



Standards  
& Testing  
Agency

# **Key stage 1: phonics screening check administration guidance**

**Guide to administering the phonics  
screening check for 2016**

**March 2016**

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## Introduction

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Standards and Testing Agency (STA). It has been produced to help headteachers and teachers to administer the 2016 phonics screening check.

This guidance is for:

- school leaders, school staff and governing bodies in all maintained schools, academies and free schools
- local authorities.

The phonics screening check should be administered during the week commencing 13 June 2016. If a pupil is absent they can take the check until Friday 24 June. Pupils must only attempt the phonics screening check once during the check window.

There are no changes to the way the check should be administered in 2016.

Instructions for scoring the phonics check will be included with the check materials. These will be sent to schools between Monday 6 June and Friday 10 June.

All other [check administration guidance](#) is available online.

## Headteachers' responsibilities

You are responsible for ensuring all check administrators are familiar with and comply with all the check administration guidance. Schools that do not comply could be subject to a maladministration investigation.

## Phonics screening check administrators

You must ensure that the check is administered on a one-to-one basis by a teacher who is known to the pupil. It must not be administered by a teaching assistant, including higher level teaching assistants, because the role requires a teacher's professional judgement about which responses are correct. The teacher must not be a relative or carer of the pupil taking the check.

It may be helpful for you to hold training sessions, or attend those run by local authorities (LAs), to ensure those involved in administering the check are fully prepared.

Check administrators must be familiar with the published guidance. It contains important information about what to do before, during and after the check, in particular:

- information for check administrators
- [phonics screening check: sample materials](#) which explains how the check is constructed and what the materials will look like
- [phonics screening check: training video](#) which includes examples of pupils attempting the check and provides guidance on how to score responses.

## Maladministration

Your school could be subject to a maladministration investigation if it doesn't comply with the check administration guidance. This comprises:

- guidance including the KS1 '[Assessment and reporting arrangements](#)' (ARA)
- information provided with the check materials.

Allegations of maladministration can come from misunderstandings about correct check administration. To help avoid this, make sure all staff, pupils and parents understand how and when the check will be administered.

## Security

It is important that the check materials, in particular the 'Phonics screening check: pupils' materials' and '2016 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance', are kept secure at all times.

The security of the check must be maintained until the check period ends on Friday 24 June. This ensures the confidentiality and integrity of the check so that no pupil has an unfair advantage over another.

You must make sure that everyone who has access to the check materials understands their responsibility for keeping them secure. The check words must not be shared with anyone who is not directly involved with the administration of the check. This includes other staff at your school or other schools, any online forums and family members.

If you suspect a breach of security regarding the check materials, the incident must be reported immediately to the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013. STA will then investigate the incident and take action where appropriate.

## **Headteacher's declaration form**

You must complete and submit the headteacher's declaration form after your school has completed the phonics screening check. You must still complete the form if your pupils are below the standard of the check.

The form either confirms that:

- your school has administered the checks according to the published guidance, or
- the statements in the form can't be confirmed and that you've raised any issues with STA.

You, or a delegated senior member of staff, must complete and submit the online form after the last check has been administered.

The form will be available from the 'Phonics screening check' section of the [NCA tools website](#) from Monday 13 June. It must be submitted by Friday 24 June.

You can't amend the form after it has been submitted.

If for any reason you, or other authorised senior member of staff, can't complete the headteacher's declaration form, you should notify the national curriculum assessments helpline.

## **Pupils who should take the phonics screening check**

All pupils in year 1 in the 2015 to 2016 academic year must take the phonics screening check, unless they have no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences.

Pupils in year 2 who fall into the following categories should also take the phonics screening check:

- Pupils who didn't take the check in year 1 because they were absent, were working below the standard of the check or had recently arrived in the country and couldn't speak confidently in English.
- Any pupil who didn't reach the expected standard in year 1.
- Any pupil who entered the schooling system in year 2.

If pupils in year 2 still don't understand grapheme-phoneme correspondences or are unable to access the materials, you don't have to administer the check to them.

If a pupil joins a school in year 2, the common transfer file should include information about whether the pupil reached the expected standard in the check in year 1. If this information isn't provided, you should either contact your LA or use the [Key to Success website](#) to search for the pupil by their Unique Pupil Number.

