



PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

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PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

1 Context

The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. It simplified the law, removing inconsistencies and making it easier for people to understand and comply with. It also strengthened the law in important ways, to help tackle discrimination and inequality.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Act) came into force on 5 April 2011. The Equality Duty applies to public bodies and others carrying out public functions. It supports good decision making by ensuring public bodies consider how different people will be affected by their activities, helping them to deliver policies and services which are efficient and effective, are accessible to all and which meet different people's needs.

The Equality Duty is supported by specific duties, set out in regulations which came into force on 10 September 2011. The specific duties require public bodies to publish relevant, proportionate information demonstrating their compliance with the Equality Duty and to set themselves specific, measurable equality objectives.

2 The specific duties require public bodies to:

- publish information to show their compliance with the Equality Duty, at least annually
- set and publish equality objectives, at least every four years

All information must be published in a way which makes it easy for people to access it.

Public bodies subject to the specific duties must publish information to show their compliance with the Equality Duty. This means that the information they publish must show that they had due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

We describe these as the three aims of the Equality Duty. The protected characteristics covered by the Equality Duty are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination)
- pregnancy and maternity
- race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality

- religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- gender
- sexual orientation

Public bodies must publish information to show that they consciously thought about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making. (www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities)

3 Meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality sits at the heart of Ascent and its purpose as a Trust for children and young people with physical and learning disabilities. The Public Sector Equality Duty however, has a wider remit to consider all aspects of equality as set out above.

We therefore have a responsibility to consider our equality duties with regard to:

- Our children and young people
- Our families and carers
- Our staff teams and Trustees
- Other professionals, students, volunteers and visitors engaged within our organisation.

This document will describe the provision, systems and policies we have in place that demonstrate our compliance with our equality duty, and to set out our processes for consultation and development of this duty.

4 Statement on Equality

This statement applies to all pupils and staff.

The Trust is committed to equality both as an employer and service provider.

- We aim to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and with respect
- We want to make sure at all members of our Trust community feel happy, safe and secure
- We try to ensure that equality of access exists for everyone
- We recognise that people have different needs and we understand that treating people equally does not always involve treating them all exactly the same
- We promote equality of opportunity regardless of the nine protected characteristics of age, disability, gender, race, religion and belief, sexuality, gender reassignment, civil partnership and marriage, pregnancy and maternity
- We actively develop the self-esteem and self-respect of all members of the Trust community
- We ensure that educational provision is relevant to our increasingly diverse society
We ensure that the curriculum actively promotes equality of opportunity
- We actively challenge all forms of bullying, harassment, prejudice and stereotyping
- We actively engage the support and commitment of our whole Trust community

As a specialist Trust for children and young people with special needs, we believe passionately in providing the best opportunities for all our young people, irrespective of the complexity of need.

We aim to provide a safe and vibrant accessible learning environment that supports every child and young person to:

- Access the best opportunities to make progress with their learning
- Feel happy and safe
- Be confident when facing challenge
- Develop independence, communication and self-advocacy
- Become valued citizens

5 Advancing equality of opportunity

As set out in the DfE guidance on the Equality Act, the Trust aims to advance equality of opportunity by:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people which are connected to a particular characteristic they have (e.g. pupils with physical disabilities, or gay pupils who are being subjected to homophobic bullying)
- Taking steps to meet the particular needs of people who have a particular characteristic (e.g. enabling Muslim pupils to pray at prescribed times)
- Encouraging people who have a particular characteristic to participate fully in any activities (e.g. encouraging all pupils to be involved in the full range of academy enrichment activity)

In fulfilling this aspect of the duty, the Trust will:

- Publish attainment data each academic year showing how pupils with different characteristics are performing where this does not easily identify pupils. (identified groups may be gender, ethnicity and disability groups)
- Analyse the above data to determine strengths and areas for improvement, implement actions in response and publish this information
- Make evidence available identifying improvements for specific groups (e.g. declines in incidents of homophobic or racist bullying)

Under the Equality Act 2010, we are required to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This includes steps we are taking to tackle disadvantages and meet the needs of particular individuals and groups of pupils. The Trust aims to foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it by:

- Promoting tolerance, friendship and understanding of a range of religions and cultures through different aspects of our curriculum. This includes teaching in RE, citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE), but also activities in other curriculum areas. For example, we deliver a range of programmes that actively support equality such as The Rainbow Flag award, Rights Respecting Schools award and Community Citizens.

- Holding assemblies dealing with relevant issues. Pupils will be encouraged to take a lead in such assemblies and we will also invite external speakers to contribute.
- Working with our local community. This includes inviting leaders of local faith groups to speak at assemblies, and organising academy trips and activities based around the local community.
- We have developed links with people and groups who have specialist knowledge about particular characteristics, which helps inform and develop our approach

6 Information about the pupil population

Ascent cater for children and young people aged 2-19 with a range of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The Trust currently have 754 students on roll within the 4 academies in the Trust. (December 2022)

The Equality Act protects people from discrimination on the basis of 'protected characteristics'. Every person has several of the protected characteristics so the Act protects everyone against unfair treatment.

