To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England?

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For the award of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

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Abstract

PhD Thesis Title: The extent and ways in which Catholic character education contributes to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England.

This research study is an exploration of the constitutive elements of character education and their contribution to the formation of pupils in Catholic primary schools in England. The key research question is: *To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England?* This frames the intent of the empirical outcomes and the focus on how schools, through both implicit and explicit approaches to character education, promote virtue literacy, develop practical wisdom and empower pupils to practice virtue to serve the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

The critical retrieval of literature explores key themes including an examination of the nature of Catholic school distinctiveness and the development of character, encompassing both the historical perspectives of Aristotle and Aquinas, as well as contemporary scholarly receptions, including MacIntrye (1981), Hauerwas (1981), Lickona (1991), Lydon (2011), Devanny (2018) and Arthur (2021). The review considers a range of models for educating for character, making particular reference to the Neo-Aristotelian Model for Moral Development (Jubilee Centre, 2022) as a point of sophisticated conceptual framing for this study. It also examines challenges for Catholic character education in a contemporary context.

The research design for this study utilises an interpretative and constructive methodology and epistemology through multiple case study based on three Catholic primary schools in the southeast of England. The design employs a concurrent nested strategy (Terrell, 2012), relying predominantly on qualitative methods through a triangulation of perspectives across the school community. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously and integrated during analysis. Data collection includes nine interviews with school leaders, parent focus groups with a total of seventeen participants and pupil focus groups, with a total of eighteen pupil participants. Quantitative measures are also utilised in the form of a pupil questionnaire completed by a total of eighty-five Year Six pupil participants.

The research findings identify the characteristics of Catholic school distinctiveness translated through school ethos and culture as a key contributor to Catholic character education and reveal the significance of modelling within different communities of practice. Further, an emphasis on Catholic Social Teaching provides the foundation for character education in all three case study settings.

The study recommends that for the Catholic school to fulfil its mission of formation and evangelisation in a contemporary context, character education must be integrated into the totality of the Catholic life of the school through strategic leadership and the articulation of a shared vision, reflected in the environment and interpreted through curriculum design. The study also advocates for the establishment of effective partnerships in order to harness the significant role and impact of community on the inculcation of character and an authentic commitment to staff formation.

Kerry Ann Macfarlane, St. Mary's University

Key Words: character education (implicit and explicit), formation, values, virtue, virtue literacy, virtue practice, phronesis (practical wisdom), modelling, community, human flourishing, Catholic Social Teaching, synodality, See-Judge-(Choose)-Act methodology

DEDICATION

'I can do all this through Him who gives me strength'. (Philippians 4: 13)

I dedicate this academic endeavour to my dear children, Carys and Euan. I hope to have inspired in them a love of learning and a determination to pursue their dreams in life.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full'.
John 10:10

1.1 Rationale

The fundamental aim of Catholic schools is a commitment to the education of the whole person through a 'personal integration of faith and life', and 'the gradual formation of conscience in fundamental, permanent virtues' (SCCE, 1977: n.44, 47). The theological virtues, particularly the virtue of charity, is the life-giving spirit which transforms a person of virtue into a person of Christ. The Church's vision for education is all inclusive, reflecting the dimensions of the human person, centred on Christ who 'is the teaching-centre, the model on whom the Christian shapes his life' (SCCE, 1977: n.47). As *The Catholic School* reaffirms:

> The mission of education to ensure strong character formation…It stimulates her to foster truly Christian living and apostolic communities, equipped to make their own positive contribution, in a spirit of cooperation, to the building up of a secular society. (SCCE, 1977: n.11)

Central to the mission of Catholic schools is to seek the fullness of truth which invokes 'a search that travels inwards in the acquisition of self-knowledge as well as outwards in the acquisition of wisdom' (CBCEW, 2020b: 3). For the purpose of this study, the term 'Catholic character education' is used to refer to pursuit of human flourishing through fostering the holistic formation of pupils aligned to Catholic teachings through an integration of implicit and explicit approaches, encompassing the knowledge and application of Christian virtue. Catholic character education reflects the Church's vision for formation - to know, love and serve God through the development of Christian wisdom:

> [Education] is about forming the human person, equipping him or her to live life to the full – in short it is about imparting wisdom. And true wisdom is inseparable from knowledge of the Creator. (Benedict XVI, 2010a)

At present, there is minimal research relating to character education within the Catholic education system in England and Wales. It is therefore of keen interest within this project to address this gap in existing research with a specific focus on evaluating the holistic impact of Catholic character education on the formation of the scholar in Catholic primary schools in England. There has been a recent national resurgence in research into character development. This renewed attention to character education led to its explicit inclusion in recent educational policy. In November 2019, the DfE published *Character Education Framework Guidance* highlighting the duty of schools to 'promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and prepare them for the opportunities and experiences of later life', also reflected in the *Education Inspection Framework* (Ofsted, 2019), which includes a judgement on the personal development of learners in relation to provision for character education. However, the *Character Education Framework Guidance* (2019) document lacks resonance with the distinctive identity of Catholic schools through its narrow focus on developing civic and performance virtues relating to skills of resilience, empathy and employability, and its omission of cardinal and theological virtues, which are foundational in the evangelising mission of Catholic education. As part of their mission, Catholic schools have an underlying apostolic purpose in promoting the fullness of Christian life through an '…educational philosophy in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony' (CCE, 1988: n.34). This project will explore, through a multiple case study approach, how character education can promote such integration, as an essential preparation for a full and flourishing life in Christ. Specifically, the research will examine how schools can promote virtue literacy through the development of virtue knowledge and understanding, virtue reasoning and virtue practice through the implicit culture of school life, as well as the explicit curriculum, aligned to the model of character developed by the Jubilee Centre (2017).

In 2017, the DfE surveyed 880 schools which showed that 97% sought desirable character traits among their students (White, Gibb, Lea & Street, 2017). Previous studies demonstrate a correlation between character education and intrinsic wellbeing (Lickona, 1996; Walker, Roberts and Kristjánsson, 2015). Although evidence of such an impact is not easily measurable, character education has also been linked to improvements in behaviour and academic attainment, as well as emotional and mental wellbeing. Whilst acknowledging the importance of educational outcomes, this research will explore the fundamental mission of Catholic schools in developing the whole child in the character of Christ. Bishop Stock (2018: 3) defines the purpose of Catholic education as transformative, both in human experience and in its wider societal mission:

> To make a distinctive contribution to the formation of all aspects of the human person in the pursuit of fullness of life given by Christ (beatitude) and for the good of human society.

As part of the review of literature, the research will explore the wider meaning and purpose of education in the context of how Catholic schools can inspire pupils to integrate belief and action through the development of *phronesis* or practical wisdom. In so doing, the research will explore the extent to which character education can promote children's skills of critical reflection as well as their capacity for autonomy and altruism to act as disciples, serving the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. It will evaluate the opportunities which schools provide to enable children to see and serve beyond themselves, reaching out to others, especially the poor and disadvantaged. In this way, Catholic character education is decisively countercultural, seeking to equip children and young people with skills of discernment, empowering them to take transformative action in the face of a myriad of challenges that the 21st century presents to their generation.

This research will evaluate how the See-Judge-Act methodology, developed by Cardinal Cardijn, originating from Thomas Aquinas' description of the intellectual virtue of prudence, can foster an exploration of the relationship between belief and action. The

need for the development of practical wisdom as integral to our growth in faith is demonstrated in the See-Judge-Act methodology for theological reflection and interpretation of reality, with the goal being transformative social action and justice. The approach is based on developing discernment, beginning with observation (See) involving questioning, information seeking and assessing our connection to the situation. This leads to the need to determine who is affected, how and why, and to examine the situation within the context of our faith and beliefs (Judge). This judgement or choice translates into action, conducted in the light of faith (Act). This process encourages reflection and critical thinking, integral to personal and spiritual growth. This study aims to examine the impact of the See-Judge-Act methodology to discover the ways in which character education can permeate the curriculum in the pursuit of social justice.

This research will examine the true purpose of education in a Catholic context. Whilst Catholic schools will always strive for academic excellence, central to the distinctive mission in Catholic education is to uphold human dignity and to respond to God's call to human flourishing. The academic curriculum in a Catholic school is inherently guided by a higher spiritual, moral and altruistic purpose. A Catholic approach to the curriculum aims to transcend the acquisition of knowledge for purely material success and promotes the use of acquired learning for societal benefit to serve the common good. Cooling (2010: 13-14) argues that the purpose of education should be concerned with developing skills of discernment to enable pupils to make judgements about the meaning and significance of their learning. He refers to the poignant words of a holocaust survivor, written in a letter to the United Nations, regarding the importance of studying history: 'Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.' When education touches the human heart, it creates a genuine sense of meaning and purpose which has the ability to energise into transformative action.

Pope Francis (2014) refers to the 'language of the head' as merely utilitarian, advocating for a harmonious fusion of three languages: 'the language of the mind, the language of the heart and the language of the hands…Three languages, together in harmony'. The

cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions of character formation, referenced by Lickona (2001: 4), relate to Pope Francis' vision of education. This project will explore the role of character education in developing meaning and purpose in learning, invoking the language of head, heart and hands through the lens of the See- Judge-Act methodology, involving the development of practical wisdom and skills of critical reflection, set within the wider context of a Catholic approach to the curriculum.

1.2 The Role of the Educational Community

It is essential that this research project examines a range of influential roles within the 'educational community' involved in the development of Catholic character, including students, parents, teachers, leaders and governors. These are all key stakeholders or 'constitutive elements' in children's lifelong journey of faith formation. For the purpose of this research, as part of the multiple case study, qualitative data will be the main instrument of data collection, obtained through interviews and focus groups, to examine and evaluate the extent to which each constitutive element contributes to and impacts on the development of virtue literacy, leading to the habitual practice of virtue.

The role of teachers in modelling the integration of faith and life is of central interest in this research. Nuzzi (1999) describes the role of teachers as models of Christ's ministry, inviting Catholic educators to lead as Jesus led. Lydon (2011: 75) explores the concept of the sacramental perspective which in the context of teaching 'constitutes modelling ministry on Christ', responding to the call to 'be with Him' (Mark 3: 14). The sacramental perspective emphasises the centrality of the relationship between educator and student in terms of formation. Lydon (2011: 73) makes reference to St. Paul's invitation to others for imitation or emulation, 'be imitators of me as I am of Christ' (1 Cor 11:1). The vision of education of John Bosco (1815-1888), founder of the Salesians, is characterised by 'the centrality of the concept of teacher as role model', which is central to the Salesian ethos (Lydon, 2001: 34). This research will examine the significance of modelling ministry on Christ and the impact of the sacramental perspective on the formation of pupils.

An area of key significance in the field of character education is the role of the family in the formation of their children. This is articulated in the *Bishop's Statement on Religious Education in Catholic Schools* (CBCEW, 2000: n.2):

> The first educators in the faith are parents. They establish in their children the sensitivity and responsiveness to the presence of God, to the practice of prayer and to the patterns of life in the community of faith, the parish. By their example in the home and in their participation in the Mass and other sacraments, the foundations of life-long faith and discipleship in their children are laid down.

This project will explore the seminal influence of parents in the development of virtue, dating back to Aquinas (1227-1274). It will examine the extent to which the relationship between school and parents facilitates character formation and the ways in which schools can promote and enhance this partnership. The conciliar document *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965: n.3) emphasises the integral role of parents in the development of virtue for the good of society:

> Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs.

The purpose of Catholic character education is based on developing children's virtue literacy illuminated by the light of the Gospel. Nurturing children's understanding and practice of virtue enables them to grow in relationship with Christ and ultimately to become servant leaders, to be transformational in society, which is at the heart of the Salesian approach. This project is keen to explore how schools 'listen' to young people and encourage dialogue so that character education can serve to renew our moral culture. How do schools support young people to respond to God's call? What opportunities are created for the sacred voice of the child to be heard? Lydon (2011: 97) describes the Salesian approach as one of empowerment for students, based on 'self-sacrificing love... openness, capacity for dialogue', but underpinned by belief and

genuine interest in the uniqueness of every individual.

Pope Francis, in his introduction to Father Rossana Sala's book '*Around the Living Fire of the Synod: Educating for the Good Life of the Gospe*l' (2020), highlights the importance of listening and engaging in dialogue with young people so that the Church can learn from their voice through journeying together: 'They have asked us to walk alongside them - not behind them or ahead of them but at their side.' This research will consider to what extent schools develop this concept of synodality and how this can contribute to character formation.

1.3 Context

Catholic schools serve a large population of 62.2 million students globally at preschool, primary, and secondary levels, as cited in the *Global Catholic Education Report* (Wodon, 2020). According to the published data in the *Catholic Education Service Digest of 2023 Census Data for Schools and Colleges in England* (2023), there are 2087 Catholic schools in England including primary, secondary, 6th form colleges and all through schools. Catholic schools represent 9% of the national total of state funded schools. A total of 821,549 pupils are educated in Catholic schools. 58% of pupils at Catholic state funded schools are Catholic. A total of 47,307 teachers are employed in Catholic state funded schools.

There are 1694 Catholic primary schools, consisting of 1652 state funded schools and 42 independent schools in England. There has been a 13% increase in academy numbers since the 2022 census. 46% of Catholic state funded schools are now academies, educating 48% of Catholic pupils. Nationally, 54% of state-educated children are now in academies. Data shows that 55 state-funded schools are supported by 27 federations: 52 of these schools are primary, and 3 are secondary. Census data shows a total of 736 primary phase Catholic academies in England. Overall, the census reports that the

number of Catholic schools in England has fallen slightly. There has been an increase in Catholic academies as more dioceses create multi-academy trusts.

In terms of local context in relation to this research, the three Catholic primary schools which are part of the multiple case study are located in southern England working with 13 local education authorities, including Hampshire, Southampton, Oxford and Portsmouth, as well as the States of Guernsey and Jersey. There are 71 Catholic schools across the diocese, two of which are joint Catholic/Anglican schools, and one a joint Catholic/Ecumenical school. Data from the recent CES census (2018) shows there are over 31,000 pupils in the diocese, served by 2,394 teachers. 57% of the pupils are Catholic and 43% represent other Christian traditions (27%), other faiths (7%) or none (9%).

1.4 Background of the Researcher

In my leadership capacity as an Assistant Headteacher in a Catholic primary school, I am responsible for the development of the curriculum, ensuring a distinctively Catholic approach. It is significant to acknowledge here that I have been directly involved in the design and implementation of the provision for Catholic Character Education in one of the schools involved in this case study. This study is therefore informed through the lens of a researcher practitioner perspective. As part of my explanation of methodology and methods below, I will give careful consideration to the implications of this in terms of positionality and the resultant challenge of objectivity and confirmation bias.

As both educator and scholar, I am inspired by the fundamental mission and purpose of Catholic schools: 'Catholic schools ought to be institutions which encourage the student community to discover what is contained in the depths of every human heart' (CBCEW, 2020: 2). This research aims to make a positive contribution to the existing body of knowledge relating to formation of pupils in Catholic primary schools through an

interrogation of relevant literature. The research will raise questions based on outcomes and seek to open a dialogue among researchers and practitioners in this field. The outcomes of the research will consider the purpose of character education in Catholic schools and analyse the factors which contribute to effective character education provision. The study will present a vision for school leaders and teachers and Catholic dioceses on how effective character education can contribute to pupil formation in a Catholic primary setting.

1.5 Research Methodology

The research project will explore, analyse and build upon existing research, which is currently limited in this field. It will identify and evaluate how character education can promote social justice through the development of virtue literacy and practical wisdom. It will explore effective practice as well as identifying challenges and seek to promote a culture of dialogue through research outcomes. The research will make proposals based on the outcomes of a robust and comprehensive review of literature and a multiple case study approach, to contribute to and influence practice in the field of Catholic character education.

The main aim of this project is to address three key research questions:

- How can Catholic primary schools promote virtue literacy?
- How can Catholic character education develop the practical wisdom of the scholar?
- How can Catholic character education empower the scholar in the practice of virtue to serve the principles of Catholic Social Teaching?

The main content of the case study research will explore both implicit and explicit approaches to character education through an examination of the domains of 'caught, taught and sought' character. There will be a comprehensive review of the impact of

leadership from both staff and students. The study will identify opportunities for pupil voice and moral action to serve the common good. It will also explore the foundational role of parents in the development of character formation.

