

# RST Network submission on the draft Health and Physical Education 0-10 Years Curriculum

## Introduction

The Regional Sports Trust (RST) Network is a national collective of 17 autonomous charitable trusts working collaboratively to enhance sport and physical activity outcomes for communities across Aotearoa, supported by Sport New Zealand.

As a network, we are broadly supportive of curriculum reform that strengthens teachers' ability, particularly primary generalists, to confidently and effectively deliver Health and Physical Education (HPE). Our workforce includes Healthy Active Learning (HAL) teams who work deeply with up to 900 schools and kura nationwide, including rural, isolated and high-equity-index communities. This provides clear insight into how curriculum design translates into real-world delivery and what is realistic for teachers to implement.

RSTs also administer and support initiatives such as Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa and Active As, which fund and enable quality physical activity opportunities in schools and communities. These funds have contributed more than \$7M across nearly 600 physical activity initiatives into school settings in 2025/26 and more than \$53M since 2021/22. Collectively, these initiatives reinforce our commitment to equitable access to meaningful, high-quality physical activity experiences for tamariki and rangatahi.

The evidence base linking physical activity to learning and wellbeing is strong. Sport New Zealand's *Active Bodies, Active Minds* report consolidates research showing that physically active tamariki and rangatahi are more engaged in learning, attend school more often, achieve at higher levels and experience improved wellbeing. In this context, we are concerned that the draft HPE curriculum reduces realistic opportunities for meaningful physical activity by expanding content volume while constraining available teaching time. This risks undermining the outcomes the HPE learning area is designed to support.

As a network committed to improving physical activity access and outcomes, we consider it essential that the curriculum enables:

- more, not less, time for movement
- greater flexibility for local curriculum design
- equitable access to high-quality physical activity opportunities
- a realistic workload for teachers

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- conditions that maximise learning, wellbeing and participation

This submission is provided to help ensure the refreshed curriculum reflects evidence, honours local context and strengthens, rather than limits, opportunities for tamariki and rangatahi to thrive through physical activity.

## What does quality look like in our view?

We support curriculum reform that provides clearer guidance than the current New Zealand Curriculum and better supports teachers to deliver the intent of HPE. Our key caveat is that Physical Education must lead to positive, holistic experiences of physical activity where all students can participate, belong and succeed.

While the draft's purpose statement suggests space for this intent, we do not see it consistently reflected in the learning area structure or in the prescribed knowledge and practices. In primary and intermediate schools, Physical Education directly shapes physical activity pathways, wellbeing, sense of belonging and movement experiences for tamariki and rangatahi. Given the diversity across the more than 900 schools and kura we work with, we believe the curriculum must be inclusive, evidence-based, culturally grounded, realistic to implement and equitable for all learners. We do not believe the draft, as currently structured, meets this standard.

We also know from research and sector data that, in relation to physical activity, students are primarily motivated by fun, connection and belonging. Active NZ and Voice of Rangatahi data consistently show fun is the leading motivator and satisfaction drops when experiences narrow. Sport NZ's Physical Literacy Approach further reinforces that quality physical activity experiences address physical, social and emotional, cognitive and spiritual needs, not technique alone. Removing Hauora, the socio-ecological perspective and limiting Te Ao Māori contexts contradicts this evidence base and reduces the ability of schools to design programmes that reflect their learners and communities.

Through the Healthy Active Learning initiative, schools have been supported over more than six years to understand and respond to learner needs by drawing on the strengths of school and community environments. This enables tamariki to develop identity and belonging to place through Physical Education, supporting engagement in physical activity and associated wellbeing benefits.

We see alignment between these principles and international best practice, including the OECD PE 2030 analysis, which calls for dynamic and inclusive Physical Education that develops the whole child and emphasises coherence with wider competencies and values.

## Key concerns with the draft curriculum

### 1. Time allocation and curriculum overcrowding

The Ministry of Education recommendation alongside the draft is for three hours per week to be allocated to HPE alongside Technology and the Arts. If this time is divided evenly across the three learning areas, and if Health is delivered separately, this could result in only 30 minutes per week for Physical Education. We consider this insufficient and likely to limit what can be achieved in the learning area.

This concern is heightened by evidence showing that 5–11-year-old students are currently receiving an average of 2.55 hours per week of Physical Education (Active NZ survey). Reducing time for movement is inconsistent with the wellbeing and learning benefits that underpin HPE.

### 2. Over-prescription and “mandated context” risk

We acknowledge a clear weakness of the current New Zealand Curriculum is that broad achievement objectives have been left open to interpretation for many teachers. The draft seeks to address this by providing clearer content and context. However, we believe the prescribed knowledge and practices go too far and introduce significant risks to the quality and inclusiveness of Physical Education.

The inclusion of specific sports or activity types suggests an unintended mandated context. A curriculum focused on technical and tactical skill acquisition in a narrow set of contexts risks decreasing enjoyment, reducing learner agency and widening inequities. It may also increase disengagement through overexposure to prescribed codes and an emphasis on performance rather than broader movement learning and positive participation experiences.

Learning in, through and about movement has long been a cornerstone of Physical Education in Aotearoa. We see limited scope for this breadth within the draft, which restricts schools’ ability to design a localised, needs-based curriculum that fits their community, facilities, strengths and identity.

