

PROMOTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS THROUGH RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS: A VISION FOR LONDON

About UNICEF UKUK's Rights Respecting School Award

The Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) is a rights based, whole school improvement programme. The Award provides a framework to embed children's rights strategically and practically into a school context. When children and young people know about their rights, they are empowered to claim them and to understand that others have rights too. The shared language of rights and respect builds stronger, more inclusive school communities and equips both young people and adults with a shared language for conflict resolution. Living and learning through rights inspires pupils to a deeper sense of engagement in their school and their community.

Rights Respecting Schools and inclusion

RRSA brings about system change in schools. It requires children (as rights holders) and adults (as duty bearers for child rights) to know and understand the rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The authority inherent in the CRC, as the most widely ratified UN Treaty, changes perceptions, particularly in the ways in which children and young people see themselves and their peers.

UNICEF UK's [evaluation of impact](#) identifies that children feel that knowing their rights makes them more able to demand them when it comes to feeling safe and seeking protection from violence, abuse, and neglect.

"The right to be safe helps. If you know this is your right and it's being violated, you can report something wrong and know it will be tackled." Pupil, Gold Rights Respecting School.

Further feedback from children consulted for UNICEF UK's RRSA Theory of Change placed 'feeling safe' and 'having a strong sense of belonging to their school community' as their top benefits of being in a Rights Respecting School. Impact evidence also shows that children and young people who know about their rights are more inclusive of others and actively promote and celebrate diversity in all its forms. 93% of headteachers report some noticeable or significant impact on children and young people having 'improved respect for themselves and for others.' Evidence also shows that children's wellbeing and self-esteem are enhanced by being part of a rights respecting community, and their appreciation of diversity is strengthened. Capacity for resolving disagreements grows and where adults need to intervene, use of rights language helps to de-escalate situations and enables bridges to be found to sustainable resolutions.

Promotion and school applications

The London VRU is promoting the importance of children's rights through London's Inclusion Charter. If a school wishes to apply for RRSA membership, they can do so via the RRSA [website](#).

Teachers and staff are supported every step of the way on their journey to become Rights Respecting. The RRSA team provides [training](#), guidance, a range of resources such as [teaching resources](#) and CPD tools for coordinators to use with their colleagues. Then, when a school is ready, an accreditation by an experienced child rights professional evaluates their practice, recognises their progress and success and offers detailed feedback, signposting the school towards further development of the work.

A Borough based sustainable approach

In early 2024¹ 340 nursery, primary and secondary schools across London, just over 10% of all London schools, are working towards rights respecting accreditation, reaching almost 122,000 children.

Building a rights respecting culture within and among schools in each London Borough has the potential for significant and positive long-term influence on developing a strong culture of inclusion for young people and their communities. To help fulfil this ambition, UNICEF UK will:

- Offer RRSA free to all state funded education settings² in the 32 local authorities in London, beginning in April 2024 for four years:
 - increasing engagement of schools currently not registered to the RRSA programme within all Boroughs and;
 - ensuring progress of the currently registered schools.
- Raise awareness of the CRC and increase knowledge and understanding of children's rights by every child and by adults as duty bearers.
- Support whole school change by providing a framework to embed the CRC strategically and practically into schools, to help to create safe and inspiring places to learn, where children are respected and have their voices heard, their talents nurtured, and they can thrive.
- Work collaboratively with Boroughs and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) to develop a strategic approach, to build capacity and ensure sustainability of the work during and beyond the period of the funding.

Using the Boroughs as local hubs, allows for a strategic approach to be taken in partnership with UNICEF UK. The approach developed should be flexible and consider the context of each Borough to ensure that it is sustainable. The approach should also build the capacity of staff within each Borough to embed children's rights within and across schools beyond the lifetime of the funding.

