



Help your children to learn

HOW IS YOUR CHILD DOING AT SCHOOL?

For both primary and secondary parents

department for
education and skills

Resources for
parents by parents

Research shows that your interest and involvement in your child's learning and education is more important than anything else in helping your child fulfil their potential. As parents, you are the people who go with your child on their learning journey, from the day they are born to the time they become an adult.

You, as the parent, carer or guardian know your child best. These leaflets give ideas and suggestions for you to choose from – you will know which ones suit you, your child and the school. All of the ideas in the leaflet have been developed by parents and can be used with, or adapted for, both primary and secondary age children and young people.

There are many sorts of schools in England – the ideas and suggestions made in these leaflets do not necessarily reflect DfES policy or school policy and should be viewed simply as support for parents in helping their children to learn. Your school may not have seen this leaflet before and it may be helpful to tell them that you are going to use it. All schools have a home school agreement and by signing this agreement you will be acknowledging your partnership with the school to help educate your child. Working in partnership with the school will help your child become a successful learner and a rounded person.



How is your child doing at school?

Your child's time at school is divided into phases that are known as 'Foundation Stage' and 'Key Stages':

The Foundation Stage is a new stage of education for children aged from 3 to the end of the reception year; Key Stage 1 covers Years 1 and 2; Key Stage 2 covers Years 3, 4, 5 and 6; and Key Stage 3 covers Years 7, 8 and 9.

At the end of the Foundation Stage, your child's teacher will summarise the progress and learning needs of your child by using the Foundation Stage Profile.

At primary school children at KS1 (age 7) and KS2 (age 11) will be aiming for different levels in their National Curriculum assessments and tests. At secondary school children will be aiming for different levels in their KS3 (age 14) National Curriculum assessments and tests and for different grades in their GCSEs in Years 10 and 11 (age 14-16) and in their AS and A levels in Years 12 and 13 (age 16-18).



Foundation Stage Profile

The Foundation Stage Profile is a way of summing up each child's progress and learning needs at the end of the Foundation Stage. For most children, this is at the end of the reception year in primary schools and other government funded early years settings.

What will the children get assessed on?

Early learning goals in the six areas of learning lay a secure basis for children's future learning.

The six areas of learning are:

- personal development
- communication, language and literacy
- mathematical development
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development.

By the end of the Foundation Stage, some children will have exceeded the goals. Other children will be working toward some, or all, of the goals – particularly younger children, those who have not had high-quality early years experience, those



with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language.

How will your child be assessed?

The Foundation Stage Profile is used by teachers to build up a picture of what a child has achieved, knows and can do by the end of the Foundation Stage. It is based on teachers' day-to-day observations of the child in the normal classroom environment. There are no tests and no set tasks. Parents and carers play an important part in building up this picture and teachers share information with them about the progress their child has made.



National Curriculum tests

The National Curriculum tests at the end of each key stage are designed to measure what all children can do when they are set the same questions.

The results of these tests give you and your child's school valuable information about how well your child is doing.

Why do children take the tests?

Children take the National Curriculum tests because they:

- give you and teachers information about your child's strengths and weaknesses
- help you and teachers plan the next stage of your child's schooling
- give each child the chance to show how much they know and what they can do in relation to what is expected of them under the National Curriculum.



What tests will your child take?

Key Stage 1 (age 7)

In year 2 your child will do key stage tasks and tests in English and mathematics, which are designed to fit into normal classroom activities. Most children will be able to do the tasks that are set for them, and many children will also take tests.

Your child can complete the tasks between January and June, and take the tests at any time during May. The school will decide the best time for this.

Key Stage 2 (age 11) and Key Stage 3 (age 14)

In years 6 and 9 your child is tested in English, mathematics and science. The questions are the same for all children in the year. Schools can use the results from the tests to compare the progress of their children with children in other schools. If necessary, teachers can then change the way their pupils are being taught.

