Belonging Framework - *Draft*

Please note that this is a working document and will be updated throughout the development of the Belonging Framework

Aim of Belonging Framework

We want Sheffield to be a place where children and young people feel that they belong in a loving family; have a stable home; feel they belong in education close to home; and contribute, engage and are valued and visible in their local community. We want them to know their voices are heard and responded to, and Sheffield, as a city, celebrates its growing young population and recognises that children and young people are key to ensuring Sheffield remains a diverse and dynamic place to live and work.

Our Belonging Framework is being developed to drive change – so that everything we do is focussed on developing or deepening children and young people's sense and experience of belonging.

We know that we cannot do this alone and, as a Council, we have seen the amazing work that schools and other education settings, communities, voluntary, community and faith groups, and others do to foster a sense of belonging. We would like to connect with those who have been successful and share your good practice. We are also mindful of how we support those who do not feel they belong and what we can do, together, to help those children, young people and families.

We have outlined below:

- Why belonging matters
- What we do and don't want the framework to be
- How we will develop the framework
- Where we will start
- Getting the language and approach right
- Next steps
- Initial views about what the Belonging Framework might include.

i. Why belonging matters

Research shows the impact belonging can have. With regards to belonging at school, it has demonstrated:

- Children and young people who have a sense of belonging in school tend to be happier and more confident and perform better academically.
- A student's sense of belonging is a rich and substantial protective factor against mental health problems such as stress, depression and anxiety.
- Addressing a sense of school belonging has been found to close the achievement gap by between 50 and 60 per cent.

- School belonging in adolescence can have a protective effect in adulthood.
- Belonging has been identified as the largest known correlate with depression in adolescence[1].

The research also shows how the degree to which school staff feel they belong has a significant impact on children and young people's own sense of belonging[2]. This is because these teachers know that they can make a difference and they have a strong sense of personal and professional agency in their school.

ii.   What we do and don't want our framework to be

As we start to develop our Belonging Framework, we do not have a fixed view of the model of belonging that we aspire to, nor a predetermined end point.

What we want is a deep, broad conversation with children and young people, stakeholders and interested parties in the city. This is about how we do things, our values, behaviours, and conversations.

Our Belonging Framework will not be another strategy. As a city, and indeed, as the council, we are not short of strategies and policies. Instead, we are describing it as a *framework*, so that other parts of the council and other organisations can review and "attach" their contribution to belonging to the framework.

iii.   How we will develop our framework

We will start with children and young people.

Throughout the development of the framework, and during its implementation, we will keep the voice of children and young people at the heart of our decisions. Their voice will drive the shape and ongoing development of the framework.

Using the approach outlined below (see Next steps), we will gain the voice of children and young people, including those who we feel are particularly vulnerable to not feeling like they belong.

The engagement of children and young people will be crucial. We need to hear what they understand by belonging, identify what makes them feel like they do or do not belong, and understand what is most important to them.

Professor of Urban Education, Kathryn Riley, of the University of Central London, who has done so much work to research and develop the concept of belonging recognises that each area across the country that develops an approach of belonging individually is reflective of the place in which it is being developed and implemented. She describes the process as being "fun" and notes we would want to bring a similar sense of enjoyment and curiosity into our own work.

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[1] Statistics included in Compassionate Leadership for School Belonging, Kathryn Riley, 2022.
[2] Place and Belonging in School: Why it Matters Today, A Research-based Inquiry undertaken by The Art of Possibilities & UCL, Institute of Education Professor Kathryn Riley, Dr Tracey Allen, Dr Max Coates

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We want to move quickly so that children and young people can see and feel tangible benefits from this work as soon as possible.

For the impact of this framework to be as broad and as comprehensive as is required, we recognise that we will need to build up and implement the work in stages – in addition to recognising existing work that contributes to Belonging, such as our Early Help Strategy and Inclusion Strategy.

iv.   Where we will start

We will begin by focusing on Children's Services in education/schools, social care, Children & Families early intervention and prevention services, and youth services.

We recognise that other council services and organisations outside the council have an impact on children's lives and on their sense of belonging too. For example, community work to encourage cohesion and community engagement impacts whole families, as do decisions about housing. Initiatives to support employment or the cost of living which have wider impacts on family life and aspirations.

As we seek to establish and develop the Belonging Framework, we will talk to other council services and other organisations beyond the council, to ensure that the ambition of being a city of belonging becomes everybody's business.

v.   Getting the language and approach right

We stated above that we do not have a fixed view of belonging that we aspire to and that we will be led by the views and voices of children and young people themselves. We acknowledge that belonging and really listening to what this means for children and young people may mean changes in language and approach are needed.

While language can be used to promote belonging, it is all too easy for our language to undermine a sense of belonging, and to alienate children and young people.

We know, for example, that in conversations with Sheffield children who are in care that the generic descriptor "looked after children" (often reduced to the initials/acronym LAC) is offensive to some children in care and the phonetically similar "LEC" compared to the word "lack" is an accidental significant poor choice of language. So, whereas actions will be vital to bringing our Belonging Framework alive, language is also critical to ensuring that the impact of our actions is not diminished.

vi.   Next steps

We will work with a range of children and young people to coproduce what belonging means to them. This will cover belonging in a range of settings - i.e. in education, including early years and post-16, as part of a family, in the community etc.

