

# IMPACT REPORT



RIGHTS  
RESPECTING  
SCHOOLS

unicef   
UNITED KINGDOM



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## RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS AWARD 2016

**The Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) aims to improve the lives of children in the UK by educating them about children's rights, through children's rights and for children's rights.**

As schools progress through the award levels, we ask that head teachers provide their perspective, with supporting evidence, on the impact that becoming a Rights Respecting school has on their pupils.

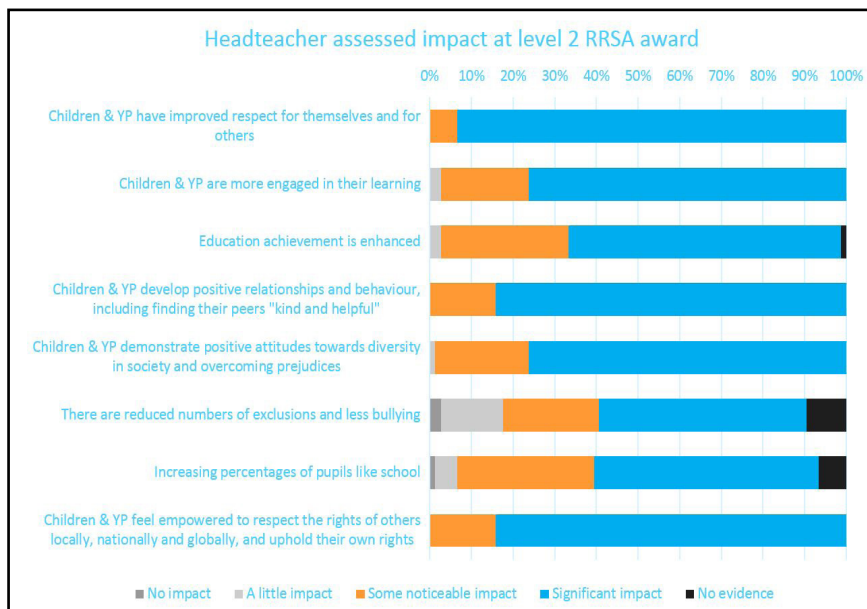
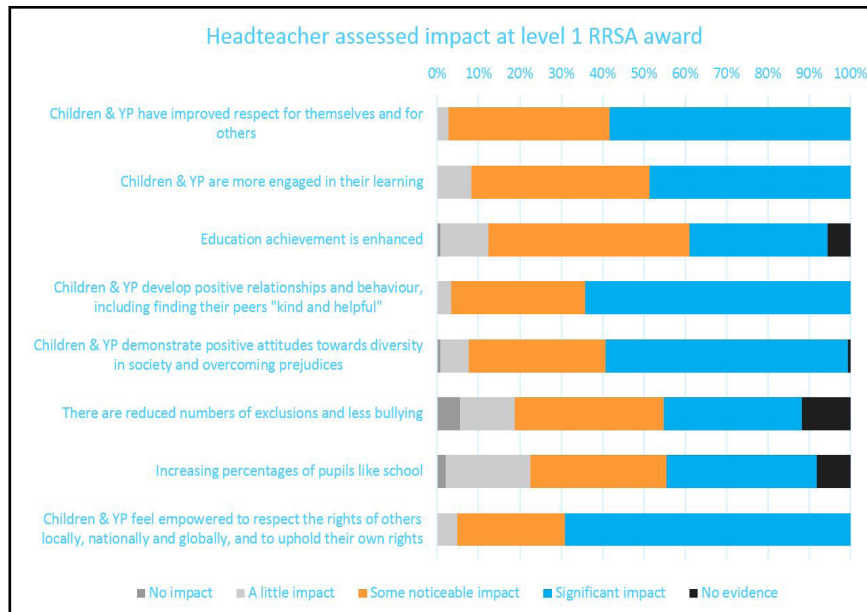
In 2016, 222 schools provided these reports – 146 for a level 1 award and 76 for a level 2 award – and the findings from these are presented in this report.

We also draw on independent school inspection reports for Rights Respecting schools to support claims for the impact on school performance and ethos. Quotes from inspection reports are labelled "IR" and include reports from OFSTED (in England), ESTYN (in Wales) and HMIE (in Scotland).

## OVERVIEW

Head teachers are overwhelmingly positive about the impact of RRSA in their schools.

