Process evaluation of the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check Pilot

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Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Glossary of terms

Access arrangements	May be put in place for pupils who are working at the expected standard at the end of Year One, but may normally receive classroom support, for example pupils with SEN, EAL and disabilities, who may require additional breaks, Braille versions of the Check or other modifications
Blending	Putting together individual sounds or phonemes to form whole words
CEIR	Centre for Education and Inclusion Research
CVC	Consonant-vowel-consonant e.g. bat or bed
DfE	Department for Education
Disapplied/disapplication	DfE expects the vast majority of Year One pupils to be able to access the Check, but suggest that pupils who have not shown any understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences in class should normally be disapplied
EAL	English as an Additional Language
Grapheme	Letter or group of letters that make up a sound or phoneme
Grapheme-phoneme correspondences	The relationship between graphemes, rather than individual letters, to individual phonemes
Phoneme	The smallest unit of sound in a spoken word that can change the meaning of a word
Phonics	A method of teaching reading and spelling that forms links between the sounds in the spoken language and their corresponding letters or letter combinations
PSC	Phonics Screening Check
Segmenting	Breaking words down into individual phonemes and translating those into the corresponding graphemes
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SHU	Sheffield Hallam University

Executive Summary

Background

In the 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* the DfE signalled its intent to introduce a Phonics Screening Check at the end of Year 1 (to five and six year old pupils). The Phonics Screening Check is designed to be a light touch, summative assessment of phonics ability. It includes a list of 40 words - half real, half pseudo - which each pupil reads one-to-one with a teacher. By introducing the Check the Government hopes to identify pupils with below expected progress in phonic decoding. These pupils will receive additional intervention and then retake the Check to assess the extent to which their phonics ability has improved, relative to the expected level.

The aim of the Pilot was to assess how pupils and teachers responded to different versions of the Check and its administration. The DfE recruited 300 schools to take part in the Pilot. All 300 schools administered the Check with Year 1 pupils during, or shortly after, the week of 13th June 2011. Across the 300 schools, the Pilot trialled a total of 360 words (each read by around 1,000 pupils).

Evaluation aims and objectives

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- assess how the Phonics Screening Check pilot is perceived by schools, parents/carers and pupils;

- evaluate the effectiveness of its administration; and

- carry out a series of monitoring visits to schools to assess the extent to which the administration of the Phonics Screening Check pilot is standardised.

The objectives of the evaluation included:

- to gather school, parent/carer and pupil perceptions of the Phonics Screening Check pilot;

- to identify what (if any) information parents/carers would like on the Phonics Screening Check pilot and how they would like this communicated;

- to monitor and gather perceptions of the Phonics Screening Check pilot administration process and corresponding guidance; and

- to identify which phonics programmes are currently taught in schools participating in the Pilot and how these are delivered.

Methodology

The following research methods were used to address the evaluation objectives:

- two surveys (using combined online and postal methods) conducted with lead teachers for the Phonics Screening Check in all 300 pilot schools, with response rates of 97% (first survey) and 90% (second survey). The first survey focussed on how phonics teaching is currently delivered in pilot schools, and took place a few weeks before the Check took place. The second focussed on the administration and content of the Check, and was administered shortly after the Check took

place;

- case studies carried out in 20 schools, which included interviews with a senior leader, the Phonics Screening Check lead teacher (where the two were different) and small groups of pupils, addressing similar issues to the second survey but asking for more detailed explanations from a wider group of respondents;

- monitoring visits to a further 20 schools;

- a survey of parents/carers, with a response rate of 26% from participating schools.

Findings

Phonics delivery

- Almost three quarters of respondents to the first school survey stated that, prior to piloting the Phonics Screening Check, they encouraged pupils to use a range of cueing systems as well as phonics. About two thirds taught phonics in discrete sessions and sometimes integrated phonics into other work, whilst just under a third always taught phonics in discrete sessions. The majority (61%) of respondents taught discrete phonics sessions 5 times per week whilst 27% taught discrete sessions 4 times per week to Year 1 pupils.

- The most commonly used approaches to delivering phonics teaching in Year 1 were whole class and small group teaching, being used as a main approach by around half of respondents in each case. Nearly 90% of respondents used teacher observation as their method of phonics assessment. Just under half used formally recorded targeted assessment whilst just under a third used this method including the use of pseudowords. About three quarters of respondents used ability grouping either across Key Stage 1 (KS1) or across Year 1 classes, whereas 15% used whole class teaching without ability grouping.

- Letters and Sounds was by far the most frequently used programme, used by 80% of schools as their main programme. Jolly Phonics was used to some extent by 65% of respondents. Other programmes were used by lower proportions of schools. Of those that used more than one main phonics programme or additional materials, two thirds indicated that this was to support pupils with particular needs whilst 40% stated that this was to deal with gaps/weaknesses in their main programme. Respondents were almost evenly split as to whether they delivered the programme systematically or whether they delivered some parts systematically and deviated from the suggested approach to delivery for other parts.

- Overall respondents were positive about their school's current approach to phonics, in particular with regards to having a clear focus on phonological awareness where 60% of respondents strongly agreed that their approach achieved this. The majority of respondents (70%) stated that all KS1 staff received training for the delivery of phonics whilst 40% indicated that their Teaching Assistants received training.

The purpose of the Phonics Screening Check

- The purpose of the Check - as stated by the DfE - was to confirm that Year 1 pupils had learned phonic decoding to an age-appropriate standard. Some

teachers were unclear about this purpose, but in the main they understood it, with most teachers in case study schools stating that the Check's purpose was one of assessing the pupils' phonics ability.

- Additionally, about a quarter felt that the Check was to identify whole class or individual learning requirements; to be used formatively to inform teaching and planning as well as summatively. This issue of ensuring the Check is designed to support teaching as well as providing a summative judgment was a key recurrent issue in the data, highlighted particularly during case study visits.

The administration of the Phonics Screening Check

Guidance

- Both the survey and case study aspects of the study provide evidence that the Phonics Screening Check guidance was largely useful, clear and straightforward. The vast majority of survey respondents felt the guidance was useful, whilst head teachers in case study schools who had read the guidance reported that they had found it to be clear and straightforward. Case study teacher comments about the training events were highly positive. In particular, the practice marking workshop was seen as essential in giving teachers confidence in administering the Check. About two thirds of teachers in case study schools (and several open comments in the survey) suggested that having similar training resources online, or as an audio/visual package for the roll out would be very helpful for staff.

- Additional information was requested by teachers in case study schools around items such as who should be conducting the Check, making comments on the marksheet and borderline disapplications. Case study head teachers asked for early guidance on when the Check would take place and what it would involve, as well as information around data reporting and publication.

Administration of the Check

- Year 1 teachers were more likely to be the lead for administering the Check than other members of staff and respondents felt teachers to be best placed to be carrying out the Check. The majority of head teachers in case study schools took a more supervisory role and had little involvement in the Check once preliminary discussions had taken place.

- The majority of teachers in case study schools had faced difficulties in judging whether a word had been read correctly or not with some of their pupils. Where problems had arisen, these were in relation to pseudowords, quieter pupils, more able pupils who rushed through the Check, and pupils who were good readers but had speech difficulties. The importance of using a member of staff who knew the pupils well and the need for a relaxed situation was noted in terms of making judgements of words.

- Just over half (54%) of survey respondents felt a longer window of time to carry out the Check was needed. Open comments from the survey and teachers from five case study schools suggested that the Check should be administered slightly earlier in the year, as mid to late spring is typically a very busy time for schools. This related to being able to use the Check to inform teaching. These schools felt that earlier access to the results would enable them to use the Check as an additional planning tool. The benefits of a tick box on the pupil list and a note-making area on the mark sheet were suggested by teachers in both case studies

and open survey comments as a way of logging additional data and noting comments around individual pupils linking - again - to making the Check as useful as possible for supporting teaching and planning.

Resources and time commitment needed to administer the Check

- The survey showed that just under two thirds (65%) of schools had found the time commitment required to administer the Check to be straightforward to manage, with just under a fifth finding it difficult to manage. The average time spent preparing for the Check was around three hours, and administering the Check was about 12.5 hours. The amount of time taken to administer the Check varied considerably between schools, with larger ones being more likely to find it took longer than smaller ones.

- According to teachers surveyed, the Check itself had taken between 4-9 minutes on average per pupil, dependent on the skills and ability of the pupils. The overall time taken to administer the Check was more resource intensive and took longer in larger schools, but was reduced in schools where pupils were asked to wait outside the room before it was their turn to take part.

- All lead teachers in case study schools felt confident in delivering the Check, and this was linked to training, preparation and previous knowledge/experience of phonics. Concerns were raised by a small number of schools around the consistency of judgement when more than one person was administering the Check.

- Qualitative evidence revealed that staff cover was the main resource issue. Some schools dealt with cover internally whilst others bought in supply teachers. A minority of schools during the case study visits suggested that after national roll out the Check may need to be administered by Teaching Assistants or within the classroom due to resource constraints, since ring-fenced funding is not likely to be provided for administration of the Check.

The content of the Phonics Screening Check

- Survey schools were asked about the suitability of a number of aspects of content for pupils working at the expected standard of phonics, and for the majority of these more than 90% of respondents felt they were suitable. Lower proportions of pilot schools felt the Check was suitable in relation to the number of words (83%), the type of vocabulary used in real words (80%) and the use of pseudowords (74%). Eighty-three percent thought the number of words was suitable for pupils working at the expected standard; teachers who thought it was unsuitable were more likely to be from larger schools and those using whole class teaching. Case study data indicated that teachers in six schools felt there were too many words for less able pupils. Whilst 80% of respondents felt that the vocabulary used in the real words was suitable for pupils at the expected standard, 20% did not, and some case study schools argued that the use of unfamiliar 'real' words was problematic.

- Just less than three quarters of schools surveyed felt that pseudowords were suitable for pupils working at the expected standard of phonics, and some teachers and many pupils in the case study schools reported that pseudowords were a 'fun', novel aspect of the Check. However, the majority (60%) of schools surveyed felt that pseudowords caused confusion for at least some pupils, with an additional 12% feeling that they caused confusion for most pupils. In case

study schools where pupils were less familiar with pseudowords, confusion was also noted by both teachers and pupils. Pupils in the case study schools generally understood the difference between real and pseudowords.

- The most common issue in the qualitative data in relation to pseudowords was the confusion caused by not having pictures alongside all pseudowords. In survey responses and during case study visits schools suggested that the pseudowords should be placed in a separate section of the Check. Taken together, these findings indicate that how pseudowords are labelled or presented is important for the DfE to consider in relation to the roll out of the Check.

- According to the case studies, pseudowords had caused problems for some higher ability pupils (when trying to make sense of the word) and with less able pupils (using the alien pictures as a clue) - both of which relate to reading ability more widely, rather than phonic decoding ability. EAL pupils were felt to be dealing better with pseudowords by their teachers.

The suitability of the Phonics Screening Check

- Three quarters of those surveyed felt that the Check accurately assessed phonic decoding ability overall for their pupils. Agreement was highest (84%) for pupils with strong phonics skills, but lower for pupils with weaker decoding skills (61%). Less than half of respondents agreed that the Check accurately assessed the decoding ability of pupils with EAL (46%), with speech difficulties (35%), with SEN (33%) and with language difficulties (28%). Around a third of respondents held neutral views around whether the Check was a good way of measuring the capabilities of Year 1 pupils in these groups. These issues were mirrored in case study findings and, in addition, about a quarter of case study interviewees mentioned that they felt the test was not age appropriate as the standard may be set too high for some of the younger or lower ability pupils.

The impact of the Phonics Screening Check

- Almost half of schools (43%) indicated that the Check had helped them to identify pupils with phonic decoding issues that they were not previously aware of. Just over half (55%) of schools surveyed and many teachers from case study schools felt that the Check had not helped them to identify these issues. This was particularly the case with smaller schools. This is linked to the issue identified earlier: schools would like to use the Check to inform teaching and planning but felt that the Check needed to be designed in such a way that it can do so.

- There were mixed views on the use that might be made from the Check results. Almost all the lead teachers from the case study schools wished to use the results to inform school planning, and five felt that the results would be needed earlier in the year to help planning for Year 2 pupils. Six wanted to use the individualised results to inform class teaching and to support individuals or particular groups of pupils. In contrast, five head teachers in the case studies did not plan to take any action to change teaching in response to the Check (due to concerns about suitability and feeling it would not add to their current knowledge), and five said they reviewed phonics teaching regardless of the Check. Five also said they would be making changes in light of the Check, and the rest said they may make changes, but felt it necessary to wait for the results of the Check before making any firm decisions.

Communication and reporting processes relating to the Phonics Screening Check

Communication with parents/carers

- The evidence showed that less than twenty percent of schools surveyed had informed parents/carers about the Check. Of the 36 schools that had done so, over three quarters had provided information on the Check's purpose and when it would take place, and two thirds provided an opportunity to ask questions. A letter was by far the most common form of communication.

- The most common reason given by case study schools for not informing parents/carers was to prevent them from becoming worried about the Check, and in turn increasing anxiety amongst pupils. Other reasons given included that it was a pilot, and that it was part of the routine assessment of schools. Although very few pupils (less than 10%) had told their parents/carers about the Check, all but three of those who mentioned it to their parents/carers reported the events in positive terms.

Communication with pupils

- Nearly all teachers in case study schools reported that pupils had coped well with the Check and had understood the instructions and what was required of them. Most lead teachers in case study schools had minimised possible pupil anxieties by introducing the Check in a very low key way, with it commonly being described to pupils as being a game, fun, or just another individual reading-based assessment. In at least four case study schools, teachers had prepared pupils for the Check by introducing additional pseudoword activities as pupils were not familiar with them.

- Most pupils indicated that the Check had been a positive experience, and they had generally understood what was required of them, including the inclusion of pseudowords. Most pupils could not recall in detail what they had been told about the Check in advance, but those that did have a clear and simple explanation of the task.

Reporting results

- Almost all schools surveyed would like detailed results at pupil-level for their school (97%), around 90% would like benchmarking data, and a similar proportion would like commentary on national level results (88%). Case study schools' responses were broadly in line with the survey responses, although six noted the need for contextualised benchmarking.

- Parents/carers responding to the parent/carer survey[1] would want to receive information on their child's performance on the Check (99%), how the school intends to respond to their child's performance (97%) and information about what they could do to support their child's phonic ability (96%). The majority of case study schools wished themselves to report findings to parents/carers, mostly in a form that could enable parents/carers to support their child's learning, and in a sensitive, appropriate way.

- The DfE has stated that there will be no publication of school-level results from the Check, but there appeared to be insufficient communication around this issue

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[1] Note that parents from only 17 of the schools responded to the survey.

with schools themselves, with all the case study schools stating that they would be opposed to publicly available results such as league tables, and appearing to be unaware of this policy. The reasons cited included that the Check is a single, isolated measure, which needed to be seen in the context of wider phonics/literacy assessment over a period of time, and that publication would place unwanted pressures on pupils.

Pupil experiences of the Phonics Screening Check

- Evidence from the survey and teacher and pupil interviews suggests that for most pupils overall, the experience of the Check was generally positive, with those pupils with stronger phonic decoding ability finding it most enjoyable. From the case studies, those who found the Check easier tended to be more positive about it; pupils who found it hard overall were more likely to be negative about the experience. Pupil anxieties were minimised in most case study schools by teachers attempting to make the Check fun and relaxed.

- Between 23 and 29% of surveyed schools felt the experience was negative for pupils with speech or language difficulties, other SEN and weak phonics skills, mirroring the findings in relation to the accuracy of the Check for assessing phonics ability. Those with weaker phonic skills, speech difficulties, SEN - and to a lesser extent EAL - were less likely to have found the Check a positive experience. Pupils who had been told it was a 'test' expressed the most anxiety overall. The location of the Check was a negative factor for pupils in two schools, where noise and pupils in adjoining classrooms were an issue.

Outcomes of the Phonics Screening Check Pilot monitoring visits

- Overall the administration of the Phonics Screening Check pilot worked effectively in the 20 monitoring visit schools, and most teachers had been able to administer the Check in an appropriate room. A minority, however, experienced difficulties. Problems arose around the storage of materials, and a lack of discussion with parents/carers of disapplied pupils. There was also confusion around the lack of a tick box on the pupil list and difficulties around running the Check and filling in the marksheet at the same time.

Discussion

- For the majority of schools and – as far as this can be judged – pupils, involvement in the Check pilot was a broadly positive experience. Case study schools were able to give a range of areas where they could see that the results of the Check being would be useful, particularly in relation to planning, teaching and support for particular pupils. There were, however, some areas that were less positive, and others where the experiences were more variable. Firstly, a number of schools identified that - in their view - the Check should be designed in such a way as to support planning and teaching. This related to using the Check as part of a wider set of tools to assess pupil reading over time; being able to use detailed notes on responses to support changes to teaching; not sharing results publicly (in line with DfE intentions); and having access to individualised results and benchmarked results at a school level. Second, there is a theme relating to the Check's suitability for some groups of pupils. Thirdly, there are some specific points in relation to other aspects of content, particularly in relation to labelling of pseudowords and ordering. Finally, there were other points relating to administration, including the need for audio/visual practice examples, and guidance and support to minimise resource costs in roll out.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

1.1.1 In order to learn to read in English, pupils must form links between the sounds in the spoken language and their corresponding letters or letter combinations. In other words pupils need to develop their knowledge of phonics; the mapping of phonemes (sounds) onto graphemes (letters). Empirical evidence suggests that systematic phonics instruction is vital in the early stages of learning to read. In a meta-analysis, Torgerson, Hall and Brooks (2006), reviewed 14 randomised controlled trials that reported on the effectiveness of systematic phonics instruction in the classroom. The findings of this review revealed that this method of instruction was positively associated with pupil's reading accuracy. The importance of systematic phonics instruction was further supported by the Rose Review (Rose, 2006) and the subsequent review of the primary curriculum (Rose, 2009). Indeed, the recommendations of the Rose Review (2006) precipitated a shift in the national strategies from the Searchlights model of reading instruction to the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tumner, 1986). This model of reading development suggests that successful reading is a result of both decoding ability and broader language skills; both skills are necessary and neither is sufficient alone. The emphasis placed on skilled decoding in this model further supports the necessity of systematic phonics instruction in the teaching of reading.

1.1.2 Despite the emphasis placed on phonics instruction in recent years, a large proportion of pupils in primary schools in England are not reaching expected levels in literacy. In the recent Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010), the Government sets out its intention to provide resources for the teaching of phonics in primary school, including training for Ofsted inspectors and trainee teachers. In addition, the Government intends to introduce the Phonics Screening Check at the end of Year One (to five and six year old pupils). DfE recruited 300 schools to take part in the Pilot which involved the administration of the Check with Year One pupils during the week commencing 13th June 2011. The check was designed to be a light touch, summative assessment, including a list of 40 words - half real, half pseudo - which a pupil would read one-to-one with a teacher. Across the 300 schools, the Pilot trialled a total of 360 words (each read by around 1,000 pupils). The aim of the Pilot was to assess how pupils and teachers responded to the different versions of the Check and its administration, with a view to rolling out the Check to all Year One pupils in 2011-12.

1.2 Commissioning

1.2.1 Sheffield Hallam University's Centre for Education and Inclusion Research (CEIR) was commissioned to undertake a process evaluation of this pilot. The aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

Aims
- To assess how the Phonics Screening Check pilot is perceived by schools, parents/carers and pupils;
- To evaluate the effectiveness of its administration; and
- To carry out a series of monitoring visits to schools to assess the extent to which the administration of the Phonics Screening Check pilot is standardised.

Objectives
- To gather school, parent/carer and pupil perceptions of the Phonics Screening Check pilot;
- To identify what (if any) information parents/carers would like on the Phonics Screening Check and how they would like this communicated;
- To monitor and gather perceptions of the Phonics Screening Check pilot administration process and corresponding guidance; and
- To identify which phonics programmes are currently taught in schools participating in the Pilot and how these are delivered (see Appendix 5)

1.2.2 The evaluation comprised four strands which addressed the evaluation objectives:
- two surveys conducted with all 300 pilot schools, with response rates of 97% and 90%;
- case studies carried out in 20 schools, which included interviews with a senior leader, the Phonics Screening Check lead teacher and small groups of pupils;
- monitoring visits to a further 20 schools; and
- a survey of parents/carers, with a response rate of 26% from participating schools.

1.2.3 There were a large number of specific evaluation questions, which are mapped onto the methods used (see Appendix 3).

1.3 Methods

1.3.1 Surveys
1.3.1.1 The first school survey was administered at the beginning of May 2011 and gathered information on the phonics programmes currently taught in schools and how these are delivered. Please see Appendix 5 for further details and a full report of findings from this survey.

1.3.1.2 School Survey 2 took place after the Phonics Screening Check (mid-June) and focused on school's experience of the Year One Phonics Screening Check, its administration and suggestions for improvement. Findings from this survey are contained within this main report and integrated with the case study findings.

Administration and response rates
1.3.1.3 A hard copy of the survey with the option of completing online was administered to schools, followed by a reminder hard copy, an email reminder containing a link to the online questionnaire and telephone chasers to maximise the response rate. Of the 300 schools participating a total of 271 responded (50 online and 221 hard copy), giving an overall response rate of 90%. Schools were informed that completion of the questionnaire was linked to the incentive payment schools would receive for participating in the Pilot which would also have boosted response rates.

1.3.1.4 Of these 271 schools, 206 are in the original sample selected by the DfE. The original sample of schools was stratified by average reading point scores, region and school type. Please see Appendix 1 for further details of the initial sampling. This report presents findings from the schools in the original sample. Survey data was linked with school data held by the DfE in order to provide further variables for analysis. These school-level variables were as follows:

- percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) (used as a proxy for the deprivation level of the school);
- percentage of pupils whose first language is known or believed to be other than English (pupils with EAL);
- percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN); and
- school size.

1.3.1.5 These variables were recoded into categorical[2] groups to enable statistical analysis. These variables were divided into four equal groups (defined by quartiles). These groups are presented in Appendix 1.

1.3.1.6 The table below (Table 1.1) shows the representativeness of the sample compared to national 2010 Census data[3]. As can be seen, the averages for each characteristic (FSM, EAL, SEN and school size) of the achieved sample are closely matched to national data, although the national average for pupils with EAL is 1.1 percentage points higher than that in the achieved sample.

Table 1.1 Average achieved sample characteristics compared with national data average

	Achieved sample average	National data average 2010[2]
FSM eligibility	18.2%	18.1%
EAL	13.1%	14.2%
SEN	1.9%	1.7%
School size	254 pupils	241 pupils

Parent/carer survey

1.3.1.7 In total the parent/carer survey was administered to 105 schools. Out of these, 17 schools distributed the survey to parents/carers. The majority of schools had opted not to inform parents/carers at this stage and had therefore not administered the survey.

1.3.1.8 The 17 schools from which responses were received gave a total sample size of 725 Year One pupils. In total 192 parent/carer surveys were received giving a 26% response rate.

1.3.1.9 Table 1.2 shows the characteristics of these 17 schools compared with the national average. As can be seen the averages for each characteristic are closely matched, although the average school size is marginally larger in the sample compared with the national average. Findings from the parent/carer survey are presented in Appendix 4. They are not included in the main report due to the survey's lack of representativeness: responses were received from parents/carers in just 17 schools (since the parental survey was only administered in the few schools that had communicated with parents/carers about the check).

Table 1.2 Characteristics of the 17 schools administering the parent/carer survey compared to the national average:

	Sample average	National data average 2010[2]
FSM eligibility	18.7%	18.1%
EAL	14.7%	14.2%
SEN	1.0%	1.7%
School size	267 pupils	241 pupils

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[2] The data has been grouped to form a set of non-overlapping categories.
[3] http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000925/index.shtml

1.3.2 Case Studies

1.3.2.1 Case study visits were conducted with 20 pilot schools in order to provide additional in-depth analysis of the views of head teachers, lead teachers and pupils.

Sampling

1.3.2.2 A long list of 45 schools was selected to represent the population of pilot schools, stratified by geographical region, urban/rural profile, school size, proportions of pupils with FSM eligibility, proportions of pupils with a statement of SEN and proportions of pupils with EAL. The lead teachers were contacted via email and then by phone to arrange a case study visit. The final selection of 20 case study schools were checked to ensure a balance across the full range of regional and school characteristics (see Appendix 6).

Conduct

1.3.2.3 The Phonics Screening Check pilot took place w/c 13th June 2011, and case study visits were arranged to take place as soon as possible thereafter to capture the responses of the teachers and pupils at the earliest practical opportunity. All visits were completed between 17th-28th June, lasted two to three hours, and involved interviews in this order:

1.3.2.4 Teacher interviews
- Lead teacher - this interview orientated the discussion, ensuring researchers were familiar with how the Check was administered in the school (duration, any associated burdens and required improvements), the suitability of check administration guidance, and teacher perceptions of the suitability of the Check for pupils and how it was introduced to pupils and parents/carers.
- Head teacher/nominated senior leader - this gathered the school's strategic view of the Check and its impact on the school.

Pupil discussions and participatory methods

1.3.2.5 Year One pupils took part in discussions with researchers in four groups of three (12 per school, selected in friendship groups by the teacher to represent the diversity of their class). The aim of the pupil discussions was to assess pupil perceptions and experiences of the Check, by asking about what they were told about the Check; whether they talked to their parents/carers about it; what it was like doing the Check and what they thought about it in general. The questions were adapted for the needs of the age groups, learning styles and abilities of the pupils and used a range of visual and participatory methods to ensure participation of pupils with varying abilities and degrees of oracy and literacy (see below).

1.3.2.6 In addition to asking pupils the agreed list of questions verbally and directly, these methods offered a toolbox of alternative and flexible approaches that enabled the inclusion of pupils with a wide range of learning styles and abilities. It therefore expanded the repertoire of non-verbal techniques to encourage maximum engagement and participation by as many pupils as possible.

1.3.2.7 The toolbox included:

- Photographic materials showing different Year One pupils taking part in a check with a teacher. These concrete visual representations served to jog pupils' memories of the Check and stimulated discussion. Thought and speech bubbles were integrated into the pictures to elicit pupils' experiences and opinions of the Check.
- A five-point pictorial graded 'Likert' scale of happy, neutral and sad faces with captions ranging from 'liked it a lot' to 'really didn't like it' was designed to elicit pupils' views and feelings about doing the Check. This method allowed all pupils - but particularly those that were less verbally confident - to summarise and express their views.

- Gendered and ethnically diverse 'Persona' dolls to explore pupils' experiences, feelings and views on the Check. Pupils were introduced to the named doll and his/her 'background story' that centred on the doll doing the Check at their own school next week. The doll wanted to know how the pupils found the Check so that the doll would know what to expect. Some pupils were better able to articulate their own experiences and thoughts through projection onto the doll, or by talking directly to the doll rather than the researcher. For others, it was a novel and engaging way of discussing a relatively brief school experience.

