

UNICEF UK RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL AWARD ASSESSMENT REPORT LEVEL TWO

School:	The Highcrest Academy
Headteacher:	Glen Burke
RRSA coordinator:	Emma Bowden
Local authority:	Buckinghamshire
Assessors:	Paul Harris and Martin Russell
Date:	3 rd May 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

The assessors would like to thank the pupils, the leadership team, staff, parents and governors for their warm welcome to the school, for the opportunity to speak with adults and pupils during the assessment, and for the detailed evidence provided to support the process. Prior to the assessment visit, the school provided a comprehensive self-evaluation form and impact evaluation form.

Particular strengths of the school are:

- a strategic commitment to the principles and values of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- an inclusive and supportive learning community where respect plays an integral part and rights are actively promoted and upheld
- young people's views are actively sought, respectfully listened to and taken seriously

Standards A, B, C and D have all been met.

2. REQUIREMENTS BEFORE ATTAINING LEVEL 2

No requirements noted.

3. MAINTAINING LEVEL 2

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 Level 2. Here are our recommendations for your school:

- Further develop the use of the Convention as an overarching ‘framework’ for strategic work including making links between particular Articles of the Convention with the school’s vision, improvement plan and policies.
- Explore further opportunities for the school to promote its Rights Respecting work (including a defined role for the steering group), as appropriate, with other schools, the wider community and in campaigning.
- Continue cross-referencing particular rights with curriculum areas and where appropriate include these in relevant documentation.
- Continue to develop pupils’ understanding of the global dimension and sustainability through themes such as the ‘UN Sustainable Development Goals’ and fair trade.

4. THE ASSESSMENT IN DETAIL

4.1. The school context

The Highcrest Academy is an academy for pupils aged 11 to 18 years. There are currently 877 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is 32.8% and 45.8% of pupils have English as an additional language; both of these figures are well above average. The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school was inspected by Ofsted in March 2016 and was graded ‘good’ in all areas. The school registered for the RRSA in March 2014 and achieved the RRSA Level 1 Award in March 2015. The school’s website provides further information about the history of the school which includes the following:

‘The academy has come a long way since 2001 when it was a “Fresh Start” School where the number of students for whom it was the first choice was in single figures. The previous school was closed because of the violent students and poor standards. The school was known locally as the “Prison on the Hill”. Highcrest has changed radically since then. It is now the only all ability academy in Buckinghamshire.’

4.2. Assessment information

Self-evaluation form received	Yes
Impact evaluation form received	Yes
Attendees at SLT meeting	Principal, senior vice principal, 2 vice principals (including the RRSA coordinator), 2 assistant headteachers and the academy’s business manager.
Number of children and young people interviewed	2 focus groups: 67 pupils in total (years 7 to sixth form) 2 learning walks (one per assessor): with principal or RRSA coordinator Class visits: total of approximately 112 pupils (years 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12).
Number of staff interviewed	6 teachers (includes trainee teacher), 4 support staff, 2 parents and 3 governors.
Evidence provided	Learning walks, class visits, pupil performance, feedback from meetings and written evidence.

Standard A: Rights-respecting values underpin leadership and management

Standard A has been achieved

Alongside The Highcrest Academy’s motto of ‘Aspire and Achieve’, the school’s mission statement ‘is to create a positive, secure and happy learning environment where all students experience success, friendship, respect and self-worth; where students value and celebrate the diverse talents and cultural heritage of all and achieve their full potential in becoming responsible citizens, respecting the rights of each other and contributing to our society’.

These aspirations are closely linked to the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and school leaders are committed advocates in using the Convention to underpin the school’s ethos and everyday practice. The headteacher explained how “*Article 2 reflects everything we do here*” and as a result of the school’s inclusive nature “*hope to see individuality shine through*”. Similarly, Article 13 is operating “*on every level*” within the academy with pupil involvement in areas of school life such as the new building development and staff interviews. Another leader commented how the academy’s “*mission statement embodies rights respecting*” and described how Article 3 is being used as a guiding principle in pupil admissions. Since achieving RRSA level 1, the impact of the school’s Rights Respecting work has been seen in several ways including a reduction in fixed term exclusions, how through pupil voice “*it’s the children’s school*” and that it is “*really understood at all levels*”. In the Academy’s self-evaluation of the impact of its Rights

Respecting work, all eight areas were assessed as being ‘significant’ or having ‘some noticeable impact’.

