

**NZEI
TE RIU ROA**

KŌRIPORIPO

**Early
Childhood
Education
Parents and
Whānau
Survey Report
2025**



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FOREWORD

Teachers and parents have a lot in common. Together, we hold the future in our hands.

By the time our tamariki are five years old, their brains are 90% developed. I know through my journey as a parent with my own tamariki that our early childhood educators are superheroes. Our society should place the highest possible value on the work they do.

I'm sure we've all had that moment when a teacher helps our child navigate a new or complex situation or skill. I have certainly seen how my tamariki have been set up as learners for life by their positive experiences in early childhood education, and I know they do best when they are safe and in learning environments of the highest quality.

This report reinforces the critical role of early childhood teachers in setting our tamariki up for life, and that qualified teachers are key to this. What is shocking to me is our Government's indifference to the affordability crisis parents face to pay for early childhood education and care. FamilyBoost replaced a universal entitlement to 20-hours free ECE for two-year-olds and put in place a rebate that many whānau struggle to even access.

In fact, only 3% of parents surveyed feel that our current National-led coalition Government is taking early childhood education in the right direction. Parents know that a deregulatory agenda impacts on children's safety and wellbeing. Moves by the current government to cut teacher pay can only be perceived as attacks on the education of our youngest ākonga.

That's why I'm so pleased to add my voice, both as a parent and as a board member of a kindergarten association, to those of the hundreds of parents and whānau, who say our teachers deserve all the support we can give them, so that our children thrive.

As parents, we know that when you uphold teachers' pay and working conditions, you uphold the learning conditions for our tamariki.

Whakamana tamariki, whakamana kaiako.



Kylie Semu

Parent and He Whānau Manaaki Kindergarten Association board member

FROM THE NATIONAL SECRETARY

Parent and whānau voice is essential in the conversation about what's best for our youngest children and babies. So it's a privilege to share their views in our second edition of the *Kōriporipo Early Childhood Education Parents and Whānau Survey*.

This survey is a companion to our survey of early childhood educators. For the first time this year, we have presented this survey report separately, thanks to the incredible response we received from parents and whānau.

Our findings show the interests of parents and whānau align closely with the kaiako and kaimahi working in the sector. That's clearly because both groups want to see the best possible outcomes for tamariki.

Parents and whānau intuitively understand that good teacher-child ratios, access to learning support, and good working conditions for teachers are all essential if we are to create quality learning conditions for tamariki, where they can grow and thrive.

Yet as this report is released, the trajectory for early childhood education is worrying. Teacher pay is already under attack, and the Government's funding review of the sector makes it clear that no additional investment will be made in the education of our youngest learners. Instead, the review proposes trade-offs which pit teacher pay and conditions against private providers' profit margins.

To secure the future of quality early childhood education, the Government needs to listen to not only the voices of our teachers, but those of our parents and whānau. Together, they can identify what their tamariki need, as well as potential solutions.

Doing nothing is not an option when the quality of education and care for our youngest children and babies is at stake. We owe it to our tamariki to act on these survey results.



Stephanie Mills

Korimako Tangiata | National Secretary

November 2025

INTRODUCTION

The *Kōriporipo Early Childhood Education Parents and Whānau Survey* is now in its second year – an ongoing national survey by NZEI Te Riu Roa of parents and whānau with children attending early childhood education in Aotearoa.





Welcome to NZEI Te Riu Roa's *Kōriporipo Early Childhood Education Parents and Whānau Survey Report* for 2025.

Last year, we ran a pilot survey of parents and whānau alongside our annual *Kōriporipo Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey*, and we were blown away by the response.

It was heartening to hear that parents and whānau back our kaiako and kaimahi. They told us loud and clear that health and safety is paramount, that quality education is critical, and that they strongly support pay parity for our ECE kaiako.

While last year's results were included alongside ECE educators' workforce survey report, this year our little tamaiti has grown up and is standing on its own feet in a separate publication.


