



# **STUDENT EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION PLAN 2025-2028**

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## 1. Introduction

The International School of Helsinki ('the **School**') is a private educational community that interacts with many individuals, including prospective students and job applicants, even before they officially join. We are dedicated to ensuring that everyone within or seeking to become part of our school is treated equitably and fairly. In student admissions, we uphold transparent selection criteria, ensuring that a candidate's health condition or functional capacity does not hinder their acceptance if we have the necessary skills and resources to support them.

The International School of Helsinki is committed to fostering a learning environment that is equitable, inclusive, and free from discrimination for all members of the community: students, staff, families and visitors. This preparation of this plan is grounded in the principles of the European Convention on Human Rights, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Section 6 of the Constitution of Finland provides that everyone is equal before the law. The Finnish Non-Discrimination Act (132572014) and Act of Equality between Women and Men (609/1986) provide further protection. This Student Equality and Non-Discrimination plan fulfils the School's legal obligations under the legislation, defines how these principles are integrated into daily operations and how any potential issues are addressed.

This plan specifically applies to the School as a community, with a primary focus on its students, while a separate plan has been developed for staff. The distinction between these plans reflects the specific requirements of employment-related legislation and the equality and non-discrimination norms governing personnel matters.

## 2. Vision, Mission and Values at the International School of Helsinki

At the School we believe that every member of our community deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their background or identity. Our Vision, Mission and Catalysts (values) demonstrate our commitment to inclusion. Over recent years, a lot of work has been done to improve understanding of Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) within our school community. Notable examples include the Statement of Belonging, Affinity Circles and staff training. There is an appreciation that the work is never-ending, and our hope in the preparation and implementation of this plan builds on the pledge made for ongoing growth and understanding of diversity and inclusion.

### 3. Context

The International School of Helsinki is an IB World School with students from over 40 different nationalities. The language of instruction is English; there are also language acquisition classes along with mandatory Finnish language and literature classes for Finnish citizens.

Students in the International School of Helsinki are from various multicultural backgrounds and are in Finland for a variety of reasons and length of time. The gender distribution of our Upper School students recorded in the 2024/25 CIS Community Survey Student Report data is 47% male, 49% female and 4% of students selected “other”, which includes students that preferred not to say or identify as non-binary. Our teachers are also from varied backgrounds. The gender distribution captured in 2024/25 CIS Community Survey Faculty Report data is 29% male, 65% female and 6% of the Faculty selected “other”, which includes staff members who preferred not to say or identify as non-binary.

### 4. Sources of data

In order to create the plan, the current situation in the School was assessed by surveying the student body. The data collected was a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data to capture not only measurable data but the lived experience of students within our community. The data used in making this plan consisted of the following sources of information:

Survey of the Upper School student in November 2024 where the survey was completed by all present students and answered anonymously through Google Forms.

Survey of students in Grade 3 to 5 of the Lower School in January 2025 where the survey was completed by adults interviewing the students and inputting the data anonymously through Google Forms.

Results from the Council of International Schools (‘CIS’) Community surveys for staff, parents, and students carried out in December 2024.

Anecdotal information collected during affinity circles; BIPOC and colorful connections.

[Narrative data from the BIPOC listening circle](#) students

[Narrative data from the Colorful Connections listening circle](#) students

The data was collected in compliance with data protection and privacy laws, including the General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679)

### 5. Plan Scope

This plan was completed following staff and student workshops to analyse the data collected in the surveys. This plan, including the surveys, has been prepared by students of the Student Voice Commission (‘SVC’), volunteer staff members and members of the School’s

DEIJ working group. The plan will come into effect at the beginning of the Academic Year 2025/2026.

The effectiveness of the plan will be evaluated on a quarterly basis by the DEIJ working group with support from volunteer students and staff members.

## 6. Purpose

Under Finnish legislation the focus of this plan is to ensure that all genders have the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities to fulfill themselves and to fully participate in society. Due to the nature of our school community and its multicultural environment we are adopting an intersectional approach and are committed to ensuring the plan prevents and addresses discrimination, promotes inclusivity, and creates a safe and supportive learning environment for everyone within our community.

## 7. Survey findings - current climate in 2024/25 academic year

### Race and Ethnicity

The data highlighted concerns about racial and ethnic sensitivity in the school community. While cultural celebrations have a positive impact, in the Upper School survey, 23% of students gave a score of between 1 and 3 in answer to the question "In relation to race and/or ethnicity, how often do you feel accepted and respected at school?" Instances of racial slurs and insensitive language, particularly in lower school recess and upper school interactions, suggest a need for greater awareness of microaggressions and appropriate language. Teachers, though well-intentioned, have made clumsy assumptions about students based on ethnicity. Narrative responses referred to students being singled out in class and asked if they wanted subtitles in their "native language". In addition, implicit biases and stereotypes based around different countries or regions have contributed to biased perceptions and the feeling of exclusion amongst a small number of students. The narrative responses made reference to anti-Asian comments used frequently as jokes.

