

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

EDUCATING FOR CIVIC VIRTUES AND SERVICE:

SCHOOL LEADER PERSPECTIVES

INITIAL INSIGHTS

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Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues is a unique and leading centre for the examination of how character and virtues impact upon individuals and society. The Centre was founded in 2012 by Professor James Arthur. Based at the University of Birmingham, it has a dedicated team of over 20 academics from a range of disciplines, including: philosophy, psychology, education, theology and sociology.

With its focus on excellence, the Centre has a robust, rigorous research and evidence-based approach that is objective and non-political. It offers world-class research on the importance of developing good character and virtues and the benefits they bring to individuals and society. In undertaking its own innovative research, the Centre also seeks to partner with leading academics from other universities around the world and to develop strong strategic partnerships.

A key conviction underlying the existence of the Centre is that the virtues that make up good character can be learnt and taught, but that these have been largely neglected in schools and in the professions. It is also a key conviction that the more people exhibit good character and virtues, the healthier our society. As such, the Centre undertakes development projects seeking to promote the practical applications of its research evidence.

Educating for Civic Virtues and Service: School Leader Perspectives

Initial Insights

Overview

A core function of education and schooling, whether explicitly recognised or not, is to prepare pupils to become responsible, active and informed citizens. Children themselves are already part of a range of often interlinked communities, and, as part of their day to day lives, they are impacted by the civic nature of these communities. Moreover, to different degrees and in different ways, children come into contact with ideas and issues that are essentially political and which relate in important ways to living in a democracy. As a result, alongside other sites of socialisation, schools play a key role in supporting children and young people to explore and express their civic character and to be able to engage with others in communities with kindness, criticality, compassion, honesty, integrity and a range of other virtues.

As the findings presented in this report suggest, most educators seem committed to the view that schools play a vital role in cultivating citizens of character. However, despite important historical connections between citizenship and character in education in England and Wales, the relationship between the two remains subject to contestation, not least with regard to the ethical dimensions involved. Here there remains something of a tension. On the one hand, schools are routinely tasked by the government, by the media and, at times, by families, to respond to some of society's most pressing challenges: tensions in communities, social injustices, the proliferation of fake news, to name but a few. Yet on the other hand, precisely how schools should respond – conceptually and pedagogically – remains unclear.

Character education aims to help pupils to understand the ethically important aspects of situations in which they find themselves, including acting rightly and for the right reasons, in order that they develop reflexivity and autonomy in the practice of virtue. This aim encompasses various aspects of pupils' lives, including the civic. This report presents the initial findings from the first phase of the *Civic Virtues Through Service to Others* project¹. Using service as a prism for exploring civic virtues in young people's lives, the project examines the meaning of civic virtue in contemporary public life and education in the U.K. The aim of the research presented in this report was to explore how school leaders understand the place of civic virtues, youth social action and the concept of service within their schools. Through semi-structured interviews with 18 school leaders, this research sought to determine how school leaders understand their role as civic educators, including the relationship between citizenship and character, and the educational activities and processes school leaders identify as central to forming citizens of character.

The initial findings presented in this report indicate that:

- *Cultivating civic virtues forms a core commitment of those schools that are taking an embedded approach to character education – and these schools often see the moral and intellectual virtues as a prerequisite and foundation for the cultivation of civic virtues.*
- *Whilst some schools have a well-developed language for civic virtues, others find the language challenging – both generally and in terms of embedding the language within the school and with pupils.*

- *The concept of service is not widely used to discuss the importance of civic virtues – with many leaders suggesting that the language of service would not resonate with or inspire pupils.*
- *Schools recognise the importance of the local community for developing civic virtues – leaders frequently highlighted how important their locality was for developing civic virtues to encourage pupils to connect with, and understand, others.*
- *Schools use staff members as civic exemplars – some school leaders spoke about how staff in their school role-modelled their own civic engagement or drew on that of other staff members to engage and motivate pupils.*
- *The Covid-19 pandemic has posed both challenges to and opportunities for the development of civic virtues in schools – many leaders cited how staff and pupils have proved adaptable by using digital technology to connect with others during the pandemic.*
- *Pupils themselves often drive the discussion of political issues within schools – leaders spoke of the need for their school to be responsive to the interests and concerns of their pupils.*

¹ <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/2934/projects/civic-virtues-through-service-to-others>



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1 Background

The formation of citizens of character has been a consistent general aim of education in the U.K., and indeed elsewhere, since at least the commencement of mass state education. Whilst not always a consistent or well-implemented endeavour at the level of government policy, schools and other educational settings play a crucial role in supporting children and young people to become responsible, active and informed citizens who are able to engage with others and within communities with kindness, criticality, compassion, honesty, integrity and a range of other virtues. The necessity of forming citizens of character has been a long-standing concern of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. As the Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2017: 1; emphasis added) states, 'character education teaches the acquisition and strengthening of virtues: the traits that sustain a well-rounded life and a *thriving society*'. The Framework also makes clear that 'schools should aim to develop confident and compassionate students, who are *effective contributors to society*, successful learners, and *responsible citizens*', and that students 'need to *develop a commitment to serving others*, which is an essential manifestation of good character in action'.

