



Starting School Together: A Guide for School Boards Considering Cohort Entry

Traditionally, children in Aotearoa start school on their fifth birthday or any school day after that. Recent changes to the Education Act mean schools can now adopt cohort entry: enrolling children in groups on specific days across the year. Schools are choosing cohort entry to support positive transitions, wellbeing, and learning.

This guide for boards draws on findings from ERO's report *Starting School Together: What Do We Know?* and provides insights from schools that have changed to cohort entry. If your Board is considering changing to cohort entry, it will help you understand:

- what cohort entry is
- which schools are using cohort entry
- why schools are choosing cohort entry
- how to move to cohort entry well.

What is cohort entry?

Cohort entry limits the days a new entrant can start school to eight times a year, twice per term. These dates are determined by the Ministry of Education.

What schools are doing cohort entry?

Schools all around Aotearoa have adopted cohort entry. ERO found cohort entry in schools in urban and rural areas, high and low decile communities, and schools of all sizes.

Why are schools moving to cohort entry?

Schools told us they adopted cohort entry because it would benefit new entrants, their whānau, and the school.

Cohort entry:

- supported new entrant social and emotional wellbeing as they started in groups, sometimes with friends from early learning. For some children, this meant a better sense of belonging, less anxiety, and quicker settling
- supported learning for new entrants and their peers as teachers had uninterrupted blocks of time to teach
- supported whānau wellbeing as their children settled well into school, and created opportunities for them to connect with other whānau and the school
- helped teachers plan ahead for groups of new children and have more time to teach as they knew when the next group of children were due to start
- enabled schools to plan transition events and activities that reached more whānau at the same time, and connected whānau to each other and the school.

Considering cohort entry? How to do it well

The Education and Training Act 2020 requires schools considering moving to cohort entry to consult with their communities. Consultation must include school staff, current and prospective parents, and local ECE services.

Consultation is a chance to ensure cohort entry is right for your school and community. ERO asked schools to share their consultation experiences and advice.

Be clear on what you want to achieve

Principals shared that it was important to be clear with their communities on the rationale for changing the school's enrolment process as it helped with making an informed decision and generating buy-in. They recommended:

- considering the pros and cons for children, whānau, teachers, and ECEs
- identifying how cohort entry aligns with your commitment to improve learning outcomes
- identifying how cohort entry aligns with your school's values, vision, and mission.

Understand the impact on your school leaders and teachers

As principals and new entrant teachers are most effected by changes in the entry process, understanding impacts on daily operations and teaching is important. You might ask your leaders about how cohort entry could impact:

- teaching and learning for teachers and students
- staffing, resourcing, and transition planning
- relationships with whānau
- relationships with ECEs.

See cohort entry in action

Principals recommended visiting schools where cohort entry is in place to learn about the implications of cohort entry for your school community.

When visiting, you could find out about:

- what other schools wanted to achieve

- how cohort entry impacted transitions
- implications for staff management, community engagement, teaching and learning.

Ask new entrant teachers about:

- the impact of cohort entry on their classrooms
- what works best to support teaching and learning
- what support and resourcing they need to transition new entrants well.

Work with your local ECEs

Ensuring ECEs are wrapped into the consultation and communication processes supports quality relationships with ECEs. It helps services adjust, as cohort entry can impact the flow of children through services, and can support effective and positive transitions. Principals suggested:

- surfacing challenges and issues with ECEs early, and helping them problem-solve
- communicating with ECEs regularly, as they are often the first point of contact for whānau
- coordinating transition activities.

Whilst cohort entry may not work for all schools, schools that have adopted it have experienced clear benefits. Your school may wish to consider adopting cohort entry.

For cohort entry information for schools: www.education.govt.nz/school/managing-and-supporting-students/starting-school/cohort-entry-in-schools/

To locate a cohort entry school:

www.educationcounts.govt.nz/find-school



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