

Policy Name: Equal Opportunities Policy Students

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1. Introduction

1.1 Sidcot School (the School) is an independent mainstream boarding and day school for girls and boys aged from 3 to 18 years; it has a strong international presence. The School is a registered charity with a Quaker ethos and welcomes staff, workers, volunteers, students, parents, applicants and governors from all different ethnic groups, backgrounds and creeds. This policy links to Quaker Faith and Practice 1.0: Advice and queries; 1.02, 22: "*Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgements about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipline asks of us? Remember that each of us is unique, precious, a child of God".* The term School Community includes staff, governors, students, parents, visitors and volunteers.

1.2 The School recognises the benefits of having a diverse School Community, with individuals who value one another, and the different contributions everyone can make. Students are taught to value and respect others. The School's values are linked to its Quaker foundation and reinforced through the Centre for Peace and Global Studies. The School is committed to being an equal opportunities education provider and is committed to equality of opportunity for all members of the School Community. In the provision of equal opportunities, the School recognises and accepts its responsibilities under the law and opposes discrimination on the basis of:

- age
- disability
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief (including where an individual does not subscribe to a particular religion or belief)
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- marital or civil partnership status and age (applicable to adult members of the school community)
- gender reassignment (see Appendix 1)

These are called the **Protected Characteristics**. The School also opposes all bullying and unlawful discrimination on the basis that a person has a special educational need **(SEN)** or learning difficulty, or because English is an additional language **(EAL)**.

1.3 The School aims to ensure that all policies and practices conform with the principle of equal opportunities. The School will tackle inappropriate attitudes and practices through staff leading by example, through the personal, social, health and economic education **(PSHE)** programme, through the supportive School culture and through the School's policies.

2. Scope and Distribution

2.1 **Scope**: This policy is for the benefit of prospective and existing students of the whole school including the Early Years Foundation Stage. The whole student community is expected to observe and implement its terms.

2.2 A separate Equal Opportunities Policy for staff (9.1) applies.

2.3 This policy is available on the School's website, on the staff intranet, and in hard copy in alternative formats where possible.

3. Aims

3.1 Through the operation of this policy we aim to:

- communicate the commitment of the School to the promotion of equal opportunities;
- promote equal treatment within the School for all members of the School Community;
- create and maintain an open and supportive environment, which is free from discrimination;
- foster mutual tolerance and positive attitudes so that everyone can feel valued within the School;
- remove or help to overcome barriers for students where they already exist;
- ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination against any person on any ground listed at paragraph 4.1;
- make it clear that, and ensure that all discriminatory words, behaviour and images are treated as unacceptable and
- take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled people at a substantial disadvantage (the 'reasonable adjustments' duty).
- monitor the impact of this policy on different groups of students to ensure equality of opportunity is effectively promoted in practice.

3.2 Safeguarding

- The School recognises that discrimination, harassment and victimisation may constitute safeguarding concerns. All staff should be aware that equality issues can be an indicator of harm or vulnerability, and concerns will be managed in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
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4. Forms of Discrimination

4.1 **Types**: Pursuant to the Equality Act. Discrimination may be direct or indirect, or arising from disability and it may occur intentionally or unintentionally.

4.2 **Direct discrimination**: Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic as set out in paragraph 1.2 above.

Direct discrimination also occurs when a person is treated less favourably because of their association with another person who has a protected characteristic.

4.3 **Indirect discrimination**: Indirect discrimination occurs where an individual is subject to an unjustified provision, criterion or practice which affects one or more of the protected characteristics and puts them at a particular disadvantage because of, for example, their sex or race.

4.4 **Discrimination arising from disability**: Discrimination arising from disability occurs when a disabled person is treated unfavourably because of something connected with their disability and the treatment cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim and where potential options are not investigated.

4.5 **Discrimination arising from Race:** Race is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins. The School will not unlawfully discriminate, harass or victimise any student on the

grounds of race and will take appropriate steps to promote respect, inclusion and equality within the School Community.

