

Tackling Early School Leaving

Universal



Intervention Strategy Handbook 3: Universal



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Introduction

The three intervention strategies featured in this handbook are tried-and-tested approaches for prevention of early school leaving and re-engagement work in schools. They are suitable for supporting those with lower risk of early school leaving (ESL) as they comprise universal strategies suitable for supporting educational engagement and future planning for all learners and therefore applying to larger cohorts of students. This handbook should be read in conjunction with the School Support Guide which explains the Pathway to Change model. The interventions in this handbook target learners on the top tiers of the Pathway to Change model, who will be focused upon ‘outcomes orientated’ mechanisms for supporting learning and work goals.

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Multimodal and participatory pedagogy

AIMS:

- To provide a multimodal learning approach that enables students to contribute ideas in different ways, e.g. visual, digital, multimodal texts (not just verbal or written).
- To foster active learning through collaboration, exploration, and engagement with multiple perspectives, ideas and points of view.

OVERVIEW: This action focuses on increasing student ownership of their learning by increasing scope for participation, leading to a positive learner identity. Less didactic, more exploratory and collaborative approaches to learning can enable students to use competencies developed in different areas of life to support their subject-based learning.

Participatory pedagogy encourages:

- Reflection and exploration
- Small group learning and collaborative knowledge creation
- An openness to different forms of participation

Reflection and Exploration

Experiencing how people resolve things differently or come to different conclusions can be a catalyst for developing new ways of thinking. The focus is not on right and wrong answers, but on exploring and evaluating different ways of making sense of pedagogic questions This can be enabled by:

- **In the classroom:** open-ended questions for groups to explore together; project-based approaches.
- **In teacher development:** through teachers' critical scrutiny of their own practice; thinking deeply about unexpected outcomes, troubling or eureka moments, or why particular students responded in the ways that they did.

Small Group Learning to Facilitate Collaborative Knowledge Creation

Students at risk of ESL often struggle to operate within large classes. Collaborating with smaller groups of peers can help bridge this and alleviate anxiety.

- Learning by doing, by actively experiencing and applying ideas, can nurture a feeling of active participation and involvement.
- Interacting with peers in collaborative small group and pair work allows students to experience peers' responses and think through ideas together before sharing thoughts in the large, more intimidating whole class forum with the teacher.
- Learning activities in which there is something active to be done, or to create, can also offer a wider range of ways to contribute than a straightforward discussion or purely verbal interaction.

Open-Minded View of Participation

- Student participation is often equated with certain behaviours: putting hands up, answering a question, completing written work. However, as students have different levels of skill, experience, confidence and knowledge in different areas, participation can cover a wide range of behaviours.

Giving creative licence or flexibility around how a response can be presented, or how a problem or question can be tackled, gives students an opportunity to draw on the skills they do have and can enhance scope for participation, autonomy, ownership and creativity.

- A student may speak rarely, or not at all, giving few verbal signs of participation. They may nevertheless be listening and reflecting on what others are discussing, but not be ready to contribute verbally.
- A student may be talking a lot about the topic, but not seeking or responding to other's views. While they contribute regularly, they may need to develop other participation skills such as how to seek other's input and deal with others' ideas.
- Contributing a piece of vocabulary, an idea, or helping resolve conflicts in the group by breaking the tension with a joke at a key moment, are all valuable forms of participation.

Multimodal Pedagogy encourages:

- Attention to all 'modes' of representation-not just spoken and written language
- Enabling students to draw on a wide range of modes to make and communicate meaning and understanding.
- Reflection and collaborative thinking

Many students at risk of ESL have additional educational needs and literacy difficulties. Traditional approaches to subject learning rely heavily on speaking and writing. Multimodal approaches offer ways to support students' engagement in idea exchange and debate with others that does not always rely solely on speaking and writing. This can be valuable for all students, even those who are verbally and linguistically confident as it encourages a broader repertoire of thinking and communication skills.

Recognising all forms of participation extends to acknowledging and valuing learning and reflection in all modes (not just the verbal). Encouraging and enabling students to explore and present ideas multimodally - through the use of images, representations, diagrams, emojis, colour, enactment and movement for instance - allows them to draw on a fuller repertoire of meaning-making skills. It can also give teachers a better insight into students' ideas and thinking, even when the students themselves struggle to verbalise these ideas clearly. This supports teachers in being able to engage with students' ideas and supports students in engaging with each other's thinking. Students' response and voice can be appreciated through visual representation of their ideas or through the creation of multimodal responses comprising, - for instance, - text, photos, emojis and symbols.

