Provision for Students in Activity Centres

June 2013

Foreword

The Education Review Office (ERO) is an independent government department that reviews the performance of New Zealand's schools and early childhood services, and reports publicly on what it finds.

The whakataukī of 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.

Increasingly, New Zealand students are participating in education programmes delivered in a wider range of settings than the traditional classroom. In this evaluation ERO looked at 14 Activity Centres providing schooling for secondary students. Our findings showed a wide variation in effectiveness. Areas needing attention included governance and management responsibilities, self review, the quality of education programmes, and transition processes for students moving to and from the Activity Centre. This report includes recommendations which, while they apply particularly to Activity Centres in this report, also have implications for other programmes delivered beyond the school gate.

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 work.

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June 2013

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Overview

This report is based on the findings of ERO's reviews of 14 Activity Centres[1] in Term 4, 2012. Activity Centres provide alternative schooling for secondary students. Most students attending Activity Centres are in Years 9 and 10, although some Year 11 students also attend from time to time.[2] Students are referred to Activity Centres by their enrolling schools because they are likely to benefit from a specialist programme that will meet their social and academic needs. Many of the students who attend Activity Centres have long histories of disengagement in school.

Overall ERO found a wide variation in the effectiveness of the Activity Centres. All Activity Centres had secure, caring and supportive environments where staff fostered good relationships with students and their families. Most had given some thought about reintegrating students back into their enrolling schools. The most useful processes began with early planning, involved collaborative decision-making about when and how the transition would happen, and involved the support of the enrolling school.

In the two most effective Centres, the focus was on improving students' academic progress. Teachers actively supported students to gain credits in the New Zealand Qualifications Framework through personalising their learning and incorporating meaningful contexts into programmes. These Centres had good systems for monitoring students' social and academic progress and identifying their strengths and needs.

In the three least effective Activity Centres, teachers had less understanding about how to plan and implement a high quality programme. While staff cared about students, they did not demonstrate the same high expectations for students to make the necessary progress to successfully transition back to school or on to further education.

Limited use of the Ministry of Education's *Activity Centre Policy Toolkit (The Toolkit)* is one of the factors contributing to the variable quality of Activity Centres. *The Toolkit* sets out the key responsibilities for Activity Centres, including those of host and enrolling schools. It also outlines the reporting requirements between the host school and the Ministry of Education. At the time of this evaluation, only one of the 14 Centres was using *The Toolkit*.

Undertaking robust self review that informs strategic planning and development is a key next step for most of the Activity Centre clusters.

In many of the Centres, the quality of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and the provision of professional development and learning for staff needed improvement. Few students had high quality IEPs outlining suitable goals and actions for how they would be supported to reach their goals. Staff in the Activity Centres identified the need for more tailored professional development related to:

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[1] See Appendix 2 for a list of the 14 Activity Centres

[2] Generally students in Years 11-13 who have behavioural issues are catered for through Alternative Education programmes.

- developing IEPs and transition plans
- increasing their knowledge of the career management competencies[3]
- supporting students to make accelerated progress in literacy and mathematics.

Most Activity Centres used learning materials provided by Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu - The Correspondence School (Te Kura) to provide some of the individual learning programmes for their students. One Centre had established a strong relationship with Te Kura and used high quality assessment information to help it meet the diverse learning needs of students. ERO found that the development of consistently positive working relationships between Activity Centres and Te Kura was dependent on both parties having a good understanding of what each student required and being responsive to their specific learning strengths, aspirations and needs.

Activity Centres had inconsistent approaches to drug and sexuality education and the involvement of social workers and health practitioners to support students. A more coordinated approach could help all students manage some significant social or health issues currently compromising their ability to succeed in further education.

Next steps

The Ministry of Education should:

- promote increased awareness and use of the *Activity Centre Policy Toolkit*
- support Activity Centre clusters to access tailored professional learning and development at the individual cluster level related to IEPs, assessment, curriculum development, careers education, strategic planning and self review
- work with the Ministries of Health and Social Development to establish a coordinated approach to improve the health and wellbeing of students placed in Activity Centres.

Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu – The Correspondence School should:
- review the extent to which its programmes and associated liaison with staff in Activity Centres is contributing to positive outcomes for students.

Activity Centres and their cluster schools should:
- develop and implement strategic planning that focuses on improving students' social and educational outcomes
- include, as part of their planning, targeted professional development for Activity Centre staff that is informed by the priorities identified in their individual Centre reports and this report
- ensure there are robust self-review processes in place to inform ongoing improvement
- ensure high quality management, reporting and support processes are implemented across the cluster, consistent with the *Activity Centre Policy Toolkit*

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[3] Ministry of Education (2009) *Career Education and Guidance in New Zealand Schools.*
http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/content/download/2767/35051/file/Career-guidelines-web.pdf

- ensure that all enrolling schools provide high quality support to students in line with the guidelines in the *Activity Centre Policy Toolkit*.

