

CATHOLIC CHARACTER EDUCATION

Growing in the virtues and celebrating human flourishing in Catholic schools



A RESEARCH REPORT
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FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

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FOREWORD

I welcome this research report *Catholic Character Education*. It presents, in a clear and systematic way, the rationale for the pursuit of character education in Catholic schools. The report's outline of Catholic education as the formation of all aspects of the human person in the pursuit of the fullness of life given by Christ (beatitude) and of the good of human society, through the practice of the virtues, accurately reflects the Church's teaching. The findings and recommendations of the report echo wider investigations into character education which are grounded in the methods and results of current research.

The present research report is timely and builds on my own earlier document *Christ at the Centre* (2013). In that document I sought, in part, to articulate in an objective way what constitutes the 'ethos' of a Catholic school and to define what the Church means by the term 'Gospel values'. The Gospel values, rooted in the Beatitudes, constitute the 'outcomes of the educational enterprise in every Catholic school'. These values have to be enacted, though, through the practice of their corresponding virtues. Growth in the virtues, through the pursuit of a human excellence which exemplifies Gospel values and which is embodied in the whole life of the school community, is the means of achieving those outcomes.

Catholic schools make their own positive and distinctive contribution to the flourishing of human society when they endeavour to become communities of character education and formation with a vision of life seen whole in Christ. This Christ-centred vision is made manifest and concrete in the ethos of a Catholic school when, in the pursuit of human excellence, Gospel values are expressed and enacted through the exercise of the theological, moral, civic, intellectual, and performance virtues.

I commend this document to all Catholic schools. Character education and the formation of all aspects of the human person through the pursuit of the virtues not only enhances the education of the individual and respects their dignity, it also promotes the common good and the flourishing of human society in the world. Much of the report's vision for 'growing in the virtues' is already incorporated into and spearheading my vision for the education and formation of our children and young people for vocation and leadership in the schools and parishes of the Diocese of Leeds. I encourage all Catholic leaders and staff to reflect on the research and the recommendations of this report and to discern how the Church's vision for education in the virtues can, in collaboration with families and parishes, be embodied within the context and life of each Catholic school.

I thank Dr. Christopher Devanny for all the work that he has done in researching and preparing this report. I thank also Professor James Arthur and the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham for the generous sponsorship and support they have provided for this research project in partnership with the Diocese of Leeds.

The Rt. Rev. Marcus Stock
Bishop of Leeds

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years there has been a number of studies and reports into character development in schools but there is, at present, very little research or reflection on the place of character education within the Catholic education system in England and Wales. This is surprising given that one of the stated aims of Catholic schools is the education of the whole person through a ‘personal integration of faith and life’, and ‘the gradual formation of conscience in fundamental, permanent virtues.’ (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1977: 45; 47) This project aims to make a contribution to that research and reflection.

The report presents the main findings of a study that explored how character education is understood and taught in Catholic schools¹. It investigated the self-reported virtues of school leaders and pupils and how leaders viewed their role in developing good character. It also explored the extent of pupils’ Virtue Literacy informed by *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2017) and via an Ad-ICM moral dilemma test.

While this report is the first of its kind, the research presented forms part of wider investigations, principally through the work of the Jubilee Centre, into how character education is understood and taught in schools.

The purpose of this report is to provide evidence and recommendations for those in Catholic schools to consider when developing their approach to character education in the interest of human flourishing.

KEY FINDINGS

- The research demonstrates that a school’s *ethos*² is the single most significant element that supports character education; there is no substitute for the ethos because it embodies the purpose and sets the direction of the school. The ethos is characterised by a unity of purpose, high quality relationships and an emphasis on service to the community, all non-negotiable elements of good character education.
- Character education in the vast majority of schools was found to be implicit – a matter of *character caught* – not explicit – *character taught*.
- The reliance on the language of Gospel values rather than the virtues prevented significant opportunities to develop pupils’ Virtue Literacy.
- There was a tendency for Gospel values to be seen as platitudes which have no deliberate or significant impact on character.
- While schools made room for *Critical Reflection* in acts of worship, opportunities for critical reflection, which support the development of *Virtue Reasoning*, were not an explicit feature across the curriculum.

¹ Involving eleven Catholic schools, all but two in the Diocese of Leeds.

² Key words or technical terms in italics on first appearance are defined in the Glossary.

“ *It was many years ago, well before the current emphasis on results was established, that Cardinal Hume said Catholic schools must be about the pursuit of goodness alongside academic achievement. (Headteacher)*

- When presented with the language of the virtues, school leaders and pupils in all age groups regarded the theological and moral virtues rather than performance virtues (excepting resilience for the former) as most important to their character development.
- Catholic schools placed an emphasis on teaching the civic virtues and understood their role as a service to the Church and to society.
- School leaders believed that resilience is crucial to leadership, teaching and learning.
- School leaders and pupils of all age groups placed little importance on the intellectual virtues.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The report makes several recommendations based on the research findings and these are presented below:

- school leaders, in concert with diocesan education services, should create a shared vision and language of the virtues;
- this shared vision should focus on a broad and balanced range of virtues, including practical wisdom;
- these virtues should be incorporated into school leader and staff formation; and,
- resilience should be recognised as important, but only as one of a number of virtues that are to be developed in pupils and staff.

Schools should improve the Virtue Literacy of their pupils in the following ways:

- review the school mission statement and identify the virtues that are essential to the mission;
- do not simply replace values with virtues as this may only exchange one set of words for another – regular and deep reflection on the meaning and application of the virtues should be implemented at all levels of the school community;
- incorporate these virtues into worship, personal and social education, and teaching and learning;
- promote the correct relationship between Gospel values and the virtues in the school vision and mission;
- audit and evaluate the provision for character education, using the *Character Education: Evaluation Handbook for Schools* (Harrison, Arthur and Burns, 2016) to map elements that are character caught and character taught;
- devise and implement a plan which includes significant actions and criteria for what leaders want to see lived out within the school community;
- leaders and teachers should plan explicit opportunities across the curriculum to teach specific virtues in order to increase Virtue Knowledge and Understanding and Virtue Reasoning;
- schools should seek to develop the intellectual virtue of Critical Reflection, a key ingredient of Virtue Reasoning, by embedding it across the curriculum; and,
- Catholic schools should take advantage of their use of bible texts and stories to orientate pupil formation and extend this to the teaching of character and virtues through reading schemes, children's classics and other fiction.

“ *We are not educating the students for in here, we are educating them for the world where they are going to make a difference. (Headteacher)*

1. CONTEXT

Human Formation

The purpose of this section is to outline aspects of the Church's vision for Catholic schools. It will demonstrate that the Church's vision for education is broad and balanced and provides fertile ground for the pursuit of character education.

Regular reflection on the educational vision for Catholic schools for the modern world began with the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and *The Declaration on Christian Education*:

'True education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult, have a share' (Vatican, 1965: 1).

The accent on formation is fundamental. It provides an all-inclusive vision that acts as a source of resistance against the modern reduction of education to utility: knowledge and training in skills for personal success and material prosperity:

'As you know, the task of a teacher is not simply to impart information or to provide training in skills intended to deliver some economic benefit to society; education is not and must never be considered as purely utilitarian. It is about forming the human person, equipping him or her to live life to the full – in short it is about imparting wisdom. And true wisdom is inseparable from knowledge of the Creator... ' (Benedict XVI, 2010a).

Authentic formation requires illumination by the light of the Gospel to be *true* education. As *The Catholic School* states:

'Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school. His revelation gives new meaning to life and helps man to direct his thought, action and will according to the Gospel' (CCE, 1977: 34).

While education rooted in Christ provides the Church with the means to promote the Catholic school's identity, the accent on the human person is central. The human person, made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), is a unique creation with an innate dignity, and is a social being whose formation is achieved in relation to others and not as a sovereign individual:

'Young people...are to overcome their individualism and discover, in the light of faith, their specific vocation.... to make the world a better place' (CCE, 1977: 45).

What is remarkable about the Church's understanding of education is how its central goal – the formation of the human person – is always united with *caritas* (love of God and neighbour Mt 22:37-39) and the common good:

'The common good is always oriented towards the progress of persons: 'The order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons, and not the other way around.' This order is founded on truth, built up in justice, and animated by love' (*Catechism* 1994: para. 1912).

What others may call 'social action' is, in the context of human formation, always a specific calling to faith and a commitment to action or as St. Paul renders it, 'faith working through love' (Gal 5:6). Consequently, 'for the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being' (Benedict XVI, 2005: 25(a)).

Schools, then, are authentic expressions of the mission of the Church in so far as they seek to embody the Church's social teaching within their ethos. The Church's social teaching:

'is not a marginal interest or activity, or one that is tacked on to the Church's mission, rather it is at the very heart of the Church's ministry of service: with her social doctrine the Church proclaims God and his mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals man to himself.' (Vatican, 2004: 67).

