

Date Reviewed: Summer 2023

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FOREST BRIDGE SCHOOL

Equality Policy

Introduction and Legal Framework

The Equality Act (2010) replaced existing equality legislation, including the Race Relations Act, the Disability Discrimination Act and the Sex Discrimination Act and as a Free School and Special School we welcome our duties under the Equality Act to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in relation to age (as appropriate), disability, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexual identity. Forest Bridge School (FBS) also recognises the duty under the Education and Inspections Act (2006) to promote community cohesion. Staff and Governors take these responsibilities very seriously. We recognise that these duties reflect international human rights standards as expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Pupil, the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, and the Human Rights Act (1998).

School Policy Links

School policies that link with this policy:

- Inclusion
- Special educational needs and disability (SEND)
- Admissions
- Complaints
- Safer recruitment

Guiding Axioms

The Equality Act (2010) has brought together all the current discrimination laws into one and sets out the *protected characteristics* that qualify for protection from discrimination involving:

- Age
- Disability including individual learning needs
- Gender including reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Family type
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation

In fulfilling the legal obligations cited above, we will be guided by nine axioms.

Axiom 1: All learners and school team members are of equal value.

We see all learners, their parents and carers, and school team members as of equal value:

- whether or not they are disabled
- whatever their ethnicity, culture, national origin or national status
- whatever their gender and gender identity
- whatever their religious or non-religious affiliation or faith background
- whatever their sexual identity

Axiom 2: We recognise and respect difference.

Treating people equally (Axiom 1 above) does not necessarily involve treating them all the same. Our policies, procedures and activities must not discriminate but must nevertheless take account of differences of life-experience, outlook and background, and in the kinds of barrier and disadvantage which people may face, in relation to:

- disability, so that reasonable adjustments are made (see also Access Policy/Plan)
- ethnicity, so that different cultural backgrounds and experiences of prejudice are recognised and proactively addressed
- gender, so that the different needs and experiences of girls and boys, and women and men, are recognised
- religion, belief or faith background
- sexual identity

Axiom 3: We foster positive attitudes and relationships, and a shared sense of cohesion.

Our approach, procedures and activities will promote:

- positive attitudes towards disabled people, good relations between disabled and non-disabled people, and an absence of harassment of disabled people
- positive interaction, good relations and dialogue between groups and communities different from each other in terms of ethnicity, culture, religious affiliation, national origin or national status, and an absence of prejudice-related bullying and incidents
- mutual respect and good relations between boys and girls, and women and men, and an absence of sexual and homophobic harassment

Axiom 4: We observe good equalities practice in staff recruitment, retention and development.

We will always ensure that policies and procedures can benefit all employees and potential employees, for example in recruitment and promotion, and in continuing professional development:

- whether or not they are disabled
- whatever their ethnicity, culture, religious affiliation, national origin or national status
- whatever their gender and sexual identity, and with full respect for legal rights relating to pregnancy and maternity

Axiom 5: We aim to reduce and remove inequalities and barriers that already exist.

In addition to avoiding or minimising possible negative impacts of our policies, we will take opportunities to maximise positive impacts by reducing and removing inequalities and barriers that may already exist between:

- disabled and non-disabled people
- people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds
- girls and boys, women and men

Axiom 6: We will consult and involve widely.

We will engage with a range of groups and individuals to ensure that those who are affected by a policy or activity are consulted and involved in the design of new policies, and in the review of existing ones. We will consult in ways which take into account:

- disabled people as well as non-disabled
- ethnicity, so that different cultural backgrounds and experiences of prejudice are recognised
- gender, so that the different needs and experiences of girls and boys, and women and men, are recognised
- religion, belief or faith background
- sexual identity

Axiom 7: Society as a whole should benefit.

Our policies and activities will benefit society as a whole, both locally and nationally, by fostering greater social cohesion, and greater participation in public life of:

- disabled people as well as non-disabled people
- people of a wide range of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds
- both women and men, girls and boys
- all people regardless of sexual orientation

Axiom 8: We will base our practices on sound evidence.

We will maintain and publish quantitative and qualitative information about our progress towards greater equality in relation to:

- disability
- ethnicity, religion and culture
- gender
- age
- sexual orientation

Axiom 9: Objectives and reporting.

