

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIPS: BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO COLLABORATIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION

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 on 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 20 academics from a range of disciplines, including: philosophy, psychology, education, theology and sociology.

With its focus on excellence, the Centre has a robust and 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. We believe these have largely been 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.



Parent-Teacher Partnerships: barriers and enablers to collaborative character education

Initial Insights

Overview

Parents and teachers are the educators of their children's characters, inside and outside of the classroom. This works best where parents and teachers form meaningful partnerships with regards to the character education of the children in their care, for both individual and societal flourishing.

This report presents the initial findings from the first phase of the *Parent-Teacher Partnerships and Character Education* project¹, in which evidence was gathered through a questionnaire with 376 parents and 137 teachers, about the extent to which they had shared understandings about the importance of character and what they perceived to be the barriers and enablers to them working collaboratively on character education.

The key findings from the study were:

- Both parents and teachers prioritised character over attainment, but perceived the opposite to be true of their counterparts.
- Both parents and teachers ranked moral followed by performance virtues as the most important. Conversely, parents believed that teachers prioritise moral virtues the least and civic virtues the most.
- Quality of communication was perceived by parents and teachers as the most important enabler of a positive relationship.
- Both parents and teachers reported that lack of time was the biggest barrier to a positive relationship between them. Other barriers frequently identified were 'not sharing the same values' and 'contact only taking place when there is misbehavior.'

This report contributes to the Jubilee Centre's wider investigation into how character education might be enhanced in UK schools². Insight gained from the research will subsequently be used to inform the design of an intervention to promote enhanced collaboration between parents and teachers on character education.

¹ www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/parentandteacher

² www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/charactereducation

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1 Purpose of the Report

This report details the findings from a questionnaire that examined the extent to which parents and teachers had shared understandings about the importance of character, and what they perceived to be the barriers and enablers to them working collaboratively on character education. The findings presented form the initial phase of a three-year project which will explore how parents and teachers perceive their partnership on character education.

Previous UK and international research has emphasised the importance of parental involvement for effective character education. With some exceptions, empirical research on what practical interventions might promote

parent-teacher collaboration on character education is limited. Whilst parental involvement in education more broadly is well-researched, much less is known about how parents and teachers might work together to cultivate character virtues in children and young people. An exploratory survey was therefore deemed a necessary starting point for this research.

The survey was designed to answer the following research questions:

- What are the similarities and differences between teachers' and parents' understandings of the importance of character, the virtues and character education?
- What are the barriers and enablers to parents and teachers working collaboratively on character education?

The key themes explored in this report include: the importance parents and teachers place on character relative to attainment; the virtues prized by parents and teachers; and, the practical steps that might be undertaken to enhance how character education is undertaken in homes and schools. The insights presented offer the first steps to enhancing the collaborative practice of parents and teachers for the benefit of the character development of their children and pupils.



2 Background

The development of children's characters is an obligation we all share, not least parents. Whilst parents are the primary educators of their children's character, empirical research tells us that parents want all adults who have contact with their children to contribute to such education, especially their children's teachers. (Jubilee Centre, 2017a: 1)

In recent years, character education has featured prominently in educational policy development both in the UK and internationally, after decades of relative neglect (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). In this report, the term 'character education' is used to refer to all endeavours to cultivate virtues in children and young people in the interests of human flourishing and can be understood as a subset of moral education. Character education in England currently enjoys sustained political support. In *Taught not Caught*, the Rt. Hon Nicky Morgan, MP and former Secretary of State for Education, argues that good character education is good education and vice versa (2017: 122); while current Secretary of State for Education Damian Hinds (2018) describes character as a 'crucial area'³; and, OFSTED recognises that, although character education is not currently mentioned in its framework, it is implied in all key judgement areas⁴. Given the increased political emphasis on character education, it is vital that research is undertaken to inform effective practice.

The present research seeks to address the following research gap: although parental involvement is typically accepted as an important part of successful character education programmes (Arthur, 2003; Lickona, 1992; Berkowitz, 2011; Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016: 153-4; Arthur *et al.*, 2014: 5; Lickona, 1996), there exists little empirical research into how parents and teachers might collaborate on character education (Berkowitz and Bier, 2017; Peterson and Skiba, 2000). More specifically, while there exists a large literature base on parental engagement in education broadly, 'far less is known about the impacts of parent involvement in schooling on student character development' (Berkowitz and Bier, 2017: 6).

In a democracy, the character education of children is generally considered to be a collaborative endeavour (Arthur, 2003: 123; Lickona, 1992). While parents are the primary educators of their children's character, schools also have an important part to play. Empirical research tells us that parents want all adults who have contact with their children to contribute to this education of character, in particular their children's teachers (Jubilee Centre, 2013; Jubilee Centre, 2017b).

Findings from a poll with 2,000 parents showed that 95% of parents/guardians felt that it is possible to teach a child values and shape their character in a positive sense, through lessons and dedicated projects or exercises at school. Moreover, 84% of parents/guardians felt that teachers should encourage good morals and values in students (Jubilee Centre, 2013). This corroborates previous Jubilee Centre research which emphasised the importance of parental involvement for effective character education (Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Arthur *et al.*, 2015b).

Character education is not about 'fixing the kids' (Arthur, 2003), irrespective of socio-political or institutional contexts; neither is it about 'fixing the parents'. The present research is concerned with recognising the synergic importance of the home and the school (at all levels) in the cultivation of character in young people. As such, the research focusses on the character education that takes place in the intersection between the home and the school.

2.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

2.1.1 Building Parent and Teacher Partnerships on Character Education

Similar to research findings into the positive impact of character education in schools (Arthur *et al.*, 2017; Silverthorn *et al.*, 2016; Elias, 2009; Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn and Smith, 2006; Bavarian *et al.*, 2013; Heckman and Kautz, 2012), most commentators agree with the precept that parental engagement in education positively impacts on children's learning. Among many other indicators, parental engagement has been shown to have a positive

impact on attitudes to science (George and Kaplan, 1998), social and emotional learning (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry and Childs, 2004; Niehaus and Adelson, 2014), as well as absenteeism and truancy (Epstein and Sheldon, 2000; Smerillo, Reynolds, Temple and Ou, 2017) and risky behaviour (ACASAColumbia, 2012). Given the acknowledged impact of parental involvement in education broadly, and the general acceptance of the importance of character education, it would appear that parents may play an integral role in the character education of their children.

