

SERVICES FOR SCHOOLS

# Classroom charters

Building the shared values of a rights  
respecting classroom

# Classroom charters

## Introduction

Classroom charters are very popular. The collaboration between children and adults in age and ability-appropriate ways to agree a charter for a rights-respecting classroom has proved to be a very valuable part of the process of making the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) a real and meaningful guide to action at a day to day level.

## What is a class charter?

Children and adults in a class or tutor group select those rights they agree are the most important in relation to what is done in that classroom. The process of developing a charter is as important as the end product. The process must be participatory, inclusive and build on the prior learning about the difference between wants and needs.

For very young children rights may need to be reworded. As children move beyond their early years, they will learn that their rights under the UNCRC are based on their needs to thrive as human beings. These rights are to do with:

- their health and safety (survival)
- their protection from harm and abuse
- the development of their potential
- their inclusion and participation in the life of the society around them (immediately, locally and globally).

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. There is a danger, however, in that by just looking at this reciprocity the responsibilities of adults are left out.

Children also learn that adults, especially their parents, teachers, carers and policy makers have the responsibility to ensure that these rights are known about, promoted and respected by all.

So the charter for a rights respecting classroom is for all, including adults.

The end product itself is always subject to review by the class from time to time in order to reinforce/refresh commitment. This is often done at the beginning of each term.

What is agreed is then set out in a way that can be easily seen around the room and signed up to by all those participating.

## What is the aim of a class charter?

The process of developing the class charter can serve to unite the class. It develops a sense of ownership of the classroom and learning. Once developed the charter 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 how it is displayed.

## In what way is it different from *golden rules* or *codes of behaviour*?

The class charter is not a direct behaviour management tool. It is indicating 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. It 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!”*

Year 4 child junior school

## How do you approach the linking of rights with responsibilities?

The main point to remember is that *the rights of the child are not conditional on responsibilities. Rights do imply 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

A child needs to see and hear how rights abusing/denying behaviour is identified by an adult and how the adult uses the language of rights to help a child understand how they have failed to respect the rights of others and how this choice has negative consequences. This will help the children themselves become empowered by the language and concepts they acquire from this rights respecting culture. This reasoning may still lead to a child being removed from their classroom to have their right to education experienced alone or in a different setting, but the rationale is clearly rooted in the rights respecting framework. Pupils who may end up excluded from school still have the same right to education as children in school. Under the Convention it is up to the state to organise this.

# How might the charters be developed and structured?

When this work first began in Hampshire class charters were often framed in terms of rights and responsibilities. However, this tended to give the impression that rights were conditional on responsibilities and in some cases the responsibilities column far outweighed the rights. This is not in the spirit of the UNCRC. So there has been a move away from this structure. It does not imply that the word responsibilities cannot



be used, but that we have to be careful. A good use of the term is around the responsibilities that adults have as duty bearers under the Convention to ensure the rights of the child. There are some examples of class charters available on the RRE website:

[www.hants.gov.uk/education/hias/rights-respecting-education/gettingstarted/examples-of-class-charters.htm](http://www.hants.gov.uk/education/hias/rights-respecting-education/gettingstarted/examples-of-class-charters.htm)

Schools have also provided opportunities for pupils and adults to expand these charters into other areas, such as lunch times, playtime and at home. The latter are featured in the section on Parents and community.

What children agree to do	UNCRC	What adults will do to realise this right
Play in a way that does not stop others playing.	<b>Article 31</b> (leisure, play and culture). Every child has the right to relax, play and join in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.	Ensure provision for range of play opportunities.

Right	Actions to realise rights
All children have this right: <b><i>To be heard and opinions listened to.</i></b>	Children should: <b><i>Listen to others speaking and respect other people's opinions.</i></b>  To ensure all children in the class enjoy the same right. By not allowing others to speak, children can deny another child from enjoying this right.



**Fairfields Primary School  
Whole School Charter 2011 – 2012**

<b>Rights</b>	<b>Children's responsibilities</b>	<b>Adults' responsibilities</b>
All children have the right to an education (Article 28).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try our best and make sure we do not waste our time in school or stop others from learning.</li><li>• Concentrate, listen to, and look at, the person speaking to us.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teach us and help us learn new things that are interesting and exciting.</li><li>• Find out how we learn best.</li></ul>
All children have the right to clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment. (Article 24).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Choose to eat healthily.</li><li>• Take care not to drop litter or food and pick things up if we do.</li><li>• Tidy our things away.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide healthy meal options.</li><li>• Keep the school clean.</li><li>• Set a good example.</li></ul>
All children have the right to use their talents to the full. They should also learn to respect other people and their cultures (Article 29).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Practise our talents so that we can improve.</li><li>• Be respectful to others.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teach us how to be respectful.</li><li>• Find out what we are good at and help us to improve.</li><li>• Praise and encourage our talents.</li></ul>
Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account (Article 12).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider how our opinions will affect others.</li><li>• Listen to other people's opinions.</li><li>• Speak to others respectfully.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen to us and act on what we say where possible.</li><li>• Help us to see when our opinions might stop us being safe.</li></ul>
Children have a right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life, their good name, their families and their homes (Article 16).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make sure we do not spread gossip.</li><li>• Treat people with respect.</li><li>• Only look at other people's belongings if invited.</li><li>• Respect people's privacy in the toilets.</li><li>• Give people 'space' if they need it.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask before looking in children's trays.</li><li>• Remind children to keep their passwords and personal information safe.</li></ul>
All children have the right to be safe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen to warnings.</li><li>• Be careful crossing the road to the field.</li><li>• Walk sensibly around the school.</li><li>• Avoid playing dangerous games.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Look after us.</li><li>• Remind us about things that might be dangerous.</li><li>• Remind us how we should behave in school when we forget.</li></ul>