



**Te Huinga o ngā Pihopa
Katorika o Aotearoa**

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference

Aroha and Diversity in Catholic Schools

Guidelines for Good Practice Demonstrating Compassion,
Respect and Sensitivity in Catholic Schools and Colleges
Regarding Sexual Diversity

October 2022

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FOREWORD

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Greetings parents and board members, principals and staff, priests and chaplains, and diocesan education staff,

**E ngā hoa aroha, ki te mea i pēnei te aroha o te Atua ki a tātou, he tika anō hoki kia aroha tātou tētahi ki tētahi.
Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 Jn 4:11)**

After receiving numerous requests from our Catholic schools and colleges for guidance on the pastoral care of young people in regards to sexual diversity, we are pleased to share our new guidelines for good practice demonstrating compassion, respect and sensitivity in accompanying our rangatahi from childhood through to adulthood.

The Catholic bishops of Aotearoa New Zealand continue to be aware of the need to support school leadership and rangatahi in navigating the complex reality of sexual diversity. We are conscious that there is a range of social, scientific, ideological and religious stances regarding this issue, and that vulnerable young people with real needs and concerns, and their whānau and wider communities, are often caught in the middle, or opposing ends, of the rhetoric. Like our schools and colleges, we bishops, as pastors, have met and journeyed with young people struggling with these issues.

This document is not intended to be a statement of Catholic understanding of the anthropology of the human person. It is focused on the young people themselves, who are being challenged by the growing and often confusing awareness of self in all its dimension as they journey through adolescence. We are aware that at times some rangatahi have experienced ridicule and bullying for being perceived to be different. We are equally aware of the pressure some of these young people feel, from social media, peers and outside groups to make decisions and act out on these decisions while they are still growing towards adulthood and still developing a mature, adult self-understanding. We are deeply concerned that some young people in our schools and society are self-harming and feeling suicidal as they undertake their journey.

In the face of similar challenges, a number of European countries have changed their praxis regarding young people and sexual diversity to providing more emotional and mental health care. As bishops we want all our young people to be wrapped in the korowai of love and compassion in our schools and colleges. All rangatahi in our Catholic schools deserve to be welcomed with aroha, manaakitanga and pono, and supported in their challenging and sacred journey from childhood to adulthood. We are much more than our gender or orientation. These are just two dimensions of our all being made in the image of God. Each of us is called into authentic relationship with God, ourselves, each other and our world. This is continuously reflected in Jesus' words and actions of love, compassion and challenge, and in those of his Church.

Aroha and Diversity in Catholic Schools is the result of dialogue between bishops, principals, national and diocesan Catholic education leaders, and young people themselves. We offer our warm thanks to the staff of the National Centre for Religious Studies, a body of Te Kupenga – Catholic Leadership Institute, for their role developing this document. The intent is to clearly articulate the rich teaching of the Church, and to provide practical information and tools to help schools make informed decisions regarding the support of rangatahi who are grappling with issues around sexual diversity.

May God bless all the rangatahi and staff of our Catholic schools.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

- ✠ John Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington, Apostolic Administrator of Palmerston North, President NZCBC
- ✠ Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin
- ✠ Michael Gielen, Bishop of Christchurch
- ✠ Stephen Lowe, Bishop of Auckland, Apostolic Administrator of Hamilton, Vice-President & Secretary NZCBC
- ✠ Paul Martin SM, Coadjutor Archbishop of Wellington

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BACKGROUND

E ngā hoa aroha, ki te mea i pēnei te aroha o te Atua ki a tātou, he tika anō hoki kia aroha tātou tētahi ki tētahi.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 Jn 4:11)

WELCOME AND AROHA

1. All young people in our Catholic schools should feel welcome and loved. We support Catholic teaching which recognises that all people are made in the image and likeness of God and are loved and called to love others as their authentic selves. As Catholic educators we follow the rich teaching of the Catholic Church in recognising that all people are different and that building relationships of aroha must always be the priority over excluding or alienating others. A critical aim for all Catholic school communities is for everyone to feel safe and respected in our schools, and we take seriously our commitment to helping young people to discover who they are and to flourish.

