

Equalities Statement – February 2026

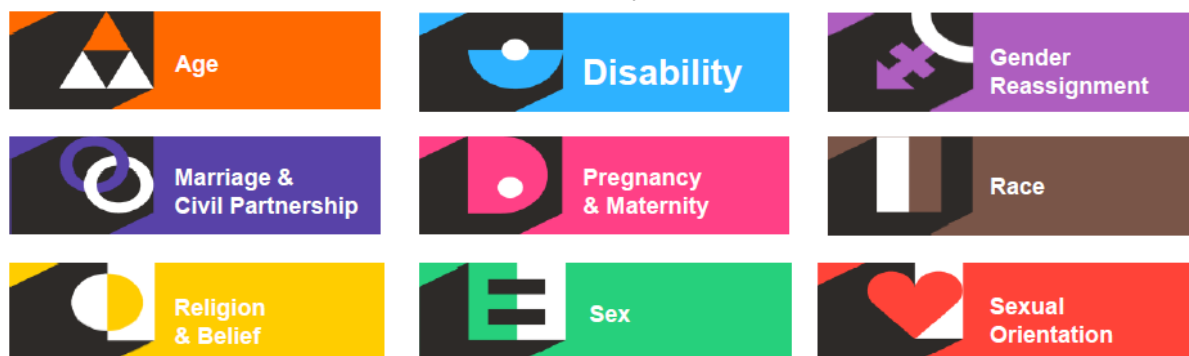
Be Here. Be You. Belong



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. ***We want to ensure that our focus and the language we use is always family centres and entrenched in respect. As such we talk about ‘Meeting our families where they are’ and reject the notion of ‘hard to reach’ or ‘hard to engage families’.*** 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 that followed there were*** 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.

We ***held a whole staff Conference Day which served as an opportunity*** for us to reflect and learn together. To uncover pitfalls ***and gaps in knowledge***, 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.

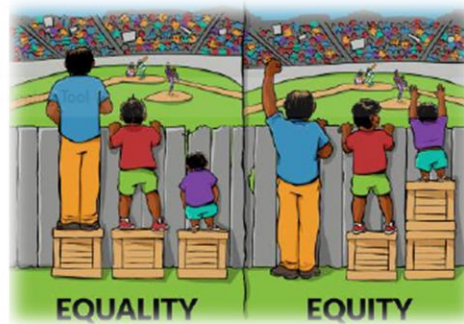
We started this work with a genuine intent to get it right, to build something that would be sustainable for the future, for us this couldn’t have ever been a tick box exercise. To build together a Belonging, inclusive culture at Riverside School, one that everyone could access and thrive within.

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:




There are so **many reasons that this continues to be a focus for us; the main being linked to our families, wider 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. **To do this meaningfully we need to ensure that we truly are meeting each and every one of our families where they are at any given moment in time.**

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



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)

This new addition supported us to facilitate these really important conversations with our families and gave us a space to be able to record and celebrate each pupils unique life and identify their families personal 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.
------------------	---

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:

My Personal and Professional Development Plan

Specialist Teaching Assistant

My contribution to Building a Brighter Future

"I will fulfil my role at Riverside school incorporating and evidencing the Riverside Teaching Assistant Standards, our school values and our Belonging agenda in everything I do"

Signed

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 continued to prioritise 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.

In July 2024, we designed and commissioned our Be Here. Be You. Belong. Mural, which proudly stands at the front of our main school site, and serves as a visual reminder to our whole school, and wider school community:



In addition to our yearly whole school Belonging Day, in January 2025 we recognised and implemented an International Day of Acceptance. Which is part of a national campaign to celebrate and include individuals with complex needs and neuro diversity.

Our next whole Staff Training Day which is taking place on February 23rd 2006 has culminated as a response to societal and community events that we began to witness in Summer 2025. This day is titled 'Community, Connection and Culture; there is more that connects us than divides us.' This day will serve as a launch for our next phase of work; where we will combine our Belonging Group, with our Wellbeing Group as we believe that these two areas are inextricably linked. We are excited to be welcoming guest speakers from 'Everyday Racism' who will be supporting staff to further understand the intricacies linked to intersectionality and unconscious bias. As a school we will ensure that we are never complacent and that we continue to be outward facing, continue to develop our knowledge to enable us to continue to improve our practice and be better placed to support all of our pupils and their families. As a part of the training day we will also share videos recorded by our families, to make sure their voices continue to be at the heart of everything we do.

Steve Solomons writes and shares a weekly Friday round up with all staff. He has used this platform to remind staff about our whole school values and our overarching commitment and responsibility to our entire community.

Please see below some extracts:

Friday 26th September

'The reason I mention this is because it symbolises the fact that our work in this area is never done. Whether a mural needs a little touch up or re-paint, or a policy needs a review and refresh, we will continue to evolve as circumstances demand. And as educators, we have a responsibility to debunk myths, dispel mistruths and engage and support our whole school community (and beyond) in the big issues that affect us all. Regardless of the sensitivities or complexities, what is crystal clear is that discrimination, in any form, is never OK and we will continue to stand together, challenge when necessary and reiterate who we are and what we stand for.

