EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
TE TARI AROTAKE MATAURANGA

Continuity of learning:
transitions from early childhood
services to schools
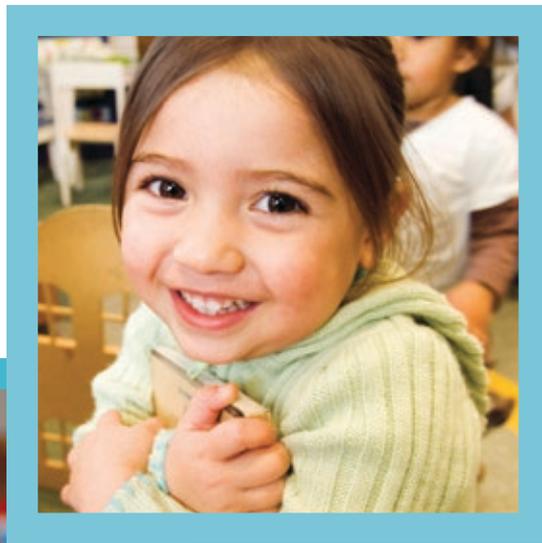
MAY 2015

Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

The Child – the Heart of the Matter

Foreword

It is the responsibility of parents and teachers to help children and young people navigate through the education system. Moving through early childhood education, school and onto further education or training is challenging for young people – every change requires the child or student to become familiar with new people, practices and expectations. It is important that leaders, teachers and parents help children navigate through and make these shifts, or transitions, as smooth as possible so that learning is continuous.

This report looks at children's experiences moving from early childhood services to schools, from the points of view of both. It gives insight into what's important, what works well and what's not working so well for our children at this critical point of transition.

The evaluation talks about a shift in emphasis from "the child being ready for school, to the need for the school to be ready for the child". This quote applies equally at the point when a child is entering an early childhood education service, moving through that service, starting school, going to intermediate and on to secondary school and into tertiary or vocational training.

When early childhood services and schools live this quote, children and young people's learning, social, physical and cultural needs are met and the learning they have achieved in one part of the system transfers to and is built on in the next. When this doesn't happen well, children's learning is interrupted and their progress and achievement is affected.

Early childhood and school teachers need to work together with parents and whānau so that the system works for children zero to 18 years.

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OVERVIEW

Overview

Going to school is an exciting and challenging time for young children and their families. Moving from early childhood education to school can be a positive and rewarding experience that sets children on a successful pathway. It can also be a period of vulnerability for many children.[1] Effective transitions are critical to the development of children's self-worth, confidence and resilience, and ongoing success at school. This is a time to build relationships, maintain excitement for learning and ensure children experience continuity in their learning.

Teachers and leaders in both services and schools must think about and respond to transition as a process, rather than a one-off. When starting school, it takes children different lengths of time to feel they belong and to settle into learning. Transition to school is more complex than just helping children become familiar with the school's environment, staff and curriculum. Good relationships among children, teachers, parents and whānau are all essential to support children settling in to school. Helping children to make sense of what is happening and supporting them through the change helps them to confidently continue on their learning pathway.

In 2013, the Education Review Office (ERO) evaluated how well early childhood services and schools supported children through the transition to school. This publication reports the findings of both evaluations.

What did ERO find?

ERO found considerable variability in how well services and schools supported children to transition to school, particularly children at risk of poor educational outcomes. What was happening for children just before and after starting school was crucial to their ongoing success and wellbeing.

Children's transition to school was more likely to be successful when:

- leaders and teachers in early childhood services and schools understood the links between *Te Whāriki*[2] and *The New Zealand Curriculum*[3] and provided a curriculum that was relevant and meaningful for children
- children's previous interests, strengths, prior knowledge and dispositions for learning were known and used to develop relevant and responsive learning for children
- culturally responsive teaching and assessment contributed to children's sense of themselves as confident learners
- strong learning partnerships with parents and whānau supported children as they approached and transitioned to school

1   Ministry of Education. (2013). *Statement of Intent 2013-2018.* Retrieved from www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PublicationsAndResources/StatementOfIntent/SOI2013.aspx

2   Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum.* Retrieved from http://www.educate.ece.govt.nz/~/media/Educate/Files/Reference%20Downloads/whariki.pdf

3   Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1-13.* Retrieved from http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/content/download/1108/11989/file/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum.pdf

- schools' practices helped children and their families develop a sense of belonging
- teachers from both sectors and external experts were seen as equal partners with an important role to play as children transitioned to school
- leaders placed emphasis on the importance of transition to ensure continuity of learning for children.

Early Childhood Services

Just over half of the services were implementing a curriculum that supported children to develop the dispositions and strong sense of identity and belonging needed to support a successful transition. These services also had collaborative relationships with parents and whānau, schools and external agencies that focused on helping children experience a successful transition. Assessment information reflected children's learning in relation to the strands of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. This information provided a useful record of learning and progress over time for children, their parents and whānau, and schools.

In the least supportive services, the curriculum did not have a strong focus on developing dispositions and social competence and, in some, lacked strong connections to children's language, culture and identity. The quality of assessment information was poor and mostly reflected children's participation in activities rather than making their learning visible. Children in these services were not well supported to develop the strong learning foundations crucial to successful transitions. It is of concern that services with high numbers of Māori and Pacific children were disproportionately over-represented in the least supported group.

Schools

ERO found that 29 of the 100 schools reviewed were 'very responsive', and another 41 were 'mostly responsive' to the needs of children starting school. Most of the 29 'very responsive' schools arranged a variety of opportunities for the child, parents and whānau to visit the school and become familiar with the surroundings, meet key people and share expectations and aspirations. These schools typically had strong partnerships with parents and whānau Leaders and teachers valued parents' input and used it to improve curriculum and processes for settling in to school.

In just under a third of the schools, the curriculum had little relationship to early childhood learning. In these schools, communication of information tended to be one way (from the school). School leaders did not invite parents and whānau to talk about their aspirations for their child or their child's culture, strengths and interests. School leaders missed the opportunity to develop true partnerships in learning with parents and whānau and the children. An inflexible curriculum meant that the *child had to fit the school*.

When transition worked best for children, early childhood and school leaders and teachers developed good relationships with each other, with parents and whānau, and with the children. As a result, school teachers gained a picture of the child as a learner, their interests, strengths, prior knowledge and dispositions for learning. They used this information to bridge from familiar experiences to ones that extended their learning. Teachers monitored progress and provided support as required. Children settled quickly, were engaged and confident in their learning.

NEXT STEPS

ERO recommends that early childhood services and schools:

- review the extent to which their curriculum and associated assessment practices support all children to experience a successful transition to school
- establish relationships with local schools and services to promote community-wide understanding and sharing of good practice.

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education:

- consider, as part of their PLD review, ways of supporting school and early childhood teachers to work together so they better understand each other's curriculum, promoting continuity of learning for children.

Introduction

All children experience changes in the way they are expected to learn and behave when they start school. The changes in relationships, teaching style, environment, space, time, contexts for learning and learning itself place considerable demands on children and their families. Thorough transition planning, including communicating well with a child's parents and whānau, helps ensure a smooth transition to school.

Much of the New Zealand and international research about transition to school focuses on what happens at school. This research highlights that while transitions can be exciting, they can also present challenges for children. Fabian and Dunlop[4] identified the transition to primary school as one of the most important and challenging times in a child's life.

The way transitions are experienced not only makes a difference to the children in the early months of a new situation, but may have a much longer-term impact, because the extent to which they feel successful (emotional and well-being) in the first transition is likely to influence subsequent experiences.

Learning to deal with transitions is part of life. Children need support to learn how to manage change and to build resilience. Teachers can help children develop a positive attitude to change by encouraging their sense of self-worth, confidence as a learner, independence and optimism.

These findings are endorsed by Peters' work, which shows that the transition from early childhood education to primary school is critical and, when managed well, can set students on a positive learning pathway.[5] The factors that lead to a successful transition are often linked and the absence of one or more factors can make transition difficult. Transitions can also be difficult when something about the school culture is at odds with the child's experiences.

Peters states that relationships play a critical part in children developing a sense of belonging and wellbeing at school. Only then can they engage in learning and continue to grow as a learner. The development of strong relationships and a sense of belonging are even more important for children most at risk of poor educational outcomes.

4   Fabian, H, and A-W Dunlop. (2007) *Outcomes of good practice in transition processes for children entering primary school.* Working paper 42. Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague, The Netherlands.

5   Peters, S. (2010) Literature Review: Transition from early childhood education to school. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

New Zealand and Australian research has identified the need for smooth transitions, particularly for children from social and cultural minorities, gifted children, and children with disabilities.[6] Researchers argue that to help overcome any negative impacts of transition, there needs to be effective communication channels that allow for:

- sharing of assessment information and discussions about children
- continuation of, or preparation for, extra support
- fostering of new and ongoing friendships
- connections to children's cultural identity such as resources, displays and experiences.

These processes and actions, they argue, maintain some sense of continuity between early childhood services and differing ethnic and cultural expectations of the more formal learning environment of school.[7,8]

Peter's literature review of transitions from early childhood education to school identifies that for Māori and Pacific children, positive and responsive relationships between children, teachers and families, and culturally responsive teaching and assessment are important for ensuring success.[9] This literature review and other New Zealand research note that transition should involve ongoing communication between teachers at the service and school, as well as families. Māori and Pacific children may encounter differences in responsiveness to their language, culture and identity, as well as a different environment and people. This means they need to have opportunities to strengthen their sense of identity and belonging to support their successful transition.[10,11]

Māori children

Tamarua looked specifically at the transition of Māori children to school.[12] She found that they were more engaged in classroom activities when a deliberate effort had been made to link unfamiliar learning to something familiar to them. This can only occur when teachers have a well developed awareness of the cultures of the children in their classrooms. She noted that tuakana teina[13] relationships were important for successful transitions. Tamarua also identified that formal testing of literacy in schools does not usually allow for the different social and cultural literacies Māori children may have developed in the home.

6   Petriwsky A. (2013). Pedagogies of inclusive transition to school. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood,* 38 (1): 45-55. p46.

7   Petriwsky A. 2013. Pedagogies of inclusive transition to school. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood,* 38 (1): 45-55. p46.

8   Grant A. (2013). Young gifted children transitioning into preschool and school: what matters? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood,* 38 (2): 23-31

9   Peters S. 2010 *Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School. Report to Ministry of Education.* Ministry of Education: Wellington. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood,* 38 (2): 23-31.

10 Ministry of Education (2014). *Moving from Pasifika immersion to Palagi primary school.* Retrieved from www.educate.ece.govt.nz

11 Podmore V. (2004). Transitions within the centre and to school. Research at a Samoan-language immersion centre. *Early Childhood Folio* 8: 19-22.

12 Tamarua, L. (2006) Pathways to literacy and transitions to school: Enabling incorporation and developing awareness of literacy. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

13 The tuakana teina relationship is an integral part of traditional Māori society and provides a model for buddy systems. An older or more expert tuakana helps and guides a younger or less expert teina (originally a younger sibling or cousin of the same gender). In a learning environment that recognises the value of ako (teaching and learning), the tuakana teina roles may be reversed at any time.

McFarlane noted that teachers need to build a strong foundation – built on children's cultural strengths and experience – to support Māori children's learning.[14] This foundation helps children acquire new skills and knowledge and helps teachers develop meaningful relationships with the children through appreciation of their culture. The use of te reo Māori in the classroom, honouring the language, is particularly important for children who move to school from kōhanga reo.

Pacific children

McKenzie and Singleton found that Samoan children's transitions can be supported by working in partnership with their local community.[15] Other key factors contributing to smooth transitions were the teachers knowing the children, knowing their culture and providing opportunities for the children's language to be used at school. They made the point that 'the culture of the child cannot enter the classroom unless it has first entered the consciousness of the teacher'.

Podmore *et al* also highlight the importance of relationships and a sense of belonging. For them, the emphasis was on the teacher from the school observing the child in a language immersion setting and supporting their competence and confidence to express themselves in Samoan, as well as in their identity as Samoan.[16]

The same considerations would apply for other Pacific cultures, languages and identities. Teachers who used the child's first language helped make transitions smoother and laid the foundation for future academic and linguistic success.

> *Language maintenance and bilingual enrichment programmes are most effective in fostering children's long-term bilingual fluency and literacy in both their first and second languages.*[17]

Many schools, particularly in Auckland, are receiving increasing numbers of children and families for whom English is their second language. Many are from the Pacific.

Children with special education needs

For children with special education needs, early planning for their move to school and a longer transition period are particularly important. Ideally this planning involves teachers (early childhood and school), parents and whānau, and support providers.

A critical part of a smooth transition is ensuring that resources and support are in place for children with special education needs. Some Ministry of Education special education teams provide support services from zero to eight years. This provides continuity of support and benefits the teacher, class and parents.

14 Macfarlane, A. (2004) Kia hiwa ra! Listen to culture – Māori children's plea to educators. Wellington: NZCER Press.

15 McKenzie, R., & Singleton, H. (October 2009) *Moving from Pasifika immersion to Palangi Primary school. Knowing the learner is precious.* Paper presented at the Exploring Effective Transitions Conference, Hamilton.

16 Podmore V. N., with Wendt Samu, T., and the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. (2006) *O le tama ma lana a'oga, o le tama ma lona fa'asinomaga – nurturing positive identity in children.* Final research report from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa Centre of Innovation project. Ministry of Education. Retrieved from www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ece/22551/22555.

17 S. May, R. Hill, S. Tiakiwai. (2004). *Bilingual/Immersion Education: Indicators Of Good Practice* Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika/5079

THE CURRICULUM IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Curriculum Standard[18] sets out curriculum expectations for early childhood services. It requires that they:

• plan, implement and evaluate a curriculum that is designed to enhance children's learning and development through the provision of learning experiences that are consistent with any curriculum framework, and that responds to the learning interests, strengths and capabilities of enrolled children
• collaborate with parents and the family or whānau of the enrolled children.

