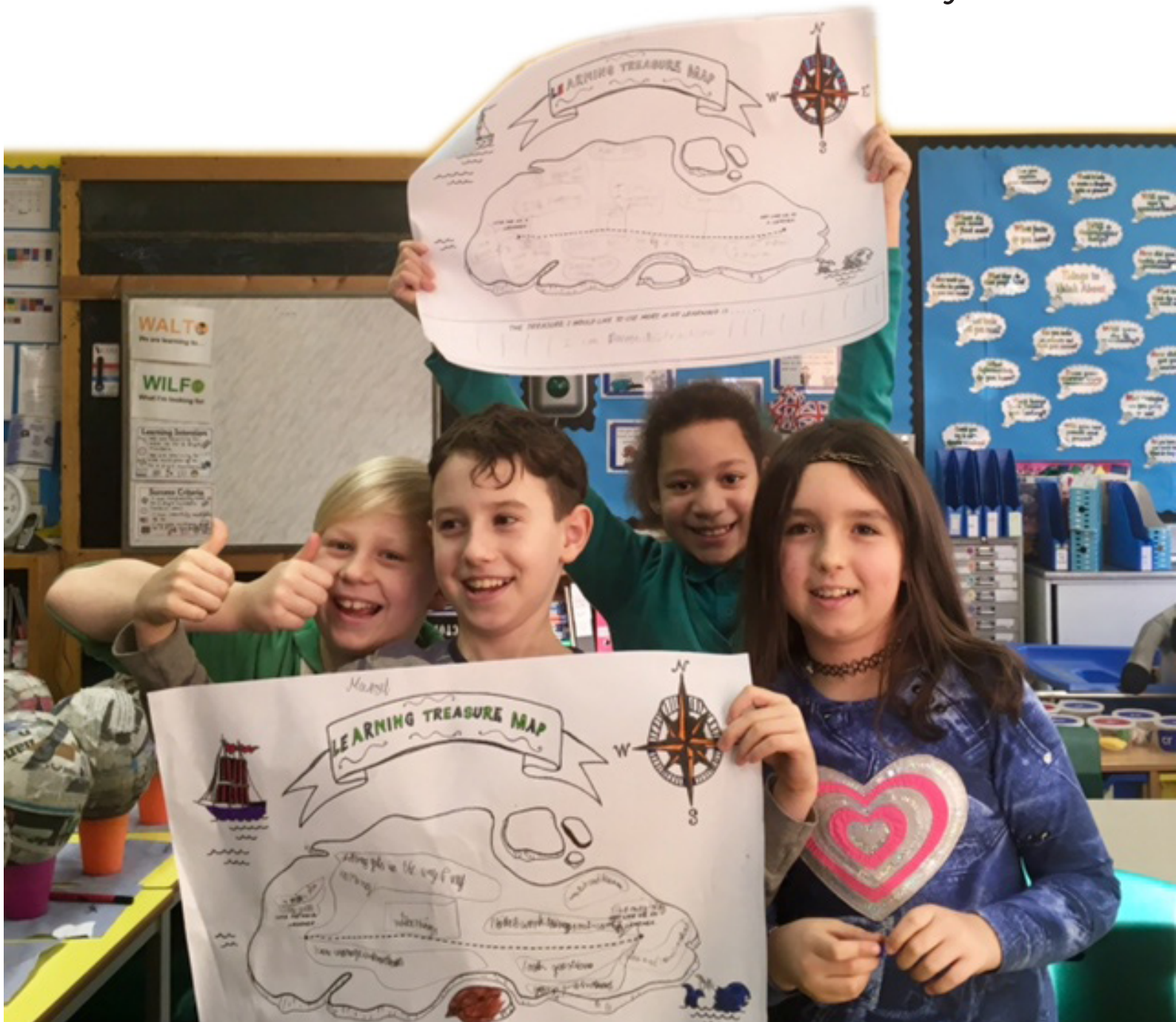




Imagining Aberdeen

Doing Our Best

A Children's Parliament programme delivered on behalf of Aberdeen City Council



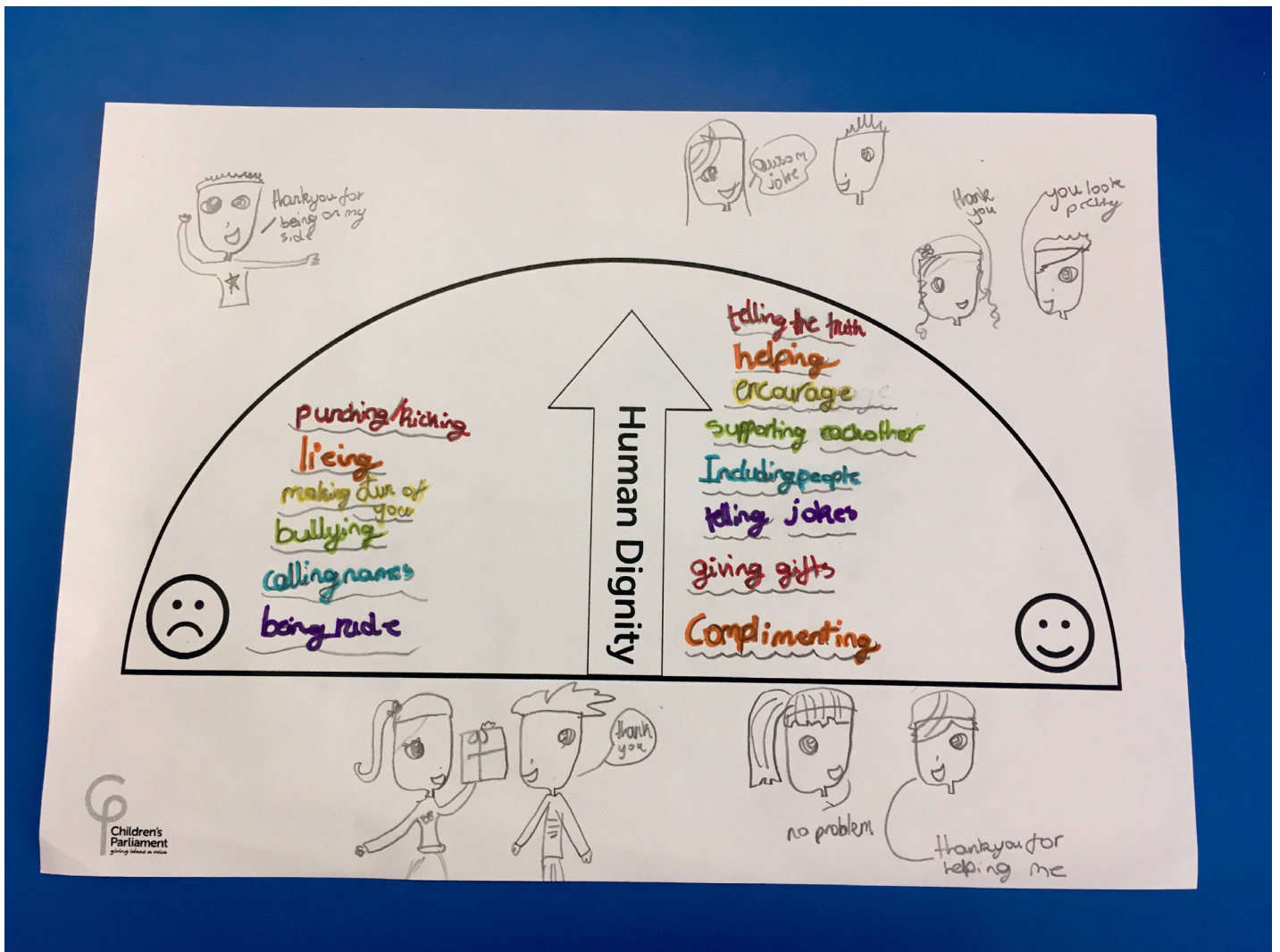


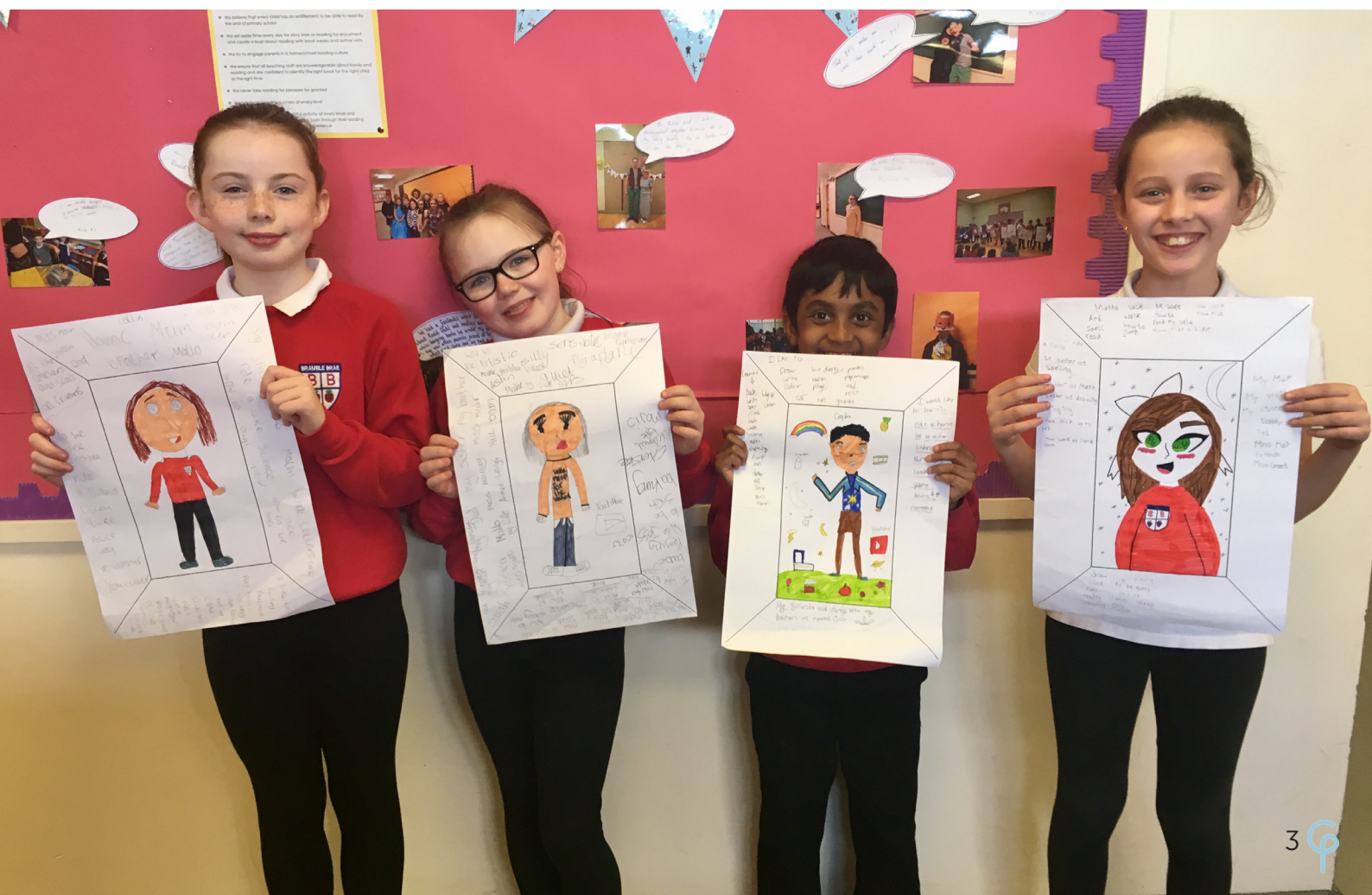
Image: MCPs (Members of Children's Parliament) use dignometers to tell us what helps and what gets in the way of their human dignity.

Children's Parliament would like to extend our thanks to colleagues, children and parents in Bramble Brae, Manor Park, Riverbank and Tullos primary schools for their enthusiastic engagement and support for the Doing Our Best programme.

Contents

Summary	4
Introduction	6
Programme Focus: Learner Self Perception and Rights-Based Relationships	7
Programme Content	8
Impact - Statistical Evidence from the Myself as a Learner Scale	9
- Evidence from Children	11
- Evidence from Class Teachers	14
Conclusion	19
Contacts	20

Image: Children identify their learning strengths and challenges through learning self-portraits



Summary

The poverty-related attainment gap is a human rights issue. To impact on attainment in the long-term and in ways that are sustained for the learner and for teachers (when it comes to their classroom practice) there is a need to address how children see themselves as learners, and to create classroom environments where children are both loved and nurtured.

Doing Our Best is a programme developed by Children's Parliament (CP) and delivered in Aberdeen City's four Attainment Challenge Primary Schools. The programme is built around a series of creative whole-class and small group tasks. The class teacher and CP worker talk with children about investigating learning, removing any sense of stigma or deficit from the programme.

The first aspect of the programme is a focus on learner self-perception, sometimes this is called academic self-perception. The programme uses the Myself as a Learner Scale (MALS) one-to-one with children pre-and-post intervention. It provides a validated tool to explain and measure the three main aspects of learner self-perception which are: A sense of agency related to learning optimism; Learned helplessness; and Enjoyment and active involvement in problem solving.

The second aspect of the programme is on the development of rights-based relationships, Children's Parliament views adult/child relationships as central to a child's wellbeing and educational outcomes. Rights-based relationships are those defined by a mutual understanding of the centrality of human dignity, empathy, kindness and trust.

