Voter Education Week:

My Voice, My Rights



October 6th-10th

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VOTER EDUCATION WEEK

MY VOICE, MY RIGHTS



Dates: October 6–10, 2025
Framing Democratic Participation Through the UNCRC

Overview

Voter Education Week will engage Irish primary school pupils in democracy, civic voice, and leadership through age-appropriate, rights-based learning. Grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 12 & 29), the initiative recognises children as current rights-holders with the ability to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them.

With the Irish Presidential Election taking place on 24th October 2025, this week provides a timely platform to connect national democratic processes with children's everyday experiences of voice, choice, and representation. Activities are designed to be adaptable so that every teacher can use them in a way that suits their classroom and pupils.



Article 2: Every child has rights, without discrimination of any kind.

Article 12: The right of every child to express their views and have them taken seriously.

Article 13: The right to freedom of expression.

Article 15: The right to association and participation in groups such as Student Councils.

Article 17: The right to access relevant and age-appropriate information.

Article 29: The right to education that prepares children for responsible life in a free, democratic society.

Article 30: The rights to identity, culture, religion, and language.

Article 31: The rights to rest, play, culture, arts, and participation in community life.



Aims:

- [ ] Fulfil children's rights under the UNCRC by providing genuine opportunities to be heard (Art. 12) and to learn about democracy through active participation (Art. 29).
- [ ] Build links between school-level decision-making and Ireland's democratic traditions.
- [ ] Build pupils' confidence in expressing ideas (Art. 13) and associating with peers (Art. 15).
- [ ] Strengthen inclusive Student Councils so that all children, including minority and marginalised voices (Art. 30), can be represented.
- [ ] Celebrate diversity and belonging as central to democracy (Art. 31).

The programme is flexible:

Option A is for schools that already have an elected Student Council (council members take on mentoring and leadership roles).

Option B is for schools electing their Student Council during the week (Monday to Wednesday becomes campaign time, and Thursday's vote serves as the real election).

We understand that every classroom and school has its own rhythm, so there is no pressure to complete every activity in Voter Education Week. Teachers are encouraged to pick and choose the activities that work best for their pupils and adapt them to their context. Even if your class cannot participate fully during the week, activities can be used later in the school year to explore rights, leadership, and democracy at a pace that suits your learners. If you need help with adaptation or implementation, you can contact our Child Rights Officer, Emma Kenny, at emma@unicef.ie.

VOTER EDUCATION WEEK

STRUCTURE OF THE WEEK



Each day focuses on a theme, connected to the UNCRC, with age-appropriate activities (Junior Infants – 6th Class).

Daily Themes	
MONDAY: My Voice Matters (Articles 12 & 13)	Children explore their right to express views. Activities include storytelling, circle discussions, “voice walls,” and rights-based posters.
TUESDAY: How We Choose Leaders (Article 29)	Pupils learn about leadership and democratic elections, linking school votes to the Irish Presidency. Activities include mock class votes, ballot design, and exploring leadership qualities.
WEDNESDAY: Running for Change – Dress-Up Day (Article 15)	Dress-up theme: **“If I Were a Leader…”** Children discover their right to association and leadership through campaigning, posters, slogans, and speeches.
THURSDAY: Voting Day (Articles 2 & 12)	Schools model fair, inclusive elections, ensuring equal participation for all children. Activities include polling stations, ballot boxes, and reflection on fairness and voice.
FRIDAY: We All Belong (Articles 30 & 31)	The week closes with celebrations of diversity and inclusion. Activities include class charter and optional Student Council inauguration ceremonies.



Learnings & Reflection

- [ ] Student “feedback walls” and journals, (“What I Learned About My Voice”).
- [ ] Teacher observations.
- [ ] Digital documentation for school newsletters/websites.
- [ ] **(for Option A)** Rights Detectives surveys to measure pupil participation and inclusion. (possibility to turn into class data projects).
- [ ] School-wide reflection on how pupil voices shaped the week.

