

Diversity and inclusion on camp: Whānau letter (Primary and Intermediate schools)

Overview

Following the release of the 'Going with the flow' resource, we heard from schools that they wanted advice about how to communicate their inclusive approaches to EOTC and school camp with whānau and caregivers.

This led to the development of the 'diversity and inclusion on camp' letter. Schools can use the letter template to communicate how they will manage and support diversity and inclusion on school camp (and EOTC). The letter is relevant for **all** students and their whānau, not just female students of menstruating age.

This document also includes information and guidance for schools about how to implement the ideas presented in the letter.

Guidance for schools

If you decide to use this letter, it is critical that you adapt them to reflect your school's context and policies.

The letter includes:

- Details about the school's values (specifically equity and inclusion) how they relate to school camp. [Note: You will need to specify your school's values if they don't include equity and inclusion].
- Introduces/refers to the school's Diversity and Inclusion policy.
- Explains what the school has done to prepare students for camp and how students will be supported during camp (regarding menstruating and rainbow-specific needs).
- Provides information about how whānau can support and prepare their child for camp regarding menstruation.

Frequently asked questions

What are the benefits of sending a 'diversity and inclusion on camp' letter to parents?

The letter has multiple benefits as it outlines the school's values, how the school will prioritise and cater for ākonga wellbeing, and the expected roles and responsibilities of ākonga, whānau and the school regarding diversity and inclusion. Being clear about these things from the outset can help to manage people's expectations, supports the consistent use of inclusion and wellbeing policies, and can also be useful when dealing with challenging situations that may arise.

What do we (as a school) need to do before sending out a ‘diversity and inclusion’ letter?

Before sharing the letter, it's important that your school is already doing (and feels confident doing) the things outlined in the letter. For example, you have a Diversity and Inclusion policy (or something similar), and it defines the term ‘rainbow young people’ and any unique considerations needed for this group of students.

Similarly, your school should have measures in place for rainbow ākonga to feel comfortable approaching school staff about making a camp support plan. Some rainbow students might still find it difficult to ask their teachers for this support, so before every camp it's important that teachers explicitly invite any rainbow students to work with staff and whānau to make a suitable plan. Be aware that some students may not be ‘out’ to their family and therefore may not want them involved in developing a support plan.

These practices and conversations are connected to wider policies about making EOTC and school camp an inclusive experience for rainbow students, e.g., sleeping arrangements and gendered activities.

What is a Diversity and Inclusion policy, why is it important, and how does my school develop one?

A Diversity and Inclusion policy is an important document that every school should have. It outlines how your school will care for and respond to the wellbeing needs of all ākonga and staff. Your school may have another name for this policy; however, such policies commonly include information about how the school will fulfill its ‘inclusion’ obligations and goals by defining key terms and detailing relevant processes and procedures.

If your school doesn't currently have a Diversity and Inclusion policy, we recommend you read the ‘Creating rainbow inclusive school policies and procedures’ resource by InsideOUT. If your school already has a Diversity and Inclusion policy, make sure that it specifically references rainbow ākonga, and that it is regularly reviewed and updated. It's also important that all staff and students have easy access to the policy (and know where to access it).

<https://insideout.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Creating-rainbow-inclusive-school-policies-and-procedures.pdf>

What happens if we get a negative response from our school community | hapori about the letter?

Some people in your hapori may disagree with, or struggle to see why it is important for schools to develop and implement a Diversity and Inclusion policy. Before sending the letter, it's important to discuss how the school will navigate any negative responses. For example, what is the consistent message the school wants to convey, and who will respond (will it be a specific person like the principal, or will all staff be supported to appropriately respond)?

A good approach is to reiterate the school's responsibility to care for all students. This means that regardless of how a student identifies or expresses themselves, the school will ensure their wellbeing and safety needs are met. Often, caregivers/whānau of non-rainbow students are more concerned about the situation than their children are. Any actions arising from a negative response should prioritise the wellbeing and safety of the rainbow ākonga, as they are much more likely to experience harassment and exclusion than any risk they pose to their peers. Reach out to organisations like InsideOUT if you need additional support or guidance.

