A Framework for **Character Education** in Scotland's Schools

Adapted by Character Scotland from "A Framework for Character Education in Schools" developed at The Jubilee Centre

"Character development is the foundation for improved attainment and human flourishing"

The aim of this Framework is to provide a rationale for the centrality of character education in Scotland within the context of Curriculum for Excellence underpinned as it is by a rich evolutionary history, the virtues of the Scottish Parliamentary Mace - wisdom, compassion, integrity, justice - and articulated in the four capacities of successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. The Framework also outlines the pivotal role of character education to Scotland's national improvement agenda on achieving excellence and equity in our educational system, to developing the young workforce and especially in closing the attainment gap. Importantly, there is a strong and supportive evidence basis on which to drive this agenda forward.

Developing our young people's characters is an obligation on us all, not least on parents. Although parents are the primary educators of character, empirical research shows that they want all adults who have contact with their children to contribute to such education, especially their children's teachers. The development of character is a process that requires the efforts of both the developing individual and of the society and its schools. A society determined to enable its members to live well will treat character education as something to which every child has a right. Questions about the kinds of people children will become, the contributions of good character to a flourishing life, and how to balance various virtues and values in this educational process are therefore salient concerns for all schools. Character Education is becoming an increasingly understood attribute of high performing education systems and successful schools.

No one doubts that belonging to a school community is a deeply formative experience that helps make students the kinds of people they become. In a broad sense, character education permeates all subjects, wider school activities and general school ethos; it cultivates the virtues of character associated with common morality and develops students' understanding of excellence in diverse spheres of human endeavour. Schools can and should help students in knowing the good, loving the good and doing the good. Schools should enable students to become good people and citizens, able to lead good lives, as well as successful ones. Schooling is centrally concerned with the formation of character and can benefit from an intentional and planned approach to character development, as explained in this Framework.

Human flourishing is the widely accepted goal of life. To flourish is not only to be happy, but to fulfil one's potential. Flourishing is the aim of character education, which is critical to its achievement. Human flourishing requires moral, intellectual and civic virtues, excellence specific to diverse domains of practice or human endeavour, along with generic virtues of self-management (known as enabling and performance virtues). All are necessary to achieve the highest potential in life. Character education is about 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 individuals who are effective contributors to society, successful learners and responsible citizens.

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Students also need to grow in their understanding of what is good or valuable and their ability to protect and advance what is good. They need to develop a commitment to serving others, which is an essential manifestation of good character in action. Questions of character formation are inseparable from these basic educational goals and are fundamental to living well and responsibly. Character development involves caring for and respecting others as well as caring for and respecting oneself.

Character education is nothing new. If we look at the history of schooling from ancient times to the 20th century, the cultivation of character was typically given pride of place with the exception of a few decades towards the end of the 20th century when, for a variety of different reasons, this aim disappeared from the curricula of many Western democracies. In many eras, Scotland has led the world in character education with Robert Owen and Kurt Hann being notable examples.

Contemporary character education, however, is better grounded academically than its predecessors, with firm support both from the currently popular virtue ethics in moral philosophy and recent trends in social science, such as positive psychology, that have revived the concepts of character and virtue. Finally, a growing general public-policy consensus, across political parties and industry, suggests that the role of moral and civic character is pivotal in sustaining healthy economies and democracies.

WHAT CHARACTER EDUCATION IS . . .

Character is a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct. Character education is an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues. Character education is more than just a subject.

It has a place in the culture and functions of families, classrooms, schools and other institutions. Character education is about helping students grasp what is ethically important in situations and to act for the right reasons, such that they become more autonomous and reflective. Students need to decide wisely the kind of person they wish to become and to learn to choose between already existing alternatives or find new ones. In this process, the ultimate aim of character education is the development of good sense or practical wisdom: the capacity to choose intelligently between alternatives. 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 ethical insight.

WHAT CHARACTER EDUCATION IS NOT . . .

Character education is not about indoctrination and conditioning. The ultimate goal of all character education should be to equip students with the intellectual tools to make wise choices of their own within the framework of a democratic society. Critical thinking is thus a vital facet of a

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well-rounded character. Character and virtue are not exclusively religious notions although they do clearly have a place in religious systems. Almost all

current theories of virtue and character education happen to be formulated in a post-religious language. Character and virtue are not paternalistic notions. If being 'paternalistic' means that character education goes against the wishes of students and their parents, empirical research shows the opposite.

