



Te Tāhu o
te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Introduction to the ECE sector

Te Pou Kaupapahere



Proactively Released

Early Childhood Education in New Zealand

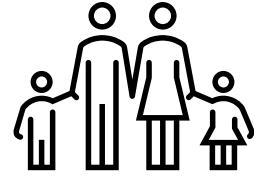
- Early childhood education (ECE) is the first part of the New Zealand education and training system.
- ECE is not compulsory, and children may attend from birth through to the start of school.
- Quality early childhood education lays the foundation for future learning. It helps children develop essential cognitive, social, and emotional skills that are necessary for success in school and later in life. ECE also has an important role in enabling parents and caregivers to participate in education, training and work.



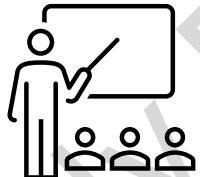
Key stakeholders



194,978
children



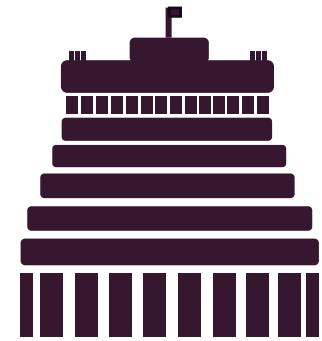
~122,000
families



36,843
teaching staff



4,410
licensed early
childhood services,
~2,000 service
providers



1 government



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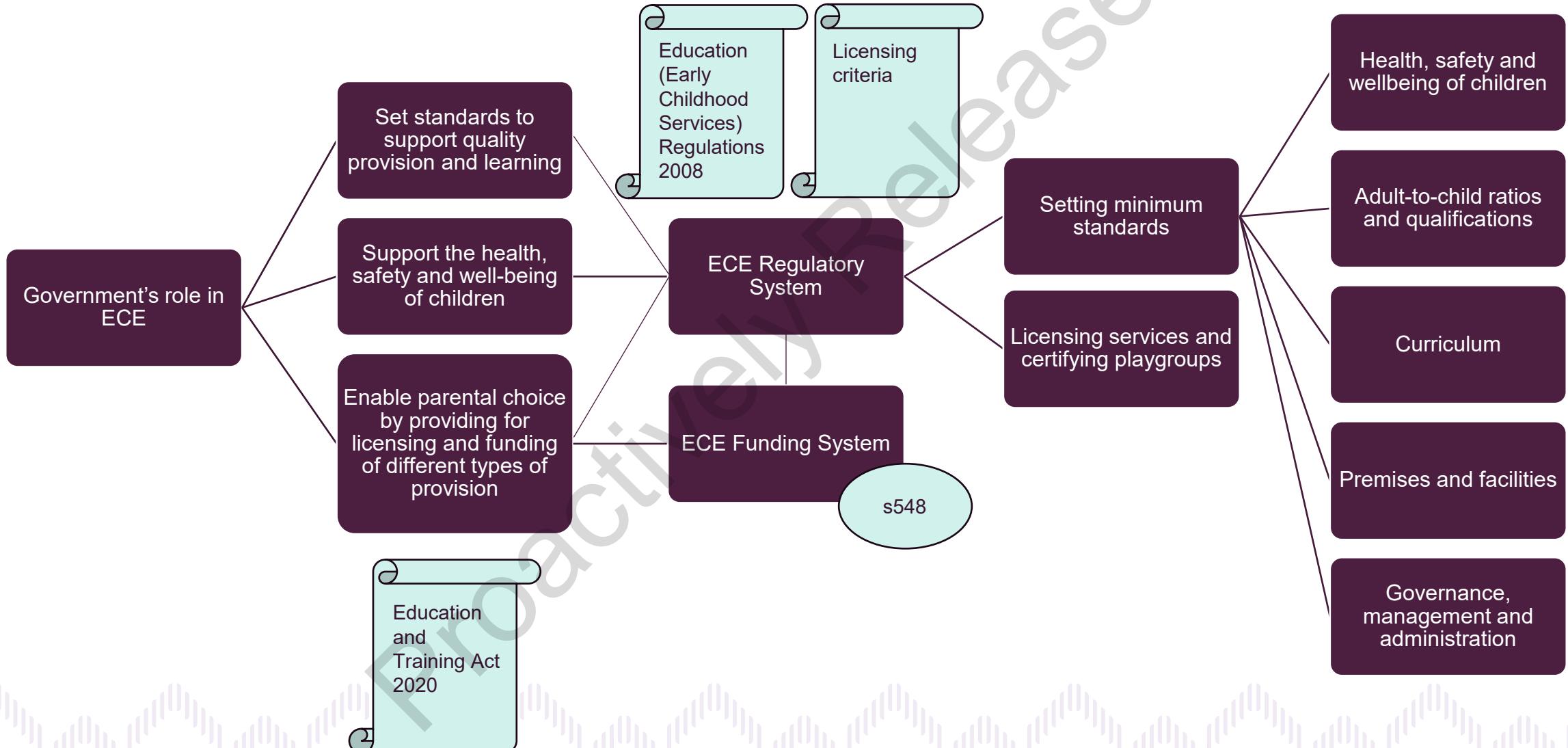
Government

