

# Phonics Checks school guidance handbook

2026



Te Tāhuhu o  
te Mātauranga  
Ministry of Education

Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa  
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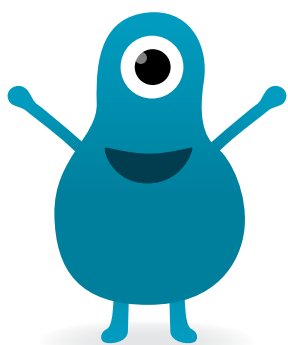
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# What's new in 2026?

The Phonics Checks were introduced in 2025 to support schools to understand and respond to student phonics progress against curriculum expectations. There are some updates to the Phonics Checks from 2026, which are outlined below.

## Requirements

From Term 1, 2026 all schools will be required to carry out checks with students in their first year of school. Checks will be carried out after students have been at school for 20-weeks and 40-weeks of term.

There may be some instances where the Phonics Check is not appropriate for assessing an individual student's learning. Please see Chapter 3 of this handbook further information.

## Online tool

In 2026, the Phonics Checks will be done online at [phonicschecks.education.govt.nz](https://phonicschecks.education.govt.nz). Detailed guidance for the online tool can be found in Chapter 4 of this handbook and at [Phonics Checks – Assessment materials](#).

## Progress descriptors

In 2026, the Phonics Check results will be provided using five Progress Descriptors to support consistent understanding of how students are progressing against curriculum expectations.

There are five descriptors to help parents and whānau understand their child's progress and achievement. The descriptors are:

- Emerging
- Developing
- Consolidating
- Proficient
- Exceeding

For more information about Progress Descriptors or Reporting to parents and whānau, please see our Tāhūrangi site: [Reporting to parents and whānau](#).

## Scoring model

The scoring model for the Phonics Check is becoming more detailed for the purposes of teaching and learning. Students will receive partial credit for the parts of words they read correctly, as well as for whole words. Further information can be found in Chapter 4 of this handbook.

# 1. About the Phonics Checks

## What is phonics?

Phonics instruction teaches the relationships between the letters of a written language (graphemes) and the sounds of spoken language (phonemes). Phonics is essential for learning to read because it helps readers to quickly identify and blend the sounds of unfamiliar written words. Effective teaching of reading and writing includes explicit and systematic synthetic phonics instruction.

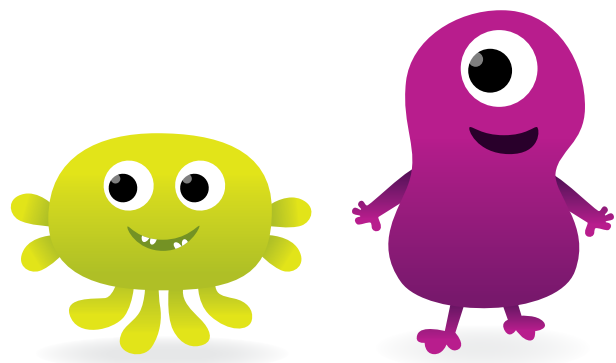
However, learning to read involves more than phonics. Phonics instruction should take place within a structured literacy approach that weaves together word recognition and language comprehension to support students to become skilled readers.

## What are the Phonics Checks?

The Phonics Check is a short assessment of how students are progressing with phonics learning. Students are asked to read up to a maximum of 40 words – some of which are real words and some that are pseudo (made-up) words.

It is carried out in a quiet setting by the classroom teacher with each student individually, and it takes 5 - 10 minutes to complete.

The Phonics Checks are administered through an **online tool**. Further administration guidance can be found in Chapter 4 of this handbook and at **Phonics Checks – Assessment materials**.



## What do the Phonics Checks assess?

The Phonics Check is designed to assess which grapheme-phoneme correspondences students know and how well they blend sounds together to read words.

The check aligns directly with the expectations outlined in the **English learning area** Phase 1 (Years 0 – 3) for ‘during the first six months’ and ‘during the first year’ as shown in the excerpt below:

Reading		Practices	
		During first six months	During the first year
Word Recognition	Phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge	Naming lowercase and uppercase letters of the alphabet.  Matching all single letters to at least one short-vowel or consonant phoneme.	Pronouncing the most frequent phoneme(s) for all consonant digraphs and some long-vowel graphemes.
	Decoding	Decoding consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words in isolation and in connected text, using their phonics knowledge.	Decoding words with adjacent consonants, consonant digraphs, and some long-vowel patterns in connected text, using their phonics knowledge.

## Why are the Phonics Checks at 20 weeks and 40 weeks?

The Phonics Check is carried out in a student’s first year of school, with a check after 20-weeks and again at 40-weeks after starting school. Weeks in the school holidays are not included.

The assessment is the same for both 20-weeks and 40-weeks, but the expectations of achievement are different.

### 20 weeks – the first six months

- The first check at 20-weeks provides teachers with an early indication of how students are progressing with their first six months of phonics learning.
- It identifies students at 20-weeks who need extra help with their phonics learning so that targeted literacy support can be provided within the first year of school.
- Achievement gaps are smaller and easier to address when students are under six years old. When children are older, the gaps are larger, and more support is often needed.
- To reach proficiency by 20-weeks, students will accurately decoding most consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words using their phonics knowledge.

### 40 weeks – the first year

- The second check at 40-weeks enables teachers to confirm the progress students have made against curriculum expectations in the first year of school.
- Students' phonics knowledge after a year of schooling is a strong predictor of later reading achievement<sup>2</sup>, so aggregated national data from the second check is also useful for understanding how well the education system supports early reading.
- To reach proficiency at 40-weeks, students will accurately decode most words of CVC, adjacent consonants, consonant digraphs, and some long-vowel patterns using their phonics knowledge.

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

The check is designed to align with curriculum expectations, so following the timeframes as closely as possible provides the most accurate information for tracking a student's learning. If a student is absent when they are due to complete the Phonics Check, it should be carried out as soon as possible after the student returns to school.

The Phonics Checks have a four-week testing window, with two weeks either side of the 20-week or 40-week timepoint. The online tool will show when the test window is open and when the check is overdue.

