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Putting children first

Importance of School Belonging

One Education Educational
Psychology Service

Manchester Inclusion
Strategy Toolkit

Importance of School Belonging

Why is it important to think about belonging in schools?

In Manchester, a key indicator that our children and young people are thriving in education is that they have a strong sense of belonging to their education setting. Research has found that a sense of school belonging is related to students' emotional wellbeing, inclusion, engagement with school (attendance and academic motivation) and educational outcomes. The Government also acknowledge that school belonging promotes children and young people's mental health:

"school should be a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging" (DfE, 2016, p.8).

All children need to feel that they belong however, there are key times to be mindful of when a sense of belonging seems particularly important:

- Early adolescence
- During transitions between year groups and particularly between education settings
- When children and young people perceive themselves to be within a minority or marginalised group of some sort.
- When there has been prior experiences of a lack of belonging

Student's views on what helps them belong

- Having friends and being a friend
- Being able to express yourself without fear of negative judgement
- Not feeling under threat of exclusion or isolation
- Being known as an individual
- School acceptance and understanding of ethnic, cultural and religious identity
- Schools valuing participation in a broad range of activities

High levels of school belonging are associated with many positive outcomes such as:

- Higher educational
- motivation and task persistence
- Classroom engagement
- Reduction in absenteeism
- Fewer incidents of bullying or aggression
- Higher levels of self-efficacy
- Better friendships
- Improved relationships with teachers

How can schools help?

Children and young people can be supported to develop a sense of belonging to their education settings at both individual and whole school level.

- A commitment from leadership to put belonging at the heart of their belonging, inclusion and diversity policies and processes; Working in partnership and collaboration with parents and the local community to contribute to the whole school ethos;
- Promote strong communication and supportive relationships between students and staff;
- Staff who have time and are available to listen and speak to students;
- Providing students with emotional support from peers and adults, when needed;
- Providing timely academic and pastoral support, when needed.

It might be helpful to consider some of these key questions

How can current strategies be adapted to support students to feel a greater sense of belonging in school? How can children and young people who had already experienced disruption in their education places (managed moves, moves to alternative provision or permanent exclusion) be further support to feel settled and part of the school community?

- Has a key adult or team of adults been identified to support young people struggling to establish a sense of belonging?

- Have you collected the views of CYP in your school to find out if they feel like they belong?

- What relational approaches are already in place at school?

- Do our policies and procedures foster belonging in school?

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It is important that every child and young person in our early years' settings, schools and Post 16 provisions, whatever their circumstance or ability, has a sense of belonging, feel respected and is valued for who they are.

School belonging is frequently described as:

"the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school's social environment"

(Goodenow & Grady ,1993, p. 80).

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Where can I get more information, advice and support?

One Education have produced an Inclusion Toolkit as part of the Inclusion Strategy which promotes educational inclusion and support for all children and young people to thrive.

Section 1: sets out Manchester's vision and guiding principles.

Section 2: sets out key approaches to good universal inclusive practice.

Section 3: provides a 'quick links' information access approach to help all those working to support children and young people to find information about specific educational needs, evidence-based approaches/ interventions and links to useful resources and supporting agencies/ services. It includes a section on attachment and developmental trauma.

Where can I find the Inclusion Toolkit?
The Inclusion Toolkit has been shared with all Manchester Local Authority Schools. This is now available on the One Education website.

oneeducation.co.uk/inclusiontoolkit

For further information, please email:
inclusionstrategytoolkit@oneeducation.co.uk

SCAN ME

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oneeducation.co.uk

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