Bristol Belonging Strategy: Belonging in Education

2021 – 2024

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

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Contents

Introduction

When children start their education journey, they join a key social community with an immense potential to influence and shape their future. Children and young people who feel safe, valued and cared for within their educational setting are much more likely to experience academic success, positive social connections and a confident perception of their connection with the community, whilst those who feel they do not fit in will experience unnecessary barriers to learning and deep feelings of alienation.

Relationships within school, with adults, with peers and with families are instrumental in a child or young person's developing sense of identity and place in society. To develop a sense of belonging in school, children and young people need to feel accepted and valued for who they are and to be offered a curriculum that feels relevant, meaningful and accessible.

All our schools and educational settings need to work relentlessly to establish and maintain an inclusive community that has the determination and flexibility to ensure every young person can thrive, especially those who are vulnerable or at greatest disadvantage.

There are many factors that may contribute to a child or young person developing feelings of disconnection from their educational community. There are those who have experienced Adverse Childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma and those with disabilities or additional learning needs. Cultural differences, sexual identity disability and poverty may also influence how a young person feels in a particular educational community. A genuinely inclusive ethos is founded on trusting relationships with families, a culture of listening to the voice of the young person and an ability to recognise and take responsibility for responding effectively to early signals that something is not going well for a young person.

Strong systems for partnership working between education settings and key delivery partners, such as health, social care, youth workers and the police are essential in supporting the achievement of genuinely inclusive provision across all sectors of Bristol. A city-wide, comprehensive network means knowledge and best practice is shared, enabling all settings to be expert at creating an environment in which every child and young person can flourish.

The **Belonging in Education Strategy** sets out how we aim to achieve this for every child in an educational setting in Bristol today and in the future. It represents one of four pillars of belonging (Beginning, Families, Education and Community) that will inform the way we work with, and for, children and young people in the city.

Belonging in Education describes our collective vision for children, young people and their families, the outcomes we want to achieve and our priorities for action. The strategy is not intended as a detailed plan of all the actions or interventions that could be introduced. Rather, it provides an overarching framework to guide future action planning. The strategy has been developed, and will be delivered, in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, including parents and carers, children and young people and schools. We begin with our vision and principles, feedback from parents and carers and an overview of challenges and opportunities facing children and young people locally. We then set out the outcomes we want to achieve and conclude with priorities for action.

Vision

'Belonging in Education" is part of an overarching 'Belonging Strategy' vision that covers all children and young people, as follows:

- For our children and young people to have the best possible start in life, gaining the support and skills they need to prosper in adulthood

- For our children and young people to be welcomed into to a city with a culture of nurture and care, with opportunities to grow with support from their community

- For our children and young people to have their needs recognised at the earliest point in a system that collaborates to help them thrive

- For our children and young people to have a home which sustains, nourishes, and protects them in safe and healthy families

- For our children and young people to have a confident sense of self and identity in a cohesive and diverse city

- For our children and young people to access education that is inclusive and values diversity, where they learn from each other and benefit from an understanding of their different experiences

- For our children and young people to own the whole city and experience and benefit from all that Bristol offers

Principles

We want every child and young person to feel a keen sense of connection to their city and a freedom to be themselves. The work required to help grow a sense of belonging is wide-ranging and will be delivered by a broad range of partners. This is set out across four related strategies that all commit to shared principles and ways of working.

Our focus on belonging is underpinned by the recognition that the quality of our **relationships** is crucial to ensuring that every child, young person and parent and carer feels themselves to be an integral, valued, and visible part of their community.

Our work on belonging supports our city-wide work to develop and implement a system-wide, **trauma-informed approach**. Trauma-informed approaches recognise the prevalence of trauma in people's lives and acknowledge the potential effects that this can have on individuals and their families, networks, and communities. They are non-labelling, respectful and hopeful approaches that recognise people's strengths and resilience and their potential for healing. We will work with partners and communities to deliver this strategy in line with our agreed **Principles** for **Trauma-Informed Practice**.

