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Children from a rights-respecting school discuss ideas on how to represent their favourite UNCRC articles in a photojournalism style.

Building your inclusion strategy through a child rights approach

November 2026

RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS
unicef
UNITED KINGDOM

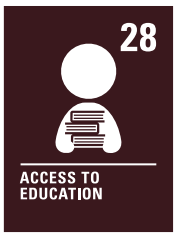
Introduction

The Government's '*Every Child Achieving and Thriving*' reforms set out an ambition for a more inclusive education system: one in which children and young people's needs are identified earlier, barriers to learning and participation are removed, and more children receive the support they are entitled to within mainstream education. This reflects **Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC**: that every child has the right to education, and that education should support them to develop their personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential.



Students at a Rights Respecting school drawing Soccer Aid T-shirt designs in class.

The **Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF)** is part of this change. It is designed to help schools strengthen their inclusive universal provision, remove barriers to learning and participation and provide early, evidence-based support for pupils with additional needs and SEND. Schools receiving the Inclusive Mainstream Fund are required to develop an Inclusion Strategy, explaining how they are identifying and responding to the needs and barriers within their school community which must be completed by **31st December 2026.**



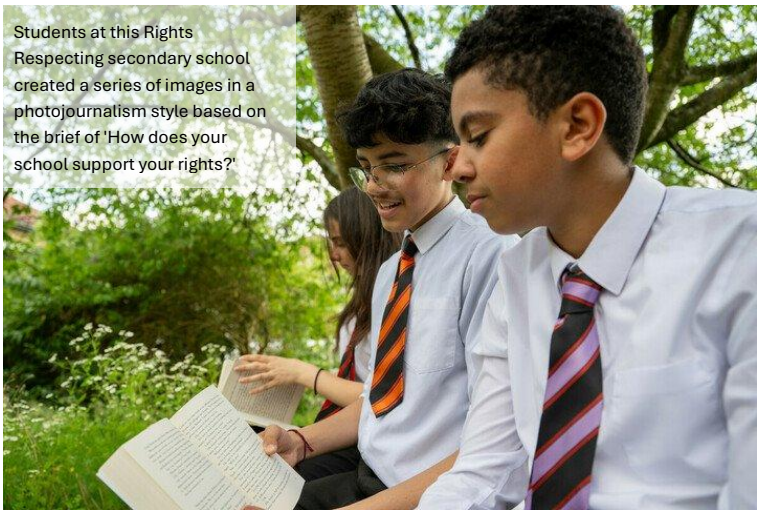


"For us, RRSA is all about joining everything up. Whether that is attendance, inclusion, SEND – we want our students to feel like they belong here."

Head of Academy, Chestnut Grove Academy, RRSA Gold, London Borough of Wandsworth

RRSA and Inclusion

UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) provides a framework for embedding children's rights across school culture, policies and practice. Rooted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Award supports schools to develop an ethos and culture built on dignity, equity, non-discrimination and participation.



Students at this Rights Respecting secondary school created a series of images in a photojournalism style based on the brief of 'How does your school support your rights?'

The DfE's seven principles of inclusion, which are outlined in the inclusion strategy guidance, provide an important foundation for schools developing their Inclusion Strategies. There is a strong connection between these principles and Rights Respecting practice, particularly in their emphasis on inclusive leadership, equitable provision, positive relationships and meaningful participation. A Rights Respecting approach can help schools translate these principles into everyday practice, ensuring that decisions about inclusion are informed by children's views and experiences.

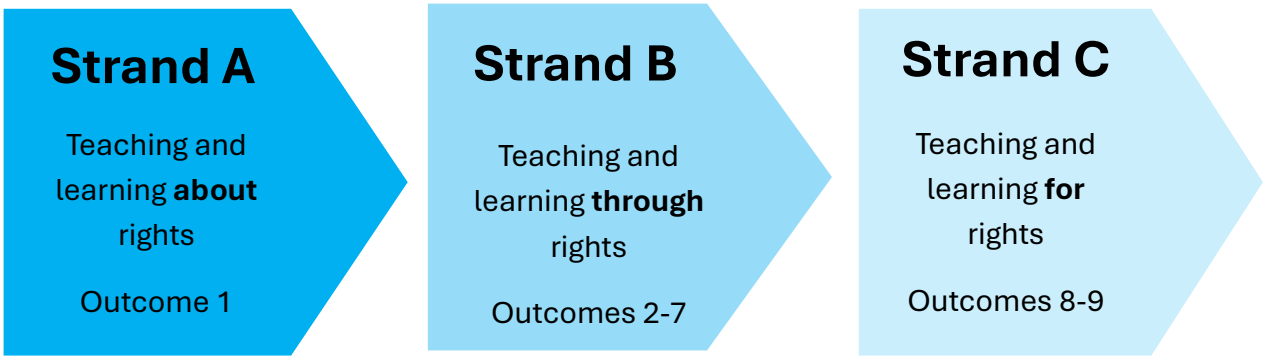
This guide explores how the seven principles of inclusion align with the RRSA framework and the wider principles of children's rights. For each principle, it provides practical examples of Rights Respecting approaches that schools can draw upon when reviewing existing provision, identifying barriers and developing their Inclusion Strategies. It also considers the potential impact of these approaches on children's experiences of inclusion, participation and belonging. Ultimately, an inclusion strategy should be more than a document, it is an opportunity to consider how we can create an ethos and culture where every child feels included, valued, heard and able to fully participate.

