

**Early Childhood
Monographs:
The Quality of Education and
Care in Kindergartens**

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About the Early Childhood Education Monograph Series

In New Zealand there are many different types of early childhood services. When parents are looking for an early childhood service for their child, they may choose a particular service because of its type. Some services are parent-led and include Playcentres and kōhanga reo. Others are teacher-led services such as kindergartens and education and care services. This monograph is about kindergartens, which provide education and care for children from two or three years to school age.

The Education Review Office (ERO) reviews all licensed early childhood services and reports publicly on the quality of education and care that each service provides. ERO has used the findings from these reviews¹ to write the early childhood monograph series. The purpose of the series is to provide evaluative information about groups of services. Parents can use this information along with the ERO report *Early Childhood Education: A Guide for Parents, June 2007*,² and ERO reports on individual services, to help make decisions about which early childhood service best fits their needs and aspirations for their child.

About kindergartens

Kindergartens are managed and administered by kindergarten associations situated throughout New Zealand. The number of member kindergartens in each association varies from one to 107. Associations have responsibility for the governance and management of individual kindergartens in their area. Association governors, directors or trustees include parent representatives from local kindergartens.

Kindergartens are part of the state sector, and all kindergarten teachers are registered and hold a recognised early childhood qualification. Most kindergarten associations employ or contract the services of senior teachers or professional managers who have responsibility for monitoring and managing the quality of education and care provided in kindergartens.

There are 33 kindergarten associations throughout New Zealand. Kindergartens make up 16 percent of all licensed early childhood services and cater for 23 percent of child enrolments in licensed services.³

Which kindergarten associations are discussed in this monograph?

This report on the quality of education and care in kindergartens is based on ERO's findings from reviews of 30 kindergarten associations⁴ completed between April 2005 and March 2008. Over this time there has been considerable change in the early childhood sector that has had an impact on the operation of kindergartens and the nature of programmes offered.

¹ Reports can be read on the ERO website www.ero.govt.nz and every licensed service holds a copy of its current ERO report.

² This report can be found at: www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/ece-guide-jun07

³ At 1 July 2008. See www.educationcounts.govt.nz

⁴ The study does not include kindergarten associations whose most recent review was a supplementary review or those that had not had an education review in the last three years.

Where were these kindergarten associations?

The 30 kindergarten associations were located throughout New Zealand in both rural and urban areas. Twelve associations were in the South Island and 18 were throughout the North Island.

When were kindergartens open?

Kindergartens generally operated during school terms and most offered sessional⁵ education and care for children from two years to school age. Traditionally kindergartens have provided five morning sessions for older children and three afternoon sessions for younger children. More recently, many kindergartens are providing other options to cater for the increasingly diverse needs of families, and in response to funding changes. Some kindergartens have extended the length and number of sessions, for example now offering six-hour sessions aligned to school hours. Over a third of these kindergartens offer extended sessions within which a mix of school day and shorter sessions are available.

Parents can find out more information about hours of operation from their local kindergarten.

How were parents involved?

There are many different ownership arrangements for early childhood services and these have implications for how parents are involved in service management and governance. Kindergartens are governed and managed by associations, which are incorporated societies. They do not operate for private or corporate profit, and parents may be involved in fundraising, property management and governance roles.

An ongoing challenge for some kindergartens was the availability of parents to participate in programmes, on local committees, and at association level. As a result, some associations had implemented strategies to support the continued maintenance and ongoing development of these kindergartens.

Kindergartens have traditionally recognised the importance of teachers and parents working together to provide a well-resourced environment and interesting programmes. There is growing appreciation in early childhood education of the important role of parents in the planning and formal assessment of their child's learning.

How frequently were these services reviewed?

Currently, ERO undertakes education reviews in early childhood education services on a three-year cycle. When the performance of a service gives cause for concern, ERO carries out a further (supplementary) review within 12 months. The supplementary review rate for kindergartens is about two percent. Across all early childhood education services, supplementary reviews generally occur in about 12 to 15 percent of services annually.

⁵ Sessional kindergartens operate morning and/or afternoon sessions of approximately three hours. Some kindergartens are operating on full day licences of six hours duration.