All pupils attending academies within Ascent have Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

We conduct regular reviews and assessment of the progress made and attainment achieved by our children and young people. This information is collated and analysed to inform school leaders, Trustees and stakeholders of the successes and areas for development with regard to pupil progress.

The data analysis has due regard for disability, age, gender, ethnicity, and any other factor that may categorise a child as having additional disadvantage or needs. This includes having due regard for national requirements such as Pupil Premium, Sports Premium, Student Bursary scheme, Free School Meals and any other entitlements designed to reduce disadvantage.

This information is summarised and presented to Trustees. This data is not made publically available due to the size of groups and cohorts that may identify individual children.

7 How we have due regard for equality

The information provided here aims to show that we give careful consideration to equality issues in everything that we do.

Schools are required to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.

The information below is a summary of how we are aware of this particular requirement and how we respond to it. Please contact us if you would like to see copies of any of our policies.

The Trust ensures it has due regard to equality considerations whenever significant decisions are made. The Trust will always consider the impact of significant decisions on particular groups. Each academy will keep a written record (known as an Equality Impact Assessment) to show we have actively considered our equality duties and asked ourselves relevant questions when implementing decisions or planning activity.

- Our entire ethos and culture is about meeting the very individual needs of each pupil. Cohorts of pupils are small and statistically insignificant.
- The academies' Progress Tracking and Personalised Intervention Process ensures every child's progress is scrutinised and any slow or halted progress acted upon immediately.
- We deal promptly and effectively with all incidents and complaints of bullying and harassment related to disability or special educational need, ethnicity and race, gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, religion and belief and sexual orientation. We keep a record of all such incidents and notify those affected of what action we have taken.
- Our complaints procedure sets out how we deal with any complaints.

We are committed to working for the equality of people with and without disabilities.

Our academy buildings are compliant with the current legislation requirements, however as all buildings were not purpose built special schools we constantly strive to keep the buildings well maintained to ensure we are able to continue to meet the increasingly complex needs of all our pupils.

8 Consultation and engagement

We aim to engage and consult with pupils, staff, parents and carers, and the local community so we can develop our awareness and information, learn about the impact of our policies, set equality objectives and improve what we do.

Our main activities for consulting and engaging are:

- Teachers and senior leaders in the academies are easily accessible to all pupils and parents.
- Quality information is communicated through regular newsletters, websites and briefings.
- Important information is shared with parents via texts to parents and emails
- Home/school contact books provide daily communication for some pupils
- Regular and meaningful consultation takes place with the School Council and groups of pupils in all academies

- Annual surveys and data collection about equality are undertaken with statistical data published and responses communicated.

9 Equality objectives

Progress towards the following objectives will be reported to Trustees annually. Data will form part of the annual contextual data for Trustees.

Objective 1: *Undertake an analysis of recruitment data and trends with regard to race, gender and disability and report on this to the Finance Risk and Resources committee and the Board of Trustees.*

Why we have chosen this objective: *To ensure that we are not unconsciously biased in our recruitment.*

Actions: Monitoring of all personal information submitted in all applications by the HR team against appointees

Objective 2: *Have in place a reasonable adjustment agreement form for all staff with disabilities, to meet their needs better and ensure that any disadvantages they experience are addressed.*

Why we have chosen this objective: To ensure the health and well-being of all staff

Actions: To meet with all staff who have declared a disability to carry out a physical adjustment assessment. Establish agreement form, engage with Occupational Health, H&S Advisor and TU where possible

Objective 3: *To ensure that all recruitment processes are fair with due attention to equality in all protected aspects.*

Why we have chosen this objective: To ensure that all applicants have equal opportunity in recruitment process

Actions: Train all members of staff and Trustees involved in recruitment and selection on equal opportunities and non-discrimination by the beginning of the next academic year. Training evaluation data will show that 100% of those attending have a good understanding of the legal requirements

Objective 4

Include the 'Two Ticks' positive about people with disabilities symbol on all job adverts, application forms and information, to support our ethos of 'employing our own'

Why we have chosen this objective: To identify applicants with disabilities to enable us to proactively employ those with additional needs and/or disabilities

Actions: Ensure recruitment policy allows us to positively discriminate in terms of appointing ex-students. To Add two ticks to all adverts and to review recruitment information.

Objective 5: To ensure that no pupils are discriminated against because of a physical disability, behavioural aspects related to their disability or medical needs or protected characteristics listed in section 2)

Why we have chosen this objective: *We want to be clear that all efforts have been made to include all our young people in enrichment activity that is appropriate to need.*

Actions: To monitor all after school and residential activity for attendance or any refusal to accept a pupil. To make changes to education visits policy to ensure all leads engage in the equality questions when making decisions about who can attend events and activities.

Progress we are making towards these objectives will be published in an annual report to Trustees in summer term.

10 Other Information

This statement should be read in conjunction with the following Trust policies:

- Equality and Diversity
- Equal Opportunities

This statement will be reviewed annually and amendments made accordingly. This statement will be published on the Trust's website.