Newsletter

ELATE

EdinburghLearns - Aspire, Transform, Engage

August-September 2026

The National Herald Saroj Lal Award Was Presented to Edinburgh Winner

Youssouf Kassime, Teacher at the Royal High School has been recognised nationally for his outstanding contribution to creating a whole-school culture built on equality, inclusion and respect.

The prestigious Herald Saroj Lal Award was presented to Youssouf in recognition of his dedication to ensuring that every pupil feels valued, respected, celebrated and included within the school community.

The award was presented by Vineet Lal, prominent activist and son of Saroj Lal, during the school's vibrant Cultural Fashion Show. This event celebrates the diverse cultures, identities and traditions represented across the school. The occasion provided a fitting backdrop for recognising work that promotes understanding, belonging and equality among pupils and staff. Vineet spoke of the importance of this work and how impressed the judging panel were with how his dedication has helped create an environment where differences are embraced and every member of the school community is encouraged to participate and thrive.



Youssouf Kassime, Award Winner

Through innovative initiatives, inclusive practices and a commitment to celebrating diversity, Youssouf has played an important role in embedding equality and inclusion across the whole school.

'The Cultural Fashion Show has been running for the past five years, but what made this year particularly special was that the event was planned and organised by a group of our S5 and S6 pupils. Having taken part as participants in previous years, they stepped forward this year as planners, organisers and leaders. It was fantastic to see them take real ownership of the event and demonstrate leadership, creativity and teamwork, skills that will serve them incredibly well in the future. I couldn't be prouder of what they achieved. Well done to them all.' Youssouf Kassime

This is the second time that a member of CEC has won this award, with Hardeep Kaur from Portobello High School winning in its 3rd year.

Jenny Hennessy, Head Teacher
Prestonfield Primary School
Chair of the Edinburgh Learns Equalities Board and Saroj Lal Award Judge

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Currie Community High School Debate Club

The Currie Community High School Debate Club have had a phenomenal year, really making the most of the new school's Debating Chamber. In the last three weeks alone, they have won three national debating competitions, and been congratulated in a motion lodged at the Scottish Parliament (text below). The club was founded and is coached by the school librarian, James Cullimore, and English teacher Miranda Whitmarsh. This was only the club's second year of competitive debating, and we are absolutely delighted with the success its members have found so far.

The year was off to a great start for the club when four of its members – Max Pica, Rory Picken (both S2), Juliet McDonald and Hoi Ching (Annabel) Lam (both S3) – were accepted to the Scottish Debate Team's Junior Squad. They have benefitted from training throughout the year organised by Team Scotland, and we are grateful they have passed this learning on to the rest of the club in the form of workshops and write-ups on our Debate Team.

In November, Currie's Annabel and Juliet defeated schools from across Scotland to win the Gold Final of the Edinburgh University Schools Juniors Debating Competition, while Freya Frette (S3) and Max were runners up. At the following national Edinburgh University Schools competition in February, Beth Houston and Mason Tait (both S6) won the Silver Final, and Juliet and Annabel won the Bronze Final – particularly successful given this was a Senior competition.

On 29 May, the club took eight young people to the Craigmount Junior Debate Competition, where they debated leading school teams from across Scotland. Currie's Max Pica and Rory Picken won the closely contested Gold Final on the motion, 'This House prefers a two-party system to a multi-party system of government.' They defeated finalists from Stewart's Melville College and George Watson's College, and Currie's Freya Frette was named Best Speaker of the competition.

The Scottish National Debate Team held the Junior Scotland Cup in June, an annual competition for debaters who trained in its junior squad. Two teams reached the Grand Final: one included Currie's Juliet MacDonald and the other Currie's Annabel Lam. Juliet's team won the competition, while Annabel was named Best Speaker. Rory Picken was ranked fourth among the competition's speakers, with Max Pica also performing strongly.

