

**Early Childhood  
Monographs:**

**The Quality of Education  
and Care in Montessori  
Early Childhood Services**

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**EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE**  
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## Contents

About the Early Childhood Education Monograph Series	1
About Montessori early childhood services	1
Overall performance of Montessori early childhood services	3
The quality of education in Montessori early childhood services	4
Philosophy	4
Programme	5
Learning environment	8
Interactions	9
National evaluations in Montessori early childhood services	10
Qualifications requirements	10
Self review	11
Compliance with legal requirements in Montessori early childhood services	13
Improvements in Montessori early childhood services	14
Conclusion	15
Further Information	16
Umbrella organisation	16
Education Review Office	16

## About the Early Childhood Education Monograph Series

In New Zealand, many early childhood services<sup>1</sup> offer programmes that are aligned to particular educational philosophies, cultural identities or religions. When parents are choosing an early childhood service for their child, they may want to know about services with a special character.<sup>2</sup>

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 reports<sup>3</sup> to write the early childhood monograph series. The purpose of the series is to provide evaluative information about groups of services that have a special character. Parents can use this information along with the ERO report titled *Early Childhood Education: A Guide for Parents, June 2006*,<sup>4</sup> 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 Montessori early childhood services

Montessori schools and early childhood services offer programmes that are based on the educational philosophies of Maria Montessori, an education reformer in Italy during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Aspects of Montessori education have been present in New Zealand since 1907. During the past 25 years, the number of Montessori early childhood services operating in New Zealand has grown. In 1980, there were about 10; in 2007, there were 95. The Montessori Association of New Zealand Incorporated (1985) represents 70 percent of Montessori early childhood services.

### Which services does this monograph refer to?

This monograph on the quality of education and care in Montessori early childhood services is based on the findings of the current ERO reports of 44 licensed services that provided a programme based on Montessori philosophy. Twenty-six of these services were members of the association, and 18 were not. The reports were completed between July 2005 and December 2006.

This study covered 45 percent of the 95 licensed Montessori early childhood services. Montessori services made up 2.5 percent of all licensed early childhood services, and 2.6 percent of all child enrolments in licensed services.

### Where were these services located?

There were 95 services located throughout New Zealand. Forty-four services were included in this study – 11 located in Auckland, one in the Bay of Plenty, one in Gisborne/Hawkes Bay, one in Waikato, nine in the Wellington region, three in Nelson/Marlborough, eight in Canterbury, one on the West Coast and nine in Otago.

Two of the services were rural and 42 were urban. Several services were linked to a Montessori school, or to a Montessori classroom in a state school.

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<sup>1</sup> A service may be a centre, kindergarten, playcentre, kōhanga reo or preschool.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this report, ‘special character’ refers to services that are based on a particular culture, educational philosophy or religion.

<sup>3</sup> Reports can be read on the ERO website [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz) and every licensed service holds a copy of its current ERO report.

<sup>4</sup> This report can be found at: [www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/ECEGuideJun06](http://www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/ECEGuideJun06).

### **When were these services open, and who attended?**

Montessori services typically opened during school terms only, and most offered morning, or morning and afternoon sessions (sometimes called 'extended day').

Most Montessori services chose to enrol children from three years of age. However, 34 services were licensed to enrol children from two years of age. Ten services were licensed for and enrolled children who were under two. The smallest service was licensed to enrol up to 16 children, and the five largest services could enrol up to 50.

In New Zealand, children may start primary school when they reach age five, but they are not required to attend school until age six. As Montessori preschool education programmes are designed for two age groups (0 to 3 years and 3 to 6 years), some services encouraged children to stay until they turned six. About half the Montessori services in this study offered a programme for five-year-old children.

The enrolment information for the Montessori services in this study showed that New Zealand European/Pākeha children made up 76 percent of enrolments, Māori children made up 7 percent, and children from 26 other ethnicities made up 17 percent of enrolments.

### **How were parents involved?**

There are many different ownership arrangements for early childhood services, and these have implications for how parents are involved in service management and governance roles. Thirty-six of the 44 Montessori early childhood services were privately owned, and so did not involve parents in governance or management. Eight services were owned by charitable trusts or incorporated societies. In these services, parents elected to the governing board provide direction and support for management and teachers.

