

2013/4

September 2013

Primary Policy Watch – Curriculum 2014: signed, sealed and now to be delivered

For a document destined to shape the lives of a generation of children, the release of the final versions of the new Primary Programmes of Study was an unnaturally quiet affair.

The media's silence on the curriculum release could perhaps be attributed to its lack of novelty, with the publication of the definitive version being viewed as merely the rubber stamping of changes they'd already reported back in July. Indeed, when compared to the version of the curriculum released following the public consultation, the final edition contains only the tweaks of a perfectionist; slight changes to wording, the occasional objective split into two; a handful of small final-hour additions slipped into the folds of the Programmes of Study before the lid shuts on them forever. The real story now is in the juggling act that befalls Primaries up and down the country in implementing the new curriculum.

All maintained schools will be expected to deliver the bulk of the new curriculum from September 2014 ([see timetable](#)), though inevitably it will not be as simple as switching one off and its successor on. As schools transition from one to the other, pupils in SATs years will find themselves out of sync. With new tests only available from 2016, the government steer is that 'pupils in years 2 and 6 should be taught the current programmes of study in English, mathematics and science'.

Logical though that seems on the face of it, the risk is that children in these cohorts will be left with a lot of ground to cover in order to catch up with the demands of the new curriculum as they move on to the next stage. To avoid this, subject experts recommend covering both curricula (where it is possible and not counter-productive to do so) in order to ensure these children have the pre-requisites in place as they move on through their academic careers. With this in mind, the government has also disapplied the current curriculum for Years 3 & 4 from this year, enabling schools to give these cohorts an extra run-up at the new tests they'll face in Year 6.

A reminder of the key changes...

Obviously you'll be poring over the detail of the new curriculum with a fine toothcomb at the earliest opportunity now that it is final... In the meantime, here is a reminder of some of the headline changes coming your way:

English

Phonics, but that's done already, so tick!

There's a much deeper focus on learning grammar explicitly. Where the current curriculum only requires that pupils be taught 'some of the grammatical features of written standard English', and learn to 'consider' language structure when composing their own texts, the new curriculum contains a long list of often complex grammatical concepts, punctuation and spelling rules that children will have to identify and label as well as use. Where the current curriculum has erred towards simplifying grammar for children – the new curriculum pulls no punches. It's out with generalisations such as 'connectives', 'complex, compound and simple sentences' and in with the proper terminology: prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs, co-ordination and subordination.

Maths

The new curriculum for maths is both a great deal harder and a lot more comprehensive in its coverage than the existing curriculum. As a general indicator, most of what is currently covered by the end of Year 6 will now be covered up to two years earlier - by the end of Year 4. That means a whole lot of tricky Secondary stuff falling back into upper Key Stage 2 to fill the newly created gap. Overall, there is a much greater focus on developing written calculation skills

(such as column addition and subtraction) early, and on knowing maths facts (e.g. times tables and number bonds) off by heart.

Science

As with the other core subjects there is a culture shift here from enquiry and investigation towards hard fact. While the initial draft featured some complex concepts cropping up earlier than in the current curriculum, many of these have gradually crept back up again. Even between July and the final published version, the unit on light has been completely removed from Year 1 and merged into the Year 3 unit. The same has happened to the unit on sound in Year 2 - this has been removed and merged into the Year 4 unit. There's nothing about climate change though - search on 'warming', 'greenhouse', and 'ozone' and the search-results box is bare.

The foundation subjects

The curriculum outside the core subjects is much slimmer, and much lighter on detail.

Those worried that the new curriculum might be just a little light on the new skills children need to succeed in the digital age will be relieved to hear that some 'modern skills' such as computing and um... well, just computing really... are also included.

And in the style of the reduced Shakespeare company here's the rest:

- History - it's chronological and it's (mostly) British.
- Geography - (mostly) local at Key Stage 1, building to global at Key Stage 2.
- Modern languages - compulsory but not restricted to particular languages after all.
- Art - children should explore different media and styles and learn about great artists.
- Music - children should explore different instruments and styles and learn about great composers.
- Design and technology - includes cooking and nutrition.
- PE - yes, children should do some.

The keen of eye may notice a couple of subjects missing here - notably RE and PSHE, which are left to the discretion of individual schools to include in their own curricula. There is also very little within the Science and Geography programmes of study that is overtly about the environment or climate change, so these too will need to be consciously planned in.

To see how the curriculum has evolved since its inception as the Draft Programmes of Study in 2012, take a look back at:

- [Primary Policy Watch: Consultation on the New National Curriculum \(February 15 2013\)](#)
- [Primary Policy Watch: Unpicking the Draft Programmes of Study \(June 29 2012\)](#)

What happens next?

In July, the government launched a [consultation on assessment and accountability](#) following their announcement in June that the current system of levels is to be abolished. (Schools will have the freedom to develop their own measures of progress so long as they are able to provide Ofsted with tangible 'pupil tracking data'). The current consultation covers proposals on everything from the future of testing (what, how much, when, by whom), to school-level accountability (85% of pupils 'secondary ready'), and a new national ranking of 11 year olds. Have your say by the 11th October.

Rosalind Letellier

Pearson Primary

For further information of interest to Primary schools, please visit pearsonprimary.co.uk and thepearsonthinktank.com, or follow [@juliecmcculloch](#) and [@PrimarySchool](#) on Twitter.