

**Early Childhood
Monographs:
The Quality of
Education and Care in
Home-based Early
Childhood Services**

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About the Early Childhood Education Monograph Series

In New Zealand there are many different types of early childhood services. When parents are choosing an early childhood service for their child, they may choose a particular service because of its type. Service types include centre-based (kindergartens, playcentres, kōhanga reo, education and care centres) and home-based services. This monograph is about home-based services, which provide education and care for children in home-like surroundings.

The Education Review Office (ERO) reviews all licensed early childhood services and reports publicly on the quality of education and care that each service provides. ERO has used the findings from these reviews¹ to write the early childhood monograph series. The purpose of the series is to provide evaluative information about groups of services. Parents can use this information along with the ERO report *Early Childhood Education: A Guide for Parents, June 2007*,² and ERO reports on individual services, to help make decisions about which early childhood service best fits their needs and aspirations for their child.

About home-based early childhood services

Home-based services provide infants and young children with early childhood education either in the home of an educator³ or in the child's own home. This may be all-day or part-day education and care.

Home-based services provide education and care for individual children or small groups of up to four children at one time. The children and educators often also attend playgroups, so that educators and children can have regular social and educational contact with others. Some children may attend other early childhood services as well as the home-based service. Parents may be charged fees for their child's attendance, depending on their entitlement to subsidies and/or on the number of hours their child is in care.

Home-based services are chartered organisations, generally known as arrangers, which manage networks. The number of networks in a particular service varies according to the size of the organisation. These services are currently regulated by the Education (Home-based Care) Order 1992.⁴

Qualified and registered teachers are employed as coordinators, known in some organisations as visiting teachers, programme managers or field officers, to support the educators in each network. The home-based network coordinator regularly visits the educator and the children in each home. Coordinators have a leadership role in working with educators to promote children's wellbeing and learning.

¹ Review reports can be read on the ERO website (www.ero.govt.nz) and every licensed service holds a copy of its current ERO report.

² This report can be found at: www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/ece-guide-jun07

³ Known as 'educarers' or 'caregivers' or a 'nanny' in some networks.

⁴ Refer to the Ministry of Education website www.lead.ece.govt.nz

Educators are offered training to improve their understanding and knowledge of how children learn. If the arranger seeks quality funding,⁵ educators are required to meet minimum training requirements.⁶ There is wide variation in the range of experience and level of qualifications that educators bring to their role.

Which home-based services does this monograph discuss?

This monograph on the quality of education and care in home-based services is based on findings from a sample group of 63 ERO reports confirmed for home-based services between February 2006 and May 2008. This represents 26 percent of the 244 home-based services currently operating in New Zealand.⁷ The sample reflects the range of education and care options available through home-based services.

In 2001, when ERO's last national report on home-based services was published,⁸ there were 184 services. There has been a 33 percent increase in the number of home-based services since 2001. Home-based services make up six percent of all licensed early childhood services.

As of 1 July 2008, 13,065 children were receiving home-based care in New Zealand, making up seven percent of all child enrolments in licensed early childhood services.

This study includes reports for both individual networks and organisations. The largest organisation in the sample had 41 networks. Most networks were licensed for 60 to 80 children.

Where were these services?

There are 244 home-based services throughout New Zealand. The 63 services included in this study covered a range of areas from Kaitaia to Invercargill.

Kaitaia/Whangarei/Auckland/North Shore	1
Northland	1
Auckland region	8
Waikato	4
Bay of Plenty	12
Hawkes Bay	4
Central Districts	2
Wairarapa	1
Wellington region	10
Nelson/Marlborough	3
Nelson/Canterbury/Christchurch	2
West Coast	1
Christchurch	5
Dunedin	7
Invercargill	2

⁵ There are two different funding rates for home-based services, a standard rate, and quality rates, which apply to networks that meet certain additional requirements.

