

Year 1 Phonics Screening Check

2022 update

Key findings from the 2022 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check

- In light of the 2021 extended test window and the Year 1 2022 cohort's COVID-19 learning from home experiences, results are considered to be stable in comparison to prior years.
- The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check was undertaken in 1,643 NSW Government schools with 65,045 Year 1 students participating and completing the assessment.
- The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check consisted of 40 items. The average number of items correct was 26.
- Students were considered to have met the expected achievement level if they correctly answered 28 or more items. In total, 55% of students achieved at or above this level (down from 57% in 2021). Note the caveat about the 2021 and 2022 test windows.
- The percentage of Aboriginal students that met or exceeded the expected achievement score increased from 29% in 2021 to 30% in 2022.
- The proportion of students learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) who met or exceeded the expected score level ranged from 30% for students at the Beginning phase to 58% for the Emerging phase, 78% for the Developing phase and 82% for the Consolidating phase.

What is the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check?

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check is a 5 to 7 minute assessment administered by classroom teachers that indicates how their students are progressing in phonics. The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check is designed to be administered towards the end of Year 1, after students have had time to develop sufficient phonic knowledge, but with enough time to make sure interventions and targeted teaching can still make a difference.

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check complements existing school practices used to identify students' progress in developing foundational literacy skills.

A trial of the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check took place in Term 3, 2020. It demonstrated the value in providing diagnostic assessments that give schools rapid insight, offered highly targeted support in a short timeframe and reduced administrative complexity.

In 2021, the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check was mandatory for all Year 1 public schools. In 2022 it was completed by more than 65,045 students, with results immediately available for teachers. This cohort represents students who began Kindergarten during the COVID-19 pandemic and who have experienced over 30% of their schooling learning from home, with students consistently experiencing full in-class learning for the first time in 2022.

Caveats

Caution should be taken when comparing the 2022 results with the results of 2021. The 2021 assessment window was extended from 3 weeks (19 days) to 20 weeks (135 days) due to COVID-19, with students taking part between August and December of 2021. More than three-quarters of participating students (including more than 90% of students who lived in major cities) took part 12 weeks or more after the assessment window opened. The overall score in 2021 for students taking part may not be directly comparable to other calendar years and may be inflated.

In comparison, the assessment window for the 2022 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check was 4 weeks.

Year 1 Phonics Screening Check

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check was administered by Year 1 teachers in schools during Term 3, Weeks 4 to 7 (including a 1 week extension). The assessment includes 40 words, consisting of 20 real words and 20 pseudo words. The words are set each year to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their ability to use their phonic knowledge to read a word. The inclusion of pseudo words ensures that students will need to use their knowledge of letter/sound correspondences to blend through the sounds in the word to read it correctly. The assessment is designed to be administered face-to-face with individual students, and teachers record student responses online.

Online professional learning instructs teachers on how to administer and interpret the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check to support student learning.

Results were immediately available to schools in the assessment tool and PLAN2, enabling teachers to rapidly 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 associated teaching strategies.

A class observation summary and a student assessment analysis were 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.

In 2022 a new feature was included in the online tool allowing teachers to record students' responses at the phoneme level of the words. This function allowed for a phonic knowledge summary to be available for teachers.

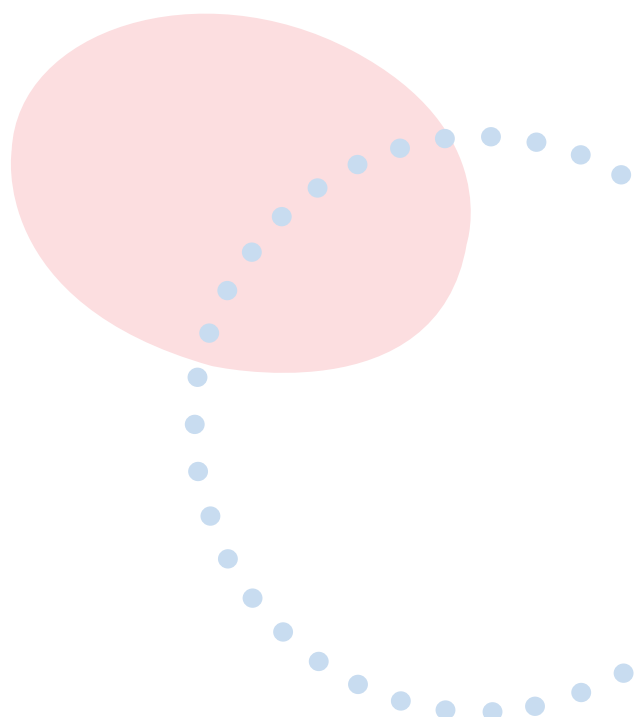
Features of the student reports include:

