

VRU

MAYOR OF LONDON
VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNIT



UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER

— GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4 —

BEYOND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT



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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.



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

LONDON'S INCLUSION CHARTER

This strategic guide provides a starting point for education leaders across London to think about how the guiding 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.



[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.

BEYOND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

This is about enabling young people to achieve by giving them a wider range of opportunities to flourish. This means providing experiences to *develop* and *recognise* 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 enriching trips and experiences. There is also extensive [research by the Education Policy Institute](#) on the positive impact access to extra-curricular provision has on wider educational engagement and outcomes.

While recognising the importance of gaining qualifications, one of the key barriers to belonging that students raised in the [research](#) that underpins [London's Inclusion Charter](#) was the pressure of academic achievement in terms of schools' focus upon future learning outcomes and exam results. Students at both secondary and primary level voiced the stress and anxiety of this pressure and the knock-on

impact on their self-esteem and engagement.

A central way schools can alleviate attainment related pressure is through focusing more broadly upon children's development, by enabling them to participate in activities to broaden their horizons beyond the core subjects and to harness children's aspirations and motivation to achieve success in the widest possible meaning.

There is a long-standing body of education research which demonstrates that successful schools and education systems are those that boost children's self-esteem and make them feel valued and valuable citizens (King et al. 2002). The research underlines the need to respect the wider range of talents, skills and aspirations of children that go beyond academic achievement. Those children who may not always excel academically need their achievements acknowledged and valued to sustain their self-esteem and sense of being valuable pupils and citizens.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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

- How does the school place value on a diverse range of skills, experiences, and cultural capital?
- How does the school ensure equitable access to a diverse range of activities, hobbies, trips, and experiences?
- What opportunities are there during the school day for students to develop their executive functioning skills?
- Is the school aware of the unique interests and ambitions of all their students?
- How is the curriculum and culture shaped to equip students for post-school life and employment?

EMBEDDING VALUE IN THE SUCCESSES BEYOND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

The young people who took part in the research that underpins [London's Inclusion Charter](#) were acutely aware of the pressures to perform in their academic studies and many felt that this is what their teachers valued the most (see Brown et al. 2024). Embedding value in successes beyond academic outcomes means bringing meaningful recognition to the importance of the full spectrum of a young person's development - of which their academic development is just one part. Schools need to give equal weight to the creative, physical, social, civic/citizenship successes of each child - of which there are many. Not every child will achieve top grades in their exams, and they need to feel that this is not the only thing society values. This also means recognising the advancement of an individual relative to their starting points and recognising that the bar for success is not uniform for all children.

Key to embedding value in the successes beyond academic outcomes is the acknowledgement and celebration of successes in a way that validates students' efforts and giving the affirmation that their work has been noticed, valued and appreciated. This implicitly sends the message that their achievements are valued, boosting their self-esteem that they are *valuable*.

HOW CAN IT BE DELIVERED?

There are a number of models and guidance resources that can support schools to develop frameworks for valuing achievement and engagement in a wide range of activities and experiences.

For example, [Children's University](#) works in partnership with schools to link with providers and activity leaders, offering a wide variety of extra-curricular opportunities embedded in belief in 'limitless learning beyond the classroom.' Children are provided with a 'passport to learning' and collect stamps as they engage with activities, allowing children to build up a record of their engagement in activities. Children's University provide certificates to reward students for their achievements. An [evaluation by EEF](#) also demonstrated the positive impact this programme has on participating students' attainment and engagement with school.



Other providers include:

[Duke of Edinburgh Award](#) is a youth awards programme that combines volunteering, physical activities, practical/social skills & personal interests and planning and undertaking an adventurous expedition.

Leadership Awards that support the personal leadership development of young people centred around extra-curricular activities including in sports, dance, environment and expeditions, provided by the [Leadership Skills Foundation](#).

[Outward Bound Trust](#) lead adventures and courses in the outdoors for young people, supporting their journey of self-development whilst engaging with physical activity, problem solving, resilience and engaging with the natural environment.

Schools can work with external providers or implement similar awards or certificates within their own setting. Emphasising value in and recognition for engagement in activities, hobbies and experiences beyond formal academic learning is a key strategy to improving the sense of belonging, emotional safety and individual identity in school, leading to wider inclusion.



SUPPORT CHILDREN'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT AS PART OF THE CORE OFFER

Going beyond simply valuing extra-curricular activities, incorporating developmental and enriching experiences into the core curriculum requires schools to redefine these traditionally "extra-curricular" activities as essential components of every student's educational journey. This involves schools acknowledging and responding to the learning and development of the whole child, enabling wider aspects of their identity and interests to be part of the core school experience.

Schools play a key role in recognising that these experiences can raise or widen aspirations through giving students access to a broader curriculum entitlement they might not otherwise benefit from - something which can change their view of themselves, what they are capable of, or interested in.

It is about valuing a wider set of interests and skills beyond the academic to afford respect and status to those young people who may not excel academically but may excel in other ways. It is also about ensuring that engagement with these activities does not exclude students and their families who may not have the time, means or confidence to engage.