Introduction

Fourteen Activity Centres[4] in New Zealand provide alternative schooling for students in Years 9, 10 and 11 who have difficulties succeeding in mainstream education. Students are referred because their behaviour impedes their own learning outcomes, or that of others, and a specialised programme is the most effective way of meeting their needs. A Ministry of Education (the Ministry) expectation is that each Activity Centre has 20 students in the centre at any one time. These students must have been enrolled at the host school or one of the other schools in the cluster.

At the time of the reviews, 211 students were enrolled across the 14 Activity Centres. Twenty-five percent of these students were New Zealand European; 61 percent were Māori; 12 percent were of Pacific heritage and one percent Asian or other ethnicities.

The main role of Activity Centres is to support students who are not experiencing success at secondary school and transitioning them back to some form of education. Activity Centres do not sit apart from mainstream schools, but sit alongside them as part of a team or process that supports students to build a positive future in learning. In particular, effective Activity Centres require the support of their host school as well as the support of the schools that place students in Activity Centres (the enrolling schools).

Once placed at an Activity Centre, students attend for periods that may vary between two weeks and two years. The length of time a student may stay depends on the policy of the cluster, as well as the identified needs of the student. Most students stay for approximately two terms, after which they are expected to return to school or some other form of education or training.

Governance of the centre is usually delegated to a management committee. In some cases the management committee comprises representatives of all or some of the enrolling schools. In other cases it may include members of the host school's board and staff.

Each Activity Centre has a director, teacher and support staff. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the director who also liaises with parents and whānau, the management committee, key people from external agencies, and community members.[5]

While programmes in each Activity Centre can vary, the daily schedule typically consists of a morning session focusing on numeracy and literacy, often supported by learning materials from Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura). This is followed by an afternoon session where

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[4] See Appendix 2 for a list of the 14 Activity Centres.

[5] In one Centre, these functions were undertaken by a manager appointed by the cluster.

a broader range of curriculum activities is provided, for example in technology, the arts, physical education and health.

In June 2011, the Ministry released, through their regional offices, the *Activity Centre Policy Toolkit* (*The Toolkit*). *The Toolkit* was produced as a result of a 2010 Ministry review of the funding models for Activity Centres and Alternative Education. It is intended to guide Centres with respect to their policies and procedures, and inform cluster personnel about their roles and responsibilities.

The Toolkit outlines how funding for students is managed by the board of trustees of the host school. The host school's board is also responsible for the physical and emotional safety of the students attending the Centre, and for ensuring the Activity Centre complies with relevant legislative requirements. *The Toolkit* sets out clear programme responsibilities and the expectations for how Activity Centres will work with individual students.

ERO reviews Activity Centres every three years. All of the Activity Centres were reviewed in Term 4, 2012. ERO collected data by talking with students, teachers and directors at Activity Centres, host and enrolling school principals and trustees; reading Centre documents; and observing the programme in action. See Appendix 3 for the evaluation framework and indicators used in these reviews.

Findings

According to *The Toolkit*, effective Activity Centres have:

- effective governance and support from the cluster
- clearly understood induction processes for students transitioning into the Centre
- individual education plans, detailing how each student is to be supported to make social and academic progress
- curricula that responds to the individual strengths, aspirations and needs of each student
- connections with parents and whānau that support student learning
- links to social agencies that help manage social and health issues
- transition processes that effectively support students to move to further education.

ERO found that the performance of the 14 Activity Centres was highly variable. All of the Activity Centres were safe and welcoming and typically had good relationships between staff and students. They were all focused on improving the educational and social outcomes for students, although that they had different levels of success for this. The variability was mostly evident in the quality of governance and education programmes, and the success of transition processes for students moving to and from the Activity Centre.

Highly Effective Activity Centres

Two Activity Centres were highly effective across the range of indicators which ERO uses (see Appendix 3 for these indicators). These Centres improved students' learning and supported them to successfully transition to further education or training. Students were supported through day-to-day teaching, with good behaviour being reinforced through appropriate reward systems.