The school improvement plan includes reference to an outcome of RRSA ‘being used throughout the school now and with increasing support and enthusiasm’. There are also aims ‘to use RRSA to ensure that every classroom is a positive learning environment’ and to achieve RRSA level 2 along with action points to support this. Several school policies include a general statement about British Values and the ‘UNCRCs rights for the child’. The intention is to include specific Articles from the Convention as appropriate when policies are reviewed. Staff have received training; weekly staff bulletins include an Article from the Convention and there are email updates including links for video clips that can be shown in tutor time. Similarly, as part of the induction process, new staff (both teaching and support) learn about the Convention and the school’s expectations for a rights respecting environment.

Inclusion is a fundamental part of the school’s ethos and its strategic commitment to this is reflected in having the ‘equalities’ and ‘inclusion quality mark flagship’ awards. Pupils spoke about how the school promotes “*accepting every race, religion and nationality*” and supports “*identities to flourish*”. A school leader explained that there is “*zero tolerance*” to any form of homophobia. The school provides intensive English language sessions for newly arrived EAL pupils and ongoing classroom support as appropriate. A wide range of additional provision is available for pupils with special needs including individual support and alternative curriculum arrangements being made at key stage 4. The school’s ‘isolation room’ coupled with ‘isolated support’ is used for pupils to reflect upon a particular incident with the help of a member of the inclusion support staff whilst continuing with their studies. It was explained that “*because we are very focused on [the] rights of the child, isolated support numbers have significantly reduced*”. As a member of staff commented “*[the] way we support students has had massive impact*”. The school website explains ‘our team often work one to one with students to get to the root of difficulties or conflicts and have been trained in restorative justice’. It was also commented that some older pupils have “*made a real difference with some of the younger students*” in supporting them if they have been receiving isolated support. The use of the school’s ‘inclusion room’ has evolved over time and is now predominantly used to help support pupils with particular needs. A pastoral support plan is used for a pupil along with the support of outside agencies where appropriate. Alternative and vocational provision can also be made if required. The school also has year managers who work with staff to help address the particular needs of individual pupils. Discussions with staff reflected their strong commitment and dedication to supporting pupils.

The school plays an active part in the local community including supporting charities such as the ‘MPS Society’ and ‘The South Bucks Community Hospice’. Pupil e-safety ambassadors have given presentations to several local primary schools and some sixth form pupils have participated in the Model United Nations with other schools. A group of year 10 pupils attended an International trade fair last year in Lithuania, in connection with a neon light product they had created as part of ‘young enterprise’. The headteacher explained how it’s “*not just freedom of expression in school and the classroom but now on a more global scale*”. The school has the ‘NACE Challenge Award’ and staff have shared good practice with other schools regarding supporting ‘more able’ pupils.

The school holds the British Council’s ‘International School Award’ reflecting its commitment to ensuring that pupil’s knowledge and understanding of the wider world are nurtured. Part

of the work connected with the award involved working with a partner secondary school in India. The school's 'carnival week' has also provided opportunities to explore the international dimension, including children's rights and 'Black History Month' is celebrated each October. The academy has developed the 'Westminster to Wycombe' project in partnership with their local MP to enable pupils to develop their skills around debating and to recognise the role that they can play in the democratic process. Topics debated include international issues such as the Syrian conflict.

Standard B:
The whole school community learns about the CRC

Standard B has been achieved

Pupils gave examples of a wide range of rights. These included the right to an education, to be protected from abuse and neglect, to privacy, to be able to practise one's own religion, to learn, to have freedom of speech, to be protected from child labour, for the views of the child to be respected, not to be discriminated against and the right to relax and play. They understand that rights are inherent, "as soon as you are born", universal (although recognising that rights are not always upheld) and unconditional. Similarly, pupils were clear that rights are inalienable and that "[you] don't lose them if you are having a bad day" and that "trying to take away rights would be like you are not human". Pupils were articulate in describing how the school helps them enjoy their rights giving numerous examples. These included the school supporting "freedom of expression" via the academy council, the provision of school trips as part of the right to an education and free time and also through making pupils aware of their rights.

Governors have been able to attend training about the RRSA. Learning walks have included a focus about the school's Rights Respecting work, including talking with pupils about their rights. A governor explained how "it's all about building positive relationships", that "it's in the ethos of the school; wellbeing and inclusion are central" and 'developing RRSA across the academy has helped us refresh some of the things we are already doing'. Parents are informed about the RRSA at the new intake induction evening and are kept updated through the school's newsletters. For example, hyperlinks in some of the newsletters have been connected to Unicef secondary school assembly presentation slides covering issues such as child labour and the UN Global Goal 6. A parent reflecting about the impact of pupils knowing their rights and that adults are duty bearers described how their child "one day thanked me for making sure that she gets everything she really should have [her rights]".

