Equal Opportunities Policy for Pupils

Document control

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Statutory status	Required by Part 1 (paragraph 5) and Part 6 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (as amended) and informed by the Equality Act 2010
Applies to	All pupils, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and to their parents, and to all staff
Availability	Published on the School website and available in hard copy on request

Policy summary

This policy explains how Cokethorpe School promotes equal opportunities for all pupils: our commitment to treating every pupil fairly and with dignity, how we eliminate discrimination and foster an inclusive community, how we make reasonable adjustments for pupils with disabilities, what we expect of everyone in our community, and how we monitor and review our practice.

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1. Why this matters

Every pupil at Cokethorpe deserves to be treated with dignity, to feel that they belong and to have the opportunity to flourish. Promoting equal opportunities is not simply a legal duty; it is fundamental to who we are as a school. A community that values and respects every individual, whatever their background, is a stronger, richer and more effective learning environment for everyone.

This policy sets out how we promote equal opportunities for pupils, how we prevent and address discrimination, and what every member of our community can expect.

2. What we are seeking to achieve

The aims of this policy are to:

- communicate the School's commitment to equal opportunities for all pupils;
- eliminate unlawful discrimination on the grounds of any protected characteristic;
- promote equal treatment for all members of our community;
- create and maintain an open, supportive and inclusive environment, free from discrimination;
- foster mutual tolerance, respect and positive attitudes so that every pupil feels valued;
- comply with our equality duties under the Equality Act 2010;
- remove or help to overcome barriers for pupils where they already exist;
- make clear that discrimination on the grounds of a protected characteristic is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

3. Scope, authority and application

This policy has been authorised by the Board of Governors. It applies to all pupils, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and to their parents. It applies on the School site and on all School-organised activities and trips. All staff have responsibilities under this policy in their conduct towards pupils. The equal opportunities rights of staff as employees are set out in the Equal Opportunities Policy for Staff.

All members of our community are expected to comply with this policy and to treat others with dignity at all times. Parents are expected to support its aims and the School's ethos of tolerance and respect. Staff, particularly those in leadership roles, have a particular responsibility to lead by example and to promote equal opportunities actively.

4. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Board of Governors	Approval of this policy and oversight of the School's compliance with its equality duties.
The Head	Ownership of this policy; leadership of the School's equal opportunities culture; monitoring and reporting to Governors via the Compliance Committee.
Senior Leadership Team	Ensuring that equal opportunities are embedded in teaching, pastoral care, admissions, discipline and all aspects of School life.
Head of Learning Development	Advising on reasonable adjustments and supporting pupils with disabilities and special educational needs.

All staff	Modelling respectful behaviour; challenging discriminatory language and conduct; following this policy in their day-to-day work.

5. Protected characteristics

Under the Equality Act 2010, the protected characteristics relevant to pupils are:

- race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin)
- sex
- disability
- religion or belief (including lack of religion or belief)
- sexual orientation
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity

Age and marriage or civil partnership are protected characteristics under the Equality Act but do not apply to discrimination against pupils. The School also has regard to socio-economic background, although this is not a protected characteristic under the Act.

The School will not discriminate against any pupil on the grounds of a protected characteristic, whether that discrimination is direct, indirect, or arising from disability, and whether or not it was intentional.

6. Equal treatment and admissions

The School treats every application for admission fairly, open-mindedly and equally, in accordance with this policy and the Admissions Policy. Although a selective school, each application is considered on its merits.

The School welcomes applications from pupils with as diverse a range of backgrounds as possible. This enriches our community and is vital in preparing our pupils for the wider world. We are committed to equal treatment for all and accept applications from, and admit, all prospective pupils irrespective of any protected characteristic or special educational need.

Parents must inform the School when submitting the Registration Form of any disability or special educational need which may affect their child's participation in the admissions process or in the education provided, so that we can consider what reasonable adjustments may be necessary.

Where bursary funds are available, means-tested awards are intended to make a Cokethorpe education possible for as many families as possible who meet our entry criteria. Details are available from the Bursar's office.

Full details of our admissions arrangements are set out in the Admissions Policy.

7. Educational services and access

The School affords all pupils access to educational provision, including all benefits, services and facilities, irrespective of any protected characteristic, subject to our reasonable adjustments duty and considerations of safety and welfare. The School will not discriminate against a pupil on the grounds of any protected characteristic by excluding them or subjecting them to any other detriment.

We will:

- treat all members of our community with respect and dignity and provide a positive learning environment free from discrimination;

- meet the needs of all pupils and ensure there is no unlawful discrimination on the grounds of any protected characteristic;
- ensure that pupils with English as an additional language receive appropriate educational and welfare support, and that where a pupil has an Education, Health and Care Plan, the School works with the family and, where appropriate, the local authority to provide such support as the School can reasonably offer;
- monitor the admission and progress of pupils from different backgrounds;
- challenge inappropriate and unacceptable discriminatory behaviour by pupils and staff;
- encourage pupils to work and play freely and to respect all other pupils irrespective of any protected characteristic;
- offer all pupils access to all areas of the curriculum and to the full range of extra-curricular activities;
- work with parents and external agencies where appropriate to combat and prevent discrimination.

