

You may have heard announcements about the Multiplication Tables Check coming in for year 4 children. Here's what you need to know:

1. We love maths. It's an awesome subject to learn and to teach.
2. Maths is a big subject and we appreciate there's more to it than times tables and there's more to times tables than learning them off by heart. However, a lot of the rich, interesting maths is all about the multiplicative relationships and these are hard to fully grasp without fluent recall of the tables. For that reason, learning the tables is fundamental – they are a key facilitator to the maths that sits on top. We've always believed that.
3. We're not worried about the checks and this wasn't a surprise. In fact, we're in favour of the checks because it's always good to sharpen practice across the education sector and this is a useful lever to get schools to do that. We're already in a good place with learning the tables and the expectations are in line with the National Curriculum so it's business as usual for us.
4. The checks will not be compulsory until 2020 so current year 2s will be the first cohort to do them when they're in year 4. We have the option of volunteering the current year 3s to do the checks in 2019.
5. They will be done at some point during the year, most likely within a three-week-long window towards the end of the year.
6. The results of the test are not published publicly, they're not going to end up on a league table and they're not to worry about. There's no pass or fail, there's just a score out of 25 marks (or 20). They're not to be used to compare children, they're for *us* to reflect on so that we make the most of our provision. We're actually looking forward to seeing how well we do.
7. The checks consist of 25 questions (possibly only 20, depending on government trials later this year). The questions will only be multiplication and they will go up to 12×12 . There's nothing novel about the questions and they don't require problem solving so there's nothing to trip them up.
8. The checks are all about remembering the multiplication facts. That doesn't mean we'll forget all about the concepts, patterns, structures and relationships in multiplication. We're going to be learning those too, partly because they go hand in hand with excellent recall.
9. There are concerns shared in the public domain that this is "yet another test". The government has been careful to call it a "check" and that's important. It signals their intention to keep it low-stakes and we should remember that the data could prove useful to us.
10. Given that the questions are relatively simple, age appropriate and the length of the check, which is carried out on a computer, is under 5 minutes, we don't think the checks are onerous.
11. Tests in themselves don't cause anxiety. It's the perceived cost of not doing well. For that reason, we will actively downplay the checks with the pupils. The only thing that will stress the children is if we repeatedly refer to the checks in class or at home, even casually in front of them when they're not supposed to be listening.
12. So we will not ever be saying "Remember you've got the multiplication checks next year." Or "We must practice because you've got the checks coming up." We just won't mention them. Please be supportive of that and refrain from referring to the checks at home too.
13. As far as they're concerned, when it comes to the day itself, they're going to have the computers or tablets out so it will just seem like the teachers have chosen to do something slightly different today.

14. You may notice us taking even more initiative when it comes to learning the tables with more options for home learning. If you are practising with your child, remember you're practising for the benefit of their wider maths education, not for them to get a high score on the tests. So please enjoy the opportunity to work with your child and remember to hold back on comments about the checks.
15. Please be supportive of our approach in parent-parent communication channels. It's important that we get behind the checks for the benefit of all our children.