

National Report Summary

ERO publishes evaluation reports on education issues of national importance. This handout is a summary of a recent national report - it captures the key points and highlights findings which you may find useful. The full report is available on our website - www.ero.govt.nz

Stories of Resilience and Innovation in Schools and Early Childhood Services Canterbury earthquakes: 2010-2012 (June 2013)

Between 2010 and 2012, the Canterbury earthquakes had a significant impact on schools and early childhood services in the region.

This Education Review Office (ERO) report gives an insight into what principals, managers and staff did at the time, and what they changed later as a result of their experiences during and after the earthquakes.

These stories are of courage, resilience and professionalism. They also contain practical information that other schools and services will find useful.

The stories tell how:

- the emergency procedures of schools and services operated in practice and were adapted in response to the situation
- staff had supported children's ongoing wellbeing and learning
- managers had supported staff and families.

ERO gathered the stories as part of regular reviews of schools and early childhood services from January to August 2012. Information was also gathered from discussions with school and early childhood associations, principals' associations, and the wider education sector.

Leaders and teachers have shared their stories so that others can consider how well prepared they are and take steps to review and improve their emergency planning.

ERO identified four key themes through the schools' and services' experiences:

- Keeping children safe
- Supporting children's learning
- Supporting staff and families
- Managing ongoing anxiety.

The report discusses each theme, highlights what worked, and looks at what schools and services would do differently in the future.

The day the quake struck

A principal describes the situation at her school immediately after the February 2011 earthquake. The school was situated at the foot of the Port Hills:

It was lunchtime when the earthquake struck. The children were all outside playing. The shaking was fast and intense. A rock fall on the cliffs behind our school happened immediately.

The children were covered in a cloud of brown soil and dust. The junior children near the back of the school struggled to see where they were going. This added to the panic. Duty teachers and many other adults rushed to the junior area to help the children get to the front of the school.

From my office and then the admin area I rang the bell. I could see children running across the front field to the fence. Others had run out the gates and across the main road. It was a natural flight instinct.

We usually assemble on the west side field above the car park but not that day. The number of children who had gathered in the front field by the fence made it clear very quickly where we were going to assemble.

Disaster preparedness – improving your systems and procedures

Examples of improvements schools and services made after the 2011 earthquake

- Developed better systems for accessing information, such as attendance registers and parents' contact details, for when they can't access the office, computer system and files, and have lost power.
- Improved processes for communicating with parents using texting, Facebook, the school website and Twitter.
- Made changes to emergency procedures, including more flexible evacuation points they could use if buildings or land were unsafe.
- Encouraged each family and staff member to have a plan for who will pick up children following a major emergency.

Questions for principals, boards, managers and associations to consider

- Do you have good communication systems?
- Does your association have good communications channels they can use with other members of the education community?
- Have you established the necessary emergency checks?
- Are your risk management procedures robust, regularly reviewed and understood?

Important advice for you and your staff to consider

- Keep emergency procedures short and simple so they are easy to remember.
- Think about storing your emergency supplies in a backpack somewhere near the emergency exit.
- Make sure everyone is aware of who is in charge all the time, even when the head teacher or principal is away.
- Have regular earthquake and evacuation drills.
- Check to see if your environment is safe and gives children somewhere to be safe near windows and potential hazards.
- Make sure your communications records are up-to-date.
- Have an emergency cell phone handy.

As well as looking at physical safety, the report has examples of how:

- schools and services introduced new practices to help keep children safe and calm in their learning, while still managing significant issues with property and resources
- leaders became role models for others, and schools became vital hubs for the wider local community with resources delivered to schools and distributed from there
- teachers found that getting children and young people back into learning helped to normalise the situation for children and their families (e.g. making learning more 'portable' was successful)
- schools and services adapted their curriculum and added new programmes in response to the emotional stress experience by children
- teachers managed the ongoing anxiety of children and supported them, enlisting outside help when needed.

FIND OUT MORE

For more ideas and information, you can read the full report online at www.ero.govt.nz/national-reports

Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa
The Child – the Heart of the Matter