Phonics checks school guidance handbook

2025

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Te Poutāhū
Curriculum Centre

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Contents

About the phonics checks
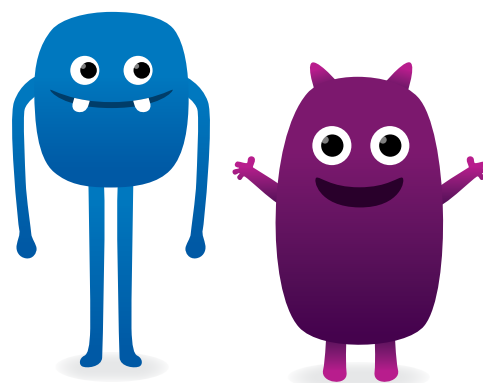
What is phonics?

Phonics is the relationship between graphemes and phonemes. It is essential knowledge for learning to read because it helps readers improve their skills to quickly identify and blend the sounds of unfamiliar written words. Effective teaching and learning for reading and writing includes explicit and systematic synthetic phonics instruction.

However, learning to read involves more than phonics. Phonics instruction should take place within a structured literacy approach that weaves together word recognition and language comprehension to support children to become skilled readers.

What are the phonics checks?

The phonics check is a short assessment that indicates to teachers how well children are progressing with phonic decoding. It is carried out in a quiet setting by the classroom teacher with each child individually, and takes around 10 minutes to complete. The child is asked to read out a list of up to 40 words that are a mixture of real words, and pseudo (made-up) words.
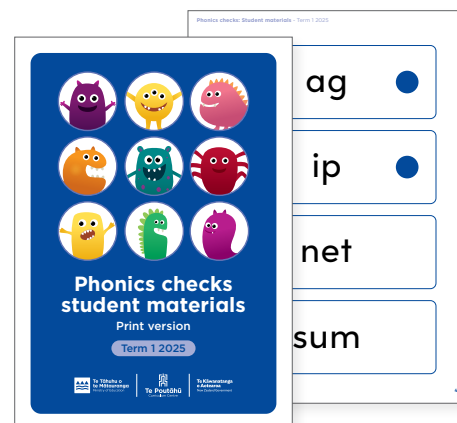
What do the phonics checks assess?

The phonics check is designed to assess which grapheme-phoneme correspondences children know and how well they blend sounds together to read words. The phonics check confirms whether children are developing the phonics knowledge they need to be successful in reading and writing.

Why are the phonics checks important?

The phonics check provides teachers with information to help them understand what phonics knowledge each child has learned and what they need to learn next.

The phonics check is an important tool for identifying children who need extra help with their phonics learning. By analysing the phonics check responses, teachers can, where necessary, plan an accelerative approach to meet children's needs.

Why are the phonics checks at 20 weeks and 40 weeks?

The phonics check is carried out in a child's first year of school, with a check at 20 weeks and again at 40 weeks after starting school. These periods refer to term time, so holidays are not included.

The first check at 20 weeks provides teachers with an early indication of how children are progressing with their phonics learning. It helps teachers to identify where children need support to accelerate learning. Starting intensive support early is more effective and efficient than starting later.[1]

The second check at 40 weeks enables teachers to gauge the progress students have made in the second half of their first year with more complex grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and may help teachers to identify where additional support is needed.

Children's phonics knowledge after a year of schooling is a strong predictor of later reading achievement,[2] so the data from the second check is also useful for understanding how well the education system supports early reading.

How tightly do I need to adhere to the 20 week and 40 week timeframes?

The check is designed to align with curriculum expectations at two points in time.

Following the timeframes as closely as possible provides the most accurate information for tracking a child's learning. If a child is absent when they are due to complete the phonics check, it should be carried out as soon as possible after the child returns to school.

When children are due to complete the phonics check at the beginning of the school year and are just settling back into school, the teacher can delay the phonics check by a maximum of two weeks. Likewise, when a child is due to complete the phonics check in the last week of the school year, teachers can do the check up to two weeks before the child's actual due date.

What is the purpose of using pseudo words?

Including pseudo words in the phonics check ensures that children are using their decoding skills rather than their memory of known words. The pseudo words are also particularly useful for assessing whether children have learned specific grapheme-phoneme correspondences. A blue circle appears next to the pseudo words to help children tell the difference between the real and made-up words. Pseudo words are for assessment purposes only and should not be used in learning contexts.

