

Aberdour floret qui laborat

Independent day school
for boys and girls aged 2-11 years

Finding the brilliance in every child

Burgh Heath Tadworth Surrey KT20 6AJ

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Appointment of Head for January, April or September 2025

Briefing for candidates

KEY DATES

25 March : Closing date

Early/mid-April : First interviews – online, by individual arrangement

End April/May : Shortlist - visits to the School

6 May : Shortlist - final interviews with the Board

We hope this briefing document will be helpful to you. Further information about the School can be found on our website www.aberdourschool.co.uk

Our advising consultant, Simon Shneerson, is very happy to answer any questions and to discuss possible applications in the strictest of confidence.

Please feel free to call him 7 days a week on 07986 100237, either during the day or in the evening, or email him at headhunter@btinternet.com.

Advising consultant **simonshneerson.** 07986 100237



Welcome to Aberdour!

A very warm welcome to Aberdour, one of the happiest schools in the country. If you are appointed, one of your main objectives will be to keep it that way.

Beneath the happiness and fun lies a very serious approach to education. Our PAL system (Personalised Achievement Learning) transformed how we worked some 15 years ago and is still far ahead of most other prep schools. We build education round the child, not the other way round, with breadth, excellent teaching, sound values, and lots of encouragement.

Our slogan, “Finding the brilliance in every child” sums things up, and our academic results are simply amazing for a non-selective school, with around half our leavers being offered senior school scholarships every year. Much more importantly though, we are a really happy school and the children bounce into school every morning.

Our much-loved Head, Simon Collins, is retiring after 18 years, leaving behind a school that is on a high, with a full roll, delighted parents, excited staff, exceptional facilities, a 100% Excellent inspection report, and a business model that is solid and sustainable even in the light of the current threats.

His successor will understand the strength of what we offer and be able to build on it. We want enhancements not demolition, and evolution not radical change.

If you can offer passion, inspiration and wisdom, and you lead with a smile and by being seen as well as heard from, then you’ll enjoy Aberdour and we’ll enjoy having you here. Do please apply and I look forward to meeting you.

Donald Davie

Donald Davie, Chairman of Governors



Overview of the school

Aberdour is a genuinely lively and exciting day prep school for boys and girls aged 2 to 11, very well located on the A217 road south of Sutton, and close to the commuter villages of Banstead, Burgh Heath and Tadworth. Junction 8 of the M25 is four miles away.

The local market has been turbulent in recent years and all four of our closest competitors have merged in one way or another. We are the only school that has remained as a standalone prep and local parents appreciate this independence. We are the largest prep school in the area, with more than 360 pupils.

Our strengths include the quality of our offer, the unique atmosphere, the partnerships we build with our parents, and our willingness to innovate. In particular, PAL (Personalised Achievement Learning) is an award-winning approach which gives the children an unusually customised education. It allows us to offer flexible timetabling and teaching, a huge range of extra-curricular and personal development activities, and highly integrated management of each child's progress. Even after 15 years few other schools come close to being able to offer this way of working.

All this has given Aberdour a very strong all-round reputation and made it a successful feeder to a broad range of leading independent senior schools. PAL allows us to achieve excellent results without over-stressing the children or the staff, and it also allows us to offer exceptional pastoral care because of the way in which we know and work with the children.

The school is full, the finances are healthy and we invest steadily in strategic resources. Our Innovation Centre contains some world-class technology and our most recent addition has been a large new Early Years and Pre-Prep, opened last September.



Ethos

Put very simply, our vision is

Finding the brilliance in every child

Our ethos is

Happiness, Fun and Achievement

and our approach is

Personalisation, Individualisation and Aspiration



The Education

Our overall aim is to lay the ground for our children to make the most of the rest of their education and to enjoy and be successful in the whole of their life as an adult. We go far beyond the narrow objectives of senior school entrance exams.

