

**An Exploration of the Leadership of
Character Education in a Free School**

**MA in Transformational Leadership
Dissertation**

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Abstract

This thesis tests the applicability of the theory of transformative leadership to character education. The researcher has carried out a case study over the course of one academic year (2015-2016). She has taken a broadly **interpretivist** research approach, gathering qualitative data over a five week period in the form of interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. The case study explores the various factors that contribute to the successful leadership of character education at a free school. These factors include: the reasons why leadership have focused on character education; the general leadership approach that has been taken; how character is taught; and how character education is measured. The results of this case study reveal that a transformative leadership approach which fully engages parents, as recommended by the literature, is specifically applicable to the successful leadership of character education.

Chapter 1: What is character education?

‘Education worthy of the name is education of character’ – Martin Buber (1965, p.104)

This statement from the German Jewish philosopher and educator epitomises the transformative power of education: to develop the child holistically, into not just a good learner, but a morally ‘good’ person who contributes to his/her community. The Latin etymology of the word ‘education’ suggests that the purpose of education is to guide and prepare a student for the world beyond the school walls.

For the purpose of this thesis, character education is defined as the inculcation of a range of different virtues in a child. The Jubilee Centre (Arthur et al., 2015) groups these virtues into moral virtues, civil virtues, intellectual virtues and performance virtues. Some schools choose to value certain virtues over others; these then form the core values of the school. The ability to exercise such virtues becomes a skill. For example, a pupil can demonstrate the virtue of courage when practising the skill of public speaking.

Why have I chosen to explore the leadership of character education?

In a performance-obsessed educational climate, it was refreshing for me to visit a school which seemed to place a strong emphasis on character education, deriving from its five core values. I now teach at this school, founded in 2012 by ambassadors of Teach First, a programme created to address the systemic problem of educational disadvantage in England and Wales. Its small size (only 60 pupils in each cohort) is a unique attribute which helps to foster a sense of community and belonging. Ofsted (2014, p.6) noted that ‘pupils’ excellent social, moral, cultural and spiritual development permeates all aspects of academy life.’

What does this thesis set out to achieve?

The thesis will attempt to answer the following key research questions:

- Why should character education be a priority for school leadership?
- How has character education been viewed by schools and the government historically in England?
- What leadership style/approach is required to make character education an effective part of the school curriculum?
- What does good character education look like in England and internationally?
- Should character be measured or tested? If so, how?

The answers to these key questions will lead to recommendations. These recommendations are aimed at leaders of this particular school but may be of interest to other school leaders who place character education high on the agenda. These research questions all feed into my central question which is: ‘Is a transformative leadership approach applicable to the successful leadership of character education?’

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review has been electronically cross-referenced to the findings. Bold text represents cross references.

This review is structured in three parts: an exploration of the reasons why school leaders should prioritise character education in the 21st century including what leadership approach is required; an outline of the historical shifts in relevant government policy and educational reform in England will explain the resurgent emphasis on character education today and the paradoxical difficulties that leaders have to face in pursuing a character-centred vision. The literature suggests these difficulties are caused by the dominant accountability-focused approach to education in the UK, labelled as the ‘**Standards Agenda**’ by Precey (2016), which has prompted leaders to neglect character education in the past. An alternative approach to the Standards Agenda will be identified, by looking at other movements developing both across England and internationally.

Why should leadership prioritise character education?

The literature suggests that leaders should prioritise character education in order to: equip learners for the future (Precey, 2015, p.2 and **OECD, 2012**, p.2); narrow the socio-economic achievement gap (Gurney-Read, 2015); and improve the attainment of pupils (**Park and Peterson** (2006).

At the moment, the business sector in the UK tells us that the education system is failing to deliver graduates who are suitably equipped with attitudes and aptitudes needed in the workplace (Hammond, 2015). This seems due to a lack of emphasis on character education.

What leadership approach is required to make character education an effective part of the curriculum?

Since values are central to character education, leaders who champion character education should have a clear set of values. This values-based approach was termed ‘transformational’ by Burns (1978). Precey (2016, p.2) laments that transactional leadership approaches (the binary opposite of transformational) are conducted in England as a result of the **Standards Agenda**. A strong head is needed who will take stakeholders with him/her to make a school one where ‘values underpin its entire structure’ (**Seldon, 2013, p.10**). Indeed, this is the reason that Ofsted (2014, p.6) commends the leadership in my free school – ‘academy leaders and governors quickly embedded the academy’s vision and beliefs’ – something made easier by the fact that it was a new school.

