

Dignity in School

Impact Report

2025

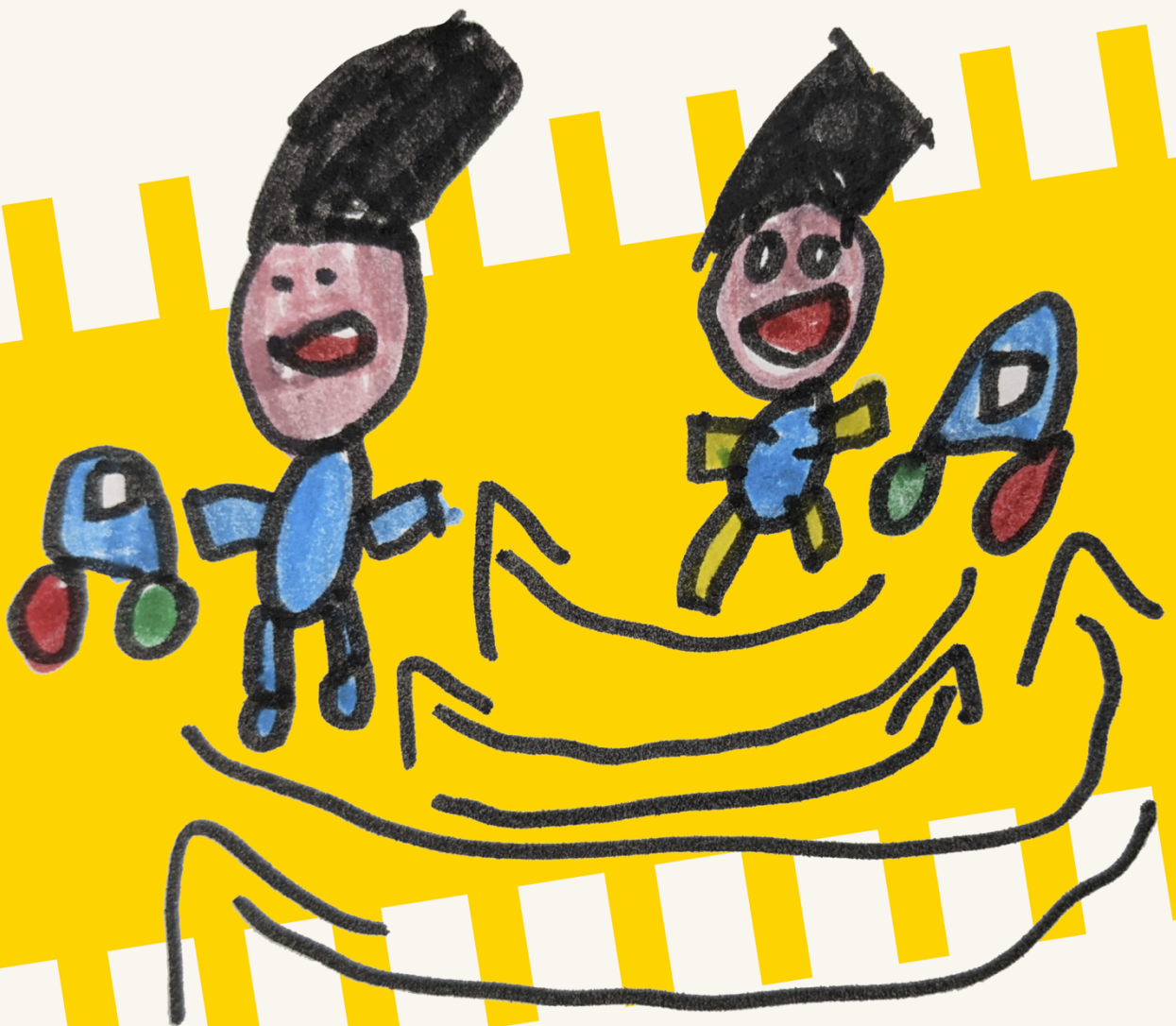


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Introduction

In the context of *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024* and the ongoing ambitions for education reform in Scotland, Children's Parliament has been delivering the Dignity in School programme across three local authorities since September 2022. This report outlines the aims and approach of the programme, evidencing its impact through the voices of children, parents, teachers, and strategic leaders, and explores how to embed and amplify this work to support meaningful, systemic and sustained culture change in education settings.

