



Ark Boulton Academy: Flourishing through a Virtues Curriculum

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This is an unpublished conference paper for the 8th Annual Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues conference at Oriel College, Oxford University, Friday 3rd – Sunday 5th January 2020.

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1. Introduction

Ark Boulton Academy Secondary School was founded in 2015 with its predecessor school's national inspections being graded at either requires improvement or inadequate for the previous ten years. Situated in the Birmingham suburb of Sparkhill a low importance is placed on education by the local community with high unemployment and the highest terror threat alert outside of London. The community is made up of predominantly Muslim families originating from Somalia, Bangladesh and the Southern Arab Peninsular. Initial research conducted in the opening term at Ark Boulton in September 2015, with year 11 students (aged 15-16) showed that students had never travelled more than a 1 mile radius from their home in Sparkhill. With an increase in gun, knife and gang crime in the area and National statistics of 1 in 8 children between the ages of 11-19 suffering from mental health disorders the students that come to Ark Boulton Academy fall prey to the system. The percentage of student premium students are at 29% nationally, Ark Boulton have 64%, free school meals students nationally are at 12.4%, Ark Boulton have 40%. The combination of low socio-mobility, low literacy levels, health problems such as heart disease and diabetes leaves children in the local community without ambition, values and role models. This makes Ark Boulton a challenging place to teach.

In 2017 the Senior Leadership Team of Ark Boulton acknowledged that for students attending the school to truly flourish then a different approach to education was needed. This approach was character education. The Senior Leadership Team was made up of staff who firmly believed that character education was a way to help young adults navigate their way in the modern world, and was needed more than ever within a community lacking in role models. Ark Boulton's school ethos is now underpinned by 10 core virtues. These form the academy's values and beliefs and are woven into the thread of the 'Virtue Curriculum' which is followed throughout the school. This programme enhances and enriches the National Curriculum, and is predicated on the ethos 'it takes a community to raise a child.'

Ark Boulton's mission is simple. We love our children. As a whole community Ark Boulton have established the goal to bring up children to have the character, skills and knowledge they need to be successful at university and/or in a career of their choice. Ark Boulton believe that the school, staff and students grow together. Staff support students to develop a lifelong love of learning, a sense of personal and civic pride and the confidence to not just navigate the modern world, but to shape it. Numerous opportunities are provided at Ark Boulton for students to develop outstanding character for which they will be recognised in society for being compassionate, charitable and self-disciplined young adults who will have the humility to be role models for generations to follow. Ark Boulton has been on a journey of school improvement for two years where establishing a purposeful, cohesive and rigorous culture driven by our ethos of virtues was a pre-requisite to allowing improvement in other areas to take root and develop. The success of

the Virtues Curriculum has notably been down to two factors; leadership and training. Establishing a culture of virtues comes from the top down as each member of the leadership team at Ark Boulton practice, role model and speak the language of virtues, whilst comprehensive and well researched training is delivered within Ark Boulton to all staff so they are not only aware of the school's ethos and vision but so staff can deliver the Virtues Curriculum to students.

This paper will provide a detailed case study of the practicalities of the implementation of the Virtues Curriculum, the training to gain staff confidence for authentic practice and delivery of the Virtue Curriculum and how Ark Boulton are continuously evaluating and developing their Virtues Curriculum. It will discuss the challenges faced by a school introducing a character based curriculum and what strategies proved successful in overcoming these challenges.

