



# Briefing report

## Education Review Office (ERO): Evaluation of Education Provision for Disabled Children in Early Childhood Education: Key findings and draft recommendations

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Addressee	Action sought	Deadline
<b>Associate Minister of Education</b>	<p>It is recommended that you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Note</b> that ERO will provide you with a near final draft of the report 'Evaluation of the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled children in early childhood education in September.</li> <li>b) <b>Agree</b> to forward this briefing to the Minister of Education and Associate Education Ministers.</li> <li>c) <b>Indicate</b> whether you wish officials to support a meeting with Minister Williams or any other relevant portfolio Ministers.</li> <li>d) <b>Note</b> this briefing is recommended for proactive release after the final report is published.</li> </ul>	



### Attachments:

**Appendix A:** Recommendations from the evaluation of provision for disabled children in ECE

**Appendix B:** Slide deck about the evaluation and findings



### Comments:

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



M22-48

25 August 2022

**Hon Jan Tinetti**  
**Associate Minister of Education (School Operations)**

## **ERO Evaluation of Education Provision for Disabled Children in Early Childhood Education: Key Findings and Draft Recommendations**

### **Purpose**

1. This briefing updates you on key findings from ERO's evaluation of the quality and inclusiveness of education provision for disabled children in early childhood education (ECE) and sets out draft recommendations to strengthen education for these priority learners.

### **Background**

2. Participation in high-quality ECE positively impacts education outcomes. These in turn positively impact life outcomes, such as health, wellbeing and earning potential. High-quality ECE supports children to develop the social, emotional, communication, cognitive and motor skills which enable them to thrive. A focused, intentional approach to developing these skills is particularly critical for disabled children, as it sets the foundation for all their future learning and engagement with others. Research shows the earlier the intervention, the greater its impact.
3. There is wide variation in the types of ECE provision available, including community-based and private providers; standalone services and those that are part of larger governing organisations.
4. Unlike schools, attendance at ECE is not compulsory, nor is it fully funded.
5. The Government has a priority in the NELP of barrier free access to education for disabled children, and the focus on inclusion (both of disabled children and more broadly) was deliberately strengthened in the *Te Whāriki* refresh in 2017.
6. To see how we are performing on this priority, ERO has carried out an evaluation of the quality and inclusiveness of education provision for disabled children in both schools and early childhood education.
7. This briefing sets out the findings and recommendations for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) evaluation. We expect to provide you with a draft report in early September prior to publication at the end of September.

8. ERO is partnering with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) on this evaluation to pool our collective expertise and our engagement with the disability sector. There is also an Expert Advisory Group including members of the disability community who are supporting this work.
9. ERO has been working closely with the Ministry of Education to ensure that findings of this evaluation can inform the review of interventions for children with the highest level of need (the Highest Needs Review).
10. The evaluation focusses on four key questions:
  - a. How well are disabled children doing in terms of learning, wellbeing, experience, and engagement at ECE?
  - b. What is the quality and inclusiveness of ECE provision for disabled children?
  - c. How strong are the system enablers that support inclusive, high-quality early childhood education?
  - d. What key action could lead to improved outcomes for disabled children in ECE?
11. The evaluation is broader than the Highest Needs Review. It focuses on disabled children with significant needs for support and adaptations/accommodations to enable them to thrive in education.
12. Data collection and analysis for the ECE evaluation is now complete. Draft findings and recommendations have been identified and shared with the project's Expert Advisory Group and key agencies, including the Ministry of Education and Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **What informed the evaluation findings?**

13. The findings of the ECE evaluation are based on broad evidence including:
  - a. Surveys of 118 parents/whanau.
  - b. Surveys of 130 kaiako/teachers, and 291 service leaders.
  - c. Site visits and observations of teaching and learning at nine services.
  - d. In-depth interviews with leaders, kaiako, and parents/whānau at 22 services, and with leaders and kaiako at two additional services.
  - e. Interviews with eight Governing Organisation leaders.
  - f. Interviews with key experts, practitioners and agencies supporting inclusive education.
14. The evaluation has a strong focus on understanding the experiences of disabled children, and a tailored approach to understanding Māori and Pacific disabled children and their families' experiences. The evaluation also includes a strong focus on quality teaching and learning practice and capturing good practice that can inspire other services.
15. The evaluation includes Kindergartens, Education and Care, Home-based and Playcentres. These service types make up 90% of English-Medium ECE services in New Zealand in 2021.