Overall performance of kindergartens

This section summarises ERO's findings about the quality of education and care in kindergartens. ERO's reports on individual services may be read on ERO's website www.ero.govt.nz, and are also available from kindergarten associations and in individual kindergartens.

- The **philosophy** of kindergartens, in terms of commonly expressed beliefs, was evident through programmes and interactions that promoted child-initiated, play-based learning in safe, dynamic and well-resourced learning environments. These programmes also reflected *Te Whāriki*⁶ (the early childhood curriculum), fostered partnerships with children and families, and promoted the notion of partnership as expressed in the *Treaty of Waitangi*.
- In kindergartens that provided **high quality programmes**, children were engaged in self-directed learning for sustained periods. Effective and meaningful opportunities for literacy, numeracy, science and technology learning were available for children to explore. Children also had a wide range of opportunities to be creative, expressive and to become increasingly confident communicators through art, music, dance and drama. Māori language and cultural perspectives were naturally integrated and appreciated by adults and children. In a few associations, ERO recommended that kindergartens include literacy and numeracy experiences in the everyday programme provided for children. A challenge in some kindergartens was to raise teachers' confidence and capability to implement programmes and practices that reflected New Zealand's dual cultural heritage.
- Most kindergartens had a sustained focus on improving **planning, assessment and evaluation** systems and teachers' knowledge. Professional development and support influenced teachers' practice and raised the quality of assessment documentation and the quality of learning programmes for children. Kindergartens collected information about individual children's interests and relationships, with the majority using a 'learning story' approach. Information and communication technologies (ICT) were used to good effect to demonstrate children's learning and involvement in programmes. However, in many kindergartens, teachers needed to improve the ways they assessed children's learning.
- The **learning environment** in kindergartens was of good to high quality. Typically, the environment was purposely designed and resourced so that children could choose their own play activities and the direction of their learning. Spaces and equipment for outdoor exploration were set up to promote children's overall development and safety.
- Generally, teachers had well-established, positive and trusting relationships with children and their families. **High quality interactions** for learning included teachers asking questions and engaging children in conversations and exploration that promoted investigation, problem solving, independence, thinking and reasoning. ERO's findings indicated the need for some teachers to improve the way they responded to and extended children's thinking and learning.

⁶ Ministry of Education (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga Mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Ministry of Education

- **Self review** in kindergartens was supported by the expectations of their association and its guidelines for the ongoing review of aspects of learning and development, communication, consultation, operations and administration. In most instances information gathered from self-review activities was used to set the kindergarten's strategic direction and to develop annual plans. All kindergarten associations needed to develop aspects of their self review.
- ERO had concerns about aspects of **compliance** in two thirds of the kindergarten associations (and their affiliated kindergartens). Most associations had systems in place to address identified concerns.

The quality of education in kindergartens

Early childhood education is a highly diverse sector that includes many different philosophies and approaches to providing education and care for young children.

All ERO education reviews in the early childhood sector focus on the quality of education. For ERO this includes the quality of:

- the programme provided for children;
- the learning environment; and
- the interactions between children and adults.

In this report, ERO based its introductory statements and findings about the philosophy, programme, learning environment and interactions on evaluation indicators published by ERO,⁷ and the signposts and explanations of the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (DOPs) published by the Ministry of Education.⁸

Philosophy

The philosophy of each service expresses the fundamental beliefs, values and ideals by which the service chooses to operate. Each chartered service must have a written statement of philosophy. This statement provides the basis for decisions by management and should be reflected in the service's practice.

ERO considers the particular philosophy of a service and how this philosophy is reflected in the programme for children when it carries out a review of an early childhood service.

How was the philosophy expressed in kindergartens?

Each kindergarten association had developed its own mission statement, vision and philosophy. These underpinned the development and implementation of teaching and learning philosophies in individual kindergartens. Philosophies in kindergartens varied to reflect community aspirations and teachers' values and beliefs.

Common values and beliefs expressed by associations included:

⁷ <http://www.ero.govt.nz/EdRevInfo/Ecedrevs/ece-eval-indic.pdf>

⁸ Ministry of Education (1998). *Quality in Action*. Wellington: Learning Media, 1998.

