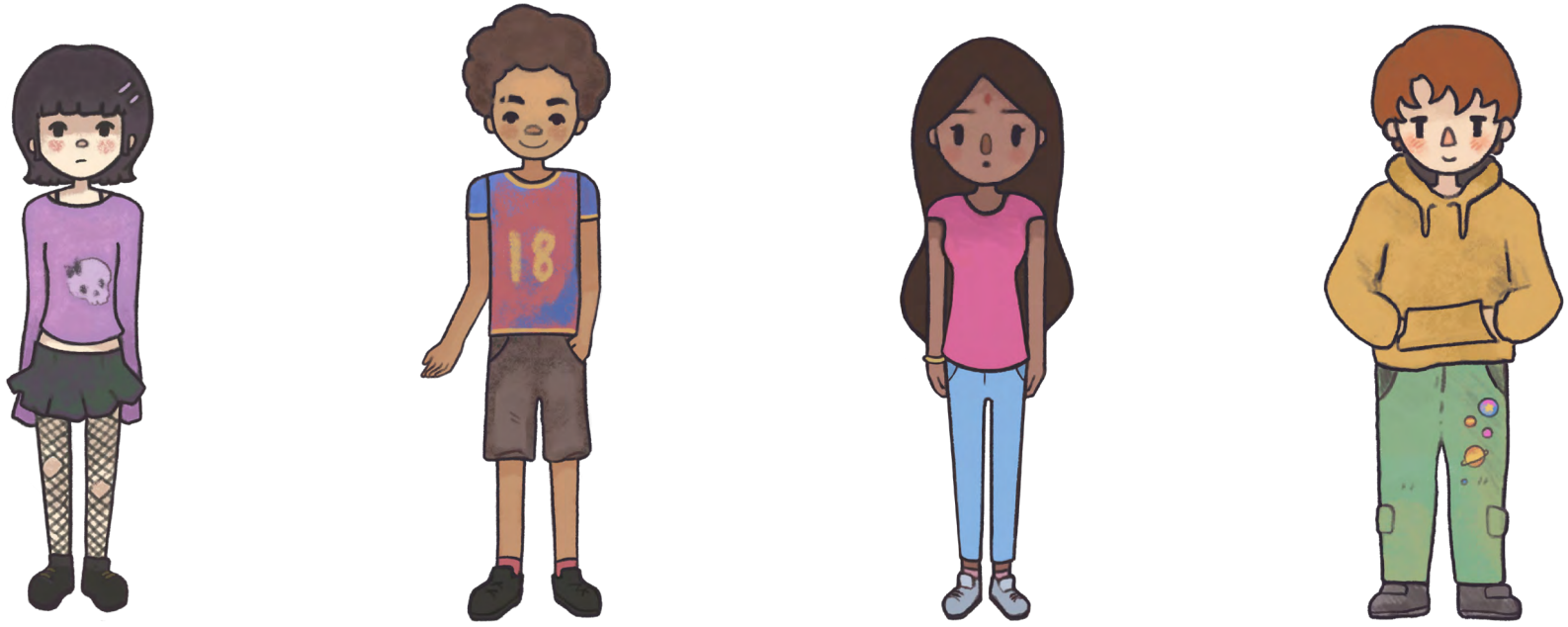
WALSALL LEARNING ALLIANCE

Empowering Minds - Embracing Belonging



Belonging Strategy

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Introduction

OUR PURPOSE

Improving the education and wellbeing of children, young people, and families across Walsall through collective accountability.

OUR PROMISE



We will:

- Put the needs of children, young people, and families first
- Be a community which nurtures all our young people, enabling them to become effective citizens, serving the common good, in a rapidly changing world. All work together for the best possible life chances for every child and family. Build positive relationships through respect, openness, and trust. Be accountable for innovation and continuous improvement across the Alliance.

THIS MEANS

- Us all creating the sense of belonging in our schools, where children and families have pride in themselves and are ambitious for their future. Families, educators, and employers working together.
- Us all celebrating strengths and achievements whilst recognising the needs of all individuals and schools.
- Us all working together with a shared commitment to develop inclusive practice that meets the needs of all our learners.
- Us all being a learning community, which prepares our young people for life through fostering hope, ambition, and the prospect of a positive future achieving excellence through equity of opportunity for all.