A trauma-informed approach is aligned with our ongoing commitment to ensuring that we **'Think Family'** and that we ensure we consider and take account of the needs of children and adults in all our work. We will also continue to focus on identifying risk and vulnerability at **the earliest opportunity**. Children's needs are usually best met by supporting their parents and carers, and preventative and early help responses are critical to avoid issues from escalating. We will focus on **families' strengths** and seek to develop the family's capacity to look after their own needs and we will work to enable parents and carers to access universal and community services wherever possible and appropriate.

These approaches require us to **listen**, understand and **work together** with children, young people, and their families. Understanding and responding to individuals' **views and experiences** is essential to this way this of working.

We will continue to improve our **partnership** working. As we create joined-up systems so that there is **no 'wrong door'** to access services, we will also build **social capital** by ensuring our systems and interactions are based on shared values, understanding and trust.

6

Challenges and opportunities

Challenges

For many children and young people in Bristol education represents a positive and happy experience where they do well, progress into further or higher education and move into the workplace. For some this is the opposite, turning things around for our most disadvantaged and vulnerable learners represents our greatest challenge in education. The impact of missed education due to the COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportional impact on children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. A June 2020 report by the **Education Endowment Foundation** (EEF) found that 10 years of progress in tackling pupil disadvantage has been wiped out due to the impact of COVID-19. Further school closures in early 2021 will have further increased this gap.

Even before COVID-19 outcomes for children and young people in Bristol needed to improve. In 2019 we knew that:

- 17% of our city's children aged 16 and under lived in low-income families

- At the end of Key Stage 2 only 23% of children with SEN achieved the required standard in reading, writing and maths combined, compared to 74% for children without SEN

- There was a 17-point difference between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged in attainment 8 scores at the end of Key Stage 4

- Absence rates in Bristol secondary schools were 6.4% and 15.4% in special schools

- Bristol's suspensions rate stood at 7.4% across all phases with a rate of 24.4% in special schools

- In 2020 3.1% of our young people aged 16-17 were Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

Opportunities

Many of Bristol's education settings are already working in ways that promote and model inclusive and trauma-informed approaches to improve early intervention and prevent exclusions.

Additionally, Bristol benefits from several mature education networks that are critical in the delivery of our vision. The **Bristol Healthy Schools** network is having a positive impact on children and young people's health.

Bristol educators are already working with social care, health and voluntary and community sector partners to develop a Family Hub model to provide families with children aged 0–11 with wide-ranging support integrated into one accessible hub.

There are many examples of high quality inclusive work going on across Bristol. By creating a system where we trust one another we can improve the way we share this best practice for the benefit of all.

What children, young people and their families say

Safe in education

Nearly three quarters of young people who we spoke to who are living in care said that a 'feeling of safety' helps them to feel like they belong at school (74%).

"...my school makes me feel like I am in a safe space and I always feel welcome when I enter the building. Whenever there is a problem, I can always talk to the support team at my school."[1]

Participate in education

"My child does not have the option available to him to go after school clubs due to his disability. It is not a level playing field - my son simply does not have the same level of opportunity as his non-disabled peers"[2]

"He is given the option not to do what the class are doing - and sadly often takes it. That means he is left out even more and sees himself as "other", thus exacerbating the issues!"[3]

[1] Belonging Strategy, Children and Young People Survey, Consultation Report, December 2020
[2] Belonging Strategy, Parent and Carer Survey, Consultation Report, December 2020
[3] Belonging Strategy, Focus Groups with Young People, Consultation Report, December 2020

Achieve in education

67% of young people who participated in the Belonging Survey felt support to achieve their aims and aspirations was the best way to develop a sense of belonging in education.

