



Character and Values-Based Education at Bilim-Innovation Lyceum, Kazakhstan Features of Outstanding Practice

Background

This paper presents six outstanding features of the Bilim-Innovation Lyceum (hereafter BIL) in Kazakhstan. The features have been drawn from a commissioned study evaluating the approach to, and provision of, character education within the BIL network in Kazakhstan.

The summary draws attention to the positive features of an overarching organisation that leads a group of schools with a core commitment to character and values education. **The findings offer insights that are relevant for education institutions globally, including academy trusts in the UK, charter school organisations in the US, and similar networks elsewhere.**

Bilim-Innovation Lyceum

The Bilim-Innovation International Social Foundation (hereafter, Bilim-Innovation ISF) currently operates 32 lyceums across Kazakhstan, comprising both public and private institutions. Character and values-based education has been a consistent focus of Bilim-Innovation ISF since its founding. Over time, this focus has shifted from being an implicit aspect of schooling to becoming a deliberate, systematic, and reflective element of BIL's educational provision.

In its *Values-based Education Conceptual Framework* (BIICF, n.d., p.4), Bilim-Innovation ISF defines values-based education as: “a comprehensive form of character education that promotes knowledge and awareness of values and helps students develop into active, engaged citizens.”

Since 2019, the Foundation has provided clearer guidance, standards, and structured plans, ensuring greater consistency in character and values education across BIL schools. This systematic approach is supported by regular communication with parents and the wider school community, embedding character education as a shared endeavour.

Outstanding Features

BIL's approach to character and values-based education is of a consistently high quality. Six features stand out as exemplary and have the potential to inform local, national and international practice on approaches to explicit and intentional character education:

- **Widespread buy-in:** Bilim-Innovation ISF's vision enjoys strong commitment from staff, students, families, and other stakeholders. Survey findings show that 86% of staff are familiar with the concept of character education, 83% of teachers actively integrate it into lessons, and 88% explicitly teach virtues. This buy-in is underpinned and shaped through the very strong core vision and ethos that has been established and which is embraced and implemented by schools. There is an impressive level of consistency in schools, which also have some flexibility to tailor the strong core vision. The buy-in is supported, and is enhanced further, by the clear language of character which is evident through BIL's work and within BIL schools. Responses to the staff survey found that 79% of staff reported that their school has a whole-school shared language of character, that 78% of staff reported that their school has a distinct character education policy, and that 86% of staff reported that there is a character education focus within other policies
- **Partnership with parents:** A hallmark of BIL's approach is the highly positive, character-focused relationship between schools, school leaders, teachers, and families. This collaborative model is world-class and central to its success. There is a real strength and vitality to the connection with, and contribution of, parents. Survey findings show that 80% of staff reported that their schools had robust engagement with parents. A further notable finding in relation to partnership with parents is that parents themselves are proud of the schools and that their children attend a BIL school. Parents are welcomed and encouraged to participate in schools and welcome these opportunities, which are also noted and welcomed by students.
- **Student benefits:** Students in BIL schools who viewed character as the primary focus of their school reported higher levels of wellbeing and flourishing compared to those who saw academic attainment as the main priority. Notably, students identified as possessing practical wisdom, or who believed their school prioritised character, were less likely to report rule-breaking or frequent conflicts with peers. Students are proud of their schools and, on this basis, actively represent their schools and seek to support other students. Students welcome the wide range of opportunities to be involved in curricular and extra-curricular activities and, importantly, view academic and character and values-based education as intertwined. Students are proactive in seeing their own character development, particularly as they reach the older school years.
- **Core resources:** BIL has developed a strong set of dedicated teaching and learning resources to support character and values-based education, providing consistency and depth across schools. These resources offer schools and teachers ideas and practical tasks through which character and values-based education can be directly taught within schools and classrooms and through which the language of character and virtue can be explored and further embedded.

- **Explicit teaching:** Character education is explicitly and effectively embedded in pedagogy. Teachers reported using a wide range of strategies, including cooperative learning (90%), reflective learning (80%), virtue literacy (92%), and experiential learning (84%) - as well as a range of resources – such as stories (95%), moral exemplars (92%), and debates (90%). Leaders work closely and extensively with teachers to integrate character and values-based education in subject lessons, aided by the dedicated resources.
- **Extra-curricular opportunities:** BIL offers a rich programme of extra-curricular activities with an explicit focus on character development, giving students meaningful opportunities to practise and live out the values promoted in classrooms. Students welcome the opportunity to represent their schools, and to engage with the community. There are very many opportunities for students to do so, and the connections with character and values-based education are explicit and well-developed. Empathy and social responsibility are two key virtues that students cite as being particularly central to their extra-curricular activities.

In summary, Bilim-Innovation Lyceum's character and values-based education approach and provision is exemplary in these six ways, offering a model and approach that can provide inspiration and ideas to those working in the field internationally. The work of BIL to fully integrate parents and families into the character and values-based education provided by schools is world-leading and offers a vision for others to learn from and follow.