For reporting purposes, pupils who don't need to take the check again will be indicated by a phonics outcome of 'Wa' (pupil took the phonics screening check and met the expected standard). If you can't establish whether the pupil took the check in year 1, the pupil should take the check in year 2.

The check must be administered to year 2 pupils during the week commencing 13 June and in the same way as year 1 pupils.

## **Eligible pupils in maintained nursery schools**

Pupils who will reach the age of 6 before the end of the school year in maintained nursery schools must take the phonics screening check.

## **Pupils who move schools**

If a pupil arrives at a school just before or during the phonics screening check week they should still attempt the check, unless they have no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences. (The check week begins on Monday 13 June.)

## **Pupils who shouldn't take part in the phonics screening check**

You may decide it isn't appropriate for a pupil to participate in the phonics screening check. Where this is the case, you should explain this to the pupil's parents. The headteacher's decision regarding participation is final.

You may want to provide a similar experience for pupils who will not formally participate in the check in 2016. You could do this by modifying the 'practice sheet' to include only single letters or simple 2 letter blends so they can demonstrate the skills they have learnt. The 'practice sheet' and live phonics screening check will be available on the 'Phonics screening check' section of the [NCA tools website](#) on Monday 13 June.

If a pupil is unable to access the check it is important that teachers are aware of that pupil's progress in phonics so they can plan the next steps in their teaching.

Any pupils who don't take the check in year 1 must be reconsidered the following year.

## **Pupils working below the level of the phonics screening check**

If a pupil has shown no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, you may decide that the pupil should not participate in the phonics screening check.

## **Pupils for whom English is an additional language**

If a pupil has limited fluency in English, or has recently moved to the UK and is unable to understand letters and sounds in English, you may decide that the pupil should not take the phonics screening check.

## **Pupils who use British sign language**

Some pupils who use British sign language (BSL) or other sign-supported communication to spell out individual letters are not using phonics in the sense of linking letters and sounds. You should consider if it is appropriate for these pupils to take the phonics screening check.

## **Pupils who are selectively mute**

Pupils who are selectively mute will be unable to participate in the phonics screening check if they don't give verbal responses in school. They may be able to identify the words in the check but will not be able to demonstrate that knowledge by speaking the answers out loud.

Pupils who are selectively mute may informally demonstrate their knowledge at home with a family member who can discuss the outcome with the teacher. This arrangement will ensure the pupil has had a similar experience to their peers and give them an opportunity to show their knowledge.

To avoid potential security issues regarding the check materials, this arrangement can only take place after the end of the check period ends on Friday 24 June.

For reporting purposes, the pupil should be recorded as 'D' (pupil did not take the phonics screening check) as the results can't be validated.

## Preparing for the check

### Receiving your materials

You will receive 1 set of materials per 30 pupils in year 1. If you have any year 2 pupils taking the check you will be provided with sufficient materials to administer the check to these pupils. Each set of materials will contain:

- 1 copy of the 'Phonics screening check: pupils' materials'
- 30 copies of the 'Phonics screening check: answer sheet'
- 1 copy of the 'Phonics screening check: practice sheet'
- 1 copy of the '2016 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance'.

You can download [samples](#) of what the check looks like.

The threshold mark will not be included in the guidance. It will be published on GOV.UK on Monday 27 June.

You will receive your check materials between Monday 6 June and Friday 10 June. When you receive the materials you should open the box and check the number of packs against the delivery note. Make sure this is witnessed by a second member of staff. The inner packs must be left unopened and stored securely until Monday 13 June.

Please make sure you keep the signed and annotated delivery note in a secure, accessible place as it will be requested if you receive a monitoring visit.

If the delivery is incomplete, or if any of the packs are unsealed or damaged on arrival you must report this immediately to the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013. You may be asked to send a photograph of the damaged packages.

If you haven't received your check materials by midday on Friday 10 June you should contact the helpline.

### Storing materials

Make sure that the answer sheets are stored securely yet are accessible for any monitoring visits.

The other phonics screening check materials must also be securely stored until the end of the check period on Friday 24 June. This is to make sure that the integrity of the check is maintained.

## Additional materials

There is no need to contact us for additional materials. If there are not enough copies of the 'answer sheet', you may photocopy it or download and print copies from the 'Phonics screening check' section of the NCA tools website [NCA tools](#). This section of NCA tools opens on Monday 13 June.

