



**St Bede's**  
Roman Catholic High School

# **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY**

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### 1 Introduction

As a Roman Catholic school St Bede's is committed to a policy of equality based on the teachings of Christ and the Church, as was stated by the Second Vatican Council.

*"All human beings are endowed with a rational soul and are created in God's image; they have the same nature and origin and, being redeemed by Christ, they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny ..... forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design." (Gaudium et Spes 29)*

**1.1** The Equality Act 2010 replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. It applies to all public sector organisations. The Act introduced a single Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), also referred to as the "General Duty", which extends to protected characteristics - race, disability, sex, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity and gender reassignment. This combined duty came into effect in 2011.

**1.2** In England and Wales, the Act applies to local authority maintained schools. The Act makes it unlawful for the responsible body of a school to unlawfully discriminate against, harass or victimise a pupil or potential pupil:

- In relation to admissions
- In the way it provides education for pupils
- In the way it provides pupils access to any benefit, facility or service, or
- By excluding a pupil or subjecting them to any other detriment on account of a protected characteristic

**1.3** The Act deals with the way in which schools treat pupils and prospective pupils. The relationship between one pupil and another is not within its scope.

**1.4** This policy should be read in conjunction with the "Bishops Memorandum (see below). This document gives further information about the exemptions that can be applied to ensure the "preservation and development of the Catholic character" St Bede's RC High School. <https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/employment-documents/bishops-memorandum>

### 2 Scope

**2.1** This policy applies to all employees and governors of St Bede's RC High School, including casual, agency staff, self-employed workers and volunteers of the School. It also applies to suppliers and those providing services under a contract to the School.



### 3 Definitions

3.1 The term “employee” used throughout this policy, covers all of the following categories of personnel; employees, directors, governors, casual staff, agency staff, self-employed workers, volunteers, suppliers and those providing services under a contract to the School.

3.2 The term “local governing body” means the local governing body (LGB) or any other committee within the LGB.

3.3 The definitions of words relating to equality and disability are as defined by law and where appropriate, are included within the text.

### 4 Aims

4.1 This policy aims to set out the way in which the school will respond to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

### 5 Responsibilities

5.1 Implementation of the duties under the Equality Act for the school is the responsibility of the Head Teacher.

5.2 The LGB will have the responsibility for reviewing and agreeing this policy, ensuring its provisions are applicable to all employees and setting the overall Equality Objectives.

5.3 All staff and governors are responsible for the implementation of the equality and community cohesion duties.

5.4 Governors are responsible for:

- Ensuring that their school complies with the relevant equality legislation
- Ensuring that procedures are followed and regularly reviewed.

5.5 The Head Teacher and Senior Leadership Team are responsible for:

- Promoting equality throughout the school, including policies and actions
- Ensuring that staff, pupils, parents and carers, governors are aware of and follow equality procedures
- Producing regular information for staff and governors, highlighting and addressing any inequalities
- Taking action against any form of discrimination
- Ensuring that all staff know their responsibilities and receive training and support.

5.6 All Staff are responsible for:

- Being able to recognise and tackle bias and stereotyping or prejudice and to deal with any incidents

- Promoting equal opportunities and avoiding discrimination
- Keeping up to date with legislative and professional developments
- Taking up training and learning opportunities
- Notifying the Head Teacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team of actions outside this policy.

**5.7** We will take steps to ensure that our contractors are adhering to our commitment to equality in their employment and service delivery and will make them aware of the school's expectations as regards adult/pupil relationships. Work will be carried out in school holidays or out of school hours wherever possible.

**5.8** We will take steps to ensure that visitors to our schools, including parents, are adhering to our commitment to equality and will make them aware of the school's expectations and policies as regards adult/pupil relationships. We will challenge any discriminatory or inappropriate behaviour.

**5.9** All employees will abide by the recommendations and rulings in this policy and actively work hard to ensure that diversity is celebrated and not discriminated against.

## **6 The General Duty**

**6.1** The General duty has three aims. It requires public bodies to have a due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equal opportunity
- Foster good relations.

