

**Early Childhood
Monographs:
The Quality of Education
and Care in Playcentres**

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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 looking for an early childhood service for their child, they may choose a particular service because of its type. Some services, such as kindergartens and education and care services, are teacher-led and. Others, such as Playcentres and kōhanga reo, are parent-led. This monograph is about Playcentres, which are parent-led cooperatives that provide education and care for children from birth to school age.

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 Playcentres

Which Playcentres does this monograph discuss?

There are 33 Playcentre Associations throughout New Zealand. These associations support local Playcentres by providing administration and parent education services. This report on the quality of education and care in Playcentres is based on ERO's findings from reviews of 30 Playcentre associations³ completed between March 2005 and May 2008. In addition to association ERO reports, an ERO report from a Playcentre in each association was used to identify examples of good practice. Playcentres make up 12 percent of all licensed early childhood services and cater for eight percent of child enrolments in licensed services.⁴

Where were these Playcentre associations?

The 30 Playcentre associations were located throughout New Zealand in both rural and urban areas. Seven associations were in the South Island and 23 throughout the North Island.

When were Playcentres open and who attended?

Playcentres, which are licensed and chartered,⁵ provide sessional education and care for children between birth and school age. The number of sessions Playcentres offer

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-june07

³ Two Playcentre associations that had had a supplementary ERO review were not included in this report and a third association, with only licence-exempt Playcentres,³ was also excluded.

⁴ As at 1 July 2008. See: www.educationcounts.govt.nz

⁵ A charter agreement is between a licensed early childhood service and the Government. It constitutes an undertaking by the management of the service to provide education and care that meets standards specified in the *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs) for Chartered Early Childhood Services in New Zealand (1996)*. Non-chartered services do not need to comply with the DOPs and receive less government funding.

each week varies. Some Playcentres, particularly in rural areas, have one two-and-a-half to three hour session a week, while others are open for five or six sessions a week. Children attending Playcentres range in age from birth to school age. In general, parents are responsible for running Playcentre sessions and are expected to participate regularly with their children. Sometimes individual Playcentres employ a paid supervisor to work alongside parents.

How were parents involved?

Playcentre philosophy recognises parents as first educators of their children, and believes in adults and children learning alongside each other. In each Playcentre, parents work collectively to share responsibility for the formal management and organisation of the centre. Parents are also responsible for planning and providing for children's learning through their participation in the early childhood programme. Individual Playcentres are represented on association committees that offer support and guidance. Associations are responsible for organising the parent education programme and ensuring centres work within Playcentre philosophy, values and policies. They also offer advice, guidance and leadership to affiliated centres. Through their association, Playcentres are affiliated to the New Zealand Playcentre Federation, which maintains a national overview.

How frequently were these services reviewed?

ERO undertakes education reviews in early childhood education services on a three-year cycle. When the performance of a service gives cause for concern, ERO carries out a further (supplementary) review within 12 months. The supplementary review rate for Playcentres is about six percent. Across all early childhood education services supplementary reviews generally occur in about 12 to 15 percent of services annually.

Overall performance of Playcentres

This section summarises ERO's findings about Playcentres. ERO's reports on individual services may be read on ERO's website: www.ero.govt.nz, and are also available from the Playcentre associations or in individual Playcentres.

- The **philosophy** of the services in terms of their Playcentre identity was strongly evident in programmes. Parent and family involvement was an essential feature. Support was given to parents as the first educators of their children though adult education programmes focused on early childhood education and learning.
- Playcentres providing **high quality programmes** offered rich creative learning opportunities that catered for the diverse interests and abilities of mixed-age groups. Assessment and planning reflected and responded to children's developing interests. Children were able to choose from a wide range of good quality materials and activities. Oral language, literacy and mathematics were included as part of these. Routines were organised to promote children's independent self-care and management skills.
- The **learning environment** in Playcentres was typically attractive, stimulating and carefully organised to include the core curriculum. Areas of play invited exploration and motivated children to try new experiences. Playcentre parent education courses included components that increased members' knowledge of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori culture. Most programmes gave children

equipment and experiences that enhanced children's understanding of Māori culture and language.

