



Standards
& Testing
Agency

Phonics screening check: administration guidance

March 2023

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1 Introduction

This guidance is for schools administering the 2023 phonics screening check. The information expands on section 8 of the [2023 key stage 1 \(KS1\) assessment and reporting arrangements \(ARA\)](#)¹.

It ensures schools can:

- prepare for check administration
- prepare check administrators
- receive and securely store check materials
- administer the check correctly
- score the check

Schools should administer the check during the week beginning Monday 12 June. Section 3 of the 2023 KS1 ARA contains a list of important dates.

Headteachers are responsible for the check administration arrangements within their school. Failing to adhere to this guidance could lead to a [maladministration investigation](#)².

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/2023-key-stage-1-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stages-1-and-2-investigating-allegations-of-maladministration

2 Headteachers' responsibilities

Headteachers must:

- identify which pupils will reach the age of 6 before the end of the academic year (most pupils will be in year 1) and should take the check in June
- ensure any pupils in years 1 or 2 who do not meet the expected standard continue to receive support in phonics
- consider whether any pupils will need braille versions of the check in June and order them from the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 by Tuesday 25 April
- consider whether any pupils will need modified versions and download them from the [Primary Assessment Gateway \(PAG\)](#)³ (excluding braille) during the check period in June
- keep all check materials secure and treat them as confidential from the point they arrive in school or are downloaded from the PAG, until Monday 26 June
- be able to give an accurate account of everyone with access to check materials from the point they arrive in school until Monday 26 June
- ensure the check is administered once to each pupil within the check window starting on Monday 12 June
- know what to expect if they receive a [monitoring visit](#)⁴
- ensure all check administrators are appropriately trained to administer and score the check according to this guidance and have viewed the training video
- ensure the check is administered by a check administrator known to the pupils
- ensure that pupils are in a fit physical and mental state to take the check
- ensure pupils' responses are scored accurately and consistently
- report any incident that affects the integrity, security or confidentiality of the check to the Standards and Testing Agency (STA)
- co-operate with any monitoring visit requests, including visits by STA or local authority representatives
- comply with national data submission requirement by [submitting check results to the local authority](#)⁵ for all eligible pupils, by the deadline communicated to them by the local authority
- complete and submit the phonics screening check headteacher's declaration form (HDF) on the PAG by Monday 3 July

³ www.primaryassessmentgateway.education.gov.uk

⁴ www.gov.uk/guidance/key-stage-2-tests-and-phonics-screening-check-monitoring-visits

⁵ www.gov.uk/guidance/phonics-screening-check-data-collection

3 Maladministration

The term maladministration refers to any act that:

- affects the integrity, security or confidentiality of the national curriculum assessments
- could lead to results that do not reflect pupils' unaided work

Your school could be subject to a [maladministration investigation](#)⁶ if it does not comply with the following:

- this check administration guidance
- [2023 KS1 ARA](#)⁷
- check administration instructions provided with the check materials

Misunderstandings about correct check administration can lead to allegations of maladministration. To avoid this, ensure all staff, participating pupils and their parents understand:

- how the check will be administered
- what assistance is and is not allowed in the check

Clarifications about the administration of the check should be reported to STA by contacting the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 or assessments@education.gov.uk.

For any allegations of maladministration please contact STA either by email STA.maladministration@education.gov.uk or 0300 303 3013.

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stages-1-and-2-investigating-allegations-of-maladministration

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/publications/2023-key-stage-1-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara

4 Participating pupils

With some exceptions (see section 4.2), all pupils who have reached the age of 6 by the end of the school year must take the check during that academic year. For the majority of pupils, this will be in year 1. This includes pupils registered at maintained nursery schools who will reach the age of 6 before the end of the school year and have completed the year 1 programme of study.

Pupils who will have reached the age of 7 by the end of the academic year (the majority of such pupils will be in year 2) who have not taken the check before, or who did not meet the expected standard in the previous year, must also take the check.

For a new pupil joining the school and who will reach the age of 7 this academic year, the school should confirm if the pupil should participate in the check. The [common transfer file \(CTF\)](#)⁸ sent from the previous school should include information to confirm if the pupil met the expected standard the previous year. If this information is not provided, you should contact your local authority or log into Get information about pupils via [DfE Sign-in](#)⁹ to search for the pupil by their unique pupil number (UPN).

If you cannot establish whether the pupil took the check in the previous year, the pupil should take the check.

4.1 Pupils absent during check week

If a pupil is absent during the check week, you can administer the check to them until Friday 23 June.

