



Standards
& Testing
Agency

Phonics screening check: administration guidance

April 2017

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Section 1: Introduction

This guidance is for schools administering the 2017 phonics screening check. The information builds on section 7 of the [2017 KS1 assessment and reporting arrangements](#)¹ (ARA).

This guidance is for:

- school leaders, school staff and governing bodies in all maintained schools, academies and free schools
- local authorities

The phonics screening check should be administered during the week beginning Monday 12 June. If a pupil is absent they can take the check until Friday 23 June. Pupils must only attempt the check once during the check window. If a pupil doesn't take the check during this period, and returns to school after Friday 23 June, they must be recorded as absent.

There are no changes to the way the check should be administered in 2017.

Instructions for scoring the phonics screening check will be included with the check materials. We will send these to schools between Monday 5 June and Friday 9 June.

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/2017-key-stage-1-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara

Section 2: Headteachers' responsibilities

Headteachers at maintained schools and academies must:

- identify which pupils should take the check
- consider whether any pupils will need braille versions of the check and order them from the modified test agency on 0300 303 3019 by Friday 5 May
- consider whether any pupils will need modified versions of the check (excluding braille) and download them from [NCA tools](#)² during the check period
- [keep check materials secure](#)³ and treat them as confidential until Monday 26 June
- ensure the check is administered once to each pupil within the check window
- ensure the check is administered by a member of staff who is trained in phonics and known to the pupil
- ensure all check administrators are appropriately trained to administer and score the check
- ensure pupils' responses are scored accurately and consistently
- ensure that any pupils who didn't meet the standard of the check continue to receive support in phonics
- report any incident which affects the integrity, security or confidentiality of the check to STA
- comply with national data submission requirements by submitting check results to the local authority (LA)
- complete and submit the headteacher's declaration form on NCA tools by Thursday 29 June

2.1 Check administrators

The check must be administered on a one-to-one basis by a member of staff who is trained in phonics and known to the pupil. The role requires professional judgement about which responses are correct. The check should not be administered by a teaching assistant or higher level teaching assistant unless they are trained in phonics. The check administrator must not be a relative or carer of the pupil taking the check.

² <https://ncatools.education.gov.uk>

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-and-phonics-screening-check-keep-materials-secure

It may be helpful for you to hold training sessions, or attend those run by LAs, to ensure those involved in administering the check are fully prepared.

Check administrators must be familiar with this document. It contains important information about what to do before, during and after the check. They must also be familiar with:

- [practice materials](#)⁴ which show how the check is constructed and what the materials will look like
- a [training video](#)⁵ which includes examples of pupils attempting the check and provides guidance on how to score responses

2.2 Maladministration

If your school doesn't comply with this check administration guidance, it could be subject to [allegations of maladministration](#). The guidance also includes:

- [2017 KS1 assessment and reporting arrangements](#)⁶ (ARA)
- printed information provided with the check materials

Maladministration investigations can lead to changes to, or annulment of, results for a whole cohort, groups of pupils or individual pupils.

Allegations of maladministration can come from misunderstandings about correct check administration. To help avoid this, make sure all staff, pupils and parents understand how and when the check will be administered.

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.

2.3 Security

All check materials, including the pupils' materials and the scoring guidance, must be kept secure from the point they are received in school until Monday 26 June. This ensures the confidentiality and integrity of the check, so that no pupil has an unfair advantage over another.

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum-assessments-practice-materials

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-sample-materials-and-training-video

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/publications/2017-key-stage-1-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara

You must make sure that everyone who has access to check materials follows the guidance on [keeping materials secure](#)⁷. The check words must not be shared with anyone who is not directly involved with the administration of the check. This includes other staff at your school or other schools, any online forums, social media or family members.

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

2.4 Headteacher's declaration form

You must complete and submit the headteacher's declaration form after your school has completed the check. You must still complete the form if your pupils are below the standard of the check.

The form confirms that either:

- your school has administered the check according to the published guidance, or
- the statements in the form can't be confirmed and you've reported any issues to STA

You, or a delegated senior member of staff, must complete and submit the online form after the last check has been administered.

The form will be available in the 'Headteacher's declaration forms' section of NCA tools from Monday 12 June, and must be submitted by Thursday 29 June.

