

Draft Relationships & Sexuality Education Framework

May 2025



New Zealand Council Of
Christian Social Services

Tirohanga Whānui | Overview

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE) Framework. We support the kaupapa to equip “young people with the knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions about their lives and navigate important topics such as consent, healthy relationships, pubertal changes, and online safety” by the Ministry of Education. We make the following recommendations in relation to the proposed Framework.

Taunakitanga | Recommendations

Our main points are:

1. Alignment of framework with pubertal development in Aotearoa

Evidence indicates that children in Aotearoa are reaching puberty earlier than in previous generations and are more likely to have begun puberty during primary school and progressed to the mid or late stages of puberty before entering secondary schooling. Māori and Pacific children are more likely to experience puberty at a young age, and research indicates that children who have experienced disadvantage during childhood may also progress through puberty earlier in relation to other groups of children (Gluckman et. al, 2011; Marks et. al, 2023).

The RSE Framework should be reflective of this evidence to ensure our curriculum supports the diversity of our student cohort and enables children to be informed and empowered to navigate this stage in their development.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that information about puberty, and specific pubertal changes such as menstruation, be taught earlier in the curriculum to reflect evidence of onset of puberty from age 7 or 8 for females, and age 8 or 9 for males (ibid). As an example, we would recommend children are taught about menstruation at age 8-9, rather than age 10-11 as proposed, given that at this later age some children will have already begun menstruating.

2. Greater inclusivity needed within the RSE Framework

The RSE Framework should enable an inclusive curriculum, representative of diverse expressions of gender and sexuality that exist among young people in Aotearoa. We highlight concerns expressed by groups such as InsideOUT Kōaro (2025) and Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa (2025) that the proposed framework is not inclusive of rainbow communities or Māori, Pacific and other cultural or non-binary understandings of gender and sexuality. Research indicates that young people experience a range of feelings, both positive and negative, in relation to puberty, emphasizing the importance of education about this topic being safe and inclusive (Marks et. al, 2023). Transgender and non-binary young people have been found to experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, bullying and

discrimination in relation to other groups of peers, further reinforcing the need for school environments and a curriculum that foster understanding and inclusion (Fletcher et. al, 2023).

Recommendation 2: We recommend the RSE Framework be revised to ensure it is inclusive of rainbow children and young people by working with experts, including consulting with children and young people, to develop appropriate content.

3. Supporting children to safely navigate online spaces

Research indicates that children are frequently exposed to unwanted harmful or upsetting content online (Classification Office – Te Mana Whakaatu, 2025; Colmar Brunton, 2020), with children and young people themselves calling for greater protections against harmful content, online bullying, and harassment (Save the Children, 2025). This aspect of the RSE curriculum should be strengthened in response to what children are telling us is needed. Currently online safety is first referenced at age 5 and not again until age 9-10. As currently framed, there is little focus on what children can do if they experience unwanted or upsetting content online.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the focus on online safety be strengthened to enable learning at all year levels and include greater emphasis on how children can respond when they experience unwanted and upsetting online content or behaviour.

4. Enabling the role of parents and caregivers in RSE

We support the acknowledgement within the consultation material of the role of that parents and caregivers play in supporting children’s understanding of relationships and sexuality. We query how parents and caregivers will be supported to have “*open conversations at home*” that “*ensures consistent messaging and deepens students’ understanding of themselves and others*”. The recently launched Parent Portal is one avenue to enable this, if it is expanded to include curriculum areas outside of English, mathematics and reading. Guidance for parents and caregivers could be strengthened by connection to existing resources that support parents’ understanding of aspects of relationships and sexuality education such as guidance around [developmentally age-appropriate sexualised behaviour](#), [how to discuss topics such as pornography with children and young people](#), and [how to support children to safely navigate digital spaces](#).

Recommendation 4: We recommend that the RSE curriculum, once finalised, be included in the Ministry of Education Parent Portal to enable parents to understand and support what is being taught.

5. Consultation with children and young people

We query what consultation has occurred with children and young people in the development of the RSE Framework, outside of the public consultation process. We refer to Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Child which upholds children’s right to have a say about matters that affect them.

Recommendation 5: We advocate for children and young people to be actively included in the development of the RSE Framework and curriculum.

Ngā Tohutoro | References

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Ko wai tātou | Who we are

NZCCSS has six foundation members; the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches.

Through this membership, NZCCSS represents over 100 organisations providing a range of social support services across Aotearoa. Our mission is to call forth a just and compassionate society for Aotearoa, through our commitment to our faith and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website - www.nzccss.org.nz.

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