In other words, by making Christ known, Catholic schools further the human formation of their pupils. Catholic education is a humanising activity. The gradual awareness and growth of each pupil's specific calling and commitment to human flourishing ('you will know them by their fruits,' Mt 7:16) is embodied in caritas, solidarity and nourished through opportunities to practise the civic virtues and is rightly understood as one of the hallmarks of Catholic schools:

'Actually educating young people to serve and give themselves freely is one of the hallmarks of Catholic schools, in the past as well as the future... That Catholic schools help to form good citizens is a fact apparent to everyone. Both government policy and public opinion should, therefore, recognise the work these schools do as a real service to society. It is unjust to accept the service and ignore or fight against its source' (CCE, 1988: 46; CCE, 2014: section 3).

The emphasis on human formation also captures the special characteristic of schools - the imparting of knowledge and the development of the intellect:

'The Catholic school should be able to offer young people the means to acquire the knowledge they need in order to find a place in a society which is strongly characterised by technical and scientific skill' (CCE 1997: 8).

This knowledge and learning is not narrowly conceived, but is transformative:

'Education is not given for the purpose of gaining power but as an aid towards a fuller understanding of, and communion with man, events and things. Knowledge is not to be considered as a means of material prosperity and success, but as a call to serve and to be responsible for others' (CCE, 1977: 56).

The Church's vision for education is indeed broad and balanced. It reflects the dimensions of the human person. This all-inclusive formation, always centred on Christ who 'is the teaching-centre, the Model on Whom the Christian shapes his life,' (CCE, 1977: 47) is an appropriate arena for the practice of an equally all-inclusive character education. As *The Catholic School* states:

'[T]he Church ... reaffirm[s] her mission of education to insure strong character formation... It ... stimulates her to foster truly Christian living and apostolic communities, equipped to make their own positive contribution, in a spirit of cooperation, to the building up of the secular society' (CCE, 1977: 11).

2. WHAT IS CHARACTER EDUCATION?

Human Flourishing

‘I have come that they may have life and have it to the full’ (John, 10:10).

A broad and balanced understanding of character education is sufficient only if it is placed within the context of human flourishing. Aristotle’s (384-322BC) term *eudaimonia* offers a vision of human flourishing indicating the purpose, the end, to which all human life aims through the pursuit of the virtues (Aristotle, 2009). Aristotle’s ethics was developed in a Christian context by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74). For Thomas, human flourishing is a gift from God, revealed by Christ (John 10:10). Human flourishing is an invitation to share the joy of God’s own life, what Thomas calls ‘*beatitudo*’.

“ *God wants your friendship. And once you enter into friendship with God, everything in your life begins to change. As you come to know him better, you find you want to reflect something of his infinite goodness in your own life. You are attracted to the practice of virtue. .*
(Benedict XVI, 2010)

For the Church, following Thomas, it is the Beatitudes (Matt 5:2-12) that ‘reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitudo.’
(*Catechism*, 1994: 1719).

Crucially, for Christians, the pursuit of human flourishing - of life to the full through the practice of the virtues - is always a striving to follow Christ via our openness to the promptings of the Spirit. This means that the theological virtues of faith, hope and love, and the interplay between virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are essential elements of virtuous living (*Catechism*, 1994: 1831-32).

Human flourishing provides a broad, balanced and positive context for character education and supplies two necessary correctives. As the goal of formation, human flourishing enables Catholic educators to resist character education’s reduction to a short-term initiative which seeks to improve academic outcomes through a focus on performance virtues like resilience. Secondly, human flourishing reminds us that character education should not aim for behaviour management or ‘fixing the kids’ (Jubilee Centre, 2017: 2). The pursuit of human flourishing is at one with the Christian notion that human life is more akin to bearing fruit (‘fruit that endures’ John 15:16 and the ‘fruits of the Spirit’ Gal 5:22) than following rules. It will always be about the development of a growing maturity in which motivation becomes intrinsic rather than a response to an external stimulus.

‘Education to freedom is a humanising action ... It is a matter of educating each student to free him/herself from the conditionings that prevent him/her from fully living as a person, to form him/herself into a strong and responsible personality, capable of making free and consistent choices’ (CCE, 2002: 52).

It calls us back to the belief that Jesus, our model of faithful living, came to show us how to be more human. Jesus was interested in the person we are called to become, as we practise the virtues by opening ourselves to the promptings of the Spirit. In the end, human flourishing does not aim for social conformity, but for people who practise those virtues and avoid those vices that enables them to become their very best selves.

Catholic Character Education

Catholic character education presupposes a shared vision of life expressed through a particular set of virtues. This has two implications: firstly, the school’s ethos must embody that shared vision of life expressed in the chosen virtues. Secondly, while this ethos provides a shared vision and a common set of virtues, the school’s changing context – e.g. a school in a particular Ofsted category or trends which require a change in strategy or curriculum – will necessitate a sharper focus on some virtues rather than others.

A Definition

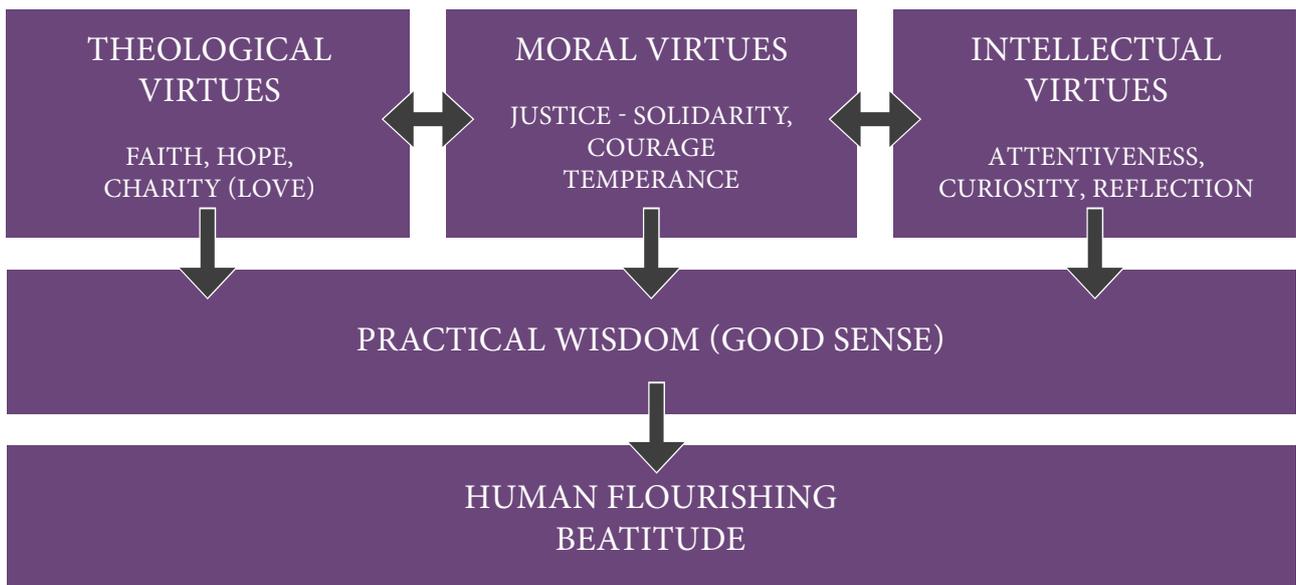
Catholic character education seeks to foster the human formation of pupils, young people and all members of the school community engaging them in a shared vision of life based on the virtues that lead to human flourishing in the pursuit of Christ. This shared vision, embodied in the ethos of the school from which all explicit and implicit educational activities proceed, calls pupils, young people and all members of the school community to grow in positive personal strengths called virtues. These virtues are broad and balanced and include the theological, moral, civic, intellectual, and performance-based virtues.

Catholic character education strives to enable pupils, young people and all staff to grasp what is important in situations and how to act for the right reasons, such that they become more autonomous and reflective in the practice of virtue. The aim of character education is the development of good sense, or practical wisdom; the capacity to choose between alternatives illuminated by the light of the Gospel. This capacity involves knowing how to choose the right course of action in difficult situations and it arises gradually out of the experience of making choices and the growth of practical and ethical insight (adapted from Jubilee Centre, 2017).

The Virtues

The Catholic Church typically focuses on the *theological* and *cardinal* virtues (*Catechism*, 1994: 1804-29). The theological virtues are essential to Christian life and Catholic schools (1 Cor., 13:13). ‘The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character... They inform and give life to all the moral virtues’ (*Catechism*, 1994: 1813).

CHART 1: VIRTUES OF CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY



Of all the virtues, charity is the most important. It is the source and goal of all the other virtues (*Catechism*, 1994: 1827).

