

SERVICES FOR SCHOOLS

RRR evidence of impact

Research findings summary – three year
study, resilience

RRR evidence of impact

Executive summary

Research in Hampshire (Professors Covell and Howe) and the University of Sussex for UNICEF shows the main impact is on:

- better self-regulation of both learning and social behaviours (less bullying and exclusions)
- critical thinking, especially around rights dilemmas
- improved self-esteem with new aspirations
- enhanced moral development and thinking
- improved behaviour and relationships
- more positive attitudes towards diversity in society and the reduction of prejudice
- development of pupils as global citizens
- improvements in attendance, learning, school engagement and academic standards
- pupils in more disadvantaged circumstances.

Summary of Covell and Howe's three year research project in 12 Hampshire schools

Teachers in the schools in which the rights, respect and responsibility (RRR) was fully implemented reported that their pupils showed higher levels of engagement, rights-respecting behaviours, and participation. They reported also decreasing levels of teacher burnout during the implementation of RRR which sustained over the time of the study. Teachers in these schools reported decreased levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation of their pupils, and increased levels of a sense of achievement.

Pupils in the schools in which the RRR was fully implemented demonstrated a greater understanding of rights and responsibilities than did their peers in the schools in which the RRR was less fully implemented. They had knowledge of the specific rights of the Convention, they understood the nature and value of respecting rights, and they understood that rights imply but are independent of responsibilities. Pupils who were aged nine and up completed surveys assessing their level of engagement in the school. Again those in the fully implemented RRR schools showed higher scores than their peers in the less fully implemented RRR schools. Pupils in schools in which RRR was fully implemented reported higher levels of enjoying school, a more rights-respecting, fair and caring school environment, and more supportive and cooperative relationships with their peers and teachers.

“Compared with their peers, those in the RRR schools perceived a more respectful and fair and safe school climate, had more positive relationships at school, and participated more in learning and school committees and activities ...

Perhaps the most important change seen in RRR schools was in the amount of participation ... and the use of democratic teaching, positive classroom management, and less confrontational dealings with their students. Teachers were listening to children, taking their views into account ... with improved relationships and a greater sense that their teaching was effective."

Among the more intriguing findings in the three years of the evaluation research, is the possibility that the positive effects of RRR are the most pronounced in the schools which are in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Within this sample, the most pronounced improvements in pupils' motivations, behaviours, engagement, and academic performance were in the schools with the greatest proportion of disadvantaged students. The knowledge that they are rights-bearing citizens of the present and the experience with having their rights respected – in particular their participation rights – appears to have profoundly affected these children.

In summary, the RRR has been demonstrated to be a very effective means not only of children's rights education, but of education. The schools that are rights-consistent and rights-respecting are functioning optimally and in the words of the overarching principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), in "*the child's best interests.*" As such, Hampshire has provided an outstanding model of how to provide children's rights education. It is a model that can and should be emulated in all education jurisdictions.

Hampshire RRR and resilience research

Executive summary

Previous RRR research in Hampshire had indicated one intriguing finding which was that the positive effects of RRR were more pronounced in schools in very disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This raised the possibility of RRR promoting resilience in children and is the focus of this research.

Further research was carried out with Year 6 pupils in Hampshire primary schools, one serving a disadvantaged area that had embedded RRR, (Woodview) (*pseudonyms are used for all schools to preserve anonymity of research participants*), another in the same area that had just begun some RRR work, (Riverview) and a third in a more advantaged area that had also developed RRR (Hillside), 2009 -2011.

Children at Woodview compared with the children at the other schools:

- reported significantly higher levels of engagement in school
- perceived their teachers to be more supportive
- rated their school climate as more positive and respectful
- had a higher level of participation, academic motivation, and effort than the children in the other two schools
- had more positive relationships with fellow students and staff.

In addition, comparisons between the pupils in the two more disadvantaged schools showed that Woodview pupils had:

- more positive self-concepts
- fewer social problems such as bullying and fighting at school
- more optimism about their futures
- more commitment to stay in school longer.

Moreover:

- the SATs scores between the advantaged Hillside students and the disadvantaged students at Woodview were almost indistinguishable
- the students from Woodview showed a socio-demographic profile that largely paralleled those from Riverview, and an achievement profile that paralleled those from Hillside.

The current research was designed to see if these positive attributes found in pupils from Woodview (and other schools) could be maintained in the first two years of secondary schooling. In other words, did RRR help to promote educational resilience in these pupils? (*Educational resilience describes the likelihood of success in school among students who are at risk of failure because of personal and social circumstances*, Martin and Marsh, 2006; Peck et al, 2008). As many as possible of these children were surveyed and interviewed at the end of Year 8.

The pupils transferred after Year 6 to one of three secondary schools: Waverley, Halcyon and Schaller schools. Both Halcyon and Waverley schools had implemented RRR but the third school Schaller, although not opposed to RRR in principle, had chosen to develop its own version. The differences among the three schools are reflected in their free school meals (FSM) indicator: Halcyon has 5.4 % FSM, Waverley 10 %, and Schaller 16%. Schaller also has the highest number of special educational needs (SEN) students at 30%. Pupils from Woodview for the most part are attending Schaller Secondary School.

Main findings of the resilience research by Professors Covell and Howe

- Students at Halcyon Secondary School reported the highest level of parental involvement, which is a key predictor of engagement in school and achievement. In addition, pupils at Halcyon reported higher levels of self-esteem and optimism than did those from Waverley; more physical activity than students in either of the other two schools; and the lowest levels of risk behaviours.
- Second, and of major importance, we note that there were few differences between the Halcyon and Schaller pupils. Students currently attending Schaller (predominantly from Woodview with its high level of implementation of RRR) reported significantly higher levels of participation in school and, perhaps surprisingly, similar levels of academic orientation and interpersonal harmony on the engagement scale compared with pupils from both other schools. Moreover, they showed no significant differences from their more advantaged peers at Halcyon on levels of self-esteem or optimism for the future.

- Overall, these data suggest that the RRR which the students experienced at Woodview has, at the very least, contributed to promoting educational resilience among them. If the RRR was not robust, then the Schaller children would have engaged in more high risk behaviours, had more social problems at school, and decreased levels of school engagement, compared to the pupils at Halcyon. The findings point to the importance of RRR in building educational resilience for socially disadvantaged children which, in turn, increases the odds that these children will experience educational success.
- The continued increase in the number of schools developing RRR over the past few years suggests that sustaining rights-consistent schooling may be more of a challenge than implementing it. The headteachers and area specialists who we interviewed identified three obstacles to sustainability that are consistent with our observations and past research: complacency, misuse, and tokenism.

Recommendations

- Use the findings of the overall research to encourage the full implementation of RRR in all schools and promote resilience.
- Continue promoting the value of listening to children's perspectives on what is important to them in school, and acting on their recommendation. This has the potential to vastly improve their engagement in school and in consequence, their academic achievement.
- The need to pay attention to the particular difficulties for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- A need to build sustainability and avoid tokenism in schools through a self evaluation of RRR that is completed annually.