### Why are pseudo words used in the Phonics Checks?

Pseudo words are included in the Phonics Checks to ensure that students use their decoding skills rather than their memory of known words. A blue circle appears next to the pseudo words to help students know the difference between the real and made-up words. Pseudo words are for assessment purposes only and should not be used in learning contexts.



### 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 students who need early accelerated learning support<sup>3</sup>. Early additional support for phonics learning has been shown to effectively promote reading development<sup>4</sup>. Students 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.

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2 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0734282915621221>

3 <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2019-74802-008>

4 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-6984.2011.00081.x>

## How can teachers prepare students to be successful in phonics learning?

Teachers prepare students for success through explicit and systematic synthetic phonics instruction for decoding and spelling. Synthetic phonics involves explicitly teaching students 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.

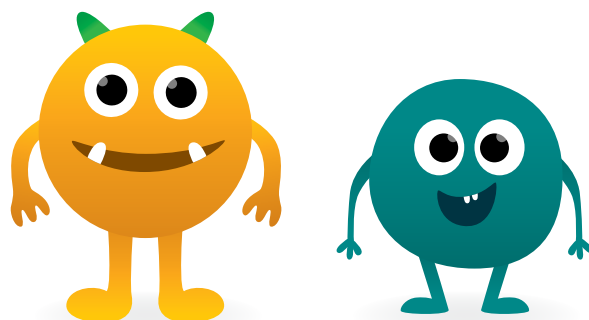
Systematic synthetic phonics instruction should be part of a **structured literacy approach** that is aligned to the **English learning area** of the refreshed New Zealand Curriculum.

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 Checks results?

Teachers use the results of the Phonics Check to notice, recognise, and respond to students' 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 Chapter 5 and 6 of this handbook.



## 2. School Leaders' responsibilities

School leaders' Phonics Checks responsibilities are to ensure:

- A school administrator is assigned to manage the student, group and school information in the online Phonics Checks tool (see **Phonics Checks – Assessment materials**).
- All students in their first year of school receive a Phonics Check within their 20-week and 40-week assessment windows (see note on exemptions in Chapter 3. Who should do the check?).
- Students' learning needs are catered for when undertaking the Phonics Checks, including those with additional learning needs and English Language Learners (see Inclusive and Accessible section).
- Checks are administered by the student's teacher.
- All teachers review this guide and the Phonics Check support materials, and understand how to administer the check.
- Teachers review data and reflect on the effectiveness of their current phonics instruction as part of whole school data-informed practice (see Chapter 7 of this handbook).
- Teachers plan appropriate instructional responses, informed by Phonics Check results, so that students are supported to progress and achieve as expected.

### Immersion and bilingual settings

Students 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.

Students who are accessing Te Marautanga o Aotearoa in te reo Māori immersion settings carry out **Hihira Weteoro** checks.

Students accessing the New Zealand Curriculum in Gagana Samoa and Lea Faka Tonga immersion settings carry out Pacific Phonics Checks in their language of instruction. See **Success as Pacific** on Tāhūrangi for further information.

### Reporting

Automated reporting functions for the online Phonics Check tool will be available at the end of Term 1, with details available closer to the time.

## 3. Who should do the checks?

### Teachers

The classroom teacher carries out the Phonics Checks with each student because the process of administering the check provides valuable information to inform teaching and learning.

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

### Students

All students at 20-weeks and 40-weeks should be included in the Phonics Checks.

In some circumstances where this assessment is not appropriate to a student's individual learning needs, the student may be exempt from completing the assessment.

Reasons for exemption may include:

**Content not appropriate:** The content of the assessment will not provide meaningful information about a student's learning. For example, if a student is not yet showing an understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds or is Deaf and communicates primarily through New Zealand Sign Language.

**Phonics Checks materials are not accessible:** The materials, even with adaptations, are not sufficiently accessible to provide meaningful information about a student's learning. For example, if a student is selectively mute or non-verbal<sup>5</sup>.

The decision around exemption must be made in consultation with the school's learning support coordinator, leaders and those who know the student best, and agreed within the student's individual learning plan.

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that an Augmentative and Alternative Communication version of the Phonics Checks are in development for students that are not currently able to demonstrate their decoding ability through reading aloud.

## Phonics Check readiness

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

Even if the student is not yet blending, the first items in Phonics Checks can be used to help the teacher identify student's grapheme-phoneme knowledge. Teachers can support students with a range of learning needs to participate in the check using the inclusive and accessible guidance in Chapter 5 of this handbook.

## Communication with parents and whānau about the checks

Use the information in the Parent Portal on [Phonics Checks - Ministry of Education](#) to communicate the purpose of the Phonics Checks to parents and whānau and respond to any questions or concerns.



# 4. Doing the Checks

## Getting Started

### Online Phonics Checks tool

The Phonics Checks will be carried out online at [phonicschecks.education.govt.nz](https://phonicschecks.education.govt.nz) with two administration modes for teachers to choose from:

#### Full online presentation mode

- Teachers record results directly in the online tool and students read the words in the check (student materials) from a device.



#### Hybrid online and paper mode

- Teachers record results directly in the application while students read from a printed PDF of the student materials.
- Teachers record results on a printed PDF marking sheet while students read from a printed PDF of the student materials. Teachers later transfer the results to the online tool.



**The Phonics Check word sets automatically change each term through the online tool. All assessment materials for Terms 1 - 4 are available to access from Tāhūrangi at the start of the year for those preferring to use printed materials.**

### Online tool instructions

User instructions for teachers and supporting materials for using the online Phonics Checks tool is available through the channels below:

**Training Module:** [Education LMS](#) includes video and interactive tasks.

**Tāhūrangi:** [Phonics Checks - Assessment materials](#) includes video and written step by step instructions.

First, work through the online module and follow up with the written instructions on Tāhūrangi if needed. Once you are familiar with how to log on to the online tool and carry out a check, you can choose your preferred mode – **full online** or **hybrid online and paper mode**.

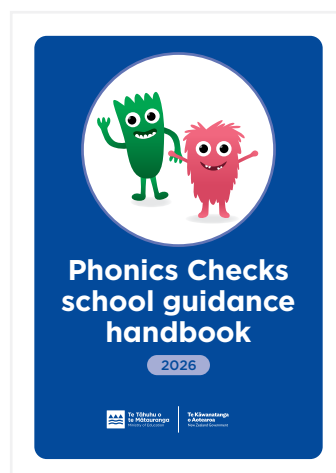
## Assessment materials

If using paper mode, download and print assessment materials as required, ensuring you have the correct set for the current term.