One of the key features of these Activity Centres was the quality of their governance and management. Both had strong management committees that involved the host school and the enrolling schools. In one Activity Centre, all the cluster schools were part of the management committee. In the other Centre, with more schools in the cluster, the management committee was made up of the previous host school, the current host school and the next host school. Schools in this cluster operated as the host school for three years. This meant that each school spent a total of nine years on the management committee, enabling greater continuity in planning and decision-making.

Both Activity Centres had good transition processes for students moving into the centres. Directors and teachers received good information about students from their enrolling schools, which served as a basis for setting up tailored plans for students. Families were included in the transition processes and were kept well informed about the progress of their child throughout their placement in the Centre.

The two highly effective Activity Centres had a clear focus on their role as a 'transition service'. One service had a goal that students should return to school after two terms. The other had a more flexible decision-making process whereby each student, their parents and

Activity Centre staff would jointly determine readiness to return to either their school or move to further education and training. Both Activity Centres had a high rate of students returning or moving to some type of education programme. In 2011, one of these Activity Centres had 21of their 25 students transition to further education, while the other had 25 of their 26 students successfully transition back to school or to another education programme.

Improvements in student learning were identified and well documented at these Activity Centres. Staff closely monitored numeracy and literacy achievement and could demonstrate the significant extent to which most students had progressed while at the Centre. In one of the Centres, six of the seven Year 11 students gained an average of 61 credits in National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), with four achieving NCEA Level 1 in 2011.

Central to this success were the efforts put into developing and meeting each student's individual goals. At one Centre, the IEPs had clear objectives and had an achievement focus. Many different personnel were involved in the IEP development process including students, their families, staff from a student's enrolling school and staff from the Activity Centre. The IEPs included a strong focus on self management and the other key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum.*

Students at these highly effective Activity Centres took increasing responsibility for their learning and confidently discussed their academic and social goals. They also set and monitored their targets for the completion of materials from Te Kura. Students at one Centre took responsibility for structuring their individual learning days, while at the other, students achieved high attendance rates despite some having a considerable distance to travel to get to the Centre.

Families of the students in these Centres received regular updates about their child's progress, either through specific reporting (three-weekly in the case of one Centre) or through regular updates of the IEP. Staff used community resources well and accessed social services on a needs basis for students and their families. One of the Activity Centres had an especially strong relationship with Te Kura which ensured students had learning materials suited to their abilities and interests.

Māori students were supported through the whānau culture of the Activity Centres. This also included daily karakia and the use of te reo me tikanga Māori. At one Centre, Māori youth workers placed a high value on Te Ao Māori and worked to increase staff and students' awareness in this area.

Career education and guidance was a feature in one of these Activity Centres. Students developed career management competencies within the curriculum. As part of their learning, students identified their individual strengths and interests and were encouraged to explore future options and build these into their transition planning. Such planning helped make learning relevant and gave students an understanding of how their overall learning programme was linked to their futures.

Partially Effective Activity Centres

Six of the 14 Activity Centres were judged as partially effective. Students typically made progress during their time at these Centres. A focus on helping students gain the skills necessary to achieve success beyond the Centre meant that the majority of students transitioned back to school or on to some other form of education. Warm, welcoming and attractive environments meant students enjoyed their time at their Centre. Good links with families and whānau were common. Reports about each student's progress were regularly sent home and parents and whānau were involved in the development of their child's IEP.

Most of these Activity Centres had established broad guidelines for how long students should attend. Generally, students were enrolled for between six to 20 weeks. In some Centres students continued to enjoy cultural and sporting links with their enrolling schools, which was likely to have helped with their transition back to that school.

Some of these Activity Centres had many of the characteristics of the highly effective Centres, however not all aspects were evident. In some cases the enrolling schools of these Activity Centres were not as involved in aspects such as governance and the development of student IEPs. This lack of involvement affected the quality of the initial information an Activity Centre received about a student. It also affected the likelihood of each student's successful return to their previous school as staff at the enrolling school lacked the understanding of the gains made by students in their time at the Activity Centre.

ERO observed high expectations for students to achieve, along with positive routines and good levels of academic improvement. However, the quality and usefulness of each student's IEP was variable. Students at some of these Activity Centres were not aware of their specific IEP goals. In one Centre, students' IEPs related only to the numeracy and literacy programme.

Overall, the learning programmes in these Activity Centres were sound, with clear links to *The New Zealand Curriculum*, including the key competencies. Career education was not as evident. Students could be better supported to develop a greater self awareness and an ability to explore potential options for the future if Activity Centres staff increased their understanding of the career management competencies.[6]

Some effective approaches supported Māori students, including increasing teachers' awareness and knowledge of students' whakapapa and the use of te reo me tikanga Māori. A focus on Te Ao Māori in the arts programme and daily karakia showed that students' culture was valued. Teachers at one of the Activity Centres were involved in the Te Kotahitanga professional development programme through their host school.