- In Playcentres, **interactions** were characteristically warm and nurturing. More experienced parents encouraged children's thinking and involvement in complex play and learning. The high adult-to-child ratios allowed adults to respond promptly to children's emerging interests. Children had many opportunities to develop their communication and social skills and play as cooperative group members.
- In many of the associations, Playcentres needed to improve their **assessment, planning and evaluation practice**. Many Playcentres were trialling new assessment approaches and this was helping to develop their assessment practice. Where parents made links to *Te Whāriki*⁶ (the early childhood curriculum), their ability to notice, recognise and respond⁷ to important aspects of children's learning was enhanced. Most Playcentres kept individual portfolios to show children's learning and participation in the programme.
- Most associations used some form of **self review**. Self review of Playcentre programmes was largely informal, although in some cases centres had developed more formal processes for evaluating and improving the quality of learning and teaching. Playcentres promoted reflection through discussions and regular meetings, and this resulted in a collective approach to making decisions. Many Playcentre associations and individual Playcentres had a regular cycle for reviewing policies and procedures. Associations had usually developed generic policies that provided a basis for monitoring and reporting on health and safety in Playcentres. Association support people often gave additional guidance.
- ERO had concerns about aspects of **compliance** in 24 of the 30 Playcentre associations, predominantly about health and safety requirements. However, associations usually had adequate processes to help individual centres improve.

The quality of education in Playcentres

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 philosophy, programme, learning environment and interactions on evaluation

⁶ Ministry of Education. (1996) *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

⁷ Assessment for learning is described as noticing, recognising and responding. These are processes that educators use when interacting with children, and underpin assessment. Educators notice things when they work with children, they recognise some of what they notice as learning, and respond to a selection of what they recognise. *An Introduction to Kei Tua o te Pae, Book 1, p6.*

indicators published by ERO,⁸ and the signposts and explanations of the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (DOPs) published by the Ministry of Education.⁹

Philosophy

The philosophy of each service expresses the fundamental beliefs, values and ideas 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 services' practice. Playcentre associations expect that individual Playcentres will develop statements that reflect the core philosophy adopted by the New Zealand Playcentre Federation.

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 Playcentres?

Playcentres shared a common core philosophy. Local associations promoted a shared philosophical approach through their management, support and parent education services. Playcentres generally maintained a strong commitment to their philosophy, which was focused on child-initiated play and parents as first educators. Playcentres catered for children in the context of the family, the centre and the wider community.

An adult education programme was available to all Playcentre members. Parents had opportunities to gain a Playcentre Diploma in Early Childhood and Adult Education. This qualification was offered through participation in locally-based workshops and training courses recognised by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). In addition to providing information about Playcentre philosophy, the courses incorporated topics about parenting skills, cooperative group processes, leadership, learning through play, and how to provide for children's learning and development.

In Playcentre philosophy the role of parents was central. Each Playcentre operated as a parent cooperative with parents sharing responsibility for the education programme and administration of the centre. More experienced members acted as mentors, encouraging parents to take part in decision-making and develop leadership skills. Playcentre recognised the role of the family as an important aspect of children's education and care as indicated by the statement 'whānau tupu ngātahi – families growing together.' The philosophy valued children learning in a mixed-age group, and most Playcentres provided sessions that catered for children from birth to school age.

Playcentre philosophy considered that the quality of the physical learning environment made an important contribution to children's learning. In recognition of this, Playcentres usually offered a wide range of play activities for children to choose from.

⁸ <http://www.ero.govt.nz/EdRevInfo/Ecedrevs/ece-eval-indic.pdf>.

⁹ Ministry of Education (1998). *Quality in Action*. Wellington: Learning Media.

The philosophy embraced New Zealand's bicultural heritage and encouraged members to gain knowledge of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Examples of good practice from an ERO Playcentre report

Parent members were actively encouraged to attend Playcentre training courses to enhance their knowledge and understanding of children's development, and Playcentre philosophy. These courses empowered parents as first educators of their children.

Playcentres were clear about their purpose and function and the association focused on supporting the implementation of the Playcentre philosophy.

Playcentres maintained their strong adherence to the Playcentre philosophy of child-initiated and adult-supported play.

