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UNIVERSITY OF BATH

LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER

— GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2 —

STUDENTS AS ACTIVE CITIZENS

CONTENTS

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FOREWORD

Lib Peck, Director of the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit

We know children and young people are safer in school. It's why we're committed to tackling rising suspensions, exclusions and persistent absenteeism that collectively led to the equivalent of 1,430 children each day having lost learning in 2021-22.

It's what led us to establishing London's Inclusion Charter, a city-wide commitment built on partnership, shaped by and for young people, teachers and schools, parents and carers, local authorities and education leaders.

The Charter draws out four key principles of inclusive practice, underpinned by evidence from nearly 4,000 students, parents and school staff that highlighted the importance of safety and belonging in school or other education settings.

London's Violence Reduction Unit has backed up these principles with more than £12m investment from the Mayor of London through interventions that foster healthy relationships, help for those with speech, communication and language needs, mentoring in pupil referral units and supporting schools to embed children's rights through UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award programme.

The Charter has always been about providing help and support but also, crucially, sharing and celebrating the success of schools who day in and day out put children and young people front and centre.

These strategic guides are the next step in the delivery of the Charter. They are for education leaders, both within schools and in local authorities, to use as part of our shared commitment to support young people in education to feel that they are safe, that they belong, and ultimately that they are in a place where they can thrive.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are indebted to the young people, school staff and families who so generously gave up their time to take part in the research that underpins these strategic guides.

We would like to extend a huge thank you to *Maureen McKenna*, whose wealth of knowledge and experience of systems change in education has been instrumental in supporting the development of [London's Inclusion Charter](#) and the resulting resources, projects and partnerships. We are indebted to her tireless drive to improve outcomes for all young people.

We would also like to thank *Ceri Brown, Michael Donnelly, Alison Douthwaite* and *Yusuf Olaniyan* from the University of Bath for driving forward the research that informed London's Inclusion Charter, and contributing heavily to shaping these guides, ensuring that learning from the research can be applied.

A special thanks also to the education leaders who so generously shared their experiences and expertise via the case studies contained in these guides, demonstrating the wealth and breadth of promising practice happening in London to ensure that young people feel a strong sense of belonging and safety in their schools. We would also like to thank the education leaders steering group who helped shape these guides in the hope they will be useful and impactful for strategic decision making in London.

This astute group of experienced leaders have played a pivotal role in enabling an inclusive education system through London's Inclusion Charter:

Chris Roberts, Senior Adviser: Safeguarding and Inclusion, Camden Learning, London Borough of Camden

Dawn Ferdinand, Headteacher, The Willow Primary School, Haringey

Gary Phillips, Director of Secondary Education, The Charter Schools Educational Trust

Gerry Robinson, Headteacher, Haringey Learning Partnership

Jan Shapiro, Headteacher, Addey and Stanhope Secondary School, Lewisham

Joan Deslandes, Headteacher, Kingsford Community School, Newham

Karen Chamberlain, Headteacher, The Lilian Baylis Technology School, Lambeth

Laura McPhee, Director of Education – Primary, University Schools Trust

Lorraine Goll, Headteacher, Holy Trinity and St Silas Primary School, Camden

Lyndsay Harris, Director of Pastoral and Inclusion, Ark Schools

Mark Aspel, Head of Inclusion, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Martin Nicolson, Virtual Headteacher for SEND, and former Headteacher of Grafton Primary School, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Maureen McKenna, former Director of Education, Glasgow City Council

Patrick Ward, Headteacher of Lewisham Virtual School, London Borough of Lewisham

Roger Mitchell, Headteacher, Ripple Primary School, Barking

Sarah Bailey, Head of Access to Education and Virtual School Headteacher, London Borough of Croydon

Sharon White, Director, Educating Horizons, London

Suzanne Parrott, Executive Headteacher, Associate Director, Education Standards, Children with a Social Worker, Achieving for Children Virtual School for, Richmond, Windsor & Maidenhead, and Kingston Local Authorities

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LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER

This strategic guide provides a starting point for education leaders across London to think about how the principles of London's Inclusion Charter can be applied to education settings. This guide is one of four available strategic guides, each dedicated to one of the principles of London's Inclusion Charter. They have been produced by London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), alongside the University of Bath, to help support leaders in schools, boroughs, Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and other education providers, with inclusive practice.

