

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A SCHOOL EQUALITY POLICY

These guidelines have been written to assist schools and are by no means meant to be a template for a model policy, as it is important that schools develop their own document, which reflects their school ethos and practice, whilst being mindful of their duties within the relevant legislation.

EQUALITY ACT 2010

The act defines nine “protected characteristics”.

They are: i)age; ii)disability; iii)gender reassignment; iv)marriage and civil partnership; v)pregnancy or maternity; vi) race; vii)religion or belief; viii)sex; ix)sexual orientation.

The characteristic “race” includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin. The characteristic “religion” also includes religious or philosophical belief or lack of religion or belief.

The act rules against direct discrimination whereby a person is treated less favourably in relation to one of the protected characteristics than they would otherwise be treated.

If the protected characteristic is race for example, less favourable treatment includes segregation from others.

The act also identifies indirect discrimination, whereby a provision, criterion or practice is applied which discriminates in relation to a relevant protected characteristic, and in so doing, puts someone at a disadvantage and is not a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

The act also defines harassment as engaging in unwanted conduct which violates a person’s dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person, due to one of the protected characteristics.

Schools must not discriminate, either directly or indirectly, nor victimise or permit harassment in the following ways;

- a) Through their admissions arrangements, or by non admittance.
- b) In the way education is provided.
- c) In the way the school affords the pupils access to a benefit, facility or service, or by not affording access.
- d) By not providing education.
- e) By excluding from school.
- f) By subjecting the pupil to any other detriment.

The responsible body of a school has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure discrimination does not take place.

Schools not only have a duty to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, but also to be proactive in the following ways:

- a) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

- b) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- c) Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic
- d) Take steps to meet the needs of pupils who share a protected characteristic if their needs are different to those who do not share that characteristic.
- e) Encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

In order to fulfil this responsibility, schools need to adopt a strategic approach to the promotion of equality and to the way their equality policies and procedures are implemented.

There are suggested strategies which could be incorporated into good practice to ensure equality for all became embedded into the school ethos, and values that schools could actively promote:

1. Actively promoting positive attitudes and behaviour for all staff, pupils and parents.
2. Valuing diversity of every kind within the whole school community. Taking steps to show that diversity is valued.
3. Removing disadvantage and discrimination of any kind, including that which may have been historically practiced and perhaps even considered acceptable.
4. Monitor ethnic data. Are pupils from ethnic minorities achieving as they should be?
5. Examine the effect of school policies and procedures on all staff, pupils and parents; is diversity considered and are appropriate adjustments made?
6. Ensure that methods of communication reflect and accommodate the diversity of the school community.
7. Recognise and challenge discrimination, and encourage all members of the school community to do likewise.
8. Ensure compliance to these policies and monitor through reporting of discriminatory bullying or hate crime recording.
9. Develop and promote positive approaches to community cohesion.

HOW CAN SCHOOLS DO THIS?