

Information for parents: 2023 phonics screening check



Standards
& Testing
Agency

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

If so, your child will be participating in the phonics screening check in June.

The phonics screening check is a check of your child's phonics knowledge. It helps your school confirm whether your child is making the progress expected in the national curriculum.

In 2023, the check will take place during the week commencing Monday 12 June.

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. For most, this will be in year 1. This includes pupils registered at maintained nursery schools who will reach the age of 6 before the end of the school year and have completed the year 1 programme of study.

What if my child does not reach the standard in year 1?

If a pupil does not meet the expected standard at the end of year 1, a programme of support should be put in place and their teacher will consider a re-take in year 2.

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.

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.

Pseudo-words 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 is to ensure 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 then highlight these 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 then will 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, allowing those pupils who need additional support to be identified and plans made in order to help them improve.

Will I receive feedback on my child's check?

Yes, your child's teacher will share your child's score with you in the last half term of year 1.

If your child has found the check difficult, your child's school should tell you what support they have put in place to help them 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 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 further details, you can also visit www.gov.uk/STA.

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