British schoolchildren are now learning computer coding. What do they think about it? And are teachers ready for the coding revolution?

Year of Code

Can you believe that not long ago the World Wide Web didn't exist? March 2014 marks the 25th anniversary of the internet. 2014 is also the Year of Code in the UK and from September the school curriculum across all state primary and secondary schools will include computer coding. This means that British schoolchildren aged 5–16 will learn code, the language (or languages) used to give instructions to computers. The British government wants to give children the computer skills they may need for the future. Learning code might help them to find work when they leave school.

Geek or enthusiast?

Some young people already know how to code, of course. Amy Mathers first tried coding at a science festival when she was 11. She was recently named the 'European Digital Girl of the Year' and now she teaches older pupils how to code during her school lunch breaks. She also gives speeches at computer industry events to encourage young people to try coding. She calls herself a geek but doesn't see that as a negative thing. She challenges people to look up the word 'geek' in the dictionary and find out that it describes someone who's an enthusiast. Amy says that she isn't surprised that coding is getting more and more popular, now that so many people have smartphones and use computers**.**

Volunteer groups

School isn't the only place where you can learn coding. There are volunteers around Britain and the whole world who have set up groups to help young people learn these skills. Steven Flower is part of the CoderDojo organisation which runs free coding clubs for people aged 5–17. He started with a group of just eight boys a few years ago and these days about 150 teenagers a month attend at his Manchester CoderDojo. The children need to bring a parent, a laptop and the desire to learn how to code. There are now plenty of girls who come to the group, Steven says, although the majority are still boys. You can look on the CoderDojo website to find your nearest group.

Can you code?

There have been some criticisms of the government policy to teach coding. For example, people are worried that teachers aren't prepared because they need to be trained to code before they can teach it to their students. Other negative comments involve Lottie Dexter, who is helping to organise the Year of Code campaign. Lottie was interviewed on TV about this new project and she admitted that she didn't know how to code! Some people think that this isn't a good advert for encouraging girls to learn coding. A Year of Code representative defended Lottie by saying that because 90 per cent of people don't know how to code it seems logical to use a person without those skills to help publicise the Year of Code.