This research is designed as a multiple case study of three Catholic primary schools across England, at different stages of provision in the development of Catholic Character Education, as well as representative of varying geographical and social demographics. The deliberate selection of contrasting levels of experience across the case study schools is intended to enhance the outcomes of the comparison and provide a richer variation in interpretation. The data collection will be a mixed methods approach, focused primarily on qualitative data as the main instrument. Quantitative measures will be used in the form of an online survey for pupils to identify general trends and key themes.

The duality of my role as researcher practitioner within one of the case study schools presented advantages in that the researcher had an established relationship with one of the schools in the case study in terms of relevant experience in the field, as well as ease of accessibility for data collection purposes. However, there is a conscious acknowledgement of potential bias which was managed proactively to mitigate this, adhering to stringent ethics protocol. As some of the respondents were colleagues, they may have felt limited or inclined to provide answers to the benefit of evaluative outcomes for the school. Self-awareness and self-assessment by the researcher was regarded as paramount in identifying specific areas which might be problematic. The researcher was aware that their positionality could lead to an unconscious confirmation bias, which will be mitigated through conscious planning, dialogue and critical reflection at all stages throughout the study to preserve the integrity of the research. The interview and focus group schedules will be reviewed by a non-participant who has knowledge of the area of study and pre-tests will be conducted. A thematic analysis approach to research outcomes will be employed, alongside regular and transparent discussions between researcher and stakeholders throughout the data collection process.

Qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups and evaluated through thematic analysis, following the principles of Braun and Clarke (2019) to identify prevalent themes and patterns. This will consist of interviews with teachers and senior leaders, governors, as well as pupil and parent focus groups across the recruited schools. For the purpose of this research, semi-structured interviews will be used which permits a degree of flexibility, allowing participants to pursue issues and ideas which may not have been initially included in a pre-planned structure (Thomas, 2013). A schedule will be prepared that is sufficiently open-ended to enable further probing and the content to be expanded upon. The combination of interviews and focus groups from members across the whole school community will help to establish how character education is approached in schools, the nature of the impact, challenges experienced and an evaluation of perspectives on contributory factors.

In addition to qualitative measures, quantitative data will be obtained via electronic questionnaires from a Year 6 pupil sample, to facilitate efficiency and triangulation of results. A Likert scale will be employed to provide differentiation of response. However, there are limitations to this type of survey as a range of errors could potentially arise such as unrepresentative sampling, inaccurate measurement or non-response, as indicated by Ponto (2015). The researcher will reduce these potential errors through devising representative sampling, creating clear questions which evoke truthful answers and implementing follow-up procedures for non-response where feasible.

The criteria for school selection will be based on Catholic schools which have an existing engagement with character education albeit to varying extents. Schools have been identified within the Diocese of Portsmouth, which consists of a total of seventy-one Catholic schools across 13 local education authorities. It is anticipated that at least one of the schools in the research project will have had Catholic character education embedded over a series of years and up to two participant schools which will be recruited are at earlier stages of implementation.

The initial phase of the research will consist of an extensive examination of the literature surrounding virtue formation, underpinned by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. It will also examine the purpose and impact of Catholic character education and the features which contribute to effective character provision in a Catholic context. Research in the secondary phase will include a multiple case study of three Catholic primary schools. This will involve data collection through extended school visits and semi-structured interviews with school leaders, teachers and governors. There will also be parent and pupil focus groups, as well as the use of electronic questionnaires to broaden understanding of the research outcomes obtained from qualitative measures. The researcher will visit each school for up to two days per term for one academic school year to enable an in-depth analysis of the implicit and explicit provision for character education. There will be a further schedule for secondary data collection in the second and third year of the study for comprehensive purposes, leading to the final phase of completion of evaluation and presentation of research outcomes.

1.6 Conclusion

This study will present, evaluate and interpret the culmination of the research findings offering a vision of the potential contribution of Catholic character education to the moral and spiritual formation of pupils in primary schools. The outcomes of the research will form the basis of recommendations for Catholic primary school leaders and teachers and Catholic dioceses.

> Once you enter into friendship with God, everything in your life begins to change. As you come to know Him better; you find you want to reflect something of his infinite goodness in your own life. You are attracted to the practice of virtue.
> (Pope Benedict XVI, 2010)

The subsequent chapter will present and analyse the retrieval of relevant literature which has underpinned the purpose of this research study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding'.

(Proverbs 3:5)

In the context of this study, the purpose of the literature review is to provide an articulation of the nature of Catholic character education in terms of purpose, pedagogy and practice within Catholic schools, as a foundation for the subsequent exploration of the extent to which Catholic character education contributes to the formation of pupils in Catholic primary schools in England.

Part One: The Distinctive Nature of Catholic Education

2.1 Introduction

The literature review will begin with an exploration of the distinctive nature of Catholic education in relation to purpose and mission, as outlined in the document *Catholic Education in England and Wales* from the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (2014), a revised version of *Principles, Practices and Concerns: A Statement from the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales* (CBCEW, 1996). This review will examine how this perennial document serves to distill and deepen the foundational principles of Vatican II (1962-1965) which presented a significant new era in Catholic education. The five central themes set out in this document, underpinned by a sacramental vision, will be given detailed commentary as part of this literature review - Search for Excellence; Uniqueness of the Individual; Education of the Whole Person; Education of All and Moral Principles. In so doing, this review will examine the nature of Catholic school distinctiveness and demonstrate how Catholic character education contributes fundamentally to the distinct identity of Catholic schools and their mission towards formation of pupils.

Pope John Paul II, in his address to American bishops during their 2004 *ad limina* visit, asserts the originality of Catholic schools as an instrument of the Church: 'It is of utmost importance, therefore, that the Church's institutions be genuinely Catholic: Catholic in their self-understanding and Catholic in their identity'.

Catholic education offers an invitation to encounter a life of discipleship with Christ. It endeavours to provide 'a synthesis of faith and culture and a synthesis of faith and life' (SCCE, 1977: n.37). The distinctive identity of the Catholic school is characterised in the essence of its evangelising mission - the pursuit of a flourishing life with Christ, leading ultimately to beatitude. Catholic schools are called upon to 'transmit a Christian wisdom' (Boland, 2012: 123) through an education in virtue, inspired and nourished by the Gospel. Later in this review, the seminal work of St. Thomas Aquinas and the classical influence of Aristotle, will provide a deeper analysis of the purpose of education through Aquinas' theological account of teaching and learning. Aquinas believed that the search for fulfilment is only possible 'through the work of Jesus Christ who teaches the way of truth that leads to life' (Boland, 2007: 40). In the words of Pope Benedict XVI (2008), 'Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the good news...every Catholic institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth'. The divine centrality of Christ is the most characterising feature of Catholic education: 'Everything that happens in a Catholic school… should lead to an encounter with the living Christ' (CCE: 2014 n.III). Christ is 'both model and means' providing supernatural inspiration and enlightenment, 'an inexhaustible source of personal and communal perfection' from which we seek to imitate Him' (CCE,1982: n.18).

Catholic education promotes aspiration to imitate Christ amongst its community throughout teaching and learning and in all aspects of school life. For St. Thomas Aquinas, human beings created in the image of God are illuminated by dignity. Aquinas uses the metaphor of the sun to illustrate how, through imitation, human beings can

communicate God's goodness to others: 'A light that not only shines but also illuminates is more like the sun than is a light that simply shines' *(Summa Contra Gentiles* II, in Boland, 2007: 158). Archbishop Miller (2006: 17) describes the principal features of Catholic school identity as 'inspired by supernatural vision, founded on Christian anthropology, animated by communion and community, imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout its curriculum and sustained by Gospel witness'. He emphasises the specific role of Catholic schools in formation of the whole child to fulfil their transcendent destiny to become saints and the need to seek perfection in all their dimensions as images of God. In seeking this perfection, Miller provides an anthropological vision for Catholic education - the need for an understanding of the origins and purpose of the human person as both natural and supernatural: 'The inspiration of Jesus must be translated from the ideal into the real (CCE, 1988: n.25). In this way, the Catholic school seeks to fulfil its distinctive mission with Christ at the centre, permeating the totality of Catholic school life as a lived experience: 'Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school' (SCCE, 1977: n.34). Miller's emphasis on supernatural destiny resonates with Aquinas' account of teaching and learning, which is rooted in significant themes of creation and anthropology as well as virtue (Boland, 2007: 133). The concept of virtue theory will be examined later in this review in the context of a contemporary re-discovery of the seminal work of Aquinas.

The Catholic school participates and serves in the evangelising mission of the Church:

> ...not only as a presence of the Church in society, but also as a genuine and proper instrument of the Church. It is a place of evangelisation, of authentic apostolate and of pastoral action … of educating the Christian person...The Catholic school finds its true justification in the mission of the Church. (CCE, 1988: n.33)

Catholic character education is at the heart of this distinctive mission in serving to enhance the spiritual and moral formation of pupils so that they may be active witnesses of Christ in the world.

Another key distinguishing feature of Catholic schools is in their articulation of vision and vocation to a life lived with Christ through their school mission statement. Research by Bryk et al (1993), in relation to Catholic schools in America, indicated how the formulation of mission statements, according to their own unique social and cultural settings, promoted dialogue and reflection throughout the school community related to the distinctiveness of Catholic education (Grace, 2017: 154). Bryk's findings acknowledged a distinction between the discourse of mission and its realisation, as described by Grace (2017: 130). For the purpose of this study, the research will explore the integrity of mission statements in the case study schools as part of the qualitative data collection. The empirical research will examine the extent to which mission statements are actualised as a lived experience as part of a wider exploration into Catholic school ethos and culture, as well as more explicitly throughout pedagogy and practice within and beyond the curriculum.

This review will explore five foundational principles articulated in the revised document of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (2014) in order to establish a framework for the distinctiveness of Catholic schools to demonstrate how Catholic character education contributes to the identity of the Catholic school. As part of the review, I will subsequently consider challenges to the notion of Catholic distinctiveness in relation to the diversity of the Catholic school community of both staff and pupils.

2.1.1 The Changing Composition of the Catholic School Community

In determining the distinctive nature of Catholic schools, it is important to provide context regarding the composition of the Catholic school community in England. Sullivan (1998) described a sharp decline in numbers of staff in Catholic schools from religious orders and a substantial increase in lay leadership since the 1960's. More recent data also reflects this, highlighting the changing composition of Catholic schools in terms of both staff and pupils. According to *Catholic Education Service Digest of 2023 Census Data*

for Schools and Colleges in England, in state funded schools there are 56.5% Catholic teachers and 20.3% with CCRS (Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies); in independent schools there are 29.7% Catholic teachers and 3.9% with CCRS. Trends in the census data also indicate an overall decline in the number of Catholic pupils in Catholic schools. The percentage of Catholic pupils is now 56.3% compared with 61.8% in 2020. Within state funded Catholic primary schools, there are 59.1% Catholic pupils and 29.9% in independent Catholic schools.

It could be argued that these compositional changes present new challenges to a definition of Catholic identity and distinctiveness within Catholic education. Sullivan (1998) raises the issue of how to relate the mission of such schools to staff and pupils who are not Catholics, as well as how to promote inclusivity within the school community. For the purposes of this research project, although the study acknowledges the relevance of data relating to the compositional factors of Catholic schools, it is not the remit of this research to provide an analysis of this impact. The study will, however, explore and demonstrate through a critical retrieval of literature, as well as empirical research methods, the extent to which Catholic distinctiveness is in part characterised by Catholic character education. It will also examine a range of contributory factors to the identity of the Catholic school including tradition and community, staff and pupil leadership, pedagogy and curriculum, as well as the significance of ethos and culture demonstrated primarily through modelling of Christ's ministry and relationships between all members of the Catholic school community.

In Pope Paul VI's *Apostolic Exhortation* (1975), he reiterates that all Christians are called to be witnesses in order to evangelise: 'Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses'. Grace (2017: 43) emphasises the need for a renewal of spiritual capital within Catholic schools. The Vatican document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (SCCE, 1982: 14)

responds to the issue of the declining number of religious in Catholic schools referring to the concept of education as a vocation:

> The lay Catholic educator is a person who exercises a specific mission within the Church by living the faith...with an apostolic intention...for the integral formation of the human person.

The duty upon lay Catholic educators to be imitators of Christ, to model, transmit and infuse the Gospel virtues among pupils throughout the life of the school is a divine calling, a vocation committed to the distinctive nature of Catholic educational mission. This is an area of key significance in this research project which will be examined more fully later in the study in relation to the work of Aquinas and as part of the field research through multiple case study.

For the purpose of this study, the literature review will demonstrate that despite the changing composition of Catholic schools, their distinctive nature can be understood and defined by an examination of their fundamental purpose and mission and in the light of the changes procured since the introduction of Vatican II. The consultation paper *Catholic Schools and Other Faiths* CBCEW (1997b: n.13) highlights the need for schools to find balance between faithfulness and openness, maintaining the missionary goal of Christian education - to be formed in Christ with a strong sense of vocation:

> The vast majority of Catholic schools are still, and will remain, Catholic communities for nurturing Catholic children in a faith that is open to others and committed to justice. (CBCEW, 1997b: n.9)

Vatican II presented a significant shift in thinking involving an openness to interfaith dialogue and encounter, challenging schools to embrace the reality of a multi-faith and diversely multicultural society and to broaden their mission to serve the common good. This responsibility is part of the identity and mission of the Catholic school, as reinforced by Pope Benedict XVI *Big Assembly* (2010): 'Respect and friendship for members of other religious traditions should be among the virtues learned in a Catholic school'.

The CES Guidance document (2008) emphasises the value of pupils of other faiths within the Catholic school community and acknowledges the importance of a clear Catholic vision and commitment to promoting the human growth of all pupils. The *Pastoral Letter on Catholic Schools* (2007) states that Catholic schools should be guided by a coherent vision of education 'based on the truth revealed by God about ourselves, our lives together in community and our ultimate destiny with God'. The document embraces interfaith dialogue whilst urging schools to retain and preserve their distinct Catholicity. Meehan (2018: 65) points to the importance of reflection and discourse:

> Christian tradition turns us outward toward an intercultural, inter-religious society...There is an expanding discourse of inclusion, respect for otherness while recognising the distinctive challenges and identity of our faith tradition.

Catholic character education, in promoting living as witnesses of the Christian faith, leads to empowerment through the development of phronesis or practical wisdom, encouraging not only introspection and self-reflection, but a 'turning outwards' beyond ourselves and towards others and the wider world in the search for truth and fulfilment - 'The Way, the Truth and the Life' (*Phil* 4: 8).

In seeking a 'true desire for unity', Pope John Paul (1979: n.32) advocates an ecumenical dimension to Catholic education, providing both mutual enrichment to the distinctiveness of the Catholic school and an opportunity to be relational and learn about, and from, other faiths, as well as engaging in dialogue. Whilst it may be argued that this diversity presents challenges to the distinctivity of the Catholic school, it clearly emphasises the need for Catholic schools to balance the tension between affirmation of Catholic identity and openness to, and respect for, the faith of others. In the Gospel of John, we are reminded of the universality of God's kingdom, 'In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places' (John 14: 3). Through an education in virtue which promotes human growth and formation, the Catholic curriculum has a distinct responsibility to be relational, to accommodate and celebrate diversity to reflect God's universal, equalising love for all.

Grace (2010: 33) describes the priority of Catholic education to 'acquire a love of God and a love of their universal neighbour and secondly to acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding to give expression to that love'. This research will include an examination of programmes of character education relating to pedagogy and practice later in this review, within the wider concept of a Catholic approach to the curriculum, which will be further enriched through empirical case study outcomes.

2.1.2 Search for Excellence

Within Catholic education, high expectations and standards for academic attainment and behaviour are part of the 'Search for Excellence' which characterises Catholic schools, creating a sense of belonging in an environment within which children and young people can flourish and thrive in all aspects of their lives. The purpose of Catholic education is to provide opportunities to develop the character of Christ in its pupils through growth in virtue, within a missionary community, developing their gifts to serve as His disciples. In striving for excellence, Catholic education seeks to be transformative in society and for the common good. The purpose of acquiring knowledge is understood as a call to serve, as articulated in the *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988: n.63):

> ...any genuine educational philosophy has to be based on the nature of the human person and therefore must take into account all of the physical and spiritual powers of each individual, along with the call of each one to be an active and creative agent in service to society.

