

The Values and Character
Dispositions of 14-16 Year Olds
in the Hodge Hill Constituency

Citizens of Character

Report Summary

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learningforlife
exploring core values

*This report is to be launched in Westminster
Abbey by The Rt. Hon. Liam Byrne MP
on Monday 9th November 2009.*

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THE SIX SCHOOLS IN THE HODGE HILL CONSTITUENCY:

Hodge Hill School
Hodge Hill School for Girls
International School and Community College
Park View School
Saltley School and Community College
Washwood Heath Technology College

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A copy of the full report and references can be found on
www.learningforlife.org.uk

FOREWORD

This is a vitally important report which has had a huge impact on the way I look at politics and public life. It deserves to be read by educators, public servants, politicians and anyone who cares about the direction of our country.

For me the origin of this work dates back five years - to the campaigns I started for community safety and regeneration in Hodge Hill. Quite simply, the more community meetings I ran the more I realised that we had to listen far harder to our young people - what they thought, what they needed, where they wanted to go.

That's what triggered a pioneering series of youth conferences across my constituency in 2006 that told us something that stunned me. Our young peoples' top priority for investment was 'learning a new skill'. Yet our constituency was in the bottom 5% for sending youngsters to university.

We persuaded the University of Birmingham to study the problem in depth. They confirmed there was no shortage of aspiration of talent. But our young people confronted a 'power failure'; they had no-one to help deliver sufficient servings of inspiration, steadiness and sheer savoir faire to make it on and up in life.

When I met the Archbishop of Birmingham, he led me to the John Templeton Foundation. Words cannot express the gratitude I feel to Prof James Arthur and his team and the heads of Hodge Hill's schools, who have over the last 2 years researched and written this vital report.

Our agenda for change in Hodge Hill - Hodge Hill 2020 - now brings together agencies and residents to fight for a different place to live. A better place. Where citizens can genuinely realise their potential.

When we launched the programme we asked our youngsters to tell us where they'd like to be in 11 years time. We got a great mix; footballers, beauticians, police-officers, teachers, doctors, scientists, lawyers. The diversity of ambition was as dazzling and beautiful as the community.

This report has helped in a real way tell us how we as a community and a country turn those dreams into reality.

Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

CHARACTER, VALUES AND THE PURPOSES OF EDUCATION

Schools and the wider educational systems in Britain are subject to an understandable pressure to provide skilled people equipped to meet the increasingly competitive demands of employment. In doing so, however, schools may ignore or take for granted another critical dimension of education – encouraging students to become aware of themselves as responsible people.

We believe that education needs to be seen as a total lifelong process involving families, schools and employers in a political and social framework concerned with personal well-being, moral sensitivity and the flourishing of human society. A reinvigorated conscious focus upon character education in schools is essential if a proper balance is to be restored to the educational process.

All dimensions of education are essential if students are to assume their personal role in society equipped with the personal qualities, dispositions, attitudes, values and virtues to take responsibility for themselves and to contribute to the common good. Good habits encouraged in the process of education underpin the ability and inclination to engage in the necessary business of further lifelong personal development and learning. Moreover,



while employers repeatedly call attention to lack of skills and relevant knowledge in their new employees, they also point to the missing dimension of personal 'character'.

Character is about who we are and who we become. It is an interlocked set of personal values and virtues which normally guide conduct and includes the virtues of responsibility, honesty, self-reliance, reliability, generosity, self-discipline, and a sense of identity and purpose. This entails active character development, which is not simply about the acquisition of academic and social skills: it is ultimately about the kind of person we become and want to become.

This process is not achieved within a vacuum; in order to become a person, an individual needs to grow up in a culture, and the richer the culture the more of a person he or she has a chance of becoming. The importance of cultural influences on the lives and aspirations of young people in Birmingham will become apparent below.

*Education is
what is left after you
have forgotten everything
you were taught at school.*

Albert Einstein

CHARACTER IN THE UK CONTEXT

A number of recent reports have emphasised the importance of character education in Britain.

A **Good Childhood** (2009) noted that many children in Britain were not able to develop within a positive environment. In the introduction to the Report, Lord Richard Layard noted “our evidence showed clearly how stressful life has become for many children in all social classes. A common thread can be identified in these problems, which is the excessive individualism in English culture. This needs to be reversed and children need to learn that being of use to others is ultimately more satisfying than an endless struggle for status.”

The authors of the Report observed that excessive individualism needs to be replaced by a value system where people seek fulfilment more from helping others rather than pursuing private advantage. They suggest that a key task of moral education is to offer a vision of a good person and a good society. Citing work from values-based schools who work with such qualities as respect, caring, responsibility, trust, gratitude and generosity, they suggest that the key question to consider is: ‘What am I like when I am the person I would like to be?’

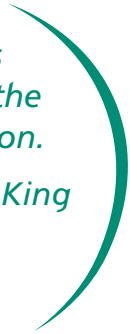
The report recommends the development of a moral vocabulary, and that teachers should both exemplify and teach the importance of key values as

illustrated through the lives of outstanding role models. They add that ‘children should be helped to develop the spiritual qualities of wonder and inner peace — and the sense of something greater than themselves.’

