EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

Fair access, respectful relationships and inclusive practice

ORGANISATION	SKAPE North East Ltd	POLICY REFERENCE	P07
UPDATED	02 November 2026	NEXT SCHEDULED REVIEW	02 November 2027
POLICY OWNER	Centre Manager	CONTACT	centremanager@skape-centre.co.uk

01 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

SKAPE is committed to fair access, inclusive education and a working environment in which everyone is treated with dignity. We value diversity and will challenge discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation. Equality means identifying and removing barriers; it does not always mean treating everyone in the same way.

This policy applies to directors, staff, students, parents and carers, volunteers, contractors and visitors. It covers referrals and placements, teaching and qualifications, activities and resources, behaviour and exclusion decisions, safeguarding, communication, recruitment and employment. Staff will apply it alongside SKAPE's Employee Code of Conduct, Safeguarding Policy, No Bullying Policy, Online Safety Policy, Confidentiality Policy and GDPR Policy, as well as the Behaviour, Exclusion, Positive Handling and Complaints policies and relevant employment procedures.

02 LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS

The Equality Act 2010 is the main legal framework for this policy. Its nine protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. Race includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins. Protection may also apply where someone is treated unfairly because of a perceived characteristic or association with another person.

SKAPE will treat all students, staff and others fairly and respectfully. We will meet the Equality Act duties relevant to our work, including our responsibilities as an employer and an education provider.

For the purposes of the Equality Act, sex is interpreted as biological sex following the Supreme Court judgment of 16 April 2025. Gender reassignment remains a separate protected characteristic. SKAPE will protect the dignity, privacy and safety of everyone and seek current specialist advice where needed before making decisions about facilities or arrangements involving competing rights.

Where SKAPE carries out a public function, it will have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty under section 149 of the Act: eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advancing equality of opportunity; and fostering good relations. Marriage and civil partnership are relevant to the first aim only. Directors will ensure that SKAPE meets the equality requirements that apply to its provision and the additional requirements agreed with commissioning schools and local authorities.

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 informs the safeguarding aspects of this policy. The SEND Code of Practice and alternative provision guidance inform collaboration with commissioning schools and local authorities, recognising that statutory duties fall on the bodies specified in the relevant legislation. SKAPE will fulfil its own duties and agreed placement responsibilities without assuming the legal status or powers of a school.

03 PREVENTING DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING INCLUSION

SKAPE will not tolerate unfair treatment or exclusion because of a protected characteristic. Staff will challenge stereotypes and discriminatory language, model respectful relationships and ensure that students can participate without being humiliated or singled out.

Staff must recognise direct discrimination, where someone is treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic; indirect discrimination, where a rule or practice disadvantages a protected group without lawful justification; harassment, involving unwanted conduct that violates dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; and victimisation, where someone is disadvantaged for raising or supporting an equality concern. Disability discrimination can also arise from unfavourable treatment because of something arising from disability or a failure to make reasonable adjustments. The statutory definitions and exceptions apply according to the context.

Teaching and PSHE will encourage respect for different backgrounds, families, cultures, religions and beliefs. Resources and examples will reflect a diverse society and be suitable for students' ages, understanding and communication needs. Staff will support respectful discussion and lawful expression of beliefs while challenging abuse, intimidation and discriminatory conduct.

Parents and carers will be offered clear information and accessible ways to engage with SKAPE. Staff will consider language, literacy, disability and communication barriers when arranging meetings or sharing important information.

04 REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AND ACCESSIBLE PROVISION

The Centre Manager will ensure that barriers for disabled students, applicants, staff and visitors are considered in advance and that reasonable adjustments are made where required. Staff should not wait for a problem to escalate before discussing support. A formal diagnosis or an Education, Health and Care Plan is not always needed before support can be provided.

Adjustments may include accessible information, visual supports, additional processing time, adapted tasks, assistive equipment, sensory or movement breaks, flexible communication and changes to routines or the way an activity is delivered. Staff will discuss needs and preferences with the individual and, where appropriate, their parents or carers and commissioner. Agreed adjustments will be recorded, shared with relevant staff and reviewed.

Staff will work with the commissioning school or local authority to understand relevant SEND information, Education, Health and Care Plan provision and individual risk assessments. SEND and disability are not interchangeable: not every student with SEND is disabled under the Act, and a disabled student may not have SEND.

The Centre Manager and Health and Safety Lead will review access to learning spaces, facilities, activities and emergency arrangements, taking account of the legal requirements applicable to SKAPE. If an access barrier is identified, they will consider reasonable changes and safe alternatives with the individual and commissioner, documenting decisions and reasons. Disabled people must not be charged for adjustments required by the Act.