4.2 Pupils who should not take the check

Headteachers make the final decision about whether it is appropriate for a pupil to take the check. In any instances when pupils are not entered for the check, schools should explain their decision to the pupil's parents. If appropriate, they should provide the parents with documentary evidence to support their decision. If the headteacher decides not to administer the check to a pupil, schools should also explain how they are helping the pupil learn to decode using phonics.

If it is not appropriate for a pupil to take the check, it is important teachers are aware of that pupil's progress in phonics so they can plan the next steps in their teaching.

⁸ www.gov.uk/government/collections/common-transfer-file

⁹ <https://services.signin.education.gov.uk>

You may want to provide a similar experience for pupils who will not formally participate in the check. You could do this by modifying the practice sheet to include only single letters or simple 2-letter blends so they can demonstrate their skills. Check materials, including the practice sheet, are available on the PAG from Monday 12 June.

Schools must submit data for all pupils including those who do not take the check. Pupils who do not take the check should be marked as 'D' (headteacher decided it was inappropriate for the pupil to take the check).

Pupils working below the standard

If a pupil has not completed the first year of the KS1 English programme of study or has shown no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, they should not take the check.

Pupils for whom English is an additional language

If a pupil has limited fluency in English, you may decide they should not take the check. If a pupil has recently moved to the country and is unable to understand letters and sounds in English, they should not take the check.

Pupils who use British Sign Language

You should consider whether you can support pupils who use British Sign Language (BSL) or other sign-supported communication, to take the check and demonstrate their ability in linking letters and sounds.

Pupils who are non-verbal or selectively mute

Pupils who are non-verbal or selectively mute are unable to participate in the check if they do not give verbal responses aloud in school. They may be able to identify the words but will not be able to demonstrate that knowledge by speaking the answers aloud.

Selectively mute pupils may demonstrate their knowledge at home informally with a family member who can discuss the outcome with the teacher. This arrangement will ensure the pupil has had a similar experience to their peers and gives them an opportunity to demonstrate their skills.

To avoid a potential security risk to the check materials, this arrangement may only take place after the check period ends on Friday 23 June.

5 Receiving and storing materials

Headteachers should consider where they will store the check materials. You must ensure you have adequate space to store materials securely. STA will deliver materials to school addresses taken from [Get Information About Schools](https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk)¹⁰, so you must ensure your school details are up to date by logging in via [DfE Sign-in](https://services.signin.education.gov.uk)¹¹.

We will deliver check materials between Monday 15 May and Friday 19 May. If your school will be closed and you have not entered your holiday dates on the PAG, or contacted us to arrange an alternative delivery date, contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013.

Schools do not need to order standard versions of the phonics screening check. STA sends materials to schools based on school census data. You will receive one set of materials per 30 pupils.

Each set of materials will contain:

- a copy of 'Phonics screening check: pupils' materials'
- a pad containing 30 copies of 'Phonics screening check: answer sheet'
- a copy of 'Phonics screening check: practice sheet'
- a copy of '2023 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance'

You can download [practice materials](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum-assessments-practice-materials)¹² to see what the check looks like.

5.1 Additional materials

Schools can download check materials from the PAG from Monday 12 June. This includes the mark sheet and modified versions (excluding braille), including Word versions with colour images, Word versions with black and white images, and Word versions without images.

If you have not received materials by Friday 19 May, if a delivery is incomplete, or if check packs arrive unsealed or damaged, you should contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013. We may ask you to send a photograph of any damaged packages.

¹⁰ <https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk>

¹¹ <https://services.signin.education.gov.uk>

¹² www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum-assessments-practice-materials

5.2 Braille versions

Schools can order uncontracted (Grade 1) Unified English Braille versions of the phonics screening check. You should order braille materials from the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 by Tuesday 25 April. Schools will receive check materials, including any braille orders, in the week beginning Monday 15 May. If schools have not received their check materials by Friday 19 May, they should contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013.

5.3 How to check your delivery

The headteacher is responsible for checking their school's delivery against the delivery note to ensure the correct number of check materials have been received. If the headteacher is unavailable, they must delegate this responsibility to a senior member of staff who understands the process.

When you receive your materials, you should open the box and check the number of packs against the delivery note. STA recommends 2 members of school staff undertake this check together. Leave the inner packs unopened and store your delivery securely until Monday 12 June.

