



Department  
for Education

Standards  
& Testing  
Agency

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Statutory guidance

# Phonics screening check

Updated 30 January 2015

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# 1.

## Overview of the phonics screening check

The phonics screening check is designed to confirm whether pupils have learnt phonic decoding to an appropriate standard. It will identify pupils who need extra help to improve their decoding skills.

The check consists of 20 real words and 20 pseudo-words that a pupil reads aloud to the teacher. You can use the [sample materials](#) to familiarise yourself with the check.

You can also look at [materials from previous years](#).

# 2.

## Schools that should administer the phonics screening check

Participation in the check depends on the type of school.

### 2.1 Maintained schools

All maintained schools and maintained special schools must participate.

### 2.2 Maintained nursery schools

Maintained nursery schools with pupils who will reach the age of 6 before the end of the school year must participate.

## **2.3 Academies and free schools in England**

Academies and free schools must participate in the check where it forms part of their funding agreement.

## **2.4 Pupil referral units and maintained hospitals schools**

If you have pupils who are on the register at a maintained school or academy they are required to take the check. Results should be reported by the school where the pupil is registered.

Pupils not on the register of a maintained school or academy that attend a pupil referral unit or hospital school are not required to take the check. They are expected to receive a comparable education to a pupil in a mainstream school. Therefore it is recommended that the phonics screening check forms part of their educational provision where appropriate.

## **2.5 Overseas schools**

Service Children's Education schools must participate.

## **2.6 Non-maintained special schools**

Non-maintained special schools can't participate in the check. You will be able to download the

[2015 materials](#) in June, once the check administration window has closed.

## 2.7 Independent schools in England

Independent schools can't participate in the check. You will be able to download the [2015 materials](#) in June, once the check administration window has closed.

# 3.

## Pupils that should take the phonics screening check

With some [exceptions](#) all year 1 pupils must take the phonics screening check. This includes pupils registered at maintained nursery schools who will reach the age of 6 before the end of the school year.

Unless they fit the exceptions, pupils in year 2 must also take the check if they:

- didn't meet the required standard in year 1
- haven't taken it before

You don't need to register pupils for the check.

Headteachers should decide whether it is appropriate for each of their pupils to take the phonics screening check. The headteacher's decision regarding participation is final.

You should explain your decision to the pupil's [parents](#) so that they understand why their child is not being assessed. If appropriate, you should provide the parents with documentary evidence to support your decision. You should also explain how the school is helping their child learn to decode using phonics.

# 4.

## **Pupils that shouldn't take the phonics screening check**

Pupils shouldn't take the check if they:

- haven't shown any understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences
- have recently moved to the country and are unable to understand letters and sounds in English
- use British sign language or other sign-supported communication, eg communication boards, to spell out individual letters
- are mute or selectively mute

If a pupil didn't take the check in year 1 or year 2 they don't need to be considered for the check in future years. They also don't need to be considered in future years if they didn't meet the standard in year 2.

# 5.

## **When to administer the phonics screening check**

The phonics screening check must be taken during the week commencing 15 June. A pupil may only take the check the following week if they were absent during check week.

# 6.

## **How to administer the phonics screening check**

Pupils must only attempt the phonics screening check once during the check window.

The check must be administered in accordance with the Standards and Testing Agency's (STA's) [check administration guidance](#). Headteachers must make sure the guidance is read and followed by everyone involved in administering and scoring the check.

The check administration guidance will be revised for the 2015 check period in February. We won't be printing the 'Check administrators' guide'.

## 6.1 Check administrators

The check must be administered on a one-to-one basis by a teacher who is known to the pupil.

The role of check administrator requires a teacher's professional judgement about which responses are correct.

The check mustn't be administered by a:

- teaching assistant
- higher level teaching assistant
- relative or [parent](#) of the pupil taking the check

## 6.2 Monitoring the phonics screening check

Monitoring visitors, for example LA or STA representatives, will make unannounced visits to schools that are participating in the check. They will look to see if your school is following our [procedures](#) on:

- keeping the check materials secure
- administering and scoring the check

If you receive a monitoring visit you must allow visitors to:

- see all materials and any relevant delivery notes
- observe any checks being administered
- see copies of correspondence and other documents sent to and received from the LA or STA about the administration of the check

We will carry out a full investigation if a monitoring visitor sees:

- administrative irregularities
- potential maladministration

This will help us to make a decision on the accuracy or correctness of a pupil's results.

