NGĀ ARONGA WHAI HUA

IMPROVING QUALITY
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION

through effective internal and external evaluation

Updated June 2021

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This document, Ngā Aronga Whai Hua – *Improving quality in early childhood education through effective internal and external evaluation,* has been developed to support early childhood services to engage in internal evaluation and ERO's external evaluation using *Te Ara Poutama – Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most[1].* It builds on *Effective Internal Evaluation for Improvement (2016)* and replaces most of the content in He Pou Tātaki: How ERO reviews early childhood services (2013).

The subtitle of *Te Ara Poutama*, 'Piki ake, kake ake – for those who aspire to seek excellence', powerfully captures the essence of the indicators and their important role in describing expectations for quality early childhood education.

These same tools and resources are used by ERO evaluators in an Akarangi | Quality Evaluation, which helps ensure an integrated approach to internal and external evaluation – one that is focused on improving quality.

The *Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric*, used in conjunction with the indicators, supports early childhood services to evaluate the extent to which they have the learning and organisational conditions to support equitable and excellent outcomes for all learners. This rubric and the indicators can also help leaders and kaiako identify the actions they need to take to focus their quality improvement planning.

This resource:

▶ provides an overview of Ngā Ara Whai Hua – Quality Framework for Evaluation and Improvement in Early Childhood Services[2]

▶ explores quality improvement in relation to a wide range of activities that can support improvement in early childhood services

▶ describes review and evaluation

▶ explores internal evaluation in depth, particularly in relation to what it is, why we do it, how to do it, and what it looks like when it's done well

▶ provides information that can support services to engage in focused planning for improvement as part of an ongoing process of monitoring and evaluation

▶ highlights the benefits of integrating internal and external evaluation

▶ describes ERO's approach to evaluating quality through Akarangi | Quality Evaluations.

---

1   Elsewhere, *Te Ara Poutama*.

2   Elsewhere, Ngā Ara Whai Hua.

FIGURE 1. Ngā Ara Whai Hua

NGĀ ARA WHAI HUA

Quality Framework for
Evaluation and Improvement
in Early Childhood Services

Striving for excellence

Akamatua

**EVALUATING
EXCELLENCE
AND INNOVATION**

Identify, investigate
and evaluate cases of
excellence and innovation.

External and internal
evaluation for ongoing
improvement

Akarangi

QUALITY EVALUATION

Evaluate the extent to which
the service has the learning and
organisational conditions to
support equitable and excellent
outcomes for all learners.

Reviewing for
accountability purposes

Akanuku

ASSURANCE REVIEW

Assess whether a service
is meeting regulatory
standards.

**TE ARA POUTAMA –
INDICATORS OF QUALITY**

*what matters most
in high quality early
childhood education*

Compliance with Regulatory Standards

Principles of *Te Whāriki*

Empowerment | Whakamana ▸ Holistic development | Kotahitanga ▸ Family and community | Whānau tangata ▸ Relationships | Ngā hononga

WHANAUNGATANGA

NGĀ ARA WHAI HUA:
QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Ngā Ara Whai Hua is underpinned by three interconnected metaphors derived from te ao Māori: ngā aka, te poutama and ngā ara. These metaphors highlight the importance of active, intentional forward movement. The poutama references Tanemāhuta's epic journey in search of knowledge and enlightenment, and the aka, the means by which he overcame the difficulties he encountered along the way.

Furthermore, the aka metaphor gives us a way of understanding Ngā Aronga Whai Hua | Evaluation for Improvement. Ngā aka symbolise growth; in order to thrive, they need suitable nourishment and the right conditions, for example, sunshine, shade, air, moisture and fertile soil. With appropriate support, ngā aka will grow upwards.

Like ngā aka, effective evaluation requires conditions that will build the capability of leaders and kaiako and increase the capacity in services to engage in evaluation. These conditions need to be supported by systems and processes/structures that encourage the use of evaluation findings for improvement purposes. It's about striving to do better.

Early childhood services need to create the conditions that support ongoing improvement and promote equitable outcomes for all children.

TABLE 1. This table relates the vine metaphor to the Process Indicators (ngā Rāpupuku) for Evaluation for Improvement (Ngā Aronga Whai Hua), the third of the five key domains (ngā Akatoro).

Ngā aka	Ngā Rāpupuku
Providing the right conditions for the vine to grow and flourish.	**3.1** Coherent organisational conditions enable governance, managers, leaders and kaiako to do and use evaluation for improvement and innovation.
Providing the nourishment and support for the growth and health of the vine.	**3.2** Capability and collective capacity to do and use evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building sustains improvement and innovation.
Supporting the vine with the necessary structures that lead to upward growth and opportunities to 're-root' and flower.	**3.3** Engagement in deliberate, systematic internal evaluation processes and reasoning promotes equitable outcomes for all children.

Recognising the importance of relationships in any evaluation and improvement context, Ngā Ara Whai Hua is underpinned by whanaungatanga. It is only by establishing and maintaining respectful, trusting relationships that everyone involved, both internal and external, can work collaboratively to achieve equity and excellence for all learners.

Ngā Ara Whai Hua is also underpinned by the principles of *Te Whāriki*, reflecting the strong connections between the curriculum for early childhood services and *Te Ara Poutama*.

Compliance with regulatory standards is fundamental to the provision of high quality early childhood education and care. Every early childhood service is responsible for ensuring children's health, safety and wellbeing on a daily basis.

What matters most in high quality education

Te Ara Poutama is at the core of every Akarangi | Quality Evaluation.

Te *Ara Poutama* identifies five domains (ngā Akatoro) that influence the quality of early childhood education. A set of evidence-based process indicators (ngā Rāpupuku) describe the learning and organisational conditions that promote or hinder children's learning.

Ngā Rāpupuku should be viewed holistically, not in isolation – they are more than a checklist. They can be used as a 'sieve' or trustworthy reference when trying to make sense of information gathered as part of an evaluation, and to identify actions for improvement.

Indicators can be used in different ways during different phases of internal evaluation. For example, a service can:

▶ use the outcome indicators (the learning outcomes from *Te Whāriki*) as the starting point for evaluating what kaiako know about children's learning and their developing capabilities

▶ use ngā Akatoro as a framework for identifying where best to focus inquiry and information gathering

▶ use ngā Rāpupuku and associated descriptors of effective practice as a framework for making sense of information, and identifying and prioritising improvement actions

▶ use the outcome indicators (the learning outcomes from *Te Whāriki*) when monitoring and evaluating the impact of improvement actions on the children, particularly in relation to equity

▶ use the Ngā Aronga Whai Hua (Evaluation for Improvement) indicators and associated descriptors of effective practice to evaluate the effectiveness of internal evaluation.

The Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric

The *Akarangi Quality Evaluation Rubric* supports early childhood services and ERO to make evaluative judgements regarding the extent to which the service has the learning and organisational conditions to promote and achieve equity and excellence. It also supports leaders and kaiako to make judgements about what they know about children's learning in relation to the outcome indicators.