The principles of *Te Whāriki,* New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, underpin practices that help children as they approach transition to school: holistic development, empowerment and relationships, and family and community. *Te Whāriki* also provides goals for each strand and learning outcomes that services can use to plan and evaluate their curriculum for children approaching transition to school. *Te Whāriki* includes guidance for services about "continuity between early childhood education and school" for each of the five strands of the curriculum. A summary of this information is included in the Figure 1.[19] Examples in the findings section of this report provide illustrations of how services support continuity of learning in relation to the five strands of *Te Whāriki.*

Figure 1: Te Whāriki – continuity between early childhood education and school

Wellbeing Mana Atua	independence, self-help skills, emotional competence, can keep themselves safe, can get help
Belonging Mana Whenua	sharing home life, knowledge of and care for their community, decision making and planning, social confidence, understanding rules and values such as honesty, courtesy, fairness
Contribution Mana Tangata	feeling welcomed and positive about themselves, welcoming of others, confident in their interests, strengths, knowledge and abilities, work cooperatively, understand others have a different point of view or feelings, express their needs and feelings
Communication Mana Reo	literacy skills (visual, oral and written), enjoy books, print concepts, familiarity with te reo Māori, practical mathematical concepts, fine and gross motor skills, enjoy expressing themselves creatively
Exploration Mana Aotūroa	have starting points for further learning, are adventurous and creative, make choices and decisions, non-locomotor and manipulative skills, use innovation, imagination and exploration, early mathematical concepts and skills, explore scientific and technological worlds, make sense of the living world, make sense of the physical world, appreciate their environment and how it changes

18 *The Curriculum Standard* outlines standards to licensed services about curriculum; health and safety; and governance, management and administration. Retrieved from www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ServiceTypes/CentreBasedECEServices/Curriculum.aspx

19 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mōngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa, Early Childhood Curriculum.* (pp. 47, 55, 65, 73, 83). Retrieved from http://www.educate.ece.govt.nz/~/media/Educate/Files/Reference%20Downloads/whariki.pdf

20 Peters, 2005, and Timperley et al, 2003, as cited in Ministry of Education. (2010). *Collaborative relationships and sharing responsibility.* Retrieved from www.educate.ece.govt.nz/learning/exploringPractice/Transitions/TransitionsInEarlyChildhood/CollaborativeRelationships/DevelopingRelationships.aspx?p=2

21 Ministry of Education. (2014). *What we have in common: Curriculum connections.* Retrieved from www.educate.ece.govt.nz/learning/exploringPractice/Transitions/TransitionsInEarlyChildhood/WhatWeHaveInCommon/Continuity.aspx?p=2

22 Robinson V., Timperley H. and Bullard T. (2000). *Strengthening education in Mangere and Otara evaluation: Second evaluation report.* The University of Auckland: Auckland.

23 Timperley H., McNaughton S., Howie L. and Robinson V. (2003). Transitioning children from early childhood education to school: teacher beliefs and transition practices. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood,* 28(2): 32-40.

24 Hartley C., Rogers P., Smith J., Peters S, and Carr M. (2012). *Crossing the Border. A community negotiates the transition from early childhood to primary school.* NZCER: Wellington. p91.

25 Peters S., Hartley C., Rogers P., Smith J. and Carr M. (2009). Supporting the transitions from early childhood education to school. Insights from one Centre of Innovation project. *Early Childhood Folio,* 13: 2-6.

The Ministry of Education provides guidance for services when thinking about transition to school. It suggests that services use the principles of *Te Whāriki* to guide their decisions about supporting children and their families through transitions. The information focuses on collaborative relationships and sharing of responsibility, and suggests that early childhood and primary school teachers share common goals for children's learning and work together to reduce discontinuities that children experience. Research suggests that early childhood teachers accompanying children on social orientation visit to schools is not sufficient on its own to develop these collaborative relationships. A planned approach to building relationships is needed where there are discussions about differences in practice.[20]

The Ministry highlights the need for continuity between children's experience of *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum* they experience while at school.

> *"Continuity for children is embedded in relationships that recognise and value their identity as learners; people know who they are, what they bring, and how they go about things."[21]*

Early childhood teachers can ensure this continuity by sharing information about children's learning with the school by providing parents and whānau with useful information to share, becoming familiar with both curriculum documents, and making comparisons and links to better support children. Studies by Robinson *et al*[22] and Timperley *et al*[23] show that collaborative relationships between early childhood services and schools develop not only from goodwill but also from actions. Those active relationships must "involve mutual respect and a balance of power."[24]

New Zealand and international research shows that sharing and subsequent use of assessment information enhances the links between learning at an early education service and at a school, and helps children see themselves as competent and confident learners. Assessment information, such as that documented in portfolios, empowers children, enhances their identities as learners, is a resource to connect knowledge of home and service with new learning at school, and fosters a sense of belonging and engagement.[25]

Dispositions

Assessment information with a strong dispositional focus contributes to a child's identity as a competent learner.[26] Dispositions include characteristics such as:

• persistence with difficulty
• taking risks
• being curious
• taking responsibility
• developing trust
• playing fair
• asking for help
• sharing knowledge.

The emphasis in *Te Whāriki* on dispositions, such as the confidence to take risks and the ability to get along with others, potentially stands children in good stead as they transition to school. The collaborative relationships and practices teachers in both early childhood services and primary schools develop can give children the confidence and connectedness to bridge the differences between their service and school.

What do successful transitions to school look like?

Noel's work notes a shift in emphasis in research literature over time from *the child being ready for school* to the need for *the school to be ready for the child*. Schools must have practices and policies that assist children and their families to comfortably move from preschool to primary school. She identified five key aspects for establishing and maintaining successful transitions:

• Building relationships.
• Planning and working with key players.
• Responding to the needs of the community.
• Linking children's early learning and prior knowledge to school.
• Evaluating and reviewing the programme.[27]

The New Zealand Curriculum also highlights the importance of relationships and of knowing each child as an individual.[28]

26 Gonzales N., Moll L. and Amanti C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: theorising practices in households, communities and classrooms.* Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc: New York.

27 Noel, A. (December 2011) Easing the transition to school: Administrators descriptions of transition to school activities. Australian Journal of Early Childhood 36 (4): 45

28 Ministry of Education. (2007). The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1-13. Retrieved from nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/ The-New-Zealand-Curriculum.

The transition from early childhood education to school is supported when the school:

• fosters a child's relationships with teachers and other children and affirms their identity
• builds on the learning experiences that the child brings with them
• considers the child's whole experience of school
• is welcoming of family and whānau.

In 2011, the Early Childhood Education Taskforce, in *An Agenda for Amazing Children,* stated that new entrant teachers in schools should appreciate the alignment between the *The New Zealand Curriculum* for schools and the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*.[29]

The Taskforce recommended:

> *the evaluation of the effectiveness of the schooling sector at recognising and building on the skills and knowledge of children moving from early childhood settings to the early years of school.[30]*

29 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa.* Retrieved from www. educate.ece.govt.nz/learning/ curriculumandlearning/tewhariki. aspx

30 Ministry of Education. (2011). *An Agenda for Amazing Children. Final Report of the ECE Taskforce.* Ministry of Education. Retrieved from www.taskforce.ece.govt.nz/.

TRANSITIONS:
The early childhood education perspective
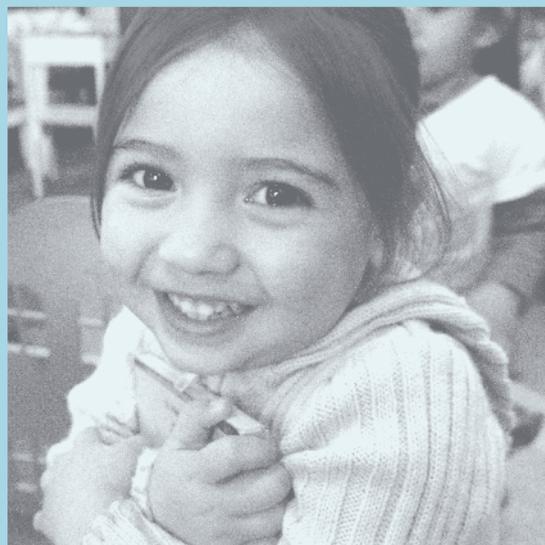
PART 1

Part 1: How early childhood services support children as they approach transition to school

This part of the report focuses on the last six months (approximately) of children's time in early childhood education. Its emphasis is on the processes and practices in place in early childhood services, rather than in schools.

ERO'S OVERALL EVALUATION QUESTION

How well are early childhood services in New Zealand supporting children, in particular children at risk of poor educational outcomes, as they approach transition to school?

ERO gathered information during regular education reviews in 374 early childhood services during Terms 3 and 4, 2013. ERO asked specific questions about:

- How responsive is the service's curriculum to the learning interests, strengths and capabilities of children as they approach transition to school?
- To what extent do assessment practices and information support children's learning as they approach transition to school?
- In what ways are teachers seeking to maintain children's connections to their language, culture and identity as they approach transition to school?
- To what extent does the service develop and engage in collaborative relationships that support children as they approach transition to school?
  - with parents and whānau
  - with schools that children are transitioning to
  - with external support agencies.
- To what extent does the service's self review identify the impact of practices and processes that support children as they approach transition to school?

Appendix 1 includes some investigative prompts and indicators used in the evaluation which may be useful for services' self review. *Appendix 2* has more information about the sample of early childhood services in this evaluation.

FINDINGS

ERO found considerable variability in how well services supported children as they approached transition to school. Approximately half of services supported children well or very well through their curriculum and assessment practices, and their relationships with parents and whānau, schools and external agencies. However, many Māori and Pacific children were more likely to be in services that were less supportive. Only around a third of services could identify the impact of their practices and processes that supported children as they approached transition to school.

Figure 2: ERO's overall findings

responsive or very responsive curriculum (56%)	
supportive or very supportive assessment (49%)	
collaborative with parents and whānau (57%)	
collaborative or very collaborative relationships with schools (52%)	
collaborative or very collaborative relationships with external agencies (55%)	
carrying out self review well or very well (36%)	
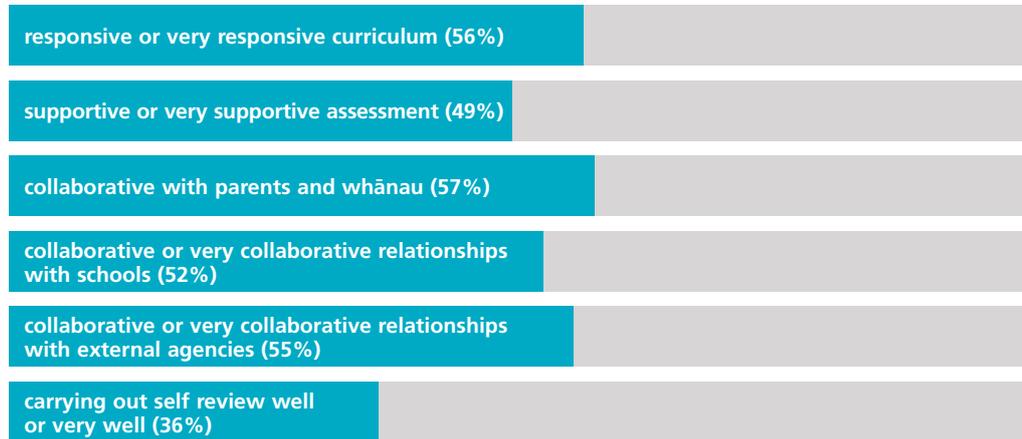
These findings are expanded on in the following section, highlighting good practice, challenges for services and improvements needed. The final section of the findings focuses on how well services are supporting children at risk of poor educational outcomes, particularly Māori and Pacific children, as they approach transition to school.

CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, RELATIONSHIPS AND SELF REVIEW

Curriculum that supports children's transition to school

Many early childhood services that effectively supported children's transition to school had a strong focus on children's dispositional learning, independence and social competence. In many of these services, older children had the opportunity to participate in a specific programme that focused on extending their particular strengths and interests in authentic contexts. These services focused on:

• literacy and mathematical concepts, knowledge and skills
• scientific concepts, sparking imagination, creativity and a sense of wonder and awe
• fine and gross motor skills
• independence and self management
• listening and following instructions
• social competence
• negotiating and making choices
• exploring and discovering
• asking questions and problem solving.

The following examples show how dispositions, specific skills and concepts were incorporated into meaningful and authentic learning contexts and, in some services, reflected their philosophy.

> The service has a strong focus on child-centred learning, and children make choices for themselves from a broad range of learning experiences provided by teachers. Hui Time supplements the programme. Children have a choice as to whether they wish to participate. Hui Time is an opportunity for children to identify what they would like to learn about. Children decide on the Hui Time focus by brainstorming and negotiating at the start of the week. Teachers work with the children's interests and suggested activities to plan a programme. A teacher facilitates discussions and decision-making and supports children with appropriate resources and activities. For example, a focus on dinosaurs included children investigating through webclips and books, sharing their knowledge, creating 3D artworks and drawings, baking, being palaeontologists and discussing their learning. Hui Time helps children develop leadership and negotiating skills, confidence to share ideas in a group, work collaboratively, research the topic and develop presentation skills.
> *Education and Care Service*

> A nature discovery programme is a feature of this kindergarten (in keeping with their philosophy) where the oldest children regularly spend a morning in the bush. The purpose is for the children to develop a deeper interest in taking care of the natural environment, independence, greater observational skills, deep enquiry, negotiation, making friends, mathematics, literacy and physical skills.
> *Kindergarten*

Clear links between a service's curriculum and the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* and, in many services, links to *The New Zealand Curriculum,* meant that children experienced a relevant and meaningful curriculum and teaching practices based on teachers' understanding of both the early childhood and school curricula. In some services the curriculum made connections between the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum*[31] and children's dispositions, especially 'learning to learn' dispositions, such as risk taking, confidence, perseverance, taking responsibility, self-care skills, problem-solving and thinking skills. In a few services, teachers worked collaboratively with local new entrant teachers to make considered and appropriate decisions about the service's curriculum, and how the curriculum in both the service and the school could assist a smooth transition for children.

31 See http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/
Key-competencies/About

Good practice also included services responding well to the interests, strengths and capabilities of children at risk of poor educational outcomes. Leaders and teachers worked closely with parents of children with special education needs and with external agencies to develop programmes that were appropriate and inclusive. Children for whom English was a second language were encouraged to speak their first language. Teachers knew, and used, common words in their first language sourced from parents. In a few services, the language and culture of Māori and Pacific children was integrated into, and reflected in, the curriculum and environment. The curriculum emphasised the people, places and things significant to Māori whānau and Pacific families. Children were developing their own identity and confidence which helps them manage change more successfully.