This was partly motivated by another awesome turnout from parents and whānau, with almost 500 responses from across the motu!

It's also a time of much change in the early childhood sector. The Government is currently in the process of reconfiguring sector regulations – the frameworks that guide the quality and health and safety of the profession; for example, teachers' qualification requirements. It is also carrying out a review of all ECE funding, with the final results due in 2026.

Alarming, the pay parity scheme for early childhood teachers has already been clawed back. For beginning teachers, relievers, and those on fixed-term contracts, employers will no longer need to take into account their previous experience, qualifications, and recognised skills when calculating their initial pay step on the pay parity salary scale.

However, you won't see additional interpretation or discussion in this report. That is intentional – we think the results speak for themselves. And while we encourage you to read all of them, here are a few to set the tone:

- Parents were asked to rank the most important aspects in choosing an early childhood education centre, from most to least important. 'The safety and wellbeing of my child/children' was seen as the most important aspect, followed by 'Having high-quality ECE/highly qualified and skilled teachers responsible for teaching' as the second most important aspect.
- 78.2% of parents would support the establishment of a public early childhood education system that is free to attend, just like schools are.
- 96.9% of parents agree that experienced and qualified teachers are critical to the provision of high-quality early childhood education.
- 95.6% of parents think that early childhood teachers deserve to be paid at least the same as primary school teachers.
- 13.9% of parents responding to the survey said their child has additional learning needs and/or requires learning support. Of this group, 63.6% said they have not found it easy to access support for their child.
- 94.2% of parents would have concerns for their child's safety if the number of children to teachers was increased.
- 81.8% of parents would have concerns for their child's safety if the number of unqualified teachers relative to qualified teachers increased.
- Only 3.3% of parents agree that the current government is taking early childhood education in a positive direction. 78.3% disagree.



We also asked parents and whānau what they value most about their child's early childhood teachers and support staff, in the form of an open-ended question. We wish we could publish all of the responses, but this report would be far too long! We have instead opted to include them throughout to give colour to the statistics.


Lastly, thank you to every parent and whānau member who took the time to complete the survey. We were also encouraged that so many of you were interested in these findings and asked to have them sent to you.

We encourage you to share this report with your friends and whānau, and to look out for our next survey in 2026.

'What do you value the most about your child's early childhood teachers and support staff?'



"Their tireless enthusiasm, kindness, and presence."



