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Character Education at St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy

At St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy, we believe that **character is who we are**.

Our character education is rooted in our Catholic mission and in our belief that every child is **important, unique and precious because God loves them**. We want every pupil to leave St Mary's not only as a successful learner, but as a confident, compassionate and courageous young person who understands their responsibility to others and has the character to make a positive difference in the world.

Our school virtues were **chosen by our children, for our children**. They are:

Peace ● Faith ● Humble ● Perseverance ● Unique ● Kind ● Inclusive ● Love ● Equal ● Generous

These virtues are at the heart of school life. They underpin our teaching, relationships, behaviour, worship, pastoral care and wider curriculum and help us to develop children who are confident, happy and responsible citizens.

Character, Virtue and Mission

We believe that a good life is one in which a person develops and practises virtues.

Character is not simply something that children are told about. **Character is caught, taught and sought.** Children develop character through the relationships they experience, the adults they see modelling positive behaviours, the opportunities they are given and the choices they make every day.

We therefore deliberately create opportunities for pupils to practise:

- **Kindness** – caring for others and recognising when someone needs help.
- **Love** – showing compassion and following Jesus' example of loving others.
- **Generosity** – giving our time, talents and resources to help others.
- **Perseverance** – continuing when something is difficult and learning from setbacks.
- **Faith** – developing a relationship with God and allowing faith to influence our choices.
- **Peace** – becoming people who promote harmony, justice and reconciliation.
- **Inclusivity** – ensuring everyone feels welcome, valued and included.
- **Equality** – recognising the dignity and worth of every person.
- **Humility** – recognising our strengths while remaining grateful, respectful and willing to learn.
- **Uniqueness** – celebrating the gifts, talents and individuality that God has given each person.

Our mission statement provides a framework through which these virtues are lived:

S – Service and Stewardship

We care for one another and recognise our responsibility to our local, national and global communities. We seek to care for God's creation and those who are most vulnerable.

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T – Togetherness

We work cooperatively for the greater good. We understand that we are stronger together and that our actions demonstrate what it means to be disciples of Christ.

M – Mission

We seek to provide every pupil with the best possible opportunities to learn, grow and achieve their God-given potential.

A – Awe and Wonder

We develop curiosity and a sense of wonder about God's creation. We encourage children to become future leaders who want to learn more, know more and understand more.

R – Reconciliation and Forgiveness

We learn to recognise when we have made mistakes, say sorry, seek forgiveness and forgive others. We understand that mistakes can become opportunities for growth.

Y – Yes!

We encourage children to say 'yes' to God, to new opportunities, to challenge, to helping others and to becoming the best version of themselves.

S – Spirituality

We develop our relationship with God through prayer, reflection and the Gospel values of acceptance, hope, faith, courage, honesty, love, charity, solidarity and truth.

Character in Action

At St Mary's, character education is not a separate subject. It is woven through the whole experience of being a pupil in our school.

Children develop character through the curriculum, relationships, worship, play, leadership, sport, creativity, service and their involvement in the wider community.

Our curriculum gives pupils opportunities to develop qualities such as:

- curiosity;
- independence;
- resilience;
- determination;
- creativity;

- critical thinking;
- teamwork;
- responsibility;
- self-discipline; and
- a love of learning.

For example, solving a challenging mathematical problem develops perseverance and resilience; scientific investigation develops curiosity and determination; studying significant historical figures develops an understanding of courage, justice and resilience; reading great literature develops empathy and an understanding of different perspectives.

We deliberately create opportunities for children to **practise virtues rather than simply talk about them**.

Character Through Sport

Sport provides powerful opportunities to develop character.

Our pupils participate in:

- high-quality PE;
- sporting competitions;
- team activities;
- physical challenges;
- exercise and fitness activities; and
- opportunities to develop healthy lifestyles.

Through sport, children learn to cooperate, persevere, manage disappointment, celebrate success, show respect and understand that improvement comes through practice.

Our website highlights the opportunities pupils have to participate in sporting competitions with other local schools and to develop both physical and mental wellbeing.

Character Through Creativity

Creativity enables children to discover talents, express themselves and develop confidence.

Pupils experience:

- art and design;
- music;
- drama;
- performance;
- creative curriculum projects;

- displays celebrating children's achievements;
- cultural learning; and
- opportunities to share their talents with others.

