



ERO Early Childhood Akatea | Governing Organisation Evaluation First Report

Governing Organisation Name: Evolve Education Group Centres Limited

Head Office Location: Auckland

1 ERO's judgement of Evolve Education Group Centres Limited is as follows:

Indicator	Below the threshold for quality		Above the threshold for quality	
Organisational conditions	Improvement required	Working towards	Embedded	Excelling
Learning conditions	Improvement required	Working towards	Embedded	Excelling

For an explanation of the judgement terms used and of the evaluation process please refer to the last page of this report. These judgements are based on the evidence provided to ERO during the evaluation process.

Children's health and safety

Improvement required

Taking reasonable steps

2 ERO's Judgements

A [Governing Organisation Evaluation](#) evaluates the extent to which organisational and learning conditions support equitable and excellent outcomes for all learners. [Te Ara Poutama Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most](#) is the basis for making judgements about its effectiveness. The [Early Childhood Education \(ECE\) - Improvement Framework \(teacher led services\)](#) derived from the indicators, is used to inform the ERO's judgements about the organisation's performance. Evaluation for improvement | Ngā Aronga Whai Hua is integrated across all of the above areas.

3 About the Organisation

Evolve Education Group Centres Limited (the organisation) is a national organisation that has 95 early learning services using the brands of Active Explorers, Learning Adventures, Lollipops, Pascals, Little Wonders, Little Earth Montessori and Little Lights. At the time of this evaluation, all services were on full licence. There have been significant changes in this organisation over the last decade, including nine Chief Executive Officers (CEO) in the past nine years. A stable senior leadership team has now been established.

The organisation underwent a change of ownership at the end of 2022. A new CEO was appointed in January 2023. She works alongside a recently formed senior leadership team who have designated authority from the board to make decisions and allocate resourcing. They oversee the operation and management of services. A deliberate restructure of roles and responsibilities included the appointment of a Head of Education and a small education team. This team provides curriculum leadership, and professional learning and development for leaders and teachers. The education team are responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the education strategy 2024-2026.

Most services are led by qualified centre managers, and some have appointed curriculum leads. There is a mix of qualified and unqualified staff.

Findings from ERO's evaluation at the governance and organisational level included evaluating the extent to which Evolve Education Group Centres Limited's strategic intentions, quality improvement systems, processes and practices support the provision of quality education and care at individual service level.

4 Evaluation Findings for the Organisation

Since 2023, there has been a significant restructure of the organisation. Governance has since developed useful strategic intentions, direction and an education strategy. There is an intentional focus on progress and developing a culture of continuous improvement.

The organisation is in the early stages of developing and implementing quality improvement systems, processes and practices

- The organisation has a useful framework to review and monitor policies, procedures and practices. Clear processes for monitoring progress and accountability assurance have been developed. Aspects of monitoring compliance require improvement to gather more reliable data and inform accurate reporting on how well services meet and maintain regulatory standards.
- There is a dedicated policy team who have responsibility for reviewing, implementing, and monitoring policies. They have undertaken a robust review of the services' implementation of policies in order to provide relevant support.
- A system for ongoing and quarterly monitoring of the strategic plan is in place. Governance provides coherent and fit for purpose systems for the services.

The organisation's capability to do and use effective internal evaluation is variable.

- Review is regularly undertaken and supports improvement. However, evaluation for improvement is not yet well understood across the organisation.
- There have been limited opportunities to build teachers' capability to evaluate aspects of curriculum and teaching practices.
- There is currently no reporting or feedback on the quality of internal evaluation at service level.
- There is a need to strengthen evaluation capability of leaders and managers to support a shared understanding of evaluation for improvement.

The organisation is developing the conditions to foster a culture of collaboration within and across the organisation.

- The organisation has developed desired values and defined behaviours aligned to these.
- The senior leadership team is responsive to emerging concerns and issues. Effective communication fosters a positive team culture and collective responsibility. Problem solving and critical reflection of practice is encouraged.
- An inspiring leadership programme has been developed and is yet to be implemented.
- Parents and whānau have opportunities to contribute to policy reviews and are surveyed about operational matters. Their perspectives are yet to be consistently considered and made evident in curriculum design.