Each Borough should establish a Child Rights Schools Steering Group; the leadership and membership of the group will depend on the context of the Borough. The chair of the group would become the named Strategic Lead and contact person for this work. For example, the chair could be the headteacher of a school (maintained or MAT) that has embedded children's rights throughout their school and has experience of RRSA or the chair could be a local authority officer, for example, the lead for inclusion, safeguarding, participation, SEND or children's rights. The membership of the group should be drawn from a combination of maintained schools and MATs, where appropriate. It is recommended that the members are senior leaders but not necessarily headteachers.

The Professional Adviser from UNICEF UK will support the development of the group in each Borough and the assessment process for RRSA. They will also provide guidance and support for schools signing up as well as existing schools.

From the second year of funding, some members of the group would be expected to take on an assessor role, supported and trained by the Professional Adviser.

Several Boroughs have already shared an overview of their planning in Appendix 1.

¹ Figures from January 2024

² Education settings includes nursery, primary, secondary and special schools and alternative provision including PRUs.

Appendix 1 Examples of Borough Child Rights Schools Steering Groups

Camden Child Rights Schools Steering Group

Membership

Headteacher of Camden school (Gold RRSA accredited)
Secondary Senior Leader
Secondary Inclusion Leader/SENCO
Primary Headteacher
Primary Deputy/ Inclusion Leader
Camden Learning adviser (Inclusion)
CEO Camden Learning

Terms of reference

The Camden Children's Rights Schools Steering Group will:

- promote children's rights across the Borough and adoption of Rights Respecting principles in schools within their locality
- work with UNICEF UK's Professional Adviser to promote and monitor the uptake to RRSA across the Borough
- promote collaboration among schools through hosting sharing events where schools can showcase their approach to promoting children's rights, including RRSA
- participate and organise cross-Borough events to showcase different approaches to promoting children's rights, including RRSA

During 2022/23, Camden Learning commissioned The Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) to capture the work of schools in Camden accredited with UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA). They explored the impact of participation in the programme on attainment and attendance; behaviour and wellbeing; reduction in prejudice and discriminatory attitudes and teacher recruitment and retention.

Young people's participation in the RRSA has an explicit link to Building Back Stronger - Camden's Education Strategy to 2030, and the ambition for young people to leave school as: "socially and morally responsible changemakers, who not only understand their rights and respect the rights of others but are also able to contribute actively to their community and to the planet." Participation is also aligned with Camden Learning's 'curriculum plus's enrichment pledge. One of its twelve promises is to give every pupil in a Camden school the opportunity to "understand and feel part of a global and diverse world."

Barking and Dagenham Child Rights Schools Steering Group

Membership

Virtual Head of SEND
Primary Headteacher (Gold RRSA accredited)
Secondary deputy
Primary deputy
LBB Learning Partnership adviser (Inclusion)

Terms of reference

The Barking and Dagenham Children's Rights Schools Steering Group will:

- promote children's rights across the Borough and adoption of Rights Respecting principles in schools within their locality
- work with UNICEF UKUK's Professional Adviser to promote and monitor the uptake to RRSA across the Borough
- promote collaboration among schools through hosting sharing events where schools can showcase their approach to promoting children's rights, including RRSA
- participate and organise cross-Borough events to showcase different approaches to promoting children's rights, including RRSA

Richmond & Kingston Child Rights Schools Steering Group

Membership

Senior School Improvement Adviser
Associate Director for School Standards and Performance
Secondary Headteacher
Primary Headteacher
Special Headteacher
Primary Deputy
Secondary Deputy
SENCo lead
PSHE lead

Terms of reference

The Child Rights Schools Steering Group will:

- promote children's rights across the Borough and adoption of Rights Respecting principles in schools within their locality
- work with UNICEF UK's Professional Adviser to promote and monitor the uptake to RRSA across the Borough
- promote collaboration among schools through hosting sharing events where schools can showcase their approach to promoting children's rights, including RRSA
- participate and organise cross-Borough events to showcase different approaches to promoting children's rights, including RRSA

Achieving for Children (Kingston and Richmond)

Achieving for Children (AfC) recognises the lasting impact on social cohesion of placing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of school life. It is by learning about rights that young people know that their rights are protected regardless of economic disadvantage, special needs, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and beliefs. By knowing them, they are empowered to speak out if their rights and those of others are being breached.

