Working with the 2 Year Old Progress Check

The EYFS 2012 contains a new statutory duty for early years settings to carry out a progress check on all 2 year olds who are in settings. This is based on growing evidence that focusing on children’s development at an early stage is most effective.

The government has based the new requirement on research evidence which highlights two key issues:

- ‘After the age of three, it becomes much more difficult to make changes in both a child’s development and in parental behaviour.’
- ‘Mothers and fathers play the most important part in raising a child.’

(from the policy document ‘Supporting Families in the Foundation Years’)

Along with funding more early years places for 2 year olds, the government intends the progress check to identify any children who may be missing out on early opportunities so that help can be provided in the crucial period before the age of three. There is also a strong emphasis on involving parents at this early stage.

The aims of the check are to:

- Review development in prime areas
- Give parents a clear picture of development
- Help practitioners understand and plan for the child’s needs
- Help parents understand and support development at home
- Note areas of good progress and identify any areas of slower progress
- Identify actions to address any concerns.

The legal requirements of the check are for practitioners to:

- review children’s progress between age 2 and 3
- agree with parents when to produce the summary
- provide parents with a short written summary in the prime areas
- highlight areas where the child is progressing well, and areas where additional support might be needed
- describe strategies to address issues or concerns
- discuss with parents/carers support for learning at home.

There is no required format for the summary. Many settings already produce summative checks and these may be continued or adjusted as necessary to meet the requirements. Guidance on the process of producing the summary, along with some sample formats, is available in the The EYFS progress check at age two, a know how guide which can be found at www.foundationyears.org.

Practitioners have raised many questions about the practicalities as they develop their setting’s approach to carrying out the progress check. Although the summary may look different in different settings, it is helpful to understand the background and principles that will be the same in every case.


Frequently asked questions

Why have the government chosen to make it a 2 year old check and not at three, for example?

The most rapid period of brain development is in the first three years of life when early experiences trigger the brain connections that will remain for life. In some crucial areas of development such as emotional control, response to stress, communication and language and sensory and physical development, a child needs to have the right experiences within sensitive periods when the brain is ready for this wiring to take place. The windows of sensitivity are strongest at this point in a child’s life and putting support in place at this time will provide most benefit to the child’s development.

Exactly what information is required in the summary?

The prime areas of learning and development – Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Communication and Language and Physical Development – are the areas with early sensitive periods in the brain and they underpin later learning. The summary must cover these areas, identifying good progress or where there is any concern. It is up to the setting whether to include other elements. It could be important, for example, also to include comments on the characteristics of effective learning as knowing how children are learning is critical to their success and is an important area to share with parents.

An assessment is only useful if it leads to something, so the summary must also include what will follow to support the child’s learning – the approach at the setting and suggestions for home for all children, as well as what will be done if there are any concerns.

How in-depth does the report need to be?

It is important that the summary is easy to understand and it is more useful if it is truly a summary. It could be kept to no more than one or two pages. It should reflect the individual child, rather than be applicable to any child of a similar age, so there should be a brief personal description of the child’s development in the areas reported on. There should also be a judgement about the progress the child is making which could be linked to the age/stage bands in Development Matters, for instance. What is important is not what the summary looks like but that practitioners have stopped to consider the child’s progress and how to respond and have had those conversations with parents.

How do we actively involve parents in the check? Do we send out a letter, have an informal chat or a meeting?

Each setting will determine the process that is most appropriate for their circumstances. Many settings already maintain on-going conversations with parents about their children’s learning and development so the check can fit easily into existing relationships. Parents surveyed say they want a face-to-face discussion. That is certainly the best way to have a meaningful two-way communication about the child’s development, with parents sharing what they observe at home while the key person shares their observations and knowledge about development and learning. The recommendation is that, having agreed with parents when to produce the summary, the key person:

- first drafts some comments and judgements
• then meets with the parents
• finally, produces the actual summary including the parents’ information and views.

This process offers an opportunity to let parents know that the setting truly values working in partnership.

**What if parents don’t want to participate or communicate with us, or don’t want the check done?**

The legal requirement – the bottom line – is that the setting must produce the summary and give it to the parent. No consent is needed to produce the check (though consent would be needed to pass it on to any other agency). That should be seen as a last resort, however, since it misses the chance to work together in the best interests of the child. A flexible and encouraging approach to meeting with parents, including making appointments at a time convenient to them, will usually be successful in drawing parents in.

**How does this check link to the health visitor check? What is the difference in the checks? How will liaison with the health visitor work?**

The government plans to introduce an integrated check, led by health visitors but in partnership with early years settings, in 2015. In the meantime, starting the 2-year-old progress check in settings now will help to identify and support vulnerable children.