> The service operated under the umbrella of a local iwi trust. All the children at the centre are Māori and most whakapapa to one of six local marae. Teachers use local landmarks, history and environmental issues to develop a strong kaupapa Māori curriculum. For example, children enjoy exploring the banks of the Waikato River and learning about river restoration programmes. These experiences integrate with other initiatives supported by the local iwi trust and deepen children's understanding of the significance of the local environment to their history and identity. Māori language, karakia, pepeha, waiata, tikanga, and myths and legends are visible in the centre on a daily basis, and help Māori children build a strong sense of their language, culture and identity.
> *Education and Care Service*

Improvements needed to support transitions through the curriculum

Substantial improvements were needed in many services to provide a supportive curriculum as children approached their time to transition to school. These improvements included:

- increasing teachers' understanding of *Te Whāriki* and the guidance it provides about ensuring continuity between early childhood education and school, and how it links to *The New Zealand Curriculum*
- responding to and extending children's strengths, interests and dispositions through the service's curriculum
- using strategies to develop literacy, mathematical and scientific concepts and skills in more meaningful and authentic contexts, rather than using extensive mat times, worksheets, isolated letter and number rote learning, reading books, and learning to write books

- developing transition programmes based on children's interests, rather than teacher-directed activities based on what parents and teachers think children might need to know for school
- moving from a surface awareness of children's language, culture and identity, to a deeper and more meaningful integration of these into their curriculum planning and implementation.

In some services, the expectations of parents for formal transition programmes presented a challenge to leaders and teachers. Often leaders and teachers did not have the professional knowledge or confidence to implement a curriculum that responded meaningfully to children's interests and enquiries and to parents' expectations, or that promoted the skills and dispositions that would support transition to school.

The challenge for many services was to develop and strengthen their understanding about the significance of children's language, culture and identity when designing and implementing their curriculum. Many services intended to respond to children's cultural heritage, but few had done so in a deliberate and planned way.

SUPPORTIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND INFORMATION

What did supportive assessment look like?

In these services children's strengths, dispositions and interests were the focus of assessment. Their learning, its increasing complexity over time and next steps were identified and recorded. Assessment information informed planning and identified children's next learning steps.

As children approached transition to school, the focus on literacy and mathematical concepts, and self management increased. Assessment information reflected children's learning in relation to the strands of *Te Whāriki*. In some services, this information highlighted for parents the links between children's learning dispositions and the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Parents and whānau were involved in, and understood, their child's progress and learning over time.

Children's identities, experiences, and parents' aspirations were visible in assessment information, acknowledging and celebrating their culture. This visibility led to greater confidence and participation of parents and whānau at the service.

Good practice included services providing parents with a summative assessment report about their child's learning and encouraging them to provide a copy to their child's teacher at school. These were detailed narratives of children's learning, based on *Te Whāriki*. They included comments on children's dispositions, and literacy and

mathematical knowledge and skills. Often these reports included information about any additional support that might be required for a successful transition. A few services were part of professional learning clusters with primary schools. This involvement had increased awareness and understanding of what assessment information is helpful to schools and new entrant teachers. Many of these services encouraged parents to share portfolios and summative assessment reports with their child's teacher at school.

The following examples about assessment practice and information highlight how assessment supports children as they approach transition to school.

Learning journals for all children approaching school show children's developing dispositions and skills. These journals are used as a formal means for teachers to identify trends and patterns in children's learning and to provide focused support for individual children. Children know about their learning and how they are supported to get along with others, make independent choices, and apply what they have learnt to new situations. These journals contribute to conversations between teachers and parents about what children are learning and how this learning supports their transition to school.
Education and Care Service

Learning stories integrate the vision of the daily four-year-old programme, which aims to support children's developing dispositions, skills, understanding, and relationships; for example: resilience, love of learning, openness, responsibility, listening, and opportunities to change things. The stories are comprehensive, show progress over time, and include children's voice. An assessment is done when children are four and a half years old as part of the transition to school programme. This focuses on three strengths of the child in terms of the vision of the programme and on one area that the child is developing. Another assessment is made when children are about to start school, which provides information about their learning in relation to each of the strands of *Te Whāriki.*
Education and Care Service

Improvements needed to support transitions through assessment
Just over half of the services in this evaluation needed to improve assessment practices to better support children as they approached transition to school. Assessment records often focused on children's participation in activities, rather than their learning. In some, children's portfolios included mostly worksheets and checklists of tasks and skills, and did not show any analysis of learning or next steps.

In these services leaders and teachers showed little awareness of the use of assessment to support children's transition to school, and many had not considered sharing assessment information with schools. Some services left it up to parents – and while they encouraged them to share assessment information, they did not provide a good rationale for doing so. Many did not know if their assessment information was useful to schools. In a few services, assessment practices were aligned to inappropriate teacher-directed and formal transition to school programmes. Teachers in some of these services used primary school standardised tests, including word recognition tests, GLoSS and NumPA[32] inappropriately.

Some services had supportive assessment practices, but improvement was needed in the schools' responses to the information provided. Leaders were frustrated when schools were not interested and saw little value in this information.

> The teachers commented on the frustration they had with a new entrant teacher at a local school who was not at all interested and said she preferred to have a clean slate and know nothing about the children that were transitioning into her class.
> *Kindergarten*

COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

What did collaborative relationships with parents and whānau look like?
In many cases, by the time children were approaching transition to school, teachers knew children and their whānau well, and had established meaningful ways of connecting with parents about their aspirations for their child's learning. Relationships with parents and whānau were well established and affirming for all involved. Early childhood services strengthened those relationships and supported and collaborated with parents and whānau as children approached transition to school. Good practice included:

- providing a key teacher for each child as they approach transition, so that parents have a dedicated person to ask for information and support
- providing information packs and/or DVDs about local schools
- providing individual transition books for children
- holding parent evenings to explain the rationale for special transition programmes and/or how learning occurs in meaningful contexts
- holding parent evenings focusing on transition and attended by new entrant teachers and/or junior school leaders

32 These standardised tests are commonly used in New Zealand primary schools. Ministry of Education, Te Kete Ipurangi. (2010). *Mathematics Assessment.* Retrieved from http://nzmaths. co.nz/mathematics-assessment

- developing graduate/school boards – who's going/gone to school and where, to maintain friendships
- facilitating school visits at a number of schools so parents make informed choices
- offering individual help for parents not familiar with New Zealand schools
- seeking feedback from parents regarding transition to school
- encouraging return visits to the centre/service after children have started school.

Some of these practices are reflected in the following examples:

"We connect with parents to discuss their child's transition – portfolio books, practices, strategies and needs around going to school. We attend meetings with parents at the school, and discuss what the child needs and/or finds challenging. We follow up with the parents once the child is at school to see where we can improve next time."
(Leader) *Specialist education and care centre for children with a disability*

The centre has a 'four-year-old' meeting to begin the dialogue with parents about transition to school. Teachers talk with parents about early literacy and mathematical concepts, and self-management skills. They explain the links between *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum* so parents and whānau understand how the two curricula link.
Education and Care Service

The centre has a school wall display with photos of the local schools and recently transitioned children attending each school. "It gives children a clear sense of connection to their school prior to transition and is the basis of many conversations between children, teachers and parents. Parents use the wall to plan play dates with children attending the same school. We promote this as an effective transitioning tool."
(Leader voice) *Education and Care Service*

Leaders stay in contact with children who have transitioned to school for a period of 12 weeks after they leave. These children are welcome to come back to visit. This period is essentially in place to support the children's emotional wellbeing and ensure that they can still maintain relationships with Playcentre peers and adults they have particularly strong bonds with beyond their time at Playcentre. Children are always an ongoing part of the Playcentre whānau and attend social family events with younger siblings and their parents as they continue through their schooling.
Playcentre

Services worked on developing collaborative and meaningful relationships with parents and whānau of Māori and Pacific children. Parents valued these relationships and acknowledged the role of the service in helping their child transition to school. The following example shows how a bilingual education and care service collaborated with parents and whānau to support children. All the children at this service identify as Māori, including some who also have Pacific heritage.

> When the child turns four and a half, the teacher with responsibility for transition to school talks with the child's whānau to ask what school they plan to send the child to, and what help they need. The teacher closest to the whānau will normally arrange for the child and a few friends from the service to visit the chosen school before enrolment. This teacher also produces a book for the child with photos about their new school and school staff so that they can share this with their friends and whānau. In this way, four-year-olds can visit a number of new entrant classes in a number of schools. The centre also works with the whānau so that they can ārahi (guide) the child and whānau into the school by attending the whakatau or pōwhiri. Even if there is no formal welcoming process, teachers will often accompany the whānau when they first visit the school.
> *Education and Care Service*

What did collaborative relationships with schools look like?

This ERO evaluation included some services where children predominantly transitioned to one local school, as well as services were children transitioned to six or more schools spread across a metropolitan city area. The collaborative relationships developed with schools went beyond visits in the time leading up to children starting school. In some services, more collaborative relationships were triggered by self review or professional learning and development (PLD) focusing on transitions to school. The following examples highlight some of the practices resulting from self review and PLD, such as sharing expectations and teaching philosophy, and school leaders and new entrant teachers observing and reflecting on early childhood education in action at one or more services.

The service's self review looked at whether strengthening relationships with the schools in their area would make the transition from kindergarten to school easier and better for the children. The teachers visited schools to observe and talk with new entrant teachers to get a better understanding of the new entrant programme. Teachers recognised some aspects of the new entrant programme they could or already did use. They also purchased some additional literacy and mathematics-based resources for their service. The leader encouraged visits by principals and new entrant teachers once a term, and had reciprocal visits to the new entrant classroom at one school. The service displayed the school newsletters, and started a school photo folder – "Who will be in your class or at your school?"
Kindergarten

As a result of PLD about transitions, the kindergarten had a meeting with teachers from three of the four schools children transition to. The purpose of the meeting was to get to know each other, and to share how the kindergarten curriculum feeds into the school curriculum, particularly in relation to learning dispositions. The teachers made links to the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

They also talked about school expectations, and how the services and schools could work together to ensure children and their families were supported to transition to school as successfully as possible. Since then, the kindergarten has had alternate visits with the new entrant classroom at the adjacent school every two weeks. This has led to a better understanding of each other's curriculum.
Kindergarten

A few services participated in 'professional learning clusters' or 'readiness for school' forums. The purpose of these meetings was to share what teachers do to support children and their families regarding transition, what strategies have worked and what could be improved. Teachers also shared assessment processes and examples of assessment information, exchanged ideas about technology, literacy and mathematical concepts in their service's curriculum. They also discussed the links between *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

ERO found that when relationships between services and schools were collaborative, transitions to school for Māori and Pacific children and children with special education needs were likely to be more successful. These relationships meant there were regular conversations and sharing of knowledge about children to support their transition.

ERO identified the following good practice in these services:

- teachers at an aoga working collaboratively with the bilingual unit at the school to which most Pacific children were transitioning to share information about children's learning and parents' aspirations
- teachers at a service catering for children with disabilities worked collaboratively with mainstream school teachers and provided workshops about effective strategies for working with individual children
- early childhood teachers working with school leaders to secure Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RT:LB) and teacher aide support while the child was still at the service to ensure there was no interruption to the support as the child transitioned to school.

However, even at some of the services where ERO identified good practice, teachers were frustrated about being actively discouraged by some schools that did not want to develop any sort of relationship with the service, or discounted the service's knowledge about strategies to help children with special needs better transition to, and learn at, school.

What did collaborative relationships with external agencies look like?

The external agencies that services worked most closely with included the Ministry of Education's Special Education staff (including specialists such as speech-language therapists, early intervention teachers, advisers on deaf children and special education advisers),[33] Child, Youth and Family staff, providers of 'B4 School checks' such as Plunket[34,35] and District Health Board staff such as public health nurses.

Some of the ways services developed collaborative relationships with these agencies included:

- meeting with schools, parents and agencies to smooth transitions and share information and strategies
- arranging for Education Support Workers (ESW)[36] to attend school visits with children with special needs
- helping secure funding and teacher aides for children with special education needs when they start school
- attending Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings with new entrant teachers of children with special needs.

33 Ministry of Education. (2014). *Special Education.* Retrieved from www.minedu.govt.nz/ NZEducation/EducationPolicies/ SpecialEducation.aspx

34 Ministry of Health. (2014). *B4 School Check.* Retrieved from www.health.govt.nz/our-work/ life-stages/child-health/b4-school-check

35 Plunket. (2014). Retrieved from www.plunket.org.nz

36 The Ministry of Education funds the employment of education support workers through either their Early Intervention Service or a small number of providers. Education support workers work alongside teachers in services to support the inclusion of children with the highest needs.

Improvements needed to develop collaborative relationships

Just under half of services evaluated needed to strengthen their relationships with parents and whānau, schools and external agencies.

Challenges for these services included:

- increasing their understanding of the links between *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum,* so they communicate to parents and whānau about how the service's curriculum is supporting children as they approach transition to school
- providing parents and whānau with relevant information that responds to their questions and concerns about transition to school
- developing collaborative relationships with schools that focus on sharing information about children, their learning, and their language, culture and identity
- developing collaborative relationships that better position services to negotiate support from external agencies
- recognising the role of early childhood services in advocacy and support for children as they transition to school.

SELF REVIEW – IDENTIFYING THE IMPACT OF PRACTICES AND PROCESSES

What did this look like when impact was well identified?

ERO found that services with good overall self-review practices were more likely to have undertaken a comprehensive review of the impact of transition processes and practices. Much of this self review focused on gathering multiple perspectives or information from various sources, including:

- parents and whānau at the service, including those children who had recently transitioned to school
- children and teachers at the service
- external agency staff, such as education support workers or therapists
- local school staff, particularly new entrant teachers
- recent research and information about best practice regarding transitioning to school.

