

RRSA ACCREDITATION REPORT

GOLD: RIGHTS RESPECTING

School:	Firrhill High School
Headteacher:	Graham Hamilton
RRSA coordinator:	Sarah Kerr
Local authority:	Edinburgh City Council
Assessor(s):	Jenny Price & Jen Myddleton
Date:	13 th March 2019

1. INTRODUCTION

The assessors would like to thank the children and young people, the Senior Management Team, staff and parents for their warm welcome to Firrhill High school, for the opportunity to speak with adults and pupils during the assessment and for the detailed evidence provided to support the process. Prior to the accreditation visit, the school completed a very comprehensive School Evaluation: Gold form.

It was evident that children’s rights are embedded across the school and underpin every facet of school life.

Particular strengths of the school include:

- Extensive opportunities for pupil participation across all stages in a variety of ways.
- A clear strategic approach by SMT and staff to embed a rights-based approach across learning and the life and ethos within school to ensure its sustainability.

Outcomes for Strands A, B and C have all been achieved.

2. MAINTAINING GOLD: RIGHTS RESPECTING STATUS

Our experience has shown that there are actions that have proven useful in other RRSA schools and settings in helping them to maintain and build on their practice at Gold level. Here are our recommendations for your school:

- Consider creating a child/family friendly school improvement plan (SIP) with children and young people, making links to articles from the CRC for each driver.
- When reviewing the whole school charter, consider making links between the school’s values and articles from the CRC more explicit – consider faculty charters – use Unicef’s guidance on creating rights-based charters.
- When reviewing policies, consider further pupil (and parent) involvement to engage their views on best practice and continue making links to articles from the CRC.
- Further develop global citizenship throughout a broad range of curricular areas, making explicit connections with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Global Goals) and the CRC
- Beyond Gold, consider an ambassadorial role within the Firrhill cluster as well as your local, national and global community.

3. ACCREDITATION INFORMATION

School context	A six-year comprehensive school with 1150 pupils, situated in the South West of Edinburgh. 18% of pupils are eligible for Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), 14% of pupils are in SIMD 1 – 3, 6% of pupils are accessing FSM, 6% of pupils with EAL and 27% with ASN.
Attendees at SLT meeting	Headteacher, 2 x depute headteachers & RRSA Lead
Number of children and young people interviewed	17 pupils in focus groups, 4 children on the learning walk and many spoken with in 5 class visits
Number of adults interviewed	16 teaching staff and chairperson of parent council
Evidence provided	Learning walk, focus groups, written evidence, class visits, website
Registered for RRSA: 04/11/16	Silver achieved: 19/02/18

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 development.

Strand A has been achieved

All young people and adults spoken with were very knowledgeable about a wide variety of rights from the CRC. In discussions with classes, pupils identified rights that they have explored in different subject areas: In English, S4 pupils identified discrimination against Catholics in a play, acknowledging rights being infringed upon; in Modern Studies, pupils talked about terrorism and how rights to be safe, protected from war and medical care are often denied; In Modern Languages class, pupils spoke about learning new languages and how it is important to respect other languages and cultures and in Media Studies, some pupils mentioned the influence of adverts and importance of reliable information. They also discussed the importance of *“our right to express our views”*. One pupil talked about the film, ‘Children of Men’, and explained that *“A girl who was pregnant, was not able to tell people or get the medical help she needed”* and made the connections to some of her rights not being met. It was clear from discussions across all age groups that children, young people and adults are aware of the nature of rights being unconditional, universal, inalienable, inherent and indivisible. It was also very evident that the role of adults and duty bearers is clearly understood throughout the school. Pupils acknowledged the support they get from staff, expressing confidence to share their ideas and be respected as individuals.

It is clear that the SMT are extremely dedicated to embedding a rights-based approach across the school to ensure its sustainability, by putting children and young people at the centre. This is highlighted through there being a wide range of pupil led groups; cross curricular planning linked to rights; policies linked to articles from the CRC; numerous displays featuring rights throughout the school and an extensive events calendar linked to rights. The Headteacher explained that, *“RRSA is a framework with a reason for weaving together empowerment, pupil advocacy, clarity of purpose and to talk about rights. RRSA is a fabulous driver for all of this”*.