A UNICEF publication **An Overview of Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries** reported that children in the UK are rated lowest among 21 rich nations. There are six major dimensions of child wellbeing outlined in the report **Material Wellbeing** (poverty, deprivation and unemployment); **Health and Safety** (Early Years health, preventative health and safety against risks.); **Educational Wellbeing** (achievement at age 15 and transition to employment); **Family and Peer Relationships** (including family structure); **Behaviour and Risks** (health, risk behaviour and experience of violence); and **Subjective Relationships** (including school life and personal wellbeing). Across these dimensions the United Kingdom is ranked, on average, bottom of the 21 nations - behind the United States. The Netherlands and three Nordic nations are at the top of the table.

The Young Foundation produced a report in June 2009 called **Grit - the Skills of Success and How They Are Grown**. It argues that Britain’s schools need to prioritise grit and self-discipline. Drawing on evidence from around the





*Intelligence plus
character – that is the
goal of true education.*

Martin Luther King

world it shows that these contribute as much to success at work and in life as IQ and academic qualifications. Too much emphasis on exams and academic qualifications has pushed these life skills to the margins. The report made clear that as a society we can no longer endorse an education system that does not sufficiently invest in developing character skills that allows a child to achieve his or her full potential.

A 2008 UK Cabinet Office report confirms some of this thinking on the vulnerable white working class group. The short report **Aspiration and Attainment amongst Young People in Deprived Communities** found that young people's aspirations and those of their parents influence their educational attainment and later life outcomes. According to the report the 11-14-age range (Key Stage 3) is a key age range, when young people move from idealistic to more realistic ambitions.

The Cabinet Report found that white boys have the lowest aspirations. Their educational attainment is also failing to improve at the rates of most other ethnic groups. It confirmed that parents are the most important influence on

children. Nevertheless the environments in which families live have major influences both on parents and young people. Young people in certain types of neighbourhood - which would include the Hodge Hill area in this study with high levels of deprivation - are less likely to develop ambitious, achievable aspirations. However, deprived communities are not all identical. Young people in some very deprived communities do have high aspirations; the challenge comes when attempting to convert those aspirations into tangible social outcomes.

All these reports point towards the need for character and values education to assume a more central role in the education system to complement the acquisition of academic skills and qualifications. The need for such education is also emphasised in the research we have carried out.

INTRODUCTION TO LEARNING FOR LIFE RESEARCH PROJECTS

Learning for Life involves a series of major research projects, largely funded by the John Templeton Foundation and Porticus UK. It is an ambitious and groundbreaking initiative with few parallels in the UK. Indeed, this is the first coherent exploration of character development that studies all educational age groups and on into employment. Within the overall project, Learning for Life, the Hodge Hill study is one of five separate studies

- (a) A character perspective in the early years;
- (b) Consistency in values - the transition from primary to secondary school;
- (c) The values and character dispositions of 14-16 year olds;
- (d) The formation of virtues and dispositions in the 16-19 age range; and
- (e) Values in higher education and employment.

The research focuses on the age range 3 to 25 years, which makes the scope and the approach unique. The five studies constitute the empirical background to our final report which will focus on Character Development, an often neglected but essential dimension of all sound education.

The overall research sample involves tracking more than 4,000 children and young people, 300 parents and 100 teachers over a two-year period in Birmingham, Bristol, Canterbury and London. In addition, the sample contains in-depth interviews with over 85 undergraduates and 65 graduate employees. Each project has a dedicated full-time research fellow working over a two to three year period.



These research projects follow up a study conducted in Bristol and entitled 'Character Education: the formation of virtues and dispositions in the 16 to 19-year-olds with particular reference to the religious and spiritual.' The report from the study, along with a summary booklet, was launched in the House of Lords in November 2006. This research was also supported by the John Templeton Foundation. The full report is available for download from our site, under Research Reports.

INTRODUCTION TO THE HODGE HILL PROJECT

Citizens of Character explores the attitudes, dispositions, and values of 14-16 year old students in a particular urban environment - the six schools of the Hodge Hill constituency in Birmingham - and the extent to which the education system and the local environment advance or inhibit their sense of self, their values and their character development. These students constituted a heterogeneous group of religious and non-religious individuals.

This project goes beyond the normal exploration and measurement of strengths of character in individuals and looks at the factors that build character in families and schools. This research has wider implications for the relationship between character and aspirations, social change, school cultures, citizenship, identity and religion.

The study discusses what students understand by character. It set out to ascertain the moral values held by a group of students living in an inner-city area. The study sought to question who or what has influenced their moral values and examined which individuals, institutions and situations might have hindered or promoted their development. Some of the issues and concerns which arose - for example, relations with neighbours, the matter of local and national pride and questions of trust - may seem not to impinge upon character education as such but are relevant in a wider context.



BACKGROUND TO THE AREA

Whilst there is a connection between individual character and civic life it is important to acknowledge that schools constitute only one element in a student's environment. Indeed the most influential source of guidance in promoting character development is the family, the mother being especially important. Culture also plays a part in shaping character.