“ *A virtue is something you do, it’s a quality of someone, you do it over time in different ways; you do an honest act and you become honest. You are what you do. (Pupil)*

The moral virtues of justice, courage and temperance together with the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom are the cardinal (from the Latin for ‘hinge’) virtues because they play a pivotal role - all the other human virtues are grouped around them. Solidarity is added because it is the pre-eminent social virtue (Vatican, 2004: 193). These five virtues are acquired by everyone through education, deliberate acts and perseverance. Practical wisdom is the most significant.

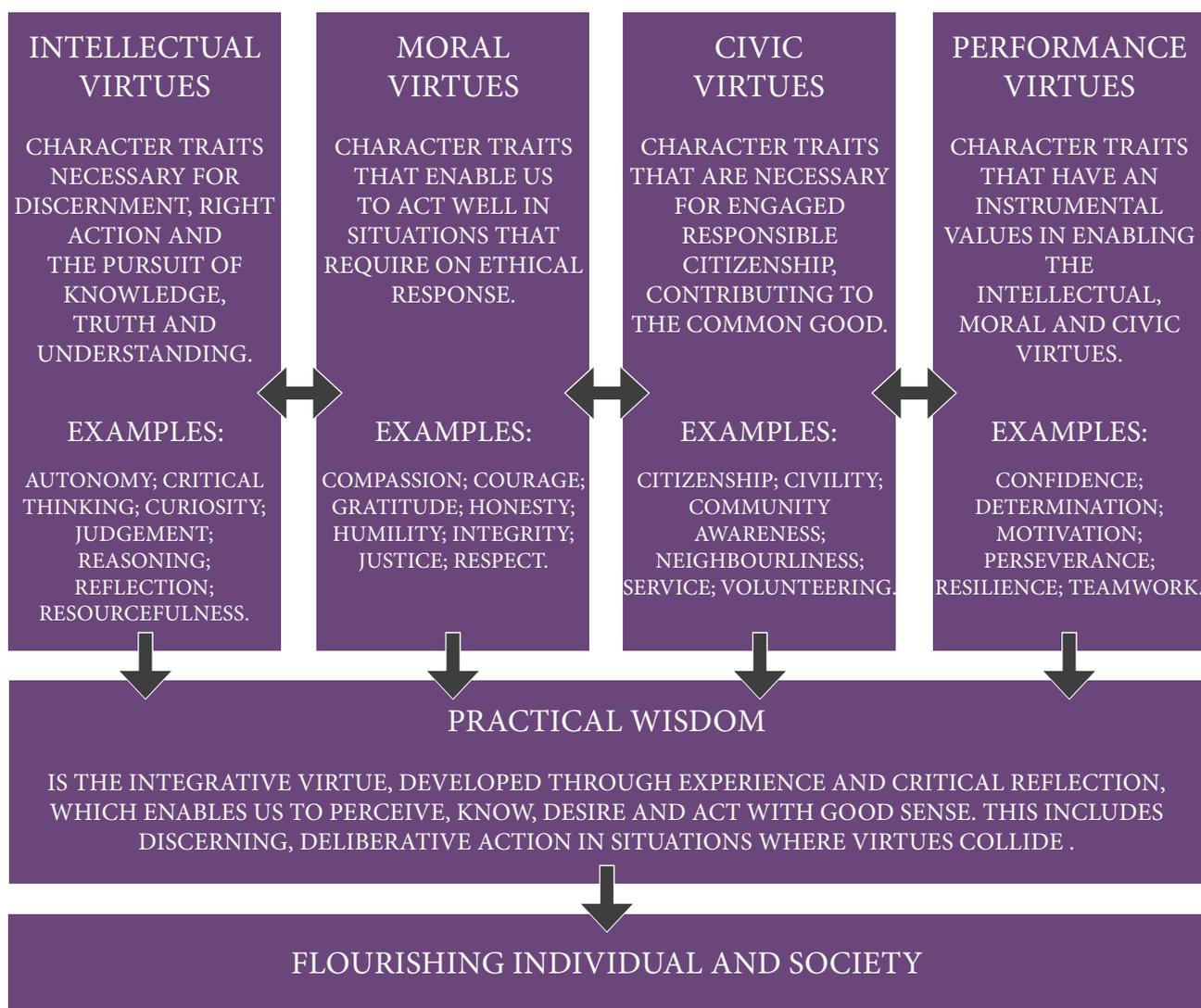


Schools have an essential role to play in providing opportunities for growth in practical wisdom, particularly at a time when time is emptied of significance save for the task and the actions on the school improvement plan. The questions which interest us in schools are frequently focused on accountability and utility: ‘What is required?’ and ‘What works?’

This culture of performance and efficiency arguably erodes our capacity for deliberation or discernment, because reflection is understood as a momentary respite within the relentless pursuit of improvement; as one teacher commented: ‘Everything in school is so fast, how is it possible to learn something of deeper significance about oneself?’. Consequently, practical wisdom is not only an important virtue for pupils, but its development is essential for school leaders and staff.

Apart from the pivotal role that practical wisdom plays in self-knowledge, the Church does not discuss the intellectual virtues in its account because it is more focused on the theological and moral virtues. The Church, following Thomas, accounts for the intellectual virtues when outlining the gifts of the Spirit. However, the need to integrate the intellectual virtues into the continuing formation of school leaders, staff and into character education is highly recommended.

CHART 2: ‘THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF CHARACTER’ from *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2017)



Virtues or Gospel Values?

In the vast majority of cases, Catholic schools prefer to articulate their ethos through the language of Gospel values, rather than virtues.

There is support for the use of values, particularly in the encyclicals of Pope St. John Paul II and in the published documents of the Congregation for Catholic Education³. The accent on a Catholic *theology* as distinct from a Catholic *philosophy* of education, following the Second Vatican Council is one of the sources for the emphasis on Gospel values.

In a popular treatment of the mission of Catholic schools Raymond Friel (2017), on the basis of his reading of *Christ at the Centre* (Stock, 2013), argues that Gospel values are preferred to virtues because only Gospel values are rooted in Christ and therefore capable of universal application (Friel, 2017: 16). Friel, following Stock, is aware that values language after Nietzsche (1844-1900) is 'often subjective, regarded as a question of personal preferences – what is right for 'me' or the community to which I belong' (Stock, 2013: 15; Friel, 2017: 17).

Gospel values have this character when they are 'chosen subjectively from the vast corpus of the Old and New Testaments' (Stock, 2013:16). Consequently, it is crucial, according to Stock, to recognise it is the Beatitudes that 'reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts' and as such are the objective 'values' given by Christ himself' (Stock, 2013: 16 citing *Catechism*, 1994: 1719).

However, contrary to Friel, we have already shown that *the virtues are rooted in Christ*. Human flourishing - the end to which the virtues aim, is *beatitude*. Understanding the ultimate end as sharing in God's life means that the theological virtues and the interplay of the gifts of the Spirit with the virtues is a requirement for living life to the full. Furthermore, the Beatitudes are 'the ultimate end of human acts' and these acts can, in this context, be understood as virtues essential for life.

Does the necessity of the virtues make this a case of preference alone? Some prefer values, some virtues, after all, the Jubilee Centre treats virtues and values as interchangeable terms (Jubilee Centre, 2017: 9). While this may be convenient, we understand that values and virtues are related, but distinct. We come to recognise Gospel values through faith seeking understanding. In other words, to profess Gospel values presupposes the priority of the theological virtues. In another sense, values per se are not reducible to actions and so are distinct from virtues, which are dispositions formed by actions. For example, we can hold honesty as a value, but can fail to act honestly. In the same way, we can hold faith as a value, but 'faith apart from works is dead' (James 2:26). In these examples, we value rightly, but we are not virtuous. Virtues are dispositions to do what is good. The good thing is not just something to profess, but something to put into practice: *we become what we do*. So, in one sense we can say, Gospel values are enacted through the virtues.

There is a further, and related, reason to uphold the distinction between Gospel value and virtue: the research outlined below found that pupils' Virtue Literacy was not promoted or developed, principally because schools rely on Gospel values to shape their ethos and so do not teach virtue in an explicit and systematic way.

³ See documents available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/index.htm

3. MAIN FINDINGS

AND DISCUSSION OF SCHOOL BASED RESEARCH

Aims and Methodology

The main aim of the research was to investigate the extent and the impact of character education in Catholic schools and how such education can be improved. Three overarching research questions were addressed:

- 1. How do school leaders in Catholic schools understand the role of educating pupils in the virtues?**
- 2. How deliberate and systematic is the teaching of the virtues in Catholic schools?**
- 3. How developed is the Virtue Literacy of pupils?**

To address the overarching research questions, this study was guided by a mixed methods approach which assessed the evidence through methodological triangulation. A combination of three methods were used: school leader and pupil self-reported virtues, a pupil moral dilemma test and semi-structured interviews with school leaders, lead teachers and pupils. In addition, six descriptive case studies were used that allowed the investigation of the nature and extent of education in the virtues in each school's context. The descriptive case studies were particularly valuable because they allowed both qualitative and quantitative data to build upon one another.

