

Equalities Statement – January 2025

Be Here. Be You. Belong



Our “Belonging” Intent

At Riverside School, we actively celebrate diversity, promote inclusion, and challenge all forms of prejudice. We have rewritten our Equalities Statement to reinforce our commitment, strengthen our practice, document what we have collectively done so far and proudly share our planned next steps and priorities.

We are acutely aware that we do not live in an equal society and that many people face prejudice and discrimination every day. The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on these nine protected characteristics:



Under the Equality Act 2010, schools have a general duty to: a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the basis of any of the protected characteristics; b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and c) foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Schools also have a specific duty to publish information showing how they are meeting this duty, which must be updated annually. They must also prepare and publish one or more specific and measurable objectives in pursuit of the duties above, which need to be reviewed every four years.

We welcome the above requirements and are fully committed to ensuring that no one at Riverside School experiences harassment, less favourable treatment or discrimination due to any of the nine protected characteristics. We ensure that everyone is treated fairly and with respect and we actively strive to create a school environment which is a safe, secure and stimulating place for everyone.

As a school we are committed to ensuring that everything we do; our ethos, curriculum and school processes permeate and prioritise equality, diversity and inclusion. We continue to ask ourselves

reflective and challenging questions such as “Is our school a place where everyone truly feels like they belong?”

We initially established our Belonging intent in September 2020, focusing on inclusion in terms of Race. The events of the summer of 2020 made us stop and think. George Floyd’s tragic murder and the Black Lives Matter Movement confronted us head on and as a school we felt we couldn’t look away.

At that time, as a Leadership Team we considered our roles, our responsibilities and our response. We felt confident that collectively we held a lot of expertise in terms of SEN, disability awareness and inclusion, but we looked inwardly and realised that what we needed to do was to focus on and explore inclusion, equality and diversity in a much wider sense and make sure that we were actively doing all we could to be inclusive and to stand up to any forms of racism or prejudice.

The demographic of our school is increasingly diverse. Currently 46% of our school population identify as White British in ethnicity and 59% are made up by a wide variety of different ethnic groups. As a wider staff team, we have been confident to talk openly about the issues surrounding the under-representation of other ethnic groups in the staff and this forms part of our recruitment action plan.

We felt strongly about our responsibility to our Riverside community; to our pupils and their families, to our staff and to anyone else who we come into contact with, to get this right, to continue to learn and to set an example. We know that many of our families already feel isolated within the wider community due to the complex needs of their children, we wanted to make sure that they were not experiencing any further feelings of exclusion due to their race or ethnicity. As educators, we naturally become influencers and are often looked to as leaders. We believe passionately that we can help to create the society we want to be part of and that we have a responsibility to work together to build a better future and society for us all.

We adopted the mantra “**Be Here. Be You. Belong**” as for us, this represented and articulated our shared commitment to create and foster an environment where everyone can be confident that they will fit in, be valued and feel safe in their own identity.

To start our Belonging journey, we sent out a call to action in October 2020 to our families and staff:

To the whole of the Riverside School community ... this is our call to action.

You will be aware that October is **Black History Month**, an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the history, achievements and contributions made by black people across the world, over many, many generations.

When we began to think about how we’d celebrate **Black History Month**, we wanted to do so much more than we could meaningfully achieve in just one day, one week or in this one month.

At Riverside School, we are wholly committed to celebrating diversity and challenging racism and discrimination in all its forms. We believe that we have a duty to play our part in building a fairer and more inclusive society, a society in which fear and prejudice have no place.

Following the tragic death of George Floyd on May 25th, millions of people across the world have stood united. They have marched together against injustice and communities have come together to grieve, to reflect, and to learn. We hope that the events you have seen unfold across the world have not only made you think about injustice in society but more importantly, made you want to do something about it.

At Riverside School, we believe we have a responsibility to shape and help create the kind of society we all want to be part of. In many ways, the events we have all witnessed have highlighted just how fractured our society can be. At Riverside School, we believe there is no place for racism, discrimination, injustice or inequality and this must cut across everything we do.

Martin Luther King said "The time is always right to do what is right" and we believe that the time is now. Over the years, many of you will have been involved in school events that have celebrated diversity and difference, but we know there is still so much more to be done.

