

**NATIONAL
REPORT
SUMMARY**



ERO publishes evaluation reports on education issues of national importance. This is a summary of a national report – it captures the key points and highlights findings you may find useful. The full report is available on ERO's website – ero.govt.nz

Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education



What did ERO do?

ERO visited 116 schools during their regular external evaluation between May and August 2017. In each school ERO asked: *How well does the school use sexuality education to support and promote wellbeing for their students?* Additionally, a specialist team of evaluators visited 10 schools identified by external stakeholders as having good practice in sexuality education and inclusion.

This evaluation took a broad approach, investigating the sexuality education curriculum within the whole school context. ERO was also particularly interested in the extent to which schools were providing an inclusive environment for sex-, gender- and sexuality-diverse students to support their wellbeing.

Why did we do it?

Comprehensive sexuality education can equip students with the skills, attitudes and understanding necessary to support positive environments for all students, including those with diverse genders or sexuality. It can contribute to the overall health, wellbeing and resilience of young people (**Ministry of Education, 2015**), as well as improving attitudes to gender and social norms, and building students' self-efficacy.

ERO last reported on schools' provision of sexuality education in 2007. In 2015, the *Ministry of Education published Sexuality Education: a guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers (Ministry of Education, 2015)*. This document is a revised version of an earlier guide (2002). The revision considers recommendations in the **Health Committee's (2013)** report on improving child health outcomes, as well as recent research and changing understanding and social climate towards sexuality and sexuality education.

What did ERO find?

When sexuality education was well taught, school leaders recognised the importance of this aspect of the curriculum for student wellbeing. Leaders made sure students had opportunities to learn from teachers or external providers with relevant expertise and experience. Trustees and leaders worked together to make sure they consulted with the community on how the school planned to give effect to sexuality education as part of the health curriculum, and that students and parents/whānau were able to have meaningful input into the content and delivery of the sexuality education programme.

Overall, however, curriculum coverage is inconsistent. Some schools are not meeting minimum standards of compliance with current requirements. Most schools are meeting minimum standards, but many have significant gaps in curriculum coverage. Although biological aspects of sexuality and puberty are well covered, more in-depth coverage is needed for aspects like consent, digital technologies, and relationships. Sexual violence and pornography were covered in fewer than half of the secondary schools ERO visited.

The most common barrier to effective implementation was a lack of specific planning for a comprehensive approach to sexuality education. Contributing factors included:

- » absent, or inadequate, community consultation
- » lack of assessment and evaluation in sexuality education
- » lack of teacher comfort and confidence
- » low prioritisation of sexuality education among other competing priorities
- » school policies not widely understood and implemented.



FIND OUT MORE

Read the full report online at ero.govt.nz/publications

Only a few schools conducted regular evaluation of their sexuality education provision, or undertook robust analysis of the perceptions and needs of their students in this learning area.

Good practice in inclusion

ERO's full report includes many examples of schools that have taken many steps to provide an inclusive and welcoming environment for sex-, gender- and sexuality-diverse students, beginning with a firm belief that such diversity should pose no barrier to full participation in school. It is clear that homophobic and transphobic attitudes do persist in broader society, but there is cause for optimism in the way that young people show an increasing acceptance and celebration of diversity. Schools cannot change every heart and mind, but they can ensure that when students walk through their doors, they hear an explicit message of welcome and inclusion. They can demonstrate that they will challenge regressive attitudes, model inclusive language, and listen to and respond to the concerns that their students raise.



"Everyone's identity is important and we're all in this together"

Teacher

Some of the secondary schools that ERO visited had active student leadership groups for advocacy and support, which contributed to the wellbeing and inclusion of sex-, gender- and sexuality-diverse students.



"It's about having a sense of community, somewhere to go where you know people share your opinions and experiences and you can feel safe"

Student

Good practice in sexuality education programmes

Teachers were confident and knowledgeable, and were skilled at creating a classroom environment of high trust and safety. Students found it comfortable to talk about sexuality education topics without judgement. Teachers modelled inclusive language and behaviour and dealt well with homophobic or transphobic language used by students when they

were made aware of it. Teachers were also sensitive and responsive to the range of maturity levels in their classrooms. Sexuality education programmes provided many opportunities for students to explore different values and beliefs. Students were able to undertake a variety of activities, e.g. written tasks, research, surveys, role play.

Good sexuality education programmes were also responsive to students' preferences and input. Teachers sought student voice about what should be covered and how, and built this into their planning. In a few secondary schools, students taking senior health were able to have input into the programme by way of their self-directed research and health promotion projects.

Further resources

ERO

- » Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education
- » Sexuality education in secondary schools – Information for senior students
- » Sexuality education in secondary schools – Information for whānau
- » Sexuality education in primary schools – Information for whānau
- » Sexuality education in secondary schools – Information for boards of trustees
- » Sexuality education in primary schools – Information for boards of trustees

These documents are available on ERO's website.

Ministry of Education

The Ministry has the following resources available:



The New Zealand Curriculum



Sexuality education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers



Sexuality education: Practical information about education for parents and carers



Supporting LGBTIQ+ students

These documents are available on the Ministry of Education website.