Catholic schools seek ultimately to enhance the dignity of the human person through fulfilment of each child's potential, using the unique gifts bestowed upon them by the Holy Spirit: 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good' (1 *Corinthians* 12: 4-7).

Worthy of reference here is the paradoxical paradigm of Catholic education presented by Grace (2016: 144) regarding the tension between the educational pursuit of the common good versus the pursuit of individualism, influenced by the growing influence of market culture in education. In the view of Grace (2016: 6), this tension creates a potential threat to the 'vision, mission and values in education and responsibilities for social, moral and spiritual formation,' undermining human dignity. Bernstein insists that: 'Pedagogy is not simply a means for the transmission of knowledge but a powerful regulator of consciousness and a formative influence upon personal identity' (Bernstein, 1996: 80).

Grace (2017: 190-194) urges Catholic schools to reflect on their distinctive mission, whilst celebrating academic success, and to re-evaluate their mission integrity to protect against secularisation so that Catholic school distinctiveness is not diluted nor its integrity compromised. Grace (2002: 431) highlights that the contemporary challenge for school leaders is to ensure that the intelligence, talent and skills of young people are not developed purely on a 'self-fulfilment' basis: 'This could lead to the creation of talented and clever but also self-centred and materially acquisitive individuals with no regard for any conception of the common good'. Concomitantly, Arthur (2013) expressed concern that within a secular and competitive educational context, Catholic schools might prioritise academic attainment rather than give emphasis to moral development and spiritual formation.

The argument presented here by Grace (2002, 2017) and Arthur (2013) can be challenged to an extent with the view that it is through the opportunity offered by Catholic schools to prioritise the poor and neglected, that those marginalised in society through social or economic disadvantage, can be afforded their inherent human dignity through education, through the experience of attainment and academic success. From this viewpoint, academic achievement is integral to Catholic education because it expresses human flourishing. This represents a vision for each individual to be

empowered to use their unique gifts and talents, ultimately for the common good of humanity:

> If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16: 24-26)

Buck (2020) upholds the importance of a holistic and inclusive approach to education, one which strives to provide 'justice of the educational experience'. In her school observations as a Local Authority Inspector, Buck observed well-intentioned charitable actions to seek to compensate for deprivation and disadvantage among pupils but recognised these efforts as providing purely short-term compensatory relief: 'There is a particular kind of poverty that finds its origins *inside* the boundary of the school - the poverty of the educational experience'. Buck argues that through high quality education and expectations, every pupil can be afforded dignity and hope so that they can be enabled to 'feed themselves' in the future and find fulfilment as children of God. This is the essence of an equitable approach to Catholic education, enabling the preferential option for the poor to be realised in its fullest sense.

In the context of Catholic schools, academic excellence is a vehicle for transformative action and social justice which supports the promotion of human dignity, where knowledge is used for purposes beyond self-fulfilment and material success. *The Common Good in Education* (CES, 1997) emphasised a countercultural response to the rise of individualism (Grace, 2017: 56-60):

> The key mission for Catholic schools is to act as a countercultural force to strengthen the spiritual and moral culture in society, to keep alive the notions of the common good and of social justice and to inspire and prepare young people to defend Gospel values in an age in which they are all under threat.

Buck (2020) offers a broader perspective to Grace's position here, expressing the view that the endeavour to ensure that all pupils achieve their potential is equally part of the

common good and social justice. This raises a question worthy of consideration as part of this research: To what extent is individualism or the pursuit of self-fulfilment the antithesis to the common good, or can it serve to support it? The essence of this argument poses a key challenge for Catholic schools in the current climate to strive to find balance between sustaining Catholic distinctiveness and performativity.

2.1.3 Uniqueness of the Individual

A characterising feature of the distinctive nature of Catholic schools is the belief that every child is of divine origin, uniquely made and loved by God: 'So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them' (*Genesis* 1:27). The story of creation represents the origin of the dignity of human life as defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, 1994: n.1700): 'The dignity of the human person is rooted in his or her creation in the image and likeness of God'.

Christian anthropology enables discovery of the true value and vocation of the human person, both in apostolic mission and immortal destiny. Catholic education should inspire students 'to develop a willingness to embrace life, and also his or her own unique vocation, as a fulfilment of God's will' (CCE, 1988: 76). The distinctive role of Catholic schools is to perfect children in all their dimensions as images of God. Miller (2006, 17: n.2) refers to the complementarity of the natural and the supernatural:

> Catholic educators should have a sound understanding of the human person that addresses the requirements of both the natural and the supernatural perfection of the children entrusted to their care.

Catholic schools have a responsibility to develop these dimensions, as well as a sense of vocation, so that each individual can discover and develop their likeness to Christ. 'He finds his perfection in seeking what is true and good' (CCC, 1994: n.1704). This resonates with John Henry Newman's belief in how faith guided his vocation to bring him to service within a supernatural destiny:

> God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next...I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. (Newman, 2019: 102)

The educational enterprise in a Catholic school is energised by an intimate and frequent encounter with Christ through the Gospel so that pupils can experience His dignity. Witnessing Christ as a model through scripture, 'enables pupils to experience his dignity as a person before he knows its definition' (SCCE, 1977: 55). In this way, developing a deeper knowledge of Christ's dignity through encounter, can enable pupils to understand the true meaning of human dignity and inspire pupils, created in God's image themselves, to develop their own Christ-like character - in thoughts, words and deeds.

The distinctive mission of Catholic education is to foster the development of practical wisdom in pupils so that their lives are illuminated and transformed by Gospel values: 'It is a search that travels inwards in the acquisition of self-knowledge, as well as outwards in the acquisition of wisdom' (CBCEW, 2020). St. John Bosco was dedicated to such mission and transformation, with a genuine interest for each individual. Lydon (2009) identifies how this Salesian approach resonates with the notion of 'intrusive interest' which Bryk, Lee and Holland (1993: 141) found to be one of the characteristics of the 'inspirational ideology' of American Catholic schools (Lydon, 2009: 50).

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), expresses the primacy of human dignity as central to the mission of the Church: 'the noble calling of humanity and the existence within it of a divine seed.' Catholic education serves to provide an experience of a divine life, enriched through the acquisition, development and practice of virtue. Each student is uniquely valued in order that they may fulfil their eternal destiny and seek salvation. In his encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti', Pope Francis examines 'The Parable of Good Samaritan' in relation to the true meaning of human dignity: 'It speaks to us of an essential and often forgotten aspect of our common humanity: we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love' (2020: 68).

2.1.4 Education of the Whole Person

> The school must begin from the principle that its educational programme is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person. (SCCE, 1977: 29)

Catholic schools provide a deeply holistic approach in educating for transformation in accordance with the teachings of the Church. There is no dichotomy of the human and the divine: 'Catholic education is based on the belief that the human and divine are inseparable' (CES, 2014: 3). Their distinctive aim is to develop the full range of dimensions of the human person - intellectual, spiritual, moral, emotional and social. The curriculum in Catholic schools seeks to form the whole person so that 'all may attain their eternal destiny and ...promote the common good of society' (Code of Canon Law, Can.795). Research by Bryk et al (1993) demonstrated the interconnectedness of the spiritual, moral and social dimensions which cannot be manifested without integration, as described by Grace (2007: 92). Through a comprehensive Catholic approach to the curriculum, which seeks to integrate the whole human person and enhance the mission of Catholic Social Teaching, Catholic schools can demonstrate the authenticity and integrity of their mission in providing a truly lived experience in the faith for its pupils: 'The spirit of Catholicism should permeate the entire curriculum' (Miller, 2006: 17-63).

As discussed earlier, one of the distinctive features of Catholic schools is the fundamental belief in the altruistic purpose of learning - knowledge is acquired not in self-interest but for societal benefit and the common good. Pope Francis (2014) presents a vision for Catholic education which invokes harmony of head, heart and hands. To achieve this harmony of dimensions requires a movement 'from theory to the practice of virtue...finding the moral and celebrating the affective' (Uttley, 2018: 144).

The Salesian charism, centred on a holistic approach to education, provides an articulation of how 'celebrating the affective' is realised in practice. Don Bosco's educational philosophy focused on the seminal importance of the relationship between educator and student, based upon the foundation of *'amorevolezza'* or loving kindness. According to Pope Francis (2013: n. 171), an openness of the heart enables 'genuine

spiritual encounter'. Stella (2001: 60) describes the concept of the heart in Don Bosco as 'the capacity of intellectual intuition and intense and spontaneous love, as capacity for understanding and love that springs from the most intimate psychological unity of man'. This psychological unity, which characterises the Salesian educative relationship, is infused with love and geniality. Fr John Lemoyne (ed.) (1989) refers to primary duty of the animator to be affective:

> Just as there is no barren, fertile land which cannot be made fertile through patient effort, so it is with a person's heart. No matter how barren or restive it may be at first, it will sooner or later bring forth good fruit…The first duty of the animator is to find that responsive chord in the young person's heart. (MB, Vol. III, pp. 236-237)

The Salesian endeavour to find a 'responsive chord' in the heart of young people is prerequisite for formation. Lydon (2022: 7) refers to the Salesian pedagogical perspective as 'human openness to the transcendent', enabling a shift of emphasis from the self towards the other, in fulfilment of God's will.

Lydon (2011: 98) defines the first principle of pastoral love, at the heart of the Salesian spirit, as dynamic presence and engagement inspired by the ministry of Jesus. For the Salesian 'animator', this active presence among young people, at a deeper level of interpretation, involves self-sacrifice in imitation of Christ. Through being familiarly present, the teacher-student relationship is remodelled and rebalanced, enabling the vulnerability of the educator, reticent of 'ekenosen', the self-emptying of Christ (2011: 99). This presence creates an arena for empathetic openness and dialogue based on mutual respect. Lydon (2022: 3) makes reference to the encounter between Jesus and two of his disciples in the biblical account of the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-35), as an exemplification of accompaniment, which is characterised by a dialogue of reciprocity and mutuality. This is echoed by Winstanley (2017) in describing the humble presence of Jesus: 'He never imposes himself, never forces his friendship; with remarkable sensitivity he reverences our freedom' (2017: 251).

According to Lenti (1989), the involvement of animators in recreational activities infused

the Salesian family spirit, providing an equalising balance in the educative relationship, building an atmosphere of joy through 'informal, uninhabited self-expression in recreation' (Lydon, 2011: 100). Fr Albert Caviglia, (cited in McPake 1981: 41), described the Salesian style of informal presence as part of their sacred duty: 'It is in the Salesians informal contacts with young people that true education of character is more than anywhere made possible'.

This is echoed by Vojtas (2018) who expresses the importance for Don Bosco of 'the accompaniment through the care of the educational environment.' Vojtas highlights that in addition to the 'visible' curriculum, the 'hidden' curriculum is a significant feature of the Salesian environment as it relates to the 'values transmitted by relational, behavioural, group dynamics and/ or implicit standards'.

Lydon emphasises that the Salesian methodology, involving engagement in extracurricular activities 'as an act of loving condescension', fosters empowerment among students (Lydon, 2011: 107). The educative collaborations between pupils and educators create a distinctive family spirit. Grech (2019: 96) refers to the Sodality of Mary Immaculate, to which St. Dominic Savio belonged: 'Being of service to others was a very useful means which Bosco used to empower young people to mature in responsibility and spirituality'. Lydon (2022: 7) makes the point that these sodalities represented collaboration between students and educators, initially focused on charitable activities involving members of the school community. Lemoyne (1989: 96) points out, however, that the work of the sodalities was extended to include service beyond the confines of the school community. This highlights the transformative nature of accompaniment and service on moral and spiritual growth.

The Salesian notion of empowerment is of central interest in this research and will be explored in greater depth through empirical methods as part of the multiple school case study, in relation to opportunities for pupil voice and altruistic leadership, and in the wider context of an examination of the pivotal role of relationships in Catholic character formation.

The Salesian style of education is characterised by an emphasis on establishing an educative pastoral community through the creation of a familial spirit and a 'serene environment' (Lydon, 2011: 101). This environment provided a stable community based on fellowship in which each individual could discover the will of God. The Synod of Bishops (2018: n.96) emphasises that accompaniment involves the sharing of gifts among fellow pilgrims as part of a community in faith:

> Community experience highlights the qualities and the limits of every person and helps us to recognise humbly that unless we share the gifts we have received for the common good, it is not possible to follow the Lord.

Fundamental to Bosco's mission is the pursuit of salvation of the youth, seeking the integration of both faith and life in the context of relationships. In the view of Vojtas (2018: 8), the animator's own experience of discipleship is foundational for Salesian accompaniment:

> But before being accompanied...the basis is to be a disciple with the attitude of the search for the signs of the Spirit in concrete situations and of practice of the virtues connected with being a disciple.

The modern dichotomy between the theory and practice of virtue resonates with the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of character education described by Lickona (2001: 4) in the introductory chapter of this study. The educational enterprise in a Catholic school strives to shape consciousness and conscience, so that it is transformational through encounter and experiences that will ignite meaning, genuine purpose and inspiration: 'The curriculum needs to bring together deep reflection, the moral questions alive in all academic discourse and stir children's souls' (Uttley, 2018: 145). This is expressed in the distinctive Catholic pedagogy described in the Vatican document, *Educating Today and Tomorrow* (2014: n.III.1e), which argues for the development of reflective skills 'related to consciousness, critical thinking and creative and transformative action'. The Salesian approach, characterised by the primacy of relationships and the creation of community bonds built upon a foundation of mutual trust, provides a distinctive pastoral environment, a visionary framework within which

contemporary Catholic schools can seek to promote inner transformational change. As Vojtas (2018: 5) observes: 'The joy and trust between educators and the young are indicators of the quality of the process of accompaniment through the environment'.

This research study will make an inquiry into the scope and pedagogy provided within and beyond the curriculum to cultivate character and promote the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, synthesizing both faith and life. The outcomes will provide valuable insight into how the Catholic school integrates the dimensions of the whole person and subsequently analyse its impact on formation of pupils.

2.1.5 Education of All

Catholic education is fundamentally built upon belief in an inclusive, equitable education for all, allowing those who are socially or economically disadvantaged to be given access to appropriate support and resources to ensure their needs are met. According to the Child Poverty Action Group, there were 4.3 million children living in poverty in the UK in 2019-20, which alarmingly represents 31% of children. Ainscow (2016) highlights the increasing demand upon schools to 'improve their capacity for improving the presence, participation and achievement of all of their students, particularly those from poorer backgrounds'. As levels of child poverty and deprivation continue to rise in the UK, the importance of the Catholic school mission to serve the poor is especially pertinent in the modern era of the twenty-first century, as stated in the Vatican Council II document on Christian education (1965: n.9):

> This Sacred Council of the Church earnestly entreats pastors and all the faithful to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools fulfil their function in a continually more perfect way, and especially in caring for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this world or who are deprived of the assistance and affection of a family or who are strangers to the gift of Faith.

The above citation from the conciliar document *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) on Christian education reflects a broad range of meaning of the term 'poor', based on an

exegesis of the Greek word '*ptochos*', the word rendered predominantly in the New Testament and translated 'poor'. There are frequent references to Jesus' encounter with the poor throughout the Bible, especially in the Gospel of Luke, exemplified in the Magnificat: '...and exalted those of low degree; He has filled the hungry with good things.' (Luke 1: 51-53) The word 'ptochos' originally meant 'destitute', 'mendicant', 'to beg for one's bread' (Kittel, ed. 1973, 6: 886). However, as Lydon (2010: 9), points out:

> Many scholars believe that Jesus used the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew word *anawim*. Although biblical scholars describe the meaning of *anawim* (a word meaning originally 'bowed down') in many different ways, they generally agree that it is not the same as the Greek word *ptochos* but covered a broader range.

Dunn (2003: 517) suggests that '*ptochos*' indicates 'those who lacked a secure economic base. Like widows, orphans and aliens, they were in an especially vulnerable position, without any means of self-protection.' It is worthy of note that the word 'vulnerable' derives from the Latin '*vulneratus*' meaning 'wounded', a term which has been interpreted broadly. By logical extension, it can be argued that 'poor' is not simply a material or social category but also relates to spiritual development. This is reflected in the meaning of the first Beatitude in the Gospel of Matthew: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5: 3).