1.3.2.8 The questions and prompts were standardised across the different techniques so that the data would be comparable, whilst also allowing the researcher to work flexibly and informally to ensure this was an enjoyable experience for pupils.

1.3.2.9 Due to the timing and nature of the study, it was not possible to fully pilot the Check-related questions and approaches in advance of the Check. However, the general methods and types of questions were tested with a local primary school using a recent school activity as an analogous scenario and focus of discussion.

Analysis
1.3.2.10 All teacher and pupil interviews were tape-recorded, anonymised and partially transcribed in order to write up a school-level report shortly after the fieldwork had taken place. Given the tight timeframes for analysis, the themes and subthemes were identified and mapped onto the key DfE research questions and corresponding report structure before systematically extracting all relevant data from each case study report across each theme and subtheme. These thematic reports were then subjected to rigorous and methodical coding and analysis, taking into account the differences between types of schools and pupils whilst also allowing for comparison within and between case studies. The case study evidence was triangulated with the survey findings, allowing conclusions to be drawn across the different strands of the project, testing the validity of judgments made in the survey responses with case study evidence from these schools.

1.3.3 Monitoring Visits
1.3.3.1 Monitoring visits were carried out in a sample of 20 primary schools participating in the Phonics Screening Check pilot. The visits were a requirement for the DfE to meet Ofqual common assessment criteria and investigated a number of elements to uncover whether the pilot schools were administering the Check appropriately, and whether there were any aspects of the process that were omitted or administered differently between schools.

Sampling
1.3.3.2 The sample was drawn from the full pilot school list of 321 schools[4] using a two-dimensional stratification matrix, and ensuring no cross over with the longlist of case study schools. The sampling matrix was stratified by geographical location and whether the school was situated in an urban or rural setting, and also sought to include a range of different sized schools, and proportions of FSM eligibility, attainment levels, EAL and SEN.

Conduct
1.3.3.3 The monitoring visits mainly took place during the week of the Phonics Screening Check with three occurring before the Check had taken place in school, 14 during the Check and 3 following its completion. Visits were unannounced and generally took between 30 minutes and an hour. The content of the visit involved the completion of 11 checklist questions followed by a discussion with the head teacher or other appropriate member of staff to talk through the checklist findings. This stage was added to the visit to give the

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[4] 321 schools expressed an interest in taking part in the Pilot, but some of these later dropped out, meaning the final number was 300.

school an opportunity to comment on their rationale for administering the Check in a particular way, or give them a chance to point out something that was not clear in the DfE Administration Guide. The checklist itself included questions around:

- the receipt of DfE materials;
- the storage of materials both before and after the Check;
- access arrangements for specific pupils;
- disapplied pupils;
- the suitability of the room where the screening check was taking place; and
- the completion of necessary check documents.

1.3.3.4 Monitors marked each question on the checklist with a 'yes', 'no' or 'NA' to indicate whether the DfE guidance had been followed accurately, adding any additional comments or evidence to verify the response in a free text box. Evidence was collected either verbally through the phonics lead teacher or through physical observations, with each question on the checklist outlining which method was preferable.

Analysis
1.3.3.5 The data from the 20 monitoring visits were collated and input into a spreadsheet which enabled the quantification of the checklist questions as well as the synthesis of the open comments. The data set was then analysed to summarise the responses and gather together any themes that had arisen in the pilot schools, using the stratified sampling criteria to indicate where contextual patterns had arisen.

2 Purpose of the Phonics Screening Check

2.0 This section reports findings relating to the views of teachers, head teachers and pupils from the case study schools around the purpose of the Phonics Screening Check.

Key findings

- **The purpose of the Check - as stated by the DfE - was to confirm that Year One pupils had learned phonic decoding to an age-appropriate standard. Some teachers were unclear about this purpose, but in the main they understood it, with most teachers in case study schools stating that the Check's purpose was one of assessing the pupils' phonics ability. The majority (65%) of school staff from the case study schools felt that the Phonics Screening Check had fulfilled its purpose.**

- **Around a quarter felt that the Check was to identify whole class or individual learning requirements; essentially to be used formatively to inform teaching and planning as well as summatively. This issue of ensuring the Check is designed to support teaching as well as providing a summative judgment is a key recurrent issue in the data from case study schools in particular.**

2.1 The DfE states[5] that *'the purpose of the Phonics Screening Check will be to confirm that all pupils have learned phonic decoding to an age-appropriate standard'* and that *'pupils who have not reached this level should receive extra support from their school to ensure they can improve their decoding skills'* and subsequently have an '*opportunity to retake the Check'*. The standard for the Check will be set based on evidence from the Pilot, and teachers were therefore unaware of how many words out of 40 pupils were required to get right to reach the age-appropriate standard.

2.2 The most common reason why teachers from the case study schools believed the Check had been put in place was as a means of assessing or testing their pupils' phonics knowledge. This type of response was mentioned by staff in over half of the case study schools, and references to an expected level to be achieved by the end of Year One was mentioned in around half of these cases:

> …to assess which children have reached a certain standard in reading at the end of Year One (CS13, Lead teacher)

2.3 For others the DfE stated purpose of the Check was less clear, with its aims not appearing to have been communicated effectively with teachers in some of the pilot schools.

2.4 Teachers in four case study schools referred to the Phonics Screening Check as a way of assessing phonics teaching standards within primary schools. This comment was typical:

> It's the Government checking up on our phonics teaching (CS17, Lead teacher)

2.5 A similar number of case study schools (six schools) talked about the Check's purpose being to create a national standard or benchmark across primary schools as a way of formalising phonics teaching and learning:

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[5] *Year One Phonics Screening Check Framework for pilot in 2011* available at
http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/y/year%201%20phonics%20screening%20check%20framework.pdf

> *To benchmark the levels they're at at the end of Year One and ensure that they're all achieving as they should be… to benchmark for next year and plan accordingly (CS16, Lead teacher)*

> *To establish a national expectation of what your six year olds should be able to understand phonically (CS20, Head teacher)*

2.6 In six case study schools staff felt that the purpose had also been to help identify where different teaching or interventions were required for either individual pupils or as a whole class. This could be in terms of extra support for less able pupils, pinpointing particular problematic sounds, the identification of any gaps in class learning, or adapting teaching for specific cohorts:

> *To assess the children's phonetical knowledge and understanding so that any teachers who are not aware where the children are can pinpoint what they need to teach (CS7, Head teacher)*

> *It's really another assessment to inform our judgement and tell us where they are and what they need to have as an intervention if they're not achieving as well as we would expect (CS15, Lead teacher)*

2.7 Even though it appears that some teachers were unclear about the purpose of the Check, most were, however, aware of the DfE core purpose of identifying pupils who needed extra support.

2.8 At the pilot phase of the Check schools were not aware of the precise mark (out of 40) required for Year One pupils to reach the age appropriate standard. Staff from the case study schools were asked whether they felt that the Phonics Screening Check had fulfilled its purpose in confirming that Year One pupils had learned phonic decoding to an age-appropriate standard. The majority of teachers (from 13 schools) believed that the Check had fulfilled its purpose.

2.9 Year One pupils in the case study schools were also asked why they thought they had taken part in the Phonics Screening Check. They were not expected to know that the purpose of the Phonics Screening Check was to confirm that they had learnt phonic decoding to an age-appropriate standard, nor that it was part of a national check. Mostly pupils understood that the Check's purpose was to enhance their learning either of sounds, or their reading and phonics understanding more generally:

> *To practice our phonics so we get better at reading (CS2, Pupil)*

> *Because she wanted us to learn sounds, like new sounds we haven't learnt and she hasn't taught us (CS10, Pupil)*

2.10 Year One pupils from 12 case study schools also felt that they had taken part in the Phonics Screening Check in order to be assessed on their phonics ability:

> *(It was) just to test us on our words and stuff (CS1, Pupil)*

2.11 Pupils from seven of the case study schools also referred to how the Check could assist their progression onto a higher reading level or support their transition into Year Two:

> *…that actually made me get better, because I'm on orange [reading book], then I moved onto light blue (CS10, Pupil)*

Because we are moving up to Year Two, so we've got to do tricky words (CS11, Pupil).

3 Administration of the Phonics Screening Check pilot

3.0 This section reports on the administration of the Phonics Screening Check pilot and covers the findings relating to the guidance provided by the DfE to schools, the administration of the Check itself and the resources and time required by schools to conduct the Check

3.1 Guidance provided by the DfE to schools

Key findings

- **Both the survey and case study aspects of the study provide evidence that the Phonics Screening Check guidance was largely useful, clear and straightforward. The vast majority of survey respondents felt the guidance was useful, whilst head teachers in case study schools who had read the guidance reported that they had found it to be clear and straightforward. During case study visits teachers generally made very positive comments about the training events. In particular, the practice marking workshop was seen as essential in giving teachers confidence in administering the Check. About two thirds of teachers in case study schools (and several open comments in the survey) suggested that having similar training resources online, or as an audio/visual package for the roll out would be very helpful for staff, as planned by the Department.**

- **Additional information was requested by teachers in case study schools around items such as who should be conducting the Check, making comments on the marksheet and borderline disapplications. Head teachers from case study schools asked for early guidance on when the Check would take place and what it would involve, as well as information around data reporting and publication.**

3.1.1 The second school survey asked respondents how they had found specific elements of the DfE guidance as well as what they had thought of it overall in terms of its usefulness (see Figure 3.1 below).

3.1.2 The vast majority of survey respondents felt that the overall guidance (96%), 'undertaking the Check itself' (95%), the 'processes to be followed before the Check took place', and 'recognising and scoring appropriate responses' (86%) were 'useful' or 'very useful' (see Figure 3.1 below).

3.1.3. Between half and three-quarters of survey respondents had found the guidance to be 'useful' or 'very useful' around 'regional accents' (74%), 'processes to be followed after the Check took place' (74%), 'access arrangements for pupils with other SEN' (64%), 'speakers of English as an Additional Language' (57%), and 'speech and language difficulties' (57%).

3.1.4 Survey respondents from schools with higher proportions of pupils with SEN were the most likely to find the guidance useful in relation to 'recognising and scoring the appropriate responses' with 94% of schools in the highest SEN quartile finding this very useful/useful compared with 75% of schools in the lowest SEN quartile (see Table 3.1 below). This finding is backed up by teachers from 12 case study schools, and open comments from the survey who stated that the plans for online video training around recognising and scoring appropriate responses would be very beneficial.

3.1.5 Sixty-eight respondents to the survey made comments and suggestions for improvements to the guidance[6]. The most common theme related to giving a set of acceptable pronunciations for words used on the Check, which was mentioned by 26 respondents, in particular for pseudowords (10 comments):

> *Provide a check of acceptable individual responses for pseudowords. It was sometimes very difficult to make an instant judgement as to whether a pseudoword pronunciation was acceptable or not (School Survey 2, respondent)*

3.1.6 The pronunciation of both real and pseudowords was also raised as a concern amongst the teachers from the case study schools in relation to scoring pupils. It was apparent that much of this concern had arisen and been resolved during the training events. Some teachers stated that they would have marked some of their pupils' responses incorrectly without this element of the training, indicating the importance of the online training around this issue in the roll out.

Figure 3.1: Responses to the question: how useful were these elements of the guidance? (%)
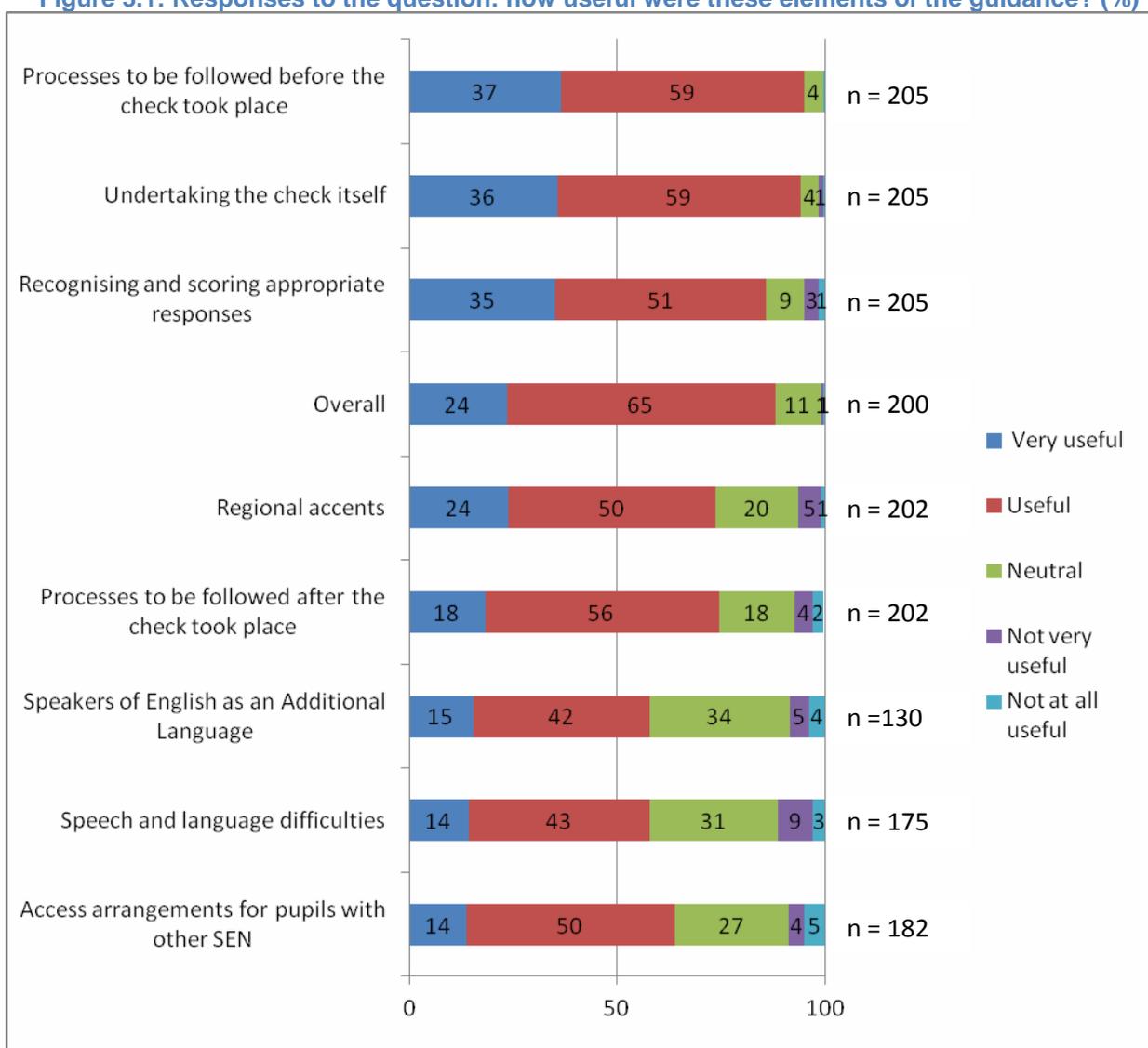
Source: School Survey 2

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[6] Note that some of the respondents commented on the content of the Check. These comments are reported in section 2.3.

Table 3.1: Usefulness of the guidance you received on the Check in relation to recognising and scoring the appropriate responses by SEN quartile[7]

	Very useful/useful %	Neutral/not very useful/not at all useful %	Total n
Lowest quartile	76	24	**50**
Lower quartile	83	17	**52**
Upper quartile	90	10	**52**
Highest quartile	94	6	**51**

Source: School Survey 2
$p<0.05$, CV = 0.20

3.1.7 In the case study schools lead phonics teachers overwhelmingly felt that the administration guide was a clear, useful and informative document that had enabled them to carry out the screening checks effectively:

> It did clearly lay out what was expected and what you needed to do; it was a useful guide if I needed it. It's not very lengthy either which is good (CS3, Lead teacher)

3.1.8 Head teachers and other senior staff who had not administered the Check themselves were far less familiar with these documents than the member of staff who had led on its implementation, and six were not familiar with it at all. Those head teachers who had become acquainted with the guidance came from a range of schools and had found it to be straightforward and helpful:

> [The guidance documents] were fine; they just gave clarity...straightforward instructions. They put things in a context of why we were doing things (CS17, Head teacher)

3.1.9 Specific comments were also made around how the guide had been helpful in relation to the inclusion of information around what to do if pupils were struggling with the Check or if a mistake was made on the marksheet, which had subsequently led to its administration being easier on the day.

3.1.10 Whilst it was felt by case study schools that the concise nature of the administration guide was beneficial and meant it was easy to use, a lead teacher spoke about how it could have been more user-friendly, suggesting that navigation would be easier if sections for before, during and after the Check were colour coded, with the Check script being placed in a separate document altogether.

3.1.11 Case study responses around the administration guide also prompted spontaneous comments about the training event the pilot school leads had attended. Around half of the lead teachers mentioned how they had either found the training more useful than the administration guide or how it had helped reinforce the guidance, making them feel more confident about administering the Check:

> The training course was most useful though, that really helped me understand the potential issues and what I needed to do, which meant the material just reminded me of what I needed to do (CS16, Lead teacher)

3.1.12 The case study interviews revealed that the other check materials were also generally felt to be useful. The grapheme-phoneme correspondences sheet enabled teachers to work out what pronunciation(s) were correct for each word, and the document seemed to be

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[7] Please note that the categories "neutral", "not very useful" and "not at all useful" are combined here because of low cell counts which otherwise render the Chi square test invalid. The decision was hence made to focus on the "very useful" and "useful" categories compared to the rest of the responses. Please see Appendix 1 for a full breakdown of the table.

something that was particularly helpful for those teachers that were not already using them in school:

> *The phoneme-grapheme was helpful just so you could fit the phoneme to different words so it helped me to compile my list for acceptable words for the Check (CS3, Lead teacher)*

3.1.13 Around a quarter of the lead teachers mentioned finding the training slides helpful, particularly in reminding them about what they had learnt at the training day. One teacher from a case study school commented on how they had found the slide on scoring points especially useful.

3.1.14 Case study schools also outlined a number of improvements that could be made to the administration guide in terms of processes to be followed before the Check took place. Additional guidance was requested around setting up the room and the more general administration of who should be carrying the Check out were requested by two schools:

> *I think one of the things I would have found difficult if I hadn't been on the training was the general setting up of the test...You need a quiet area to do it. You can't do it in a busy classroom because you need to listen carefully to what the children are saying (CS9, Lead teacher)*

> *I think you'd need guidance on how it should be administered in the sense of where, who should do it, timings (CS10, Head teacher)*

3.1.15 Five open comments from the survey indicated that some respondents had experienced difficulties with the collection of completed checks and requested additional guidance around this matter. In addition, smaller numbers noted a requirement for advice on disapplication, particularly borderline cases, discontinuing the Check with pupils and the benefits of being given a set of guidance notes per class rather than per school.

3.1.16 Other specific guidance-related issues identified by a minority of teachers included:
*   The survey revealed six open comments asking for more guidance on how to deal with particular groups of pupils specifically pupils with SEN, EAL, speech and language difficulties and strong regional accents.
*   Three teachers who had filled in open comments in the survey requested simplified guidance, such as a single page 'at-a-glance sheet'.
*   Some areas of uncertainty had arisen in the case study schools around whether teachers administering the Check could write comments on the answersheet, for example in relation to pupils who do not complete all 40 words; whether to mark an answer correctly if a pupil moves on to the next word and then self corrects at a later point, and what to do if a pupil refuses to participate in the process.
*   Clearer guidance around the forms. One lead teacher had faced confusion prior to the delivery of the consignment in terms of understanding what was meant by doing *"all the form 18s and then do all the form fives"[8]* (CS10, Lead teacher).

3.1.17. Head teachers from the case study schools were asked about what guidance they would need in their role as school leader once the Phonics Screening Check becomes statutory. Four stated that they were happy with the information they had received during the pilot phase, indicating that they had liked its similarity to Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) booklets:

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[8] Please note that there were 18 different versions of the Check being trialled during the Pilot. In the roll out there will only be one version.

I don't think there's anything additional from the information that the Phonics Screening Check lead has passed to me. It seemed to go really straightforward. It's just like administering the KS2 SATS: you get a pack, with everything explained (CS9, Head teacher)

3.1.18 Early guidance on when the Phonics Screening Check would take place and what it would involve was suggested by three head teachers from case study schools; this was felt to be important due to the already busy school calendar and the feeling that many schools would be suspicious of the Government's intentions of running the Check:

Crucially, heads need to be made aware as quickly as possible that this will be happening next year….because schools are very busy and if it's something new, schools need time and help to get it right (CS12, Head teacher)

3.1.19 Some head teachers from case study schools wanted guidance on how to report pupil outcomes to parents/carers (see section 7.3) and asked whether there would be an expectation to pass over this information and if so whether there would be a standardised format from the DfE. Others were more concerned with how the data was going to be used by the Government, and wanted information around how it was going to be published and whether this information would be publicly available or whether it would be something that schools could use internally or from a benchmarking or contextual point of view (see also section 7.3).

3.2 Administration of the Check itself

3.2.0 The following sections discuss findings on the administration of the Check itself in terms of: staff roles in implementing the Check; the location of the Check; staff confidence in administering the Check; making judgments around pupil responses; and other findings related to the administration of the Check.

Key findings:

The role of staff implementing the Check
- **Year One teachers were more likely to be the lead for administering the Check than other members of staff, and respondents felt teachers to be best placed to be carrying out the Check.**

- **The majority of head teachers in case study schools took a more supervisory role and had little involvement in the Check once preliminary discussions had taken place.**

Staff confidence in administering the Check
- **All lead teachers in case study schools felt confident in delivering the Check, and this was linked to training, preparation and previous knowledge/experience of phonics. Concerns were raised by a small number of schools around the consistency of judgement when more than one person was administering the Check.**

Judging pupil responses
- **The majority of teachers in case study schools had faced difficulties in judging whether a word had been read correctly or not with some of their pupils. Where problems had arisen, these were in relation to pseudowords, quieter pupils, more able pupils who rushed through the Check, and pupils who were good readers but had speech difficulties.**

- **The importance of using a member of staff who knew the pupils well and the need for a relaxed situation was noted in terms of making judgements of words.**

Findings relating to the administration of the Check
- **Just over half (54%) of survey respondents felt a longer window of time to carry out the Check was needed. Open comments from the survey and teachers from five case study schools suggested that the Check should be administered slightly earlier in the year, as mid to late spring is typically a very busy time for schools. This related to being able to use the Check to inform teaching. These schools felt that earlier access to the results would enable them to use the Check as an additional planning tool.**

- **The benefits of a tick box on the pupil list and a note-making area on the mark sheet were suggested by teachers in both case studies and open survey comments as a way of logging additional data and noting comments around individual pupils linking - again - to making the Check as useful as possible for supporting teaching and planning.**

3.2.1 Role of staff implementing the Check

3.2.1.1The survey was administered to the Phonics Screening Check lead in the school, in total 96% of respondents stated that they were the phonics lead. Table 3.2 below shows a breakdown of the roles of the survey respondent (respondents may have more than one role). The most commonly cited role was Year One class teacher, around a quarter of respondents stated that they were the literacy co-ordinator or Key Stage One co-ordinator. Fewer respondents were the head teacher or deputy head teacher. A number of respondents (42) also cited an 'other' role in the school, the most frequently noted other roles were Foundation stage co-ordinator/manager, assistant head, SENCO co-ordinator/assistant, reading recovery teacher and Reception teacher.

Table 3.2: Role of survey respondents

	%
Head teacher	9
Deputy head teacher	12
Literacy co-ordinator	24
Key stage 1 co-ordinator	23
Year One class teacher	63
Other Key Stage 1 teacher	11
Other (please specify below)	20

Source: School Survey 2
Total n = 206
NB: total exceeds 100% since respondents were able to make more than one response

3.2.1.2. The case study data findings showed that classroom teachers tended to take on the role of running the Phonics Screening Check with the Year One pupils, and as with the survey this was more likely to be Year One teachers themselves, although in some cases the lead teacher was in charge of a split year class. Some Year One teachers noted the importance of their role in the process as they knew the pupils well, as indicated by this quote:

> [We have] single form entry and I had done the training and I know the children, they are my class (CS4, Lead teacher)

3.2.1.3. One school had used their reception teacher to lead the Check, with the head teacher stating that this had been an obvious choice because she already knew the pupils but had a sense of objectivity, but also indicated that they may use their Year One teacher once the Check had been rolled out. The lead teacher at this school felt that her role as Communication, Language and Literacy Development Lead had also added to the role:

> I already collect and analyse phonics and other data, so it made sense for me to do it (CS13, Lead teacher)

3.2.1.4 In two case study schools, staff who would be teaching the pupils in Year Two took the lead in the Phonics Screening Check, using the assessment as a way of planning how to work with individual pupils in the following year. In one case this was the Year One teacher who would be teaching the same group of pupils in Year Two, and in the other school the Year Two lead was the Literacy Coordinator and felt that she would be able to use her knowledge of this year's check to train up Year One teachers after the roll out as well as it helping with next year's planning:

Part of the reason being that I will be taking the class when they go into Year Two next year. I will have the information on them and that gives me an idea of what I have to teach in September (CS14, Lead teacher)

Neither of the [Year One] teachers are teaching Year One next year. I'm not teaching Year One next year either, but I did last year, and I am Literacy Coordinator and so…I could train next year's Year One teachers up…I could group those children from that. I would know what Phase I have to start at (CS9, Lead teacher)

3.2.1.5 Generally head teachers had little involvement with the Phonics Screening Check. They had a tendency to participate in the initial stages of the process, followed by a more supervisory role rather than dealing with the administration of the Check itself. Head teachers were therefore more likely to be the ones making the decision to take part and deal with the preliminary paperwork and in-school discussions, often acting as a conduit between the DfE and those teachers who would be carrying out the Check.

3.2.1.6 Head teachers also tended to take on the responsibility for facilitating staff release from the classroom and the organisation of supply cover. Some head teachers spoke about having a more involved role, either in terms of going through all the paperwork together or in one case administering the Check themselves.

3.2.1.7 In a minority of case study schools senior members of staff had led the Phonics Screening Check. One school had used their assistant head as one of the three members of staff running the Check in a larger than average primary school. Another school had given the role to the deputy head due to their Year One teacher being occupied with pre-school visits due to the time of year, but expressed that they would have preferred to have used the Year One teacher:

I thought she [Year One teacher] would've been the best person to do this as she knows the children better (CS1, Lead teacher).

3.2.2 Location of the Check
3.2.2.1 Most schools were able to administer the Check in a quiet, undisturbed room. This was in line with findings from the monitoring visits (see section 9), but a couple faced problems in terms of location.

