

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



THE  
JUBILEE CENTRE  
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

# SCHOOLS OF VIRTUE

## CHARACTER EDUCATION IN THREE BIRMINGHAM SCHOOLS

RESEARCH REPORT

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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 30 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. We believe 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.

This report was launched by Gary Lewis, Executive Headteacher at Kings Langley School and Chair of the Association for Character Education (ACE), on the 19 October 2017 at the University of Birmingham School.



# Schools of Virtue

## Character Education in Three Birmingham Schools Research Report

### CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Purpose of the Report</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>8</b>
Character Education in Britain	8
Problem Statement and Conceptual Clarifications	9
Related Studies on Character Education	12
Overall Evaluative Goals	12
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>14</b>
Rationale: Case Study Design	14
Mixed Methods within the Case Study	14
Analysis of Data	17
Limitations of the Research	17
Ethical Considerations	17
<b>Findings and Discussion</b>	<b>18</b>
Character Education Caught	18
Character Education Taught	22
Character Sought	27
Overall Findings	28
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Appendices<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>34</b>
Appendix 1: Background to the Schools	34
Appendix 2: <i>A Framework for Character Education in Schools</i>	35
<b>Research Team</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>38</b>

<sup>1</sup> Online Appendices can be found at: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/schoolsofvirtue](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/schoolsofvirtue)

# Foreword

## Gary Lewis

It is my pleasure to present this report as an important vehicle in both promoting character education and its obvious benefits and for providing a well-researched base to inform school leaders and others as they seek to implement strategic plans for their own individual and unique communities.

As an Executive Headteacher with some 17 years of experience and as Chair of the Association for Character Education (ACE), I believe passionately that schools that have a clearly communicated ethos and a culture that promotes the development of 'strong character', are providing a vital service to both their pupils and our wider society. Such schools are determined to equip their pupils with a range of emotional and 'character' skills that are going to enable them to flourish in both their personal and working lives. These schools are ambitious in developing pupils who are able to think independently and reflect carefully when they are faced with making decisions that will impact on themselves and others.

I am conscious that school leaders are working in an educational climate that frequently presents mixed messages in terms of the published metrics used to determine 'successful schools'. In a data driven environment, it is difficult for school leaders to focus on matters other than the next set of public examination results, attendance figures, or rates of exclusions. I believe we need courageous and determined leaders who are prepared to place the development of their pupils' character and emotional resilience ahead of all other measured outcomes. I would also encourage these same leaders to have confidence that children who have had the opportunity to develop independence, self-reliance and a specific understanding of their responsibilities in the wider community, will inevitably achieve on all fronts, including realising academic success in public examinations.

Employers are now making it abundantly clear that successful applicants for jobs need much more than a string of examination results. They want individuals who are able to work collaboratively in teams, to show leadership and initiative when necessary, and perhaps most importantly, they want employees who are able to interact confidently, politely and with emotional intelligence when mixing with others of all personality hues. These requirements sum up the aims of character education in a nutshell.

This report acknowledges that character is both caught and taught and that schools also take active steps to develop their pupils into independent thinkers, able to take responsibility for their own decisions and actions. We're reminded that character is also sought and the development of character means sometimes taking the more difficult path. Schools aim to progress critical thinking and working to encourage pupils to reflect on their actions is a particular recommendation within the report which should be emphasised.

Senior school leaders are in a unique position to establish a strategic plan for school development which recognises that character, and its development, needs to permeate all aspects of the school community, including the curriculum on offer, and that teachers, support staff, and pupils need to understand that each and every member of the school community has a vital role in building a climate that allows everyone to flourish. Consistent and targeted training, coupled with regular and honest self-evaluation, will ensure that Schools of Character are determinedly ensuring that they are providing a safe and welcoming environment, which enables all of their pupils to grow and flourish regardless of their backgrounds or aptitudes.

I have worked closely with the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues for many years and appreciate the highly successful mix of meticulously planned academic research coupled with proven and concrete examples of character education in a range of schools and institutions. Their *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* provides a clear reference point for all schools and I would urge all of those with an interest in character education to refer to the wide range of published material available from the Jubilee Centre.

In conclusion, as both a parent and Headteacher, I have only ever wanted children in my care to have access to happiness and fulfilment and I know that such goals can only ever be reached through the medium of 'strong character'. This report reflects in detail on the work of three schools in Birmingham and I know that the values and virtues embraced by these schools are likely to appeal to the vast majority of parents who want the schools that their children attend to provide so much more than academic success.

### **Gary Lewis**

Executive Headteacher, Kings Langley School  
Chair of the Association for Character Education

# Executive Summary

Stakeholders across all areas of education have paid attention to and shown an increasing interest in the character development of young people in recent years. Politicians, employers, researchers, teachers, parents, and young people have recognised the positive impact that placing an emphasis on character development alongside academic attainment can have on personal and societal flourishing. This approach has been advocated by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues since its launch in 2012.

While an array of disparate resources have been developed to support schools looking to implement character education, there has been little attempt in the UK to study individual schools that place the development of character at the heart of their educational vision and general school ethos. This report addresses this gap by focussing in depth and detail on three schools in Birmingham recognised for their pro-active and intentional approach to cultivating virtues in their pupils. The schools were the University of Birmingham School, Nishkam High School, and St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School<sup>2</sup>. The research methods employed comprised a mixture of semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and moral dilemmas.

## Key findings

This study has identified the following key findings based on the experiences of the three case study schools involved. Character education was both caught and taught in the three case study schools involved, with active steps taken to help ensure that good character was also sought by the pupils – particularly in the secondary schools.

- Each school had an existing vision for character education that was developed in response to the particular context in which it operated. Staff outwardly 'bought into' and supported each school's vision for character education and this consistency between vision and action reinforced pupils' engagement in character education provision. Staff recognised that they were character 'educators' and 'role models'.
- The vision of character education was implemented in each school through intentional and careful planning. Character education was taught across the three schools and was intended to support the development of pupils' virtue literacy. Methods to develop virtue literacy were embedded within the curriculum across the schools and within discrete lessons at the two secondary schools. Such approaches were identified to support the development of a shared 'language of character' which facilitated discussions on character development.
- Encouraging pupils' critical reflection on their own and others' actions was suggested to contribute to pupils intrinsically seeking opportunities to develop their character so that they become more autonomous in their decision-making. Pupils in all three schools regarded moral rather than performance virtues as important in their character development and pupils in the secondary schools scored higher on moral functioning tests than the national average<sup>3</sup>.

The findings of the study have been used to revise the Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools*<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, these findings provide a snapshot of character education within each of the three schools during the fieldwork period. It should be noted that character education provision within each school continues to evolve to meet pupils' needs.

## Key recommendations

The report makes three key recommendations concerning the implementation of character education:

- The delivery of character education provision should aim to enable pupils to demonstrate practical wisdom and seek opportunities to act virtuously. This behaviour is facilitated by autonomous Virtue Reasoning and requires the pupil to think independently and reflectively. Consequently, character education should seek to develop the intellectual virtue of critical thinking, and this can be facilitated through embedding pupil reflection within character education.
- Schools should consider the self-evaluation of their character education provision, with reference to the Jubilee Centre's *Character Education: Evaluation Handbook for Schools* (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016).
- The contribution that character education makes to school outcomes, such as increased employability, increased positive behaviour, and improved attainment, should be investigated further.

<sup>2</sup> For further information about the three schools see Appendix 1: Background to the Schools

<sup>3</sup> The Adolescent Intermediate Concept Measure (Ad-ICM) identifies the cognitive component of moral functioning, in other words, pupils' judgement of what is the best course of action in a given situation. Pupils at the University of Birmingham School and Nishkam High School were asked to respond to a series of moral dilemmas and to identify the best and worst justifications from a given list. Scores for both schools were higher than that seen in the Jubilee Centre's previous *Character Education in UK Schools* (Arthur *et al.*, 2015b) study of 31 schools and suggests that, on average, pupils in these two schools selected action and justification choices that were a better match to the expert panel.

<sup>4</sup> Extracts from the Jubilee Centre's revised *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2017a) can be found in Figures 1 and 2, Appendix 2. The full *Framework* document is available on the Jubilee Centre website: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf)

# 1 Purpose of the Report

This report presents the findings of a study that explored how character education is being implemented in three schools in Birmingham (UK). The study utilised the neo-Aristotelian conception of character and character education, as detailed in *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2013a; revised 2017 – see Appendix 2), as a lens through which to investigate the approaches of the three schools. The study should be seen as part of the wider practical work of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues to promote and develop character virtues in individuals and throughout society (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). Previous work by the Centre has considered the development of character through, for example, investigations of particular variables that can contribute to the development of character (Arthur *et al.*, 2014a); and large dataset surveys (Arthur *et al.*, 2015b).

The study focussed on three schools in Birmingham that have been inspired by the *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* and intentionally placed an emphasis on developing their pupils' character. The schools were the University of Birmingham School, Nishkam High School, and St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School (see Appendix 1 for background to the schools). It was the working hypothesis of the study that there is no 'magic bullet' that will address all the challenges that schools are likely to encounter when introducing character education. Further, there is no blueprint for character education and the context in which a school operates will often determine the approach that is taken, as well as the virtues that are prioritised. As noted by Seider (2012: 220-2), the 'copying and

'pasting' of character education programmes within an existing school culture is unlikely to be successful. He argues that it cannot be assumed that a programme of character education judged a success in one school will have the same outcomes in another. Consequently, this study sought to explore the practical steps the three schools have taken to implement character education in response to their own context.

This report demonstrates how a neo-Aristotelian conception of character education can be brought to life in different types of schools. It looks for evidence in the three schools about how character is caught, taught and sought<sup>5</sup>. The findings from the research have informed revisions made to the Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). It is also intended that they will provide evidence for policymakers, and inspiration for educators and other interested parties, to consider when they are progressing their own approaches to developing pupils' character in the interest of human flourishing.

'A SINGLE ACT OF KINDNESS THROWS OUT ROOTS IN ALL DIRECTIONS, AND THE ROOTS SPRING UP AND MAKE NEW TREES.'

Amelia Earhart

<sup>5</sup> Definitions of these terms are given in Sections 2.2.3-2.2.5.





## 2 Background

### 2.1 CHARACTER EDUCATION IN BRITAIN

Character education has a long history in Britain and has been argued to have always been part of the aim of general education, even if it was not explicitly stated (Arthur, 2003: 11). In the last five years, interest in character education, as well as a knowledge and understanding of the term, has grown. The development of character has been identified as one of 12 strategic priorities within the Department for Education's (DfE) 2015–2020 Departmental Strategy (DfE, 2016a: 35–36); the Departmental Plan (DfE, 2016b) also referred to the commitment to continue to promote the importance of character education. Such commitment has also been seen with the provision of funding and the establishment of an award to recognise the work of schools and organisations in developing character by the DfE (Gov.uk, 2016). Furthermore, the former Secretary of State for Education, the Rt. Hon Nicky Morgan MP has also authored a book on character education (2017). A survey of over 880 schools in England, carried out by the DfE in June–August 2016, showed that 97% sought to promote desirable character traits in their pupils (DfE, 2017: 6). The survey also found that schools primarily aim to develop character to promote good citizenship (97%), and academic attainment (84%), and the character traits most highly prioritised were honesty, integrity, and respect for others. Furthermore, within the National Foundation for Education Research's *Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey* 72% of senior leaders responded that they had a school ethos that identified the character traits intended to be developed by all pupils (Smith *et al.*, 2017: 14).

Research by the Jubilee Centre (Arthur *et al.*, 2015b; Walker *et al.*, 2017: 599) has demonstrated that when measures of moral reasoning in young people were ordered by the mean scores, a variety of schools were found in both the top and bottom quartiles. This included fee-paying and state schools, faith and non-denominational schools, as well as grammar schools and schools with academy status. Such a result has been used to argue that no one type of school has the monopoly over the character development of their pupils. Furthermore, the increasing focus on character education by

policy-makers is not unique to the experience of the UK and has also been witnessed in countries including the US, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, Australia, and others (Arthur *et al.*, 2017; Kristjánsson, 2015).

This growth is evidenced by the establishment in 2015 of a new organisation, the Association for Character Education (ACE) ([www.character-education.org.uk](http://www.character-education.org.uk)). The level of interest in this Association from schools has demonstrated the significance placed on character education. To support practice, the Jubilee Centre has created a number of resources, including: programmes of study for character education within both primary and secondary schools (Smith, 2014; Wright, Morris and Bawden, 2014); guides on embedding character education within the primary and secondary curriculum (Fullard, 2016; Harrison, Bawden and Rogerson, 2016); and a *Character Education: Evaluation Handbook for Schools* (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016)<sup>6</sup>.

Further examples of the renewed focus on character education in Britain include the ongoing work commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to explore the impact of character education interventions, along with the collation of evidence on character as part of a Teaching and Learning Toolkit (EEF, n.d.). Furthermore, interest in character education has also permeated professional bodies, such as the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD), which has advised employers on how recruitment practices can consider character development progressed through participation in youth social action (CIPD, 2015). The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) in the *First Steps Report* (2012) identified the value employers place on character when recruiting, in addition to the report, *Helping the UK Thrive* (2017), and the featured survey of employers, which again highlighted the importance placed on character and attitudes to work when recruiting school and college leavers. Evaluations of young people's involvement in community organisations have also demonstrated the contribution this participation can make towards the development of young people's characters: examples of this can be seen in the Jubilee Centre's *Building Character through Youth Social Action* (Arthur,

Harrison and Taylor, 2015); studies on the association between previous membership of the Scouts or Guides and reported mental wellbeing (Dibben, Playford and Mitchell, 2016); and in evaluations of the National Citizen Service (NCS) (Booth *et al.*, 2015; Cameron *et al.*, 2017).

