Early Childhood Monographs:

The Quality of Education and Care in Catholic Early Childhood Services

June 2007

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About the Early Childhood Education Monograph Series

In New Zealand, many early childhood services¹ offer programmes that are aligned to particular educational philosophies, cultural identities or religions. When parents are choosing an early childhood service for their child, they may want to know about services with a special character.²

The Education Review Office (ERO) reviews all licensed early childhood services and reports publicly on the quality of education and care that each service provides. ERO has used the findings from these reports³ to write the early childhood monograph series. The purpose of the series is to provide evaluative information about groups of services that have a special character. Parents can use this information along with the ERO report titled *Early Childhood Education: A Guide for Parents, June 2006*,⁴ and ERO reports on individual services to help make decisions about which early childhood service best fits their needs and aspirations for their child.

About Catholic early childhood services

Catholic early childhood services have very different histories. In some cases, religious orders set up a service as part of their mission and, over time, the purpose of the service changed. Some long-established services were set up to meet the needs of particular parish families. More recently, ethnic chaplaincies and parishes with high Pacific populations have set up services that are based on a Pacific language and culture, in a religious context. The New Zealand Association of Catholic Childcare Organisations represents all Catholic early childhood services.

Which services does this monograph refer to?

This monograph on the quality of education and care in Catholic early childhood services is based on the findings of the current ERO reports of all 16 licensed services affiliated to the New Zealand Association of Catholic Early Childcare Organisations. The reports were completed between February 2004 and April 2006.

Catholic services made up 0.4 percent of all licensed early childhood services, and 0.4 percent of all child enrolments in licensed services.

Where were these services located?

Eight of the 16 services were located in the Auckland diocese, five in the Wellington diocese and one each in the Hamilton, Palmerston North, and Christchurch dioceses.

All services were urban, and most were linked to a parish and the associated Catholic primary school. In some cases these links were strong. Where this was the case, ERO found that parish and school leaders took key roles in the governance of the service, and that reciprocal links between the service and the school helped children to feel comfortable about starting school when they turned five.

¹ A service may be a centre, kindergarten, playcentre, köhanga reo or preschool.

² For the purpose of this report, 'special character' refers to services that are based on a particular culture, educational philosophy or religion.

³ Reports can be read on the ERO website www.ero.govt.nz and every licensed service holds a copy of its current ERO report.

⁴ This report can be found at: www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/ECEGuideJun06.

When were these services open, and who attended?

There was a wide variation in the daily opening hours and enrolment ages at Catholic early childhood services. Half the services operated sessions for older children only, while the others offered part-day or all-day education and care for children from infant to school age. One service, following its original mission, offered places for children with special needs. The smallest service was licensed to enrol up to 19 children, and the largest service could enrol up to 50.

The enrolment information for the Catholic services showed that New Zealand European/Päkehä children made up 42 percent of enrolments; Pacific children included six nationalities and made up 39 percent of enrolments; Mäori children made up 10 percent; and children from 12 other ethnicities made up 9 percent of enrolments.

How were parents involved?

There are many different ownership arrangements for early childhood services, and these have implications for how parents are involved in service management and governance roles. Most Catholic early childhood services were owned by a charitable trust or an incorporated society. These services do not operate for profit, and parents may be involved in fundraising and/or governance roles.

In early childhood education, there is growing recognition of the benefit of teachers and parents working together to identify learning goals and teaching strategies for each child.

In some Catholic services, parents were involved in planning for children's learning through sharing information, aspirations and strategies. Parents helped or led part of the programme in a small number of services, and some services sought parent feedback on aspects of policy and operations.

How frequently were services reviewed?

ERO undertakes education reviews in early childhood education services on a regular cycle. When the performance of a service gives cause for concern, ERO carries out another review, within 12 months. For Catholic early childhood education services, the proportion of supplementary reviews was slightly, but not significantly lower, than that for all early childhood services.

Overall performance of Catholic early childhood services

This section summarises ERO's findings about Catholic early childhood services. ERO's reports on individual services may be read on ERO's website www.ero.govt.nz, and are also available in the services.

- The **philosophy** of the services, in terms of their Catholic identity, was evident through regular prayer and bible stories, and celebrations throughout the church year. This philosophy was integral to the interactions between teachers, children and their parents.
- In Catholic early childhood services that provided **high quality programmes** children were engaged in self-directed learning for sustained periods, and literacy and numeracy concepts were introduced through real situations and conversations. However, in almost one third of services, ERO had concerns that aspects of literacy and numeracy were taught out of context as isolated skills.
- About half of the services had a satisfactory approach to **assessment, planning** and evaluation. These services offered child-centred programmes and staff members used individual observations to find out about children's interests and achievements. However, about half the services did not have, or were in the early stages of developing, programmes that reflected observed individual strengths and interests. In these cases, plans for individual children showed limited reference to the early childhood curriculum *Te Whäriki* (1996).⁵
- **Learning environments** in Catholic early childhood services were typically attractive, spacious and well resourced, with opportunities for children to select equipment and to help tidy up. The cultural values of the services were apparent through posters, photographs, and artefacts such as woven mats and carved tanoa.⁶
- Interactions between adults and children were usually warm and friendly. Teachers modelled courtesy and respect. Children interacted positively and enjoyed the friendship of their peers. Although encouraging, few teacher interactions were focused on extending children's strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning.
- The seven **Pacific language services** in this study provided language and cultural support for children and families in a Catholic context. Adults in four of the Samoan language services were using gagana Samoa⁷ consistently enough to foster children's regular use of this language.
- The 10 Catholic early childhood services that ERO reviewed in 2005 and 2006 met current **qualifications requirements**, and were meeting or were in a good position to meet the 2007 requirements for qualified, registered staff.
- Self review was underway in most services, but few showed systematic review of
 operations. A quarter sought parents' views when reviewing policies, operations
 or programmes.

⁵An electronic version is at: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/downloadable/dl3567 v1/whariki.pdf.

⁶ A tanoa is a Samoan carved wooden bowl.

⁷ Samoan language.

• ERO had concerns about aspects of **compliance** in nine of the 16 services. These concerns included inadequate: record keeping; security of gates, doors and fences; and evacuation procedures.

The quality of education in Catholic early childhood services

Early childhood education is a highly diverse sector that includes many different philosophies and approaches to providing education and care for young children.

All ERO education reviews in the early childhood sector focus on the quality of education. For ERO this includes the quality of:

- the programme provided for children;
- the learning environment; and
- the interactions between children and adults.

In this review, ERO based its introductory statements and findings about the philosophy, programme, learning environment and interactions on evaluation indicators produced by ERO,⁸ and signposts and explanations of the Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs) produced by the Ministry of Education.⁹

Philosophy

The philosophy of each service expresses the fundamental beliefs, values and ideals by which the service chooses to operate. Each chartered ¹⁰ service must have a written statement of philosophy. This statement provides the basis for decisions by management and should be reflected in the services' practice.

ERO considers the particular philosophy of a service and how this philosophy affects the programme for children when it carries out a review of an early childhood service.

How was the philosophy expressed in Catholic early childhood services?

- Each chartered Catholic early childhood service had developed its own statement of philosophy. There is no single philosophy or tradition of Catholic early childhood education, and the national association does not provide a philosophical direction that services are required to implement. As a result, the philosophies of Catholic services showed varied emphasis.
- The philosophies of 14 services clearly promoted Catholic or Christian values, and two services did not include religious reference in their philosophy. Each service expressed Catholic or Christian values to different degrees and in different ways. Half the services included daily prayer, Christian songs or bible stories. The Catholic character was noticeably integrated into programmes where children learned about customs and events in the church year, and was integral to the interactions between teachers, children and their parents.

⁸ http://www.ero.govt.nz/EdRevInfo/ECedrevs/ECE%20Eval%20Indicators.pdf

⁹ Ministry of Education. *Quality in Action*. Wellington: Learning Media 1998.