In early childhood education, there is growing recognition of the benefit of teachers and parents working together to identify learning goals and teaching strategies for each child.

Parents of children attending Montessori early childhood services had many opportunities to learn about Montessori education, and to attend social events. Parents were informed about their child's education through formal reports and interviews with their child's teacher. Interviews were generally held either once per term or twice per year, and parents communicated frequently through short conversations with teachers before and after sessions.

In a few Montessori services, parents contributed to planning. In many services, teachers were exploring how to engage parents in planning for their child.

Parents assisted with or led part of the cultural programme in seven services, and felt comfortable staying to watch children working in their classroom in six services. Parents also accompanied children on excursions. Some services sought parent feedback on aspects of policy and operations.

### **How frequently were services reviewed?**

ERO undertakes education reviews in early childhood education services on a regular cycle. When the performance of a service gives cause for concern, ERO carries out another review, within 12 months. For the Montessori early childhood education services, the proportion of supplementary reviews was slightly, but not significantly lower, than that for all early childhood services.

## Overall performance of Montessori early childhood services

This section summarises ERO's findings about Montessori early childhood services. ERO's reports on individual services may be read on ERO's website [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz), and are also available in the services.

- The **philosophy** of the services, in terms of their Montessori identity, was strongly evident through programme organisation and the prepared environment.<sup>5</sup> As described in their philosophies, teachers established a calm, respectful atmosphere in which children often worked independently, older children helped younger ones and parents took an active role in the local Montessori community.
- In Montessori early childhood services providing **high quality programmes** teachers successfully integrated Montessori and the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (1996),<sup>6</sup> principles, and had broadened their approach to planning and assessment. These teachers modelled high quality interactions and maintained a very respectful, purposeful environment. Children worked with interesting educational resources, and routines supported learning.
- About two thirds of the services had a satisfactory approach to **assessment, planning and evaluation**. These services offered individual and group programmes that were based, at least in part, on children's interests. Assessment practices commonly included the use of narrative approaches and photographs, and helped teachers and parents understand children's learning. Assessment, planning and evaluation practices were identified as areas for improvement in many services.
- **Learning environments** in Montessori services were typically very well organised and facilitated an ordered approach to learning. Commitment to accepting cultural diversity was shown through displays, photographs and cultural celebrations. Environments were commonly enhanced by attention to nature and aesthetics, and outdoor and dramatic play equipment was generally adequate.
- **Interactions** were typically warm, friendly and calm. Generally, children engaged in shared conversations with teachers and peers, and were confident communicators. In services offering high quality programmes, teachers skilfully supported play and learning through use of open-ended questions that facilitated children's thinking and extended their enquiries.
- Forty-two of the 44 Montessori early childhood services that ERO reviewed in 2005 and 2006 met current **qualifications requirements**. Of the 39 services for which readiness to meet the 2007 requirements for qualified, registered staff was reported, 20 were meeting, and 15 were in a good position to meet the requirements by 2007. It was not clear whether four services would meet these requirements.

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<sup>5</sup> The Montessori Association of New Zealand describes the Montessori 'prepared environment' as: "A holistic learning environment that facilitates interactions between the child, the adults (parents and teachers) and the physical environment (indoors and outdoors). The physical environment will include a wide range of Montessori and other learning materials. The Montessori learning environment is prepared in order to facilitate the exploration, freedom and independence of the child at each stage of their development."

<sup>6</sup>For more information about *Te Whāriki* see: [http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/downloadable/d13567\\_v1/whariki.pdf](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/downloadable/d13567_v1/whariki.pdf).

- **Self review** was underway in most services, but few showed systematic review of operations. Half the services sought parents' views when reviewing policies, operations of programmes.
- ERO had concerns about aspects of **compliance** in 23 of the 44 services. The concerns included inadequate: trial evacuation procedures and earthquake safety provisions; personnel management; and outdoor safety.

## **The quality of education in Montessori 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 review, ERO based its introductory statements and findings about the philosophy, programme, learning environment and interactions on evaluation indicators produced by ERO,<sup>7</sup> and signposts and explanations of the Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs) produced by the Ministry of Education.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Philosophy***

The philosophy of each service expresses the fundamental beliefs, values and ideals by which the service chooses to operate. Each chartered<sup>9</sup> 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.

