



**UNICEF UK
RIGHTS RESPECTING
SCHOOLS AWARD:**
A good practice review



About UNICEF

UNICEF is the world's leading organisation working for children and their rights. Every child, no matter who they are or where they live, has the right to grow up safe, happy and healthy.

UNICEF UK raises funds for UNICEF's emergency and development work around the world and advocates for lasting change for children worldwide. This includes working to change government policies and practices that restrict child rights in the UK and internationally.

UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award seeks to put the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of a school's ethos and culture to improve well-being and develop every child's talents and abilities to their full potential.

The Rights Respecting School Award recognises achievement in incorporating the Convention into a school's planning, policies and practice. A Rights Respecting School teaches child rights and models rights and respect in all its relationships – between teacher/adults and pupils, between adults, and between pupils.

We are a UK registered charity, supported entirely by voluntary donations. We do not receive any money from the UN.

For more information, please visit **[unicef.org.uk](https://www.unicef.org.uk)**

Introduction

UNICEF UK has worked in partnership with two researchers from the Universities of Brighton and Sussex to identify nine schools in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland that have demonstrated good practice in the UNICEF UK Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA). We have based this good practice review on research gathered during visits to these nine schools.

The research included:

- interviews with pupils, staff, school leaders, parents and governors
- analysis of relevant documents, such as curricular plans, RRSA and behaviour policies, RRSA presentations, and inspection reports.

This good practice review aims to help all schools to develop similarly strong RRSA profiles.

This report builds on the findings from the *Evaluation of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award* published in 2010.

Please see unicef.org.uk/RRSA-evaluation

For more information on UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting School Award, please visit unicef.org.uk/RRSA

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1. Why start the rights-respecting journey?

We asked school leaders why they had chosen to be involved with UNICEF UK's rights-respecting journey. Their responses fell into two categories.

“

The ethos and culture of our school is recognised as being child focused – the RRSA work has affirmed what we were already doing. We now feel part of a bigger movement.”

Principal

1. School ethos is in keeping with the RRSA

A number of schools leaders explained that the RRSA resonated with their school's ethos and that this would be affirmed by their involvement.

This was particularly true of the Christian principles present in the Church of England and Catholic schools. One school had hinged the RRSA to 'statements to live by', a model that makes the Catholic values of the school explicit and promotes a positive and caring Christian ethos that is understood and communicated to everyone.

In non-faith schools, the RRSA was often seen as offering a vision or values base that was consistent with that held by school leaders and governors. For some schools, developing an explicit RRSA approach enabled a unification of the school's existing values, policies and principles.

2. To improve behaviour and relationships

The other main reason given for the initial involvement of the school in the RRSA was to improve behaviour and relationships.

Usually the issues related to children's relationships with one another and behavioural issues, although more than one school mentioned parental attitudes to school or staff-pupil relationships as having been problematic in the past.