Please stand with us as we explore this further. We want each and every one of you to feel a true sense of belonging and connection to Riverside School, that you can be "you" in all of your uniqueness, beauty and glory. One of our strategic priorities is "to further strengthen a truly inclusive environment, in which the whole school community feel welcomed, valued and confident to bring their whole selves to the school" and we would love you to help us shape our next steps as we embark on this journey together.

Our January staff conference will act as a launchpad for this work and if you would like to contribute in any way to the planning stage, we would love to hear from you. We will be hosting two working parties in November for families and staff and if you would like to be involved, please complete the attached form.

Thank you in advance for playing your part in building a better future.

We then held staff and family working parties with those who responded and it was very humbling to hear individual stories, reflections and thoughts. We worked alongside an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer who supported us to successfully plan and facilitate the meetings.

Families spoke very positively about feeling safe, welcomed and relaxed at school. Of Riverside being an extended family and not just an educational setting; one mum who shared that for her, *"the school was like an anchor and at times she found herself clinging to that anchor"*. These examples were reassuring to hear but we were mindful that these responses came from families confident enough to respond to our call and take part in the meetings.

A priority for us moving forward was to make sure that we were reaching all of our families, especially those that may have felt less able, or empowered to speak up, in order to hear what their experiences of Riverside are. Our intent was to create an environment where all our families and all our staff feel that they are able to bring their whole selves to Riverside School and feel completely accepted, valued and included in doing so. In order to do this, we acknowledged that we would also need to hear of things that may not be going so well in order to be able to improve and make meaningful and sustainable change.

One parent remarked that they were so happy to see Riverside making strives to do the *“right thing in this current climate”*, we echoed this sentiment to our staff and our next step was to hold a Whole Staff Conference Day. A day that we called “Be Here. Be You. Belong”, held poignantly almost a year to the day of the first year anniversary of George Floyd’s death.

Within the year there had been developments across the world; Derek Chauvin was found guilty of murdering George Floyd, in a court case that was said to change the course of history. The dance group Diversity performed an emotive and moving account of the year 2020 with a Black Lives Matter focus, and featured the phrase 'I can't breathe'. A performance which sadly resulted in Ofcom receiving a record number of complaints regarding their performance and it became the most complained about TV moment of the past 10 years.

Footballers took the knee, Statues of historic figures were removed, and many companies and celebrities made statements of support and solidarity.

Our Conference Day was a chance for us to reflect and learn together. To uncover any pitfalls, and make meaningful suggestions for how we could all improve and strive to do even better. We acknowledged that we all bring unique perspectives dependent on our past experiences and it was important for us to hear from all our staff, to listen and learn how they wanted our / their school to feel. Ultimately, we wanted to know what we could do to improve things further in order to achieve an inclusive culture at Riverside School, one that everyone feels fully part of and is able to identify with.

2020 and 2021 were very uncertain and challenging times, with Covid, and with so many other priorities, but we absolutely believed that this was the right time for us as a school to be focusing on this, for our staff, for our pupils, for their families and for our wider community.

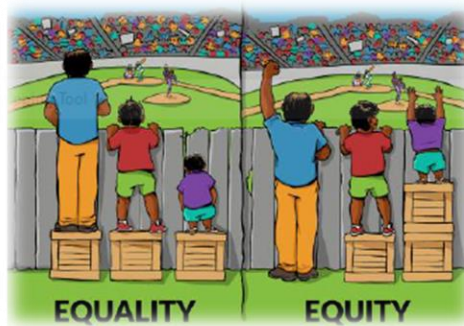
We started this work with a genuine intent to get it right, to build something that would be sustainable for the future, for us this couldn’t have ever been a tick box exercise. To build together a Belonging, inclusive culture at Riverside School, one that everyone could access and thrive within.

At Riverside School we have always been committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils, staff, parents and carers irrespective of race, gender, disability, belief, sexual orientation, age or socio-economic background. We have aimed to deliver a culture of inclusion and diversity in which all those connected to the school feel proud of their identity and ability to participate in school life. We actively tackle discrimination through the positive promotion of equality, by challenging stereotypes and by creating an environment which champions respect for all. Together we are committed to celebrating difference and actively supporting and allowing our pupils to Be All That They Can Be.

We aim to ensure that all pupils are able to access opportunities to succeed and reach the highest level of personal achievement. This Equalities statement sets out the ways in which we have and continue to achieve this commitment.