These Activity Centres were still developing a strategic approach to increasing the involvement of their enrolling schools to improve current practice. Cluster-wide plans were not in place outlining necessary improvement actions or clear roles and responsibilities.

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[6] Ministry of Education. (2009) *Career Education and Guidance in New Zealand Schools.*
http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/content/download/2767/35051/file/Career-guidelines-web.pdf

Activity Centre clusters need to use robust self-review processes to evaluate the effectiveness of their programmes in terms of outcomes for students.

Minimally Effective Activity Centres

Three of the Activity Centres were judged as minimally effective. These Centres had appropriate environments and staff had good relationships with students, including Māori students. Te Ao Māori was valued through practices such as daily karakia and use of te reo Māori, as well as through connections with whānau. Governance and resourcing was well managed through good working relationships with the host school. ERO found evidence that some students made progress during their time at these Activity Centres. However, literacy and mathematics data was not well managed and IEPs did not establish specific enough goals and strategies to support each student's academic progress and social development.

The focus on transitioning students was not as evident. These Centres tended to have fewer guidelines about how long students should stay and less urgency about moving students back to school or on to other education. The data available suggested that, at these Centres, fewer students returned to their schools or on to further education. In one Centre in 2011, only 14 of their 36 students transitioned back to school or on to some other form of education.

In two of the three Activity Centres, cluster schools were far less involved in transition processes and in the overall running of the Centre. For example, enrolling schools were not active participants in induction processes that guided the transition of a student into the Centre. In some cases, enrolling schools provided a limited amount of achievement information about a student placed in an Activity Centre.

Across all three Activity Centres, the governance relationship was typically limited to one with the host school without a collective response from all the cluster schools to achieving the best outcomes for these students. These Activity Centres had limited evidence of a strong strategic focus on reviewing how teaching, learning and transitions could continue to be improved.

Not Effective Activity Centres

Three of the Activity Centres were judged as not effective. These Centres had respectful and caring environments with good relationships between staff and students. Despite this, they did not have a consistent focus on students improving their behaviour and academic results or on their return to some form of education. Dated reading materials and poor information and communication technology (ICT) resources contributed to environments that were not sufficiently engaging for students.

Overall, the quality of the learning programmes in these three Centres was poor. IEPs were either not evident or had little use for promoting high achievement expectations for students. Students would benefit from their teachers having greater knowledge of a range of numeracy and literacy assessment tools they could use to gain information about students' strengths and needs and use it to plan a tailored and meaningful curriculum. Staff also need to extend their knowledge of the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum* to help them recognise

and focus on improving students' social skills. Professional development in the career management competencies would further assist staff in these Centres to understand the importance of students developing self awareness of their strengths, exploring options for the future and taking action to meet their goals.

In these Centres, students' attendance patterns, and engagement and achievement levels were inconsistent and not well monitored. ERO found limited evidence of the students successfully transitioning to further education in 2011. These Centres were not actively preparing students with the skills necessary to move back to their school or on to further education.

These Activity Centres had not, in recent times, been well-supported by their cluster schools, and management committees had not overseen their work. A lack of strategic planning to improve student outcomes meant that staff had little guidance and support. Staff and students in these Centres had too often been 'out of sight and out of mind' from the schools in the cluster. Two of three Activity Centre clusters were actively attempting to remedy their performance in this area. Both host and enrolling schools were working to develop plans to lift the quality of their Activity Centre.

Links to Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu – The Correspondence School (Te Kura)

Most Activity Centres used Te Kura programmes as the basis of their literacy and mathematics programmes. Other learning areas supported by Te Kura programmes included social studies and science. The extent to which Activity Centres and Te Kura worked well together appeared to be linked to the quality of the liaison between them, as well as the overall readiness of the Activity Centre to use Te Kura materials as part of an individualised programme for each student.

One of the highly effective Activity Centres had an excellent relationship with their liaison person from Te Kura. This effective liaison with Te Kura meant the types of learning materials provided were tailored for each student's strengths, needs and interests.

ERO observed Te Kura lessons in some Centres that engaged some students, while in others students were less interested and needed redirection by staff to do the tasks. When Activity Centre staff did not have good information about students' achievement and progress, and where the liaison was not as strong, Te Kura materials were more likely to have been used as activities to keep the students busy rather than as a programme to accelerate their progress. In these Centres, students did not have a clear set of goals to work towards and hence the materials from Te Kura were not well linked to students' interests, strengths and needs.