Furthermore, parents are interested in and supportive of character education, as has been shown by polling conducted by the Jubilee Centre (2013b) which has demonstrated strong support for character education. Of the 1,001 parents surveyed, over four-fifths (87%) identified that schools should develop pupils' characters and encourage good values. Moreover, 95% of parents surveyed agreed with the statement that it is possible, through lessons and dedicated projects or exercises at school, to teach a child values and positively shape their character.

In addition, the Jubilee Centre carried out a survey of parents who had applied, and received a place for their child to attend the University of Birmingham School in the 2017/18 academic year. Of those parents who responded to the questionnaire, over four-fifths (81%, n=53) identified that the school's vision to develop pupils' character was extremely important in their decision to apply for a place at the school (Jubilee Centre, 2017b). This further demonstrates the value parents place on character and its development.

Character education has also attracted much academic attention in recent years. As character education has been generally conceived as a multi-faceted concept that embodies a range of explicit and implicit activities, previous studies have warranted contributions from across a range of disciplines, including: philosophy (see for example Kristjánsson, 2015; Carr, 1991; Curren, 2000); psychology (see for example Morgan, Gulliford and Kristjánsson, 2017; Fowers, 2012; Peterson and Seligman, 2004); and education (see for example Arthur *et al.*, 2017; Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016). This work has further demonstrated the breadth of character education and the range of lenses through which it can be viewed. The present study has been influenced and informed by this research.

<sup>6</sup> All Jubilee Centre character education resources can be found at: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/charactereducationresources](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/charactereducationresources)



## 2.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

This study defined a *school of virtue* as one that has placed an emphasis on, and taken practical steps to support, the development of pupils' character and virtues. Common to the three schools selected to be the focus of the research was that their approach to character education provision was consistent with that described in the Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2013a; 2017a). Within the Centre's *Character Education: Evaluation Handbook for Schools*, a distinction is made between formative and summative evaluation where, rather than looking to provide a 'grade' based on an evaluation of pupils' achievements, schools should undertake formative evaluation to enhance and improve provision (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016: 7). Such an approach enables the school to also consider how character education has been implemented and to initiate changes to the school's approach to character education as a result of this feedback. The study adopted this approach and so was less concerned with questions about 'what works' and more with what approaches to character education were being implemented by the schools.

While both the University of Birmingham School and St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School rooted character education in the concept of 'virtues', Nishkam High School used the term 'values'; both concepts were however used to focus on the qualities that support human and societal flourishing. Research has shown these concepts are often used interchangeably and any difference is normally semantic rather than substantive (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016). For ease of reference, the term 'virtues' (as defined in Section 2.2.1) has been used in this report. As a further note on definitions used within this report, it was identified that schools' use of the term 'pupils' varied, often according to the age of the child. For the purposes of clarity and concision, 'pupils' is used as a broad category covering all those who attend the school.

### 2.2.1 Character and Virtue

Character is framed by the Jubilee Centre in broadly Aristotelian virtue ethical terms (Jubilee Centre, 2017a; Kristjánsson, 2015). Drawing on neo-Aristotelian philosophy, character is seen as the basis for human flourishing and, as such, the development of good character should be one of the fundamental goals of education. The Centre has defined character as being a set of personal traits and dispositions that can 'inform motivation and guide conduct' and is seen as morally evaluable and educable (2017a: 2). As noted in *A Framework for Character Education in Schools*, virtues are traits that 'sustain a well-rounded life and a thriving society' (Jubilee Centre, 2017a: 1) and are to be conceived of as 'the building blocks of character' (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016: 19). The virtues can be grouped into four categories: intellectual; moral; civic; and performance (see Figure 1, Appendix 2). However, integrating them and adjudicating in cases of conflict is the meta-virtue of *phronesis*, often referred to as practical wisdom or 'good sense'. Practical wisdom is defined as:

*The integrative virtue developed through experience and critical reflection which enables us to perceive, desire and act with good sense. This includes discerning and deliberative action in situations where virtues collide* (Jubilee Centre, 2017a: 5).

The enhancement of practical wisdom and the related enablement of autonomous virtuous action should be viewed as the ultimate goal of character education from an Aristotelian perspective (although it has been underplayed in some recent forms of character education). The transition from moral reasoning to moral action, or virtue practice, has been previously identified as a gap in our understanding of moral development (Blasi, 1980). Despite this gap, embedding virtues throughout the curriculum has been suggested to be a way in which virtue literacy can be strengthened (Wright, Morris and Bawden, 2014; Smith, 2014; Fullard, 2016; Harrison, Bawden and Rogerson, 2016; Arthur *et al.*, 2014a) and has been hypothesised as providing the antecedent steps towards virtuous action and practice (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). Each virtue is made up of a number of components, some of which have been conceptualised to form a definition of virtue literacy, including: Virtue Perception; Virtue Knowledge and Understanding; and Virtue Reasoning (see full list of components in Figure 2, Appendix 2).

'ONLY THOSE WHO WILL RISK GOING TOO FAR CAN POSSIBLY FIND OUT HOW FAR ONE CAN GO.'

T S Eliot

### 2.2.2 Character Education

Character education has sought to help individuals develop the virtues that contribute to the pursuit of *eudaimonia*, a Greek term for flourishing and the state in which the individual can thrive (Kristjánsson, 2015). The concept can be exemplified by considering what it is to be a successful human being, identified as comprising the ability to develop and maintain relationships, along with the individual identifying and pursuing work to which they are suited, along with also attending to physical and emotional wellbeing (Morris, 2009: 4).

The purpose of character education has therefore been identified to promote intrinsic wellbeing, in the sense in which it is as an end in itself in addition to its extrinsic benefits. Following from this intrinsic focus, character education in its broadest form has also been demonstrated to contribute to a number of extrinsic or instrumental outcomes including attainment (see Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Arthur and O'Shaughnessy, 2012) and social mobility and related employability skills (see Jubilee Centre, 2016; Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Heckman, Stizrud and Urzua, 2006). It has also been linked to the promotion of British Values (Ward and Harrison, 2016). The Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* has identified that the development of character has provided a foundation to support 'improved attainment, better behaviour, and increased employability' (2017a: 11). These are similar to the DfE's stated aims for character education (DfE, 2016a).

Character education has been depicted by Berkowitz (2012) as a 'semantic minefield' in which an overlapping terminology is used by different theorists to describe what is incorporated within the concept. The Centre views character education as a broad term that encompasses all 'explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues' (Jubilee Centre, 2017a: 2). As such, character education has 'taught', 'caught' and 'sought' elements (Arthur *et al.*, 2017; Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016; Jubilee Centre, 2017a: 2) and should not be conceptualised only as a discrete subject; rather it is embedded within institutional cultures. Previous research relating to taught, caught, and sought aspects of character education has been briefly described on the following pages. An exhaustive summary of the literature has not been provided, but rather general themes identified to have an influence on the development of pupils' character have been explored.

### 2.2.3 Character Caught

The school ethos, culture, and vision relate closely to what is often termed the *caught* elements of character education which emphasise the impact of the environment of a school. Where a school's ethos is focussed on the development of pupils' characters, an intentional and authentic approach is integral to facilitating this (Character.org, 2010), which is enabled by the direction of the Senior Leadership Team (Arthur *et al.*, 2015b: 6). Furthermore, it has been suggested that there should be at least one teacher who is designated the lead for the implementation of character education (Arthur *et al.*, 2015b: 6) and that staff should receive training in character education (Arthur *et al.*, 2015a: 29). An independent review commissioned by the DfE has identified the importance of character development, and a school's culture, in promoting positive behaviour amongst pupils (Bennett, 2017: 12-3).

As noted in the Learning for Life study (Arthur *et al.*, 2006: 2), high-quality relationships, defined as being built on trust and respect, across a school are imperative for the development of pupils' characters. Character education, therefore, has been noted to not just occur in the classroom but has also been identified to be affected by wider relationships within the school. The promotion of inclusivity, where pupils are involved and feel connected to the school, has been identified to contribute to the development of positive relationships within and across a school (Berkowitz and Hoppe, 2009: 135). Prior work has also demonstrated the influence that the quality of relationships both across, and between, pupils, staff members, and pupils' parents and carers can have. This has included the influence of teachers acting as role models on pupils' character development (Arthur *et al.*, 2015a), developing positive dialogues with parents to support parental involvement in character education (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016: 153-4; Arthur *et al.*, 2014a: 5), along with processes of induction which seek to develop pupils' understanding of their own and others' emotions and how these are affected by people's actions (Berkowitz, 2011: 157).

It is recognised that character development is not limited to only take place in the classroom, rather, as Character.org's *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education* (2010) has highlighted, families and communities are partners in the development of character and that schools should look for opportunities to encourage their engagement with the school's

character education approach. Arthur has also argued that the development of character is not an individualised pursuit and has a 'social content' (2003: 97). Consequently, schools do not act as isolated units and should be perceived as being part of a wider community.

### 2.2.4 Character Taught

*Taught* approaches to character education have been noted to be explicit and often curriculum-based. Such approaches could involve a school teaching about virtues and character through a standalone lesson or activity, or through incorporating character education within subjects with the aim to provide the 'rationale, language and tools' required to develop character (Jubilee Centre, 2017a: 11). Research by the Jubilee Centre has indicated that character education can be embedded in the curriculum, either as a discrete learning opportunity, or through embedding character within lessons and teaching it through subjects (Arthur *et al.*, 2017; Harrison, Bawden and Rogerson, 2016). Support for the Jubilee Centre position comes from the Rt. Hon Nicky Morgan MP (2017), former Secretary of State for Education, who published a book on the importance of character education and former Eton Headmaster Tony Little (2015) in his book *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Education*.

There have been a number of studies that have evaluated the effectiveness of curriculum-based characters education, these have demonstrated that stories can teach school children about the qualities of virtuous character (Arthur *et al.*, 2014a; Carr and Harrison, 2015); character education can be taught through and within subjects (Fullard, 2016; Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016); and that self-reflection can support pupils to develop future mindedness (Arthur *et al.*, 2014b). At a broader level, reviews of the evidence on the effectiveness of school-based programmes, which seek to develop pupils' characters and related social and emotional learning have demonstrated the need for effective planning within taught approaches that are focussed on clear objectives as to 'cognitive, affective and behavioural competencies', in addition to the necessity to ensure that teachers have received training, in the form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or guidance on the delivery of the programme (Clarke *et al.*, 2015: 82; Berkowitz, 2011: 157-8).

Previous work has identified that learning outside the classroom can offer pupils the chance to develop their character and practise

their virtues through organised and structured activities (Arthur *et al.*, 2017). These often have been facilitated through the provision of extra-curricular activities, or enrichment, which allow young people to practise different virtues in a safe space in which feedback on how to improve the future demonstration of virtues can be provided (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016). Youth social action, a further opportunity to facilitate learning outside of the classroom, has been defined as 'practical action in the service of others that creates positive change' (#iwill, n.d.). Three randomised control trials facilitated by the Behavioural Insights Team (Kirkman *et al.*, 2016) identified that participants in youth social action projects showed significant increases in measures of empathy, grit, and resilience.

The conceptualisation of character education as having both taught and caught elements has generated, to some extent, a false dichotomy. In reality, taught and caught approaches to character education are often intertwined and mutually supportive of each other (Harrison,

Morris and Ryan, 2016), and each will aim to progress pupils towards the third element of character education – character sought.

### 2.2.5 Character Sought

The ultimate aim of character education is for pupils to become autonomous and independent thinkers, who have learnt when to take the right action at the right time. Taught and caught character education that has enabled progression towards an individual internalising virtuous habits has been conceived as ideally leading to character being *sought*. Here, the ideal has been identified that pupils will actively employ critical reflection and autonomous Virtue Reasoning to demonstrate full autonomous virtue whereby the individual actively 'owns' the decision to proceed in a virtuous way, rather than being compelled by external factors (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). This can contribute to character education promoting democratic citizenship and decision-making (Jubilee Centre, 2017a: 3). Schools are therefore required to provide varied opportunities that generate the formation of

personal habits and character commitments. It is believed that over time these will help pupils to seek, desire, and freely pursue their character development. The promotion of critical reflection, or thinking, has been theorised to be a key component of virtuous action through the promotion of Virtue Reasoning. Work by Keskin-Semanci (2015) has suggested a weak, but statistically significant, correlation between trainee teachers' critical thinking and levels of demonstrated moral judgement. In addition, Weinstock, Assor and Broide (2009) found a correlation between the encouragement of critical thinking and levels of autonomous moral judgement in pupils, a result which informed a recommendation for teachers to promote and facilitate the development of their pupils' critical thinking.





### 2.3 RELATED STUDIES ON CHARACTER EDUCATION

A strength of previous systematic evaluations of character education has been that they have highlighted the shared features of taught character education programmes (see, for example, Berkowitz and Bier, 2005; Berkowitz, Bier and McCauley, 2016). As demonstrated in the work of Seider (2012), there is also the opportunity to consider how the taught and caught elements of character education reinforce one another within a school environment. Seider's work provided a case study of three schools in the US that have made character education central to their vision of the school and have each developed 'powerful and productive cultures atop three very different character foundations' (Seider, 2012: 5). The reinforcement offered by taught and caught elements of character education can also be seen within the work of Meidl and Meidl (2013), and in Berkowitz *et al.*'s PRIMED model (Berkowitz, Bier and McCauley, 2016).