Creativity teaches children that there is more than one way to solve a problem and encourages imagination, confidence, perseverance and self-expression.

Our vibrant school environment celebrates children's creativity and makes their achievements visible to the whole community.

Character Through Performing

Performance helps children develop confidence, courage, teamwork and resilience.

Our pupils have opportunities to participate in:

- class assemblies;
- whole-school assemblies;
- school productions;
- worship;
- musical activities;
- Trust initiatives such as **Stronger Together**; and
- performances for families and the wider community.

Standing in front of others, learning to work as part of a team and overcoming nerves are valuable character-building experiences.

Character Through Service and Leadership

At St Mary's, we believe that children should not simply learn about making a difference — **they should have opportunities to make a difference**.

Our pupils develop leadership and service through:

- Senior Chaplains / **Mary's Missionaries**;
- pupil leadership;
- school council and pupil voice;
- lunchtime clubs;
- prayer and worship leadership;
- charity fundraising;
- community projects;
- Faith in Action;
- service to the parish;

- supporting younger pupils;
- environmental projects;
- volunteering; and
- opportunities to support those who are vulnerable.

Our Senior Chaplains have developed their own recruitment and interview process for future chaplains and lead prayer, worship and activities for other pupils.

Our pupils are encouraged to understand that leadership is not about status or power; it is about **service**.

Character Through Catholic Life and Mission

Our Catholic life provides daily opportunities for children to develop virtues through faith in action.

Pupils participate in:

- prayer and liturgy;
- Mass;
- retreats;
- sacramental preparation;
- chaplaincy;
- Bible study;
- Visio Divina;
- CAFOD and Catholic Social Teaching activities;
- Faith in Action;
- charity work;
- parish activities; and
- service to others.

Through our Catholic life, children learn that faith should influence how we live and how we treat others.

Our chaplaincy team provides opportunities for pupils to explore Scripture, reflect, pray and develop their relationship with God. Our Senior Chaplains lead activities and help pupils to understand what it means to be missionary disciples.

Character Through Kindness

We believe that **small acts of kindness can have a great impact**.

Our Senior Chaplains celebrate pupils through our **Act of Kindness / Hands of Kindness Award**, recognising children who demonstrate our school virtues through their actions.

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Children may be recognised for demonstrating:

- love;
- charity;
- perseverance;
- resilience;
- generosity;
- inclusion;
- kindness;
- courage;
- service; or
- care for others.

The award reminds our pupils that character is demonstrated through the choices we make every day.

Our school website describes the award as recognising pupils who understand that **small acts have a great deal of power**.

Character Through Community

St Mary's understands that we are part of something much bigger than our school.

We are proud of our relationships with:

- St Mary's parish;
- our local community in New Mills;
- our Catholic school family;
- St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust;
- local organisations;
- other schools;
- community groups;
- older people; and
- charities and organisations supporting vulnerable people.

Our pupils have visited and supported **Watford House**, sharing stories, singing carols and giving handmade gifts. They have supported charitable collections, helped people experiencing homelessness and taken part in community initiatives.

These experiences help children understand that they have both a **local and global responsibility**.

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Character Through Stewardship

Our Catholic understanding of stewardship teaches children that we have a responsibility to care for God's creation.

Pupils develop this through:

- wildlife projects;
- litter picking;
- reducing waste;
- recycling;
- environmental projects;
- sustainability initiatives;
- planting and caring for the school grounds; and
- learning about climate change.

Our children understand that they can make a difference through small actions and that caring for the world is part of our responsibility as Christians.

The school's wildlife and environmental projects demonstrate this in practice, including creating a wildlife haven and encouraging pupils to reduce waste.

Character Through the World of Work

We want our pupils to leave St Mary's believing that their future is full of possibility.

We therefore provide opportunities for children to:

- learn about different careers;
- meet professionals;
- develop enterprise skills;
- understand the world of work;
- recognise their own talents;
- develop aspirations;
- learn about responsibility; and
- understand that hard work, perseverance and character can help them achieve their goals.

Our careers opportunities help children understand that **they have the power to become anything they want to be**, while also recognising the contribution they can make to the lives of others.

The school's careers work includes opportunities for parents, carers, friends and families to inspire pupils and share their experiences of different careers.

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Character Through Pupil Voice

We believe that children should have a voice in shaping their school.

