



Mr Dan Stockton
Headteacher
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30/03/2021

Dear Dan,

Following an evaluative assessment of your school on Friday 26th March 2021 by Geoff Smith, Trustee of ACE and Gary Lewis, Chair of the Association of Character Education and Senior Research Fellow at the Jubilee Centre, Birmingham University, the Association can confirm that Oak Tree School has met the high standards required to be awarded the ***“School of Character Kitemark”***. Warm congratulations to you and all your colleagues at Oak Tree for receiving the award.

It is clear that since its launch some 7 years ago, Oak Tree School has based all developments around a set of 4 core values that have been carefully evolved after lengthy discussion at senior leadership level and involving a committed governing body. These 4 values underpin both the development of curriculum material and relationship and behaviour policies at all levels. Teachers are very happy to work in an environment where they feel valued and regularly enjoy both personal and professional development. Consequently, they have a direct and highly effective impact on school development and direction. They have a clear understanding of the school’s objectives and are able to relate these values to everyday situations, which ensures a genuine consistency of approach across all areas of the school. Similarly, other support staff and particularly those who work directly with members of the school’s local community and parents, have a clear understanding of the school’s values and consequently are able to consistently reinforce the school’s determination to develop all aspects of their pupils’ character and emotional development. This “360 degree” approach ensures that all stakeholders are immersed in the school’s values and wider educational objectives.

The school caters for children with a wide spectrum of specific and sometimes extensive needs. Consequently, it was a real pleasure to meet with a cross section of the student population who were able to speak with confidence and eloquence about their experiences at the school. These students

were able to relate the character education programme to their own development and understood very clearly how it influenced the high quality relationships which exist at all levels within the school community. It was particularly rewarding to listen to young people who were able to describe their own journey and development at the school and the various interactions and activities which had enabled them to develop as independent and emotionally stronger individuals, able to self-evaluate at a relatively sophisticated level.

CPD that supports teachers' ability and confidence to deliver character education is featured throughout the school year, and forms a part of the induction process for new staff. An extensive training programme is complimented by a culture of encouraging staff to be 'reflective practitioners.' Similarly, the consistent "drip feed" approach to staff development via regular weekly activities has ensured a very strong team ethos which enables staff at all levels to seek advice and support from each other no matter what their position within the school's staffing structure. Colleagues were particularly praiseworthy of the senior leadership team who "always had time to listen and respond to any issues or ideas". This positive culture certainly enables a collegiate and devolved approach to wider problem solving within the school and ensures that each individual understands their role in ensuring the high quality educational provision apparent at all levels within the school.

The atmosphere at the school was relaxed but purposeful and has resulted in very positive and mutually supportive relationships. Interactions are always polite, calm and with an obvious intent to promote student well-being and development. The senior leadership are fully aware that the very high standards achieved at the school can only be maintained in the future by a total commitment to supporting and enhancing the quality of interactions taking place in and outside of the classroom. It was reassuring to discover that the governing body share this same understanding and commitment.

Colleagues had a detailed understanding of the needs and characteristics of the students in their care and were united in their determination to ensure that only the highest levels of personal attainment at both an academic and emotional level would be acceptable. These high aspirations are led by the senior team but shared and actively promoted by all members of the school community.

The school provides extensive opportunities for students to develop their leadership and collaborative skills, both in and outside of the classroom, and the sense of civic and personal responsibility fostered by the many varied activities in which students take part was an obvious strength of the school.

Going forward, the school might want to consider the following suggestions: -

- Further work in scaffolding character skills and values so that students understand that the overall goal of "strong character" is to be able to make the right choice in a wide range of

situations, would be beneficial. Linking curriculum and pastoral resources and materials so that they carefully and purposefully promote character development in a structured manner is likely to be of particular benefit to the school.

- Progressing further the already excellent liaison work taking place with the parent community so that when students return home they remain exposed to a consistent values driven experience which reflects their diet at school.

In summary, both assessors felt privileged to visit the school and were struck by the fact that the unflinching focus on character values allows students, teachers and support staff to flourish and work together in a wonderfully supportive environment that fosters a sense of well-being and positive community.

Kind regards



Mr Gary Lewis

Chair, Association for Character Education (ACE)

Geoff Smith, Trustee ACE

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