This is a report on the impact of Doing Our Best. Quantitative data is available from the results coming out of the MALS tool. Qualitative evidence comes from the views of the children and classroom teachers who have participated. In summary:

When we measure learner self-perception we learn that:

- The programme has had a positive impact on the learner (academic) self-perception.
- The impact has been statistically significant for all learners in terms of a sense of agency related to learning optimism.
- Children who started with a lower than average score received most benefit from the intervention. For them, there was a statistically significant impact in terms of 2 areas: enjoyment and active involvement in problem solving and sense of agency related to learning optimism.

Reflecting on the programme, children say that:

- Doing Our Best supports them to think about learning and themselves as a learner.
- They like the programme activities which are engaging and fun.
- Activities help them to consider approaches, attitudes and skills for learning.
- They have learned about their rights and the core idea of human dignity. This helps them think about how they get on with others.

Reflecting on the programme, classroom teachers say that:

- Initial preparation and discussion prepared the ground well, and the experience of the programme dispelled early worries about workload.
- As co-facilitators, class teachers like having time with small groups of learners. They observe that many children need and benefit from this focus and attention.
- Children are now seen more as individuals, each with potential and capacity to talk about and improve attitudes and skills for learning.
- There has been positive impact on how children understand and talk about themselves as learners, with insight that can be used in the classroom day-to-day.
- The programme activities and impact would be enhanced by developing more explicit connections across the curriculum.
- The programme enhances adult/child and children's peer relationships.

Image: Children share their work and ideas with their peers.



Introduction

The Imagining Aberdeen programme, commissioned by Aberdeen City Council (ACC) and facilitated by Children's Parliament (CP) is made up of 2 distinct elements – the ongoing original work called Imagining Aberdeen, now delivered with the team of Imagineers from the partner schools, and the Doing Our Best programme which supports Aberdeen City's work to address the poverty-related attainment gap. This is a report on the Doing Our Best work.

The Doing Our Best programme was developed and piloted by Children's Parliament from January to June 2016 with school partners in four Local Authorities, funded with a Scottish Government grant from the Scottish Attainment Challenge Schools Programme . CP brought the programme to ACC and this was delivered in the 2016/17 school year in the city's four Attainment Challenge primary schools: Bramble Brae, Manor Park, Riverbank and Tullos. In each school two classes (a total of 210 children) and their class teachers engaged with the work during the school year; the first class in each school between September and January, and the second from February to June.

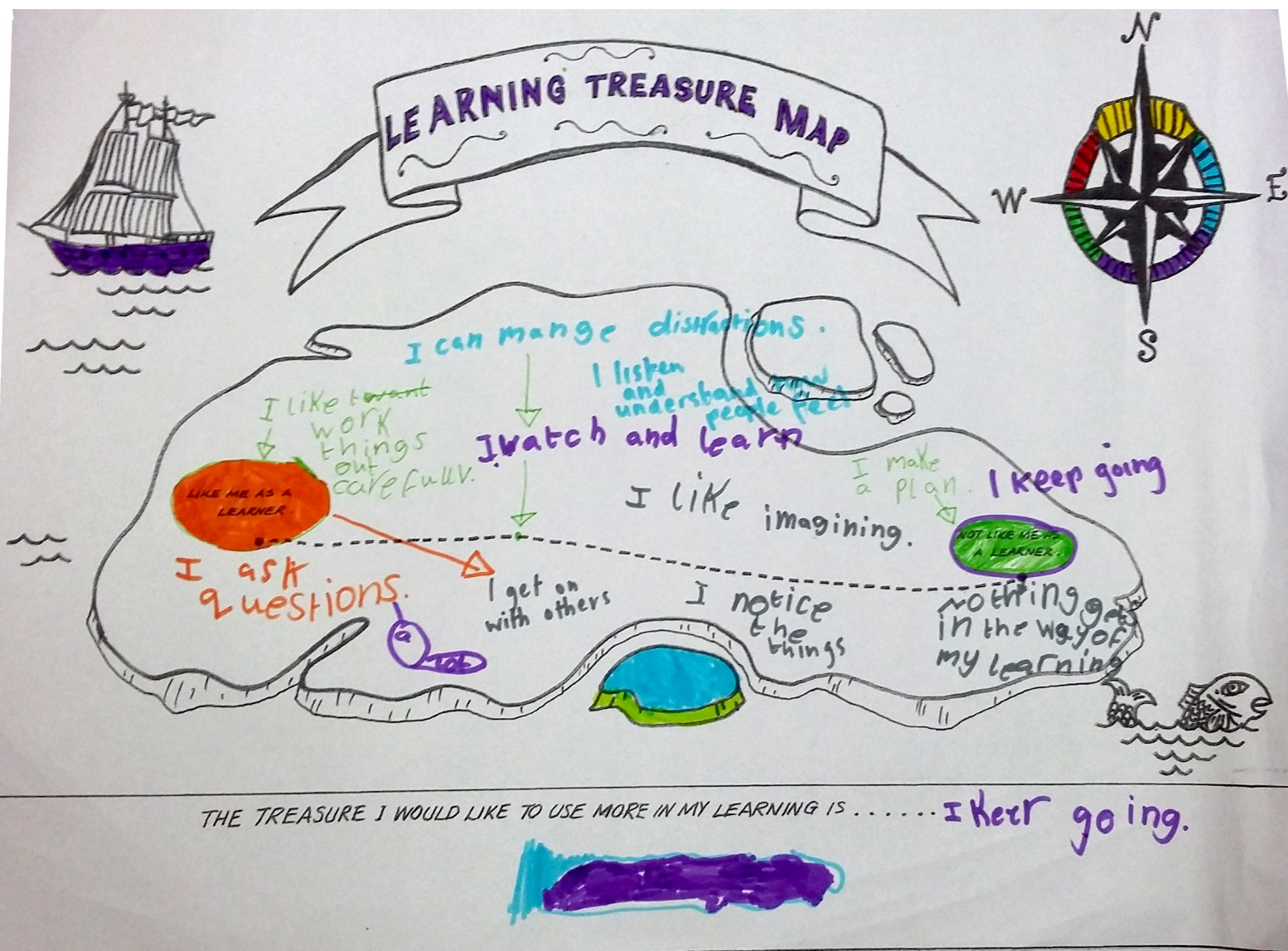


Image: Learning Treasure Maps help children explore their learning experiences.