At the heart of what we do is PAL (Personalised Achievement Learning). PAL is our own system and we have developed it over the last fifteen years. There are various sides to PAL, covering our approach to teaching and learning, the way we monitor and manage our children's progress, the elements we build into their life at Aberdour, and the flexibility and aspiration with which we do things. You can find out more about PAL on the school website.

PAL gives children goals, programmes, opportunities to find themselves and their brilliance, and we have developed the PAL Curriculum which integrates every subject with lifelong learning. Academic subjects are interwoven with sports, arts, and extra-curricular activities, and we make extensive use of technology both for teaching and learning and as areas in which the children explore applications for themselves.

Together with our in-built flexibility and our child-centred orientation, each and every child really does have huge scope to grow, to explore, to enjoy school life, to build skills, and to gain self-confidence. We do find the brilliance in every child, and that is exactly what our parents want us to do.



Class sizes and teaching

With around 360 children throughout the school, Aberdour has approximately 50 children in each year group from Reception to Year 6, with typical class sizes of 18. We have three forms throughout the school.

We are effectively full in many year groups. Advance registrations for future years are strong and there are waiting lists for places.

Classroom staff are well supported by teaching assistants and specialist technicians. As part of the PAL system, we use specialist “PAL Tutors” to monitor each child’s performance and co-ordinate/manage their progress and activities on an individual basis.