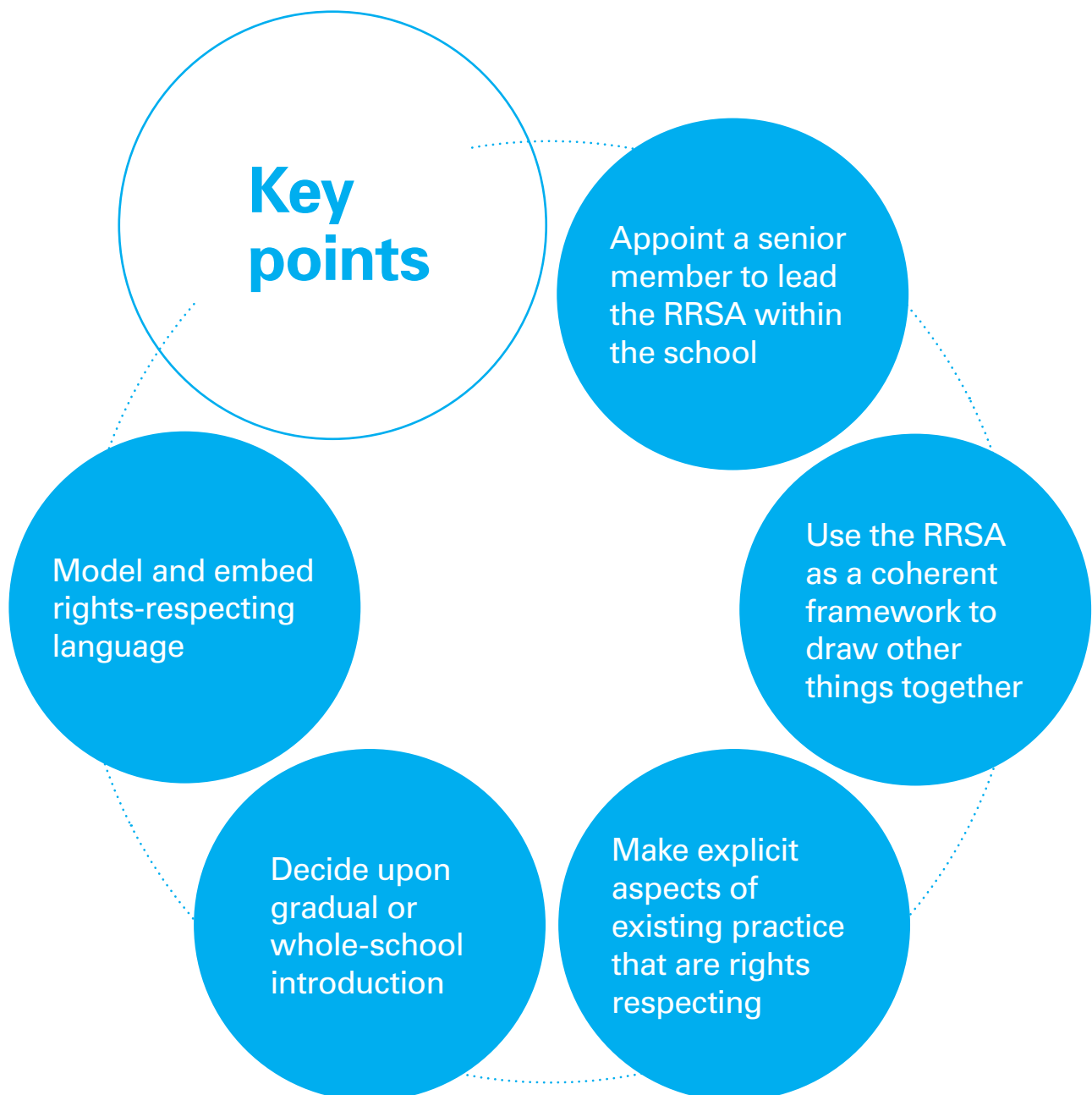
→ A rights-respecting school has its pupils at the core of its ways of working.

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2. Getting started

We asked school leaders to identify their key recommendations to help begin the UNICEF UK's rights-respecting journey.



Appoint a senior member of staff to lead the RRSA within the school

Eight of the nine schools appointed a senior member of staff as the RRSA lead or coordinator, who was then given time to develop strategies for taking forward the rights-respecting journey.

In some schools, the RRSA lead/coordinator mapped out the RRSA standards covered by each department with the aim of providing a holistic view of where and how the school was already working in a rights-respecting way.

Use the RRSA as a coherent framework to draw other things together

School leads/coordinators presented the RRSA to staff as a means of providing a common focus and values framework for pupils, staff, parents and governors, in a way that could:

- involve the whole school community
- be applied to all aspects of school life
- encompass all school initiatives.

Schools also used the RRSA as offering a coherent framework to draw together the wide-ranging initiatives in which they were involved, including citizenship, SEAL, Eco-schools and Healthy Schools.

Make explicit aspects of existing practice that are rights respecting

School leaders introduced the rights-respecting work to staff in such a way that they didn't feel like it was 'another new (temporary) initiative'.

RRSA leads/coordinators helped staff to recognise existing rights-respecting practices within the school and by making this explicit enabled staff to develop an understanding that additional re-planning of the school curriculum was limited.

Schools used their early launch events to encourage staff to identify existing rights-respecting aspects in their current work. RRSA leads/coordinators then allowed time for staff to consider and discuss how to develop a rights-respecting approach.

“

A senior teacher is the rights-respecting coordinator and this is needed. He looks at rights-respecting at all levels and has an overview of what is going on in the school. He knows what the school council is doing and how this may link to what other groups may be doing, he sees opportunities for work to be taken forward.”

Principal

“

A lot of the RRSA agenda recognised what we were already doing.”

Principal

“

[RRSA] offered a more positive and preventative approach to addressing challenging behaviour that encouraged mutual respect and empowered children.”

Principal

Decide upon gradual or whole-school introduction

Some schools began implementing the RRSA following a large-scale community-launch event, often involving a UNICEF UK Professional Adviser and/or other schools in the local area that had already established the RRSA. This then led to a whole-school event whereby all staff simultaneously began developing a rights-respecting approach.

Other schools introduced the RRSA to fewer numbers of staff. When others saw the benefits of the approach, they also wanted to become involved so it grew from there. Typically, school leaders provided training and support to all interested staff, and staff also visited each others’ lessons. This provided encouragement and engendered new ideas on adopting a rights-respecting approach in their work.