AfC is committed to supporting all schools to implement the RRSA and has incorporated the award into its strategic documentation including performance indicators where appropriate. The RRSA Implementation Plan (2024-2028) is currently being developed and will build on current practice. The implementation plan will include the following:

Progress to date 2019-2023

- Briefing to the School Improvement Team
- Series of briefings to Primary, Special and Secondary Headteachers which included input from schools engaged in RRSA
- Current Bronze, Silver and Gold schools sharing practice with schools interested in doing RRSA

Phase 1 2024-2025

- Establish a Children's Rights School Steering Group with terms of reference
- Further Headteacher briefings which include input from schools who are doing RRSA
- Briefing to school governors
- Briefing to other children's services teams and identification of the CRC in AfC training
- Children's Rights and RRSA to be incorporated into the School Development Plans
- RRSA to be included as an agenda item for School Improvement Adviser visits, with termly updates to the Children's Rights Steering Group
- Schools who have been accredited at Silver and Gold to act as ambassadors to promote the programme locally

Phase 2 2024-2028

- Continue with briefings for the next cohort of schools and the role of RRSA ambassador in promoting the programme
- Children’s rights and RRSA to be incorporated into the School Development Plans
- Run a series of local events to celebrate children’s rights
- Training of RRSA assessors

Lambeth Child Rights Schools Steering Group

Membership

Primary Headteacher (Gold RRSA holder)
 Secondary deputy
 Primary deputy
 Child Friendly Lambeth team member
 Primary deputy (academy)
 Lambeth education adviser

Terms of reference

The Child Rights Schools Steering Group will:

- promote children’s rights across the Borough and adoption of Rights Respecting principles in schools within their locality
- work with UNICEF UK’s Professional Adviser to promote and monitor the uptake to RRSA across the Borough
- promote collaboration among schools through hosting sharing events where schools can showcase their approach to promoting children’s rights, including RRSA
- participate and organise cross-Borough events to showcase different approaches to promoting children’s rights, including RRSA
- Maintain and develop links with Child Friendly Lambeth

CHILD FRIENDLY LAMBETH PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Lambeth’s ambition for all children and young people is that it should be one of the best places in the world for them people to grow up, providing a rich mix of relationships, experiences, opportunities, and services that enable children and young people from all backgrounds and communities to thrive. Our ambition is to become a child friendly community where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children and young people are an integral part of public policies, programmes, and decisions. Where children and young people have a real say in the decisions that affect their lives. As part of those efforts Lambeth has applied to become a UNICEF UK Child Friendly Community. UNICEF UKUK accepted our expression of interest and in November 2021 Lambeth began its three-to-five-year journey to gain accreditation by:



- putting the rights of children and young people at the centre of decision-making
- amplifying the voice of children and young people to have more say in decisions that affect them; and,
- supporting more children and young people to access greater opportunities.

Following on from our public launch in Windrush Square in March 2022, we entered a six-month phase of consultation where we spoke to over 1500 children and young people aged 2-25 years to listen to their ideas around a variety of issues including:

- How they could be more involved in decisions that affect their lives and the spaces they live in
- How Lambeth could be more child friendly
- How we can support children and young people to be more healthy
- How they think the cost-of-living crisis would impact on families

Our programme consultation with under 5's has been recognised by UNICEF UKUK as an area of excellent practice and we were invited to share our methodology and findings nationally.

Our consultation and subsequent voting on the programme priorities by our children and young people, offers, partners and elected members resulted in six key priorities for the programme, those being:

1. Culture
2. Communication
3. Cooperation and leadership
4. Safe and secure
5. Place
6. Child friendly services

Equal and included is the key golden thread underpinning all our priorities.