Responsibility for early childhood education and care

- Prior to the 1980s, childcare and education were split. 'Childcare' was the responsibility of the Department of Social Welfare and 'education' services (kindergartens and playcentres) were the responsibility of the Department of Education.
- Integration took place in 1986, with the Department of Education as the responsible agency.
- In 1989, as part of the Tomorrow's Schools reforms, the Department of Education became the Ministry of Education.



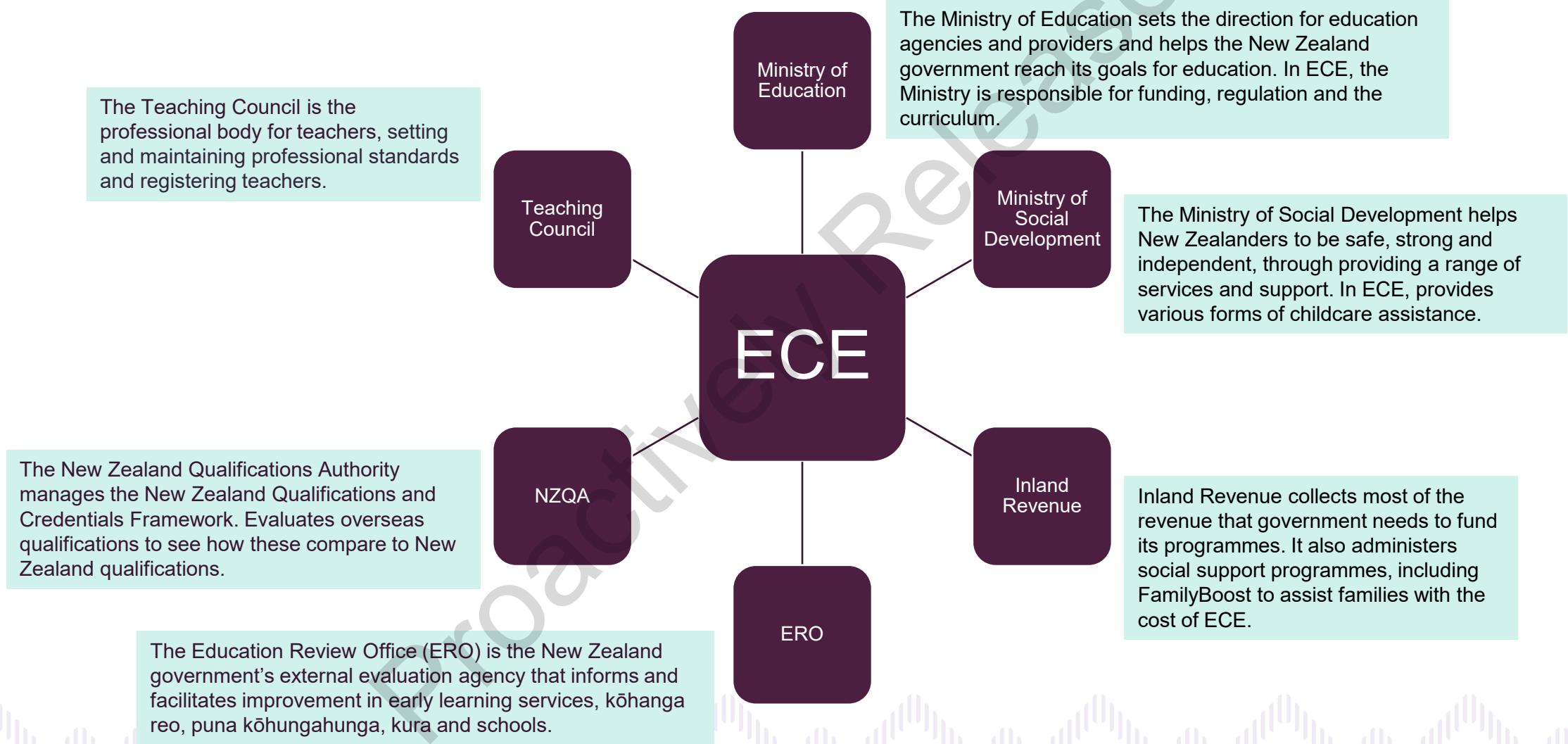
The Education and Training Act 2020 sets out government's role in ECE provision



