



Standards
& Testing
Agency

Administering the phonics screening check to year 2 pupils in the 2021 autumn term

June 2021

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1 Introduction

This guidance is for schools administering the phonics screening check to year 2 pupils during the second half of the 2021 autumn term.

The information is relevant to:

- school leaders, school staff and governing bodies in all maintained schools, academies and free schools
- maintained nursery schools that have eligible pupils
- local authorities (LAs)

1.1 Background

Cancellation of the phonics screening check in June 2021 means incoming year 2 pupils did not take the check in year 1. In the 2021/22 academic year, it is statutory for schools to administer a past version of the phonics screening check to year 2 pupils during the second half of the 2021 autumn term and return results to their LA.

The autumn check is intended to ensure that year 2 pupils who need support in learning to decode using phonics are not missed.

The autumn check is designed to be as flexible as possible, whilst also minimising any burden that could have arisen from the existing requirement, which would have required all year 1 and 2 pupils to be assessed concurrently in a short window in the summer term.

Year 2 pupils who meet the expected standard in phonics in the 2021 autumn check will not be required to complete any further statutory assessments in phonics. Year 2 pupils who do not meet the expected standard in the 2021 autumn check will be expected to take the statutory check in June 2022, alongside year 1 pupils.

Year 3 pupils, who were due to take the statutory check in June 2021 (when they were in year 2), are not required to take the autumn check. Schools are expected to maintain a programme of support for these pupils but do not need to return phonics data for year 3 pupils to their LA.

1.2 Important dates

Date	Action
Friday 22 October 2021	Schools should order braille versions of the 2017, 2018 or 2019 phonics screening check, if required.
Second half of the 2021 autumn term	<p>Schools must administer a past version of the phonics screening check to year 2 pupils.</p> <p>Where possible, schools are encouraged to administer the check at the beginning of the second half of the autumn term. This leaves the final weeks before the end of term for pupils who were absent.</p>
By the end of the 2021 autumn term	Schools must submit phonics results for their year 2 pupils to their LA.
Friday 21 January 2022	Deadline for LAs to submit phonics data to DfE, via COLLECT.

2 Responsibilities

2.1 Headteachers' responsibilities

Headteachers at maintained schools and academies must:

- identify which pupils should take the autumn check
- consider whether any pupils will need braille versions and, if required, contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 by Friday 22 October
- ensure all check administrators are appropriately trained
- ensure a past version of the check (from 2017, 2018 or 2019) is administered to each eligible pupil during the second half of the 2021 autumn term
- ensure pupils' responses are scored accurately and consistently
- ensure that any year 2 pupils who do not meet the expected standard in the 2021 autumn check continue to receive support in phonics, and take the statutory check in June 2022 (alongside year 1 pupils)
- submit autumn check results to their LA for all eligible pupils by the end of the 2021 autumn term
- report any incident that affects the integrity of the autumn check results by contacting the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 as soon as possible

Headteachers do not need to complete a separate headteacher's declaration form (HDF) for the autumn check. The phonics screening check HDF submitted by schools in June 2022 will cover both checks.

2.2. Local authorities' responsibilities

Responsibilities include:

- ensuring training and advice is available to schools on all aspects of the check
- following the [phonics data collection and submission guidance](#)¹ to collect results from schools, quality assure and submit data to DfE for checks administered in the 2021 autumn term

LAs should not conduct monitoring visits to schools administering the autumn check.

¹ www.gov.uk/guidance/phonics-screening-check-data-collection

3 Participating pupils

3.1 Pupils who should take the check

With some exceptions (see below and section 3.2), all year 2 pupils who reach the age of 7 by the end of the 2021/22 academic year must take the check in the 2021 autumn term.

Year 3 pupils who were due to take the check in June 2021 when they were in year 2 are not required to take the autumn check. Schools are expected to maintain a programme of support for these pupils but do not need to return phonics data for any year 3 pupils to their LA.

