

How ERO undertakes Akanuku | Assurance Reviews of Centre-based Early Childhood Services

February 2021

ERO's role and purpose

The Education Review Office (ERO) is a government department with responsibility for evaluating and reporting publicly on the quality of education provided in New Zealand schools and early childhood services. Its role encompasses accountability (including compliance with legal requirements), educational improvement, and knowledge generation.

Children and young people are central to ERO's approach. This is reflected in ERO's whakataukī and is the foundation for ERO's purpose statement.

Whakataukī: Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa. The Child – the Heart of the Matter.

Purpose: Our evaluation insights are a catalyst for change so that every child achieves success as a lifelong learner.

ERO's evaluation approaches include the following principles of practice:

- a focus on the learner and the equity and excellence of education outcomes
- promoting external accountability and strengthening internal accountability
- a culturally and contextually responsive approach
- the integration of internal and external evaluation
- a participatory evaluation process
- technical rigour in evaluation design; data gathering; analysis, synthesis and reasoning; and the communication of evaluation information
- the promotion of evaluation use
- developing evaluation capacity
- capable and ethical evaluation practice.¹

ERO evaluations should act as a catalyst for change and improvement in early childhood services and organisations that have governance oversight of individual services. Where ERO determines that children's wellbeing or health and safety is at risk, ERO will recommend to the Ministry of Education that it intervene.

At a system level, ERO's national evaluation reports contribute to the development and improvement of policy. Good practice reports share ERO's findings about schools' and early childhood services' successes in improving professional practice and learner outcomes.

¹ Education Review Office (2018). *External Education Evaluation in Aotearoa New Zealand: Principles of Practice*. Wellington.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi

ERO is committed to honouring Te Tiriti/the Treaty as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand and the agreement that underpins relationships between Māori and the Crown. Te Tiriti/the Treaty informs the development and implementation of all policies and procedures in ERO, including its review approaches. ERO promotes educational success for Māori, as Māori, and the realisation of Māori potential. [Ka Hikitia](#), the Government's Māori Education Strategy, clearly articulates this aspiration for the education sector.

Conduct during ERO Reviews

Review Officers use ERO's *Manual of Standard Procedures* and follow the *Code of Ethical Conduct for Review Officers*. The procedures allow for flexible and responsive evaluation that reflects the context of individual services. ERO's Code expects and requires standards of fairness, impartiality, responsibility and trustworthiness. These standards reflect those in the State Services Commission's *Standards of Integrity and Conduct*.

Legal requirements in Aotearoa New Zealand

Early childhood services are licensed in accordance with the Education and Training Act 2020 under the [Education \(Early Childhood Services\) Regulations 2008](#) which prescribe standards that each licensed service must meet.

Licensing criteria are used to assess how the centres meet the standards required by the regulations (regulatory standards). The licensing criteria for centre-based early childhood services are the [Licensing Criteria for Education and Care Services 2008](#)

Services must meet the regulatory standards and the requirements of the licensing criteria to gain and maintain a licence to operate.

The Licensing Criteria incorporate the prescribed curriculum framework which is made up of the English and te reo Māori versions of the principles and strands from the early childhood curriculum [Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa \(Te Whāriki\)](#).

All licensed early childhood services are required to provide a curriculum that is consistent with the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*.

ERO reviews of early childhood services

ERO's approach is underpinned by evaluation research and current educational theory. Through its evaluation practice, ERO aims to build the capacity of early childhood services to review, evaluate and improve practice.² ERO's aim is for all services to be on a pathway of ongoing improvement.

Akanuku | Assurance Reviews

ERO undertakes an Akanuku | Assurance Review process in any centre-based³ service:

- having its first ERO review, including if it is part of a governing organisation
- previously identified as 'not well placed' or 'requiring further development'
- that has moved from a provisional to a full licence
- that has been re-licensed due to a change of ownership
- where an Akanuku | Assurance Review process is determined to be appropriate.

An Akanuku | Assurance Review assesses whether a service meets regulatory standards/licensing requirements. ERO will recommend that the next review of the service is likely to be an Akarangi | Quality Evaluation; or that the next ERO review of the service will be in consultation with the Ministry of Education.

Akarangi | Quality Evaluations

ERO's Akarangi | Quality Evaluation process:

- evaluates the extent to which the service has the learning and organisational conditions to support equitable outcomes for all learners
- builds upon services' internal evaluation processes and information
- focuses on improvement for equity and excellence.

ERO will undertake an Akanuku | Assurance Review if significant concerns are identified during an Akarangi | Quality Evaluation.

