Children & Young People Board

Agenda

Tuesday, 12 March 2024
11.00 am

Hybrid Meeting - Beecham Room, 7th Floor,
18 Smith Square and Online

There will be a meeting of the Children & Young People Board at **11.00 am on Tuesday, 12 March 2024** Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online.

LGA Hybrid Meetings
All of our meetings are available to join in person at 18 Smith Square or remotely via videoconference as part of our hybrid approach. We will ask you to confirm in advance if you will be joining each meeting in person or remotely so we can plan accordingly, if you wish to attend the meeting in person, please also remember to confirm whether you have any dietary/accessibility requirements. 18 Smith Square is a Covid-19 secure venue and measures are in place to keep you safe when you attend a meeting or visit the building in person.

Please see guidance for Members and Visitors to 18 Smith Square here

Catering and Refreshments:
If the meeting is scheduled to take place at lunchtime, a sandwich lunch will be available.

Political Group meetings and pre-meetings for Lead Members:
Please contact your political group as outlined below for further details.

Apologies:
Please notify your political group office (see contact telephone numbers below) if you are unable to attend this meeting.

Conservative:	Group Office:	020 7664 3223	email:	lgaconservatives@local.gov.uk
Labour:	Group Office:	020 7664 3263	email:	labgp@lga.gov.uk
Independent:	Group Office:	020 7664 3224	email:	independent.grouplga@local.gov.uk
Liberal Democrat:	Group Office:	020 7664 3235	email:	libdem@local.gov.uk

Attendance:
Your attendance, whether it be in person or virtual, will be noted by the clerk at the meeting.

LGA Contact:
Abigail Benari
abigail.benari@local.gov.uk

Carers' Allowance
As part of the LGA Members' Allowances Scheme, a Carer's Allowance of National Living Wage and/or London Living Wage is available to cover the cost of dependants (i.e. children, elderly people or people with disabilities) incurred as a result of attending this meeting.

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ   www.local.gov.uk   **Telephone** 020 7664 3000   **Email** info@local.gov.uk
Local Government Association company number 11177145
Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 0367557
Chairman: Councillor Shaun Davies   **Acting Chief Executive:** Sarah Pickup CBE   **President:** Baroness Grey-Thompson

V2 2023

Children & Young People Board – Membership 2023/24

Click here for accessible information on membership

Councillor	Authority
Conservative (6)	
Cllr Patricia Bradwell OBE (Vice Chairman)	Lincolnshire County Council
Cllr Tony Ball	Essex County Council
Cllr Roger Gough	Kent County Council
Cllr Laura Mayes	Wiltshire Council
Cllr Annabel Wilkinson	North Yorkshire Council
Cllr Phillippa Williamson	Lancashire County Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Mark Sutton	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Robert Flatley	Derbyshire County Council
Cllr Andrew Leadbetter	Devon County Council
Labour (7)	
Cllr Louise Gittins (Chair)	Cheshire West and Chester Council
Cllr Victoria Cusworth	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr Adam Ellison	South Tyneside Council
Cllr Fiona Venner	Leeds City Council
Cllr Imran Khan	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Cllr Mili Patel	Brent Council
Cllr Garry Bridges	Manchester City Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Leigh Redman	Somerset County Council
Cllr Rachel Massey	Rochdale Borough Council
Cllr Joshua Garfield	Newham London Borough
Liberal Democrat (3)	
Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE (Deputy Chair)	Portsmouth City Council
Cllr Cordelia Law	Torbay Council
Cllr Mark Cory	Colchester Borough Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Dine Romero	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Independent (2)	
Cllr Jon Hubbard (Deputy Chair)	Wiltshire Council
Cllr Anne Dorrian	Boston Borough Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Helen Wetherall	North East Derbyshire Council
Cllr Edward Maxfield	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Rachel Smith-Lyte	East Suffolk Council
Cllr Alex Reeve	Uttlesford District Council

Agenda

Children & Young People Board

Tuesday, 12 March 2024

11.00 am

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday, 20 June 2024, 1.00 pm, Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Minutes of last Children & Young People Board meeting

Children & Young People Board

Tuesday, 23 January 2024

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Attendance
An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A**

Item	Decisions and actions

1   Welcome, Apologies and Substitutes, Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Children and Young People Board.

Apologies were received from Cllr Annabel Wilkinson, Cllr Phillipa Williamson and Cllr Anne Dorian substituted by Cllr Mark Sutton and Cllr Robert Flatley.

Cllr Vernon-Jackson declared he had previously worked in the Department of Health and Social Care in relation to item 3.

No other declarations of interest were received.

2   Note of the Previous Meeting

Members agreed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 October.

Members discussed the issue of considering care experience as a protected characteristic. Louise Smith, Senior Adviser, advised members that work by the Office of the Children's Commissioner to gather views of care experienced people on this issue was expected to be published in the coming months and would inform the LGA's position on this and any advice issued to councils.

For information, the appointments to outside bodies are as below:

National Youth Agency (NYA) - Cllr Jon Hubbard

Asylum, Migration and Refugee Task group - Cllr Roger Gough & Cllr Cordelia Law

Children's Improvement Board (CIB) - Louise Gittins, Chair

3   NHSE - Children's Mental Health

The Chair invited David Lockwood, Head of CYP and Perinatal Mental Health, Andrew Nichols-Clarke, Senior Development Lead, Health and Justice Children Programme, Yvonne Carey, Senior Programme Manager, NHSE QTT and Kate Brooker, Independent Social Worker, NHSE QTT to present to the Board. The three presentations (pages 15 – 70 in agenda) outlined the range of activity the National Health Service England (NHSE) had been undertaking concerning children's mental health, the wider activity being undertaken by the NHS, alongside specific programmes of work; the Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism Inpatient Quality Transformation Programme and the Framework for Integrated Care were discussed.

Members comments:
- A concern was raised regarding the work of the Vanguards being a small part of the overall need of the country and there was a request for information on how NHSE would see this roll out, alongside the local mental health hubs and the recruitment issues being faced.
- A member acknowledged the large role domestic abuse plays in mental health related family interventions.
- There was a concern raised regarding the effect of the closure of youth services and what is being done to address this.
- A member welcomed better partnership working to rethink how to support young people, however noted the presentation referred to a lot of services that are underfunded and barely exist in some places.
- It was raised that it would be difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the Vanguards and the transferability of the desired outcomes to another area.
- A member requested information on if there is work being done at a national level to provide sufficient provision and secure units to reduce councils' placements competition and reduce costs.
- It was highlighted that local authorities and the third sector have an important role in tackling health inequalities by providing early intervention to marginalized communities.
- A member encouraged a focus on early intervention and working with local authorities on mental wellbeing to increase prevention.
- There was a concern raised regarding how to increase the profile of children's issues within Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs).

NHSE responded to comments:
- It was acknowledged that the scale of the challenge is large, and it would be a long process before need can be fully met. Sustainable funding and a focus on joining up sectors and partners is the focus going forward to be able to meet need.
- The Vanguards are of a small scale due to funding currently. The Framework to Integrated Care is evidence based, thus needed to be tested to understand if it works within the community and the system. Each Vanguard is being evaluated individually, which will provide the evidence base to make a case for wider roll out.
- The Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

colleagues have started a scoping exercise on youth workers, looking at what provision is available and how it can be improved – which NHSE will start feeding into with the results of the Vanguards.

- NHSE and the Department for Education (DfE) are doing a joint piece of work to help address high-cost placements and understand how to support this continued work by looking at Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding (DoLS) and complex needs pathways for young people.
- There is further investment in the secure estate both across justice and welfare. New and secure children's homes are being developed in London and the West Midlands. The work of the Vanguards is to provide early intervention to stop the high need of placements.
- Experts from Sonnet Advisory are looking into how impact can be measured in the system and how a system can change to be trauma-informed to support these young people.
- Colleagues encouraged a united voice to increase the emphasis on early intervention and prevention and increase the profile of children in relevant Boards.

Decision

The Board noted and commented on the presentations from NHS England colleagues on activities taken related to children's mental health to date and considered areas of discussion listed under paragraph 23 and the next steps.

Actions

- NHSE to share information about the interventions, for instance the work of the DoLS for Member feedback to encourage an ongoing dialogue between the LGA and NHSE.
- Officers to invite NHSE to future task group meeting and back to the Board eventually.

4 Isos Partnership - Effective SEND System

The Chair invited Ben Bryant, Director of Isos Partnership to provide an update on the LGA/CCN-commissioned research on what a financial sustainable system that meets the needs of children and young people with SEND looks like.

Members comments:
- It was raised that good practice needs to be shared to help councils control their budgets, as most councils are overspent due to the huge increase in requests for SEND referrals and transport.
- A member highlighted the need for a positive focus on the vision and outcomes rather than a budgetary led agenda. Also, there was a request for a re-evaluation of the measurements of success for children with SEND, for example an emphasis on developing good social relationships rather than high GCSE grades.
- Information was requested on where Isos Partnership see the role of the special school sector in the vision of the new school system.