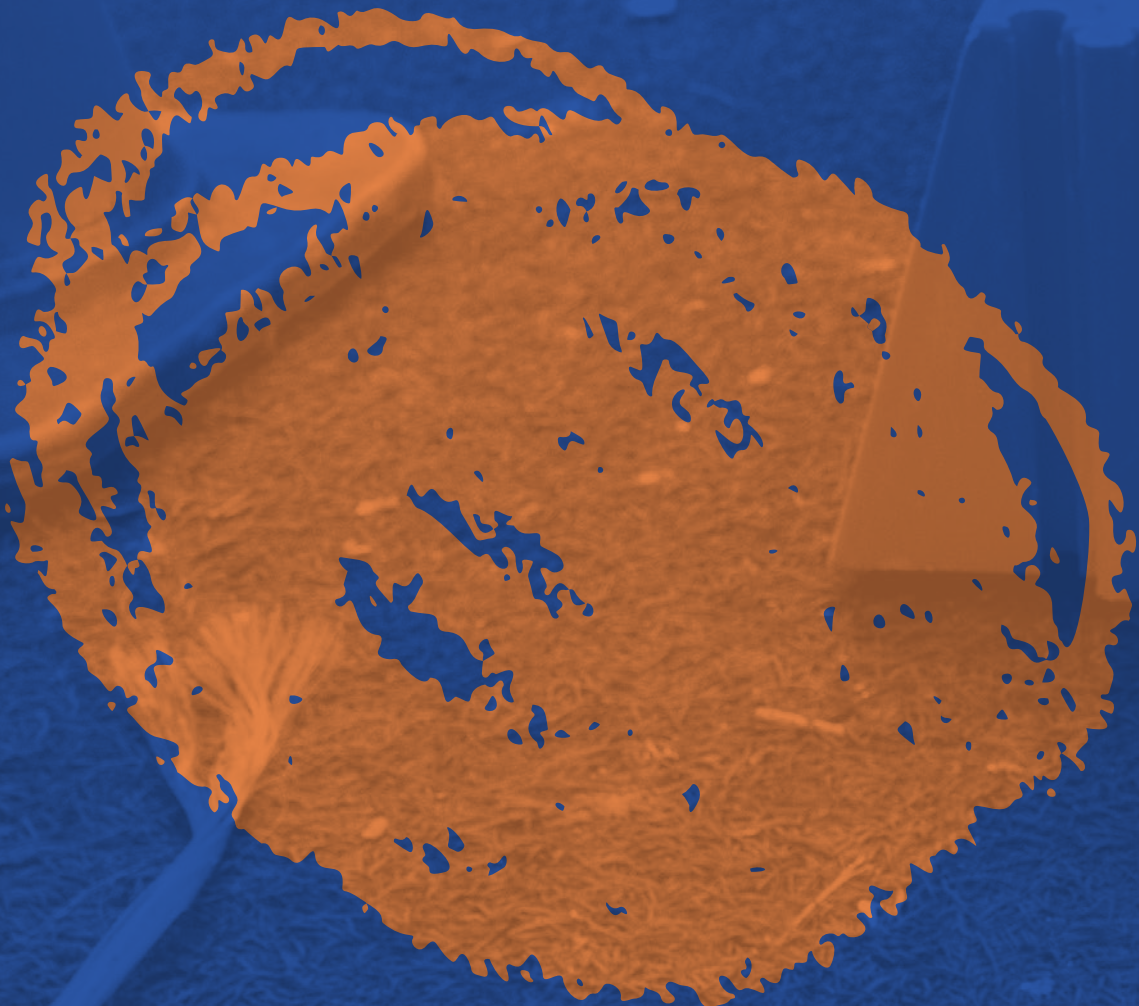
"What I value most are the small but powerful things: teachers who kneel to a child's level and really listen, who comfort children in distress rather than manage them, and who take the time to connect with whānau in an honest and open way. As a parent, I don't expect perfection; I value effort, communication, and consistency."



"The ratios are amazing at her centre, and the teachers have time to give her the attention, love and care she deserves and needs. It is also clear that due to good ratios, the teachers are not over stressed. I have seen firsthand the stress that minimum ratios cause staff and children. Very sad really."

WHAT THE SURVEY TELLS US

For parents and whānau, *Kōriporipo* 2025 highlights the importance of high-quality, safe, culturally responsive early childhood education that is affordable and accessible to all tamariki. However, the majority of respondents don't believe the current government is steering the sector in a positive direction.



The most important aspects in choosing an early childhood centre

Parents were asked to rank the most important aspects for them in choosing an early childhood education centre, from most to least important.

The results are shown in the table below.

Most important aspects of choosing a centre	Rank
The safety and wellbeing of my child/children	1
Having high-quality ECE/highly qualified and skilled teachers responsible for teaching	2
Convenience (location/hours available)	3
The cost/affordability	4
The cultural and language needs of my child/children	5
The recommendation from other parents/people I know	6

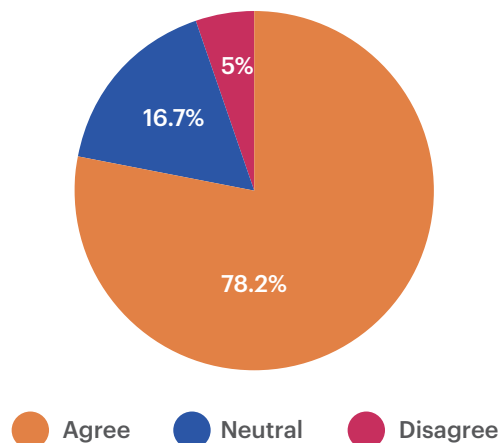
“Their professional expertise and high levels of training and qualifications mean they have a deep understanding of children’s social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs. They have the depth and breadth of expertise to support every child to thrive. We are SO lucky at our kindergarten.”