The improvement of character education at inner city schools requires more than a strong values base: it needs a leadership approach which encourages social justice and engagement with the community. This leadership approach is defined by Shields as ‘**transformative leadership**’ (Shields, 2010) or ‘strong leadership’ according to **Wrigley** (2003 p.56). The Jubilee report suggests that parents are a vital aspect of this community, who provide the key to the successful development of a child’s character (**Arthur et al., 2015 p.4**). If, according

to the **Rowntree report**, only 14% of a child's achievement can be affected by the school, then both schools and parents need to work in conjunction with each other and share this responsibility (Hirsch, 2007).

The theory above suggests values are important for leadership but does not explicitly explain why such an approach is important for character education. I feel the answer is to increase the performance and ultimately, the happiness of pupils – a concept which is conspicuously absent from the literature or policy – with the exception of Sahlberg (2015) who attributes Finnish educational success to Finland's emphasis on the pursuit of happiness as the purpose of teaching and learning. If a school achieves both academic results and holistic pupil success, it can be placed in Fielding's ideal 'person-centred' i.e. results-orientated, relationship-focused quartile (Fielding, 2006) which means that school can fulfil its moral obligation to create happy individuals and make the community a better place:

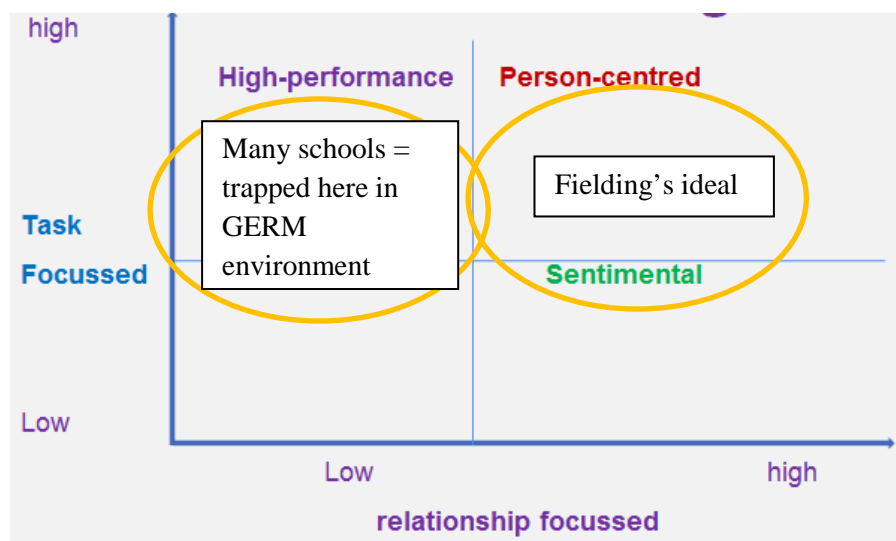


Fig. 1: CCCU (2014) graph interpreting Fielding's (2006) communal orientation of schools

What should leadership actually do?

The Jubilee centre (**Arthur et. al.**, 2014, p.6) recommends five different ways leaders can prioritise character education:

- 1) all teachers should be trained in character education
- 2) at least one staff should be responsible for character education
- 3) schools must have a character education policy
- 4) schools need to help students ensure they are motivated by moral interests concerning others rather than self-interest
- 5) schools should assess their own efforts and how far they have developed the character of students.

The report stresses that these five recommendations are unlikely to be enough without an effective school leadership team committed to the cause. However, I would argue that having one responsible member of staff negates the responsibility of all staff to embed character

education across the curriculum. It is not clear how useful a character education policy will be, unless it helps to elucidate the definition of 'character education' and aid a consistent approach. The Jubilee Centre has developed a handbook to help schools self-evaluate their own efforts to improve character education.¹

Overview of relevant government policy

The 'Standards Agenda'

Since the 1980s, Park (2013, p.13) asserts that the predominant government approach to education has been to focus on accountability. Precey (2016, p.2) has labelled this series of accountability measures (e.g. inspections, standardised tests, targets, league tables, Progress 8/ Attainment 8 measures, the English Baccalaureate) the '**Standards Agenda**'.

Why the Standards Agenda?