Staff spoke passionately about the positive impact of RRSA over the last three years, consistently acknowledging it as *“a framework”*, providing a *“common language”* for all. Each faculty has done extensive work to make cross curricular links between subjects, with rights explicit as the common theme and language, for example: Science and Maths departments have worked closely on STEM projects linking Global Goals with rights as well as making links to rights with the Eco pupil group and with the whole school challenges. The curriculum lead for Social Studies explained that, *“Rights is the foundation of learning for all these areas and is having an impact on Higher results”*. A modern studies teacher said that, *“We use rights to explore further into experiences such as terror attacks to gain a deeper understanding”*; *“Rights is steering discussions now, the pupils are beginning to show more empathy and express their opinions”*. A Geography teacher explained how *“Geography just naturally lends itself to discussions on rights”*.

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 B has been achieved

Most pupils were able to explain how their school facilitates their enjoyment of their rights, acknowledging the role of adults as duty bearers. It was clear that most pupils spoken with understand the meaning of equity and fairness - a younger pupil explained how this is taught, *“Diversity is taught in different formats to support our learning. Equality was put in to show how it affects everyone”*. Children and young people agreed that the school would act if they shared that their rights were not being met. There are clear systems in place, upheld and supported by SMT, to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to communicate their views such as: whole school council, student council and a variety of representative groups which feed in to each other and are beginning to make links to children’s rights.

Relationships observed during the visit between pupils and staff and between pupils were mutually respectful. The school data collated from questionnaires shows an upward trend on each point around relationships, showing improvements in the feelings of respect and value from pupils to staff and vice versa since the school achieved Silver accreditation. This is almost entirely attributed to the commitment of the whole school community in embracing a rights respecting approach so wholeheartedly. One pupil said *“The staff are friendly, understanding and show they enjoy their subjects and listen to you.”* When talking about behaviour, a pupil commented, *“We’ve talked about dignity and how this also links to our mental health”*. In addition, the new Behaviour Policy was produced through consultation with the Rights Respecting steering group who shared their views on how to incorporate a more rights-based approach to sanctions on behaviour.

Children and young people spoken with agreed that they feel safe and protected in the school most of the time. This was attributed by pupils to staff having an “open door” policy, posters with information and *“trusted guidance teachers”* if they didn’t want to speak to friends first. All pupils agreed that they had an adult they could speak to in school for support if needed. They felt confident that their *“concerns or anxieties”* would be taken seriously and acted upon and some recognised that this was a positive shift over time since working with RRSA. When discussing spikes in disclosures relating to child protection, a member of the Pupil Support team commented, *“Children and young people are more aware of their rights and they are more open to share now which will help us to protect them better”*. While children and young people in the focus group acknowledged that some bullying still existed in the school, they appeared confident in the school systems that it is dealt with fairly, effectively, respectful of individual pupil’s dignity, and with respect for the rights of the victims and those of the perpetrator. A pupil said, *“The school is definitely trying to improve bullying. It still happens sometimes but we know it is taken so seriously now”*. Some pupils mentioned the stages within the behaviour policy and the Alternatives to Exclusion programme. One pupil spoke about how historically, pupils may have been sent home for bullying or other types of behaviour but that it didn’t address the “root cause”, so the new systems ensure that *“They get the help they need, when they need it”*.

The health and wellbeing of all children and young people is clearly a priority for the school which is evident through the partnerships with outside agencies who visit the school to provide support around bereavement, sexual health, and lifestyle; learning around internet safety; anti-smoking campaigns; a funded school counsellor; for pupils who struggle with large spaces at lunch and break times, the

'learning centre' provides a "safe space" within the pupil support area of the school to work and socialise in smaller groups; A parent HWB group; growth mindset and the PSE curriculum. The PSE curriculum was recently reviewed and reimagined through consultation with pupils to ensure that what is taught is relevant to the issues they are most interested in but also what they can identify with. More planned learning around LGBT+ issues, consent in relationships and sexual health has been included as a result. A parent said, "My son is more able to verbalise his feelings than my older children who haven't been in the school with RRS. He has a much more open approach and communication from the school is very different." The school has also introduced growth mindset through Mindset UK over the last four years and have trained pupils to become Mindset mentors, putting on workshops for parents to support exam stress and to "understand that mistakes are a welcome part of learning". With a nurturing approach, the Support for Learning team are currently creating a nurture classroom within the school to allow pupils to access a safe space to learn or calm down and then engage in restorative dialogue as needed.

