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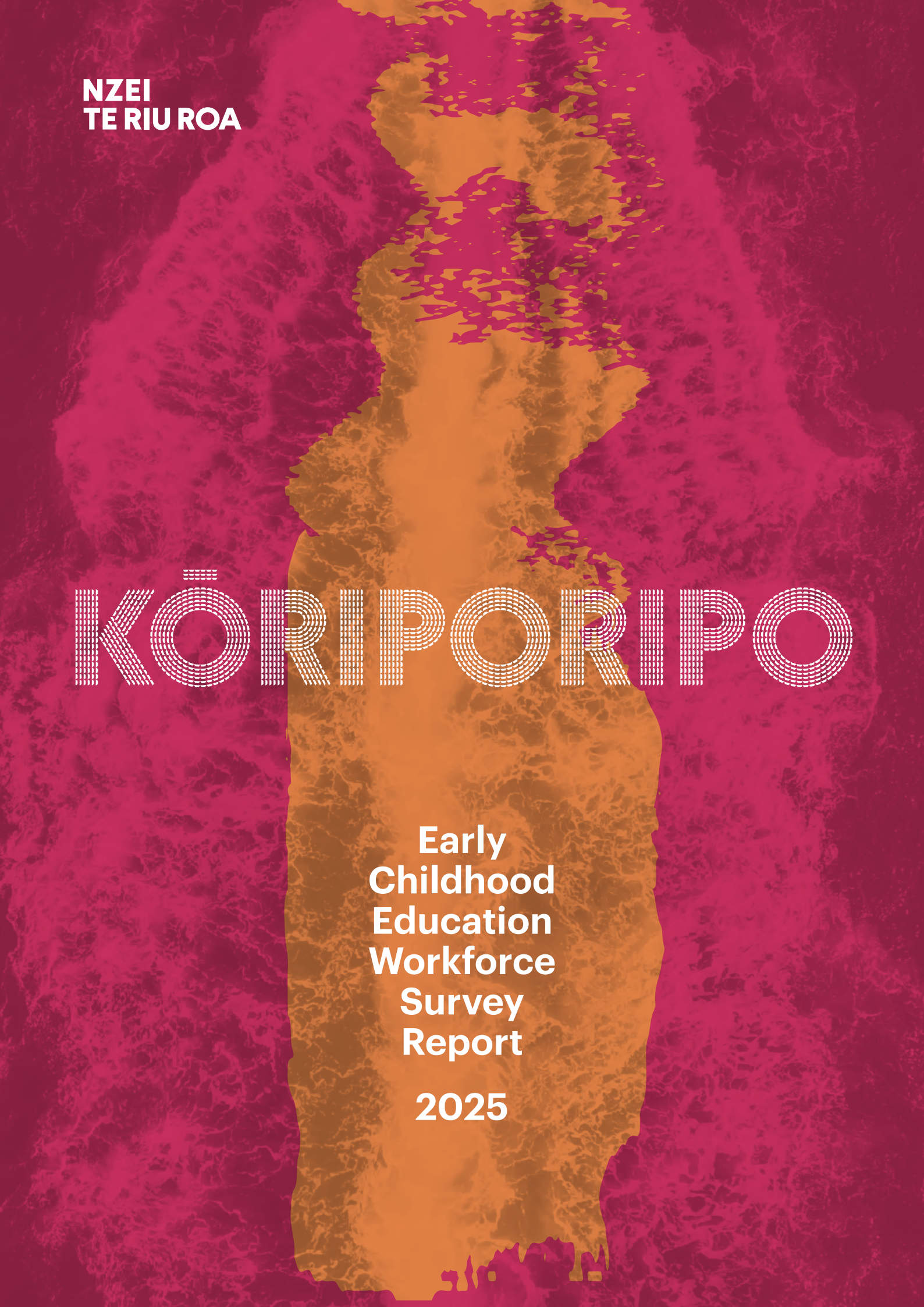

Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey Report

2025

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FOREWORD

The deregulation agenda this Government is pushing in early childhood education is not just a misguided policy shift; it is a dangerous and destructive attack on the very foundations of our system. International and national research consistently shows that high-quality, culturally responsive early childhood education is vital, especially for children from less supportive home environments. The Government's changes threaten to undo decades of collective effort and advocacy, and go against evidence that the earliest years matter and make a profound difference. Many experts and advocates worldwide have been stunned to see these changes happening in Aotearoa.

Supporting our kaiako and kaimahi with the structural indicators of quality – proper ratios, qualified teachers, and professional conditions – are essential to safeguarding fit-for-purpose early childhood education. Instead, we're witnessing an assault on the professionalism, pay, and status of those who nurture and educate our tamariki daily, driven by profit rather than children's rights and futures. This Government's actions are an ideological attack on equity, on the nature of ECE as a public good, and on the fundamental idea that every child deserves the best start in life.

The Government's so-called effort to make ECE cheaper is merely a smokescreen, aimed at transferring public funds into private profit, at the expense of early childhood teachers who dedicate their lives to children and the children who need them the most. It's deeply troubling. The blueprint is clear, and Australia's experience warns us of the terrible outcomes: corporate chains, uneven quality, teacher burnout, and decisions driven solely by profit not pedagogy.

We must not stand idly by as our reputation as a global leader in early education is undermined. This survey shows an alarming rise in teachers contemplating leaving ECE, particularly in the private sector. Our kaiako and kaimahi are undervalued, overworked, and pushed to the brink, even as parental voices emphasise the importance of trained teachers and quality education. This sector needs government investment. Evidence shows that money poured into the early years yields enormous returns for current and future generations.

Let's be clear: these government reforms are not about improving access or supporting children and families. They are about privatising a sector that should be a public good and prioritising profits over the wellbeing of children, teachers, and communities. We stand at a critical crossroads. Together, we must reject this dangerous path because the future of our tamariki, our communities, and Aotearoa's proud legacy in early childhood education depends on it.

Wendy Lee

ECE advocate, author, and researcher

FROM THE NATIONAL SECRETARY

I am once again extremely pleased to be able to share with you our NZEI Te Riu Roa *Kōriporipo Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey* report for 2025. *Kōriporipo* is the largest Aotearoa workforce survey for early childhood education kaiako and kaimahi.

Their collective voice speaks volumes about the state of our early childhood education system and delivers conclusive evidence which steers us towards what matters most.

When conditions for those who educate our youngest ākonga are downgraded through reforms, the impact is felt during the most crucial years of children's development.

In the past year, the Government has scrapped early childhood teachers' pay equity claim and ended pay parity for some. It has moved ahead with regulatory change which will downgrade the quality and safety of children's education.

Cutting teachers' pay is unacceptable and only underscores the Government's lack of commitment to our most precious taonga.

The evidence from kaimahi is clear: what is in the best interests of tamariki is qualified teachers, a high number of teachers to children, more learning support, and for teachers to be properly valued through fair pay and decent working conditions.

As long-time early childhood leader Wendy Lee says, now is a time for action. Let us join together in kotahitanga and take action to stop our precious early childhood system from being taken backwards. We owe it to our tamariki.

