

Listening to Black and Global Majority children in Hackney secondary schools talk about their sense of belonging

A Hackney Schools Group Board Report

Written by

Marisa Childs, Chair of HSGB

Debra Robinson, System Leader for

Diversity and Inclusion, Hackney Education

Silvi Shrestha, Strategy & Governance

Officer, Hackney Education

January 2026

 **Hackney**

Forewords	3–5
Executive summary	6
Introduction	7–9
Our approach to capturing pupils’ voice	12–13
Copy of the letter shared with all participating children through their schools	14
What the children said	15–19
Good practice in Hackney schools	20
Conclusion from Marisa Childs	22–23



Foreword

Councillor Anntoinette Bramble

The Hackney School Board's focus on belonging for the school community has inspired important efforts to make every child's school experience in Hackney more inclusive and supportive. This latest project, exploring the sense of belonging among Black and Global Majority students, takes this commitment further by giving these students a meaningful opportunity to share their views about what impacts their school life.

The children who participated in this project expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to be heard, whether formally or informally. While formal channels of communication are essential, it's often the everyday encounters and interactions that provide space for children to share what is happening to them in the moment; something that can be incredibly valuable. With my background in teaching, I understand the importance of these interactions, and I admire those teachers who make an effort to truly listen and connect with their students.

The purpose of this project is to strengthen and build on the work already done in schools. It is a tool that facilitates the empowerment of young voices, recreating a safe space for open dialogue where young people are leading the conversation. I would like to express how impressed and proud I am of the young people who took part. It is bold and brave to open and speak about a personal topic.

Hackney Schools Group Board, a concept I proposed and which officers helped establish, operates as an independent advisory body. Their work aligns closely with our anti-racist goals as a Council. Across the board, we are working to create an environment where every child and young person feels valued and included. I'm immensely proud to be part of a borough that's dedicated to supporting our children and young people to fully be themselves during their educational journey and this report is indicative of this dedication.

I would like to thank the Hackney School Group Board, Marisa Childs, Debra Robinson, Silvi Shrestha and everyone who contributed to this piece of work, especially the young people involved.



Marisa Childs

Chair of Hackney Schools Group Board

I BELONG TO HACKNEY.

I was born at Mother's Hospital in the 70s and raised in Dalston during the vibrant 80's. From exploring Ridley Road market with my family most Saturdays to endless hours of adventure playground exploring and cooling off in London Fields Lido, my sense of belonging blossomed within the rich tapestry of cultures that defines Hackney. My school experience further solidified this feeling, creating a safe space where diversity felt like a great strength.

The recent demographic and economic shifts in Hackney, whilst bringing undeniable benefits to the borough, has introduced new layers which have posed a challenge to a sense of belonging for many. Furthermore, data on exclusion rates and SEND, and the Child Q report have further fuelled and increased this concern and

provided the backdrop and motivation for this important project.

This report delves into the emotional landscape and current experiences of belonging for Black and Global Majority children in secondary schools in Hackney. Debra and I both being Black women and leading the conversations was important simply because representation matters and those who know it feel it. Ultimately, a strong sense of belonging fosters not just academic success, but a well-rounded understanding of self and the skills, confidence and agency that prepares children well for the exciting chapters that life holds ahead.



Debra Robinson

System Leader for Diversity and Inclusion, Hackney Education

For me, feeling safe created a strong sense of belonging at home, at school and through the familiar landmarks of Hackney. My primary school was based in Oldhill Street, Tyssen School, which is now Oldhill and is a colourful imprint etched in my memory. Tyssen School, despite the historical links the Tyssen family had to the slave trade, was warm and amiable. Most of the teachers were pleasant and engaging and the vibrant classrooms with the clinks of the milk bottles made it a place that I wanted to be on a daily basis. Upon reflection, when I look back at my primary school photos, I was one of probably four Black girls in my class. I now know that the security that I felt was about just being treated as a child who was born into many intersections and feeling that they were not barriers to what I could achieve, irrespective of the cruel world outside.

