Establishing a certificated playgroup

'Establishing a certificated playgroup' has been developed to guide parents through the process of establishing a playgroup. It contains information to help you set up a quality playgroup in your community.

The Ministry of Education employs staff in its regional offices to work with parents establishing playgroups and assist them to work towards certification.

Their particular focus is on the set up, delivery and maintenance of quality early childhood education programmes for children.

Contact your local Ministry of Education office if you are interested in establishing a certificated playgroup.

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Introduction

Playgroups provide an environment for children and parents to learn together and for parents to support each other. Playgroups meet in different settings throughout New Zealand, but they all have one thing in common – they offer the opportunity for parents or caregivers to give their children valuable educational and social experiences.

The value of playgroups

Playgroups are one early childhood education (ECE) option available to children and families in New Zealand. They contribute towards a key government objective of increasing participation in quality early childhood education.

The benefit of playgroups is that they can be set up quickly, are flexible and they have fewer regulatory requirements than other ECE services and can respond well to the needs of their community.

What is a playgroup?

The Education and Training Act 2020 (The Act) allows for the service provider (organiser) of a playgroup to be an individual or a group of people. In many cases this will be a parent or groups of parents.

The Act defines a playgroup as a group that meets on a regular basis to facilitate children's play and in respect of which:

(a) no child attends for more than four hours on any day, and
(b) more than half the children attending on any occasion have a parent or caregiver present in the same play area at the same time.

This ensures playgroups have a high ratio of adults present while children are learning. It also limits the length of time a child can attend on any one day to four hours maximum.

The main aim of a playgroup is to provide a learning environment that is varied and responsive to the interests and learning needs of individual children. In addition to providing ECE opportunities for children, playgroups provide an informal support network for parents. Playgroups encourage and support parents to learn about the education needs of children and acknowledge the significance of their role in their child's early education.

There are many different types of playgroups in New Zealand. Some have a primary focus on maintaining culture, language or philosophical approaches, such as Ngā Puna Kōhungahunga (Māori language playgroups), Pasifika, Montessori or Steiner playgroups. Some playgroups operate in rural areas and may only have one session per week while others may run up to five mornings a week. A playgroup may be the only facility in an area that focuses on early childhood education.

Playgroups are the only ECE service that are certificated rather than licensed. This means that there are fewer regulatory requirements that need to be met.

To receive funding and support from the Ministry of Education, playgroups are required to be certificated. Certification is optional and it is possible for playgroups to operate without a certificate. However, if a playgroup is not certificated it will not receive funding and support from the Ministry of Education even though it must operate within the definition of a playgroup in the Education and Training Act 2020.

So, what is the difference between a playgroup and other ECE options such as early childhood education and care centres, playcentres and kindergartens?

There are two main types of ECE service – teacher-led and parent-led. All teacher-led services and parent-led services other than playgroups are licensed.

Teacher-led services and parent-led services below outlines the types of ECE services available.

Teacher-led services

Education and care services

run all-day sessions or flexible hour programmes for children from birth to school age
some services cater for specific age ranges, eg, under twos
may be privately owned, or owned and operated by a community group
some have a particular language and cultural base.

Kindergartens

accept children between two and five years old and can have set morning and afternoon sessions for different age groups
some offer all-day or flexible sessions for a wider age range of children
non-profit, community-based services managed by a Kindergarten Association.

Home-based education and care services

involve an educator[1] providing education and care for groups of up to 4 under school age children at a time in a home setting
each educator must belong to a licensed home-based care network and is supported by a coordinator[2] who is a registered ECE teacher.

[1] For definition of educator see the **Glossary** at the end of this publication.

[2] For definition of a coordinator see the **Glossary** at the end of this publication.

Parent-led services

Playgroups

are run by parents and cater for groups of children from birth to school age and their parents
typically meet for 1 to 5 sessions each week to provide play, social and learning opportunities for children
can be certificated and may be less formal than other kinds of ECE services.