Why Do We Need a Belonging Strategy?

> BELONGING IS THE SENSE OF BEING SOMEWHERE YOU CAN BE CONFIDENT THAT YOU WILL FIT IN AND FEEL SAFE IN WHO YOU ARE.

However, the number of young people who feel they do not belong in school continues to rise, as do rates of exclusion.

The Belonging Challenge

Walsall children and families should receive the *Right Help*, in the *Right Place* and at the *Right Time*

1 in 4 children and young people feel they don't belong in school; a figure which is rising.



Children from disadvantaged communities are twice as likely as their more advantaged peers to feel they don't belong and four times more likely to be excluded.

Black Caribbean and special educational needs children are more likely to be excluded than their peers.

The Belonging Opportunity

A sense of belonging has been linked to:

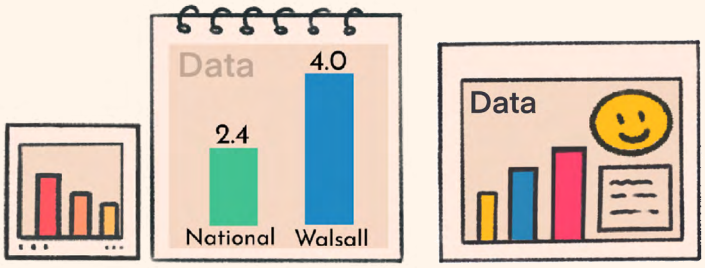
- Increased student motivation
- Improved academic achievement
- Increased staff wellbeing
- A growing sense of agency in the students and staff
- Reductions in student absenteeism
- A belief that we can make a difference

Unauthorised absence % Academic Year 23/24

400 Walsall children not in school, 210 progressing through admissions process but 190 children missing education (Aug 2024)

School exclusions and suspensions have risen this year with disruptive behaviour being the main significant reason for exclusion (54%) and for suspension too (52%). Over the last 4 years, 2/3rds of excluded pupils were male.

During 2023/4 there were 834 initial enquiries to electively home educate pupils. Of these, 29% cited reasons related to school dissatisfaction and 12% related to mental health concerns. These were the two top reasons for requesting EHE.



What have children and young people told us about Walsall

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE SAID...

- Children are concerned about being safe in their environment, including living in and having access to clean and green opportunities, to good education that meets needs and jobs for the future
- Children want to be an active part of making change.
- Having access to support that will help with meeting children and their families' basic needs (food, clothes, education housing) is as important as supporting children with more complex issues.
- Children in more deprived areas feel more negative about how they feel growing up in Walsall now and about their future opportunities.
- Children are sceptical about whether we will take positive action because of what they say and secure more positive outcomes.

- Help and support is not always easy to get or is not provided in a way that is engaging or meets their needs
- Some of our children conveyed a level of discouraged acceptance that they are treated differently in various settings and that racism was a part of their daily lives.
- Children identified that having a good and sustainable network of support (through friends, family and trusted adults) provides them with the foundations of the best start in life as well as feeling safe and developing into successful adults.



WHAT CAN WE DO TO ENSURE CHILDREN HAVE A SENSE OF BELONGING?



- Access to affordable activities
- Caring supportive communities
- Feeling listened to
- Safe and secure communities/ feeling safe
- Be inclusive - including understanding and responding effectively to different cultural needs.

