



Starting an early childhood service

Checklist for choosing your premises

About this checklist

This checklist is designed to help you consider a range of issues when choosing a location for your new premises, whether you're looking for a site and building a new service or renovating an existing building. It looks at the things to consider for outdoor and indoor spaces and how spaces can work together.

Location and outdoor space

☐ **Wind, sun and shade**

Consider wind direction and wind-chill factor in the proposed outdoor area.

- Will sun get into the building and onto the section?
- Will there be some shaded areas? What trees are there?

[Sunsmart Schools – SunSmart](#)

☐ **Road access**

- Is there potential for safe parking, safe access and access for disabled people?
- Are there suitable safe places outside the building that can be used as assembly areas for staff and children during an emergency evacuation? Care should be taken that the location and nature of the assembly areas keep children safe from harm.

☐ **Site elevation**

Is the site relatively level, to ensure direct access from indoor to outdoor play areas and usable outdoor space?

☐ **District Plan**

Look at your council's District Plan to see what your proposed site and land around you can be used for.

[Council websites and maps - LGNZ](#)

☐ **Resource Management Act**

Some resource consent rules can limit outdoor play for children. If these limits are too strict, the Ministry of Education might say the space doesn't meet licensing requirements.

Check with your local council to ensure you understand all Resource Management Act 1991 requirements before purchasing a section or building.

[Council websites and maps - LGNZ](#)

☐ **Land health and safety issues**

Ask the local city or district council for a land information memorandum (LIM).

Check the site for any potential hazards – for example, leachate, long-life spray, chemical storage or methane gas build up in landfills.

Contact your local National Public Health Service for advice on health issues.

Outdoor space

Check that the existing outdoor space or building plans meet the minimum outdoor space requirements of the licencing criteria. Some of the things you will need to think about are:

- good drainage in all weather
- sufficient area of safety surface
- large open areas
- a variety of surfaces, including grass and hard surfaces
- easy visibility
- smooth indoor-outdoor flow
- at least 5 square metres of activity space per child
- the ability to provide a range of educational activities
- storage for outdoor play equipment
- fences or structures of a height and design to prevent children from leaving
- self-latching mechanisms on gates that are unreachable by children
- access for any utility vehicles such as tailors if you need to refill bark or sand areas.

☐ **Outdoor noise levels**

Excessive noise levels in early childhood centres have a direct impact on the learning of young children, as well as on the wellbeing of teachers.

Noise in the outdoor space can be reduced by:

- good site selection
- location and design of playgrounds on site
- acoustic fencing and plantings.

The World Health Organization (1999) has recommended maximum noise exposures in early childhood education and care centre environments.

Environment	Critical health effect(s)	L _{Aeq} [dB(A)]	Timeframe (hours)	L _{Amax} , fast [dB]
Outdoor play areas	Annoyance (external source)	55	During play	-

LAeq [dB(A)] – level for ‘A-frequency weighted’ sound averaged over a time period.
LAmax, fast [dB] – maximum sound level for ‘A-frequency weighted’ fast sound for a single sound event.

Buildings and indoor space

□ **Building health and safety issues**

Check the building for hazards such as lead-based paint and asbestos.

Consider:

- asking the vender about any hazards
- commissioning a building report.

Contact your local National Public Health service for advice on health issues.

□ **Areas that work well together**

To ensure areas work well together consider:

- keep children's sleep areas separate from the main play spaces, which can be noisy. Sleep areas should not be located in places that become excessively hot or cold
- locate offices near the entrance so staff can easily monitor visitors arriving and leaving
- position the kitchen in a central location to support efficient service operation
- use double doors that open directly to outdoor areas to promote good indoor-outdoor flow
- locate infant and toddler spaces close to sleep areas, nappy changing facilities and direct outdoor access
- provide infant and toddler areas close to a kitchen or kitchenette for preparing and warming bottles and food
- position main play areas directly alongside outdoor play spaces
- include covered areas, such as verandas, between indoor and outdoor spaces to support play and learning in all weather
- provide shelter from prevailing winds
- include locker and storage areas for children's bags and personal belongings
- provide storage space for prams and car seats
- create a welcoming arrival area for children, parents and whānau
- provide a separate dining area where possible.

If you're renovating, check with your architect to find out which walls are load bearing. Consider removing walls with no purpose.

There may be costs in the setting up stage. However, a well-designed environment, which assists with good supervision, will allow teachers to work more effectively with children in the years to come.

Criteria and licensing may require extra staffing in hard-to-supervise buildings or premises. This may result in extra cost in the long term.

□ **Indoor space**

Check the ability of the existing building or building plans to meet the minimum requirements for licensing. Some of the things you will need to think about are:

- a space for undisturbed rest or sleep
- a space for staff planning, meetings with parents and whānau, and staff breaks (these functions may share the same space)
- at least one toilet for every 15 people over the age of two attending the service
- handwashing and drying facilities, including at least one warm water tap for every 15 people over the age of two attending the service
- adult toilet and handwashing facilities (these may also be used as accessible facilities)
- body washing facilities suitable for the ages of the children attending the service, with visibility from another area of the centre
- nappy changing facilities that are suitable for the ages of the children attending the service and visible from another area of the centre
- accessible facilities for people with disabilities, including appropriate slopes, door widths and passageways
- kitchen facilities and spaces for eating
- clear visibility of children when they are using outdoor play areas
- at least 2.5 square metres of outdoor play space per child that can be easily supervised
- a variety of surface types to support a range of learning and play experiences
- sufficient storage for equipment, resources and materials
- facilities for preparing and cleaning up art and creative activities
- lighting appropriate to the purpose and use of each space
- good ventilation, either natural or mechanical
- the ability to maintain a comfortable indoor temperature
- acoustic design features and materials that help reduce noise levels

□ **Indoor noise levels**

The World Health Organization (1999) has recommended maximum noise exposures in early childhood education and care centre environments:

Environment	Critical health effect(s)	L _{Aeq} [dB(A)]	Timeframe (hours)	L _{Amax} , fast [dB]
Pre-school indoor areas	Speech intelligibility, disturbance of information extraction, message communication	35	During class	-

Environment	Critical health effect(s)	L _{Aeq} [dB(A)]	Timeframe (hours)	L _{Amax} , fast [dB]
Pre-school sleep rooms	Sleep disturbance	30	Sleeping time	45

L_{Aeq} [dB] –level for ‘A-frequency weighted’ sound averaged over a time period.
L_{Amax}, fast [dB] – maximum sound level for ‘A-frequency weighted’ fast sound for a single sound event.

☐ **Premises above the ground floor**

Having an early childhood service in premises above the ground floor can create additional challenges in meeting regulatory requirements and licensing criteria.

If a licence is issued, restrictions may apply to the ages or number of children who can attend. Additional conditions may also be imposed, such as requiring staffing levels above the prescribed adult-to-child ratios to support safe evacuation procedures. You should consider these additional operating costs when making decisions about your service.

In an emergency, evacuating children from premises above the ground floor may be more complex. Having an approved building evacuation scheme alone may not be enough to demonstrate that the service meets licensing criteria.

There are additional health and safety considerations relating to the physical and psychological wellbeing of children that must be fully addressed in all circumstances, including during an emergency evacuation. Your application and evacuation plan will need to demonstrate how these additional health and safety risks will be managed and mitigated.