A driving factor behind reforms aligned with this accountability agenda is, according to the government, the desire to 'raise standards' by creating competition (DfE, 2015). The stipulation of the 1980 Education Act that schools must publish their results led to greater accountability and competition (Peal, 2014, p.105). The drive for the marketization of education continued in the 1980s and the 1988 Education Reform Act represented the erosion of Local Authority control (Gillard, 2015). Another reason why the government wanted to be seen to 'raise standards' in this manner was the need to hold schools financially accountable to the taxpayer. Underlying this is the desire to promote Britain's status in the global economic competition. This is apparent in one recent reform which explicitly states its purpose is to ensure GCSE grades 'will match that of top-performing countries' (DfE, 2015).

How does the 'Standards Agenda' hinder the prioritisation of character education in schools?

The National Teachers Union in England (NUT) and Sahlberg, a Finnish educator, both consider the Standards Agenda to be part of a wider Global Education Reform Movement (GERM). They see this movement as a virus, which focuses on attainment over character, thereby 'abandoning education's role of creating cultural good and social cohesion.' (NUT, 2015). Although the NUT has a clear agenda since it often campaigns against government initiatives, here they seem to have valid reasons which are supported by Sahlberg. The English assessment system hinders the development of the whole child because teachers focus on teaching to test at the expense of developing self-discipline, resilience and other virtues in students. Research by the Jubilee Centre supports this statement: only half (54%) of English secondary school teachers in the study said their school has a whole-school approach towards character education (Arthur et al., p.5). Seldon (LI, 2015) and Wrigley(2003, p.53) similarly believe the Standards Agenda has caused character education in the state sector to become sidelined. Dweck (1999) and Syed (2015) both agree that the current assessment system does not create 'can-do' learners who are willing to try and fail and try again.

¹ <http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/1721/character-education>

An alternative to the Standards Agenda

How has the UK government's support of character education changed in recent years?

Although the Standards agenda has on the whole deprioritised character education in the past, there are indications that the government, lobbied by educationalists in the last five years, are starting to realise the importance of character education.

After the August 2011 riots in England, the media began to call for schools to play a greater role in nurturing civic responsibility (PEAL, 2014, p.220). The Academies programme became a focus of the government at this time. Seldon, Master of Wellington College and Vice-Chancellor for the University of Buckingham, praises Michael Gove and Michael Wilshaw for simultaneously raising standards and granting schools more autonomy via the academy programme but scolds them for adopting a 'mechanistic model of the purpose of education' (Seldon, 2013, p.2). The PISA findings suggest schools with more autonomy over curricula and assessment tend to perform better (OECD, 2012, p.24). It is not clear, however, whether this is because they focus on character education.

This was followed by the first real demonstration of governmental commitment to the cause in December 2014: Education Secretary Nicky Morgan announced the creation of a £5 million Character Innovation fund. This fund was designed to support eight projects intended to develop 'character education' (specifically the skills of 'grit' 'resilience' and 'determination', self-confidence and respect).

What does good 'character education' look like?

Below are a few examples of schools across England, both private and state, which, in resisting the Standards agenda, are becoming pioneers for character education:

- **Wellington College:** Seldon attributes the transformational improvement in Wellington College's academic attainment from 2006 to 2014 to its emphasis on character education.
- **King Science Academy** (now Dixons Kings Academy, part of an Academy Trust chain), an inner city school in Bradford. opened in 2011. However, one month after Seldon's lecture, Ofsted judged it as 'requires improvement' in all three categories due to the below-average progress of pupils. The GCSE results, 18 months after King Science Academy became part of the Dixon Academies Group, paint an improved picture of attainment.² However, we do not know if the original character education emphasis which Seldon praised in 2013 remained a focus under new leadership; thus we cannot assert that it contributed to the improved attainment.
- **King Solomon's Academy**, which opened in 2007, is cited as a state school pioneer of character education (Seldon, 2013). The school's first set of results in August 2014 suggests a strong link between character education and attainment: 93% of students

² 67% of pupils achieved five A* - C including English and Maths, which is 10% above the national average for 2015 (Dixon Kings Academy, 2016)

achieved five A*-Cs including English and Maths. This result was repeated in August 2015 and August 2016.