---

1   Ministry of Education. (2024). Six insights from the Early Literacy Approach and Literacy and Communication Trial evaluations. **https://www.education.govt.nz/news/new-literacy-evaluation-reports-and-insights-released**

2   Utchell, L. A., Schmitt, A. J., McCallum, E., McGoey, K. E., & Piselli, K. (2016). Ability of Early Literacy Measures to Predict Future State Assessment Performance. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 34*(6), 511-523. **https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282915621221**

Why is a mixture of real and pseudo words used in the phonics checks?

Real words are also included in the phonics check. As children progress with their reading, they need to be able to adjust their pronunciation of grapheme-phoneme correspondences to match words in their oral vocabulary.

What is the research supporting the use of the phonics checks?

There is good evidence to support the use of a phonics check in the first year of school as a way to identify children who need early accelerated learning support.[3] Early additional support for phonics learning has been shown to effectively promote reading development.[4] Children who receive support early are more likely to have future success in reading.

Being able to hear different sounds within words is also essential for successful spelling. Explicit, data-informed teaching of phonics strengthens both reading and writing, and in turn reading and writing support phonics learning.

How can teachers prepare children to be successful in phonics learning?

Teachers prepare children for success through explicit and systematic synthetic phonics instruction for decoding and spelling. Synthetic phonics involves explicitly teaching children to read and spell by blending phonemes into words and segmenting words into phonemes. This is supported by using an evidence-informed scope and sequence.

Current research indicates that teaching phonemic awareness and phonics together leads to stronger reading outcomes. Phonemic awareness is the knowledge of the smallest units of sound in words, and it is taught most effectively when graphemes are presented along with sounds.

Systematic synthetic phonics instruction should be part of a structured literacy approach that is aligned to the **English learning area** of the refreshed New Zealand Curriculum. Further guidance on effective techniques to support phonics learning will be included in a teacher manual for structured literacy approaches for Years 0-3 that will be available in Term 2, 2025.

---

3 Double, K. S., McGrane, J. A., Stiff, J. C., & Hopfenbeck, T. N. (2019). The importance of early phonics improvements for predicting later reading comprehension. *British Educational Research Journal, 45*(6), 1220-1234.

4 Ehri, L., Nunes. S., Stahl, A., & Willows. D. (2001). Systematic Phonics Instruction Helps Students Learn to Read. Evidence from the National Reading Panel's Meta-Analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 71*(3), 393-447; Snowling, M. J., & Hulme, C. (2012). Interventions for children's language and literacy difficulties. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 47*(1), 27–34. **https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-6984.2011.00081.x**; Slavin, R., Lake, C., Davis, S. & Madden, N. (2011). Effective Programmes for Struggling Readers: A Best EvidenceSynthesis. *Educational Research Review, 6*(1);1-26

Decoding during the first six months at school

At this level, children will be taught to decode vowel-consonant (VC), and consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words with single-consonant and short-vowel grapheme-phoneme correspondences

Decoding during the second half of the first year at school

At this level, children will be taught to decode words with adjacent consonants, consonant digraphs, and some long-vowel grapheme-phoneme correspondences.

Systematic synthetic phonics knowledge is only one element of a structured literacy approach. Other elements include vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. For more details, see the **English learning area** in the refreshed New Zealand Curriculum.

## What do teachers do with phonics check results?

Teachers use the results of the phonics check and the phonics continuum to notice, recognise, and respond to children's phonics strengths and needs.

As a first step, teachers can respond to phonics check results by reviewing their existing universal phonics instruction and adapting their teaching to meet the strengths and needs of their students. For further details see the ***Using the phonics checks for data-informed instruction*** section.

