



Phonics Screening Check

What is the Phonics Screening Check?

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check is a short assessment that takes 5-7 minutes and indicates to classroom teachers how their students are progressing in phonics. The Phonics Screening Check is designed to be administered in Year 1, after students have had time to develop phonic knowledge, but with enough time left to make sure interventions and targeted teaching can still make a difference.

The Phonics Screening Check complements existing school practices used to identify students' progress in developing foundational literacy skills.

This document provides a summary of information and data from the Phonics Screening Check trial delivered in 2020.

2020 Phonics Screening Check trial

The trial was conducted to determine if the Phonics Screening Check provided teachers with reliable diagnostic information on student phonics development to better target support to students.

Schools were invited to participate in the trial through an Expression of Interest. Year 1 teachers in participating schools administered assessments online to individual students between 10-28 August 2020.

Results were immediately available to schools in the assessment app and PLAN2, enabling teachers to rapidly move to use the results to address learning gaps.

To assist teachers in using the results, test items were aligned to the NSW English K-6 syllabus, National Literacy Learning Progression and teaching strategies.

A Student assessment analysis and a parent feedback summary report were also available in the online tool. The Student assessment analysis allowed teachers to observe students' progress against phonic knowledge sub-element indicators, check student progress and create 'Areas of Focus' for targeted teaching and skill development.

Features of the student reports included:

- an observation summary of the student's responses with the teacher's comments and observations
- an observation diagnosis linked to the learning progressions where the student may require explicit instruction, guided and independent practice
- links to further resources like teaching strategies and professional learning.

Support

Online professional learning provided teachers with an opportunity to develop an understanding of how to implement the Phonics Screening Check and interpret the information to support student learning. The professional learning included information on effective teaching strategies for early reading instruction. Additional professional learning for effective reading instruction and resources was available for department teachers if needed.

Participating department schools were provided with two days casual relief for each Year 1 teacher to cover:

- professional learning in Term 2 to support teachers to administer the assessment and to analyse the results
- time taken to administer the assessment.

Participation rates

The 2020 trial of the Phonics screening check was undertaken in 520 NSW government schools (out of 1,700 possible schools) with 23,975 Year 1 students participating (33.6% of 71,000 Year 1 students in total).

Results from the trial sample were weighted to derive the NSW government Year 1 population estimates, based on key student demographics (for example, socio-economic status, geolocation).

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check trial consisted of 40 items. The average number of items correct was 23.

Students were considered to have met the expected achievement level if they correctly answered 28 or more items. 43% of students achieved at or above this level.

This result is in line with the first Year 1 Phonics Screening Check undertaken by South Australian students in 2018¹.

Results by equity groups include (Figure 1 and Table 1):

- a smaller proportion of Aboriginal students met or exceeded the expected achievement score level (18.4%) in comparison to non-Aboriginal students (45.6%).
- a higher percentage of students living in major cities (46.7%) scored at or above the expected level in comparison to students living elsewhere (inner regional = 34.7%; outer regional = 27.2%, remote/very remote = 23.8%).
- the proportion of English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D)² students meeting or exceeding the expected score level ranged from 20.5% for students at the Beginning phase, to 45% for the Emerging phase, and over 60% for students at the Developing and Consolidating phases. While students at Developing and Consolidating English can easily master the constrained set of phonics skills required to decode words, they may still be behind their English speaking peers in reading and require vocabulary building and other scaffolding to make meaning from text and read with fluency and comprehension.
- students in the highest Socio-educational Advantage (SEA)³ quarter were three times more likely to meet or exceed the expected level than students in the lowest SEA quarter (62% for SEA Quarter 4 versus 22% for SEA Quarter 1).
- a smaller proportion of students in Early Action for Success (EAfS) Phase 1 (26.2%) and Phase 2 (30.8%) schools⁴ met or exceeded the expected level than students at non-EAfS schools. In 2020, there are 527 department funded EAfS schools across NSW. EAfS provides targeted support for identified primary schools in the lowest quartile of NAPLAN performance in literacy and numeracy and the highest needs as reflected in their Family Occupation and Employment Index (FOEI) values. There is a significant representation of students from outer regional and remote, Aboriginal and Beginning EAL/D backgrounds across the EAfS schools. This reflects the results being in a similar range as to Quarter 1 and 2 of SEA which represent the same demographic groups.

Results are also summarised in Table 2 by total score groupings (students who scored 0 to 19, 20 to 27 or 28+).

1 South Australia Year 1 Phonics Screening Check 2020: <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-phonics-screening-check-results-fact-sheet.pdf>.

