



Denying
child rights
is wrong.
Put it right.

RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL AWARD CHARTERS

Establishing and building shared values for a rights respecting classroom.

RRSA STANDARD C:10

L1: Charters or agreements based on the UNCRC which help everyone to understand their responsibilities in relation to rights are introduced into all classrooms and the wider school.

L2: Charters or agreements have created a whole-school ethos based on mutual respect for rights in which a traditional structure of rules is rarely required.

Charters are not only very popular, they are also included in the standards for achieving the RRSA. Why is this? The collaboration between children and adults in age- and ability-appropriate ways to agree a charter for a rights-respecting classroom / school area has proved to be a very valuable part of the process of making the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child a real and meaningful guide to action on a day-to-day basis.

1. WHAT IS A CLASS CHARTER?

A charter for a rights respecting classroom (or any other part of the school) sets out:

- those rights selected from the UNCRC which are deemed to be most relevant. The rights should be worded in language that is meaningful to the children.
- beside each right, the actions agreed between all children and adults to ensure that the rights are realised.
- who agreed to the charter. This is often done by all signing it.

What is agreed is then set out in a way that can be easily seen around the room / area.

Charters can be developed with the active participation of children from infant onwards. A charter acts as a reminder of the shared values and principles based on the UNCRC and is applicable to all.



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2. WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE CHARTER?

The aim is to make the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child a real and meaningful guide to action on a day-to-day basis. This means the process of creating the charter should be inclusive and model its aims so that the class charter unites the children and young people in the class. The charter develops a sense of ownership of the classroom and learning. Once developed it becomes a point of reference for the class and once signed by the teacher, assistants and pupils it signifies a shared enterprise and acts as the 'social glue' which binds everyone together. We would recommend that children also have a say in where and how it is displayed. These decisions will be influenced by the setting, area and age of those involved.

3. HOW SHOULD THE CHARTER BE CREATED?

Children and adults in a class or tutor group familiarise themselves with the articles of the UNCRC (using child friendly summaries if appropriate). Those rights they decide are the most important in relation to what is done in that classroom / area are selected and voted on. This should be done in a way that is age and ability appropriate. (There are examples of possible approaches below.)

The **process** of developing a charter is as important as the end product. The process should be participatory, inclusive and build on prior learning about the difference between wants and needs and the reciprocity of rights. For very young children rights may need to be reworded.

An approach to developing a primary school class charter (developed by Portway Junior School).

- Recap on the UNCRC
- Consolidate why the convention was agreed upon and why it exists, and the importance of children under 18 having rights. Extend to include the Human Declaration of Rights for adults and the similarities and differences.
- Choose the articles, from the UNCRC, that specifically relate to their lives in school (for example, Articles 3, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 37, 39) then get the children to discuss how and why these relate to life in school.
- Diamond nine the children's choices making sure they can justify their reasons. (These have differed in each class depending on the cohort, ethnic backgrounds etc.)
- Use the 6 most popular and reasoned article for the class charter; the children need to identify the responsibilities that then link with the 6 most popular articles.
- Agree the Charter's wording and ownership by the class/tutor group or school. Vote democratically about its design, placement within the school/class, signing of the Charter and what role the teacher plays on the Charter (responsibilities /rights /signature etc). Talk about any issues that the children have – for example not signing, wording, if new people arrive.
- Link the wording on the Charter to the UNCRC
- Then link the Charter to rewards and sanctions, discussing and agreeing as a class how these link into the classroom.
- Revisit and tweak the Charter as a class, a good exercise if new people join the class, good for Circle Time and helps with children settling into a new class/school.



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How do you link rights and responsibilities?

The three main points to remember are:

- The rights of the child are not conditional on responsibilities. Rights do imply responsibilities but are independent of responsibilities.
- A right cannot be withdrawn as a punishment but what can be withdrawn is the opportunity to infringe other people's rights.
- Adults working with children need to model rights respecting behaviour and use rights respecting language in order to reinforce the benefits of this values system

In learning that these rights are universal, children understand that this means that their rights are bound up in respecting the rights of others. Some like to refer to this reciprocity as rights and responsibilities.

It is most important that adults and children alike learn not only that all children should be rights respecting but also that **adults** bear the responsibility for ensuring these rights are known about, understood and realised.

This means that:

- parents and carers are responsible for ensuring they model rights respecting behaviour in bringing up their children
- schools are responsible for promoting a rights respecting environment
- children learn to become rights respecting global citizens

As children mature, their understanding of a rights respecting way of life grows more profound. They learn to distinguish between absolute and relative rights. They see the importance of adults and young people upholding the values and principles in the charters to which they have subscribed both in day-to-day matters and in terms of issues locally and globally. This will be reflected in the increasing sophistication of the charters.

The end product itself should always be subject to review by the class / school from time to time in order to reinforce / refresh commitment and, importantly, to allow for refinement of understanding and expression. It therefore helps if the charter is dated. Even if a school decides to adopt an overarching charter for a rights respecting school, there should be provision for a regular revisiting, and refreshing of commitment to it by all.