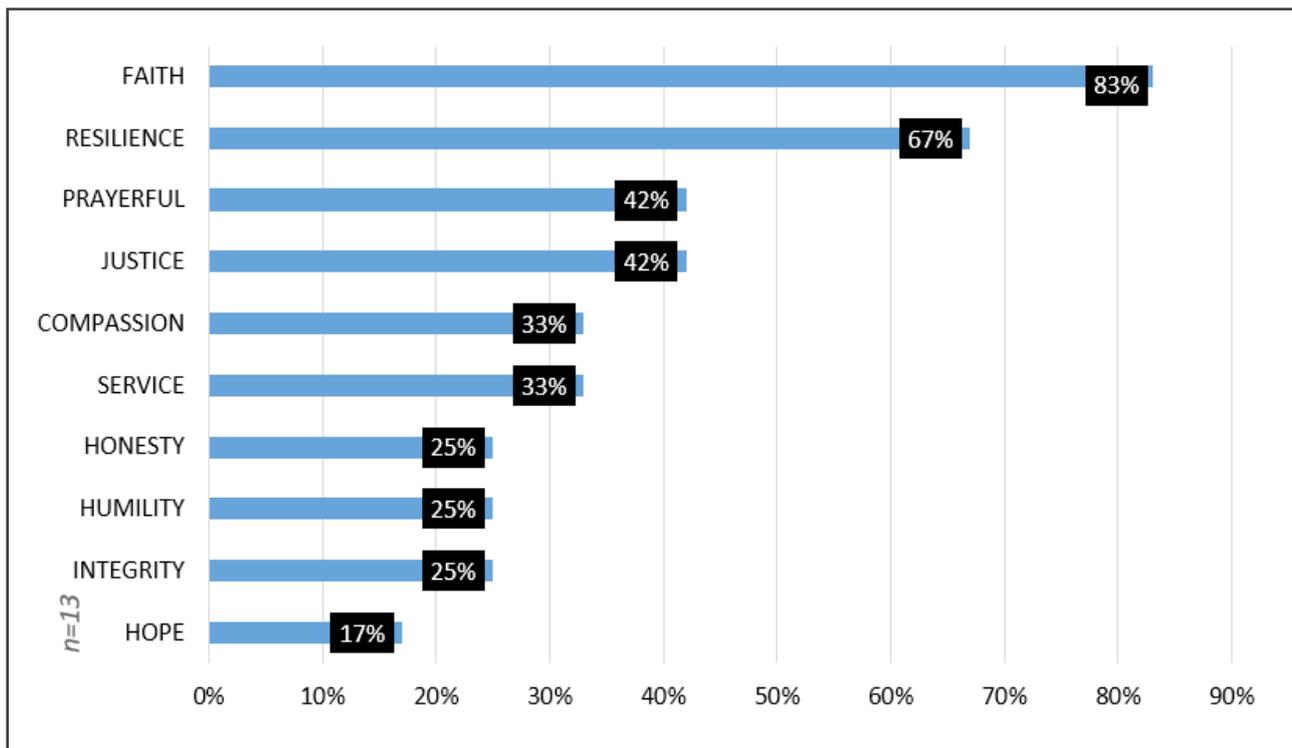
- Semi-structured interviews with 11 school leaders or lead teachers
- Group interviews were held with 18 pupils (12 primary and 6 secondary)
- Survey completed by 54 Diocese of Leeds school leaders (41 primary and 13 secondary)
- Survey completed by 193 Diocese of Leeds and Diocese of Hallam pupils (114 primary and 79 secondary)

Q1: HOW DO SCHOOL LEADERS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF EDUCATING PUPILS IN THE VIRTUES?

Leaders who took part in the research were asked to select their most important virtues in three categories: personal virtues, virtues for the ideal school leader, and virtues for the Catholic school leader.

“ *Your character impacts on every single thing: I don't think you could be a good teacher if you didn't have high moral standards for yourself and others. The moral virtues are definitely integral to being a good teacher. It's absolutely not simply skill or performance based.*
(Headteacher)

CHART 3: SECONDARY HEADTEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MOST IMPORTANT VIRTUES FOR A CATHOLIC LEADER



Faith

Faith was by far the most significant virtue when primary and secondary school leaders were asked about the role of the Catholic leader; this demonstrates the centrality of faith to the leadership of a Catholic school. Leaders were found to believe that faith is expressed in the ethos and is the principal guide for the actions of the school.

In interviews, when asked ‘What motivates you as a Catholic school leader?’ respondents remarked:

My faith – to be a leader of a Catholic school helps me in my service of God and I can incorporate that in my daily work. I have a privilege to live my faith as a headteacher.

We should not be here if we do not recognise the core principles of what we are. Our relationship with God that I often talk about, witness my faith and I expect staff to do that with the children. We should be sharing our faith journeys with the children, if I get something wrong I’ll hold my hands up to a child, to a parent – if we’re wrong we have to say – that element of forgiveness is a key part of who we are.

The fact that I can come to work and I can talk about when I was at Mass on Sunday nobody bats an eyelid and somebody else chips in 'well my PP' [Parish Priest] and you can talk to youngsters like that as well and you can bring in that other dimension – sacraments in school. I do think we are the parish for young people – because there is a lot of faith sharing going on – experience of church, prayer and Eucharist, which is the key.

There was a marked difference in the prominence attached to faith for secondary and primary school leaders; 42% of secondary heads said faith was a very important personal virtue, while 76% of primary heads said likewise. Is this because there is more of a fit between the personal and the professional role for primary school leaders? Could living out one's faith and leadership of a Catholic primary school be, in general, more closely aligned? Catholic primary school heads are, arguably, closer to the day-to-day faith life of the school and in closer proximity to the parents and the life of the parish, though secondary heads would, no doubt, dispute this. Therefore, it may be that other virtues spoke more readily to headteachers because they were thinking more about their faith in action e.g. love, compassion and justice.

Resilience

In each survey, primary and secondary leaders placed resilience either first or second in order of priority. Resilience seems, at times, to provide a common language for the school community. Whole school strategies and interventions in the classroom that aim to increase academic standards were linked in discussion to the importance of hard working, resilient staff and pupil self-discipline and perseverance. One secondary headteacher spoke about how a teacher is like a coach getting the team and individual athlete ready for a big sporting event:

They are going to push you [pupils] and set the hurdles high ... training you so that when the exam comes you are ready and can do your best possible performance.

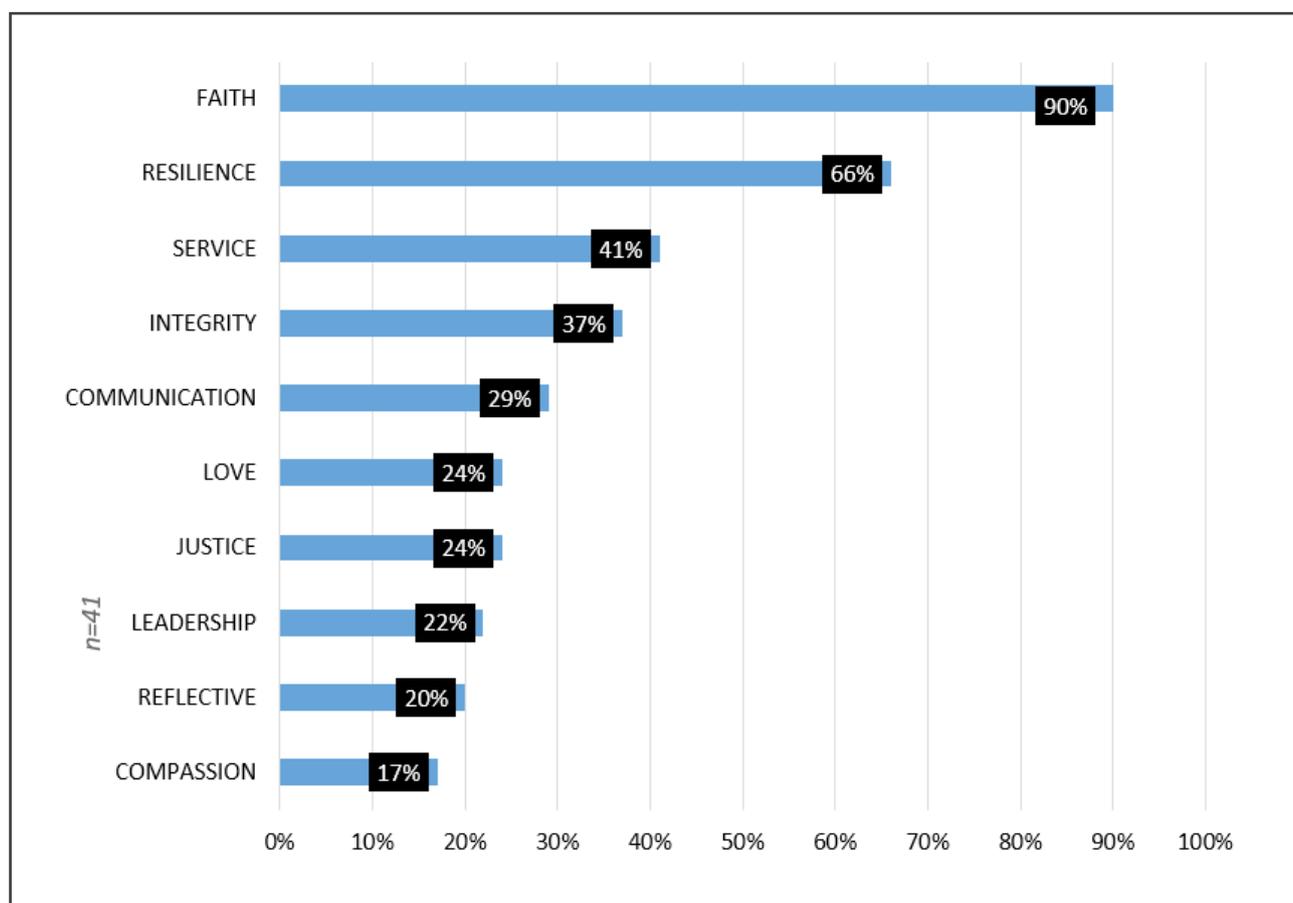
This reflects the dominance of assessment in maintained schools of whatever type. However, the clarity of vision a strong Catholic ethos provides can act as a buttress against the dominance of assessment and competency which can undermine the ethos, as one teacher explained:

It has brought home to me something of the significance of a Catholic school because Catholic schools have a concrete sense of who they are, and this is some protection from the pressure and danger.

Leaders who appeal to resilience to create a common language for their school community can only do so if they allow it to act as an apologist for accountability measures which, unchecked, make 'exams ... so pervasive in schools that they ... crowd out other educational goods' (Arthur et al., 2015: 5). Resilience cannot create moral purpose. It is essential therefore that resilience is placed in a broader social context and always understood only as one of a number of virtues that we seek to develop in pupils.

The same three performance virtues - determination, teamwork and leadership – figure in the selection of both secondary and primary leaders for the ‘ideal school leader’. At play here is a dispassionate eye for what is required of leaders, irrespective of the context in which they work. The absence of the majority of the performance virtues from what leaders think is required of the Catholic leader, is a clear signal that Catholic leaders prioritised the theological and moral virtues. The word ‘Catholic’ generates a selection of virtues which offers an understanding of Catholic leadership as, primarily, one of faithful service.

CHART 4: PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF MOST IMPORTANT VIRTUES FOR A CATHOLIC LEADER



Intellectual Virtues

The priority given to theological and moral virtues can provide only a limited explanation for why the intellectual virtues are not a high priority for primary and secondary leaders. There are two more likely reasons for this situation, one applicable to all schools and one to Catholic schools. There appears to be a link between the low priority given to intellectual virtues by school leaders (and pupils) and the high priority given to resilience. The question arises:

Does a preoccupation with accountability measures – with performance - require a focus on limited measurable ends or targets which are inherently anti-intellectual because they focus solely on ‘what is required?’ and ‘what works?’

A culture which concentrates on measurable outcomes will always be impatient of anything it perceives as distracting schools from attending to those outcomes. Secondly, the focus on a theology rather than a *philosophy* of education, following the Second Vatican Council, has led to an emphasis on the distinctive nature of Catholic schools - their ecclesial identity:

‘Often what is perhaps fundamentally lacking among Catholics who work in a school is a clear realisation of the identity of a Catholic school and the courage to follow all the consequences of its uniqueness ...’ (CCE, 1977: 66). This ‘calls for courageous renewal on the part of the Catholic school... And so, now as in the past, the Catholic school must be able to speak for itself effectively and convincingly’ (CCE, 1997; 3).

While the focus on ecclesial identity can give some protection from the pressure of accountability measures (highlighting in particular the crucial role of courage, honesty and integrity for the Catholic leader), the unintended consequence of this focus – albeit a necessary one to maintain the ethos of the Catholic school faced with increasing secularisation, pluralism and technological change - is that it arguably leads to a downplaying of the intellectual virtues. It is essential, for both reasons, that leaders and those with responsibility for training leaders include the intellectual virtues in the selection of virtues for the Catholic leader. This integration will help to provide the reflective practitioner, who wants to learn from evidence based research, with a theological *and* philosophical formation which will go some way to alleviate the increasing emphasis on utility.



Civic Virtues

The civic virtues are the most visible and intentional expression of character education in Catholic schools. The practice of the civic virtues is the arena in which the distinction between *character caught* and *character taught* can intersect.

Catholic leaders exemplify this civic engagement in so far as they understand their role as a vocation to serve: a calling to live out the Gospel by striving to place Christ at the centre of all relationships and activities. As one headteacher commented:

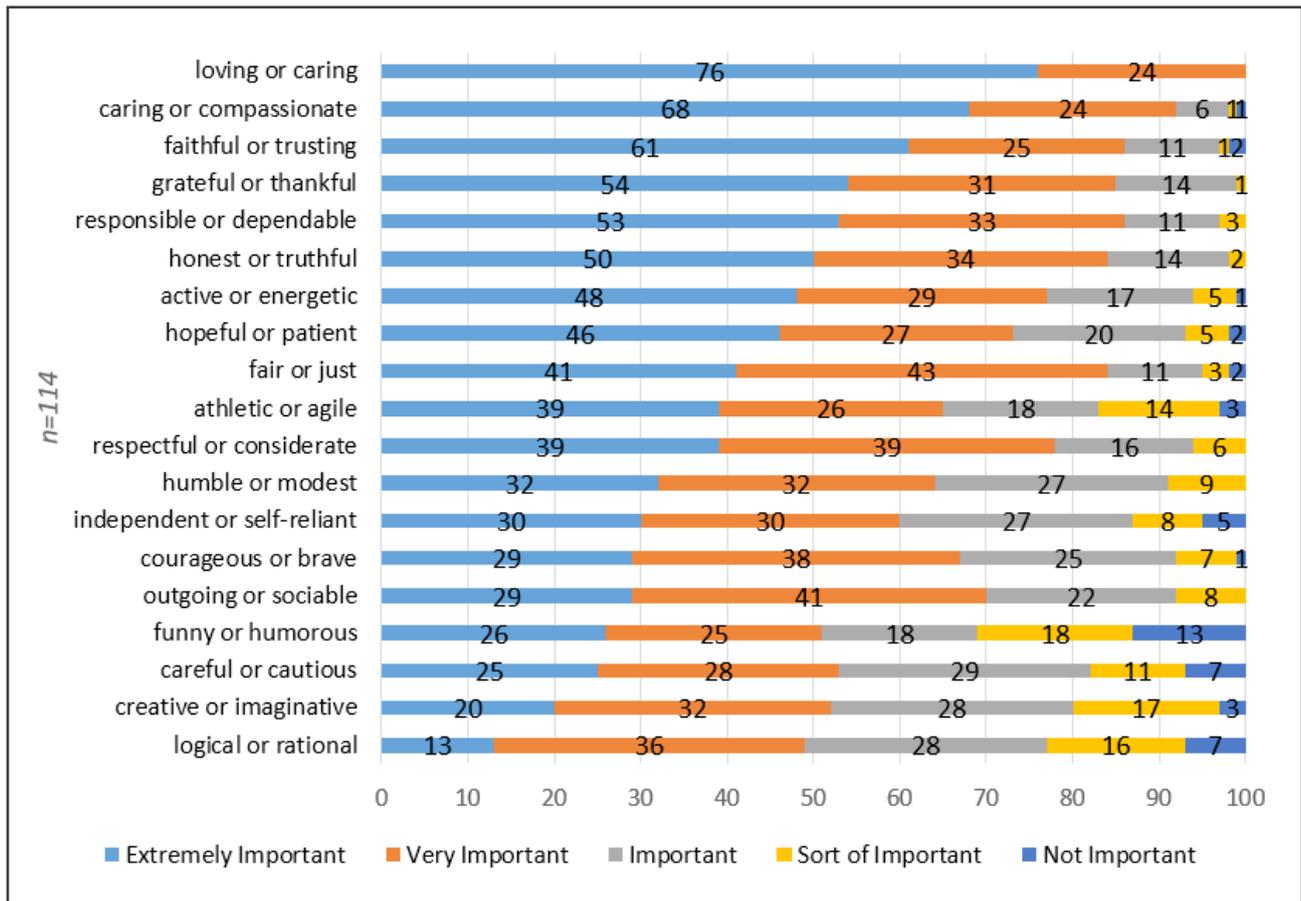
For me it's the difference between vocation and occupation. Sometimes it can feel like an occupation, but you have to remember it's about you, your character, living out as a teacher your vocation.