- providing equitable opportunities for families to access and participate in high quality and affordable early childhood education;
- promoting excellence and innovative practice;
- making a commitment to partnership as defined by the Treaty of Waitangi;
- valuing family involvement and partnerships with parents;
- valuing children and empowering them to be life-long learners;
- providing individual learning programmes in the context of play-based, child-initiated learning guided by the principles of *Te Whāriki*;
- providing a safe and dynamic learning environment; and
- implementing teaching practice that reflects current theories of teaching and learning in the New Zealand early childhood context, where teachers are viewed as learners alongside children.

Generally, individual kindergarten philosophies reflected aspects of the key values and beliefs expressed by associations. Most kindergartens undertook regular consultation and review of their statements of philosophy. They implemented a shared philosophy that reflected the aspirations and needs of families, teachers and associations.

High quality education and care were achieved when adults understood and implemented practices that nurtured and extended children's interests and view of the world.

Examples of good practice from ERO kindergarten reports

Each kindergarten teaching team established statements about their teaching philosophy. Teaching practice was generally focused on enhancing children's sense of themselves as competent, independent learners, and programmes reflected the principles of Te Whāriki (the early childhood curriculum). Teachers conscientiously established environments that were highly conducive to learning. They engaged with children in their self-selected activities and provided very good support for them to initiate and direct their own learning.

Assessment practice strongly reflected the kindergarten philosophy, which recognised the whole child, involved families, provided feedback to children about their learning, and captured learning in context.

The association philosophy, "the child is the heart of the matter", underpinned all resourcing and maintenance decisions. The association's advocacy for children informed budget decisions and strategic planning. Children's wellbeing was paramount.

Programmes

High quality programmes in early childhood services promote and extend the learning and development of children through focusing on their strengths and interests. Effective planning, assessment and evaluation processes help teachers to provide high quality programmes. Teachers use assessment information to identify children's progress and plan for their learning.

In high quality programmes, children learn literacy and numeracy concepts through meaningful play. Programmes promote positive outcomes for children through acknowledging and supporting tikanga Māori and te reo Māori, and the cultures and ethnicities of all children attending the service.

What was the quality of the programmes?

High quality programmes in kindergartens were those where:

- teachers identified the interests of groups and individual children, recognised their learning, planned experiences to extend these interests and learning, and included the perspectives of teachers, children and parents;
- evaluation focused on outcomes for children, including effective review of curriculum provision and management, teaching practice, and responsive professional development and feedback to teachers;
- child-initiated play was aligned to the principles, strands and goals of *Te Whāriki*;
- flexible routines enabled children to engage in sustained and uninterrupted play, and programmes provided a balance of child-initiated and teacher-led learning experiences;
- literacy, numeracy, science and technology were integrated with children's play and exploration;
- there was a wide range of opportunities for children to be creative and become increasingly confident communicators through visual and performing arts;
- Māori language and cultural perspectives were integrated naturally and appreciated by adults and children; and
- relationships between kindergartens, families and schools supported children's seamless transition from kindergarten to school.

Overall, kindergartens provided good to high quality programmes that were responsive to the interests and learning needs of groups and individual children. They had a sustained focus on improving assessment, planning and evaluation systems and knowledge.

This study reinforces the findings of ERO's 2007 report, *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Education* that good assessment practice was generally evident in kindergartens, although some aspects needed further development. These included the use of assessment information to plan for more complex learning, evaluating programme effectiveness, and increasing the involvement of children and parents in the assessment process. Both studies found that in most kindergartens, professional development and support had influenced teacher practice and raised the quality of assessment, documentation and programmes.

Kindergartens collected information about individual children's interests and relationships, with the majority developing a narrative style of writing observations. The quality of this documentation varied, with some kindergartens being quite innovative in the ways that they documented children's learning and others still at a very early stage of development. In many kindergartens, information and communication technologies (ICT) was used to good effect to record, display and share information about children's learning, and increasingly showed children's progress and development over time.

Most kindergartens featured an approach to programme organisation that incorporated flexible routines and sustained and uninterrupted periods of time for children to engage in activities they had chosen themselves. Teachers planned, led and integrated learning opportunities with groups of children.

Developing children's early understanding and interest in literacy and numeracy was a priority in kindergartens. Teachers generally maximised opportunities to extend, explore and develop children's skills and ideas about oral language, print and mathematics in child-directed play and learning. A small number of associations, needed to improve the way they integrated literacy and numeracy into the learning programme.