Ben Bryant responded to comments:
- Good practice does have a role to play, however it is the fundamental incentives and design of the system that needs to change.
- There is a vision to provide a positive focus, to reduce the need to segregate children with SEND and instead calibrate a system within mainstream schools to meet the need of children with SEND.
- The role of the special school sector in the vision for a new SEND system is not known yet - there are many factors to consider.

Decision

The Board noted the work undertaken by the Isos Partnership on this project to date and provided feedback on the findings to date and proposed next steps. A SEND workshop will be coordinated to provide Members with further opportunity to feedback.

Actions
- Officers to share slides.
- Officers to coordinate a SEND workshop.

5 Foundations - Children's Social Care and Early Help Practice Guides

The Chair invited James Somerville, Senior Policy Adviser at Foundations to present his item which outlined that as part of its children's social care reform programme the DfE had commissioned *Foundations – the What Works Centre for Children and Families*, to produce practice guides to set out what the evidence says about how to achieve the outcomes in the Children's Social Care National Framework.

Members comments**:**
- A member requested within the practice guide a section specific to councillors and what they can do to help – to increase accessibility and save time.
- A member asked how the voice of the child would be incorporated into the guides.
- There was a request for councillors to contribute to the guides.

James Somerville responded to Member comments:
- James Somerville welcomed the councillor specific resource. The What Works Centre was speaking to children's services leaders to understand their use of evidence to help inform the creation of better guides. The guides would be accessible and searchable on a website.
- The voice of children will be included through research questions in all the systematic reviews around perspective of beneficiaries and secondly, each practice guides have an advisory group including people with lived experience.
- James will investigate the possibility of councillors being invited to the practice guide advisory groups.

Decision
The Board provided feedback to the Foundations What Works Centre on what would be most helpful in the new practice guides to support children's social care and early help services.

Actions
- Officers to share slides.
- Members to share any further feedback particularly to the questions posed on the last slide of the presentation.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Louise Gittins	Cheshire West and Chester Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Patricia Bradwell OBE	Lincolnshire County Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE	Portsmouth City Council
	Cllr Jon Hubbard	Wiltshire Council
Members	Cllr Victoria Cusworth	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Adam Ellison	South Tyneside Council
	Cllr Fiona Venner	Leeds City Council
	Cllr Imran Khan	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
	Cllr Mili Patel	Brent Council
	Cllr Garry Bridges	Manchester City Council
	Cllr Tony Ball	Essex County Council
	Cllr Roger Gough	Kent County Council
	Cllr Laura Mayes	Wiltshire Council
	Cllr Cordelia Law	Torbay Council
Apologies	Cllr Anne Dorrian	Boston Borough Council
	Cllr Annabel Wilkinson	North Yorkshire Council
	Cllr Phillippa Williamson	Lancashire County Council
In Attendance	David Lockwood	Head of CYP and Perinatal Mental Health, NHSE
	Andrew Nichols-Clarke	Senior Development Lead, Health and Justice Children Programme, NHSE
	Yvonne Carey	Senior Programme Manager, NHSE QTT
	Kate Brooker	Independent Social Worker, NHSE QTT
	Ben Bryant	Director, Isos Partnership
	James Somerville	Senior Policy Adviser, Foundations
	Cllr Mark Sutton	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Robert Flatley	Derbyshire County Council
	Cllr Leigh Redman	Somerset County Council
	Cllr Joshua Garfield	Newham London Borough
	Cllr Rachel Massey	Rochdale Borough Council
	Cllr Dine Romero	Bath & North East Somerset Council

Children and Young People Board

12 March 2024

NLCBF - Support for care leavers

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Summary

The Children and Young People's Board has expressed an interest in hearing directly from young people with care experience. Hannah McCowen, Manager of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF) will be attending the meeting of the Board to update on the forum's work. Hannah will be joined by three care-experienced young people from the NLCBF's Young People's Benchmarking Forum who will discuss the key issues that are important to them.

LGA Plan Theme: Putting people first

Recommendation(s)

That the Children and Young People Board considers the presentations from the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum and young people with care experience, and Catch 22, and reflect how they can be taken forward in the LGA's work programme.

Contact details

Contact officer: Megan Edwards

Position: Adviser

Email: megan.edwards@local.gov.uk

NLCBF – Support for care leavers

Background

1. The Chair of the LGA, Councillor Shaun Davies, announced at the LGA Annual Conference that one of his priorities for 2023-24 is corporate parenting, and in particular how the LGA can support improved outcomes for care leavers and others with care experience. This was also discussed at Executive Advisory Board on 20 July 2023.

2. The Children and Young People Board are leading on the work programme to improve support for care leavers. Work is taking place across three strands:

    2.1 The LGA as an employer: training for all staff, guaranteed interviews for those with care experience where minimum criteria are met for roles (subject to legal advice); specialist support during the recruitment process, and a ring-fenced supported internship for care leavers.

    2.2 The LGA's work to support and improve local government: dedicated outreach and support for care experienced graduates applying to the National Graduate Development Scheme; best practice guidance and case studies for councils; lobbying government for national changes to provide better outcomes for care leavers and ensure councils have the support and resources to provide the best support for care leavers; training for councillors and officers on corporate parenting, including across the 'corporate core'.

    2.3 The LGA as a convener: working with the Care Leaver Covenant to promote their work and encourage sign ups; communications campaign to raise awareness; Work with LAMIT (Local Authorities' Mutual Investment Trust) and CCLA (Churches, Charities and Local Authorities Investment Management) to publicise their work to support care leavers.

3. Both Executive Advisory Board and the Children and Young People Board were clear that the programme should be informed by those with care experience, and the CYP Board have expressed an interest in hearing directly from young people with care experience.

4. Ensuring that the voices of those with care experience directly influence this work is vital to ensure the impact and relevance of the programme. Officers have already engaged with a range of organisations representing those with care experience, including the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, Become and the Care Leavers' Association to understand key priorities for those with care experience. Work has also been informed by research and reports developed with care leavers. Members of the CYP Board have also attended meetings with care leavers to speak with them directly.

5. The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF), who are attending the board meeting, are a forum of over 125 local authority leaving care teams in England that work together to improve outcomes for young people leaving care. The NLCBF runs events throughout the year for leaving care practitioners and managers which focus on sharing good practice, hearing the voices of care experienced young people and sharing the latest policy and research updates. All NLCBF member local authorities have access to these events, many of which can be accessed online as well as in person. The Forum is run by the charity Catch 22.

6. The Young People's Benchmarking Forum forms a key part of the NLCBF's work. It is a forum of care-experienced young people that ensures the voices of those with care experience are heard and gives them a direct role in shaping the decisions and priorities of the NLCBF.

Outcomes for those with care experience

7. Many people with care experience leave care and go on to happy, fulfilling lives. Care experienced people told the Independent Review of Children's Social Care that it was important to recognise that, while a lot of policy and media attention is given to the disproportionate numbers of care experienced people who experience negative outcomes, such outcomes are not inevitable and care can be a "positive, transformational and lifesaving experience". For example, there is evidence that longer-term care can be a protective factor in children's educational outcomes. One of the aims of the LGA's campaign is to emphasise a more positive narrative around those with care experience.

8. However, by understanding where those with care experience are more likely to experience negative outcomes than their peers, it is possible to identify opportunities to address these issues. The Care Review highlights several key areas where government, business and society can play a role in supporting care experienced people:

    8.1 An estimated 26 per cent of the homeless population have care experience. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the prison population in England have spent time in care.

    8.2 Four in ten (41 per cent) of care leavers aged 19-21 are not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to 12 per cent of all other young people of the same age.

    8.3 Adults who spent time in care between 1971-2001 were 70 per cent more likely to die prematurely than those who did not.

    8.4 Six per cent of care leavers report having no-one at all to provide emotional support, and nearly one in ten only had support from their leaving care worker.

What care leavers say is important to them

9. The following list has been compiled from a variety of organisations (including the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, the Care Leavers National Movement, Barnardo's and the Children's Commissioner) that have worked with care leavers to identify key support that they would like to see, noting that young people would like to see support offered to all care leavers, including those who are living outside of their local authority area.