3.2.2.2 In case study schools, the room chosen for the Check was often a resources room or other small, quiet room (at least six schools), sometimes an office belonging to a senior lead (three schools) or the staff room - which were seen to be 'special' by pupils. Three schools used the library, and three others used unused classrooms. One used a curtained off corner of the main classroom (which was L-shaped), which was *"quiet and physically removed"* (CS16 Lead teacher).

3.2.2.3 Four small case study schools had found problems in finding an appropriate space to carry out the Check; open comments from some survey respondents also revealed problems around this issue (also see section 9 for detail around the monitoring visits on this issue):

Finding quiet place for 1-1 for that length of time was very difficult (School Survey 2, respondent)

3.2.2.4 Two schools had used cloakroom areas which were noisier and had interruptions, as a researcher's fieldnote and a lead teacher identify:

I conducted the focus group in the same place where the Check took place – a small table in a cloakroom/wide hall area which formed part of a very noisy thoroughfare. A number of classes nearby had doors open…staff and pupils constantly walking past providing a high

level of distraction for pupils. It was very difficult for me and the pupils to concentrate as part of the focus group because of disruptions and interruptions. The head teacher commented that that 'happens some afternoons, but in the mornings, more quiet formal teaching occurs so that area would not have been so noisy and distracting on the mornings the Check was conducted. But it still raised the issue that small schools have problems finding additional appropriate space to conduct the Check outside of classrooms' (CS16, researcher's fieldnote)

We are so limited with space, this room [library] was the only place I could come with the children…people came in and used the photocopier that did disrupt and distract the children. We couldn't have done it in the class or anything like that. We had to have a separate, quiet room (CS8, Lead teacher)

3.2.3 Teachers' confidence in administering the Check

3.2.3.1. Lead phonics teachers from all case studies felt confident in terms of preparing for and administering the Phonics Screening Check, as this quote illustrates:

Overall, I felt fine about doing it. All the materials were there and there wasn't anything extra that I had to do, nothing overly onerous about it (CS13, Lead teacher)

3.2.3.2 Ten lead teachers attributed their confidence to the DfE training event they had attended, with some noting how it had cleared up any confusion around pronunciations and scoring the marksheet:

I felt confident because of the training course, particularly the audio/marking exercise as there was a lot of discussion about different pronunciations. It was initially confusing but became clearer as we went through the process. The training definitely helped. If I was given it [the Check] without the training I would feel a lot less confident about how to score it consistently and correctly. The training was essential (CS15, Lead teacher)

3.2.3.3 Almost half of the phonics leads from case study schools felt that the training day had allowed them to gain confidence around carrying out the Phonics Screening Check and clarify any questions they had around its implementation. One lead teacher mentioned how the DfE training had given gravitas to her request to be released for a whole day to administer the Check, giving the activity a more critical status. The practice marking workshop was by far the most valued element of the training day, and was the main aspect of the event mentioned by the case study schools, with lead teachers commenting that they would have scored the mark sheets differently had they not attended. This point also led to concerns around the consistency of data from the screening check and therefore its validity:

Learning about the regional accents was helpful...that was made very clear on the day. I don't know if reading a paragraph in a book is quite the same... we listened to tape recordings of children's responses and there were children who got a word correct and self corrected and got it wrong. I think if that was me I think I would have marked it as correct (CS18, Lead teacher)

It was more helpful that I'd actually been to the training...Especially when it came to the pronunciation of the sounds. ...you've got to make sure everybody knows what they are doing otherwise the data becomes a little bit meaningless (CS19, Lead teacher)

3.2.3.4 One lead teacher outlined how her participation in the event had made her feel that her professional opinion had been valued which had made her feel empowered and therefore confident about running the Check:

I felt really good about it and I'll tell you why. As teachers I feel we are constantly thrown things: 'do this', 'try this' 'oh there's problems in Key Stage One - do this'. For the first time in my career I felt I was part of something where I was being asked as a professional what I thought about it when I went to the training in Sheffield. I actually thought they are not just

saying 'this is what you are going to do', they were asking us. I felt like rather than just having 'get on with this' we were doing something for a reason that would impact on my daily teaching of phonics. So because of that I felt empowered when I was doing the test and I felt quite confident (CS9, Lead teacher)

3.2.3.5 Preparation was key for some lead teachers in relation to their level of confidence in administering the Check itself, for some this was due to their own groundwork in going through the grapheme-phoneme correspondences sheet for example:

It took preparation time in the evening for the alien words - I had to think what children could say other than what you were thinking. The grapheme-phoneme correspondence form was great (CS6, Lead teacher)

3.2.3.6 For a few lead teachers it was their previous knowledge and experience of phonics that had enabled them to feel confident in administering the Check, this seemed to be particularly the case for those teachers who were used to using pseudowords with their pupils:

Yes [I felt confident doing the Check] we do phonics every day and have had Letters and Sounds training (CS20, Lead teacher).

3.2.4 Making judgements about pupils' responses[9]
3.2.4.1 The majority of teachers from the case study schools had faced difficulties around judging whether a word had been read correctly or not with some of their pupils.

3.2.4.2 Several teachers talked about how they faced some difficulties in working out whether to mark some of the pseudowords as being correct or where pupils had attempted to change a pseudoword to a real word, but also noted that they would have struggled with this aspect far more had they not prepared adequately beforehand:

The 'aw' sound in the pseudowords, they almost all made the mistake saying 'ow' but the training was good so I knew that this was incorrect. You have to read all the words first and say all the possible variations (CS7, Lead teacher)

If I hadn't been on the training I would have found that difficult, but the training covered that really well I thought, and gave us lots of examples. I kept referring to some of the pages in the pack that they gave us….You know if it was a word like ▆▆▆ did they say ▆▆▆ or did they say ▆▆, but the training covered the yes and the no's really well. I think if teachers hadn't been on the training they would find administering the test and marking it difficult (CS9, Lead teacher)

3.2.4.3 One lead mentioned the difficulties associated with one pseudoword which she felt was not explained explicitly enough on the grapheme-phoneme correspondence sheet. Occasions were noted where pupils had responded with a word that matched the picture of an alien. Other teachers faced problems around hearing the responses of the quieter pupils, and were not clear on the protocol around asking them to repeat their answer:

If children said the word quietly so it could be difficult, if I asked them to repeat it then they took that to mean that I must think it was wrong and then they changed the way they said the word. So then I started to say at the beginning could you say it loud and clear so I could hear it (CS5, Lead teacher)

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[9] In this section, actual words used in the Check referred to by teachers have been removed, since they may be used in roll-out.

3.2.4.4 A similar issue related to hearing what was being said occurred with the more able and confident pupils who were more likely to rush through their responses than their less able counterparts (see also sections 4 and 5):

> There were occasions when children said it wrong and I just waited, or I said 'can you say that one again for me?' because they were rushing through – the more confident ones needed to slow down. I knew that they knew it, but they were so ultra confident rather than sounding out the words they were just saying them, even the silly ones, they were just saying them so quickly, I had to ask them to slow down and say it again for me. I don't know if that was right but when you know that a child can do it then that's your instinct to do that (CS10, Lead teacher)

3.2.4.5 One lead teacher noted complications with a particular pupil who was a very good reader but had speech and language difficulties which meant his speech was unclear, meaning that in a different context she could have asked him questions around the content of what he was saying but in the Check situation this had not been possible:

> I very often don't understand what he says but I can ask him questions about the content and then know that he's understood what he's read. With the test he's saying the word and I'm thinking did he read it right? I don't know (CS18, Lead teacher)

3.2.4.6 Additional considerations were made in one school with higher levels of EAL pupils in terms of accent and dialect. In another school with a similar EAL intake they stated that there had been no problems in judging whether a pupil had read the word correctly or not where the teacher was familiar with the pupil:

> I knew most of the children; accents were not a problem (CS13, Lead teacher)

3.2.4.7 Other schools, who had made the decision to administer the Check with staff who did not know the Year One pupils well, faced issues around making judgements:

> The biggest thing was that I was doing it for both classes and I don't know the other class as well so I didn't know what they would need i.e. extra time or explanation, therefore they were at a disadvantage - and I wasn't always sure if they were getting them right as well as in my class. In the future we will give training to the other teacher to do their own class (CS6, Lead teacher)

3.2.4.8 Prior to the Check a small number of teachers had assumed that they would have problems judging whether their pupils had responded appropriately, but in the event this had not been the case due to their previous relationships with the pupils. In CS2 the teacher had been concerned about judgements made around pupils with lisps, but had subsequently found no issues around this due to the fact that she was the Year One class teacher and knew the pupils well. A similar scenario occurred in two schools where pupils had a strong regional accent or specific ways of saying things, but again the fact that these teachers knew their pupils well meant that they knew this was how they would normally pronounce the sound, for example:

> Some children might say ███ for ████ but I know those children, I know that that is how they would say it, so I'd mark that correct (CS10, Lead teacher)

3.2.4.9 However, in one small case study school where the lead was not the class teacher it was felt that the way they had implemented the Check and the size of the school had helped in terms of the clarity of responses. The lead teacher here felt that the fact the pupils were already acquainted with him and the way they had portrayed the Check as a quiz had created a relaxed situation where the pupils were more likely to speak loudly and clearly:

I think I'm familiar enough and the situation was relaxed enough to not put that pressure on. The 'quiz' scenario helped this (CS1, Lead teacher).

3.2.5 Findings related to the administration of the Check

3.2.5.1 Although most schools had found the administration of the Check fairly straightforward, there were comments around various issues that they felt would have made it easier for them. The main issues mentioned were in terms of the timing of the Check, the collection of the consignment, and around alterations to the pupil list and marksheet.

Timing of the Check

3.2.5.2 As Figure 3.2 below shows, over half of the survey respondents felt that schools required a longer window in which to carry out the Phonics Screening Check, with open comments also highlighting this issue:

The timing of the test was an issue, need longer than a week to conduct the Check, especially at short notice of being given a week to do it (School Survey 2, respondent)

3.2.5.3 Although 28% of respondents stated that they thought there were no changes needed in relation to the Check's timing, the survey indicated that 16% thought that the administration should take place earlier in the school year - an issue that was also raised by teachers in four case study schools and some of the open comments in the survey. It was felt that the end of the summer term was already a very busy time for a number of primary schools. This was a particular issue for the lead teacher in one school where Year One and Year Two pupils were taught together, which meant additional pressures because of the SATs:

If I hadn't had a split year class it would've been absolutely fine, but because it had to be me really, I could've asked someone else to do it but I was interested in doing it myself, it was a bit awkward, a bit pressured. If I could make any suggestions it would be that it's a really bad time of year for split year classes with SATs being carried out (CS2, Lead teacher)
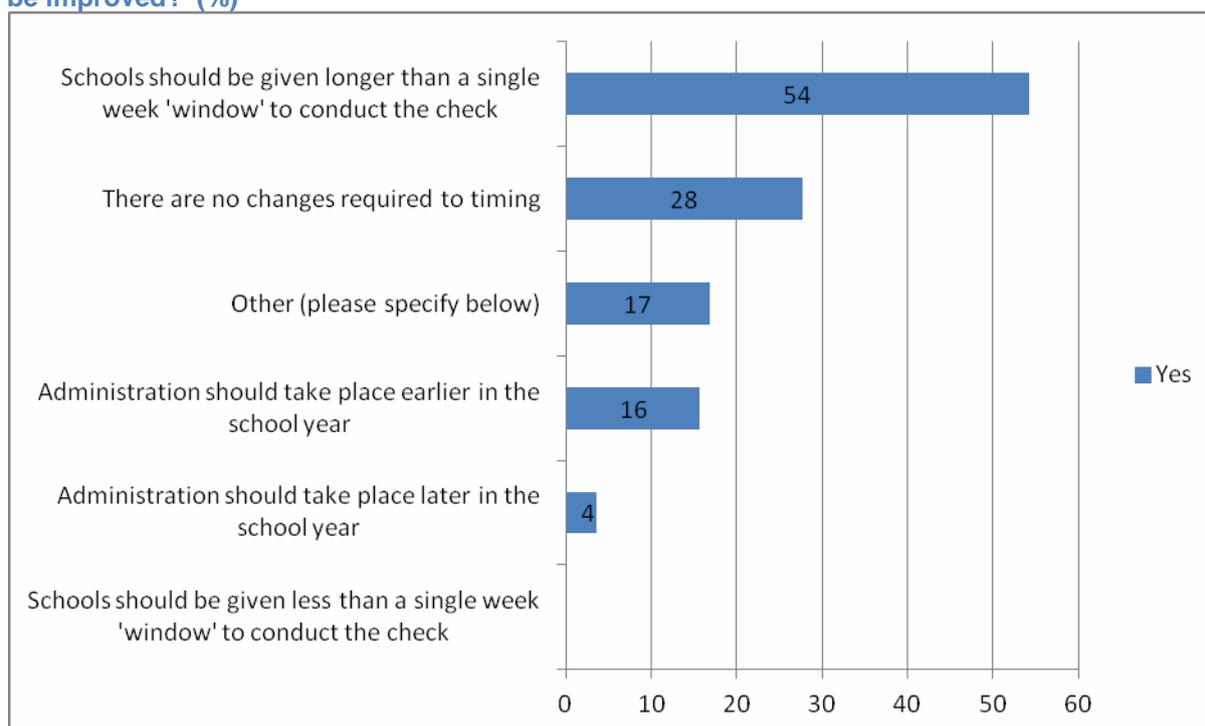
3.2.5.4 In relation to the timing of the Check, the majority of teachers from case study schools also emphasised how they would like to use the results as a planning tool, but some felt that June was too late in the year for this to occur.

The check materials

3.2.5.5 Six interviewees from the case study schools and open comments from the survey suggested changes to the pupil list in terms of tick boxes for pupil context (e.g. adding data on pupil background, newly arrived pupils, SEN, EAL, or why the Check was stopped). They felt that this was needed to provide context for the DfE when they were analysing results from schools[11]:

> There should be space to say if the child is EAL, SEN, or how long they had been at the school (CS4, Lead teacher)

3.2.5.6 Others spoke about how it would have been beneficial to have an area on the marksheet to record additional data in relation to the identification of gaps in learning or uncertainty around judgements:

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[10] Please note that fewer respondents answered this question due to a routing error in the questionnaire. However responses to this question were scrutinised alongside the independent variables used in analysis and revealed no significant differences from the complete sample. Whilst some precision may be lost due to a lower subsample size there is no evidence that responses will be systematically biased in terms of school size, FSM, SEN and EAL. We can therefore be confident that responses to this question would reasonably reflect responses if all respondents in the sample had completed this question. Please see Appendix 1 for further details.

[11] It should be noted, however, that the marksheet had a unique reference number which carried all this information from the School Census, which had been added to reduce the burden on teachers completing the form.

I would like another section to record what they said so I could go back to make use of it. I did actually make notes on a couple of children after the Check if they'd had a particular misconception so I could report it back to the class teacher to help them in the future (CS13, Lead teacher)

3.2.5.7 Some teachers stressed the need to carefully cover or obscure the mark sheet from the pupils as this was a potential distraction, and two lead teachers mentioned problems relating to pupils' awareness of the marking system, as some pupils had identified which columns recorded correct and incorrect answers:

Some children were very aware of the answer sheet; [one pupil in particular] very quickly sussed that this column meant you got them right and this column meant you got them wrong. So they'd say 'I'll do it again' (CS18, Lead teacher)

3.2.5.8 Two case study schools had experienced problems in receiving the consignment. The head teacher in CS2 spoke about how their materials had been sent to the wrong school, but had subsequently arrived at the school before the week of the Phonics Screening Check. The situation was more stressful for CS9 where they had been told the materials would arrive on the Thursday before the Check commenced on the Monday, but had still not appeared by the Friday. The lead teacher had phoned the helpline to chase up the consignment but had been disappointed in the response. Finally the materials arrived at the school on the Monday morning just before the Check took place at 9.30am which meant the lead had not been able to read through the documentation:

I was worried because I had arranged cover for the Monday. So I phoned the helpline…who didn't know what I was talking about…So he said he would look into it for me. Then I phoned again at lunchtime because I was really worried that I wasn't going to get the tests for Monday when I had the cover. Then Monday morning the tests arrived. So it was quite stressful…what I wanted to do on Friday afternoon before I left school was to get everything sorted out so that on Monday morning I could just come in and get straight on with it (CS9, Lead teacher)

3.2.5.9 Linked with this are comments from a case study school and open comments from six survey respondents relating to problems around returning the Check materials to DfE, as explained by this teacher for example:

Hopeless arrangement for collection of response sheets. Had to ring daily and made 3 different collection dates. They were then returned to us. Made our own arrangements! (School Survey 2, respondent).

3.3 Resources and time commitment needed to administer the Check

3.3.0 This section presents findings relating to the time spent on preparing for and administering the check, average time per check for each pupil and evidence on how manageable the time and resource commitment was.

Key findings

- **The survey showed that around two thirds of schools had found the time commitment required to administer the Check to be straightforward to manage, with just under a fifth finding it difficult to manage. The average time spent preparing for the Check was around three hours, and administering the Check was about 12.5 hours. The amount of time taken to administer the Check varied considerably between schools, with larger ones being more likely to find it took longer than smaller ones.**

- **According to teachers surveyed, the Check itself had taken between four and nine minutes on average per pupil, dependent on the skills and ability of the pupils. The overall time taken to administer the Check was more resource intensive and took longer in larger schools, but was reduced in schools where pupils were asked to wait outside the room before it was their turn to take part.**

- **Qualitative evidence revealed that staff cover was the main resource issue. Some schools dealt with cover internally whilst others bought in supply teachers. Some comments suggested that after the national roll out the Check may need to be administered by teaching assistants or within the classroom due to resource constraints, since ring fenced funding is unlikely to be provided for administration of the Check.**

3.3.1 The survey showed that head teachers, other teachers and supply cover staff were more likely to be spending time preparing for the Check than teaching assistants or administrative staff (see Table 3.3 below), with other teachers spending the most time to prepare (an average of one hour and 22 minutes). Staff in schools took three hours and 22 minutes on average preparing for the Phonics Screening Check.

3.3.2 An average of 12 hours and 48 minutes was spent on administering the Check overall. The staff groups spending the most amount of time on this was 'other teachers' and supply cover (averages of five hours 41 minutes and five hours five minutes respectively). Head teachers spent an average of one hour 40 minutes administering the Check whilst less time was required from teaching assistants and admin staff.

3.3.3 Proportionally head teachers spent less time administering the Check than preparing the Check compared with other teachers, which also reflects the findings from the case studies.

Table 3.3: Time spent on preparation and administering the Check

	Head teacher/ deputy head[12]	Other teachers	Tteaching assistants	Admin staff	Supply cover
Hours spent preparing for check (av.)	52 mins	1 hr 22 mins	5 mins	7 mins	56 mins
Hours spent administering check (av.)	1 hr 40	5 hr 41 mins	22 mins	1 min	5 hr 5 mins

Source: School Survey 2
Total n = 182

3.3.4 As Table 3.4 shows, time spent on administering the Check varied according to school size (F = 13.6, p<0.01), with larger schools spending longer administering the Check[13].

Table 3.4: Average time spent on administering the Check by school size

	Average time spent on check
Smallest	5 hrs 48 mins
Smaller	11 hrs 6 mins
Larger	15 hrs 24 mins
Largest	18 hrs 18 mins

Source: School Survey 2
Total n = 182

3.3.5 Table 3.5 shows that 65% of the pilot primary schools responding to the survey had either found the administration of the Check 'very straightforward' or 'straightforward' to manage, and 19% had found the resource management to be 'difficult' or 'very difficult'[14].

Table 3.5: Difficulty in managing the time commitment

	%
Very straightforward for the school to manage	15
Straightforward for the school to manage	50
Neutral	16
Difficult for the school to manage	17
Very difficult for the school to manage	2
Total	**100**

Source: School Survey 2
Total n = 206

3.3.6 The time taken to conduct the Check per pupil took longer than teachers had anticipated and varied according to the skill and ability of individual pupils. Time taken overall was more resource intensive in larger schools.

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[12] The check would have been administered by either the head/deputy or another teacher, but generally not both, therefore the averages for head teachers are only for schools that chose for the head teacher or deputy to administer the Check, and not all schools.

[13] A one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences in time spent on administering the Check between school size quartiles. Time spent administering the Check differed significantly across the school size quartiles.

[14] This included in-school preparation and administration only, not time allocated to training or evaluation.

3.3.7 For the vast majority of the schools surveyed the Check itself took between four and nine minutes to complete per pupil, on average. Table 3.6 below shows that for 99% of respondents, the Check took longer than the two to three minutes indicated by DfE in the training session manual. For over half (53%) of respondents, the Check took more than seven minutes per pupil to complete the Check[15].

Table 3.6: Responses to the question 'how long did administration of the Check take to complete?'

	%
0-3 minutes	1
4-6 minutes	46
7-9 minutes	39
10 minutes or more	14
Total	100

Source: School Survey 2
Total n = 206

3.3.8 Open comments from the survey also highlighted that, for many, the process had taken much longer than expected, for example:

> One child took 16 minutes to complete (School Survey 2, respondent)

3.3.9 The qualitative data indicated that the administration time was very variable, depending on the skills and ability of the pupils, as this quotation indicates:

> There were a lot of children that were sounding out but not blending, so that took a long time. … some children were very quick … and then some children took a lot longer than the five/ten minutes (CS9, Lead teacher)

3.3.10 The amount of time it took overall to conduct the Checks varied, from around one to two full days to administer to a class of 30 pupils and this was more arduous for teachers in larger schools. In two schools teachers mentioned that it had been spread over a few days due to it being demanding for the administering teacher, indicating the need for guidance on managing the Check:

> If all were done continuously, it would have been a very tiring, long process. The need to concentrate for a long time to get them all done would have been more difficult for one teacher to do in a larger school (CS15, Lead teacher)

3.2.3.11 The actual organisation of the Check (see also section 9 on the monitoring visits) tended to involve one of two methods, which affected the length of time taken overall. In some schools, the teacher withdrew pupils one at a time, picking up one pupil as they dropped off another in the classroom. One of the survey respondents summarised the difficulties with this approach:

> A lot of time was spent fetching/waiting for pupils as the room used was not adjacent to classrooms (School Survey 2, respondent)

3.2.3.12 This was more time-consuming than the alternative, where two or more pupils were withdrawn to start with, one undertaking the Check, with other(s) waiting outside. After the

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[15] Please note that this does not include time taken to get to and from the Check room where the Check was being conducted.

pupil had completed the Check, they were asked to return to the classroom and ask another pupil to come to wait outside the Check room until called in.

3.3.13 Other factors affecting time included the distance between the classroom and the room where the Check took place, break times, and preparation time:

> I thought I'd be able to get through 45 children [in one day] but this proved impossible…The guidance suggests two to three minutes per pupil…some children took a long time over the test (CS18, Lead teacher)

3.3.14 Both case study schools and survey respondents noted how it had taken longer than they had anticipated to administer the Phonics Screening Check with their Year One pupils. Some head teachers from smaller primary schools spoke of the difficulties they envisaged within larger schools where the Check would clearly take more time to conduct, and therefore use more resources. Comments around the amount of time it had taken came from both small and larger primary schools:

> It's taken a lot longer than the test organisers have anticipated. So the amount of supply time would need to correspond with that (CS18, Head teacher)

3.3.15 Some head teachers did note, however, that the next time they administered the Check may take less time as they would be more familiar with the process:

> I would think with time and experience the teacher would administer it quicker (CS7, Head teacher)

3.3.16 The school survey also asked a question around whether access arrangements (planning for specific pupils such as EAL or SEN who may require additional arrangements to enable them to access the Check appropriately) had been used in the pilot schools, and if so for how many pupils. Additional time and rest breaks were used for an average of seven percent of pupils per school, modifications were made by the school for an average of two percent of pupils per school, and the rephrasing of specific instructions (including the use of gestures to facilitate access) were used for an average of 11% of pupils per school.

3.3.17 Comments from the case study schools around the level of resource-commitment for schools taking part in the pilot Phonics Screening Check related mainly to cover in the classroom. This was brought up by more than half of the schools and many survey respondents also commented on teaching cover. Many teachers spoke about the financial implications of the Phonics Screening Check where funding [16] was spent on organising supply cover to enable the lead teacher to be away from the classroom:

> The funding wasn't great, it didn't even touch it, it has been quite tricky, and it needed three of us full time (CS5, Lead teacher)

> Using a class teacher has significant implications on the budget/resource commitment. (CS13, Head teacher)

3.3.18 Some felt this would be exacerbated next year when the funding would not be available:

> Luckily we had a final year student on placement so I was able to be covered by another class teacher. Under normal circumstances, I don't think we would be able to provide supply cover for the screening check (School Survey 2, respondent)

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[16] Schools involved in the Pilot received £250 pounds each towards the costs of preparation and administration time.

3.3.19 Other schools[17] which mentioned teaching cover had minimised financial implications by providing it in-house either through support staff or cover supervisors:

> *Here we have no problems in covering staff absence from the classroom as we have very experienced support staff who step up to cover supervisor level when a class teacher is out of class (CS1, Head teacher)*

> *Teachers will need release time if this test is to be carried out properly. It was only okay for me this year because I had a student doing a final teaching practice (School Survey 2, respondent)*

Or by more senior non-teaching members of staff such as the head teacher:

> *As the test was administered by myself, the deputy head, this was fairly straightforward as I have a fifty percent teaching commitment. This would have proved more difficult if a class teacher had administered the tests as supply cover would have been needed for at least one day. This in turn would have been expensive for the school (School Survey 2, respondent)*

3.3.20 Although it was felt to be advantageous to use a member of staff who knew the Year One pupils' phonics abilities and for the Check to take place in a quiet area away from the classroom, two case study head teachers and five open comments from the survey mentioned using teaching assistants particularly if they were not going to receive any funding to implement the Check once it was rolled out nationally:

> *This year the resource has been provided to cover staff time and costs, but next year, if schools are expected to fund this out of their normal resourcing and it becomes the school's commitment then I can guarantee it will be Teaching Assistants being used - or at least a known adult. The children need to feel comfortable - the relationship is more important than teacher knowledge - unless additional resource is provided (CS13, Head teacher)*

3.3.21 Linked to this was the problem mentioned by three case study schools of finding an appropriate space to conduct the Check which is also outlined further in section 3.2.