The area where this research project on values and dispositions of character took place is in East Birmingham and bordered on the north of the M6 corridor. The area is diverse including a predominantly Asian inner-city area and a mostly white area on the city's eastern boundary. The neighbourhood is surrounded by major trunk roads and is often characterised as feeling like an island. There is a mix of modern housing and light industrial businesses. There is no strong all-inclusive sense of community, and population mobility is high. There are also few amenities for the inhabitants. The area is one of the most deprived in the West Midlands, with high levels of social and economic deprivation. Rates of educational attainment at all age levels are below the average for the city of Birmingham and are well below the national average.



The local community provides very few public amenities to stimulate the development of character skills, with few public libraries, community centres, youth clubs or sporting facilities accessible to young people. This means that there are few places available for the cultivation of a common citizenship or a sense of shared life. Opportunities to exercise civic and social virtues such as leadership, volunteering, courage, charity, toleration and respect are extremely limited.

Despite this and the disparate nature of the population, small pockets of strong communities do exist, particularly in the well-established Asian community. Young people in the Asian districts are generally optimistic about their futures, and there is no collective sense that they might be held back by their location. Parents here are ambitious and optimistic about their children's futures. Their aspirations for their children are often centred on responsibility to the family. Parents' aspirations for their sons tend to revolve around jobs that would allow them to support their families financially. Fathers perceive themselves to be strong influences, and the local Mosque provides educational support for the local community.

KEY FINDINGS

From all the evidence gathered in this project – interviews, questionnaires, written reflections – there is an overwhelming sense that these students are concerned about values and character and about the quality of their communities and the society in which they are growing up.

The key findings of this research include:

SELF-IMAGE

These students have a positive self-image, in contrast with the negative, self-centred image often presented by the media.

Most students stated that they were happy most of the time, while few thought that there was little to be optimistic about.

More white and black students, those of mixed ethnicity and single children expressed negative views about their happiness, their ability to trust, their experience of fairness, and their pride in their locality and nationality.

ASPIRATIONS

A large majority of students, especially black and Asian, expressed high academic aspirations.

Students seemed to have difficulties in understanding the language of character and values and in finding their own words to express their feelings and



sentiments. For example, they found it hard to make a distinction between 'being good' and 'being successful'. Nonetheless, responses to the questionnaires indicated that this is in fact a distinction which is tacitly operating in their lives.

IDENTITY

The Muslim student responses indicated that they place a high value on religion, both in terms of identity and as a moral compass.

In many respects the responses of students claiming to be members of the Church of England strongly resembled those of students claiming no faith. It seems that many students placed a nominal value on the Church of England as an identity marker, but not as a moral compass.

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY

Many students say they engage in their local community and a majority said they would vote if they could.

Boys and Muslim students were more positive than other ethnic groups about trusting people in their own communities.

Many students expressed distrust of politicians and society, although more said they trusted people around them, including teachers, neighbours and even the police.



SCHOOL LIFE

While the majority of students enjoy school life, they are concerned about issues such as dishonesty and lack of sharing.

Many students expressed an interest in character development and identified school as a place that could do more to develop character.

ETHICS AND SOCIETY

The study revealed a complex structure of ideas about character and society within which individual students held differing views, for instance between views expressed by boys and girls, by members of different ethnic or religious groups, by those whose parents had different levels of education, and by only children and those with siblings

Girls and Muslim students were more likely to agree with the importance of tolerance, courtesy, justice, loyalty, trust and honesty. Caribbean students, those of mixed ethnic background and only children were less likely to do so.

Similarly, girls were more likely to agree with the importance of following rules and norms, with generally positive responses all round. Only children, Caribbean students and those of mixed ethnic background tended to be less positive.

The following quotations from the students illustrate some of the key findings

The thing that really matters in life is your family.

I believe trust is vital to personal relationships and without it you cannot be friends with someone – trust must be earned and that sometimes takes a long time as it is not easy to gain – but easy to lose.

My mother has been there for me every step of the way and I cannot thank her enough for that. My love for her is unconditional and she is my greatest role model.

In life, I think humility, self-discipline, and forgiveness are very important.

I think that if we are all honest, courageous and forgiving the world would be a better place.

The Bible, The Qur'an etc, state that all humans are equal, so why is this not the case?

RESEARCH PROCESS AND FOCUS

As far as possible the research strategy was designed to explore the ways in which young people describe how they think, feel and behave.

The main research concerns were

- 1) What do these young people understand and say about character and values?
- 2) To what extent is it true that the local environment and the particular school context influence character development?
- 3) Is there a relationship between socio-economic status and positive character development?

The study sought to explore the qualities of character and values espoused by participating students, and to explore the ways in which they see these values as shaped, cultivated or even negated by their teachers, mentors, parents, peers and by prevalent societal factors. For many students these will be the values with which they leave school. The study also sought to find out the type of person that these young people aspire to become.

The research was undertaken in four sequential phases.

INTERVIEWS

The first phase involved three interviews with nine groups of six Year 10 students. The interview questions were designed to collect data relevant to all the research questions.

INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

The second phase involved the design and construction of a 62-item questionnaire chiefly aimed at a statistical exploration of the issues covered in the group interviews, with a few additional items exploring citizenship, religious influences and community involvement.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In the third phase the fieldwork continued in the form of four interviews with a single group of eleven students in two of the schools. Questions were aimed at clarifying provisional interpretations of data in the group interviews in the first phase. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with five students, now in Year 11, from each of the six schools.

SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE

The fourth and final phase of the project was a second questionnaire of 69 items exploring views that had been expressed strongly in earlier phases and the extent to which they were shared in the general school population.

Participants were selected for interview with a view to working with the broadest range of students including academic students, sports-oriented students, vocational/practical students, students from different ethnic groups, and students who have encountered barriers or have struggled against varied disadvantages.

FINDINGS OF PHASE 1

GROUP INTERVIEWS

The purpose of this phase of the research was to collect data that would explore how students defined good character and to discover what values they held. The decision was taken to use the term 'values' as a proxy for 'character', because 'character' is not a term used in English schools. It was also important to discover where the students saw their particular character traits emanating from, and what sources influenced their core selves. Character was discussed not only in terms of what values they held, but also what action they took.

Clearly, conclusions drawn about their actions need to take account of problems associated with self-reporting and with self-presentation within a group context. In the groups, the students talked about 'values' and 'character' rather than the unfamiliar concept of 'virtues'.



DETAILED FINDINGS

SELF-IMAGE AND IDENTITY

When asked about their personal qualities and values, students were evasive. They appeared to feel unable to be honest about having either positive or negative qualities. Although many qualities were given, only closing house doors, academic cleverness, loss of control (lack of anger management) and sarcasm were cited twice or more.

A question about role models aimed to ascertain what students thought were desirable characteristics without suggesting to them what a good character was or whether goodness mattered at all.

There was a wide range of answers here, although most said that they looked up to one or both of their parents. As in selections of inspirational figures in the Learning for Life Values Poster Award, mothers headed the list, followed by Martin Luther King. These responses did not seem to be the result of group compliance since they were quite prepared to disagree with each other. Nine students mentioned particular footballers - David Beckham, Ryan Giggs and Michael Essien amongst others. Interestingly, boys often supported these suggestions, but no girls commented.

Businessmen who 'started from nothing' were a minority response - only five of the fifty-four students spontaneously mentioned them. Specific mention was made of Lord Alan Sugar, Sir Richard Branson and Bill Gates. These suggestions did not receive support from the rest of the group.

ASPIRATION

Being asked about their ideas of a successful person allowed students to begin talking about the area in which they lived and to elicit notions of success without directly comparing it with the ideal good character. Three main responses emerged. Working hard and the relation of desire and hard work in tandem was the main general response. Seventeen students said the ability to get on with people would make a successful person where they lived.

A related response was the need to **blend in with the group**: adopting a low profile in difficult surroundings would represent being a successful person in those surroundings. A few students thought that looking good and wearing the right clothes indicated success, while a couple of students mentioned having the right car.



The follow-up question addressed the qualities of a good character rather than a successful one and explicitly aimed to draw out contrasts between goodness and success. The most significant result here was that students were confused and had great difficulty in understanding this contrast. Phrases such as '*I don't get it*' and '*what are you talking about?*' were common in the varied student responses. The most common responses were, in order, socialising, intelligence, loyalty, friendliness, caring, keeping a low profile and respect. The range of concepts cited reinforces the impression that the distinction between success and goodness is blurred in their minds.

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY

Students understood a citizen simply '**as a person in the community**'. Some thought it was about law, morals, care and responsibility. They saw citizenship contributing to society but were uninterested in the subject, with some saying there is no real sense of community. Descriptions and definitions of a citizen were rudimentary at best, with barely a single student managing a coherent response. The earlier Bristol study noted that kindness, care, fairness, trustworthiness and respect were central to having a good character but none of these character qualities was mentioned in this study in relation to being a citizen.

Students' views on their neighbours were passionate and genuine, reflecting the nature of their community and the impact it has on them and their character. Students referred to cases of

loud music and aspects of the behaviour of chaotic neighbours as exhibiting anti-social behaviour. i.e. ***'There are these people who do Karaoke and it's so loud.'***



Examples of good interacting neighbours were fewer, - ***'Mine are nice. They are old people'***.

Students do not feel secure in their local environment. Most negative responses concerned physical threats (40%), distrust of others, and vulnerability of females. There were only two positive comments on being happy and two students who said they liked school. There was no doubt here answers were not masked or ambivalent.

ETHICS AND SOCIETY

Asked what they might really think if they saw a wallet on the pavement, the majority of students said they would return the wallet. However, one or two students in each group even said they would either 'just' take the money or the entire wallet. Some students said they

would feel sad for the victim or feel proud of a good act. Students felt able to talk easily about pocketing the wallet, ***'I would take the money and dash the wallet'***, which indicates a strong feeling that one had a moral right to be dishonest in this kind of instance.