Issue and asks from care leavers	Examples of good practice
Finance: support managing household bills; cold weather allowance; council tax exemptions; savings; higher rate of universal credit for under 25s	Winter fuel payments in Gateshead; paying council tax for those living out of authority in Doncaster
Housing: priority access to affordable housing; Staying Put and Staying Close; access to a 'handyman' service and a maintenance fund; access to guarantor schemes for to	Rent guarantor schemes (e.g. in Devon); home improvements via EQUANS
Travel: support with the cost of getting to appointments, work and staying connected with family and friends; driving lessons.	Greater Manchester free bus travel; Cornwall free bus travel; free driving lessons and paid for licenses in Medway; bicycle packages in Reading
Health: timely access to mental health services; access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services until 25 where necessary to avoid moving into adult support too early; paid-for prescriptions; NHS dentists; optician appointments.	Dedicated mental health worker in Lincolnshire; paid prescriptions in Oldham
Digital connection: devices and access to WiFi and data to connect with health services, apply for jobs and stay connected to friends and family.	TalkTalk free broadband and data for active job seekers; Greater Manchester free data, devices and digital skills training
Leisure: gym passes, including for a friend to go with them; funds for leisure activities.	Cornwall Culture Card; free activities in leisure centres in Dudley; Christmas/festival allowance in Cheshire West and Chester
Education, employment and training: guaranteed interviews for apprenticeship roles; "work wardrobes"; financial support until a	Year-round accommodation at the University of Kent; interview clothing through Smart Works or Suited and Booted; financial support between

first pay check clears; education bursaries up to the age of 25 (these are currently available for those aged 16-19).	benefits ending and first wage payment in Cheshire West and Chester;
Practical support: starter packs for new homes or going to university; mentoring or buddying schemes; clothing allowance; passports.	Clothing allowances in Kent; setting up home start packs and TV licences in Northamptonshire; coaching for care leavers in Southwark
Offers for specific groups of care leavers: including care experienced parents, former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, young people with additional needs, those involved with the criminal justice system and the LGBTQ+ community	Support for care experienced parents in Hertfordshire; building community for former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Leeds;
Accessing records: including support through the process.	Access to Records training by the Rees Foundation
Post 25 support: to avoid a 'cliff edge' or support.	"Always here" support for those with care experience beyond 25 in North Yorkshire

Implications for Wales

10. Children's social care is devolved in Wales however learning from the programme can be shared with the Welsh Local Government Association.

Financial Implications

11. This programme will be delivered within existing budgets, and has been prioritised within this Board's work programme.

Equalities implications

12. This programme is focussed on reducing inequalities for those with care experience.

13. Around one quarter of care leavers are former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Specific consideration will be given to how the specific needs of this group are recognised in the programme of work.

Next steps

14. It is proposed that the board considers the presentation from the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum and young people from the Young People's Benchmarking Forum, and reflects on the issues raised. Areas for discussion may include:

14.1. What are the priority issues for care leavers.

14.2. How would they like to see these addressed and support improved at both the national and local level.

14.3. How can these issues, suggestions or proposals be taken forward within the LGA's work programme to improve support for care leavers.

14.4. How can the LGA continue to work with, and support the work of, the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum.

London Violence Reduction Unit – inclusive education charter

Purpose of Report

For information.

Summary

Colleagues from the London Violence Reduction Unit (LVRU) will be giving a presentation on the London Inclusion Charter, which has been developed to improve levels of school attendance.

LGA Plan Theme: Putting people first

Recommendation(s)

That the Children and Young People Board note the work being undertaken by the London Violence Reduction Unit and consider how it could be extended to other areas and complement existing council work to increase levels of school attendance.

Contact details

Contact officer: Clive Harris

Position: Senior Policy Adviser

Phone no: 020 7664 3207

Email: Clive.harris@local.gov.uk

London Violence Reduction Unit – inclusive education charter

Background

1. The London Violence Reduction Unit (LVRU), set up the Mayor of London, has led a partnership approach to develop an inclusion charter for London. It is informed by the voices of young people, schools, parents and carers, councils and education specialists through research and discussions. The LVRU are inviting London councils, schools and all education settings, and young people, to sign up to the charter and promote and embed its four principles of inclusion; embedding equity and diversity, students as active citizens, being adaptable and reflective and looking beyond academic achievement.

2. The inclusive education charter is included at Annex 1, alongside a set of slides that will inform discussion at the Board meeting (Annex 2), a headline report on research into belonging and safety in London schools (Annex 3) and an example charter created by the LVRU Young People's Action Group (Annex 4).

Implications for Wales

3. There are no implications for Wales arising from this report.

Financial Implications

4. There are no financial implications for the LGA arising from this report.

Equalities implications

5. Embedding equality and diversity is one of the four principles that underpin the inclusive education charter.

Next steps

6. That the Board consider how the LVRU's work could be extended to other areas and complement existing council work to increase levels of school attendance.

LONDON'S
INCLUSION CHARTER

⊘ Embedding Equity and Diversity
⊘ Students as Active Citizens
⊘ Being Adapatable and Reflective
⊘ Beyond Academic Achievement

VRU | MAYOR OF LONDON

London's Inclusion Charter

We know that children and young people are safer in school. That is why driving up attendance and playing our part in tackling rising suspensions, absenteeism and exclusions is at the heart of the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit's (VRU) prevention work.

Since 2018/19, London has seen a 14 per cent rise in suspensions and a 106 per cent increase in persistent absenteeism. This has led to the equivalent of 1,430 children each day having lost learning in 2021/22 - up 71 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels in 18/19.*

Evidence shows there is a correlation between children with a history of either suspension or exclusion from school and violence. An Ofsted report on knife crime showed that children excluded from school are twice as likely to carry a knife, while data also highlights that almost one in two of the prison population were excluded as children*.

We need to make a London-wide aspiration and commitment for change for the benefit of young people to keep them safe and to support them to thrive in school. This must be backed up by investment to support schools and the promotion of good practice already happening across the capital.

This is a big ambition that no one agency can achieve on its own.

This is why the VRU, set up by the Mayor of London, has led a partnership approach to develop London's Inclusion Charter. It is informed by the voices of young people, schools, parents and carers, local authorities and education specialists through research and discussions.

We are inviting local authorities, schools and all education settings, and young people, to sign up to the Charter and promote and embed its four principles of inclusion.

⊘ **The Charter** prioritises education that is fully inclusive, fair and available to all. It's what we heard from headteachers, education professionals, young people, parents and carers and local authorities, when we began this journey at a VRU conference in July 2022.

⊘ **The Charter** recognises that teachers, school staff, governors and trustees want the very best for the children and young people in their care and the Charter will work to empower and enable all those involved in the education of London's children and young people.

⊘ **The Charter** promotes and invests in inclusive practices. It will tackle stark disproportionalities and work with schools to embed anti-racism across education. Children's rights and the experience of teachers is at its heart.

⊘ **The Charter** shines a light on promising practice and celebrates inclusion already flourishing in many parts of London. By working in partnership with schools and local authorities already demonstrating inclusive practice, we will all work to increase young people's sense of belonging and safety so that they can thrive.

⊘ **The Charter** is backed up by investment in staff and schools, building on the professional commitment and dedication to supporting children and young people following the challenges presented by the pandemic. This includes £1.4 million investment to provide a universal offer of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award programme free to all state-funded schools and education settings in London.

⊘ **The Charter** is a partnership approach with young people and schools, developed to further embed inclusive and accessible education and to prevent escalation points in behaviour.

⊘ **The Charter** seeks to help tackle the causes of all forms of exclusion, including suspension, managed moves, and rising levels of absenteeism, through a set of agreed guiding principles around inclusion.

> The Charter should not be seen as advocating for a zero-tolerance approach to exclusion or suspension as there will be times when it is necessary for the safety of children and staff. Headteachers and schools must have the right to decide.

The Charter's four principles:

Embedding Equity and Diversity

Students as Active Citizens

Being Adaptable and Reflective

Beyond Academic Achievement

These were informed by VRU research, carried out by the University of Bath, which captured the views of nearly 4,000 school children, parents and school staff across London.

We are asking you to:

We are inviting local authorities, young people, schools and all education settings to sign-up to support the inclusive principles in London's Inclusion Charter.

THAT MEANS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES:

⊘ Adopting the four guiding principles of London's Inclusion Charter.

⊘ Work with schools so they take up the free offer of support through UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award. You can do that here.

⊘ Creating a Child Rights Schools Steering Group and network with other boroughs.

THAT MEANS FOR SCHOOLS AND ALL EDUCATION SETTINGS IN LONDON:

⊘ Adopting the four guiding principles of London's Inclusion Charter.

⊘ Working with your local authority to take up the free offer of support through UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award.

⊘ Work with the VRU to demonstrate and showcase inclusive practice.

THAT MEANS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:

⊘ Learning more about participation in school and your rights.

⊘ Create a charter based on our four guiding principles that works in your school or setting.

⊘ Watch our video by the VRU's Young People's Action Group to learn how they went about creating their own Charter. You can watch that here.

What the VRU commits to do:

PUTTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS FIRST:

⊘ Education is key to a child's development, forming the basis of their ability to hone communication skills, develop critical thinking, and empower them later in life. The right to education is entrenched in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: without the opportunity to learn, children are more likely to be trapped in cycles of poor health, poverty, and exploitation (UNICEF).

⊘ The VRU has invested £1.4 million in a new partnership with UNICEF UK to ensure that from February 2024, the Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) will be free for all state-funded education settings in London for the next four years. This will include new schools as well as schools already engaging with RRSA. UNICEF UK will provide a team of professional advisers who will work with local authorities across London to provide support and advice.

⊘ Through the Charter, access to all the RRSA resources from UNICEF UK will be free. You can learn more and apply here.

ENCOURAGING INVESTMENT IN INCLUSIVE PRACTICES:

⊘ Enabling schools and their staff to embed inclusive practices is essential in meeting the needs of every child in their community.

⊘ We will continue to support boroughs, learning partnerships and Multi-Academy Trusts to apply for funding in evidence-based inclusive practices in schools.

