CENTRAL LONDON

CHURCH SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Language for Learning Policy & Framework

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Language for Learning Policy and Framework

Introduction

Our three schools belong to the London Diocesan Board for Schools and serve communities within the local authorities of Westminster and Camden. Our schools have been serving their local communities and their children for many years, and we remain committed to this service.

The Church of England's historic commitment to education was founded upon several important principles:

- ***Parish responsibility*** – every parish has a responsibility to serve its local community, including through the education of local children.
- ***Education as part of the Church's mission*** – Church schools were founded not simply to provide academic education, but to nurture the whole child: spiritually, morally, socially and intellectually.
- ***Serving all*** – although Church schools were established to serve their parishes, they welcome children and families of all faiths and none, reflecting the Church of England's commitment to serving the whole community.

As Church schools, we believe that every child is made in the image of God and is therefore inherently valuable, unique and worthy of dignity. We want the very best for every child. This means pursuing the highest possible academic standards while also valuing the whole child – mind, body and spirit – and creating a culture of love, respect, wellbeing and safety for everyone within our communities.

We aim to value ourselves as special and unique; to value one another and treat each other with kindness, respect and grace; and to value families and communities as places where love, belonging and hope can flourish.

"Every person needs a place that is furnished with hope."

Maya Angelou

The purpose of this policy and framework is to provide all members of our school communities – including staff, pupils, parents and carers, governors, visitors and those working in partnership with our schools – with a shared understanding of how language can be used to support, encourage, challenge, believe in and enhance the lives of others.

Living and working in a multicultural and diverse city such as London provides a wealth of opportunities. However, these opportunities are not always experienced equally. Individuals and communities can encounter barriers associated with characteristics and circumstances including race, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, special educational needs, socioeconomic circumstances and place of birth.

Our responsibility within our schools is to ensure that through our interactions, teaching, curriculum, enrichment and conversations, we help everyone recognise that they matter, that they belong and that they have the capacity to achieve and flourish.

Many schools express these ambitions through their visions and values. The greater challenge is ensuring that these values are lived in the everyday: in the small moments, in difficult conversations, in the language used when somebody is not present, and particularly in challenging moments.

This is why we have developed our Language for Learning Framework.

Challenging barriers to opportunity is not always easy. Some barriers are visible and conscious; others can be unconscious, embedded within established practices or reflected in assumptions that have become normalised.

As Rosa Parks is credited with saying, ***to bring about change: "You must not be afraid to take the first step."***

Our schools already have policies and procedures which underpin and support this framework, including:

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Policy
- Equality Policy and Equality Objectives/Action Plan
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Workforce and employment policies
- Staff Code of Conduct

This framework does not replace these policies and procedures. Rather, it brings their principles to life through the everyday language, interactions and behaviours of our school communities. It provides a practical framework for how we speak to and about one another, how we describe children and their needs, how we challenge assumptions and barriers, and how our language communicates dignity, belonging and aspiration.

Language is powerful.

It can raise expectations or unintentionally limit them; it can create belonging or reinforce exclusion; it can help someone recognise their potential or cause them to question it.

Through this framework, we seek to develop a shared language across our three schools that is respectful, inclusive, precise and hopeful, and which reflects our belief that every person is of inherent worth and every child should be supported to thrive and flourish.

Our Language for Learning Principles

Across our schools, our language should:

Recognise dignity

We recognise the inherent worth and individuality of every person. We seek to speak ***with*** people rather than simply ***about*** them.

Communicate aspiration

Our language should communicate that every child can learn, develop and achieve. We will not allow the language we use today to place a ceiling on what we believe someone may achieve tomorrow.

Create Belonging

Our language should help people understand that they are valued members of our communities. Difference should not be treated as deficiency.

Describe rather than define

A person's need, behaviour, attainment, disability, background or circumstance is part of their experience; it does not define the entirety of who they are.

Remain curious

We seek understanding before making assumptions. We ask questions, listen and recognise that our own experiences can influence how we interpret those of others.

Be precise

Professional language should describe what we actually know rather than relying upon labels, generalisations or assumptions.