How the Act, regulations and criteria apply to early learning services

FIRST TIER	<p>Education and Training Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Define different ECE service types › Allows regulations and criteria to be developed › Enables the Minister of Education to legislate (by NZ Gazette notice) a national ECE curriculum framework 			
SECOND TIER	<p>ECE Regulations</p> <p>Licensed services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Licensing process › Structural requirements such as ratios, qualifications, maximum numbers › Miscellaneous provisions › Standards 		<p>Certified playgroups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Certification process › Miscellaneous › Standards 	
THIRD TIER	<p>Criteria (to assess compliance with standards)</p> <p>Centre-based services</p>	<p>Home-based services</p>	<p>Hospital-based services</p>	<p>Certified playgroups</p>
<p>Guidance — not part of legislation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Example, templates, etc › Things to consider › Useful information 				

Government agencies and their link to ECE





Early childhood services

Most services are licensed

- The Ministry of Education is responsible for licensing services and making sure services comply with regulated standards.
- Most services are licensed, and there are four different sets of licensing criteria:

Centre-based services	Home-based services	Hospital-based services	Kōhanga reo affiliated with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust
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- Ngā kōhanga reo are centre-based but have separate licensing criteria.
- Playgroups are not licensed. Playgroups are certified in accordance with the Education and Training Act 2020, under the Education (Playgroups) Regulations 2008. They have separate certification criteria to assess how they meet minimum standards.

Further categories can be applied

- Early childhood services are also sometimes categorised according to who has programme responsibility or involvement:

Teacher-led	Parent/whānau-led
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education and care (includes casual education and care services, Puna Reo, Reo Rua education and care, Leo o Fanau Moana immersion and Leo o Fanau Moana bilingual*)• Hospital-based services• Kindergarten• Home-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kōhanga reo• Playcentre

- Funding rates and conditions are applied to the service types in the above table.

ECE service numbers

Number of licensed ECE services				
Service type	2002	2007	2015	2024
Education & Care	1,612	1,927	2,409	2,666
Kindergarten	606	618	652	674
Home-based	194	224	417	248
Kōhanga reo	545	470	450	416
Playcentre	492	465	427	382
Casual Education & Care	38	35	9	3
Hospital-based	-	-	20	20
Correspondence School	1	1	1	1

Observations:

- *Increased growth in teacher-led ECE services following the introduction of 20 Hours ECE in 2007*
- *Long-term down-trend in the number of whānau/parent-led services*
- *Rapid growth and subsequent decline in the number of home-based providers*

Diversity of provision

- For-profit or not-for-profit
- Standalone services or part of a multi-licence provider

Number of services	Number of service providers
1 service	1628
2 to 25 services	259
26 services or more	17



The Ministry of Education works with the ECE sector

- The Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC)
- Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust and Ngā Puna Reo O Aotearoa
- Early Learning Regulatory Advisory Group