2. In Scripture we see in Jesus' words, "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*" (John 4:11) a basis for the Catholic Church's teaching about relationships. In John 6:37 Jesus elaborates, "*Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, I will not reject anyone who comes to me.*" Yet, we hear from some self-described gay and trans young people that their journey has been particularly difficult and painful because they were in Catholic schools. Others say they found an absence of criticism and judgement and were welcomed with aroha and support in a Catholic school context.

3. As people of God, we have four relationships that are integral to our humanity, those with God, self, one another, and Creation. Pope Francis in his encyclical letter on fraternity and social friendship, "*Fratelli Tutti*" (2020) states,

"Love also impels us towards universal communion. No one can mature or find fulfilment by withdrawing from others. By its very nature, love calls for growth in openness and the ability to accept others as part of a continuing adventure that makes every periphery converge in a greater sense of mutual belonging." (#95)

E kore au e ngaro, he kākano ahau I ruia mai I Rangiatea.

I can never be lost, I am a seed sown from Rangiatea.

I have a reason for being.

Elder (2020, p105)

WE ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE - WITH DIVERSE GIFTS

4. Human sexuality is a complex gift from God. It does not define the whole person but is a vital aspect of understanding ourselves and other people. It is as whole people: physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and sexual beings, that we are called into relationship with God, ourselves, one another, and creation. This is especially challenging for young people seeking to determine and understand their own identity at so many human levels.

5. From a Catholic perspective the profound awareness that every person is made in the image and likeness of God includes that we are not all the same, literally "*thank God*". There is significant diversity in the way this image and likeness is present and lived in the world. Catholic understanding is richly nuanced by tradition and formal teaching that seeks to place aroha love and pūaroa compassion for community and individuals - as relational with one another, God, self, and creation - at the centre of any decision-making process.

6. Our understanding should begin with a clear Catholic awareness that our schools are filled with wonderful, diverse, and uniquely gifted young people who are connected to whānau and wider communities in myriad ways. Many are in a traditional nuclear family, many share living with mum or dad in different homes, some have two dads or two mums; for some life is fairly easy, for others it can be really hard. Some

young people are unsure about their sexual orientation, some have it sorted, while others feel external pressure(s) to be who they are, or to be who they are not. Some feel the weight of their identity so strongly that it crushes and threatens to break them, others seem to breeze through life's challenges.

All are welcome, loved, supported, and encouraged to be their true, whole selves in our Catholic schools.

WE ARE COMMUNITY

7. Catholic schools are first and foremost Christ-centred communities that reflect the Church's mission to spread the good news. We are there to empower each young person to achieve *"life to the full"* (John 10:10). This means that Catholic schools should form a community of support animated by the Gospel in which all members, the young people and their whānau should feel loved, supported, nurtured, and protected. They are welcome at our place. This is at the core of our being, it applies to everyone not just particular groups, and in our schools, it is ALWAYS grounded in a Catholic context – grounded in the aroha of Te Atua God for all, and most powerfully represented in the Eucharist: the community gathered in love around the table with Hēhu Jesus.

8. Pope Francis (2016) recognises the importance of acknowledging the human dignity of each person in *Amoris Laetitia* when he writes,

"It is a profound spiritual experience to contemplate our loved ones with the eyes of God and to see Christ in them. This demands a freedom and openness which enable us to appreciate their dignity. We can be fully present to others only by giving fully of ourselves and forgetting all else. Our loved ones merit our complete attention. Jesus is our model in this, for whenever people approached to speak with him, he would meet their gaze, directly and lovingly (cf. Mark 10:21)." (323).

9. Our Catholic schools are places where human sexuality should be seen as a gift that is positive, open and enables young people to see and seek their true potential as made in the image and likeness of God and where our differences should be respected and appreciated (*Amoris Laetitia*, 285). The beautiful words of gift in *Genesis*, where God creates male and female and blesses all humanity to multiply and fill the world, highlight the co-creative power of sexuality within committed, loving relationships, especially through Sacramental marriage, and acknowledges that every human child is a shared gift from God.