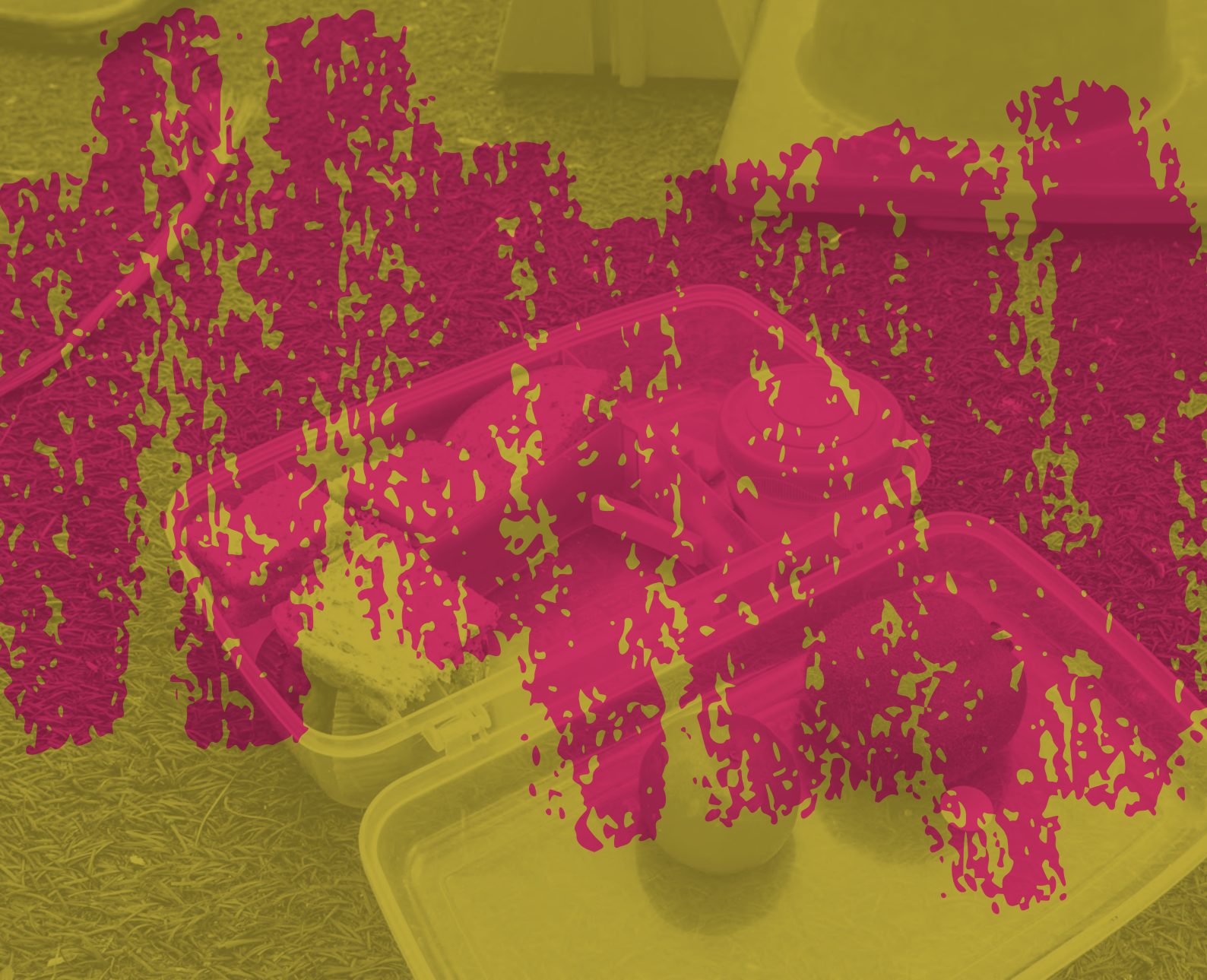
Stephanie Mills

Korimako Tangiata | National Secretary

September 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Kōriporipo Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey* is now in its third year and is the largest survey of early childhood educators in Aotearoa. In 2025, more than 2,000 educators took part to make their voices heard on the issues that matter to them and why they do the mahi they do.



Welcome to *Kōriporipo* 2025, our third annual workforce survey report! We extend our sincere thanks to all the kaiako, kaimahi, parents and whānau who participated in this year's survey. As always, we were blown away by the response and humbled by the stories you chose to share.

Below we detail the survey results, as well as a brief recap of key events in the early childhood education sector over the past 12 months. For those keen to get right into the numbers, here are some of the key findings from *Kōriporipo* 2025:

Learning support needs increase

- 96.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that in the last few years children have needed more social, emotional and learning support, showing a clear upward trend from 92.1% in 2024 and 89% in 2023.
- 91.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it has been more difficult to access learning support for children who need it, with 75% strongly agreeing.

Kaiako and kaimahi looking to leave the sector

- 32.8% of respondents said that in the past six months they had frequently thought about leaving the sector, while 28.6% of respondents said they occasionally thought about leaving the sector. This is consistent with last year's findings.

Private sector results continue to be worse

- Respondents from the private sector were more likely to regularly think about leaving the sector. 37.7% said they frequently thought about leaving, compared with 30.7% for community-based respondents.
- 24.7% of private sector respondents said that when they wake up, they feel excited about going to work, compared to 36.5% for community-based respondents.

Kaiako and kaimahi are overloaded

- Respondents continue to spend their own, unpaid time completing the requirements of their role. In the month before completing the survey, 61.9% of respondents were spending more than an hour each week doing unpaid work. 21.3% were doing more than an hour each day.
- Respondents also overwhelmingly agreed that increased workloads have caused educators to be more stressed at work, with 92.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this.

Ratios an ongoing concern

- 93.3% of respondents agree that current regulated minimum ratios do not enable the best quality learning environments for tamariki; this is consistent with previous years of the survey.

Improvements to non-contact time being honoured

- While respondents are reporting that working conditions seem to be getting worse, one area that bucks the trend is around employers honouring non-contact time entitlements. Non-contact time is time "off the floor" that allows kaiako to plan and assess learning, for example, by engaging in individual child observations or producing learning stories. 46.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are able to take their current entitlement to non-contact or professional time every week. This builds on 41.8% last year, and 33.5% in 2023.

Respondent voice

As with previous years, we asked respondents open-ended questions about health and safety incidents they have witnessed because of understaffing, poor ratios, process, health and safety practices, or other causes. We also asked respondents to tell us what it is about early childhood education that they love, and what values or experiences inspire them to do this work. These responses are included throughout the report.

Parent survey

As with last year, we also ran a parents' survey in parallel to the *Kōriporipo* workforce survey. We will be releasing these results in a separate report later this year. However, what we can say now is that there is strong alignment between parents and whānau and the wider early childhood education workforce. A few 'sneak-peek' results clearly show this.

- 95.6% of parents think that early childhood teachers deserve to be paid at least the same as primary school teachers.
- 81.8% of parents would have concerns for their child's safety if the number of unqualified teachers relative to qualified increased.
- 96.7% of parents believe that early childhood education is not just 'babysitting' and that the education component is essential.

These are encouraging results. They reinforce that parents and whānau are allies and support early childhood educators in their fight for positive change across the sector.

Recommendations

As with previous years, we close the report with a series of recommendations. In these, we call on this and future governments to:

- **Listen to the experts.** Respect teacher and workforce voice and give teachers quality conditions to teach in with ratios that are fit for purpose. This gives tamariki an environment that meets their learning needs as whole people and upholds their identity and culture; it's the best way to ensure children are school-ready.
- **Uphold Te Tiriti and *Te Whāriki*.** Te Tiriti o Waitangi underpins our education system. Our curriculum is world leading and universally recognised.
- **Improve access to learning support.** Early intervention is most effective when it is early. Urgently address learning support needs for our youngest ākonga, and develop wrap-around supports for parents and whānau within early childhood education services.
- **Commit to full pay parity for teachers to support quality learning for the long term.** A teacher is a teacher. Their qualifications, certification requirements, skills, and expertise are just as valuable, and the job is just as complex, no matter the age of the learner.
- **Commit to quality funding.** For all tamariki to thrive by the time they start school/kura, quality funding and a public early childhood education system is essential. Kindergartens and community ECE are the cornerstones of not-for-profit, high-quality ECE. Removing quality funding to these services will drive down standards, not improve them. Kindergartens and community ECE are essential to our communities.
- **Make early education affordable for everyone.** Cap parent fees now and work towards full public provision of quality early childhood education.

"Lack of learning support for high-needs tamariki, so teachers are having to have one-on-one with specific tamaiti (for safety reasons) because there is not enough education support worker (ESW) support, which leaves sometimes two teachers with the rest of the tamariki (up to 36)."

INTRODUCTION

A lot can happen in a year – and this is certainly the case for the early childhood education sector at large. The Government has continued its strong attacks on early childhood educators with cuts to teacher pay and regulations that ensure quality education. The stakes and the fight for high-quality early education for all tamariki have never been higher or more important.

The past year in early childhood education has shown just how quickly things can take a turn for the worse when the government in charge doesn't act in the best interests of children.