3.3.22 For some it was felt - based on the time the Check took in their school, and extrapolating to other schools - that the amount of resource allocated to the Phonics Screening Check was could be better spent in other ways, as this comment from a survey respondent pointed out:

> *Overall, the cost of running the Phonics Screening Check is disproportionate to the outcome - [in terms of identifying pupils who need more phonics practice]. It would be more efficient for DfE to promote a list of alien words and new activities/resources that teachers can use to strengthen their current phonics teaching and assessment. This would remove the need for a very expensive formal test (School Survey 2, respondent).*

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[17] Mentioned by six case study schools and ad hoc open comments from a school survey respondent

4 Content of the Phonics Screening Check

4.0 This section looks at general issues relating to the content of the Check, examining responses to a number of aspects of content and their suitability for pupils working at the expected level of phonics in the school, using qualitative data to illuminate them. The section then addresses the use of pseudowords in particular.

4.1 General issues relating to findings

Key findings

- **Survey schools were asked about the suitability of a number of aspects of content for pupils working at the expected standard of phonics, and for the majority of these more than 90% of respondents felt they were suitable. Eighty-three percent of survey respondents thought the number of words was suitable for pupils working at the expected standard; teachers who thought it was unsuitable were more likely to be from larger schools and those using whole class teaching. Case study data indicated that teachers in six schools felt there were too many words for less able pupils.**

- **Whilst 80% of respondents felt that the vocabulary used in the real words was suitable for pupils at the expected standard, 20% did not, and some case study schools argued that the use of unfamiliar 'real' words was problematic.**

4.1.1 Overall, 90% or more of the survey respondents felt that most aspects of content in Figure 4.1 were suitable for pupils working at the expected standard. Whilst eighty-three percent of survey respondents thought the number of words was suitable for these pupils, a minority (16%) felt that the number of words was unsuitable. In addition, 80% of respondents felt the type of vocabulary used in real words was suitable for pupils working at the expected standard, with 20% thinking it was unsuitable. Both of these issues are addressed below using case study data. The use of pseudowords is addressed in section 4.2.

Figure 4.1: Survey respondents' views of the suitability of the aspects of the content of the Check for pupils working at the expected standard[18] of phonics (%)
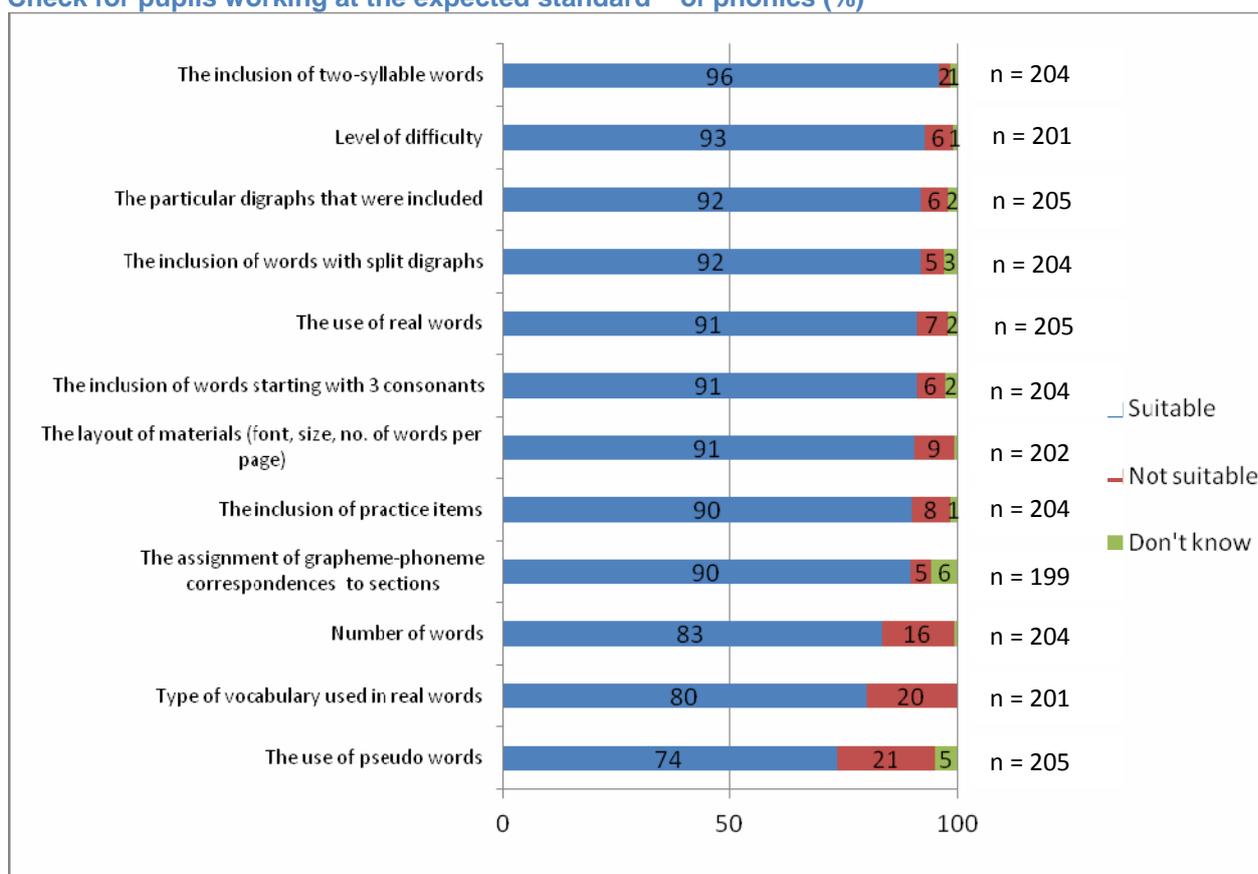
Source: School Survey 2
Total n = 206

4.1.1 Number of words

4.1.1.1 In addition to the overall findings presented above around suitability in relation to the number of words, further statistical analysis suggests that there was a significant association between the suitability of the Check in relation to the number of words and the size of the school, and how schools grouped their pupils for phonics teaching, as indicated in Table 4.1 below. Teachers in larger schools were less likely to state that the Check was suitable in relation to the number of words, as were those working in schools that used whole class teaching without ability grouping. 67% of teachers in these schools stated that the Check was suitable in relation to the number of words, compared with 98% of those who used ability grouping across KS1.

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[18] this question did not include any definition of 'expected standard' so responses depended on respondents' understanding of the term

Table 4.1: Suitability of the Check in relation to the number of words by grouping of pupils for phonics teaching and school size

Ability grouping[a]	Suitable %	Not suitable %	Total n
Ability grouping across KS1	98	2	**60**
Ability grouping across Y1 class(es)	79	21	**86**
Whole class teaching without ability grouping	67	33	**30**
School Size[b]			
Smallest	92	8	**51**
Smaller	87	13	**52**
Larger	84	16	**50**
Largest	72	28	**50**

Source: School Survey 2
[a] p<0.01, CV=0.31
[b] p<0.05, CV=0.20

4.1.1.2 As part of the case study interviews, teachers were asked about possible improvements to content. Bearing in mind the large number of proportion of respondents agreeing that the number of words was suitable reported above, the most common issue raised by around a third of case study schools (and five survey schools in open comments) was that the Check was too long, and these teachers saw this as a particular issue - although not exclusively - for pupils of lower ability and those with SEN:

> I think for the special needs children 40 words is far, far too much. I think if you could get it down to half. To be honest I think for a lot of the children it was very long (CS9, Lead teacher)

4.1.1.3 Some schools discussed how this impacted on the pupils, as mentioned by this lead teacher:

> It wasn't too onerous, not like a test, but the length was too long for five and six year olds. It could have been five or six words less. Even some of the higher ability pupils were getting bored and tired towards the end but they managed to keep going (CS16, Lead teacher).

4.1.2 Vocabulary used in real words

4.1.2.1 The vast majority (80%) of survey respondents felt that the vocabulary in the Check was suitable. Although some teachers in case study schools implied the Check included a good choice of words, the DfE research questions and therefore interview questions focused more on any improvements the teachers felt were needed to the content of the Check. In response, at least four case study schools noted that some pupils struggled with unfamiliar 'real' words:

> The words need looking at - the vocabulary- if you put a word in you need to think how relevant it is to a child, like ▮▮▮▮ they did not know what it was, they like to know what the word is. The words were too obscure, like ▮▮▮▮. It's not a used word, they won't come across it, which is fine if it is a nonsense word but if it's a real word they are told that they have to say it correctly (CS5, Head teacher)

4.1.2.2 A further nineteen survey respondents made spontaneous open comments about the obscure or unsuitable use of vocabulary, highlighting particular words pupils struggled with (some of these difficulties related to pronunciation which is also covered in section 3.2.4).

4.1.2.3 However, some teachers felt that these unfamiliar real words provided a learning point for the future, to work with pupils, for example, on decoding unfamiliar split digraphs.

4.1.3 Reading in context

4.1.3.1 At least seven case study schools and three survey schools in open comments raised the point that the Check should be looking at comprehension in addition to decoding ability; therefore words should be used in context. This applied equally to the more advanced readers - who often searched for a known 'real' word - as well as those with weaker decoding skills. For example, one school commented:

> *How does phonics reflect their comprehension? We know some children can read but they can't tell you what the book is about. It depends what we are trying to do, is it to get all the children to be readers or do we want them to have the comprehension to know what they are reading? Some children are really good on their phonics but they do not comprehend what they are reading. They are not making the connection from what they are reading (CS4, Lead teacher)*

4.1.3.2 This issue goes beyond simply content, and links to schools' views of the suitability of the Check (see section 5).

4.1.4 Other findings in relation to content

4.1.4.1 Four case study schools (and 24 survey schools using open comments) found that the Sassoon Infant typeface that was used, which has a rounded lower case k (i.e. k), meant pupils confused lower case k with capital R. Some schools treated this is as a learning point, to change their teaching, but others felt it meant the Check was testing letter recognition, not phonic decoding.

4.1.4.2 Finally, one school suggested changes to format, perhaps allowing the Check to take place online, or as flashcards, and another suggested there should be a written element. Another discussed issues with the layout, again relating it to problems with the pseudowords confusing pupils identified in section 4.2 below:

> *It was confusing the way it was set out because for young children to suddenly have the real words and then the tricky [pseudo] words and then back to the real words and then the tricky words they found it difficult…for the fluent readers it wasn't an issue but I think for the ones who were struggling with the idea that you have a few letters there and it's made a word the idea that for one page it was a real word and then the other page it was a pseudoword just threw them (CS19, Lead teacher).*

4.2 Findings relating to pseudowords

Key findings:

- **Just under three quarters of schools surveyed felt that pseudowords were suitable for pupils working at the expected standard of phonics, and some teachers and many pupils in the case study schools reported that pseudowords were a 'fun', novel aspect of the Check. However, the majority (60%) of schools surveyed felt that pseudowords caused confusion for at least some pupils, with an additional 12% feeling that they caused confusion for most pupils. In case study schools where pupils were less familiar with pseudowords, confusion was also noted by both teachers and pupils. Pupils in the case study schools generally understood the difference between real and pseudowords.**

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- **The most common issue in the qualitative data in relation to pseudowords was the confusion caused by not having pictures alongside all pseudowords. Schools in the survey and case studies suggested that the pseudowords should be placed in a separate section of the Check. Taken together, these findings indicate that how pseudowords are labelled or presented is important for the Department to consider in relation to the roll out of the Check.**

- **According to the case studies, pseudowords had caused problems for some higher ability pupils (when trying to make sense of the word) and with less able pupils (using the alien pictures as a clue) - both of which relate to reading ability more widely, rather than phonic decoding ability. EAL pupils were felt to be dealing better with pseudowords by their teachers.**

4.2.1 Figure 4.1 in section 4.1 above shows that 74% of surveyed schools felt that the inclusion of pseudowords were suitable for use with pupils at the expected standard in the Check.

4.2.2 The second school survey included one question relating specifically to the use of pseudowords. Table 4.2 below indicates that although this large majority of schools felt the use of pseudowords was suitable for pupils at the expected standard, 60% of schools felt that it caused problems for at least some pupils overall - i.e. one or more - and 12% felt it caused confusion for most pupils.

Table 4.2: Responses to the question 'How were the pseudowords received by pupils?'

	%
They didn't cause confusion for any pupils	28
They caused confusion for some pupils	60
They caused confusion for most pupils	12
They caused confusion for all pupils	0
Total	**100**

Source: School Survey 2
Total n = 206

4.2.3 As Table 4.3 shows, half of respondents in schools with shorter discrete phonics sessions of 5-10 minutes in length found the Check suitable, compared to around 80% of

those in schools holding longer sessions. Teachers who found the inclusion of pseudowords to be a suitable aspect of the Check were more likely to state that they 'always encourage pupils to use phonics as the strategy to decode unfamiliar phonically regular words' as part of their phonics strategy. Conversely those schools who use a range of cueing systems, such as context or picture clues, as well as phonics were less likely to find the Check suitable in relation to the use of pseudowords.

Table 4.3: Suitability of the Check in relation to the use of pseudowords by average length of each discrete phonics session and phonics strategy used

Average length of phonics session[a]	Suitable %	Not suitable %	Total n
5-10 minutes	50	50	**24**
11-20 minutes	81	19	**102**
21-30 minutes	78	22	**55**
Phonics strategy used[b]			
We always encourage pupils to use phonics as the strategy to decode unfamiliar phonically regular words	90	10	**51**
We encourage pupils to use a range of cueing systems, such as context or picture clues, as well as phonics	73	27	**139**

Source: School Survey 2
[a] p<0.01, CV=0.24
[b] p<0.05, CV=0.18

4.2.4 The case study data, and also open comments from the surveys, shed light on these findings. School responses indicate that their pupils' comfortableness with using pseudowords was very much linked to the amount of exposure they had had to them in the past. This was largely dependent on the extent to which the schools specifically prepared for the Check and more significantly the degree to which their chosen phonics programme had incorporated the full range of items present on the Check, including pseudowords:

> *The children were really used to using non-words, they're really used to the non-words; we've been doing that all along. Used the word 'rubbish' words from a game they play already (CS2, Lead teacher)*

4.2.5 In general, pupils appeared to understand that some words were not real, and described pseudowords thus:

> *[They're] a bit different to normal words (CS12, Pupil)*

> *[Alien words] means they are not true; it doesn't exist (CS17, Pupil)*

4.2.6 A substantial number of the lead teachers also commented that the use of the pseudowords and in particular 'alien' pictures had been favourably received by many of their pupils. Comments indicated they injected a degree of fun and novelty to the Check, which was also reported by pupils:

> *Children quite liked the pseudowords being alien words. A lot of them said they were funny (CS18, Lead teacher)*

> *The alien words [were fun], it made it interesting (CS3, Pupil)*

> *[I really liked it because] I thought it was fun because the fake words were funny…the aliens looked funny (CS20, Pupil)*

4.2.7 However, the most commonly reported issue (mentioned in at least eight case study schools and 25 survey schools in open comments) related to the confusing, distracting and inconsistent use of pictures alongside pseudowords. This was a problem for both schools that taught pseudowords and those that did not. In all but one case, schools felt that a picture should always be used with a pseudoword:

> *There was an issue around the image not being repeated for every non-word. Where it wasn't, the children thought they were back to 'real words'. So I had to keep reminding them they were nonsense words. (CS20, Lead teacher)*

> *Don't put an alien next to only some pseudowords and not others, it caused more confusion. Pictures too distracting (School Survey 2, respondent)*

4.2.8 Several pupils also mentioned the confusion caused by the inconsistent use of pictures, as one pupil explained:

> *It was a bit confusing 'cause some of them didn't have an alien next to it and some of them did…some of them were alien words when they didn't even have an alien on but some of them didn't have aliens on, they had nothing… they should have told us if it was an alien word or not (CS18, Pupil)*

4.2.9 Pupils from the majority of case study schools commented that they were not familiar with using pseudowords as part of their phonics learning. In these schools, pseudowords were identified as the main reason why many pupils found the Check hard, as this pupil explained:

> *[It was] hard….because I was not used to the alien words, no one has taught me those words before (CS3, Pupil)*

4.2.10 Other comments provided more clarity over why pupils found these words difficult. At least three teachers in case study schools and 22 open comments from the survey also reported that pupils became confused by trying to convert pseudowords into more familiar real words, for example:

> *Because there were so many pseudowords, the children were trying to turn them into real words; there was a word ▉▉ and a lot of children were trying to make it ▉▉. Even though we do teach nonsense words in the classroom, but when we feel they are secure in their phonics knowledge we stop the nonsense words so much (CS11, Lead teacher)*

> *[Some words] were changed by children who had generally sounded out correctly, [they] said it once correctly and then clearly thought to themselves 'oh that sounds a bit like [another word], that must be what it says' (School Survey 2, respondent)*

4.2.11 Some teachers noted that there were specific issues for pupils with more advanced reading skills:

> *It very much depends on the individual child. Some children who have a really high reading level and can decode phonetically [sic]and write phonetically were finding it very hard to read the pseudoword, it may be they did not like the concept or maybe they did not look right to them and they were stuttering on the words (CS4, Lead teacher)*

4.2.12 Other teachers pointed out difficulties for pupils of 'lower ability' and SEN partly by the use of pictures as 'clues' to the word:

> *Also when the alien pictures were next to the words, a lot of my SEN children or low ability children would say 'alien' or 'dinosaur', that was really confusing for them, because they have*

always been taught - if you can't sound it out, use the picture cues, so they were saying that word, it threw them off, to have only two pictures next to the words on a page was confusing for them, the pictures could be at the top of the page (CS11, Lead teacher)

4.2.13 Both of these types of comments relate to pupils using other techniques to read the words, such as sight reading and contextual clues.

4.2.14 In contrast, others felt that their EAL pupils (particularly those with higher ability) when freed from the barriers of context, actually tended to flourish with regard to the pseudowords. Two teachers (CS13) speculated that their EAL pupils were at an advantage over their non EAL peers with regards to the pseudowords, because those pupils typically possessed a narrower English vocabulary and would therefore be less inclined to attempt to correct pseudowords into actual ones:

EAL children did better with the non-words than the real words and I think that was because it took away the need to worry about the context or looking at pictures. They just used their phonics. I got a lot more out of that [check] than reading a book with them (CS19, Lead teacher)

EAL children seemed to do better with the made-up words. Sometimes if a child is very good at speaking English, they were sometimes trying to make the made-up words into real words. If they were reading ████ they might say ███ because they want it to be a real word, but EAL children, whose vocabulary is not so big would use phonics purely and simply, rather than trying to think 'what word is this? (CS13, Lead teacher)

4.2.15 Six survey respondents identified that the switching backwards and forwards between real and pseudowords caused confusion for pupils. Some suggested that the Check could be improved by starting more gradually with real words, then progressing onto pseudowords graded by level of difficulty:

I feel it would be useful to do the pseudowords second as children became complacent with their self checking with the real words due to this (School Survey 2, respondent)

Nonsense words came first in the tests which immediately put some children off from the start. Could we start with the real words? (School Survey 2, respondent)

Would like a more gradual start to the test, so that the least able children could feel they achieved something. Would like specific cut off points of level of difficulty (School Survey 2, respondent).

5 Suitability of the Phonics Screening Check for pupils

5.0 This section presents teachers' views on the suitability of the Check for particular groups of pupils, and pupils overall, using data from case studies to shed light on these findings.

Key findings

- **Three quarters of those surveyed felt that the Check accurately assessed phonic decoding ability overall for their pupils. Agreement was highest for pupils with strong phonics skills (84%), but much lower for pupils with weaker decoding skills (61%). Less than half of respondents agreed that the Check accurately assessed the decoding ability of pupils with EAL (46%), with speech difficulties (35%), with SEN (33%) and with language difficulties (28%). Around a third of respondents held neutral views around whether the Check was a good way of measuring the capabilities of Year One pupils in these groups. These issues were mirrored in case study findings and - in addition - about a quarter of case study interviewees mentioned that they felt the Check was not age appropriate as the standard may be set too high for some of the younger or lower ability pupils.**

- **Taken together these findings indicate that the Department need to consider addressing these potential issues by - for example - exploring the needs for guidance re disapplication and discontinuation**

5.1 Suitability for specific groups of pupils

5.1.1 The second school survey asked teachers about the extent to which they thought the Check accurately assessed the phonic decoding ability of different groups of pupils. Figure 5.1 shows that 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Check accurately assessed the phonic decoding ability of their pupils overall and there was no difference between views of the Check's suitability for assessing boys and girls. However, there were differences in relation to other groups of pupils. Agreement was highest (84%) for pupils with strong phonics skills, but much lower for pupils with weaker decoding skills (61%). Less than half of respondents agreed that the Check accurately assessed the decoding ability of EAL pupils (46%), those with speech difficulties (35%), SEN (33%) and language difficulties (28%). Around a third of respondents held neutral views around whether the Check was a good way of measuring the capabilities of Year One pupils in these groups.

Figure 5.1: Responses to the question 'To what extent do you feel the Phonics Screening Check accurately assessed the phonic decoding ability of your school's pupils?' (%)
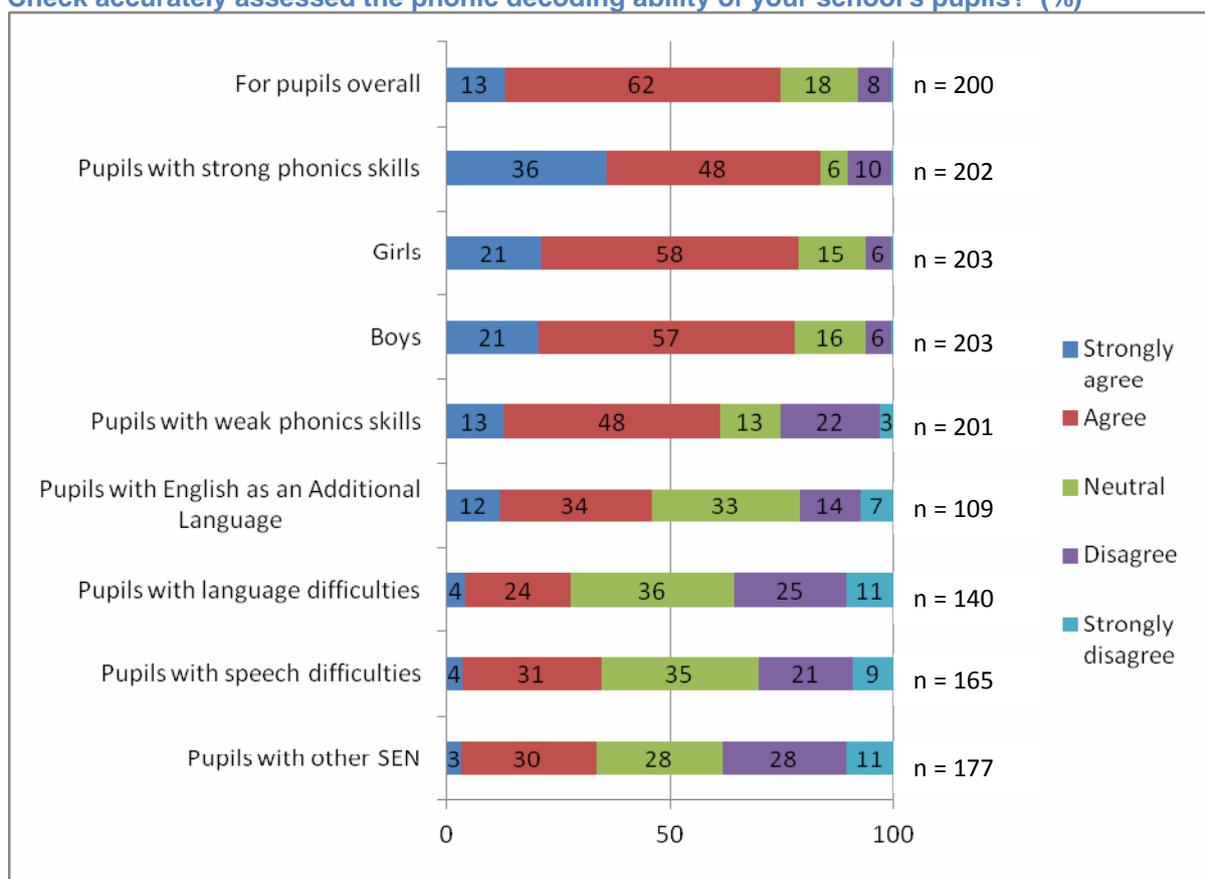
Source: School Survey 2
Total n = 205

5.1.2 These differences are broadly in line with the issues noted in section 8 below, which includes more detailed discussion of the schools' views of the experiences of pupils in these different groups. There were some specific issues in relation to suitability for pupils with SEN:

> People who have got issues [like Downs syndrome] don't learn that way, phonics only works on 95% of children, and I think somehow that needs to be taken into consideration, like we as professionals do when we're working with children. And again the thing about reading, phonics is not the only thing….it's also other strategies (CS2, Head teacher)

5.1.3 Additional statistical analysis suggests that schools with lower levels of FSM eligibility were more likely to agree that the Phonics Screening Check accurately assessed the phonic decoding ability of pupils with weak phonics skills, compared with schools with higher levels of FSM eligibility (Table 5.1). The reasons for this would require further investigation.

Table 5.1: Extent to which the Phonics Screening Check accurately assessed the phonic decoding ability of pupils with weak phonics skills by FSM eligibility quartiles[19]

	Strongly agree/ agree %	Neutral/ disagree/ strongly disagree %	Total n
Least deprived	80	20	**50**
Lower middle	61	39	**51**
Upper middle	48	52	**50**
Most deprived	56	44	**50**

Source: School Survey 2
p<0.01, CV = 0.24

5.2 Suitability of the Check for pupils overall

5.2.1 Whilst 75% of survey respondents felt the Check accurately assessed phonic decoding ability for pupils overall, (see Figure 5.1 in section 5.1), further analysis indicated a number of differences between schools related to time spent on phonic decoding. Table 5.2 shows that schools that spent more time on phonics sessions were more likely to agree that the Check accurately assessed the phonic decoding ability of pupils overall.

Table 5.2: Analysis of responses to the question: to what extent do you feel the Phonics Screening Check accurately assessed the phonic decoding ability of your school's pupils overall? By time spent on phonics teaching[16]

	Strongly agree/agree %	Neutral/ disagree/strongly disagree %	Total n
5-10 minutes	56	44	**27**
11-20 minutes	72	28	**101**
21-30 minutes	81	19	**58**

Source: School Survey 2
p<0.05, CV = 0.18

5.2.2 Case study evidence on the suitability of the Check suggests that individual teachers held very mixed views, with most stating that it was appropriate for most but not all pupils (as indicated in section 5.1 above). When asked about the suitability of the Check overall, around half the interviewees from the case studies either stated or alluded to the fact that overall the Check was suitable:

> I think that will prove whether they have done it to an age-appropriate standard (CS8, Head teacher)

5.2.3 However, a few lead teachers in case study schools, and a number responding to open comments to the survey, felt the Check should be focussed on assessing reading in context rather than phonic decoding ability in isolation, since this was how reading was taught in these schools:

> Very difficult test for Year One pupils because it's not something they are familiar with doing. So we are used to asking them to decode words in context. In books to apply their knowledge of the picture cues, the context and so on (CS18, Lead teacher)

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[19] Please note that the categories 'neutral', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' are combined here because of low cell counts which otherwise render the Chi square test invalid. The decision was hence made to focus on the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' categories compared to the rest of the responses. Please see Appendix 1 for a full breakdown of the table.

