



Official Response to the consultation on

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES RELATING TO THE PHONICS SCREENING CHECK FOR YEAR 2 PUPILS IN ENGLAND FOR 2020/21 ACADEMIC YEAR ONLY

Policy proposal

STA informed schools (in an email sent on 14 July 2020) of our proposal for the PSC for year 2 pupils for the 2020/21 academic year. We proposed not to require all year 2 pupils to take the existing summer term PSC in 2021, but instead require schools to:

- Administer an existing past PSC test paper (available on gov.uk) to all year 2 pupils in the second half of the autumn term 2020, in order to assess which pupils are at the expected standard in phonics;
- Report to the department, via a data return to their local authority, the results of that autumn term assessment of year 2 pupils;
- Administer the PSC only to year 2 pupils yet to meet the expected standard in phonics (based on the results of the autumn term 2020 check), in summer 2021 at the end of year 2 (alongside the year 1 cohort).

Response

1. Schools have performed an amazing job over the past four months, in many cases continuing to deliver classroom-based learning, whilst also rolling out a wide variety of online learning. Teachers have collected and assessed work and fed back to pupils wherever possible, but there have been issues far beyond a school's control which have caused some pupils to be unable to engage with learning.
2. Voice is pleased to note from the proposals that there is no intention to include any data which may be collected in Analyse School Performance. Given the significant learning loss that may have occurred for some pupils, it would be wholly unreasonable for schools to be held to account for a situation so far beyond their control.
3. From September every school in the country will begin formatively assessing their new cohorts. This is something they do every year – what knowledge and skills have been retained and what needs to be revisited? This formative assessment is vital to develop a plan to support and nurture each and every pupil, recognising where they are in their learning whilst also considering how to move them forward.
4. As a result of lost classroom time, this year the task facing schools will be greater than ever before. There will be a greater divergence between pupils and extra support will need to be provided. There will be a need to nurture pupils with their mental health and wellbeing, comfort those who have suffered loss as well as more generally recover the learning skills that have not been exercised.

5. Voice is pleased that the proposed autumn term assessment is designed to be...
“flexible in approach, in order to reduce the burden that may otherwise have arisen from a requirement to administer a statutory assessment in phonics to two whole year groups of pupils in the summer term 2021.”
However, we do have concerns that it will be a workload burden at a time when schools will be at their busiest.
6. It is right and proper that schools focus on the needs of the pupils and not the needs of the system. Schools will identify those who need additional support and they will provide that in myriad ways. It is reasonable for schools to record this data. It is reasonable for school to enter these Y2 pupils into the summer phonics screening. Using the same system as previous years normalises the approach and prevents pupils from being singled out by their peers.
7. Any decision to require schools to do more, within that first term risks overload. So, identifying the pupils, withdrawing those same pupils from the class to take a test, and withdrawing a staff member to administer the test are all additional tasks which could be argued as unnecessary. Notwithstanding the fact that there may be further, localised, lockdowns and the predicted second wave it seems unreasonable to mandate this of schools.
8. There is to be a new reporting requirement for schools to share this data via the local authority, but for whom is this of benefit? And does the benefit outweigh the effort? For individual schools who have already identified the pupils who require additional help, and have implemented appropriate catch-up strategies, it is an unnecessary additional data burden.
9. The formal test and data collection do not improve the learning for the pupil. They do not support the class teacher nor the school and, as the document states,
“The data from the autumn term 2020 check will not be used for any school accountability purpose; as such the data from the autumn term check will not be added to Analyse School Performance.”
10. As previously stated, these proposals will place additional demands on staff, both teaching and support, at a time when we believe their skills would be better used directly working with pupils and not on administering additional tests.
11. It must also be recognised that staff continue to be vulnerable, some may be shielding which will further impact the ability of schools to administer the test. It may also be detrimental to other pupils in the classroom when their staff and support are withdrawn from the classroom.
12. In summary, whilst Voice recognises there is a particular need to identify the needs of pupils after so much time away from the classroom, we feel that schools and teachers are best placed to do this using formative methods which will directly inform their teaching.
13. We feel that any additional statutory tests implemented at this time, will be an unnecessary burden and would increase workload at an already busy time. Furthermore, it will impact staff who may be stretched and vulnerable putting their wellbeing at risk.
14. The requirement to submit data through an additional data collection is an unnecessary administrative burden. The data will not directly support schools, teachers nor pupils and, whilst we are pleased it will not be used for accountability purposes, it also means it cannot be considered for schools’ benefit.