4. IN WHAT WAY IS IT DIFFERENT FROM ‘GOLDEN RULES’ OR ‘CODES OF BEHAVIOUR’?

The class charter is **not a direct behaviour management tool**. It indicates that a significant part of the role of the school and the teacher is to help realise the rights of the child. Rules are something which are often externally imposed, whereas charters are democratically negotiated using an internationally agreed values framework. A charter should begin a process of replacing rules.

“We used to have rules that you made and we often broke. Now we’ve got responsibility and we have to choose, there’s no-one else to blame but me. It’s my responsibility to make the right choice!” Y4 child Junior School.

5. HOW MIGHT THE CHARTERS BE STRUCTURED?

The charter should always be rooted in articles of the Convention with pupils selecting and expanding on the articles that they consider are most appropriate.

Three columns showing what children and adults need to do to realise their rights.

One way that is recommended is to set out the selected rights in one column and then add two more columns to allow children and adults to set down what actions they will take to ensure these rights are realised for all:

| What children agree to do to realise this right | UNCRC | What adults will do to realise this right |
|--|--|---|
| Play in a way that does not stop others playing. | Article 31 (leisure, play and culture). Every child has the right to relax, play and join in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities (or other wording with same meaning). | Ensure provision for range of play opportunities. |

Venn diagram showing what children and adults need to do to realise their rights.

Another approach illustrated in the example below uses a Venn diagram. Each article is set out and underneath the article **children / young people** and **adults** list the actions they need to take to realise the right. In the middle is a circle showing the actions to realise the right that **both** parties need to take. The example below is from Wallasey Secondary School:

Wallasey School Charter

Article 19 of the UNCRC - Children and young people have a right to be protected from violence, abuse and neglect.

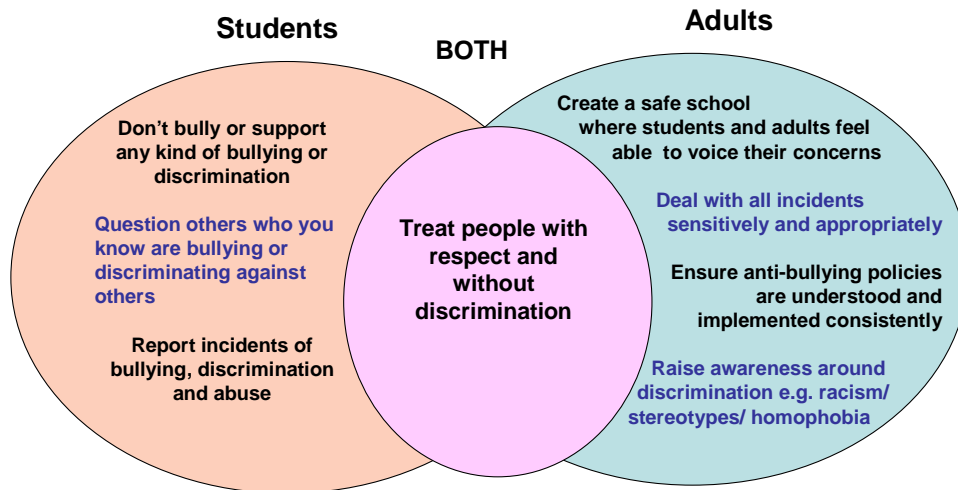
This covers:

Safety

Bullying

Discrimination

SEAL



Two columns showing rights and responsibilities

| Right | Responsibility |
|-------|----------------|
| | |

Creating two columns: one each for Rights and Responsibilities has been a popular approach. With this form of charter it is important, however, to avoid overloading the responsibilities column and to ensure that children do not end up with a charter that only refers to their responsibilities.

In arriving at actions / responsibilities it is not unusual for pupils to identify more than one. It is acceptable to have more than one responsibility allied to a right.



6. DO CHARTERS VARY WITH THE AGE OF CHILDREN?

Yes, initially with very young children they may be very simple and use images instead of words or as well as. As children move into upper Key stage 2 it would be more common for children to make more references to the articles in the convention.

In secondary schools tutor groups / year groups can generate charters at the outset, depending on the extent of support from teachers and assistants. Due to the way most secondary schools are structured, however, they should look at ways of securing agreement to a charter to which all children, perhaps through their tutor groups have been able to contribute and to which everyone agrees to sign up. This can then be the point of reference for the whole school.

7. WHY DO ADULTS SIGN?

This is more than a symbolic gesture. It is about indicating to children and reminding adults that the whole experience of teaching and learning is a shared enterprise and will work best if everyone keeps to the class charter. It strengthens the relationship between children and adults. This is also true of charters covering lunch times, play areas, extended school spaces.

8. ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES

- Teachers could also link the development of a rights respecting charter to lessons to improve social and emotional literacy. In England the SEAL materials could be used for support if needed.
- Children should be encouraged to see how they could link any involvement in school initiatives like Eco Schools and Healthy Schools into the actions column in their charter.
- Note also links to the Citizenship objectives such as:
 - Research & debating issues/events
 - Know why/how rules/laws are made
 - Discuss Anti- Social behaviour
 - Take part in making/changing rules
 - Different types of responsibilities
 - Resolving differences
 - Explaining choice