



Te Tāhuhu o
te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education



Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Introduction to early childhood services

A guide for people thinking about starting
an early childhood service



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Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga | Ministry of Education

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Introduction

This resource is for people thinking about starting early childhood services. It will give you some understanding of:

- the types of early childhood services there are
- how early childhood services are regulated
- how early childhood services are funded
- what to consider when starting a service.

After deciding what type of service you would like to start, see our guides and factsheets:

- Starting an early childhood service – A guide for people starting a centre-based service.
- Starting an early childhood service – Applying for a centre-based education and care service licence
- Starting an early childhood service – Laws and regulations
- Starting an early childhood service – Checklist for choosing your premises
- Starting an early childhood service – Useful contact information
- Starting an early childhood service – Chronology

You can find these on our website.

[Guides and factsheets – Ministry of Education](#)



Types of early childhood services

To start an early childhood service, you need to know what type of service you want to open and if you need to apply for a licence or certification.

There are four main types of licensed and certified early childhood services:

- Licensed centre-based education and care services
- Licensed home-based education and care services
- Licensed hospital-based education and care services
- Certified playgroups.

Centre-based education and care services

Section 10 of the Education and Training Act 2020 defines an early childhood education and care centre as a premises that is used regularly for the education or care of 3 or more children (not being children of the persons providing the education or care or children enrolled at a school who are being provided with education or care before or after school) under the age of 6 years by day (or part of a day) but not for any continuous period of more than 7 days.

Centre-based services include:

- Playcentre
- Te Kōhanga Reo
- Kindergarten
- education and care services
- puna reo
- reo rua education and care
- leo o fanau moana immersion
- leo o fanau moana bilingual.

Sometimes, services are referred to as:

- childcare centres
- preschools
- crèches
- a'oga amata
- early childhood centres.

They can have a variety of different operating structures, philosophies and affiliations such as Montessori or Rudolf Steiner.

Note: If you are considering opening a playcentre, talk to the Playcentre Association. If you are considering opening a Kōhanga Reo, talk to the Kōhanga Reo National Trust.

Section 10 of the Education and Training Act 2020 defines home-based education and care services as the provision of education or care, for gain or reward, to children who are under the age of 5 years, or who are aged 5 years but not enrolled at school, in:

- the children's own home or
- the home of the person providing the education or care or
- any other home nominated by a parent of the children.

Hospital-based education and care services

Section 10 of the Education and Training Act 2020 defines hospital-based education and care service as the provision of education or care to 3 or more children under the age of 6 who are receiving hospital care.

[Education and Training Act 2020, Section 10 – New Zealand Legislation](#)

Services operating from hospital premises that provide education and care to siblings of patients or children of hospital staff or patients are centre-based education and care services, not hospital-based education and care services.

Playgroups or puna kōhungahunga

Section 10 of the Education and Training Act 2020 defines a playgroup as a group that meets on a regular basis to facilitate children's play, where:

- a. no child attends for more than 4 hours on any day and
- b. more than half the children attending on any occasion have a parent or caregiver present in the same play area at the same time and
- c. the total number of children attending on any occasion is not greater than 4 times the number of parents and caregivers present in the same play area at the same time.

[Education and Training Act 2020, Section 10 – New Zealand Legislation](#)

Playgroups include puna kōhungahunga, cultural playgroups and community language playgroups.

Teacher-led and parent-led services

Early childhood services can be teacher-led or parent-led, dependent on the type of service being provided.

Teacher-led services

Education and care services:

- run all-day sessions or flexible hour programmes for children from birth to school age
- some services cater for specific age ranges, for example, children under 2 years old
- may be privately owned or owned and operated by a community group
- some have a particular language and cultural base.

Kindergartens:

- accept children between 2 and 5 years old and can have set morning and afternoon sessions for different age groups
- some offer all-day or flexible sessions for a wider age range of children
- non-profit, community-based services managed by a Kindergarten Association.

Home-based education and care services:

- involve an educator¹ providing education and care for groups of up to 4 under school age children at a time in a home setting
- each educator¹ must belong to a licensed home-based care network and is supported by a coordinator², who is a registered ECE teacher.

¹ An educator is the person with the designated role of providing education and care directly to children in his or her care and attends to the health and safety of those children.

² The coordinator is the person who has primary responsibility for overseeing the education and care, comfort, and health and safety of the children, and providing professional leadership and support to educators within the service.

Parent-led services

Playgroups:

- are run by parents and cater for groups of children from birth to school age and their parents
- typically meet for 1 to 5 sessions each week to provide play, social and learning opportunities for children
- can be certified and may be less formal than other kinds of early childhood services.

Pasifika playgroups

In addition to the above playgroup requirements, Pasifika playgroups focus on developing and maintaining Pasifika languages and cultures.

Ngā puna kōhungahunga

In addition to the above playgroup requirements, Māori language and tikanga is reflected in the structure and content of the playgroup sessions.

Playcentres:

- are collectively supervised and managed by parents for children from birth to school age
- have a strong focus on parent education as well as children's learning
- are supported by Playcentre Associations around the country.