With reference to parental involvement in education more broadly, an apparent gap is observable; while polls and surveys show that many parents and teachers approve of collaboration on educational matters, they do not think that current practice capitalises on the potential for parent-teacher partnerships. For example, a poll run by PTA UK (2016) found that, while 84% of parents/guardians wanted to be engaged with their children's school, nearly half (46%) were unsure that their feedback was taken into account; worryingly 17% cited feeling intimidated as a barrier to getting involved. Moreover, research shows that parental involvement wanes as children get older (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). As such, there appears to be an aperture between parent-teacher support for collaboration and the reality of parent-teacher engagement practices, which widens as children age. This aperture points to the existence of obstacles to positive parent-teacher interaction (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

2.1.2 Character and Virtue

The current research is underpinned by virtue ethical philosophy that views virtues as constitutive of the good life. The virtues are human excellences thought necessary to live a flourishing life (Kristjánsson, 2013: 14), acquired through upbringing, developed through habituation and later honed through the agent's own critical thinking (*ibid.*). The virtues are 'like' dispositions, or more accurately 'dispositional clusters' concerned with praiseworthy socio-moral reactions and behaviour (*ibid.*). The virtues can be classified into four types: intellectual, moral, civic and performance

³ www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-sets-vision-for-boosting-social-mobility

⁴ www.slideshare.net/Ofstednews/character-education-conference-may-2018

(Jubilee Centre, 2017a). Integrating this four-part typology, according to a standard Aristotelian conception of virtue ethics, is the meta-virtue of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) which, developed through experience and critical reflection, enables us to perceive, know, desire and act with good sense. As such, virtues are understood to be settled (stable and consistent) states of character, concerned with good or praiseworthy individual and collective human functioning.

Character, as defined in this research, is the set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation, and guide conduct (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). Character refers to a certain subset of personality, which is morally evaluable and educable (Arthur *et al.*, 2015b: 35). Through reflection, hard work and education, character can be developed and virtues reinforced. This improvement of character can be achieved, alongside other approaches, through the observation of excellent role models (caught), character instruction (taught) and/or autonomous reflection and reasoning (sought) (Harrison *et al.*, 2016; Miller, 2018; Jubilee Centre, 2017a; Lickona, 1992).

2.1.3 Barriers and Enablers to Collaboration on Character Education

There are differences between the theory and practice of parental engagement; parents and teachers seem to agree in principle on the positives of collaboration (PTA UK, 2016), but discord becomes apparent when the reality of parent-teacher relationships is scrutinised (Barge and Loges, 2003). Research shows that parent-teacher interaction can often be a fraught experience whereby power asymmetry and issues pertaining to trust may lead to 'ambivalent partnerships' (McGrath, 2007). As noted above, such discord points to the presence of barriers to parent-teacher collaboration. In the literature, barriers to parent-teacher collaboration include unapproachability of teachers (Ellis, Lock and Lummis, 2015), perceived limited and negative contact from teachers (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2013), lack of trust (McGrath, 2007) and perceived lack of respect (Ellis, Lock and Lummis, 2015). Furthermore, 'not sharing values' has been shown to be a barrier to

collaboration (Hauser-Cram *et al.*, 2003), while sharing values has been shown to enable positive relationships between parents and teachers (Lasky, 2000). Similarly, trust (McGrath, 2007), respect (Ellis, Lock and Lummis, 2015) and approachability (*ibid.*) are cited as enablers of collaboration between parent and teacher.

According to Adams and Christenson (2010: 478), the ideal parent-teacher relationship would be based, not only on two-way communication, cooperation, and coordination, but also on collaboration. Shared understanding and goal setting are at the forefront of this collaboration between parents and teachers (*ibid.*; Vosler-Hunter, 1989:15). However, there is evidence to suggest that, when it comes to character education, this shared understanding of priorities may be problematic. The Making Caring Common project team (Weissbourd *et al.*, 2014) diagnosed a rhetoric/reality gap between what parents and teachers reported as their priorities and the message they conveyed to children. The study found that although parents and teachers stated they prioritised caring over attainment, their children/pupils thought they were prioritising attainment. A similar sentiment informs the hypothesis of the current research that, underlying any potential mismatch between parents and teachers on virtue and character, may be a communication gap (Berkowitz and Bier, 2005). The present research considers two key areas where a communication gap might exist; i) the prioritisation of attainment over character; and, ii) the prioritisation of different types of virtues.

2.1.4 Project Aims

The overarching goal of the research was to explore how parents and teachers might work more collaboratively on character education and how they perceive each other's attitudes to virtue and character. This exploration was seen to be a necessary precondition for the creation of any intervention to promote better collaboration between parents and teachers on character education. A questionnaire, completed by parents and teachers, sought to explore this theme and add to existing knowledge, in particular with respect to the

UK context.

The aims of the research were to:

- Scrutinise parents' and teachers' attitudes to character education, and explore whether there is congruency or discrepancy in their understanding of each other's priorities
- To investigate if parents' and teachers' attitudes to character education are communicated clearly to each other
- To identify any enablers and barriers which may facilitate, or hinder, the communication between teachers and parents, and
- To inquire if interaction between parents and teachers is an appropriate target for a character education intervention

There was no evidence within the UK of any previous work that sought to combine the elements of these aims into a single research project.

3 Methodology

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENT

The research began with a scoping period, including a review of pertinent literature. Drawing on the literature and similar surveys identified (Bowman *et al.*, 2012; Jubilee Centre, 2017b), two self-report questionnaires (one for parents and one for teachers in online and hard copy format) were developed. Expert opinion from established academics in the field was sought on how to construct particular questions. The questionnaire was piloted by six parents and seven teachers between December 2017 and January 2018. Following feedback from the piloting, some questions were changed in order to make them clearer and others removed as they were deemed superfluous to the study. The final questionnaire was then administered and completed by teachers and parents over a period of three months.

