

Sexuality education in secondary schools

INFORMATION FOR WHĀNAU

Sexuality education is important

This brochure tells you what sexuality education should look like in your child's secondary school, and how the school should consult with you about it.

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.

Your child's school is required to make sure all students get high quality sexuality education that:

- » 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.

What has ERO been doing?

ERO has recently completed an evaluation of sexuality education in New Zealand schools. Some schools were doing a good job of teaching sexuality education, but many schools could be doing better.

Society is changing, so schools need to change too, to help young people face new challenges.

These include things like social media use and the growing understanding of different gender identities and sexual orientations.

What is sexuality education?

Sexuality education includes learning about biology but also friendships, relationships, and social issues.

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 that is welcoming for everybody.

Sexuality education in Years 9 and 10

Health education, which includes sexuality education, is compulsory in Years 9 and 10.

Your sexuality education programme should have covered:

- » consent
- » positive relationship skills
- » human rights and respect
- » conception and contraception
- » gender identity
- » sexual orientation
- » sexual health and STIs
- » online environments
- » gender stereotypes
- » body changes.

ERO recommends that schools spend at least 12-15 hours on sexuality education each year.

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.

Students choosing health will continue to explore what was covered in Years 9 and 10 but will be encouraged to think more deeply.

The sexuality education programme at your school should include:

- » analysing gender and sexuality
- » exploring and critiquing how sexuality and gender are viewed in society and culture
- » researching positive sexual health behaviours
- » working across the school to affirm human rights to be inclusive of everybody.

Who teaches sexuality education?

Most secondary schools have trained specialist health teachers, but they can also use external providers.

ERO found that many school leaders weren't reviewing how well their sexuality education programmes met the needs of their students. Some students prefer this education to be provided by a teacher they already know, while others prefer external educators they don't have to see on a day-to-day basis. Schools need to make sure they clearly understand what their students need or prefer.

Consultation with the board of trustees

The board of trustees at your child's school **must** consult with the community **at least every two years about the health education curriculum**, which includes sexuality education. This is an opportunity for you to discuss your expectations for your child's sexuality education.

Each school's consultation process will work differently.

What does good consultation look like?

Features of a good consultation process include:

- » consultation on the proposed health education curriculum taking place at least every two years and preferably every year
- » opportunities for formal and informal discussions
- » providing translators or people to liaise where needed
- » clear explanations of what will be covered in class
- » opportunities for questions, suggestions and feedback.



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

board chair

When schools are consulting well, they gather perspectives from parents/whānau and students and consider them when developing their sexuality education programme. When that happens programmes are more likely to reflect the needs and values of the community.

If you still wish to withdraw your child after you have talked about it, you can do so by writing to the school principal.

If you feel your school's board hasn't been consulting with the community effectively or every two years, you can talk to the principal or directly to the board about your concerns.

What young people want from sexuality education

New Zealand research suggests students do not think the sexuality education they receive in school is comprehensive enough. Teachers and parents might feel that enough is being covered, but it is important to respect and acknowledge the changing needs of young people.

Students ERO talked to mentioned the value of learning things before they needed to know about them. This preparation made the changes occurring for them seem less scary and this promoted positive body image and understanding.

Year 11 students told ERO they had learnt a lot about understanding others and themselves through their Year 9 and 10 sexuality education programme.

Welcoming and inclusive school environments

ERO's interaction with gender and sexuality diverse students showed that without explicit support, they can see the school environment as indifferent or hostile to them. It is important that school leaders and trustees create a welcoming and inclusive environment.



I think it's really important that people learn about LGBTQI. It's really important that people understand. They weren't accepting because they didn't understand.

student

Some schools have become more inclusive by having a gender-neutral uniform or dress code, or providing gender-neutral bathrooms.

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 secondary schools – Information for boards of trustees
- » 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.