**6.2** At St Bede's RC High School, we commit to abide by the Equality Act 2010.

**6.3** We accept our legal duty to ban unfair treatment and achieve equal opportunities in the classroom, the workplace and in wider society. Equality considerations are embedded in day-to-day school practice to tackle discrimination and inequality. By placing an equality perspective in all our policies and practices, we recognise that we are not thinking about people as a homogenous group but as distinct groups and individuals with differing needs, characteristics and behaviours. Our legal duty applies to all aspects of the School community and our public sector interface. It relates equally to children and adults, and applies to all pupils, staff, visitors and contractors.

**6.4** The Act defines types of discriminatory ("unlawful") behaviour and categories ("protected characteristics") to which the law applies and against which it offers protection. The provisions concerning protected characteristics and unlawful behaviour also apply to the LGB as an employer.

## **7 Protected Characteristics**

**7.1** The term "protected characteristics" refers to the categories to which the law applies. Under the Act, it is unlawful for the School to discriminate on the grounds of:

- Age
- Disability

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

**7.2** A person's age is a protected characteristic in relation to employment and extends to goods and services, but does not apply to pupils. The School remains free to admit and organise children in age groups and to treat pupils in ways appropriate to their age and stage of development.

**7.3** The extended scope of the Act makes it also unlawful to discriminate on these grounds against another person with whom a pupil or member of staff is associated ("by association") or because of a characteristic which it is thought a person has, even if this is mistaken ("by perception").

## **8 Discriminatory Behaviour**

**8.1** Unlawful behaviour is defined as: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

**8.2** Direct discrimination occurs when one person treats another less favourably, because of a protected characteristic, than they treat or would treat other people.

**8.3** Indirect discrimination occurs when a "provision criterion or practice" is applied generally but has the effect of putting people with a particular characteristic at a disadvantage when compared to people without that characteristic.

### **8.4 Harassment**

**8.4a** Harassment has a specific legal definition in the Act. It is "unwanted conduct, related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person". This covers unpleasant and bullying behaviour but potentially also extends to actions which, whether intentionally or unintentionally, cause offence to a person because of a protected characteristic.

### **8.5 Victimisation**

**8.5a** Victimisation occurs when a person is treated less favourably than they otherwise would have been because of something they have done ("a protected act") in connection with the Act. Even if what was said or done was incorrect or misconceived, for example based on a misunderstanding of the situation or of what the law provides, protection against retaliation is given unless the action was in bad faith. The reason for this is to ensure that people are not afraid to raise genuine concerns about discrimination because of fear of retaliation.

**8.5b** As well as it being unlawful to victimise a person who does a protected act, a child must not be victimised because of something done by a person with whom the child is associated, whether or not that person was acting in good faith.

**8.5c** If a pupil has done a protected act, then the child's own good faith will be relevant.

## **9 General Exceptions Relevant exceptions which apply to the schools:**

### **9.1 Curriculum**

**9.1a** The content of the school curriculum has never been subject to discrimination law, and the Act now states explicitly that it is excluded. However, the way in which the School provides education - the delivery of the curriculum - is explicitly included. This ensures that the School is free to include a full range of issues, ideas and materials in the syllabus, and to expose pupils to thoughts and ideas of all kinds, however challenging or controversial, without fear of legal challenge based on a protected characteristic.

**9.1b** Schools will take steps to ensure that the way in which issues are taught does not subject individual pupils to discrimination.

### **9.2 Uniforms**

**9.2a** The Act does not deal specifically with school uniform or other aspects of appearance, however, the general requirement not to discriminate in the treatment of pupils applies.

**9.2b** It is for the LGB to decide on uniform and rules relating to appearance, under the duties placed upon it by statute to manage the school.

**9.2c** Schools must have regard to their obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998, as well as under equality law, and to ensure that blanket uniform policies do not discriminate because of race, religion or belief, gender, disability. We will ensure to consider the implications of uniform requirements and act reasonably to accommodate needs, without compromising important School policies, such as school safety or discipline.

### **9.3 Bullying**

The issue of bullying motivated by prejudice is a particularly sensitive issue. Although the relationship between one pupil and another is not within the scope of the Act, schools need to ensure that all forms of prejudice-motivated bullying are taken seriously and dealt with equally and firmly.

