

Ph

KEY STAGE
1

YEARS
1-2

National curriculum assessments

Check administrators' guide

Phonics screening check

2014



Standards
& Testing
Agency

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2014 Check administrators' guide: Phonics screening check

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This document is available for download at www.education.gov.uk/ks1.

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1. Introduction

This 'Check administrators' guide' (CAG) has been produced by the Standards and Testing Agency (STA), an executive agency of the Department for Education (DfE). It should be read by anyone who is involved in the administration and scoring of the phonics screening check. It contains important information about what to do before, during and after the check. A copy of this document should be taken into the room where the check will be administered.

This guide must be followed to ensure the correct and consistent administration of the check for all schools. Schools which do not comply with the guidance in this document could be subject to investigations of maladministration. A full guide to the statutory requirements is available in the 2014 key stage 1 'Assessment and reporting arrangements' (ARA).

All references to academies include free schools as in law they are academies.

For the purposes of this document all references made to schools include maintained nursery schools with registered children who will reach the age of six before the end of the school year.

1.1 Changes for 2014

The phonics screening check must be administered by all maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units, as well as maintained nursery schools with registered children who will reach the age of six before the end of the school year.

Children who were not assessed at all at the end of year 1, as well as those who did not meet the standard at the end of year 1, are now included in the phonics screening check retakes policy.

The threshold mark for the phonics screening check will not be included with the check materials. Instead, the threshold mark will be available on the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/ks1 on Monday 30 June.

For 2014, schools must report children's marks for the check to their local authorities. They do not need to indicate whether children have met the standard of the check as in previous years (see section 5.5).¹

1 Schools need to report a child's mark not Wa or Wt. Amended June 2014

2. Planning for the phonics screening check

Schools should consider which teacher(s) will administer the phonics screening check, any adaptations that may be needed and where the check will be administered. Consideration must also be given to any year 2 children taking the check (see section 2.4).

2.1 What the phonics screening check looks like

The phonics screening check contains 40 words divided into two sections of 20 words. Each page contains either four pseudo-words or four real words; real words and pseudo-words will not be mixed up on a page. All letters are in lower case. An example of the check can be found in the sample materials which are available from the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/ks1.

The words in the standard version of the check will be printed on white paper and written in the font 'Sassoon Infant', font size 60. Schools may modify the materials to meet the needs of specific children, further information is provided in section 2.5.1.

Each pseudo-word will be accompanied by a picture of an imaginary creature. The picture is used to provide children with a context for the word they are being asked to decode. This means that the child is being asked to decode the type of imaginary creature so that they are not trying to match the pseudo-word to a word in their vocabulary. An example of what can be said to introduce the check is available in section 4.1.

2.2 What is included in the materials

Schools will receive one set of materials per 30 children in year 1. If schools have any year 2 children taking the check they will receive extra materials. Each set of materials will contain:

- one copy of the 'Phonics screening check: children's materials';
- 30 copies of the 'Phonics screening check: answer sheet';
- one copy of the 'Phonics screening check: practice sheet'; and
- one copy of the '2014 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance'.

The threshold mark will not be included in the guidance, it will be available on the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/ks1 on Monday 30 June.

There is no need to contact STA for additional materials. If there are not enough copies of the 'answer sheet', schools may photocopy one or download and print copies from the 'Phonics screening check' section of the NCA tools website at www.education.gov.uk/nca_tools.

2.3 Preparing phonics screening check administrators

The phonics screening check must be administered on a one-to-one basis by a teacher who is known to the child. It must not be administered by a teaching assistant, including higher level teaching assistants, because the role requires a qualified teacher's professional judgement about which responses are correct. The teacher must not be a relative or carer of the child taking the check.

STA encourages schools to hold training sessions, or attend those run by local authorities (LAs), to ensure those involved in administering the check are fully prepared.

The following materials are available on the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/ks1 and provide further support:

- 'Phonics screening check: sample materials'. This document explains how the check is constructed and what the materials will look like.
- 'Year 1 phonics screening check training video'. This includes examples of children attempting the check and provides guidance on how to score responses. Teachers should watch the video before administering the check so that they fully understand the scoring rules.
- The international phonetic alphabet.
- Guidance for schools on monitoring visits will be available on the DfE's website from April. It will outline what schools should expect during an LA monitoring visit.

For further support, contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 or email assessments@education.gov.uk.

2.4 Who should take the phonics screening check?

Children in year 1

All children in year 1 in the school year 2013 to 2014 must take the phonics screening check, unless they have no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences.

Eligible children in year 2

The following children in year 2 should also take the phonics screening check.