"Rights Respecting feeds into the culture that we are trying to create in our school. We have an inclusive culture; they know there are people here to support them."

Headteacher, Downsell Primary School, RRSA Silver, London Borough of Waltham Forest

UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award

Schools involved in RRSA use a framework to support them to embed children's rights across the whole school.



The RRSA Strands[1]

Strand A: Teaching and learning about rights
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is made known to children, young people and adults, who use this shared understanding to work for improved child wellbeing, school improvement, global justice and sustainable living.

Strand B: Teaching and learning through rights – ethos and relationships
Actions and decisions affecting children are rooted in, reviewed and resolved through rights. Children, young people and adults collaborate to develop and maintain a school community based on equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination and participation; this includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners and promotes wellbeing.

Strand C: Teaching and learning for rights – participation, empowerment and action
Children are empowered to enjoy and exercise their rights and to promote the rights of others locally and globally. Duty bearers are accountable for ensuring that children experience their rights.



Students at this UK Rights Respecting primary school co-created this photo in a series to show their favourite child rights. They composed the images which were then briefed to a photographer.

1. See the RRSA website for full RRSA Strands and Outcomes

RRSA and the DfE's Seven Principles of Inclusion

Principle 1 Ambitious leadership and governance

Make inclusion everyone's business

A Rights Respecting approach recognises that all adults share a responsibility for upholding children's rights and that children's experiences and views should inform how schools identify barriers, set priorities and evaluate progress.

Rights Respecting practice includes:

- embedding child rights, equity and inclusion within school decision-making
- ensuring governors hear directly from children about their experiences of inclusion and belonging in line with Article 12 & 13
- all staff understand their roles as duty bearers with responsibility for protecting rights for all children
- involving a pupil led Rights Steering Group and other pupil representatives in inclusion reviews and school improvement planning
- reviewing policies through a child rights lens
- considering whether pupil leadership opportunities reflect the diversity of the school community
- ensuring children with SEND have meaningful opportunities to influence school improvement
- using children's lived experience alongside other evidence to identify priorities and evaluate impact.

Impact → Inclusion becomes a whole-school responsibility rather than something associated solely with SEND staff. Leaders and governors develop a richer understanding of where children experience inclusion, where barriers remain and what needs to change.

Linked RRSA Outcomes: 1, 2, 6, 8



Principle 2 Evidence-based support and early intervention

Create a culture where children communicate their thoughts and adults listen

A Rights Respecting school creates a culture in which children know their views matter, feedback is welcomed and adults listen and respond.

Rights Respecting practice includes:

- developing a strong, rights-led culture of pupil voice and feedback
- ensuring children have trusted adults they can approach (duty bearers)
- creating regular, accessible opportunities for children to talk about their experiences of learning, wellbeing and belonging
- asking children what helps them learn and what makes school more difficult
- ensuring pupil voice is accessible to children who communicate in different ways
- looking beyond behaviour to consider what a child may be communicating
- ensuring concerns and feedback lead to action and that children know what happened as a result
- involving children in reviewing whether support is working for them.

Impact → Children have more opportunities to communicate difficulties before they escalate. Their lived experience becomes part of the evidence used to understand need and plan support. Over time, children learn that when they raise concerns or identify barriers, adults listen and respond.

Linked RRSA Outcomes: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8



Principle 3 High-quality adaptive teaching

Move from equality to equity and involve children in learning

Every child has the same rights, but not every child needs the same thing to access them. A Rights Respecting approach can help the whole school community understand why different approaches and adaptations may be needed to enable equitable participation.

Impact → Adaptation is understood as part of equitable and inclusive teaching rather than as giving some children an advantage. Children participate more fully in learning and become more confident in explaining what helps them. Their experiences can also inform wider improvements to curriculum and teaching.

Linked RRSA Outcomes: 2, 6, 7

Rights Respecting practice includes:

- exploring equality and equity with staff and pupils and identifying what this looks like in practice
- involving children in identifying and implementing strategies and adaptations that support them
- using pupil voice groups, subject representatives or other pupil groups to gather children's perspectives on curriculum and teaching
- involving pupils in discussions with subject leaders about accessibility, participation and engagement
- providing accessible information, resources and communication for pupils and families
- considering sensory, communication and individual learning needs when planning teaching and learning
- ensuring adaptations preserve dignity and promote participation and independence
- giving children meaningful opportunities to contribute to decisions about their own learning and support.



