

Speech Sound Development Guide

Typical acquisition ages for New Zealand English

The table below shows the ages by which most children (90%) in New Zealand have mastered each speech sound. Every child is different — use this as a guide, not a diagnosis. If in doubt, a qualified SLT can assess your child.

Age range	Sounds mastered	Example words	Notes
By 2 years	p, b, m, h, n, w	papa, bye, me, hat, no, wawa	Building blocks
By 3 years	d, t, k, g, ng, f, y	dog, top, cat, go, sing, fun, yes	Big expansion phase
By 4 years	s, z, sh, ch, j, l, v	sun, zoo, shoe, chip, jump, leg	School readiness sounds
By 5 years	r, th (voiced)	run, the, this, that	"th" as in "the"
By 6 years	th (unvoiced)	think, three, both	"th" as in "think"
By 7–8 years	All sounds fully mastered	—	Errors after age 7 warrant referral

What about consonant clusters?

Consonant clusters (blends like "sp", "tr", "str") develop slightly later than individual sounds. Expect clusters to be mastered by age 5–6. Blends like "str" and "spl" can take until age 7.

Intelligibility — how well can others understand your child?

18 months:	~25% understood by strangers — parents understand more
2 years:	~50% understood by strangers
3 years:	~75% understood by strangers
4–5 years:	Near 100% understood by strangers; speech almost adult-like

When to seek a speech-language therapy assessment

- Your child is not meeting the sound milestones in the table above.
- Strangers have significant difficulty understanding your child (see intelligibility guide above).
- Your child is frustrated, avoiding talking, or reluctant to communicate.
- You have any concerns at all — early assessment is always better than a wait-and-see approach.