



06.06.2023

Dear Mark and Gurdeep,

It was a pleasure to visit Aylesbury Grammar School and provide it with the *School of Character Quality Mark Plus* award on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2023, following an extensive assessment process. Please do pass on our congratulations to staff, pupils, governors and parents/carers, who have all contributed to achieving this formal recognition of the high standard of character education that exists at Aylesbury Grammar.

The school's leadership has demonstrated a purposeful and visionary approach to evolving the school's character education over a number of years. This vision is clearly and consistently shared with staff and pupils and has helped shape the strengths of the school's character provision. These include;

- The school has transitioned from character education that predominately aids and assists learning (through the AGS Learner), to encompassing the development of moral and civic based virtues. The embedding of the school's *Emotional Character* programme has played an important role in having a more explicit focus on the development of moral reasoning and 'doing the right thing for the right reason.'
- The school's strong focus on *Wellbeing*, as well as character, was cited by pupils as an important factor in enabling their individual flourishing.
- Broadening the responsibility of the school's character programme beyond the main *Character Lead* has been a significant success since ACE's previous assessment. Staff take full ownership of their role in developing and delivering the school's character provision, particularly in terms of the character-based curriculum. Staff are given the flexibility to develop their own content around specific character-based themes and values, with quality ensured through lesson observations and feedback from pupil voice. This approach is demonstrative of the leadership's aim of enabling '*autonomy*' and '*accountability*' to help facilitate a highly-motivated and competent staff team. All staff spoke with significant

enthusiasm about their role as practitioners of character and not just teachers of their subject. Staff spoke passionately and with authority on how character is infused in all aspects of school life.

- Developing ‘*autonomy*’ and ‘*innovation*’ within the older pupils by empowering them to source inspiring curriculum content for some of the character-based lessons, is also exemplary practice.
- Facilitating pupil voice so it can shape the school’s character provision and culture through the *Committee for Change* and *Pupil Character Group*, is also to be applauded.
- The assessment demonstrated the extent to which older pupils are expected to role-model good character to younger pupils. Without being prompted, younger pupils shared how older pupils’ conduct is values-driven and this in turn supported the development of their own character. Whilst this was expressed as an ambition by the school’s leadership it was rewarding to hear from younger pupils how character is ‘caught’ in this way. Role modelling, at all levels, has become habituated into the school’s culture, helping facilitate good character through emotional contagion.
- Pupil leadership is a strong feature of the school with pupils provided with extensive opportunities.
- Pupils have a strong sense of civic duty and equate ‘service to others’ as a necessary attribute in order to thrive in life.

As the school moves forward with its character provision it is recommended that;

- It underpins its character provision (particularly its taught-based curriculum) with more character-based theory and philosophy. Further utilising research and resources from the *Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues* can support the school to base its approach more explicitly on Virtue Ethics and Aristotelian theories of flourishing. This will help provide a more definitive foundation and help shape the school’s ‘why’ as well as its ‘how’ in terms of character development. Drawing on *Positive Education* is another option.
- Whilst the school has broadened its character education programme to encompass the development of ‘Emotional Character,’ pupils could benefit from greater exposure to a range of virtues. There is the opportunity to support pupils to have a broader vernacular in the language of character. When discussing character, pupils mainly drew on the school’s 5 values, and whilst these values are exceptionally well-embedded there is now the opportunity to expand pupils’ virtue literacy. Using the Jubilee Centre’s *Building Blocks of Character* could be a useful way to support staff and pupils to understand the breadth of moral, civic, intellectual and performance-based virtues that are required to flourish and

make the right choices in life. Explicitly exploring the importance of practical wisdom/phronesis through moral dilemmas would also deepen staff and pupils' conceptual understanding of what it means to have good character.

- The absence of a character-based rewards system has played an important role in supporting pupils to act with good character because it is the 'right thing to do,' and not out of motivation for a reward. Yet, there could be an opportunity to introduce a rewards system which provides praise for when virtuous behaviour is displayed, whilst still ensuring good character is still virtue-led and not rewards-driven. A character-based rewards system could also help further explicitly embed more moral-based virtues within the school's shared language around character.

Congratulations once again on becoming a *Quality Mark Plus School*, and also on behalf of ACE, I would like to express our gratitude for the support that Aylesbury Grammar School has given (and continues to do so as a *Regional Character Hub School*) to other schools to support them on their journey to embed character education.

Yours sincerely



Tom Haigh

(ACE CEO)