Model and embed rights-respecting language

School leaders considered the modelling of RRSA language and behaviour as fundamental to the development of a rights-respecting approach. Schools encouraged a whole-school approach to using a language of rights and respect around the school. The language was built explicitly into school policies and within new schemes of work where these were being written.



→ Establishing rights-respecting language and behaviours encourages pupils to adopt inclusive attitudes that celebrate rather than stereotype diversity.

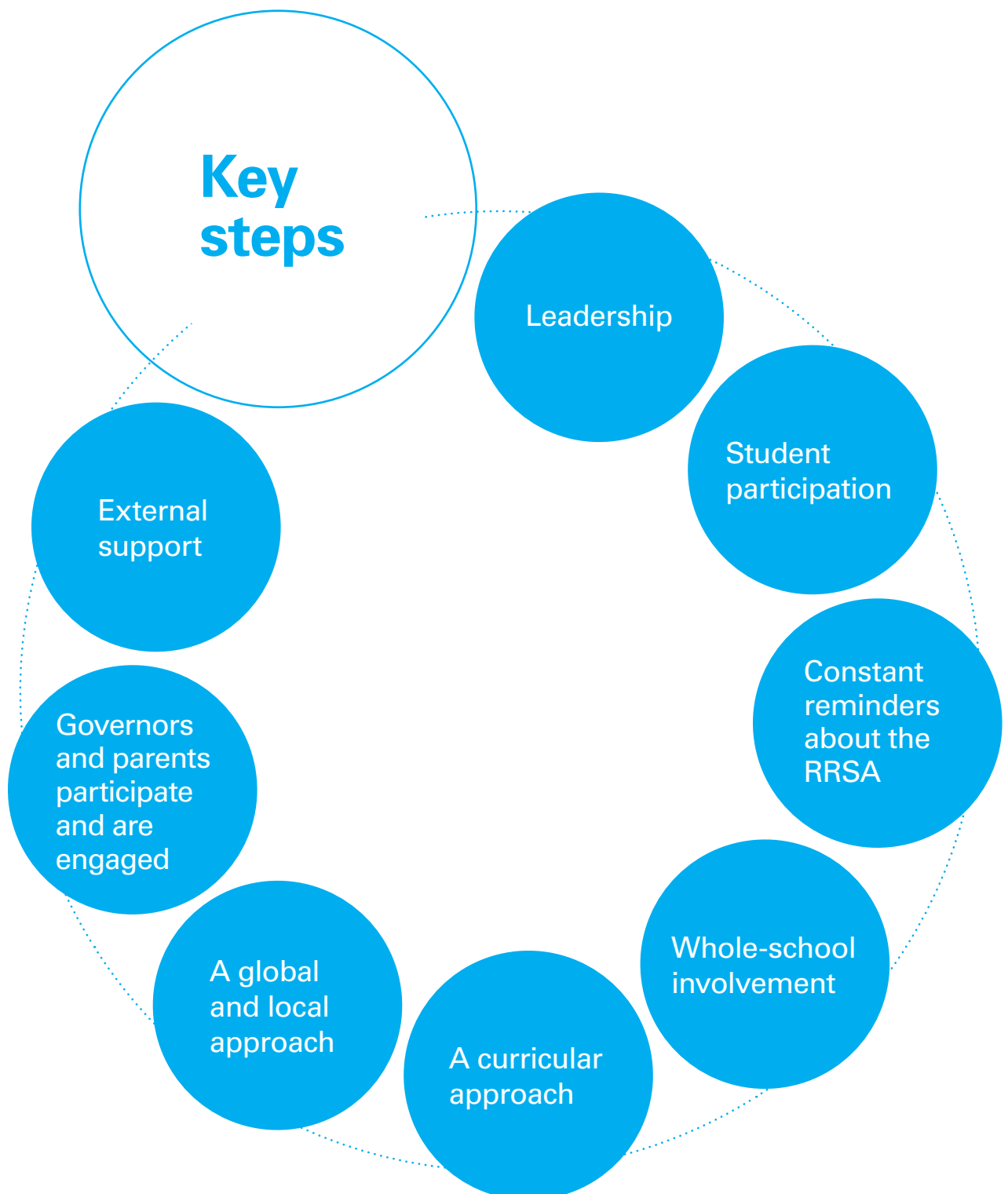
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3. Implementing the RRSA

We asked school leaders to identify the steps that they took to implement the RRSA effectively.