⊘ You can learn about working with the VRU and future funding opportunities here.

SUPPORTING AND PROMOTING LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS:

⊘ We all know that schools cannot be expected to do this work on their own. Partnership and collaboration are key. Many community and third sector organisations already work closely with their local schools and are valued members of school communities.

⊘ The VRU will bring boroughs together, to enable schools to share, learn and develop through events and networks that spotlight, and promote inclusive approaches. We will work with boroughs to develop a process which is accessible, aligns to the priorities and has measurable impact.

⊘ You can find more about how to access examples of promising practice here and through the hashtag **#LondonInclusionCharter** on social media channels.

Our four guiding principles of inclusion

1 Embedding Equity and Diversity

This is about integrating approaches to ensure students from all backgrounds feel welcome and valued in school, taking into account different cultures, faiths, abilities, aptitudes, attainment levels, gender identifications and neurodiversity. Recognising the disproportionate impact of exclusion on communities in London, this principle involves creating opportunities to explore and value our differences, challenging stereotypes, racism and discrimination and taking action to ensure that they are tackled.

Examples include:
- *External events for families and the community, such as celebrating world cultures and spiritual festivities.*
- *Curriculum topics such as learning about highly successful dyslexic figures, women who changed the world, black authors.*
- *Taking time to discuss difference in learning styles, recognising and encouraging students to value their unique strengths and those of others.*
- *Developing neuro-inclusive school practices to ensure the needs of all are supported and met.*

2 Students as Active Citizens

This is about collaborating to create a sense of shared responsibility and accountability for the whole school community. It involves working together with young people, school staff, families and local communities on issues that matter to them.

This principle requires adults listening to young people and the community, before taking concrete actions to respond to these issues in shaping school policies, activities and the learning environment. It is about young people shaping and actively participating in the life of the school. Ensuring that pupil, parent and community representation groups fully reflect the community is also key.

Examples include:
- *Forums to hear young people's views on matters such as school uniform, trips, use of school spaces and policies.*
- *Feeding back on actions taken, such as 'you asked for…we did,' displays and noticeboards.*
- *Student responsibility opportunities, such as Parent Governor Association groups, eco-committees, student council, or peer mentors.*

3 Being Adaptable and Reflective

This is about creating a supportive culture where educators are empowered and enabled to innovate, experiment and refine their practices to meet the diverse needs of all. Enabling staff to continually reflect on and adapt their practice and provision ensures that young people can access opportunities to realise their goals.

This involves developing reflective and adaptable school systems and practices in relation to learning, behaviour, or the way that school staff communicate with students, families and each other. It's also one way in which schools can ensure that equity and diversity are embedded, by making adjustments to support specific young people.

Examples include:
- *Fostering a culture where staff feel safe to test and trial new teaching approaches through offering professional development training.*
- *Adjusting routines to suit learners' needs, for instance through movement breaks.*
- *Offering different curriculum pathways which better meet the needs of all young people, keeping a focus on positive outcomes, such as achievement.*

4 Beyond Academic Achievement

This is about enabling young people to achieve by giving them opportunities to flourish. This means providing experiences to develop all their skills, talents and abilities, be they academic, creative, physical, or interpersonal. It's not just about what happens in lessons, but also the activities the school offers outside of lessons and the opportunities for stimulating trips and experiences.

It is also about having high expectations for all young people, supporting them to form high but realistic expectations of themselves and to know and value both their strengths and weaknesses.

Examples include:
- ☑ *Prioritising trips, activities and speakers that enable students to experience new places and viewpoints.*
- ☑ *Removing barriers (be they physical, social or economic) to ensure that opportunities and experiences can be accessed by all.*
- ☑ *Celebrating the successes of all young people.*
- ☑ *Monitoring and tracking engagement to ensure they are maximising the benefit, including vulnerable groups such as young carers, looked after children and those from particular ethnic groups.*

You can learn more about the research carried out by University of Bath here.

Our research with the University of Bath highlighted that the spirit in which the principles are implemented is of critical importance. Participants recognised that schools' engagement with the four principles could be on a continuum, with a tokenistic acknowledgement at one end and a more holistic, whole-school approach at the other.

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London's Violence Reduction Unit

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LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER

Since 2018/19, London has seen a 14% rise in suspensions and a 106% increase in persistent absenteeism. This has led to the equivalent of 1,430 children each day having lost learning in 2021/22 - up 71 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels in 18/19.

The Charter prioritises education that is fair and accessible to all. Children's rights and teachers' experiences are at the heart of the Charter.

It is backed up by investment in staff and schools, building on the professional commitment and dedication to supporting children and young people following the challenges presented by the pandemic.

This includes £1.4 million investment to provide a universal offer of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award programme free to all state-funded schools and education settings in London.

Partnership and collaboration are key.

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RESEARCH: UNIVERSITY OF BATH

Between November 2023 and January 2024 we asked

"What really matters to help students feel a sense of belonging and safety at school?"

We heard from:

32 London boroughs

3473 student surveys

179 educator surveys

145 parent/carer surveys

87 students in focus groups

19 school leader interviews

38 primary schools

25 secondary schools

13 PRUs and APs

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RESEARCH FINDINGS

Do you feel a sense of belonging at school?

- **66%** of primary-aged students and **56%** of secondary-aged students – 'yes, usually' or 'yes'
- **27%** of secondary-aged students and **24%** of primary-aged students – 'yes a bit' or 'I don't know.'
- **5%** of primary-aged students, **8%** of secondary-aged students – 'no'
- **4%** did not want to answer

What stops you feeling a sense of belonging and safety?

- **44%** of secondary-aged students and **39%** of primary-aged students – **feeling under pressure**
- **36%** of primary-aged students and **27%** of secondary-aged students – **not feeling able to be myself in school**
- **43%** of primary-aged students and **30%** of secondary-aged students – **worrying about bullying (or unkind behaviour)**
- **28%** of secondary-aged students – **teachers not understanding me**

What helps you feel safe in school?

- **69%** of primary-aged students – **teachers being respectful to all students**
- **67%** of primary-aged students – **knowing teachers will stop all kinds of bullying or unkind behaviour**
- **67%** of secondary-aged students – **no threat of physical violence at school**
- **67%** of primary-aged students and **53%** of secondary-aged students – **having school rules that are fair**
- **59%** of primary-aged students – **teachers accepting me for who I am**

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FOCUS GROUPS

"in our school, we're really good at including people and we have loads of people from different countries and backgrounds and teachers talk to us a lot about that and I think it just really helps."

PRIMARY-AGED STUDENT

"if you're not treated with the same level of respect, how are you going to form positive relationships with everyone."

SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

"I feel like they care more about what I'm wearing than what's going on and why so worried about my jacket?"

SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

"some teachers are really good at picking up on if you're upset or uncomfortable... and come up and check on you."

PRIMARY-AGED STUDENT

"I think there's a larger range of types of people than what schools expect."

SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

"a lot of people are just kind of constantly scared the whole time, they don't really feel safe in themselves because they're taught that, the grade is going to be the thing that determines their entire future."

SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

Agenda Item 4

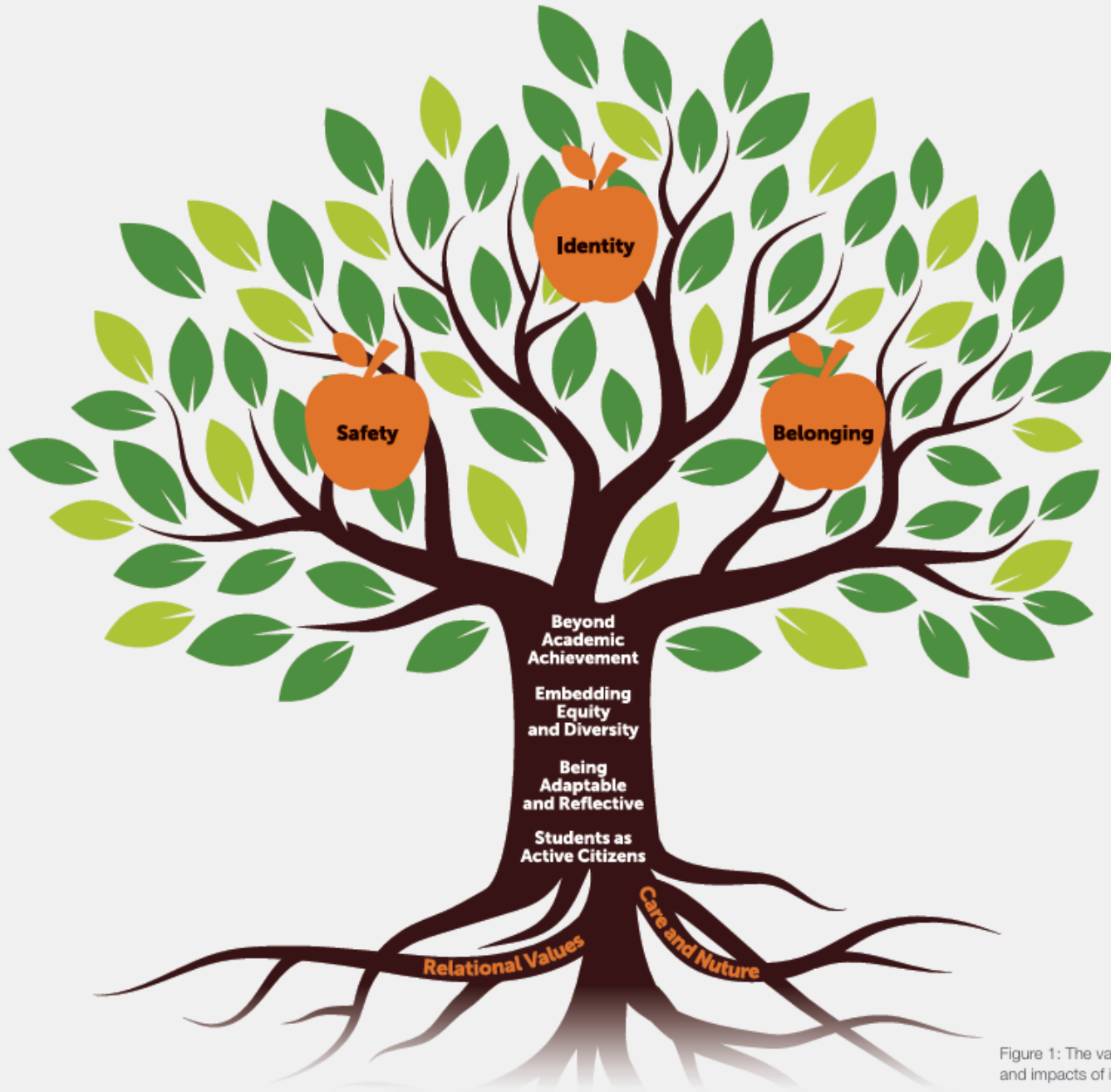VRU | MAYOR OF LONDON
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Figure 1: The values, principles and impacts of inclusion