Children's wide-ranging strengths and interests were catered for and enhanced by opportunities to explore and express themselves freely through art, music, dance, drama, science, and technology.

The effective integration of te reo Māori and tikanga varied across kindergartens. Good practice was seen when teachers consistently:

- helped children to learn respect for Māori culture and to understand and develop knowledge about similarities and differences of New Zealand's dual cultures;
- used te reo Māori throughout sessions and gave children opportunities to use and respond to simple phrases;
- fostered tuakana-teina relationships by encouraging older children to care for and support younger children;
- worked to develop meaningful relationships with families and whānau; and
- provided enjoyable opportunities for singing waiata and listening to Māori stories and legends.

Teachers also showed care and concern for the environment and integrated natural resources and learning about aspects of tikanga Māori for children and families. Many kindergartens needed to work on increasing teachers' confidence and capability to implement programmes and practices that reflected New Zealand's dual cultural heritage.

Ways of smoothing children's transition from kindergarten to school varied from kindergarten to kindergarten. Transitions were more successful where teachers developed ongoing and reciprocal relationships with local schools. Kindergarten programmes prepared children well by developing concepts and skills such as independence, self-responsibility and perseverance, and increasing children's confidence in their own ability to learn new skills and take on new challenges.

Children learnt in an environment where te reo and tikanga Māori were valued. Children and teachers used te reo in waiata, greetings and farewells. Tikanga Māori was evident in the use of mihi to greet visitors, karakia before food and careful handling of food. Māori values and Te Whāriki principles were reflected in the kindergarten programme and environment. A good example was the buddy programme, with its tuakana-teina relationships where older children cared for the younger children. Teachers made an effort to explain to parents the purpose of the

kindergarten's bicultural programme. As a result of these initiatives, Māori children were developing a strong sense of their identity and self worth.

Inclusive practice was particularly evident in the team-teaching approach that involved support and trainee staff, and parents who frequently participated in sessions and occasionally attended workshops with staff. Parents and other family members appreciated the comfortable, welcoming environment and high levels of information available to them. Children with specific learning needs were well supported and included naturally in the programme. Strong links were promoted with neighbouring schools and children were encouraged to identify the school they would attend. Teachers were responsive and flexible in meeting changing community needs.

The culturally diverse nature of the kindergarten community was reflected and celebrated in a variety of ways. These included displays of specific cultural artefacts stories and books about other countries and cultures, and books written in languages other than English. Several children's portfolios contained aspects of their home languages and cultures, and teachers supported and affirmed the children's developing skill in the English language. Parents were also encouraged to contribute to children's' developing understanding of the richness of cultural diversity through presentations at group time.

Children's literacy learning was well supported in many areas of the kindergarten. They accessed writing materials independently and frequently experimented with writing, making good use of resources in the literacy corner. Children enjoyed using a variety of books, including reference books relating to current interests. Self-made books contained children's dictated narrative to tell stories and to describe photographs and artwork. Children were becoming familiar with the use of ICT such as digital and video cameras to record their activities.

Learning environment

A high quality learning environment is responsive to the learning interests and strengths of the children attending. In this environment, children select learning resources and make choices about what they want to do in a culturally relevant setting that stimulates their curiosity so they explore and learn.

What was the quality of the learning environment?

Overall, the learning environment in kindergartens was of good to high quality. Environments were thoughtfully planned to provide a wide variety of learning experiences for young children. Teachers gave careful consideration to organising equipment and learning resources in a way that motivated children's curiosity, creativity and imagination. Most kindergartens had well-established processes for the ongoing upgrading of equipment, grounds and buildings. This contributed to the quality of the learning environment for both children and teachers.

The environment was purposely designed and resourced so that children were able to choose the direction of their learning. Good practice was seen where:

- specific areas were created in direct response to children's interests;
- children were able to integrate areas of play and manipulate and use equipment in open-ended ways;

- New Zealand's dual heritage and the cultural and social diversity of families attending were reflected in the environment; and
- the environment was inclusive, and accessible to all children.

