

2021 Phonics Screening Check

The 2021 Phonics Screening Check results show statewide improvement in the ability of year 1 students to decode and blend letters into sounds.

The Phonics Screening Check was introduced in 2018 for year 1 students across the South Australian public education system. The check is a short, simple assessment for all year 1 students that helps teachers to measure how well students are learning to decode and blend letters into sounds - one of the building blocks of reading.

The Phonics Screening Check contains 40 words. Words at the beginning of the check are the simplest and then become increasingly complex. More information about the check can be found at:

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/teaching/curriculum-and-teaching/literacy-and-numeracy/phonics-screening-check>

By providing information about how year 1 students are learning phonics, the department aims to:

- ensure that students who are struggling in learning to read are identified early
- support schools to teach and assess phonics in schools
- improve reading and literacy for students throughout their schooling
- ensure that parents and the wider community are confident about the teaching of reading in schools.

Participation and training

In 2021 the Phonics Screening Check was implemented between 2 August and 27 August in every South Australian public school with year 1 students enrolled.

To support schools to undertake the Phonics Screening Check, an additional 2 temporary relief teacher days for each year 1 teacher were made available. This release time enables teachers to attend professional learning, implement the check with students and respond to the results.

Over 1600 teachers and school leaders attended full-day differentiated Phonics Screening Check professional learning. Based on the success of online delivery in 2020, this professional learning was again delivered online in 2021.

Teachers were provided with a range of resources to ensure they are equipped to respond to the results of the check and design learning for students. These resources have been built on and enhanced each year since 2018.

Student results

Schools undertook the Phonics Screening Check and entered data for more than 13,500 year 1 students enrolled across 427 schools. 13,184 year 1 students actively participated in the check.



In 2018 the Department for Education engaged an external expert, Dr Jennifer Buckingham, Research Fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies to provide advice regarding the expected achievement of year 1 students undertaking the check by mapping the items to the Australian Curriculum. Dr Buckingham advised that, according to analysis, it is reasonable to expect year 1 students to decode 28 items correct out of the 40 items in the Phonics Screening Check. As this number was determined against the Australian Curriculum, it will only require updating in line with any changes to the curriculum.

Across South Australian public schools, 8,863 year 1 students (67%) showed that they met the expected achievement by correctly decoding 28 words or more out of 40. This is an improvement of four percentage points from 2020 where 63% of students were able to correctly decode 28 words or more out of 40. There has been a cumulative improvement of 24 percentage points from 2018 when only 43% of students were able to correctly decode 28 words or more.

The number of students unable to decode any of the words in the Phonics Screening Check correctly remained steady at 2% (293 students). In 2020 this number was 244 students (2%), reduced from 432 students (3%) in 2019 and 566 students (4%) in 2018.

In 2021 the data shows improvement in all student groups.

Key findings from the 2021 Phonics Screening Check

- Sixty-seven per cent of year 1 students scored at or above the expected achievement score. This is **an improvement of 4 percentage points** from 2020 to 2021.
- Sixty-eight per cent of females scored at or above the expected achievement score compared to 66% of males.
- Thirty-eight per cent of Aboriginal students scored at or above the expected achievement score. This is **an improvement of 4 percentage points** from 2020 to 2021.
- Thirty-seven per cent of students with a verified disability scored at or above the expected achievement score. This is **an improvement of 3 percentage points** from 2020 to 2021.
- Seventy-one per cent of students identified as speaking English as an additional language or dialect scored at or above the expected achievement score. This is **an improvement of 4 percentage points** from 2020 to 2021.
- Seventy-one per cent of students from metropolitan schools scored at or above the expected achievement compared to 58% from non-metropolitan schools. This is **an improvement of 6 percentage points** for students from metropolitan schools and **1 percentage point** for students from non-metropolitan schools.
- In schools serving the most disadvantaged communities, 38% of students scored at or above the expected achievement compared to 77% of students in schools serving the least disadvantaged communities. This is **an improvement of 2 percentage points** for schools serving the most disadvantaged communities and **3 percentage points** for schools serving the least disadvantaged communities.