5.2.4 In addition to the differences for different groups noted in section 5.1, the age appropriateness of the Check was specifically mentioned by five interviewees from different case studies. Some felt that the Check could be unsuitable for some of the younger or lower ability pupils in classes. It was also felt the pace may be too fast and served to confuse some pupils, and some questioned whether the age standard was set too high:

> There were sections in the Check that went on to what we would call Level 3 graphemes and we haven't taught our children all of that yet. So in terms of decoding nonsense words I think that would be out of reach at the moment (CS17, Head Teacher)

5.2.5There was an acknowledgement, however, from a small number of head teachers and leads that it is difficult to know about the age appropriateness until they are aware of exactly what the standard (to be set based on evidence from the Pilot) will be, therefore they would need to wait to hear their school's results before being able to pass judgements on suitability:

> Can't easily say whether it fulfilled its purpose without seeing the results (CS15, Lead teacher).

6 Impacts on pilot schools following the Phonics Screening Check

Key Findings

- **Almost half of schools (43%) indicated that the Check had helped them to identify pupils with phonic decoding issues that they were not previously aware of. Just over half (55%) of schools surveyed and many teachers from case study schools felt that the Check had not helped them to identify these issues. This was particularly the case with smaller schools. This is linked to the issue identified earlier: schools would like to use the Check to inform teaching and planning but that the Check needs to be designed in such a way that it can do so.**

- **There were mixed views on the use that might be made from the Check results. Almost all the lead teachers from the case study schools wished to use the results to inform school planning, and five felt that the results would be needed earlier in the year to help planning for Year Two pupils. Six wanted to use the individualised results to inform class teaching and to support individuals or particular groups of pupils. In contrast, a quarter of head teachers in the case studies did not plan to take any action to change teaching in response to the Check (due to concerns about suitability and feeling it would not add to their current knowledge), and a quarter said they reviewed phonics teaching regardless of the Check. Another quarter said they would be making changes in light of the Check, and the rest said they may make changes, but felt it necessary to wait for the results of the Check before making any firm decisions.**

6.0 This section reports on the impacts on schools following the Pilot, in terms of enabling teachers to identify issues with pupils' decoding skills; informing the planning of their phonics teaching; identifying individual pupil support needs; and teachers' use of the Check results.

6.1 Identifying pupils with phonic decoding issues

6.1.1 Respondents to the second school survey were asked specifically about impact, on whether the Check helped identify any issues with phonic decoding that the school was not previously aware of. Forty-three percent of the 205 schools taking part stated that it had helped. However, the majority of teachers (55%) surveyed and many teachers from case study schools felt that the Check had *not* helped them to identify pupils with phonic decoding issues that they were not previously aware of, as expressed by this teacher:

> I think it has met its purpose….but on the whole, there weren't any surprises…It didn't tell me anything I didn't already know for the vast majority of pupils (CS16, Lead teacher)

6.1.2There was a strong relationship here with school size, as Table 6.1 below indicates. Those in smaller schools were far less likely to agree that the Check had helped them identify pupils with issues decoding phonics. It may be the case that teachers in schools with fewer pupils are able to spend more time with individual pupils and therefore have a better grasp of their learning needs, but this issue would require further investigation.

Table 6.1: Responses to the question 'Did the Check help you identify any pupils with issues decoding using phonics that you were not previously aware of?' by school size quartiles

	Yes %	Total n
Smallest	20	**51**
Smaller	40	**50**
Larger	65	**49**
Largest	52	**50**

Source: School Survey 2
p<0.01, CV=0.34

Case study schools were asked how they would make use of the results of the Check, and the rest of this section reports on this data.

6.2 Planning as a result of the Check

6.2.1 Most of the case study schools stated they intended to use the results of the Phonics Screening Check to help plan phonics delivery in Year Two and for addressing gaps in learning for next years' Year One cohort - providing the results are presented in a way that enables them to do this:

> *If it gives us an indication of where children are in terms of their reading ability then that would help us to plan ahead. I would like a pass mark, but also a breakdown of who got which word wrong so we can see if it is a particular sound or a particular blend which is not covered in Letters and Sounds or we need to add an extra week to one of our phases to cover it (CS7, Lead teacher)*

6.2.2 In relation to planning Year Two, five schools noted that this meant that results of the Check would need to be returned to schools very quickly[20], or the Check should take place earlier to enable this to happen:

> *I would like to know where the gaps in learning are…That goes with the time of year the Check is, because if I was doing the Check at Easter time as a class teacher I would then make sure those gaps were filled before the children moved up to the next class in September. But I think because of the time of year we've done them, yes the class teacher needs to know about it so that he or she can address it next year, but the Y2 teacher needs to know what the outcome is (CS9, Lead teacher).*

6.3 Teaching and supporting individual pupils

6.3.1 As well as its current purpose as a summative assessment to aid teachers' planning at Key Stage or year group level, at least six schools raised the potential of using the results of the Check as a formative assessment - to inform earlier intervention as part of class teaching:

> *It would help address teaching and planning, how phonics is delivered. I am in a job-share with another teacher, so it'll be good to compare our findings and intervene early where necessary (CS15, Lead teacher)*

6.3.2 Four schools pointed out that the individual data gained as a result of administering the Check would help them deal with particular issues by promptly addressing aspects of their phonics teaching and learning:

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[20] DfE's plans for the roll out will mean that teachers will know immediately whether pupils have met the standard or not. This was not possible for the Pilot.

If we had this kind of information [i.e. individual data] you know if it came back and said 'this group of six children do not know the 'igh' sound' that could be sorted in half an hour with input from the teaching assistant or the teacher (CS9, Lead teacher)

6.3.3 The other major area that schools discussed was in relation to using the results to support individual or specific groups of pupils:

It would be nice to have a level to check that they are where they need to be, and if they are not what we could put in place. Also to compare with other schools to see if we are behind, or above, if we are behind then we can put more intervention in for children who are struggling and try to do more intervention for them (CS11, Lead teacher)

6.3.4 In addition, one school noted that the Check had helped assess the current phonics programme they used, and another - where the lead teacher felt phonics teaching needed a higher priority and major overhaul - suggested that the Check might help make significant changes to phonics provision in the school:

The more information you can get the more it helps you. Having done it I don't know how we've done in comparison to other schools and I would like to know how much work we've got to do to be on track. I do feel we are quite weak and that we've got a lot of work to do. I'd like to know if all the other schools are in a similar boat to us; how many schools are doing much better than us... I have written my own notes and I think I do feel quite comfortable with which children are struggling with which aspect. I found that information out myself during the Check. … to know how we are in comparison with other schools would help as a prompt to other teachers in the school that we really do need to do this. Some of the teachers might not see it as such an important issue and it would give the head, deputy and myself the prompt – 'look we really need to do something about this'. Without that I think it could carry on being a bit wishy washy and people might not do anything about it. I think it could help that (CS10, Lead teacher)

6.3.5 Much of the discussion in relation to how the results of the Check could be used was dependent on teachers having quite fine-grained, individualised responses at a pupil-level. Instead of the Check being merely summative, the majority of schools highlighted its main benefit as being a formative assessment (to 'diagnose' gaps, as some teachers described it). The emphasis was on the Check being used as part of a wider range of data to really help support teachers in making interventions:

What we would like is a sort of diagnostic test because that would be more beneficial for us. Certainly a result for each child but we've already got that testing done as [we've] gone along (CS17, Lead teacher)

6.4 Schools' use of the Check findings

6.4.1 Five case study head teachers stated that they did not intend to change any aspect of teaching as a result of the Check. For some this was because they felt they already had a comprehensive phonics programme in place at their school:

We've got specialist teachers in literacy and phonics so feel we've got the teaching and assessment well covered already, so are unlikely to change anything else (CS12, Head teacher)

6.4.2 The same number of interviewees talked of the potential to make changes but that this would be dependant on the results of the Check. They felt, as previously noted, that they were mostly 'already aware' of how their pupils were learning phonics and that they knew of any issues or gaps in knowledge. They did however acknowledge that if any 'unexpected results' were to come out of the Check that they would act on these:

We would review our teaching more if we found major gaps from the results. I won't ignore data if it does come in, but I'd be surprised if it does throw up gaps we are not already aware of. For example we might find that children are working below the age-expected score and therefore we would have to do quite a major review of phonics, because something would clearly not be working (CS8, Head teacher)

6.4.3 This was in keeping with the head teachers who had talked about using the Check as a possible 'diagnostic' or formative tool; however most did mention that they were not expecting to learn anything that they were not already aware of.

6.4.4 Two head teachers spoke of reviewing phonics teaching but said that they were planning to do this anyway and this was not necessarily related to the Check:

The school always reviews the teaching of phonics because not every cohort is the same, so you have to plan and resource according to your cohorts, even if they are small cohorts (CS2, Head teacher)

6.4.5 Of those who talked about their plans to review phonics regardless, some did say that they felt the Check may be useful in helping to identify those areas which require attention:

Yeah, we're planning to review phonics anyway next year. The Check lead has already talked about which phases of phonics need to be taught when, so I think that will be the biggest impact of the Check. For example, with Phases 3&4 [of Letters and Sounds] these may need to be taught lower down the school so the children really grasp those before they start the phases for Year Two (CS9, Head teacher).

7 Communication and reporting of the Phonics Screening Check

7.0 This section presents evidence on how schools communicated information about the Phonics Screening Check pilot to parents/carers and to pupils, and outlines what pupils told their parents about the Check. It also reports on how schools would like the results reported to them by DfE and their plans for reporting the results to parents/carers.

7.1 School communication with parents/carers

Key findings

- **Less than 20% of schools surveyed had informed parents/carers about the Check. Of the 36 schools that had done so, over three quarters had provided information on the Check's purpose and when it would take place, and two thirds provided an opportunity to ask questions. A letter was by far the most common form of communication.**

- **The most common reason given by case study schools for not informing parents/carers was to prevent them from becoming worried about the Check, and thus increasing anxiety in the pupils. Other reasons given included that it was a pilot, and that it was part of the routine assessment of schools. Although very few pupils (less than 10%) had told their parents/carers about the Check, all but three of those who mentioned it to their parents/carers reported the events in positive terms.**

- **The majority of case study schools wished themselves to report findings to parents/carers, mostly in a form that could enable parents/carers to support their child's learning, and in a sensitive, appropriate way.**

7.1.1 In the second schools survey, respondents were asked whether schools informed parents/carers about the Check. As can be seen in Table 7.1, over four-fifths of schools did not inform parents/carers of the Check.

Table 7.1: Responses to the question: did the school inform parents/carers of its involvement with the Phonics Screening Check pilot?

	%
Parents/carers were informed before the Check had taken place	13
Parents/carers were informed after the Check had taken place	4
Parents/carers were not informed about the Check	82
Total	100

Source: School Survey 2
Total n=205

7.1.2 The 36 schools that did inform parents/carers were asked what information was provided to them. Table 7.2 indicates that over three quarters of schools that did provide information to parents/carers gave details of the purpose of the Check, and when it would take place. Two-thirds also gave parents/carers an opportunity to ask questions about the Check.

Table 7.2: Information provided to parents/carers in relation to the Check

	%
Details of the purpose of the Check	86
Details on when the Check would take place	78
Opportunity to ask questions about the Check	67
Other	17

Source: School Survey 2
Total n=36
NB: total exceeds 100% since respondents were able to make more than one response

7.1.3 Table 7.3 below indicates that the vast majority of schools that informed parents/carers did so via a letter, although in a small number of cases meetings were held. Other means described included putting information into a newsletter (four schools), on the school website (three schools), and providing opportunity to contact the school if required following written communication (two schools). Of the roughly 75 parents/carers that responded to the parent/carer survey that had been informed about the Check, all but three had received the information by letter. Over 60% of these parents/carers were happy or very happy about the information they received from the school, and only 10% (eight parents/carers) were unhappy, mainly because the information was not detailed enough, or - in a couple of cases - provided too late.

Table 7.3: Methods of providing information to parents/carers in relation to the Check (%)

	Details of the purpose of the Check %	Details on when the Check would take place %	Opportunity to ask questions about the Check %	Other %
by letter	83	72	50	11
by email	6	6	6	0
by text message	0	0	0	0
via group meetings	0	0	3	0
via one to one meetings	0	0	8	0
by phone	0	0	0	0
in other ways	3	6	11	6
not provided	11	14	19	11

Source: School Survey 2
Total n=36
NB: total exceeds 100% since respondents were able to make more than one response

7.1.4 Five of the case study schools - none of which was in a socially deprived area - had informed parents/carers about the Check, three via a line on a newsletter, and two by letter (one of these because of the evaluation case study visit taking place).

7.1.5 The most common reason given for not telling parents/carers was to prevent parents/carers becoming worried about, or over-reacting to, the Check, which might result in increased anxiety for pupils:

> It's the kind of school where the parents would've wanted a formal meeting about it, and they would've really worried about the results, and they'd start coaching their children, so it's best that they don't know (CS2, Lead teacher)

7.1.6 This was linked to the view that there was no need to contact parents/carers because it was a pilot (two schools) or that it was routine assessment (six schools):

We chose not to tell parents because it wasn't a huge issue for pupils. We just didn't feel the need given we already routinely assess their phonics anyway (CS16, Lead teacher)

7.1.7 Of the other four schools, three gave no reason for not contacting parents/carers, and one said they intended to but did not have time.

7.1.8 No parents/carers had contacted any of the case study schools about the Check, either beforehand or afterwards.

7.2 Pupil communication with parents/carers

7.2.1 The majority of focus group pupils reported that they did not mention the Check to their parents/carers. Three pupils in different schools suggested they had kept it from their parents/carers to avoid questions from them, for example:

We're keeping it up as a secret! Because my mummy and daddy always speak too much and say 'what did you do, what did you do'? (CS2, Pupil)

7.2.2 In 12 of the 20 case study schools a few pupils (less than five in each) reported that they told their parents/carers. Their comments suggested they enjoyed the experience and included references to their parents/carers' positive and encouraging responses:

I said I got a sticker and we read, and we read very silly words and they were funny (CS10, Pupil)

I told my mum I did some silly alien words and my mum asked did I get them all right and I said yes. And I was proud of myself (CS16, Pupil)

7.2.3 Whilst the overwhelming responses from pupils were mainly positive, there were just three pupils who reported or received a more negative response from their parents/carers, including:

I said they were a bit confusing (CS10, Pupil)

[I told my parents] that we'd been doing some hard phonics… they said I should have worked harder [because I found them hard] (CS16, Pupil)

7.3 Reporting to parents/carers

7.3.1 Almost all of the small group of parents/carers that responded to the survey (n=130) wanted to know about their child's performance on the Check, how the school intend to respond to their performance, and how parents/carers could help support their child with phonics. The majority of case study schools (at least 16) also wished to utilise the report findings with parents/carers, in some form or another, most commonly (nine schools) to enable parents/carers to support their children's learning:

You would be able to suggest [to parents] phonemes that they could work on (CS3, Head teacher)

With parents, it might feed into informal parents' evenings and whether we might do any curriculum evenings on phonic development. We do some work around maths and reading and phonics does come through quite heavily in our reading meeting, but I probably wouldn't want to share it in a formal way with parents. I don't think that's the best use of data because it's about that level of understanding about what it means. Breaking that down through parents' evening I think would be really useful (CS10, Head teacher)

7. 3.2 Seven schools discussed reporting the results directly to parents/carers, although - as the quote below indicates - they were all mindful of how they might do this in the most appropriate way:

> *[Reporting to parents is] difficult isn't it because you don't want to create this atmosphere where 'she's only working at Phase Five when mine's at Phase Six'. At our school we tend to put a level by some subjects, but with others we put a tick, a minus or a plus which means 'working' at' 'working below' or 'working above' and I may be tempted to use something like that rather than a number (CS9, Lead teacher).*

7.4 Communication with pupils

Key findings:

- **Nearly all teachers in case study schools reported that pupils had coped well with the Check and had understood the instructions and what was required of them. Most lead teachers in case study schools had minimised possible pupil anxieties by introducing the Check in a very low key way, with it commonly being described to pupils as being a game, fun, or just another individual reading-based assessment. In at least four case study schools, teachers had prepared pupils for the Check by introducing additional pseudoword activities as pupils were not familiar with them.**

- **Most pupils indicated that the Check had been a positive experience, and they had generally understood what was required of them, including the inclusion of pseudowords. Most pupils could not recall in detail what they had been told about the Check in advance, but those that did had a clear but simplified explanation of the task.**

7.4.1 In case study interviews with lead teachers, over half reported that they told pupils about the Check on the day it was administered; three reported telling them the day before and four stated that they told pupils some days in advance – most often linked with teachers preparing pupils for the Check with additional focused activities (discussed below). The remaining schools did not state when they told pupils.

7.4. 2 Teachers variously described and introduced the Check to pupils in fun ways as a quiz, phonics game or reading game; or focused on it as an additional reading activity/reading time or just doing some extra work. Most teachers however, described it in terms of seeing how good pupils were at their sounds or phonics. Some schools used the word 'check' (including saying that they were checking on how the pupils were doing at phonics). Two lead teachers reported that they told pupils it was 'a test':

> *A little test about their reading (CS8, Lead teacher)*

> (*I told the pupils) I will be administering a phonics test with you, just to check how you're doing with your phonics (CS20, Lead teacher)*

7.4. 3 As reported in section 8 pupils in CS8 appeared to be more anxious about the Check compared to pupils in other schools where the Check was not explained in these terms. In CS20 the lead teacher went on to say that the pupils asked what the test would be like and she explained the process, including what they would have to do in terms of segmenting and blending. The teacher commented:

When the children knew it was a check I think they felt it was OK. It wasn't something to worry about, it was just checking what sounds you know and [the teacher] just needs to know what we need to go over (CS20, Lead teacher)

7.4.4 Lead teachers in five schools stated that they deliberately didn't use the terms test or check to make it as low-key and as least stressful for pupils as possible:

Pupils are so used to being tested, but I don't mention 'tests' – they're too little (CS12, Lead teacher)

7.4.5 In spite of the guidance materials that pilot training teachers had received, teachers still had differing interpretations of the degree of preparation necessary prior to administering the Check. In at least four schools, teachers specifically prepared their pupils for the Check, in particular through re/introducing pseudowords and related activities in advance of the Check, which they described as: *'training them up a little bit'* (CS6, Lead teacher); or *'a little practice'* the day before (CS18). The lead teacher in CS18 explained that as her pupils had only come across pseudowords once with a 'treasure chest' activity (part of the Letters and Sounds scheme) she felt the pupils needed more practice to be familiar with this aspect of the assessment. The lead in another school stated that without this additional revision, EAL pupils would have struggled even more:

We have done a couple of [pirate] games off the internet introducing the children to pseudowords. We did some preparations beforehand, made up some nonsense words. It was definitely more of a problem for EAL children because they weren't quite sure if it was a real word they hadn't quite heard and I had to remember to tell them all the time [whether it was real or not] (CS19, Lead teacher)

7.4.6 In contrast, four other case study schools did not do any additional preparation with pupils. As one lead teacher suggested, coaching for the assessment would have been counterproductive:

We didn't do any activities prior to the Check because we wouldn't do that anyway. If we were doing an assessment we would just assess them as they are. It's defeating the object doing any preparation (CS8, Lead teacher).

7.4.7 Teachers mostly described introducing the Check in a straightforward, relaxed, light touch way. As a result, teachers also reported that the pupils *'were fine, not stressed'*, or *'happy, confident, comfortable – smiling when they were picked'*. Many lead teachers commented that pupils were used to being taken out of class for individual work or activities with a member of staff, particularly for regular reading and assessments, so on most levels the Check was nothing out of the ordinary. Given this, teachers did not feel it was appropriate or necessary to give any additional information to pupils as to the full purpose of the Check (see also section 2) – just that it was another usual reading/phonics assessment:

[They] would have been aware it was some form of test but not that it was a national thing or a pilot or anything. They wouldn't understand [that]. We would have [said] something like 'just to understand how many words and sounds you can read and how wonderful you are (CS17, Lead teacher)

7.4.8 Regarding the pupils understanding of the purpose of the Check, teachers nearly all agreed that the pupils understood the instructions and the task they were asked to do in terms of sounding and reading real and pseudowords. Teachers explained to them that there may be some words that they may not know, some may be easier than others, but encouraged pupils to 'do their best'. Teachers widely remarked that pupils 'were fine' with this explanation and had no questions about what they had to do. These comments were typical:

[They had] no queries or anxieties, they seemed to understand instructions... Pupils seemed happy to do it, even the ones who were struggling (CS15, Lead teacher)

The children were not fazed. There wasn't any anxiety at all from the children (CS20, Lead teacher)

7.4.9 Although teachers downplayed the significance and full purpose and importance of the assessment, one teacher acknowledged that not all pupils responded in a relaxed way. One commented that:

We kept it fun and light…but some were more anxious than others…you can never reconcile those individual differences (CS14, Lead teacher)

7.4.10 Turning now to the pupils' views and recall regarding the information they were given about the Check, most could not remember a great deal about what they were told before the Check was administered. Typical recollections included fairly accurate, albeit simplified versions of the instructions, commonly relating to real and pseudowords, as they understood them:

Miss said there are some silly alien words so you have to try your best. It was to see what it's like, if you find it difficult (CS16, Pupil)

Well, [the teacher] told us that if there were monsters, they are not real words and if they weren't monsters they were real words. If you knew the word straight away you didn't have to sound it out (CS20, Pupil).

7.5 Reporting results of the Check

Key findings

- **Almost all schools surveyed wanted detailed results at pupil-level for their school (97%), around 90% wanted benchmarking data, and a similar proportion wanted commentary on national level results (88%). Case study schools' responses were broadly in line with the survey responses, although six noted the need for contextualised benchmarking.**

- **The DfE have stated that there will be no publication of school-level results from the Check, but there appeared to be insufficient communication around this issue with schools themselves, with all the case study schools stating that they would be opposed to publicly available results such as league tables, and appearing to be unaware of this policy. The reasons cited included that the Check is a single, isolated measure, which needed to be seen in the context of wider phonics/literacy assessment over a period of time, and that publication would place unwanted pressures on pupils.**

7.5.1. In the second school survey, respondents were asked about what information in relation to pupil performance they would like to have reported to them. Figure 7.1 indicates that almost all schools surveyed (97%) wanted detailed results at pupil-level for their school, around 90% wanted benchmarking data for comparison with other schools, and a similar proportion wanted commentary on national results (88%). Around three quarters asked for overall results for all schools involved. Other information requested by a small number of schools included a more detailed breakdown of results to support school planning and teaching (four schools - e.g. words broken down into phonic category groups, separate

results for boys and girls), data in a form suitable to be given straight to parents/carers (two schools), support to implement changes needed (two schools), and information from surveys conducted (two schools).

Figure 7.1: Information schools would like to receive in relation to the performance of pupils on the Phonics Screening Check (%)
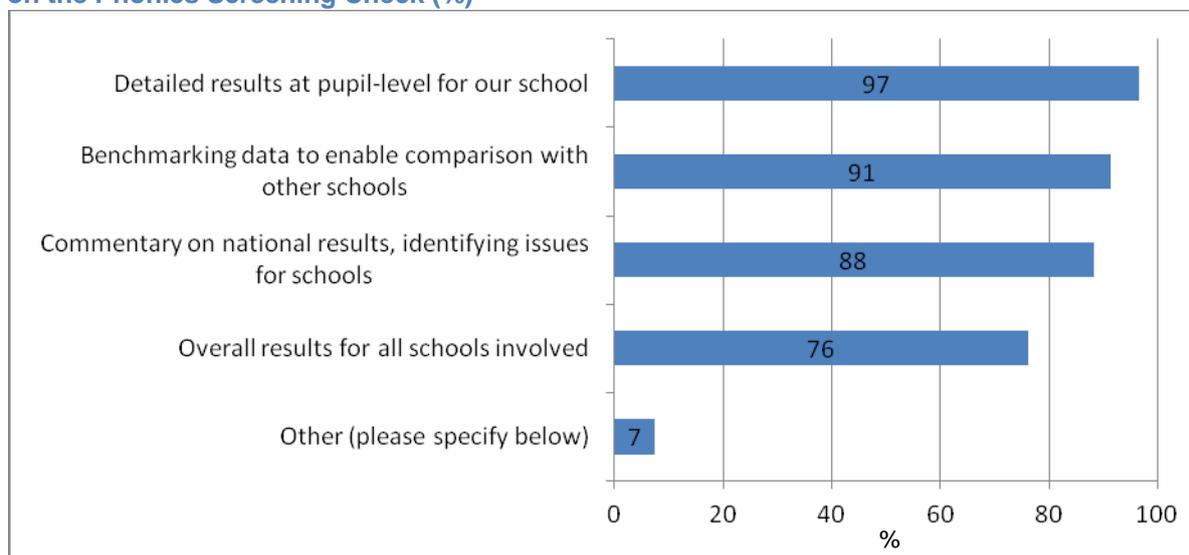
Source: School Survey 2
n = 205

7.5.2 There were some differences in responses to this question by FSM eligibility quartile, as indicated in Table 7.4 below. Those in the two highest FSM eligibility quartiles were less likely to wish to receive commentary, or overall results for all schools than those in the two lowest FSM eligibility quartiles.

Table 7.4: schools that would like to receive types of information in relation to the performance of pupils on the Phonics Screening Check by FSM eligibility quartile (%)

	Least deprived %	Lower middle %	Upper middle %	Most deprived %
Commentary on national results, identifying issues for schools[a]	92	98	83	80
Overall results for all schools involved[b]	80	88	67	69

Source: School Survey 2
Total n=205
[a] p<0.05 CV = 0.22
[b] p<0.05 CV = 0.20

7.5.3 All but three of the case study schools specifically asked for the results of the Check at a school level to be made available to them in a form that enabled benchmarking of their school's results against other schools nationally. Five schools specifically noted it would be helpful to be able to benchmark against other local schools, and six schools noted the importance of considering the school context in relation to benchmarking, for example:

> It would be helpful to have ourselves benchmarked with similar schools, but more often than not, those schools are not that similar anyway. We are a one-form entry school with numbers and profiles of intakes fluctuating every year so there is always some variance in numbers and percentages in terms of performance, so it is hard to spot trends, although we do have some larger cohorts coming through now (CS16, Head teacher)

7.5.4 The vast majority of case study schools (16 schools) stated they would also like individual pupil results, as a level or in more detail, to support planning and other work:

> *[We] would like individual results, to identify which pupils require further intervention and to see comparisons with other schools and the national picture (CS15, Lead teacher)*

7.5.5. At least five schools felt the data on its own was problematic as a measure (see also below on public reporting), which led two schools to argue that they wouldn't get much from individual level data, since their own phonics assessment data was more useful:

> *I'm unsure about the need to check or set standards when we already have an expected standard for phonics programmes of study (Letters and Sounds phases). We're very clear here at what stage pupils are at, and should be and we communicate that to parents. So I assume the expected standard will be referenced to that - which schools are already working to. All very tricky - not sure what people are trying to get out of this really (CS12, Lead teacher)*

7.5.6 Two schools, in addition, made suggestions for how the data could be provided - in spreadsheet form (CS2) or online (CS13).