A sense of belonging, safety and identity

from the four guiding principles

underpinned by relational values and care and nurture.

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LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

❖ **Embedding Equity and Diversity**

❖ **Students as Active Citizens**

❖ **Being Adaptable and Reflective**

❖ **Beyond Academic Achievement**

- Our role is not to tell schools, boroughs or trusts what to do – it's to influence and promote change.

- That means working in partnership to promote the guiding principles to support greater inclusion across schools and services in London.

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LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

❖ **Embedding Equity and Diversity**

- integrating approaches to ensure students from all backgrounds feel welcome and valued in school;

- taking into account different cultures, faiths, abilities, aptitudes, attainment levels, gender identifications and neurodiversity;

- recognising the disproportionate impact of exclusion on communities in London;

- creating opportunities to explore and value our differences, challenging stereotypes, racism and discrimination and taking action to ensure that they are tackled.

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LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

❖ **Students as Active Citizens**

- creating a sense of shared responsibility for the whole school community. It involves working together with young people, school staff, families and local communities on issues that matter to them;

- requires adults listening to and acting on the views of young people and the community;

- young people shaping and actively participating to the life of the school, such as, policies which impact on them;

- ensuring that groups/committees fully represent the school community.

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LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

❖ **Being Adaptable and Reflective**

- supportive culture where staff are empowered and enabled to innovate, experiment and refine their practices to meet the diverse needs of all;

- adjusting routines to suit learners' needs, for instance through movement breaks;

- offering different curriculum pathways to better meet the needs of all young people, keeping a focus on positive outcomes, such as achievement.

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LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

❖**Beyond Academic Achievement**

- enabling young people to achieve by giving them opportunities to flourish;

- having high expectations for all young people and celebrating their successes;

- removing barriers to ensure that opportunities and experiences can be accessed by all;

- monitoring and tracking engagement to ensure they are maximising the benefit, including vulnerable groups such as young carers, looked after children and those from particular ethnic groups.

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LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER: OUR ASK OF YOU

Embedding Equity and Diversity

Being Adaptable and Reflective

Beyond Academic Achievement

Students as Active Citizens

For local authorities

- adopt the guiding principles and use them to support your policies and practice

- set up a Child Rights Schools Steering Group to promote children's rights across the borough, including take up of the offer of Rights Respecting Schools Awards from UNICEF

- work with VRU and your schools to share promising practice

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LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER: OUR ASK OF YOU

Embedding Equity and Diversity

Being Adaptable and Reflective

Beyond Academic Achievement

Students as Active Citizens

For schools

- adopt the guiding principles and use them to support your policies and practice

- consider taking up the offer of free access to Rights Respecting Schools Awards with UNICEF

- work with VRU and your borough to share promising practice

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LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER: OUR ASK OF YOU

Embedding Equity and Diversity

Being Adaptable and Reflective

Beyond Academic Achievement

Students as Active Citizens

For young people

- work with your school using the guiding principles to develop a Charter for your school community

- engage positively with your school to explore ways in which you can influence the life of the school;

- learn more about participation and your rights as set out in UNCRC.

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SHINING A LIGHT ON PROMISING PRACTICE

The Charter celebrates inclusion already flourishing in many schools across London.

Sharing examples through social media #LondonsInclusionCharter

We want to increase the reach of Promising Practice to enable more schools to be able to share their work under each of the guiding principles.

London's Inclusion Charter — VRU | MAYOR OF LONDON

Spotlight on Ark Schools

Focusing on improving inclusion

About us: Ark Schools is a multi-academy trust operating a network of 39 schools in London, Birmingham, Portsmouth, and Hastings. Ark is committed to ensuring that every child, regardless of background or prior attainment, achieves highly enough to have real choices at age 18. 43% of Ark's students are eligible for free school meals, 16% are SEND and 46% are EAL.

The need: The post-covid climate has created a 'perfect storm' for schools, exacerbating challenges around poor mental health, attendance, behaviour and undiagnosed SEND Needs.

Establishing a new role: Ark Schools established a new central role in September 2022, a Director of Pastoral and Inclusion. This role has brought together the areas of attendance, behaviour, SEND, safeguarding, mental health and Personal Development under one strategic umbrella for the first time as a network.

Developing a team: Creating this role has meant that a wider Pastoral and Inclusion team could be formed with the pre-existing Head of Safeguarding and Head of Inclusion roles. As such, the network has been able to provide a model for schools as to how to triangulate inclusion work, acknowledging these key areas of school provision fundamentally interact and impact on one another and should not be seen in isolation.

Creating a Personal Development framework: A core part of the network's drive on attendance and behaviour has been supporting schools in prioritising the development of the whole child, providing opportunities for all students that build a sense of safety, purpose, joy and belonging. In order to maintain our focus on this work, the network made the decision to elevate Personal Development as a strategic objective. A key part of this work has been developing a Personal Development framework, which has allowed schools to situate and assess their current provision for students beyond the academic. The framework mandates our foundational expectations for Personal Development provision, and provides guiding resources and support for schools to implement successfully.

The work so far:
Leadership
- Created learning networks for Secondary Vice Principals with responsibility for Pastoral and Inclusion, Senior Mental Health Leads, Extra-curricular leads and Personal Development leads. These networks meet regularly to receive update training and share practice. This is in addition to the SENCo and DSL learning networks that already existed.

Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Facilitated training for all DSLs and DDSLs in the network on Trauma Informed Practice through Trauma Informed Schools UK.
- Established a MAT partnership with Place2Be the leading children's mental health charity that works directly with schools and students in supporting a whole school approach. Place2Be facilitated our key note session and training at the annual Network Day in October 2023, delivering training to all Ark staff on developmental trauma and emotional regulation.
- Ensured that every school in the network has a Senior Mental Health Lead who receive termly training from Place2Be on topics such as Emotionally Based School Avoidance, SEMH, and LGBTQ+ and mental health.

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WHAT NEXT: FOUNDATIONS OF SUPPORT

- **Children's Rights:**

  - Boroughs are setting up their Child Rights Schools Steering Groups and more schools are registering for UNICEF's RRSA - free for 4 years.

- **Investing in inclusive practices:**

  - The VRU currently invests in programmes to support improving inclusive practices (Inclusive and Nurturing Schools; Difference Matters).

  - We want to encourage and support further investment in inclusive practices, working alongside local authorities including investing in the professional learning of staff.

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WHAT NEXT: FOUNDATIONS OF SUPPORT

- **Learning Partnerships:**

  - To continue sharing promising practice and supporting partnerships the VRU will be facilitating networks of learning

  - The VRU recognise schools cannot do this work alone and will continue to support and invest in wider partnerships to support schools (PRU/AP Mentoring, Stronger Futures, Talk Matters, and the Parent Carer Champion Network).

- **Research and impact:**

  - Full research report and a strategic guide for boroughs and school leaders will be published by the University of Bath.

  - Facilitating an inclusion research network for research partners.