- 98% reported some noticeable or significant impact on pupils' respect for themselves or others
- 94% reported some or significant improvement in pupils' engagement with their learning
- 86% reported some or significant impact on educational attainment
- 98% reported some or significant impact on pupils' behaviour and ability to develop positive relationships
- 93% reported some or significant impact on pupils' positive attitudes towards diversity and overcoming prejudice
- 69% reported some or significant reduction in the numbers of exclusions and incidents of bullying
- 75% reported some or significant increases in the proportion of pupils who enjoy school
- 97% reported some or significant impact on pupils feeling empowered to respect the rights of others locally, nationally and globally, and to uphold their own rights.



The graphs above show how head teachers rate the impact of RRSA on each of the eight areas. Overwhelmingly, the impact is felt to be 'noticeable' or 'significant', particularly in improving children's respect for themselves and others and in becoming more empowered to support the rights of others. While there are clear reports of impact at both Level 1 and Level 2, more significant impact is reported in Level 2 schools, as expected.

Head teachers support their claims with a wealth of evidence, including school data on attainment, attendance, exclusion and bullying incidents; awards received; responses to pupil surveys; feedback from pupils, parents, teachers, visitors and school inspections; and their own observations. In many cases where there was not considered to be noticeable impact, head teachers commented that this was due to the school performing well in this area before undertaking the RRSA.

# PUPILS' COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INCLUSION

Head teachers described the positive impact of discussions resulting from the focus on children's rights which permeated throughout the curriculum, particularly through religious and moral education and through Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE). They describe how pupils drive new work to address prejudice against particular groups, suggesting awareness raising campaigns, fundraising and other actions to support vulnerable groups. Several schools highlighted the positive impact on relationships where they have a culturally diverse intake.

These positive reports are supported by school inspectors, who make frequent reference to how RRSA, combined with other initiatives, help pupils to value diversity and cultivate an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance. RRSA is often cited by schools and inspectors as a valuable way to teach positive British values.

*"Children and young people demonstrate positive attitudes towards diversity in society and overcoming prejudices. In talking to children they have become far more aware of the diversity which surrounds them. They talk about diversity in our school - as seen by our Global Community display - and how their attitudes relate to the information they hear (in the news/family/assemblies/lessons etc). The children talk positively about how diversity benefits society."*

**(Level 2, Primary School)**

*"The introduction of Rights Respecting School agenda has had a significant impact on pupil voice and pupils being aware of the importance of equality in education. [...] Secondary pupil surveys in PSHE indicated that pupils wanted inserts on mental health, equality and LGBT issues. These have all been introduced into the curriculum and young people have responded well to the content. [...] Stonewall Scotland awarded the school the School Champions Award in March 2016. [...] Primary parents rated the School as excellent at developing moral values within children and promoting racial harmony."*

**(Level 1, Primary and Secondary)**

*"Pupils learn about British values through a wide range of opportunities planned within and outside the formal curriculum. Their work on restorative justice and Unicef's 'Rights Respecting Schools' allows pupils to develop their understanding of what is right and wrong. This is reflected in the high levels of respect, acceptance and tolerance observed among pupils and adults. These experiences enhance the harmonious relationships found in this culturally diverse school."*

**(IR, Level 1, Primary School)**

*Leaders' work in developing a coherent and well-considered personal, health, social and economic education programme is a strength. Alongside Catholic values, reflecting the religious character of the school, pupils' learning about children's and human rights enhances the school's work to promote diversity and equality. Frequent opportunities to talk about and practise rights respecting principles, as promoted by Unicef, help keep pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism."*

**(IR, Level 2, Primary School)**

## CHILDREN FEEL SAFE AT SCHOOL

Many schools were able to cite results of pupil surveys that show very high proportions of pupils feeling safe at school. Head teachers highlighted several ways that RRSA had contributed to this. Learning about rights was felt to increase pupils' awareness of the impact of their behaviour on others. Schools generally reported a decrease in bullying incidents, or that bullying was extremely rare as a result. Bullying associated with prejudice of all kinds was felt to be reduced as a result of pupils' increased commitment to inclusion and social justice. Several schools described approaches such as playground pals and peer mentors to help ensure that incidents were resolved appropriately. Pupils were often said to be taking a lead in activities to reduce bullying behaviours.

Head teachers also told us that pupils often felt empowered to speak up if they felt threatened or were concerned about anything, and to use the language of children's rights to challenge behaviours they felt breached those rights. School inspections have found that the RRSA work undertaken in schools helped to improve relationships, reduce bullying and provide an environment where pupils can discuss concerns. As a result, pupils say that feel safe and enjoy being at school.

