



Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

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Introduction, and Legal Context

Melrose Education is committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion and actively supports practices that promote genuine opportunities for all staff and learners across its schools. Melrose Education is committed to promoting a positive and diverse culture in which all staff and learners are valued and supported to fulfil their potential irrespective of any protected characteristic. Melrose Education recognises its obligations under the Equality Act (2010) and are committed to promoting the equality and diversity of all those we work with especially our staff, learners, families, and visitors. We oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination, bullying, and harassment and will make every effort to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and its subsequent provisions.

This policy is intended to support compliance with the Equality Act 2010, the Children and Families Act 2014, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations, the Independent School Standards, the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations, safeguarding duties including Keeping Children Safe in Education, UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, and wider employer duties to provide a safe, fair and non-discriminatory working environment.

For the purposes of this policy, "Melrose Education" means the company, its schools, central office, employees, workers, volunteers, contractors, agency staff, visitors, learners and any other person engaged in school or company activity, as applicable. This policy applies to conduct during work, on school premises, during school activities, educational visits, work-related events, online activity linked to work or school, and any conduct that may affect safeguarding, professional standards, the company's reputation or the welfare of learners.

This policy and all associated procedures also apply to all staff including volunteers, learners including those on placement, and visitors at our schools and should be read in conjunction with the following Melrose School policies:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- SEND and Welfare
- Admissions
- Standards of Appearance/Uniform
- Exclusions
- Complaints
- Accessibility Plan
- Anti-Bullying
- Staff Code of Conduct and Behaviour
- Safer Recruitment
- Whistleblowing
- Harassment, Bullying and Dignity at Work
- Prevention of Sexual Harassment
- GDPR

Failure to comply with these policies and procedures may result in disciplinary action. Discriminatory treatment, bullying or harassment of staff or learners by visitors is not tolerated.

Information, and Objectives

Melrose Education will work across its school communities to analyse data and existing practices to set out the actions taken in compliance of the Equality Act 2010, and to inform the setting of relevant EDI objectives to support the development of each school and its community. These will be set out in an Individual school EDI Information and Objectives plan managed by the school's EDI Lead.

Each school will maintain equality information and objectives, or an equivalent EDI action plan where this is not a statutory publication duty, which are informed by school context, learner

profile, staff feedback, incident records, accessibility planning and stakeholder voice. These objectives must be reviewed at least annually and should be capable of demonstrating how the school is eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations.

Compliance

This policy has been developed in response to the Equality Act 2010 and replaces previous policies relating to race, gender, and disability equality. It has been designed to help the school meet its objectives and duties such as:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and other prohibited conduct.
- Advancing opportunity in an equitable way between those who have a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Fostering good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Ensuring adherence to the Equality Act 2010 which defines nine protected characteristics which may be applicable to our staff, learners, and wider school community.
 - Age (as an employer but not applicable to learners)
 - Disability
 - Sex
 - Gender reassignment
 - Race
 - Pregnancy and maternity
 - Marriage and civil partnership (as an employer and in relation to staff)
 - Religion or belief
 - Sexual orientation

The following groups have been identified as key recipients in terms of the implementation of this policy in schools:

- Learners with SEND including autism
- Looked after children or children in need
- Children at risk of exclusion
- Children from an ethnic group, including those from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller backgrounds
- Children missing in education
- Children with medical conditions affecting attendance at school
- School age/teenage parents
- Young carers
- Children within, or at risk of joining, the criminal justice system
- Children with mental health issues
- Children in receipt of free school meals
- Children living in areas of deprivation
- Those who are classed as gifted and talented
- Are gender questioning or going through transition
- Children who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual
- Children who are non-binary or transgender

This list is not exhaustive.

Where equality duties interact with safeguarding, SEND, health and safety, behaviour, attendance, curriculum, premises, staffing or operational requirements, leaders must take a balanced, evidence-informed and case-by-case approach. Decisions must be lawful, proportionate, properly recorded and focused on the welfare, safety, dignity and rights of all learners and staff.

This policy recognises the main forms of unlawful discrimination under the Equality Act 2010, including direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, discrimination arising from disability, failure to make reasonable adjustments, harassment and victimisation. Discrimination can also occur because of perception, association, combined factors or the way a policy or practice impacts a particular group.