As last year's *Kōriporipo* survey report was being written, the Ministry for Regulation was completing its review of the early childhood education sector. Meanwhile, the Associate Minister of Education had begun publicly making casual remarks about moving away from the pay parity funding system.

At that time, we wrote that it "seems clear that the early childhood sector is at a crossroads. One path leads toward a scenario where profit-making is the main driver for early childhood education provision, while the other path is one that celebrates quality, accessible early childhood education for all, and puts ākonga before profits".

The Government has now taken the sector clearly down one of these paths; the path of profit-making and lowered quality. Sadly, our early childhood education system is being reconfigured with the interests of business profit, and not tamariki, in mind.

Quality education is now under attack. Pay parity is now under attack. Whānau and educators alike are concerned about what will come next. Will it be cutting kindergartens out from the public sector? Or will our beloved *Te Whāriki* curriculum come under scrutiny from government ministers who don't value te ao Māori, te reo me ngā tikanga?

Below, we outline key changes that demonstrate the Government's move away from quality. However, what matters most now is that educators and whānau come together to advocate for an early childhood education system that encourages quality and accessibility for all tamariki.

The Government has taken the sector clearly down the path of profit-making and lowered quality. Sadly, our early childhood education system is being reconfigured with the interests of business profit, and not tamariki, in mind.

Deregulation creates health and safety worries

The Ministry for Regulation's review of the sector was the first for the newly created bureaucratic entity. It essentially duplicated longstanding efforts by the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the sector, to review and improve regulatory settings in early childhood education; the key difference being that the Ministry for Regulation has no background knowledge or expertise in education. This was plainly displayed in the review itself, which was framed strictly in economic terms, with its terms of reference[1] speaking of 'market failures', 'costs and benefits', but remaining light on mentions of quality or the wellbeing of tamariki.[2]

1 Ministry for Regulation, *Terms of Reference for the regulatory sector review of early childhood education*. Accessed 29 August: https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-06/Terms%20of%20Reference%20for%20the%20regulatory%20sector%20review%20of%20early%20childhood%20education.pdf?VersionId=.egwWxXvdyQHJ7cmxddHLF3sddVVny0i

2 The Terms of Reference did however quote section 12 (a) of the Education and Training Act 2020, which includes as an objective 'setting standards to support quality provision and learning' despite marginalising the issue of quality in its review. As discussed below, these objectives are now being changed to a regime of 'minimum standards' by the Associate Minister.

This made *Kōriporipo* respondents nervous. At the time the Ministry of Regulation was completing its review, nearly three-quarters (73.3%) of respondents to the 2024 survey agreed or strongly agreed that they were "worried about the health and safety implications of deregulation". *Kōriporipo* 2025 shows that this concern continues and has increased, with 76.4% of respondents now agreeing or strongly agreeing to the same question.

Pay parity under attack

It is not only the regulatory side of ECE that is being reconfigured in the interests of profit-seeking. Just a few weeks after the release of *Kōriporipo* 2024, and after heavy lobbying from for-profit employer groups like the Early Childhood Council (ECC), the Associate Minister removed pay parity funding requirements for non-permanent staff, including relievers and those on fixed-term contracts.[3]

Then came further exclusions. From 1 July 2025, providers only had to pay newly qualified kaiako at step one of the pay scale, regardless of their qualification level. It was later revealed that this move would mean $22m less in the back pockets of newly trained kaiako over the following two years.[4] It was an insult to those entering the profession, a shock to migrant teachers whose visas were now at risk, and foolhardy in the context of a sector already struggling to attract new staff.

If these actions didn't make the Government's intention to scrap pay parity clear, in a paper titled 'Options to reduce ECE service staffing costs', Ministry of Education officials said the quiet part out loud, stating: "The options in this paper begin the process of proactively moving away from the opt-in pay parity system and providing greater autonomy to providers to negotiate with teachers on matters of pay".[5]

Officials further stated that "The wider funding review you are seeking Cabinet approval for provides the opportunity to complete this process", making it clear that the funding review, the results of which are expected later this year, has a predetermined outcome: to scrap pay parity for early childhood teachers.

With the funding review consultation later this year, and qualification requirements, funding for quality, and parity all on the chopping block, the sector could not be balanced on a more dramatic precipice, nor could those working in it feel more relentlessly under attack.

Pay equity claim cancelled

In a brutal and unprecedented move, the Government retroactively cancelled the ongoing pay equity claim for teachers, which sought to ensure they are valued equally to male-dominated professions of similar levels of qualification and skill.

Early childhood teachers had raised the claim in 2020 before being joined by their primary colleagues later that year. Secondary colleagues then followed in 2021. The early childhood part of the claim was five years in the making, and most of the work had been done before the claim was extinguished overnight in this callous act by the Luxon Government.

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3 John Gerritsen, Relief teachers cut from early childhood centre pay parity scheme, *Radio New Zealand*, 4 September 2024. https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/527027/relief-teachers-cut-from-early-childhood-centre-pay-parity-scheme

4 John Gerritsen, Newly qualified early childhood teachers to lose as much as $22m over next two years, *Radio New Zealand*, 25 July 2025. https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/567963/newly-qualified-early-childhood-teachers-to-lose-as-much-as-22m-over-next-two-years

5 Ministry of Education, *Report: Options to reduce ECE service staffing costs*, 14 February 2025, #1342617. Released to NZEI Te Riu Roa under the Official Information Act. p.9.

These attacks on fair pay send a clear message that the coalition Government does not value the work early childhood educators do.

It is also clear that the Associate Minister of Education will continue his ideological campaign to reduce barriers to profit-making in early childhood education at the expense of children's health, safety, wellbeing, and education.

These attacks on fair pay send a clear message that the coalition Government does not value the work early childhood educators do.

The purpose of early childhood education redefined

As this report is being prepared, the Education and Workforce Select Committee has just closed submissions on the Education and Training (Early Childhood Education Reform) Amendment Bill, which seeks to redefine the purpose of early childhood education away from a system geared toward improving quality to one based on minimum standards.

It is such a poor piece of legislation that its accompanying Regulatory Impact Statement, which checks that the proposed legislation has been carefully analysed and thought through, failed its quality assurance review.[6] The document cites increased risks of 'policy failure' and litigation as a result of this poorly conceived initiative.

There is another way, but we have to work together

Taking all this in, you would be forgiven for feeling angry, or even hopeless. However, that anger is justified, and there is hope. Just because the Government has decided to take the path of profit-making and low quality doesn't mean those working in the early childhood sector have to accept it. Nor does it mean that whānau with children in early childhood education need to accept it.

By joining together – and joining your union! – early childhood kaiako and kaimahi can amplify the call for a quality early childhood education system that values their work and puts the needs and wellbeing of tamariki at the centre of all decisions about the sector.