In September to December 2016, the DfE commissioned 11 case studies in a cross section of mainstream schools, special schools, and pupil referral units (PRUs). These case studies sought to depict the unique and common features in the schools' approaches to character education and enable a better understanding of the different approaches to implementation (DfE, 2017). It was identified within each case study site that the approach to character education sought to encourage pupils to develop both socially and emotionally and also to support the development of interaction with others. Across the case study sites, it was also acknowledged that character education had been facilitated through the development and implementation of a shared vision of what character education sought to achieve (DfE, 2017: 10).

### 2.4 OVERALL EVALUATIVE GOALS

This study took a holistic approach to explore how character education has been implemented within the three aforementioned schools in Birmingham. The features of character education as implemented within each school are identified in this report with the view to provide some stimulus for other schools looking to enhance character education provision. Furthermore, the study also considered the effectiveness of character education within the school, as described by both teaching staff and pupils. This offered the opportunity to consider the perceived difference attributed to the implementation of both taught and caught character education from these distinct perspectives. It was intended that this consideration would develop understanding of the nature of influence that character education can have on a school, its staff, and its pupils. A primary goal was to consider how the original *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2013a) has been interpreted by the three case study schools and how this has been embedded within practice. Evidence from this study has been used to revise the *Framework* (Jubilee Centre, 2017a).

It is thought that the findings of this report are likely to be of interest to members of the teaching profession and associated colleagues, along with professional bodies and voluntary and community sector organisations with an interest in the development of character education. It is also intended that the findings will be of value to policymakers, in particular, the reflection on schools' experiences of the development of character education and the depth of analysis of pupils' views and the meaning they ascribed to character education. A series of recommendations that are intended to support schools to develop their approach to character education are incorporated within Section 5 of the report.







# 3 Methodology

## 3.1 RATIONALE: CASE STUDY DESIGN

This study intended to explore the influence of character education, as perceived by both pupils and teaching staff, through considering how character education has been implemented across three schools. Consequently, a case study design was developed which took a holistic approach (Yin, 2003: 43-5), focussed by the rationale of the report to explore character education at the micro-level (as seen in the work of Seider, 2012; Meidl and Meidl, 2013; DfE, 2017). It was not the aim of the study to draw comparisons between the three schools, as each will operate within a different context. Instead, the study focussed on the unique ways in which character education has been explicitly and implicitly put into practice and explored the perceived impact of this from pupils' and teaching staffs' perspectives.

A challenge often directed towards the case study research design is the difficulty of generalising findings to other cases. The intended purpose of the study was to explore perceptions of how character education had been implemented across three schools. Consequently, the purpose of the study adhered to Yin's (2003: 13) assertion that case studies should be used when the focus of a study is the context in which a phenomenon occurs. Within this study, the context was the school environment and the ways in which character education was implemented.

Purposive sampling (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: 156-7) was used to select the three schools that comprise this study; the cases were selected as they each prioritised character education. While each was based in the Birmingham area, the three schools provided a range of contexts in which character education was implemented, both in terms of the catchment areas served and educational settings. The in-depth approach developed within the study intended to differentiate it from the previous work of the Jubilee Centre. Further background information about each of the schools can be found within Appendix 1.

The perceived need for schools to demonstrate evidence of the effectiveness of approaches to character education has led to calls to explore the potential to quantify and measure the outcomes it achieves (Berkowitz, 2014; Curren, 2014; Kotzee *et al.*, 2014). While it has been seen that there is evidence regarding the positive 'by-products' of focussing on the intrinsic good that can be achieved through character education, the literature has also identified a number of challenges in the measurement of the effects of character education. Such identified difficulties have often related to wider limitations of available research methods. For example, the difficulty of using self-reported measures has been noted previously (Kristjánsson, 2015: 68); an individual's self-concept may be different from how they are perceived by others and may also be influenced by social desirability bias. In addition, the difficulty of isolating the outcomes of character education interventions from confounding variables has been recognised and attempts to measure impact, and as a consequence, define success, can run counter to the intrinsic nature of character education (Kristjánsson, 2015). Consequently, as argued by Kristjánsson (2015: 69) and the work of the Jubilee Centre (Arthur *et al.*, 2015b; Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016), the use of methodological triangulation should be considered when evaluating character education. Such debates have informed the decision to use mixed methods within the case study research design.

## 3.2 MIXED METHODS WITHIN THE CASE STUDY

Based on previous work of the Jubilee Centre, the study employed mixed methods to allow for methodological triangulation (for further information see Arthur *et al.*, 2015b) and necessitated the use of more than one method to verify and develop the findings of the study (Bryman, 2016). The intention of the study was to explore perceptions of character education from the views of both teaching staff and pupils. Consequently, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed through the use of interviews with teaching staff, group interviews with pupils, and a survey of pupils. Following Denscombe (2014: 150-1), it was important within this mixed methods case study design to have clarity as to the sequence of the methods used, the links between the methods, and how they related to each other, in addition to the relative emphasis that would be placed on each method when the data were analysed.

The use of a mixed methods approach ensured that the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative approaches could build upon one another. When the data were analysed, a greater emphasis was placed on the qualitative data as these allowed a more extensive exploration of the context in which the school operates, along with the perceptions on the ways in which character education has been implemented across the three schools. Consequently, analysis was primarily focussed on qualitative data in order to explore the teachers' and pupils' perceptions of character education. Quantitative analysis of questionnaires then revealed a greater breadth of pupils' perceptions of character education.

'HUMAN GREATNESS DOES NOT LIE IN WEALTH OR POWER, BUT IN CHARACTER AND GOODNESS. PEOPLE ARE JUST PEOPLE, AND ALL PEOPLE HAVE FAULTS AND SHORTCOMINGS, BUT ALL OF US ARE BORN WITH A BASIC GOODNESS.'

Anne Frank

### 3.2.1 Interviews with Teaching Staff

Semi-structured interviews with teaching staff were held across the three schools. Interviews were also held with teaching assistants at St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School who could also reflect on the provision of character education throughout the school. A convenience approach to sampling was used whereby teaching staff were invited to participate by their schools; interviews with teaching staff took place between July 2016 and February 2017. Schools were asked to ensure that a mix of teaching staff were available to be interviewed according to the subject they teach, their gender, and level of teaching experience.

Questions were focussed on teaching staff's perceptions of how character education has been implemented and the perceived influence of this within the school. In addition, questions were also posed about whether there were barriers and enablers which either helped or hindered the progression of character education within the school. The semi-structured nature of the interviews ensured flexibility so that the researchers were able to respond to the participants' comments and, consequently, this method generated more of a conversation between participant and researcher. This was seen to be appropriate as it supported open discussion on character education and how it has been implemented within the school.

### 3.2.2 Group Interviews with Pupils

Group interviews were also held with pupils across the three schools between November to December 2016. At Nishkam High School and the University of Birmingham School, the group interviews were held with pupils in Year 8 and Year 13 as these pupils were surveyed during the previous academic year. At St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School, the group interviews were held with those pupils in Year 6, as this year group was surveyed in the previous academic year when they were in Year 5.

Pupils were selected to participate in the group interviews by teaching staff so that there was a mix of pupils based on their gender, ethnicity and level of attainment. In addition, pupils were selected across tutor groups at Nishkam High School and the University of Birmingham School, and classes at St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School and, consequently, all participants knew one another.

It was identified that some pupils may be reticent in discussing their thoughts on their school and character education. The group interview method was selected to ensure there was a focus on the interactions between participants and allowed pupils to build on and develop one another's comments (Denscombe, 2014: 188), adding a greater depth to pupils' responses.

### 3.2.3 Pupil Questionnaires

Within the study, pupils were surveyed in order to explore how character education within each of the schools may have an effect on pupils' perceptions of themselves and the school ethos.

The first two questionnaires, which featured questions on the pupils' views of their ideal school and the Adolescent Intermediate Concept Measure (Ad-ICM), were administered in September 2015. Questions were posed on pupils' ideal school, in particular, the nature of relationships across the ideal school, the physical environment of the school, along with the structure of lessons. Pupils were asked to respond to moral dilemmas and complete the Ad-ICM, a measure developed to identify the cognitive component of moral functioning or, in other words, pupils' judgement of the best course of action within a moral dilemma (Thoma, Derryberry and Crowson, 2013). The Ad-ICM measure used in this study was shortened from the seven items used in Thoma, Derryberry and Crowson (2013), to the three items used in Walker *et al.* (2017). Pupils were presented with three stories, each measuring a different virtue, and then rated suggested action choices available to the protagonist and reasons (or justifications) for that action on a scale from 1 (*I strongly believe that this is a good choice /reason*) to 5 (*I strongly believe that this is a bad choice/reason*).

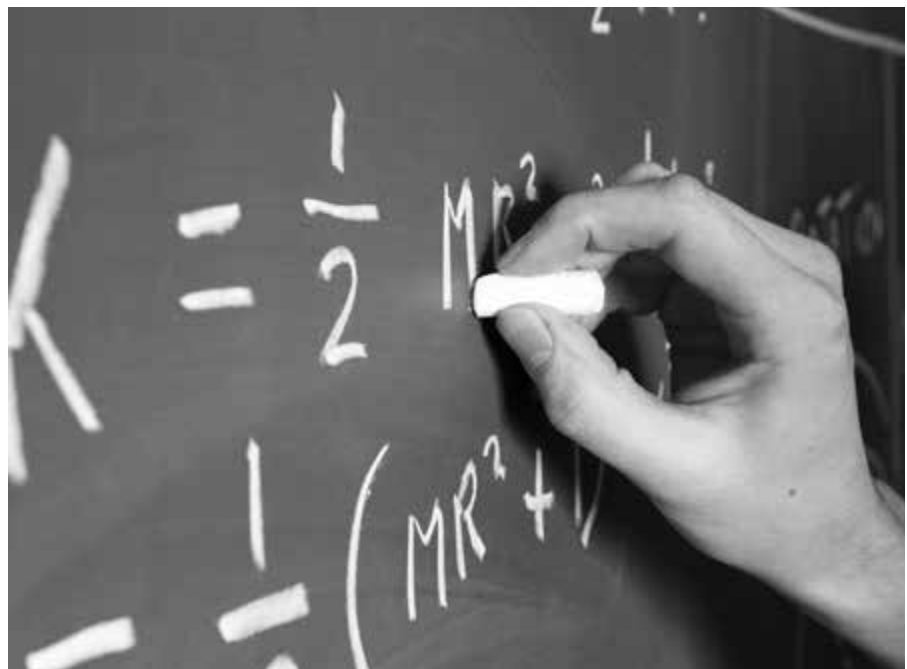
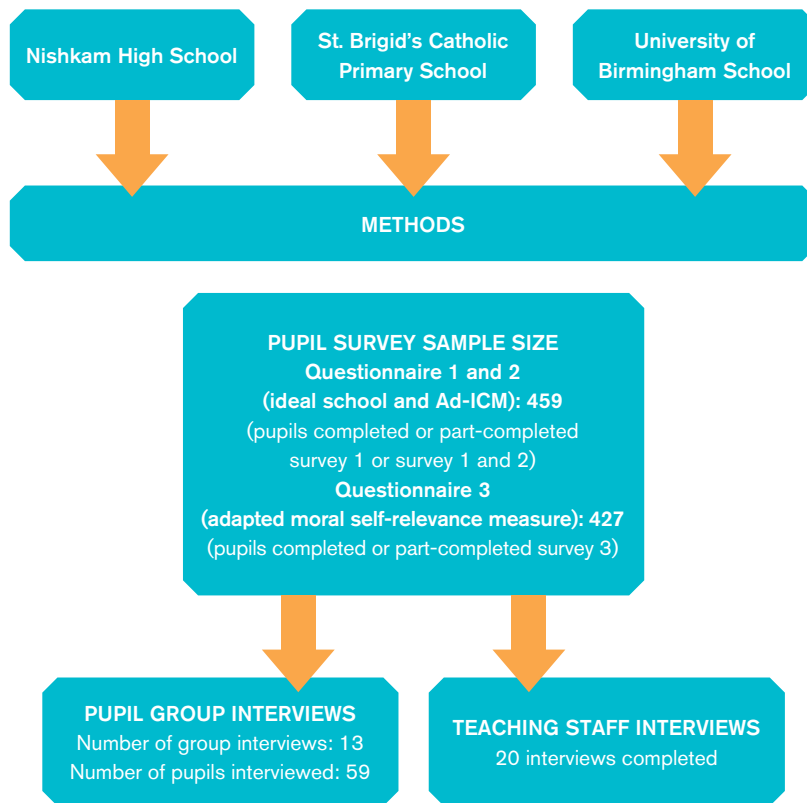


The best three actions and reasons, and the worst three actions and reasons, were then ranked by the pupils. Pupils' responses were compared with the expert panel's judgements as to what was considered a good or bad response and scored as 'acceptable', 'neutral' or 'unacceptable'. From this, it was possible to calculate a 'total good' and 'total bad' score. A pupil who selected acceptable or unacceptable options that were compatible with the expert panel, for example, scored 100%. A score could be negative if the pupil selected acceptable items as 'bad' and unacceptable items as 'good'. The Ad-ICM was also used as part of the Jubilee Centre's *Character Education in UK Schools* (Arthur *et al.*, 2015b) study. Further information on the development and use of the measure can be found in this previous report.

Within the third and final questionnaire, which was administered between June and July 2016, pupils were questioned on the importance they placed on the moral virtues, an adapted measure based on the work of Patrick and Gibbs (2012) and their development of a moral self-relevance measure. Pupils from across the three schools were asked to consider the importance of moral virtues and other non-moral qualities (using a rating from 1 *Extremely important* to 5 *Not important to me*); pupils were then asked to pick three out of the 16 moral virtues or non-moral qualities that they identified as being most important.