- an observation summary of the student's responses, at both word and phoneme level, 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, resources and professional learning.

An emphasis on phonics

Since the trial of the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check in 2020, resources have been developed to strengthen the teaching of phonics, as part of reading instruction, in NSW public schools. These include:

- release of evidence-based reading guides that support shared understanding about learning to read and the inclusion of explicit and systematic phonics as best practice in effective early reading instruction
- professional learning opportunities to build teacher capacity on the role phonics plays in learning to read and becoming a skilled independent reader
- resources for teachers to use in the classroom for explicit phonics instruction as part of learning-to-read programs
- development of an on-demand phonics diagnostic assessment for use by classroom teachers to assist in checking for impact of learning as part of the teaching and learning cycle.



Participation rates and analysis

The 2022 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check was undertaken in 1,643 NSW Government schools, with 65,045 Year 1 students participating and completing the assessment (96.1% of the total number of Year 1 students across the testing window).¹

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check consisted of 40 items. The average number of items correct was 26.

Students were considered to have met the expected achievement level if they correctly answered 28 or more items. In total, 55% of students achieved at or above this level (down from 57% in 2021).

This result is in line with the second phonics screening check undertaken by South Australian students in 2019.²

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

- the percentage of Aboriginal students who met or exceeded the expected achievement score increased from 29% in 2021 to 30% in 2022 – however, a much smaller proportion of Aboriginal students met or exceeded the expected achievement score level (30%) in comparison to non-Aboriginal students (58%)
- a higher percentage of students living in major cities (58%) scored at or above the expected level in comparison to students living elsewhere (47% for inner regional, 42% for outer regional and 24% for remote / very remote)

