



Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
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BT19 7PR

22 June 2026

Year 2 Phonics and Year 5 Multiplication Check

Dear Principal,

We wrote to you on the 21 April regarding the new [Statutory Assessment Policy Framework](#). The Framework outlines a clear assessment pathway from Year 1 to Year 10, including reading and mathematics related assessment reforms.

The pathway is designed to support pupils' learning journeys by ensuring that the essential building blocks of literacy, numeracy and science are firmly established. The Year 4, 7 and 10 assessments for all pupils in literacy, numeracy and science will commence on a phased basis from March 2030 following the roll out of the new curriculum. In the interim, CCEA will continue the system level sample assessments for pupils in these year groups to provide an overview of system level performance. As you know, these are low stakes assessments administered and marked by CCEA. I hope to write to you early in the 2026-27 academic year highlighting in more detail the outcomes and findings from the 2025-26 assessments.

In the 2026-27 academic year, CCEA will begin roll out of the new assessment framework by introducing the new Phonics and Multiplication Checks in Years 2 and 5 of primary schools.

Please be assured that the outcomes of these assessments will not be published at school level or used for any school accountability purposes. Rather they are designed to be quick, easy checks of progress which can be reported at a system level and inform internal school self-evaluation and planning. We will accompany the roll out of both checks, with appropriate professional learning.

Year 2 Phonics Check

The first Northern Ireland Year 2 Phonics Check will be carried out in June 2027.

The Year 2 Phonics Check reflects the evidence supporting systematic phonics as an important foundation for reading. The Department's [Literacy Framework](#) and [Guidance](#) recommend the use of a systematic phonics programme within the Foundation Stage and highlight the role of explicit phonics and phonemic awareness teaching in supporting phonological skills, reading and spelling development.

Accordingly, the Department recommends that all schools adopt a systematic phonics programme in the Foundation Stage. The Year 2 Phonics Check will be based on systematic synthetic phonics, as secure phonics knowledge is an important contributor to later reading fluency and comprehension.

The Department recognises that schools are at different stages in their implementation of the new literacy framework and again I reiterate this is a low stakes assessment designed to inform teaching and learning, helping to identify pupils who may benefit from further support in phonics.

The Department is preparing a literacy strategy which will outline further support for schools, including around phonics teaching in the Foundation Stage. We will provide further details on the format and nature of the phonics check early in the autumn term.

Year 5 Multiplication Check

The Multiplication Check will also be introduced for Year 5 children in the summer term of the 2026-27 academic year. Its purpose is to check whether children can quickly recall multiplication facts up to 12×12 . It will be a short digital assessment consisting of around 25 multiplication facts and will take less than 5 minutes to complete involving minimal workload or administrative time for schools.

Children should be able to recall multiplication facts for all times tables fluently and accurately. The Multiplication Check reinforces the importance of developing fluent recall of times tables and a secure understanding of number bonds, as these form the foundation of strong mathematical knowledge and confidence. The outcomes of the check will help schools identify pupils who may require additional support to strengthen these essential skills

Professional Learning Opportunities

We intend to offer a range of professional learning opportunities to support the roll out of both the phonics and multiplication check, as well as wider implementation of the new Assessment Framework for 2026-27 year. We will be in touch with further details at the start of the new term.

I appreciate that you may have some queries on the above information and have attached a list of Frequently Asked Questions which may be helpful. If you have any further queries, please contact keystage.assessment@education-ni.gov.uk.

Thank you for your continued dedication to support our children and young people.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Suzanne Kingon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Dr Suzanne Kingon
Deputy Secretary Education Policy and Delivery
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STATUTORY ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the timescale for the statutory assessment pathway?

The proposed timescales are as follows:

- The Year 2 Phonics Check will be sat in June 2027 and the Year 5 Multiplication Check by the end of academic year 2026-27.
- The first new statutory Year 4 literacy and numeracy assessments under the new framework will take place in March 2030 (Year 2 of implementation of the new curriculum).
- The first new statutory Year 7 and Year 10 assessments in literacy, numeracy and science will take place in March 2031 (Year 3 of implementation of the new curriculum).

The Department will, over the coming months, consider expert advice on the appropriate timescales for introducing other aspects of the framework including the new baseline check and the Writing Repository, ensuring each is introduced in a manner consistent with system capacity and high-quality technical development.

How is the Phonics and Multiplication Check administered?

The Phonics Check will be an assessment provided to schools for Year 2 pupils and administered by their teacher. Substitute cover costs will be provided.

The Multiplication Check is a digital assessment of memorisation of times tables and recall.

How long is the Check?

It is estimated the Phonics Check will take up to 10 minutes per pupil to administer and mark the results.

The Multiplication Check should take up to 5 minutes per pupil.

What about if I have pupils with Special Educational Needs?

Any pupil who is able to engage with the phonics or multiplication curriculum teaching should be able to participate in the checks. Principals may exempt pupils with a statement under Article 16 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. This will be a matter for Principals to determine. Further information regarding access arrangements will be provided in the new academic year.

How will the results be used?

The Department of Education will not publish school-level outcomes for the phonics and multiplication checks, but schools will have access to national system level data to allow them to benchmark pupils' performance. Teachers and schools will be able to identify their pupils' results. Scores will help identify those who will need additional support in these areas.