



Date	May 2015
Key stages	KS3- KS5
School type	Academy, secondary
Themes	Character, resilience

Grit improves grades

Kings Langley School

Context

Kings Langley School is a larger than average secondary school situated in the Dacorum district. The proportion of disadvantaged students who are eligible for the pupil premium grant is below the national average and the proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average.

Brief description

In February 2015 Kings Langley School was one of only 27 schools and organisations in the country to receive £15,000 in the Department of Education Character Awards in recognition of its work to promote traits such as grit and resilience in pupils. This signified that the school's work in character education has improved future outcomes of pupils in factors such as exam results, behaviour, attendance and job prospects. Since starting his role in 2003, Headteacher Gary Lewis has been working on building the values of character, resilience and grit amongst pupils as well as creating a strong school ethos and a feeling of identity.

Character education at Kings Langley

Core values embedded into all areas

Kings Langley has embedded three core values into everyday school life: 'stickability' – learning to stick with things and cope with failure, self-regulation- learning to have control over actions, and empathy. Pupils at the school learn that these three character qualities are the basis of success in all aspects of their lives; this is reaffirmed by Gary Lewis who believes that the most important thing in life is "your ability to deal with many situations and to manage your behaviour." Senior leaders encourage all teachers to nurture these traits in their pupils and to embed the core values into lesson plans. Staff support the school's practice and regularly attend inset days and CPD sessions which focus on character. Assemblies, PSHE lessons and extra-curricular activities are designed to ensure that students are constantly exposed to the core values and character development themes. The school's vision for character education is clearly communicated in the form of posters around the school, letters home and the use of social media. This constant communication is an important part of the character mission and demonstrates that the school has a coherent vision where character is given equal importance to academic attainment.

Character Education at Kings Langley is also embedded into all subjects. The character education programme is led by Ruth Jennings, Deputy Headteacher, who is responsible for ensuring that “character” is taught not only in PSHE but in all subjects. In addition the school has just appointed a teacher who is a “lead practitioner” in developing character education through research and implementation of best practice. Gary feels that this whole school approach and level of resource will guarantee that “character development will continue to remain the highest priority at Kings Langley School .”

Manners and body language

The school promotes the practice of maintaining good manners and positive body language. Close attention is given to personal presentation which includes maintaining high standards of the school uniform. As well as this there is a high focus on communication, specifically covering language, vocabulary, tone of voice and smiling.

Extra-curricular activities

The school has a diverse extra-curricular programme which includes sports and activities proven to build character such as the Duke of Edinburgh programme and regular visits to an outdoor education centre in Wales. In addition, the school makes constant efforts to remind pupils about how they can give back to the community and show compassion. As a result pupils are provided with opportunities to volunteer in the school’s ‘pledge an hour’ scheme.

PSHE lessons

As part of the PSHE programme pupils are given resilience lessons based on the Penn Resilience Programme (PRP), a programme designed to enable young people to develop vital resilience skills, learn from difficult situations and develop emotional awareness and critical life skills. All teachers attended special resilience training sessions to learn how to deliver this programme. Recently, the amount of time dedicated to PSHE lessons has been doubled in order to further build on the school’s commitment to the subject. Classes are also now half their normal size to ensure that the character related themes dealt with in PSHE can be explored in more intimate groups. This allows teachers to properly address challenging topics.

“You can’t expect children to improve academically without the right emotional skills to handle whatever they may face in life”

Impact

Outstanding behaviour and safety of pupils

In an Ofsted inspection in December 2014 Kings Langley School received outstanding for the ‘behaviour and safety of pupils.’ Ofsted inspectors noted that students are very positive about their school, show respect for its buildings and resources and ‘wear their uniform with pride.’ The report also noted that the headteacher and senior leadership have created a school in which students develop the qualities of character and the academic skills to become successful citizens; ‘they do not give up when they find out the work is difficult.’ The school feels that the students have responded very well to its character education and that they engage well in PSHE lessons and they share problems and issues with the class.

A school of character

Under the leadership of the headteacher the school has developed a reputation both locally and regionally as a centre of excellence and has received many accolades and awards. Kings Langley was one of seven school case studies to be included in the University of Birmingham's report on *Schools of Character*. The report recognised the school's commitment to character education. In the report Gary Lewis says that concentrating on traditional standards, such as uniforms, helped the school come out of a slump but the biggest impact occurred when he started to introduce character education to the school. He believes that character education at Kings Langley School 'is both taught and caught, which is what makes it so effective.' He also feels that character education has given Kings Langley uniqueness and cannot praise enough the impact of helping pupils develop these skills: "I'd rather a pupil get a grade B but have a whole array of leadership qualities and teamwork skills, than achieve an A* and sacrifice all those other skills."

Next steps

Gary Lewis has just been appointed as the inaugural chair of the soon to be launched Association of Character Education which is being financed and run by Birmingham University. This association is developing a "kitemark" that schools can aspire to achieve which will help cement their commitment to character development. The leader of character education at Kings Langley, Ruth, has also been seconded to work with Birmingham University to develop resource materials that all schools nationally can use to help implement character education.

Contact	Gary Lewis, Headteacher at Kings Langley School
Related documents and links	http://www.kingslangley.herts.sch.uk/ http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/SchoolsOfCharacterPDF.pdf http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/media/news/article/4278/New-Association-for-Character-Education-Set-to-Launch https://www.gov.uk/government/news/winners-of-

If you have an aspect of interesting practice that could be shared or are interested in finding out more about a case study please get in touch by emailing exchangingexcellence@hertsforlearning.co.uk

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