Pasifika playgroups

In addition to the above playgroup requirements, Pasifika playgroups focus on developing and maintaining Pasifika languages and cultures.

Ngā Puna kōhungahunga

In addition to the above playgroup requirements, Māori language and tikanga is reflected in the structure and content of the playgroup sessions.

Playcentres

are collectively supervised and managed by parents for children from birth to school age
have a strong focus on parent education as well as children's learning
are supported by Playcentre Associations around the country.

Ngā Kōhanga Reo

cater for children from birth to school age in a Māori language and tikanga Māori environment
parents and whānau manage and operate the kōhanga reo with the support and guidance of the Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust
some kōhanga reo are also teacher-led services with trained kaiako.

How to get started

There are some things you will need to consider when setting up a new playgroup.

What to think about first

Contact your local Ministry of Education office to find out what other groups are currently operating in your area. You could also approach your local Citizens Advice Bureau, Plunket, Parents Centre or your ante-natal group for information. You could consider joining a group which is already operating.

You will be asked by staff at your local Ministry of Education office to think about why you want to set up a playgroup and what you hope to achieve. You need to be sure there are enough parents who are prepared to be involved in the everyday operation and management of the group.

If you decide you want to establish a playgroup, there are some things you will need to think about and consider as part of your planning. These include:

Finding a suitable venue

Certificated playgroups are required to operate from venues that can be used by other groups in the community. Most playgroups operate from schools, church buildings or community halls which are often centrally located, easily accessible and affordable. Some playgroups share premises with other early childhood education providers such as playcentres and kindergartens. Certificated playgroups cannot operate from private homes.

Your premises should be a safe and comfortable place for parents and children to meet. Children attending need to have access to a wide range of experiences and it is important the facilities and equipment reflect the culture and purpose of the playgroup.

Things to consider when choosing a venue could include:

When is the venue available?
Would you be comfortable bringing your child to this place?
Is this a place where you would feel comfortable as well?
Would your child be safe here?

What is the cost of the venue and what does this include/entitle you to?
How confident are you that you will have ongoing access to this venue?
Is there adequate parking and is it easily accessible?
Is there public transport close by?

You should ensure that the premises you select have met the certification criteria before you sign an agreement

Other things you will need to consider in relation to your premises are:

Toilets – These need to be clean and tidy and easily accessible, with hand-washing facilities.
Kitchen – Can this be easily accessed by adults, with facilities the group could use, eg, fridge, microwave, crockery?
Heating and ventilation – Is there adequate heating? It is important to ensure all heaters are safe and inaccessible to children. There need to be enough doors and windows to allow air to flow through easily.
Outdoor area – If there is an outdoor area for children to play in, does it have safe structures and suitable fencing so children can be kept safe? If there is no outdoor area you will need to consider how the group is going to provide for physically active play opportunities.
Furniture – When thinking about furniture such as couches, chairs and tables, consider the comfort of parents and children.
You will also need to think about when the playgroup is open – what days the group will meet each week and how many hours the group will operate each day. Remember that no child can attend for more than four hours in any one day.

Equipment

As the playgroup becomes more established you will begin to gather a range of equipment for different uses in the learning programme. This could include items brought from home or collected for free.

The equipment you select needs to be both fun and educational and it should be made available in a way that lets the children choose their own play activities, based on their interests.

When creating your own resources or purchasing equipment for children remember that it needs to be:

appealing to children
reflective of children's everyday lives and also provide new opportunities and challenges
able to be used imaginatively, and in different ways
large and strong enough not to be broken off or swallowed
durable, washable and hygienic
safe for children to use.

There are many natural and recyclable resources that are free and useful for play. Home made resources can be both effective and cheap. Some businesses, eg, signwriters, carpenters, joiners or material shops may have offcuts that could provide your playgroup with some useful and fun play resources. Be discerning about the type of resources you choose.

Staff at your local Ministry of Education office will be able to advise you on suitable quality equipment for your

playgroup.

Storage of equipment

Storing your equipment on site can be an issue if you share the premises with other groups. You will need to consider whether there is enough secure space for your storage needs.

