



ACCESS AND INCLUSION POLICY

How Ember Learning Removes Barriers to Belonging

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1. PURPOSE AND POLICY STATEMENT

Ember Learning works with students who have stepped away from mainstream education, most commonly through emotionally based school avoidance, exclusion, or significant anxiety. For this cohort, the barriers to inclusion are rarely about a diagnosed condition or a protected characteristic alone. More often, the barrier is the anxiety and disengagement itself, being watched, being tested, being expected to perform on demand, before trust has had a chance to build. Mentees may have had similar experiences.

This Policy sets out how Ember Learning removes those barriers in practice. It should be read alongside, not instead of, the Equal Opportunities Policy (EL-EOP-001), which addresses protected characteristics and legal compliance, and the Quality of Education Policy (EL-QOEP-001), which addresses curriculum adaptation for students / mentees with an EHCP or documented additional need. This Policy focuses on what neither of those covers: the relational and practical adjustments that make access possible for an anxious, disengaged student before any formal need has even been identified.

2. SCOPE

This Policy applies to all sessions and all communication with students / mentees and families from first contact onward. It sits alongside the Student Behaviour and Relationships Policy (EL-SBRP-001), the Equal Opportunities Policy (EL-EOP-001), and the Quality of Education Policy (EL-QOEP-001).

3. PRINCIPLES

- Belonging comes before performance. A student / mentee is not expected to demonstrate engagement before they are given the conditions to feel safe.
- Adjustment is the default starting point, not an exception a student / mentee has to qualify for. We do not wait for a diagnosis before we adapt.
- A student / mentee not managing something, such as a camera, a group setting, or a timed task, is treated as information about where they are, not as a failure to meet an expectation.
- Progress is measured in engagement: a student / mentee showing up, building trust, and beginning to participate again, not in how quickly they conform to a standard format.

4. ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

Ember Learning builds specific, practical adjustments into the ordinary run of provision, rather than treating them as special measures applied on request. The following applies to students under the teaching programme. The following principles apply to students under the teaching programme and, adapted for the Mentee's own autonomy, to Mentees under the mentoring programme. Where a

Mentee is aged 18 or over, adjustments are made in partnership with the Mentee themselves rather than defaulting to family involvement:

- A student's first direct contact with their teacher happens before they join any group session. This gives the relationship a chance to form before a student has to manage being watched by peers as well as an adult.
- The baseline assessment for students is deliberately framed as a calm snapshot to help Ember understand them, not as a test. This is a considered response to assessment anxiety being common in this cohort, not an incidental choice of wording.
- Parent or carer presence during the welcome week is stepped back gradually across sessions, rather than withdrawn all at once, so a student is not expected to manage a new adult and a new format alone from the first session. For a Mentee aged 18 or over, the equivalent adjustment is a gradual build-up of trust directly with the Mentor, rather than reliance on a parent or carer's presence, unless the Mentee has specifically asked for a parent, carer, or other trusted person to be involved.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead is introduced to the student by name and by face early on, as a specific person they can go to, rather than left as a line in a policy document the student never sees.
- Where a student is finding a session, a topic, or participation difficult, the response is proportionate to the specific challenge rather than a fixed process. This may include a direct conversation with the family, or, for a Mentee aged 18 or over, with the Mentee themselves (involving family only where the Mentee has agreed to this), and is communicated to whoever needs to know, which may include the teacher, the DSL, and the commissioning body, so that the response is coordinated rather than siloed in one conversation.
- Reminder methods (for example, phone notification or email) are set to the preference of the family, rather than standardised, since a mismatched channel can itself become a barrier to a student simply showing up.

These adjustments are available to any student on the basis of need, whether or not that need has been formally assessed or documented.

5. ADDITIONAL AND COMPLEX NEEDS

Where a student or mentee has an Education, Health and Care Plan or another documented additional need, delivery is adapted in line with Section 3.4 of the Quality of Education Policy (EL-QOEP-001). This Policy does not repeat that detail; it sits alongside it to cover the wider group of students / mentees whose access barriers are not tied to a formal diagnosis.

6. COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL NEEDS

Where a student / mentee requires communication adjustments, for example due to a language barrier or a specific communication need, or where cultural or linguistic sensitivity is relevant to delivery, this is addressed in Section 8 of the Equal Opportunities Policy (EL-EOP-001). This Policy does not repeat that detail.

7. WORKING WITH FAMILIES AND COMMISSIONERS

Individual access needs are most often identified through the first contact call and the welcome week, not through a form. Teachers, Mentors and the DSL are expected to listen for what a parent / carer says in these early conversations and adapt tone, pacing, and format accordingly, in addition to anything a commissioning body has formally communicated at referral. Where a need becomes apparent only after provision has begun, the teacher / mentor raises it with the DSL, who agrees any

adjustment with the family (or, for a Mentee aged 18 or over, with the Mentee themselves, involving family only with the Mentee's consent) and, where relevant, the commissioning body.

8. LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES

This Policy should be read alongside the Equal Opportunities Policy (EL-EOP-001), the Quality of Education Policy (EL-QOEP-001), and the Student Behaviour and Relationships Policy (EL-SBRP-001).

9. REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if there is a significant change in legislation, guidance, or the operational context of Ember Learning. Responsibility for maintaining and reviewing this Policy sits with the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Policy Owner:	Jack Bradley, Director
Date Adopted:	1 September 2026
Next Review Due:	1 September 2027 (or earlier if a trigger event occurs)
Approved by:	Jack Bradley, Director, 1 September 2026