

Feedback to the Ministry of Education on the Draft Relationships and Sexuality Education Framework

09 May 2025

Summary

As the independent advocate working for and with all mokopuna (children and young people), Mana Mokopuna – Children and Young People's Commission (Mana Mokopuna)¹ provides this feedback to the Ministry of Education on the Draft Relationships and Sexuality Education Framework (Draft RSE Framework).

Mokopuna, their whānau and communities have told us that this is an issue that matters to them.

Overall, our view is that there are vital aspects of learning missing from the Draft RSE Framework, and these must be included. Without these being included, opportunities will be missed to ensure mokopuna are well-equipped at age-appropriate stages to learn about their development, rights and wellbeing, and to be safe and prevent harm. This is important for all mokopuna, including Rainbow mokopuna.

We strongly **recommend** that mokopuna themselves must be directly engaged in the draft RSE framework to inform its development. This must occur as the next step before a final RSE Framework is adopted and it is incorporated into the Health and Physical Education Curriculum area.

We strongly **recommend** that the RSE Framework is further strengthened, not diluted, and that key topics are covered in the Framework which are currently missing or inadequate. (See paragraph 13 below).

Mana Mokopuna is available to you on an ongoing basis, to provide independent advice into the development of RSE education, in order to support the Ministry of Education to uphold the rights of mokopuna in their education, as well as their wider range of rights that are interconnected with their learning and development through RSE.²

Introduction

“ I think I've learnt more from health than in all my other subjects combined – it is such an important thing to learn about and these topics will apply in everyday situations. The consequences of not learning it are really quite big.”

- Year 12-13 student,

Review of relationships and sexuality education, Education Review Office, 2024³

1. Ensuring that all mokopuna in Aotearoa grow up safe, well, and equipped to manaaki, tautoko, and awhi⁴ each other, must remain a core priority within our education system. Relationships and

¹ Mana Mokopuna – Children and Young People's Commission is the independent Crown entity with the statutory responsibility to advocate for the rights, interests, participation and well-being of all children and young people (mokopuna) under 18 years old in Aotearoa New Zealand, including young persons aged over 18 but under 25 years if they are, or have been, in care or custody.

At Mana Mokopuna we have adopted the term 'mokopuna' to describe all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. 'Mokopuna' brings together 'moko' (imprint or tattoo) and 'puna' (spring of water). Mokopuna describes that we are descendants, and or grandchildren, and how we need to think across generations for a better present and future. We acknowledge the special status held by mokopuna in their families, whānau, hapū and iwi and reflect that in all we do. Referring to children and young people we advocate for as mokopuna draws them closer to us and reminds us that who they are, and where they come from, matters for their identity, belonging and well-being at every stage of their lives.

² For example, their rights to health; life survival and development; identity; right to live free of all forms of violence – all of which are substantive rights that all children in New Zealand hold under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³ Education Review Office 2024. [Let's talk about it: Review of relationships and sexuality education](#)

⁴ To care, support, embrace and look after each other.

Sexuality Education (RSE) plays a critical developmental and preventative role in supporting mokopuna to understand themselves and others, develop in healthy ways, build respectful relationships, and recognise, prevent and respond to harm. A strong, inclusive, and evidence-based approach to RSE is essential for promoting mokopuna wellbeing and reducing the risk of harm to mokopuna across the life course.