I went to Skinners Company School for Girls, again a place where fun and positive memories were made. I now know that my

inspiration to become a teacher derived from seeing Black senior figures; a mathematics teacher and History teacher. I knew that I loved English and this was taught by a tall dark haired Irish teacher, who always wore a brown tweed blazer. His thick Irish accent added another dimension to his charismatic personality. Again, belonging was through the introduction of novels that we would read as a class; the Black female protagonists were seen through a variety of lenses, both courageous and oppressive. More importantly, there was a semblance of balance.

Feeling a sense of belonging within the school environment, when the external world is unkind, is fundamental to any child's confidence, growth and maturity. Feeling seen and heard and having opportunities that allow you agency, within the confines of the school environment, must be a principle that we all try to uphold as part of our ethos, without fear of the young person's voice.

Executive summary

The purpose of this project was to start a conversation with Black and Global Majority secondary school children about their sense of belonging in their schools and allow the children to have control of their dialogue. The space we held was for them to speak and for us to listen to understand as well as learn. School is their place of work, where they spend the majority of their childhood and we wanted to hear what that feels like in their own words, allowing them the opportunity to be an integral part of their school life journey, showing up authentically and having a say in how their sense of belonging could be improved.

As part of this project, we were able to speak with around 150 children in 6 secondary schools. Having spoken with them, it was evident that there were varying practices in different schools. In some schools, there was a need for more opportunities for children to express their views whilst in others children felt heard through channels like the student council. Whilst student councils provide opportunities for some children, there is a need for genuine platforms for all children to amplify their voice. This would provide an opportunity for improved communication between the school and its pupils.

Children spoke a lot about their relationships with the teachers. Some highlighted the positive interactions they really valued, like being praised, being sought their opinions and being listened to when it was a crucial time for them. Many children also spoke about supply teaching staff not adhering to the school's principles

and ethos which impacted the children's school experience negatively. Schools could think about how staff are equipped with ongoing understanding of what impacts children with ongoing training. For example, Systemic, Trauma Informed, Anti-Racist approach could further enhance understanding and knowledge which could foster a sense of belonging for all children.

Furthermore, some children highlighted a lack of diversity and positive representation of Black and Global Majority cultures in the curriculum. Whilst many Hackney schools have undergone in-depth curriculum reviews, a key learning from the children suggested that, an ongoing review of the curriculum must address how the retraumatising ways in which Black people are continually presented through oppressive lens, clouded their subject choices.

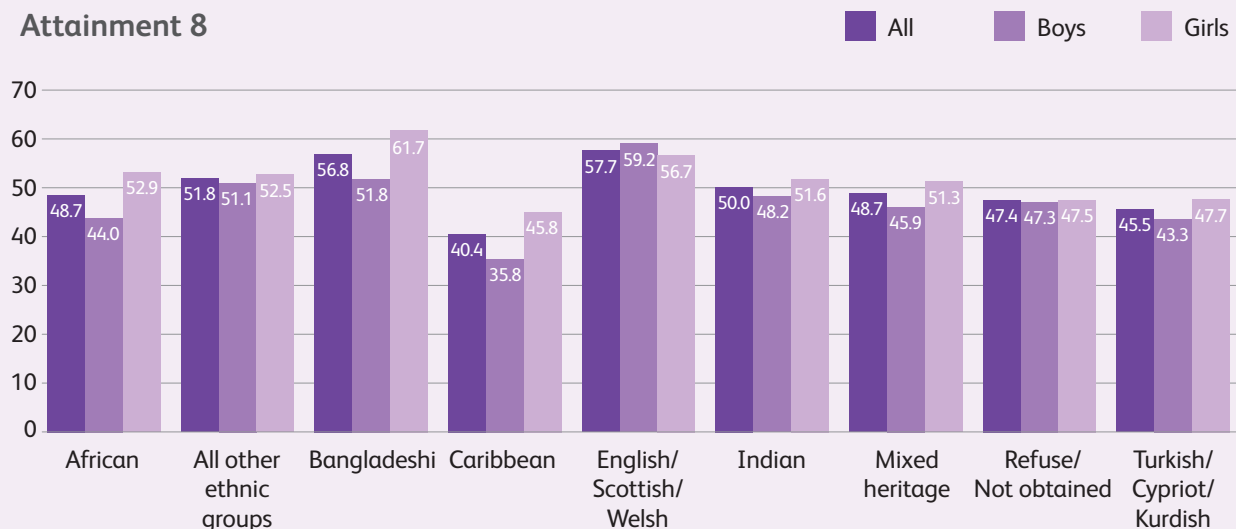
Introduction: Why we chose to listen to Black and Global Majority children in secondary schools about belonging

Hackney boasts some of the country's top performing schools with high levels of attainment. Many Black and Global Majority children make good progress in our Hackney schools and continue to outperform their peers nationally. However, both exclusion and outcomes data suggest that disproportionately still exists. Black Caribbean children continue to underperform compared to their peers on the Hackney

level. Looking at the latest data available, the graph depicts the gaps in outcomes, which have been consistent for years.

