

# Briefing report

## Education Review Office (ERO): COVID -19 update

Date	20 March 2020
Security Level	N/A
ERO Priority	Medium
ERO Reference	M20-7
Date requested	ERO initiated
Date due	ERO initiated
Proactive release	Recommended

Addressee	Action sought	Deadline
<b>Minister of Education</b>	<p>It is recommended that you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>note</b> that ERO is taking a cautious approach to its work in individual schools and early learning services because of COVID-19</li> <li>b) <b>agree</b> to the flexible approach to early learning and school reviews outlined in this briefing</li> <li>c) <b>note</b> that these events will diminish ERO's ability to meet its agreed outputs</li> <li>d) <b>note</b> that this briefing is recommended for proactive release</li> </ul>	



### Attachments:

**Education Review Office (ERO):  
COVID -19 update**



### Comments:

Minister's Office to complete	
Noted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approved	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referred to:	
Date signed by Minister:	



Our Ref: M20-7

20 March 2020

**Hon Chris Hipkins**  
**Minister of Education**

### **COVID -19 update**

#### **Purpose**

1. To brief you on actions ERO is undertaking in relation to its schools and early learning service reviews in response to COVID-19.

#### **ERO response to COVID-19**

2. As a consequence of the rapidly changing COVID-19 landscape, ERO is taking a cautious approach to its work in individual schools and early learning services. This acknowledges the current pressure that schools are under in planning their pandemic response, reduced availability of flight travel in New Zealand and as a precaution to stem the transmission of COVID-19. The consequence of these changes will result in reduced outputs by ERO.
3. An ERO review is a significant event in the life and functioning of a school or early learning service in the week that we are there. We recognise there is substantial pressure on schools and their leadership at present to prepare their pandemic response and for the potential of school closure. This includes working with their parent and student communities, and with staff, to maintain confidence in their health and safety and to plan for the delivery of education via remote/distance channels. We do not want to see an ERO Review as unnecessarily adding to this existing pressure and have already agreed to defer reviews in some institutions who have requested this.
4. In some cases, it is also proving impractical to undertake all aspects of a review. For example, some early learning services visited this week have had few of their enrolled children present. The consequence of this has been that it is difficult to observe their programmes and practice.
5. As a consequence, ERO will discuss with individual schools and services their capacity to host and accommodate an ERO review at this time, with a view to delaying the review, staging and sequencing elements of the reviews or limiting the focus of the review.
6. In any one week ERO would usually be working in approximately 17 schools and 32 early learning centres. These reviews take us to every populated community in the country and involve ERO staff in substantial travel, with teams of reviewers away from home for 4 out of 5 days in a week. We have had some concerns expressed to us in the past week about review officers being a possible source of COVID-19 transmission, particularly when we are working in small isolated communities.

## Minimising exposure and Transmission

7. We are looking to minimise the risk of exposure of ERO staff to COVID-19 or of our staff being vectors in its transmission in schools and early learning services. To do this we are ceasing all non-urgent air travel, and will have staff work from their home base. The practicalities of achieving this require us to delay 'out of town' scheduled reviews, and to look at how we might undertake elements of a review remotely (e.g. document and data analysis, interviews with a Board Chair or leadership team by phone/skype etc.). We are looking to rapidly develop an approach and tools that are responsive to these changed circumstances and place a strong emphasis on school's own self-evaluation.
8. We are also managing issues with staff whose health may be compromised.

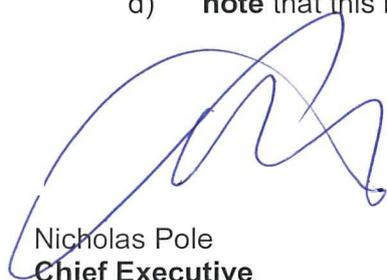
## Assuring child safety and wellbeing in Early Learning Services remains a priority

9. At the core of our work in early childhood services is assuring the health and safety of children. This is particularly the case in respect of new services and those that have previously been found to have concerns. In any reconfiguration of our schedule we will continue to prioritise this group of services.

## Recommendations

10. It is recommended that you:

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| a) <b>note</b> that ERO is taking a cautious approach to its work in individual schools and early learning services because of COVID-19 | <b>noted</b> |
| b) <b>agree</b> to the flexible approach to early learning and school reviews outlined in this briefing                                 | <b>agree</b> |
| c) <b>note</b> that these events will diminish ERO's ability to meet its agreed outputs   | <b>noted</b> |
| d) <b>note</b> that this briefing is recommended for proactive release  | <b>noted</b> |



Nicholas Pole  
**Chief Executive**

NOTED/APPROVED

Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Education**

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