Poverty in the faith, in an increasingly secularised society, is an integral part of Catholic school mission in supporting children and their families. Buck (2020) defines the unique strengths of Catholic schools in their endeavour to 'provide pupils with opportunities to grow in knowledge and love of God, following the way of Christ, enriched by the Spirit.' McKinney (2018: 97), highlights the duty of Catholic schools to respond to the consequences of material and emotional poverty in the faith: 'This enactment of the preferential option for the poor recognises the inherent dignity of each person as made in the image of God'.

Ainscow (2016) refers to 'the barriers often experienced by children with impairments which lead them to become marginalised as a result of contextual factors'. Buck (2020) acknowledges that certain kinds of poverty exist outside the boundary of the Catholic school. In responding to the challenge of how Catholic schools should serve the poor, in its widest definition, Buck asserts the need for Catholic schools to offer an education that is both distinctive and inclusive of all. *The Catholic School* (SCCE, 1977: 58) expresses the preferential option for the poor as more broadly defined to include those who experience economic or spiritual poverty, or deprivation within the family: 'The Church offers its educational service to the poor, or those who are deprived of family help or affection or those who are far from faith'.

McKinney (2018) highlights the multi-dimensionality of poverty which, as part of a duty of Christian care, should be extended to the culturally, emotionally and spiritually poor, as well as the marginalised. Catholic schools are committed to providing opportunities for all to excel in order that every individual can fulfil their potential, seeking to overcome the challenges of disadvantage or vulnerability. Catholic schools are committed to the spiritual, moral and religious development of every child:

> Education is a service provided by society for the benefit of all its young people, in particular for the benefit of the most vulnerable and the most disadvantaged - those whom we have a sacred duty to serve. (CES, 1997: 13)

The Catholic school curriculum provides a platform to promote the permanent principles of Catholic Social Teaching, prioritising active mission for social justice. The encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), emphasises the need to develop the distinctive Catholicity of the curriculum in Catholic schools, bringing faith into action by showing children and young people 'the authentic face of religion and a real world that can be attained by social action inspired by faith' (Grace, 2017: 212). Catholic Social Teaching is a powerful agent for a countercultural approach serving to strengthen the Catholicity of educational mission. The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales document, *The Common Good in Education* (CES, 1997: 13) urged Catholic schools to

take ownership of and participate in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching as vital for the moral and spiritual nourishment of its pupils: 'Education is about the service of others rather than the service of self'.

The distinctive mission of Catholic education for the common good requires that every individual fulfils their full potential, recognising and upholding human dignity:

> Children and young persons are therefore to be cared for in such a way that their physical, moral and intellectual talents may develop in a harmonious manner, so that they may attain a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom and be formed to take an active part in social life (Code of Canon Law, Can.795).

This research study will examine the extent to which an education for all is manifested in the case study schools through their distinctive Catholicity and approach to Catholic Social Teaching, as part of the qualitative data collection.

2.1.6 Moral Principles

Catholic education invites children and young people to encounter the living Christ as part of a community in fellowship and faith, founded on the Christian virtues and open to transformation, highlighted in *The Catholic School* (SCCE, 1977: n.31-32):

> [The Catholic school] must develop persons who are responsible and inner-directed, capable of choosing freely in conformity with their conscience … where young people gradually learn to open themselves up to life as it is, and to create in themselves a definite attitude to life as it should be. When seen in this light, a school is not only a place where one is given a choice of intellectual values, but a place where one has presented an array of values which are actively lived.

The duty of Catholic schools is to promote the primacy of the spiritual and moral life, enhancing Catholicity among pupils (Grace, 2007: 190). The pivotal purpose of this research study is to explore how the moral and spiritual dimension of pupils is developed within the Catholic school, and more specifically through Catholic character education.

> The fundamental educational challenge for Catholic schools is to find ways to provide an education in the virtues for there to be a disposition towards the good that can be firm or habitual. (CBCEW, 2020: 3)

This research project seeks to respond to this challenge in its review of literature, enhanced by an empirical exploration of how Catholic primary schools provide an education in virtue through a comprehensive examination of Catholic school culture, leadership, curriculum and community.

The Catholic school prioritises the importance and role of community in developing morality. It takes a distinctly countercultural approach in its mission of solidarity. The Catholic school community can be viewed as a model for society: 'Society can take note from the Catholic school that it is possible to create true communities out of a common effort for the common good' (SCCE, 1977: n.62). The notion of community and its impact on formation will be explored extensively later in this review of literature and as a prominent theme in the case study research.

The Catholic school is distinctive in its commitment to the mission of formation. In his encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI (2009: n.9) reiterates that education is for the purpose of complete formation of the person, recognising the role of the Catholic school in the shaping of Catholic social conscience, inspired by faith: 'Only in charity, illumined by the light of reason and faith, is it possible to pursue development goals that possess a more humane and humanising value'.

Faith and spiritual development are at the heart of the Catholic school, ensuring that a Catholic ethos permeates the whole educational experience. The Vatican II document, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) defines the purpose of the Church as 'perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human'. Through developing the spiritual and moral life of pupils through a distinctively religious curriculum, designed to develop virtue literacy and practical wisdom. The pedagogical concept of virtue literacy and the theological concept of practical wisdom will be discussed more fully later in this literature review as part of an exploration of a

programme for character education.

Grace (2010: 33) describes the primacy of a loving relationship with God as the first priority in learning:

> To acquire a love of God and a love of their universal neighbour and secondly to acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding to give expression to that love in what they do in their adult lives.

Grace expresses here the centrality of God's loving presence in the Catholic school, from which transformative social action and justice can emanate. This illustrates the foundational aspiration of Catholic character education - to serve the principles of Catholic Social Teaching so that pupils can be active, transformative and responsible citizens in the world for the common good. The outcomes of this research project will include an articulation of how schools provide opportunities to nurture spirituality and develop social conscience to enable children to become evangelizers in the world themselves.

The religious dimension of the Catholic school contributes to its distinctive character 'since everything ultimately relates to God' (CES, 1999: 8). The curriculum in the Catholic school is illuminated by the Gospel so that Christ permeates all aspects of school life, providing meaning and purpose through an education in virtue. Children are guided to be critical thinkers within a context of virtue, so that they can 'serve as witnesses to moral and spiritual values in the wider world' (CBCEW, 1996: 3). The See-Judge-Act methodology, developed by Cardinal Cardijn (1882-1967), provides a model for developing skills of discernment to provoke action in the light of the faith. This approach enhances the Catholic approach to the curriculum in demonstrating the relationship between belief and transformative action, enabling students to be witnesses in the world.

Through empirical methods, this research will examine the extent to which the See-Judge -Act methodology impacts on the formation of pupils as part of a wider exploration into

Catholic character education, including the formation of social conscience. This study will explore the extent to which Catholic Social Teaching is reflected in the curriculum and examine the opportunities provided by Catholic schools to strengthen Catholic social conscience, foundational in the development of virtue.

Part Two: The Development of Character

Catholic education seeks to provide an encounter with the living Christ, enabling children and young people to become disciples of Jesus as 'the Way, the Truth and the Life' (John 14:6) Christians are called to be 'conformed to the image of his Son' (*Roman* 8: 29-30). The Catholic school is committed to providing a holistic approach to character formation - educationally, spiritually, morally and socially, with the ultimate goal of human flourishing. The primary role of the Catholic school is educating for transformation, providing an education in virtue, modelled on Christ's ministry, so that every child can discover their unique likeness to Christ and fulfil their eternal destiny. Through the pursuit of discipleship, character formation is 'a process of becoming' (Austin, 2016: 202-217). Christian character, in its most fundamental expression, is the possession of virtues and the pursuit and practice of a moral life which relates us to God, with emphasis on imitating Jesus Christ as the model and source of divine inspiration. Catholic character formation is centred on theology as its foundation, pursued through 'deliberate, divine and human effort to acquire the virtues that are consistent with the Christian faith' (Arthur, 2021: 28).

In this review of literature, it is acknowledged that there are a range of philosophical and theological accounts of character formation and virtue from both secular and Christian perspectives. The concepts of character formation and virtue have been subject to much contention among theologians, academics, philosophers and educationalists. Although this section of the literature review will consider both historical and contemporary perspectives on character formation, the study does not seek to find a unitary definitive solution to the arguments posed, rather to assimilate and reflect upon the range of

perspectives in order to provide a comprehensible Christian account of virtue education which will inform and enrich the evaluative outcomes of the study. The final outcomes of the theoretical and empirical study in this research project seek to make a response to the questions and challenges raised to provide a comprehensive framework to support development of programmes of Catholic character education within primary educational settings with a view to application in further academic research in the future.

The review will subsequently explore the development of character through an examination of historical and contemporary perspectives, beginning with an analysis of the concept of virtue according to Aristotle and Aquinas. Later in this chapter, it will review the seminal role of the family as primary educators in the development of character, inspired primarily by the work of St. John Bosco. The study will also include an examination of virtue theory and will finally consider and make proposals to address modern challenges in the field of Catholic virtue education.

It is pertinent, however, to firstly begin with an examination of the language of character in order that subsequent references to the term 'character' and 'virtue' can be understood in the context relevant to their use in this literature review.

2.2 The Language of Character

'Be thou made perfect as your heavenly father is perfect' (Matthew 5: 48).

In this context, *The Sermon on the Mount* has been described as the ethical statement for Christians. Lydon (2023, 5: 4) emphasises that a consistent thread woven throughout the Sermon is the challenge to disciples to maintain a singleness of purpose – expressed in the command to 'be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect' (Lydon, 2023, 5: 48). The Greek word *teleios* expresses consistency, singleness of purpose, integrity, wholeness. It connects with Jesus' claim that 'if your eye is sound, your body will be full of light' (Lydon, 2023, 6: 22). The Hebrew word *tam* provides the appropriate

background to the Greek word *haplous* (sound), indicating singleness of purpose/integrity. The theme of singleness of purpose is critical in the context of the ethic of Jesus. For the disciple, it is essential to seek first the values of the Kingdom (compassion, forgiveness, justice) as opposed to being concerned with one's own material welfare: 'Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it' (Matthew 7: 13-14). Lydon (2023, 5: 4) makes worthy mention of the word, used in the gospel of Matthew for money, found in Jewish writings to denote the illusory security of this world's goods, compared to the single-minded trust in God on the part of the committed disciple.

The words cited in Matthew (5: 48) 'be thou perfect' articulate a vision of Catholic Christianity as the committed pursuit of human flourishing - to grow in virtue and likeness to Christ on a lifelong journey of moral and spiritual formation, with the ultimate end in fulfilment of a supernatural destiny in union with God. Christian education is inherently an intentional moral enterprise: 'Catholic morality is a response to the human heart for truth and goodness...[it] seeks to educate for growth' (Pinckaers, 2001: 1).

To some extent, the language of character has a universal application but it requires some clarification in order to understand the meaning of a multiplicity of terms such as 'virtues', 'values', 'character', 'virtue education'. As part of a comprehensive literature review, the study aims to articulate a definition of character education within a Catholic context, contributing to the discussion on interpretations of the language of 'virtues vs values'. Educationalists vary in their choice and use of character vocabulary; for some there are distinct and opposing positions as to which is the preferred vocabulary to best represent the intended meaning. Stock (2012) refers to the subjectivity of 'values' which can be given their objectivity and validation through the Gospel, rooted in the Beatitudes. He urges schools to 'integrate Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic church into every aspect of learning, teaching and the totality of school life.' Similarly, Friel (2019) advocates the language of values, as opposed to virtues, in the belief that

'this approach keeps us facing the Gospel' through which values are given an objective Christian foundation. Arthur (2021: 75), however, provides contrasting definitions in relation to the language of virtue and values. The latter he refers to as subjective, aspirational, abstract and temporal, in contrast to virtues which he defines as objective and observable. Virtues are 'permanent qualities which are considered morally good and desirable. [They] are realised intentions that result in lived right conduct.'

The dichotomy between the language of values and virtues is interpreted by Lickona (1991: 51) as 'operative values' (values in action) and 'espoused values', maintaining that 'a value becomes a virtue only to the extent to which it is acted upon'. Virtues, in this sense, can be interpreted as the enactment of values. They are more closely associated with habitual behaviour and as the application of subjective values, aligned with the evangelising mission of the Gospel. The key categories of cardinal and theological virtues will be discussed later in this study as part of an analysis of Aquinas' treatment of the virtues.

The word 'character' is originally derived from the Greek word *charakter.* The etymological definition of the contemporary term is associated with 'making a mark upon a coin' and is used broadly to identify individuality or distinctiveness. Within contemporary discourse on character education, there is some controversy regarding the notion of character and virtue, as highlighted by Kristjansson (2013). In his paper *Ten Myths about Character, Virtue and Virtue Education*, Kristjansson discusses the complexities of interpretations of character and virtue, identifying and seeking to dispel a series of myths or misgivings which have led to ambiguity and scepticism within education.

Kristjansson (2013: 270) makes a distinction between character and personality or 'temperament', defining character as '...a sub-set of personality traits that are morally evaluable and considered to provide persons with moral worth'. He defines character as composed of traits which are 'reason responsive and educable'. Goldie (2004: 43)

emphasises a similar point that character traits are dispositions 'to respond to certain kinds of reasons'.

Scripture provides a rich source of the origins of the Christian language of virtue. For Hauerwas (2001: 8), the New Testament contains moral teaching as 'ways of wisdom that lead to holiness and perfection through living the virtues and the precepts'. The *Sermon on the Mount* is a paradigm of Christian virtue, providing a 'charter of the Christian life'. It establishes a pathway to the fulfilment of the Christian understanding of telos, which is the ultimate state of wisdom. St. Paul, in his *Letter to the Romans* (12: 9-13), expresses the virtues as the perfection of Christian character:

> Let love be sincere, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with fraternal affection; anticipate one another in showing honour. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality.

Kristjansson (2013: 271) suggests that notions of character or virtue relate to 'any form of moral education that foregrounds the role of virtuous character in the good life.' Virtues can be defined as 'developed states of morally good character', to which vices are oppositional:

> Virtues and vices are taken to be settled states of character, concerned with morally praiseworthy or blameworthy conduct in significant and distinguishable spheres of human life.

The definition of character provided by Hauerwas (1975: 12) highlights that the development of character involves the intellectual faculties of reason, conscious choice and decision making and ultimately invokes accountability:

> Character can be understood as what a man can decide to be rather than what he is naturally. A man chooses to have character - a man can and should be held responsible for what he is.

Hauerwas asserts the importance of self-agency and self-determination in his treatment of the virtues, emphasising the responsibility of the moral agent.

This literature review will subsequently examine the cultivation of character through the work of Aristotle and Aquinas, including a discussion of the relationship between faith and reason, as well as the capacities of human intellect and will in relation to conscience in the development of Christian virtue. For the purpose of this study, the concept of character will be examined in the context of virtue ethical discourse based upon Aristotelian and Thomist accounts. Worthy of note, in the interest of clarity and comprehensibility, the terms 'character education' and 'virtue education' are intended to be used and interpreted synonymously throughout this research project.

2.3 Historical Perspectives

Our contemporary understanding of Christian character education can be enhanced through the lens of historical perspectives. Notably, the work of thirteenth century theologian and philosopher, St. Thomas Aquinas, provides a rich historical perspective to the review of literature for this research, and to some extent, reconciles the moral philosophy of Aristotle with Christianity.

This exploration of historical perspectives on virtue ethics seeks to demonstrate how a Neo-Aristotelian and Thomistic account of the virtues can serve to renew and enhance modern perspectives in the pursuit of human flourishing within the context of contemporary Catholic education. The review will subsequently provide a comparative account of virtue according to Aristotle and Aquinas and explore their relevance and potential influence on contemporary receptions of the development of character.