Mainstream settings should be able to meet the needs of most children and young people with SEND by delivering high quality teaching and doing what is necessary to enable them to develop, learn, participate and achieve the best possible outcomes (SEND Code of Practice para 1.34). However, children, young people and their families are telling us that they do not always feel their needs are being met in mainstream education. Special schools often represent the best option for children and young people, but for others special schools or elective home education have become the only available alternatives. Bristol currently has a shortage specialist school provision. According to the **Office of National Statistics** there has been a 28% increase in Special School places in Bristol between 2016 and 2019. In the same period primary school places have increased by 4% while secondary school places have increased by 10%.

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"Our son is unable to attend full time. The staff do not have the skills, experience or training to deal with him"[4]

In addition, some children and young people are telling us that their schools and what they learn are not representative of the communities they identify with.

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"I really want Black British history to be taught in the national curriculum. A lot of it is down to education - there's a lot of ignorance there"[5]

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"Inclusion in education is about ensuring that every learner feels valued and respected, and can enjoy a clear sense of belonging"[6]

It is clear, that some of the most vulnerable children and young people in Bristol are not being adequately served by the education system. As leaders we must be brave enough to give and receive constructive criticism of the behaviours that have led to a culture of exclusion and to challenge this.

Our collective responsibilities for improvement have been laid bare in the 2019 Local Area SEND review. Too many children and young people with SEND are being excluded from education, from communities and from the opportunities our city has to offer. We have a duty as leaders to listen to the voices of children, young people and their parents and carers. We need to ensure that when a child or young person is at risk of exclusion, we take quick and decisive action to ensure this does not happen. We have been given a clear message that more inclusive practice and individual support is necessary for each child to feel a sense of belonging and to fulfil their potential.

4 Survey of Parents and Carers of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Spring 2020
5 Babbasa, Changes - How Lockdown Will Affect The Future Of Young People (2020)
6 Survey of Parents and Carers of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Spring 2020

Strategy

We want every child and young person to feel a strong sense of connection to their city and a freedom to be themselves. The work required to help grow a sense of belonging is wide-ranging and will be delivered by a broad range of partners. This is set out across four related strategies that all commit to shared principles and ways of working.

We will continue to improve our partnership working. As we create joined up systems so that there is no 'wrong door' to services we will also build social capital by ensuring our systems and interactions are based on shared values, understanding, and trust.

Moving forward we aim to turn the tide on exclusion by focusing our Belonging in Education Strategy on the following three key themes as we rebuild our education system and develop a world class and inclusive offer for our children and young people. This model will also inform how the education systems works with other organisations to ensure children and young people can flourish from the beginning, at home and in their communities.

