

FAIRNESS AND BELONGING (FAB): DATA PRINCIPLES

Better questions. Better insight. Better decisions.

What FAB means in data



Fairness and belonging is not limited to race and ethnicity. It requires partnerships to consider the full range of characteristics and circumstances that may contribute to unequal experiences, access or outcomes.

Why this matters

Across the North West there is strong commitment to fairness and belonging in children's safeguarding. The challenge is not intent, but operationalisation. The North West Discovery Phase found that while partnerships have invested significantly in data and performance infrastructure, equity-focused questions are not consistently visible in analysis, reporting or governance conversations.

These principles are designed to strengthen the connection between data, insight and decision-making. Fairness fails not because data is absent, but when insight does not reach the conversations and decisions that shape children's experiences and outcomes.

This is not discretionary. Working Together 2026, the Equality Act 2010 and inspection frameworks require safeguarding partners to understand differential experience, challenge inequity and demonstrate impact.

Fairness fails not from a lack of data, but when the chain between analysis, insight and decision-making is weak.

How to use these principles

Wherever your partnership starts



These principles are designed to support progress at every stage. The question is not "Are we doing all of this?" but "What is the next step for us?"

Use these principles to interrogate data, surface unfairness and drive fairer experiences. Moving from traditional analysis to more meaningful insights.

1



Ask "who?" not just "how many?"

Patterns of inequality can only be identified when data is analysed at group level and compared against the local population. Intersectional analysis is essential.

- Is this measure broken down by characteristics e.g. ethnicity, disability, and are groups defined on their own terms?
- Are you using the most recent census as your population denominator? Note: census data under counts groups - see below.
- Where multiple characteristics intersect, e.g. Black girls in CP; disabled children in EHE, does your analysis capture the intersection?

From averages to disparities

2



Name data limitations

Data reflects recording systems, levels of need and service access. Some children and families may never appear.

- Who is structurally unlikely to appear in the dataset?
- Does the recording definition shape who is identified? Would changing a field's language change who gets counted?
- Is ethnicity self-reported or professional-assigned? Are under-captured groups explicitly noted where absent?
- Have practitioners identified what the data may be missing?

From what is recorded to what is missing

3



Prioritise understanding narratives

Data identifies patterns. Stories and qualitative insights help explain them. A number without context can be actively misleading.

- Has this dataset been reviewed alongside practitioner insights and family experience?
- Are voluntary community sector and other partners (e.g. education and housing) contributing data and insight, or only appearing as a referral source category?
- Is there space for uncertainty or contested interpretation?
- Could the pattern reflect recording practice rather than actual change?

From patterns to meaning

4



Interrogate the system, not just the pattern

Many disparities are produced through system design, thresholds, pathways and decision-making.

- Are structural factors, such as poverty, housing, racism and access to services, included in the analytical frame?
- Are strengths and protective factors visible, or only deficits?
- Has potential tool bias been considered?
- Would a different threshold, definition or eligibility criterion produce a different result?

From individual deficit to system conditions

5



Connect insight to decisions

Analysis that remains in analytical outputs does not influence action or decision-making is not learning, it is reassurance.

- What decision should this analysis inform?
- Are FAB findings presented explicitly at governance level, not buried in appendices?
- Are data quality gaps reported to governance as equity concerns, not only as technical matters?
- Are mechanisms embedded to capture feedback and impact of decisions?

From learning to action

6



Learn with, not just about

Data about children, families and communities is not neutral. People affected by systems bring insight that data alone cannot provide.

- Have communities contributed to (a) what gets measured, (b) how findings are interpreted, (c) what counts as a good experience?
- Is community voice representative?
- Is professional and community insight treated as evidence of equal standing to administrative data?
- Whose voice is present, and whose is absent?

From analysing people to learning with them

Working Together 2026 — what partnerships must be able to answer

FAB analysis should enable governance to answer all five questions. Where it cannot, that is itself a finding to report.



1

Who experiences different outcomes, and by what characteristic or circumstance?



2

What system-level explanation has been tested?



3

What action is planned or underway to address disparities, and by when?



4

Is it making a difference, what has changed as a result of actions (over time)?



