Pupil Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

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Aquinas Church of England Education Trust

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Pupil Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

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Statement of intent

AQUINAS Church of England Education Trust (the Trust) understands that, under the Equality Act 2010, all schools have a duty to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
- Advance equality between different groups.
- Foster good relations between different groups.
- Promote mental health and wellbeing.

Our Trust's overall values are underpinned by our statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010. We are dedicated to ensuring that every pupil receives an education that offers them the best chance at fulfilling their potential, and to promoting mental wellbeing amongst our pupils. We are committed to supporting and celebrating all pupils' individual identities. We have developed this policy to provide a clear framework for how we will achieve our aims.

Our academies' demographic state is directly linked to our overall aims for achieving equality. Specifically, we aim to:

- Develop an understanding, awareness and tolerance of different cultures and religious beliefs within the pupil body of the Trust community of schools.
- Close gaps in attainment and achievement between pupils and all groups of pupils; especially boys and girls, students eligible for free-school meals, students with special educational needs and disabilities, looked after children and students from different heritage groups.
- Ensure that there is equality of professional opportunity and development within the Trust's employed staff with representation being reflective of groups with protected characteristics.
- Improve accessibility throughout all the Trust's academies for pupils, staff, and visitors with disabilities.

To achieve our aims, we will adopt the following methods:

- Embedding equality within teaching and resources.
- Using key data indicators to understand the needs and characteristics of our academies.
- Promoting community cohesion.
- Promoting parental engagement.
- Investing in regular staff training.
- Using key data, such as measures of wellbeing, to monitor the progress of pupils with protected characteristics.
- Regularly reviewing our policy to ensure it reflects current trends and issues.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation including, but not limited to, the following:

- Human Rights Act 1998.
- The Equality Act 2010.
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).
- Data Protection Act 2018.

This policy has due regard to statutory and good practice guidance, including, but not limited to, the following:

- DfE (2014) 'The Equality Act and schools'.
- DfE (2018) 'Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children'.
- DfE (2018) 'Gender separation in mixed schools'.
- DfE (2018) 'Equality Act 2010: advice for schools'.
- DfE (2018) 'Mental health and wellbeing provision in schools'.

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Admissions Policy.
- Anti-bullying Policy.
- Attendance Policy.
- Children Looked After Policy.
- Complaints Policy.
- Relationships and Sex Education Policy.
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy.
- Pupils with Additional Health Needs Attendance Policy.

2. Roles and responsibilities

The **Trust Board** will:

- Be responsible for ensuring the school complies with the appropriate equality legislation and regulations.
- Take all reasonable steps to ensure pupils and potential pupils will not be discriminated against, harassed, or victimised in relation to:
  - Admissions.
  - The way the school provides and education for pupils.
  - How pupils are provided with access to benefits, facilities, and services.
  - The exclusion of a pupil or subjecting them to any other detriment.
- Ensure all policies are developed and implemented with appropriate equality impact assessments informing future plans in collaboration with headteachers.

Headteachers will:

- Implement and champion this policy, ensuring that all staff and pupils apply its guidelines fairly in all situations.
- Conduct regular training sessions to ensure all colleagues are aware of their responsibilities, as well as to develop their skills and knowledge.
- Review and amend this policy, considering new legislation and government guidance, and previously reported incidents, to improve procedures.
- Ensure that appropriate counselling is made available for pupils who require immediate interventions, parental assistance, and personal counselling.

Staff will:

- Be alert to the possible harassment of pupils, both inside and outside of the school, and to deal with incidents of harassment and/or discrimination as the highest priority.
- Carry out their statutory duties relating to equal opportunities and inclusivity and pertaining to their specific roles.

- Have due regard to the sensitivities of all pupils, and not provide material that may cause offence.
- Act as a role model for equality, diversity, and inclusion across the whole school community.