Relationships

Learning

Structure
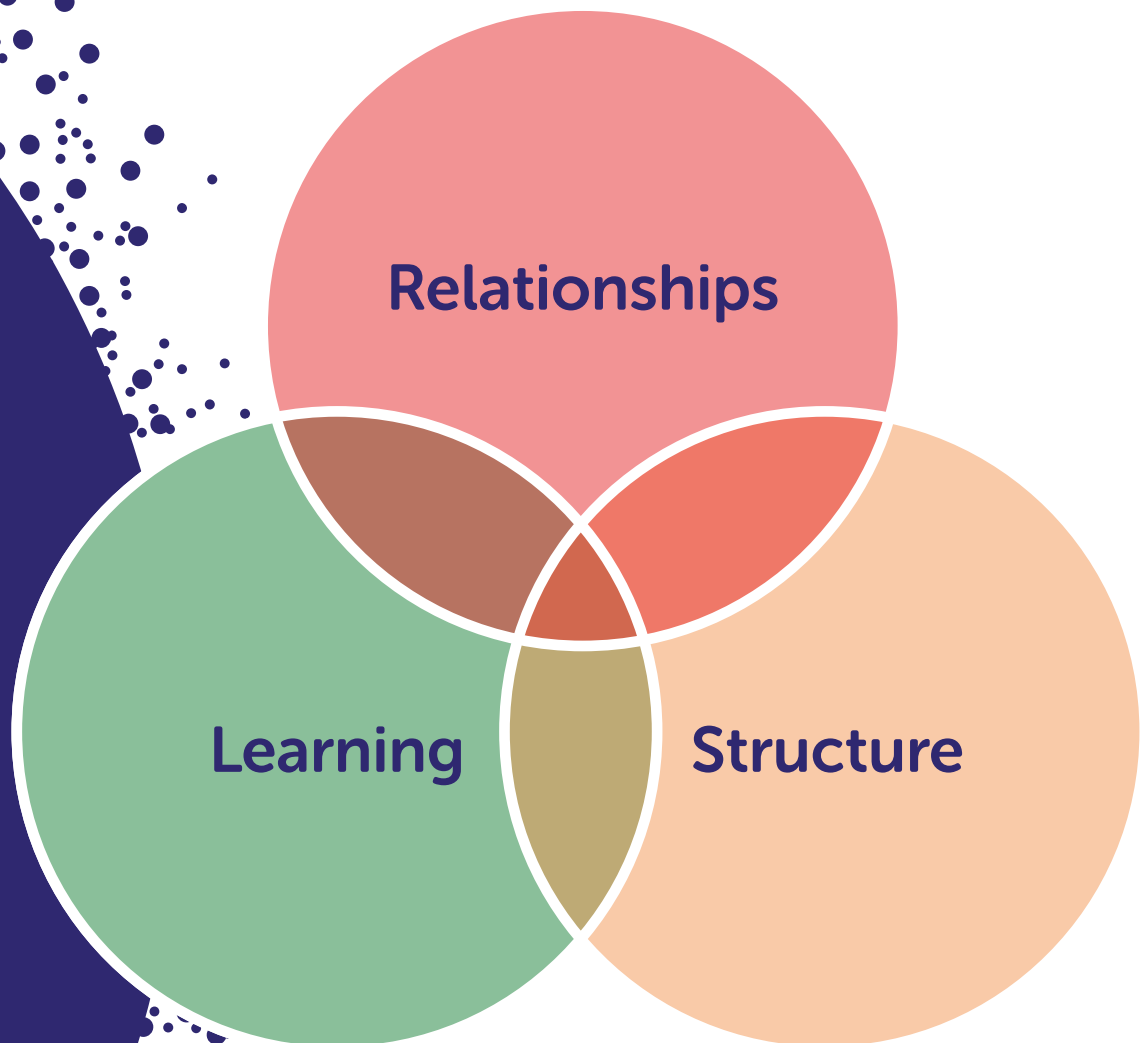
Theme 1 - Build trusting relationships

Strong and lasting relationships are built on trust. In the past five years a succession of leadership changes, poor communication, and a failure to deliver statutory services has eroded the trust between families, educators, and the wider social care system. Without trusting relationships, we are less likely to share ideas, talk openly and learn from one another. The recent **Ofsted & CQC SEND Area Inspection** laid bare this lack of trust and confidence in our system. To regain this and break the cycle of exclusion many find themselves in we need to start listening to and positively acting on what children and young people tell us. By doing this we can improve opportunities to co-produce services with families at home and in their community and create a more proactive approach to inclusion.

The impact of COVID-19 on the education system has been profound, but it has shown us that we are stronger together. Bristol educators and the communities they serve have been unified in our city's response to the crisis. We must now collectively act to strengthen these relationships with children, young people, and their families to bring about the scale of change needed in Bristol. It will take time to rebuild trust in and across our system, and heal the harm done to some of our children and young people, but if we get it right, we can create a truly collaborative and inclusive system.

