



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Version control

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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

1. Staff Policy

Equals Trust is committed to providing a working environment in which all employees, workers, job applicants, volunteers, trustees, governors and members of the wider school community are treated fairly, with dignity and respect.

The Trust values diversity and recognises that people bring different backgrounds, experiences, perspectives and needs. We believe that an inclusive working environment supports staff wellbeing, improves decision-making, strengthens relationships and enables all employees to contribute fully to the life and success of our schools.

The Trust will not tolerate unlawful discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, victimisation, bullying or any other conduct that undermines equality, dignity or respect at work.

This policy applies to all aspects of employment and engagement with the Trust, including recruitment, appointment, induction, pay, training, promotion, performance management, flexible working, family leave, sickness absence, disciplinary and grievance matters, redundancy, dismissal and post-employment matters.

Nothing in this policy reduces any statutory employment or equality right. Where legislation provides greater protection than this policy, the statutory provision will apply.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- all employees of Equals Trust;
- casual workers;
- agency workers;
- apprentices;
- volunteers;
- trustees and governors;
- job applicants;
- former employees where relevant;
- contractors, consultants and visitors while working with or on behalf of the Trust.

The policy also applies to conduct outside the workplace where it is connected to work, including work-related social events, training, conferences, online platforms, email, social media and other digital communications.

3. Legal Framework

This policy has been developed with reference to the Equality Act 2010 and associated employment legislation.

The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- marriage and civil partnership;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race, including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation.

The Trust also recognises that employees may experience disadvantage or barriers linked to wider personal, social or economic circumstances. Whilst these may not always be protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, the Trust will seek to act fairly, reasonably and compassionately in its employment practices.

4. Public Sector Equality Duty

As a public body, the Trust and its schools must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty when carrying out their functions.

This means consciously considering the need to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Having due regard means that equality considerations should be embedded into decision-making. Equality should be considered before and during the development of policies, processes, staffing decisions and organisational change, rather than as an afterthought.

The Trust and its schools will seek to ensure that equality considerations are proportionate, meaningful and relevant to the decision being made.

5. Specific Equality Duties

The Trust and its schools will comply with the specific equality duties applicable to schools and public bodies in England.

This includes:

- publishing information to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty;
- publishing one or more equality objectives;
- reviewing and updating equality objectives at least every four years;
- ensuring relevant equality information is available on school websites where required;
- considering equality implications when developing policies, practices and school improvement priorities;
- maintaining appropriate accessibility planning arrangements for pupils.

6. Equality Objectives

Each school must publish one or more equality objectives that support the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Equality objectives should be:

- relevant to the school context;
- informed by available evidence;
- linked where appropriate to school improvement priorities;
- reviewed regularly;
- published at least every four years.

Examples of equality objectives may include, but are not limited to:

- improving access and participation for pupils with disabilities;
- reducing gaps in attendance, attainment or exclusion for particular groups;
- improving representation, recruitment or progression of underrepresented staff groups;
- strengthening inclusive curriculum practice;
- improving accessibility of communication with parents and carers;
- improving staff understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion.

7. Responsibilities

7.1 Trust Board

The Trust Board has overall responsibility for ensuring that the Trust meets its statutory equality obligations and that equality, diversity and inclusion are considered within governance, strategy and decision-making.

The Trust Board will:

- ensure that this policy is approved, reviewed and implemented;
- have oversight of Trust-wide equality risks and priorities;
- ensure that equality is considered in significant strategic decisions;
- support compliance with statutory publication requirements;
- promote a culture of dignity, respect and inclusion.

7.2 CEO and Executive Leaders

The CEO and executive leaders are responsible for ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded across Trust leadership, policy, people management and organisational development.

They will:

- model inclusive leadership;
- ensure that senior leaders understand their responsibilities;
- consider equality implications in strategic decision-making;
- ensure that policies and procedures support equality and inclusion;
- take appropriate action where concerns are identified.

7.3 Head Teachers

Head Teachers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented consistently within their school.

They will:

- promote an inclusive school culture;
- ensure that staff are treated fairly and consistently;
- consider equality implications in staffing decisions;
- ensure that reasonable adjustments are considered where required;
- ensure that complaints or concerns are addressed appropriately;
- ensure that school equality objectives are published and reviewed;
- ensure that employment practices reflect this policy.

7.4 Line Managers

Line managers are responsible for applying this policy in day-to-day people management.

They must:

- treat employees fairly and with dignity;
- avoid discriminatory decision-making;
- support reasonable adjustments;
- challenge inappropriate behaviour;
- seek HR advice where equality issues arise;
- ensure that decisions are evidence-based and documented where appropriate.