More generally speaking, the character of children cannot simply be put on hold at school until they reach the age where they have become wise enough to decide for themselves. Some form of character education will always be taking place in school. The sensible question that can be asked about a school's character education strategy is not, therefore, whether such education does occur, but whether it is intentional, planned, organised and reflective, or assumed, unconscious, reactive and random. The emphasis on character and virtue is not conservative or individualist – all about 'fixing the kids'. The ultimate aim of character education is not only to make individuals better people but to create the social and institutional conditions within which all human beings can flourish. Character education is not about promoting the moral ideals of a particular moral system. Rather, it aims to promote a core set of universally acknowledged (cosmopolitan) virtues and values.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Character is educable and its progress can be measured holistically

Character is important: it contributes to human and societal flourishing

Character is largely caught through role-modelling and emotional contagion: school culture and ethos are therefore central

Character should also be taught: direct teaching of character provides the rationale, language and tools to use in developing character elsewhere in and out of school

Character is the foundation for improved attainment, better behaviour and increased employability

Character should be developed in partnership with parents, employers and community organisations

Character education is about fairness - each child has a right to character development

Character empowers students and is liberating

Character demonstrates a readiness to learn from others

Character promotes democratic citizenship

WHICH VIRTUES CONSTITUTE GOOD CHARACTER?

Individuals can respond well or less well to the challenges they face in everyday life, and the moral virtues are those character traits that enable human beings to respond appropriately to situations in any area of experience. These character traits enable people to live, cooperate and learn with others in a way that is peaceful, neighbourly and morally justifiable. Displaying moral and other virtues in admirable activity over the course of a life - and enjoying the inherent satisfaction that ensues - is what it means to live a flourishing life.

No definitive list of relevant areas of human experience and the respective virtues can be given, as the virtues will to a certain extent be relative to individual constitution, developmental stage and social circumstance. For example, temperance in eating will be different for an Olympic athlete and an office worker; what counts as virtuous behaviour for a teenager may not pass muster for a mature adult; and the virtues needed to survive in a war zone may not be the same as those in a peaceful rural community.

There are also a great many virtues, each concerned with particular activities and potential spheres of human experience. It is, therefore, neither possible nor desirable to provide an exhaustive list of the moral virtues that should be promoted in all schools. Particular schools may decide to prioritise certain virtues over others in light of the school's history, ethos, location or specific student population. Nevertheless, a list of prototypical virtues – that will be recognised and embraced by representatives of all cultures and religions – can be suggested and drawn upon in character education. The list below contains examples of such virtues that have been highlighted in some of the most influential philosophical and religious systems of morality – and that also resonate well with current efforts at character education in schools.

In addition to those prototypical moral virtues, schools need to promote specific civic virtues, such as service, citizenship and volunteering, helping students understand their ties to society and their