It is expected that all services will use the indicators and the rubric as part of their internal evaluation to establish where they are on the emerging−excelling continuum. All judgements should be supported by evidence and lead to improvement actions being agreed. See Table 2 for the judgement terms and descriptors used in the rubric.
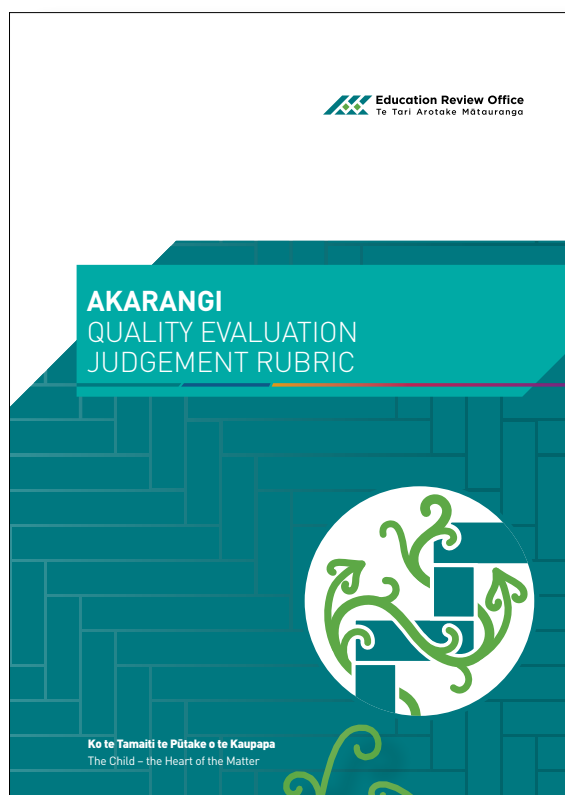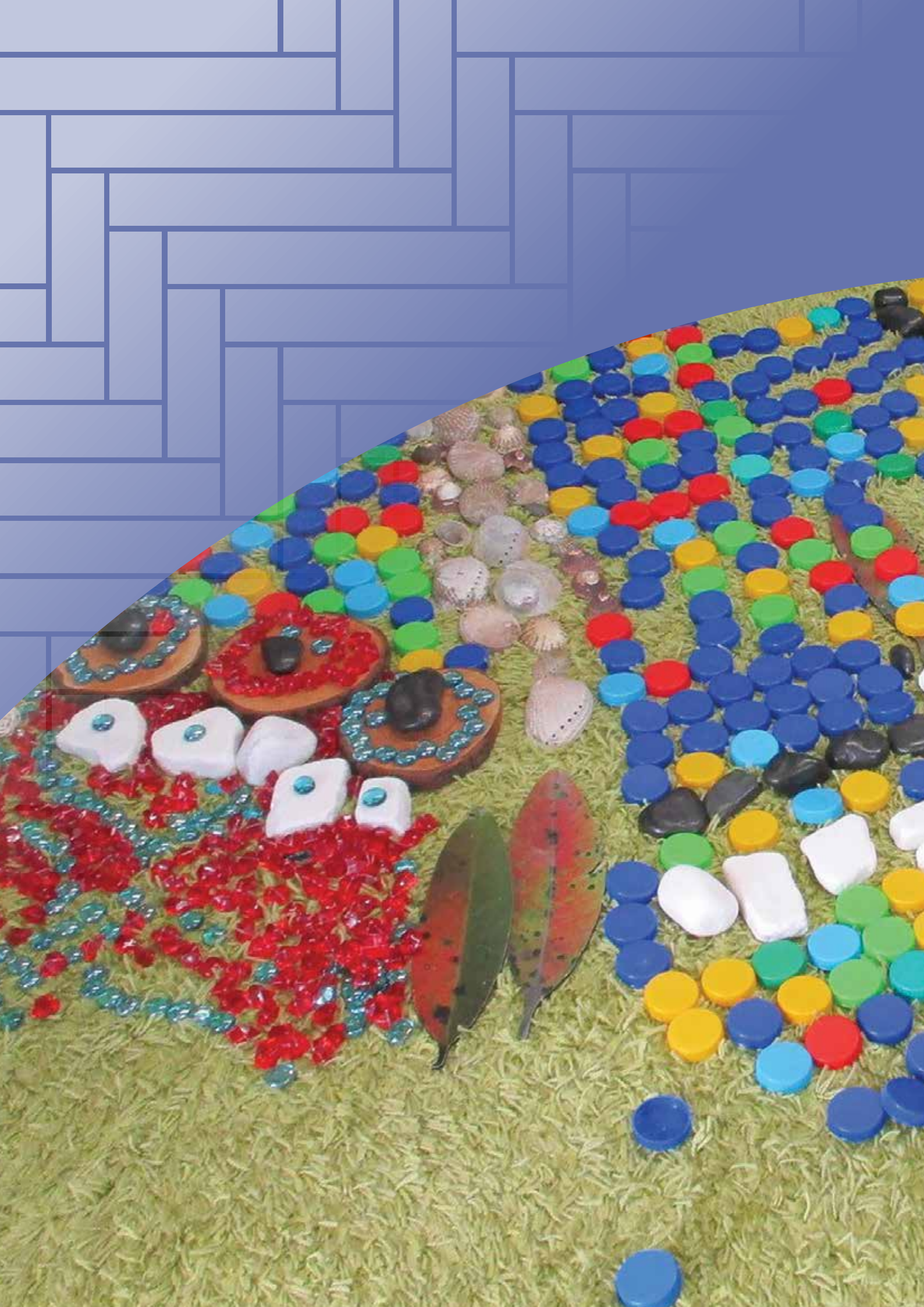
TABLE 2. Judgement terms and descriptors (Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric)

Judgement	Description
Whakatō Emerging	**The seed is sown, a place of potential** *Emerging* means that the service is at an early stage of developing the learning and organisational conditions (systems, processes and practices) to improve quality and realise equitable outcomes for children.
Whāngai Establishing	**Nourishment is provided** *Establishing* means that the service is establishing the learning and organisational conditions (systems, processes and practices) and is building shared understandings to improve quality towards realising equitable outcomes for children.
Whakaū Embedding	**Consolidation of all elements has occurred** *Embedding* means that the service has established and is embedding coherent learning and organisational conditions (systems, processes and practices) and is consistently implementing practices and processes to enable improvement in quality towards realising equitable outcomes for children.
Whakawhanake Sustaining	**Appropriate conditions provide strong and ongoing support** *Sustaining* means that the service has evidence of its capability and capacity to sustain ongoing improvement to the learning and organisational conditions (systems, processes and practices) and the impact of this improvement in realising equitable outcomes for children.
Kia rangatira ai te tipu Excelling	**A combination of favourable conditions and a nourishing environment produces ongoing quality of results** *Excelling* means that the service is sector leading and demonstrates exemplary practice resulting in equitable outcomes for children.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND REVIEW AND EVALUATION

Quality improvement in early childhood services is driven by various systems, processes and practices including inquiry, appraisal, action research, monitoring, review and evaluation.

Table 3 lists some of these systems and processes. Each has a somewhat different purpose and responds to somewhat different questions.