The following can be accessed from

### Phonics Checks – Assessment materials:

- Introduction script
- Practice sheet
- Student materials
- Marking sheet
- Scoring Guidance



## Allocating time and preparing the space

Log on to the online platform, by following the **online tool instructions**.

If you are using paper mode, have your assessment materials ready.

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

Teachers should conduct the check with each student individually in a quiet space where there are few distractions.

## Introducing the Phonics Check to students

Introduce the Phonics Checks to students following the introduction **script**.

Run through the **practice words** with students. Model how to segment the letter sounds and blend them together to encourage students to use this technique as they do the check, especially for the items they might find difficult.

## Administration tips

- Teachers can indicate which word comes next, by pointing left to right, but should not provide decoding clues.
- Avoid telling the student whether they read a word correctly or not. This can affect confidence and performance. Instead, offer encouragement such as, “*Keep going*”.
- After marking five whole words in a row as ‘not yet’, teachers stop the check regardless of how far through the check they are and praise the student’s effort.

## Scoring the Phonics Check

### Partial credit scoring

The scoring model for the Phonics Check is now more detailed for the purposes of teaching and learning. Students will receive credit for the parts of words they read correctly, as well as for whole words read correctly.

This approach reflects feedback from the sector about the advantages of a more fine-grain, strengths-based way to track emergent phonics progress. It also provides a more detailed description of progress aligning to the five progress descriptors that support **reporting to parents and whānau**.

#03

pen

○ Got it ● Not yet

Select from common feedback ▼

p e n

✓ □ ✓

"pin"

### Marking whole word items and sub-items

Mark each word as 'got it' (correct) or 'not yet' (incorrect). If a word is marked 'not yet', you can still give partial credit by selecting the individual grapheme phoneme correspondences the student read correctly.

Whole word correct ('got it' button)	Whole word incorrect ('not yet' button)
Student sounds out the phonemes and then says the whole word.	Sounds out the phonemes but does not blend the word.
Corrects initial attempts and finishes with the correct pronunciation.	Omits letter sounds, adds letter sounds, substitutes letter sounds, or reverses letter sounds.
Words pronounced in keeping with what is normal for the student's speech pattern.	

Sub items correct (tick)	Sub items incorrect (leave blank)
Pronounces the correct phoneme that corresponds to the grapheme.	Pronounces letter name rather than the phoneme that corresponds to the grapheme.
Blends adjacent consonants correctly.	Omits letter sounds, substitutes letter sounds, or reverses letter sounds.
Words pronounced in keeping with what is normal for the student's speech pattern.	Pronounces individual letter sounds within a digraph (e.g. t - h instead of 'th').

## Variable pronunciations

Children’s pronunciation of grapheme-phoneme correspondences can vary due to speech patterns or accents. For example, a child might pronounce *rem* as *wem* or say *pon* in a way that sounds like *bon*.

The Phonics Checks assess decoding ability, not speech accuracy. When marking, consider whether variations are consistent with the child’s normal speech. If unsure, ask them to repeat familiar words with the same graphemes. If the child decodes correctly but pronounces differently due to their speech patterns, mark the item as correct.

## Typical age students learn to pronounce consonants correctly

The typical ages at which a student can pronounce consonant sounds correctly are:

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

It can still be common for five- and six-year-olds to pronounce l, r, s, th and z incorrectly by substituting with different sounds. Further information can be found at [Pronouncing L, R, S, Th, and Z - The Center for Speech & Language Development](#).

## Score ranges

The Phonics Checks at 20-weeks and 40-weeks have score ranges specific to each timepoint. These ranges align with the five progress descriptors that indicate how students are progressing against curriculum expectations.

Some test items carry greater weight to ensure scores accurately reflect students’ decoding ability for specific graphemes and word types within the teaching sequence. Items that appear later in the sequence are weighted more heavily, so the overall score better represents progress according to the descriptors.

If you would like a detailed breakdown of item scoring, please email us at [phonics.check@education.govt.nz](mailto:phonics.check@education.govt.nz)

	Progress Descriptor	Score Range 20-weeks	Score Range 40-weeks
Below curriculum expectation	Emerging	0-9	0-40
	Developing	10-18	41-82
	Consolidating	19-28	83-123
At or above curriculum expectation	Proficient	29-50	124-190
	Exceeding	51+	191+

# 5. Inclusive and accessible checks

The Phonics Checks can be made more inclusive of and accessible to a range of students 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:**

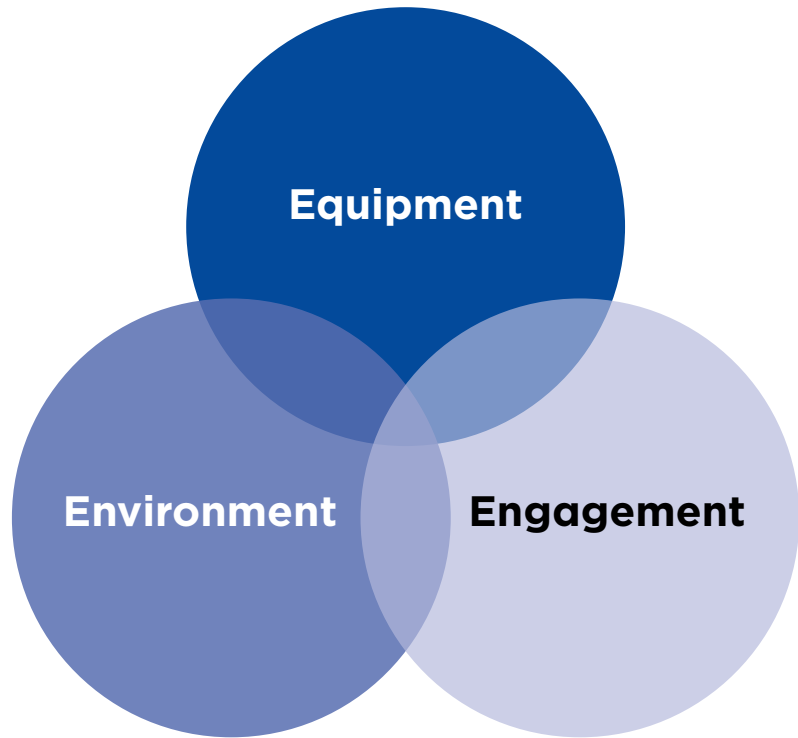
Factors relating to the content and presentation of Phonics Check materials.

