

Professor Kathryn Riley & Dr Manuela Mendoza, May 2021



Why  
belonging  
matters

What's the  
evidence?

Why we need  
compassionate  
leaders

*'Belonging'  
is that sense  
of being  
somewhere  
where you  
can be  
confident  
that you will  
fit in and feel  
safe in your  
identity.*

**Covid 19** has exposed the divisions within and across society. Those on the margins have found themselves most exposed to its impact. However, the Pandemic has also taught us that wisdom and compassion help build connections and communities, and that schools need to be places of belonging.

**For many children and young people** today, home and community are not fixed, and schools represent one of the few points of continuity and stability in their lives. Nevertheless, our world is at a turning point - a moment of transformation - and the opportunity exists to move forward and create the conditions for school belonging.

**Hackney headteachers** have told us (through the project 'Leading in a New Era: Compassionate Leadership for School Belonging') about how the Pandemic has re-affirmed important values and perspectives.

*You can't have a community unless you really understand your context.*

*You have to be compassionate, starting with yourself.*

*All voices and specially the children's need to be heard.*

*The focus needs to be on belonging, on families, on the ethos, and to ignore a lot of the noise from outside.*

*We have recognised what's valuable – our families, our young people and staff.*

*We've learned the difference between sympathy and empathy.*

**Next Steps in Hackney:** We are looking to set up a programme to support the work of Hackney schools in creating the conditions for school belonging. The focus will be on the purposeful actions that schools can take to make a difference to the lives of young people.

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## WHAT THE EVIDENCE TELLS US

Belonging, Inclusion	Ostracisation, Exclusion
<p>Young people who feel they belong in school tend to be happier, more confident and perform better academically. Their teachers are more professionally fulfilled.</p> <p>A sense of belonging is manifested in the ways in which staff and students listen and respond to each other and talk about each other.</p> <p><i>TIMMS data shows a significant link between 'belonging' and young people's academic performance in maths and science.</i></p>	<p>The number of young people who feel they don't belong in school is rising.</p> <p>Those from socio-economically disadvantaged communities are twice as likely as their more advantaged peers to feel that they do not belong in school, and four times more likely to be excluded.</p> <p><i>The excluded seek belonging elsewhere, finding it in many ways, including self-harm, gang membership and forms of extremism.</i></p>

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT WHAT WORKS

- Intentional, purposeful, and positive interventions (not one-off reactions) that are clearly understood across schools and the school system and which aim to create the conditions for school belonging.
- Place-based, compassionate, and intentional leadership which listens to, and involves, staff, young people, families, and communities.
- We *do not know* what is to come: across the world, in our country and in our neighbourhoods. However, we *do know* the expectations, beliefs, practices, and relationships that can help create the conditions for school belonging.