² See Appendix 1 for further information and resources to support review and evaluation activities.

³ Education and care services; Playcentres and kindergartens.

Process guidelines for an ERO Assurance Review

Notification

ERO begins an Akanuku | Assurance Review process with an email notification that includes links to the following documents on ERO's website:

- guidelines about how ERO undertakes an Akanuku | Assurance Review
- an Akanuku | Assurance Review background information form
- ERO's Centre Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklist
- a statistical profile form
- information to distribute to parents, whānau kaiako about the review.

ERO notifies a service approximately **four weeks** prior to an Akanuku | Assurance Review.

Pre-review information

Apart from the Centre Assurance Statement, statistical profile and background information form, ERO does not expect documents to be prepared especially for an Akanuku | Assurance Review.

Services are also asked to send to ERO prior to an Akanuku | Assurance Review:

- Correspondence from the Ministry of Education related to licensing
- The service's philosophy statement
- The service's annual plan
- An example of recent review and evaluation.

ERO uses information provided by a service to prepare for an Akanuku | Assurance Review. This helps ERO to develop knowledge about a service's context and practices.

Information exchange

A review officer will contact a service at least **two weeks** prior to the review to discuss the Akanuku | Assurance Review process, a date to provide the requested documentation to ERO and the date for the review team to visit the centre. This is an opportunity to clarify information about the Akanuku | Assurance Review process.

The focus of the review

Akanuku | Assurance Reviews focus on compliance with the four regulatory standards and licensing criteria. In particular, ERO looks at systems for managing areas that have a potentially high impact on children's wellbeing, including:

- emotional safety (including positive guidance and child protection)
- physical safety (including supervision; sleep procedures; accidents; medication; hygiene; excursion policies and procedures)
- suitable staffing (including qualification levels; police vetting; teacher certification; ratios)

- evacuation procedures and practices for fire and earthquake.

Investigation, evaluation and synthesis

During an Akanuku | Assurance Review, the ERO team gathers and records evidence informed by:

- discussions with those involved with the service
- analysis of additional documentation and
- observations of the curriculum in action, including teaching practice, the environment and resources.

ERO will develop tentative findings through a synthesis of evidence gathered by reviewers. Synthesis will include identifying any non-compliance with the regulatory standards and associated licensing criteria.

Discussion of emerging findings

The ERO team will discuss the emerging evaluation findings with the personnel nominated by a service. An emerging findings discussion will include any identified non-compliance.

A discussion of findings should include the service provider and any others who will have the responsibility to take action as a result of an ERO review.

Reporting ERO's judgements and evaluation findings

The audience for ERO reports includes the public and the Government, as well as those in the early childhood education sector.

ERO's judgements

In an Akanuku | Assurance Review ERO's onsite evaluation results in a judgement being made as to whether a service is either 'meeting' or 'not meeting' each of the four regulatory standards. ERO reports these judgements as well as information about all/any non-compliance identified. An ERO Akanuku | Assurance Review report will include **one** of the statements below.

- At the time of the review, ERO found the service was taking reasonable steps to meet regulatory standards;
or
- Since the onsite visit the service has provided ERO with evidence that shows it has addressed non-compliances and is now taking reasonable steps to meet regulatory standards; or
- At the time of the review, ERO identified non-compliance with regulatory standards that must be addressed; or
- At the time of the review, identified areas of non-compliance with regulatory standards that are an unacceptable risk to children.

Key next steps

If a service is meeting all the regulatory standards the Akanuku | Assurance Review report may include (if appropriate) some key next steps in relation the criteria in the Curriculum Standard.

Recommendation

Where non-compliances are identified ERO will recommend the Ministry of Education:

- follows up with the service provider to ensure that identified non-compliances are addressed promptly, or
- reassess the service's licence.

Next ERO Review

Akanuku | Assurance Review reports include one of the following statements:

- The next review of the service is likely to be an Akarangi | Quality Evaluation, or
- The next ERO review of the service will be in consultation with the Ministry of Education.

Akanuku | Assurance Review report

A draft report is sent to the early childhood service within two weeks of the completion of ERO's onsite review. A service provider has 10 working days from the date ERO emails the report to:

- query the evidential basis of reported findings
- advise ERO in writing of any errors of fact
- provide additional documentation/evidence.

ERO considers any response from a service and, where justified by evidence, may amend the report. The report is confirmed and a copy is emailed to the service provider within two weeks.

A confirmed report is released publicly on ERO's website two weeks after it is emailed to a service provider.