The data presented in the Hackney Education Attainment Scrutiny Report of March 2023 provides a very strong case for and why Hackney Schools Group Board (HSGB) felt it important to listen to pupil voice.

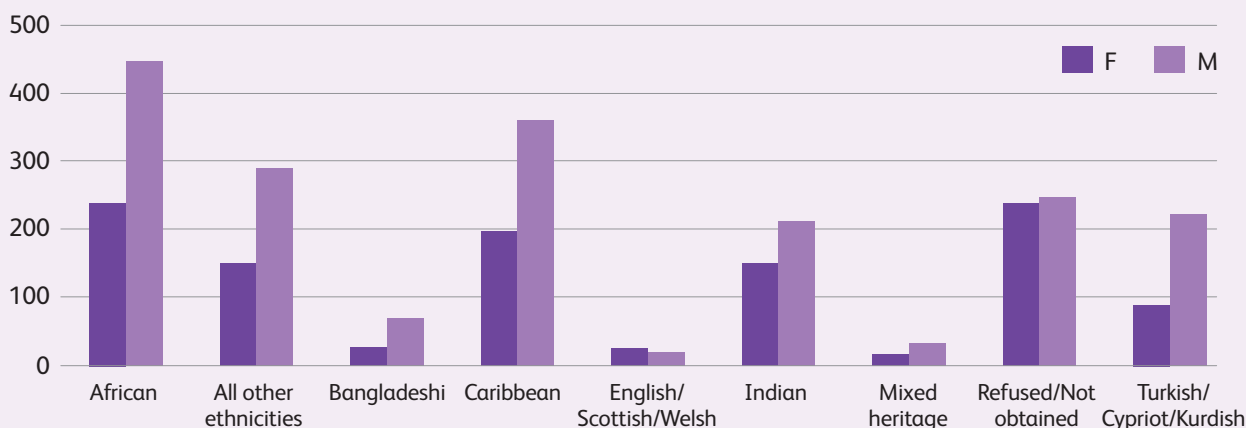
Attainment 8



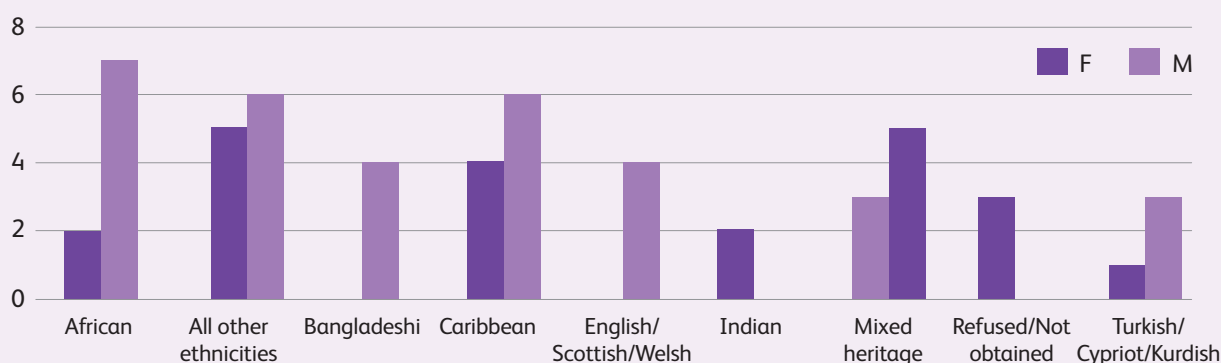
“On the Attainment 8 measure, Caribbean, Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot and Mixed Heritage pupils have the lowest Attainment 8 scores in Hackney. Caribbean boys (36.2) and Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot boys (42.4) have the lowest attainment overall.”