London's Inclusion Charter was launched in February 2024. The VRU led a partnership approach to develop the Charter, built on the voices of young people and informed by schools, parents and carers, local authorities and education specialists. It champions four guiding principles:

1. EMBEDDING EQUITY AND DIVERSITY
2. STUDENTS AS ACTIVE CITIZENS
3. BEING ADAPTABLE AND REFLECTIVE
4. BEYOND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The principles of London's Inclusion Charter were informed by a major London-wide study, carried out by the University of Bath, to understand what is important for belonging, safety and inclusion in London schools (see here).

This study engaged thousands of students from across all 32 London boroughs. Between November 2023 and January 2024, 3,473 students in London were asked about what would help them to feel a greater sense of safety and belonging at school. Students came from 81 schools that were located across all 32 London boroughs, reflecting the diversity of the city.

The research also heard from 87 students directly through a series of focus groups, to enable more in-depth discussion of the things that mattered to them the most. As well as talking to students, the research engaged parents and teachers. The views of 145 parents, and 179 educators were captured through an online survey, alongside interviews and focus groups with a further 19 school leaders and educators.

THIS STUDY INCLUDED:

32 LONDON BOROUGHS

3473 STUDENTS

81 SCHOOLS

145 PARENTS

179 EDUCATORS

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London's Inclusion Charter advocates for three foundations of support which demonstrate how leaders in education can focus their efforts embedding its four guiding principles.

These are:

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

This is about centering educational strategies in children's rights principles. It is also about empowering children and young people to learn about their rights, and advocate for themselves, their peers, the wider community and global issues.

INVESTING IN INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

This is about sustainably investing in resources and staff professional development, so that schools and all staff have the necessary resources, capacity and knowledge to embed inclusive practices.

LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

This is about leveraging the wealth of knowledge and promising practice in the sector, bringing communities of practice together, learning from a robust evidence-base, and sharing what works. It is also about recognising that schools cannot do this work in isolation, and partnership with local organisations, businesses, families and communities is essential.

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STUDENTS AS ACTIVE CITIZENS

This requires adults to seek out the student and community voice and hear their values and 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.

The principle matters because disengagement in school leads to lower attendance, lower self-esteem, educational underachievement, drop-out and exclusion (Fullan 2016, Lukes 2015). For example, the research carried out as part of developing London's Inclusion Charter showed that neurodivergent children and young people can often feel that school structures, practices and processes do not reflect their lived experiences and realities. Youth participation directly counters

these factors leading to individual gains such as personal, social and emotional skills, improved self-esteem and self-development (Sabo 2001, 2003) and higher educational achievement (Nia et al. 2014).

Many boroughs across London actively engage with their young citizens through Young Mayors, Young Leaders Academy, Youth Parliaments, Young People's Action Groups, Children in Care Councils and Youth Councillors, etc. These all align with the UN's Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) in terms of incorporating the child's voice into the design and delivery of services.

Children and young people are crucial sources of information in shaping educational inclusion at the system-level. This includes first-hand accounts from children and young people about what they want and need from education services, their lived experiences of those services and how they think improvements could be made.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Questions to consider when reflecting on practice and policies under this principle:

- How are students involved in shaping their school and learning environment?

- Are all student voices represented in decision-making?

- How does the school reach out to and involve families and the wider community?

- How do students engage with the wider world and global events?

- How does the school nurture students' skills to advocate on behalf of themselves and their peers?

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STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING

Strengthening the student voice in school decision-making involves establishing platforms where students' perspectives on important issues are actively sought, heard, and addressed. It's crucial to acknowledge that there are multiple student voices within a school. Schools need to build a range of opportunities to ensure that the perspectives of students from various diverse groups within the school community are actively included and represented.

To strengthen student voice within school, it's important to understand that it is not merely about collecting student opinions. Instead, it is an ongoing process of engaging with students to co-develop school practices and processes. This means that student voice encompasses not only their rights but also their responsibilities as local, national, and global citizens. Rights come with the duty to collaborate with staff to create an inclusive school environment. It is a continuous and reciprocal process.