We will formulate and publish specific and measurable objectives, based on the evidence we have collected and published and the engagement in which we have been involved, in relation to:

- disability
- ethnicity, religion and culture
- gender
- age
- sexual orientation

We will set out within the framework of the overall school improvement plan and processes the specific equality objectives we shall pursue. The objectives which we identify will take into account national and local priorities and issues, as appropriate. Our equality objectives will be kept under review and we will report annually on progress towards achieving them.

Curriculum

Although pupils and young adults with autism often face many barriers to learning, often associated with sensory processing issues, social and communication difficulties, and behavioural problems that do not mean that they are unable to learn. FBS governors and SLT will keep each curriculum subject or area under review in order to ensure that these barriers are reduced and that teaching and learning in the FBS reflect the axioms set out above.

Ethos and Organisation

We will ensure that the axioms listed above apply to the full range of our policies and practices, including those that are concerned with:

- pupils' progress, attainment and achievement
- pupils' personal development, welfare and well-being
- teaching styles and strategies
- admissions and attendance
- staff recruitment, retention and professional development
- care, guidance and support
- behaviour, discipline and exclusions
- working in partnership with parents, carers and guardians
- working with the wider community

Prejudice and Bullying

Some parents/carers of pupils with autism have reported that their child has told them that they are being bullied at school with many pupils finding break or lunch times particularly difficult or frightening. For pupils with autism, bullying behaviour often stems from the differences between them and other pupils in school: in the way they speak, look or act, or how they are treated by adults.

Especially given the experience of many pupils with autism, FBS is strongly opposed to all forms of prejudice which stand in the way of all pupils reaching their potential. We will fulfil all the legal duties referred to above. We will also put in place the necessary policies and procedures to remove all forms of prejudice such as:

- prejudices around special educational needs and disability

- prejudices around racism and xenophobia, including those that are directed towards religious groups and communities, for example anti-Semitism, and those that are directed against travellers, migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum
- prejudices reflecting sexism and homophobia

Recruitment

We recognise our duties under safeguarding legislation and will comply with both the Health Standards (England) Regulations (2003) and Section 60 of the Equality Act (2010). We will also comply with the relevant statutory requirements and the guidance as contained in the documents: 'Keeping pupils safe in education. Statutory guidance for schools and colleges' DfE (2014) and 'Working Together to Safeguard Pupils' DfE (2013).

Vacancies will be advertised openly and will normally be available for members of staff in the school to apply. In most cases vacancies will be advertised externally unless there are cogent reasons why this should not occur, for example in situations of potential redundancy. Governors will wherever possible make reasonable adjustments to recruitment processes, working conditions or the working environment. All decisions relating to appointments or promotions will be conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act (2010). See also the Safer Recruitment Policy.

Roles and Responsibilities

The governing body is responsible for ensuring that the school complies with statutory requirements, and that this policy and its related procedures and action plans are implemented. At all times a nominated member of the governing body will have a watching brief regarding the implementation of this policy.

The Headteacher is responsible for implementing the policy, for ensuring that all staff are aware of their responsibilities and are given appropriate training and support; and for taking appropriate action in any cases of unlawful discrimination. The Headteacher may delegate day-to-day responsibility to a member of the SLT.

Staff will be expected to:

- promote an inclusive and collaborative ethos in their classroom
- deal with any prejudice-related incidents that may occur
- plan and deliver lessons and sequences of lessons reflecting the above axioms
- support pupils in their class for whom English is an additional language (see EAL Policy)
- keep up-to-date with equalities legislation relevant to their work

Information and Resources

We will ensure that the content of this policy is known to all staff and governors and, as appropriate, to all pupils and their parents and carers.

Religious Observance

We will respect the religious beliefs and practice of all staff, pupils and parents, and comply with reasonable requests relating to religious observance and practice.

Staff Development and Training

All staff, including support and administrative staff, will receive appropriate training and opportunities for professional development, both as individuals and as groups or teams. The principles outlined in relation to fair and equal treatment will also apply to selection for training. Requests for training will be considered in accordance with the FB's operational priorities, based on the school development plan and CPD budget.

Breaches of the Policy

Any breaches of this policy will be dealt with in the same ways that breaches of other school policies are dealt with, as determined by the Headteacher and governing body.

Impact Monitoring and Evaluation

Quantitative and qualitative data will be collected relating to the implementation of this policy, and Governors may make adjustments as appropriate in the light of such review. In particular we will collect, analyse and use data in relation to achievement, broken down as appropriate according to special educational and disabilities ; ethnicity, culture, language, religious affiliation, national origin and national status; gender; age; and sexual orientation.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Headteacher