7.6 National publication of results

7.6.1 At the time of the evaluation, teachers (and researchers) were unaware of the Government's decision to not publicly report the results of the Check. So whilst most teachers were unanimous in asking that the results be shared with them in the ways identified above, they were also strongly against the national publication of the Check that might enable 'league tables' to be constructed. At least 16 of the 20 were actively opposed to this, for a number of reasons.

7.6.2 The most commonly cited set of reasons (at least eight schools) related to the Check being only a single, isolated, uncontextualised measure (see also section 2). The check, it was argued, needed to be seen in the context of wider phonics assessment, and wider work in reading and literacy (four schools). Related to this, at least five schools argued that at this young age pupils' progression varied greatly, therefore some form of future tracking would be needed for the Check to be a useful measure:

> *If we're only doing a test in Y1, in theory we are not comparing it to anything else. So, to me I've no issue if they want to do a phonics test in R, Y1 and Y2 and say 'lets work out where the gaps are', that would make more sense. I'm not advocating that as a national policy, but that would make more sense. If you take some data it needs to be compared to something else. And again, with a small school comparing data year on year (as in large schools) doesn't prove anything because cohorts are different. So you need to be comparing this cohort with itself next year to see if they've made any progress (CS8, Head teacher)*

7.6.3. Four schools argued that publication in this way would be problematic because the school and pupil context would not be taken into account, whilst another three suggested that external publication in this way would place unwanted pressures on pupils:

> *There is a need to know about phonics progress but making this information public could lead to extra pressure as has happened with SATs and take away the fun that my children have experienced with phonics. Phonics is really fun and it's a way to decode words but that's not the be all and end all. I wouldn't want to think that in five years' time we are spending more time decoding words than coming to the library and having time to read for pleasure and write for pleasure (CS20, Lead teacher)*

7.6.4 Three schools specifically noted that they were against publication on RAISEonline[21] for similar reasons to those noted above:

> *A national perspective would be useful as a comparison like they already do. Commentary and feedback on the results would be useful. If they could report to schools the levels without making this into a Government witch-hunt about pupils who can't read at school and blame the schools. It's far better to encourage parents to read with their children and promote learning to read, but I'm concerned that it will be going on RAISEonline which will present a significant difficulty for a lot of schools where there is a high percentage of EAL. Teaching reading is not easy (CS12, Lead teacher).*

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[21] RAISE (Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School Self-Evaluation) online presents school and pupil performance data, used by schools and OfSTED.

8 Pupil experiences of the Phonics Screening Check pilot

8.0 This section focuses on the experience of pupils who took the Check, both from the case study interviews with groups of Year One pupils, and also from staff interviews and survey responses, where relevant.

Key findings

- **Evidence from the survey and teacher and pupil interviews suggests that for most pupils overall, the experience of the Check was generally positive, with those pupils with stronger phonic decoding ability finding it most enjoyable. From the case studies, those who found the test easier tended to be more positive about the Check; pupils who found it hard overall were more likely to be negative about the experience. Pupil anxieties were minimised in most case study schools by teachers attempting to make the Check fun and relaxed.**

- **Between 23 and 29% of surveyed schools felt the experience was negative for pupils with speech or language difficulties, other SEN and weak phonics skills, mirroring the findings in relation to the accuracy of the Check for assessing phonics ability. Those with weaker phonic skills, speech difficulties, SEN - and to a lesser extent EAL - were less likely to have found the Check a positive experience. Pupils who had been told it was a 'test' expressed the most anxiety overall. The location of the Check was a negative factor for pupils in two schools, where noise and pupils in adjoining classrooms were an issue.**

8.1 The school survey elicited teachers' views on the experience of pupils taking the Check (Figure 8.1 below). Sixty two percent of respondents thought the experience was positive or very positive experience for pupils overall, with 8% feeling it was a negative experience. Even more respondents felt it was positive for pupils with strong phonics skills (84%), with only 1% feeling it was negative. For other groups of pupils, between 26 and 39% of respondents felt it was a positive experience, with between 36 and 47% feeling it was a neutral experience and between 16 and 29% feeling it was a negative experience. The groups of pupils that were seen to have the least positive experiences were pupils with weak phonics skills, pupils with language difficulties and pupils with SEN. These figures can be understood in more depth from the case study evidence.

Figure 8.1: School views on the experience of the pupils when undertaking the Phonics Screening Check (%)
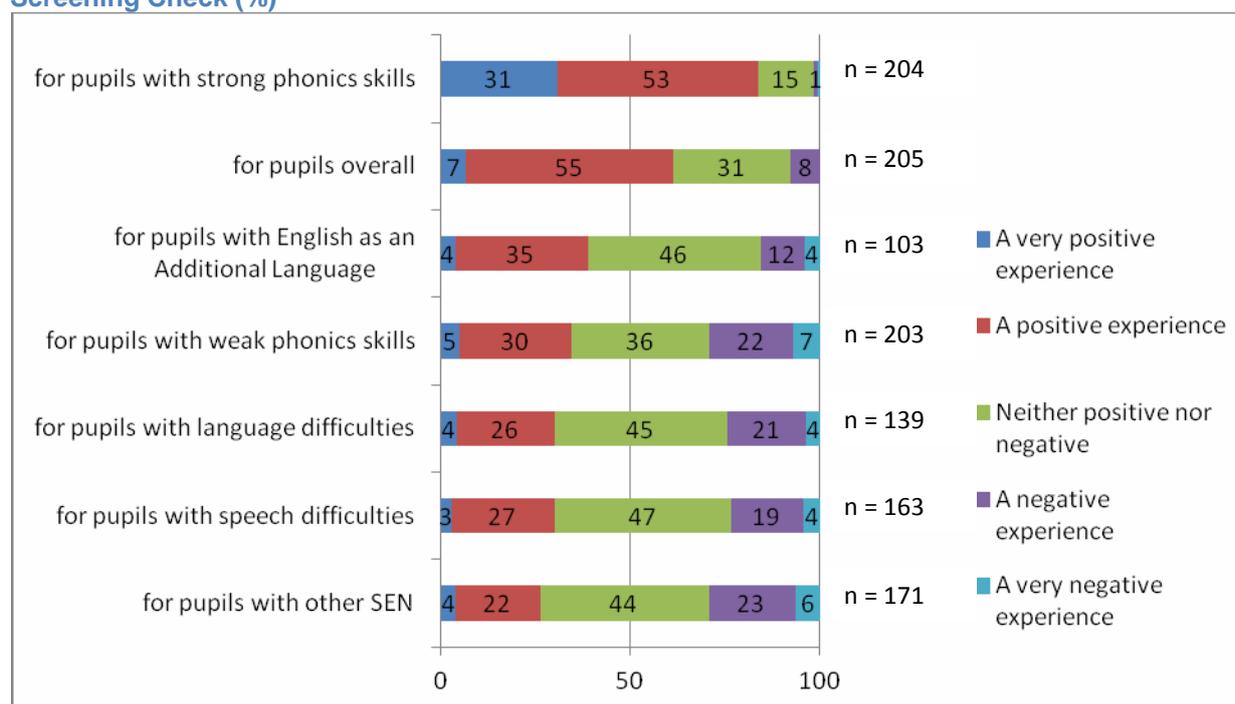
Source: School Survey 2

8.2 Overall, both pupils' and teachers' responses suggest that pupils' experiences were usually very positive. In part, this related to the low key, fun way in which it was introduced by teachers.

8.3 During the case study group discussions, pupils could recall the Check with relative ease and were able to give a range of responses to the questions about how they found doing the Check. Using a five-point pictorial Likert scale[22], most pupils indicated that they liked doing the Check or thought it was okay. They were mainly positive about their experience of the Check, commonly describing it as 'fun' and 'easy' - with these two aspects often being related to each other:

> I liked it because it was really fun (CS2, Pupil)

> Well it was really fun to me. I liked it a lot … it was easy (CS11, Pupil).

8.4 Other positive adjectives used to describe the experience included *'interesting', 'exciting', 'fantastic', 'brilliant'.* Although a notable majority of pupils described the Check - or aspects of it - as 'easy', there was a spectrum of views expressed about its relative ease or difficulty. In many cases, their overall response (whether they liked it or not) seemed to be related to whether they found it easy or difficult. As Figure 8.1 suggests, pupils with strong phonic skills found the experience most enjoyable as they derived a sense of achievement from it. The views of teachers and pupils also supported this:

> I felt like I was going to get it all right because I'm a really good reader (CS9, Pupil)

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[22] A five-point pictorial graded 'Likert' scale of happy, neutral and sad faces with captions ranging from 'liked it a lot' to 'really didn't like it' was designed to elicit pupils' views and feelings about doing the Check. This method allowed all pupils - but particularly those that were less verbally confident - to summarise and express their level of agreement or disagreement in relation to a number of statements to capture the intensity of their self-reported feelings.

The more able, confident pupils quite enjoyed it – getting to the end and attempting all the words (CS15, Lead teacher).

8.5 However not all strong readers found the Check easy or enjoyable, particularly because of the pseudowords they were unused to and the lack of teacher feedback as to whether their attempts were correct. These pupils commonly identified that there were some words that they found easy and others they found hard or 'tricky' - usually the pseudowords. Further discussion of pupils' responses to pseudowords is covered in section 4.1.

8.6 Overall, teachers confirmed that the majority of pupils had not been unduly worried or anxious about the Check and thought that most pupils found the experience enjoyable. Pupils seemed most relaxed and confident about the Check in schools where teachers had introduced it in a low key or fun way. Schools employed various strategies - for instance, most deliberately avoided describing it as a 'test' so instead used more upbeat terms such as a '*quiz*', or '*game'.* Others used puppets or toys to introduce pseudowords, which pupils thought were fun, or gave stickers to the pupils as a reward for taking part. Teachers and pupils commented:

[the quiz was] awesome, I liked it because I knew I was going to get the sticker (CS1, Pupil)

The format didn't bother them at all. They were concentrating on the stickers they would get after. Overall they didn't mind doing it (CS7, Lead teacher).

9 Monitoring visits outcomes

9.0 This section covers the outcomes from the 20 monitoring visits and presents findings on preparations for the Check including the storage of materials, access arrangements and modifications, room preparations, conducting the Check itself including using the marksheet and pupil list, and the return of Check materials.

Key findings

- **Overall the administration of the pilot check worked effectively in the 20 monitoring visit schools, and most teachers had been able to administer the Check in an appropriate room.**

- **A minority, however, experienced difficulties. Problems arose around the storage of materials, and a lack of discussions with parents/carers of disapplied pupils**

9.1 Overall

9.1.1 Table 9.1 below summarises the different monitoring elements and whether they were adhered to consistently across the 20 visits. Overall the administration of the pilot check worked effectively in the 20 monitoring visit schools, with only a small minority of schools not being able to adhere to certain elements of the guidance.

9.1.2. Problems arose around incorrect materials being delivered in one school, and insufficient blank pupil forms in another. The materials had not been stored securely in three schools, both prior to and after the Check, and discussions had not taken place with the parents/carers of disapplied pupils in six schools. All 20 monitoring visit schools had used an appropriate room in relation to noise levels, lighting and comfort, but two had administered the Check in a room with displays that may have assisted the pupils in the Check.

9.1.3. Access arrangements were considered by all 15 schools with pupils who were felt might need alternative methods to access the Check, and were subsequently organised in four schools. Pupil lists and marksheets were filled in correctly by all 17 of the schools who had administered the Check or were conducting it at the time of the visit[23]. These findings are explored in more detail in the remainder of this section.

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[23] Three schools had not administered the Check at the time of the monitoring visit.

Monitoring element	Adhered to	Not adhered to	Not applicable	Not known
1. Consignment checked & all materials received	19	1	0	0
2. Sufficient blank forms available for the schools (either received or ordered)	19	1	0	0
3. Screening check materials being stored securely	17	3	0	0
4. Access arrangements been considered	15	0	5	0
5. Access arrangements organised where appropriate	4	11[24]	5	0
6. Discussions with parents/carers of disapplied pupils	0	6	14	0
7. Appropriate room	20	0	0	0
8. Appropriate displays in screening room	17	2	0	1
9. Information captured on completed marksheets	17	0	3	0
10. Pupil list been completed to confirm the status for each check	17	0	3	0
11. Completed materials packaged & securely stored for collection	13	3	3	1

9.2 Preparing for the Phonics Screening Check

9.2.1 Receipt and storage of screening check materials

Administration guidance - preparing for the Phonics Screening Check

The *Year One Phonics Screening Check Administration Guide* outlined processes for the receipt and storage of screening check materials. Schools participating in the Pilot received a consignment during the beginning of June 2011 containing:

- A cover page with school name;
- A pupil list;
- Pre-printed marksheets for all pupils on the pupil list (including five blank marksheets for pupils who have arrived in school since the January 2011 School Census);
- A copy of the practice sheet;
- A copy of each of the screening check materials required for use with pupils; and
- A return address mail bag.

Pilot schools were informed that upon arrival the contents of the pack should be checked carefully, and to telephone the DfE Phonics helpline immediately should anything be missing. The materials included five blank forms for those pupils who had arrived at the school since the January 2011 School Census, who would therefore not have been sent a pre-printed marksheet. The guidance suggested that schools with more than five newly arrived Year One pupils should telephone the Phonics pilot helpline to request additional blank forms. Once the screening check materials had arrived with the phonics pilot schools the Administration Guide requested that they should be stored securely.

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[24] Please note that it is unclear whether teachers from these schools felt that alternative access arrangements were needed for some of their pupils and did not organise them, or whether they considered them and made the decision that they were not applicable.

9.2.2 Monitoring visits sought to uncover whether the consignment had been checked by the sample pilot schools and included all of the necessary materials, this question was assessed through verbal feedback from the lead phonics teacher. The vast majority of schools had received the correct materials in time for the commencement of the screening check. One school, however, had received a mismatch between their word documents and mark sheets. Comments from the lead phonics teacher from a large primary school revealed problems due to their three form entry, as the sorting of the materials into the appropriate classes had taken more time than they had anticipated.

9.2.3 Monitors asked teachers from the 20 sampled pilot schools whether or not they had received sufficient blank forms for these pupils, and if not whether they had been able to order supplementary ones from the helpline.

9.2.4 None of the primary schools included in the monitoring visits had had more than five Year One pupils join the school since January 2011, and therefore no teachers in the sample had telephoned the helpline to request additional forms. Although teachers were not asked how many of the blank forms they had used, half of them indicated that they had used at least one of the additional sheets; perhaps not surprisingly these schools were more likely to be larger than those who did not need to use any extras. A problem had arisen in one school which had been asked by the DfE to conduct the screening check twice with their pupils but had only received five blank forms rather than 10. The school had faced further complications when it was realised that all five forms contained the same words meaning that the newly arrived pupils would be assessed twice using the same screening check material.

9.2.5 Once the screening check materials had arrived with the phonics pilot schools, the Administration Guide requested that they should be stored securely. Monitors were required to gain physical evidence as to whether this was being administered appropriately, and were advised by the DfE that this would normally mean within a locked cupboard or cabinet with limited access. This information was not, however, included as part of the Administration Guide for schools taking part in the Pilot, although it should be noted that teachers did not attribute this variation in their delivery to the lack of guidance. When visits occurred whilst the Check was in the process of being carried out, monitors were advised to be shown where the materials would normally be stored. In four of the schools this was not possible due to the room where the materials were being stored being in use at the time of the visit, in these instances a verbal response was gained.

9.2.6 The majority (17 schools) of the schools were found to be storing the materials securely. Most were using a locked safe or cupboard in the head or deputy's room or the school office, and the remainder were either locked in a cupboard in the Year One teacher's classroom or in a corridor. Teachers from two schools noted that they had decided to house the materials in the same way that they would store their SATs papers. Three of the monitoring visits revealed schools that were not storing their screening check materials in a secure manner, with one keeping them on top of a cupboard in the Year One teacher's classroom and two only locking the cupboard at the end of each school day. It should be reiterated, however, that there was limited information in the Administration Guide around what the DfE meant by the word 'secure'[25].

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[25] Again it should be noted that teachers did not attribute this variation in their delivery to the lack of guidance.

9.3 Access arrangements and modifications

Administration guidance - access arrangements and modifications

The Administration Guide indicated that schools may have a small number of pupils who require additional arrangements to access the screening check, and that the assessment needs and type and amount of support they would ordinarily be given in the classroom should take into account in relation to the Check.

Access arrangements may, for example, be put in place for pupils with SEN, those with a disability, or EAL pupils. Schools with pupils considered to require access arrangements that were not specified in the DfE guidance were asked to contact the helpline. The Administration Guide also outlined a number of access arrangements that schools could use with specific pupils, including:

- additional time and rest breaks;
- the use of British Sign Language;
- Braille versions of the Check;
- the rephrasing of instructions including the use of gestures;
- school based modifications such as changing the font, reducing the number of words on a page or printing on different coloured paper; and
- the use of coloured overlays.

The DfE expects the vast majority of Year One pupils to be able to access the Check, but suggest that pupils who have not shown any understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences in class should normally be disapplied. The Administration Guide states that schools should inform parents/carers about why a decision to disapply their child had taken place, along with the approach they were taking to help the child to read.

9.3.1 The use of access arrangements in the 20 monitoring visit schools were assessed by asking the lead phonics teacher whether or not they had been considered for pupils requiring additional help and subsequently organised where it was deemed appropriate. Five teachers from monitoring visit schools stated that they did not have any Year One pupils that they had had to consider alternative arrangements for, although one head teacher mentioned that if they had been aware of what font was being used they would have made alterations. Access arrangements had been considered for specific pupils in 15 of the sampled pilot schools for children with SEN and EAL, although only four of the schools had implemented any changes.

9.3.2 One teacher, from a school with very high levels of pupils with EAL, stated that they always considered access arrangements in the classroom for their pupils, and had transferred this knowledge to the screening check. The lead phonics teacher in this school had used puppets as part of the screening check, informing the pupil that the puppet wanted to know what the words were, and then giving each pupil a sticker once they had finished. Pupils who were found to be struggling with the screening check had been given extra time in two schools with high levels of EAL pupils. In another school a selective mute pupil was supported by an additional adult whilst carrying out the Check.

9.3.3 A teacher from a school with high levels of EAL pupils had considered writing the words in sand, but indicated that she would organise access arrangements for specific pupils once the Phonics Screening Check was rolled out nationally.

9.3.4 It was anticipated that most Year One pupils would be able to access the screening check, with or without additional arrangements being put in place. For the minority that had not shown a previous understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, however, it was suggested that they should be disapplied.

9.3.5 Pupils were found to have been disapplied from taking the screening check in six of the monitoring visit schools. None had informed individual parents/carers about their child's disapplication. One school with high levels of EAL had run the Check with all Year One pupils to ensure that none of them felt excluded, and had subsequently disapplied a small number following its completion. A letter had been sent home to the parents/carers from this school outlining the nature of the pilot Phonics Screening Check, and indicating that some pupils may be disapplied, but this was not followed up after the Check as it was felt that those parents/carers whose children were not showing an appropriate understanding of phonics would already be aware that it was likely their child would be disapplied. One school that had not disapplied any pupils from taking the screening check indicated that the decision had been reached due to the fact that it was a pilot.

9.3.6 In the six schools where pupils were disapplied, reasons for not informing parents/carers of their child's disapplication were mainly around the fact that they had not been told about their children's participation in the screening check, and schools subsequently felt that it would therefore be problematic to let them know that their child had not taken part. One school mentioned that although the Administration Guide had indicated that parents/carers should be informed of their child's disapplication, this was not something that had been outlined in the DfE training session. The schools where pupils had been disapplied either had high levels of EAL or FSM eligibility or both, none of them had high levels of pupils with SEN[26].

9.4 Room preparations

Administration guidance - location of the check

The Administration Guide stated that the room where the Phonics Screening Check is conducted should be free from excessive noise, provide a comfortable well lit space for pupils and not contain any displays or materials that could be deemed to assist them with the Check in any way.

9.4.1 The monitoring visits collected evidence about the rooms where the 20 sampled schools were carrying out their checks through physical observations wherever possible and through conversations with the lead phonics teacher in a minority of schools where it was not. Every school had managed to find a quiet well lit room to carry out their screening checks. Issues had arisen at one particularly large school where difficulties were found in finding an appropriate location due to the availability of space in the building, echoing findings from both the case study and survey elements of the evaluation. It had eventually been decided to use a through room to carry out the Checks, and this was considered to be a convenient location as it was only busy and therefore noisy during lunch and break periods. Appropriate locations in other schools included a library, the head teacher's office, the staff room, a meeting room, a music room and a room in a separate building. At least four schools had placed a 'no entry' sign on the door on the screening check room to prevent interruptions.

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[26] It should be noted that the levels of FSM, SEN and EAL relate to the whole school and not just children in Year One.

9.4.2 Inappropriate displays and materials were deemed to be ones where the pupil was given help with their phonic decoding, or where there were pictures of words that might appear in the Check that could provide visual cues. However, this level of detail around displays was not given to the pilot schools within the administration guidance. The majority of schools visited by the monitors either had nothing on the walls in the screening check room or contained displays that would not assist pupils with their phonic decoding in any way. Two schools, however, were found to have unsuitable displays. In both of these rooms alphabet friezes were found on the walls, and in one there was also consonant blending on a chalk board. Feedback from one of the teachers from these schools suggested that the room they were administering the Check in had not been their original choice, and that they had had to relocate at the last minute due to stock being stored in the initial room.

9.5 During and after the screening check

9.5.1 The marksheet and pupil list

Administration guidance - the marksheet and pupil list

The pre-assigned Phonics Screening Check marksheets included boxes for teachers to complete for all Year One pupils in terms of the day in which the Check took place, and - for those pupils not taking part - reasons for non-completion of the Check. Teachers were also required to add full pupil names, gender and date of birth for those pupils who had joined the school since the January 2011 School Census to the marksheet. The remainder of the marksheet was split into section 1 and section 2 with each pseudoword and real word outlined, alongside a 'correct' and 'incorrect' box in which to mark pupil responses.

Lead phonics teachers from pilot schools were asked to complete the appropriate information boxes on each marksheet before the screening checks commenced, and mark pupil responses with a cross or a slash using black ink. The Administration Guide stated that if any errors occurred whilst the Check was taking place, teachers should fill in the box completely and place a cross or slash in the appropriate place.

Teachers from the pilot schools were also asked to confirm the status of each marksheet being returned through completion of the pupil list. The list outlined all Year One pupils the DfE believed to be taking part in the Check and schools were required to indicate whether each pupil was present at the Check, absent, had been disapplied, had left the school, whether the marksheet was damaged, or if it was a blank marksheet that had not been used.

9.5.2 The monitoring visits sought to acquire physical observations of several completed marksheets in each of the 20 pilot schools to ensure that a response had been filled in for each question and screening check item, and that information was clear and legible. Monitors also verified whether the information boxes at the top of the form, including the day of the week, had been added, and in the case of a blank form whether full pupil names, gender and date of birth had been included.

9.5.3 Data could not be collected in the three schools where the monitoring visits took place before the screening check was carried out, as the marksheets had not been completed yet. Evidence was collected from the remaining 17 schools - either verbally or through observation - and showed that all the necessary information had been captured on the marksheets. Phonics teachers in the schools that had completed the Check noted that the marksheets had been simple to complete. Monitors found that all of the remaining schools that were administering the Check at the time of the visit had filled in their marksheets

correctly. Issues arose in one of these schools where photocopies of the marksheet were used, with the data being transferred onto the original forms before being sent back to the DfE to ensure no mistakes had been made. Furthermore, a teacher from another school mentioned the difficulties in listening to pupil responses whilst trying to fill in the marksheet, which had led to mistakes and subsequent corrections being made on the marksheet.

9.5.4 The collection of evidence to confirm that pupil lists had been completed with the status for each screening check was problematic during the monitoring visits. Three schools had not administered the Check, meaning that the paperwork had not yet been filled in; two schools who were administering the Check at the time of the visit had either not yet filled in the pupil list, or the list was in use at the time and monitors were unable to make physical observations; and two of the schools that had already administered their checks had already sent back the materials to the DfE.

9.5.5 For those school visits where data was obtained (10 schools), all had filled in the pupil list correctly and clearly, but this sometimes followed confusion around where to place a mark on the sheet. This finding echoes comments from teachers who had noticed the problem but had not yet attempted to fill in the paperwork, as well as two that had only become aware of the omission through their conversation with the monitor. Phonics teachers felt that schools may forget to complete this part of the pupil list due to the lack of a column or box to mark, even though it was stated in the Administration Guide that the status of each pupil must be added. This echoes findings from the case study element of the evaluation.

9.6 The return of screening check materials

Administration guidance - return of the screening check materials

Schools taking part in the Pilot were asked to return their screening check materials following the end of the Check's administration. Schools were required to ensure that they were packaged and ready for collection by the DfE on a specified day.

9.6.1 Physical observations were used within the monitoring visits to find out whether the screening check materials had been packaged appropriately and stored securely awaiting collection. Monitors were required to make sure that materials had been packaged in the return envelope(s) and stored somewhere like a locked cupboard or cabinet with limited access. If the Check had not been completed monitors asked to be shown where they would normally be stored. Again, information around the materials being stored securely was not included as part of the Administration Guide for schools taking part in the Pilot[27].
It was difficult to gather physical evidence around this aspect of the Check's administration as only three schools had completed the Check, and two of these had already had their materials collected. Verbal responses were therefore used for the vast majority of the schools. Discussions with teachers indicated that most would be storing the materials in the same place as they had kept them prior to the screening check. Two schools that had been previously storing the materials in classrooms indicated that they planned on moving the materials to the school office once the Check was completed. Overall, teachers from four schools revealed that they might be storing the materials in an insecure manner, one on top of a cupboard in the Year One classroom, two where they were only locked away at the end of each day, and another where they were being stored in the office but only being locked away intermittently.

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[27] As before it should be noted that teachers did not attribute this variation in their delivery to the lack of guidance.