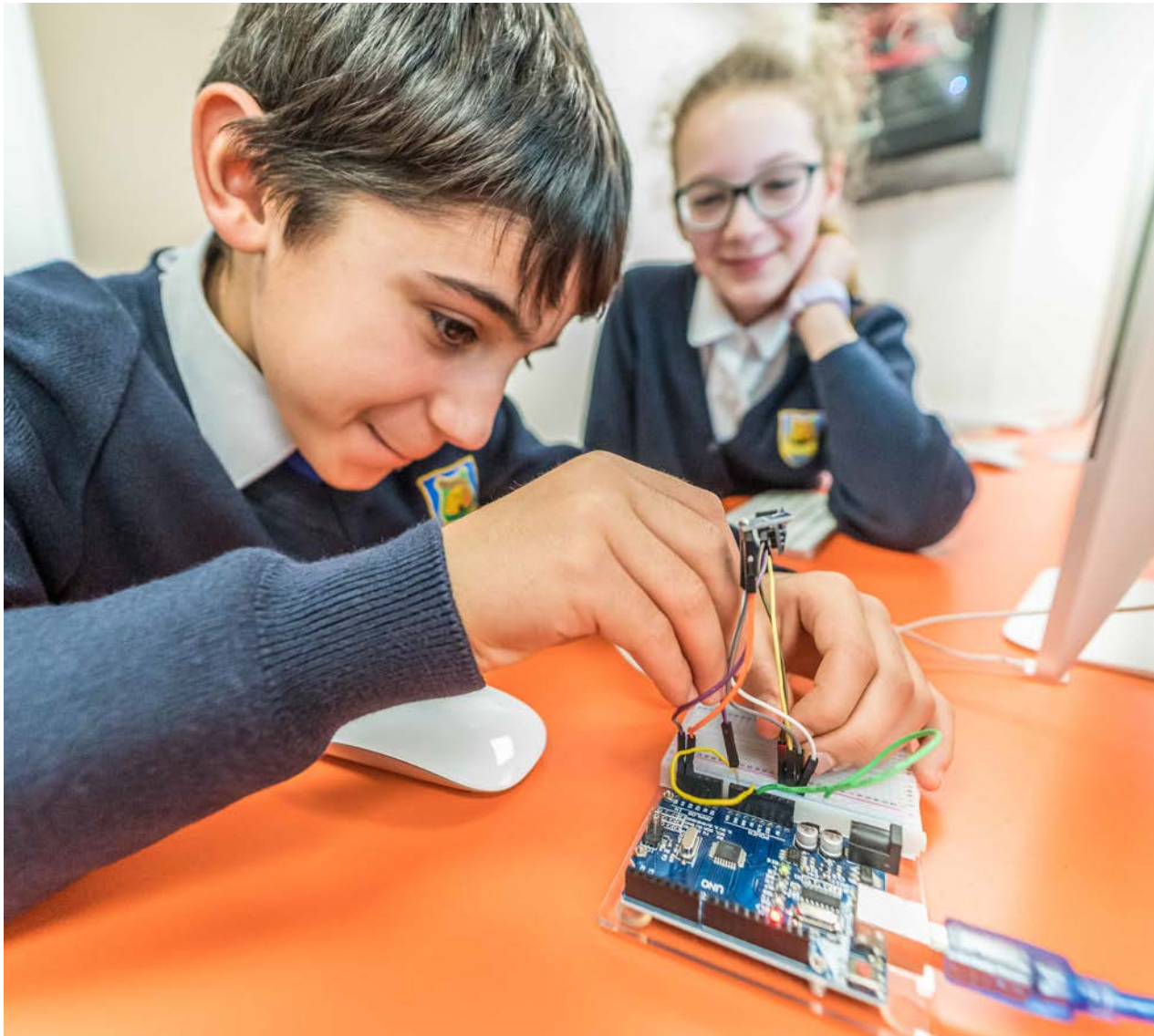
Structure of the school

Aberdour moved to an 11+ format a few years ago, reflecting changes in the local senior school market. We have a fairly conventional structure with three main sections:

Pre-Prep consists of Little Learners Nursery, along with Reception and Year 1. In their own dedicated area, they enjoy brand new classrooms and facilities, with full use of advanced technology and the latest eco-friendly features. Outdoor space includes a tree house and large ground level play areas.

Middle School (“Fearless Flyers”) contains Years 2 and 3, moving the children into a more formal learning environment which also has its own dedicated area. All children at all stages of the school, however, use various shared facilities, including the dining room, the sports hall and swimming pool, and the Innovation Centre.

Senior School rounds off the Aberdour experience and takes children from Years 4 to 6.



Curriculum

We teach a very broad curriculum which goes way beyond the National Curriculum. We cover all the traditional academic subjects and much more besides, including a significant focus on wellbeing, resilience and creativity.

The Lifelong Learning Curriculum has already received national accolade for its innovative features. Essentially it fully integrates every subject so that children in the various age groups receive a thematic education that links individual subjects and builds breadth of understanding. It also allows us to introduce and then develop various cross-curriculum techniques for investigating and learning. Allowing for many options to suit individual children's interests, it aligns with other elements of PAL such as our Aberdour Challenge and Stepping Stones personal development programmes.

Technology is woven into every aspect of Aberdour life, as we recognise that the children will be living and working in a world where a core skill will be to leverage technology and adapt to new innovations. Creativity is central to this and the Innovation Centre includes remarkable equipment for STEAM, as well as high-quality spaces for creativity in performing arts. We are at the forefront of using AI in a prep school setting.

With many acres of open space, playing fields and a new 3G pitch, a large sports hall and an indoor swimming pool, we also incorporate a wide choice of team and individual sports and activities into our curriculum. There are of course also many out-of-school trips and residential.



Senior Schools

Aberdour feeds into a large number of senior schools, mainly in the independent sector but also including grammar schools and academies. In 2023, the 48 Year 6 leavers received 127 senior school offers and won 61 scholarships.

The scholarship record has been consistently strong for many years and is a matter of pride to the school, the staff and the parents. It is all the more significant because we are most definitely not a hot-house, but our pupils enjoy learning and their achievements, their abilities and their inter-personal skills mark them out when they visit senior schools.

Our main senior schools are the most local: Epsom College, Reigate Grammar School, Caterham, St John's Leatherhead and Box Hill. There are occasional leavers for boarding senior schools.

Staff

There are approximately 55 members of the teaching staff, including teaching assistants, plus a team of peripatetic teachers for music and various specialist activities.

We have an excellent support team handling admin, finances and the premises.