*"There have been no exclusions. Anti-bullying log shows a 50% decline in the number of incidents from 2014 to 2015. Learning mentors confirm a decrease in the number of school based incidents needing to be followed up. Scrutiny of class sanctions grids by head teacher shows a reduction in the number of minor incidences."*

**(Level 1, Primary School)**

*"School's ethos of restorative approaches encourages children to talk openly about issues and to move on from conflict. Trained Peer Mentors encourage play, resolve disputes and support vulnerable children. [...] Incident reports show that most disagreements are settled through restorative approaches. Anti-bullying Gold Award report states: "A particular strength was the breadth and depth of the work around the Unicef Rights Respecting Award that underpins your ethos, and is evident in the children's responses to all aspects of fairness, responsibility and engagement."*

**(Level 1, Primary School)**

*"There is a positive 'tell culture' where pupils will report incidents that affect the safety and learning of all. Although incidents still occur they are minimal and parents, staff and children are addressing the problems and supporting children to resolve and respect others. A weekly award for the RRSA has been introduced and this is about sharing what the children have written either about a friend, a peer or an adult. All members of school from cleaners to governors can nominate an adult or child."*

**(Level 2, Primary School)**

*"You are rightly proud that you have secured the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools level 2 award. This work has helped to develop an open culture in school where pupils are confident to discuss issues and concerns. Pupils take on the role of anti-bullying 'champions' and play a pivotal role in preventing bullying and discriminatory behaviour. They feel safe and happy in school and trust the adults who work with them."*

**(IR, Level 2, Primary School)**

*"Children in focus groups identify better relationships with each other as a result of their understanding of their work associated with children's rights. They feel that incidents of bullying have reduced. The annual survey carried out by children for anti-bullying week indicates that the work taken forward by the school in this area is having a positive impact."*

**(IR, Level 1, Primary School)**

## CHILDREN FEEL VALUED AS INDIVIDUALS

Head teachers reported that RRSA impacted positively on pupils' self-esteem and the level of respect they showed for each other. This was evident from improvements in pupil behaviour and in increased confidence. We received frequent reports that pupils increasingly felt able to demand that their rights were respected, including challenging disruptive behaviour that made learning more difficult. RRSA was felt to contribute to positive relationships across the school community which helped pupils to feel valued by their peers and by adults.

Schools also developed ways to celebrate pupils' achievements and to recognise them publicly in the school. This ranged from opportunities to display talents like musical performances, to nominated awards for positive behaviour towards others. Pupils undertake a wide range of roles that provide them with a sense of personal achievement and increase confidence, for instance by acting as peer mentors, representing the school externally, and sitting on committees.

Again, these claims by schools are supported in school inspection reports. As well as feeling proud of their own achievements, school inspections have found that pupils in Rights Respecting schools show a particular pride in being a part of their school community. Inspectors comment on the self-respect and respect for each other shown by pupils in Rights Respecting schools.

*"Learning about rights has had a noticeable impact on the level of respect our pupils have for themselves and others. Class charters have greatly reinforced this."*

**(Level 2, Special School)**

*"Staff really like the way the RRS language is used to make the children think about their behaviour. [...] Respect for others is promoted and enhanced across the school. Behaviour in the school was already very good but the introduction of RRS has given all children the language to be assertive rather than either passive or aggressive should they encounter difficulties in relationships with others. This in turn has a positive impact on their self-esteem."*

**(Level 2, Primary School)**

*There exists a shared belief that 'by understanding their own rights children learn to respect and uphold the rights of others'. Pupils willingly undertake duties and responsibilities such as 'pastoral peers', 'playground-activity leaders' and 'academy councillors'. This develops confidence and self-belief and encourages pupils to value the contributions of their peers.*

**(IR, Level 1, Primary School)**

*Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of pride in their school. Pupils enjoy taking on roles and responsibilities such as that of 'school ambassador'. The school's commitment to being a Rights Respecting school is clear. Pupils respond well to the high expectations placed upon them. They show respect for themselves and for each other.*

**(IR, Level 2, Primary School)**

## IMPACT ON PUPIL WELL-BEING AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Children's well-being is closely linked to their positive relationships, and schools report that pupils have high levels of self-esteem and well-being as a result of the rights respecting work undertaken. Some head teachers indicate that pupils' emotional literacy, and the confidence to raise concerns is improved through knowing about their rights. In general, Rights Respecting schools have a number of explicit approaches in place to support children's well-being.

In school inspection reports, the role of the Rights Respecting approach in supporting pupil well-being is emphasised. The positive ethos and relationships, the open culture and the encouragement for pupils to take responsibility for raising concerns and supporting each other are all felt to contribute to the good emotional health and welfare of pupils.