Demonstrate compassion

Our language should retain humanity and kindness, including when expectations need to be reinforced, behaviour challenged or difficult decisions communicated.

What Do We Mean by Language for Learning?

Language for Learning is broader than identifying words that are considered acceptable or unacceptable.

It is about recognising that language shapes: culture, expectations, relationships and opportunity.

The framework therefore applies to the language we use:

- when teaching children;
- when speaking directly with children;
- when talking about children;
- when communicating with parents and carers;
- between colleagues;
- when discussing families and communities;
- in meetings and professional discussions;
- in reports, referrals and assessments;
- in emails and other written or digital communication;
- within curriculum materials and resources;
- during recruitment, induction, appraisal and professional development;
- when communicating with governors, visitors and external professionals.

A fundamental expectation is that:

The standard of respectful language does not change because the person being discussed is not in the room.

Staffrooms, offices, meetings and informal professional conversations should therefore reflect the same values and expectations as classrooms and formal communications.

The Language of Aspiration

Our expectations of children can be communicated subtly through our language.

We recognise that children begin from different starting points, experience different barriers and require different forms of support. Equity does not mean treating everyone identically.

However, identifying a child's current attainment or need must never become a prediction of their future potential.

We describe where a child is now without allowing that description to determine where we believe they can go.

We therefore challenge language that inadvertently lowers expectations.

Instead of: ***"He's low ability."*** We should describe precisely the knowledge, understanding or skill the child is currently developing.

Instead of: ***"She can't do that."*** We might say: "She cannot yet do this independently and currently requires…"

Instead of: ***"This class wouldn't cope with that."*** We ask: "What adaptations, scaffolds or preparation would enable them to access this successfully?"

Our language should move professional thinking towards possibility, provision and progress.

Language, Identity and Belonging

We believe that in order to succeed people (children, staff and parents) need to feel happy and safe. To experience these feelings, you need to feel a sense of belonging and that you matter.

The National Children's Bureau highlights on their website:

"Recent government research revealed a concerning statistic: only three-fifths of pupils feel a sense of belonging at school. Additionally, UK 15-year-olds report some of the lowest levels of life satisfaction among OECD countries (PISA, Department for Education, 2023).

A useful definition of belonging in a school context is summarised in 'School Belonging: The Importance of Pupil and Teacher Relationships' (Allen et al 2021) which defines it as:

The extent to which pupils feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment.

A strong sense of belonging at school significantly improves pupil outcomes, including academic performance and attendance. It is one of the strongest predictors of academic achievement, particularly when combined with high expectations from families and school staff. Pupils who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to be engaged and motivated, key indicators of successful learning. Additionally, the

benefits of a positive connection to school extend into adulthood, influencing future career decisions and overall life satisfaction.

A positive school climate, characterised by fairness, safety, and inclusivity, significantly influences pupils' sense of belonging.

Quality and consistency in teacher-pupil interactions are essential for building a lasting sense of connection. Friendliness and fairness from teachers are highly valued by pupils and significantly influence their sense of belonging. Supportive and individualised attention from teachers, where pupils feel seen and heard, plays a crucial role in fostering this connection.

As we strive for academic excellence for all pupils, we must not overlook the importance of fostering an environment where every pupil feels a sense of belonging. Teachers, peers, support structures and various external factors all contribute to creating a supportive and inclusive school community. Understanding and addressing these factors is crucial in nurturing a positive learning environment for all pupils. Education is not just about academic achievements; it's about building a community where every pupil feels they truly belong."

Race, Ethnicity, Nationality and Culture

We recognise and value the racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of our communities. All three schools have signed the LDBS Anti-Racism Charter and use these principles in our work.

Staff should avoid assumptions about an individual's identity, culture, nationality, family, language or experience based upon appearance, name or perceived background.

We should work to ensure that we all pronounce people's names correctly and be willing to ask respectfully when we are unsure.

We recognise that avoiding discussions about race does not necessarily create equality. Children should be supported to understand diversity and difference in thoughtful and age-appropriate ways. Our PSHE curriculum here supports difference and provides a definition of racism.