“The centre is child focussed, and it has great philosophies and practices to ensure children are loved, cared for, and ready for school. I feel like my boys have teachers who they connect with in a reciprocal relationship, and the centre makes adjustments to suit their learning needs. I realise I am lucky in this respect. However, this isn’t our first preschool. For our area, we pay relatively low fees, but the fees are [still too] high for me to be at work full time with our two children.”

Affordability of early childhood education

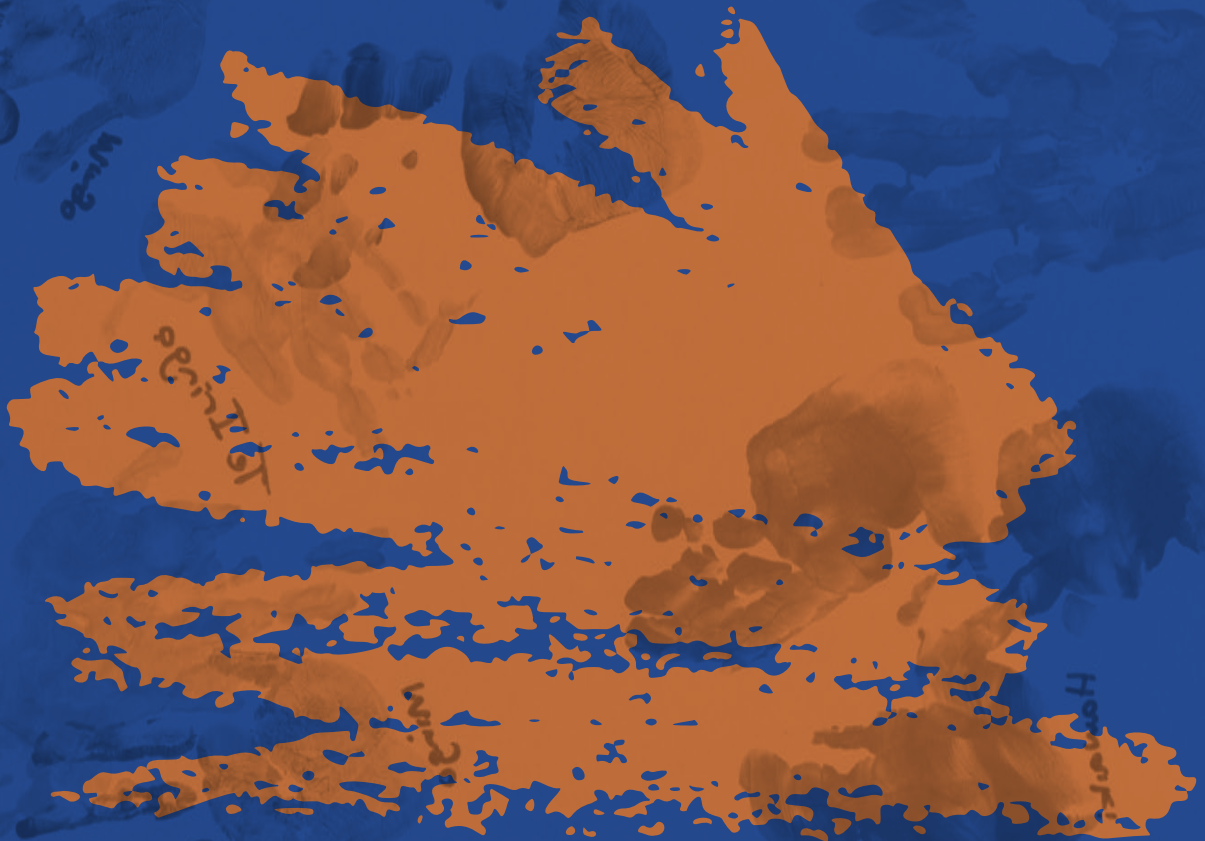
- Just 27.9% of parents agree that early childhood education is affordable.
- 76.9% of parents agree that 'Capping fees at \$10 per day per child would have a positive impact for parents/whānau with children in early childhood education services'.
- 78.2% of parents would support the establishment of a public early childhood education system that is free to attend, just like schools are.
- Just 14.9% of parents agree that the Government's FamilyBoost policy has improved or significantly improved the affordability of early childhood education for their whānau. 45.7% disagree, while 39.4% answered neutrally.
- About half (47.4%) of parents agree that they are able to access 20-hours free ECE (which covers costs for children three years old and above) without paying additional fees. 17.3% answered neutrally, while 35.3% disagree.