*"Positive relationships are always encouraged and modelled [...]. Pupils can demonstrate ways of having good relationships and are more respectful as a result of developing a greater awareness and understanding of rights. Pupils regularly share examples of times when peers are kind and helpful and recognition for this is given by staff through the use of golden tokens. [...] We use Emotion Talks in school to help pupils understand their emotions and result in positive relationships. We are about to begin using the new Building Resilience resource in school which again emphasises the links between the UNCRC, H&WB outcomes and the well-being indicators. The establishment of our nurture room is also helping us reach children who need extra support in being able to form positive relationships, be learning ready and be able to enjoy all their rights."*

**(Level 1, Primary School)**

*"Children have an awareness of rights respecting language and it's given them a vocabulary to voice their opinions and articulate their feelings. This has improved the self-esteem of some of our children who may have been hesitant or reluctant to speak out previously. Some children have stated that this is due to feeling safe and listened to in school."*

**(Level 1, Primary School)**

*The 'rights respecting' culture seen across the school plays a significant part in how well pupils and staff interact, leading to a high degree of pastoral care and an ethos that ensures the social and emotional development of pupils is a high priority. Pupils are encouraged to play a part in this, for the most part self-regulating their own behaviour in classrooms and on the playground. This, in turn, has a big impact on the well-being and welfare of pupils, who feel safe in school and are not afraid to speak up when the actions of others cause them concern.*

**(IR, Level 1, Primary School)**

*Ensuring children's well-being is a major strength of the school's provision. In recent times, its focus on initiatives such as the health committee and 'Rights Respecting Schools' are impacting positively on children's well-being overall. [...] Nurturing and supportive relationships between children, staff and families are a strong feature of the setting. Children's rights are respected through the inclusive and respectful ethos that values everyone's contribution equally. As a result children feel valued, safe and secure in the setting.*

**(IR, Level 2, Primary School)**

## IMPROVEMENT IN PUPIL ENGAGEMENT

Schools comment on improvements in pupil engagement both with their own learning and with the school community. Head teachers highlight how pupils' understanding of their right to an education encourages them to take ownership of their learning, to know what they need to do well and to show commitment to achieving. Schools frequently comment that attendance and punctuality is improved. Heads also link this to pupils' increased enjoyment of school.

Pupils are encouraged to engage with schools through increased opportunities to have a voice and to influence decisions made in the school. Heads report that pupils respond well to these opportunities and pass on feedback from pupils that suggests they value this approach. Feedback from schools and comments from school inspectors suggest that giving pupils a voice in decisions about the school and their own learning, encourages them to engage more at school.

*As a Rights Respecting School, [School] places much emphasis on the rights and views of children.*

*Pupil voice is very strong in the school. Pupils play an active role in their learning in classrooms, engaging well with teachers in conversations about their learning.*

**(IR, Level 2, Primary School)**

*"Children have a voice across the school and are involved in challenging themselves and making their own choices within lessons. They respect their right to learn and to be the best they can be and challenge themselves across the curriculum."*

**(Level 2, Primary School)**

*"School pupil surveys show that children are happy to be at school. In the last survey in May 2016 81% of children said they were happy at school and 19% said that they were mostly happy. No one said that they were unhappy. [...] This is an increase over previous years where 50% said they were happy 28% were mostly happy and 22% were unhappy.*

*Attendance has also significantly improved; Attendance in 2012-13 was at 95.6% last year it was 97.1% and currently is running at 97.8%, which is well above the national average."*

**(Level 1, Primary School)**

*"Course Representatives and UNICEF Steering Group members have completed training to lead the Survey in classes encouraging students to give constructive feedback about college provision. 'The best thing about [College] is the support and the friendly manners of the staff. [College] is a rights respecting college that means that all student and staff have the right to a voice and they are able to express themselves without being judged. You can always make a significant change at [College]' (Survey 2015). 'The fact that students have right to voice, is amazing because it creates a sense of importance for students and this improves both the work ethics as well as social life' (Survey 2015). The UNICEF Steering Group is influential in affecting change with their profile raised across curriculum areas with the addition of the new UNICEF Ambassadors who are linked to each school and have a strong presence to protect the right to voice (Article 12)."*

**(Level 2, Higher Education College)**

# IMPROVEMENT IN PUPIL ATTAINMENT

It is difficult for head teachers to assess the impact of any specific programme or intervention on pupil attainment, since a wide range of factors contribute to results. However, schools were able to give clear, concrete examples of how engaging in RRSA helped to contribute to good and improving academic achievement. Heads described pupils' increased ownership of their learning and enthusiasm for their work. Pupil involvement in making curriculum decisions and providing feedback on teaching also contributed to the sense of ownership and in some cases was felt to improve the standard of teaching.

