



Standards  
& Testing  
Agency

# **Administering the phonics screening check to year 2 pupils in the 2020 autumn term**

**September 2020**

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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 2020 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 2020 means incoming year 2 pupils did not take the check in year 1. In the 2020/21 academic year only, 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 2020 autumn term and return results to the LA.

Year 2 pupils who meet the expected standard in phonics in the 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 autumn check will be expected to take the statutory check in June 2021, alongside year 1 pupils.

Year 3 pupils, who were due to take the statutory check in June 2020 (when they were in year 2), are not formally 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 the LA.

## 1.2 Important dates

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
Friday 23 October	Schools should order braille versions of the 2017, 2018 or 2019 phonics screening check, if required.
Second half of the 2020 autumn term	Schools must administer a past version of the phonics screening check to year 2 pupils.
By the end of the 2020 autumn term	Schools must submit phonics results for their year 2 pupils to the LA.
22 January 2021	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 23 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 2020 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 autumn check continue to receive support in phonics, and take the statutory check in June 2021 (alongside year 1 pupils)
- submit check results to the LA for all eligible pupils by the end of the 2020 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 2021 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](#)<sup>1</sup> to collect results from schools, quality assure and submit data to DfE for checks administered in the 2020 autumn term

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

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/guidance/phonics-screening-check-data-collection](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/phonics-screening-check-data-collection)

## **3 Participating pupils**

### **3.1 Pupils who should take the check**

With some exceptions (see section 3.2), all pupils who will reach the age of 7 by the end of the 2020/21 academic year must take the check in the autumn 2020 term (most pupils will be in year 2).

### **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](#)<sup>2</sup> 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 download modified check materials from GOV.UK. This includes 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.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum-assessments-practice-materials#phonics-screening-check-resources](http://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 2020 autumn term (between the October half term and Christmas).

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 2020 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 2021.

### 5.2 Check administrators

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

Check administrators should familiarise themselves with the [training video](#)<sup>3</sup> to understand how to score the check consistently.

### 5.3 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.

### 5.4 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

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<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-sample-materials-and-training-video](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-sample-materials-and-training-video)



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](#)<sup>4</sup>) that does not give rise to a special educational need but requires alternative access arrangements
- who are unable to sit and work for a sustained period because of a disability or behavioural, emotional or social difficulty

It is not possible to list all the circumstances in which pupils may need adaptations. If you need to discuss access arrangements to meet a pupil's specific needs, you should use 'Message us' in the 'Available activity' section of the Primary Assessment Gateway. For general enquiries you should contact the national curriculum assessments helpline.

## 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

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<sup>4</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/6](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/6)

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**

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' check results to the LA by the end of the 2020 autumn term. 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	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 – 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)
- during the Christmas holiday – the previous school should have assessed the pupil and should include the pupil in their data submission to the LA

## 7.2 Submitting data to DfE

LAs must submit their schools' check results to DfE using [COLLECT](#)<sup>5</sup> between 7 December 2020 and 22 January 2021.

## 7.3 How DfE will use data

Data from the autumn check will be used by DfE to determine which eligible pupils have not met the expected standard in phonics by the end of the 2020 autumn term, and are therefore expected to take the statutory check in June 2021 (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 2021 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 added to Analyse School Performance or reported in national statistics, but schools should use the assessment outcomes to help inform their own teaching and support to pupils.

## 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 2020 and June 2021, schools must report both results to parents.

## 7.5 Maintaining pupils' educational records

Schools should include the results of any phonics screening checks taken in the 2020/21 academic year in pupils' CTFs. Where a pupil takes the check in autumn 2020 and June 2021, both results should be included in the CTF.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://sa.education.gov.uk>

## **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](mailto:assessments@education.gov.uk).

### **8.2 Message us**

For queries relating to access arrangements to meet a pupil's specific needs, schools can 'Message us' in the 'Available activity' section of the Primary Assessment Gateway.

### **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](mailto:assessments@education.gov.uk).





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