KIPP schools in the USA

The robust approach to character formation and pupil behaviour in a chain of charter schools in the USA during the 1990s – Knowledge Is Power Programme (KIPP) schools – has proved successful according to Peal (2014, p.235). Peal (2014, p.237) states that KIPP schools have great results and are in deprived areas. Observers criticise KIPP schools for seeming ‘cultish’ and ‘brainwashing’ but Peal (2014, p.238) asserts that there is nothing wrong with brainwashing students into universally positive characters. Although exam results in the 1990s were promising, analysis showed that some of these children dropped out of university after achieving a place. The reason for this failure was their lack of character skills (Seldon, 2013, p.11). Duckworth has proved that self-control is a more reliable predictor of success in later life than exam success (Duckworth et al., 2007). Charter schools must therefore ensure their teaching of character endures beyond exams.

Should we measure character education?

Many organisations and educators such as **Park** (2013, p.57) believe it is important to measure a child’s character development in order to make schools accountable for teaching it. Furthermore, parents wish to be informed about the character development of their children. A Teach First Ambassador report (Teach First, 2010) suggests it is difficult to track a school’s ethos as represented by the character of its pupils. Nevertheless, the difficulty of the task does not mean we should not try.

How can we measure character education?

The Jubilee centre (Arthur et al., 2014) used three different methods for the assessment of character, the limitations of which are acknowledged:

- 1) Assessing how pupils respond to a moral dilemma scenario
- 2) Student self-assessment
- 3) Teacher assessment.

Similarly, Park, the director of Antidote, has developed a PROGRESS diagnostic (Park, 2013, p.73) which can be used as a self-evaluation tool for schools to measure a sense of belonging. The PROGRESS diagnostic also involves students in assessing their own characters, an approach recommended by **Ruddock and Fielding** (2006) and by the Jubilee centre (Arthur et al., 2014) in order that students can gain a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.

Other tools have been developed to measure the resilience of young people. The success of Angela Lee **Duckworth**’s grit scale is apparent (Duckworth, 2007). The measuring tool used on army recruits was a 5 minute survey asking respondents to rate themselves 1-5 on statements such as ‘setbacks don’t discourage me’ or ‘I finish whatever I begin’. Her simple

survey proved more effective than SAT tests (Syed 2015). The grit scale has also proved to be more effective at predicting winners of the Spelling Bee than IQ (Duckworth, 2007).

Others vehemently argue that to measure a child's character development would be detrimental and discouraging. Millar (2015) shudders at the prospect of producing a league table measuring the number of virtuous pupils in schools internationally. Hammond (2015) poses the crux question: 'How do we monitor and report on children's character development through school without using fixed grades and percentages?' He then proceeds to answer his own question: he believes we should recognise character traits (curiosity, intrinsic motivation, creativity, thinking, communication, willingness to participate) but not grade them: 'we just need to prove that they are not being taught out of pupils'. Nevertheless, he is not clear as to how teachers should 'recognise' character traits in children. **Hammond** (2015), ridiculing the possibility of getting a B- in grit or a C+ in curiosity, argues that character development should not be measured: 'not everything that counts can be counted'. He argues that talking about 'progress' in character education suggests a 'fixed mind-set' (Dweck) and prefers to talk about 'development' of a child. His argument may hold, only if one regards character traits to have limits.

Conclusion

Historically in England, character education has not explicitly been a priority of the 'Standards Agenda'-obsessed government, an accountability agenda pursued largely in order to secure Britain's place in the international rankings. However, recently, there have been signs of change: government policy suggests the government is beginning to recognise the benefits of character education. Leaders should focus on developing the character of their students not only because it will improve their academic results, but also it will help to prepare students for the unpredictable world of work into which they will enter upon leaving school, whilst also improving their chances of success and happiness in later life. Leaders should take a transformative approach and involve parents in the character development of their students. Accordingly, character development should be measured and reported back to parents in an easily accessible format. One way of teaching character education is through the behaviour system of the school. The literature I have studied suggests that 'a young child's moral code is caught, not taught' (**Peal, 2014, p.239**) hence character education should not just be confined to stand-alone lessons. Lively debates should be had about which character virtues should be taught (Teach First, 2010). Whatever virtues a school decides upon, these virtues must be upheld by staff and repeatedly practised by pupils.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research design

This research assignment will provide a snapshot and will be presented in the form of a case study, a specific example which illustrates a general principle about the leadership of character education. It will not be a longitudinal study as it is difficult to measure the impact of character education which often emerges long after children have left school. The type of case study approach I have chosen conforms best to Bassey's (1999) 'theory seeking/testing' case study. I gathered data over a five week period (one half term) to test whether the theory around the leadership of character education applied to this school.