8. Promoting equal opportunities through School life

Equal opportunities are promoted actively through the curriculum and wider School life. Through assemblies, LIF-Ed, Religious Studies, Drama, English and other lessons, the School will:

- promote tolerance of and respect for each other, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010;
- promote positive images and role models to avoid prejudice and to raise awareness of related issues;
- encourage pupils to question and challenge assumptions and stereotypes in order to understand discriminatory behaviours and bias;
- foster an open-minded approach and encourage pupils to recognise the contributions made by different cultures and backgrounds.

The School environment should be one in which all can feel secure, physically and emotionally. The display of pupils' work and visual materials across the School should reflect the diversity of our community and of wider society, including positive and active images of people with disabilities and of people from different ethnic groups and backgrounds in non-stereotypical roles.

9. Religious belief and British values

Cokethorpe has a joint Roman Catholic and Church of England foundation. While the School's ethos is shaped by Christian values and tradition, we do not select for entry on the basis of religious belief. We welcome and respect pupils of all faiths and of none, subject to considerations of safety, welfare and the rights and freedoms of others.

Through the curriculum and wider School life, the Governors, through the Senior Leadership Team, actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

10. Disability and reasonable adjustments

The School has an ongoing duty to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with a disability so that they are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared with other pupils. This duty applies throughout the admissions process and throughout a pupil's time at the School.

Where a reasonable adjustment may be needed, the School will consult with the pupil's parents, the Head of Learning Development and, where appropriate, the pupil themselves and their external advisers, about what adjustments can reasonably be made. The School will carefully consider any proposals for auxiliary aids and services in light of the pupil's disability and the resources available.

If the School considers that a particular adjustment would not be reasonable, it will explain its reasons and try to find an alternative solution where possible.

The School's Accessibility Plan 2026-2029, which is reviewed at least every three years, sets out how we plan to increase access to the curriculum, to the physical environment and to information for pupils with disabilities. A copy is available on request.

11. Requests for variation in uniform or arrangements

All pupils are required to wear a uniform until the Sixth Form, where a business dress code applies. The Head will consider written requests from parents or pupils for variations to the uniform or other arrangements for reasons connected with disability, gender reassignment, religion or belief, or another relevant protected characteristic, provided they are consistent with the School's policy on health and safety and are reasonable in all the circumstances.

Where there is uncertainty about whether an item may be worn, parents are encouraged to discuss the matter with the Head in advance.

12. Raising and responding to concerns

A pupil or parent who believes that a pupil has been treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic, or that this policy has been breached, is encouraged to raise the matter. A pupil may speak to a trusted member of staff, their Tutor, their Head of Year or a senior leader. A parent may contact the School in the first instance through their child's Tutor or Head of Year.

Staff will record and refer concerns through the appropriate School process. Where a concern may involve abuse or significant harm, it is referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Formal complaints are handled under the Complaints Procedure Policy.

Pupils who are in breach of this policy will be dealt with under the Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy and, where relevant, the Prevention of Bullying Policy. Harassment, prejudice-based bullying and victimisation are not accepted. The response will consider the needs and safety of the pupil affected, the circumstances and intent, the impact, any pattern of behaviour, and the appropriate educational and disciplinary response.

13. Training and communication

Equality, respectful conduct and the recognition of discriminatory behaviour are addressed through staff induction, safeguarding training and relevant professional development. All staff receive training on the School's equality duties and on this policy.

Pupils receive age-appropriate education on equality, diversity and respect through the curriculum and pastoral programme, including LIF-Ed lessons, assemblies and tutor time.

This policy is published on the School website and is made available to staff, pupils and parents.

14. Monitoring, review and reporting

The Head regularly monitors and reviews the effectiveness of this policy in practice, including relevant patterns in admissions, participation, concerns and outcomes, taking care to use information lawfully and proportionately.

Findings and any recommended actions are reported to Governors at least annually via the Compliance Committee.

This policy is reviewed annually, and sooner if the law, authoritative guidance or the School's arrangements change.

15. Related School policies and plans

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following:

- Accessibility Plan 2026-2029
- Admissions Policy
- Complaints Procedure Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy for Staff
- Learning Support Policy
- Prevention of Bullying Policy
- Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures

16. Legislation, regulation and guidance

Relevant authoritative sources include:

- Equality Act 2010
- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (as amended)
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2026
- Equality Act 2010: advice for schools (DfE, current edition)
- EHRC Technical Guidance for Schools in England