- Those who did not take the check in year 1 because they were absent, were working below the level of the check or had recently arrived in the country and could not speak confidently in English.
- Those who did not reach the expected standard in year 1.
- Those who entered the schooling system in year 2.

If children in year 2 still have no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences or are unable to access the materials, schools do not have to administer the check to these children.

If a child joins a school in year 2, the common transfer file should include information about whether the child reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check in year 1. If this information is not provided, the school should either contact its LA or use the Key to Success website at www.keytosuccess.education.gov.uk/schools to search for the child by their Unique Pupil Number. Children who do not need to take the check again will be indicated by a phonics outcome of 'Wa' (child took the phonics screening check and met the expected standard). If schools are unable to establish whether the child took the check in year 1, the child should take the check in year 2.

The check must be administered to year 2 children during the week commencing 16 June and in the same way as to year 1 children.

Eligible children in maintained nursery schools

Children who will reach the age of 6 before the end of the school year in maintained nursery schools must take the phonics screening check.

Children who move schools

If a child arrives at a school just before or during phonics screening check week they should still attempt the check, unless they have no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences.

Children working below the level of the phonics screening check

If a child has shown no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, the headteacher may decide that the child should not participate in the phonics screening check.

Children for whom English is an additional language

Children who have limited fluency in English, or who have recently moved to the country and are unable to understand letters and sounds in English, must not take the phonics screening check. However, any children who do not take the check in year 1 must be reconsidered the following year.

Children who use British sign language (BSL)

Some children who use BSL or other sign-supported communication to spell out individual letters are not using phonics in the sense of linking letters and sounds. Headteachers should consider if it is appropriate for these children to take the phonics screening check.

Children who are selectively mute

Children who are selectively mute will be unable to participate in the phonics screening check if they do not give verbal responses in school. They may be able to identify the words in the check but will not be able to demonstrate that knowledge by speaking the answers out loud.

Children who are selectively mute may instead informally demonstrate their knowledge at home with a family member who can discuss the outcome with the teacher. This arrangement will ensure the child has had a similar experience to their peers and give them an opportunity to show their knowledge. In order to avoid potential security issues regarding the check materials, this arrangement can only take place after the end of the check period on Friday 27 June (the last date a child may take the check).

For reporting purposes, the child should be recorded as 'D' (child did not take the phonics screening check) as the results cannot be validated.

2.4.1 Children that do not participate in the phonics screening check

The headteacher may decide it is not appropriate for a child to participate in the phonics screening check (see section 2.4).

The child should be recorded as 'D' (child did not take the phonics screening check) when reporting results to the LA (see section 5.5). Any year 1 children who do not take the check in 2014 should be reconsidered for the check in 2015.

If the headteacher decides that the child should not take the check, they should explain this to the child's parents. The headteacher's decision regarding participation is final.

You may want to provide a similar check experience for children who will not formally participate in the check in 2014. You could do this by modifying the 'practice sheet' to include only single letters or simple two letter blends so children can demonstrate the skills they have learnt. The 'practice sheet' and live phonics screening check will be available on the 'Phonics screening check' section of the NCA tools website at www.education.gov.uk/ncatools on Monday 16 June.

If a child is unable to access the check it is important that teachers are aware of that child's progress in phonics so they can plan the next steps in their teaching.

2.5 Adapting the phonics screening check

You may need to adapt the phonics screening check for some children. Adjustments may be made based primarily on normal classroom practice for children with specific needs. You do not need to request permission from STA to make adaptations, however you must ensure that any adaptations made neither advantage nor disadvantage individual children.

It may be helpful to use the 'practice sheet' with children before administering the check. This will enable teachers to identify where it may be appropriate to adapt the materials, for example changing the font or font size.

Those who may need adjustments include children:

- with a statement of SEN as described in the SEN Code of Practice (DCSF reference 581/2001) available to download at www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213170/special-educational-needs-code-of-practice;
- with a local agreement such as an individual pupil resourcing agreement (IPRA);
- for whom provision is being made in school under School Action or School Action Plus of the SEN code of practice and whose learning difficulty or disability significantly affects access to the check;
- with a disability that does not give rise to a special educational need but requires alternative access arrangements; or
- 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 of the circumstances in which children may need adaptations. You should contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 for information on specific situations not covered by this document.

2.5.1 Examples of adaptations to the phonics screening check

School-based modifications to the phonics screening check materials

The following versions of the check will be available to download from the 'Phonics screening check' section of the NCA tools website at www.education.gov.uk/ncatools from Monday 16 June.