The Jubilee Centre places service within the civic virtues. Catholic leaders go further and root service in faithful leadership which seeks to engage all staff and pupils in their own calling to serve. Service in this sense is often characterised as 'servant leadership'. A broad spectrum of meaning may be attached to this term, from leaders performing mundane tasks to leaders who create opportunities for others to express their gifts which, in turn, builds the school's capacity. Servant leadership is, then, not only about symbolic acts, but about leaders who trust staff and pupils with leadership roles and who forgive failure. It is about 'decreasing in order for others to increase'. In essence, leaders in Catholic schools are indispensable to the extent to which they continually nurture new leaders.

This discloses the necessity of increasing a school's leadership capacity by recognising and promoting the gifts and talents of others. Leaders and teachers empower each other and their pupils to take on leadership roles within the school through a broad range of virtues. As one school leader remarked:

“ *Our motto is 'To Love and Serve'. It's not about achievement – or should I say it's not about a self-centred achievement – for me to do well. Yes, you've got your gifts and talents, but it's not just about using for yourself it's about using them to serve others, so you're thinking about others and the community.*

CHART 5: YEAR 5 & 6 PUPILS' SELF-REPORTED VIRTUES



Q2: HOW DELIBERATE AND SYSTEMATIC IS THE TEACHING OF THE VIRTUES IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?

The teaching of the virtues in Catholic schools is more *character caught* than *character taught*. It is the ethos and the practical application of the mission of the Catholic school that bears the weight of character formation.

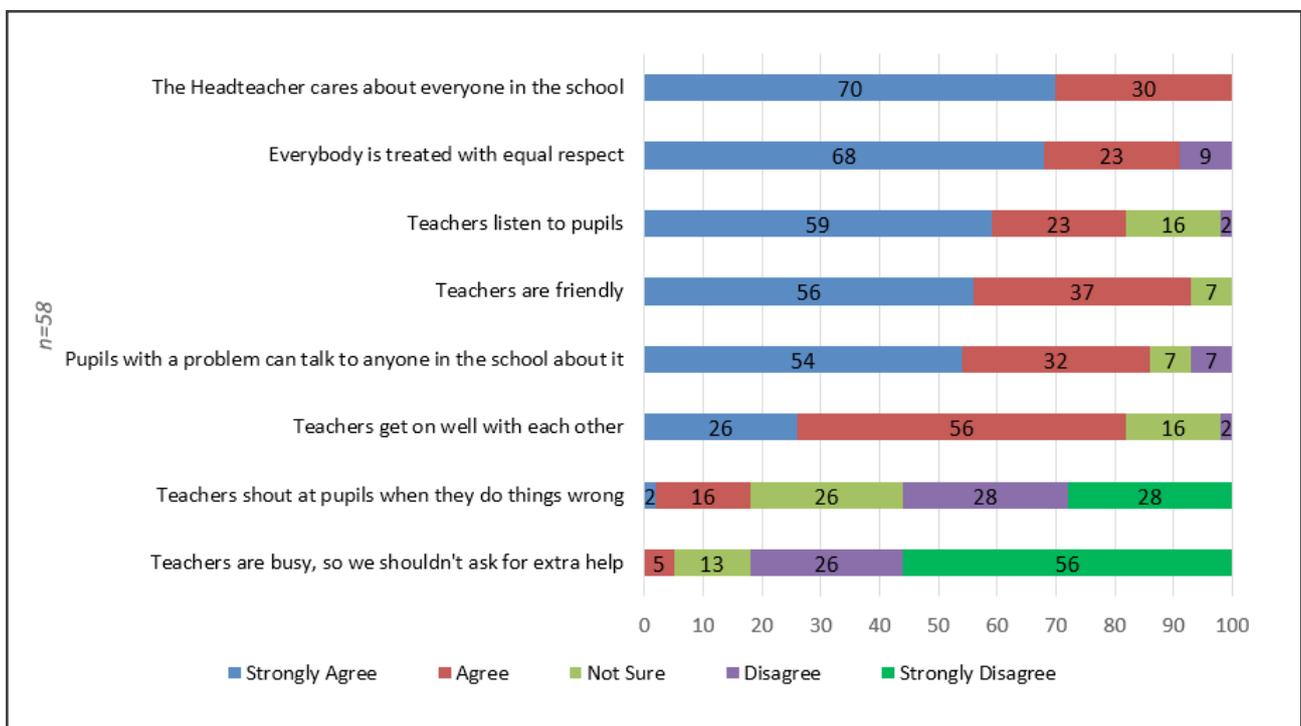
This practical enactment is characterised by a unity of purpose, high quality relationships and an emphasis on service to the community, all non-negotiable elements of good character formation.

Ethos – Unity of Purpose

The importance of a strong ethos cannot be overstated because there is no substitute for ethos in character education and moreover, the ethos of the Catholic school is constitutive of the school's moral depth. Promoting a shared vision of life, identified as growth in those virtues that lead us to Christ, involves not only giving priority to the question of purpose over 'What is required?' and 'What works?' but ensuring that the question of purpose, as far as possible, shapes the question of content and technique. This explains why performance outcomes are understood as integral to the ethos of Catholic schools and not additional to that ethos (The Code of Canon Law, 1983, 806: 2).

Leaders and teachers testified to the veracity of the statement: ‘the Catholic school must be able to count on the unity of purpose and cohesion of all its members’ to bring its ethos into being (CCE, 1977: 65). Schools produced mission statements collaboratively with representatives from all groups within the school community and had regular reviews to ensure the statement was fit for purpose. The most effective statements were those that translated the mission into very short summaries that pupils learn and increasingly practise. Another effective feature was the production of year group versions of the mission that acted as age appropriate glossaries of key values.

CHART 6: YEAR 9 AND 10 PUPILS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONSHIPS IN THE IDEAL SCHOOL



However, the preference for gospel values rather than the language of virtue in the majority of schools prevents a deeper appreciation of Virtue Literacy, especially the knowledge and understanding of virtue language and the essential role of critical reflection in decision making.

Ethos – High Quality Relationships

Building and sustaining high quality relationships based on trust and mutual respect among all groups within the school community is integral to the development of pupils' character. Chart 5 presents the self-reported virtues of pupils and highlights those that are essential to high quality relationships.

Of interest in the pupil surveys is how the theological virtue of hope is viewed. While 61% of female (39% male) pupils in Years 5 and 6 thought hope was 'extremely important' this dropped to 29% for Year 7 females (14% male) and 24% (9% male) for Years 9 and 10.

This is, in one important sense, understandable given that faith is more readily articulated in a school of religious character. Love is also personified in action towards one's neighbour and typically described as evidence of the Catholic ethos of the school. Theological hope is not so easily placed, because in modern society it is often reduced to a psychological trait about how optimistic one feels or to the pursuit of future goals. This reduction of the theological character of hope reflects a shift to an increasing emphasis on individual, secular autonomy following the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment sought total freedom for human beings from all authorities. However, such *absolute* self-reliance is entirely counter not only to character education which presupposes a community of shared virtues but also to theological hope which is the virtue 'by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit' (*Catechism*, 1994:1817).

The key place that theological hope is expressed and nourished is in prayer. A Catholic school must, therefore, be a community of prayer always rooted in the primacy of grace (Pope St. John Paul II, 2001: 38).

When thinking of their ideal school (Chart 6), findings showed that pupils believe that positive and supportive relationships are very important between leaders, teachers and pupils. There is a high level of agreement that teachers should be friendly and approachable, that the headteacher should care for all and that everyone should be treated with equal respect.

While schools, in general, promote respect for all, Catholic schools root respect within the Incarnation and biblical account of creation. The belief that the Son of God became human endows humanity in both its unity and extraordinary diversity with dignity, meaning and purpose. Furthermore, the belief that we are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27) means that everyone possesses a 'basic dignity that comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment, not from race, or gender, age or economic status' (Catholic Education Service, 1997: 6).

This is readily understood and confirmed by a headteacher:

What motivates me, and all my staff, is that each young person is made in the image and likeness of God and is to be celebrated; and they themselves have a unique calling I would say, and I feel this very strongly that my young people have a positive impact on the world. They are powerful self-advocates by the time they get to the sixth form.