2. Design and Implementation

A Director of Virtues was appointed by interview process in autumn 2017, and was immediately made a member of the Senior Leadership Team reporting to the Vice Principal for Behaviour, Culture and Ethos, highlighting the significance and importance of the role in the academy. The Director of Virtue had previous experiences as Head of Faith and writing a Faith Development curriculum in a previous inner city school setting. The Director of Virtues was given the role of the designer of the Virtues Curriculum, which was made up of standalone taught lessons, the culture and ethos of the school and an enrichment programme that provides opportunities to carry out and apply the virtues in a variety of situations. Ark Boulton Academy embarked upon a journey to introduce character education via a 'virtues' programme in Summer Term 2017. Ark Boulton Academy made a concise decision to use the term 'virtues'. This was because the Senior Leadership Team believed there was a difference between values and virtues: any organisation can have a set of values upon which they build an ethos, culture and organisational behaviour but these aren't necessary with good intentions for society. The values in question may be to do what is necessary for increasing profits, results or status. Ark Boulton Academy believe virtues are the gold standard for moral and ethical behaviour which will help individuals as well as society to flourish. This meant that the adults at Ark Boulton Academy have a responsibility to learn about what virtuous living is, how they can practise it daily to embed it into the culture, ethos and daily routines of the school and write policies and practices that are aligned with virtuous living. In 2018, the development of a program of study in character education based on virtues as the foundation for studying all aspects of life affecting young adults in the modern world began. Within the Virtue Curriculum there were several strands: curriculum; training; teaching and learning; and monitoring and assessment.

2.1 Teaching Model

Since its inception Ark Boulton had focussed on 10 core virtues which yet the teaching of character development and virtues at Ark Boulton was not formalised until the role of a Director Virtues was established. Prior to the appointment of a Director of Virtue aspects of a virtues education could only be observed via form groups being named after the schools virtues and by an initial vertical project of study where form groups looked at the meaning of the names of their form group and a role model who demonstrated that virtue was studied. For example, Justice Form Tutors in years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 worked in groups to develop resources for use in Form Time about Malala Yousafzai to study her life experiences whilst focussing on and discussing the virtue

of justice. After monitoring and evaluation, it was deemed this approach had limited success: Form Tutors were able to produce resources that related to their virtues but with varying uniformity, and virtue based lessons were taught with varying consistency across the school. Learning walks, conducted by the Senior Leadership Team showed that teachers were not confident in their role as a virtue/character educator and saw this form of virtues education as an add-on to the main subjects that they specialised in and taught. Hearts and minds of staff needed to be changed to inspire and motivate teachers to deliver a program that was meaningful, authentic and placed just as much purpose on developing character as gaining qualifications in subject areas.

Three models were discussed in the initial Virtue Curriculum planning phase:

- The first model considered was a once a term character development drop down day where students would be taken off curriculum and would be exposed to a day of specific lessons and learning based around Ark Boulton's core 10 virtues. This would be a programme delivered by Form Tutors and designed by the Achievement Leader serving the year group. Achievement Leaders are Heads of Year responsible for the academic progress of the students in their year group. They work alongside a Student Support Leader who is responsible for the welfare and pastoral support of the child. Ark Boulton had previously designed and carried out a successful 'Rights and Responsibilities' drop-down day. Although this had good initial feedback from students and staff, it was noticed that the impact wasn't long lasting, cost effective or sustainable due the resources required to run the day.
- The second model consisted of Form Teacher-led virtue lessons whereby Form Tutors designed the virtue lessons in teams. This was trialled for half a term, however, due to staff lack of confidence and inconsistency in content and teaching and learning, this model was changed. It was realised teachers did not have the time to learn about another subject in the depth that would require to teach outstanding lessons and therefore this was affecting confidence, morale and staff buy-in.
- The third model was implemented in autumn 2018. Within this model four lessons a week were dedicated to a bespoke virtues programme delivered by Form Tutors. Form Tutors were supported and held accountable by Achievement Leaders. Achievement Leaders conducted learning walks in the same way as academic lessons to support staff in the pedagogies that were used for teaching and learning in virtue lessons. Achievement Leaders reported to the Director of Virtues and Assistant Principal on the quality of virtue lessons, making viable links with literacy assessments and the behaviour of students in their year groups. The teaching and learning aspects of the programme were standardised via whole school resources and this was the focus of training for Achievement Leaders. This model was coupled with once a term drop down days to focus on the statutory aspects of PSHE, SMSE, SRE and other government requirements, as well as an assembly programme and opportunities outside of the school to partake in charity initiatives and partner with organisations with a similar ethos in regards to character development and virtues. The third model was chosen to take the load off teachers to learn about virtues in the depth that was required of them. Staff training in virtues was critical to the success of the Virtues Curriculum. It also allowed middle leaders in the school to be trained by the Director of Virtues and therefore be able to support their team of Form Tutors in delivering outstanding virtue lessons.

