

RRSA ACCREDITATION REPORT

GOLD: RIGHTS RESPECTING

School:	Longstone Special School
Headteacher:	Ioannis Skarmoutsos
RRSA coordinator:	John McIlmoyle & Stephanie Plunkett
Local authority:	Education Authority South Eastern Region
Assessor(s):	Anne-Marie Poynor and Niki McQuillan
Date:	22 May 2019

1. INTRODUCTION

The assessors would like to thank the children, the Senior Leadership Team, staff and governors for their very 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 strong commitment to living out the CRC as a Rights Respecting School in every aspect of school and community life.
- Promoting and giving pupils a voice in things that concern them and all children throughout the world, engaging with the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.
- Encouraging and facilitating pupil advocacy and campaigning for the rights of children locally and globally.

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 work with and in the community and local schools as ambassadors for the rights of children
- Continue to embed the knowledge and understanding of the CRC articles and the fact that rights are inherent, inalienable, indivisible, universal and unconditional
- Continue to participate in local and global campaigns, Global Goals and Connecting Classrooms building strong links with other agencies

3. ACCREDITATION INFORMATION

School context	Longstone Special School provides education for pupils aged from four to sixteen years who have a range of complex learning difficulties. The pupils travel from a wide catchment area within north County Down and the greater Belfast region.
Attendees at SLT meeting	Principal/Vice Principal/RRSA coordinator
Number of children and young people interviewed	All pupils met with during interviews, class visits and comprehensive school tour
Number of adults interviewed	7 teaching staff, 4 support staff, 3 parents (2 also governors, Chair of Governors, 1 caretaker, 1 canteen staff, 5 outside agency representatives
Evidence provided	Learning walk, focus groups, written evidence, class visits
Registered for RRSA: 11 June 2014	Silver achieved: 5 April 2017

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

The school has a strong commitment to promoting and upholding the rights of children locally and globally. It can be seen, heard and felt everywhere, in all aspects of school life. The leadership is proud that their recent (2019) ETI report recognises their rights respecting work stating that, *“the school has achieved a silver award for developing the pupils’ awareness and understanding of rights.”* Recommendations from Silver informed the school’s *“Achieving Gold”* journey, deepening their understanding of rights and making them more explicit in policies, curriculum, teaching and learning. The VP spoke of how at Silver, *“we thought we were good,”* until working for gold and the realisation of *“how much has been achieved since.”* The chair of the Board of Governors noted that there has been *“a huge shift in school – the whole programme is ingrained in the entire school,”* including the new nursery which has been added since Silver.

The nursery visit demonstrated how children are being introduced to the concept of rights, through Early Years, children’s right to play, to have healthy options and to have a voice, all in preparation for transition into KS1. Parents are closely involved in programmes and workshops that help them to consider the importance of nurturing their child and ensuring their rights are being met from an early age. There is a strong sense of community across the school and beyond the gates. Creative and interesting displays, in abundance, are closely linked to relevant articles and, caring about and for the environment is very evident. Pupils spoke with confidence and knowledge about a wide range of articles such as 28, 29, 12 and 31, how they were for *“all children”* and couldn’t be *“taken away.”*

The Learning Walk was led by four School Council representatives, including the head boy. A tour map was provided with 14 ‘stop’ signs, which included visits to a whole range of KS1 and 2 classes. The head boy introduced each ‘stop’ with the confidence and flair of a professional tour guide, and without prompting either explained it or handed over to the others. Pointing to one display he stated with pride, *“this is our school mission statement”* and on prompting it was clear that they, the pupils, know what it means. It may be worth explaining at this stage that before this morning tour had commenced there was word that a parent, who was unable to attend the afternoon meeting, had caught a taxi in the hope that they could speak to the assessors. The parent spoke of how the family had come from South Africa where *“he (her son) was under a shell”* and of their despair for him. Then he came to Longstone where *“he’s come out of his shell... he talks about everything... he is now able to express how he feels. “He’s a rising star!”* The *“he”* being the head boy who was leading that very same tour.

