

Early Childhood Education Service

National roll out of the B4 School Check - role of early childhood education services and teachers

On 1 June 2008, the Ministry of Health and District Health Boards (DHB) will begin the phased delivery of a free and comprehensive health check for all four year olds across the country. The check is called the B4 School Check and parents/caregivers will be invited to participate with their child in having the Check. The Check is part of the Well Child Tamariki Ora checks offered to all children and their families/whānau from birth to five years.

The B4 School Check provides a significant opportunity for the health sector, parents/caregivers and educators to work together to promote health and enhance wellbeing of all children. Well-being – Mana Atua is the first strand of Te Whariki, the early childhood education curriculum, and promotes the importance for children to experience an environment where their health is promoted, their emotional wellbeing nurtured and they are kept safe from harm.

The Check is also designed to support and empower families/whānau and communities to enhance their children's ability to participate and learn. It provides an opportunity to identify any support needs of children not engaged with early childhood education and provides an opportunity to engage these children with education.

The Check includes:

- general questions on health and development
- assessing a child's hearing, vision, teeth, gums, height, and weight
- reviewing immunisation status
- questions about a child's development and behaviour.

If during the Check any issues of concern are identified, the child and their family/whānau will be offered additional support, including referral for a more in depth assessment and if needed help from an appropriate service. The Check will be provided by a registered nurse, such as Public Health, Well Child/Tamariki Ora and Practice Nurses, supported by Vision Hearing Technicians.

The B4 School Check was piloted in the Counties Manukau and Wanganui DHB regions from August to November 2007, with almost 900 Checks completed. Evaluation of the pilots was extremely positive with 99 percent of families/whānau surveyed reporting the Check was delivered in a culturally appropriate manner; 98 percent reporting that they would recommend it to their family/whānau and friends; and 92 percent reporting a high level of satisfaction with the Check. The pilot services successfully reached Māori and Pasifika families, as well as families living in more deprived areas. There was over-representation in the pilot samples from these groups. The evaluation found the programme also increased links across the health and education sectors overall.

How will the B4 School Check involve early childhood education services?

The B4 School Check is likely to involve early childhood education teachers in cases where children attend an early childhood education service and new entrant and junior primary teachers where children and their families have not been offered the Check before they start school.

The Checks are likely to be delivered in a range of venues, for example, Plunket rooms, general practice, marae, mobile clinics, and through home visits. You may be asked if your early childhood service can be used by the local DHB as a venue for the delivery of B4 School Checks to children attending your service. This would be subject to agreement between your early childhood service and the DHB. One manager of a day care centre in Whanganui said of the Check being provided in her centre that:

'I felt the B4 School Check was very beneficial for parents being provided in a familiar and comfortable environment which in the case of one parent enabled her to discuss freely any issues with the health nurse without having to find a babysitter for other children and worry about her children (three under five) while the discussions took place. We felt it went very well without a lot of disruption and the children responded well to what was being asked of them. Once parents realised what it was about they were very positive about it and wanted to be part of it.'

One aspect of the B4 School Check is to identify any developmental, social-emotional and behavioural issues that could impact on a child's learning ability and provide appropriate support to children, their families, early childhood services and schools to maximise the child's learning experience.


Parents/caregivers will be asked to fill out two questionnaires. Subject to parental consent, teachers will be asked to complete a short questionnaire about their observations of the child's strengths and difficulties. The Parental Evaluation of Development Status (PEDS) is a questionnaire for parents/caregivers relating to a child's development. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a questionnaire for both parents/caregivers and teachers relating to a child's behaviour. Both are tried and tested screening tools.

The nurse undertaking the B4 School Check will liaise with early childhood teachers and primary teachers to ensure completion of the SDQ-T (for teachers). Teachers are strongly encouraged to complete the SDQ-T because it increases the sensitivity of the Check if completed by both parents/caregivers and teachers. The SDQ-T only takes 5 to 10 minutes to complete for each child. The information from both questionnaires is compared by the nurse, to provide insight into what might best support and/or develop the child. More information will be provided at a later date.

When will the B4 School Check start in my region?

Mid-Central, Lakes, Waikato, and Nelson-Marlborough DHBs are to start offering the B4 School Check from early June 2008, and the other 17 DHBs will begin delivering the Checks over the following months, with all DHBs providing Checks by 31 August 2008. For more information about the B4 School Check in your area, please contact your local DHB. Contact details for DHBs are available on the Ministry of Health's website www.moh.govt.nz.

The Ministries of Health and Education look forward to the support of early childhood education services and primary schools in the implementation of the B4 School Check across the country.



Janice Wilson
Deputy Director-General
Ministry of Health



Nicholas Pole
Deputy Secretary
Ministry of Education