

FAQs – Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers



Introduction:

This FAQ sheet has been developed in response to questions frequently asked during the workshops facilitated across the country in 2015 by Ministry of Education contracted PLD providers. This resource is divided into two parts:

- Part 1: Legal obligations and engaging with the school community
- Part 2: Teaching and learning - meeting learners' needs.

References:

All page references relate to *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees, and teachers*, Ministry of Education (2015). Accessed from: <http://health.tki.org.nz/Teaching-in-HPE/Policy-guidelines/Sexuality-education-a-guide-for-principals-boards-of-trustees-and-teachers>

Links are provided to other useful references mentioned in the answers sections.

Terminology: We use the term '*sexuality education learning programme*' or '*learning programme*' to be inclusive of the diversity of ways schools include aspects of sexuality education in their school curriculum. See the statement at the end of this FAQ sheet for further explanation.

Part 1: Legal obligations and engaging with the school community

Q

Do we need to send a letter home prior to teaching a sexuality education programme? Do we need parental permission for their child(ren) to participate in sexuality education learning?

A

No, there is no specific obligation to send a letter home and parental permission is not needed for participation in sexuality education learning. However, parents and caregivers need sufficient information to enable them to make an informed decision about their children's participation in sexuality education, which *may include* information provided in a newsletter, and/or a letter home before the sexuality education programme is taught, in addition to the two yearly community consultation (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 33). Teachers and leaders may wish to take care to inform the parents of students new to the school as they may be unaware of content due to arriving at school between consultations. For example, schools may include information in an enrolment or induction package.

Q

When sexuality education is being taught, can parents ask that their child NOT participate? If so, what is the BoT, principal, and/or teacher expected to do to support students who are withdrawn from class?

A

Parents and caregivers may write to the principal requesting that their child be excluded from any particular element of sexuality education. The principal is required to ensure that the student is excluded from the relevant learning and that the student is supervised during that time (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 33). There is no specific requirement for a teacher to provide alternative work for the student to complete.

Q

What are the requirements and expectations for the two-yearly community consultation?

A

The Board of Trustees is responsible for ensuring that community consultation on the Health Education programme is undertaken every two years. The board will prepare a draft statement on the delivery of health education, adopt and carry out a method of consultation, consider any comments received and adopt a statement on the delivery of Health Education. The consultation process will include informing the school community about the content of Health Education and aim to find out the community's wishes as to how Health Education should be implemented in the school (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 32). Note that the consultation relates to *Health Education* and not solely to sexuality education. Pages 31 - 38 of *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers* provides clear guidance in this area.

Q

How can we meaningfully consult with parents and whānau regarding sexuality education - what sort of (and how much) information should we be sharing with them? How can we best do this?

A

It is valuable to share with parents and whānau what will be covered in the sexuality education programme and open the door for discussion with parents who are curious or concerned. The school's newsletter, school intranet, class blog site or an email may be useful ways to share this information. To develop student understandings, teachers are encouraged to include as part of classroom learning, activities that require students to engage in discussions at home.

It is important that when consulting parents how they can contact the school to discuss any queries they have. Parents may be defensive and negative about sexuality education as they are unaware of what will be covered. An informed conversation normally clarifies concerns.

Q

How can I involve parents into the discussions that we are having with their child in the classroom? Where can we direct students and parents for further material or information?

A

Information on what is being taught in Health Education can be provided to parents at the beginning of their child's time at school or at the beginning of the year. It may also be useful to identify teachers of Health Education at school events, to provide parents with the opportunity to discuss the programme with the teachers. If parents or schools are interested, Family Planning offers a course for parents called 'Open and Honest' which aims to equip parents and whānau with the skills to engage in conversations around sexuality with their children. Ideally this would be organised by the school prior to teaching the sexuality education programme. Additionally, the 'Open and Honest workbook' from Family Planning found [here](#), and the Ministry of Education parent pamphlet on sexuality education found [here](#), are useful

documents that provide parents with information that they could use to engage in conversations.

Q

What are the requirements for school documentation for sexuality education?

A

Sexuality education is a key area of learning in the Health and Physical Education learning area in The New Zealand Curriculum (2007). Documentation around sexuality education will therefore align with the documentation that is developed and maintained for all other curriculum learning experiences at school.

Q

At what point do teachers not answer questions that the students have? How much depth do teachers give in their answers to students? What is the legal standing for teachers when asked questions by students?

A

Although teachers can legally respond to any questions asked by students' during sexuality education lessons, or at any other time, teachers are also entitled to refuse to answer questions if the circumstances mean this is a more appropriate way to manage the situation at the time (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 33).

