

News story: Multiplication tables check trials to begin in schools

A select number of schools across the country will start trialling the multiplication tables check from next month, the Schools Standards Minister Nick Gibb has announced today (Wednesday 14 February).

The multiplication tables check is designed to help ensure children in primary school know their times tables up to 12 off by heart. As well as being critical for everyday life, knowledge of multiplication tables helps children to solve problems quickly and flexibly, and allows them to tackle more complex mathematics later on in school.

In the primary assessment consultation run by the government last year, the majority of the sector said that Year 4 would be the best point to run a check on progress being made.

The check follows the successful introduction of the phonics screening check in 2012. There are now 154,000 more six-year-olds on track to become fluent readers than in 2012 and England's recent rise up the international PIRLS rankings puts the success of the government's reforms on a global scale.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

Academic standards are rising in our schools thanks to our reforms and the hard work of teachers, with 1.9 million more pupils in schools rated good or outstanding than in 2010. It is important to have an assessment system that continues to drive this improvement.

Just as the phonics screening check helps children who are learning to read, the multiplication tables check will help teachers identify those pupils who require extra support. This will ensure that all pupils leave primary school knowing their times tables by heart and able to start secondary school with a secure grasp of fundamental arithmetic as a foundation for mathematics.

The new on-screen check will last no longer than five minutes and is similar to the checks many schools use already. It will enable teachers to monitor a child's progress in a consistent and reliable way but has been carefully designed to avoid causing additional stress for children and teachers.

It will be sat by 8 and 9 year olds in Year 4, after teachers and schools told the Government this was the best point for it to be introduced. Results from the check will not be published at school-level, and will not be used by Ofsted and others to force changes in schools.

The system is being developed in active partnership with schools, with two trials already completed. This consolidation of basic mathematical knowledge

is in line with the principle of the maths 'mastery' pedagogy, which is successfully practised by world leaders in mathematics, Shanghai and Singapore and is now being introduced to schools in England.

In the most recent Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), England's mean score was 546, compared to Singapore which scored 618, topping the study for maths at both year 5 and 9. Approaches like this aim to close that gap and raise national standards in mathematics.

The multiplication tables check was announced as part of the government's response to its primary assessment consultation last year. This consultation proposed a number of other changes to make assessment in primary schools more accurate and reduce the burden of tests on teachers and children.

This trial comes ahead of the national voluntary roll out of the multiplication tables check for all Year 4 pupils from June 2019, before it becomes mandatory in June 2020. A national sample of schools has already been selected to participate in the trials and they will soon receive their invitation to participate. The trials will ensure the check is robust, accessible and minimises any additional burden on schools as a new assessment.

The trials follow a recent commitment from the Education Secretary to continue to improve academic standards in order to deliver a truly world-class education that not only inspires young people to make the most of their lives but also gives them the opportunity to fulfil their ambitions, no matter where they live.

Multiplication tables trials will make a positive contribution to the government's commitment through the Industrial Strategy to drive up the study of maths, ensuring that more students leave education at age 18 with a basic level of numeracy, improving the take up of maths qualifications and tackling STEM skills shortages in the economy.

Speech: Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's Press briefing in Bangladesh

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's Press Briefing Transcript:

Thank you your Excellency, it's wonderful to be here in Bangladesh on my first visit. This is a relationship that is incredibly important for the UK. It is hard to overstate the cultural, commercial and personal links between Britain and Bangladesh. We are proud to have I think 500 thousand people of Bangladeshi origin in our country and I want to convey an important message, which is that once we are leaving the European Union, we will want to intensify our bilateral relations and do more in trade together, as well as

of course trading with the rest of the Europe.

I also want to congratulate Bangladesh and the people and the government of Bangladesh on the way they have handled one of the biggest humanitarian crisis we have seen in the last few decades. I think that the government of Bangladesh has shown immense compassion, speed and mercy in dealing with a challenge that I think any government would have found very daunting indeed. I am going tomorrow to Cox's Bazar to look at the camps, to look at some of the contribution that the UK is able to make to helping with that extraordinary Bangladeshi humanitarian effort.

And the third thing I want to say is that, we had an excellent meeting, I thought, with the Prime Minister. It went, it was very long and very friendly, and we discussed all the issues of cooperation between the UK and Bangladesh, the success of Bangladesh, as it rises up inexorably and the population grows more successful, we also discussed the importance of a free press and free, fair and democratic elections.

And I am delighted that the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be coming to our Commonwealth Summit in April where she is going to be majoring on female education, 12 years of quality female education which is again one of the areas where Bangladesh has got an absolutely outstanding track record.

So, thank you again for having me along today, see you all soon!

