



Villiers School

Equality and Human Rights Duty

All public bodies in Ireland have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This is a legal obligation, called the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, and it originated in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014.



An Choimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Introduction

Villiers School is 200 years old and has a strong commitment to the principles of social justice. The school's mission states that Villiers School strives to include students regardless of;
"...academic ability, race, nationality, religion, gender, socio-economic background..."

Villiers School is committed to promoting equity, diversity and inclusion both within our school community and in the wider community. Villiers School strives to foster a safe and inclusive culture with equality at its heart so that diversity can flourish. We embrace our diversity as a strength, and we work with sincerity to enable all in our community to grow and flourish equally.

We place inclusive principles and practices at our core and are fully committed to understanding the challenges that exist for our community under the nine grounds for discrimination identified under the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018, namely, gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community.¹

We seek to proactively address these, to the best of our abilities, whether this be in respect of recruitment, the curriculum or school culture:

- Through a DEIJ focus in our policies, practices, and procedures
- Through appropriate training, development and experiences
- Through promoting these principles across the curriculum

Discrimination, in any form, is not accepted within Villiers School, we aim to be a leading voice for equity, diversity and inclusion in Irish education.

¹ <https://www.ihrec.ie/guides-and-tools/human-rights-and-equality-in-the-provision-of-good-and-services/what-does-the-law-say/equal-status-acts/>

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014²

Section 42 of the Act places a Duty, or statutory obligation, on public bodies to take positive action to:

- Eliminate discrimination;
- Promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services;
- Protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) guidance identifies key groups as the focus when implementing the Duty:

“Keep the focus on people across the nine grounds included in equality legislation and on the potential impact of those at risk of poverty or social exclusion”.³

The nine grounds for discrimination as identified under Irish legislation in the Equal Status Acts⁴ are:

- Gender (including gender identity)
- Civil status
- Family status (including lone parents and carers)
- Age
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Race
- Religion
- Membership of the Traveller community

The Act identifies three key steps that public bodies should follow when implementing the Duty:

1. Assess
2. Address
3. Report

² https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2022/08/ihrec_act_2014.pdf

³ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2019). Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. Page 17.

⁴ Equal Status Act 2000. <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/enacted/en/html>

Section 1 - Assess

The following methods were used to gather and identify equality and human rights data in the school for students, parents and guardians, staff and other stakeholders:

- Focus groups and anecdotal evidence
- Engagement of an independent DEIJ consultant and whole school audit
- Academic research, conferences, workshops, training courses
- Department of Education Inspection findings

The whole school audit, which focused on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, was conducted by independent consultants Inclusion Labs, and had a sample size of 730 responses, including:

- Faculty and Staff (53 respondents)
- Senior Leaders and Governors (8 respondents)
- Students (513 respondents)
- Parents and Guardians (156 respondents)

Assessment Findings

Areas of strength

- The most recent whole school evaluation noted that Villiers School has a very inclusive culture.
- The school's admissions process shows it values having different cultures and identities in the school community.
- Most respondents to the audit believe they have a personal responsibility to celebrate diversity and be inclusive.
- The school communicates its commitment to addressing issues regarding discrimination.
- The school is willing to address and remedy any issues raised by students and/or families regarding identity and inclusion.

Areas for further development

- Build more awareness of social justice among all stakeholders
- Social justice education and training for staff
- Increased diversity and representation among school staff
- Developing the curriculum to include lessons related to social justice
- Increased opportunities for student voice
- Enhanced inclusion for persons whose identity, or identities, are often marginalised
- Increased diversity within the student body
- Increased gender equality
- Review of school communications and policies

Section 2 - Address

Villiers School is committed to ensuring that every member of the Villiers School community studies or works in an inclusive and non-discriminatory environment.

Students and staff have the right to a school which is free from any form of discrimination, harassment, or aggressive or micro aggressive acts based on any of the nine grounds for discrimination as identified under Irish legislation in the Equal Status Acts⁵, namely gender (including gender identity), civil status, family status (including lone parents and carers), age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, or membership of the Traveller community.

Action steps are being implemented in the interest of preventing discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity and treatment of our staff and students; and to protect the human rights of those staff and students. These action steps aim to improve accessibility, accountability, and delivery of care in the interest of driving cultural change and redefining organisational priorities, procedures, and practice.