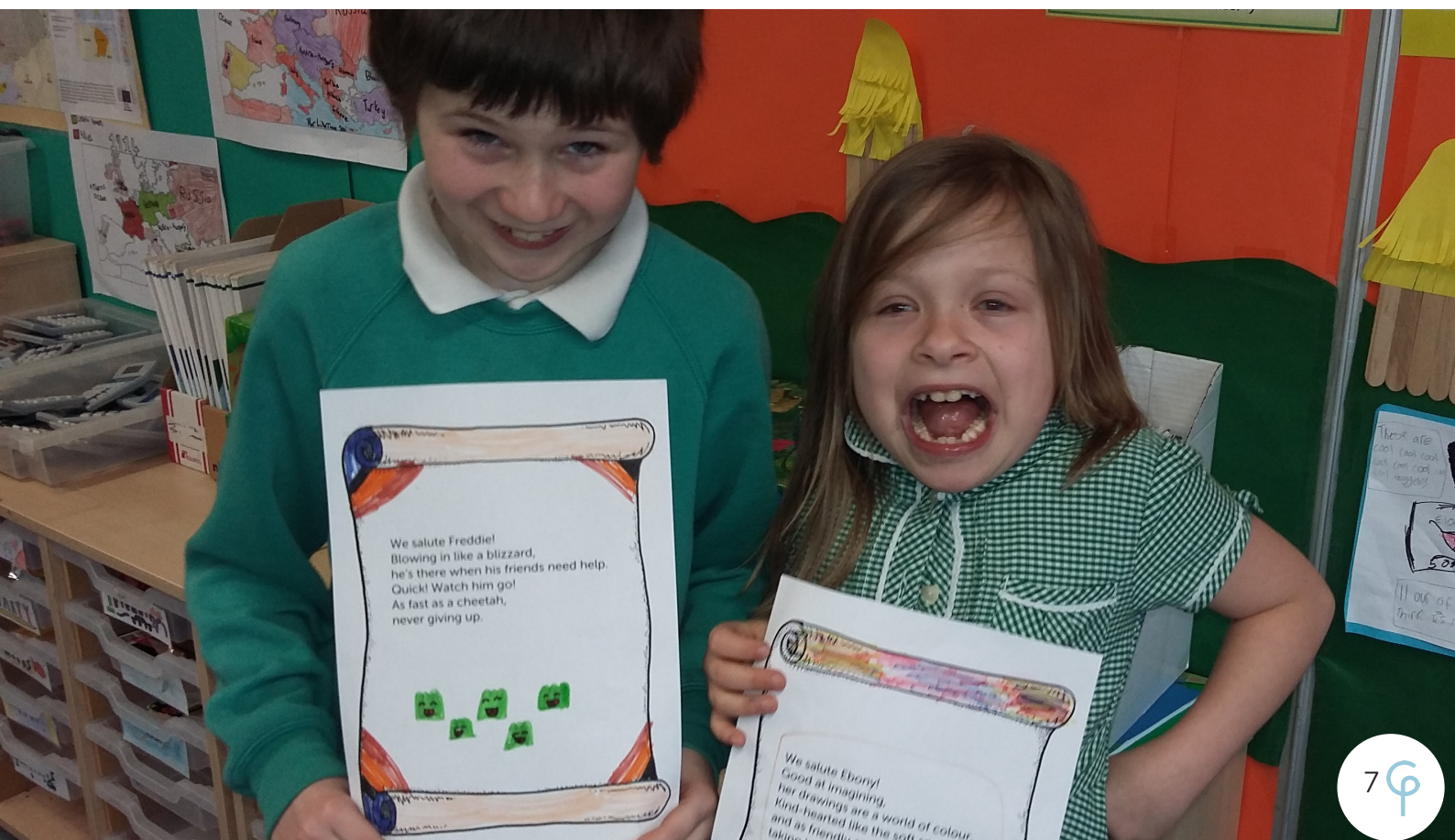
Programme Focus: Learner Self-Perception and Rights-Based Relationships

The first aspect of the programme is a focus on learner self-perception (sometimes this is called academic self-perception). As Educational Psychologist Bob Burden recognised: 'Ability alone is not enough: how we think about ourselves matters too.' At the outset of the programme, to help us measure levels of learner self-perception, the Doing Our Best programme uses the Myself as a Learner Scale (MALS) one-to-one with children. Subsequently, the CP worker facilitates most of the small group work, but importantly the class teacher facilitates engagement with children identified by MALS as scoring below the class average, these are children we can identify as needing particular support to build their view of themselves as learners. Teacher engagement with these children supports further reflection and dialogue in the context of the learner/teacher relationships back in the classroom, day-to-day.

The second aspect of the programme is on the development of rights-based relationships. The Doing Our Best programme activities are located in the bigger context of experiencing school as a healthy, happy and safe place to be. To achieve this understanding children first reflect on what children need, they explore the idea of human dignity, and learn about rights. The work seeks to evidence that we can improve how children and teachers talk, feel about and approach learning, bringing benefits to child and teacher and to the learning environment. Children's Parliament views adult/child relationships as central to a child's wellbeing and educational outcomes. For us rights-based relationships are those defined by a mutual understanding of the centrality of human dignity, empathy, kindness and trust.

Finally, in terms of focus, Children's Parliament views the poverty-related attainment gap as a human rights issue. We understand the need to impact on attainment in the long-term and in ways that are sustained for the learner and for teachers when it comes to their classroom practice.

Image: Praise poems reflect children's strengths and achievements.



Programme Content

The Doing Our Best programme is built around a series of creative whole-class and small group tasks. The class teacher and CP worker talk with children about **investigating learning**, removing any sense of stigma or deficit from the programme. As examples of the tasks: children create 'learning selfies' to help identify that we are learning all the time at home, in school and in the community; they meet and identify with a team of characters who have different approaches and skills when it comes to learning; they use treasure maps and a treasure box to help explore and identify what they need as a learner and what they can work on. The programme ends with writing Praise Poems for each child, celebrating them as individuals and as learners.

Children's Parliament Investigates Learning

Start here

1. Learner Self Perception

Myself as a learner
"Ability alone is not enough. How we think about ourselves matters too."
- Bob Burden

The scale captures the child's general perceptions of their learning capabilities. Using 20 statements it tells us about 3 aspects:

- A sense of agency related to learning optimism
- Learned helplessness
- Enjoyment and active involvement in problem solving

7. Praise Poems

Ancient cultures celebrated their greatest thinkers, leaders, poets and warriors. As we do here - every child is celebrated as a great learner.

In praise of Calum
Behold Calum! Minecraft adventurer,
His hair the colour of sun's fire,
He cares for others with the strength of a mighty bear

2. Learning Selfies

Things I have learned in my life

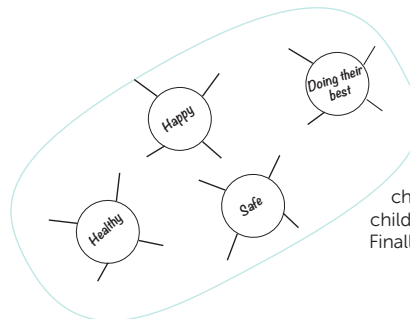
Things I like to do



People who are important to me

Things I would like to learn

Drawing and talking means children begin to view learning as being life-long, happening in all areas of life, involving aspiration and supported by the important people in their lives.

