

Positive Foundations for Learning: Confident and  
Competent Children in Early Childhood Services

October 2011



# Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

## The Child – the Heart of the Matter

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We welcome comments and suggestions on the issues raised in education evaluation reports.



## Foreword

The whakataukī of the Education Review Office (ERO) demonstrates the importance we place on the educational achievement of our children and young people:

*Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa  
The Child – the Heart of the Matter*

In our daily work we have the privilege of going into early childhood services and schools, giving us a current picture of what is happening throughout the country. We collate and analyse this information so that it can be used to benefit the education sector and, therefore, the children in our education system. ERO's reports contribute sound information for work undertaken to support the Government's policies.

Children's emotional well-being and social skills are at the heart of Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum. High quality early childhood education and care provides a positive environment in which children can grow as confident and competent children.

Successful delivery in education relies on many people and organisations across the community working together for the benefit of children and young people.

We trust the information in ERO's evaluations will help them in their task.

Dr Graham Stoop  
Chief Review Officer  
October 2011

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## Overview

The early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*,<sup>1</sup> provides a framework for early childhood services to implement a curriculum that supports children's competence and confidence as learners. Developing social competence enables children to relate to others in ways that enrich and extend their learning. Educators have a key role in nurturing children's emotional well-being and helping children to develop an understanding of appropriate behaviour.

The Education Review Office (ERO) evaluated how effectively early childhood services helped children to develop social competence, emotional well-being and an understanding of appropriate behaviour. ERO gathered data for this evaluation from 310 early childhood services during their regular scheduled education reviews in Terms 2 and 3, and part of Term 4, 2010.

This report discusses the areas of strength, and areas for development that ERO found. It also describes the practices of specific service types – Playcentres, kindergartens and education and care services – in supporting children's social competence, and understanding of appropriate behaviour,

Early childhood services were generally very good at helping children to learn alongside other children and adults, and to understand the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour. In 45 percent of the services reviewed educators used practices that were highly effective in assisting children to develop social and emotional competence. In a further 38 percent, practices were mostly effective. Fourteen percent had somewhat effective practices and three percent were not effective.

In services with highly effective practice, educators acknowledged and valued children's cultural background and the experiences and perspectives they brought to their learning. Interactions with children were sensitive, caring and respectful. Educators had high expectations for children and they took account of parents' aspirations in setting these expectations. They were attuned to younger children, responding sensitively to their body language and including them in conversations. Learning environments were calm and unhurried, allowing time for rich conversations and opportunities for educators to work alongside children, supporting their interactions with others.

Socially and emotionally competent children were observed by ERO to be:

- confident in relating to other children and adults
- initiating conversations with others and asking questions
- considerate and supportive of younger children
- independent problem solvers and negotiators

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

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- learning to respect the views and opinions of others
- happy and settled, and familiar and comfortable with centre routines
- secure in their relationships with others, with a strong sense of belonging.

Common features of highly effective practice in supporting children's developing social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour, across the service types,<sup>2</sup> included:

- respectful, responsive and reciprocal relationships among all adults involved in the centre
- educators having respectful and supportive interactions with infants, toddlers and young children
- good two-way communication processes for sharing relevant and timely information between educators and families
- the provision of timely, targeted professional learning and development for educators, especially when children needed additional support with their learning and/or their behaviour was challenging
- well-considered self review that ensures alignment of policy and practice and a consistent approach to supporting children's well-being.

Where practice was not effective, this was largely due to educators' limited understanding of policy expectations and associated lack of consistency. Turnover of educators, and/or a lack of professional leadership and support also contributed to poor practice. Other issues related to curriculum implementation, especially educators not being responsive to children's needs and having poor quality interactions with them. In some services, the learning environment did not support children. Children's behaviour, learning and development were not helped by their limited access to resources and the poor management of group times.

<sup>2</sup> Service types referred to are Playcentres, kindergartens and education and care centres

## Next steps

ERO recommends that early childhood services regularly review and improve the extent to which:

- educators work in partnership with parents and whānau to support children's developing social competence, emotional well-being and understanding of appropriate behaviour
- their behaviour management policy or positive guidance procedure, and educator practice, are aligned
- they have processes to identify children's challenging behaviours and strategies to respond to them
- their curriculum assists children to develop as socially and emotionally competent and confident learners.

## Introduction

### Government's education priorities

The Government's education sector goal is to have a world leading education system that equips all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st century. One of the education priorities to achieve this goal focuses on increasing opportunities for children to participate in high quality early childhood education. Early childhood services that provide high quality education and care are effective in supporting children's developing social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour.

### Te Whāriki<sup>3</sup>

The early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* provides a framework for services to implement a curriculum that supports children's developing social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour. The term curriculum is defined as:

*the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development. (page 9)*

*Te Whāriki* is founded on aspirations for children:

*to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society. (page 10)*

The principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* together form the framework for the curriculum. Each strand has several goals, and learning outcomes have been developed for each goal. The following strands and associated goals have links to children's development as socially and emotionally competent and capable learners.

*Mana atua – Well-being Goal 2* – children experience an environment where their emotional well-being is nurtured. Associated learning outcomes focus on children developing: an increasing ability to determine their own actions and make their own choices; an ability to identify their own emotional responses and those of others; and trust that their emotional needs will be responded to.

*Mana atua – Well-being Goal 3* – children experience an environment where they are kept safe from harm. Associated learning outcomes focus on children developing: increasing knowledge about how to keep themselves safe from harm; an ability and confidence to express their fears openly; trust that their fears will be taken seriously; an

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Education, (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.



increasing sense of responsibility for protecting others from injury and from physical and emotional abuse.

*Mana atua – Belonging Goal 4* – children and their families experience an environment where they know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Associated learning outcomes focus on children developing: the capacity to discuss and negotiate rules, rights and fairness; an understanding of the rules of the early childhood education setting, of the reasons for them, and of which rules will be different in other settings; an understanding that the early childhood education setting is fair for all; an understanding of the consequences of stepping beyond the limits of acceptable behaviour; an increasing ability to take responsibility for their own actions; and the ability to disagree and state a conflicting opinion assertively and appropriately.

*Mana tangata – Contribution Goal 3* – children experience an environment where they are encouraged to learn with and alongside others. Associated learning outcomes focus on children developing: a range of strategies for solving conflicts peacefully; an increasing ability to take another’s point of view and to empathise with others; ways to enjoy solitary play when they choose to be alone.

*Mana reo – Communication Goal 1* – children experience an environment where they develop non-verbal communication for a range of purposes. Associated learning outcomes focus on children developing an ability to express their feelings and emotions in a range of appropriate non-verbal ways.

### Regulatory frameworks

The regulatory frameworks<sup>4</sup> under which early childhood services operate include requirements and expectations related to children’s social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour.