The 'question box' is a useful technique for teachers to use to avoid being put on the spot by students' questions, allowing teachers time to prepare appropriate answers, with support if needed. The question box also provides the teacher the opportunity to reframe some questions, especially when students are seeking answers to questions about sexually explicit situations (for example) that others in the class may not yet be ready to hear about or engage in learning around.

As to how much depth a teacher could or should give when they answer a student question, it is important to provide a response that addresses the question and clears up any misconceptions students may have, and to respond in a way that is age and developmentally appropriate. But at the same time the teacher needs to feel comfortable and safe when answering any questions.

Q

How do teachers need to deal with ethical issues that arise when students initiate conversations around sexuality and behaviours, particularly under 16 years of age? How should teachers deal with disclosures?

A

A teacher is entitled to answer students' questions regardless of their age (Ministry of Education 2015; pg 33). It is important if the student indicates they want a teacher's advice about personal issues, that they explain to the student that if their physical or emotional safety is (known or perceived to be) at risk, the teacher is obligated to refer the situation to those who are qualified to deal with the issue. A request for confidentiality is often asked for, but teachers must be very clear that it cannot be given if the teacher believes the student is at risk. The teacher needs to explain to the student who else will be informed to retain the trust with that student. The school counsellor, nurse, teacher in charge of Health Education, or members of school's senior leadership, are good people to talk when teachers are unsure of how to answer a question.

Note that age 16 is the age of consent – it is the age at which young people can legally consent to having sex - see <http://www.youthlaw.co.nz/information/relationships/ages/>. Being younger than 16 has no implications for teaching sexuality education.

Q

Are there special adaptations of MoE requirements for Catholic schools?

A

In the case of state-integrated and special character schools, the school's proprietors will provide guidance and direction as to how the curriculum, including sexuality education, is planned for and delivered. This will vary from school to school.

Part 2: Teaching and learning - meeting learners' needs

Q

After reading the revised guide, I can't identify any differences to how sexuality education is currently delivered in our school. Are you able to clarify this?

A

Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers is a revision of the previous 2002 guide. The revised 2015 guide aligns with the NZC (2007). The level 1-8 learning intentions (linked to the HPE Achievement Objectives) have been updated. There are also a range of comments throughout the guide about framing sexuality learning in a positive way, while also exploring issues of consent, the influence of the media and social media, and changing cultural and social climates around sexuality. If teachers have already aligned their sexuality education programme with the 2007 curriculum, and review their programme regularly, then it is unlikely changes will need to be made.

That said, a lot of the material in the revised guide relates to school-wide processes around sexuality, gender and cultural inclusiveness, community consultation, and including student voice in planning. By strengthening these processes, teachers might find that information emerges that gives added direction sexuality programme planning (as an example: student voice reflecting on what was learned at intermediate school might let a teacher know that the Year 9 programme needs to be changed in order to build on what students already know).

Q

What content is appropriate to teach at each level in upper primary and in years 9 and 10? How many hours should be spent on sexuality education learning at each level?

A

Upper primary/intermediate, and Years 9 and 10, are interesting age groups as students are at varying stages and combinations of physical, social, and cognitive development. Some students are pre-pubescent yet others have been, or are going through, puberty, and there are likely gender and ethnic differences further complicating this picture. It is vital that teachers know their learners and plan the sexuality education programme accordingly. The content that is suggested for the various year levels is described on pages 22-23 of *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers*. It is a good idea to repeat or revisit some aspects of the learning programme from year to year, especially around puberty and sexual decision making, as students will often say "we are not ready until we are ready". *Sexuality Education: A*

guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers states that the recommended time that students spend is 12-15 hours per year on sexuality education. (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 23).

Q

What are the best approaches to teaching sexuality education? For example, how do you make it less awkward for shy students who have trouble sharing their ideas? Am I best using outside providers or classroom teachers?

A

Classroom teachers are the best people to deliver sexuality education. Teachers may or may not need the support of outside providers. Teachers of sexuality education need to be comfortable with the content and able to talk openly and honestly. If teachers are confident and empathetic to students with well-planned lessons, the classroom environment will be engaging and learning focused. Students find this aspect of education interesting and with a safe classroom culture most students will engage without embarrassment or fear of the content. Page 25 of *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers* gives clear characteristics of a supportive programme. The value of a classroom teacher teaching this material is that it normalises sexuality education as an integral part of learning for students. If outside providers are brought in to cover all content it can convey the message that this is a special area of learning and the likelihood of students directing any further questions they have to their health teacher are reduced.