Developing an identity as a valued learner is a higher-level mechanism for inclusion and engagement. A multimodal approach supports students' positive learner identity in recognising diverse expressions of learning and in enabling them to relate to others in the classroom. Multimodal participation through digital technology, or non-digital approaches such as art, graffiti, drama or song, enables students to personalise their work, representing aspects of themselves through the inclusion of subtle references to popular culture. Teaching approaches with creative flair can help students find ways of being in the classroom that remain consistent with their sense of self outside school, while also engaging with academic concerns.

RESOURCES:

- Designated person to lead on developing pedagogy. Ideally this should be someone with: responsibility and experience of developing pedagogy within the school; authority to influence whole school approaches to learning and teaching; protected time to plan and resource the intervention over an extended time; positive relationships with the teaching staff.
- CPD time at regular intervals to enable ongoing staff collaboration.
- IT support and capacity to enable: engaging presentations during CPD; easy resource and ideas sharing for staff to share good practice; staff to access support when innovating with digital tools
- Adequate and comfortable space within classrooms for group work

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

Implementing this action requires 3 strands:

1. Teacher experimentation and exploration of new approaches.
2. Ongoing teacher reflection with the class about the impact on students' engagement and learning.
3. Teacher collaboration to reflect on and further develop the changes they are making.

Teacher experimentation and exploration

Strategies by which teachers can promote participatory cultures and pedagogy in the classroom include:

- Students work in small groups for part of a lesson **to create a multimodal response to a problem or question** on iPads. Using an App such as 30Hands or ShowMe for instance (see references, resources, and further help section for useful apps), students present their interpretations (e.g. of a character or situation) using an image, emoji, keyword and sound effect. They can later project and present their multimodal text to the class and explain what the group were trying to represent. The teacher can then facilitate a whole class discussion to further explore and build on their ideas. This offers an opportunity to influence the class' perception and subsequent discussion. In addition, students' originality, creativity and digital skills are given a platform, inspiring each other.
- Providing an **image bank** for students to choose from can be more productive than asking them to search for images on the internet as it forces discussion and choice, rather than unfocussed browsing.
- Students work to create a multimodal text explanation of a concept, for instance, how the heart functions. They can use the functions on their phone or tablet to record, sketch, add images etc to demonstrate their understanding.
- Students create freeze frames or tableaux, using their bodies to illustrate a concept or idea. It could be the emotional impact of a particular conflict, or an attitude of particular groups in a historical period. This could be performed to the class or captured on mobile technology to enable detailed group discussion.
- Games with images representing human diversity where participants should describe the images and reflect about the notions and conceptions that emerged from that activity; videos to explore concepts.
- Longer, project-based collaborative challenges which are undertaken over a series of lessons. These may be more effective after some groundwork has been carried out to get students used to this way of working where students are used to more didactic, teacher-led pedagogy.

Ongoing teacher reflection with the class

- These can be brief discussions at the end of a class, or a longer episodes such as a survey or focus group. Students can respond anonymously using post-it notes, or contribute verbally, face to face, depending on confidence levels. Typeform (see references, resources, and further

help section) is a survey platform that enables images, aiding non textual and multimodal comprehension.

- This shared reflection is key in modelling the democratic aspect of participatory pedagogy to students. It helps them both reflect on learning, developing metacognitive skills (their understanding of their own cognitive and learning processes) and self-understanding. It signals that the teacher cares about their engagement, values their input and is working with them.
- This reflection can support metacognition for the students by encouraging them to consider how and why they reached the conclusions that they did. It also offers valuable and unexpected insights for the teacher about their students' thought processes, nurturing curiosity, helping them overcome assumptions and develop their practice.

Teacher collaboration

This aspect has two important strands:

1. Critical reflection enabling teachers to reach fresh insights and overcome assumptions.
2. Sharing good practice to develop pedagogy across the school.

The first strand can be accomplished individually or in groups. The Critical Incidents approach (Cartwright, R. 2023, Mena, J. 2023) can be a valuable way to support teachers to reflect. This involves identifying a challenging or unexpected incident and reflecting on one's reaction to it in order to consider alternative responses.

