

## INSIGHT | RATIOS &amp; SUPERVISION

# The Roster Lies

*Ratios on paper are not ratios at the actual minute. How services close the gap between staffing compliance and safe supervision.*

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A service can be fully in ratio and still have weak supervision. Two educators in a preschool room meet the one-to-ten ratio — but if one is changing a nappy and the other is absorbed in a conversation at the gate, the main group may not be actively supervised at all. The roster says coverage exists. The room says otherwise.

## Why ratio creates false confidence

Ratios tell services the minimum staffing requirement. They do not tell services whether children can be seen, heard, counted, and responded to right now. The gap between the two is where most supervision findings sit — and it is where the NQS refinements are increasingly focused.

## The better question

Instead of asking "Are we in ratio?", ask: "Is the current supervision arrangement actually controlling the risk in this moment?" That question has to be asked continuously — at every transition, every break changeover, every room movement.

### A 60-SECOND TEST FOR SERVICE LEADERS

Walk through your service at 8:45am on a Tuesday. Count the adults. Count the children. Now observe: can every child be seen, heard, counted, and responded to within three seconds? If not, ratio is being met but supervision is not being delivered.

## Three places the roster lies

1. Break changeovers: the relief educator is rostered but hasn't physically arrived at the zone.
2. Nappy change or toileting: one educator is out of the room, and the roster doesn't show it.
3. Gate conversations: an educator is physically present but attentionally absent — drawn into a parent conversation at drop-off.

## What holds up

Services that pass supervision findings well don't just have correct ratios — they have explicit handover protocols, break coverage confirmed before the break starts, and a culture where "who is holding the scan?" is a normal question, not a confrontation.

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This article is part of The Practitioner's Guide to the NQF — M<sup>c</sup>Arthur's editorial series for the early childhood education sector. For the full whitepaper and webinar replay, visit [www.mcarthur.com.au/insights](http://www.mcarthur.com.au/insights).