The final version of the questionnaire included questions on the following themes:

i) Prioritisation of character and virtues

The first of these questions asked parents and teachers to choose and rank the three virtues they thought most important to cultivate in their children/pupils from a list of eight. From each of the moral, civic, intellectual and performance types, two virtues were chosen to form the list:

- Moral (Compassion, Honesty)
- Civic (Service, Civility)
- Intellectual (Curiosity, Good Judgement)
- Performance (Resilience, Confidence)

Virtues chosen were either seen as a priority by the UK Department for Education (DfE, 2017), or featured as a high priority for parents and/or teachers as evidenced in previous polls (Arthur, Harrison, Burn and Moller 2017; Jubilee Centre, 2013). To explore how parents/teachers perceived each other's prioritisation of virtues, parents and teachers were asked to choose and rank the three virtues they believed the other thought most important to cultivate in their children/pupils.

ii) Character relative to attainment

The next set of questions examined how parents and teachers prioritise, and how they perceive the other to be prioritising, character relative to attainment. The match/mismatch was examined using a 10 point scale. Parents

and teachers were asked a series of five questions on how important they believed their children's/pupils' character was, as opposed to attainment, for themselves (as parents and teachers), for the teachers of their children (or parents of their pupils), for the children (their children or the pupils they teach), for employers and for the wider public. A binary question was also used, which asked participants to choose between a proxy for attainment (GCSE results) and character. The intention, in using a scale and a binary question was to gain evidence that might strengthen the findings and examine if patterns exist. While the scale allowed for granularity (the respondents could pinpoint where on the scale their priorities lay, and as such could pinpoint if they thought character and attainment were of equal importance or to what extent they thought one had priority over the other), the binary question allowed participants to directly contrast character against attainment.

In addition, a dilemma question, focussing on the virtue of honesty, was used in order to investigate if parents and teachers shared reasoning patterns when approaching moral decision-making. The dilemma asked participants what they would advise their children/pupils to do, given an opportunity to make a dishonest line call in tennis. It also asked them to choose an option which represented how they would reason in this scenario; the options mapped onto deontological, utilitarian and virtue ethical moral theories (Arthur *et al.*, 2015a; Harrison and Khatoon, 2017).

The dilemma was deemed to be realistic in the pilot and advice on relating it was drawn from various sources (see, for example, Walker *et al.*, 2017).

iii) Barriers and enablers to collaboration

A third theme addressed in the questionnaire was that of enablers and barriers to collaboration on character education. The questions on this theme explored parents' and teachers' perceptions of what enables collaboration on character education and what might constitute barriers to that collaboration. These questions asked participants to choose up to two enablers and up to two barriers from predetermined lists; an 'other' option was also included. The items on these lists were informed by the comments on the pilot and

the literature review that preceded the creation of the questionnaire (Ellis, Lock and Lummis, 2015; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; McGrath, 2007). In order to receive qualitative information that would help illustrate the data gathered from the closed question, an open response question was included. This question asked parents and teachers for their ideas for strategies for enabling parent-teacher collaboration on character education.

3.2 PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Parents and teachers were recruited through contact with UK secondary schools in the counties of Northampton, Hertfordshire, Derbyshire and Warwickshire. Seven schools were included in the study. Due to the project time and resource limitations, the sample was purposeful and non-probabilistic. A designated lead at each of the participating schools recruited parents who had pupils in the school aged 11–14, to complete the questionnaire. They also sent the questionnaire to all teachers and teaching assistants in the school. For convenience, the questionnaire was offered to parents and teachers in two formats; online via SurveyGizmo and hard copy. Table 1 provides details of the participants in the research. Of the parents who responded, 283 (77%) were female, while 84 (23%) were male; 87 (64%) of teachers were female, while 49 (36%) were male.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Once collected and transcribed, the survey data was cleaned and filtered on an Excel spreadsheet. Subsequently, the data was exported to SPSS version 24 to run the statistical analyses. Independent samples T-tests were carried out to compare the means between the two cohorts of respondents. A one-way ANOVA with a linear contrast was carried out to test the linearity of teachers' perceptions at different ages (see Section 4.1). When character strengths were ranked, a score was calculated to capture the magnitude of the selection made, whereby higher scores were translated into higher rankings. In Section 4.2, percentages refer to the proportion of the overall total score. The quotes presented were extracted from two open response questions and coded based on the topics that emerged in the quantitative analysis.

3.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

There are several principal limitations with the research; these are concerned with the sample and the research instruments. The study utilised non-probabilistic purposive sampling and therefore the data is likely to contain some bias; the findings cannot be generalised to the population. Furthermore, schools were recruited on a voluntary basis and, therefore, it is likely that these schools already had an interest in this research area. The relatively small size of the population sampled in this survey poses a further limitation to the research. The small sample size may affect the reliability of the survey results because it leads to a higher variability, which may lead to bias.

Table 1: Participants in the Research

| | Parents | Teachers |
|-----------|---------|----------|
| Online | 278 | 132 |
| Hard Copy | 98 | 5 |
| Total | 376 | 137 |



There are well known challenges in measuring character and virtue (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016; Kristjánsson, 2015) and the instruments used in this study are likely to contain limitations that affect their validity. Self-reporting measures were used, which carry the risk of self-deception, whereby participants see themselves as something other than they are in practice. Similarly, many of the questions may stimulate responses more in line with social desirability than a person's actual moral responses in life. It may be the case that parents and teachers answer in line with how they believe they ought to be perceived rather than answering honestly. A further potential problem lies in so-called 'demand characteristics', where participants try to work out the aim of the study and answer in ways to either support those aims or undermine them, ie, self-confirmation bias (Weber and Cook, 1972).

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study received full ethical approval from the University of Birmingham's Ethics Committee. All participants were fully informed, in writing, about the purpose of the research and given the opportunity to withdraw at any point during completion of the questionnaires and one month after completion of the questionnaires, in line with BERA (2018) guidelines. Voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants.

4 Findings

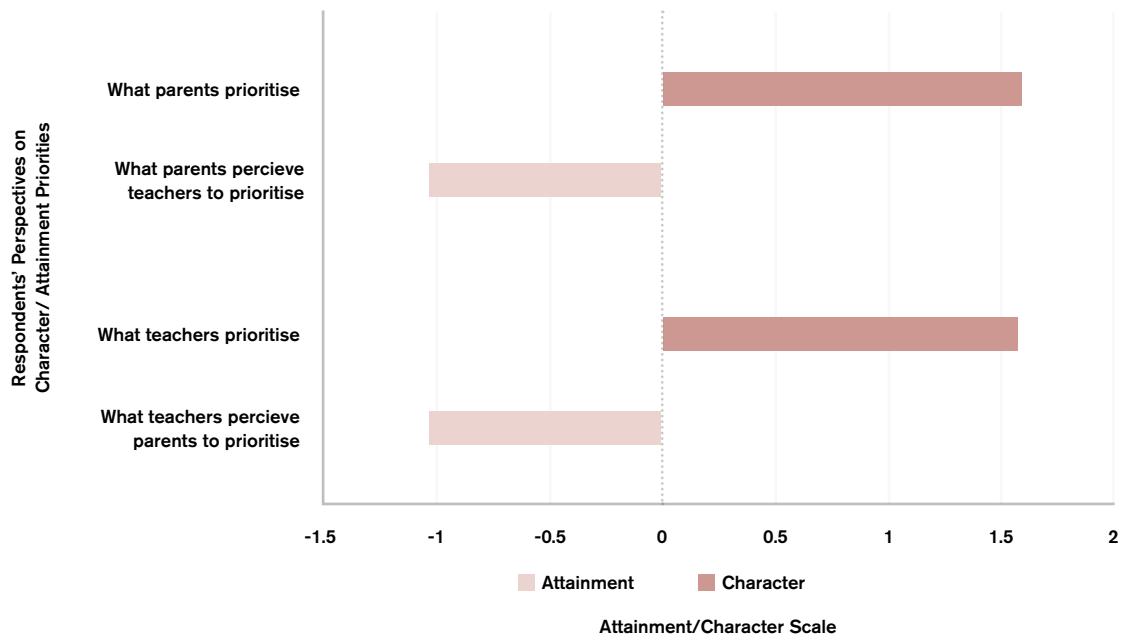
This Section describes the findings from the survey. Demographic information for parents and teachers who were participants in the survey is provided in Appendix 1. All findings are statistically significant⁵ (greater than chance alone would imply).

