Phonics screening check: information for parents

Standards & Testing Agency

Phonics screening check

Do you have a child in year 1 at primary school?

If so, your child will take part in the phonics screening check in June.

The purpose of the phonics screening check is to confirm that all children have learned phonic decoding to an age appropriate standard.

With some exceptions, all pupils who have reached the age of 6 by the end of the school year must take the check during that academic year, including those in maintained nursery schools. For most pupils, this will be in year 1.

You can find the exact assessment dates for each academic year in the primary assessments future dates[1].

What is phonics?

Phonics is an effective way of teaching children to read. By ensuring high quality phonics teaching, we want to improve literacy levels and give all children a solid base to build on as they progress through school.

Through phonics, children are taught how to:

- recognise the sounds that each individual letter makes
- identify the sounds that different combinations of letters make, such as ‘sh’ or ‘oo’
- blend these sounds together from left to right to make a word

Children can then use this knowledge to ‘decode’ new words that they hear or see. This is the first important step in learning to read.

1. www.gov.uk/guidance/primary-assessments-future-dates

What is the phonics screening check?

The phonics screening check contains 40 words divided into two sections of 20 words. Both sections contain a mixture of real words and pseudo-words.

Pseudo-words are words that are phonically decodable but are not actual words with an associated meaning. They are included in the check specifically to assess whether your child can decode a word using their phonics skills.

All pseudo-words in the check are accompanied by a picture of an imaginary creature. Children are taught that when a word has a creature next to it, it is a pseudo-word. This ensures that they are not trying to match the pseudo-word to a word in their vocabulary.

The check is designed to give teachers information on how your child is progressing in phonics. It will help to identify whether your child needs additional support at this stage so that they do not fall behind in this vital early reading skill.

Do I need to do anything to prepare my child for the check?

Phonics works best when children are given plenty of encouragement and learn to enjoy reading and books. Parents play a very important part in helping with this.

You can highlight the phonics sounds when you read with your child. Teaching how sounds match with letters is likely to start with individual letters such as ‘s’, ‘a’ and ‘t’ and will then move on to two-letter sounds such as ‘ee’, ‘ch’ and ‘ck’.

With all books, encourage your child to ‘sound out’ unfamiliar words and then blend the sounds together from left to right rather than looking at the pictures to guess. Once your child has read an unfamiliar word, you can talk about what it means and help them to follow the story.

Your child’s teacher will also be able to suggest books with the right level of phonics for your child. These books are often called ‘decodable readers’ because the story is written with words made up of the letters your child has learnt. Your child will be able to work out new words from their letters and sounds, rather than just guessing.

Most schools use book bags and a reading record, which is a great way for teachers and parents to communicate about what children have read. The reading record can tell you whether your child has enjoyed a particular book and shows problems or successes they have had, either at home or at school.

How will the results be used?

Schools will have access to all their pupils' results to identify those who need additional support and make plans to help them improve.

The Department for Education does not publish school-level results for the phonics screening check, but schools will have access to national, regional and local authority results[2] to allow them to benchmark their pupils' performance.

Will I receive feedback on my child's results?

Your child's teacher will share your child's score with you in the second half of the summer term.

If your child has found it difficult, the school should tell you what support they have put in place to help your child improve. You might like to ask how you can support your child to take the next steps in reading.

Children who have not met the standard in year 1 will re-take the phonics screening check in year 2. The results of any re-take will also be shared with you.

Further information

Your child's teacher will be able to answer any questions about the phonics screening check.

For more details, you can also visit www.gov.uk/STA.

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2. www.explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/phonics-screening-check-attainment

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Phonics screening check: information for parents
Electronic version product code: STA/25/8938/e ISBN: 978-1-78957-932-1

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