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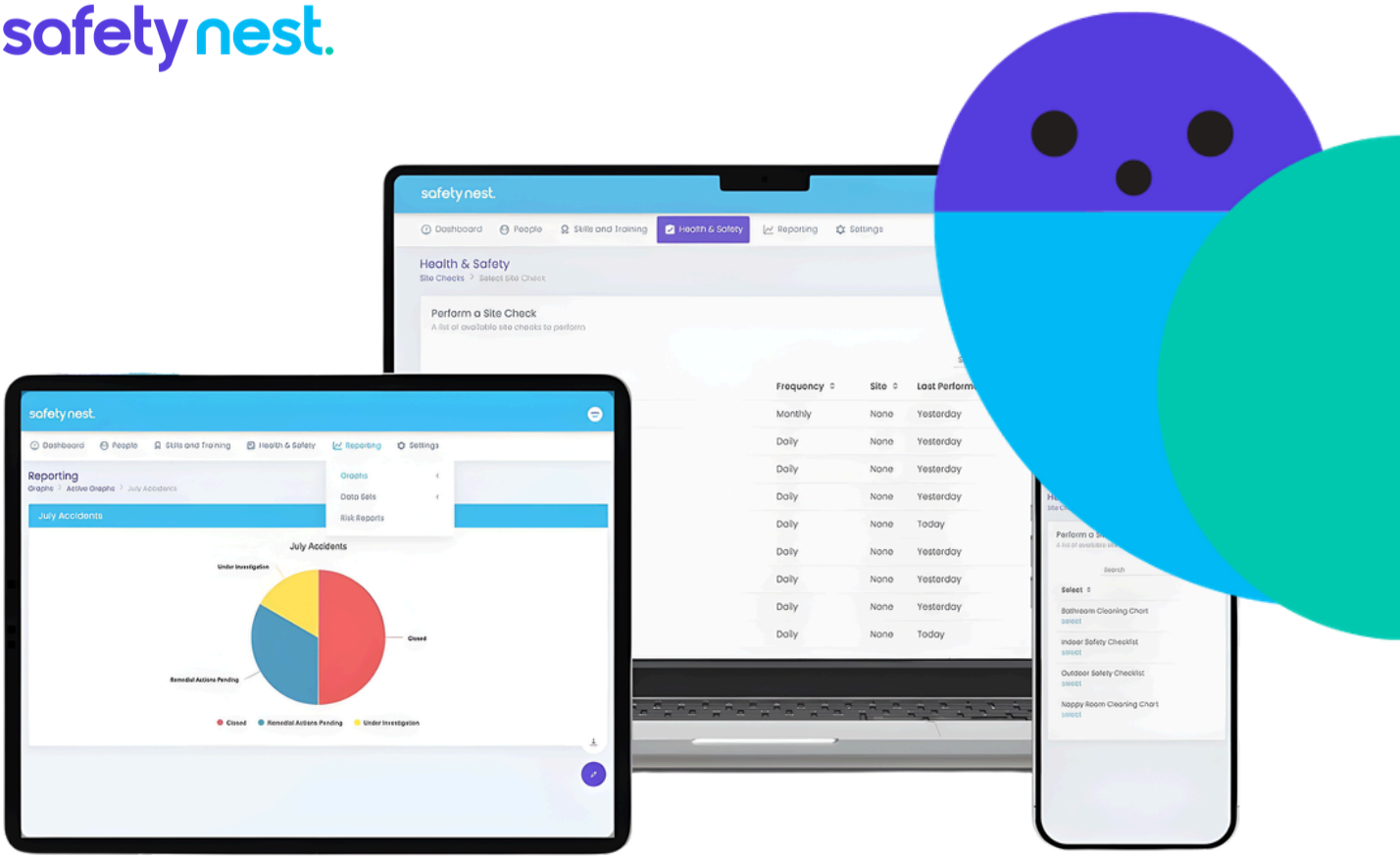

Preparing for the New ERO Approach

What ECE services need to know and how to prepare.

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A Practical Guide for Early Learning Services.