The ***Information for school leaders*** section includes instructions for submitting results to the Ministry through a secure data portal.
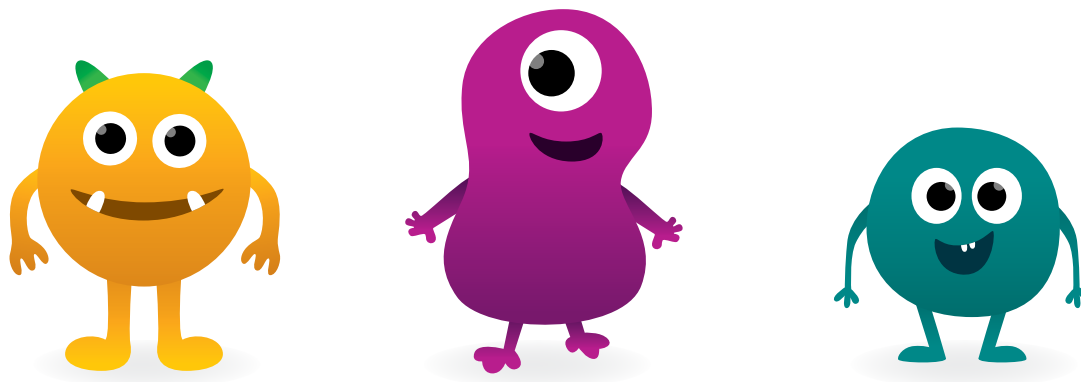
Information for school leaders
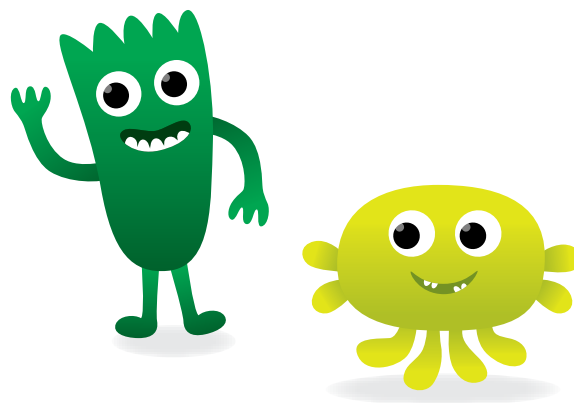
School leaders' phonics check responsibilities are to ensure:

- children with additional learning needs are catered for

- the check is administered by the child's teacher

- all teachers review this guide and the phonics check support materials, and understand how to administer and score the check

- teachers review data and reflect on the effectiveness of their current phonics instruction as part of whole school data-informed practice (see ***Using the phonics checks for data-informed instruction***)

- teachers plan appropriate instructional responses for learners, informed by phonics check results, so that they are supported to progress and achieve as expected.

The Ministry of Education supports whole school data-informed practice by providing regular school-level reports. When schools upload their phonics check data to the Ministry's secure data portal, they will receive a report that includes:

- a summary of progress and achievement

- demographic analyses

- national achievement norms.

Phonics check data will also be aggregated and anonymised for monitoring how well our education system is supporting literacy learning.

Please see *Phonics check assessment materials* on Tāhūrangi for instructions on uploading phonics checks results to the Ministry's secure data portal.

Before the phonics checks

Before teachers begin, they should become familiar with the assessment materials and the supporting guidance.

What is included in the assessment materials?

The phonics check is designed to assess which grapheme-phoneme correspondences children know and how they blend sounds together to read words.

The *Phonics check assessment materials* include:

- **Student materials** (including a page of practice words)
- **Scoring guidance**
- **Marking sheet**
- **Script for introducing the check**
- **Phonics continuum.**

The student materials include intentional blank pages. Please select double-sided printing option when printing.

Who should do the checks?

All children should be included in the check unless they do not yet have an understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, for example:

- Deaf children who use New Zealand Sign Language as their only or primary language
- children who have complex communication and/or learning needs at a level that precludes participation in this learning. (Please note that some children with high and complex needs will be able to learn grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis.)

The classroom teacher carries out the phonics check with each child because the process of administering the check provides valuable information that can inform teaching and learning.

The phonics check should not be administered by a teacher aide or other support person because the administrator needs to have teacher-level knowledge of both the child and phonics. Specialist resource teachers and teacher aides can support classroom teachers to administer the checks when necessary.

If teachers are unsure about children's blending abilities, and whether they are 'ready' to do the check, they should instruct the child to say the grapheme sounds they know and then blend them. Teachers can model this using the practice sheet.

Even if the child is not yet blending, the first items in phonics check can be used to help the teacher identify children's grapheme-phoneme knowledge.

Teachers can support children with a range of learning needs to participate in the check using the guidance in the *Inclusive and accessible phonics check practice* section.

Communication with parents and whānau about the checks

Use the information on phonics checks in the parent portal on **education.govt.nz** to communicate the purpose of the phonics check to parents and whānau, and respond to any questions or concerns.

How to carry out the phonics checks

Allocating time and preparing the space

There is no time limit for completing the phonics check. Give children enough time to respond to each word. If needed, teachers can allow children to have short rest breaks but make sure they finish the check on the same day.

Teachers should conduct the check with each child individually in a quiet space where there are few distractions. The space should be well-lit, free from significant interruptions, and comfortable for the child. If the child usually wears glasses or hearing aids, ensure these are being used before beginning the check.

Introducing the phonics check to children

Teachers should aim to be consistent with the words they use to introduce the phonics check to each child. Use the practice sheet to model how to segment the letter sounds and blend them together, to encourage children to use this technique as they do the check, especially for the items they might find difficult.

The following is a script for talking to children about the phonics check and using the practice sheet just before starting the check.

