

Parent Information Leaflet: Understanding Protective Characteristics & the Importance of Language

Dear Parents & Carers,

At Copthorne CE Junior School, we believe in fostering an inclusive and respectful environment for all children. Part of this includes understanding **protective characteristics** and how we use language to support a positive and welcoming school community. This leaflet provides important guidance on how we can work together to promote respect and kindness.

What Are Protective Characteristics?

The **Equality Act 2010** outlines nine protective characteristics that help ensure everyone is treated fairly and with respect. These include:

✓ **Age** – Respecting people of all ages. ✓ **Disability** – Supporting those with physical or hidden disabilities. ✓ **Gender reassignment** – Respecting people's choices about their gender. ✓ **Marriage & civil partnership** – Recognising different family structures. ✓ **Pregnancy & maternity** – Understanding and supporting parents and carers. ✓ **Race** – Valuing different cultures, backgrounds, and skin colours. ✓ **Religion or belief** – Respecting all faiths and beliefs. ✓ **Sex** – Treating boys and girls equally. ✓ **Sexual orientation** – Being respectful of all family types and relationships.

Teaching children about these characteristics helps them develop empathy, understanding, and a strong sense of fairness.

Why Language Matters

Words are powerful! The way we speak to and about others can have a big impact. At school, we teach children to use kind, inclusive language. This means:

✓ Using positive words that respect everyone. ✓ Avoiding name-calling or jokes at someone's expense. ✓ Standing up for others when they hear unfair language. ✓ Asking questions in a respectful way when learning about differences. ✓ Using respectful terms when discussing skin colour and cultural backgrounds.

Using respectful language helps children feel safe, valued, and confident in themselves.

Right and Wrong: Helpful Guidance

RIGHT: ✓ "It's great that families can look different, but all are special." ✓ "Some people need extra help, and that's okay." ✓ "Let's use kind words when talking about others." ✓ "We should describe skin colour positively and respectfully."

WRONG: ✗ Making fun of someone's accent, name, skin colour, or background. ✗ Using words that stereotype or assume things about people. ✗ Laughing at or excluding someone because they are different. ✗ Using outdated or offensive terms for skin colour, such as "coloured" or "half-caste."

By encouraging positive language, we create a school where everyone feels welcome.

Inappropriate Language & Skin Colour

It is important to recognise and challenge offensive language related to skin colour. Some words and phrases are unacceptable as they can be hurtful and discriminatory.

⊗ Words and phrases to avoid:

- Using animal-related terms like “monkey” when referring to people.
- Describing skin colour using negative words such as “dirty.”
- Making jokes or comments that mock someone’s skin tone.
- Using slang or outdated words that are offensive, such as “coloured” or “half-caste.”

✓ What to do instead:

- Use respectful and accurate descriptions when discussing differences.
- Encourage children to celebrate diversity rather than mock it.
- Educate children on why certain words can be harmful and unacceptable.
- Speak up if you hear inappropriate language and explain why it is wrong.

By addressing this issue, we can create a more inclusive and respectful school environment for all.

How You Can Support at Home

Parents and carers play a vital role in shaping children’s attitudes. Here are some ways you can help:

- 🔗 **Model inclusive language** – Show respect in how you talk about others.
- 🔗 **Encourage curiosity** – Answer children’s questions about differences honestly and kindly.
- 🔗 **Challenge unkind words** – Gently correct any disrespectful language your child might hear or use.
- 🔗 **Celebrate diversity** – Read books, watch films, and explore different cultures together.
- 🔗 **Use appropriate vocabulary** – Teach children to describe skin colour in a respectful and accurate way.

Working Together

We are committed to creating a safe and supportive environment for every child. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Mrs Denison at head@copthornejunior.co.uk.

Thank you for helping us build a community of kindness and respect!

Kind regards

Mrs Denison
Headteacher

Mrs Garrard
RSHE Lead