Pupils interviewed and visited in classes were aware of articles such as, the right to play, education, developing their talents and especially having a voice. They were very clear that the teachers and adults are the *“duty bearers”* and they themselves the *“rights holders.”* Charters in some classrooms indicated how staff could help them access their rights. The School Council wanted to ensure that even temporary members of staff knew about what *“being an RRS meant”* and the importance of the CRC articles, so they designed a welcome pamphlet outlining RRS and the CRC, pointing teachers to the website for further information. Assemblies and articles of the month are part of the everyday fabric of the school.

The school has achieved Level 1 of the Global Learning Programme through which each class have participated in practical action projects and global learning lessons. Linked through ‘Connecting Classrooms’ to a school in Kenya the pupils have written to them and sent photos and are hoping to

establish more links with them and other classrooms. There is a strong sense of community, with links to local organisations, other primary and post primary schools, in the hope that they will eventually be a 'Rights Village.' Senior leadership spoke of how there has been a "big change to the local aspect."

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

The senior pupils led 'diamond nine' lessons with junior classes to help them choose the articles that they felt applied to the playground and canteen, pitching them at their level of understanding. Some of the articles highlighted were 12, 15, 19, 24, 29 and 31. Following consultation with the rest of the school the two charters were then created. Pupils spoke about ways in which issues are dealt with in a fair and equitable way, ensuring that they feel safe and know how they can be respectful towards each other. Anti-Bullying Ambassadors have been trained and there is a display with their pictures illustrating Art 19 and outlining who they can turn to for help with issues. They explained that they are there to help anyone who might be experiencing problems such as bullying. A child-friendly Anti-Bullying Policy has also been created by the pupils and is prominently displayed. It informs pupils of the different types of bullying e.g. physical, emotional, verbal and cyber, including pictures. One of the ambassadors said, "people know you." They explained that "every single year we review the policy ... this is the procedure." A prefects board provides another means of seeking help if necessary. The safeguarding team of adults and outside agencies is displayed providing a network of support and help for pupils, parents and staff alike. The pupils understand that structure of support and feel safe and protected. During a twilight session the teachers mapped out where themes of fairness and equity could be included and explored through curriculum areas and connected learning using scenarios and stories in lessons.

There is a collaborative relationship with the canteen staff. The school cook spoke of "how we have brought into the RRS ... working along with the children ... encouraging healthy eating (Art 24) ... providing a clean environment ... introducing food from different countries ...", on the pupils' suggestion, "... to reflect the different cultures in the school (Art 30)." The pupils have "good ideas" and it is about "us all working together." Chinese New Year and tasting their food was one celebration – a lucky choice as one of the canteen staff is Chinese. Arising from one very popular suggestion is a fortnightly "Friendly Friday," with a "longer break!".

In partnership with Bangor Alternatives a mentoring programme was introduced for older pupils who can be disaffected. This work was specifically linked to the CRC articles 12, 28, 24, 29, 31, 34, 36 and 40. A representative from BA spoke passionately about their work and how it has immensely helped pupils who might be otherwise disengaged, and for whom "formal education doesn't work, making that move "from the fringes into mainstream." It has provided them with a set of life skills managing things like "masculinity, gender and anti-social behaviour." The young people engaged with the Police Service (PSNI) in a question and answer session for which they prepared about 50 questions that concerned them, living in NI. "Do you: feel you make Belfast safer? Employ Catholics? Control the paramilitaries? It was an opportunity for the young people to learn first-hand about their work. At the final BA celebration, the pupils did their own presentations, talking about the programme and how much it had benefited them. The organiser said that "every step of the way we have seen progression." One participant talked about his experience saying, "it's made me more positive." This is a pupil whose attendance and behaviour would have been cause for serious concern. Strong links and visits from the PSNI continues to be a significant aspect of the schools RRS work.