> *In this activity, I am going to ask you to read some words aloud. You might have seen some of the words before and others will be new.*
>
> *Try to read each word but don't worry if you can't. If it helps, you can say the sounds you know and then blend them together to say the word.*
>
> *This practice sheet shows you what the words will look like. I'm going to read this word; "iii – t, it".*
>
> *Now you have a go at reading this next word aloud (teacher points to 'on').*
>
> *This next word is a made-up word. We can imagine it is an alien word spoken by a creature from another planet. You can tell which words are made up by this blue circle.*
>
> *I'll have a go at reading this made-up word "fff – ooo - mmm, fom".
> Now you have a go at reading the next made-up word (teacher points to 'nep')*
>
> *Now we are going to start reading out the words in the activity.*
>
> *In this check, I won't tell you whether you have got the word right or not. I will be proud of you for giving these words a go.*
>
> *Can you start reading the words to me?*

If appropriate for the child, teachers can choose to run the practice words using an "I do / we do / you do" approach, where the teacher models the segmenting and blending, then the teacher and child segment and blend the word together, and then the child segments and blends the word by themselves.

Administration tips

- When administering the check, it is important teachers tell children that some words are real and some are made up. Pseudo words are indicated by a blue circle next to the word.

- Teachers can prompt the child to move to the next word but be careful not to do so while they are in the process of decoding the word. Encourage children to do this out loud as some may try to decode the word in their head.

- Teachers can indicate which word comes next but should be careful not to provide decoding clues, for example, by pointing left to right.

- Consistency in administering the check is important. Teachers can offer encouragement and support when conducting the check. Do say "keep going", don't tell them if they have decoded a word correctly or not.

- After marking five consecutive errors, teachers stop the check regardless of how far through the check they are and praise the child's effort.
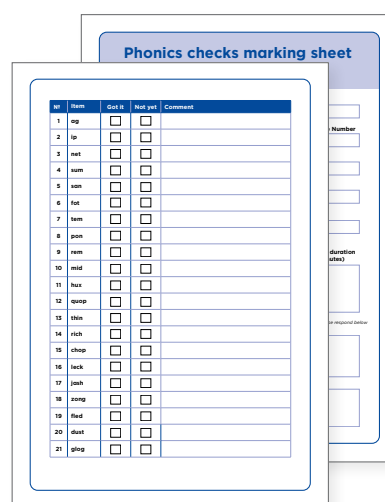
Recording and scoring children's responses

A phonics check is marked using an excel form, or a paper-based marking sheet. Both versions of the marking sheet and instructions for use can be downloaded.

Teachers record children's responses to each item. Options are:

- 'Got it' for answers that are correct
- 'Not yet' for answers that are incorrect

When marking the phonics check using the excel form, scores will be automatically totalled for an overall score. If using a paper-based sheet, one point is given for each correct 'Got it' answer and manually added together for a total score. See ***Understanding and analysing the results*** for achievement levels and further information.

Teachers should record both the errors and the nature of the errors to help plan future phonics teaching. Teachers can note the grapheme-phoneme correspondences children read correctly or incorrectly, if any were added or missed, and if blending was used.

When teachers stop the phonics check after five consecutive errors, **the remaining answers are left blank**. A blank answer indicates the point at which the phonics check was stopped, and all subsequent answers must be blank.

Below are examples of answers and how they would be scored.

'Got it'	'Not yet'
Sounds out the phonemes, or names the letters, and then says the word.	Sounds out the phonemes but does not blend the word (don't prompt).
Elongates the phonemes and then blends them to form the word.	Elongates the phonemes but leaves gaps and doesn't blend them.
Uses alternative valid pronunciations of graphemes in pseudo words.	Inappropriate pronunciations of real words, for example, reading 'blow' to rhyme with 'cow'.
Corrects initial attempts and finishes with the correct pronunciation.	Omits letter sounds, adds letter sounds, substitutes letter sounds, or reverses letter sounds.
Words pronounced with the child's accent or particular speech pattern.	

Variable pronunciations

Children's pronunciation of phonemes and graphemes may differ based on their speech patterns or accents. For example, a child might produce a soft r sound and provide the answer that sounds like 'wem' for the pseudo word 'rem'. In some accents, certain graphemes may be spoken in a way that sounds like different graphemes. For example, in certain accents, the 'p' can be pronounced in a way that resembles the sound of a 'b'. A child speaking with this accent might decode the pseudo word "pon" correctly but pronounce it in a way that sounds more like "bon".