Press release: Tax-Free Childcare opens to all eligible families

Today (14 February 2018) Tax-Free Childcare opens to all remaining eligible families: parents whose youngest child is under 12. The new scheme helps working parents with the cost of childcare.

It's quick and easy to apply, and parents could save thousands of pounds each year. For every £8 parents pay into their childcare account, the government will add an extra £2, up to £2,000 per child per year. HM Revenue and Customs has been gradually rolling out Tax-Free Childcare since April 2017.

The money can go towards a whole range of regulated childcare, including nurseries, childminders, after-school clubs and holiday clubs.

Parents, including the self-employed, can apply online for Tax-Free Childcare by visiting [Childcare Choices](#). Parents can also access the government's childcare calculator through Childcare Choices, which helps parents to choose which government support is best for them.

Nicole, a mum of twins from Greater London, who uses Tax-Free Childcare,

said:

“I was concerned about the cost of childcare, because I don’t get any other support, and I’m a single mum with 15-month-old twins. Tax-Free Childcare has taken a big burden off my shoulders

“It’s massively helped me: the extra money makes a huge difference, and I find the system really easy to use. It allows me to comfortably work full time, knowing that my children are being well looked after.”

Elizabeth Truss, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, said:

“Tax-Free Childcare will cut thousands of pounds from childcare bills and is good news for working parents.

“More parents will be able to work if they want to and this demonstrates our commitment to helping families with the cost of living.

“All eligible parents with children under 12 can now apply through Childcare Choices and should take advantage of the available support.”

Since opening the service, through which parents can apply for both Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare, more than 340,000 families have successfully applied. Of these, more than 190,000 have a Tax-Free Childcare account.

The childcare service builds on the childcare support already available to thousands of families, including:

- 15 hours free childcare for families in England
- enhanced childcare support through Universal Credit
- tax credits for childcare

[What’s Tax-Free childcare like?](#)

Speech: The UK’s shared economic values with Sweden

Britain cares deeply about its relationship with Sweden. I am here to reinforce this message from our Prime Minister, our Parliament and our people.

Whilst in Stockholm today (13 February 2018), I will be meeting with Finance Minister Magdalena Andersson to ensure that the bonds between our citizens and businesses strengthen over the coming years.

Our two countries are linked by shared economic principles: we both aim to maximise our trade opportunities globally, and we both have deep expertise in

our respective financial sectors. Our economies are closely linked: from Spotify to IKEA, we Brits consume Swedish products at an astonishing rate. Nearly 7% of all Swedish exports end up in the UK, making us Sweden's sixth most important export partner.

As you know, the British people have voted for Brexit, and the British government is committed to delivering this in a way that protects the interests of families and businesses. We will leave the EU in March 2019, but we are not leaving Europe. We want to maintain the close connections between the UK and the economies of the EU27.

In the short term, our priority is to offer certainty. To do this, we must agree a time-limited Implementation Period after we leave the EU. Again, this is in both our interests because businesses across Sweden, the UK, and Europe will have time to prepare for a single set of changes once we know what our future partnership will look like.

Of course, Sweden did not vote for Brexit, but you have a strong interest in a successful outcome. You rightly want to maintain the integrity of the Single Market and the Customs Union while avoiding damage to trade and economic growth. If we can be ambitious in agreeing a new model of cooperation, one that looks beyond models that already exist, then I am confident that we can agree a deal that is good for the UK, for Sweden and for the EU.

This future partnership must cover the length and breadth of our economies, including financial services. This will benefit all of us: in the UK and the EU. The City of London is a global financial centre, which attracts capital and people from across the world and channels finance into the European economy. London's strengths – concentration of activity, depth of expertise, and ability to channel capital – cannot be easily replicated. We can and should approach negotiations with the aim to preserve this European asset, securing a deal that benefits both our economies.

We want to establish a new economic partnership with the EU that recognises our existing deep interconnectedness. A spirit of pragmatic cooperation is vital to achieving this.

I say this because both sides need to be clear about what they want from a future relationship. The complaint from Brussels has been that the UK "hasn't made up its mind what type of relationship it wants" but in London, many feel that we have little signal of what future relationship the EU27 would like to have with a post-Brexit Britain. I don't believe this can be a question only for British politicians and British voters to resolve.

If we can work together on the basis that a good deal is in everybody's interests, we can agree a future partnership preserving the best of what we have – allowing our businesses to continue trading together in goods and services.

Two weeks ago the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge came to Sweden to celebrate your energy, creativity and innovation. Let us use this same energy to agree

a new, deep and special partnership that keeps our relationship growing strongly in the future.