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Belonging, identity and safety in London schools

Research and Policy Briefing on behalf of London's Violence Reduction Unit

February 2024

Ceri Brown, Alison Douthwaite, Michael Donnelly and Yusuf Olaniyan

"Belonging is knowing that you're seen, knowing that you're noticed, knowing that you matter"

School Improvement Leader, Multi Academy Trust

Executive Summary

With rates of persistent absence and school suspension rising in London and across the country, understanding the drivers of inclusion is a key educational priority. This University of Bath report shares finding on students' views about school belonging and safety, pointing to both enablers and barriers.

Findings highlighted the fundamental importance of a secure sense of belonging and safety to students' inclusion in education. Students identified respect, fairness and being listened to as vital features of the caring, nurturing relationships needed to feel included in school. Students' sense of identity was fundamental to their feelings of belonging, both in terms of feeling able to be themselves and having opportunities to explore and develop the skills and abilities they felt proud of.

Key barriers to belonging and safety were also relational. Students highlighted pressure around academic attainment that undermined their sense of feeling known or noticed as individuals. Relationships were seen to be the central foundation through which belonging is generated, underpinned by values of care, and nurture.

Introduction

In November 2023, the University of Bath was commissioned by London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) to undertake a piece of research on inclusion and belonging in schools across all London boroughs.
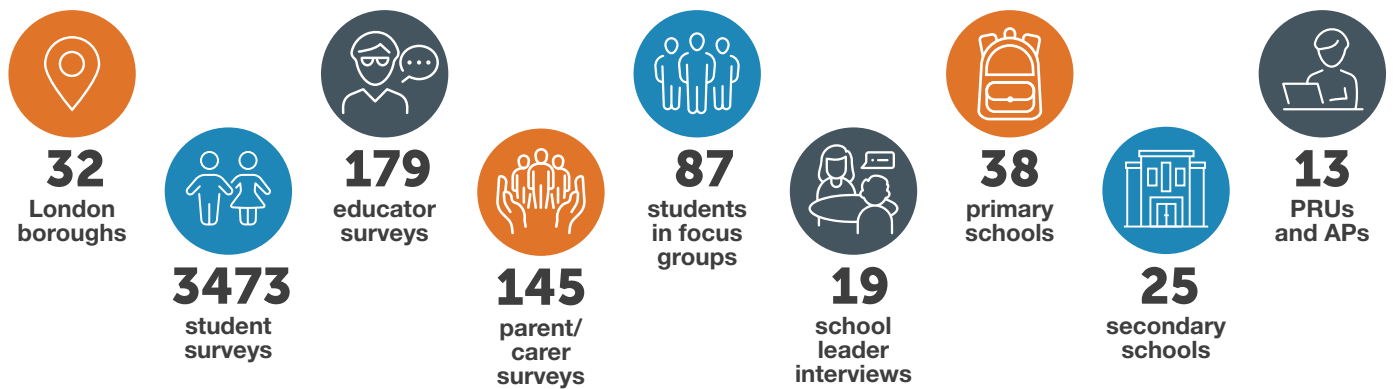
The primary aim was to capture students' perspectives on what they need from education to feel the sense of belonging and safety necessary to be included and succeed at school. Equally important were the views of education leaders, practitioners and parents on what schools need to be more inclusive. The research informed key principles for inclusive education that led to the VRU's development of London's Inclusion Charter.

Our findings point to a set of principles, values and impacts underpinning school inclusion. This report starts by sharing the findings from students, before introducing a model of the four principles, the values that enable these to be effectively implemented, and the impacts for students of belonging, safety, identity building and affirmation, central to *London's Inclusion Charter.*

Between November 2023 and January 2024 we asked

"What really matters to help students feel a sense of belonging and safety at school?"

We heard from:

32 London boroughs

3473 student surveys

179 educator surveys

145 parent/ carer surveys

87 students in focus groups

19 school leader interviews

38 primary schools

25 secondary schools

13 PRUs and APs

Key Findings

Do you feel a sense of belonging at school?

- **66%** of primary-aged students and **56%** of secondary-aged students – 'yes, usually' or 'yes'
- **27%** of secondary-aged students and **24%** of primary-aged students – 'yes a bit' or 'I don't know.'
- **5%** of primary-aged students, **8%** of secondary-aged *students – 'no'
- **4%** did not want to answer

What helps you feel safe in school?

- **69%** of primary-aged students – **teachers being respectful to all students**
- **67%** of primary-aged students – **knowing teachers will stop all kinds of bullying or unkind behaviour**
- **67%** of secondary-aged students – **no threat of physical violence at school**
- **67%** of primary-aged students and **53%** of secondary-aged students – **having school rules that are fair**
- **59%** of primary-aged students – **teachers accepting me for who I am**

What helps you feel a sense of belonging in school?

- **60%** secondary-aged students and **69%** primary aged students – **having friends they trust**
- **67%** of primary-aged students and **43%** of secondary-aged students – **being treated with as much respect as everyone else**
- **52%** of primary-aged students and **40%** of secondary-aged students – **feeling able to be myself at school**

What stops you feeling a sense of belonging and safety?

- **44%** of secondary-aged students and **39%** of primary-aged students – **feeling under pressure**
- **36%** of primary-aged students and **27%** of secondary-aged students – **not feeling able to be myself in school**
- **43%** of primary-aged students and **30%** of secondary-aged students – **worrying about bullying (or unkind behaviour)**
- **28%** of secondary-aged students – **teachers not understanding me**

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To what extent do London students feel a sense of belonging in school?

When asked if they feel a sense of belonging, it is encouraging that over half of students said *'yes, usually'* or *'yes, a strong sense,'* but over a third of secondary-aged students and almost a quarter of primary-aged students gave less certain responses on belonging at school, saying *'yes, a bit'* or *'I don't know.'* A significant minority of those taking part said they *'do not feel any sense of belonging at school'* (5% primary-aged and 8% secondary-aged students). While these percentage figures may appear low, they represent a cohort of students who could benefit from deeper understanding and targeted actions to build school belonging.

> **"**in our school, we're really good at including people and we have loads of people from different countries and backgrounds and teachers talk to us a lot about that and I think it just really helps.**"**
>
> PRIMARY-AGED STUDENT

What factors support students' sense of belonging?

The survey asked students to select 5 factors that were most important to help them feel a sense of belonging at school.

Both secondary-aged (60%) and primary-aged (69%) students said that having friends they could trust was most important. They told us that friendships were a motivator to come to school, because people your own age understand you in a way adults cannot.

The second most important factor was *'being treated with as much respect as everyone else'* (selected by 43% of secondary-aged students and 67% of primary-aged students). When students spoke about the importance of respect, they referenced times when they were not listened to, or when their needs were ignored or mislabelled.

Over half of primary-aged students (52%) and 40% of secondary-aged students selected *'feeling able to be myself at school'* as a top factor, highlighting identity affirmation as an important aspect of school belonging. They spoke about the importance of having a wide range of activities to discover their passions, having learning needs recognised and self-expression through clothing and presentation.

> **"**friendships are the support system.**"**
>
> SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

> **"**if you're not treated with the same level of respect, how are you going to form positive relationships with everyone.**"**
>
> SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

> **"**(what's important is) being able to come to the school and have that environment where you're able to express your interests and explore your hobbies productively, because obviously everyone will have an aspiration of sorts that they'll want to work to.**"**
>
> SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

What factors help students feel safe in school?

We asked students about the 5 most important factors that made them feel safe at school.

Among primary-aged students, the top factor was *'teachers being respectful to all students'* (69%), closely followed by *'knowing teachers will stop all kinds of bullying or unkind behaviour'* and *'having school rules which are fair'* (both receiving 67%). Having school rules that are fair was also the second most important factor for secondary-aged students (53%). At secondary level, the most important factor was having *'no threat of physical violence at school'* (67%).

The way schools deal with bullying and discrimination was mentioned as contributing significantly to students' feelings of safety at school. They found it helpful when staff took time to understand their viewpoints if conflicts arose and supported them to resolve problems.

Fairness was also raised by a large proportion of both primary-aged (48%) and secondary-aged students (38%). In conversations, students questioned when teachers focused on issues such as school uniform not being worn correctly, above more important issues such as bullying or discrimination. Relational factors were most significant for their sense of safety. Respect, fairness, being listened to and feeling cared for, were all important to help students to feel safe in school.

> **"**some teachers are really good at picking up on if you're upset or uncomfortable... and come up and check on you.**"**
>
> PRIMARY-AGED STUDENT

> **"**I feel like they care more about what I'm wearing than what's going on and why so worried about my jacket?**"**
>
> SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

> **"**(its good to) know the root of the problem ...(to) find out why it happened in the first place.**"**
>
> SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

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What are the barriers to belonging for students?

We were also interested to understand what students saw to be the barriers to belonging in school.

'Feeling under pressure' was the most selected factor by secondary-aged students (44%), but also by a significant proportion of primary-aged students (39%). Students felt the pressure around exam results as being all-consuming and overly deterministic of their futures.

Not having their identities recognised and affirmed emerged as key barrier to belonging and safety. 36% of primary-aged and 27% secondary-aged students selected *'not feeling able to be myself in school'* as a top factor. Students spoke about schools not 'understanding' the 'range of types of people' and about success being narrowly defined.