Pupils taught outside of their chronological year group

Where a year 1 pupil will reach the age of 7 by the end of the 2021/22 academic year (that is, their age would ordinarily mean they were in year 2) and they will remain with this cohort (and move into year 2 in the 2022/23 academic year), they should not take the 2021 autumn check. These pupils should instead take the statutory check alongside their current cohort in June 2022.

Where a year 2 pupil will reach the age of 8 by the end of the 2021/22 academic year (that is, their age would ordinarily mean they were in year 3) and will remain with this cohort (and move into year 3 in the 2022/23 academic year) and they have not taken the check before, they should take the check in the 2021 autumn term.

Where a year 2 pupil will reach the age of 8 by the end of the 2021/22 academic year (that is, their age would ordinarily mean they were in year 3) and will remain with this cohort (and move into year 3 in the 2022/23 academic year) and they have previously participated in the 2020 autumn phonics check but did not meet the expected standard, they should take the check in the 2021 autumn term. If they do not meet the expected standard in the autumn 2021 check, they should also take the check in June 2022.

3.2 Pupils who should not take the check

Headteachers may decide it is not appropriate for a pupil to take the check. Where this is the case, you must explain this to the pupil's parents. If appropriate, you should provide the parents with documentary evidence to support your decision and explain how you are helping the pupil to learn to decode using phonics. The headteacher's decision regarding participation is final.

You may want to provide a similar experience for pupils who will not formally participate in the check. 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.

Schools must submit data for all year 2 pupils including those who do not take the autumn 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 shown no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, they should not participate in 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 it is appropriate for pupils to take the check if they use British Sign Language (BSL) or other sign-supported communication to spell out individual letters, but are not using phonics in the sense of linking letters and sounds.

Pupils who are mute or selectively mute

Pupils who are mute, or selectively mute, are unable to participate in the check if they do not give verbal responses 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.

4 Check materials

Schools can choose from the [past phonics screening check materials](#)² used in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

If pupils have already seen all the past materials available, schools should choose the version that the pupils are least familiar with or the version that they completed the longest time ago.

Schools can use check materials from different years for pupils in the same cohort, if required.

4.1 Adapting check materials

The standard check materials are provided 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 also download modified check materials from GOV.UK. These include Word versions with colour images, Word versions with black and white images, and Word versions without images. The materials are designed so that 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
- using coloured overlays (if this is normal classroom practice)

4.2 Braille versions

You can order braille versions, if required, by contacting the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 by Friday 22 October.

² www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum-assessments-practice-materials#phonics-screening-check-resources

5 Preparing to administer the check

5.1 Administration period

Schools have flexibility to decide when they administer the check within the second half of the 2021 autumn term. Where possible, schools are encouraged to administer the check at the beginning of the second half of the autumn term. This leaves the final weeks before Christmas to administer the check to any pupils who were absent.

Pupils in the same cohort can take the check on different days. If a pupil is absent when the rest of the cohort takes the check, schools can administer the check to the pupil at any point up until the end of the 2021 autumn term. Any pupil who is absent from school for this entire period should be recorded as 'A' (absent) in the results data. This pupil would then be eligible to take the statutory check in June 2022.

Schools may not be able to administer the check to pupils as planned due to coronavirus disruption. In this instance, schools can administer the check at any point up until the end of the 2021 autumn term. If schools are unable to administer the check for the entire period, they should record these pupils as 'A' (absent) in the results data. These pupils would then be eligible to take the statutory check in June 2022.

5.2 Administering the check remotely

If pupils are unable to attend school during the second half of the autumn term, schools may choose to administer the autumn check remotely.

If schools choose to administer the check remotely, they must ensure:

- the pupils are fit and well
- the check is administered on a 1-2-1 basis by a member of staff trained in phonics
- the check materials must not be shared with the pupil's parents beforehand

This arrangement only applies to the autumn check and there is no requirement for schools to administer the check remotely and may instead record such pupils as 'A' (absent).