The purpose of the phonics check is to identify the child's phonics decoding ability rather than their speech production accuracy. When marking the check, it is important to consider what is consistent for the child in their regular speech and identify if any incorrect grapheme phoneme correspondences are due to their speech patterns or due to a decoding error. At the end of the phonics check, ask them to repeat other familiar words with the grapheme-phoneme correspondences you are unsure of. If the difference is due to a speech pattern difference, and the child is decoding correctly, mark the word item as correct.

Average age children learn to pronounce consonants correctly

Age	Consonant
6 years	th (voiceless)
5 years	r, zh, th (voiced)
4 years	l, j, ch, s, v, sh, z
2-3 years	p, b, m, d, n, h, t, k, g, w, ng, f, y

Pronunciation of pseudo words

Some of the graphemes used in the check represent a number of different possible phonemes. When decoding a real word in the check, the child has to select the correct phoneme for the word, for example the 'ow' in 'blow' should not be pronounced as the 'ow' in 'cow'. However, when decoding a pseudo word, all plausible alternative pronunciations are acceptable.

The table below provides an example of the guidance on acceptable pronunciations of the pseudo words in the check. Detailed guidance on the acceptable pronunciation of pseudo words is available in the Scoring guidance.

Pseudo words	
tem	This item uses the '**t**' in '**t**op' and rhymes with 'h**em**'
quop	This item uses the '**qu**' in '**qu**iz' and rhymes with 'st**op**'
clisk	This item uses the '**cl**' in '**clown**' and rhymes with 'd**isk**'.

Inclusive and accessible phonics check practice

Responding to barriers to the phonics checks

The phonics check can be made more inclusive of and accessible to a range of learners when we understand and address the barriers the standard phonics check can present. Barriers can be encountered across one or more of the following areas:
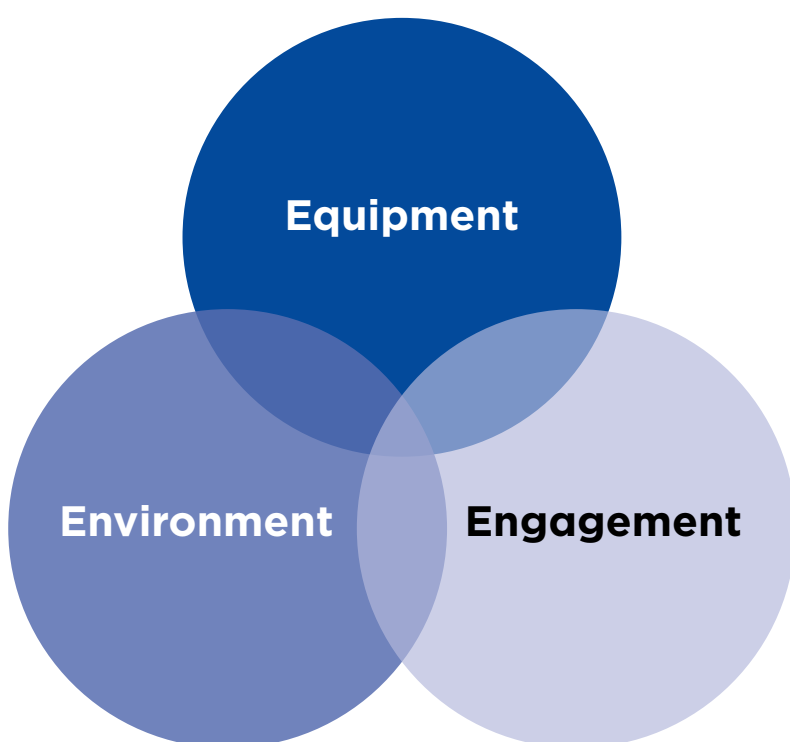
Equipment:
Factors relating to the content and presentation of phonics check materials.

Environment:
Factors relating to the physical and interpersonal space in which the phonics check occurs.

Engagement:
Factors affecting learners' engagement, sustained interest, attention, and persistence with the phonics check.

It is important to embed appropriate flexibility for children who may require additional support across one or more areas to successfully demonstrate their phonics knowledge during the check.