The *Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1998* and the *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (1996)* (DOPS), under which some services are still licensed and chartered, include requirements in relation to supporting children’s learning and development.

The *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008*, under which services are being re-licensed over a six-year period from 2009, also set out requirements and expectations with regard to supporting children’s social competence and emotional well-being. They include the prescribed curriculum framework (the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*). The curriculum standard<sup>5</sup> requires services to plan, implement and evaluate a curriculum that is designed to enhance children’s learning and development. Curriculum criterion (C 10) states:

4 Current frameworks are the *Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1998*, the *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (1996)* (DOPS), and the *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008*

5 See: <http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ServiceTypes/CentreBasedECEServices/Curriculum.aspx>

*The service curriculum supports children's developing social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour.<sup>6</sup>*

Services are required to document a process for providing guidance to encourage social competence in children. The rationale/intent for this criterion notes that:

*this criterion helps to ensure the service curriculum supports and positively guides the development of children's social competence and their ability to establish and maintain appropriate relationships with other children and adults.*

Guidance information on the Ministry of Education's website<sup>7</sup> about supporting children's social competence states:

*As children learn to make sense of their world and develop working theories they develop an understanding of themselves in social contexts, including the early childhood service.*

*What is viewed as social competence and appropriate behaviour may vary from setting to setting and will depend on the values that families, educators, and communities hold. It is therefore vital that educators, parents, the community, and children share with each other their understandings of social competence.*

*The environment, our expectations, and our teaching practices will be strong indicators of what we consider as socially appropriate and competent behaviours.*

*A service curriculum that supports social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour will provide ongoing opportunities for children to practise, through actions, words, and behaviours, their growing competence.*

### Taumata Whanonga

The behaviour summit, Taumata Whanonga, held in April 2009, resulted in *Positive Behaviour for Learning*,<sup>8</sup> an action plan developed by the Ministry of Education. This plan reflects the priorities for action agreed by those who attended Taumata Whanonga. It is based on research that shows the best results occur when there is a dual focus on behaviour and learning, rather than viewing them as separate aspects requiring different approaches. This plan, while focusing largely on schooling, does include some actions that include teachers in early childhood services and parents of young children with behaviour difficulties.

6 See: <http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ServiceTypes/CentreBasedECEServices/Curriculum/ChildrenAsLearners/C10BehaviourManagement.aspx>

7 [www.lead.ece.govt.nz](http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz)

8 See <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/EducationInitiatives/PositiveBehaviourForLearning.aspx>

### Social and emotional competence in early childhood education

Recent articles about children’s social and emotional competence highlight some useful ways of defining and understanding this critical aspect of young children’s learning and development.

Social and emotional competence is referred to as a “*multifaceted domain incorporating elements such as feelings, temperament, values, personality, dispositions and behaviour.*”<sup>9</sup> Young children gain the ability to understand their own emotions and those of others in their early years. They develop competence in regulating their own emotions and in responding to the emotions of others.

*Emotional competence is viewed as an organisational construct that reflects the child’s capacity to integrate behavioural, cognitive and affective skills with emotional expression, social problem solving and negative social behaviour considered important parts of the construct.*<sup>10</sup>

Young children who are socially and emotionally competent are more likely to behave with empathy and show less aggression.<sup>11</sup> The development of social and emotional competence contributes to a young child’s success in an early childhood service and has a major influence on the establishment of positive peer relationships.<sup>12</sup> This development begins in infancy and continues through to adolescence. Developing strong social and emotional competence is essential for children’s everyday well-being as well as for engagement and learning in school and beyond.

### Professional learning and development programmes (2010–13)

Ministry of Education ECE professional development programmes (PLD) focuses on:

- targeting locations with low rates of participation to support quality provision in those communities
- services that are likely to enrol children who have the greatest potential benefit to make from participating in quality ECE (Māori, Pacific and children from low socio-economic areas).

The focus of the professional development for teachers in target locations is based on assessed need and includes some of the following areas:

- literacy and numeracy
- transitions
- education and care of children under two years of age
- developing children’s social competence
- leadership.

- 9 Barblet, L. and Maloney, C. (2010). Complexities of assessing social and emotional competence and wellbeing in young children. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*. Volume 35, Number 2, June 2010.
- 10 Deans, J., Frydenberg, E. and Tsurutani, H. (2010). Operationalising Social and Emotional Coping Competencies in Kindergarten Children. *New Zealand Research in Early Childhood Education Journal*. Volume 13, 2010. p.113.
- 11 Kim, M., Pizzo, P. and Garcia, Y. (2011). *The path towards social and emotional competence* accessed at [www.ChildCareExchange.com](http://www.ChildCareExchange.com).
- 12 Deans, J., Frydenberg, E. and Tsurutani, H. (2010). Operationalising Social and Emotional Coping Competencies in Kindergarten Children. *New Zealand Research in Early Childhood Education Journal*. Volume 13, 2010.

## Methodology

### ERO'S FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION

During regular education reviews ERO analysed information gathered in response to the following key questions:

How effectively does this service's curriculum support children in developing their social and emotional competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour?

In what ways does this service work in partnership with parents and whānau to support children's developing social and emotional competence?

How does this service's behaviour management policy or positive guidance procedure align to educator practice?

How are managers and educators supported in managing children's challenging behaviours?

In early childhood services that had highly effective practice, most or all of the indicators<sup>13</sup> were evident.

### SAMPLE

Data for this evaluation was gathered from 310 services reviewed in Terms 2 and 3 and part of Term 4 2010. Table 1 shows the types of services in the sample.

Table 1: Service types

Service type	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage <sup>14</sup>
Education and care	126	41	64
Kindergarten	80	26	16
Playcentre	99	32	12
Homebased Network	5	1	8
Total	310	100	100

The types of services in this sample were not representative of national figures. Education and care services and home-based networks were under-represented, and Playcentres and kindergartens over-represented. These differences were statistically significant.<sup>15</sup> Therefore an analysis of the data for Playcentres, kindergartens and education and care centres has been undertaken and reported separately in this report,

13 Appendix One includes the evaluation framework of questions and indicators used in this evaluation.

14 The national percentage of each service type is based on the total population of services as at April 2011. For this study, it includes education and care, kindergarten, Playcentre, and homebased networks.

15 The differences between observed and expected values were tested using a Chi square test. The level of statistical significance for all statistical tests in this report was  $p < 0.05$ .

along with a section that looks at the overall findings for 305 services. Homebased networks in the sample (five networks), were not included in the analysis of data and overall evaluation findings because of the small number.

### DATA COLLECTION

During each service's review, ERO collected information from a variety of sources including:

- discussions and interviews with managers and educators
- informal discussions with parents
- observations of interaction between educators and children and their parents, and between children
- documentation related to the service's operation and to the assessment of individuals and groups of children.