This second strand is longer-term strategy where small groups of teachers meet on a regular basis, develop trust and understanding. The objective is for staff to share what has and hasn't worked, discuss and explore together the reasons for this, and develop and refine approaches collaboratively. Applying understandings of participatory cultures to developing the second strand can aid success. While dictating good practice does not nurture a participatory culture among staff, posing a problem, such as, 'how could we make multimodal pedagogy work in core subjects?' and enabling groups to discuss, after having experimented in the classrooms, facilitates the development of lesson ideas, queries, doubts and success stories in a collaborative fashion. Revisiting or reformulating the question for the next meeting, can help foster a sense of development and avoid the sense of initiative fatigue.

Theories Behind the Strategy

Participatory Pedagogy is a theory of learning which encourages learners to actively create their own meaning through participation. It attempts to counter inequalities by offering more democratic relationships between staff and students. It is based on work by Paulo Freire¹ and promotes co-participation, sharing of knowledge and co-creation of new knowledge. It aims to increase student ownership of their learning by increasing scope for participation. Thinking critically about dominant classroom practices and the ways this might disadvantage certain individuals or groups is central to this approach.

Participatory Culture is a recent, influential theory developed by Henry Jenkins² to account for the impact new technologies have had on our forms of expression and engagement. It notes that in digital and online settings, people are not just consumers of digital material but participants and co-creators who engage creatively, influentially and collaboratively. For instance, in online gaming chat rooms, young people might ask questions about how to tackle a problem in a game, give other players advice, create memes, share digital artwork related to the characters or 'work arounds' to challenges. Through this they experience being part of an 'affinity group' strengthening their sense of citizenship and educational engagement. Encouraging learners to use the competencies they develop in these settings may help students and teachers in supporting classroom learning in more formal contexts.

Multimodality is a theoretical approach³ which understands human communication (and therefore learning) to be about more than just language. Interaction and meaning-making occur across multiple modes; visual modes such as colour and image; embodied modes such as gesture, gaze and touch; spatial modes and sound modes such as volume, tone and pace. In the context of classroom learning, paying attention to the modes of communication which teachers and students are able to use to convey their thoughts and ideas can help us consider what we are enabling, or restricting, in terms of thinking together. Many teachers use multimodal approaches during teaching. Reflecting on students' access to these tools to express, collaborate and present their ideas and interpretations in the classroom can highlight ways to further improve teaching and learning.

¹ [An Introduction to Paulo Freire and his Influence on Participatory Action Research | Participatory Methods](#)

² [Jenkins on Participatory Culture - New Learning Online](#)

³ [Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication \(routledge.com\)](#)

Promoting Inclusive Learning Environments

AIMS:

- To develop learning environments that recognise all students' entitlement to a learning experience that respects diversity, enables participation, removes barriers and anticipates and considers a variety of learning needs and preferences.

OVERVIEW:

Young people at risk of ESL often find it difficult to engage with the formal learning environment of school or college and may experience education as isolating or inappropriate to their learning needs. Students' educational, social or mental health difficulties can make learning within traditional classrooms of 30 students challenging. This may present as disruptive behaviour, conflict or a refusal to engage in learning, leading to the student being removed from the group (to learn separately). This can cause a significant negative impact upon students' learner identity; leading them to feel that they do not belong in school/education. This action concerns;

- Tackling students' assumption that they do not deserve a quality education and that they are not cut out for learning.
- Strengthening students' sense of belonging in school through building a positive learner identity.
- Creating a culture based on connection and inclusion.
- Making the adjustments necessary to the learning environment (e.g., small group learning, peer learning) to tackle the rigidity of institutional settings so that learning environments become inclusive.

Given there are limits to how flexible schools can be within the rigidity of national structures, promoting inclusive learning also involves attending to these aspects of inclusivity within 'alternative learning arrangements' for young people in other non-formal education settings.

Culture of inclusivity

Inclusive cultures are generated at a leadership level but these values must be shared with teachers, support staff and pupils. They support learners to reflect on their own identities and the identities of others, and how this relates to different modes of behaving towards 'other' cultural groups.

London's Inclusion Charter⁴ identifies four principles underpinning inclusive school cultures:

- Embedding Equity and Diversity
- Students as Active Citizens
- Going Beyond Academic Achievement
- Being Adaptable and Reflective

It highlights the value of collaborative approaches to developing school policies and practices with students and families.