Speech: Call for Safe, Voluntary, and Dignified Return of Rohingya Refugees

Thank you Mr President,

And thank you to Assistant Secretary-General Jenca and High Commissioner Grandi for your briefings.

This weekend, UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson visited Cox's Bazar, where he met some of the almost one million Rohingya refugees enduring the difficult living conditions, that you've heard about today. Visiting northern Rakhine, he saw with his own eyes the horror of what has happened.

When he met Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on Sunday, the Foreign Secretary said that there needed to be the right conditions created in Rakhine that make it safe for Rohingya refugees to return to their homes, free from fear, and in the knowledge that basic rights will be protected and upheld.

This Council stated last November that the Rohingya refugees must be allowed to return to their homes – safely, voluntarily, and in conditions of human dignity.

Mr President,

The UK believes that his Council has a duty to ensure those words are matched by action.

We should be clear on three things:

- We should be clear on why refugees fled Rakhine in the first place, indeed why they continue to do so;
- We should be clear that the conditions in Rakhine today are not yet suitable for informed, safe, voluntary, and dignified returns;
- And we should be clear what needs to be done now.

The Rohingya refugees fleeing Rakhine have suffered the most appalling violence: rape, murder, the burning of their villages.

In December, Special Representative Pramila Patten briefed us on the horrific sexual atrocities allegedly committed by the Burmese security forces.

More details emerged last week of specific atrocities committed by Burmese security forces at Gu Dar Pyin and Inn Din villages.

Even now, Rohingya still flee forced starvation and continued human rights

violations.

As many of us have said, this is ethnic cleansing.

Mr President,

We welcome the Burmese government's dialogue with Bangladesh and the initial preparations it has made for returns. Much of this is in response to this Council's focus on the crisis.

But the UK believes the conditions in Rakhine do not yet allow for the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees.

Now, Mr President, we must be clear on the way forward.

Last November's Presidential Statement remains the guiding frame set by the United Nations Security Council for the actions which need to be taken.

I want to highlight four in particular.

First, both Myanmar and Bangladesh must cooperate fully with the United Nations. We welcome Bangladesh's initial engagement with the UNHCR, which now needs to fully involve them in the returns process, ideally through a Tripartite Agreement. Only the UNHCR has the expertise to handle returns on this scale and give confidence to refugees. It is also essential that Myanmar allows all United Nations agencies to provide humanitarian support for all their peoples.

Second, the parties should take concrete steps to ensure that refugees will be able to return home on a voluntary basis and with access to accurate information.

Refugees should not be sent to internment camps, and Myanmar must set out how restitution of property and livelihoods will occur.

Women and girls have suffered specific sexual and gender-based violence and face specific risks. They must be represented in any decision-making process and their views given special consideration.

Dismantling the IDP camps which have existed in central Rakhine since 2012 and supporting their inhabitants in returning home would be a positive confidence-building measure.

Again we believe that the UNHCR is the only agency with the necessary expertise.

Third, Burma must ensure the safety for all communities in Rakhine. This means an immediate halt to violence and human rights violations and steps to reduce intercommunal tensions.

It also means giving refugees confidence that those who have committed crimes will be brought to justice through an open and transparent accountability process.

Instead, we have seen the arrest of two Reuters journalists who reported on those killings and the denial of access to UN-mandated human rights bodies.

The UK calls for the release of the Reuters journalists, and calls for the Burmese government's full cooperation with the UN Fact-Finding Mission, the Special Rapporteur, and OHCHR.

Fourth, Myanmar must demonstrate progress implementing the Rakhine Advisory Commission recommendations. These recommendations continue to provide a blueprint for a more peaceful and prosperous future for all communities in Rakhine. Crucially, they address civil and political rights, including pathways for the Rohingya to receive full Burmese citizenship, as well as addressing socio-economic development. Genuine progress on implementation would demonstrate that the Burmese government is sincere about offering Rohingya refugees a viable future to return to.

Mr President,

Before I conclude, I want to once more pay tribute to Bangladesh for hosting the Rohingya community while they fled in panic for their lives.

But while they remain, Bangladesh – supported by all of us and the international community – must protect refugees and provide for their needs. This includes getting children into schools, helping men and women earn livelihoods, providing support to victims of sexual violence. Humanitarian agencies need to deliver services and prepare camps for the monsoon season.

The UK stands with Bangladesh. We have contributed £59 million in assistance. We urge the international community to do more to support Bangladesh as they help these refugees and the communities that host them.

Mr President,

The world watched in horror as the violence in Rakhine forced the Rohingya to flee. This Council has played a vital role in shining a spotlight on the situation and in encouraging action by the authorities on the ground. We must not turn away or become distracted. We should stand ready to visit ourselves, and we must be ready to take further action.

Thank you.