



Te Tāhuhu o  
te Mātauranga  
Ministry of Education



New Zealand  
Government  
Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa

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# Starting an early childhood service

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Questions and answers for people  
starting centre-based services



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## Introduction

In this document we have some commonly asked questions about starting a centre-based early childhood service. It has the answers to these questions and links to more information on our website.

If you are not able to find the answer to a question you have, contact one of our regional teams.

[Regional offices – Ministry of Education](#)

## What is an early childhood education service?

The Education and Training Act 2020 defines an early education service as an early childhood education and care centre, a home-based education and care service, or a hospital-based education and care service.

An early childhood education and care centre is defined as premises used regularly for the education or care of three or more children (not being children of the persons providing the education or care, or children enrolled at a school being provided with education and care before or after school) under the age of six:

- by the day or part of a day, but
- not for any continuous period of more than 7 days.

A home-based education and care service is defined 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.

A hospital-based education and care service means the provision of education or care to 3 or more children under the age of 6 years who are receiving hospital care.

## What are the different types of childhood education services?

There are five types of early childhood education service:

- Te Kōhanga Reo
- Licensed centre-based services
- Licensed home-based services
- Licensed hospital-based services
- Certified playgroups.

Each type of early childhood education service has different licensing or certification criteria.

[Licensing criteria – Ministry of Education](#)

## What are teacher-led services?

Teacher-led services are:

### Education and care services

- Run all-day sessions or flexible hour programmes for children from birth to school age.
- Some services are for certain ages like children under 2.
- 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 educator<sup>1</sup> providing education and care for groups of up to 4 under school age children at a time in a home setting. For definition of educator, see the Glossary at the end of this publication.
- Each educator must belong to a licensed home-based care network and is supported by a coordinator<sup>2</sup>, who is a registered ECE teacher.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

## What are parent-led services?

Parent-led services are:

### 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 ECE services.

### Pasifika playgroups

- As well as the above playgroup requirements, Pasifika playgroups focus on developing and maintaining Pasifika languages and cultures.

## Ngā puna kōhungahunga

- As well as 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 Te Whānau Tupu Ngātahi o Aotearoa – Playcentre Aotearoa.

## Ngā kōhanga reo

- Cater for children from birth to school age in a Māori language and tikanga Māori environment.
- Parents and whānau manage and operate the kōhanga reo with the support and guidance of the Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust.
- Some kōhanga reo are also teacher-led services with trained kaiako.

## How do I start an early childhood service?

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.

To find information about these and the process to apply for the relevant licence or certification go to our website and see 'Starting an early childhood service'.

[Starting an early childhood service](#)

Also see our guides:

- Introduction to early childhood services
- 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.

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

## What do I need to think about when starting up or buying an early childhood service?

### Geographic area

Understand the geographic area you want to start your service in and decide the type of service that would work best for you and your community.

- 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.

[Regional offices – Ministry of Education](#)

## **Review regional data**

Look at the regional data to give you an idea of the needs of the area you are thinking about starting a service. Go to:

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

[Statistics – Education Counts](#)

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

[Commuter - Waka](#)

## **Funding**

### **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](#)

## **Curriculum**

### **Te Whāriki**

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

[Te Whāriki Online – Tāhūrangi](#)

### **Exemplars**

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](#)

### **More information**

Also see our guide for people thinking about starting a centre-based early childhood service.

[Starting an early childhood service - Ministry of Education](#)

## Where do I find information about other early childhood services in the area?

See [What do I need to think about when starting up or buying an ECE?](#)

## Where can I build an early childhood service?

District plans and the Resource Management Act 1991 influence where you are allowed to have an early childhood service. Contact your local council for more information about where you can build.

[Council websites - LGNZ](#)

### Resource consent

Resource consent allows a person or group to operate a licensed service on particular premises. The environmental effects of having an early childhood service in the neighbourhood will be considered before resource consent is granted. Sometimes resource consent must be publicly notified. Consents can be declined or have conditions attached (e.g. a higher fence or off-street parking requirements).

To get more information about resource consent see our guide Starting a centre-based early childhood service.

[Starting an early childhood service - Ministry of Education](#)

Contact your local council for more information about the consent process.

[Council websites - LGNZ](#)

## What should I consider when choosing a site for my early childhood service?

There are many things to consider when choosing a site for your early childhood service to ensure you meet relevant building requirements and meet licensing criteria.

To help with your decision, see our guide and factsheet:

- Starting a centre-based early childhood service
- Checklist for choosing your premises.

[Guides for starting an early childhood service – Ministry of Education](#)

## Why do I need a licence to start an early childhood service?

There are legal requirements that must be met to operate any premises as an early childhood service.

Licences set the standards for curriculum, premises and facilities, health and safety, and governance and management of early childhood services.

Licences are issued to early childhood education services under the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 by the Ministry of Education.

## What is a probationary licence?

A probationary licence is the initial licence you need to apply for when wanting to start an early childhood service. A full licence assessment is carried out by the Ministry of Education within 12 months of getting a probationary licence.

During the full licence check, the Ministry of Education will assess policies, practices and curriculum implementation in action.

## What standards do I have to meet to get a full licence?

Standards are set by legislation, regulations, and licensing and certification criteria.

See our content on licensing and regulations on our website.

[Licensing and certification – Ministry of Education](#)

## What are the key roles in an early childhood service?

The Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 define 3 distinct positions of responsibility in a centre-based ECE service:

- service provider
- contact person
- person responsible.

### **Service provider**

A service provider is a body, agency, or person operating the early childhood service.

- The service provider is the holder of the licence and is legally responsible for meeting regulatory requirements.
- An application for a licence made on behalf of a service provider must be made by a fit and proper person to be involved in the management of the service as described in the regulations.