Teams in Education & Skills, Children's Social Care and Community Youth Services will work together to utilise their knowledge, skills and experience of engaging with young people to find out – as a snapshot, almost – how these young people feel about belonging now. Surveys, focus groups and social media will be explored. Our initial thoughts are that we need to include as many children as possible including the following groups of children and young people in the engagement:

- Children who have been excluded from school.
- Looked after children and care leavers.
- Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and/or additional needs.
- Children who are from minority ethnic groups and backgrounds.
- Children who are LGBTQ+.

We understand that multiple experiences, identities and inequalities can overlap, interact and compound - intersectionality - and we will be mindful of this throughout our engagement with children and young people.

The topics we think we will need to cover include: What does belonging mean to you and why is it important? How do you feel when you belong / don't belong? What things help/ hinder?

This is because:

- The framework has to be built on what young people say they feel or need in relation to belonging.
- We need to shape the framework so that it addresses the needs and life experiences of young people.

We will use this information to:

- Help develop the framework – to ensure it covers the issues young people have raised/addresses what is important to them.
- Create a sound research and consultation base for the framework.

We are keen that children and young people steer the engagement process, including methods/approach.

Schools and education settings, including early years and post-16
We think schools and education settings will be key in developing the Belonging Framework, because of the crucial role they play in almost all of our children and young people's lives.

We want the Belonging Framework to reflect how education leaders, their workforce, and children feel and how they nurture a sense of Belonging in their settings. Also, to contribute to the coproduction of the Framework which will enable collaborative discussions about the further work needed to support children and young people's Belonging.

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As noted above, we have seen many great examples of how they foster a sense of belonging and we are keen to explore further opportunities which will positively impact our children and young people, including reducing absence from education and exclusion.

Parents, carers and other family members
We will also seek the views of parents, carers and other family members as part of the development of the Belonging Framework – including those of very young children who might not be able to give their own views. We will be open to a range of ways to listen to and seek their feedback including through schools and education settings, and other trusted networks and organisations. Early year settings, Family Hubs and voluntary, community and faith organisations will be key to this.

vii.   Initial views about what the Belonging Framework might include

As outlined above, we will work with children and young people to develop the Belonging Framework. Initial views are that it should include:

- A set of principles we should apply in all contexts.
- Work under the four themes: Belonging as part of a family, in school, their community, and within Sheffield.
- Commissioning intentions.
- A set of "I" statements that capture what is important to children and young people, in their own words, that others can use to assess or measure themselves against.

Draft principles to apply in all contexts:
1. We will consider children and young people's belonging in all decisions.
2. We will listen to children and young people's views to understand their wants and needs – and ensure all decisions are informed by this.
3. We will take always start with what is working well (a strength-based approach) and will make sure our priority is children, young people and families and our relationships with them - not process.
4. We will build on commonalities and celebrate difference.
5. We will consider the needs of different groups of children and young people including those of different races and ethnicities, with care experience and children with a disability.
6. We will think how the language we use would feel to a child, young person, parent, grandparent, or carer if they were reading or hearing it. How easy would it be to understand. Keep concise and simple.

Draft Commissioning Intentions
We will develop our strategic commissioning intentions with children and young people, working with education, health, social care and voluntary sector services in local areas. By coproducing the design, delivery and continuous improvement of

services we will ensure there is a focus on early intervention and prevention by providing the right support and resources at the right time.

Children and young people will hold us to account for ensuring that our high level commissioning intentions, set out below, translate into detailed commissioning plans for services that underpin their sense and experience of belonging in all its forms:

Prebirth to 5 Years: The best start in life is key to building a successful future. With the right support at the right time, parents bond with their children, there is advice and guidance when required from the right and trusted person, children gain good early language and communication skills, and physical and mental health is already a key feature for all the family. Children start school ready to engage and excited. Children and families are supported at an early stage where this is not the case. Parents are given opportunities to learn and access job opportunities.

Age 5-11 Years: Schools are equipped and funded to ensure that children remain and feel a sense of belonging in their local school. There may be wrap around support with targeted interventions to support a child within school. There are a variety of affordable and enriching activities for children and families to access. Children live in good homes and thriving communities. Children can access strategies that support with anxiety and all provision is accessible, diverse and inclusive: meeting the needs of all children including those who are neuro-diverse and those who suffer from anxiety.

 Age 11 – 16 Years: Children can and want to stay in their local mainstream school – some pupils will need targeted support within their school or access to a different curriculum. Special schools will meet the needs of our most complex children. Children can access strategies that support with anxiety and all provision is accessible, diverse and inclusive: meeting the needs of all children including those who are neuro-diverse and those who suffer from anxiety. We work hard to ensure that children can stay in their family and home. We are clear as a city about the need for children to experiment, take risk and become independent and ensure that all professionals are working to ensure this does not turn into exploitation, abuse or criminal activity due to exploitation.

Age 16-18 Years: Young people are equipped to become independent accessing good education, training and job opportunities.

 Age 18-25 Years: Young people are supported into adult life with interventions only taking place if and when required to ensure a positive transition to adulthood.

Impacts
Outcomes for the Belonging Framework will have a qualitative rather than quantitative focus. They will be developed iteratively through the process of coproduction.

These outcomes may relate to individual experience, happiness, fulfilment, purpose, stability and so on and will relate back to our vision. However, we will be led by what children and young people tell us.

What do you think of this draft Belonging Framework?

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