Health and social support for students in Activity Centres

Each of the Activity Centres is tasked with managing the pastoral care of students, as well as their educational development. Pastoral care focused on issues associated with smoking, sexual and reproductive health, and drug and alcohol use. For many students these issues had contributed to their previous lack of engagement and success in education.

ERO observed some effective practices across the Activity Centres in dealing with health and social issues. Staff often had good connections with health and social agencies to support students. However, ERO observed considerable variation in how social and health issues were managed. For example, some Centres allowed students to smoke in designated areas while others expected and maintained a smoke-free environment.

Smoking is just one of many issues affecting student health and wellbeing. ERO suggests that a more coordinated approach is needed to support students with social and health issues. There is potential for a targeted investment from health and welfare agencies to further improve outcomes for students in these Centres.

Ministry of Education Support

Activity Centre Policy Toolkit (The Toolkit)

ERO found that only one of the 14 Activity Centres was using *The Toolkit* released by the Ministry in July 2011. Twelve centres were not using *The Toolkit,* and one had a copy in draft form and was not sure of its status as a policy document.

The Toolkit has the potential to support Activity Centres to serve students more effectively. It has a clear focus on improving outcomes for students, making the service available to as many students as possible (through the enrolment expectations), and ensuring that the relationships between host and enrolling schools work in the interests of students.

The Ministry of Education should increase awareness of *The Toolkit* and the expectations described in this document. Centres' lack of familiarity with this document has meant that most of them are not currently meeting expectations relating to stakeholder roles and responsibilities (particularly host and enrolling schools), reporting accountabilities, performance outcomes measures, and enrolment numbers. *The Toolkit* should also provide the clusters with clearer guidelines as to how Activity Centre resources are to be distributed by the host school.

The Toolkit outlines an expectation that the Activity Centres will regularly report a wide range of outcomes to the Ministry. ERO found variation in the extent to which the reports were being completed and in the reliability of the information included in the reports. Some of the reports were compliance focused with little emphasis on improvements. Centres should be supported to use the Ministry's self-reporting processes as a regular part of their self review. The Ministry should also consolidate any systems for monitoring and responding to reporting from each of the Activity Centres.

Students with special needs

One Centre reported an instance where the Ministry of Education's special education staff removed their support for a student because the student was now in an Activity Centre. More information is needed to determine the extent of this practice. Ideally students with special needs, who are placed in an Activity Centre, should receive intensive support to make the most of their time in the Centre and have the best possible chance to make a positive transition back to school or on to further education.

Curriculum development and assessment support

Most Activity Centre staff felt that they would benefit from some tailored professional development. This view was also supported by host school staff and management committees. While staff in some Centres had taken up opportunities to participate in professional development with host school teachers, this did not always meet their specific needs. They also expressed a keen desire to meet with staff at other Activity Centres to talk about their work. It may be useful for staff in Activity Centres to be able to work with colleagues who work in Alternative Education, given the similarities in their contexts. Staff also noted that a lack of access to relieving staff was a barrier to their participation in professional development.

ERO's previous findings[7] about professional development suggest that high quality professional learning and development for Activity Centre staff should be closely tied to the contexts in which they work, so that what they learn will be applied to classroom learning. Such development should also:

- be coordinated, well led and able to be sustained
- challenge teachers' assumptions about their practice
- be informed by analyses of student achievement and relevant educational research
- be engaging for teachers and coordinated with Centre-wide support for teachers and learners.

It is less likely that one-off courses will be effective in helping staff in Activity Centres to transform the quality of their teaching and learning. Instead, high quality professional learning and development based within each Centre should target the specific development needs of the staff and be linked to the overall development plan for each Activity Centre.

Improving practice in activity centres

ERO has identified the areas where practices in Activity Centres could be improved. Often it is about minimising some practices and maximising others. Table 2 describes some of the practices that Centres could do less of and what they could do to improve.

Table 2: Improving practice in Activity Centres

Less of this	More of this
Accepting poor quality or no information from enrolling schools.	Requiring enrolling schools to provide good quality and useful information about students' achievement in literacy and mathematics.
Accepting deficit thinking about students' capabilities, and their capacity to improve.	Believing that students can improve and helping them to plan for improvement through high quality IEPs.
Activity centre programmes sit apart from those in enrolling schools.	Programmes that have links back to what students are doing in their enrolling schools so that students can seamlessly move back to their schools. Enrolling school teachers are involved in the IEP and helping to co-construct learning pathways for students.
Expecting students to make all the changes necessary to return to school.	Expecting students and enrolling school staff to make changes that support students' successful transition back into school.