About Children's Parliament

Established in 1996, Children's Parliament is dedicated to the realisation of children's human rights in Scotland. Our dream is that children grow up in a world of love, happiness and understanding. Our mission is to inspire greater awareness and understanding of the power of children's human rights and to support implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Our approach is rights-based, relational, and creative. We collaborate with children, educators, policy makers, and communities to embed dignity, equity, and respect across Scotland.

At Children's Parliament we approach culture change by taking a human rights approach. This ensures that children's rights, as outlined in the UNCRC, guide the actions, behaviours, and policies of those who work with and care for children. It empowers children as rights-holders, supports them to advocate for themselves, and builds the capacity of adults to uphold these rights.



About Dignity in School

Central to a human rights approach are relationships based on respect and dignity. Strong, positive relationships between adults and children are the bedrock of successful engagement in school and learning. Ensuring children's lived experiences, ideas, and opinions inform what we do and how we do it is fundamental to getting it right

The Dignity in School programme has been running since August 2023 and is a flagship initiative developed and delivered by Children's Parliament. Funded by The Gordon Cook Foundation, and working in partnerships with local authorities, policy and academic collaborators, Dignity in School has developed a programme that embeds a rights-based approach to culture change in Scottish schools.

'Dignity' as an expectation that should be experienced by all people, is deeply embedded in human rights treaties. The UNCRC recognises the inherent dignity of every child, emphasising that children have the right to be respected, valued, and treated with dignity and fairness, and this is crucial for their wellbeing, development, and ability to participate fully in society. Dignity in School supports a shift from behaviourist models to relational, participatory approaches that align with Scotland's commitment to the UNCRC.

The behaviourist model requires children to comply with a set of standards that might include, for example, compliance with uniform standards, modes of behaviour and learning approaches. Children who experience challenges in their lives and find adherence to these standards difficult, often find themselves 'getting into trouble' due to their dysregulated behaviour. These children do not have the emotional resilience, understanding of their feelings or ability to communicate in a calm and coherent way to enable them to achieve the level of compliance a school requires of them. These children often find themselves in a disruptive cycle for their entire school career; dysregulated behaviour is punished; the punishment doesn't seek to find out why children are behaving the way they are meaning children often don't receive the support they need to help them through challenging times.

Dignity in School works alongside children and adults in classrooms and across schools to address the fundamental need that all children feel safe and happy in school. It explores the impact of a reward and sanctions approach, Scotland's centuries' old *modus operandi*, and considers the impact of such an approach on children. With support from the Dignity in School team, teachers are supported to adopt a different approach by putting respect and dignity at the heart of all their thinking, planning and actions. Adopting this relational approach is at the heart of meeting the requirements of the UNCRC.

Our Approach

With an initial commitment established through the development of a partnership with local authority strategic leads, Children's Parliament facilitated a bespoke programme of work in close partnership with each school and local authority, collaboratively designing tailored action plans with clear timelines. Before any direct work began in the schools, children and adults were asked to complete a 'dignity assessment'. The dignity assessment is a whole community questionnaire that provides feedback on what is working and what needs to improve. This process led to the identification of a number of change projects linked to school improvement plans, which empowered both children and adults to become active participants in shaping their school communities.

The Dignity in School team developed bespoke responses and plans to support culture change in each of the individual settings. Rooted in understanding of UNCRC and the concept of dignity, staff were initially supported through modelling and coaching to experience rights-based practice.

Following the initial introductory period with teachers, children and teachers were all asked to complete a 'dignity assessment' to find out how both children and adults experienced school. The information from the dignity assessments informed the identification of a 'change project', a project that would provide an opportunity for children and adults to work together towards an agreed goal using a rights-based approach and practice. Each change project utilised a range of creative processes from film making and drama to interactive art installations and a community project to create a shared community space. While the change project was different in each school, the key components of each included:

- Finding out from children and adults how they felt about their school experiences and their relationships across the school community.
- Information for parents/carers and adults in school about UNCRC and rights-based practice.
- Bespoke training for all staff.
- Support for staff in the use of dignity assessments and how they can usefully inform relationship policies.
- Ongoing reflection on what changes were taking place and where challenges and barriers remained.
- Identifying tangible shifts in culture through improved relationships.
- Support for children's involvement in school improvement plans.