Staff work well together and collaboration and mutual understanding are good. Everyone regards themselves as part of one big team, and the children know they can approach any member of staff about any concern they may have.



Premises and facilities

The school is set in a large 12-acre parkland site which backs onto Tadworth Woods, with an entrance directly from the main A217 road. The Nursery and Pre-Prep area has its own access from the main car park. Senior School children (Years 4-6) have a dedicated classroom block and there are of course specialist facilities for science, music and art.

Whole-school facilities include the dining room building, a large sports hall, an indoor swimming pool, and large playing fields. Ground source heating pumps have been installed beneath the fields and there is a very popular parents' coffee shop, open every day, which generates a substantial revenue as well as lots of goodwill.

The Innovation Centre was built in 2015-16 and contains various state-of-the-art resources, including a dynamic Maths learning zone, VR and AR equipment, a STEM base, a Languages Studio, and Global Learning rooms with green screen technology. It won the Best Use of Technology category in the 2018 TES Independent School Awards. Aberdour has also been shortlisted three times for Preparatory School of the Year.

Most recently we opened our brand new Nursery and Pre-Prep premises in September 2023. An investment of over £2 million, this has given us some exciting and versatile spaces in buildings that incorporate the latest eco-friendly features as well as advanced educational technology.



Governors and leadership

The school is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. This means it does not have any outside shareholders and all surpluses are ploughed back into developing the school.

Overall responsibility lies with the Board of Governors, who are the trustees of the charity as well as non-executive directors of the company. We currently have seven governors, with skills and expertise spanning business and education. The Chairman has a strong background in the business world and is also a past parent. The Board has a clear vision for the school's future, along with key strategies which are reviewed at periodic away-days with the SLT, the latest having taken place in January this year. Plans cover the next five years and the key priorities are logical and achievable; there are solid contingency plans for the effect of any change of government.

Governors know the school extremely well and have excellent relationships with the outgoing Head, Simon Collins, and the staff. They are both visible and actively supportive, without interfering in operational matters.

The SLT currently consists of the Head together with the Senior Deputy Head, the Head of Pre-Prep, the Head of Middle School, and the Bursar. The team is very solid and are critical friends to one another, with a culture that is built on openness and honesty, mutual support, a commitment to deliver, and the ability to crack a joke together.

The Bursar, Mike Valentine, has been in post for six years and has a very sound handle on all aspects of the school's finances, business and infrastructure.



The Head and the challenges of the role

In summary, the Head is responsible for the overall leadership and success of the School, as well as all its activities and the safety, well-being and development of the children and staff.

The full Job Description contains everything every prep school headship contains, and we assume you know that it is a comprehensive list covering (among other things) strategy and planning, leadership and management, curriculum, teaching, pastoral care, other activities, staff management, recruitment and development, safeguarding and wellbeing, marketing and parental relationships, compliance and reporting, visibility, ambassadorship and role modelling. As a standalone school the Head needs to understand and lead the school's business as well as its activities, and living on site comes with some general responsibilities for monitoring the campus outside school hours.

The Head reports direct to the Governors via the Chair of Governors.

The central challenges of the role are to

- maintain Aberdour's position as the leading local prep school
- protect its uniquely happy atmosphere
- ensure it and the children are safe at all times
- continue to develop the high quality, broad education it offers
- delight our parents and other stakeholders

Governors are not looking for radical change, but rather for steady evolution of a highly successful offering. That will call for forward thinking, a willingness to challenge and an ability to do it nicely, for patience as well as ambition, and for wisdom as well as experience.

Taken as a whole, this role combines a large amount of responsibility for everyday activities, together with the ability to think and act strategically, to anticipate the future and to prepare for it. You will also be the very visible public face of the school, representing its heart and soul as well as its values and expertise.

As Donald Davie said in his welcome note, the new Head will understand the strength of what Aberdour offers and be able to build on it, with enhancements not demolition, and evolution not radical change.

If the scope of all this excites you, please read on for a person profile and details of the application process.