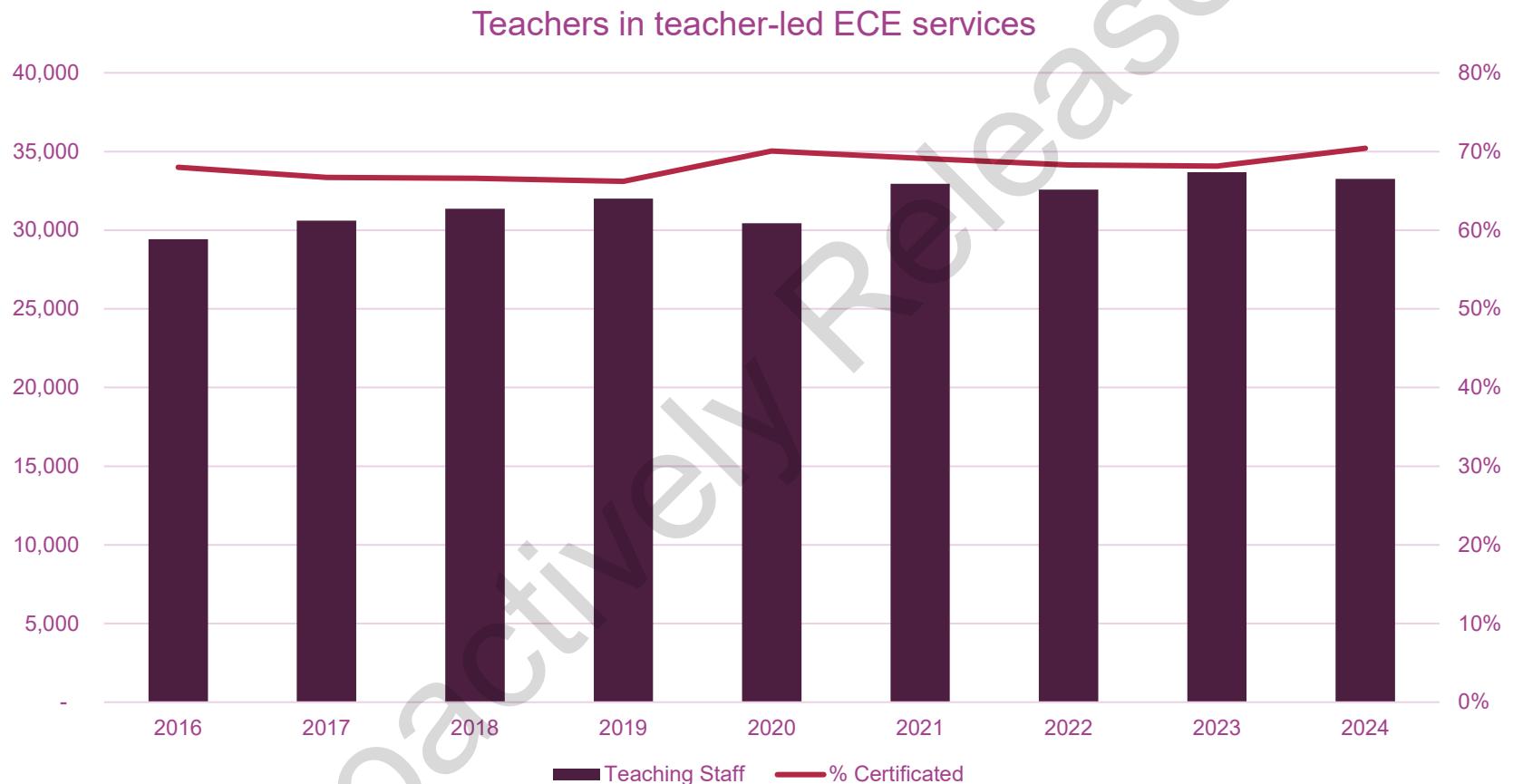
Teaching staff

Some definitions

- **Qualified teacher:** a person who holds a qualification that can be recognised by the Teaching Council for registration purposes.
- **Certificated teacher:** a holder of a current practising certificate that has been issued by the Teaching Council, or a letter from the Teaching Council advising that certification has been approved and that the practising certificate will be mailed within 4 to 6 weeks.



ECE workforce





Parents and caregivers

Parents and caregivers

- The Ministry of Education does not have a great deal of data relating to parents and caregivers as we primarily interact with early childhood services.
- The Growing Up in New Zealand study found that at two years of age, 56% of children were being looked after regularly each week by someone other than their parents. The main reason why children were in regular ECE was predominantly because of the work and study commitments of their mothers.
- We do not collect data on the fees parent and caregivers pay. However, we know parents can have difficulty taking up ECE for their family:
 - The New Zealand Childcare Survey (2017) found that *not having care available when they needed it* was the main childcare difficulty for parents that worked, or wanted to work (38%)
 - The survey also found that *care being too expensive* was second biggest difficulty for parents who worked or wanted to work (19 percent).
- Additionally, many services have waitlists, which vary by child age, region and service type.

Morton, S.M.B., et al 2014. Growing Up in New Zealand: A longitudinal study of New Zealand children and their families. Now we are Two: Describing our first 1000 days. Auckland: Growing Up in New Zealand
[Childcare a challenge for 1 in 6 working parents | Stats NZ](#)

Difficulties with ECE can lead to work consequences

- The New Zealand Childcare Survey (2017) found that 68% of parents who experienced difficulties getting childcare also experienced work-related consequences due to those difficulties. For this group:
 - 49 percent made changes to their usual work
 - 23 percent turned down paid work
 - 20 percent stopped searching for paid work
 - 18 percent were prevented from making changes to their usual work
 - 5.3 percent resigned from paid work.





