

The Learning Centre Ltd Education Review

- [About The Centre](#)
- [The Education Review Office \(ero\) Evaluation](#)
- [Review Priorities](#)
- [Areas Of National Interest](#)
- [Management Assurance On Compliance Areas](#)
- [Recommendations](#)
- [Future Action](#)
- [Community Page](#)

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

About The Centre

Location	Ponsonby, Auckland City
Ministry of Education profile number	25335
Type	Education and Care Service
Number licensed for	50 children, including up to 20 aged under 2
Roll number	61
Gender composition	Boys 31, Girls 30
Ethnic composition	NZ European/Pākehā 50, Māori 4, Cook Island Māori 2, Chinese 1, other European 3, other 1
Review team on site	July 2009
Date of this report	15 October 2009
Previous ERO reports	No previous reports

The Education Review Office (ero) Evaluation

The Learning Centre opened in April 2007 in a villa in the heart of Ponsonby, a residential suburb of Auckland. The licensee has undertaken significant work to renovate and attractively refurbish the premises, employ well qualified staff, and to consult with and involve the parent community. In setting up this early childhood education service she has focused on providing favourable adult-to-child ratios and small group sizes in an unhurried, home-like environment. This is the centre's first ERO report.

The licensee and teachers are inspired by, and show a strong commitment to, the teaching and learning philosophies of Dr Emmi Pikler and RIE (Resources for Infant Educators) and this is clearly evident within the programme. Teachers' practices reflect a strong focus on primary care and the principles of respect, especially with regard to care routines. Staff are in the early stages of extending this approach across the centre to include the older children. They have provided parents with very good information about their philosophical understandings and have actively promoted these approaches to early childhood education.

Within the programme, of particular note is the learning that occurs for older children in the outdoors. They play together cooperatively and enjoy a variety of opportunities for physical challenge and independent exploration. Teachers respect their choices about where and with whom they will work and provide good support for their play. Adults extend children's learning experiences and build on their knowledge in specific areas of interest.

Children's individual assessment portfolios are a positive feature of teachers' work. These valued records contain good quality learning stories and photographs that illustrate teachers' knowledge of children and their families. Some teachers are beginning to record discussions with parents, who report that they appreciate the information provided in these books.

The licensee demonstrates a commitment to providing a high quality early childhood education service. As evidence of this she has employed a large staff, most of whom are qualified teachers, to provide a low adult to child ratio and opportunities for high quality interactions between adults and children. The licensee and senior staff are considering ways reduce the number of transitions for children as they progress through the centre while at the same time maintaining primary care giving and consistency of care.

The licensee and head teacher have established a sound foundation of management planning, administrative practices and well documented policies and procedures. Ongoing professional development and a variety of self-review processes have also become established aspects of the centre's operation.

While the centre-wide focus has been on successfully embedding the basic principles of respectful practice, it is now time to consider reviewing the environment and the quality of

teaching practice to evaluate their impact on children's learning.

The licensee and head teacher have identified several areas for further development. These include teachers: exploring new processes for programme planning based on the very good assessment information they gather; considering strategies for reflecting on and responding to the aspirations of the whānau of Māori children in the centre; and using their scheduled quarterly reviews of curriculum areas to ensure that children have sufficient variety of resources in each area of play.

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 The Learning Centre Ltd 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 The Learning Centre Ltd.

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.

In addition, in view of the fact that this is the first review of this centre, ERO decided to evaluate:

- the quality of management and self review.

Centre management suggested that within these areas the review could consider:

- consultation with and involvement of parents.

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

The Quality of Education

Background

The centre operates in a renovated and adapted villa. The upstairs, which is at street level, is divided into two areas for infants and toddlers, and includes a sleep room, bathroom, staffroom, kitchen and office facilities. Both play areas open onto a small outdoor play space. The downstairs caters for children over the age of two years, organised into three age groups. Each age group has a designated 'home' space in the room, and all of these children have ready access to both indoor and outdoor play areas.

The head teacher, who is a registered teacher, provides professional leadership for a teaching staff of thirteen, nine of whom are qualified teachers. Five of these are team leaders, with responsibility for a separate age group of children. All teachers in the downstairs work with children from the three groups.

Areas of good performance

Philosophical foundation. The licensee and teachers have purposefully and conscientiously developed core values and a strong philosophical basis for their work. Their commitment to, and interpretation of, the principles of Pikler and RIE philosophies are extensively articulated and documented. Very good processes for staff induction, and for informing parents, ensure that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the rationale underpinning centre practices.

Professional reflection and development. Ongoing professional development, teacher reflection and action research focus largely on the implementation of RIE and Pikler principles. Teachers have given particular attention to the principles of respect, care routines and transition processes as children progress through the centre. Staff professional development has included opportunities for team building and consideration of assessment and planning practices.

Philosophy in practice. Teachers in the infant and toddlers' areas reflect their commitment to RIE practices, the principles of respect, their focus on care routines, and their belief in children's intrinsic motivation to develop on their own, by:

- · allocating a primary caregiver for each child, providing consistency and continuity of care, and ensuring that familiar adults are always nearby;
- · purposefully taking time, in a calm and unhurried atmosphere, to establish trusting relationships with children and their parents;
- · establishing familiar routines and regular patterns in the day;
- · gently and sensitively inviting children to participate in care routines, which are flexible for individual infants;
- · providing consistent boundaries and close supervision; and
- · observing children closely and refraining from interrupting or interfering in child initiated play or from pressuring children to achieve milestones.
- Learning in the outdoors. A positive aspect of the programme for the older children is the atmosphere of relaxed, enjoyable involvement in child-initiated learning in the spacious, well resourced outdoor area. Here children:

- choose from and freely explore a variety of interesting activities, play areas and physical challenges;
- play together happily in small groups and engage in social and cooperative interaction as they develop their play; and
- are well supported by responsive adults who respect their choices, model curiosity and an interest in discovery, and engage in discussions about their activities.