I have chosen a broadly **interpretivist** or 'anti-positivistic' (Opie and Sikes, 2004, p.9) approach since it suits the nature of my central question: participants' opinions are vital in evaluating which factors are key to the successful leadership of character education. Here, a qualitative case study is necessary to explore the cause and effect of certain relationships between pupils, teachers, parents and school leaders. Sometimes the qualitative data will be converted into quantitative data for analytical purposes; I am aware this does convert the data into 'fact'.

Since this is a small-scale study, compromises will be made over how much data I can gather. I have not explored the development of character education from primary through to secondary in the interests of conducting a thorough and meaningful analysis of the data. I have chosen to gather data from a range of participants in order to triangulate and thus strengthen the credibility of my results (Opie, 2004, p.72). Below are the four different groups of participants from which I planned to gather data:

- 1) School leaders (the Head and the Principal)
- 2) Teaching staff
- 3) Students
- 4) Parents.

Ethical considerations

The nature of qualitative or interpretive research opens an array of ethical issues. For example, 'interviewing one's peers raises ethical problems that are directly related to the nature of the research technique employed' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 199). This assertion concerns the degree of openness or closure that is adopted with participants. I chose to be just as open with some teachers as I was with others about the purpose of my research. The key to the successful resolution of problems around disclosure lies in establishing good relations (Cohen et al, 2000, p.66) I tried to establish an atmosphere of trust and confidence with teachers by:

- emailing them in advance to gauge willingness to participate
- having informal conversations about the purpose of my study
- sending them the interview questions in advance
- explaining the use of phone recording

- guaranteeing them anonymity.

Interviewing students as part of a focus group presented more complex ethical issues. I made sure to disclose enough to pupils for them to understand how their views would be used for research purposes. I also gave pupils and parents the option of 'opting-out' of the study.

Methods

Bassey (1999, p.69) highlights that case studies often (although not always) draw on more than one method of data collection in order to provide the 'rich picture' which is the hallmark of the case study approach.

a) Interviews

Semi-structured interviews seemed an appropriate method for finding out the views of the Head of Secondary, the Principal and staff because they allow the researcher to explore the 'why' behind any findings (Opie, 2004, p.111). One part of the interview involved asking the interviewee to map the school onto Fielding's diagram (*Fig. 2*) – this was an alternative visual way of comparing interviewees' perceptions of school culture and leadership. Interviewees were also asked to circle a list of virtues from an audit drawn up from the literature review. This exercise enabled me to see if there was general agreement or disagreement about which character skills that the school tries to cultivate in children.

b) Focus groups

These were used to gather responses from the pupils (two groups of six pupils). A range of pupils from different year groups were chosen at random to make sure the data was as representative as possible. There were a range of interactive activities to increase engagement. I gave pupils the opportunity to write down some of their answers to minimise the problems of a 'group-think' situation.

c) Questionnaire

I felt this was method was best suited to parents as it would be quick and easy to complete. I thought that the response rate from parents would be higher if the questionnaire was self-administered (given to them whilst they were waiting to see a teacher on Parent Consultation Day) rather than sent via post or email (in an online format).

Alternative methods

Alternative methods to the ones selected above were considered and rejected for the following reasons:

1. A structured questionnaire for the teachers: this was considered too limiting – answers would lack depth and there were concerns over the response rate
2. Observations of pupils: there was not enough time for this and it would exclude pupil voice from the study
3. Postal questionnaire for parents: there were concerns that this method might yield a lower response rate

Chapter 4: Analysis

Comparison across Groups

The definition of character education provided by the Head, Principal, teachers and parents all emphasised the moral purpose of character education and the benefits to society. Pupils saw the importance of character education in terms of treating others well but the link with good economic prospects took precedence. Leaders, teachers and parents agreed that character education was a priority in this school, although there was at least one person in each of these three groups who observed that it had been a greater priority in the school's early stages. Parents, like teachers and leaders, saw the importance of a values-based leadership approach for making character education an effective part of the curriculum. Both teachers and pupils felt that character education could be improved if more regular conversations were held to discuss how pupils felt about the outcomes of the character reports. Three groups (teachers, parents and leaders) were at odds with pupils, who felt that they should not receive grades or scores for demonstrating particular virtues. The idea that character is not affected by the school which was expressed by one parent, was also hinted at by a pupil - 'teachers don't see everything you do'.