All staff associated with the school (including school community boards, Melrose Education central office team, peripatetic tutors, therapists etc) will:

- Actively promote opportunity in an equitable way in all areas of school life.
- Ensure that members of the school community know their rights and respect the rights of others.
- Aim to ensure that prejudice or discrimination in all its forms is actively rejected.
- Raise awareness of equality issues for all members of the school community.
- Establish strategies to ensure equal access to the curriculum and enable each learner is able to fulfil their potential regardless of ability, gender, race, disability, religion, or sexual orientation.

Equality and diversity principles based on the above aims will be embedded in our daily practices, policies, and the processes of decision-making, including:

- Admissions, induction, and attendance.
- Learners' progress, and achievement.
- Learners' personal development, and wellbeing, particularly in relation to safeguarding.
- Parent involvement.
- Working with the wider community.
- Behaviour management, staff recruitment, and professional development.
- Curriculum access, and participation.
- Teaching styles, and strategies.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Directors have overall responsibility for this policy and for ensuring compliance. The designated senior member of staff with overall responsibility for all EDI matters at each school is the Principal supported by an appointed EDI Lead. The Company EDI Lead is Andrew Patterson.

The Directors/proprietors and senior leaders will ensure that equality and inclusion are considered in strategic decision-making, policy review, recruitment, staff development, premises planning, admissions, exclusions, behaviour management, curriculum design, safeguarding practice and complaints handling. Leaders must ensure that incidents and patterns are reviewed so that preventative action can be taken where needed.

It is the responsibility of all staff to:

- Treat colleagues, learners, and visitors with dignity and respect; and avoid behaving in any manner that may give rise to claims of discrimination, harassment, or victimisation.
- Support and participate in any measures introduced to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Actively challenge discrimination, and disadvantage in accordance with their responsibilities.
- Report immediately any issues associated with EDI in accordance with this policy.
- Ensure that language, displays, teaching materials, social media activity and day-to-day professional conduct do not stereotype, exclude, demean or unlawfully discriminate against any individual or group.
- Complete relevant EDI, safeguarding, professional conduct and safer working practice training as required by the company or school.

Duty to Make Reasonable Adjustments

Melrose Education will actively seek, as far as is reasonable, to make reasonable adjustments, where there is a need to ensure that a disabled person has the same access to everything as a non-disabled person. We will also take positive and proactive steps to remove, reduce, or prevent the obstacles faced by a disabled individual.

Where a request for an adjustment is refused, leaders must record the reasons, the evidence considered, any alternatives offered and how the decision was communicated. Refusals must be based on lawful, objective and proportionate reasons, not assumptions about disability, cost, convenience or diagnosis.

Reasonable adjustments may include changes to policies, procedures, working arrangements, the physical environment, communication methods, support arrangements, auxiliary aids, timetables, assessment arrangements, access to trips and enrichment, or other measures that are reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances. Disabled learners and staff must not be charged for reasonable adjustments.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is anticipatory in relation to disabled learners. This means schools must think ahead and consider what disabled learners generally may require, rather than waiting for a specific difficulty to arise. For staff, workers, job applicants and visitors, reasonable adjustments will be considered where the company knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, that the person is disabled and may be placed at a substantial disadvantage.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments covers all aspects of school life, including the curriculum, classroom organisation, and timetabling, access to facilities, clubs, and visits, sports, and policies.

Melrose Education will monitor the physical features of the company's premises to consider whether disabled users of the premises are placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to other users. Where possible and proportionate, Melrose Education will take steps to improve access for disabled users of the premises. Please see each school's Accessibility Plan for further information.

At each Melrose School, we will work closely with parents to ensure that the needs and provision required with respect to learners' special education needs – as identified in the Education, Health, and Care plan (EHCP) are met, where possible.

In making reasonable adjustments, Melrose Education is required to provide auxiliary aids and services for disabled learners. Staff will carefully consider any proposals made by parents and will not unreasonably refuse any requests for such aids and services.

Uniform

The Uniform Policy, where applicable, in each school applies equally to all learners, irrespective of their gender, gender reassignment, race, disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy, or maternity, religion, or belief or special educational needs, subject to considerations of safety and welfare.

Uniform and appearance expectations must be applied consistently and in a way that is lawful, proportionate and sensitive to disability, religious belief, race, sex, pregnancy or maternity, gender reassignment and safeguarding considerations. Any restrictions must be capable of objective justification, particularly where they affect religious dress, cultural identity, disability needs, hair texture or protective hairstyles.

However, we will consider reasonable requests to alter the uniform, for example for genuine religious requirements, and in making reasonable adjustments for disabled children to avoid substantial disadvantage.