⁶ A minimum of Module 1 of the New Zealand Certificate in Family Daycare: Caregiver or equivalent.

⁷ As at 1 July 2008. See: www.educationcounts.govt.nz

⁸ *What Counts as Quality in Home-Based Care*, Education Review Office, July 2001. See www.ero.govt.nz

When were these services open and who attended?

Home-based services can be flexible in the times they operate. Some may be licensed to provide care overnight and at weekends, depending on demand and the availability of educators and coordinators.

In New Zealand, children can start primary school when they reach the age of five, but are not required to attend school until the age of six. Home-based services cater for children from birth to school age.

In the home-based services in this study New Zealand European/Pākehā children made up 62 percent of enrolments, Māori children 10 percent, Pacific children (including six nationalities) one percent, and children from 16 other ethnicities made up 27 percent of enrolments. Fifty-one percent of enrolments were boys and 49 percent girls.

How were parents involved?

The many different ownership arrangements for early childhood services have implications for how parents are involved in service management and governance roles.

Some home-based care networks are community based and others are privately owned. None of the sample reports referred to any parental involvement on governing boards and it was not clear how these services consulted parents about aspects of policy and operation.

The Education (Home-Based Care) Order 1992 states that parents, guardians, and families of children receiving home-based care must have opportunities to discuss and exchange information with the arranger, coordinators, and caregivers.⁹ The Order also states that parents, guardians and families must have opportunities to talk with the arranger, coordinators and educators (caregivers) about developmentally appropriate programmes suited to the needs of children receiving home-based care.¹⁰

In early childhood education there is growing recognition of the benefit of educators and parents working together to identify learning goals and teaching strategies for each child. ERO found in this study that parents of children in home-based services had many opportunities to discuss their child's care and education. Daily interaction with the educator was an integral part of arrival, departure or handover times.

All educators recorded information about aspects of the learning and development of each child in their care. In many services coordinators had begun to explore ways of involving parents more in their children's programme of learning. Parents were encouraged to share ideas and contribute to the identification of activities, outcomes and possible next steps for their children's learning.

How frequently were services reviewed?

ERO undertakes education reviews in early childhood education services on average every three years. When the performance of a service gives cause for concern, ERO

⁹ Education (Home-Based Care) Order 1992, Clause 4 Subclause 49.

¹⁰ Education (Home-based Care) Order 1992, Clause 4 Subclause 50.

carries out a follow-up (supplementary) review within 12 months. The supplementary review rate for home-based care services is about five percent.

Across all early childhood education services, supplementary reviews generally occur in about 12 to 15 percent of services annually.

Overall performance of home-based early childhood services

This section summarises ERO's findings about home-based early childhood services. ERO's reports on individual services may be read on ERO's website (www.ero.govt.nz) and are also available from the network of the home-based services.

- The **philosophy** of the services was reflected in practices that affirmed the value of children learning and being cared for in a home setting. The emphasis for all services was on establishing positive relationships with children and their families to support children's wellbeing and learning.
- Where **programmes** were of good quality, children had opportunities to participate regularly in a wide range of activities and experiences both in the home and beyond. Children had fun and learnt through their play. They were supported in developing their literacy and numeracy skills through everyday experiences and routines. In a few home-based services, children experienced a bicultural dimension to their programme. Home-based services were increasingly focusing on how to promote and extend children's learning.
- A quarter of services had a sound approach to **assessment, planning and evaluation**. In these services, coordinators helped educators to identify and build on children's strengths and interests in order to promote and extend their learning and development. Many educators and coordinators needed further training and support to increase their understanding of assessment and to improve their assessment, planning and evaluation practice.
- **Learning environments** were generally comfortable and stimulating. Most children had access to a wide range of appropriate equipment and learning resources, both indoors and outside, to support their play. Home settings provided good opportunities for children to learn from their involvement in regular household activities. More than half the services needed more rigorous monitoring of aspects of health and safety in private homes to be assured of children's safety.
- **Interactions** between adults and children were typically warm, caring, respectful and responsive. Educators were affectionate with children and the children were secure in their care. Educators made good use of their knowledge of the children and their family life when talking with children or responding to their needs, preferences and interests.
- Most services met **qualifications requirements** for coordinators, as the persons responsible for each network. Expectations for educator qualifications varied from service to service.
- **Self review** was under way in home-based services, with most managers and coordinators regularly reflecting on how to improve practice. Many services needed a more planned and systematic approach to self review to bring about ongoing improvement to outcomes for children. There was also scope for increased involvement of parents and whānau in the process of self review.
- ERO had concerns about aspects of **compliance** in a third of services. Concerns related mainly to the inconsistent application and implementation of