- A PDF of the standard materials that can also be used for printing onto different coloured paper.
- Word versions of the standard materials with colour pictures, black and white pictures, and no pictures.
- A PDF of the 'Phonics screening check: practice sheet' that can also be used for printing onto different coloured paper.
- Word versions of the 'Phonics screening check: practice sheet' with colour pictures, black and white pictures, and no pictures.
- A PDF of the 'Phonics screening check: answer sheet'.
- A PDF of the '2014 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance'.

These materials are designed to be modified by teachers to meet the needs of individual children and their own approach to teaching phonics. Examples of modifications include:

- changing the font;
- changing the font size;
- having fewer words per page; or
- removing the imaginary creatures for any children that might find them distracting.

The online versions are also provided if teachers need to print additional materials.

Braille versions of the phonics screening check

Braille versions of the check are available on request. They will be provided in grade 1 Braille without pictures of imaginary creatures. Schools can order Braille versions by contacting STA's modified test helpline on 0300 303 3019. To comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, these requests must not be sent by email.

Braille orders placed by Monday 12 May will be delivered to schools by Friday 13 June. If a child is identified as needing Braille materials after 12 May, you should telephone STA's modified test helpline.

Rephrasing instructions

The phonics screening check has a standard introduction. However, if a child is likely to be confused by this, schools may choose to develop their own. The instructions may refer to the practice words but must not refer to the words within the actual check.

Rest breaks

The phonics screening check usually takes between four and nine minutes for each child. However there is no time limit and children should be given enough time to respond to each word. If teachers believe a child will find it difficult to concentrate or may experience fatigue during the check, they may use rest breaks to make it more manageable. Children should be isolated from the rest of the cohort during a rest break and the check must be completed on the same day. Rest breaks may be taken when needed and teachers should consider when would be most appropriate to take them. If rest breaks are likely to be required more frequently than between the two sections or at the end of a page, it is recommended that materials are modified so there are fewer words on each page.

Use of coloured overlays

Schools may use a coloured overlay if this is normal classroom practice.

Use of cued speech

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

Use of visual phonics

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

Use of 'sound buttons'

If a child uses 'sound buttons' to help them decode words as part of normal classroom practice they may use them during the administration of the check. The child must be provided with a clean copy of the check so that they can mark the sound buttons against the graphemes themselves. You must not mark the graphemes for the child.

Use of readers

The use of readers is not allowed.

2.6 Preparing the room

The phonics screening check should be administered in a room which is quiet and provides a comfortable, well lit space for the child. Rooms must be prepared before children are admitted. Displays or materials that could help children in the check must be removed or covered for the duration of the check. More than one room will be needed if the check will be administered to more than one child at the same time.

3. Receiving and storing phonics screening check materials

3.1 Security of phonics screening check materials

It is the headteacher's duty to ensure that the phonics screening check materials, in particular the 'Phonics screening check: children's materials' and '2014 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance', are kept secure at all times. It is important that the security of the check materials is maintained until the end of the check period on Friday 27 June (the last date a child may take the check). This ensures the confidentiality and integrity of the check is maintained so that no child has an unfair advantage over another.

Those with access to the check materials must not share the check words with anyone not directly involved with the administration of the check. This includes other staff at the school or other schools, any on-line forums and family members.

If you suspect a breach of security regarding the check materials, the incident must be reported immediately to the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013. STA will then investigate the incident and take action where appropriate.

3.2 Deliveries of phonics screening check materials

Phonics screening check materials will be delivered to schools by Friday 13 June.

If you have not received your check materials by midday on Friday 13 June you should contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013. Service Children's Education (SCE) schools can contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on +44 161 288 8482.

When you receive the materials you should open the outer packaging and check the number of packs against the delivery note. This should be witnessed by a second member of staff. Keep the signed and annotated delivery note in an accessible place as it will be requested if you receive a monitoring visit. The inner packs must be left unopened and stored securely until Monday 16 June.

If the delivery is found to be incomplete, or if any of the packs are unsealed or damaged on arrival you must report this immediately to the national curriculum assessments helpline. You may be asked to send a photograph of the damaged packages.

The following advice will help to ensure the check materials are kept securely:

- Check the materials against the delivery note. Sign and annotate the delivery note to indicate how many packs you have received and place them back into their original boxes. Reseal the boxes and store in a secure, locked location.
- Keep the annotated copy of the delivery note in an accessible place in case your school receives a monitoring visit.
- Conduct regular checks of the materials to ensure they have not been tampered with.
- Ensure individual packs of check materials are not opened until the week commencing Monday 16 June.
- Ensure anyone handling the check materials understands their sensitivity.
- Ensure the check materials are stored securely when not in use.

