Curriculum, Subjects, Number of Hours

The school curriculum comprises all learning and other experiences that each school plans for its pupils, reflecting its particular needs and circumstances.

Aims for the school curriculum

Broad aims for the school curriculum were first established by the Education Act 1944 [1]. However, there was no government control over the curriculum until the Education Reform Act 1988 [2] introduced a national curriculum [3] with the aim of giving pupils an entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum, setting standards for pupil attainment, and supporting school accountability.

Legal framework

The legal basis for the national curriculum in Wales is Section 99 of the Education Act 2002 [4], which states that pupils of compulsory school age in maintained schools [5] are entitled to a curriculum which:

‘(a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and

(b) prepares those pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.’

Accountability measures

The curriculum in maintained schools is also influenced by the accountability framework, which includes:

- the school inspection [6] system led by Estyn
- the publication annually, in the school’s prospectus, of information about the school’s curriculum and performance (as outlined in 2011 guidance [7] from the Welsh Government)
- the publication of the results of school-level performance measures as part of the National School Categorisation System [8], which uses data and school self-evaluation to drive school improvement.

Responsibility for the school curriculum

Responsibility for the school curriculum is shared between a number of bodies listed below.
The National Assembly for Wales has responsibility, under the Education Act 2002, for determining the 'knowledge, skills and understanding', the 'matters, skills and processes' and the assessment arrangements for each area of learning in the Foundation Phase, and for the programmes of study, attainment targets and assessment arrangements for each curriculum subject at Key Stage 2. It steers school decision making on the curriculum through the National School Categorisation System (performance and accountability measures (see above).

Estyn, established under the Education (Schools) Act 1992, is responsible for inspecting education and training providers, including schools. Judgements on the breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum contribute to the school inspection judgement on the quality of teaching and learning experiences.

Local authorities have a duty, under the Education Act 2002, to ensure that the curriculum offered in maintained schools in their local area meets statutory requirements. They also have a duty, under Sections 390 and 391 of the Education Act 1996, to establish a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) to advise on the teaching of religious education in schools.

Schools are responsible for planning the whole school curriculum for their pupils and ensuring that it meets statutory requirements. Responsibility is shared between the headteacher and the governing body. Individual teachers are also responsible for planning lessons that meet statutory requirements (see the section on the ‘Practising Teacher Standards’ under the subheading ‘Teaching methods and materials’ below).

Requirements for the school curriculum

Depending on local factors, Welsh-medium and / or bilingual education is available alongside English-medium education. In addition, and whatever the medium of instruction, all children must learn Welsh throughout compulsory education.

Maintained primary schools must teach pupils in the Foundation Phase (ages 5-7) the Foundation Phase Framework and those at Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) the national curriculum (Curriculum for Wales).

They must also offer:

- religious education (RE)
- personal and social education (PSE)
- the Curriculum Cymreig (opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their knowledge and understanding of Wales).

In addition, they must plan the curriculum around the requirements of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework, and consider the requirements of the Digital Competence Framework. The subheadings which follow provide further information.

Current school curriculum

The curriculum currently in force was introduced on a phased basis from 2008 and fully implemented from the 2011/12 school year. A new curriculum is in development; the intention is for it to be taught in all maintained schools and settings across Wales from September 2022. See the subheading ‘Curriculum reform' below for further information.
Foundation Phase Framework

The Foundation Phase [11] spans early years education (ages 3-5) and Years 1 and 2 (ages 5-7) of compulsory education.

The Foundation Phase Framework [20] is the curriculum for this phase. It was introduced in 2008 and revised in 2015 to reflect a higher level of expectation with regard to what learners should know and be able to do, and to allow for better integration of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) (see the subheading below for further information). The Framework aims to offer a child development-focused, age-appropriate informal system of learning, based on well-structured play, practical activity and investigation. It is intended to develop children’s:

- skills and understanding
- personal, social, emotional, physical and intellectual well-being
- positive attitudes to learning
- self-esteem and self-confidence
- creative, expressive and observational skills
- first-hand experience of solving real-life problems and their learning about conservation and sustainability through activities in the outdoors.

Compulsory areas of learning

The Foundation Phase Framework is based on seven statutory ‘areas of learning’:

- personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity
- language, literacy and communication skills
- mathematical development
- Welsh language development
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development.

In Welsh-medium schools, there are six statutory areas of learning: Welsh language development is not taught as a separate area of learning as both English and Welsh are developed through ‘language, literacy and communication skills’. Of the 1261 maintained [5] primary schools in Wales in January 2018, 404 were Welsh-medium; source: School Census Results, 2018 [24] (Welsh Government).

For each area of learning, a ‘statutory education programme’ sets out what children should be taught, and a series of outcome statements sets out the expected standards of children’s performance (see the article on 'Assessment in Primary Education [25]').