2. Mokopuna have told us that RSE matters to them and that it is important to them. Mokopuna themselves have clearly told us that they value being taught about what healthy, safe, and respectful relationships look and feel like, in ways that make sense for their age and stage of development.⁵ Mokopuna are asking to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to learn about relationships, puberty, safety, sexuality, sexual wellbeing, and health – to help them navigate and prevent issues such as bullying, online harm and unsafe relationships.
3. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including exposure to harmful relationships, have lifelong impacts on people's mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing.^{6,7} In Aotearoa New Zealand, we have a long and ongoing history of child maltreatment – high rates of sexual, emotional, and physical harm persist, disproportionately affecting some population groups more than others.⁸ Rates of mental distress, including anxiety and depression have doubled in recent years,⁹ with one in nine mokopuna attempting suicide, and over double that rate for Rainbow mokopuna.¹⁰ Mental wellbeing is worst for the one in five young people who make up the Rainbow cohort.¹¹
4. Comprehensive, holistic RSE, delivered early and consistently from early childhood education and throughout adolescence, is one of the strongest tools we have to address this harm and prevent it from continuing into the next generation.^{12,13} In short, a comprehensive, holistic RSE Framework and content is an essential component in supporting intergenerational change for mokopuna so all children and young people can have a strong start in life, grow up safe and well, and be themselves.
5. The previous RSE Guidelines were an important step forward, despite still having some limitations. However, some of the proposed changes to RSE now risk undoing the progress that New Zealand has been making when it comes to RSE for our country's mokopuna. The Draft RSE Framework looks to delay vital learning until too late (i.e. lessons on each topic need to be better aligned with the realities of age and stage learning and exposure for mokopuna). It also narrows the scope of RSE: and moves away from a rights-based, inclusive approach to RSE. Any updates to RSE must ensure the inclusion and safety of Rainbow mokopuna in their school, education and communities.
6. As the independent advocate for all mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand, we are very concerned about the absence of mokopuna participation in the development of the draft framework. While opportunities for mokopuna to respond to consultations exist now and later in the year, it is essential that the Ministry of Education directly seeks their input and views to inform the formation of the framework. As a primary duty bearer under the Children's Convention, the New Zealand government, including the Ministry of Education, has an obligation to uphold children's rights and ensure that mokopuna are heard and actively involved in shaping decisions about any topic, such as the RSE Framework and curriculum, that affects their lives.

⁵ Mana Mokopuna 2024 [A place to talk peacefully - mokopuna voices on healing from family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa](#) eg at page 29 and [Let's talk about it: Review of relationships and sexuality education](#)

⁶ Dempster-Rivett, K Thesis 2022. [Making the invisible visible: Exploring the complex pathways between childhood experiences of maltreatment and the perpetration of family harm](#); Zeanah, P. et al. (2018). [Addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences: It's All about Relationships](#).

⁷ Brainwave, 2018. [Why should we care? The abuse and neglect of children in New Zealand](#)

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Te Hiringa Mahara 2024 [Focus on youth wellbeing more urgent than ever](#)

¹⁰ MSD 2021. [National Youth Health and Wellbeing Survey](#) at page 13

¹¹ Ibid. page 88.

¹² [Relationships and Sex Education: The Evidence \(2022\)](#)

¹³ [Evidence-Based Sex Education: The Case for Sustained Federal Support | Guttmacher Institute \(2025\)](#)

To prevent harm, the RSE Curriculum must be grounded in mokopuna rights and evidence

“ Yeah, and also teach a lot more in schools. ‘Cos... when I was in primary school, I never got any in depth lessons about like family centred violence. [...] and don’t get me wrong that stuff does happen, strangers do hurt children and that, but let’s be honest its mostly family members and friends of family doing it. And they never taught me that. I just thought it was like, coz I was a child... and I thought ‘oh well its bad if a stranger does it, but because it’s my uncle, oh its fine then.”

- Mokopuna,

A place to talk peacefully, Mana Mokopuna – Children and Young People’s Commission, 2024¹⁴

7. In order to effectively promote respectful, violence-free, pro-social and emotionally healthy relationships, and to increase mokopuna capability to make safe and informed decisions, comprehensive, holistic RSE for all mokopuna that is grounded in children’s rights is essential.¹⁵ In Aotearoa New Zealand, not only do we have extremely high rates of family violence, sexual violence, and intimate partner violence, but mokopuna Māori, Pacific, and mokopuna who identify as takatāpui, rainbow and whaikaha are disproportionately overrepresented in these rates.¹⁶ Aotearoa has high rates of bullying compared internationally, with some reports showing almost double the OECD average.¹⁷ This is a constant challenge for mokopuna, their whānau, families and schools. It is known that inclusive schools with good practices can mitigate and prevent bullying¹⁸. RSE plays an important role to help all mokopuna learn good behaviours, address inequities, and break cycles of harm.
8. RSE must embed mātauranga and te ao Māori, and embrace the identity, language, and culture of mokopuna Māori and their whānau, hapū, and iwi.¹⁹ This is critical to upholding the Government’s obligations to Māori under te Tiriti o Waitangi, as well as addressing the inequitable family violence and sexual violence prevalence, disproportionately poor health and wellbeing outcomes, and other ongoing harmful impacts of colonisation.²⁰
9. Children’s rights to education are outlined in Articles 28 and 29 of the Children’s Convention, which specifies that education of children must be directed to ‘the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin’.²¹ Guidance from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (General Comment No. 1) emphasises that education must respect and support the right of all children to participation.²²