Importantly there has been the introduction of a raft of new qualifications to help prepare pupils for the future workplace. The choice of courses and qualifications have been chosen to help meet their needs and provide them with employable skills. The T & D department even brought in a real car for one of the pupils to work on. One boy spoke of how *“we can write down what we did or didn’t enjoy.”* Term Planners and lessons explicitly reference rights. In one year 10 class the pupils were learning about the European Elections and voting for our local representatives in Stormont, though one pupil did remark that *“it (Stormont) is not in use at the minute”* and it was *“what they (politicians) used to do over there.”* A new system for IEPs, commended by ETI, is in place and pupils are regularly involved in setting and evaluating their own targets. Pupils take more ownership of their learning and achievements. Introducing interventions and programmes as part of RRS has led to more regular attendance at school and the drop in suspensions has been *“significant.”* As ETI stated in their report *“the quality of the provision for pastoral care is outstanding. There is an inclusive ethos and nurturing environment that permeates all aspects of the school.”*

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

The principal spoke about the effects of RRSA on the pupils; *“the biggest change has been in the pupil voice. Before they needed a lot of prompting but now they are excited to come in and express their views. The global aspect has been a big thing ... every lesson now has a global focus.”* A view that is heartily endorsed by the SMT and all staff. The co-ordinator spoke of how much the steering group and School Council have progressed *“they have lots of ideas... so many and they are so confident now.”* The steering group agreed that they enjoy *“talking about things and making ideas.”* They were able to quote article numbers such as 24, 31, 28, 34 and 36, explaining what they are and what they mean. Article 29 was another important one to them. All the pupils in the school can put ideas into a suggestion box for discussion at meetings. They spoke about how they could influence after-school clubs. The council were also given a budget of £100 and told that they could allocate it to whatever they thought was important. They were confident and able to consider global issues that especially impact on other children. The VP said that they are *“like a group of adults.”*

The School Council chose Soccer Aid, the right to play, for one of their events. They presented an assembly to explain what it was about and challenged each class to devise an *“obstacle course.”* These will be judged and one pupil said that *“every £1 raised will be doubled.”* Another idea they had was to send each child in the school a birthday card especially as not every child gets one. There is a different design for the rights respecting birthday card for boys and girls, which is changed every year – so that they don’t get the same one two years in a row. They participate in the ‘OutRight Project’ every year and feel it is important to campaign for the rights of other children. The whole school participated in UNICEF’s Shoe Share and donated three trolley loads of shoes to Clarks. There is an obvious concern for local people in their community and so they have a link to a local foodbank, regularly organising collections of food for the less fortunate in their community.

There has been a whole-school focus on recycling. The Eco-Eagles have a recycling rota and take their work very seriously, working hard to avoid sending food waste to landfill and ensuring that as much as possible is recycled including donating their unwanted clothing in ‘Cash for Clobber’. The school are currently involved in an Inter-school project with Kenya. Correspondence to the twin school has included reference to their RRSA. Year 10 ran a practical action project during Fairtrade Fortnight which focussed this year on ‘gender equality’ and ‘fair wages for women.’

The pupils participated in 'Get Up and Go Green' (Art29). The school worked with the local community to get funding to create a beautiful Community Garden which had its official opening on the 12 April 2019. The school planted a 'Rights Respecting Tree' in front of the school in commemorate and celebrate being an RRS. Each child has planted flowers in it. Pupils from Longstone, a local school and members of the wider community engaged in RR workshops together. The School Council also led a fundraiser for Tear Fund to build four toilets in a developing country helping other children around the world to have dignity when using the bathroom. Photos of the before and after were pointed out on one of the displays.

As part of their work on the Global Goals 2030 each class made paper chains and wrote in their chain "*we will do this.*" One pupil spoke about plastic and the risk to animals under the sea, stating "*people don't respect animals enough.*" There are many other campaigns but a recent one has made the school very proud. The pupils went to a local beach to do a litter pick and were appalled at the rubbish that people left on the beach. Heavily laden with rubbish they soon realised that there weren't any rubbish bins. They were so incensed that they decided that they would write to the local council asking for some bins and inviting them to meet with them to discuss the issue. They await the result.