¹⁰ A charter agreement is between a licensed early childhood service and the Government. It constitutes an undertaking by the management of a service to provide quality education and care that meet the standards specified in the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs)* for Chartered Early Childhood Services in New Zealand (1996).

- The promotion, maintenance and enhancement of the Samoan language and culture within a Catholic community was central to the philosophy of six services, and one service served the wider Tokelauan community. Some of these services taught cultural stories along with bible stories, while others did not.
- About one third of all Catholic services had strong reference to the principles of *Te Whäriki* in their statement of philosophy, and this was apparent in the way these services operated.

An example of the expression of philosophy in a Catholic early childhood service.

The charter clearly identifies the Christian values on which the centre's philosophy is based. Staff members actively promote these values, and the centre's special character is evident throughout the daily programme. Parents appreciate the support provided for them and their children, and the centre is an integral part of the local Catholic education community.

Programme

High quality programmes in early childhood services promote and extend the learning and development of each child through focusing on their strengths and interests. Effective planning, assessment and evaluation processes help teachers to provide high quality programmes. Parents and teachers use assessment information to identify and value children's learning.

In early childhood education, literacy and numeracy concepts and understanding are developed through meaningful, real learning situations. High quality programmes promote positive outcomes for children through acknowledging and supporting tikanga Mäori and te reo Mäori, and the cultures and ethnicities of all children attending the service.

What was the quality of the programmes?

- High quality programmes in Catholic early childhood services showed:
 - extended periods of uninterrupted play;
 - well-developed individual planning for all children; and
 - early literacy and numeracy taught unobtrusively through real situations.
 Children at these services were intensely engaged in learning activities for sustained periods of time.
- The Catholic early childhood services offered a very diverse range of programmes. Some were well founded in current best practice, while other well-intentioned programmes included practices that were less effective in supporting children's learning. In some services, teachers were engaged in professional development to improve programme implementation.
- Nine of the services had established systems for formally observing children, and satisfactory assessment, planning and evaluation practices. In some services these were particularly well developed and included clear links to the goals of *Te Whäriki*. Five services were producing good quality portfolios of children's work that showed the child's learning and development, alongside the teacher's planning and analysis. However, nine services were in the very early stages of

- developing programmes based on observed strengths and interests of individual children.
- Almost half the services were effectively integrating early literacy and numeracy concepts into real situations. Some services used the less effective method of teaching letters and numbers in an isolated way, and a few of these services also had limited opportunities for children to engage in free-choice play.
- Recognition of biculturalism was evident in five of the nine services that were not primarily Pacific language services. Children understood basic M\u00e4ori language (nouns and commands) and sang waiata. One service had made a strong commitment to introduce all children to biculturalism and tikanga M\u00e4ori, and another was committed to reflecting each child's cultural identities and languages.
- Children at Catholic Pacific language services were immersed in cultural and language learning, with one service using several languages. Many of the adults in the Samoan services (aoga amata) consistently spoke in Samoan, and children in these services met the strong expectation that they reply in gagana Samoa. These children gained confidence and learned correct language structure and pronunciation. However, three of the Pacific language services were not using their language consistently enough to foster its regular use by children.

An example of good practice in a Catholic early childhood service.

Teachers have made significant changes to their planning processes as a result of intensive professional development. Clear links to Te Whäriki, the early childhood curriculum, and the service's philosophy are evident in planning and assessment.

Teachers make good quality observations of children. Through discussion of observations, teachers collaboratively develop individual programme plans for children. Programmes are evaluated and the next steps for learning are identified. This process allows teachers to identify and acknowledge children's interests and to build the learning programme around them.

Teachers have made good progress in developing children's assessment portfolios. Teachers gather a range of data including regular anecdotal observations, annotated photographs, progress reports and art works. Contributions from parents and children are encouraged. Portfolios provide parents with a clear, ongoing record of children's learning.

Learning environment

High quality learning environments are responsive to the learning interests and strengths of the children attending. In these environments, children select learning resources and make choices about what they want to do, in a culturally relevant setting that stimulates their curiosity to explore and learn. Good design for children's physical activity is particularly important where children spend much of their day at the service.