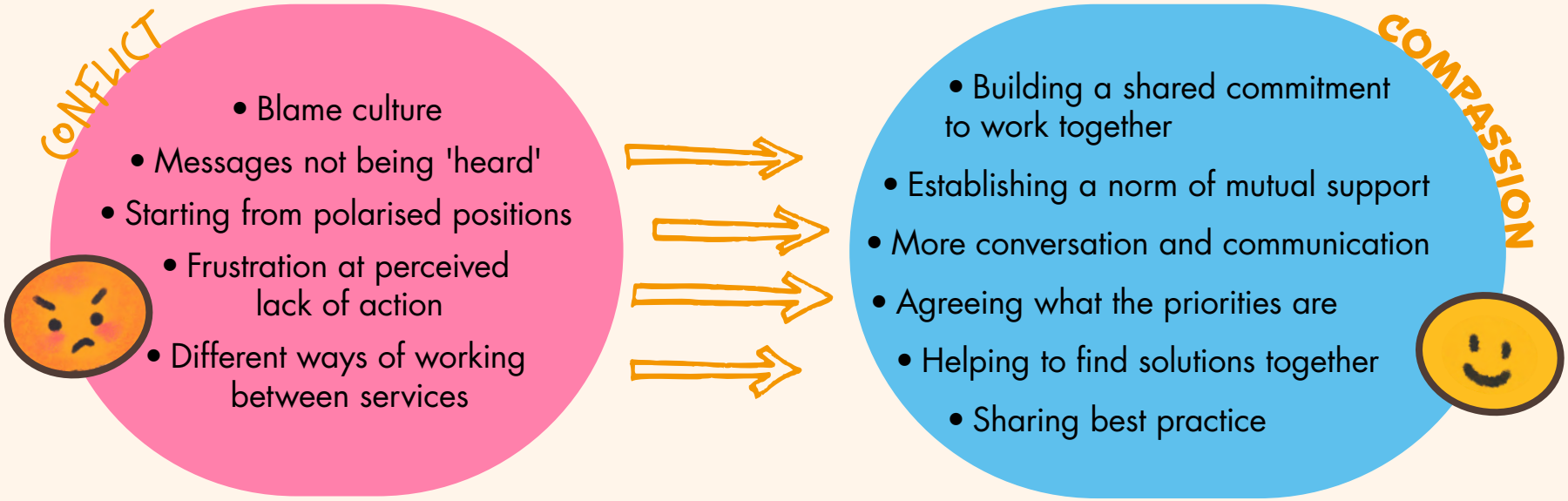
CHILDREN MENTIONED PLACES WHERE THEY FEEL THEY BELONG

- Home with family
- School
- Being with friends



What we will do

WE HELD A BELONGING CONFERENCE TO START THE JOURNEY
WE AGREED TO CHANGE THE CONVERSATION FROM CONFLICT TO **COMPASSION**



What does this mean?

Our approach to working with children and young people will start with us being professionally curious and interested in them, their story and their background.

We will focus on the child or young person, what has led them here and how we can help them thrive.

We will explore how we might help build confident relationships between them and their schools and colleges.

We will always approach our work using principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging. We want to encourage all children and young persons to receive the support they need to live a happy, healthy and fulfilling life.

"WE MADE PLEDGES TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF WALSALL. THE PLEDGES ARE BUILT ON A FOUNDATION OF INCLUSIVITY, EQUITY, RELATIONAL RESTORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND TRAUMA INFORMED COMMUNICATION."

Our Pledges To The Children of Walsall

✓Growing and Learning: Helping you to discover what you are good at and how to be the best you can be.

✓Listening and Caring: Paying attention to what you have to say and showing you that we care about you.

✓Being Safe and Confident: Making sure you feel safe and happy where you are and encouraging you to believe in yourself.

✓Joining Up and Helping Out: Bringing together different people and places that can help you and your family when you need it.

✓Speaking Up and Changing Things: Trying to change things for the better and making sure people listen to what you want.

✓Going to School and Learning More: Making sure there is a school place for you and helping you with your learning if you need it.

✓Talking and Standing Up for You: Using kind words, hearing your opinions, and standing up for what you need.

✓Working Together and Getting Support: Working with other people who can help you and getting the right support when you need it.

✓Changing and Fitting In: Changing the way we teach you if you find school hard and helping you to fit in with others.

✓Family Support: Supporting families to be their best and making places like Walsall better for children to grow.





Sign here to be the change champion for our children _____

How Will We Do It?

PRIORITY 1

We will support the education, wellbeing and social, emotional and mental health needs of all children and young people to enable them to be successful at their school or setting.

