Character and Attainment:

Does Character Make the Grade?

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The Research Evidence

'far too neglected in the current debate there is a set of behaviours and attitudes, a kind of social literacy that we must foster. An exclusive focus on subjects for study would fail to equip young people with these, though rigour in the curriculum does help. These personal behaviours and attributes – sometimes termed character – play a critical role in determining personal effectiveness in their future lives, and should be part of our vision.'

(CBI First Steps Report, 19th November 2012)

The research literature shows a clear and positive correlation between character education and academic attainment. There is a good deal of evidence of the link between character education and behaviour (and attitudes to learning) in schools, and between behaviour and grade attainment.

Weber and Ruch, 2012

- Demonstrate that the research shows that character traits (e.g., perseverance, care for detail) were identified as contributing to school success. Variables such as self-reliance, responsibility, insistently orderly, socially mature, are positively related to academic success.

Snyder, Vuchinich et al., 2012

- Present findings that add to the literature that demonstrates character development programs improve academic achievement as well as an array of positive behaviours.

Durlack, Weissberg et al., 2011

- Findings from meta-analysis of 213 USA school-based programs demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement.

Lovat, Toomey et al., 2009

- The impact on student academic diligence was demonstrated by students, showing increased attentiveness in class and a greater capacity to work independently; assuming more responsibility for their own learning; asking questions and working together more cooperatively; investing greater care and effort in their schoolwork; and taking more pride in their efforts.

Park and Peterson, 2006

- Lessons in character education indicated a potential 16% improvement in academic achievement. Good character leads students to the desire to do the right things at school e.g. behave positively in classroom, put more effort in learning if necessary, and this behaviour leads to school success.

Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn and Smith, 2003

- A study of 681 elementary schools in California showed that schools with higher total character education implementation tended to have higher academic scores by a small but significant margin. Two attributes that had the strongest links with academic achievement were evidence that parents and teachers modelled and promoted good character education, and opportunities for students to contribute in meaningful ways to the school and its community.

Caprara, Barbaranelli et al., 2000

- Early pro-social behaviour strongly predicts subsequent level of academic achievement, even after controlling for variation in early academic achievement.

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