The third model, now known as the Virtues Curriculum is run as a whole school curriculum where all Form Tutors deliver a curriculum based on the Virtues of charity, self-discipline, honesty, service, commitment, justice, compassion, courage and gratitude. All Form Tutors deliver the same resources on each day based on the training the week before. This training is delivered for an hour every week, to all staff members, by the Director of Virtues and is based on academic literature, studies, theories and research in virtuous living. Through internal staff questionnaires and surveys it has been shown that this approach increases teachers' confidence and credibility on the topics within the curriculum, some of which are on a sensitive nature and some of which require prior knowledge where teachers may not have this. Virtue lessons, from within the curriculum, are standalone lessons which are delivered four times a week for half an hour each. Three of these lessons involve specific learning content on specific virtues whilst one lesson is called Family Time where the Form Tutor leads a guided discussion on behaviour points, attendance, achievement and any detentions with tutees. Each lesson follows the same formula of a DNA based on prior knowledge or recall from the lesson before, a stimulus in the form of a quote or video as the basis of teacher exposition, Think Pare Share technique which leads to student discussion, ending with a written reflection based on discussions to the questions posed to the stimulus.

One of the reasons why the Virtue Curriculum has been successful is the focus on a set of straightforward and universal outcomes of the programme:

1. Raising awareness of behaviour in the academy such as throwing litter on the playgrounds, behaviour in and around the academy and ability to understand how to change and self-regulate.
2. Application of the virtues through a series of projects to demonstrate commitment, service, charity, justice and self-discipline
3. Enhancement of Virtue Literacy whilst also linking the Virtues Curriculum to the school's overarching literacy targets.
4. Decrease in the number of serious behaviour incidents due to the topics covered within the program.

2.2. Training

The delivery of the Virtues Curriculum is by every member of staff, from teaching staff to the canteen staff, as everyone has a part to play in the flourishing of a child, therefore training is an influential factor in the success of the programme. A directed 38 hours in the school year is spent on training for staff to work together to script Virtues Curriculum resources that are tailor made for the students at Ark Boulton, as well as material that will help youngsters navigate the world they live in today, such as being a good internet citizen, showing compassion for the environment and encouraging mental, physical and emotional wellbeing.

All staff are present in the training since the language of virtues and implementation of the concepts applies to all areas of Ark Boulton; senior leadership, operational, support staff, behaviour team, enhanced provision team and teaching staff. It was decided from the inception of the Virtues Curriculum that all 66 staff members needed to know that there is high expectation that at Ark Boulton staff are role models for students and that students will be looking to them to live out the values laid out to them in the Virtues Curriculum. If there is not an authentic practice of these virtues amongst staff specifically towards students, the outcomes of the Virtues Curriculum would not be achieved. This approach was not something staff could pick up from a text book and

just read about to gain knowledge. It was an approach that staff had to live by in their daily lives, it had to be embedded into the culture and ethos of the whole school so that it was normalised and shared amongst all without it being seen by staff and students as a novelty factor. From the beginning of the Virtues Curriculum staff were expected to speak the common language of virtues in conversations with students, through role modelling, which in turn would support students in developing respect and self-discipline. The leadership of the school realised that staff needed to have considerable motivation to do this on top of their usual work. Through the use of small group and whole staff discussions during virtue training and staff feedback sheets and surveys the School Leadership Team appealed to teachers about the reason why they came into teaching as educational research shows that a large percentage of teachers enter the profession for moral purpose.