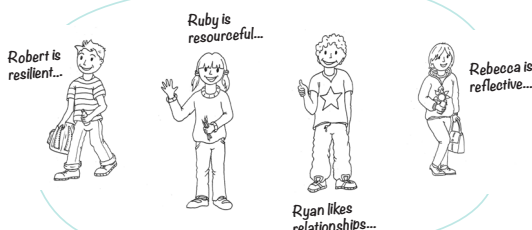


6. The healthy, happy, safe school

Looking to the learning environment and relationships children identify the characteristics of a school that would see children as healthy, happy and safe learners. Finally, the characteristics of a school where everyone does their best are imagined.

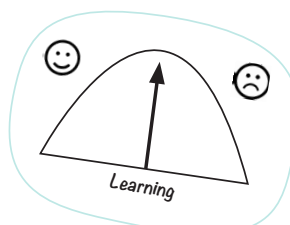
3. The Learning Team

Children meet 4 characters they can relate to at different degrees. Their learning characteristics may be familiar or new.



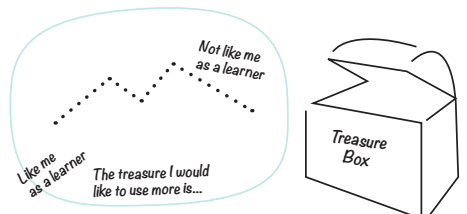
4. The Learn-o-meter

Children reflect on what supports learning and what gets in the way. They begin to reflect on differences and similarities on their views of the learning environment.



5. The Learning Treasures

Parchment scrolls in the treasure box reveal individual learning treasures like 'I ask questions' or 'I notice things'. One by one the children plot the treasures on their own treasure map. They can pick a treasure to develop further.



Impact: Statistical Evidence from the Myself as a Learner Scale

This section of the report is about the statistical evidence of impact of the programme which uses the Myself as a Learner Scale to measure learner (academic) self-perception.

The Doing Our Best programme facilitates a range of conversations with children using approaches we hope they find interesting, fun and purposeful. We want children to be curious and to engage with us in an investigation of learning. Our starting point is a realisation that successful learning is a complex thing; a mix of interactions between teachers, learners, learning activities and the learning environment. As Doing Our Best is all about learner voice and valuing children's lived experience we also want to start with a better understating of how children see themselves as learners. To help, the programme uses the Myself as a Learner Scale (MALS), a tool developed by Professor Robert Burden and published by Imaginative Minds Ltd.

MALS captures the child's general perceptions of their learning capabilities relating to school related activities – **their self-concept as a learner**. This is thought to be important because how a person feels and thinks about themselves is linked with their successes and failure in many areas. Schools may already be using measures for general self-concept/wellbeing; this tool gives us information regarding academic self-concept.

In MALS the key elements of a positive self-perception as a learner and a problem-solver are identified as: confidence in one's ability to do well in a variety of academic learning situations; access to and a wide use of vocabulary; enjoyment in problem solving; a reflective learning style; and lack of anxiety when faced with new work.

MALS uses 20 statements which the child responds to on a 5-point scale; from 'yes, definitely true' to 'no, definitely not true'. The tool has been developed for use by 8 to 16-year olds and can be fully self-administered although in the Doing Our Best programme the tool is facilitated by the CP worker to assure understanding and accuracy. Using MALS can help us understand 3 main factors of the academic self-concept of the children we are working with:

- 1. A sense of agency related to learning optimism:** 13 of the 20 statements in MALS help us score this factor with statements like: *I have a good vocabulary and I usually think carefully about an assignment before starting it.*
- 2. Learned helplessness:** 8 of the 20 statements in MALS help us score this factor with statements like: *I get anxious when I am faced with new work and I'm not very good at solving problems.*
- 3. Enjoyment and active involvement in problem solving:** 6 of the 20 statements in MALS help us score this factor with statements like: *I like having difficult work to do and I prefer being told what to do than having to work it out for myself.*

Scoring results in a score of between 20 and 100. A large number of studies using MALS have indicated that a score between 60 and 80 is likely in most cases to represent the average range across a group. We have used MALS in our project to gather insight about children across all four

partner schools; analysis showed there were no differences in impact across the four schools. Of the 210 children who participated in Doing Our Best we were able to pre and post-test using MALS with 190 of the children – a small number of children left the school, or were absent for a period.

Of the 190 children tested, our analysis also looked specifically at impact on the 83 children whose mean (average) score on the pre-test was less than the overall mean.

Statistical analysis confirms the following about the programme, both generally and in terms of the three key factors highlighted above:

- **The Doing Our Best programme had a positive impact on children as learners in terms of all the intended areas:** A sense of agency related to learning optimism; learned helplessness; and enjoyment and active involvement in problem solving.
- **The impact has been statistically significant for all learners in terms of a sense of agency related to learning optimism.**
- **Children who started with a lower than average score received most benefit from the intervention.** For them, there was a statistically significant impact in terms of two areas: enjoyment and active involvement in problem solving and sense of agency related to learning optimism.



Image: Children work in small groups, allowing them to share ideas while creating their Learning Treasure Maps.