Spaces and equipment for outdoor exploration were challenging, flexible and spacious, and catered for all aspects of children's development. A feature in many kindergartens was the use of planting and landscaping to reflect their local environment and to teach children about conservation and the care of pets, gardens and equipment. In most kindergartens, the environment was well managed to promote children's engagement in physical challenges, problem solving and decision-making.

Teachers in most kindergartens had made considerable effort to develop informative, attractive and interesting displays about the kindergarten's philosophy, organisation, management, and about children's work and learning. Teachers used ICT well to invite parents' and children's involvement in the programme and to enable children and their parents to revisit previous learning experiences. Displays throughout the kindergarten gave children and parents a sense of belonging and the confidence to make a contribution to the kindergarten.

High quality, attractive, accessible resources, tools and equipment were provided for children. Play areas were carefully planned to enable children to explore, climb, run, play co-operatively and quietly observe. The outdoor learning environment offered children opportunities to enjoy a varied programme of physical activity and exploration. Children were well supported by skilled adults to access appropriate resources to enhance their play, ideas and developing theories.

The environment was spacious. It was set out for young children and promoted a flow of play and links between areas of the curriculum. Considered attention to supervision allowed children full access to extensive learning areas. A large range of up-to-date and high quality equipment was used well by children to support their play and ideas. They were purposefully engaged in observation and care of the environment, which included a variety of birds and small animals. Through investigating changes and life cycles over time, children were beginning to make sense of the living world.

Interactions

In high quality early childhood services, adults respond to children with warmth and affection, and promptly comfort and reassure children when necessary. Adults engage in two-way conversations with children that encourage and extend thinking and learning. Children manage their interactions with others confidently.

What was the quality of interactions?

High quality interactions in kindergartens were characterised by:

- respectful, reciprocal and trusting relationships where teachers were responsive and attuned to children's care and learning needs;
- questioning, reflective listening and conversations that promoted investigation, problem solving, independence, thinking and reasoning;
- inclusive practices and attitudes that valued all children and their families irrespective of gender, ability, ethnicity, age or background;

- practices that fostered increasing social confidence and competence; and
- collaborative and trusting relationships between adults that focused on positive outcomes for children.

In most cases, teachers had established open, friendly and welcoming relationships with children and families based on mutual trust. However, the quality of teaching and learning interactions across kindergartens varied. There was a need for some teachers to respond to, and extend, children's thinking and learning by encouraging them to ask questions and explore new learning more deeply.

In most kindergartens, teachers used a range of appropriate strategies to support children's interactions with one another and to develop skills and behaviour for communicating, cooperating and learning with and alongside their peers. In a small number of kindergartens, teachers needed to improve their knowledge and skills in encouraging desired behaviour.

Teachers generally demonstrated a high level of inclusive practice that valued the diverse strengths and needs of children and their families. In some kindergartens teachers needed to respond more effectively to the needs of younger children and children with special learning needs.

Positive relationships were a feature of learning partnerships at the kindergarten. High levels of mutual respect and sensitive understanding of individual children's needs were evident in interactions between teachers and children. Teachers used positive guidance and support to foster the development of social and cooperative development skills in ways that were meaningful to children.

National evaluations in kindergartens

Based on its findings in early childhood services, ERO evaluates and reports on education policy and practice. ERO collects specific information about certain topics in all services for a defined timeframe. This information is reported in individual services' review reports, and is often aggregated for a national evaluation report.

Between 2005 and 2008, ERO investigated, in all early childhood services, progress with self-review and the quality of assessment.

Self review

Self review is the process through which early childhood services evaluate the effectiveness of what they do, with the aim of improving the quality of their practice. All chartered services must review their philosophy and charter in consultation with educators and parents and whānau. They must also regularly evaluate and modify policies, objectives and practices through an ongoing, recorded process of internal review.

How well developed was self-review?

As part of its national evaluations, ERO reported on self review in half the kindergarten association reports. All associations had some form of self review for policies and procedures, and self-audit processes to monitor compliance with legal and legislative requirements.

Most associations had developed a documented process for self review that encompassed aspects of learning, development, communication, consultation, operations and administration. Information gathered through self review was, in most instances, used to inform strategic directions and develop annual plans at both association and individual kindergarten level.