## Preparing check rooms

The phonics screening check should be administered in a room which is quiet and provides a comfortable, well-lit space. Rooms must be prepared before pupils are admitted.

Displays or materials that could help pupils in the check must be removed or covered for the duration of the check. More than 1 room will be needed if the check will be administered to more than 1 pupil at the same time.

## Arrangements for pupils with specific needs

Your school may need to adapt the phonics screening check for some pupils. Adjustments must be made based primarily on normal classroom practice for pupils with specific needs. You don't need to request our permission to make adaptations, however you must ensure that any changes don't advantage or disadvantage individual pupils.

It may be helpful to use the 'practice sheet' with pupils before administering the check. This will enable teachers to identify where it may be appropriate to provide a pupil with a rest break by splitting the check into parts or to adapt the materials, e.g. changing the font or font size.

Those who may need adjustments include pupils:

- with a statement of SEN as described in the [SEND Code of Practice](#)
- for whom provision is being made in school under SEN support and whose learning difficulty or disability significantly affects access to the check
- with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) or SEND support plan
- with a disability that doesn't give rise to a special educational need but requires alternative access arrangements
- who are unable to sit and work for a sustained period because of a disability or behavioural, emotional or social difficulty.

It is not possible to list all of the circumstances in which pupils may need adaptations. You should contact the national curriculum assessments helpline for advice on specific situations.

## Adapting the check materials

You may need to adapt the phonics screening check materials to meet pupils' specific needs. [Samples](#) of what the check looks like are available on GOV.UK.

The following versions of the check will be available to download from the 'Phonics screening check' section of the [NCA tools website](#) from Monday 13 June:

- Pdf version of the standard materials that can also be used for printing onto different coloured paper.
- Word versions of the standard materials with colour pictures, black and white pictures, and no pictures.
- Pdf version of the 'Phonics screening check: practice sheet' that can also be used for printing onto different coloured paper.
- Word versions of the 'Phonics screening check: practice sheet' with colour pictures, black and white pictures, and no pictures.
- Pdf version of the 'Phonics screening check: answer sheet'.
- Pdf version of the '2016 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance'.

They are designed so that teachers can modify them to meet the needs of individual pupils and their own approach to teaching phonics. They are also provided in case you need to print additional materials. Examples of modifications include:

- changing the font
- changing the font size
- having fewer words per page
- removing the imaginary creatures for any pupils that might find them distracting.

## Coloured overlays

You may use a coloured overlay if this is normal classroom practice.

## Rephrase instructions

The phonics screening check has a standard introduction. However, if a pupil is likely to be confused by this, you may develop your own. The instructions may refer to the practice words but must not refer to the words within the actual check.

## Access arrangements

### Rest breaks

Each pupil will usually take between 4 and 9 minutes to complete the phonics screening check, however there isn't a time limit. You should give pupils enough time to respond to each word.

If you believe a pupil will find it difficult to concentrate or may experience fatigue during the check, you may use rest breaks to make it more manageable. Rest breaks can be taken when needed.

When planning for the check, consider when it would be most appropriate for the pupil to take a break. If the pupil is likely to need a rest break more frequently than between the 2 sections of the check or at the end of a page, we recommend you modify the materials so there are fewer words on each page.

The pupil must be kept isolated from the rest of the cohort during the rest break. The check must be completed on the same day.

### **Cued speech**

If the pupil is familiar with cued speech it can be used by a professional skilled in cued speech and by the deaf pupil to make their responses clear for all words. If the deaf pupil would prefer to speak the words then cued speech should be used to help clarify what sounds they were aiming for.

### **Visual phonics**

These techniques can be used to help pupils make their responses clear if this is normal classroom practice.

### **'Sound buttons'**

If a pupil uses 'sound buttons' to help them decode words as part of normal classroom practice they may use them during the administration of the check.

You must give the pupil a clean copy of the check so that they can mark the 'sound buttons' against the graphemes themselves. You must not mark the graphemes for the pupil.

### **Readers**

The use of readers is not allowed.

### **Braille versions**

Braille versions of the check are available on request. They will be provided in grade 1 United English braille (UEB) without pictures of imaginary creatures.