Partnerships

Local authority engagement

- Clackmannanshire Council (3-year full programme engagement)
- Dundee City Council (3-year full programme engagement)
- Dumfries and Galloway Council (3-year bespoke engagement)
- West Partnership (ongoing collaboration and engagement)
- West Lothian (bespoke coaching and mentoring)

Full Offer: Direct work with teachers, strategic leads, and the wider local authority workforce to demonstrate, learn from, and share effective rights-based practices to drive culture change in schools and communities. Included coaching and mentoring, signposting to relevant networks and resources and bespoke support for specific challenges and areas for development.

Coaching and Mentoring: One-on-one conversations to enhance an individual's knowledge and understanding in order to support the development of rights-based practice. The focus of the coaching empowered adults to identify challenges, potential solutions, and a plan of action. Attention to monitoring and evaluating change was an important aspect of the coaching process.

Exchanges of learning, information sharing, and support with professional networks and in academic spaces

- Glasgow School of Art, Strathclyde University, Galloway University, Dundee University, Stirling University, University of the Highlands and Islands, and Edinburgh University
- Education Scotland
- Scottish Government
- National anti-racism networks
- National learning for sustainability networks
- General Teaching Council
- Children's rights networks



Third Sector Partners

- Scottish Youth Parliament
- WOSDEC
- SCOTDEC
- Intercultural Youth Scotland
- Malawi Partnership
- Dumfries and Galloway Third Sector Partnership
- Connect Alloa
- Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

National support/resources realised from local Dignity in School programme work

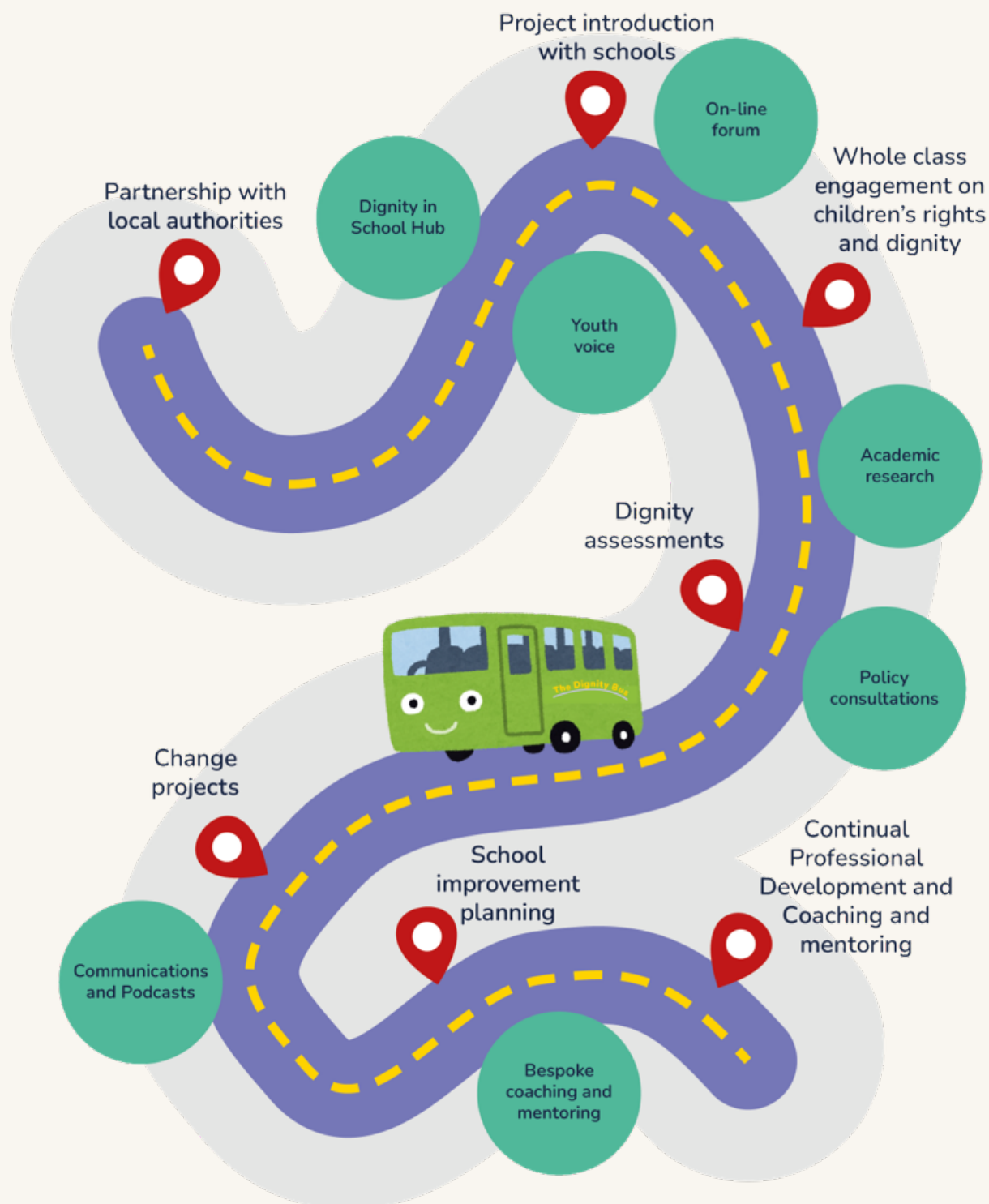
A key component of the project was to develop shareable resources, learning and reflection tools for schools and local authorities beyond the core project locations. Throughout the process of engagement learning was captured and shared in the following ways:

- **Dignity in School Hub:** online eLearning and resources to support school and local authority workforce – www.dignityinschool.scot
- **Dignity in School Podcast series:** exploring what UNCRC means for children and adults, what human rights practice looks like along with its impact and where dignity fits in rights-based practice.
- **The Dignity in School National Forum:** a space for learning and discussion about human rights practice to share challenges, seek answers to questions and get support from others on the journey.
- **Dignity in School training:** both bespoke and general, ranging from an introduction to the UNCRC, raising awareness and understanding of rights – based practice and support in relation to specific requests such as supporting schools to involve children in moving from 'behaviour policies' to 'relationship policies'.
- **Dignity in School policy and curricular development support for Scottish Government Working Groups,** including Social Justice Committee, Education Scotland Rights and Participation Network, Learning for Sustainability Leadership Group, Anti-Racist Education Group and Curriculum Development Group

Dignity in School project timeline

Initial Pilot 2021-22	Developing Relationships 2022-23	Strategic Partnerships 2023-24	Dignity Building Pathways 2024-25	Reflect, Strengthen and Plan 2025-26
Consultation pilot phase in two schools in Aberdeen and Edinburgh.	Development of the networks of practice in Dundee City Council and Clackmannanshire Council.	Continued development of capacity building supporting strategic leaders to embody and consider UNCRC in all council structures. Consolidating work in existing settings,	Developed approaches to national change programmes through the medium of Dignity. This included investigation models into Gender Equality in our new Local authority D and G, and Anti-Racist Education in Dundee.	Embedded theme of dignity in relation to Anti-Racist Education and Learning for sustainability. Developed a review and report on programme impact.

Dignity in School project timeline (continued)



Mini Case Study: Glebelands Primary School – Leading with Dignity

Overview

Glebelands Primary School in Dundee has become a national leader in embedding dignity into education, thanks to its collaboration with Children's Parliament and the dedication of its Dignity Team. The school has actively engaged in national policy discussions, partnered with academics from the University of Edinburgh, and shared their work through high-profile networks and conferences.

Key Highlights

- **Whole-School Transformation:** Dignity has become a central theme in school culture, curriculum, and improvement planning.
- **Innovative Practices:** Daily dignity-focused check-ins and the integration of rights-based learning to support student wellbeing.
- **Empowering Children and Adults:** Dignity Ambassadors and student-led community change sessions empower children and adults as active participants in shaping their environment.
- **Creative Advocacy:** The school produced a film documenting their dignity journey and established a dedicated Dignity Hub as a central resource.
- **National Leadership:** The school's Dignity Lead has shared expertise at national events, including the Five Nations Network and through collaboration in Dundee City Council.