4.6 **Discrimination arising from Gender Reassignment:** Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to discriminate against a pupil because of gender reassignment. This means that pupils who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone a process (or part of a process) to reassign their sex are protected.

A pupil does not need to have undergone any medical treatment to be protected under the Act. They may be at any stage of the transition process.

In line with the findings of the 2024 CASS Review, our approach recognises that issues relating to gender identity in children and young people are complex and may require careful, sensitive, and age-appropriate support. Our priority is always the safeguarding, wellbeing, and education of every pupil. Where pupils express gender-related distress, we will work closely with families and relevant professionals to provide support that is informed, compassionate, and developmentally appropriate.

4.7 **Discrimination arising from Sexuality:** Sexual orientation is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. The School will not unlawfully discriminate, harass or victimise students because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, or because of their association with somebody of a particular sexual orientation.

4.8 **Discrimination arising from Religion or belief:** Religion or belief is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and includes any religion, religious belief, philosophical belief, or lack of religion or belief. The School will not unlawfully discriminate, harass or victimise students on these grounds and will respect the diverse beliefs and convictions of members of the School Community.

4.9 **Discrimination arising from pregnancy and maternity**: The School will not unlawfully discriminate against a student because of pregnancy, maternity or related circumstances. Appropriate support and reasonable adjustments will be considered on an individual basis, taking account of the student's welfare, educational needs and safeguarding requirements.

5. Harassment

5.1 There are three types of harassment that are unlawful under the Equality Act 2010.

5.1.1 Harassment related to a relevant protected characteristic: as defined in paragraph 1.2. Harassment occurs when a person engages in unwanted behaviour which is relevant to one of the relevant protected characteristics and which has the purpose or effect of:

(a) violating a student's dignity; or

(b) creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the student.

5.1.2 Sexual harassment: This occurs when a person engages in unwanted behaviour which is of a sexual nature and which has the purpose or effect of:

(a) violating a student's dignity; or

(b) creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the student.

5.1.3 Less favourable treatment of a student because they submit to or reject sexual harassment or harassment related to sex.

6. Victimisation

6.1 Victimisation means treating someone badly because their behaviour amounts to a "**protected act"** (or because the School believes that a person is or will undertake a protected act). Treating a student less favourably because they have taken such an action will be unlawful victimisation.

6.2 A "**protected act**" is:

6.2.1 making a claim or complaint of discrimination (under the Equality Act 2010 as set out above) or

6.2.2 helping someone else to make such a claim by giving evidence or information or

6.2.3 making an allegation that the School or someone else has breached the Equality Act 2010 or

6.2.4 doing anything else in connection with the Equality Act 2010.

7. Admission

7.1 **Applicants**: Subject to Section 11, below, and subject to age considerations; the School accepts applications from and admits students irrespective of their Protected Characteristics and will not discriminate on these grounds in the terms on which a place is offered. The School will treat every application in a fair, open-minded way.

7.2 **Selection**: Every application will be considered on its merits within the School's criteria for selection on grounds of the student's ability and aptitude, but this will not be done as a way of excluding students with a disability or special educational needs, subject to section 10 below.

7.3 **Admissions Policy**: The School's Admissions Policy (3.3) reflects the School's approach towards equal opportunities and is consistent with this policy.

8. Education and Associated Services

8.1 **Equal access**: Subject to considerations of age, safety and welfare, paragraph 8.2 and section 11, below, the School will afford all students equal access to all benefits, services, facilities, classes and subjects including all sports and after school clubs/activities, irrespective of their Protected Characteristics (although subject to their age).

8.2 **Positive action**: The School may afford students of a particular disability or special educational need, access to additional education or training to meet the special needs of the students in that group, for example, special language training for groups whose first language is not English.

8.3 **Exclusions**: Subject to section 11 of this policy, the School will not discriminate against any student by excluding him or her from the School, or by subjecting him or her to any other detriment, on the grounds of his or her sex, sexual reassignment, race, disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, or special educational needs.