TABLE 3. Approaches to quality improvement

System/process	Purpose(s)	Questions posed
Teacher inquiry	To continuously inquire into the impact of one's teaching on children's learning, and to make informed changes to practice with the aim of enhancing that impact.	What is and is not working, and for whom? What do I need to do differently, and why?
Professional growth	Professional growth cycles focus on how teachers meet the Code (ngā Tikanga Matatika) and Standards (ngā Paerewa) in their everyday practice.	How am I meeting the Code (ngā Tikanga Matatika) and Standards (ngā Paerewa) in my everyday practice? Am I supporting professional learning and collaboration?
Reflection	To consider personal performance in the light of theory, intentions or the perspectives of others.	What sense do I make of this? What do I think about this? How does this resonate with other learning and experiences I've had?
Research	To generate knowledge by posing and answering questions.	What is happening and why? What can I learn from the information I have gathered?
Monitoring	To track and measure progress in terms of meeting requirements or milestones (accountability).	Are we doing what we said we would do? How are we going?
Review	To take stock or look back on a situation, event or process to see what can be learned.	What is happening here? Are we following our policies and procedures? Are we doing what we said we would do? Do we need to change anything?
Evaluation	To engage in systematic inquiry with the aim of making a judgement about the quality, effectiveness or value of a policy, programme or practice in terms of its contribution to desired outcomes.	How well are we implementing …? To what extent are we …? How effective is our practice in engaging children in ….? How successful …?

14

NGĀ ARONGA WHAI HUA
IMPROVING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
THROUGH EFFECTIVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Review and evaluation

Licensing requirements

The licensing criteria in the Governance, Management and Administration (GMA) regulatory standard requires each service to have in place an ongoing process of self-review: 'an ongoing process of self-review helps the service maintain and improve the quality of its education and care.'

Services are required to document:

► [their] process for reviewing and evaluating the service's operation (for example, learning and teaching practices, philosophy, policies, and procedures) by the people involved in the service. The process is consistent with criterion GMA4, and includes a schedule showing timelines for planned review of different areas of operation.

► recorded outcomes from the review process.[3]

Review

Review focuses on what is happening; often it is a 'looking back' or 'taking stock' activity. Review involves asking questions such as:

► What is happening here?

► Are we following our policies and procedures?

► Are we doing what we are required to do?

Review is about:

► accountability, and ensuring compliance with licensing requirements

► looking at all aspects of the service's operations over time

► implementation of policies, procedures and practices to ensure licensing requirements are met.

Many services will already have quality assurance systems that enable them to monitor and review their compliance with regulatory standards and associated licensing criteria, together with their strategic and operational systems as documented in plans, policies and procedures.

---

3 *https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/licensing-and-regulations/the-regulatory-framework-for-ece/licensing-criteria/centre-based-ece-services/governance-management-and-administration/professional-practices/gma6-self-review/*

Evaluation

Evaluation focuses on how well or how effectively policies, procedures and practices are being implemented. Evaluation involves asking questions such as:

- ▶ How well ...?
- ▶ How effectively ...?
- ▶ To what extent ...?
- ▶ What is so? Why is it so? So what? What next?

Evaluation is about:

- ▶ determining quality, effectiveness and/or impact
- ▶ identifying what is and is not working, and for whom, with the aim of improving practice and what is happening for children.

INTERNAL EVALUATION

This section explores internal evaluation in greater depth, particularly in relation to what it is, why we do it, how to do it, and what it looks like when it's done well.

What is internal evaluation?

Evaluation is about establishing the quality, effectiveness or value of something. Internal evaluation is undertaken by those in the service rather than people external to the service. It is a systematic process used to evaluate what is and is not working, and for whom, and then to determine what changes are needed. We usually choose to develop our practices and make improvements *as a result of* evaluation; the developments and actions we take are not evaluations. Planning and documenting the process and outcomes of internal evaluation is a legislative requirement for early childhood services.

Why does it matter? Why do we do it?

Internal evaluation has many benefits; these include:

- ▶ assisting in the development of a cohesive and critical team culture
- ▶ enabling us to see and celebrate the difference we are making for children and their whānau
- ▶ enabling us to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of our practices in relation to children's learning
- ▶ supporting our improvement journey towards high quality education and care for all children.

It's tempting to assume that good or well-intentioned practices will result in good outcomes for children, but this is not necessarily true. Internal evaluation makes us think deeply about the impact of what we do, helps us to stop assuming, and encourages us to focus on children and their learning.

You can use the learning outcomes from *Te Whāriki* as the basis for deciding your service's priorities for children's learning – you will already have unpacked these outcomes and established priorities in consultation with your community. Now consider the children at your service and what you know about their developing capabilities associated with the learning outcomes. Where do you need to focus your internal evaluation effort?

What does internal evaluation look like when we do it well?

When internal evaluation is done well, processes are coherent, and align with a service's vision and goals and associated planning. All those involved in the service work collaboratively to ensure that the efforts that have gone into an evaluation lead to ongoing improvement.[4]

– Ngā Aronga Whai Hua: Evaluation for improvement[5]

Using te Akatoro – Ngā Aronga Whai Hua | Evaluation for Improvement in Te Ara Poutama you could work together with others at your service to unpack the three indicators (3.1–3.3) and associated examples of effective practice to consider and evaluate the extent to which your service has the conditions (systems, processes and practices) to implement high quality, robust internal evaluation.

In Table 4, the three indicators and examples of effective practice are reframed as questions to guide your evaluation and inquiry, focused on the quality and effectiveness of your internal evaluation.

---
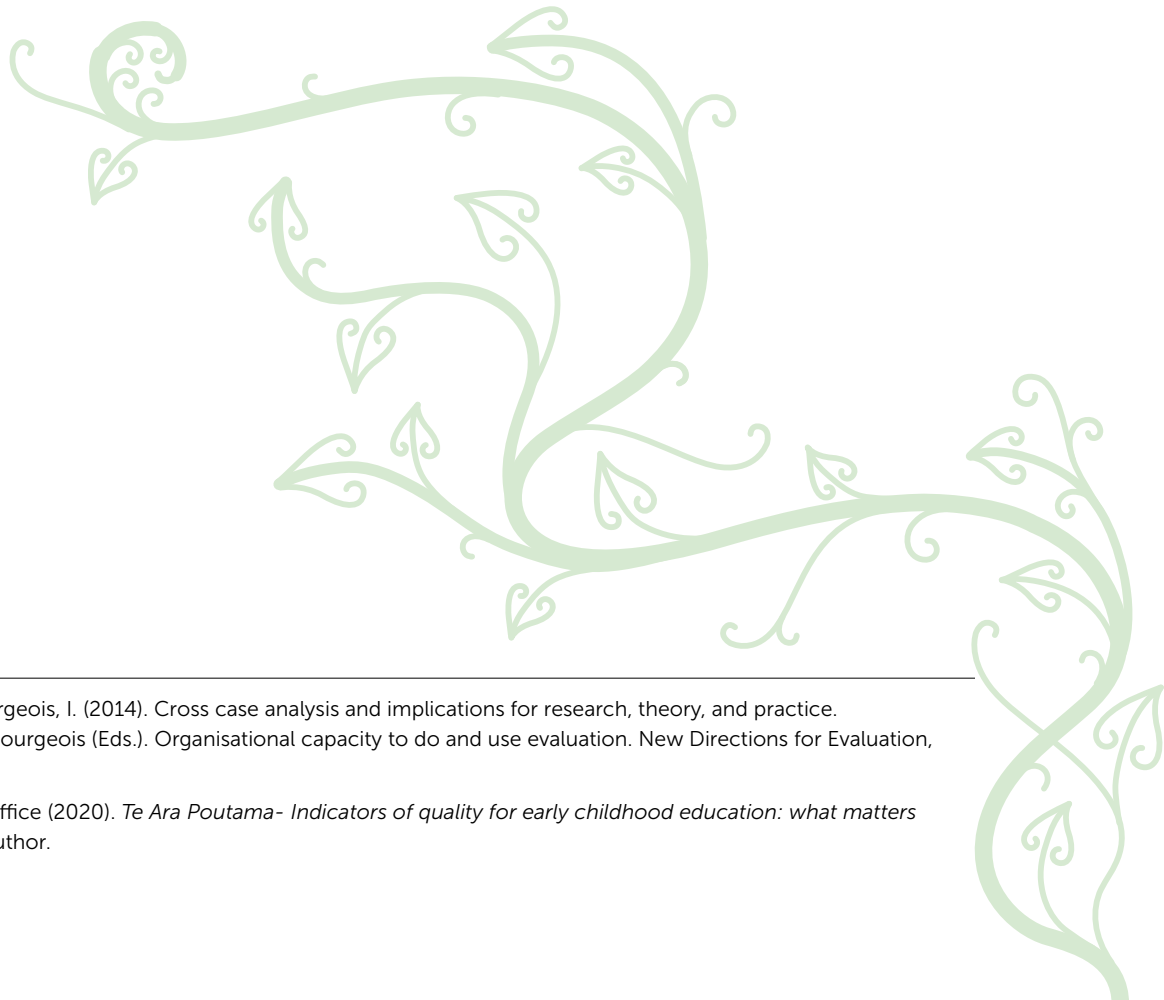
4   Cousins, J.B., & Bourgeois, I. (2014). Cross case analysis and implications for research, theory, and practice. In J.B. Cousins & I. Bourgeois (Eds.). Organisational capacity to do and use evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation, 4, 101–119.