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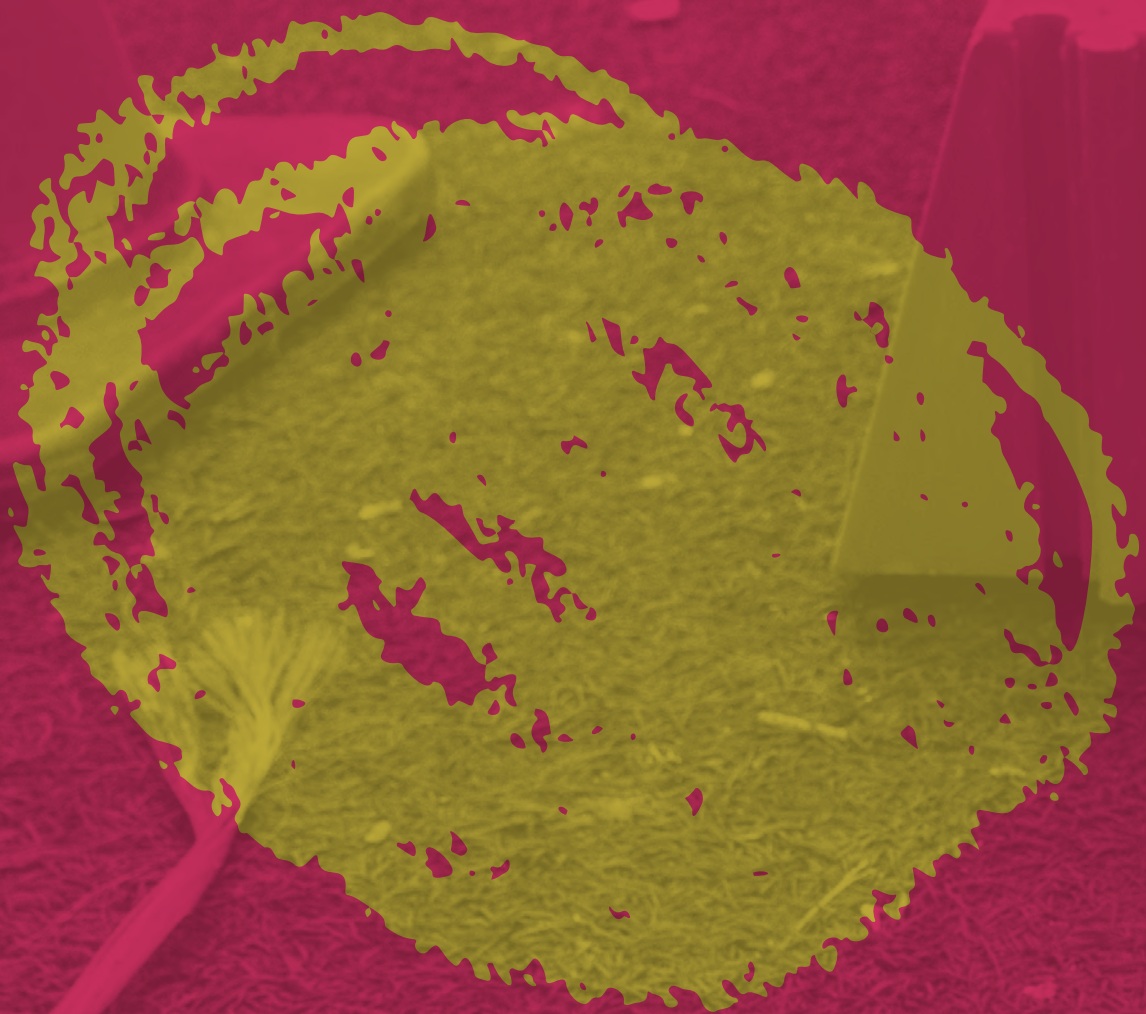
6 Ministry for Regulation, *Regulatory Impact Statement: Proposals responding to the ECE regulatory sector review*. https://www.regulation.govt.nz/assets/RIS-Documents/Regulatory-Impact-Statement-Proposals-responding-to-the-ECE-regulatory-sector-review.pdf

WHAT THE SURVEY TELLS US

Kōriporipo 2025 continues to track the how early childhood educators are faring – the challenges they face, and the joys they experience in doing this mahi. The survey also reflects the ongoing issues in the profession and the contrasts between the private and not-for-profit sides of the sector.



This is the third year the *Kōriporipo* survey has run. As with previous years, the facts speak for themselves. Some of the most shocking results from previous years have been repeated. As such, a third of respondents still regularly consider leaving the sector; early childhood workers are still feeling burnt out; workloads continue to grow; respondents continue to give their own, unpaid time to their work at alarming rates; and minimum ratios continue to be seen as unworkable and unrealistic.

These results are covered in more detail below. The most significant finding, however, is just how embedded the issues are. It is clear the many problems early childhood education face will require significant resourcing to address.

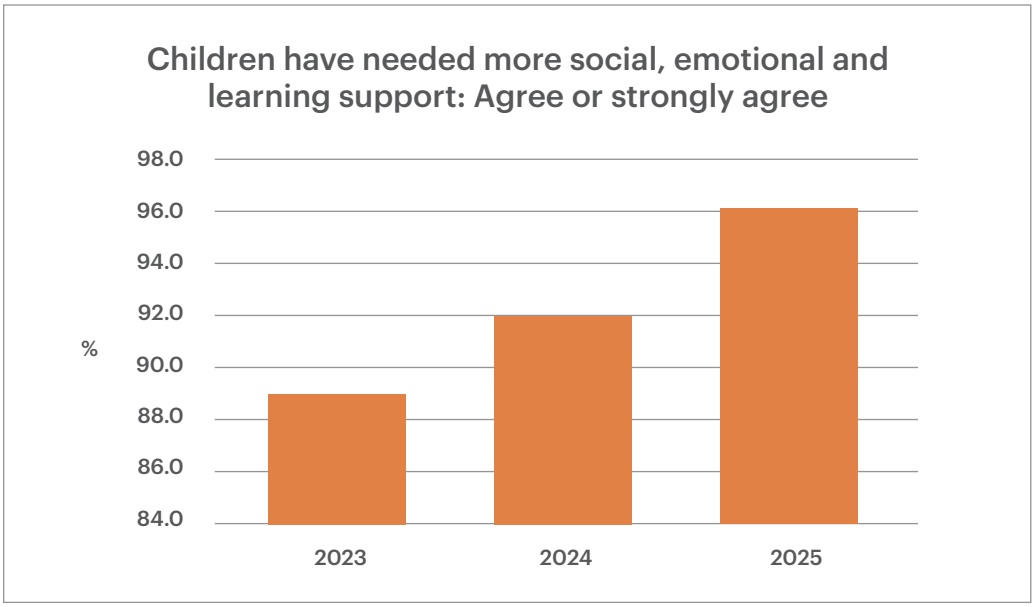
As with *Kōriporipo* 2024, results tended to be worse for respondents from the private, for-profit side of the early childhood education sector. Respondents employed in the private sector were more likely to feel overloaded, feel less valued, and more likely to be thinking about leaving early learning altogether.

Learning support needs increase

Being an annual survey, we don't expect major shifts year-to-year; however, we are keeping an eye on emerging trends. One that's clear in *Kōriporipo* 2025 is the increase in the social, emotional, and learning support needs of children.

96.1% of respondents agree or strongly agree that in the last few years children have needed more social, emotional, and learning support, showing a clear upward trend from 92.1% in 2024 and 89% in 2023.

In the 2025 survey, we asked respondents whether they agreed that it has been more difficult to access learning support for children who need it. 91.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, with 75% strongly agreeing.



Kaiako and kaimahi looking to leave the sector

32.8% of respondents said that in the past six months they had frequently thought about leaving the sector, while 28.6% of respondents said they occasionally thought about leaving the sector. This is consistent with last year's findings.

Respondents who said they had thought about leaving the sector were asked to indicate the reasons they had thought about leaving and to choose as many as they felt applied from a multi-choice list.

Feeling burnt out remains the most common reason that respondents were considering leaving. This was closely followed by "the sector is moving in the wrong direction" as the second most common reason, up from third place last year. Workload concerns dropped from second to third, while uncertainty over the future of pay parity came up one position to fourth. Concerns around inadequate pay dropped from third to fifth place; a shift largely explained by pay increases delivered by the rollout of pay parity over the past three years.

For what reason(s) did you consider leaving the sector?		2024 position	Change
1	Feeling burnt out	1	No change
2	The sector is moving in the wrong direction	3	+1
3	Workload is too much	2	-1
4	Uncertainty around the future of pay parity	5	+1
5	Pay is not good enough	4	-1

"I love my role and can't imagine doing anything else, but I will if we lose parity."

Respondents from the private sector were more likely to regularly think about leaving the sector. 37.7% said they frequently thought about leaving, while 29.8% said they occasionally think about leaving. This can be compared with community-based respondents, of whom 30.7% said they frequently think about leaving, and 28% who said they occasionally think about leaving.

While these results support our 2024 findings that respondents from the private sector appear to be less satisfied with their work, it remains a problem that a third of ECE workforce are frequently thinking about leaving – regardless of which part of the sector they work in.

Given turnover has gone down in recent years thanks to the introduction of pay parity, we will look closely next year as to whether the Government's changes to the pay parity scheme are driving these numbers up.

"I am here simply because I love and care about the children. So, I am still striving to be [the best teacher I can be] even though my pay is not liveable. I feel guilty to take sick leave, and I am burning out while kindergarten and primary school teachers have paid term breaks to recharge professionally and physically."