7.5 Employees

All employees are responsible for:

- treating colleagues, pupils, parents, carers and visitors with dignity and respect;
- complying with this policy;
- avoiding discriminatory, harassing, bullying or victimising behaviour;
- challenging inappropriate behaviour where safe and appropriate;
- reporting concerns in accordance with Trust procedures;
- participating in relevant training.

Employees should understand that they may be personally liable for acts of unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation committed during employment.

7.6 Governors and Trustees

Governors and trustees must act in accordance with this policy and support the Trust in meeting its equality duties. They should ensure that equality implications are considered in governance decisions and that school leaders are held appropriately to account.

8. Forms of Unlawful Discrimination and Prohibited Conduct

The Trust will not tolerate any form of unlawful discrimination or prohibited conduct.

8.1 Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination occurs where a person is treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic.

This may include treating someone less favourably because they are perceived to have a protected characteristic or because they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic.

8.2 Indirect Discrimination

Indirect discrimination occurs where a policy, criterion, practice or way of working applies to everyone but places people with a particular protected characteristic at a particular disadvantage, and the Trust cannot show that it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

8.3 Discrimination Arising from Disability

Discrimination arising from disability occurs where a disabled person is treated unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of their disability, and the treatment cannot be objectively justified.

8.4 Failure to Make Reasonable Adjustments

The Trust has a duty to make reasonable adjustments where a disabled employee, worker or job applicant is placed at a substantial disadvantage because of a provision, criterion, practice, physical feature or lack of auxiliary aid.

8.5 Harassment

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

8.6 Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

The Trust will take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of employees in the course of their employment. This includes promoting appropriate standards of conduct, responding appropriately to concerns, providing information or training where required and taking action where conduct falls below expected standards.

8.7 Victimisation

Victimisation occurs where someone is treated less favourably because they have made, supported or may make a complaint or allegation relating to discrimination, harassment or another equality matter.

8.8 Bullying

Bullying may not always be linked to a protected characteristic, but it is unacceptable and may be addressed under the Trust's relevant conduct, grievance or dignity at work procedures.

9. Dignity and Respect at Work

The Trust expects all employees and representatives of the Trust to maintain professional standards of behaviour.

This includes:

- communicating respectfully;
- listening to others;
- avoiding offensive, stereotypical or exclusionary language;
- respecting difference;
- raising concerns appropriately;
- avoiding conduct that could reasonably be perceived as intimidating, humiliating, degrading or hostile.

The Trust recognises that intent is not always determinative. Behaviour may still be unacceptable even where an individual did not intend to cause offence.

10. Recruitment and Selection

The Trust is committed to fair, transparent and inclusive recruitment.

Recruitment and selection processes will:

- be based on objective criteria;
- be linked to the requirements of the role;
- avoid unlawful discrimination;
- support safer recruitment requirements;
- provide reasonable adjustments for disabled applicants;
- use structured shortlisting and interview processes wherever possible;
- maintain appropriate records of decisions.

Job descriptions and person specifications should be reviewed to ensure that criteria are necessary, proportionate and relevant to the role.

The Trust will not ask health or disability-related questions before making a job offer except where permitted by law, for example to establish whether reasonable adjustments are needed for selection or where a requirement is intrinsic to the role.

11. Pay, Benefits and Equal Pay

The Trust is committed to equal pay for equal work and to maintaining fair, transparent and defensible pay arrangements.

Men and women are entitled to equal pay where they are carrying out:

- like work;
- work rated as equivalent;
- work of equal value.

The Trust will ensure that pay decisions are made in accordance with the relevant pay policy, national conditions where applicable, job evaluation arrangements, governance approvals and objective evidence.

Pay decisions must not be influenced by protected characteristics or by assumptions relating to an individual's personal circumstances.

The Trust will retain appropriate records to demonstrate the basis on which pay decisions, allowances and additional payments have been made.

12. Promotion, Development and Career Progression

The Trust is committed to ensuring that access to training, professional development, leadership opportunities and progression is fair and inclusive.

Managers should ensure that:

- development opportunities are communicated fairly;
- selection for training or progression is based on objective criteria;
- part-time staff, flexible workers and staff returning from family leave are not disadvantaged;
- disabled employees are supported to access development opportunities;
- assumptions are not made about an employee's ambition, availability or capability because of a protected characteristic.

13. Flexible Working, Family Leave and Work-Life Balance

The Trust recognises that employees may have different working patterns, caring responsibilities, health needs or personal circumstances.

Requests for flexible working, family leave and leave of absence will be considered in accordance with the relevant Trust policies and statutory requirements.

Managers must ensure that employees are not treated unfavourably because they:

- request flexible working;
- are pregnant;

- take maternity, adoption, paternity, shared parental or parental leave;
- take carer's leave;
- have caring responsibilities;
- request adjustments because of disability or health-related needs.

