



## **Equal Opportunities Policy**

January 2024

Review by January 2025

At Thomas Johnson Lower School, our wide-ranging curriculum offer is used to tackle discrimination, challenge stereotypical images, and thus support pupil and staff wellbeing and self-esteem. Through these approaches we aim to continually raise standards and attainment throughout the school.

Thomas Johnson Lower School seeks to abide by all Equal Opportunities legislation and the following Policy is based on guidance issued by the Department for Education.

## **Background**

The Equality Act 2010 brings together all previous anti-discrimination legislation, with the aim of making it easier for compliance and understanding including helping school leaders and governors to understand their legal responsibilities and tackle inequalities in education.

The Act replaces the Race Relations Act, the Disability Discrimination Act and the Sex Discrimination Act. Schools' existing statutory duties in relation to race, disability and gender have been replaced by a 'general duty' to have due regard for equalities and two new 'specific duties' to:

- publish equality information which shows compliance with this general duty at least annually; and
- to prepare and publish one or more specific and measurable equality objectives that will address equality challenges at least every four years.

Under the Act, schools must make sure that their policies and practises are fair and do not discriminate in relation to:

- the way they provide education;
- the way they offer access to benefits, facilities or services;
- admissions;
- exclusions.

The Act also defines four kinds of unlawful behaviour: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

## **Equal Opportunities: Statement of Commitment**

The governing body and school is committed to a policy of equality and aims to ensure that no employee, job applicant, pupil or other member of the school community is treated less favourably on grounds of age, disability, ethnicity and race, gender, gender identity and transgender, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, sexual identity and orientation, aspects of a person's identity known as 'protected characteristics'.

Any behaviour, comments or attitudes that undermine or threaten an individual's self-esteem on these grounds will not be tolerated. We aim to provide equal access to high quality educational opportunities and to ensure that everyone feels that they are a valued member of the school community. We seek to provide a safe and happy environment where we can all flourish and where cultural diversity is celebrated, where all children and young people can be free from discrimination and harassment and where they can learn and reach their full potential.

Avoiding discrimination and promoting equality supports an agenda of improving the attainment and progress of all pupils.

We aim to empower our pupils to make informed choices so that they are better prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life within our community. Equality of opportunity cannot be realised without the involvement and commitment of all members of the school community and a

common understanding of the pivotal role of equal opportunities in the context of the school's ethos and values, in particular, the recognition that the role of all staff is crucial in the delivery of the objectives of the policy.

All members of the school community are responsible for promoting the school's Equal Opportunities Policy and are obliged to respect and act in accordance with the policy.

### **Aims and objectives**

The governing body and school, through its adopted Equal Opportunities Policy, aim to:

- carry out its legal duty in complying with the relevant legislation
- ensure there is a 'general duty' to have due regard for equalities in all its functions;
- ensure all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that employees do not carry out unlawful or discriminatory actions or behaviour;
- ensure compliance with the two 'specific duties';
- not discriminate against a child applying to be admitted to the school, existing pupils, job applicants or existing members of staff;
- reinforce the school's position as a provider of high-quality education and as a good employer providing development opportunities;
- ensure that equality remains high on the school's strategic agenda;
- achieve a staffing composition that reflects the composition of the wider community;
- ensure all staff work together with a shared sense of purpose to meet the needs of every pupil;
- ensure that pupils and staff contribute towards a happy and caring environment by showing respect for, and appreciation of, one another as individuals;
- ensure that complaints or evidence of failure to comply with the school's Equal Opportunities Policy will be dealt with promptly and fully investigated according to the relevant procedure (e.g. complaints relating to staff may be investigated either under the disciplinary, grievance or anti-harassment procedure as appropriate). All forms of discrimination by any person within the school's responsibility will be treated seriously as such behaviour is unacceptable.

#### Specific objectives for this period:

1. To invite a range of visitors from local community groups to share their culture and beliefs, giving children the opportunities to ask questions and learn characteristics of different groups of people
2. To ensure that vulnerable groups of pupils achieve challenging targets and the differences in attainment for these pupils are at least in line with the national average.
3. To ensure 100% of staff and governors involved in recruitment and selection training have a clear understanding of equal opportunities and non-discriminatory practice.

### **The public sector equality duty**

Schools are also bound by a part of the Equality Act 2010 known as 'public sector equality duty'. This replaces the previous statutory duties for schools on race, gender and disability. These duties are incorporated along with the larger group of protected characteristics.

Under the public sector duty schools have a 'general duty' to have due regard for the need to:

- eliminate all forms of discrimination, harassment and victimisation that are prohibited by the Equality Act;
- advance equality of opportunity;
- foster good relations.