5.3 Check administrators

The check administrator must be trained to teach phonics and should familiarise themselves with the [training video](#)³ so the check is scored accurately and consistently. They should be known to the pupil but must not be a relative, carer or guardian.

The role requires professional judgement about which responses are correct, but there is no requirement for any teacher to undergo additional training in phonics. Year 2 teachers will already have been trained in phonics (in accordance with the existing year 2 curriculum) and can, therefore, administer the check.

The check should not be administered by a teaching assistant or a higher-level teaching assistant unless they are trained and have experience delivering phonics sessions to pupils.

5.4 Preparing rooms

Administer the check in an area that is quiet and well lit. Displays or materials that could help pupils should be removed or covered for the duration of the check. If more than one adult is administering the check to pupils at the same time, you may need an additional room to ensure pupils taking the check do not disturb or distract one another.

5.5 Access arrangements

You may need to adapt the check for some pupils. Adjustments must be based on normal classroom practice for pupils with specific needs. You do not need to request permission to make adaptations, but you should ensure that any modifications do not advantage or disadvantage pupils.

Adjustments may be appropriate for pupils:

- for whom provision is being made in school under special educational needs (SEN) support and whose learning difficulty or disability significantly affects access to the check
- with an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- with a disability (as defined in section 6(1) of the [Equality Act 2010](#)⁴) that does not give rise to a special educational need but requires alternative access arrangements

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-sample-materials-and-training-video

⁴ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/6

- 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 in the 'Available activity' section of the [Primary Assessment Gateway](https://www.primaryassessmentgateway.education.gov.uk/)⁵ from the start of the autumn term.

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. Rest breaks can be given 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.

The pupil should be kept separate from the rest of the cohort during a rest break. The check should be completed on the same day.

Cued speech

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

Visual phonics

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

⁵ <https://www.primaryassessmentgateway.education.gov.uk/>

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 themselves. You must not mark the graphemes for the pupil.

Readers

Readers are not allowed.

6 Administering the check

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

The standard check materials include a double-sided practice sheet with 4 pseudo-words and 4 real words on each side. You can use this to familiarise pupils with the 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, which 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.

6.1 Assistance

You must ensure that 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 that the word must be blended, guidance which would not be allowed during the check itself.

Pupils should be given 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 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.

6.2 Problems or queries during the check

Most pupils should be able to attempt all words in the check. However, it is important that 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. If a pupil needs frequent, lengthy rest breaks, think about stopping the check completely. When making the decision to stop, ensure that the pupil has been given a full opportunity to show what they can do. If the check is stopped before the end, you should report the pupil's score for what they have attempted.

6.3 Completing the answer sheet

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

6.4 Scoring the check

Instructions for scoring the check are included 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. When scoring the check, you should consider:

- if a pupil sounds out the phonemes but does not blend the word, they must not be prompted to do so, and this must be scored as incorrect
- pupils may elongate phonemes but if they leave gaps between phonemes and do not blend them, this must be scored as incorrect
- alternative pronunciations must be considered when deciding whether a response is correct – for real words, inappropriate grapheme-phoneme correspondences must be marked as incorrect (for example, reading ‘blow’ to rhyme with ‘cow’ would be incorrect)
- alternative pronunciations of graphemes will be allowed in pseudo-words – the scoring guidance gives some alternative pronunciations, but the list of acceptable pronunciations is not exhaustive
- a pupil’s accent should be considered when deciding whether a response is acceptable and there must be no bias for or against a pupil with a particular accent
- any pronunciation difficulties should be considered 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, this should be marked as correct – however, pupils must not be prompted to ‘have another go’ and the final attempt must be scored, even if this is incorrect and a previous attempt had been correct

7 After the check

The data collection process for the autumn check has been designed to mirror the existing summer collection process, to minimise change for schools and LAs.

