



Headteacher Name: Mrs Samantha Drew
Alumnis Trust School: Dolton C of E Primary EX19 8QF

Association for Character Education Quality Mark (October 2023)

Dear Sam,

Following an evaluative visit to Dolton Primary School on Thursday 19th October 2023 by Mr Gary Lewis, Chair of the Association for Character Education, the Association can confirm that your school has met the standards required to be awarded the ***ACE School of Character Quality Mark***.

Congratulations to you, your students, staff and governors as this award clearly recognises the quality of learning and virtues-driven personal development programme enjoyed by all members of your school community.

Your school is part of the Alumnis Trust group of schools and much of the character provision, structure and future planning of your school is shared by all schools in the group. This level of consistency in both provision and leadership across the MAT is relatively unique and is a particularly strong feature of the Trust, and by definition, your school. In particular, the Assessor would wish to highlight the following Trust-wide strengths: -

Led and driven by the CEO, Neil Moir and the senior leadership of the Trust, including Rachael Sharpe (Director of Education) and Lyndsey Bolton (Trust Character Lead), the Trust has articulated a set of clear virtues/values and has placed the development of Character at the very heart of provision for both students, staff and the wider community it serves. Virtues/values and personal development are intricately woven with the clearly espoused Christian Spiritual building blocks shared by nearly all schools in the Trust. This level of consistency and clarity of objectives must be considered a considerable strength and an excellent foundation for further growth and development of all schools.

The clear central leadership ensures that a language of character and virtue permeates all activities of the Trust and provides an obvious platform for all members of the community to participate actively in the shared goals and Trust wide vision. Students and staff speak warmly of their sense of purpose and belonging and this was most obvious in their sense of emotional and physical well-being. They were proud to be part of the community of the wider Trust and were clearly flourishing on so many fronts.

Planning and provision has evolved carefully over the past 3 years and each school has a wealth of support available from skilled and well-informed senior leaders who have actively researched the impact of developing character in terms of both academic achievement and personal growth. Planning is detailed, ambitious and meticulously evolved and has ensured that character growth is embedded in the DNA of each school. This has resulted in staff at all levels feeling well-supported, confident in the use of high-quality resources and able to understand that their own personal growth and professional development is inextricably linked with the stated aims of producing an outstanding educational experience for all members of the Trust's community. Undoubtedly, nearly all schools are reaching a point of "critical mass" in terms of commitment and purposeful understanding from staff at all levels who are evidently developing competence and confidence in equal measure.

The assessor was able to examine in detail a wealth of high-quality planning documents including the "Inspiring Change Programme", C360 Character Curriculum, appraisal templates for staff focusing on character and personal growth, easy to use and extensive character evaluation tools and "Core Virtue" curriculum materials carefully designed for each key stage from Early Years to Key Stage Two to ensure both academic and spiritual evolution in step with emotional and age related personal growth. This level of detailed planning, covering all aspects of character "taught, caught and sought", is considered by the Assessor to be of a very high standard and worthy of copying by other schools in the UK.

Having visited and examined the provision of character education in many schools both nationally and internationally, the Assessor was impressed with the level of understanding and deep comprehension of character education at all levels across the organisation. Staff and students trusted in the culture which was being actively created and felt involved and informed at each step of its development. As a consequence, they are empowered to take risks and exploit opportunities as they arise but always from a solid foundation of careful and regularly promoted reflection and self-examination. This level of harmony and an understanding of a shared common aim undoubtedly creates students and staff who feel fulfilled and supported at a multitude of levels.

The Assessor was delighted to see that the evolution of character and virtue in its widest sense was not progressing at the expense of high-quality evaluation of provision. Feedback provided by regular assessment and supportive measurement, including the examination of "community" evaluation data and reports, enables leadership at all levels to ensure that both academic progress and character development evolve hand in hand and are mutually supportive.

Character training for staff has evolved carefully and staff are feeling ever more confident and competent in their delivery of a wide range of character materials. Staff were able to discuss in some detail the training that has been delivered across the Trust with the added benefit of accelerated learning arising from working collaboratively with colleagues from

different schools. High quality face to face training is backed up with some excellent modules provided on-line which helps ensure and promote staff competence and confidence.

Further evidence of the detailed planning is available in the excellent recruitment material and arrangements in place which was clearly and confidently articulated by Jac Robilliard. This purposeful recruitment strategy is promoting the induction of staff already committed to the moral and values driven purpose of each school. It was similarly rewarding to note that discussions with HR professionals working in the Trust reinforced the in-depth understanding of the benefits of Character Education for all employees. Conversations with Charlotte Reed around the Trust's People Strategy and development in fostering a Characterful Culture for all staff further highlighted the importance the Trust places on developing and supporting flourishing adults in order to enable flourishing children and schools.

The assessor was delighted that both behaviour management policies and recognition and reward structures were directly informed by the Trust's character programme and virtues focus. Both students and teachers valued the recognition system and its focus on positive reinforcement and its consistent application must be considered a real success. Relationships are purposeful, respectful and always professional. This provides students with a sense of security and support which directly links to their individual flourishing.

The assessor would like to thank the Headteacher Samantha Drew, Character Lead, Lyndsey Bolton and Senior Lead Anton Devereaux for their warm and accommodating welcome which allowed him in a short space of time to reach a number of positive conclusions regarding character and virtue provision at the school. Particular strengths noted during the assessment include:-

- Passionate articulation of commitment from Head supported and driven by leads in the school which outlined the journey the school has been on in placing character at the heart of their curriculum and wider school work. In a short space of time the school has begun to embed and transform practice by placing character development centrally and this ensures the school is in a good position to flourish and develop further over the coming months.
- The strengths of the Early Years Foundation Stage led by Gemma Scott and Sally Lawson. The team are incredibly passionate about the development of character with the very youngest children in the school, putting in place the firmest of foundations enabling children to grow and develop as they embark on the rest of their journey through the school.
- The use of social media and digital platforms such as Seesaw to recognise, celebrate and document character development with parents and the wider community – ensuring an “outward facing school”.

- The understanding and commitment of new members of staff who have recently joined the team, including Daniel Bashford (KS2 Classteacher), demonstrated a very clear understanding and intent of character and virtue provision in the school.
- The strength of shared language across the whole school where children and staff are able to articulate why and how they have developed the language of character to facilitate and support growth.
- Key members of Administrative staff, including Gillian Bray (Lead Administrator), shared a common understanding and realisation that their actions and commitment were vital in supporting the development of character across the whole school.
- Commitment and understanding of the impact of character development by the SENDCo, Carla Hannam, will continue to enable and shape characterful development for all students at the school.
- A commitment from staff and leads to develop parents ' understanding of character development and plans in place to develop this further.

Points for reflection as you move forward:

- Ensure that a whole school approach is further embedded - from Early Years to Year 6 with new staff continuing to invest and shape the provision
- Continue to develop focused and targeted work with parents - developing a shared language to support with home and school progression
- Continue to develop children as 'characterful learners' drawing upon effective character virtues and approaches to enable masterful learning and to realise that character development is the foundation for further academic success

Regards



Mr Gary Lewis

(on behalf of the Association for Character Education)

October 2023