

**CABINET – 21 JULY 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 present the outcomes of a six-week public consultation on the Belonging in Education Strategy 2026-2029 and seek approval for the final Strategy (attached as Appendix A to this report), which has been updated to reflect stakeholder feedback.

Recommendations

2. The Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) Note the outcomes of the public consultation on the Belonging in Education Strategy 2026–2029;
 - (b) Approve the final Belonging in Education Strategy 2026–2029, as set out in Appendix A.

(KEY DECISION)

Reasons for Recommendation

3. 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 with stakeholders since the beginning of the academic year, with much of the strategic direction and themes also reflected in the recently published White Paper, 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving'.
4. The consultation findings demonstrate broad support for the strategic priorities, alongside clear feedback on the need for greater clarity on delivery, strengthened inclusion for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and a stronger emphasis on the voice of

children, young people and families. The final Strategy has been updated to reflect these findings.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. School leaders have coproduced the Strategy with the County Council and provided detailed feedback, which has been incorporated into the final version in Appendix A.
6. Health colleagues and representation from parent/carer forums have also had the opportunity to have early sight of the Strategy and provide feedback which has been incorporated.
7. Following the Cabinet's approval in March 2026, a six-week consultation was held on the Belonging in Education Strategy between 22 April and 3 June 2026.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

8. 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.
9. 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).
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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.

13. 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

14. 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 – Every Child Achieving and Thriving.
15. The Assistant Director of Law and Governance and the Director of Corporate Resources have been consulted on this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

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

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PART B

Background

17. 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.
18. This Strategy provides the strategic framework and direction for the Education system within Leicestershire between 2026-2029. The Strategy has been developed in consultation with local area partners, parents and carers.
19. 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 the natural variability of children and young people and help them feel a sense of belonging.
20. The actions and activity identified within the Strategy will be implemented within existing resources, supplemented by any additional reform grant funding provided by the Department for Education Reform Grant, to support the implementation of the Government's published White Paper – Every Child Achieving and Thriving.
21. 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.
22. Implementation of the Strategy will be monitored by the 'Building Education Services Together' Programme Board and, once established, the 'SEND Reform Implementation Board'. These will jointly report to the Children and Families Partnership, which comprises of the Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Family Services and representatives from the Council's Children and Family Services, Adults and Communities, and Public Health Departments, the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated

Commissioning Board, the Leicestershire Partnership Trust, Special, Primary and Secondary Schools, Further Education and the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum.

23. 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 made to the Children and Families Partnership.
24. 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.
25. All service areas within the Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs are aligned to the new Strategy and strategic direction outlined, ensuring future development work adheres to this.

Consultation

26. A six-week public consultation on the draft Belonging in Education Strategy 2026–2029 was undertaken between 22 April 2026 and 3 June 2026. The consultation was conducted primarily through an online survey, with accessible versions available on request.
27. A total of 24 responses were received. Respondents included parents/carers (54%), school staff (29%), Leicestershire County Council staff (13%) and others (including a childminder).
28. There was strong overall support for the four strategic priorities:
 - (a) Priority 1 (Belonging): 21 of 24 respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
 - (b) Priority 2 (Relationships): 22 of 24 respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
 - (c) Priority 3 (Autonomy): majority agreement, though more mixed views.
 - (d) Priority 4 (Support systems): 18 of 24 respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
29. Overall, 15 of 24 respondents felt the Strategy reflected needs well (very/fairly well), while 6 felt it did not (not very/not at all well), and 2 were unsure.
30. There was strong support for the concept of Belonging. Respondents widely agreed that belonging is critical to wellbeing, attendance and outcomes. However, feedback highlighted that “belonging” needs to be clearly defined and experienced positively, not just assumed.
31. Amongst the responses, there was a strong consensus that trusted relationships between staff, children and families are essential, but there were

some concerns that were raised about inconsistent staffing, time pressures, and lack of capacity to build relationships in schools.

32. While respondents supported the principle of children having autonomy, feedback highlighted the perceptions of inflexible systems and curriculum; concerns about over-emphasis on attendance and the need for more personalised approaches.
33. There were some concerns raised on whether schools feel equipped. Although the priority was supported, many respondents felt schools are not currently equipped to deliver this consistently. The key issues that were noted included access to specialist support, workforce capacity, and variation in how inclusive practice is applied.
34. Significant feedback highlighted concerns about the suitability of mainstream provision for some children with SEND, the need for specialist expertise, environments and resources and pressures on schools and families where needs are not met. This does reflect parent carer community concerns over the national direction of travel, as laid out in the SEND Reforms: putting children and young people first.
35. A consistent theme was that priorities, particularly 1–3, were viewed as high-level and lacking clarity on implementation, accountability, resources and funding. Priority 4 was seen as stronger where it included more practical delivery detail.
36. Respondents highlighted the need for stronger and ongoing involvement of children, young people and parents in design, governance and monitoring of impact.
37. In response to consultation feedback, the Strategy has been strengthened to:
 - (a) clarify expectations and delivery across all four priorities
 - (b) strengthen focus on inclusion, particularly for children and young people with SEND
 - (c) emphasise relational practice and consistency across settings
 - (d) include clearer expectations for partnership working and external support
 - (e) reinforce the role of children, young people and parent/carers voice in ongoing governance and implementation
38. Consultation feedback highlighted the importance of ensuring sufficient capacity, workforce development and access to specialist support to deliver the Strategy effectively. These considerations will be addressed through the detailed implementation plan.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

39. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive an update report at its meeting on 1 September 2026.

Equality Implications

40. 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.
41. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed on the Strategy and consultation approach and is attached as Appendix B to this report. 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.

Human Rights Implications

42. 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

43. The partnership implications of the refreshed Strategy are set out in paragraphs 18-19 and 22-24 of this report.

Background Papers

[Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 03 March 2026 Building Education Services Together: Programme Plan](#)

[Report to Cabinet on 24 March 2026 Belonging In Education Strategy 2026-2029](#)

Appendices

Appendix A – Belonging in Education Strategy 2026-2029
 Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment
 Appendix C – Belonging Strategy Consultation Summary

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