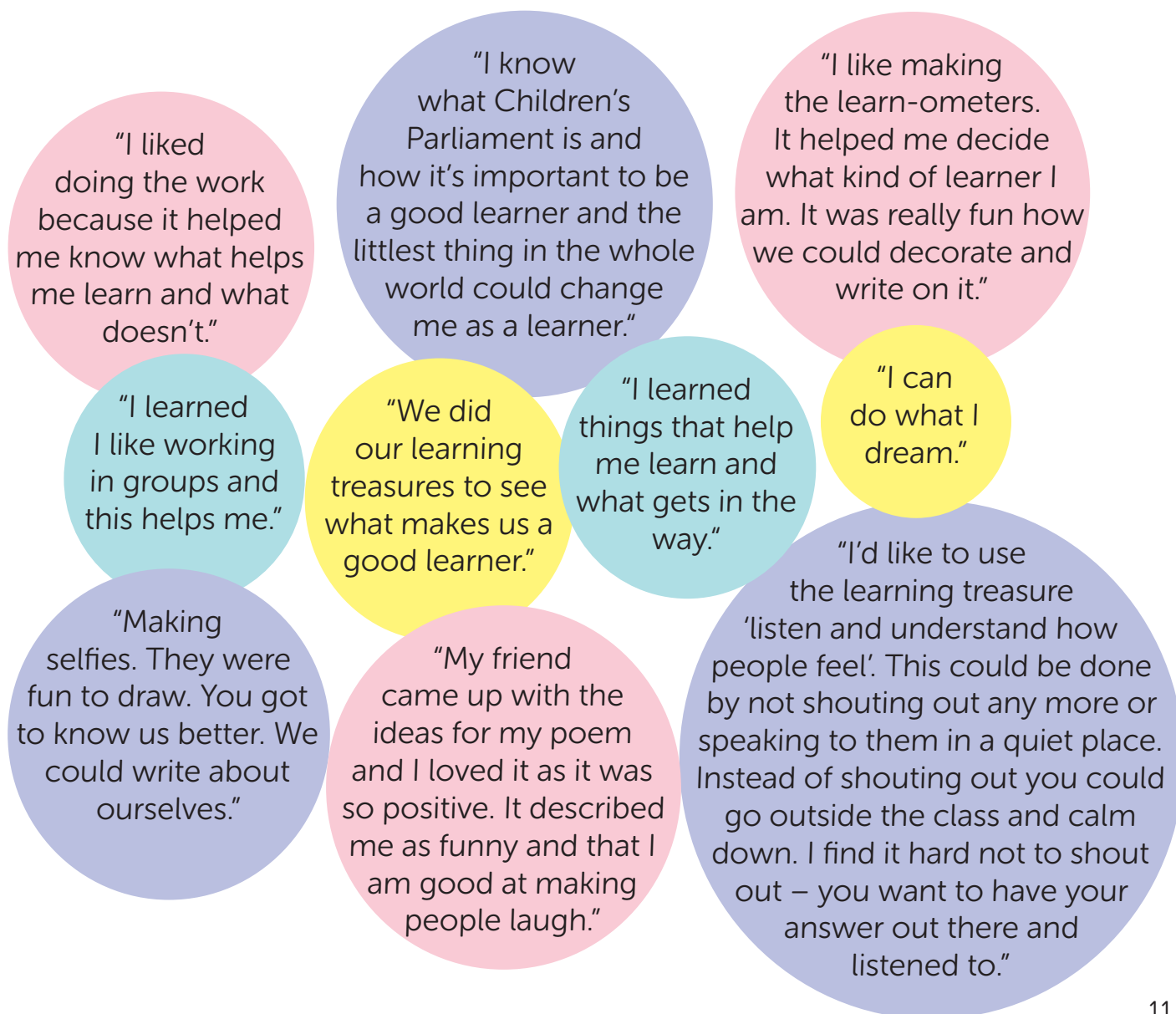
Impact: Evidence from Children

This section of the report is about the child's experience of the Doing Our Best programme with a focus on:

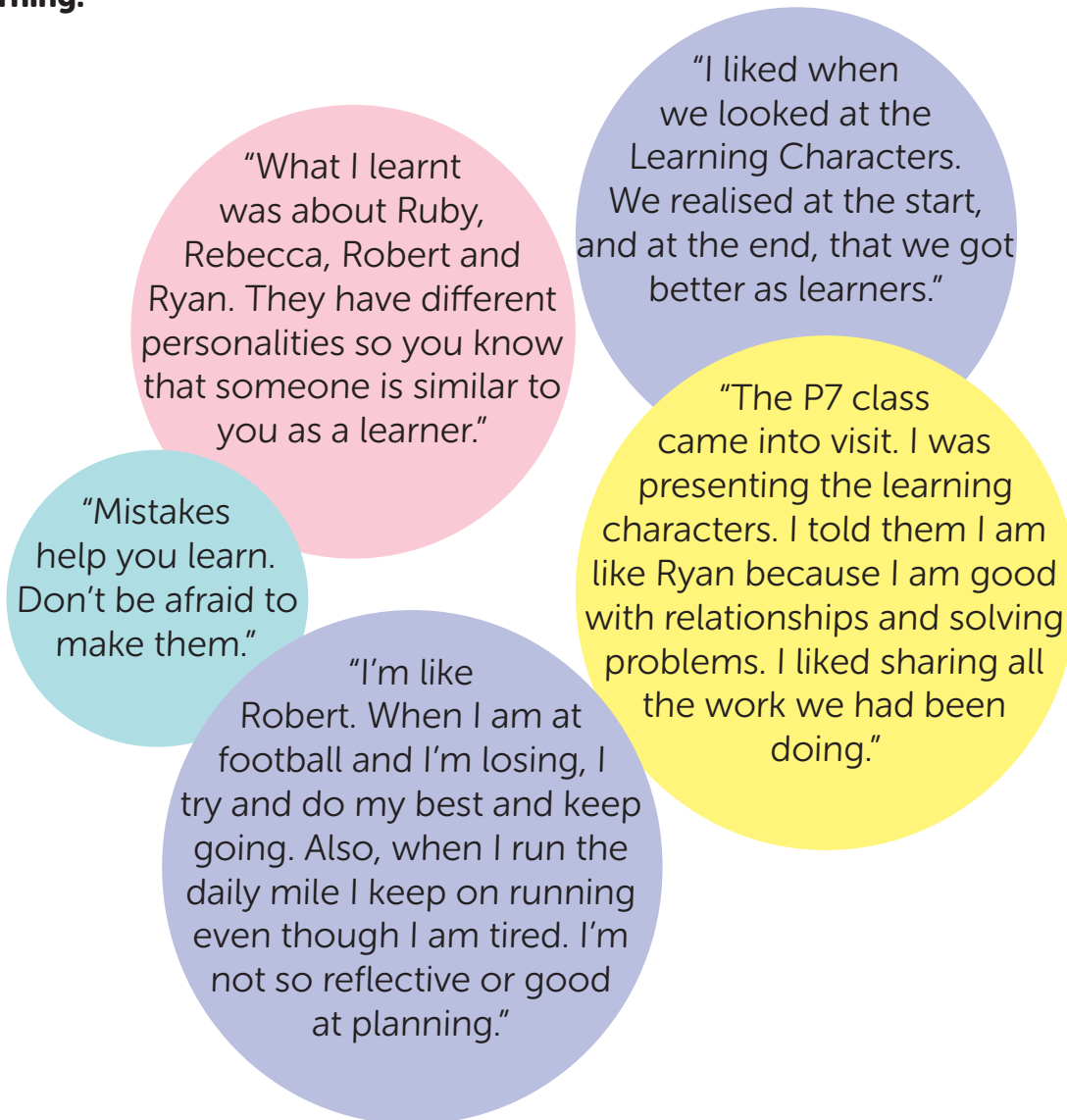
- How children see themselves and themselves as a learner
 - Approaches, attitudes and skills for learning
 - The core ideas of human dignity and rights and consideration of interpersonal relationships
 - Celebrating at the end of the programme
-

Children were asked to tell us what they liked most and what they learned about being part of their Doing Our Best project. Several themes emerged, quotes are drawn from the eight participating classes who have completed the programme in the 2016/17 school year.

From the individual conversations with children at the end of their project, there was a strong element of **personal reflection by children about themselves**, and **particularly how they see themselves as a learner**. In many of these direct quotes, children refer to a favourite activity within the programme.