Most educators and parents seem committed to the view that schools play a vital role in cultivating citizens of character. However, despite a longstanding connection between citizenship and character in education in the U.K. (Ministry of Education, 1949; Arthur, 2003; Peterson, 2011), the relationship between the two remains subject to contestation (Althof and Berkowitz, 2006; Peterson, 2019; Kristjánsson, 2021). Conceptually, a range of questions remain apparent. These include inter-related concerns about the correct relationship between the good person and the good citizen, the proper balancing of individual rights and collective responsibilities, and linkages between local, national and globalised forms of citizenship. Each of these concerns impact, in turn, on the viability and meaning of terms such as 'citizenship', 'civic virtue' and 'service in pursuit of the common good' in diverse, liberal democracies today.

Alongside these broader conceptual issues lie a range of educational and practical matters about how children and young people learn as, and in order to become, democratic citizens through their education and schooling. These matters include the requisite role of character and the wider concept of the ethical in education for democratic citizenship, as well as the best curricular and pedagogical approaches for not only cultivating civic character, but for providing pupils with opportunities to experience and reflect on forms of civic engagement.

Research over the last twenty years has continued to present a mixed picture about the extent to which schools take an intentional, explicit and coherent approach to educating for citizenship, as well as about how teachers understand citizenship education (OfSTED, 2013; Burton and May, 2015; Peterson, Durrant and Bentley, 2015; Davies and Chong, 2016; Weinberg and Flinders, 2018). While, as stated above, most schools and teachers would understand themselves as playing a key role in forming citizens of good character, it is not clear whether or how this view manifests in a clear and systematic way. Similarly, though some studies suggest the importance of certain pedagogical approaches, such as focussing on real-life political issues, active involvement of pupils in the learning process, collaborative discussion and an open democratic climate (Davies *et al.*, 2019), others point to inconsistencies and uncertainties across schools, including whether teachers have the expertise and confidence to engage pupils in discussion and reflection about their citizenship and civic engagement. It remains the case that there is too little empirical research to gain a true and deep insight into how school leaders and teachers understand citizenship, civic virtues and the formation of good citizens and indeed about how children and young people experience this aspect of their education.

It is also important not to lose sight of the fact that the civic work of schools and teachers takes place within a wider societal and political context. In recent years, serious concerns have been raised about a number of core elements of democratic life (Foa *et al.*, 2020).

These include increased political polarisation, uncivil political discussion and debate, political apathy, the continual denial of equitable inclusion, and an overall decline in commitment to, or a unified understanding of, the common good. However, alongside these issues sit more positive, hopeful instances and examples of civic commitments and service that have brought people together in their communities over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. These include evidence of more young people engaging in community action and volunteering over the course of the pandemic (Saxton, 2020; Boelman, 2021). In this context, schools clearly have a vital role to play in cultivating citizens of character. What is needed now is a concerted effort to understand more about how education builds civic character and offers opportunities for young people to express their civic character in collaboration with others.

To this end, since January 2021, the Jubilee Centre's *Civic Virtues Through Service to Others*² project has examined the nature, place and role of civic virtues in the U.K. today. The broad definition that underpins the project understands civic virtues as:

positive and stable character traits that enable citizens to participate in the public life of their communities, whether locally, nationally or globally. In a democracy, civic virtues enable effective participation in the various institutions and organisations of political and civil society that comprise the public domain. The formation and expression of civic virtues in pursuit of the common good are vital for individual and societal flourishing.

This report provides initial insights from the project so far. More specifically, it presents data from interviews with 18 school leaders in order to (i) explore how school leaders understand their role as civic educators, including the relationship between citizenship and character, and (ii) examine the educational activities and processes school leaders identify as central to forming citizens of character.

² <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/2934/projects/civic-virtues-through-service-to-others>

2 Methodology

The research reported here forms part of the wider *Civic Virtues Through Service to Others* project. The wider study, following previous Jubilee Centre studies on character education, adopts a multi-method approach to obtaining data in order to examine various aspects of educating for civic virtue in the U.K. today. Such an approach enables the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, bringing together different data sources to explore and examine perceptions of civic character, whether and how schools educate civic virtues, and how children and young people understand and experience the civic within their education and lives. The wider research project includes:

1. Literature reviews of (i) the nature of civic virtues and (ii) educating for civic virtues in the U.K.;
2. Semi-structured interviews with school leaders responsible for planning, overseeing and implementing character education, citizenship education, social action and other relevant courses of study in state primary and secondary schools;
3. Voluntary surveys of teachers and pupils;
4. Semi-structured interviews with teachers in state primary and secondary schools;
5. Semi-structured interviews with representatives from social action organisations working with schools to provide and develop opportunities for children's and young people's civic engagement;
6. Focus groups with pupils in primary and secondary schools.

