

What should I teach at each Key Stage?

The Department for Education advises the following mix as **guidance** at each Key Stage:

The structure of the national curriculum, in terms of which subjects are compulsory at each key stage, is set out in the table below:

Figure 1 – Structure of the national curriculum

	Key stage 1	Key stage 2	Key stage 3	Key stage 4
Age	5-7	7-11	11-14	14-16
Year groups	1-2	3-6	7-9	10-11
Core subjects				
English	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mathematics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Science	✓	✓	✓	✓
Foundation subjects				
Art and design	✓	✓	✓	
Citizenship			✓	✓
Computing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Design and technology	✓	✓	✓	
Languages		✓	✓	
Geography	✓	✓	✓	
History	✓	✓	✓	
Music	✓	✓	✓	
Physical education	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: At key stage 2 the subject title for languages is 'foreign language'; at key stage 3 it is 'modern foreign language'.

[Source: Department for Education, last updated 2 December 2014]

Please note also that many secondary schools now choose to start Key Stage 4 in Year 9, this gives the “average” pupil more time, and more chance to achieve respectable grades. In some schools this also allows some of the “brighter” pupils to take some of their GCSEs in Year 10, and study either an additional subject in Year 11, or follow on with a higher level of study in a subject passed at the end of Year 10. It is quite possible for some Gifted & Talented pupils to have finished one or two AS-Levels by the end of Year 11, as well as achieving 8 or 9 GCSEs.

Notice I highlighted the word **guidance**: that doesn't mean you have to follow it, although it would be advisable to follow most of the general criteria for English, Maths, Science and some computing and creativity.

Anything else?

Yes, the document continues:

All schools are also required to teach religious education at all key stages. Secondary schools must provide sex and relationship education.

Figure 2 – Statutory teaching of religious education and sex and relationship education

	Key stage 1	Key stage 2	Key stage 3	Key stage 4
Age	5-7	7-11	11-14	14-16
Year groups	1-2	3-6	7-9	10-11
Religious education	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sex and relationship education			✓	✓

[Source: Department for Education, last updated 2 December 2014]

The “sex and relationship” education usually falls into part of the broader spectrum taught as PSHE/PHSE – Personal, Social and Health Education.

Many secondary schools pay little attention to RE (Religious Education), whereas others (especially faith schools) focus on it rather more strongly. Since it is usually the parents’ choice as to whether children attend faith schools, so, too, it should be up to the parent (and perhaps the child!) to choose how much (or how little) time is spent on RE.

Even if you are not especially religious, you might like to think along the lines of what a Hindu/Buddhist school I taught in termed the Human Values – Peace, Love, Truth, Right Conduct (AKA good behaviour) and Non-Violence.

~~

The Essentials

The most crucial thing the whole way through is to keep their focus on the “three Rs”: **R**eading, **wR**iting and **aR**ithmetic (Maths as they progress from later KS2 onwards).

Try to keep some focus on grammar and spelling – apart from making their communication look more competent, when they get to their GCSE exams, there are marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar in many subjects (not just English) – in GCSE ICT and A Level computing, I have known cases where those few extra marks have pushed a student up by a grade.

Try to keep the mix, the weekly timetable, and the workload balanced.

As I have said elsewhere, If you have a child with a serious learning block (typically something like handwriting, reading or basic maths) it’s worth setting aside some serious time each day **now** to help them overcome that – even if some of the rest of the curriculum/work-mix/timetable is pushed aside for a few weeks. These issues aren’t anything *wrong with* your child; usually more that their school has not had the resources to give them a bit of extra help when they have needed it. This is your chance to change that. Check my sheet on *Blocks To Learning*.

Understanding the subject areas

Art and Design

Can typically include Fine Art (painting, drawing, sculpture, pottery, photography...)

Citizenship

This is generally about being a responsible member of society, and understanding how society works – anything from the basics of the legal and judicial systems to government and elections, your local council, road safety, being responsible with litter ...

At KS3 and KS4, Google PSHE/PHSE [Personal, Social and Health Education]

Design and Technology

Product Design; Resistant Materials Technology (used to be woodwork and metalwork when I was a lad!); Textile Technology (clothes, shoes, cushions, shawls, curtains ...); Food Technology (cooking and diet); Electronics.

Languages

In KS2, this can be the “usual” Modern Foreign Languages (typically French, German, Spanish, Italian ...) or other languages – so you could choose Latin, Ancient Greek, or a language associated with your faith, Hebrew or Arabic, for example.

In KS3 the National Curriculum stipulates a Modern Foreign Language – i.e. one that is in everyday use in one or more countries today.

Other subject areas not mentioned so far

Performing Arts (in addition to Music)

Other performing arts that can (should!) also be covered, in addition to music include drama, and (optionally) dance.

Business Studies / economics

Generally Business Studies at GCSE and Economics or Business Studies at A Level.

Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology

These are the social sciences. These subjects are rarely taught in our schools at Key Stage 3, and not given the focus they deserve at Key Stage 4 in many schools. They're often options at A Level.

Home schooling could be your opportunity to make a change here. If you have a child of secondary age interested in these subject areas, encourage them to study.

In General

The advice about encouraging social sciences in that last paragraph can equally apply to some of the other subjects now all-too-often marginalised in many secondary schools: Music, Drama, Dance, Art and some of the more creative Technologies. If your child has interest, talent, ability – or just love for these subject areas, nourish that. Let them grow a little more into the real person they are, than the “one size fits nobody” production line that mainstream education can all too sadly be. Dare to be different!