

What Matters Most

ERO's Early Childhood Education Services Newsletter | APRIL 2026 | ISSUE #14



Tēnā koutou katoa

The first quarter of 2026 has certainly flown by. Our reviewers are enjoying connecting with services, engaging with leaders, staff, children, and whānau as part of our review programme. Every day we see providers, leaders and staff working hard to ensure that every child gets the best possible start.

Our Director of ECE, Viv Ruth, has been out and about in services, observing the mahi that our teams do every day alongside you. Viv is a qualified early childhood teacher and experienced regulator, and has thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to step back into services and engage with educators and children.

2026 is set to be a year of change for the early childhood education sector. From 20 April, we moved to the updated licensing criteria, following the Ministry for Regulation's review. The changes are designed to modernise and simplify the regulatory framework governing early childhood education in New Zealand, with a strong focus on improving outcomes for children, reducing compliance burdens for providers, and enhancing clarity and consistency across the sector. There's more about how ERO is responding to this change in today's newsletter.

We are working closely with the Ministry of Education to plan what implementation would involve under the proposal to transfer ECE regulatory functions from the Ministry to ERO. We are also keeping in regular contact with the early childhood sector peak bodies and representative groups around this proposal.

It's important for you to know that there are no changes to our current approaches at this time, and we will keep you updated as the work progresses.

We always welcome your feedback following a review. The best way to let us know what worked for you and how we can improve is by completing the Post Review Questionnaire (PRQ) that we email to you when ERO's report is confirmed.

The latest data from the PRQs show that more than 97% of the early childhood services that have filled in a PRQ so far in 2025/26 are using our review findings to improve practices. This is a positive outcome, as it affirms the usefulness of our reviews, and shows that services are taking meaningful steps to enhance their practice, leading to better experiences and outcomes for children. Whakamiharo!

Ngā mihi
Shelley Booyesen
Deputy Chief Executive
Review and Improvement



In this newsletter:

- Early Childhood Licensing Criteria update
- Regulatory functions proposal
- Post Review Questionnaire
- Our evidence website and social media

Early Childhood Licensing Criteria update

The Government has made changes to the Early Childhood Licensing Criteria. This follows the Ministry for Regulation's review of the criteria. The criteria changes were gazetted on 28 November 2025 and came into effect on 20 April 2026.

The new criteria aim to streamline ECE regulations with clearer standards that prioritise better outcomes for children.

You will find all the new criteria on the Ministry of Education's website here:

[New licensing criteria for centre-based ECE services – Ministry of Education](#)
[New licensing criteria for home-based ECE services – Ministry of Education](#)
[New licensing criteria for hospital-based ECE services – Ministry of Education](#)

There is also a guide to explain the changes: [2026 changes to licensing criteria - Ministry of Education](#)

Our review process

ERO's review process and the way we check and verify centre assurance has not changed.

We have amended our Assurance Statements to reflect the updated licensing criteria, and these are published on our website:

- For centre-based and home-based services: [How ERO reviews and evaluates early childhood services and governing organisations | Education Review Office](#)
- For governing organisations: [Akatea | Governing Organisation Evaluations | Education Review Office](#)

All early childhood services being visited by ERO will need to complete the updated version of the Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklists.

Our reviews of early childhood services continue to be focused on quality learning experiences for children, while still being vigilant about the safety and care of our youngest learners.

We are focused on the extent to which your early childhood service has the learning and organisational conditions to support equitable and excellent outcomes for learners.

Quality early childhood education is essential for enhancing children's learning and developmental outcomes. Our reviews are designed to support your service to continually improve and lift the quality of education and care you provide.

There are no changes to our review approach at this time

All ERO reviews start with an initial focus on checking for compliance in areas that have a potentially high impact on children's health, safety and wellbeing.

If a service has significant areas of concern identified, our reviewers will undertake an Akanuku | Assurance Review focusing on compliance.

We undertake an Akanuku | Assurance Review of your service when:

- Half or more of the licensing criteria or regulation ERO has checked are non-compliant, which indicates a systemic failure and one or more of the following criteria is also evident.
- The Assurance Statement(s) indicates a limited understanding of the full licensing criteria.
- There has been considerable turnover in teachers and / or leaders.
- ERO's reporting history indicates that this service has not maintained compliance with regulatory standards.

If an Akanuku | Assurance Review is not required, the team will continue with an Akarangi | Quality Evaluation.

What happens if ERO finds an area of concern?

Where areas of concern are identified, ERO's reviewers will discuss these with you. They will be included in your report.

If we identify an immediate or unacceptable risk to children's health and safety, this will be shared with the Ministry of Education.

Regulatory functions proposal

Last year, Associate Minister for Early Childhood Education, Minister Seymour, announced the Government's intention to move responsibility for functions relating to the licensing, certification, and enforcement of ECE services from the Ministry of Education to ERO. This is subject to legislation.

At this time, your interactions with ERO will continue as usual, with no immediate changes at this point.

ERO and the Ministry are collaborating closely, and connecting with sector peak bodies to ensure any transition is seamless for all stakeholders.

Any updates to the regulatory environment will be communicated clearly, enabling you to understand how to engage with us effectively.

Post Review Questionnaire

Your feedback about your review experience is important to us. When you receive your confirmed ERO report, we will also send you a link to our Post Review Questionnaire (PRQ). This quick survey helps us to gather your views on our review process, usefulness of the review, what has worked well for your service and what can be improved.

Our evidence website and social media

You can access our national evaluation and research team's insights, reports and guides at www.evidence.ero.govt.nz

We also regularly share news, links, and sneak peeks through our dedicated research social media accounts. Look for 'Te Ihuwaka Education Evaluation Centre' on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

For more information about ERO and our mahi please visit ero.govt.nz

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