Furthermore, the following graphs show how Black and Global Majority children are starkly overrepresented in the permanent exclusions and suspensions data in Hackney. Whilst conducting our interviews, it became increasingly evident that exclusions and suspensions affected a child's sense of belonging at school, they *‘didn't feel like they fitted in with their school's culture’*, subsequent to their period of exclusion.

Number of suspensions in Hackney secondary schools in 2023–24



Number of permanent exclusions in Hackney secondary schools in 2023–24



This, along with experiences highlighted from the Board’s [previous work on belonging](#) were an impetus for our project, *Listening To Secondary Black & Global Majority Children on their Sense Of Belonging*.

As important as GCSEs results are, in an ever changing world of AI and job roles that are yet to exist, the HSGB is very keen to go beyond the data and get an idea of what emotional intelligence looks like in our schools. Thus, how can we measure empathy, effective communication, social skills, motivation and most importantly a sense of agency? All the aforementioned are real life-skills that help us navigate through life, hence, the significance of this piece of work and capturing the voices of Black and Global majority children.

The importance of feeling a sense of belonging

“The feeling of belonging is a basic human need: it gives us a sense of place in the world and is critical for our resilience and wellbeing”

(Karen Noble, *Supporting Young People to Belong at School*)

There is a growing discourse and understanding of the importance of belonging for everyone. A number of recent studies and articles show the value of children feeling a sense of belonging in schools. It can really help enhance educational outcomes, help children flourish in the education system, and impact their mental health in a positive way. The report ‘Encouraging a Sense of

Belonging and Connectedness in Secondary Schools' highlights that a positive sense of belonging at school has fundamental benefits for students, including feeling that: their teachers and peers like, value and accept them, the curriculum is interesting and relevant, they are capable of succeeding at school, their cultural identity is welcome and valued, and they can 'be themselves' within appropriate boundaries. (Source: [Report](#))

Whilst we were carrying out our project the Greater London Authority also published findings from a research they commissioned University of Bath to undertake entitled 'Belonging, identity and safety in London schools' December

2023 (Source: [Report](#)). Their findings identified respect, fairness and being listened to as vital features of the care and nurture needed to feel included in school. Students' sense of identity was fundamental to their feelings of belonging, both in terms of feeling able to be themselves and having opportunities to explore and develop the skills and abilities they felt proud of.

Children and young people spend a majority of their day in a school therefore it is crucial that they feel a sense of belonging in this space, a place where children can feel safe. As one child we spoke with put it '*I should feel like I'm at home, I am here a lot*'.



Thank you

We would like to thank the children who participated in the sessions and spoke so candidly about their experiences. They were open, honest, courageous, realistic and optimistic in equal measures. The power of their lived experience of school life and what belonging does and does not look like and how they articulated this with such expression will never be forgotten. It was a pleasure to spend time with such confident and articulate young people.

THANK YOU ALL SO VERY MUCH.

We would also like to thank the headteachers, schools, and staff who allowed us into their schools to speak with their children and helped organise the sessions. Without your help and support the project would not have been possible.



Our approach to capturing pupils voice: Engage, collaborate and listen

ENGAGE

The initial planning stages involved speaking with secondary Headteachers directly, to clarify the ambitions of this work and to emphasise its importance. It was also a great opportunity to engage with Headteachers to establish a connection and gain an understanding of what they feel about their schools' culture of belonging through the lens of Black and Global majority children. We were really encouraged by the Headteachers' responses upon our engagements.

We also shared the questions that would form the basis of the conversation with children with the Headteachers prior to the engagement sessions to get their buy in. Some even contributed to our approach to capturing pupils' voices by suggesting questions to ask and providing feedback following the sessions.

COLLABORATE

It was very important for us to work in collaboration with the Headteachers on this project. We asked the Headteachers to choose the participants for the engagement sessions. In order to ensure we captured a breadth of perspectives, the schools were advised to choose a range of children. For e.g. different attainment groups, children with SEND, children who had been suspended etc. We shared an introductory

letter with participants ahead of the session clarifying the purpose of the session.