HOW CAN IT BE DELIVERED?

There are a range of ways in which this two-way process of embedding student voice can be achieved. The most common method is through student councils, which many schools have in place. Ensuring that the voices of all students are represented requires supporting them to have the confidence and skills to engage in student voice programmes. It could also mean thinking about the design of student voice programmes to ensure they appeal to a diverse range of pupils and enable a diversity in forms of expression and communication.

There are many other roles schools can create to involve pupils, such as junior road safety officers, eco committee, Rights Respecting School committee, LGBT+ groups, equalities groups and so on. Schools can also create such groups when there are major projects that they want to develop and deliver, such as the creation of new policies, development of the school estate, or re-design of curricula. Additional resources and initiatives include:

National Youth Agency's youth participation framework: Hear by Right.

UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award.

Youth Sports Youth Voice Toolkit.

Anna Freud's Mentally Healthy Schools, a whole-school approach to pupil voice.

Understanding wellbeing through surveys, for example BeeWell.

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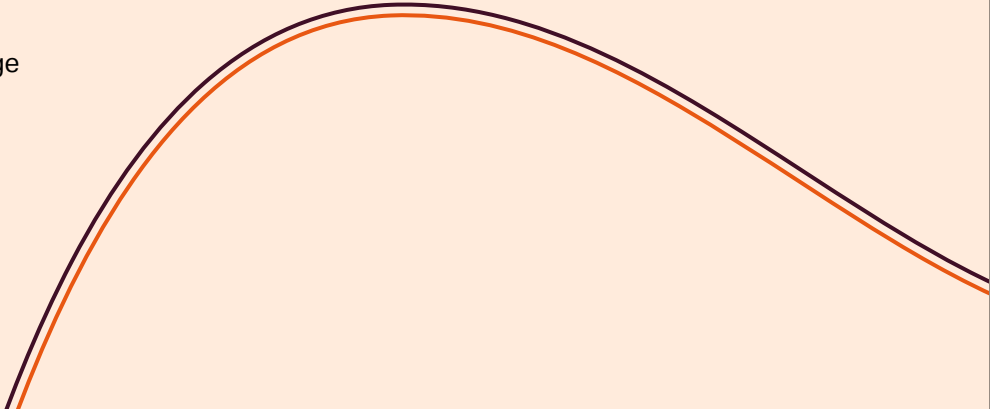
A CHILDREN'S RIGHTS APPROACH

Placing children's rights at the centre of schooling experiences can be an effective vehicle for nurturing students to be and become active citizens with a strong sense of belonging and social responsibility.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out 54 articles of children's rights covering all aspects of a child's life including their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (see here). Importantly, building a school environment around key elements of these articles enables a school culture that values wellbeing, participation, relationships, and self-esteem, where students become actively involved in school life and the wider world.

A rights-based approach to schooling can involve embedding the UNCRC articles into the fabric of the school, in terms of school structures, practices and processes, as well as intentionally teaching about rights so that students are empowered to advocate on behalf of themselves, their peers, communities, and around global issues. This can have a positive impact on relationships and conflict resolution, as students are empowered to understand their responsibility towards themselves and others.

This approach complements the principle of going Beyond Academic Achievement, recognising the purpose of education to extend beyond narrow attainment measures and outcomes.

HOW CAN IT BE DELIVERED?

One way schools can be supported towards embedding a children's rights approach is through the guidance and framework of established evidence-based programmes.

UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award Programme provides a framework and resources for schools to create safe and inspiring places to learn where children's rights are embedded in school culture and learning. This programme is free to all education settings in London until March 2028.

UNICEF UK also provide a range of free resources and teaching tools for schools, providing content for assemblies, lessons, and INSET resources.

OutRight is an annual campaign by young people, for young people that provides access to learning activities, presentations and live events. By participating in the campaign, children develop their knowledge of Children's Rights and UNCRC, using their voice and making chance, and engaging with decision-makers.

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EXPERT INSIGHTS

Martin Nicolson, former headteacher of Grafton Primary School, shares promising practice on how a children's rights approach can elevate students as active citizens.

RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL

As a UNICEF Rights Respecting School, Grafton Primary puts the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) at the heart of the school's everyday practice. The UNCRC has 54 articles that determine the internationally agreed rights of the child. As a Rights Respecting School, Grafton Primary ensures that these rights are learned, taught, practised, respected and promoted by the whole school community.

TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT RIGHTS:

At Grafton, each class creates their own Class Charter. Children choose the five most important rights they believe should be respected within their classroom and agree how they will respect these rights. The Article of the Week is displayed in every classroom and shared on the school's website to ensure all children and parents are aware of the rights and understand them.

EMBEDDING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS:

A committee of Rights Ambassadors promote children's rights and work towards making the school a better place. To become an Ambassador, children complete an application form that is signed by parents, showing that they are committed to the role. Ambassador teams meet weekly and have a number of responsibilities around the school to promote children's rights, such as handing out Parking Pledges, collecting organic waste for the compost bin, planting outside the school, taking part in national initiatives such as the Great British Spring Clean and distributing games and toys at playtime.

Grafton Primary also takes part in a range of local, national and international fundraising activities, exploring where the money raised goes and how they can make a difference in the world. The school also takes part in a range of community-based initiatives within the borough such as reducing air pollution in the local area.

Since completing the Recognition of Commitment in 2014, the school have noticed that their core value of 'respect' has become more embedded in the school culture. Children have a greater awareness of local, national and global issues, they are keen to speak out and share

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their opinions on important matters and know that they are listened to. Grafton uses the language of rights in day to day teaching and it supports both the behaviour and inclusion policies.

Taken from the UNICEF UK Assessor's report for Gold Rights Respecting Schools Award:

'It was evident that children's rights are embedded across the school and underpin every facet of school life. Particular strengths of the school include: Children with an exceptional knowledge of rights even in the early years. Numerous opportunities for children to take on leadership roles and influence the life of the school. Strong commitment to children's rights from all staff and governors with the impact of this recognised by Ofsted.'

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FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Central to the success of meaningful community participation is the establishment of a trusting and respectful shared space where schools, students, families and community members can build the relationships and the local knowledge necessary to cement strong partnerships and identify and develop aligned stakeholder priority areas of focus for community and family involvement in school life. A shared space in this sense is not necessarily a physical space, but rather a space for open dialogue, interaction and involvement.

HOW CAN IT BE DELIVERED?

These partnerships are most effective when they are sustained and ongoing as opposed to one off tokenistic activities. This is because the benefits to students arise as much through the relationships and networks that sustain the activities as they do of the activities themselves. Ongoing participation is also important to build students' sense of being meaningful and valued community members, in which they are empowered to develop a stake in and sense of stewardship over their local communities.

London's Inclusion Charter recognises that schools, families and the wider community share equal partnership in the learning and development of their children and young people. A partnership between schools, families, communities and their young people is therefore an important aspect of ensuring the belonging, safety and wider inclusion of all, fostering improved engagement in education and access to positive opportunities.

Save the Children's Families Connect programme supports families to engage with their children's learning, building strong relationships between schools, families, and communities.

EEF parental engagement toolkit shows the average impact of parental engagement strategies to be on average an additional four months' progress over the course of a year.

EEF Guidance Report on working with parents to support children's learning.

The School and Family Works take a holistic approach to working with schools to create supportive communities that increase the wellbeing of children and their families.

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EXPERT INSIGHTS

Jan Shapiro, Headteacher of Addey and Stanhope Secondary School, Lewisham, shares promising practice on student, family and community partnership.

Addey and Stanhope is a small secondary school with approximately 600 students. It serves an area of high disadvantage with 60% FSM & Pupil Premium, 50% SEND and almost all students are from the global majority. Jan discusses the key ways by which they have been able to achieve student, parent and community partnership, fundamentally through the strongly relational culture they have built. This culture conceives of the school, their parents and the local community as a family, and places care and nurture at the heart of their decision-making.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL POLICY AND DECISION-MAKING

Jan attributes the school's success in building students as active citizens to the fact that students feel pride in the school, and feel empowered to have an active voice in the world around them. The school runs an initiative called 'change- makers' which is based around the "vision that that the students become agents of change in their local community" and wider society. These activities are then celebrated with the family and community in 'change-maker events' taking place within community spaces.