some requirements of the Home-based Care Order, and the ineffectiveness of some personnel management practices in bringing about improvement to the performance of coordinators and educators.

The quality of education in home-based early childhood services

Early childhood education is a highly diverse sector that includes many different philosophies and approaches to providing education and care for young children.

All ERO education reviews in the early childhood sector focus on the quality of education. For ERO this includes the quality of:

- the programme provided for children;
- the learning environment; and
- the interactions between children and adults.

In this report, ERO based its introductory statements and findings about the programme, environment and interactions on a set of evaluation indicators published by ERO,¹¹ and on the signposts and explanations of the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (DOPs) published by the Ministry of Education.¹²

Philosophy

The philosophy of each service expresses the fundamental beliefs, values and ideals by which the service chooses to operate. Each chartered service must have a written statement of philosophy. This statement provides the basis for decisions by management and should be reflected in the service's practice.

ERO considers the particular philosophy of a service and how this philosophy is reflected in the programme for children when it carries out a review of an early childhood service.

How was the philosophy expressed in home-based early childhood services?

Most home-based services demonstrated a commitment to practices that emphasised the importance of learning and care for individuals or small groups of children in a nurturing environment.

Examples of good practice from ERO home-based service reports

The people in this organisation had a shared belief in the value and richness of home-based care and learning, and its benefits for children and families. The team leader and visiting teachers engaged in ongoing professional development and demonstrated a strong commitment to providing well for children. Educators also articulated this commitment and showed a growing familiarity with Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum, and the DOPs. As a result, educator and visiting teacher practices were continually refined and parents and whānau were increasingly aware of the educational aspects of the provision for their children.

¹¹ <http://www.ero.govt.nz/EdRevInfo/Ecedrevs/ece-eval-indic.pdf>

¹² Ministry of Education (1998) *Quality in Action*. Wellington: Learning Media.

The values and beliefs expressed in the service's philosophy underpinned all aspects of its operations. Managers were committed to providing well-resourced and affordable care in the homes of carefully selected educators. The philosophy successfully promoted the belief that all children were unique and learned best through play. Aspirations expressed in the philosophy were shared by all stakeholders and positively influenced learning opportunities for children and partnerships with families.

Programmes

High quality programmes in early childhood services promote and extend the learning and development of children by focusing on their strengths and interests. Like other early childhood services, home-based services use planning, assessment and evaluation to help provide appropriate programmes for children. In home-based services, coordinators encourage educators to use assessment information to identify children's progress and plan for their learning.

In high quality programmes, children learn literacy and numeracy concepts through meaningful play. Programmes promote positive outcomes for children through acknowledging and supporting tikanga Māori and te reo Māori, and the cultures and ethnicities of all children attending the service.

What was the quality of the programmes?

All home-based services offered programmes that incorporated aspects of good practice. However, services varied in the extent to which they provided programmes that included all of the features most likely to promote children's learning and development. Some coordinators and educators used planning, evaluation and assessment practices that identified and built on children's strengths and abilities. Planning and assessment were identified as areas of good performance in a quarter of the services.

