



RECOMMENDATIONS: INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION NOW

It is important to get things right in early childhood education. This hinges on an improved funding system which genuinely puts the needs of tamariki at the centre. Children have a right not just to physical safety, but also to education which affirms their whakapapa and their role in society.

1. Make ratios fit for purpose

That ratios be reviewed immediately, with a new band for two-year-olds, improved ratios at every band as per the table below, and an implementation timeline to grow the teaching workforce to accommodate this. In addition, a move from centre-wide to in-room ratios and a buffer to ensure teachers can take breaks, with the aim of improving health and safety and education in centres. Clear guidelines need to be developed for ratio requirements, such as recognising room-based ratios as opposed to those counted at the centre level.

Age band	Existing ratio	Recommended ratio	Timeline
Under two-years-old	1:5	1:3	Move to 1:4 immediately and 1:3 by 2027
Two-years-old	1:10	1:5	Move to 1:7 immediately, reaching recommended ratio by 2027
Three-years-old and above	1:10	1:5	Reach 1:8 ratio by 2026, reaching recommended ratio by 2028
Ratios must always be sufficient to enable staff to take tea and meal breaks throughout the day, either outside the centre or in a space for staff, away from tamariki.			

2. Value teachers

Move immediately to a centralised early childhood education pay system with full pay parity for all teachers, including relievers and those on fixed-term contracts, to address the teacher shortage, to properly respect and recognise teachers as the professionals they are, and to retain qualified staff. Introduce free training for early childhood teachers to encourage more teachers into the profession.

3. Safety comes first

That the safety of children, and the workplace health and safety of staff, is a non-negotiable bottom line for the outcomes of any government process, including for regulatory and funding review processes. Government should be required to guarantee that any changes will not increase the risk of harm for a single child or staff member in licensed early childhood education services.

4. Make early childhood education free, accessible, and culturally appropriate

We recommend that government work towards full public provision of early childhood education. This includes exploring the actual cost of services by consulting with the community-based, not-for-profit sector to deliver adequate funding for education and ensure the sustainability of the sector. Payroll for teachers and staff should be centralised and fees should be capped, with a fee cap modelled on the Canadian system (which provides for a cap of \$10 per day per child), progressing to fees-free provision over a period of five years. We also recommend measures to ensure the diversity of services is sustained and expanded, to ensure culturally appropriate services for Māori and Pacific tamariki, and to ensure not-for-profit community provision is retained and expanded. Make early childhood centres community hubs, where wrap-around support can be provided, to ensure whānau and caregivers can access the support needed for their tamariki.

5. Learning support for all who need it

Staffing and resourcing for the Early Intervention Service needs to be drastically increased in order to bring wait times and waitlists down; this should happen immediately. Ultimately, children should be waiting no longer than one month to receive the support they need. In the mid-term, a comprehensive and dedicated early childhood education learning support service should be built up and tasked with assessing and allocating learning support for early childhood education. Such support should begin in early childhood to ensure tamariki do not fall through the gaps and are supported to achieve their best in life. This service should be culturally responsive and encompass relevant assessment, as discussed above, in order to ensure adequate, additional support for tamariki, whānau, and kaiako. It should also include regular, comprehensive professional learning and development opportunities for early childhood kaiako that are local and accessible.

6. Value all kaimahi and support staff and the contribution they make to early childhood education

We recommend that support staff, such as unqualified teachers, administrators, cooks, and cleaners, are paid no less than the Living Wage. They also need a pathway to both professional development and qualifications, receiving higher pay as their experience grows. This should be funded by government and ring-fenced in any operational funding.