PRIORITY 2

We will enable our children and young people to succeed regardless of their background and needs of culture so that every child and young person has a sense of belonging and feels part of their setting and community

PRIORITY 3

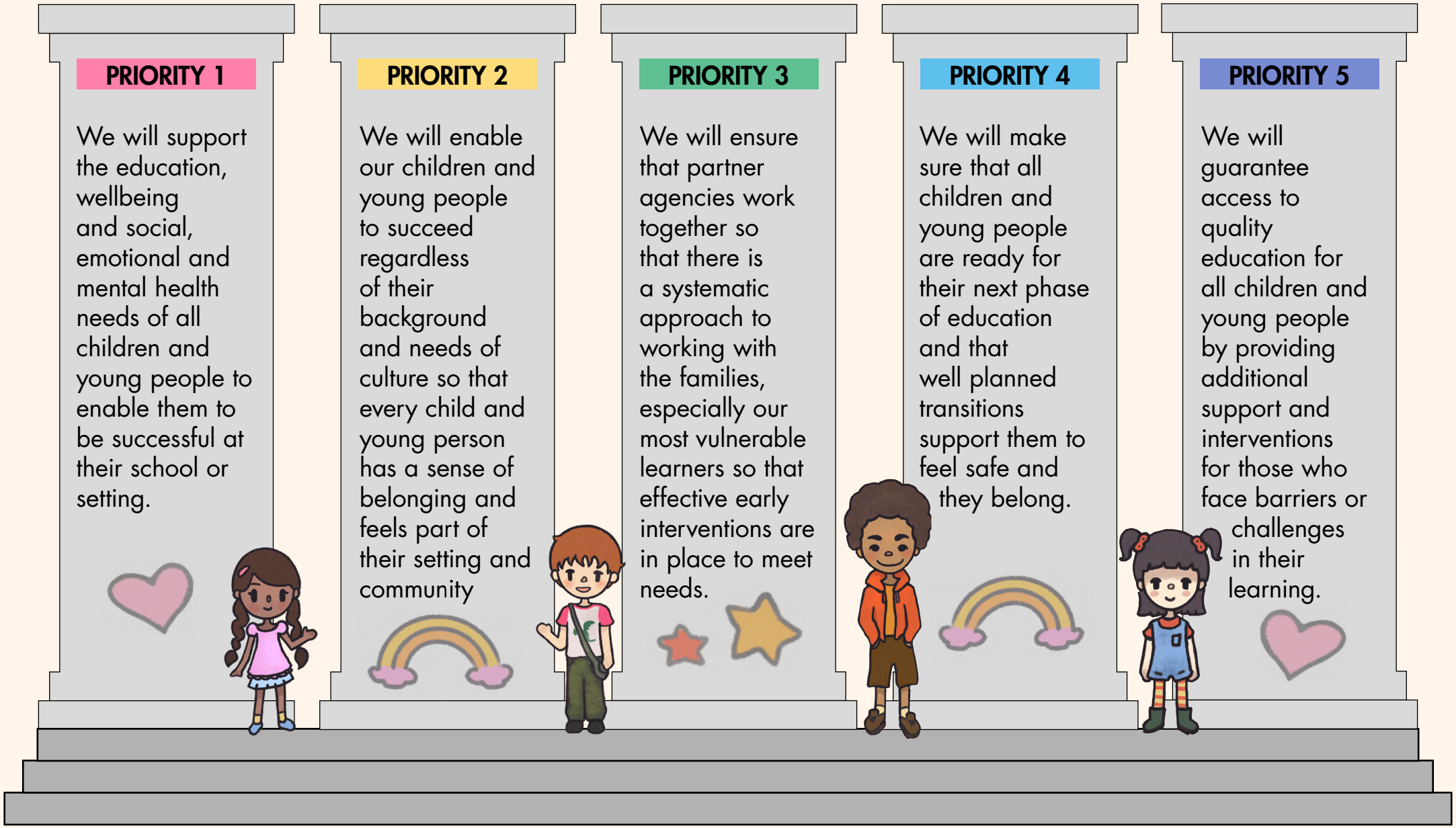
We will ensure that partner agencies work together so that there is a systematic approach to working with the families, especially our most vulnerable learners so that effective early interventions are in place to meet needs.

PRIORITY 4

We will make sure that all children and young people are ready for their next phase of education and that well planned transitions support them to feel safe and they belong.

PRIORITY 5

We will guarantee access to quality education for all children and young people by providing additional support and interventions for those who face barriers or challenges in their learning.



How Will We Know We've Done It?

Children feel they matter and have a voice, learning, aspirations and opportunities



Children are at the heart of school life: their resilience is fostered.







Everyone talks about what matters – learning and people

Children understand what is expected of them and have a voice







Staff retention is high, giving consistency and helping innovation.



THIS STRATEGY IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY

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