Education plans that align with the Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Services 2008 have been established for some centres and are beginning to be implemented. Measurable indicators that enable area managers to make judgements about the quality of curriculum and report on progress are yet to be developed.

5 Leadership to support quality education and care

The education team have developed an education strategy to strengthen the delivery of curriculum. Two regional managers oversee the work of area managers. Eleven area managers, assigned to individual services, oversee curriculum at service level. They do not yet report to governance on the quality of curriculum.

The education team and regional managers are in the early stages of building curriculum leadership capability across the organisation. Area managers know the strengths and areas for improvement in each service well.

- Access to targeted professional learning and development provides opportunities to grow leadership knowledge and skills.
- Most area managers have an informal overview of the strengths and areas of improvement for their services.
- Service visit reports provided by area managers are focused on daily operations, rather than the quality and effectiveness of curriculum. Effective feedback and feedforward are necessary to enable service leaders and teachers to provide a rich curriculum for all learners.

6 Summary of findings from visits to sample services

ERO visited a sample of 24 services to verify what Evolve Education Group Centres Limited knows about the quality of each of the services' learning conditions and the extent to which the organisational conditions support service improvement. ERO selected the service sample in consultation with the governing organisation.

The education team have recently introduced some professional learning modules to build the confidence and capability of adults providing education and care to foster children's growing social and emotional competencies. Teams are at varying stages of undertaking this professional learning. This is making a difference for some children.

Service leaders and teachers have variable knowledge and understanding of *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum

- This variable knowledge impacts on their ability to implement a rich and responsive curriculum for all learners.
- Almost all services are using the learning outcomes in *Te Whāriki*, in limited ways. Leaders and teachers are yet to use the learning outcomes to show children's progress over time or make explicit how they relate to identified learning priorities.
- A collaborative approach to working with families and external agencies is supporting children with additional needs to access the curriculum.
- Most of the youngest children (under two years old) experience calm, unhurried, peaceful routines that support their emotional and physical wellbeing.
- Routines and transitions interrupt play and learning in most services. Transition times require further consideration to ensure that all children experience a responsive curriculum with regular opportunities for sustained play and learning.
- Teachers have varying capability and confidence to use te reo Māori within the daily curriculum. Tikanga Māori practices are promoted by most teachers during routine times.
- The curriculum for most two to three years olds is not sufficiently meeting their learning needs. An intentional focus on developing a responsive curriculum that supports the learning and development for two-year old children is needed to ensure they are sufficiently challenged.

Most centre managers and teachers are yet to fully understand the purpose and use of internal evaluation.

- Review is predominately used to inform and guide improvements to teaching practice and learning environments.
- There is limited information about how developments and improvements to curriculum have had an impact on children's learning.

The organisation has recently developed initiatives to improve curriculum provision in its services. These include professional learning and development (PLD) programmes and an education strategy. These are at the early stages of implementation and therefore it is too soon to know the impact on teaching practices and children's learning. There is not yet targeted PLD for untrained staff to build their capability to provide a rich curriculum for all children.

7 Where to next for improvement?

Prior to the next ERO evaluation Evolve Education Group Centres Limited will progress the following actions through its quality improvement planning. This includes to:

- Refine education plans to better support reporting about the quality of curriculum.
- Build area managers understanding of the purpose and use of evaluation to enable them to support the evaluative capability of centre managers
- Monitor, evaluate and report on the impact of professional learning and development provision for both qualified and untrained staff to identify what is working or not, and for whom.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum for two to three-year-olds and once embedded evaluate the effectiveness of the changes made.

8 Management Assurance on Legal Requirements

As part of this review, a representative of Evolve Education Group Centres Limited completed an *ERO Governing Organisation Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklist*. In these documents they stated that the organisation has the systems, processes, and practices to be assured that service providers for licensed services within the organisation are meeting legal requirements related to:

- curriculum
- premises and facilities
- health and safety practices
- governance, management, and administration.

