

Phonics Screening Check

Parent and Carer Information Sheet



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1 What is the Phonics Screening Check?

The phonics screening check is a statutory reading check that all year 1 children take during a particular week in June. The check is designed to assess if each child has reached the age appropriate standard of decoding by the end of year 1.

2 How is the check administered?

The check is completed by the child on a 1:1 basis with a teacher. It usually takes 5-10 minutes for the child to complete. However, there is no time limit and the child can take as long as they need. The teacher can also allow the child a rest break if it is necessary. The children will have worked on similar activities in their phonics lessons and will be familiar with the format. The only difference will be that the teacher will be unable to help the children on this occasion.

3 What does the check consist of?

The check contains 40 words – 20 real and 20 pseudo words (nonsense words). The words are presented to the child in the form of a booklet with 4 large words per page.

The words gradually get more difficult from 2 and 3 'sound' words such as 'it' and 'vap', to longer words with more complex 'sounds', such as the a_e sound in the word 'same'.

Below, are examples of how the words are presented to the children:



example of Phases 2
and 3 pseudo words



example of Phase 5
real words

The pseudo words are presented with a picture of an alien. This tells the child that this word will not make sense to them. It will instead be the name of the kind of alien. This has been added so that the child does not attempt to turn the words into real words.

4 Why use pseudo words?

The ultimate aim of teaching phonics is that the child progresses from decoding each sound, to automatic recognition of words. However, even as adults, we still need to be able to decode unfamiliar words. The ability to decode unfamiliar words will help your child to read increasingly more difficult texts and will help them to develop their vocabulary. The pseudo words allow the teacher to be sure that the child is able to decode unfamiliar words and is not just reading words from memory.

5 What is the expectation?

It is expected that, by the end of year 1, children are able to recognise the grapheme-phoneme correspondences up to the end of phase 5, segment words (split into sounds) and blend them back together to be able to read them.

(See Useful Terms for more information about phonic phases.)

For the last few years, the expected standard for the screening check has been set at 32 out of 40 words correctly decoded. However, this can change and the Department for Education does not release the 'pass' mark until a few weeks after the children have completed the check.

6 Do all children complete the check?

It is expected that all year 1 children complete the screening check, unless they have no understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondence (the way sounds link to letters). However, if a teacher feels a child is really struggling, they may choose to end the check before the end.

7 What about children with SEND?

There is no time limit on the check and the teachers are able to edit the size of the text or the number of words presented to the child at once, if this is necessary. Coloured overlays can also be used as needed.

8 What happens if a child does not meet the expected standard?

If a child does not meet the expected standard, the school are required to provide extra support for them in phonics. Children who do not meet the expected standard in year 1, complete the check again in year 2.

9 What happens to the data?

You will be informed of your child's result shortly after the check is completed. The data collected from the check is used within school to provide assessment on the child's decoding skills. It is also a requirement that it is submitted to the Department for Education, where it is used to collate information about the standards in phonics across the country.

10 How can you help?

- The most important thing you can do, to help support your child with their reading, is to read with them. Listening to your child read is important but reading to them is just as important. If they hear you read, they are hearing how to pronounce unfamiliar words and are developing new vocabulary.
- When you listen to your child read, allow them time to attempt to decode unfamiliar words themselves, before stepping in to help them. If you find your child is struggling to decode a word, you can help by pointing out the sounds (not the letters) in a word. For example, the word 'keep' would be 'k-ee-p' and 'light' would be 'l-igh-t'.
- When you listen to your child read, pick out a word from the book and ask them to say which graphemes (letters) are making a certain phoneme (sound). For example, the 'ee' sound (phoneme) in 'reaching' is represented by the letters (grapheme) 'ea'.
- When you are out and about, ask your child to read what traffic or shop signs say. Allow your child time to decode the words before stepping in to help.
- Practise speed reading (reading as quickly as possible) the graphemes your child is learning in school. Your child's teacher can help by giving you a list.
- If you have access to the Internet, there are many free phonics games the children can play.
- Keep reading activities short. It is much better to read little and often, than to read a lot infrequently!
- Stop before your child becomes bored and restless.

Tips on pronouncing sounds:

When you were in school, you may have been taught that c says 'cuh' (or curly c) and t says 'tuh', etc. However, when sounding out in phonics, it is important that the children keep these sounds short and unvoiced (without the 'uh' on the end). It is easier to do this if you whisper the sounds.

This is important because if we voice the sounds, it can make sounding out the words difficult.

For example, the word 'fluff' is 'f-l-u-ff' but if we add the voiced 'uh' on the end of each sound, it would be 'fuh-luh-u-fuh', or 'ferleruffer'!

11 Useful terms:

Phoneme	This is the smallest unit of sound in speech. For example, there are 3 phonemes in the word 'cat' (c-a-t) and in the word 'rain' (r-ai-n). There are 5 phonemes in the word 'steamy' (s-t-ea-m-y).
Grapheme	This is the letter or group of letters that represent a sound (phoneme). For example, 't', 'sh', 'ff' and 'igh'.
Decode/decoding	This is the process of seeing a written word and being able to read it aloud. Decoding is concerned with reading the words, rather than their meaning.
Segmenting	This is breaking the word down into individual sounds (spelling).
Blending	This is smoothly putting the sounds back together to read the word.
Diagraph	These are two letters representing one phoneme (sound). For example, 'ph', 'ee' and 'ng'.
Spilt diagraph	These are two letters representing one phoneme, but the letters are separated by another letter. For example, in the word 'game', the 'a' and 'e' make up the 'ay' phoneme but they are separated by the 'm'. You will see this written as 'a-e' or 'a_e'.
Trigraph	These are three letters representing one phoneme (sound). For example, 'igh', 'ear' and 'ure'.
Phase 2	Children begin to learn which letters represent which, using them to blend for reading and orally segment for spelling. They use simple 2- and 3- sound words. Graphemes taught - s, a, t, p, i, n, m, d, g, o, c, k, ck, e, u, r, h, b, f, ff, l, ll, ss.
Phase 3	Children continue to learn new graphemes, using them to blend for reading and segment for spelling. Graphemes taught - j, v, w, x, y, z, zz, qu, ch, sh, th, ng, ai, ee, ight, oa, oo, ar, or, ur, ow, oi, ear, air ure, er.
Phase 4	There are no new graphemes taught during this phase. Children are taught to blend and read longer words with adjacent consonants, e.g. 'stamp' , 'milk' , 'train' .
Phase 5	In this phase, the children learn some new graphemes and some alternative ways to pronounce graphemes they already know. • New graphemes taught – ay (day), ou (out), ie (pie), ea (pea), oy (boy), ir (girl), ue (blue), aw (saw), wh (when), ph (photo), ew (new), oe (toe), au (Paul), a-e (make), e-e (these), i-e (like), o-e (home), u-e (rule). • Alternative pronunciations for graphemes – i (find), o (cold), c (cent), g (giant), u (put – southern pronunciation), ow (blow), ie (field), ea (bread), er (her), a (what), y (very), ch (school, chef), ou (could, you).