3. Protected characteristics

We will not discriminate against, harass, or victimise a pupil, or prospective pupil, because of their:

- Sex.
- Race.
- Disability, which includes mental health, encompassing prejudiced assumptions, attitudes or behaviours related to mental health.
- Religion or belief.
- Sexual orientation.
- Gender reassignment.
- Pregnancy or maternity.

We will not discriminate against a pupil, or prospective pupil, because of a characteristic related to a person, such as a parent, with whom the pupil or prospective pupil is associated.

We will not discriminate against a pupil, or prospective pupil, because of a characteristic which they are believed to have, even if the belief is mistaken.

4. Sex

For this policy, sex refers a pupil's biological assignment at birth depending on their reproductive organs. We understand some pupils identify as a gender different to the one they were assigned at birth, and we will support pupils through their transitioning phases.

We will ensure that pupils of one sex are not singled out for different or less favourable treatment from that given to pupils of other sexes.

The school will only separate pupils by sex where there is reasonable justification for doing so, or if one of the following applies:

- Pupils will suffer a disadvantage connected to their sex.
- One sex has needs that are different from the needs of the other sex.
- Participation in an activity by pupils of one sex is disproportionately low.

The school will consider non-statutory exceptions on a case-by-case basis, and regularly review the impact of any separation to ascertain whether it remains lawful.

Pupils will be offered equal opportunities to undertake any activity in the school, e.g., in relation to technology lessons, all pupils will be allowed to choose which skills they learn.

There may be occasions where we deem it necessary to teach some subjects in single-sex classes, but we will ensure that such classes do not give pupils a disadvantage when compared to pupils of the other sex in other classes. Occasions where pupils are separated to be taught in single-sex classes will be considered and justified to ensure parents, Ofsted and, where necessary, the wider community can understand the reasons behind separation. Where a subject is taught in a single-sex class, trans pupils will be allowed to attend the single-sex class that corresponds with the gender they identify with.

Pupils' age and stage of development will be taken into consideration before segregating sports teams. Both sexes will have equal opportunities to participate in comparable sporting activities; where separation is deemed necessary, the single-sex sports teams will receive the same quality and number of resources.

5. Race and ethnicity

We will ensure that pupils of all races and ethnicities are not singled out for different and less favourable treatment from that given to other pupils, regularly reviewing our school practices to ensure that they are fair.

We will ensure pupils with EAL are treated equally and fairly, while ensuring they are always supported.

We will not segregate pupils based on their race or ethnicity, understanding that claims of 'separate but equal' will not be tolerated, and that such actions will always be viewed as direct discrimination.

We may, however, take positive action, e.g., organising open days for pupils and families of a specific race that is under-represented, to address the challenges affecting pupils of one racial or ethnic group, where this can be shown to be a proportionate way of dealing with such issues.

6. Disability

We will ensure that pupils with disabilities are not singled out or treated less favourably than other pupils simply because they have a disability, which includes any mental health issue, regularly reviewing our school practices to ensure they are fair.

We will avoid implementing rules that could have an adverse effect on pupils with disabilities (e.g., by making physical fitness a basis for admission, or asking all pupils to deliver a presentation, as this could be unfair towards pupils with anxiety), unless it is for a legitimate reason and is a proportionate way of achieving that legitimate aim.

We will ensure that we do not discriminate against pupils with disabilities because of something which is a consequence of their disability (for example, by not allowing a pupil on crutches outside at break time because it would take too long for them to get in and out), unless it is for a legitimate reason and is a proportionate way of achieving that legitimate aim.

We will make any reasonable adjustments, and provide any auxiliary aids, necessary to ensure the full inclusion of pupils with disabilities, especially where the pupil also has SEND but does not have a SEND statement or EHC plan.

We will meet our duty to undertake accessibility planning for pupils with disabilities and ensure that an Accessibility Plan is implemented and reviewed where necessary.

The school adheres to our **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy** containing further information addressing equal opportunities for pupils with SEND.

