

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



THE JUBILEE CENTRE  
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

# EMBEDDING CIVIC CHARACTER IN SCHOOLS: A PRACTICAL RESOURCE

Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues  
University of Birmingham

[www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk)



# JUBILEE CENTRE FOR CHARACTER AND VIRTUES

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

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

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

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*University of Birmingham 2023*



# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

*Schools of Civic Character: A Practical Resource* aims to support school leaders, teachers, governors and other interested stakeholders to educate all pupils for good citizenship. The Resource builds on the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues' recent research on *Civic Virtues Through Service to Others* <sup>[1]</sup>, identifying key practices and approaches taken by the schools who participated in the study. Throughout the Resource, extracts from interview data from school leaders collected through the project are included to provide a sense of schools' work in embedding civic character.

In addition, the Resource incorporates core elements of two foundational Centre resources - *The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2022) and *The Character Teaching Inventory* developed as part of the Centre's *Teaching Character Education: What Works Research Report* (Arthur, Fullard and O'Leary, 2022). The Resource is informed further by a two-day consultation on *Embedding Civic Character in Schools* conducted by the Centre held at St. George's House, Windsor and the *Statement* that was produced as a result (Jubilee Centre, 2023).

The Resource starts from the following two important premises:

First, that being a school of civic character must develop from the foundations of an

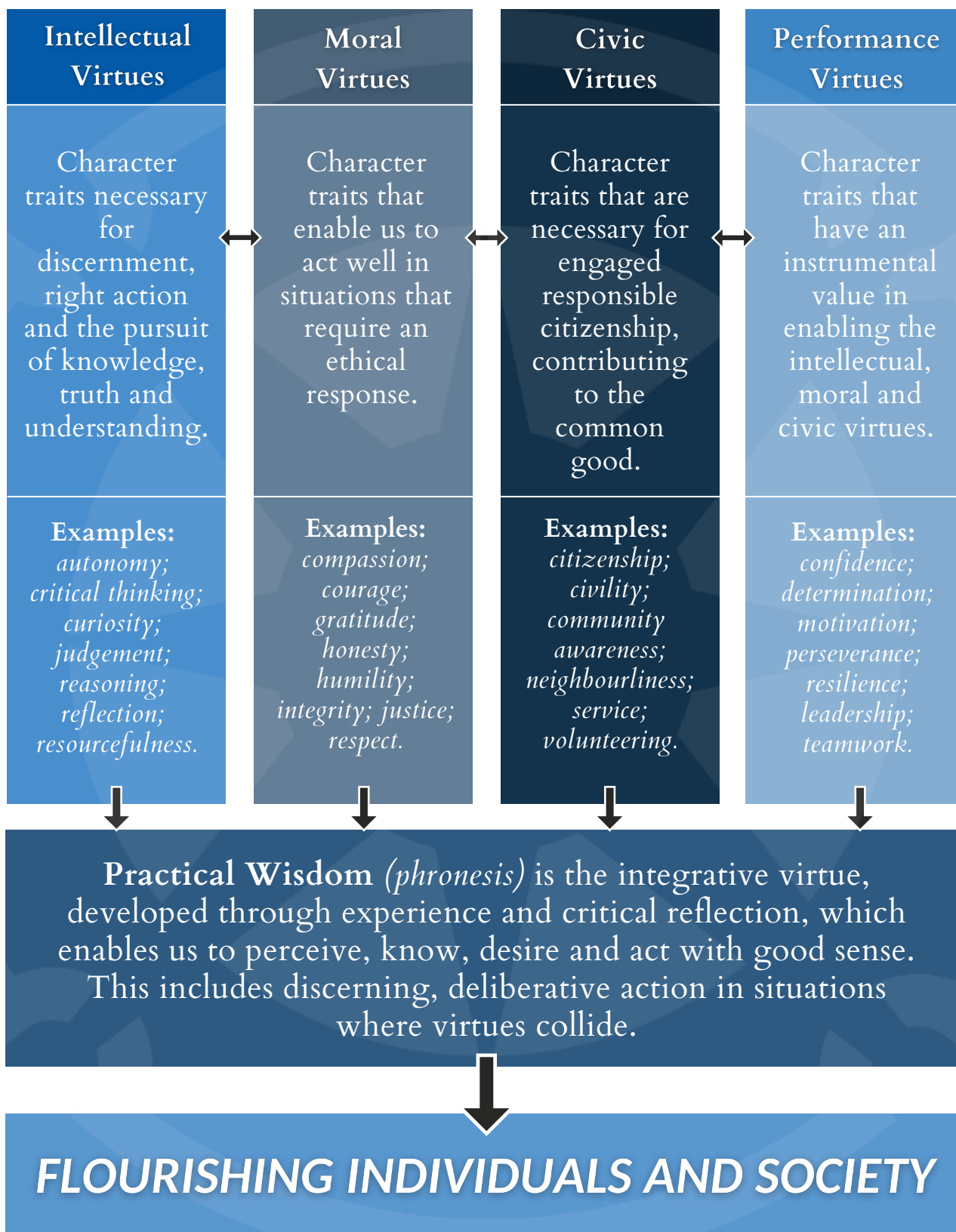
intentional and embedded approach to character education more widely.