Person profile

The ideal candidate should have the following:

Education and professional background

- Graduate with recognised teaching qualification
- Proven track record as a successful, effective teacher
- Experience of headship or senior leadership, managing both people and performance
- Broad knowledge of educational theory and practice and of the needs of the prep and pre-prep age group, as well as trends, issues and opportunities

Personal characteristics

- Natural affinity with the ethos of the School
- A deep passion for education and for the development and well-being of each pupil
- An inspiring, enthusiastic, friendly personality
- A people person with self awareness and empathy, compassion and patience
- A sense of humour, a sense of fun, and a sense of community
- Adaptable, flexible, resilient and reliable
- A can-do attitude, but able to say no nicely as well as yes enthusiastically



Person profile (continued)

Leadership skills and style

- Team leader and team player
- Ability to genuinely inspire as well as providing direction and coaching
- Proven ability to establish effective partnerships with members of an SLT/SMT, particularly a Bursar
- Open, honest and supportive
- Reflective approach and mindful of well-being
- A decision maker as well as a facilitator of others
- Effective prioritisation skills
- Customer focussed and comfortable with parents

Business and management skills

- Financial awareness and the ability to balance educational and business desirables
- Ability to consider and discuss the widest strategic issues with Governors
- Marketing savvy
- Broad awareness of legalities and good practice within schools and headship
- Confident about overseeing advanced use of ed tech

Thinking and communication skills

- Able to think strategically and practically
- Sound judgement of people and situations
- Clear and perceptive communicator and a good listener
- Able to be the very visible face of a notably happy school
- Able to forge strong links with other schools and the wider community



Remuneration package

A very comprehensive reward package will be offered, including:

- An excellent salary
- Comfortable on-site accommodation in a 4-bedroom house, including utilities
- Membership of our private pension scheme or contributions to one of your choice
- Life insurance and critical illness cover
- Generous staff discount on school fees at Aberdour, if relevant
- Free lunches during term-time
- Ongoing investment in your personal training and development

Terms of employment

- The School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Applicants must be prepared to undergo appropriate child protection screening, including checks with past employers and the Disclosure and Barring Service.
- Any appointment will be subject to satisfactory references and vetting, and to medical fitness to work.
- Employment will be subject to three terms' notice of termination by either side, with one term's notice during an initial probationary period of one year.
- The successful candidate will be expected to commit to the following:
 - Aberdour School seeks to provide a safe environment for children. The Head's responsibility for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and young persons for whom he or she is responsible, or with whom he or she comes into contact, will be to adhere to and ensure compliance with the School's Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection Statement at all times.



How to apply

To apply, simply download and complete the Application Form, and e-mail it to Simon Shneerson, our advising consultant, at headhunter@btinternet.com.

Applications must be received by 11 am on Monday, 25 March. Earlier applications are very welcome.

We do not need a cover letter as the form includes a personal statement, but do use the e-mail to mention anything that we can do to help you.

