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Guidance

Submitting phonics programmes for validation: application form guidance

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This guidance is to help programme providers submit a self-assessment form for validation.

Programme providers should give advance notice to phonics.validation@education.gov.uk when they are considering submitting a programme for validation.

Submitting a self-assessment form

1. Use [Validation of systematic synthetic phonics programmes: supporting documentation](#) to familiarise yourself with the validation process.
2. Use the self-assessment form (SAF) at [Systematic synthetic phonics \(SSP\) teaching programme validation](#). Number all self-assessment criteria in the form as the automatic formatting can sometimes remove the numbers.
3. If your programme website does not support file storage or the files are too large to send as attachments in one email, set up a Google Docs, One Drive or DropBox folder for the evidence for each criteria. Email phonics.validation@education.gov.uk for a list of panel email addresses for granting access permissions if necessary.
4. Complete the SAF and accompanying evidence for each criteria point. Embed a link to the relevant evidence folder into the SAF boxes for each criteria.
5. Submit the SAF to phonics.validation@education.gov.uk.
6. Make the school references aware that the DfE will contact them with a survey about using the phonics programme in their school setting, and that the school contact may receive a follow up call from a validation panel member.
7. Provide contact emails in the school reference information section so that the panel can contact school references.

Validation panel guidance to all programme providers

This feedback highlights recurring themes across individual programme providers collated during the first 2 rounds of validation. The panel want all programme providers to reflect on this feedback, regardless of validation outcomes.

Accessibility for teachers

The layout and numbering of pages is important, whether teacher manuals or handbooks are online or otherwise. If the panel struggled to find something, then teachers may also have this issue, and this could cause important parts of the programme to be missed.

Overloading of content in lesson plans

Lessons should not be too 'full' (for example excessive use of songs, games and instruments), especially if there is no explicit guidance for lesson timing and 'non-negotiable' elements of lessons. This can lead to cognitive overload and lack of pace in lessons. In particular, new teachers may make too much use of the 'extras' in phonics lessons.

Programme publishers must ensure there is not too much flexibility and fluidity in the timings, activities and sequence. Combined with no clear expectations of children's progress, programmes could leave both teachers and pupils confused and unprepared for standardised assessments.

The programme should leave enough time for pupils to read and write within discrete phonics lessons. Training is needed for additional activities to ensure that they encourage full participation by all children and that activities retain focus on the core learning. Use the activity guidance in [Reading framework: teaching the foundations of literacy](#).

Assessing progress and interventions, especially for the lowest attaining 20% of children

Programme publishers must provide specific guidance in relation to smaller, more targeted activities, for example 1:1 sessions for children not keeping up. Publishers should also include specific separate interventions which could be used to accelerate progress and to respond to gap analysis outcomes.

Decodable materials

The programme needs to:

- ensure that resources are consistent, coherent and that pupils are able to utilise them accurately and efficiently to practise phonics
- be linked to books or texts in a book scheme (that schools can purchase) that will fully support the progression used within the effective delivery of the programme

Ensure that any resubmissions contain a guidance document that shows exactly how the programme's progression, common exception words, tricky words and decodable reading material align together. This is a vital resource for schools to have to hand and also shows the panel that all books aligned to teaching are fully decodable.

This document is often best presented in a table format, with a column for the stage of teaching, grapheme phoneme correspondences and common exception words taught up to this point and the book titles.

There needs to be:

- guidance for teachers on how to use decodable materials and how to align these to a formal teaching sequence
- a clear link between guidance for how the order of teaching common exception words aligns with sequencing of decodable books or texts

Training

Full guidance about training should be provided. Training should include:

- the principles underpinning the approach
- the pedagogy and how the programme can be effectively implemented
- classroom organisation
- pace and progression linked to national expectations and milestones
- the delivery method within a teaching sequence and key principles of each section
- how to undertake effective and efficient assessment
- gap analysis and subsequent activities to address underachievement or lack of progress

Programmes should provide evidence that details the options available to schools including:

- training delivery options (blended, online or face to face)
- further bespoke options which provide more specialised support

- ongoing support packages and opportunities for self-evaluation and prioritisation for schools before or within the training

Reading framework: teaching the foundations of literacy

All programmes should review the recently published [reading framework](#), particularly sections on use of whiteboards in lessons and activities in lessons.

Reflect on how your SSP programme aligns to the guidance in this document and how your programme can support schools to align their teaching to the best practice within in this guidance.

Validation panel guidance for programme developers

Programme developers should use the panel's general feedback. They may also find the following suggestions useful to address the common pitfalls of building programmes on 2007 Letters and Sounds.

The lack of books in Phase 5

Books need to cumulatively build alongside the progression, but there are often gaps in this provision for early sound within Phase 5.

Schemes can address this by either adding additional books to this part of the teaching (making your own or combining sources of books) or by changing the progression so that some sounds appear earlier on than in the 2007 progression.

Both approaches are valid, and it is down to the professionalism of a programme developer to choose with approach to take. The programme should provide:

- all that is essential to teach SSP to children in reception and key stage 1 years of mainstream primary schools, up to or beyond the standards expected by the national curriculum
- sufficient support for children to become fluent readers

An example of not doing this well is moving Phase 4 from reception into year 1 within the progression, with no other changes to the teaching sequence. This has a significant impact upon

the amount of teaching time there is to cover Phase 5 adequately. It also means there isn't much time for consolidation or practice before the test.

Mixing and matching decodable resources

A common issue caused by trying to ensure there are enough books in each phase, is the mixing and matching of books and resources.

While combining resources is not 'prohibited' by the validation criteria, it should be done with care so that the formatting across books is consistent and doesn't cause confusion. An example of good practice is ensuring that common exception words are labelled in a similar manner across all books.

Schools need a clear list of when each book is introduced with respect to the progression and weekly teaching planning. This document is often best presented in a table format, with columns for stage of teaching, common exception words and the book titles.

Programme providers who want a copy of the updated Letters and Sounds

The Department for Education (DfE) funded the development of an example progression. This is an example of good practice developed by outstanding schools using Letters and Sounds in the English Hubs programme. It is not mandatory for systematic synthetic phonics programmes (SSP) programmes to use this progression.

Any material funded by DfE is Crown copyright material and can be used by anyone. If you would like a copy of the example progression email phonics.validation@education.gov.uk.

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