Playgroup curriculum

All certificated playgroups are required to 'plan for, provide and review an education programme that is consistent with the curriculum framework' which can be found in the booklet 'Certification Criteria for Playgroups 2008'.

The curriculum framework provides the structure for everything that happens, and the way in which it happens, in a playgroup. The early childhood curriculum framework consists of the four principles and five strands of Te Whāriki. Te Whāriki is Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document. It describes in broad terms what is seen as important learning for children as well as the kinds of environments in which this learning can occur.

Te Whāriki's vision is for children to "grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging, and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society". This vision is the foundation for the opportunities, activities, events, experiences and interactions that occur in early childhood settings.

In early childhood 'Curriculum' means the "sum total of experiences, activities and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development."

A curriculum that is based on the four principles of Te Whāriki means that playgroups:

empower children to learn and grow by encouraging and allowing them to make choices and take responsibility for their own learning
reflect the holistic way that children learn and grow by recognising that all learning is interwoven and occurs within the context of relevant and meaningful experience
incorporate and involve children's families and their local community by respecting differing viewpoints and fostering family and community participation
recognise that children learn through interacting with the people, places and things in their environments by providing a wide and interesting array of people, places and things for children to interact with.

The five strands of Te Whāriki; **well-being, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration**, give more direction to what children will experience in a playgroup environment. They are the 5 key areas of learning and development in early childhood education. A curriculum that focuses on the 5 strands means that children will experience environments where:

they are **physically and emotionally safe** – (Well-being)
they and their families feel a **sense of belonging** – (Belonging)
everyone is **treated fairly and contributions are valued** – (Contribution)
using **language and a range of other communication tools** (such as books, art, dance, drama, mathematics, movement, music) from children's own cultures, from New Zealand's Māori heritage and from other cultures is promoted and valued – (Communication)
they can actively **explore and make sense of their world** – (Exploration).

So what does this mean in practice for playgroups?

The day to day activities, experiences, events, routines, rituals, resources, opportunities and interactions that occur in the playgroup should reflect and promote the principles and strands of Te Whāriki but the specific nature of these will be decided on by the children and families in the playgroup.

Each playgroup will do things in ways that best suit the values, beliefs and interests of their own children, families, and the resources available in the setting and local community.

Some playgroups find it helpful to provide a range of activities, resources, and experiences each session that allow for:

family and dramatic play
creative play
exploring language, literacy and communication
physically active play
constructive play
exploratory play
manipulative play.

The way these types of play are made available to children, and the ways that adults interact and respond to children as they play should reflect the principles and strands of Te Whāriki.

It is useful to ask the following questions to help decide what might happen and how adults might interact with children and each other on a day-to-day basis in the playgroup:

What are our children interested in, trying hard to master, spending a lot of time doing, finding out about at the moment? Are we providing opportunities, activities and resources that support them to continue to do these things?

Well-being

Are we providing opportunities, activities and resources that will enable children to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes relating to keeping themselves safe and healthy?
Are we interacting with children and each other in ways that promote a good sense of self-worth?

Belonging

Are we providing opportunities, activities and resources that are familiar to children and enable them to feel welcomed and comfortable in this place?
Are we interacting in ways that show each other that in this place we are safe and cared for and we are all respected and accepted for who we are?

Contribution

Are we providing opportunities, activities and resources that encourage children to actively participate with and

alongside others?
Are we acting and interacting in ways that support children to learn about valuing themselves and others and working together?

Communication

Are we providing opportunities, activities and resources that enable children to develop increasing competence and confidence to communicate in a range of ways and for a range of purposes? Are we providing opportunities for children to learn about New Zealand's dual heritage and some activities and resources that reflect Māori language, culture and values?
Are we interacting in ways that encourage children and adults to think, problem solve, express ideas, opinions and feelings?

Exploration

Are we providing opportunities, activities and resources that are enticing, interesting, challenging and meaningful for children and encourage them to try things out, experiment, play around with materials and ideas and revisit and build on past experiences and ideas?
Are we interacting in ways that encourage children to actively explore their environments and are we showing that we value their play and spontaneous exploration?

