Dear Parents

**Re: Phonics Screening:** Information and guidance for parents

We are writing to inform you about the National Phonics Screening Test which will take place in Key Stage 1 during the Summer Term. This letter aims to explain this process, in addition to providing you with ideas to help your child with phonics at home.

# What is the phonics screening check?

The national phonics screening test was introduced in 2012 to all Year 1 pupils. It is a short, statutory assessment to confirm whether individual pupils have learnt phonic decoding to an appropriate standard. It aims to identify the children who need extra help so that they can be given support by school to improve their reading skills. At St Levan Primary School we already identify children and provide early intervention support, however we must comply with the statutory requirement.

# Who is it for?

Year 1 pupils will take the phonics screening check in June. In addition, any Year 2 children who did not reach the required level in Year 1 will need to re-take the assessment.

# How is the check structured?

It comprises a list of 40 words and non-words (alien words), which a child will read one-to-one with a teacher. Half the words cover phonic skills which are usually covered in Reception, and half the words are based on Year 1 phonics skills. The list is a combination of both real and made up, non-words which rely purely on using phonics to decode. The non-words are words that have been made up and will be shown with a picture of an imaginary creature (see examples in table below). We call them alien words so that there is a context for reading them e.g. the name of the alien in the picture prompt. Other examples of sample words can be downloaded from [http://primarytools.co.uk.](http://primarytools.co.uk/)

Examples of words: real words

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| meet | plan | ships | call |
| grit | trains | shin | week |
| handy | scrape | trumpet | surprise |
| newt | slide | brains | finger |

Examples of non-words (alien words)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| tox | blan | elt | geck |
| thazz | sclak | steck | clinp |
| quemp | shoik | thene | blust |
| jound | strupe | snemp | stroft |

# Why have you included non-words in the screening check?

Non-words are an established assessment method of many schools, and are included in many phonics programmes. They are included because they will be new to all pupils, so there won’t be a bias to those with a good vocabulary knowledge or visual memory of words. Pupils who can read non-words should have the skills to decode almost any unfamiliar word.

# Is it stressful to test such young children?

The assessment will be age-appropriate, with children sitting with their teacher and reading one-to-one. The check is very similar to tasks the children already complete during their daily phonics lessons. Therefore, children will be familiar with the format and with the idea of alien words. It should be an enjoyable activity for children which takes no more than a few minutes. There will be a few practice words at the beginning to ensure your child understands the activity.

# Does a teacher have to carry out the screening check?

Yes, the class teacher will carry out the check with the pupils in our school.

# What happens if a child struggles with the screening check?

The screening check will identify children who have phonic decoding skills below the level expected for the end of Year 1 and who therefore need extra help. Schools are expected to provide extra help and children will then be able to re-take the assessment in Year 2.

**After the check**

We will tell you about your child’s progress in phonics and how he or she has done in the screening check as part of the end of year report. If your child has found the check difficult, we will also tell you what support we have put in place to help him or her improve. You might like to ask your child’s class teacher how you can support your child to take the next step in reading.

All children are individuals and develop at different rates. The screening check ensures that teachers understand which children need extra help with phonic decoding.

# How can I help my child?

At St Levan Primary we often check phonic development within our approach to the assessment of reading. This screening forms part of our overall assessment procedure. Phonics works best when children are given plenty of encouragement and learn to enjoy reading and books. Parents play a very important part in helping with this.

**Some simple steps to help your child learn to read through phonics:**

* Let your child see you enjoying reading yourself – they are influenced by you and what you value! Immerse your child in a love of reading: share books and magazines with your child, take them to the library to choose books, read to them regularly, point out texts around you, e.g. in the street.
* You can reinforce phonics at home. Look on the website for activities and how to pronounce the letter sounds. http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/phonics-made-easy
* You can then highlight these sounds when you read with your child. Teaching how sounds match with letters is likely to start with individual letters such as ‘s’, ‘a’ and ‘t’ and then will move on to two letter sounds such as ‘ee’, ‘ch’ and ‘ck’.
* With all books, encourage your child to ‘sound out’ unfamiliar words and then blend the sounds together from left to right. Once your child has read an unfamiliar word you can talk about what it means and help him or her to follow the story.
* Your child’s teacher will also be able to suggest books with the right level of phonics for your child. Your child will be able to work out new words from their letters and sounds, rather than just guessing.
* Try to make time to read with your child every day. Grandparents and older brother or sisters can help, too. Encourage your child to blend the sounds all the way through a word.
* Word games like ‘I-spy’ can also be an enjoyable way of teaching children about sounds and letters. You can also encourage your child to read words from your shopping list or road signs to practise phonics.
* Help your child to practise reading key words and sounds when these are sent home.
* Remember- We are here to help your child to do their very best!

Our School uses a Home Reading Record booklet, which is a great way for teachers and parents to communicate about what children have read. The reading record can tell you whether your child has enjoyed a particular book and shows problems or successes he or she has had, either at home or at school.

Free resources for you to access with your child can be found at [www.phonicsplay.co.uk](http://www.phonicsplay.co.uk) and [www.familylearning.org.uk.](http://www.familylearning.org.uk/)

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.