**Environment:**

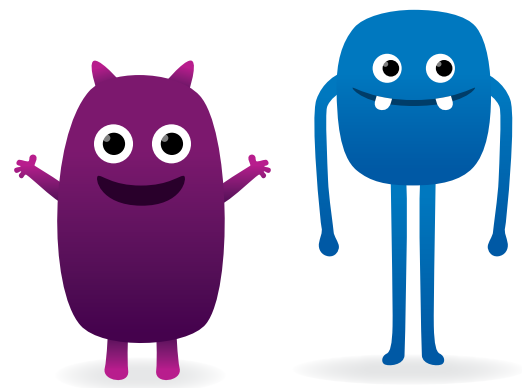
Factors relating to the physical and interpersonal space in which the Phonics Check occurs.

**Engagement:**

Factors affecting learners' engagement, sustained interest, attention, and persistence with the Phonics Check.



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



<b>Equipment: Factors relating to Phonics Check content and materials</b>	
<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Response</b>
The standard Phonics Check requires blending of grapheme-phoneme correspondences.	Some students may not yet be blending grapheme-phoneme correspondences together. Teachers can support these students 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 students 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.
	If the student 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 student's literacy and communication learning. Literacy and communication progressions are in development to support this.
The standard Phonics Check is in a language that the student does not have full access to.	Deaf or hard of hearing students who communicate primarily through New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) may not need to take the Phonics Check. Teachers should collaborate with the student's Resource Teacher of the Deaf (RTD) to notice, recognise, and respond to the student's literacy and communication learning.
	For students who are English Language Learners (ELL), consider allowing bilingual school staff to translate assessment instructions to support the teacher to administer the Phonics Check with a student, where appropriate. Please refer to the scoring guidance to ensure accents and varied speech patterns are accommodated for in the checks.
	Students 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 student to ask questions in their preferred language if this best supports the student to do the Phonics Check.

<b>Equipment: Factors relating to Phonics Check content and materials</b>	
<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Response</b>
The standard Phonics Check requires the student to read aloud.	For students who are non-speaking or have significant communication, speech and/or language difficulties, and use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), we are developing the AAC version of Phonics Checks to be available later in 2026.
The standard Phonics Check requires clear sight.	Support blind and low vision students to access the Phonics Check using alternative formats, such as Braille or enlarged text.
	The appropriate Phonics Check format can be identified by the student's Resource Teacher Vision (RTV) and accessed from <b>BLENNZ</b> . Teachers will carry out the Phonics Check with blind and low vision students with the support of the RTV.
	If the student usually wears glasses, ensure they are wearing these for the Phonics Check.

<b>Environment: Factors relating to the physical and interpersonal space in which the Phonics Check occurs</b>	
<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Response</b>
The standard classroom environment is noisy or busy.	Support students 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 students focus on the Phonics Check successfully.
	Offer flexible seating and positioning to help students feel secure and at ease for the Phonics Check.
	If the student usually uses hearing assistive technology ensure that these are fitted for the Phonics Check.
The classroom teacher does not have the expertise to adequately support the student with the Phonics Check.	Teachers can work with the student's parents and learning support specialists ahead of time to understand strategies that will support the student with the Phonics Check. A learning support specialist can assist the teacher to carry out the Phonics Check.

<b>Engagement: Factors affecting learners' engagement, sustained interest, attention, and persistence with the Phonics Check</b>	
<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Response</b>
The standard Phonics Check requires sustained focus.	Teachers can support students to maintain focus by dividing the Phonics Check into smaller more manageable sections. These can be interspersed with brain and movement breaks to help students reset and refocus.
	When undertaking the Phonics Checks using the online tool, one word will be displayed at a time on the student's device for ease of focus. If completing a manual Phonics Check using 'paper mode', the teacher can cover the other words on the page for the same effect.
	Reducing distractions and clutter will support students to concentrate on the Phonics Check.
	Providing physical manipulatives, such as sensory toys, may also be helpful to some students.
	In addition to the script provided, teachers can motivate students 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 students are getting answers wrong or right.
The standard Phonics Check might cause anxiety.	Teachers can reduce assessment anxiety by familiarising groups of students with the Phonics Check ahead of time, explaining that it allows the students show all their learning, and helps teachers and whānau support their next learning steps.
	Teachers can help students feel secure by allowing them to hold a comfort item, such as a soft toy, during the check.
	If students become anxious during the assessment, teachers can offer short breaks, encouragement, and reassurance to help students reset and come back to the check.

## 6. Response to the Phonics Checks results

The following guidance identifies what the scores and progress descriptors tell us about how children are tracking with their phonics learning in relation to curriculum expectations. It also outlines what this might indicate about children's learning needs, and how teachers can respond.

The Phonics Checks are not the only way for teachers to monitor phonics progress. From the time students begin school and again after completing the 20-week check, teachers monitor progress closely and respond to learning needs as they arise. Monitoring may include observations, frequent checks for understanding, and noting how students respond to prompt, corrective feedback designed to support their progress.

Curriculum level	Progress Descriptor	Score ranges		Teaching and learning response			
		20-weeks	40-weeks	Support	Students require		
Not yet at curriculum expectation	Emerging	0-9	0-40	■	■	■	Universal and targeted support with close monitoring to accelerate progress. Tailored support may be applicable.
	Developing	10-18	41-82	■	■		Universal and targeted support with close monitoring to accelerate progress.
	Consolidating	19-28	83-123	■			Universal support with close monitoring to increase progress.
At or above curriculum expectation	Proficient	29-50	124-190	■			Current level of universal support and monitoring to maintain progress.
	Exceeding	51+	191+	■			Current level of universal support with monitoring to maintain progress, and extension opportunities.

