

Focus on exams 'hinders development of character' in British school children

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Two new reports by the University of Birmingham's Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues have found that moral character is being squeezed out of children's education.

The reports, *Character Education in UK Schools* and *The Good Teacher: Understanding Virtues in Practice*, call for moral virtues to be put at the heart of British education.

According to the Jubilee Centre's research, it is possible to cultivate good moral virtues in children, such as honesty, self-discipline, fairness, courage and [gratitude](#). Furthermore, a school pupil's ability to demonstrate these qualities can lead to a flourishing life, as well as improved performance in the classroom.

But the *Character Education in UK Schools* report reveals that 80% of school teachers feel that schools' focus on academic attainment is hindering the development of students' characters.

According to the report, many British children struggle to identify good moral judgements when faced with scenarios that require virtues such as honesty, courage and self-discipline.

With more than half of the school pupils surveyed failing to identify good moral judgements when responding to moral dilemmas, there is growing concern that teachers are not being given the time or the tools to teach students the difference between right and wrong.

The research also shows that, contrary to popular opinion, children who say they do sport do not demonstrate better moral judgement. Those doing music or choir (48%), drama (48%) or charity work (50%) were better able to make good moral judgements.

Despite 60% of British teachers reporting that they teach a subject relating to their students' personal development and many considering moral education to be an integral part of their job, only 33% of teachers have had any specific training to support students in this area.

Many teachers who took part in the study, which examines the views of over 10,000 students and 255 teachers, recommended that schools provide more 'free space' where students could be themselves, without having to think about exam scores.

The Good Teacher report found that over a third (37%) of school teachers in the study believe that they do not have enough time to do their job to a standard they believe is right. Many point to the impact of increasing workloads and the narrow focus on exams and inspections.

According to teacher educators interviewed by researchers, British training courses spend little time reflecting on the teaching of moral virtues, because the focus is always on meeting Teachers Standards and on the technical aspects of teaching practice.

The research also finds that there is a positive attitude towards teaching moral character within the education sector. Most British school teachers consider moral education to be an integral part of their job.

Professor James Arthur, Director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, said: 'While it has been hugely encouraging to see both major political parties in Britain back the need for character education in recent months, more needs to be done to empower teachers to achieve

what they came into teaching to do: to develop the whole child.

'Academic attainment is, of course, important, but the moral character of a child matters more. Research shows that a good grasp of [moral](#) virtues, such as kindness, honesty and courage, can help [children](#) to flourish as human beings, and can also lead to improvements in the classroom.

'And that level of understanding doesn't just happen; it needs to be nurtured and encouraged, both in school and at home.

'That is why the Jubilee Centre is recommending a review of character education within teacher education courses and is calling for more time for [teachers](#) to pay attention to issues of character in the classroom.'

Provided by University of Birmingham

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