If you, or an authorised senior member of staff, can't complete the headteacher's declaration form or need help completing it, you should notify the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013. You can't amend the form after submission.

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-and-phonics-screening-check-keep-materials-secure

Section 3: Participating pupils

All pupils in year 1 must take the check, unless they have no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences.

Pupils in year 2 who fall into the following categories should also take the check:

- pupils who didn't take the check in year 1 because they were absent, were working below the standard of the check or had recently arrived in the country and couldn't speak confidently in English
- any pupil who didn't reach the expected standard in year 1
- any pupil who entered the schooling system in year 2

If a pupil joins a school in year 2, the common transfer file should include information about whether the pupil reached the expected standard in year 1. If this information isn't provided, you should contact your LA or use [Key to Success](#)⁸ to search for the pupil by their unique pupil number (UPN).

For reporting purposes, pupils who don't need to take the check again will be indicated by a phonics outcome of 'Wa' (pupil took the check and met the expected standard). If you can't establish whether the pupil took the check in year 1, the pupil should take the check in year 2.

The check must be administered to year 2 pupils during the week beginning 12 June and in the same way as to year 1 pupils.

If pupils in year 2 still don't understand grapheme-phoneme correspondences, or are unable to access the materials, you don't have to administer the check to them.

3.1 Eligible pupils in maintained nursery schools

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

⁸ www.keytosuccess.education.gov.uk

3.2 Pupils who move schools

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

3.3 Pupils who shouldn't take the check

Headteachers may decide it isn't appropriate for a pupil to participate in the check. Where this is the case, you should explain this to the pupil's parents. If appropriate, you should provide the parents with documentary evidence to support your decision. 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. The 'practice sheet' and 2017 phonics screening check will be available in the 'Test materials' section of NCA tools from Monday 12 June.

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

Any pupils who don't take the check in year 1 must be reconsidered the following year.

3.4 Pupils working below the standard

If a pupil has shown no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, you may decide that the pupil should not participate in the check.

3.5 Pupils for whom English is an additional language

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

3.6 Pupils who use British Sign Language

Pupils who use British Sign Language (BSL), or other sign-supported communication to spell out individual letters, are not using phonics in the sense of linking letters and sounds. You should consider if it is appropriate for these pupils to take the check.

3.7 Pupils who are selectively mute

Pupils who are selectively mute are unable to participate in the check if they don't 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 aloud.

Pupils who are selectively mute 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.

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

Section 4: Preparing for the check

4.1 Receiving your materials

Schools do not need to order standard versions of the phonics screening check. Materials are sent to schools based on the year 1 autumn census. You will receive one set of materials per 30 pupils in year 1. If you have any year 2 pupils taking the check you will be provided with sufficient materials to administer the check to these pupils. Each set of materials will contain:

- one copy of the 'Phonics screening check: pupils' materials'
- one pad containing 30 copies of the 'Phonics screening check: answer sheet'
- one copy of the 'Phonics screening check: practice sheet'
- one copy of the '2017 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance'

You can download [practice materials](#)⁹ to see what the check looks like.

The threshold mark will be available on [GOV.UK](#)¹⁰ from Monday 26 June.

We will deliver check materials between Monday 5 June and Friday 9 June. If your school will be closed during this week, and you haven't already entered your school's holiday dates on NCA tools or contacted us to arrange an alternative delivery date, please notify the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013.

If you haven't received your check materials by midday on Friday 9 June, you should contact the helpline.

4.2 Security of materials

Headteachers are responsible for ensuring that the integrity of the check is maintained until Monday 26 June. This ensures the confidentiality and integrity of the check is maintained so that no pupil has an unfair advantage over another.

Headteachers must follow the guidance on [keeping materials secure](#)¹¹ and treat them as confidential from the point the school receives them until Monday 26 June.

⁹ www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum-assessments-practice-materials

¹⁰ www.gov.uk/sta

¹¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-and-phonics-screening-check-keep-materials-secure

Check packs must not be opened before Monday 12 June. They should only be opened when the check is going to be administered for the first time. After administering the check, schools must make sure the materials are stored securely until Monday 26 June.

To maintain the integrity of the check, check administrators must not discuss the content with anyone or use the check words to prepare pupils. In particular, they mustn't discuss specific content that could compromise the check on social media or publish it in blogs. Any school behaviour that leads to check materials being shared before Monday 26 June may lead to a [maladministration investigation](#)¹².