14. Disability, Health and Reasonable Adjustments

The Trust is committed to supporting disabled employees, workers and job applicants.

Reasonable adjustments may include, but are not limited to:

- changes to working arrangements;
- adjustments to duties;
- phased returns;
- modified equipment;
- changes to communication methods;
- adjustments to attendance at meetings or training;
- changes to processes or procedures;
- additional support or supervision;
- occupational health advice.

All requests for reasonable adjustments should be considered individually. Managers should seek HR advice where appropriate and should not reject a request without proper consideration.

Reasonable adjustments should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they remain appropriate.

15. Pregnancy, Maternity and Related Protection

Employees must not be treated unfavourably because of pregnancy, maternity leave or a pregnancy-related illness.

Managers must ensure that:

- pregnancy-related absence is recorded appropriately;
- risk assessments are completed for pregnant women where required;
- reasonable support is provided;
- female employees are not disadvantaged in relation to pay progression, development, promotion, redundancy selection or employment opportunities because of pregnancy or maternity leave.

Employees returning from maternity, adoption, shared parental or other family leave should be supported appropriately on return to work.

16. Gender Reassignment

The Trust will not tolerate discrimination, harassment or victimisation because of gender reassignment.

Employees who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process of gender reassignment are protected from discrimination.

The Trust will seek to handle matters relating to gender identity sensitively, confidentially and respectfully.

17. Religion, Belief and Cultural Needs

The Trust will seek to accommodate employees' religion, belief and cultural needs where this is reasonable and compatible with operational requirements.

This may include consideration of:

- religious observance;
- dress and appearance;
- prayer or reflection needs;
- dietary needs at work events;
- leave requests for religious festivals;
- adjustments to working arrangements where appropriate.

Requests will be considered individually and fairly.

18. Menopause, Women's Health and Wellbeing

The Trust recognises that female employees may require support in relation to menopause, menstrual health, fertility treatment, pregnancy loss, endometriosis or other health issues that may affect work.

Managers should respond sensitively and consider appropriate support, which may include:

- temporary adjustments;
- flexible working arrangements;
- occupational health advice;

- access to wellbeing support;
- adjustments to absence triggers where disability or health-related equality considerations apply.

This section should be read alongside the Trust's relevant wellbeing, sickness absence, or leave policies.

19. Equality in Organisational Change and Redundancy

The Trust will ensure that equality considerations are embedded into organisational change, restructuring and redundancy processes.

This includes:

- considering the equality impact of proposed changes;
- consulting affected employees fairly;
- using objective selection criteria where selection is required;
- avoiding criteria that unlawfully disadvantage employees with protected characteristics;
- considering reasonable adjustments for disabled employees;
- considering the position of employees on maternity, adoption, shared parental or other family leave;
- documenting decision-making appropriately.

20. Procurement, Contractors and Third Parties

The Trust expects contractors, suppliers, consultants and third parties working with or on behalf of the Trust to act consistently with the principles of equality, dignity and respect.

Where appropriate, equality expectations should be reflected in procurement, service specifications, contracts or partnership arrangements.

Concerns about the conduct of contractors, suppliers or third parties should be raised with the relevant senior leader.

21. Pupils, Parents, Carers and the Wider School Community

Although this is a staff policy, the Trust expects employees to apply the same principles of dignity, respect and non-discrimination when dealing with pupils, parents, carers, visitors, volunteers, governors, trustees, suppliers and members of the wider community.

Employees must ensure that their conduct supports the Trust's safeguarding responsibilities and promotes an inclusive school environment.

Separate pupil-facing policies may address equality duties relating to curriculum, behaviour, admissions, accessibility, SEND, bullying, safeguarding and school improvement.

22. Equality Impact in Decision-Making

Equality considerations should be built into decision-making where policies, practices, staffing arrangements, service models or organisational changes may affect employees or the wider school community.

The level of assessment should be proportionate to the significance of the decision.

Managers and leaders should consider:

- who may be affected by the decision;
- whether any group may be disadvantaged;
- whether the impact can be removed or reduced;
- whether reasonable adjustments are required;
- whether consultation or engagement is needed;
- what evidence supports the decision;
- how the decision will be reviewed.

Equality impact does not require a particular outcome, but it does require genuine, conscious and informed consideration.

23. Raising Concerns

Employees who believe they have experienced or witnessed discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, victimisation, bullying or other inappropriate conduct should raise their concern as soon as possible.

Concerns may be raised through:

- the employee's line manager;
- the Head Teacher;
- HR;
- the Grievance Policy;
- the Whistleblowing Policy, where appropriate;
- another appropriate senior leader where the concern relates to the usual line manager.

The Trust will take concerns seriously and will respond appropriately.

Employees will not be victimised for raising a genuine concern or supporting another person who raises a concern.