'Advance equality of opportunity' is further defined as:

- removing or minimising disadvantages connected with a relevant protected characteristics
- taking steps to meet the different needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic
- encouraging persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or any other activity in which they are under-represented

The 'need to foster good relations involves tackling prejudice (e.g. tackle homophobic bullying in schools) and promoting understanding (e.g. of different faiths)

### **Employment matters**

Appointments: in all staff appointments the best candidate will be appointed based on strict professional criteria.

Family-friendly policies: the governing body /school is a family-friendly employer and will do its best to respond to the changing needs of all staff by publicising existing schemes designed to support employees in combining work and other responsibilities (parental leave arrangements, job share opportunities, flexitime where appropriate, carers' leave provision).

### **Training and development**

The success of the Equal Opportunities Policy is closely linked to the provision of relevant training. Governors will be encouraged to take up all relevant opportunities provided by the Local Authority's Governors Training Programme.

The school will endeavour to:

- enhance and develop the skills, knowledge and abilities of existing employees to realise their full potential, irrespective of background or employment status;
- provide equal access to training and development opportunities for all staff, including part time, on the basis of their assessed training needs;
- promote greater awareness of equal opportunities and the contribution which staff, governors, parents/guardians and pupils can make;
- equip employees with the skills to provide personal and organisational solutions to discriminatory practices and behaviour and to promote anti-discriminatory behaviour generally.

Professional development involves a continuous process of learning involving self-development, encouragement and motivation. The school places great importance on the relationship between team leaders and their teams and will ensure that employees are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their own learning and development in the context of the school's performance management system.

### **Pupils and the curriculum**

The school follows governing body pupil admission policies that do not permit gender, race, sexual identity, faith or belief, colour or disability to be used as criteria for admission. The school's aim is to provide for all pupils according to their needs, irrespective of gender, race, sexual identity, faith or belief, colour or disability, ability or ethnic origin. Pupils should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum which avoids stereotypes and provides good role models for all pupils. Equality of opportunity should inform the whole of the curriculum and be reviewed regularly.

Equal opportunities issues will be taken account of in planning the curriculum. This should be reflected in curriculum planning documentation.

## Monitoring, review and evaluation

1. Governors have a duty to ensure that policies are regularly monitored and reviewed. Monitoring is an essential aspect of this policy, as it should provide important information by which the school can measure its performance against its aims and objectives. Statistical information can also enable the governors and head teacher to detect where potential or actual imbalance exists and to take steps to correct them.
2. Monitoring with respect to employment will be undertaken in the following areas on at least an annual basis by gender, race, disability, grade and subject area:
  - composition of the school staff;
  - recruitment trends;
  - take up of training opportunities;
  - promotion patterns;
  - use of complaints procedure;
  - use of grievance, disciplinary, harassment etc;
  - use of sanctions;
  - take-up of family-friendly policies, e.g. flexible working arrangements.
3. Exit interviews can also provide further helpful information and feedback.
4. Governors will ensure that the Equal Opportunities Policy is reviewed on an annual basis. Equal opportunities implications will be considered and recorded whenever school policies are developed or reviewed.

## Appendix A: Discrimination, victimisation and harassment

Discrimination on grounds of race, gender, disability, religion or belief, or sexual orientation is illegal. However, for the school community, discrimination is also unacceptable on any of the other grounds referred to in this policy statement. Failure to comply with the policy will be fully and promptly investigated using the appropriate procedures.

There are four ways in which discrimination may occur:

1. **Direct discrimination:** This means treating someone less favourably than others would be treated in the same or similar circumstances on the grounds of race, gender etc.
2. **Indirect discrimination:** This means applying a requirement or condition which cannot be justified to all groups but which has a disproportionately adverse effect on one group because the proportion of that group which can comply is smaller than the proportion of the group(s) which can comply with it.
3. **Victimisation:** This occurs when a person is treated less favourably than other persons would be treated because that person has done a 'protected act' under the Equal Pay Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Race relations Act or Employment Equality Regulations, for example, by bringing forward proceedings or giving evidence or information.
4. **Harassment:** Harassment can take many forms, from the most obvious abusive remarks to extremely subtle use of power. As with unfair or unlawful discrimination, harassment can be intentional or unintentional. However, the key issue is not simply the intention of the offender but the impact of the behaviour on the person receiving it. Harassment may involve any of the following:
  - physical contact or violence;
  - offensive humiliating and intimidating remarks or actions;
  - exclusion from participation in job-related or classroom-related discussions, training or social or other events;
  - unfair work allocation;
  - unjust or excessive or humiliating criticism of performance;
  - offensive signs or notices;
  - graffiti; and
  - repeated demands or requests for sexual favours.

There are merely examples and not an exhaustive list. Whatever the form, the school will provide support for any member of the school community, pupil or staff member who feels threatened or isolated because of such actions.