## Draft findings

16. The evaluation has identified twelve key findings, which are summarised below. The evaluation in ECE has key findings similar to those for schools:
- a. Expectations for disabled children's inclusion are high.
  - b. Too many disabled children are experiencing exclusion.
  - c. Disabled children enjoy attending, but it is unclear how well they are learning and progressing.
  - d. Kaiako/teacher confidence in teaching disabled children is low.

More detailed information on the findings and supporting evidence is in Appendix B (slide pack).

**Finding 1:** National expectations for disabled children's inclusion in ECE are robust and well communicated, but there is not yet systematic monitoring of how well these expectations are being met.

**Finding 2:** Strong expectations for inclusion are not consistently translated into enrolment and practice – one quarter of disabled children were discouraged from enrolling at early childhood services, and one fifth were asked to stay home when services were engaging in particular activities. Disabled children with complex needs were much more likely to be turned away from a service than those with low needs.

**Finding 3:** The wellbeing of disabled children is generally well-supported, with most parents reporting their child has a sense of belonging at their service. However, disabled children are not fully included in activities and learning experiences at their service.

**Finding 4:** There is a lack of information, including limited use of assessment, showing how well disabled children are progressing towards their learning goals across the breadth of the curriculum. This is particularly concerning as many kaiako report a lack of confidence in supporting disabled children's learning.

**Finding 5:** Children with more complex needs find it harder to access ECE and have poorer experiences when they are enrolled.

**Finding 6:** Parents of Māori disabled children report similar outcomes for their child as other parents, but kaiako report a lack of confidence in ensuring Māori disabled children succeed as Māori.

**Finding 7:** Many services do not have good information about how well they are providing for disabled children. Kaiako and parents are much less positive than leaders about how well disabled children are being provided for.

**Finding 8:** *Te Whāriki* is designed to be flexible and inclusive, enabling adaptation to children's strengths, interests and needs. However, kaiako report they are not confident adapting their service's curriculum for disabled children.

**Finding 9:** Services' physical environments are almost always appropriate for the children currently attending, however, they are not universally accessible. This may be a barrier to enrolment for those children who need additional adaptations, such as specialist changing facilities or wheelchair access.

**Finding 10:** Parents, kaiako and leaders have strong, positive relationships, but they are often not working together to support disabled children's learning. A strong learning-focused partnership between parents and kaiako is particularly critical for disabled children's success.

**Finding 11:** Many services are not working collaboratively with other services, schools and specialists to improve education for disabled children.

**Finding 12:** Transitions from ECE into school settings are not working well. Communication and information sharing are the key areas of concern.

These findings are set out in more detail below.

**Finding 1:** National expectations for disabled children's inclusion in ECE are robust and well communicated, but there is not yet systematic, system-level monitoring of how well these expectations are being met.

17. While system expectations are clear (for example, as articulated in *Te Whāriki*, and Governing Organisations documents) there was no systematic monitoring of how well those expectations were met. We cannot identify disabled children or track their progress and experiences, which severely limits Government's ability to drive improvement.

**Finding 2:** Strong expectations for inclusion are not consistently translated into enrolment and practice – one quarter of disabled children were discouraged from enrolling at early childhood services, and one fifth were asked to stay home when services were engaging in particular activities.