⁴ Brown et al 2024 [Belonging, identity and safety in London schools](#)

Inclusive systems to support young peoples' social and emotional wellbeing and mental health

Although policy encourages schools to support young peoples' wellbeing by building children's individual skills, such as resilience, students find this unhelpful⁵. This approach leads young people to see resilience as a product of their individual mental strength and ability to cope with educational failure⁶.

This misses the the social and environmental aspects of resilience and can dissuade children from seeking support. Inclusive and collaborative (as opposed to individualistic) approaches to supporting children's wellbeing stress the importance of children's relationships with peers and adults, both in the school and community and the value of resources, relationships and networks that strengthen children's sense of identity and belonging.⁷ Strengthening children's sense of belonging and safety in school is central to their inclusion⁸

Inclusive approaches to behaviour management

'Zero tolerance' approaches that take a hard line and punitive approach to behaviour management have damaging impacts on young people, and particularly to disengaged students with elevated risks of ESL. While schools are now widely familiar with attachment theory perspectives in their understanding of children's behaviour, it is important to look beyond a limited focus on family attachments to consider the importance of an attachment aware approach to behaviour in schools⁹. Recognising and supporting relationships, supporting community engagement, social identity and student agency are key features of behaviour management approaches based on relational values, which are more effective for students at risk of ESL.

Clear communication around alternative provision.

Where alternative learning arrangements are made for students (whether in intervention groups or in alternative provision), clear and positive communication are important in managing expectations and explaining the purpose of the change and why it has been identified as beneficial to the young person. This has a powerful influence on how the young person sees the change, whether it is viewed as a 'punishment' or 'opportunity. This can have an important impact on how they see themselves as a learner.

RESOURCES:

This action is best achieved through the leadership of an identified person with both the knowledge and power to review and address the inclusivity and appropriateness of organisational systems and learning environments for young people at risk of ESL. This person should also be able to co-ordinate alternative learning arrangements for young people for whom full time learning in school/college is not appropriate.

- Designated person (someone in a leadership role who has the authority to guide policy and employ inclusive action in building a whole-school inclusive culture)
- Private space for one-to-one meetings with young person and peer group
- Teachers responsible for social and emotional curriculum areas (i.e. PSHE; Relationships Education; Health and Wellbeing education; Character and civic education)
- External agencies (e.g. social worker, health practitioner, virtual school officer, traveller liaison worker)
- Internet facility and web platform for the young person, e.g. Zoom/Teams, email account
- Inclusive education training programmes (e.g. roots of empathy)

⁵ Brown and Donnelly 2021; Donnelly et al, 2020

⁶ see Brown and Dixon 2019

⁷ Brown and Shay 2021

⁸ Brown et al. 2024

⁹ Parker 2018, Parker and Levington 2018

- Adaptations to make learning environment accessible and comfortable; ear defenders, comfortable chairs, lesson capture facility, safe spaces, ramps

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

Inclusive pastoral policies

- **Develop collaborative rather than individualistic student wellbeing approaches.** Review the understanding of ‘resilience’ promoted in school policy. Consider an approach to supporting wellbeing based on collaborative strategies that recognise that strengthening belonging, identity and relationships are central to students’ wellbeing and inclusion. One framework that takes such an approach is *Connected Belonging*¹⁰, developed by the University of Bath (see references resources, and further help section).
- **Take relational approaches to behaviour management**¹¹
- **Develop policies in collaboration with students and teachers:** Students and teachers should have the opportunity to opt into the behaviour policy and comment on the adjustments the policy may require. This includes in negotiating agreed definitions for key terms that underpin mental health policies (e.g. wellbeing, resilience, character, thriving). One way of achieving this is the image bank generated in the study described in Brown and Dixon (2020) where young people were asked to photograph images that represented mental health terms and in using these to facilitate discussions both online and in guided focus groups ([@youngpeoplesmentalhealthstudy](#)).
- **Signposting pastoral support mechanisms:** Ensure that the process is transparent, identifies key persons and their responsibilities, and that concerns are followed up consistently.
- **Develop a clear student-informed bullying policy,** which includes definitions of and responses towards the multiple types of bullying including; physical, verbal, ‘cyber’, and relational aggressions (exclusion by subtle methods such as ignoring, smirking or dismissing victim’s attempts to be included) and micro-aggressions (commonplace or casual daily assaults such as verbal, or behavioural indignities, whether intentional or not, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly culturally marginalized groups).
- **Implement Rubber boundaries:** The concept that while rules apply to all, they can be bent to accommodate individual difference. It is the principle of reassuring learners who try to be excluded that their efforts will not be effective. It is a way that educational settings let students know; ‘we can change and we will help you to make positive change in order that that you can feel you belong here’.
- **Ensure access to a ‘safe space’:** A designated space where young people can visit when feeling overwhelmed or in need of support. Ideally this would be a private space with therapeutic resources to alleviate anxiety (comfortable seating, calming wall displays, access to a pastoral staff member). If a dedicated safe space is not possible, can existing provision accommodate a ‘safe space’ during a regular appointed time?. N.B. safe spaces are not just physical/material but are also social spaces. In the case of home-learning (RE adjustments made in response to a pandemic) can a group/therapeutic space be created online at a time that students can ‘drop in’ to?