¹⁴ [A place to talk peacefully - mokopuna voices on healing from family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa](#)

¹⁵ Sex Education Forum (UK. 2022). [Relationships and Sex Education: The Evidence](#)

¹⁶ [HNZ-TWO-Health-Status-Report_FULL.pdf; Analysis Papers from Communities | Te Puna Aonui](#)

¹⁷ Jang-Jones A, McGregor A. 2019. PISA 2018: New Zealand students’ wellbeing. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education. Rates in Aotearoa were 15% compared with average OECD rate of 8%.

¹⁸ Ministry of Education and Office of the Children’s Commissioner 2021. [Our Kind of School | Mana Mokopuna](#)

¹⁹ Fitzpatrick, K. et al 2022. [Relationships and sexuality education: Key research informing New Zealand curriculum policy](#); Le Grice, J & Braun, V. 2018. [Indigenous \(Māori\) sexual health psychologies in New Zealand: Delivering culturally congruent sexuality education](#)

²⁰ Te Puna Aonui, 2022. [Tangata Whenua Analysis Paper](#)

²¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 29.1(d) [UNCRC Article 29](#)

²² Para 8. [General comment No. 1 \(2001\), Article 29 \(1\), The aims of education | Refworld](#)

10. It is essential that the Ministry of Education upholds the rights of all mokopuna to non-discrimination and education, as well as the following children's rights which are particularly important when setting the framework for RSE in New Zealand:
 - Right to life, survival and development – Article 6
 - Right to Identity and Self-Expression – Article 8
 - Right to Be Heard – Article 12
 - Right to Information and Freedom of Expression – Article 13
 - Right to Protection from Harm – Article 19
 - Right to be Free from Exploitation and Harmful Practices – Article 36
11. A children's rights-based framing is critical to any RSE content. As a primary duty bearer under the Children's Convention, the Ministry of Education has is obligated to ensure that RSE upholds and protects the rights of mokopuna as described within the Children's Convention, and to involve mokopuna in the development of such content. We note that mokopuna themselves have recently asked for more comprehensive and in-depth RSE.²³
12. We are very concerned that, by reducing the content covered in RSE through the Draft RSE Framework, the Government is removing the opportunity for mokopuna to learn about key topics that are crucial in relation to their development, health, wellbeing and safety. The Draft Framework misses key opportunities because it proposes to teach essential concepts at times that are too late for the age and stage of development of mokopuna, and the ages at which they are exposed to information and experiences from other sources (both at school, at home and online).
13. RSE is an important preventative mechanism to protect mokopuna from unsafe relationship behaviours and sexual harm.²⁴ It is also important to recognise the increasing complexities that mokopuna face in our world, including the proliferation of social media and the vast landscape of online relationships, digital content, and privacy concerns.^{25,26} Given the reality that mokopuna exist and live in all parts of their world – including the online world – they must be supported to be equipped with knowledge through their education to navigate these realities safely, and in as healthy ways as possible.

We recommend that any revisions to the RSE Framework ensure that the following subject areas are included in RSE.