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[7] See, for example, ERO (2009) *Managing Professional Learning and Development in Secondary Schools*. Wellington: Education Review Office.

Expecting students to make a successful transition back into school without planning for the transition.	Preparing for the transition through involving students, teachers, parents and whānau, Activity Centre staff and external agencies.
Activity Centre staff working in isolation.	Activity Centre staff networking with other Activity Centre staff and are involved in host school professional learning and development.
Making assumptions about the effectiveness of the Centre.	Using frameworks and indicators to carry out robust Centre self review.

Conclusion

ERO found that the quality of 14 Activity Centres varied across the country. While each of the Activity Centres had good relationships with students and their families, and had created warm and supportive environments, there were differences in how well they supported students to make progress, achieve success, and return to their school or transition to some form of education.

The highly effective Activity Centres had the following characteristics:

- effective management committees with supportive enrolling schools
- a strong focus on students making social and academic progress while at the Centre, and successful transition when they leave
- high quality IEPs
- responsive staff, curricula and support systems.

An important factor was the poor implementation of *The Toolkit*. Most Activity Centres were not using *The Toolki*t. The Ministry had also not prioritised the use of *The Toolkit* and, at the time of this evaluation, had not taken steps to remedy this situation.

ERO found considerable variability in the support provided to Activity Centres by cluster schools. A greater focus from the Ministry on the implementation of *The Toolkit* would emphasise the different roles that schools in each cluster should take to support their Centre.

Further initiatives are needed to improve the effectiveness of many of the Activity Centres. Tailored professional development is needed for many staff in Activity Centres to support them to develop high quality IEPs and implement a meaningful curriculum that assists students to make necessary gains in literacy and mathematics and develop their social skills. A professional development strategy should be developed that supports staff to improve the quality of transition plans for students. Staff also need to use the career management competencies as part of an overall approach to careers education in these Centres. Activity Centres should undertake robust self review to identify priorities for improvement that are incorporated into cluster strategic plans.

It would be worthwhile for Activity Centres to work with Te Kura to review how well Te Kura programmes serve their students. They could also review, through analysis of

pre and post test results, the extent to which Te Kura programmes accelerate the progress of students in literacy and mathematics, and whether this acceleration might be better achieved through a more personalised approach. Te Kura staff could usefully support teachers in this evaluation process by providing information about the achievement of students undertaking their programmes. Consistently positive working relationships between Activity Centres and Te Kura depend on both parties having a good understanding of what each student requires and being responsive to their specific learning strengths, aspirations and needs.

Some students in Activity Centres have significant social or health issues that could compromise their ability to succeed in further education. Potentially, the support for students in Activity Centres extends beyond the scope of education and may also require specific strategies from other government agencies. Students would benefit from a more consistent and coordinated approach to drug and sexuality education that includes the involvement of social workers and health practitioners.

Next steps

The Ministry of Education should:

- promote increased awareness and use of the *Activity Centre Policy Toolkit*
- support Activity Centre clusters to access tailored professional learning and development, at the individual cluster level related to IEPs, assessment, curriculum development, careers education, strategic planning and self review
- work with the Ministries of Health and Social Development to establish a coordinated approach to improve the health and wellbeing of students placed in Activity Centres.

Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu – The Correspondence School should:
- review the extent to which its programmes and associated liaison with staff in Activity Centres is contributing to positive outcomes for students.

Activity Centres and their cluster schools should:
- develop and implement strategic planning that focuses on improving students' social and educational outcomes
- include, as part of their planning, targeted professional development for Activity Centre staff, that is informed by the priorities identified in their individual Centre reports and this report
- ensure there are robust self-review processes in place to inform ongoing improvement
- ensure high quality management, reporting and support processes are implemented across the cluster, consistent with the *Activity Centre Policy Toolkit*
- ensure that all enrolling schools provide high quality support to students in line with the guidelines in the *Activity Centre Policy Toolkit*.

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Host School*   The school that receives resources from the Ministry of
                                      Education to provide an Activity Centre programme.

Cluster of Schools*   All other state or state integrated schools in the geographic
                                      vicinity [of an Activity Centre] with secondary aged
                                      students.

Enrolling School*   A member of the cluster of schools that has a student on its
                                      roll attending an Activity Centre [or could potentially enrol
                                      students in that Activity Centre].

Management Committee   A group of representatives from several enrolling schools,
                                      the host school, and sometimes from the community, who
                                      help the director to set the direction for the Activity Centre,
                                      ensure that the centre is effectively managed, and monitor
                                      that the Activity Centre is achieving the goals that have been
                                      set.

