



Discussion Paper 4A

Ratios, group size, and space per child in early care and education – a quick overview

Interested? See the full discussion paper at www.ecereform.org

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Ratios, group size, spaces, in early care and education

Discussion paper 4A version 1.0, 26 September 2023 (quick overview)

What we need to do

- Urgently improve teacher:child ratios, with a priority on the youngest children.
- Introduce group size limits, integrated with ratios
- Improve space per child indoors and outdoors

ECE Reform has proposal to improve all of these over a period of three years.

Ratios and group sizes (funded goal after three years)

There is an advantage to combining ratios and group sizes together in one set of tables, and we need to consider children’s hours of attendance in each day. We also need to consider manageable team sizes, balanced against ideal small group sizes. These tables have been developed to allow flexibility for age group divisions. Any particular centre would only be working from one of the five tables, depending on their structure, and session length.

Age grouped

Teacher led, long day (max 11 hrs)			
Age range	Minimum teacher:child ratio	Max group size	Group size to ratio
Under 18 months	1:3	9	3x
18 to 30 months	1:4	12	3x
24 to 36 months	1:6	18	3x
3 years and over	1:8	32	4x

Teacher led, school day (max 7 hrs)			
Age range	Minimum teacher:child ratio	Max group size	Group size to ratio
Under 18 months	1:3	9	3x
18 to 30 months	1:4	12	3x
24 to 36 months	1:6	18	3x
30 to 36 months	1:7	35	5x
3 years and over	1:8	40	5x

Teacher led, sessional (max 4 hrs)			
Age range	Minimum teacher:child ratio	Max group size	Group size to ratio
Under 12 months	1:3	9	3x
12 to 30 months	1:4	12	3x
24 to 36 months	1:6	24	4x
30 to 36 months	1:10	40	4x
3 years and over	1:15	45	3x

Mixed age

Teacher led, mixed age, all ages			
Total number of children	Max under 12 months	Max all children under 30 months	Minimum teachers
Up to 10	1	5	2
11-15	2	7	3
15-20	3	10	4
21-25	4	12	5

Teacher led, mixed age, over 1 year		
Total number of children	Max children 12 to 30 months	Minimum teachers
Up to 12	6	2
13-18	9	3
19-24	12	4
25-30	15	5

See the next page for definitions of ‘group size’ and ‘spatially separated’.

We can't get there in one go. The failure to improve conditions for children and teachers until now has caused an exodus of teachers, in turn resulting in a barrier to ratio improvements. But the conundrum is that unless ratios are improved, we cannot rebuild the teaching workforce.

When viewing these tables, it's essential to understand that these changes must be funded, and there is no expectation to reach these ratios with current funding. Unless changes such as these are made however, the collapse of the teaching workforce will continue.

Age range with age division	Minium Ratio	Max Group Size
Immediate		
Under 2 years	1:4	12
Over 2 years	1:10	40*
After 18 months		
Under 2 years	1:4	12
2-3 years	1:7	21
Over 3 years	1:10	40*

'Immediate' and 'after 18 months' are dated from passing of the legislation.

*Excludes sessional ECE.

Group Size Definition

'Group size' means the number of children in a spatially separated group, with specifically allocated teachers (counted in ratio), applied for 80% of the operational day.

'Spatially separated' means separated from other groups by being in a separate room, where a 'room' is a space divided from other spaces by a barrier at least 1.5m high.

- Group size does not apply outside.
- Group size doesn't mean structural room size or centre size.

Space per child – proposed transitions to match Australian standards

These changes have to be funded. They bring New Zealand in line with Australian minimum standards, allowing for the difference in wording (NZ = free from fixtures and fittings, Australia = clear floor space).

Time frame from legislation commencement	Indoors (free from fixtures and fittings)	Outdoors (child access space)
<i>Existing Centres</i>		
	m^2	
6 months	2.75	5.5
18 months	3.0	6
3 years	3.6	7.2
<i>New centres</i>		
	m^2	
Immediate	3.0	10
3 years	3.6	10

Note that the Australian outdoor standard is 7.0m² – the 7.2m² is double the indoor space of 3.6m².

See full discussion document for further explanation.

This is a very quick overview. For a full discussion with background and rationale, and supporting evidence, go to www.ecereform.org/ratios-group-size-spaces.