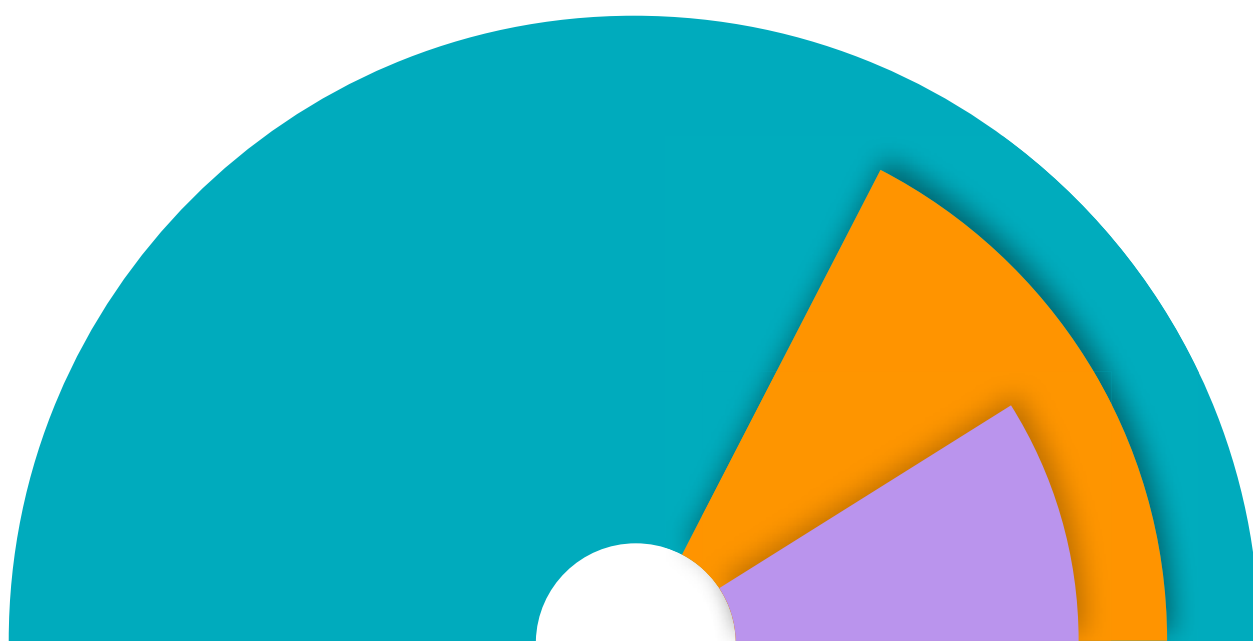
Where the Phonics Checks identify students are not making the required progress to meet expectations at the 20-week and 40-week checks, teachers intensify teaching and provide more frequent opportunities for repeated exposures to the learning.

If many students have a Phonics Check result that indicates they need additional support, this signals that the school and teacher may need to review their approach to explicit phonics teaching.

## Phonics teaching and learning responses

The most effective approach to teaching and learning is through a multi-layered, flexible teaching response that adapts the intensity of instruction to student needs (also known as ‘response to intervention’ (RTI) or ‘multi-tiered system of support’ (MTSS) models).

Our New Zealand model is **Te Tūāpapa o He Pikorua** (below). Te Tūāpapa shows visually – through the depiction of smaller and smaller layers that build on top of one another – how support is designed to be dynamic and integrated, rather than a linear progression from one level of support to the next. The layers of support increase or decrease in response to each learner’s needs and the context, informed by data and evidence.



### Te Matua

#### Universal

Strengthens inclusive environments, cultures and practices.

### Te Kāhui

#### Targeted

Offers focused approaches to enhance participation, learning and wellbeing.

### Te Arotahi

#### Tailored

Provides more specific supports for unique needs and contexts.

The three layers of support are universal, targeted and tailored:

### Universal

- All students continue to receive inclusive everyday universal classroom teaching that includes prompt, corrective feedback aimed at supporting their progress.
- Adaptive teaching is provided at the universal classroom level to support all students to engage in the same learning by using scaffolds and reducing cognitive load.
- Effective classroom teaching that includes small group work targeted to specific needs is part of the same continuum of support as targeted teaching for those students who need it, but at a lower level of intensity.

### Targeted

- In addition to universal classroom teaching, provide intensive, targeted support aligned to student needs identified through the Phonics Check, observations, and other data (including diagnostic assessments if needed).
- See *Building phonemic awareness and phonics to support decoding* in the Years 0–3 section of **the Accelerating progress in literacy – Teacher guidance** for further strategies.

### Tailored

- A tailored approach may be more individualised, specific support for learners with unique and/or complex needs, or may provide more intensive teaching for students whose progress isn't adequately accelerated through targeted support; In both instances, it should be considered in discussion with school leaders, specialists and those who know the student best.
- Tailored supports build on and connect with the universal curriculum teaching programme.
- While in most cases tailored support won't be necessary in the first 20 weeks at school, it is important not to wait to increase the intensity of support for any student whose acceleration is not sufficient to meet end-of-year curriculum expectations by 40-weeks.
- There may also be some students whose needs require very intensive support from their first day of school, such as those with high and complex learning needs.

**For more information about universal, targeted, and tailored teaching, see the 'Leaders integrate universal, targeted and tailored responses ('tiered' support)' accordion of the 'Create the conditions to accelerate progress' tab here: [Accelerating progress - Leadership guidance](#).**

### Monitoring for all

All students, regardless of achievement, require monitoring, daily or weekly, depending on level of response required.

- Monitor progress during universal teaching using ongoing formative assessment (e.g., observations and checks for understanding).
- Use progress monitoring tools to track progress (such as **DIBELS non-word fluency subtest**) during targeted support and adjust teaching as needed to accelerate progress.

## Specific responses 20-weeks

### 20-weeks *Emerging*

**Universal Targeted Tailored**

Students require universal support plus intensive targeted support. They are not yet tracking to meet proficiency at the 40-week check, and require close monitoring, daily or weekly, to accelerate learning as needed. Tailored responses may also be appropriate and are considered in discussion with school leadership and those who know the student best.

If progress monitoring indicates that a student is making minimal progress while receiving targeted support, teaching adjustments as well as the increased intensity of a tailored response need to be considered.