Members followed the ideal of working as a parent cooperative. They shared the tasks of caring for, and educating children, as well as managing all the administrative responsibilities that were part of operating a Playcentre.

Programmes

High quality programmes in early childhood services promote and extend the learning and development of children by focusing on their strengths and interests. Effective planning, assessment and evaluation processes help adults to provide high quality programmes. Parents 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?

Features of high quality programmes in Playcentres included:

- rich, creative learning opportunities that used good quality resources and usually featured the variety of play activities traditionally included in many programmes;
- child-initiated, play-based learning experiences that allowed children many opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning by choosing their activities and making decisions about their involvement;
- a warm and positive social environment that gave children opportunities to learn about friendships, sharing, and cooperating with others;
- assessment and planning practice that reflected and encouraged children's developing interests and was linked to the principles of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*;
- well-organised and flexible routines that encouraged children's self-care and management skills; and
- oral language, literacy and mathematics as part of the programme through children's active experiences with resources and their interaction with others.

Children attending these Playcentres were motivated, independent learners who were challenged and stimulated to develop life-long learning dispositions that they could use later in other learning situations.

Children developed foundation ideas and skills in literacy and numeracy through meaningful experiences incorporated into their play. Oral language development was strongly supported through conversations, stories, songs, and social interactions.

In most Playcentres, children experienced activities from a wide range of learning areas with ready access to both indoor and outdoor play spaces. Playcentre programmes generally engaged children in communicating and building relationships with others, developing skills in creative expression, and in actively exploring the environment. Children shared books and enjoyed stories, and were often able to investigate ideas about science and nature.

Some Playcentres also offered additional sessions for older children. In accordance with Playcentre philosophy, centre sessions usually catered for a mixed-age group of children from birth to school age.

An innovation in some Playcentres was the availability of a SPACE (Supporting Parents Alongside Children's Education) programme,¹⁰ which catered mainly for first-time parents and their newborn babies during the first year of a child's life.

Playcentre associations and many Playcentres demonstrated a commitment to include a bicultural perspective in the learning programme. Most Playcentres had learning resources that reflected a Māori dimension. Parent education courses included components that increased members' knowledge of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and bicultural aspects. However, most Playcentres needed to improve parents' ability and confidence to use te reo Māori in their interactions with children. Those centres that were doing well in this area usually had a parent member or an association representative that provided skilled support for implementing te reo and tikanga Māori in the programme.

In some associations, Playcentre parents had been learning about assessment through professional development or adult education programmes. In these centres, members were planning programmes based on children's strengths and interests. Centres were developing portfolios that showed their children's learning and participation in the programme.

Programmes reflected Playcentre philosophy. Children engaged in sustained periods of child-initiated, parent-supported play. High adult-to-child ratios meant prompt and appropriate attention to children when needed,

Programmes were based on the provision of good quality resources in Playcentre's traditional 16 areas of play. Children had freedom to choose where they would play and make decisions about their involvement in activities. Ongoing education for all

¹⁰ SPACE programmes have been developed by the Hutt Playcentre Association, which has a contract with the Ministry of Social Development to strengthen and support the implementation of the SPACE programme nationally. For further information see: www.space.org.nz

adults involved in providing programmes for children was key to the effective implementation of the Playcentre's philosophical approach.

Parents led assessment, planning and evaluation. Attendance was high at the regular meetings where children's progress was discussed and formal plans were developed. More experienced Playcentre people mentored new members. A high level of participation in Playcentre training had very positive outcomes in developing adults' understanding and increasing the quality of education provided for children.

Centre members skilfully assisted their children to play peacefully and to develop socially in a supportive environment. Relationships were generally caring and positive between children and adults, and children and their peers. Centre members helped children to manage difficult situations and to use words to solve social dilemmas. Children were learning about friendships, sharing, cooperating, taking turns and generally operating successfully as part of a group. These were positive ways of helping children to develop social skills for their future years.

Literacy and mathematics were generally well integrated into the Playcentre programmes in contexts that were meaningful to children. High quality programmes resulted in good outcomes for children.