"I am sick of being at the bottom of the heap; I feel exploited because I care."

Workload changes

75.1% of respondents said their workload had increased in the last few years. This was higher for respondents from the private sector at 77.2%.

83.6% of respondents felt that over the past month, at least once a week, they didn't have enough time to complete everything required of their role. 48.7% said they feel like this most days. Private sector respondents were more likely to feel like this when compared with their community sector counterparts, with 51% of private sector respondents feeling like this most days, against 47.6% for community respondents.

88.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that increased workloads have compromised the ability of educators to provide high-quality early learning. This is consistent with the uptick seen between 2023 and 2024.

"The reason I have always had time for my work recently is entirely because I switched to relieving, so all my duties are while the children are in the classroom. Prior to that, I was finding it very difficult to fit it all and often working outside those hours."

"'I am working like a machine.' This is the most common sentence I hear from most of the teachers."

Respondents also overwhelmingly agreed that increased workloads have caused educators to be more stressed at work, with 92.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this. This result is consistent with the findings from last year. However, more respondents have moved into the 'strongly agree' category, with this shifting from 61.3% in 2024 to 66.5% in 2025.

"I love children. Their joy. I still love my job most days. I love to inspire and have fun and teach. I just wish the children could have the learning environments they deserve and that it wasn't just seen as a business."

Consistent with previous years, 75.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they often sacrifice their own wellbeing to ensure tamariki get what they need.

Respondents continue to spend their own, unpaid time completing the requirements of their role. In the month before completing the survey, 61.9% of respondents were spending more than an hour each week doing unpaid work. 21.3% were doing more than an hour each day.

"Kaiako are burnt out, stressed, putting their wellbeing second. The sector is like a ticking time bomb."

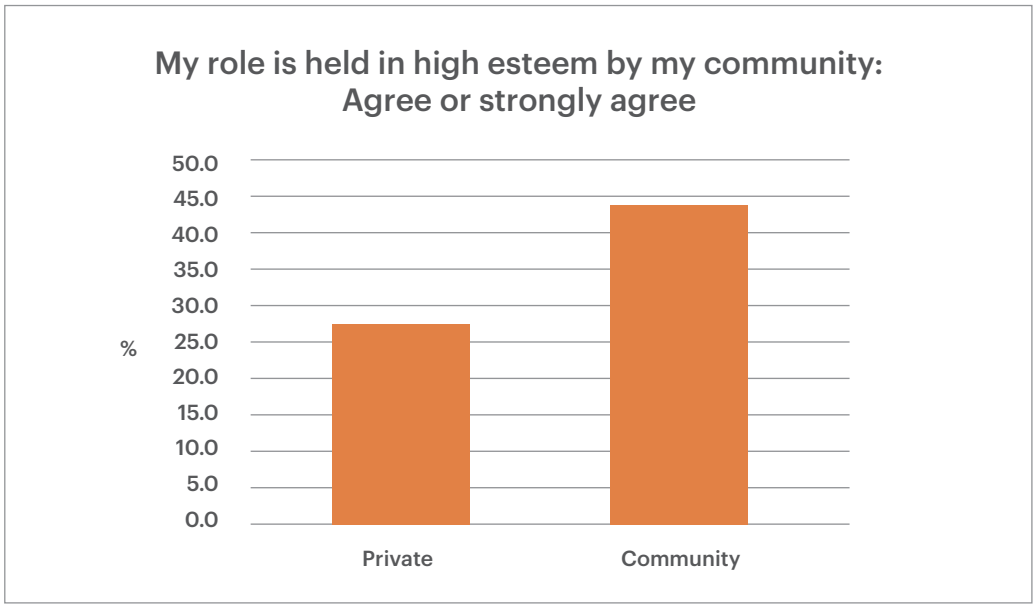
"I genuinely want to make a difference in children's lives, but this is unrealistic with government ratios and lack or resources for children with high needs."

External expectations and esteem

Parents' expectations of kaiako (e.g., email communications, social media, etc.) also appear to have increased, with 79.2% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that expectations have increased in the last few years, up from 74% last year.

Respondents were split when asked whether they thought their roles were held in high esteem by their communities, with 37.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing, 31.9% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, and 30.4% neutral. These results are similar to those from last year.

"I feel sad at the erosion of quality time that kaiako now have with children and their whānau, and the multiple pressures expected of them from so many directions. The profession is, I believe, undervalued, underpaid, and under resourced when you consider the scope and importance of the work undertaken every day."



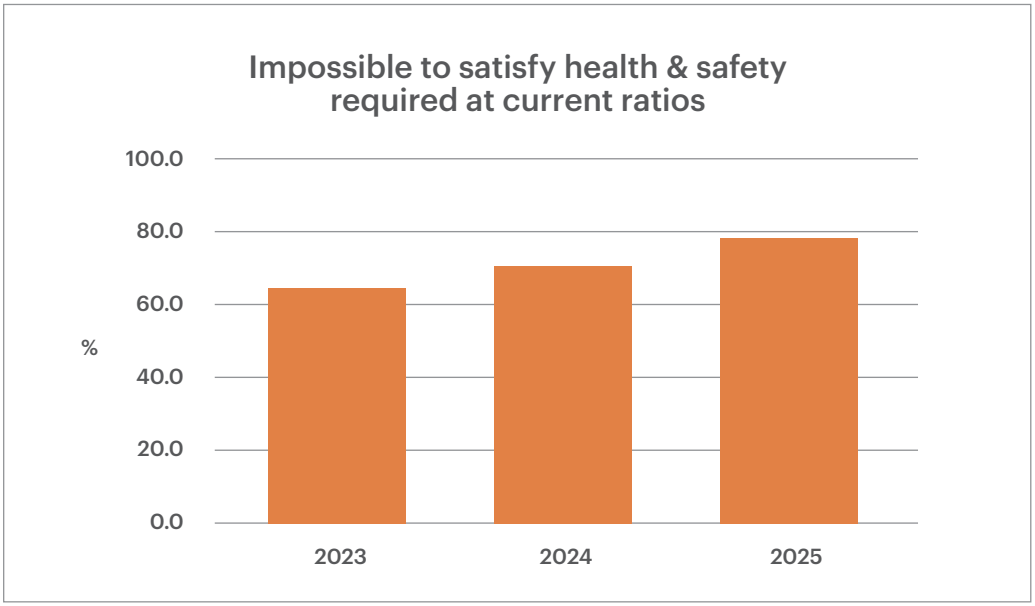
When analysed by sector, private sector respondents were far less likely to agree with this question, with just 28.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This can be compared with community-based respondents, who were far more likely to see their roles as being held in high esteem by their communities, with 43.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This is one of the starkest differences between the private and community-based parts of the sector.

"High-quality early childhood education is so important to give tamariki a good start to their education and life journey. Quality being the key point. Public ECE, qualified kaiako, better ratios, better funding, pay parity, learning support, and quality focused regulations are so essential to support the best possible learning outcomes in a caring, professional, well-resourced learning environment. This is what I believe and what I want for the future of ECE. Staying in the profession and fighting for these things is for the tamariki and their whānau."

Ratios

93.3% of respondents agree that current regulated minimum ratios do not enable the best quality learning environments for tamariki; this is consistent with previous years of the survey.

78.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it would be impossible to satisfy health and safety requirements at current regulated minimum ratios. This is up significantly from 70.2% in 2024 and 64.7% in 2023, reflecting health and safety concerns from deregulation.



38.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they sometimes have to skip breaks or cut them short to stay within ratio.

"It's difficult to meet the needs of the children when staffing ratios require you not to be able to put tired toddlers to bed. Information sharing is difficult when there is no time to talk to colleagues; this can result in missed medication or late medication."

"Poor ratios also make everyday care harder."

