



Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards

Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Ms Alison Jeffery
Director of Children's Services
Portsmouth City Council
3rd Floor, Civic Offices
Guildhall Square
Portsmouth
PO1 2AL

12 December 2017

Dear Ms Jeffery,

I am writing following the publication of the 2017 phonics screening check results in the Department's Statistical First Release 49/2017.

As you will be aware, the phonics screening check is designed to ensure that pupils have reached the expected standard in phonic decoding, as well as helping identify those pupils who need additional support. Getting the fundamentals right at an early age is vital for children. Ensuring the mechanics of reading are secure enables their reading fluency to progress, and this is a good indicator of success at secondary and later life.

In any local authority area, there will be schools with differing characteristics that will have reached different levels of progress with their pupils in the check. I have, nevertheless, noticed that your authority's result has declined by 4 percentage points since 2016.

I recognise that this has taken place against a background of a significant increase of 26 percentage points between 2012 and 2016, which represents a significant improvement over time and a credit to the hard work of teachers and head teachers in your schools.

I also note that your authority's results have now fallen below the national average of 81 per cent.

It is important to continue to support those schools that require it, to ensure that this decline does not continue to future years. We want every child to reach their potential and this means ensuring all pupils can read fluently by the time they leave primary school.

Notwithstanding the large body of research evidence which shows that systematic phonics is the most effective method for teaching literacy for all children, not all schools currently use such programmes or teach them effectively. These programmes are especially effective for younger, at-risk readers. Phonics is also most effective when combined with a language-rich curriculum to develop children's positive attitudes towards literacy.

I should be grateful, therefore, if we could meet at your earliest convenience to discuss how this decline in phonics attainment can be reversed and the plans you intend to put in place to ensure your schools continue to improve their phonics teaching.

With best wishes.

Your sincerely,