Recent professional development focused on assisting educators to notice, recognise and document children's learning more systematically. This process provided educators with a better basis for formally planning how they intended to respond to the emerging interests and strengths of the children in their care. As a result, educators fostered children's learning and development more systematically.

Few services used self-review processes to determine the effectiveness of their planning, evaluation and assessment practices in promoting and extending children's learning.

In general, educators and coordinators regularly communicated with parents and whānau about their child's care and aspects of their learning. Where ERO found good practice, educators worked with parents to achieve their goals and monitor their child's progress.

Coordinators maintained an ongoing discussion about children's progress with parents and encouraged their input. There were also twice-yearly opportunities for formal discussions and reporting to parents. This cooperative approach enabled all parties to contribute their knowledge of each child to the planning and evaluation of programmes.

Some home-based networks had good strategies for communicating with parents and whānau. However, ERO found scope for parents to be more involved in planning for and assessing their child's learning.

Very few children in home-based services had opportunities to become familiar with New Zealand's bicultural heritage through the inclusion of a Māori perspective and te reo Māori in the programme. Where ERO found good practice, tikanga Māori was reflected in educators' homes through posters and resources, and te reo Māori was used with children. The integration of any bicultural dimension into a network's programme typically depended on the motivation and commitment of the coordinator.

Coordinators were enthusiastic about building educators' awareness and incorporation of te reo Māori and bicultural aspects into their provision for children. Coordinators were beginning to include te reo Māori naturally in their interaction with educators and children and to promote resources with Māori themes.

The coordinator was a confident role model and mentor for educators and children. She willingly responded to educators' requests for tuition in tikanga and te reo Māori to meet the identified needs of this group. Educators were increasingly confident in using te reo Māori in meaningful contexts with children.

It was not clear how services reflected the multi-cultural nature of New Zealand society, or met the unique cultural needs of the children who attended the service. Thirty-eight percent of enrolments for home-based services in this study were non-New Zealand European/Pākehā children.

In some services, literacy and numeracy learning was integrated into the daily programme of experiences and routines. Strategies for developing literacy skills were identified as an area of good performance in just under half of the services. Good practice in literacy, enhanced children's understanding of language, increased their oral competence, and nurtured their love of books and reading. Strategies for developing skills in numeracy were identified as an area of good performance in a quarter of the services. Where ERO found good practice in numeracy, children had opportunities to explore number concepts through games and in the context of their play.

Children were supported and challenged to develop their ability to communicate and to explore literacy and mathematical concepts. Educators regularly shared books and stories and provided opportunities for children to use writing and drawing tools. Everyday experiences were built on to develop ideas of number and mathematical concepts in a meaningful context. Children learnt effective skills that established a sound foundation for future ongoing learning.

Many educators were good at identifying children's interests, and providing varied activities and resources to support these. In two-thirds of the services, educators were responsive to children's interests. The coordinator often had a significant part to play in assisting educators to use their knowledge about children's interests to extend and deepen their learning experiences. Where ERO observed good practice, coordinators shared ideas with educators and provided them with additional information and resources to build on children's learning.

The coordinators fostered children's appreciation of music through a range of musical experiences and frequent opportunities for dancing, singing and playing musical instruments. Children participated with enthusiasm. They developed skills and abilities in rhythm, beat and pitch. Children had the opportunity to develop skills in a range of art media, including painting, drawing and weaving. The coordinators arranged visits to see several artists at work and the art gallery. An artist came to playgroup and showed them the skills of drawing. Children displayed their work at a public exhibition. Parents were invited to participate.

A particular feature of programmes in home-based services was the opportunity most children had to participate in activities outside the home. Most services organised regular playgroups for children and the educators. Educators routinely took children on walks and other excursions around the neighbourhood. They made good use of local parks and facilities. Some children regularly attended music groups or visited libraries with their educator.