Classroom-based strategies:

- **Review seating plans with the young person:** to ensure that students are grouped with peers who they deem to be effective learning partners (and recognise that this may fluctuate). Liaise with the teacher to adjust seating/grouping arrangements where necessary.

¹⁰ [Practitioner Video - Introduction to Connected Belonging on Vimeo](#) and [Connected Belonging : Wiltshire Healthy Schools](#)

¹¹ [Building belonging in your school: 12 ideas education behaviour inclusion welcome students teachers \(sec-ed.co.uk\)](#)

- **Ensure that the learning environment is comfortable and conducive to learning;** Consider questions such as; Is the temperature too hot or too cold? Are the chairs comfortable? Can all learners see, hear, and engage in the learning activities? Learners will differ in their sensory engagement in learning spaces. Consult with the student to consider their sensory experience of learning, in identifying adjustments that can be made.
- **Ensure that young people have the resources they need to access learning objectives.** On reviewing the learning environment, what resources may be possible to improve the sensory experience of learners, e.g. ‘ear defenders’ (to protect against audio over stimulation), ‘voice recorders’, ‘class/lecture capture facilities,’ ‘stress-balls’.
- **Regularly review and negotiate reduced timetables:** To be led by student voice but to include teachers and families where appropriate in these discussions.
- **Ensure that special arrangements (e.g. ‘comfort breaks’ or ‘time out’) are negotiated in advance with teachers and explained to peers.** This may involve a ‘time-out’ card, or a ‘toilet-pass’ as a proxy to a verbal request. It also involves considering the impact of special arrangements on other learners and how this is communicated to the cohort. It is important that all learners understand the justification for individual adjustments in appreciating that equity in learning does not always involve equality of experience (i.e. give all learners what they *need*, not necessarily the *same* learning experience).
- **Ensure that students removed from class are not relegated to inappropriate spaces (such as corridors).** If young people need to be removed from a classroom, the quality of the learning environment should be assessed and carried out in a way that minimises the damage to students’ perceptions of themselves as a learner. At the heart of this is the understanding that learning adjustments are motivated from the perspective of supporting the learning experiences of the young person in question, not for the benefit of the cohort that remains in the traditional learning space.

Building a positive learner identity

- **Identify the young person’s unique gifts, talents, and interests and connect them with those of peers in the school or community.** Careful recounting and recording of students’ educational and biographical histories, significant relationships, interests and experiences can identify, record and highlight their gifts, talents, interests and achievements. Following this mapping exercise, the goal is to identify points of connection with peers in the school or community in drawing attention to potential learner membership communities. At the heart of this approach is a ‘reflective listening’ approach to enable the young person to build trust in their teachers and in the education system.
- **Develop personalised learning or career plans:** i.e., a road map to the pathways and actions needed to achieve educational and career goals (see Handbook 1). This helps learners to envisage the journey by which individual skills, talents and interests can generate positive aspirations for the future and confidence in one’s identity as a learner.
- **Build in opportunities for student led group project learning:** Knowledge holds more meaning when learners take ownership for learning. This includes a balance between seeking the answers from knowledgeable others (i.e., teachers) and (where possible and appropriate) seeking out the answers independently and particularly as part of a team.
- **Offer communication skills training:** For example in providing prompt sheets and/or guidance in how the young person can best present themselves to different audiences e.g. teachers, peers, employers and leadership team (see Handbook 2); how to listen and ask questions; how to address and correspond with employers, tutors, members of the community).
- **Celebrate and display learners’ achievements:** For example, in temporary exhibitions and on more permanent display within the school/learning environment. Many students at risk of Early

School Leaving are rarely recognised or receive acknowledgement of their achievements in school. Recognition can be particularly effective when shared with home, or with the learning cohort.