On 18 June, the club competed in the Ayrshire Cup, a national competition principally attended by senior secondary pupils and debaters who had recently completed S6. Currie's Juliet MacDonald and Annabel Lam won the Gold Final, while Max Pica and Rory Picken won the Silver Final. Rory and Max were also named the competition's first and second-ranked speakers respectively.

In the Gold Final, Juliet and Annabel, both aged 14, defeated a team that included an 18-year-old due to represent Scotland at the World Schools Debating Championships in August, widely regarded as the World Cup of schools debating.

On 17 June, MSPs lodged the following motion at the Scottish Parliament:

'That the Parliament congratulates the Currie Community High School (CCHS) debate team on what it believes has been a remarkable year of success following on from its 2025 victory at the Schools' Mace Novice Final; understands that CCHS pupils won the Junior Scottish Cup, University of Edinburgh Juniors, the Craigmount Cup and the Silver Final at the University of Edinburgh Schools Debating Competition; notes that four of the pupils have been selected for the junior national debate team, making CCHS the school with the highest number of members of that team; recognises that the pupils are coached by the school librarian, James Cullimore, and English teacher, Miranda Whitmarsh; considers that these results have established Currie as one of Scotland's most successful debating schools, which is exceptionally rare for any state school, but particularly one so new to debating; believes that debating has given the pupils confidence, critical thinking skills and access to opportunities that might otherwise have felt remote, and wishes the CCHS team all the best in its future endeavours.'

CCHS Debate Club strives for inclusivity and excellence at all levels. Many of our debaters have additional support needs, and one of the most important features of our club is making those who want to speak and participate feel comfortable. We do competition coaching on Wednesdays but our Tuesday lunchtime sessions are open to everyone, and we welcome new members every week – pupils just bring their lunch and an appetite for argument.

One reason for the club's rapid success was an S1&2 Debate Rota experience piloted by CCHS for the last two years, in which all S1&2 pupils experienced six weeks of double debating lessons. This allowed excellent potential debaters to be identified by the English Department in the junior school, enabling the club to grow to its current 25 members.

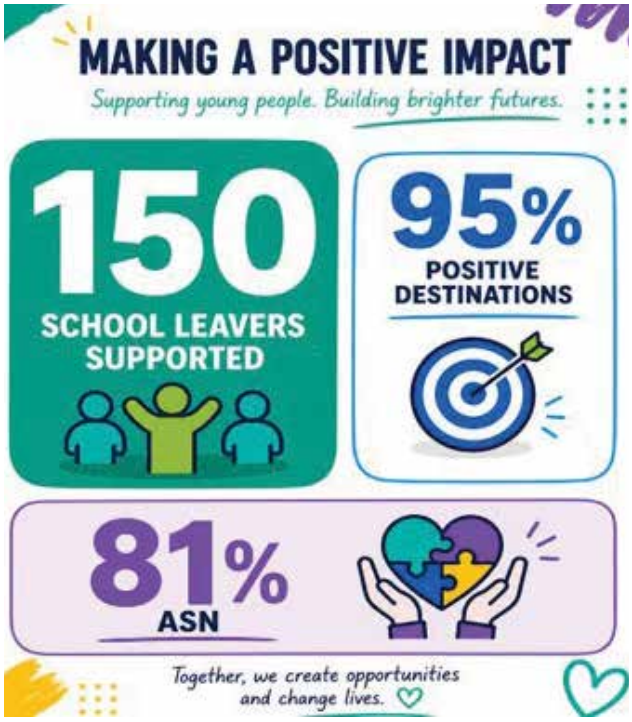
In the 2026/2027 session, CCHS Debate Club look forward to:

- Entering all available national competitions (of course!)
- Starting a Debating Captain coaching programme, where our Debating Captains will offer coaching and advice for younger years in English lessons
- Hosting an evening of debate at CCHS for spectators before Christmas – look out for tickets
- Continuing to spread the skills our debaters learn throughout the school community
- Taking part in the work of the CCHS Pupil Parliament.