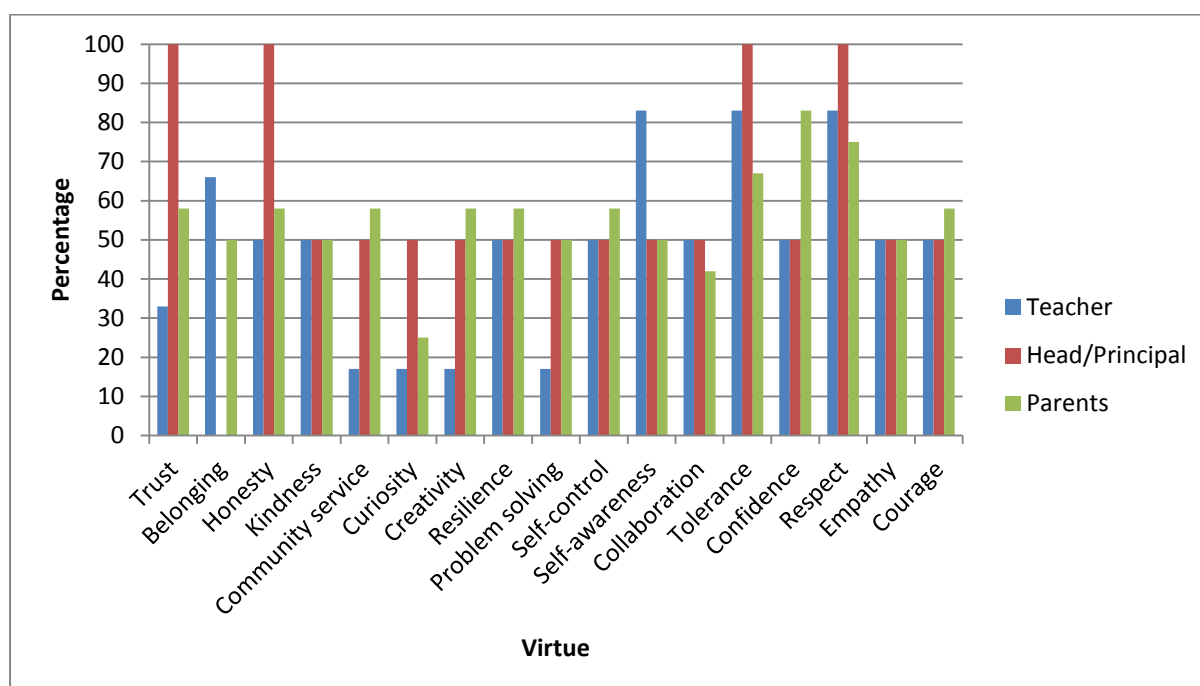


Fig. 2: graph to compare different groups' perceptions of which virtues the school tries to cultivate

Belonging was a virtue which half of the parents who completed the questionnaires and more than half of teachers interviewed felt the school tried to cultivate. However, neither the Head nor the Principal commented that this was a focus of the school. Respect is the strongest virtue (similar to 'tolerance') according to all groups – which was accurately predicted by the Head and the Principal. Curiosity is by far the weakest virtue according to all groups (not even mentioned by the pupils). Perhaps this is because language around this virtue is not used in school.

Chapter 5: Findings

This section has been electronically cross-referenced with the literature review. Bold text represents cross references. Hold down CTRL and left-click the bold text to take you back to the relevant section of the thesis.

‘Is a transformative leadership approach applicable to the successful leadership of character education?’

This case study suggests that leadership needs to have character education high on the agenda in order for it to become an effective part of the school curriculum. To have character education high on the agenda means that the school’s values need to drive the actions of staff and pupils i.e. ‘values underpin its entire structure’ (**Seldon, 2013, p.10**). In contrast to the Jubilee Centre’s recommendation (**Arthur et. al., 2014**) that there should be one member of staff responsible for overseeing character education, this case study suggests that all staff, parents and pupils need to be aware of the virtues pupils need to develop, the positive outcomes this will lead to, and how to use the school’s values to demonstrate these virtues.