A main finding of *Schools, Civic Virtues and the Good Citizen* (Peterson and Civil, 2022) was that educating civic character must start from and interrelate with the development of moral, intellectual and performance virtues - as set out in the Jubilee Centre's *Building Blocks of Character* (see next page). The aforementioned report found that teachers and pupils in primary and secondary schools identified moral virtues (principally justice, honesty, integrity and compassion) as being of particular importance for being a good citizen, alongside civic virtue.

Second, that being a school of civic character requires an intentional approach that includes an explicit language of character, including of civic virtues, that is used and is meaningful to the distinctive nature of the school community. As with character education more widely, there is no single blueprint for being a school of civic character. Each school, working with their communities, must tailor the general principles set out in this guide to reflect their own contexts and commitments.

[1] [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/2934/projects/civic-virtues-through-service-to-others](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/2934/projects/civic-virtues-through-service-to-others)

# THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF CHARACTER





# DEFINITIONS

## What are character and character education?

The *Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2022: 7) provides the following definitions of character and character education, and these definitions underpin the approach to civic character taken in this resource:

**Character** is a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation, and guide conduct.

**Character education** includes all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people to develop positive personal strengths called virtues.

In fundamental terms, 'character education teaches the acquisition and strengthening of virtues: the traits that sustain a well-rounded life and a thriving society. Schools should aim to develop confident and compassionate pupils, who are effective contributors to society, successful learners, and responsible citizens' (2022: 6).

As the Framework also makes clear, though the aims, goals and content of character education involve more than civic character, all good character education should pay appropriate and due attention to the virtues required to be a good citizen given that the 'ultimate goal of all proper character education is to equip pupils with the intellectual tools to make wise choices of their own within the framework of a democratic society' (2022: 7). In other words, a well-rounded character education will include an intentional and planned approach to embedding civic character.

“ Character is about developing our young people and is about developing desirable qualities that can contribute to being good citizens and a flourishing society. It is part of our culture and is part of our community.

Secondary School Lead

”

## What does it mean for a school of character to embed “civic character”?

All schools in liberal democracies have a responsibility to educate children and young people for informed, active and morally responsible citizenship and to develop a commitment to the common good - in other words, to be good citizens and to think beyond oneself and one's immediate interests and connections to take account of what is in the common interest of one's community and society. This civic task has been a longstanding aim of education and schooling in many countries, yet there remains inconsistency about how schools understand and approach the task.

Embedding civic character can be defined as placing the virtues needed for informed, active and morally responsible citizenship at the heart of the schools' wider character provision - including its ethos, culture and community. Schools in which civic character is embedded cultivate in all pupils particular civic virtues, but it is also clear that other categories of virtue - intellectual, moral and performance - are necessary for being and becoming good citizens. Such a school will have a clear vocabulary of character, and will ensure adaptations are made which provide all pupils with a range of opportunities to engage in the civic life of the school as well as in the civic lives of their communities. A school of civic character adopts a caught, taught and sought approach, enabling all pupils to learn about being a good citizen, to take action on matters of importance to themselves and others, and to come together with others to serve communities and to develop a commitment to the common good.