Both Aristotle and Aquinas offer a teleological account of the virtues although there are differences in the interpretation of *telos*. The Greek term *telos* relates to the pursuit of

moral character as the end goal. For Aristotle, the telos of the human person is to live a life worth living according to virtues. According to Aristotle, the gift of happiness is attainable in this lifetime but Aquinas, in contrast, believed that perfect happiness (*beatitudo*) can only exist in God, in that which is perfectly good. For Aquinas, God is the *veritas prima*, the first truth. Human beings 'attain their last end by knowing and loving God' (ST. I.I.8). Aquinas, in agreement with fourth century philosopher St. Augustine of Hippo, believed that perfect happiness was impossible on earth and could only be attained in the anticipation of the afterlife. As to virtue leading us to a happy life, I hold virtue to be nothing else than perfect love of God' (St. Augustine, in Schaff, 2015, p.32).

For Aquinas, man has a predisposition to do good 'Whatever man desires, he desires it under the aspect of good' (ST. I.II 5.1). However, unlike Augustine, Aquinas concludes in *Summa contra Gentiles* that although perfect happiness is not possible here on earth, an imperfect happiness could be attained through the development of the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and courage. Aquinas describes virtues as 'good [qualities] of mind whereby we live righteously' (ST. I.II 55.4). Aquinas can therefore be considered as 'midway' between the virtue ethics of Aristotle and St. Augustine.

The work of St. Thomas Aquinas is hugely influenced by Aristotle, but transcends secular Aristotelianism, providing a Christian theological perspective. In Christian understanding, virtue is dependent on God for its full expression. Thomas believed God is the *veritas prima*: 'It is only to the first truth that we must give the obedience of faith' (Boland, 2007: 33). Aquinas believed that human fulfilment is only possible through Jesus Christ who teaches the way of truth that leads to life (ST. III, Prologue).

In an Aristotelian account of virtue, the notion of character is essentially functional, based on one's ability to perform the natural functions of the human person. In *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VI, Aristotle relates prudence to intellectual virtues based on the view that moral virtue requires the role of reason in the form of judgement and decision making: 'Intellectual virtues give us the knowledge and the understanding as to

what the right principle is and the standard that determines it. Just knowing the truth makes us no wiser' (Boland, 2012: 125). Aristotle elevates prudence as the integrative 'meta-virtue'. An Aristotelian teleological theory of ethics is based on the capacity to make virtuous choices about means to achieve a good end. The exercise of good judgement relates to the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Christian ethics, however, seeks a relationship with a living God discovered through faith and requires to be navigated by Christian sources of moral decision making (Arthur, 2021: 28). Lydon (2023, 5:5) highlights that for Aquinas, prudence is the key virtue because it discovers the best way to do the right action. Prudence seeks counsel, involving critical thinking. It goes beyond knowledge to a discernment that follows the heart involving a moral maturity. Justice, Courage and Temperance traditionally complete the list of cardinal virtues because together they form the basis of moral character, upon which conscience depends.

According to Aristotle, wisdom is the 'head of all knowledge.' It provides the path to human happiness, 'Virtue is ensuring the rightness of the end and prudence ensuring the rightness of the means' (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI, Aristotle, 1982). Aquinas recognised that the intellectual virtues provide a richer understanding of rationality but viewed Aristotle's definition of the intellectual virtues as incomplete. Aquinas believed 'human flourishing is found in knowledge understood more deeply and in wisdom as spiritual and contemplative' (Boland, 2012: 133). In following the Dominicans, Aquinas devoted himself to a life of teaching which he believed is 'a service of the human search for wisdom' (Boland, 2007: 40).

Aristotle's intellectual virtues of *scientia, intellectus and sapienta* correspond to three of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas sees these gifts as the highest reach of human experience, 'bringing to perfection the operation of the theological virtues of faith and love' (Boland, 2012: 129).

Zagzebski (1996) proposes a 'virtue epistemology' approach which emphasises the fundamental role of the intellectual virtues focusing on the knowledge of the moral agent. Similarly, Williams (2004) supports Aquinas' position in elevating the significance of the contemplative mind. For Aquinas, the intellectual virtues are 'a kind of beginning of bliss or beatitude which is the contemplation of truth' (ST. Ia. IIae, q.57, a. 1 and 2).

For Aquinas, the primacy of knowledge of God leads to a vision of supernatural destiny offering a theological view of human life supported by the intellectual virtues. According to Aquinas, the gift of knowledge 'perfects the virtue of faith' (Boland, 2012: 132). Boland goes on to cite Aquinas' *De Veritate*, in which he considers that 'knowing is not just intellectual but it is also, following St. Augustine, always moral and theological; the human mind functions at its best in seeking to respond to good and to know God' (Boland, 2017: 42). O'Leary (1994) highlights the importance of knowledge of God but also the 'weakness of human intellect and its need for divine illumination'. This reflects Aquinas' desire for knowledge to be cultivated within a context of faith, as expressed by Boland (2012: 131). Thomas references Augustine in relation to the pursuit of truth, 'one who teaches cannot provide the seeing power, external words are signs of truth but cannot provide the understanding of the truth which comes from God alone' (II Sentences 28, 1, 5 and 3).

In relation to Aquinas' account of teaching and learning, Boland (2017: 49) defines God's teaching as uniquely interior:

> God alone teaches us in the sense of giving us the light of reason ...in the sense of being the truth on which all other truth depends and in the sense of placing in us the desire for a fulfilment that is found only in God.

Aquinas understood the vocation of teaching as engagement of interior intellect within an innate capacity for knowledge and truth. For Aquinas, the human being is an agent with freedom to judge and act wisely and become 'not only moved but a mover' (Boland, 2007: 169). In this understanding, the moral and intellectual virtues converge under the

faculty of reason. Aquinas regards the theological virtues of faith, hope and love as infused 'in us without us' (ST. I.II.62) beyond human capacity. Through the gift of God-given grace, we are called to a supernatural destiny strengthening our capacity for love, 'Growth in dispositions is a move from less to more perfect' (ST. I. II. 54, 4 ad. 1).

Aristotelian ethics emphasise human sociality and are based on a central belief that a virtuous life should be lived in accordance with reason in order to reach the end goal of human happiness: 'By wisdom we judge rightly concerning the first truth, God, who is the principle and end of all things' (Boland, 2012: 132). Notably, Aristotle attributes reason more prominence than love in his account of virtue. Aquinas, in contrast, exalted love and believed it is expressed and experienced through virtue. 'The way we express love is through *virtue*. If we are bereft of virtue, we are unable to express love' (DeMarco, 2012). Aquinas provides a theological understanding of human happiness (beatitude) as a supernatural destiny which is ultimately consummated with God. In seeking to elevate the theological virtues, Aquinas emphasises the supremacy of love as essential to good teaching. As DeMarco (2012) observes, the idea of animating love is in fact, the essence of the expression of a virtuous life:

> Love becomes animated when we perceive the good of others and desire to protect and promote that good. Turning from our concerns about ourselves and looking at the needs of others is an effective means of animating our love, bringing it out of dormancy, and preparing it for virtuous expression.

Notably, in the Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI *Lumen ecclesiae* (1974: n.24), there is explicit reference to Aquinas in relation to the inter-relatedness of faith and reason and their convergence 'towards one truth.' This is similarly echoed in *The Catholic School* (1977) which emphasises the harmonious relationship between faith and reason in the interests of the common good. For Aquinas, there is a reciprocity between faith and reason, instead 'each is within the other' (Boland, 2012: 123).

Aquinas refers to *cogitatio* (questioning, considering, evaluating) that precedes the act of faith but also of *cogitatio* that accompanies it. Aquinas appeals for 'better reasoning and better philosophy because faith needs good philosophy and good science as much as they need faith if they are to find their place in a full understanding of the truth about our world' (Boland, 2012: 124). Aristotle argued that man must have capacity for moral agency. As Hauerwas (1975: 40) highlights: 'It is by our ability to act in a determinative manner that we can acquire character and as a consequence, act in accordance with who we are'.

2.4 The Concept of Conscience

In understanding moral behaviour, it is important to consider the role of the human mind in relation to the concept of 'conscience' within medieval theory. The word 'conscience' is derived from Latin *conscientia.* Its Greek equivalent is *syneidesis* meaning 'sharing knowledge with oneself'. The neologism originated in the work of St. Jerome (342 - 420) in his commentary on the Book of Ezekiel and was later understood to have been interpreted erroneously as two separate words *syneidesis* and *synderesis* (Kries, 2002: 67). The term 'synderesis' can be defined as 'the innate ability to be self-moving morally' (Lydon, 2011: 116). As Lydon (2011) suggests, despite its mistaken origin, the terms provide a useful distinction of the two concepts in relation to our understanding of human conscience. Sorabi (2014: 12) suggests that conscience provides a level of self-knowledge which allows a duality of being 'both the judge and the one being judged'. Conscience is an interior domain in the human person involving consciousness of the self and is therefore self-reflexive.

St. Paul is regarded as the innovator of *syneidesis* or *conscientia* known as 'legislative conscience' linking virtue to moral or natural law and involving a sense of obligation. Philip the Chancellor (ca.1170-1237) referred to synderesis as a habit-like power or 'dispositional potentiality' (*habitualis potentiae*). It is 'a faculty of the soul that disposes its possessor towards choosing an unqualified good - though one that is innate rather

than acquired through habituation' (Eardley, 2021: 1). St. Bonaventure (1217-1274) described synderesis as the 'spark of conscience' (Commentary on the Sentences 2.39: a.2; McGrade trans. 2001: 186). He defined conscience as partially innate and partially acquired in regard to natural law, thus assuming middle ground between the thought of St. Paul and Aristotle.

In considering how the human will and intellect interact with moral knowledge, Aquinas presents a distinctly contrasting position to Bonaventure. Bonaventure assigned synderesis to the will rather than the intellect. Aquinas, however, believed the rational part of the soul consists of both will and intellect. The object of the will is the good and the object of the intellect is truth. Intellect is further categorised as speculative '*intellectus speculaticus*' and practical '*intellectus practicus*' (see Summa I, q.79, a.11, ad.2). For Aquinas, synderesis and conscience are both domains of the practical intellect. Synderesis is ultimately an innate natural power:

> Wherefore the first practical principles, bestowed on us by nature, do not belong to a special power, but to a special natural habit, which we call synderesis. Whence synderesis is said to incite good, and to murmur at evil, inasmuch as through first principles we proceed to discover, and judge of what we have discovered. It is therefore clear that synderesis is not a power, but a natural habit. (S.T. I, q.79, a.12, corp.)

Christian virtue is concerned with the discovery of wisdom and truth. Virtuous dispositions need to be habituated and developed to be sustained and flourish; they need to be nurtured through social and historical narratives and situated within communities.

Aquinas understood the human person as relational, belonging within a community in their search for truth and wisdom: 'For Aquinas, human beings see truth when it is in some kind of community - it is only a truth when it is shared' (Boland, 2007: 67). Gula

(1989: 137- 138) insists that Conscience is properly formed in dialogue with several sources of moral wisdom:

> As humans we consult our own experience as well as the experience of family, friends, colleagues, and experts in the field which pertains to the area of judgement at hand. We analyse and test the stories, images, language, rituals, and actions by which the various communities in which we participate live the moral life. As Christians we turn to the testimony of scripture, the religious convictions of our creeds, the lives of moral virtuosos, and the informed judgement of theologians past and present who help interpret the traditions of Christian life. Christian communities have access to a rich heritage of stories, images, language, rituals, devotional practices, and spiritual disciplines which nurture one's moral vision and practice.

In essence, Gula is referring to the formation of conscience, a process which constitutes the bridge between *synderesis* and *syneidesis*, described by Timothy O'Connell (1990: 111) as Conscience 2:

> If Conscience 1 (synderesis) is a characteristic, Conscience 2 is the process which that characteristic demands. Conscience 2 deals with the efforts to achieve a specific perception of values, concrete individual values. It is the ongoing process of reflection, discernment, discussion and analysis in which human beings have always been engaged.

O'Connell defines Conscience 2 as a process of moral reasoning, reflecting Gula's reference to dialoguing with several sources of moral wisdom. In the specific context of this project, the crucial sources of moral wisdom for primary school students are the family and the school. An analysis of the relative impact of these sources will constitute a key part of this thesis.

Aquinas offers an uplifting perspective for modern conceptions of Christian virtue, emphasising knowledge of the divine and the potential of self-agency. Aquinas upholds the centrality of wisdom in order to discover the meaning and purpose of life and its ultimate truth. In the context of the formation of conscience, Aquinas adopts a virtue-

driven approach as opposed to the 'moral reasoning approach' of O'Connell and Gula, reflecting the integral connection between virtue and character discussed previously. Lydon (2023: 5.8) suggests that in the mind of Aquinas, conscience as a fully human faculty uses both conceptual knowledge and evaluative knowledge. Evaluative knowledge is a particularly human trait, collating information to create a picture which depends critically on character. Moral character might be described as a 'world vision', the basis of our 'seeing', which radically influences our perception, for example, whether the glass is half full or half empty. This is fundamental to the whole operation of conscience.

The Synderesis, the habit of conscience, is founded on moral character. 'Seeing' involves evaluative knowledge, which Lydon (2023: 5.9) describes as 'knowing through imagination' because it involves internalising and applying our inherited norms, as well as understanding their limitations.

As stated earlier, for Aquinas conscience depends on moral character, the development of which will be influenced by dialoguing with sources of moral wisdom analogous to the moral reasoning of Gula and O'Connell. The review will now focus on the concept of the family as primary educators in the foundation of virtue within the individual since the family represents a key interlocutor in the formation of conscience and, by logical extension, virtue.

2.5 The Family as Primary Educators

'*Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.*' (Matthew 19: 14-15)

Throughout the Bible, children are welcomed to God, invited to respond to the divine call of discipleship in order that they may flourish and fulfil their eternal destiny in the Kingdom of Heaven. Scripture is replete with references to the educative duty of parents

from birth to adulthood: 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it' (Proverbs 22: 6). In the Old Testament, Moses refers to the duty of the family in preparing children to grow in knowledge of God:

> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6: 6-7)

In Thomas Aquinas' account of teaching and learning, he refers explicitly to the education of children in relation to their familial upbringing, '...the young are capable of being trained' to arrive at the perfection of virtue (ST. I-II, q. 95, a. 1). According to Thomas, children become virtuous prior to the full development of their rational capacities. Thomas asserts the seminal role and responsibility of the family in the nurture of virtue:

> As it begins to have the use of its free-will, it begins to belong to itself, and is able to look after itself, in matters concerning the Divine or the natural law, and then it should be induced, not by compulsion but by persuasion, to embrace the faith…... it is the parents' duty to look after the salvation of their children, especially before they come to the use of reason. (ST. II-II, q. 10, a. 12)

Thomas believed that children incrementally develop their capacity to be reflective and discerning (Arthur, 2021: 62). Aquinas acknowledges that parents are the first educators of their children:

> Now it is evident that the upbringing of a human child requires not only the mother's care for his nourishment, but much more the care of his father as guide and guardian, and under whom he progresses in goods both internal and external. (ST. II-II, q. 154, a. 2)

Parents share the responsibility for nurturing 'internal and external' goods with other agents and institutions, but only in a secondary sense. According to Aquinas, individuals comprise and constitute the state, but the basis of society is the family (Arthur, 2021: 62).

Lydon (2011: 169) highlights St. Thomas' point that parental responsibility is a lifelong obligation, referring to education as synonymous with 'nurture' and 'upbringing, encompassing formation in virtue which he refers to as formation of both the mind and the soul (Summa Contra Gentiles book III, q. 122).

Thomas believed that a childhood within a Christian family, brought up 'in things pertaining to the Christian mode of life' reflecting longevity and perseverance in the faith (ST. III, 68.9). In order to grow in knowledge and love of God, children fundamentally need role models within established communities, beginning within the Christian family and extending to the school and Church. As Hauerwas (2010: 95) notes: 'There is no substitute for learning to be a Christian by being in the presence of significant lives made significant by being Christian'. In order to develop and flourish, character virtues require the experience of their practice in community contexts. As Carr (1991: 9) observes:

> The fundamental moral virtues cannot be learned in any context of socialization or education apart from the example of those parents, teachers and friends who are able to exhibit to some degree how they work for the good in human life.

Aquinas suggests that the permanent bond between man and woman in marriage significantly contributes to moral formation. In Genesis (1: 27-28), God instituted marriage as an intimate communion between man and woman, further ordered for the purpose of procreation:

> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it".

