



Guidance on social cohesion for schools

Introduction:

He whakamana tāngata – A life of dignity for all

In times of uncertainty, increased polarisation and pressing social challenges, it is imperative that we are all helping to create and maintain safe, inclusive and harmonious spaces.

Individuals, workplaces, schools, places of worship, and public institutions must actively champion social cohesion. As the cornerstone of a harmonious and inclusive society, social cohesion fosters unity, respect and understanding among all members of our society.

In schools, social cohesion refers to an environment where students are encouraged to have positive relationships and where all students feel they belong. Educators play a key role in highlighting that having a diverse range of people in your community is a strength.

This document provides guidance to help educators in organisations and institutions across Aotearoa New Zealand foster safe and inclusive practices for students, and to ensure diversity in all forms is accepted and celebrated.

We aspire to a society where everyone feels they belong, can be their authentic selves, and can freely participate.



Definition:

A socially cohesive society is one in which all individuals and groups have a sense of belonging, social inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy¹.

Values:

Mana tangata - Human dignity

All people have dignity and rights and deserve respect, even if we do not agree with them.

Maia, tika, pono - Courage and integrity

We can call out wrongs and discrimination in a constructive and respectful manner. We must stand up for peace and harmony and move away from prejudice and hatred.

Whakawhanaungatanga - Relationships

We are all connected - unity is not uniformity, diversity is not division. Unity in diversity reflects the idea of kotahitanga. Communication and relationships are a way to achieve our goal of social cohesion. Relationships should be formed and nurtured through manaaki and kindness.

Actions:

Promote equal opportunities:

- Stand for equal access to education and opportunities. Remove barriers that prevent children and their communities participating on an equal basis with others.
- Eliminate and stand against discrimination based on race, gender, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, or other characteristics.
- Support school led initiatives that challenge stereotypes and prejudices.

Honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi:

- Learn what it means to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi as an inclusive human rights document.²
- Honour the unique position of Māori as tangata whenua by learning about your local history.

Encourage cross-cultural awareness:

- Create opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and learning.
- Invest in cultural competency training for staff.

¹ Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch mosques on 15 March 2019
<https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/>

² More information at: Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission – Te Mana i Waitangi
<https://tikatangata.org.nz/human-rights-in-aotearoa/human-rights-and-te-tiriti-o-waitangi>



Promote inclusivity in education:

- Ensure schools have a curriculum that reflects Aotearoa New Zealand's diverse society and history.
- Implement anti-bullying programmes³ and policies that protect students and staff.
- Use diverse learning resources and ensure they are safe and appropriate with no unintended consequences.

Support workplace inclusion:

- Develop diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace, including hiring practices that reflect all people of Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Provide training to staff to address unconscious biases and foster an inclusive work environment.

Facilitate cultural exchange:

- Encourage public events that highlight diverse cultures, arts and traditions.
- Support local community initiatives that promote cultural understanding and appreciation.

Foster civic engagement:

- Encourage active participation by staff and students in local communities and democratic processes.
- Promote volunteering and community service as a means of building social connections.

Ensure accessible communication:

- Ensure school information and services are available in multiple languages and accessible formats as required.

- Promote the use of clear and respectful communication between management, staff, students and whānau, even when having difficult conversations.

Encourage interfaith dialogue:

- Foster dialogue and understanding among children and staff of different religions and faiths.⁴
- Promote religious freedom and tolerance.

Strengthen social support:

- Promote mental health and well-being services.⁵
- Create avenues for staff and students to access support in times of need.

Resolve issues peacefully:

- Create a culture for staff and students where individuals feel safe. Encourage people to report any racism, discrimination, or harassment they see or experience, or any other instances where they feel unsafe.⁶
- Provide a safe space for students to share their, or their family or community's, experiences. Avoid minimising or comparing them to one other.
- Offer a range of options to resolve complaints or issues, seek to discuss differences in a way that does no further harm.⁷ Options include mediation and facilitated conversations. Ensure these are accessible, culturally appropriate and trauma-informed and suit the people involved.

³ More information at: Bullying Free NZ <https://bullyingfree.nz/>

⁴ More information at: Religious Diversity Centre Aotearoa New Zealand <https://rdc.org.nz/>

⁵ More information at: KidsHealth NZ – Helplines & Mental Health Support Services <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/helplines-mental-health-support-services>

⁶ More information at: Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission – Complaints <https://tikatangata.org.nz/resources-and-support/make-a-complaint>

⁷ More information at: Positive Behaviour For Learning (PB4L) Restorative Practice <https://pb4l.tki.org.nz/PB4L-Restorative-Practice>



Examples of applying the above guidance in response to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East

An inclusive, safe, and harmonious workplace and/or learning institution would:

- Acknowledge the existence of the conflict in an age-appropriate manner, its related tensions and anxieties, and its effect on people and communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Encourage active listening and understanding of other peoples' experiences to promote respect and empathy.
- Recognise that while there are differing views on the conflict, no individual should be expected to explain or advocate for a political position or individually held belief. Everyone has a right to an opinion but consider whether it needs to be shared if it has the potential to harm others.
- Recognise that individuals from communities, whether racial, ethnic, religious, national or other, do not represent the full spectrum of views, actions and beliefs of that community.
- Recognise that groups will contain a range of diverse views, identities and experiences, eg. there is religious diversity within Palestinian and Israeli communities. There are Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Palestinians, among others, and non-Jewish residents and citizens of Israel, including Muslims, Christians, and Druze.
- Do not use inflammatory or dehumanising language eg. racial slurs or animal metaphors to describe people. Think about the language you are using and how it will affect people.
- Make it clear that no one should make or promote dehumanising statements or act in a way that makes others feel unsafe. Ensure that you do not use this language yourself. If this occurs, ensure there are systems in place to take immediate and meaningful action.
- Appreciate the emotional and mental burden affected communities carry. This may include offering resources and support for dealing with the stress, anxiety and emotional challenges related to the conflict.
- Encourage colleagues and students to show manaakitanga to affected individuals, including by offering pastoral support or other care where possible.
- Ensure there are no negative repercussions for staff or students who have exercised their right to express their views, for instance by attending a protest in their personal capacity or posting on personal social media.

We're here to help

Have a discrimination complaint? Need more information?

Call **0800 496 877**

Text **021 0236 4253**


Email Infoline@hrc.co.nz

tikatangata.org.nz



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