

# Year 1 Phonics Screening Check

## 2025 update

### Key findings from the 2025 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check

- The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check was undertaken in 1,648 NSW Government schools with 61,964 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 28.5.
- Students were considered to have met the expected achievement level if they correctly answered 28 or more items.
- 64% of students achieved at or above this level (up from 60% in 2024).
- The percentage of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students that met or exceeded the expected achievement score increased from 36% in 2024 to 40% in 2025.
- 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 65% for the Emerging phase, 85% at the Developing phase and 90% 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 who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, EAL/D learners, and/or from regional, rural and remote settings.

This document provides a summary of information and data from the 2025 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 7. 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 decode 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 2025 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check was undertaken in 1,648 NSW Government schools with 61,964 Year 1 students participating and completing the assessment (97% of the total number of Year 1 students across the testing window).<sup>1</sup>

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check consisted of 40 items. The average number of items correct was 28.5.

Students were considered to have met the expected achievement level if they correctly answered 28 or more items. In total, 64% of students achieved at or above this level (up from 60% in 2024).

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

- the percentage of Aboriginal students<sup>2</sup> that met or exceeded the expected achievement score increased from 36% in 2024 to 40% in 2025
- a higher percentage of students living in major cities (67%) scored at or above the expected level in comparison to students living elsewhere (56% for inner regional, 51% for outer regional and 36% for remote / very remote)
- the proportion of students learning EAL/D<sup>3</sup> who met or exceeded the expected score level ranged from 34% for students at the Beginning phase, to 65% for the Emerging phase, 85% at the Developing phase and 90% at the Consolidating phase

- students in the highest socio-educational advantage (SEA)<sup>4</sup> quarter (quarter 4) were twice as likely to meet or exceed the expected level than students in the lowest SEA quarter (82% for SEA Quarter 4 versus 41% for SEA Quarter 1).

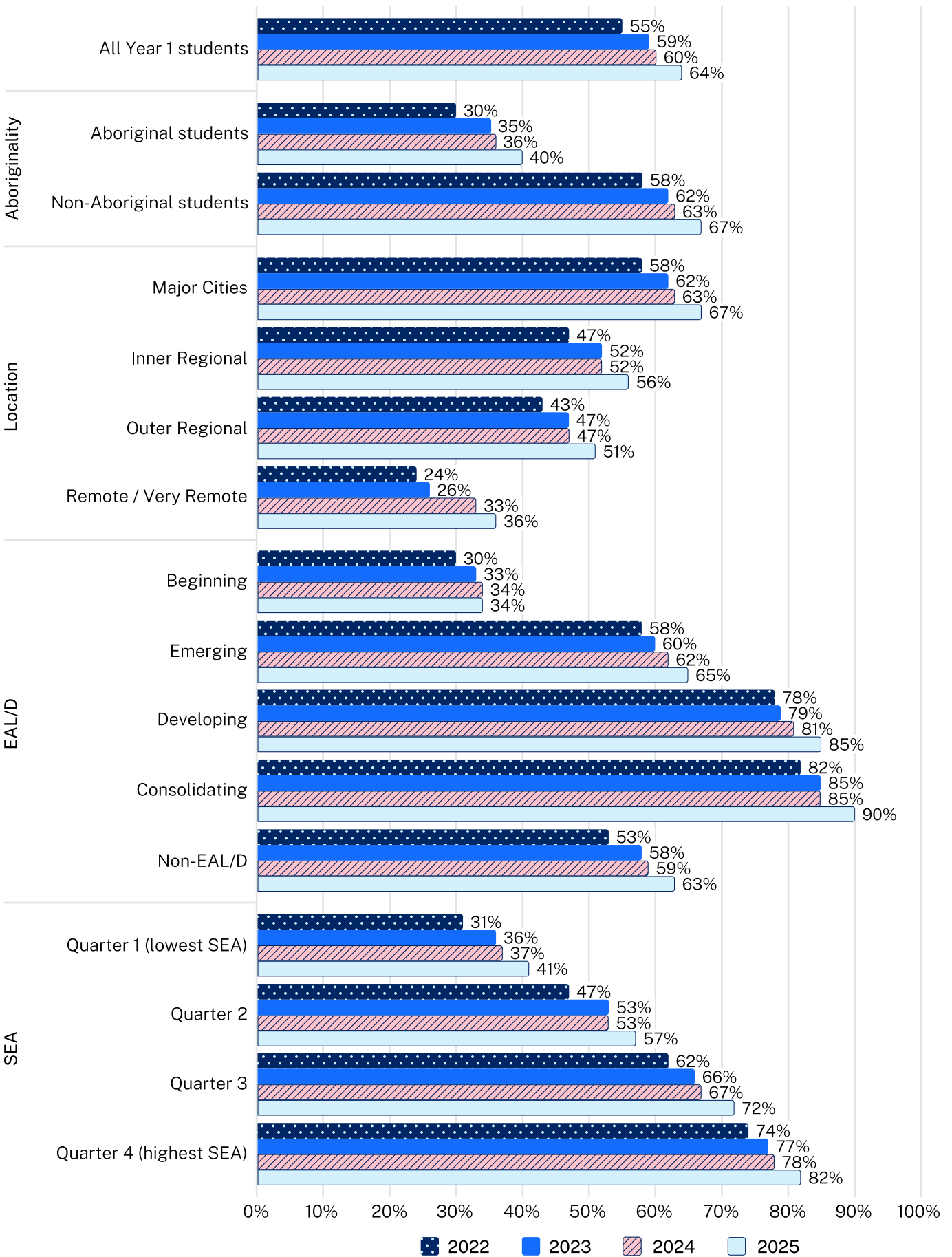
Results are also summarised in Table 2 by total score groupings (students who scored 0 to 19, 20 to 27, or 28+).