Leadership

There is no doubt that the school's leadership plays an important role in developing and sustaining a school-wide RRSA approach. Identifying a lead/coordinator to play the role of a rights-respecting 'champion' is critical here, particularly during the initial stages of development.

All nine schools had embedded a strong rights-respecting approach into ways of working and staff felt that this would continue, regardless of school leadership changes or the absence of a RRSA champion. School leaders did, however, acknowledge that the departure of the champion could make the sustainability of any rights-respecting work vulnerable because of the need to regularly refer to respecting rights in all communications and school developments in a consistent manner.

School leaders agreed that it was vital to model rights-respecting behaviour when interacting with each other, staff and pupils. Some school leaders recommended that the headteacher take on the role of RRSA lead/coordinator so as to communicate maximum commitment. In other schools, particularly those that are larger, a school leader adopted the role.

A clear vision

In either case, any RRSA developments require a clear and regularly articulated vision demonstrating where school leaders view the school in rights-respecting terms in the future. Also, school leaders must have a clear view of how to introduce the RRSA to staff and pupils, and how to develop rights-respecting language and processes throughout the school coherently.

School leaders acknowledged that those leading on the RRSA in schools need time to develop the work. This is especially necessary in the early stages of adopting and developing a rights-respecting approach and supporting other staff to do so.

The RRSA lead/coordinator should also develop an overview of the rights-respecting advances taking place and make connections between developments in different areas of the school.

Allocation of time for staff to develop ideas on adopting and embedding a RRSA approach within their work was seen as significant when building staff capacity. In some schools, explicit RRSA targets were included in professional development programmes.

It was evident that these schools are popular working environments and receive plenty of applicants for each post. The commitment to respecting rights is made clear in job adverts, descriptions and interviews and applicants are often required to demonstrate their understanding of what it means to work in a rights-respecting school. The headteacher's strong commitment and the presence of a member of staff, usually the RRSA lead/coordinator, to act as a driving force are seen as crucial to giving clear continuing messages to stakeholders about the ongoing priorities of respecting rights and of developing a RRSA approach in the school.

“

A senior member of staff in this role is significant as they have the seniority to make a difference within the school and to delegate responsibilities... a teacher on a full teaching timetable wouldn't be able to give the time to develop the work in a whole-school way and build a clear picture of the RRSA work going on across the school.”

RRSA coordinator



Listening to children is critical in the facilitation of [RRSA] work, letting them take the lead and giving power to their voice, which can make a real difference.”

Headteacher

Student participation

The authors note that student participation appears to be more extensive in this qualitative study of nine schools than in the wider sample of our previous evaluation* (2010). This additional input is considered by school leaders as key to sustainability.

School leaders maximise engagement by offering pupils a large number of groups to join, such as student councils, Eco committees, and peer mentors and other working parties alongside the school council. The groups change the membership each year so that more pupils have responsibility for and input into what happens in their school.

The majority of the schools visited also involve pupils directly in staff appointments by means of interview panels and/or teaching feedback. One school encourages pupils to write reports on the headteacher and teachers, and this has led to significant changes. In one case, pupils requested increased teaching hours by the headteacher and this was achieved.

Pupils train new staff

In one of the nine schools, Year 8 school council members evaluate two lessons taught by all new staff, looking specifically for signs of a rights-respecting approach. The pupils themselves adopt a rights-respecting approach during the observations. In two of the schools, pupils train new staff, including midday supervisors, teaching assistants, site managers and technicians, in rights-respecting behaviours. One primary school invests a great deal of leadership in the pupils and the headteacher places strong emphasis on pupils facilitating other pupils and teachers.

In most of the schools, a number of pupils act as rights-respecting ambassadors and present to other schools in the community. Pupils from a school in Wales and one in Scotland have spoken to the Children’s Commissioner for Wales and Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People respectively about their experiences of the RRSA. In Scotland, one school has developed this further. Pupils and teachers undertake Level 1 assessments in other schools, which the pupils interviewed suggested had enabled them to bring back ideas into their own school.

Constant reminders about the RRSA

School leaders made a conscious effort initially to inform pupils, parents and staff about the RRSA by intentionally referring to the award in several aspects of daily school life, either explicitly or discreetly, on a regular basis.

- school assemblies
- staff meetings
- class discussions
- school council and other groups involving pupils
- school celebrations where praise was given for pupils’ achievement in the broadest sense and not solely academic achievement
- verbal reminders about the expectations of pupils’ behaviours and attitudes towards others.

*UNICEF UK’s Rights Respecting Schools Award (2010)
unicef.org.uk/RRSA-evaluation



← Engaging and listening to pupils can facilitate and sustain rights-respecting developments in your school.