A feature in most associations was the open communication and meaningful consultation with teachers and parent representatives. Feedback from these people through self-review processes influenced decisions relating to association and individual kindergarten development. Some examples of improved outcomes for children, families and teachers were changes in session times, more collaborative decision-making and improvements in the quality of teaching practice. In one association, consultation with Māori whānau and Pacific people ensured that decision-making reflected the needs and aspirations of these groups.

In most associations, senior teachers played a key role in self review. Through their professional leadership they influenced the quality of reflective practice, teacher appraisal processes and outcomes. Senior teachers provided useful critique, feedback and written reports to teachers and associations about the quality of education and care for children.

In over half the associations, self review was clearly understood as a process or series of processes that focused on improving outcomes for children. Some associations were evaluating the ongoing effectiveness of changes made as a result of self review, and ensured that focus remained centred on continual improvement to outcomes for children. In two associations, professional development relating to self review had been provided for teachers in individual kindergartens.

In all associations, ERO identified ways to improve self-review practice. Among these were one or more of the following:

- improving understanding of the associations' role in self review;
- clarifying and coordinating self-review practice;
- increasing consultation;
- developing more rigorous teacher appraisal with a greater focus on improving teaching practice;
- increasing support for individual kindergartens; and
- establishing more focused reporting against strategic goals.

Self review was an integral part of the kindergarten's organisation. The association's policies and procedures outlined a framework, key indicators and guidelines for teachers. The purpose of self review was well understood by teachers as a vehicle for improving teaching, learning, development, adult communication and collaboration, and kindergarten organisation and management. Systems were clear, manageable, easily understood and effective. Information gained from self review was interpreted and used to assist the targeting of financial resources for programme enhancement, property development, and the introduction of new kindergarten initiatives.

Assessment

Assessment is the process used by teachers and parents to gather information to support children in their learning by noticing, recognising and responding to children's strengths and interests.

The Ministry of Education has funded professional development over a five-year period starting from 2005. Early childhood services were at varying stages in their understanding and implementation of assessment practice.

How well developed were assessment practices?

As part of its national evaluations, ERO reported on the quality of assessment in a third of the kindergarten association reports. While there was some variability in the quality across associations, half of them demonstrated well-developed assessment practice.

Specific professional development in assessment had improved teachers' understanding and approaches to assessment in most associations. Where senior teachers had provided informed leadership and direction in promoting high quality assessment, considerable progress had been made in improving assessment practice.

Most associations provided guidelines and expectations for assessment. In all instances, teachers documented children's learning and these documents reflected elements of current theory and good practice. Children's assessment information was well organised and accessible to children and their parents.

The use of up-to-date ICT contributed to the quality of assessment documentation and content. While in some kindergartens assessment information was used as the basis for programme planning, this was something that needed to be improved, as was documenting children's progress and learning over time.

A challenge for kindergartens was to work with parents as partners in their child's education and learning by increasing their involvement in assessment.

Teachers made good use of professional development to support the development of good assessment practice. In particular, they used the Ministry of Education exemplars to guide discussion and accessed professional development relating to the exemplars through the association. Regular input from the senior teacher also contributed to teachers' professional knowledge about assessment practice.

Assessment practice was clearly linked to the kindergarten philosophy. The value placed on learning through play was evident in teachers' assessment of children. Rich records of children's learning over time were included in children's individual profiles. These records provided a meaningful picture of children's experiences at kindergarten that identified each child's strengths, interests and dispositions for learning.

Teachers maximised opportunities to share their knowledge of children with each other and families. They also involved children in the assessment process. This was achieved through teachers working alongside children to develop profiles and empowering children to make decisions about these records. ERO observed children spending extended periods of time revisiting their learning through these documents.

The use of ICT had a positive influence on the ways teachers recorded, shared and reflected on their observations of children. This genuine focus by teachers on children, was reflected in high quality assessment practice and documentation.

Compliance with legal requirements in kindergartens

All licensed early childhood services must comply with legal requirements that describe the minimum standards for education and care.

As part of an education review, ERO asks the management of a service to complete a *Centre Management Assurance Statement* to attest to the extent to which the service is meeting its legal and regulatory obligations. Where areas of non-compliance are identified ERO asks management to advise what action is being taken.