2 EAL/D learners are students whose first language is a language other than Standard Australian English and who require additional support to develop the English language proficiency required to access the school curriculum. EAL/D learners enter our schools at different ages and stages of schooling and at different phases of English language proficiency. EAL/D students of any age may be in any of the four English language learning phases: Beginning, Emerging, Developing and Consolidating and may move through the four phases at different rates. On average, it takes EAL/D students 5-7 years to master the academic English language required for success at school and may take up to 11 years for students from refugee backgrounds who have experienced trauma and interrupted or no prior schooling.

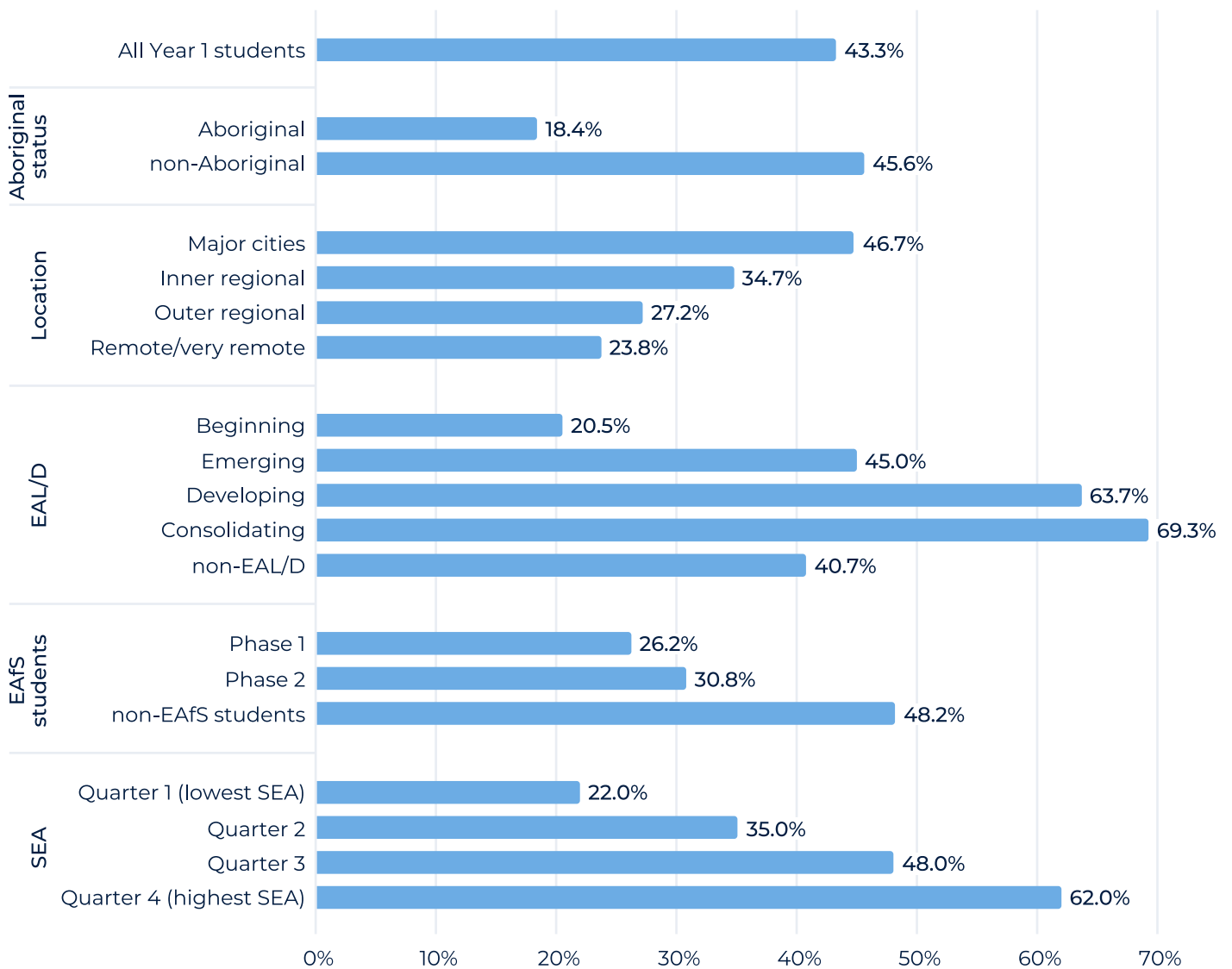
For more information about the phases and support provided to schools, refer to the Department's '[English as an Additional Language or Dialect: Advice for schools](#)' or the ACARA [EAL/D Learning Progression](#).

3 SEA quarter is a student-level measure of socio-educational advantage based on parents' highest educational attainment and occupation group.