We will ensure that any medical conditions related to a pupil with a protected characteristic is fully supported in line with our **Pupils with Additional Health Needs Attendance Policy**.

7. Religion and belief

We will ensure that pupils are not singled out or treated less favourably because of their religion or belief, regularly reviewing our school practices to ensure that they are fair.

We will ensure that pupils are provided with the appropriate space in which they can practice their faith, e.g., to perform their daily prayers.

Absences in relation to religious observances will be handled in accordance with the school's **Attendance Policy**.

The school will liaise with local religious leaders of all faiths to inform the amount of leave pupils will be granted in relation to religious observance.

8. Sexual orientation

We will ensure that all gay, lesbian, and bisexual pupils, or the children of gay, lesbian, or bisexual parents, are not singled out for different or less favourable treatment from that given to other pupils, regularly reviewing our school practices to ensure that they are fair.

We will ensure that pupils are taught about the nature of marriage, including same-sex marriage, by presenting the facts of English and Welsh law – teachers will not offer personal opinions when discussing marriage in RSHE. We will educate pupils on positive relationships, families, and gender identities within the LGBTQ+ community. RSHE lessons will be taught in accordance with our **Relationships and Sex Education Policy**.

We will ensure that any religious beliefs with regards to sexual orientation are taught to pupils in an educational context, in a manner that is not prejudicial or discriminatory.

We will support LGBTQ+ pupils to feel comfortable and ensure they can celebrate their identity.

We will ensure that there is a designated safe space within our school where pupils can discuss issues of sexual orientation without fear of discrimination.

9. Gender reassignment

We will ensure that pupils are not singled out or treated less favourably in relation to gender reassignment, i.e., because they are trans or have trans parents, siblings, or other family members. We will regularly check our practices to ensure that they are fair in this regard. We recognise that gender reassignment does not necessarily involve physical change and can be solely social and emotional.

We will make reasonable adjustments to accommodate absence requests for treatment and support of trans pupils by external sources, e.g., charities and support groups. Any such absences will be recorded accurately and sensitively by the SENCO to ensure the privacy of the pupil.

Pupils have the right to dress in accordance with their true gender identity within the constraints of our dress code, outlined in our **School Uniform Policy**.

We will ensure that there are suitable toilet and changing facilities for pupils to use, including:

- **Unisex toilets and changing facilities with private changing options, or**
- **Gender-specific toilets and changing facilities with private changing options, or**
- **A combination of both.**

The facilities will be made available to all pupils and pupils can use the facility they feel most comfortable in, e.g., if a trans pupil wished to use a private changing room.

We will support trans pupils to feel comfortable and ensure they can celebrate their identity.

We will ensure that there is a designated safe space within our school where trans pupils can discuss issues of gender without fear of discrimination.

10. Pregnancy and maternity

We will ensure that pupils are not singled out or treated less favourably because they become pregnant, have recently given birth, have children or are breastfeeding.

We will make reasonable adjustments to accommodate absence requests for the treatment and support of pupils who are pregnant or have just given birth.

11. Child Looked-after children (LAC)

LAC and previously LAC (PLAC) will be given the highest priority for admissions, as per the requirements of our **Admissions Policy**.

We will ensure that pupils are not singled out or treated less favourably because they are looked after, or have previously been looked after, by the state.

A personal education plan will be created and implemented for all LAC and PLAC, to ensure that their education and development needs are fully covered, including appropriate transition and catch-up support to ensure that they do not fall behind.

We will ensure that any SEND that LAC or PLAC have are duly considered and addressed, whether this is with or without a SEND statement or EHC plan.

The school adheres to our **Child Looked After Policy** containing further information addressing equal opportunities for LAC.

12. Curriculum

We believe that pupils should be exposed to thoughts and ideas of all kinds, however challenging or controversial, and will not make any unjustified changes to our curriculum content on the grounds of any protected characteristics that a pupil may have. We will ensure, however, that the curriculum is as balanced as possible, and delivered in such a way that prevents discrimination and the promotion of prejudicial stereotypes.