Pupils in Year 7 and 12 at both Nishkam High School and the University of Birmingham School were surveyed, along with Year 5 at St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School. It should be noted that the Ad-ICM was intended to be used with adolescents and was not designed to be used with younger pupils. Consequently, the results of the Ad-ICM for Year 5 pupils have not been incorporated within the findings of the report.

Chart 1: Final Samples Across All Research Methods



### 3.3 ANALYSIS OF DATA

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, with subsequent thematic analysis undertaken using the NVivo 11 software package. As an initial stage, the researchers familiarised themselves with the data and interview transcriptions were coded with a priori themes established in the evaluation framework within the Centre's *Character Education: Evaluation Handbook for Schools* (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016: 29-60) as it was identified that these themes would encompass the breadth of character education. Such themes included: school ethos, culture and vision; curriculum; learning outside the classroom; whole school community and community links. These themes and related codes were then reviewed and refined and further emergent coding allowed sub-themes to be incorporated which developed a more comprehensive coding dictionary. Survey data was entered and processed using the SPSS 22 software package.

### 3.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

In order to explore the influence of character education, it was necessary to study those schools which were already focussed on the development and entrenchment of character education. Consequently, it was not possible to draw comparisons between those schools which have focussed on character education and those which have not. Nevertheless, the purpose of the study was to explore the influence of character education, which was identified primarily through the analysis of qualitative data; it was therefore necessary to purposively sample those schools which have an interest in character education.

The initial survey of pupils was based on self-report measures and so may be affected by social desirability bias where respondents provide answers which are seen to be 'acceptable'. Analysis has also been restricted to only report on frequencies. Nevertheless, the focus on understanding teacher and

pupil perceptions of their school's character education provision meant that an emphasis was placed on the analysis of qualitative data within the mixed methods case study design. In an approach different to that utilised within previous studies from the Jubilee Centre (see for example Arthur *et al.*, 2014a; 2015a; 2015b) quantitative data supported the analysis of qualitative data in order to facilitate broader analysis of pupils' perceptions, along with measures of moral judgement as measured through the Ad-ICM. Consequently, the triangulation of data addressed this limitation.

In terms of the group interviews, teaching staff were asked to select pupils to participate, and although the researchers requested a mixed sample of pupils, there was the potential for the sample to be unrepresentative of the pupil population. For instance, more female pupils were interviewed, as was the case for the sample of teaching staff interviewed. Within the University of Birmingham School, two group interviews were held with pupils who were ambassadors and who volunteer to represent the school; it may be the case that these pupils held more favourable views of the school. Nevertheless, it was felt that conducting group interviews with these pupils provided a greater depth to the data.

A further limitation of the use of group interviews was that pupils who participated may not have felt comfortable expressing their feelings to their peers and felt the need to self-censor. To attempt to counteract these effects, the researchers emphasised the importance of pupils respecting one another's answers both inside and outside the group setting and made it clear that there was no expectation for pupils to share anything they did not feel comfortable other people knowing.

The use of a case study design could be argued to affect the generalisability of the findings. The purpose of the report is to share learning with other schools and organisations interested in the development of character

education. Consequently, the case studies have been structured thematically around taught, caught, and sought approaches to character education. Two of the schools were faith schools; with St. Brigid's being a Catholic Primary School and Nishkam High School defining itself as a multi-faith school. The focus on faith within these two schools has not contradicted the development of the neo-Aristotelian lens which has informed the current study. As argued by Arthur (2003: 53), character education within a Christian context can be understood in terms of a developmental model in which moral training is centred on both knowing and doing the good. A neo-Aristotelian view of character education has also foregrounded the importance of Virtue Reasoning and an individual being motivated to act for the right reasons and has demonstrated the parallels between the two approaches. It is recognised that each and every school functions within its own context; consequently, the study intended to provide broad findings that can be applied across a range of circumstances.

### 3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval was granted for the design of the study by the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee. In each of the three schools a senior member of staff consented to the participation of their school. Subsequently, for each stage of the research respondents were provided with information sheets and consent or opt-out forms. Parents also provided their informed consent for their children to participate in interviews. Each of the three schools agreed to be named in the report. Teaching staff were guaranteed confidentiality, although they were informed that due to their schools being named in the report, it may be the case that their comments could be attributed to their participation.

# 4 Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the findings from the research; organised under six prominent themes that link to caught, taught and sought aspects of character education as defined in *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). Findings are reported thematically and discussion as to how these findings relate to the wider relevant literature has been included.

## 4.1 CHARACTER EDUCATION CAUGHT

### 4.1.1 School Ethos Based on Character

**Each of the three schools had a vision of character education, which had been developed in response to the particular context in which it operates.** The centrality of character to the schools' vision for education had been informed by the Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2013a) and other publications.

As such, their approach to character education was intentional, deliberate and conscious. The schools strove to make explicit their focus on character education to both pupils and staff; for example, through embedding references to character and virtues in classes and through staff engagement in CPD sessions. At the heart of each school's approach to character education was building and developing core virtues. Despite the differences in the structure of the schools, all teaching staff identified that there was an emphasis placed on the development of pupils' characters, along with their academic attainment. Furthermore, within each of the schools, pupils also recognised that the school had wider aspirations than only considering academic attainment and broadly this was identified as a focus on supporting pupils to become 'good' people.

As part of the wider Nishkam School Trust, some staff at Nishkam High School noted that the school provided an 'all through' model, which meant the vision for character education operated across a network of schools so that similar expectations were placed on pupils throughout their school career. It was noted that staff were expected to attend ten CPD days, five of which took place at a Trust level, which offered the opportunity to consider character education and facilitated the development of lesson plans across the Trust. At St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School, the emphasis placed

on the Catholic faith was identified to provide a foundation for character education. While it was noted that not all staff members identified as being Catholic, several members of the teaching staff referred to the mission statement that the school educates their children 'in a Catholic community with Christ at the centre'; this mission statement was seen to guide the actions of the school.

Such clarity of vision was also referenced at the University of Birmingham School, where teaching staff identified that the school clearly communicates its vision both within the school and within external communications. Several staff identified the influence of the school's approach to character education when deciding to apply for their role, as suggested by the below quotation from a member of the University of Birmingham School teaching staff:

*Obviously, the character element was really important to me as well, because I do think previous experience, particularly at GCSE level, in other schools in this country, I think we do, we're like training the students to jump through hoops and it's like we want, because of pressure put on teachers as well for results and performance-related pay, a lot of teachers are feeling the strain and I think they know there's pressure on them to also get outcomes from students. I think it's nice to be in a place where, and I know we don't have GCSEs yet here, but where like students aren't just a vehicle for results and outcomes, although teachers I don't think want that to be the case, I think a system can sometimes make us feel like that and it can strain the relationships.*

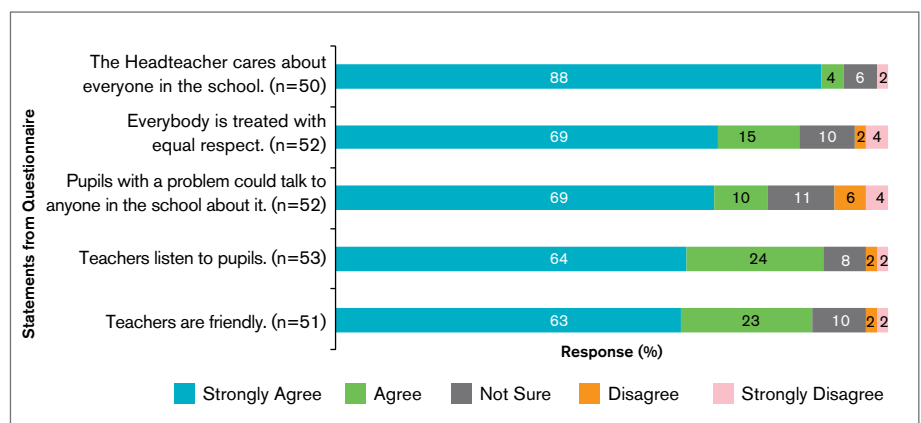
The finding that each of the three schools had developed a vision for character education that had been targeted towards the specific context in which the school operates has shown the practical implementation of existing recommendations and advice as to how character education should be progressed. Principles promoted by Character.org include that 'the school uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development' (Character.org, 2010: 6) and schools should take a holistic approach which identifies how all aspects of schooling can have an effect on the development of pupils' characters. The finding supports research on character education conducted by the DfE that showed that 'schools reporting highly visible, planned, reflective and specific approaches for character education were more likely to offer a range of provision' (DfE, 2017: 9).

### 4.1.2 Teachers as Character Educators

**Consistency within character education was seen to be dependent on school staff and pupils 'buying into' the vision; teachers viewed themselves as character educators.**

Across the schools, a majority of teaching staff reflected that clarity as to schools' vision of character education was important and should be communicated clearly. The actions of the Senior Leadership Team were often cited as having a significant role in this regard. Such consistency was conceptualised in terms of the expectations that were placed on staff and pupils and the way in which character education was embedded throughout the school. One teacher from Nishkam High School stated:

**Chart 2: St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School Pupils' Perceptions of Relationships within their Ideal School**





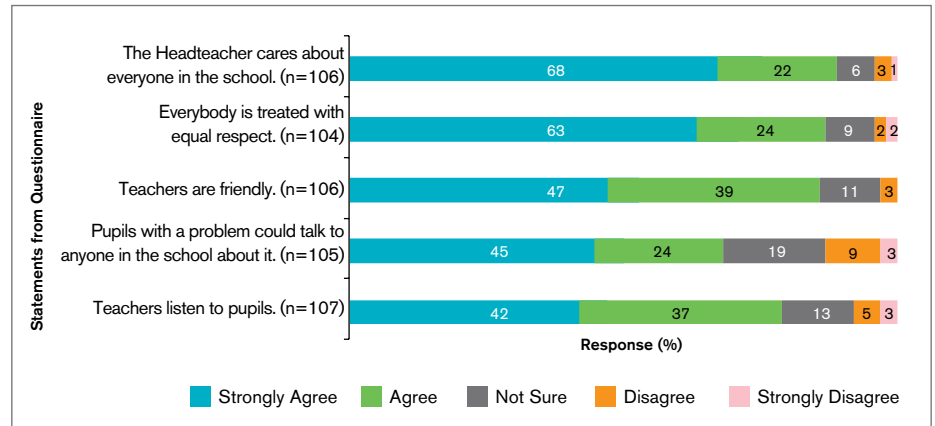
...you have to have buy-in from everybody and even though you may plan staff training, you may think about things like the passports, have you talked to your receptionist or the dining hall staff or the security guards...

At Nishkam High School, this consistency was often identified as the continual drip feeding of prompts and reminders to teaching staff to embed character education, such as reminders to use the language of virtues when interacting with pupils. At the University of Birmingham School, the Senior Leadership Team's use of the language of virtues when communicating with staff and pupils was identified as a way in which to support the development of a consistent vision of character education and was also noted by some as being part of a genuine display of the Senior Leadership Team's character. As one member of the University of Birmingham School teaching staff reflected, there was a need for character education to be authentic:

*For it to be really truly embedded, it has to be genuine and it has to be perceived as genuine by the students.*

Although the importance of a vision for character education was frequently referenced, an interesting dynamic was suggested in terms of whether the development of character education should have top-down ownership, with the Senior Leadership Team having control over the school's approach to character education, or whether the approach should be determined by the 'grassroots' actions of the teaching staff. Teaching staff also expressed that a 'democratic' school culture in which staff

**Chart 3: Nishkam High School Pupils' Perceptions of Relationships within their Ideal School**



perceived that they had a voice in discussions was also valued. While it was recognised that the Senior Leadership Team had a clear role in developing a strong vision for character education, the benefits of all staff members having a sense of ownership of this vision was also emphasised.

Role modelling, defined as the display of the behaviours that the school wishes to see demonstrated by both its staff and pupils, was seen by staff members to contribute to the consistency of the school's approach to character education. In all three schools it was reinforced that staff should be aware that they are role models to pupils and should use a consistent language of virtues in order to be seen to support character education. The expectation upon pupils to demonstrate virtues was seen to be central to role modelling. As part of this demonstration of virtues, it was also suggested that staff members should work

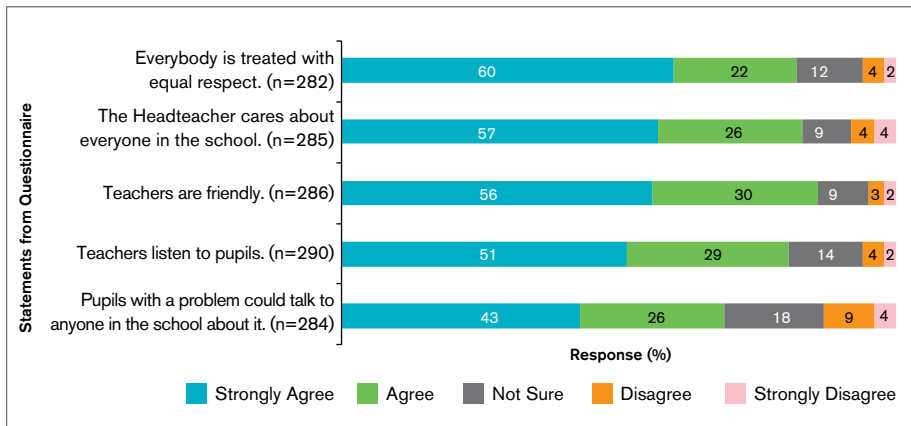
to develop positive relationships with pupils through initiating informal conversations and displaying kindness and empathy towards pupils. One member of the University of Birmingham School teaching staff commented:

*Children are like mirrors, they reflect what you do.*

Along with the identification of staff members acting as role models, pupils also expressed that they placed a high value on positive relationships with teachers. Charts 2, 3 and 4 show pupils' perceptions of their ideal school. The results from all three schools have demonstrated that pupils think that positive and supportive relationships are important. Pupils noted high levels of agreement that teachers should be friendly and listen to pupils and that the Headteacher should care about everyone in the school.