### **9.4 Duty of Care**

In addition to the Equality Act, the School also has many other duties, including the duty of care to pupils, and the duty to deliver key areas of the curriculum such as religious education or sex and relationship education. Appropriate sections in other School policies may include specific exceptions to this equality statement.

### **9.5 Recruitment to Reserved Posts**

In order to preserve and develop the Catholic character of the School, the LGB will apply the rules as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding

- Ensuring that the Bishops' Memorandum, which sets out the collective requirement on all schools that are Catholic in relation to staffing are followed.

- Senior leadership such as Headteacher, Deputy Headteachers, Chaplain and Head or Coordinator of Religious Education must be filled by a practising Catholic (also any such temporary appointments and secondments):

<https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/employment-documents/bishops-memorandum>

## 10 Positive Action

The Act makes provision for Positive Action, which allows schools to target measures designed to alleviate disadvantages experienced by, or to meet the particular needs of, pupils with particular protected characteristics. In employing Positive Action, we will ensure such measures are a proportionate way of achieving the relevant aim.

## 11 Disability

**11.1** The Act encompasses specific provision regarding disability. The overriding principle of equality legislation is generally one of equal treatment. However, the provision relating to disability discrimination is different in that it allows, and in some cases requires, more favourable treatment to ensure, as far as is reasonably possible, that a person with a disability can benefit from what is on offer to the same extent as a person without that disability.

**11.2** The Act defines disability as: “when a person has a “physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on that person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities”. Some specified medical conditions, for example HIV, multiple sclerosis and cancer are all considered as disabilities, regardless of their effect. Long term is defined as lasting, or likely to last, for at least 12 months.

**11.3** The provisions on unlawful behaviour towards disability are reinforced.

**11.3a** Direct discrimination - A school must not treat a disabled pupil less favourably simply because of disability. There are no grounds for direct discrimination.

**11.3b** Indirect discrimination - A school must not do something which applies to all pupils but which is more likely to have an adverse effect on disabled pupils only unless it can be shown to be for a legitimate reason, and a proportionate way to achieve that legitimate aim.

**11.3c** Discrimination arising from disability - A school must not discriminate against a disabled pupil because of something that is a consequence of their disability. Like indirect discrimination, discrimination arising from disability can potentially be justified.

**11.3d** Harassment - A school must not harass a pupil because of disability.

## 11.4 Reasonable Adjustments and Auxiliary Aids

**11.4a** The duty to make reasonable adjustments applies only to disabled people. Our duty is summarised as:

- Where something the School does places a disabled pupil at a disadvantage compared to other pupils then the School must take reasonable steps to try and avoid that disadvantage.
- Schools are expected to provide an auxiliary aid or service for a disabled pupil when it would be reasonable to do so and if such an aid would alleviate any substantial disadvantage that the pupil faces in comparison to non-disabled pupils.

**11.4b** Schools are not subject to the other reasonable adjustment duty to make alterations to physical features as this is already considered part of their planning duties.

### **11.5 Auxiliary Aids and Services**

**11.5a** Since September 2012, schools also have an extended duty to supply auxiliary aids and services for disability as reasonable adjustments, if these are not already covered or supplied through Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) (replacing Special Educational Needs (SEN) statements) or other sources.

**11.5b** The School is committed to provide adequate financial resources to meet this extended duty and to carry out regular review. This duty is intended to avoid disadvantage in relation to disability and extends to pupils and to the LGB as an employer.

### **11.6 Duties around Accessibility for Disabled Pupils**

**11.6a** Schools need to carry out accessibility planning for disabled pupils. We have a duty to implement disability accessibility plans and to make all reasonable adjustments aimed at:

- Increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the curriculum
- Improving the physical environment, to enable disabled pupils to take better advantage of education, benefits, facilities and services, and
- Improving the availability of accessible information to disabled pupils.

**11.6b** We commit to providing adequate resources for implementation of plans and regular review.

## **12 The Public Sector Equality Duty**

**12.1** The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) came into force in April 2011 and extends to protected characteristics - race, disability, sex, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment. In relation to these groups, it calls for the School to have a due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations across all characteristics - between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

### **12.2 This means:**

**12.2a** We will ensure that decision-makers are aware of the PSED duty to have “due regard” when making a decision or taking an action and give relevant and proportionate consideration when assessing whether it may have implications for people with particular protected characteristics.

