Equal Opportunities Policy

The Abbey School, Reading

Reviewed by:	Director of HR and Compliance and Head of Finance and Resources	July 2025
Ratified by:	Whole School Leadership Committee and Governor Audit	July 2025
Next review: April 2027		

17 Kendrick Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5DZ
Tel: 0118 987 2256 - **Email:** schooloffice@theabbey.co.uk
www.theabbey.co.uk
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Introduction

The Abbey School **(**School**)** is an independent selective day school for girls aged from 3 to 19 years. The School is a registered charity with a Christian ethos and welcomes staff, workers, volunteers, students, parents, applicants and governors from all different ethnic groups, backgrounds and creeds. The term School Community includes staff, governors, students, parents, visitors and volunteers, all of whom have rights and responsibilities in making The Abbey a truly equitable and inclusive school.

The School recognises the benefits of having a diverse School Community, with individuals who value one another, and the different contributions everyone can make. Students are taught to value and respect others. The School is committed to being an equal opportunities education provider and employer and is committed to equality of opportunity for all members of the School Community. In the provision of equal opportunities, the School recognises and accepts its responsibilities under the law and opposes discrimination on the basis of the following protected characteristics:

- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief (including lack of religion or belief)
- sexual orientation
- sex
- marital or civil partnership status
- age

The School also opposes all bullying and unlawful discrimination on the basis that a person has a special educational need and disability **(**SEND**)** or learning difficulty, or because English is an additional language.

The School aims to ensure that all policies and practices conform with the principle of equal opportunities. The School promotes positive attitudes and practices through the personal, social and health education **(**PSHE**)** programme, the supportive School culture and the School's policies. The School's Abbey Learner Profile underpins an educational philosophy which actively promotes the development of attributes and approaches to develop all students into inquiring, knowledgeable, reflective and caring young people.

This Policy is consistent with the School's policies, including the Admissions Policy; Behaviour and Discipline Policy; Curriculum Policy, School Uniform Code, Educational Visits Policy, English as an Additional Language Policy; Anti-Bullying Policy: Disability Policy; Accessibility Plan; Special Educational Needs and Disability Policy; Safer Recruitment Policy and Code of Conduct for Staff.

All policies can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required.

Policy statement

Scope: This policy applies to all members of the current and prospective School Community.

Policy aims: Through the operation of this policy we aim to:

- communicate the commitment of the School to the promotion of equal opportunities

- promote equal treatment within the School for all members of the School Community, such that all students experience equitable opportunities to fully participate and engage in all aspects of School life
- create and maintain an open and supportive environment which is free from discrimination and which recognises the uniqueness of every student
- foster mutual respect and positive attitudes so that everyone feels valued and feels that they have a voice within the School
- be alert to the early signs of needs that could lead to later difficulties, and respond as appropriate
- remove or help to overcome barriers for students where they already exist
- ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination against any person on any ground as per the list below
- make it clear and ensure that all discriminatory words, behaviour and images are treated as unacceptable
- take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled people at a substantial disadvantage (the 'reasonable adjustments' duty).

Forms of discrimination

Types: Discrimination may be direct or indirect, or arising from disability, and it may occur intentionally or unintentionally.

Direct discrimination: Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic as set out above.

Direct discrimination also occurs when a person is treated less favourably because of their association with another person who has a protected characteristic (other than pregnancy or maternity).

Indirect discrimination: Indirect discrimination occurs where a person is subject to an unjustified provision, criterion or practice which puts them at a particular disadvantage because of, for example, their sex or race.

Discrimination arising from disability: Discrimination arising from disability occurs when a disabled person is treated unfavourably because of something connected with their disability and the treatment cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Harassment: Harassment relating to any of the protected characteristics is unlawful and prohibited. Harassment is unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment occurs when a person is subjected to unwanted conduct which is of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment is unlawful and prohibited. The conduct need not be sexually motivated, only sexual in nature.

Victimisation: This is less favourable treatment of a person who has raised or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010 for discrimination or harassment, or because they are suspected of doing so.

Admissions

Applicants: The School accepts applications from, and admits students irrespective of, their race, disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief or special educational needs and will not discriminate on these grounds in the terms on which a place

is offered, subject to below. The School will treat every application in a fair, open-minded way.

Selection: Every application will be considered on its merits within the School's criteria for selection on grounds of the student's ability and aptitude, but this will not be done as a way of excluding students with a disability or special educational needs.

Admissions Policy: The School's Admissions Policy reflects the School's approach towards equal opportunities and is consistent with this policy.

Employment

This policy applies to the advertisement of job roles, recruitment and appointment, promotion, training and development, terms and conditions of work, performance management, pay, termination of employment, any references issued and to every aspect of employment. All terms and conditions of employment and related benefits shall be non-discriminatory, other than where there is legal justification, such as in the case of gender specific roles. Applicants for employment/volunteers will be assessed according to their skills, experience and suitability for the role.