Action Steps Implemented

Establishment of DEI School Based Initiatives:

- DEI Lead Group, DEI Collaborative Group and DEI Working Group⁶
- DEI themed school-based initiatives around gender identity, LGBTQ+, race, disability
- LGBTQ+ and BLM Flag in front of School
- Staff Training, which to date has included anti-racism training and training in the provision for students with additional educational needs, including assistive technology
- General education in the areas of DEI, including guest speakers, both in whole school assemblies and in smaller class groups and specific subject areas.
- Themed events in the school, e.g., International Week, Black History Month, Stand Up Week, AEN week
- Parent Education, through Parent-Teacher Association

Student Groups

- Affinity, activist, and advocate groups - POCA, LGBTQ+, AEN Club
- Reformed Student Council with reserved places for representatives of student groups

Language

- Official use of non-gendered language in school communications and policies – e.g., Head Students, Head of School, use of gender-neutral pronouns.
- Agreed terms to describe groups, e.g., the 'FAGs' as a name for the LGBTQ+ group was not allowed as it had the potential to be offensive.
- Building a language and nationality profile of our students.

⁵ Equal Status Act 2000. <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/enacted/en/html>

⁶ DEI = Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice

Development of School-based DEIJ Resources

- DEIJ section in school library, summer reading list themed around DEIJ
- DEIJ monthly calendar
- Student-led video productions

External Agency Connections:

- 'Belong To' Quality Mark
- 'Jigsaw' One Good School

National advocacy:

- Invited to participate in the review of the national anti-bullying strategy for schools
- Membership of the Advisory Group for the review of the EPSEN Act
- Encouraging and supporting training for the Irish School Heads Association (an association of Minority Faith Schools)
- Advocating for the broadening of the terms of reference of 'inclusion' in the Chief Inspector's Report (currently inclusion refers primarily to students with AEN)
- Advocating for mandatory DEIJ training and strategies in place in all schools (similar to the current Child safeguarding provision)
- Advocating for all schools to have a funded post of responsibility for DEIJ

Section 3 - Report

Review of school communications and policies

<u>Action</u>	<u>Impact</u>
An ongoing review of all school communications and policies to remove gendered language.	School policies and communications are inclusive of all stakeholders, regardless of gender, or gender identity.
The Villiers School dress code and uniform policy has been reviewed and modified, in particular in the context of gender equality and the inclusion of transgender and non-binary students.	The dress code and uniform policy is inclusive of all students, regardless of gender, or gender identity. There are no longer any specifications within the dress code which depend on gender.

Build more awareness of social justice

<u>Action</u>	<u>Impact</u>
Guest Speakers and assemblies	60% of staff surveyed felt guest speakers and assemblies were the most successful activities enacted in 2021/22. Further, 48% of students identified guest speakers as one of the most successful initiatives to encourage learning in this area.
DEIJ themed school-based initiatives around gender identity, LBGTQ+, race, and disability. Recent key events have included: - European Week Against Racism - World Down Syndrome Day - Additional Educational Needs (AEN) Week -Black History Month -LGBTQ+ Stand-Up Week	A clear theme from student feedback is their willingness to participate in DEIJ themed school initiatives. Students are also aware of key events and able to suggest focus for future events.

Developing the curriculum to include social justice

<u>Action</u>	<u>Impact</u>
A curriculum review has been undertaken by staff under the guidance of the lead team. This has included the auditing and de-colonising of existing curricular content. It has also involved the promotion of curricular initiatives that align with the DEIJ calendar. Wellbeing subjects have been targeted for direct instruction and workshops (some student-led) for social justice-themed content.	Anecdotal evidence suggests that a high proportion of teachers are engaging with DEIJ themes. At the end of the school year, schemes of work will be critically examined. All Junior Cycle students have had exposure to at least three DEIJ lessons delivered by senior cycle students in association with staff mentors. In a recent review of initiatives, students highlighted in-class themed lessons (54% of students surveyed) as the most effective way to enhance learning in DEIJ.