4. Administering the phonics screening check

The phonics screening check can be administered on any day during the week commencing Monday 16 June. It must be administered by a qualified teacher on a one-to-one basis.

If a child is absent during the check week, the school can administer the check up to Friday 27 June. Any child who is absent from school for this entire period should be recorded as absent when submitting the results data for the check. Children must only attempt the phonics screening check once during the check window.

It is important that the security of the check materials is maintained until the check period ends on Friday 27 June. This ensures the confidentiality and integrity of the check is maintained so that no child has an unfair advantage over another.

4.1 At the beginning of the phonics screening check

Teachers should introduce the phonics screening check as consistently as possible, bearing in mind some children may require more explanation in order to understand the task.

The check materials include a double-sided 'practice sheet' with four pseudo-words and four real words on each side. This can be used to familiarise children with the task. If a child is struggling to decode the words on the 'practice sheet' you should stop the check and discuss with your headteacher whether the child should participate in the check (see section 2.4.1).

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

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 don't worry if you can't. 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 out loud these four words which you should have come across before [at, in, beg and 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 and ect]?
- Ok, now we are going to start reading out the words in this booklet and I'm going to write down what you say on my sheet.

- In this booklet there are four 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 child whether they are real words or types of imaginary creatures on each page.

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, pointing from left to right or hovering over letters.

4.2 Scoring the phonics screening check

You should score the phonics screening check as the child works through each word in order. For each word, you should make a record on the 'answer sheet' of whether the child said the word correctly or not, considering the following points:

- Children may choose to sound out phonemes before blending. If a child sounds out the phonemes but does not blend the word, they must not be prompted to do so. This must be scored as incorrect.
- Children may elongate phonemes as long as they are blended to form the word. However, if children 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 incorrect (for example, reading 'blow' to rhyme with 'cow' would be incorrect). However, alternative pronunciations of graphemes will be allowed in pseudo-words. Some alternative pronunciations may be found in the phonemic representation column in the scoring guidance document although the pronunciations listed may not form a conclusive list.
- A child's accent should be taken into account when deciding whether a response is acceptable. There must be no bias for or against children with a particular accent.
- Any pronunciation difficulties for a child should be taken into account when deciding whether a response is acceptable (for example, a child who is unable to form the 'th' sound and instead usually says 'fw' should have this scored as correct).
- If a child shows their ability to decode by correcting an incorrect attempt, this should be marked as correct. However, children must not be prompted to 'have another go'. If a child makes several attempts at a word the final attempt must be scored, even if this is incorrect and a previous attempt had been correct.
- You should not indicate whether a child has decoded a word correctly or incorrectly during the administration of the check, but you may offer encouragement or support to ensure the child remains focused on the task.
- Children should be given as long as necessary to respond to a word, although in most cases 10 seconds should be sufficient. You should decide when it is appropriate to tell the child to move onto the next word, taking care not to try to move the child on if they are still trying to decode the word.

For more guidance on how to score the check, watch the 'Year 1 phonics screening check training video' available on the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/ks1.

The '2014 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance' gives detailed guidance on acceptable pronunciations of the check's pseudo-words. It provides two explanations of how words are pronounced. For example:

blan This uses the 'bl' from 'black' and rhymes with 'pan' /blæn/

The '2014 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance' will be sent to schools with the check materials in June. It must not be opened until Monday 16 June when it will also be available from the 'Phonics screening check' section of the NCA tools website at www.education.gov.uk/ncatools. The threshold mark will not be included in the guidance. It will be available on the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/ks1 on Monday 30 June.

4.3 Completing the 'Phonics screening check: answer sheet'

You should use the 'answer sheets' to record each child's responses during the check to ensure you have an accurate record of how many words a child read correctly. You can also use them to record your own comments, for example any graphemes a child did not recognise or when blending was difficult. This may help when planning future phonics teaching.

A sample 'answer sheet' can be found within the sample materials, available from the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/ks1.

4.4 Dealing with queries and issues during the phonics screening check

You must ensure that nothing you say or do during the phonics screening check could be interpreted as giving children an advantage. For further help and guidance, contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013.

Most children should be able to attempt all words in the check. However, it is important that children should not become distressed or have a negative experience during the check.

If a child is struggling with the check, you should give careful consideration to stopping it before the end.

Similarly, if a child is showing signs of fatigue, you should consider using a rest break. If a child requires frequent lengthy rest breaks, think about stopping the check completely.