Education and associated services

Equal access: The School will afford all students equal access to all benefits, services, facilities, classes and subjects including all sports, irrespective of their race, disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief or special educational needs, subject to considerations of safety and welfare.

Positive action: The School may afford students of a particular racial group, or students with a disability or special educational needs, access to additional education or training to meet the special needs of the students in that group

Exclusions: The School will not discriminate against any student by excluding them from the School, or by subjecting them to any other detriment, on the grounds of their race, disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, or special educational needs.

Teaching and School materials: Efforts are made to recognise and be aware of the possibility of bias (for example, gender or racial), so that this can be eliminated in both the School's teaching and learning materials and teaching styles. Resources are carefully selected for all areas of the curriculum to avoid stereotypes and bias. Curriculum planning will consider how courses and particular topics need to be inclusively and sensitively delivered to students.

Student interaction: All students are encouraged to work and make friendships with, and have respect for, all other students, irrespective of their race, disability, sexual orientation, religion, belief, pregnancy or maternity or special educational needs, subject to considerations of safety and welfare. Positive attitudes are fostered towards all groups in society through the curriculum and ethos of the School, and students are encouraged to question assumptions and stereotypes. The School's PSHE curriculum encourages respect for other people, with particular regard to the protected characteristics.

Bullying: The School will not tolerate bullying or cyberbullying for any reason. Specific types of bullying include:

- bullying relating to race, religion, belief or culture
- bullying related to SEND, learning difficulties or disabilities
- bullying related to appearance or health conditions
- bullying relating to sexual orientation

- bullying of young carers or looked after children or otherwise related to home circumstances
- sexist or sexual bullying.

The School's Anti-Bullying Policy provides further information.

School uniform

The School Uniform Code is consistent with this policy. The School Uniform Code applies equally to all students and is subject to considerations of safety and welfare. The School may consider reasonable requests to alter the School Uniform.

Symbols of faith: The Head may agree to a bracelet or necklace being worn if it is a religious requirement. It must be worn under the sleeve/blouse so that it does not show and is to be removed during PE lessons for safety reasons. Head coverings, when required on religious grounds, are permissible in the Senior School. They must be of plain black fabric. The full face must remain visible, and scarves should not fall further than 6 inches below the shoulder. This is subject to considerations of safety and welfare and the principles of the School's existing School Uniform Code. Where there is uncertainty as to whether an item may be worn, the issue must be referred by the student or their parents to the Head, whose decision will be final, subject to the Parental Complaints Policy.

Disabled students: Reasonable adjustments may be required to the School Uniform for students who require them. The student or their parents should refer the matter to the Head to ensure all reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate the student.

Religious belief

The School's religious ethos, services and school timetable are set in accordance with the Christian tradition. The School respects the right and freedom of individuals to worship in accordance with other faiths, or no faith, subject always to their respecting the rights and freedoms of the School Community as a whole and considerations of safety and welfare.

Special educational needs and disabilities

The School is inclusive and welcomes members of the School Community with special educational needs and disabilities. The School maintains and drives a positive culture towards inclusion in all activities and does not treat a member of the School Community less favourably on these grounds without justification. The School does all that is reasonable and practicable to ensure the curriculum, ethos, culture, policies, procedures and premises are accessible to everyone.

Definitions: Children have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. A disability is a physical or mental impairment which has a "*substantial and long-term adverse effect*" on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activity (Equality Act 2010).

Reasonable adjustments: The School has an on-going duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' for students with special educational needs and disabilities in respect of the education and associated services provided to ensure that students are not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with other students. This is a broad expression that covers all aspects of school life, for example:

- the curriculum
- classroom organisation and timetabling
- access to school facilities
- dietary requirements
- clubs and visits

- school sports and
- school policies.

Reasonable adjustments may typically include:

- making arrangements for a child in a wheelchair to attend an interview or assessment in an accessible ground floor room
- providing examination papers in larger print for a child with a visual impairment
- rearranging the timetable to enable a student to attend a class in an accessible part of the building
- arranging a variety of accessible sports activities.

The School is not legally required to make adjustments which include:

- physical alterations such as the provision of a stair-lift or new ground floor facilities, or a new library.

In making "reasonable adjustments" the School is required to provide auxiliary aids and services for disabled students where to do so would be reasonable. The School will carefully consider any proposals made by parents and will not unreasonably refuse any requests for such aids and services.

Informing the School: In accordance with the School's terms and conditions, parents of students must notify the Head in writing if they are aware or suspect that the student (or prospective student) has a disability or if they (either parent), the student (or prospective student), have at any time had, or has a learning difficulty. The registration form enables prospective parents to give details of their child's disability when applying for a place at the School. Parents must provide copies of all written reports and other relevant information upon request. Providing the School with such information will enable the School to support the student as much as possible. Confidential information of this kind will only be communicated on a "need to know" basis. The School will have due regard to any request made by a parent or student (who has sufficient understanding of the nature and effect of the request) to treat the nature or existence of the student's disability as confidential.