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Schools also referred to the RRSA when actively acknowledging and celebrating different cultures and religions within the school, the community and the wider global environment.

Staff and pupils developed class charters based around the RRSA and post notices and images of rights-respecting related activities on school notice boards and on visual display screens throughout the school.

One school is planning to set up a radio station to broadcast a weekly lunchtime feature called 'Article of the Week' to focus on one article from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Another school gave the following examples of what they had done to make respecting rights explicit amongst pupils and staff:

- Weekly school planners including a quote each week linked to an article from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 'Article of the Week' where the whole school discusses a particular article during tutor time. This is also linked to weekly assemblies.
- Pupils update the RRSA display boards around the school.
- Posters on children's rights are visible to pupils and staff.
- Pupils run some assemblies to update staff and pupils about RRSA events taking place in the school.
- The school organises a rights-respecting week each term, whereby daily starters throughout the school are based on the RRSA. Pupils are engaged in discussions on content and think about the most powerful way of communicating rights-respecting issues to fellow pupils. Pupils initiated 'Respect Week' in this manner.
- The RRSA is mentioned in staff briefings that are attended by teaching and support staff.

“

Developing a [rights-respecting] approach in the school is a mindset – it's not to do with time.”

RRSA coordinator

Most of the school leaders interviewed were unable to identify any specific investment that they have made to RRSA development, reasoning that it is embedded in the school and is not distinct from their work. Much of the staff development, for example, addresses rights-respecting work whatever the other points of focus. In most of the schools, however, when introducing and developing the RRSA, time was allocated during staff development days to help understand where respecting rights is already present and to consider how to further incorporate a rights-respecting approach into current ways of working.

To raise awareness of the school's rights-respecting approach to parents and carers, some schools developed a dedicated section of their website and sent regular newsletters to parents to inform them of RRSA-related developments.

Sustainability

Sustainability of the RRSA is ensured by making frequent reference to and regularly describing rights-respecting developments in school assemblies, staff meetings, in communications and information that go to pupils, staff, parents, governors and the community, and on the school website. Policy documents, including the school development plan, also contain references to the RRSA.

One school provided an additional ongoing programme of staff induction, development and modelling. Staff reported this as positive and key to sustainability:

- All new staff are introduced to respecting rights.
- All existing staff attend an annual session on 'moving forward' on respecting rights.
- All senior staff model rights-respecting behaviour to ensure that it remains embedded throughout the school.
- Respecting rights is mentioned regularly, for example in assemblies and staff meetings. (This was described by staff as 'drip feeding'.)

Similarly, lesson planning and staff meetings include significant coverage of the RRSA even when not identified specifically in meeting agendas. All schools clearly demonstrated that the RRSA lead/coordinator invested significant time in its continued development, in some cases by designating one/two days a week, but in all cases by addressing a rights-respecting approach in conjunction with other topics.



I give the [pupils from the rights-respecting Working Party] a quarter of an hour to discuss what they are going to do – and the children will be on task – that is an amazing testimony to the power of rights-respecting schools to give pupils that kind of freedom, different areas to work in and pupils leading the group.”

RRSA coordinator

Whole-school involvement

The adoption of a whole-school approach facilitates progress in developing a rights-respecting approach, although school leaders acknowledge this as a slow process with few, if any, 'quick-wins'. A conscious effort is made by the headteacher or RRSA lead/coordinator to involve the whole school in any RRSA developments, for example by regular rotation of student council membership to help spread the RRSA as widely as possible. Teaching assistants, midday supervisors and site managers are all involved and are included in rights-respecting training, which is pupil-led in some schools.



“

If you value it you don't count the minutes and we value this, and it's not an added extra, it is here with us.”

Principal

← Involving all staff and pupils is seen to be the most important factor in long-term stability.

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The involvement of all staff and pupils is seen to be the most important factor in long-term sustainability. Whole-school involvement and the communication of rights-respecting values are achieved through constant reference to respecting rights and modelling rights-respecting language. We received such comments as *“these schools don't ‘do’ rights-respecting, they live and breathe it”*.

Promoting a rights-respecting community

Building up areas with a large number of RRSA schools is reported to be a key target by governors and school leaders, although it is unclear whether this is crucial to longer term sustainability. As pupils transfer from primary to secondary schools they act as catalysts for this. Year 6 pupils of one primary school transferred to the local secondary school, and when revisiting the former asked the headteacher why the secondary school was not taking part in the RRSA. As a result, the secondary school has since registered with the RRSA and the primary school is providing support with teachers undertaking joint planning. Further to this, the primary school pupils are giving presentations on the RRSA to the secondary school pupils.