- Why should character education be a priority for school leadership?
 - Character education leads to academic success for pupils (as proposed by **Park and Peterson, 2006**), which in turn leads to economic and emotional success
 - Character education enables leaders to have a positive impact on society.
 - Leaders should take a responsible approach (**Biesta, 2013, p.733**) instead of a responsive one: they should not instigate a character education programme in response to any accountability measures introduced by the government, but should do so for the reasons stated above.
 - Leaders need to inform pupils that they face an unpredictable future and therefore prepare them to deal with ‘unexpected events’ (**OECD, 2012**).
 - Pupils in this school seem to be aware that they need to interact with different members of society in an increasingly globalised world.
- What leadership approach is required to make character education an effective part of the school curriculum?

Both leaders’ visions and overall leadership approaches were aligned in this case study. This suggests that a values-based approach is essential for the successful leadership of character education – an approach which **Wrigley (2003, p.56)** claims is the mark of strong leadership in general. The best way to do this is to adopt a transformational leadership approach which aspires to have transformative impact on the community and therefore involve parents – the group which has the greatest impact on the character formation of children according to **Arthur et al. (2014 p.4)**.

- What does good character education look like?

A good character education should involve backwards-planning: leaders should envisage what virtues an ideal pupil would have upon leaving school and then formulate the values out of these virtues. This case study demonstrates that, with the right leadership, Seldon's **Wellington College** 'well-being' model can be successfully applied to a state school. It is important to consider the context of the school when formulating values: pupils in some areas might be lacking more in resilience than creativity for example. **Teach First** (2010) ambassadors were right not to prescribe exactly what an ideal school culture would look like.

Good character education involves both the explicit and implicit teaching of character. Contrary to **Peal's (2014, p.239)** assertion that 'a young child's moral code is caught, not taught', explicit teaching is essential for the pupils at this school and provides the foundations for implicit teaching for example the modelling of healthy relationships by staff. Examples of good character should be praised using the explicit language of the values; this will be embedded in the culture of the school if staff and pupils share a common language.

- Should character be measured or tested? If so, how?

Children should not take exams in character education as proposed by **Seldon (2013, p.13)** or the Jubilee Centre (Arthur et al., 2014) but they do need and want feedback on their character development (as do parents). They recognise that this aspect of their education is just as important as academic success and is in fact linked. This feedback is best triangulated (with feedback from their peers, themselves and their teachers) so that pupils receive an accurate picture from all angles. This method of scoring challenges **Hammond's (2015)** notion that 'not everything that counts can be counted'. The reporting system needs to be clear, accessible and easy to understand so pupils and their parents can identify weaknesses and quickly work out how to improve. The most important thing to be measured is the success of the school's character education – one of the five recommendations from Jubilee centre (Arthur et. al., 2014, p.6)

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Recommendations

This assignment has led me to the following recommendations for the school. The school should:

- Develop a tool for evaluating the success of character education in this school
- Give teachers more guidance about the ways they can implicitly and explicitly teach character
- Measure the character development of teachers
- Focus on improving the virtue of curiosity in pupils. This will promote pupil independence
- Ensure staff share a common language around the key virtues. Teachers need to constantly refer to the values in different subject lessons.
- Explore why the emphasis on values has dropped this year to avoid it happening in the future.
- Involve parents more in the character education of their children. E.g. include parents in the character reporting process so they can feedback on character development of a pupil at home.
- Educate pupils about the link between character education and academic success
- Make pupils aware of the different ways these two aspects (character and academic) of their education are assessed

What I have learnt:

This thesis has taught me the importance of self-evaluation and self-awareness for the leadership of character education. These virtues should be upheld by those adopting a transformative leadership approach. Such a values-based approach is applicable to the leadership of character education since it requires leaders to model and demonstrate their values. This case study has revealed how essential it is to involve all stakeholders in the vision; parents play a key part in such a transformative leadership approach. The dialogue between parents and teachers should be a two-way process; all too often schools fail because it is mainly one-way (the teacher reports back to parents). Parents have an enormous role in shaping the character education of their children so it makes sense for leadership to prioritise this. Further research could be conducted to find out how parents can be best engaged in this role. It is hoped that if other school leaders see the successes and weaknesses of the school in this case study, they will be intrinsically motivated to take a transformative leadership approach, prioritise character education and build on the recommendations made in this conclusion.