Current knowledge and skills	Possible next steps
Student may correctly identify some grapheme phoneme correspondences (GPCs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit, intensive teaching of unknown GPCs.</li> <li>• Support decoding and spelling at word level.</li> <li>• Extra practice with blending.</li> </ul>

Universal adaptive techniques and resources to support next steps may include:

- Sound and phonics cards that include pictures (**Ready to Read Phonics Plus Sound Cards - Kākano | Seed**).
- Sound and phonics cards on the Parent Portal that include audio of the sounds for accurate modelling (**Phonics Checks - Ministry of Education**).
- Echo reading.
- Letter tiles with a small number of letter options to choose from (forced choice rather than unlimited choice).

Targeted/tailored support for 20-week students at the *Emerging* level may include:

- Delivering explicit instruction in decoding and spelling GPCs at both sound and word level to support orthographic mapping and fluent reading.
- Providing additional support with blending, starting with continuous blending using familiar correspondences. (e.g. “ffffffaaaaannnn, fan” instead of “/f/, /a/, n/, ‘fan’”).

See ‘Building phonemic awareness and phonics to support decoding’ in **Accelerating progress in literacy – Teacher guidance** for more teaching techniques.

**20-weeks *Developing*****Universal Targeted**

Students require both universal and targeted support. They are not yet tracking to meet proficiency at the 40-week check and require close monitoring, daily or weekly, to accelerated learning as needed.

Current knowledge and skills	Possible next steps
Student can accurately identify many GPCs and is blending some words with accuracy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support decoding and spelling at word level.</li> <li>• Extra practice with blending.</li> </ul>

Universal adaptive techniques and resources to support next steps may include:

- More modelling of continuous blending to decode words (e.g. “ffffffaaaaannnn, fan” instead of “/f/, /a/, n/, ‘fan’”).
- Providing opportunities for students to practice blending words with two sounds (e.g. am) before building up to words with three sounds.
- The teacher reviewing the video guide for how to blend and articulate sounds to inform their teaching, available under the *Phonics 6 blending and articulation* heading at [Ready to Read Phonics Plus - Video guides](#).

Targeted support for students at the *Developing* level may include:

- Intensive, explicit teaching to support decoding and spelling at word level to aid the orthographic mapping process, which supports fluent reading.
- Intensive explicit instruction in blending words to support fluent reading.

See the ‘Building phonemic awareness and phonics to support decoding’ in [Accelerating progress in literacy – Teacher guidance](#) for more teaching techniques.

**20-weeks *Consolidating*****Universal**

Students require universal support that includes whole class instruction as well as small group work targeted to specific needs.

Students are close to, but not yet on track to meet proficiency at the 40-week check, so close monitoring is needed to ensure they increase their progress to meet the higher expectations of the 40 weeks Phonics Check.

Current knowledge and skills	Possible next steps
Student can accurately identify GPCs and is blending some words with accuracy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decoding and spelling at word level for areas of need.</li> <li>• Extra practice with blending.</li> <li>• Introduce digraphs and adjacent consonants.</li> </ul>

**20-weeks Proficient****Universal**

Students require universal support that includes whole class instruction as well as small group work targeted to specific needs.

Students are on track to meet proficiency at the 40-week check, but monitoring is still needed to ensure they maintain progress to meet the higher expectations of the 40 weeks Phonics Check.

Current knowledge and skills	Possible next steps
Student can accurately identify many GPCs and is blending them into words with frequent accuracy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decoding and spelling at word level for areas of need.</li> <li>• Introduce digraphs and adjacent consonants.</li> </ul>

**20-weeks Exceeding****Universal**

Students require universal support that includes whole class instruction as well as small group work targeted to specific needs – including opportunities for enrichment and extension.

Students are on track to meet proficiency at the 40-week check, but monitoring is needed to ensure they maintain progress to meet the higher expectations of the 40 weeks Phonics Check.

Current knowledge and skills	Possible next steps
Student can accurately identify many GPCs and is blending them into words with frequent accuracy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decoding and spelling at word level for areas of need.</li> <li>• Introduce unknown long-vowel patterns and words with more than one syllable, if appropriate.</li> </ul>



## Specific responses 40-weeks

### 40-weeks *Emerging*

**Universal Targeted Tailored**

Students require universal support plus intensive targeted and/or tailored support. Students require close monitoring, daily or weekly, to accelerate learning as needed.

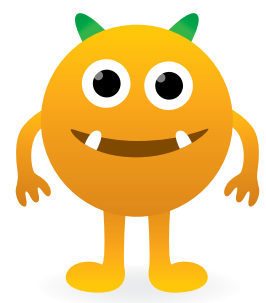
Current knowledge and skills	Possible next steps
May identify grapheme phoneme correspondences and may read some CVC words correctly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensive support decoding and spelling at GPC and word level for areas of need.</li> <li>• Extra practice with blending.</li> </ul>

Universal adaptive techniques and resources to support next steps may include:

- Using GPCs all students know during new learning when modelling words that include the GPC focus of the lesson, if possible. For example, if the focus of the lesson is the split digraph a\_e, and not all students know the GPC for 't' or 'n', only use example words without those letters - such as 'cape' and 'made' but not 'name' or 'late.'
- Using letter tiles with one grapheme (such as 'ai') per tile rather than only one letter per tile (such as separate 'a' and 'i' tiles making up the grapheme 'ai').

Targeted/tailored support for 40-week students at the *Emerging* level may include:

- Intensive, explicit teaching to review and revisit previously taught GPCs that haven't been transferred to the student's long-term memory yet, while also introducing new ones. Rather than revisiting the scope and sequence step-by-step for previously taught content, instead focus on filling the students' gaps as well as providing additional practice of what is currently being taught at the universal classroom level. You may also want to frontload students by introducing them to new grapheme-phoneme correspondences before they are taught to the rest of the class.
- Intensive, explicit teaching to support decoding and spelling of grapheme-phoneme correspondences at both sound and word level to support fluent reading.
- Intensive explicit instruction and practice in continuous blending of words.
- Using word chains (e.g. mop -> map -> mat) to effectively and efficiently accelerate learning because they are simultaneously building phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge, and spelling and decoding skills.



**40-weeks *Developing*****Universal Targeted**

Students require both universal and targeted support. They require close monitoring, daily or weekly, to accelerate learning as needed.