5.4 Security of check materials

Headteachers must ensure the integrity, security and confidentiality of the check is maintained so that no pupil has an advantage from when the check materials are received or downloaded from the PAG until Monday 26 June.

Headteachers should ensure teachers and all other staff who may handle the materials understand their sensitivity.

Schools must store check materials securely in a locked cupboard. The headteacher should allocate responsibility for overseeing the storage of check materials to a member of staff not directly involved with the administration of the checks. This member of staff should take responsibility for the secure storage of check materials. They should also keep a log of requests for access to the materials.

You must not open check packs before Monday 12 June. You must only open them when the check is going to be administered for the first time.

Teachers and check administrators must not discuss the content with anyone or use the check words to prepare pupils. Schools must not discuss on social media or publish online specific content that could compromise the check.

Any school behaviour that leads to check materials being shared before Monday 26 June could lead to a maladministration investigation.

If you suspect a breach of security, you should report the incident immediately to the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 or email STA.maladministration@education.gov.uk.

5.5 Practical advice for keeping materials secure

For all check materials:

- put the unopened materials back into the original delivery box
- store check materials in a room where there is no information technology equipment kept, as this equipment is often targeted during burglaries
- do not store in a room that is prone to flooding
- store the boxes in a secure, locked cupboard
- limit access to the location of the materials
- a nominated member of staff should be responsible for the cupboard keys and ensure they are kept secure at all times
- check the boxes regularly to ensure they have not been tampered with
- keep a record to document instances of access to the materials and to log regular security checks
- plan a reporting procedure in the event of a problem, such as if keys are lost or stolen
- check the packs have not been opened before Monday 12 June
- keep check materials secure and treat them as confidential until Monday 26 June this includes electronic versions downloaded from the PAG and any materials subsequently printed in hard copy

Split site schools and administering a check at an alternative location

If you need to send check materials to a location away from the main school site prior to administration, the headteacher must ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to maintain the integrity, security and confidentiality of the check contents.

Schools used as a polling station or to host public events

If your school is used as a polling station, or to host a public event you should:

- ensure check materials are secure and kept away from the polling station area and visitors
- check the materials before the opening and after the closing of the polling station or public event

6 Preparing to administer the check

6.1 Check administrators

A member of staff trained in phonics and known to the pupil must administer the check on a one-to-one basis. The role requires professional judgement about which responses are correct. A teaching assistant or a higher-level teaching assistant should not administer the check unless they are trained in phonics and have experience delivering phonics sessions to pupils. Adults administering the check must not be a relative, carer or guardian of the pupil taking the check.

Check administrators should familiarise themselves with this guidance and with:

- the printed instructions for administering the check
- guidance on how to [score pupils' responses](#)¹³
- the [check video and practice materials](#)¹⁴

6.2 Preparing rooms

Administer the check in a room that is quiet and provides a comfortable, well-lit space. You should prepare rooms before pupils are admitted. If there are displays or materials which could help pupils you must remove or cover them for the duration of the check. If more than one adult is administering the check to pupils at the same time, you may need more than one room to ensure pupils taking the check do not disturb, distract, or aid one another.

6.3 Access arrangements

You may need to adapt the check for some pupils. You must base adjustments on normal classroom practice for pupils with specific needs. You do not need to request permission to make adaptations, but you must ensure any modifications do not advantage pupils.

Those who may need adjustments include pupils:

- for whom provision is being made in school under special educational needs and disability (SEND) support and whose learning difficulty or disability significantly affects access to the check

¹³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-2022-materials

¹⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-sample-materials-and-training-video

- with an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- with a disability (as defined in section 6(1) of the [Equality Act 2010](#)¹⁵) that does not give rise to a special educational need but requires alternative access arrangements
- who are unable to sit and work for a sustained period because of a disability or behavioural, emotional or social difficulty

It is not possible to list all the circumstances in which pupils may need adaptations. If you need to discuss access arrangements to meet a pupil's specific needs, you should use the 'Message us – access arrangements' form on the PAG. For general enquiries, you should contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013.

Rest breaks

The check is not timed but we expect it will take each pupil between 4 and 9 minutes to complete. You should give pupils enough time to respond to each word. If you believe a pupil will find it difficult to concentrate, or may experience fatigue during the check, you may use rest breaks to make it more manageable. You can give rest breaks whenever they are needed.

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

Cued speech

If a pupil with a hearing impairment is familiar with cued speech, it can be used by an appropriately trained professional to make their responses clear. If a pupil with a hearing impairment would prefer to speak the words, you should use cued speech to help clarify what sounds they are aiming for.