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

### **How was the philosophy expressed in Montessori early childhood services?**

- The owners or directors of each Montessori early childhood service had derived a service philosophy primarily from their interpretation of the educational philosophy of Maria Montessori. The national association does not provide services with a philosophical direction. As a result, the philosophies of different services, while largely similar, varied in emphasis.
- The philosophies of all services clearly promoted a Montessori approach to education. This approach was characterised by the view that each child is an

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ero.govt.nz/EdRevInfo/ECedrevs/ECE%20Eval%20Indicators.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Education. *Quality in Action*. Wellington: Learning Media 1998.

<sup>9</sup> A charter agreement is between a licensed early childhood service and the Government. It constitutes an undertaking by the management of a service to provide quality education and care that meet the standards specified in the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs) for Chartered Early Childhood Services in New Zealand* (1996). Non-chartered services do not need to meet the DOPs and receive less government funding.

individual, who will develop a joy of learning, be able to learn independently, and have opportunities to engage in a wide but organised programme of learning.

- Some philosophy statements identified the teachers' central role in preparing the learning environment and modelling total respect for the child. ERO found that teachers prepared orderly, logically arranged classrooms, and in most cases, relationships were consistently respectful, and featured shared conversations.
- In some services, the philosophy referred to the role of older children helping younger children to learn, and to children working cooperatively by mutual agreement. ERO observed that children interacted in these ways.
- The role of parents and family in the education and well-being of each child was strongly recognised and valued in Montessori service philosophies. Family members in some services contributed cultural knowledge. This supported their philosophy of embracing diversity through learning about cultural identity.
- About one third of the Montessori services had philosophies that referred to sharing and respecting te reo Māori and tikanga Māori. Although good practice was observed in some settings, this was an area for further development in many services.
- About half the Montessori services had strong reference to the principles of *Te Whāriki* in their statement of philosophy. This reflected substantial consideration of *Te Whāriki* by Montessori teachers. As a result, many Montessori teachers were successfully applying current educational knowledge to enhance the original Montessori educational philosophy.

An example of the expression of philosophy in a Montessori early childhood service.

*The basic philosophy of Montessori is based on the concept that children have within themselves the potential for self construction towards mature adulthood, and an in-built love of learning.*

*The prepared environment is rich with experiences that motivate and allow the children to self develop. They are compelled to explore and master whatever the environment offers. Everything is accessible. Child-sized furniture and utensils are viewed as pre-requisites for meaningful learning.*

*Teachers who are the keepers of the 'prepared environment' are responsible for the atmosphere and order of the classroom, the programme of activities, and challenges and changes of pace, to meet each child's individual needs.*

## **Programme**

High quality programmes in early childhood services promote and extend the learning and development of each child through focusing on their strengths and interests. Effective planning, assessment and evaluation processes help teachers to provide high quality programmes. Parents and teachers use assessment information to identify and value children's learning.

In early childhood education, literacy and numeracy concepts and understanding are developed through meaningful, real learning situations. High quality 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?**

- High quality programmes in Montessori early childhood services showed:
  - planning evaluation, and assessment practices that were a blend of Montessori philosophy and curriculum, and the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*;
  - individual and group plans that were responsive to children's interests, with a balance of teacher- and child-initiated work, and indoor and outdoor activity;
  - introduction of literacy, numeracy and science concepts through discussion in dramatic play and real situations; and
  - flexible routines that allowed children to complete activities.

Children at these services developed positive dispositions to learning and were confident in self-care skills.

