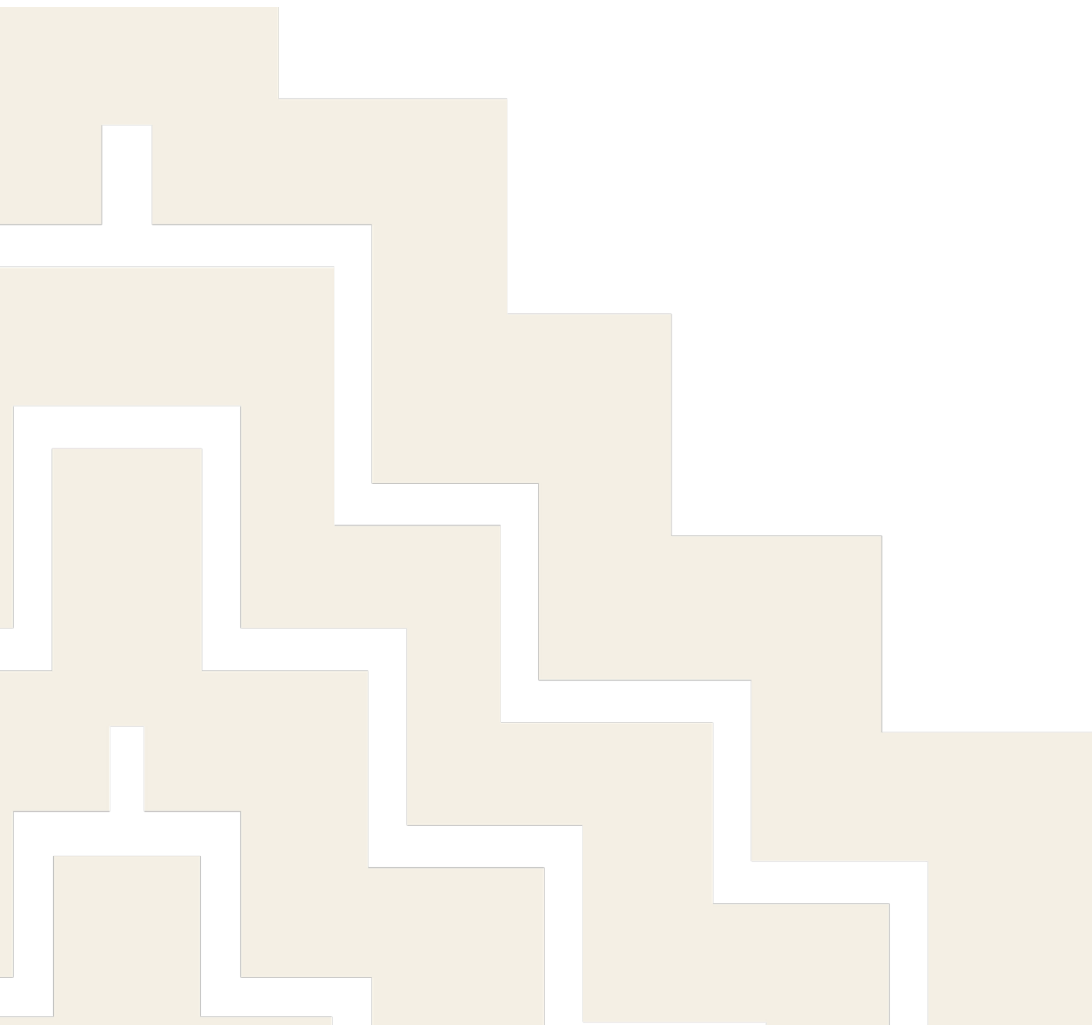


KINDERGARTENS AOTEAROA

Waiho i te toipoto,
kaua i te toiroa

Kindergartens Aotearoa (Free Kindergarten Association)
Manatōpū

Pūrongo-ā-tau | Annual Report 2025 - 2026



Tēnā koutou katoa
Ngā mihi mahana kia koutou
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

I am pleased to present the *Kindergartens Aotearoa* Annual Report 2025 - 2026.

The past year has been challenging and demanding for early childhood education (ECE), as the coalition government continues to pursue its ambitious agenda in ECE. The government introduced and passed three separate amendments to the Education and Training Act in quick succession, primarily focused on reducing compliance costs to ECE service providers.

Not only did the rushed nature of the legislation undermine our right to authentically engage in the democratic process, the changes have undermined Te Tiriti o Waitangi, eroded public education, weakened regulation and accountability, politicised education and teaching, and undermined the teaching profession.

The revised law shifts the intent of ECE regulation from the interests of tamariki to those of business, and positions ECE as a means to meet labour market demands rather than as a right of every tamaiti to high-quality early childhood education.

We have engaged fully in the process, presenting comprehensive submissions to government review teams and to parliamentary select committees, representing the interests of tamariki, whānau and communities, our kaiako and kaimahi, and high-quality ECE services publicly through the media and to government and its agencies. However, the current government's view of ECE remains unchanged: it views ECE as a cost not an investment, and as a result, it is intent on reducing or limiting cost at the expense of quality, for both the government and for service providers.