Practice in some Playcentres strongly reflected a commitment to building both adults' and children's familiarity with the bicultural heritage of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Where this occurred most effectively adults used te reo Māori naturally in the course of their interaction with children as well as in waiata and stories, and incorporated aspects of tikanga Māori into their everyday routines.

A planned session was tailored to the needs and interests of older children to prepare them for the transition to school.

Learning environment

A high quality learning environment is responsive to the learning interests and strengths of the children attending. In this environment, children select learning resources and make choices about what they want to do, in a culturally relevant setting that stimulates their curiosity to explore and learn.

What was the quality of the learning environment?

The learning environment in Playcentres was typically high quality. The indoor environment was attractive, stimulating and carefully organised to provide for children's diverse interests and abilities. Outdoor areas were usually spacious, interesting and provided for physical activity and challenge in a safe environment.

The learning environment was well resourced with a wide range of appropriate equipment and materials that generally catered well for the age range of the children.

Equipment was accessible and had been selected to support learning. Play areas invited exploration and motivated children to try new experiences. In some Playcentres there was an increasing emphasis on improving provision for infants and toddlers.

Parents generally set up the learning environment to give children the opportunity to select from a wide range of activities and experiences.

In some Playcentres, displays of children's work celebrated their learning. Information was readily available to support parents' understanding of the learning process.

Playcentres were well maintained and resourced, providing rich and challenging learning experiences in the indoor and outdoor areas, and in the wider communities through planned excursions. High quality, well-organised and developmentally appropriate resources and equipment were accessible to children to support their learning in all areas of play.

Displays of children's work in most Playcentres reflected the members' enthusiasm for the learning process. Outside areas were generally spacious and well equipped with activities that promoted physical challenge and stimulated children's play. Playcentre environments were highly conducive to self-directed learning.

Spacious and attractive outdoor environments were a feature across the association. They provided a continuum of physical challenges and expressive play experiences for children of differing abilities and ages. Verandas provided transitional spaces between indoor and outside play areas, and were used well in inclement weather.

Interactions

In high quality early childhood services, adults respond to children with warmth and affection, and promptly comfort and reassure children when necessary. Adults engage in two-way conversations with children that encourage and extend thinking and learning. Children confidently manage their interactions with others.

What was the quality of the interactions?

In all Playcentres, interactions were characteristically warm and nurturing. Relationships between children were well established and parent interactions with children were caring, respectful and encouraging. Positive strategies were used to foster children's social skills. Children were developing a strong sense of well-being, belonging and emotional security.

In most Playcentres, more experienced parents used a range of approaches to encourage children's thinking and involvement in complex play and learning. They listened to children's ideas, used open-ended questions to promote thinking skills, and affirmed children's achievements and persistence. These interactions enabled children to become increasingly confident about making choices and engaging in challenging learning opportunities. This was also an area where some Playcentres could improve their performance.

A feature of Playcentres was the high adult-to-child ratios that enabled adults to respond promptly to children's emerging interests. Many parents were observed extending children's exploration and inquiry skills through their interactions. In some Playcentres, more experienced adults encouraged children to talk about what they were doing, solve problems and develop thinking and reasoning abilities. Children benefited from interactions with adults that supported their learning and development in positive and empowering ways.

In most Playcentres children had many opportunities to develop their communication and social skills through interactions with others. Parents often modelled language

for children, promoting language development. Children were learning about friendships, sharing, cooperating, taking turns and generally operating successfully as part of a group. They played happily alongside and with other children, developing social skills. Adults fostered social interaction and play between older and younger children who benefited from playing in inclusive, mixed-age group setting.

Relationships between children and adults were well established and parent interactions with children were positive, affirming and supportive. As a result, children had a strong sense of belonging and emotional security in the Playcentres.

In some Playcentres, more experienced adults used open-ended questions well to encourage children to talk about what they were doing, problem solve and develop thinking and reasoning abilities.

Interactions between children, their peers and adults were warm, friendly and caring. Children's immediate needs were responded to with prompt, appropriate attention. Peers played well together and were helped to take turns and share. Adults encouraged the development of social skills with positive affirmation and specific praise. Children's sense of wellbeing and belonging was fostered and enhanced by positive and affirming relationships.

