

UNICEF UK RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL AWARD ASSESSMENT REPORT LEVEL TWO

School:	St Mary's High School, Newry
Principal:	Margo Cosgrove
RRSA coordinator:	Maurice Fitzpatrick
Local authority:	Education Authority, Southern Region
Assessors:	Vivien Kelly and David McGimpsey
Date:	7th December 2016

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a Level 2 re-accreditation report. We would like to thank the students and all the adults we met for the warm welcome we received. The extensive information and evidence provided ensured we were given a very deep understanding of the school's continuing journey to be rights respecting.

Key strengths of the school are:

- The excellent rights respecting relationships between all adults and young people.
- The consistency of the views of all students and staff interviewed about being a rights respecting school and what the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) meant to them.
- The many opportunities for student voice, the confidence displayed by students and the pride shown by everyone in their rights respecting achievements.

Standards A, B, C and D have all been met.

2. REQUIREMENTS BEFORE ATTAINING LEVEL 2

No requirements noted.

3. MAINTAINING LEVEL 2

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 Level 2. Here are our recommendations for your school:

- Seek to sustain and further develop the excellent practice evidenced in this report.
- Continue to provide opportunities for all members of the school community to campaign to uphold the rights of children locally and globally.
- Continue to deepen understanding of the Convention using the full text where appropriate and use to inform the roles of rights holders and duty bearers.

4. THE ASSESSMENT IN DETAIL

4.1. The school context

St Mary's High School, Newry City, is all ability, non-selective 11-19 Catholic girls' school with 671 pupils. The school draws 38% of its pupils from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and includes children from the Traveller Community on its roll. It has 8% newcomer, 8% English as an Additional Language (EAL) and 22% Special Educational Needs (SEN). Attendance is high at around 94%. It has specialist status in Mathematics and Business and has strong association with local and national businesses as well as being an active partner in the Newry and Mourne Learning Community. Last year's GCSE and GCE A-level results were the best ever exceeding targets and enhancing opportunities for students.

It received '*outstanding*' for achievements and standards in leadership and management in its 2015 Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) report in which the pupils were described as, "*Confident, respectful, friendly and polite...with positive dispositions to learning, high self-esteem and taking pride in their work.*"

It registered for RRSA in 2010, achieved Level 1 in 2011 and first achieved Level 2 in April 2014.

4.2. Assessment information

Self-evaluation form received	Yes
Impact evaluation form received	Yes
Attendees at SLT meeting	Principal and Vice Principal
Number of children and young people interviewed	80 students
Number of staff interviewed	7 teaching staff 1 support staff 1 parent 1 Governor
Evidence provided	Learning walk Written evidence - 3 files Assembly 2 lessons

Standard A:

Rights-respecting values underpin leadership and management

Standard A has been achieved

The Principal and senior leaders spoke of how the Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA) ethos permeates all aspects of school life. The strong pastoral ethos and effective personal management was acknowledged in a recent ETI inspection, which noted that this was based on "a deep appreciation of each individual's rights and their active participation as local and global citizens." The very detailed impact evaluation form identifies significant impact across all eight criteria. The Principal spoke of how the RRSA is embedded within and across the school community. "For Level 2 we described rights respecting (RR) as an umbrella covering everything. Now RR is more than umbrella - it is everything, now it is integrated and inclusive with the rights of the child at the centre of everything we do."

RRSA at Level 2 is integral to the School Development Plan (SDP). "RRSA is embedded within the SDP and is the driver for school improvement."(Principal). Whole school policies are linked to the UNCRC to ensure a consistent approach. The school has sustained a focus on rights-based work for more than five years and this was evident in the confidence shown by all young people and adults talked to during our visit. There has been whole school training each year and ongoing mapping against school aims and curriculum. The school council contributes to information for parents and temporary teachers and the training of staff. A range of staff are involved in RR to ensure continuity and sustainability.

Active and wide ranging pupil voice groups are encouraged. "So many of our pupils are in youth forums, both in school and in the local community." (Principal.) A member of the SLT sits on each of the school groups that include the junior and Senior School Councils, ECO and Charities Committees. Students develop a sense of "service" through volunteer work and understood that their rights were diminished if other children's rights were denied. The School Councils were involved in reviewing school policies including the Anti-bullying, E safety, Health Education and Behaviour Policies. "They negotiated rewards e.g. special passes to the canteen." (Vice Principal). "There are few discipline problems and no expulsions." (Principal).