Jenny Hutchison, Head Teacher
Currie Community High School



Jobs Employment Training (Jet)





The JET (Jobs Employment Training) programme has been revised to target disengaged school leavers at risk of a negative destination more effectively. The young people referred to JET now have a much more personalised timetable created in collaboration with their school to meet the needs of each learner. These include combinations of; work placements, school based flexible curriculum offer, School College Partnership (SCP), mentoring, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) collaborative work, industry insight sessions, employer led activity (often through community benefits) and third sector employability input.

I felt stuck and I didn't know what I wanted to do, then I researched JET and after a few sessions with my project officer I took the decision to go to Inch View Care Home and do a work experience. I worked with the resident's doing activities and it's one of the best things I've ever done. I did Health and Social Care as well and I got a certificate for that. I was at school on a Monday and the care home on a Wednesday and Thursday and then in College on Fridays. Now I have been offered a full-time course at college for a Health and Social Care course in Sighthill College and I have a part-time job at the care home on a 12 hour contract. I have grown bonds with people through this experience. Take my word and do it, it's the best opportunity. **Tyne, Castlebrae Community Campus**





Mya, Craigroyston Community High School

My experience with JET has been some of the best months of my life. Before joining, I lacked confidence in finding a career and often felt uncertain about my future. With JET, I regained my confidence, completed work experience, and secured part-time employment—something I never thought would be possible. **Mya, Craigroyston High School**

I stopped going to school at 13 due to bad health, my teachers gave me many options to get some learning but I declined them all as I had bad anxiety going places where I didn't know anyone. My school mentioned JET to me and it sounded good but I wasn't sure if I was going to go for it or not, but I did and I don't regret anything. JET has helped me become more confident and has made me and my families relationship so much better due to me going to college and work experience and now going to do an apprenticeship and all that happened because of JET. **Hannah, Gracemount High school**

Stuart Burns, Developing Young Workforce (DYW) Coordinator
City of Edinburgh Council

Gold Award for Music for Craiglockhart Primary School

Craiglockhart Primary School was absolutely thrilled to be the first school in Edinburgh and the 5th in the whole of Scotland so far, to have been awarded the Gold Award for Music from the We Make Music School Scheme. Mae Murray MBE, Director of Music Education Partnership Group (MEPG) and Head of Scottish Young Musicians, proudly presented the award to Music Teacher Angela Simms and pupils Amalia and Molly at the Usher Hall Big Sing event, just before the end of term in June. The award recognises and celebrates the rich variety of music making activity in Scotland across several themes; Planning and Organising, Singing, Playing Instruments and Performance, Exploring Sound and Creative Music-Making and lastly, Listening, Responding and Reflecting.

Craiglockhart's vision for music is to embed music as the soul of the school and to place music at the centre of the school community and beyond. Weekly lessons and many events that take place in and out of school throughout the year, have contributed towards this achievement.

Craiglockhart hopes this will inspire more Edinburgh schools to work towards this award.

More details can be found at:
https://wemakemusicscotland.org

Angela Simms, Music Teacher
Craiglockhart Primary School



Left to right: Angela Simms, Amalia, Mae Murray and Molly

Royal's Miles Better Offering a Healthy, Rights Respecting Breakfast



Minister Siobhian Brown and Head Teacher Lisa Black with breakfast club pupils

Lisa Black, Head Teacher at Royal Mile Primary, welcomed Siobhian Brown, Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, to experience the impact of our universal Breakfast Club. The visit highlighted how this daily provision strengthens children's wellbeing, learning and rights, while living out our SMILE values: Successful, Multicultural, Included, Loved and Empowered.

Pupil Support Officer, Lynne Robertson, works closely with Magic Breakfast and local businesses to provide a healthy breakfast and a gentle transition into learning.