The tests usually take place in early May. Check with your school for exact dates.

Optional tests

For some time now, optional tests in English and mathematics have been available in primary schools at the end of Years 3, 4 and 5. These tests help schools to see what progress pupils have made during Key Stage 2. The tests have been extremely

popular in primary schools, with over 90% of primary schools using them last year.

Your child may be able to take their key stage tests earlier if they are working above the level for their age group (see page 12). Your child's teacher will be able to assess if your child should take the test earlier than their age group.

To raise standards at Key Stage 3 and help to inform teachers and parents of progress, there are optional tests for pupils in secondary schools.

These tests are:

- Year 7 progress tests
- Year 7 and 8 optional tests.

Year 7 progress tests

The progress tests for English and mathematics at the end of Year 7 are for pupils who did not achieve the expected level (level 4) in their Key Stage 2 tests. These tests aim to make sure that as many of these pupils as possible have made the necessary progress to catch up by the end of their first year of secondary school. These tests are taken within a set period, though the teacher decides the order and the exact day of each test, usually in June. Check with your school for exact dates.



Year 7 and 8 optional tests

Following the success of the optional tests in primary schools, these are now available for schools to use with KS3 pupils in English and Maths at the end of Years 7 and 8.



Do all children have to take the end of key stage tests?

The Headteacher of your child's school must make sure all children in Years 2, 6 and 9 are assessed. A very small number of children, whose teachers do not think they have reached the right level on the National Curriculum scale (see page 12), will be assessed by teacher assessment only and will not take any tests.

What if my child is off school at the time of the tests?

Children can only take the national tests on the set dates. If your child misses a test they will not get a test result in that subject. Check with your school about the exact dates in May when your child will be taking the tests.

You can help your child not to miss out by making sure:

- they go to school on the dates of the tests
- they do not miss any of the tests, unless they are ill
- you don't take holidays during term time as your child's learning will be affected by missing school.

What if my child needs extra help to do the tests?

Your child's teachers will decide if they need extra help to do the tests. Your child may be able to get extra help if they:

- normally get extra help in the classroom
- are on the school's special needs register, or
- have a statement of special educational needs.



Are the tests stressful?

Some parents are worried that children may become anxious or stressed over the tests. However, the tests are not designed to be 'pass or fail' exams. They only cover what your child has been learning at school. When children know what to expect they are much less likely to suffer stress and are more likely to show all of the skills, knowledge and understanding they have gained during the key stage.



Schools help children to prepare for the tests by:

- getting them used to the layout and design of past papers;
- encouraging them to work independently; and
- letting them know that there may be some questions in the test that they will not be able to answer.

Feedback from teachers shows that they think that most children cope well with the tests.

How can I help my child do well in the tests?



The school must teach your child what they need to know and prepare them for the tests. But there are a number of things you can do to help your child do their best.

- Make sure your child doesn't go to school tired. If children are tired, they find it harder to concentrate and it is more difficult for them to learn new things.
- Try to take an interest in your child's homework. Help them to do it thoroughly and check that they have finished it properly.
- If your child is 9 or older, encourage them to read quietly for 20 minutes every day. If your child is younger than 9 years old, try to read with them for 20 minutes every day.
- Find opportunities for your child to use numbers in everyday situations, like when you go shopping, and get them to work out sums in their head.
- Talk to your child about the world around them and encourage them to ask questions about the way things work.
- Try to keep up-to-date with what your child is learning at school and talk about it with them as much as possible.
- Reassure your child that doing their best is what's important.

Teacher assessments

Teachers also assess your child's progress at the end of each key stage.

They carry out assessments in the classroom, and they cover all parts of the subjects your child is taught.

Why do schools do teacher assessments as well as tests?

Tests and teacher assessment measure your child's progress and they show what all children can do when they are set the same questions. Teacher assessments also show how well a child is progressing in all areas of a subject over a period of time.