As the recently published *Statement on Embedding Civic Character in Schools* (2023: 2) - which drew out of a consultation involving school leaders, teachers, leaders from community organisations and researchers - makes clear 'social and political associations are needed if humans are to form and express virtue and, ultimately, are to flourish given that the good life is realised at least in part through our attachments to others'. As the Statement makes clear 'the opportunity and experiences needed to form and express civic character is an entitlement that all pupils deserve and need'.

## What are civic virtues?

Civic virtues are positive and stable character traits that enable citizens to participate in the public life of their communities, whether locally, nationally or globally. In a democracy, civic virtues help citizens to get along with others and enable effective participation in the various institutions and organisations of political and civil society that comprise the public domain. The formation and expression of civic virtues in pursuit of the common good are vital for individual and societal flourishing. Important civic virtues include civility, tolerance, service to others, volunteering, community awareness and neighbourliness.

Civic virtues are connected to the other categories of virtue, most notably depending and building upon the moral virtues. Other virtues which play an important role in being a good citizen include: the moral virtues of honesty, justice, compassion and gratitude, the intellectual virtues of judgement and reasoning, reflection and curiosity, and the performance virtues of motivation and determination. Such virtues play a pivotal role in preventing vulnerable members of our communities from becoming further marginalised, as well as in helping to challenge injustices. Some important civic virtues are:

## What is a good citizen?

Being a good citizen involves more than obeying laws, following rules and periodic voting in public elections. To be a good citizen is to play an active, informed and morally responsible role in the civic lives of the communities in which one lives and requires a concern for the common good of those communities. For children and young people this includes playing an active part in the civic life of their school and engaging in critical discussion and reflection about what it means to be a good citizen. This idea of being a good citizen rests on the idea that citizenship is a participatory endeavour exercised together with others and which is fostered through associations built on trust, belonging, understanding, dialogue and shared commitment to others.

“ I believe a good person and a good citizen are the same in the sense that they have a strong moral compass, stands up for what is ‘right’, and look after others as well as themselves. ”

Secondary School Teacher

<b>Civility</b>	Being polite and respectful in acting and speaking with others, appreciating differences in relation to experiences, cultures and characteristics, including when discussing matters on which people disagree
<b>Community Awareness</b>	Learning about the community, understanding the strengths and needs of the community, sharing information with and about the community and ensuring access to all members of the community
<b>Neighbourliness</b>	Being friendly, helpful and taking care of others in the local neighbourhood
<b>Service</b>	Serve other people, groups or organisations through social action, taking into account their needs and interests
<b>Tolerance</b>	Living alongside and appreciating others who hold views with which one disagrees.
<b>Volunteering</b>	Giving time willingly and freely to help others for the good of others and the community

# A 'CAUGHT, TAUGHT AND SOUGHT' APPROACH TO EMBEDDING CIVIC CHARACTER IN SCHOOLS

Just as with character education more generally, schools that embed civic character in schools will employ a range of pedagogical processes, strategies, interventions and relationships that serve to develop civic character. One way of categorising these is through the 'caught, taught and sought' typology originally set out in *The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2022: 12) and which states that 'Character virtues can be:

- **CAUGHT...** through a positive school community, formational relationships, and a clear ethos.
- **TAUGHT...** through the curriculum using teaching and learning strategies, activities and resources.
- **SOUGHT...** through chosen experiences that occur within and outside of the formal curriculum.

“

I don't think moral virtues can exist without civic virtues and I don't think civic virtues can exist without moral virtues.

Secondary School Lead

”

The tables on the following pages draw on the Jubilee Centre's *The Character Teaching Inventory* to set out a variety of teaching strategies through which schools do and can embed civic character as part of a caught, taught and sought approach. Crucially, while the typology separates the teaching strategies into three areas, it should be remembered that a number of the strategies possess aspects that combine elements of caught, taught and/or sought. In addition, and as stated previously, the embedding of civic character in a school should be built on the foundations of a wider commitment to character education.

A caught, taught and sought approach to civic character enables schools to develop a cohesive and consistent approach throughout the school, including the development of the language and vocabulary necessary for pupils to understand and reflect critically on the virtues involved. Through a caught, taught and sought approach, all members of the school community (most importantly pupils) are able to 'join the dots' between the various elements of their education that contribute to the development of civic character.