Principle 4 Enriching provision beyond the classroom

Ensure extra-curricular opportunites reflect children's views

A Rights Respecting approach encourages schools to consider whether children can genuinely access the wider life of school – but also whether children have opportunities to shape what that wider offer looks like.

Rights Respecting practice includes:

- auditing who participates in clubs, trips, sport, play, residentials, enrichment and pupil leadership to ensure equitable access
- asking children what helps them to participate and what barriers they experience
- identifying financial, physical, sensory and communication barriers to engagement
- involving children with SEND in making activities and opportunities more accessible
- ensuring children can influence the clubs and enrichment opportunities available
- enabling pupils to propose, develop or lead clubs and activities themselves
- considering whether all children can participate in the wider opportunities available to their peers

Impact → Schools move beyond asking whether opportunities are simply available to considering whether they are accessible, relevant and shaped by children themselves. More children can participate in the wider life of school, develop their interests and strengths, and experience a stronger sense of ownership and belonging.

Linked RRSA Outcomes: 2, 6, 7, 8



Principle 5 A safe and respectful culture

Dignity and belonging matter

Inclusion means more than being physically present. Children need to experience school as a place where they are safe, respected, valued and that they belong.

Impact → Children are more likely to experience school as a place where they are safe, respected and valued. Relationships and behaviour approaches support belonging rather than creating additional barriers, while leaders develop a better understanding of where experiences may differ between groups of children.

Linked RRSA Outcomes: 3, 4, 5, 6

Rights Respecting practice includes:

- using Rights Respecting class or whole school charters to develop a shared culture
- supporting children to use rights language to share concerns and manage disagreements
- building predictable, positive and trusted relationships between children and adults based on rights and respect
- reviewing behaviour approaches through a rights lens
- using rights language in restorative approaches where appropriate
- using rights to challenge discriminatory language, prejudice and stereotypes
- helping children understand how their actions can affect the rights of others
- regularly gathering evidence about children's experiences of safety, dignity and belonging in line with Article 12
- ensuring children know how to raise concerns about their rights and trust that adults will respond.



Principle 6 Strong partnerships with families and wider services

Build a shared understanding of children's rights

A Rights Respecting approach recognises children as participants in decisions affecting them and families as important partners.

Rights Respecting practice includes:

- sharing accessible information with parents and carers about children's rights and the UNCRC
- explaining the school's Rights Respecting approach and how this connects with inclusion
- using rights language when advocating with and for families
- helping families understand children's right to be heard in decisions affecting them
- including children's views within support planning
- reviewing support with, rather than simply about, children
- using child-friendly and accessible versions of plans
- asking children what they would like adults and their families to understand
- providing different and accessible ways for families to contribute
- using family forums and consultation to understand families' experiences
- showing children and families how their views have influenced decisions – for example, "We did."

Impact → Children and families develop a stronger shared understanding of rights and inclusion and have meaningful opportunities to influence support and provision. Decisions are better informed by children's lived experience and families' knowledge, while trust can be strengthened when people see that their views are heard and lead to action.

Linked RRSA Outcomes: 1, 7, 8



Principle 7 Inclusive Environments

Ask whose voices are shaping the environment

An inclusive environment is not only about physical accessibility. It includes the sensory, communication, learning and social environment, and whether children have meaningful opportunities to influence it.

Rights Respecting practice includes:

- creating regular opportunities for children to give their views about the school environment and their experience within it
- asking children what helps them learn and participate and putting this into practice
- engaging children in developing aspects of classrooms, social spaces or routines to ensure they can learn and particpate
- considering whether existing pupil voice structures are accessible to children with SEND
- ensuring someone is speaking up for children whose voices may be less easily heard
- ensuring children who communicate differently have meaningful ways to express their views
- involving children in decisions about changes to classrooms, social spaces and school routines
- reviewing physical, sensory, communication and social barriers
- returning to children after changes have been made to ask whether they have actually helped.

Impact → Schools develop a richer understanding of accessibility based on children's lived experience rather than adult assumptions alone. Barriers that might otherwise remain hidden become visible, environments become more responsive, and a wider range of children can influence changes to the places in which they learn and participate.

Linked RRSA Outcomes: 2, 6, 8





Students at this UK Rights Respecting primary school co-created this photo in a series to show their favourite child rights. They composed the images which were then briefed to a photographer.

THANK YOU

Find out more about the Rights Respecting Schools Award

UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award supports schools to embed children's rights across school culture, policies and practice, helping to create inclusive environments where every child feels safe, respected and able to participate.

To find out more about the Award, explore our resources and discover how your school can get involved, visit:

www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/

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