4.1 PRIORITISATION OF CHARACTER

Participants were asked to show the extent to which they would prioritise character over attainment, or vice versa, on a 10 point scale. Parents (parents' mean [pm] = 1.59) and teachers (teachers' mean [tm] = 1.58) reported that they prioritise character over attainment, as shown in Chart 1. Although they reported that they share a belief that character is more important than attainment, they both believed the opposite to be true of their counterparts. Parents reported that teachers prioritised attainment (pm = -1.04) and teachers reported that parents prioritised attainment (tm = -1.04). Both parents and teachers also reported that they perceived the wider public to prize character over attainment (pm = 1.85/ tm = 1.57), but that employers narrowly prize attainment over character (pm = -.09/ tm = -.04).

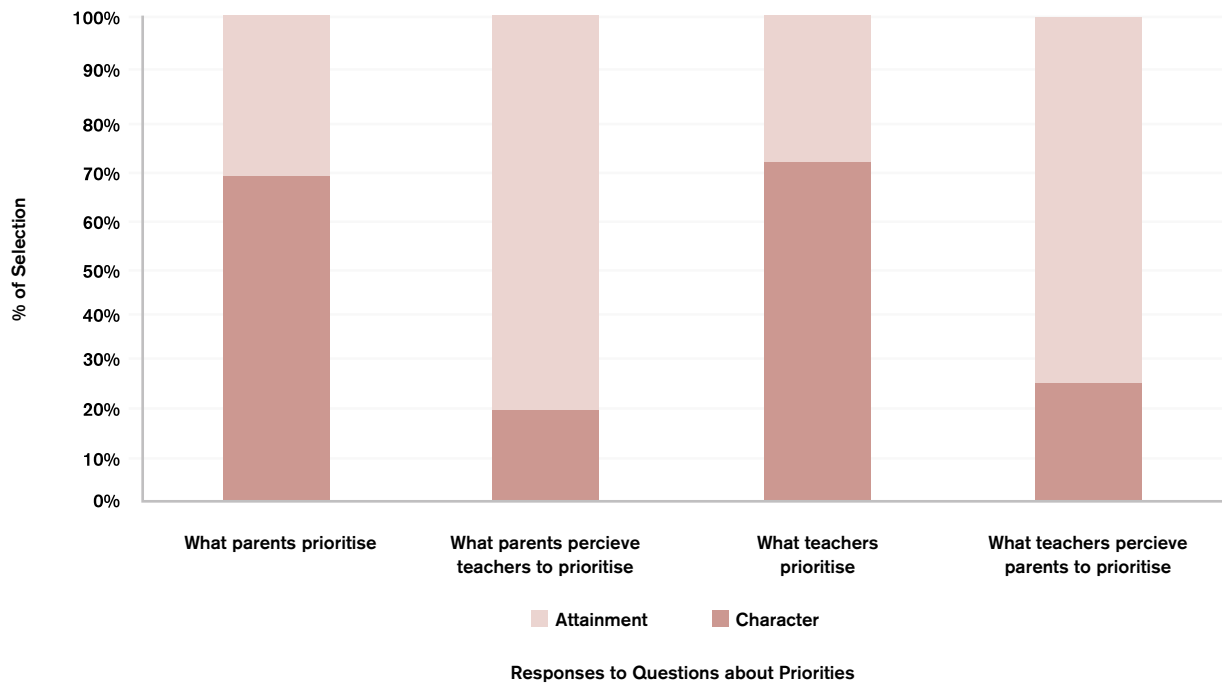


Chart 1: Parents' and Teachers' Prioritisation of Character and Attainment



⁵ p < 0.05

Chart 2: Parents' and Teachers' Prioritisation of Good Character and Good GCSE Results

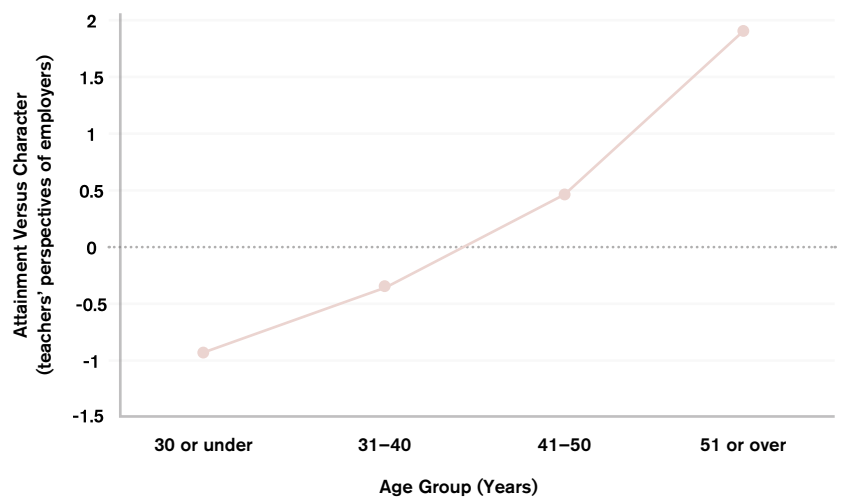


Differences were observed between parents and teachers on how they perceived their children's/pupils' priorities. While parents reported that they believed their children prioritised character over attainment ($p_m = .51$), teachers felt that attainment was more important for the pupils they teach ($t_m = -1.26$).

