

Acorn Early Learning Centre Education Review

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This report has been prepared in accordance with standard procedures approved by the Chief Review Officer.

About The Centre

Location	St Heliers, Auckland
Ministry of Education profile number	10373
Type	Education and Care
Number licensed for	50, including up to 22 aged under 2 years
Roll number	91
Gender composition	Girls 46, Boys 45
Ethnic composition	NZ European/ Pākehā 80, Māori 3, Cook Island 1, other ethnicities 7
Review team on site	December 2008
Date of this report	18 February 2009
Previous ERO reports	Education Review, March 2006

The Education Review Office (ero) Evaluation

Acorn Early Learning Centre is situated in the residential suburb of St Heliers. The licensee and staff have been responsive to the recommendations of the 2006 ERO report and have addressed the areas identified for development. The centre has undergone a period of significant change in both property and staffing. In particular, the last twelve months has involved a number of major property developments that have positively transformed and further enhanced the centre's learning environment to meet the needs of children and adults more effectively. The licensee ably filled the roles of centre manager and full-time teacher until the appointment of a new centre manager in late 2007.

Children experience a welcoming and nurturing environment in the centre. They engage happily in a range of learning experiences and explore their chosen play areas. In addition, children receive high quality care, which is affectionate and attentive and promotes their emotional and physical wellbeing. Routines are well timed, flexible, unobtrusive and developmentally appropriate.

Collaborative working relationships amongst staff, and favourable adult to child ratios, help to ensure that toddlers and children receive attentive care from staff and enjoy good quality educational opportunities. Teacher professional development has focused on improving planning, assessment and evaluation practices. Teachers have been receptive to this training, which is impacting positively on the ways in which records are kept of children's learning.

Relationships with parents continue to be strengthened. Parents are informed about their children's learning and development and about centre events, and have some opportunities to share information and perspectives with each other and teachers. Parents report that they value the individual support they receive from the centre manager and staff. Centre staff are also considering how to further support parents to make contributions to narratives about children's learning. This development should enhance the home-centre partnership.

Well developed self-review practices are a feature of the centre. The licensee and centre manager have prioritised self review in the areas of learning, collaboration and governance. These reviews have resulted in the establishment of a calm and harmonious atmosphere, underpinned by positive relationships. Children are benefiting from an improved programme, which is more responsive to meeting their needs and to extending their learning experiences.

Future Action

ERO is confident that the service is being managed in the interests of the children. Therefore ERO is likely to review the service again as part of the regular review cycle.

Review Priorities

The Focus of the Review

Before the review, the management of Acorn Early Learning Centre was invited to consider its priorities for review using guidelines and resources provided by ERO. ERO also used documentation provided by the centre to contribute to the scope of the review.

The detailed priorities for review were then determined following a discussion between the ERO review team and the management and staff. This discussion focused on existing information held by the centre (including self-review information) and the extent to which potential issues for review contributed to positive outcomes for children at Acorn Early Learning Centre.

All ERO education reviews in early childhood focus on the quality of education. For ERO this includes the quality of:

- the programme provided for children;
- the learning environment; and
- the interactions between children and adults.

ERO's findings in these areas are set out below.

The Quality of Education

Background

Since the 2006 ERO review, the centre has undergone a period of significant change in both property and staffing. In particular, the last twelve months has involved a number of major property developments that have positively transformed and further enhanced the centre's learning environment to meet the needs of children and adults more effectively. This has included a new classroom for the younger children, renovation of existing facilities and better provision for staff, as well as a new garden and improved parking.

The licensee and owner of the centre appointed a new centre manager in November 2007 and have carefully managed the centre through this time of change. Collaborative working relationships amongst staff, and favourable adult to child ratios, are helping to ensure that toddlers and children receive good quality care and valuable educational opportunities.

Areas of good performance

Wellbeing. The centre is a welcoming family environment that fosters a strong sense of belonging. Some younger children attend a few sessions each week along with older siblings. Centre routines support children to settle quickly on arrival and enable them to separate easily from their parents. Toddlers are provided with close support from staff, which encourages interactive learning alongside other children. Routines for care are respectful and unobtrusive, and behaviour is managed in a calm, low-key manner.

Interactions and engagement in play. Teachers encourage high levels of interaction as they facilitate and guide children's ideas so that they further extend their emergent interests. Some staff use open-ended questions skilfully to stimulate children's thinking and to extend and develop conversations with them. Children enjoy long periods of uninterrupted play and move easily between the indoor and outdoor environments. They access a good range of resources and are encouraged to use equipment in innovative ways.

Programme and environment for toddlers. Children under two and a half receive good quality care and education. They are given opportunities to explore, make discoveries and to establish relationships with each other and with older children. The new purpose-built under two area has been carefully furnished and resourced to meet children's developing needs and to build their social independence.

Professional development. Professional development on the uses of Kei Tua o te Pae, the Ministry of Education early childhood assessment exemplars, has impacted positively on teachers' planning, assessment and evaluation. This training has been useful in building staff confidence and ensuring that good assessment processes are used consistently. Collaborative sharing of ideas by staff at monthly programme planning sessions has helped to make the programme more flexible and has increased adults' responsiveness to children's emergent interests. As a result, children enjoy more meaningful learning experiences.

Reflective practices. The licensee, centre manager and staff have developed robust self-review practices. These practices include:

- targeted professional development for teachers to improve processes for planning, assessment and evaluation;
- reviewing of daily routines to support the smooth day to day running of the centre and to maximise learning opportunities for children;
- review of strategic and annual plans, policies, and the staff handbook; and
- ensuring that centre practices are reflective of New Zealand's bicultural heritage and support the achievement of positive outcomes for Māori children.

