



Starting an early childhood service

Checklist for choosing your premises

About this checklist

This checklist is designed to help you consider a range of issues when choosing a location for your new premises, whether you're looking for a site and building a new service or renovating an existing building. It looks at the things to consider for outdoor and indoor spaces and how spaces can work together.

Location and outdoor space

Wind, sun and shade

Consider wind direction and wind-chill factor in the proposed outdoor area.

- Will sun get into the building and onto the section?
- Will there be some shaded areas? What trees are there?

[Sunsmart Schools – SunSmart](#)

Road access

- Is there potential for safe parking, safe access and access for disabled people?
- Are there suitable safe places outside the building that can be used as assembly areas for staff and children during an emergency evacuation? Care should be taken that the location and nature of the assembly areas keep children safe from harm.

Site elevation

Is the site relatively level, to ensure direct access from indoor to outdoor play areas and usable outdoor space?

District Plan

Look at your council's District Plan to see what your proposed site and land around you can be used for.

[Council websites and maps - LGNZ](#)

Resource Management Act

Some resource consent rules can limit outdoor play for children. If these limits are too strict, the Ministry of Education might say the space doesn't meet licensing requirements.

Check with your local council to ensure you understand all Resource Management Act 1991 requirements before purchasing a section or building.

[Council websites and maps - LGNZ](#)

Land health and safety issues

Ask the local city or district council for a land information memorandum (LIM).

Check the site for any potential hazards – for example, leachate, long-life spray, chemical storage or methane gas build up in landfills.

Contact your local National Public Health Service for advice on health issues.

[Find the National Public Health contact details for your region](#)

Outdoor space

Check that the existing outdoor space or building plans meet the minimum outdoor space requirements of the licencing criteria. Some of the things you will need to think about are:

- good drainage in all weather
- sufficient area of safety surface
- large open areas
- a variety of surfaces, including grass and hard surfaces
- easy visibility
- smooth indoor-outdoor flow
- at least 5 square metres of activity space per child
- the ability to provide a range of educational activities
- storage for outdoor play equipment
- fences or structures of a height and design to prevent children from leaving
- self-latching mechanisms on gates that are unreachable by children
- access for any utility vehicles such as tailors if you need to refill bark or sand areas.

The premises and facilities licensing criteria provide more details on these requirements.

Relevant licensing criteria:

[Premises and facilities licensing criteria](#)

Outdoor noise levels

Excessive noise levels in early childhood centres have a direct impact on the learning of young children, as well as on the wellbeing of teachers.

Noise in the outdoor space can be reduced by:

- good site selection
- location and design of playgrounds on site
- acoustic fencing and plantings.

The World Health Organization (1999) has recommended maximum noise exposures in early childhood education and care centre environments.

Environment	Critical health effect(s)	L _{Aeq} [dB(A)]	Timeframe (hours)	L _{Amax, fast} [dB]
Outdoor play areas	Annoyance (external source)	55	During play	-

L_{Aeq} [dB(A)] – level for 'A-frequency weighted' sound averaged over a time period.

L_{Amax, fast} [dB] – maximum sound level for 'A-frequency weighted' fast sound for a single sound event.

Buildings and indoor space

Building health and safety issues

Check the building for hazards such as lead-based paint and asbestos.

Consider:

- asking the vender about any hazards
- commissioning a building report.

Contact your local National Public Health service for advice on health issues.

[Find the National Public Health contact details for your region](#)

Areas that work well together

To ensure areas work well together consider:

- keeping children's sleep rooms away from main play areas. These can be noisy. Sleep rooms should not be in cold or very hot locations
- having offices near the entrance area, to see visitors arrive and leave
- a centrally located kitchen
- double doors that open directly to the outdoor area for a good indoor-outdoor flow
- locating infant and toddler areas close to their sleep area, nappy change area, and with direct access to the outdoors
- having infant and toddler areas located close to a kitchen area or have their own kitchenette for warming bottles and so on
- having main play areas directly alongside the outdoor area
- covered roofing and verandas between the indoors and outdoors for wet day activities
- shelter from prevailing winds
- locker area and storage for children's bags and belongings
- where prams or car seats can be stored
- a welcoming arrival area
- separate dining (desirable).