What was the quality of the learning environments?

• Catholic early childhood services were typically attractive, spacious and well resourced. There was usually easy access for children between the indoor and

- outdoor spaces, and children could choose what they wanted to play with for most of the day, and with whom.
- Children's interest in communication was stimulated. Interesting posters, photographs and objects were displayed that often demonstrated cultural values. Comfortable areas for reading and writing were features of several services. These areas encouraged children to develop early literacy awareness.
- Children's achievements were celebrated. Notice boards displayed children's art and craft. The higher quality displays had been personalised through use of photographs and captions. Some parents contributed photographs of family events. Together, these strengthened the sense of community and identity.
- Physical environments were being upgraded to provide safety and physical challenge. Some of the services with younger children had designed a safe, stimulating environment especially for infants and toddlers, and some had taken care to provide physical challenge for older children.

An example of good practice in a Catholic early childhood service.

The indoor environment is bright, colourful and stimulating. Displays are attractive and informative and placed close to related activity areas. The Christian character is portrayed through posters and icons.

Children's art works are named and have well-considered captions to celebrate their achievement and to provide information to parents about the purpose and outcomes of the activity. Photographs prompt conversation.

Well-selected resources assist in the development of mathematical skills and concepts. Photographs, artefacts, books, games, puzzles, posters and language charts support awareness of the bicultural nature of New Zealand.

Interactions

In a high quality early childhood service, adults respond to children with warmth and affection, and promptly comfort and reassure children. When working with infants and toddlers, adults respond to verbal and non-verbal communication, and respectfully explain what they are doing. Adults engage in two-way conversations with children that encourage and extend thinking and learning. Children confidently manage their interactions with others. They engage adults in conversation, and meet adult expectations for respectful, helpful and cooperative behaviour.

What was the quality of the interactions?

- Interactions in Catholic early childhood services were typically warm and friendly. Teachers modelled courtesy and respect, and responded to children with affection. Teachers positively reinforced expectations for behaviour and recognised children's growing independence. Children interacted confidently, enjoyed the friendship of their peers, and showed a strong sense of belonging.
- Worship and prayer times offered organised opportunities for contribution in some services. Children at these services enjoyed opportunities to take leadership roles. They listened and responded to cultural and religious stories, and

- participated in singing. These practices helped children learn their Catholic and cultural identities.
- Of the eight services that enrolled children under two years of age, only two demonstrated a high quality of interactions with infants and toddlers. Adults encouraged children's exploration and showed particular care and gentleness at these services.
- In some services, teachers were able to use questions to help children clarify their ideas. However, few teachers were particularly skilful in helping children engage in cooperative play and high-level thinking, such as extending or debating ideas.
- ERO had concerns about the quality of interactions in a few services. In three services, adults limited children's opportunities to develop thinking and language skills by making many of the decisions about activities for them, and by not readily engaging children in conversation.

An example of good practice in a Catholic early childhood service.

Teachers skilfully engage children in conversation. They use open-ended questions to develop children's thinking and use effective strategies to develop and extend their vocabulary. The small group size allows for many opportunities for children to interact one-to-one and to have in-depth conversations with each other and with staff. Children's communication skills are enhanced and their thinking is supported.

Children enjoy friendships with their peers and engage in positive social interactions. They interact confidently with adults and involve them in their play. Teachers consistently model courtesy and respect.

National evaluations in Catholic early childhood services

Based on its findings in early childhood services, ERO evaluates and reports on education policy and practice. ERO collects specific information about the topic for a defined timeframe. This information is reported in individual services' review reports, and often aggregated for a national evaluation report.

Between 2004 and 2006, ERO investigated in all early childhood services: qualification and registration of teachers; and services' progress with self review.

Qualifications requirements

The requirements for early childhood teacher qualifications and teacher registration were introduced by the Government to improve the quality of early childhood education. Since 2005, there must be one registered (and qualified) teacher working with children at all times in each licensed early childhood service. This number will increase to 50 percent of regulated¹¹ staff from December 2007.