Educators and coordinators showed initiative in creating opportunities to extend children's experiences through playgroups and group outings. Group gatherings provided opportunities for children to socialise with a larger group of peers, and enjoy experiences not always available in their educators' homes. Educators were able to build friendships, get new ideas and fresh approaches, and work with other children. Coordinators interacted with and fostered relationships among children and educators in a different environment from that of caregiver homes.

The coordinator has the primary responsibility for overseeing the education of children in care, and for providing professional leadership to educators. The role of the coordinator is pivotal in bringing about improvement in the way children learn through play. Educators were generally most appreciative of the ongoing support they received from their coordinator. Where ERO found good practice, coordinators used their expertise to model effective practice for educators, and offered appropriate guidance and support for them.

The coordinator recognised the potential and needs of each educator and was able to design appropriate approaches to assist their ongoing development. She actively engaged with children, and provided a positive teaching role model to educators using such strategies as reflective listening, open questions and scaffolding. These opportunities increasingly empowered educators in their role with infants, toddlers and young children.

Most of the 63 services needed to improve aspects of their assessment practice. The extent and quality of information relating to children's progress was variable. Where assessment was effective, the educators:

- used assessment to recognise children's learning and respond in a way that extended and challenged each child;
- developed meaningful records of children's learning;
- included parents' contributions and aspirations for their child; and
- involved children in conversations about learning and providing them with opportunities to revisit their learning.

Educators worked hard to provide meaningful records of children's learning and development. Daily diaries, photographs and learning stories were rich evidence of children's developing relationships with people, places and things. These records gave parents detailed insight into their children's routines, interests and learning, and invited parents' comments and input into future planning.

To improve assessment practice in home-based services, coordinators and educators needed to undertake professional development. Educators needed support to help them recognise the significance of what children were learning. They needed better guidelines for collecting, recording and using assessment information to plan programmes and set children's next learning steps. Many coordinators also needed ongoing opportunities to enhance their own knowledge and understanding of assessment so that they could model effective practice for educators.

In about a third of the services, ERO identified the need for ongoing professional development and more rigorous performance management of coordinators and/or educators.

Learning environment

A high quality learning environment is appropriate to the learning interests and strengths of the children attending. Learning resources are accessible to children and this allows them to make choices about what they want to do. Children feel comfortable in a culturally relevant setting that stimulates them to explore and learn. Provision for children's physical activity is particularly important where children spend much of their day at the service.

What was the quality of the learning environment?

The use of private homes in home-based care meant that each home was a unique learning environment. Most homes provided a comfortable, stimulating learning environment with a wide range of appropriate equipment and resources that children could use in their play. Often the service arranger supplemented the resources available in the home.

Children were cared for in the security of a home setting, surrounded by familiar toys, resources and facilities. They were confident in the environment and demonstrated a strong sense of belonging. A good range of resources and toys supported children's holistic development. Materials sourced by the educators addressed individual children's strengths and interests and provided additional challenge. The service provider also supplied equipment, such as double buggies, to support the educators as required.

In general, children in home-based services made good use of indoor and outdoor spaces for play and exploration. Children participated in and learnt from everyday household routines and activities. In addition, children cared for in their own homes benefited from being in an environment that was familiar and provided continuity with family life.

Learning environments were carefully planned, with suitable places within each home and property allocated for quiet, solitary, active and interactive play.

Educators and coordinators valued children's play as meaningful learning. Priority was given to ensuring that children had regular opportunities to be creative and expressive, try new things, solve problems and develop physical self-confidence. Good quality equipment and resources, and flexible programmes, enabled children to develop interests and persist at self-selected tasks for sustained periods of time. Children were motivated, curious and enthusiastic learners.

Educators, with the support of their coordinators, set aside specific indoor and outdoor areas that provided a safe environment for children's learning. In other areas of the home, and during excursions beyond the home, for example visits to the weekly playgroup, educators were required to maintain continuous appropriate supervision.

Coordinators completed checks of the environment and resources to assist in maintaining safety. There were good records kept of any concerns being actively followed up.