**Chart 4: University of Birmingham School Pupils' Perceptions of Relationships within their Ideal School**



All three schools have introduced methods to progress interaction between older and younger pupils. For example, within the University of Birmingham School, tutor groups were identified to be clustered into colleges. Cross-college events, such as sports days, were highlighted as offering the opportunity for year groups to collaborate with one another. Some older pupils reflected on the school having a community atmosphere in which mixing across the year groups, in both formal and informal settings, was seen to be commonplace. Consequently, role modelling should not be understood only in terms of the image that staff project to pupils but also that pupils act as role models for one another, or what might be termed 'near-peer' role modelling.

The role of teachers as character educators has been emphasised in the *Statement on Teacher Education and Character Education* (Jubilee Centre, 2016). The need for consistency within the implementation of character education echoes the recommendations of both the Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2017a) and the *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education* (Character.org, 2010), which uphold that a school's approach to character education needs to be planned and sustained. In *Character Education in UK Schools* (Arthur *et al.*, 2015b: 6), a recommendation was made that there should be a lead member of staff charged with the introduction of character education, however, it was recognised that

this role would be very much dependent on the facilitation of the Senior Leadership Team to support character education within the school. The recognition from teaching staff in this study that they are role models for pupils is in line with previous studies where teachers recognised their contribution as role models and influenced character development in young people (Arthur *et al.*, 2015a). Within Arthur *et al.* (2017: 104), a distinction was made within the concept of role modelling between the copying and the emulation of teachers' actions by pupils. Here, emulation was considered a way in which a pupil recognises the value of the staff member's behaviour and then considers how they could demonstrate similar character traits. It has also been argued that 'conscious role modelling by teachers is undervalued and needs to be developed' (Arthur *et al.*, 2017: 107).

#### 4.1.3 School Culture that Prioritises Positive Relationships

**Positive relationships were understood by the teachers to be fundamental to the school's vision and related approaches to character education.** The school ethos can be seen to be dependent on the quality of relationships both across, and between, pupils, staff members, and pupils' parents. Teaching staff across the three schools identified that their school's approach to character education helped to facilitate the development of high-quality relationships between staff and pupils. In response, pupils also frequently expressed appreciation for the atmosphere

within their school, often identifying it to be supportive. Some teaching staff within both the University of Birmingham School and Nishkam High School noted that staff visibility, for example, staff standing in hallways during lesson change over time, offered opportunities for informal conversations where staff could demonstrate an interest in individual pupils. Furthermore, both the University of Birmingham School and Nishkam High School have facilitated the opportunity for staff and pupils to eat together at lunchtime, again demonstrating how chances for informal interaction are embedded throughout the school day. One member of the University of Birmingham School teaching staff reflected:

*I think the staff here really go out of their way to make sure children are enjoying their days here and I feel like the school here does so much more for the children than perhaps other schools do and I think that's wonderful. For example, the fact that we eat, I often eat with the children downstairs at lunchtime and you've got a child in year eight sitting opposite you, telling you about how much they like KFC or something, but it's really nice, there's not this kind of separation between pupils and staff that there can be at other schools.*

As a primary school, St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School pupils would spend more intensive periods of time with one teacher and teaching staff frequently highlighted that they felt that the school had generated an atmosphere of trust, a sentiment echoed within the other two schools. This atmosphere was suggested to help staff to be perceived as approachable and enabled pupils to be able to discuss any concerns they may have with staff members.

It was notable that some members of teaching staff who were asked about parental involvement in character education were unable to identify explicit forms of involvement and this may suggest a lack of shared understanding of what is meant by parental involvement in character education. Nevertheless, teaching staff across the three schools referred to the importance of communicating with parents to support pupils to demonstrate positive behaviour, either through informing parents of successes or, alternatively, concerns.



Within both the University of Birmingham School and Nishkam High School, teaching staff frequently referred to the importance of the role of the tutor teacher to facilitate the link between parents and school. Links between the school and pupils' homes were often seen as a way of reinforcing the school's approach to character education. An example of such a link can be seen within St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School where parents were consulted as to what virtues should be prioritised by the school as part of their character education provision. One member of St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School teaching staff noted the benefit of parental involvement:

*Again, you can't always assume that people see things in the same way that we're trying to, you know, push forward with our vision, so I think you have to make it very clear to them, you know, what's going on, what's expected of them and their children really.*

Teaching staff frequently referred to the need to appreciate pupils as individuals and to create a supportive atmosphere in which pupils can express their own individuality; this was also supported by several pupils who referenced that they valued teachers recognising their individual learning needs. Such a finding can be supported by Arthur *et al.* (2006) where the need for quality relationships between teachers and pupils was cited as being of central importance for the development of pupils' characters. This finding has further challenged the common critique of character education that it seeks to condition character rather than foster the development of critical reasoning within pupils (Kristjánsson, 2013: 277). The creation of an environment in which pupils feel comfortable to be themselves could be argued to be the result of positive relationships across the school, in that pupils feel accepted and express multiple facets of their personality. It is theorised that this

environment will then help to maintain positive relationships throughout the school as the cumulative effects of individual pupils being accepted will develop into a broader atmosphere of support. This finding has added further support for the important contribution made by reflection and processes of induction, and the specific focus placed on pupils understanding their actions in relation to others (Berkowitz, 2011: 157), in developing positive relationships within schools.

## 4.2 CHARACTER EDUCATION TAUGHT

### 4.2.1 The Components of Virtue

**The development of virtue literacy, to create a shared language of character development, was noted to be a significant feature of the three schools' approaches to character education.** Each school sought to develop a 'language of character', and action was taken to embed this throughout the school through the use of a variety of methods, including: assemblies; displays; consistent use of virtue language by teachers; and communication with pupils and parents. Although members of the teaching staff did not explicitly refer to virtue literacy as a concept, it was identified that staff and pupils having access to a common language of virtues created a shared framework in which character development could be discussed and could form the basis of explicit, taught elements of character education. Members of teaching staff frequently referred to the importance of virtue literacy, both in terms of understanding what is meant by the virtues (Virtue Knowledge) and perceiving when situations require the demonstration of virtues (Virtue Perception), along with the process of reflecting on the exhibition of an appropriate level of virtue (Virtue Reasoning).

Virtue literacy has been identified to be comprised of a number of different components (Jubilee Centre, 2017a: 8), including Virtue Knowledge and Understanding. This has matched the aim of the Jubilee Centre's *Knightly Virtues* programme, which sought to highlight that virtue language should not be conceived as 'stand-alone' terms, but rather requires broader comprehension in order to root the virtue terms within a wider 'moral discourse' (Arthur *et al.*, 2014a: 10). A shared language has been seen as necessary to discuss the complexity of character education and has demonstrated the practical application of the Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* and the notion that schools need to be able to accentuate character development (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). It has been hypothesised that those who possess virtue literacy, coupled with Virtue Reasoning, are more likely to practise virtues (Jubilee Centre, 2017a), with due regard to the so-called moral gap (Blasi, 1980). This is an

empirical claim that is required to be tested in practice. However, the empirical claim is based on presumed conceptual links between understanding, perception, reasoning and motivation, laid out in a neo-Aristotelian theory of virtue.

The need to consider pupils' perceptions throughout the development of a school's approach to character education can also be linked to the opportunity for schools to evaluate their approach to character education. It is recommended that the evaluation of character education should take a formative approach, in which viewpoints from across the school are fed back into the development of the provision of character education, as identified in the Jubilee Centre's *Character Education: Evaluation Handbook for Schools* (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016: 7).

The following examples were identified by teaching staff at one or more of the three schools as methods intended to embed virtue literacy within lessons:

- The virtues that pupils were expected to demonstrate were identified at the start of the lesson. This was often supported through including a visual reminder of these virtues through their inclusion in the lesson objective.
- As a more reflective approach, pupils were asked to consider how they, or their peers, had demonstrated the virtues throughout the lesson. A 'virtue-spotter' was also appointed to identify the virtues that were being demonstrated throughout the lesson.
- Listing the virtues at the front of exercise books was suggested to provide a point of reference for pupils and to reinforce the language of character. The virtues were also embedded through their use when interacting with pupils, for example when promoting positive interaction between pupils or to encourage continued engagement with a task.
- A diary, or pupil passport, was used to note the virtues which are prioritised by the school. As noted by the two secondary schools, the use of a diary also supported structured reflective activities by offering pupils space to write down their response to stimulus intended to inspire reflection.

It was identified by a limited number of teaching staff that the entrenchment of the language of virtues throughout the school could result in the virtues being perceived as platitudes which are used by pupils to meet staff expectations without any real reflection on their meaning. This could be argued to demonstrate the need to consider virtue literacy holistically.

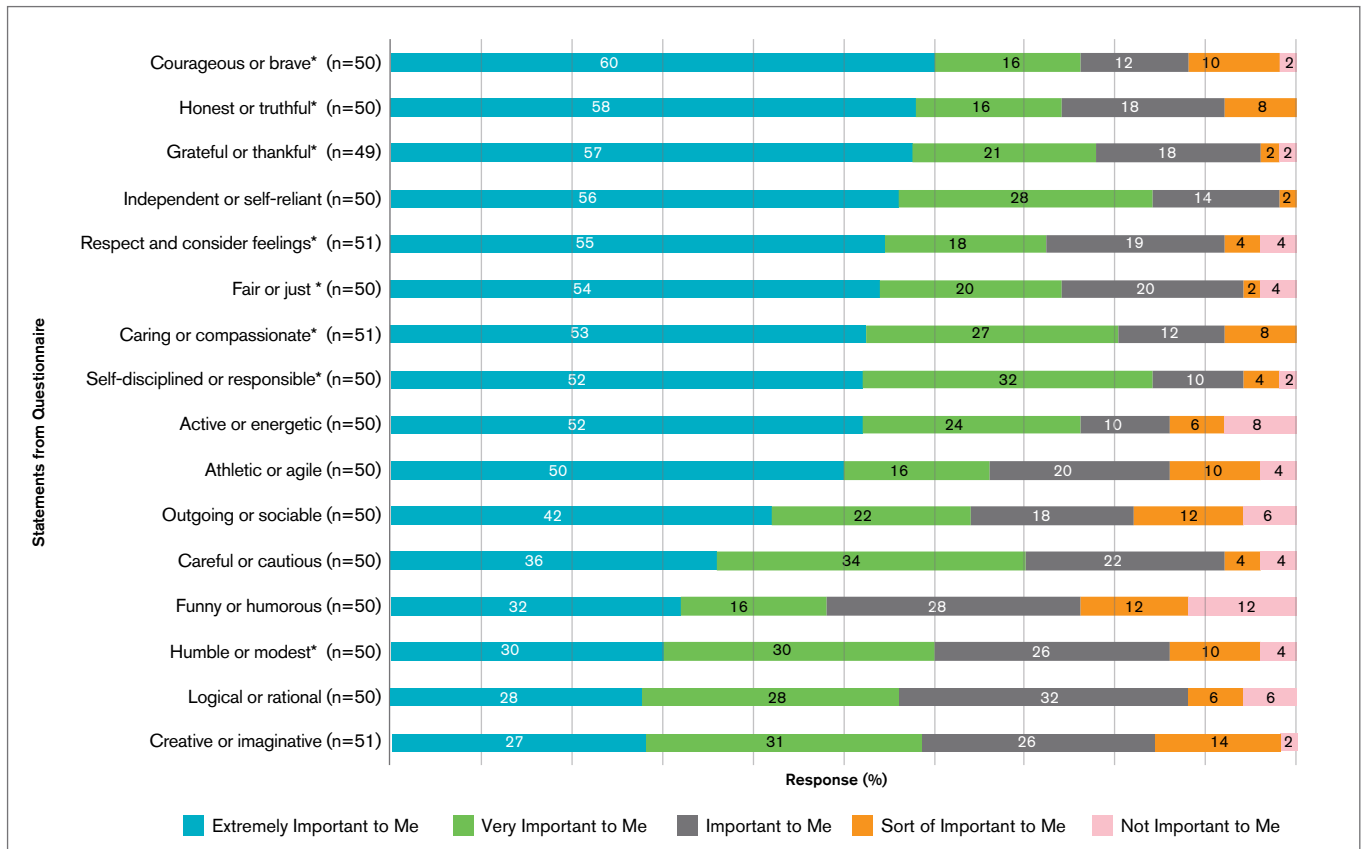
Several teaching staff referred to the difficulty of communicating the abstract concepts of virtues and character to pupils. Teaching staff within St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School reflected on the importance of the accessibility of the language of virtues for primary pupils. Teaching staff at the University of Birmingham School noted that discussions intended to encourage pupils to reflect on the virtues were often contextualised by referring to real-life events or hypothetical scenarios. A small number of teaching staff identified that this was a way in which a commensurate focus on understanding both the definition, and application, of the virtue could be developed and was suggested as a potential way in which to avoid pupils using the virtues as 'buzzwords' and not engaging with the meaning ascribed to the terms.

Some pupils in Year 13 at the University of Birmingham School reflected that they had experienced an initial scepticism towards character education when they started at the sixth form and reflected that they questioned the extent that they needed to develop their character and highlighted their resistance to being told what it meant to be a 'good person', as can be seen in the following quotation from a Year 13 pupil at the school:

*And it was a matter of like when we started last year, because we'd all come from different backgrounds where it wasn't so much of a community and character education, we'd barely heard of it, a lot of us were like, this is, we don't want to be any part of this...*



Chart 5: St. Brigid’s Catholic Primary School Pupils’ Responses to the Question ‘How important is it to you that you are...?’



