
**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.

All maintained schools [4] in Wales are expected to provide a balanced and broadly based curriculum.

This curriculum is expected to include the national curriculum [5], which, in primary phase education, comprises the Foundation Phase Framework [6] in Years 1 and 2, ages 5-7, and the national curriculum programmes of study [7] in Key Stage 2 (Years 3-6, ages 7-11).

The legal basis for the national curriculum in Wales is Section 99 of the Education Act 2002 [8]. This states that pupils of compulsory school age in maintained schools 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 pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.’

In accordance with Section 101 of the Act, maintained primary schools must provide religious education and the national curriculum, as part of their whole school curriculum.

**Historical note:** Broad aims for the school curriculum in Wales were first established by the Education Act 1944 [9]. However, there was no government control over the curriculum until the Education Reform Act 1988 [10] introduced a national curriculum. This was with the aim of giving pupils an entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum, setting standards for pupil attainment, and supporting school accountability.

**Responsibilities**

Responsibility for the school curriculum is shared.

- The National Assembly for Wales is responsible for determining the content of each area of learning in the Foundation Phase Framework, and of the programmes of study at Key Stage 2. It also steers school decision making on the curriculum through the National School Categorisation System performance and accountability measures.
• **Estyn**, which is responsible for school inspection, makes judgements on the breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum. These contribute to the school inspection judgement on the quality of teaching and learning.

• **Local authorities (LAs)**[11] have a duty, under the **Education Act 2002**[12], 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**[13], to establish a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). The SACRE advises on the locally agreed syllabus for 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**[14].

The curriculum in maintained schools is influenced to a significant extent by accountability measures. These include:

• the school inspection system (see the article ‘**Quality Assurance in Early Childhood and School Education**’[15])

• the publication annually, in the school’s prospectus, of information about the school’s curriculum and performance (as outlined in 2001 **guidance**[16] from the Welsh Government)

• the publication of the results of school-level performance measures as part of the **National School Categorisation System**[17], which uses data and school self-evaluation to drive school improvement.

**Requirements**

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.

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

The national curriculum (including the Foundation Phase Framework, see below) does not constitute the whole curriculum for schools. Schools are free to include other subjects or topics of their choice in planning and designing their programme of education.

Under the **Education Act 2002**[18], as part of their whole school curriculum, maintained primary schools must teach the national curriculum (including the Foundation Phase framework) and religious education (RE). It is also a statutory requirement for maintained schools to provide a daily act of collective worship. This is typically a school assembly of a reverential or reflective nature, which is broadly Christian.

**Current curriculum**

The curriculum currently in force was introduced on a phased basis from 2008 and fully implemented from the 2011/12 school year. 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**[19] (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).

Schools must also 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.

A new curriculum [20] 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 spans early years education (ages 3-5) and Years 1 and 2 (ages 5-7) of compulsory education.

The Foundation Phase Framework [21] is the curriculum for this phase. 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 1238 maintained primary schools in Wales in January 2019, 399 were Welsh-medium [Schools’ Census Results: as at January 2019 [22]].)

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 [23]').

The Foundation Phase Framework 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. The 2015 revision also
aimed to allow for better integration of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) (see the subheading below for further information).

**National curriculum at Key Stage 2**

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

**Compulsory subjects**

The compulsory national curriculum subjects for Key Stage 2 (ages 7–11) are:

- English
- Welsh first language
- mathematics
- science
- design and technology
- information and communication technology (ICT)
- history
- geography
- art and design
- music
- physical education (PE)
- Welsh second language (compulsory if not studying Welsh first language).

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 Hwb 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. Schools may, for example, choose to teach a modern foreign language/languages at Key Stage 2, and guidance is available in a non-statutory framework (Modern Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum for Wales (2008) (Appendix, pages 26-31).

Revised programmes of study for English, Welsh (first language) and mathematics in 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**

All maintained primary schools must teach religious education (RE). They must also provide a daily act of collective worship. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE and collective worship if they wish.

