

Scholars Preschool Education Review

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1 The Education Review Office (ERO) Evaluation

Confirmed Education Review Report: Scholars Preschool

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

Scholars Preschool in Pukekohe has been providing care and education since 2005 for up to 30 children from infants to school entry age. The centre has a separate self-contained room and outside area for infants and toddlers. Children over the age of two are organised into two age groups, mainly for the morning programme. The owners operate two other early childhood centres in the Franklin District of South Auckland.

The overall findings of the centre's first ERO review in 2007 were that children were provided with good quality care, but that staff and managers could improve the quality of education by providing children with more stimulating learning options. Developing the quality of education remains a key priority for the centre to address.

Staff have maintained a positive partnership with parents to support children's learning and development. They know children well and work in ways that accommodate children's individual characteristics and needs. The current staff, who are mostly new in 2010, are developing ideas about what makes a good quality programme. They recognise that they can have a positive impact on children's learning by increasing their emphasis on children's interests and reducing the focus on teacher-directed activities. There has been a good start to making these significant and appropriate changes to the programme.

Staff are following children's lead more and are focusing on children's interests in their assessment practices. They have recognised that their planning processes do not help them as well as they should to provide challenging, meaningful experiences for children of different ages. The owner will seek external support for staff to develop more skills in programme planning.

Children are independent and settled. They are assisted to play cooperatively with their peers and to develop their social competence. However, the timetable and organisation of play areas do not always provide children with good opportunities to explore a wide curriculum or to sustain their play. The current staff team acknowledges these issues and is encouraged to review and improve the programme.

Some progress has been made in establishing self review and strategic planning. The owner states her commitment to now linking these processes so that they lead to improved

practices. ERO recommends, and centre managers agree, that staff need to use children's interests as a platform for extending their learning through meaningful, developmentally appropriate experiences.

Future Action

ERO is confident that the service is being managed in the interest of the children. Therefore ERO is likely to review the service again within three years.

2 Review Priorities

The Focus of the Review

Before the review, the management of Scholars Preschool 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 Scholars Preschool.

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

Approximately half of the staff hold recognised early childhood qualifications and the remainder are in training to become qualified. Two provisionally registered teachers are about to embark on a programme of advice and guidance to gain full teaching registration. The owner/operator works as a part-time teacher in the centre and wants to maintain the flat management structure introduced in 2010. Given the relative newness of the teaching team, the owner should continue to monitor how well professional leadership meets staff development needs.

The 2007 ERO report noted that staff should provide children with greater choices throughout the day, organise equipment more effectively, and review provision for older children. These remain areas for managers and staff to address.

Areas of strength

Relationships. Staff understand the importance of establishing positive relationships with children and families. They get to know families well and continue to share information that will help children to settle and progress. Staff are affectionate with children and seek to

understand and respond to their individual characteristics. They talk frequently with children about their activities and their perceptions, making links with home. As a result of these good practices, children are settled, comfortable and secure in the centre.

Teamwork. The current staff team works cooperatively to manage the programme, routines and supervision. In 2010, effective teamwork and shared beliefs have helped to generate a positive atmosphere, focused on children. This environment is likely to support further programme improvement.

Changes to teaching and learning. Staff are noticing children's strengths and interests more readily and often record these skilfully in narrative assessments and portfolios. Staff work alongside children to assist, affirm and provide them with guidance. At times they integrate te reo Māori, literacy and numeracy appropriately in play contexts. Staff recognise that they now need to develop effective planning that will help them to generate a more stimulating programme in response to the interests they have identified.

Fostering children's social and emotional competence. Staff are patient and positive in their interactions with children. A recent review of behaviour management strategies has resulted in an increased focus on explaining to children what to do, and the reasons why, rather than simply telling them what not to do. Clear and consistent routines help children to predict their day and develop independence. Children learn how to take turns, help each other, manage conflict, and work positively with their peers.