Lisa explained to the Minister, *The impact of the Breakfast Club is clear. Staff observe that children who attend arrive calmer and ready to learn whilst the club has also improved attendance and punctuality. Families tell us the provision helps them manage work and home commitments, knowing their child is supervised, cared for and has access to a healthy breakfast.*

Helen Cormack, Deputy Head Teacher, worked with pupils, staff and families to embed children's rights into the daily routine: *We have created a clear, child-friendly Mealtime Charter. This ensures that every child at Royal Mile Primary is welcomed, safe, well-nourished and supported to build positive relationships.' Reflecting key UNCRC principles, it helps pupils start the day the SMILE way.*

Helen Cormack, Deputy Head Teacher
Royal Mile Primary School

Wellbeing as a Staff Priority at Prestonfield Primary School

At Prestonfield Primary our wellbeing champion, Laura Darby, has recently launched a monthly newsletter for staff focused on issues that matter most to our team. Each edition is created in collaboration with team members, ensuring that the topics reflect real experiences and concerns within our school community. From mental health awareness to understanding endometriosis and celebrating neurodiversity, the newsletter provides insights, resources, and practical advice to support the wellbeing of all.

A unique and valued aspect of each issue is a section dedicated to fostering positive workplace relationships. Here, staff share reflections and guidance on how we can be the best colleagues to one another, emphasising empathy, understanding, and support in day-to-day interactions. This approach not only raises awareness of important health and wellbeing topics but also strengthens the sense of connection and care across the team.

The newsletter has quickly become a space for open dialogue, shared learning, and mutual support. By shining a light on both individual and collective wellbeing, it helps staff feel seen, heard, and empowered. Through this initiative, our wellbeing champion, Laura is creating a culture where wellbeing is prioritised, knowledge is shared, and everyone is encouraged to contribute to a supportive and inclusive workplace.

Jenny Hennessy, Head Teacher and Laura Darby, Prestonfield Primary School Wellbeing Champion, Mental Health Lead and Class Teacher

Cultural Event at The Royal High School

Participating in and managing this year's culture show was a fantastic chance for us to connect and collaborate across year groups. It resulted in wonderful experiences and a strong bond between diverse cultures. Although the planning was divided amongst the six of us, we all felt our contributions were significant to the final show's success. Seeing it live felt surreal and rewarding. We had a big responsibility to execute the show and uphold its legacy and seeing it come to life proved it was all worthwhile. **Jana, Esme, Rishika (S5) The Royal High School**



From left to right; Jana, Esme, Yousaf Kassime and Rishika (S5 Racial Equalities Academy)

S6s, we have witnessed the growth of Culture Week from our first year to now. It's inspiring to see how well it's been for younger years joining in. Over the years, older pupils have encouraged many younger ones to participate in this annual event. They have gained confidence to showcase their culture and traditions on the runway. We have delegated roles to ourselves and peers to ensure the best show for all pupils. Overall, we have been delighted with the tremendous success of this year's Culture Show and hope that next year will be even better. **Ruqaya, Nadiya and Geetanjali (S6) The Royal High School**



From left to right: Nadiya, Ruqaya and Geetanjali

Pentland Primary Celebrates Gold School Sport Award

Pentland Primary is delighted to celebrate its first Gold School Sport Award from sportscotland, recognising their ongoing commitment to putting sport at the heart of the school's planning, practice and ethos.

Over the past year, a keen and committed Sports Council pupil group, led by PE Teacher Mrs Millar and Active Schools Coordinator (ASC) Lorna Norman, met once a month with a shared aim to deliver high quality sporting experiences and promote healthy, active lifestyles for every pupil in our school.

The Sports Council played a key role throughout our journey to gold. They gathered evidence to complete a baseline assessment; created an action plan to target areas for improvement; and showcased the breadth and impact of the activities now on offer as validation for our application.

To celebrate this achievement, we held an assembly to share the exciting news with the school community, and Tammy McKinlay (Edinburgh Active Schools Manager) proudly presented us with our Gold flag.

As this school term has begun, we have appointed new members for this year's Sports Council who look forward to using their ideas and voice to further increase opportunities and engagement in PE, physical activity and sport within and beyond life at Pentland Primary.