10. Key documents for Catholic schools in Aotearoa are: *Wonderfully Made in God's Image: A revised Framing Document for Human Sexuality Education in Aotearoa Catholic schools, and companion to the Having Life to the Full course* (NCRS, 2021). This is the guiding document for Catholic schools in Aotearoa; and *"Gender Complexity in Catholic Schools: Some guidance for Principals, BOTs, Staff, Students and Whānau of Catholic Primary and Secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand"* (NCRS, 2018).

INFORMED CONSCIENCE

11. Catholic schools are called to help form the consciences of the young people in their care, while recognising that parents, caregivers and whānau have a role to play in this area. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states

"Deep within their conscience humanity discovers a law which they have not laid upon themselves but which they must obey. Its voice, ever calling them to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in their heart at the right moment... For humanity has in their heart a law inscribed by God... Their conscience is humanity's most secret core and their sanctuary. There they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths" and the "moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, is a judgement of reason which at the appropriate moment enjoins them to do good and to avoid evil."
(CCC1776-77 - adapted for inclusive language)

It is this informed conscience that will guide us in the decisions we make, including decisions around sexuality.

ACKNOWLEDGING COMPLEXITY

12. Catholic schools need to consider that there are many voices in the conversation regarding LGBTQIA+ issues. Health professionals are uncertain of reasons for increased challenging of gender identity among adolescents. Certainly, gender dysphoria and sexual diversity is real. There is also experience of those who have transitioned wishing in later life that they had not, often revealing a reality that they felt strong pressure as young people to conform to others' expectations, and/or to make a decision about who they were when they were filled with uncertainty. For some young

people, encouraging reflection on gender and other sexuality self-determination may exacerbate identity crises, for others it may be supportive and affirming. This is a necessarily complex area and requires a whole whānau approach rather than application of a set of policies. (See Parkinson, J STL PhD unpublished, Preparing Catholic schools to care for gender dysphoric students).

13. Young people themselves have a range of attitudes and opinions in this area. Often in our Catholic schools many rangatahi simply get on with accepting one another, resolving issues, and reaching out in love and kindness to those who need support. Others can be very cruel and disrespectful of those they deem 'different'. Sadly, support and bullying can often exist side by side in the same school.

14. Often, rangatahi wish to make strong, public stands particularly regarding justice or an injustice. From a Catholic stance this is to be encouraged and affirmed – throughout the life of the Church people have stood tall in the face of injustice. At times, this desire for justice can become associated with particular ideologies and may become disassociated with Catholic understanding. It is important young people receive authoritative Catholic education in these areas, where they can affirm and test the reality of what the Church teaches rather than accept as truth often limited secular interpretations of this rich teaching.

15. There are groups and individuals who hold ideological stances which run counter to Catholic teaching on human sexuality. Care needs to be taken to be open to concerns raised and learning to be gained – especially in terms of deeply concerning trends in adolescent mental health - while not endorsing a secular worldview. Often there are Catholic individuals, or others, within these organisations who are well equipped to speak into the Catholic school context. Sometimes building positive relationships with these individuals, rather than with the organisations, can be an excellent way of addressing concerns and supporting groups of young people in our care.

Our Catholic community has always been diverse

16. Individuals and groups within the Catholic Church have a range of voice, attitudes, and experiences regarding LGBTQIA+ issues. Our Catholic community has always been diverse, with faith-filled people living lives which incorporate a range of sexual orientation, expression, and loving family life. They are part of the Church. Within strong Church teaching in this area, highlighting the importance of loving,

committed relationships, Catholics hold a spectrum of views on how to understand and interpret what is a committed relationship.