The research from which the initial insights presented in this report are drawn centres on the semi-structured interviews with school leaders responsible for planning, overseeing and implementing character education, citizenship education, social action and other relevant courses of study in state primary and secondary schools in England and Wales.

2.1 RATIONALE AND SAMPLE

In light of the extant literature, as well as the overall aims of the *Civic Virtues Through Service to Others* project, the research team, through semi-structured interviews, focussed on understanding the place of civic virtues, of youth social action, and of the concept of service within schools. In addition, the interviews sought to determine how school leaders translate these understandings into the culture, curriculum, pedagogies and activities within their schools.

Given that there is no clear and consistent process for the teaching of civic virtues in schools, and the likelihood that approaches to doing so will vary in intention, detail and depth, the study adopted what might broadly be termed a mixed, non-probability sampling method. In one sense, the sample was purposive in that the leaders selected all

worked in schools that had an explicit focus on cultivating good citizens in their mission and ethos. An element of quota sampling was involved, given that the research team were interested in interviewing leaders from primary and secondary schools, from across a broad geographical base, and to involve schools that did and did not take an intentional and explicit approach to character education.

Key details of each of the schools from which the leaders were drawn are set out in Table 1.1 below. Table 1.1 also indicates the position of the school leader interviewed. In each case a decision was made in consultation with the school as to who within the school would offer the best insights into educating civic virtues at the school, whether that be the headteacher or a member of the senior leadership team with responsibility for character, citizenship, and/or personal development.



Table 1.1³

No.	Name of School ⁴	Primary (P)/ Secondary (S)	School Type	No. of Pupils	% Eligible for FSM ⁵	Position of Interviewee
1	The Croft School	S	Academy Sponsor Led	750-999	≥50%	Headteacher
2	Greenview	P	Academy Sponsor Led	500-749	40-49%	Headteacher
3	Brownhill	P	Academy Sponsor Led	200-349	40-49%	Headteacher
4	Eastlands	S	Foundation School	1,000-1,499	<10%	Character-lead
5	Sycamore	P	Academy Converter	350-499	20-29%	Character-lead
6	Ivydale	S	Academy Converter	≥1,500	<10%	Citizenship-lead
7	Woodheath	P	Academy Sponsor Led	350-499	10-19%	Headteacher
8	Weststone	P	Community School	500-749	<10%	Headteacher and character-lead
9	Sunnyview	S	Academy Converter	750-999	10-19%	Character-lead
10	Quarrybank	P	Community School	200-349	<10%	Character-lead
11	Seagrove	S	Welsh Establishment	1,000-1,499	No Data	Character/personal development-lead
12	Grange Oak	S	Academy Sponsor Led	≥1,500	20-29%	Headteacher
13	Stamford Hall	S	Academy Sponsor Led	≥1,500	20-29%	Character-lead
14	Cliffend	S	Academy Sponsor Led	1,000-1,499	30-39%	Assistant headteacher
15	Bankside	S	Academy Converter	≥1,500	<10%	Assistant headteacher/ character-lead
16	Newtown	S	Academy Converter	≥1,500	<10%	Assistant headteacher/ character-lead
17	Bluebells	S	Academy Converter	750-999	10-19%	Character-lead
18	Hillbourne	P	Community School	359-499	20-29%	Headteacher

³ The data in this table is taken from: <https://www.get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/>

⁴ Pseudonyms have been used for each of the schools.

⁵ Free school meals are available to children of families who are on low incomes or receive benefits.



2.2 RESEARCH METHODS AND ANALYSIS

Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit the perceptions of the school leaders about educating civic virtues. Owing to the constraints posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, all of the interviews were conducted remotely using either Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Prior to the interviews, the leaders were provided with a detailed information sheet explaining the project and how the data would be obtained, recorded, stored and used. All participants also signed consent forms. At the start of each interview, leaders were reminded of the aims of the study, and were provided with key details contained within the consent form (including anonymity, how the data would be stored and used, and their right to withdraw).

Interviews typically lasted an hour, and were recorded and then transcribed by either a member of the project team or a professional transcription service. Whilst the interviews were semi-structured, in the final event they each followed a similar pattern and covered consistent ground. Each interview started with several general questions about the school's approach to character education and citizenship education. From this basis, the leaders were then asked about how they, and the school, understood civic virtues and what approaches and activities were central to cultivating civic virtues at their school. Further questions examined the place and benefits of social action in the school; connections between the school and the local community;

whether/how the school seeks to balance engagement in local, national and global issues; perceptions and use of the concept of 'service' within the school; how the school motivates pupils to engage with, and in, their communities; barriers to educating civic virtues; the relation in the school between civic virtues and moral, intellectual, and performance virtues; and how the leader viewed the role of the school in responding to opportunities and challenges in the broader political and social context. Finally, at the end of each interview, leaders were asked how they would define a 'school of civic character'.

