George Mitchell School Primary Phase

Right Respecting Ambassadors

George Mitchell School Primary Phase has started its journey to put the United Nations Convention of the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) at the heart of their school ethos, policies and principles.

In January 2016, the Primary Phase applied for the Recognition of Commitment to show UNICEF that we are committed to embedding the UNCRC in our school community.
What is the United Nations Convention of the Rights of a Child (UNCRC)?

The 54 articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) cover all aspects of a child’s life, from the right to education, health and protection from abuse to the right to freedom of expression and access to information. It also says what governments and adults must do to ensure all children can enjoy all their rights. The Convention underpins all the work that Unicef does.

Although the Convention must be seen as a whole and all the rights are linked, there are four articles in the Convention with a special status of general principles. These are overarching rights that are needed for any and all rights in the Convention to be realised:

**Non-discrimination (article 2):** the Convention applies to all children whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities, whatever they think or say, no matter what type of family they come from, whatever their circumstances. For example a child in care has the same right to an education as a child who lives with his/her parents.

**Best interest of the child (article 3):** a child’s best interests must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children. All adults should do what is best for children and should think about how their decisions will affect children. Determining what is in children’s best interests should take into account children’s own views and feelings.

**Right to life, survival and development (article 6):** children have the right to life and governments must do all they can to ensure children survive and develop to their fullest potential. The right to life and survival guarantees the most basic needs such as nutrition, shelter or access to health care. Development - physical, emotional, educational, social and spiritual - is the goal of many of the rights in the Convention, for example the right to education, access to information, freedom of thought or right to play.

**Right to be heard (article 12):** every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This principle recognises children as actors in their own lives and applies at all times, throughout a child’s life. This means that when adults make decisions about a child’s life, the child should be asked what they think and feel and adult’s decision needs to take these into account. The Convention recognises that the level of a child’s participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child’s age and maturity.
Our Rights

In 1989, governments across the world promised all children the same rights by adopting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention says what countries must do so that all children grow as healthy as possible, can learn at school, are protected, have their views listened to, and are treated fairly. These are our rights.

Article 1
Everyone under the age of 18 has all the rights in the Convention.

Article 2
The Convention applies to everyone: whatever their race, religion or abilities, whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from.

Article 3
The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all things that affect children.

Article 4
Governments must do all they can to make sure every child can enjoy their rights.

Article 5
Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to direct and guide their children as they grow up, so that they can enjoy their rights properly.

Article 6
Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to make sure that children survive and develop to their full potential.

Article 7
Every child has the right to a legal name and nationality, as well as the right to know and, as far as possible, to be cared for by their parents.

Article 8
Governments must respect every child’s right to a name, a nationality and family ties.

Article 9
Children must not be separated from their parents unless it is in their best interests (for example, if a parent is harming a child). Children whose parents have separated have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this might hurt the child.

Article 10
Governments must act quickly and sympathetically if a child or their parents want to live together in the same country. If a child’s parents live apart in different countries, the child has the right to visit both of them.

Article 11
Governments must do everything they can to stop children being taken out of their own country illegally or being prevented from returning.

Article 12
Every child has the right to a say in all matters affecting them and to have their views taken seriously.

Article 13
Every child has the right to say what they think and to ask and receive all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.

Article 14
Every child has the right to think and believe what they want and to practice their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Governments must respect the rights of parents to give their children information about this right.

Article 15
Every child has the right to meet with other children and to join groups and organizations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.

Article 16
Every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child’s private, family and home life.

Article 17
Every child has the right to reliable information from the media. This should be information that children can understand. Governments must help protect children from materials that could harm them.

Article 18
Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must support parents by giving them the help they need, especially if the child’s parents work.

Article 19
Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.

Article 20
If a child cannot be looked after by their family, governments must make sure that they are looked after properly by people who respect the child’s religion, culture and language.

Article 21
If a child is adopted, the first concern must be what is best for the child. All children must be protected and kept safe, whether they are adopted in the country where they were born or in another country.

Article 22
If a child is a refugee or is seeking refuge, governments must make sure that they have the same rights as any other child. Governments must help in trying to reunite child refugees with their parents.

Article 23
A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and independence, and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to provide support to disabled children.

Article 24
Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must work to provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

Article 25
If a child lives away from home (in care, hospital or in prison, for example), they have the right to a regular check of their treatment and the way they are cared for.

Article 26
Governments must provide extra money for the children of families in need.

Article 27
Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical, social and mental needs. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.

Article 28
Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free. Secondary education must be available for every child. Discipline in schools must respect children’s dignity. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

Article 29
Education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child’s respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.

Article 30
Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, regardless of whether these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.

Article 31
Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

Article 32
Governments must protect children from work that is dangerous or might harm their health or education.

Article 33
Governments must protect children from the use of illegal drugs.

Article 34
Governments must protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

Article 35
Governments must ensure that children are not abducted or sold.

Article 36
Governments must protect children from all other forms of bad treatment.

Article 37
No child shall be tortured or have other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. A child should be arrested or put in prison only as a last resort and for the shortest possible time. Children must not be in prison with adults. Children who are locked up must be able to keep in contact with their family.

Article 38
Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war. Governments must not allow children under the age of 15 to take part in war or join the armed forces.

Article 39
Children neglected, abused, exploited or who are victims of war must receive special help to help them recover their health, dignity and self-respect.

Article 40
A child accused or guilty of breaking the law must be treated with dignity and respect. They have the right to help from a lawyer and a fair trial that takes account of their age or situation. The child’s privacy must be respected at all times.

Article 41
If the laws of a particular country protect children better than the articles of the Convention, then those laws must stay in place.

Article 42
Governments should make the Convention known to children and adults.

The Convention has 54 articles in total. Articles 43–64 are about how adults and governments work together to make sure that all children get all their rights.
What is the Rights Respecting Schools Award?

The Unicef UK Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) supports schools across the UK to embed children’s human rights in their ethos and culture. The award recognises achievement in putting the UN Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) at the heart of a school’s practice to improve well-being and help all children realise their potential.

The award is based on principles of equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination and participation. The initiative started in 2006 and schools involved in the Award have reported a positive impact on relationships and well-being, leading to better learning and behaviour, improved academic standards and less bullying.

What impact does achieving the Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA) aim to have?

On our school
- RRSA is not an initiative, but instead provides an overarching set of values that improve the climate for learning and within which other initiatives can sit
- A deeper and more cohesive way of working
- Improved relationships with pupils and a reduced hierarchical divide between staff and pupils, due to a common rights-respecting language

On our children
- Improved self-esteem and feelings of being valued and listened to
- Increased levels of respect for each other, leading to improved relationships with other pupils and with staff
- A sense of security as rights-respecting language and behaviour is used consistently throughout the school
- Improved attainment and attendance, and a reduction in exclusions
- An understanding and respect of religions, cultures, beliefs and abilities different to their own
- A wider and deeper understanding of the world in which they live.

On our adults
- Strengthened collaborative working
- Increased consultative approach with other adults and pupils
- A sense of ownership in developing an approach that meets the needs and aspirations of the school as a whole
- A sense that the whole school is working towards a common goal, leading to feelings of empowerment for both staff and pupils
- A platform is developed for parental engagement and discussion.