LISTEN

We used focus groups to listen to the children. We chose this method because it was important to have direct engagement with the children and hear from them about their experience. This method was simple and effective and enabled us to capture rich qualitative data. On conducting the focus groups, it was clear the approach was the best one. The sessions were personable and children really appreciated the opportunity to share their perspective.

Our approach sought to explore what belonging in school meant to the children. All the questions were open-ended to allow children to express their views as openly as possible. We wanted to uphold the principle of listening not to respond but to understand and value the authentic voices of the children. We took a unique approach to capturing the voices of children by having direct conversation with them about the issues that are important to them in their schools.

We held a number of sessions in each school; for lower years (Y7 and Y8) and for upper years (Y9, Y10 and Y11). We wanted the children to feel comfortable within their age-group to share their views. Each focus group was an hour long with a

maximum of 12 children. School staff were not present in the sessions to enable the children to speak freely. The conversation started with an introduction and an explanation of the rationale for this work.

Notes of the conversation with children were anonymised and sent directly to the respective Headteacher and their SLT who coordinated the sessions. The notes captured children's accounts in their voice and what they felt compelled to share in the sessions.

We carried out the engagement sessions throughout the 2023–24 academic year. As

part of this project we were able to engage with 150 children in six secondary schools. Our approach has the potential to explore further and broaden the findings by taking a whole school approach to asking all children as well as teachers about their sense of belonging. This would help better understand the lived experiences of all in the current education system and factors that impact everyone's sense of belonging.

The focus group methodology has proven a great mechanism for capturing feedback from children and schools could easily use this to do so if they wanted their contribution to processes and policies.



Copy of the letter shared with all participating children through their schools



Dear pupils of _____,

My name is Marisa Childs, and I am the Chair of Hackney Schools Group Board (HSGB).

The HSGB acts in an advisory capacity and is designed not only to provide strategic insight to schools in Hackney, through working with Hackney Education, but also to champion the voices of school leaders, pupils and parents/carers within Hackney and the value they can all bring to shaping the local education system.

HSGB remit is to act as a challenge and advocate for supporting the education system to make sure all Hackney children do as well as they possibly can throughout their journey of the education system and are well prepared for adult life.

There are 16 Secondary Schools in Hackney, and they vary from faith schools to academies, with many achieving good and great results for a high number of students. The HSGB is, however, conscious that not every young person's school journey is the same. Across the Hackney Education system, pupils from Black and Global Majority communities can have a different experience and achieve less well than their peers.

HSG Board is working with the Inclusion and Diversity Lead, Debra Robinson, to listen to young Black and Global Majority pupils in Years 8 to 11. We are very interested in and are focusing on listening to the voices of Black and Global Majority students to get a better understanding of what your lived experience at school looks and feels like.

We have four questions that we thought would be a good starting point:

1. What are the main parts of your school's culture/ values that make you feel a sense of belonging at school?
2. Is there anything that can be done to improve your experience at school?
3. How much do you feel your voice and experience are represented within the school community and the curriculum? How could this be improved?
4. What do you think about the way adults use language to communicate with you in school?

We will be organising an in-person session in your school on _____, to hear directly from pupils about your experience. You can attend this meeting in your school to tell us what you think. This session will be led by me, Marisa Childs and Debra Robinson.

Our engagement with Hackney school pupils is being carried out independently of your school, but with your schools' knowledge with the aim to ensure every child's education results in positive outcomes, an important priority in Hackney. We look forward to meeting and listening to you.

Kind regards,

Debra Robinson & Marisa Childs



What the children said

The questions listed in the letter to the children formed the basis of our conversation with them. As such, we have been able to capture rich and nuanced insights.

Some of the questions elicited emotional responses from children as many recounted personal experiences and incidents in their schools. Their anonymous accounts have been shared directly with the respective schools. We felt it was important to provide authenticity to the children's voice to highlight their lived experience and their perspective of school life in hope that schools can use the insight to help enhance their educational journey. As such, we have used direct quotes from the children in this report.

What are the main parts of your school's culture/values that make you feel a sense of belonging at school?

Children highlighted a range of factors that contributed to their sense of belonging in their schools. Their accounts also brought to light all the wonderful work that schools are doing to recognise and celebrate diversity in their schools, and to really nurture children through their school journey. This valuable work was also recognised and appreciated by the children.

“When I come to school, I can be myself.”