8.4 **Teaching and School materials**: Efforts are made to recognise and be aware of the possibility of bias (for example based upon sex or race), so that this can be eliminated in both the School's teaching and learning materials and teaching styles. Materials are carefully selected for all areas of the curriculum so as to avoid stereotypes and bias. The School's PSHE curriculum encourages respect for other people, with particular regard to the Protected Characteristics.

8.5 **Student interaction**: All students are encouraged to work and play freely with, and have respect for, all other students, irrespective of their Protected Characteristics, subject to considerations of safety and welfare. Positive attitudes are fostered towards all groups in society through the curriculum and ethos of the School, and students will be encouraged to question assumptions and stereotypes.

8.6 **Bullying**: The School will not tolerate bullying or cyberbullying **for any reason**.

Please refer to the School's Anti-Bullying Policy (5.4). In some circumstances, bullying may amount to a safeguarding or child protection concern, in which case the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding policy (2.1) will apply. Both policies are available on the School's website, staff intranet and in hard copy form upon request, and in accessible formats wherever possible.

8.7 **Behaviour** – The School recognises that where challenging behaviour is related to a student's special educational needs or disability, use of positive discipline and reward methods may enable the School to manage the student's behaviour more effectively and improve their educational outcomes.

8.8 When considering sanctions, the needs of students with special educational needs or any disability will be specifically considered.

9 School Uniform

9.1 The School Uniform requirements as outlined in The Blue Book apply equally to all students, irrespective of their sex, gender reassignment, race, disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief or special educational needs, subject to considerations of safety and welfare. However, the School will consider reasonable requests to alter the School Uniform, for example, for genuine religious requirements, and reasonable adjustments for disabled children. The School offers gender-neutral uniform choices.

9.2 **Symbols of faith**: Certain items of jewellery, such as the Kara bangle, and certain items of headwear, such as the turban and headscarves may be worn by students when doing so is genuinely based on manifesting religious or racial beliefs or identity. This is subject to considerations of safety and welfare and the School's existing uniform requirements as outlined in The Blue Book. Where there is uncertainty as to whether an item may be worn under this section, the issue must be referred by the student or his or her parents to the Head, whose decision will be final, subject to the Complaints procedure.

9.3 **Disabled students**: Reasonable adjustments may be required to the School Uniform for disabled students who require them. The student or his or her parents should refer the matter to the Head to ensure all reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate the student.

10. Religious Belief

10.1 **Religion**: The School's ethos and weekly Meeting for Worship is centred around Quakerism, but the School respects the right and freedom of individuals to worship in accordance with other faiths, or no faith.

11. Disability and Special Educational Needs

11.1 **Our approach**: We are a mainstream School which welcomes members of the School Community with disabilities and special educational needs subject to being able to reasonably accommodate their needs. We maintain and drive a positive culture towards inclusion of disabled people and those with special educational needs in all the activities of the School, and we will not treat a member of the School Community less favourably on these grounds without justification. We will do all that is reasonable to ensure that the School's curriculum, ethos, culture, policies, procedures and premises are made accessible to everyone. Our Special Educational Needs and Disability in Practice Policy (6.4) and Supporting Students with medical conditions and disabilities policy (4.2) is consistent with this policy and is available on the School's website, on the staff intranet and in hard copy form upon request.

11.2 **Definitions**:

Children have **Special Educational Needs** if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. A learning difficulty or disability is a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age (SEND Code of Practice 2015).

A **disability** is a physical or mental impairment which has a "substantial and long term adverse effect" on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activity (Equality Act 2010).

11.3 **Reasonable adjustments**:

11.3.1 The School has an on-going duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled students and students with special educational needs in respect of the education and associated services provided, to ensure that such students are not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with other students.

This is a broad expression that covers all aspects of School life, for example:

- the curriculum
- classroom organisation and timetabling
- access to school facilities
- clubs and visits
- school sports and
- school policies.