A further question requiring the teachers and parents to make a binary choice between attainment and character was also asked. As shown in Chart 2, the majority of parents and teachers, if they had to make a choice, prioritised good character over good GCSE results, yet they both believed their counterparts would prioritise good GCSE results over good character, thus replicating the finding above. Parents and teachers who prioritised good GCSE results over character ($N=148$) when asked the binary question, still tended towards character when choosing to represent their priorities on the 10 point scale as described above; albeit to a lesser extent than parents who chose character over good GCSE results ($p_m = .47$ as opposed to $p_m = 2.17$, and $t_m = .30$ as opposed to $t_m = 2.05$).

There was a tendency across the sample for older participants to place a greater importance on character than younger participants. Two linear trends are seen in this respect; i) younger teachers perceived employees as prioritising academic achievement, whereas older teachers

Chart 3: Importance of Character for Teachers by Age Group



perceived employees as prioritising character; and ii) more older parents perceived the wider public to be in favour of character than younger parents.

As Chart 3 shows, teachers aged 30 or younger believed that academic attainment is more important to employers than character. This trend reverses with age and for teachers aged 40 and above, character is considered more important.

4.2 VIRTUE PROIRITISATION

Responding to the list of eight virtues presented in the questionnaire, both parents and teachers ranked moral, and to a lesser extent, performance virtues as the most important (see Charts 4 and 5). The figures in this Section represent a percentage of the total score calculated from the overall ranking (parents percentage = [pp]; teachers percentage = [tp]). Parents' top three virtues to develop in their children were honesty (22%), compassion (18%) and confidence (16%), whilst teachers' top three virtues to develop in their pupils were resilience (23%), honesty (21%) and compassion (20%). Differences emerged when parents and teachers were asked for their perceptions of the virtue priorities of their counterparts. Parents reported that compassion was important to them, yet teachers did not perceive parents to be prioritising compassion (pp = 18%/ tp =9%) to the same degree. Teachers perceived parents to be prioritising confidence to a larger degree than parents' self-reports of the importance of confidence (pp = 16%/ tp = 23%).

To measure the difference between parents' and teachers' perceptions, a difference between the ranked priorities was calculated. The differences among virtues were subtracted to create what is called a mismatch index. A higher mismatch equates to a wider difference between the priorities of parents and teachers. As seen in Chart 4, the biggest mismatch occurred when parents had to select the priorities of their children's teachers. Parents believed that teachers prioritised civic and intellectual virtues to a higher degree but their own selection was more moral and performance guided. Compassion, despite being ranked third overall by teachers (20%), was the last selection made by parents (8%) with a mismatch of 12%. This trend was repeated to a lesser degree with the virtue of honesty, ranked second by teachers (21%), but fifth by parents (11%).

Chart 4: How Parents Prioritise the Virtues

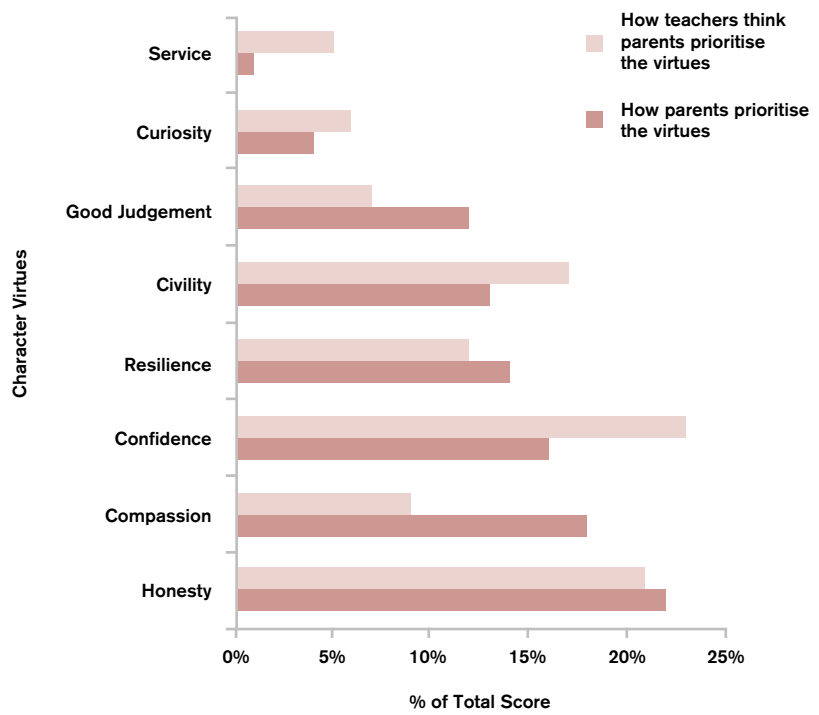
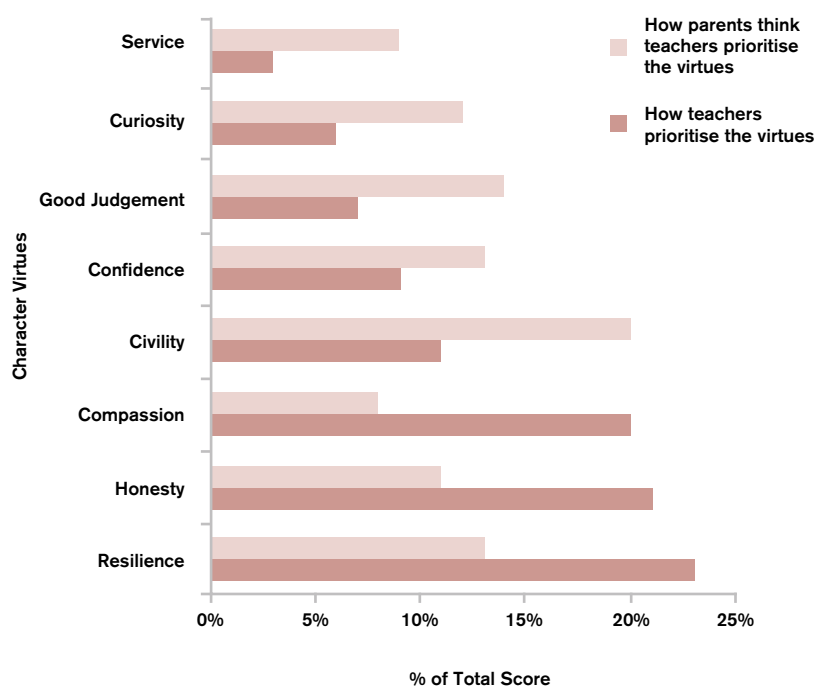


Chart 5: How Teachers Prioritise the Virtues





When grouped by character types (see Table 2), parents ranked moral virtues as their top priority and civic as their bottom. Conversely, parents believed that their counterparts (teachers) had the exact opposite prioritisation with moral virtues at the bottom and civic at the top.