Similarly, other primary schools are supporting secondary schools to create a smoother transition for their leavers and to build a local rights-respecting community. RRSA hubs are being developed to enable schools to visit others that have successfully established the RRSA, talk to pupils and learn about developments, such as the class charters, global citizenship curriculum and approaches to student engagement.

→ Embedding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and current affairs into the curriculum helps children to develop an understanding of children's rights and inspires learning.
© UNICEF UK/09/Davies



A curricular approach

The nine schools visited were characterised by a value system based on articles contained within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is embedded into curricular projects. When the schools tackle an area of history or geography, for example, it is related explicitly to the relevant article, and the ways in which the children's rights are realised or ignored is explored within that context.

A common approach is to dedicate each half-term to one article and for teachers to address that article in their curricular planning.

Many of the primary schools facilitate progress in adopting a rights-respecting approach by translating or simplifying the RRSA for very young children. One of the primary schools uses drama, whilst another uses child language for drawing up charters and referring to issues and behaviour verbally in the classroom. This school also uses fairy tales and games to make the articles more accessible to the youngest children. According to staff and pupils across the schools, making the rights-respecting work fun and relevant is an important contributor to progress and sustainability.

One primary school helps pupils to develop an understanding of issues concerning children's rights by following selected items of current news coverage. This is exemplary practice in enabling very young children to access rights' issues that are discussed in their homes.

Making the RRSA part of the required curriculum provides a very strong incentive and support for schools to embed it. This is particularly helpful in Scotland, where rights are central to the Curriculum for Excellence.

“
It has strengthened the links between areas of the curriculum and made learning more meaningful, giving pupils and staff a reason to learn, encouraging deeper learning.”

Headteacher

A global and local approach

Many pupils in the schools visited demonstrate a very high level of understanding of how children's rights are met or denied across the world and how access to rights may be improved. In many cases, these schools have developed links with schools in other countries to help pupils understand the cultures and lifestyle of those who live there. In some cases, staff and pupils have visited schools in developing countries and brought back visual images, artefacts and stories about the lifestyle of those they visited. Several schools follow the news closely and identify children's rights issues that they then address and discuss in lessons. They have covered such issues as tsunamis, global warming, access to clean water, World Food Day, child soldiers in Afghanistan, and Madonna's adoption of a child from Malawi. The written work that this generates is of a very high standard, both in terms of understanding children rights' issues and literacy. In some schools, parents come into school to give their input on specific issues about which they have first-hand experience or expertise, and this makes it more meaningful.

One school held an 'International Day' involving schools in five of the countries featured in the World Cup football competition. All classes across each of the schools covered the same scheme of work for one day. This included an exchange of videos and emails that asked questions about their different schools and lifestyles.

Examining international development

Another school used the 'Mantle of the Expert' to explore the role of aid workers with the Year 1 class. The teacher described how the whole class came into school dressed up as aid workers and undertook a project to build a classroom (within their own classroom) for a child in Uganda. Many parents were involved and the pupils recalled the experience with great delight, and demonstrated a good understanding of the related children's rights issues.

Year 6 pupils in one school described their involvement with Oxfam's GROW campaign. They formed groups to raise awareness of children's rights being denied and the importance of the global food programme by setting up stalls at local events. Their work has even been covered by the local press and radio station.

Many of the nine schools focused on the local and global issues addressed by Fairtrade. Pupils held Fairtrade Christmas fairs, campaigned for families to buy more Fairtrade items and discussed and wrote about the implications for farmers and workers in low-income countries, and about how fair trade could help children's rights to be met.

Exploring issues affecting children in the UK

Some schools have focused on poverty in the UK to highlight that the rights of children closer to home are denied, as well as those in more distant countries. The primary school that uses current news coverage (see **A curricular approach**), for example, included a section addressing news items related to poverty in Britain. In another school, the steering group suggests that the rights of the school children are first and foremost in their considerations and that there are still children at school whose rights are being denied outside of the school setting.

The pupils of one school are involved in 'Sandwatch', a national environmental initiative that develops awareness of the fragile nature of the marine and coastal environment and the need to use it wisely. Pupils reported having been on visits to the beach to measure erosion and to pick up anything that might be damaging the environment.

“

The rights-respecting work provides a curriculum that is real and thereby meets the requirements of the Scottish curriculum to teach real and meaningful activities.”

Headteacher

“

The link with Mwimbi in Kenya has changed the attitudes of both children and staff in relation to the rights of children in other countries.”

Headteacher



[RRSA] offered a more positive and preventative approach to addressing challenging behaviour that encouraged mutual respect and empowered children.”