11.3.2 Reasonable adjustments may typically include:

- making arrangements for a child in a wheelchair to attend an interview in an accessible ground floor room
- allowing extra time for a dyslexic child to complete an assessment
- providing examination papers in larger print for a child with a visual impairment
- rearranging the timetable to allow a student to attend a class in an accessible part of the building
- arranging a variety of accessible sports activities.

11.3.3 The School is not legally required to make adjustments which include physical alterations such as the provision of a stair-lift or new ground floor facilities, or a new library. However, the needs of disabled people will be considered when building or renovating school facilities.

11.3.4 In making 'reasonable adjustments' the School is required to provide auxiliary aids and services for disabled students. The School will carefully consider

any proposals made by parents and will not unreasonably refuse any requests for such aids and services. The cost to the School, however, is a factor that may be taken into account. Each case is treated on its own merits.

11.3.5 Many disabled children will have a special educational need (SEN) and may need auxiliary aids which are necessary as part of their SEN provision; in some circumstances as part of an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). There should be no assumption, however, that if an auxiliary aid is not provided under the SEN provision that it must be provided as a reasonable adjustment.

12. Informing the School

12.1 **Prospective students**: Please refer to the Admissions Policy (3.1) regarding the duties of parents to inform the School when making an initial inquiry, of any special circumstances relating to their child which may affect their child's performance in the admissions process and ability to fully participate in the education provided by the School. Parents are also under an ongoing duty when their child has been enrolled, to keep the School appraised of any change of circumstance.

12.2 **Existing students**: Where the School becomes aware of an existing student's disability or special educational need, the School will do all that is reasonable to assist the student whilst at the School, which may include making reasonable adjustments. If in the professional judgement of the Head, and after consultation with the parents and the student (where appropriate), the School cannot provide adequately for the student's physical and educational needs, after all reasonable adjustments have been made, parents will be asked to withdraw the student.

12.3 **Access**: The School will monitor the physical features of its premises to consider whether disabled users of the premises are placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to others who are not disabled. Where possible and proportionate, the School will take steps to improve access for disabled users of the premises. The School has conducted an audit of our provision for students with disabilities. The results of the audit have informed our 3-year school accessibility plan which is a written action plan with targets and which is kept under review and revised as necessary by the Director of Operations. The next review is due in September 2027. The Plan is available on request.

13. Students with EHC Plans (formerly known as statements of special educational need)

13.1 The School implements its Special Educational Needs and Disability in Practice Policy (6.4). The School's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) is responsible for the co-ordination of the Special Educational Needs provision within the School.

14. Students with English as an Additional Language

14.1 Please refer to policy 6.13 – English as an Additional Language.

15. Provision for Students with Particular Religious, Dietary, Language or Cultural Needs

15.1 The School will make individual provision for such students where necessary and in accordance with this policy. As a Quaker school, we have a very tolerant and supportive ethos which welcomes students of all faiths and none. Provision will

be made, as requested, for separate Acts of Worship both in school and in boarding houses.

15.2 The Housekeeping department work closely with students with dietary needs and our catering provision is diverse and monitored through the Food Committee on which several students sit. The School cherishes diversity and organises several multi-cultural events through the year such as 'International Day', Chinese New Year and "European Day of Languages".

16. Responsibilities

16.1 All members of the School Community are expected to comply with this policy and therefore to treat others with dignity at all times.

16.2 **Overall responsibility**: The Governing Body has overall responsibility for the effective operation of the School's Equal Opportunities Policy and for ensuring compliance with the relevant statutory framework prohibiting discrimination. The Board of Governors has delegated day-to-day responsibility for operating the policy and ensuring its accessibility, availability, maintenance and review to the Senior Leadership Team.

16.3 **Training:** The School will ensure that staff receive appropriate training in equality, diversity and inclusion, including understanding their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and how to identify and respond to discriminatory behaviour.