We believe our school vision: ‘To inspire breakthroughs in the way society enables children with complex needs to find true fulfilment’, highlights our commitment and drive to support our pupils to be active and valued members of their wider communities and within society.

We believe in order to be the best school that we can be, we need to bring the community into our school and work to influence beyond our school perimeters in order to ensure meaningful space is made for children and young people with complex needs. To do this, we need to play a part in wider discussions and debates, ensuring that meaningful inclusion for our pupils will be possible.



We believe that it is important that our staff and community understand the difference between Equality and Equity, if we are truly going to be able to support our pupils to Be All That They Can Be. We deliver regular whole school training to help staff understand that equality is giving everyone the same, whilst equity is giving everyone what they need to have the same / equal opportunity. For example within our school context, equity is giving particular pupils visual supports, objects of reference, sensory supports etc to ensure each pupil has what they need in order to succeed.

If we consider the letters that we send home to families; equality would be that all parents receive the same letter in the same way. Equity would be considering if certain families required letters to be given in a different home language or for the information to be given via a phone call if needed.

As we are striving to create a feeling of belonging at Riverside, we believe it is more than simply having a seat at the table, and being represented. We believe it is about making sure everyone is seen, heard, valued, and that they feel like they belong and can contribute.

Following our Be Here. Be You. Belong. Conference Day, and subsequent positive staff engagement we created our 'Belonging' Staff Working Party. We began by asking ourselves why it was important for us as a school to be focusing on Inclusion, Diversity and Equality/Equity across all areas of our school life. We used the following slide to support our staff training:

Why does it matter to us?

- Increased Family Engagement**
- Better outcomes for all**
- Positive Influence/impact on our Wider Community
- Improved staff engagement
- Responsibility - it's the right thing to do!**
- Increased Productivity

Improved cultural insights
Reduced staff turnover
Improved Creativity
Happiness
Reputation
Innovation; to lead the way

Our Mission: To transform our challenge for learning into the lives of our pupils

(Legal) Duty of Care
Great Place to Work
Well-being
Health and Safety
Satisfaction
Engagement

BE HERE. BE YOU. BELONG. RIVERSIDE SCHOOL

There are so many reasons, for us the main one being linked to our families, engagement and ultimately our pupils' outcomes. Our school mission: 'To transform our children's lives and the lives of their families,' is both a big statement and a big responsibility. In order for us to be able to fulfil this, we are very aware that we need to be able to communicate at a deeper level with all our families to find out what they need to make the biggest difference to their lives. When we started to reflect, it was clear that if we are not enabling our families to feel psychologically safe enough to tell us what the most important things are for them, then we are not going to be in a position where we can meaningfully support them. Our first collective priority was therefore clear: we needed to ensure that we were meaningfully engaging all families and developing and fostering mutually trusting relationships where families could share their wishes, priorities and needs.

With this in mind, in September 2023 we updated Our Happiness Passports to include the below page:

BE HERE. BE YOU. BELONG.

My Life, Culture & Community

People who are important to me:
(Please send in photos or email them to your class teacher if you are happy for them to be included)

My World at home: (Please include any religions/faiths, languages spoken/heard at home; are there any key words they you would like us to use/refer to throughout their day? Any important rituals that take place, anywhere important that you visit or attend, anything else that is important to your family)

Dates, celebrations, occasions and events that are important to me and my family:

Areas in my Community that my family would like me to be able to access meaningfully: (This could be your dentist, a local shop, a particular park, a hairdressers/barbers, a religious setting, crossing roads, walking past dogs etc. Please give us much detail as you can)

Supporting us to facilitate these really important conversations with our families and giving us a platform to be able to record and celebrate all of their unique lives and priority areas.

The Belonging Working Party developed further and evolved into 5 individual Belonging Groups each overseen by two Belonging Leads, spanning across our three School sites.

- **Recruitment and Retention Belonging Group**
- **Staff Engagement Belonging Group**
- **Family and Community Belonging Group**
- **Curriculum Belonging Group**
- **Physical Environment Belonging Group**

It was important to us that staff from every role were represented and had the opportunity to join a group they were passionate about, in order to hear from a diverse range of lived experiences and support us to look through other lenses, when making decisions.