- 1 During the test window in 2025, there were 64,214 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 multiple other equity groups including Aboriginal English, EAL/D, inner regional, outer regional and remote/very remote, as well as the bottom SEA quartile. The term 'Aboriginal' used in this report is inclusive of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.
- 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 EAL/D assessment, learning progression and phases, refer to the department's [Assessing EAL/D learners](#) or the [ACARA EAL/D learning progression \[PDF 398 KB\]](#).
- 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, 2022 to 2025**



**Note 1.** The EAL/D learning progression 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 2025. 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 5 September 2025. 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.** Students are included in the reporting as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander if they or their parents, families or carers identified them on the school enrolment form. Many students who are speakers of Aboriginal English are also EAL/D learners. Aboriginal English is the name given to dialects of English spoken by many Aboriginal peoples across Australia. Aboriginal English differs from other dialects of English in linguistic structure (sentence formation and word meanings) and cultural usage.

**Note 3.** Since 2022, the official test window for the Phonics Screening Check is usually 3 to 4 weeks, between Week 4 and Week 7 of Term 3. Students' phonics progress at this age is considered to grow month-to-month.

**Table 1**

**Proportion of students meeting expected score by equity groups, 2024 and 2025**

Group	2024	2025	Change (percentage points)
All Year 1 students	60.2%	64.4%	+4.2
Aboriginal students	35.7%	39.9%	+4.2
Non-Aboriginal students	62.8%	67.1%	+4.3
Major Cities	63.1%	67.3%	+4.2
Inner Regional	52.2%	56.4%	+4.2
Outer Regional	46.5%	50.7%	+4.2
Remote / Very Remote	32.9%	36.1%	+3.2
EAL/D Beginning	33.8%	33.9%	+0.1
EAL/D Emerging	62.3%	64.8%	+2.5
EAL/D Developing	80.8%	84.9%	+4.1
EAL/D Consolidating	85.3%	90.1%	+4.8
Non-EAL/D	58.6%	63.0%	+4.4
SEA Quarter 1 (lowest SEA)	37.2%	41.1%	+3.9
SEA Quarter 2	52.7%	57.4%	+4.7
SEA Quarter 3	66.8%	71.8%	+5.0
SEA Quarter 4 (highest SEA)	78.2%	81.6%	+3.4

Table 2

## Student total score groupings on the 2025 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check by equity groups, 2025

Group	Score 0–19		Score 20–27		Score 28+		Total count
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
All Year 1 students	12,686	20%	9,399	15%	39,879	64%	61,964
Aboriginal students	2,646	42%	1,141	18%	2,516	40%	6,303
Non-Aboriginal students	10,040	18%	8,258	15%	37,363	67%	55,661
Major Cities	8,609	18%	6,777	14%	31,680	67%	47,066
Inner Regional	3,119	26%	2,085	17%	6,739	56%	11,943
Outer Regional	843	31%	489	18%	1,368	51%	2,700
Remote / Very Remote	115	45%	48	19%	92	36%	255
EAL/D Beginning	1,637	48%	625	18%	1,162	34%	3,424
EAL/D Emerging	1,879	19%	1,613	16%	6,421	65%	9,913
EAL/D Developing	314	6%	525	9%	4,721	85%	5,560
EAL/D Consolidating	62	4%	97	6%	1,452	90%	1,611
Non-EAL/D	8,794	21%	6,539	16%	26,123	63%	41,456
SEA Quarter 1 (lowest SEA)	5,355	41%	2,361	18%	5,395	41%	13,111
SEA Quarter 2	3,581	24%	2,694	18%	8,459	57%	14,734
SEA Quarter 3	2,209	14%	2,276	14%	11,414	72%	15,899
SEA Quarter 4 (highest SEA)	1,285	7%	1,943	11%	14,328	82%	17,556

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to exactly 100%.

## Conclusion

The results of the NSW 2025 Year 1 Phonics Screening Check demonstrate a statistically significant improvement in Year 1 students' key foundational literacy skills, with an approximate 4-percentage point increase statewide compared with 2024.

The department aims to ensure students who need extra support when developing phonic knowledge 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.