

Allenby Primary School as Level 2 Rights Respecting School¹



Allenby Primary in Southall is a one-form entry school with 265 children on roll; currently there are a dozen children receiving specialist provision in the SLD unit. The school achieved UNICEF's Level 1 Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA) in November 2013, and was the first school in Ealing to be granted the Level 2 award (March 2015). In UNICEF's most recent assessment report, the head, Baljit Ahluwalia, is quoted as saying "There would be no Allenby without rights-respecting, it is in the blood." During my recent visit, I commented to the rights officer who was

one of my guides, "You guys know this stuff down to your bones." "No, Miss," she replied passionately, "we know it in our hearts!"

Regardless of what part of their anatomy retains this information, the school itself has displays dedicated to its commitment to the programme in every classroom, corridor and office. In fact, so intrigued was I by the creativity the different classes showed in these displays that I appointed two of my guides as note-takers so that I could concentrate fully on what I was seeing, hearing and feeling.

It is impossible to miss or minimise the importance that the staff, students and their parents give to Allenby's status as a Rights Respecting School. The whole community was involved in the negotiation and implementation of the school charter, which has been translated into many different languages by parents². In addition, individual classes have their own rights-based agreements. Students interviewed by the UNICEF assessors said that they would not give up their charters to go back to 'rules': "We feel we are valued because we were consulted."³ These charters are at the centre of school life: individual classrooms have note boards where children can jot down how they have manifested one of the articles.



¹ Report of a visit made to Allenby Primary by Nora Leonard, SACRE consultant.

² There are 23 different ethnicities at Allenby, with 22 different home languages spoken.

³ UNICEF UK RRSA Level Two assessment report.

As one of my guides commented: “Everyone gets a chance to express themselves: Article 12: the right to a voice.”



Headteacher Baljit Ahluwalia in front of the SLD unit charter.

children from the unit in regular activities ensures that pupils are being educated in how to support people with additional needs.

“The RRSA recognises achievement in putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) at the heart of a school’s planning, policies, practice and ethos. For a school to receive accreditation, it must evidence that it has reached the four standards of a Rights Respecting School.”⁴ Standard A requires that rights-respecting values underpin leadership and management, and is considered by UNICEF UK to be a strength of Allenby. The RRSA programme aims to build the capacity of children as rights-holders to claim their rights. Adults are considered the ‘duty-bearers’ whose obligation is to ensure these rights, and performance management at Allenby requires that all staff and governors are committed to the task of fulfilling these obligations.

To achieve Standard B the whole school community must learn about the CRC. My guides repeatedly stressed the importance of the Allenby community, showing me window displays that were facing the outside of the school so that parents could see them, and learn about the various school projects and endeavours. The evidence that the school had fulfilled the requirement of Standard C—that it has a rights-respecting ethos—was impossible to miss. As the UNICEF officers assessing the school for Level 2 observed, the children in each class own their individual charters, and can “explain with enthusiasm” how these have been created and used.⁵

⁴ <http://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/about-the-award/what-is-rrsa/the-rrsa-standards/>

⁵ UNICEF UK RRSA Level Two assessment report.



Library display

Standard D requires that the pupils are empowered to become active citizens and learners. Student council members are directly involved in developing the creative curriculum and special school events; the pupils themselves decided that they should be known as “rights officers” because they see everything through the lens of the RRS ethos.

There was a palpable confidence amongst my guides that their opinions mattered, and that children are capable of being agents of change. One of the highlights of the tour was a visit to the playground where I was told that each class had been given the opportunity to choose one feature for the new playground—as long, of course, as it fulfilled safety requirements.

Allenby’s pupils show concern about international issues, and the need to ensure that children across the globe are able to access their rights. The school is active in several charities such as Save the Children and Children in Need; having established a close working link with Free the Children,⁶ they are participating in a project to raise money to build a school in a less economically developed country. The prominent “brick by brick” display in the corridor helps them understand that it can take a long time to raise the required funds.



Brick by brick: a long way to go

Several of my guides acknowledged the fact that Allenby’s one-form entry was in large part responsible for the tightness of the community: as one expressed with pride, “I know the name of every student in the school.” They were also full of praise for headteacher Baljit Ahluwalia: for improving the playground and the school dinners, but most of all for introducing the UNICEF programme to the school.

I want to thank Baljit and my guides Daud, Raheema, Naima, Sumaya, Scarlett and Maya B for sharing their passion with me. It is clear that taking part in the RRS programme has infused them with confidence and self-esteem: to say that I left the school inspired would be an understatement.

~Nora Leonard, Ealing SACRE consultant, July 2015

⁶ <http://www.freethechildren.com/>



My guides