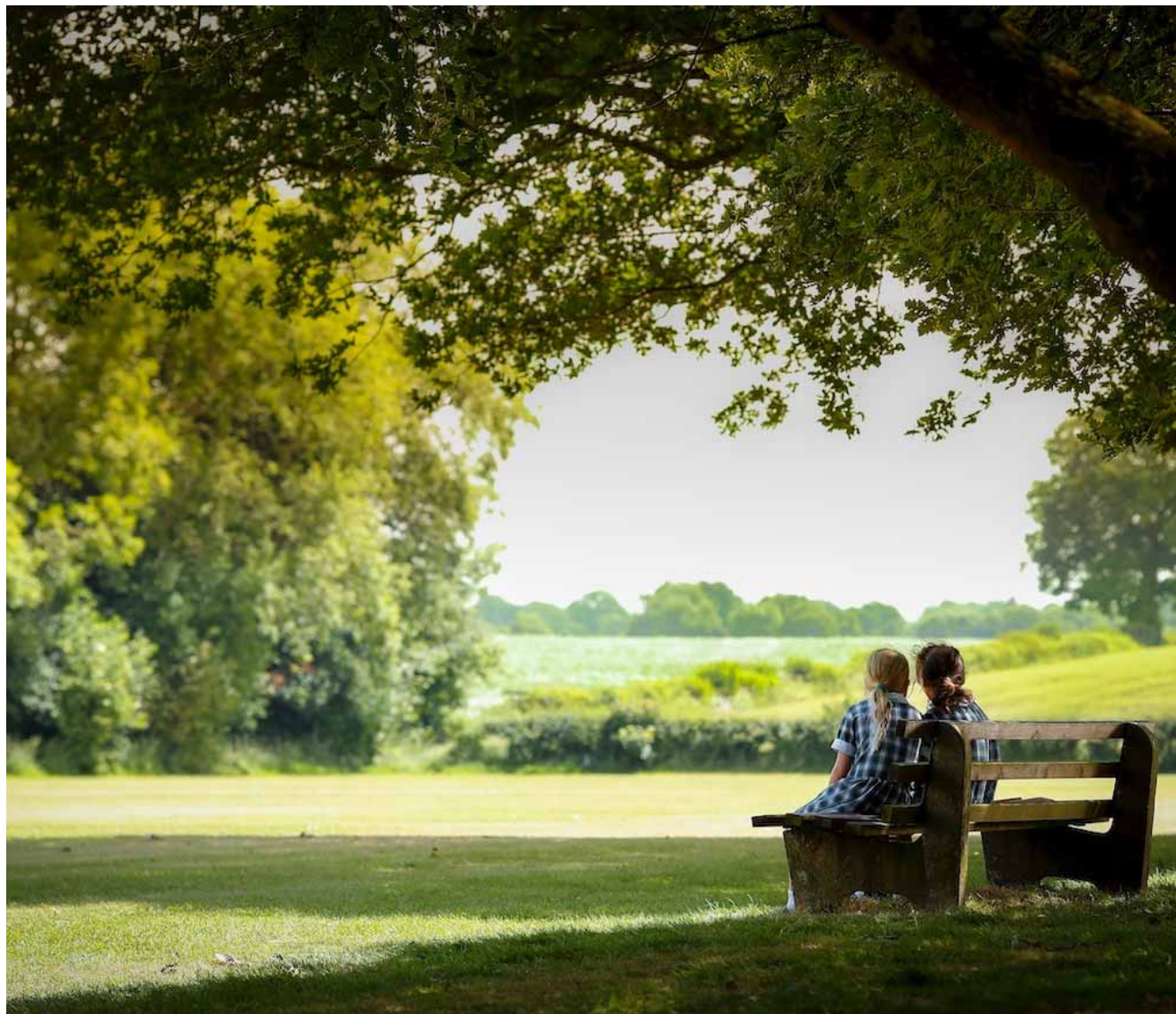
If you would like to discuss the School, the vacancy or any aspect of your application, please contact Simon Shneerson on 07986 100237 (any day of the week between 8 am and 10 pm), or you can use the email address above. Simon is discreet and will be helpful, honest, objective and informative.

There is no need to visit Aberdour before applying, as the school website contains plenty of information, videos and all our policies. However, if you'd like to see the school in person, you are most welcome to arrange a visit through Simon Shneerson.

The assessment process

Initial interviews will be held online during the Easter holidays, and we will look for mutually convenient dates and times.

Short-listed candidates will be invited to spend a day in the school, again on a mutually convenient date, and will then be asked to meet the full Board of Governors on 6 May.



Confidentiality

- References will only be requested at shortlist stage and we will let you know before we approach referees.
- Please let us know if you have any specific concerns about a referee being contacted.

Thank you for your interest in this post. We look forward to hearing from you and, hopefully, to meeting you in person.

Please note that it is the School's policy to employ the most suitable person for each appointment and not to discriminate against any person because of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.