All data was collected by ERO review officers in the normal course of their review activities. ERO's *Framework and Resources for Early Childhood Education Reviews* sets out the process for education reviews.<sup>16</sup>

The term 'educator' is used in this report as an inclusive one to include teachers (qualified and registered) and parent educators.

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.ero.govt.nz/Review-Process/Frameworks-and-Evaluation-Indicators-for-ERO-Reviews>

## Findings

### SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S DEVELOPING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE AND UNDERSTANDING OF APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR<sup>17</sup>

Children's social competence and emotional well-being is at the heart of the early childhood curriculum. ERO evaluated how well each service's curriculum supported children's learning and development.

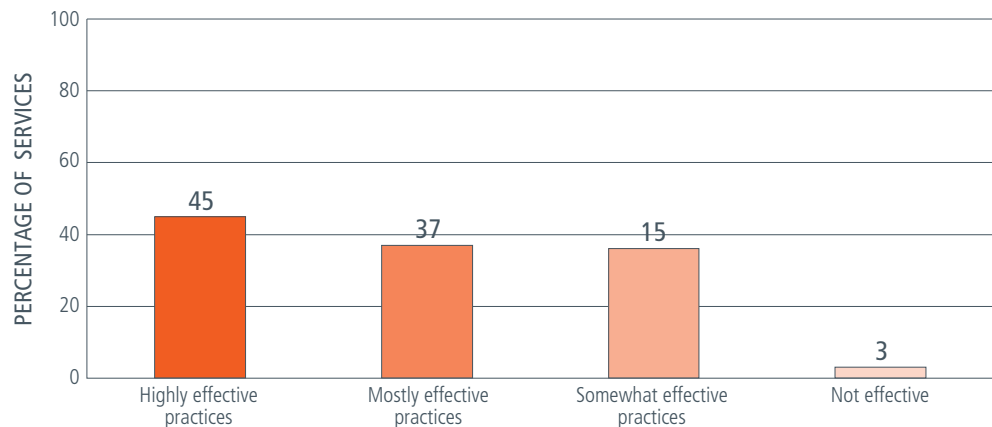
#### What did ERO ask?

*How effectively does this service's curriculum support children in developing their social and emotional competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour?*

#### What did ERO find?

As shown in Figure 1, most of the services (83 percent) were implementing a curriculum that supported children's developing social competence, and understanding of appropriate behaviour. Fourteen percent of services had some effective practices, and three percent had practices that were not effective.

Figure 1: Supporting children's developing social and emotional competence and appropriate behaviour



<sup>17</sup> Analysis for 305 services: kindergartens, education and care centres and Playcentres.

Highly effective practice included:

- knowing children well and being sensitive to their preferences for learning and well-being
- engaging in interactions that were consistently caring, respectful and responsive to children's feelings
- being quick to comfort, reassure and support children in a calm, considered and unhurried environment
- having high expectations for children's learning and behaviour
- showing respect for, and valuing, different cultural perspectives to learning and behaviour
- actively listening to children's ideas, encouraging them to express their feelings
- providing space for children to retreat
- alerting children to changes in routines and varying the pace of the day according to their needs
- explaining rules and reasons for them
- modelling desired behaviour
- encouraging independence and providing opportunities for children to lead and take responsibility.

Where practices were highly effective in supporting children's social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour, ERO observed children:

- showing confidence in relating to others and inviting other children to join in their play
- initiating conversations with adults and other children
- being considerate and supportive of younger children
- solving problems independently and negotiating desired outcomes with others, for example, establishing ground rules for games
- learning to respect the views of others
- being familiar and comfortable with routines
- being happy and settled
- being highly aware of expectations and associated limits and boundaries for behaviour and often having opportunities to determine these
- developing dispositions such as being resilient, persevering with a task and showing empathy for others
- developing a strong sense of security and belonging.

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Where practices were less effective, educators were often inconsistent in their approach and use of strategies to support children's social competence and emotional well-being. Poor or ineffective practice included:

- restricting children's access to play areas and/or resources
- using negative responses or a 'sharp tone' to manage children's behaviour, especially at large group or mat times
- interrupting children's play with routines or large group times
- ignoring unacceptable behaviour such as children hitting or biting others
- intervening too quickly in disputes between children and solving problems for children rather than helping them learn ways to manage situations themselves
- not being responsive to infants' needs for food and sleep.

Where practices were ineffective, or poor, ERO observed children:

- withdrawing from potentially negative situations rather than attempting to negotiate with others
- being upset by the challenging behaviour of others
- being intimidated and frequently interrupted by others
- being unsettled and frequently crying, particularly evident in younger infants and toddlers
- hitting and screaming at others
- being bored and frustrated because of limited resources and/or choices in the physical environment
- having their ideas, views and preferences discounted by educators
- being disruptive at large group times
- being restricted in high chairs for prolonged periods
- busy, but not engaged in meaningful interactions or sustained conversations.

### **PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND WHĀNAU**

#### **What did ERO ask?**

*In what ways does this service work in partnership with parents and whānau to support children's developing social and emotional competence?*

#### **What did ERO find?**

Warm, trusting, respectful and affirming relationships were integral to developing children's social competence and emotional well-being. Getting to know children and their whānau was an important first step for educators in developing relationships. This included respecting and valuing the role of parents and whānau in their child's learning and development.



The ways in which children and their whānau were welcomed into a service mattered. Processes for settling children took account of their individual needs and circumstances and included parents. Parents were comfortable being in the service and were encouraged to participate in the programme.

Communication was important and worked best when it was two-way and timely. Managers and educators were approachable and accessible to parents at times that suited both parties. Informal daily conversations often focused on a child's social and emotional well-being. Sometimes documents, such as daily notebooks for infants and toddlers, detailed information about the child's health and well-being. Multiple forms of communication between educators and parents included messages in pockets on the wall, email, face-to-face, website, newsletters, phone calls, questionnaires, whānau hui, and centre diaries. Educators and parents discussed aspects of children's behaviour as needed. These conversations often focused on children's friendships, how they were feeling, and how educators were helping children to socialise with others in the service.

Inclusive assessment practices were integral to working in partnership with parents and whānau. Where partnerships were well developed, services formally and regularly sought input from parents and whānau. Children's portfolios or profile books that documented their learning were used as a basis for conversations with them and their parents. These were easily accessed and parent and whānau contributions were encouraged along with parent involvement in deciding next learning steps for their child. Fundamental to well-developed partnerships was the knowledge and respect that educators had for each child's language and culture.

Strategies that worked well in building a partnership between parents and educators to support children's social competence and emotional well-being included:

- sensitive and responsive processes for welcoming children and their whānau into the service
- transition processes in services and to school that focused on continuity and belonging for children and their whānau
- formal meetings and interviews about children's learning and development
- photos displayed on family/whānau boards
- educators writing narrative assessments (social stories) about children's developing social competence
- interactions that were responsive to children's preferences for learning and their well-being
- involving parents in review of policies or guidance associated with social competence.