As the research was to some degree exploratory, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed key themes relevant to the extant literature and project aims to be covered, whilst also providing scope for unforeseen areas and themes raised by the leaders themselves to surface. Analysis of interview data was thematic, using a constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) within a modified framework approach (Richie and Spencer, 1994). Once the interviews and transcriptions had been concluded, data underwent a separate content analysis by three members of the project team, each of whom developed a set of possible themes, with responses grouped under similar headings. The three sets of themes were then brought together, discussed and modified to derive a final set of themes that form the basis of Section 3 in this report.

2.3 LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are several limitations associated with the research presented here that are important to note. First, the size of the study necessarily prohibits generalisations. That said, in conducting the interviews, the research team aimed not to establish more generalisable patterns, but rather to determine how, for these leaders, educating for civic virtues is understood and reported. In this sense, the findings are instructive and their generalisability can be developed further through the ongoing research of the wider project. Second, whilst the research team consciously attempted to interview leaders from a range of different schools with different approaches to character education, citizenship education and social action, it cannot be ruled out that, owing to the sampling method and the reliance on self-reporting, this aspect of the study is limited by biases concerned with self-deception, social-desirability and self-confirmation.

The data presented here was part of the first phase of the *Civic Virtues Through Service to Others* project. This phase was granted ethical approval by the University of Birmingham. Research protocols were in place throughout, including the use of participant information sheets, consent forms and clear procedures regarding anonymity and the storage and use of data (as explained above). Actual school names have been replaced with pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.



WORLD MAP
The world is a globe, and the map is a representation of it. It is a tool for navigation and a source of information. The map shows the continents, oceans, and the lines of latitude and longitude. It is a masterpiece of cartography and a testament to human ingenuity.

♂

♀

Saturn

ASIA
TARTARY
RIBBON
THE GREAT OCEAN

REPUBLIC OF VENICE

THE GREAT SOUTH SEA
MARDERZUR

THE GREAT OCEAN

THE GREAT OCEAN

3 Findings

The interview data was analysed thematically as the research team were interested in how school leaders understand and approach educating for civic virtue. Though the discussions were wide-ranging, this section presents seven main themes that give an insight into the views of school leaders across the interviews before providing some discussion and interpretations of them in Section 4. Before moving to these themes, it is important to state that, as might be expected, school leaders cited a range of mechanisms and processes through which pupils learned about citizenship and developed their civic character. While a few of the secondary schools had specific classes for Citizenship education, more commonly these mechanisms and processes involved a blend of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education, links with character education, form time/pastoral experiences, extra-curricular activities, cross-curricular learning and the building of connections between school life and pupils commitments outside of school.

3.1 CIVIC VIRTUE AND EMBEDDED APPROACHES TO CHARACTER EDUCATION

Though schools were not categorised as being character-focussed or not - for the reason that all schools develop pupils' character to some greater or lesser extent - the first theme identified across the interviews was that those schools with a planned and intentional approach to character education (hereafter referred to as 'embedded') are clearly building links with citizenship and civic virtue. Two important and related elements stood out in relation to this more general statement. The first was the view that character and citizenship are inherently connected, enabling pupils to engage in and with their communities. One school leader talked about how character and citizenship 'dovetail together' [Hillbourne], while others conveyed:

I think character is more of the umbrella [...] this is what our school stands for, these are our values and ethos [and] there is overlap with civic virtues, with active citizenship and so on [...] - Bankside

I don't think moral virtues can exist without civic virtues and I don't think civic virtues can exist without moral virtues. I mean, how can you have compassion and understanding, but not have any responsibility or care within the broader context of yourself? - Blueheath

The second element, expressed by a number of the leaders in schools that had embedded character education, was the sense that moral and intellectual character serve as a prerequisite and foundation for the cultivation of civic virtues. As one school leader suggested, 'I would say that, certainly the moral and intellectual are the first ones that we go to' [Hillbourne]. One school leader reported a similar view in relation to their conception of what a school of civic character should be:

A school of civic character is two-pronged [...] the development of character and virtue within school and then the ability to then put that into practice, like going out into the community and doing something or giving something and then reflecting on that.
- Brownhill

Another leader also spoke of the connections between civic virtues and moral and intellectual virtues, highlighting how engagement in civic life builds from a moral and intellectual foundation:

I suppose if you are going to be someone who is giving back to the community, you're volunteering your service, then you're going to, by proxy, be someone who is probably friendly, is probably respectful. You're probably going to have an element of trust, so that there's therefore crossover into the moral virtues there, isn't there? [...] I think certainly at school level, and just in terms of probably explicit teaching you can do, the moral side of it and intellectual is much easier. You've got to give them the opportunities for civic values, probably to live those experiences a bit more, to develop them. So giving them that exposure to the community and interacting with different people to really develop those virtues.
- Grange Oak

Here, the leader is thinking through and balancing conceptual and practical concerns in a way that gives shape to pupils' participation in their communities whilst also recognising challenges involved in operationalising a vocabulary of civic virtues (a point returned to later in this section).