- All Montessori early childhood services offered programmes that included an individual work cycle, a group programme, self-care and social routines, and outdoor play. The quality of programme planning and evaluation ranged from poor to high quality. Two thirds of the services had aspects of sound planning including: combined use of *Te Whāriki* and the Montessori curriculum; individual and group plans that were responsive to children's interests; monitored implementation of the planned programme; and programme evaluation. The priorities for improvement were the development of planning systems, and the strengthening of skills in planning from children's interests and assessment records.
- Many Montessori services were making important, early steps in developing assessment practices that met current standards of good practice. Montessori teachers traditionally make careful records of children's systematic progress through Montessori materials. In addition to recording this progression, teachers in two thirds of the services were adopting holistic assessment practices that described children's learning through their interactions with others and their environment. These teachers (and occasionally parents) recorded observation, analysis and next steps in portfolios, along with photographs and annotated art works.
- Literacy and numeracy were strong features of Montessori education programmes. In many services, teachers used conversation to extend children's oral language, and when reading poems and stories, teachers discussed literacy and numeracy concepts. However, enhancing the use of literacy in authentic contexts was an area for improvement in seven services. Mathematics learning was promoted during the work cycle, through children's use of specially designed equipment. Active promotion of children's science knowledge was a feature of the programme in eight services.
- The use of te reo Māori and teaching of tikanga Māori was becoming an integrated component of the programme in about one third of the Montessori services. Many of these services used introductory Māori greetings, commands and waiata. Teachers who were confident used Māori nouns and phrases when talking with children. In a few services, teachers were developing children's

awareness of Māori patterns, symbols and celebrations. However, in one third of the services, knowledge and confidence to speak te reo Māori and to develop children's awareness of biculturalism was not well developed.

- In most services, routines served to support the Montessori learning programme. Routines were well established and teachers signalled transitions between phases of the day in a friendly, respectful manner. In many services, there was sufficient flexibility to accommodate individual differences, and the regular routines helped children learn independence, social and self-help skills. In a small number of services, the quality of education was negatively affected by strong emphasis on correctly following routines, and by limits on what children were allowed to do.

An example of good practice in a Montessori early childhood service.

*A sound curriculum management policy states the licensee's expectations for programme planning, assessment and evaluation. A Montessori approach provides a firm foundation for most aspects of the programme and practices.*

*The directress undertakes regular assessment of individual children. Anecdotal observations note children's competency in Montessori activities and areas of interest. This information is summarised into an assessment profile giving clear and specific details of each child's progress, interests, abilities and areas for development.*

*Attractive learning profiles for each child contain learning stories and other assessment documentation, annotated art work, photographs, Montessori activities and, at times, evidence of the child's involvement in the group programme. The recent inclusion of learning stories gives parents a clearer picture of what the child is doing within the classroom. These books are easily accessible to children and provide an informative record of their participation during their time at the preschool.*

*Profiles are shared with parents at the biannual parent teacher conferences. Goals and teaching strategies are set. There are clear links to Te Whāriki and the Montessori curriculum. The useful learning story template is being well utilised to analyse children's dispositions, Montessori specific priorities and other skills and knowledge. Learning stories give parents a clearer picture of what the child is doing within the classroom. Profiles are easily accessible to children and provide an informative record.*

*The term topics of interest are extremely well supported by excursions into the community, and visitors to the school that enhance and enrich children's learning. These events are individually planned for and evaluated. This is good practice. Evaluations indicate learning outcomes for children and identify changes that need to be taken into consideration in the future.*

*Well-established routines provide a structure to the day. Children are actively engaged in discussions, listening to stories and singing songs. Children develop knowledge of healthy food, good eating and hygiene habits and practise independence and self-help skills through a lunch programme.*

## ***Learning environment***

High quality learning environments are responsive to the learning interests and strengths of the children attending. In these environments, 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. Good design 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 environments?**

- Montessori classrooms consistently displayed prepared environments.<sup>10</sup> Children chose equipment, worked with it in a defined space, and then returned it to its allocated position on a shelf or table. Much of the equipment was designed to develop a specific skill or thinking concept. Tools and furniture were child-sized. The environments supported Montessori philosophy and practice with confidence.
- The learning environments were commonly enhanced by attention to aesthetics. In many Montessori services, particular care with the design of entrances, gardens and displays was apparent. These features encouraged a sense of peace and wonder, and provided a point of interest for talking about ecological values.
- The displays in Montessori services regularly featured cultural items that reflected the often diverse cultural mix of the local Montessori community. The items, including photographs of cultural interest, sometimes supported the current learning theme. In a smaller number of services, displays and resources recognised Māori culture and language. Cultural displays demonstrated the commitment of Montessori services to embracing diversity.
- Spaces and equipment for outdoor activity, challenge and exploration were available and were sometimes a feature of the learning environment. Some services had modified their approach to the Montessori work cycle so that children had greater opportunity to work outside and to develop large muscle coordination. However, in six services ERO identified that outdoor learning areas needed to be improved, particularly to benefit older boys, and in some cases, the outdoor areas did not meet minimum safety requirements.
- In a few services, children's work was celebrated through wall displays. In some, art was carefully mounted on walls. In others, photographs of children working with equipment were displayed alongside informative captions on notice boards, or in books that recorded the term's activities. These high quality displays helped children to share their experiences with teachers, family and peers.
- ERO noted good provision and use by children of resources such as family play and open-ended creative or art materials in eight services. However, ERO reported the lack of this equipment in six services that had few opportunities for