Professional development and staff training around the Virtues Programme began with Monday training sessions, based on the Virtue lessons for the forthcoming week. Virtues training consists of:

- Research at an academic level into the virtues and benefits to health, relationships, wellbeing, quality of life, academic outcomes
- Group activities to understand tasks
- Facilitated whole staff discussions to share real life experiences
- Scripting of virtue resources
- Live practice of lesson delivery
- Writing virtue expositions
- Pre-empting likely responses and questions from pupils
- Differentiating resources for individual students/classes/year groups
- Feedback, reflection on previous virtue lessons
- Quality assurance of teaching and learning
- Moderation of marking virtue exposition speeches and performances
- Data and assessment informing future planning

The Director of Virtues met with Achievement Leaders individually once a week, once as a team and had scheduled meetings with other staff who were involved with projects in smaller groups. In one to one meetings with Achievement Leaders, joint learning walks were carried to assess standardisation in virtue lessons and to assess where support and subsequent school training was needed. Achievement Leaders were required to carry out learning walks in their areas for the rest of the week, and complete a walkthrough template assessment sheet which tracks whether: whole school resources have been used; the Think Pair Share technique is being administered; the Form Teacher has 'narrated the thinking' for the stimulus; and if time is given for a written reflection. Meeting with Achievement Leaders regularly allowed the Director of Virtue to train staff on what standard practice should look like and limit the variation in the resources, language and pedagogy used to teach virtues.

One member of the Achievement Leaders, in particular, showed the potential to write resources for the virtue lessons. This member of the Achievement Leaders received individual mentoring from the Director of Virtues beginning in September 2018 to research, write and assess the virtue lessons. This was successful from an early stage so mentoring was developed through a Coaching leadership model, used commonly throughout the Ark Academy chain, on a weekly

basis. This member of the Achievement Leaders has gone on to lead staff training sessions for year 7 and 8 staff in weekly staff meetings.

Training has developed and is now based on teachers' confidence of topics such as digital resilience, tackling homophobia, radicalisation and extremism and how these are linked to Ark Boulton's 10 core virtues. Developing an internal training programme for the Virtues Curriculum has demonstrated that training must begin with the *why* and narrate the purpose and reasons for embarking on change. Ark Boulton Academy has an expectation that all teachers are teachers of their subject, literacy and virtue. In order for a teacher to take on the extra subject of virtues, they must understand the importance of why it is needed in the modern world. Much research and communication with the local community has been undertaken to understand the issues that students face. This research has been used by the school's Culture, Ethos and Behaviour team, Enhanced provision team and the Director of Virtues to form the basis for virtue concepts and content covered. Staff at Ark Boulton work extremely hard on lesson planning, forging relationships, safeguarding, pastoral care, and extracurricular activity and therefore the Virtues Curriculum needs an equal or greater purpose if staff are subsequently asked to do more. The purpose of the Virtues Curriculum, given the difficult circumstances of the profession, the context of Ark Boulton and the challenges of students' ability levels, needed to be rooted in the compelling reasons why this character education programme is needed in the context of the school.

2.3 Assessment

One of the initial difficulties of implementing the Virtues Curriculum was how to assess authentic application of the Virtues Curriculum as an outcome, as character education is notoriously hard to measure and assess. Several methods of measuring outcomes for students, such as measuring attitudes before and after topics on a Likert scale were researched by the Director of Virtues and discussed as a whole staff. Within the model of the Virtue Curriculum, an assessment was designed for all students to undertake to capture outcomes from the learning after each term. This involved written reflections on content covered each half term. Every student was assigned to write a virtues exposition and perform it in front of peers. Showcase assemblies took place where the best virtue expositions were performed to whole year groups and the Senior Leadership Team. This allowed leaders to measure the impact of the programme and implement change to increase its effectiveness. There was obviously no historical data in Ark Boulton and staff and students had no experience of this previously, therefore staff were given training on the new model of assessment for virtues expositions and a rubric to follow with statements that they could follow in a best fit model. The rubric is divided into two parts; content and delivery. This was followed up with book looks and moderation.