The children made strong connections with the learning characters they were introduced to - Ruby, Rebecca, Robert and Ryan – who helped them **consider approaches, attitudes and skills for learning.**



The children reported positively about the end of programme exhibitions and presentations to others, including children in school and parents/carers, when they could **celebrate themselves as learners.**



Finally, considering the Doing Our Best programme focus on rights-based relationships, children also identified impact in terms of the **core ideas of human dignity and rights** and **consideration of their relationships with others**.



Impact: Evidence from Class Teachers

This section of the report is about classroom teacher experiences of the Doing Our Best programme with a focus on:

- Initial thoughts or worries about taking part
 - Teachers engaging as a co-facilitator
 - Views on how children engaged
 - Impact on teaching and learning
 - Connecting the programme with other parts of the curriculum
 - The impact of the programme on relationships
-

Class teachers involved in delivery were asked their views on their participation and its impact on the children, on themselves as teachers, on relationships and learning in the classroom. Conversations between the class teacher and Children's Parliament facilitator took place on an ongoing basis, but more formally at the midway and end points of the programme.

Quotes shared are from teachers from the four participating schools - names and locations are not given to assure anonymity.

Teachers were asked about their **initial thoughts or worries about taking part** – we were interested in this because we understand that workload issues are of concern and that there may be some cynicism about 'another initiative'. These quotes from interviews with teacher colleagues confirm these pre-programme concerns. Teacher reflection confirms that initial preparation and discussion prepared the ground well, and that relationships are developed when there are opportunities to work together over time.

"At the beginning, I assumed that I would have to be involved in planning the activities the children would do. I also thought that it could be time consuming with all the other workload in school. This was not the case as the CP worker had all the planning done and we liaised each week on what would be covered the following week."

"I was worried about the time being taken away from the regular curriculum. The timetable already feels stretched, so I thought this might be another distraction. I also worried that I would have to prepare lots of resources. "

"I'd had the opportunity to be involved briefly in the Imagining Aberdeen project the year before, so when I found out about this project I was delighted to have another opportunity to work with the Children's Parliament team. As this project is so focused on the children as learners I was excited to see how the children engaged with it and how it linked with the SHANARRI work the children have been involved in within school. After the initial meeting with CP workers I was even more interested as there were so many activities that give real opportunities for the children to learn about themselves as learners, and would let me know more about the class as well."

Class teachers were also asked about **how they engaged as a co-facilitator**. Feedback here illustrates that class teachers particularly like having time with small groups of learners and appreciated the flexibility of CP colleagues.

"I liked taking out small groups to work with as the CP worker worked with the class. This is a luxury teachers get so rarely."

"At times, it's hard to give my kids the level of attention that they need, so this project has given me the space and time to do this."

"I found it really easy to get involved in the project as the CP worker always takes some time at the end of each day to talk about what's been done and what's happening the following week. There have also been opportunities for me to lead parts of sessions and work with groups on things such as the learning selfies. The whole experience has just been brilliant for us. The only aspect I have found difficult is that at times day to day school things get in the way of my involvement with working with groups with the dedication I would like, but the Children's Parliament team is always so supportive and understanding it makes it all so much easier."

Teachers were asked about **how they felt the children engaged** with the project, Teachers identify that it is evident that children enjoy the focus of the work, as well as the opportunity to talk with the CP worker or their class teacher in a small group environment.

"The class love their Children's Parliament 'day' and, in my eyes, have really engaged with project."

"This was something they could all participate in and feel successful at. It was also a valuable tool for self-discovery and provided the children an opportunity to learn from each other - and for those who struggled more or had less confidence to see how the more confident children learned."

"They really enjoy the chance to work outside of the classroom in small quiet groups where their voices are heard. The children that I have been working with love the fact that they get my undivided attention too. I like that the children are learning vocabulary about their learning that is unrelated to their level of intelligence and more to do with learning qualities."

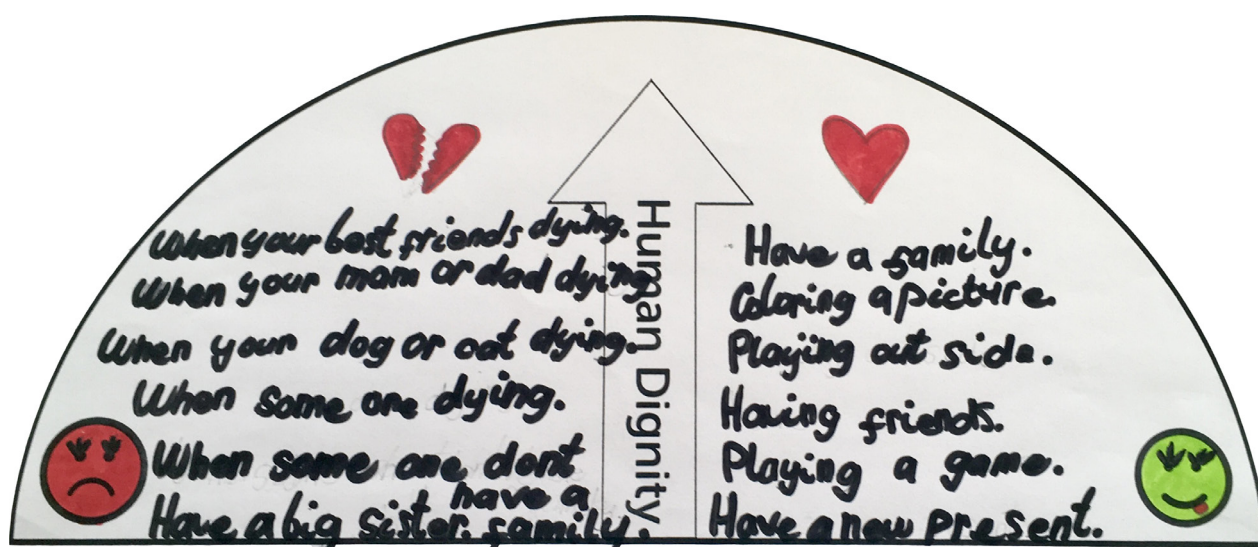


Image: A child's Dignometer.

In terms of **impact on teaching and learning** teachers reported a positive impact on the way children understand and talk about themselves as learners, with a level of insight that can be used in the classroom on a day-to-day basis. Teachers also reported a positive shift in their view of children as individuals, each with potential and capacity to talk about and improve attitudes and skills for learning. These illustrative quotes from classroom teachers provide some excellent insight into the programme.

"The project has had an overarching effect on how I work with the class – I feel I am more aware of how they learn and I have seen great progression in confidence with the class as a whole but especially with some individuals."

"They are definitely more reflective. They now take time to look at what they've done and how they are doing it. Through Doing Our Best, they have built up experience of talking about their learning. The children have loved working with you and your inputs will be missed greatly. But rest assured, I will keep making reference to what we have learned."

