SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING:	**Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**
DATE:	**12 November 2026**
SUBJECT:	**Bury Belongs in School**
REPORT FROM:	**Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**
CONTACT OFFICER:	**Ben Dunne, Director of Early Years, Education and Skills**

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 The **Bury Belongs In School** report sets out a key delivery programme for the ambitions contained within the **Education and Inclusion Strategy**. It translates the strategy's vision that every child should attend, participate, belong and achieve into a practical, borough-wide framework for action. Rather than viewing attendance, behaviour and inclusion as separate issues, the report recognises that educational engagement and attainment are fundamentally linked to a child's sense of belonging, safety and connection within school.

1.2 The initiative is underpinned by a whole-system approach involving schools, colleges, health services, children's social care, families, community organisations and other partners. Through the principles of early intervention, needs-led support, mainstream inclusion and shared responsibility, the programme seeks to remove barriers to learning before they escalate into persistent absence, exclusion or poor educational outcomes. This directly supports the **Education and Inclusion Strategy's** commitments to create an inclusive, safe, high-attaining and collaborative education system across Bury

2 ISSUES

2.1 The report is informed by clear evidence that Bury faces significant inclusion and educational performance challenges which, if left unaddressed, may limit progress towards the ambitions set out in the Education and Inclusion Strategy.

2.2 Local authority benchmarking report (2025) highlights a notable disparity between performance in the primary and secondary sectors, with outcomes generally stronger in primary schools than in secondary settings. Several key indicators place Bury below where the borough would aspire to be nationally. Secondary suspension rates rank 128th out of 153 local authorities, secondary exclusion rates rank 120th, Attainment 8 ranks 115th, and secondary absence ranks 100th nationally. GCSE attainment in English and mathematics is also comparatively weak, ranking 129th nationally.

2.3 The challenges are particularly acute for vulnerable learners, including children and young people with SEND. The benchmarking report highlights high rates of suspension, persistent absence and reduced educational outcomes among secondary-aged pupils with additional needs. These trends suggest that too many young people become progressively disconnected from education as they move through the system, resulting in poorer attendance, greater reliance on exclusionary practices and lower attainment at Key Stage 4.

2.4 Without a coordinated and sustained response, there is a risk that these patterns continue to suppress educational outcomes, increase pressure on specialist and alternative provision, reduce life chances for vulnerable learners and hinder Bury's ambition to improve its standing against national, Greater Manchester and statistical neighbour comparators

3.1 Bury Belongs in School represents a strategic response to these challenges and a practical mechanism for delivering the borough's wider educational vision. It seeks to create the conditions in which attendance, inclusion and attainment improve not through enforcement

alone, but through stronger relationships, earlier intervention, better coordinated services and more inclusive mainstream provision.

3.2 The programme aligns closely with the five commitments contained within the Education and Inlcusion Strategy, particularly the ambitions that every child should experience a sense of belonging, feel safe, receive an excellent education and benefit from a connected local system. Through the implementation of the SEND Reform Programme, the Experts at Hand model and a borough-wide Inclusion Dashboard, partners will be better equipped to monitor progress, identify emerging concerns and target support where it is needed most.

3.3 For scrutiny members, the key consideration is that Bury Belongs in School as an institutional pledge is not simply an attendance initiative. It is a long-term improvement programme designed to address some of Bury's most significant educational challenges and strengthen outcomes across the borough. Success will depend upon sustained collaboration, collective accountability and a shared commitment from all partners to ensure that every child and young person can participate, belong and succeed within their local community.

List of Background Papers:-

a) Bury Belongs in School
b) Bury v LA Rankings

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