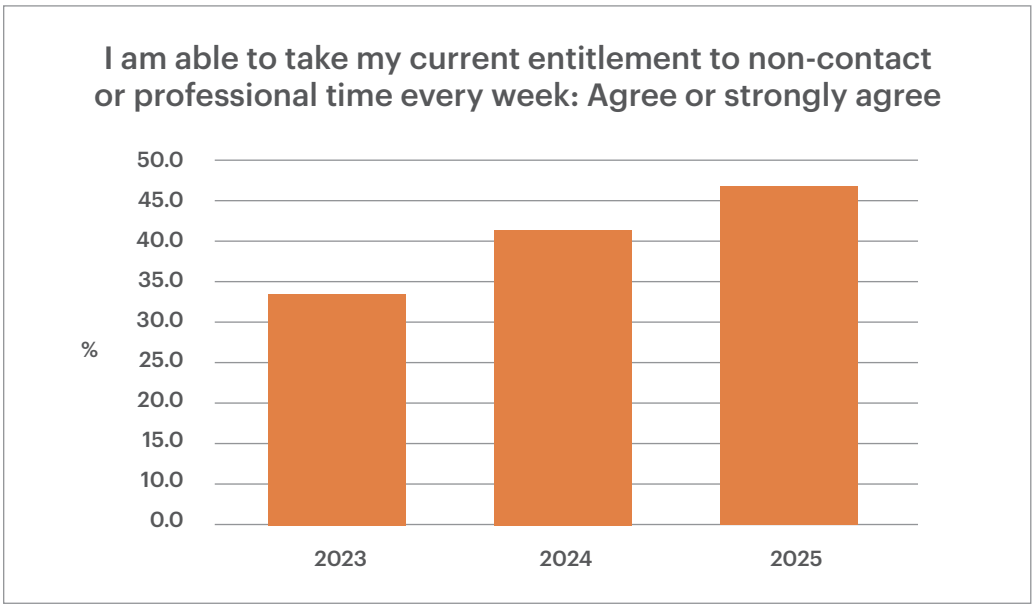
"I love ECE, [but] there are just parts of ECE that are really hard and burnout is real. It's hard to come back from burnout, so I truly hope something around our ratios, around the workloads, around the commitment and expectations of kaiako is done, so that we feel like we can be our best selves in the roles that we're doing – rather than getting so busy ticking boxes and checking lists that we miss those magic intentional teaching moments. Please help us to keep doing what we love."

"In my experience, and from talking with other teachers, problems from having too few staff happen often. When there aren't enough teachers for the number of children, it's hard to watch everyone properly. For example, if there are not enough adults in the room, it's harder to see what's happening in different areas. This can lead to children wandering off into unsafe spaces, or small accidents becoming more serious because there's no one close enough to help straight away."

Non-contact time

While educators' working conditions seem to be getting worse, one area that bucks the trend is around employers honouring non-contact time entitlements. 46.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are able to take their current entitlement to non-contact or professional time every week. This builds on 41.8% last year, and 33.5% in 2023.

Increased unionisation among those working in private ECE is one factor in this shift, as it leads to stronger worker voice and advocacy. While these improvements are worth celebrating, the flipside is that less than half of respondents are getting their entitled non-contact time, which is clearly not good enough.



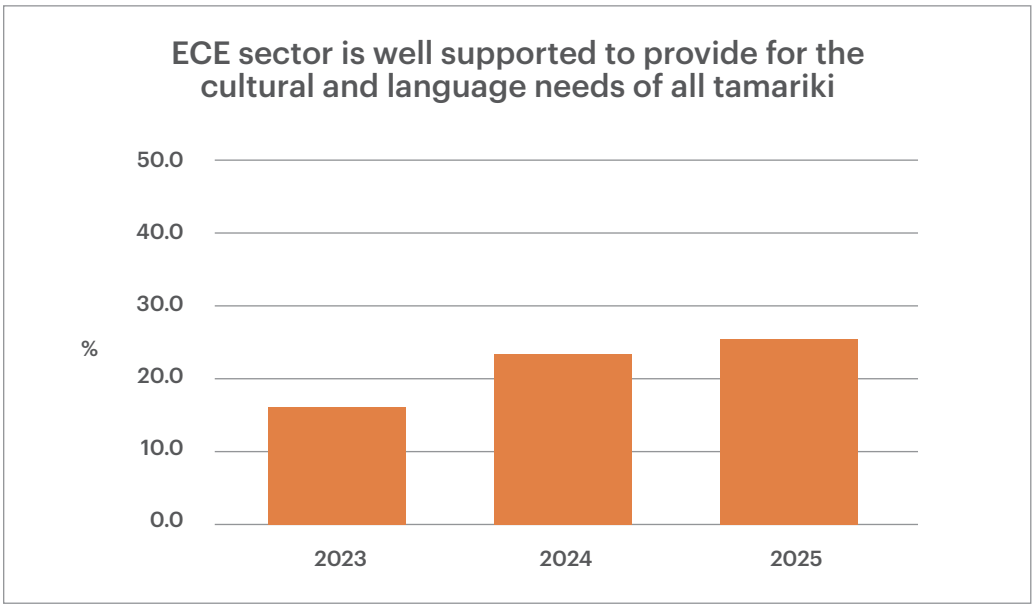
A new question in *Kōriporipo* 2025 asked respondents whether they had enough time built into their role to complete reporting requirements. Just 22% agreed or strongly agreed with this, while under half (49.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. 28.3% answered the question neutrally.

"Being a part of a public kindergarten, I love that I get to work to build community. Working with tamariki through a holistic, play-based curriculum. The non-contact time and session times enable us to deliver quality education for our tamariki. Planning is important, and having this time as a team is critical to being able to plan effectively for our tamariki."

Cultural and language needs

Only a quarter (25.8%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the ECE sector is well supported to provide for the cultural and language needs of all tamariki.

While this is a long way from where things need to be, it does represent an improvement from the previous years which saw 23.3% in 2024 and just 17% in 2023.



"I'm a Pākehā and love teaching* Te Whāriki. *The tamariki and the curriculum were my starting point to learn about te ao and te reo Māori. It's the most beautiful culture I have experienced so far, and I can't wait to start my level three course. The Ready to Read Phonic Plus books are also tino pai for the tamariki because they remember well how to pronounce the Māori letters/kupu. All the Māori celebrations are part of our curriculum, and many of our centre whānau joined the hīkoi last year. He waka eke noa – we are all in this together."

"I love supporting young children to be confident and competent learners. I love our holistic, bicultural, inclusive curriculum, **Te Whāriki,** *and strengths-based approach to the learning and wellbeing of tamariki. I like to think I'm helping to create the change I'd like to see in the world by modelling love, empathy, and respect for diversity to learners, and using social and emotional coaching to support them to treat each other the way they'd like to be treated."*

"The knowledge that what we do in these formative years makes an impact on future generations; it is fundamental that we teach this age like they deserve to be treated: with mana, care, dignity, high learning, quality interactions and teaching that values diversity and **Te Whāriki."**

Job satisfaction

A third of respondents (32.4%) said that when they wake up, they feel excited about going to work. This was much lower for private sector respondents, with 24.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared to 36.5% for community-based respondents.

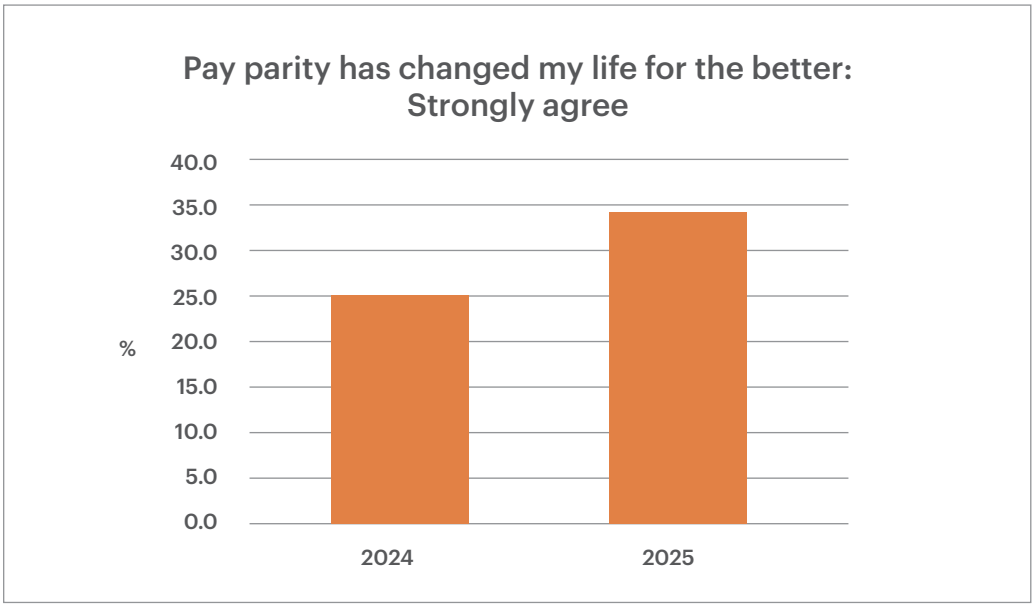
71.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "Te Tiriti is at the heart of everything we do as kaiako". This was an increase from 62.7% last year.