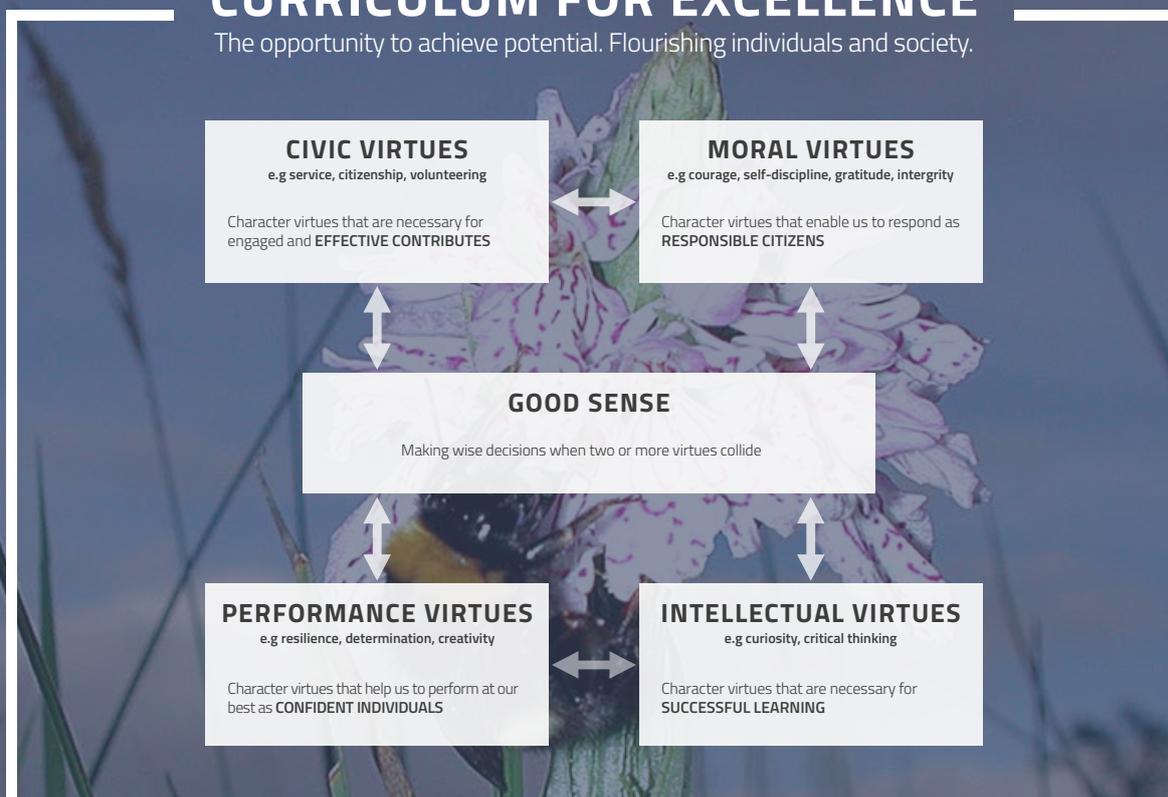| VIRTUE	DEFINITION
Courage	Acting with bravery in fearful situations
Justice	Acting with fairness towards others by honouring rights and responsibilities
Honesty	Being truthful and sincere
Compassion	Exhibiting care and concern
Self-discipline	Making yourself do the things that should be done
Gratitude	Feeling and expressing thanks for benefits
Humility/Modesty	Estimating oneself within reasonable limits

responsibilities within it. Furthermore, all developing human beings will need to possess a host of intellectual virtues, such as curiosity and critical thinking, that guide their quest for knowledge and information. Among the intellectual virtues one deserves a special mention here. That is the virtue which the ancient Greeks called phronesis, but can also be called 'good sense' – the overall quality of knowing what to want and what not to want when the demands of two or more virtues collide, and to integrate such demands into an acceptable course of action. Living with good sense entails considered deliberation, well founded judgement and the vigorous enactment of decisions. It shows itself in foresight, in being clear-sighted and far-sighted about the ways in which actions will lead to desired goals. The ability to learn from experience (and make mistakes) is at the centre of it. To live with good sense is to be open-minded, to recognise the true variety of things and situations to be experienced. To live without 'good sense' is to live thoughtlessly and indecisively. 'Bad sense' shows itself in irresoluteness, or remissions in carrying out decisions and in negligence and blindness to our circumstances. To live without 'good sense' is to be narrow-minded and closed-minded; it can reveal itself in an attitude of being 'cocksure' – a 'know-it-all' that resists reality. 'Good sense' should not be confused with 'cunning' as non-moral straining for any self-chosen good. 'Good sense' underlies and informs all the other virtues; indeed it constitutes the overarching meta-virtue necessary for good character. It requires a well-rounded assessment of situations, thinking through and looking ahead to potential actions and their consequences.

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

The opportunity to achieve potential. Flourishing individuals and society.

CIVIC VIRTUES
e.g service, citizenship, volunteering

Character virtues that are necessary for engaged and **EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTES**

MORAL VIRTUES
e.g courage, self-discipline, gratitude, intergrity

Character virtues that enable us to respond as **RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS**

GOOD SENSE

Making wise decisions when two or more virtues collide

PERFORMANCE VIRTUES
e.g resilience, determination, creativity

Character virtues that help us to perform at our best as **CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS**

INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES
e.g curiosity, critical thinking

Character virtues that are necessary for **SUCCESSFUL LEARNING**

Virtues are empowering and are the key to fulfilling an individual's potential. Because of the foundational role of the virtues in human flourishing, schools have a responsibility to cultivate the virtues, define and list those they want to prioritise and integrate them into all teaching and learning in and out of school. Students therefore need to learn their meanings and identify appropriate practices in which to apply them in their lives, respecting themselves (as persons of character) and being of service to others.