As expressed by Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation on the Christian family, *Familiaris Consortio* (1964: n.38), the Holy sacrament of matrimony 'consecrates' the couple in dedication to the 'ministry' of their children and the evangelising mission of the Church: 'It enriches them with wisdom, counsel, fortitude, and all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to help the children in their growth as human beings and as

Christians.' The primary role of parents as the first evangelisers of their children is as witnesses of the faith: 'By virtue of their ministry in educating, parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children' (1964: n.39).

The Second Vatican Council describes the Christian home as a 'domestic church' in which Catholic parents have a duty to create an atmosphere of living faith, as articulated in *Lumen Gentium* (1964: n.11):

> Parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.

As discussed in the earlier part of this thesis, the Christian school has a central role in partnership with the family in providing an education in virtue, enabling children to seek and discover the true meaning and purpose of life with Christ at the centre. For Aquinas, Christ is not simply a guide to virtue but the ultimate end of human action; the human telos is revealed through Him. The nature of sanctification is to live according to God's design and purpose for us. In Aquinas' account of teaching and learning, he describes the divine purpose of education as illumination leading to wisdom. As Ozolins (2013: 9) observes:

> For Aquinas, teaching is connected with the Divine, since he argues that though human beings are able to teach, they do so in a secondary sense and that it is God who primarily teaches. This is because God is the source of all being and is the light at the heart of our being. In the learning process, a key feature of Aquinas' account builds on the nature of illumination, which is to say an understanding of what is taught that enables us to see how what we have learnt connects to other things. Ultimately, these connections lead us to Wisdom, which is to say God, and for Aquinas, wisdom in its different forms is the central aim of all teaching and learning.

Arthur (2021: 102) describes the Catholic home and school as places of 'ecclesial experience', central to formation and evangelisation. Groome (1996: 118) states that the

essence of Christian pedagogy is transformative, involving engaging 'the very "being" of students, to inform, form and transform their identity and agency – who they are and how they live – with the meaning and ethic of Christian faith'.

The significance of the role of parents in providing a holistic and integrated approach to education is a prevalent theme throughout Vatican documents on Catholic education. The conciliar document *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) highlights the seminal duty of the family both in the educational process and formation in virtue:

> As it is the parents who have given life to their children, on them lies the gravest obligation of educating their family. They must therefore be recognised as being primarily and principally responsible for their education…It is therefore the duty of parents to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellowmen which will promote an integrated, personal and social education for their children. The family is therefore the principal school of the social virtues which are necessary to every society.

The idea of a 'family atmosphere' animating Christian life relates to the work of St. John Bosco who believed that fostering a 'family spirit' within a school would complement the formation experienced in the home. As Lydon (2004: 4) suggests, for Bosco, 'just as the family is the prime educational community and is designed naturally for the education of the child, so any educational community should, ideally and optimally, reproduce the family situation'.

The duty of parents is to cultivate an environment of virtue and discipline of vice. The Catechism (CCC, 1994: n.2223) explains that:

> Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues.

The nature of education as relational to its context is highlighted in the Congregation's document *Educating Together in Catholic Schools* (CCE, 2007: n.12), which emphasises the primacy of the family as a natural community:

> Because its aim is to make man more man, education can be carried out authentically only in a relational and community context. It is not by chance that the first and original educational environment is that of the natural community of the family.

This is similarly expressed in *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (SCCE, 1982: n.12), asserting the value of the Catholic school in supporting and serving the family:

> It is also true that among the means which will assist and complement the exercise of the educational rights and duties of the family, the school has a value and an importance that are fundamental.

In an address given to the Catholic Education Service in April 1995, Cardinal Basil Hume highlighted the importance of a harmonious triangulation between home, school and parish as 'three independent and complementary experiences of the Church. They must be in communion, recognising the contribution of each, supporting one another.'

The necessity of partnership between the family and the school is also expressed by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation on the family, which highlights the function of the Catholic school in complementing the duties and responsibilities of the family: 'Schools do not replace parents, but complement them' (*Amoris Laetitia*, 2016: 84).

It can be argued that the development of virtue occurs through a process of 'osmosis', a gradual assimilation of, and response to, a range of significant external factors and influences. This review has expressed the seminal role of parents in this process, which is further supported and enhanced through the distinctive nature of the Catholic school and Church. It is important to recognise the crucial role of the teacher in the Catholic school in the development of Catholic character; the teacher's role is pivotal in modelling Christ's ministry through personal relationships and daily witness of the faith. This is

explored in *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988: 26) which articulates the significance of the Catholic educational community in formation:

> Prime responsibility for creating the unique school climate rests with the teachers as individuals and as a community. The religious dimension of the school climate is expressed through the celebration of Christian values in Word and Sacrament, in individual behaviour, in friendly and harmonious personal relationships, and in a ready availability. Through this daily witness, the students will come to appreciate the uniqueness of the environment to which their youth has been entrusted.

A salient point worthy of mention here is to acknowledge that within a complex modern society, the reality is that not all families provide an integrated model of Christian faith and life, which inevitably presents a contemporary challenge to the notion of the family as primary educators. Lydon (2004: 3) points out that the Congregation's 1988 document, referenced earlier, introduces a note of caution in suggesting that while schools are aware of the concept of the notion, 'unfortunately the same is not always true of the families themselves' (CCE, 1988: n.43). This document does, nevertheless, maintain that 'partnerships between a Catholic school and families must continue and be strengthened' (CCE, 1988: n.42).

A discussion regarding the nature of these challenges will be engaged later in this review in relation to contemporary challenges for character education.

2.6 Contemporary Scholarly Receptions

As discussed earlier, the development of virtue is dependent on relationships within established communities such as the family and the school. This is articulated in contemporary accounts of virtue theory through the seminal work of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntrye and theologian Stanley Hauerwas. Boland (2007: 161) attributes the origins of the re-emergence of interest in virtue theory to Anscombe (1958) who argued in her publication *Modern Moral Philosophy*, that moral obligation is meaningless without faith in a divine being, referring back to Aristotle as the way forward.

MacIntyre (1981) makes a significant contribution in the field of modern moral philosophy which he describes as fragmented, unintelligible and inadequate in responding to the challenges of modern morality. For MacIntyre, 'in our modern world, there is no shared view of the telos and a rejection of any notion of virtue' (Arthur, 2021: 100). On this basis, MacIntyre advocates a teleological understanding of human life, restoring conceptions of morality rooted in the contributions of Aristotle and Aquinas (Arthur, 2021: xvi). Akin to Anscombe, MacIntyre proposed a re-invention of virtue theory in order to provide an account of human morality, based on returning to the inherited tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas to interpret and renew an account of the virtues. For MacIntyre, Aquinas extends and deepens our understanding of Aristotelian morality (MacIntyre, 2007: ix). According to Arthur (2021: 29), Aquinas provides a synthesis of Aristotelian concepts of morality but which is distinctly subordinated to a Christian vision and framework, and with a fuller understanding of human flourishing in relation to God.

In the view of Boland (2007: 34), whilst MacIntyre is critically faithful to these earlier traditions, he successfully 'goes decisively beyond them'. Both MacIntyre and Hauerwas share the concern that modern moral philosophy has created an abstract foundation for morality, disengaged from their theoretical and cultural context (Boland, 2007: 186). MacIntyre insists that we must learn from the past by 'understanding our contemporary selves and our contemporary moral relationships in the light afforded by a tradition that enables us to overcome such constraints on such self-knowledge that (advanced) modernity imposes' (MacIntyre, 2007: xi). MacIntyre highlights a tension between individualism and Aristotelianism; in his view, modernity 'has no place' for virtue (Boland, 2007: 188).

An Aristotelian theory of virtues is teleological in that it is concerned with purposes and end goals. It involves the cultivation and habituation of virtues, demanding choices and

the exercise of judgment to enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia* (human flourishing). For Aristotle, human pleasure or happiness is the telos of human life. This enjoyment is defined as excellence in activity but is relative and open to subjective interpretation: 'The standard of utility or pleasure is set by man' (MacIntyre, 2007: 160-161). There are, however, 'deep conflicts in our cultural history' in terms of how human flourishing is defined (2007: 162). Thomas acknowledged that human beings are free and rational. His account of human morality has a distinctively theological foundation with the ultimate telos as supernatural destiny. According to Pinckaers (1995: 399), Thomas' theory is based on wisdom 'fostering the intimate collaboration of intellect and will, rather than on voluntary obedience.' For Thomas, there must be an emphasis on moral habituation in acquiring *phronesis* (practical wisdom). As Arthur (2021: 61) suggests: 'Education prepares us for learning through the acquisition of intellectual virtues while preparing us for living through the moral virtues'. In Aquinas' account, moral choice is informed by reason and deliberation, as part of a process of self-direction. This is developed by Hauerwas (1995: 123) in his description of character as 'directing rather than compelling', highlighting that human character provides direction but it does not determine human moral capacities or potential in its entirety (Arthur, 2021: 57). In this interpretation, *habitus* (dispositions) are not static but malleable; moral development is a process of learning, involving freedom and intentionality. Within Brugger's framework for moral character (2009: 5), the volitional domain relates to free deliberation and choice: 'One's character is one's own doing, one builds it up or tears it down, one choice at a time' (2009: 9). This raises the notion of the circularity of virtue theory, highlighted by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics VI* in discussing the formation of character.

Modern receptions of Aquinas on virtue have contributed to a revival of interest in, and re-interpretation of, virtue theory, emphasising the key concept of 'communities of practice' in character education. MacIntyre highlights the significance of the historical and social context within which human actions occur, which are inextricably linked to the communities within which the individual derives his or her identity. 'The self has to find

its moral identity in and through its membership in communities' (MacIntyre, 2007: 221). The experience of membership within a community develops understanding of what is good. In the view of MacIntrye, formation involves the acquisition of virtue through 'participation in a range of social practices within living traditions' (Arthur, 2021: 100).

MacIntyre's work emphasises the formative role of communities of practice in the inculcation of virtue. According to Jones (2015: 67), human beings as social animals have a natural inclination to form communities, requiring support from others to acquire and practice virtue. Returning again to Brugger's framework (2009), the relational domain emphasises the dependence between persons within the community which leads to their interdependence. Boland (2007: 162) highlights that 'moral development is always within communities and traditions whose narratives teach the virtues and provide characters that are worthy of emulation.'

For MacIntyre (1981: 155), aligned with Aristotle, a community is characterised by agreement as to goods and virtues as part of a common allegiance, 'whose shared aim is the realization of the human good'. For Aristotle, the bond of friendship embodies 'a shared recognition of a pursuit of a good… which is essential and primary to the constitution of any form of community' (1981: 156). The prevalent role of community in the cultivation of virtue, as in education, is in teaching a 'vision of human life' (Boland, 2007: 190), which within a Christian anthropology, is relational to God in both creation and redemption. For MacIntyre (1981: 156), however, there is some degree of pessimism in the notion of sharing and sustaining in a community as 'alien to the modern liberal individualistic world'. The notable point raised here by MacIntyre will be addressed later in this review in relation to contemporary challenges for character education.

According to Arthur (2021: xvi), MacIntyre's work is an attempt to restore an Aristotelian-Thomist account of moral life. MacIntyre (2007: 259) proposes that the

Aristotelian tradition 'can be restated in a way that restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments.' Like MacIntyre, Arthur opposes the notion of human character as a 'rational moral agent' on the basis that detachment and objectivity do not offer an accurate portrayal of human nature (ibid). Boland (2007: 162) emphasises a developmental view of the human person as the basis of modern virtue theory. Within human character 'there are many kinds of potential awaiting actualization'; character is shaped through choices and commitments. In terms of Christian anthropology, education is a 'human awakening' (Maritain, 1943: 2), a journey towards fulfilment with God. Christian character formation, in the view of Arthur (2001: 8), is an 'authentic means to facilitate the search for personal meaning and purpose in life through developing a transcendental relationship with God'. The Christian community is an invaluable resource within which to pursue such meaning and purpose, contributing to the cultivation of character. Lydon (2011: 169), referring to the work of Aquinas, similarly makes the point that the 'significance of tradition and community is, undoubtedly, an integral prerequisite to growth in virtue.'

Central to MacIntyre's work is the concept of 'goods *internal* to practices' referring to achievement which is for the good of the community who participate in the practice, in contrast to *external* goods which relate to someone's property or possession (MacIntrye, 2007: 190). MacIntyre defines virtue as 'an acquired human quality, the possession of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices' (2007: 191). He explains that 'the virtues are those goods by reference to which we define our relationship to those other people with whom we share the kinds of purposes and standards which inform practices' (2007: 191). The acquisition and exercise of virtues serves not only to 'sustain practices and enable us to achieve those goods internal to practices, but which will sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good...and will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good' (2007: 219). The concept of self-knowledge and the search for knowledge of the good is key in the cultivation of virtue.

Aligned with MacIntyre, Hauerwas (1983: 1) believes that moral life is relevant to historical communities and settings of time and place. In the view of Lydon (2011: 170), Hauerwas emphasises the role of narrative in providing consistency and continuity to the self. For Hauerwas, character is shaped within communities. The development of virtue will always 'gain its intelligibility from narratives that place our lives within an adventure.' (Hauerwas, 1981: 115) The concepts of narrative unity and tradition are essential to both MacIntyre and Hauerwas' account of virtue (Boland, 2007: 188).

According to Boland (2007: 182), Hauerwas' interest in Aquinas was in demonstrating that human intention and action generate a moral history which is aligned to the concept of the human being as self-determining. This idea of self-creation resonates with the Scripture reference from the Gospel of Mark 7: 14-23: 'What comes out of us is more ours than what we take in'. Boland (2007) suggests that when a rational agent acquires disposition, it involves self-determination. The human being is 'both receptive and initiating' in relation to the world, 'an agent not only moved but a mover' (2007: 169). Such an agent can perform actions that bring about disposition (habitus). He goes on to suggest that the virtue centred approach implies an understanding of the person 'growing into freedom through self-determination,' in the search for truth (2007: 195). Hauerwas explores the close interdependency of action and agency (2009: 26) highlighting the responsibility of the individual in moral decision making, 'finally the agent is the arbiter of what constitutes the act' (2009: 28). For Aristotle, the acquisition and exercise of virtues is a means to an end; the relationship of the means to an end is internal, not external. According to MacIntyre (2007), this allows Aquinas to synthesize Aristotle and the New Testament. He goes on to say: 'A key feature of this parallelism is the way in which the concept of a good life for man is prior to the concept of a virtue' so that the concept of virtue is a secondary concept (2007: 184). Having established that virtue theory recognises the human person is self-determined and self-creating, focusing on the moral agent before the moral act, Boland raises the point that a virtue centred

approach can be liable to interpretation as pagan, risking becoming a form of Pelagianism (Boland, 2007: 190-191).

Hauerwas highlights the concept of continuity of the self, aligned to his view that character is prior to virtue. 'An ethic of virtue gains its intelligibility from narratives that place our lives within an adventure' (Hauerwas, 1981: 115). For Hauerwas, scripture offers a narrative of truth, giving coherence to the self. 'It is not gained by attaining a universal point of view, but by living a faithful narrative that does not betray the diversity of our existence' (1981: 149). Hauerwas (1981: 114-115) refers to the importance of moral training, where character is developed through the experience of moral challenges. Human nature cannot be reduced to rationality when it is a 'rich complex arrangement of powers and qualities'. Hauerwas (1981: 144) emphasises the complexity of human nature, where narrative 'charts the way for us to live coherently amidst the diversity and conflicts that circumscribe and shape our moral existence'.

In agreement with Aristotle, Hauerwas believes that an education in virtue requires the establishment of communities, 'which have been formed by narratives faithful to the character of reality'. These communities support and facilitate the formation of the self but 'depend on the development of, and trust in, persons of virtue' (1981, 116-117, 120). This highlights the importance of role models of moral virtue exemplified primarily within the family and school communities.