“Funding simply hasn’t kept pace with inflation and after minimal increases in recent years, the sector remains woefully underfunded and higher fees are out of reach for many households ... ”

“Increasing state house rentals, no relief for fuel costs and the high cost of living impact the families and whānau we work with every day” ... Government chooses where to spend our public funds and it has chosen not to support those communities. It’s a missed opportunity and that’s deeply disappointing.”

“Affordable, high-quality, inclusive ECE that is accessible across our diverse communities supports our tamariki and whānau to thrive - that has to be our priority.”

Kindergartens Aotearoa, media release 28 May 2026

Alongside a minimal funding increase in the government’s budget, the changes to licensing rules, potential reduction in teaching qualification requirements, removal of pay parity, increasing targeted funding, and removing the 100% funding band are all in play - potentially unravelling the years of progressive change in the sector. 2026 is election year and our focus as KA is to influence the political agenda to ensure a strong and enduring future for high-quality, community-based ECE and strengthen ECE as a public good.

Board and Tumuaki Group Hui

The *Kindergartens Aotearoa* board met (online) five times during the year and met with the tumuaki group twice. The tumuaki group met 18 times, a mix of online and kanohi ki te kanohi. Members of the tumuaki group represent KA in various forums including the Ministry of Education with Sherryll Wilson representing our associations on bargaining and property matters, Amanda Coulston as a member of the Ministry of Education Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC), and Dawn Osman, representing KA associations party to the support staff collective agreement. Tara Solomon convenes the KA communications team hui and works with our communications partner *For Purpose*, on content for KA social media platforms and the website. Karen Skett co-ordinates the KA human resources group.

Key areas of focus

- regulatory and funding reviews and changes to legislation: analysis, submissions, representation to government
- bargaining: renewal of the teachers and support staff collective agreements
- advocacy: public and political comment - high-quality ECE as a public good
- representation: engaging with education sector groups and in wider national forums
- 2026 election campaign: enrol to vote, key messages funding, qualifications, high-quality
- KA constitution and membership

KA Board

- Daniel Wark, chair - He Whānau Manaaki
- Paul Geden, deputy chair - Kaitiaki Kindergartens *resigned September 2025*
- Martin Robinson, deputy chair - He Whānau Manaaki *resigned December 2025*
- Jocelyn Wright, deputy chair - Kidsfirst Kindergartens
- Krissy Thompson, treasurer - Inspired Kindergartens
- Tara Morrison, secretary - Kindergarten Taranaki
- Andy Pilbrow, Napier Kindergartens *Resigned March 2026*
- Jessica May Dean, Kaitiaki Kindergartens

Tumuaki Group

- Sherryll Wilson, Kidsfirst Kindergartens
- Amanda Coulston, He Whānau Manaaki
- Peter Monteith, Inspired Kindergartens
- Dawn Osman, Kindergarten Taranaki/ He Whānau Manaaki
- Tara Solomon, Kaitiaki Kindergartens
- Gillian Crawford, He Whānau Manaaki
- Jade Holland, Napier Kindergartens

Mematanga I membership

In 2025, we revised and updated the KA associate member policy and in April 2026, welcomed Heretaunga Kindergartens Te Matau-a-Māui as an associate member. In March 2026 Kindergarten Taranaki joined with He Whānau Manaaki confirming the strong alignment between the associations sharing the same core values.

“It provides an opportunity to join a strong organisation that will be better for tamariki in our region.”

- Kindergarten Taranaki Chief Executive, Dawn Osman

“We can have a louder advocacy voice - we are stronger together ..This is what working collectively looks like - combining our strengths to ensure kindergartens thrive and remain resilient”.

- He Whānau Manaaki Board Chair, Dr Kath Cooper

Wānanga I forum

KA hosted three forums in Wellington including one co-hosted with NZEI Te Riu Roa. The purpose of the forums was to bring together kindergarten associations and ECE organisations to consider the current social and political context and the impact on ECE, and to collaborate to influence policy settings. Across the three forums, over 120 participants heard from academics and researchers, politicians and economists.

16 September 2025 **Ensuring an enduring future for ECE in Aotearoa**

The forum focused on recent changes in ECE policy and what was foreshadowed, political perspectives and policies, and the future for ECE. Participants spent time considering a range of scenarios and the possible outcomes for tamariki, whānau, kaiako, communities and for ECE services. Forty seven people attended the forum including association governance board, leadership and management team members from thirteen kindergarten associations, members of the KA Kaitiaki Council, representatives from Te Rito Maioha. Willow-Jean Prime, Labour Party and Dr Lawrence Xu-Nan, Green Party.