18. A significant proportion of parents of disabled children we heard from reported that not all services were welcoming, and they had been discouraged from enrolling their child in a service.
  - a. One quarter (26%) of parents of disabled children have been discouraged from enrolling their child by one or more services.
  - b. Nearly 1 in 5 parents have been asked to keep their child at home at least once (not related to government COVID-19 restrictions).

**Finding 3:** The wellbeing of disabled children is generally well-supported, with most parents reporting their child has a sense of belonging at their service. However, disabled children are not fully included in their service.

19. Most parents of disabled children report their child's wellbeing is strongly supported in the service they attend. They feel loved, cared for and comfortable. However only two thirds of parents are satisfied their child was included in all aspects of life at the service. Over a third disagree their child had good friends at the service.

**Finding 4:** There is a lack of information showing how well disabled children are progressing towards their learning goals, across the breadth of the curriculum. This is particularly concerning as kaiako reported a lack of confidence in supporting disabled children's learning.

20. It is unclear how well disabled learners are progressing against their learning goals because assessment does not consistently show learning or progress. Approximately half of kaiako are not sharing children's learning with parents or identifying their next steps for learning.
21. Forty percent of kaiako were either not, or only somewhat, confident to assess disabled children's learning. Fifty-four percent of kaiako had not accessed ongoing learning relating to disabled children, and a third report they are not supported to access this.

22. We observed assessment documentation largely shared what children had *done*, rather than what they had learnt.
23. In interviews, we heard from leaders and key system informants that Initial Teacher Education is not setting new teachers up with the skills and experiences they need to be confident. Three-quarters of kaiako report they had not been mentored to teach disabled children during their beginning teacher experience.

**Finding 5:** Children with more complex needs find it harder to access ECE and have poorer experiences when they are enrolled.

24. Children with more complex needs are more likely to experience exclusion. One third of parents of children with complex needs had been discouraged from enrolling their child at one or more ECE services, compared to no parents of disabled children with low needs.
25. Fewer than half of parents of children with complex needs reported their service supported their child to be included, and only one third of parents of children with complex needs were often included in learning conversations with their child's kaiako.

**Finding 6:** Parents of Māori disabled children report similar outcomes for their child as other parents, but kaiako report a lack of confidence in ensuring Māori disabled children succeed as Māori.

26. Almost all parents of Māori disabled children reported their child enjoyed going to their service, and agreed their child felt loved, cared for and comfortable attending.
27. While 68 percent of parents of Māori disabled children felt that kaiako helped support their child to learn about their culture, nearly two-thirds of kaiako had limited confidence in working in a culturally responsive way with Māori disabled children, and around one fifth believed kaiako in their service did not work with whānau to enhance learning and wellbeing for Māori disabled children.

**Finding 7:** Many services do not have good information about how well they are providing for disabled children. Kaiako and parents are much less positive than leaders about how well disabled children are being provided for.

28. Services often lacked focus on disabled children. Forty-one percent of leaders reported provision for disabled children was rarely or never a focus of internal evaluation.
29. Across almost all questions, and in interviews, service leaders were much more positive about the quality of provision for disabled children than parents or kaiako. For example:
  - a. Ninety-eight percent of service leaders believe their service enables disabled children access to the full learning programme.
  - b. Seventy-seven percent of kaiako are confident to include disabled children in the full range of learning opportunities.
  - c. Sixty-six percent of parents are satisfied their child is included in all aspects of life in the service.

**Finding 8:** *Te Whāriki* is designed to be flexible and inclusive, enabling adaptation to children's strengths, interests and needs. However, kaiako report they are not confident adapting their service's curriculum for disabled children.

30. Nearly two-thirds of parents are satisfied with how kaiako adapt the learning programme for their child, however, 33 percent of kaiako reported a lack of confidence in making adaptations to the curriculum for disabled children.
31. Kaiako indicated a lack of confidence when using specialised resources/adaptations (e.g. assistive technology or communication tools) where required.