05 FAIR REFERRALS BEHAVIOUR AND PLACEMENT DECISIONS

Placement decisions will be based on the student's needs, the support and reasonable adjustments available and whether SKAPE can safely meet those needs. Decisions must be individual, evidence-based and recorded; staff must not make blanket assumptions about a diagnosis, disability, background or protected characteristic.

Before applying behaviour consequences or reviewing a placement, staff will consider communication needs, disability, SEND, trauma, medical conditions and relevant adjustments. They will consider whether an unmet need or safeguarding concern has contributed to the behaviour. Reasonable adjustments and support must be considered alongside the seriousness of the incident and the safety of others.

Physical attacks, serious threats and other serious incidents will trigger the placement review arrangements in the Behaviour Policy. Decisions about exclusion or ending a placement will follow the Exclusion Policy in liaison with the commissioner. Equality duties do not require unsafe placements to continue, but the decision must be lawful, proportionate and based on an assessment of the individual circumstances and available adjustments.

06 SAFEGUARDING AND DISCRIMINATORY INCIDENTS

Staff must take racism, faith-based abuse, sexism, homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and disability-related abuse seriously, including online incidents. Prejudice-based harm may affect mental health, wellbeing and willingness to seek help. Staff must not dismiss incidents as banter or assume that the absence of a complaint means no harm has

occurred. Online incidents will also be addressed under the Online Safety Policy, alongside the No Bullying and Safeguarding policies where relevant.

Staff will act promptly to protect those affected, listen without blame and record the incident factually. The record should include the words or actions reported, relevant context, the accounts of those involved, actions taken, decisions and reasons, people informed and follow-up outcomes. The Centre Manager will oversee the response under the Behaviour and No Bullying policies; any safeguarding concern must also be reported without delay to the DSL and managed under the Safeguarding Policy.

SKAPE will follow its own safeguarding arrangements alongside the relevant policy and agreed reporting procedures of the commissioning school or local authority. SKAPE's DSL will liaise promptly with the commissioner's DSL or designated safeguarding contact about discriminatory behaviour that raises safeguarding concerns, serious incidents or patterns of risk. A commissioning school retains its overarching safeguarding responsibility for its student; this does not replace SKAPE's responsibility to safeguard students in its care. Necessary protective action or referrals must not wait for a commissioner's response.

Students questioning their gender will be listened to respectfully and supported without bullying, assumptions or pressure. The DSL and Centre Manager will follow current KCSIE guidance and the Safeguarding Policy when considering individual welfare, parental involvement, information sharing or requests for changes, seeking advice where needed. Decisions will also take account of equality law, privacy and the rights and safety of others.

Concerns or allegations about staff must be managed under the relevant arrangements in SKAPE's Safeguarding Policy and any applicable employment procedure. Complaints will be handled in accordance with the Complaints Policy, while concerns about wrongdoing or unsafe practice can be raised under the Whistleblowing Policy. Where a complaint or whistleblowing disclosure includes a safeguarding concern, staff must follow the Safeguarding Policy without delay. Students and adults who report concerns or support another person's complaint or disclosure must be protected from retaliation or victimisation.

07 RECRUITMENT EMPLOYMENT AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Directors and the Centre Manager will ensure that recruitment, selection, training, promotion and employment decisions use fair criteria relevant to the role. Applicants and staff will be able to request reasonable adjustments. Recruitment and selection must follow SKAPE's Safer Recruitment Policy alongside its Safeguarding Policy, including the required suitability checks and safeguarding arrangements. The Employee Code of Conduct sets out the standards of respectful and inclusive conduct expected of staff.

Staff will receive induction and relevant equality and safeguarding updates. Managers will consider disability, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief and other relevant needs when applying employment procedures, and obtain appropriate advice on legal requirements. Staff concerns will be addressed through the relevant grievance or disciplinary procedure, with safeguards against victimisation.

08 RESPONSIBILITIES AND RAISING CONCERNS

Directors

- Oversee implementation of this policy and ensure that resources and arrangements support compliance.
- Review equality monitoring and improvement actions with the Centre Manager.

Centre Manager

- Lead implementation and ensure staff understand their responsibilities and receive appropriate support and training.
- Consider equality impacts when policies, placements or provision change.
- Ensure reasonable adjustments are considered, recorded and reviewed.
- Oversee equality concerns, incident responses and improvement actions.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

- Lead the safeguarding response to prejudice-based harm and discrimination that raises safeguarding concerns.

- Coordinate necessary information sharing and liaison with the commissioner's DSL or safeguarding contact and other agencies.
- Ensure safeguarding action is taken promptly and is not delayed by a behaviour review or complaints process.