17. Reporting, Recording and Monitoring Breaches of this Policy

17.1 The School has an "open door" policy and encourages open and positive communication as this often results in positive outcomes.

17.2 The School also has a Complaints Procedure (2.6), which is available on the School's website, on the intranet and in hard copy in other formats wherever possible, upon request. The School will treat any potential breaches of this policy in confidence.

17.3 **Reports**: Any person wishing to report a breach of this policy that does not constitute a complaint under paragraph 17.2 above, should contact the Deputy Head (Pastoral) or other member of the School's Senior Leadership Team (contact details available in the Blue Book and upon request).

17.4 **Enforcement**: We will treat seriously and urgently investigate every complaint and report. Disciplinary action may be taken against any member of the School Community who is found to have acted in contravention of this policy.

17.5 **Record, Monitor and Evaluate**:

All reported breaches of this policy will be recorded and reviewed regularly. In addition, the School will monitor patterns and trends in relation to behaviour incidents, bullying, exclusions, participation in activities, and academic progress across different groups of students.
This monitoring will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of this policy and to identify any areas where additional action or support may be required. Findings will be reported to the Senior Leadership Team and Governors as appropriate.

17.6 This policy is the responsibility of the Deputy Head (Pastoral) and will be reviewed annually.

18. References

Legal and Regulatory Framework

- Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (current version)
- National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (current version)

19. Related Policies

2.6 Complaints Procedure

3.1 Admissions Policy

4.2 Supporting students with medical conditions and disabilities

5.1 Behaviour Policy – Senior School

5.4 Anti-Bullying Policy

6.4 Special Educational Needs and Disability in Practice

6.13 EAL Policy

7.1 PSHE Policy

7.3 Sex and Relationships Education Policy

9.1 Equal Opportunities (Staff)

9.9 Whistleblowing Policy

19. Document Change History – document any changes since policy redrafted in January 2016.

Date of change	Detail significant changes and any new legislation / guidance taken into account
20 January 2016	Board Adopts Redraft of Policy
27 April 2018	Reviewed and adopted by Board Paragraph 9 – reference to gender-neutral uniform choices Paragraph 11 – “mainstream” substituted for “inclusive” to be consistent with admissions policy.
27 March 2019	Policy reviewed and updated

12 May 2021	Review of document, minor wording changes, review and replacement of Appendix ,1 Sidcot School Transgender Plan with Sidcot School: Guidance for supporting transgender individuals
23 March 2024	Review of policy. Added definitions into section 4.
1 September 2024	Review of policy. Awaiting final document of new advice to schools to support gender questioning children to make any further changes. See appendix .
1 September 2025	Review of policy Changes made to paragraph 4.6 in light of the CASS review
1 September 2026	Review of policy. Changes made to show clear links to safeguarding, active monitoring, staff training and impact evaluation.
1 October 2026	Changes made: - Previous appendix removed and replaced with appendix 1 - Nomenclature changed in line with KCSIE and government guidance - Section 4 language altered to focus upon school situation. - References section added

Appendix 1

Guidance for Supporting Students who are Questioning their Gender Identity or who have the Protected Characteristic of Gender Reassignment

1. Purpose

This guidance forms part of the School's commitment to equality, inclusion, safeguarding and student wellbeing. The School recognises that some students may experience questions or concerns relating to their gender identity, gender expression, or the protected characteristic of gender reassignment under the Equality Act 2010.

- The School's approach is underpinned by:
- safeguarding and welfare of all students;
- compliance with the Equality Act 2010;
- respect for the dignity of each individual;
- a commitment to inclusion;
- the School's Quaker ethos;
- recognition that issues relating to gender identity can be complex and may evolve over time.

The School will seek to support students sensitively and appropriately while balancing the rights, wellbeing and legitimate interests of all members of the School community.

2. Guiding Principles

The School will:

- treat all students with dignity and respect;
- take seriously any concerns expressed by a student regarding their wellbeing;
- ensure safeguarding remains the primary consideration in decision making;
- make decisions on an individual case-by-case basis;
- work in partnership with parents wherever appropriate;
- take account of professional advice where relevant;
- consider the needs of other students who may be affected by any arrangements;
- take all reasonable steps to prevent any student experiencing bullying, victimisation or discrimination.