You should refer to the [guidance on monitoring visits](#) for further information. This will be revised in April.

### **Maintained schools**

LAs have a statutory duty to make monitoring visits to at least 10% of maintained schools in their authority before, during and after the check period.

### **Academies**

Academies created before 1 September 2014 must choose which LA they come under for monitoring purposes. This can be your geographical LA or another LA. We will ask you to confirm your choice in the autumn term, 2014.

If you became an academy after 1 September 2014 you will be part of your geographical LA's arrangements.

## **6.3 Maladministration**

The term 'maladministration' refers to any act that:

- affects the integrity, security or confidentiality of the phonics screening check
- could lead to results that don't reflect pupils' unaided work

Your school could be subject to investigations of maladministration if it doesn't comply with:

- the 'Assessment and reporting arrangements'
- our [check administration guidance](#)

Maladministration can lead to changes to, or annulment of, results for a whole cohort, groups of pupils or individual pupils.

You should report any issue with the administration of the check and/or any allegations of maladministration you receive by calling the [national curriculum assessments helpline](#).

We have a statutory duty to investigate any matter brought to our attention relating to the accuracy or correctness of any pupil's check results. Our maladministration team will work closely with LAs to investigate any allegations of maladministration. The '[Maladministration investigation procedures](#)' explain how we do this.

# 7.

## Materials for the phonics screening check

You don't need to order standard materials for the phonics screening check. We will send materials based on your school's year 1 autumn school census data.

Braille materials must be ordered by Friday 1 May via our [modified test helpline](#). To comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, you mustn't request materials by email.

You will receive your check materials, including any braille orders, between Monday 1 June and Friday 12 June. Materials will be delivered to school addresses taken from [EduBase](#). Please make sure your details are up to date.




## 7.1 Additional materials

You will be able to download materials from the 'Phonics' section of the [NCA tools website](#) from Monday 15 June. This includes the mark sheet.

## 7.2 Security of the check materials

Headteachers are responsible for ensuring that the integrity of the check is maintained so that no pupil has an unfair advantage over another. You must [keep your check materials secure](#) and treat them as confidential from the point your school receives them until Friday 26 June.

Packs mustn't be opened before Monday 15 June. They must only be opened when the check is going to be administered.

Teachers mustn't discuss the content of the check with anyone or use question-specific information to prepare pupils for the check. This helps to maintain the integrity of the check. In particular, you mustn't discuss specific content which could compromise the check on social media or publish it in blogs. 

After the check has been administered, you must make sure the materials are stored securely until Friday 26 June.

# 8.

## Reporting phonics screening check results

### 8.1 Reporting to local authorities



Schools must report pupil-level phonics screening check data to their LA. LAs must submit this to the Department for Education (DfE) between Monday 15 June and Friday 31 July. Data received by the DfE after 31 July will not be included in the provisional statistics or initial release of [RAISEonline](#) data.

Guidance on how to submit results will be provided:

- in the [check administration guidance](#) in February
- by your LA

You should contact your LA directly if you have queries.

## 8.2 Reporting to [parents](#)

By the end of the summer [term](#) headteachers should report:

- each pupil's phonics screening check score
- whether or not a pupil has met the standard

The threshold mark will be published on Monday 29 June on GOV.UK.

# 9.

## How results will be used by the Department for Education and Ofsted

The DfE won't publish school-level results in performance tables. It will use national results to track standards over time [↗](#)

Ofsted will have access to school-level results via the [RAISEonline website](#) for use in

inspections. They will use the check results alongside other information about a school's teaching when considering a school's performance.

Schools will have access to:

- school-level results via RAISEonline so that they can analyse their own performance
- national and LA results so they benchmark their pupils' performance

National and LA results will be published in autumn 2015.

# 10.

## 'Parent' - a definition

The term 'parent' is used here as defined in section 576 of the Education Act 1996 as:

- parents of a pupil
- any person who is not a parent of a pupil but who has parental responsibility for the pupil
- any person who has care of a pupil

# 11.

## Getting help

### **Standards and Testing Agency**

53-55 Butts Road  
Earlsdon Park

Coventry  
CV1 3BH

Email

[assessments@education.gov.uk](mailto:assessments@education.gov.uk)

National curriculum assessments  
helpline

0300 303 3013

## Standards and Testing Agency

Email

[schooltests@rnib.org.uk](mailto:schooltests@rnib.org.uk)

STA modified test helpline

0300 303 3019

For guidance on ordering modified test materials.

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