Process guidelines flowchart for an ERO Akanuku | Assurance Review

Notification and pre-review information

ERO's email notification includes information about the review process and the documents to complete and collate prior to a review



Information exchange

The review coordinator will contact the service to discuss a date for pre-review documentation to be provided to ERO.



The focus of the review

Akanuku | Assurance Reviews assess whether the service is 'meeting' or 'not meeting' regulatory standards.



Investigation, evaluation and synthesis

ERO gathers and documents evidence informed by discussion, analysis of documentation and observations.



Discussion of emerging findings

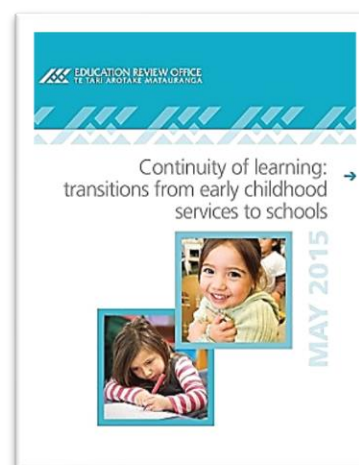
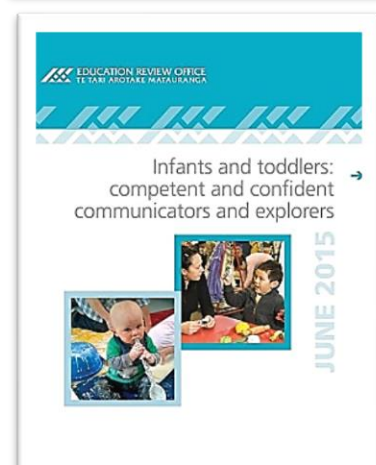
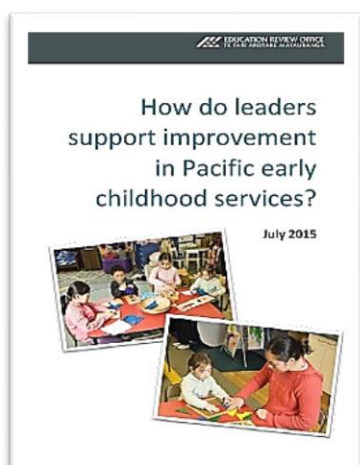
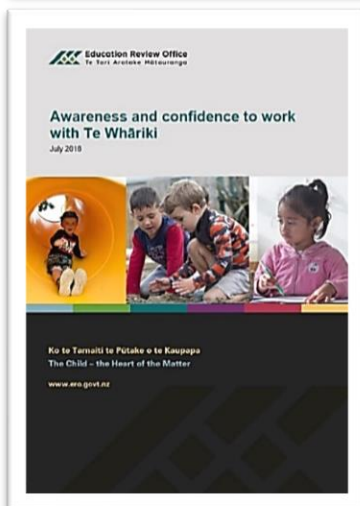
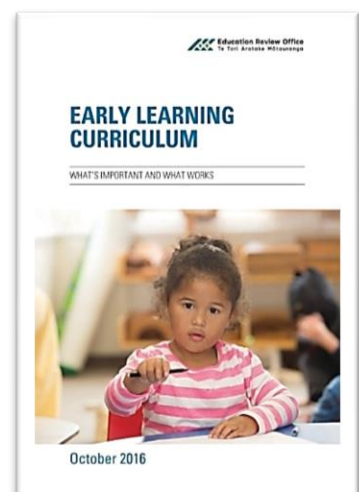
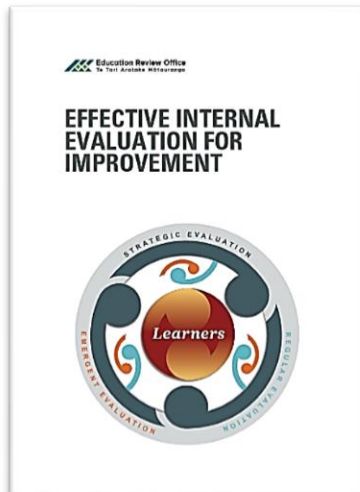
The ERO team will discuss emerging review findings, including any non-compliances identified.



Reporting

Judgements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the service is either 'meeting' or 'not meeting' each of the four regulatory standards
ERO recommends the Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> follow-ups to ensure that identified non-compliances are addressed promptly by the service, or reassesses the service's licence.
The 'next ERO review'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is likely to be an Akarangi Quality Evaluation, or will be in consultation with the Ministry of Education.

Useful resources



Appendix 1: Review and evaluation

ERO complements the review and evaluation activities of early childhood services. ERO's external evaluation process is responsive to a service's review and evaluation processes and outcomes.