**12.2b** We will ensure that equality implications are taken into consideration in developing policies and taking decisions, and are reviewed on a continuing basis.

**12.2c** We will ensure that the PSED is integrated into all the School's functions and policies and that the analysis necessary to comply with the duty is carried out seriously, rigorously and with an open mind.

**12.3** The School cannot delegate responsibility for carrying out the PSED duty to anyone else.

### **13 “Due Regard”**

**13.1** The duty to have “due regard” to equality considerations means that whenever significant decisions are being made or policies developed, thought must be given to the equality implications. The significance of the implications, and the amount of thought that needs to be devoted to them, will vary depending on the nature of the decision.

**13.2** It is good practice to keep a note of any equality consideration although this does not necessarily need to take the form of a formal equality analysis. Records in School documents will demonstrate that the due regard duty is being fulfilled.

### **14 Education Specific Employment Provisions**

**14.1** The role of the LGB as an employer is covered by separate employment legislation and codes of practice. In addition to these, the Equality Act brought in some specific employment issues just for academies.

**14.2** All of the protected characteristics, including age, are covered by the employment provisions of the Act.

**14.3** Notwithstanding the exception set out in paragraph 9.5, as an employer, the School must not discriminate against a potential employee in respect of whether to offer a job or the terms on which a position is offered and must not discriminate against an existing employee in respect of the benefits, facilities and services offered to employees, including training opportunities, promotion or dismissal.

**14.4** Harassment against potential or existing employees in relation to any of the protected characteristics is also unlawful, as is victimisation of any person who has done a protected act. The School is under the same duty to make reasonable adjustments in relation to disability for employees or potential employees as for pupils, as set out earlier. Reasonable adjustments must be made to arrangements or practices to alleviate disadvantage and must also take reasonable steps to provide any necessary auxiliary aids and services. The duty also calls for consideration to be given to alterations to physical features of the School where that is reasonable to avoid disadvantage caused by disability.

**14.5** The Act also introduced provision to make it unlawful for an employer to enquire about the health of an applicant for a position until a job offer has been made, unless the questions are specifically related to an intrinsic function of the work. Job applicants can no longer be required to complete a generic health questionnaire as part of the application process. There are potential implications in relation to establishing teachers’ fitness and ability to teach (as required by the Health Standards (England) Regulations 2003). Existing school practices must now comply with both the Health Standards Regulations and Section 60 of the Equality Act. Necessary health questions may be asked after job offer. Any health related questions must be targeted, necessary and relevant to the position applied for.

### **15 Community Cohesion**

**15.1** The Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006 requires schools to promote community cohesion under a duty which came into force in 2007. It links in with the Public Sector Equality Duty under “foster good relations”. Though the requirement for Ofsted inspectors

to grade academies on community cohesion work was dropped in 2012, this duty remains and is the legal responsibility of the LGB. Ofsted inspections are still required to consider the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

**15.2** This provides an opportunity for the School to demonstrate how wider links with the community contribute to pupils' development in these areas. To fulfil the duty, we must demonstrate that we understand the context of our community; that we have planned and taken an appropriate set of actions; and that there is evidence of the impact of these actions.

**15.3** From our perspective, "community" has a number of dimensions, including:

- The School community, our pupils, their families, our staff and LGB and the wider community which uses our facilities and services
- The community within which we are located, including the UK and the global community.

**15.4** Our focus on community cohesion work is about promoting cohesion across different cultures, religious or not, ethnic and socio-economic groups as we are responsible for equipping pupils to live and thrive alongside people from many different backgrounds.

**15.5** Our main contributions to community cohesion can be made in three areas:

**15.5a** Teaching, learning and the curriculum: using the curriculum to value diversity whilst also promoting shared values.

**15.5b** Equity and excellence: ensuring equity and high standards for all and tackling underperformance by any particular group.

**15.5c** Engagement and extended services: engaging with other schools/academies, parents and the community, as well as local authorities and other partners in developing extended services.

**15.6** To meet the duty, in practice this means we will:

- Monitor and deal effectively with racial incidents and bullying
- Ensure the curriculum is inclusive
- Recognise and value diversity
- Take Positive Action to: close attainment gaps, raise expectations and increase workforce representation.
- Offer staff development inclusive of support staff
- Develop cultural and local community links.

