

Equality Act Fact Sheet

The Equality Act has been the main source of UK Equality Legislation since 2010. It is a piece of legislation that it is important for us all to know about. Working in line with the Equality Act not only prevents you from being unlawful in your teaching but also promotes Human Rights. Equality and Human Rights legislation are intrinsically linked, they are both about the preservation of dignity and respect for all. This can also be seen in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Equality legislation applies to those who run clubs and those who provide education or community services, amongst others, and encourages positive action. It requires us to promote the interests of children and young people by working in a diverse and varied way, not to treat everyone the same, but to treat everyone differently to allow them to achieve, to be treated fairly and to have their individual needs met.

The Equality Act protects us from direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation and places an expectation on us of reasonable adjustment to meet people's needs. It sets out a list of protected characteristics; Age Disability Gender reassignment Marriage and civil partnership Pregnancy and maternity Race Religion and belief Sex Sexual orientation.

In most circumstances it is not just the person with the protected characteristic who is protected under the Equality Act; it is also their immediate family: Parents, Children or Siblings.

The Equality Act prohibits direct and indirect discrimination:

- An example of direct discrimination would be if a dance school chose not to offer a place to a child with a physical disability because other parents in the school felt uncomfortable with their attendance, claiming it impacted on the class dynamics.
- An example of indirect discrimination would be to say that all boys who attend class must have short hair or hair cut in a certain style, this would indirectly discriminate against a Sikh boy who may wish to have long hair in a turban in line with his beliefs.

So how and where is the Equality Act impacting on dance schools, here are 3 examples of what we might need to take into consideration on day to day to day basis.

- To differentiate lessons for different abilities and different physical or learning needs.
- For exams we may make application for reasonable adjustment for a student to allow them to demonstrate their exam work to the best of their ability.
- As business owners we need to consider access requirements and accessible facilities. In addition however there are many other aspects of our business where we should consider whether we are being legally compliant and making decisions that are truly in the best interests of each and every student in our school.

For example - Shows

Here are some areas you may want to consider from an Equality impact perspective:

Makeup: it is common for teachers to stipulate make up must be worn for shows. Make up is a necessary tool for adult professional performers, it is an important part of the theatrical aesthetic and the application of stage make up is also part of the tradition and history of working in the theatre and many dance teachers want to share that experience and that learning with their students. There are a few important things to remember though and the first is that we cannot make any type of makeup, tan or clothing 100% compulsory. There must always be negotiation and this is ok.

We are not trying to make everyone the same, sentences like “bold bright make up looks great on stage” are much better than stipulating the colours or shades you want used - they may not actually look that great on everybody.

Hair: Certain hair styles may have been traditionally normalised in certain dance styles for example the ballet bun, but that may be a tradition that dates back to a time when there was little / no racial diversity in the ballet world. It is widely appreciated that certain hair types do not take well to certain hair styles. Can you provide a range of suitable options that meet the needs of your school?

Costumes: There are many reasons why an individual may have concerns about a particular costume, for example regarding gender, gender identity or religion. It is important to consider the demographic of your school when costuming, costume for the children you have, not for the performance you have imagined and make sure you have options to accommodate everyone’s needs and beliefs.

Theme: what is the plot / story line, who are the characters? Many of our traditional shows and performances were written in less inclusive, less considerate times, check your plot line, if you use a script read through the script carefully, look out for jokes, characters, parts that may be stereotypes and may cause distress to your cast or audience.

Please also be considerate of complaints. A parent of a child may well come to you and explain that they feel uncomfortable with decisions you have made about a performance, a costume, a uniform. Please listen carefully and see what you can do to support this family. We all have different life experiences and understand issues of discrimination in different ways. They may just be bringing something to your attention you have not yet thought of. We do not all get everything right all the time and a concern may be raised because of a perspective different to your own, this is OK, we can all work together and learn together. Please do not ignore the concern though, as this may change an accidental mistake and unintentional indirect discrimination into a direct act of discrimination and as disrespect.