I would support the establishment of a public early childhood education system that is free to attend, just like schools are

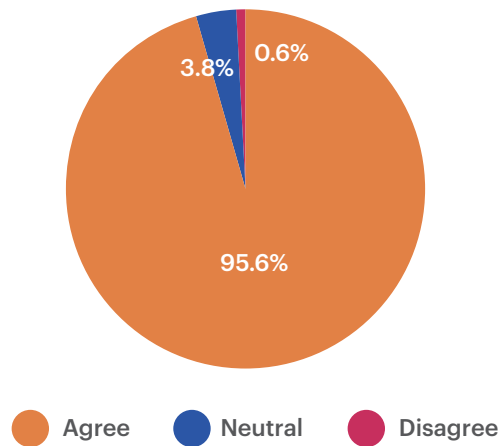


"Their dedication to the wellbeing and education of my child and other children through a variety of cultural and educational activities and focus on play-based learning."

“Qualified teachers who know my grandchild and have the relevant training to respond to his individual learning and needs. Then, to plan for his learning to build on his interests and strengths, while supporting his undeveloped skills. All of this requires skilled teachers who are qualified. I would not want my grandchild or anyone’s child to have untrained teachers. Our children are too important and what happens in these early years lays the foundations for a child’s future and the health of Aotearoa New Zealand.”



Early childhood teachers deserve to be paid at least the same as primary school teachers



Teachers and quality

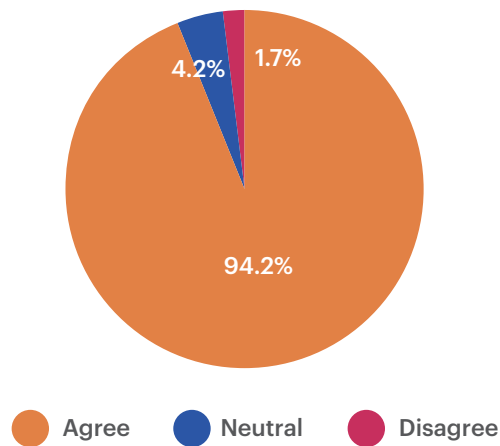
- 96.9% of parents agree that experienced and qualified teachers are critical to the provision of high-quality early childhood education.
- 95.6% of parents think that early childhood teachers deserve to be paid at least the same as primary school teachers.
- 96.2% of parents agree that funding should be prioritised to ensure staffing and resources are available to provide inclusive and tailored support for every child.
- 96.7% of parents believe that early childhood education is not just 'babysitting', and that the education component is essential.

Learning support

- Of the parent respondents to the survey, 13.9% said their child has additional learning needs and/or requires learning support.
- Of this group, 63.6% said they have not found it easy to access support for their child.

“The expertise and qualifications that allow them to not only safely care for my child, but also to engage, educate, and teach them to be part of a community.”