Interactions

In high quality early childhood services, adults respond to children with warmth and affection and promptly comfort and reassure children when necessary. When working with infants and toddlers, adults respond to verbal and non-verbal communication, and respectfully explain what they are doing. Adults engage in two-way conversations with children that encourage and extend thinking and learning. Children manage their interactions with others confidently.

What was the quality of interactions?

Positive relationships were highlighted as an area of good performance in all the services in the sample. The relationships of educators with children were typically described as warm, respectful, and responsive. Relationships among coordinators, educators, children and their families were mutually responsive.

A feature of the service was the strength of relationships between educators, coordinators, children and their families. Trusting relationships were evident between all parties and coordinators provided affirming support for educators. These factors contributed to children's strong sense of belonging and well-being while they were in care.

Good quality interactions between educators and children were highlighted in the majority of services. Educators:

- showed a genuine affection for the children in their care;
- gently helped children to understand expectations and boundaries;
- had fun with children and making their learning enjoyable through play;
- made good use of their knowledge of the children and their family circumstances to talk with children about their lives and experiences;
- responded appropriately to children's verbal and non-verbal cues, and supported their language development through frequent one-to-one conversations; and
- responded flexibly to children's interests and social, physical and emotional needs.

Effective interactions between educators and children resulted in the following outcomes:

- children had secure relationships with their educators;
- children were settled and comfortable in their environment; and
- children displayed high levels of confidence and trust in the educators.

Effective interactions between educators, coordinators and parents and whānau benefit children. The following are examples of good practice.

Regular dialogue between educators and parents contributed to a mutually supportive relationship that encouraged consistency of care, and met parents' aspirations.

There was an effective system for matching educators with prospective families, and the coordinators monitored parents' satisfaction [with the service].

Coordinators modelled effective communication between adults and with children. They had a good rapport with educators, parents and children, and facilitated, when necessary, the exchange of information between them to maintain good working relationships and the wellbeing of all.

ERO found that variability in the extent to which interactions between educators and children extended learning. Where ERO observed good practice, coordinators helped educators to engage children in deliberate, purposeful interactions to deepen and extend their learning.

National evaluations in home-based early childhood services

Based on its findings in early childhood services, ERO evaluates and reports on education policy and practice. ERO collects specific information about certain topics in all services for a defined timeframe. This information is reported in individual services' review reports, and is often aggregated for a national evaluation report.

Between 2006 and 2007, ERO evaluated how well qualifications requirements were being met in 28 of the 63 services in this sample. ERO also reported on progress with self review in 39 of the 63 services.

Qualification requirements

The requirements for early childhood teacher qualifications and teacher registration were introduced by the Government to improve the quality of early childhood education. From 2005 there had to be one registered and qualified teacher, the coordinator, as the person responsible for each network of home-based services.

Were qualification requirements being met?

Most of the home-based services had a qualified registered teacher as the person responsible for each network and most were fully registered. A few were provisionally registered and working towards full registration through an advice and guidance programme.

The advice and guidance programme for provisionally registered teachers was satisfactory in most cases. In a few services, the advice and guidance programme needed to be organised, documented and implemented more effectively.

The permanently employed coordinator was a fully qualified and registered, experienced early childhood teacher. The manager placed a strong emphasis on recruiting and retaining fully qualified and skilled practitioners. She was successful in employing a capable coordinator who was effective in her role as a supervisor, coach and mentor to network educators. Children, educators and parents benefited from the coordinator's expertise and knowledge.

Self review

Self review is a process through which early childhood services evaluate the effectiveness of what they do, with the aim of improving the quality of their practice. All chartered services must review their philosophy and charter in consultation with educators and parents and whānau. They must also evaluate and modify policies, objectives and practices through an ongoing, recorded process of internal review.

How well developed was self review?