"I have always put the value of Te Tiriti first in my practice. I love the kaupapa Māori values, yet believe there needs to be more support in educating our community about what they mean for our youngest citizens."

Pay parity

61.4% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that pay parity had changed their life for the better, up from 56.7% last year. This included a significant increase in those strongly agreeing, from 24.8% to 34.4%.

However, pay remained an issue. Only a third of respondents (33.6%) felt adequately remunerated for the work they do; marginally up on last year (31.5%).



"ALL QUALIFIED ECE teachers should receive pay parity across the sector. We need 100% trained kaiako or teachers in training across the board. We are losing or not enticing people into ECE due to unrealistic salaries and/or stressful working conditions and unrealistic expectations and workloads. We are the voice of the tamariki, our future generation of Aotearoa. The first three years are vital for the development of tamariki!!"

"I love the children, but I HATE that we have lost agency within our jobs to provide better care. We need to be paid fairly. If it was a male-dominated field, we would be getting paid way more than what we receive."

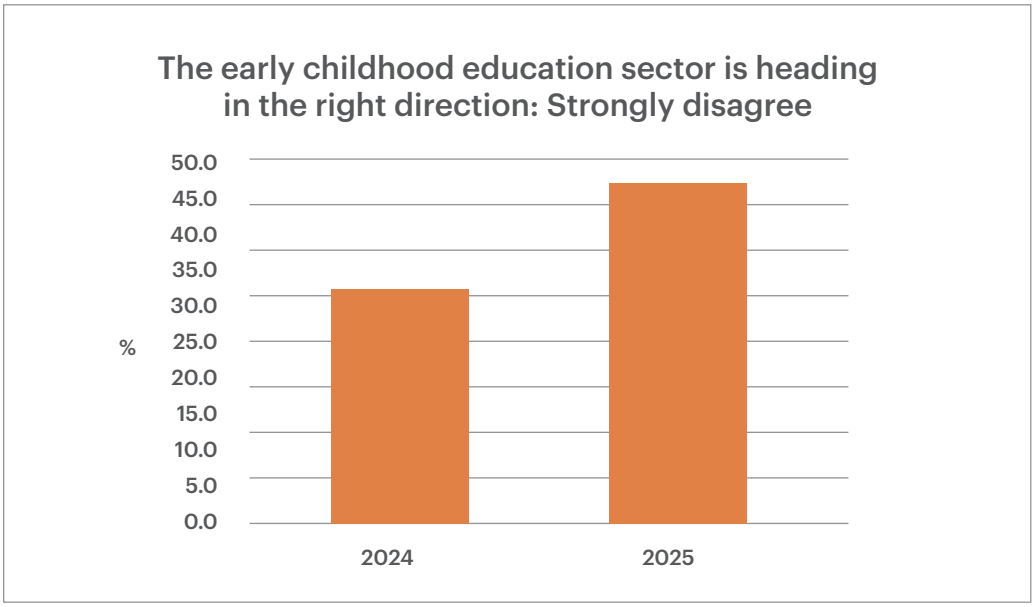
"What disappoints as an experienced, qualified relief teacher is to have my salary capped at step 6. It is grossly unfair. Particularly given relief teachers fund their own PLD, first aid training, and teacher registration costs."

Wrong direction

Respondents were asked whether they agreed that the early childhood education sector is heading in the right direction. 47.2% strongly disagreed, up from 31.1% last year; a clear indictment of the deregulatory direction set by Associate Minister of Education David Seymour. Only 5% agreed or strongly agreed, down from 7.1% last year.

It is clear that respondents are concerned with the health and safety implications of deregulation with 55.1% strongly agreeing, up from 38.9% last year.

A new question asked in 2025 was whether respondents supported teacher qualification requirements being relaxed for early childhood education. 91.9% of respondents did not support this.



"ECE is not understood by the current Government. The reason we have regulations is so that children don't get hurt. The regulations have been created in response to incidents where children have been hurt or died."

The sample

2,077 educators completed the survey. 20.6% of respondents said they whakapapa Māori, up significantly from 15.3% in 2024.

In terms of experience, the sample was similar to previous years:

- 33.1% of respondents had been working in the sector for more than 20 years.
- 19.7% between 14 and 20 years.
- 23.5% between 8 and 14 years.
- 12.4% between 4 and 8 years.
- 7.2% between 2 and 4 years.
- 2.7% between 1 and 2 years.

A variety of service types were represented, similar to previous years:

- 40% of respondents were employed in kindergartens.
- 34.1% were in private education and care.
- 17.8% were in community-based education and care.
- Māori immersion ECE, puna reo and kōhanga reo, represented about 2%.
- Around 1% were from Pacific language services.

There were a range of job types represented:

- 52.1% of respondents were qualified and certificated teachers.
- 16.9% were head teachers.
- 5.8% were centre managers.
- 3.5% were in-training teachers.
- Kindergarten senior teachers, team leaders, and unqualified teachers made up 2% each.

And a range of tenures:

- 63.4% of respondents were on permanent full-time contracts.
- 22.9% were permanent part-time.
- The total number of respondents working as relievers was 10.1%, up from 6% last year.

"The ECE Minister should come and work with us at least for a week as a teacher, then he would see the difference between imagination and reality. When he will give his best every day and still get treated like a nanny."

RECOMMENDATIONS

We need a new vision for early childhood education that prioritises quality education and places children's and teachers' wellbeing at its heart. This means listening to the early childhood teachers – our experts – on what they need to best meet the needs of the tamariki they teach and significant commitments by government to invest in our children's futures.

A bold vision, and a government with both conviction and moral clarity is needed to turn around a sector clearly marching swiftly away from quality ECE.

Despite Aotearoa's own ground-breaking longitudinal Dunedin Study, which provides ample evidence for the value of investment in the early years, ideology is driving change in Aotearoa which is taking us backwards.

Countries which had been following Aotearoa as a high-quality system are now looking elsewhere for models where state investment is dedicated to the first five years of life, ensuring their youngest tamariki are set up to thrive throughout their lives.