### Gender and Sexual Orientation

The school community faces issues related to discrimination, in particular microaggressions and inappropriate joking. There are also instances of unintentional double standards by teachers, and gender-based divisions in class. The narrative responses included reference to student's ability and performance in certain classes being based on their gender, and exclusion from participation in recess and sports games based on gender. Key concerns raised in the narrative responses included a lack of education on identity, intentional and accidental misgendering, stereotypes being used offensively and the use of "gay" as an insult. Cultural differences and varying maturity levels add complexity and highlight the need

for age-appropriate education on respectful language and inclusivity regarding gender and sexual identity.

## Ableism and Neurodiversity

The data highlights that microaggressions, particularly joking and teasing about learning abilities, are common. There is a culture of trivialising inclusive language, with many recognising it as wrong but not understanding its impact or harm. Most reported experiences focus on invisible disabilities, with little data on physical disabilities. The narrative responses included examples of peer interactions that are harmful including the use of derogatory terms as slurs and conditions such as dyslexia, Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder as insults or jokes. While some teachers support students with learning differences, this support is inconsistent. Narrative responses provided referenced teachers not following learning plans and singling out students in classes.

## Religion

About a third of Upper School students reported witnessing or experiencing religious discrimination, with joking and name-calling being the most common forms. While most students believe the school takes action against religious discrimination, only a minority of students feel adults can have honest conversations about religion. In the Upper School student survey, 18 students stated that they did not feel accepted or respected based on their religion. Narrative responses provided by Muslim students referenced being subject to slurs and inconsiderate treatment during Ramadan, including interruption of prayer by students and being required to participate in sports activities. Additionally, Christian students mentioned becoming accustomed to jokes about their faith.

## Curriculum and Resources

The data suggests that more work is needed to ensure representation in the curriculum and resources for our diverse community. Question C3D3 in the CIS survey from December 2024 sought feedback on the statement, "The school's curriculum provides my child with opportunities to learn about their own background and culture. " 45.8% of parents and 35.8% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed. The narrative responses provided included reference to the Euro or Western-centric curriculums especially in the MYP along with the "Colonisers gaze" whereby different people and cultures viewed through a Western perspective.

# 8. Three Year Plan for Improving our School Culture and Environment

## Year 1: Foundations & Visibility 2025-26

**Goal:** In the first year of the plan we aim to build awareness of current policies and create a visible culture of inclusion. The aim is to also establish clear protocols for addressing discrimination while increasing focus on student leadership and student-led engagement.

## 1. Clarification and Communication of Protocols

- The Wellbeing Lead and DEIJ working group will assist in establishing an Equality and Non-Discrimination Student Plan Committee composed of volunteer students and staff members. This Committee will be responsible for the implementation of this plan including the preparation and distribution of surveys to assess the effectiveness of the plan.
- The Student Life Coordinator and Division Leads will update behaviour policy to include definitions of microaggressions, and forms of discrimination.
- The Student Life Coordinator and Division Leads will create structured protocols for addressing discrimination, making response steps predictable and clear, while educating students about the statement of belonging and the safeguarding policy which includes identity based harm.
- The Student Life Coordinator and Division Leads will ensure that all staff, students and families are aware of protocols for confidential reporting of concerns including the identity-based harm component of the child safeguarding plan.
- The Wellbeing Lead and Division Leads will create and communicate a protocol for the school and staff to ask students about their preferred pronouns to record and action that information.

## 2. Visual Representation & Community Engagement

- Launch the concept of a student-created mural in a visible location to celebrate our multicultural identity.
- Implement the [DEIJ cultural celebration calendar](#) including UN observance days across the school to ensure consistent celebration of the cultural events. This should include digital communications, announcements and activities within the Advisory/Homeroom/Maja/Koti/Kota frameworks. It should include student leaders to plan celebrations from a peer to peer perspective.
- Introduce a Prospectus/Brochure for our community members highlighting the school's DEIJ commitment.
- Increase the home school connection by inviting families to be involved in activities to promote diverse perspectives such as reading stories.