14. We are concerned that currently, these crucial areas have been omitted from the Draft Framework:
 - **Consent** – Although consent is mentioned in the draft framework, it is important that this is strengthened to ensure that it meets the needs of mokopuna. We raise this as it is evident that consent education is lacking right now and needs to be strengthened for mokopuna. For example, 82% of recent school leavers didn't learn and would have liked to learn about consent.²⁷ There are high rates of sexual assault for girls in Aotearoa,²⁸ indicating a greater need to strengthen education around consent and safe, healthy relationships.
 - **Pornography** – A report by the Classification Office grounded in participatory research with mokopuna shows that one in four young people in New Zealand has seen porn before the age of twelve.²⁹ Therefore, mokopuna must be educated about porn before they are exposed to it,

²³ [Let's talk about it: Review of relationships and sexuality education](#)

²⁴ New Zealand Parliament Health Committee 2013. [Inquiry into improving child health outcomes and preventing child abuse - Vol 1](#)

²⁵ Beres, M et al. 2020., [Youth Healthy and Safe Relationships: A Literature Review](#).

²⁶ Classification Office 2025. [Content that Crosses the Line: Conversations with young people about extremely harmful content online](#)

²⁷ [Let's talk about it: Review of relationships and sexuality education](#)

²⁸ [Help Auckland 2023 Sexual Abuse Statistics](#)

²⁹ Classification Office. [Getting real about the impacts of online pornography on young people](#)

as porn has become a default learning tool for young people which can be harmful for healthy romantic relationships.³⁰

- **Stalking** – Noting that stalking can cause significant harm to mokopuna victims/victim-survivors and their whānau and communities, we advocate for stalking to be added as a topic to RSE. For more evidence please refer to Mana Mokopuna's recent submission on the Stalking and Harassment Amendment Bill.³¹
 - **Gender identity (including transgender, non-binary, and intersex)** – Research shows that gender diverse and gender questioning students are subjected to negative academic and social experiences such as verbal slurs, emotional harassment, bullying and abuse.³² Rainbow mokopuna also experience higher rates of mental distress.³³ It is crucial that the RSE Framework includes a focus on positively contributing to preventing such harm and mental distress for rainbow mokopuna. Rainbow mokopuna themselves have shared that RSE must be fully inclusive of rainbow lived experience.³⁴
 - **Te Ao Māori and Cultural Inclusion** – Comprehensive research has emphasised the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, indigenous knowledge and human rights in RSE, highlighting the importance of incorporating mātauranga Māori to support ākonga Māori to thrive in school and health education.³⁵ It is also important that a wide-range of cultures are included in the draft framework, so that it is reflective of the realities of our mokopuna populations in New Zealand. For example, more work is needed to ensure that RSE is culturally inclusive for Pacific mokopuna.³⁶
 - **Rights to equality under the law** – The RSE Framework intends that mokopuna learn how perspectives are influenced by family values, and it is valuable for mokopuna to learn that perspectives differ throughout society about sex, gender and reproduction. However, they must also learn that all genders, abilities, and ethnicities have equal rights under the law,³⁷ and should be free from all forms of discrimination, including racism and sexism. Stereotypes reinforced by culture, religion and family values cannot take away people's equal human rights under the law, including rights to consent to marriage, reproductive autonomy, gender expression and sexuality, and equal participation in the workforce.
 - **Safety awareness must include family violence and sexual violence** – Mokopuna, their whānau, and people within their communities have told us that there is not enough education and awareness about family violence and sexual violence (FVSV). Voices within the FVSV sector have made strong calls for consistent, realistic, and culturally safe RSE – not just for mokopuna, but for their caregivers, communities, and the systems around them.³⁸
15. To improve the safety and wellbeing of our mokopuna and future generations, our RSE curriculum needs to be strengthened – not diluted. RSE must be responsive, inclusive, and grounded in children's rights to ensure mokopuna are equipped to navigate relationships, healthy and safe development, identity formation and sexual wellbeing. A robust, evidence-based RSE framework is essential to prevent harm, promote wellbeing, and uphold the rights and dignity of every mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand, now and for generations to come.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Mana Mokopuna 2025. [Submission to Justice Committee: Crimes Legislation \(Stalking and Harassment\) Amendment Bill](#)

³² Chandra, Krishn. Thesis 2019. [Gender identity: Exploring struggles & school support among New Zealand senior secondary students](#)