Individual Education Plan (IEP)   A plan, developed collaboratively by a range of people who
                                      have expertise and an interest in promoting the student's
                                      progress, that: "records the student's current strengths and
                                      successes; identifies a few clear, achievable, measurable
                                      goals that build on current strengths and reflect next learning
                                      steps; identifies success criteria for each goal [set in the IEP
                                      process]; identifies opportunities for the student to engage
                                      with new ideas and practise new learning"; [and the points in
                                      time when the plan will be reviewed].[8]

*Definitions sourced from the *Activity Centre Policy Toolkit*, (Ministry of Education, 2011)

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[8] Ministry of Education (2011) *Collaboration for Success: Individual Education Plans*. Wellington: Learning
Media

Appendix 2: Activity Centres in this evaluation

Akina Activity Centre (Hastings)

Auckland Secondary Schools Centre (West Auckland)

Awhina Activity Centre (Rotorua)

Hutt Valley Activity Centre (Wellington)

Invercargill Activity Centre (Invercargill)

London House Learning Centre (Dunedin)

Manawatu Community High School (Palmerston North)

Napier Community Activity Centre (Napier)

Papakura Activity Centre (South Auckland)

Porirua Activity Centre (Wellington)

Taranaki Activity Centre (Spotswood)

Te Kura o Waipuna (Auckland)

Turanganui-ā-Kiwa Activity Centre (Gisborne)

Wellington Activity Centre (Wellington)

Appendix 3: Evaluation framework and indicators

In evaluating the quality of Activity Centres, ERO focused on the following questions:

- How well are students achieving and progressing?
- How well is the Activity Centre focused on improving educational and social outcomes for each student?
- To what extent is the Activity Centre part of a cluster-wide plan for supporting students in the Centre?
- How effectively managed are the processes used in transitioning students to further education, training or employment?

ERO developed a specific set of indicators (see below) outlining quality at an Activity Centre. These indicators were informed by *The Toolkit* and adapted from indicators used in earlier evaluations. They were originally sourced from the literature on good practice in catering for at-risk students in alternative education settings.

Dimension: Outcomes	Indicators
Educational outcomes/ Promoting students' engagement achievement and progress	• Students show signs of meaningful progress during their time at the centre. • Students are engaged and enjoy learning. • Students are achieving in national qualifications (age 14+). • Work samples provide evidence that students are achieving. • Parents and whānau are satisfied with their child's achievement. • High priority is given to achievement in literacy and mathematics. • Planning in literacy and mathematics is appropriate for meeting the specific requirements of each student.
Social Outcomes	• Students are healthy. Any significant social or health issues are addressed through appropriate agencies.
Student engagement	• Students are engaged in discussions about their learning and learning processes. • Students have opportunities to explore their interests and strengths. • Students have clear and challenging goals or expectations for learning. • Students take responsibility for their own learning. • Students state that they enjoy learning and can say how it is relevant to their ongoing achievement and pathways.
Quality of curriculum, planning and assessment	• Teachers are making use of information about students (e.g. assessment information) to plan, implement and review the curriculum for them.[9] • Planning reflects the need to identify and develop the interests and strengths of students. • Educational activities include contexts that are authentic and relevant to students. • Topics and themes link to situations outside the classroom context and are relevant to students.

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[9] The question applies to the IEP process and to centre-wide curriculum design and review.

	• Students are able to investigate their own questions. • Resources are appropriate, accessible and enhance the programme. • Classroom activity is engaging and challenging for students. • Students receive high quality feedback on their learning. • High quality career education and guidance is given with an emphasis on transition to the workplace or further education/training.
Identifying student needs	• Teachers and leaders use valid and reliable approaches to identify the educational strengths and weaknesses of students. • Teachers and leaders have sought and used the student's point of view with regard to what supports their learning. • Teachers and leaders have processes in place for identifying and supporting the needs of students in relation to any physical, sensory, psychological, neurological, behavioural or intellectual impairments. • Teachers and leaders have culturally responsive processes to identify and support the needs and aspirations of Māori and Pacific students and their parents and whānau and these are embedded in the curriculum and the tikanga of the Centre.
Sustaining student development and gains	• Programmes offered to students engage them in learning and in knowing about their pathways to further education, training or employment. • There are processes for accessing and maintaining coherent interagency support for students while they are in Activity Centres and after they move on to further education, training or employment. • Integrating key competencies (from The New Zealand Curriculum) into the programme.
Individual Education Plans (IEPs)	• IEPs have clear goals for learning or development. • IEPs explain the processes to be used to support students to reach their goals. • IEPs are integrated into the exit transition of the student. • IEPs are regularly reviewed and revised in line with student progress and needs. • IEPs contain a plan for future education/employment. • IEPs contain an understanding of the student's exit transition and what has to happen to support that transition. • IEPs include an indication of what the student wants to achieve in the residence to prepare them for their future education, training or employment. • The IEP incorporates the key competencies (of The New Zealand Curriculum).
Pedagogy for at risk students	• Educational activities involve authentic problems, and are relevant to students. • There are non-authoritarian and non-coercive classroom structures where power is shared between the student and teacher, e.g. classroom rule sharing, negotiated outcomes (excellence). • Staff support the development of the key competencies (of The New Zealand Curriculum). • Staff apply strategies to limit negative behaviour. • Topics and themes link to situations outside the classroom context and have some immediate relevance and meaning to them. • Students are able to investigate their own questions.