"It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognise those differences and to examine the distortions which result from misnaming them." Audre Lorde (2017:95)

Stereotypes, racialised assumptions and generalisations about communities have no place within our schools.

Religion and Belief

We are proud of our identity as Church of England schools.

Our Christian foundation calls us to serve the whole community and recognise the dignity of every person.

We therefore confidently articulate our Christian character while respecting and welcoming children, families and colleagues of different faiths and those with no religious faith.

We avoid assumptions about people's beliefs or practices based upon their perceived religion, ethnicity or cultural background.

Sex, Gender and Sexual Orientation

Our language should not restrict children's interests, ambitions, behaviour or opportunities according to stereotypes associated with sex or gender.

We recognise that families take many different forms and should speak about families in ways that allow children to recognise their own experiences without suggesting that one family structure is inherently more valuable than another.

Staff should use respectful and appropriate terminology and should seek advice where terminology or an individual's preferred language is unclear.

SEND, Disability and Neurodiversity

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are children first.

Our language should recognise strengths alongside needs and should focus professional conversations on identifying barriers and determining the provision required to enable participation, independence and success.

For example, rather than simply saying: ***"He can't access the lesson."*** we should ask: "What is currently preventing him from accessing this learning, and what reasonable adjustments or adaptations would reduce that barrier?"

We should avoid defining children solely through diagnosis, disability or need.

Language should promote increasing independence wherever possible rather than inadvertently communicating permanent dependency.

Socioeconomic Disadvantage

Financial circumstances should never become shorthand for children's ability, aspirations or the commitment of their families.

We avoid deficit assumptions such as: ***"Those parents don't value education."*** Instead, we distinguish carefully between what we know and what we assume.

Where engagement is difficult, we seek to understand the potential barriers and consider how the school can make engagement more accessible.

Poverty and disadvantage may affect opportunity. They do not determine potential.

INSERT quote from EEF working with parents and WWC outcomes of disadvantaged report.

Families and Personal Circumstances

Our schools serve families with a wide range of structures, histories and circumstances.

These include children who may be adopted, fostered, in kinship care, looked after or previously looked after, living with one or more parents, living across different households, or cared for by extended family members.

Our language should be sufficiently inclusive to recognise this diversity while remaining sensitive to individual circumstances.

Language About Behaviour

Behaviour should be described accurately rather than used to define a child.

There is an important difference between:

"He is disruptive" and "***He repeatedly called out while another pupil was speaking***."

Likewise: "***She is rude***." is less useful than: "***She interrupted the adult repeatedly and used language that did not meet our expectations for respectful communication***."

The second form is more precise and separates the person from the behaviour.

This distinction matters because behaviour can change.

When children are distressed or dysregulated, adults should seek to use calm, predictable and non-shaming language while continuing to maintain appropriate boundaries and expectations.

Compassion does not require us to remove expectations. Equally, high expectations do not require us to remove compassion.

Language Between Adults

The principles of this framework apply equally to interactions between adults.

Our schools should be places in which colleagues can disagree professionally, ask difficult questions, offer challenge and provide feedback without undermining dignity.

Professional disagreement

We challenge ideas, actions and decisions rather than attacking individuals.

Curiosity before judgement

Where possible, we seek clarification before reaching conclusions.

For example: "Can you help me understand why…?" may enable a more productive conversation than immediately assuming another person's intention.

Speaking about colleagues

We do not use belittling, stereotypical, discriminatory or demeaning language about colleagues, including when they are not present.

Power and responsibility

We recognise that language can carry different weight depending upon professional roles and relationships.

Leaders therefore have a particular responsibility to consider how their language may be experienced by others.

At the same time, every member of our community should feel able to challenge inappropriate language respectfully, regardless of seniority.

Humour and 'banter'

Humour can strengthen relationships and community. However, describing something as a joke or banter does not automatically remove its impact.

Where somebody indicates that language has caused discomfort or offence, we listen rather than immediately dismissing their experience.

Intent, Impact and Context

Language is complex.