# CIVIC CHARACTER CAUGHT

<p><b>Definition</b></p>	<p>Civic character can be caught through a positive school community, formational relationships and a clear ethos</p>
<p><b>Description</b></p>	<p>Civic virtues are embedded within and throughout the schools': physical/learning environment; distinctive vision, ethos and culture; and positive relationships between staff, pupils and the wider school community.</p>
<p><b>Example actions with illustrative extracts from school leaders</b></p>	<p><b>PHYSICAL/LEARNING ENVIRONMENT</b></p> <p>A collaborative, supportive and aspirational physical/learning environment that reflects the distinctive community of the school and which strikes a balance between academic progress and the development of civic character.</p> <p>'A school of civic character is one where the young people in the school [are] able to talk beyond their examination results. There's a wider context in terms of how they're speaking. We have to get our young people to really buy into this sense of they've got a place, and they have a voice to be able to advocate.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Secondary School Leader</i></p> <p>'For us as a school and my teachers, civic character is about creating those well-rounded individuals that are not just exam grades.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Secondary School Leader</i></p> <p><b>VISION, ETHOS AND CULTURE</b></p> <p>Civic virtues are fundamental to the mission statement of the school and form a core part of the language of virtue within the school. Civic virtues are part of the lived experience of pupils within the school, and are recognised and supported by staff, families and the wider community.</p> <p>'[Civic character] is linked to our school values and the service that pupils have provided to their classroom for that week. And the exchange of that is that pupils have shown that they are trustworthy and reliable, and are in service of their peers.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Primary School Leader</i></p> <p>'We know that if you can have children before the age of 10 doing social action, they will continue as a lifelong commitment. The pupils tend to look outside, and they tend to look beyond themselves to see what they can do. And they can see those steps of how their characters are building and changing how they interact, how they respect one another and the different things that they've achieved amongst themselves. Also, that wider sense of community that we can see building in terms of some of the projects we have done with other schools. So that's a complete sense of unity of purpose in the local area.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Primary School Leader</i></p> <p>'It goes back to Aristotle's thought about a flourishing society. That individuals do good in order to make a better society. And at its most simplest level, you do the right thing because it's the right thing for you and for your world and for the future. And that's what we're trying to do, shape their future lives, make them the best person in conjunction with their parents. Make them the best possible well-rounded person they possibly could. Open their eyes to the world, open their eyes to society. It's about the bigger picture. If you're making yourself a better person, then the world will be a better place.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Primary School Leader</i></p>



**Further  
example  
actions with  
illustrative  
extracts from  
school leaders**

**RELATIONSHIPS**

**Relationships in the school are civil and democratic. The school actively builds a sense of belonging for pupils, staff and families, including through strong, connections with the local community. The school positions itself as a hub within and for the community.**

'Over the last couple years there has been more pupils who are engaging with various charities or organisations. We have built better relationships as well because suddenly we're not just a school [in a given location]. We are the school [in a given location] whose students have gone out and spoken to the tiny little charity that does music lessons for people with Alzheimer's, or spoken to the local food bank.'

*Primary School Leader*

'Schools have a curriculum and schools need to make sure that all staff are comfortable and briefed and understand and have the correct training to be able to teach that curriculum. We have those healthy discussions and debates ourselves. And I like to think we're very effective communicators with parents. Because we always either take a forum of parents if the topic is something that could be difficult, or we have sent things out to parents to give them an opportunity to come back and discuss with us prior to teaching. I think that's really important, because I think parents like to be prepared for anything we are going to be doing.'

*Primary School Leader*

'We want to look out for our local community and our local people and really be a hub where everyone wants to come and be.'