- **Consider collective as opposed to individual rewards for work or behaviour:** Individualistic rewards such as certificates or points/prizes that reward the individual, can contribute to a competitive peer environment, where the wider cohort fail to recognise or even denigrate the achievements of individuals. Following a collaborative approach, rewards are better assigned to a learner community (e.g. 'House', registration class ect). Prizes are later awarded as shared experiences or events that aim to bond and widen students' identity as a community of learners.

Creating an inclusive culture within the student body

- **Recognise the social and educational value of diversity among learners:** Inclusive education requires, firstly, an understanding of the subordination, exclusion and discrimination of key groups within society going beyond the 9 protected characteristics (e.g. by race, gender, 'ability', sexuality, and ethnicity or cultural group). Secondly, developing an appreciation of diversity in society and the opportunities for learning. Thirdly, opportunities for transforming the learning environment and culture in order to celebrate individual and group diversity. Where possible links to issues current on a local, national, or international level, are fruitful, for example the recent; Black Lives Matter, Me Too/ Everyday Sexism Project, The Proud Trust (see references, resources, and further help section).
- **Include small group and whole-cohort teaching on what is an 'inclusive community'.** While being careful not to single out individual children, the focus is on celebrating the diversity of learners and skills, and the value of diverse sections of society (such as those experiencing SEND and those from non-majority socio-cultural groups).
- **Schedule anti-bullying and discrimination seminars / guided discussions:** possibly through PSHE or 'relationships education' where different types of bullying are discussed in whole-group, small group and paired discussion activities, with an objective to generate a sense of empathy, respect and tolerance among students.
- **Develop Student voice platforms:** a representative body (or council) responsible to bring student issues to the school leadership team. It is important that student representatives reflect the diversity of learners (not just those most engaged in education).
- **Adopt restorative justice or mediation approaches to conflict:** A relational approach to behaviour management, conflict or social issues, for example, through restorative practice that aims to approach behavioural management through a focus on resolving conflict, repairing harm, and healing relationships (see NGLC 2024 in references, resources, and further help section).
- **Find opportunities for student-led projects about wider problems that concern them:** This refers to educational activities that explore and seek to develop strategies to address issues of current local, national and global concern.

Promoting inclusive alternative learning arrangements:

This action concerns the inclusive learning environment of 'alternative' education providers aimed at young people for whom full-time formal education is not appropriate. Inclusion in this context includes specific actions such as:

- **Review your knowledge of the 'local offer':** knowing about all the provisions available for young people with Education, Health and Care plans in the local area.
- **Compile an up-to-date record of young person's curriculum and academic progress (see Handbook 1).**

- **Offer travel-training** (Familiarising the young person with bus routes or travel plans to arrive at a new setting/work experience/taster-day for educational/training/work purposes (see Handbook 1).
- **Facilitate a warm handover-** when a tutor accompanies a young person to a new education/training setting on their first point of contact and/or first day, and introduces the student to a point of contact in the new setting.
- **Maintain an educational log:** a record that documents the young person's educational journey in order to cross reference achievements and progress educationally, personally, and socially.
- **Produce a personalised record of achievements and learning requirements: skills, interests and learning needs.** This is particularly relevant for those young people who fall under the threshold for an EHCP, or have yet to receive it. This document serves as a proxy record outlining any additional learning needs or requirements. However, it is important that this record does not only focus on what the young person finds challenging but also captures their achievements and skills (which include personal, social, emotional, 'soft skills'). The record could include examples of good work.
- **Offer taster-visits at alternative learning providers** to be organised individually or in a group depending on the needs and preferences of the young person.
- **Develop a contract of participation.** To be compiled prior to the young person's commencement at the alternative education provider, this involves working individually with the young person to identify their aspirations, objectives, motivations and purpose for participation. It should also include a section completed by the educator 'key person' laying out their expectations, what they offer and how they see the young person adding value to the aims and aspirations of the provider (see handbook 1).

Theory Behind the Strategy: The Educational Binds of Poverty

Brown's¹² theory suggests that the barriers facing students in poverty act as interconnected 'binds' that restrict and impact their educational progress. To achieve educational success, children have to negotiate these 'binds' or constraints on their actions and motivations in school. They may not recognize a 'bind' as an obstruction to success but they are aware of the consequences for social inclusion. The 'binds' thwart the child's opportunities to feel that they are a valued learner and interrupt the sense of school belonging that leads to educational success. Although children can exert agency and strive to be included, their choices are limited by competing demands so that the trade-offs of trying to escape their binds inevitably impact upon their educational opportunities and life chances. There are five 'binds':

Material Bind: The impacts of economic hardship, e.g. children being too hungry, tired, unprepared or anxious to learn due to inappropriate housing, financial insecurity, or poor health.

