



Briefing report

Education Review Office (ERO): Starting school together: What do we know about cohort entry?

Date	18 May 2022
Security Level	N/A
ERO Priority	Medium
ERO Reference	M22-22
Date requested	ERO initiated
Date due	ERO initiated
Proactive release	Recommended

Addressee	Action sought	Deadline
Associate Minister of Education	<p>It is recommended that you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Note that ERO intends to release the attached report <i>Starting school together: What do we know about cohort entry?</i> on Thursday 2 June 2022. b) Agree to forward this briefing and the attached report to the Minister for Education, Hon Chris Hipkins. c) Indicate if you want to discuss this report with ERO officials prior to its launch. d) Note this briefing is recommended for proactive release at the time of its publication. 	



Attachments:

Education Review Office (ERO):
Starting school together: What do we know about cohort entry?
Appendix A: Report and Summary
Appendix B: Draft ERO media release

Minister's Office to complete	
Noted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approved	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referred to:	
Date signed by Minister:	



Comments:



Our Ref: M22-22

18 May 2022

Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education

Starting school together: What do we know about cohort entry?

Purpose

1. This briefing provides you with a near final draft report and summary from ERO's evaluation of cohort entry, attached as Appendix A. We intend to publish this Report on Thursday 2 June 2022.
2. The Report looks at the impact of cohort entry on children and their peers, whānau, schools, and early childhood education services.

Background

3. Cohort entry was formally included in the Education Act in 2017 in response to changing patterns of school enrolment around the country. In 2022, 7 percent of schools across the country have cohort entry in place. Over two thirds (70 percent) of these are in urban areas, and more than half (58 percent) have rolls of more than 300 children. Cohort schools are also two and a half times more likely to be higher decile. As more Māori and Pacific learners attend primary schools in urban areas like Auckland, they are more likely to be at schools running a cohort entry policy.
4. Over the past nine months ERO has evaluated the impact of cohort entry in schools that have adopted this approach. To do this we have surveyed and interviewed principals, new entrant teachers, and parents in both cohort and continuous entry schools and interviewed ECE providers.

Overall findings

5. ERO looked at how cohort entry impacts new entrants, peers, schools, whānau, and ECEs.
6. We found that schools that have tried cohort entry recommended it and intend to stay with it. Only 2 percent of schools thought they would return to continuous entry.
7. Our research found that for schools that adopted it cohort entry had many benefits. It:
 - a) **Helps with new entrants' successful transition to school.** New entrants start school with a group that can include friends from their ECE service or children they meet during transition. Group starts improve children's sense of belonging as beginning school is a shared experience. Nearly all principals (93 percent)

said children settled better in class with cohort entry. Schools reported students are less anxious and more confident with group starts. It also supported learning, with eight out of 10 principals reporting cohort entry improved new entrants' engagement with learning.

- b) **Has a positive impact on peers.** Cohort entry means they experience fewer interruptions to their learning, and helps them stay settled in class. They also get to reset and relearn classroom routines with each new cohort group. They also benefited from uninterrupted blocks of teaching time which can be used to progress school readiness and learning.
 - c) **Helps whānau connect with the school.** Whānau were more likely to meet other whānau, either through the transition process, school events, or starting their children on the same day. Building supportive networks was easier.
 - d) **Helps schools plan for transition and gives teachers more time to teach.** Principals can schedule whānau visits and share information to groups, ensuring a consistent experience for whānau. Teachers can plan and prepare for groups of new students starting on specified dates. Planning and preparation ranges from preparing stationery packs to transition visits and lesson planning. Eight out of 10 teachers reported it positively impacted on their work.
8. There are some schools that decided to remain with continuous entry to encourage enrolments within their schools, or because their community has specific needs like higher numbers of children with learning or behavioural support needs.
9. Although, on average, the number of children leaving an ECE service in a cohort is small, we found that ECE services thought that cohort entry into school has the potential to change the pattern of how children flow in and out of an ECE service, and how services manage their rolls.

Implications

10. Whilst cohort entry may not work for all schools, there are clear benefits so far for the schools that have adopted it. Other schools may wish to consider adopting cohort entry, particularly as it has the potential to support transitions, boost whānau engagement, and provide teachers with more time to teach.
11. Covid disruptions have led to increasing concerns about how well children are transitioning into school, highlighted the importance of whānau engagement, and have led to teachers reporting increasingly unmanageable workloads. Cohort entry could be one option for schools to consider in addressing these issues.

Publication

12. ERO intends to publish this report on Thursday 2 June 2022. We plan to share the report with key groups through:
- a. An ERO media release on the morning of publication (see Appendix B).
 - b. Publication of the report on the ERO website.
 - c. Sending the report to peak bodies that support boards, principals, early childhood education providers, and carer groups.
 - d. Delivering online webinars on key findings and advice for schools and services.
 - e. Providing accessible guides for schools, ECE providers, and whānau.

Recommendations

13. It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** that ERO intends to release the attached report *Starting school together: What do we know about cohort entry?* on Thursday 2 June 2022. **Noted**
- b) **Agree** to forward this briefing and the attached report to the Minister for Education, Hon Chris Hipkins. **Agreed** **Disagreed**
- c) **Indicate** if you want to discuss this report with ERO officials prior to its launch. **Yes** **No**
- d) **Note** this briefing is recommended for proactive release at the time of its publication. **Noted**


Nicholas Pole
Chief Executive

NOTED/APPROVED



Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education
21 / 05 / 2022

Appendix A: Report and Summary
Appendix B: Draft ERO media release