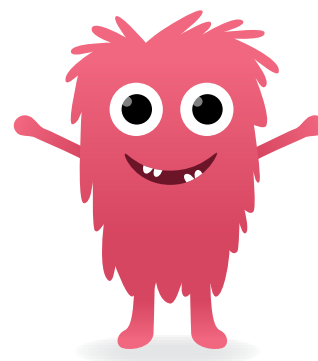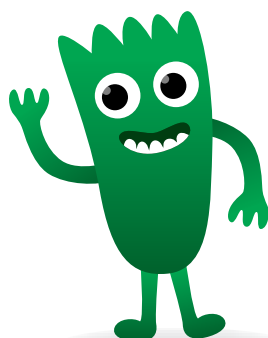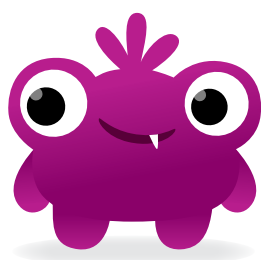The following tables identify responses for increased inclusion and access over the three dimensions.

| Equipment: Factors relating to the content and presentation of phonics check materials	
Barrier	**Response**
The standard phonics check is in a language that the child does not have full access to.	If the child does not yet understand the connection between graphemes and phonemes, they should not take the phonics check. Use informal assessment to notice, recognise, and respond to the child's literacy and communication learning. Literacy and communication progressions are in development to support this.
	Deaf or hard of hearing children who communicate primarily through NZSL may not need to take the phonics check. Teachers should collaborate with the school's Resource Teacher of the Deaf (RTD) to notice, recognise, and respond to the child's literacy and communication learning.
	For children who are English Language Learners (ELL), consider allowing bilingual school staff to translate assessment instructions to support the child to do the phonics check, where possible.
	For children who access the New Zealand Curriculum through Gagana Sāmoa or Lea Faka-Tonga, we are developing phonics checks in these languages.
	Children who are accessing the New Zealand Curriculum through both English and another language in a bilingual setting, should be supported to complete the phonics checks in English. Teachers may consider translating the assessment instructions and providing opportunities for the child to ask questions in their preferred language if this best supports the child to do the phonics check.

The standard phonics check requires child to read aloud.	For children who are non-speaking or have significant communication, speech, or language difficulties, and use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), we are developing the AAC version of the phonics checks. AAC can be low tech or high tech and includes: • using gestures and facial expressions • pointing to words • using an iPad or tablet • using a speech generating device.
The standard phonics check requires clear sight.	Support blind and low vision children to access the phonics check using alternative formats, such as Braille or enlarged text. The appropriate phonics check format can be identified by the school's Resource Teacher Vision (RTV) and accessed from **BLENNZ**. Teachers will carry out the phonics check with blind and low vision children with the support of the RTV. If the child usually wears glasses, ensure they are wearing these for the phonics check.
The standard phonics check requires blending of grapheme-phoneme correspondences.	Some children may not yet be blending grapheme-phoneme correspondences together. Teachers can support these children to take the phonics check by modelling the segmenting and blending approach using the practice sheet (prior to the check). Teachers can record the grapheme-phoneme correspondences children know in the comment field, and use this to inform their next teaching and learning steps. Teachers stop the phonics check after marking five consecutive 'Not yet' word items.

Environment: Factors relating to the physical and interpersonal space in which the phonics check occurs	
Barrier	**Response**
The standard classroom environment is noisy or busy.	Support children to do the phonics check by choosing a quiet space away from significant interruptions, such as a classroom break out space. Remove clutter and distractions that might cause sensory overload to help children focus on the phonics check successfully. Offer flexible seating and positioning to help children feel secure and at ease for the phonics check. If the child usually uses hearing aids, personal listening devices (PLDs) or other hearing technology, ensure that these are fitted for the phonics check.
The classroom teacher does not have the expertise to adequately support the child with the phonics check.	Teachers can work with the child's parents and learning support specialists ahead of time to understand strategies that will support the child with the phonics check. A learning support specialist can assist the teacher to carry out the phonics check.

Engagement: Factors affecting learners' engagement, sustained interest, attention, and persistence with the phonics check	
Barrier	**Response**
The standard phonics check requires sustained focus.	Teachers can support children to maintain focus by dividing the phonics check into smaller more manageable sections. These can be interspersed with brain and movement breaks to help children reset and refocus. If children find it difficult to focus on one word among others on the page, teachers can opt to use the slide deck version of the student materials on a tablet, which displays one word at a time. For paper materials, the teacher can cover the other words on the page for the same effect. Reducing distractions and clutter will support children to concentrate on the phonics check. Providing physical manipulatives, such as sensory toys, may also be helpful to some children. In addition to the script provided, teachers can motivate children to maintain their attention by offering encouragement to stay focused on the phonics check. To support consistent administration, it is still important to avoid indicating if children are getting answers wrong or right.
The standard phonics check might cause anxiety.	Teachers can reduce assessment anxiety by familiarising groups of children with the phonics check ahead of the check. Teachers can help children feel secure by allowing them to hold a comfort item, such as a soft toy, during the check. If children become anxious during the assessment, teachers can offer short breaks, encouragement, and reassurance to help children reset and come back to the check. Teachers stop the phonics check after marking five consecutive word items as 'Not yet'.

