

2023 Character Education Parent Poll

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham

Summary of Results

June 2023

Yonder conducted an online survey with 608 UK adults 18+ who are parents of children aged 0-18. Fieldwork was conducted between the 22th to the 26nd of May 2023.

The proportion of completed responses of parents with children in the following key stages: 40 (7%) with a child(ren) not yet attending nursery or reception, 62 (10%) with a child(ren) in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), 56 (9%) with a child(ren) in Key Stage 1 (KYS1), 83 (14%) with a child(ren) in Lower Key Stage 2 (KYS2), 154 (25%) with a child(ren) in Upper Lower Key Stage 2 (KYS2), 257 (42%) with a child(ren) in Lower Key Stage 3 (KYS3), 215 (34%) with a child(ren) in Lower Key Stage 4 (KYS4), 145 (24%) with a child(ren) in Lower Key Stage 5 (KYS5) and 14 (2%) with a child(ren) not in the above key stages or home-schooled.

Influencers of character development

The survey began by asking parents who they think has the biggest influence over character¹ development.

- Overall, the majority believe that parents/carers influence character development (90%). This was followed by teachers (85%) and children's friends and peers (75%).
- Parents of younger children, particularly those in early years foundation / key stages 1-2 think siblings play a big role in influencing character development (78%), higher than the average of 73%.
- In comparison, those with older children in secondary school/college are more likely to think teachers play a role in influencing character development (87%) when compared to the total sample (85%). Role models/ mentors are also considered to have an influence on secondary school/college students compared to the total sample (73% vs 71%).
- Less than half of the parents surveyed believe that social media stars/ influencers (47%) and celebrities (43%) play a large role in influencing character development.

The role of teachers in character development

- The majority of parents we surveyed agreed that teachers play a role in developing the character of their pupils (86%), with more than 2 in 5 parents (42%) strongly agreeing and 44% just agreeing.

¹ Character was defined as 'a set of positive personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs pupils' motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others. This gives pupils the qualities they need to flourish in our society'.

- Overall agreement was particularly high amongst parents of children in key stage 3 (years 7-9), with more than 9 in 10 parents (91%) agreeing teachers play a role in character development.
- Only 10% of parents neither agreed nor disagreed that teachers play a role in character development and 2% disagreed.

The importance that schools include character education

Parents were then asked whether they agree or disagree that it is important for schools to have a planned and intentional approach to teaching character education².

- Many parents surveyed agreed that a planned and intentional approach to character education was important in schools (83%).
- Parents from Scotland*, London* and the South East* in particular agreed this was important (95%, 94% and 89%).
- One in 10 respondents (11%), neither agreed nor disagreed that it is important for schools to have a planned and intentional approach and only 3% disagreed.

Importance of developing a good character vs academic attainment whilst in school

Parents were then asked what they thought was most important, whether their child/children obtain good exam/academic results in school or they develop a good character while in school.

- Two-thirds of parents (66%), believe developing a good character whilst in school is more important than academic attainment, primarily driven by parents with children in the lower key stages (school years 3-4)* believing this was more important (77%). One-third (34%) believe good academic results are more important.
- Differences were seen in the age of the parents, older parents (55+)* were more likely than younger parents (35-44)* to think that academic results were more important (47% vs 30%), whereas younger parents (35-44)* thought developing a good character was most important (70% vs 53% of those aged 55+)*.
- Respondents were then asked what they believe teachers at their child's school think is most important out of the two. Almost 3 in 4 (73%) parents believe teachers think academic results are more important compared to 27% who believe developing a good character is more important whilst in school.
- Those with children aged 16-18 in particular, felt that teachers cared more about academic results (79%).
- Parents who believe their child/children obtain good academic results whilst in school are also more likely to think this is what teachers care most about (43% vs 34%).
- Similarly, respondents who believe developing a good character whilst at school is most important (66%) are also more likely to think this is what teachers also care most about (89%).

² Character Education in the survey was defined as 'all explicit and implicit education activities that help young people develop personal positive strengths such as honesty, confidence, critical thinking and citizenship. Character education involved teaching students to understand what is ethically important in difficult situations and how to choose the right course of action.'



****Low base size, please use with caution***

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