Social justice education and training for staff

<u>Action</u>	<u>Impact</u>
<p>Staff training has been focused on advocacy. Whole school DEIJ themed staff training has included the use of assistive technology and supporting the management of challenging behaviour. Voluntary CPD has also been undertaken by many staff on anti-racism and supporting LGBTQ+ students.</p> <p>DEIJ lead group training includes a Postgraduate Diploma in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion from the University of Limerick, as well as conferences and workshops run by the Boarding Schools Association (BSA), International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), Educational Collaborative for International Schools (ECIS) and Association of International Educators and Leaders of Colour (AIELOC).</p>	<p>75% of staff respondents, when surveyed on the impact of curriculum review, identified more training as a desirable development.</p> <p>Specific CPD and whole-staff training is of high priority within ongoing DEIJ implementation strategies.</p>

Increased diversity and representation among school staff

<u>Action</u>	<u>Impact</u>
<p>The school is committed to recruiting a diverse work force. The school strives to ensure representation from across the protected characteristics where possible. We have modified our recruitment processes to encourage a diverse range of applicants. The IBDP (International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme) also gives us a unique opportunity to recruit teachers from a diverse range of cultural and geographical backgrounds.</p> <p>A DEIJ statement has been added to the careers section of our website: "Villiers School is committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion both within our school community and in the wider community. We welcome and actively encourage applications from individuals of diverse and minority backgrounds."</p>	<p>We hope that the impact of a more deliberate commitment to DEIJ in recruitment and hiring practices will be a more diverse staff with a wider set of experiences.</p> <p>A more diverse staff will result in increased representation and cultural diversity, as well as international mindedness.</p>

Increase opportunities for student voice

<u>Action</u>	<u>Impact</u>
Formalisation of student alliance groups [LGBT+, POCA (People of colour alliance) and AEN (Additional educational needs)]	Students have a safe space where they are encouraged to share their voice and their identities.
Representation from student alliance groups within DEIJ Working Group. Reformed Student Council with reserved places to ensure representation from student alliance groups.	Increased presence of diverse student voices. Members of student groups which can often be marginalised in society are now represented within the student council and their voice can be centered within the school community

Enhanced inclusion for persons whose identities are often marginalised

<u>Action</u>	<u>Impact</u>
Student groups - AEN Club, POCA, LGBT+ Alliance	These groups formed in 2021, but in 2022 were explicitly included on the school's extra-curricular timetable. They operate at lunchtimes and have seen significant numbers of students in attendance. The student groups have nominated Student Council representatives and DEIJ Working Group members to bring forward talking and action points for DEIJ Leads. In a review of initiatives in this area, POCA was identified by staff and students as one of the most effective initiatives in 2022.
Physical modifications to campus for persons with disabilities and/or reduced mobility. In 2022, phase one of our accessibility project came to completion, including ramps to the dining hall and hockey pitch, automated entrance doors around the school, and renovations to make the student hub accessible.	Increased accessibility to hockey pitch, dining hall and student hub. Doorways which can be opened using a button, so that wheelchair users and those with reduced mobility, can access the school buildings autonomously.
For persons of varied socioeconomic background, a sponsorship fund in place for discretionary school uniform and equipment, educational fee bursaries and Board of Governors assistance fund. Trips away policy update, with advanced notice and consultation for overseas trips with substantial costs.	It is hoped that this will allow more equal access to and participation in optional school activities and equipment to all students, regardless of socioeconomic circumstances. This will be surveyed and reviewed in 2023.

Diversity within the student body

<u>Action</u>	<u>Impact</u>
The school admissions office is actively encouraging applicants from diverse backgrounds.	The school has 42 nationalities represented in the student body.

Diversity and inclusion within extracurricular activities

<u>Action</u>	<u>Impact</u>
A broad range of school clubs, societies and sports are offered and made available to all genders.	We have added Debating this term to our existing extra-curricular roster. We have also added student groups (AEN, POCA and LGBT+ Alliance) to our lunchtime clubs roster.
Accessibility to sports fields and facilities has been enhanced and improved with the addition of wheelchair accessibility ramps to dining hall and hockey pitch, the accessible student hub and automated entrance doors.	Student access to extra-curricular activities will be surveyed at the end of 2022/2023 term.

Increased gender equality in the student body

<u>Action</u>	<u>Impact</u>
Introduction of gender-neutral bathrooms and changing rooms	There are 12 student and 2 staff designated gender-neutral bathroom areas in the school spread across the campus. There is a designated gender-neutral changing room for PE and After-School Sports.
Introduction of gender-neutral school uniform and dress code	Uniform is no longer gender-specific. All students are required to wear navy and all students have the option of wearing trousers or skirts. All students have the option to have a single piercing in each ear.
Facility to accommodate non-cisgender boarding students	A designated dormitory area for non-cisgender boarding students has been identified.