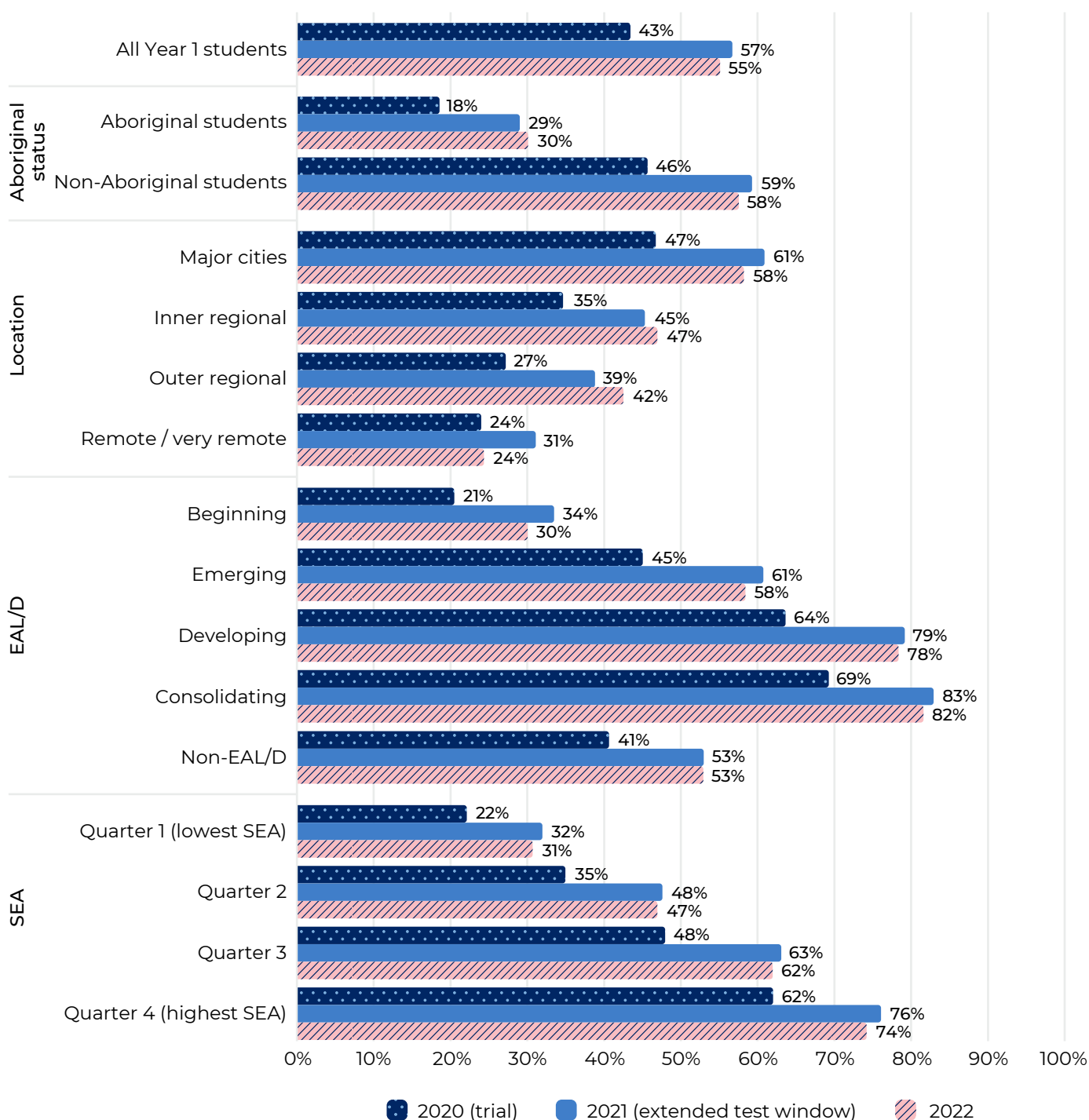
- the proportion of students learning EAL/D who met or exceeded the expected score level ranged from 30% for students at the Beginning phase to 58% for the Emerging phase, 78% for the Developing phase and 82% for the Consolidating phase³
- students in the highest socio-educational advantage (SEA)⁴ quarter (Quarter 4) were more than twice as likely to meet or exceed the expected level than students in the lowest SEA quarter (74% for SEA Quarter 4 versus 31% for SEA Quarter 1).

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

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- 1 During the wide test window in 2022, there were 67,677 distinct Year 1 students enrolled in NSW Government schools. This number was used to calculate the participation rate to ensure all Year 1 students, who were required to undertake the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check, were captured.
 - 2 Refer to the [South Australia 2019 phonics screening check fact sheet](#).
 - 3 Students learning EAL/D 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. These learners enter our schools at different ages and stages of schooling and at different phases of English language proficiency. Students learning EAL/D at any age may be in any of the 4 English language learning phases – Beginning, Emerging, Developing and Consolidating – and may move through the 4 phases at different rates. On average, it takes students learning EAL/D 5 to 7 years to master the academic English language required for success at school, and it 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 [EAL/D advice for schools](#) [PDF 5.4MB] or the ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression.
 - 4 SEA quarter is a student-level measure of socio-educational advantage based on parents' highest educational attainment and occupation group.
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Figure 1

Percentage of Year 1 NSW Government school students who have met or exceeded expected phonics achievement by equity groups



Note 1. EAL/D phase was assessed for most students in January to May 2022. A substantial number of students at the Beginning and Emerging phases during this time may have progressed to higher EAL/D phases by the test window between 8 August and 2 September 2022. Non-EAL/D students include those with EAL/D classifications of 'Unknown / not provided', 'Not required' and 'To be assessed'. The EAL/D phase data used in this report is the students' overall phase of English language proficiency rather than disaggregated proficiency phase in the listening, speaking and reading modes.

