Step two

The ‘Know How’ guide will see you through the progress check at two, says Susan Soor, development officer, National Children’s Bureau

The new EYFS may seem familiar, but it has interesting new features. One key change is the introduction of a new statutory assessment in the years birth to five: a progress check at age two.

Section 2 of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage describes the requirements for this new check. Practitioners must:
- review the progress of the child when they are aged between 24 and 36 months
- provide parents and/or carers with a short written summary of their child’s development in the three Prime areas: Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Physical Development and Communication and Language
- in the written summary, identify the child’s strengths and any areas where the child’s progress is less than expected, then describe the actions the provider intends to take to address any concerns
- discuss with parents how the child’s learning and development can be supported at home.

WHY HAS THE PROGRESS CHECK BEEN INTRODUCED?

The thinking behind this progress check can be summed up in two words: early intervention. If a practitioner can identify an area in which a child is developing at a slower pace than expected, support can be put in place for that child in the setting, through partnership with parents and by working with other professionals.

As practitioners, we may sadly be aware of children who have not received support until well into their school years and for whom valuable opportunities for learning and enjoyment have been lost. It is hoped that the progress check will act as the starting point for a process of early intervention for some children, leading to improved life chances.

A second strand to the thinking behind the progress check relates to partnership with parents. The Tickell review of the EYFS called for a greater emphasis on the role of parents and carers as partners in their children’s learning and the process of carrying out the progress check, required by law, is a new point of engagement between practitioners and parents.

While the statutory requirements (the musts) focus on reviewing the child’s progress and providing the written summary, the need to work in partnership with parents, to communicate clearly and to provide accurate information about a child, are fundamental elements of the progress check as described in the framework.

WHEN SHOULD THE CHECK TAKE PLACE?
The framework says that the check should take place as close as possible to a child’s second birthday, hence its description as ‘the progress check at age two’. The reason for this is that the progress check can help to feed into the Healthy Child Programme health and development check, which must be carried out by health visitors soon after a child’s second birthday. Where possible, parents should be encouraged to share a copy of the progress check with their health visitor.

However, the statutory requirements state that the progress check must be carried out at any time between 24 and 36 months. This provides the flexibility that may be needed according to the individual circumstances of children, their families and settings. For example, if a child joins a setting a few months after their second birthday, then the progress check can be delayed until the child has settled in and practitioners have built up a clear picture of the child’s development.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE PROGRESS CHECK?

The practitioner who knows the child well and who works directly with them in setting. This should normally be their key person. However, in order to build up a clear picture of the child, it is important to incorporate a range of viewpoints: parents, other practitioners within the setting and other professionals who may work with the child.

Their observations should be incorporated into a child’s record on an ongoing basis and sought before carrying out the progress check. Likewise, the person most central to the process is the child and their contributions should also be included.

Ongoing assessment within the setting should be based on what the child can do consistently and independently, led by their own preferences and interests. Likewise, young children may comment on photographs and visual evidence within their assessment records, identifying what they enjoyed or found difficult.

HOW SHOULD THE PROGRESS CHECK BE CARRIED OUT?

As described above, the progress check begins with and is underpinned by a process of high-quality ongoing observational assessment. Shortly before the progress check, the practitioner should take the opportunity to review and reflect upon the child, looking back over available assessment evidence and seeking contributions from others. The practitioner should use Development Matters – the revised version of the grids in the current EYFS Practice Guidance – to make best-fit judgements about a child’s progress in the three Prime areas, which may be supported by their professional observation. Where possible, parents should be encouraged to share a copy of the progress check with their health visitor.

At this point a practitioner should draft some comments for each of the three Prime areas, before arranging an opportunity to discuss the child’s progress with their parents or carers. During the discussion, the practitioner should make note of the parent or carer’s comments or concerns and agree a plan to take the child’s learning forward, including how their learning can be supported at home.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The practitioner can now finalise the written summary of the progress check, incorporating any comments or contributions from parents, and add the child to the child’s ongoing learning and development record.

The practitioner should also put in place any actions agreed to support the child’s learning and development in the setting or at home.

If any concerns have been raised about a child during the progress check, the practitioner should discuss these further with the leader or manager of the setting, the SENCO or their childminding support officer.

Next steps might include a further review at an agreed date or considering what support is needed from other agencies and gaining parental consent to share information.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

The National Children’s Bureau (NCB) was asked by the DfE to write material to provide additional support to the sector in carrying out the progress check. The EYFS progress check at age two. A ‘Know How Guide’ includes material on the relationship between ongoing assessment and the progress check, working in partnership with the parents and listening to the voice of the child.

The document also covers in more detail what practitioners should do if a child appears to be developing at a slower pace in any area and guidance on preparing the progress check for a child with identified disabilities or special educational needs.

The final section of the document contains some adapted examples of how settings in some local authorities are currently providing information to parents, under the 2008 EYFS framework. These may act as useful starting points for settings or for practitioners to devise their own format in preparing for the EYFS progress check at two.

OVER TO YOU...
The progress check at two becomes statutory in September 2012. The next few months provide an opportunity for local authorities, leaders and practitioners to shape how it will take place in their settings and local areas. It is important to remember that the statutory requirements for the progress check are relatively slim; its written format can be determined by those who are working directly with children and their families. However, it is only by basing the progress check on high-quality, ongoing assessment, including the contributions of parents and young children, and working effectively with other professionals when needed, that a difference can be made to the outcomes of young children.

The level of support given to the settings and practitioners by their local authorities and leadership teams will clearly be crucial in determining the impact.

Making appropriate judgements about young children’s progress, and working in partnership with parents, requires strong child development knowledge and skills, gained through both initial training and ongoing continuous professional development. This highlights again the crucial importance of the Nuth 6 review and the urgent need to address the qualification levels of those who work with our youngest children.

NCB is interested in finding out more about how you are carrying out the progress check in your setting or local area. To share your experience, email us at scudm@ncb.org.uk.