Visual phonics

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

¹⁵ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/6

Sound buttons

If a pupil uses sound buttons to help them decode words as part of normal classroom practice, they may use them during the check. You must give the pupil a clean copy of the check so they can mark the sound buttons against the graphemes. You must not mark the graphemes for the pupil.

Readers

Readers are not allowed.

Adapting check materials

We provide check materials in font 'Sassoon Infant', style 'regular' and size '60'. Most pupils will use standard versions of the phonics screening check, but you may need to adapt check materials to meet pupils' specific needs.

Schools can download check materials from the PAG from Monday 12 June. This includes:

- the mark sheet and modified versions (excluding braille)
- Word versions with colour images
- Word versions with black and white images
- Word versions without images

We have designed the materials so schools can modify them to meet the needs of individual pupils and their own approach to teaching phonics. Examples of modifications may include:

- changing the font
- changing the font size
- having fewer words per page
- coloured overlays (if this is normal classroom practice)

7 Administering the check

Pupils must only attempt the check once during the check window. You should introduce the check as consistently as possible, bearing in mind some pupils may require more explanation to understand the instructions. Schools must not administer the check virtually to pupils.

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

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

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

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

You should try to read each word but do not worry if you cannot. If it helps you, you may sound out the letters before trying to say the word.

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

Have a go at reading these 4 words aloud. You should have come across before [in, at, beg, sum].

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

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

Now you are going to start reading out the words in this booklet and I am going to write down what you say on my sheet.

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

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

Can you start reading the words to me?”

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

7.1 Assistance

You must ensure nothing you say, or do, during the check could be interpreted as giving pupils an advantage.

If a pupil is likely to be confused by the standard introduction, you may develop your own. Your instructions may refer to the practice words but must not refer to words within the check itself.

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

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

You should give pupils as long as necessary to respond to a word, although in most cases 10 seconds should be enough. You should not indicate whether a pupil has decoded a word correctly, or incorrectly, during the check, but you may offer encouragement. You should decide when it is appropriate to tell the pupil to move onto the next word, taking care not to do so while they are still trying to decode the word.

7.2 Problems or queries during the check

Most pupils should be able to attempt all words in the check. It is important, however, they do not become distressed or have a negative experience. If a pupil is struggling, you should consider stopping the check before the end.

Similarly, if a pupil is showing signs of fatigue, you should consider using a rest break (see section 6.3). If a pupil needs frequent, lengthy rest breaks, think about stopping the check completely. When making the decision to stop, ensure you have given the pupil a full opportunity to show what they can do. If you stop the check before the end, you should report the pupil's score for what they have attempted.

7.3 Completing the answer sheet

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

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

If you are not familiar with the answer sheets, past materials are available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)¹⁶.

7.4 Scoring the check

We have included Instructions for scoring the check with the check materials. You should score the check as the pupil says each word. Make a record on the answer sheet of whether the pupil said each word correctly or not. You should consider the following points when scoring the check:

- if a pupil sounds out the phonemes but does not blend the word, you must not prompt them to do so, and you must score as incorrect
- pupils may elongate phonemes but if they leave gaps between phonemes and do not blend them, you must score as incorrect
- you must consider alternative pronunciations when deciding whether a response is correct — for real words, inappropriate grapheme-phoneme correspondences, you must mark as incorrect (for example, reading ‘blow’ to rhyme with ‘cow’ would be incorrect)
- you can allow alternative pronunciations of graphemes in pseudo-words — the scoring guidance gives some alternative pronunciations, but the list of acceptable pronunciations is not exhaustive
- you should consider a pupil’s accent when deciding whether a response is acceptable and there must be no bias for or against a pupil with a particular accent — pupils can use any acceptable regional pronunciation even if it is not within their usual accent
- you should consider any pronunciation difficulties when deciding whether a response is acceptable — for example, a pupil unable to form the ‘th’ sound who instead usually says ‘f’ should have this scored as correct
- if a pupil shows their ability to decode by revising an attempt, you must mark this as correct — you should not, however, prompt pupils to ‘have another go’ and must score the final attempt even if this is incorrect and a previous attempt was correct

7.5 Administering the check at an alternative location

Schools can administer the check at an alternative location to the rest of the cohort away from school. This may include administering at a pupil referral unit or at the pupil’s home, as long as the pupil is in a fit state.

¹⁶ www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum-assessments-practice-materials

The headteacher is responsible for ensuring the integrity, security and confidentiality of the check is maintained, and the check is administered according to this check administration guidance.

