

Deaf Education ECE Trust
Minutes of meeting held 25 February 2026



Present: Krista Clifford, Susan Swolfs, Tania Drain,
Chelcie Dietrich.

Apologies: Emma Downie

Interpreters: Julia Freeman, Holly Rikiranga

Secretary: Vanessa Burrows

Welcome and Karakia

(A copy of these minutes to be given to Board Chair for signature after the meeting)

Previous Minutes

Minutes of 29th October were distributed prior to the meeting and confirmed to be a true and accurate record.

Actions from Previous Minutes

Translate Policies to NZSL (short version)

- Work in progress.

Chairperson Report to be shared with wider parent community and staff via newsletter

- Susan to send out with LSM approval.

Correspondence

EQI Application – Review Outcome

- An EQI review application was submitted and rating moved from 3 to 5.
- Services rated 1–4 receive additional funding for low socio-economic communities.
- While the funding difference is not extremely large, it is still significant for us.
- The rating is based on census data, and it appears the Auckland areas our children come from have become more affluent.
- We can apply for another review in October.

Charities Commission – Annual Filing

- The annual report (required to maintain charity status) was completed, filed, and accepted.
- Since the merger, we have faced challenges determining what exactly must be reported, as Early Years technically sits under the broader KTR organisation.
- Historically, we have submitted the entire KTR Annual Report, as it is difficult to separate Early Years information due to funding structures.
- This approach carries some risk regarding reporting accuracy, but the Charities Commission has accepted the full report and audit.
- Improve clarity going forward.
- Early Years does not receive charitable donations, though funding applications are possible.
- The preschool operates under MoE funding, which is insufficient on its own.
- Because the preschool is a licensed service, the Early Years Trust Board must exist to maintain charitable status.
- If the charitable status were ever lost:
 - The preschool could operate unlicensed, but
 - Funding would be significantly affected, and long-term sustainability would be at risk.
- Board would be notified if direction changes.

Head of Centre reports

Preschool Auckland Report – taken as read

Attendance for Term 4 was lower than average, with a notable number of children attending below 50%, and 46% attending under 70% of the time.

Reasons for low attendance were discussed.

Attendance impacts funding, and current rates remain low overall. While we cannot force attendance, increasing enrolment numbers improves funding.

IP Process/Attendance Exemptions (EC13)

- There are options for children with high needs to be exempted from attendance rules via an IP review.
- This requires appropriate evidence and documentation.
- Most of our children would meet criteria but there are some barriers.
 - Families often cannot access or provide medical evidence.
 - Some families are unaware they can receive Disability Allowance until prompted.
 - Advisors are not always informing families of entitlements.
 - GPs often initiate Disability Allowance discussions as part of medical paperwork; but this may vary by practitioner.
 - Long-term diagnosed conditions require ongoing re-confirmation through a doctor.
 - Preschool has been sending information and forms, but evidence remains hard to obtain.

Staffing / Ratio Implications

- Low attendance is helping maintain teacher to child ratios currently.
 - Over 20 children attending generally occurs only 3 days a week and requires three qualified teachers.
 - At times, lunch breaks leave only one qualified teacher, requiring use of discretionary hours or Preschool Lead covering during office time.
 - Last term, 78.6 out of 80 discretionary hours were used.
 - Discretionary hours are closely monitored to avoid exceeding limits.
- If numbers increase without adequate staffing, the Trust may need to request additional staffing support from Ko Taku Reo.

Provision and Enrolment Impacts (Ormiston):

- Enrolled School Ormiston Primary School provision not accepting new enrolments, may extend beyond Term 2 which significantly affects preschool.
 - Older children are showing reduced interest in the environment as they have outgrown equipment and play spaces.
 - Behaviour is affected as they are developmentally ready for school.
 - Literacy and numeracy are offered, but transition to school would better meet their needs.
 - Hard for Enrolled school to predict provision numbers due to inconsistent or late information provided.
 - Teacher shortages are adding pressure across the organisation.

Potential for Second Preschool:

- Consideration of a second preschool aligns with the long-term vision, especially given many families travel significant distances. Challenges include land, buildings, and funding.
- Have previously explored land availability around Anton Centre and potential TAP funding but increased housing density has since caused local schools to overflow, complicating the situation.
- BLENZ in Manurewa had previously been explored as an option and does have a preschool space but had no capacity to host us - may be worth revisiting.

- Previously had discussions with AKO Adventures in Manurewa around co-enrolment as they have two Deaf teachers. May be potential to explore this further.

Head of Early Years – taken as read

- Highlighted the upcoming licensing criteria changes, which will come into effect on 20th April 2026 as published in the Gazette. Explanatory video created, and the link was included in the agenda.
- Tabled 2026 Goals and Internal Evaluation for 2025 Goals completed.
- Playground software was discontinued at the end of 2025, with all documents downloaded. Historical learning stories remain accessible through the Playground website for parents.
- Storypark is now fully in use and operating well.
- The Child Protection Policy is currently being reviewed, and a revised draft will be brought to the next meeting.
- Recent updates to the national safeguarding and child protection expectations have strengthened requirements, which is positive given the vulnerability of many of our learners with additional needs.
- All staff completed Child Protection module at the start of the year, with a strong focus on the licensing criteria changes and updated child protection requirements.
- Across the wider school, child protection training is revisited every year with all staff as mandatory training.

Financials

Financial report presented – taken as read

Positive financial movement, with the deficit now at \$65K, reduced from \$107K for 2025 financial year.

Policy Review

Medicine

Discussion around upcoming licensing criteria changes.