Self review led to improved practice and included:

- giving children opportunities to develop literacy and mathematical concepts, and dispositions in meaningful contexts rather than through a formal teaching programme
- increasing children's awareness of what happens at school
- aligning learning dispositions with key competencies to help make connections between *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum*
- providing assessment information that shows children's progress and continuity of learning over time

- proactively approaching schools to develop collaborative relationships and share knowledge of curriculum and approaches to teaching and learning
- accessing professional learning and development about transitions
- revisiting parents' aspirations for their children as they approach transition to school
- increasing parent and whānau involvement in the transition process
- making contact with children and their parents and whānau after they have started school.

Improvements needed to review the impact of practices and processes

ERO found that many of the services in this evaluation needed to include transition to school as a focus of their self review. Leaders and teachers did not recognise the importance of reviewing transition practices and processes, or the need to identify what makes a successful transition for all the children at their service.

Supporting language, culture and identity

ERO found that few services nurtured and maintained children's connections to their language, culture and identity as they approached transition to school. In some services, the curriculum and associated practices supported many of the children enrolled because the values and practices of the service and the school they were transitioning to closely reflected those of their family. However, this was not the case for many Māori and Pacific children.

For Māori and Pacific children the curriculum must be responsive, with strong connections to their language, culture and identity, and focused on developing 'learning to learn' dispositions and social competence.[37]

Good practice

The following examples show some of the ways early childhood services sought to nurture children's language, culture and identity. The children in these services developed a strong sense of identity and belonging that was based on who they were. Their language, culture and identity was valued, and leaders and teachers worked to ensure this was maintained as the children transitioned to school. Children learnt in meaningful contexts, and their assessment information made visible the learning that was valued both at the service and by their family.

Parents and whānau, and teachers from both the services and the schools worked collaboratively to develop strong learning partnerships and support children so they made positive transitions to school. This nurturing of a strong sense of identity and belonging helps children cope with any discontinuity experienced when transitioning to school.[38,39]

37 See Introduction for research about transitions for Māori and Pacific children.

38 Ministry of Education (2014). *Moving from Pasifika immersion to Palagi primary school.* Retrieved from www.educate.ece. govt.nz

39 Podmore V. (2004). Transitions within the centre and to school. Research at a Samoan-language immersion centre. *Early Childhood Folio* 8: 19-22.

Aoga – total immersion Samoan service sharing primary school grounds

The aoga forms part of a collaborative community, along with bilingual units at the local primary and intermediate schools, promoting Samoan language, culture and identity. Teachers at the aoga meet with teachers at the school regularly as part of the transition process. The new entrant teacher visits the aoga to observe the children, to get to know the teachers and see the curriculum in action. The teacher is part of the interview process for children transitioning to primary school. Portfolios are used for this interview and information (children's language, culture and identity, and aiga backgrounds) is noted by the primary teachers who know the children due to regular visits.

Partnerships with parents are well established, with many opportunities to interact on a formal and informal basis. Understandings and beliefs about children's learning are shared between parents and teachers, and parents have many opportunities to comment on, and provide input into, the curriculum, philosophy and governance. Fa'aloalo (respect) is a key 'poutu' at the aoga. This is a shared concept for all.

Early childhood service with mostly Māori children (next to local school)

Almost two-thirds of the children at the service are Māori, as are the managers. Teachers build children's confidence in their identity and culture and a sense of belonging before they leave the service. The service is very responsive to the needs and interests of individual children. All children have individual development goals set with input from parents and whānau and all teachers at the service through observations during play. Goals are worked on through the child's interests. Learning stories are linked to children's progress with the goals, and they note their new and emerging interests. The managers check portfolios monthly for evidence that learning stories tell a relevant, useful story about children's learning and progress. The service's curriculum is regularly reviewed for relevance for children and their families. Ninety percent of parents are involved in the service, contributing to the curriculum, and the managers are reviewing ways to get 100 percent involvement. Te reo and tikanga Māori is integral to who the teachers are, and is very evident throughout the curriculum, including interactions with children and the learning environment. The managers and teachers have visited all schools in their area. They have joined a readiness for school community forum of early childhood and school teachers to share what they do, what has worked, and what is still needed to be done to support children and families. Both schools and early childhood services have shared their expectations for children with each other, so they have a better understanding of each other's perspective.

Education and care service supporting children with special needs

The leaders and teachers were very supportive of a child with autism who recently transitioned to school. Leaders and teachers collaboratively developed strategies to support the child with the parent, special education specialists, and the education support worker. Teachers tailored activities to motivate the child to participate and be involved. With the teachers' help, the parent developed a 'passport' that gave school staff very clear information about the child's needs, and what works and what does not work in engaging the child. Assessment information, which included the Ministry of Education's Special Education observations and learning stories, and learning stories from the early childhood service, supported this process. The parent talked with school staff, the children in the new entrant classroom and the parents at the school to inform them of her child's needs and strengths and answer any questions they had prior to the child starting school. The parent told ERO the best thing that happened for her child at the service was everyone sitting down and making a plan together. The parent commented, "the perfect transition is strong communication, listening to families, letting parents lead with support, recognising that the parent is the expert on the child. The parent has to feel comfortable to ask questions. I was empowered to do all of this through, in part, the emotional support I got from the preschool." The parent also identified what could have been done better:

- More school visits prior to starting school.
- More support from GSE[40] with both the education support worker and teacher aide on board during the transition.
- ORS funding[41] applications begun and processed earlier so they are already in place when a child starts school.[42]

Challenges for services to better support language, culture and identity

The findings of this evaluation highlighted a lack of response to children's language, culture and identity and prompted a closer analysis of where there were greater numbers of Māori and Pacific children enrolled. This analysis focused on the services in the sample where the number of Māori or Pacific children made up 40 percent or more of a service's roll.[43] Figures 3 and 4 show that in the services that had poorer quality practice overall in supporting children as they approach transition to school, there were higher proportions of Māori or Pacific children enrolled. This was particularly in relation to curriculum, assessment, collaborative relationships, and self review. Children in these services were less likely to develop and maintain a strong sense of identity and belonging that would support them as they transitioned from their early childhood service to school.

40 Ministry of Education, Special Education

41 Ongoing Resourcing Scheme

42 Ministry of Education research that "support is frequently not in place before the child enters school" supports this parent's perspective. Ministry of Education. (2013). *Transitions from early intervention to school-age special education services – an overview of the literature.* Ministry of Education: Wellington. p7

43 The numbers and percentages of Māori or Pacific children enrolled in these services includes children of all ages, rather than just children who were approaching transition to school at the time of ERO's review.

Figure 3: Māori children over-represented in least supportive services
19 of the 38 services are in the partially or not supportive groups.

495 Māori children were enrolled in these 19 services.

highly supportive	supportive	partially supportive	not supportive

Figure 4: Pacific children over-represented in least supportive services
12 of the 17 services are in the partially or not supportive groups.

329 Pacific children were enrolled in these 12 services.

highly supportive	supportive	partially supportive	not supportive

CONCLUSION

Strong learning foundations and a sense of identity and belonging can contribute to transition being a successful experience. Successful transition from early childhood education to school can help maintain continuity of learning. ERO found that the most effective practices supporting children as they approach transition to school included:

• a responsive and holistic curriculum focused on dispositional learning, independence and social competence as outlined in *Te Whāriki*

• assessment information that makes children's strengths, dispositions and interests visible, identifies their progress and shows continuity of learning over time

• relationships with parents and whānau, and other important adults, focused on learning and supporting the child (including their language, culture and identity)

• collaborative relationships between teachers in services and schools so expectations, philosophies and curricula are shared, valued and understood

• evidence of the impacts of processes and practices around transition, with self review resulting in positive changes in support for children.

While about half of services in this evaluation were supporting children as they approached transition to school, ERO's findings raise concerns about the support for Māori and Pacific children. These findings show that Māori and Pacific children are disproportionately over-represented in the least supportive services in this evaluation.

Early childhood education lays a foundation for future learning and education success, and research shows that culturally responsive teaching and assessment are strong themes for that future success.[44] This is particularly important for Māori and Pacific children

44 Peters S. 2010 *Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School. Report to Ministry of Education.* Ministry of Education: Wellington.

in developing a strong sense of identity and belonging to support their transition to school.[45, 46] Eighty percent of Māori children enrolled in early childhood education attend an English-medium service.[47] Similarly, 85 percent of Pacific children enrolled in early childhood education attend a mainstream (non-Pacific immersion) centre.[48]

The challenge for many services in this evaluation was to develop and strengthen their understanding about the significance of children's language, culture and identity when designing and implementing their curriculum. Many services intended to give priority to children's cultural heritage, but few had done so in a deliberate and planned way.

Assessment remains a challenge for many services.[49] Children's learning – knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions – was not always visible to parents and whānau in assessment records, and was not promoted as a valuable way of supporting children's transition to school. Opportunities for children to revisit their learning that shows progress over time enhances their sense of self as capable and confident learners.[50] When that learning and progress is visible and shared as part of transition, those transitions are more likely to be successful.

Although many services in this evaluation provided parents with information about their child's learning to be shared with schools, such information was not always sought or valued by schools as a means to support successful transition for children and their families. Improved collaboration, particularly between services, schools, parents and whānau, would enable and enhance the sharing of information about children's learning, and support their successful transition to school.

45 Ministry of Education (2014). *Moving from Pasifika immersion to Palagi primary school.* Retrieved from www.educate.ece.govt.nz

46 Podmore V. (2004). Transitions within the centre and to school. Research at a Samoan-language immersion centre. *Early Childhood Folio* 8: 19-22.

47 As at 1 April 2014, 80 percent of Māori children enrolled in early childhood education attend mainstream services, of which almost three in 10 are enrolled at a Māori ECE service. Education Counts. (2014). Retrieved from www.educationcounts.govt.nz

48 As at 1 April 2014, less than one percent of Pacific children attend a Māori ECE service. Education Counts. (2014). Retrieved from www.educationcounts.govt.nz

49 ERO has highlighted the need for improvement in assessment practices and information in both *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Services, November 2007, and Priorities for Children's Learning in Early Childhood Services, May 2013.* Both reports are available at www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports

50 Peters S., Hartley C., Rogers P., Smith J. and Carr M. (2009). Supporting the transitions from early childhood education to school. Insights from one Centre of Innovation project. *Early Childhood Folio,* 13: 2-6.

TRANSITIONS:
The new entrant perspective
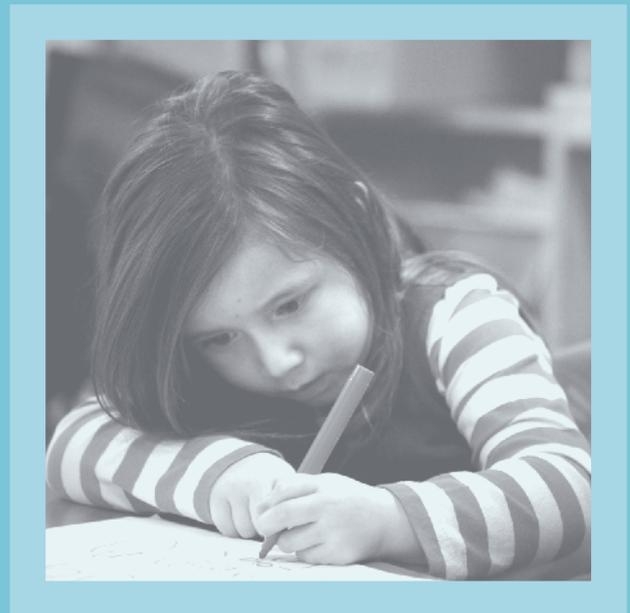
PART 2

Part 2: How school leaders and teachers support children as they settle into school

Part 2 focuses on what successful transition to school looks like – in particular for children at highest risk of poor outcomes – and the challenges for school leaders and teachers supporting children settling in.

OVERALL EVALUATION QUESTIONS
• What does successful transition to school look like, in particular for priority learners?
• What challenges are schools experiencing when supporting children to transition?

ERO gathered information during regular education reviews in 100 schools during Term 4, 2013. ERO asked the following key questions in each school:

• How does the organisational and professional support by the school leadership promote the success of transitions to school for new entrant children?
• How does the school deliberately develop and engage in collaborative relationships that support children as they transition to school?
• How responsive and adaptive is the new entrants' curriculum to the learning interests, strengths and capabilities of children as they transition to school?
• How does the school's self review identify and improve the impact of practices and processes that support children as they transition to school?
• How is the school supporting transition for priority learners (Māori, Pacific, children with special education needs, children from low socio-economic backgrounds)?

Appendix 4 includes some investigative prompts and indicators used in the evaluation, which may be useful for schools' self review. *Appendix 5* has more information about the sample.

FINDINGS

What is transition?
The notion of transition varied from school to school. For some they identified this as simply being the time until a parent was able to leave a child alone in the class. Most schools recognised that settling into school was a process, rather than an event. Some identified that this process can take anything from a year on either side of the child enrolling in the school, depending on the child.

> The school values highly the transition to school process. The deputy principal takes a lead role in the transition process. She quotes: "The sparkle in the five-year-old eyes when they start school must be sustained" as her guiding philosophy for transitioning children to school.
> *Large, urban, contributing primary*

ERO found that 70 of the 100 schools visited were 'generally responsive' in the way they supported children as they settled into school. The remaining 30 of the schools had a 'less responsive' approach to transition.

Generally responsive	Less responsive

Of the 'generally responsive' schools, ERO identified 29 as being 'very responsive' to the needs of children transitioning to their school and 41 as 'mostly responsive'.

Very responsive	Mostly responsive	Less responsive

Very responsive schools

These schools could demonstrate that they had real knowledge about their newly enrolled children. They took care to translate that knowledge into providing the best possible environment and education for each and every child. This enabled smooth transitions to the school. Leaders in the 'very responsive' schools ensured that transition was flexible and tailored to the individual child.

Mostly responsive schools

ERO identified the remaining 41 of the 70 'generally responsive' schools as 'mostly responsive'. Their leaders knew that transition was important and had a range of good features in place, but they had not yet developed the coherence of practice evident in the 29 'very responsive' schools.

Less responsive schools

Thirty schools had a 'less responsive' approach to transition. They understood that transition was important and had some of the foundations necessary for success but did not necessarily take concrete steps to ensure that it happened well. They tended more toward a 'one size fits most' approach. These schools had few strategies in place to recognise or respond to children as individuals with their own interests, strengths and capabilities. They rarely took into account the children's prior knowledge or learning.