Of course, the teacher assesses your child's work informally almost every time they teach a class. For example, the teacher will listen to your child reading, mark the sums they do or watch how they carry out a scientific experiment. Knowing how well your child is doing in class helps the teacher plan what they should learn next.

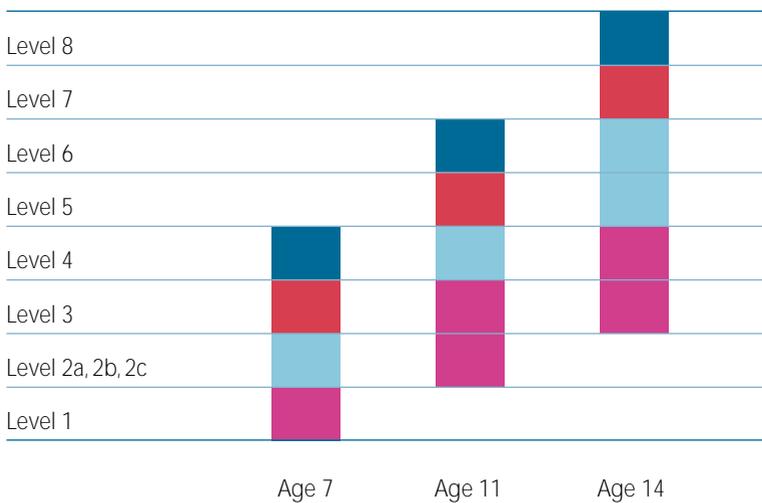
The results of the tests and the teacher assessments may be different, but they are both equally important to your child. For example, a teacher may feel your child is doing better in a subject as a whole than they are in subject areas covered in the test.

Your child compared to his or her age group

The graph below shows the levels on the National Curriculum scale and expected achievements at certain ages.

Key to levels

- exceptional performance
- beyond expectations
- at level expected
- below expectations





What do the levels mean?

There are eight levels in the National Curriculum. By the age of 7, children have normally achieved level 2. However, children who are not achieving above level 2c may not be progressing well enough to achieve level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2. By age 11, children have normally achieved level 4, and by age 14 they normally achieve level 5 or 6. If your child has reached the expected level in the National Curriculum, it means that they know as much as (or more than) most other children of the same age, and they have the same skills.



What are 'age standardised' scores

If your child is doing their Key Stage 1 or 2 tests, the school may also give you 'age standardised' test scores. These will tell you how your child is doing compared with other children born in the same month.

'Age standardised' scores are also available for primary schools to use with the optional tests at Years 3, 4 and 5.

What do the results mean?

The results show whether or not your child has reached the expected National Curriculum level for their year group.

Every school will have set a target for a certain percentage of pupils to reach the expected levels in English and mathematics. The results will show whether your child's school has managed to achieve that target.

Questions that are often asked about the tests and teacher assessments

	Age 7 Key Stage 1	Age 11 Key Stage 2	Age 14 Key Stage 3
What will the tests cover?	Reading, writing (including handwriting), spelling and maths	Reading, writing (including handwriting), spelling, maths, mental arithmetic and science	English (including reading, writing and studying a Shakespeare play), maths, mental arithmetic and science
How long are the tests in total?	Less than three hours	Just over five hours	Just under eight hours
When are tests?	The tests can be taken anytime in May to fit in with other schoolwork	All tests will take place during the first two weeks of May Please check with your school for exact dates	All tests will take place during the first two weeks of May Please check with your school for exact dates
What will the teacher assessment cover?	English, maths and science	English, maths and science	English, maths, science, history, geography, a modern foreign language, design and technology, information and communication technology, art and design, music, PE, religious education and from 2004 citizenship
What National Curriculum level should most children achieve?	At least 2b – level 2 is divided into three grades (2a, 2b and 2c) Children who achieve no higher than 2c may not be progressing well enough to reach level 4 when they are 11	At least level 4	At least level 5 Many will be expected to achieve level 6
How will I get my child's results?	The school will send you a report telling you what National Curriculum level your child reached in the tests and teacher assessments		

