

THE Montessori METHOD



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reflects upon the implications of the EYFS progress check at age two...

In recent articles I have explored children's skills and abilities during their unique development from birth to five, and therefore it now seems appropriate to examine what is asked of practitioners in terms of assessment during this stage.

The revised EYFS demands that practitioners rethink their assessment procedures due to the newly introduced statutory check at age two and the revised format of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile to be completed during the summer term of the Reception year, when children turn five. There is also an expectation that settings track children's progress in line with the Development Matters. Practitioners are required to explain and demonstrate the progress made by every child in the seven areas of learning identified by the EYFS. This applies to all settings, including Montessori nurseries and daycare centres.

All children who enter nurseries before their third birthday are now subject to the 'two year check', which complements the health check currently undertaken by the health services. The model for this assessment is not very clear, but a booklet produced by the National Children's Bureau, *The EYFS progress check at age two. A Know How Guide*, offers many practical ideas on how to approach this initial assessment of two-year-olds, and has been very useful to all settings.

Working in partnership

Reflecting on this requirement, it is only fair to point out that most settings have been engaged in this process for many years in a less formal way. In getting to know any new child entering nursery, experienced practitioners consider children's physical skills, their ability to communicate and their personal and social qualities. These areas of development are usually the focus of the first meetings practitioners have with parents. The 'two year check', however, makes this process official and puts practitioners under pressure to produce an accurate assessment within a certain timescale. And this is where the challenge lies; as children's attendance at nursery before the age of three can be limited, with many only attending one or two sessions per week, opportunities to get to know the child are fewer.

In these circumstances it would seem appropriate to engage with parents and

involve them in this assessment, as they know their child better than anyone else. Together, practitioners and parents can 'paint a picture' of each child, focusing on his or her personal social and emotional development, communication and language aptitudes, and gross, fine motor and balancing skills.

It is already known for settings to ask parents to share the two-year-old health check alongside the other information they provide about the child. The benefits of this approach lie in the fact that the assessment is based on three individual perspectives of the child and should present a more reliable picture as a result.

Daycare settings, which are likely to have known their children since the age of one or even earlier, should not have a difficulty in completing this check because they will have observational evidence and intimate knowledge of their children to support their judgements. They will also be able to complete the check soon after each child's second birthday, whereas other settings may have to wait until close to their third birthday, if – for example – the child starts nursery at two and eight months, and attend two sessions per week. We all know the developmental leaps children can make between their second and third birthdays, and therefore the data collected should only be considered in the context of the individual child and the information available to the practitioner.

No doubt the aim of this new approach is to identify children's individual achievements and needs early so that we can support their development and learning effectively. The tracking of the child's progress following the 'two year check' will be equally important if we are to make accurate assessments for each child's learning and development at five when completing the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. For this reason, sharing information and children's records with Reception class teachers will be important. How we communicate our findings with parents and other professionals will be fundamental, because our aims should be to nurture children whatever the results of their assessment.

Finally, another burning question remains: will there be enough money to support those children whose assessments identify a significant need that will require expert help and the involvement of other professionals?

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