Cultural Bind: The impacts of cultural differences between home and school, e.g. children experiencing school as a place they don't fully belong as the culture, language, routines, norms and expectations are very different between home and school (compared to advantaged peers).

Social Bind: The social capital penalties for children in poverty e.g. they may be less likely to enter pro-schooling friendship groups and more likely to enter anti-schooling groups causing them to feel torn between engaging in work and gaining peer approval.

Mobility Bind: The impacts of more turbulence and transitions. Children in poverty are twice as likely to move school (and home and community) than their more advantaged peers so experience greater disruption to learning and to their sense of belonging in school.

Mental Health: Those living in poverty are disproportionately impacted by mental health problems, e.g. families living in poverty will be unable to afford counselling sessions for their child in comparison to their more affluent peers.

Children's efforts to negotiate or escape individual binds may have unintended negative consequences. For example, parental job loss can prompt a move of home and school. Seeking social acceptance and belonging the child prioritizes peer approval over success within the school where they have a weaker sense of fitting in and belonging.

¹² Brown, C. (2015) The Educational Binds of Poverty: The lives of school children

Strengthening community collaboration

AIMS:

- To strengthen collaboration with the local community to encourage young people's social and educational development and participation in society.
- To strengthen young people's sense of belonging by supporting their connections to other networks and communities.

OVERVIEW: Two key factors leading to ESL/NEET are;

1. a disjointed approach to tracking and supporting those at risk or who are already NEET¹³.
2. a low sense of school belonging¹⁴.

Working as part of a community network can foster and increase reciprocal knowledge of populations at risk; flag problematic situations and help identify solutions; enable the sharing of resources to strengthen children's development and community participation and support young people's sense of belonging.

Collaboration strategies include:

- **Informing** and keeping the community up-to-date with school events and news
- **Getting input** from families/community
- **Working** and **deciding together** when making school improvements and tackling issues

Engagement with families

Creating meaningful opportunities for families to get involved with school life, decision-making and students' learning supports a sense of belonging for all students but is particularly important for those more vulnerable to ESL. Educational settings can act as a source of support for families, enabling them to encourage their children to engage with their education. Family engagement can also increase schools' awareness and understanding of community-specific issues, which can be pivotal in effectively understanding and addressing the barriers faced by some young people and communities. Families should be involved with and participate in developing educational interventions to tackle absence, disengagement and ESL.

In practical terms, this involves:

- building trusting relationships
- regularly consulting and feeding back
- supporting families to tackle and overcome any additional barriers to learning they face
- learning from parents to better support their children

Engaging with community groups, organisations, enterprises or charities

Partnering with community organisations can be an effective way to harness skills and expertise in the community, while simultaneously strengthening young people's connection to local places outside of school and the home. Many charities focus on specific vulnerability groups or circumstances, and are therefore, ideally placed to work with at-risk groups on issues of aligned social interest. They can support the school in terms of promoting awareness and understanding of certain issues through visits,

¹³ Learning and Work Institute <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/107372/pdf/>

¹⁴ Parker et al (2022) [file:///C:/Users/aliso/Downloads/manuscript%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/aliso/Downloads/manuscript%20(2).pdf)

assemblies and input into the curriculum. They can also support individual young people where school resources or knowledge is limited. Community groups can also offer schools valuable, practical opportunities for their students to build a sense of citizenship and belonging through involvement in community events and initiatives.

