

RRSA ACCREDITATION REPORT

GOLD: RIGHTS RESPECTING

School:	Whitehouse Primary School
Headteacher:	Dawn Blain (Acting)
RRSA coordinator:	Jenny Campbell
Local authority:	Education Authority North Eastern Region
Assessor(s):	Niki McQuillan and Anne-Marie Poynor
Date:	26 September 2019

1. INTRODUCTION

The assessors would like to thank the children, the Senior Leadership Team, staff, governors and parents for their warm welcome to the school, for the opportunity to speak with adults and children during the assessment and for the detailed evidence provided to support the process. Prior to the assessment visit, the school completed a 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:

- A clear, strategic commitment to the principles and values of the UNCRC in every aspect of school life and across the school community.
- Highly articulate and confident pupils who are passionate about their school and their rights respecting work both locally and globally.
- A positive school community, with all stakeholders encouraging and supporting the impact the rights awareness has had at every level of school life.
- A very caring and nurturing learning environment where each child is valued and encouraged to achieve their full potential in all aspects of their learning and life.

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:

- Continue to act as ambassadors for rights with local schools through collaboration with their link school and Shared Education partnership.
- Continue to develop and strengthen knowledge and awareness of rights, particularly with younger pupils and the fact that rights are inherent, inalienable, indivisible, universal and unconditional.
- Further develop the positive impact of pupil voice through continued campaigning work both locally and globally and continuing to take action for the Global Goals.

3. ACCREDITATION INFORMATION

School context	Whitehouse Primary School and Nursery Unit is a controlled co-education school in Newtownabbey, Co Antrim. The current school enrolment is 461, including 34 newcomer children with 43.4% entitled to free school meals. Whitehouse has been involved in a partnership with another local school for 25 years and it recently became a hub school for shared education. The school has received the British Council International Schools Award, an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Capita Excellence Award and the Eco Green Flag.
Attendees at SLT meeting	Principal (acting), Head of Key Stage 1/Deputy Principal, Head of Key Stage 2 and Deputy Chair (BOG)
Number of children and young people interviewed	45 pupils including 6 Eco Warriors and 4 children from Steering group on learning walk.
Number of adults interviewed	3 teaching staff, 4 support staff, 3 parents and RRSA lead.
Evidence provided	Whole school assembly, learning walk, focus groups, written evidence, class visits and pupil presentation.
Registered for RRSA: 12 July 2016	Silver achieved: 7 June 2018

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 children and adults spoken with during meetings, focus group conversations and by presentation were very familiar with a wide range of articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and could confidently talk about the importance of rights for all children around the world. Pupils of Whitehouse are passionate about the rights they have been learning about and could name over twenty-one articles of the CRC. They understood that these rights were unconditional, universal, entitlements from birth and could not be taken away. They appreciate that all children around the world have the same rights but understood that sometimes they may be prevented from accessing these rights in difficult circumstances and highlighted some of these, such as war, terrorism, poverty, natural disasters and child labour. One P6 pupil demonstrated how integral rights have been embedded into the school culture and declared *“If we got our Gold, we wouldn’t stop doing it!”*.

Children understood that children are rights holders and that all adults are duty bearers responsible for ensuring that all children are safe and protected. The Steering Group have created displays for each classroom to reinforce these concepts and instigated a whole school charter to replace the individual classroom charters with input from all children. This charter has been adopted by the whole school and is displayed in each classroom and all common areas. A pupil explained the charters *“are in the same place in every room so that children can see them... especially as they move about school.”* The children feel strongly that this provides clarity and better use of rights respecting language as it outlines the roles of rights holders and duty bearers and has also been welcomed by parents, as one commented. *“The school charter shows you what our role is as parents, as duty bearers.”*

