

Birkenhead Sixth Form College
Single Equality Scheme (Draft)

2009 - 2012

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formats on request)**

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Forward by Principal and Chair of Corporation

Birkenhead Sixth Form College is committed to the principles of equality and diversity for everyone. The College's existence and activities are determined by a belief in and a desire to ensure that all members of the College have an equal opportunity to maximise their potential and are equally valued and treated with respect. It seeks to provide employment, education and services in an environment in which diversity is valued.

The belief in equality and diversity underpins and impacts on all areas of activity and influences how the College works and what it does. The College is opposed to any form of unlawful discrimination and commits itself to eliminating any inequalities by taking positive action wherever possible.

The Single Equality Scheme statement provides the framework and context to demonstrating the College's commitment to:

- proactively promoting equality of opportunity for current and prospective students and staff;
- remove barriers to access, achievement and progression;
- value the diversity and differences of everyone that studies and works at the College;
- meet individual needs to enable the fulfilment of potential;
- create an environment free from discrimination,
- provide a high quality learning experience for students and a supportive working environment for students and staff.

Kathryn Podmore
Principal

Peter Cumings
Chair of Governors

Section 1 - Introduction

Birkenhead Sixth Form College Single Equality Scheme (SES) sets out our approach to equality and diversity, both for ourselves as an employer of over 220 staff, and also as a Post 16 education provider in Wirral. It is called a 'Single' Equality Scheme because it explains and responds to our statutory duties to promote equality in all six specific areas – race, disability, gender (including transgender), sexual orientation, age and religious belief.

The statutory duties are under the following legislation:

- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Sexual Discrimination Act 1975.

The SES also provides appropriate regard to the forthcoming Single Equality Act relating to sexual orientation, age and religious belief. Further details of the equality legislation applying to this document is summarised in section 4.

The Scheme and associated Action Plan will be developed over a three-year cycle with annual reviews and updated action plans reported to all College stakeholders.

Section 2 - College Background

Birkenhead Sixth Form College provides education for young people and adult students undertaking full or part time study. There are approximately 1,200 students, aged 16-19 that travel to the College from all over the Wirral Peninsula. The College also caters for approximately 3,000 adult students enrolling on both award bearing and recreational courses.

The College's mission aims to provide:

“High quality education for all” and embraces the core values of inclusivity, support, partnership, mutual respect and development of potential.

Birkenhead Sixth Form College was established in 1988. It is located in Wirral about one mile from the centre of Birkenhead in a mixed residential area. The accommodation is based on a small site originally constructed in 1962 with further expansions completed over a number of years.

The College currently supports over 150 students with additional support needs. Additional support needs might include Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Asperger's Syndrome, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, specific learning difficulties, sensory difficulties, depression, mental health and emotional problems and students with English as an additional language.

The range of support is variable depending on student need. It might incorporate one to one assistance in the classroom, liaison with tutors about students' specific requirements, taster sessions prior to starting College to ease the transition from Secondary School; and information provided in a number of formats including Braille and the provision of specialist equipment to meet particular needs.

Wirral is the eighth largest Metropolitan Council in England and Wales, with a diverse socio-economic population of over 325,000. The ethnic mix is predominantly White British (97%), which reflects the figures for 16-19 year old College students. Gender balance is almost equal between male and female students.

The ethnic mix for adult students is similar to the 16 – 19 age group; with the proportion of females on adult courses in Outreach at almost 77% and on evening classes at 71%.

96% of staff employed by the College is White British, and 67% are female.

Section 3 - The College Vision for Equality

The College is fully committed to achieving equality of opportunity and to celebrating cultural diversity as reflected in the Equal Opportunities, Disability and Race Equality Policy. In this respect every member of the College community has a responsibility for equality and diversity.

In summary the policy states that:

- The College will treat all its members with respect, dignity and provide a working environment free from unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation.
- The College will not tolerate any form of behaviour or activity, which discriminates on the grounds of age, colour, disability, ethnic origin, gender, marital status, nationality, race, religious belief, sexual orientation or socio-economic background.
- The College is fully committed to meeting all students' needs, encouraging them to achieve their full potential and to raising educational standards. It aims to create a positive, inclusive atmosphere based on respect for people's differences and the challenging of stereotypes.
- The College is also committed to making its workforce more representative of the Community it serves and to making full use of the skills and knowledge of people from different groups. It aims to create good relations between people of different groups and to improve staff morale and performance.

The SES will help us to achieve this vision and give us a framework for action across all six equality strands. It demonstrates our commitment to go beyond mere compliance with the legislation. It moves towards mainstreaming equality and diversity by bringing together our work into one place, consulting widely on it and putting in place a comprehensive equality action plan to ensure our commitments are carried out.

Section 4 - The Legal Framework

Three single pieces of legislation are central to our SES:

- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (RR(A)A)
- Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005
- Equality Act 2006.

The legislation imposes specific duties on all public bodies to promote equality in everything that we do. The general duties for each piece of legislation are outlined below, and the specific duties form the framework and guidance for producing this SES and Action Plan.

Under the general duty of the RR(A)A, public authorities are required to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different races.

The DDA 2005 requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to:

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act
- eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disabilities
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life
- take steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than others.