Pupils have learnt about rights in a variety of ways. Assembly presentation themes are linked to particular Articles from the Convention. Copies of the Convention are found on display in corridors and in key areas of the school buildings. Pupils gave examples of where they had learnt about rights in lessons including RE which "helps us respect other religions", PSHE and topics in subject areas such as history and geography. A sixth form pupil explained in history they had learnt about multiculturalism and "acceptance of different cultures". During a learning walk, a class of year 12 pupils studying 'person centred care for teenagers' as part of their health and social care course, were asked by the assessor what they understood by the term 'dignity'. Answers included "respect", being treated equally and

“not to put them down”. The pupils understood that disabled people have the same rights as everyone else. Staff also gave examples of where links had been between topics and rights. In technology, issues such as child labour and fair trade have been covered, in year 7 Spanish, the culture, education and standard of living in Spanish speaking countries such as Guatemala have been explored and in geography there have been opportunities to discuss a range of rights such as the right to be registered at birth, to have an adequate standard of living, to have an education and the right to have clean water. Examples of curriculum documentation with links to rights included a year 7 PE topic about ‘healthy, active lifestyles’ (Articles 24, 31 and 33) and a year 10 technology topic about cultural foods, health and well-being (Articles 12, 14, 28 and 29).

Pupils understand that for many children and young people around the world their rights are being denied such as in the Syrian conflict and because of the effects of poverty. A pupil described how *“Malala had to fight for her education”*. When asked about how extreme flooding caused by climate change is linked to rights, pupils were able to make connections in terms of the impact upon a range of rights including the right to an education, to play, to be safe and access to the clean water, the lack of which could lead to cholera. A parent commented that pupils, as a result of RRSA being prominent across the academy, *“now have much more awareness of the global perspective and their role in the world”*.

Standard C:
The school has a rights-respecting ethos

Standard C has been achieved

The whole community collaborated to develop the Highcrest Academy Charter. As well as being displayed in all classrooms and learning spaces, it is published for every pupil in their ‘Planner’. The charter focuses on Articles 2, 13, 28 and 29 and identifies agreed actions for young people and for adults to respect these rights. Care was taken to ensure that the Charter is consistent with the academy’s mission statement and motto. Some of the pupil actions from the charter are used as a focus within the ‘on report’ system; this helps to emphasise to pupils, especially when things have gone wrong, that actions to respect rights are always a priority. The charter is explained to pupils on their induction day and is revisited with the whole school community every September. It was interesting to note that a member of staff commented that *“the more staff and pupils have worked with the rights, the less the charters are relied on”*. This may suggest that the charter has fulfilled a function in taking the academy to a place where rights have become ‘the norm’. Consideration could be given to a review of the charter in the future to refresh and re-engage the whole community in their focus on rights.

Mutual respect is a noticeable characteristic of the academy and the assessors experienced a calm, purposeful atmosphere around the site; respectful relationships were evident between pupils and adults and among peers. Rights respecting language has become established with both pupils and staff using a framework of common language based on respect for rights. Rights respecting actions are celebrated in various ways, for example in the Technology area pupils nominate their peers for ‘Stars’ when actions show particular support for the rights of others. The school leadership team have taken the innovative step of introducing a focus on ‘Relationships for Learning’; CPD was provided to introduce the

concept and the identified characteristics are now formally looked for and recognised in the lesson observation process.

The young people clearly understand that they have a right to an education and to be active participants in their own learning. This is reinforced in the wording of the school charter. The concept of aspiration is embraced by all and pupil targets include an 'aspirational grade'. There is a significant emphasis on the personalisation of learning, one pupil explained "*our targets change; they are specific to us as a person*". All pupils have mentoring meetings which provide an opportunity to discuss their progress with their key member of staff and their parents. One parent said of these meetings that "*you see a real dialogue between the pupil and the teacher. The teachers really respect the children as individuals; they are in the driving seat. They are really partners in the process.*" The academy's data demonstrates both a reduction in negative incidents impacting upon learning and improvement in 'teaching and learning' observation data.

When asked in a focus group meeting, all young people said they felt safe at school and they were able to give examples of how the school helps them be safe including 'lockdown drills', learning about on-line safety in 'Life Lessons' and anti-bullying work, with one pupil declaring "*bullying is not tolerated here*". The academy provides a counsellor (accessible to staff too) whose support is highly valued by the pupils and they trust the email system used to secure support. There is also a 'concerns box' system which enables pupils to raise issues discretely with the Heads of Learning. All prefects receive first aid training as part of their induction and some are involved in running a mentoring programme to support younger pupils who struggle to engage with academy life and learning. It is clear, therefore, that pupils understand that they have a right to be safe and their views around this issue are monitored and acted upon regularly by the senior leadership team. In this regard, school leaders explained to the assessors the context of some of the pupil responses to the questionnaire used earlier in the year as part of the RRSA application. The pupils themselves are empowered to act for the safety and wellbeing of each other; assessors were informed of occasions when pupils have made appropriate and effective disclosures to staff, out of concern for their peers.