5   Education Review Office (2020). *Te Ara Poutama- Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most*. Wellington: Author.

TABLE 4. Ngā Aronga Whai Hua indicators, together with the examples of effective practice reframed as questions for internal evaluation

Ngā Rāpupuku	Ngā pātai
3.1 **Coherent organisational conditions enable governance, managers, leaders and kaiako to do and use evaluation for improvement and innovation.**	▶ How well have we embedded evaluation into our systems, processes and practices? ▶ How fit for purpose are our tools and information gathering methods? ▶ To what extent do we value and seek child, parent, whānau and community voices when engaged in evaluation? ▶ Do we have the relational trust in our service that supports collaboration, risk taking and openness to change and improvement? ▶ How effectively do we allocate resources (for example, time, expertise and staffing) to support change and improvement? ▶ In what ways do we share new knowledge (what we learn from our evaluation and improvement activities) within our service and in the wider community?
3.2 **Capability and collective capacity to do and use evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building sustains improvement and innovation.**	▶ What opportunities do we have to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence we need to engage in evaluation for improvement? ▶ How data literate are we? ▶ In what ways do we use relevant research evidence to support our evaluation and planning for improvement? ▶ To what extent do we use evaluation to sustain improvement in our service?

3.3
 	
Engagement in deliberate, systematic internal evaluation processes and reasoning promotes equitable outcomes for all children.
	▶ In what ways do we scrutinise our practice using carefully considered questions?
	
	▶ How well do we monitor implementation of our improvement actions and evaluate their impact?
	
	▶ To what extent do our internal evaluation processes enable us to understand:
	
	   ▶ How individual children and groups of children are progressing in terms of the learning outcomes in *Te Whāriki*?
	
	   ▶ How our improvement actions have helped our service realise its vision, values, strategic direction, goals and priorities for children's learning.

18

NGĀ ARONGA WHAI HUA
IMPROVING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
THROUGH EFFECTIVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION

How do we do it?

In this section we continue to draw on the concepts, grounded in Māori traditions and stories, that underpin Ngā Ara Whai Hua.

As recounted in Te Ara Poutama:

The separation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku signalled many changes for their children. They were stunned by the possibilities and potential of their new existence. While different children took responsibility for the development and establishment of their chosen domains, one of the siblings, Tanemāhuta or Tāwhaki (tribal differences) set out in search of knowledge. This knowledge was critical for those who were to be kaitiaki over certain domains. It would set in place the way in which everything would co-habit and live in harmony.

Tanemāhuta knew that this knowledge was located within the realm of the almighty IO. He developed a plan to ascend through the 10 plains by way of a vine or aka. At each level he would stop, observe, scan and learn about the terrain and, in particular, possible challenges and conflicts he would encounter. From there he would strategise and plan different routes to get to the next plain. He encountered many barriers but was able to work his way around or through these. It was not an easy journey.

The Poutama is used in many contexts to identify the journey of Tane to achieve knowledge and enlightenment. The vine or aka was the way in which he achieved his feat.

The evaluation process can be likened to Tanemāhuta's journey to achieve knowledge and enlightenment. Tanemāhuta strategised and planned the different routes to get to the next plain, stopping, observing and scanning to gain the information he needed to move forward.

Evaluation requires us to notice what is happening for children; it also requires us to consider how our curriculum is responding to their interests and needs, and to what extent we are intentional and culturally responsive in our teaching practices. We learn what is and is not working, and for whom. It is only by doing this that we can prioritise efforts to achieve equity and excellence for all learners, and overcome whatever barriers stand in our way.

In the next section we use the story of Tanemāhuta to illustrate different aspects of the evaluation process and evaluative reasoning.

Evaluation processes and evaluative reasoning

This section explores and unpacks the evaluation processes outlined in *Effective Internal Evaluation for Improvement (2016)*. For each of these processes we have included prompts to show where ngā Akatoro (the Domains) and ngā Rāpupuku (the Indicators) from *Te Ara Poutama* and the *Akarangi Quality Evaluation Rubric* could be used in your own internal evaluation processes and your planning for improvement.

Figure 2 shows how evaluation processes and improvement planning are connected. Improvement actions arise out of collaborative sense making, your evaluation findings and emerging priorities for action. Quality improvement planning is based on the agreed improvement actions and priorities.

FIGURE 2. Evaluation processes and reasoning for improvement

When learning to evaluate, it is best to use these processes in a systematic, step-by-step way – all the processes, along with the associated reasoning and thinking, are important. Once you are confident in working with them, you can move between them in a more flexible, deliberate and less stepped way.