The Principal highlighted the positive support of the governors and their child-centred approach to decision making and how life in school is underpinned by a rights respecting framework. *“The chair always asks how is this impacting on the children? And, is this the best decision for the children?”* She went on to emphasise how this has developed since achieving Silver. *“The programme is genuinely run by the children.”* This view was endorsed by many teachers throughout the visit. Clearly all aspects of school life are now fully immersed in RRSA, which is supported across the school and provides a driver for school improvement. This is reflected in key targets of the SDP, in all curriculum planners and policy documents having explicit links to the UNCRC. The positive impact of engaging with the programme on learning and behaviour was reported by several teaching staff and highlighted by the Head of Key Stage 2 with a very noticeable increase in pupil confidence throughout school impact on learning and behaviour. *“They take ownership of their own learning”* and he went on to comment. *“Children have the confidence to choose work that challenges them.”* The RRSA lead summarised how learning about rights was the impact moving from Silver to Gold. *“It’s a programme for everyone...it’s seen as something we are doing anyway...framing it through rights ... this is the people we are.”*

Children clearly understood how local and global issues and sustainable development are linked to rights. The school has been engaged with The Sustainable Development Goals and the Steering Group led an assembly on the World’s Largest Lesson. This work has been further enhanced with the school recently being awarded with a Green ECO flag with the Eco Committee promoting healthy living, outdoor living and waste reduction linked to articles. Pupils have explored how their actions

with regard to waste can impact globally. Projects have included Toilet Twinning with a school in Cambodia. They have been involved in campaigning government officials for the rights of prisoners in Myanmar. Pupils are proud of their efforts and during the learning walk a P6 pupil pointed out a display commenting *“each time I pass this it makes me smile.”*

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

All children spoken with were confident that every child within the school enjoyed their rights. Pupils agreed that all pupils are respected and treated fairly in school. This was highlighted in a recent pupil survey which showed a significant increase to 84% of pupils feeling they are treated fairly compared with 75% since beginning to engage with the programme. Pupils have a clear understanding about the difference in the roles of a rights holder and duty bearer. This is exemplified in their new school charter which underpins all aspects of school life and which is shared with the whole school community. Children were confident that duty bearers would act upon any concerns they had.

The school mission statement has been updated to reflect the language of rights and all school policies are now written from a rights respecting perspective. The school values are also clearly aligned with rights to ensure there is a consistency of message for the whole school community. As a result, relationships in the school are based on dignity for all and are open and respectful. Adults and children use the language of rights as part of daily school life with pupils encouraged to consider how their actions and choices can better reflect the rights of others. Respect for differences has been explored and promoted through collaborative activities with their Shared Education partners during a conflict and reconciliation PDMU (Personal Development and Mutual understanding) programme.

Pupils feel safe in school and this has been reflected in an increase from 87% to 95% of pupils stating they feel safe or very safe in a recent pupil survey. Through the Whitehouse “Helping Hand” programme there are a range of structures in place to give very clear mechanisms to help the children feel safe in school and provide opportunities for pupils to express concerns or worries. Every classroom has a “Feeling Happy and Safe” door and Years 4 to 7 have a “Feeling Safe Box” where they can anonymously post any concerns. There is also a school councillor in school available and pupils can either refer themselves or use the drop-in clinic. The introduction of a team of pupils to act as ICT pupil mentors who are dedicated to help children stay safe on-line forms part of the rights-based E-Safety group and has been very successful with the pupils. There has been an increase from 78% to 91% of pupils agreeing that it is easy to get help in school if they have concerns. Pupils take part in the annual Anti-Bullying Week and in the “Speak Out, Stay Safe” campaign run by the NSPCC. Year 7 pupils participate in the Bee Safe Roadshow run by Antrim and Newtownabbey Council as part of their Healthy Living topic.

Pupil health and well-being is of paramount importance in Whitehouse Primary. Children can participate in the wide programme of extra-curricular activities available and there is a healthy break/lunch policy in place and pupils throughout the school take part in the Daily Mile. The New Year, New You initiative was recently introduced to promote a healthy lifestyle. Pupils take part in Children’s Mental Health Week and a programme of Mental Health workshops was organised for P5 pupils. Key Stage 1 pupils create Emotional First Aid Kits with the school councillor.