Long-Term Vision

1. Annual national rollout of Voter Education Week to embed rights-based democracy education.
2. Embedding of student voice and civic education in SPHE and Ethical Education curricula.
3. Strengthened Student Councils as inclusive, representative bodies.
4. Preparation of children as informed, empathetic citizens who understand their rights.

Why It Matters

Voter Education Week makes children’s rights real and visible. It connects Articles 2, 12, 13, 15, 17, 29, 30, and 31 of the CRC with joyful, practical experiences of leadership, participation, and fairness. This initiative connects classroom learning to real-world citizenship. It gives children a hands-on experience of democracy and empowers them to use their voices. With Ireland’s Presidential Election as a backdrop, Voter Education Week offers a unique opportunity to foster lifelong civic engagement. This can help to empower pupils not only to imagine the future, but to exercise their rights in the present.

Sharing Your Experiences:

We would love to hear how your school is participating in Voter Education Week! If you are sharing photos or reflections on social media, please tag us so we can celebrate your work. Your feedback helps us improve the programme and showcases the creative ways schools are empowering children to use their voices. We are **@unicefireland** and **@unicef_ireland_youth**.

MONDAY MY VOICE MATTERS



UNCRC Focus: Articles 12 & 13 – Right to be heard and express views

Learning Goal: Children recognise their voices have value in shaping their community.

Suggested Flow

Starter (10 mins):	Ages 4–7: Read or listen to *Say Something* (Peter H. Reynolds) → discuss: "What would you say if you could change something?" Ages 8–12: Circle discussion: "What decisions affect us in school?"
Main Activities (30–40 mins):	Voice Portraits (ages 4–7): Draw yourself using your voice. See *Say Something* for reference. Rights in Action posters (ages 8–12): Show how CRC Articles are visible in school. Student Voice Wall: Post ideas the school should hear.
Group (15 mins):	Compare and Discuss that just as the principal and teachers make decisions in school and listen to students' voices, the President and government make decisions for the country and listen to citizens. Reflect on the importance of the right to be heard in both school and national communities, and how speaking up can create change.

Reflection Question: "When was a time your opinion changed something at school?"

Option A (Existing Councils)

- Student councillors act as *Rights Detectives*, gathering anonymous ideas from pupils.
- Council presents a "Voice Report" at Friday's assembly.

Option B (Elections This Week)

- Worry & Wonder Box: collect suggestions for candidates to address.
- Candidates begin gathering feedback for manifestos.

TUESDAY HOW WE CHOOSE LEADERS



UNCRC Focus: Article 29 – Education should prepare children for democratic life

Learning Goal: Children have a better understanding of elections and leadership qualities.

Suggested Flow

Starter (10 mins):	"Line Up and Choose", students vote with their feet by standing under a picture that represents their choice (e.g., lion or dolphin as a class mascot) (adjust based on age).
Main Activities (30–40 mins):	Ballot design (ages 4–7). "What Makes a Good Leader" workshop (ages 8–12). small groups brainstorm qualities of a good leader (e.g., fairness, kindness, listening) and create posters or word clouds to share. Showcase past Irish Presidents and leadership qualities.
Group (15 mins):	Compare school ballots with real election posters.

Reflection Question: "What makes a leader fair and trustworthy?"

Option A (Existing Councils)

- Student councillors explain their own election experiences and qualities of good leaders.
- Younger pupils vote on fun issues (story/song choice).

Option B (Elections This Week)

- Students preparing to run begin designing real campaign posters.
- Teachers support candidates in identifying qualities they want to show.



WEDNESDAY

RUNNING FOR CHANGE

DRESS-UP DAY

UNCRC Focus: Article 15 – Right to association and leadership

Learning Goal: Children explore campaigning, decision-making, and respectful leadership.

Suggested Flow

Starter (10 mins):	Dress-up parade: “If I Were a Leader…”
Main Activities (30–40 mins):	Ages 4–7: Leadership sashes, megaphones, role-play being “Leader for a Day.” Ages 8–12: Mini-campaigns with posters, slogans, and short debates.
Group (15 mins):	Speeches/hustings: “If I Were President…”

Reflection Question: “What responsibilities do leaders and adults have to listen to children’s voices, and how can we remind them that we have a right to be heard?”