10 Discussion

10.1 It should be noted at the start of this final section that for the majority of schools and – as far as it can be judged – pupils' involvement in the Check pilot was a broadly positive experience. Case study schools were able to give a range of areas where they could see the results of the Check being useful, especially in relation to planning, teaching and support for particular pupils.

10.2 There were, however, some areas that were less positive, and others where the experiences were more variable. This short discussion aims to pull together some of the themes that run through the data gathered as part of this evaluation. There were a number of such strands that emerged from the evaluation. Firstly, a number of schools identified that - in their view - the Check should be designed in such a way as to support planning and teaching. Second, there is a theme relating to the Check's suitability for some groups of pupils. Finally, there are some specific points in relation to other aspects of content and administration.

Ensuring the Check supports planning and teaching

10.3 Teachers in the case study schools were clear that to get the most value from the Check it should not be seen as only a summative assessment, but primarily as a potential aid to teaching and learning. For some, this meant it would be used as part of a wider set of tools used to assess pupil reading over time, and not seen as a one off assessment. There were some implications here in relation to timing – some suggested it should be earlier in the year. Some suggested it should include an opportunity for teachers to make detailed notes to support changes to teaching. Schools were clear - in line with the Department's view - that it should not be reported publicly in a form that could be used to create league tables; and that results should be made available to schools in an individualised form, to aid its usefulness. There was a clear majority that felt that benchmarking would be useful, but the vast majority of schools felt it needed to take into account the profiles of their school's pupil population. Schools wished to pass the information on to parents/carers in a form that enabled parents to support their children's learning.

Ensuring the Check is suitable for all pupils involved

10.4 Whilst 75% of schools felt the Check worked accurately and more felt it was a positive experience for pupils overall, this was not true for some groups of pupils. A large minority of schools surveyed – between thirty and forty per cent - felt that the Check did not accurately assess phonic decoding ability for pupils with SEN (especially language and speech difficulties) and weaker phonic decoding skills and to a lesser extent it was seen as being problematic for pupils with EAL. A smaller but still notable proportion felt that undertaking the Check was a negative experience for these groups. Such schools benefited from the guidance, but felt that additional guidance on disapplication from and discontinuation of the Check for particular pupils would be useful.

Points relating to content

10.5 One key element of the Check where there was less consensus related to the use of pseudowords. Some of the issues around pseudowords related to the organisation of the check (e.g. the use of pictures with each pseudoword) but others linked to more fundamental issues related to differing views on the usefulness of testing phonic decoding without context (e.g. within sentences). Case study schools found that some higher ability pupils struggled with pseudowords, in addition to lower ability pupils and those with SEN. Although pupils

found these the most challenging and confusing aspect of the Check, many also simultaneously described pseudowords as being 'fun'.

Other points relating to administration

10.6 Whilst the Check guidance was overwhelmingly viewed by case study teachers to be useful, clear and straightforward, it was clear that the inclusion of audio/visual practice examples (as intended) and more detailed guidance on how to present the Check to Year One pupils were important to schools. In addition, whilst the time commitment was seen to be manageable by most schools, they felt that arrangements for conducting the Check to minimise resource implications such as providing cover or using teaching assistants to administer the Check, which has implications in relation to guidance to schools.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Detailed Tables

Table A1.1 Representativeness of DfE sample by government region compared with population of primary schools

	National pop'n	National pop'n %	All Responses	All Responses%	Responses in Sample	Responses in Sample%
East Midlands	1535	10	28	9	25	11
East of England	1863	12	36	12	34	15
Inner London	690	4	18	6	10	4
North East	879	5	13	4	12	5
North West	2445	15	43	14	31	13
Outer London	997	6	14	5	11	5
South East	2347	15	52	17	40	17
South West	1806	11	25	8	22	10
West Midlands	1748	11	24	8	19	8
Yorks & Humber	1749	11	47	16	26	11
Total	**16059**	**100**	**300**	**100**	**230**	**100**

Source: DfE

Table A1.2 Representativeness of DfE sample by attainment band compared with population of primary schools

	National pop'n	National pop'n %	All Responses	All Responses%	Responses in Sample	Responses in Sample%
<= 14.35	3205	20	52	17	36	16
14.36 - 15.40	3219	20	54	18	36	16
15.41 - 16.21	3208	20	61	20	54	23
16.22 - 17.00	3223	20	60	20	45	20
17.01+	3204	20	72	24	59	26
Total	**16059**	**100**	**300**	**100**	**230**	**100**

Source: DfE

Table A1.3 Representativeness of DfE sample by school type compared with population of primary schools

	National pop'n	National pop'n %	All Responses	All Responses%	Responses in Sample	Responses in Sample%
Community	9170	57	180	60	131	57
Voluntary aided	3547	22	63	21	49	21
Voluntary controlled	2382	15	51	17	46	20
Foundation	421	3	3	1	3	1
Community Special	497	3	2	1	1	0
Foundation Special	16	0				
Academy	26	0				
Total	**16059**	**100**	**300**	**100**	**230**	**100**

Source: DfE

Table A1.4 Quartiles of percentage of pupils eligible for FSM

	% of pupils eligible for FSM
Least deprived	0 - 6.4
Lower middle	6.5 - 12.3
Upper middle	12.4 - 25.6
Most deprived	25.7 +

Source: School Survey 2

Table A1.5 Quartiles of percentage of pupils whose first language is known or believed to be other than English

	% of pupils whose first language is know or believed to be other than English
Lowest quartile	0 - 0.9
Lower quartile	1 - 3.2
Upper quartile	3.3 - 14.4
Highest quartile	14.5+

Source: School Survey 2

Table A1.6 Quartiles of percentage of pupils with a statement of special education needs

	% of pupils with a statement of special educational needs
Lowest quartile	0 - 0.39
Lower quartile	0.40 - 0.98
Upper quartile	0.99 - 1.81
Highest quartile	1.82 +

Source: School Survey 2

Table A1.7 Quartiles of school size categories

	Number of pupils
Smallest	0 - 156
Smaller	157 - 217
Larger	218 - 338
Largest	339 +

Source: School Survey 2

Table A1.8 Detail on question 15 compared with full sample

		n	Mean	s.e.	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
School size	Full sample	206	253.7	9.998	234.1	273.3
	Q15	83	259.1	16.548	226.7	291.53
FSM	Full sample	206	18.23	1.103	16.1	20.4
	Q15	83	17.747	1.722	14.4	21.12
SEN	Full sample	206	1.932	0.498	1.0	2.9
	Q15	83	1.489	0.204	1.1	1.89
EAL	Full sample	206	13.054	1.546	10.0	16.1
	Q15	83	11.781	2.423	7.0	16.53

Source: School Survey 2

For all criteria there is a clear overlap in confidence intervals therefore the profile of respondents to question 15 does not differ significantly from the profile of the full sample.

Table A1.9 Usefulness of the guidance you received on the Check in relation to recognising and scoring the appropriate responses by SEN quartile full breakdown

	Very useful %	Useful %	Neutral %	Not very useful %	Not at all useful %	**Total n**
Lowest quartile	28	48	14	6	4	**50**
Lower quartile	35	48	10	6	2	**52**
Upper quartile	40	50	10	0	0	**52**
Highest quartile	37	57	4	2	0	**51**

Source: School Survey 2

Table A1.10: Extent to which the Phonics Screening Check accurately assessed the phonic decoding ability of pupils with weak phonics skills by FSM eligibility quartiles full breakdown

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	**Total n**
Lowest quartile	16	64	8	12	0	**50**
Lower quartile	16	45	16	24	0	**51**
Upper quartile	10	38	14	30	8	**50**
Highest quartile	10	46	16	24	4	**50**

Source: School Survey 2

Table A1.11: analysis of responses to the question: to what extent do you feel the Phonics Screening Check accurately assessed the phonic decoding ability of your school's pupils overall? by time spent on phonics teaching full breakdown

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	**Total n**
5-10 minutes	11	44	33	11	0	**27**
11-20 minutes	13	59	20	7	1	**101**
21-30 minutes	14	67	10	9	0	**58**

Source: School Survey 2

Appendix 2: Statistical detail

Statistical Significance
Statistical significance is a term used to signify when a finding such as an association or difference is unlikely to be created through chance alone. It does not indicate whether a finding is important (this is the non-statistical, lay definition of the word 'significant'). Tests of statistical significance are used to assess whether findings within the sample can be reasonably inferred to the population that the sample represents. A key assumption of these tests is that random sampling is used. The test then focuses on whether pure randomness (that is incorporated into the design through this random sampling) is likely to produce the findings seen within a sample. If the probability of chance (pure randomness) creating the findings is 'small' (commonly defined as $p<0.05$ or $<5\%$) it is concluded that randomness is unlikely to produce the sample findings and a 'statistically significant' finding can be declared. By stating statistical significance, the findings are inferred from the sample to the population - i.e. they will be expected to be found within the population (and are unlikely to be a result of random variation). A non-significant finding can be seen as being as important as a significant one.

Chi-square test of association
Chi-square tests of association are used to assess whether two variables can be regarded as statistically independent of one another. The test takes account of the (random) sample size and the size of the contingency table whilst comparing the actual (observed) responses across the table with what would be expected if the two variables were completely independent.   This process is used to calculate a test statistic that is then compared to the appropriate theoretical chi-square distribution (determined by the table's dimensions; two by three; three by four etc.). If this test statistic is large enough to conclude that it is unlikely to be created through chance / randomness a 'statistically significant' association is concluded. Commonly this is when the probability value (p-value) is less than 5% (or 0.05); i.e. the probability that a test statistic 'this size' being created randomly is found to be 5% or less. The approach adopted is mirrored across many tests of statistical significance; to first assume no association (or difference) and that any differences seen across the contingency table can be accounted for by random variation (the null hypothesis) and then to form an alternative position (statistically significant association) if this initial assumption is found to be unlikely (i.e. having a probability of 0.05 or lower).

Cramer's V
Chi-square test statistics depend upon the size of contingency table under scrutiny and because of this they cannot be directly compared. Cramer's V is a statistic that standardises the Chi-square test statistic so that direct comparison is possible (regardless of the size / dimensions of the contingency table under scrutiny). Cramer's V values are used to determine the strength of association or dependency between two categorical variables after significance has been ascertained using chi-square tests. Cramer's V has a value between 0 and 1, values close to 0 show little association, values close to 1 show strong association. It has particular utility for comparing the relative strength of the associations.

Appendix 3: List of Evaluation Questions

Initial Mapping of Evaluation Questions to Evaluation Strands

	Teacher Survey 1	Teacher Survey 2	Parent/carers Survey	Case Study	Monitoring
Schools:					
S1: What do the schools understand the purpose of the Phonics Screening Check to be?				✓	
S2: To what extent do schools perceive the Phonics Screening Check to have suitably assessed the phonic decoding ability of their pupils?		✓		✓	
S3: What do schools perceive the experience of their pupils to have been when undertaking the Phonics Screening Check?		✓		✓	
S4: Could anything in relation to the content of the Check be improved?		✓		✓	
S5: What resource was required by schools to administer the Phonics Screening Check (including hours invested by teacher grade and additional costs on supply cover if applicable) and what are the views of schools on this resource-commitment?		✓		✓	
S6: Whether the guidance for schools on administering the Phonics Screening Check was useful. What suggestions (if any) do schools have for improvement to the guidance?		✓		✓	
S7: What information on the Phonics Screening Check (if any) was provided to the parents/carers of participating pupils and in what form?		✓		✓	
S8: Could any aspects of the administration process by refined or improved?		✓			
S9: What information would schools like reported to them after the Phonics Screening Check trial and in what form?		✓		✓	
S10: How much teaching time is devoted to phonics and how is this incorporated into the curriculum and timescale?	✓				
S11: What programme is being used to deliver phonics, what level of difficulty is this work and for how long has this programme been used?	✓				
S12: Do schools deviate from their chosen phonics programme and, if so, how and why?	✓				

	Teacher Survey 1	Teacher Survey 2	Parent/carers Survey	Case Study	Monitoring
S13: What are the experiences of teachers in relation to using the chosen phonics programme?	✓				
Parents/carers:					
P1: Are parents/carers aware of the Phonics Screening Check? If so, to what extent? Do they understand its purpose?			✓		
P2: Have parents/carers discussed the Phonics Screening Check with their children and if so what sense did parents/carers gather from this discussion as to their child's experience of the Check?			✓		
P3: Have parents/carers received any information on the Phonics Screening Check, if so what information have they received?			✓		
P4: How was the information communicated and how suitable was it considered to be?			✓		
P5: What information (if any) on the Check would parents/carers like and how would they like this communicated?			✓		
Pupils:					
C1: Did pupils receive any information about the Phonics Screening Check? If so, what information did they receive and to what extent are they aware of the Check and its purpose?				✓	
C2: Do pupils have opinions on the Phonics Screening Check and, if so, what are their opinions on its suitability?				✓	
Monitoring:					
M1: To what extent are a sample of participating schools observed to be appropriately administering the Phonics Screening Check to pupil on the day of the Check? Were any aspects of this process observed to be omitted or administered differently between schools?					✓

Appendix 4: Parent/Carer Survey

Table A4.1 Does your child know about the Phonics Screening Check which has recently taken place at your school?

	%
Yes	57
No	41
Don't know	2
Total	100

Source: Parent/Carer Survey
n = 185

Table A4.2 Have you talked about the PSC pilot with your child?

	%
Yes	39
No	61
Total	100

Source: Parent/Carer Survey
n = 102

Table A4.3 How did your child feel about doing the Check?

	%
Very happy	25
Happy	40
Neither happy nor unhappy	33
DK	3
Total	100

Source: Parent/Carer Survey
n = 40

Table A4.4 Has your child's school given you any information about the Phonics Screening Check?

	%
Yes	74
No	18
DK	8
Total	100

Source: Parent/Carer Survey
n = 100

82

What information did the school give you and how did they do this? (Tables A4.5-A4.7, n = 76)

Table A4.5 Information about what the Check was for

	%
by letter	96
by email	4
via one to one meetings	0
via group meetings	0
by phone	0
by text message	0
in other ways	0
not provided	3

Source: Parent/Carer Survey

Table A4.6 Details of when the Check would take place

	%
by letter	92
by email	4
via one to one meetings	0
via group meetings	0
by phone	0
by text message	0
in other ways	0
not provided	4

Source: Parent/Carer Survey

Table A4.7 A chance to ask questions about the Check

	%
by letter	62
by email	3
via one to one meetings	1
via group meetings	0
by phone	0
by text message	0
in other ways	4
not provided	14

Source: Parent/Carer Survey

Table A4.8 How happy were you with the info that your school gave you?

	%
Very happy	26
Happy	39
Neither happy nor unhappy	27
Unhappy	6
Very unhappy	1
Total	100

Source: Parent/Carer Survey
n = 77

Table A4.9 If you were unhappy was it because:

	%
Too complex	14
Too short	50
Other	36
Total	100

Source: Parent/Carer Survey
n = 14

Table A4.10 Would you like to receive any more information on the Phonics Screening Check?

	%
Yes	81
No	17
DK	2
Total	100

Source: Parent/Carer Survey
n = 183

What sort of information would you like to be given? (Tables A4.11-A4.16)

Table A4.11 Information about what the Check was for

	%
Yes	85
No	12
DK	3
Total	100

Source: Parent/Carer Survey
n = 130

Table A4.12 Details of when the Check would take place

	%
Yes	75
No	22
DK	3
Total	100

Table A4.13 A general explanation of phonics

	%
Yes	74
No	26
Total	100

Table A4.14 Your child's performance on the Check

	%
Yes	99
No	1
Total	100

Table A4.15 How the school intends to respond to your child's performance

	%
Yes	97
No	1
DK	1
Total	100

Table A4.16 Information about what you could do to support your child with phonics

	%
Yes	96
No	4
Total	100

Appendix 5: Analysis of Responses to the First School Survey

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The Centre for Education and Inclusion Research (CEIR) at Sheffield Hallam University was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to conduct an independent process evaluation of the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check pilot. The process evaluation will assess how the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check is being administered and how schools and pupils in the pilot schools perceive the check. Overall the study:

- Identified which phonics programmes are currently taught in pilot schools and how these are delivered
- Gathered the views and perceptions of school staff and pupils regarding the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check
- Monitored and gathered perceptions of the administration process for the check and corresponding information for schools

The study involves the following elements as set out below:

- School Survey (Part 1): This gathered information on the phonics programmes currently taught in schools and how these are delivered.
- School Survey (Part 2): This focuses on school's experience of the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check and its administration, and suggestions for improvement.
- Case study visits: Researchers visited 20 Pilot schools in the two weeks following the check. These visits involved interviews with the head teacher, an interview with the lead teacher for the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check, and paired/small group discussions with pupils from Year 1 about their experience of the check.
- Monitoring visits: A different sample of 20 schools was randomly selected for a monitoring visit.

1.1.2 This report presents findings from school survey 1. The purpose of this survey was to inform the evaluation study and to inform the technical development of the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check. This survey was not designed to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the schools' approaches to the teaching of phonics or on the use of specific products.

1.1.3 A hard copy of the survey with the option of completing online was administered to schools at the beginning of May, followed by a reminder hard copy, an email reminder containing a link to the online questionnaire and telephone chasers to maximise the response rate. Of the 299 schools participating a total of 290 responded (87 online and 203 hard copy), giving an overall response rate of 97%. Schools were informed that completion of the questionnaire was linked to the incentive payment which would also have boosted response rates.

1.1.4 Of these 290 schools 226 are in the original sample selected by the DfE. This report presents findings from the schools in the original sample. Survey data was linked with school data held by the DfE in order to provide further variables for analysis. These school level variables were as follows:

- percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) (used as a proxy for the deprivation level of the school)
- percentage of pupils whose first language is known or believed to be other than English (pupils with EAL)

- percentage of pupils with a statement of special education needs (SEN)
- school size.

These variables were recoded into categorical[28] groups to enable statistical analysis. These variables were divided into four equal groups (defined by quartiles).

1.1.5 The tables below (Table 1.1.1 and 1.1.2) show the representativeness of the sample compared to national 2010 Census data[29]. As can be seen from Table 1.1.1, the averages for each characteristic (FSM, EAL, SEN and School size) of the achieved sample are closely matched to national data, although the national average for pupils with EAL is 1.6% higher than that in the achieved sample. Table 1.1.2 shows that the achieved sample is also closely matched to national data in terms of government office region for most areas, there is a slightly lower proportion of schools nationally in the East of England than in the achieved sample, and a slightly higher proportion of schools nationally in the West Midlands than in the achieved sample.

Table 1.1.1 Average achieved sample characteristics compared with national data average

	Achieved sample average %	*National data average 2010 %**
FSM	*17.9*	*18.1*
EAL	*12.6*	*14.2*
SEN	*1.9*	*1.7*
School size	*248*	*241*

*for primary and middle-deemed primary schools

Table 1.1.2 Lead teacher for the Phonics Screening Check pilot

	Achieved sample %	National data average 2010 %*
East Midlands	11	10
East of England	16	12
London	9	11
North East	5	5
North West	14	15
South East	18	16
South West	9	11
West Midlands	8	11
Yorkshire and The Humber	11	11
Total	**100**	**100**

*for primary and middle-deemed primary schools

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[28] The data has been grouped to form a set of non-overlapping categories
[29] http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000925/index.shtml

1.1.6 Initially a univariate[30] analysis was conducted. Following this bivariate[31] analysis was undertaken using the independent variables specified above. Statistical tests (chi-square and Cramer's v (CV)) were used to identify any statistically significant associations and the relative strength of these associations.

1.2 Demographics of respondents

1.2.1 The majority (81%) of those completing the questionnaire were lead teachers for the Phonics Screening Check pilot (Table 1.2.1).

Table 1.2.1 Lead teacher for the Phonics Screening Check pilot

	%
Yes	81
No	19
Total	**100**

Total n=212

1.2.2 Respondents commonly had more than one role within the school with over a third stating that they had more than one role. Almost half (47%) of respondents stated that they were the Year 1 class teacher whilst fewer head teachers and deputy heads completed the questionnaire (Table 1.2.2). A number of respondents indicated that they had another role in the school not on the specified list. Commonly cited other roles were Year 2 class teacher (as well as Year 1), Year 1 or Key Stage 1 leader, Reception teacher, Foundation stage teacher and Assistant head.

Table 1.2.2 Role in school

	%
Head teacher	19
Deputy head teacher	12
Literacy co-ordinator	25
Key stage 1 co-ordinator	21
Year 1 class teacher	47
Other Key Stage 1 teacher	11
Other	22

Total n = 224

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[30] The analysis is carried out with the description of a single variable
[31] The analysis of two variables for the purpose of determining any relationship between them

1.3 Organisation of phonics delivery

1.3.1 In terms of the school's approach to phonics, almost three quarters of respondents (74%) stated that they encouraged pupils to use a range of cueing systems as well as phonics (Table 1.3.1).

Table 1.3.1 School approach to phonics

	%
We always encourage pupils to use phonics as the strategy to decode unfamiliar phonically regular words	26
We encourage pupils to use a range of cueing systems, such as context or picture clues, as well as phonics	74
Total	**100**

Total n=221

1.3.2 The majority of respondents (63%) stated that they mostly teach phonics in discrete sessions and sometimes integrate phonics into literacy sessions/other curriculum work whilst 29% stated that they always teach phonics in discrete sessions. Few respondents stated that they only sometimes taught phonics in discrete sessions (Table 1.3.2). A small number (12) of respondents gave more detail in the 'other' category (note that this is a little higher than the percentage presented in the table because some respondents gave an 'other' as well as selecting one of the criteria). Here respondents mentioned that they link phonics to literacy, to reading and writing, or to all other areas of the curriculum.

Table 1.3.2 Organisation of phonics teaching in Year 1 curriculum

	%
Always teach phonics in discrete sessions	29
Mostly teach phonics in discrete sessions, sometimes integrate phonics into literacy sessions/other curriculum work	63
Mostly integrate phonics into literacy sessions/other curriculum work, sometimes teach it in discrete sessions	6
Never use discrete phonics sessions, always integrate phonics into literacy sessions/other curriculum work	1
Other	2
Total	**101***

*NB total is less than 100% due to rounding
Total n=220

1.3.3 The majority (61%) of respondents taught discrete phonics sessions 5 times per week whilst 27% taught discrete sessions 4 times per week to Year 1 pupils (Table 1.3.3).

Table 1.3.3 Frequency of discrete phonics sessions to Year 1 pupils

	%
1	1
2	3
3	6
4	27
5	61
6	0
10	1
Total	**99***

*NB total exceeds 100% due to rounding
Total n=224
Mean = 4.5

1.3.4 Discrete phonics sessions were taught more frequently at Reception level with 82% of respondents teaching discrete sessions 5 times per week (Table 1.3.4).

Table 1.3.4 Frequency of discrete phonics sessions to Reception pupils

	%
0	1
1	1
3	3
4	13
5	82
10	1
15	1
Total	**102***

*NB total exceeds 100% due to rounding
Total n=208
Mean = 4.9

1.3.5 For the most part the average length of each discrete phonics session was under 30 minutes. Over half (53%) stated that the sessions were 11-20 minutes in length whilst fewer (13%) stated that the sessions were 5-10 minutes in length (Table 1.3.5). A small number (7) of respondents (note that this is a little higher than the percentage presented in the table because some respondents gave an 'other' as well as selecting one of the criteria) gave further detail on this in the 'other' box such as additional 1 hour fortnightly sessions, or quick fire 5 minute sessions as well as the discrete lesson.

Table 1.3.5 Average length of each discrete phonics session in Year 1

	%
5-10 minutes	13
11-20 minutes	53
21-30 minutes	28
31-40 minutes	1
41-50 minutes	2
More than 50 minutes	1
Other	1
Total	**99***

*NB total exceeds 100% due to rounding
Total n=223

1.3.6 Since few respondents stated that their phonics sessions were longer than 30 minutes, the bivariate analysis explored any associations with the first three categories. A significant association was found with the proportion of pupils with SEN ($p<0.01$, CV=0.21): schools with higher proportions of pupils with SEN tended to have longer sessions (Table 1.3.6).

Table 1.3.6 Average length of each discrete phonics session by school SEN quartiles

	5-10 minutes %	11-20 minutes %	21-30 minutes %	**Total n**
Lowest	29	51	20	**51**
Lower middle	7	65	27	**55**
Upper middle	12	53	35	**51**
Highest	6	57	38	**53**

$p<0.01$ CV=0.21

1.3.7 Few respondents (5%) devoted more than 50% of their overall literacy teaching time to phonics teaching. Just under half (48%) gave 25-50% whilst a similar proportion (45%) devoted 10-24% to phonics teaching (Table 1.3.7).

Table 1.3.7 Proportion of time given to literacy teaching overall in Year 1 that is devoted to phonics teaching

	%
More than 50%	5
25-50%	48
10-24%	45
Less than 10%	2
Total	**100**

Total n=221

1.3.8 The most commonly used approaches to delivering phonics teaching in Year 1 were whole class and small group teaching, with around half of respondents stating that they used these approaches as their main approach. Paired work and individual approaches were also used but not as often, with around two thirds of respondents stating that they sometimes use these approaches (63% and 70% respectively) (Table 1.3.8). Some (27) respondents cited further detail in the 'other' box. Responses indicated that ability grouping was used (13

respondents mentioned this), that teaching was spread across year groups e.g. mixed with Reception or Year 2 (5 respondents mentioned this) or that phonics delivery was linked to other areas of the curriculum (3 respondents mentioned this).

Table 1.3.8 Approach(es) taken to delivering phonics teaching in Year 1

	Main approach used %	Sometimes used %	Never used[32] %	Total n
Whole class	51	38	11	**221**
Small group	50	47	3	**221**
Paired work	7	63	30	**221**
Individually	8	70	22	**221**
Other	5	2	88	**224***

*NB the total n is slightly higher because 3 respondents put an 'other' response and did not complete the criteria in the question

1.3.9 Due to low numbers in some categories bivariate analysis was carried out for the larger groupings. No significant associations for whole class or small group approaches were found with the independent variables. Grouping 'main approach used' and 'sometimes used' for paired work revealed a significant association in relation to the proportion of pupils with SEN ($p<0.05$, CV=0.22). Those with higher proportions of pupils with SEN were more likely to use paired work with 84% of those in the highest SEN quartile using this method compared with 56% of those in the lowest quartile (Table 1.3.9).

