

Sexuality education in secondary 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, including sexual and reproductive health
- » 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 9 and 10

Health education, which includes sexuality education, is compulsory in Years 9 and 10. Your child should have received health education unless you withdrew them.

The sexuality education programme in Years 9 and 10 should cover:

Social aspects

Human rights, consent, and the importance of equality and respect in relationships; the messages we send and receive in society about sexual behaviours; the skills needed for positive and supportive relationships – online and in real life.

Emotional aspects

The emotional effects of sexual identity, sexual attraction and maturing sexually.

Physical aspects

Sexual differences, conception, contraception, sexually transmissible infections and other aspects of sexual decision-making.

Sexuality education in Years 11 to 13

Health and sexuality should be woven through all Year 11 to 13 subjects, but students in these years can choose health as an NCEA subject.

The sexuality education programme at your child’s school should cover:

Critical thinking

Analysing issues to do with gender and sexuality, and exploring how sexuality is viewed in society and culture.

Supporting students’ own and others’ wellbeing

Researching positive sexual health behaviours; evaluating community agencies related to sexual health; working across the school to affirm human rights and be welcoming and inclusive around sexuality.

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.



The most important thing is to hear from parents and the students to make sure the school is meeting their needs.

board chair

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. In some secondary schools, boards support student LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex and asexual) groups.

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. 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.



I think it's really important that people learn about LGBTQ. It's really important that people understand. They weren't accepting because they didn't understand... younger is better. If we normalise it, it will be better.

students

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.

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.



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

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 primary 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.