The following text adapted from the ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression describes the acquisition of phonics developed through the progression of language learning at Beginning and Emerging phases.

EAL/D learners at the beginning phase of learning English are unfamiliar with the sounds of English but begin to use isolated words as they develop their proficiency in English. Learners must be able to hear and reproduce sounds before they link these to graphemes. As learners gain mastery of oral language they begin to use beginning knowledge of English sounds and symbols to decode words.

EAL/D learners at the Emerging phase of learning English increasingly discriminate between sounds in English, including initial, medial and final sounds. EAL/D learners can decode simple texts with familiar vocabulary. They have a foundational knowledge of predictable English sound–symbol relationships and some common letter patterns.

Note 2. Students are counted as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander if they are identified and accepted as such by the community with which they are associated, and they identify themselves as such on the school

enrolment form. The term 'Aboriginal' is used in this report to describe the many nations, language groups and clans in NSW, including those from the Torres Strait. The preference for the term 'Aboriginal' over 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' in NSW recognises that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of NSW.

Note 3. The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check test window was substantially longer in 2021 (20 weeks between August and December 2021) than the test window of 2022 (4 weeks in August 2022). Students' phonics progress at this age is considered to grow month-to-month.

Table 1

Average student score and proportion of students meeting expected score by equity groups

Group	2021	2022
All Year 1 students	57%	55%
Aboriginal	29%	30%
Non-Aboriginal	59%	58%
Major cities	61%	58%
Inner regional	45%	47%
Outer regional	39%	42%
Remote / very remote	31%	24%
EAL/D Beginning	34%	30%
EAL/D Emerging	61%	58%
EAL/D Developing	79%	78%
EAL/D Consolidating	83%	82%
Non-EAL/D	53%	53%
SEA Quarter 1 (lowest SEA)	32%	31%
SEA Quarter 2	48%	47%
SEA Quarter 3	63%	62%
SEA Quarter 4 (highest SEA)	76%	74%

Table 2

Student total score groupings on the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check by equity groups

Group	Score 0-19		Score 20-27		Score 28+		Total count
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
Total participants	17,252	27%	11,929	18%	35,864	55%	65,045
Aboriginal	3,027	52%	1,011	18%	1,730	30%	5,768
Non-Aboriginal	14,225	24%	10,918	18%	34,134	58%	59,277
Major cities	11,897	24%	8,690	18%	28,640	58%	49,227
Inner regional	3,970	33%	2,467	20%	5,705	47%	12,142
Outer regional	1,251	36%	726	21%	1,461	42%	3,438
Remote / very remote	134	56%	46	19%	58	24%	238
EAL/D Beginning	1,868	51%	688	19%	1,092	30%	3,648
EAL/D Emerging	2,573	23%	2,064	19%	6,513	58%	11,150
EAL/D Developing	519	10%	606	12%	4,080	78%	5,205
EAL/D Consolidating	96	7%	163	12%	1,149	82%	1,408
Non-EAL/D	12,196	28%	8,408	19%	23,030	53%	43,634
SEA Quarter 1 (lowest SEA)	6,880	51%	2,484	18%	4,148	31%	13,512
SEA Quarter 2	4,920	32%	3,237	21%	7,217	47%	15,374
SEA Quarter 3	3,169	19%	3,226	19%	10,406	62%	16,801
SEA Quarter 4 (highest SEA)	1,950	10%	2,871	15%	13,852	74%	18,673

Conclusion

The results of the 2022 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check are considered to be stable in the development of Year 1 students' key foundational literacy skills when compared with 2021.

The department aims to ensure students who need extra support when learning to read are identified early. Information from the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check, together with the Phonological awareness diagnostic assessment, the Phonics diagnostic assessment and other department reading assessments and resources, can support teachers in implementing effective reading instruction.