National evaluations in Playcentres

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 2005 and 2008, ERO investigated Playcentres' progress with self review and the quality of assessment.

Self review

Self review is the 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 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?

As part of its national evaluations, ERO reported on self review in 13 of the 30 Playcentre associations included in this study. Most associations had used some form of effective self review. Commonly Playcentres reviewed against their charter agreement (the DOPs) and their strategic or annual plans. In some centres strategic plans had been developed to set goals for ongoing improvement. However, these plans were not always well understood by Playcentre members, and their use needed to be increased.

Playcentres in these associations promoted reflection through formal and informal discussions and regular meetings. A wide range of perspectives was gathered from parents resulting in a collective approach to decision making.

Many of the associations and their affiliated Playcentres had a regular cycle for reviewing policies and procedures that led to change and improvement. Associations generally had generic policies that guided the operation of the Playcentres and these provided a basis for monitoring and reporting on health and safety in centres.

In most associations self review of Playcentre programmes was largely informal and involved discussion and reflection among centre members. Association liaison people often provided additional guidance through their reports on the quality of the environment, resources and programme. In some cases, Playcentres had developed more formal processes for evaluating and improving the quality of learning and teaching.

The practice of self review was embedded in all levels of the organisation. Playcentre members were accustomed to reflecting on their practice in order to improve it.

Self-review processes promoted improvement and change. Regular review of policies and procedures supported children's safety and well-being. Strategic planning for Playcentre operations included the development of goals and actions that showed how objectives were met. These strategies provided centre members with a sound direction for improvement.

Numerous opportunities were available to members to encourage both formal and informal discussion. Playcentre and association meetings, as well as liaison visits, encouraged decision making among members about aspects of management. This ongoing dialogue provided valuable information for making decisions and improving Playcentre operations.

Playcentre members understood the purpose and value of self review. They made effective use of self review to inform future development.

The practice of regular internal review meant that Playcentres were well placed to inform incoming members of centre objectives and practices, and ensured that practice generally improved.

Members promoted discussion among parents, made decisions about improvements to centre operations and planned new initiatives. The range of strategies used included session evaluations, reports to meetings, and session planning and evaluation meetings. They maintained individual child portfolios and gathered parents' ideas on children's development needs.

Assessment

Educators and parents use assessment information to support children in their learning. They notice, recognise and respond to children's strengths and interests. The Ministry of Education has funded professional development on assessment over a five-year period starting from 2005. Early childhood services are at varying stages in their understanding and implementation of effective assessment practice.

How well developed were assessment practices in Playcentres?

As part of its national evaluations, ERO reported on the quality of assessment in 10 of the 30 Playcentre associations included in this study. In most Playcentres in these associations, assessment practice was being developed or refined. Many centres were

trials new assessment approaches. Some were using good quality assessment, planning and evaluation practice. Professional development in *Kei Tua o te Pae*, the early childhood exemplars, had increased parents' understanding of current approaches to assessment. Children's interests and strengths were increasingly used as a basis for programme planning.

In some Playcentres, parents referred to *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum. Familiarity with *Te Whāriki* enhanced their ability to notice, recognise and respond to significant aspects of children's learning.

Most Playcentres kept individual portfolios to show children's learning and participation in the programme. Many gathered information about the child's life outside Playcentre from the child and other family members to give an holistic view of the child's learning. Assessment records often included written observations and narratives accompanied by photographs to highlight children's learning and development.

The majority of Playcentres in these associations had evaluation processes to assess the quality of activities provided to support children's learning. However, while discussions reflected the level of children's participation in the activities, the quality of their learning was not always discussed.

In many of the associations, ERO identified a need for improvement in assessment, planning and evaluation practice. The nature of Playcentres, particularly their frequent and ongoing changes to membership, resulted in variable practice. In many Playcentres, associations offered regular support and ongoing training to help parents improve their ability to notice, recognise and respond to children's learning.

Planning processes were established in most Playcentres, with varying levels of effectiveness. Most centres collected information about children's responses to the programme and were beginning to use this information to guide planning.

Most Playcentres not only evaluated each session, but also evaluated in depth at the end of each term... to make some judgements about how well they supported children's learning.