Learning about rights has helped to promote respect and a sense of inclusivity in all aspects of school life for each child. For example, the very popular house system runs regular competitions which serve not only to promote respect for rights but encourages the school value of “being people of character.” Regular, pupil led, assemblies on rights are timetabled and each month focuses on an individual right. All this activity is shared with the stakeholders through regular newsletters and posted on dedicated social media pages and the very dynamic school website.

Children are actively involved in making decisions about their own learning. This is encouraged through a number of ways, including “Brain-Book-Buddy-Boss” which deals with any learning difficulties the children have identified and The Accelerated Reading scheme for Key Stage 2 pupils to help them develop independence and control over their reading. Pupils are encouraged to identify strengths and weaknesses and to set goals for self-improvement. They complete a planning board at the beginning of each topic to outline what skills and knowledge they want to learn. Key Stage 2 pupils created their own marking scheme. Learning and individual achievements both inside and outside school is regularly celebrated at assemblies, through the House system, the weekly Principal Praise Time, Fame Frame, Pupil of the Week and Pupil of the Month. These achievements are shared with the school community through the school website. Pupils stressed how they enjoy being involved in their learning and feel strongly about how understanding their rights has helped them access their learning but also how disruptive behaviour can prevent others from enjoying this right. One teacher shared that a child commented to a class mate “*you need to stop that - it’s having an impact on my right to learn.*”

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

Children spoken with are confident about how their views are taken seriously in the school community and there are many opportunities and structures in place to develop this. Pupils expressed how ideas and suggestions they have given in the pupil happiness survey have been implemented in the classroom. Pupils in the very active Steering Group act as RR ambassadors with link schools through their Shared Education partnerships. They are involved in promoting the rights of the child and assist in work to implement strategies that respect pupils’ rights. Shared Education activities are evaluated by pupils which then inform future planning. The school council are working ever more closely with governors and the SLT to make decisions about all aspects of school life. Children are now actively involved in the school development planning process. There is a team of ICT mentors, elected by their class peers, to help develop and promote all aspects of ICT learning, including on-line safety. The very active Eco team work on projects in conjunction with the Steering group to improve respect for the environment and in helping to make the school environment a better place for everyone. Paper and plastic recycling has been improved and food waste is sent for composting. They competently presented a very comprehensive and passionate overview of their programme and how it links to rights. The Steering Group have carried out surveys both with peers and the local community to identify where children’s rights are not being met. Their findings will be addressed at their regular meetings.

Pupils are actively involved in acting as ambassadors for rights in the local community and are clearly proud of what has been achieved as a result of their actions. They have organised and participated in clean-up teams in conjunction with members of the community in an effort to improve the environment of local play parks. This has involved lobbying and meeting local council members and the community policing team to discuss the problems of litter and anti-social behaviour in these popular communal areas. As a result, police patrols have increased in local parks to help eliminate anti-social behaviour. There are plans in progress for Whitehouse pupils to create exterior murals on the local youth centre on the theme of children's rights and the Steering Group to speak to local secondary pupils at an assembly about rights and how to respect each other's rights. Pupils have also presented to other schools in the local area and highlighted the importance of children's rights and the RRSAs and to encourage them to progress on their journey.

Whitehouse Primary has a strong history of significant and consistent fund raising across a wide range of local, national and global causes that promote rights, for example Cash for Clobber, Fairtrade Week in addition to supporting several local charities. The school felt that being involved in global charities had helped to further develop pupil awareness of the wider world around them. Pupils regularly vote for the charities and events they wish to support. In addition, they have helped to campaign for the rights of the child at a global level through participation in the Walk for the World and Write for Rights' Amnesty International campaign. The children clearly feel empowered to talk about their rights and to encourage others to show respect for them and a recurrent observation during the visit highlighted that the children know *"what they are doing in the community affects what can happen in the world."* At a recent outdoor pursuits activity for year 6 pupils one Whitehouse pupil expressed concern to the organiser about a scavenger hunt activity to create pictures with their finds on a local beach. She explained that *"One of our rights, article 29, says we have the right to be taught to respect the environment. We shouldn't be taking rubbish to the beach. We should be taking rubbish from the beach!"*