In addition to the moral virtues, all human beings need personal traits that enable them to manage their lives effectively. These traits are sometimes called performance virtues and enabling virtues, to distinguish them from the specifically moral ones. In contemporary school policy discourse, they are commonly referred to as 'soft skills'. One of the most significant of those is resilience – the ability to bounce back from negative experiences. Others include determination, confidence, creativity and teamwork. All good programmes of character education will include the cultivation of performance virtues, but they will also explain to students that those virtues derive their ultimate value from serving morally acceptable ends, in particular from being enablers and vehicles of the moral virtues.

Although virtues can be divided up into different categories, they form a coherent, mutually supportive whole in a well-rounded life, and character education is all about their integration, guided by the overarching intellectual virtue of good sense.

"Learning and developing our virtues is empowering and key to fulfilling our potential."

THE GOALS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION

It is common for a school to outline the goals of education in its mission statement, and a school that seeks to strengthen the character of its students should affirm its commitment to doing so in its mission statement. Each school needs to describe the kinds of future citizens it wants to help develop and then outline the philosophy that underlies its approach. The philosophy and approach should involve clear ethical expectations of students and teachers and modelling by teachers to guide the building of individual virtues in students. Schools should provide opportunities for students to not just think and do, but also understand what it means to be and become a mature, reflective person. They should help prepare students for the tests of life, rather than a life of tests.

SCHOOL ETHOS IS BASED ON CHARACTER

The research evidence is clear: schools that are values-driven have high expectations and demonstrate academic, professional and social success. They are committed and determined to develop the character of their students through the articulation of, demonstration of and commitment to core ethical virtues and to the cultivation of meaningful personal relationships. Because the ethos of a school is the expression of the collective character of everyone, it is important for every member

of a school community to have some basic understanding of what character is. Students and teachers therefore need to learn not only the names and meanings of character virtues, but display them in the school's thinking, attitudes and actions.

Character virtues should be reinforced everywhere: on the playing fields, in classrooms, corridors, interactions between teachers and students, in assemblies, posters, head teacher messages and communications, staff training, and in relations with parents. They are critical in extra-curricular activities and should translate into positive feelings and behaviour.

The process of being educated in virtue is not only one of acquiring ideas. It is about belonging and living within a community – for schools are, together with the family, one of the principal means by which students grow in virtue.

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TEACHERS AS CHARACTER EDUCATORS

Character education builds on what already happens in schools, and most teachers see character cultivation as a core part of their role. Considerations of character, of the kind of person students hope to become, should be at the heart of teaching and education. The virtues

acquired through experience by students are initially under the guidance of parents and teachers who serve as role models and moral exemplars.

In order to be a good teacher, one needs to be or become a certain kind of person: a person of good character who also exemplifies commitment to the value of what they teach. The character and integrity of the teacher is more fundamental than personality or personal style in class, and it is no less important than mastery of subject content and techniques of instruction. Teaching a subject with integrity involves more than helping students to acquire specific bits of knowledge and skills. Good teaching is underpinned by an ethos and language that enables a public discussion of character within the school community so that good character permeates all subject teaching and learning. It also models commitment to the forms of excellence or goodness inherent in the subject matter: the qualities of craftsmanship, artistry, careful reasoning and investigations, the beauty and power of language, and the deeper understanding made possible by the disciplines. Such teacher commitment is important if students are to learn the value of what is taught and learn to do work that is good and personally meaningful.

Although a clear picture is emerging of the inescapability of character education, teachers often complain that they suffer from moral ambivalence and lack of self-confidence in their (inescapable) professional position as role models and character educators. Repeated empirical studies show that teachers find it difficult to address ethical issues in the classroom. Although many teachers possess a strong interest in moral issues, they are not always adequately trained to reflect

critically upon and convey moral views to their students in a sophisticated way. Unfortunately, the recent surge in interest in character education has so far failed to make an impact on teacher education and training. Indeed, contemporary policy discourse, with its amoral, instrumentalist, competence-driven vocabulary, often seems to shy away from perspectives that embrace normative visions of persons in the context of their whole lives. The lack of teacher education programmes with a coherent approach to character education is most likely the result of more dominant principles of grade attainment and classroom management. This seems a lost opportunity, however, given the commonly expressed desire among trainee teachers to make a moral difference. It is therefore fitting to conclude this Framework document with a call for increased attention to moral issues, in general, and character- educational issues, in particular, in teacher education and training.

Character Scotland has been supporting schools and teachers to explore their development of intentional character education since 2009. We encourage all schools and teachers to register with us and take advantage of research and learning materials which will help to implement the framework in their school or teaching practice.
www.character-scotland.org.uk/signup

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