### 3. Equity, inclusion and learner diversity

We are concerned that the draft reflects more traditional technique-led approaches that have historically disadvantaged many learners and contributed to inequities of outcomes. This includes limited ability to deliver deep socio-cultural learning alongside movement contexts, despite the diversity of cultures across Aotearoa.

We also consider the strong performance and technique emphasis will disadvantage many young people who experience intellectual or physical disabilities. There appears to be limited

scope to adapt, scaffold or differentiate learning, increasing the risk that these learners are excluded and unable to find success in this curriculum area.

In addition, the draft's strict year-by-year progression does not appear to recognise significant variation in physical and cognitive development. The current curriculum structure has allowed teachers to move up or down levels to meet learners where they are. The draft's structure and framing do not readily enable this responsiveness.

#### 4. Age and stage appropriateness

We have concerns about the age and stage appropriateness of several knowledge and practice statements. For example, a Year 2 knowledge statement expects learners to understand abstract exercise physiology concepts such as heart rate, circulation and muscle temperature in a way that is typically addressed much later in schooling.

A further example appears in Year 8 athletics, where students are required to use accurate technique in a standing and three-step javelin throw. This is a highly technical skill and may be unrealistic in many settings, particularly for generalist teachers and schools with limited equipment and facilities.

#### 5. Logistics of delivery and resourcing constraints

Delivering the draft HPE curriculum places significant logistical pressure on schools and teachers. The volume of annual knowledge and practices, combined with limited time allocations, creates a risk of superficial rather than meaningful learning. This reflects wider sector feedback that the draft is content-heavy and structured more like a syllabus, increasing workload and planning demands.

Many schools do not have reliable access to adequate facilities or to volumes of specialised equipment. There are 417 primary and intermediate schools across the motu with an isolation index number greater than 1.27 who receive targeted Ministry of Education funding due to geographic isolation. The draft's movement-focused teaching sequences assume regular access to safe indoor and outdoor spaces, storage and equipment that many schools, particularly smaller rural and high-equity-index schools, do not have.

Aquatics also poses major logistical challenges. Many schools do not have pools and accessing community pools is not always feasible due to transport costs, supervision requirements and time constraints. These barriers create clear inequities between schools and undermine the draft's intention that all students meet aquatic safety expectations.

The strict year-by-year sequencing creates implementation challenges for teachers and schools. Where learners do not meet expectations at one year level, the next year shifts quickly to new knowledge and practices, leaving teachers to design bridging content under significant

time pressure. This approach risks widening achievement gaps over time. Also, a vast number of schools in Aotearoa operate multi-level classrooms, creating challenges for teachers to plan and implement in these contexts. In particular we note small schools which may operate with up to four year levels in one classroom with small cohorts of students in each year group.

Finally, the breadth of content prescribed appears unrealistic. In Year 1, there are more than 40 knowledge and practice outcomes to be covered in the Physical Education and Outdoor Education strands alone, excluding Health. This compares with 15 achievement objectives across two to three years at Level 1 in the existing New Zealand Curriculum. Given recommended time allocations and the nature of quality Physical Education teaching, we do not consider this volume deliverable in practice.

We are also concerned that, given these implementation pressures, schools may increasingly engage external providers to deliver Physical Education. Beyond cost and equity implications, there are quality risks when provision becomes one-size-fits-all and delivered by coaches rather than teachers who understand learners and can contextualise Physical Education within the broader curriculum.

## Recommendations

To meet the needs of all students and support lifelong engagement in physical activity, we recommend a more holistic curriculum model with knowledge and practices that:

1. Enables exposure to a wide range of sports and physical activity contexts, rather than narrowing contexts through implied mandated codes.
2. Balances participation, fun, skill development and fitness, with emphasis on inclusive, positive experiences.
3. Supports a range of approaches to skill development, including play-based learning, game sense and structured learning where appropriate.
4. Strengthens understanding of socio-cultural influences on physical activity and links to holistic wellbeing, including through Hauora and a socio-ecological perspective.
5. Ensures age and stage appropriateness and allows for variation in physical and cognitive development.
6. Restores flexibility so schools can lean into local strengths, facilities and community identity when designing local curriculum.
7. Provides meaningful inclusion of Te Ao Māori and other cultural movement contexts, enabling learning through and about movement rather than technique alone.

8. Supports learner agency through appropriate use of student voice and choice in contexts and learning pathways.

## We further recommend:

- Removing implied mandated sports or codes, allowing schools to select authentic, locally feasible contexts to support participation, learning outcomes and stronger Hauora connections.
- Shifting from strict year-level sequencing to a more spiraled approach where concepts recur and deepen over time, supporting composite classes and learner diversity, including in rural and isolated kura settings.
- Increasing the recommended time allocated to Physical Education, including mandating a minimum of 2.5 hours per week for Physical Education to support learning and wellbeing benefits and enable progress towards daily physical activity guidelines.

## Conclusion

In summary, we are concerned the draft's highly prescribed knowledge and practices risk reducing Physical Education to a technique and performance-focused programme delivered in limited contexts. This reduces flexibility for local curriculum design, creates substantial implementation pressure for generalist teachers and risks widening inequities between schools and learners.

We support a refreshed HPE curriculum that is more consistent with UNESCO's position on Quality Physical Education and reflects Aotearoa-based philosophies such as Balance is Better, which emphasise variety, enjoyment, wellbeing and quality experiences regardless of ability. We recommend a more holistic, inclusive and flexible curriculum, supported by sufficient time allocation, so all tamariki and rangatahi can thrive through positive movement experiences.