	• Students are able to work together in some situations, discussing ideas, reaching conclusions and teaching each other.
	• Students are taught to evaluate their own learning and are aware of their achievements and next steps.
	• Classroom activities take into account the individual needs of students.
	• There are clear goals and expectations for classroom activity and student work.
	• Staff have high expectations and express these often.
	• Learning is valued by staff and students.
	• There are close relationships between staff and students with adult educators operating as respected leaders and role models.
	• Staff understand and affirm, through their practices and protocols, the cultural backgrounds of the students.
	• Classroom activity is engaging and challenging for students, rather than 'dumbed-down busy work'.
Pedagogical culture and environment	• There is a warm, nurturing and safe atmosphere in the Activity Centre.
	• Humour is used to support the development of positive relationships among staff and students.
	• Teachers recognise that previous structures have not worked for these students.
	• Teachers recognise that motivation is likely to be a bigger challenge than ability for many students.
	• Teachers assume that students can succeed and are not fatalistic or judgemental about what a student may bring (socially or culturally) to the classroom.
	• Staff are compassionate, actively listening to students and reflecting their points of view.
	• Students express a sense of security and comfort with the environment.
	• Staff show enthusiasm about making a difference for students.
	• Staff demonstrate the importance of social and pastoral care as a pathway to support the achievement of students.
Numeracy and literacy development	• Planning in literacy and mathematics is appropriate for meeting the specific requirements of each student.
	• Resources are appropriate, accessible and enhance the programme and are relevant for the diverse identities, languages and cultures of the students.
	• Students are positive about the progress they are making.
	• Students initiate aspects of their own learning.
	• Diagnostic assessments describe each student's ability in reading (especially in decoding and comprehension), writing and numeracy.
	• A variety of relevant activities are used to support and increase student reading, writing and mathematics knowledge and skills.
	• Oral language strategies are used to support language development.
	• Students receive positive feedback about their work in literacy and mathematics.
	• Progress in mathematics and literacy is recognised and recorded in IEP documentation.
The use of Te Kura programmes	• Where appropriate, Te Kura staff support students to achieve the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve academic goals.

Dimension: Management and Governance	Indicators
Transitions in and out of the Activity Centre	• There are good quality orientation and induction processes in place. • Staff focus on building effective relationships with students as they transition into the Activity Centre. • Parents are included in the process of finding out about students. • Students' destinations are monitored and recorded. • The exit outcomes of students are analysed to inform programme evaluation. • Exit transition planning is based on the progress students have made. • The exit transition planning details the types of support students will receive for their ongoing learning and development. • The exit transition includes clear roles and responsibilities for the student and those supporting the student after they leave the centre.

Leading and Managing	• School leaders (in the Activity Centre and the enrolling school) use information from a variety of sources (e.g. students' achievement and progress, feedback from students, parents and whānau, and transition data) to make decisions about provisions for students.
	• School leaders ensure that the curriculum is well designed and that teachers are implementing high quality teaching strategies and interventions for students.
	• Good quality and appropriate professional development is provided for staff (PLD is linked to evidence about what needs to be improved).
	• A robust performance appraisal process has been established that focuses on building the capacity of teachers and leaders.
	• School leaders are responsive to community aspirations, interests and concerns.
	• School leaders provide clear direction for the work and development of the school characterised by:
	  o unity of purpose
	  o consistency of expectation
	  o clear lines of communication.
	• The school's procedures and practices align with policies and directions.
	• Leaders provide good quality and timely information about the achievement and progress of students.

Governance	• The principal and the board of the host school receive good quality and timely information about the achievement and progress of students. • The principal and board understand their role.