HOW CAN IT BE DELIVERED?

It is important to work with families from the outset to raise the profile of trips and experiences and to set aside sufficient time to address the individual barriers that may prevent families from enabling their children to attend. Schools also have a role in monitoring and tracking engagement with activities and then exploring the reasons behind students not taking up the offer and tailoring the offer to maximise engagement. This requires sensitively listening to students and families and gaining a deeper understanding of their context. [This research by the Sutton Trust](#) demonstrates the importance of working in partnership with parents to ensure equitable access.

When creating an entitlement to a curriculum that is broader than academic achievement, care should be taken to ensure that these experiences are themselves not embedded with bias – they should be mindful of the diversity of the cohort and ensure equity of access (eg. be mindful of cost, barriers to engagement due to caring responsibilities, etc.).



There are a range of resources available to demonstrate how non-academic skills can be built into the school curriculum:

[POSTnote](#) by the University of Cambridge on how non-academic skills are taught and evidence on effective approaches to teaching them.

[RSA's report on Arts-Rich Schools](#) demonstrates what works in arts-based learning with a range of case studies from around the UK.

[Arts Council England's](#) projects with schools.

Arts Council England's [Local Cultural Education Partnerships](#).

[EEF Toolkit](#) on supporting self-regulation and executive function in Early Years.



EXPERT INSIGHTS

Lyndsay Harris, Director of Pastoral and Inclusion, Ark Schools, shares promising practice on a MAT approach to a universal entitlement to a broad and extended curriculum.

Ark is an education charity that exists to make sure that all children, regardless of their background, have access to a great education and real choices in life. There are 39 Ark schools serving around 30,000 children in Birmingham, Hastings, London and Portsmouth. Ninety percent of Ark schools are in areas with above average deprivation, and forty-five percent of students are eligible for free school meals.

Ark wants every child at their schools to have access to a wide range of enriching activities, within and beyond the school day. The extended curriculum hinges around a 'universal entitlement' which sets out what every child in an Ark school is entitled to, including a homework club, at least one trip annually, and the opportunity to perform at least twice per year.

Developing the extended curriculum' is a core strategic priority for Ark. Their dedicated programmes provide opportunities that many students would not ordinarily be able to access. There are three strands: music, sport, and culture.

ARK MUSIC

Ark Music was launched in 2009 to build confidence, ability and a lifelong love of music. The programme has four core aims:

1. A life enriched by music for every child through curriculum and enrichment provision. All students have access to high-quality music lessons and free out of school activities. Four thousand students a year take part in music outside school.
2. Teachers and artists working in partnership, so teachers have the support and breadth of expertise to deliver at their best. Delivery of the programme is supported by a network of 100 professional musicians.
3. Removing barriers to progression so students can develop their musicianship beyond school. Ensembles and scholarships are available for students wishing to take their study of music to the next level.
4. Network-wide performances bring Ark's 39 schools together for unforgettable events. Six hundred students perform at the biennial gala.

[Ark Acton - Music is not just an 'add-on'](#)

ARK SPORT

Ark Sport was launched in 2022 to ensure every Ark school has a vibrant sports culture that boosts wellbeing and nurtures talent. Three years later, all 30,000 Ark students have increased access to free clubs, 2,500 have entered competitions, and over 100 have been selected for a scholarship.

The programme has five distinct strands of activity:

1. Universal access

The aim is for every student to develop a love of movement, and a deep connection to their physical self and wellbeing.

2. Providing competition at network-level

The trust brings schools together to compete in athletics, football and basketball at prominent venues.

3. Supporting and accelerating talent

Through the scholarship programme, high-ability students receive dedicated support. Two students have since won national athletics competitions.

4. Equal opportunity and enjoyment for girls

Pilot projects address barriers to girls' enjoyment and participation in sport.

5. Supporting teachers and coaches

Ark Sport provides the same amount of training for PE as teachers would receive for core subjects.

[Ark Globe - Sporting excellence](#)

ARK CULTURE

Ark Culture was launched in 2024 to ensure every child attending an Ark school has a rich arts and cultural education. The project started in Ark's Hastings schools, with a focus on addressing regional inequalities in access to the arts.

The programme aims to:

1. Deliver a broad and balanced arts curriculum taught by confident teachers.
2. Support a rich and diverse extracurricular offer in all Ark schools.
3. Support students' personal growth through a universal entitlement to arts and culture.

[Ark chosen for groundbreaking Arts education pilot in Hastings](#)

INCLUSION STRATEGY AUDIT TOOL

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

PRINCIPLE: <i>Beyond Academic Achievement</i>	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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the school place value on a diverse range of skills, experiences, and cultural capital? How does the school ensure equitable access to a diverse range of activities, hobbies, trips, and experiences? What opportunities are there during the school day for students to develop their executive functioning skills? How is the school aware of the unique interests and ambitions of all their students? How is the curriculum and culture shaped to equip students for post-school life and employment? 				

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[Find out more about London's Inclusion Charter](#)