Local authorities (LAs) have a duty, under Section 390 of the Education Act 1996, to establish a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) to advise on matters concerning the teaching of RE. The SACRE, which includes faith groups and teachers, also advises on the locally-agreed syllabus/curriculum for RE.
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.

- Maintained schools without a designated religious character must follow the locally agreed syllabus/curriculum which all LAs are required to adopt. This must, in accordance with Section 375 of the Education Act 1996, ‘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’.
- **Foundation** [28] and **voluntary-controlled schools** [29] with a designated religious character 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** [30] designated as having a religious character, the **governing body** [14] determines the syllabus for RE. This is 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 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** [33] on collective worship in non-denominational schools.

The statutory provisions relating to religious education and collective worship are contained in **Welsh Office Circular 10/94** [34], and in Sections 69 to 71 and Schedules 19 and 20 of the **School Standards and Framework Act 1998** [35], as amended. They were originally introduced under the **Education Reform Act 1988** [10].

**Personal and social education**

Schools must also provide pupils in Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) with a programme of personal and social education (PSE). This builds on the ‘personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity’ area of learning in the Foundation Phase, and schools are expected to base their provision on the **Personal and Social Education Framework for 7-to 19-year-olds in Wales** [36] (2008).

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, however, choose to provide sex education and, when they do, this will often be within the context of PSE. The governing bodies of all maintained schools 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** [37] is available from the Welsh Government.

**Note:** In January 2018, the Welsh Government published the **report** [38] 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. Following the report’s recommendation, the Welsh Government **confirmed** [39] (in May 2018) that relationships and sexuality education (RSE) will become a statutory part of Wales’ new curriculum. See the subheading ‘**Curriculum reform**’ below for further information on the new curriculum.
**Curriculum Cymreig**

All maintained schools 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. It also aims to provide opportunities to develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the cultural, economic, environmental, historical and linguistic characteristics of Wales across the curriculum. Guidance [40], published in 2003, is available to help schools use and develop the Curriculum Cymreig as part of the whole school curriculum.

**National Literacy and Numeracy Framework**

The National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) [41] 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 (on a non-statutory basis) to include 3- to 4-year olds in the earlier years of the Foundation Phase, and 14- to 16-year-olds in Key Stage 4.

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.

As set out on page 8 of the Welsh Government guidance [42], 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] (2015), and the revised statutory programmes of study for English, Welsh (first language) and mathematics in Key Stage 2, which came into effect in September 2015, aim to allow for better integration of the LNF. They also reflect a higher level of expectation for what learners should know and be able to do during primary education.

**Digital Competence Framework**

The Digital Competence Framework [44] is intended to encourage the integration of digital skills across the full range of curriculum subjects for learners aged 3-16+. It will be formally introduced in
September 2022 with the rest of the new Curriculum for Wales (see ‘Curriculum reform’ below), but was issued in advance (in September 2016) to allow schools to familiarise themselves with it. It sits alongside the programme of study for information and communication technology (ICT), which remains in place.

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).’ (Curriculum reform: The Digital Competence Framework In Brief, National Assembly for Wales Research Service).

Under the Digital Competence Framework, the Welsh Government expects all teachers to embed the teaching of digital competence into their teaching, as they do for literacy and numeracy.

**Time allocation/number of hours**

Under Section 108 of the Education Act 2002, the amount of time to be allocated to each curriculum subject cannot be prescribed. It is a matter for schools to decide how much time each subject should take up.

However, recommended minimum weekly lesson times are provided in Chapter 22 of the School Governors’ Guide to the Law. (These are as determined by Welsh Office Management of the School Day Circular 43/90.) The guidance recommends that pupils in Year 1 and 2, ages 5-7, receive at least 21 hours of lessons each school week, and that those in Years 3-6, ages 7-11, receive a minimum of 23.5 hours of lessons (taught time). There is a further requirement on schools to allow sufficient instruction time to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum that meets all statutory requirements.

