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MANIFESTO FOR

LEARNING

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WHY A MANIFESTO FOR LEARNING?

Education should be accessible to all young people, regardless of their age, ability or circumstances because it plays such an important role in our lives and our ability to participate in society.

Educational experiences can be negative. This manifesto stems from our concern that too many young people are excluded from learning, but also from our desire to try and do something about it.

Education matters to us. It offers opportunities and makes us feel good about ourselves.

This manifesto sets out what we think needs to change in schools so that everyone can take part in education and benefit from it.

We think that as students we have valuable knowledge and experience that should be listened to.

This manifesto has been written by secondary school age students who have experienced marginalisation from mainstream education. The themes and words have been drawn from accounts given by over a hundred young people excluded from school or identified as at risk of exclusion.

The aim is to send a message to those who have power and influence over the way schools are run.

The following young people were involved in drafting and producing the manifesto:

St Gerard's Centre, St Mary's High School, Croydon :

Oke Ejiro

Rayanne Martin

Jael Pongola

Beatrice Saah

Quentin Usideme

Seweryn Pisula

Dequan Brown

Alex Black

Urban Academy, Kids Company:

Anella Alfred

Darrell Campbell

Diana Mosley

Wade Wallace

Robbie-Leigh Hannah

Jessica Michael

Sadia Conteh

Roxanne Pinnock-Watson

Georga Jennings

Ebony-Vogue McFarlane

Yasmin Bolarinwa

Inclusion Centre, Islington Arts and Media School:

Odean Carnegie

Sahin Demirkiran

Katriye Hassan

Aaron Holliday

Micki Jo McGowan

Andrew Oyedipe

Sean Garrett-Pag

Aurelio Gasper-Abreu

James Pugh

Halilu Rahman

Yawer Salah

Abdul Saliu

Eloise Smyth

Davian Tapper

Zachary Walker

LET US HAVE SOME SAY IN THE WAY CLASSROOMS ARE SET UP



1 Make education accessible and enjoyable

Learning should be fun. Bring a sense of humour into the classroom and don't get offended if we crack jokes.

Use examples that make sense to us and relate to our lives.

LEARNING SHOULD BE FUN. BRING A SENSE OF HUMOUR INTO THE CLASSROOM



2 Improve the condition of schools

Provide us with equipment and resources we need to learn (for example, books, sports equipment, art materials).

Provide us with school buildings that cater for our needs, with enough space, proper heating in the winter and air conditioning in the summer.

Let us have some say in the way classrooms are set up.

Make sure buildings are well kept. Dirty schools take away our energy for learning.

Provide us with decent, safe and accessible toilet facilities. We are fed up with toilets that are too small and out of bounds during certain periods in the day.

Make sure we have decent sized playgrounds and spaces to hang out in at break and lunch times.

3 Get to know and understand us

Don't shout at us and abuse your rights as teachers.

Accept that we cannot always follow or understand what you are talking about. Don't lose your patience and assume we are deliberately trying to annoy you.

Recognise we (just like you) have bad days, frustrations and worries that can make learning difficult. Don't take it personally and give up on us.

Listen to us carefully and don't jump to conclusions. We are vulnerable to being misunderstood because of what might have happened in the past. Don't give us a bad name and make it stick.

Understand that we don't hate teachers or school. We can all name teachers we have liked and respected. But we feel very resentful to those who let us down and single us out.



Recognise that we do care (even if we don't always show it) and really do want to stay in school.

DON'T GIVE US A BAD NAME AND MAKE IT STICK

5 Help us manage risks inside and outside of school

Understand that we often have fears about our own safety. Streets and playgrounds can be threatening places and sometimes we feel we have no choice but to fight back. Remember we are often victims too.

Give us practical solutions when we feel under threat. Help us to feel safe.

We might not always show it, but sometimes we are anxious and scared because of what we are coping with outside of school. Understand that this can make it difficult for us to concentrate so give us some leeway.

As teachers you have a lot of power over our lives. Remember that we do not respond well to threats and intimidation.

Realise that the negative things that you say to us stay with us long after we leave school.

UNDERSTAND THAT WE DON'T HATE TEACHERS OR SCHOOL



6 Make rules we can understand and follow

Don't make rules for the sake of it. Some rules just don't make sense to us and make us feel negative about school.

We understand rules are necessary but let us be involved in making them. Don't ask us and then ignore what we say.

Respect our needs and our wishes and don't make rules that make life difficult for us. Let us take our blazers off when it's hot and put hats on in the playground when it's freezing cold.

Pointless rules make us feel angry and are likely to get broken. For example, why do we have to carry the same sized bags*?

Make sure rules are enforced and applied to everyone equally and fairly.

4 Respect who we are and where we come from

Accept who we are and recognise we are different from you. Don't criticise the way we live our lives or the things we value.

Don't disrespect or judge our families. They are the most important people in our lives.

Understand that we are often coping with stresses, pressures and anxieties that you have had little experience of.



DON'T ASSUME WE'RE ALWAYS THE ONES IN THE WRONG

7 Be aware of the prejudices we might be facing and don't add to them

Don't make assumptions about us because of our backgrounds or how much money our parents have.

Don't assume we're always the ones in the wrong because we hang out with certain friends in school or have been in trouble in the past.

Don't stereotype us because of the way we look, talk and walk. Get to know us for who we really are.

Recognise that racism in school is still a serious problem that many of us have to cope with.

* Rules requiring pupils to carry bags of a particular size and shape were enforced in several of the schools. Some pupils had received temporary exclusions for carrying bags that were considered too large.

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**ACCEPT WHO WE
ARE AND RECOGNISE
WE ARE DIFFERENT
FROM YOU**

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