Option A (Existing Councils)

- Student councillors mentor groups in running mini-campaigns on school issues.
- They model giving speeches and answering respectful questions.

Option B (Elections This Week)

- Official campaign day: candidates prepare real speeches, manifestos, and hustings.
- Younger children create campaign symbols with support.



THURSDAY

VOTING DAY!

Option A (Existing Councils) Mock Irish Presidential Election

UNCRC Focus: Articles 2 & 12 – Equal right to participate; right to be heard through voting

Learning Goal: Children experience inclusive, fair elections while learning about the Irish Presidency.

Suggested Flow

Starter (10 mins):	Teacher introduces the Irish President's role in simple, age-appropriate language. Option to read or watch *Mary Robinson: A Voice for Fairness* (John & Fatti Burke) → discuss: "What can leaders and adults do today to make sure children's voices are listened to and respected?" Present child-friendly profiles of the real Presidential candidates.
Main Activities (40–60 mins):	Set up polling stations with booths, ballot boxes, and voter lists. Pupils vote in secret using ballots with candidates' names/photos; younger pupils can use symbol/photo ballots. Student Council members serve as poll clerks, monitors, and help younger pupils navigate the process. Count votes transparently, modelling fairness, inclusion, and respect for results.
Group (15 mins):	Reflection wall: "Why I Voted…" or "If I Were President…" Compare the school mock election and the national Presidential process.

Reflection Question: How did it feel to use your vote today?”

Notes for Facilitators:

- [ ] Emphasise participation over outcomes — the goal is to experience democracy and **the right to have a voice.**
- [ ] Highlight the importance of secrecy, fairness, and inclusion.
- [ ] Optionally link the reflection to Student Council initiatives (“How could our voices make a difference in school like adults do in the country?”).



THURSDAY

VOTING DAY!

Option B (Elections This Week) Student Council Election

UNCRC Focus: Articles 2 & 12 – Equal right to participate; right to be heard through voting

Learning Goal: Children experience inclusive, fair elections while electing their new Student Council.

Suggested Flow

Starter (10 mins):	Teacher explains the election process: nomination, secret ballot, polling stations, and vote counting. Emphasise fairness, confidentiality, and equal participation for all pupils.
Main Activities (40–60 mins):	Set up polling stations with booths, ballot boxes, and voter lists. Pupils vote in secret for their Student Council candidates. Younger children can use symbol/photo ballots or receive teacher assistance to ensure accessibility. Older pupils or helpers act as poll clerks and guides, supervising voting and ensuring rules are followed. Count votes transparently; record results clearly for announcement.
Group (15 mins):	Reflection wall: “Why I Voted…” or “If I Were on the Council…” Discuss how fair voting ensures everyone’s voice is represented.

Reflection Question: How did it feel to use your vote today?”

Optional:

- [ ] Announce results in a mini Inauguration Ceremony with certificates or ribbon launch on Friday.
- [ ] Link to national elections: compare processes to Ireland’s Presidential Election, highlighting how everyone’s vote counts.

Notes for Facilitators:

- [ ] Focus on inclusion and participation, not just those elected.
- [ ] Use this as a teaching moment for responsibility, citizenship, and student voice.
- [ ] Encourage candidates to thank peers and emphasise ideas rather than popularity.



FRIDAY

WE ALL BELONG

UNCRC Focus: Articles 30 & 31 – Right to culture, identity, and participation in community life

Learning Goal: Democracy celebrates inclusion and diversity.

Suggested Flow

Starter (10 mins):	"Belonging feels like…" sentence starters.
Main Activities (30–40 mins):	Ages 4–7: Drawings of belonging. Ages 8–12: Class charter that sets out relevant CRC rights for the class or school-wide democracy collage where students create a collage showing how their rights are reflected in school decisions and activities.
Group (20 mins):	School assembly showcasing songs, speeches, posters, or collages.

Reflection Question: "What does it mean for everyone to belong in our school community?"