Children

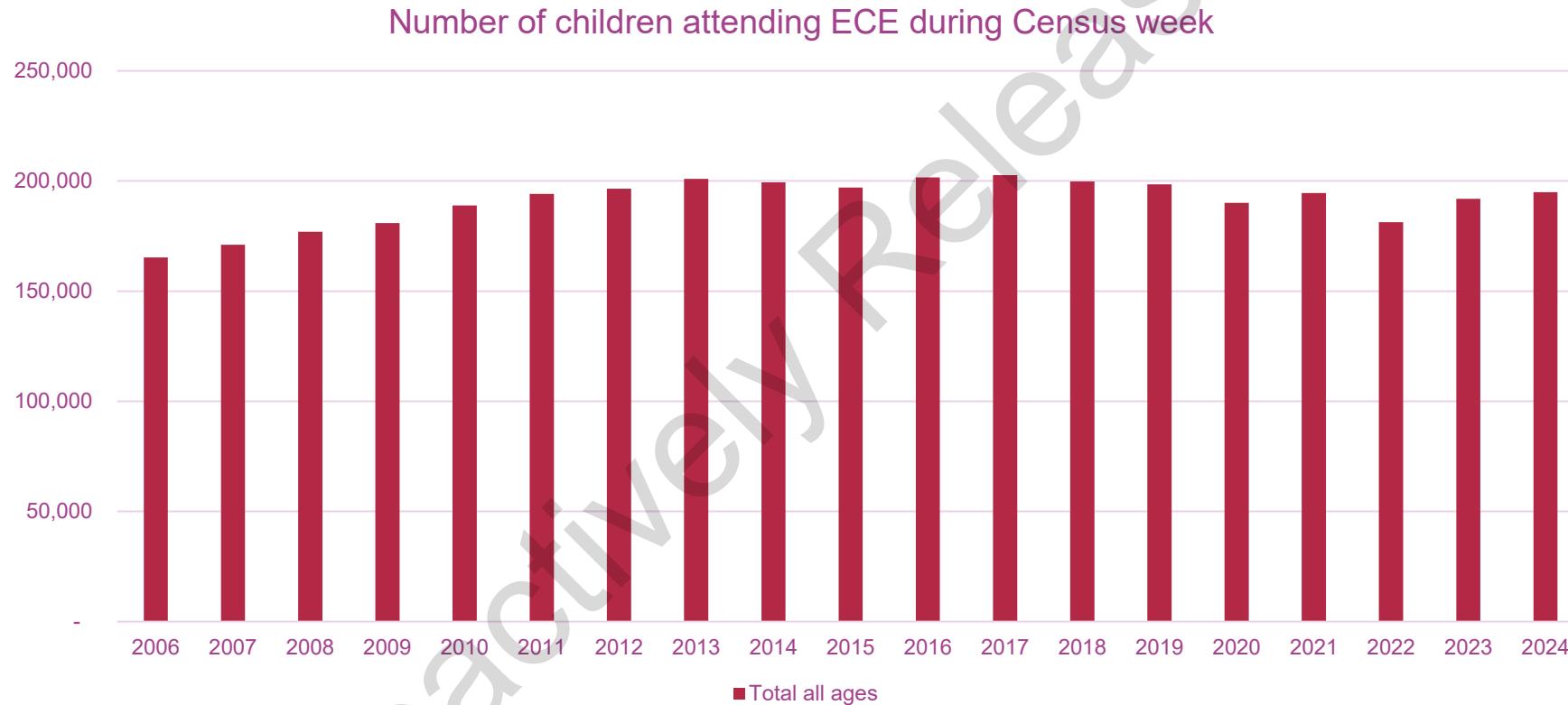
Children

- A relatively **high proportion** of children in New Zealand attend ECE. In March 2025, **96.8%** of children regularly attended ECE in the six months prior to starting school.
- Participation varies across ethnic groups, with Māori and Pacific children having **lower participation intensity** than that of the total population.
- The benefits of ECE attendance are nuanced, but key findings show that **better quality** ECE leads to better outcomes, and that children from **disadvantaged backgrounds** tend to benefit the most from ECE participation. In 2024, 3- and 4-year-old children in low socio-economic status areas had **lower** participation intensity than those in higher socio-economic status areas.