Quality improvement planning and implementation

Monitoring and evaluating impact

Prioritising to take action

Learner-focused evaluation processes

We can do better

Noticing

Collaborative sense making

Investigating

22

NGĀ ARONGA WHAI HUA
IMPROVING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
THROUGH EFFECTIVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION
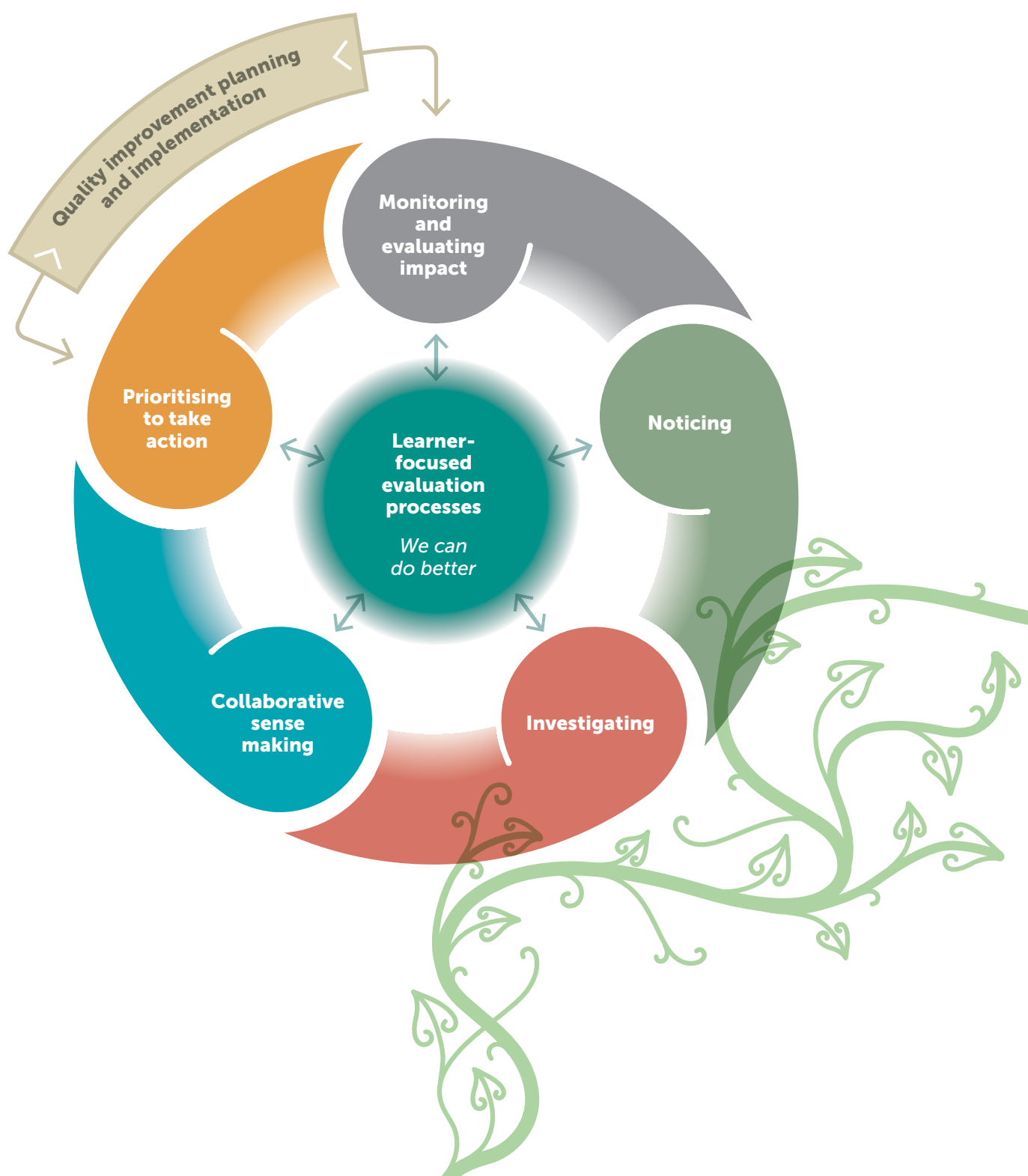
Noticing

Tanemāhuta developed a plan to ascend through the 10 plains by way of a vine or aka. At each level he would **stop, observe, scan** ....

When noticing:

we maintain a focus on learners, especially Māori learners, children of Pacific heritage, children with additional learning needs and children up to the age of 3

we are alert to children who may need additional support to experience equitable opportunities to learn

we have an inquiry 'habit of mind'

we are open to scrutinising information about our practice

we see dissonance and discrepancy as opportunities for deeper inquiry.

We ask ourselves:

Are we surprised by what we have noticed?

Is this what we expected?

Is this good? How do we feel about this?

Should we be concerned? If so, why?

Do we need to take a closer look?

Do we need to investigate to find out what is happening here?

What are our evaluation wonderings?

NOTICING

Noticing involves:

keeping our focus on equity

having our priorities for children's learning at the front of our minds

scanning

being aware of hunches and gut reactions

knowing when to be deliberate and intentional about responding to what we are noticing.

Using ngā Akatoro me ngā Rāpupuku

we could use an indicator or domain as a lens for noticing

we could use ngā Rāpupuku as a scanning tool

we could check with the indicators to see if what we are noticing is unexpected

we could use an indicator or a domain to help clarify whether we need to take a closer look.

Tips and suggestions

Sometimes what we notice can be fixed or solved without the need for an evaluation, for example, a health and safety matter.

We need to be open to finding out what is happening.

At this stage we do not know what changes, if any, we might make.

Investigating

Tanemāhuta would **learn** about the terrain and, in particular, possible challenges and conflicts he would encounter.

When investigating:

we focus, using an equity lens, on what is happening for children – especially Māori learners, children of Pacific heritage, children with additional learning needs and children up to the age of 3

we ensure we gather sufficient information to be able to respond to our questions

we check our information is 'fit for purpose' – that it will tell us what we need to know

we actively seek multiple perspectives (voices).

We ask ourselves:

What do we already know about this?

– How do we know this?

What more do we need to find out?

– How might we do this?

What is our evaluation focus?

What 'good' questions should we ask?

What is/are our evaluative question/s?

What questions will guide our investigation?

How will we gather relevant and useful information? In what time frame?

Who will be involved in the information gathering?

INVESTIGATING

Investigating involves:

bringing together what we already know (information we have in hand)

developing a plan to gather information, using existing tools and methods, or developing new tools

identifying relevant sources of information

seeking different perspectives.

Using ngā Akatoro me ngā Rāpupuku

we can use the indicators and examples of effective practice to help us understand what 'good' looks like

we can use the indicators and examples of effective practice to identify what information we might need to gather, and from what sources

we can use the indicators to help us frame the questions we want to investigate.

Developing evaluation questions as part of the evaluation plan helps focus information gathering. As observed earlier, evaluation questions can be framed along these lines:

▶ How well …?

▶ How effectively …?

▶ To what extent …?

▶ What is so? Why is it so? So what? What next?

Tips and suggestions

Evaluation involves working together – it's not an individual activity.

Evaluation requires us to be clear about what we are evaluating and why.

Having a formal plan for the evaluation, including for information gathering and sense making, is essential.

We don't make any changes to our practice at this stage.

Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua – Self-review guidelines for early childhood education[6] includes useful guidance on planning and information gathering (see pages 24–25).

---

6   Ministry of Education (2006). *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua- self-review guidelines for early childhood education*. Wellington: Author. https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/licensing-and-regulations/the-regulatory-framework-for-ece/licensing-criteria/self-review-guidelines/

Collaborative sense making

Tanemāhuta would learn about the terrain and, in particular, **possible challenges and conflicts he would encounter**.

When sense making:

we ensure we have the necessary capability and capacity (people/time)

we are open to new learning

we know what 'good' looks like so that we can identify our strengths and areas in need of improvement

we have robust findings to inform our decision making and prioritising

we keep our focus on equity – what this means for Māori learners, children of Pacific heritage, children with additional learning needs, and children up to the age of 3.

We ask ourselves:

What is our information telling us? What insights does it provide?

How do we feel about what we have found? Is this good enough?

Do we have different interpretations of the information? If so, why?

What might we need to explore further?

What do current research and ngā Rāpupuku me ngā Akatoro say about quality? How close are we to this?