The school's culture is clearly founded on mutual respect and emphasises the uniqueness and dignity of each person. The pupils who the assessors spoke with, felt strongly that the systems in place throughout the academy were fair and transparent. Whilst recognising the role of adult intervention when relationships break down, the young people were clear that disagreements are often resolved through their own actions. One pupil referred to the right to privacy, saying that sometimes people just need time and space "*to be left alone, as part of sorting things out*". Others referred to the fact that "*freedom of speech can help you negotiate*" and to the importance of "*respecting their opinion*" even though you might completely disagree. The rooms provided for young people unable to be with their timetabled classes/teacher (either as a short term response or a planned provision) were visited and clearly emphasised respect and dignity alongside an unequivocal focus on learning.

Pupils across the academy understand that many children in the world are being denied their rights; a year 10 technology lesson was observed in which there was a detailed discussion about the huge implications of child labour with regard to a wide range of rights including safety and the lack of education. The desire of the pupils to engage with complex global issues was exemplified by a parent who spoke of their child raising the issue of child soldiers in conversation at home and the parent was surprised but welcomed the fact that

“they are engaging with issues that they may not otherwise have come across”. Asked about the attitudes and actions they would associate with being a global citizen the pupils’ responses included *“non-discrimination”*, *“respecting others and treating people fairly”* and *“community involvement”*.

Standard D:

Children are empowered to become active citizens and learners

Standard D has been achieved

Article 12 of the Convention is fundamental to the ethos of the academy and is evident in the day to day life of the school. Young people of all ages and abilities asserted that their ‘voice’ and opinions are always welcomed and acted upon. There is a strong, democratically structured system for ‘pupil voice’ involving year councils and a whole school ‘academy council’. When asked about this system the pupils strongly asserted that they trust it to be fair and effective. Examples of significant changes brought about as a result of ‘pupil voice’ include the provision of additional revision spaces at lunchtimes, the introduction of ‘B’ teams to enable wider participation in competitive sport and academy representation, a change to uniform regulations during particularly hot weather and a range of charity initiatives. The pupils have also devised the guidelines for the sixth form study area and they are currently engaged in consultation about *“different coloured ties to represent ‘House’ membership”* In addition to this, there are consultations with pupils on a range of curriculum and pastoral issues and the school leadership team use such feedback to inform strategic decisions. The senior pupils (who are elected via a full school ballot) meet with the school leadership team on a termly basis and oversee a budget which allows them to initiate projects on behalf of their peers. A recent ‘site walk’ with the academy’s business manager resulted in improvements to the provision of drinking water for pupils. Parents value the emphasis on pupil voice at Highcrest saying that *“they are more vocal.... It takes them out of their shell and helps them to be better citizens”*.

The PSHE curriculum for all year groups has been restructured as ‘Life Lessons’ and both pupils and staff recognise this as an area of learning that makes almost constant reference to the Convention. Content is extremely varied and covers issues and topics such as bullying, radicalisation, relationships and sex education, recycling and sustainability. The school liaises with many external agencies to ensure the widest possible support for the young people in taking informed choices in their lives. In tutor time pupils have access to current news and media stories with the opportunity to explore and discuss these together. “Wellbeing Days” (including one for staff) include workshops and access to external providers on issues as varied as bereavement support and housing. Following a recent reduction in policing numbers, the school fought to reinstate a local provision enabling the pupils to engage positively and proactively with issues around crime and their safety both in school and in the community. The school’s innovative approach to the curriculum, with opportunities to pursue a range of more vocationally oriented courses ensures meaningful learning for all and greater aspiration; this is backed up with a quality programme of careers information, advice and guidance. The impact of these includes the academy’s recognised high performance at sixth form and a zero ‘NEET’ figure.



The young people at Highcrest have a growing sense of the role they can play in the wider world. Comments in the focus group sessions included reference to FairTrade as way of making a difference to the rights of others. The young people are increasingly proactive in supporting the realisation of the rights of others. For example, their current focus on raising funds for the local hospice ensures that *“people can get their right to health care whatever their age”*. Last summer a group of pupils spontaneously initiated a plan to support the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire. Looking more globally, ‘Comic Relief’ is a regular focus for the school and a group of pupils, connected through the Erasmus project, are working with young people in Spain and France to raise awareness of radicalisation. Strong engagement with rights and the active promotion of respect for the rights of others are clearly important characteristics of life at Highcrest Academy. The pupils inspire hope for the future. As one young man explained, *“knowing about rights helps to shape a new generation... it’s the way to a better life”*.