Impact

Glebelands demonstrates how a focus on dignity can drive meaningful change in educational attainment, enhancement of wellbeing, and inspire both local and national communities.

"The word that best describes your school is 'dignity'"

- HMIE inspector (2025)

Overview of local, regional and national impact

Our work in schools

- Increased knowledge and understanding of rights-based approach and influenced practice in 147 primary schools across three local authorities
- Directly engaged 2500 adults through in-person and online training and support
- Directly engaged 2234 children
- Created case studies and classroom resources in collaboration with learners and educators which has created a range of national resources. These include Dignity in Action, Dignity in School Improvement Planning, Equality and Equity, Anti-racism and Gender Equality, all available on the Dignity in School Hub.

Our work with local authorities

- Delivered the full bespoke programme over three years in Clackmannanshire Council and Dundee City Council, with additional bespoke partnerships developed with Dumfries and Galloway and the West Partnership
- Bespoke coaching and digital offers in West Lothian and West Partnership (this network includes school partners reaching 50% of teachers in Scotland)
- Supported training for all probationary teachers in Dignity in School local authorities, responding to teaching practice in relation to UNCRC and rights-based practice.

Our work with Scottish Government and policy stakeholders

- Contributed to 4 government consultations, Anti-Racist Education, MindYerTime, Tobacco and Smoking Action Plan and Learning for Sustainability.
- Contributed to development of national frameworks and policy guidance, including most recently the Breaking the Mould Principles Anti-Racist Curriculum: Children's Version, a new set of principles to frame anti-racist education in Scottish schools and local authorities.
- Influenced school culture and the practical implementation of UNCRC across our partnerships, with our partner local authorities responding with changes to structures, strategic thinking and planning, for example supporting the engagement of children in service design across Clackmannanshire Council.

Our work with academic and Third Sector partners

- Collaborated with 6 universities to support engagement with rights-based approaches in action, utilising our work as case studies. This included our work with Glasgow School of Art, who recently changed MA modules to include children's rights as the framing for all course materials and assessments.
- Shared findings and practice at national events, including the Five Nations Conference, National Teaching Conferences such as Pedagoo, and through national publications such as General Teaching Council Magazine which is shared with over 53,000 members.
- Co-developed research, creative practice, and policy-informed content in partnership with Strathclyde University. This included a partnership with Dr Amy Hanna, which developed an approach to understanding how rights and dignity are respected and realised in school spaces with children as co-researchers.

Fostering National Collaboration

The creation of the Dignity in School National Forum and podcast series has connected a growing community of educators, creating a movement that champions dignity and children's rights across Scotland.



Assessing impact

An overview of our impact assessment alongside our organisational monitoring and evaluation methods is included below:

Debriefs Each session to review impact on specific sessions	Academic Research In partnership with academic partners.	Team Reflections Weekly and Termly debriefs and reflection sessions	Monthly Forum Feedback Children and adults	Dignity Surveys and Questionnaires Data from questionnaires and surveys
Reviews (Start/Mid/End) With school partners	Forums and Focus Groups With both adults and children	Case Studies To showcase and reflect on impact	Daily Debriefs With the children, adults and partners	Dignity Matrix Review Team, Local Authority and school specific versions



Evidenced outcomes for children

**“Dignity is new to me; I am glad I have learned about it.
Dignity is when you are special and accepted, and make you
feel important. Dignity is the soil of your rights”**

- Member of Children's Parliament

**“This has been one of the best days, as we learn rights and
what they mean for me”**

- Member of Children's Parliament

- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Improved self-regulation
- Decreasing incidences of dysregulation and bullying behaviours
- Improved engagement in learning
- Increased attainment
- Greater understanding and application of rights
- Increased agency of learners
- Improved relationships with adults
- Growth in new friendships
- Higher expectations made of children
- Increased involvement in learning and teaching and school improvement plans



Evidenced impact on schools and communities

“It's much safer as everyone is kind to each other since the Dignity Team came. In the playground, there are fewer fights and bullying”