Intent matters. Impact matters. Context matters.

Someone may use inappropriate or outdated language without intending to cause harm. Equally, the absence of harmful intent does not mean that language cannot have a negative impact.

Our response should therefore be thoughtful and proportionate.

We should consider:

- what was said;
- the context in which it was said;
- the impact upon others;
- whether the individual understood the implications;
- whether the language reflects a genuine mistake or misunderstanding;
- whether there is a pattern of behaviour;
- what learning, support or intervention is appropriate.

Not every mistake constitutes discrimination or misconduct. However, repeated or deliberate discriminatory, degrading or demeaning language may require action under the school's relevant policies and procedures.

When We Get Language Wrong

Language changes over time and people have different experiences and levels of knowledge.

A learning organisation must allow people to ask questions and make genuine mistakes while maintaining clear expectations that we listen, reflect and learn.

When our language causes concern, we encourage a simple approach:

Listen → Acknowledge → Correct → Learn → Move Forward

We take the view that on the very rare occasion, a person may inadvertly use a word or language not in line with the principles of this document, but through no ill meaning or mal-intention. Given this, we will provide guidance and advice to that individual on the first occurance of this, but any future occurences will be dealt with in line with relevant policies. Our approach is taken from Kim Scott's work on Bias, Prejudice and Bullying.

When responding to **bias,** we will use an 'I' statement. This is to help the individual notice their mistake/bias.

For example: *"I am assuming you meant to say… "I believe it is not the correct term to use when referring to X, the correct term would be.."*

Or Responding to **prejudice,** we will use an 'It' statement. This is to create a clear boundary and acknowledgment of the incorrect use of language and provide an opportunity for the individual to reshape their language.

For example: *"It is disrespectful to keep misnaming X" or "It is against our policy to talk about an individual using those terms and it would be advisable to change your language."*

Responding to **bullying language**, we will use a 'you' statement. This is to create a decisive action, to stop the behaviour and language being used.

For example: *"You need to stop talking to X in that way." Or "You need to stop using that word, it is offensive."*

We would expect the response from individuals to be reflective and understanding of how their language may cause offense.

For example:

"Thank you for correcting me. I understand why that language wasn't appropriate. I'll use that terminology in future."

We should resist becoming defensive when somebody respectfully challenges our language.

Equally, correction should ordinarily be undertaken in a manner that supports learning and preserves dignity.

Our aim is not to create a culture in which people are frightened to talk about difference.

Our aim is to create a culture in which people become increasingly confident, knowledgeable and respectful when doing so.

Challenging Language

Everyone within our schools has a responsibility to challenge language that conflicts with our values and expectations. The nature of the challenge should be proportionate to the circumstances.

Staff may find the following approaches helpful:

Seek clarification

"What do you mean by that?"

Encourage reflection

"I wonder whether there's another way we could describe that."

Challenge an assumption

"What evidence do we have for that rather than what we might be assuming?"

Offer alternative language

"We wouldn't normally use that term. A better way of describing this would be…"

Identify impact

"I don't think that was your intention, but that phrase could be experienced as…"

Establish a clear boundary

"That language isn't acceptable within our schools."

There will be occasions when language requires immediate and direct challenge, particularly where it is discriminatory, degrading or threatening.

A Language for Learning Glossary

The partnership will maintain a practical Language for Learning glossary to support staff.

The purpose of the glossary is not to create an exhaustive list of permitted and prohibited words. Language develops and context matters.

Instead, the glossary will help colleagues understand why particular terminology may be inappropriate and identify more precise, respectful alternatives.