Catholic services may set their own requirements for levels of staff knowledge and ability to teach in the Catholic tradition. There is no requirement for Catholic early

¹¹ Regulated staff members are those that are governed by the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1998 for early childhood centres, and the Education (Home-Based Care) Order 1992 for home-based care networks.

childhood services to have tagged teaching positions, ¹² and there is no Catholic qualification in early childhood education. Early childhood educators may study courses in religious education as part of, or in addition to, their training for an approved qualification. These courses are tailored for early childhood educators and are provided by one university and two Catholic education institutions.

Were qualifications requirements being met?

- All Catholic early childhood services reviewed in 2005 and 2006 were meeting the requirement to have a registered (and qualified) 'person responsible'.
- All but two services reviewed in 2005 and 2006 were meeting the 2007 target of 50 percent of regulated staff being registered (and qualified) teachers. The two services not meeting this requirement were well placed to meet it, as they had staff members due to complete their training before December 2007.
- Catholic early childhood services reported that the qualifications and teacher
 registration requirements have improved the quality of education and care
 provided. Services reported that training of staff members brought in new
 thinking. Some services have developed greater understanding of children's
 emergent learning and stronger acknowledgement of the cultural dimensions of
 their community. As a result, ERO found that Catholic early childhood services
 were beginning to meet the identified needs of their diverse communities.

An example of good practice in a Catholic early childhood service.

The employment of qualified staff and having staff in training is impacting positively on the quality of service provided. The preschool has an increased reputation in the community and now has a waiting list.

Parents and committee members report that improvements to the programme are visible. Parents are better informed about the programme and about their child's learning.

The management committee is identifying appropriate personnel and procedures to provide supervision, support and guidance for trained teachers as they work towards full registration. The management committee shows confidence in staff and the programme.

Self review

Self review is the process through which early childhood services evaluate the effectiveness of what they do, with the aim of improving the quality of their practice. All chartered services must review their philosophy and charter in consultation with educators, parents or guardians and, where appropriate, whänau. They must also regularly evaluate and modify policies, objectives and practices by an ongoing, recorded process of internal review.

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¹² Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration act (1975), Catholic integrated schools designate a proportion of teaching positions as positions carrying a responsibility for religious instruction (S65).

How well developed was self review?

- Most Catholic services had some form of self review. However, few were
 working systematically to review their operations against their charter agreement
 (the DOPs). Less than half had an established cycle for reviewing policies and
 procedures, and some had not developed all necessary policies. Although some
 services documented planned or spontaneous reviews, others only reviewed
 through informal discussion.
- Some services had undertaken useful reviews of aspects of the quality of education they provided. These reviews investigated learning programmes; the learning environment together with associated safety issues; and staff interactions with children.
- Four services involved parents, and one service had used consultants in their self-review processes. The services that sought the opinions of parents, children and experts were better able to understand the impact of their policies and programmes on children's learning.

An example of good practice in a Catholic early childhood service.

A strong cyclical self-review process includes the gathering of information from a range of sources including parent surveys and outside evaluators.

Analysis of the 2004 survey data was used to set strategic and annual goals for 2005, and information gathered in 2005 informs the strategic plan.

The teaching team has used a range of appropriate self-review processes to review the philosophy and practices against the DOPs, review programme planning, and to identify possible next steps. Teachers are using information gained from training to develop an assessment, planning and evaluation framework that better reflects their philosophy and intent. They have reviewed service menus and have begun a quality improvement process in healthy eating.

Compliance with legal requirements in Catholic early childhood services

All licensed early childhood services must comply with legal requirements. These requirements are to ensure that early childhood services meet minimum standards of education and care, and support the provision of high quality education and care.

As part of an education review, ERO asks the management of a service to complete a Centre Management Assurance Statement to attest to the extent to which the service is meeting its legal and regulatory obligations. Where areas of non-compliance are identified by an early childhood service, its management is asked to advise ERO what action it is taking to comply.

