

# RRSA REACCREDITATION REPORT

## GOLD: RIGHTS RESPECTING

<b>School:</b>	Longstone Special School
<b>Headteacher:</b>	Ioannis Skarmoutsos
<b>RRSA coordinator:</b>	Stephanie Plunkett and John McIlmoyle
<b>Local authority:</b>	Education Authority, Northern Ireland
<b>School context:</b>	Longstone Special School provides education for pupils aged four to sixteen years who have a range of complex learning difficulties. Pupils travel from a wide catchment area within North County Down and the greater Belfast region. The current pupil roll is 225. 53% of pupils are eligible for Pupil Equity Funding.
<b>Attendees at SLT meeting:</b>	Principal and both RRSA Leads
<b>Number of children and young people spoken with:</b>	14 pupils during focus group meeting 5 pupils leading mini tour of school
<b>Adults spoken with:</b>	6 Teachers, 1 support assistant, 1 parent, 2 governors
<b>Key RRSA accreditations:</b>	Registered for RRSA: 11 June 2014 Silver achieved: 5 April 2017 Gold achieved: 22 May 2019
<b>Assessor:</b>	Gerry McMurtrie
<b>Date:</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> May 2022

## REACCREDITATION OUTCOME

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

**Longstone Special School 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 range 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:**

- Rights are explicitly linked to all areas of the school's work - visible on displays linked across the curriculum and very prominent on the website and school communications.
- A strong commitment to children's rights and to RRSA from leaders at all levels tied into the vision and values of the school. Quality training and support for staff has been sustained.
- The school's respect for and empowerment of the children is extremely clear and highly effective. This is evident in the role of pupil voice to shape key areas of school life and practice, particularly regarding learning and teaching.
- The caring and nurturing ethos of the school, where the values of dignity and respect are lived and valued by children and their parents.

## **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 the good practice around rights that has become embedded across the school. Ensure that all new initiatives are related back to rights.
- Continue to develop your nurturing ethos, supporting your approach to inclusion and non-discrimination. Provide opportunities to explore and celebrate diversity in all its forms so everyone feels valued and included.
- Continue to create opportunities for pupils to be at the heart of decision making, influencing, and shaping the life and work of the school.
- Continue to act as ambassadors for rights and the RRSA through your networks and collaboration with other schools.

## 2. VISIT HIGHLIGHTS

STRAND A	Highlights and comments
<p>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.</p>	<p>Pupils interviewed confidently spoke about a wide range of rights and understood them to be universal and unconditional. One pupil said, <i>“Rights start the day you are born until you are 18. They are for every child everywhere in the world.”</i> Pupils agreed that although every child is entitled to rights, issues such as climate change, war, poverty and natural disasters impact on how children access them. Another pupil said, <i>“Some countries don’t allow girls to go to school...some countries have a famine. In Ukraine, children are hiding in bunkers to keep safe.”</i> The school continues to strengthen awareness of rights through teaching and learning. All staff receive regular training and updates to support them to thread articles throughout the curriculum and assemblies. RRSA is a standard theme during staff and governor meetings. School policies continue to make explicit links to the CRC. The school have strengthened their global work and recently achieved Level 2 in the Global Learning Programme NI.</p> <p>The school have completed a School Improvement Project to improve the evaluation of planning, teaching, and learning by introducing a new planner format. Staff are required to highlight rights they will be focusing on in subjects every week, completing a review to track progress. The planners require staff to highlight how they are differentiating work based on individual needs of children. The principal advised, <i>“The new weekly planners ensure rights are in everything we do and gives our pupils the opportunity to provide regular feedback, to help us improve. This ensures the sustainability of RRSA. Our next step is to become a Nurture School, a project by the Education Authority. We have attended the first two courses and it’s all linked to rights, so supports our ongoing RRSA work.”</i></p>
STRAND B	Highlights and comments
<p>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</p>	<p>Pupils agreed they feel safe in school and that they are listened to, respected, and supported. One said, <i>“Our teachers and the teacher assistants, they are people that uphold our rights and are called duty bearers. They will always help us when we need it...the only thing standing in your way is asking for it...you have to ask for help. It’s your right.”</i> Another pupil said, <i>“We have the Feeling Safe box, so if you don’t want to talk to someone, you can put something in the box and the staff read it and come to you. We are reassured in the school that we are safe and that helps us to keep calm.”</i></p> <p>Pupils’ social and emotional wellbeing is a priority. The RRSA lead spoke about the importance of RRSA during the pandemic: <i>“All of our initiatives kept going, but RRSA was the most important one to us. It made the most sense. Covid provided us an opportunity to talk about the right to be safe and the right to an education for all. It helped our children to understand what was happening. The recovery curriculum was very rights focused, meeting the individual needs of our children.”</i> The school have introduced communication passports for children with autism, allowing children to highlight to adults how they wish to learn, what their interests are, and</p>

<p>learners and promotes wellbeing</p>	<p>what communication tools work best for them. Children are supported to regularly review their support plans to ensure they best meet their needs.</p> <p>Staff advised that much work goes in to develop positive relationships, with pupils supported to understand the impact of behaviours on others and the importance of mutual respect. Pupils have been introduced to The Zones of Regulation framework, creating toolboxes highlighting what colour zone they feel they are in, giving staff the opportunity to put strategies in place. The school provides pupils with access to a range of counselling services such as Barnardo’s and the Happy Minds project. Pupils can access the EA Youth Service Reach 4 Resilience programme, which provides them with strategies to develop and maintain good mental health. Bangor Alternatives run a Rights Respecting Mentoring programme for pupils to help improve attendance, attainment, and positive engagement in school life. Pupils have been learning about keeping safe in the community, with one pupil sharing, <i>“We have travel training, so we know how to travel safely on buses and go places on our own when we are older.”</i></p>
<p><b>STRAND C</b></p>	<p><b>Highlights and comments</b></p>
<p>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 children experience their rights.</p>	<p>Pupil voice remains an area of strength, with relevant supports put in place to ensure every pupil can have a say in a way that works for them. During the pupil led virtual tour of the school, a pupil said, <i>“Learning about our rights is very important. When you go around the school, we have QR codes, so if one of us is off and can’t talk to a visitor...they can scan the code and listen to us telling you about our rights.”</i> Pupils have regular meetings where they share their ideas with each other, and with staff. One said, <i>“We always have lots of ideas to make the school better. We wanted new benches to help our right to relax and play, so we went to the principal, and we got the money to buy them.”</i> Pupils spoke about being involved in creating a child friendly Anti-Bullying policy, alongside the planning and organisation of the Anti-Bullying campaign and subsequent wall displays. The School Council have also been given the responsibility to allocate a new Rights Respecting Trophy to students as part of the Annual Prize Day celebrations.</p> <p>Pupils support a wide range of local and global charities and spoke of their pride at raising over £500 for UNICEF UK’s Ukraine appeal. Pupils regularly raise awareness of global issues through their participation with UNICEF UK’s OutRight campaign. As part of their Global Goals Week pupils chose to raise awareness of Goal 2, Zero Hunger, by donating food and essential items to Flourish, an organisation helping victims of Human Trafficking living in Northern Ireland. They also supported Goal 4, Quality Education, by supporting UNICEF’s Afghanistan appeal. Pupils created short videos to raise awareness of these issues, sharing with the wider community. Pupils provided a Rights Respecting School tour to the Northern Irish Minister for Education, and also provided a tour, as part of the school’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, to retired staff members, promoting the importance of RRSA and the CRC.</p>