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"Positive relationships with teachers where you can talk to them about things you can't/ don't want to talk about at home"[7]

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[7] Belonging Strategy, Children and Young People Survey, Consultation Report, December 2020

Priorities

- Advocate for those who face the greatest risks and collectively challenge and disrupt any discriminatory action, practice, organisation or individual

- Rebuild trusting relationships by ensuring mistakes are owned and dealt with in an open and transparent way

- Embed restorative approaches in our system as a way of healing divisions and repairing relationships

- Build relationships with organisations that share our values to further enhance our learning and our understanding of inclusive practices

- Communicate our successes, and our shortcomings, making sure information relating to inclusion is accessible and reliable

- Deliver on the promises we make to children, young people, and their families

Outcomes 2021 – 2024

- Bristol organisations working for the benefit of children, young people, and their families are recognised as being a positive influence on inclusion

- The way organisations work with one another, and with families has improved

- The use of restorative approaches to reduce conflict and heal harm have become normal practice in Bristol

- Bristol organisations work collaboratively with organisations outside of the city boundaries to improve knowledge and understanding of inclusion

- Bristol has a clear and transparent communication strategy to ensure a consistent narrative around inclusion and education

- Children, young people, and their families trust that the education system is working in their best interests

Theme 2 - Learn from one another

Listening to and understanding the needs of our children and young people, and their families, must inform the way we work and how we make decisions.

> "It would be good if teachers could learn more about trauma and adoption in general... the words that help, the actions that don't. It doesn't need to be dry – it's actually fascinating! Done by an adoptive parent would be specifically good"[8]

Creating a safe and welcoming space for children and young people and their families to share their perspectives, challenges and hopes will improve the way our education system works, how we work with partner organisations and ensure a whole family approach to improve early intervention.

> "Young people's voices are not heard enough by decision makers."[9]

As education leaders we must ensure that our education workforce has access to the best training and our talent pool is representative of the city's diverse population. What we learn from one another should underpin our values; influence our behaviours and understandings; and guide our collective action in the delivery of our mission.

> "I think diversity is really important, it is your education as well if you are surrounded by diversity, I think that is an education that is just as important as what you learn in school."[10]

> "I think that my school could have more darker skinned people like me so I can feel I belong more in the school."[11]

[8] Survey of Parents and Carers of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Spring 2020
[9] Belonging Strategy, Focus Groups with Young People, Consultation Report, December 2020
[11] Belonging Strategy, Children and Young People Survey, Consultation Report, December 2020

Priorities

- Develop a set of shared values, behaviours and understandings that underpin how we work with families and partners

- Ensure children, young people and their families' views and wishes are an integral part of our decision-making process

- Increase the number of education settings that take a trauma informed approach to increase early identification of risk and vulnerability, build resilience and support recovery

- Take significant steps to increase the diversity of our education workforce ensuring our education voice and content is representative of Bristol's diversity

- Embed an evidence informed approach to school improvement to maximise the impact of SEND and Pupil Premium funding

Outcomes 2021 – 2024

- The Bristol education system has developed a set of shared values, behaviours and understandings related to inclusion

- Children, young people, and their families feel part of the solution and are active partners in decision making

- Children and young people are supported at an earlier stage to minimise risk and harm

- The Bristol education workforce is starting to represent the diversity of the children and young people in the classroom

- The Bristol education system can demonstrate a significant improvement in education outcomes for Bristol children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, or those with additional learning needs

Theme 3 - Create an effective structure

Creating a system based on trust means we are more likely to share freely, take risks and provide challenge, but it requires the right structure to ensure it runs smoothly. Without a strong and representative governance and accountability framework poor inclusion practices will continue to go unchallenged. Without processes and procedures that are fit for purpose we will continue to see failures in service delivery and an erosion of trust. Without a means for capturing and sharing knowledge we will continue to see good practice in isolation.

We know that moving children and young people from one school to another negatively impacts their ability to form and sustain relationships. Yet as a system we regularly move children and young people during the school year.

In a recent survey on belonging, 90% of young people who responded told us that friends and peer groups provide the greatest sense of belonging in education.

> "It's hard feeling like I belong somewhere after moving to 3 different secondary schools since year 7".[12]

We must ensure that we develop an infrastructure that is fit for purpose and is driven not only by our statutory duties, but a shared moral purpose to improve outcomes for all children and young people.