The legislation states that a person has a disability if:

“He or she has a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.

Under the Equality Act 2006, public authorities are required to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination and harassment that is unlawful under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equal Pay Act 1970
- promote equality of opportunity between men and women, and take active steps to promote gender equality when carrying out functions and activities.

The Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) provide support, guidance and an enforcement role to ensure compliance with the legislative requirements.

We also acknowledge that equality and diversity mean more than the promotion of race, disability and gender equality. We therefore regard the following additional legislation as relevant to our SES and addressing the six strands of equality:

- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006

This legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone in relation to his or her age and employment. Key issues whilst applying this legislation include recruitment and selection of staff, offering equal access to training opportunities, acknowledging long service and supporting staff that has caring responsibilities.

- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003

This legislation outlaws discrimination in employment and vocational training on grounds of sexual orientation and has been amended to take account of the introduction of civil partnership. The regulations promote recognising and being respectful of individual's sexual preference, maintaining confidentiality about their sexual preference and not deliberately disclosing a person's sexuality.

- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003.

This legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief defined as being any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief. This includes accommodating religious needs such as requests for time off to attend religious functions, acceptance of a person's religious or belief system, meeting a person's specific dietary requirement such as Halal or Kosher food and prayer facilities, as far as possible.

- Gender Recognition Act 2004

This legislation provides for legal recognition of a transsexual person in their acquired gender and an opportunity to acquire a new birth certificate in their new gender (a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC)). The legislation also makes it unlawful to disclose information acquired in their official capacity about the gender history of a person holding a GRC. The holder of the GRC is not obliged to inform their employer that they hold one, but if they do so the employer is obliged to hold this as 'protected information'.

- The Human Rights Act 1998

Human Rights are rights and freedoms that belong to all individuals regardless of their nationality or citizenship. They are fundamentally important in making a fair and civilised society. There are 16 basic rights in the legislation – all taken from the European Convention on Human Rights

- Single Equality Bill 2009

The Single Equality Bill comes into force in April 2011 and seeks to introduce a new equality duty on the public sector. It will aim to end age discrimination, obligate transparency (especially on wage differentials), extend the scope of 'positive action' and strengthen the enforcement of equality legislation.

Section 5 - Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's)

It is important to understand whether our services are meeting everyone's needs, and that people who need our services have access to them. To achieve this aim the College completes a process known as Equality Impact Assessments.

An Equality Impact Assessment is a way of deciding whether an existing or proposed policy, procedure, practice or service does (or may) affect people differently, and if so, whether it affects them in an adverse way.

The completion of Equality Impact Assessments is firmly embedded in the College corporate review processes. All policies (either new or under review) that are presented to the Corporation, or appropriate committee, include a copy of the completed Equality Impact Assessment. All policies are also independently reviewed by a member of the College Senior Management Team and Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator. A random sample is also considered by the College Equality and Diversity Committee and Student Council.

A summary of the results of the Equality Impact Assessments will be reported as part of the annual review of the SES.

Section 6 – Consultation and Involvement

Ongoing consultation and involvement are both ways of ensuring the College get the input it needs to fulfil the various statutory duties explained in this SES. The College regards consultation and involvement as a fundamental and vital part of the development and implementation of the SES and Action Plan.

The College will be consulting and involving staff, students, governors and other stakeholders to ensure that the College promotes equality in everything that we do. The College is a member of the Wirral Council led Equality Watch Group that has 350 representatives to share ideas and gauge ideas on equality and diversity matters

Section 7 - Monitoring and Review Procedures

The legislation outlined in the legal framework section places a statutory duty on the College to monitor and review any adverse or differential impact on equality.

The Assistant Principal (Estates and Services) will oversee the development and implementation of the SES and Action Plan, with support from the Equal Opportunities Co-ordinator. There is a commitment to update the Action Plan annually, and to revise the SES at least every three years.

Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of both documents will rest with the Equality and Diversity Committee, reporting to the College Senior Management Team and ultimately the Corporation. Information will also be shared with all staff, students and other stakeholders to facilitate improvements aimed at proactively developing positive actions in relation to race, disability and gender equality.

The College Strategic Plan also operates on a three-year cycle, and it is intended that the SES will be complementary to this development and planning cycle.

Organisations contracted to deliver College services will also have to demonstrate their commitment to comply with their responsibilities under equality legislation.

Section 8 - Reporting Procedures

The College has a statutory duty to report annually on the schemes' progress. An annual report will be presented to the College Corporation and Student Council on the implementation of the SES. A revised SES Action Plan will also be presented to the SMT, Corporation and Student Council each year, reflecting the work completed in the previous plan.

Copies of the SES, Action Plan and annual report will be published on the College website and intranet. A copy will also be distributed to all representatives of the Wirral Council Equality Watch Group. All information will also be made available in alternative formats on request.

Section 9 - Complaints Procedures

The College welcomes contact from stakeholders, individuals and/or organisations that wish to discuss any issues relating to the SES. All complaints or concerns will receive a response in line with the College Complaints Procedure. Further details can be obtained by contacting Reception on telephone number 0151 652 5575. Further details about the Complaints Procedure can be located on the College website at www.bsfc.ac.uk.