In conclusion, this review acknowledges that there is a multiplicity of approaches to understanding human morality and the variance within this field remains unresolved within the context of modernity and individualism. Contemporary scholarly approaches to character education highlight that Aristotle believed that living a good life means seeking the good of life, defined by the acquisition and habituation of virtue. For MacIntrye, the search for the good provides narrative unity to the self, but he proposes

a restatement of Aristotelianism through the creation of new forms of community. Hauerwas, however, adopts a more decisively theological direction in claiming that Scripture provides a true story, one that gives coherence and unity of the self (Boland, 2007: 185). For Arthur (2021: 181), the various rival and incompatible conceptions of virtue negate any opportunity for unity to the concept. This is articulated by MacIntrye (2007: 202):

> Without any overriding concept of the telos of a whole human life, conceived as a unity, our conception of certain individual virtues has to remain partial and incomplete.

It is clear that a need still exists to establish greater coherence and unity among theorists in contemporary conceptions of virtue and the nature of telos, building on the prominent work of Aristotle and Aquinas. The core challenge, however, is in seeking such coherence within a modern individualistic society where new conceptions of virtue emerge. Arthur (2021: 5) suggests that the Aristotelian-Thomist model offers a theoretical and pragmatic framework for conceptualising Catholic character education, connecting moral virtues, moral character and the telos of a human being.

This review will subsequently focus on an examination of character education within education settings. This will include a discussion of the concept of virtue literacy as part of the framework for virtue education developed by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues.

Part Three: Educating for Character

2.7 Introduction

'Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught.' (Colossians 2: 6-7)

In order to provide a meaningful understanding of Christian character education, it needs to be understood in the context of human flourishing. For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* offers a vision of human flourishing indicating the purpose and *telos*, to which all human life aims through the pursuit of virtue (Aristotle, 2009). As discussed earlier in this review, Aristotle's account of the virtues was developed in a Christian context by St. Thomas Aquinas. For Thomas, human flourishing is a gift from God, revealed to the human person by Christ (John 10:10). Human flourishing is an invitation to share the joy of God in relationship with Him, described by Thomas as 'beatitude'. As part of this empirical case study, this project will explore and examine pupils' understanding and vision of what constitutes human flourishing and the ways in which Catholic primary schools create a culture, ethos and environment, as well as provision for a range of experiences and opportunities, within and beyond the curriculum, to develop the moral lives of pupils in their pursuit of beatitude.

This chapter will subsequently examine the literature pertaining to the variety of ways in which character is taught within education settings, drawing upon research from both faith based and community schools. This will include an exploration of frameworks, programmes, practices and approaches to provide a comprehensive literature base, the outcomes from which will inform the data collection for this study. Although this research project is focused on the primary phase, much of the discussion will be relevant, applicable and transferable to character education in secondary schooling.

2.7.1 Educating for Character - A Range of Models

It is important to begin with an explanation of some of the terminology used here to describe how character education is taught in schools, in an endeavour to provide semantic clarity to the variations in vocabulary and also to make important distinctions in usage. For the purpose of this review, use of the term 'framework' is understood to include broad, generic principles, of which the Jubilee Centre's *Framework for Character Education in Schools* is a notable example, as well as Lickona, Schaps and Lewis' (2007)

Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education. A framework may comprise multiple pedagogical practices and also has the capacity to be transferable in other settings and contexts. The term character education 'programme' refers to specific published curricular for character, such as the *Narnian Virtues: A Character Education English Curriculum* (2021), which will be explored later in this chapter. The term character education 'practices' relate to a range of strategies employed as part of character provision, such as collaborative learning or the use of literature and moral dilemmas. These practices might, for example, make use of a published programme for their delivery. 'Approaches' to character education is a further potential category of terminology. Approaches could make use of a combination of both practices and programmes: for example, Lickona's (1991) *Comprehensive Approach to Character Education*. It is important to acknowledge that the examples of terminology mentioned here, although not exhaustive, are of course open to alternative interpretations or definitions and are indeed likely to overlap conceptually to some extent. However, some examples of the range of terminology have been intentionally included here to highlight necessary distinctions that exist in usage and meaning, within the context of this study.

The focus of this project, in its most basic expression, is to examine Christian character education, its purpose and meaning, and how it is taught, promoted, developed and experienced in Catholic primary schools through case study analysis. In order to do this comprehensively, it is important to broaden the literature base to include an exploration of a range of secular models which will enable comparisons to be built upon within a Christian context. This review will subsequently explore the literature pertaining to the ways in which character and wisdom are taught and modelled in both faith and community schools, both in the UK and America.

The overall outcomes of this study are intended to support the development of a fuller and deeper understanding of how character education in Catholic schools contributes to the formation of young people - it firmly acknowledges an awareness, however, of the fact that not all children attending Catholic schools are Catholic, as noted earlier on in

this review, evidenced in the data from *Catholic Education Service Digest of 2023 Census Data for Schools and Colleges in England*. It is logical to argue that education in its widest sense, and by its very nature, has the capacity to impact on and shape the character of *all* students, irrespective of faith affiliation or beliefs - a virtuous life cannot be viewed as solely accessible to Christians. It is worth reflecting on the view of C.S. Lewis (1989: 89) here: 'I think that for young people today, we had better make them good pagans before we make them good Christians.' Lewis reminds us that pursuing a good and virtuous life is accessible to all, irrespective of denomination or spirituality. Studies have shown that the concept of morality does not depend on adherence to a religious faith, demonstrating that 'an educational focus on morality can be achieved in public schools independent of students' religious affiliations' (Nucci and Powers, 2014: 122-123). Arthur (2021: 118) asserts a clear dichotomy, however, between Christian and secular telos: 'Christians pursue distinct virtues which reflect their Christian calling.' For the Christian, the ultimate end goal is salvific and beatific. This project recognises that character education in a Catholic school is distinctive from secular education in its Christian faith, tradition and practices, but will examine secular models that may be transferable and adaptable within a Christian context. On this basis, the review will begin with an examination of a significant secular framework for character education, developed by The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues in 2013, drawing primarily although not exclusively, on the work of Arthur (2021) *A Christian Education in the Virtues: Character Education and Human Flourishing.*

2.7.2 The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

According to Arthur (2021: 85), the publication of three books in the United States led to major developments in the field of character education, namely that of Lickona (1992), Kilpatrick (1993) and Wynne and Ryan (1993). He goes on to note that each of these books resonate with the perspective of Hauerwas, discussed earlier, in highlighting that moral decisions are made within a narrative context, as a self-determining agent. These

books, as well as the work of Lickona, Schaps and Lewis (2007), the latter of which will be discussed subsequently, provided an influential background to the creation of 'The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues' in 2012. Arthur describes The Jubilee Centre's aim to 'explore, through research, how one could teach and train for the virtues, character and wisdom in order to avoid ethical blindness in students and those training for the professions' (Arthur, 2021: 85). The philosophy of the Jubilee Centre is underpinned by a belief that the purpose of education is more than the transmission of knowledge; it is concerned with the search for meaning and purpose. This is reticent of the work of Cooling (2010: 14) who argues that the aim of education should be concerned with discernment about the meaning and significance of learning: 'How young people think about meaning and significance radically influences their values and behaviour. It affects the sort of citizen that they are and will become.'

Similarly, Sternberg (2015: 297) asserts the importance of teaching wisdom over knowledge. He argues that wisdom is a 'better vehicle' in the pursuit of satisfaction or happiness, it provides for the mindful deliberation of values, it represents an avenue in the creation of a more harmonious world and prepares the students themselves, as part of a 'greater community', for their prospective future roles parents and leaders. Grant (2009), however, is critical of the work of Sternberg, arguing that he presents an essentialist position to justify character education, without considering specifically *how* schools should teach wisdom. Grant (2009) critiques character education initiatives, arguing that they can be derived from superficial thinking:

> While analysing various values frameworks, he illustrates inconsistencies between the moral values often established as goals for character education programs and the values actually taught in compulsory schooling' (Ambrose & Cross, 2009: 13).

In the words of Arthur (2021: 86), there is an 'ethical deficit' in modern society which has generated a demand for schools to get involved with character education. Whilst Arthur does not explicitly define or expand upon the term 'ethical deficit', it can be implied that

the term provides a rationale for a holistic approach to character education, referenced earlier in this review as one of the key distinctive features of Catholic education. Arthur (2021: 85-86) highlights a dissonance between claims of moral commitment and ethical behaviour - the transfer of morality into practice. He refers to the work of Sternerg's (2002) six fallacies of thinking, which describe how knowledge and expertise can generate a susceptibility to unethical behaviour. Arthur's use of the term 'ethical deficit' emphasises the contradictions that exist in human morality, advocating the importance of an education in moral wisdom.

The Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2017), first published in 2013, represents a major initiative in recent character education research. The Jubilee Centre provides programmes and resources for both primary and secondary schools to facilitate the explicit teaching of character, supporting the development of practical wisdom and *Virtue Literacy.* The concept of virtue literacy as a pedagogical basis for character education will be examined in detail subsequently in this chapter. The framework categorises virtues as moral, intellectual, civic and performance, but excludes spiritual or theological virtues, hence Aristotelian. Arthur (2021: 89) considers the question as to whether spiritual qualities should be incorporated in this list of virtues but goes on to suggest that this involves issues of faith which assume 'desire for God'. Arthur (2021: 89) does, however, acknowledge that there is often a 'spiritual dimension' to character development within secular educational approaches which enable an introspective exploration of character at a deeper level:

> The secular educational ideal may or may not rely on Christian tradition for inspiration. Modern educational usage of the spiritual dimension in education appears to emphasise what some call humanistic ideas of character which appear to go beyond and cannot be reduced to a materialistic view of the world. This leads to an attempt to understand oneself at a deeper level - an encounter with one's inner dimension without accepting belief in the supernatural or in God.

Arthur's underlying point here is that all educational endeavours, across both faith and non-faith affiliated settings, have the capacity to nurture moral knowledge,

understanding and self-reflection, with a view to leading more meaningful and fulfilling lives. In the Christian context, the aims of education are directed through faith to provide a theologically informed view of the human person. Within this argument, it is worthy of mention that human character should be viewed and understood in holistic terms, avoiding focus on single, compartmentalised aspects of character; the virtues should not be interpreted individually and distinct from one another in the pursuit of human goodness, but as interdependent and in totality, a 'profound integration of the spiritual, intellectual, emotional and volitional life' (Volger, 2020: x).

The Jubilee Centre's Framework identifies three key domains in the development of character: caught, taught and sought (2017: 9). These domains provide a useful distinction, especially for educationalists, in clarifying understanding of the different potential influences on moral character development in schools. In summary, *caught* character refers primarily to the influence of culture and ethos, modelled by the staff community. *Taught* character refers to the explicit educational experiences, both within and beyond the classroom, that foster the language, knowledge, understanding and skills that enable character development and ultimately lead to *sought* character. In this way, although distinct, caught, taught and sought approaches are inevitably deeply interconnected. The latter involves the provision of opportunities that generate the formation of personal habits and character commitments and lead to autonomy in the pursuit and practice of virtue. Sought character relies on the interplay and impact of both caught and taught approaches to character in order to be nurtured. This study will make reference to these terms in order to categorise and analyse different aspects of character development and will form a key part of the structure of the empirical case studies.

2.7.2.1 The Jubilee Centre Framework and a Christian Lens

The Jubilee Framework, as a secular model of character, has the potential to be adapted through a Christian lens for Catholic schools. Arthur envisions the idea of a 'virtue-based

framework' for Christian education (2021: 116), asserting that Christian virtues are distinctive because they are distinct from the secular telos (2021: 118). However, this is not to suggest that Christian virtues do not exist or do not belong within a secular vision of morality - for example, the virtues of humility and charity. The fundamental distinction lies in the notion of Christian telos. For the Christian, the pursuit of a supernatural destiny with Christ is the source and the summit of a virtuous life. In Arthur's view (2021: 118), each of the virtues contained within the Jubilee Framework appropriates the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, but can only be transformed and given their full expression through the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. The cardinal virtues must be viewed as interdependent, operating in conjunction, not isolation, and as constituent elements of human morality as a whole. Prudence is concerned with practical reason achieved through discernment of right means and ends, using skills of critical thinking and reflection. 'The prudent man looks where he is going' (Proverbs 14: 15). Justice is the desire and pursuit to do what is right and fair. Fortitude provides a strengthened resolve to pursue the good, in resistance to temptation. Temperance offers moderation and balance in choices of pursuits and priorities, regulating our natural desires towards Christian moral life. According to Anderson (2020: 20), the goodness of moral virtue leads to secular ends, but without the theological virtues, moral virtues alone cannot be directed towards supernatural destiny: 'While the four cardinal virtues make the possessor good and his work good, they can only render that person and work good for a terrestrial aim.' Theological virtues are gifts from God and are therefore inextricably bound within us as part of Christian identity and eternal destiny, leading to beatitude: 'The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character... They inform and give life to all the moral virtues' (CCC, 1994: 1813).

Within *The Jubilee Centre Framework,* the intellectual virtues are described, among others, as autonomy, critical thinking, curiosity, reasoning and reflection. They aim to direct human intellect towards the pursuit of truth, knowledge and understanding.

According to Aquinas, the intellectual virtues are distinct from, and prior to, moral virtues in that they require the effective use of knowledge and, therefore, contribute to the practice of moral virtue (ST. I-II, q. 57, a. 1). Moral virtues are served by the intellectual virtues, informing reason, appetite and will: 'Intellectual virtues help us to think well, while moral virtues help us to desire well' (Arthur 2021: 123). In this way, prudence is regarded as the superior, integrative intellectual virtue, directing the moral virtues, providing 'right reason' to moral decision making and action. Arthur (2021: 122) makes a key distinction between the moral and intellectual virtues, arguing that we can possess intellectual virtues without being morally good, because the latter 'do not have the appropriate love or desire built into them'. For the Christian, the pursuit and discovery of the ultimate truth through the acquisition of knowledge is an important part of Christian moral life, reticent of Thomas' insistence on the importance of studiousness (*studiositas).* Arthur (2021: 123) goes on to say, however, that intellectual virtues require moral virtues, as they provide an emotional dimension to substantiate choices as real, arguing that 'we have to know reality before we can do good' (2021: 123). This aligns with Baehr (2017: 1159) in advocating the significance of the role of intellectual virtue in the formation of young people, 'in such a way that they become willing and able to submit their minds—their thinking, believing, and other cognitive processes—to "the way things are"'. Baehr (2017: 1160) recognises the 'positive moral valence' of intellectual virtue, emphasising its contribution to human flourishing.

Having discussed the relationship between the moral and intellectual virtues within *The Jubilee Centre Framework* from a Christian perspective, this study will now consider the role of civic and performance virtues within a Christian model for character development. In the Framework, civic virtues are defined as 'necessary for engaged, responsible citizenship, contributing to the common good' (2017: 5) and are therefore deeply interconnected with moral virtue. Some of the examples listed in the Framework include civility, citizenship, community awareness and volunteering. Civic virtues seek to develop students' understanding of social responsibility and the importance of service,

which is a fundamental part of Christian mission. The concept of service is integral to the practice of virtue and commitment to social justice; it is faith in action - serving others for societal benefit rather than driven purely by individual interest and materialism in pursuit of the common good. The virtue of solidarity, deeply connected with love and justice, is a commitment to the common good, which is at the heart of the mission of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), reflected in Vatican Council II (1987: n.38):

> When interdependence becomes recognized…the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a 'virtue,' is solidarity…it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.

Booth (2021) highlights an important distinction in an understanding of the terms 'common' and 'good' in relation to Catholic Social Teaching. He argues that there should be a focus on both what is common and what is good and cautions against subjective conceptions of the common good. For Booth, the common good and social justice are intimately connected. In his view, the common good concerns 'the social conditions necessary to bring the world closer to perfection or to bring God's kingdom closer on earth'. This is reticent of the declaration in Mark 1:15 inviting all to share in the redemption of Christ, the ultimate common good: 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!' This reference can be interpreted in relation to the Greek word *eggiken* in the present perfect tense, meaning 'to draw near', emphasising that the Kingdom of God is close; seeking to build God's kingdom here on earth fundamentally contributes to the common good. In the context of this study, the question this raises for schools is how conceptions of the common good are interpreted and translated throughout the curriculum and Catholic life of the school in delivery of the evangelising mission of the Catholic school.