Understanding and analysing the results
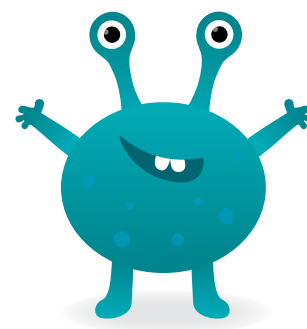
When marking the phonics check using the excel form,
marks will be automatically tallied to provide a total score. This score will indicate how children are progressing in relation to curriculum expectations.

The curriculum expectations in relation to the phonics check are:

- A score of 9-12 correct words at 20 weeks
- A score of 24-30 correct words at 40 weeks

Considering the total score is a useful first step for analysing a child's results because it gives an indication of their decoding knowledge and skills. The following levels relate to total scores.

Twenty weeks

Needs support: Score range of 0-5.
Children correctly decoded fewer than half the words at the expected level.

Progressing towards: Score range of 6-9.
Children correctly decode some words at the expected level.

Proficient: Score range 10-12.
Children correctly decode most or all words at the expected level.

Exceeding: Score range 13 and above.
Children correctly decode more words than at the expected level.

Forty weeks

Needs support: Score range of 0-15.
Children correctly decoded fewer than half the words at the expected level.

Progressing towards expectation: Score range of 16-23.
Children correctly decode some words at the expected level.

Proficient: Score range 24-30.
Children correctly decode most or all words at the expected level.

Exceeding: Score range of 31 and above.
Children correctly decode more words than at the expected level.

Responses

The following table identifies what the levels tell us about how children are progressing in relation to curriculum expectations, what this tells us about children's learning needs, and how teachers can best respond.

If a lot of children in a class have a score range that indicates they need support, this signals that the school and teacher may need to review their approach to explicit phonics teaching.

Levels	Interpretation	Teaching Response
Needs support	Children need immediate support to reach curriculum expectation.	Provide intensive support to accelerate children's progress.
Progressing towards	Children are progressing towards curriculum expectations.	Children still need some help to decode words proficiently at curriculum level. Providing additional support to meet curriculum expectations when the gap is small is more effective than waiting to see if children catch up on their own.
Proficient	Children are decoding words at the level of curriculum expectation.	Continue to provide the current level of support as you work through your chosen phonics teaching scope and sequence. Continue to monitor children's progress and take action to increase support if needed.
Exceeding	Children are decoding words at a level that exceeds curriculum expectation.	Provide extension opportunities to maintain learning progress.

Further analysis

Within all level ranges, the phonics check allows teachers to investigate children's skills and knowledge in phonics, including:

- Knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondences

- Ability to blend the sounds accurately

- Ability to identify and then blend an increasing number of sounds

The marking sheet has a tab that provides teachers with a summary of children's accuracy with each grapheme type (e.g. vc, cvc, split digraph-cvc). This gives a quick view of children's areas of strength and learning needs as they progress along the phonics continuum. The phonics continuum diagram shows the progression of phonics knowledge and skills that children need to develop to accurately read increasingly complex words.

The phonics check results provide a starting point to evaluate children's current level of phonics knowledge. Combining data from the phonics check with other observations and assessment evidence offers a more complete picture of children's strengths and learning needs. This information supports teachers and schools to plan a range of responses.

If teachers and school leaders are analysing results as a team, they could ask guiding questions such as:

- What patterns can we see in the data?

- Are there any surprises?

- What are the children doing well?

- What knowledge and skills still need improvement?

- What are the implications for our practice?

- How will we plan to meet identified learning needs?

Meeting identified learning needs may involve universal approaches that encompass the whole-class or all classes in the school with year 0-1 learners, as well as targeted or tailored approaches for needs that require more intensive or specific responses. For example, in universal whole-class phonics instruction, children can all progress through the sequence of content but the tasks they are given to consolidate their learning can differ in complexity.

To begin with, some children may need to develop their early phonemic awareness skills alongside explicit instruction for particular grapheme-phoneme correspondences. However, other children may need specific instruction in blending sounds together to read written words. It is useful to include wider observations to gain a more complete picture of children's learning needs.

The different kinds of errors made during the phonics check offer insights into where children are up to in their learning. For example, during the check, a child may be able to sound out each phoneme correctly but unable to blend them accurately. Analysing the word a child says may reveal one or more of the features shown in the table below.

Pay particular attention to the child's success in decoding the pseudo words as these can act as an authentic assessment of their phonic knowledge and skills, and provide useful information about how they apply their phonics skills to unknown words.