Most students admitted to changing their behaviour in order to adapt to changing circumstances, e.g. ***'You couldn't talk the same to everyone, you have to adapt.'*** Interestingly, in one school no student said he or she would change behaviour, ***'I wouldn't change for anybody. No way.'***

In addition, students admitted feeling that they should behave in a certain way but in the event behaved in another way. Participants regularly cited peer pressure, fear of rejection of offers to help, a feeling that old people dislike youth, the intervention of others, and that people should look after themselves. There were also those who mentioned fear of arrest and implication in an incident ***'cos they might make a fingerprint of you touching her and the police will then arrest you', 'yeah, you'll become number one suspect'***.

Among the main pressures that might force students to overlook good values are 'Peer Pressure' and 'Exams'. The word 'Stress' was used in many instances. Some students confessed to spending significant amounts of time on the web or computer games.

In response to a question about the motivations for good behaviour - whether it was because of reward, an inculcated automatic response or a felt impulse to assist others - students said that the main reasons for doing a good act were it was the right thing to do, empathy with the person, sympathy for the helped, hope of reward, to feel a sense of pride and to have good feelings.

SCHOOL LIFE

The most cited good qualities to have at school were **Work Hard**, then **Be Focussed**, **Listening** and **Cooperating** were next, followed by **Communication Skills**. Next were **Respecting Others** and then **Being Independent** and **Sociable**.

Asked what has been the most positive moment for you in this inner city school, these were, in order of frequency, Academic Achievement, Awards and Formal Recognition, Sports Achievement, Outward Bound Education and trips offsite.

Many responses to a question about teachers demonstrating good character were positive. Many students pointed to the example of teachers who insisted on uniform and self-presentation. Others were admired for their capacity to motivate and encourage a love of what you do, to inspire commitment and punctuality. About a fifth felt that teachers didn't address character at all. The question was answered with some enthusiasm and without complication.

Respondents recognised fairness in teachers as consistency, consistent behaviour, followed by watching and determining in teacher actions a willingness to listen, a positive attitude and an ability to provide a sense of security. Students talked about recognising fairness as sensing '*a kind of atmosphere*' generated around the teacher. Many students found it difficult to articulate any response.



QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSES

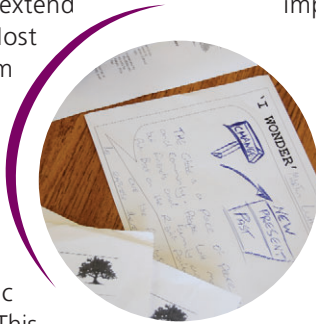
OVERVIEW OF PHASE 2 QUESTIONNAIRE ONE FINDINGS

The purpose of the 54-question questionnaire was to confirm findings from the initial rich data arising from the group interviews and to extend those findings. Most respondents were Muslim (73%), with 13% Christian and 13% with no religion. The Other Christian group here includes only a small number of Roman Catholics, since many local Catholic students attend Catholic schools outside the area. This may well give an unrepresentative picture of the attitude of Christian youths in the community at large.

The items with which there was most agreement (over 80%) related to honesty, trustworthiness, fairness and respect. Students also mentioned ambition to do well in exams and the mother's influence on their attitude to life. By contrast, students expressed the view that people in the media and community leaders had little influence on their attitude to life. While students claimed to be involved in their communities, a minority actually help out in the community or in school-run community projects.

OVERVIEW OF PHASE 4 QUESTIONNAIRE TWO FINDINGS

In the second questionnaire, some of the same patterns re-emerge, notably the influence of mothers and the importance of responsibility, truthfulness and honesty. In addition, students expressed the view that education is vital to progression in life and emphasised how much they value their friends. Although they claimed to be able to accept those with a different religion, students equally said that their religious group was often seen negatively. Consistent with the group interviews above, students did not trust politicians and were concerned that conflict was not often resolved without fighting or threats.



PHASE THREE GROUP INTERVIEWS 2 AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Preliminary analysis of the Phase 2 questionnaire data had revealed that some students' responses were polarized on certain issues. A sample of 44 students from 2 of the schools was therefore randomly selected and invited to take part in discussion groups. Each group consisted of 11 students (who had progressed to Year 11).

Discussions, which were led by a researcher and were recorded, lasted 45 minutes. Then fifteen minutes were allocated to a writing task in which the students independently recorded their reflections on the issues raised in the discussion. The findings below are drawn from the transcripts of the discussions and from student written responses and reflections.

SELF-IMAGE AND ASPIRATIONS

Hard work came top of the qualities student thought they needed to succeed in the 21st century, with nearly all students mentioning it. Being a good communicator was the next most important quality. After these came; **kindness, caring, motivation, getting on with people** and **being a good person**. However, according to the responses there was no organised scheme in any school to encourage character development. One student

said that assemblies touched on the subject but they focused on the dangers of drugs, sexual health and other PSHE related topics.

Students did not feel personally empowered. Very few said that they were particularly optimistic when asked directly, and the majority said that they tended towards being pessimistic. There were many shrugs and several comments that there was **'not much to be optimistic about'**, but if things changed that would be good. All students who expressed a view said that they couldn't envisage change when asked.