During each education review, ERO evaluates the service's management of compliance with a specific selection of legislative obligations that have a potentially high impact on outcomes for children's emotional and physical safety; staff qualifications and organisation; and evacuation procedures and practices for fire and earthquake. If concerns arise, ERO may evaluate a wider range of requirements.⁹

What was the level of compliance?

ERO reported that it did not identify any concerns about compliance with legal and regulatory requirements in a third of the 30 kindergarten associations and their affiliated kindergartens.

Teachers, parents and the association work together to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for children. Ongoing monitoring of health and safety procedures and regular maintenance inspections ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to keep children safe.

What concerns were identified?

ERO identified compliance concerns in two thirds of the kindergarten associations and/or their affiliated kindergartens in relation to one or more of the following requirements:

- outdoor safety in the areas of fencing, safety surfacing, equipment maintenance and placement, and sun safety;
- protection against earthquake damage;
- implementation of hazard identification and management systems;
- supervision and monitoring of eating, hand washing and nappy changing;
- written parent/guardian approval for adult: child ratios for excursions outside of the kindergarten;
- appropriate child protection reporting policy and procedures; and
- requirements for licence display.

Some of these concerns related to association governance and management practices, and some were specific to individual kindergartens.

⁹ For further information, see: <http://www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/Handbooks>

Overall kindergarten associations were found to provide a well-documented framework for ongoing self-audit approaches for administration, health, safety and hygiene. In addition senior teachers played a key role in the ongoing monitoring of compliance in kindergartens.

Improvements in kindergartens

Improvements over time in the quality of education and care provided by a service give a useful perspective on the vitality of the service. ERO's previous national evaluation reports¹⁰ have highlighted high quality practice and identified areas for improvement.

Many changes are taking place in kindergartens as they respond to the changing needs of their communities and to wider changes in the early childhood sector.

What improvements have been made?

Association reports highlighted the progress being made by kindergartens in improving assessment, planning and evaluation systems and knowledge. In most associations, professional development and support have influenced teacher practice and raised the quality of assessment documentation and programmes for children.

Considerable improvements have been made to programme provision, interactions between teachers and children, and professional development opportunities for teachers. However, a remaining challenge for associations is to achieve a consistent quality of education across all kindergartens.

Particular focus is needed to increase teachers' confidence, capability and knowledge to:

- work well with increasingly diverse communities; and
- cater for the interests, strengths and learning needs of younger children and those children with identified special needs.

Conclusion

This monograph gives parents an overview of the quality of education and care in kindergartens and includes some examples of good practice. It shows that education provision across kindergartens was of good to high quality.

In all associations, kindergartens were improving planning, assessment and evaluation practice and knowledge. Some kindergartens had established high quality and innovative practice. Self-review practices were in various stages of development. Where self review was well established, the information gathered was analysed and used to improve outcomes for children and their families.

Parents can use this report along with other ERO reports to help make decisions about which early childhood education services suit their aspirations for their children.

¹⁰ *What Counts as Quality in Kindergartens*, Summer 1997; *What Counts as Quality in Early Childhood Centres*, Winter 2000.

Further information

Umbrella organisation

The majority of kindergarten associations (29 in total) affiliate to the national body, New Zealand Kindertartens Incorporated (NZKI), while four belong to a grouping of kindertartens known as EC Leadership (previously New Zealand Federation of Free Kindertartens).

Contact addresses

New Zealand Kindertartens Incorporated

Level 1

Braemar House

32 The Terrace

PO Box 3058

Wellington 6140.

Website: www.nzkindertartens.org.nz

EC Leadership (formerly New Zealand Federation of Free Kindertartens)

Website: www.ecleadership.org.nz

Education Review Office

ERO reports

The following ERO evaluation reports, related to kindertartens are available on its web site: www.ero.govt.nz.

- *Maori Children in Early Childhood: Pilot Study*, July 2008.
- *Early Childhood Education Monograph Series 2007–09*
- *Early Childhood Education: A Guide for Parents*, June 2007.
- *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood*, December 2007
- *What Counts as Quality in Early Childhood Centres*, Winter 2000

ERO has reviewed all kindertartens that have been operating for more than 12 months. The report of each review is available on the ERO website.

www.ero.govt.nz.

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