

**CABINET – 24 MARCH 2026****BELONGING IN EDUCATION STRATEGY 2026-2029****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to consult on the 'Belonging in Education' Strategy, which will aim to support all children and young people to have a strong sense of belonging in their school and provision environment as well as in their community. An outline of the Strategy is attached as Appendix A to this report and sets out the proposed approach to the consultation.
2. The Strategy will serve as the overarching strategic framework and direction for the education system within Leicestershire, working together to ensure a commitment to belonging, where all children and young people feel a sense of belonging in education, so they can live their best lives and be the authors of their own life stories.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that:
 - a) the draft Belonging in Education Strategy be approved for consultation;
 - b) a further report be submitted to the Cabinet in July 2026 presenting the outcomes of the consultation and the final Strategy for approval.

Reasons for Recommendation

4. The Strategy establishes a robust strategic framework designed to align all related policies, practices, and education improvement initiatives. It articulates clear aims and objectives for educational leaders and the broader Children's Partnership across Leicestershire to enhance outcomes for all children and young people. This Strategy has been developed collaboratively, particularly with schools, since the beginning of the academic year and much of the strategic direction and themes are reflected in the recently published White Paper, 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving'. A public consultation on the

Strategy will help to validate that the identified priorities reflect the appropriate focus for future improvement efforts.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive a report as part of the consultation process at its meeting on 2 June 2026.
6. It is intended that the Cabinet will receive a further report at its meeting on 21 July 2026 to detail feedback from the consultation exercise and to present the final Strategy for approval. Comments from the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be included within the final Cabinet report.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

7. One of the primary pieces of legislation regarding children and young people is the Children and Families Act 2014. This sets out the duties that local authorities and Integrated Care Boards must fulfil.
8. A key interdependency for the Strategy is improvements in attendance rates for all pupils. This aligns with the statutory guidance 'Working together to Improve School Attendance' (August 2024).
9. The Alternative Provision Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (February 2025) establishes a statutory framework for children and young people accessing alternative provision. Those participating in alternative provision will be identified as a distinct group within the Belonging in Education Strategy cohort.
10. In February 2026, the Department for Education published the Education Reform White Paper, 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving', which aligns with the strategic vision of this strategy and the department. In Every Child Achieving and Thriving, belonging is a key strategic theme:
 - A core condition for learning and achievement
 - A key indicator of system health
 - A justice issue, especially for disadvantaged and SEND pupils
 - Something schools must actively build, measure and improve
 - Central to the government's vision of inclusive, high performing education
11. On 3 March 2026, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the delivery of the Building Education Services Together Plan, to improve the service offer and help address the budget deficit.
12. The Cabinet, on 17 June 2025, approved the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025-2028, after a consultation period. Both the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025-2028 and the draft Belonging in Education Strategy 2026-2029 are aimed at providing the framework for additional support.

Resource Implications

13. This Strategy provides the strategic framework and direction for the Education system within Leicestershire. Officers will develop an implementation plan, closely linked to the Government's recently published White Paper – Every Child Achieving and Thriving.
14. The Strategy sets out a shared commitment for the Children's Partnership to work together to ensure all children and young people feel a sense of belonging in their educational setting and in implementing the Government's White Paper. Like all authorities, the County Council continues to face increasing demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), with attendance continuing to be an issue, alongside suspensions and exclusions, in line with national figures. The Strategy will provide a strong strategic vision and framework to address these issues, with 'Belonging' as the key driver. The Strategy has a focus on how partners can work together to better meet the needs of all children and young people, adapt to variability in settings and help children and young people feel a sense of belonging.
15. The Strategy will be implemented within existing resources, supplemented by additional reform grant funding provided by the Department for Education Reform Grant, to support the implementation of the published White Paper.
16. The Director of Public Health, Law and Governance and the Director of Corporate Resources have been consulted on this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