So, with that in mind and to end today's Friday Roundup, I wanted to share an email we received from a visiting lecturer who came to the school last week. They wrote: "Riverside seems to be such a positive school. The staff I have come across being here today are so helpful and clearly have the pupils at the heart of all that they do. It is evident that you all go far beyond education and teaching to create a real community hub for your pupils and their families".

I think we can leave it there ... a "community hub" is about right and I would like to thank you for the part you play in creating this very special community hub. Mes que un club indeed. More than a school. A very, very special place.'

Friday 19th September

'We often hear the phrase "It takes a village to raise a child", a proverb originating from a number of different African cultures, including the Igbo and Yoruba communities of Nigeria. It describes our collective responsibility in doing what we do and thank you, as always, for your

personal contribution to our pupils, families and colleagues, regardless of your role, phase, pathway or site.

You may also have heard me refer to FC Barcelona's motto "Mes que un club", which is Catalan for "More than a club" and signifies FC Barcelona's deep cultural, political and social significance in the region. In this regard, we are "More than a school" and in light of recent national and global events, never has it been more important to reinforce our values and expected behaviours. If, on a personal level, you have been affected by anything you have seen or heard in recent weeks, either within or outside Riverside School, I hope that you feel able to voice how you feel. It may be to a colleague or a line leader, a Mental Health First Aider or through our Employee Assistance Programme but please, please reach out. There will always be someone here for you.

We all get a little nostalgic from time to time, revisiting something from the past when it relates to something in the present. In July 2022, we released "If You're Out There" to support our Belonging Agenda and over three years (and nearly 10,000 views) later, I think it is just as (if not more than) important as ever. If you haven't seen the film, please check it out at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS8gPSpeJA&t=390s>. You will see that it reflects our school community at the time, in all its diverse glory and for ease of reference, I have copied the final message here:

At Riverside School, family is everything.

Stories are shared. Of joy, hope and deep connection. And at times, of isolation and exclusion. Words hurt, actions heal.

Together, we will create a world that doesn't judge, but embraces people for who they are.

A world in which everyone is valued, seen and heard.

A world in which no one is excluded and everyone belongs.

This is the world we all want to see.

We know you're listening.

We know you're out there.

Join us.

Be Here. Be You. Belong.

At Riverside School, our position remains resolute and we will always stand up and speak out against discrimination in all its forms. Thank you for sharing this commitment and for bringing your true colours, day in, day out, to this place we call home.'

Friday 12th September

'Last week I shared a message from a parent whose child left us in July and this week, I wanted to share a message from a parent whose child has just started with us:

"Hi Steve, I just wanted to send an email to express our deep gratitude for the welcome our daughter has had. She has been accepted and embraced for who she is and we have been made to feel so comfortable with leaving her with the school. We are so grateful for the community yourself and staff have created. It is the first time she has been included and welcomed into a wider school community and we are excited to see how her journey with yourselves progresses".

I wanted to pick out four words that, in light of the sentiments in my recent letter to families and subsequent Friday Roundup, really stand out .. "accepted", "embraced", "included" and "welcomed". These are more than just words and really chime with our values. At Riverside School, we choose acceptance rather than rejection; we embrace rather than resent; we include rather than exclude and we welcome rather than shun. These values apply to each and every one of our 360 pupils. A number which is symbolic, as in order to truly see, we need to look. 360 degrees. To see all of them. And their families. And our staff community. And our staff's families. Our school community reflects and represents a wonderfully diverse population, each person bringing a heritage and culture, a set of lived experiences, personal stories and unique journeys.

So, if anyone is minded to post or share anything on social media that could be seen as discriminatory, I would urge you to stop and think. You may want to consider how you would feel if you were on the receiving end. Or how your colleagues, or our families would feel. If you, or they, were made to feel rejected, resented, excluded or shunned? If you, or they, were "othered" (the opposite of feeling like you belong). Because that is not the Riverside Way. We will never tolerate discrimination in any form, and in line with our Equality policy, Equalities statement, EDI policy, Social Media policy, Disciplinary policy, E-safety policy and Staff code of conduct, we will challenge discrimination in all its forms. I don't think you'd have it any other way.

So, as we go into a weekend in which division and polarisation is becoming a little too evident in the world, at Riverside School, we will never lose sight of the rainbows, and as I wrote last week, we will always stand together to play our part in Building a Brighter Future. A future in which differences are celebrated and diversity, kindness and hope will always triumph. Unity is strength, and you could say that the reception area at Riverside West Wickham (as with all our sites), says it all ...



