

Frequently asked questions about the strengths and difficulties questionnaire used in the *B4 School Check*



What is the purpose of the *B4 School Check*?

The main purpose of the *B4 School Check* is to offer parents or caregivers of all children turning four the opportunity to spend 45 minutes to an hour talking about their child's health, wellbeing, and development with a registered nurse.

A *B4 School Check* is about health in its broadest sense. It is a group of checks and screens set in a context of health promotion and focus on wellbeing. Among the sets of questions is the strengths and difficulties questionnaire or SDQ.

What is the SDQ?

The SDQ is used to assess a child's social and emotional development. The SDQ is not used to diagnose or label children, rather it is a tool designed to get an overall picture of the child's strengths and difficulties. This may identify needs that should be discussed further with the child's parents or caregiver.

The SDQ is based on the Child Behaviour Checklist and Rutter questionnaires, which have long been used in clinical and educational practice, but it puts more emphasis on the child's strengths rather than just their difficulties.

The SDQ's focus is on whether a child has difficulty with emotions, concentration, behaviour or getting along with others. It is well respected by specialists and researchers, used by several countries and is available in several languages.

The SDQ contains good principles for considering a child's strengths as well as any areas of difficulty. The SDQ reflects current academic thought about risk and resilience and the impact this has on a child's development and learning.

There are two versions of the questionnaire: one for parents (SDQ-P), and the other for teachers (SDQ-T). The questionnaires aim to get two views of a child's social development: from the home environment using the SDQ-P, filled out by parents or caregivers; and from the wider social environment using the SDQ-T, filled out by a teacher.

The SDQ is better at identifying strengths and difficulties if both a parent or caregiver and a teacher complete the questionnaire.

For more detailed information about the SDQ, and its validity as a behavioural and social development assessment tool, visit www.sdqinfo.com

Why is the SDQ being used as part of the *B4 School Check*?

There is no perfect tool for identifying a child's social and emotional needs, but the SDQ was considered by the Ministries of Health and Education to be the most appropriate for use in the *B4 School Check*.

The SDQ was selected over other tools for identifying social and emotional needs because it is:

- widely used and accepted internationally by people working in child health, development and education
- quick to use and easy to score

Was the SDQ trialled in NZ and what was the outcome?

The SDQ-P and SDQ-T were trialled in New Zealand as part of the pilot of the B4 School Check that took place in 2007.

The B4 School Check was piloted in the Whanganui and Counties Manukau District Health Boards from August to November 2007. The pilot services were evaluated by an independent organisation to help fine tune the B4 School Check for introduction around the country in 2008. Parents of children who received the B4 School Check were asked what they thought about the service, and some of the results were:

- nearly all of the parents who participated (98%) indicated that they would recommend the programme to others.
- 92% reported high levels of satisfaction.
- most parents (86%) reported high levels of confidence in the programme.
- 99% of survey participants felt that their child's check was completed in a culturally appropriate manner.

Is the use of the SDQ supported by the Ministry of Education?

Yes. The use of the SDQ is supported by both the Ministries of Education and Health, and the SDQ information pamphlet was developed jointly. Both Ministries acknowledge the value of the professional judgement of early childhood education (ECE) and new entrant primary school teachers and encourage teachers to contribute to the *B4 School Check* by completing the SDQ when it is requested.

What communication has there been from the Ministries of Education and Health to ECE centres about the SDQ-T?

A joint letter from the Ministries of Education and Health was mailed out in June 2008 to approximately 4,000 ECE centres around the country. In this letter, teachers were strongly encouraged to complete the SDQ-T. The letter also stated that the Ministries of Health and Education looked forward to the support of ECE centres and primary schools in the implementation of the *B4 School Check* across the country.

A second joint letter, enclosing a copy of the SDQ pamphlet and these FAQs, was sent to ECE centres in February 2009.

There will be ongoing communication with ECE centres about the programme as it develops.

Is it compulsory to fill out the SDQ-T?

While it is not compulsory for teachers to fill out the SDQ-T, you are strongly encouraged to do so by both the Ministries of Education and Health. The purpose of the SDQ is to get two views of a child's social and emotional development: from the home environment and from a wider social environment using the SDQ-T filled out by a teacher. A more holistic view will be gained if the SDQ-T is completed.

Who can fill in an SDQ-T?

Any teacher who knows the child well can fill in an SDQ-T. 'Teacher' is defined as a teacher, supervisor, educator, kaiawhina, kaiako, faiaoga or staff member (paid or unpaid) of an ECE service such as kindergarten, home-based education service, education and care centre, or Playcentre.

Can we change the wording of the SDQ questions?

The SDQ is an internationally validated tool developed overseas and as such the wording of the questions cannot be changed. If you have additional comments, feel free to add these to the questionnaire.

Are teachers expected to discuss their SDQ observations with the child's parents or caregivers?

The SDQ-T is a record of a teacher's observations of a child in a social, learning environment. It is good practice to discuss these observations with the child's parents or caregivers.

Is there an expectation that the teacher will go over the SDQ-T results with the nurse?

The *B4 School Check* nurse will review the findings of the SDQ-P and the SDQ-T and consider whether additional support or intervention is needed. If the parents or caregivers agree, the *B4 School Check* nurse may ask the teacher to be involved in a discussion about the child. The parents or caregivers may wish to be present during this discussion.

However, for the majority of children there will be no concerns identified and therefore no need for further discussion or follow up.

Can the nurse and teacher discuss the findings of the SDQ-P?

Discussion of the SDQ-P between the nurse and teacher can only happen with the parents' or caregivers' consent. The *B4 School Check* consent form covers consent from the parents or caregivers to have a teacher fill out the SDQ-T. Any discussion of the results of the SDQ-P between the nurse and teacher would require additional verbal consent from the parents or caregivers. It is highly likely that parents would want to be involved in any discussion about their child.

If the child attends more than one ECE centre, which centre should fill out the SDQ-T?

If a child attends more than one ECE centre, it does not matter which centre fills out the SDQ-T, as long as the teacher completing the form is confident doing so, and knows the child well.

Can the SDQ-T be filled in electronically and forwarded?

The copyright on the SDQ forms prevents forms being completed electronically. It is fine to scan and email, or fax a copy of the completed form, so long as secure transfer of the information is ensured.

Are the SDQ results sent to the school the child will be going to?

The SDQ results are not sent to the school the child will be attending. However, if concerns are identified, parents are encouraged to discuss these concerns with the school.

Te Whaariki has a holistic approach, whereas the SDQ is a checklist. Won't the SDQ label the child?

As mentioned earlier, the SDQ is not used to diagnose or label children, rather it is a tool designed to get an overall picture of the child's strengths and difficulties. This may identify needs that should be discussed further with the child's parents or caregiver – for example, if the child has difficulty with emotions, concentration, behaviour or getting along with others – and may result in the child being referred for further assistance. The information may also be used with other assessment and observational information collected in the centre in the development of a programme for the centre and for home.

The frequently asked questions when updated will be available on the Ministry of Health's website www.moh.govt.nz/b4schoolcheck