National curriculum at Key Stage 2

The national curriculum sets out the compulsory subjects that must be taught in Key Stage [14] 2 in maintained schools [5] in Wales. It also sets out, in associated programmes of study [12], the content for these subjects. The programmes of study include attainment targets [13] which set out the expected standards of learners’ performance (see the article on ‘Assessment in Primary Education [26]’).

Compulsory subjects

The compulsory national curriculum subjects for Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) are:
It is for schools to choose how they organise their curriculum to include the programmes of study for the compulsory national curriculum subjects. The programmes of study are available on the [Learning Wales](https://learningwales.org) website. The national curriculum is not the whole curriculum for schools, and they are free to include other subjects or topics of their choice in planning and designing their programme of education. For schools wishing to teach a modern foreign language / languages at Key Stage 2, guidance is available in a non-statutory framework included as the Appendix in [Modern Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum for Wales](https://learningwales.org) (2013).

Revised programmes of study for English, Welsh (first language) and mathematics for Key Stage 2 came into effect in September 2015. These revised curriculum requirements aimed to allow for better integration of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) (see the subheading below), and to reflect a higher level of expectation for what learners should know and be able to do.

**Religious education and collective worship**

All [maintained](https://wales.gov.uk/topics/education/schools/maintained-schools/) primary schools must teach religious education (RE) and must also provide a daily act of collective worship. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE and collective worship.

The nature of the RE and collective worship in an individual school depends on whether the school is designated as having a religious character, as well as on the legal category of school.

All [local authorities (LAs)](https://wales.gov.uk/topics/education/schools/la-approach/) are required to adopt a locally agreed curriculum for RE, which must ‘reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain’ ([Education Act 1996](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/49/contents), Section 375). The syllabus must be followed in all maintained schools without a designated religious character.

[Foundation](https://wales.gov.uk/topics/education/schools/faith-schools/) and [voluntary-controlled schools](https://wales.gov.uk/topics/education/schools/voluntary-controlled-schools/) which are [faith schools](https://wales.gov.uk/topics/education/schools/faith-schools/) must also follow the locally agreed syllabus for RE. However, parents have the right to request that their child is taught RE in accordance with the school’s trust deed or designated religion. In [voluntary-aided schools](https://wales.gov.uk/topics/education/schools/voluntary-aided-schools/) designated as having a religious character, the governors determine the syllabus for RE in accordance with the provisions of the trust deed relating to the school, or in accordance with the school’s designated religion. However, parents have the right to request that their child is taught the locally agreed syllabus for RE.

The [National Exemplar Framework for Religious Education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales](https://learningwales.org) and [Religious Education: Guidance for 14 to 19-year-olds](https://learningwales.org) (2011) provide guidance for schools.
It is also a statutory requirement (under Section 390 of the Education Act 1996 [18]) for all LAs to establish a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) to advise on matters concerning the teaching of RE. Faith groups and teachers are represented on the SACRE.

The daily act of collective worship, which all maintained schools must provide, and which typically means a school assembly of a reverential or reflective nature, must be broadly Christian. This broadly Christian content requirement can be removed for the school as a whole. For schools which have a designated religious character, collective worship must be in accordance with the religious character of the school. Estyn (the inspectorate) has produced guidance [35] on collective worship in non-denominational schools.

The statutory provisions relating to religious education and collective worship were originally introduced under the Education Reform Act 1988 [2], and are now contained in Welsh Office Circular 10/94 [36] and in Sections 69 to 71 and Schedules 19 and 20 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 [37], as amended.

Personal and social education

Schools must provide pupils in Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) with a programme of personal and social education (PSE) and are expected to base their PSE provision on the Personal and Social Education Framework for 7-to 19-Year-Olds in Wales [38] (2013). In Key Stage 2, PSE builds on the ‘personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity’ area of learning in the Foundation Phase [11].

Although primary schools are expected to plan and deliver a broad, balanced and holistic PSE programme, they are not currently required to provide sex and relationships education (SRE). They may though elect to do so and, when they do provide sex education, this will often be within the context of PSE. The governing bodies [19] of all maintained schools [5] are required to have an up-to-date policy on the provision of sex education, which must include a statement about a parent’s right to withdraw their child. Further information [39] is available from the Welsh Government.

Note: In January 2018, the Welsh Government published the report [40] of the expert panel on sex and relationships education. The panel was formed in March 2017 to examine the provision of SRE and how schools could be supported to deliver it consistently and to a high standard. The report considers the current and future provision of the SRE curriculum in schools, the establishment of professional learning courses for new and existing members of the education workforce, and mechanisms to share best practice related to the teaching of SRE. Following the report’s recommendation that SRE should be a statutory part of Wales’ new curriculum, the Welsh Government confirmed [41] (in May 2018) that relationships and sexuality education (RSE) will become statutory. See the subheading ‘Curriculum reform’ below for further information on the new curriculum.