Teachers had a more accurate idea of parents' priorities, but there was still a difference between the top two types. Teachers ranked moral as their top and performance as their second and believed that parents ranked performance as their top and moral as their second.

Table 2: Parents' and Teachers' Priorities Grouped According to Virtue Types

Parents' priorities

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Moral | 40% |
| Performance | 30% |
| Intellectual | 16% |
| Civic | 14% |

How parents perceived teachers to prioritise the virtues

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Civic | 29% |
| Performance | 26% |
| Intellectual | 26% |
| Moral | 19% |

Teachers' priorities

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Moral | 42% |
| Performance | 29% |
| Civic | 15% |
| Intellectual | 12% |

How teachers perceived parents to prioritise the virtues

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Performance | 30% |
| Moral | 27% |
| Civic | 25% |
| Intellectual | 18% |

4.3 MORAL REASONING

Parents and teachers were asked to respond to an ethical dilemma about whether they would advise their children/pupils to make a dishonest line call in a high stakes tennis match. The figures below represent the percentage of the total responses per cohort (parents percentage = [pp]; teachers percentage = [tp]). Almost all the respondents (93% parents and 97% teachers) said that they would advise their children/pupils to make an honest call (see Chart 6). A further question asked them to give a justification for this advice to enable a better understanding about the type of reasoning underlying the guidance they would give their children/pupils. The most popular reason for parents and teachers was that it is unsportsmanlike (pp =59%/ tp =76%), followed by being against the rules (pp =37% / tp =22%), and they might get caught (pp =.3%/ tp =.7%). This showed that parents and teachers are both more likely to employ virtue, rather than rule- or consequence-based reasoning, if faced with this dilemma.

4.4 BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO COLLABORATION

This Section reports on parents' and teachers' views of the barriers and enablers to collaboration on character education.

4.4.1 Barriers

Lack of time was reported as the biggest barrier to a positive relationship between parents and teachers on character education. Compared to their response to the question on enablers, a higher percentage of teachers cited 'not sharing same values' as a barrier rather than an enabler (tp =34%/ pp =8%). More parents than teachers cited 'too much focus on attainment' as a barrier to a positive relationship (pp =21%/ tp =16%). Equal proportions of parents and teachers perceived 'only contacted when child misbehaves' as an important barrier (pp =28%/ tp =28).

Chart 6: Moral Reasoning Choices of Parents and Teachers in Response to Dilemma

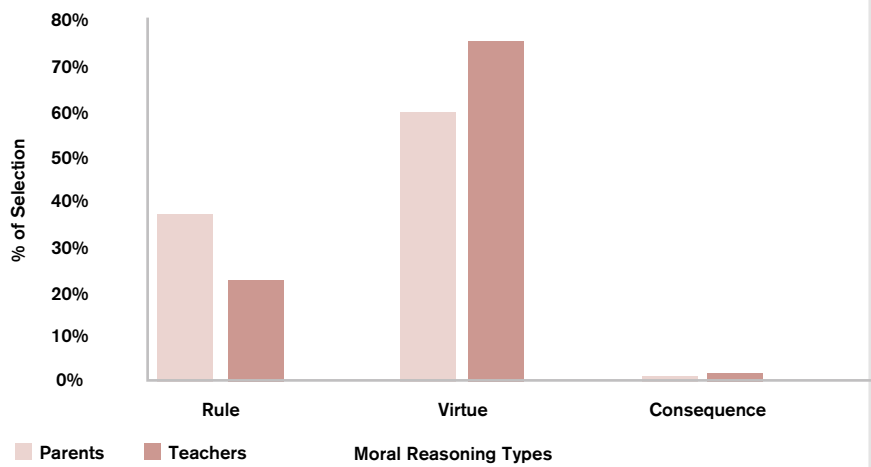
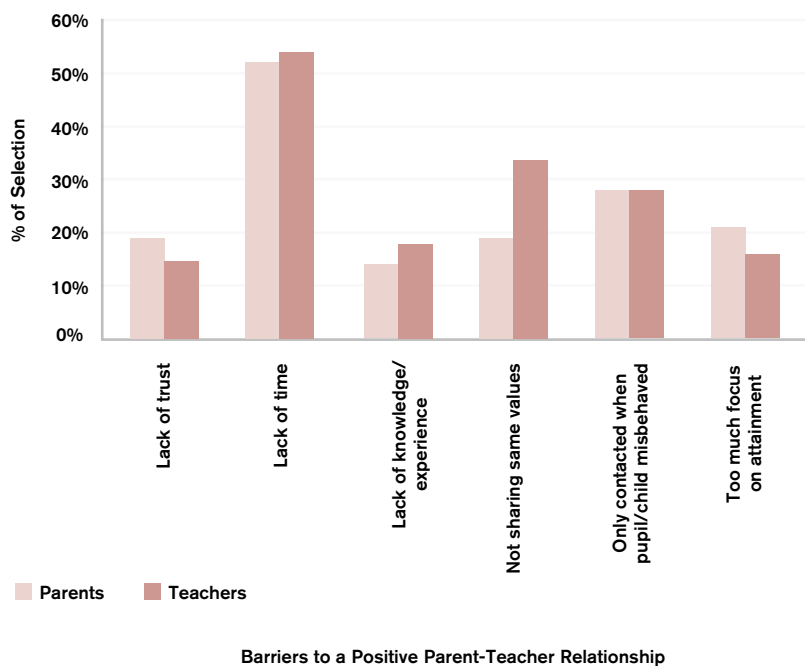


Chart 7: Barriers to a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship on Character Education



After analysis of the open response question, the findings about barriers and enablers were grouped into three prominent themes; time, communication, and shared values. Parents and teachers reported that quality of communication, rather than quantity of communication, was important for building trusting and respectful relationships. One parent outlined the issue by stating that:

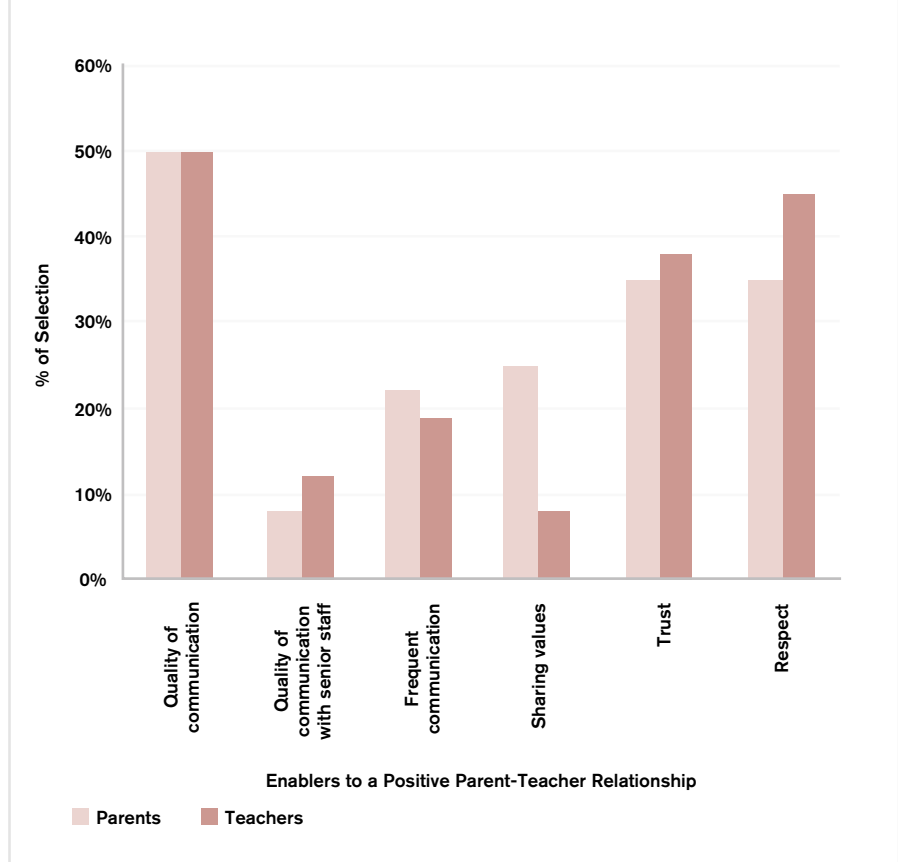
My son – and I expect he is typical of teenagers – doesn't talk about his school work/life very much at home. What I do get is very limited. Therefore, I would prefer more opportunities to talk to his teachers and to hear about his achievements and not just when he has stepped out of line. I appreciate that this is difficult to secure as everyone's time is in short supply but it seems essential to me if you really want to work together. (Parent)

However, one teacher observed that communication with parents is 'extremely time limited so usually very restricted to attainment conversations.' (Teacher)

Communication, of high and low quality, was the most frequently cited factor affecting collaboration between parents and teachers. The problem was summed up by a parent who stated that they 'have no idea what goes on in the school from day to day either academically or character building. I don't know what work is being done'; and another who said 'there is no transparency around this for parents so it is really difficult to know what is being discussed, what is being challenged etc. regular feedback on this unique aspect of the school's teaching'. Parents also reported wanting communication on positive and challenging behaviour; one parent identified that 'most teachers [only] contact parents when a child did something wrong', although some were appreciative of this and one stated that 'I would hope the school would contact me if they noticed detrimental changes in peer communication and interaction, as much as in academics.' This ideal was shared by several teachers with one commenting that:

Regular communication with parents is key, and letting parents know how important character development is for our children. Parents need to be enlightened as to how they can influence their own children at home with values to get the most out of their children. (Teacher)

Chart 8: Enablers to a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship on Character Education



Finding common or shared values was also commented on in the open response question. One parent recommended 'specially designed school activities involving teachers, children and parents that help align value', while another believed that 'whole school events that enable me to get to know staff and their values through shared experiences were important'. However, a few parents disagreed with the idea of teachers as character educators, with one commenting:

I do not feel I need this engagement with teachers. I would prefer them to concentrate on educating my child and let me focus on his character development, and instilling our own family values in him. (Parent)

4.4.2 Enablers

With the exception of 'sharing values' and to a lesser extent 'respect between parents and teachers', teachers and parents were broadly in agreement about what is most important for them to collaborate on character education

(see Chart 8). 'Quality of communication' was selected by both parents and teachers as the most important enabler of a positive relationship. Teachers prioritised respect more highly than parents (pp =35%/ tp = 45%), while parents deemed 'sharing values' more important than did teachers (pp =25%/ tp =8%). Parents and teachers seemed to agree on the extent to which 'trust' was an important enabler of a positive relationship (pp =35%/ tp =38%).

Analysis of the qualitative data showed that both teachers and parents had practical ideas about what will enable a positive relationship and facilitate their improved collaboration on character education. Most of the ideas focussed on improving communication and ranged from regular emails home about character, as well as academic achievement, to ensuring that character was part of the discussion at parent-teacher meetings. Parents and teachers both suggested workshops as a good use of parent/teacher time. Moreover, both parents and teachers suggested the use of technology in promoting collaboration on the issue of character education; making greater use of parent portals to this regard, with one teacher suggesting that:

To use technologies that allow parents to see positive and negative behaviour logs that are made about their child, on a daily basis using an App. Parents can act quickly, speak to pupils and staff, things are left over a period of time. (Teacher)

4.5 KEY FINDINGS

- Both parents and teachers prioritised character over attainment, but perceived the opposite to be true of their counterparts.
- Both parents and teachers ranked moral followed by performance virtues as the most important. Conversely, parents believed that teachers prioritised moral virtues as the least important and civic virtues as the most important.
- Parents and teachers reported that they would use virtue as opposed to rule- or consequence-based reasoning to choose how to advise their children/pupils, when faced with an ethical dilemma.
- Quality of communication was chosen by parents and teachers as the most important enabler of a positive relationship.
- Both parents and teachers reported that 'lack of time' was the biggest barrier to a positive relationship between them. Other barriers frequently cited included 'not sharing the same values' and 'contact only taking place when there is misbehaviour'.



5 Insights

The findings support previous research, mostly undertaken in the USA, that parents and teachers should work in partnership on character education (Lickona, 1992, 1996; Berkowitz, 2011; Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016: 153-4). This research therefore provides a justification for an intervention to promote collaboration between parents and teachers on character education.