4 Phase 1 schools commenced EAfS between 2012 and 2015, Phase 2 schools commenced in 2017.

Figure 1:

Percentage of Year 1 government school students who have met or exceeded expected phonics achievement by equity groups (weighted)



Note: EAL/D phase was assessed for most students in March – May 2020. A substantial number of students at the Beginning and Emerging phases in March – May may have progressed to higher EAL/D phases by September 2020. Non-EAL/D students include those with EAL/D classifications of 'Unknown/not provided', 'Not required' and 'To be assessed'.

Table 1:

Average student score and proportion of students meeting expected score by equity groups
(weighted and unweighted)

	Unweighted		Weighted	
	Average score	% met	Average score	% met
All Year 1 students	22.8	42.6%	23.1	43.3%
Aboriginal	14.3	18.7%	14.2	18.4%
non-Aboriginal	23.7	44.9%	23.9	45.6%
Major cities	24.0	46.2%	24.1	46.7%
Inner regional	20.4	34.7%	20.4	34.7%
Outer regional	17.9	27.2%	17.8	27.2%
Remote/very remote	15.4	21.7%	15.8	23.8%
EAL/D Beginning	14.6	19.2%	15.1	20.5%
EAL/D Emerging	23.7	44.4%	23.9	45.0%
EAL/D Developing	28.7	63.1%	28.8	63.7%
EAL/D Consolidating	30.2	68.8%	30.4	69.3%
non-EAL/D	22.1	40.0%	22.3	40.7%
EaFS Phase 1	17.2	26.3%	17.2	26.2%
EaFS Phase 2	19.1	30.9%	19.0	30.8%
non-EaFS	24.6	47.7%	24.7	48.2%
SEA Quarter 1 (lowest SEA)	15.9	22.0%	15.9	22.0%
SEA Quarter 2	20.8	34.9%	20.8	35.0%
SEA Quarter 3	24.8	47.8%	24.9	48.0%
SEA Quarter 4 (highest SEA)	28.6	61.8%	28.7	62.0%

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Table 2:

Student total score groupings on the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check by equity groups
(number and unweighted percentage)

	0-19		20-27		28+		Total count
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
Participants	9,225	38.5%	4,538	18.9%	10,196	42.6%	23,959
Aboriginal	1,399	66.4%	315	15.0%	393	18.7%	2,107
non-Aboriginal	7,811	35.8%	4,221	19.3%	9,790	44.9%	21,822
Major cities	5,971	34.6%	3,323	19.2%	7,977	46.2%	17,271
Inner regional	2,500	46.9%	977	18.3%	1,850	34.7%	5,327
Outer regional	637	54.2%	218	18.6%	320	27.2%	1,175
Remote/very remote	92	66.7%	16	11.6%	30	21.7%	138
EAL/D Beginning	558	63.5%	152	17.3%	169	19.2%	879
EAL/D Emerging	1,555	35.0%	914	20.6%	1,968	44.4%	4,437
EAL/D Developing	362	18.6%	356	18.3%	1,229	63.1%	1,947
EAL/D Consolidating	82	15.2%	87	16.1%	372	68.8%	541
non-EAL/D	6,653	41.3%	3,027	18.8%	6,445	40.0%	16,125
EaFS Phase 1	2,159	56.9%	635	16.7%	998	26.3%	3,792
EaFS Phase 2	1,290	50.7%	466	18.3%	787	30.9%	2,543
non-EaFS students	5,776	32.8%	3,437	19.5%	8,411	47.7%	17,624
SEA Quarter 1	3,244	61.2%	889	16.8%	1,166	22.0%	5,299
SEA Quarter 2	2,671	45.8%	1,126	19.3%	2,033	34.9%	5,830
SEA Quarter 3	2,000	32.1%	1,246	20.0%	2,976	47.8%	6,222
SEA Quarter 4	1,203	18.8%	1,245	19.5%	3,953	61.8%	6,401

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Feedback

98.6% of the teachers who have responded to surveys found the information the Phonics Screening Check provided about students' phonic knowledge was beneficial and had an impact on their classroom practice. Teachers liked that the assessment provided information on where to target their teaching to support students in learning to read.

Providing a package of professional learning and resources together with the assessment is critical for success. 98% of teachers said that they benefitted from the professional learning and resources to assist them in implementing the assessment, analysing the results and planning for what to do next in the classroom.

Conclusion

The Phonics Screening Check trial demonstrated the feasibility of providing diagnostic assessments that give schools rapid insight. It offers highly targeted support in a short timeframe and reduced administrative complexity.

Using the information from the Phonics Screening Check, together with the Phonological awareness diagnostic assessment and other effective reading resources, the department aims to ensure that students who are struggling in learning to read are identified early and students' with developing foundational literacy skills are confirmed.