Schools must not administer the check virtually to pupils.

If schools need specific advice on administering the check at an alternative location, they should contact STA using the 'Message us – access arrangements' form on the PAG.

8 After the check

8.1 Headteacher's declaration form

Headteachers must complete and submit the HDF after your school has completed the check, as detailed in article 5A(1)(c) of the [Education \(National Curriculum\) \(Key Stage 1 Assessment Arrangements\) \(England\) Order 2004](#)¹⁷. You must still complete the HDF if all pupils are working below the standard of the check.

The HDF confirms either:

- your school has administered the check according to the published guidance; or
- the check was not administered because all pupils are working below the standard or are unable to access it; or
- you cannot confirm the statements in the HDF and you have reported any issues to STA

You or a delegated senior member of staff, must complete and submit the HDF online after you have administered the last check. The HDF will be available on the PAG from Monday 12 June and you must submit it by Monday 3 July.

Failure to complete the HDF by the deadline may result in a maladministration investigation. If you or a delegated senior member of staff, cannot complete the HDF or need help completing it, contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013. You cannot amend the HDF after submission.

¹⁷ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/2783/contents/made

9 Reporting check results

STA will publish the threshold mark on Monday 26 June on GOV.UK. Schools do not need to wait until we publish the threshold mark before submitting their data to the local authority.

9.1 Reporting to local authorities

Schools must report their pupils' check scores to the local authority by their submission deadline. You must submit results for all pupils who are eligible to take the check using the following codes:

Description	What to record
Pupil took the check and met the expected standard	Score – record in the phonics mark field
Pupil took the check and did not meet the expected standard	Score – record in the phonics mark field
Absent	A – record in the phonics outcome field
Headteacher decided it was not appropriate for pupil to take the check	D – record in the phonics outcome field
Pupil left the school	L – record in the phonics outcome field
Check subject to maladministration	Q – record in the phonics outcome field

The local authority will tell you how to submit your data and by when. We have advised management information system (MIS) suppliers of the data requirements for the check. Your local authority or MIS supplier, depending on local arrangements, may offer support for these systems.

Local authorities must submit check data to the Department for Education (DfE) using COLLECT by Friday 21 July. Further support for schools and local authorities is available in DfE's [data collection and submission guidance](#)¹⁸.

9.2 Pupils who move schools

If a pupil moves school:

¹⁸ www.gov.uk/guidance/phonics-screening-check-data-collection

- before the check administration period—the receiving school should assess the pupil and submit data for them
- during the check period—the receiving school should find out whether the pupil has already taken the check (if not, they should assess the pupil and submit data for them)
- after taking the check—their result should be submitted by the school where they took the check and provided to the new school in the CTF

If a pupil arrives from a non-participating school, for example they have recently arrived from overseas or were electively home educated, the receiving school should consider administering the check and must submit data for them.

If a pupil arrives after the check administration period and does not take the check, they do not need to be included in that year's data submission.

9.3 How results will be used

DfE does not publish school-level results for the phonics screening check.

Results will be available in [Analyse School Performance](#)¹⁹ and schools will also have access to [national and local authority results](#)²⁰ to allow them to benchmark their pupils' performance.

9.4 Reporting results to parents

Headteachers must report the pupils' scores to parents by the end of the summer term. This should include whether or not their child has met the expected standard, to ensure they are aware of their child's progress in developing phonics decoding skills. If a pupil has not met the expected standard, headteachers should outline the support that the school will put in place to help the pupil progress.

Headteachers can choose how to communicate results to parents, which you should provide in the context of their overall attainment and progress. Headteachers must provide reports for all pupils, including those who have left the school or were absent during the check.

¹⁹ www.analyse-school-performance.service.gov.uk

²⁰ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics>

9.5 Pupils who do not meet the expected standard

The DfE has published [guidance](#)²¹ on what schools should do if a pupil does not meet the expected standard.

If a pupil does not meet the expected standard at the end of year 1 you should consider them for a retake in June 2024. You are expected to maintain a programme of support for these pupils.

²¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-responding-to-the-results

10 Further information

10.1 General enquiries

For general enquiries about check administration, call the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 or email assessments@education.gov.uk.

10.2 Message us

You can find message us forms on the [PAG](#)²².

For queries relating to access arrangements to meet a pupil's specific needs, schools can use the 'Message us – access arrangements' form.

²² www.primaryassessmentgateway.education.gov.uk



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