Principal

Participation and engagement of governors and the parent council

Governors and parent councils are directly involved with the development of the school ethos. In the schools visited, they were closely involved with all RRSA initiatives and those interviewed demonstrated a high level of commitment to the RRSA. Governors, parents, staff and children of one primary school, for example, developed the values system together through an activity that enabled them to identify the top 10 values for the school. When appointing new staff, governors in another school ensure that all candidates are asked during the interview process about their understanding of what it means to work in a rights-respecting school.

Schools that have made significant progress on the RRSA have close working relationships between governors, parent council, staff and pupils. Student council members regularly attend governors’ meetings and governors also attend student council meetings when discussing specific issues. In one school, the student council gave a presentation to the governors to secure their initial agreement for the school’s engagement in the RRSA.

External support

School staff mentioned UNICEF UK and particularly the RRSA Professional Advisers as a significant source of face-to-face support. Additional resources, such as publications or activities, were loaned from local authorities or purchased or downloaded from websites such as UNICEF UK, CAFOD and Oxfam.

Some school leaders identified that national policy support was also useful. The Children’s Commissioner for Wales and Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People supported schools in developing rights-respecting approaches and met with children in their respective countries. The Children’s Commissioner for Wales, for example, opened the ‘Kids Conference’, which was held in partnership with UNICEF UK to launch the RRSA in South Wales, as well as launched a rights-based website for children from an RRSA school. The Welsh measure provides an impetus for schools to become rights-respecting.

In Scotland, several councils have taken on a leading role in developing the RRSA within the local authority, and supporting schools, currently covering registration and assessment costs and ensuring regular contact with the Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People. Scotland has made respecting rights central to its new Curriculum for Excellence and provides a supportive context for the development and sustainability of the RRSA.

→ External support from UNICEF UK and other local schools can help your school to develop a strong RRSA profile.

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4. What is the impact of UNICEF UK's RRSA?

We asked all adults, including staff, governors, parents/carers, and children to describe the impact that the RRSA has made.

Impact on the school

Staff from all nine schools reported that by working towards a RRSA approach within the school, a more cohesive way of working was achieved. Staff worked towards developing and sustaining a rights-respecting approach in the classroom and towards building this into school policies in both the long-term and the day-to-day curriculum development plans.

Staff reported the development of a common language of rights and respect that is used consistently in all areas of school life, including in school policies. There is an expectation that rights-respecting language will be used by staff and pupils alike and, in this respect, as schools develop a common rights-respecting language, they reported improved relationships with pupils and less of a hierarchical divide between staff and pupils.

All schools stated that the RRSA has facilitated the strategic development of the school curriculum and school policies, and has supported schools in developing an ethos of rights and respect.

Impact on children and young people

All staff noted major improvements in pupils' self esteem, behaviour, relationships with one another and with staff, and the absence of bullying. Pupils interviewed felt valued and listened to, and acknowledged that staff were genuinely concerned for the well being of the pupils in the school.

Pupils also reported a sense of security within their schools brought about by a consistent school-wide approach in terms of the rights-respecting language used and in terms of the expectations of behaviour placed on them by adults in the school. They also frequently mentioned their increased capacity to resolve their own disagreements.

Further to this, they demonstrated an awareness and understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and what this means in terms of their lives and the lives of other children. Pupils also recognised an increase in their understanding and respect for religions, cultures and beliefs different to their own.

“

The teachers care and they sort things out for us.”

Year 5 pupil



“

Student-teacher relationships have become a lot easier, we can communicate with the teachers a lot easier – you have the confidence to put your hand up when you don’t understand.”

Secondary school pupil

◀ The RRSA can improve communication between pupils and staff.

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In all nine schools, the relationship between the RRSA and subsequent academic achievement was acknowledged in terms of pupils being in a better state to learn.

In some schools, school leaders and governors attributed improvements in attainment and attendance, and reductions in exclusion to the RRSA. Most, however, were more cautious in claiming a direct impact on attainment, because they felt that pupils’ grades and targets fluctuate too much each year to reflect embedded change.

Pupils with special educational needs and children in care, in particular, seem to make a higher than expected level of academic progress (as reflected in the schools’ high value-added scores) in rights-respecting schools. According to parents and governors, some of these pupils also become much more confident. One school showed evidence that increased awareness in respecting rights gave one individual the confidence to withdraw from a group in which criminal activities took place, with the pupil recognising that they had a right not to be involved if they didn’t want to be.



[The RRSA] has provided a coherent framework for the development of school policies.”

RRSA coordinator

An understanding of global citizenship was exceptionally well developed in these schools, with pupils demonstrating an understanding of poverty in the UK, as well as worldwide. Pupils also demonstrated an increased awareness of environmental and community issues and an increased awareness of how their approach to situations can influence people around them.