Where partnerships were limited or not yet developed, services needed to:

- ensure educators were more available and approachable for parents
- include parent and whānau aspirations, expectations and perspectives in the programme, particularly in planning and assessment processes
- be more responsive to cultural diversity by acknowledging and valuing children's language and culture
- acknowledge parents' role as confident partners in their child's learning
- manage relationship issues between adults in the service.

### POLICY AND PRACTICE

#### What did ERO ask?

*How does this service's behaviour management policy or positive guidance procedure align to educator practice?*

#### What did ERO find?

Where ERO found strong alignment between services' policy and practice, documented expectations were well understood by educators. In some services, the principles of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* underpinned practice with a strong focus on relationships and empowering children as capable learners.

Where services formally reviewed their policy or guidance document, this often led to increased awareness and clarity of expectations and more consistent practice. In some services, policy review resulted in particular emphasis on an aspect of the curriculum or led to a new focus for self review. In others, policy review happened as a result of an incident or concern. Self review sometimes included feedback or input from parents and whānau. It also involved educators and/or managers collecting data by observing practice and comparing it to policy expectations.

Where self review was more informal, policies and guidance documents were discussed at meetings and modified or endorsed by managers and/or educators. This often meant the service did not know how well policy expectations were implemented in practice, or how effective educators' practices were in bringing about positive outcomes for children.

Where policy and practice were not well aligned, it was often because policies did not include explicit expectations and strategies to guide practice. Policies in some services focused on what not to do rather than giving guidance about strategies to support children's developing social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour. In some instances, policies were generic and had been developed by an umbrella association or organisation without involving educators and parents from the individual service.

Other factors influencing the lack of alignment between policy and practice included:

- a high turnover of educators, and services not having good induction processes to ensure all educators were familiar with expectations
- services not having a process to evaluate how well practice and policy were aligned.

## MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

### What did ERO ask?

*How are managers and educators supported in managing children's challenging behaviours?*

### What did ERO find?

Across the services, managers and educators were generally well supported in responding to children's challenging behaviour. Findings highlight the importance of well understood and agreed guidance or policy related to managing challenging behaviour. Such guidance sets out expectations, promotes a common understanding of what constitutes challenging behaviour, and documents strategies and agreed approaches.

In some services, managers and educators exchanged information, shared concerns, developed strategies, made decisions, solved problems and reflected on their practice. These discussions often took place at team or staff meetings and gave educators the opportunity to learn from each other, gain an understanding of expectations and give and receive feedback. At such meetings managers were often involved in decisions about strategies and next steps. This led to increased consistency of practice.

Some services accessed professional learning and development (PLD) opportunities to upskill and support educators. Topics for PLD included:

- positive behaviour management
- conflict resolution
- effective communication
- positive parenting
- identifying and supporting children with special needs.

In some services, PLD contributed to development and review of guidance and policy documents. It also led to understanding among educators about agreed strategies, and promoted ongoing discussion. Educators were encouraged to use agreed strategies to manage children's challenging behaviour through services' induction processes, and advice and guidance programmes associated with teacher registration.

Where services were using external support from specialist services and agencies, this was useful and timely. Some services were proactive in seeking support and had developed good working relationships with external agencies and specialist services. ERO found few instances where services had difficulty getting appropriate external support.

Managers and/or leaders played an important role in providing guidance, particularly where services were part of an umbrella association or organisation. Being part of a cohesive team was important to managing challenging behaviour. Support for each other, and a shared understanding of appropriate, agreed strategies were critical to implementing a consistent approach.

Modelling of good practice by professional leaders or other educators was a constructive way to help educators. This included sharing specific strategies and collaborating on solving problems.

The learning environment played a key role in developing children's understanding of appropriate behaviour. In some services, educators fostered children's emotional resilience. Children were learning to trust that the environment was fair and consistent. They had opportunities to solve problems and make real choices and decisions, rather than always relying on adults to fix or sort out issues. Children also had access to a wide range of resources and were engaged in meaningful play.

Strategies used by educators to manage challenging behaviour included:

- establishing and discussing rules and expectations with children, using pictorial prompts with younger children
- noting strategies to be used by educators in the daily diary
- redirecting children
- actively listening to children
- knowing and respecting children's preferences
- considering children's dispositions when grouping them for specific activities
- being aware of practice that has the potential to disengage children, for example long or highly teacher- directed mat times
- developing individual plans for children that need additional help with their learning and/or behaviour.

ERO identified several issues for services in managing challenging behaviour. In some services new, inexperienced or unqualified educators were not aware of strategies, or confident in using them when children's behaviour was challenging. Sometimes a lack of stimulation in the environment, or a shortage of resources led to disruptive behaviour.

Where challenging behaviour was not addressed or responded to this was often because educators were ignoring it or were not aware of it. In these services, situations often escalated beyond a single incident.

**PLAYCENTRES: SUPPORTING CHILDREN’S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE, AND UNDERSTANDING OF APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR IN**

Playcentres are parent co-operatives. The parents and whānau of children attending each Playcentre are responsible for the management of the centre on a day-to-day basis. Playcentres are affiliated to regional associations which belong to the New Zealand Playcentre Federation. Playcentres generally have a high ratio of adults to children. Some are small and located in rural areas and others suit the needs of families in urban areas.

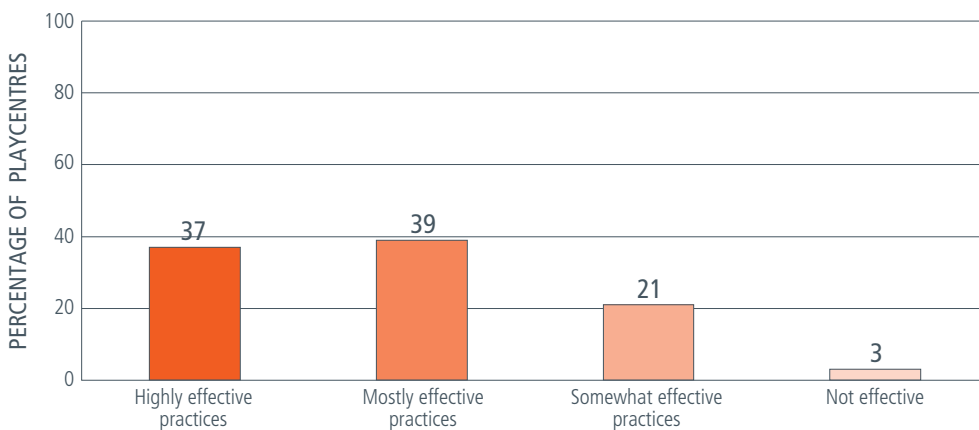
As well as providing early childhood programmes for children, they offer educational programmes for parents and whānau that can lead to parents gaining a recognised qualification: *The Playcentre Education Diploma Curriculum 2000*.