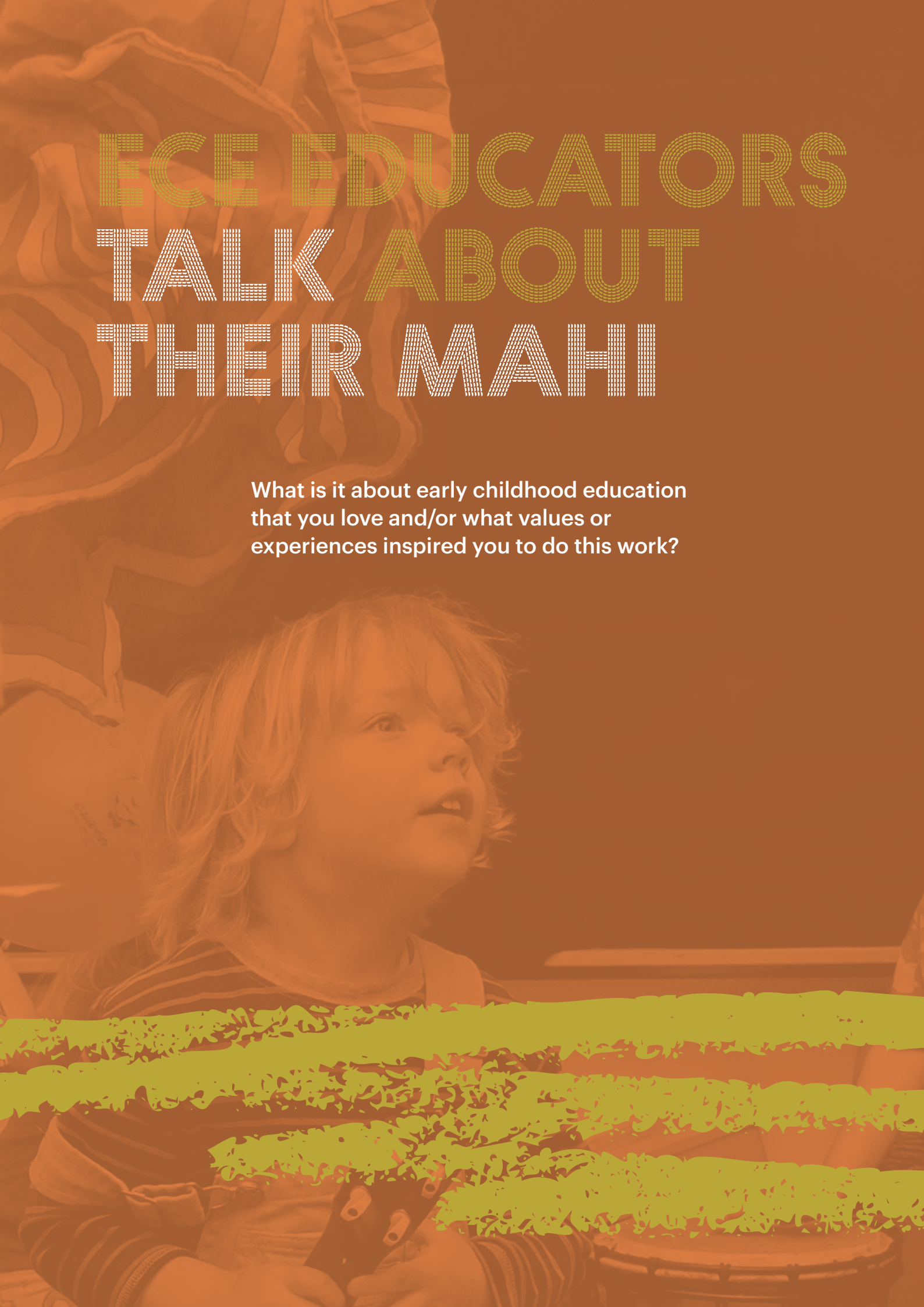
We call on this and future governments to:

- **Uphold Te Tiriti and *Te Whāriki*.** Our early childhood curriculum is world-leading and universally recognised. Tamariki Māori need environments which are culturally appropriate and affirm their whakapapa.
- **Listen to the experts.** Respect teacher and workforce voice and give teachers quality conditions to teach in where ratios are fit for purpose. This gives tamariki an environment that meets their learning needs as whole people and upholds their identity and culture; it's the best way to ensure children are school-ready.
- **Improve access to learning support.** Urgently address learning support needs for our youngest ākonga, and develop wrap-around supports for parents and whānau within early childhood education services.
- **Commit to full pay parity.** Full pay parity for teachers to support quality learning for the long term and at least the Living Wage for all support staff. A teacher is a teacher. Teachers' qualifications, certification requirements, skills, and expertise are just as valuable, and their job is just as complex, no matter the age of the learner. All support staff make a crucial contribution, and this should be reflected in pay rates and development pathways.
- **Commit to quality funding.** For all tamariki to thrive by the time they start school or kura, quality funding and a public early childhood education system is essential. Kindergartens and community early childhood education are the cornerstones of quality. Removing any amount of funding to these services will drive down standards, not improve them.
- **Make early education affordable for everyone.** Reduce and cap fees now, and work towards full public provision of quality, low-cost or free, early childhood education.

"Children are at the heart of my practice; I want to do everything I can to help each and every one thrive."

ECE EDUCATORS TALK ABOUT THEIR MAHI

What is it about early childhood education that you love and/or what values or experiences inspired you to do this work?



"Manakitanga: Hearing tamariki believe in themselves – 'I did it', 'Look, I can do it', 'Look, I'm doing it.' Tamariki building that strong learner identity and belief in themselves is what inspires me to be part of ECE."

"The framework of Te Whāriki and well-paid pay parity inspired me to do this work."

"I love children and teaching. I picked early childhood education because I liked the idea of teachers working together in a classroom, compared to primary where it's one teacher per classroom."

"The experience with the children is what I enjoy most; we use play as the core theory whilst upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi and all it encompasses. I thrive on being a good role model for tamariki/mokopuna and supporting them to learn through social and cultural interactions. Having my own children and wanting the best practices for them is what inspired me to study and become a kaiako."

"No two days are the same. The children are so keen to soak up knowledge."

"The opportunity to collaborate with community, the diversity, and creative input."

"Love the variation each day, the tamariki, the curiosity of our environment, the excitement of the little things, the learning from peers, whānau and tamariki. Being part of a child's world is magical and to learn each day is a privilege."

"Every day is different. And every day is a chance to start fresh."

"I have been in the sector since the 1970s, and would still choose it today. Every day is different, and making children's lives exciting and providing a safe environment for them to learn in is the best."

"I have always put the value of Te Tiriti first in my practice. I love the kaupapa Māori values, yet believe there needs to be more support in educating our community about what they mean for our youngest citizens."

"Being at the experienced end of the sector, I absolutely love being able to make a difference in the lives of tamariki and whānau. Being able to offer strategies, knowledge or links to outside agencies, being part of their support network, and seeing the spark on the face of a tamaiti when they realise they are capable of learning and can succeed."

"We are raising the next generation. Parents have to work a lot more than they did 20+ years ago, so we are fundamental to contributing to [our] newest members of society. They deserve to have passionate, qualified teachers who have the ability and staffing to be present and TEACH. Not just crowd control."

"I love facilitating children's learning. The highlight of my day is always seeing a child's pride and mana when they are able to see through a task and learn something from it. I am inspired to do this mahi because I believe that children deserve passionate and engaged adults in their lives."

"The opportunity to collaborate with community, the diversity, and creative input."

"I enjoy working with young, inquiring minds, encouraging growth in all aspects of child development."

"The conversations with tamariki. The joy you feel when you've achieved something with a tamaiti, or a group of tamariki."

"The wonder, the joy, the love of little people. Feeling like I make a difference. Respect, relationships, kindness."

"I love being able to support our youngest members of society and their whānau."

"I love raising children in my care to become confident, competent, and compassionate learners! They are valued in all aspects of holistic development throughout their childcare journey. Raising them – teaching, nurturing and building them to be mighty in their generation and lead with purpose and dignity!"

"Learning te ao Māori, learning other cultures, supporting our whānau with diverse kids."

"I love teaching, listening to the children, watching them as they play and learn. Being alongside them and supporting as they make a discovery or figure something out. I love answering their questions. I just LOVE to TEACH!"

"Kindergarten runs in my blood. I am absolutely passionate about everything kindergarten stands for. I strive to give back to communities, support whānau, and most of all, provide a safe and nurturing environment where tamariki can move through the strands of Te Whāriki *and achieve outcomes in their own time and space. These are our future citizens of society, and they deserve the very, very best."*

"I am passionate about tamariki learning through play, and I believe whanaungatanga, the building of relationships with children, is key to them thriving as learners."

"I love the opportunities to facilitate and support the young learners' learning, whether it be emotional, social, cognitive or physical. It's a joy to be a part of their lives, watching the change which comes from professional, caring, thoughtful, energetic kaiako."

"I love being able to support our youngest members of society and their whānau."

"It's so important! We are literally building brain architecture. What could be more important?!"

"Knowing that I can make a positive difference in the lives of tamariki and whānau, and seeing the mana and agency that tamariki leave our service with."

"I passionately believe that early childhood education lays the foundation on which all future learning sits. To see a child achieve, meet challenges, and grow is quite amazing."

The wake of a
vessel on the water,
indicating where
it has come from
and that it is making
forward progress.
nā Paetahi Park,
Hereturikōkā 2023