By contrast, several of the leaders interviewed in schools that did not have an intentional and planned approach to character education had significant gaps where connecting character with civic virtues was concerned. Leaders in these schools typically talked about having well-developed approaches to teaching pupils

about and for citizenship – whether through curricular and/or extra-curricular activities – but suggested that these were not linked explicitly to pupils' character development. One leader, for example, reflected upon citizenship education in their school reporting that 'at the moment it's very much facts based, there's some kind of debate in there, but there needs to be a lot more. And certainly it's lacking from the character side of all that' [Newtown]. Similarly, another leader spoke of the fact that opportunities to develop the civic virtues of their students were 'dotted across the curriculum' and that the school had 'never sat down as a staff or the senior leadership team and really debated' connecting civic virtues and character [Ivydale].

3.2 THE LANGUAGE OF CIVIC VIRTUES

A further theme identified across the data concerned the language of civic virtues. Some of the leaders in schools in which character education was embedded had an intentional and well-developed language of civic virtues. These leaders were clear about which civic virtues their school sought to cultivate in their pupils, whether through the curriculum, school ethos and culture, or through extra-curricular activities (such as developed youth social action programmes in the community). One leader, for example, listed 'citizenship, civility, community awareness, neighbourliness, service, volunteering, friendliness, courtesy, caring and helpfulness' as the key civic virtues their school developed [Woodheath]. Another leader spoke of the importance of volunteering as a core civic virtue:

Well, volunteering is very central to what we do here, we volunteer from the beginning of coming into the school [...] one of our other virtues is around pride and we certainly engender pride in the local community. Pride in the links the children have within the world as well. – Hillbourne

Whilst the commitment, and explicit attention, to civic virtues in these leaders' depiction of their schools is notable, across the sample a more common response by leaders, when asked about civic virtues, was to cite difficulty in developing a clear vocabulary of civic virtues within the everyday language of their schools. When reasons for this difficulty are examined, a few are notable. Some leaders, particularly those in primary schools, expressed a concern that pupils would not understand civic virtues or may struggle to specifically connect civic virtues with their activities outside of the

school. In relation to primary schools, the following school leader discussed the challenges of approaching civic issues in an age-appropriate way:

In the classroom when they arrive in year three obviously they are seven years old, so to start talking about large civic issues would not be appropriate, because they wouldn't understand it [...] so we kind of develop their behaviour first within the classroom [...] with each other and then we can start relating that to topics that we'll talk about [...] so some of the topics that we'll talk about in say citizenship or geography or you know any subject where we can find explicit examples will help us. – Sycamore

A further reason for the lack of specific language around civic virtues raised by the leaders centred on the challenges for pupils in terms of making immediate sense of the language involved. One leader suggested 'if you ask the child at the school about civic values, they might not understand you straight away. But if you talk to them about community then they're going to have a good understanding [of] what you're describing there.' [Grange Oak]. The approach stated by this leader – namely, using a more general and relatable proxy for civic virtues, such as community – was not uncommon, with several other leaders reporting a similar use of a more general proxy term for civic virtues.

3.3 THE CONCEPT OF SERVICE

Connected with the lack of a specific vocabulary of civic virtues, many of the school leaders raised significant hesitations and concerns about the concept of 'service'. Echoing previous Jubilee Centre studies on youth social action (Arthur, 2017b), the leaders conveyed the view that 'service' has negative connotations, which in turn meant that the language of service was not one that pupils could, or would, engage with. Various related hesitations stood out. Some leaders suggested that the concept of service was limited and would not inspire pupils. One leader, for instance, argued that service does not 'sound as dynamic as leadership or growth mindset' [Ivydale]. Interestingly, for this leader, the other-regarding, perhaps even selfless, connotation of service meant that pupils would not be motivated by the concept: 'service is more about what you are giving for and to other people or communities' whereas 'growth mindset and leadership suggest there's something a bit more in it for you'. The leader continued to contend that the language of service was associated with '100 per cent giving, which is nice to do, but [...] I don't think that would inspire people generally as much.' Similarly, another leader argued:

I think if we start using the idea of service [...] it almost comes off, "what do you mean I'm serving somebody? Why would I be doing that?" We don't really say service, it's more about how we help the community or what actions can we take to support people. So yeah, I think action and help rather than service in the context of the school. – Eastlands

In this extract, the school leader is concerned that the concept of service infringes on the autonomy of students to develop or direct their own civic engagement. A common concern raised by a number of the leaders was that service involved unequal power relations akin to 'servitude' or 'subservience'. In place of service, school leaders referred to the language of 'action', 'social action' or 'empowerment' as this feels more relatable to their pupils. 'Action', one leader argued, 'feels empowering, it feels strong' and pupils 'hear it and see it in their own social media platforms'. Social action was associated with 'being involved, being part of a change, making a difference' and was 'clearer', 'really positively framed' and 'understood by pupils' [Stamford Hill].