Engagement with employers

Establishing and promoting links with the local labour market can help young people to generate positive work aspirations and develop awareness of career opportunities and pathways to jobs. It is important that young people feel that opportunities are within their reach and that they are supported to explore and develop their skills and talents to maximise the potential of experiences. Young people need to feel a sense of worth and that they have something to offer both within and beyond the school. Schools have statutory responsibilities in careers guidance and it is essential that young peoples' experiences with employers are positive and encouraging and not off-putting. It can take time to build relationships with employers so collaboration with parents or local Chamber of Commerce may be a valuable starting point¹⁵.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Activities promoting family and community engagement and involvement:

- Exhibitions or performances-showcasing students' work
- Newsletters, update emails, text messages, social media posts
- Yearly event calendar
- School/Headteacher column in local paper
- Events welcoming family and community in to school
- Parent/community cafes to socialise and get input
- Monthly/termly discussions or drop-ins
- Information, guidance or support sessions
- Involving families in homework club, extracurricular activities
- Meetings in neutral community spaces can be valuable in avoiding an unhelpful power imbalance when certain school spaces are used.
- Supported study with family/community members.
 - Open school libraries: Keeping school libraries open during out of school hours, including on weekends, so that young people and their families can access them.
 - Support classes to help families to support young people's well-being.
 - Visiting speakers.
 - Advisory councils, panels and forums.
 - Offer students the opportunity to become Community Ambassadors. Offer parents the opportunity to be Parent Ambassadors to champion an issue or help reach other families.
 - Using the school as a community hub; from movie nights to hosting support services on site at set points for family access.

Activities promoting engagement with the local labour market:

- Bringing employers into school to give talks, training events, workshops, informal discussions.
- Activity sessions to develop skills: enterprise day, mock interviews, CV workshops, Q&As.
- Organising work placements and/or work experience opportunities or 'meaningful encounters' where the student has a chance to learn about what work is like and what it takes to be successful in the workplace.

¹⁵ [Engaging with Employers \(somerset-ebp.co.uk\)](http://somerset-ebp.co.uk)

- Bringing employers and young people together to showcase and celebrate successful work experiences. This can promote the sharing of good practice between employers' work experience provision and to celebrate the achievement of young people in the role.
- Workplace, College and University Visits.
- Business challenges: Engage a business to work with students on an enterprise related or business-related challenge.

Activities promoting engagement with social organisations, enterprises or charities:

- Educational and social projects that align with community interests. These could focus on key themes according to young peoples' needs, e.g. education for social inclusion, for health, for leisure, for social justice, for climate sustainability, for school-work transition, solidarity, citizenship, health, violence prevention, racism and xenophobia and so on.
- Enrichment activities where families, young people, employers and community members come together for activities related to sport, culture, music, art. Unequal access to extra-curricular activities, particularly sport and music, due to family income denies young people the opportunity to build key skills for participation in society ¹⁶.
- Publishing a newsletter or article together addressing a key regional or local issue to build young people's sense of living within a community. For groups with low levels of literacy (i.e. parents of children with English as an additional language (EAL) or from Gypsy/Roma/Traveller communities) short pod-cast or audio newsletters could be an effective alternative.

¹⁶ Donnelly et al 2019. [Extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Theory Behind the Strategy: Connected Belonging

Key factors in students' engagement in learning and participation in society is their sense of belonging. This refers to the confidence they feel in fitting in and feeling safe in their identity and a feeling of being at home in a place, and of being valued¹⁷. **Connected Belonging**¹⁸ is an evidence-informed approach to enhancing wellbeing in schools, drawn from research with children and young people. Crucially it; **acknowledges** the importance of different aspects of identity to children's wellbeing; it **recognises** that supporting young people's connectedness and sense of belonging to their various communities can enhance wellbeing, and **builds** on the reciprocal relationship between children and the different social domains of their lives (schools, peers, local community and wider society). School's role in wellbeing promotion therefore involves exploring children's sense of connection with seven key domains of their lives and what makes them unique as an individual;

- **School identity** refers to a positive learner identity where students' learning styles, aptitudes, abilities and interests are celebrated
- **Cultural group identity** relates to students' home backgrounds and culture(s).
- **Local community identity** concerns children's sense of being valued, connected members of their local communities.
- **Place attachment** recognises that children form connections to places as well as people.
- **Social identity** relates to our intersectional identities, or how our identities arise from belonging to multiple, different social groups.
- **Peer-group identity** refers to children's connectedness to friends and peers broadly around their age or life stage.
- **Citizenship identity** refers to students' sense of being both national and global citizens of a diverse, multicultural society.
- **Individual identity** is the sense of self that we have as a unique individual.

¹⁷ Riley. (2019). Agency and Belonging: What Transformative Actions Can Schools Take to Help Create a Sense of Place and Belonging? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 36(4), 91–104. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsecp.2019.36.4.91>

¹⁸ [Practitioner Video - Introduction to Connected Belonging on Vimeo](#) and [Connected Belonging : Wiltshire Healthy Schools](#)

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