The licensed service provider/s of the sampled services listed at the end of this report also completed an *ERO Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklist* for their service. In these documents they attested that they have taken all reasonable steps to meet legal requirements, including those detailed in Ministry of Education Circulars and other documents, related to these areas.

All early childhood services are required to promote children's health and safety and to regularly review their compliance with legal requirements.

9 Next ERO Review

The next ERO evaluation is likely to be in 2 years.



Patricia Davey
Director of Early Childhood Education (ECE)

11 November 2024

[Further information about how ERO evaluates Akatea / Governing Organisations is available here.](#)

10 About the Governing Organisation

Service types	Education and care service	
Total number of licensed services	95	
Total number of children licensed for across all services	6676, including 1861 up to 2 years of age	
Total number of children enrolled across all services	5985	
Ethnic composition <i>Using rounded percentages</i>	Māori 13%; NZ European/ Pākehā 48%; Pacific 6%, Indian 12%, other ethnic groups 21%	
Number of full-time equivalent teachers	Qualified	653
	Unqualified	275
Review team on site	July to September 2024	
Date of this report	11 November 2024	
Most recent ERO report(s) These are available at www.ero.govt.nz	No previous Governing Organisation Evaluation reports	

11 List of sampled services

All sampled services are on a full licence.

Services sampled in this evaluation included:

Profile Number	Name of service	Service Type
45457	Active Explorers Blenheim	Education and care service
25423	Active Explorers Ellerslie	Education and care service
46482	Active Explorers Glenfield Kea	Education and care service
46163	Active Explorers Grenada	Education and care service
25394	Active Explorers Highbrook	Education and care service
45587	Active Explorers Lower Hutt	Education and care service
65195	Active Explorers Nelson Street	Education and care service
45567	Active Explorers St Lukes	Education and care service
20247	Active Explorers Swanson	Education and care service
46057	Active Explorers Upper Hutt	Education and care service
46630	Learning Adventures Levin	Education and care service
45121	Little Earth Montessori Kāpiti	Education and care service
46275	Little Wonders Aoraki	Education and care service
80085	Little Wonders Oamaru	Education and care service
47124	Little Wonders Pegasus	Education and care service
46150	Little Wonders Childcare (Roslyn)	Education and care service
25124	Lollipops Airport	Education and care service
47350	Lollipops Lynfield	Education and care service
45283	Lollipops Mount Albert	Education and care service
20231	Lollipops North Harbour Fantails	Education and care service
20508	Lollipops North Harbour Kakapos	Education and care service
46961	Lollipops Paraparaumu	Education and care service
25379	Lollipops Waiuku	Education and Care service
46120	Pascals Blenheim	Education and Care service

Activities undertaken by the evaluation team

- Pre-visit contact with the service provider/organisation leader(s).
- Meetings and / or conversations with governance, management and leaders.
- Verification and validation of what the organisation knows about the quality of education and care in its services.
- Reading documentation.
- Sampling of information related to compliance.

Activities undertaken by the evaluation team in the service sample visits

- Pre-visit contact with the service leader.
- Meetings and / or conversations with leaders and teachers.
- Verification and validation of information shared by the organisation at service level.
- Reading documentation as service level.
- Scanning the learning environment and resources.
- Observations of interactions and teaching practice while onsite in the sample services.
- Sampling of information related to compliance.

Description around ERO's judgement terms

ERO's judgements are based on *Te Ara Poutama* and the *Early Childhood Education Improvement Framework (teacher led services)*.

	Above the threshold for quality
Excelling	The organisation is excelling in the learning and organisational conditions to support high quality education and care for children.
Embedded	The organisation has embedded its learning and organisational conditions to support ongoing improvement in the provision of quality education and care for children.
	Below the threshold for quality
Working towards	The organisation is working towards establishing the learning and organisational conditions to support improvements in the provision of quality education and care for children.
Improvement required	The organisation has not yet developed the learning and organisational conditions to support eh provision of quality education and care for children.