A large number of children who took part emphasised the importance of friendship groups and how this contributed to a strong sense of belonging in their schools. The diversity of the children in their school was also highlighted as helping enhance a feeling of belonging. In their friendship

groups, they could be themselves and be understood. They could even speak in their mother tongue with their friends.

Some schools were praised for their welcoming atmosphere with friendly staff. Many schools' core values and uniform were cited as aspects that brought the children together and created a sense of community.

“School has a warm environment.”

“I don't feel judged by anyone.”

Children who shared that they felt a strong sense of belonging in their schools also stated that they felt heard by staff and that their voice made an impact in their schools. They felt heard through formal channels like effective student councils and pupil surveys, or informal channels like conversations with staff. Children in one school spoke about how their effective

student council was a great way to influence the decisions on aspects like school uniform and school meals. Many children shared that they really valued the positive interactions with the school staff; when they were given the opportunity to express their opinion; when teachers were open to having conversations and saw things from the children's perspectives, teachers actively sought children's opinions; it made them feel a sense of belonging.

“Teachers praise me.”

“Bullying is dealt with quickly.”

Children in one school highlighted that extra curricular activities and after school clubs that cater to everyone's interests were positive aspects of the school culture. We know a large number of schools put an emphasis on after school clubs for all of their children by way of enriching children's experience. The children stated how they could be themselves during these sessions. Some children in a number of schools spoke fondly of attending talks by inspirational role models and attending school trips. These activities provided more opportunities for the children to be themselves outside the classroom.

Many children reflected on culture days as being positive and a great way to enhance belonging because children could showcase cultural clothes and celebrate their heritage. The schools' offer of food from different countries on culture days was appreciated, with children wishing for the schools to offer a diverse school menu throughout the year.

Is there anything that can be done to improve your experience at school?

Many children who expressed a lack of belonging gave examples of feeling unheard. They shared their frustration at teachers for not allowing them to share their point of view (to clarify a situation or to give their input). In some cases they just wanted to be listened to but often felt brushed aside.

“When we want to talk to them, it is at a crucial time.”

“If you try to talk to teachers, they might give you detention.”

Some children expressed that their schools should provide them with frequent and meaningful opportunities to give feedback so they could contribute to making positive improvements to the school processes and culture. Some children utilised our sessions to provide feedback on specific processes in their schools that could be improved. These have been shared with respective schools directly for them to reflect on how improvements could be made. Some children felt that giving them meaningful opportunities to share their point of view also meant that school staff had to be willing to listen and sometimes learn from them. The latter was specifically relevant when teachers showed lack of knowledge of a religion or a culture and continued to perpetuate false information or negative stereotypes.

Some spoke about the value of having Black & Global Majority teachers; they would show empathy and understanding of the child's background and culture. However, this was not the most important aspect of how teachers added to the child's sense of

belonging. Ultimately the children wanted to build a teacher pupil relationship based on understanding and respect.

“...you feel more comfortable with teachers that act like you.”

Across a few schools children shared a number of issues about substitute teaching staff. Along with low quality of teaching from supply teachers, children shared that sometimes they made remarks that were ignorant or acted contrary to the values of their school. One child recounted an instance when a supply teacher made fun of a peer’s accent, when they were asked to read a text out loud.

“I feel like everything would be resolved if we were heard. If they valued our education more than our race”

Children across a few schools shared their perception that the behaviour policy was applied differently when dealing with white and Black & Global Majority children which they thought was unfair. The sanctions given to some children were less severe for the same actions perpetrated. Some children received ‘positive attention’, ‘extra support’ and ‘care’. Some children got away with wearing certain clothes and having a certain kind of hairstyle which were against the Uniform Policy; many felt that this was linked to race. Children shared that they wanted the behaviour policy and sanctions to be applied equally and fairly.

“We are told not to congregate in a group. Majority in our friendship group are Black and the teacher tells you you need to disperse. White students, they don’t have to do that.”

Children in some schools shared that there was a disproportionate focus on promoting LGBTQIA+ rights which overshadowed any focus on discussing issues of racism. Whilst they recognised that both were forms of oppression that required addressing, they stated that each issue should be given an equal spotlight. Many also felt that they did not have the sufficient linguistic tools to be able to discuss race and racism adequately. One child acknowledged that:

“Both communities have undergone hardships. However, in one community, there is more progression. It is easy to highlight issues of sexuality but race is complicated.”