## **16 Information Gathering and Policy Revision**

**16.1** We will continually seek the views of stakeholders in order to improve our practice. In gathering information, we will consult and engage both with people affected by decisions: pupils, parents and carers, staff, governors, members of the local community and with others with specialist knowledge to inform the school's approach, as appropriate. Sources might include: pupil data and surveys, school council, assertive mentoring and EHCP/SEN reviews, parents' evenings, surveys and informal conversations, staff and committee

meetings, performance management reviews, workforce statistics, training, curriculum review, staff surveys, policy, procedure and financial review, etc.

**16.2** All our policies and procedures are subject to review by the LGB at appropriate intervals. We are required to update published information at least annually and to update equality objectives at least once every four years, against actions taken and progress made. Information will be made available on the School website and in School documents.

**16.3** Evidence of the duty and engagement with people affected by its decisions will be recorded in: School policies, development plans, notes from relevant committees, pupil performance data, Head Teacher reports, staff training, community involvement, and other sources as appropriate.

## 17 Equality Objectives

17.1 All schools are required to prepare and publish specific and measurable objectives to pursue over the coming years to achieve the three aims of the duty.

### 18.1 Our School's Equality aims are:

- a. To provide a safe and accessible environment and address any issues of exclusion on account of protected characteristics. *For example, adjustments have been made to toilet and bathrooms to enable pupils with disability to access facilities without an adult's assistance*
- b. To ensure equity and high standards for all and to tackle underperformance by any particular group. *For example, following careful analysis of data, the School prioritised key groups for additional resources and supported intervention.*
- c. To continue to raise attendance and to address related issues. *For example, the school has brought in new approaches to encourage improved attendance from disadvantaged pupils. Bus and train passes were purchased for pupils who were struggling financially to afford school transport.*
- d. To foster an environment of dignity and respect. *For example, after consulting with parent/carers and pupils, the school has changed its uniform and appearance policy, removing the distinction between boys and girls uniform.*
- e. To advance equality of opportunity, remove or minimise disadvantage and encourage participation in all activities. *For example, the School ensured all vulnerable pupils were invited and encouraged to physically attend school during school closure as part of Covid lockdown restrictions.*
- f. To promote tolerance and friendship. *For example, key staff are trained in restorative justice to resolve issues between pupils*
- g. To eliminate and take action against all forms of discrimination. *For example, the curriculum, notably in RE and PSHE, has been adjusted to maximise opportunities to educate pupils on issues of discrimination and stereotyping.*
- h. To continue to address workforce-based equality issues by conforming to agreed Human Resource procedures on appointments, promotions and other employment issues but always appointing the best candidate. *For example, the school has diversified its work force with more teachers and staff from BAME background. Advertising material seeks to be inclusive of*

*people of different races and faiths to encourage applications from a wider ethnic and those of other faiths.*

i. To continue to seek the views of pupils, staff, parents and carers, and stakeholders in the wider community. *For example, the views of parents/carers and pupils are regularly sort through questionnaires and school assesses how to react to these views.*

j. To work in partnership with outside agencies and the local community to achieve these aims. *For example, the school has engaged with Stonewall to seek advice on how to support LGBTQ+ pupils*

## **19 Legal Considerations**

**19.1** Under the Equality Act 2010, whilst the school is free to meet the Equality Duties in ways appropriate to our own set of circumstances, we have a specific duty:

- a. To publish information to demonstrate compliance
- b. To prepare and publish equality objectives.

**19.2** Notwithstanding the above, the LGB recognises its obligations, protected in law, to preserve and develop the Catholic character of its schools as set out in the Bishops' Memorandum of Understanding between the Catholic Church and the Department of Education <https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/employment-documents/bishops-memorandum>

## **20 Related Policies**

St Bede's RC High School - Equalities Scheme

- St Bede's RC High School - Complaints Policy
- St Bede's RC High School - Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Policy
- St Bede's RC High School - Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- St Bede's RC High School - Anti-bullying Policy
- St Bede's RC High School - Home/School Agreements and Pupil Codes of Conduct
- St Bede's RC High School - Uniform Policy

Policy reviewed: March 2021