



# Why student voice data matters as a Trust Leader

# Belonging drives hard outcomes

Belonging is sometimes spoken about as though it sits outside the main business of school. In reality, it sits right at the centre of it. When students feel that they belong, they are more likely to attend, more likely to engage in learning and more likely to seek help when they need it. When they do not feel that they belong, the signs often show up elsewhere: poorer attendance, lower motivation, rising anxiety, behaviour concerns and in some cases, absence from school life altogether.

This is why student voice data matters so much. It gives leaders a way to understand not just what is happening, but what may be driving it. Attendance data can tell you that a student or group of students is missing school. Student voice data can help explain why. A mental health referral tells you that a need has become serious. Student voice data can often show the earlier signs of disconnection, before the problem grows.

That is especially important at a time when schools are expected to do more with limited resources. There is a clear budget message here, even if it is not always stated directly. Reactive support is expensive. Persistent absence, crisis intervention, external referrals and high levels of pastoral need all place pressure on school budgets and staff capacity. The earlier leaders can spot risk and respond in a focused way, the better the outcome is likely to be for students and for the Trust.



# Averages are not enough

One of the main reasons student voice data is underused is that it is often looked at in the wrong way. A Trust-wide average might tell you that most students say they feel safe in school or that a high percentage report positive relationships with staff. That may sound reassuring, but it can also hide too much.

The real value comes when leaders look at the experience of different groups. Do students with SEND feel as connected to school as their peers? Do students in care report the same sense of trust in adults? Are there differences between year groups, between boys and girls, or between students from different ethnic backgrounds? These are the questions that turn student voice into a tool for action.

Without this level of detail, some students can disappear into the average. A school may look positive overall while one group is showing clear signs of disengagement. If that is missed, leaders often end up responding only when the problem is already visible in attendance, behaviour or safeguarding data. By then, the response is more intense, slower and significantly more expensive.

For Trust leaders, the ability to look across schools and across student groups is especially powerful. It helps them see patterns that individual schools may not spot on their own. It also helps them ask better questions. Which groups of students feel least connected? In which schools are those gaps widest? Where is support needed now, before issues become more serious?



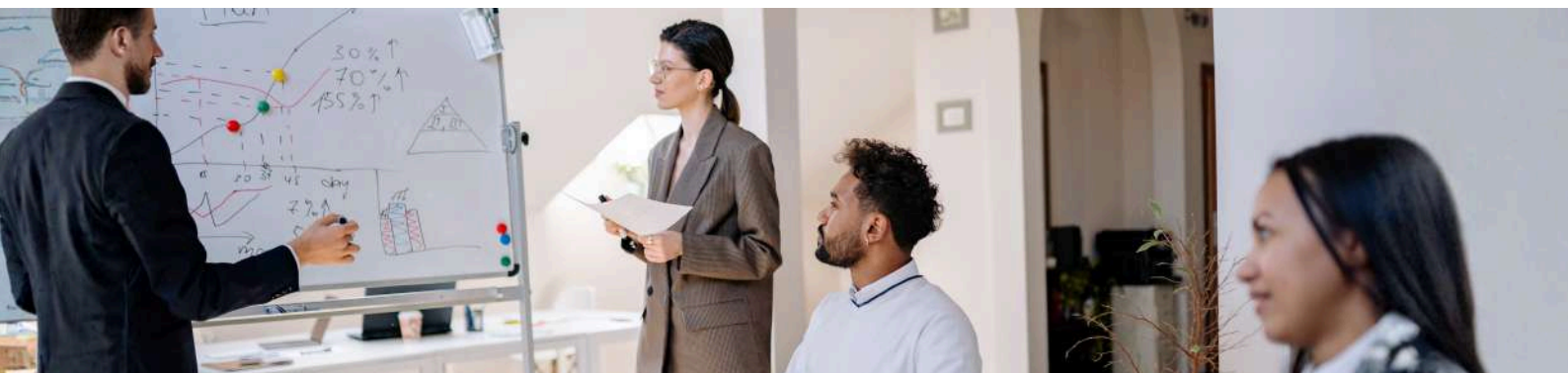
# Student voice should lead to action

Collecting student voice data is not enough on its own. Its value depends on what leaders do next. If surveys are carried out once a year, reported upwards and then quietly set aside, little changes. If students are asked for their views but never see any response, trust is weakened rather than strengthened.

Good use of student voice data means building it into the normal cycle of Trust improvement. It should be gathered regularly, reviewed carefully and considered alongside other data rather than separately from it. Where there are signs that a particular group of students feels less safe, less connected or less supported, there should be a clear response. That might involve changes to pastoral support, building stronger adult relationships, targeted attendance work or closer review of how inclusion is actually working in practice.

This is where belonging becomes a useful anchor. If leaders treat belonging as a serious part of school quality, they are more likely to act early and well. They are also more likely to ask the right questions. Not simply, "Are students attending?" but, "Do students feel that this school is somewhere they are known and valued?" Not simply, "How many referrals have there been?" but, "Which student groups are telling us through their responses that they are beginning to disconnect?"

These are better leadership questions because they focus on cause as well as effect.



# A Trust-level opportunity

For leaders in Trusts, student voice data offers more than a view of individual schools. It provides a Trust-wide picture of how students experience the organisation. That matters because improvement is not only about raising outcomes. It is also about making sure that the experience of school is fair, inclusive and strong across all groups and all settings.

When student voice data is used well, it helps leaders target support where it is most needed. It can show which schools may need help to strengthen relationships, which phases may need closer attention and which student groups may be at greater risk of poor attendance or mental health concerns. This makes support more focused and more sensible. In a tight financial climate, that matters. It is far better to direct help with precision than to spread resources thinly and hope for the best.

There is also a cultural message in this. Trusts that take student voice seriously show that they are willing to listen, willing to learn and willing to act. That is not only good for students. It also shapes the culture of the organisation more widely. Schools improve best when people feel heard and when evidence is used to support better decisions rather than simply to judge.



# Listening well is part of leading well

Student voice data should not be treated as an optional extra or a useful addition if time allows. It should be seen for what it is: a practical source of insight into the daily experience of students and a valuable guide to where Trust leaders should focus their attention.

For Trust leaders, the case is simple. If belonging shapes attendance, engagement and mental health, then it makes sense to measure it. If different groups of students experience school in different ways, then it makes sense to look beyond averages. If early support is more effective and less costly than late intervention, then it makes sense to use student voice data to act sooner.

In a sector where leaders are expected to improve outcomes, support mental health and use resources wisely, listening to students carefully and using what they say intelligently is an essential part of effective leadership.

**If the question is how to capture student voice easily across a Trust, Satchel Pulse provides a practical answer**



We help Trusts gather high-quality student feedback across schools, break the data down by key groups and turn it into insight leaders can use.

**Book a meeting to see how we can support a more joined-up approach across your Trust.**