**Finding 9:** Services' physical environments are almost always appropriate for the children currently attending, however, they are not universally accessible. This may be a barrier to enrolment for those children who need additional adaptations, such as specialist changing facilities or wheelchair access.

32. Encouragingly most leaders and parents reported the physical environment of the ECE service was fully accessible for disabled learners.
33. Through observations, we found spaces were accessible for the children currently attending, but some areas would not be suitable for children with different types of disability. In interviews, we heard some service leaders had to make adaptations to their service when children with different types of disability enrolled. This may mean parents choose to enrol their child at a different service, so they do not have to wait for a fully accessible ECE environment.

**Finding 10:** Parents, kaiako and leaders have strong, positive relationships, but they are often not working together to support disabled children's learning. A strong learning-focused partnership between parents and kaiako is particularly critical for disabled children's success.

34. Almost all kaiako, leaders and parents are positive about the relationships they developed. However, 46 percent of parents feel kaiako never or only sometimes discuss their child's learning goals with them, and 55 percent said kaiako never or only sometimes discuss their child's next steps.
35. Only 66 percent of parents are satisfied with how their service works with them around their child's individual learning plan.
36. One third (38 percent) of kaiako lack confidence to work with whānau to define success.

**Finding 11:** Many services are not working collaboratively with other services, schools and specialists to improve education for disabled children.

37. More than half (54 percent) said they had either never or rarely ever collaborated with ECE networks and/or schools to improve education for disabled learners.
38. Two in five kaiako believe they have no or only limited access to specialists and learning support leaders. Twenty-seven percent of kaiako reported this paid leave to work with specialists was either not available, or available to only a small extent.
39. Only 63 percent of parents were satisfied with how their child's ECE collaborated with external agencies.

**Finding 12:** Transitions from ECE into school settings are not working well. Communication and information sharing are the key areas of concern.

40. Transitions from ECE to school are an area of challenge. In interviews, we heard the process of applying for funding, and sharing documents and information with schools and the support systems at schools, was a difficult and sometimes traumatic process for parents.

### **Draft recommendations**

41. ERO and its partners (ODI and HRC) have developed a draft package of recommendations to address the areas of greatest concern, and to strengthen education for these priority learners. There are three areas of recommendation:

**Area 1:** Strengthen prioritisation and accountability for disabled children

**Area 2:** Building leaders' and teachers' capability to teach disabled children

**Area 3:** Empowering disabled children and their whānau

42. The recommendations under each area are attached in Appendix A.
43. ERO has shared the findings and areas of action with key agencies, including the Ministry of Education, and discussed high level options for improving education for disabled children. Based on these discussions, ERO has identified 13 draft recommendations against the three areas. Each of these options will require further cross-agency consideration and detailed policy development, including costings. The recommendations are set out below.
44. Due to the similar nature of the findings, the ECE evaluation reflects similar recommendations as the schools' evaluation.

**Action Area 1:** Strengthen prioritisation and accountability for disabled children

45. To increase the prioritisation of disabled children in early education, and visibility of how well they are doing in terms of learning and progress achievement (findings 1 - 3, 5, 7 and 9), ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education (MoE) and ERO work together to develop and implement the following five recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** Develop with services ways to better identify and track the enrolment and participation of disabled learners in ECE (MoE).

**Recommendation 2:** Provide guidance to services on expectations for inclusion and provision of education for disabled children, and what needs to be in place in all services (MoE).

**Recommendation 3:** Provide support for service leaders and Governing Organisations on understanding how well their service is meeting the needs of disabled children (ERO).

**Recommendation 4:** Include provision and outcomes for disabled children as a focus in all ECE evaluations (ERO).

**Recommendation 5:** Explore policy options to support services to reduce the barriers to enrolment and participation for disabled children in high quality ECE (MoE).

46. Implementing these recommendations will provide greater visibility at a national level of how well disabled children are doing in terms of learning and progress, and improve



support and accountability for service leaders on their legislative obligations and how these should be enacted.

