

RRSA REACCREDITATION REPORT

GOLD: RIGHTS RESPECTING

School:	St Mary’s High School Newry
Headteacher:	Denise Crawley
RRSA coordinator:	Maurice Fitzpatrick
Local authority:	Northern Ireland, EA Southern
School context:	St Mary’s is an all-girls secondary school with 585 pupils on roll. 38% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals, 21% have an SEN statement, 15% speak English as an Additional Language. The school is an Eco Ambassador School and has achieved the Investors in People Health and Wellbeing Award.
Attendees at SLT meeting:	Principal and Vice Principal/RRSA Lead
Number of children and young people spoken with:	20 pupils across 3 focus groups
Adults spoken with:	6 Teachers, 1 support assistant
Key RRSA accreditations:	Registered for RRSA: 11 May 2010 Silver achieved: 8 June 2011 Gold achieved: 7 December 2016
Assessor(s):	Frances Bestley and Gerry McMurtrie
Date:	1 March 2022

ACCREDITATION OUTCOME

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

St Mary’s High School, Newry continues to meet the standard for UNICEF UK’s Rights Respecting Schools Award at Gold: Rights Respecting.

1. STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is based on a virtual reaccreditation visit. The assessors would like to thank the children, the Senior Leadership Team, and staff 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 accreditation visit, the school completed a comprehensive School Evaluation: Gold form and provided a good collection of digital evidence.

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

Strengths of the school include:

- Very articulate young people who demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of rights. They knew a wide range of articles and were confident in the concept of rights.
- Very confident students who know that their views are taken seriously.
- A strong focus on the health and wellbeing of students within the context of rights so that young people feel supported and protected.
- Continued commitment by the whole school to place the CRC at the heart of policy and practice. After many years engagement with the Rights Respecting Schools Award, there is still innovation and creativity in the way it is taken forward and adapted.

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 work on enabling the pupils and adults use of rights vocabulary such as duty bearers and rights holders. UNICEF UK's [ABCDE of Rights](#) resource will support staff.
- Continue to provide opportunities for young people to be at the heart of decision-making, influencing and shaping the life and work of the school. You may consider pupil involvement in a child friendly School Development Plan, for example.
- As a long-standing Gold Rights Respecting School, continue to strengthen your ambassadorial role, promoting the CRC and the benefits of a child rights-based approach.

2. VISIT HIGHLIGHTS

STRAND A	Highlights and comments
<p>1. Children, young people and the wider school community know about and understand the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and can describe how it impacts on their lives and on the lives of children everywhere</p>	<p>Students interviewed were extremely knowledgeable about rights and understood them to be universal and unconditional. One pupil told us, <i>“You are given rights at birth...all children have them. You don’t need to do anything to get them. Inalienable means they can’t be taken away.”</i> Pupils shared that they learn about rights through a wide range of subjects, assemblies, school activities and class conversations around current events. One pupil shared, <i>“We have PD classes, so you talk about world issues. We are talking about Ukraine and Russia at the minute and the impact that is having on rights. We all want to do something to help.”</i> The RRSA lead told us, <i>“Being involved with RRSA since 2011 means it’s embedded throughout out curriculum. CRC is at the core of the life of the school. Induction programmes and citizenship cover rights, however it’s in all departments. Where rights are appropriate, they are explicitly linked. We signpost the Convention in school documents, letter heads, minutes of meetings, policies...the Convention is part of everything.”</i> He went on to say, <i>“As a mature RR school, the teachers come forward with the links and ideas...it’s no longer just down to us to lead the award. The pupils also come with their own ideas.”</i> Staff agreed that RRSA is embedded across the school, as one said, <i>“It’s all linked to rights. Covid has been a massive challenge, but RR helped us to keep students at the centre...checking in with families, supporting pupils with their education. Our background with RRSA stood beside us.”</i></p>
STRAND B	Highlights and comments
<p>2. In school young people enjoy the rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.</p>	<p>Students understood that adults across the school are responsible for supporting them to access their rights. One said, <i>“The best thing about being in a RR school is you just know you are supported. We are going to be treated equally, be respected and not discriminated.”</i> They agreed that suitable mechanisms were in place to enable them to raise any concerns with staff, and all agreed that they would be listened to. The RRSA lead said, <i>“Students know they will receive support, and can go to any staff member with concerns and they will be dealt with in a fair way.”</i></p>
<p>3. Relationships are positive and founded on dignity and a mutual respect for rights</p>	<p>Staff and pupils said that relationships were positive across the school, with any issues being dealt with in a respectful, restorative manner. A whole school charter, ‘RESPECT’ is displayed across the school, reinforcing the importance of mutual respect for rights. Students were involved in revising the charter to make sure it was still fit for purpose. A revised Positive Behaviour policy is linked to rights. One pupil shared, <i>“We are treated with dignity and mutual respect.”</i></p>
<p>4. Young people are safe and protected and know what to do if they need support.</p>	<p>A student said, <i>“The best thing about being in a RR school is you are going into a safe environment; we are protected from harm.”</i> Another student shared, <i>“Some of us are trained up and we have child protection training. In Y13, we have pupils working with Y8s and we know what to do if someone confides in us. We have to make it clear we can’t promise not to tell someone if it needs to be taken forward to get them support.”</i></p>