Read more about Te Whāriki. Ask the staff at your local Ministry of Education office for more information and ideas about what you can do to support children's learning and promote Māori cultural learning within playgroups.

Managing the financial side of setting up a playgroup

It does not need to be expensive to start a playgroup. It is a good idea to work out a budget so that the group knows right from the start how much money they will need to set up and run the playgroup. While many items can be donated to the group or collected for free other costs **may** include:

- rent and bond for the premises
- play equipment
- matting or carpet
- food and drink for children and adults (or will they bring their own?)
- electricity
- first aid kit
- administration costs such as photocopying.

Your group will need to open a bank account in the name of the playgroup (or organising body) to receive Ministry of Education funding if you choose to become certificated.

Your group will need to consider how to cover costs before receiving Ministry of Education funding if your playgroup becomes certificated, or how costs will be covered if you do not receive Ministry of Education funding. In some groups

parents make regular financial contributions but in other groups no parental contribution is required. Groups can raise funds themselves, eg, through donations, fundraising, community grants or from other agencies.

Some funding for set up costs is available for eligible groups from the Ministry of Education. Information about funding is included in the Being eligible for funding section of this publication. You could also talk to the staff at your local Ministry of Education office for more information.

What is involved in running a playgroup

Running a playgroup is like running a small community committee. Your group needs to manage the finances of the group and ensure effective communication.

It takes ongoing commitment to operate a playgroup. The work involved includes:

- organising people to take on different roles within the playgroup such as equipment librarian, roster secretary
- creating and running a programme that offers children interesting and stimulating opportunities for learning
- cleaning, morning teas, rosters and other issues related to day-to-day running will need to be addressed
- establishing a committee – think about group leadership, secretarial and administrative functions and financial accountability – people who will take responsibility for keeping records such as enrolments and attendance, and someone who will take responsibility for the learning environment
- organising the finances and funding. This will involve ensuring there is sufficient funding and the required documentation is in place.

You also need to have a contact person to receive and pass on information from the Ministry of Education.

A number of people need to be available from within the playgroup to share the workload. Identify the strengths and motivations of the people within your group. Consider options available to job-share some of these roles. Staff at your local Ministry of Education office can assist your group to get up and running.

The responsibility for the finances belongs to the whole group as it is the group that needs to decide what their income is spent on. It is the group's responsibility to ensure the Ministry of Education funding is used to provide a quality playgroup for children. The group also makes sure that the criteria for certification to be eligible for funding from the Ministry of Education is met.

Tell me more about certification

To talk about becoming a certificated playgroup, contact your local Ministry of Education office. There will be staff who can help you with the certification process.

On 1 December 2008 the Education (Playgroups) Regulations 2008 and the Certification Criteria for Playgroups 2008 came into force. These regulations and certification criteria contain the requirements and standards of education and care that a playgroup must meet in order to be certificated and be eligible to receive Ministry of Education funding and support.

Standards and certification criteria for playgroups

There are 5 standards that your playgroup will need to comply with.

Curriculum: there are two criteria within this standard; one requires the playgroup to plan for, provide and review an education programme that is consistent with the curriculum framework prescribed by the Ministry of Education and the other requires a procedure for positive guidance of children's behaviour.
Premises and facilities: there are 8 criteria within this standard; these include design and layout of premises; outdoor space; furniture and equipment; toilet/ hand washing and drying facilities.
Health and safety: there are 12 criteria within this standard; these include emergency management and evacuation procedures, hazard management and maintaining good health and safety practices at the playgroup.
Management and administration: there are 6 criteria within this standard. These include procedures and records to be maintained that deal with financial management, enrolment and attendance records, and involvement of parents in decision-making.
Ratios[3]: this standard requires playgroups to ensure that more than half of the children attending any session have a parent or caregiver present in the same play area at the same time. At the very least there must be one adult for every four children present in the same play area at the same time.