Debbie Millar, PE Teacher
Jennifer Cairns, Head Teacher
Pentland Primary School



Pentland Primary Celebrates Gold School Sport Award



Sports Council meeting with Lorna Norman, Active Schools, and Mrs Millar, PE Teacher, Pentland Primary School



New flag

Pilrig Park School Retains Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flag Award



At the end of June, we were thrilled to hear that we had successfully retained our Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flag Award, once again recognising our school's ongoing commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility.

The assessment feedback praised our whole-school approach to Eco-Schools activities, highlighting how all pupils and staff have opportunities to be involved. Assessors were particularly impressed with our action planning, which showed careful monitoring of progress and reflection on what has been learned throughout the journey.

The Eco Committee's work on reducing food waste received special recognition. By measuring food waste and surveying pupils about their food preferences, we were able to target actions where they would have the greatest impact. These efforts have led to a noticeable reduction in food waste, particularly fruit waste, while also saving money for the school.

The feedback also celebrated the outstanding work of reducing energy in our school by introducing energy monitors, creating awareness campaigns and hosting a whole-school poster competition, which have all helped reduce energy waste across classrooms. In addition, learning about growing plants, supporting wildlife and improving recycling and composting practices was commended.

Assessors noted the positive involvement of Pilrig Park's wider school community and praised the way everyone in the community is informed through assemblies and other communications.

We are incredibly proud of this achievement and would like to thank everyone who helped make it possible.

Donna Wheat, Eco Committee Staff Lead
Pilrig Park School

A pupil making a bird feeder, Taim, Pilrig Park School



Pilrig Park School retains Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flag Award



A pupil making a poster about turning the lights off , Saim, Pilrig Park School



Members of the Eco Committee (White Class) during a litter-pick, Pilrig Park School

Growing Together: Queensferry High School and Rotary Partnership

A fantastic example of school and community partnership came to life at Queensferry High School in September with the official opening of a new Community Garden and Outdoor Learning Area, created in partnership with the Rotary Club of South Queensferry.

For nine months, Rotary's Environmental Team, alongside other community volunteers, worked tirelessly to transform part of the school grounds into an impressive sustainable learning space. The completed garden features extensive raised vegetable beds, a polytunnel greenhouse and a large seating area with a pergola.

Officially handed over on 1 September, the garden will now become a valuable part of school life. Pupils will have opportunities to develop horticultural, environmental and sustainability skills, while teachers will be able to use the space creatively for learning across the curriculum.

More importantly, the project demonstrates the impact that genuine, sustained partnerships between schools and their communities can have.

Queensferry High School is incredibly grateful to Rotary members and community volunteers for their time, expertise and commitment. Their contribution has created a lasting resource that will benefit young people for many years to come – a brilliant example of partnership working and community spirit in action.

Kenny Manson
Deputy Head Teacher
Queensferry High School



Garden being constructed last May, Queensferry High School

Growing Together: Queensferry High School and Rotary Partnership



Completed garden, Queensferry High School



Garden opening ceremony and hospitality for Rotarians and guests from our hospitality class

Pilrig Park School Achieves RRSA Gold: Rights Respecting Schools Award

We were extremely proud to hear that we had achieved the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award at Gold level. This award recognises all the work that staff and pupils have put in place to deeply embed children's rights into the school's culture and curriculum. The accreditation report highlighted the school's dedication to promoting student voice, building relationships based on dignity, and integrating rights education into daily school life.

A huge thank you to our pupils, staff, and parents/carers for your passion and commitment to making Pilrig Park School a truly rights respecting school. Together, we are making a real difference in the lives of our young people.

We are now looking at our re-accreditation (in 2029) and this year we have developed a new One World Challenge, giving pupils the opportunity to explore different countries, global issues and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Through pupil voice, creativity and collaboration, we hope to introduce our pupils to the concept of global citizenship in a way in which is accessible to all.