9 December 2025 **ECE funding: an investment in the future**

The purpose of the forum was to design a funding model for ECE using research-based evidence on principles and approaches to funding ECE. The forum unpacked the ministerial advisory group's terms of reference for the funding review and identified elements of the current funding system that should be maintained and where change is needed. Twenty-five people attended the hui representing Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand, Sosaiete A'oga Amata Samoa Aotearoa Incorporated, Ngā Puna Reo o Aotearoa, Te Whānau Tupu Ngātahi o Aotearoa | Playcentre Aotearoa, Barnardos Aotearoa, NZEI Te Riu Roa and kindergarten associations. The outcome of the forum was a letter signed by all participating organisations to the advisory group, setting out the principles to underpin any new funding system and solutions to each of the group's terms of reference.

21 April 2026 **Whakamana i te Ao Mokopuna | Progress in Early Childhood Education Summit**

The summit was co-hosted with NZEI Te Riu Roa. A state of emergency was declared for Wellington the day before the summit, and it was shifted online. Riripeti Reedy opened the summit, followed by keynote speaker Abigail Boyd, Australian NSW Green MP who reported on the findings of the parliamentary inquiry into ECE, presenting a cautionary tale about the impact on children of weak regulatory settings. Georgie Dent, Parenthood Australia chief executive discussed building parent action momentum to affect change, and speakers Emeritus Professor and sociologist Paul Spoonley, Professor Linda Mitchell, Dr Ganesh Rajaram Ahirao and Dr Aroaro Tamati spoke of our unique cultural, social and economic context in Aotearoa.

Kaitiaki Council

- Dr Jacoba Matapo, Auckland University of Technology | Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau
- Professor Sandy Morrison, University of Waikato | Te Pua Wananga ki te Ao
- Professor Jenny Ritchie, Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington
- Retired Professor Linda Mitchell, University of Waikato | Te Whare Wananga o Waikato
- Emeritus Professor Helen May University of Otago | Ōtakou Whakaihū Waka
- Professor Alex Gunn, Te Kura Akau Taitoka | University of Otago College of Education
- Professor Carmen Dalli Victoria University of Wellington | Te Herenga Waka

In 2025, we established the Kaitiaki Council as a champion of the kindergarten movement and ECE as a public good.

We are privileged to have esteemed academics, who hold such mana in their field and more broadly within education, work alongside us. The council have shared their unique insights, wisdom, expertise, experience and influence at our forum, and members have been actively engaged in activities to influence government policies including preparing briefing papers, and publishing articles and opinion pieces.

Kōkiri | advocacy

Kindergartens Aotearoa continues to actively engage both politically and publicly, influencing decision-makers to ensure the best interests of tamariki are paramount across all policy and regulatory settings. In the past year we have prepared several submissions, appeared before parliamentary select committees, engaged in correspondence and in forums with ministers, and appeared on national radio and television and issued numerous media releases.

Key submissions and media releases

27 August 2025	Education and Training (ECE Reform) Amendment Bill: submission
19 October 2025	Education (Early Childhood Services) Amendment Regulations 2025: submission
18 November 2025	Opposition to gutting the independence and core functions of the Teaching Council: signatory, open letter to the government
1 December 2025	Government undermines early childhood education, ignoring parents and the sector: media release
4 December 2025	<i>Kindergartens support Te Tiriti</i> : response to government removing requirements from boards of trustees to take Te Tiriti o Waitangi into account in decision-making: media release
9 January 2026	Education and Training (Systems Reform) Amendment Bill: submission
13 April 2026	<i>Choose ECE - it's worth investing in our youngest citizens</i> : response to funding review: media release

20 April 2026	<i>Putting Tamariki first: new licensing rules come into effect: media release</i>
20 May 2026	<i>ECE pays off now and in the future: KA budget expectations: media release</i>
28 May 2026	<i>A missed opportunity: response to government budget: media release</i>
30 June 2026	<i>Recognising our teaching professionals: settlement of the KTCA: media release</i>

Social media

LinkedIn and Facebook continue to be the main advocacy platforms supported by the KA website <https://kindergartensaotearoa.org.nz>. Publications, articles, submissions and media releases, as well as insights from KA forums are shared - building relationships, responding to challenges, and supporting member associations. Four pou provide the framework for our social media mahi - advocacy, innovation and sustainability, community/collaboration and quality and impact. Our following and reach has grown significantly in the past 12 months, attracting interest not only from Aotearoa but internationally as well.

Kupu whakatepe | conclusion

I would like to thank the Kaitiaki Council, the board and tumuaki group for your leadership, vision and commitment to the kindergarten movement. I also extend thanks to all our associations' boards and staff who contribute to our collective efforts.

Communities are at the heart of what we do - tamariki and whānau. We want every child to experience kindergarten nestled in their community, and the highest quality teaching by passionate and skilled teachers and support staff, in rich and diverse learning environments - it's what happens in kindergartens that counts and we focus on using our collective knowledge, skills and resources to support this.

We are strongly committed to the kindergarten movement, continuing to innovate and grow the unique service we are proud to represent. We want enduring community-based, not-for-profit, public ECE services to thrive in Aotearoa.

He waka eke noa, ngā mihi mahana kia koutou
Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa

Daniel Wark
Kindergartens Aotearoa Board Chair