Some children shared feedback about how transition from primary school to secondary school could be improved if schools facilitated formal introduction to children and teachers, and conducted a tour of the school at the start of secondary school. This would have helped children feel a sense of belonging from the beginning of this transition.

How much do you feel your voice and experience are represented within the school community and the curriculum? How could this be improved?

This question was followed with the explanation that schools have to work within the rigid structure of the national curriculum, however, there were some opportunities for schools to add to their curriculum.

Some children reflected on the value of learning about their culture and of figures who represented them. If the curriculum

was more inclusive of other cultures, they would have more passion for the subjects and children would be more eager to learn as they would have an emotional connection to the subject matter.

“If we learnt about someone like ourselves, it would make us feel attached.”

Some children shared examples of the inspiring topics they studied; for e.g. the Haitian revolution, Mansa Musa, Black British history, and inspiring texts they read like *The Dark Lady* by Akala. We learnt that one school had created a booklet celebrating achievements of Black people. Children also studied speeches made by renowned and inspiring leaders; like Martin Luther King Jr, Barack Obama, Malala, David Lamy etc. The children shared that exposure to positive representation of Black and Global Majority people made them feel more confident, and it helped break stereotypes. However, many children felt that there was an absence of the Black British voice in the curriculum.

“In English, we had to do a presentation about someone who inspires me. I chose Digga D.”

Children in some schools expressed a sense of frustration at the lack of diversity in the curriculum. There was very little representation of Hindu culture or Bengali culture. Some children gave feedback that there could be more efforts to showcase Black excellence. However, children also shared examples of good practice of how their schools were creative in delivering a semblance of a curriculum, where they could see themselves represented through a positive lens, thus inspiring their learning.

Children in one school spoke highly of the language corridor where a language of the week was highlighted. It helped celebrate cultural and racial diversity in a visible way.

“I saw my country on it and it made me smile.”

Children unanimously agreed that Black History Month was not fit for purpose and celebrating Black history for a month did not add value to the learning. There was a resounding sense of frustration that Black History Month also focused on American history and transatlantic slavery which have negative and oppressive narratives. Some texts that were taught even had racist connotations or reflected on negative experiences of people of colour which did not inspire children.

We also received positive feedback about celebration of Black history throughout a ‘season’ rather than just a month.

In general, children were ‘sick’ of the focus on transatlantic slavery as the main basis of Black African and Caribbean history. It was taught in primary school and continued throughout their secondary school journey. Many of the children spoke about their history lessons adding to the oppressive lens through which Black people were viewed.

“The struggle isn’t who we are, it is what we were put through.”

“Sometimes it gets annoying about learning about slave trade from primary school.”

Some children expressed that they did not feel enthusiastic about the topics in history. Children spoke about the curriculum not

being a good reflection of Black British History.

Overall, children shared a yearning for a diverse curriculum with texts written by Black and Global Majority authors that focused on positive histories and reflected the diversity of Hackney community. There was a feeling that these texts did not have to be driven by race but just ‘normalising’ seeing and hearing Black voices and narratives across the curriculum throughout the year would suffice.

What do you think about the way adults use language to communicate with you in school?

This question was included at the suggestion of a Headteacher who felt it was important to find out how language used in schools impacted children’s sense of belonging.

Some children spoke positively about teachers who were strict but balanced, who spoke with respect and calmness, who the children felt they could turn to when they needed. Some teachers made an effort to get to know the children - which was appreciated by them.

Equally and on the other end of the spectrum, children shared their encounters with teachers who shouted at them and didn’t allow them to share their points of view. Children stressed how much they did not appreciate being shouted at – it made them feel angry and it did not inspire them to listen.

“They don’t need to shout to get their points across.”

“How can you shout at me and expect me to listen?”

“You get a sense when a teacher does not like you.”

In one school, the experience of children in lower year groups differed to that of upper groups. The lower year groups mentioned being shouted at and about the lack of respect shown, whereas, the upper group expressed they felt they were spoken to with respect.

