

Appendix 2. Clarifying rights, respect and responsibilities in the UNICEF UK Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA)

In August 2011 UNICEF UK released new guidance for class and school charters.

Why have we recommended this change?

We want to ensure that the RRSA community is faithful to the general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC applies to all children and they are the designated rights-holders. Adults such as parents, teachers, local and central government are duty-bearers. Rights are unconditional; they are therefore not dependent upon a responsibility and cannot be taken away, earned or used as a reward. Because they are universal, however, children and adults should be encouraged to show rights-respecting behaviours. In this way individual children can both enjoy their own rights and respect the rights of others.

We want all the adults, children and young people in rights respecting schools to understand the nature of rights as inalienable, universal, unconditional, inherent and indivisible. Rights do not come with responsibilities attached. It may be possible to refer to responsibilities if you can ensure that everybody understands that children are not the duty-bearers and that the rights are not a reward for the fulfilment of a responsibility.

What is different?

Our custom and practice was to recommend that schools established a negotiated agreement which focused on children's rights and their responsibility to behave and speak in a way which respected that right. Over time we have come to see this as a risk. By linking rights and responsibilities so closely it may lead to a fundamental misunderstanding.

The new guidance has been developed to strengthen the school ethos by incorporating the role of the duty-bearers. Our new charters are negotiated agreements which identify the rights-respecting attitudes and actions of children and adults and the language has shifted from responsibility to respect.

[...] We recommend that before you next revise your charters you provide staff training and ensure that the whole school moves to 'rights-respecting actions or attitudes' and 'respect for rights'; rather than **only** coupling the word 'right' with 'responsibility'. Constant repetition may distort the balance and have the unintended consequence that adults and children believe that access to rights is dependent on 'responsible' or 'good' behaviour. Of course we want children to grow up to be 'responsible citizens' who behave in a way that respects the rights of others; and a school ethos of mutual respect certainly supports this.

What's it all about?

Rights Respecting

School Award