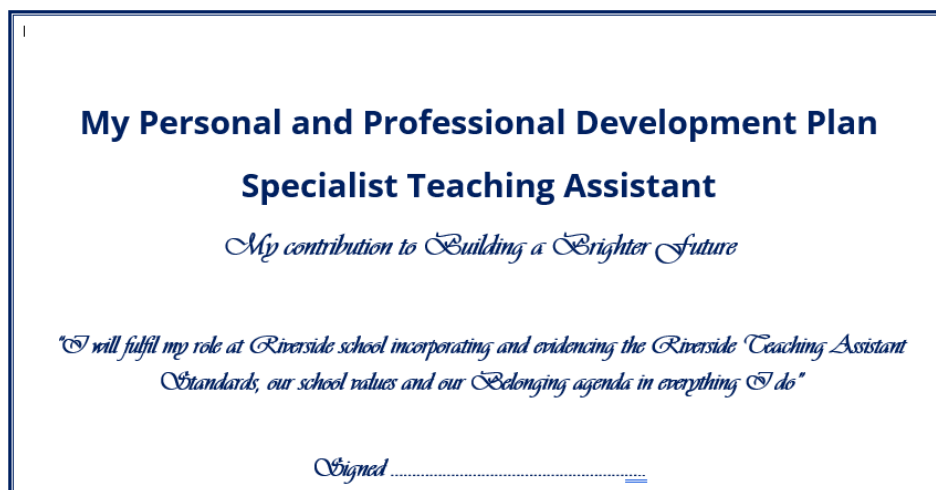
The Belonging Groups were overseen by one of the Deputy Headteachers, who led our Belonging agenda. By setting up five distinct groups we felt we would be best placed to ensure all areas of the 9 protected characteristics are being considered, reflected and included within everything we do. We also wanted to ensure a level of accountability and consistency throughout the school and place Belonging at the very heart of everything we do.

Our Belonging journey and agenda has continued to develop and evolve as have we. In September 2023 we decided to merge the Belonging Groups into one team led by three of our Belonging leads. The momentum had continued to develop and the leads began to complete termly Belonging Learning Walks across all four sites; sharing positive reflections and pointing out where further developments and improvements could be made.

One of our School Development Pledges focused on our Belonging agenda and we ensure that all staff are aware and feed into this:

Pledge 10	We will promote inclusion and celebrate diversity in all its forms to ensure that everyone in our school community feels a true sense of belonging.
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Within staffs individual PDPs 'Personal and Professional Development Plan's' there is a requirement for them all to sign and make clear their individual commitment to our agenda:



Further training opportunities were provided in the form of Belonging staff Meetings and all staff completed an Unconscious Bias training by March 2024. This will now be an annual requirement for all staff.

We believe that a sense of belonging is essential for all our staffs wellbeing. That it is a sense of belonging that enables staff to feel accepted, acknowledged, valued and celebrated whilst they are with us.

We have prioritised the notion Psychological Safety for our staff body, as we recognise that simply building a diverse team of people from different backgrounds, genders, ethnicities, personalities is not enough. If staff do not feel safe to express themselves and be their authentic selves for any reason then we will not see the benefits of the many different perspectives we may have. We understand that it is not enough to have a seat at the table.

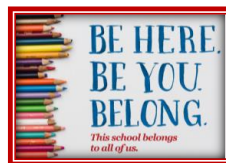
As such Belonging featured heavily as part of our Pulse Staff Survey, giving us an opportunity to illicit feedback in order to help shape our next steps and priority areas. We are focused on creating a culture of open and honest communication where any concerns can be listened to & addressed. Where everyone feels their perspectives are valued.

We will continue to drive this work as a priority as we recognise the need to continue to cultivate a culture of Belonging for our whole Riverside Community. We also use the 'Five Pillars of Belonging' to help guide us; Feeling Welcomed, Known, Included, Supported and Connected.

In addition to our whole school Belonging Day, this month; January 2025 we are recognising and implementing an International Day of Acceptance. Which is part of a national campaign to celebrate and include individuals with complex needs and neuro diversity.

We will continue to place **Belonging** at the very heart of the way **we all** work. We believe it is only when everyone can bring their true selves to Riverside, that will we benefit from the **best that everyone can be**.

Be Here. Be You. Belong.



Charlotte Downs – January 2025