24. Complaints and Breaches of this Policy

Breaches of this policy may be addressed under the relevant Trust procedure, including the Disciplinary Policy, Grievance Policy, Capability Policy, Whistleblowing Policy or other appropriate process.

Serious acts of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, bullying or victimisation may amount to gross misconduct and may result in dismissal.

Where a concern relates to safeguarding, the Trust's safeguarding procedures must be followed.

25. Confidentiality

Equality-related matters will be handled sensitively and confidentially.

Information will only be shared where there is a legitimate need to do so, including where required for safeguarding, legal, HR, occupational health or management purposes.

The Trust will process personal data in accordance with data protection legislation and relevant privacy notices.

26. Training and Communication

The Trust will ensure that this policy is communicated appropriately to employees, leaders, governors and trustees.

Training or guidance may be provided on:

- equality and diversity;
- inclusive leadership;
- recruitment and selection;
- reasonable adjustments;
- harassment and sexual harassment prevention;
- unconscious bias;
- dignity at work;

- Public Sector Equality Duty;
- equality impact in decision-making.

Managers are expected to understand their responsibilities and seek HR advice where equality issues arise.

27. Monitoring and Review

The Trust will monitor the application of this policy to support fairness, consistency and compliance.

Monitoring may include, where appropriate and lawful:

- recruitment and selection data;
- workforce composition;
- pay and progression data;
- training and development access;
- employee relations casework;
- grievances and complaints;
- sickness absence and adjustments;
- exit information;
- staff survey themes;
- equality objectives and progress.

Data will be used proportionately and in accordance with data protection requirements.

The policy will be reviewed at least every three years, or earlier where there are legislative changes, significant organisational changes or identified operational need.

28. Relationship with Other Policies

This policy should be read alongside relevant Trust policies and guidance, including:

- Recruitment and Selection Policy;
- Pay Policy;
- Appraisal or Performance Management Policy;
- Disciplinary Policy;
- Grievance Policy;
- Capability Policy;
- Flexible Working Policy;
- Leave of Absence Policy;
- Sickness Absence Policy;
- Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Shared Parental Leave Policies;

- Menopause Policy or Guidance;
- Supporting Trans Employees Guidance;
- Staff Code of Conduct;
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- Whistleblowing Policy;
- Data Protection Policy.

Where there is overlap between policies, managers should seek HR advice to ensure that the correct process is followed.

29. Legislative Changes

This policy will be interpreted in accordance with current employment and equality legislation.

Where statutory rights or duties are amended or enhanced, the Trust will apply the statutory requirements pending formal policy review.

Appendix 1: Summary of Protected Characteristics

Protected characteristic	Summary
Age	Protection from unlawful discrimination because of age or age group.
Disability	Protection for individuals who meet the statutory definition of disability, including a duty to consider reasonable adjustments.
Gender reassignment	Protection for individuals proposing to undergo, undergoing or having undergone gender reassignment.
Marriage and civil partnership	Protection from discrimination because someone is married or in a civil partnership.
Pregnancy and maternity	Protection from unfavourable treatment because of pregnancy, pregnancy-related illness or maternity leave.
Race	Includes colour, nationality, ethnic origin and national origin.
Religion or belief	Includes religious and philosophical beliefs, and lack of religion or belief.
Sex	Protection from discrimination because someone is male or female.
Sexual orientation	Protection from discrimination because of sexual orientation.

Appendix 2: Examples of Equality Considerations in Schools

Equality considerations may arise in relation to:

- recruitment and safer recruitment;

- deployment of staff;
- part-time and flexible working arrangements;
- sickness absence management;
- menopause and health-related support;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- reasonable adjustments;
- staff restructuring;
- redundancy selection;
- training and professional development;
- pay decisions and allowances;
- uniform or dress requirements;
- religious observance;
- staff conduct and dignity at work;
- parental engagement;
- accessibility of school events;
- communications with families;
- SEND and disability access;
- pupil behaviour and exclusions;
- curriculum and school culture.

Appendix 3: Equality Decision-Making Checklist

Before making a significant policy, staffing or operational decision, leaders should consider:

Question	Notes
Who will be affected by this decision?	Consider employees, pupils, parents, carers and others where relevant.
Could the decision affect people with protected characteristics differently?	Consider direct and indirect impacts.
Is there evidence to support the decision?	Use relevant data, consultation feedback or case information where available.
Could any disadvantage be removed or reduced?	Consider adjustments, alternatives or mitigation.
Have reasonable adjustments been considered?	Particularly where disability may be relevant.
Is the decision proportionate?	Consider whether the intended aim could be achieved in a less disadvantageous way.
Has the decision been documented?	Keep an appropriate record of the consideration given.
Does HR or legal advice need to be sought?	Especially in complex or high-risk cases.