\* denotes moral virtues, as identified in *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2013a; 2017a)

It was noted by some that these opinions had been reformed through being able to appreciate the benefits of character education to their own life. This pupil perspective demonstrated the need to consider the development of taught character education from the position of those who will be receiving it to ensure it is seen to be relevant to pupils’ experiences.

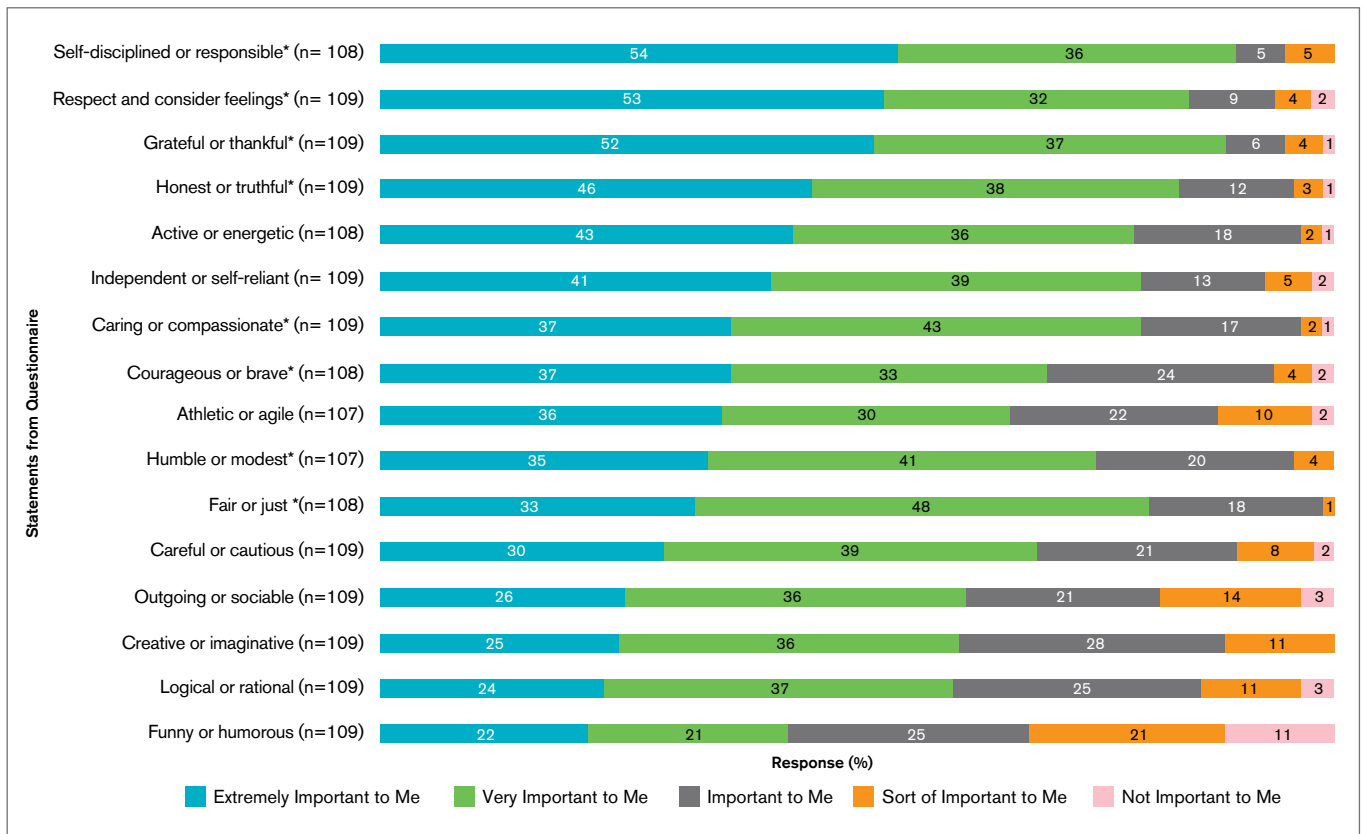
either *extremely* or *very important to them*; and, 90% of Nishkam pupils felt that being self-disciplined or responsible was either *extremely* or *very important* to them. The highest proportion of St. Brigid’s pupils felt that being courageous or brave was either *extremely* or *very important* to them (76%).

Pupils across the three schools were asked the extent to which they believed that various moral and non-moral qualities were important to them. Broadly, a higher proportion of pupils selected that the moral virtues were either *extremely* or *very important* compared to non-moral qualities (as can be seen across Charts 5–7). For example, in the University of Birmingham School 87% of pupils felt that being respectful or considerate to others was

‘EACH OF US, FAMOUS OR INFAMOUS, IS A ROLE MODEL FOR SOMEBODY, AND IF WE AREN’T, WE SHOULD BEHAVE AS THOUGH WE ARE – CHEERFUL, KIND, LOVING, COURTEOUS. BECAUSE YOU CAN BE SURE SOMEONE IS WATCHING AND TAKING DELIBERATE AND DILIGENT NOTES.’  
 Maya Angelou

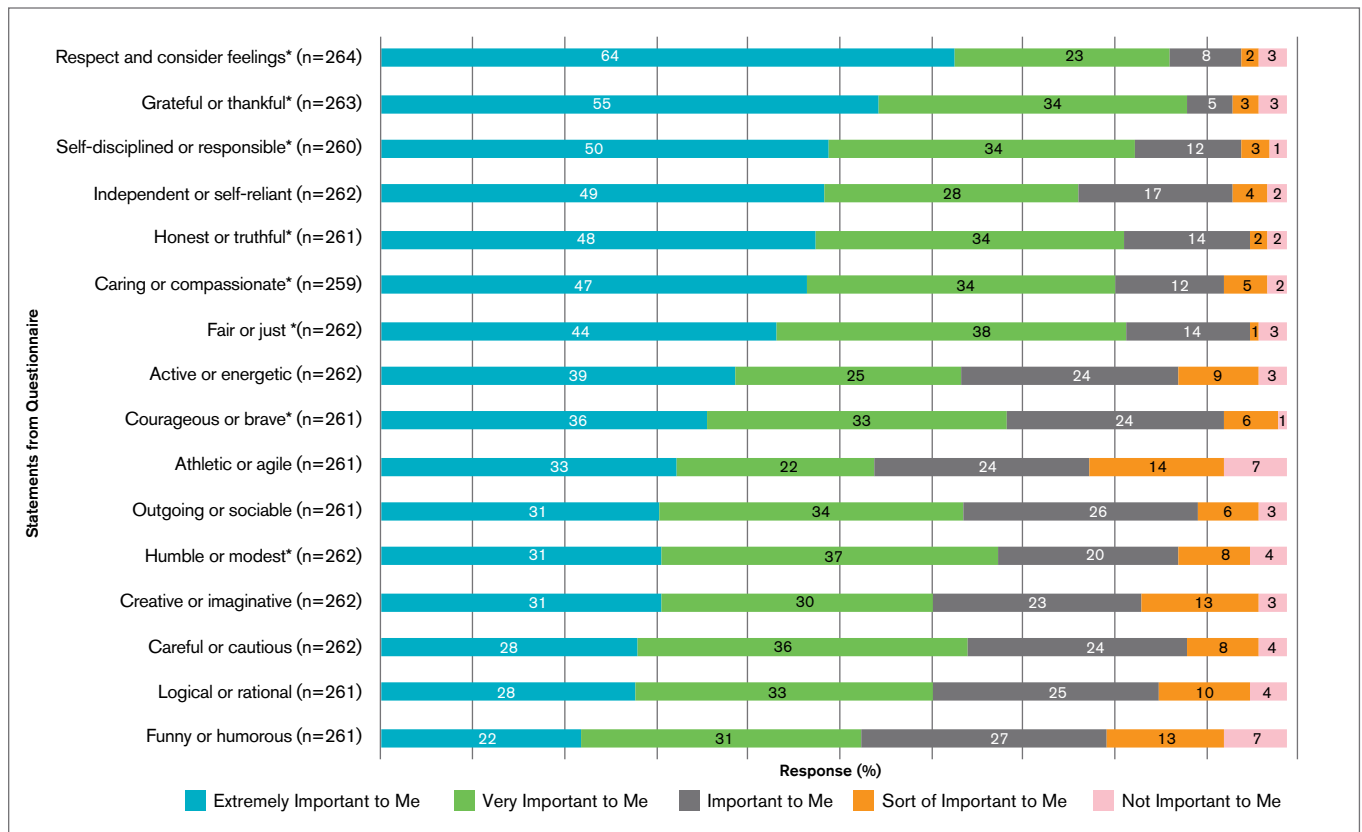


**Chart 6: Nishkam High School Pupils' Responses to the Question 'How important is it to you that you are...?'**



\* denotes moral virtues, as identified in *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2013a; 2017a)

**Chart 7: University of Birmingham School Pupils' Responses to the Question 'How important is it to you that you are...?'**



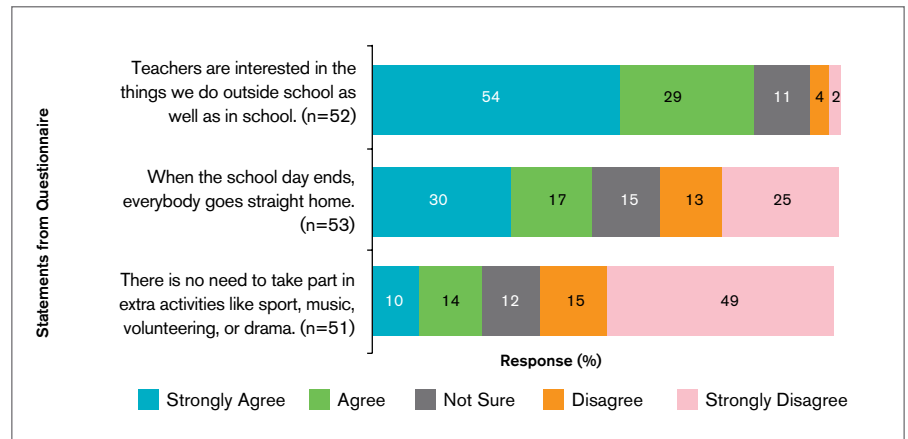
\* denotes moral virtues, as identified in *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2013a; 2017a)

**4.2.2 Character Education in the Classroom, School, and Community**

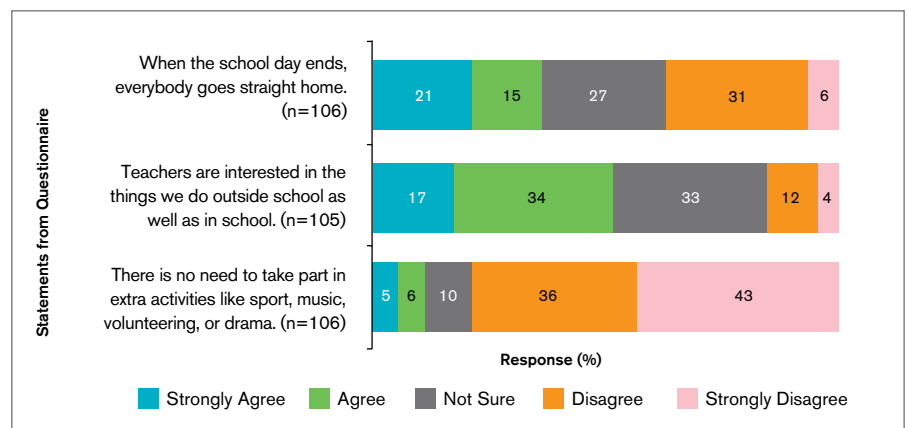
Teaching staff reported that character was *taught* in different areas of school life, both in and outside the classroom. These activities included discrete classes focussed on character education (see Section 4.3.1 for further details) and embedding character education through and in the curriculum (see Section 4.2.1 for further details) and offered the opportunity to develop the components of virtue. Enrichment opportunities offered pupils the chance to practise virtues and supported the development of positive relationships across the school.

Teaching staff and pupils across the schools identified that enrichment opportunities, (sometimes known as co- or extra-curricular) were embedded within the school day. High levels of support for enrichment were communicated by both staff and pupils alike. Pupils also expressed broad appreciation for the range of enrichment activities that they accessed across the three schools and some older pupils reflected that they were unlikely to access such opportunities within other schools. Such sentiments were also expressed when pupils were asked what enrichment would be like within their ideal school (Charts 8, 9 and 10). The majority of pupils across the three schools either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that teachers would be interested in what pupils do outside, as well as inside, the school. Furthermore, a high proportion of pupils also suggested that they strongly disagreed that within their ideal school there was no need to take part in extra activities and this perhaps indicated further that pupils have broadly positive experiences of enrichment. The data demonstrated more mixed results when pupils were asked whether, in the pupils' ideal school, everyone goes straight home at the end of the school day. As Nishkam High School and the University of Birmingham School have an extended school day, it may be that some pupils interpreted the question as referring to the need to stay later than the already extended day at school, rather than a wider comment on the provision of enrichment activities.