Certain items of jewellery, such as the Kara bangle, and certain items of headwear, such as the turban and headscarves may be worn by learners when doing so is genuinely based on manifesting religious or racial beliefs or identity. Where there is uncertainty as to whether an item may be worn, the issue must be referred to the school principal, whose decision will be final, subject to the complaints procedure.

We subscribe to the Halo Collective and welcome afro-textured hair worn in all styles, including but not limited to, afros, locs, twists, braids, cornrows, fades, hair straightened through the application of heat or chemicals, weaves, wigs, headscarves, and wraps. However, if staff are supporting a child who is at increased risk to pull or grab hair, appropriate consideration should be made, and appropriate measures put into place to reduce risk of harm to staff which may mean covering or securing loose hair.

Admissions Policy

Admissions criteria are defined under each school's policy and are applied consistently to every young person, irrespective of any protected characteristic.

Admissions decisions must not unlawfully discriminate against a learner because of a protected characteristic. Where a learner has SEND, a disability or an EHCP, the school must consider whether reasonable adjustments, auxiliary aids, specialist provision, risk assessment or consultation with the placing local authority are required before any decision is made. Any decision that the school cannot meet need must be evidence-based, clearly recorded and linked to the school's admissions arrangements, registration, resources and safeguarding obligations.

Religious Beliefs

Melrose Education respects the religious beliefs and practice of all staff, learners, and parents, and each Melrose school will comply with reasonable requests relating to religious observance and practice, wherever possible. An example where a request may be refused is if the religious observance takes place during lesson time. Whilst the school will explore other ways to accommodate the request, such as amended timetabling, this may not always be possible.

Requests relating to religion or belief should be considered fairly and consistently. Where a request cannot be agreed, the reason must be explained and recorded. Any refusal must be based on legitimate and proportionate reasons, such as safeguarding, health and safety, curriculum requirements, attendance, supervision, the rights of others or the operational needs of the school.

Curriculum Delivery

Each school's curriculum is crucial to tackling inequalities for learners including gender stereotyping, preventing bullying, and raising attainment for certain groups. The principles of equality and diversity are embedded in all our academic and social curriculums. Positive and proactive steps will be taken to prevent discrimination against, or victimisation of, any learner in the provision of education or access to any benefit, facility, or service including educational trips, work experience, and leisure activities.

Where external speakers, visitors, resources or online content are used, staff must consider safeguarding, equality, curriculum suitability, accuracy, political impartiality, accessibility and the risk of discriminatory or extremist content before use.

Curriculum planning must comply with safeguarding duties, equality law, the Independent School Standards, statutory guidance where applicable, and the requirement to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teaching should promote respect for people with protected characteristics while remaining age-appropriate, evidence-informed, politically impartial where required, and sensitive to learners' SEND, communication needs, trauma histories and safeguarding context.

Melrose Education recognises and promotes awareness of the possibility of bias (for example, gender or racial) and works to eliminate such bias in both teaching and learning materials and pedagogical approaches. Materials are carefully selected for all areas of the curriculum to avoid stereotypes and bias.

Melrose Education, and its' schools, may take positive action to give learners of a particular racial group, or learners with a disability or special educational needs, access to additional education or training to meet the needs of the learners in that group, for example, special language training for groups whose first language is not English.

All learners are encouraged to work with, socialise, and have respect for, all other learners, irrespective of any protected characteristics, subject to considerations of safety and welfare. Positive attitudes are fostered towards all groups in society through the individual school curricula and ethos, and learners are encouraged to question assumptions and stereotypes.

Gender Identity

Melrose Education is mindful of its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 towards learners and staff who are protected because of sex and/or gender reassignment. This section must be read alongside safeguarding policies, Keeping Children Safe in Education, the Staff Code of Conduct, SEND duties, data protection requirements and any current government or regulator guidance relevant to gender-questioning children and young people.

Following the UK Supreme Court judgment on the meaning of sex under the Equality Act 2010, references to sex, man and woman under the Equality Act must be understood in line with the current legal position. Trans people remain protected from discrimination and harassment under the protected characteristic of gender reassignment. Decisions must not be based on stereotypes or assumptions and must take account of the rights, dignity, privacy, safety and welfare of all learners and staff.

In respect of learners identifying as transgender or non-binary, we will be sensitive to their individual needs whilst also recognising the needs and sensitivities of other learners. Learners who have confirmed that they have commenced the process of transitioning, and, therefore, fall under the protected characteristic of gender-reassignment will be provided with appropriate pastoral care and support.