Some children felt that some teachers held negative stereotypes - they noticed that terms such as ‘aggressive’ and ‘angry’ were used to describe Black children. They felt that teachers’ language could be more respectful. In contrast, they felt the treatment of white children was different. They were shown empathy and their challenging behaviour was understood to be due to ‘stress’ or ‘sadness’.

“Sometimes the way they speak with Black students is so disrespectful.”

Few children stated that the perception that Black children were ‘aggressive’ and ‘angry’ also stopped the school from recognising they had social, mental and emotional needs and providing adequate support to address their needs. In response to what resolve could look like, they reiterated that they just wanted an opportunity to speak about their feelings and for the adults to really listen to them.

“I feel like all your emotions, sadness and joy gets pushed and they focus on one emotion ‘anger’. They always tell me to calm down. I am just trying to express how I feel. I feel very strongly about something – why does it have to be anger.”

Good practice in Hackney schools

Children said that they felt a sense of belonging in their schools when:

- The curriculum highlights significant Black British figures and is not limited to Black History Month.
- Black history is delivered with compassion and authenticity.
- When they are seen as individuals, not just as part of a homogeneous group.
- Supply teachers and staff align with the school's ethos, ensuring consistency within the culture.
- Effective student councils and other forums allow them to express themselves and contribute to school decisions.
- They see senior leaders who reflect the school's diversity.
- A behaviour policy that is applied fairly and consistently.
- They are spoken to in a manner that is just and free from prejudice or labeling.





Conclusion from Marisa Childs

As we conclude this report, I am reminded of two key moments during this project.

Firstly, an initial conversation with a particularly courageous Headteacher which proved incredibly valuable in the development of this project. Their openness led to a remarkable three-way dialogue involving students, a member of the school's Senior Leadership Team and myself (following the initial engagement sessions).

In this follow up session, the children openly shared what worked well for them in school and what needed improvement, offering insightful suggestions on strengthening belonging across curriculum, culture, and perception. They used the metaphor of school as their 'workplace' which resonated deeply

with me. Just as adults, students deserve to feel engaged and have their 'job satisfaction' regularly assessed.

My fervent hope is that this report ignites an overdue and crucial dialogue within schools which empowers students to have the confidence and feel safe and secure enough to actively shape their sense of belonging within their educational experience.

Secondly, Debra, Silvi and I received the following message after the very first session we convened with some Black and Global Majority children which highlighted how meaningful the conversations had been for the children too. The names of the pupils have been anonymised and they are referred to as Pupil A, Pupil B and Pupil C.

Hi...

Just wanted to provide feedback from the year 8s on the belonging session... Pupil A, Pupil B & Pupil C all expressed that they found the session like a 'weight off' and that they felt that it was a space they 'didn't even know they needed' to be able to frankly discuss their experiences as young black women. They asked if it could be a regular occurrence, described it as 'like therapy' and spent their break time continuing the discussion amongst themselves.

I know the session was for research purposes, but if it's possible to send my thanks to the facilitators and feedback on how impactful and valuable my year group found the discussion, I would really appreciate it!


Thanks

References and additional reading

1. [Lilian Baylis School – A Whole School Approach to Anti-Oppression](#)
2. [Listening to parents speak about a sense of belonging](#)
3. Article: [Whole School Approach to Pupils Voice](#)
4. <https://home.smartschoolcouncils.org.uk/bloglist/2023/3/20/pupil-voice-and-ofsted>
5. Blog: [Supporting Young People to Belong At School](#)
6. [UCL – Research Shows 'A Sense of Belonging' in Schools is Important for Pupils' Learning and Behaviour](#)
7. Article: [Relationships and Belonging](#)
8. Blog: [Why Schools Need to be a place of belonging](#)
9. Bernardo's Report – [How systemic racism affects young people in the UK](#)
10. Mayor of London's [Inclusion Charter](#)
11. [Encouraging a Sense of Belonging and Connectedness in Secondary Schools](#)
12. [Just for Kids Law – Race Poverty & Schools Exclusion](#)
13. [School Exclusions – a Literature Review](#)

Accessibility statement

If you need any information on this brochure in a different format please email:

 [**hackneyschoolsgroupboard@hackney.gov.uk**](mailto:hackneyschoolsgroupboard@hackney.gov.uk)

We will consider your request and get back to you in five working days.