Ngā kōhanga reo:

- cater for children from birth to school age in a Māori language and tikanga Māori environment
- parents and whānau run the kōhanga reo with the support and guidance of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust (some kōhanga reo are also teacher-led services with trained Kaiako)



Laws, regulations and criteria for early childhood services

To ensure early childhood services and kōhanga reo meet a minimum standard, they must comply with the laws, regulations and criteria that govern their operation.

The Education and Training Act 2020

The Education and Training Act 2020 applies to all early childhood services in New Zealand.

[Education and Training Act 2020 – New Zealand Legislation](#)

Regulations

Early childhood service and playgroup regulations are part of the Education and Training Act 2020.

[Education \(Early Childhood Services\) Regulations 2008 – New Zealand Legislation](#)

[Education \(Playgroups\) Regulations 2008 – New Zealand Legislation](#)

Licensing and certification criteria

Criteria are used to assess compliance with the minimum standards set by the regulations.

Each type of early childhood service has different criteria.

[Licensing criteria for centre-based education and care services – Ministry of Education](#)

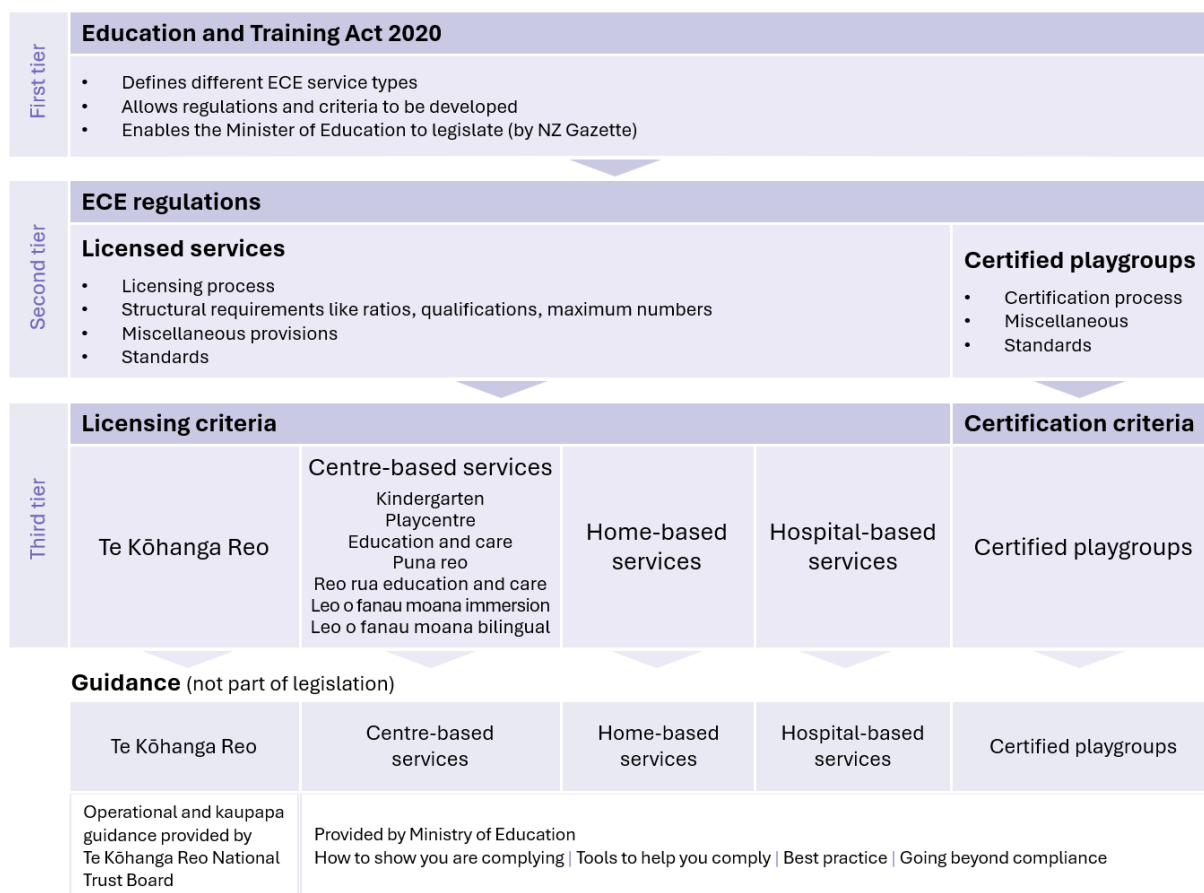
[Licensing criteria for home-based education and care services – Ministry of Education](#)

[Licensing criteria for hospital-based education and care services – Ministry of Education](#)

[Licensing criteria for kōhanga reo affiliated with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust – Ministry of Education](#)

[Certification criteria for playgroups – Ministry of Education](#)

Figure 1 How the Education and Training Act 2020, regulations and criteria apply to early childhood services.



Curriculum requirements

Te Whāriki is the curriculum framework for early childhood services. It provides the basis and context for the curriculum regulatory requirements in the Regulations for all early childhood services. The curriculum framework is set by the Minister of Education and the current framework was published in the New Zealand Gazette on 21 April 2023.