[12] Belonging Strategy, Children and Young People Survey, Consultation Report, December 2020

Priorities

- Improve the efficiency and quality of our Education Health and Care planning (EHCP) process

- Improving educational transition points so that children and young people can form an early sense of belonging in their new setting

- Develop and implement an inclusive governance framework that provides the right mix of support and challenge to tackle poor attainment and attendance, and high exclusions

- Standardise the decision-making process for managed moves between schools, and placements into alternative learning provisions. Ensure they are only used when in the best interest of the child

- Transform Bristol City Council's Department for Education and Skills to improve efficiency and performance

- Improve the accuracy of our inclusion data and increase the role it plays in our decision making

- Standardise procedures to ensure sufficiency of specialist placements for children and young people

- Improve the way we share best practice to ensure every child in Bristol can benefit from inclusive and evidenced based classroom teaching and practice

Outcomes 2021 – 2024

- Bristol partners have improved the speed and quality of the EHCP process, in line with best practice guidance

- Children and young people find it easier to transition through educational phases

- Bristol has an education governance system with clear and consistent accountability for inclusion

- School moves are minimised and agreed only in the best interest of the child, in a way that is consistent, transparent, and fair

- Bristol City Council's Department for Education and Skills is recognised as being more efficient and effective in the delivery of statutory functions and its system leadership role

- Inclusion data is accurate and consistently used in decision making

- There is a standardised procedure to ensure year-on-year Bristol has sufficient specialist places that meet the needs of children and young people

- Bristol has developed and shared a range of toolkits to demonstrate best practice for inclusion in education

Long-term outcomes and measuring progress 2021 - 2030

Each of these themes, and associated priorities must be developed together as we look to build a culture of inclusion in our education system.

Culture is not easily measured, it is visible in the way we work, learn, and trust one another. It is underpinned by a set of shared behaviours and values that are representative of diversity. It is supported by a structure that provides the right mix of support and challenge. When it is absent it leads to mistrust, exclusion, a lack of diversity and accountability. As we move forward and deliver some of our short-term outcomes, we will start to see a dramatic change in the indicators of exclusion. Longer-term we can measure our progress by tracking these indicators. If we are heading in the right direction we expect to see:

- An improvement in our attendance rates
- Fewer suspensions
- Continued low rates of permanent exclusions
- More diversity in our education workforce
- More children/young people from underrepresented groups engaging in active citizenship
- Better attainment for all our children/ young people and a rapid improvement in the attainment of those with SEND and those entitled to Free School Meals

- A decrease in the number children/ young people being moved in year between settings

- More children/young people having their support needs identified and diagnosed early

- Fewer children/young people entering Alternative Learning Provision

- Fewer parents/carers feeling there is no alternative but to home school their child

- More parents/carers telling us they are happy with the education system in Bristol

- More children/young people telling us they feel a sense of belonging in education

- More young people with SEND and from disadvantaged backgrounds entering further education, employment, or training

- An increase in the representation of BAME culture and history in the curriculum

We understand that it will take time to turn things around, but collectively we are committed to getting this right. We will ensure that we build on what is already working well; making sure good practice is shared across the city. We will engage and provide a meaningful role for children and young people in issues that matter to them, issues like climate change and discrimination. We will work with city partners and national bodies that share our values to continuously expand our collective knowledge.

Rebuilding our education system by strengthening the way we work together, learn from one another, and deliver our statutory responsibilities represents a huge challenge for the city. No one organisation can do it alone, together we must work with and for our children and young people to get it right and create a city where every child and young person can feel a sense of belonging in education.

I want a city that helps, not discourages me,

I want a city that respects me,

I want a city that doesn't judge a book by its cover, so why judge a person by its colour,

I want this city to see yes I am a Muslim and my hajib is my crown and identity

I want this city to see the Muslim woman is clothed in strength and dignity.

Ayan Mohamed, 12 years