In this evaluation, some Playcentres had a high turnover of parents, and others had a stable group of parents with a mix of experienced and new members. Parent involvement in training programmes that led to qualifications, also varied across the

**What did ERO find?**

Figure 2, shows that three quarters of the Playcentres in this evaluation had highly or mostly effective practices to support children’s developing social and emotional competence, and understanding of appropriate behaviour.

Figure 2: Effectiveness in Playcentres



In Playcentres where practices were highly effective, the centre's philosophy strongly underpinned the curriculum and guided how parents supported children's learning. Warm, positive and respectful relationships were at the heart of effective practice. High levels of parent involvement in training meant there were good role models, and new parents were well supported in their use of strategies that helped children's developing sense of belonging.

Playcentre workshops for parents and whānau, along with introductory/induction programmes and involvement in gaining qualifications through training programmes, were crucial to effective practice. This was especially so when parents were faced with children's challenging behaviours. Association personnel, such as liaison or field officers, also supported individual Playcentres by undertaking observations of individual children and providing formal feedback on strategies parents were using with children with challenging behaviours.

The collaborative and inclusive culture of Playcentres with highly effective practices meant parents had opportunities to discuss issues as they arose. This often happened during daily session evaluation meetings, where parents could talk about what had happened at a session and share successful strategies. In many of these Playcentres, regular and well-considered review of positive guidance procedures ensured close alignment between guidance and practice. Sometimes review was triggered by an incident or concern during a session. Spontaneous reviews enabled parents to focus on an aspect of policy or practice, and make changes based on what was happening for children.

In the 24 percent of Playcentres where practices were less effective in supporting children's social competence, and understanding of appropriate behaviour, issues related to:

- a high turnover of parents and/or the parent group being very new
- minimal or no involvement in Playcentre training courses
- limited understanding of policies and/or procedures for guiding children's behaviour resulting in inconsistent practice amongst parents
- policy guidance from the umbrella association being out-of-date or not providing strategies that focus on positive guidance
- a lack of support from their umbrella association.

### Examples of how three effective Playcentres supported children's developing social and emotional competence, and appropriate behaviour

Warm, positive relationships are a feature of the Playcentre. Friendships between children are well established and their enjoyment of playing together is highly evident. All parents are part of discussions when concerns are raised and possible solutions discussed. Unhurried sessions, where adults take time to be involved with children, support their engagement in positive learning experiences.

Practices are well aligned to policy expectations. Playcentre training provides all centre members with an understanding of policy, procedures and practices about managing behaviour and supporting children's growing social and emotional competence. Discussion about the behaviour management policy is part of induction of new centre members. Open and honest discussions about children's challenging behaviour help parents and give them strategies for managing this.

The Association's positive guidance policy is well implemented. Parents provide good support for children in managing their frustrations and strongly encourage them to be considerate and caring of others. Older children have opportunities to nurture and care for younger children and younger children learn by observing and imitating older peers. Children are capable and independent learners. They move confidently between areas of play, pursuing activities that interest them and often maintaining high levels of engagement for long periods. Children confidently initiate and maintain conversations with adults and seek their assistance. Toddlers have good opportunities for sensory play and exploring the environment.

Parents collectively discuss and plan for children at termly and daily evaluation meetings. They identify strategies to support children to include others in their play; develop self control in challenging situations, foster friendships, and cater for children missing friends or babies who are fearful of strangers. Parents' interactions with children are consistently respectful, affirming, and caring.

The Association field officer and more experienced members provide strong support for newer members in their parenting and educator roles. A feature is the very high level of members who have Course 3 and one member with a Playcentre Association Certificate. Playcentre Association workshops and parent education courses promote positive guidance and peaceful, cooperative interactions in accordance with Playcentre philosophy and the basic rules of behaviour. If necessary, members collectively discuss ways to manage challenging behaviour at end of session evaluation meetings. The centre is very well managed with well developed systems of self review.

Relationships and interactions are warm and promote respect. Children from many ethnic backgrounds are included with their families in centre activities. Parents support each other, mindful of responsibilities for all children, not just their own. Children are encouraged to play in mixed age groups, learning how to interact with those younger and those older. Adults listen to children, respond appropriately to them and are sensitive to their feelings.

Routines and rituals foster leadership and independence. At flexible kai time children pour their own drink of water, collect their own food box and engage in table conversations. Although adults are hovering, they often deliberately leave children to have their own space and independent learning time.

### **KINDERGARTENS: SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE, AND UNDERSTANDING OF APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR**

Kindergartens are teacher-led services that are managed and administered by kindergarten associations. Associations are responsible for governance and management of individual kindergartens in their area. All kindergarten teachers are registered and hold a recognised early childhood qualification. Most kindergarten associations employ or contract senior teachers or professional services managers who have responsibility for monitoring and managing the quality of education and care provided for children.

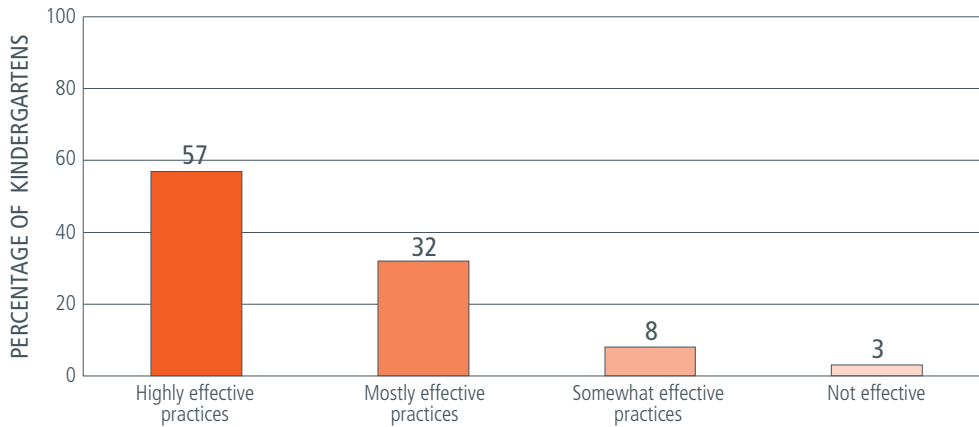
Many of the 80 kindergartens in this evaluation were located in increasingly culturally diverse communities. Some had shifted from sessional to all-day licences, leading to changes in adult:child ratios and in the mix of ages of children attending.

