

Year 1 Phonics screening check 2026

What is the phonics check?

The Phonics Screening Check is a national test for all children in Year 1. Children will take this check during the week beginning 8th June 2026 in a one-to-one setting with a teacher that they are familiar with. Pupils will have the opportunity to take this check again in Year 2 if they do not meet the required standard in Year 1.

The phonics screening check is not a formal test, but a way for teachers to ensure that children are making sufficient progress with their phonics skills to read words and that they are on track to become fluent readers who can enjoy reading for pleasure and for learning. The check will help to identify whether your child needs additional support at this stage so that they do not fall behind in this vital early reading skill. Whilst children learn phonics to help them with both word reading and spelling, the Phonics Screening Check only tests their skills at word reading. This is called **decoding**.

During the Phonics Screening Check, children are asked to read (decode) 40 words. Some of these words are real words but some are pseudo-words (nonsense words). Pseudo-words are included to ensure that children are using their decoding skills and not just relying on their memory of words they've read before. Each pseudo-word is clearly identified with an image of an alien. Most teachers and children, therefore, refer to pseudo-words as alien words.

The test itself is divided into two sections. Section 1 is the easier part. In this section, children are asked to recognise simple word structures from the earlier phases of the phonics curriculum such as 'shop', 'peel' and 'yell'. Section 2 is the trickier part of the test. Here, children need to recognise sounds from the later stages of the phonics curriculum. They also encounter **sounds** that correspond to more than one **phoneme** (e.g. the grapheme 'ea' represents different phonemes in the words bread and bead).

There is no time limit for the Phonics Screening Check, but it usually takes less than 10 minutes. The pass mark for the check is usually 32/40.

How can you support your child?

With this letter you will find a chart of all of the captions which we use in school to accompany each of the sounds. Some sounds are made from more than one letter and we call these sounds 'special friends'. Sounds such as 'a-e in cake' are still called special friends but they have been separated for being too chatty in class. Please ask your child to practice reading through these sounds as often as possible.

Also accompanying this letter is a booklet of real words and pseudo words, similar to those which the children have to decode in the phonics screening test. For each word the children need to spot the 'special friend' (described above) or shake their head if there isn't one, fred talk (this means to say the sounds in order' and then say the word. For example for the pseudo word 'splote' children would say 'special friend o-e, fred talk s/p/l/o-e/t' say the word splote'. Next term we will send home a further list each week and another booklet for half term so please practice these words as much as possible with your child.

There is a video of a child completing this check in the Y1/2 area of the school website so please take a look so you know how your child should be completing the words.

If you have any questions about the screening check or the information in this letter, please contact your child's class teacher.

Thank you for your continued support.

The Year 1/2 team