17. In terms of marriage, for example, it's important to recognise that because the Catholic Church has an understanding of marriage as a 'Sacrament' the nuance is very different to that of the state – because the Sacrament of Marriage has both unitive and procreative dimensions. While both Church and state recognise the legal rights and implications for individuals who are civilly married, the Catholic Church emphasises that Sacramental marriage, conferred on each person by the other, is a particular relationship between a man and a woman whereby their loving commitment to each other (unitive dimension) is blessed by God, and they are able to share in God's creative action in the forming of a new human person (procreative dimension). Catholic marriage includes, and requires, the possibility of a child being born of their shared sexual intimacy: created and nurtured in the couple's love. This does not mean that other couples cannot commit to wonderful, loving, and enduring relationships, it simply means that such relationships are not 'Sacramental marriage' within the Catholic Church as they cannot be open to the possibility of new life without external intervention.

It's important that young people in Catholic schools know the reasons behind Catholic teaching on Sacramental marriage and that the Church does not teach that this is the only way in which loving individuals can commit to one another.

CARING FOR OUR RANGATAHI

18. Schools need to follow a pastoral approach with young people; teaching them the wisdom of the Church, without the condemnation. As Australian bishop, Vincent Long van Nguyen said, "We cannot talk about the integrity of creation, the universal and inclusive love of God, while at the same time colluding with the forces of oppression in the ill-treatment of racial minorities, women and homosexual persons. It won't wash with young people especially when we purport to treat gay people with love and compassion and yet define their sexuality as 'intrinsically disordered'. This is particularly true when the Church has not been a shining beacon and a trail-blazer in the fight against inequality and intolerance." (Ann D Clark Lecture delivered by Most Rev Vincent Long OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, Evan Theatre, Penrith, 18 August 2016). The example of Jesus, and the Church's teaching on conscience, would indicate that this is a journey to be

grounded in love for the other, particularly those who may be vulnerable and feel ostracised (Pope Francis, *Amoris Letitia*, 2016. #250). Pope Francis spoke about this when he said, “*There must be room for God our Creator, the Holy Spirit and Jesus to speak to our hearts, and the heart of the Church, as she responds to the challenges guiding and supporting the faithful.*”

19. There is a spectrum of material available on websites and in organisations which is genuinely seeking to support young people – to affirm their identity, alleviate their fears, embrace them as individuals, and equip them for living happy, fulfilled lives. This can be a complex field to navigate, and support is provided in the “*Wonderfully made in God’s Image*” NCRS document (2021).

WISDOM WITHIN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

20. As Catholic educators we need to make clear links between what we teach, how we behave, and the four core principles of Catholic social teaching (from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace). We are called to recognise injustice in our own and wider society; to challenge and change our attitudes; and to act for this to happen. (See, Judge, Act). How we as a Church treat those members of the LGBTQIA+ community should reflect Catholic social teaching.

21. The four core principles are human dignity, solidarity, common good and subsidiarity, all have a link to a Catholic understanding of Sexuality:

- a. **Human dignity:** We are all made in the image and likeness of God – that makes each one of us sacred. We all have dignity because of this sacredness - which must be recognised and protected by each other and, when needed, by law.
- b. **Solidarity:** We are in relationship with all others – each is my neighbour, in Christ we become children of God in one family. It gives us an opportunity to become one with them and see ourselves as they are, in and with them. We belong to one human family and so need to look out for each other as we do in our own families. We have a duty/obligation to promote the rights and development of all people across the world. Solidarity helps us to think of others before ourselves – what would Jesus do in this situation? - he continually reached out to those who were marginalised. Solidarity requires that our response in aroha should not be based on who we perceive the other person to be, where they come from, what sex they are or what job they do, what matters is that they are made in the

image and likeness of God, just like us. We must love them as God loves us all.

