

FOREST OAK SCHOOL
and
MERSTONE SCHOOL



Equalities &
Accessibility Policy

March 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 This plan is drawn up in accordance with the planning duty in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the SEN and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA). It draws on the guidance set out in the “Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled young people”, issued by DfES in July 2002.

1.2 Disability is defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA): “A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day to day activities.”

2. Key Objectives

2.1 To reduce and eliminate barriers to the curriculum and to full participation in education for young people and prospective young people with a disability.

3. Principles

3.1 Compliance with the DSA is consistent with the education department’s aims and equal opportunities policy and the operation of the SEN policy.

3.2 Forest Oak & Merstone recognises its duty under DDA (as amended by the SENDA):

- Not to discriminate against disabled young people in their admissions and exclusions and provision of education and associated services.
- Not to treat disabled young people less favourably.
- To take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled young people at a substantial disadvantage.
- To publish an Accessibility Plan. (Refer Accessibility Plans Appendix A & B)

3.3 In performing their duties, staff will have regard to the DRC Code of Practice (2002):

- Forest Oak & Merstone recognises and values parents / carers’ knowledge of their child’s disability and its effect on his / her ability to carry out normal activities and respects the parents / carers and child’s right to confidentiality.
- Forest Oak & Merstone provides all young people with a broad and balanced curriculum, differentiated and adjusted to meet the needs of individuals and their preferred learning styles, which underpin the development of a more inclusive curriculum

Setting suitable learning challenges

- Responding to young people’s diverse learning needs
- Overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of young people

4 Activity

[This section outlines the main activities which Forest Oak & Merstone undertake, and is planning to undertake, to achieve the key objective (above).]

4.1 Education and related activities Forest Oak & Merstone will continue to seek and follow the advice of LA services, such as specialist teacher advisers, educational psychologists and SEN inspectors / advisers, social workers and if appropriate health professionals from the local NHS Trust.

4.2 Physical environment Forest Oak & Merstone will take account of the needs of the young people and visitors with physical difficulties and sensory impairments when planning and undertaking future improvements and refurbishments of the site and premises, such as improved access, lighting, acoustic treatment and colour schemes and more accessible facilities and fittings.

4.3 Provision of information Forest Oak & Merstone will make itself aware of local services, including those provided through the LA, for providing information in alternative formats when required or requested.

5 Equality

5.1 Forest Oak & Merstone is an inclusive education provider that caters for young people with an EHCP outlining a number of learning needs. Predominantly the schools educate young people with Learning Disabilities and ASC needs and delivers education with a tailored timetable to support the needs of the young person. The schools adopt a therapeutic culture whereby all young people in the school community are of equal worth no matter what their complex needs or starting points. The schools believe that the Equality Act 2010 provides a framework to support our commitment to valuing diversity, tackling discrimination, promoting equality and fostering good relationships amongst our young people who have, in the past, been disadvantages within education and society

5.2 Our approach to equality is based on the following 7 key principles as well as the aims of the schools:

- All young people are of equal value – whether or not they are disabled, whatever their ethnicity, culture, national origin, gender, gender identity, whatever their religion or faith and whatever their sexual orientation.
- We recognise, respect and value difference and understand that diversity is a strength - we constantly take account of differences and strive to remove barriers to young people learning.
- We foster positive relationships and attitudes – we actively promote positive attitudes and mutual respect within the school community and when out in public.
- We foster a shared sense of cohesion and belonging – we want all young people within the school community to feel a sense of belonging and be able to participate fully in school life.

- We observe good equalities practice for staff – we ensure policies and procedures benefit all employees and potential employees in all aspects of their work, including recruitment and continued professional development.
- We have high expectations of all our young people with an expectation for them to make good progress no matter their starting points and achieve their highest potential.
- We work to raise standards for all young people including the most vulnerable – we believe in improving the education for young people with special educational needs and preparing them for independence into adult life.

5.3 Although this policy is the key document for information about our approach to equalities in line with the public sector equality duty, we ensure that information about our responsibilities under the Equality Act are included in our school evaluation, school development plan.

5.4 We also use the following documents to support Equality:

- Behaviour Management policy including Anti-bullying policy
- Admissions policy
- Exclusion policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding policy
- First Aid and Medication policy
- Complaints policy

5.5 The Equality Act also applies to Forest Oak & Merstone in their role as employers and the way we comply with the LA safer recruitment processes.

5.6 What are we doing to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation?

- We take account of equality issues in relation to admissions and exclusions, the way we provide education to our young people and the way we provide access to facilities and services.
- We are aware of reasonable adjustment for disabled young people – designed to enhance access and participation to the level of non-disabled young people and stop young people being placed at a disadvantage.
- The Head of the Schools and HR LA Partner ensure that all appointment panels give due regard to this policy and the school's policy and procedures when it comes to employment, promotion and training opportunities.
- We take seriously the need to consider the equality implications when we develop, adapt or review policies
- We actively promote equality and diversity through the curriculum (P.S.H.E and ASDAN) and by creating a school environment that respects all.

- Our admissions arrangements are fair and transparent and we do not discriminate against young people by treating them less favourable on the grounds of sex, race, disability, religion or sexual orientation

5.7 Behaviour, Exclusions and Attendance

5.7.1 Forest Oak & Merstone policies on behaviour – rewards and exclusions – takes full account of the duties of the Equality Act. We make reasonable, appropriate and flexible adjustment for all of our young people with special educational needs. We closely monitor data on exclusions and absence from the schools and take action promptly to address concerns.

5.7.2 All the schools challenge all forms of prejudice and prejudice-based bullying. Evaluation will take place on an annual basis

Appendix A

Accessibility Plan

Curriculum Access

Target	Strategy	Outcome	Review
Ensure the teachers differentiate to meet need of all pupils	Review pupil's EHCP's	All pupils needs met in classroom environment	
Review Engagement Profile for pupils with complex needs. Train staff in use of it.	Training for all staff re: Engagement profile	Engagement profile assessment in place for all pupils	
Ensure all trips and visits are planned to include all pupils irrespective of need	Review trips & visits and use of inclusive minibus transport	All classes have equal access to visits	

Communication Access

Target	Strategy	Outcome	Review
Ensure the teachers use adapted communication systems to increase pupil access	Makaton training for staff and parents Expand use of switch technology	All pupils communication needs met in classroom environment	
Pupil access to written word increased	Training for all staff re: Communicate in Print symbol software	Symbol software use to support bridge into reading	
Parents to be supported by FSW to access written communications	Open support from FSW also targeted support for specific families	All parents have equal access to communications from school	

Physical Access Plan

Target	Strategy	Outcome	Review
Increase access to sensory garden for pupils who use wheelchairs	Clear sensory garden area and install new raised beds	Full access to area and increased access for horticulture activities	
Increase access to swimming for physical therapy	Timetable planning and staffing to support water based physio sessions	All pupils requiring a session have access to pool session weekly	
Trips – use of accessible transport to include all	Trip to London Houses of Parliament – accessible coach booked	All students able to attend trip	