If you're renovating, check with your architect to find out which walls are load bearing. Consider removing walls with no purpose.

There may be costs in the setting up stage. However, a well-designed environment, which assists with good supervision, will allow teachers to work more effectively with children in the years to come.

The Ministry of Education may require extra staffing in hard-to-supervise buildings or premises. This may result in extra cost in the long term.

Indoor space

Check the ability of the existing building or building plans to meet the minimum requirements for licensing. Some of the things you will need to think about are:

- a space for undisturbed rest or sleep
- a space for staff to plan and meet parents – this may double as a space for staff breaks
- at least 1 toilet for every 15 people over the age of 2 at the service
- handwashing and drying facilities with at least 1 warm water tap for every 15 people over the age of 2 at the service
- adult toilet and handwashing facilities – they may double as a disabled toilet
- body washing facilities that are suitable for the ages of children you hope to be licensed for – think about visibility from another area of the centre
- nappy change facilities that are visible from another area of the centre and are suitable for the ages of children you hope to be licensed for
- access for people with disabilities – including slopes, width of doors and passageways
- kitchen facilities and spaces to eat
- being able to see children easily from inside when they are outdoors
- at least 2.5 square metres of play space per child that is easy to supervise
- a range of floor surfacing to allow you the ability to provide a range of educational activities
- storage for resources (generous amounts of storage is always useful)
- art preparation and clean up facilities
- lighting appropriate for the purpose of the room
- designed to be well ventilated, either naturally or mechanically
- a way of maintaining a comfortable temperature
- acoustic design and materials to reduce noise levels.

The premises and facilities licensing criteria provide more details on these requirements.

Relevant licensing criteria:

[Premises and facilities licensing criteria](#)

Indoor noise levels

The World Health Organization (1999) has recommended maximum noise exposures in early childhood education and care centre environments:

Environment	Critical health effect(s)	L _{Aeq} [dB(A)]	Timeframe (hours)	L _{Amax, fast} [dB]
Pre-school indoor areas	Speech intelligibility, disturbance of information extraction, message communication	35	During class	-

Environment	Critical health effect(s)	L _{Aeq} [dB(A)]	Timeframe (hours)	L _{Amax, fast} [dB]
Pre-school sleep rooms	Sleep disturbance	30	Sleeping time	45

L_{Aeq} [dB] – level for ‘A-frequency weighted’ sound averaged over a time period.

L_{Amax, fast} [dB] – maximum sound level for ‘A-frequency weighted’ fast sound for a single sound event.

Premises above the ground floor

Having an early childhood service in premises above the ground floor can create extra challenges for you to meet regulations and licensing criteria.

If a licence is issued, the ages or number of children you can have attending might be restricted.

The Ministry may also impose an additional condition that requires you to staff the service over and above the prescribed adult to child ratio for evacuation purposes. Consider this additional operating cost when making decisions.

In the event of emergencies, evacuations may be more difficult and an approved building evacuation scheme will not be enough to prove that your service meets licensing criteria.

There are additional health and safety considerations related to the physical and psychological wellbeing of children that we must be assured will be fully met under any circumstance, including during an emergency evacuation. Your application and evacuation plan will need to mitigate additional health and safety concerns.

See our guidance for service providers – Evacuation Plans for ECE Services in High Rise Buildings on our website.

[Guidance for service providers, evacuation plans for ECE services in high rise buildings](#) PDF 1MB

Relevant criteria:

[HS104 Fire evacuation scheme – Ministry of Education](#)

[HS105 Emergency plan and supplies - Ministry of Education](#)



**Te Tāhuhu o
te Mātauranga**
Ministry of Education



**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government