Being in a school environment where their identities are not valued may have particularly profound impacts for certain groups of students. For example, for students whose family or community views on sexuality or gender limit opportunities to positively explore this aspect of their identities, being able to do this at school was seen to be particularly important.

> "an important bit of school is that it's not always focused on grades and doing well in tests, it kind of shows like people are succeeding by doing what they love with the people around them… not just always academic, it's also about building what you actually enjoy doing."
>
> SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

> "I think there's a larger range of types of people than what schools expect."
>
> SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

> "a lot of people are just kind of constantly scared the whole time, they don't really feel safe in themselves because they're taught that, the grade is going to be the thing that determines their entire future."
>
> SECONDARY-AGED STUDENT

Recommendations

Our findings inform the following recommendations to strengthen students' sense of belonging, safety and identity, which are integral to their sense of inclusion in school.

- Support students' friendships and relationships

- Recognise the importance of caring and nurturing staff-student relationships

- Focus beyond academic achievement to reduce pressure associated with attainment targets

- Create opportunities and experiences that respond to the diversity of abilities and aptitudes and promote the holistic development of students

- Develop conflict resolution approaches that focus on dialogue with students and working together to develop shared responsibility and problem-solving

- Collaborate with students and families/carers to develop school rules that everyone is signed up to

- Partner with students in reviewing policies and processes so that changes made make a measurable difference to students' feelings of being heard

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The values principles and impacts of inclusion

These four guiding principles represent the mechanisms by which schools can ensure students' sense of inclusion. They have been developed in consultation with students, educators, school leaders and parents across all 32 London boroughs.
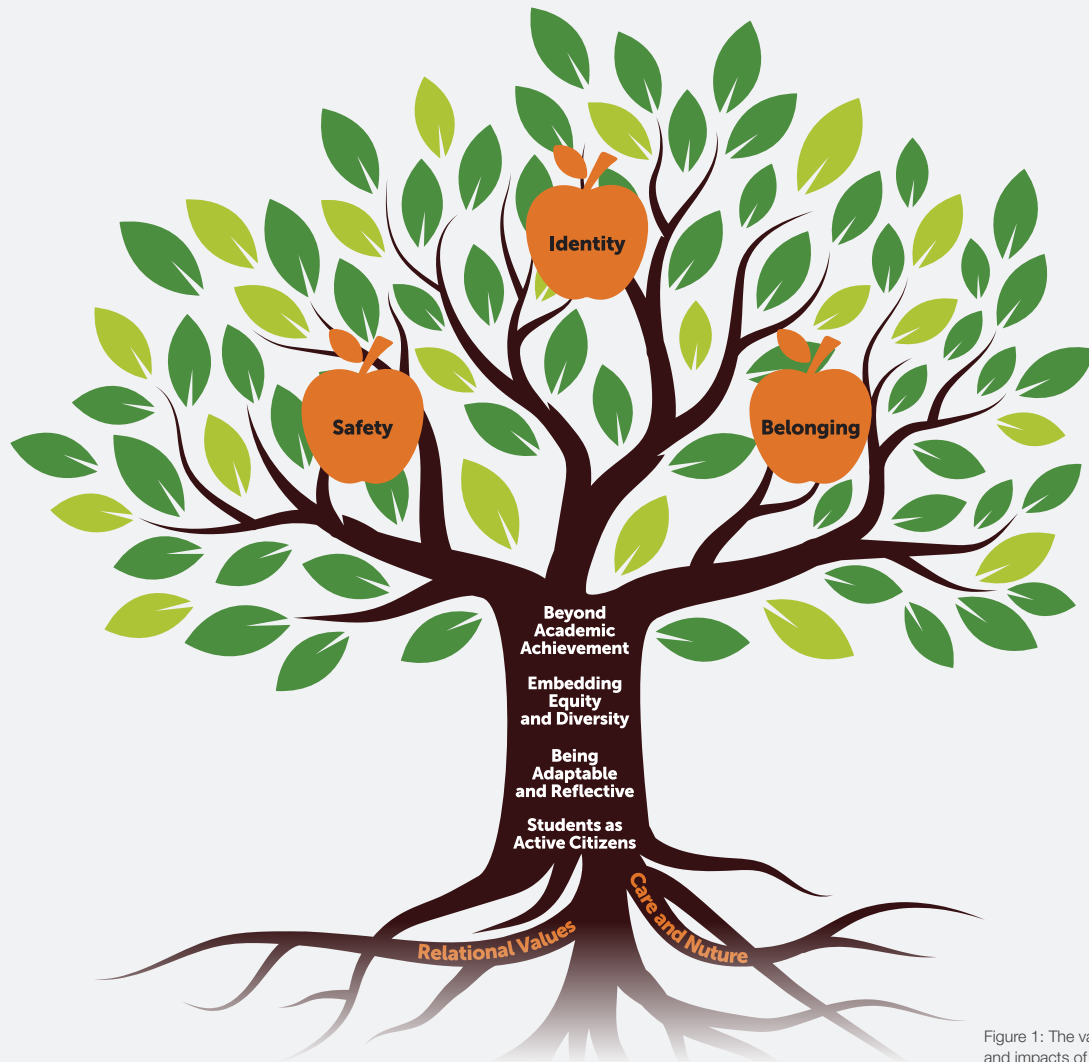

Figure 1: The values, principles and impacts of inclusion

1.

Students as Active Citizens

This is about collaborating to create a sense of shared responsibility and accountability for the whole school community. It involves working together with students, school staff, families and local communities on issues that matter for them. This principle requires adults to seek out the student and community voice and hear their concerns, before taking concrete actions to respond to these issues in shaping school policies, activities and the learning environment. It is about students shaping and actively participating in the life of the school. Ensuring that student, parent and community representation groups reflect the breadth of student composition is also key to engaging students and their communities as active citizens.

Examples include:

- Forums to hear students' views on matters such as school uniform, use of school spaces and policies.
- Feeding back on actions taken, such as 'you asked for…we did,' displays and noticeboards.
- Student responsibility opportunities, for instance participation on the Parent Governor Association groups, eco-committees, student council, or peer mentors.

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2.

Being Adaptable and Reflective

This principle is about creating a supportive culture where educators are empowered and enabled to innovate, experiment and refine their practices to meet the diverse needs of all students. Enabling staff to continually reflect on and adapt their practice and provision ensures that all students can access opportunities to realise their goals. This involves developing reflective and adaptable school systems and practices in relation to learning, behaviour, or the way that school staff communicate with students, families and each other. Adaptable and reflective practice is also one way in which schools can ensure that equity and diversity are embedded, by making adjustments for specific students to support them.

Examples include:

- Fostering a culture where staff feel safe to trial new teaching approaches through offering professional development training, and allowing the freedom to try new things, fail and to try something else.
- Adjusting routines to suit learners' needs, for instance through movement breaks.
- Offering different curriculum pathways which better meet the needs of all learners, keeping a focus on positive outcomes, such as achievement.

3.

Embedding Equity and Diversity

This is about integrating into policies and systems approaches to ensure students from all backgrounds feel welcome and valued in school, taking into account different cultures, faiths, beliefs, abilities, aptitudes, attainment levels, gender identifications and neurodiversity. Recognising the disproportionate impact of exclusion on communities in London, this principle involves creating opportunities to explore and value our differences, challenging stereotypes, racism and discrimination and taking action to ensure that they are tackled.

Examples include:

- external events for families and the community, such as celebrating world cultures and spiritual festivities.
- curriculum topics such as learning about highly successful dyslexic figures, women who changed the world, black authors.
- day-to-day classroom interactions, like taking time to discuss difference in learning styles, recognising and encouraging students to value their unique strengths and those of others. developing neuro-inclusive school practices to ensure the needs of all are supported and met.

4.

Beyond Academic Achievement

This principle is about enabling students to achieve in the broadest sense, by giving them opportunities to flourish. Providing students with the experiences to develop all their skills, talents and abilities, be they academic, creative, physical, or interpersonal, can ensure their wellbeing both now and in the future. It's not just about what happens in lessons, but also the activities the school offers outside of lessons and the opportunities for stimulating trips and experiences. It is also about having high expectations for all students, supporting them to form high but realistic expectations of themselves and to know and value both their strengths and weaknesses.

Examples include:

- Prioritising trips, activities and speakers that enable students to experience new places and viewpoints.
- Removing barriers (be they physical, social or economic) to ensure that opportunities and experiences can be accessed by all students.
- Celebrating the successes of all students.
- Monitoring and tracking engagement in activities to ensure that all are maximising the benefit, including vulnerable groups such as young carers, looked after student and those from particular ethnic groups.

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The Three Impacts that Lead to Inclusion

Our research highlighted that these four principles support inclusion by leading to the realisation of three key impacts. Not only are these impacts seen to be central to the wellbeing of students in the here and now, but they are also seen to have lifelong benefit in leading to a sense of inclusion and participation in society in the future.

Belonging

A sense of belonging is central to self-worth, motivation, and the foundation for learning. School inclusion depends upon students feeling a sense of belonging and connection to the communities that they are part of. Schools have a vital role to support and strengthen students' sense of belonging to the school community, their peers, families, local community and broader society.