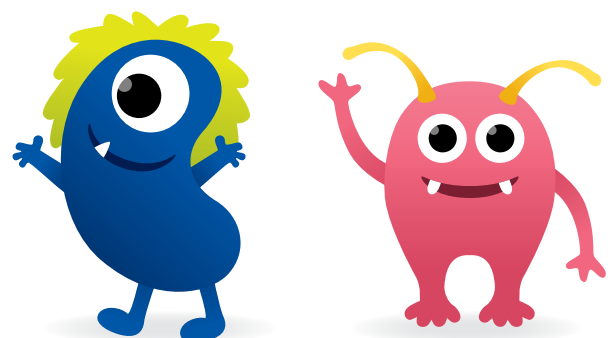
Current knowledge and skills	Possible next steps
Can correctly read most CVC words and may be blending words with digraphs and/or adjacent consonants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support decoding and spelling at word level for areas of need.</li> <li>• Introducing words with long vowels and two syllables.</li> </ul>

Universal adaptive teaching techniques and resources may include:

- Using a mix of easier and harder words with the focus GPC in them to meet the differing needs of students (e.g. aid, rain, mail, plain, chain, stairs, raining, haircut, mailbox).
- Supporting students to move to reading two syllable words by starting with compound CVC/CVC words such as laptop, Batman, and suntan.

Targeted support for 40-week students at the *Developing* level may include:

- Support with correctly blending up to six phonemes to make words.
- Decoding words with long vowel grapheme-phoneme correspondences.
- Helping students to hear and recognise the difference between short and long vowel sounds by using word pairs where the only difference is the vowel sound (e.g. pan- pane/pain, bit - bite).



**40-weeks Consolidating****Universal**

Students require universal support that includes whole class instruction as well as small group work targeted to specific needs.

Students are not yet at curriculum expectations and require monitoring to ensure their rate of progress is increased and later maintained.

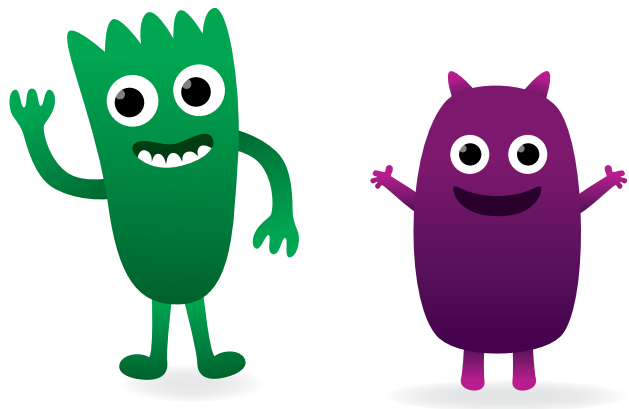
Current knowledge and skills	Possible next steps
Can correctly read most CVC words and is blending words with digraphs and/or adjacent consonants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support decoding and spelling at word level for areas of need.</li> <li>• Introduce a range of long vowel patterns and two syllable words.</li> </ul>

Universal adaptive teaching techniques and resources could include:

- Teacher think-alouds that model how to decode more complex words e.g. for the word 'train', "This word has 'ai' in the middle and we've been learning that it usually shows the long /a/ sound".

Targeted support for 40-week students at the *Consolidating* level may include:

- Multiple opportunities to decode words with long vowel grapheme-phoneme correspondences.
- Helping students to hear and recognise the difference between short and long vowel sounds by using word pairs where the only difference is the vowel sound (e.g. pan- pane/pain, bit - bite).
- Intensive explicit instruction for blending words with digraphs and adjacent consonants. This will require intensive explicit instruction at word level, and then into text level to support progress.



**40-weeks Proficient****Universal**

Students require universal support that includes whole class instruction as well as small group work targeted to specific needs.

Students require monitoring to ensure their rate of progress is maintained.

Current knowledge and skills	Possible next steps
Can correctly read most CVC words, words with digraphs and/or adjacent consonants and may read some words with long vowels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support decoding and spelling at word level for areas of need.</li> <li>• Practice with a range of long vowel patterns and two and three syllable words.</li> </ul>

**40-weeks Exceeding****Universal**

Students require universal support that includes whole class instruction as well as small group work targeted to specific needs – including opportunities for enrichment and extension.

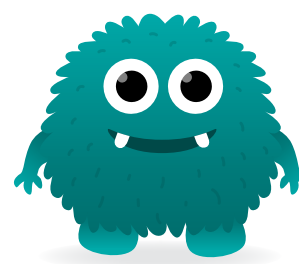
Students require monitoring to ensure their rate of progress is maintained.

Current knowledge and skills	Possible next steps
Can correctly read most CVC words, words with digraphs and/or adjacent consonants and can read some words with a range of vowel patterns (long vowel, r-controlled, diphthongs) and may read multi-syllable words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support decoding and spelling at word level for areas of need.</li> <li>• Practice with a range of long vowel patterns, less common GPCs and multisyllable words.</li> </ul>

**Further analysis**

Overleaf is a table of common errors and some analysis with suggestions for appropriate teaching responses to these errors. All teaching responses include explicit teaching using the *I do/We do/You do* approach, and provide timely, corrective feedback to the student

This table presents a sample of words, the insights that can be gleaned from analysing mistakes and, a suggested response.



Example Word	Student Response	Analysis	Teaching Response
ag	'a' read as letter	Unconsolidated letter sounds.	Include daily letter-sound fluency practice to decode / encode / decode with <b>Ready to Read Phonics Plus sound and phonics cards</b> . Add sound-to-symbol mapping tasks with materials (hear sound → choose correct letter). VC blending practice: ag, am, ad, at.
ag	a-g	Blending difficulties.	Include daily continuous blending practice with VC/CVC words. Word-chaining activities.
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.	Include daily letter-sound fluency practice to decode / encode / decode with <b>Ready to Read Phonics Plus sound and phonics cards</b> . Short vowel CVC word blending and segmenting activities.
ag	ap	Letter confusion due to visually similar letters or unconsolidated letter sound knowledge.	Include daily letter-sound fluency practice to decode / encode / decode with <b>Ready to Read Phonics Plus sound and phonics cards</b> . Word Chain activities to support hearing initial, medial and final sounds. Word level fluency practice. Incorporate targeted handwriting practice to differentiate similar looking letters.
sum	sam		
mid	mib		
chop	shop	Unconsolidated letter sound knowledge of common digraphs.	Include daily letter-sound fluency practice to decode / encode / decode with <b>Ready to Read Phonics Plus sound and phonics cards</b> . Consonant digraph word blending and segmenting activities Word level fluency practice.
chop	cop		
splam	slam	Omission of consonant in consonant cluster due to unconsolidated blending skills.	Modelling with stretching the sounds in consonant clusters before blending them. Practice with minimal pairs to highlight the difference: "Slip vs sip. Which has two sounds at the start? Blend both slowly and clearly."
glog	log		

# 7. Whole school data informed approaches

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 data literacy - an understanding of data and what it tells us
- analysing data as a team
- using data to collaboratively identify effective teaching strategies
- using data to create an action plan for instruction.