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children to express their creativity, develop complex play scenarios or extend their thinking.

An example of good practice in Montessori early childhood services.

*The preschool learning areas are well planned and organised. Resources are rotated and updated to meet children's learning needs and interests. Montessori equipment is displayed for easy identification and access. Children use an individual mat to work alone, or collaborate in small groups of their choosing.*

*The outdoor areas provide a variety of well-maintained spaces that have interesting form and flow. Moveable and fixed structures, including decked paths and safety surfaces support children's physical activity, and help challenge skill development. Children also use these structures as venues for sustained social play. Raised gardens and fruit trees extend the children's studies of natural life. Shade trees have been planted.*

*Literacy and numeracy skill development is carefully fostered through use of inherently interesting tasks. Resources sequentially draw out children's competencies according to the Montessori method. Clocks, calendars, maps and nametags help foster learning in meaningful contexts.*

*Staff acknowledge New Zealand as the home of Māori language and culture. The centre is a welcoming place for children and their families. Increasingly staff use and teach te reo and ngā tikanga Māori, especially through the use of greetings, waiata and making Māori language and patterns visible in centre signage and equipment. These strategies affirm the value of Māori language and culture for the children, many of whom have several backgrounds.*

## **Interactions**

In high quality early childhood services, adults respond to children with warmth and affection, and promptly comfort and reassure children. 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 confidently manage their interactions with others. They engage adults in conversation, and meet adult expectations for respectful, helpful and cooperative behaviour.

### **What was the quality of the interactions?**

- Interactions in Montessori early childhood services were typically warm, friendly and calm. Teachers created this atmosphere through their unhurried manner and great respect for each child. Generally, adults used positive reinforcement to guide children's behaviour, and children knew adults' expectations for routines. As a result, children's well-being and sense of belonging was well supported.
- Generally, teachers listened carefully to children and acknowledged and valued their ideas. Many teachers had sustained, shared conversations with children. In

one third of the Montessori services, older children took responsibility for modelling or describing work to younger class members. Children confidently initiated conversations and asked for help or information.

- Children had adequate or strong support to explore ideas, to think and reason, and develop theories about their world. Teachers in 14 services skilfully facilitated children's thinking through techniques such as open-ended questioning and reflective listening. Children in these services were more likely to participate in high quality interactions. However, teachers' skills in supporting learning, particularly in clarifying children's thinking and use of open-ended questions needed to be improved in 14 services.
- ERO had concerns about the low quality of interactions in a small number of services. In eight services, teachers were not sufficiently aware of inappropriate behaviour by children, and some children at these services were not productively engaged in learning. In three services, the way in which teachers managed behaviour was overly directive, negative or inconsistent.

An example of good practice in a Montessori early childhood service.

*Teachers' interactions with children and their families are respectful and responsive. Teachers are good role models of Montessori values and philosophy. Teachers use technical language in relevant contexts, foster children's observation skills and support children to purposefully engage in activities as a member of a group, or alone.*

*Teachers positively guide children's behaviour, accept differences and take delight in children's progress. Children and teachers share conversations about interests and life outside the school. Children confidently communicate to ask for assistance, clarify their thinking and share their humour.*

## **National evaluations in Montessori 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 the topic for a defined timeframe. This information is reported in individual services' review reports, and often aggregated for a national evaluation report.

Between 2004 and 2006, ERO investigated in all early childhood services: qualification and registration of teachers; and services' progress with self review.

### **Qualifications requirements**

The requirements for early childhood teacher qualifications and teacher registration were introduced by the Government to improve the quality of early childhood education. Since 2005, there must be one registered (and qualified) teacher working with children at all times in each licensed early childhood service. This number will increase to 50 percent of regulated<sup>11</sup> staff from December 2007.