7.1 Providing data to local authorities

Schools must report their pupils' autumn check results to the LA by the end of the 2021 autumn term. Schools must only include results for checks that were administered during the second half of the autumn term in accordance with this administration guidance.

Data must be submitted for all year 2 pupils who are eligible to take the check, using the following codes:

Description	What to record
Pupil took the check	Score – record in the phonics mark field
Absent including disruption caused by coronavirus	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 has left the school	L – record in the phonics outcome field
Check subject to maladministration	Q – record in the phonics outcome field

In 2017, 2018 and 2019, the threshold mark was 32. Schools and LAs do not need the threshold mark when submitting data as the system will convert the pupil's score to an outcome (whether they met the expected standard).

Management information system (MIS) suppliers have been advised of the data requirements for the autumn check. Your LA or MIS supplier, depending on local arrangements, may offer support for these systems.

Pupils who change schools

If an eligible pupil changes school:

- before the October half term – the receiving school should assess the pupil and submit data for them
- after the October half term – the receiving school should find out whether the pupil has already taken the autumn check (if not, they should assess the pupil and submit data for them)

- after taking the check, but before results have been submitted to the LA – their result should be submitted by the school where they took the check and be provided to the new school in the common transfer file (CTF)
- after results have been submitted to the LA – the previous school should have assessed the pupil, included the pupil in their data submission to the LA and provided the result to the new school in the CTF

7.2 Submitting data to DfE

LAs must [submit their schools' check results](#)⁶ to DfE using COLLECT [via DfE Sign-in](#)⁷ between 6 December 2021 and 21 January 2022.

7.3 How DfE will use data

Data from the autumn check will be used by DfE only to determine which eligible pupils have not met the expected standard in phonics by the end of the 2021 autumn term and are, therefore, expected to take the statutory check in June 2022 (alongside year 1 pupils). These aggregated results will be used to create the school-level 'expected lists' provided to LAs to help inform their monitoring of the June 2022 check. Pupil level results will be added to the National Pupil Database (NPD) as the record of the relevant pupil's phonics assessment.

Data from the autumn check will not be used in Analyse School Performance, performance tables or the Inspection Data Summary Report (IDSR). LAs will not use this data for accountability purposes. Schools should, however, use the assessment outcomes to help understanding of pupils' phonics decoding skills and to inform future teaching and support.

7.4 Reporting results to parents

Headteachers must report pupils' results to parents in their annual reports. This should include whether their child has met the expected standard to ensure they are aware of their child's progress in developing phonics decoding skills.

For year 2 pupils who take the check in autumn 2021 and June 2022, schools must report both results to parents.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/phonics-screening-check-data-collection#submit-your-data>

⁷ <https://services.signin.education.gov.uk/>

Schools can choose to report pupils' check results to parents earlier. There is no requirement to provide any interim reports and schools must still include autumn check results in pupils' annual reports.

7.5 Maintaining pupils' educational records

Schools should include the results of any phonics screening checks taken in the 2021/22 academic year in pupils' CTFs. Where a pupil takes the check in autumn 2021 and June 2022, both results should be included in the CTF.

8 Further information

8.1 General enquiries

For general enquiries about check administration and access arrangements, contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 or assessments@education.gov.uk.

For general enquiries about submitting data to DfE, LAs can use the data collections [service request form](#)⁸.

8.2 Message us

Message us forms can be found in the 'Available activity' section of the [Primary Assessment Gateway](#)⁹ from the start of the autumn term.

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

For general enquiries schools and LAs can use the 'Message us – general enquiry' form.

8.3 Maladministration

Schools must report any issue with the administration of the check, or any allegations of maladministration, by contacting the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 or assessments@education.gov.uk.

⁸ <https://form.education.gov.uk/service/Data-collections-service-request-form>

⁹ <https://www.primaryassessmentgateway.education.gov.uk/>



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