



03/10/2023

Dear Justine,

Following an evaluative assessment of your school's character education provision on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023, the Association for Character Education can confirm that Notre Dame Sixth Form College has met the exacting standards required to be awarded the **"School of Character Quality Mark Award"**. Our congratulations are given to colleagues in your college who have all contributed enormously to this outstanding achievement, and Catherine Herring in particular. Similarly, our sincere congratulations are extended to you, your students and governors, as this award clearly recognises the high quality of learning, mutually respectful relationships and values-driven personal development programme, which are prevalent in the college's provision.

The assessment demonstrated a significant number of strengths in terms of its character provision;

- The atmosphere around the college is calm with students conducting themselves in a considered and respectful manner. This is reflective of the values-driven culture which has been intentionally cultivated by the college's leadership.
- The college's approach to character education is underpinned by character-based theory and pedagogy, with research and frameworks from the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, providing it with a strong foundation. Having this foundation not only has the benefit of orientating its current approach, but will act as a constant guide as its character education evolves and develops in the future.
- The high-quality content of the schools' character curriculum delivered during PTE, provides students with a nuanced understanding of the key concepts of character. Pupils commented that the sessions support them to "explore where your morals lie."
- The Stella Maris programme is the central vehicle to the development of character within the college. The initiative provides a strong framework for motivating students to 'seek out' opportunities where they can develop their character, and become ethical and civic-minded young leaders. Students are able to discuss how their participation in Stella Maris activities develops specific virtues, helping them to flourish in life.

- Effective reflective practices are well embedded within the Stella Maris programme. As a result, students are clearly able to articulate which virtues they feel they have developed and which virtues they desire to focus on developing further.
- The staggered criteria outlined in the Bronze, Silver and Gold Stella Maris award, is well designed in terms of increasing levels of responsibility, agency and ethical leadership within students.
- The language of character and virtues is present around the college. This provides students, visitors and staff with the message that character development is a core part of the purpose of education at the college.
- Character is 'caught,' through the Stella Maris commendations, allowing the positive reinforcement of the college's virtues on a regular basis, whilst also supporting pupils to understand how their conduct is demonstrative of a specific virtue.
- Staff are encouraged to not only be effective teachers of their subject but role models who 'live' the Stella Maris virtues. This is facilitated through staff Stella Maris commendations, recruitment processes and appraisals.
- Developing strong ethical leaders is a core focus of the college. Choosing to put leadership at the heart of the Stella Maris initiative, as well as providing student leadership opportunities such as the Student Exec Group is excellent practice. The student Exec Group is comprised of well-defined student leadership roles which are embraced with dedication and gratitude by those who fill them. Students also spoke of student led assemblies and the benefits this brings to the forging of strong character.
- Sharing the College's approach to developing character with other Catholic-based colleges, whilst ensuring that any adaption of the Stella Maris programme is done with the same level of robustness and integrity, will help support the embedding of character within other Catholic Sixth Form colleges.

As the College moves forward with the development of its character programme it is recommended that;

- Staff are supported to deepen their understanding of some of the key concepts of character such as human and societal flourishing as its broader aim, and the importance of 'phronesis' in making the decisions, at the right time and for the right reason. Reconnecting staff with the 'why' in terms of the development of character would be beneficial.
- Character is embedded within subject areas, so it is not only taught in PTE but also features within the teaching of subjects as well. Whilst character is recognised and rewarded in the

classroom, it hasn't been embedded within the content of subject curriculum. This can be achieved in a way that doesn't require additional content to be taught, but that character is authentically explored where there is genuine opportunity to do so, in a reflective, planned and purposeful way.

- Consider the benefit of having greater synergy between what is taught in PTE and the content of assemblies.
- Consider opportunities for furthering the partnership with Leeds Trinity to evaluate the impact of the Stella Maris programme.
- When students identify which two virtues they want to personally focus on developing as part of the Stella Maris programme, they often select performance virtues, particularly in terms of increasing confidence and linking character to performing well in their A-Levels. Whilst this is entirely understandable and very beneficial for the students, there is potentially the opportunity to 'build in' the need for students to also select a moral virtue as a focus too. This will support students to understand the critical importance of moral character to gaining happiness, fulfilment and developing a flourishing life.
- The college has developed strong reflective practices for students, there is now the opportunity to explore how a similar focus on reflection could be used to support staff to reflect on their own character, and which virtues they would like to focus on improving within themselves. This will support staff to further their ability to become strong virtuous role models for the pupils. With both students and staff personally committed to a journey of self-improvement through the ongoing development of virtues, it will allow further flourishing of the college's characterful culture. One consideration could be to expand the question about how the member of staff "contributes to Catholic Life," within the appraisal process, so it also embraces a conversation about their character and virtues.
- Students spoke of the sometimes inconsistent manner in which commendations are given out, depending on the member of staff. Developing a more consistent approach to the allocation of Stella Maris Commendations will help sustain the perceived 'value' of the rewards.

Yours sincerely



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ACE CEO

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