Curriculum Cymreig

All maintained schools [5] must also include the Curriculum Cymreig as part of the curriculum. This aims to help learners understand the distinctive aspects of living and learning in 21st century Wales, and give them opportunities to develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the cultural, economic, environmental, historical and linguistic characteristics of Wales across the curriculum. Guidance [22], published in 2013, is available to help schools use and develop the Curriculum Cymreig as part of the whole school curriculum.

The National Literacy and Numeracy Framework

The National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) [42] became a statutory curriculum requirement
for 5- to 14-year-olds in September 2013. It is a curriculum planning tool introduced to improve levels of literacy and numeracy skills in schools in Wales and to help teachers to embed literacy and numeracy into all subjects. In September 2015, the LNF was extended to include 3- to 4-year olds in the earlier years of the Foundation Phase [11] and 14- to 16-year-olds in Key Stage [21] 4 on a non-statutory basis.

Through ‘expectation statements’, the LNF describes the skills the Welsh Government expects children and young people to develop throughout their time in school. In literacy, it includes expectations for:

- oracy (speaking and listening) across the curriculum
- reading across the curriculum
- writing across the curriculum.

For numeracy, it includes expectations for:

- developing numerical reasoning
- using number skills
- using measuring skills
- using data skills.

Teachers are expected to use the LNF to:

- develop curriculum content to ensure that all learners have opportunities to develop and refine the skills set out in the LNF
- integrate literacy and numeracy into their teaching, whatever the subject
- inform discussions about learner performance
- help learners with their own self-assessment activities and planning for learning
- monitor, assess and report on individual learner performance
- identify learners who may benefit from intervention or who are working beyond age-related expectations.

The revised Foundation Phase Framework [43] and the revised statutory programmes of study [27] for English, Welsh (first language) and mathematics, which came into effect in September 2015, allow for better integration of the LNF into the teaching of language, literacy and communication skills; mathematical development; and Welsh language development in the Foundation Phase [11], and of English, Welsh and mathematics in Key Stage [21] 2. The revised Foundation Phase Framework and programmes of study also reflect a higher level of expectation for what learners should know and be able to do during primary education.

Further information is available in the 2016 strategic action plan [44] for the National Literacy and Numeracy Programme, and in a research paper [45] produced by the National Assembly for Wales in June 2013, which summarises the policy context to the development of the LNF. See also the article on ‘Assessment in Primary Education [26]’.

**Digital Competence Framework**

The Welsh Government defines digital competence as a:

set of skills, knowledge and attitudes to enable the confident, creative and critical use of technologies and systems. It is the skill set that enables a person to be a confident digital citizen, to interact and collaborate digitally, to produce work digitally and to be confident
in handling data and computational thinking (problem solving) (source: Curriculum reform: The Digital Competence Framework [46], In Brief, National Assembly for Wales).

A Digital Competence Framework [47] has been available to schools since September 2016. This will be finalised for formal first teaching across the whole of Wales with the rest of the new Curriculum for Wales from 2022 (see ‘Curriculum reform’ below). It was issued in advance to allow schools to have time to familiarise themselves with the framework, begin to develop their practice, and consider how they can embed the expectations into their planning for the new curriculum.

The framework is intended to encourage the integration of digital skills across the full range of curriculum subjects for learners aged 3-16+. It sits alongside the programme of study [48] for information and communication technology (ICT) which remains in place. The Digital Competence Framework was developed following the September 2013 publication of the report [49] and recommendations of the ICT Steering Group, established to examine the future of computer science and ICT in schools.

Curriculum reform

A new Curriculum for Wales for 3-to 16-year-olds is being developed, which is due to be used by all maintained schools [5] across Wales from September 2022. It focuses on four core purposes to ensure that children and young people develop as:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

It will be organised into six ‘areas of learning and experience’:

- expressive arts
- health and well-being
- humanities
- languages, literacy and communication
- mathematics and numeracy
- science and technology.

These will sit alongside three cross-cutting curricular responsibilities – literacy, numeracy and digital competence, which will be the responsibility of all teachers and taught across all subjects.

Development of the new curriculum is being led by a network of pioneer schools [50], working collaboratively across Wales with other schools, regional education consortia [51], the Welsh Government, and wider stakeholders.


Further information about the new curriculum, including the timetable for change, is available on the Welsh Government website [23].
Time allocation/number of hours

Under Section 108 of the Education Act 2002, the amount of time to be devoted to each curriculum subject cannot be prescribed. Consequently, it is a matter for schools to decide how much time each subject should take up. In terms of minimum weekly lesson hours, government guidance recommends that pupils in Year 1 and 2, ages 5-7, receive 21 hours of lessons each school week, and that those in Years 3-6, ages 7-11, receive 23.5 hours of lessons.