³³ Fleming et al 2023. [Rapid and unequal decline in adolescent mental health and well-being 2012–2019: Findings from New Zealand cross-sectional surveys](#)

³⁴ Violence Information Aotearoa 2021. [Healthy relationships and consent: through the lens of Rainbow identifying youth](#)

³⁵ [Relationships and sexuality education: Key research informing New Zealand curriculum policy](#)

³⁶ Cammock, R. et al. 2023. [Pacific high school students' experiences of sexual and reproductive health education in Aotearoa New Zealand](#)

³⁷ Power, Elise 2024. [Supportive schools: an investigation of rainbow-affirmative inclusivity in schools and its effects on rainbow and non-rainbow young people](#)

³⁸ "A place to talk peacefully": Mokopuna voices on healing from family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa

RSE must give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

“ I want our school to accept more openly that sexuality is a big part of maturing into adulthood! I wish our school could openly establish in class times that being gender diverse in a community filled with different people and opinions is okay because so many students are discriminated from other students and or teachers.”

- Takatāpui Ākonga, *Brief on Takatāpui Voices*, Youth19, 2023³⁹

16. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is an essential part of our education system and must be woven throughout the curriculum. To ensure that RSE serves all mokopuna equitably, including tamariki and rangatahi Māori, RSE must embed mātauranga and te ao Māori.⁴⁰ A Tiriti-consistent approach to RSE must support identity, language, and culture and respond to the voices and aspirations of whānau, hapū, and iwi.⁴¹ It is also a vital step in tackling the inequities Māori face in areas such as sexual violence, discrimination, and health outcomes.⁴²
17. To uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi and ensure RSE is meaningful and relevant, the curriculum should incorporate mātauranga Māori concepts of relationships, sexuality, and wellbeing. Acknowledging these perspectives throughout the RSE framework supports the identity and wellbeing of ākonga Māori and enriches the understanding of relationships for all mokopuna, by grounding RSE in both cultural knowledge and lived realities.^{43,44}
18. The Ministry of Education must also recognise that Māori have the right to lead in decisions that affect their communities, including how RSE is shaped and delivered. This includes supporting kaupapa Māori approaches, resourcing Māori educators and providers, and ensuring that RSE reflects te ao Māori understandings of relationships, identity, and wellbeing.
19. Te Tiriti o Waitangi affirms Māori authority and the right to determine what works for tamariki and rangatahi Māori. When RSE is grounded in this commitment, it will not only uphold indigenous rights but also strengthen the relevance, safety, and impact of education for all mokopuna.⁴⁵

Mokopuna have the right to be heard, their voices must shape the RSE curriculum and their education

“ The rights of rainbow youth must be protected.”

- Mokopuna,
'You need to get in early, as soon as you see people struggling' – Understanding the life-course journey, Mana Mokopuna – Children & Young People's Commission, 2024⁴⁶

20. As noted earlier, mokopuna have the right to be heard and to participate in decisions that impact their lives. Young people have consistently called for inclusive, affirming, and practical RSE that reflects their realities and supports their wellbeing.⁴⁷ This is affirmed by the voices of Rainbow mokopuna who advocate for the full inclusion of culturally diverse sex, sexuality, and gender

³⁹ Takatāpui voices on what is needed for bright futures: a Youth19 Brief — Youth19 - A Youth2000 Survey

⁴⁰ Relationships and sexuality education: Key research informing New Zealand curriculum policy

⁴¹ Indigenous (Māori) sexual health psychologies in New Zealand: Delivering culturally congruent sexuality education

⁴² Te Puna Aonui, 2022. *Tangata-Whenua-Analysis-Paper.pdf*

⁴³ Violence Information Aotearoa 2022. *Research and resources supporting tamariki healthy intimate partner relationships*

⁴⁴ King, P. et al *Exploring the nature of intimate relationships: a Māori perspective*

⁴⁵ Indigenous (Māori) sexual health psychologies in New Zealand: Delivering culturally congruent sexuality education

⁴⁶ Mana Mokopuna 2024. "You need to get in early, as soon as you see people struggling," *Understanding the life-course journey*

⁴⁷ Relationships and sexuality education: Key research informing New Zealand curriculum policy

diverse identities.⁴⁸ We amplify and support their advocacy, so that all Rainbow mokopuna can grow up safe, well and fully included in Aotearoa New Zealand, able to be themselves.

