

# Toddlers need progress checks to spot problems early, says Tickell review <sup>[1]</sup>

The "nappy curriculum" is bogged down in targets and needs streamlining, Tickell review recommends

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## EXCERPTS.

Toddlers should undergo progress checks to see how well they can walk, talk and ask for help, a government-commissioned review recommended today.

The checks would help to identify any early problems or special educational needs, says Dame Clare Tickell's review into the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for under-fives.

It says there should be a requirement for childminders and nurseries to provide parents with a written summary of their child's progress in "prime areas" such as communication and language, personal, social and emotional skills and physical development when the child is between two and three years old.

The review also calls for everyone who works with under-fives to hold at least A-levels or equivalent qualifications. At the moment, more than one in four of those working with young children hold only GCSE-level qualifications or less.

Tickell's review into EYFS - dubbed the "nappy curriculum" - concludes that while the system has helped to boost standards, it is bogged down by targets and has left staff spending too much time filling in forms rather than helping children to develop.

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"The current EYFS is cumbersome, repetitive and unnecessarily bureaucratic. And it isn't doing enough to engage parents in their child's development, or make sure children are starting school with the basic skills they need to be ready to learn."

The review says that the development checks - for children who are at nursery or looked after by a childminder - will sit alongside health visitor checks, which are carried out at age two.

Tickell says: "We're asking practitioners to step back at a particular point in time and ask a set of simple questions.

"Evidence shows that early identification of need followed by appropriate support is the most effective approach to tackling disadvantage and helping children overcome specific obstacles to learning."

The review sets out a number of areas, such as managing feelings and behaviour, moving and handling, health and self-care, understanding and speaking, which should be looked at when a child is 24-36 months old.

Boosting the qualifications of childminders and nursery staff is another key recommendation of the review. Tickell says ideally there should be "one graduate within each setting".

"It's very important that we have a highly qualified workforce," she says. "There are lots of ways that people can work their way through and up in early years."

According to the latest figures, in 2009 72% of the early years workforce had at least a level 3 qualification (equivalent to A-levels). But this means that some 28% are not educated to this standard.

Current rules state that all nursery supervisors and managers should have a "relevant" level 3 qualification, but childminders are exempt from this. Tickell suggests that all staff should have a qualification at this level which relates to working with young children.

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Under the system, every nursery, childminder and reception class in England has to monitor children's progress towards 69 centrally-set "early learning goals" up to the age of five. Tickell says this should be cut to 17.

A revamped EYFS should be more in line with what children will be expected to learn at primary school, to help get them ready for the classroom, the review says. And it should focus on three areas that are the "foundations" for children's ability to learn and develop - personal, social and emotional development, communication and language, and physical development.

Within these areas, the curriculum should focus on literacy, numeracy, understanding the world and expressive art and design.

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In her review, Tickell says: "My findings indicate that although child protection training covers recognising and reporting abuse or neglect, it does not generally highlight adult behaviours that staff should watch out for."

Christine Blower, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), says: "Reducing from 69 to 17 the benchmarks for young children is a victory for common sense. The EYFS had become a bureaucratic nightmare."

"Young children develop at different rates so it is essential the goals set for them are appropriate. They should be play-based. The focus on literacy and numeracy risks moving to a formal approach to learning at far too early an age, especially in reception classes."

The latest government figures show that under the current EYFS, just over half (56%) of five-year-olds in England achieved a good level of development in the areas assessed.

-reprinted from The Guardian

**Region:** Europe <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** infant/toddler <sup>[3]</sup>

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