[Education \(Early Learning Curriculum Framework\) Notice 2023-go1546 – New Zealand Gazette](#)

Visit our Tāhūrangi website to see the framework and helpful teaching and learning resources.

Also see our content on meeting curriculum licensing and certification criteria.

Te Whāriki

Licensed early childhood education and care services and certified playgroups must follow the national gazetted curriculum framework for early childhood education, Te Whāriki.

[Te Whāriki Online – Tāhūrangi](#)

Kei Tua o te Pae/Assessment for Learning

Kei Tua o te Pae/Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars is a best-practice guide that will help teachers continue to improve the quality of their teaching.

[Kei Tua o te Pae – Tāhūrangi](#)

Curriculum licensing and certification criteria

Our web content has information on professional practice, culture and identity, children as learners, working with others and required documentation.

[Curriculum licensing criteria – centre-based education and care services](#)

[Curriculum licensing criteria – home-based education and care services](#)

[Curriculum licensing criteria – hospital-based education and care services](#)

[Curriculum certification criteria – playgroups](#)



Agency roles and responsibilities

The Ministry of Education works with the Education Review Office (ERO) to make sure children receive quality education and care.

We meet regularly with ERO to discuss any issues as they arise and to review our agreed ways of working.

Our responsibilities

We are responsible for licensing services and making sure services comply with regulated standards. We have the statutory powers, or legal authority, to intervene when services breach regulated standards.

The regulations provide us with the authority to use compliance tools or reclassify your licence if we identify non-compliance. We also have the authority to suspend a service's licence if any non-compliance poses significant risk to the safety and wellbeing of children. We can cancel a licence where non-compliance is not remedied.

More information can be found here:

[What happens when early learning services do not meet compliance – Ministry of Education](#)

To help you keep up to date, the Ministry publishes a bulletin which is emailed to all service providers. The bulletin is our way of communicating important information, changes and events happening in the early childhood services community.

[Early learning bulletins - Ministry of Education](#)

ERO's responsibilities

ERO reviews all licensed early childhood services and schools. This may be a general review or a review of matters relating to the performance of all New Zealand schools and licensed early childhood services. ERO's function is set out in Section 463 of the Education and Training Act 2020.

[ERO's functions – Education and Training Act 2020 – New Zealand Legislation](#)

You can find review reports on ERO's website.

[Home – Education Review Office](#)

Funding

Licensed early childhood services and certified playgroups are eligible to receive government funding. To get funding, they must comply with the Ministry of Education funding rules.

The ECE Funding Handbook and Playgroup Funding Handbook provide details about how early childhood services are funded.

The ECE Funding Handbook

The ECE Funding Handbook sets out how we fund licensed early childhood education services.

[ECE Funding Handbook – Ministry of Education](#)

The Playgroup Funding Handbook

The Playgroup Funding Handbook explains how playgroup funding is calculated and what conditions need to be met to receive funding.

[Playgroup Funding Handbook – Ministry of Education](#)

How to decide what type of service to start

Research

When considering starting an early childhood service, do some research. Get to know the area you want to start your service in and what type of service would best suit you and the community.

To do this, you can:

- visit other services in your area to find out what types of services are already in your community
- do an assessment to understand what kind of service would best suit your community's needs
- talk to staff at your regional office about early learning services and needs in your area
- review regional data
- look through information we provide on our website.

Regional data

Here are some places you can get information about your region.

Education Counts

Education Counts is a 'one-stop shop' for information about education statistics and research. It has data and information about what early learning services already exist in your area, and a forecast of population growth. This can help you decide if there is demand for another service in your area.

[The Early Learning Network Dashboard – Education Counts](#)

Education counts statistics

Education Counts also has early learning statistics such as participation, finances, services, staffing and language use.

[Statistics – Education Counts](#)

Statistics New Zealand

Statistics New Zealand's Data Explorer includes census information, ethnicity and age.

[Aotearoa data explorer – Statistics New Zealand](#)

Commuter Waka

Commuter Waka shows regional data about how people travel for work and school.

[Commuter - Waka](#)

What is required to set up a service

Know what is required to set up a service, from what our requirements are to how to design and build your service. See our information about how to start the different types of early childhood service.

[Starting a centre-based education and care service – Ministry of Education](#)

[Starting a home-based education and care service – Ministry of Education](#)

[Establishing a certified playgroup – Ministry of Education](#)

[Establishing a certified puna kōhungahunga \(Māori language playgroup\) – Ministry of Education](#)

Licensing and certification criteria

It is important to understand the licensing or certification criteria so you can ensure your service meets the required standards. See the criteria for the different types of early childhood service.

[Licensing criteria for centre-based education and care services](#)

[Licensing criteria for home-based education and care services](#)

[Licensing criteria for hospital-based education and care services](#)

[Certification criteria for playgroups](#)

Guides and factsheets

See our series of guides and factsheets.

[Guides and factsheets – Ministry of Education](#)

Contact us

If you have questions and need more information, get in touch with our regional teams.

[Contact details for our regional offices](#)



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

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