During each education review, ERO evaluates the service's compliance with a specific selection of legislative obligations that have a potentially high impact on outcomes for children's: emotional safety; physical safety; staff qualifications and

organisation; and evacuation procedures and practices for fire and earthquake. If concerns arise, ERO may evaluate a wider range of requirements.¹³

What was the level of compliance?

In seven of the 16 Catholic services, ERO had no concerns about meeting legal and regulatory requirements.

An example of good practice in a Catholic early childhood service.

This service has a long history of discretionary or supplementary reviews, with concerns about non-compliance. The 2004 report noted that the management committee had worked closely with an external professional adviser to address areas of concern identified in the 2002 report, and had improved its financial controls.

The 2006 report noted that the service had strengthened and reinforced the sound practices that were in early development in 2004. The committee had established a strong culture of self review, and had built up a strong operational framework of policies and procedural statements to guide the work of the service. The loan repayments were on track. An administrator had been appointed, and this allowed the supervisor to take a more prominent role in guiding staff. ERO did not identify any areas of major concern in compliance with regulations.

What concerns were identified?

Nine of the 16 Catholic services were not satisfactorily meeting requirements. The key concerns included inadequate:

- record keeping of children's' sleeping, accidents, attendance and administration of medicine;
- gates, doors and fences that presented risks to the physical safety of children; and
- fire and earthquake trial evacuation procedures.

Three services were not implementing an effective hazard management system.

In addition, six services were not adequately implementing all the requirements of their charter (the DOPs). The key concerns were about: planning, evaluating and improving curriculum programmes; and the effectiveness of personnel, employment and financial policies.

Improvements in Catholic early childhood services

Improvements over time in the quality of education and care provided by a service give a useful perspective on the vitality of the service.

What improvements have been made?

ERO has published one previous review: *Catholic Early Childhood Services in New Zealand, February 2004*. The changes between the 2004 report and this report include a 25 percent increase in the number of services and the proportion of services that included daily prayer or worship.

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¹³ For further information, see: http://www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/Handbooks.

Individual ERO review reports of the Catholic early childhood services highlighted improvements in the following areas:

- assessment and planning processes for individual children;
- development of portfolios that communicate children's achievements;
- management structures, operational frameworks and financial controls;
- outdoor learning environments, and in two cases plans to upgrade these areas;
- interactions with parents and children, including greater use of reciprocal interaction and home languages;
- professional knowledge through higher numbers of qualified teachers and effective external consultancy; and
- self-review processes, including in some cases, the development of a strong culture of self review.

Conclusion

This monograph gives parents an overview of Catholic early childhood services and includes some examples of good practice. It shows that there was a wide variation in the type and quality of education provided, with some services providing high quality programmes.

All services met requirements for staff qualifications. Services had begun to use self review to improve the operation of the service and the quality of their programmes, and the benefit of this, to children's learning, was noted in some services. ERO identified concerns about meeting requirements in nine of the 16 services.

Parents can use this report, along with other ERO reports to help make decisions about which early childhood services meet their aspirations.

Further information

Umbrella organisation

Membership of the New Zealand Association of Catholic Early Childcare Organisations is open to licensed early childhood services and licence-exempt playgroups. There are no formal guidelines concerning the structures, legal identity and Catholicity of Catholic early childhood services. These are under development. The association represents Catholic early childhood services at a national level and maintains a communication network among its members.

All 16 services included in the study for this monograph were affiliated to the New Zealand Association of Catholic Early Childcare Organisations.

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Education Review Office

ERO reports

The following ERO evaluation reports, related to Catholic early childhood services are available on its web site: www.ero.govt.nz.

- Early Childhood Education: A guide for parents, June 2006.
- Catholic Early Childhood Services in New Zealand, February 2004.
- Catering for Diversity in Early Childhood Services, June 2004.

ERO has reviewed all licensed Catholic early childhood services that have been operating for more than 12 months. The report of each review is available on the ERO website: www.ero.govt.nz.

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