

UNICEF UK RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS AWARD THEORY OF CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

The Rights Respecting Schools Award in the UK works with schools across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Our 'Theory of Change' explains how this programme works to change children's experiences in school and is supported by a review of the available evidence. More information about Rights Respecting Schools Award, and how we measure our impact for children, is available at [unicef.uk/rrsa](https://www.unicef.uk/rrsa)



RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS: THE EVIDENCE

Rights Respecting schools take a whole-school approach to embedding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) at the centre of their ethos and learning. Rights Respecting Schools put in place policies and activities that support children's rights in education and their wider lives.

Rights Respecting schools teach children about the rights that they have and the key principles inherent in upholding children's rights. Placing *equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination, education and participation* at their centre means that schools ensure a balanced commitment to children's wellbeing, as well as to their attainment and achievement.

Schools are encouraged to use the CRC as a framework for all aspects of their work and make explicit how everything they do promotes and protects children's rights. A rights-based approach is applied across all school relationships, including teachers, parents and governors, as well as children, and to the wider local and global community.

Rights Respecting schools ensure children **enjoy all their rights** in school, respect the rights of others and build positive relationships with adults and peers across the school. Through including the CRC in the curriculum, children and teachers have a **better knowledge of children's rights** and what these mean in their lives. This

enables children to recognise when their rights are being breached. Alongside strong policies, this empowers children to disclose concerns to appropriate adults in the school. As a result, children should **always feel safe at school** and in their wider community.

As well as strengthening children's capacity as rights holders, informing children about rights encourages them to respect the rights of others.^{1,2,3} Non-rights respecting behaviours such as **bullying and discrimination are reduced**. Children's rights provide a framework that emphasises social justice and inclusion which can have lasting effects on young people's attitudes and behaviour towards others. Teaching children about their rights encourages them to respect the rights of others to hold and express differing views which is a protective factor against extremism.⁴

Positive relationships are supported by procedures, policies and guidance that establish interactions based on rights and ensure that disagreements are managed well.³ Good relationships between teachers and pupils and a positive school climate contribute to high levels of **pupil wellbeing and engagement** in learning.¹ Emotional wellbeing has been identified as a growing concern in the UK^{5,6} and teachers have a specific role in supporting pupils' wellbeing.⁷ Where relationships are perceived as positive, children are more likely to enjoy school and feel valued

leading to improved health and wellbeing.^{8,9} Resilience – the capacity to cope with everyday challenges – is associated with schools that have shared decision-making, participation, supportive social environments and good community relationships.¹⁰

One study has shown that knowing about their rights is associated with **higher wellbeing in children**.¹¹ Children reporting higher levels of participation and being heard, also have higher levels of wellbeing.¹¹ Other studies also show a link between wellbeing and participation in school and the community.^{12,13} Feeling safe at home, in school and in the local community was also associated with higher levels of wellbeing.¹¹

Pupil engagement may be reflected in **improved attendance and attitudes** towards learning and school. Child Rights Education is linked to better engagement and fewer absences, particularly in more disadvantaged schools.¹ Improved relationships can also reduce teacher burnout.¹⁴

High levels of wellbeing and engagement lead to improved attainment.¹⁵ Whole school approaches to influencing pupil behaviour and social and

emotional learning improve attainment¹⁶ and **reduce the attainment gap** between the most and least deprived.^{1,17,18}

Opportunities for young people to participate in decisions that affect them and their community can **improve the school environment** and pupil wellbeing.¹⁹ Through the process and the effects of involvement, young people feel valued and included.²⁰ It also provides opportunities to develop listening and negotiation skills, and confidence to participate in wider community and political issues.^{21,22} Schools that listen to the concerns of children and involve them in decision making are more likely to address bullying and violence than other schools.²³

An understanding of children's rights helps pupils to relate to social justice issues in their local and global communities. This may include being better informed about important issues and understanding how to participate in constructive debate and democratic processes. This experience can encourage children to remain interested in these processes in future, and to **become 'active', politically engaged citizens**.¹⁴