In the worst cases the new entrant had to fit into a rigid system where no part of that system catered for them as an individual.

The child had to be ready for the school.

In the **'very responsive' schools** ERO found the following:

Strong leadership.	Leaders emphasised the importance of successful transitions. They provided appropriate resources, support and care for the specialised new entrant teacher.
Relationships between school/ early childhood service/parents and whānau were positive and mutually respectful.	Teachers gathered good information that they used well. Parents felt welcome and able to talk with teachers about their child's progress through transition. Parents' input was both respected and valued. Two-way partnerships between parents and schools supported the child's learning. The child's wellbeing was at the centre of school processes.
Teachers had a good understanding of *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum* and their similarities and differences.	The school's curriculum helped to bridge differences by using similarities, and built on the children's prior learning. It was flexible and met the diverse needs of the children.
The school had robust systems in place to determine the effectiveness of transitions.	Teachers regularly monitored how transitions worked and continuous improvement was a feature. Expectations were clearly stated for leaders, teachers and parents. Teachers promptly addressed any difficulties the children experienced.
School leaders and teachers took care of priority learners.	They identified and addressed specific learning needs quickly. Leaders and teachers responded well to the diverse needs of Māori and Pacific learners, and learners of English as a second language.

Figure 5: Smooth transitions depend on strong leadership

CURRICULUM
responds to child's strengths, needs and culture

RELATIONSHIPS
with early childhood services, parents and child

ROBUST SELF REVIEW
is improvement focused

LEADERSHIP
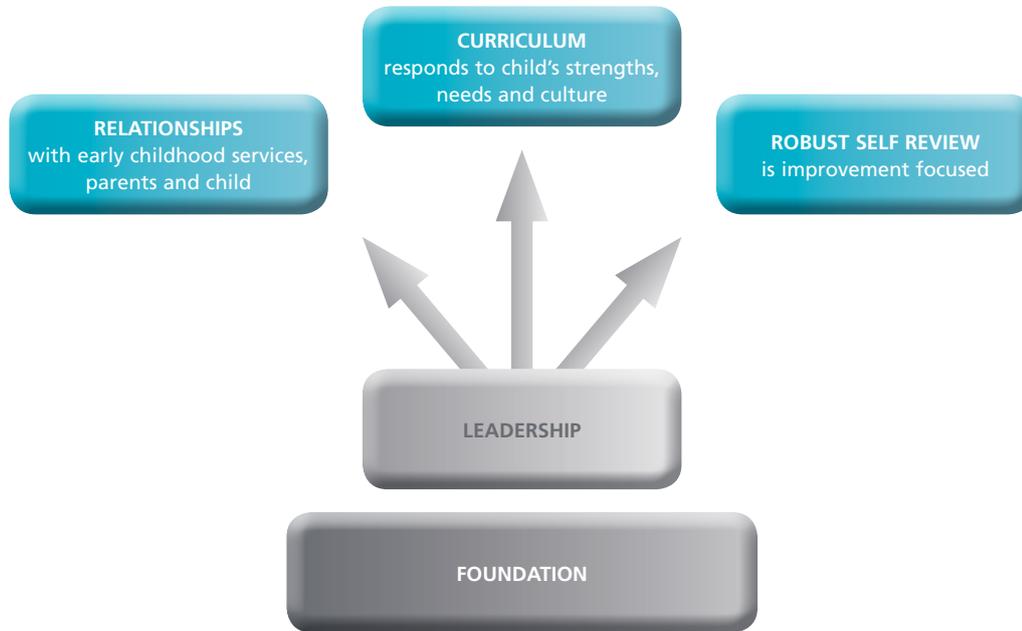
FOUNDATION

The leaders in schools where the children experienced smooth transitions laid the foundation for success but also they took care that critical elements to succeed were in place:

• They built strong relationships around the children.
• They developed a curriculum that placed the children at the centre, focusing on them as individuals and providing them with relevant learning, targeted to their needs.
• They constantly reviewed transition processes and outcomes for children – which led to refinements in transition policies and practices.

Together these elements meant that the school was well prepared to receive each and every child and that they settled into school quickly.

The school was ready for the child.

FOUNDATIONS FOR TRANSITION

Most school leaders recognised that transition is important and all schools had an enrolment interview with parents/whānau, most commonly with the principal or a senior teacher.

Leaders arranged school visits for the children approaching enrolment. The arrangements varied from only one visit to nine or more visits to familiarise the child with the school environment and classroom culture. Some schools were flexible in the number of visits offered, some formalised the visits into a transition programme and others had both a formal programme and flexible visits. The success of each strategy depended on the individual circumstances of the school and the children. For example, some schools were small and knew their communities well, while some children had older siblings at the school, were already familiar with the environment and felt less need for familiarisation visits. There did not appear to be any particular advantages to any one arrangement of visits, but anecdotally, teachers reported that children who had visited or participated in a transition programme settled more quickly than those who had not. Many schools arranged a 'buddy' who also helped the new entrant to settle in.

Figure 6 shows these foundation elements present in most schools:

• transition seen as important
• school-organised visits prior to enrolment
• teachers arranged a buddy to help the new entrant settle.

School leaders identified other features that they viewed as important contributors to successful transitions in their schools. These are shown in the following graphic. ERO found several things that the very responsive schools were more likely to have or be doing than the other schools. There is not any one thing, but rather a collection of features together that resulted in smooth transitions that were responsive to the child.

Figure 6: Foundation elements

Most schools have the foundation elements (grey).
The very responsive schools have a stronger focus on transitions.

Element	Value
Transition seen as important	95
School visits before enrolment	90
'Buddies' for new entrants	59
Improvement-focused self review	72
Features familiar from ECE	69
Knowledgeable about *Te Whāriki*	55
ECE training or experience	45
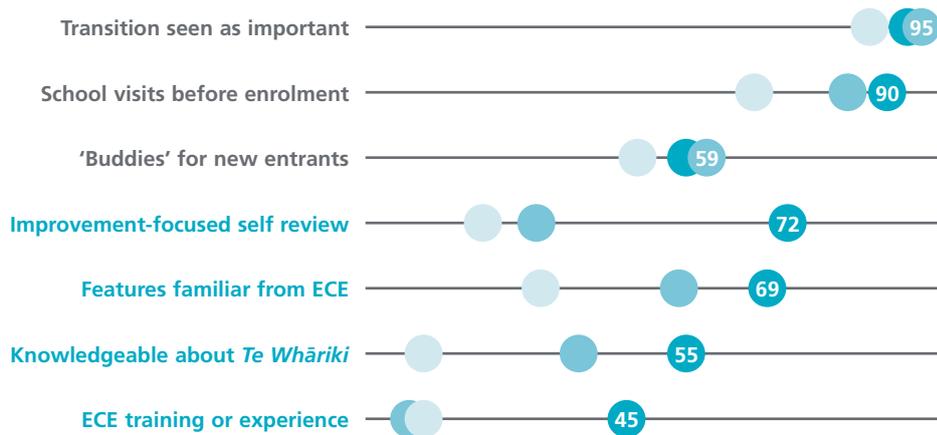
● the 'very responsive' schools, 29 in total

● the 'mostly responsive' schools, 41 in total

○ the 'less responsive' schools, 30 in total

The numbers are percentages of the group of schools that exhibited the feature. *95% of the 'mostly responsive' schools told reviewers that transition is important.*

The highest value for each element is noted on the graphic. *So 95% of the 'mostly responsive' schools was a slightly higher percentage than in the 'very responsive' schools.*

'Very responsive' schools differed from the 'less responsive' in the following ways (which are discussed in the next sections):

• Their focus on improvement through formal self review.
• Their understanding of the early childhood curriculum.
• Their use of familiar features from the child's experience of early childhood education.

LEADERSHIP

Leaders of the 'very responsive' schools made sure that transition into school was valued in tangible ways. The new entrant[51] teachers were supported to make the transitions as smooth as possible.

School leaders demonstrated the importance they placed on transition by:

The care taken in appointing the most **appropriate teacher** to the new entrant class.	In some cases this was a teacher new to the role as teacher in a new entrant class. If this was the case, they tended to be well supported by senior leaders in the school.
The **support provided** through leadership and professional learning and development (PLD), including the resources allocated to that person and to the transition process.	Resources included a teacher aide, class size restrictions, an environment tailored to the age/needs of children, time to visit early childhood services and establish relationships with parents and whānau, and management units.
Having a clear **understanding of the education experiences** of children in early childhood services and how that can inform the school experience.	Almost half of 'very responsive' schools reported having someone with early childhood qualifications or experience connected with the new entrant class – such as a senior leader, the class teacher or a teacher aide in the classroom. Just over half of the very responsive schools demonstrated a clear understanding of *Te Whāriki*. Typically, teachers in these schools made links between the dispositions in *Te Whāriki* and the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum*.
Reviewing the **effectiveness of the programme** as a whole in light of current research, with a view to making improvements.	This was the largest point of difference between the 'very responsive' schools and the rest. It demonstrated that school leaders were truly committed to having the best possible transition practices.

51 The term 'new entrant' is used in this report to refer to the first class in a school. Some schools call this their Year 1, Reception class or even Year 0.

CURRICULUM

Curriculum that supports children's transition

The teachers in the 'very responsive' schools knew *Te Whāriki* and had worked with early childhood teachers to bridge the learning experiences from ECE to school.

New entrant teachers found out about each child's interests, strengths, culture and capabilities before they started school, through:

• observations in the early childhood service and on school visits
• talking with the service's teachers and child's parents and whānau
• referring to the children's portfolio or learning story journal.

After starting school, the new entrant teachers learnt about the child through:

• ongoing observations and discussions with parents and whānau
• formal and informal testing.

ERO found that the 'very responsive' schools used all these strategies wherever possible and tailored aspects of the curriculum to engage, challenge and motivate the children. By contrast the 'less responsive' schools typically used few, if any, of these strategies.

Formal testing for new entrant children varied from school to school.[52] Many schools designed their own tests, some drawing from elements of the Standard Entry Assessment (SEA). The type of assessment used was not linked to how responsive the school was. What mattered was how teachers and leaders used the information they gathered.

New entrant teachers in very responsive schools used the information to:

• provide new entrant children with familiar settings and ways of learning
• make links between *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum*
• design a curriculum that valued and built on the child's prior knowledge and experiences.

52 See *Appendix 7* for the range of formal tests that teachers used in new entrants' classes.

The new entrant teacher encourages all new entrant children to bring their early childhood portfolio (if they have one) to share with her and their new classmates. The teacher uses the information to identify children's skills, interests, strengths and needs. She uses it in her initial discussion with parents alongside the 'school readiness checklist' questions to find out as much as she can about each child.

The teacher said: "Children are very proud of their portfolios. They share them confidently, introducing friends and teachers from their early childhood service. They talk about things they did and their learning. Some children make their own links between learning at the service and at school."

When children have been at school for a week or two, the new entrant teacher phones all new entrants' parents to talk about how the transition is going for their child. Sometimes she is able to talk with parents at school, but most children come to school by bus and so this is not always possible. The teacher says that the phone calls are invaluable as they help her to better understand children. In one situation she thought a new girl was struggling to settle and was unhappy because she didn't talk and didn't like to play outside with other children. But the girl's mum said her daughter came home very talkative and loved her new school. Her mum was able to encourage her daughter to open up a little and let her teacher know she could speak!

Small, urban full primary

The relationship with parents was very important and an essential, informal way for teachers to build a complete picture of each child. This picture helped teachers to manage transitions.

The following example shows how a large urban contributing primary school used its strong parent partnerships to develop a picture of each child that recognised and celebrated their culture. This enabled teachers to smooth transitions by tailoring the curriculum, building on their knowledge and understanding of each child.

Review and development

The school has a transition policy and practices which are strongly founded on research. School leaders review the effectiveness of the policy every year and report findings to the board. They recognise the importance of a good transition to school and that new entrants benefit from the best possible start and accelerated learning in their early years at school. As a consequence the board has a charter goal to enhance successful transitions. They noted that positive and affirming relationships were the foundation for learning and necessary to establish effective partnerships between the school and families. Transition processes recognise parents as first teachers and empower parents within the school environment.

The school operates a playgroup and encourages parents to bring their preschool children along. School staff use this opportunity to talk to parents and to observe the children at play. An enrolment pack, familiarisation visits and meetings with key staff all provide good information for parents and help to establish partnership relationships with them.

Children's strengths and successes throughout transition are celebrated formally and informally through the use of certificates, reports to parents and a 'partnership book'. Children take pride in their 'partnership book' which highlights their successes and is a valued tool for communication and ongoing learning. New entrant teachers make a point of talking with parents after school, noting if there are any concerns or parental anxiety and following up with longer meetings as necessary.

Partnership with parents

Regular partnership meetings between parents and teachers and teacher aides are a particular strength of the school. There are specific meeting groups for each of the major ethnic groups in the school: Pacific, Māori and Indian.

Before a new topic for learning is introduced to students, the partnership group discusses what the children already know and relate it to any similar experiences they may have had. Teachers gain valuable cultural insights that help to close the cultural gap between school and home, and provide important information for staff when designing the curriculum. The meetings provide powerful professional learning for teachers. For example, the Māori partnership group also supports teachers in developing Tātaiako competencies.[53] Teachers are confident to include tikanga Māori, Pacific and Indian perspectives and to be culturally responsive in their teaching.

The partnership meetings also take parents through the 'partnership books', encouraging them or their wider family to work through the activities with their child. Teachers model reading at home, describe progress towards the National Standards and give parents practical ideas and hands-on activities to support their child's learning. Parents and whānau have the opportunity to ask questions or raise any matters that concern them. All these strategies support the school's philosophy that 'efficacy and motivation is heightened as the learning is embedded in the class, the wider community and the home'.

These mixed school and parent groups also evaluate how successfully the programmes provide for children and help develop a strong sense of common purpose throughout the school.

53 Tātaiako competencies are the cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners.

Learners at risk of poor educational outcomes

Teachers' knowing the child was critical for all learners but it was particularly important to tailor the curriculum for learners at risk of poor outcomes.[54] In the 'very responsive' schools 'each transition responds to each child' so that their needs are met.

