

Response to Ofsted's Education Inspection Consultation: April 2025

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, based at the University of Birmingham, is the leading global multi-disciplinary research institution dedicated to the study and promotion of character and character development. The Centre welcomes the opportunity to respond to Ofsted's consultation on improving education inspections.

The Centre informed the 2019 revision of the Ofsted inspection framework, particularly in the inclusion of character and character development within the personal development criteria. The 2019 framework guidance explicitly adopts the Centre's definition of character as; *'the set of positive personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others. This gives pupils the qualities they need to flourish in our society.'*

This inclusion has been well received by school leaders, pupils, parents, and governors and has been consistently recognised by inspectors. In addition, the UK Government has emphasised the importance of character development in education. The Department for Education's 'Character Education Framework' provides non-statutory guidance to schools on character education and development for pupils as it sees it as fundamental to nurturing well-rounded individuals who contribute positively to society. By excluding character development from the inspection criteria, there is a risk of creating a disconnect between policy and practice, potentially hindering the cultivation of environments where students feel valued, connected, and a sense of belonging.

We strongly recommend that character and character development is more explicitly incorporated into; i) the descriptions of the evaluation areas; and, ii) the *Education Inspection Toolkits*. We make this recommendation for the following reasons:

1. **Consistency with the 2019 Framework:** Since the 2019 revision, school leaders, teachers, pupils, and parents have increasingly recognised the importance of character development as central to a comprehensive, inclusive, and modern education. **Our research highlights this growing emphasis: in 2014, only 1% of "Outstanding" schools had their approach to character explicitly mentioned in Ofsted reports. By 2022, this figure rose to 14%, and by 2024, it reached 22%.**
2. **The Benefits of Intentional Character Development Programmes:** A growing body of research indicates that schools adopting intentional and explicitly structured character education programmes see a range of positive outcomes. These include improved academic attainment and behaviour, and enhanced employability (which is a key element of the governments growth agenda). Character is consistently cited as one of the most important attributes employers look for in employees. Character

development programmes have also been linked to the development of civic and moral competencies, contributing to students' and broader societal flourishing.

Building on this literature, The Jubilee Centre is currently conducting a large-scale quantitative study examining the relationship between character education and school performance in England. Early findings reveal a clear, graded pattern: **schools who prioritise character educationⁱ have the highest average Progress 8 scores**, with other UK schools performing lower. Because Progress 8 controls for prior attainment, this pattern suggests that schools formally recognised for excellence in character education are not simply enrolling high-attaining pupils, but are adding measurable added academic value. When a pupil is supported to cultivate intellectual character traits such as curiosity, creativity and autonomy along with 'performance' traits such as resilience and determination, their attitudes to learning improves along with their ability to pursue the acquiring of knowledge and critically engage with it. Our research has also shown that UK adults (demographically matched to census data) who, when leaving school, selected their career path while considering implications for their character development, were more likely to flourish as adults across a range of measures compared to those who simply weighed up the pros and cons. Additionally, a recent large-scale study that we conducted in the USA and UK with 4000 participants (again, demographically matched to census data) showed a strong link between the character strength of practical wisdom and overall flourishing.

These recent studies provide further evidence as to why character is an important educational philosophy and approach that schools can adopt to achieve key educational outcomes. **Recognising this, the OECD is considering new measures that prioritise character development as essential for human flourishing.**

We are concerned that the proposed new report card does not explicitly address character development, and the draft Education Inspection Toolkit mentions 'character' only once.

Furthermore, key character-related qualities highly prized by employers—such as creativity, compassion, integrity, responsibility, resilience, perseverance, teamwork, and initiative—are not consistently highlighted in either document. This omission risks undermining efforts to foster a sense of belonging and holistic development among students, which are critical to their well-being, employability, and life chances.

Based on our and others research, we make the following three recommendations to Ofsted:

- i) **Retain the language of "character," "character development," and relevant named character qualities within *Education Inspection Toolkits* and in**

particular the **personal development and wellbeing** report card evaluation areas.

- ii) **Provide clear evaluation criteria:** Develop specific criteria for assessing / evaluating the effectiveness of character development initiatives, offering schools clear guidance on best practices.
- iii) **Offer further training/CPD for Inspectors:** Ensure that inspectors are adequately trained to evaluate character development, enabling them to provide constructive feedback to schools.

The **Jubilee Centre can support Ofsted implement these recommendations** by sharing research evidence on the importance of character for human flourishing, advising on the development of appropriate evaluation measures and training inspectors.

By incorporating character and character development into the report card and inspection toolkits, Ofsted can continue to play a pivotal role in promoting the holistic development of students, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging and readiness to contribute positively to society. It also reinforces the link between character and desirable outcomes of education, including employment, improved wellbeing, and civic engagement.

We urge Ofsted to ensure that character development remains a fundamental part of school evaluation, reinforcing its role in preparing young people not only for academic success but also for meaningful and fulfilling lives.

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ⁱ Schools who have been awarded the ACE Schools of Character Qualitymark or Qualitymark+