There has been an important change in the way early childhood education services are regulated in Aotearoa New Zealand.

From **1 September 2026, the Education Review Office (ERO) has taken on responsibility for regulating early childhood education services**, including licensing, certification, monitoring, compliance and enforcement. ERO will also continue its role in reviewing and evaluating the quality of education and care provided by services.

For services, this means that **compliance and quality are increasingly being considered together.**

This doesn't mean you need to suddenly create a mountain of new paperwork.

Instead, it is a good opportunity to make sure that your existing systems are working well, your team understands what is expected, and you can easily demonstrate how you identify, manage and follow up on risks, incidents, hazards and areas for improvement.

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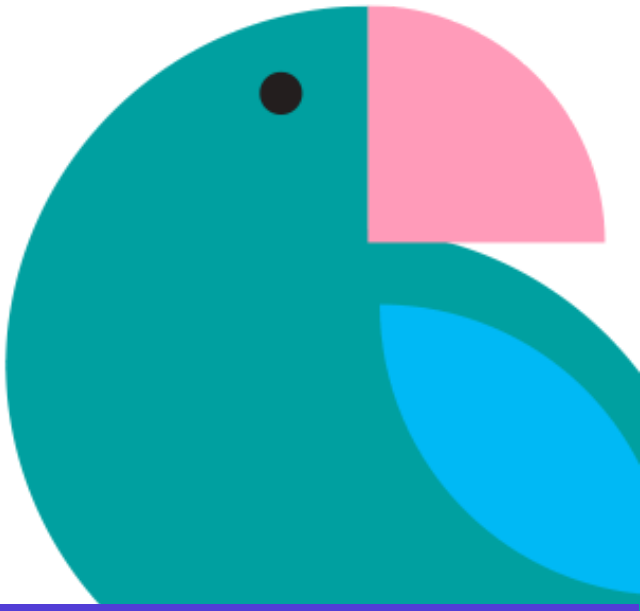
What is Changing?



Previously, the Ministry of Education was responsible for the regulatory functions associated with ECE, while ERO focused primarily on evaluation and review.

ERO's new regulatory role brings these functions together.

ERO will now be responsible for:

- Licensing and certification
- Monitoring compliance
- Responding to concerns and incidents within its regulatory role
- Compliance and enforcement
- Evaluation and review of education and care
- Supporting services to improve quality and outcomes

ERO describes the new approach as bringing **quality and compliance together into one integrated review process.**

The intention is to provide a more complete picture of how a service is supporting children's:

- Learning
- Wellbeing
- Health and safety
- Inclusion
- Belonging

It also means ERO will be looking at how the systems and practices within a service support these outcomes.

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What does this mean for Your Service?

The key thing to remember is:

Your everyday practice matters - but so does the evidence that demonstrates it.

A service may have excellent processes, but if staff don't understand them or records don't demonstrate that they are being followed, it can be difficult to show this during a review.

Likewise, having beautifully documented policies isn't enough if they don't reflect what actually happens in the centre.

The strongest position is when:

Policy → Practice → Evidence → Review → Improvement

all connect.

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Your ERO preparation checklist

Use the following checklist as a practical health check for your service.

1. Health & Safety

Make sure you can demonstrate that health and safety risks are actively identified, managed and reviewed.

- [ ] Hazards are identified and recorded
- [ ] Risk assessments are completed where appropriate
- [ ] Significant risks have clear controls in place
- [ ] Staff understand the controls that apply to their environment
- [ ] Hazards are followed up and closed when resolved
- [ ] Regular hazard checks are being completed
- [ ] Playground and equipment checks are documented
- [ ] Cleaning and hygiene processes are being followed
- [ ] Emergency procedures are current
- [ ] Emergency drills are completed and recorded
- [ ] Emergency equipment is checked
- [ ] Staff know what to do in an emergency

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2. Incidents, injuries and near misses

ERO's focus on children's health and safety means it is important that your incident management process demonstrates more than simply recording what happened.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Are injuries recorded appropriately?
- [ ] Are incidents recorded and followed up?
- [ ] Are near misses being identified?
- [ ] Are patterns or recurring issues being identified?
- [ ] Are actions taken following an incident recorded?
- [ ] Are serious or significant incidents escalated appropriately?
- [ ] Are parents/whānau notified where required?
- [ ] Are staff aware of their responsibilities when an incident occurs?
- [ ] Do incident records demonstrate that the service learns from what has happened?

