

THE MOUNT SCHOOL

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY POLICY

2026-2027

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This policy should be read alongside the Safeguarding and Child Protection, SEND, Admissions, Behaviour, Anti-Bullying, RSE and PSHE, Safer Recruitment, Staff Code of Conduct, Complaints, Grievance and Disciplinary policies.

1. Policy statement

The Mount School is committed to equality of opportunity, dignity and respect. The School is an equal opportunities employer and seeks to provide an inclusive educational environment in which pupils and adults are treated fairly and are able to participate without unlawful discrimination.

The School is committed to achieving and maintaining a workforce which draws on the widest possible range of knowledge, skills and experience. Recruitment, employment, education and school life will be managed in accordance with applicable equality law and the School's safeguarding responsibilities.

No employee, prospective employee, pupil or applicant for admission will receive unlawful treatment because of a protected characteristic, because they are perceived to have a protected characteristic, or, where the law provides, because of association with someone who has a protected characteristic.

Equality does not always mean identical treatment. The School will make reasonable adjustments for disabled people where required and may take lawful positive action where the statutory conditions are met.

2. Legal and regulatory framework

This policy has been reviewed with reference to the Equality Act 2010; relevant employment equality requirements; the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 as amended and current DfE Independent School Standards guidance; current DfE Equality Act advice for schools; KCSIE 2026; the current EYFS statutory framework; and the School's duties relating to SEND, safeguarding, relationships education and reasonable adjustments.

The Mount is an independent school. The Public Sector Equality Duty does not automatically apply to the School merely because it is a school. The School nevertheless applies the principles of equality, inclusion and evidence-informed review across its provision, while meeting the specific Equality Act duties that apply to independent schools as service providers, education providers and employers.

3. Protected characteristics

The protected characteristics listed in section 4 of the Equality Act 2010 are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

The way particular Equality Act provisions apply differs according to context. For example, age and marriage/civil partnership are relevant protected characteristics in employment but do not operate in precisely the same way in the schools provisions. Staff must therefore avoid assuming that every legal rule applies identically to employment, admissions and pupil provision.

4. Forms of unlawful discrimination and prohibited conduct

- Direct discrimination: treating a person less favourably because of a protected characteristic, subject to any lawful statutory exception.
- Indirect discrimination: applying a provision, criterion or practice which places people sharing a protected characteristic at a particular disadvantage and cannot be objectively justified where the law permits justification.
- Discrimination arising from disability: treating a disabled person unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of disability without objective justification.
- Failure to make reasonable adjustments for disability where the duty applies.
- Harassment related to a protected characteristic where covered by the applicable Equality Act provisions, and other discriminatory or degrading conduct which the School will address through its safeguarding, behaviour or employment procedures.
- Victimisation: subjecting a person to detriment because they have done, or are believed may do, a protected act such as raising an equality concern.

The School will also address prejudice, bullying, sexual harassment, misogyny, racism, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse, disability-related abuse and faith-based hostility under the appropriate safeguarding, behaviour, anti-bullying and staff conduct procedures, whether or not the particular incident ultimately meets a statutory legal definition.

5. Aims and implementation

The School, with the assistance of staff, will:

- break down barriers to equality of opportunity which may prevent pupils or staff from participating, belonging, progressing or accessing benefit;

- advertise vacancies appropriately and ensure selection criteria are relevant to the role;
- promptly and fairly investigate complaints of discrimination, harassment, victimisation or discriminatory conduct and take appropriate action;
- ensure staff understand this policy and receive proportionate training;
- review recruitment, promotion, training and development arrangements to identify unjustified disadvantage;
- review relevant pupil data, incidents, complaints and patterns so that leaders can identify barriers or disproportionate impact;
- ensure official communications and published information reflect the letter and spirit of this policy;
- promote a school culture in which difference is respected and no form of unlawful discrimination is normalised.

6. Pupils, education and school life

The principles of equality apply to admissions, education, pastoral care, behaviour, discipline, exclusions, access to benefits and facilities, educational visits, clubs, awards, curriculum opportunities and other aspects of school life, subject to lawful exceptions.

Leaders and staff will have high expectations for all pupils and will identify and reduce barriers experienced by disabled pupils, pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils, pupils known or previously known to children's social care and pupils who may face other barriers to learning or wellbeing. Equality considerations must work alongside, not replace, individual safeguarding and SEND assessment.

