The Polygon School
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POLICY DOCUMENT
018a: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Access: Unrestricted

Publish to: All Staff, All Pupils & School Website

Status: Statutory

Approval level: Full Governing Body

Review Responsibility	**Valid from**	**Signed off**	**Valid to**	**Frequency Of review**
SLT/ RW/ Equality Champion	07-12-2023	FGB	07-12-2024	Annual
SLT/RW/Equality Champion	07-12-2024	FGB	07-12-2025	Annual
SLT & Equality Champion	07-12-2025	FGB	07-12-2026	Annual
SLT & Equality Champion	December 2026	FGB	December 2027	Annual

The Polygon school provides education for boys with complex neurodevelopmental disorders for whom mainstream school is inappropriate.

Most of the pupils could be designated as disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) description of disability. The vast majority are at social-economic disadvantage, many have experienced early trauma and some have poor mental health. A small percentage of pupils are, or have previously been, Looked After.

At The Polygon we recognise that all pupils are entitled to a high-quality education in a nurturing and inclusive environment, where all can thrive, make progress and fulfil their potential. Equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded within all areas of our school community: the quality of learning, the behaviour and attitude of the pupils, and the leadership.

- **Equality** – means that everyone is treated the same, is treated fairly and has the same opportunities. **Equity** is slightly different from equality in that it recognises that each person has different circumstances. This means that varying types or levels of support might be required, depending on individual need, to take full advantage of equal opportunities.
- **Diversity** – means recognising, respecting and welcoming everyone's different backgrounds, identities and experiences. Promoting diversity celebrates people's differences and uniqueness**.**
- **Inclusion** – means that everyone is encouraged to retain their uniqueness, they aren't singled out for being different, and have a sense of belonging and being valued. Inclusion importantly goes a step further than diversity. Promoting diversity is sometimes criticised as a tick-box exercise, often driven by data. For example, a school could claim to be 'diverse' based on numbers of pupils and staff who meet a certain criteria.

Promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in our school is essential for both staff and students. Not only is it a legal requirement, but it enables every member of our diverse community to feel secure and included within the school.

The Legal Framework

The Equality Act 2010 brought together a range of anti-discriminatory laws and offers protection from discrimination, harassment and victimisation for nine specific personal characteristics – known as protected characteristics under the law.

Protected Characteristics

The protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The Act makes it unlawful for a school to discriminate against, harass or victimise a pupil or potential pupil. This includes:

- In relation to admissions.
- In the way that it provides education for pupils.
- In the way that it provides pupils access to any benefit, facility or service.
- By excluding a pupil or subjecting them to any other detriment.

Positive Action

The Act encourages us to take proportionate, positive action, to deal with particular disadvantages affecting students with a particular protected characteristic. This includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and young people (including those with long-term conditions). Positive action could also include providing support for a group of students who share a protected characteristic.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) within the Equality Act instructs the school to

- Have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation (and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act).
- Advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

The PSED helps us to focus on key issues of concern and improving pupil and student outcomes. Keeping Children Safe In Education (KSCIE) guidance stresses the importance of obligations under the PSED in relation to safeguarding – reminding us to be mindful that some pupils or students may be more at risk of harm from specific issues such as sexual violence, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying or racial discrimination.

Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at a Whole-School Level

We aim to embed an ethos of, and true commitment to, equality, diversity and inclusion in the school culture and a core part of creating a positive learning environment.

This includes:

Setting clear expectations – our school's policies and procedures (including behaviour policies, anti-bullying policies, staff code of conduct, etc.) clearly state the expectation that everyone is to be treated fairly and equitably.

Challenging negative attitudes – we have a clear policy with regards to discriminatory behaviour and language which should never be dismissed as banter.

Support strategies – there are strategies in place to encourage anyone to come forward if they are experiencing or witnessing anything that contravenes the school's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Creating an inclusive culture – including whole school representations of diversity in the images and posters used around school, our yearly celebration of Diversity Day and our termly 'Pop-up' Shop.

Providing effective training – all staff participate in explicit equality, diversity and inclusion training, but also training that illustrates how important inclusion is for all aspect of education, including provision for special educational needs and/disability, safeguarding topics such as preventing radicalisation and extremism, and mental health and wellbeing.

Reflecting inclusion in the curriculum – exploration of topics such as celebrating difference, recognising and avoiding stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination – most notably relationships education, sex and relationships education, and health education.

As well as explicitly teaching these topics during PSHE lessons, we aim to go further by ensuring representation of diversity across the wider curriculum. It is incredibly important that the pupils see themselves and their experiences reflected positively in the texts and resources they encounter.

Seeking out feedback - it is not enough to implement inclusive strategies, we need to actually make sure that pupils and staff feel included. We use the school council, pupil voice and staff surveys to ascertain whether this is the case for all staff and pupils and welcome suggestions as to what more could be done.

Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at a Classroom Level

Against a backdrop of an inclusive whole-school culture, we aim to promote inclusion at a class or lesson level. Promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in the classroom helps to ensure that each student is able to learn in an environment where all aspects of their identities are recognised and respected, and where they feel safe and secure.

Representation in our resources

We are trying to evaluate the resources that we use through an inclusion lens.