Some children spoken with were very animated when they talked about feeling valued as individuals in their school. As an inclusive school, a strong culture of non-discrimination is reinforced through its values of diversity and inclusion. Evidence was provided regarding equity of opportunity being upheld by the SMT through the division of financial support to ensure that all children and young people, regardless of financial standing can access all activities they choose. Based on pupil data the Pupil Support Team provide targeted support to children and young people who are identified as either: looked after/accommodated children (LAC); have high levels of social, emotional or behavioural needs; living in poverty; or have English as an additional language (EAL). They provide increased support to enable opportunities to take part in clubs, activities, and trips through building trusted relationships. The Headteacher is committed to meet with every single pupil on an individual basis throughout the year to discuss what is working well and what is not going well. It was clear in discussions that the pupils value this opportunity. Pupils from the RRS group were clearly able to articulate how the approach to embedding rights within the school ethos has led to them feeling more valued and included. A pupil pointed out that, "There are loads of different clubs to suit all of our interests and needs".

Both pupils and staff spoke about the right to education and how this is actively respected throughout the school. Staff shared how they had incorporated articles of the CRC in their planning of the curriculum to ensure that children and young people are hearing the language of rights consistently across their school day, whereby pupils are increasingly using the language of rights to have discussions about their education. The Headteacher explained how "The right to education is strongly embedded in terms of dealing with behaviour". A pupil also said, "Every faculty is linked to rights". The language of rights is expected to be used in restorative conversations with children and young people. Pupils in the focus group were confident to be able to discuss their learning with their teachers, particularly with their mentor, who they meet with each term to discuss and plan learning. Pupils also shared examples of being able to consult on their learning to ensure they are being supported and challenged appropriate to their individual abilities. One pupil stated of staff "They consider our extra needs and do their best to accommodate them." Other pupils also went on to explain how the values of inclusion are upheld through the provision of learning opportunities within school noting examples such as, in French, words will be printed off for less able pupils; research on topics in Science is based on ability and in Maths there is choice for the different levels of challenge.

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.

Strand C has been achieved

It was evident that most young people spoken with feel that knowing about their rights and being part of a school community that actively promotes them, has made them feel valued, empowered and proud to be in Firrhill High School. All pupils know that their views are listened to and taken seriously, some explaining enthusiastically that, *“Our Headteacher always takes us seriously”*; *“He is so inclusive and listens 100% to our ideas”*. This view was reflected in most classes visited. Another pupil said, *“We get a lot of say if any changes affect us”*. Some leadership opportunities are formalised through written applications and/or voting systems, for positions such as Prefects, House Council Leaders, Head Boys/Girls, Whole School Council members and Senior School Council. Systems in place to ensure pupils can participate and have a say on matters that affect them are structured in many ways. Other leadership opportunities are more informal and inclusive, whereby everyone can be involved as much or as little as they wish, such as Eco club, RRS group (which includes the Gender, Sexuality, Equality Alliance (GSEA) group) and the Debate Club. All these groups have played an equal role in striving for whole school improvement matters, such as: Design of new gender-neutral toilets; Involvement in PSE programme; Structure of the school day; Decisions on charities and fundraising events; Lunchtime and after school clubs; and school uniform. The Headteacher also reflected on where pupils have strongly influenced decisions, noting that, *“Pupils of our school wanted to keep the structure of the day as four plus three so we did”* [number of periods before and after lunch]; *“The pupils didn’t like the idea of vertical registration classes, so we haven’t changed them even though it was the preference of most staff. Over time the things we anticipated to go wrong didn’t!”* Children and young people have also had the opportunity to be involved in initiatives relating to pupil voice and participation such as the Scottish Youth Parliament, LGBT Youth Network meetings and attending model UN debates.

Many of the young people spoken with have been involved in many different types of fundraising and campaign activities advocating for the rights of children both local and globally, such as: Firrhill Festive Food bank; Christmas Craft Fayre for elderly members of the local community; Christmas concerts for World Aids Day, Upcycled fashion show with a local primary school; fundraising for Riding for the Disabled; Unicef’s Day for Change, Unicef’s Soccer Aid Playground Challenge. The school has also raised awareness of children’s rights through: World Children’s Day; Remembrance/Armistice Day; Unicef’s Outright campaign on clean air; Holocaust memories; European Day of Languages; and World Peace Day, all of which have made links to articles from the CRC which some pupils pointed out. A particularly moving campaign discussed was “Hats for Kira” which was instigated by pupils to fundraise specifically for a fellow pupil who required cancer treatment in the US. Hats and mugs, with the slogan #KiraTheMachine were created and sold, with the money raised going towards her treatment, enhancing her opportunity to access her right to medical care. The school is also addressing global matters through subject areas such as PSE, Modern Studies, Geography, RMPS and STEM related projects which have now been linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (and articles from the CRC), with opportunities to promote global citizenship themes throughout, while maintaining the language of rights.