#### **What did ERO find?**

Figure 3, shows that 89 percent of the kindergartens in this evaluation had highly or mostly effective practices to support children's developing social and emotional competence.



Figure 3: Effectiveness in kindergartens



Respectful, responsive relationships were central to highly effective practice. Philosophy statements outlined what is valued and set the foundation for the nature of relationships. Teachers were committed to working closely with parents and whānau. They had high expectations for children's learning and behaviour. Deliberate teaching of social skills helped children express their feelings and listen to others. Teachers were also skilful at knowing when to intervene and when to stand back and allow children to negotiate and resolve problems. An 'unhurried' environment meant there was time for rich and sustained conversations between adults and children.

Where practice was highly effective, kindergartens were welcoming for children and their families. Physical environments were stimulating, offering children genuine choices and supporting high levels of engagement. Children had opportunities to explore their ideas and interests with teachers and to solve problems. They were skilled at supporting each other as articulate and competent communicators, valuing friendships and learning about being a friend in a trusting and secure environment. Children were highly aware of expectations and often involved in determining and reviewing rules, limits and boundaries. They were developing a strong sense of belonging.

Most kindergartens benefited from their association's ongoing, targeted PLD and association policy guidance and support. Guidance and expectations for self review helped to ensure alignment between policy to guide teachers to support children's social competence and practice.

Issues in the 11 percent of kindergartens where practices were less effective included:

- teachers not acknowledging or being responsive to children's cultural backgrounds
- teachers not taking time to build shared understandings of expectations when teaching teams changed
- children busy, but not engaged in meaningful interactions with teachers or their peers
- teachers not noticing, or being aware of, inappropriate behaviours, confrontations or conflicts between children
- the environment offering limited resources or choices for children, which led to conflicts among children
- poor management of group times resulting in some children being disruptive.

### Examples of how four effective kindergartens supported children's developing social and emotional competence

Relationships and interactions are warm and promote respect between children and among children and teachers. Through the programme children are empowered to take increased responsibility for the well-being of themselves and others. Children are involved in developing the rules, limits and boundaries. These are well known to children. Those who have attended the kindergarten for longer help the new comers and explain the rules to them when and where warranted. Routines and rituals foster children's independence and respect their preferences. Teachers are sensitive to, and knowledgeable about children's cultural backgrounds.

Children start at two years of age at this kindergarten. They gain a real sense of whānau and belonging. Children are developing positive social skills in an emotionally supportive and caring atmosphere. There are many adult and child-initiated opportunities for children to talk in groups where they can share their ideas, take turns and contribute to group problem solve. Teachers are attuned to children and actively listen to them. Positive role modelling by teachers encourages children to develop a range of communication skills and strategies to manage their own behaviour.

Central to the curriculum and the philosophy that underpins it is the value given to children's views and perspectives in the programme and the organisation of the environment. Children's ideas are highly valued. Teachers make a conscious effort to foster in children respect, responsibility and cooperation. Taking responsibility is a disposition that is particularly encouraged, with the expectation that children will take responsibility for the well-being of themselves and others.

Children play, learn and have fun in an environment where they relate to adults and other children, and where teachers model cooperative relationships in their interactions with children, their families and with other staff. Children are secure in their belief and expectation that their opinions and ideas will be heard and that both adults and children will respond appropriately to what they say and share.

The partnership between teachers and parents and whānau is based on principles of inclusiveness and accessibility. Parents feel welcome as they assist with learning, and work alongside or observe their own child. Parents attend an afternoon playgroup where they make friends, talk to each other, and gain parenting skills. The consistency between learning at home and in the kindergarten is increased. Parents describe their improving capability to support their child's emotional and social development.

The environment is a feature in promoting partnership. In the foyer, a large visual display of planning and evaluation of learning provides adults with an immediate connection with the learning is happening, how learning takes place and demonstrates the outcomes of the learning for children. The display is informative and interesting.

Non-English speaking/reading parents are equally able to enjoy the environment as they observe learning through the large photos of children interacting with others. The environment reflects te ao Māori with many objects, charts and descriptions displayed using signage in te reo Māori. The programme for children is truly brought alive for families through this living environment. Tuakana/teina relationships are practised. Children develop clear understandings of acceptable behaviours and are treated with consistency. They learn that they are valued.

Families are valued. Through the open-door policy and strong links with parents, families, parents, whānau and community know that they have a place to come, to "have a cup of tea", talk and share with each other and share with their children in their learning.

**EDUCATION AND CARE CENTRES: SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE, AND UNDERSTANDING OF APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR**

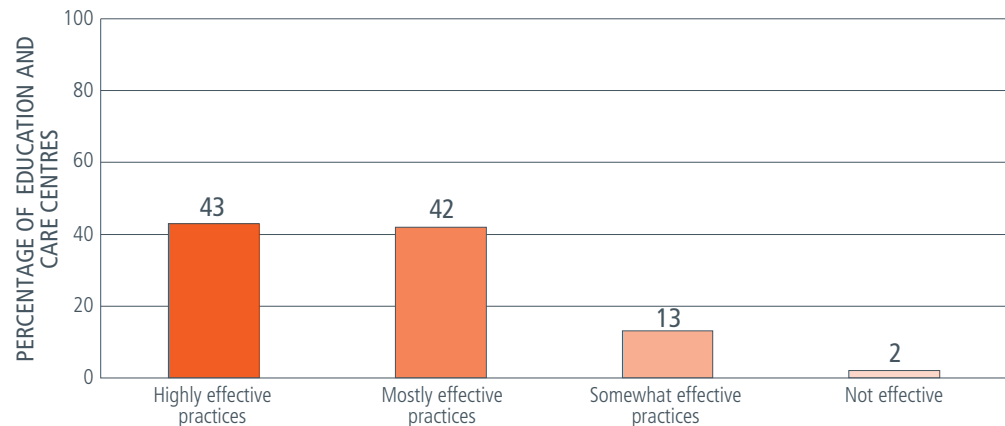
Education and care centres are licensed, teacher-led services. They include all-day and sessional services, Māori immersion and Pacific language centres, and private and community-owned centres. Some centres operate from particular philosophical approaches, such as Montessori or Rudolf Steiner. Others may affiliate to institutions, organisations and community groups such as churches, tertiary providers, businesses or government departments.

Education and care centres cater for children of varying ages. Some are licensed for children under two years of age, some for children over two and others have mixed-age grouping. Children attend for varying hours, with some attending fulltime and others for only a few hours each week.

**What did ERO find?**

Figure 4 shows that 85 percent of the education and care centres in this evaluation had highly or mostly effective practices to support children’s developing social and emotional competence.

Figure 4: Effectiveness in education and care centres



A common feature of highly effective practice in education and care centres was positive relationships between teachers, children and their parents and whānau. Warm, reciprocal and trusting relationships contributed to an environment which was conducive to supporting children’s social competence and emotional well-being. Processes for welcoming, settling and transitioning children included parents and whānau. Interactions

with children were respectful and affirming. Teachers listened to children and took time to get to know them and their families.