Friday 5th September

We often talk about the great privilege (and responsibility) we have to provide our children and their families with the very best and for children who start with us at 3 and leave us at 19, that's 16 years. For children with regressive conditions, it could be less. None of us have a crystal ball, none of us know what the future holds and we will therefore never, ever forget that every day really does count. So, whether you are currently working with 3 year olds or 19

year olds, whether you are in class or make up the invaluable infrastructure team that makes everything tick, thank you for shaping their lives. In ways we may never know. But one thing is certain. They, and their families know.

And finally, further to my letter to families on Monday, you may have spotted that along with the showers this week, there have been rainbows in the sky. Thank you to those of you who sent me photos. You will recall that during the pandemic, we, alongside many others, used rainbows as a symbol of hope during such uncertain times. Well, that was then, and this is now, and five years on, the rainbows came out again, arching across the sky in all their beauty. All their colours. As they shone, they eclipsed and transcended the flags beneath them. At Riverside School, we are proud to stand together, playing our part in Building a Brighter Future, a future in which differences are celebrated and diversity, kindness and hope will always triumph.

Our important, and irresistible journey continues



Yesterday was Census Day, the day when pupil data is collated and in the context of what we have been referring to a lot lately, I thought you'd be interested to know that our pupil population now boasts a wonderful total of 33 different home languages. These include Albanian, Arabic, Bahasa, Bengali, Bulgarian, Cantonese, Chinese, Czech, Ebra, English, French, Igbo, Indonesian, Italian, Kiswahili, Kurdish, Lithuanian, Malayalam, Mandarin, Panjabi, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Putonghua, Russian, Somali, Swahili, Tamil, Telugu, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu and Yoruba. I am sure you will all know the languages spoken or heard by your pupils at home and if you are not 100% sure, thank you in advance for taking the time to find out. And for going that one stage further, like learning a few key words, phrases or songs that reflect and celebrate the richness of what our pupils and families bring. I know they appreciate the efforts you go to.

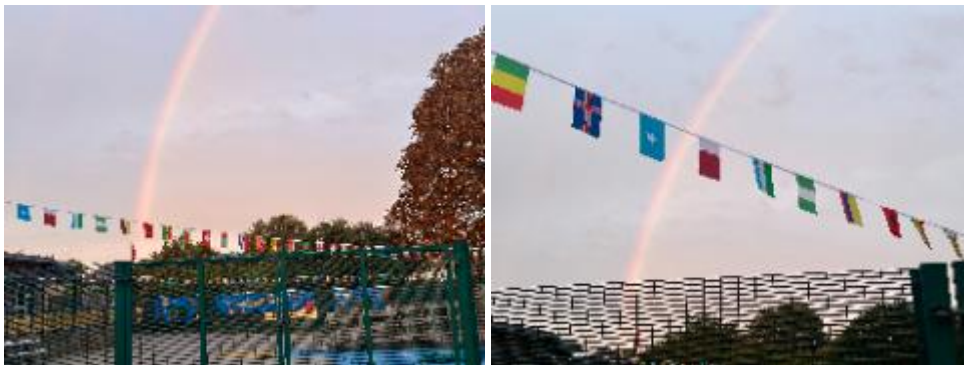
*To end today's **Roundup**, I'd like to take you back to Wednesday morning. It was just before 7.00am when the first car pulled into the SPC car park. The single flag in the adjoining garden behind our fence stood still, as it has done since it was hoisted a couple of weeks ago. But this morning was different. As more and more people arrived, what they saw was not just one flag, but 200, stretching far and wide across our playground. And each one representing a different country. Not a single country missing. They were all there. And in addition to the red, white and blue, there was green, and yellow, and orange, and purple, and pink, and black. Every colour of the rainbow. There were stripes and shapes and patterns. Familiar and unfamiliar. All of equal value.*

And then, high above them arched a rainbow.

A rainbow? But there was no rain. As it happens, rainbows don't actually need rain, they just need sun and an airborne water source, such as mist, or fog, or dew. The water droplets, just like raindrops, refract, reflect and disperse sunlight to create the arc. The symbol of hope.

And at that moment, it felt peaceful. Just the sound of the flags gently swaying, a few birds chirping and the rustling of leaves.

A couple of hours later, as our pupils went out to play, they noticed too. Some looked up excitedly to try and find the flags that meant something to them. Others simply looked up as the flags waved in the wind, in all their glory.

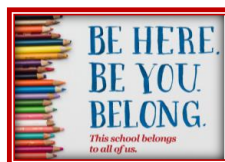


In 1957, Martin Luther King Jr proclaimed: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that". Almost 70 years later, not a truer word spoken.

At Riverside School, we will always choose love over hate and we will never, ever lose sight of the rainbows.

Wishing you and your loved ones a happy and peaceful weekend.'

As a school we will continue to drive this work as a priority as we recognise the need to continue to cultivate a culture of Belonging and Wellbeing, one that is focused on promoting connection for our whole Riverside Community. We will continue to consider the 'Five Pillars of Belonging' to help guide us; Feeling Welcomed, Known, Included, Supported and Connected. We will continue to place these concepts 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 we will benefit from the best that everyone can be.



Charlotte Downs – February 2026