Most schools worked well with children with special education needs. School leaders and teachers took time to find out about the children before they reached the school. They set up meetings with appropriate people and external agencies to develop individual education plans (IEPs) and ensured that applications for appropriate funding were made well in advance of the children starting school. Often, for children with special needs, transition started a year to six months before they enrolled in the school. Typically ERO found schools prepared very well for these transitions, and that the partnerships with external agencies eased transitions and provided 'wrap-around' support for the children.

This high quality provision for children with special education needs was evident even in the schools ERO judged to be 'less responsive' overall. Following is one such example:

> The mother of a child with special education needs who has recently started school spoke with ERO. She said: "It's been a dream start, no horror stories as we might have expected. In this school they don't see a condition, they just see him. They've made sure that he has what he needs to be included and successful."

ERO noted difficulties experienced by a few schools that could compromise transition for children with special education needs:

- In some regions the early intervention support (Ministry of Education support and funding for children with special education needs that is available from the time they are born until they are settled into school) did not transfer with the child and the school had to reapply. This meant that the child often started school before the funding was approved.
- Some early childhood teachers and/or leaders were reluctant to share information about individual children, citing the Privacy Act, leading to delays in determining the nature of support required.
- When relationships between the school and early childhood service had broken down, the teachers from both places were unable to work together to develop an IEP for the child.

54 All learners are vulnerable at transition, but some more so than others because of their social or emotional circumstances. Learners at risk of poor educational outcomes are groups of students who have been identified as historically not experiencing success in the New Zealand schooling system.

ERO found several examples of excellent support for children with special education needs. One school provided a teacher aide to the early childhood service in the lead up to transition, ensuring continuity of support for the child. Another school supported the parent as well as the child.

> When a child with sight and hearing impairment was to arrive at school, the new entrant teacher changed the physical layout of the room to make it as easy as possible for him to navigate. The board funded the teacher to attend a course that provided specific training on how to deal with the child's needs. The boy's parent attended the course with the teacher, meaning a learning partnership was developed.

The following case study illustrates the importance of individualised care in planning transition for all children. In this school, new entrants visited several times before starting school. They were enrolled by the office administration person rather than the principal or teacher so new parents did not make these important connections at the start of their association with the school.

James*, who has special education needs, has had an IEP developed with his family. At his previous school, he was incorrectly told he was only allowed to attend half days, but at this school he attends full days and is very well supported by his teacher aide, the principal and teachers, and older students. The school has worked closely with James' mother to develop his programme and support his learning and engagement in the school.

His mother reports that his capabilities are being appreciated and developed.

*Not their real names
Small, rural full primary school

Amanda* is a capable child who can count to 20 in four languages and speak German fluently. At Playcentre she took ownership of her own portfolio, deciding what to put in it and writing in it herself. She also wrote in her friends' portfolios before she left. The school did not consider asking about her portfolio, and didn't ask her mother about her abilities. The Year 0 to 4 teachers did not know about Amanda's literacy and linguistic capabilities before she enrolled.

On the first day at school she was taught the letter T. However, on her third day, she was given a certificate and her capability and settling were celebrated.

The school was aware that it had to understand James as a learner and then respond positively to his particular needs. They did so admirably, but the same process for transition was lacking for Amanda. The good practice seen for James, identifying and extending his capabilities, should be happening for each and every child at transition.

Almost half of the 'generally responsive' schools made good provision for Māori children.[55] Many of these school leaders recognised the importance of taking time to build relationships with Māori parents and whānau. They provided professional development for staff focused on *Ka Hikitia*[56] and *Tātaiako*, which led to culturally responsive teaching and opportunities for Māori to succeed as Māori.

> Māori children are well supported and feel a sense of belonging in the school through integration of te reo and tikanga Māori into programmes. The school values included in programmes are based on tikanga values and are supported by the community. A strong kapa haka group is popular and a new tutor has started who intends to include the junior syndicate in the group.
>
> The teachers deliberately engage children's families in the life of the school and are well aware of families who may need extra encouragement to gain a sense of trust.

However, ERO found that many school leaders had not engaged with *Ka Hikitia* or *Tātaiako* and considered how these would affect their practices. 'Less responsive' schools were also least likely to have any consistent practice that supported the language, identity and culture of Māori.

Many schools had very good transition practices that clearly benefited Māori and Pacific children but several did not have specific strategies that recognised, valued or used children's home languages, or cultural backgrounds and strengths. These cultural aspects of identity were used in responsive schools to support planning and to make the environments more inclusive and welcoming for children and their parents and whānau.

ERO found only a few cases where school leaders had engaged with the Ministry of Education's *Pacific Education Plan* (PEP). Engaging with the PEP would help them to better understand the needs this group of children, many of whom have English as their second language. Teachers in a few schools planned their literacy curriculum using the children's first languages as their basis.

In schools with high numbers of Pacific children, leaders had often appointed people who could speak one or more Pacific languages. ERO found repeated examples where the use of language was a critical factor in establishing relationships with the children, their parents and family.

55 This value includes the schools who did not have any children who identified as Māori transitioning at the time of review.

56 *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success* is a Ministry of Education strategy to rapidly change how the education system performs so that all Māori students gain the skills, qualifications and knowledge they need to enjoy and achieve education success as Māori.

The home-school coordinator supports the non-Pacific new entrant teachers to understand the particular importance of being Niuean, Samoan, Tongan or Fijian. For her, and for the families she represents, culture, language and identity is everything. Now these young teachers greet parents and the child with the appropriate cultural greeting.

One school exemplified their cultural understanding for a Samoan boy in a school with few other Pacific students:

A Samoan child had come from his early childhood service with labels and descriptions suggesting he was disengaged. The school organised oral language support for him, with a focus on his culture. The school also found him a senior student to be his buddy. She was unknown to the new entrant but was Samoan and when she arrived in his classroom he ran to her, embraced her and said "She's Samoan!" ERO observed him to be very engaged and apparently loving school.

COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Who do they involve?

To make sure children's transitions to school were smooth, teachers and leaders needed to develop several two-way relationships focused on the child and their learning. The 'very responsive' schools took considerable time to build relationships with the parents and whānau, with the children's early childhood teachers, with the children themselves and, where necessary, with external support agencies.

Parents and whānau

School leaders met parents and whānau when they enrolled their child. Usually they also interviewed the parents and whānau, although in one or two cases that responsibility was delegated to another person. These interviews gave parents and whānau the opportunity to meet with key people in the school and to find out important and useful information.

We enrol a family not just a child.

Leaders in the 'very responsive schools' all recognised that parents and whānau were transitioning too. Their collaborative relationships involved mutual respect and a balance of power by acknowledging and respecting parents and whānau as the child's first teachers.

These relationships were more than just the school providing opportunities for the children to visit or evenings to tell parents and whānau what was expected of them and their children. Communication was two-way. Teachers and leaders in responsive schools learned about the children being enrolled, their dispositions, their strengths and their cultures. They learned about the family and their aspirations for their children.

Parents felt that their input was valued and appreciated the interest taken in them as a family. The 'very responsive' school leaders made sure that this information was passed onto the new entrant teacher.

The following example describes the positive impact of developing a genuine collaborative partnership with parents in a small, rural, full primary school.

Focus on transition

Two years ago the school leaders reviewed their transition policy and practices to improve the way they worked with parents to support the children's learning and wellbeing. They saw this as important to ensure smooth transitions and to keep parents involved throughout the child's journey through school. The school developed a parental partnership policy specifically focused on achievement and teaching.

School leaders are aware that, with many immigrant families (many with English as a second language) it is important to provide as much information as possible so parents can understand the New Zealand education system and the teaching approaches used. They need to make the families feel welcome and develop a sense of belonging to their school community. School leaders use a range of effective strategies to achieve this.

The school's special character, including culture and values important to families, is reinforced through a coherent induction programme for all staff. Other strategies included:

• opportunities for the children to visit the school with their families
• opportunities for families to socialise with other families
• a formal welcome ceremony for parents
• information evenings.

A staff member who can speak several of the languages of the families at school accompanies children on the bus to and from school and talks with parents as they meet their children.

The new entrant teacher displays photographs of children before they start school so that other children know they are coming and can welcome them. The teacher also contacts parents after the first week of school to develop the whole picture of the child's experience and check the parents' and family's experience of transition.

Relationships with parents

Building parental understanding and involvement starts with the new entrant pack. It includes information about why it was important to bring children for visits and some of the feelings children might have as they approach school. The information helps parents to understand that starting school is a different experience for each child and provides reassurance.

The pack also contains a set of prompts for parents to consider about reading and writing, mathematics, oral language skills, physical development, and social and emotional competency. These prompts are used, with the early childhood education portfolio, as the basis for a conversation with parents about their child as they transition to school. Teachers use every opportunity to learn as much as they can about the child's family, their hopes and aspirations for the child and the child's strengths and interests. They use this information to tailor the curriculum, to smooth the transition and engage the child in learning.

Parents are encouraged to attend information evenings which cover a range of topics. School leaders take parents through the teaching approaches used, including restorative practices,[57] and model strategies that parents can use at home. They explain writing, reading and maths development, National Standards, and especially the support provided for children with English as a second language.

57 Restorative practices are responses to anti-social behaviour, truancy or lateness which are aimed to solve problems and build or restore respectful relationships.

Self review

School leaders actively seek parents' feedback in every forum and use it to refine their processes. For example, families with English as a second language fed back that they prefer face-to-face meetings to written communication. This led school leaders to set up parent conferences as the primary mechanism for reporting progress. Parents were involved in meetings to set the school vision, led by the principal, to decide the qualities they wanted for staff, children, teachers and the environment. These meetings informed the allocation of resources and strategic planning in the school. The work on the shared vision brought the community closer together and parents knew that their opinions were valued.

By contrast, in the 'less responsive' schools, the information gathered at the enrolment interview was limited to formal data about the child, such as date of birth, ethnicity, early childhood service attended and siblings at the school. The school tended to provide information through one-way communication, determined by what the leaders thought parents should know. This approach to the enrolment meetings meant the opportunity to develop a learning partnership with the parents and whānau was lost. Indeed the interview set the balance of power with the school.[58]

Working with early childhood teachers

Teachers strengthened the transition processes when they built effective relationships with the teachers from early childhood services where most new entrants come from. Benefits included:

Observing the children approaching transition in their familiar early childhood education environment.	Teachers noted children's socialisation and 'dispositions to learn',[59] which enriched the information provided by the early childhood teachers.
Arranging two-way **visits between the children** at the school and early childhood service.	Children got used to the school environment and made connections with older children already at school.
Arranging two-way **visits between the teachers** so they understood what the teaching and learning looked like for each other. They shared strategies that helped 'bridge' the learning experiences of the service and the school.	One relationship resulted in a 'learning story' in the child's journal. The story specifically talked about the visits to school, the new entrant teacher and who the new classmates were, and included a map showing where the new entrant would keep their belongings.

58 Timperley H., McNaughton S., Howie L. and Robinson V. (2003) *Transitioning children from early childhood education to school: teacher beliefs and transition practices.* Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 28 (2): 32-40

59 'Dispositions to learn' refer to how knowledge, skills and attitudes come together as the chid develops. An example of a disposition is 'curiosity'

Three times as many of the 'very responsive' schools had truly reciprocal arrangements than the other schools had. The example below shows how one very responsive school made connections with key people.

> The new entrant teacher, who is syndicate leader and part of the senior management team, makes effective links with the parents, whānau and early childhood service staff to focus the transition process on the wellbeing and success of children in their first year at school.
>
> She plans on knowing each child as an individual, building relationships and raising their familiarity with the school environment and school expectations. On their visits before they start school the new children are welcomed and issued with book bags and books to take home and share with their families.
>
> Parents and whānau are invited to be part of the child's transition to school – with the child and to meet the teachers separately. Parents also have opportunities to talk about their child's learning journey portfolio from early childhood and to write 'about my child in a million words or less'.

OTHER STUDENTS

Tuakana teina[60] and buddies

ERO found that more than half of schools visited had a formal buddy system to support new entrants. Buddies were either classmates or senior students in the school.

> The teacher appoints a class buddy to support children as they learn how to participate in class tasks and experiences. The school promotes a tuakana teina culture, and parents, trustees and teachers are proud that children take responsibility for each other's wellbeing and give help and companionship in classrooms and the playground.

This proved particularly valuable for children whose buddies were older students who could also support the children's own culture and identity.

Support agencies

Establishing effective relationships with support agencies for children with special education needs was critical to the success of their transition. Schools that established good relationships with parents and whānau, early childhood teachers and early intervention providers developed strong individual education plans (IEPs). The careful planning involved in these IEPs meant that children had continuity of support that ensured smooth transitions to school.

60 Tuakana-teina relationship, an integral part of traditional Māori society, provides a model for buddy systems. An older or more expert tuakana helps and guides a younger or less expert teina (originally a younger sibling or cousin of the same gender).

Strong relationships with other external support agencies enabled schools to seek advice and assistance when teachers identified children with special concerns.

SELF REVIEW – IDENTIFYING THE IMPACT OF PRACTICES AND PROCESSES

Most of the responsive schools reviewed their transition practices, either formally or informally. In contrast, very few of the 'less responsive' schools carried out any form of review.

ERO found in schools with only informal review processes, teachers were reactive. They monitored children's progress and made adjustments to their programme to suit the child or group of children in the new entrants' class. Teachers and senior leaders' discussions about transition practices were based on anecdotal evidence, including feedback from parents, rather than analysis of sound data. Senior leaders rarely reported to the board about the effectiveness of transition practices.

Most of the 'very responsive' schools had robust, formal self review practices, and their responses were proactive. They analysed data and looked for how they could improve the whole process of transition. Senior leaders considered children's wellbeing as well as assessment data and sought parents' and children's views. Their focus was on providing a smooth transition to ensure minimal disruption to each child's learning.

The following example is an urban, contributing school's response to a need for improvement in transition. A key feature of the response is the two-way partnership, involving parents in the process:

What triggered the review?

The principal decided to review and improve transition to school after recognising that they did not have processes in place that would mean every child was likely to successfully transition into their school. Relationships with the early childhood centre near the school were unproductive and some parents had unintentionally made children anxious by telling them how they would have to behave when they got to school.