If the check is stopped before the end, the child's score must be reported to your LA.²

2 Schools should submit the child's score to the local authority. Amended May 2014.

5. After the phonics screening check

5.1 Storing the 'Phonics screening check: answer sheets' and check materials

The 'answer sheets' must be stored securely, ensuring they are accessible for any monitoring visits.

The other phonics screening check materials must be securely stored until the end of the check period on Friday 27 June so that the integrity of the check is maintained (see section 3.1).

5.2 Completing the headteacher's declaration form

Headteachers must ensure that their school complies with all aspects of the key stage 1 ARA. Headteachers must complete and submit the headteacher's declaration form to confirm that their school has administered the check according to the published guidance. It must be completed by the headteacher, or another authorised senior member of staff, after the last check has been administered. Submission of the form confirms the check has been administered in accordance with the statutory requirements set out in the key stage 1 ARA and that the security and confidentiality of the check has been maintained.

The headteacher's declaration form will be available from the 'Phonics screening check' section of the NCA tools website at www.education.gov.uk/ncatools from Monday 16 June. It must be submitted by Friday 27 June.

It is important that the headteacher is fully briefed about any incidents that arise during the check. Any incident that may affect the integrity, security or confidentiality of the check must be reported to STA.

If for any reason the headteacher, or other authorised senior member of staff, cannot complete the headteacher's declaration form they should notify the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013.

5.2.1 What to do if all children are working below the level of the phonics screening check

The headteacher must submit the headteacher's declaration form to confirm that all children are working below the level of the phonics screening check and that the materials were stored securely throughout the check period.

5.3 Establishing results and informing parents

The 2014 'Phonics screening check: scoring guidance' will be included with the check materials, and will be available to download from the 'Phonics screening check' section of the NCA tools website at www.education.gov.uk/ncatools from Monday 16 June. Teachers should check each child's score against the threshold mark available on the DfE's website www.education.gov.uk/ks1 after Monday 30 June to establish whether they have achieved the expected standard.

Teachers must report to parents whether or not their child has met the expected standard to ensure they are aware of their child's progress in developing phonics skills. This must be done by the end of the summer term at the latest. You can choose how to communicate results to parents. You may wish to include additional information, for example any extra support the school is putting in place for their child or how parents can help their child progress with phonics and reading at home. A template for reporting results to parents can be downloaded from the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/ks1.

5.4 What to do if a child does not meet the expected standard

If a child does not meet the expected standard, the school should remind and reassure the child's parents that the phonics screening check is used to provide an indication of whether or not their child is meeting the expected standard of phonics decoding. The school should outline the support that will be put in place to help the child progress.

The DfE has published guidance on the action schools should take if a child does not meet the expected standard. 'Phonics screening check - responding to the results' is available from the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/pedagogy/a00210354/phonics-screening-check.

Children who have not met the expected standard in the check at the end of year 1 must be considered for a retake in June 2015. If children have not reached the standard in year 2, it will not be necessary for them to retake the check in year 3 or beyond. However schools will be expected to maintain the programme of support for these children.

5.5 Providing results data to local authorities

All schools, including academies, must report pupil-level phonics screening check results to their LAs. Results must be submitted for all children in year 1 and year 2 that are eligible to take the check.

Report an outcome code if a child:

- is absent (A);
- did not take the check (D); or
- has left the school (L).

In all other cases, the marks obtained in the phonics screening check must be submitted.³

LAs will provide details of how schools should provide data to them and the deadline date. Management information system suppliers have been advised of the data requirements for the check. Support for these systems is often offered through an LA or through the supplier, depending upon local arrangements.

If a child moves school after taking the check, their results should be submitted by the school in which they took the check and provided to the next school via the common transfer file.

LAs will submit check results data to the DfE between Monday 16 June and Thursday 31 July⁴. Data received by the DfE after Thursday 31 July will not be included in the provisional statistics or initial release of RAISEonline data.

3 Schools need to report a child's mark or outcome code A, D or L. Amended May 2014.

4 Schools and local authorities do not need to wait until the threshold is published before submitting their data. Amended February 2014.



About this publication

Who is it for?

This guidance is for headteachers and teachers who will administer the phonics screening check. It is also sent to local authorities.

What does it cover?

- How to prepare for the check.
- Receiving and storing check materials.
- How to administer the check.
- How to complete the headteacher's declaration form.
- What to do with results from the check.

Related information

Visit the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/ks1 to access all related information.

For more copies

Additional printed copies of the 'Check administrators' guide' are not available. It can be downloaded from the DfE's website at www.education.gov.uk/ks1.