21. We note that the consultation period for this Draft RSE Framework was short, not well publicised and was not mokopuna-friendly. We are not aware of any direct, intentional engagement with diverse mokopuna to inform the development of the Draft Framework. Because RSE is something that affects all mokopuna, and because it is something that mokopuna care so deeply about and will affect them on a life-course, intergenerational basis, we expect that mokopuna should be involved and consulted in the development of the RSE Framework and curriculum. The Ministry of Education now has an opportunity to remedy this oversight, and design mokopuna engagement for the wider Health and PE curriculum, including the RSE framework.
22. Mana Mokopuna advocates for consultation practices which empower and support diverse mokopuna to participate and have their voices heard. We also ask the Ministry of Education to ensure that these key opportunities that directly affect mokopuna will, in future, be shared with mokopuna directly and intentionally, to seek their input – as well as using the Parent Portal.⁴⁹

RSE must start early and support learning across the life-course



If we teach children from an early age how to be a better person not only with respecting those who are in the rainbow communities but in every attribute of life, this makes tough topics for my generation to talk about much easier.”

– Year 11-12 Student,

*Review of relationships and sexuality education, Education Review Office, 2024*⁵⁰

23. Mokopuna need access to RSE that starts early, evolves with their developmental stages, and responds to the realities they face. High-quality, comprehensive age and stage-appropriate RSE gives children and young people the tools to understand themselves and others, to build respectful and healthy relationships, to recognise and prevent unsafe situations, and to seek help if they find themselves in unsafe situations.⁵¹ Evidence shows that delaying this learning increases risk of harm later in life.⁵²
24. In short, high-quality, comprehensive and accessible RSE is crucial to support the healthy development of mokopuna. It should begin in early childhood and continue throughout childhood and adolescence. We cannot ignore that mokopuna are exposed to complex concepts from very young ages, and RSE must reflect this reality.
25. Recognising the evolving capacities of mokopuna ensures that RSE builds protective knowledge and critical life skills over time. In early childhood, for example, this should include aspects such as understanding feelings, consent, and respect, including for selves, others and differences. An early and sustained approach also reduces stigma and opens space for conversations that would otherwise be avoided — which is essential to create safer schools, communities, and futures for all mokopuna.⁵³
26. When introduced early and taught consistently, RSE supports inclusion, wellbeing, and safety across all aspects of life, and normalises and encourages healthy and safe relationships and inclusion. RSE

⁴⁸ Rainbow hub Waikato [Healthy Relationships and Consent, Through the lens of Rainbow identifying youth](#)

⁴⁹ [Parent Portal launched to empower parents | Beehive.govt.nz](#)

⁵⁰ [Let's talk about it: Review of relationships and sexuality education](#)

⁵¹ Holland, W, & Doherty, J. 2016. [Chapter 5 Leading high-quality practice in children's learning and development from birth to seven years.](#)

⁵² Villardón-Gallego, L. 2023. [Early Educational Interventions to Prevent Gender-Based Violence: A Systematic Review](#)

⁵³ Ibid

is essential to mitigate and counter the ACEs too many mokopuna face. This is important considering the high proportions of mokopuna negatively impacted by discrimination, racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism and bullying.

Schools and teachers must be equipped to create safe and supportive environments for mokopuna & whānau

“ The school has very open communication. They sent home a notice advising what topics were being covered... His form teacher also texted all parents advising that she was available for phone calls if parents wanted to discuss further – which is great!”