Role modelling, defined as the display of behaviours that the school wishes to see demonstrated by its staff, pupils and parents (Arthur et al., 2017: 19), is central to developing high quality relationships. At St. Anthony's Catholic Primary Beeston, a focus on nurture principles demonstrates the essential function of role modelling for building character:

The main aim of nurture is to develop those virtues necessary for life and to close the gap in age related expectations at the earliest opportunity because this provides the most successful impact. The typical nurture group consists of two adults and six children. The idea is to provide intensive nurture provision, equivalent to a day a week in the Rainbow Room. Adults model and role play how to communicate and interact with one another, acting like a good parent. There are always two adults because one adult working in a group cannot model appropriately. Within the group there are always four targeted children and two role models so that even within the group there are role models at peer level that are used as good examples for other children.

One of the Mini-Vinnies at Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic Primary Yeadon, explained during interview how the recognition of virtuous behaviour has influenced that group's work:

We have a weekly Good Samaritan award and we go to the classes and ask the teacher who has been virtuous. We have this tree and we make leaves and whoever has been showing our virtue for that month goes on it. We collect the leaves, they say what someone's done, and take them to celebration assembly. We all listen to what different people have done and we vote, without knowing who has done it, for the best example of a Good Samaritan that week.

Peer group role modelling from school buddy and peer mentoring systems which operate at the pastoral and academic level, to pupil leadership in initiatives like Mini-Vinnies, Junior SVP, 'Faith in Action', chaplaincy, charitable work and sport leader's awards are examples of good practice in many Catholic schools.

High quality relationships with parents is also a key feature of character education. St. Anthony's uses role modelling to engage its parents:

Engagement with parents was the way to bring this school out of where it was because you will never bring a school out without bringing the parents too. They have to be actual partners in that learning journey. The impact of the conscious decision to make engagement with parents integral to the school's success as a community of learning has been absolutely phenomenal.



The school is totally committed to family learning that models the virtues. We run family learning courses continuously. Where we see a need we make a course. Some are academic based, some cover practical skills. The school does not run courses for three or four weeks, we are running 24-week programmes. They are in the school day and our parents will move their work commitments to attend. I know we are an anomaly: parents come to our courses – they don't go anywhere else. It's not simply about competence, the parents have complete trust. Family learning opens their eyes to how their child behaves in a school setting, how their child mixes with others, how in fact they, as a parent, behave towards their child when they see comparisons with other parents. Everything is specific and targeted. We don't waste time on things that won't make an impact. So they are a fantastic learning opportunity.

The lesson for all schools is that engagement with parents builds and sustains a unity of purpose, a unity through which character formation in all its aspects is most readily achieved:

It is essential that we are strong for this community. It is down to the parents to make the difference, but it is also definitely down to us too.

Ethos – Service to the Community

The engagement of pupils in the civic virtues is one of the hallmarks of Catholic schools. As the lead teacher of Mini-Vinnies at St. Christopher's Catholic Primary Romiley states:

This is the sort of initiative we wanted to run that is centred on service to others and focused on gospel values and character formation. The structure of Mini Vinnies, with its elected Chair and Treasurer, has enabled me to see them grow as leaders. Children bring all their ideas and they lead it. It's a delight, because it is not teacher led. It's not about a typical non-uniform day with a £1 coming in from the family for a good cause, but children devising projects and running projects and benefiting the community – that is why it is at the heart of a Catholic school for me.

At St. John's School for the Deaf, the civic virtues are deliberately pursued in a different setting to the classroom because:

We are not educating the students for in here, we are educating them for the world where they are going to make a difference. Growth in the civic virtues is central... Students with complex needs might be quite isolated in their home area so in Year 9 they start going to a mini-college to prepare them for the outside world and they do work experience in Years 10 and 11. In the sixth form students join mainstream colleges e.g. York College, and our students are encouraged to do a volunteering project. In this area there's a dementia café and students who are studying construction at York College volunteer at 'Helping Hands', a charity in Harrogate that improves older people's houses. They get a lot from this experience, not least they realise that they have a lot to give: civic virtues are very strong.

Leaders saw the civic virtues as a means of increasing social awareness amongst pupils. At St. Christopher's Romiley, pupils' 'service of others has helped them to see that need is on their doorstep and not simply in the developing world ... the children will often say, "We've seen this, can we do something about it?" It encourages a community spirit, something that we need in our community'.

“ *I'm more aware of the people in need around us – before I didn't realise – I'm grateful for what I have and I'm a better person for helping people. (Pupil)*

Q3: HOW DEVELOPED IS THE VIRTUE LITERACY OF PUPILS?

Virtue Literacy consists of three components; Virtue Knowledge and Understanding, Virtue Perception and Virtue Reasoning (Jubilee Centre, 2017). Two of these components shall be attended to below.

1. **Virtue Knowledge and Understanding;**
2. **Virtue Reasoning.**

(Jubilee Centre, 2017)

1. *Pupils' knowledge and understanding of virtue is not promoted and developed.* There were two isolated examples in two schools where the virtues were introduced and taught to the children.

The creation of a shared language of virtue, using the virtues from the John Paul II Foundation for Sport at Ss. Peter and Paul's, allowed what was an initial focus in acts of worship, to become a way for the school to emphasise 'living the virtue throughout the school day':

The school has dispensed with the many and varied school awards (e.g. 'Star of the week') used to celebrate the Friday celebration assembly to give prominence to those who have been 'living the virtue' which is the only certificate the school awards. A senior leader describes the impact of the focus on virtue: "because we are doing one virtue for a whole month that has had a greater impact... Staff are a lot more aware of them and bring them into everyday conversations in the classroom" and "the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the virtue and the virtues is much deeper – having it for a month allows you to go deeper into the meaning and application of the virtue.

In interview a pupil, rather remarkably, confirmed this when he said:

A virtue is something you do, it's a quality of someone, you do it over time in different ways; you do an honest act and you become honest. You are what you do.

The involvement of Year 7 pupils in the *Narnian Virtues Project* taught by the English Department at McAuley Catholic High Doncaster demonstrated the significance of teaching character and virtues through stories, but also how explicit teaching of the virtues not only increases Virtue Knowledge and Understanding but enables pupils to apply that understanding to their everyday actions.

The teaching of specific virtues and their accompanying vices gave the pupils the language to identify virtues and vices in practical situations. It was interesting that once we started you could see the students using their own examples of when they were demonstrating virtues and vices. The ability to apply the virtues to episodes in one's own life and others' lives became evident after the fourth and fifth week. I started to see my students thinking more about their own actions on a day-to-day basis, thinking of examples in school when they were showing the virtues and when they weren't.

However, once the project came to an end, the teacher noticed a decline in pupils' Virtue Literacy. The absence of explicit teaching of the virtues across the curriculum is the principal reason why Virtue Literacy is not developed and applied in everyday life. This application is impeded when Gospel values alone shape the school's ethos. The danger in such a reliance is manifest when Gospel values are only seen as 'buzz words' by pupils and staff without any deeper reflection on their meaning and their role in personal change.

2. Virtue Reasoning is associated with the ability to reflect on situations that require a virtuous response. Critical reflection is essential to virtue reasoning because it allows pupils to consider their character and encourages pupils to seek opportunities to develop it. It is, in other words, a vehicle for *character sought*.

At St. John's School for the Deaf the staff:

measure and plan for 'what counts in life' for its students. This is broken down and assessed at regular intervals: how well are you learning in this and that subject? How well are you respecting others? How well are you doing with your life plan?

In such an environment:

motivation is not external, based on awards but a key internal driver. They are proud of what they have achieved because they have come from a different place and their pathway is different.

The importance of critical reflection to the development of intrinsic motivation is demonstrated in 'Learning outside the Classroom' at Sacred Heart Catholic Primary, Sowerby Bridge:

Reflection, of purposely encouraging pupils to think about their experiences, is a deliberate practice central to learning in Forest School. Our working motto is "slow thinking, slow learning results in deep learning" ... everything in school is so fast, how is it possible to learn something of deeper significance about oneself?

...Through reflection ...

motivation becomes something real in Forest School; it is an intrinsic motivation to pursue a task. It is not an external reward that they could get in the classroom like a badge or a sticker. The children become motivated people.

This intrinsic motivation is related to teamwork and leadership:

Forest School gives lots of opportunities for the children to go out and try things in their own way and enough space for negotiation and ways of working to achieve a pupil's aim peacefully. It allows things to be self-initiated and this encourages leadership which can inspire others, empowers them and, at the same time, increases confidence.

Furthermore, out of this space given for reflection and negotiation

flow opportunities to practise the moral virtues of gratitude, tolerance, courage and self-discipline. Opportunities to take risks and conduct challenging activities foster courage and self-discipline and gratitude comes from a slowly growing respect for nature and conservation. The children can see how clearing an area makes a positive impact on them and on the space created, and how overuse of an area can show them how overuse of the environment can have a negative impact. The planting of trees in an area of the Forest School has given the children an insight into the improvement of an area for the community and the benefit it brings to wildlife;

demonstrating how Forest School can promote the civic virtues of community spirit and neighbourliness.