### 3. Addressing Discrimination & Bias

- Start-of-year mandatory “Responding to Discrimination” Professional Development for all staff with age-appropriate case studies and concrete examples.
- Develop a case study bank and time in the PD Calendar for staff to discuss real-life classroom challenges to foster peer support.
- Develop training for staff to lead or respond to discussions about equality and equity with students.
- Establish time and space within the Student Support Team meetings to discuss concerns about identity-based harm and discrimination, ensuring dedicated time to address these concerns at a grade level.
- Introduce the language of restorative conversations and learning experiences when addressing discrimination and bias-related incidents, for example, “this is a caring conversation, and we’ll return to it”.
- Ensure staff, students and families understand the restorative approach by providing workshops and other information-sharing events.
- Identify and establish additional student affinity circles, for example, a religious based affinity circle.

### 4. Curriculum & Materials Audit

- A volunteer group of students and staff members to begin an audit of school materials for diversity and representation to address concerns that it is too Euro-Western centric.
- Advisory and Wellbeing Leads will map where DEIJ related themes are taught across the Advisory curriculum ensuring vertical alignment. Identified gaps in content or overlaps will be addressed with revised curriculum content.
- Divisional and Instructional Leaders will map where religion is taught across the curriculum and ensure diverse perspectives along with horizontal and vertical alignment. Identified gaps in content or overlaps will be addressed with revised curriculum content.
- Gather teacher and student input on book purchasing with an intentional DEIJ lens.



At the end of Year One, a survey would be conducted and analysed by the volunteer team to assess the impact of the changes. Adjustments would be made based on those findings.

## Year 2: Implementation & Integration 2026-27

**Goal:** We aim to embed Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) practices into our school culture and curriculum to foster a learning environment where every student - regardless of background - feels valued, seen, and a true sense of belonging. By doing so, we seek to address systemic inequities and create a more inclusive community that supports the success and well-being of all learners.

### 1. Expanding Visibility & Student Involvement

- Implement the student mural project referenced in 'Visual Representation and Community Engagement in Year 1 above.
- Ensure the cultural celebration calendar is widely used with intentionality. Celebrations should focus on authenticity, student-led event planning and community engagement.
- The student affinity circles will support in establishing a student-led DEIJ storytelling program where students document and share their diverse experiences in an appropriate format.

### 2. Strengthening Teacher Support & Intervention

- Create reflective learning experiences that help students understand the impact of identity-based harm and support their growth and reintegration into the school community. These sessions will focus on inclusion, respect, and restorative practice.
- Provide targeted teacher workshops on responding to racism, sexism and microaggressions.
- Train staff on restorative approaches in particular acknowledging the impact of different cultural backgrounds.

### 3. Curriculum Development & Resource Expansion

- The Equality and Non-Discrimination Student Plan Committee will oversee completion of the audit of school materials and begin replacing or

supplementing texts with diverse resources.

- The Equality and Non-Discrimination Student Plan Committee will work with Division Directors, Learning Collaborators and Instructional Leads to integrate DEIJ themes across subjects.
- The DEIJ Working group, counselors and Advisory Leads will work together to develop and introduce both preventative and responsive DEIJ-themed advisory lessons as part of the curriculum in the Upper School to address identity, bias, and discrimination.

At the end of Year two, a survey would be conducted and analysed by the volunteer team to assess the impact of the changes. Adjustments would be made based on those findings.

### Year 3: Sustainability & Continuous Growth 2027-28

**Goal:** Ensure DEIJ efforts become embedded, self-sustaining, and continually evolving.

#### 1. Institutionalising DEIJ in School Culture

- Establish an annual review process for DEIJ initiatives, using student and staff feedback to help plan and structure future Equality and Non-Discrimination plans.
- Introduce mentorship programs where older students support younger peers in identity-related challenges.
- Continue the mural and visual representation projects, with the aim of making them student-driven.

#### 2. Professional Development & Teacher Support

- Require ongoing DEIJ training for staff, beyond the initial mandatory session.
- Expand the case study resource bank discussions, allowing staff to share challenges and solutions.
- Offer coaching and consulting sessions for all teachers who feel unprepared to address difficult topics. Educators and staff members of colour will be provided with specific coaching and/or training to address their needs and concerns in addressing difficult topics and situations.

### 3. Refining Curriculum & Student Empowerment

- The Instructional Leaders and PYP Coordinator will evaluate the impact of curriculum changes using annual CIS survey data and adjust materials accordingly.
- Create student-led initiatives, such as workshops on allyship, anti-racism, and bystander intervention.

### 4. Review and Creation of a new Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan

- Conduct a DEIJ survey to track progress and inform future improvements for the next three year plan.