The health visitor Healthy Child Programme and the EYFS checks cover many of the same things, focusing on emotional development, communication and language and physical development. The health visitor checks are currently not universally available although health visiting teams are working towards this. The checks usually involve a one-off assessment through a meeting which may be a home visit. The health visitor is knowledgeable about significant milestones and screening markers for difficulties, while the early years practitioner can provide useful help through on-going knowledge of the child and family, gained over time and through observing in a range of contexts.

Government guidance encourages early years settings to link with health visitors where possible. Settings could ask parents if their child is scheduled for a health visitor check. Settings should encourage parents to share the summary with health visitors or obtain consent to share it directly. If a child has already had their check by a health visitor, the setting could ask parents to share that information with the setting. The parent held record known as ‘the red book’ is an effective way of ensuring the information is shared between the health visitor and the parent and it is advisable to ask the parent to bring this to the progress check meeting.

Systems for working together with health visitors are in development so, as well as being proactive to make links in your area and encouraging parents to share records, you can expect further information and support for systems being developed at the local authority level with health partners.

**When should the check be done? What if a child is nearly three, or already three, when they join the setting?**

Ideally, the check should be done as close to the second birthday as possible. There may, however, be many reasons for it to be later in the year. An accurate assessment is possible
only after getting to know the child, so most settings will observe a child and prepare a summary only after a settling-in period of a few weeks. If a child is nearly three, there should still be time to complete the summary, though it may need to rely more on parents' knowledge and be based on a more limited time for practitioners to observe.

If a child is already three when they join the setting, there is no legal obligation to produce a summary check. It is still a good idea, though, to know where children are in their development when they join a setting so that their needs are met and progress can be followed. Many settings do regular summary checks with all children.

What about children who don’t attend a setting?

Children who don’t attend a setting may have a health visitor check but won’t have an EYFS check. Over the next two years, however, there will be many more funded places for the most vulnerable 2 year olds enabling more children to benefit from this check. All children should be covered through the health visitors development check from 2015.

If a child attends more than one setting, who does the check?

The setting where the child spends more time should produce the summary but a conversation with the other setting should be part of the information that is fed in to the process.

What do we do with the information? How do we use it?

The whole point of the check is for something to happen as a result. The summary goes to the parents and includes suggestions for supporting learning at home. A copy stays in the setting and helps the key person to know about a child’s strengths and weaknesses and to plan to support their development in the crucial prime areas.

How do we refer if we have concerns about a child?

It depends on the concern. It may be that the setting SENCO could become involved or it may be that further support is required from the SIYC area inclusion team or multi-agency partners. Children’s centres or voluntary agencies may be able to support the child and family. Any referral must be with parental consent.

Do we follow up to see how children have progressed?

In daily interactions with a child, practitioners observe and try to understand what a child is learning so that they can respond appropriately to support children to make progress. It is also a good idea to step back from time to time to look at the bigger picture – is the child making good progress overall in the areas of learning and development? There is no legal requirement for further summative assessments until the EYFS Profile at the end of the reception year but it is a good idea to use this process periodically to see what difference the setting is making to individual children and to the group of children as a whole.

How will this impact on our current systems of observations and paperwork?

If your setting is already producing summative assessments, it may make no difference at all while, for some settings, it will mean thinking about how to arrange time for the key person to
reflect on everything they know about the child, meet with parents and write a brief summary.

Bear in mind that this is a brief summary of all the observations of a child over a period of time – and observation means what has been noticed about what the child does and says, not necessarily what has been written down. The EYFS tells us that assessment ‘should not entail prolonged breaks from interaction with children, nor require excessive paperwork’, so systems for both ongoing, formative assessment and summative assessment should be as streamlined as possible to avoid extra work that takes time away from being with children.

**What happens to the data?**

There is no legal requirement to collect data. The report belongs to the parent and there are no plans for data to be collected nationally, as happens with the EYFS Profile. Services for Young Children (SfYC) are collecting data on the number of progress checks completed each term.

For the setting, however, putting the data together will help leaders to consider how effective the setting is at helping children to make progress. Children will continue to learn and develop as they grow and data can help a setting to see if they are helping children to make better progress. For example, it can help to identify children who may have been developing more slowly than expected for their age and measure their progress since being in the setting towards achieving at a level more typical for their age. Settings can look at progress data to decide what they support well and where they might further develop their knowledge, provision or practice.

**Will Ofsted be looking for these reports?**

A progress check for all 2 year olds has been a statutory requirement since September 2012 and Ofsted will check that a good system is in place in the setting. They will also explore whether practitioners know where children are in their learning and about their progress, so the 2 year old check will be helpful in ensuring that each child’s development is well-understood and supported.