Rules and routines will be applied consistently but not mechanically. Staff should consider whether disability, SEND, language, culture, religion or another relevant circumstance requires a reasonable adjustment or different support while maintaining appropriate safeguarding and behavioural expectations.

7. Admissions

Admission and assessment procedures will be fair, transparent and consistent with the School's Admissions Policy. The School will not unlawfully discriminate in deciding whether to admit a pupil or in the terms on which a place is offered.

Disability must not of itself be treated as a reason to refuse admission. The School will consider reasonable adjustments and the individual circumstances of the child. SEND and disability are related but distinct concepts and must not be treated as interchangeable.

Any decision that a pupil's needs cannot reasonably be met must be based on lawful, individual and evidence-based consideration rather than assumptions about a diagnosis, disability or protected characteristic.

8. Disability and reasonable adjustments

If an employee is disabled or becomes disabled, the School encourages them to discuss any workplace disadvantage so that appropriate support and reasonable adjustments can be considered.

A disability will not of itself justify non-recruitment. Reasonable adjustments to recruitment procedures will be made where required so that disabled applicants are not placed at a substantial disadvantage.

The School will consider reasonable adjustments to work arrangements or premises for disabled staff. This may include specialist equipment, altered working arrangements, job redesign or other appropriate measures.

For disabled pupils, the School will take reasonable steps to avoid substantial disadvantage in education and associated services and will consider auxiliary aids and services where the duty applies. Adjustments will be individual, anticipatory where required, and kept under review.

The School will not require a disabled person to pay the cost of a reasonable adjustment that the School is legally required to make.

9. Curriculum, protected characteristics and respectful school culture

The curriculum and wider school experience will foster respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010, in an age-appropriate manner consistent with the Independent School Standards and current statutory Relationships Education/RSE guidance.

Teaching must not suggest that people with a protected characteristic deserve less respect or are inherently inferior. Where sensitive or contested issues arise, staff will teach in a balanced, age-appropriate and legally compliant way and will not promote partisan political views.

The School will take appropriate steps where prejudice or discrimination emerges among pupils, including racism, misogyny, disability-related prejudice, religious hostility or prejudice concerning sexual orientation or gender reassignment. Safeguarding concerns will be referred under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

10. Safeguarding and equality

Equality and safeguarding are interconnected. Some children may be more vulnerable to abuse, bullying, exploitation, isolation or barriers to disclosure because of disability, SEND, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or other circumstances.

Staff must never dismiss harmful conduct as banter, part of growing up, a cultural issue or an inevitable feature of a protected characteristic. Child-on-child abuse, sexual harassment, discriminatory abuse and harmful sexual behaviour must be responded to under KCSIE 2026 and the School's safeguarding procedures.

Information about protected characteristics must be handled sensitively and lawfully. Confidentiality must not prevent necessary safeguarding information sharing.

11. Recruitment and selection

The staffing process is governed by the School's principles of non-discrimination and safer recruitment. Selection will seek the best match between the applicant's knowledge, skills, experience, suitability and the requirements of the role.

All applicants will be treated courteously and consistently. Selection tests, where used, must be relevant, proportionate and administered fairly.

Shortlisted applicants will complete the School's required suitability/self-declaration process. All offers are conditional upon satisfactory completion of the pre-employment checks required by KCSIE 2026, the Independent School Standards and the School's Safer Recruitment Policy.

Reasonable adjustments will be made to recruitment and selection processes for disabled applicants where required. Recruitment decisions must not be influenced by assumptions about disability, pregnancy, maternity, family status, religion, race, sex, sexual orientation or other protected characteristics.

12. Employment, training, promotion and terms

Training needs will be identified through appraisal and management processes. Staff will have appropriate access to training and development, and promotion decisions will be based on legitimate, non-discriminatory criteria.

No employee or prospective employee will receive unfair or unlawful treatment in relation to recruitment, selection, promotion, transfer, training, benefits, terms and conditions, grievance, disciplinary action, redundancy, dismissal or workplace conduct.

Part-time and fixed-term staff will not be treated less favourably than comparable full-time or permanent staff contrary to applicable legislation. Any different treatment must be lawfully justified where the legislation permits justification.