Q

What MoE resources are available to support teaching of sexuality education at specific year levels?

A

The Ministry of Education is currently revising the Curriculum in Action title 'Positive Puberty' (for upper primary/intermediate students and is developing a 'relationships' teaching resource for years 1-4. These resources will be available from: <http://health.tki.org.nz/Key-collections/Curriculum-in-action>

As part of the workshops facilitated in 2015 to support the implementation of *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers* a list describing a range of teaching and learning resources was developed. This list is available [here](#).

Q

How do we manage the cross over between Keeping Ourselves Safe/relationship violence and sexuality education?

A

Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers recommends that programmes in sexuality education need to be positive and supportive (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 7). Learning around issues of coercion, consent and safety are important aspects to teach in sexuality education programmes, however sexuality education should not be framed by notions of risk and safety (p. 23). It is recommended that teachers consider separating lessons that focus on specifically on sexual violence, safety and abuse from sexuality education focused on healthy relationships, sexual well-being, diverse sexual and gender identities (etc), and addressing these negative contexts in lessons on mental health, keeping safe or during alcohol and other drug education units (p. 23).

Q

How do I keep the classroom environment safe, fun and informative?

A

It is important to ensure that programmes are relevant and interactive. This can be done by involving students in setting content and contributing to pedagogical decisions (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 5). At the beginning a programme of learning around sexuality it is useful to develop a class kaupapa to ensure the expectations within the class are clear and students and teachers feel safe to share. It would be beneficial if class members co-constructed this kaupapa and it is made visible in the class and often referred to during the unit of learning.

Q

Does the sex of teacher matter? Is it best to have a female teaching some aspects and a male teaching others?

A

Like any aspect of The New Zealand Curriculum, sexuality education programmes need effective teachers who have access to formal appraisal procedures within the school which are linked to effective professional development (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 33). In general, the sex of the teacher is not important, but some schools may decide to deliver aspects of a sexuality education programme in a way which best meets their learners' needs. For example, to help some students feel comfortable with the subject matter, schools may choose to teach physical aspects of pubertal change by having a male and female teacher available.

Q

What professional learning and development (PLD) may be required for teachers of sexuality education?

A

The Ministry of Education advocates effective professional learning and development in the area of sexuality education (2015; p. 33). The nature of this PLD is entirely dependent on a school's context and individual teachers' strengths and needs. PLD may involve, for example, Health and Physical Education learning area pedagogical content knowledge, keeping up-to-date with sexuality-related information, observing colleagues teaching, seeking guidance and advice from an external support person. PLD opportunities may also be available through Family Planning. See <http://www.familyplanning.org.nz/courses> for the range of workshops offered or contact your local Family Planning health promoter.

Q

How do I teach sexuality education in a manner that is culturally appropriate for my students from diverse ethnic backgrounds?

A

Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers includes some information on page 24 to explain some points to consider when teaching Māori and Pasifika students. It is important for teachers to know their students, families, whanau and the cultural values they bring with them. As teachers prepare to teach sexuality education it is helpful to contact people such as guidance counsellor, families, or cultural advisors, if they have questions or need more detail on cultural perspectives. Families from some religions may also have beliefs that need to be considered as the sexuality education programme is developed. As all teaching in Health Education is designed with values of inclusion and whānaungatanga at the fore, a

diversity of ideas and beliefs should be accepted, and students can bring different cultural perspectives which will enrich the learning as they explore the issues. Teachers will need to approach with care, situations where student beliefs do not align with the values of social justice. It requires considered thought and planning to engage in discussion to explore and challenge these beliefs respectfully, and to ensure all students are left with clear messages about inclusive attitudes, and an understanding of acceptable and expected behaviours.

Q

How often should sexuality education programmes like 'The Sexuality Road' be taught - should it be every year?

A

It is important that learning experiences in sexuality education draw from a range of resources in order to provide sexuality learning programmes that meet learners' needs. Resources such as the Family Planning Sexuality Road can be used as part of learning programmes at different year levels. There is a different version of this resource for each of years 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10, and many other teaching resources for sexuality education provide multi-level learning opportunities. It is also important to note that the age and level for different resources and activities are ONLY a guide; sexuality education learning programmes need to be developed based on learners' needs.

Q

The revised SEG is extremely extensive and seems to incorporate so much more than has been expected of teachers in the past - eg violence prevention, social media influences, diversity of sexual/gender identity, consent/coercion, access and influence of pornography. Whilst these issues are all important and need to be addressed with students, where is the time to come from in order to explore these issues effectively?