All staff

- Model respectful, inclusive behaviour and follow the Employee Code of Conduct.
- Apply agreed reasonable adjustments and make learning and communication accessible.
- Challenge discriminatory language and behaviour safely, support those affected and report concerns promptly.
- Keep accurate incident records and follow the Safeguarding, No Bullying and Online Safety policies where relevant.
- Handle sensitive information in line with the Confidentiality and GDPR policies, while sharing information lawfully when needed to safeguard a student.
- Take part in relevant equality and safeguarding training and updates.

Students

- Respect others in their language and actions and follow SKAPE's behaviour expectations.
- Seek help from a trusted member of staff if they experience or witness discrimination or bullying. Staff will support students to understand these expectations and communicate concerns.

Raising concerns and complaints

- Students and parents or carers can raise a concern with any member of staff or the Centre Manager.
- Staff will offer communication support and explain the next steps.
- Formal complaints will follow the Complaints Policy. Concerns about the Centre Manager will follow the alternative route in that policy.
- Safeguarding concerns must be acted on immediately under the Safeguarding Policy, without waiting for the complaints process.
- Staff can use the relevant grievance or whistleblowing arrangements where appropriate.

09 EQUALITY OBJECTIVES MONITORING AND REVIEW

SKAPE's equality objectives are set out below, with practical actions and observable outcomes. Suggested evidence is illustrative, not a checklist: the Centre Manager may use relevant examples from everyday practice, professional discussion, observations, feedback or existing records to explain progress. Not every type of evidence needs to be collected, and separate documents are not required simply for this review. This does not replace any recording required under safeguarding, incident reporting or other SKAPE procedures. The Centre Manager will coordinate delivery and review progress with directors and the local authority, with staff contributing where relevant.

Objective 1 Ensure directors and staff understand equality legislation and SKAPE's responsibilities

- Action: Provide equality and diversity information at induction and relevant updates thereafter. Discuss how the Equality Act, this policy and linked safeguarding procedures apply to staff roles and day-to-day decisions.
- What success looks like: Directors and staff can explain their responsibilities, identify discriminatory practice and describe how to arrange adjustments or report concerns.
- Possible evidence: This may include induction and training records, any meeting notes and examples from staff discussions.

Objective 2 Promote cultural understanding and respect for different religious beliefs and ethnic backgrounds

- Action: Use PSHE, pastoral work and everyday teaching to explore different cultures, beliefs and experiences. Adapt discussion and resources to students' ages, understanding and communication needs, and challenge stereotypes respectfully.
- What success looks like: Teaching includes examples of different cultures and beliefs. Students can show respectful responses to difference through discussion, supported communication or observed behaviour.
- Possible evidence: This may include PSHE and pastoral plans, learning records, completed activities, observations and student feedback.

Objective 3 Promote mental health awareness and provide appropriate support and interventions

- Action: Help students recognise feelings, understand wellbeing and know how to ask for support. Identify barriers to accessing emotional support, including communication needs, disability and experiences of prejudice. Offer appropriate pastoral or ELSA support and liaise with the commissioner or specialist services where needed. Staff must follow the Safeguarding Policy where concerns indicate risk of harm.
- What success looks like: Students have accessible ways to express emotional needs. Where a need is identified, records show the support agreed, any referral or commissioner liaison, and a review of its effect. Staff support and observe students without attempting to diagnose mental health conditions.
- Possible evidence: This may include PSHE resources, pastoral or ELSA plans and reviews, student feedback and appropriately anonymised examples of support or referral.

Objective 4 Work to close gaps in attainment and achievement between groups of students

- Action: Review attendance, engagement, progress towards SMART targets, curriculum achievements and qualifications against each student's starting point. Give particular consideration to students eligible for Pupil Premium, students with SEND, looked after children and students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Identify avoidable barriers and agree support or adjustments with a responsible role and review date.
- What success looks like: Reviews identify where progress or access is limited and show what action has been taken. Follow-up evidence shows whether gaps are narrowing or explains the next steps where difficulties remain. Comparisons will take account of different starting points and small student numbers.
- Possible evidence: This may include baseline information, weekly learning records, target reviews, assessment or qualification outcomes, attendance information and placement review notes.

Objective 5 Improve accessibility for disabled students staff and visitors and make reasonable adjustments

- Action: Review access to learning spaces, specialist teaching areas, activities, information and emergency arrangements. Discuss individual barriers with the person concerned and, for students, the commissioner where appropriate. Record agreed adjustments, responsible roles and review dates; consider safe alternatives where barriers cannot immediately be removed.
- What success looks like: Relevant staff can explain and demonstrate agreed adjustments. Access concerns have a recorded response, and reviews show whether adjustments are effective for students, staff or visitors. Physical access issues are considered with the Health and Safety Lead.
- Possible evidence: This may include access reviews, relevant risk assessments, support or adjustment records, observations and feedback. Confidential staff information will be handled appropriately.