Adapting practice

The SEND Code of Practice requires all teachers to differentiate and personalise teaching and learning to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. We understand that good teaching practice should include a variety of teaching and assessment methods, as well as accessible resources to ensure all pupils can access the learning opportunities. This should be driven by the actual needs of the individual learner. We support our SEND pupils by implementing strategies such as rephrasing questions, considering sensory needs when organising classroom spaces, building movement breaks into lessons and providing materials in a variety of different formats to suit different pupils' needs.

Celebrating the diversity of our pupils

School staff work hard to get to know our pupils and try to reflect their uniqueness. This might include asking pupils to contribute to class displays illustrating something unique about themselves.

Being mindful of language

We understand that is important for school staff to model inclusive language. Whilst staff would always avoid language they know to be offensive or unacceptable, sometimes we might not recognise the implications of certain phrases or terminology. Phrases which are considered 'everyday' may

actually carry assumptions that exclude some individuals. By being mindful of the implications of our language in class, we can help to promote inclusivity. Language evolves and although we might not always get it right, it is important to make the effort to model language that is as inclusive as possible.

Benefits of Diversity

Learning to relate to people in different ways, especially those who are different to us, helps foster empathy. At The Polygon we understand that through learning about people from different cultures, different religious backgrounds, different types of families and different ways of thinking, pupils develop understanding and self-confidence for situations when they meet these people in the future.

As pupils build empathy, they are able to reduce their prejudices consciously and build relationships with their peers. These interpersonal skills are valuable not only to strengthen friendships, but are also useful skills in the future. By developing an appreciation for people who are both similar and different to them in different ways, building empathy and interpersonal skills, they become better equipped to manage groups situations and interpersonal conflicts if they arise in the school day.

Major role models

Our school staff are in a unique position to offer gentle questioning when situations where diversity and inclusion matters arise. They aim to guide class discussions and class content relating to people with identities of different kinds. They can also help the class to feel safe as a group, especially pupils who may fall into minority groups, and set examples through the behaviours they model.

Sometimes the most impactful thing for our staff is to merely call attention to the fact that there are assumptions at play, and pupils will often respond positively to this increased awareness. Sometimes school staff will explicitly need to challenge discrimination and examples of unconscious bias whilst at the same time seeking to further a better understanding.

Understanding the particular issues and risks of misogynistic rhetoric

School staff are increasingly concerned about the impact of online influencers who promote misogynistic rhetoric. This content can be permissive of: discriminatory behaviours and attitudes (including racist, antisemitic, homophobic, transphobic, and misogynistic attitudes); sexual harassment and abuse; abuse in relationships; and victim-blaming narratives.

The entry point for our pupils' first engagement with such content can often seem quite superficial, but social media algorithms can then lead them to increasingly problematic and extreme content. This all comes at an age when pupils may be particularly insecure and vulnerable to persuasive narratives. For example, much of this content taps into insecurities about body image and agency. The focus on money, success and power also plays on financial and status insecurities that may lead to risky and even illegal behaviours.

Women and girls in particular are put at risk by narratives that normalise sexual harassment and abuse, promote unhealthy relationship behaviours and victim blaming. Similarly, the sharing of homophobic and transphobic content by some influencers can inform behaviour and attitudes towards LGBT+ pupils in school. Toxic masculinity is also harmful and deters men and boys from accessing support for their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Some online spaces even direct young people towards other harmful content, including content that promotes self-harm and suicide.

In some extreme circumstances, pupils can also become radicalised via involvement in forums and communities that promote and celebrate violent behaviours, including rape, child abuse and terrorist acts.

Our PSHE curriculum focuses on healthy relationships, respect, self-esteem, digital literacy, economic wellbeing, critical thinking, and recognising and challenging negative influences. This is crucial for safeguarding and building resistance to problematic narratives (as well as the influencers and algorithms that deliver them so effectively).

Recruitment Procedures

Recruitment procedures are applied equally to internal and external applicants. The procedures and practices are monitored constantly as a management priority to ensure their proper operation, as laid down in the guidelines set by Southampton City Council. All staff responsible for recruitment are required to participate in any SCC training to ensure their understanding and implementation of these procedures as well as the local safeguarding board safer recruitment training. Ethnic monitoring is carried out during recruitment of staff and reported to Southampton City Council for monitoring.

The Governing Body

The Polygon Governors are wholeheartedly committed to the principle of equality of opportunity, both in their capacity as an employer and as a school. As such, they are determined to make all efforts to prevent discrimination or unfair treatment against, and promote equality of opportunity for all members of staff, potential members of staff on the grounds of sex, race, gender, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, responsibilities for dependants, age, disability or offending background.

This policy provides guidelines which must be followed by everyone employed at the school and those who volunteer to work with school pupils. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action, and in serious cases, dismissal.

The Equality Act 2010 requires us to publish our equality objectives every 4 years.

These are the objectives we would like to focus on over the next 4 years, from 2024 to 2028:

- All staff to come together each school year to engage in face-to-face explicit Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training.
- SLT to review the support strategies in place to encourage pupils or staff to come forward if they are experiencing or witnessing anything that contravenes the school's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- All staff to be involved in a yearly audit of teaching and assessment methods, as well as evaluating resources through an inclusion lens to ensure all pupils can access the learning opportunities. This might involve sharing good practice around considering sensory needs when organising classroom spaces, building movement breaks into lessons and providing materials in a variety of different formats to suit different pupils' needs.