Initially the school leaders decided to show how important they thought transition to school was by having both the principal and the assistant principal visit the local early childhood centre to talk with parents and centre teachers. First they organised an afternoon and evening at the school for parents to find out about the school. The meetings were well attended but school leaders noticed they were only a one-way process for providing information to the parents and gave parents little opportunity to share information about their child or develop any trust relationships with school leaders.

The new process

School leaders decided to trial a new process and involve parents in the review of the process. The principal followed two groups of children who were transitioning to school. The trial involved children who were going to start school soon. They and their parents visited the school for one afternoon a week for six weeks and met in the school library. The assistant principal played literacy games with the children and read to them while the principal met with the parents. During this time, the parents heard about the activities in and out of the class their child could be involved in. The assistant principal observed how well the children joined in, shared and persisted during the games. She used the information to help the child's new teacher understand what type of activities the child enjoyed.

After this, the children worked with their parents on an art or construction activity. During this time parents could talk more informally with the school's leaders and ask questions. These visits meant that the parents and children met all the significant adults they would engage with at school.

The child and a parent also spent a morning in the new entrant class before starting school. They met with the assistant principal soon after starting school to check whether there were any issues and to gain feedback.

Before each child started school a buddy was selected from the new entrant class and another buddy from a more senior class in the school. The child was introduced to the new entrant buddy on the morning they came for a class visit. The older buddy watched out for the child at lunch and playtimes to check that they had someone to play with. The senior buddy also talked with the teacher about any issues that had occurred and how they helped resolve them.

Review and improvement

The principal met with some of the parents in the first two intake groups twice throughout the process to hear how it was working for them. With permission, she recorded their discussion so she and other staff could listen and discuss the views later. Parents liked the time in the activities where they could ask questions they did not want to ask in front of others. They also used that time to talk about what their child liked to do or was really interested in. They appreciated knowing the person they could talk to if they were worried after their child started school. They especially liked socialising with the other parents.

Parents and leaders identified what worked and what needed to change. Parents suggested that six weeks was not the best time frame as some children had to wait three or four weeks after the transition cycle before they started school. Each cycle now lasts five weeks, so two cycles run in one term. School leaders could not predict how successfully a child would transition to school but found that the positive relationships formed with the parents meant that any concerns were raised more quickly and problems could be resolved promptly.

The principal identified that the transition process was just as important for younger siblings as for older siblings. She used the parents with children already at school to share examples of things their other children had done and how they had worked with the school to resolve any concerns.

A parent's perspective

A parent told ERO how quickly and easily her son settled into school despite their fears that he might find it hard. The child was the eldest in the family and had been to an early childhood centre across town. He did not know any children at the school. The parents felt their six visits to the school meant they worried less about him starting school and knew who they could talk to about anything that worried their child. "He really wanted to come to school in the end". When their son started school he talked a lot about his buddy, made friends quickly and his learning 'took off'.

Future improvements

Many children have successfully transitioned to school and the relationships between the school and the neighbouring early childhood centre are now good. However, the principal has identified some further areas for improvement.

The first change relates to better access to and use of assessment information about the child from the early childhood service. The previous poor relationship between the service and the school meant that the children's profile books have not been offered, asked for or used. The school leaders think the situation can improve to enable sharing of rich information about each child's interests and learning. Teachers can then use this to better tailor the curriculum.

Secondly, teaching in the junior class is now more collaborative, meaning that new entrant children are taught by more than one teacher. Teachers in the junior school are now discussing how this changed practice might influence the transition-to-school programme.

Similarly, many school leaders focused on particular aspects of transition they had identified for improvement. For instance, enhancing the way they built relationships, how well they shared information with parents or the structure of classes – and, in particular, whether or not to have a reception class to stage transition.

ERO found that some schools had reception classes especially to help children who arrived during the year with no early childhood education experience or limited prior learning. They provided targeted teaching in small classes to support children to transition into the new entrant classes. Some schools also had sound reasons for moving away from having a reception class. These individual schools were responding to their own contexts and findings.

The structure of the classes was reviewed with children's needs in mind. The school now has five new entrant rooms starting at the beginning of the year. In the past, two classes received all new enrolments and these children later moved into new rooms. Feedback from families indicated that children found it difficult to reconnect and teachers found that this caused delays in learning as the children established new relationships and class connections. The outcome of this review has been that children now stay in one class instead of moving to another class when numbers increase. Parents are very pleased with this organisation.

Transition and the first few weeks at school are reviewed continually to help school leaders and teachers make sure that children have the best start socially and academically.

An example of the review process is the recent decision to make it a 'formal deliberate act' that students of the same ethnic background are grouped together in classes. This resulted from feedback from the students themselves and after difficulties with some children settling.

ERO found excellent practice where new entrant teachers networked with local early childhood services to reflect on and review ways that services and schools could work together to improve transition practices and processes.

Some schools that did not review their transition practices risked being complacent about how effective these practices were. Some said they 'knew their community well' based on their special character status or the fact that they were small. They relied on that knowledge to inform transitions. They may be right and their practices could be excellent, but until they complete a formal review of effectiveness, they will not know for sure and will not be able to identify possible improvements.

ERO found no significant difference in terms of responsiveness related to the decile of the schools.[61] What made the difference was how responsive the school was. The following example showcases two very different transition processes and contrasting self-review practices in two high decile schools.

61 The Ministry rates schools based on socio-economic factors. There are ten decile groups with decile 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest socio-economic rating.

School A was a large school with over 300 students. They received children from six different early childhood services and had two transition classes.	**School B** was very large with more than 500 students. They received children from three early childhood services and had three transition classes.
Foundation	
• The school leaders regarded transition as an important time. Transition was variable, dependent on each child and their family. It could take up to a year.	• The school leaders viewed eight weeks' transition as the important time needed for a child to master skills before they moved on to formal learning.
• Parents, families and children visited the school prior to enrolment.	• Parents and children visited the school prior to enrolment.
Curriculum	
• Teachers were familiar with *Te Whāriki*.	• The principal and teachers were not familiar with *Te Whāriki*.
• Teachers used the insights gained from their visits to early childhood services to inform their curriculum planning.	• Teachers visited the ECEs and gathered information about any special needs children to set up support they required.
• Teachers made good use of an inquiry based programme[62] to provide experiences that were familiar and of interest to children.	• Teachers did not link learning to areas of interest to children in the class.
• Teachers gave feedback to children, reinforcing them as capable learners.	
• Learning was targeted for individual children and culturally responsive.	• All children experienced the same teacher-led, skills programme for eight weeks.[63] • Teachers did not cater for children who found tasks difficult or too easy.
• Children experienced a curriculum founded in *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum*.	• Children experienced a curriculum that was not founded in *Te Whāriki* or *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

62 Inquiry-based learning is centred on interests of the child. The child has an area of interest and the teacher guides learning through the exploration of that interest, extending the child's natural curiosity.

63 Children had to master the skills before progressing to *formal learning* in Year 1. Teachers kept children who did not achieve the skills required for additional time (up to 10 weeks) in the programme. Skills assessed included number concepts, letter recognition, social and motor skills.

School A continued	School B continued
Relationships • Senior leaders and new entrant teachers visited early childhood services and talked with children about their learning stories. • Services visited the school with children. • School leaders held morning teas for parents each term to build relationships.	• Senior leaders and new entrant teachers visited early childhood services and talked about the school.
• Teachers gathered information including children's strengths, interests and aspirations from parents and early childhood teachers.	• Teachers gathered basic information from parents such as gender, place in family and ethnicity.
• Teachers' information to parents included how to support their child's learning. • Teachers ran information evenings for parents with question and answer sessions.	• Teachers gave parents information about the school and expectations.
• Teachers informed parents about how well their child was transitioning.	• Teachers told parents about their children's progress in the transition programme.
Self review • Leaders used research about transition to inform their review of practice and to improve their ways of working.	• The principal was convinced the programme worked well. Success was anecdotal as school leaders had not formally reviewed it.
Outcomes • Children were engaged in their learning. • Teachers developed children's sense of being capable learners by tailoring the curriculum to their needs and interests.	• Children were very quiet and compliant. • Many who started school as capable, confident learners were not sufficiently challenged by the transition programme.
The school fits the child. **School A was a very responsive school.**	*The child fits the school.* **School B was a less responsive school.**

Every child is vulnerable at transition. Every child deserves a school that responds to them as an individual so that they can continue to engage confidently and enthusiastically in their learning.

CONCLUSION

Transition to school from an early childhood service is a critical time for children as it sets them on their learning pathway for life. Children who experienced a smooth transition gained confidence in themselves as learners able to manage change. They experienced a consistent educational experience when early childhood services and schools shared a common vision and worked closely with parents and whānau to actively support the children's learning. The importance of this is very evident for priority learners but no less critical for each and every child to succeed as a learner.

ERO found some examples of excellent practices to help children settle into schools. The examples clearly showed the importance of strong leadership, focused on ensuring that transitions were as smooth as possible for children starting school. Children who experienced smooth transitions got the best start possible to their entire school learning pathway.

The leaders in schools where children experienced smooth transitions not only laid the foundation for success but also made sure critical elements to succeed were in place. Strong two-way partnerships between the school and parents supported children in their transitions and their learning.

Most schools, even those judged to be less responsive, had high quality transitions for children with special needs. They recognised, and acted on, the importance of providing a smooth transition for these children, taking into account the individual child's culture, strengths and needs and their parents' aspirations for them. Schools should extend many of the good practices they use for children with special needs to better support all children to successfully transition to school.

ERO's findings show that some schools need to re-evaluate how they help children settle into school, in the light of best practice. Transition practices and processes are an important aspect of the school and how effective these are should be reported to the board of trustees. School leaders need to do everything they can to ensure that each and every child is provided with a smooth and consistent pathway into this next stage of early learning.

Appendix 1: Evaluation framework for early childhood services

Evaluation questions, investigative prompts and indicators[64]
Question 1
How responsive is the service's curriculum to the learning interests, strengths and capabilities of children as they approach transition to school? Include focus on children at risk of poor educational outcomes.

Investigative prompts

- What curriculum decisions are made to support these children?
- If there are any special programmes, what do these focus on?
- What do teachers do? (Teaching practices/pedagogy)
- What/who informs curriculum decisions?
- What is the influence of *Te Whāriki*?
- How does assessment/self review inform the curriculum?
- How is the curriculum designed to support children at risk of poor educational outcomes?
- How do leaders support teachers to provide a responsive curriculum for young children?

Indicators of 'very responsive'

- The curriculum responds to the learning interests, strengths and capabilities of young children, including children at risk of poor educational outcomes
- The curriculum helps connect young children's experience with people, places and things
- The leader promotes quality learning and teaching for young children
- Teachers understand how their curriculum for young children aligns to the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*
- Teachers have sufficient knowledge, including subject and general knowledge, to build on young children's existing understandings, working theories and dispositions
- Teachers have a depth of subject knowledge that enables them to respond meaningfully to young children's interests and enquiries
- Young children are supported to understand and contribute to decisions about their learning
- Teachers' practices develop young children's social competencies
- Assessment information is used to plan and guide the curriculum
- The service's curriculum focuses on enhancing dispositional learning as well as skills and ways of knowing
- Teachers question whose knowledge is valued and reflected in the service's curriculum
- There are opportunities for young children to experience unfamiliar routines, new and self directed challenges, co-operative ventures and sustained projects
- Teachers engage with young children's first language and the language of their parents/whānau to make learning more meaningful
- Self review informs curriculum design
- There are clear priorities for young children's learning that align to current theory and practice
- Parents have opportunities to meet and contribute ideas to the curriculum

APPENDIX 1

Question 2

To what extent do assessment practices and information support children's learning as they approach transition to school?

Investigative prompts

- What information is recorded about children's learning as they approach transition to school?
- What information is shared? With whom and how?
- How is assessment used to support children as they approach transition to school?
- What processes are in place for identifying where children need additional support?

Indicators of 'to a great extent'

- Assessment records and reflects young children's strong sense of pride and knowledge about their culture, language and identity
- Assessment information clearly shows young children's progress over time
- Assessment information is shared between services and schools, and services are aware of how useful this information is to support transitions for young children moving to school
- Parents and whānau are well informed about their child's learning in relation to the service's curriculum priorities
- Services are using *Te Whāriki* to make learning visible in assessment records
- Teachers involve parents/whānau in assessment in meaningful ways; co-construction of learning outcomes supports transitions to school
- Teachers reflect on young children's cultural identity when assessing learning and development (to support transition to school)
- Assessment is linked to young children's goals and next steps teachers can take to add value to and extend on young children's learning
- Assessment shows deepening and increasing complexity of young children's learning
- Assessment illustrates continuity of learning and demonstrates young children's progress in a range of contexts
- Assessment builds young children's identity as a learner

Question 3

In what ways are teachers seeking to maintain children's connections to their language, culture and identity as they approach transition to school? Include focus on children at risk of poor educational outcomes.

Investigative prompts

- How is knowledge about each individual child's language, culture and identity shared to support children as they approach transition? With whom?
- How are teachers and leaders supporting children's language culture and identity and incorporating this into the programme in a meaningful and respectful manner?
- How aware are teachers of te ao Māori perspectives across the curriculum?
- How are teachers recognising the diversity among children of Pacific heritages?
- How are teachers supporting children for whom English is an additional language?

Indicators

- Teachers are aware of, and value, young children's language, culture and identity
- Teachers use a range of teaching strategies and practices to respond to cultures, languages and identities of young children
- Young children's language, culture and identity are reflected in assessment records in meaningful ways – their cultural capital is acknowledged and celebrated
- Leaders and teachers acknowledge whakapapa as integral to the development of a sense of self, belonging and connectedness
- Leaders and teachers recognise the importance of Pacific children's culture, language and identity and provide a culturally responsive environment that reflects Pacific ethnicities
- Cultural events are celebrated in ways that maintain and build on young children's language, culture and identity
- Young children contribute to the development of a curriculum that is responsive to their culture, language and identities
- Appropriate teaching and learning resources are available and include relevant displays
- Teachers and leaders are aware of and use *Ka Hikitia*, the *Pacific Education Plan*, and *Tātaiako*
- Teachers move beyond 'Pakeha ways' to engage with whānau in ways that foster a climate of collaboration and genuine power sharing
- Leaders are involved in professional learning development relevant to the language, culture, identity of young children
- Teachers encourage parents and whānau to take leadership roles where appropriate

Question 4

To what extent does the service develop and engage in collaborative relationships that support children as they approach transition to school?

a. with parents and whānau

b. with schools that children are transitioning to

c. with external support agencies

Investigative prompts

- How does the service collaborate with parents and whānau to support children as they approach transition to school?
- How does the servicwwe build collaborative relationships with staff at schools children are transitioning to?
- What understanding do leaders and teachers have of *The New Zealand Curriculum?*
- How does the service build collaborative relationships with staff at external support agencies that children are involved with?

