

# RRSA ACCREDITATION REPORT

## GOLD: RIGHTS RESPECTING

<b>School:</b>	Mountjoy School
<b>Headteacher:</b>	Gill Howard
<b>RRSA coordinator:</b>	Antonia East
<b>Local authority:</b>	Dorset
<b>Assessor(s):</b>	Jilly Hillier and Isobel Mitchell
<b>Date:</b>	10/02/2021

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This is a Gold virtual accreditation report. 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 an excellent collection of evidence.

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:

- The way the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is used to frame the school’s policies and practice illustrating a strategic and explicit commitment to rights at all levels.
- The way staff clearly understand how the articles of the CRC and the values underpinning it link to their work with the children and young people in their care.
- The importance placed on hearing all students’ opinions using a variety of methods whereby children and young people can express themselves even if their ability to communicate verbally is limited.

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 develop activities to collaborate with other schools and act as ambassadors for children’s rights. Ensure that outward facing communication tools such as the school values document, prospectus and the website make the school’s commitment to children’s rights explicit.
- Further develop opportunities for the students to learn about how children experience their rights in other places and use their voice to enable all children and young people to access their rights, through for example: taking part in UNICEF UK’s [Outright campaign](#) and learning about and taking action for the [UN Global Goals](#).
- Reflect on the stories and images used in teaching to ensure they are presenting multiple perspectives on the world and familiarising the students with people from races and cultures different to their own.
- Continue to create opportunities for students to have their opinion heard in decision making, particularly in relation to the proposed new build.

## 3. ACCREDITATION INFORMATION

<b>School context</b>	A small special school for children from 3 to 19 where all pupils have a learning difficulty, complex needs or Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD). A very small minority of pupils speak English as an Additional Language and more than 20% of children are in receipt of free school meals. The school was rated ‘good’ by Ofsted in 2016.
<b>Attendees at SLT meeting</b>	Headteacher / RRSA coordinator / Chair of Governors
<b>Number of children and young people interviewed</b>	17 pupils on-line in classes.
<b>Number of adults interviewed</b>	In addition to those attending the SLT meeting, 3 teaching staff, 2 support staff, 1 parent.
<b>Evidence provided</b>	Evidence pack including for example, virtual school tour, policy documents, photographs of displays, pupils’ work, curriculum documents, School Improvement Plan, videos of pupils. On-line discussion groups.
<b>Registered for RRSA: 22/06/2017</b>	<b>Silver achieved: 11/07/2019</b>

**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**

It is clear from talking to staff and pupils and from the evidence presented that the pupils at Mountjoy learn about their rights in a variety of ways. Children’s rights are very creatively displayed around the school and the assembly programme is explicitly linked to rights. The curriculum intent for all pupils at Mountjoy is underpinned by the central tenets of a child rights-based approach - survival, development, participation, and protection. Each pupil follows a personalised curriculum where goals are determined in consultation with the child during their annual review meetings. This leads to a M.A.P (My Aspirational Progress) for each pupil and these are brought together by the teacher to form the curriculum for the class. PSHCE is a fundamental part of their learning and is woven through the teaching every day. The central themes of the PSHCE curriculum are explicitly linked to the CRC, for example. “Emotional skills” are related to Article 12 - the right to be heard and “Spiritual” is related to Article 14 - the right to practise your own religion. Each class also learns about a ‘Right of the Week.’ Year 10 have recently been teaching the younger children about rights through a PPT presentation they participated in called ‘Shine a Light’ which used images and words to present children’s rights in different parts of the world.

The pupils at the school have significant communication challenges but despite this, some of them were able to talk to us about rights during the accreditation visit, mentioning the right to a voice, the right to clean water, the right to be healthy and to be safe. Pupils’ work and comments made on their annual reviews provide further evidence that the children and young people are developing their knowledge of rights. For example, the comments on one of the pupil’s annual reviews state; ‘She has made links between academic study and Rights Respecting work e.g. through voting on new readers through to constructing a set of class rules and comparing the lives of children in Ethiopia and the UK as part of our 1980s History project.’ Learning about the CRC is built into staff and governor training and induction and their knowledge of rights and how these relate to their work is excellent. The RRSA Lead has a role in school that enables her to have an overview of policy and practice which has enabled RRSA and the CRC to be embedded across the school. She is also a parent of a child at the school and is therefore also able to share the positive impact from a parent’s point of view.

Parents learn about the school’s work on rights through the newsletter, open days and through the annual reviews with their children where rights language is used. The parent we spoke to felt that the school had always been rights respecting but explained that over the last few years this has been more explicitly related to the articles in the CRC and that this has helped her to advocate for her son with professionals outside of school. *“My son has had all the support he needs from school and so have I. I have always felt very included in what was being provided for him. He is very confident; he knows what he wants and when he wants it and has developed communication to express that. He knows the people here are there to help him. The rights are evident in all that they do here at school. With the level of need my son has, I have to be an advocate for him, and the rights help me to do that.”* It was clear from speaking to the Senior Leadership Team that listening to the children, protecting them from harm and doing what is best for them has always been at the heart of the school, linking this approach to the rights in the CRC has strengthened it and given the children and young people a solid foundation to take with them when they leave school. *“Knowing that rights are important across the world makes them realise that this is for them as adults out there in the wider world. They will take it out to beyond school. They will become parents themselves and they will know that their children will also have rights.”*