Pronunciation of the pseudo words gives insights into children's knowledge of each phoneme. Noting errors is a starting point for determining what further phonics instruction a child needs.

This table presents a sample of words and the insights that can be gleaned from analysing mistakes made in the phonics check.

Example word	Student response	Analysis
ag	'a' read as letter	Use of a letter name for a sound due to unconsolidated letter sounds
ag	a - g	Blending difficulties
zong	z-o-n-g	
fot	foot	Unconsolidated short vowel sound or trying to match this pseudo word to a real word in their oral vocabulary
ag	ap	Letter confusion due to visually similar letters or unconsolidated letter sound knowledge
sum	sam	
mid	mib	
chop	shop	Unconsolidated letter sound knowledge of common digraphs
chop	cop	
splam	slam	Omission of consonant in consonant cluster due to unconsolidated blending skills
glog	log	

Using the phonics checks for data-informed instruction

Planning for assessment and data-informed instruction

Ongoing formative assessment is essential, as it allows teachers to continuously monitor children's literacy progress. By assessing students' literacy skills, teachers can notice, recognise, and respond to individual strengths and areas needing improvement, and plan accordingly.

Continuous assessment helps teachers to select teaching strategies that build on children's prior knowledge and extend their understanding. It enables teachers to match instruction to each children's unique needs, ensuring that every child receives the appropriate support, exactly when they need it, to advance their literacy skills effectively.

Standardised assessment tools, such as the phonics check, gauge children's literacy progress over specific periods. These assessments help teachers and parents to understand how well children are meeting curriculum expectations and to identify when more supports are required.

The phonics check is an important part of the comprehensive system for assessment and aromatawai across the whole learning pathway, which includes twice-yearly progress monitoring of reading, writing, and maths for children in Years 3–8. Assessment allows teachers to collect data, and in turn use it to inform their teaching practice.

Whole school data-informed practice

Developing a whole-school culture of data-informed practice is a key role for school leaders. This includes establishing a consistent approach to data collection, analysis, and use. Developing this culture involves:

- whole school planning for data collection and use
- building an understanding of data and what it tells us
- peer sharing of data analysis techniques
- analysing data as a team
- using data to collaboratively identify effective teaching strategies
- using data to plan instruction.

School-level reports

The Ministry of Education supports whole school data-informed practice by providing regular school-level reports. When schools upload their phonics check data to the Ministry's secure data portal, they will receive a report that includes:

- a summary of progress and achievement
- demographic analyses

- national achievement norms.

Phonics check data will also be aggregated and anonymised for monitoring how well our education system is supporting literacy learning.

For instructions on uploading phonics check results to the Ministry of Education, please see the *Phonics check assessment materials*.

Using the phonics checks as formative assessment to plan instruction

Teachers can use the phonics check as formative assessment. Once data has been collected using the phonics check, it can be analysed using the Phonics continuum. Combined with their knowledge of the children, teachers can use this information to:

- identify areas of strength and learning needs
- reflect on what has been taught and its effectiveness
- set learning goals for the class, groups and individuals
- plan instruction using an evidence-informed scope and sequence.

Ready to Read Phonics Plus books, cards, games, and other resources align with the phonics check and the **English learning area Teaching sequence – Phase 1**. These resources are distributed free to primary schools that use the New Zealand Curriculum.

When support is needed

The results of the phonics check may indicate that accelerative support is required to help children progress and achieve as expected in the curriculum. The updated curriculum expectations are based on New Zealand evidence[5] of what a wide range of learners can achieve when a structured literacy approach and fast-paced scope and sequence are used for teaching and learning.

If the phonics check results indicate that a child needs additional support, teachers can use diagnostic assessments to get a detailed understanding of the child's phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge.

Accelerative approaches to teaching and learning help children who are not progressing their phonics knowledge and skills at the pace that is outlined in the **English learning area**. Acceleration uses explicit teaching strategies, supportive learning conditions and scaffolding to help children so they can progress faster than they would with 'usual teaching conditions'. Teachers can consider the learning needs of their class based on the phonics check results, and plan accelerative approaches at a universal, targeted, or tailored level.

Accelerating phonics learning requires the use of explicit systematic synthetic phonics instruction as outlined in the **English learning area**, but is delivered with increased intensity and duration, and closer monitoring of children's learning progress in response to teaching.

Further accelerative guidance will be available on Tāhurangi from Term 1, 2025.

---

5 Better Start Literacy Approach Child Well-being Research Institute. (2023). *Our Research*. University of Canterbury. **https://www.betterstartapproach.com/our-research**