### **Contact person**

The contact person is a person nominated by the service provider to represent its management, and this person's name is displayed on the Certificate of Licence. The contact person must:

- be able to respond to the Ministry of Education as soon as practicable on any issue relating to licensing
- have authority to act on behalf of the service provider and
- reside locally.

A person will generally be considered to 'reside locally' if they live within the geographical boundaries serviced by the regional Ministry of Education office. Contact your regional Ministry of Education office if you are unsure whether the contact person would meet this requirement.

## Person responsible

The person responsible:

- is 1 or more persons nominated for the purpose by the service provider
- is directly involved in, and primarily responsible for, the day-to-day education, care, comfort, health and safety of the children
- must supervise the children, and the adults providing education and care, at all times while children attend the service.

The person responsible must hold an early childhood education or primary teaching qualification recognised by the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand for registration purposes and must hold a current practising certificate. They must also hold a first aid qualification from an accredited first aid training provider.

There must be 1 person responsible for every 50 children.

[Education \(Early Childhood Services\) Regulations 2008, Regulation 3 – New Zealand Legislation](#)

[Education \(Early Childhood Services\) Regulations 2008, Regulation 44 – New Zealand Legislation](#)

[Education \(Early Childhood Services\) Regulations 2008, Schedule 1 – New Zealand Legislation](#)

## For someone involved in governance of a service, what constitutes a fit and proper person?

A fit and proper person is described in clause 8 of the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008.

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

## How many children can we take care of?

Your Certificate of Licence will include the maximum number of children you are allowed to have.

To determine the maximum number of children, consideration is given to how many children are ready to enrol and your staffing numbers. As you increase enrolments and staffing, you can apply to increase your maximum number using an EC8 form.

You can never have more children than the maximum number stated on your Certificate of Licence at any one time

## How many staff do I have to have?

See [How many children can we take care of?](#)

## What is the adult-to-child ratio?

There must always be a certain number of adults for the number of children attending. This is called the adult-to-child ratio. The ratio varies depending on the age of the children in your care and the type of service you are providing.

The adult-to-child ratio must be **kept at all times**. This includes when you take children on an excursion or when adults stop working for lunch or other entitled breaks. To cover breaks, you may wish to employ additional staff or bring in staff from non-contact time.

Schedule 2 of the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations sets out the adult-to-child ratios required for each age group and service type.

[Schedule 2 of the Education \(Early Childhood Services\) Regulations – New Zealand Legislation](#)

## What facilities do I have to have?

There are numerous requirements for an early childhood service. See our guide Starting a centre-based early childhood service for information. Also see the licensing criteria.

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

[Premises and facilities licensing criteria – Ministry of Education](#)

## What records do I need to keep?

All businesses keep records of tax, finances, management decisions and so on. You also need to keep records to comply with Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 and the ECE Funding Handbook.

For more information about these records see our guide, Starting a centre-based early childhood service.

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

## What funding is available?

The ECE funding handbook has information about:

- ECE funding subsidy
- 20 Hours ECE funding
- equity funding
- the annual top-up for Isolated Services.

**The ECE Funding Subsidy** is the primary form of government funding for licensed ECE services. The ECE Funding Subsidy contributes to services' operating costs by paying for part of each hour each child spends in ECE, to a maximum of six hours per child-place per day, 30 hours per child-place per week (i.e. seven days). The ECE Funding Subsidy is paid three times a year – in March, July, and November.

**20 Hours ECE** is a higher rate of funding than the ECE Funding Subsidy for three-year-olds, four-year-olds and five-year-olds for up to a maximum of six hours per child per day and 20 hours per week. There are additional requirements services must meet in order to receive this funding. 20 Hours ECE funding is paid three times a year, along with the ECE Funding Subsidy.

**Equity Funding** provides additional educational resources to targeted communities to help improve access to early childhood education. Equity Funding is available to all licensed ECE services that meet certain criteria. Equity Funding is paid three times a year, along with the ECE Funding Subsidy.

**The Annual Top-up for Isolated Services (ATIS)** is an income top-up for small licensed ECE services in isolated areas. The ATIS is separate from the Isolation component of Equity Funding. The ATIS is calculated annually in arrears. Payment is made each year with the July ECE Funding Subsidy payment.

See the ECE funding handbook for more information.

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

## Is there a curriculum for early childhood services?

Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum (Te Whāriki) sets out the curriculum to be used in New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) settings and provides guidance for its implementation.

Go to our website to download a copy of Te Whāriki and see the licensing criterion C101.

[Te Whāriki – Tāhūrangi](#)

[C101 Curriculum consistency - Ministry of Education](#)

## How do I apply for a centre-based early childhood service licence?

To apply for a centre-based early childhood service probationary licence, a person involved in the governance of the proposed service needs to complete our EC1-CB form and attach appropriate documentation.

For details about the application process and the documentation that needs to be submitted with a centre-based early childhood service licence application, see our guide Applying for a centre-based service licence. It also has information about the required statutory declaration.

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

## How long does the licence application process take?

The regulations require us to take all reasonable steps to make a decision as to whether your application is successful within 30 working days of receiving your complete application.

We need all the information requested in the application and payment of the application fee before we can start assessing your application.

## How much does it cost to apply for a centre-based early childhood service licence?

There is a non-refundable application fee of \$2,817.50 (including GST). We need proof of payment before we review your application.

See more information see our web content and guide about applying for a licence.

[Apply for an early learning service licence or certification - Ministry of Education](#)

[Guides for starting an early childhood service - Ministry of Education](#)

## What is the Early Learning Information (ELI) system

We use the ELI system to collect enrolment and participation information from early learning services. Eligible services must connect to it.

Read about the ELI System on our website.

[Early Learning Information \(ELI\) System – Ministry of Education](#)



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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.

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