Home-based services were involved in a high level of informal review and reflective practice. Managers and coordinators used a wide range of procedures to assist them in bringing about improvement. Self review was most effective when managers and coordinators shared an understanding that self review should have a positive influence on programme effectiveness and lead to continual improvement to outcomes for children.

The coordinators demonstrated a good understanding of the role of self review in improving the service's operations and programmes for both parents and children. They regularly gathered information, both formally and informally, from parents and educators to use as a basis for making changes to improve processes and practices.

Where services had effective self-review processes, they displayed many of the following features:

- ongoing review of strategic and operational plans;
- regular review of policies and procedures;
- surveys and consultation with all stakeholders;
- a rigorously implemented staff appraisal process;
- ongoing systematic review of safety and maintenance requirements; and
- documented review of changes implemented as a result of self review to monitor the impact of the changes.

ERO found that nearly three-quarters of the services needed to improve their self review. In the just under half of the services, reported recommendations were linked in some way to improving self review. The key areas for improvement in self review included the need for:

- a more planned, systematic and documented approach to self review;
- more rigorous reflection on professional practice, as well as policy and systems review;

- ongoing review of the curriculum programme for children;
- more effective staff appraisal systems; and
- more consultation and inclusion of educators and parents in review and decision-making processes.

Compliance with legal requirements in home-based early childhood services

All licensed early childhood services must comply with legal requirements that describe the minimum standards for education and care.

The same provisions of the Education Act 1989 that apply to other early childhood services cover home-based networks. Home-based services are also regulated by the Education (Home-based Care) Order 1992.

This Order includes codes relating to the premises where home-based care takes place and to the arrangements related to home-based care. There are provisions for the health and safety of children and provisions relating to the quality of services that must be provided by home-based networks.

As part of reviews, ERO asks the management of a service to complete a *Home-based Care Management Assurance Statement* to attest to the extent to which the service is meeting its legal and regulatory obligations. Where areas of non-compliance are identified by an early childhood service, ERO asks management to advise what action it is being taken.

During each review, ERO evaluates the service's compliance with a specific selection of legislative obligations that have a potentially high impact on outcomes for children's: emotional safety; physical safety; staff qualifications and organisation; and evacuation procedures and practices for fire and earthquake. If concerns arise, ERO may evaluate a wider range of requirements.¹³

What was the level of compliance?

In two thirds of the home-based services, ERO reported no instances of non-compliance with legal requirements.

Children benefit from the high standard of health and safety in educators' homes. Since the 2005 review, the coordinators have introduced new systems for safety in the homes. Coordinators conduct monthly health and safety audits and educators undertake a daily check on the environment. Risk management plans are written for potential hazards and parents are made aware of these. Educators are very aware of the service's expectations for health and safety while children are in their homes.

The service provided good information to parents to heighten their awareness of their obligation to ensure the safety of nannies and children in the home. The licensee/director acknowledged the potential difficulties in applying the requirements of The Education (Home-based Care) Order 1992 to family premises. To date, the service has successfully worked with nannies and families to meet the safety

¹³ For further information, see: <http://www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/Handbooks>

requirements of the 1992 Order while respecting families' different values, choices and perceptions of safety and risk.

What concerns were identified?

In a third of services, reports included actions required to meet legal requirements. In an additional 33 percent of services ERO made recommendations aimed at improving aspects of practice related to compliance.

Educators and coordinators are required to share the responsibility for providing a safe place for children to play and learn. When children are cared for in their own home, parents are required to make sure that they also comply with the regulations.

Most concerns raised by ERO related to the need for improved health and safety practices. In ERO's 2001 national evaluation report, *What Counts as Quality in Home-Based Care*, ERO had concerns about how services interpreted and applied aspects of the Education (Home-Based Care) Order 1992. In this evaluation ERO also found inconsistencies across and within networks. ERO found that services needed to clarify their expectations for compliance, monitor that coordinators and educators were meeting these expectations, and follow up on any areas of non-compliance.