Impact on staff

Staff recognised that the positive staff-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships have been a major benefit to them. They noted that the attitudes and behaviours of their colleagues had also improved throughout the school. Staff referred to the elimination of raised voices and to the consultations of pupils in making decisions relating to the curriculum, behaviour, meal and break arrangements, extra-curricular activities and fundraising, and to these consultations being taken seriously by staff. In many cases, decisions made by pupils are honoured by staff.

All staff interviewed feel that they now work in a more collaborative way, have an increased awareness of how their work corresponds with the RRSA, and have developed and used rights-respecting language throughout the school. As all members of the school community understood and developed an ethos of rights and respect, staff felt a sense that the whole school was working towards a common goal. This consequently led to feelings of empowerment for both staff and pupils.

According to school leaders and staff, a RRSA approach has had a positive impact on school leadership, with school leadership teams in some schools adopting a more consultative approach, exploring ideas with staff, and in some cases pupils, and listening to and acting upon their responses.

Impact on families and local communities

School staff noted a dramatic change in parental attitudes, and reported a better understanding by some parents of their own and their children's responsibilities to respect each other's rights. Schools involve parents directly in rights-related activities, such as those involving the environment (recycling, water use, Fairtrade), and parents also help to provide costumes for role play and drama activities.

Schools reported that direct information sessions for parents often reach the 'usual suspects' only. However, when pupils go home enthused about a project or parents/carers are asked by their children to help make cakes to sell for charity, or costumes for a particular event or activity, they are much more likely to be engaged in a meaningful way.

Some schools inform parents of any developments in the RRSA through newsletters, whilst others also use photographic evidence to enhance access to communications for parents with limited literacy.

Schools also reported an increase in the number of pupils working within the local community as volunteers in, for example, nursing homes, churches and local charity shops.

→ Staff recognised that the positive staff-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships have been a major benefit to them.

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5. Being a rights-respecting school over and above being a good school

We asked school leaders and pupils if there is a difference between being a good school and being a rights-respecting school.

We identified the following four additional areas present in a rights-respecting school.

1. An emphasis on pupil well-being

A rights-respecting school has its pupils at the core of its ways of working and prioritises the well-being of its pupils.

The well-being of the children is of great significance to the headteacher and to the staff. One school provides a quiet space where pupils can go and talk to staff or a counsellor (a school counsellor visits the school twice a week). These 'calming rooms' are decorated creatively with soft cushions and dimmed lighting. Children can also post their worries in the 'worry box'. The children commented that their worries tended to be solved by either the class or headteacher on the same day.

“

A good school goes through all the processes and gets good exam results. But a rights-respecting school has a different agenda. Rights-respecting schools have children at the core of what they are doing, they work so that every child's experience is a good one, no one is left behind.”

Principal

2. Relationships

Pupils in schools with a well-established rights-respecting ethos demonstrate an understanding of how to behave in a rights-respecting way and recognise the value of behaving in such a way. When moving schools or comparing with siblings or friends who do not attend rights-respecting schools, pupils note strong differences. In RRSA schools, for example, people have relatively higher levels of respect for each other, tend to adopt a positive approach to the resolution of conflict, and adopted inclusive attitudes that celebrate rather than stereotype diversity.

Many characteristics of a good school, like leadership and a cohesive curriculum, are not only visible in rights-respecting schools, they may be stronger. In rights-respecting schools, the understanding of rights in the wider context and the expectations of respect in relationships are noticeably different.



“

A good school provides for the needs of the students through academic and pastoral strands, but a [RRSA] school ties together the pastoral thinking – staff and students can see the bigger picture, they can look beyond the school and see the value of an rights-respecting approach.”

Teacher

← A rights-respecting school prioritises the well-being of all of its pupils.

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3. Global citizenship

Pupils and staff in RRSA schools have a wider and deeper understanding of the world in which they live, global issues, and how the rights of citizens in other countries and in the UK are sometimes denied. They demonstrate greater interest in world events and issues, and their work and discussion of these demonstrate a level of sophistication beyond that seen in other non rights-respecting schools.

4. Preparation for life

In the schools visited, children’s learning about rights and respect supersedes school rules, helping children to transfer this understanding to all aspects of their lives.

The schools are typically highly inclusive and governors and staff regard this inclusivity as a requirement to realising the right of all children in their community to an education. These children are better prepared for life in terms of attitudes towards others, irrespective of disability, race, gender or sexual orientation. Not only have these children developed an understanding of rights and respect for school, they have developed an understanding for life.

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