

Sexuality education in primary schools

INFORMATION FOR BOARDS OF TRUSTEES

Sexuality education is important

This brochure provides guidance on how you should approach your responsibilities around sexuality education at your school.

Sexuality education is a key learning area in *The New Zealand Curriculum*. It focuses on the wellbeing of students themselves, of other people and of society through learning about sexuality as an aspect of health.

Good quality sexuality education:

- » promotes students' overall wellbeing
- » increases students' ability to make good decisions about their health
- » helps students think critically and act fairly towards others
- » helps students thrive and become confident and actively involved life-long learners.

Boards of trustees are required to ensure quality outcomes for all students through sexuality education.

Sexuality education is much more than learning about ‘the birds and the bees’

Sexuality education includes learning about biology as well as about relationships, friendships, whānau, and social issues. Society is changing, so schools need to adapt to address the new challenges young people are facing. These can include things like the importance of social media and the growing understanding that there are different sexualities and sexual orientations. You may need to change your policies to make sure you are providing a safe and welcoming environment for all students.

Sexuality education contributes to the overall health, wellbeing and resilience of young people.

Sexuality education helps everyone develop the skills, attitudes and understanding necessary to share a positive environment at school. You can shape policies around sexuality education at your school so they go beyond the curriculum to help create a genuinely inclusive environment.

Sexuality education in Years 1 to 3

In Years 1 to 3 it is recommended that sexuality education be woven into general learning. In these years sexuality education should cover:

Physical aspects

Learning about growth, development and the human body, including identifying body parts.

Relationships

Learning friendships skills; supporting the wellbeing of others; and discussions about differing family structures.

Stereotypes

Identifying, questioning and discussing gender norms.

Sexuality education in Years 4 to 6

It is recommended that specific time be dedicated to sexuality education from Year 4 onwards. In these years the sexuality education programme should cover:

Physical aspects

Puberty-related changes, body growth and development; how to support yourself through these changes; and how to access health care. Human reproduction may be included.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes about relationships, sexuality and gender, and how these affect wellbeing.

Online safety

Social media and online environments; and how to identify risks and issues.

Sexuality education in Years 7 and 8

In these years your child’s sexuality education programme should cover:

Physical aspects

Conception and childbirth; and identifying health care resources in the community.

Relationships

Intimate relationships and sexual attraction, highlighting respect and communication; and creating strategies to support inclusion, diversity and respect in friendships and relationships – online and in real life.

Board requirements

The board’s minimum requirements (as directed by the Ministry of Education) are to:

- » support the development of a curriculum statement for sexuality education in the curriculum by ensuring:
 - › community consultation occurs at least once every two years
 - › broad community priorities around wellbeing and sexuality education are reflected in the curriculum
- » effectively address incidents or complaints of sexual harassment or bullying, including homophobic and transphobic harassment
- » have a child protection policy that meets the requirements of the Vulnerable Children Act 2014.

Questions for the board

Boards should proactively develop sexuality education programmes and support diverse students, considering such questions as:

- » are we meeting our obligations, both legal and to our young people, and how do we know?
- » what would a programme that meets the needs of our community look like?
- » are we appropriately supporting our sex-, gender- and sexuality-diverse students, and how do we know?
- » if not, what would that look like in our school, and how could we find out?

What good practice looks like

In schools with good stewardship leaders and teachers work together to support students' learning in sexuality education, and their wellbeing across the school. Leaders and teachers report to trustees on the sexuality education programme, and trustees use this information to review programmes and resources.

Leaders in these schools recognise the importance of sexuality education for student wellbeing. They make sure students have opportunities to learn from teachers or external providers with relevant expertise and experience.

Trustees and leaders work together to consult with the community on how the school implements sexuality education as part of the health curriculum, and make sure students and parents/whānau have meaningful input into the sexuality education programme.



Trustees and leaders promote a positive view of sexual diversity by ensuring all parents, children and families feel included through a focus on wellbeing and inclusive behaviours.

school

Sexuality education needs to be well planned, age appropriate and provide opportunities for students to work towards developing empathy.

Trustees in schools with good stewardship make sure they know of common issues in the school about sexuality (e.g. through reports from the principal) and act on this information.

They support sexuality diversity for both students and staff, for example by adopting a gender-neutral uniform or dress code, or by providing access to gender-neutral bathrooms.

Boards should also:

- » have a policy that explicitly addresses bullying through social media, websites and other technology
- » have clear, documented referral pathways to a variety of community support services and documented protocols to support these referrals (e.g. when it is appropriate to notify parents; and for information sharing between the school and support services)
- » scrutinise the delivery of sexuality education in the curriculum by:
 - › requesting reports on the number of hours of curriculum delivery spent on sexuality education
 - › considering learning outcomes against the expectations of the school curriculum statement for comprehensive sexuality education
 - › considering the responsiveness of sexuality education to the diversity of cultural and religious beliefs in the school community, and to those with additional learning needs.

Support for all students

Most schools will have some students who are sex-, gender- or sexuality-diverse, or unsure of their gender or sexuality – even in Years 1-8. These students are at greater risk of depression, self-harm and suicide. It is important boards recognise this and look for ways to support these students.



In some cultures it's not OK to be lesbian or gay. Sometimes they won't accept you in your family. By not talking about it, it makes it seem embarrassing and not the norm. They are trying to teach us that it is the norm.

student

Areas for improvement

ERO's evaluations show most boards have good child protection policies for reporting on bullying or harassment. However, they do not all have policies that promote inclusion for diverse students, and support for sex-, gender-, and sexuality-diverse students is often implicit and reactive rather than explicit and proactive.

When stewardship performance is not going well, sexuality education can be a low priority for boards and some schools have no planned sexuality education programme.

Instead of relying on school culture and environment to teach friendship, communication and relationship skills, boards should plan for explicit teaching that will build towards the requirements of the higher levels of the curriculum as set out in the Ministry's *Sexuality Education* guidelines.

Some schools, have a programme in place, but the board does not scrutinise its delivery. Often in these schools the board is unaware of its responsibility to make sure it consults with the community about the implementation of the health curriculum.

ERO's interaction with students has indicated that, without explicit support, they often perceive the school environment or indifferent or hostile towards their diverse sexuality.

To be truly inclusive, schools should consider how their policies and practice can support these students before they are prompted by a specific enrolment.

Find out more

Education Review Office

ERO has completed an evaluation of sexuality education in New Zealand schools and published several documents relating to it (aside from this one):

- » 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

These documents are available on the ERO 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.