Amidst this general hesitation with the language of service, there were some leaders who spoke of how the concept of service did form a core part of their schools. One leader spoke of how service was used 'directly with pupils' to create a school ethos where 'we are all in service of each other'. [Greenview]. Another, from a primary school, spoke of the place that serving others held in their school as a basis for engendering dignity and pride in the local community and the community beyond. A leader from a different primary school spoke of how, in their school, service was conceived as a core part of what it means to be a person and a citizen given that 'we are all in service of each other' [Greenview]. Another leader, this time in a secondary school, recounted how service to others lies at the heart of the school's work on character education. In particular, they highlighted the ways that children at the school encountered role models of those who have and do serve their communities as well as undertaking service to others themselves [Seagrove].

Finally, for this theme, in one school where the language of civic virtues was widely reported to be used, the leader reflected that service was less easy to institute in daily school life than other civic virtues:

[...] it is harder to sometimes get into a sentence, for example, when you're saying that the children who are getting star of the week, for example. It's harder to word in a way that the children will then understand [...] And I think that often when you're talking about something that they've done using

service, you can use so many of the other civic virtues instead that that one maybe gets a little bit lost. – Woodheath

This extract reveals the difficulty that some school leaders have in condensing or framing civic virtues in a language that pupils will understand and relate to, particularly in primary schools.

3.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

All of the school leaders cited the local community, including the school itself, as the most important space for practising and developing civic virtues. School leaders frequently highlighted how important the locality was for developing civic virtues which encourage pupils to connect with, and understand, others. Leaders typically suggested that focussing on local issues, activities and participation provided a platform for encouraging pupils to see the connections between the local, the national and the global. As one leader argued, 'a lot of the things that we do between local and global mirror one another' [Hillbourne]. The local was often cited as the prism through which broader national or global issues are understood and experienced:

We know our community well, so we know about the deprivation, we know about the drugs issues, we know about the huge spike in domestic violence over the last couple of years, we know about child sexual exploitation, county lines drugs running, all that kind of stuff. But we also know about bigger things outside of the locality, such as global warming, and Black Lives Matter and things that can be spoken about at a local level but are actually global issues. – Woodheath

A common standpoint described by leaders involved civic learning building outwards from the school itself as a civic community, to the local area around the school, and then to the national and the global. In this vein, for example, one school leader spoke of the importance of the school's history for fostering a sense of civic identity amongst the pupils:

We scoured the local archive for as much information as we can about the school through history because it adds to the sense of joining something more than yourself [...] And this rich fabric of legacy becomes a massive part of them understanding their duty, their sort of semi civic duty to the school, which then extrapolates into the wider community. – Greenview

Though the schools included in this study were not divided by indicators of deprivation owing to sample size, a further subtheme that emerged from school leaders' reflections on the importance of the local was how the type of civic engagement was impacted by the character of the community within which the school sits. One school leader reflected on their experience of developing civic virtues in both an affluent and deprived community:

Having done it twice in two schools in very, very different contexts, having come at it from very different points of view. So probably the first school I explored these kinds of concepts with was in the western part of London in a more affluent area, where it was mostly about what you'd consider the traditional ideas of civic responsibility, around the rule of law, around British values, around all these kinds of bits. And it was about establishing, what now seems, but at the time felt far wider, a narrow view of civic responsibility and societal responsibility. – Greenview

Contrasting this approach with their current school in a deprived urban area, the leader spoke at length about the needs and challenges of their community, including levels of pupils living in emergency housing, significant mobility of families and pupils (including those on short term overseas visas or seeking asylum), and levels of crime in the immediate community. According to the leader,

these had 'changed the view of how civic and societal responsibility is taught here massively' [Greenview]. They reflected that:

For a lot of our children, whether they come from Latin America, whether they come from Afghanistan, whether they come from the [Indian] subcontinent, their view of civic responsibility and the morality of civic responsibility is incredibly elastic [...] So it's about the architecture of dialogue and structuring conversations that lead children and parents, and it has to be both parties at once, to come to the conclusion that there is a civic duty and there is a civic society [...] And that there is a role for them and the school in that and doing that through a culture of service and understanding and private and public responsibility. – Greenview

Similarly, a school leader who described their move from a school in a deprived area to a school in a more affluent area spoke of the challenge of teaching the more affluent pupils about civic virtues within the local community. According to the leader, pupils in the current school were less likely to make a deep connection between their own activities and the specific needs of the community:

our parent association has amazing fundraising events and raises lots of money for the school and for local charities and the hospice [...] it's a different sort of community isn't it? It's a community that will give money

and will give a little bit of time, but it's not a sense of community of "right, we're all in this together." [...] if you've got a community project in some more deprived areas, it might be that there'll be students in that school or in the classroom that are going to get a direct benefit straight away from that happening. For them [more affluent pupils], it's much more abstract, very few of them will need help from a charity or will benefit from volunteer work. – Eastlands