CASE STUDY: FOSTERING INCLUSION

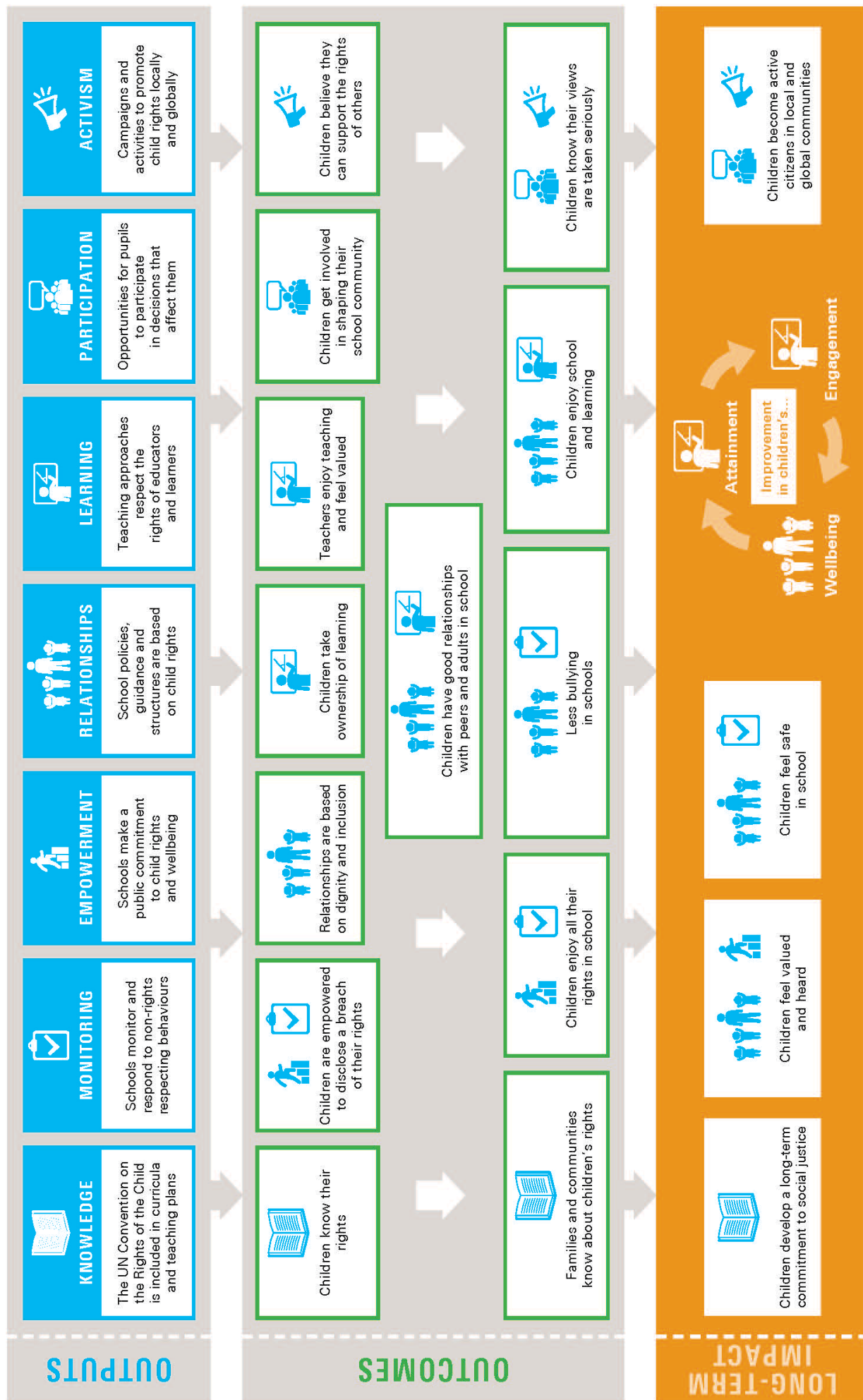
A teacher at a primary school in an inner city area in England explained how becoming a Rights Respecting School helped their students become more outward looking and challenged some negative attitudes.

- "This is an area where there are a lot of negative views about immigration and refugees. It is a very white area. There are a few pupils from other cultures, and pupils are welcoming towards them, but they pick up negative attitudes from others. As part of teaching about Islam, we arranged a visit to a local mosque. In that first year, a lot of parents refused to let their children go on the visit. We nearly had to cancel it the first year."

In becoming Rights Respecting, the school began to work on children's rights, teaching pupils about respecting diversity and the rights of others. They also taught about refugees in their curriculum.

- "It's helped to get the children to look outside their little bubble. It's opened up their eyes to life beyond their local community and to think about children elsewhere in the world and other children in their own country. When we arranged the visit to the mosque the second year, a lot of parents left it to their child to decide, and this time they overwhelmingly chose to go; only one refused. The pupils themselves saw why it was valuable."

THEORY OF CHANGE: RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS



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