The outcomes were assessed via:

1. A data drop of virtue exposition and portfolio assessment marks every term and analysed by the Director for Virtues and Achievement Leaders
2. Composing and performing an exposition speech based on a topic students had studied such as Compassion for the Environment, Healthy Relationships, Being Good Digital Internet Citizens, Gratitude for Education, Mental, Physical and Emotional Wellbeing assessed against an assessment rubric
3. Virtues portfolios - assessing written reflection on virtues content based on content from virtue lessons

4. Student attitudes and behaviours towards opportunities to take part in application of the virtues through a series of projects to demonstrate commitment, service, charity, justice and self-discipline
5. Behaviour statistics i.e. numbers of pupils who are not in detention, a decrease in the serious nature of behaviour incidents

2.4 Monitoring

At the beginning of any new programme within a school it is vitally important to monitor its delivery to ensure staff have confidence in what they delivering and to ensure a consistency across the whole school. At the time that the Virtues Curriculum was being implemented, Ark Boulton was establishing whole school standardised routines and since the Virtue Curriculum was given the same importance as any other subject lesson, the same routines were implemented in regards to the delivery of the Virtues Curriculum. At Ark Boulton Academy every teacher is a teacher of their subject, literacy and virtues. The language of virtues is observed in all forms of marketing and branding and in all policies. The lessons are given equal training time as subject lessons. Teachers are assessed via performance management on virtues as well as in their subject area. Monitoring of the Virtue Curriculum is carried out by the Assistant Principal for Character Education, Pastoral and Welfare, the Director of Virtues and Achievement Leaders via:

1. Standards walks to reduce in school variation of teaching, this happens every day by Achievement Leaders who support their year groups by team teaching, coaching, role modelling, live coaching in virtue lessons.
2. Support in place for form teachers; individual support for teachers who need it for specific content, sensitive topics or where the resources need to be tailored for specific class groups. For example one class who had a number of students who were struggling with eating disorders and the whole class were affected by this.
3. New teacher induction and coaching; concentrated training for new teachers to learn about the specific issues relating to the community that the academy serves and the purpose and need for character education and virtue lessons.
4. Learning walks; quality assurance to reduce the in-school variation of teaching and learning with specific respect to virtue lessons.
5. Monitoring visits; to assess the standards of practise and policy and feedback at senior leadership level.
6. Analysis of behaviour logs; the nature of behaviour logs and percentage of pupils who are making good choices with respect to following academy expectations.
7. Data drop; assessment data for virtue portfolio marks and virtue exposition marks.
8. Book looks; quality and standards of written virtues work, presentation, content, original ideas, examples of evidence of applying virtues to a student's own life.
9. moderation of virtue expositions and portfolio assessments; training for teachers and moderation to standardise assessment marks awarded.

This model of monitoring is being constantly evaluated and revised and issues that arise from the different forms of monitoring are now included within whole school weekly training, delivered by the Director of Virtues. This training provides an opportunity for Achievement Leaders and Form Tutors to learn more about the virtues on an academic level, and teaching and learning pedagogy is discussed, evaluated and practised. This form of monitoring, combined with Ark Boulton's assessment procedures in regards to the Virtue Curriculum has given rise to a more

effective model and has significantly reduced variability in delivery and outcomes of virtue lessons. An increase in standards of presentation and quality of written work, standard of virtue exposition speeches and an increase in assessment marks has been witnessed across the whole school.