You can order braille versions by contacting STA's [modified test helpline](#). To comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, do not send requests for braille materials by email. Braille orders placed by Monday 11 May will be delivered to schools by Friday 10 June. If a pupil is identified as needing braille materials after 11 May, you should telephone STA's modified test helpline on 0300 303 3019.

## **Pupil absence during the check week**

If a pupil is absent during the check week, you can administer the check up to Friday 24 June. Any pupil who is absent from school for this entire period should be recorded as absent when submitting the results data for the check.

## Check administrators' responsibilities

The check must be administered on a one-to-one basis by a teacher who is known to the pupil. It must not be administered by a teaching assistant, including higher level teaching assistants, because the role requires a teacher's professional judgement about which responses are correct. The teacher must not be a relative or carer of the pupil taking the check.

If you are a check administrator you should prepare by familiarising yourself with this guidance, in particular:

- information about keeping check materials secure
- instructions for administering the check, including how to score pupils' responses.

Your headteacher is responsible for arranging training to make sure you are ready for the check. As a result you should understand and feel confident about:

- administering the check
- amending the check materials if you have pupils with specific needs
- dealing with issues while you're administering the check.

## Preparing the room

The phonics screening check must be administered on a one-to-one basis in a room which is quiet and provides a comfortable, well-lit space. The room must be prepared before pupils are admitted. This means removing any displays or materials that could help pupils in the check.

## Security of materials

It is important that the security of the check materials is maintained until the check period ends on Friday 24 June. This ensures the confidentiality and integrity of the check is maintained so that no pupil has an unfair advantage over another.

You must not share the check words with anyone not directly involved with the administration of the check. This includes other staff at the school or other schools, any online forums and family members.

If you suspect a breach of security regarding the check materials, report the incident immediately to the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013. The STA will then investigate the incident and take action where appropriate.

## Administering the check

You should introduce the phonics screening check as consistently as possible, bearing in mind some pupils may require more explanation in order to understand the task.

The check materials include a double-sided 'practice sheet' with 4 pseudo-words and 4 real words on each side. You can use this to familiarise pupils with the task. If a pupil is struggling to decode the words on the 'practice sheet' you should stop the check and discuss with your headteacher whether the pupil should participate in the check.

During the practice, you can give further guidance to ensure pupils understand the task. For example, you may remind the pupil that the word must be blended, which wouldn't be allowed during the check itself.

The following text provides an example of how you could introduce the check.

*In this activity, I am going to ask you to read some words aloud.*

*You may have seen some of the words before and others will be new to you.*

*You should try to read each word but don't worry if you can't. If it helps you, you may sound out the letters before trying to say the word.*

*This 'practice sheet' shows you what the words will look like.*

*Have a go at reading out loud these 4 words which you should have come across before [at, in, beg and sum].*

*The words on this side [turn over 'practice sheet'] are not real words. They are names for types of imaginary creatures. You can see a picture of the creature next to each word.*

*Can you read out the words on this page for me [ot, vap, osk and ect]?*

*Ok, now we are going to start reading out the words in this booklet and I'm going to write down what you say on my sheet.*

*In this booklet there are 4 words on each page. I will tell you at the start of each page whether they are real words that you may have seen before or names for types of imaginary creatures.*

*The first page has names for types of imaginary creatures and you can see their pictures.*

*Can you start reading the words to me?*

It is important to tell the pupil whether they are real words or types of imaginary creatures on each page.

You can point to whole words to indicate which word comes next but you must be careful not to point to the words in a way that indicates how to decode them. Avoid, for example, pointing from left to right or hovering over letters.

## Completing the answer sheet

You should use the answer sheets to record each pupil's responses during the check so that you have an accurate record of how many words a pupil reads correctly.

You can also use them to record your own comments, for example any graphemes a pupil didn't recognise or when blending was difficult. This may help you plan future phonics teaching.

If you're not familiar with the answer sheets you can download [sample versions](#).

## Scoring the phonics screening check

The '2016 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance' will be sent to schools with the check materials between Monday 6 June and Friday 10 June. It shouldn't be opened until Monday 13 June when it will also be available from the 'Phonics screening check' section of [NCA tools website](#).

The scoring guidance details acceptable pronunciations of the check's pseudo-words. It provides 2 explanations of how words are pronounced. For example: blan This uses the 'bl' from 'black' and rhymes with 'pan' /blæn/.