**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**

Actions and decisions affecting children at Mountjoy are driven by the values of the CRC, RRSA and human rights education. For example, priorities on the School Improvement Plan are underpinned by teaching and learning ‘about’ rights, ‘through’ rights and ‘for’ rights. The RRSA Lead has thought carefully about what the RRSA outcomes look and feel like when not all children can articulate their enjoyment of rights and so the role of adults as duty bearers who facilitate access to rights has even greater importance. The children and young people we spoke to were very positive about how their teachers are *“helpful and listen.”* When asked to describe the best things about their school they said *“Amazing, helpful and happy.”* Most of the students are not able to articulate how the school staff act as duty bearers to protect their rights because of their special educational needs but the headteacher told us; *“Our duty is to do something that they would want if they could communicate.”* *“As duty bearers we serve our young people to do what is best for them.”*

It was clear during the visit that relationships and interactions between adults and pupils are based on care, dignity and respect. The school uses a therapeutic approach to behaviour management and the pupils learn about forming positive relationships in PSHCE. They know they can approach a member of the Emotional Support Team if they have any concerns. From Early Years onwards, the pupils and their teachers work together to create a rights-based charter and agree how they can respect each other using simple concepts such as ‘being kind’ and ‘listening to each other.’ The headteacher explained that the more able children can reflect on fairness using social stories and comic strip conversations but that this concept is hard for some to understand. However, they do understand that if there is an incidence of challenging behaviour then the adults will need to work out how to address that *“not to punish them but to support them to manage their behaviour.”* Whilst the pupils would not be able to articulate an understanding of the concept of ‘equity’ they have a variety of needs and the staff and the parent we spoke to said that they are very understanding of each other and they accept that some of their peers may need to be treated differently to others. Speaking about her son, the parent we spoke to said; *“his peers are very understanding and inclusive of him, they embrace his presence in the room.”* Many of the pupils need support with personal care, the staff are committed to maintaining the pupils’ dignity *“No matter what they need, their dignity is preserved.”*

The pupils we spoke to were able to give us examples of how the school keeps them safe, they talked about learning how to cross the road safely and keeping safe around medicines. They have taken part in Anti-bullying week and had lessons in on-line safety and followed the NSPCC programmes - PANTS and the ‘Speak out Stay Safe.’ These lessons have been related specifically to rights such as the right to be protected from harm and the right to privacy. The staff reported that bullying is rare and if a pupil or parent has a concern, they can raise it through a complaints procedure – pupils can post their concern into a box or speak to a trusted adult.

Keeping healthy in body and mind is a vital part of the PSHCE programme, covering for example, healthy eating and keeping safe from drugs. The pupils also spoke to us about how they have been learning how to use hand sanitizer to protect against germs. The school uses a multitude of techniques such as mindfulness, anxiety mapping, hydro therapy, horse riding, as well as outdoor

education to support the pupils with their mental health and well-being and the school were specifically mentioned by their local MP in parliament as a good example of going 'above and beyond' to support their pupils and their families during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Helping children to express their personality and celebrating difference is core to the PSHCE programme and the staff explained how inclusion was central to what they were all about as a special school – finding ways for all their pupils, whatever their needs, to be included in school and community life. The pupils learn about cultures and beliefs different from their own through special celebration days such as Hanukkah day and Chinese New Year and the links to rights such as Article 13, freedom of expression and Article 14 – freedom of religion are made explicit in lesson materials and displays.

Pupils have many opportunities to be engaged in their learning. The pupils and their parents are heavily involved in creating their personalised curriculum and targets which are developed at their annual review meetings. The children take part in surveys about their school and their views on what they learn and what they are most proud of are displayed around the school. The responses show great pride in what they have achieved and show how much they value the support they receive with their learning, for example: 'I learnt why I need exercise and that I am waterproof!', 'My art and maths is good. I am proud.' 'The best thing about school is the MSI curriculum - I know where I should be'; 'The therapy that helps me.'

**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 staff we spoke to were passionate about giving every pupil a chance to express their views. They use a 'Total Communication' approach to enable the children and young people to express themselves. One of the pupils explained to us through a video, the many tools which pupils can use to communicate ranging from low tech such as flip books and symbols to high tech such as a device for communicating through eye gaze. Putting Article 12, the Right to Participation at the centre of their work as a school has made a big difference and the staff and parent spoken to report that this has increased the pupils confidence and engagement with their learning. The approach is quite new for some parents, many of their children have severe learning disabilities so they are used to speaking for them and making decisions on their behalf, but through the schools' work on children's rights they start to understand that their children have rights and can express their own choice.

The 'My Voice, My Choice', project is a way of ensuring children at Mountjoy know that they have a right to be involved in decision making raising awareness of opportunities for participation such as 'Who helps you make decisions?' 'What decisions are coming up in your life?' and 'How can you prepare for these?' Pupil voice has been used to good effect in the school. The Beach School and Forest School projects were designed with input from the post 16 students and pupils are involved in designing questions and interviewing candidates for roles at the school.

The students in school have learnt about current global issues such as climate change and the Black Lives Matters movement and some have taken part in projects where they use their voice to influence change in their local environment and community. The Eco Schools group have achieved the Silver Award and have been engaged in practical work in the school grounds as well as a letter writing campaign on pollution and climate change. They have also been engaged in creative projects such as building robots from recycled material and designing posters to promote recycling and saving

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water. The school have recently installed solar panels. The staff felt that the Eco Schools project has helped the pupils to *“understand that they can make a difference and be useful and active members of society.”* There is good collaboration between work on rights and Eco Schools.

The pupils play an active part in the West Dorset Special Schools Youth Parliament and have had the opportunity to raise their views with their local MP. They are currently forging links with other local schools with a view to acting as ambassadors for children’s rights. Some of this activity has been curtailed due to the Covid–19 pandemic but plans are in place to continue work with a local secondary and primary school who are also engaged in the Rights Respecting Schools Award. Work is also planned within Bridport town as a part of its right respecting work. Pupils are also going to be involved in designing a new building in conjunction with a secondary school which shares the same school site.