Indicators of 'to a great extent'	
a) with parents and whānau	• Partnerships with parents are well established and their aspirations and expectations are valued and acted on • Teachers involve parents/whānau in assessment in meaningful ways; co-construction of learning outcomes supports transitions to school • Teachers spend time talking with, and listening to, whānau and building relationships with them • Teachers value whakapapa, context and connections with whānau • Leaders are responsive to issues, concerns and questions from parents/whānau about transition to school • Teachers talk with parents/whānau where they have concerns about their child's learning and/or transition to school • Teachers/leaders provide appropriate information about transition to school to parents/whānau that support young children and their whānau • Leaders and teachers seek ways to increase parents' understanding of curriculum areas in ECE • Teachers provide opportunities for parents/whānau to contribute their perspectives to the transition process
b) with schools that children are transitioning to	• Collaborative relationships with schools are established • The service shares information with schools to support continuity of learning between centre and school • Assessment information is shared between services and schools, and services are aware of how useful this information is to support transitions for young children moving to school • Teachers and leaders in services are aware of *The New Zealand Curriculum* and its links to *Te Whāriki*
c) with external support agencies	• Collaborative relationships with external support agencies are established • Staff work closely with multidisciplinary teams which include the early intervention teacher, speech therapist, physiotherapist and occupation therapist (for children with special needs) and have plans in place to support young children as they approach transition • Leaders and teachers understand the importance of relationships in supporting young children as they approach transition

Question 5

To what extent does the service's self review identify the impact of practices and processes that support children as they approach transition to school? Focus on curriculum, assessment and collaborative relationships.

Investigative prompts

- What does the service know through its self review about its effectiveness in supporting children's transitions?
- What policies or procedures does the service have to guide transition to school?
- How do leaders promote and implement effective self review as a means to improve the quality of children's transition journeys?
- Whose perspectives are sought?
- How do services use self review information to support children's smooth transitions?
- Is there evidence of change from this process?

Indicators of 'to a great extent'

- Self review informs curriculum design
- Self review is ongoing and responsive to identified priorities for learning
- Self review is used for ongoing improvement and modification of practice, programmes, interaction and assessment
- Self review is used to modify planning to meet young children's changing interests and build on their strengths
- Leaders and teachers evaluate the impact for young children of curriculum design decisions and implementation (teaching practice)
- Leaders and teachers review and reflect on their transition practices and seek to make improvements for the benefit of young children and their whānau – identifying and removing barriers to successful transition is evident

APPENDIX 2

Appendix 2: Early childhood services in this evaluation

Data for this evaluation was gathered from 374 services reviewed in Terms 3 and 4, 2013. Table 1 shows the types of services in this sample.

Table 1: Service types

Service type[65]	Number of services in sample	Percentage of services in sample	National percentage of services as at 17/01/2014
Kindergarten	67	18	17
Playcentre	82	22	12
Education and Care Service	193	52	61
Home-based Education and Care Network	32	8	10
Total	374	100	100

This sample is not representative of national figures. Playcentres are over-represented, and education and care services are under-represented. These differences are statistically significant.[66]

65 This evaluation did not include Te Kōhanga Reo or Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu – The Correspondence School.

66 The differences between observed and expected values in Table 1 were tested using a Chi square test. The level of statistical significance for all statistical tests in this report was $p<0.05$.

APPENDIX 3

Appendix 3: Glossary of terms and programmes

Te Reo Māori	English meaning
hapū	sub-tribe, kinship group
iwi	tribe, wider kinship group
karakia	prayer, grace
kaupapa Māori	Māori way of being
pepeha	a statement that identifies the ancestral links of Māori
te ao Māori	the Māori world
te reo	the Māori language
tikanga	customary practices
Turangawaewae	a place to stand; places where we feel especially empowered and connected; our foundation, our place in the world, our home.
waiata	song(s)
whakapapa	genealogy
whānau	family
whāriki	woven mat
Samoan	**English meaning**
aiga	family
aoga	full immersion Samoan education and care service
fa'aloalo	respect
poutu	main supporting posts (pillars)
Programmes and terms used in schools	
PMP	Perception motor programme
WALTS	We are learning to . . .
Jolly phonics	An alphabet phonics programme

APPENDIX 4

Appendix 4: Evaluation framework for schools

School leaders may find these investigative prompts and indicators useful when they review and improve their transition processes.

1. Effective leadership: How does the organisational and professional support by the school leadership promote the success of transitions to school for new entrant students?	
importance placed on successful transitions	• policy, framework, expectations • focus on wellbeing and success in students' first year
organisational support for the new entrant teacher	• commitment to appointment of expert new entrant teachers • staffing allocation and other responsibilities reflect value placed on role • professional learning and development for the teacher(s) • size and formation of classes • length of time students spend in new entrants
communicate with and include new and potential new parents in ways that promote and celebrate the success of transitions	• useful information shared with parents to develop common expectations • parents and whānau are welcome and feel they contribute meaningfully

support for the new entrant students in ways that promote and celebrate the success of transitions to school	• visits by children to school, teachers to early childhood services and former students to early childhood services
	• provision of particular curriculum programmes that
	  – 'bridge' the learning experience from early childhood services to more formal school
	  – capitalise on individual's strengths, identity, language and culture
	• environment is welcoming and structured for new entrants
	• school organisation
	• messages for students and teachers

unintended consequences of school leadership decisions on the success of transitions	• the interpretation of the use of National Standards • changing previous reporting practices

2. Activation of educationally powerful relationships: How does the school develop and engage in collaborative relationships that support students as they transition to school?	
explore and understand the expectations, relationships, aspirations of others in ways that are educationally powerful	• new entrant teacher has time to get to know whānau • information from parents valued and used to foster new entrant sense of belonging • information from early childhood services used

support for parents, family and whānau	• information for parents as above and
	  – relating to *The New Zealand Curriculum* – key competencies and values and how these build from *Te Whāriki*
	  – about other school networks, extra-curricular activities

relationships deliberately activated at the teacher and leader level	• students with students • teachers with students • teachers with parents, family and whānau • teachers across sectors (with early childhood services) • leaders across sectors (e.g. early childhood-school leader clusters)

3. Effective pedagogy How is the new entrant's curriculum responsive and adaptive to the learning interests, strengths and capabilities of students as they transition to school?	
curriculum-in-action	• evidence of understanding of early childhood curriculum and attempts to 'bridge' the difference • planning in keeping with Literacy Progressions and Number framework • appropriate and prompt intervention to assure students' success as new entrants (ie do not wait till 6-year-old Reading Recovery) • the focus on key competencies to support student agency • opportunities to develop relationships and friendships • problem solving and risk taking • recognises and builds on prior knowledge, values, language, culture and identity of each student • students use first language to develop English literacy
use of formal and informal assessment practices	• information from early childhood services and home included in development of education pathway/profile/portfolios

4. Productive inquiry and knowledge building How does the school's self review identify and improve the impact of beliefs, practices and processes that support students as they transition into school	
processes and clear indicators to review effectiveness of transition	• clear expectations re supporting students' transition to school • developing productive relationships with early childhood services • developing welcoming and inclusive relationships with parents
evidence of improvement and ongoing monitoring and accountability	• parental voice • review meetings with school leaders
specific actions put in place for students for whom transition has not been easy	• identifying and responding fast enough to students who are experiencing learning difficulties • right interventions put in place as soon as possible

5. Priority learners: How is the school supporting transition for priority learners (Māori, Pacific, students with special education needs, students from low socio-economic backgrounds)?	
organisational and professional support by the school leadership	• priority learners are a clear priority for the senior leadership team • processes in place to identify priority learners • PLD about *Ka Hikitia*, *Pasifika Education Plan* and Tātaiako • leaders and teachers recognise the importance of language, culture, identity and this is translated into what happens in the classroom and throughout the school • processes to identify and support families with financial hardships
deliberately develop and engage in collaborative relationships	• strong working relationships developed with helping agencies and whānau, iwi and communities • where possible support staff transition with children with special needs

Appendix 5: Schools in the evaluation

This evaluation involved 100 schools in which ERO carried out an education review in Term 4, 2013. The types of schools, decile groupings, school localities (urban or rural) and roll sizes of the schools are shown in Tables 1 to 4 below.

The schools sampled were broadly representative of schools nationally, although the resulting sample had proportionately fewer full primary, composite, rural, small and low decile schools.

Table 1: School type

School type	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools[67]
Full (Years 1-8)	48	48	53
Contributing (Years 1-6)	49	49	40
Composite (Years 1-15)	1	1	3
Special (Years 1-15)	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100

The school types in this sample are representative of national figures.[68]

Table 2: School decile group

Decile group[69]	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Low (1-3)	24	24	29
Medium (4-7)	38	38	39
High (8-10)	38	38	31
Total	100	100	100

The decile groups of the schools in this sample are representative of national figures.

67 The national percentage of each school type is based on the total population of schools as at May 2014. For this evaluation, it includes full and contributing primary schools, composite and special schools. This applies to decile, locality and roll size in Tables 2, 3 and 4. Note the figures are rounded to whole numbers, so some totals do not appear to add up to 100 percent.

68 The differences between observed and expected values in Tables 1-4 were tested using a Chi square test. The level of statistical significance for all statistical tests in this report was $p<0.05$.

69 A school's decile indicates the extent to which a school draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the lowest proportion of these students.

Table 3: Locality

Locality[70]	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Main urban	59	59	49
Secondary urban	6	6	5
Minor urban	8	8	10
Rural	27	27	34
Total	100	100	100

The locality of schools in this sample is representative of national figures.

Table 4: Roll size

Roll size[71]	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Very small	5	5	11
Small	24	24	25
Medium	37	37	38
Large	21	21	17
Very large	13	13	6
Total	100	100	100

The roll sizes of schools in this sample are not representative of national figures.
Very small schools were under-represented, and very large schools were over-represented.
This difference was statistically significant.

70 Based on location categories used by the Ministry of Education and Statistics New Zealand as follows: Main Urban population > 30,000; Secondary Urban 10,000 to 30,000; Minor Urban 1,000 to 9,999; Rural < 1,000.

71 Roll sizes for full and contributing primary schools are: very small (between 1–30); small (between 31–100); medium (101–300); large (301–500); and very large (500+). Roll sizes for composite and special schools are: very small (1–100); small (101–400); medium (400–800); large (801–1500); very large (1501+).

Appendix 6: Ministry of Education support for transition to school

The Ministry supports transitions between early childhood education and schools through the following:

- *Early Childhood Education Strategic Plan (2002–2012) Pathways to This Future: Nga Huarahi Arataki.* This plan promotes consistency of education between birth and eight years by early childhood services sharing a common vision of success and forging close links with primary schools.
- *Special Education Policy Guidelines*[72] (2012). Aims to provide learners with special needs with a seamless education from the time their needs are identified. This principle will be obvious in practice when transition procedures enable learners to move successfully from one setting to another.

The Ministry's current *Statement of Intent* with regard to transitions has resulted in a variety of key policy documents and initiatives:

- *Continuity of Early Learning Group* – research and literature reviews about good practice in using learning progress and outcome information to develop tools and resources to improve and build on current knowledge and practice regarding transition to school.[73]
- *Transitions to school* – intensive, focused community initiatives to support at-risk families to get their children ready for and settled in their first year at school (130 families).[74]
- *Mutukaroa* – home-school learning partnership that seeks to encourage active engagement of parents and whānau in learning partnerships (50 schools).[75]
- *Ka Hikitia Accelerating Success 2013–2017* – to support successful transitions so Māori develop a strong sense of belonging, together with pride in their identity, culture and language.[76]
- *Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017* – to effectively transition and support Pacific learners into English medium schooling, and to plan for Pacific children who may have no early childhood education experience before starting school.[77]

72 www.minedu.govt.nz/.../ AboutUs/ContextOfOurWork/ SpecialEducationPolicyGuidelines. aspx

73 Available at www.lead. ece.govt.nz/~/media/ Educate/Files/Reference%20 Downloads/Lead/Files/ECAC/ June2013ContinuityEarlyLearning NZCAPresentation.pdf

74 Available at www.national.org. nz/news/news/media-releases/ detail/2013/08/26/$27-million- investment-in-education- initiatives-aimed-at-priority- children

75 Ministry of Education. (2014). *Mutukaroa.* Retrieved from nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of- support-incl.-PLD/School-initiated- supports/Mutukaroa

76 Ministry of Education. (2014). *The Māori education strategy: Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013-2017.* Retrieved from www. minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/ PolicyAndStrategy/KaHikitia.aspx

77 Ministry of Education. (2013). Pasifika Education Plan 2013- 2017. Retrieved from www. minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/ EducationPolicies/~/media/ MinEdu/Files/EducationSectors/ PasifikaEducation/ PasifikaEdPlan2013To2017V2.pdf

Appendix 7: Formal assessment tools used at school entry

Assessment tools used in the schools varied enormously. The most common usage was of the SEA or adapted variations of that test.

ERO found one school where testing did not relate in any way to the New Zealand curriculum.

SEA	School entry assessment (skills, knowledge and understanding)
RoL	Record of learning
JOST	Junior oral language screening tool
JAM	Junior assessment maths
CAP	Concepts about print
BURT	Burt word reading test
PIPS	Performance indicators in primary schools
ESAs:IS	Essential skills assessment: information skills
NumPA	Numeracy project assessment
Duncan Word Test	
6 yr NETS	
Running records Reading	
GlOSS	Global strategy stage maths testing
BSM assessment sheets	Beginning school maths sheets
IKAN	Individual knowledge assessment of number
HRS in words test	
ELLPS	English language learning progressions

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