"The children regularly talk about what they've done and relate other aspects of their learning to things covered in Children's Parliament, this might be a reminder of what makes a positive learning environment from our class learn-o-meter or what kind of learner character we are and what can help us in our learning when things are tough. Having the opportunity to work with groups on things such as our learning selfies has made me much more aware of the class as individuals – a class that I thought I knew well threw up some real surprises about aspirations they have. We also as a class make use of our learn-o-meter as a reminder of a happy classroom environment."

"It is good for pupils to have a vocabulary about learning - including resilience, reflective and resourceful. At first, I was like, this isn't suitable language - too challenging for my pupils. However, I realise now that the more vocabulary they have, the more they can express themselves in an accurate way - i.e. wider than 'bored' or 'angry'. Doing Our Best does rely on the teacher following up with this language to embed it in the classroom, often stating the obvious, for example 'you used a dictionary so you are resourceful'. I am going to try and reuse Doing Our Best activities with my new class. As a teacher, this work has been a reminder that it should be about praising skills rather than knowledge. Praising people for trying and their effort rather than always praising the most academic pieces of work. "

"The one-to-one/ small group time helped the children in my class because many don't get this at home or school. More adult attention was positive. Through the activities the children talked about learning and about themselves as learners, identifying factors that can support them in this process. When creating the learn-o-meters one of my pupils (with ASN) said 'if I don't want to say what is getting in the way, I can show you'. Getting this out of this pupil was great because he doesn't often engage. We are encouraged to have our pupils engage in target learning but it is difficult. Through Doing Our Best my class now know the language of learning. They have covered many of the skills without it being boring. I thought the 'learn-o-meters' was the best activity because it was physical and the children enjoyed crafting it. It created a dialogue around learning without the children being aware – hidden learning."

"The children contributed and focused during all the sessions – I did not expect this. It has developed them as learners. It is going to stick with them as learners. It made me think about personalisation of choice for pupils' learning. Children can make good decisions and it is often easy for me, as the adult, to fall into the pattern of making decisions for them."

"The class are very behind and because of that very down on themselves. It was nice to think about their strengths. For the more able children, Doing Our Best has been a good opportunity for them to reflect and work with others and realise that learning is not only about getting the correct answers. It has reminded them they have to work on other skills like having good relationships. It has boosted the confidence of the lowest achievers. It has had an impact on individual pupils."

In their reflections on the programme teacher colleagues have also made commitments to take their learning, and the resources and approaches used, to their next class:

"I would definitely use elements of Doing Our Best with other classes. The children are more self-aware as learners and know what they need to learn effectively. And we have enjoyed (and found useful!) having a shared experienced as a class. Certain individuals have a much deeper awareness of themselves and others."

When reflecting on the delivery of Doing Our Best it has also become clear that the programme would be enhanced by developing further/more explicit **connections with other parts of the curriculum**. There were examples of this, with one class teacher identifying using the dedicated Doing Our Best blog to fulfil some Literacy experiences and outcomes, and another linked the programme to the term's topic study, but there may be room for development. This from teacher colleagues:

"From a teaching point of view, I think it would be good if Children's Parliament and the teacher could build more of Doing Our Best into the curriculum. For example, reflectiveness could be linked directly with literacy skills like writing. As a class, we could look at the work, improve it and think of this positively. It would be good if more of the Doing Our Best activities could be incorporated into school work."

"I chose a topic that related to the Children's Parliament work. It would fit really well into rights based topics or a more health and wellbeing topic, such as a good mindset. There should be more planning between the teacher and CP at the start of term."

As well as enhancing learner self-perception Doing Our Best is of course also interested in **changing relationships**. Earlier quotes already highlight the benefits of participation, with reflections from classroom teachers below offering further insight:

"I am going to steal all the activities for next year. It has been nice for me to get to know the pupils on a deeper level. I used to think of each child as 'good at maths', 'needs help in literacy', now I know them better as individuals. Doing Our Best has allowed me to get to know my pupils."

"Some children are now more in touch with how they are feeling and are better at expressing this. This is especially apparent in the children who wouldn't have opened up before. I listen more to the children. It has changed the way I communicate with them e.g. not shouting, asking about their personal life. I feel more relaxed with them and they have picked up on this. The children I worked with I can speak to easier and they are confident to speak back whereas before they would have chosen to speak to a PSA etc. rather than me."

"Working with CP reminded me of the benefits of getting down on the floor and working together or having discussions. It is important that adults join the children when sitting in a circle. I often find I am in the habit of sitting on a seat looking down at children. It isn't very balanced. The children engage so much more when we're all together."

"My time is very stretched. I have however realised that there is one child in particular who needs to be known personally before she is able to engage in learning so I have learnt to take a few minutes to listen to her stories before expecting her to engage."

"It was really nice to give time to pupils in smaller groups... Doing Our Best has helped me be more aware of pupils in my class, who on the surface are bolshie but this is a cover for insecurities."

Image: Opportunities to share and celebrate are an important part of a rights-based approach to learning.



Conclusion

Delivering the Doing Our Best programme has evidenced that:

- Learner/academic self-perception matters. As Bob Burden recognised: 'Ability alone is not enough: how we think about ourselves matters too.' Through Doing Our Best we have evidenced that it is possible, to a statistically significant degree, to enhance this key aspect at the heart of a commitment to raising attainment. Children who started with a lower than average score in terms of learner self-perception received most benefit from the intervention.
- Children are curious and capable of reflecting on themselves as learners and - in an asset-based model - they enjoy investigating learning and becoming a better learner.
- Children need a vocabulary that supports their understanding of learning and themselves as learners.
- To learn, and to be the best learner, children need to be in an environment where relationships are based on human dignity, empathy, kindness and trust. These are rights-based relationships. To understand and experience rights-based relationships these must be modelled by adults in the learning environment.
- If teachers are expected to be the agents for change when it comes to addressing the poverty-related attainment gap, they must be given opportunities to reflect on their practice and the tools to address entrenched cultural barriers to learning.
- The programme has reminded teachers that teaching and learning is about relationships. Teachers are now more likely to understand that they need to spend time with small groups and with individual children.

Aberdeen City Council has commissioned Children's Parliament to continue the Doing Our Best programme into the 2017/18 school year. We look forward to continuing to make a difference to the educational experience of participating children and enhancing the work of our teacher colleagues as we work together to raise attainment for all.




Contacts for Imagining Aberdeen: Doing Our Best

Dr Colin Morrison, Children's Parliament Co-Director colin@childrensparliament.org.uk

Catrin Jeans, Programme Manager, Children's Parliament catrin@childrensparliament.org.uk

Sarah Elder, Programme Worker, Children's Parliament sarah@childrensparliament.org.uk



Children's Parliament
Summerhall, Edinburgh, EH9 1PL
0131 558 9030
info@childrensparliament.org.uk
www.childrensparliament.org.uk
 [@creative_voices](https://twitter.com/creative_voices)