

THE KEY STAGE 3 NATIONAL STRATEGY

The Key Stage 3 national Strategy is the DfES's response to a widely held perception that pupil progress loses pace between the ages of 11 and 14. It was launched in September 2001 and has been rolled out in stages over the last three years. It is funded by the Standards Fund.

The Strategy aims to raise standards by making education for 11- to 14-year-olds challenging, demanding, vigorous and inspiring across the whole curriculum. It is based on four principles:

- Expectations: establishing high expectations for all pupils and setting challenging targets for them to achieve
- Progression: strengthening the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and ensuring progression in teaching and learning across Key Stage 3
- Engagement: promoting approaches to teaching and learning that engage and motivate pupils and demand their active participation
- Transformation: strengthening teaching and learning through a programme of professional development and practical support.

The Strategy covers five areas ('strands') of the curriculum. These are English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT), and the foundation subjects (TLF – Teaching and Learning in the Foundation subjects). TLF includes Humanities, Modern Foreign Languages, Art, PE, RE.

Effectiveness of the Strategy is measured against targets for attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics, science, and ICT:

- by 2004, 75% of 14-year-olds will achieve Level 5 in English, mathematics and ICT, and 70% in science
- by 2007, 85% will achieve Level 5 in English, mathematics and ICT and 80% in science.

These are ambitious targets. Last year, just 64% of 14-year-olds reached Level 5 in English, 65% in mathematics and 59% in science.

How does it work?

Some aspects of the Strategy are more widely used in real classrooms than others. Two tangible outcomes in particular seem likely to endure:

1. Tighter, punchier lesson structure. Typical features include:

- Getting straight down to work with a starter activity. These are designed to grab the pupils' attention and get them thinking. Often with a game-like feel or a competitive element, they are meant to be especially appealing to boys, who tend to work better for short-term goals and quick results.
- Explicit learning outcomes. The teacher tells pupils exactly what they are to learn. 'By the end of this lesson, you will be able to...' is now a common message on whiteboards.
- Active learning. Pupils are all expected to join in and be active in their own learning. There is a quite a lot of hands-on work.
- Variety. Lessons include a mix of teaching from the front, group work and private work.
- Targeted work. Work is well targeted to pupil ability; it is challenging without being so hard that some are bored, left out or left behind.
- An emphasis on skills. Lessons are as much about skill and strategy as knowledge – pupils have to explain how they arrived at their ideas and show they can apply what they have learnt.
- Links. Pupils are encouraged to make links between lessons and see how each one fits into the bigger picture. Science, for example, is organised around 5 key scientific ideas: cells, interdependence, particles, forces and energy.
- A lesson recap. The teacher rounds up at the end with a plenary session, recapping what has been achieved and reminding pupils of the lesson's learning objective.

2. Intervention – providing extra support for pupils not living up to their potential.

The Strategy advocates intervention targeted at pupils who are working below national expectations but who have the potential to meet the expectations for their age group with timely support and motivation. In practice, this typically involves giving extra support to pupils whose attainment is otherwise likely to fall below Level 5 by giving them booster lessons in the run-up to SATs in Year 9. Catch-up classes and summer school sessions are also becoming increasingly common.

Significant resources have been put in place to support the Strategy. LEAs are required to have a Strategy Manager and consultants for each strand. These are funded by the Standards Fund and are not charged to schools or their partner learning providers.

Why is the KS3 National Strategy relevant to learning providers?

The Key Stage 3 National Strategy highlights the priority areas for development for teaching 11- to 14-year-olds. For organisations wanting to work with Year 7 to Year 9

in secondary schools or provide services or resources that schools will find useful and relevant, the Strategy provides an excellent way of identifying shared agendas.

The Strategy's emphasis on enjoyment, involvement and motivation is particularly useful since it encourages schools to think more holistically, valuing enrichment experiences such as out-of-school learning, and allowing teachers to interpret the curriculum in new and imaginative ways.

What to do

LEA-level Key Stage 3 Strategy Managers have the overview of how the Strategy is implemented and supported in each LEA, and are good to sound out if you have an idea. Some LEAs have contact details for the Manager on their websites and information on their own local priorities. There may also be LEA-led initiatives that museums and other organisations can take part in.

With an increase in teacher and school networking, partner organisations may be able to join relevant groups, host meetings, use teacher networks for consultation or collaborate on projects.

Schools will also be looking for ways to reach out to parents and their communities: this is another area where museums and other learning organisations may be able to offer help.

Although many lesson resources have been produced centrally, there is a demand for more if they are of the right type and quality. The increasingly widespread use of lesson starter activities, for instance, offers an opportunity for you to create activities that tie in with the Key Stage 3 curriculum and also to get pupils thinking about your organisation