Admission of children with special educational needs and disabilities: Applications for a place at the School can be made on the basis that reasonable adjustments (see definition above) can be made by the School to cater for the child's special educational needs and disabilities. The School will not offer a place if, after all reasonable adjustments are made, the School are not able to provide adequately for the student's physical and educational needs. The School shall inform the parents of their decision and give details of the reasonable adjustments they are going to make or give reasons why an offer of a place has not been made.

Existing students: Where the School becomes aware of a special educational need or disability of an existing student, the School will do all that is reasonable to assist the student whilst at the School, which may include making reasonable adjustments. If in the professional judgement of the Head, and after consultation with the parents and the student (where appropriate), the School cannot provide adequately for the student's physical and educational needs after all reasonable adjustments have been made, parents will be asked to withdraw the student, without being charged fees in lieu of notice and with the acceptance deposit returned. The School will do what is reasonable to help parents find an alternative placement which will provide their child with the necessary environment and level of teaching and support.

Access: The School will monitor the physical features of its premises to consider whether disabled users of the premises are placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to other users. Where possible and proportionate, the School will take steps to improve access for disabled users of the premises. The School has an Accessibility Plan, which is kept under

review and revised as necessary. The Plan is available on request from the Head of Finance and Resources.

SENDCo: There is a Whole School Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator.

Students with Educational Health Care Plan

The School's Policy on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities includes details about the welfare and educational provision for students with an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP).

Students with English as an additional language

Students with English as an Additional Language (**EAL**) will receive additional learning support if necessary. The School will consult with the student and the parents as appropriate. The School has appropriate welfare support for all such students.

Provision for students with dietary needs

The school caters for any student with specific dietary needs.

The school is very much aware of the dangers of food allergies. Once a specific need has been identified, the Catering Team will liaise with the student and their family to discuss their needs and arrange to meet these within the daily provision.

All menus will comment in English whether food items contain allergens. The school can offer a Halal option within the daily menu, a vegetarian alternative at every meal and a choice of gluten free bread and pasta.

Responsibilities

All members of the School Community are expected to comply with this policy and therefore to always treat others with dignity and respect.

Overall responsibility: The Board of Governors has overall responsibility for the effective operation of the School's Equal Opportunities Policy and for ensuring compliance with the relevant statutory framework prohibiting discrimination. The Board of Governors has delegated to the Head of Finance and Resources day-to-day responsibility for operating the policy and ensuring its accessibility, availability, maintenance and review.

Management: Those working at a management level have a specific responsibility to set an appropriate standard of behaviour, to lead by example and to promote the aims and objectives of the School regarding equal opportunities.

Monitoring and review

Monitoring: To ensure that this policy is operating effectively with respect to admission and selection, and to identify those sections of the local community which may be under-represented in the School, the School records and monitors applicants' race, disability and religion or belief confidentially as part of the Admissions procedure and employee or volunteers as part of the safer recruitment process.

Review: The Head of Finance and Resources is responsible for the ongoing monitoring and regular analysis of the data monitored for the purposes of this policy and will arrange for the taking of appropriate positive steps to eliminate unlawful direct and indirect discrimination where necessary. The Head of Finance and Resources is also responsible for reviewing whether the aims of this Policy are carried out throughout all areas of the School and taking

appropriate action where necessary. This policy is reviewed regularly by the Head of Finance and Resources. Recommendations for any amendments are reported to the Board of Governors.

Reporting and recording incidents of discrimination

Questions about this policy: If you have any questions about the content or application of this policy, you should contact the Head of Finance and Resources

Complaints: If you believe that you have received less favourable treatment on any of the unlawful grounds listed above, or if you feel that this policy has been breached in any way, you are encouraged to raise the matter through the School's formal Parental Complaints and Policy. Allegations regarding potential breaches of this policy will be treated in confidence and investigated in accordance with the Policy and Procedure.

Grievance: If any employee/volunteer believes they have been discriminated against, harassed or victimised on the grounds as set out in this policy, they may raise the matter informally with their Head of Department or Director of HR and Compliance. If the employee/volunteer wishes to raise the matter further, they should invoke the school's Grievance procedure.

Reports: If you would like to report a breach of this policy that does not constitute a complaint as above, please contact the Head of Finance and Resources.

Enforcement: We will treat seriously and urgently investigate every complaint and report. Disciplinary action may be taken against any member of the School Community who is found to have acted in contravention of this policy.

Record: All reported breaches of this policy will be recorded and this record will be reviewed annually by the Head of Finance and Resources.

Publication

This policy is available on the School's website.