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believing in children, learning together

## Inclusive Schools Ethos

**Accord is a coalition of organisations – including a wide range of religious groups, humanists, teachers, trade unionists, educationalists and civil rights activists – who are working together to promote inclusive education across all our schools.**

Inclusivity means that all involved in the life of a school should be valued and treated equally and fairly, irrespective of their background, level of attainment, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, dis/ability, religion or belief.

### The challenge

It is the policy of the Accord Coalition that all state-funded schools should operate inclusive admissions, recruitment and employment policies that do not discriminate on the basis of pupils', parents' or teachers' religion or beliefs – notwithstanding the need for particular skills and aptitudes in some subject groups.

The principle of inclusivity is not one that can be monopolised by any single belief system, but is something that has to be owned and developed, for public benefit, from a variety of perspectives.

Similarly, inclusivity is not a matter of formal procedure and regulations alone. Crucially, it involves developing a community ethos for each school, based on fairness and non-discrimination. Such a culture of mutuality will be able to draw positively on the particular characteristics of the school in its local setting, while adhering to widely accepted public standards.

'Ethos' has been defined as *"the character-based spirit of a community as seen in its goals and aspirations."* In some cases the ethos of a school may be informed by resources derived from a specific religious or non-religious belief system reaching out to value both its own and others' contributions to the common good. In other instances it will seek creatively to blend a wide range of resources in order to achieve common purpose and vision.

### The opportunity

The Accord Coalition would encourage the governors of all schools to develop in a consultative way an 'ethos statement', based on the principle of inclusivity, to help establish a culture of mutuality in which specific policies based on non-discrimination can be recognised, valued and enabled to flourish.

In the case of religious foundation schools, a positive ethos can helpfully be expressed through convictions derived from the belief background of that school, in conscious dialogue with those of other life-stances and beliefs.

For example, Christian supporters of the Accord Coalition are proposing that church schools are challenged by the core tenets of their faith not to favour church members above others (as happens under many current policies), but rather to enact love of neighbour in its widest sense and to make the needs of the most vulnerable – of whatever belief background – their priority.

Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Humanists, Buddhists, Hindus and many others will share that ethos but express it in their own terms. Similarly, ensuring the dignity and wellbeing of pupils with Special Needs will be core to ethos of all their schools.

**The Accord Coalition is seeking to publish and encourage a range of 'ethos statements' suitable for different schools, reflecting the principles of inclusion and non-discrimination which underlie its aims.**

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### **About the Accord Coalition**

The Accord Coalition is a campaign coalition, launched in 2008, which brings together a wide range of organisations, both religious and non-religious, who want state funded schools to be open and suitable to all children of every background, no matter what their parents' or their own beliefs, and who are concerned that restrictive legislation around admissions, employment and the curriculum in state funded faith schools can serve to undermine community cohesion and not adequately prepare children for life in our increasingly diverse society.

Accord's growing list of members and supporters includes the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the British Humanist Association, the Christian think tank Ekklesia, the British Muslims for Secular Democracy, The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches and the race equality think tank The Runnymede Trust.