- c. **Common good:** We journey towards achieving our full potential as individuals in community. We aim for the best outcome in any situation, decision or action for humanity and not just for the few, the majority, the rich or the powerful.
- d. **Subsidiarity:** We should allow for the individual to have responsibility or at least contribute to any decision-making that will affect them. At times parents, teachers and governments sometimes make decisions for us, and it is important that they do so. If a decision affects you – who makes it? This will depend on the type of decision and the importance of it. Parents for example guide us and teachers accompany us in the decisions we make. It means we can participate and feel that we have a say in what goes on with the things that affect us. Regarding their developing sexuality, each person discerns for themselves with the support and moral guidance of adults in the community. Subsidiarity also indicates a responsibility for support people to often question or challenge an individual’s understandings or actions if they seem poorly grounded or inauthentic due to developing maturity, peer pressure, mental health or other complex factors.

22. Research shows (see *References*) many young people identifying as LGBTQIA+ experience verbal/physical and cyber bullying in and out of schools and concludes that the impact of this bullying upon our rangatahi is that they are more likely to: leave school early; have poor concentration; attend school irregularly; gain lower academic and learning achievement.

As Catholic schools it is our duty to provide young people with a place permeated by the Gospel where they feel safe, welcomed, and loved.

23. Having an informed conscience helps us to understand the Catholic social justice responsibility to be companions for the young people in our care. As Pope Francis states in *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), “*The Church makes her own the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception. During the Synod, we discussed the situation of families whose members include persons who experience same-sex attraction, a situation not easy either for parents or for children. We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual*

orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while 'every sign of unjust discrimination' is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence. Such families should be given respectful pastoral guidance, so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God's will in their lives (250).

24. In recent times the Catholic Church has a renewed emphasis on its role in safeguarding all members of the community. The Catholic Church has a responsibility to protect those who are children and vulnerable in our community. Those who identify as LGBTQIA+ are often part of this category. The National Office for Professional Standards implements

safeguarding for the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand:
<https://safeguarding.catholic.org.nz/>

25. In the National Safeguarding principles number 1 states: *"The Catholic Church believes that every person has a value and dignity which derives directly from their creation in the image and likeness of God. This implies a duty to value all people and therefore to protect them from harm. Children and people at risk were welcome and safe in the company of Jesus and should be welcome and safe in his Church. The safeguarding of children and adults is an integral part of the life and ministry of the Church and flows from the gospel"* (p.1).

RESPONDING AND ACCOMPANYING

26. The following approaches support responding to individuals and groups who recognise themselves as being part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

GENERAL

- a. Recognise the God-given dignity of each person.
- b. Recognise that Catholic schools have a right and responsibility to know and teach what the Church teaches and that aroha, manaakitanga and pono towards all people must be present in this teaching.
- c. Remember our mission as Catholic schools is to spread the good news as the NZCBC (2014) states, *The significance of this goal for all Catholic educational institutions was re-affirmed by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008: "First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth"* (The Catholic Education of School-Age Children, 12).
- d. Sometimes we can find the ideals of Christ, and his Church, challenging or confronting. Nonetheless, ideals are important because they call us beyond ourselves as we strive to live them to the best of our ability or capacity. For example, Sacramental Marriage within the Catholic Church is understood differently from civil marriage, and the Church acknowledges each as real and distinct.
- e. Primarily, be kind, look positively at each person as a 'whole' human being and not just as a sexual being – while important, people are 'more' than their sexual identity.
- f. Ensure that school is a safe place - many young people may not feel accepted anywhere else in their life and school may be their only place of sanctuary.
- g. Acceptance of others sets a very 'low bar' - Catholic schools need to be centres of welcome from all the community.
- h. Provide information to the community about the policies and expectations of the school/college so the whole school community is on board.
- i. Support all our young people to encounter Christ not just those who follow Catholic Church teaching.
- j. Investigate ways enrolment forms, school documents and other policy material could use child/tamariki/rangatahi.
- k. Ensure Discrimination/Harassment/Bullying Policy documentation clearly articulates in the procedures and guidelines how homophobia, sexism, racism, and other forms of violence are unacceptable and how they are to be addressed if present.

SPECIFIC FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOL STAFF

Apply all the 'General' approaches above.