Many Playcentres were now including perspectives from the child and other family members, with entries about the child's life outside Playcentre, to give a more holistic view of their development.

Children's portfolios provided a rich and valuable record of children's play and learning experiences. Parents compiled these records, which consisted of anecdotal observations, digital photographs, work samples and learning stories showing children's involvement and progress over time. Portfolios provided a basis for planning an interesting and challenging learning environment for children.

The association accessed training for facilitators and assessors on Kei Tua o te Pae and strengthened the focus on planning, assessment and evaluation practices in training manuals and course readings.

Playcentres needed regular support and ongoing training to ensure that programme planning, assessment and evaluation practices continued to improve. The association

recognised that due to the nature of Playcentre and its frequent and ongoing changes in membership, it needed to provide regular training at different levels. Regular training and ongoing support were considered to be likely to improve assessment and evaluation practices in Playcentres and provide greater depth of learning and challenge for children.

Compliance with legal requirements in Playcentres

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

As part of an education review, ERO asks the management of a Playcentre to complete a Playcentre Management Assurance Statement to attest to the extent to which the centre is meeting its legal and regulatory obligations. Where areas of non-compliance are identified, ERO asks management to advise what action is being taken.

During each education review, ERO evaluates the centre's compliance with a specific selection of legislative obligations that have a potentially high impact on outcomes for children's emotional and physical safety; staff qualifications and organisation; and evacuation procedures and practice for fire and earthquake. If concerns arise, ERO may evaluate a wider range of requirements.¹¹

What was the level of compliance?

In six of the 30 Playcentres' associations, ERO reported no concerns about meeting legal requirements.

The property officer has assisted Playcentres to develop and display hazard identification. These were important steps for centres in taking responsibility for requirements related to health and safety.

The Playcentre had clear guidelines and procedures for reviewing health and safety compliance and legislative requirements. The supervisors completed pre-session health and safety checks and audited the environment and activity areas each term.

The board developed robust systems to audit and monitor the safety requirements. Playcentres' reports to the association were consistent and comprehensive, reflecting good practice. The association support person visited each of the Playcentres regularly and reported to the centre and the association about the way requirements had been met.

What concerns were identified?

In 24 of the 30 Playcentre associations, some affiliated Playcentres were not meeting all legal requirements satisfactorily. Areas of non-compliance were predominantly in health and safety requirements. However, associations usually had adequate processes to help Playcentres to improve.

¹¹ For further information, see: <http://www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/Handbooks>

The most frequent concerns were about identifying hazards to the safety of adults and children and monitoring safety procedures.

Improvements in Playcentres

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?

ERO reports of Playcentre associations highlighted improvements in the following areas:

- assessment practice, as a result of professional development in assessment and evaluation;
- bicultural practice;
- development of annual and strategic plans and self-review processes;
- improved association services through restructuring and reallocation of association personnel; and
- building and playground upgrades to enhance the quality of learning environments.

Conclusion

This report gives parents an overview of the quality of education and care in Playcentres and includes some examples of good practice. Similarities among Playcentres were the positive interactions, high quality learning environments and the emphasis on child-initiated play. Playcentres varied in the extent to which they planned programmes to extend children's strengths and interests.

Playcentres all used some form of self review, often with an emphasis on reflection about the quality of the programme. These self-review practices generally led to improvements in the service and increased learning opportunities for children. In most Playcentres, assessment practice was developed through the trialling of new approaches to assessing children's learning and progress.

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

Further information

Umbrella organisation

Contact address

New Zealand Playcentre Federation

Website: www.playcentre.org.nz

Education Review Office

ERO reports

The following ERO evaluation reports, related to Playcentres are available on its web site: **www.ero.govt.nz**

- *Maori Children in Early Childhood: Pilot Study, July 2008.*
- *Early Childhood Education: A Guide for Parents, June 2007.*
- *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood, December 2007*
- *Parent-led Services in Early Childhood Education, June 2004.*

ERO has reviewed all licensed and chartered Playcentres that have been operating for more than 12 months. The report of each review is available on the ERO website: www.ero.govt.nz.

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