Legal requirements for early childhood services

Early childhood services are required to undertake review and evaluation as part of their legal requirements. The licensing criteria to assess the governance, management and administration (GMA) standard specifies, in GMA6, that *an ongoing process of self-review helps the service maintain and improve the quality of its education and care.*

The licensing criteria GMA6 requires early childhood services to document:

- a process for reviewing and evaluating their operation
- a schedule showing timelines for planned review of different areas of operation
- recorded outcomes from the review process.

Guidance and support to help services with review and evaluation

The Ministry of Education has published guidelines for early childhood services: [Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua](#). These guidelines set out a process for services to use to undertake review and evaluation. This process is one that requires a systematic approach that includes preparation, data gathering, analysis and decision-making.

ERO has also published an overview of the processes involved in evaluation: [Effective Internal Evaluation for Improvement](#). This overview can be used by early childhood services to inform review and evaluation of their policies and practices.

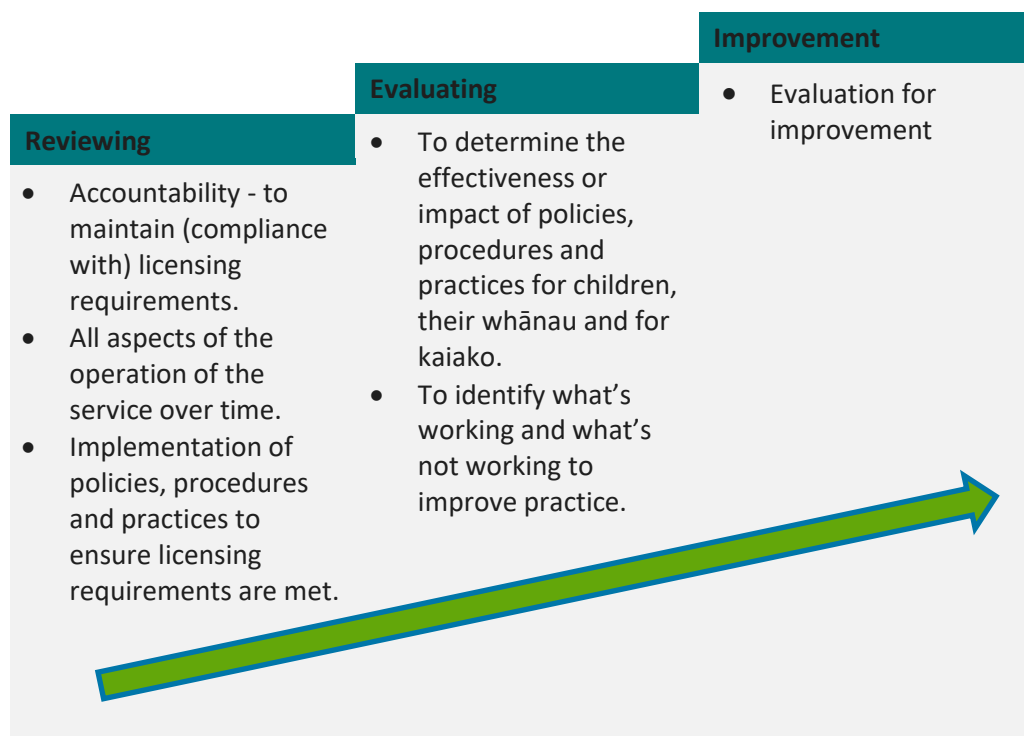
Building evaluation capability

ERO aims to strengthen the evaluation capability and capacity of an early childhood service through:

- making its own external evaluation processes transparent
- modelling evaluation practice
- encouraging participation in ERO's evaluation process
- having discussions about the service's review and evaluation processes
- discussing resources that services can use to help with review and evaluation.

Reviewing and evaluating for improvement

Review and evaluation are activities that can be used for accountability purposes, to help with decision making and knowledge building that contribute to ongoing improvement.



ERO's approach	Akanuku Assurance Review	Akarangi Quality Evaluation	Akamatua Excellence
Documentation required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A process for reviewing and evaluating the service's operation (for example, learning and teaching practices, philosophy, policies and procedures) by the people involved in the service. The process includes a schedule showing timelines for planned review of different areas of operation. Recorded outcomes from the review process. Evidence of opportunities provided for parents and adults providing education and care to contribute to the development and review of the service's operational documents (GMA 4). 		
Licensing requirement(s) Early Childhood Regulations 2008	GMA 6 - An ongoing process of self review helps the service maintain and improve the quality of its education and care (including the requirements of GMA4).		