Option A (Existing Councils)

- Existing Council leads closing assembly.
- Council presents findings from Rights Detectives and sets future actions.

Option B (Elections This Week)

- Hold an Inauguration Ceremony for the new Student Council (certificates, oath, ribbon launch).
- Compare with Ireland's Presidential inauguration traditions.



CLASS CHARTER

GUIDELINES

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A classroom charter is an agreement amongst the children and adults in your classroom that sets out the rights from the CRC that are deemed most relevant to your class and the actions to ensure that the rights can be realised and enjoyed by everyone.

The charter is not a behaviour management tool. Rules in codes of behaviours are often externally imposed, whereas charters are democratically negotiated. The participatory process in developing a charter is as important as the end product.

The term responsibility should only be used when referring to what adults will do as duty bearers to uphold children's rights. Remember that rights are inalienable, meaning they cannot be taken away. Having rights doesn't depend on fulfilling responsibilities. Rights can't be used as a reward or a punishment.

Benefits for children

- It builds shared values for a rights respecting classroom.
- It is a real and meaningful guide to action on a day-to-day basis.
- It develops a sense of ownership of the classroom learning.
- Its acts as the 'social glue' that binds everyone together.

Decide which articles to represent

A charter will take several sessions to complete. Children, staff and possibly parents, should be involved in the process.

Facilitate a child-led discussion and reach a consensus on which articles to include (whilst still acknowledging that rights are indivisible). You could use a diamond ranking activity to do this.

In infant settings two or three rights on a charter is typical, a senior primary class may have five or six.

Consider the language

The language of the Convention can be complicated. While it is good to encourage children to use their own words, it is important not to lose the accuracy in the meaning.

One way to simplify an article is to use fewer words, so for example, Article 31: "Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities" can, in a nursery setting, become "The right to play (31)" but not "The right to toys". Using the article number (at all ages) shows that rights are not just a nice idea but actually belong to part of something bigger, namely the Convention.

Agree actions

Agree actions for children as Rights Holders and actions for adults as Duty Bearers. Consider each chosen article and identify ways to respect theser rights in the classroom.

For example, “We have agreed that the right to have your voice heard will be on our charter – how will you respect this right for yourself and for each other? What will adults (duty bearers) do to ensure you can enjoy this right in class?”

This may begin with a long list of suggested actions which will need to be streamlined or whittled down through discussion, agreement and, perhaps, more voting.

Design the charter

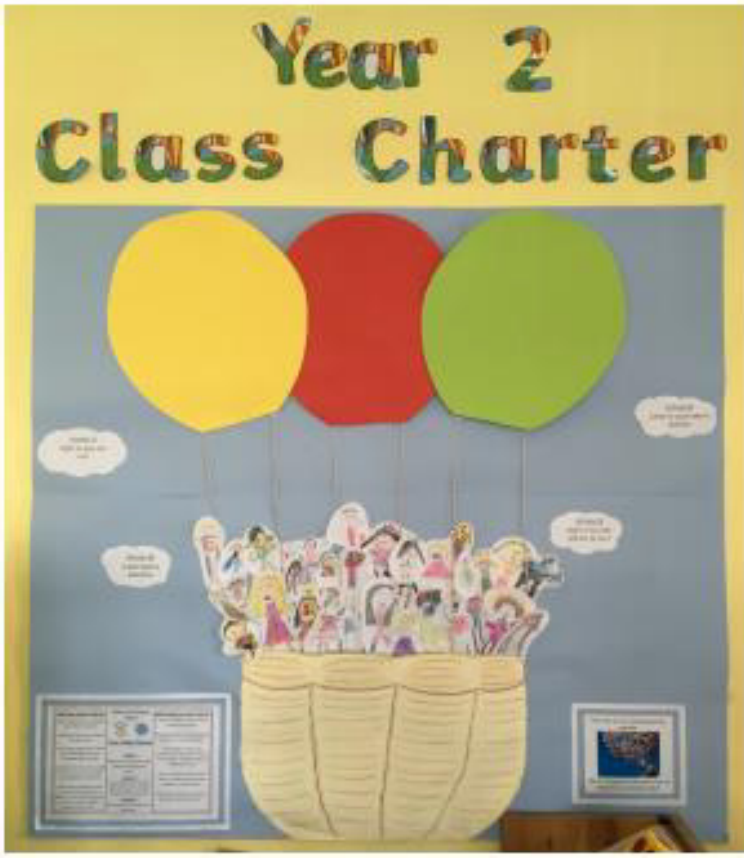
Encourage the children to create a design that represents their chosen articles, using a theme of their choosing.