The Ad-ICM (UK) test, completed by Year 7, 9 and 10 pupils, was designed to identify pupils' judgement of the best course of action and the best reasons for action when faced with a dilemma and so gives some indication of virtue reasoning. The pupils were asked to reflect on the situation and decide what the protagonist should do when confronted with a dilemma about honesty. The data for Year 7 suggests that, in general, these pupils are able to identify what protagonists should do and they choose some justifications for actions that observed social norms and universal principles. There was also a tendency for some pupils to choose an action or justification out of self-interest.

Results for Years 9 and 10 indicated that the desire to act in their own self-interest was overwhelming. It is usual to suggest that, as pupils get older, their ability to choose best courses of action and best justifications for action increases (Arthur et al., 2017: 27). However, the inability of this age group to move beyond self-interest may be age-related, particularly when faced with a dilemma involving honesty - which pupils quite readily view in terms of a conflict of loyalties between peer group over teacher (Arthur et al., 2015: 23).

Nevertheless, the exposure of Year 7 pupils to the practice of critical reflection in the *Narnian Virtues Project*, to some extent, accounts for their better performance in the Ad-ICM test in comparison with Years 9 and 10:

A key feature promoted by the Narnian project was the importance of critical reflection or looking back at your own actions and critically studying yourself and seeing how you can improve as a person: personal reflection as a means of moving forward... after the fourth week they were able to talk about when they were living the virtues and when they weren't. Later, the students were able to talk more fluently about how their actions impacted other people and how the story linked. So, they would say 'I was more like Edmund on that occasion wasn't I sir!' On the fifth week I started to see my students thinking more about their own actions on a day-to-day basis. Some could go further and compare the characters to themselves more generally, not just on one occasion. We had quite a few Susans and Edmunds not many Peters. The ability of some students to deliberate and reflect on courses

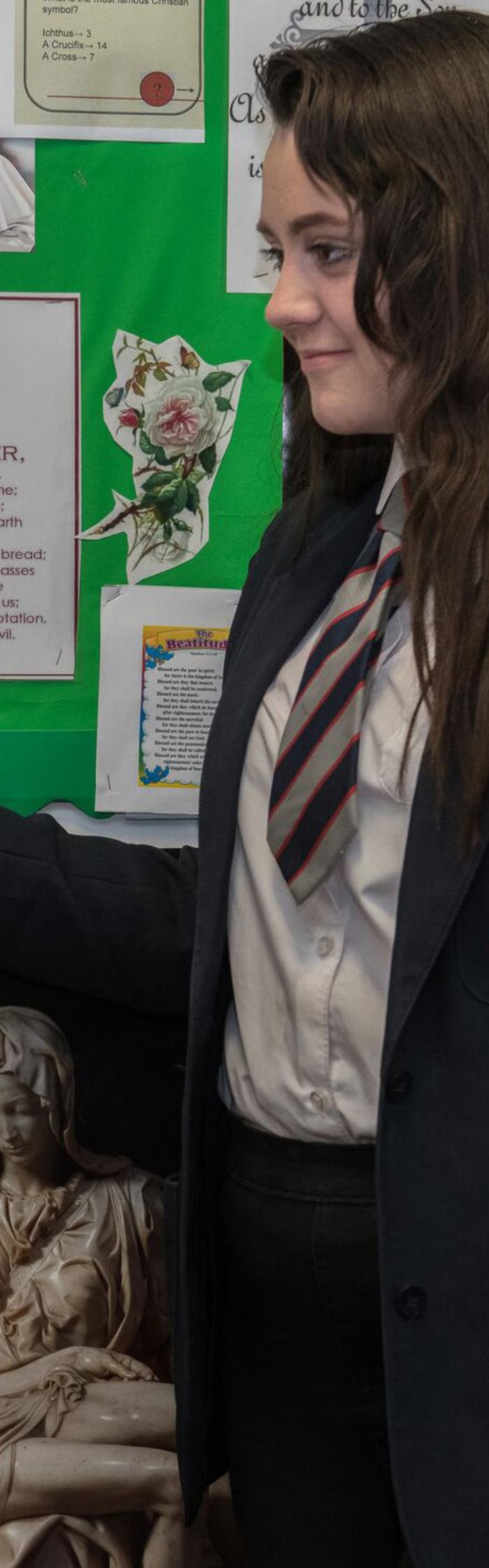
of action to discern best and worst action choices was a highlight and there was no way they could have done that before the project started as accurately and eloquently as they did. I am certain it was the C. S. Lewis text plus the reflection on it that enabled them to do it.

The concept of reflection is not uncommon to Catholic schools. Reflection is central to all good acts of worship. However, the key to worship is not simply going forth from it to perform a good deed, but the quality of personal reflection as an aid to becoming a better person through deepening one's relationship with God. This makes sense in a Catholic school, because the word of God is the principal source of orientation for human formation. Schools could point to other examples of reflection, e.g. diary writing and journaling. However, the key to the positive impact of critical reflection is that it must be not only a regular feature of school life but have an explicit and systematic focus on the virtues:

The project had a positive impact during its delivery but what was also clear was the decline in that impact once the project finished. The most significant thing that was lost when the project ended was the weekly dialogue about what they were doing and how they were behaving to each other. We lost the actual discussions around love, wisdom and the other virtues. Being able to talk about being honest and taking on advice from wise people. All of that discussion helped them to think about their own behaviour specifically because it was a regular thing, they were doing it every week. The students can still name the virtues and the vices, but they have forgotten how relevant they are to how they can change their character.

The lack of attention to critical reflection outside of this project meant that pupils' development was arrested once the project was completed. Consequently, building in critical reflection across the curriculum is essential to the development of practical wisdom and self-knowledge.





NEXT STEPS

Based on the insights revealed through this project, the following 'next steps' are suggested for Catholic schools and school leaders to enhance their character education provision:

- Communicate to all a clear understanding of the relationship between the Church's vision for education and the school's mission.
- Leaders should evaluate their role in relation to the virtues identifying strengths and the virtues that need development.
- Create significant opportunities for all staff to reflect on those virtues that will enable their formation as leaders and teachers.
- The school community should reflect on the virtues and select a broad and balanced range of virtues that are clearly defined and express the Church's vision within the school's own context.
- Audit and evaluate the provision for character education developing a plan which includes significant actions and criteria for what leaders want to see lived out within the school community.
- Integrate systematic opportunities across the curriculum to engage all in the explicit teaching of the virtues with a particular focus on critical reflection.

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GLOSSARY

Character ^{*4} – a set of personal dispositions that evoke specific emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct.

Character caught ^{*} – the school community of both staff and students provide the example, culture, and inspirational influence in a positive ethos that motivates and promotes character development.

Character sought ^{*} – the school provides varied opportunities that generate the formation of personal habits and character commitments. These help pupils and young people over time to seek, desire and freely pursue their character development. Character sought specifically refers to the transition from external to intrinsic motivation in the pursuit of the good.

Character taught ^{*} – the school provides educational experiences in and out of the classroom that equip pupils and young people with the language, knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes that enable character development.

Critical Reflection – or critical thinking is a component of virtue reasoning and is concerned with making reasoned judgements which includes the ability to explain differences in moral situations. It is the means used to equip pupils and young people with the ability to make wise choices of their own within the context of our modern society.

Ethos – refers in a Catholic school to ‘a way of living, behaving and doing things by people who, though diverse, follow common values and are united by a shared vision of life.’ (Stock, 2013: 18). For a more detailed exposition of the Catholic school ethos see Stock (2013: 18-24).

Narnian Virtues Project - The Narnian Virtues Character Education research project is led by Professor Mark Pike, Head of the School of Education at the University of Leeds. The project is a teaching intervention based on C. S. Lewis’ ‘Chronicles of Narnia’ which explores twelve ‘Narnian virtues’ (love, wisdom, fortitude, courage, self-control, justice, forgiveness, gratitude, humility, integrity, hard work and curiosity) through a study of C. S. Lewis’ books.

Virtue Literacy ^{*} – has several components: virtue perception, virtue knowledge and understanding and virtue reasoning.

- **Virtue Knowledge and Understanding** – understanding the meaning of the virtue term and why the virtue is important. Being able to apply the virtue to episodes in one’s own and others’ lives.
- **Virtue Perception** – noticing situations involving or standing in need of virtues.
- **Virtue Reasoning** – discernment and deliberative action about virtues, including in situations where virtues conflict or collide. Virtue reasoning concerns making reasoned judgements which includes the ability to explain differences in moral situations. This emphasis on acquiring judgement must be reflective and so allow for the empowerment of the ethical self through autonomous decision-making.

⁴Term marked with * are as defined in A Framework for Character Education in Schools (Jubilee Centre, 2017)

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