Teaching methods and materials

Teaching methods and learning materials are not officially prescribed. Within each school, they are usually decided by the class teacher in consultation with the headteacher and subject or key stage leaders. Subject leaders (or subject co-ordinators) are classroom teachers who have additional responsibility for a particular subject area and who give help and guidance to their colleagues within the school. Key stage leaders have a similar responsibility for a particular stage of education. In primary schools, they usually combine this role with that of being a class teacher and this would usually be recognised with additional pay.

Professional standards for teaching and leadership

Teachers and school leaders are guided in their practice by professional standards. Since September 2017, newly qualified teachers commencing induction have been required to work to new professional standards for teaching and leadership. There are five standards:

- pedagogy – the teacher consistently secures the best outcomes for learners through progressively refining teaching, influencing learners and advancing learning
- collaboration – the teacher takes opportunities to work productively with all partners in learning in order to extend professional effectiveness
- professional learning – the teacher consistently extends knowledge, skills and understanding and can show how reflection and openness to challenge and support informs professional learning to progressively develop pedagogy
- innovation – the teacher employs an innovative outlook which is exemplified through the controlled and measured development of techniques and approaches to improve pedagogic outcomes
- leadership – the teacher exercises leadership through all aspects of professional practice to support the efforts of others across the school and beyond to fulfil the educational ambitions for Wales.

The new standards will apply to all serving teachers and leaders by September 2018 (and to all initial teacher training programmes from September 2019). In the meantime, serving teachers are required to use the Professional Standards for Education Practitioners in Wales (2011) and trainee teachers are required to meet the Qualified Teacher Status Standards.

The professional standards for teaching and leadership were introduced following the publication of the Furlong review, Teaching Tomorrow’s Teachers (2015).

Guidance on curriculum planning

The Welsh Government supports teachers in their curriculum planning through the Learning Wales website. This provides guidance and support documents for schools and access to the national
curriculum programme of study and additional subject guidance. The Welsh Government also hosts the Hwb website, which is an online space for teachers to share and access a range of digital tools and resources to support the learning of 3- to 19-year-olds.

Specialist subject guidance, support and resources for teachers in particular curriculum subjects is also available. For example, the PSHE Association provides guidance for the teaching of personal and social education (PSE) in Wales.

In addition, in March 2018, the Welsh Government launched the Foundation Phase Excellence Network, which aims to improve teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase across all schools and education settings. The network involves local authorities (LAs), schools and childcare settings which deliver the Foundation Phase, regional consortia and third sector organisations sharing expertise, experience, knowledge and best practice. An online community learning zone was established to facilitate the sharing of resources and information between practitioners.

In May 2018, Estyn, the schools inspectorate, published Curriculum Innovation in Primary Schools, which describes effective approaches that schools should consider when developing an innovative. The report draws on visits to 30 primary schools in 2017 and identifies four stages of development as schools transform their teaching and learning practices.

Teaching across subject boundaries

Literacy, numeracy and digital competence skills are increasingly taught across the curriculum. The frameworks for teaching these skills are provided by the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework and the Digital Competence Framework. See the subheadings ‘National Literacy and Numeracy Framework’ and the ‘Digital Competence Framework’ in this article.

For other subjects, teachers choose whether to teach within subject boundaries or across two or more subject areas in an integrated way, for example through project work.

Textbooks and learning resources

There are no prescribed textbooks for pupils; all teaching and learning materials are selected by schools.

Textbooks are produced by commercial publishers and do not require government approval. However, schools will generally only choose to use textbooks which pay attention to national curriculum programmes of study, to the Foundation Phase Framework, or to other frameworks in places such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework or the Digital Competence Framework.

Maintained schools may not charge for the cost of materials, books or any other equipment used by pupils.

All schools have a range of ICT tools available for use by teachers and pupils. These may include computers, laptops, tablets and digital cameras. Interactive teaching with electronic whiteboards is widespread, as is access to virtual learning environments and other digital resources.

Homework

Schools decide how much and how often homework is set, reflecting the school's circumstances and its pupils' needs.

In Estyn’s Guidance Handbook for the Inspection of Primary Schools (2018), inspectors are asked
to consider the ‘nature and extent of learning outside the classroom that links directly to the planned curriculum, for example to support the development of pupils’ understanding of a specific topic, subject or learning area’ (page 20). In addition, teachers may use pupils’ homework as part of statutory assessment arrangements at the end of Key Stage 2; see the article on ‘Assessment in Primary Education’ [69]’ for further information.

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