**Action Area 2:** Building leaders and teachers' capability to teach disabled children

47. To increase disabled children's sense of belonging and acceptance in early education, and kaiako' confidence in teaching disabled children (findings 3 - 8, 10 - 11), we recommend that the Ministry of Education, ERO and the Teaching Council work together to develop and implement the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 6:** Strengthen initial teacher education focus on teaching disabled children e.g. through placements that provide experience of teaching these learners (Teaching Council).

**Recommendation 7:** Ensure a focus on teaching disabled children in the Guidelines for Induction, Mentoring and Mentor Teachers (Teaching Council).

**Recommendation 8:** Ensure guidance around the professional standards for teachers (Our Code, Our Standards) makes explicit the expectations for inclusion of disabled children and encourage uptake of disability specific training (Teaching Council).

**Recommendation 9:** Include disability as a priority in professional learning and development provision for kaiako (MoE) and hold targeted events on key aspects of teaching disabled children (Teaching Council).

**Recommendation 10:** Review the quality of disability specific PLD provision for ECE leaders and kaiako and provide services with guidance on how to identify quality, targeted PLD and support to improve their practice (MOE, ERO).

**Recommendation 11:** Ensure there is in place and increase use of guidelines, resources, and supports (assessment, curriculum, scaffolding etc) for teaching disabled children, including supports to notice, recognise, and respond to progressions for disabled children (MoE).

48. Together, these recommendations will build service leaders and kaiako' knowledge and capability to teach disabled children and, in doing so, improve disabled children's experience of, and outcomes at, early education.

**Action area 3:** Empowering disabled children and their whānau

49. To increase disabled children's whānau's understanding of their education rights, how to raise concerns or make a complaint about their experience at school (findings 2-6 and 8-11), or to get someone to advocate on their behalf, we recommend that the Ministry of Education, ERO, and Whaikaha | Ministry for Disabled People (MfDP) develop and implement the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 12:** Ensure there is support for parents and whānau to understand education rights, what they should expect from a service, how to raise concerns and complaints and access to advocacy support if they need it. (MoE).

**Recommendation 13:** Put in place the tools and guidance required to ensure that information follows disabled learners across education settings (MoE).

50. Implementing these recommendations will ensure disabled children and their whānau are informed of their education rights, have access to independent advocacy if they need it, and provide greater visibility and accountability of complaints at a national level.

## Next Steps

51. Adoption of these recommendations has the potential to significantly improve education experiences and outcomes for disabled children. The recommendations are high level and require work programmes led by the Ministry of Education, ERO, Teaching Council and the Ministry for Disabled People to develop more detailed options for Ministers, including costing.
52. The Office for Disability Issues, which is partnering with us on this evaluation, is briefing Hon. Poto Williams in her capacity as Minister for Disability Issues on these key findings and draft recommendations.
53. Given their education portfolios, ERO recommends that you forward this briefing to Hons Hipkins, Davis, and Sio. You may also wish to convene a meeting of interested Ministers to discuss these findings and recommendations.
54. We will provide you with a copy of the near final draft in September.
55. We intend to publish this report alongside the report on provision for disabled learners in schools in late September. We will brief you on our publication approach in mid-September.

## Recommendations

56. It is recommended that you:
- a) **Note** that ERO will provide you with a near final draft of the report 'Evaluation of education provision for disabled children in early childhood education' in September. **Noted**
  - b) **Agree** to forward this briefing to the Minister of Education and Associate Education Ministers. **Agreed/Disagreed**
  - c) **Indicate** whether you wish officials to support a meeting with Minister Williams or any other relevant portfolio Ministers. **Yes/No**
  - d) **Note** this briefing is recommended for proactive release after the final report is published. **Noted**



Nicholas Pole  
**Chief Executive**

NOTED/APPROVED



Jan Tinetti  
**Associate Minister of Education (School Operations)**

28/ 08 /2022