Check administrators 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 online forums, social media and family members.

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

4.3 Storing materials

When you receive your materials, you should open the box and check the number of packs against the delivery note. Make sure a second member of staff witnesses this. Leave the inner packs unopened and store your delivery securely until Monday 12 June.

Keep the annotated delivery note in a secure, accessible place as it will be requested if you receive a monitoring visit.

If the delivery is incomplete, or if any of the packs are unsealed or damaged on arrival, you must report this immediately to the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013. We may ask you to send a photograph of the damaged packages.

You should only open check packs when the check is going to be administered for the first time.

Make sure that the completed answer sheets are stored securely after the check, and are accessible for any monitoring visits. All unused check materials must also be stored securely until Monday 26 June.

¹² www.gov.uk/guidance/key-stage-1-and-2-school-visits-following-an-allegation-of-maladministration

4.4 Additional materials

There is no need to contact us for additional materials. If you need more copies of the 'answer sheet', you may photocopy it or download and print copies from the 'Test materials' section of [NCA tools](https://ncatools.education.gov.uk)¹³ from Monday 12 June.

4.5 Preparing rooms

Administer the check in a room that is quiet and provides a comfortable, well-lit space. Rooms should be prepared before pupils are admitted.

Displays or materials that could help pupils must be removed or covered for the duration of the check. If you're administering the check to more than one pupil at the same time, you may need more than one room.

¹³ <https://ncatools.education.gov.uk>

Section 5: Arrangements for pupils with specific needs

Your school may need to adapt the check for some pupils. Adjustments must be based on normal classroom practice for pupils with specific needs. You don't need to request our permission to make adaptations, but you must ensure that any modifications don't advantage or disadvantage individual pupils.

It may be helpful to use the 'practice sheet' with pupils before administering the check. This will enable you to identify where it may be appropriate to provide a pupil with a rest break by splitting the check into parts, or to adapt the materials such as changing the font or font size.

Those who may need adjustments include pupils:

- with a statement of SEN as described in the [SEND Code of Practice](#)¹⁴
- for whom provision is being made in school under SEN support and whose learning difficulty or disability significantly affects access to the check
- with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) or SEND support plan
- with a disability that doesn't 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 of the circumstances in which pupils may need adaptations. You should contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 if you need advice on specific situations.

5.1 Adapting check materials

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

The following versions of the check will be available to download from the 'Test materials' section of NCA tools from Monday 12 June:

- PDF version of the standard materials that can also be used for printing onto different coloured paper

¹⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

- Word versions of the standard materials with colour pictures, black and white pictures, and no pictures
- PDF version 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
- PDF version of the 'Phonics screening check: answer sheet'
- PDF version of the '2017 Phonics screening check: scoring guidance'

They are designed so that schools can modify them to meet the needs of individual pupils and their own approach to teaching phonics. They are also provided in case you need to print additional materials. Examples of modifications may include:

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

Coloured overlays

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

Rephrase instructions

The check has a standard introduction. However, if a pupil is likely to be confused by this wording, you may develop your own. The instructions may refer to the practice words but must not refer to words within the actual check.

5.2 Access arrangements

Rest breaks

The check is not strictly timed, but we expect each pupil to take between 4 and 9 minutes to complete it. 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 must be kept isolated from the rest of the cohort during a rest break. The check must 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 cued speech 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.

‘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

The use of readers is not allowed.

5.3 Braille versions

Braille versions of the check are available on request. They are provided in grade 1 Unified English braille (UEB) without pictures of imaginary creatures.

You can order braille versions by contacting STA’s modified test agency on 0300 303 3019. Braille orders placed by Friday 5 May will be delivered to schools by Friday 9 June. If a pupil is identified as needing braille materials after Friday 5 May, you should telephone STA’s modified test agency.

5.4 Pupil absence during test week

If a pupil is absent during the check week, you can administer the check up to Friday 23 June. Any pupil who is absent from school for this entire period should be recorded as absent in the results data.

Section 6: Check administrators' responsibilities

The check must be administered on a one-to-one basis by a member of staff who is trained in phonics and known to the pupil. The role requires professional judgement about which responses are correct. The check should not be administered by a teaching assistant or higher level teaching assistant unless they are trained in phonics. The check administrator must not be a relative or carer of the pupil taking the check.