Addey and Stanhope has a school council that is led by the head boy, the head girl and their senior prefect team. They regularly consult with representatives from every form class. The council does not just consider matters like 'uniform' policy but include issues of significant societal importance such as on the themes of social justice and equity and equality in order to develop within all students a sense of being societal and school 'improvers'. For example, the school council campaigned for a 'green space' where they could play outside, which the school then implemented, as well as for a 'quiet space' for contemplation and emotional regulation, which has since been introduced within the library.

However, Jan recognises that the student voice goes way beyond this, and they involve pupils in all key decision-making where possible. This includes within curriculum development consultations. Whenever the leadership team present at an educational conference, they take a student ambassador to co-present.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Central to the school's success in engaging the parent and local community, Jan describes her staff as being driven by a strong moral purpose. This commitment means they will go the extra mile in seeking to know and help their communities.

One of the ways they do this is the leadership team taking at least 30 mins at the end of school every day to walk the high street, the local estates and the territory of their community to talk to parents, resident and workers, chat to them and get to know them, community concerns and build relationships. This encourages community members to come into the school and give back; parents offer their

time and resources willingly and voluntarily.

Furthermore, Jan observes they have many families experiencing multiple hardships, some of whom have had negative schooling experiences themselves. The early work the school carries out to get to know their new students enables Jan to get a sense of who these families are. The SEND department organises coffee mornings for parents/carers of vulnerable children who meet with her and key teachers informally to build relationships from the outset. This plays dividends later in getting parents onboard with any support needed at a later point for their children. They also use this as an opportunity to signpost parents for support with their own issues and concerns.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE OBSERVED IMPACT?

The school hasn't had a permanent exclusion in five years and very few suspensions. This has been a conscious decision by Jan who tries to avoid them recognising that 'it is effectively shutting the door on their future". The school welcomes students that have or would have been excluded elsewhere, and Jan attributes the school's success in 'turning around' and retaining these students to the fact that students feel cared about and want to be at school.

Further testimony to the strength afforded to the student voice and involvement in the community is that the school boasts three students who have occupied the role of Lewisham Young Mayor. The school supports this through raising the profile of the position, working with students to support their application as well as the campaign activities of the successful candidates.

HOW COULD OTHER SCHOOLS DEVELOP A SIMILAR APPROACH?

Jan observes that while there is no single thing that makes a difference, central to their family ethos is the commitment to approach every child from a position of love and positive regard. The first thing, according to Jan, is in working very hard to get to know their students, their families and who they are. This is achieved through school visits in sender schools and through engaging parents from the outset, which creates a sense of belonging right from the start. Jan describes their work-related learning and partnership programme as 'huge' and much of the school's success is in drawing in the community.

Another way by which schools can embed an approach that supports students as active citizens is through strengthening their core offer on citizenship education. Jan observes that while schools have a statutory duty to teach British values, Addey and Stanhope take this further in timetabling citizenship education into the key stage three curriculum to ensure that it has the time and attention that it deserves. Citizenship is also a GCSE option in the school.

In summing up Jan argues that her ethos is guided by an approach that puts students at the very heart of all decision-making.

"[It's about] working from the student up, not ever from top down. [It's about] using the child as a lens into practice and not the other way round. Let's get it right for them and form a strategy around them"

– Jan Shapiro

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INCLUSION STRATEGY AUDIT TOOL

This tool is intended to help you reflect on current policy and practice and decide where to prioritise action.

PRINCIPLE: Students as Active Citizens	WHAT PRACTICES AND POLICIES DO YOU ALREADY HAVE TO REFLECT THIS PRINCIPLE?	WHAT IS GOING WELL, AND WHAT COULD YOU SHARE WITH OTHER SETTINGS?	THINKING AHEAD, WHERE COULD YOU FOCUS ACTION?	NOTES
• How are students involved in shaping their school and learning environment? • How are all student voices represented in decision-making? • How does the school reach out to and involve families and the wider community? • How do students engage with the wider world and global events? • How does the school nurture students' skills to advocate on behalf of themselves and their peers?				

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Find out more about London's Inclusion Charter