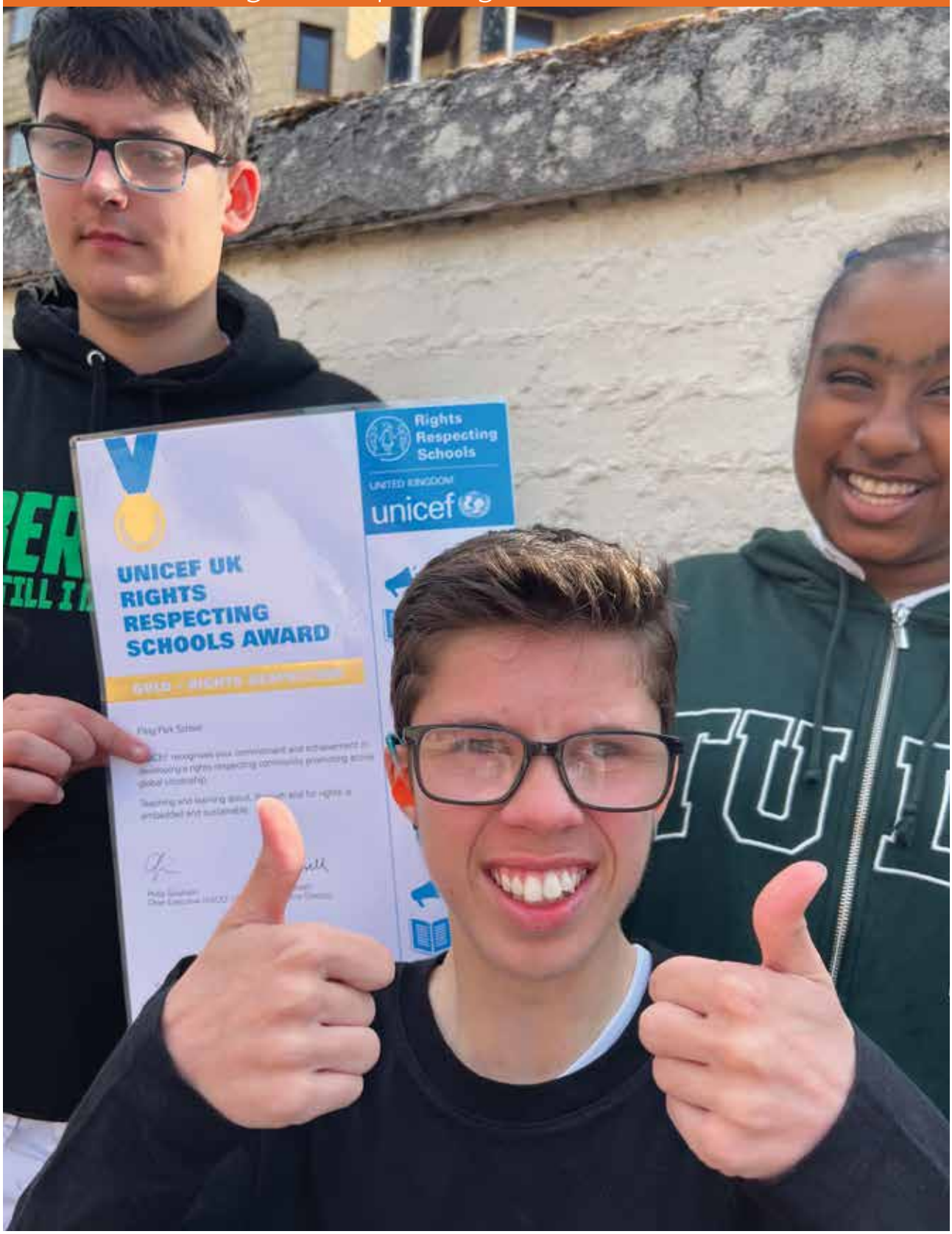
We are excited to see where our Rights Respecting journey takes us next.

Ruth McLarty and Catriona Ferguson
Principal Teachers and RRSA School Leads
Pilrig Park School



Pupils from Orange and Red classes, along with excited members of staff, celebrating the arrival of the GOLD banner

Pilrig Park School Achieves RRSA Gold: Rights Respecting Schools Award



Duhan, Luke and Peter, Pilrig Park School proudly holding the RRSA Gold Award