Where can I get more information and support about menstruation and rainbow-inclusive practices?

The letter includes two recommended sources of information that whānau and caregivers can use if they want more information about menstruation. We suggest you become familiar with this information as well.

Family Planning: <https://www.familyplanning.org.nz/advice/periods/periods>

The Ikura | Manaakitia te whare tangata—Period Products in Schools Initiative:
Whānau resource

English: <https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2023-12/Ikura-Whanau-Resources-1-5-English.pdf?VersionId=mIQ7auDxmQlw0Vxi625Fa3MqMn0m7eoG>

Te reo Māori: https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2023-12/Ikura-Whanau-Resources-1-5-Maori.pdf?VersionId=QZ8cvllnpSIX95_xpKSkmr_s75aOFnAb

The Ikura | Manaakitia te whare tangata—Period Products in Schools Initiative:
Ikura comic series for students

English: https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2023-12/Ikura-Comics-1-5-English.pdf?VersionId=ARL4kBSGrbL2Zs1LBxUFeWQ2VMru_6H

Te reo Māori: <https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2023-12/Ikura-Comics-1-5-Maori.pdf?VersionId=ykuH9WQfbf0EdQo3fgcDRTM1Of7TF1E9>

We also recommend the following organisations/resources for menstruation and rainbow-related information:

‘Going with the flow’ resource: www.eonz.org.nz

InsideOUT: <https://insideout.org.nz/>

Ministry of Education – Inclusive Education: Guide to LGBTIQ+ students
<https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/supporting-lgbtqa-students/>

Camp support plan: InsideOUT has a gender transition support plan template available to download on their website (link below). While this is typically used for students who are transitioning while they are based at school, the plan can be adapted to suit a camping/EOTC experience. Ask for support from colleagues with experience in this area, and work with your rainbow ākonga to decide what is relevant and what is missing on the template.

<https://insideout.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Gender-transition-support-plan-template.pdf>

Letter template (primary/intermediate schools)

[Add school logo/letterhead]

[Date]

Kia ora whānau, parents, and caregivers

Soon, your child will be going on school camp. We know this is an exciting time for many students and we look forward to sharing their experience with you.

Equity and inclusion are important to us at [school name]. These values are part of our school charter, and staff and students practise them every day. Going on camp is no different! It is important to us that every child feels safe, included, and cared for during their school camp experience. As a school, we have developed a Diversity and Inclusion policy. This reflects our commitment to these values and helps to guide staff and students in their behaviour and responses to other people.

Below, we have included information about how you can support and prepare your child for their camp experience.

Menstruating students

Menstruation commonly begins between the ages of 10 and 14, however some children get their first period earlier or later than this. Having a period for the first time can be a stressful and anxious experience, especially if it occurs while students are at camp. We encourage all whānau and caregivers to talk with their children about menstruation and the suitable products they can use. We also recommend that all menstruating-aged children bring period products with them to camp. Pads with and without wings are best for beginning menstruators. Period togs can also be useful if your child will be involved in water activities.

Staff will ensure that all students have access to a toilet facility to change and dispose of their period products. If your child is participating in a remote activity where toilet facilities are limited, we will talk with them beforehand about ways we can manage this, so they feel safe and can appropriately prepare. We will also make sure that any student who unexpectedly gets their period on camp is given the support they need/want, including period products (if required).

Rainbow students

Many rainbow students, particularly transgender and non-binary students, have unique experiences and needs around their period. As a school, we follow the inclusion and rainbow-support guidelines provided by InsideOUT and the Ministry of Education. When relevant, we offer to work with each of our rainbow students' and their whānau (where appropriate) to develop a camp support plan to ensure they get the care and support they need.

For more information about periods and period management we recommend the following websites:

Family Planning: <https://www.familyplanning.org.nz/advice/periods/periods>

Ikura | Manaakitia te whare tangata—Period products for schools [see 'more information']:

<https://www.education.govt.nz/parents-and-caregivers/schools-year-0-13/available-assistance/period-products-schools#more-information-for-whanau-families-6>

If you would like to discuss your child's wellbeing or would like to view the school's Diversity and Inclusion policy, please talk to your child's teacher.

Thank you for your support.