A useful question to ask:

"If ERO selected one incident at random, could we demonstrate what happened, what we did about it, whether the risk was addressed, and whether anything changed as a result?"

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3. Medicines, injuries and illness

Check that your records demonstrate both compliance and good practice.

- [ ] Medicine records are complete
- [ ] Required authorisations/signatures are present
- [ ] Medicine administration is recorded correctly
- [ ] Medication is stored appropriately
- [ ] Expired medication is identified and removed
- [ ] Injury records are complete
- [ ] Illness records are maintained
- [ ] Parents/whānau are notified where required
- [ ] Staff know the procedures for managing illness and injury

4. Staff and supervision

Make sure your records demonstrate that staffing and supervision requirements are being actively managed.

- [ ] Ratios are being monitored
- [ ] Staff qualifications and certifications are current
- [ ] Required safety checks are current
- [ ] Staff know their roles and responsibilities
- [ ] Staff understand key health and safety procedures

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- [ ] New staff receive appropriate induction
- [ ] Relief/casual staff receive relevant information
- [ ] Staff training is recorded
- [ ] First aid requirements are being met
- [ ] Staff know where to find important policies and procedures

5. Policies and procedures

Don't just ask: **"Do we have the policy?"**
Ask: **"Can we demonstrate that the policy is being followed?"**

Review your key policies and check:

- [ ] They are current
- [ ] They reflect current regulatory requirements
- [ ] Staff know where to find them
- [ ] Staff understand the procedures relevant to their role
- [ ] The procedures reflect what actually happens in your service
- [ ] Reviews and updates are recorded
- [ ] Staff are informed when significant changes are made

6. Risk management

Your risk management system should show an ongoing process rather than a collection of old documents.

Check that you can demonstrate:

- [ ] Risks are identified

- [ ] Risks are assessed
- [ ] Controls are put in place
- [ ] Responsible people are identified where appropriate
- [ ] Actions are followed up
- [ ] Risks are reviewed when circumstances change
- [ ] Previous incidents or near misses can result in changes to controls
- [ ] Higher-risk activities have appropriate planning and controls

7. Excursions and outings

For excursions and other activities outside the normal centre environment:

- [ ] Risks have been identified
- [ ] Appropriate controls are documented
- [ ] Supervision requirements are clear
- [ ] Staff responsibilities are clear
- [ ] Emergency arrangements are considered
- [ ] Parent/whānau permissions are managed appropriately
- [ ] Any significant changes to the activity are considered
- [ ] Staff have access to the relevant information before leaving the centre

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8. Records and evidence

One of the easiest ways to prepare is to ask:

“If we were asked to prove this tomorrow, could we?”

Consider whether you can quickly locate evidence for:

- [ ] Hazard checks
- [ ] Risk assessments
- [ ] Incidents
- [ ] Injuries
- [ ] Medicines
- [ ] Illnesses
- [ ] Excursions
- [ ] Equipment checks
- [ ] Maintenance issues
- [ ] Emergency drills
- [ ] Staff training
- [ ] Staff meetings
- [ ] Follow-up actions
- [ ] Internal reviews/evaluations
- [ ] Changes made following identified issues

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9. Internal evaluation and continuous improvement

ERO's approach is not simply about finding things that are wrong.

ERO's existing quality framework places strong emphasis on evaluation and improvement, and its indicators are intended to help services identify both strengths and areas for improvement.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] What are our current priorities for improvement?
- [ ] How did we identify these priorities?
- [ ] What evidence did we use?
- [ ] What actions have we taken?
- [ ] Who is responsible?
- [ ] What has changed?
- [ ] How do we know whether the change has made a difference?
- [ ] Can our team explain our current improvement prioritie

A simple record showing: issue → action → outcome → next step, can be extremely valuable.