17. This report has been circulated to all Members of the County Council.

Officer(s) to Contact

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PART B

Background

18. The Belonging in Education Strategy 2026 to 2029 sets out the education vision and priorities for the County Council and its partners for children and young people aged 0-18 and 19-25 for those young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in Leicestershire.
19. It provides the overarching strategic framework and direction for the education system across Leicestershire 2026-2029. The Strategy has been developed in consultation with local area partners, parents and carers.
20. Through co-production, the Strategy identifies four key priority areas over the next three years. These are:
 - **Priority one** – Every Child and Young Person has a sense of belonging in the Education setting they attend
 - **Priority two** – Building Relationships as Foundations
 - **Priority three** – Schools and professionals ensure children and young people feel autonomy and the authors of their own life stories.
 - **Priority four** – Schools feel equipped to support, especially when a sense of belonging breaks down and can reach out for appropriate external support, when needed.
21. Implementation of the Strategy will be monitored by the 'Building Education Services Together' Programme Board and, once established, the 'SEND Reform Implementation Board'.
22. The Strategy is supported by a comprehensive work plan that specifies deliverables, outcomes for each priority area, and key implementation roles. Progress will be monitored through a robust performance management framework and reported into the governing boards outlined above. Reviews of progress against the deliverables and outcomes for each priority area will be undertaken regularly. Subsequent reports will be presented to the Children and Families Partnership.
23. Progress in implementing the Strategy will be communicated to key partners through existing feedback routes. Feedback from parents/carers and children/young people will be sought on an on-going basis.
24. All service areas within the Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs are aligned to the new Strategy and strategic direction outlined, ensuring future development work is in adherence to the strategic direction, as laid out within this Strategy.
25. An Easy Read version of the Strategy will be developed. This will be available to support the consultation period.

Consultation

26. Several workshops have been held with school leaders over this academic year. These were to examine the vision for the Strategy, to understand what would be useful to include and to develop the four priority areas.
27. The draft Strategy has been produced based on these conversations and shared with staff, parent/carer representatives and health colleagues. All feedback was gathered and the draft Strategy was updated to reflect these suggestions. This multi-agency feedback loop has been crucial to help shape the Strategy and ensure it is fit for purpose. In addition, schools have been able to provide the voice of the children and young people that they have gathered as part of this work.
28. A full public consultation on the Strategy will seek to confirm that the priorities identified within it are the right focus for improvement activity to be prioritised over the next three years.
29. It is proposed to hold a six-week consultation process on the Belonging in Education Strategy 2026-2029. This will be conducted primarily by using an online survey, which also be available in accessible print versions on request. Subject to the Cabinet's approval this will commence on 20 April 2026 until 1 June 2026.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

30. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive a report as part of the consultation process at its meeting on 2 June 2026.

Equality Implications

31. The development of the Strategy will have a positive impact on equality, diversity, and inclusion for people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and more widely. Improvements to partner services will support all children and young people in Leicestershire to thrive and feel a sense of belonging in the educational provision that they attend. This Strategy aims to deliver the Council's vision for all children to thrive, fulfil their potential, belong, and live their best lives within their communities. Improvements to service provision should also benefit the parents, carers and families of children and young people in Leicestershire.
32. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed on the Strategy and consultation approach which can be found at Appendix B. It concluded that the Strategy would have a positive impact for all protected groups and other communities which are of special interest to the Council. The EIA will be revised following the consultation and submitted to the Cabinet.

Human Rights Implications

33. The EIA concluded that the continued work of the Partnership would benefit all protected groups and is expected to have a positive impact.

Other Implications and Impact Assessments

34. The partnership implications of the Strategy are set out in paragraphs 19-22 of this report.

Background Papers

Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 March 2026 Building Education Services Together: Programme Plan -

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s194972/Building%20Education%20Services%20Together%20Programme%20Plan%20-%20Children%20and%20Families%20OSC%20030326.pdf>

Appendices

Appendix A – Belonging in Education Strategy 2026-2029

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment