

Year 1 Phonics Screening Check

2024 update

Key findings from the 2024 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check

- The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check was undertaken in 1,618 NSW Government schools with 62,413 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 27.5.
- Students were considered to have met the expected achievement level if they correctly answered 28 or more items.
- 60% of students achieved at or above this level (up from 59% in 2023).
- The percentage of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students that met or exceeded the expected achievement score increased from 35% in 2023 to 36% in 2024.
- The proportion of students learning English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) who met or exceeded the expected score level ranged from 34% for students at the Beginning phase to 62% for the Emerging phase, 81% at the Developing phase and 85% at the Consolidating phase.

What is the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check?

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check is a 5 to 7 minute diagnostic 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 in Term 3, 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.

It is designed to provide schools with rapid insights that can be used diagnostically by schools to inform teaching and learning practice.

The screening check was trialled in 2020 and has been mandatory since 2021 for all Year 1 public school students.

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check is part of the department's ongoing support to improve student learning outcomes for all students, including those from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, EAL/D learners and regional, rural and remote settings.

In 2024, it was completed by 62,413 students with results immediately available for teachers.

This document provides a summary of information and data from the 2024 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check.

Year 1 Phonics Screening Check

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check is administered by Year 1 teachers in schools during Term 3 Weeks 4 to 6. 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 are 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 are aligned to the NSW English K–6 syllabus, National Literacy Learning Progression and associated teaching strategies.

A class observation summary, a phonic knowledge summary and a student assessment analysis are available in the online tool. The student assessment analysis allows 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 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

Resources are available to strengthen the teaching of phonics, as part of reading instruction, in NSW public schools. These include:

- evidence-based reading guides that support a 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
- 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 2024 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check was undertaken in 1,618 NSW Government schools with 62,413 Year 1 students participating and completing the assessment (96% 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 27.5.

Students were considered to have met the expected achievement level if they correctly answered 28 or more items. In total, 60% of students achieved at or above this level (up from 59% in 2023).

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

- the percentage of Aboriginal students² that met or exceeded the expected achievement score increased from 35% in 2023 to 36% in 2024
- a higher percentage of students living in major cities (63%) scored at or above the expected level in comparison to students living elsewhere (52% for inner regional, 47% for outer regional and 33% for remote / very remote)
- the proportion of students learning EAL/D³ who met or exceeded the expected score level ranged from 34% for students at the Beginning phase, to 62% for the Emerging phase, 81% at the Developing phase and 85% at the Consolidating phase

- 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 (78% for SEA Quarter 4 versus 37% for SEA Quarter 1).

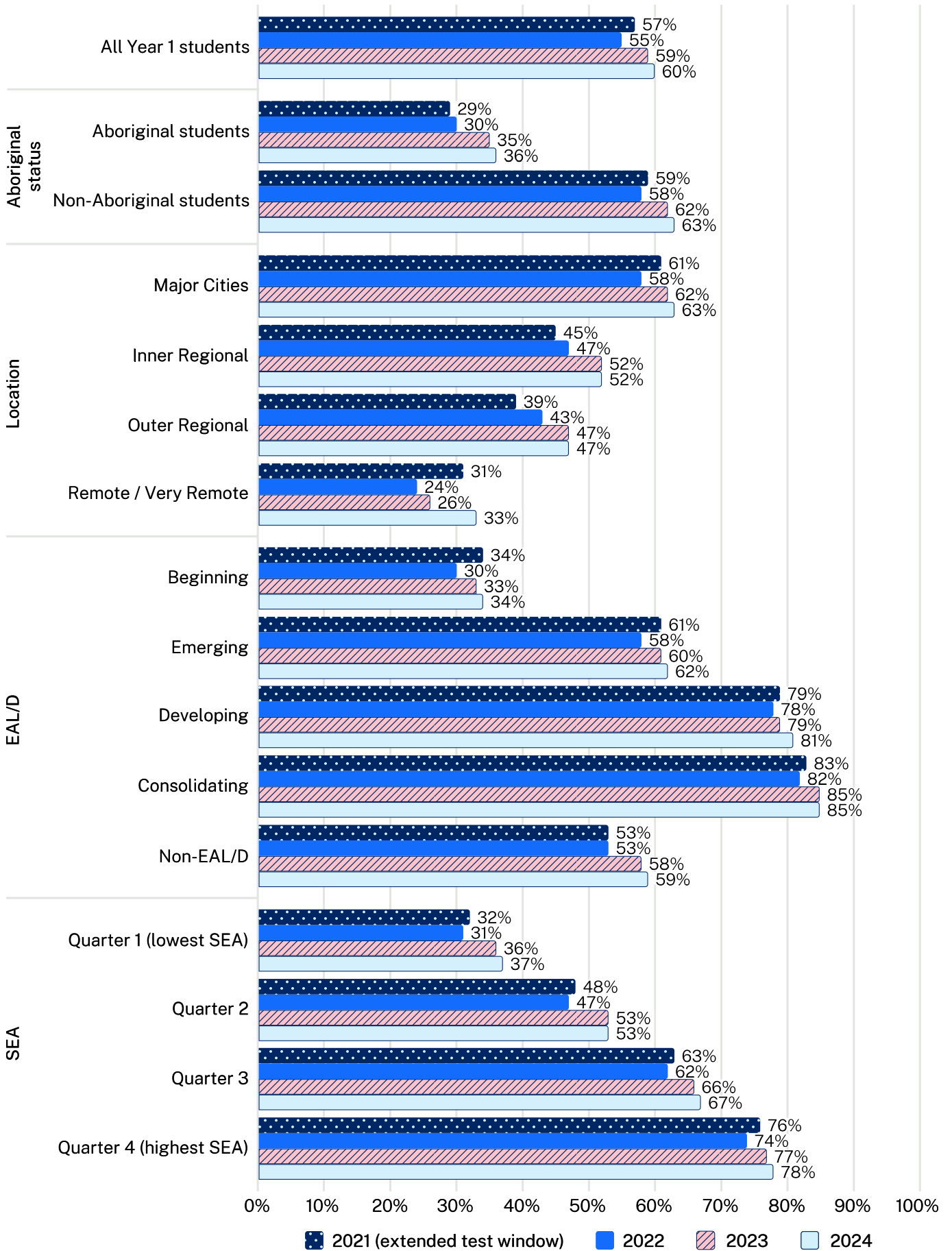
Results are also summarised in Table 2 by total score groupings (students who scored 0 to 19, 20 to 27, or 28+).



- 1 During the test window in 2024, there were 65,279 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 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students may fall into all equity groups including EAL/D, inner regional, outer regional and remote/very remote as well as the bottom SEA quartile.
- 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. EAL/D learning progression flags are now a feature in PLAN 2 and can support teachers to unpack phonic screening check results alongside language learning needs for EAL/D learners. 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.

Figure 1

Percentage of Year 1 government school students who have met or exceeded expected phonics achievement by equity groups, 2021 to 2024



Note 1. The EAL/D LP phases indicated in the above percentages may not represent students' English language proficiency phase at the time of the test window due to the timing of EAL/D phase data updates. EAL/D phase was assessed for most students between January and May 2024. 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 11 and 30 August 2024. 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 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. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student enrolment data is reflected in this Phonics Screening Check. The current NSW Public School enrolment form asks if the student is of 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin'. Parents/carers/kin can record this on the student enrolment form at any stage throughout enrolment in a NSW Public School. The term 'Aboriginal' is used in this document to refer to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.

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 4 weeks in 2023 and 3 weeks in 2024 (in August). Students' phonics progress at this age is considered to grow month-to-month. The 2020 trial assessment was completed by students at 520 NSW Government schools (33.5% of the Year 1 cohort). Caution should be used in extrapolating the performance of the trial cohort to the full Year 1 cohort for 2020.

Table 1

Proportion of students meeting expected score by equity groups, 2023 and 2024

| Group | 2023 | 2024 | Change (percentage points) |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|----------------------------|
| All Year 1 students | 59.4% | 60.2% | +0.8 |
| Aboriginal students | 34.5% | 35.7% | +1.2 |
| Non-Aboriginal students | 62.0% | 62.8% | +0.8 |
| Major Cities | 62.1% | 63.1% | +1.0 |
| Inner Regional | 52.3% | 52.2% | -0.1 |
| Outer Regional | 46.8% | 46.5% | -0.3 |
| Remote / Very Remote | 25.7% | 32.9% | +7.2 |
| Beginning | 33.1% | 33.8% | +0.7 |
| Emerging | 60.5% | 62.3% | +1.8 |
| Developing | 78.9% | 80.8% | +1.9 |
| Consolidating | 85.3% | 85.3% | 0.0 |
| Non-EAL/D | 58.0% | 58.6% | +0.6 |
| Quarter 1 (lowest SEA) | 35.6% | 37.2% | +1.6 |
| Quarter 2 | 52.5% | 52.7% | +0.2 |
| Quarter 3 | 66.0% | 66.8% | +0.8 |
| Quarter 4 (highest SEA) | 76.7% | 78.2% | +1.5 |

Table 2

Student total score groupings on the 2024 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check by equity groups, 2024

| Group | Score 0–19 | | Score 20–27 | | Score 28+ | | Total count |
|------------------------------------|------------|-----|-------------|-----|-----------|-----|-------------|
| | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | |
| Total participants | 14,683 | 24% | 10,155 | 16% | 37,575 | 60% | 62,413 |
| Aboriginal | 2,799 | 47% | 1,044 | 17% | 2,138 | 36% | 5,981 |
| Non-Aboriginal | 11,884 | 21% | 9,111 | 16% | 35,437 | 63% | 56,432 |
| Major Cities | 10,203 | 21% | 7,442 | 16% | 30,164 | 63% | 47,809 |
| Inner Regional | 3,383 | 29% | 2,127 | 18% | 6,009 | 52% | 11,519 |
| Outer Regional | 981 | 34% | 547 | 19% | 1,326 | 46% | 2,854 |
| Remote / Very Remote | 116 | 50% | 39 | 17% | 76 | 33% | 231 |
| EAL/D Beginning | 1,743 | 49% | 628 | 18% | 1,208 | 34% | 3,579 |
| EAL/D Emerging | 2,270 | 21% | 1,783 | 17% | 6,688 | 62% | 10,741 |
| EAL/D Developing | 411 | 8% | 567 | 11% | 4,126 | 81% | 5,104 |
| EAL/D Consolidating | 82 | 6% | 123 | 9% | 1,186 | 85% | 1,391 |
| Non-EAL/D | 10,177 | 24% | 7,054 | 17% | 24,367 | 59% | 41,598 |
| SEA Quarter 1 (lowest SEA) | 5,808 | 45% | 2,329 | 18% | 4,812 | 37% | 12,949 |
| SEA Quarter 2 | 4,135 | 28% | 2,904 | 20% | 7,847 | 53% | 14,886 |
| SEA Quarter 3 | 2,784 | 17% | 2,590 | 16% | 10,834 | 67% | 16,208 |
| SEA Quarter 4 (highest SEA) | 1,639 | 9% | 2,212 | 13% | 13,805 | 78% | 17,656 |

Conclusion

The results of the NSW 2024 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check show a slight statewide increase in the development of Year 1 students' key foundational literacy skills when compared with 2023.

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