- a. Acknowledge that all people are made in the image and likeness of God.
- b. Don't justify unkind words or behaviour with a responsibility for Catholic Character.
- RE teachers especially should be welcoming, caring, challenging and kind.
- c. Participate in PLD targeted towards developing an understanding of the LGBTQIA+ community – especially through participation in the Having Life to the Full course.
- d. Examine the language used by staff themselves personally and within the school community. Eg: using the phrase "you guys" could be changed to "all students".
- e. Don't use homophobic or transphobic language. Eg: "that film was gay", or "you throw like a girl" (both implying negative perceptions)
- f. Work on and identify resources used in teaching to ensure they are inclusive and respectful of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- g. Have a full school approach to pastoral care that reflects the Catholic Church's teaching found in Mt 22:34-40 the Great Commandment, "To love God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbour as yourself." This can enable an environment that will reduce bullying in all its forms.
- h. Welcome all young people who attend Catholic schools, including their individual and whānau complexities.

SPECIFIC FOR WHOLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Apply all the 'General' approaches above.

- a. Respect that young people may have concerns regarding LGBTQIA+ issues that are valid and need to be addressed with sensitivity by the community.
- b. Address requests for support and consideration regarding LGBTQIA+ matters on a case-by-case basis with all individuals involved.
- c. Recognise the importance of friendship, that the development of positive, affirming, and healthy relationships with peers and others is a significant aspect of school life.
- d. Support young people in developing skills to recognise and respond to external pressures which may push them into accepting definitions of who they are too early, as they make their sacred journey from childhood to adulthood. International research and practice highlight diverse understandings in this complex area – the young person's sacred journey must always be prioritised over ideological stances.
- e. Ensure that no young person is referred to a programme or organisation that supports any kind of 'conversion therapy' practices as is contrary to the human dignity of each person (<https://www.catholic.org.nz/assets/Uploads/NZCBC-submission-on-the-Conversion-Practices-Prohibition-Legislation-Bill.pdf> p.2).
- f. Investigate appropriate dress codes so that young people feel comfortable in the uniform they are required to wear. Eg: for girls they should be able to wear either skirts or trousers and for boys trousers or culturally appropriate items.

SPECIFIC FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- a. That you are welcome and acknowledged as being made in the image and likeness of God including your sexual identity.
- b. That our school will be supportive of your journey of self-discovery: accepting, challenging and encouraging with aroha, manaakitanga and pono.
- c. That our school will provide support that ensures your well-being and safety. We also acknowledge from Catholic Tradition that parents are the first and foremost educators of their children in matters of faith and morals.
- d. That you have a right to privacy and confidentiality as understood in New Zealand law.
- e. That you have a right to be treated with dignity and respect, and you have a responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect.
- f. That there are staff who are available to discuss your needs, interests, and concerns as young people, including if you identify as LGBTQIA+.
- g. That you having the opportunity for active participation in the school learning environment is following the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.
- h. That activities which involve changing clothes and/or sleeping overnight will be planned on a case-by-case basis always remembering that the dignity of each young person concerned must be a priority.
- i. That it is OK, with the help of the school, to form a school support group to meet your needs.

TOOLS FOR DECISION MAKING

WHERE IS CATHOLIC CHARACTER?

27. Each school community must make decisions about what actions to take when joining in with, utilising, or supporting other organisations that support and care for our young people. If an activity, ideology, or group does not support Catholic teaching, or it seeks overtly or subtly to undermine, ignore, or lose the Catholic special character, it should be avoided or adjusted.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

28. If an event or activity seems 'borderline', but is important for the student community, it is often possible to pick up the positive resonance within a Catholic context simply by re-naming and re-focussing an event or activity. For example, the focus of a proposed 'Pride' day could be oriented towards inclusion of everyone, with powerful messages of support, care, belonging and welcome. It is often the name we use that helps to promote the underlying cause we wish to support without overtly causing 'fear' or 'concern' within parts of our Catholic school community.