The school has been sharing good practice and raising the profile of RRSA with other schools for several years within and beyond the Local Learning Area Community. Recently it actively promoted the RRSA in a presentation to all Catholic Maintained Schools. It has supported St Patrick's College, Dungannon to its Level 2 in 2015 and more recently Carrick Primary School, Warrenpoint to its Level 1 award.

As a RR school, ECO school and a Welcoming School, local and global citizenship is at the heart of the school curriculum and charity work. Wall displays, assemblies and project work explore global issues and ensure the girls are aware of the links with UNCRC articles and encourages them to think how they can make a difference. The school has helped to build and continues to help fund a school in Nigeria, which the RRSA Coordinator himself visited. "Father Donal, shows us in assembly how our efforts (supporting the Nigerian school) make a difference." (Year 9 pupil). "St Vincent de Paul tells us what happens to our hampers," explained another student talking about support for families in need in the local area.

Standard B:

The whole school community learns about the CRC

Standard B has been achieved

All curriculum areas contribute to learning about UNCRC and it was evident from the learning walks and interviews throughout our visit that students have a good understanding of the Convention. They showed knowledge of a wide range of articles and gave good reasons why it was important to know about your rights and why some children might not be able to access their rights. "We have everything in place to help us know and use our rights... our whole school charter promotes our rights...I genuinely believe our school is a rights respecting school." (Comment made by student during focus group interviews).

A Rights Respecting flyer compiled with the help of the students' council is sent to every parent and governor. RR activities are reported on regularly in Newsletters, at school events or meetings and on the school website. A parent said "The main way we learn about rights respecting is from our children. Because of the knowledge gained from here I can support my other children in other schools." Students have made presentations to the Board of Governors (BOG) and to the Parents and Friends Group. The Chair of the BOG said "The ongoing support for local and national charities allows pupils to become active citizens helping to improve life for others." A parent added "They have a sense of citizenship and a sense of joy and pride in what they are doing to support the rights of others."

Staff talked about the positive impact of being a RR school and how in their plans and policies the UNCRC had been integrated, audited and mapped. A teacher said *"It no longer sits separate. It is an integral part of everything we do"* An English teacher talked about how, for example, in Romeo and Juliet the role of girls in the past led to discussions about a number of rights, while the PE and RE teachers gave examples of how the girls would explore moral and health issues and relate them to the UNCRC.

The school charter and a digital footprint charter is prominently displayed throughout the school, in classrooms and on the school website. A range of displays linked to Unicef/UNCRC and specific articles was evident during our learning walk. Asked, *"How do you define a RR culture?"* the students thought it was *"because St Mary's involves everyone in everything we do."* The Chair of the BOG said RRSA complements the core ethos of the school. *"It is their (the pupils) own ideas, their displays, their charity work."*

In addition to displays related to specific subject areas, connected projects in KS3 (Year 8 Africa, Year 9 Fair Trade and Year 10 Human Rights in China) enable students to use their subject learning and skills in shared investigations of relevant rights and in the development of imaginative presentations. Year 10 students explore the Chinese One Child Policy through the perspective of rights and environmental and sustainable development, Year 9 pupils write to local shops about child labour and Fair Trade and Year 8 pupils learn about the diverse environments of Africa and begin to explore how the rights, for example, to play, to clean water, to education are experienced in another country.

Standard C:

The school has a rights-respecting ethos

Standard C has been achieved

St Mary's school charter has been refreshed and streamlined to incorporate the core values of the school with key articles from the Convention. The development of a new version has been an inspiration to other rights respecting schools. *"We review the school charter every year and we think the latest one is the best. Everyone gets it!"* (Year 9 student). *"We've had agreed charters so long it is hard to imagine what the school would be like with just rules."* (Year 12 student). When asked how their school could be more rights respecting one student said, *"Just keep living out the charter."*

The students and staff spoke of how the use of RR language impacted on caring relationships and gave examples of how it was used to solve problems and resolve conflicts. Focus group students said *"The staff model RR language"* and *"They listen to us and respect our opinion."* Teachers said, *"How we speak to the girls is really important. Rights respecting strategies support staff consistency."* A parent said *"Respect is lived in this school,"* and the Chair of the BOG believed *"For them (students and staff) RR is an all-embracing concept."*

Students and staff said that being a RR school has had a positive impact on their learning. The students told us that their confidence comes from knowing their teachers have high expectation of them. One teacher who had returned to the school after a number of years spoke of the shared respect in the classroom and the increased motivation and self-belief of the students. The plus/minus/interesting strategy has been very successful in helping

students to ask for help and encouraging feedback and is credited by the principal in helping to raise standards. The two lessons observed involved the students exploring the topic of culture in Year 12 sociology and Drugs awareness in Year 10 and the moral issues raised were linked to relevant UNCRC articles.