*Secondary School Leader*



# CIVIC CHARACTER TAUGHT

<p><b>Definition</b></p>	<p>Civic character can be taught through the curriculum using teaching and learning strategies, activities and resources.</p>
<p><b>Description</b></p>	<p>Civic character – including those civic virtues central to the schools’ vision and ethos – are taught explicitly within the curriculum of the school in ways that ensure access and engagement (adapted where necessary) for all pupils. All pupils have an appropriate opportunity to learn what these virtues mean with applicable support provided to enable pupils to engage in critical reflection and in their application, as well as to consider how civic virtues are relevant to their own lives and communities.</p>
<p><b>Example actions with illustrative extracts from school leaders</b></p>	<p><b>THE CURRICULUM</b></p> <p>Opportunities are identified to teach and make links to civic virtues throughout the curriculum. This includes providing opportunities for all pupils to engage in discussion about current issues that matter and that are relevant to their lives as young citizens.</p> <p>'Civic character needs to be planned and it needs to be really within the curriculum.' <i>Primary School Leader</i></p> <p>'When we speak to pupils about why our virtues curriculum is so important, it's this idea of thinking beyond self. And this is absolutely how we frame in our thinking about beyond self, it's thinking about your purpose of why you're here.' <i>Secondary School Leader</i></p> <p><b>TEACHING AND LEARNING</b></p> <p>A range of teaching and learning strategies are employed to cultivate civic virtues. At the heart of these strategies is dialogue, whether through discussion-based, enquiry-based, and/or problem-based learning adapted to meet the needs of all pupils. Teaching civic virtues incorporates key knowledge and understanding, as well as skills. Without these, it is unlikely civic character will be well informed or applied wisely.</p> <p>'One of the reasons we have the two hours on the curriculum time is to create the time and space for pupils to have civic conversations, which might be a bit unstructured. So [on a range of social and political issues], we are able to have really meaningful conversations with our young people about these topics.' <i>Secondary School Leader</i></p> <p>'We have been working with the year group leads at the school to think about how we can grow the character curriculum through the wider curriculum and through explicit sessions. Civic virtues and citizenship fall under the broader remit of our approach to character. Essentially, we've taken virtues from the Jubilee Centre, and we've worked with each year group lead to look at the curriculum areas for each year.' <i>Secondary School Leader</i></p> <p>'We have been making sure that we are really embedding civic character within not only our school ethos, but also our school curriculum as well. We have been focusing on the four types of virtues, making sure that everyone is aware that there are four types and the language that is associated with each type of virtue.' <i>Primary School Leader</i></p>

**Further  
example  
actions with  
illustrative  
extracts from  
school leaders**

**ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES**

A variety of teaching strategies, activities and resources are used to cultivate all pupils' civic understanding, skills and virtues. These include the use of stories, dilemmas, current affairs, sport, drama, and engagement in meaningful civic projects. All pupils have the opportunity to identify, learn about, and learn from others who have played an active and democratic role in their communities.

These role models and exemplars might include:

- Family members;
- Active members within the local community;
- Friends;
- Teachers and other staff in the school;
- Prominent figures in the local, regional, national or international community (including those from the past);
- Fictional characters in books, films, poems and songs.

'We have a real focus on the community, you know the whole school community is focused on virtues. There is a mixture intellectual, moral and performance virtues, as well as civic virtues such as citizenship, civility, community awareness, neighbourliness, service, volunteering, friendliness, courtesy, caring and helpfulness. We wanted these virtues to be woven in throughout our curriculum and we wanted there to be conversations around these virtues.'

*Primary School Leader*

'We try our best to make sure our pupils understand their place that they have in society, the community, in the world. Within character education itself every single subject within our curriculum has to identify links to character education in each scheme of work.'

*Secondary School Leader*





# CIVIC CHARACTER SOUGHT

<p><b>Definition</b></p>	<p>Civic character can be sought through chosen experiences that occur within and outside of the formal curriculum.</p>
<p><b>Description</b></p>	<p>The school understands itself as an institution that contributes within, and to, its various communities. Through its curriculum, extra-curricular activities and links with the community, the school provides opportunities for all pupils to serve others and their communities. In addition, the school encourages all pupils to take responsibility for their own civic engagement and social action on matters meaningful to themselves and their communities.</p>
<p><b>Example actions with illustrative extracts from school leaders</b></p>	<p><b>ENRICHMENT</b></p> <p>Opportunities are provided for all pupils to engage in civic related enrichment such as pupil voice, leadership, representative committees and other extra-curricular activities, as well as through engaging with visitors from the civic community inside the school.</p> <p>'The framing of character development in our school is very much based on the idea of responsibility. It's about giving back to the community. But it's also about thinking beyond your generation and what you are going to leave behind. It's never been framed around "this is what will get you better opportunities in a college or it might get you into university".'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Secondary School Leader</i></p> <p>'A school of civic character is two-pronged. That is the development of character and virtue within school and then the ability to then put that into practice, like going out into the community and doing something or giving something and then reflecting on that.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Primary School Leader</i></p> <p>'A school of civic character is one that is outward-facing, that recognises its role within its own local community, encourages service within that community and empowers pupils to have an awareness of the world around them, then to have the tools and the platforms to discuss those things safely where everybody, including the staff, feels confident to be able to do that, and then be supported to take social action and make change if they so wish.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Secondary School Leader</i></p> <p>'And we always have pupils that volunteer their time, as well. We have grown our pupil leadership and I think other pupils that might not necessarily be pupil leaders but want to get involved anyway, just naturally do now. It has just evolved really. I suppose it has become contagious, in a positive way, wanting to contribute.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Secondary School Leader</i></p>