The Rights Respecting approach was felt to reduce some barriers to effective learning. Some cited fewer disruptions and higher attendance as contributing to improved exam results. Many schools told us that pupils increasingly recognised the impact of their behaviour on others' learning, or felt confident to challenge disruption in classes. These factors were directly associated with their Rights Respecting work. Increased emotional wellbeing due to improved relationships and reductions in bullying was also felt to contribute to improved results.

Echoing the comments of head teachers, school inspectors note that Rights Respecting schools support pupil achievement, both by creating an environment that is conducive to good learning and by helping the school and pupils together to identify and remove barriers to learning for individuals.

*and demonstrate a clear understanding of routines and expectations. [...] Children achieve well. All children can explain their writing targets and understand what they need to do to achieve them. The vast majority of students take responsibility for their own learning and are motivated to achieve well."*

**(Level 1, Primary School)**

*"RRSA has had an impact on exam results by helping retain students, especially vulnerable students. Student co-planners have worked extensively in curriculum and lesson design."*

**(Level 1, Secondary School)**

*"The vast majority of children now take much more responsibility for their own learning. They are able to discuss and evaluate their learning and explain their academic targets as well as their learning behaviour targets. Outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 have been broadly above national averages for the past 5 years including for groups of pupils such as Pupil Premium children."*

**(Level 2, Primary School)**

*The school places a very strong emphasis on moral values and care and respect through its focus on the rights of the child. It is an extremely inclusive and welcoming environment, which has a very positive effect on pupils' achievement and wellbeing. It promotes an ethos based on fairness and personal responsibility, which helps to create a learning environment that encourages participation by all.*

**(IR, Level 2, Primary School)**

*The school's promotion of rights means that pupils understand and respect everyone's entitlement to learn. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and respectful. Consequently, lessons are very productive and progress without interruption.*

**(IR, Level 1, Primary School)**

*Children show a marked increase in understanding how they can improve their work. Learning has become more focussed and the children are more engaged since the introduction of class charters. [...] Pupils are punctual, settle quickly to lessons*

# INCREASE IN ACTIVE GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Active global citizenship encompasses a number of impacts for pupils in Rights Respecting schools. Children's knowledge about rights and awareness of what they mean for themselves and for children in very different circumstances is improved by the RRSA approach. Schools report that children are more aware of world events, such as the refugee crisis and climate change, and are able to use their knowledge of children's rights to talk about these.

Beyond this, schools report that children themselves show a desire to take action to support the rights of others in a wide range of ways. Fundraising and support for children's charities is common across the schools. Taking action to influence is also reported in many schools, including writing to the Prime Minister and to local MPs to lobby on children's rights issues. This is felt to improve children's understanding of the political processes and to encourage them to feel they have an active role to play in this.

School inspection reports praise RRSA schools for raising pupil awareness and understanding of the situation of children globally and of democratic processes.

*"The work around the class charters encouraged the children to think about the rights of children in their own environment. This led on to discussions around children who are not able to access their rights for different reasons. [...] Children talk with animation about the need for equality in school but also are able to talk about the inequality they perceive in the lives of other children nationally and globally. They are keen to support charities such as Children in Need to raise money for children [...]. They have also written to the Prime Minister about the plight of children in other countries"*

**(Level 1, Primary School)**

*"Staff report that they feel that RRS has made the children more aware of their role as citizens and how their actions can impact on others. [...] Children report that they are now much more aware of their own rights and the need to defend the rights of others who may not be as fortunate. Pupils are much more vocal about wanting to stand up for and defend the rights of others as is evidenced by requests to the head for fundraising activities and through Pupil Voice mechanisms such as Rights Respecting Council and Rights Respecting Citizens. All children in the school have been involved in campaigns such as 'Send my Friend to school' which raise awareness of global injustices and inequalities. They understand that they can make a difference by communicating with our local MP and that their voices are listened to. We have received letters from MPs and the Prime Minister, David Cameron, recognising the children's work on this."*

**(Level 2, Primary School)**

*"Most pupils make outstanding progress in developing their social and life skills as a result of their work on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. [...] Pupils transfer their knowledge of rights effectively when considering the needs of children in other countries, for example when collecting money to help rebuild a school in Nepal. [...] The school uses the rights of the child extensively to explain the role the pupils play in society and the wider world."*

**(Level 2, Primary School)**

*Pupils put their understanding of democracy into action through their participation in the centre-based pupil councils, which feed into a whole-school pupil parliament.*

**(RoC, Special School)**