2.5 Leadership

A leader creates opportunities for positive experiences based on the assessment of the people they serve and the environment in which they are learning in. A leader then fulfils their needs in order to overcome barriers to success. You may recognise this as the job that teachers do in the classroom every day. Yet many teachers haven't been taught how to lead their pupils, only to teach. At Ark Boulton Academy, every member of staff is a leader in their own capacity, in their own areas, in their own classrooms. Ark Boulton follows an 'I, We, You' formula to being a leader. Mastery is obtained by repeated practice whereby students fail, succeed and improve through guided examples from their leader. It is the job of the senior leaders in the academy to lead all the other adults in the academy so that they can do the same in their classrooms, departments or faculties. This means that everything the Senior Leadership Team do, say and how they make someone feel is of huge importance. This is reflected in the ethos, culture, hierarchy and structure of how Ark Boulton is run. The Senior Leaders lead with behaviour, virtues and character education. This is our leadership model at Ark Boulton.

2.5.1 Director of Virtues

A Director of Virtues was appointed in autumn 2017 to initially design the Virtues Curriculum and lead the school in training and in the delivery of virtue lessons. The Director of Virtues is responsible for whole school staff development in regards to the Virtues Curriculum as well as leading the Achievement Leaders in their middle leadership responsibilities of organising, leading and supporting their year teams. The role of Director of Virtues allows for a member of staff to work with and support form tutors, middle leaders, senior leaders and external organisations that have a similar ethos to Ark Boulton Academy. The role of the Director of Virtue is to serve the staff as a role model. To instruct, to lead by example, to work together on examples of good practice and then to allow each member of staff to flourish in opportunities that have been created for them, checking on their successes, helping them to improve, gently encouraging them, recognising their successes and having faith in their abilities. It is of huge importance that virtues is represented at senior leadership level and that character education is an integral part of the ethos and culture, practice and policy of the school.

3. Impact

3.1 Attendance

Initial attendance figures, since the introduction of the Virtues Curriculum, show an increase from 91.8% – 97.6% which means that Ark Boulton is creating safe spaces in which students want to come to school. This overall trend of attendance continues to be strong and is actually better than it was at the same time last year. During the autumn term 2017-8 the proportion of students who maintained 99-100% attendance was 46% whereas this is currently 55%. Ark Boulton have maintained their place at the top of the Ark academy network for attendance.

3.2 Behaviour

Since the introduction of the Virtues Curriculum the academy has steadily and dramatically reduced the rate of both permanent and fixed term exclusions. Ark Boulton recognises its moral obligation to avoid students being permanently excluded due to the fact that vulnerable young people, specifically in the Sparkhill area, who are excluded from school are at greater risk of being drawn into criminality and radicalisation. Ark Boulton have managed to establish a ‘standard level of performance’ (a performance standard is a management-approved expression of the performance threshold(s), requirement(s), or expectation(s) that must be met to be appraised at a particular level of performance) around culture which is typified by good behaviour and character development while at the same time recognising that the school has a duty to the wider community by driving down both the fixed term exclusions and permanent exclusion rate and not contributing to the chronic shortage of secondary school places in the area. During the period since the implementation of the Virtues Curriculum began the nature of behaviour incidents throughout Ark Boulton has changed from violent or aggressive incidents to low level disruption and incompleteness of homework – showing progress here but clearly some intervention work to be done in this area. Ark Boulton now have the second lowest exclusion rate in the network of 37 Ark Academies.

The investment in staff in terms of their expertise and capacity to deliver the Virtues Curriculum and enable character development, as well as an increased focus on behaviour management techniques and the improvements in the quality of teaching have been instrumental in reducing exclusions and improving behaviour at Ark Boulton.

3.3 Staff

The Virtues Curriculum has been successful due to the participation of 66 members of staff. The staff at Ark Boulton have been motivated, largely through internal training, and have wholeheartedly bought into the Ark Boulton’s virtue based approach to education. Staff support for the Virtues Curriculum has allowed school leadership to focus on creating a school ethos, culture and identity based strongly around and within a moral purpose. Regular staff surveys show that staff now have a greater knowledge and understanding of the topics covered within the Virtues Curriculum, including sensitive and statutory content, and are confident in delivering them following training sessions.

