

How to deal with protesting at your School during Schools' Pride Week Aotearoa

Homophobic and transphobic bullying and discrimination can happen at any time, and during Schools' Pride Week this can often be heightened due to increased visibility. Last year we saw organised protests and bigotry campaigns throughout the country and so this resource is to provide support and advice during this time, and to prepare for future incidents.

Disinformation and hate campaigns

In today's reactionary political climate, we are seeing a rise in disinformation and hateful rhetoric targeting rainbow communities. We are seeing this in our local communities and media, as well as international media. Rainbow rights are being stripped and policy reversed across the globe and we have people in our own parliament advocating for this too.

This rise has been documented extensively in local and international research, including by the Aotearoa-based Disinformation Project in its landmark 2023 report on transphobia within New Zealand's disinformation ecologies. ([Read the report here](#))

One of the biggest disinformation topics we are seeing from our detractors is the discussion on relationships and sexuality education in Aotearoa schools.

From political parties running on the removal of RSE guidelines completely, to coalition deals meaning the Ministry of Education has had to remove the current guidelines while they are consulted on and updated, leaving schools with the 2007 curriculum to work from in the interim. We have now seen the first draft of the new framework, which has completely erased all mention of trans people, intersex people, and has but a single mention of differences in sexual orientation, but not until Year 8.

Fear mongering and disinformation that RSE is telling children to be transgender, or teaching explicit content, has now left a nearly 20 year gap in the curriculum.

This current wave of disinformation traffics in recycled homophobic tropes that have historically been deployed in moral panics about rainbow people. These lies are deliberately designed to erode support for rainbow people's rights and to push rainbow people out of public spaces such as schools, libraries, local and national government, and community leadership positions.

Schools' Pride Week Aotearoa is currently being subjected to numerous disinformation and defamation campaigns which have been ramping up over the past 3 years. These campaigns are led by well-known anti-rainbow hate groups and ultraconservative Christian organisations

including Brian Tamaki and Destiny Church, Family First NZ, Let Kids Be Kids and Resist Gender Education NZ.

We saw protests outside schools last year coordinated by groups like these and with the current social and political commentary on our communities, we think it is important to be prepared in case this happens again.

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We do not recommend engaging with these people in any way. They use intimidation tactics and are not safe. They thrive on publicity and attention so not giving them this is the best course of action.

If possible, organise before and after school volunteers to be on duty at your school's entrance, or outside rooms where events are taking place if there is likely to be bullying or disruption from other students. In the event of protesters, having umbrellas (we recommend rainbow ones!) on hand which can be used to block offensive signs, or protect students as they walk past.

If your pride flags or displays are vandalised, replace them. We have progress pride and trans pride flags on our [webstore](#) if you need them.

If you do not already, then we highly recommend setting up rainbow-specific bullying and discrimination prevention policy and procedures. These can help school staff recognise this when it happens, and give them the tools and confidence needed to deal with it swiftly, whether in school or by outside protesters.

See our resources:

- [Ending rainbow focused bullying and discrimination](#)
- [Creating rainbow inclusive school policies and procedures](#)

Feedback from Schools

We had feedback from schools who were targeted with protesting during last year's pride week and here are the ways they uplifted their rainbow young people afterwards.

"The day after we had protesters, parents and teachers came before school and covered the concrete at the entrance in beautiful chalk messages so the students could walk through with pride and aroha."

“After a protest out the front of our school by Destiny Church, a group of our Year 13 students came along to that day's Pride events to sing the school waiata for the students participating to show their support and aroha.”

“We had a deputy principal and our school dog on flag duty at breaks, to stop people from vandalizing it.”

Mythbusting and Debunking

Check out the [Mythbusting and Debunking](#) page on our website to brush up on responses to how to combat lies and disinformation about rainbow communities.

We also have a handy template you can use in response to negative or threatening correspondence from your school communities [HERE](#)

Social Media

One of the places schools are seeing the most pushback is on social media. This can be distressing for rainbow staff, students and whanau to see and here are our top tips to manage this.

- Monitor your school's social media channels including facebook groups or pages where people can comment.
- Consider making any posts about Schools' Pride Week closed to comments. Facebook and Instagram both “turn off commenting” as an option on individual posts.
- Delete any hate speech immediately and refer to your schools policy if needed to block or remove followers.

Support

Young people may need extra care and support during this time. Make sure they have access to guidance counselors or other trusted staff to talk to.

- 0800 OUTLINE - free phone line and web chat available where all counsellors are from the rainbow community.
Call 0800 688 5463 between 6pm-9pm or visit www.outline.org.nz
- 1737 - a free service for anyone feeling down, anxious, a bit overwhelmed or just in need of a chat. Calling and texting is free 24/7

- Youthline - Free call 0800 376 633, free text 234, webchat at youthline.co.nz

Contact your local InsideOUT School Coordinator if you require in person support.

The fear of pushback should not prevent us from taking action to celebrate and protect our takatāpui and rainbow students. Behaviour like this makes Schools' Pride Week even MORE important to show your rainbow school community that bigotry will not be tolerated. While the backlash is vocal, it is a vocal minority. Most of our communities are supportive and want to see students in their schools thrive. We offer our heartfelt gratitude to all the amazing rainbow young people, staff and allies leading this change on the ground in our communities.

Happy Schools' Pride Week!