Areas for improvement

Continuing good practice. The licensee and centre manager are focused on continuous improvement. ERO's evaluation confirms the following as priorities for further centre development:

- · the development of children's portfolios, so that linking back to children's emergent interests is more frequent, showing children's progress in learning over time;
- · the continued development of the programme for older children to further extend their learning; and
- · increasing parent involvement in the centre by further encouraging more parents and caregivers to contribute to the narratives about their children's learning, and improving communication with parents about the educational aspects of the centre programme.

Areas Of National Interest

Overview

ERO provides information about the education system as a whole through its national reports. This information will be used as the basis for long term and systemic educational improvement.

Māori Children

As part of this review ERO evaluated the extent to which this service carries out a process to identify and respond to the aspirations and expectations of the parents and whānau of Māori children and focuses on the potential of Māori children to develop as competent and capable learners. Acorn Early Learning Centre has three Māori children enrolled. One staff member is Māori.

Areas of good performance

Responsive practices. In accordance with Ka Hikitia, the Ministry of Education Māori Education strategy, staff, through their self-review processes, have adopted the following strategies to reflect their commitment to realising the potential of Māori children in the centre:

- whole centre teacher professional development, with a focus on te reo and tikanga Māori;
- an ongoing relationship with Orakei marae, that includes weekly classes for children in te reo Māori me nga tikanga;
- more focused discussions with Māori whānau on their aspirations and expectations for their children, on enrolment and through ongoing regular informal discussions;
- increased planned use of te reo Māori and waiata in the programme;
- the development of a culture board that acknowledges Māori culture;
- increased resources pertaining to Māori; and
- the blessing of the new building, in acknowledgement of Māori protocols and practices.

Area for improvement

Continued professional learning focus. The licensee and centre manager agree that there should be continued professional learning to consolidate and further improve teachers' use of te reo Māori and their knowledge of tikanga.

Management Assurance On Compliance Areas

Overview

Before the review, the licensee and staff of Acorn Early Learning Centre completed an ERO Centre Management Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklist. In these documents they have attested that they had taken all reasonable steps to meet their legislative obligations related to:

- administration;
- health, safety and welfare;
- personnel management;
- financial and property management.

During the review, ERO checked the following items because they have a potentially high impact on outcomes for children:

- emotional safety (including behaviour management, prevention of bullying and abuse);
- physical safety (including behaviour management, sleeping and supervision practices; accidents and medication; hygiene and routines; travel and excursion policies and procedures);
- staff qualifications and organisation; and
- evacuation procedures and practices for fire and earthquake.

During the course of the review ERO's investigations did not identify any areas of non-compliance.

Recommendations

ERO and the centre managers agreed that:

6.1 teachers should continue to use self-review practices to further consolidate and extend their use of good quality teaching practices.

Future Action

ERO is confident that the service is being managed in the interests of the children. Therefore ERO is likely to review the service again as part of the regular review cycle.

Elizabeth Ellis

Area Manager

for Chief Review Officer

18 February 2009

18 February 2009

To the Parents and Community of Acorn Early Learning Centre

These are the findings of the Education Review Office's latest report on Acorn Early Learning Centre.

Community Page

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Relationships with parents continue to be strengthened. Parents are informed about their children's learning and development and about centre events, and have some opportunities to share information and perspectives with each other and teachers. Parents report that they value the individual support they receive from the centre manager and staff. Centre staff are also considering how to further support parents to make contributions to narratives about children's learning. This development should enhance the home-centre partnership.

Well developed self-review practices are a feature of the centre. The licensee and centre manager have prioritised self review in the areas of learning, collaboration and governance. These reviews have resulted in the establishment of a calm and harmonious atmosphere, underpinned by positive relationships. Children are benefiting from an improved programme, which is more responsive to meeting their needs and to extending their learning experiences.

Future Action

ERO is confident that the service is being managed in the interests of the children. Therefore ERO is likely to review the service again as part of the regular review cycle.

When ERO has reviewed an early childhood centre we encourage management to inform their community of any follow up action they plan to take. You should talk to the management or licensee if you have any questions about this evaluation, the full ERO report or their future intentions.

If you would like a copy of the full report, please contact the centre or see the ERO website, <http://www.ero.govt.nz>.

Elizabeth Ellis

Area Manager

for Chief Review Officer

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT REVIEWS

About ERO

ERO is an independent, external evaluation agency that undertakes reviews of schools and early childhood services throughout New Zealand.

About ERO Reviews

ERO follows a set of standard procedures to conduct reviews. The purpose of each review is to:

- improve quality of education for children in early childhood centres; and
- provide information to parents, communities and the Government.

Reviews are intended to focus on outcomes for children and build on each centre's self review.

Review Focus

ERO's framework for reviewing and reporting is based on four review strands.

- Quality of Education - including the quality of the programme provided for children, the quality of the learning environment and the quality of the interactions between staff and children and how these impact on outcomes for children.

- Additional Review Priorities - other aspects of the operation of a centre, may be included in the review. ERO will not include this strand in all reviews.
- Areas of National Interest - information about how Government policies are working in early childhood centres.
- Compliance with Legal Requirements - assurance that this centre has taken all reasonable steps to meet legal requirements.

Review Coverage

ERO reviews do not cover every aspect of centre performance and each ERO report may cover different issues. The aim is to provide information on aspects that are central to positive outcomes for children and useful to this centre.

Review Recommendations

Most ERO reports include recommendations for improvement. A recommendation on a particular issue does not necessarily mean that a centre is performing poorly in relation to that issue. There is no direct link between the number of recommendations in this report and the overall performance of this centre.