5

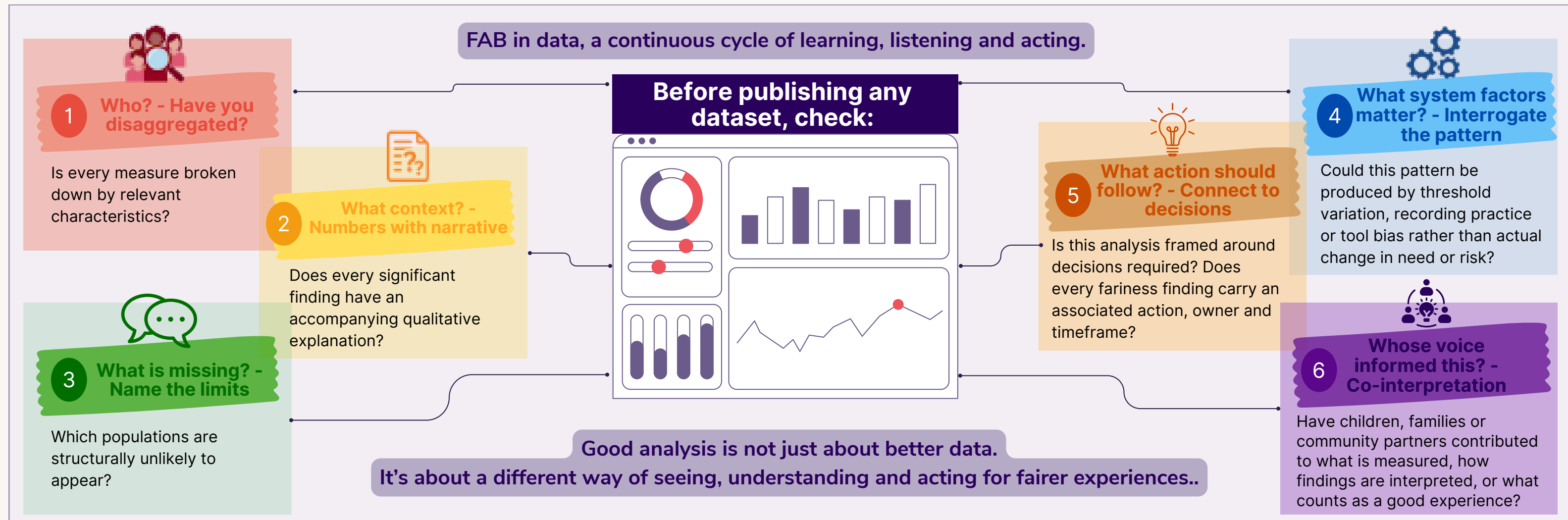
How is insight used to improve fairness and belonging?

Groups commonly missed, under counted or inadequately disaggregated in analysis

Disabled children • Neurodivergent children • Children in poverty • Gypsy, roma and traveller communities • Displaced children• Children in temporary accommodation • LGBTQ+ young people • Children missing education • Children on waiting lists • Care-experienced children • Rurally isolated families • Children seen only by voluntary sector• Children with speech & language needs • Families affected by immigration processes

FAIRNESS AND BELONGING (FAB): DATA PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

These principles help us move from traditional analysis to fairer, more meaningful insights.



Better questions → Deeper understanding → Better decisions → Better outcomes for children, young people and families

References and evidence base

PRACTICE AND EVIDENCE

[Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel \(2025\). Learning Support and Capability Project. London: DfE.](#)
[Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel \(2023\). It's Silent: Race, Racism and Safeguarding Children. London: DfE.](#)
[Brown, L. / LBTC \(Feb 2026\). Why fairness fails when systems can't learn](#)
[Brown, L. / LBTC \(2026\). Fairness Learning Theory: full statement](#)
[CSA Centre \(2023\). CSE risk tool variability and equity implications](#)
[Missing People \(2023\). Ethnicity and missing incidents: racial disparities in response](#)
[DfE \(2025\). CSAE recording practices in children's social care](#)
[MSP Evidence Centre \(2023\). SEND children and exploitation risk](#)
[Brennan, McPherson & Larigkou / YEF \(Mar 2025\). Using data and intelligence in focused deterrence](#)

NATIONAL POLICY & STATUTORY FRAMEWORKS

[HM Government \(2026\). Working Together to Safeguard Children. London: DfE.](#)
[HM Government \(2010\). Equality Act 2010. London: The Stationery Office.](#)
[Ofsted / CQC / HMICFRS \(2022\). Joint Targeted Area Inspections. London: Gov.uk.](#)
[Ofsted \(2023\). ILACS framework. London: Ofsted.](#)

Further reading

NORTH WEST (NW) WEBSITE

All NW data tools, thematic datasets, storyboard template and dashboard guidance: nwadcs.org.uk/hub
NW FAB workstream outputs, including scrutineer toolkit and further resources: nwadcs.org.uk/hub/fab

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