Table 1.3.9 Use of paired work to deliver phonics teaching in Year 1 by school SEN quartiles

	Main approach used/ sometimes used %	Never %	Total n
Lowest	56	44	**55**
Lower middle	67	33	**57**
Upper middle	74	26	**54**
Highest	84	16	**55**

$p<0.05$ CV=0.22

1.3.10 A high proportion of respondents (87%) used teacher observation as their method of phonics assessment. Just under one half (47%) used formally recorded targeted assessment whilst 31% used this method including the use of non-words. Fewer respondents (21%) stated that they had an end of unit/phase written test (Table 1.3.10). Some respondents (35 in total) gave more detail on this in the 'other' box; respondents cited how often assessment was used (daily, weekly, termly), and whether they had formal assessments such as spelling or written work, or informal assessments such as teacher observation. The frequency of these statements (with the number of respondents shown in parentheses) are as follows:

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[32] It should be noted for this question that a number of respondents left some of the categories as missing (e.g. paired work), where they have responded to other questions and not left the entire question as missing, a missing response has been take to mean "never used".

Frequency of use:
- Daily (2)
- Ongoing (this could be daily) (2)
- Weekly (3)
- Half termly (1)
- Termly (4)
- End of phase (4)

Assessments:
- Reading (6)
- Written work (6)
- Spelling (2)
- Observations (sometimes noted as observations of reading and written work) (2)
- Tests/assessment sheet (2)
- Informal assessments (3)

Table 1.3.10 Methods of phonics assessment used in Year 1

	%*
Formally recorded targeted assessment	47
Formally recorded end of unit/phase written test	21
Formally recorded assessment that includes use of non-words	31
Teacher observation	87
Other	14

* NB: total exceeds 100% since respondents were able to make more than one response
Total n = 224

1.3.11 Most respondents assess/formally record phonics once every half term or once every term (46% and 37% respectively). Fewer respondents (9%) assess/formally record phonics more than once every half term (Table 1.3.11).

Table 1.3.11 Frequency of assessment and formal recording of phonics

|	%
More than once every half term	9
Once every half term	46
Once every term	37
Once every year	2
Never	6
Total	**100**

Total n=221

1.4 Phonics programmes used[33]

1.4.1 Letters and Sounds was by far the most frequently used programme by schools participating in the pilot, with 80% of respondents stating that this was their main programme used. Jolly phonics was used to some extent by 65% of respondents, although only 10% indicated that this was their main programme used. Respondents also used Read Write Inc, with 9% indicating that this was their main programme. Schools also made some use of their own programme/materials, 21% indicated that they used these to some extent. Very few respondents used Letterland, the Local authority programme or THRASS (Figure 1.4.1). In total 53 respondents mentioned that they used an 'other' programme, with 18 of these citing two 'other' programmes and 5 citing three 'other' programmes. Therefore in total 76 other programmes were mentioned within the 53 schools. The most commonly cited programmes were:

- **PhonicsPlay** (mentioned 9 times)
- **LCP** (mentioned 9 times)
- **BigCat phonics** (mentioned 7 times)
- **ELS** (mentioned 5 times)

Figure 1.4.1 Extent of use of phonics programmes/teaching materials in Year 1[34] (%)
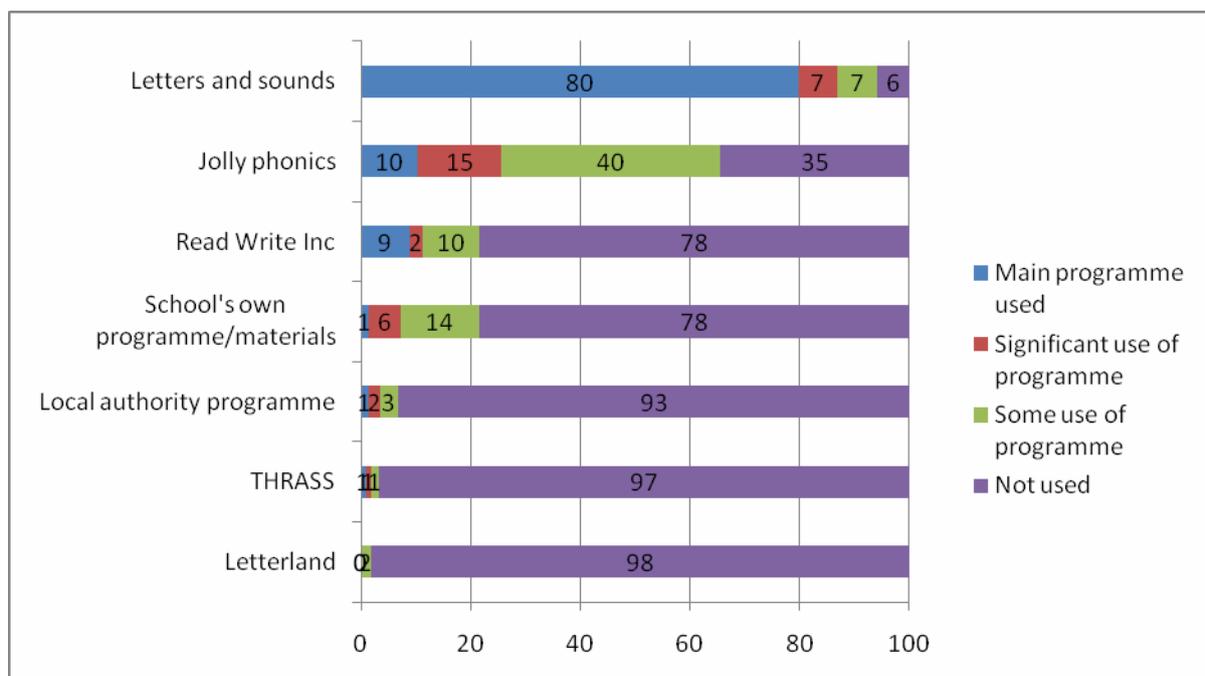
Total n =223

1.4.2 Of those that used more than one main phonics programme or additional materials, 66% indicated that this was to support pupils with particular needs whilst 40% stated that this was to deal with gaps/weaknesses in their main programme. Fewer (12%) stated that this was to support the assessment of phonics (Table 1.4.1). A number of respondents (51 in total) gave further detail on this in the 'other' category. Responses here indicated that a mixture of programmes was used to support pupils with varying needs, that Jolly Phonics

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[33] The use of phonics programmes by schools in the pilot may not be representative of the use or popularity of different phonics programmes across the country, and no judgement is being implied about the quality of any of the products.

[34] For this question it should be noted that a number of respondents left some of the categories as missing, e.g. THRASS. Where they have responded to other categories in that question a missing answer has been taken to mean "not used".

was used as an introduction and in their view it was more child friendly (due to visual stimuli, songs and pictures), that using varying programmes enabled the school to use the best of everything, and that using more than one programme enabled variety in phonics teaching. This is set out in further detail below (the number of respondents is shown in parentheses):

- Take the best of all programmes (5)
- Different programmes complement each other (6)
- To provide full coverage and fill gaps in other programmes (5)
- To provide extra resources (2)
- Use Jolly Phonics as an introduction to phonics (4)
- Jolly Phonics is more child friendly (9)
- To support differing needs and learning styles (11)
- To create variety (5)
- To support assessment (2)

Table 1.4.1 Reasons for using more than one programme or additional materials in Year 1

	%*
To support pupils with particular needs	66
To deal with gaps/weaknesses in our main programme	40
To support the assessment of phonics	12
Other	28

* NB: total exceeds 100% since respondents were able to make more than one response
Total n = 178

1.4.3 Most respondents (80%) stated that they delivered the main phonics programme in its entirety (Table 1.4.2).

Table 1.4.2 Delivery of main phonics programme in entirety or selected phases of the programme only

	%
We deliver the programme in its entirety	80
We deliver selected phases of the programme	20
Total	**100**

Total n = 224

1.4.4 In terms of systematic delivery of the phonics programme, respondents were almost evenly split as to whether they delivered the programme systematically or whether they delivered some parts systematically and deviated from the suggested approach to delivery for other parts (Table 1.4.3).

Table 1.4.3 Systematic delivery of programme or deviation from the programme's suggested approach to delivery

	%
We deliver the programme systematically	51
We deliver some parts systematically and deviate from the suggested approach to delivery for other parts	49
Total	**100**

Total n = 224

1.4.5 There was some variation in terms of school FSM quartile for systematic delivery of the phonics programme (p<0.05, CV=0.19). Respondents in schools with higher proportions of pupils eligible for FSM were more likely to state that they delivered the programme systematically (Table 1.4.4).

Table 1.4.4 Systematic delivery of programme or deviation from the programme's suggested approach to delivery by school FSM quartiles

	We deliver the programme systematically %	We deliver some parts systematically and deviate from the suggested approach to delivery for other parts %	**Total n**
Least deprived	43	57	**56**
Lower middle	41	59	**56**
Upper middle	63	37	**57**
Most deprived	58	42	**55**

p<0.05   CV=0.19

1.4.6 Two thirds of respondents had used their main phonics programme for 3 years or more whilst only 8% had used it for less than 1 year (Table 1.4.5).

Table 1.4.5 Length of time school has used main phonics programme

	%
Less than 1 year	8
1 to 2 years	26
3 years or more	66
Total	**100**

Total n=224

1.4.7 Most respondents used ability grouping either across Key Stage 1 or across Year 1 classes (74%), whereas 15% used whole class teaching without ability grouping (Table 1.4.6). Other responses (41 in total) indicated that both ability grouping and whole class teaching were used (9 respondents), and that grouping across different stages/groups (year groups, Foundation Stage, Reception, Key Stage 1) was common (16 respondents). A few respondents (4) mentioned using targeted intervention or support.

Table 1.4.6 Pupil groupings for phonics teaching

	%
Ability grouping across KS1	30
Ability grouping across Year 1 class(es)	44
Whole class teaching without ability grouping	15
Other	11
Total	**100**

Total n=221

1.4.8 There was some variation in ability grouping according to school size, proportion of pupils with SEN and proportion of pupils with EAL (Tables 1.4.7 to 1.4.9). Those in the largest schools were more likely to use ability grouping across Year 1 classes. Those with the highest proportion of pupils with SEN were less likely to use whole class teaching without ability grouping than those with lower proportions of pupils with SEN. In contrast those with the highest proportion of pupils with EAL were more likely to use whole class teaching.

Table 1.4.7 Pupil groupings for phonics teaching by school size quartiles

	Ability grouping across Key Stage 1 %	Ability grouping across Y1 class(es) %	Whole class teaching without ability grouping %	Other %	**Total n**
Smallest	47	31	9	13	**55**
Smaller	27	50	18	5	**56**
Larger	36	31	15	18	**55**
Largest	9	64	20	7	**55**

p<0.01 CV=0.22

Table 1.4.8 Pupil groupings for phonics teaching by school SEN quartiles

	Ability grouping across Key Stage 1 %	Ability grouping across Year 1 class(es) %	Whole class teaching without ability grouping %	Other %	**Total n**
Lowest	30	44	17	9	**54**
Lower middle	22	45	26	7	**58**
Upper middle	26	37	15	22	**54**
Highest	42	49	4	5	**55**

 p<0.01 CV=0.19

Table 1.4.9 Pupil groupings for phonics teaching by school EAL quartiles

	Ability grouping across Key Stage 1 %	Ability grouping across Year 1 class(es) %	Whole class teaching without ability grouping %	Other %	Total n
Lowest	45	32	9	14	56
Lower middle	33	45	11	11	55
Upper middle	30	49	11	11	57
Highest	11	49	32	8	53

p<0.01 CV=0.20

1.5 Teacher Experiences

1.5.1 Overall respondents were positive about their school's current approach to phonics against the specified criteria, in particular with regards to having a clear focus on phonological awareness where 60% of respondents strongly agreed that their approach achieved this. Respondents were less likely to agree that their approach linked closely with the school's reading scheme, was particularly suitable for pupils with specific learning difficulties or was particularly suitable for pupils with EAL (Figure 1.5.1).

Figure 1.5.1 Perceptions of school's current approach to the teaching of phonics in Year 1 (%)
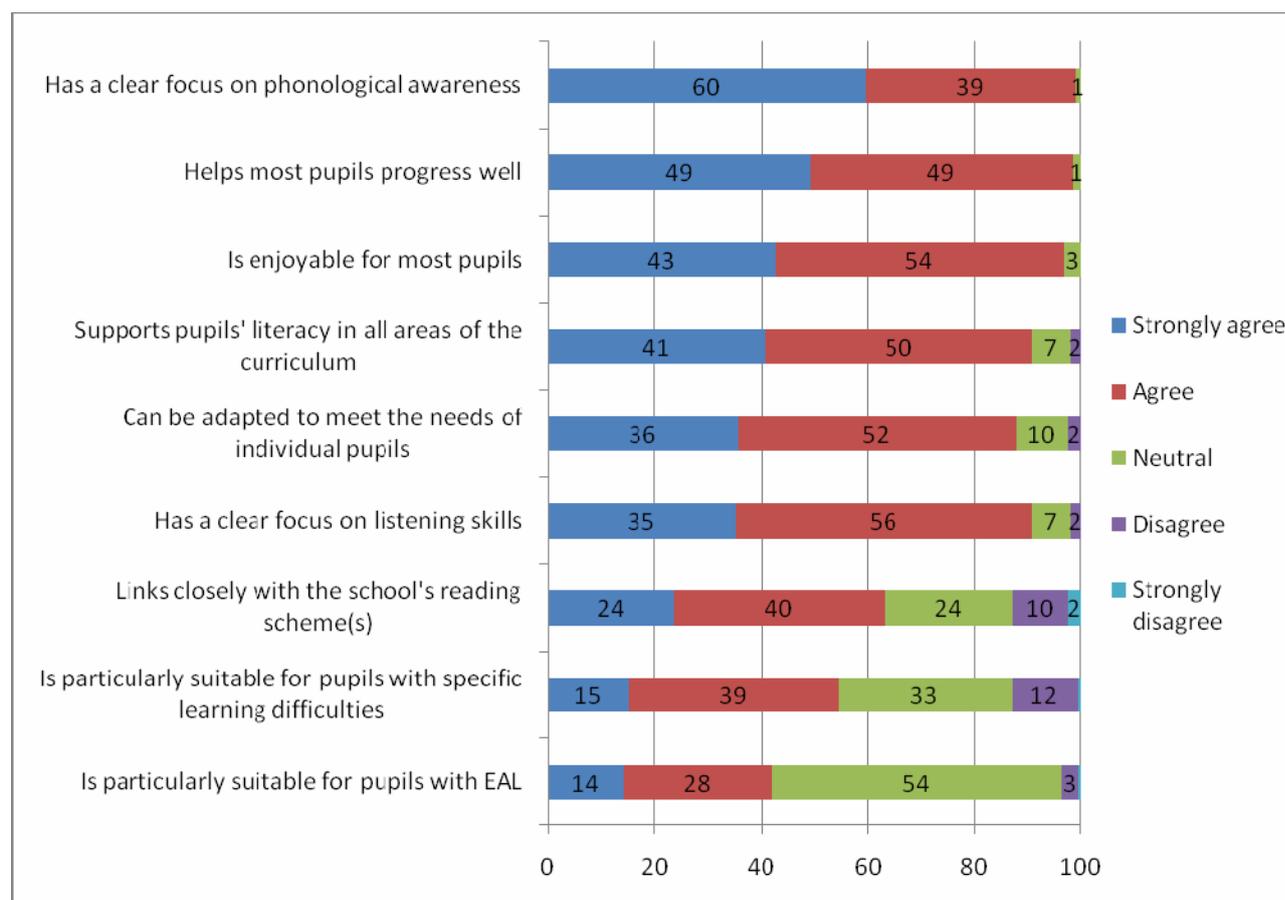
1.5.2 Due to low numbers in the 'disagree' categories, the bivariate analysis explored differences in the first three categories for the current approach being particularly suitable for

pupils with EAL. Respondents in schools with higher proportions of pupils with EAL were more likely to agree that their approach was particularly suitable for pupils with EAL, although it could be the case that those with lower proportions were more likely to indicate that they were 'neutral' because they felt this was less applicable to them (Table 1.5.1).

1.5.3 There was also some variation by FSM quartile for this criteria, those in the higher FSM quartiles were more likely to agree that their current approach was particularly suitable for pupils with EAL (Table 1.5.2). This could be explained by the fact that schools in the higher FSM quartiles tend to have more pupils with EAL. The same was true for larger schools which could again be explained by the higher proportions of pupils with EAL in larger schools compared with smaller schools (Table 1.5.3).

Table 1.5.1 Agreement that current approach is particularly suitable for pupils with EAL by school EAL quartiles

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Total n
Lowest	5	14	81	**43**
Lower middle	10	24	66	**50**
Upper middle	11	33	56	**54**
Highest	31	42	27	**52**

p<0.01 CV=0.29

Table 1.5.2 Agreement that current approach is particularly suitable for pupils with EAL by school FSM quartiles

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Total n
Least deprived	8	26	66	**50**
Lower middle	12	16	71	**49**
Upper middle	18	32	50	**50**
Most deprived	20	42	38	**50**

p<0.05 CV=0.20

Table 1.5.3 Agreement that current approach is particularly suitable for pupils with EAL by school size quartiles

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Total n
Smallest	7	20	73	**45**
Smaller	10	42	48	**52**
Larger	22	27	51	**49**
Largest	19	26	55	**53**

p<0.05 CV=0.18

1.5.4 There was some variation between agreement that the current approach was particularly suitable for pupils with specific learning difficulties and EAL quartiles. Those with larger proportions of pupils with EAL were less likely to agree that their current approach was suitable for pupils with specific learning difficulties (Table 1.5.4).

Table 1.5.4 Agreement that current approach is particularly suitable for pupils with specific learning difficulties by school EAL quartiles

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Total n
Lowest	27	35	24	15	**55**
Lower middle	9	53	23	15	**53**
Upper middle	11	43	38	9	**56**
Highest	13	28	47	11	**53**

p<0.05 CV=0.17

1.5.5 The majority of respondents (70%) stated that all Key Stage 1 staff received training for the delivery of phonics whilst 40% indicated that their teaching assistants received training (Table 1.5.5). A number of respondents (47 in total) also cited that all school staff received training (6 respondents stated that all staff received training). Other staff mentioned included Reception staff (5 respondents), Foundation stage staff (2 respondents), Early Years staff (3 respondents), Key Stage 2 staff (7 respondents) and teaching assistants (6 respondents). In addition some respondents mentioned that they carried out in house training (4 respondents).

1.5.6 Larger schools were more likely to state that all their Key Stage 1 staff received training for the delivery of phonics in Year 1 than the smallest schools (Table 1.5.6). Furthermore schools with higher proportions of pupils on FSM were more likely to indicate that all their Key Stage 1 staff received training for the delivery of phonics than those in the least deprived schools (Table 1.5.7).

Table 1.5.5 Staff receiving training for the delivery of phonics in Year 1

	%*
All Key Stage 1 staff	70
Year 1 teachers	30
Teaching assistants	40
Other	20

* NB: total exceeds 100% since respondents were able to make more than one response
Total n = 222

Table 1.5.6 All Key Stage 1 staff receiving training for the delivery of phonics in Year 1 by school size quartiles

	Yes %	Total n
Smallest	54	**56**
Smaller	74	**54**
Larger	79	**56**
Largest	75	**56**

p<0.05 CV=0.22

Table 1.5.7 All Key Stage 1 staff receiving training for the delivery of phonics in Year 1 by school FSM quartiles

	Yes %	Total n
Least deprived	66	56
Lower middle	58	55
Upper middle	76	55
Most deprived	80	56

p<0.05 CV=0.19

1.6 Open ended comments

Respondents were asked to use an open comment box at the end of the questionnaire to "*make any other comments about how your school delivers phonics in Year 1*", 79 schools took the opportunity to do so. A thematic analysis revealed comments clustered in four main areas.

By far the most common theme - mentioned by around 41 schools - was on how they *matched their teaching to meet their pupils' needs.* Twelve of these discussed using some form of ability grouping to do so, discussing the varying ways they did so, from cross-year, cross-key stage to within class grouping (mentioned most commonly). Eleven schools discussed utilising specific approaches for particular groups of learners, in particular pupils with SEN (6 schools) or Gifted and Talented pupils (2 schools), mainly via use of an additional phonics or other reading programme, or modification of the main programme:

> *Programme X is used to support SEN children in Year 1 who do not know all their initial sounds.*
> *SEN pupils in Year 1 also use the Toe by Toe system to support reading and phonics.*

Eleven respondents discussed using creative methods, especially ICT (4 schools) and interactive, fun approaches (6 schools):

> *[we use] outdoor learning - phonemes in the trees, on the walls etc… boxed games to play with teaching assistants or parent helpers…*
> *our sessions are fun, lively and interactive. We use a range of resources, strategies and games.*
>
> *I strongly believe that it is the way in which the programme is taught which is important. Dynamic sessions, pace, emotional connection and links with other learning are all essential for success.*

Twelve schools specifically mentioned *using teaching assistants* to support phonics teaching, and 7 discussed how they ensured the pace of phonics teaching was designed to fit the needs of the children:

> *I teach a mix of Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 children so phonics is taught across a wide age and ability range. The mixed ages allow for great flexibility in being able to teach children according to their stage, not age.*
>
> *We take programme Y at the children's own pace, and do one phoneme per week.*

Twenty two schools discussed **linking phonics teaching to other areas of literacy and the wider curriculum**. Nineteen of these discussed links to other aspects of literacy, especially handwriting (10 schools), reading (5 schools) and more generally (4 schools):

> *Phonics is used as a tool for reading alongside other strategies. We link the teaching of programme y to the weekly spellings we expect children to learn both at school and at home.*

> *We give pupils activities to consolidate phonics during our 'Reading Workshop'. We use words with digraphs recently taught in phonics for handwriting.*

> *We base our handwriting on phonics so they learn phonics sounds as groups with handwriting joins.*

Six schools discussed linking phonics more broadly to the wider curriculum:

> *Phonics is a strong part of all teaching in Year 1- not just the [phonics] sessions.*

Seventeen schools made comments on **their schools phonics' programme(s)** with 9 discussing how different programmes linked together:

> *We do feel that programme Z is an excellent structured programme which works well for our school, but we do supplement it with programme Y games.*
> *We mainly follow programme Y, but have used programme X for longer (over 10 years) so combine the two.*

> *Programme X is used every day by the class teacher - stand alone lessons happen if a problem is identified in the 'starter' part of the literacy lesson, or in handwriting. Programme y activities are used as part of a 'starter' to literacy lessons*

Nine schools made more general comments about their programmes(s), usually praising their suitability for their school.

The final broad category of comments, made by respondents from 11 schools, related to **evaluation, review and assessment** of phonics:

> *Pupils are assessed half termly and regrouped accordingly. Programmes are altered to ensure children are making good progress.*
> *We are working on assessment systems.*

> *As we are reflective practitioners and promote assessment for learning, we evaluate our discrete phonics sessions every day. We will review certain sounds and decoding methods, depending on the children's needs. This helps formulate which phase children are working towards, and how to move them forward. Our discrete session weekly plans are therefore a working document throughout the week.*

Appendix 6: Case study school characteristics

Case study code	School profile	Region
CS1	An average sized voluntary aided CoE primary school, serving an area of economic and social advantage. Almost all pupils from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is also well below the national average.	East Midlands
CS2	Small village school with four split-year classes. Most pupils are of White British heritage, with no pupils having English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and the uptake of free school meals are both well below average. Pupils attain above the expected levels on entry to school.	East Midlands
CS3	Larger than average primary with three form entry. The school serves an area of disadvantage in a large town with a higher than average proportion of pupils on free school meals. The majority of pupils are from ethnic minority groups, including a large proportion with EAL. Levels of SEN and disabilities are also high.	East
CS4	Average size school in a large town, with a third of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. Many pupils start school with lower than average levels of reading and writing. A significant number of pupils are in the early stages of learning to speak English as an additional language.	East
CS5	Much larger than average primary. 100% ethnic minority intake, mainly EAL pupils. SEN is slightly above average.	East
CS6	Larger than average primary with a growing (already high) proportion of ethnic minority pupils, high proportion of EAL pupils.	London
CS7	Relatively small urban school with around half the pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, with a similar proportion of the intake having SEN and disabilities.	London
CS8	A smaller than average primary school with mixed-age classes, including a mixed Y1/Y2 class. Percentage of pupils with SEN and disabilities is below average. Currently no EAL pupils. The majority of pupils are White British.	Yorks & Humb
CS9	Average sized community primary school serving mainly pupils from a White British heritage, with a more recent influx of Eastern European pupils. The school is in an area of social deprivation and has a children's centre attached to it. Around half the pupils are eligible for FSM. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and is rising year on year.	Yorks & Humb

Case study code	School profile	Region
CS10	This is an average-sized school, which is popular and oversubscribed, serving an area of relative social advantage. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.	East Mids
CS11	An average sized community primary school serving an area of relative advantage. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, and a small minority are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Lower than average proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.	East Mids
CS12	Small, rural school with mainly White British pupils, with a catchment that includes a neighbouring town with high levels of owner occupation. Levels of free school meal uptake and learning difficulties/disabilities are well below the national average, although the numbers of pupils with statements of special educational needs is higher.	North West
CS13	A large, multi-ethnic primary school in a commuter town which forms part of a large conurbation. Significant numbers of pupils are entitled to FSM and with EAL. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average but the number with statements of special educational need is above. A large proportion of learners are from minority ethnic groups and over a third are EAL.	North West
CS14	A small nursery and infant school where most pupils are of White British heritage. The school serves the town's main area of social housing, with high levels of deprivation and disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is high. The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average.	North West
CS15	Small primary school with split Y1/Y2 class, serving a socio-economically mixed town. Pupils are mainly White British. An average number of pupils claim free school meals and have special educational needs.	Yorks & Humb
CS16	A small, one-form entry primary school; predominantly White British but increasing diversity of other heritages. Above average proportion of EAL, though few at are an early stage of learning to speak English. FSM eligibility above average and increasing; SEN above average. On-site specialist units for nursery assessment and hearing impaired pupils.	Yorks & Hum
CS17	Average sized primary located in an affluent small town. Predominately White British families, with a very small percentage who come from minority ethnic backgrounds. SEN and/or disabilities and FSM eligibility are below average.	South East
CS18	Large C of E, voluntary controlled primary school serving a social-economically mixed area. Proportion of pupils with SEN and disabilities is above average. Few pupils with EAL. The proportion of pupils eligible for FSM eligibility is above average compared to the LA.	South East

Case study code	School profile	Region
CS19	A small infant school, located in the inner city. FSM eligible pupils varies from 40% to 20% between years. Although White/other White background pupils predominate at the school, there is a large mixture of ethnic backgrounds, with a large proportion of pupils with EAL (many of whom are at the very early stages of learning English). The number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average.	London
CS20	An ethically diverse inner city primary school, with one form entry. The school serves a very disadvantaged area, with a very high proportion of pupils eligible for FSM; 16 different home languages are spoken. School has a high turnover of pupils and standards are much lower than average.	London