Changes to tests from 2003

You may have heard that there will be some changes to the tests from 2003. There are no changes to what children study but just some small changes to the structure of tests, so they are better matched to the changes in teaching introduced over the last few years. Changes include:

- The mathematics test papers for all key stages will include more questions that require pupils to use their skills in problem solving.
- In Key Stage 1, the result of the spelling test will be reported as part of the writing test rather than separately.
- In Key Stage 2, handwriting will be assessed in the writing test rather than in a separate test.
- In all three key stages, two contrasting pieces of writing will be set in the writing tests in order for a child to demonstrate a range of writing skills.
- In science at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 there will be an increase in the number of questions assessing scientific enquiry.

What will my child's report tell me?

At least once a year you will receive a written report on how your child is doing at school. Every report you get must tell you:

- how well your child is doing in all the National Curriculum subjects
- how well your child is doing in all the other subjects and activities which are part of the school's curriculum
- how your child is getting on in general at school and what their attendance rate is, and
- what to do if you wish to discuss your child's report with the school.

When your child has taken the national tests at Key Stage 1, 2 or 3, the school's report must also tell you:

- the results of your child's tests, and
- the levels your child achieved in all the parts of each subject (for example, what levels they achieved in the reading and writing parts of the English tests).

The report will include a summary of:

- the results for all the children in your child's age group in the school, and the national results for the previous year.

See the booklet *Getting the most from school reports* for more information.

This summary will also be published in the school's prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents.

If your child has special educational needs, the school should tell you how much of an achievement it has been for your child to reach their particular level in a subject.

Overall, the report must tell you what your child has learnt, the things they are good at and where they might need extra help. The report might also give you some practical ideas about things you can do to help your child in the future.



How well is my child doing at school?

How can I find out how well my child's school is doing?

- Your local education authority publishes tables showing the results from all the primary schools in your area. You will be able to use these tables to find each of the local school's results for the English, mathematics and science tests for 11 year olds (Key Stage 2). You can then compare the results for your child's school against other local and national averages to find out how well the school is doing.
- The Department publishes information for schools and colleges showing results in secondary schools in Key Stage 3 tests, again in English, maths and science; the results in GCSE/GNVQ examinations; and the results in A level examinations.
- The tables are usually published in a local newspaper, and on the website at www.dfes.gov.uk/performance/tables. There will be a brief description of each school giving, for example, the ages of its pupils and whether it is a community or voluntary controlled school.

- All this information can help you compare your child's school with other local schools. If you want, you can get more information about test results from each school's prospectus. School prospectuses will also include details of what percentage of the pupils who took the national tests achieved the expected levels on the National Curriculum scale.

Where can I get more information?

If you would like to find out more about anything you have read in this leaflet, please contact your child's school. The school will also be able to tell you what your child will be doing in the National Curriculum and you might like to speak to your child's teachers about this.

You can find out more information on the Department for Education and Skills Parents' website: www.dfes.gov.uk/parents





Help your children to learn

Resources for parents

Reference HYCL



Help your children to learn

Getting the most from school reports

Reference HYCL/3



Help your children to learn

Making the most of parents' evenings

Reference HYCL/1



Help your children to learn

Making the most of time with your child

Reference HYCL/4



Help your children to learn

Formal meetings with teachers

Reference HYCL/2

Other leaflets in the series are also available.

If you would like to share your experiences, or you have any queries or require further information, please visit our website www.dfes.gov.uk/parents

The information in this leaflet was written by 'Strikers' a parent support group. Further copies of this leaflet, and others in the 'Help your children to learn' series, can be obtained from Prolog; 0845 60 222 60 quoting reference HYCL/5 for this leaflet and the references shown above for others in this series.