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<sup>11</sup> Regulated staff members are those that are governed by the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1998 for early childhood centres, and the Education (Home-Based Care) Order 1992 for home-based care networks.

Montessori services set their own requirements for levels of staff training in Montessori education. This training is considered important for maintaining the special character of Montessori services. Montessori diplomas gained in New Zealand or overseas are not approved qualifications for Government requirements. However, one tertiary institution offers a Bachelor of Education (Montessori Early Childhood Teaching). This approved degree includes specific training in Montessori education.

### **Were qualifications requirements being met?**

- Forty-two of the 44 Montessori early childhood services were meeting the requirement to have a registered (and qualified) 'person responsible'. In the two services not meeting the requirement, qualified staff members were either in the process of applying for registration or had not applied.
- Twenty services were meeting the 2007 target of 50 percent of the regulated staff being registered (and qualified) teachers. Fifteen services were well placed to meet the target, as they had sufficient staff members due to complete an approved qualification. Two services had not considered how they could meet the 2007 target, and two services reported that their location was a barrier to recruiting sufficient trained teachers. Information was unavailable for five services.
- The advice and guidance programme for provisionally registered teachers was satisfactory in most services. Seven services had registered teachers who were providing effective advice and guidance programmes. However, in three services, there was no advice and guidance programme operating for the provisionally registered teachers on the staff.
- Montessori early childhood services reported that the process of teachers gaining full registration has improved their provision of early childhood education. It has helped the teaching staff to use *Te Whāriki* and the Montessori curriculum in a complementary manner. For some services, the qualifications requirement has helped strengthen teachers' understanding of biculturalism, and has improved their understanding of New Zealand early childhood education.

An example of good practice in a Montessori early childhood service.

*The preschool has one fully registered teacher and two other trained staff members who have applied for provisional registration.*

*The supervisor facilitates a useful programme for the staff members who have recently completed their teacher training. As a result, these staff members contribute fully to programme planning and teaching, and their new ideas and teaching practices are positively valued.*

### **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 with educators, parents or guardians and, where appropriate, whānau. They must also regularly evaluate and modify policies, objectives and practices by an ongoing, recorded process of internal review.

### How well developed was self review?

- Almost all Montessori early childhood services had some form of self review. However, only four services systematically reviewed their operations against their charter agreement (the DOPs). Twenty services had an established cycle for reviewing policies and procedures, while six did not. A quarter of the services documented review findings and improvement plans that stemmed from planned or spontaneous reviews. In five services, self review informed the annual or strategic plan.
- Half the services reviewed the quality of curriculum<sup>12</sup> provided for children. Services were at different stages in this area, with one quarter of all services engaging mainly in reflective discussion, and another quarter taking more formal approaches. Services with well-developed self-review processes were beginning to identify outcomes of self review in terms of improvements to children's learning. However, ERO identified that 12 services had not reviewed their curriculum and so were unable to show whether they were providing programmes that met the requirements specified in the DOPs.
- Montessori early childhood services consulted with parents through satisfaction surveys and parent meetings. ERO reported that parent consultation occurred in half the services and was an area for improvement in eight services.
- In some services, self-review practices were very limited. Two services only used self-audit check sheets, and five only reviewed through reflective discussion. Self review contributes more effectively to service improvement when the quality and impact of practices are evaluated through planned, recorded processes.

An example of good practice in a Montessori early childhood service.

*The centre's self-review process is consistent with the principles of the Ministry of Education's draft guidelines. The process is proving useful to management and staff in determining the effectiveness of selected aspects of programme and centre operations.*

*The five-year strategic plan forms a sound basis for ongoing review. Additionally, areas that arise through staff and management reflection and discussion, parent feedback and programme considerations are reviewed.*

*A cycle of policy review is thoroughly implemented. Following parent and teacher consideration of their relevance, currency and appropriateness, policies are ratified at a staff meeting.*

*The centre charter has been reviewed recently after comprehensive parent consultation. This document underpins operation and management, and it is reflected in the everyday practice of the educators.*

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<sup>12</sup> Curriculum in this sense is the sum total of the experiences, activities and events, whether direct or indirect, that occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development.