The threshold mark will not be included in the guidance. It will be available on GOV.UK on Monday 27 June.

You should score the phonics screening check as the pupil works through each word in order. For each word, you should make a record on the answer sheet of whether the pupil said the word correctly or not, considering the following points.

If a pupil sounds out the phonemes but doesn't blend the word, they must not be prompted to do so and this must be scored as incorrect.

Pupils may elongate phonemes but if they leave gaps between phonemes and don't blend them, this must be scored as incorrect.

Alternative pronunciations must be considered when deciding whether a response is correct. For real words, inappropriate grapheme-phoneme correspondences must be marked as incorrect (for example, reading 'blow' to rhyme with 'cow' would be incorrect). However, alternative pronunciations of graphemes will be allowed in pseudo-words. The scoring guidance gives some alternative pronunciations however the list of acceptable pronunciations is not exhaustive.

A pupil's accent should be taken into account when deciding whether a response is acceptable but there must be no bias for or against pupils with a particular accent.

Any pronunciation difficulties should be taken into account when deciding whether a response is acceptable. For example, a pupil unable to form the 'th' sound who instead usually says 'fw' should have this scored as correct.

If a pupil shows their ability to decode by correcting an attempt, this should be marked as correct. However, pupils must not be prompted to 'have another go' and the final attempt must be scored, even if this is incorrect and a previous attempt had been correct.

You should not indicate whether a pupil has decoded a word correctly or not during the administration of the check; you may offer encouragement or support.

Pupils should be given as long as necessary to respond to a word, although in most cases 10 seconds should be enough.

You should decide when it is appropriate to tell the pupil to move onto the next word, taking care not to do so while they are still trying to decode the word.

## **Problems or queries during the phonics screening check**

You must ensure that nothing you say or do during the phonics screening check could be interpreted as giving pupils an advantage. For further help and guidance, contact the national curriculum assessments helpline.

Most pupils should be able to attempt all words in the check. However, it is important that pupils should not become distressed or have a negative experience during the check.

If a pupil is struggling with the check, you should give careful consideration to stopping it before the end.

Similarly, if a pupil is showing signs of fatigue, you should consider using a rest break. If a pupil needs frequent lengthy rest breaks, think about stopping the check completely.

When making the decision to stop, you should ensure that the pupil has been given the full opportunity to show what they can do. If the check is stopped before the end, you should report the pupil's score for what they have attempted.

## **Further guidance**

For more guidance on how to score the check, watch the ['Year 1 phonics screening check training video'](#).

## Results and reporting

The threshold mark will be published on GOV.UK on Monday 27 June. Check administrators should check each pupil's score against the threshold to establish whether they have achieved the expected standard.

### Pupils who don't meet the expected standard

The Department for Education (DfE) has published [guidance](#) on what schools should do if a pupil doesn't meet the expected standard.

Pupils who haven't met the expected standard in the check at the end of year 1 in 2016 must be considered for a retake in June 2017. Schools are expected to maintain the programme of support for these pupils.

### Reporting results to parents

You must report pupils' results to parents whether or not their child has met the expected standard to ensure they are aware of their child's progress in developing phonics skills. This must be done by the end of the summer term at the latest. You can choose how to communicate results to parents.

If a pupil hasn't met the expected standard you should outline the support that will be put in place to help the pupil progress.

### Providing results data to local authorities

All schools, including academies, must report pupil-level phonics screening check results to their LAs. Results must be submitted for all pupils in year 1 and year 2 that are eligible to take the check, using the following codes.

Description	What to record
Pupil took the phonics screening check and met the expected standard	Score - record in the Phonics mark field
Pupil took the phonics screening check and did not meet the expected standard	Score – record in the Phonics mark field
Absent	A – record in the Phonics outcome field
Pupil did not take the phonics screening check	D – record in the Phonics outcome field
Pupil has left the school	L – record in the Phonics outcome field

Your LA will tell you how to submit your data and by when. Management information system suppliers have been advised of the data requirements for the check. Support for these systems is often offered through an LA or through the supplier, depending on local arrangements.

If a pupil moves school after taking the check, their results should be:

- submitted by the school in which they took the check
- provided to the next school via the common transfer file

LAs will submit check results data to the DfE by the end of the summer term.

Data received by the DfE after Thursday 30 July will not be included in the provisional statistics or initial release of RAISEonline data.



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