All the students interviewed said their school was a safe place and that they were given advice or lessons in Personal Development about how to keep safe in a range of areas including sports safety, e-safety, and road safety. Personal health and well-being issues are a priority in this school and all students showed knowledge and confidence in how they could protect themselves from abuse or receive help and advice if needed both within school and from outside agencies such as Childline, NSPCC and the Samaritans. Stress management and mindfulness sessions are part of an impressive programme to support the mental well being of all the students. Year 11 students take part in workshops on mental health and stress management. *"They see it as a right for the whole part of them - physical, spiritual, mental and intellectual - to be developed - for them to learn about."* (Teacher).

"The students will increasingly try to resolve conflicts themselves," said one teacher who went on to say, *"they will express concern if a student is in trouble after trying to deal with it themselves. They know to come to us and feel safe doing so."* These statements were supported in the interviews with the students and during the learning walk. *"There is no bullying,"* said one younger pupil, while another said *"We are a girls' school so we can fall out over nothing but we are more aware of the right not to offend and we are able to solve our own problems."* Students, parents and staff all said at different times during our visit *"We are a happy school."* A student designed poster featuring a bee encouraging pupils to *"Bee Positive"* is displayed around the school. *"Chill skills"* are taught to help develop strategies for challenging situations.

At RR assemblies the school council presents to the whole school on the work of Unicef and on issues such as climate change and childhood poverty. In Citizenship, English, History, and RE the students are provided with opportunities to explore how issues such as identity, diversity, stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination can lead to children being denied their rights. Pupils become ambassadors of human rights through completion of lobbying letters in Year 9 English to local MP promoting Fair Trade. The school uses twitter, the school website and displays around the school to promote International Days and key information about UNICEF and Global goals to which all departments contributed.

Standard D:

Children are empowered to become active citizens and learners

Standard D has been achieved

Evidence of student voice is easy to find in St Mary's. There is a wide range of opportunities made available for student voice and for students to be actively involved in decision-making. In addition to the Junior and Senior Student Council student groups or committees include those for Healthy Eating, ECO School, fundraising, and parish and community work. The school council surveyed the whole school on what should be the whole school theme for the year and choose *"Positive well-being and self-care."* The assessors were particularly

impressed by the system of appointing students as learning partners, mentors and ambassadors for areas such as Literacy, Maths, STEM subjects, languages and ICT. These champions of their curriculum area are selected each term from senior classes to create learning posters and support younger students. This helps develop self-esteem and confidence of both the mentors and the younger students they help. *"We look after each other,"* said one enthusiastic ambassador. *"The more you give to the rights of others the better person you will be."*

The students gave many examples of how they are able and encouraged to make informed decisions about their learning and wellbeing. *"We are encouraged to come up after class and we can email teachers as well...we know our learning objectives so we can set our own targets... the atmosphere gives everyone a chance to speak up."* (Students during focus interview). Local and global citizenship is seen as the context and driver for both the ECO committee's work on sustainable development and the Charities committee's fund raising campaigns. Events such as UN International Day, Women in Politics Day, World Youth Day and various public speaking events provide opportunities to explore some of the UNCRC articles in more depth. Year 10 students interviewed local female politicians asking *"What's your party's position on refugees?"* One told us *"We have a right to ask those questions."* The student council contributed this question used at recent interview for new staff: *"How would you promote a RR school?"*

The students gave examples of how their fund raising for local and national charities, for example, the Samaritans or Macmillan Cancer helped children and families in times of trouble. Their long-term support for street children in Zambia and the aid worker involved, who was in school during our visit, meant they all knew why they were raising money and had had ongoing feedback on the impact and the value of their individual efforts.