10. Don't forget the "why"

Good compliance isn't about having a perfect filing cabinet.

ERO's new approach is intended to provide a broader picture of how a service supports children's learning, wellbeing and safety.

So, when reviewing your systems, ask:

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Does this process help keep children safe?

Does our team understand it?

Are we actually doing what our policy says?

Can we demonstrate that we are doing it?

Do we act when something isn't working?

Do we learn from incidents, risks and feedback?

If the answer to these questions is yes, you are in a much stronger position.

What might an ERO review look like?

ERO has indicated that its new approach for standalone English-medium and Pacific- medium centre-based services will bring compliance and quality together.

ERO has said reviews will consider areas including:
- Children's health and safety
- Teaching and learning
- Leadership and management
- Staffing, ratios and service requirements
- Premises and facilities
- Learning, engagement and belonging
- Inclusion
- Relationships with families and whānau

Reviews will also result in a published report outlining areas such as regulatory compliance, strengths, quality of education and care, areas for improvement and next steps.

For services being notified of an ERO visit, ERO's current process includes providing information about the review and requesting specific documentation before the visit. ERO also currently asks services to complete an assurance statement/self-audit and provide other information to help prepare for the review.

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Your "ERO ready" Test

Before your next review, gather your leadership team and ask them these five questions:

1. Can we demonstrate that we know our biggest health and safety risks?

2. Can we show what we do to manage those risks?

3. Can we demonstrate that our staff are actually following our processes?

4. Can we show what happens when something goes wrong?

5. Can we demonstrate that we learn from what happens and make improvements?

If your team can answer these questions confidently - and quickly find the evidence to support their answers - you're heading in the right direction.

A Final Tip

Don't wait until you receive an ERO notification to start preparing. The best preparation is keeping your systems review-ready throughout the year.

Rather than undertaking a huge annual "ERO tidy-up", make compliance part of your normal operating rhythm.

Regularly review: **What happened? What did we do? What did we learn? What changed? Can we prove it?**

That is much more powerful than simply having a large collection of completed forms.

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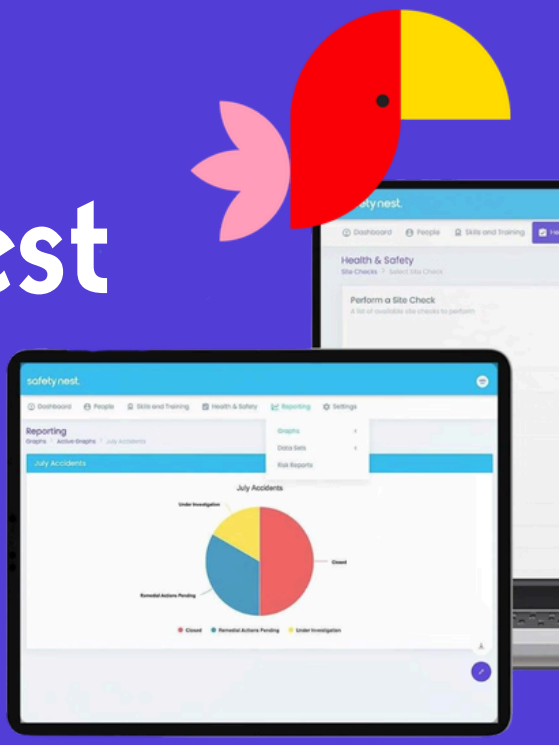
How SafetyNest can help...



SafetyNest is designed to help services keep their health and safety processes, records and follow-up actions together in one place.

From hazards and risk management through to incidents, injuries, illnesses, medicines and excursions, having your records organised and accessible can make it much easier to demonstrate what is happening in your service.

The goal isn't to create more paperwork.

It's to make the work you're already doing easier to manage, track and demonstrate.

Keep this guide handy.

We recommend using this checklist as a regular health check rather than only reviewing itwhen an ERO visit is announced.

Good compliance isn't something you prepare for once. It's something you can demonstrate every day.

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