

## **Times tables test / multiplication tables check: the basics**

Primary-school children are expected to know all their times tables up to 12x12. Under the current National Curriculum, children are supposed to know their times tables by the end of Year 4, but until now they were not formally tested on them other than through multiplication questions in the Year 6 maths SATs.

### **Why a new test?**

The DfE says that the check is part of a new focus on mastering numeracy, giving children the skills and knowledge they need for secondary school and beyond. The purpose of the MTC is to determine whether Y4 pupils can recall their multiplication tables fluently (being able to answer times tables questions accurately and quickly, without having to work out the answers).

Announcing the tests in 2017, the then Education Secretary Justine Greening said, 'A good primary education lays the foundations for success at secondary school and beyond. This year's (2017) Key Stage 2 results showed our curriculum reforms are starting to raise standards and it is vital we have an assessment system that supports that.'

### **Which children will sit the multiplication check?**

The times tables test is being introduced in English schools only. It will be taken by children in Year 4, in the summer term (during a three-week period in June; schools will decide which day to administer the check).

Although all tests were cancelled because of COVID-19, in 2020 the MTC became compulsory for all English maintained schools, special schools and academies (including free schools).

Children with special educational needs will be provided for when taking the MTC.

### **How will children be tested?**

Children will be tested using an on-screen check (on a computer), where they will have to answer multiplication questions against the clock.

This will be the first time that the DfE has used computerised tests in primary schools. Calculators and wall displays that could provide children with answers will be removed from the room the MTC is taking place in.

The test will last no longer than 5 minutes and is similar to other tests already used by primary schools. Their answers will be marked instantly.

Children will have 6 seconds to answer each question in a series of 25. Each question will be worth one mark and be presented to the child in this format:

$n1 \times n2 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

Questions will be selected from the 121 number facts that make up the multiplication tables from 2 to 12, with a particular focus on the 6, 7, 8, 9 and 12 times tables as they are considered to be the most challenging. Each question will only appear once in any 25-question series, and children won't be asked to

answer reversals of a question as part of the check (so if they've already answered  $3 \times 4$  they won't be asked about  $4 \times 3$ ).

Once the child has inputted their answer on the computer / device they are using, there will be a three-second pause before the next question appears. Children will be given the opportunity to practise answering questions in this format before the official check begins.

The six-second time limit per question has been decided on by the DfE because it should allow children enough time to demonstrate their recall of times tables without giving them the time to work out the answers to each question.

### **How will the multiplication tables check results be reported?**

Pupils' individual results will be made available to schools. It's unlikely that children will be told their individual score, but schools will be required to report the results to parents or carers.

School-level results won't be made publicly available or be used in league / performance tables.

### **What if a child doesn't do well in the multiplication check?**

There will be no "pass mark" (expected standard threshold) and no child will "fail" the test. Multiplication facts will be the only things tested (there will be no testing of children's knowledge of division facts or problem-solving in the check).

The DfE says the purpose of the check is to help teachers identify which children are falling behind and target areas where they're not being given a chance to succeed.

### **How can you help your child practise their times tables?**

Because the National Curriculum for maths is so extensive, there is an expectation that parents will help their children learn their times tables at home and not rely on schools to bring them up to speed.

**Some of the techniques you can use include:**

- Practising times tables by rote.
- Asking your child multiplication questions out of order – such as 'What's  $11 \times 12$ ? What's  $5 \times 6$ ?'
- Asking your child the related division facts: 'What's  $8 \div 4$ ? What's  $9 \div 3$ ?'
- Using arrays to help your child memorise times tables – you can use fun objects like Smarties or Lego bricks to make it more entertaining.
- Giving your child word problems to test their skills, like 'If Peter has 800ml of orange juice and needs to share it between four friends, how much can they each have?'
- Using times tables apps and games like TheSchoolRun's multiplication games to build speed and of course, Times Table Rockstars!
- Singing times tables using songs like Percy Parker.