For a quarter of the services, ERO recommended more effective management of the performance of coordinators. In some services appraisal processes were not sufficiently thorough to bring about change and improvement.

Other instances of non-compliance related to inadequate fire and earthquake trial evacuation procedures, and/or earthquake safety provision, and to insufficient record-keeping of medication given to children.

Improvements in home-based early childhood services

Improvements over time in the quality of education and care provided by a service give a useful perspective on the vitality of the service.

What improvements have been made?

In 2001, when ERO's last national evaluation report, *What Counts as Quality in Home-Based Care*, was published, there were 184 home-based services; currently there are 244.

Improvements between the 2001 evaluation and this current evaluation include:

- positive relationships between educators and children reported for all services, as distinct from 85 percent of services in 2001;
- an increased focus on promoting and extending children's learning while maintaining high standards of care;
- improved compliance with legal requirements (in 2001, 75 percent of services were required to take action to improve aspects of safety; in 2008, 60 percent of services needed to improve health and safety practices);
- strengthened management systems, including some improvement in the quality of performance appraisal systems, (although performance management is still an area for further development);
- no references to some inappropriate practices noted in the 2001 report, such as children watching too much television, or learning literacy and numeracy through the use of worksheets rather than through play; and

- an increased focus on the importance of self review in improving outcomes for children.

Concerns raised in the 2001 report in which there has been little improvement include:

- the frequent absence of a bicultural perspective and use of te reo Māori in programmes, the learning environment and interactions;
- variations in the quality of educators' programme planning and implementation, with an ongoing need for effective training and professional development;
- variation in the effectiveness of coordinators' professional leadership in providing appropriate advice and guidance to educators for extending children's learning;
- inconsistencies in the interpretation and the application of the Home-based Care Order; and
- a lack of information in ERO reports about how services make provision for cultural diversity or cater for children with special needs.

Improvements identified in ERO review reports of individual home-based early childhood services included:

- coordinators' use of their service's newly developed quality indicators to review the provision of high quality education and care;
- coordinators' training in the use of a narrative approach for planning, assessing and evaluating the programme and children's progress;
- efforts to raise coordinator and educator awareness of the need to incorporate te reo Māori and bicultural aspects into programmes;
- effective performance appraisal for educators, linked to appropriate professional development opportunities; and
- for some services, more clearly defined vision statements, systems, procedures and quality expectations for the provision of day-to-day care, as a result of organisational review and restructuring.

Conclusion

This report gives parents an overview of home-based early childhood services, and includes examples of good practice. It shows that all services delivered aspects of good quality education. However, most services needed to improve planning and assessment practice to support children in their learning.

Most services had a qualified registered teacher coordinating each network. Educators had varying levels of training and experience. Professional development for educators and coordinators was required for ongoing improvement of the quality of education for children in home-based services.

While some services used self review to improve the service and outcomes for children, effective self review was not a strong feature of home-based services. Improvements to self review were recommended for about three-quarters of services.

Parents can use this report, along with other ERO reports, to help make decisions about early childhood services for their children.

Further information

Umbrella organisation

Contact information

New Zealand Home-based Early Childhood Education Association Inc.

Website: www.nzhomebasedece.org.nz

(NB. A large number of private and community-based organisations are providers of home-based early childhood services. Parents are advised to consult the Yellow Pages for contact details of local providers.)

Education Review Office

ERO reports

The following ERO evaluation reports related to home-based early childhood services are available on ERO's website: www.ero.govt.nz.

- *Early Childhood Education: A Guide for Parents*, June 2007.
- *What Counts as Quality in Home-based Care*, July 2001.
- *Maori Children in Early Childhood: Pilot Study*, July 2008.
- *Early Childhood Education Monograph Series*, 2007-2009.

ERO has reviewed all home-based services that have been operating for more than 12 months. Reports of these are available on the ERO search page.

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