<p>5. Children’s social and emotional wellbeing is a priority. They learn to develop healthy lifestyles.</p>	<p>The Principal advised, <i>“We organised health and wellbeing campaigns and workshops online during lockdown. We applied for additional laptops to support families, including Wi-Fi access. Some families were provided with financial support and some with food packages.”</i> A wellbeing fun day is organised 3 times a year with all off timetable. The RRSA lead said, <i>“We use those to tie themes together. The SNAG group look at a healthy mindset, we have been doing exercise, dance, healthy eating, quizzes. It helps promote positive mental health. We put more support in place to improve mental wellbeing for the new pupils who didn’t have the usual transition support.”</i></p>
<p>6. Children and young people are included and are valued as individuals.</p>	<p>The Principal shared, <i>“Everyone is included and welcome. We have children who celebrate different religions. We have quite a diverse community and new children are supported to become part of the community quickly.”</i> The English department look at diversity and inclusion through literature to ensure students can see themselves through books.</p>
<p>7. Young people value education and are involved in making decisions about their education.</p>	<p>One student said, <i>“We have personalised targets, and the teachers talk to us about what our best targets could be. During the year, we talk about them to keep on track and see if we need help. We have afterschool booster classes so if you need support, you can go there. Because our opinions are listened to, we can ask to learn a topic in a certain way. Teachers allow you to explore things in the way you think will work best for you.”</i></p>
<p>STRAND C</p>	<p>Highlights and comments</p>
<p>8. Children and young people know that their views are taken seriously.</p>	<p>A member of the RRSA group said, <i>“One of our jobs this year was to revamp the school charter. We wanted to change it up and make sure every student knows what rights we have in school.”</i> Students have been involved in revising school policies. The Sex and Relationships policy review highlighted the need to do more around gender identity. Students carry out surveys to gather views, <i>“It’s important to have our opinions and voices heard. When it comes from a young person, people listen more. When pupils see that you have a voice, they know they have one too. It’s not just people in a group, everyone can come and give their views and opinions, so it means everyone is listened to and valued.”</i> Pupils present their group activities annually to SMT.</p>
<p>9. All children and young people have taken action to uphold their rights and the rights of others, locally and globally.</p>	<p>Students engage in annual debate competitions. One student told us, <i>“We went into Newry Town Hall, and we gave a speech about the environment in front of the councillors. We didn’t win but it was a great experience. We were highlighting the effects of plastics around the world, how it impacts on the environment. We don’t have single use plastic bottles anymore. One of the ideas we came up with was to introduce water stations on local parks and walkways. The councillors came to tell us that they are now working on this.”</i> Students worked with Queens University Belfast and Global Child to develop a global rights resource. One student said, <i>“We worked together to look at ways to present the rights to different cultures and nationalities, so it would work for everyone. It showed us that rights weren’t just for us in school, they are for everyone all over the world. We got to pick the images, put into different languages, make sure the language was clear. We wrote definitions to explain what some of the bigger words meant so younger children could understand them, without us changing the rights. This will be put into a book and presented to Governments, and you can look to see if those rights are being fulfilled in that country. We wanted images so they applied to everyone. We challenged some images that we thought was stereotyping people, so we changed that.”</i></p>