## Compliance with legal requirements in Montessori early childhood services

All licensed early childhood services must comply with legal and regulatory requirements. These requirements are to ensure that early childhood services meet minimum standards of education and care, and support the provision of high quality education and care.

As part of an education review, ERO asks the management of a service to complete a Centre 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, its management is asked to advise ERO what action it is taking to comply.

During each education 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.<sup>13</sup>

### What was the level of compliance?

In 22 of the 44 Montessori services, ERO had no concerns about meeting legal and regulatory requirements.

An example of good practice in a Montessori early childhood service.

*The service has clear procedures for identifying hazards in the environment and has processes to deal with any issues as they arise. Centre policies provide guidelines for administering medicine, napkin changing and dealing with child or adult accidents. The teachers report to the licensee/manager on any issues that may occur. The preschool has effective policies for behaviour management and the reporting of suspected child abuse. The children are provided with a safe learning environment.*

### What concerns were identified?

Twenty-two of the 44 Montessori services were not satisfactorily meeting requirements. The key concerns included inadequate:

- fire and earthquake trial evacuation procedures, and/or earthquake safety provision;
- personnel management processes resulting in insufficient qualified staff, and incomplete personnel and appraisal records; and
- outdoor safety in the areas of secure fences, gates and grates, and soft fall surfaces.

Eight services were not implementing an effective hazard management system.

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



## Improvements in Montessori 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?

ERO has published one previous review: Provision of Early Childhood Education in Montessori Preschools, May 2002. At that time, there were just over 90 Montessori services; now there are 95.

The improvements between the 2002 report and this report include:

- greater alignment with the learning and development objectives of the DOPs, with only two services not meeting these requirements;
- a increase from 73 to 93 percent of services having adequate provision for gross motor skill development;
- better access for children to outdoor play areas and improved safety of outdoor equipment;
- a significant reduction in the number of services lacking a schedule for policy and procedure review, and improved keeping of records required by regulation; and
- better earthquake protection overall, although earthquake protection or evacuation schemes were still substandard in 14 services.

The areas in which there has been little improvement about concerns raised in the 2002 report include:

- the quality of planning systems and of individual plans for children's learning;
- the provision for resources and teacher support for creative expression and dramatic play; and
- the speaking of te reo Māori with children, and increased expectations on services to demonstrate a sound understanding of tikanga Māori and biculturalism.

Individual ERO review reports of the Montessori early childhood services highlighted improvements in the following areas:

- assessment practices, such as keeping more holistic assessment records (often in the form of children's learning portfolios), and sharing these records with parents;
- resources for scientific, creative and dramatic play, and the use of them to support children's interests and to help children achieve *Te Whāriki* goals; and
- service operations and programme management practices.

## Conclusion

This monograph gives parents an overview of Montessori early childhood services, and includes some examples of good practice. It shows that there were some common features, but also wide variation in the type and quality of education provided, with some services providing high quality programmes.

Almost all services met requirements for staff qualifications and were using self review to improve the operation of the service and the quality of their programmes.

Self-review processes frequently led to improvements in the service, and improvements for children's learning. ERO identified concerns about meeting requirements in 22 of the 44 services.

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

## **Further Information**

### ***Umbrella organisation***

Membership of the Montessori Association of New Zealand Incorporated (1985) is voluntary and is open to schools and early childhood services. This association states that it does not assess the authenticity of the programmes of its member services. It represents Montessori early childhood services at a national level, organises professional development, a biennial conference and Montessori publications.

Twenty-six of the 44 services included in the study for this monograph were affiliated to the Montessori Association of New Zealand and 18 were not affiliated.

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Internet address: [www.montessori.org.nz](http://www.montessori.org.nz)

### ***Education Review Office***

#### ***ERO reports***

The following ERO evaluation reports, related to Montessori early childhood services are available on its web site: [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz).

- *Early Childhood Education: A guide for parents, June 2006.*
- *Provision of Early Childhood Education in Montessori Preschools, May 2002.*
- *Catering for Diversity in Early Childhood Services, June 2004.*

ERO has reviewed all licensed Montessori early childhood services that have been operating for more than 12 months. The report of each review is publicly available on the ERO web site: [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz).

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