The glossary will use the following structure:

Area	Language to reconsider or avoid	Why?	Language we encourage / considerations
SEND	"SEN child"	Defines the child primarily through need	"Child with SEND"; consider individual preference
Attainment	"Low ability"	Can imply fixed potential	Describe current attainment, knowledge or specific barriers
Behaviour	"Naughty child"	Defines the child rather than describing behaviour	Describe the observable behaviour
Disability	"Normal children" when comparing with disabled pupils	Positions disability as abnormal	Use the precise comparison required
Disadvantage	"Those families don't care"	Assumes motivation without evidence	Describe the known barrier or engagement issue
Learning	"They can't do it"	Can communicate fixed expectations	"They cannot yet do this independently…"

The full glossary should address terminology relating to:

- race and ethnicity;
- nationality and culture;
- religion and belief;
- sex and gender;
- sexual orientation and families;
- SEND;
- disability and neurodiversity;
- socioeconomic disadvantage;
- children in care and care experience;
- attainment and ability;
- behaviour;
- mental health and wellbeing.

Where terminology is evolving, contested or dependent upon individual preference, the framework should acknowledge this rather than presenting one term as universally correct.

Respectful curiosity is preferable to confident assumption.

Language for Learning in the Curriculum

This framework should also be visible through what and how we teach.

Our curriculum should provide opportunities for children to:

- encounter people, cultures, communities and experiences beyond their own;
- recognise themselves positively within the curriculum;
- challenge stereotypes and assumptions;
- develop appropriate vocabulary for discussing difference;
- disagree respectfully;
- ask thoughtful questions;
- understand that language can change over time;
- recognise discriminatory and prejudicial language;
- develop confidence to challenge injustice;
- recognise the achievements and contributions of a diverse range of people.

Teachers should consider both the representation within the curriculum and the language through which that curriculum is taught.

Working With Parents, Carers and Communities

Our language should communicate partnership rather than judgement.

Families know their children in ways that schools cannot, while schools bring professional expertise about education and learning.

Effective partnership requires both.

Where disagreements occur, staff should remain respectful, factual and solution-focused.

We should avoid making assumptions about parental commitment, capacity, culture or aspiration based upon attendance at meetings, communication style, financial circumstances, language proficiency or previous experiences with education.

Where barriers to participation exist, we should seek to understand and, where reasonably possible, reduce them.

Leadership Responsibilities

Leaders across the partnership have a particular responsibility to model Language for Learning.

Leaders will:

- model respectful, inclusive and aspirational language;
- challenge language which undermines dignity, belonging or aspiration;
- create opportunities for professional discussion and learning;
- support staff to develop confidence in discussing identity and difference;
- ensure recruitment and induction introduce the principles of this framework;
- consider Language for Learning through professional development and appraisal;
- ensure curriculum development reflects the principles of the framework;
- listen to pupil, parent and staff voice;
- identify patterns of concern rather than viewing incidents entirely in isolation;
- distinguish appropriately between mistakes requiring education and conduct requiring formal intervention;

- ensure concerns are addressed through appropriate school policies where necessary.

Leaders should also create a culture in which they themselves can be respectfully challenged.

Leadership does not mean always having the correct language. It means being willing to listen, reflect, learn and model improvement.

Our Shared Responsibility

Language for Learning belongs to everyone.

It is not solely the responsibility of senior leaders, teachers, inclusion leaders or those with particular lived experiences.

Every adult contributes to the culture experienced by our children.

Every conversation has the potential to communicate something about who belongs, who is valued, what we expect and what we believe is possible.

We therefore ask ourselves:

Does my language preserve dignity? Does it communicate belonging? Is it based upon evidence or assumption? Does it describe rather than label? Does it communicate aspiration? Would I use the same language if the person I were discussing were sitting beside me? Does my language help this person to thrive and flourish?

Monitoring and Review

The Language for Learning Framework will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to reflect current understanding, appropriate terminology, statutory expectations and the needs of our school communities.

Language evolves. Therefore, this framework and its associated glossary should themselves be regarded as living documents.

Feedback from pupils, staff, parents, governors and other members of our communities should contribute to their continued development.

Our success will not ultimately be measured by whether everyone knows the contents of this document.

It will be seen and heard in our schools: in classrooms and corridors; in meetings and staffrooms; in difficult conversations and celebrations; in how we speak when people are present and when they are absent; and in the expectations we communicate to every child.

Our aspiration is that our language consistently demonstrates what we believe:

You matter. You belong. You can learn. You can contribute. You can achieve. You can flourish.