To ensure equality, diversity and acceptance are taught and promoted throughout each subject area:

- **A range of activities are undertaken including celebratory days, weeks or months, assemblies and activities that allow for discussion of stereotypes, cultures, and difference in lessons.**

The observation of inclusive teaching strategies is a key aspect of each academy's programme of monitoring.

We will respect the right of parents to withdraw their child from sex education.

13. Promoting inclusion

We will promote inclusion and equality in all our academies by:

- Ensuring that pupils are called by their preferred names, which may be different from their legal names, considering the correct spelling, structure, and pronunciation.
- Ensuring, as far as possible, that our local AAC and staff body reflect the full diversity of our local community.
- Providing an environment where prejudiced assumptions, attitudes and behaviours are continually challenged.
- Instilling in pupils an awareness of prejudice, giving them confidence that it can, and must, be eradicated.
- Providing a variety of educational and residential visits that expose pupils to a wide range of cultural experiences.
- Ensuring equal access to opportunities, such as extracurricular activities and the curriculum.
- Taking care in the use of language and the choice of resources, so that teaching and non-teaching staff avoid reinforcing stereotypical views of society.
- Valuing the cultural experiences and contributions of all pupils, regardless of any protected characteristic that they may have.

- Communicating our policy to parents to gain their understanding, agreement, and support for its provisions.
- Discussing equality issues as an agenda item for the school council.
- Promoting equality of opportunity within the wider society.
- Ensuring admission arrangements will not unfairly disadvantage a pupil from a particular social or racial group, or with SEND.

14. Pupils that have left school

Our responsibility to not discriminate, harass or victimise does not end when a pupil has left school. It will continue to apply regarding subsequent actions related to our previous relationship with the pupil, such as the provision of references.

15. The Public Sector Equality Duty

We will meet our duty to publish:

- Annual information to demonstrate how the school is complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty, considering the specific circumstances surrounding pupils who have any of the protected characteristics outlined in the section entitled “protected characteristics”.
- Equality objectives (at least every four years) outlining how we may further equality in our school.

There are some protected characteristics where statistical data is less likely to be readily available, and pupils will not be pressured into providing information related to any characteristic which they may identify with.

16. Bullying and discrimination

Our **Anti-bullying Policy** will be used in conjunction with this policy to prevent, and effectively deal with, any discriminatory incidents.

Any incidents of a child protection or safeguarding nature will be reported, recorded, and dealt with in line with the process in our **Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy**.

It the responsibility of the headteacher to decide whether it is appropriate to notify social services and/or the police of any incident.

Concerns with regards to the handling of bullying and discrimination incidents will be dealt with via the procedures outlined in our **Complaints Policy**.

17. Staff training

New staff will receive relevant training on the provisions of this policy during their induction.

Colleagues will receive ongoing equalities training that will:

- Focus on colleagues' specialisms in relation to equality, for example, a focus on homophobic bullying to address a planned approach towards inclusion.
- Ensure all colleagues are aware of, and comply with, current equalities legislation and government recommendations.
- Ensure all colleagues are aware of their responsibilities and how they can support pupils with protected characteristics.
- Provide support for teachers to effectively manage any discrimination towards pupils with protected characteristics.
- Provide up-to-date information on the terms, concepts and current understandings relating to each of the protected characteristics.
- Develop appropriate strategies for communication between parents, educators and pupils about any issues related to a protected characteristic.
- **Ensure that the school is aware of, and participates in, relevant awareness days as agreed by the EDI Strategic and Lead Groups on an annual basis.**

18. Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed on a **biennial** basis by the **Education Scrutiny Committee** and **Chief Executive**. Monitoring is conducted through the Trust's programme of quality assurance and that undertaken by the individual Academy. Changes to this policy are communicated to relevant stakeholders.

The next scheduled review date for this policy is **April 2025**.