Where practice was highly effective, communication was a strength. Managers and teachers shared information in a variety of ways, both formally and informally. These included emails, newsletters, notice boards, photographs, children's portfolios or profile books, parent meetings and whānau hui. Teachers engaged in daily conversations with parents and whānau about their child's learning and development.

Guidance policies were closely aligned to teacher practice. Regular policy review increased teachers' understanding of expectations and approaches. Teachers made good use of a range of strategies to help children work with and alongside others. In some centres, stability of staffing contributed to increased consistency in teachers' expectations of children and in their use of strategies to support children's social and emotional well-being.

Teachers were generally well supported with PLD, particularly related to managing challenging behaviour and working with children with specific learning and behaviour needs.

In the 15 percent of education and care centres where practices were less effective, issues related to:

- a lack of leadership, turnover in teaching team or management and poor induction processes, resulting in new staff being unaware of policy guidelines and expectations and/or inconsistent practice across the teaching team
- policy guidance which had not been reviewed for some time and parents and whānau not being involved in review of policies or procedures
- teachers having a limited repertoire of strategies, and often relying on only one or two strategies, to positively guide children
- poor quality interactions between teachers and children, for example interactions that were not sustained or of sufficient depth to engage children in meaningful learning
- a programme that did not respond to children's interests, failed to provide sufficient stimulation and challenge, and lacked access to sufficient resources
- teachers not being attuned or responsive to tired and/or hungry infants, and infants and toddlers being restricted in highchairs for long periods of time with little interactions from adults
- negative interactions between teachers and children, and teachers using raised voices when interacting with children, for example at group times
- teachers ignoring, or not noticing or being aware of, children's disruptive behaviour.

### Examples of how three effective education and care centres supported children's developing social and emotional competence

Sensitive strategies are used to settle new children. Staff have good, honest, open communication with parents. Parents are confident in asking for advice and help if needed. As a result of self review teachers and parents have a good understanding of the expectations and strategies in the behaviour management policy. Good teamwork contributes to collaboration and consistency amongst staff.

The centre is proactive in accessing support from external agencies. Staff participated in professional development to increase their awareness of neglect and abuse. Teachers are skilful at teaching children to respond appropriately to each other. Recently at a staff meeting teachers reviewed the Behaviour Management policy and talked about what it meant for them as teachers. They also discussed the different strategies they use with children. The policy was also put out to parents to contribute to the review.

Teachers draw on a range of strategies to effectively guide children's social and emotional competence. Children have the time and space to solve their own challenges. Teachers are mindful of adapting the wide range of strategies required to support the development of skills according to the individual child's needs. Strategies employed include:

- helping children to understand their emotions as well as those of others
- providing opportunities to identify and discuss feelings
- providing a calm atmosphere
- alerting children to a change in routine to ensure smooth transitions through the use of music
- being responsive to children's behaviour and capitalising on the teachable moment
- providing spaces for children to retreat to during the course of the day
- varying the pace of the programme.

Teachers, families and children experience respectful and affirming relationships with one another. Teachers are approachable and encourage positive socialising strategies that allow children to play together in groups as they pursue their interests.

Conversations enrich children's thinking and add complexity to their play. Children socialise in group activities and pursue their own interests as individuals, confidently approaching teachers as needed. Teachers work closely with parents and whānau sharing children's social and emotional learning and behaviour.

The head teacher, supported by the professional services manager, business manager and centre manager, initiates and implements effective spontaneous and planned self review. Key outcomes of self review include:

- improved staff appraisal processes
- focused professional development on identified areas for improvement
- routines that promote children's independence and self care skills
- increased opportunities for cooperative play among toddlers and young children.
- High quality self review ensures teachers are provided with effective support and guidance focused on improving social and emotional outcomes for children.

## Conclusion

Generally, ERO's findings present a positive picture of how most services are supporting children's learning and development. However, in a few services ERO found evidence of poor quality practice that is likely to be harmful for children.

ERO found significant variation<sup>18</sup> between service types in the extent to which their curriculum supported children as competent and confident learners. Kindergartens were more likely than Playcentres and education and care centres to effectively support children to be socially and emotionally competent. There were, however, common features across the service types of highly effective practice and practice that was less effective in supporting children's social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour.

The early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, provides a strong foundation for services to plan, implement and evaluate their curriculum for supporting children's developing social competence and emotional well-being. *Te Whāriki* describes experiences and indicative outcomes for infants, toddlers and young children. ERO observed these in action where educator practices were highly effective.

Services should regularly evaluate their curriculum, associated policies and procedures and practices to ensure infants, toddlers and young children are well supported, socially and emotionally. Through this process services can understand the impact of educators' practice on children and their learning outcomes.

One of the factors in services where practice was not effective related to the lack of alignment and the inconsistency of practice between educators. This was often because educators were not aware of the positive guidance expectations set out in policy nor did they understand it. Where practices were highly effective, self review contributed to shared understanding and consistency.

This evaluation has highlighted the importance of educators and parents working in partnership to support children's social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour, particularly when issues arise or children need additional support. Self review needs to include a focus on the effectiveness of services' partnership with parents and whānau in supporting children to develop as competent and confident learners.

<sup>18</sup> Differences in ratings between the types of services were checked for statistical significance using a Kruskal-Wallis H test. The difference in ratings between pairs of service types were checked for statistical significance using a Mann Whitney test.



### NEXT STEPS

ERO recommends that early childhood services regularly review and improve the extent to which:

- educators work in partnership with parents and whānau to support children's developing social competence, emotional well-being and understanding of appropriate behaviour
- their behaviour management policy or positive guidance procedure, and educator practice, are aligned
- they have processes to identify children's challenging behaviours and strategies to respond to them
- their curriculum assists children to develop as socially and emotionally competent and confident learners.

## Appendix 1: Evaluation framework and indicators

Early childhood services can use this evaluation report to review their policies and practices to determine how well their curriculum supports children to develop their social and emotional competence, and understanding of appropriate behaviour. The following questions and indicators could be used to guide self review.

### Overall evaluation question

- How effectively does this service’s curriculum support children to develop their social and emotional competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour?