Students overwhelmingly said that other students did not have a sense of responsibility for their own progression in life at Key Stage 4. Many students also said that, by and large, other students were not very responsible and some referred to parents not being responsible enough.

All students said that they saw education as playing a part in their future. They said that going to college was the way forward in order to do well and both groups accepted this as correct. All of the students said that they expected to go on to 'A' levels. Academic success was a general target. Students expressed little vision of what they would do at University or what occupation they might be pursuing in



ten years time - the majority said that they simply didn't know.

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY

Many students in the Hodge Hill area said they would not bother voting even if they could. They felt *'forgotten'* in the political process. Many said that politicians did not *'live in the real world'* or understand what it was like in their community. Several pupils commented that it was as if no one cared about them or their way of life, so they did not see why they should vote. This reflects the sense of disempowerment noted above.

In discussions about relationships with neighbours, a majority of students said that their neighbours were either distant or troublesome. Individual students said that their neighbours were often disinterested, careless, thoughtless or did not share the same standards. Some older neighbours were seen positively.

However, there is a strong sense of Islamic solidarity within the community as well as a strong concern expressed by the Muslim students that stereotypes of Asians were widespread.

Muslim students tended to get on better with their neighbours, for example one student spoke of kind neighbours, *'who brought round food for a meal'*.




Most students said that they wanted to be good, despite living in a neighbourhood with a high level of economic and social problems. However, students said that there wasn't much trust in the community and several wanted to work hard in order to leave the Hodge Hill area. Most said there was little to do in East Birmingham.

Many students wanted the police to intervene more in the community to make it a safer place. A majority said or agreed that theirs was a community that was increasingly only about selfish individual interest. School, they said, demonstrated some moral values here and there, *'we have assemblies where they tell us to work hard and wear school uniform,'* but one student said that although the school cared somewhat, it needed kinder, more caring teachers.

ETHICS AND SOCIETY

Many students thought Britain an unfair place, but there was a minority who thought it was a fair place. One student said that government investment in the neighbourhood seemed to be minimal, especially compared to some places in London (Camden) where more seemed to be invested. Other students agreed that more investment would make young people happier. It was noted that Camden in London had schemes to



assist *'poor kids who wanted to do stuff at sports centres and that'* but that such schemes were completely absent in their part of Birmingham. All students were in agreement here.

Muslim students tended to think that Britain was fairer, one remarked that *'it's what you make of it innit? Seems fair to me'* suggesting that they had a higher level of self-control than other groups. Non-Muslim students were more critical of Britain, commenting that it had done little for them.

Asked how they would deal with unfairness, several students said that they would reflect on what had happened to them and work to improve the situation, but many would clearly need extra support to overcome obstacles that seemed unfair, carry on in school and perform well.

Many students said they did not trust people easily, although Pakistani students displayed far more trust of their teachers than the other groups. Nearly all students across the board voiced a lack of trust of the police and politicians. Muslim students said they trusted the police more, but all students complained about being stopped for no real reason by the police.

'There are 10 to 15% of people that are good and then the rest.'

'Well you can trust people and I guess it's cool when you can but a lot of the time it's not possible, not round here anyway.'

IDENTITY

Being British meant many things to students. Tea, fish and chips, playing football, traditions and 'speaking in a posh way' were some answers to the question, and another said that it was enjoying a good measure of sporting success. Muslim students said that they were quite proud of Britain, and in particular its education system, the National Health Service and the levels of societal organisation. However, several group members though said that Britain had too many problems and that their ethnic identity excludes them from feeling British and a few students even said that racism was a factor of Britishness.

Many students said that they were not proud of Birmingham. Several students identified the ghettoisation of communities as a feature of the city. However, some students did think Birmingham was a calmer and less congested city than London with a big city feel but without the *'craziness'* of London. Individual students stated Birmingham's football clubs and the Bull Ring as a source of pride.

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT INTERVIEWS

The second part of Phase Three involved individual interviews. Five students from each of the six schools were interviewed separately with thirty individual interviews conducted in total. The individual interviews centred on the following themes: aspirations, character, trust, neighbourhood, Islam, political engagement, school, family and pride. Students came from all six schools and came from a range of backgrounds.

The individual student interviews were semi-structured. The intention was to listen, as far as was possible, to the voices of the students, rather than to impose on them a language or a set of values, which would have led to a predetermined outcome.

Below is a brief summary of the interviews.

ASPIRATIONS

When asked what they wanted to do in the future, responses were varied. Most students demonstrated a high level of ambition (builders, doctors, lawyers and business people, members of the army were mentioned as future careers, as was a desire to go to university). A minority had no idea what they wanted to do. Nearly all students rated earning an income as their main aim in life.



CHARACTER

Many students had a level of aspiration in terms of getting on in life. However, when prompted to elaborate on how they would achieve their goals, a few admitted that they did not have an idea of the practical steps they would need to take in order to achieve what they set out for themselves.

