

The Case for 'Rights-Respecting Schools' based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a globally-agreed set of values for all children. It promotes universal principles of the need to promote and protect the rights of all children, which applies to the various aspect of Citizenship.
- Children learn they have rights – now, solely because they are children. They are not earned or awarded at a certain age. This is of much greater interest to them than being prepared for what they may acquire later in life. They are citizens now and not pre-citizens.
- In learning about rights they learn that all children have these same rights, unconditionally. This develops a sense of being connected with other children globally and supports children in their development of becoming, and sense of being, 'global citizens'.
- In learning about their rights children also learn about the importance of respecting the rights of others, i.e. responsibilities. This helps to maintain a positive tone to any work. It contributes to developing a positive and socially responsible identity, which is more likely when children believe in and feel good about themselves.
- Children come to realise that they have a responsibility to themselves to ensure that they take the opportunities that their rights offer.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child gives adults and children a language which they can use regularly and consistently in relation to a wide range of moral issues, from behaviour issues in the classroom and playground to all aspects of the curriculum for global citizenship, e.g. fair trade, sustainability and equalities issues.
- The language and concepts of Rights, Respect and Responsibilities provide children with important intellectual tools supporting their development as Global Citizens. It supports them in thinking about and forming moral judgements and in expressing moral and political arguments.
- The language and concepts of Rights can be continuously reinforced through classroom and corridor displays, assemblies, and the regular and consistent use of the language of rights and responsibilities by all members of the school community.
- The UNCRC also gives adults and children a framework for asking questions about moral issues and issues of justice. This helps to extend and consolidate children's understanding of human rights and wider moral and political issues.
Questions such as:
 - *What rights of the child are involved here?*
 - *How can the words Wants and Needs help us understand what's happening here?*
 - *Who has responsibilities in this situation? What are they?*
 - *Whose rights are/are not being respected here?*
 - *What examples of people enjoying their rights can you see in this situation?*
 - *Are there any examples of rights being denied?*
- Using the Convention on the Rights of the Child in this way avoids any tendency towards moral or cultural relativism in any discussion of social and moral dilemmas. It provides a framework of universally-agreed moral benchmarks against which cultural values, beliefs and practices can be evaluated.

- The realisation that there are many situations where rights appear to conflict, promotes the development of higher order thinking and reasoning skills.
- Difficulties faced by children can be seen as rights issues rather than individual weaknesses or failures.
- Teaching directly about rights can focus on and appeal to pupils' self interest, linking work to current realities and enabling work to have a positive tone.
- It avoids the teacher's or the school's values being seen as isolated examples of political correctness. It demonstrates, for example, that codes of conduct are not unique to each school, but come from principles that are world-wide and expressed in the UN Convention.
- Where this approach has been taken – as in several schools in Hampshire in the UK and in Cape Breton in Canada – the evidence of its value has been convincing. For example:
 - children have raised self-esteem
 - teachers find their role more professionally satisfying
 - children have more positive attitudes towards diversity and difference
 - behaviour and relationships improve, including teacher/pupil relationships
 - pupils make better progress in their learning, including progress in language and literacy
 - there is less bullying
 - children become more confident and articulate when engaging with moral issues, including issues of global justice, reaching higher levels of understanding as 'global citizens'.
 - Children also become more committed global citizens, showing a concern to engage with issues of rights-abuse to try to make a difference.
- Support for this approach comes from leading experts in the field of school improvement and effectiveness, MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed, 'The Intelligent School' (2004): "We would place pupils' rights and responsibilities at the heart of an effective school."
- The UNICEF UK 'Rights Respecting Schools' Award scheme provides schools with a framework of benchmarks which 'fit' closely with the 'Every Child Matters' key outcomes, much of the Ofsted school Self-Evaluation Form, and the National Healthy Schools standards. It also has close links with 'Assessment for Learning'.
- In summary, the benefits of a 'Rights Respecting School' cover five key areas:
 - (i) promoting pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence
 - (ii) supporting pupils' moral, social and cultural development;
 - (iii) promoting positive relationships and behaviour, including countering racism and other forms of abusive and discriminatory behaviour and harassment;
 - (iv) developing effective global citizens;
 - (v) overall school improvement, including improving academic standards

This summary is an adapted version of the case for a moral framework for schools based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child written by Ian Massey, Inspector for Intercultural Education, Hampshire LEA www.hants.gov.uk/education/childrensrights