### Indicators of effective practice

- Relationships and interactions in the service are warm and promote respect between children, between children and educators, and amongst educators, children and parents and whānau.
- Children are empowered to take increased responsibility for the well-being of themselves, others and the group.
- Through the programme and interactions with others, children have opportunities to develop strategies, skills and dispositions that support them in their social interactions with others.
- Children are developing social competencies such as the ability to take on other points of view and develop negotiation strategies.
- Children know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour.
- Children are developing strategies to manage their own behaviour.
- Children are learning appropriate ways of letting other children know that their behaviour is unacceptable or inappropriate.
- Children are offered genuine choices.
- Children are involved in developing the service rules, limits and boundaries.
- The service curriculum provides opportunities for children to discuss and negotiate rights, fairness, and justice with adults.
- Educators, through their interactions with children, emphasise what to do and why, rather than what not to do, in explanations and instructions.
- There are enough resources to promote children’s choices for challenge, revisiting prior learning, wider community experiences, exploration, solitary and group play and their choices are respected.
- Educators use learning conversations (a range of conversation skills) to encourage children to talk and think about relationships, decision making and the consequences of different responses to a given situation or problem.

- Educators notice and positively respond to children's developing social and emotional competence.
- Educators are responsive to children's communication and behaviour and capitalise on the teachable moment to promote social and emotional learning.
- Educators actively listen to children, interpret and respond to non-verbal and verbal communication.
- Educators acknowledge and respond sensitively to children's feelings.
- Educators and children have developed trusting relationships where children are confident to ask questions and seek support.
- Educators understand that challenging behaviour is often a form of communication and should be responded to and managed in accordance with the individual needs of the child.
- Educators model and promote pro-social behaviour in the context of their relationships with children and with other adults (parents and other educators).
- Managers and educators organise and manage the learning environment so that challenging behaviour is minimised or less likely to occur.
- Routines and rituals foster children's independence and respect their preferences.
- Educators use consistent and positive guidance strategies to manage children's challenging behaviours in understanding and dignified ways.
- Educators are sensitive and knowledgeable of cultural factors that are contextually relevant for children.
- Educators are sensitive to different behaviours and know when to seek support.
- Educators use children's interests and strengths to integrate social competencies into learning.
- Assessment, planning and evaluation practices reflect, and are inclusive of, social and emotional development.
- Children experience consistency of expectations/strategies for promoting social and emotional competence from all educators in the service.
- Educators discuss emotions with children in meaningful and supportive contexts.
- Educators are attuned to children's cues.
- The environment is emotionally safe and trustworthy.
- Educators liaise with parents, other professional agencies and establish IEP's for children who require additional support with their communication skills and social interactions.
- The service regularly reviews manager/educator practice associated with supporting children's social and emotional competence.

### Investigative questions

- In what ways does this service work in partnership with parents and whānau to support children's developing social and emotional competence?
  - What opportunities are there for educators to regularly communicate with parents and whānau about their child's learning and development?
  - What opportunities are there for educators to communicate with parents and whānau about their children's developing social and emotional competence?
  - How do the service's policy/procedures acknowledge and include different cultural expectations and practices that parents and whānau might have regarding their children's social and emotional competence?
  - What does the service do to share/consult on its behaviour management policy or positive guidance procedures and practices with parents and whānau?
  - How does the service support parents and whānau in their role in developing their child's social and emotional competence?
  - How does the service provide opportunities for parents and whānau to give feedback about how the service is supporting children to become socially and emotionally competent?
  - How does the service manage complaints about strategies for developing children's social and emotional competence?

### Investigative questions

- How does this service's behaviour management policy or positive guidance procedure align to educator practice?
  - How does the service review its behaviour management policy or positive guidance process and associated practice to ensure alignment of policy/process and practice?
  - How does this service evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies educators use to support children's social and emotional competence?
  - How does the service ensure there is a shared understanding of policy/procedures and what it means for educator practice? How are new staff/educators or relievers made familiar with the policy or document guidance process, and service expectations?
  - How well are the strategies used by educators aligned to the service's documented behaviour management policy or positive guidance procedures?
  - How does the service ensure there are regular opportunities for educators to reflect on how practice is working for them and for children?

### Investigative questions

- How are managers and educators supported to manage children's challenging behaviours?
  - In what ways do educators support each other in understanding and managing challenging behaviour?
  - Do educators share a common understanding of the strategies they will use when children's behaviour is challenging or disruptive?
  - How do leaders in the service access support from relevant agencies when they are dealing with a child with challenging behaviour?
  - Is the available support timely and responsive?
  - Do educators use children's challenging behaviour as a potential learning opportunity?
  - How does the service involve children and their parents and whānau in decisions regarding situations where behaviour is challenging or disruptive?
  - What professional development have managers and educators accessed to support them in understanding and managing challenging behaviour?



## Education Review Offices

### **CORPORATE OFFICE – TARI RANGATŌPŪ**

Level 1, Sybase House  
101 Lambton Quay  
PO Box 2799  
Wellington 6140  
Phone: 04 499 2489 Fax: 04 499 2482  
info@ero.govt.nz

### **TE UEPŪ Ā-MOTU**

**Māori Review Services**  
c/o Corporate Office  
Phone: 04 499 2489 Fax: 04 499 2482  
erotu@ero.govt.nz

### **NORTHERN REGION – TE TAI RAKI**

#### **Auckland**

Level 5, URS Centre  
13-15 College Hill  
Ponsonby  
PO Box 7219, Wellesley Street  
Auckland 1141  
Phone: 09 377 1331 Fax: 09 373 3421  
auckland@ero.govt.nz

#### **Moana Pasefika**

c/o Auckland Office  
Phone: 09 377 1331 Fax: 09 373 3421  
auckland@ero.govt.nz

#### **Hamilton**

Floor 4, ASB Building  
214 Collingwood Street  
Private Bag 3095 WMC  
Hamilton 3240  
Phone: 07 838 1898 Fax: 07 838 1893  
hamilton@ero.govt.nz

### **CENTRAL REGION – TE TAI POKAPŪ**

#### **Napier**

Level 1, Dundas House  
43 Station Street  
Box 4140  
Phone: 06 835 8143 Fax: 06 835 8578  
napier@ero.govt.nz

#### **Whanganui**

Education House  
249 Victoria Avenue  
PO Box 4023  
Whanganui 4541  
Phone: 06 345 4091 Fax: 06 345 7207  
whanganui@ero.govt.nz

#### **Wellington**

Revera House  
48 Mulgrave Street  
Wellington 6011  
PO Box 27 002  
Marion Square  
Wellington 6141  
Phone: 04 381 6800 Fax: 04 499 2482  
wellington@ero.govt.nz

### **SOUTHERN REGION – TE TAI TONGA**

#### **Christchurch**

39 Princess Street  
Christchurch 8041  
P O Box 25102  
Christchurch 8041  
Phone: 03 378 7351 Fax: 03 366 7524  
christchurch@ero.govt.nz

#### **Dunedin**

Floor 9, John Wickliffe House  
265 Princes Street  
Dunedin 9016  
PO Box 902  
Dunedin 9054  
Phone: 03 479 2619 Fax: 03 479 2614  
dunedin@ero.govt.nz