**Further  
Example  
actions with  
illustrative  
extracts from  
school leaders**

**SOCIAL ACTION AND VOLUNTEERING**

All pupils are actively encouraged and provided opportunities to engage in pupil led, school-led and community-led social action. The school also recognises, builds on and celebrates those civic activities in which pupils engage independently of the school.

'A school of good civic character enables pupils to see how they can become positively contributory members of their community and that ultimately results in them doing that of their own independence. So they can see the way and they've got the confidence to go and do it.'

*Primary School Leader*

'We are at early days, but our plan is to put all of our extracurricular onto an [online] platform, so that we can log it. But equally, we understand the platform can also allow the pupils to add things that they are doing themselves. So, going forward we will have a much more formal platform to recognise what students are doing outside of school.'

*Secondary School Leader*

'One of the biggest benefits of our focus on character and civic character has been a real development of connectedness. That has been huge. We do have this greater connectedness to the community.'

*Primary School Leader*

Character is not just about what is in the school building. If we restrict it to within the school building, then pupils view community and their civic virtues as what they do in school and they leave the school gate and that's done now. So we were really keen not to do that. We have had students do all sorts of incredible things outside of school that maybe without our character programme we would not have known as much about.

*Secondary School Leader*



# REFERENCES AND FURTHER JUBILEE CENTRE RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS



The following is a list of Jubilee Centre resources that will inform schools who are seeking to transform their school improvement through an explicit focus on character education.

Arthur, J., Fullard, M., and O'Leary, C. (2022) *Teaching Character Education: What Works Research Report*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, [Online], Available at: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/Research%20Reports/TeachingCharacterEducation\\_WhatWorks\\_ResearchReport.pdf](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/Research%20Reports/TeachingCharacterEducation_WhatWorks_ResearchReport.pdf)

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Peterson, A., and Civil, D., with Ritzenthaler, S. (2021) *Educating for Civic Virtues and Service: School leader Perspectives Initial Insights*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, [Online], Available at: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/projects/CelebrationBritain/CivicVirtues/EducatingforCivicVirtuesandServiceInitialInsights.pdf](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/projects/CelebrationBritain/CivicVirtues/EducatingforCivicVirtuesandServiceInitialInsights.pdf)

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**All Jubilee Centre teaching resources can be freely downloaded from: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/teacherresources](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/teacherresources)**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the following school leaders and colleagues who have offered feedback on the development of this resource:

- **Stefan Boudreau**, Wrotham School
- **Triestina Bozzo**, Ryburn Valley High School
- **Professor Ian Davies**, University of York
- **Evan Hollows**, Eastbrook Primary School
- **Tina Lovey**, Rivermead Inclusive Trust
- **Mark Mackley**, St. Matthew's Church of England Primary Academy
- **Caroline Saunders**, The Regis School
- **Matt Stevens**, Saracens High School

## MA CHARACTER EDUCATION

A three year, part time, online programme, the MA Character Education adopts a broad, multidisciplinary understanding of character – encompassing aspects of wellbeing, ethics, citizenship and social and emotional education.

Learn more at:

[www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/charactereducationma](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/charactereducationma)



*Embedding Civic Character in Schools: A Practical Resource* is based on research that was conducted by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, part of the School of Education at the University of Birmingham.

For more information about the Jubilee Centre, to view published research and resources, or to get involved please visit [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk)

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