



Mr Andrew Thelwell (Principal) and Mr Jason Cochrane (Head of Primary)

Bede Academy

Sixth Avenue, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 2SY (Secondary site)

Curlew Way, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 3PX (Primary site)

Association for Character Education Kitemark Plus (April 2022)

Dear Andrew,

Following an evaluative visit to the Academy on Thursday 28th April 2022 by Mr Gary Lewis, Chair of the Association of Character Education, and Ms Nadine Fielding, Headteacher, Morpeth First School, the Association can confirm that your school has met the exacting standards required to be awarded the ***“School of Character Kitemark Plus”***.

Congratulations to you, your students, staff and governors as this award clearly recognises the quality of learning and values-driven personal development programme enjoyed by all members of your school community. The progress the school has made in the evolution and development of its Character Programme over the past 3 years is very impressive and indicates that a values-led approach is central to the Academy’s obvious success. In particular, the awarding body wishes to commend you on the following: -

- The senior leadership of The Academy has fully embraced the suggestions made by ACE during a previous assessment and has embarked on a detailed, extremely well-researched plan to ensure that all aspects of virtue and character education pervade every detail of the life of the school. In particular, the determined leadership provided by Andrew Thelwell, ably and rigorously supported by Jason Cochrane, Julie Normanton and Bethan Harding has produced a platform which will undoubtedly ensure further success and on-going rapid progress.
- It is refreshing to visit a school which has spent considerable human and other resources on researching all aspects of character provision and then have used their findings to produce a detailed and carefully co-ordinated improvement plan that places character education at the core of all activity. The many “jigsaw pieces” of character provision have been skilfully woven together to produce a mutually supporting picture of values led provision which is having a sustained impact on behaviour, academic progress and personal well-being. The seamless transition of the character programme from the primary to secondary phase of the Academy is undoubtedly an example of “excellent practice”.

- Following a comprehensive review of the school's values involving a cross section of stakeholders, the leadership have moved to a greater focus on virtue education as being a means of achieving the stated aims of the Academy. This has proven to be a real success as discussions with staff indicate that they now have a fundamental understanding of the "character skills" necessary for children to flourish and this has provided them with a comprehensive tool kit to produce materials and to teach in a manner which actively transmits value systems. Similarly, the school has further developed its combination of Christian teachings and gospel values with its "triangle of virtues" to produce a very effective, mutually supportive culture. This is another example of "excellent practice".
- The school continues to evolve its understanding of the wider aspects of Character Education as a consequence of informed leadership focusing on pertinent and relevant "CPD" opportunities for teachers and support staff alike. Teachers have access to very good quality materials which are produced under the direct leadership of Caroline Park for delivery in "tutorial reflection sessions" and it is impressive that more and more subject areas are attempting to integrate character values into everyday lesson planning.
- Once again, both students and teachers were able to discuss with confidence and clarity their understanding of the Academy's journey over past months and both groups were able to provide multiple examples of how the relatively recent work on "virtues" was impacting positively on behaviour, relationships and the development of both emotional and performance character traits. There is a real sense of pride in the school's culture and this culture is reflected in the many routines of behaviour and attitudes which are second nature and which were observed by the assessors during their visit.
- The assessors were delighted to review professionally produced materials and communications displayed across both sites which effectively transmitted the community's 7 virtues. This was further reinforced by a welcoming and character focused website which also provided evidence of regular and detailed communications with parents and the wider community which consistently repeat the language used by the school to reinforce virtue culture.
- Character training for staff has been a key objective in recent months and staff are feeling ever more confident and competent in their delivery of a wide range of character materials. Excellent assemblies that are professionally and meticulously prepared and presented, provide a positive platform for further character links in extra curricula, tutorial and PSHE sessions. All of these "character jigsaw pieces" are designed to reinforce each other and provide students with an opportunity to see virtues in action in a wide range of situations. Staff confidence is further enhanced by the professional and detailed plans which map out the Academy's journey in both the short and longer terms. Such plans provide clarity and a consistent message which in turn reduces misunderstandings and related anxieties.

- The assessors were delighted that both behaviour management policies and reward structures were directly informed by the school's character programme and virtues focus. Both students and teachers valued the reviewed reward system and its greater focus on positive reinforcement and its varied but consistent application must be considered a real success. Similarly, a more reflective approach to managing behaviour has also resulted in increasingly positive relationships which are based on good communication and mutual respect.

The assessors were delighted to visit a school where character education was placed at the core of ALL activities and provision and this is certainly an example for other schools to witness that such an in-depth approach to character education rather than an additional "bolt on" style can have a significant impact on both academic and personal development standards.

The assessors are confident that the school's leaders will continue with their ambitious programme and it is hoped that they will seek to share their successes with other schools on a similar journey.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Lewis". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Mr Gary Lewis

Ms Nadine Fielding

(on behalf of the Association for Character Education)