COLLABORATIVE SENSE MAKING

Collaborative sense making involves:

coming together as a group to interpret what we have found

scrutinising our information with an open mind

building relational trust that supports open and honest conversations

working with different kinds of data and information, both quantitative and qualitative

drawing on research evidence and using appropriate frameworks and indicators to help us make sense of the information we have gathered

listening to what our information is telling us about equity and excellence in our service.

Using ngā Akatoro me ngā Rāpupuku

we could use ngā Rāpupuku and examples of effective practice to help us understand how well we are doing.

Using the Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric

we can identify where our service is on the 5-point emerging – excelling continuum

we can make judgements about the extent to which we have in place the learning and organisational conditions to support equitable and excellent outcomes for all learners

we can make informed decisions about what actions we need to take to move forward.

26

NGĀ ARONGA WHAI HUA
IMPROVING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
THROUGH EFFECTIVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Tips and suggestions

Having different 'eyes' on the information brings different perspectives, which strengthens sense making.

When sense making we may find we need to gather more information or refocus our evaluation by changing our evaluation priority/question(s).

It is at this point that we discuss what the information we have gathered is telling us about our practice, particularly its impact on the children.

Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua – Self-review guidelines for early childhood education[7] includes useful guidance on sense making (see pages 26–32).

7   Ministry of Education (2006). *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua- self-review guidelines for early childhood education*. Wellington: Author. https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/licensing-and-regulations/the-regulatory-framework-for-ece/licensing-criteria/self-review-guidelines/

Prioritising to take action

> From there he would **strategise and plan different routes** to get to the next plain. He encountered many barriers but was able to work his way around or through these. It was not an easy journey. The Poutama is used in many contexts to identify the journey of Tane to achieve knowledge and enlightenment. The vine or aka was the way in which he achieved his feat.

When prioritising to take action:

we are clear about our findings

we understand what we need to improve

we are clear about the actions we need to take and why

we have the resources necessary to take action

we are ready to develop a plan that sets out clear actions and expectations for change.

We ask ourselves:

What do we need to do and why?

What are our options?

Have we faced this situation before?

How big is the change we have in mind?

Does this need to be included in our quality improvement plan?

What strengths do we have to draw on?

What support, expertise or resources might we need?

PRIORITISING TO TAKE ACTION

Prioritising to take action involves:

considering possible options in the light of research about 'what matters most' as set out in *Te Ara Poutama*

deciding what actions will make the biggest difference for these learners, at this time

being clear about what we need to improve

identifying where we have or don't have the capability and capacity to make these improvements

prioritising our resources to achieve the desired outcomes.

Using ngā Akatoro me ngā Rāpupuku

we can identify possible improvement actions.

Using the Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric

we can identify where we are on the continuum and what we need to do to improve.

Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua – Self-review guidelines for early childhood education[8] includes useful guidance on deciding what actions to take based on your judgements and findings (see pages 33–37).

---

8   Ministry of Education, (2006). *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua- self-review guidelines for early childhood education*. Wellington: Author. https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/licensing-and-regulations/the-regulatory-framework-for-ece/licensing-criteria/self-review-guidelines/

Planning for improvement

*Tanemāhuta set out in search of knowledge. This knowledge was critical for those that were to be kaitiaki over certain domains. It would set in place the way in which everything would co-habitat and live in harmony. Tanemāhuta knew that this knowledge was located within the realm of the almighty IO. He developed a plan to ascend through the 10 plains by way of a vine or aka. At each level he would stop, observe, scan and learn about the terrain and, in particular, possible challenges and conflicts he would encounter. From there he would **strategise and plan different routes to get to the next plain**. He encountered many barriers but was able to work his way around or through these. It was not an easy journey.*

Quality improvement planning is the key to making changes that will have the greatest positive impact for children. It sits alongside, and is informed by, your internal and ERO's external evaluation findings.

Quality improvement planning involves using insights gained from internal and external evaluation to plan clear and measurable improvement actions. Such planning requires us to decide who will be responsible for tasks, to work out what resources are required, and to agree on time frames. We prioritise actions and have a clear, shared understanding of what success will look like.

Quality improvement planning

When planning for improvement:

we are intentional in aligning our strategic and improvement planning

we are clear about what we are wanting to improve and why

we consider how we will know that our improvement actions are having the impact we want

we identify what expertise, time and resources we need to achieve the planned improvements.

We ask ourselves:

What is/are our priority/priorities for improvement?

Why this/these area(s)?

What improvement actions have we planned to take?

Why these actions?

Which indicators of quality are we focused on?

What is the time frame? (When do we expect to see evidence of improvement?)

Who is involved?

How will we monitor our progress?

What shifts in practice (and thinking) do we expect to see?

What will success look like?

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

Quality improvement planning involves:

responding to the findings of internal and external evaluation

documenting our quality improvement plan so it can be shared with others

thinking carefully about what actions will support the improvements we need to make

being strategic and purposeful – we can't improve everything at once

keeping our focus on equity.

Using ngā Akatoro me ngā Rāpupuku

we can reflect on our personal strengths and on areas that we need to work on

we can gain a clearer picture of what 'good' looks like

we can explore the relationship between what we *do* (process indicators) and what our *impact* is (outcome indicators)

we can maintain our focus on the areas of practice that make the greatest difference for children.

Using the Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric

we can determine our 'next steps' as we strive to move along the quality pathway.

See *Piki Ake, Kake Ake Striving for Equity and Excellence. Guide to quality improvement planning for early childhood services*.

Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua – Self-review guidelines for early childhood education[9] includes planning templates and other tools you can use for internal evaluation purposes (see pages 64–70).

9   Ministry of Education (2006). *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua- self-review guidelines for early childhood education*. Wellington: Author. https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/licensing-and-regulations/the-regulatory-framework-for-ece/licensing-criteria/self-review-guidelines/

Monitoring and evaluating

> He (Tanemāhuta) encountered many barriers but was able to work his way around or through these. It was not an easy journey. The Poutama is used in many contexts to identify the journey of Tane to achieve knowledge and enlightenment. The vine or aka was the way in which he achieved his feat.

When monitoring and evaluating:

we are clear about what we are aiming to achieve (in other words, what our improvement focus is)

we are clear about how we will monitor progress

we have the capability and capacity to monitor and evaluate the impact of our improvement actions.

We ask ourselves:

When will be a good time to evaluate the impact of our improvement actions?

What is happening for the children now, especially Māori learners, children of Pacific heritage, children with additional learning needs and children up to the age of 3?

Do we have measurable, observable evidence of this, or are we just assuming things have improved?

Were there any unintended impacts? If so, what will we do about these?

MONITORING AND EVALUATING

Monitoring and evaluating involves:

keeping an eye on and noticing what is happening as we implement our improvement actions

having systems, processes and tools to monitor how we are going and to evaluate impact

knowing when and how to evaluate progress and impact

knowing when to adjust or change actions or strategies.

Using ngā Akatoro me ngā Rāpupuku

we can use the indicators as signposts when monitoring progress towards our desired goals/outcomes

we can use the indicators and examples of effective practice to help us evaluate the impact of our improvement actions.

Using the *Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric*

we can use the evaluation rubric to identify progress and improvement in relation to specific improvement actions.

Tips and suggestions

When implementing and embedding changes to practice, it is important to monitor and evaluate whether they are having the desired impact. In doing so, we must keep our focus on equitable outcomes for identified children and groups of children. This is a very important step – don't let it drop off.