Before the Ministry of Education can undertake a certification assessment, your group will need to complete an application form. Staff at your local Ministry of Education office will arrange for a site visit to assess whether the playgroup meets the requirements of the 2008 regulatory system.

[3] Refer to **Glossary** for information on the ratios standard.

Types of certificate

There are two types of certificates:

Interim: For an interim certificate a playgroup must meet the ratios of parents to children standard and the premises and facilities standard and be likely to comply with all other certification criteria within 12 months. An interim certificate will be issued for no longer than a 12-month period.

Full: For a full certificate all certification criteria must be met.

A certificate will be issued for a 3-year period. You will need to apply for a new certificate every 3 years.

Being eligible for funding

To be eligible to receive funding a playgroup must:

- be certificated (that is hold a valid interim or full certificate), and
- meet the conditions for payment of funding set out in the Ministry of Education's Playgroup Funding Handbook.

There are two types of funding available from the Ministry that playgroups can apply for: playgroup funding and special grants.

Playgroup funding

Playgroup funding supports the day-to-day operating costs of running a playgroup. It is based on the average number of children attending and hours of attendance per session over a 6-month period. Funding can be claimed for a maximum of 25 children between birth and 6 years old for each playgroup session. Funding cannot be claimed for children attending the playgroup with a caregiver when they are enrolled with a home- based service.

There are no restrictions on the number of times or hours a certificated playgroup can meet in a week provided no child attends for more than 4 hours per day.

Special grant

The special grant is a discretionary grant to assist a playgroup to cover large 'one off' costs that cannot be met from other funding. This is a discretionary grant and there is no guarantee that applicants will receive the money they apply for.

For more information about conditions that govern funding of playgroups and how to apply for funding refer to the Playgroup Funding Handbook on the Ministry's website, or your local Ministry of Education office will be able to provide you with a copy.

Financial reporting

Every year in July, playgroups are required to complete and return a Playgroup Funding Report to the Ministry of Education. This report needs to show how the money the play group has received from the Ministry of Education over the past year has been spent.

Annual statistics form

The Ministry of Education collects information from all playgroups (not just those receiving Ministry of Education support and funding) through an annual statistics form. This form is sent out to playgroups in June each year and requests information on:

the number of hours the playgroup is open for
the age, gender and ethnicity of children enrolled at the playgroup.

This information is used to inform the Ministry of Education about the numbers of playgroups operating, the average numbers of children attending and those that are receiving Ministry of Education support and funding.

Closing a playgroup

If the playgroup closes then all remaining playgroup funds received from the Ministry of Education must be returned. Any equipment or resources purchased using that funding or grant money may also need to be returned to the Ministry of Education.

It is important that clear financial records and equipment inventories are kept. You will need to discuss this with staff at your local Ministry of Education office.

The dispersal of group-owned assets (money and equipment) should be decided by remaining members of the group, in consultation with staff at your local Ministry of Education office.

Ministry of Education regional offices

The Ministry of Education maintains a regional office network that provides services to communities. The Ministry of Education has staff in these offices who support all playgroups in their local area.

Contact your local Ministry of Education office if you have an enquiry about playgroups.

Glossary

The following is an explanation or definition of terms that have been used in this publication:

Parent means:

I. the person (or people) responsible for having the role of providing day-to-day care for the child, and
II. may include a biological or adoptive parent, step parent, partner of a parent of a child, legal guardian or member of the child's family, whānau, or other culturally recognised family group.

Educator means the person with the designated role of providing education and care directly to children in his or her care, and attends to the health and safety of those children.

Coordinator means the person who has primary responsibility for overseeing the education and care, comfort, and health and safety of the children, and providing professional leadership and support to educators within the service.

Regulation 19: Ratios standard

The ratios standard requires the service provider for every certificated playgroup to ensure that:

(a) more than half of the children attending on any occasion have a parent or caregiver present in the same play area at the same time, and
(b) the total number of children attending on any occasion is not greater than 4 times the number of parents and caregivers present in the same play area at the same time.