A

The Education Review Office identified that schools with effective sexuality programmes spend at least 12-15 hours per year on sexuality education from Year 7 onwards (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 22-23). Reviewing regularly the school's HPE learning area programme ensures that a variety of issues are covered across the different year levels. Sexuality-related issues may also be interwoven with other aspects of the learning programme (for example friendships and relationships, mental well-being and managing change, and alcohol education). *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers* (pages 15-23) provides links between the HPE Achievement Objectives and possible sexuality learning contexts, across all levels of the NZC.

Note that the sexuality education section of *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (1999) statement included mention of all of these aspects of sexuality education – they are not new to the curriculum.

Q

What are some possible ways of measuring the learning outcomes of a sexuality education programmes in primary schools, and in Year 9 and 10? Do we formally assess this learning?

A

Meaningful assessment is required and is as important in sexuality education as it is for all learning in the NZC. Assessment is an essential part of effective teaching practice to identify

what students have learned, and where their learning needs to develop. Assessment 'for' and 'of' learning needs to be clearly linked to the learning intentions of the learning programme. There are many ways to determine how well the learning intentions of a sexuality education programme have been met.

Formative assessment should happen throughout the learning process. Ongoing formative assessment, linked with robust feedback and feedforward to students (provided in a timely manner), will benefit student learning progress and achievement. Formative evidence of what has been learned emerges from the activities students engage in every lesson. Gathering student voice throughout the programme can also be an effective way to capture student understanding and help the teacher be responsive to learners' needs. This could be done by using strategies like exit cards or learning logs/journals (Ministry of Education, 2015; p. 26). Summative assessment occurs at critical times across the period of the whole learning programme, as the range of learning is consolidated and reaches key stages of development. This is usually, but not necessarily, at the end of a 'unit' of learning. The mode for summative assessment is not limited to written accounts of student learning and could, for example, include evidence presented in verbal/oral, visual, digital, video, or role play form.

Q

What resources are available to support teaching sexuality for students with special education needs?

A

As part of the workshops facilitated in 2015 to support the implementation of *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers* a resource sheet was developed which contains ideas for resourcing learning experiences in sexuality education for students with special education needs. This resource sheet is available [here](#). Alongside this, use the school's SEN coordinator or other designated resources people to access support materials and teaching resources. See also <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/>

Links referred to in this document:

<http://shop.familyplanning.org.nz/open-and-honest-workbook>

<http://parents.education.govt.nz/assets/Parents/Documents/Primary-school/Sexuality-Parent-Guide.PDF>

<http://www.youthlaw.co.nz/information/relationships/ages/>

<http://health.tki.org.nz/Key-collections/Curriculum-in-action>

<http://www.familyplanning.org.nz/courses>

<http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/>

Terminology:

'Sexuality education learning programme' or 'learning programme'

We use these terms to be inclusive of the diversity of ways schools include aspects of sexuality education in their school curriculum.

Although many schools deliver their sexuality education as a **'unit'** or as a **'topic'**, this is not the only way sexuality can be included in a school's curriculum.

In **primary schools**, the student's learning programme is not necessarily delineated by topic/ subject/learning area and sexuality and relationships is more a context for learning in a broader school curriculum.

The recommendation that Year 7 and upwards have 12-15 hours of sexuality education for the sexuality education (learning) programme to be effective means that some learning in **intermediate and secondary schools**, which fits under the broad understanding of sexuality (and relationships) education, may in fact be found with other learning in contexts such as managing friendships and interpersonal communication, alcohol (and other drug) education, or managing change and stress. To refer to the 'learning programme' implies that aspects of sexuality education could be found across learning programmes developed for the HPE learning area.

NOTE: We are NOT using the term 'programme' to refer to the pre-planned programmes that external providers may offer, designed to be delivered in schools as a pre-determined package. We note these other uses of the term 'programme' and recognise the confusion over the language, which is why we stress the term **'learning programme'**. Our intention when we emphasise **'learning'** this way is saying that the learning is embedded in understandings of the NZC, other policy level requirements of schooling in NZ, and in expected teacher practice.

The dual use of the word 'programme' is unfortunate but as it is a term being used in education to refer to the design of learning programmes across the curriculum, Health Education teachers will need to be prepared to make a distinction between **the 'learning programme' they design and plan to meet the unique needs of learners in their class and in context of their school community**, and the pre-packaged (often one-size-fits-all) programmes developed by outside providers.