Although primary schools must provide the national curriculum/Foundation Phase Framework, this is not the whole curriculum. Schools are free to include other subjects or topics of their choice in planning and designing their programme of education.

**Curriculum reform**

A new Curriculum for Wales for 3-to 16-year-olds is being developed. It is due to be used by all maintained schools across Wales from September 2022, and focuses on four core purposes. These aim 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.

The new curriculum will be organised into six ‘areas of learning and experience’:
- 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 has been led by a network of ‘pioneer schools’, working collaboratively across Wales with other schools, the regional education consortia, the Welsh Government, and wider stakeholders.

The changes follow the publication of the Donaldson review (in 2015), which examined the curriculum and assessment arrangements from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4 (ages 3 to 16). Following its acceptance of the report’s recommendations, the Welsh Government published A Curriculum for Wales: a Curriculum for Life, an implementation plan for the new curriculum, in October 2015.

The White Paper, Our National Mission: a Transformational Curriculum set out proposals for the legislative framework to facilitate implementation of the new curriculum. Published for consultation in January 2019, it covered:

- the purpose and structure of the curriculum
- the place of the Welsh and English languages in the new curriculum
- the place of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and religious education (RE) in the new curriculum for 3- to 16-year-olds, and the right to withdraw from RSE and RE
- the assessment of learners.

A consultation on the draft curriculum was held between April and July 2019. It is intended that the new curriculum and assessment arrangements will be finalised and available in January 2020 prior to implementation in September 2022.

**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.

The class teacher is responsible for planning lessons and for drawing up schemes of work to ensure that the curriculum provided meets the statutory requirements.

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.

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.

There are no prescribed textbooks or other learning materials for primary pupils. Textbooks are
produced by commercial publishers and do not require government approval. Schools may not usually 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 other handheld devices, interactive whiteboards and virtual learning environments.

Schools and teachers make decisions about teaching methods and materials in the context of national standards and guidance as outlined below.

**Frameworks and guidance**

Teachers and school leaders are guided in their practice by the [professional standards](#) for teaching and leadership.

There are five standards (page 16), which set expectations for pedagogy, collaboration, professional learning, innovation, and leadership.

1. **Pedagogy:** teachers are expected to consistently secure the best outcomes for learners through progressively refining teaching, influencing learners and advancing learning.
2. **Collaboration:** teachers are expected to take opportunities to work productively with all partners in learning to extend their professional effectiveness.
3. **Professional learning:** teachers should consistently extend their knowledge, skills and understanding.
4. **Innovation:** teachers are expected to employ an innovative outlook, exemplified through the development of techniques and approaches to improve teaching outcomes.
5. **Leadership:** teachers should exercise leadership through all aspects of professional practice.

The Welsh Government supports teachers in their curriculum work through the [Hwb](#) website. This provides guidance and support documents for schools, and access to the [Foundation Phase Framework](#), the national curriculum programmes of study, and additional subject guidance. It is also 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.

The Hwb website also includes dedicated areas focused on resources relating to a particular subject, initiative or policy area. One of these is the [Foundation Phase Excellence Network](#), which aims to support teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase. The network involves local authorities (LAs); schools and early years/childcare settings which deliver the Foundation Phase; regional consortia, and third sector organisations, who share expertise, experience, knowledge and best practice.

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

In addition, Estyn, the inspectorate publishes reports highlighting effective practice in a wide range of areas, including the curriculum. For example, in May 2018, it published [Curriculum Innovation in Primary Schools](#), which describes effective approaches to support schools in developing their curriculum.

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](#), 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).

Teachers may also use pupils’ homework as part of statutory teacher assessment arrangements at the end of Key Stage 2; see the article on ‘Assessment in Primary Education’ [61] for further information.

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