If you are a check administrator you should prepare by familiarising yourself with this check administration guidance, and also with:

- how to [keep check materials secure](#)
- printed instructions for administering the check
- how to score pupils' responses

Your headteacher is responsible for arranging training to make sure you are ready for the check. They should also ensure you have read this guidance and viewed the [training video](#)¹⁵. As a result, you should understand and feel confident about:

- administering and scoring the check
- adapting check materials if you have pupils with specific needs
- dealing with issues which may occur while you're administering the check

¹⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-sample-materials-and-training-video

Section 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.

The 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 the check and discuss with your headteacher whether that pupil should participate in the check.

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 wouldn't 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 these 4 words aloud 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 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.

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. Avoid, for example, pointing from left to right or hovering over letters.

7.1 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 didn't recognise or when blending was difficult. This may help you plan future phonics teaching.

If you're not familiar with the answer sheets, you can download [practice materials](#)¹⁶.

7.2 Scoring the phonics screening check

The scoring guidance will be sent to schools with the check materials. It should not be opened until Monday 12 June. Check materials will also be available from the 'Test materials' section of NCA tools from Monday 12 June.

The scoring guidance details acceptable pronunciations of the check's pseudo-words. It provides 2 explanations of how words are pronounced. For example: 'blan' uses the 'bl' from 'black' and rhymes with 'pan' /blæn/.

The threshold mark will not be included in the guidance. It will be available on [GOV.UK](#)¹⁷ from Monday 26 June. Schools do not need to wait until the threshold mark is published before submitting data to the LA.

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, considering the following points.

- If a pupil sounds out the phonemes but doesn't blend the word, they must not be prompted to do so and this must be scored as incorrect.

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

¹⁷ www.gov.uk/sta

- Pupils may elongate phonemes but if they leave gaps between phonemes and don't 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). However, 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 taken into account when deciding whether a response is acceptable but there must be no bias for or against pupils with a particular accent.
- Any pronunciation difficulties should be taken into account when deciding whether a response is acceptable. For example, a pupil unable to form the 'th' sound who instead usually says 'fw' should have this scored as correct.
- If a pupil shows their ability to decode by correcting 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.

You should not indicate whether a pupil has decoded a word correctly or not during the check but you may offer encouragement or support.

Pupils should be given as long as necessary to respond to a word, although in most cases 10 seconds should be enough.

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.

7.3 Problems or queries during the check

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

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

If a pupil is struggling with the check, you should consider stopping it 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.

For further help and guidance, contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013.

Section 8: Results and reporting

The threshold mark will be available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)¹⁸ from Monday 26 June. Check administrators should compare each pupil's score against the threshold to establish whether they have achieved the expected standard.

8.1 Pupils who don't meet the expected standard

The Department for Education (DfE) has published [guidance](#)¹⁹ on what schools should do if a pupil doesn't meet the expected standard.

Pupils who haven't met the expected standard at the end of year 1 must be considered for a retake in June 2018. Schools are expected to maintain a programme of support for these pupils.

8.2 Providing results data to local authorities

All schools, including academies, must report pupil-level check results to their LA. Results must be submitted for all pupils in year 1, and any in year 2 that are eligible to take the check, using the following codes:

| Description | What to record |
|---|--|
| Pupil took the phonics screening check and met the expected standard | Score – record in the phonics mark field |
| Pupil took the phonics screening 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 inappropriate 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 |

¹⁸ www.gov.uk/sta

¹⁹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-responding-to-the-results

Your LA will tell you how to submit your data and by when. Management information system (MIS) suppliers have been advised of the data requirements for the check. Support for these systems may be offered by your LA or MIS supplier, depending on local arrangements.

If a pupil moves schools after taking the check, their result should be:

- submitted by the school in which they took the check
- provided to the next school in the common transfer file

LAs should submit check results data to DfE by the end of the summer term.

Data received by DfE after Friday 28 July will not be included in the provisional statistics or initial release of data from the RAISEonline replacement.

8.3 Reporting results to parents

By the end of the summer term, you must report the pupil's score to parents. 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 skills. You can choose how to communicate results to parents.

If a pupil hasn't met the expected standard, you should outline the support that will be put in place to help the pupil progress.

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