3.4 Culture

The culture in the academy is largely positive. Evidence via discussions in virtues training have shown that relationships between staff and pupils are becoming more positive. Student’s engagement with the virtue topics is high as demonstrated through evidence via learning walks. Assemblies, form time (family time) and whenever students are gathered collectively is typified by well-rehearsed and embedded routines and expectations. Students expect feedback, they expect to be challenged when conduct is not 100% and they understand that the interventions of staff are driven by our ethos and rooted in the fact that staff care about students and are invested in them. The continuing trend of excellent attendance is indicative of this. There is a greater emphasis on positives and rewards than previous. Our rewards system is simple and based upon weekly data based on student conduct, attendance and service. This is having a greater impact than it might do on its own due to the fact that there is a weekly review with each form group and pastoral leaders publish and share a weekly ‘rank order’ to build in elements of competition, using the language of virtues.

3.5 Academia

Student data shows, in the first term that the Virtues Curriculum was introduced, that Ark Boulton had a large proportion of students who fell within the emerging and expected levels of achievement in delivery and content for virtues exposition speeches, in regards to Ark Boulton's internal assessment model. By summer term 2, most students were within exceeding level of achievement, which means that they have increased literacy skills to write their speeches, but also they are confident at public speaking to deliver their speeches. The Virtues Expositions continues to be an assessment of knowledge and application of the Virtues Curriculum and an indication of the positive culture and ethos at the academy. The Year 11 nationally recognised GCSE results are on an upward trajectory year on year, this is down to improvements in behaviour and teaching and learning, predicated by the culture and ethos established in large by the Virtues Curriculum.

3.6 Recognition

Ark Boulton Academy are second time Envision winners, down to students who won due to their confidence and presentation skills, skills that were practiced termly in virtues lessons. Ark Boulton have won a Quality Mark award by Values based Education based on an inspection in December 2018, one of only 3 other secondary schools in the country. Ark Boulton have been recognised by Parliamentary Review, and were featured in *Our Future King*, Prince Charles at 70. We continue to do research with the Jubilee Centre for Character Education and Virtues at the University of Birmingham and partner with charities and organisations to volunteer in the community.

4. Conclusion

The 2017 DFE report *Developing Character Skills in Schools* concludes that the research provided evidence of the wide array of activities that schools are undertaking to develop character or nurture specific traits including resilience, self-esteem and confidence, communication skills, self-regulation, perseverance and motivation, respect, tolerance, and empathy. The majority of schools within this report explained that their approach to developing character underpinned their school mission or philosophy and values, as well as being tailored to the needs of students. However, closer inspection of the report and its findings show that these schools' approaches to character development were not intentionally designed programmes (only 17% of schools acknowledged having a specific policy in place for the development of the character of their students) and therefore a series of barriers exist which prevent schools in undertaking character education in more depth. These barriers commonly include a lack of time, skills, training and resources. Ark Boulton acknowledged these barriers throughout the design and implementation of the Virtues Curriculum and made concise and deliberate attempts to address the barriers. Ark Boulton continue to address these barriers through student voice, parent voice and research into the local area, including issues that affect the community. Ark Boulton recognises the need to continue to codify and sharpen our 'set pieces' (routines and rituals driven by the academy ethos on which we build our culture). Additionally, we will continue to invest in the development of our virtues programme to help us continue our journey for the academy, the students and the community that we serve. Ark Boulton strongly believe that a whole school approach to character

development will lead to an increase in the confidence and skills of their staff. Developing a well-researched and resourced Virtue Curriculum with dedicated teacher training on the subject, driven by a strong, motivated and inspiring leadership model has created an ethos and culture steeped in the importance and purpose of the character education of the students it serves, in academy school life and beyond. It is the aim of Ark Boulton to enable students to flourish so they will be able to feel confident to have a voice to change the things in society, to make it better for the common good, stand up when injustice is happening around them and look after their family whilst giving back to the communities which we serve. Ark Boulton are passionate about sharing practice so that character education is the ‘risk’ that Headteachers take to improve the life chances of their students and for their community to flourish in coming generations.