3. Safeguarding

The School recognises that students who are questioning their gender identity may experience distress, anxiety, social difficulties, bullying or other vulnerabilities.

In some circumstances considerations relating to gender identity may form part of a wider safeguarding assessment. Where concerns arise regarding a student's welfare, mental health, emotional wellbeing or vulnerability, these will be managed in accordance with the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will be involved where appropriate.

4. Individual Support Plans

Where a student requires specific support relating to gender identity, the School may develop an individual support plan.

This may involve consideration of matters such as:

- pastoral support;
- communication arrangements;
- wellbeing support;
- participation in activities;
- uniform arrangements;
- use of facilities;
- boarding arrangements;
- educational visits and residential trips.

Support plans will be reviewed regularly and adapted as circumstances change.

5. Communication with Parents

The School recognises the important role of parents in supporting their children. The School will normally seek to work openly and collaboratively with parents in matters relating to student welfare and gender identity. However, where there are safeguarding concerns or exceptional circumstances, the School will act in accordance with safeguarding legislation, statutory guidance and professional advice.

Any decision to withhold information from a parent will be made only where there is a lawful and safeguarding-based justification for doing so.

6. Names and Pronouns

Students may request that particular names or pronouns are used within the School community. Such requests will be considered sensitively and individually, taking account of:

- the student's wishes;
- safeguarding considerations;
- parental involvement where appropriate;
- the practical operation of school systems;
- legal and official record-keeping requirements.
- The School may maintain legal names and sex markers where required for statutory, regulatory, examination, medical or safeguarding purposes.

7. School Uniform

The School provides flexibility within its uniform arrangements. Students may wear either approved School uniform option unless there is a safeguarding, welfare or practical reason requiring a different approach.

Any individual adjustments will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

8. Toilets, Changing Facilities and Boarding Accommodation

The School recognises that toilets, changing facilities and boarding accommodation require careful consideration. Decisions regarding access to facilities will be made individually, taking account of:

- safeguarding;

- privacy;
- dignity;
- welfare;
- risk assessment;
- the needs of the individual student;
- the needs and reasonable expectations of other students.
- Alternative arrangements may be provided where appropriate.
- For boarders, accommodation arrangements will be assessed individually and reviewed regularly.

9. Physical Education and Sport

The School believes that participation in sport contributes significantly to student wellbeing and development. The School will seek to enable all students to participate in physical education and sporting activities wherever possible.

Where relevant, decisions regarding participation will take account of:

- safeguarding;
- fairness;
- safety;
- the welfare of all participants;
- the requirements of sporting governing bodies;
- biological sex where relevant to particular activities or competitions.
- Individual risk assessments may be undertaken where appropriate.

10. Educational Visits and Residential Trips

The School will take reasonable steps to ensure that students can participate safely in educational visits and residential activities. Where necessary, individual risk assessments will be undertaken and arrangements adapted to ensure that the welfare and dignity of all students are maintained.

11. Bullying, Harassment and Victimisation

The School has a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation. Any incidents motivated by:

- gender identity;
- gender reassignment;
- sex;
- sexual orientation;
- any other protected characteristic

will be investigated and addressed under the Behaviour Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy and Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy as appropriate.

12. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

The School will handle personal information sensitively and in accordance with data protection legislation. Information relating to a student's personal circumstances will only be shared on a need-to-know basis.

The School will balance:

- confidentiality;
- safeguarding responsibilities;
- parental responsibilities;
- legal obligations;
- the rights of the individual student.
- Students should not assume that information disclosed to staff can always remain confidential where safeguarding concerns arise.

13. Review

This guidance will be reviewed annually, or sooner if changes in legislation, statutory guidance, safeguarding practice or independent school regulatory requirements require amendment.