Project development. Teachers are working with children to extend their particular interests over time. For example, children's enjoyment of baking activities has developed into an ongoing focus that teachers have planned for and documented to show a variety of learning outcomes. The planned extension of an interest in dinosaurs has recognised children's competence as learners and thinkers and has resulted in good quality conversations amongst children and adults.

Assessment information. Teachers record good quality assessment information on daily information sheets for younger children and in individual portfolios for all children. Learning stories and photographs document teachers' sound knowledge of children and their families and demonstrate that teachers think about next steps and possibilities for further learning. They often show children's developing dispositions and the continuity of learning interests over time. Some parent input is recorded. Parents comment that they appreciate the information contained in portfolios.

Areas for improvement

Communication and exploration. The centre philosophy includes a commitment to implementing Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum. Teachers could enhance learning opportunities for older children and reflect the communication and exploration strands of Te Whāriki more closely by more frequently engaging in reciprocal and playful interactions with children, continuing to share their pleasure in exploration and discovery, and expanding children's attempts at social communication.

Philosophy development. The centre's philosophy for infant educators is well articulated and embedded in practice. The licensee and teachers are now strengthening the extent to which the Pikler and RIE philosophies and teaching strategies are reflected in programmes for older children

Programme planning. Teachers are working towards improving their planning processes. Although they often talk with parents, observe children carefully, notice what they are doing and recognise the learning that occurs, teachers seldom record their spontaneous or planned teaching responses. Teachers could consider how to make best use of the valuable assessment information being collected for more purposeful and better targeted planning.

Indoor equipment and resources. The centre has now been in operation for two years. It is timely for the indoor learning environments to be reviewed and if necessary adapted, to better stimulate and support extended learning by:

- reflecting to a greater extent the diverse cultures and languages of children and staff; and
- responding to what teachers notice about children's emerging ideas and interests.

Management and self review

Background

The centre opened in April 2007 and provides early childhood education for up to 50 children. The licensee undertakes the management role and, in addition to thirteen teachers, employs an administrator and a cook.

Areas of good performance

Commitment to quality. The licensee has maintained a focus on high adult-to-child ratios, employing ten qualified teachers which is six more teaching staff than is required by the centre's licence. She has established clear underpinning values and her commitment to ongoing quality improvement is evident in an on-going focus on self review and professional development.

Parent partnerships. The licensee has recently established a Parent Voice Committee for the purposes of liaison, feedback and consultation. This is a positive move. Parents have many opportunities to talk with their children's teachers and to contribute to policy review. They have also been provided with very good information about the philosophical approach of the centre to early childhood education. They are well informed about centre practices.

Management planning. The licensee has established good quality management and financial planning processes and systems for monitoring compliance and accountability.

Self-review systems. Reflective practices and performance appraisal systems are well established and contribute to decisions about professional development and change to procedures. Models for formal self review are currently being developed. Although the centre is relatively new, self review is an embedded component of centre operations.

Areas for improvement

Further use of self review. Self review is a well developed tool used to continue to evaluate and improve current practices. There is evidence of it being used for various aspects of centre operations including the quarterly reviews of curriculum areas. It would now be timely to

consider the quality and effectiveness of the programmes provided and the learning outcomes for children.

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. Four children identify as being of Māori descent.

Areas of good performance

Communication with whānau. The centre's philosophy has an emphasis on building responsive relationships with families. There are good opportunities for whānau to discuss their aspirations and their children's interests and preferences with teachers. The recently established Parent Voice Committee should provide further avenues for whānau of Māori children to contribute their wishes for their children's care and education.

Strategic plan. The licensee and teachers have expressed an interest in developing teachers' confidence and skills in using te reo Māori and in exploring the potential for more fully integrating te reo me ngā tikanga Māori into teaching programmes. Professional development for this purpose is yet to be scheduled.

Recommendation

ERO recommends, and the licensee and head teacher agree, that it is timely to review the centre's policies and practices with a view to developing strategies for:

- focusing on the potential of Māori children to develop as competent and capable learners; and
- reflecting on and responding to the aspirations of Māori children's whānau.

Management Assurance On Compliance Areas

Overview

Before the review, the licensee and staff of The Learning Centre Ltd completed an ERO Centre Management Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklist. In these documents they 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 identified areas of non-compliance. In order to address these, the licensee and staff must:

5.1 address the health and safety matters identified and discussed during the review and show increased vigilance in identifying and removing or minimising hazards to children's safety,

[Education (ECC) Regulations 1998, 21(4), 23(2), 24(1(a),(4)].

Recommendations

ERO and the licensee agree that:

6.1 staff consider and agree a range of teaching strategies to increase the challenge and complexity of the programmes provided for children; and

6.2 the environment be reviewed and upgraded if necessary, to ensure that children have access to sufficient variety of resources to foster and support self-initiated exploration and learning.

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.

Dr Graham Stoop

Chief Review Officer

15 October 2009

15 October 2009

To the Parents and Community of The Learning Centre Ltd

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

Community Page

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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>.

Dr Graham Stoop
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.