The present research identified current 'gaps' that might be preventing fruitful parent-teacher partnerships on character education in the UK. Perhaps the most notable gap is that, although parents and teachers both prioritised character over attainment, they did not believe that their counterparts shared this conviction. This miscommunication or misinterpretation effect has also been found in previous similar studies, most notably in The Making Caring Common project (Weissbourd *et al.*, 2014). The Making Caring Common project diagnosed a rhetoric/reality gap between what parents and teachers reported as their priorities, with regards to caring and attainment, and the messages they conveyed to children. The present research departs from the Making Caring Common study insofar as children were not involved in the survey; it also extends the findings in a number of ways. First, the research showed that parents and teachers shared similar priorities in that both prioritised character over attainment and ranked the moral virtues of compassion and honesty highly. Second, misperceptions operated in both directions; parents misperceived the priorities of teachers (ascribing them a preference for attainment over character) and teachers misperceived the priorities of parents (once again ascribing them a preference for attainment over character). Third, this gives one reason to suppose that what the Making Caring Common project team conjecture is a rhetoric/reality gap may be, in the case of this research, an ascription/actuality gap; while parents and teachers ascribe pro-attainment priorities to each other, the actuality of parents' and teachers' priorities shows these ascriptions as erroneous (in fact both parents and teachers report character as more important to them than attainment).

This hypothesised ascription/actuality gap is further supported by the findings concerning barriers and enablers. For both parents and teachers, 'lack of time' was cited most often as a barrier to a positive relationship between parents and teachers, while 'only being contacted when child misbehaves' was the second most frequently cited barrier for parents. This finding is consistent with previous research concerning the relationship between parents and teachers as potentially 'ambivalent partnerships' (McGrath, 2007), informed by past negative contact (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2013). Nevertheless, findings from this research concerning enablers of positive relationships between parents and teachers constitute valuable insight on how to improve these potentially ambivalent partnerships. 'Quality of communication' was chosen by both parents and teachers as the most important enabler of a positive relationship and, while 'respect' was cited more often by teachers than parents, parents and teachers agreed that 'trust' was an important enabler of a positive relationship. This finding is continuous with previous research on the issue of parental engagement. While Barge and Loges (2003) found that parents and teachers agreed on the importance of constructive communication for collaboration, Adams and Christenson (2000) found that trust between parents and teachers is a vital element in building and maintaining the family-school relationship; and Stakes (2004: 28) maintained that parent-teacher partnerships require 'mutual trust and respect, and equality'. Findings on the ascription/actuality gap, together with findings on what parents and teachers perceived as hindering a positive relationship, give a justification for an intervention targeted at improving communication between parents and teachers.

Although the findings in this report should be treated with a degree of caution, due to limitations of the research, they do present evidence that an intervention is likely to be effective. Such an intervention should seek to facilitate communication between parents and teachers, helping them see clearly that they share a mutual overriding aspiration: namely,

the cultivation of good character. A particularly encouraging finding was that parents and teachers were both able to identify practical actions and ideas that would help facilitate closer collaboration on the cultivation of virtues in their children/pupils. Giving parents and teachers a platform to talk about character education could counteract the 'ambivalence' of their partnership by proving a rich and positive topic of conversation (as opposed to merely bad behaviour or concerns over attainment). The next stage of the research is to build on this evidence to construct and pilot an intervention that seeks to foster positive collaboration on character education.

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Appendix

Demographics of Respondents – Respondents' Gender and Age

| | | Parent | | Teacher | |
|----------------------|-------------|--------|------------|---------|------------|
| | | Count | Column N % | Count | Column N % |
| What is your gender? | Female | 283 | 77.1% | 87 | 64.0% |
| | Male | 84 | 22.9% | 49 | 36.0% |
| | Total | 367 | 100.0% | 136 | 100.0% |
| Age recorded | 30 or under | 14 | 3.9% | 35 | 27.3% |
| | 31–40 | 103 | 28.7% | 42 | 32.8% |
| | 41–50 | 190 | 52.9% | 37 | 28.9% |
| | 51 or over | 52 | 14.5% | 14 | 10.9% |
| | Total | 359 | 100.0% | 128 | 100.0% |



Demographics of Respondents – Respondents' Ethnicity

| | Parent | | Teacher | |
|---|--------|------------|---------|------------|
| | Count | Column N % | Count | Column N % |
| English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British | 240 | 64% | 107 | 78% |
| Irish | 4 | 1% | 0 | 0% |
| White and Black Caribbean | 2 | 0.5% | 2 | 2% |
| White and Black African | 2 | 0.5% | 0 | 0% |
| Any other mixed or multiple backgrounds | 10 | 3% | 1 | 1% |
| Indian | 27 | 7% | 7 | 5% |
| Pakistani | 9 | 2% | 1 | 1% |
| Bangladeshi | 1 | 0.3% | 0 | 0% |
| Chinese | 2 | 0.5% | 0 | 0% |
| Any other Asian background | 4 | 1% | 2 | 2% |
| Caribbean | 3 | 0.8% | 1 | 1% |
| African | 18 | 5% | 4 | 3% |
| Any other Black/Caribbean/African background | 1 | 0.3% | 0 | 0% |
| Arab | 3 | 0.8% | 0 | 0% |
| Any other ethnic group | 2 | 0.5% | 0 | 0% |
| Prefer not to say | 6 | 2% | 2 | 2% |

Demographics of Respondents – Respondents' Religion

| | Parent | | Teacher | |
|--------------|--------|------------|---------|------------|
| | Count | Column N % | Count | Column N % |
| Christianity | 172 | 45.7% | 57 | 41.6% |
| Hinduism | 6 | 1.6% | 1 | 0.7% |
| Islam | 24 | 6.4% | 4 | 2.9% |
| Judaism | 1 | 0.3% | 1 | 0.7% |
| Sikhism | 25 | 6.6% | 4 | 2.9% |
| None | 109 | 29.0% | 63 | 46.0% |
| Other | 14 | 3.7% | 2 | 1.5% |

| | | Parent | | Teacher | |
|--------------------------------|-------|--------|------------|---------|------------|
| | | Count | Column N % | Count | Column N % |
| Do you practise your religion? | Yes | 151 | 42.9% | 42 | 33.6% |
| | No | 201 | 57.1% | 83 | 66.4% |
| | Total | 352 | 100.0% | 125 | 100.0% |

Demographics of Respondents – Respondents' Education

| | | Parent | | Teacher | |
|---|-------|--------|------------|---------|------------|
| | | Count | Column N % | Count | Column N % |
| Did you complete the majority of your pre-university education in the UK? | Yes | 275 | 74.9% | 122 | 90.4% |
| | No | 92 | 25.1% | 13 | 9.6% |
| | Total | 367 | 100.0% | 135 | 100.0% |
| Do you have a higher education qualification? | Yes | 252 | 68.5% | 123 | 91.8% |
| | No | 116 | 31.5% | 11 | 8.2% |
| | Total | 368 | 100.0% | 134 | 100.0% |



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