**Chart 8: St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School Pupils' Perceptions of Enrichment**

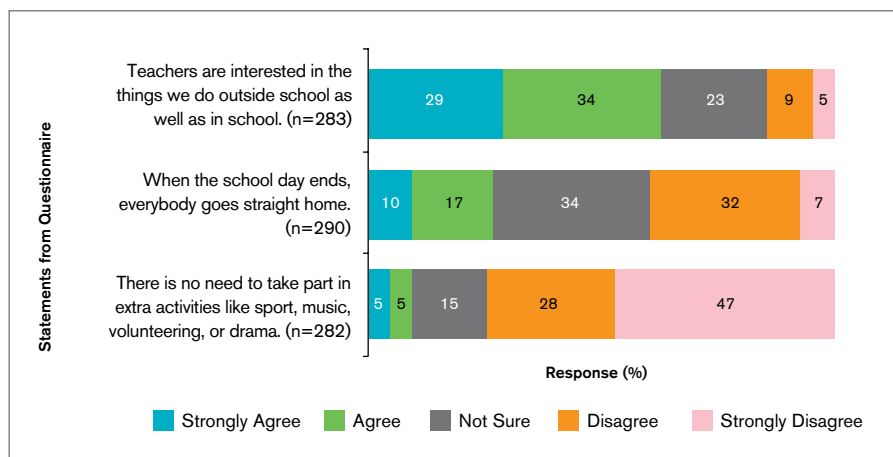


**Chart 9: Nishkam High School Pupils' Perceptions of Enrichment**



**‘CHARACTER IS LIKE A TREE AND REPUTATION ITS SHADOW. THE SHADOW IS WHAT WE THINK IT IS AND THE TREE IS THE REAL THING.’**  
**Abraham Lincoln**

Chart 10: University of Birmingham School Pupils' Perceptions of Enrichment



Across the schools, teaching staff either reflected that there was often little explicit reference to virtues when interacting with pupils during enrichment activities, or did not mention enrichment as an opportunity to develop pupils' virtue literacy. While it was suggested that explicit references to virtues were not made when running enrichment activities, the benefits of enrichment were often referred to in terms of the opportunities the activities provided for pupils to broaden their scope of experience. For example, one member of staff at St. Brigid's commented:

*They need to be able to practise them and they need to be able to use that language in their everyday life I think.*

Furthermore, some teaching staff and pupils acknowledged that enrichment gave pupils the chance to practise their virtues in a different setting to the classroom. As one Nishkam High School Year 13 pupil stated:

*...you kind of think about it outside the school environment and you're like, okay, maybe I should start trying that, and so you do things differently outside of school as a test trial and then you're like, okay, this is alright, I'm going to keep doing this.*

In particular, University of Birmingham School teaching staff regularly reflected that enrichment facilitated the development of positive relationships between staff and pupils through the chance to explore a shared interest.

In terms of links with the wider community, the University of Birmingham School was identified to hold a distinct position because of its close links with the University of Birmingham. Teaching staff who reflected on the links with the University frequently referred to the use of resources and access to facilities, along with training developed by the Jubilee Centre to support character education.

Those members of teaching staff who discussed social action commonly referred to it as offering a way in which to promote greater social awareness amongst pupils. In particular, some teaching staff acknowledged that these activities helped to increase pupils' knowledge of the local area, especially those pupils who have a longer commute to school. When asked about how virtues were embedded within the school day, teaching staff and pupils at Nishkam High School frequently referred to the Sikh principle of *sewa*, or selfless service for others, and how character education can be embedded outside the classroom. As one member of the Nishkam High School teaching staff reflected:

*I think I'd probably go back to when I first started and what I was overwhelmed by was serving and that the children serve each other and the respectfulness that goes with that and that its expectation is that... we're reliant on each other and it shows respect because at some stage, every child has the opportunity to do serving duty...*

Within St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School, social action was frequently referenced in connection to the Church. For example, it was identified that fundraising activities were usually targeted towards Catholic charities and that pupils had helped to run coffee mornings for local parishioners. One member of the teaching staff at St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School made the following comments when discussing the benefits of developing character in the local community:

*I think it gives them better realisation of what's going on out there, how they can help others, you know, promotes their self-esteem, confidence, yeah, greater awareness of what's going on around them, yeah, in their community.*

At the University of Birmingham School, it was noted that youth social action often took place as part of enrichment activities, with some pupils reporting that they spent an extended enrichment period outside of the school, working within the local community. One example is the 'Thank Chew' café – where the pupils cook a meal to say thank you to a member of their community.

Across the schools, activities to develop pupils' characters in different areas of the school were highlighted. Classroom approaches which explicitly focus on the virtues, either through a discrete session, or through embedding virtues throughout subjects, as identified by both Harrison, Bawden and Rogerson (2016) and Wright, Morris and Bawden (2014), were perceived to contribute to the development of the components of virtue literacy: Virtue Perception; Virtue Knowledge and Understanding; and Virtue Reasoning (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). The development of this literacy then helped to develop a shared language, which was used to discuss character development.

Learning outside the classroom has been suggested to be a way in which pupils can be offered an opportunity to reflect on their virtues through both formal and informal means (Arthur *et al.*, 2017; Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016). In particular, Harrison, Morris and Ryan (2016: 134-5) discuss the role played by those who run activities outside the classroom to act as character coaches whereby conversations are held on an individual basis with pupils to encourage the pupil to think about their experiences. Youth social action was identified as a further chance to learn outside of the classroom and all three schools discussed particular examples of youth social action in which their pupils had the opportunity to participate. In particular the 'double benefit' (Jubilee Centre, 2014) of social action was recognised; pupils contributing to their school's local community as well as building their character.

### 4.3 CHARACTER SOUGHT

#### 4.3.1 Critical Reflection and Autonomous Virtue Reasoning

**The two secondary schools in particular encouraged their pupils to seek out opportunities to develop their own character; to help the pupils understand that the virtues are intrinsic to individual and societal flourishing. This involved punctuating the school day with opportunities for the pupils to critically reflect on who they are and who they want to become.**

Interviews with teaching staff at each of the two secondary schools demonstrated the importance placed on encouraging pupils to reflect on their virtues and character through incorporating dedicated time during the school day to facilitate reflective activity. This approach was seen as central to pupils seeking to develop their own character and decision-making becoming more autonomous and intrinsic. At the University of Birmingham School, teaching staff were supportive of the extended form time at the start of the day, known as Personal Learning and Development (PLAD); here pupils received a planned and structured character education programme at least once a week. These discrete sessions focussed on explicit character education and could include guided discussions, or reflection,

on particular themes or the virtues of focus. At Nishkam High School, reference was made to protected parts of the day that focussed on facilitating pupil reflection. The school was noted to benefit from a reflective space where, every other day, pupils listen to multi-faith prayers. In addition to this, there was also a reflection at the end of each day whereby pupils undertake a pre-determined and planned reflective activity. The role of reflection in supporting pupils to pursue the development of their character can be seen in the following quotation from a Year 13 pupil at Nishkam High School:

*I think that's the whole point of reflection, 'cause I don't think anyone can tell you what you can do to be a good person, I think it has to come from your own person...*

At the University of Birmingham School, the visibility of the virtues was enhanced by the use of planners that gave space for pupils to write down the virtues in focus, along with space to reflect on how they have demonstrated the virtues throughout the course of a day. An emphasis on supporting pupils to understand their behaviour through encouraging reflection was also identified as an approach by teaching staff at the University of Birmingham School. For example, detentions were referred to as a period of reflection in which pupils were asked questions in order to encourage them to consider and explain their actions. Teaching staff suggested that these approaches allowed staff to resolve the incident while also offering pupils the opportunity to reflect on their version of events, and to consider how others could have perceived their actions. It was suggested that a benefit of this approach was that it ensured that pupils understood why they had been sanctioned, something identified by teaching staff as increasing the effectiveness of disciplinary approaches.

Although there was broad agreement that the effects of developing components of virtue literacy progressed pupils to demonstrate greater self-awareness of how their behaviour affects both themselves and other people, teaching staff identified that such awareness and reflection did not always translate into virtuous behaviour. While this fact was mostly explained as children exhibiting behaviour that would normally be expected of children their age, the importance of ensuring that pupils

actively reflected in depth on their actions (and how these have demonstrated the virtues) to secure sustained engagement with taught character education was also referenced.

The Ad-ICM measure was designed to identify pupils' judgement of the best course of action when faced with a dilemma and could be suggestive of the autonomous Virtue Reasoning required in order for an individual to progress to seek out opportunities to pursue their character development (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). Typically, items identified as inappropriate tended to prioritise self-interest and narrow conceptions of the situations.

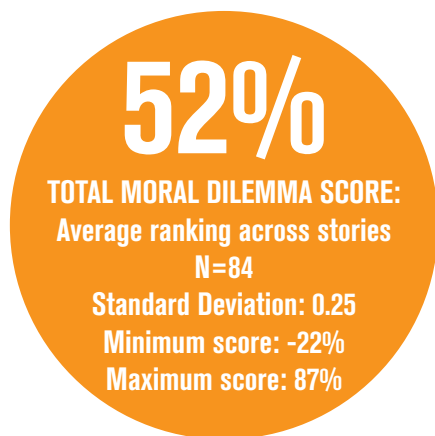
Year 7 and 12 pupils from both the University of Birmingham School and Nishkam High School completed the Ad-ICM test (the test was not deemed age-appropriate for the St. Brigid's pupils). On average, pupils at the University of Birmingham School had a 49% (n=197) match with the expert panel who contributed to the scoring of the Ad-ICM (Chart 11) and for Nishkam High School (Chart 12) this result stood, on average at 52% (n=84) agreement with the expert panel. These overall scores were higher than that seen in the *Character Education in UK Schools* study (43%), which was achieved by Year 10 pupils across a range of schools (Arthur, *et al.*, 2015b) and suggests that, on average, pupils in these two schools selected action and justification choices that were a better match to the expert panel. As noted by Kristjánsson (2015: chap. 3), the Ad-ICM has been considered a measure of moral thinking and is described as 'a *roundabout* way to access *some* information about moral functioning' (Kristjánsson, 2015: 75). In this regard, the Ad-ICM is indicative of the cognitive component of moral functioning, in other words, pupils' judgement of what is the best course of action.

When the University of Birmingham School data was split according to school year, it can be seen that Year 12 pupils achieved a higher average score (54%, n=118) than Year 7 pupils (40%, n=79). This may be due to the differences in the age of the two groups and so may reflect older pupils' enhanced ability to identify the best course of action when faced with a moral dilemma and has echoed the findings of a previous study which has

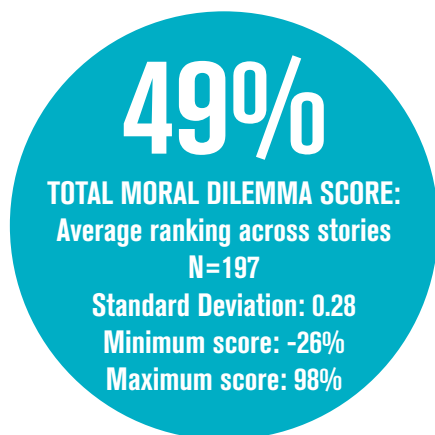


indicated that different Ad-ICM scores are achieved according to age educational groups across high school years (Thoma, Derryberry and Crowson, 2013: 247-9). Although the overall average Ad-ICM score within each school was higher than that identified in the *Character Education in UK Schools* study, within the study presented here the Ad-ICM was administered at the start of the school year, when Year 7 pupils at Nishkam High School and both Year 7 and Year 12 pupils at the University of Birmingham School had just started at the school. This would have limited the exposure to the school's character education provision. It is necessary to consider this context when drawing comparisons with the *Character Education in UK Schools* study due to differences in prior exposure to character education programmes within each school.

**Chart 11: Ad-ICM Nishkam High School Years 7 and 12**



**Chart 12: Ad-ICM: University of Birmingham School Years 7 and 12**



The identification from teachers that reflection has supported pupils to understand their own, and others', display of virtues suggests support for the findings of the Centre's *My Character* study (Arthur *et al.*, 2014b: 21), whereby it was concluded that structured reflection benefited pupils and allowed them to consider who they are, alongside their aspirations. The identification from some pupils that they have applied processes of reflection to consider their behaviour outside of a school context could be said to demonstrate how embedding reflection throughout the school day can support pupils to become autonomous in their Virtue Reasoning and can lead to pupils actively seeking to demonstrate virtuous behaviour, termed as character sought. Consequently, a focus on the development of pupils' Virtue Reasoning, and the critical reflection it entails, challenges previous criticisms of character education that it seeks to constrain individuals by forcing them to comply with expected forms of behaviour, as identified in *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2017a). The connection between reflection and Virtue Reasoning is at the centre of how taught and caught approaches to character education reinforce one another (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016: 60).

#### 4.4 OVERALL FINDINGS

The overall findings from this study are summarised below.

- All three schools reported that *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* as published in 2013 had influenced and informed a school approach to character education.
- Each school demonstrated a vision for character education that had been developed in response to the particular context in which it operates. This vision was implemented, in each school, through intentional and careful planning.
- Staff outwardly 'bought into' and supported the school's vision for character education and this consistency between vision and action reinforced pupils' engagement with character education. Staff recognised that they are character 'educators' and 'role models'.

- Character education was seen to be both caught and taught in all three schools, and active steps were taken by school staff to help ensure that good character was also sought by the pupils – particularly in the secondary schools.
- Character education supported the development and maintenance of positive relationships within and across the schools – but also depended on them.
- The cultivation of virtue literacy was seen to provide a framework of shared language and was deemed necessary for character development in staff and pupils.
- Pupils in all three schools prioritised moral over performance virtues.
- Building in reflection time throughout the school day facilitated character development – encouraging pupils to seek opportunities to develop their own character.
- Pupils at the University of Birmingham School (49%) and Nishkam High School (52%) achieved a higher Ad-ICM average score for the moral dilemma tests than that seen in the previous *Character Education in UK Schools* study of 31 schools (43% average).