Pregnancy, maternity and family-related rights will be respected. Staff must not be disadvantaged because they are pregnant, on maternity leave or exercising other statutory family-related rights.

13. Religion or belief and reasonable arrangements

The School will treat religion and belief fairly and will consider requests relating to religious observance, dress, food or working arrangements on their individual merits, taking account of equality law, safeguarding, operational requirements and the rights of others.

No pupil or member of staff should be pressured to adopt, renounce or conceal a religion or belief as a condition of fair treatment, subject to the School's lawful ethos, curriculum and employment arrangements where applicable.

14. Complaints, grievances and concerns

Pupils and parents/carers should raise concerns through the appropriate pastoral, safeguarding or Complaints Policy route. Staff may raise employment concerns through management, the Grievance Procedure, Whistleblowing Policy or safeguarding procedures as appropriate.

Complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation will be taken seriously and handled fairly, promptly and confidentially so far as possible. Safeguarding allegations or concerns about adults must be referred through the safeguarding/LADO route where the threshold may be met and must not be investigated solely as an ordinary equality complaint.

There must be no victimisation or retaliation against a person because they raised, supported or participated in a genuine equality concern. A deliberately false allegation made in bad faith may be addressed under the relevant behaviour or disciplinary procedure, but an allegation that is unsubstantiated or mistaken is not, for that reason alone, malicious.

15. Breaches of this policy

Breaches by staff may be dealt with under the Disciplinary and Conduct Policy. Serious unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or retaliation may amount to gross misconduct depending on the circumstances.

Pupil conduct will be addressed under the Behaviour, Anti-Bullying and Safeguarding policies. Responses will be proportionate, educative and safeguarding-informed, with reasonable adjustments made where required.

16. EYFS and Nursery

This policy applies to the School's EYFS/Nursery provision. Young children will be supported to develop respectful relationships, recognise difference positively and participate fully in provision. Staff will challenge prejudice and exclusion in developmentally appropriate ways.

Reasonable adjustments, SEND support, intimate care, medical needs, safeguarding and communication with families will be coordinated so that equality considerations are embedded in day-to-day practice rather than treated as a separate exercise.

17. Monitoring, evidence and review

The Headteacher will oversee implementation. The Director / Proprietor will provide appropriate oversight and challenge. Leaders will review relevant evidence such as recruitment outcomes, staff concerns, pupil incidents, bullying/prejudice records, complaints, admissions issues, SEND/reasonable-adjustment decisions and participation in school opportunities.

Monitoring will be proportionate and data-protection compliant. Small-group data will not be published or circulated where this could identify individuals unnecessarily.

The policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner following significant legal or regulatory change, a serious equality concern, inspection findings or evidence that School practice is creating unintended disadvantage.

Appendix 1 - Equality and reasonable-adjustment decision record

Field	Record
Person/pupil and context	
Barrier or disadvantage identified	
Protected characteristic / disability relevance	
Adjustment or adaptation requested/considered	
Safeguarding/SEND/medical factors	
Options considered	
Impact on individual and others	
Decision and reasons	
Person consulted	
Review date/outcome	

Appendix 2 - Equality incident / concern prompts

- What happened, when and where?
- Who was affected and who witnessed it?
- Was there language or conduct connected to a protected characteristic or prejudice?
- Could this be bullying, child-on-child abuse, sexual harassment, discriminatory abuse or a safeguarding concern?
- Does the person affected have SEND, disability, communication or other needs affecting disclosure or response?
- What immediate support and safety measures are required?
- What behaviour, safeguarding, HR, LADO or complaints route applies?
- What was recorded, communicated and reviewed?
- Does the incident reveal a wider pattern requiring curriculum, training or policy action?

Appendix 3 - Annual equality review checklist

- Recruitment and selection arrangements reviewed for unjustified barriers.
- Reasonable-adjustment requests and outcomes reviewed.
- Admissions decisions checked for equality concerns.
- Prejudice-related, discriminatory and bullying incidents reviewed for patterns.
- Safeguarding and child-on-child abuse data considered where equality factors are relevant.
- Curriculum documentation provides for age-appropriate respect for protected characteristics.
- Pupil access to clubs, trips, awards, leadership and enrichment considered.
- Staff training and policy awareness reviewed.
- Complaints/grievances reviewed for equality themes.
- Actions, owner and completion date recorded and reported to the Director / Proprietor.