Charters vary from class to class and from school to school. This is encouraged. Some are very creative, linking their charter to current learning themes or particular interests (butterflies, planets, kites, hand prints, super heroes perhaps) but they should all have the same content:

Child friendly description of rights (linked to specific articles from the CRC) -without losing the true meaning of the article being referenced. The article number should always be mentioned (Article 12 for example).

Actions for children to respect the rights of others and themselves and actions for adults as Duty Bearers to ensure that rights are being upheld and respected.





Sign and display

The pupils and adults based in that class should sign the charter in some way to show their agreement.

Signing may be attaching their photograph around the edge of the charter or adding a thumb print for example.

Ensure it is displayed in a place visible to all signatories. Refer to the charter on a regular basis to reinforce learning, for example, celebrate when the relevant rights are being positively respected, or remind children and adults of their mutual agreement if a problem arises.



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Cover photo: children participating in child rights programme, South Africa



STUDENT COUNCIL GUIDELINES

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All children have the right to express their views on matters that affect them, and adults should listen and take children seriously. (Article 12)

Active student councils are essential in helping children to enjoy this right at school. Child participation should permeate all teaching, learning, and actions in the school. However, it is also necessary to set up a group to represent the student body when making decisions in the school.

Name

Many schools will call this group a student council. However, you can get creative with the name such as:

- rights committee
- the rights detectives
- children's committee

Encourage the children to make suggestions and vote on their preferred name.

Purpose

This group influences the school's rights respecting work, ensuring children play a leading role in embedding the principles of child rights in school life.

It provides a link between children, teachers, school leadership and the wider school community when making decisions in the school.

The group could be consulted on matters such as:

- Curriculum planning
- Governing bodies
- Staff appointments
- Evaluating teaching and learning
- Policy development
- Designing the playground
- Running after-school clubs
- Taking on the role as playground mediators
- And many more!

Members

Most of the members should be children who represent the different classes and reflect the diversity in the school. Ensure this is decided through a democratic process, such as an election in each class.

There is no minimum age at which children can participate.

Younger children should be offered appropriate support in line with their evolving capacities, for example, child-friendly documents, playing games, using visual activities.

Offer additional support and time for children in vulnerable situations, including those in care, refugees or children with disabilities.

Adults should include at least one member of the school leadership team, along with a selection of teachers. Also include support staff such as a caretaker or a special needs assistant.

Parents/carers and a member of the local community (health worker or faith leader) are also a brilliant addition.

When including adults in the group, however, ensure that they do not dominate – in terms of either numbers or voices. Consider developing a child-led, mutually agreed, simple terms of reference to guide how the group will function, including how to deal respectfully with disagreements.

These groups are most effective when they have support from the principal and school leadership team.









Represent

The members can engage with their peers and represent their views in this group.

For example, if the school is considering a change to the homework policy the group members should share this information with the children in their class to hear their views. The group representatives can bring their classmates' opinions to a committee meeting and make an informed decision.

The group representatives should then provide the feedback from this meeting to their classmates.

Review

The group can carry out detective work to find out how rights respecting the school already is. This highlights what needs work and can inform plans to improve school practice. Every school will do this in a way that suits their own context. Download suggestions from unicef.ie/child-rights-schools such as:

- Safety walk
- Accessibility walk
- Survey

Feedback

When children's opinions are fed into adult decision-making processes, the children must receive timely feedback on what happened: Were their opinions taken into account? If so, how? What was the result? If not, why not?

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