Our school virtues were chosen by our children for our children.

Pupil voice is therefore central to our approach to character education.

Through:

- school council;
- pupil leadership;
- chaplaincy;
- class discussions;
- questionnaires;
- pupil voice activities;
- Trust initiatives; and
- leadership opportunities,

children are encouraged to express their views, listen to others, make decisions and understand the responsibilities that come with having a voice.

Our pupils understand that their ideas can lead to positive change.

Character, Resilience and Wellbeing

We recognise that developing character does not mean expecting children never to experience difficulty.

Instead, we want pupils to develop the resilience and emotional understanding to face challenges, seek help when needed, learn from mistakes and try again.

We help pupils to develop:

- self-belief;
- motivation;
- perseverance;
- self-control;
- emotional literacy;
- resilience;
- confidence;
- coping strategies;
- empathy; and
- the ability to reflect and learn from experience.

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Our pastoral provision, relationships with trusted adults, mental health and wellbeing work, physical activity and opportunities for reflection all contribute to this.

Children learn that **asking for help is a strength, not a weakness**.

Character is Caught, Taught and Sought

At St Mary's, we believe that character develops when children experience it, learn about it and actively choose to practise it.

Character is caught

Children see character in action through:

- the example of staff;
- relationships between adults and children;
- older pupils supporting younger pupils;
- chaplains and pupil leaders;
- parents and families;
- parishioners;
- community members; and
- the wider school community.

Character is taught

We explicitly teach:

- virtues;
- Gospel values;
- Catholic Social Teaching;
- relationships;
- resilience;
- emotional wellbeing;
- respect;
- responsibility;
- British Values;
- leadership;
- online safety; and
- personal development.

Character is sought

We provide opportunities for pupils to actively practise character through:

- leadership;

- service;
- sport;
- creativity;
- performance;
- volunteering;
- charity;
- environmental action;
- community involvement;
- worship; and
- challenge.

Character and the Wider Curriculum

Character education is woven through every subject.

Children develop:

Perseverance when solving a challenging mathematical problem.

Curiosity when investigating in science.

Courage when presenting their ideas.

Empathy when exploring characters and experiences through literature.

Respect when learning about different cultures, beliefs and perspectives.

Justice when exploring historical events and social change.

Stewardship when learning about our environment and the world God has entrusted to us.

Creativity through art, music, drama and design.

Teamwork through PE and collaborative learning.

Determination when refining and improving their work.

In this way, character is not an additional part of our curriculum. **It is part of the way we learn.**

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Character and the Wider Community

Our character education extends beyond the classroom.

Pupils have opportunities to participate in:

- parish life;
- charity work;
- community projects;
- visits to care homes;
- environmental projects;
- sporting competitions;
- performances;
- clubs;
- leadership opportunities;
- Trust activities;
- Faith in Action;
- fundraising;
- volunteering; and
- activities supporting those in need.

Through these experiences, children learn that they have the capacity to make a positive contribution to the lives of others.

Supporting Character at Home

Character develops through the partnership between school, home, parish and community.

Parents and carers can support character development by:

- praising effort as well as achievement;
- encouraging children to persevere when something is difficult;
- helping children reflect on mistakes and learn from them;
- encouraging kindness towards siblings and friends;
- talking about how our actions affect other people;
- encouraging children to take responsibility;
- helping children to manage worries and emotions;
- encouraging participation in clubs and activities;
- supporting volunteering and community involvement;
- visiting and spending time with older relatives;
- encouraging children to care for animals and the environment;

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- attending Mass and parish activities where appropriate;
- talking about Gospel values at home; and
- celebrating acts of kindness and service.

Small everyday experiences can develop lifelong virtues.

Our Character Ambition

Ultimately, we want every child who leaves St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy to know:

I am important and precious because God loves me.

I am unique.

I have gifts and talents to share.

I can persevere when things are difficult.

I can make a difference.

I have a responsibility to care for others and for God's creation.

I can serve my community.

I can learn from my mistakes.

I can show courage, kindness, compassion and love.

I can use my gifts to make the world a better place.

Our ambition is that every pupil leaves St Mary's as a **confident, compassionate, resilient and responsible young person**, equipped not simply to succeed in life, but to **live a good life, serve others and make a positive difference in God's world**.

At St Mary's, character is who we are — and our mission is to become the people God calls us to be.