School leaders are responsible for ensuring that teachers review data and collaboratively reflect on the effectiveness of their current phonics instruction as part of whole school data-informed practice.

Teachers are responsible for planning appropriate instructional responses, informed by Phonics Check results, using a range of assessment evidence and contextual information. This is so that students are supported to progress and achieve as expected, using a multi-layered flexible teaching approach.

## Multi-layered flexible teaching

The most effective way to support accelerated progress is through a multi-layered, flexible teaching approach that adjusts the intensity of instruction to meet individual student needs. This approach requires adaptable, data-informed strategies to ensure every student receives the right level of support at the right time using universal, targeted and tailored supports.

Multi-layered teaching is represented by *Te Tūāpapa o He Pikorua*, which illustrates how support is dynamic and integrated rather than a linear progression from one level to the next. The layers increase or decrease based on each learner's needs and context, guided by data and evidence. This approach may also be known as a 'response to intervention' (RTI) or 'multi-tiered system of support' (MTSS).

When this system works effectively, the distribution of students receiving support will be approximately:

- **Universal only:** 80% of students or more
- **Targeted:** 15% of students or less
- **Tailored:** 5% of students or less

Phonics-specific elaborations of universal, targeted and tailored supports are outlined in the Response to Phonics Check Results section. Additionally, **Accelerating progress - Leadership guidance** provides more information about multi-layered flexible instruction in the 'Leaders integrate universal, targeted and tailored responses ('tiered' support)' accordion of the 'Create conditions to accelerate progress' tab.

## Plan for data collection

Ongoing formative assessment is essential for monitoring student literacy progress to identify strengths and gaps and inform targeted instruction. Continuous monitoring allows teaching to build on prior knowledge and provide timely support for individual needs. Standardised tools, such as the Phonics Check, offer valid and reliable tracking of progress against curriculum expectations. These complement a range of other types of assessment evidence and contextual information to inform planning.

## Phonics Checks analysis

Phonics Checks occur at 20- and 40-weeks of school for individual students, rather than all at the same time, requiring two analysis processes to inform student, class and whole-school level responses.

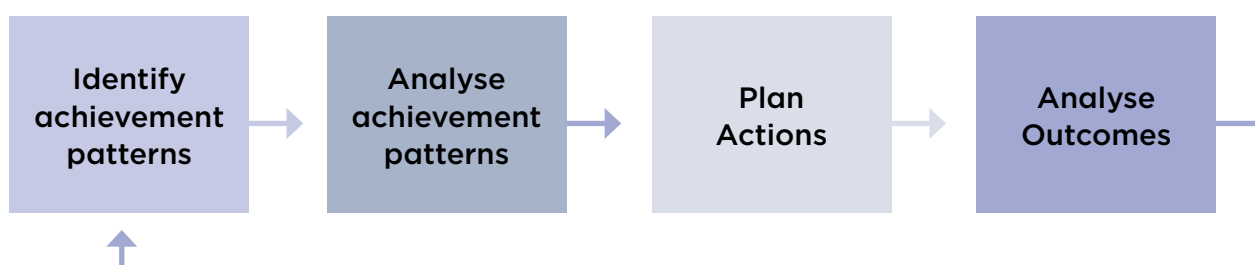
### Process 1: Immediate teacher-level analysis

- Teachers review student results, and promptly action a teaching response, including targeted support as needed (see Teaching Response guidance).
- Teachers adjust universal teaching if required.
- School Leaders enable targeted support by allocating resources (see [Accelerating progress - Leadership guidance](#) for more information).

### Process 2: Regular Phonics Check data review meetings

School leaders and teachers should hold regular data conversations at set points (e.g., weeks 5 and 9 of each term) to confirm that every student is receiving the right level of instruction and that students at risk of not meeting curriculum expectations are identified early for more intensive support.

Use Phonics Check data to guide these discussions, agree next steps, and repeat them as part continuous cycle of review, such as the four-step process outlined below<sup>6</sup>.



<sup>6</sup> These four steps are partly based on Brown, S., & Stollar, S. (2025). *MTSS for reading improvement: A leader's tool kit for schoolwide success*. Solution Tree Press.

### 1. Identify achievement patterns

- Calculate percentage of students at proficient or above at 20- and 40-weeks with the goal of 20% or less requiring targeted or tailored support.
- Identify the effectiveness of universal instruction. If more than 20% of students require targeted or tailored supports, review universal class teaching.
- Identify missed concepts and align next steps with scope and sequence. Identify patterns (e.g., gaps in digraphs or vowel patterns).
- Review progress monitoring results of students receiving targeted and tailored support.



### 2. Analyse achievement patterns

- Determine why achievement patterns exist using data.
- Evaluate universal instruction:
  - Is it effective? How do we know? How can it be improved?
  - Identify teacher strengths and professional development needs.
- Review student progress history and identify any external impacts (e.g., attendance).
- Confirm Targeted/Tailored supports are being provided in a timely manner and assess if they need intensification.
- Identify resourcing issues and barriers.



### 3. Plan Actions

- Develop and assign responsibility for an action plan.
- Define monitoring process (who, how and when).
- Adjust teaching actions:
  - Re-target missed concepts.
  - Adjust approach for challenge, explicitness, feedback, and opportunities to respond.
  - Adjust intensity / dosage of support as needed.
  - Provide teacher capability support if needed.
- Address any resourcing issues - strengthen or remove barriers as needed.



### 4. Analyse Outcomes

- Did adjustments achieve expected improvement?
- How do we know?
- What further actions are needed?





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