- Category 1 Medicines
Reconsider how Category 1 medicines (e.g., Arnica, Pawpaw, antiseptic creams) are managed as these items are not included at all in the new criteria.
 - Historically, permission for using these products was obtained at enrolment. The team needs to consider whether to:
 - Remove Category 1 products entirely,
 - Request specific permission at the time of use, or
 - Continue seeking permission at enrolment for over-the-counter items.

The preschool team will gather data and report back with a recommendation.

- Category 3 Medication
Medication for ongoing-condition medication (e.g., asthma, eczema creams)
 - Permission is currently obtained termly, with instructions from parents.
 - There is no current requirement to record each instance of administration.
 - Under new criteria, a timeline for parental acknowledgment may be required.

Preschool team to decide on reporting that will best support children and families.

General

New ECE Regulations – Video and Key Changes

ECE Regulations video aligns well with the Key Changes document, highlighting the updates in a clear and understandable format. This has been shared with staff on call back days. Approach to “go with the flow” given the volume of sector changes but emphasise staff should not be passive—there will be opportunities to provide feedback as changes roll out.

Webinar led by Sue Kurtovich, a well-known expert in the ECE sector provided further clarification on the upcoming changes:

- Most key points had already been captured in the video,
- Additional minor updates were identified, which, while small, will still have a significant impact on practice.
- For example, changes to cleaning requirements will necessitate adjustments to current processes. An action plan is being developed to implement all required changes before 20 April.

Work to action:

- Review and update all policies,
- Remove outdated versions from the website,
- Re-upload revised policies with correct criteria references,
- Review the Medicine Policy, as this area includes major changes under the new criteria.

Philosophy Statement

New regulations remove the requirement for a written philosophy, but given the unique nature of the service, Ko Taku Reo will retain theirs.

Philosophy summarised for NZSL translation and will put this on the website. Licensing criteria set the minimum standard, and services are free to exceed requirements if appropriate.

Parent Access to Information

- The new Information Booklet is currently on hold until all regulatory changes are finalised so that content aligns correctly.
- The teaching team to decide whether to:
 - Include choking information in the booklet,
 - Provide it separately, or
 - Direct families to where the information can be accessed.

Regulatory Oversight – ERO and Director of Regulations

New role – this role will come under ERO and they will have the key responsibilities regulating ECE.

- Funding mechanisms are also under review, and more significant changes to how centres are evaluated and funded can be expected.

2026 Goals – Discussion Summary (Draft for Agreement)

1. Review and strengthen our connections with Enrolled School, AODC's and outside organisations.

Improve how we connect with Advisors on Deaf Children (AODC) and support strong transitions for students moving into enrolled, mainstream, or other special school settings.

- There is a significant need to review and strengthen connections with AODCs, particularly for children transitioning into enrolled settings.
- Completion of the information booklets and setting up regular meetings with Advisors of Deaf Children, whanau sharing Storypark with the AODC's was identified as part of this goal.
- Approximately half transition to Enrolled. Parents make the final decision.
 - When a child transitions to mainstream, the advisor leads.

- When transitioning to enrolled or other special schools, we play a larger role as relationships and systems are clearer.

Parent-Focused Support

- Create best practice guidance for parents entering mainstream:
 - Tips
 - Questions to ask
 - Who to connect with
 - Importance of a transition meeting with specialists
- Proposed focusing on building information packs for parents, rather than relying solely on advisors, to empower whānau to advocate confidently.
- Recommended framing the goal as strengthening connections with parents first, followed by advisors and other organisations.

2. Team will use and share assessment data to inform programme practices.

Improve assessment consistency and monitoring of young children's language development.

- Monitoring protocols need to be clarified with AODCs.
- Concern children aged 0–2 not being monitored closely enough for language development.
- Need to use assessment data more effectively to inform programme practices.

3. Expand our professional knowledge around how to build identity and wellbeing in our deaf learners.

Broaden the team's professional knowledge and share expertise with whānau.

- Deaf Studies Themes 1 & 2 have been released; Themes 3–5 expected soon. We have developed Deaf Studies in ECE exemplar for Theme 1. Continue making exemplar for each theme as appropriate.
- Teacher aides will need dedicated time to collaborate with teachers.
- Request to share more with whānau around:
 - Deaf studies
 - Deaf identity
 - Lived experience and expertise
- Agreement that we want to expand and share professional knowledge more proactively with families.

Goals approved with the wording changes and additions discussed.

KTR Board Representation and Trust Deed membership changes

- At the recent Ko Taku Reo School Board meeting, members expressed a lack of understanding about the Trust and its function.
- KC Will prepare a video resource explaining:
 - Why the Trust exists
 - What it does
 - Governance responsibilities
- This resource will also support onboarding for the new Board representative.
- The Trust has requested the Board appoint a representative.
- Once the video is shared and a representative is confirmed, a Trust Deed update will be required.
- SDH raised no objections to coming off the Trust due to changes in her role.
- KC now permanent Head of Early Years will be added to the Trust Deed.
- According to the Ko Taku Reo Schedule of Delegations, the School Board delegates responsibility for Early Years Trust representation to the Head of Early Years.
- Approved.

ACTIONS:	
Child Protection Policy Review – revised draft to be brought to next meeting.	KC
Category 1 Medicine – gather data and make a recommendation on how these are managed.	SS
Category 3 Medicine – decide on reporting that will best suit children and families.	SS
Create video explaining ECE Trust.	KC
Update 2026 Goals with wording changes and additions as agreed.	KC

_____ Date _____

Chairperson, Deaf Education ECE Trust