Parent/whānau of Year 8 student,
*Review of relationships and sexuality education, Education Review Office, 2024*⁵⁴

27. Mokopuna have the right to learn in environments where they feel safe, respected, included and supported. Achieving this requires a community-informed and whole-school approach to relationships and sexuality education – one that integrates teaching about respect and consent with robust systems for preventing and responding to harm.⁵⁵
28. The Education Review Office has highlighted the following points concerning school support and teacher's understanding of RSE:
 - Boards and school leaders are concerned about staff and student safety during RSE consultations, particularly given the lack of training. Schools are asking for clearer guidance or external facilitation support.
 - Recommendation 5 of the ERO Review advised that teachers, particularly those in primary schools, must receive RSE training as part of initial teacher education and through ongoing professional development.⁵⁶
29. Teachers and school staff play a vital role in the lives of mokopuna, and we must ensure they are well supported to deliver RSE. They need clear, consistent guidance, specialist-designed resources, and access to professional development and training to support safe and best practice. Ensuring that teachers are provided with training and that schools are well resourced is essential to ensuring mokopuna are safe, supported, and able to thrive, through RSE that effectively equips them with the knowledge they need for childhood and life.

Conclusion

30. Aotearoa New Zealand has both a responsibility and an opportunity to ensure that all mokopuna receive high-quality, rights-based RSE that starts early and supports learning throughout their lives. This is consistent with the State of New Zealand's duties under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The evidence is clear, RSE plays a critical role in preventing harm, promoting wellbeing, and building the skills and understanding young people need to grow up safe, connected, healthy and confident in themselves and their relationships.
31. Mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand have consistently said that this education – about relationships and sexuality – matters to them. Their voices, rights, and realities must be at the centre of any changes to this crucial part of their learning about themselves, their development,

⁵⁴ [Let's talk about it: Review of relationships and sexuality education](#)

⁵⁵ Dixon, R. et al 2024 [What would it take for relationships and sexuality education to be enacted meaningfully and responsively? Provocations informed by New Zealand policy and teachers' perspectives](#)

⁵⁶ [Let's talk about it: Review of relationships and sexuality education](#)

health and wellbeing. Now is the time to listen to them, and rather than diluting RSE in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is the time to strengthen our commitment to a safer, more inclusive future for all children and young people. Doing so is crucial so that we become a country where we have fewer mokopuna struggling with their mental health, fewer mokopuna experiencing family violence and sexual violence, and fewer mokopuna and whānau affected by suicide. Comprehensive, holistic RSE is crucial so that all mokopuna are growing up safe and well, surrounded by healthy relationships, and thriving and flourishing in their development, on a positive trajectory for their lifetimes.



Not teaching students about healthy relationships will lead to students getting into unhealthy relationships. It'll create even more this intense sense of loneliness and isolation. It could make a teen suicide rate even worse."

- Year 11-13 Student, Rainbow Focus Group,
Review of relationships and sexuality education, Education Review Office, 2024⁵⁷

Recommendations

32. Our main recommendation is that **mokopuna themselves must be directly engaged in the draft RSE framework** to inform its development. This must occur as the next step before a final RSE Framework is adopted and it is incorporated into the Health and Physical Education Curriculum area.
 - a. The Ministry of Education has time to develop and undertake direct engagement with diverse mokopuna, to ensure they can participate in the design of the final curriculum area before the proposed term four consultation period.⁵⁸
 - b. Mana Mokopuna is available to independently advise the Ministry of Education on engaging diverse ākonga, so that mokopuna have the opportunity to shape the RSE framework. This is crucial because mokopuna are the primary audience of the framework and the content that will sit underneath it. Through the RSE framework and its content, mokopuna will access essential information crucial to their learning and development, and their lives in an ongoing way.
33. Our other recommendations for the changes needed to the draft framework, and supporting evidence for them, are provided throughout this submission (particularly the bullet points under paragraph 13). We strongly advocate for the RSE framework to cover a wider range of subjects that are crucial for mokopuna to learn about, to prevent harm and stay safe, such as consent, pornography, and stalking; and to support positive mokopuna development and wellbeing, including gender identity (including transgender, non-binary, and intersex), te ao Māori and cultural inclusion and rights to equality under the law.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ We understand that the Ministry of Education intends that updated RSE content will be included in the refreshed health and physical education (HPE) learning area, due to be released for feedback in Term 4, 2025. We understand that the final HPE learning area is planned to be gazetted and available for use in 2026, and required for use from 2027. (As per: [Consultation on draft RSE framework is now open](#))