Safety

There are three dimensions of safety that enable students to feel a sense of belonging and security in the different communities that they are a part of. E*motional safety* is the sense of being accepted for who you truly are as an individual, that your feelings are recognised and that your needs are met. *Social safety* is about mutual respect and feeling secure in the absence of harassment, discrimination or intimidation. *Physical safety* is a sense of security in the absence of harm or injury to self or others.

Identity building and affirmation

Identity is multifaceted. Individual identity involves feeling known and valued for our strengths and limitations, and what sets us apart from others as unique and 'special'. Social identity involves feeling recognised and valued for our social characteristics including gender, faith, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and socio-economic background, as well as the intersectionality between these characteristics (how these different characteristics interact). This social dimension relates to our family, cultural, community, peer group and citizenship identities. Providing opportunities for students to build and affirm their identities is a central way in which schools can strengthen students' sense of belonging and safety.

Core Values Underpinning Enactment of the Four Principles to Inclusion

The research highlighted that the spirit in which the principles are implemented is of critical importance. Participants recognised that schools' engagement with the four principles could be on a continuum, with a tokenistic acknowledgement at one end and a more holistic, whole-school approach at the other. They therefore advised that the implicit values that underpin successful enactment of the principles should be made explicit.

Relational values

Relationships are the central mechanism by which a sense of belonging, safety and self-worth can be nurtured within students in school. A focus on relationships has various dimensions. Most central is building relationships between staff and students, where students feel known, understood and valued. Secondly, helping students to build and sustain relationships over time is key to their achievements, future success and wellbeing. Thirdly, relational values extend to the initiation and maintenance of strong partnerships with families and carers, and the local community. Lastly, it is important to recognise that positive relationships are modelled at a leadership level and cascade down via supportive relationships between staff and then to students.

Care and nurture

Aligned with a relational approach are the values of care and nurture as an underpinning feature of school culture. This is where staff go beyond caring about what students achieve to also demonstrating care about who students are and what they need. The important factor is that students feel cared for. This is conveyed in daily interactions between staff and students, reflecting a genuine interest in students' lives and wellbeing. To care involves noticing and responding to students' state of being, needs and achievements. Care and nurture should extend to school policies and practices, such as behaviour management approaches that recognise that behaviour is the communication of a need. Care and nurture involve showing kindness and compassion in the face of need, and recognising student's rights and responsibilities to self and others. Care and nurture values also underpin relations between staff and school leaders, as well as in the schools' communications with and expectations from families and carers.

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Using The Principles of London's Inclusion Charter

❖ **Equity & Diversity**

❖ **Active Participation**

❖ **Flexibility & Adaptability**

❖ **Achievement**

We worked with the Young People's Action Group on the guiding principles and we asked them how they thought they could be used by schools, trusts or boroughs.

Having reviewed a range of charters, the YPAG chose to use the format 'We will … by …,' and 'So, you can …' to exemplify the guiding principles.

Schools, trusts and boroughs may wish to use the guiding principles to frame their work on inclusion and design their own ''We will … by …,' and 'So, you can …' statements which reflect their context. The examples given should not be seen as exhaustive.

Equity and Diversity

We will embrace different cultures and backgrounds by

➢ including positive role models in the curriculum in a planned and purposeful way, for example, positive historical figures and current role models that represent students in the school community
➢ ensuring school staff have an understanding of their students' different cultural backgrounds
➢ having culture days in schools led by young people which include having different cultural foods as part of the school meal offer

So, you, as students and staff, feel represented in a culture that is representative of the local community and to counter the development of stereotypical beliefs.

We will accommodate the beliefs and practices of our students by

➢ having comfortable areas to pray and reflect
➢ catering to different dietary requirements
➢ learning about a variety of beliefs, including being mindful of religious calendar events which may overlap with the school calendar
➢ learning about beliefs from an objective view, such as learning similarities and differences

So, you, as students and staff, feel comfortable practising your beliefs.

We will support LGBT students and staff by

➢ having a student and staff group focused on LGBTQ+ issues, which would include having 'safe' places where students can come together to talk about specific issues around their identity
➢ learning about the history and stigma experienced by others and including LGBT figures into lesson plans and assemblies
➢ celebrating difference through events similar to culture days

➢ support school staff to be confident in how to approach bullying and harassment related to LGBT students
➢ using gender neutral language rather than boys/girls etc.

So, you, as students and staff, feel safe and welcomed in the school environment.

We will be open, transparent and fair working in partnership with parents[1] and students to meet the needs of each and every student in our care by

➢ creating a positive, welcoming learning environment
➢ building trust and confidence with parents showing that we place their child at the centre of our decision-making
➢ contacting parents to praise their child's achievements
➢ planning our lessons carefully and seeking the views of students regularly on learning and teaching

So, you, as a parent or student, are confident in the school's staff and processes.

Active Participation

We will seek the views of students and staff on matters which impact on them by

➢ having a range of committees led by students, parents, governors and/or staff in the school to take forward initiatives
➢ students being able to positively contribute to the school's policies, particularly those that directly impact on them, such as the behaviour policy
➢ students and staff working together with mutual respect
➢ using surveys regularly to gather students' views on what is working well in school and what needs to be improved – ensuring that the results are shared openly
➢ ensuring input from students is acted upon, including feedback on learning, teaching, the school environment, and sharing the reasons when input is not able to be acted upon
➢ clear and consistent communication between students and teachers based on student feedback on issues they have with the school either (through questionnaires, focus groups, interviews)

So, you can shape our school's future together with staff.

We will listen to students' concerns fairly and impartially by

➢ all students feeling that staff listen, value and act upon their views
➢ staff responding sensitively and thoughtfully, when disagreements arise, working with the student and their family to resolve them
➢ feeling like you belong, feeling like you are heard, feeling like your perspective is valued
➢ potentially having anonymous ways of students reporting their issues so they don't fear being overlooked by their teachers as each problem will be viewed equally, for example, creating a safe space for students to express their honest opinion about the school (eg: anonymous feedback)

So, you feel safe, secure and have a strong sense of belonging in the school community.

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[1] We use parents to include all those who have caring responsibilities for children and young people

Flexibility and Adaptability

We will use a variety of approaches in lessons by

➢ active learning strategies being used more regularly, rather than just call and response between teachers and students
➢ students being able to exercise choice in their learning, including the appropriate use of digital technology
➢ having students lead learning within the classroom, either as an individual at the board or through leading class discussions
➢ students receiving high quality feedback on their learning, understanding what they need to do to improve
➢ students being able to give effective feedback to their peers on learning and suggest ways to improve
➢ adapt our teaching so that every student finds learning accessible

So, you learn in the way that best meets your needs and enables you to be able to achieve your potential.

We will develop our curriculum to be flexible and responsive to all students' needs and aspirations by ensuring it

➢ provides equity of opportunity for all our students
➢ design is creative and innovative and maximises outcomes for all students
➢ enables students to be successful in their future career pathways
➢ includes opportunities for students to achieve vocational qualifications

So, you are able to enjoy a curriculum which allows you to be confident, resilient and successful

We will include and communicate with parents by

➢ being welcoming and understanding of the lived experience of all our parents
➢ reducing language barriers between school staff and parents
➢ helping parents be better able to support their child's learning
➢ ensuring that students' progress reports are accessible for parents

So, your parents feel welcomed and know that you are well-supported

We will be flexible in how we support our students by

➢ using soft starts for individual students who would find this beneficial
➢ being professionally curious about the background of our students
➢ working with partners, where appropriate, to plan individual student's learning to maximise their potential
➢ not using sanctions immediately when a student is not following rules, such as being late or incorrect uniform but instead explores sensitively the reasons behind this

So, you feel we care for you and you belong in our school

Achievement

We will ensure all our students are able to access a range of learning experiences by

- ➢ ensuring that students have access to a broad range of after-school and lunchtime activities
- ➢ pastoral leads tracking the uptake of after-school and lunchtime activities
- ➢ students being able to learn outdoors as well as in classrooms
- ➢ younger students have the opportunity to learn through play

So, you develop confidence and resilience through experiencing learning in a broad range of contexts

We will recognise and celebrate the achievements of all our students by

- ➢ ensuring that our students are recognised for effort as well as academic achievement
- ➢ pastoral staff to know the interests and talents of every student, including their achievements with the school
- ➢ encouraging students to be proud of themselves and not to compare themselves to others
- ➢ school staff using praise to reinforce positive behaviours
- ➢ introduce ways for parents to receive positive feedback on their child, for example, through praise phone calls

So, you feel proud about your achievements.

We will encourage a diverse range of career paths by

- ➢ planned careers advice which ensures students are exposed to a range of non-traditional careers
- ➢ school staff receiving training on unconscious bias with a focus on career pathways
- ➢ careers evenings for students and parents together
- ➢ providing tailored work experience and information on the wide range of apprenticeships available

So, you can reach your individual potential.

We will keep an open mind …

So, you are part of an adaptable and resilient community