Objective 6 Monitor and respond to discriminatory prejudicial and derogatory language and behaviour

- Action: Challenge and record racist, sexist, homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, disability-related and faith-based incidents, including online incidents. Support those affected, follow the relevant linked policies, involve the DSL and commissioner where appropriate and review patterns or recurrence.
- What success looks like: Incident records show the response, follow-up and outcome. Staff can explain when to involve the DSL. Repeated concerns lead to a documented change in support or intervention; a low number of reports alone will not be treated as evidence of success.
- Possible evidence: This may include anonymised incident and follow-up records, staff discussions, feedback and examples of changes made in response to recurring concerns.

Objective 7 Review programmes of study and curriculum content to reflect a diverse society

- Action: Review the programmes of study, National Curriculum content used and wider learning programme so that teaching represents different backgrounds, cultures, beliefs and families and encourages respect and equality. Check resources for stereotypes, respectful language and accessible presentation, and revise them where needed.
- What success looks like: Staff can show examples of reviewed programmes and resources, explain changes made and demonstrate how learning promotes inclusion and respect. Content is appropriate to students' ages, development and individual needs.
- Possible evidence: This may include programmes of study, planning notes, before-and-after resource examples, completed work and observations.

Objective 8 Strengthen student voice and accessible ways to seek help

- Action: Explain how to report bullying, discrimination or unfair treatment during induction and revisit this through placement reviews or pastoral work. Offer visual, written, verbal or supported communication and invite feedback on access, inclusion and students' experiences.
- What success looks like: Students can identify or indicate a trusted adult or a way to seek help, with support suited to their needs. Feedback and concerns receive a recorded response and lead to changes where appropriate.
- Possible evidence: This may include induction records, accessible reporting resources, review notes and anonymised examples of student feedback and action.

Monitoring and the local authority review

The Centre Manager will keep a proportionate summary of progress against each objective, drawing on existing records and examples where possible. This will identify what is working, any barriers and agreed next steps, including responsible roles and timescales where needed. Progress can be discussed and recorded in a format suited to SKAPE and the LA review arrangements; a separate evidence file or fixed set of documents is not required.

At the LA meeting, the Centre Manager will discuss progress against each objective using relevant examples of practice and its effect on students and provision. Further actions, support and timescales will be agreed where needed, with outcomes recorded and relevant actions shared with staff and directors. Directors will review progress at least annually.

These objectives are commitments for the review period, not a statement that every action is already complete. Evidence will be handled under the Confidentiality and GDPR policies, anonymised where possible and shared only where necessary and lawful. Small group information will be handled carefully to avoid identifying individuals. Necessary safeguarding information sharing must not be delayed.

This policy is dated 02 November 2026 and will be reviewed by 02 November 2027, or sooner following relevant changes in law or guidance, a significant incident or changes in provision.

10 LEGISLATION GUIDANCE AND RELATED POLICIES

The following sources informed this review. Legislation takes precedence; guidance is applied according to SKAPE's legal status and the activity concerned. Links provide access to the current published versions.

Equality Act 2010, particularly sections 4, 13, 15, 19 to 21, 26 to 27 and 149, and the relevant employment, services and education provisions: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

DfE Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2

Government Equality Act guidance and DfE advice for schools, read alongside subsequent legal developments: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance and https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools

Ofsted Equality duties on education inspection, including the Supreme Court ruling on sex: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-duties-on-education-inspection

SEND Code of Practice 0 to 25 years and DfE Alternative Provision guidance: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25 and https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision

Related SKAPE documents: Employee Code of Conduct; Safer Recruitment Policy; Safeguarding Policy; No Bullying Policy; Online Safety Policy; Confidentiality Policy; GDPR Policy; Behaviour Policy; Exclusion Policy; Positive Handling Policy; Complaints Policy; Whistleblowing Policy; relevant recruitment and employment procedures. These documents provide the detailed procedures supporting this policy.

11 DOCUMENT REVISION HISTORY

DATE	CHANGE	APPROVAL	REV.
23/07/2023	Initial Policy	K Watson	01
23/07/2024	Policy Review	K Watson	02
03/03/2025	Policy Review	K Watson	03
20/03/2026	Policy review	K Watson	04
05/08/2026	Policy Review	K Watson	05
01/09/2026	Policy Review	K Watson	06
02/11/2026	Comprehensive review of equality duties, KCSIE 2026 safeguarding expectations and inclusive practice; updated SKAPE branding, role responsibilities and organisational arrangements.	L. James	07