Areas for development and review

In order to further support the centre's shift to a more balanced programme that is informed by children's interests, staff will need to:

- respond to what children are doing by providing them with further resources, making suggestions, planning with children, and considering further possibilities for extension to support their growing capabilities;
- have conversations with children that genuinely seek their ideas, encourage them to express their thinking, and add to their knowledge base;
- plan meaningful activities and an expanding range of experiences that evolve from areas that children show an interest in or from other relevant contexts, such as community events; and
- deliver well-managed mat times that are stimulating, interactive, and inclusive and that are appropriate to the ages of children participating.

Staff and managers have already identified some of the areas noted above and have begun to adapt some practices accordingly. When the programme is informed more by children's

interests, children will be more likely to engage deeply in and persist with their learning, acquire new skills and understandings easily, and develop an intrinsic motivation to learn. By contrast, the main outcome of teacher-directed activities is that children learn to follow instructions.

Reviewing the learning environment. As noted in the 2007 ERO report, staff need to review the ways in which they arrange the physical environment and equipment and schedule the day. At present, the organisation of resources, materials and the morning timetable, do not always provide children with a full curriculum or rich opportunities for open-ended exploration and play. Changes in the learning environment would help staff to better meet their aims as expressed in the centre philosophy.

3 National Evaluation Topic

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.

Promoting Children's Social and Emotional Competence

As children learn to make sense of their world they develop an understanding of themselves in social contexts, including the early childhood service. As part of this review ERO looked at how each service's curriculum supports children's developing social and emotional competence.

The findings are reported in the Quality of Education section of this report and used as part of a national evaluation report on this topic.

4 Management Assurance on Legal Requirements

Before the review, the staff of Scholars Preschool completed an ERO Centre Management Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklist. In these documents they attest to taking all reasonable steps to meet their legislative obligations related to:

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

The centre management of Scholars Preschool has identified that it is has not met its obligations in some areas. Centre managers have identified that they need to:

4.1. review policies and procedures related to civil-defence preparedness, crisis management and post-disaster relief,
[Education (ECC) Regulations 1996, 23, 24];

4.2. undertake regular policy review,
[Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices, 1998, 10(e)]; and

4.3. arrange for police vetting of non-registered employees,
[Education Act, 1989, s315].

During the review, ERO checked policies, procedures and practices about compliance in the following areas 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.

ERO's investigations identified that centre managers must:

4.4. position play equipment to meet safe-fall requirements for all equipment over 600mm height in order to protect children's safety,
[Education (ECC) Regulations, 1996, 24].

5 Recommendations

ERO and the centre managers agreed that:

5.1 external support should be sought to help staff adapt their programme planning so that the process evolves from children's interests and guides staff to extend children's learning and development;

5.2 staff, with management support, should continue to improve the education provided for children by providing a developmentally appropriate, meaningful programme that supports all children's growing capabilities; and

5.3 the owner should further develop self review and link it with strategic and annual planning so that it is more useful in guiding centre improvement.

6 Future Action

ERO is confident that the service is being managed in the interest of the children. Therefore ERO is likely to review the service again within three years.

Richard Thornton
National Manager Review Services
Northern Region

24 September 2010

About the Centre

Location	Pukekohe, South Auckland
Ministry of Education profile number	10398
Type	Education and Care Service
Number licensed for	30 children, including up to 12 aged under 2
Roll number	49
Gender composition	Boys 27 Girls 22
Ethnic composition	NZ European/Pākehā 46 Māori 1 Indian 1 South African 1
Review team on site	August 2010
Date of this report	24 September 2010
Previous ERO report	Education Review, September 2007

Community Page

24 September 2010

To the Parents and Community of Scholars Preschool

These are the findings of the Education Review Office's latest report on Scholars Preschool.

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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 contact person 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>.

Richard Thornton
National Manager Review Services
Northern Region

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.
- National Evaluation Topics – This strand contribute to the development of education policies and their effective implementation. The information from this strand is aggregated by ERO for its national evaluation reports. Topics for investigation are changed regularly to provide up-to-date information.
- 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.