

# ERO Early Childhood Service Akarangi | Quality Evaluation Report

**Early Childhood Service Name:** Stepping Stones Learning Environment

**Profile Number:** 45015

**Location:** Owhata, Rotorua

## 1 ERO's judgement of Stepping Stones Learning Environment is as follows:

Domains: Ngā Akatoro	Below the threshold for quality		Above the threshold for quality	
The learner and their learning He Whāriki Motuhake	Improvement required	Working towards	Embedded	Excelling
Collaborative professional learning and development builds knowledge and capability Whakangungu Ngaio	Improvement required	Working towards	Embedded	Excelling
Leadership fosters collaboration and improvement Kaihautū	Improvement required	Working towards	Embedded	Excelling
Stewardship through effective governance and management Te Whakaruruhau	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.*

Children's health and safety

Improvement required

Taking reasonable steps

## 2 ERO's Judgements

[Akarangi | Quality Evaluations](#) evaluate the extent to which early childhood services have the learning and organisational conditions to support equitable and excellent outcomes for all learners. [Te Ara Poutama Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most](#) and [Early Childhood Education \(ECE\) Improvement Framework \(teacher led services\)](#) are the basis for making judgements about the quality of the service in achieving equity and excellence for all learners. Evaluations for improvement | Ngā Aronga Whai Hua is integrated across all of the above domains.

## 3 About the Service

At Stepping Stones Learning Environment the owner is a qualified teacher who leads daily operations as well as teaching and curriculum. There have been significant staff and leadership changes since the last ERO evaluation in August 2021. Children learn in a mixed-aged setting. The centre philosophy places value on children learning in a home away from home, whanaungatanga (strong relationships with families) and tuakana-teina (younger children learning from older).

## 4 Progress since the previous ERO report

The 2021 ERO report identified three areas for improvement related to strengthening planning, assessment, and internal evaluation practices and responsiveness to children's identities, languages and cultures.

Good progress has been made in implementing individual planning and assessment that shows children's progress over time in relation to valued ways of learning, development, and skills. Good progress has also been made in responding to the cultural identity of tamariki Māori. Teachers are increasingly integrating learning linked to te reo Māori and te ao Māori (Māori world view). Responsiveness to Pacific and other cultures is mostly limited to celebrations and some learning environment resourcing. Limited progress has been made in strengthening internal evaluation and this remains an area for growth.

## 5 Learning Conditions

### The learner and their learning | He Whāriki Motuhake

Children experience a responsive curriculum underpinned by reciprocal relationships that positively promotes their emotional wellbeing, social competency, oral language and independence.

- Infants and toddlers benefit from warm nurturing interactions with teachers, who maintain a calm, slow pace and support their participation alongside other children. Older children's higher thinking processes and understandings of the world around them are fostered through thoughtfully designed experiences and sustained play.
- Learning-focused partnerships are developing. Parent goals for their child are regularly gathered through a range of communication platforms, and acknowledged within learning assessments.
- Transitions into and from the centre are well supported through open communication with whānau.

## Collaborative professional learning and development builds knowledge and capability | Whakangungu Ngaio

Systems and practices to support ongoing professional growth and learning continue to be developed.

- Regular mentoring is in place which supports leaders' and teachers' goal setting. The system for professional growth does not yet fully align with Teaching Council requirements.
- Some relevant professional learning is undertaken. The impact for children from teachers implementing this new knowledge is unknown.
- Teachers are undertaking self-review to develop aspects of the curriculum. This focuses on changes made and what teachers and children are doing, rather than considering the effectiveness of change to improve outcomes for children.

## 6 Organisational conditions

### Leadership fosters collaboration and improvement | Kaihautū

Leaders are taking steps to establish effective leadership that supports collaboration for improvement.

- Distributed leadership is being developed within the new teaching team through sharing areas of responsibility and access to some relevant professional learning.
- Relational trust between leaders and teachers promotes a team culture of openness to change. Shared understanding of the service's philosophy and curriculum priorities are evident.
- Professional mentoring for leadership is no longer in place. As such, leaders are not supported by an professional network to effectively monitor and promote improved teaching practices.

### Stewardship through effective governance and management | Te Whakaruruhau

Governors are developing conditions to promote the learning and wellbeing of children and progress toward equitable outcomes for all.

- Strategies are in place to promote equity of access and participation for children and their families. Small group size of children, good resourcing and thoughtful development of the premises support quality provision of the enacted curriculum.
- Positive steps have been taken to support staff retention and stabilise the teaching team.
- Strategic planning is in place. This is not yet formally evaluated to measure the effectiveness of actions taken to achieve priorities for improvement.

## 7 Management Assurance on Legal Requirements

Before the review, the staff and management of Stepping Stones Learning Environment completed an *ERO Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklist*. In these documents they attested that they have taken all reasonable steps to meet their legal obligations related to:

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

During the review, ERO looked at the service's system for managing the following areas that have a potentially high impact on children's health and safety:

- emotional safety (including positive guidance and child protection)
- physical safety (including supervision; sleep procedures; accidents; medication; excursion policies and procedures)
- suitable staffing (safety checking of staff, ratios)
- relevant evacuation procedures and practices.

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

## 8 Areas of Concern

ERO found an area of concern in the service relating to safety checking of staff. This includes:

- having a written procedure for safety checking all children's workers before employment, and every three years thereafter, that meets the safety checking requirements of the Children's Act 2014
  - detailed records being kept of all components of the safety checks and the results
  - rechecking existing staff every three years, including assessment of risk.
- Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008, GMA7A.

## 9 Where to next for improvement?

Stepping Stones Learning Environment will include the following actions in its quality improvement planning:

- Further develop the teaching team's capabilities to meaningfully integrate Pacific cultures and values into the daily curriculum.
- Establish effective professional growth cycles for leaders and teachers that meet the requirements of the Teaching Council.
- Build shared understanding and use of effective evaluation to shift the focus from what teachers and children are doing to what impact teaching practices have on children's outcomes.

#### Activities undertaken by the evaluation team

- Pre-visit contact with the service provider/manager.
- Reading documentation and records of children's learning and development.
- Scanning the learning environment and resources.
- Observations of interactions and teaching practice while onsite.
- Meetings and / or conversations with leaders and teachers.
- Sampling of information related to compliance.

[\*Further information about how ERO evaluates early childhood services is available here.\*](#)

*Lisa Oldridge*

Lisa Oldridge  
Director of Early Childhood Education (Acting)

25 February 2025

## 10 Information About the Service

Service Type	Education and care service
Number licenced for	36 children, including up to 10 aged under 2
Percentage of qualified teachers	100%
Ethnic composition <i>Using rounded percentages</i>	Māori 55%; NZ European/Pākehā 77%; Samoan 5%; Cook Island Māori 3%
Service roll	38
Review team on site	October 2024
Date of this report	25 February 2025
Most recent ERO report (s) These are available at <a href="http://www.ero.govt.nz">www.ero.govt.nz</a>	Akarangi   Quality Evaluation, August 2021; Education Review, October 2017

### 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)*.

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