INTEGRATING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION

The relationship between internal and external evaluation is an important one. The two processes best complement each other when they share a common language. When used for both internal and external evaluation, ngā Rāpupuku (the Indicators) and associated tools promote shared understanding and facilitate identification of specific improvement actions.

FIGURE 3. Quality improvement planning

What will this mean for my early childhood service?

You will have the opportunity to share and discuss with ERO:

► What you know about children's learning in relation to the learning outcomes in Te Whāriki?

► What you know about the learning and development of Māori children; children of Pacific heritage, children with additional learning needs and children up to the age of 3 in our service?

► What your priorities are for children's learning? Why these priorities?

► What you know about how your learning and organisational conditions (see Te Ara Poutama and the Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric) are enabling (or hindering) equitable and excellent outcomes for all children?

► Your current improvement focus/foci?

You will be able to share what you know about:

► the conditions in your service that support internal evaluation

► the capabilities that you bring to internal evaluation

► the internal evaluation systems and processes that your service has developed (see Indicators 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 in *Te Ara Poutama*, pages 27–28)

► where you see your service fitting on the *Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric*

► recent examples of internal evaluation and how you have responded to the findings.

What will this mean for what ERO does?

We will use what your service has learned from its own internal evaluation processes (about how well you are doing and what you know about children's progress and learning) to focus our evaluation discussions and activities.

We are interested in hearing what you have learned about how well your service's learning and organisational conditions support or hinder children's learning.

We will evaluate the quality and effectiveness of your internal evaluation processes and verify your internal evaluation findings.

We will support you to purposefully engage with external evaluation and use it as an opportunity to validate your internal evaluation processes.

We will work with you to identify the improvement actions that will make the most difference for children at your service.

AKARANGI | QUALITY EVALUATION

ERO's approach to evaluating quality in early childhood services

Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te kaupapa: The child – the heart of the matter

ERO's primary purpose for undertaking external evaluation in early childhood services is to improve the quality of education and care for all learners. Education outcomes are the starting point for evaluation and the focus of improvement actions.

Thomas Schwandt (2017) asserts that in evaluating for equity we need to ask: For these learners, in this place, at this time – *What is going on here? What does it mean? How do we know? What next?*[10]

ERO's approach to external evaluation is underpinned by:

▶ te Tiriti o Waitangi principles of participation, partnership and protection

▶ current education research about what matters most in improving outcomes for all learners

▶ evaluation theory and research relating to approaches that promote inquiry and knowledge building and enhance their use for improvement and innovation

▶ the legal and regulatory frameworks that define pre-tertiary institutions' accountabilities related to education provision.

In a Quality Evaluation, ERO evaluates the extent to which a service has learning and organisational conditions to support equitable and excellent outcomes for all learners.

ERO's evaluation process is described below, together with information about what you can expect from an Akarangi (Quality Evaluation).

FIGURE 4. ERO's external evaluation process

notifying → exchanging information → designing the evaluation → on-site → reporting

---

10 Schwandt, T. (2017). The centrality of engagement and ethics to the task of evaluating for equity. Keynote presented to the Quality Evaluation Office Professional Forum, Auckland, New Zealand.

34

NGĀ ARONGA WHAI HUA
IMPROVING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
THROUGH EFFECTIVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Notifying

ERO initiates an evaluation by sending your service a notification email that details:

▶ the timing of the evaluation

▶ documentation the service is asked to share with ERO

▶ the date by which documentation is required

▶ relevant resources on ERO's website, including the Indicators, the assurance statement and the self-audit checklist

▶ any information required before the on-site phase of the evaluation.

Exchange of information

Before the on-site phase begins, ERO and your service share information. This exchange gives you the opportunity to:

▶ become familiar with ERO's evaluation approach and resources

▶ ask questions about the evaluation process

▶ clarify any administrative details, for example, dates and times, protocols to be observed, timing of specific meetings and the location of the team's on-site base.

This exchange of information is an essential preparatory step for both your service and the ERO team.

Internal evaluation

The ERO team considers information from your service's internal evaluation to see what you know about:

▶ your effectiveness, in terms of achieving equitable and excellent outcomes for learners

▶ the extent to which learning and organisational conditions support or inhibit improvement.

Evaluation design

The ERO team uses all available information, including discussions with you, to design the evaluation.

On-site information gathering, analysis and synthesis

The on-site phase of the evaluation begins with an initial discussion between key personnel in your service and the ERO team.

We are particularly interested in discussing:

▶ what you know about children's learning in relation to the learning outcomes in *Te Whāriki*

▶ what you know about the learning and development of Māori children, children of Pacific heritage, children with additional learning needs, and children up to the age of 3

▶ what your priorities are for children's learning, and why

▶ what you know about how the learning and organisational conditions in your service (see *Te Ara Poutama* and the *Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric*) are enabling or hindering equitable and excellent outcomes for all children

▶ your current improvement focus/foci.

This initial discussion is also an opportunity for the ERO team to:

▶ share and discuss the proposed design of their evaluation

▶ clarify what they have in mind when it comes to involving service personnel in the evaluation process

▶ provide further information about the evaluation process.

Compliance

In a Quality Evaluation, ERO will begin with checking some compliance items. The following items are checked because they have a potentially high impact on children's learning, wellbeing, and health and safety:

▶ emotional safety including positive guidance and child protection, including safety checking

▶ physical safety including supervision, sleeping practices, accidents, medication, hygiene, and excursion policies and procedures

▶ suitable staffing including qualification levels and safety checking, including police vetting, teacher registration and ratios