Where a learner is gender-questioning or requests a change of name, pronouns, uniform, facilities, records or other arrangements, the school will take a cautious, safeguarding-led, case-by-case approach. Decisions must consider the learner's age, maturity, SEND, mental health, family circumstances, safeguarding information, the views of parents or carers unless there is a clear safeguarding reason not to involve them, and the impact on other learners and staff. The decision-making rationale must be recorded. A learner's legal name, recorded sex or statutory records must not be changed without appropriate authority, parental involvement where required, and the necessary documentation. Schools should seek advice from the DSL, senior leaders, HR and, where appropriate, the local authority or legal advisers before making significant changes.

Staff must not make promises of absolute confidentiality to a learner about gender-related information. Information should be shared only on a need-to-know basis, in line with safeguarding, data protection and professional duties. Any arrangements for toilets, changing, residential visits, sport, intimate care or searching must be risk assessed, lawful, proportionate and recorded, with suitable alternative arrangements considered where necessary to protect dignity, privacy and safety.

Recruitment and Selection

All employees, whether part-time, full-time, temporary, or permanent will be treated fairly and equally. We will avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment, promotion, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, discipline, and selection for redundancy. Selections will be made based on aptitude, ability, and/or merit, where appropriate.

Selection criteria must be objective, role-related and consistently applied. Applicants must not be asked unlawful or unnecessary questions about protected characteristics. Pre-employment health questions should only be asked where lawful, for example to establish whether reasonable adjustments are needed for the recruitment process, to assess ability to carry out an intrinsic function of the role, or where otherwise permitted by law.

Recruitment must also comply with safer recruitment requirements for schools, including appropriate checks, right to work checks, reference processes, prohibition checks where applicable, online searches where required by safeguarding guidance, and the Single Central Record. Equality monitoring information must be separated from selection decisions and used only for lawful monitoring and improvement purposes.

Where appropriate, we will endeavour to make all reasonable and effective adjustments during the recruitment and selection process. Where recruitment and selection is carried out by a third party, on our behalf, we will take all reasonable steps to ensure they adhere to the principles of this policy.

Reporting and Recording Incidents of Discrimination and Harassment

All incidents of discriminatory treatment, bullying, and harassment must be reported to senior staff and recorded as soon as is reasonably possible (and in any event within 24 hours of the incident). All bullying-related incidents (confirmed or otherwise) will be addressed in accordance with our Anti-Bullying Policy.

Where an incident involves a learner, a member of staff, a visitor, a contractor, online conduct, sexual harassment, hate crime, peer-on-peer abuse, radicalisation concerns or a person in a position of trust, leaders must consider whether the matter also requires action under safeguarding, behaviour, staff conduct, disciplinary, whistleblowing, complaints, LADO or police reporting procedures.

Records should identify the type of incident, protected characteristic or perceived characteristic involved, action taken, safeguarding considerations, parental or external agency contact where appropriate, outcome, follow-up and any preventative learning. Records must be stored securely and processed in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Complaints and Grievances

If an individual believes that they have been discriminated against, harassed or victimised, they are asked to follow our complaints or grievance procedure (as appropriate).

Reasonable adjustments will be made to complaint and grievance processes where required, including support with communication, accessible formats, meeting arrangements, accompaniment, interpretation, advocacy or additional time where appropriate.

No person will be victimised or subjected to detriment for raising an equality, discrimination, harassment or victimisation concern in good faith, supporting another person to raise a concern, giving evidence, or otherwise exercising rights under the Equality Act 2010. Malicious or knowingly false allegations may be addressed under the relevant procedure, but a concern that is not upheld will not of itself be treated as malicious.

Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The designated senior member of staff with overall responsibility for the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of this EDI Policy, in each school, is the Principal supported by the School EDI Lead.

Additional support can also be provided to any parent or significant person, wishing to know more about the policy and procedures outlined above. A copy of this policy document is available on request.

The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed and monitored on a regular basis, using feedback from learners, parents, staff, and other stakeholders, and an assessment of progress against targets identified in each school's Equality Information and Objectives document will be made.

The policy will be reviewed annually or sooner where there are changes to legislation, statutory guidance, case law, safeguarding requirements, inspection expectations or significant incidents. Leaders must ensure that staff understand how this policy applies in practice and that appropriate training is provided.

Monitoring will include, where appropriate, analysis of recruitment, retention, staff development, exclusions, behaviour incidents, attendance, bullying, discrimination and harassment records, complaints, safeguarding themes, accessibility actions, curriculum review, staff and learner voice, and progress against school EDI objectives. Trends must be reported to senior leaders and proprietors in a way that supports oversight while preserving confidentiality.