29. For example, there is benefit in young people forming support groups where they can share concerns, respond to issues, and simply create a space where they feel safe to be who they are. It is in this context that Rainbow clubs or groups have become common in NZ schools including many Catholic schools. One potential issue is that Rainbow is sometimes associated with an ideology which has no association with the Catholic character of the school, and thereby creates or implies a disconnect. Some Catholic schools have reinforced the connection to the school's identity and the genuine support of students who identify as LGBTQIA+ by naming such groups a "Wellness Group" or "Diversity Group".

30. Sometimes, what started with a very specific ideological stance has become much broader in society and links easily with Catholic Social Teaching. For example, Pink Shirt Day is celebrated annually around the globe, beginning in Canada in 2007 when two students took a stand against homophobic bullying after a peer was bullied for wearing a pink shirt. In Aotearoa, Pink Shirt Day works to create schools,

workplaces, communities and whānau where everyone feels safe, valued, and respected. Catholic schools can easily support this understanding of the day as being against all forms of bullying, including homophobic.

WHAT'S IN A RESOURCE?

31. Given the wide range of materials and school demographics, it can be challenging to decide what resources are appropriate for a Catholic school setting. (Eg: for books, art, videos, podcasts, and music etc.) All young people should be able to 'see themselves' in at least some of the materials used at school. Many books which include sexual diversity are appropriate for Catholic schools, and there is also a responsibility to ensure ideas and attitudes which overtly undermine the Catholic Character of the school are not promoted. Professional discretion must be applied, and it is perfectly acceptable to not include some books or resources in a school, knowing that they may be available in public libraries or elsewhere.

32. The following are guiding questions for school librarians and faculty heads, etc, when considering the appropriateness of a resource:

- Can I justify how this resource fits with the Catholic Character of our school...
 - To a young person?
 - To a parent?
 - To the bishop?
- Does the resource promote loving relationships?
- Does it support positive attitudes towards being myself?
- Does it clearly show that bullying is never OK?
- Does it recognise the challenges of knowing who I am, and support this journey of discovery?
- Does it highlight the dangers and consequences associated with abuse in relationships that have a power imbalance?
- Does it challenge unkind attitudes towards individuals by whānau and communities?
- Does it reflect that diversity and religious belief can be supportive of each other?
- While explicit sex would be unacceptable, if mentioned, does it reflect that casual sex can be damaging and dis-empowering?

HOW DO WE DECIDE ON EVENTS OR ACTIVITIES?

33. There is simply no easy answer to this question. Each situation must be judged on its merits. As a school community if a group requests that an event/activity or group be established to support and or give voice to the LGBTQIA+ community or issues, the following guide is helpful in making decisions about what sort of activity, event or group might be appropriate for Catholic schools in affirming authentic Catholic understanding of human sexuality.

Catholic teaching to be affirmed:

Questions we can ask ourselves before we support an activity or event:

-
- | | |
|---|---|
| a) Every person has dignity, because they are made in the image and likeness of God (see Genesis 1:26 -27). | • Does the activity highlight or sit well with this belief? |
| b) The dignity of each person and the source of their most important identity is found in this creation in the image and likeness of God (CCC §364). | |
| c) We believe in a God who is love; Where love is present God is present <i>Deus caritas est</i> , (Pope Benedict XVI, 2005. #1.) | • Does the activity highlight the importance and power of relational, empowering and transforming love? |
| d) Sexuality and gender do not define a person. Human sexual integration is achieved by learning and maturation over our lifespan. How this happens is dependent on each unique individual and the integration of cognitive, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual aspects of the whole human person. | • Does the activity avoid overemphasis on the sexual dimension of individuals or relationships?
• Does it emphasise wholeness?
• Does it emphasise the integration of all aspects of the whole human person? |
| e) Sex as entertainment objectifies individuals and relationships, reduces the dignity of the human person, increases potential for harm, and limits capacity to enter into a lasting, committed relationship. | • Is saying 'no' to sex outside of committed, loving relationships encouraged?
• Is the dignity of the human person affirmed?
• Is sex seen as more than just personal choice?
• Do associated images, words and behaviours avoid being overly sexualised? |
| f) 'Overly sexualised' activities and statements also limit human dignity in this way. | |
| g) Couples who have sex should be in a committed, enduring, loving, monogamous, sacramental relationship because this is the context in which a child, who deserves to be loved, may be born - they share in the creative action of God. | • Does the activity promote not having casual sex?
• Does the activity promote being chaste?
• Is the potential of becoming pregnant or having a child honoured?
• Is the love of a parent for a child honoured? |
| h) We are called to love one another: no-one is to be bullied, judged, abused, victimised, or ridiculed because of an aspect of their personal identity (CCC 2358 -2359/Pope Francis <i>Amoris Letitia</i> 2016. # 250). | • Does the activity promote kindness and practical and emotional care for each other?
• Does it place reasons for this kindness in a context of God's call to love one-another? |
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APPENDIX 1 – STUDENT VOICE