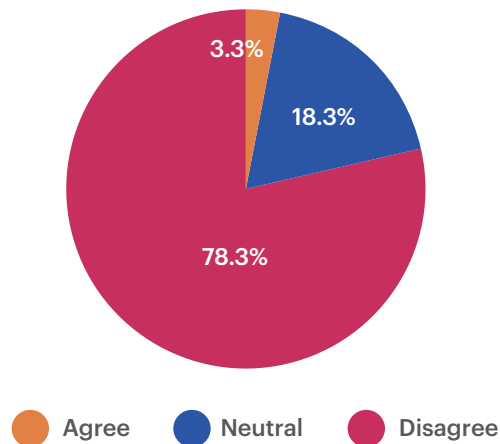
I would have concerns for my child's safety if the number of children to teachers was increased



- 94.2% of parents would have concerns for their child's safety if the number of children relative to teachers was increased.
- 97.7% of parents think it is important that their child is in a safe environment (e.g., bookshelves secured to walls, appropriate door handle height).
- 81.8% of parents would have concerns for their child's safety if the number of unqualified teachers relative to qualified increased.

"We have been through three centres to land where we are now. I really appreciate the high teacher-to-child ratio. I appreciate how the teachers know all the kids and parents, and treat them as individuals (previous centres managed the children as a group, which was not great). I value that the centre pays its teachers the Living Wage [as a] minimum, and they have little staff turnover and generally happy staff, which flows on to my child having a stable and happy environment."

The current government is taking early childhood education in a positive direction



Values

- 98.1% of parents agree that all children should have a right to quality education and care.
- 99.6% of parents agree that all children deserve to thrive in early learning settings.
- Only 3.3% of parents agree that the current government is taking early childhood education in a positive direction. 78.3% disagree.
- 59.9% of parents disagree that we need to be testing children enrolled in early childhood education. 14.9% of parents agree with the idea. 25.2% were neutral.

Parent choice

- 77.8% of parents agree that 'Early childhood education services available in my area are appropriate for my child (e.g., meet language or cultural needs, provide learning support access, have appropriate hours available)'.
- 87.4% of parents agree that having their child in early childhood education allows them to work.
- 78.8% of parents have children at their first choice of early childhood education centre.

"Their knowledge and focus on play-based learning, community, and the importance of turangawaewae and belonging in fostering children's natural curiosity and exploration."



The sample

Demographics

- 487 parents completed the survey.
- 79.3% of respondents' children were over two; 20.7% were under two.
- Most children (54.6%) were in the three- to five-year-old age group.
- Every region in Aotearoa was represented in the sample, apart from Tai Tai Poutini – West Coast.
- Parents from Te Whanganui-ā-Tara – Wellington were the largest group at 26.7%, closely followed by Tāmaki Makaurau – Auckland at 23.6%.
- Waitaha – Canterbury made up 13.9% of the sample, Waikato 8.3% of the sample, and Ōtākou – Otago 6%.

Service type

- 39% had children attending kindergarten services.
- 32% had children attending private education and care services.
- 19.2% had children attending community-based services.
- 2.1% had children attending kōhanga reo.
- 1.7% had children attending puna reo.
- 0.8% had children attending another language immersion service, such as a Pacific language service.
- 5.1% of respondents did not know what type of service their child attended.

Time in early childhood education


- Children were in services for as little as 0–5 hours per week, up to more than 40 hours per week.
- The most common time in service for an average week was between 25 and 30 hours, at 21.3% of the sample.



“I value their commitment to teaching my moko te reo Māori (which I support at home), and exposing my moko to meeting other centres regularly for whakawhanaungatanga.”

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 both early childhood teachers and families about what's needed to improve the sector 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 teacher

PARENTS AND WHĀNAU TALK ABOUT ECE KAIAKO

What do you value the most
about your child's early childhood
teachers and support staff?

"That they are qualified and provide care and learning that is catered to my child's age and needs. And most of all, because they are warm, hardworking, loving kaiako who invest so much time and energy into our tamariki."