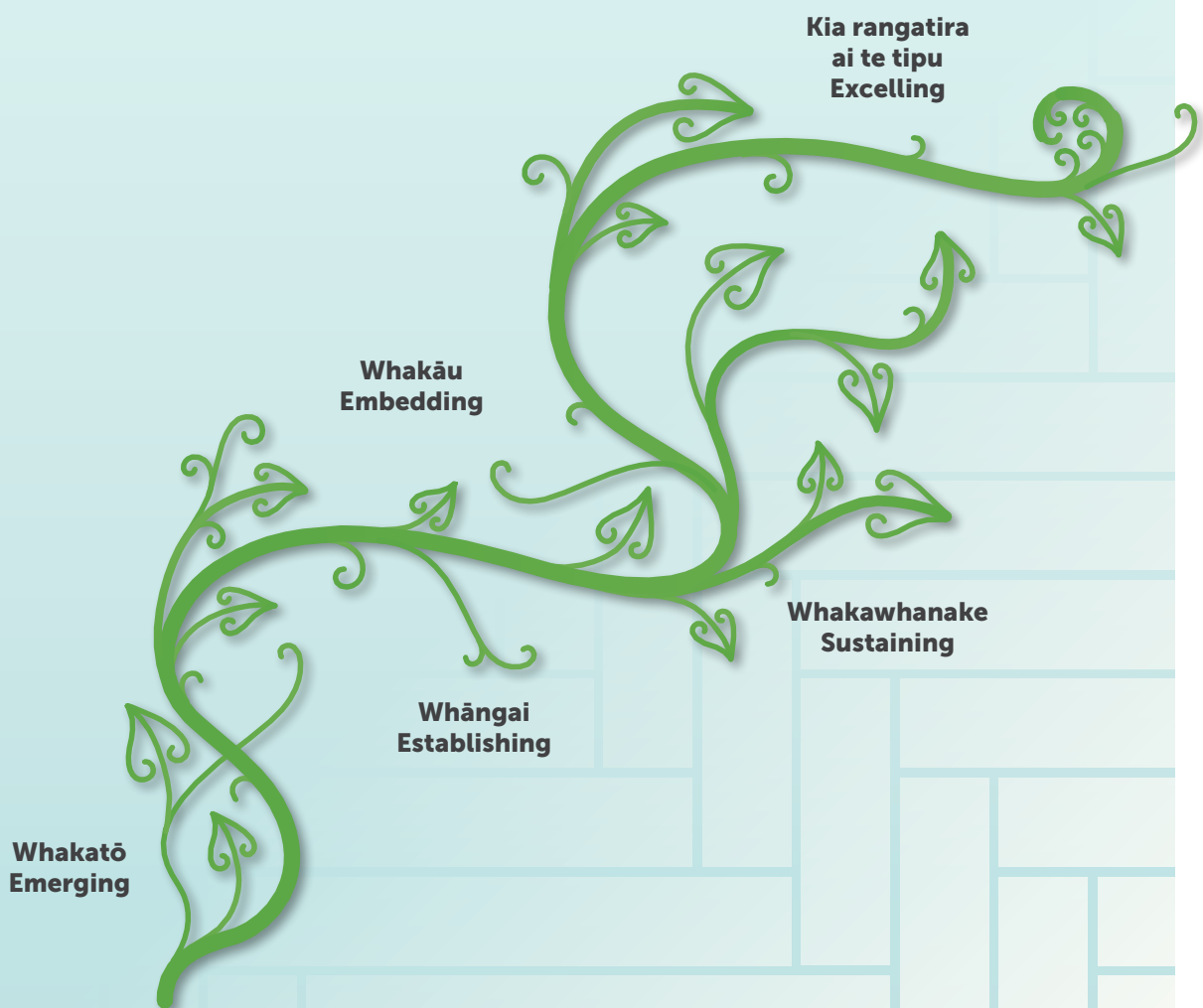▶ evacuation procedures and practices for fires and earthquakes.

If this checking process identifies non-compliance that is an 'unacceptable risk' to children (related to any of the items above), ERO will shift the focus of the evaluation to that of an *Akanuku | Assurance Review* and do a full assessment of the regulatory standards and licensing criteria.

ERO also checks to see that areas of non-compliance in the previous ERO report (if applicable) have been addressed.

Evaluators gather information in a range of ways. They will read documents, meet with key people, and observe aspects of your curriculum in action.

Evaluators use *Te Ara Poutama* as the basis for making judgements about what is happening for the children in your service, and the extent to which you are providing learning and organisational conditions that support their learning. The five-point quality improvement continuum found in the *Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric* will be used when judging where your service is at on its improvement journey:

36

NGĀ ARONGA WHAI HUA
IMPROVING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
THROUGH EFFECTIVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION

FIGURE 5. Akarangi judgement continuum

**Kia rangatira
ai te tipu
Excelling**

**Whakāu
Embedding**

**Whakawhanake
Sustaining**

**Whāngai
Establishing**

**Whakatō
Emerging**

Where does the service see itself and why −
on the basis of what evidence?

Where does ERO see the service and why −
on the basis of what evidence?

Table 5 (also found on page 12) defines each of the five 'judgement' terms. As mentioned earlier, the expectation is that services will use the ngā Rāpupuku in *Te Ara Poutama* and the *Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric* in their own internal evaluation processes. Supported by appropriate evidence, services should be able to evaluate where they are on the continuum and see what they need to do to improve.

TABLE 5. Judgement terms and descriptors (*Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric*)

Judgement	Description
Whakatō Emerging	**The seed is sown, a place of potential** *Emerging* means that the service is at an early stage of developing the learning and organisational conditions (systems, processes and practices) to improve quality and realise equitable outcomes for children.
Whāngai Establishing	**Nourishment is provided** *Establishing* means that the service is establishing the learning and organisational conditions (systems, processes and practices) and is building shared understandings to improve quality towards realising equitable outcomes for children.
Whakaū Embedding	**Consolidation of all elements has occurred** *Embedding* means that the service has established and is embedding coherent learning and organisational conditions (systems, processes and practices) and is consistently implementing practices and processes to enable improvement in quality towards realising equitable outcomes for children.
Whakawhanake Sustaining	**Appropriate conditions provide strong and ongoing support** *Sustaining* means that the service has evidence of its capability and capacity to sustain ongoing improvement to the learning and organisational conditions (systems, processes and practices) and the impact of this improvement in realising equitable outcomes for children.
Kia rangatira ai te tipu Excelling	A combination of favourable conditions and a nourishing environment produces ongoing quality of results *Excelling* means that the service is sector leading and demonstrates exemplary practice resulting in equitable outcomes for children.

At the conclusion of the on-site phase the ERO team will meet with nominated service personnel to share and clarify their emerging and tentative findings.

Reporting

Akarangi |Quality Evaluation reports are concise. They include:

▶ ERO's judgements in relation to ngā Akatoro (Domains) and the associated process indicators

▶ ERO's judgements concerning what your service knows about the children's learning, based on the Outcome Indicators derived from *Te Whāriki*

▶ a short context section

▶ a summary of findings

▶ improvement actions

▶ any actions for compliance.

The unconfirmed report is emailed to your service 20 working days from the last day the ERO team was at your service. You will be invited to respond, noting any errors of fact, significant omissions or comment on any other matters related to the findings, including providing additional evidence to support this. Your service has 15 working days to respond.

The ERO coordinator will then consider all matters raised in your response, plus any additional evidence provided. They may want to discuss your response with others. The coordinator will then decide whether to alter the report, and if so, they will make whatever amendments they consider justifiable.

ERO will publish the Akarangi | Quality Evaluation report on its website two weeks after sending it to your service.

USEFUL REFERENCES

Earl, L. (2014). Considerations in the framing, definition, identification and selection of indicators of education quality and their potential use in evaluation in the school setting. Accessed from *Effective School Review: Considerations in the framing, definition, identification and selection of indicators of education quality and their potential use in evaluation in the school setting | Education Review Office (ero.govt.nz)*

Education Review Office (2016). *Effective Internal Evaluation for Improvement*. Wellington: Author. Accessed from *Effective internal evaluation for improvement (1).pdf*

Education Review Office (2016). *Effective School Evaluation: how to do and use evaluation for improvement*. Wellington: Author. Accessed from *ERO-15569-Effective-School-Evaluation-June16-FULL-WEB-002.pdf*

Education Review Office (2020). *Te Ara Poutama – indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most*. Wellington: Author. Accessed from *Te-Ara-Poutama-Indicators-of-quality-full-document (2).pdf*

Education Review Office (2020). *Akarangi Quality Evaluation Judgement Rubric*. Wellington: Author. Accessed from *Online-Rubric_0.pdf*

Indicators background papers. Accessed from *Te Ara Poutama Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most | Education Review Office (ero.govt.nz)*

Ministry of Education (2006). *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: Self-review guidelines for early childhood education*. Wellington: author .Accessed from *https://education.govt.nz/early-childhood/licensing-and-regulations/the-regulatory-framework-for-ece/licensing-criteria/self-review-guidelines/*

Ministry of Education (2017). *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington: Author. Accessed from *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa - Early childhood curriculum (education.govt.nz)*