Equality & Diversity Policy

1. Purpose

St-Edmunds Society is committed to providing an inclusive, supportive and respectful educational environment in which every student has the opportunity to participate, develop their skills, achieve their potential and progress towards their individual goals.

As an alternative education provider, we recognise that our students may have experienced barriers to education or may require a different approach to learning and support. We are committed to understanding individual needs and removing, wherever reasonably possible, barriers that may prevent a student from engaging with education or achieving their potential.

We will promote equality, diversity and inclusion across all aspects of our provision and will not tolerate unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation.

2. Scope

This policy applies to everyone involved with St-Edmunds Society, including:

- students and prospective students;
- teaching, assessment and support staff;
- volunteers and contractors;
- managers and members of the leadership team;
- visitors and other individuals working with or representing the organisation; and
- partner organisations, schools, agencies and other stakeholders where relevant to our provision.

The principles within this policy apply to recruitment and admissions, induction, teaching and learning, assessment, student support, attendance, behaviour, progression, careers guidance and all other services provided by St-Edmunds Society.

3. Legal and Regulatory Framework

St-Edmunds Society will operate this policy in accordance with applicable legislation, regulatory requirements and relevant guidance.

This includes, where applicable:

- Equality Act 2010;
- Children and Families Act 2014;
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) legislation and guidance;
- Human Rights Act 1998;

- Education and Skills legislation relevant to our provision;
- relevant awarding organisation requirements;
- applicable Ofsted and/or Ofqual requirements; and
- relevant safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance.

This policy should also be read alongside our other relevant policies and procedures, including our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Behaviour Policy, Complaints Policy, Admissions Policy, SEND arrangements and Health and Safety Policy.

4. Protected Characteristics

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to discriminate against an individual because of a protected characteristic.

The protected characteristics are:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender reassignment
4. Marriage and civil partnership
5. Pregnancy and maternity
6. Race
7. Religion or belief
8. Sex
9. Sexual orientation

St-Edmunds Society will ensure that decisions relating to education, selection, training, assessment, student support, progression and access to other benefits and opportunities are based on fair, transparent and objective criteria.

5. Our Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

St-Edmunds Society will:

- treat every individual with dignity, fairness and respect;
- promote equality of opportunity;
- value and respect differences between individuals and communities;
- provide an environment in which students feel safe, valued and able to participate;
- take reasonable steps to remove or reduce barriers to learning;

- provide appropriate support for students with additional needs;
- challenge discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping;
- take concerns about discrimination, bullying or harassment seriously;
- provide fair and consistent assessment and decision-making processes; and
- regularly review our practices to identify and address potential barriers or inequalities.

We recognise that treating everyone fairly does not always mean treating everyone in exactly the same way. Where appropriate, individual circumstances and additional needs will be considered to ensure that students have a fair opportunity to participate and achieve.

6. Fair Access to Education

St-Edmunds Society is committed to providing fair and equitable access to its educational programmes.

We pride ourselves on our open-door approach and aim to work constructively with schools, local authorities, families, professionals and other agencies to support students who may benefit from an alternative educational environment.

Access to our provision will not be unfairly restricted because of a protected characteristic.

Where a student has additional needs or circumstances that may affect their ability to access our provision, we will consider what reasonable and appropriate support can be provided.

Admission decisions will be based on relevant and objective criteria, including the suitability of the programme to the student's educational needs and circumstances and the organisation's ability to provide appropriate and safe support.

7. Inclusive Teaching and Learning

We recognise that students have different experiences, abilities, learning styles, interests and support needs.

Our teaching and learning approaches will seek to:

- recognise individual strengths and areas for development;
- encourage participation and engagement;
- provide appropriate challenge and support;
- promote respect for different backgrounds and perspectives;
- avoid unnecessary barriers to participation;
- use accessible and appropriate learning resources;
- encourage students to develop confidence and independence; and
- provide appropriate opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and competence.

Staff are expected to use inclusive teaching approaches and to consider the individual needs of students when planning and delivering education.

8. Reasonable Adjustments and Additional Support

Where a student has a disability or other identified need, St-Edmunds Society will consider reasonable adjustments and appropriate support to enable them to access education and demonstrate their knowledge, skills and competence.

Depending on the circumstances, support or adjustments may include:

- adapted learning materials;
- alternative formats;
- additional time;
- assistive technology;
- adjustments to the learning environment;
- changes to teaching approaches;
- additional explanation or guidance;
- appropriate assessment arrangements; and
- access to relevant support services.

Any adjustment to an assessment must remain consistent with the requirements of the relevant awarding organisation or assessment framework.

9. Equality in Assessment

Assessment decisions will be fair, consistent, transparent and based on the relevant assessment criteria.

Students will be provided with appropriate information, instructions and guidance regarding assessment requirements.

We will seek to ensure that students have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and competence.

Where reasonable adjustments are required, these will be considered and implemented in accordance with applicable requirements.

Assessment decisions will not be influenced by irrelevant personal characteristics or discriminatory considerations.

10. Dignity, Respect and Behaviour

Everyone within the St-Edmunds community is expected to treat others with dignity, courtesy, tolerance and respect.

Students and staff are expected to:

- respect differences between individuals
- listen to and consider different views
- communicate appropriately
- avoid discriminatory, abusive or offensive language
- respect personal boundaries
- treat others fairly
- contribute positively to the learning environment
- challenge inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour
- report concerns appropriately

We recognise that disagreement and differences of opinion may occur. However, disagreement does not justify behaviour that is abusive, threatening, discriminatory or intended to intimidate or humiliate another person.

11. Discrimination, Harassment, Bullying and Victimisation

St-Edmunds Society has zero tolerance for unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation.

This includes conduct based on, or related to, a protected characteristic.

Examples may include:

- discriminatory comments or jokes;
- racial or religious harassment;
- homophobic, biphobic or transphobic behaviour;
- sexist behaviour;
- disability-related harassment;
- exclusion or unfair treatment because of a protected characteristic;
- unwanted conduct of a sexual nature;
- threatening or intimidating behaviour; and
- retaliation against an individual who has raised a concern or supported an investigation.

Such behaviour may result in appropriate action under our Behaviour procedures.

12. Supporting Students from Diverse Backgrounds

We recognise and value the diversity of the students who access our provision.

Staff will seek to understand the individual circumstances and experiences of students and will avoid assumptions based on background, identity, family circumstances, disability, culture, religion or other personal characteristics.

Where appropriate, we will work with schools, families, professionals and partner agencies to identify barriers to learning and develop suitable support strategies.

13. Reporting Concerns

Any student, member of staff or other individual who believes they have experienced or witnessed discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation is encouraged to raise their concern.

Concerns can be raised through the organisation's complaints or reporting procedures.

All concerns will be taken seriously and considered fairly. Where appropriate, concerns will be investigated in accordance with the relevant policy or procedure.

Individuals who raise concerns in good faith will not be subjected to unfair treatment or victimisation as a result of doing so.

14. Breaches of the Policy

Any breach of this policy will be taken seriously.

Depending on the nature and severity of the breach, action may include:

- informal intervention or advice;
- additional support or education;
- mediation where appropriate;
- action under the Behaviour Policy;
- disciplinary action;
- referral to an appropriate external agency; or
- removal from a programme or termination of a professional relationship, where appropriate.

Serious matters may also be referred to the police, safeguarding partners, awarding organisations, regulators or other relevant authorities where required.

15. Responsibility

The Trustees of St Edmunds Society have ultimate responsibility for the equality and diversity policy. Every member of St Edmunds Society is required to support this policy and ensure discrimination does not occur.