Along similar lines, other schools in deprived areas stated how their community-driven focus encouraged pupils to consider how to drive social change that responds directly to community needs. As one school leader noted, this was particularly important when the school was a core focal point in, and for, the community:

When I say volunteering doesn't come naturally, I think the deficit is the fact that there aren't really opportunities in the community. Like we don't have sports hubs, or we don't have local youth centres. We don't really even have a green space where we can develop skills, so what we try to do is we try to bring that volunteering back into school. So, we have litter pickers, and our pupils are on a rota to support serving at lunch time. – Croft



Whilst lack of community infrastructure clearly poses challenges, school leaders whose schools serve deprived communities spoke of how their work could develop a sense of cohesion and connectedness between the school and the community. Crucial to these perceptions was the idea that when pupils contributed to genuine community needs, they could more likely recognise the tangible benefits of their civic actions and virtues.

3.5 STAFF AS CIVIC EXEMPLARS

In line with research on character education that highlights the importance of teachers and other staff acting as role-models for pupils, some school leaders talked about how staff in their schools role-modelled their own civic engagement or used that of other staff members to engage and motivate pupils. One school leader spoke of structuring assemblies around staff members volunteering at the local Salvation Army and *'giving freely of their time at a soup kitchen'* as a way to ensure that the language of civic virtue *'is shared with the children'* [Hillbourne]. Connected to this, school leaders spoke of how their own volunteering or community engagement motivated them to enhance civic opportunities for their pupils.

One leader explained the opportunities they were given through volunteering when they were a pupil: *'I suppose really, I do believe personally, there is value in volunteering, and I suppose, going back to it, it does come back to the opportunities I know it's given me.'* Those experiences, they claimed, *'are what's really going to help students [...] [to] become the best version of themselves'* [Eastlands]. Similarly, another leader spoke of how their own experiences in the voluntary sector had taught them important skills:

I mean I worked in the voluntary sector on two or three occasions. I've done some volunteer work overseas. I guess in my heart I realised what it offered to me in terms of developing my own skills and qualities. I came out with incredibly average GCSEs and A Levels, and I think I've got where I am and hopefully being a reasonably good teacher because of my skills, not because of my qualifications. And a lot of that came through volunteer work or paid work in the voluntary sector. – Ivydale

For these leaders, their own experiences of community engagement seems to motivate their associated commitment to civic virtues as a teacher.

3.6 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC VIRTUES

A view was expressed by some of the leaders that the Covid-19 pandemic had imposed severe restrictions on the ability of schools to engage with the local community. Several school leaders spoke of how the pandemic interrupted the development of their civic engagement programmes, impacting upon pupils' opportunities to engage to the extent desired by the school. Yet, it also became clear that schools have been adaptable in the face of the challenges posed. One leader gave the example of a programme the school was running alongside a local residential home whereby pupils taught residents how to use technology like smartphones. With the onset of the pandemic, this activity had moved online, with the pupils teaching residents about Zoom and other forms of digital communication [Hillbourne]. Another leader explained how the pandemic reinforced the need for civic virtues amongst the school's pupils:

Hopefully going forward schools can now say, "We can see that the civic nature of this is even more important now." This is more about the world, this is more about our community than ever before [...] actually never before has there been a greater motivation to be more civic minded and to be more morally minded, I think.
– Weststone

Whilst for this leader the pandemic revealed the importance of civic virtues, for others there was a concern that the initial voluntary spirit witnessed at the start of the nationwide lockdown was gradually disappearing. As one leader argued, *'this time one year ago when we were talking to our pupils and there was the offer to make cards and donations to nurses and doctors and it was about supporting key workers.'* A year later, however, *'you haven't got the same level of appreciation or empathy or compassion around what's happening'* [The Croft School].

3.7 PUPILS' ROLE IN DRIVING DISCUSSION OF POLITICAL ISSUES WITHIN SCHOOLS

In a number of the secondary schools in the sample, leaders reported that it was pupils themselves who often drove the type of political or contemporary social issues which were discussed in the school. School leaders wanted their schools to be responsive to pupils' interests and concerns, stating it was important that schools provided an environment in which matters such as diversity, social justice and sustainability could be learned about and discussed in a safe and informed way. One of the leaders explained how their pupils had connected with the 'Me Too', 'climate change' and 'Black Lives Matter' movements, asking the school to do more to engage with the issues involved. Though this was sometimes challenging, this leader reflected that *'it's good that they want to do that, and they are challenging us to give them a platform to air their views'* [Ivydale]. Some leaders positioned pupils' motivations to engage with pressing civic matters within school as stemming from their embedded approach to character education, including the strong civic component within this. One school leader observed that:

[...] due to the success of our character education we have incredibly active and aware young people without our school, so they guide us sometimes so, for example on issues such as Black lives Matter, it's come from the students [...] and they feel confident [...] confident and comfortable doing that. – Bankside

For this school leader, and for several others interviewed, the development of core virtues enables pupils to be able to learn about, discuss and engage with challenging and often controversial and/or sensitive civic matters – including those initiated from their own interests and experiences.