Many students stated they did not wish for help - they did not want people to interfere. A significant number of students admitted not really talking to other people much. This means that they were unlikely to trust others and would rather go about their own private activities rather than join clubs, meet with others, enjoy school trips or learn new things and have new experiences.

TRUST

When asked whether they trusted other people, the majority of students stated that they distrusted people in general, with several saying that they would rather keep their lives private from others since they did not know what others would do with their information. Some students trusted a small number of their teachers, whilst the police and politicians were barely trusted at all.

When asked about the role of newspapers in their outlook, most students said that newspapers were not

to be trusted. Two students said that newspapers were just businesses that sensationalised stories for profit, ***'most of what they write is rubbish. It's there to sell the paper'***.

Most students who expressed a view said that they did not trust politicians and several expressed unhappiness with government, ***'useless, they never change a thing'***. Some students didn't understand the concept of politics at all, ***'I don't really know what that means', 'I'm too young to know about that'*** and did not articulate views about it.

There was a high level of guardedness in the actual interviews themselves about personal details and feelings. There was often a reluctance to expand manifested by shrugging, fidgeting and saying ***"I dunno"*** a lot.

NEIGHBOURHOOD

When asked what their neighbours were like, and whether they got on with them, the majority of students spoke about a lack of shared standards between neighbours. Most students said that neighbours caused high levels of friction and frustration.

The students were asked about their local neighbourhood and whether it affected their behaviour. All students stated that they were anxious about the

security of their neighbourhoods (see sample below). The majority of students mentioned neighbourhood crime levels. Muggings, fighting, gangs and drug dealing were also mentioned on several occasions.

The majority of students expressed a desire for a secure, quiet, clean, ordered environment to live in. Although a small minority of students did not comment on the issue of greater security and order, there was no actual dissent on this matter.

When asked about whether they helped out in the community, the majority of students remarked that there were no opportunities to work in the community, either within or outside school. Several students observed that there were few clubs or community organizations and that, where they did exist, students didn't attend them.

ISLAM

The majority of Muslim students stated that Islam was misrepresented in the press and half of the students who responded to this theme said that it was incompatible with the British way of life. In addition, around half thought that adherence to Islam was lapsing among some other students.



SCHOOL

Most of these students enjoyed school. However, several commented that teachers rarely had time to talk to them individually. Some stated that their teacher had shown real effort and care by pushing them to succeed. According to the majority, character education was non-existent in schools. Some students said that school trips were good for developing character, and a small number of students said that school trips were pointless, *'what's the point of that?'* Students mentioned a lot of fighting both on school premises and also outside of school.

'There's a lot of fighting in school and you can't always move into a good area ... so you have to keep yourself to yourself.'

'There's always something kicking off in this school. It's hard to get on with things. You have to keep your head down.'

FAMILY

The subject of family troubles often came up unprompted. Several students mentioned family troubles within a large number of local families. Several students did not live with or get on with their parents. There was also one mention of others' parents being benefit dependent and actively boasting about it in the community, *'my mum's friend says about how she lives like a queen off the social'*.

PRIDE

When asked about whether they were proud of Birmingham, some students were proud of Birmingham, but none expressed pride in East Birmingham, as also reported above. Many students said that they would leave Birmingham if they could. When asked, many students said they were proud to be British. When asked whether they thought that the area was split into racial groups, the majority of students agreed, *'that's about right'*. No students actively disagreed.

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION

Unlike the Bristol study, this study has not been directed at investigating any special role of religion in young people's thoughts about character. Religion was considered only as one among a number of potential explanatory variables in the study. However, religion has pushed itself forward as very influential, with spontaneous references to religion when talking about character, showing that they thought it was important. Distinct, though sometimes very subtle, differences were found in the structure of responses from different religious groups. Muslim pupils stood out as being especially distinctive.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN HODGE HILL CONSTITUENCY

A key objective of the Learning for Life project is to make a contribution to the development of pedagogy for the integration of character formation in the core curriculum, learning and ethos in schools.

The contrast between students' positive self perception of care and consideration and relative lack of community action prompted interest in exploring ways secondary schools can provide a structured educational programme to support young people's civic engagement.

The partnership with one school has been successful in developing and piloting an innovative service learning programme. The 'Learning for Life Leadership Programme' supported a group of twelve Year 10 students in leading change within their community and putting their civic aspirations into action.

The programme consists of four elements

Student voice and consultation – exercises and activities to identify participants' own notions of community, issues of concern and civic responsibility as starting points for future civic action and learning.

Social Capital Development – exercises and activities to build stronger bonds among participants raising a sense of trust and support. Building

bridges with other community members and agents of change, creating crosscutting ties.

Critical Literacy – the use of Open Space for Dialogue and Enquiry.

Supporting young people to think through community issues, examine their own assumptions and appreciate different perspectives on these issues.

Collaborative Service Learning – project management and enterprise tasks to support young people leading their own community action project.

Interim findings from piloting this programme have identified the impact of character education in helping young people to be

- able and willing to contribute to the well-being of their communities;
- well motivated and ambitious and able to take responsibility for their own actions;
- able and willing to work as part of a team;
- self-aware of their own individual capacity to be an active citizen.



TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS

Learning for Life has been working alongside young people and teachers in Hodge Hill to develop a series of teaching and learning materials that cover various aspects of character education. The intention has been to build on the research findings to give a practical response to the challenge of developing character in young people. Learning for Life ran a series of workshops in Hodge Hill which encouraged young people from the constituency to consider what character education means to them and why having values and virtues matters. The young people were then challenged to co-develop and co-design a series of resources. To date the following teaching and learning materials have been created.

Character First Guide - Many of the young people felt that they were under pressure to do well academically at school, but they were given little credit for being a person of good character. They expressed a concern that they might not get the jobs they wanted in the future as they did not have high enough grades. As a response the students helped create a guide for young people to show that employers were looking to recruit people with academic skills, but also people with character. The students selected seven virtues that they thought young people should possess to be good employees and each of these was explained in the guide.

The Value-Able Teaching Pack - The young people who attended the workshops felt that they had never been taught about values in school. As a response the students co-developed a set of teaching activities that would enable other students to discover what values are and why they are important. The students were very keen that the lessons were interactive and engaging and that they encouraged debate and discussion.

Character-Building Teaching Pack - Many of the young people who attended the workshops were worried about their lives after they left school. They felt they had developed a character to survive school, but were unsure if they had developed a character to thrive in an environment where there would be less structure and guidance. They suggested creating a teaching resource that explored the character required to be a successful member of society as well as a successful employee. The resources encourage young people to think about who they are and who they want to be, and to think about what character they will need to be successful as individuals as well as successful members of a society.

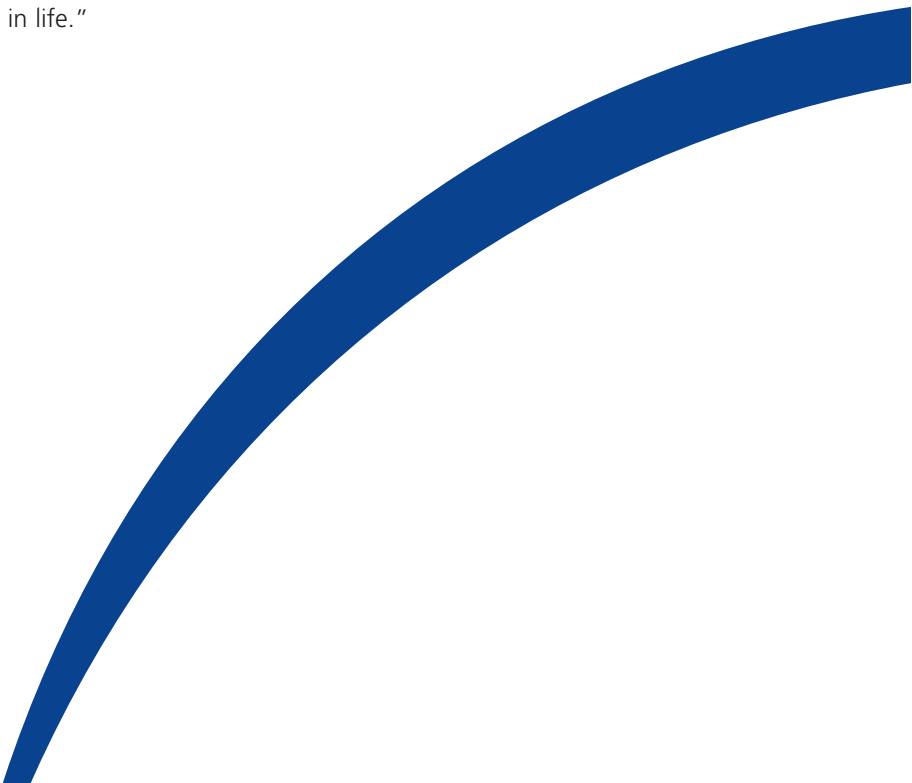
Other resources that have been suggested by the young people in Hodge Hill and are currently under development are **Character and University - writing a successful UCAS application** and **Character and Volunteering - developing yourself while helping others**.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

All the evidence gathered in this project conveys an overwhelming sense that students in Hodge Hill are concerned about values and character and about the quality of their communities and the society in which they are growing up. The picture emerging from this study is complex and variegated, but it does provide a genuine snapshot of the views and aspirations of a cross-section of young people living in a challenging environment.

As Liam Byrne observes in his Foreword, “our young people confronted a ‘power failure’; they had no-one to help deliver sufficient servings of inspiration, steadiness and sheer savoir faire to make it on and up in life.”

The findings of this study are consistent with the educational reports cited, which point towards the need for character and values education to assume a more central role in the education system as a complement the acquisition of academic skills and qualifications. And partly as a result of this, an agenda for change in Hodge Hill – Hodge Hill 2020 – has been introduced, which, as Liam Byrne points out, ‘now brings together agencies and residents to fight for a different place to live. A better place. Where citizens can genuinely realise their potential.’ This is a sign of hope and real progress that corresponds to the aspirations of these young people.





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