"Small centre with only 18 kids at a time. Chill Steiner vibes and lots of outdoor time."

"I value their genuine passion and love for ECE and professionalism most. Plus, I believe when teachers are well treated and respected, they can maintain high-quality education for our children."

"Expertise, experience, kindness, compassion."

"They are experts in child development. They engage beautifully with the children, understanding and engaging in their interests, and assisting them to develop skills essential for life. They work alongside parents to provide the best nurturing environment for our tamariki."

"The rich learning environment they provide that is tailored to my child's needs and interests."

"Warm, caring, supportive team providing a wonderful learning environment, catering for their intellectual, emotional, social and physical needs, sharing information and guidance for both tamariki and family whānau."

"Low numbers of tamariki and fully qualified teachers."

"Their experience, caring nature, and ability to love my children like their own."

"Their aroha, manaakitanga, and time."

"That they are trained to give my son the best early education. The early years are the most important and impactful in development. Knowing [teachers] are trained gives me confidence [children] will learn and are safe."

“That they are all qualified; it reassures me that my child is in safe and capable hands on his kindy days. I know that the teachers incorporate essential life skills and literacy/ maths into my child’s play.”

“The teachers tailor learning to the age and stage, highlight interests and concerns, are well informed, and offer huge support to the families who attend the service. They go above and beyond to meet our child’s social, personal, spiritual, cultural needs, and expose them to a wide variety of education that is evidence based.”

“They weave Māori values, Māori tikanga and world views in their practices as kaiako.”

“Excellent ratios – 1:3 or 1:4 at most across the centre (0-5 mixed license in one space) – highly experienced and nurturing kaiako, who celebrate diversity, inclusion, and advocate for quality ECE, especially for our Māori learners.”


“They are long-time employees; they are highly experienced, creative and nurturing. They have great relationships with the wider community. They are skilled at teaching appropriate skills and knowledge for the age group they teach. They genuinely care about my child.”

“Intelligence, good judgment, caring attitude, patience, kindness.”

“Having a smaller number of children to teachers allows my daughter’s personality and interests to be recognised and embraced.”

“Their passion and knowledge. They are all fully degree qualified and understand how to support tamariki to grow and develop; they don’t just watch them. They always have wonderfully stimulating activities set up, are passionate about supporting [children’s] transition to school, and organise lots of extracurricular things through the year, such as disco nights, Christmas markets, etc. Kindergarten has been an amazing place for my child and it’s all down to our wonderful kaiako.”

“Making my child feel safe, seen and welcome.”



"Their experience working with young children, how they know the families, their advice on dealing with behaviours in this age group."

"They are our village as first-time parents, as we talk to them about the things we're navigating too! Their training and expertise are such wonderful resources to tap into when we're stressed about toilet training, sleep, and other toddler challenges."

"I have learnt so much from the kaiako who teach my children. From how to support big emotions to ideas for extending their interests, it has made a very positive difference to my parenting. I also value how well they know my children; they really take the time to understand them and tailor their teaching to fit their needs."

"They are my daughter's second family. They help her navigate the world, provide her with stimulating learning experiences, and celebrate who she is."


"They go above and beyond for the children in their care, volunteering much of their free time to compensate for the failure of the Government to pay them [more] and the centre accordingly. They are warm, caring, competent and loving. Couldn't wish for better people for my children to spend their day with."

"Their qualifications that make the interaction with the children seem calm and easy. We need more highly educated ECE teachers."

"The energy, patience, and care they give to our tamariki. The creativity they bring to their jobs, and the endless delight they take in our kids is priceless. I value knowing that, if I have to have my child in ECE in order to work, they are having an enriching time somewhere that feels safe and caring and gives them community."

"They are very caring and have helped greatly with my mokopuna tuarua since he's been at puna reo. He has improved so much in this environment."

"How hard they try to do the best they can with what they have. Ratios for two-year-olds should be LOWER. MAX 1:8, because they still have high caregiving needs."



**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*