



Morpeth First School
Association of Character Education Kitemark Award

Dear Nadine,

Following an evaluative visit to your school on 6th July 2021, by Tom Haigh, CEO of the Association for Character Education, the Association can confirm that your school has met the high standards required to be awarded the ***“School of Character Kitemark”***.

Please pass on our congratulations to colleagues in your school and particularly Sadie Rodway, who have all contributed enormously to this excellent achievement. Similarly, our sincere congratulations are extended to you, your students, staff and governors as this award clearly recognises the quality of learning, mutually respectful relationships and values-driven personal development programme which are prevalent in all aspects of your school’s provision.

Highly effective and sustainable character education should be bedded in, not bolted on. This principle is clearly evident at Morpeth First school, where character is woven into the very fabric of the school. As a result, it permeates all aspects of school life. This is a remarkable achievement considering the limited time since the launch of the school’s values, and is testament to the strong visionary leadership, collaborative spirit of the staff team, and sheer dedication that has gone into implementing a whole-school character strategy.

Significant time was invested in engaging relevant stakeholders, including staff and governors, to select which values should orientate the school’s character provision. Asking staff and governors to bring in a picture of their own child and describe the experience they would want for them, were they to attend the Morpeth First School, helped facilitate the development of an ambitious vision and ethos to serve pupils at the school. Teachers reported that the 3 values-*Treasured*, *Courageous* and *Empowered* shaped and informed the school’s

culture and decision-making. These values are clearly 'lived' as well as 'laminated.' Staff explained that they had the *courage* to take risks and innovate, and *empowered* to implement new ways of working. *Treasuring* all pupils, as if they were their own children, was sighted by multiple members of staff. Pupils were also able to identify the 3 values that underpinned the school's ethos and explained that these, "*are the really important values for our school.*" The school has a significant number of values including some 'pairings.' When speaking with pupils this didn't seem to be problematic. Focusing on a value each month allows staff and pupils time to explore each one at depth for 4 week periods. Pupils comfortably explained the meaning of more nuanced virtues such as *Integrity* with ease and confidence. A common language is evidently established in the school through extensive reinforcement using a plethora of initiatives. This includes impressive and extensive values-based displays in communal corridors, a virtuous code of conduct, values painted as murals, a values-based rewards scheme and table groups named after the virtues.

Information provided prior to the visit evidenced that the school is taking a pedagogical approach to character education. High-quality internal CPD drew on character education-based research. This helped develop staff understanding of why good character is essential for individual and societal flourishing. It supported colleagues to explicitly re-evaluate the purpose of education beyond solely the transfer of knowledge and academic attainment, and to incorporate the development of good character. The internal training provided a strong prior foundation to the delivery of external training provided by ACE. As a result, when speaking with teaching and support staff it was clear that there is a strong base-level understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the theories of flourishing. In time this will allow the leadership to broaden the responsibility of driving all areas of the character programme beyond a core group of SLT.

The ability to reflect on how one's own virtues guide and orientate decision-making, behaviour, conduct and communication, is essential when striving to develop good character. So, it was highly encouraging to see that *reflection* is a central feature within the school, such as through the pupils' *Character Journals*. Having *Reflective Staff Journals* is a strong example of innovative best practice. These journals provide a space for staff to share reflections on their teaching practice and their own character. Reflecting and journaling in this way has led to dialogues between leadership and staff which may have been less forthcoming otherwise.

This has multiple benefits for the leadership. You are now able to identify personal challenges promptly and quickly, as well as celebrate self-identified successes with the individual. Continuing to maintain and develop high levels of trust will facilitate the sharing of reflections and insights that will be highly valuable when leading and supporting staff. Incorporating character and values into the recruitment and training of all staff, reinforces the importance of character, to both new and existing staff.

I Will Goosehill is a strong initiative that develops civic mindedness and a habit of service within the pupils. Pupils throughout the school were keen to share their pledge and the action they were taking to fulfil it. The recently established parent's group has a strong focus on complimenting this work through developing links with local charities and causes. Building in reflection to support the pupils to explicitly explore the civic and moral virtues developed through these experiences will be valuable, and contribute to how character is 'sought,' as well as 'taught,' and 'caught.'

The school should congratulate its self on the strong progress made in integrating character provision across the school. As it moves forward there are a number of areas for consideration, that would be benefit from some reflection;

- **Integrating character into the core curriculum.** Some progress has been made, but there is ample opportunity for teachers to assess where and how the school's values can be reinforced through the core curriculum.
- **Developing character in the home.** The school has developed a strong flow of communication to parents about how character is developed in the home. Newsletters referring to how activity in the school links directly to the school's values, and a section of the mid-term report template dedicated to feedback on the pupil's character, are two good examples. The next step is to support parents on practical ways that they can develop character within the home. Reflecting on whether this could be one of the aims of the new character-based parent group should be considered.
- **Sharing responsibility across the staff team.** Having the school's character programme led by the headteacher and supported by a Character Lead has allowed rapid progress in setting excellent foundations for the school's programme. As more

staff become both confident and competent in their understanding of what it means to develop good character, why it is important, and how to do it, responsibility should be shared widely. This can be done in innovative ways that are built into the implementation of the overall plan, but crucially ensures mass ownership across the team, while still been driven by the HT and Character Lead.

- **Empower all staff to maximise the value of their reflective journal to reflect on their own character and virtue.** The assessment found that some staff viewed the purpose of the journal was to reflect on their teaching practice. Others also saw it as an opportunity to reflect on their own character, virtue and decision-making. Supporting staff to have the confidence and ability to reflect on their own character, with the aim of becoming exemplar role models for pupils, would be a highly effective exercise. This approach acknowledges that reflection is a skill that is learnt. Exploring responses to everyday moral and ethical dilemmas experienced by staff could be an interesting way to develop phronesis- practical wisdom- in the team.
- **Have a drip feed approach to CPD.** It is important to have regular CPD, even if done informally for a short period of time, as it helps deepen understanding, increase confidence and provides regular inspiration.

Congratulations once again and I wish you all the best as you and your school continue on your journey of developing character into the pupils of your school.

Yours Sincerely



Tom Haigh

CEO, The Association for Character Education