- Member of Children's Parliament

- Improved relationships and behaviour change to support a culture rooted in human rights values
- Opportunities to contribute to local/national policy engagement
- Reduced bullying and disruptive behaviours
- Increased engagement and agency for both children and adults and children contributing to a stronger community culture.
- Whole school commitment to respect and dignity at the heart of all interactions and practice

Evidenced impact on adults

“We can't go back to how it was before”

- Class Teacher

- Increased confidence in relational pedagogy
- Adults' expectations of children increased
- Children taking more responsibility to shape their learning
- Greater enthusiasm and reduced workload
- Practical application of UNCRC principles in classrooms
- Commitment to embedding of dignity and respect resulting in positive impact on class culture and attainment.

Impact on Policy and Practice

**“Working with Dignity in School has been transformative;
we have moved on our rights respecting journey in a
proactive way, developing new processes, spaces and
training for all council staff”**

- Head of Education Clackmannanshire Council

- Evidence-based support for rights-led culture change
- Embedded UNCRC into professional learning pathways
- Created scalable training, tools, and digital platforms.

Summary of Culture Change

- A shift from punitive models to relational, rights-based approaches
- Empowered practitioners who prioritise dignity in interactions
- Schools increasingly acting as communities of care and respect
- Development of local authority planning approaches that consider and frame decision making around UNCRC.



Learning and Reflection

Dignity in School is evidencing that when we support adults to consider their approach to learning through a lens of respect and dignity for the child, relationships flourish, and a community approach to learning and change develops. Through this change in the environment around them, children grow in confidence and can take on responsibilities to shape their learning. In doing so, we have continually seen the impact on children who develop social skills and build friendships, alongside building skills in self-regulation. Realising their rights is transformative, resulting in a reduction of incidents of distressed and disruptive behaviour, increased confidence and an improvement in the attainment of learners. We have found when we invest in adults and support a systematic approach to embedding children's rights, schools and communities are best equipped to meet the needs of all their learners.

These key learnings summarised, include:

- Cultural change requires a commitment to relational practice
- Rights-based practice supports teacher and child
- Rights-based practice supports effective child participation and engagement
- Strong leadership with clearly articulated permission to shift the paradigm to rights-based practice is essential for deep change
- Children thrive in environments where their dignity is upheld

Over the past 20 years, Scotland has launched numerous initiatives aimed at supporting specific groups of children—such as those with care experience, behavioural challenges, or poor attendance. While these targeted, independently funded interventions can help individuals in the short term, they often fail to transform the broader school culture. What we have learned through the Dignity in School programme and three decades of work by Children's Parliament, is that separating children for additional support doesn't create lasting, systemic change. Instead, an education system rooted in relational and rights-based practice, where dignity is central, fosters inclusive environments with high expectations for all. This approach encourages responsibility, builds self-esteem and empathy, and supports all children to thrive. With leadership backing, such a model could evolve into a whole-systems approach aligned with Scotland's goal to 'get it right' for every child.

What Next?

Scotland's education system is at a crossroads. A historical reliance on compliance and behaviourism is no longer fit for purpose. Reform must centre the dignity and rights of children, with educators supported to embrace this shift. The Dignity in School programme demonstrates that change is possible; when all partners are engaged in an approach that holds rights at the heart of all we do with, and for children, culture change happens. The direct work with schools and local authority leads, as well as our reach across academic and third sector spaces has confirmed that the Dignity in School programme offers a new, impactful, relevant and timely intervention that addresses many of the testing issues those in education and beyond are grappling with. The significance of the improved outcomes for children, and in particular for children for whom school has not felt the easiest or happiest environment to be in, cannot be underestimated.

This is not 'another initiative'; this is an evidenced, ground up process that produces fundamental and lasting change. It includes *all* children and requires adults to take responsibility for creating environments which meet children's needs. This of course means adults having to re-think the Scottish predilection for punishment and the need for teachers to be seen to be 'in control'. When the impact of relational practice, with dignity at its heart is understood and practiced, there is no going back.

Children's Parliament would like to use the learning and evidence from this first phase of Dignity in School to develop a **capacity building** programme that brings new local authorities and new third sector and other partners into the Dignity in School fold.

For more information about Children's Parliament and the work we do, please visit:

www.childrensparliament.org.uk