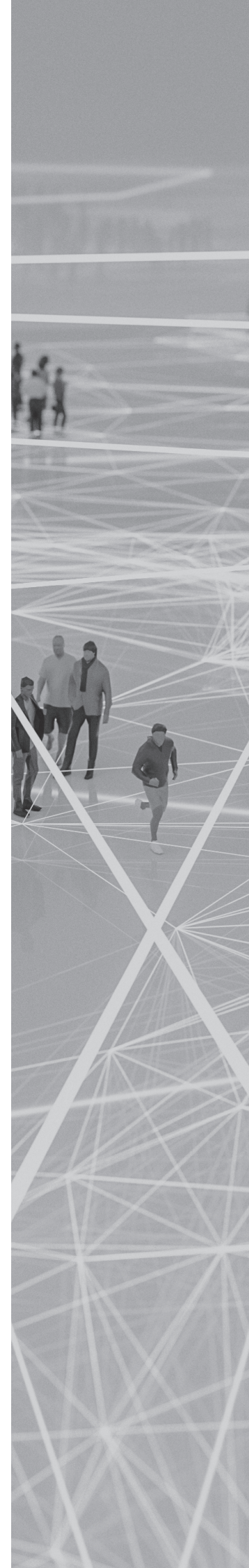
4 Discussion and Next Steps

By interviewing school leaders working in schools with an explicit focus on cultivating good citizens, this research has highlighted the interrelationship between character education and education for citizenship. This challenges recent criticisms (Suissa, 2015; Kisby, 2017; Jerome and Kisby, 2019) which claim that many forms of character education focus wholly or excessively on the individual, at the expense of wider communal or political ties (Peterson, 2020). It is clear that schools with an embedded approach to character education consider the moral and intellectual virtues as the foundation for education for citizenship and the development of civic virtues. Across the sample reported on in the present research, however, there was no clear or consistent process for teaching civic virtues in schools. This finding is notable, given the importance of an explicit and shared vocabulary of character (Jubilee Centre, 2017; Arthur *et al.*, 2017a). The challenges involved are reflected in the difficulties many of the school leaders had in developing a language of civic virtues which could inspire or connect with their pupils. As part of the project's next phase, the research team will conduct surveys with educators and pupils to uncover how schools across the country, including those without an explicit focus on cultivating good citizens, practise civic virtues in their everyday language and ethos.

Related to concerns over the language of civic virtues are the difficulties many of the school leaders associated with the concept of service, a finding that affirms previous Centre studies on youth social action (Arthur *et al.*, 2017b). Leaders with an embedded approach to character education were more likely to classify the concept of service as a civic virtue and to use that language to inform how their teachers and pupils approached civic engagement within their school and the local community, an approach in contrast with the concerns about the concept of service raised by some of the other leaders. This particular finding is notable, and suggests more work needs to be done in order to theorise service as a virtue, and to understand more about how positive conceptions of service are at play in schools. The next phase of the project will seek to interview schools with an explicit commitment to service as one of the schools' core virtues or values to gain deeper insights into how these schools adopt and operationalise a positive conception of service.

School leaders value the local community as the primary space through which their pupils develop civic virtues, a finding that has parallels with other recent reports on civic life in Britain that have also emphasised the importance of the local (The Young Foundation, 2019; Tanner, Krasniqi and Blagden, 2021). Whereas local, national and global commitments are sometimes seen as sitting in tension, school leaders typically suggested that focussing on local issues acted as a prism through which pupils could understand and experience bigger questions of national or global importance. The character of the local community, however, had a big impact on the type of civic engagement pupils engaged in and, in turn, the civic virtues they developed. It was clear that some of the school leaders whose schools served more affluent areas reported that they had to work harder to make civic engagement appear relevant and less abstract to pupils. By contrast, in more deprived areas, the civic work of the school was more connected with the needs of the local community and, by extension, of the pupils themselves. Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly had an impact on local community engagement, school leaders frequently spoke of how their schools have adapted to deliver civic opportunities remotely.

The insights into the relationship between character education, civic virtues and education for citizenship presented in this report form just one part of the ongoing research project *Civic Virtues Through Service to Others*. The research summarised in this report highlights how school leaders perceive the relationship between character education, civic virtues and education for citizenship. The initial findings reveal that civic virtues are a core commitment of those schools that are taking an embedded approach to character education, as well as the importance assigned to the local community as a space for expressing and cultivating civic virtues. In addition, these initial findings highlight the difficulty schools face in developing a specific language of civic virtues and some concerns about the concept of service. Future research needs to explore in more detail how schools are successfully cultivating civic character within and beyond the school gates, including how schools have, and can, foster positive readings and forms of civic virtues such as service. This is a task the research team will explore in the next phase of the project.





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