The findings from the present research have provided evidence that has informed the Centre's revised *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (see Appendix 2).

# 5 Recommendations

In light of the findings, this section makes recommendations that are intended to support schools to implement, or further develop, their approach to character education. Central to this study was the idea that schools operate within their own specific context, which needs to be taken into account when developing an approach to character education. Consequently, these recommendations are intended to reflect on the experiences of the three case study schools and provide suggested broad areas that schools and other organisations may wish to consider when looking to develop their approach to character education.

## Recommendations for educators

- In developing a vision for character education, and related activities, schools, and other interested organisations, should be aware of how each activity relating to character education will enhance the development of the components of virtue literacy, defined as: Virtue Perception; Virtue Knowledge and Understanding; and Virtue Reasoning. The Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2017a) explores the components of virtue in greater detail.
- Character education should aim to enable pupils to demonstrate practical wisdom and seek opportunities to act virtuously. This behaviour is facilitated by autonomous Virtue Reasoning and requires the pupil to think independently and reflectively. Consequently, character education should seek to develop the intellectual virtue of critical thinking, and this can be facilitated through embedding pupil reflection within character education.
- Schools should consider the self-evaluation of their character education provision, with reference to the Jubilee Centre's *Character Education: Evaluation Handbook for Schools* (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016).

## Recommendations for future research

- Larger scale studies, as well as trials of specific interventions, should be undertaken which aim to explore further the transition from virtue literacy to Virtue Action and Practice.
- The contribution that character education makes to school outcomes, such as increased employability, increased positive behaviour, and improved attainment, requires further investigation.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Background to the Schools

The schools included in this case study were purposefully sampled and a brief description of each of the schools has been provided to give a sense of the context in which each operates.

### University of Birmingham School

The University of Birmingham School opened in September 2015 and is a University Training School, meaning that trainee teachers have the opportunity to work alongside experienced teachers (University of Birmingham School, n.d.c). Close links with the University of Birmingham have allowed the school to access world-class resources, along with supporting research into teaching and learning strategies (University of Birmingham School, 2016). Based in Selly Oak, the school has been opened to children of all abilities and has an academically selective sixth form. There were 150 pupils in Year 7 when this project commenced. Each year 150 pupils will join Year 7 until the school reaches its full capacity of 1,150 pupils by 2020 (University of Birmingham School, n.d.b). The school's admission policy has set it apart from other schools as pupils are recruited according to four 'nodal points' that have been used to measure the distance between the 'node' and applicants' addresses. Consequently, the pupil population were from a variety of different locations within the local area (University of Birmingham School, n.d.a) and pupils in the sixth form have travelled in from across the city to study. The University of Birmingham School was the first secondary University Training School; aspects of character education were identified to be influenced by close links with the University of Birmingham and the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. This relationship has provided an additional facet to the study of how character education has been implemented.

### St Brigid's Catholic Primary School

St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School is based in Northfield, an area of South Birmingham. The area served has a high proportion of children experiencing social deprivation. Approximately, 76% of the school's pupils identified as Catholic. Data from the school's 2013 Ofsted report showed that the proportion of pupils who received pupil premium broadly matched the national average and the proportion of pupils who were in receipt of, as then, a statement of educational needs was above average levels (Ofsted, 2013). The proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic background was also noted to be above the national average; however the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language was similar to the national level (Ofsted, 2013). The school was judged to be a 'good' school when it was last inspected in 2013. The centrality of the Catholic faith to St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School has meant there was a greater focus placed on the role of religion as a basis for character education and this has provided an interesting dimension in which to study character education.

### Nishkam High School

Opening in September 2012, Nishkam High School is a four-form entry Free School and is part of Nishkam School Trust, a multi-academy trust. The school has identified itself as a Sikh ethos, multi-faith secondary school and has provided both secondary education and a sixth form for girls and boys aged between 11 to 19 years. Nishkam High School has promoted a view in which children 'learn from faith, as well as about faith', as such, faith has permeated the school week and has not been confined to religious education lessons (Nishkam School Trust, n.d.: 8).

As of June 2015, the school has approximately 300 pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 and has a further 36 pupils in the sixth form.

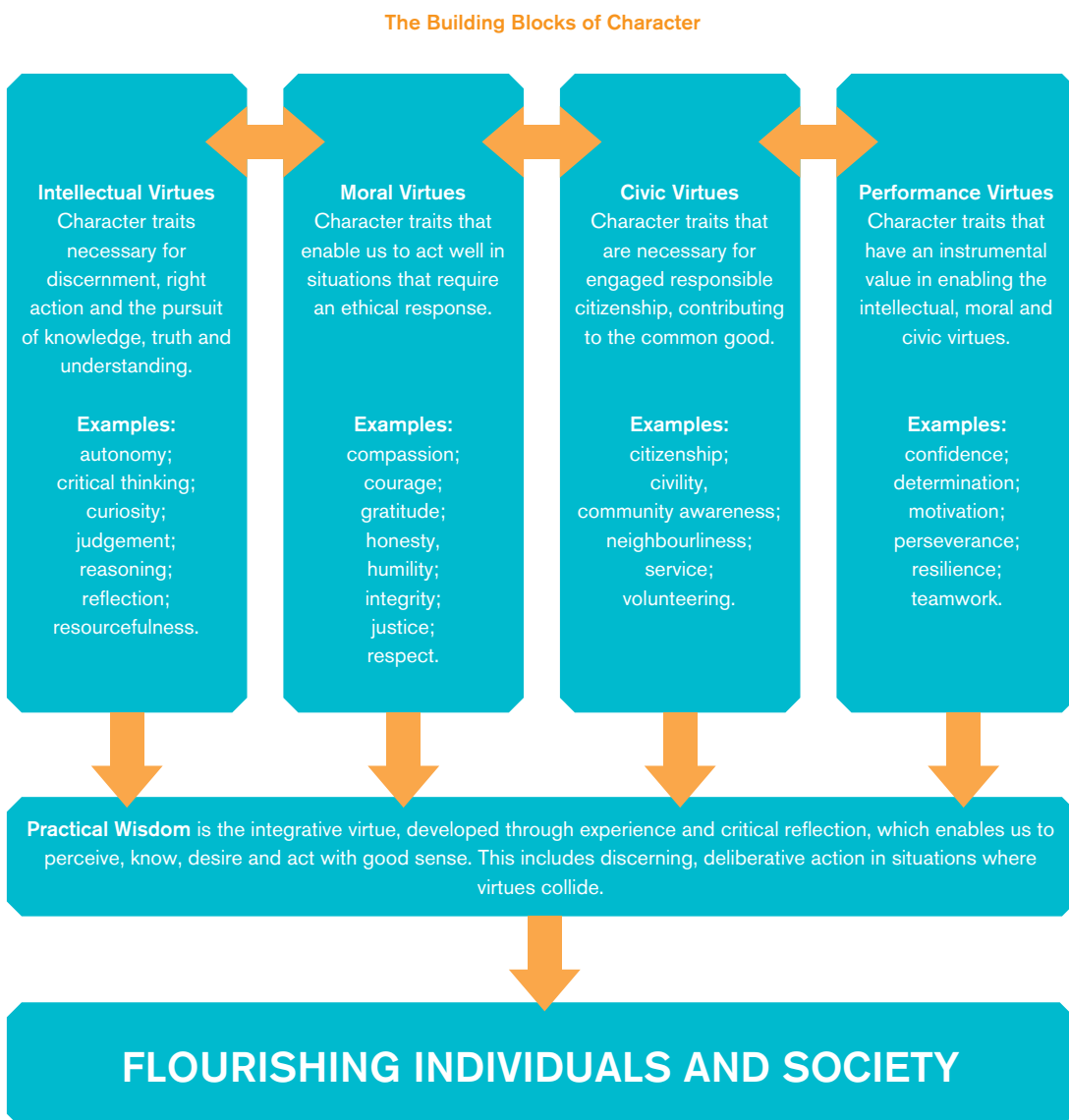
Approximately four-fifths of pupils are from Sikh background and approximately one-eighth of the intake identified as Amritdhari, or formally baptised, Sikhs (Nishkam High School, 2015). Around half of the school's places were open to non-Sikh families and pupils have also been drawn from the Christian, Muslim, Hindu faiths, as well as those that identify as being of no faith.

An above average proportion of the pupil population have been identified to speak English as an additional language and there was a lower than average proportion of pupils who received the pupil premium or have special educational needs (Nishkam High School, 2015). The school achieved around the national average in terms of A-level results and was judged by Ofsted to be outstanding in 2014 (Ofsted, 2014). In addition, the sixth form was also assessed to be outstanding with particular recognition of the support available for more able pupils. As a multi-faith, Sikh ethos school, Nishkam High School's character education, similar to St. Brigid's Catholic Primary School, was rooted in religion. In particular, the multi-faith nature of the school has provided this study with an additional dimension.

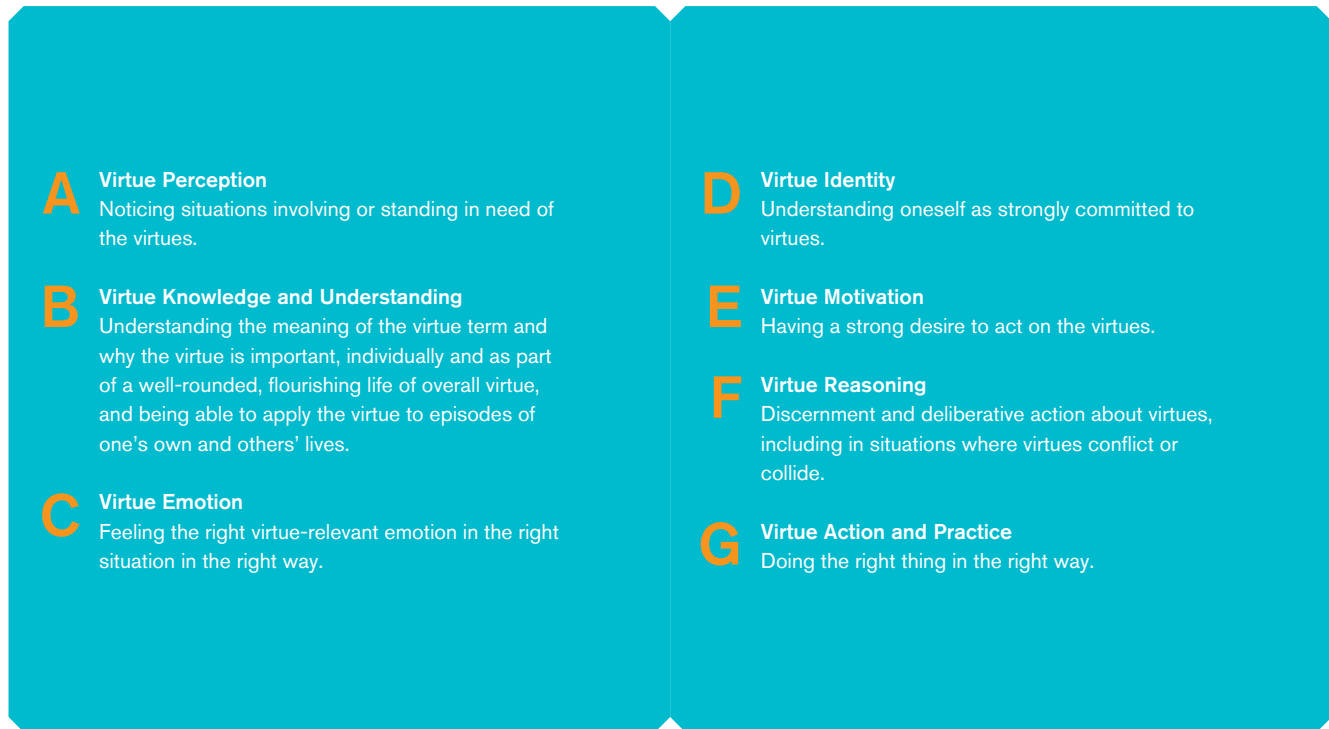
## Appendix 2: A Framework for Character Education in Schools

Extracts from the Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2017a) have been reproduced below. For more information about the *Framework*, or to read it in full, please visit this link: <http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf>

Figure 1: Reproduced from the Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2017: 5)





**Figure 2: Components of Virtue**Reproduced from the Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2017a: 5–8)

While the perfect unity of the virtues is an admirable aim for the life-long cultivation of character, most of us will never reach that ideal. This is especially true for young moral learners who are on the way to becoming more virtuous. To complicate matters further, each virtue does not constitute a single discrete trait that one either has or has not. Rather, each virtue comprises various components that may not all develop in tandem. The major components

are listed and defined in the Components of Virtue table. A student can be strong on one (say, with Virtue Emotion) but weaker on another (say, Virtue Action and Practice). Rarely will all those components align in perfect harmony in a single person. Different strategies and interventions in the field of character education target different components and require different methods of evaluating effectiveness. The more of those components

that have been cultivated successfully, the more likely it is that the student can master the whole virtue. Character educators need not, therefore, feel disheartened even if they only see progress in some components of virtue at any particular time in the educational process.

# Research Team

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Professor James Arthur is Director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham and Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Staffing. He is Chair of the Society for Educational Studies, and was Head of the School of Education 2010–2015.

## **TOM HARRISON** **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

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Dr. Tom Harrison is Director of Education at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, leading on all the development projects, enabling the Centre's work to be transformative. Tom is Director of the MA in Character Education at the University of Birmingham.

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Emily Burn is a Research Associate in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. Emily has an MA in Research Methods in Politics and International Relations, and a BA in Politics and International Relations from the University of Sheffield.

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