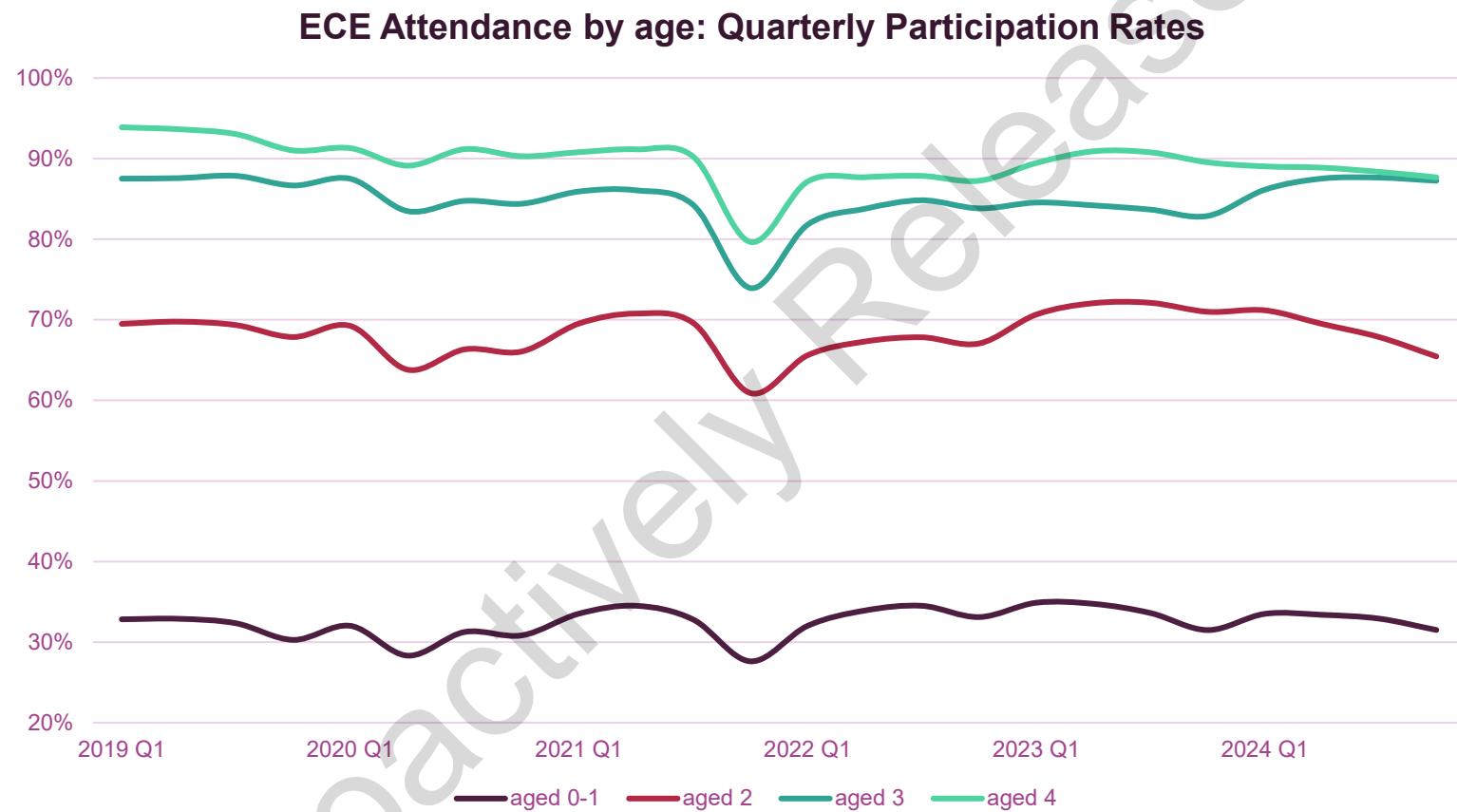


Van Huizen, T and Plantenga J. *Do children benefit from universal early childhood education and care? A meta-analysis of evidence from natural experiments*. *Economics of Education Review* (2018). 66 pp 206-222.

Number of children participating in ECE



Age variations





He mea tārai e mātou te mātauranga
kia rangatira ai, kia mana taurite ai ūna huanga.

We shape an education system that delivers
equitable and excellent outcomes.