

New Subjects In School Shake-Up

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Thousands of secondary school pupils are to tackle completely new subjects as they return for the new academic year.

Curriculum shake-up for secondary schools

A new curriculum will see youngsters learn about subjects such as credit card debt, climate change and tackling obesity.

The changes will also allow headteachers in England to schedule lessons in "economically useful languages" such as Mandarin and Urdu.

Traditional study topics such as Shakespeare and the Second World War will remain.

But themes like sustainable development, environmental change and global poverty will be given greater focus to make pupils aware of their responsibilities as world citizens.

Pupils aged 11-14 will get an entitlement to cook and will be taught how to make simple, healthy meals from basic fresh ingredients, helping to fight obesity.

Youngsters will also be taught skills like personal finance, budgeting, mortgages and interest rates, and balancing credit cards.

Ministers say the changes will free up about a quarter of the school day to give teachers more chance to help pupils who are falling behind with the basics.

Launching alongside the new curriculum is a pilot scheme of specialist diplomas offering teenagers a combination of academic and vocational study.

New subjects are being offered

Subjects like construction and the built environment, creative and media, and information technology and society will be trialled this year on a small scale.

Critics say the new qualifications will mean little.

Education consultant Jan Parnell told Sky News: "It'll only work if employers really do get on board and there are lots of constraints around small businesses getting involved.

"But I think if we move slowly, evaluate it properly and really try to make it practically focused as well as the theory, we'll engage a larger group."

Just 145 schools and colleges are starting to teach the new qualifications but in two years' time 14 different subjects will be offered.

The Government hopes they will encourage up to 90% of students to stay on at school by 2015.