In 2022 the National Centre for Religious Studies had dialogue with students in Catholic schools, and recent school-leavers, regarding LGBTQIA+ community and issues, the following is a sample of their comments:

In general:

- You are going to have gay kids, that's not an option. You can ensure that they are welcomed. You may as well welcome them.
 - Their home and family might not be welcoming them. What's the point in alienating them? That's not part of Catholic ethos.
- It's important to have an open mind – even LGBTQIA+ need an open mind. Ask if you want to know something. There's always more to learn.
- It's important that people don't assume. E.g., Calling lesbians Gay. People get put into stereotypical boxes. It can be really hurtful – people are sensitive.
- So, we weren't allowed to talk about LGBTQIA+ issues at assembly because it was political, yet there was a pro-life/pro-choice thing that was fine – and that's political too.

Other Students:

- Individual students are not an issue, they tend to be intrinsically accepting.
- The students are more accepting – but the odd one still says 'off things'.
- People come out, people change, that's just how it is. It's not scary, it's just human.
- Friends often want nothing to do with a person if they come out. It can be very hurtful.

Staff and Teachers:

- It's important to have a community of accepting staff and teachers that don't make the kids feel excluded or 'wrong'.
- Teachers need PD.
- Teachers need to shoot down the off-hand comments like 'that's gay!' It's just not acceptable.
- Staff need to be careful about what they portray – the language they use. They need to be aware that especially for kids that are 'shame-full', quiet or vulnerable. Teachers sometimes don't think.
- Some SLT are supportive but overly concerned to appeal to parents, and to keep teachers happy.

Catholic Context:

- The Catholic thing needs to be more explicit about bullying. They need to make bold statements – that religion can't be used to make people feel bad – love one another is always said, but it doesn't always happen.
 - Love your neighbour as yourself.

- Some feel they are 'protected' in saying awful things when it should be the opposite.

Uniform:

- People are able to change their uniform with no hassle. It's a positive experience for them and helps them feel better.
- Our school just introduced the option of girls wearing trousers in uniform. Lots of girls wear trousers – no problem.

Diversity group:

- [School name] has a diversity club, but there are numerous obstacles.
 - We want it to be a normal club.
 - We can't advertise in notices or be at assembly
 - We grow at a slow rate because it's not advertised.
 - It's not just for LGBTQIA+ it's also for allies.
 - Primarily, it's just a safe space to talk about things.
- People need reassurance that we're not going to turn half the school gay. But people need to know that if they come out it's going to be fine.
- We're not trying to push anything we're just supporting people to be themselves.
- Our group is called SAGE (Sexuality And Gender Equality).

Importance of a safe space:

- All Catholic schools should have a diversity group. School is usually the safest place.
- School is definitely one of my safe places.
- [referring to this discussion and this document] It's good that this is happening. Some don't have very safe families and school needs to be safe - until they learn to do things for themselves.
 - It's an awesome concept.

This discussion has resonance with what is expressed in the diagram from Ministry of Education research on inclusive education: *LGBTQIA+ Students in schools across Aotearoa New Zealand were asked what they wanted /needed*