Catholic Social Teaching, originating in 1891 with the encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* from which the principles of CST have derived, is firmly rooted in scripture and focuses on promoting human dignity and advancing social justice. The principles of Catholic

Social Teaching provide 'a moral compass, guiding us to live out our faith in the world' (cafod.org.uk). The extent to which schools promote CST and seek to provide opportunities for pupils to serve the principles of CST, leading to the development of autonomous sought character, is a key area of interest in this research project. A Christian framework for education requires a distinctive Catholic approach to the curriculum as part of its provision for character education, which encompasses and advances social justice. The extent and the ways in which Catholic Social Teaching is integrated into the curriculum for character education will be examined as part of the empirical school case studies in this project.

In addition to the civic virtues, performance virtues (also referred to as 'enabling virtues') are included in *The Jubilee Centre Framework* (2017), such as confidence, determination, motivation, perseverance, resilience and teamwork. Essentially, these are skills or competencies which facilitate the exercise of the other virtues. They are described as 'having an instrumental value in enabling the intellectual, moral and civic virtues' (2017: 5). The purpose and role of performance virtues within a Christian framework for character raises an interesting argument for educationalists. Ostensibly the performance virtues, similar to the intellectual virtues, lack any specific disposition towards the good and questionably, therefore, have no function or direction in developing Christian character. According to Arthur (2021: 124-5), however, these skill-related performance virtues have an ethical dimension where they are employed to serve Christian ends. For the Christian, an intimate relationship with Christ 'manifests itself in love and that the actions of love are the performative consequences of faith' (2021: 126). Arthur seems to offer a redefinition of performance virtues here through a Christian lens, virtues that are motivated by faith and enacted through love, linking them to theological virtues.

Arthur (2021: 116) argues that the virtues included in the *Jubilee Centre Framework*, although based on a secular model, 'can be seen, interpreted and experienced through the lens of Christian beliefs and practices,' emphasising that the virtuous life of the human person must be understood in holistic terms and in totality. For the Christian, in

contrast to secular *telos*, God is the source and summit of a virtuous life, in which Christians are called to a 'perfect holiness', as articulated in *Lumen Gentium* (1964: n.11):

> Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect.

Arthur (2021: 114) emphasises that within a Christian perspective, the virtue of love is integral to human development. 'Without love, the Christian virtues are deficient and lack ordering to their final end in God'. This echoes the words of Pope Benedict (2009), 'Everything has its origins in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it'. Although the *Jubilee Centre Framework* provides a comprehensive secular model for character education, which can be re-interpreted and re-imagined by Christian schools, there is evidently a need for a distinctively Christian character education framework, as Arthur (2021: 114) suggests, 'which will provide principles for reflection, criteria for judgement and directions for action'.

2.7.3 Christian Pedagogy and the See-Judge-Act Methodology

The See-Judge-Act methodology, previously referenced in Chapter Two Part One, was created by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, although originating in Thomas Aquinas' description of the intellectual virtue of prudence. Cardijn introduced a process of seeing, judging and acting in meetings of the Youth Christian Workers (YCW) to encourage people to observe situations, evaluate them based on the Gospels and to act in response to observed injustices. In this way, the See-Judge-Act method provides a Christian hermeneutical and pedagogical approach to character education, based on three distinct stages of observation, discernment and action, in response to the events and challenges of the modern world. In the words of Pope John XXIII (1961: n.236):

> First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgement on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles.

This is more expressed by Pope Francis in his book *Let Us Dream* (2020), where he emphasises the integration of thinking, feeling and doing, reflecting the unity of the human person, 'We have to see clearly, choose well and act right' (2020: 7). In so doing, the character of Christ can be revealed within us and to us, '...in making your choice you reveal your heart' (2020: 1).

The inductive, transformative approach offered by the See-Judge-Act methodology examines the relationship between Christian faith and action, focused on developing skills of discernment and practical wisdom, inspired and illuminated by faith. In reflecting on Luke's Gospel on the story of the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-35), Friel (2019: 9) describes Jesus as 'their living interpretative principle' referring to a 'relationship of ongoing growth and formation'. According to Friel, Jesus invites us to interpret the reality of the modern world through the lens of the Gospel, as expressed by Vatican Council II (1965: n.4): 'The church has the duty in every age of examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel'.

Despite the strong Christian foundation upon which the See-Judge-Act methodology is based in seeking to produce 'agents of change', Friel (2009: 10) raises concern for the absence of this pedagogical approach as an 'established feature of mainstream Catholic education in England', suggesting that this could be partially explained by 'a lack of any central interest in the curriculum of Catholic schools beyond Religious Education'. The challenge, as alluded to by Friel, is the absence of any detailed design of specific curriculum programmes to develop Catholic character in mainstream education. This poses an interesting argument which will be addressed in the subsequent chapter in the context of challenges for Catholic character education. Through empirical methods, this research will investigate if the See-Judge-Act methodology is currently used as part of a Catholic approach to the curriculum in the case study schools, and if so, it will examine the extent to which the approach impacts on the formation of pupils as part of a wider exploration into Catholic character education, including the formation of social

conscience. This study will explore the extent to which Catholic Social Teaching is reflected in the curriculum and examine the opportunities provided by Catholic schools to strengthen Catholic social conscience, foundational in the development of virtue.

2.8 The Centrality of Virtue Literacy

The Jubilee Centre's *Knightly Virtues Programme* (2015), designed for 9–11-year-olds, provides an enriched understanding of the power of narrative in the cultivation of moral knowledge. This research programme involved participation at different stages of the project from more than 5,000 pupils from one hundred schools, fifty-five of these schools (including thirty Catholic and Church of England) and 3,272 pupils (1,517 of which attended a Church school). The stated aim of the programme is to develop the virtue literacy of students in terms of knowledge, understanding and practice of moral character through the use of literature. Virtue literacy incorporates a wide range of virtues, intellectual, moral, civic and performance, as described within *The Jubilee Centre Framework*, which need to be taught, learned and cultivated through habitual practice.

Virtue literacy, as defined by *The Jubilee Centre* authors of the programme, comprises three interrelated components: virtue knowledge, virtue reasoning, and virtue practice (2017: 6-7). Virtue knowledge is concerned with the familiarisation and acquisition of the vocabulary of character and virtue, with awareness that knowledge of virtues will not necessarily affect choices and behaviour. Virtue reasoning involves the practice of discernment, making reasoned choices and judgements and deciding how to act in given situations with an emphasis on critical reflection. This involves the development of practical wisdom or *phronesis*. Virtue practice constitutes the desirable attitudes and behaviours demonstrated through virtuous action. The research suggests that determination of a child's virtue literacy should consider all three components in combination. Worthy of mention here is to acknowledge that the three components of

virtue literacy, as described above, are terms which will be utilised as part of the qualitative research for this study.

Key findings of The Jubilee Centre '*Knightly Virtues: Enhancing Virtue Literacy Through Stories Research Report*' (2015), identified an improvement in the use of virtue knowledge and use of virtue vocabulary in personal contexts as well as a positive impact on behaviour, observable by parents, teachers and the students themselves (2015: 5). Another interesting outcome of the study revealed that children in faith-based schools have statistically significantly higher virtue literacy than students from community schools (2015: 4). This raises the question as to the reasons and rationale for this outcome. As discussed earlier, in the context of the distinctive nature of Catholic schools, the mission of education is directed towards the acquisition of virtue in the likeness of Christ, in order that children can pursue their eternal destiny with God. There is an expectation, or at least an assumption, that this is reflected implicitly, in the ethos and culture of the Catholic school, as well as through more explicitly taught approaches and expressed throughout the totality of school life within Christian tradition and practice. An examination of both implicit and explicit approaches to character will be examined as part of the multiple case study of Catholic primary schools in the UK.

The *Knightly Virtues* research report findings clearly demonstrate that the use of literacy-based programmes provide a rich source of moral exemplars in a range of fictional contexts, which offer a parallelism to the moral secular challenges of the modern world. This facilitates the shaping of pupils' moral imagination and aspiration. The report does, however, highlight the need for schools to facilitate use of the language of virtue and enable pupils to practice virtues in meaningful contexts: 'Schools need to provide opportunities for children to exercise the virtues in practice, as well as encourage a rich discourse of virtue language, understanding and reasoning.' (2015: 9) Carr and Harrison (2015: 6), in exploring the theory supporting the *Knightly Virtues* project, argue that imaginative literature provides an 'indispensable source of insights into human moral

condition', enabling children to develop virtue literacy through observing and examining the choices and actions of characters as exemplars. Pike, Lickona and Nestfield (2015: 71) describe Lewis' Narnia novels as 'an excellent example of literature's ability to illuminate how events are shaped and character is formed by the moral choices we make', which they argue provide a 'universality of core ethical values'. Lewis (1943: 16) asserts 'the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attributes are really true and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of thing we are'. Aligned with Lewis, Lickona (1996: 299) rejects moral relativism and subjectivity, upholding the importance of moral objectivity as part of the underlying philosophy of character education.

2.8.1 Virtue Literacy - Research Perspectives

A range of research has been undertaken both in the UK and internationally to examine models of and provision for character education in secular educational settings which enables analysis of key findings and recommendations. The *Schools of Virtue: Character Education in Three Birmingham Schools Research Report* (2017) focused on a case study of three schools in Birmingham across primary and secondary settings, each of which adopted an intentional approach to character education through caught, taught and sought approaches. The report's recommendations contributed to a revision of the *Jubilee Centre Framework*. Findings highlighted that pupil participants viewed moral rather than performance virtues as most crucial to character development. Outcomes also emphasised that virtue literacy needs to be developed as part of an explicit curriculum, with an emphasis on encouraging the intellectual virtue of critical thinking, facilitated through embedding pupil reflection in order to develop practical wisdom through virtue reasoning and promote autonomous sought character: 'The delivery of character education provision should aim to enable pupils to demonstrate practical wisdom and seek opportunities to act virtuously' (2017: 5). Worthy of note is the fact that opportunities for the development of sought character were more explicit in secondary school settings. Notably, the consistency between 'vision and action'

reinforced pupils' engagement with character education, where staff recognised themselves as role models. Within character caught approaches, conscious modelling of high quality relationships across the school community, also highlighted in research by Arthur, 2010: 2), was regarded as foundational in the development of pupils' character, including partnership with parents. The significance of the family as primary educators in the cultivation of virtue is also emphasised in the Character Education Partnership's *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education* (2007), now known as character.org. Character education ultimately has a social context; it is developed within communities - primarily the family, supported by the school. For Hauerwas (1981: 116), 'the development of character takes place in the context of community shaped by a narrative'. The *Schools of Virtue* report highlights the significance of positive dialogue with parents to encourage engagement in character education. The seminal role of the family in the nurture of character is also emphasised in the *Character Education in UK Schools Research Report* (2015). As part of this research project, the case studies will explore how schools develop effective partnerships with parents to promote the development of character.

Key research conducted by Berowitz and Bier (2006), published in a report *What Works in Character Education: A Research-Driven Guide for Educators* (WWCE), represents an attempt to synthesise existing scientific research on character education in order to reach practical conclusions for the benefit of educational practitioners. The report identifies thirty-three school-based K-12 programmes in the United States, as well as numerous intervention strategies, which according to Berowitz and Bier, scientifically demonstrate effectiveness. However, worthy of note here is the limited explanation of research methodology and methods employed for undertaking such programme evaluations.

Berowitz and Bier's research domain included a broad definition of character education, which included various initiatives such as social and emotional learning, service learning and drug and alcohol prevention, and citizenship education. They found that regardless

of the type of enterprise, the outcomes were notably similar. Of the 33 programmes, 27 involved some form of social-emotional curriculum. These included social skills and awareness; self-management and self-awareness; problem solving and decision making. This resonates with earlier discussion in this study related to holistic approaches to character education as part of Catholic school distinctiveness. All programmes in Berowitz and Bier's research addressed some aspect of character development – 18 of which were 'grounded in core/universal values or explicitly targeted the moral/ethical development of students' (2006: 5). However, Berowitz and Bier express concern regarding the limitation of some programmes in measuring only a narrow range of outcomes. Similarly, in the context of this study, this project acknowledges that there are a range of character education programmes in existence, but as there is no scientific research into their effectiveness, this review has focused on models which are supported by and have been developed from research.

Worthy of note is the fact that 14 of the 33 programmes in the study, integrated character education into some aspect of the core academic curriculum. Significantly, the research identified eight pedagogical elements which were prevalent in at least half of the programmes: professional development for implementation; interactive teaching strategies; direct teaching strategies; family and community participation, as well as modelling and mentoring (2006: 6). Other pedagogical strategies used by less than half of the effective programmes included classroom or behaviour management strategies, whole school strategies such as individual or team leadership and community service and service learning. In their research report, Berowitz and Bier provide a broad view of what constitutes character education. For Arthur (2014: 54), however, their examination of empirical research does not provide a distinctive account of the content or teaching methods of character education which would resonate with teachers to reflect their objectives, purposes or practices in character education endeavours.

Berowitz and Bier (2006: 22,23) acknowledge that they are unable to draw conclusions about whether a set of 'character words', such as virtues, is effective as a strategy for character education. However, they conclude that the modelling of character through behaviours is a significant factor in developing the trust of students in their perception of integrity:

> Without modelling and fostering corresponding behaviours in the school or classroom is not only insufficient to produce character development in students, but may indeed breed cynicism in the students, who perceive a lack of integrity between the words and the culture of the school as they experience it from day to day and moment to moment.

The notion of students' 'perception of integrity' is fundamental to building and maintaining relationships of trust and mutual respect. Character must be modelled, which reflects a sacramental vision in the context of Catholic distinctiveness.

The outcomes in Berowitz and Bier's research reiterate and further demonstrate the emergence of key themes and concepts in this study, especially the seminal significance of modelling behaviours in the development of character, as well the importance of implicit and explicit approaches (both caught and taught), with opportunities for virtue practice through, for example, service and volunteering (sought character). These themes will form part of the discussion in a more detailed exploration in the subsequent chapter.

2.8.2 Virtue Literacy and the Use of Narrative

As discussed earlier in this review, in *After Virtue* (1981), MacIntyre advocates the role of imaginative stories in moral learning. He argues that the life of the human person is deeply contextualised within narrative, therefore to respond to the question: 'What am I to do [with my life]?', we need to first answer the question: 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' (1981: 216). MacIntyre's argument is essentially that the unity of

our moral lives is intelligible only within a model of narrative construction and interpreted in terms of narrative traditions (MacIntyre, 1985: 204-25). He argues that it is not possible to understand or explain human identity and purpose without the perception of ourselves as agents with purposes and choices, akin to characters in a story. This is articulated by Nucci and Powers (2014: 131):

> The academic curriculum contains many instances in the context of literacy and social studies of stories or events that replicate or reinforce social and moral values that students may be addressing in everyday experiences.

Using quality narrative exemplars of virtue, both in excess and deficiency, can enhance pupils' self-knowledge and practical wisdom. The lens through which they interpret the fictional world of narrative facilitates introspection and, at a deeper level, a search for meaning, purpose and truth in their own lives. This is expressed in the *Knightly Virtues Research Report* (2015: 9): 'Narratives provide the logical form or contours of human self-understanding'.

These positive outcomes relating to the use of literature for character education are endorsed by more recent research by The Jubilee Centre which involved the development of *The Narnian Virtues Project* (2019), based on the work of C. S. Lewis. The project designed a literacy-based character cross-phase programme for 10–14-year-olds. This international character project involved 2,000 children in 57 schools across eight countries, including England, the United States, Ireland, the Netherlands, Cambodia, Turkey and Mexico. The novels studied focus on six universal virtues: wisdom, love, integrity, fortitude, self-control and justice, which it is argued, 'offer common ethical ground to the schools of increasingly pluralistic societies' (The Jubilee Centre, *Narnia Virtues: A Character Education English Curriculum*, 2019). The project investigates how students understand, acquire and practice the virtues through their engagement with the *Narnian Virtues* curriculum, based on three Narnia novels: '*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe', 'Prince Caspian'* and '*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader'.* A key feature of

the project was establishing partnerships with parents, inviting children to reflect on their moral development in discussion with their families using the *Virtue Improvement Plan* (V.I.P) to generate a 'personal virtue target', as well as a character passport workbook for home activities.

The *Narnian Virtues Programme* research evidence demonstrates that the programme developed students' knowledge and application of virtue language, improving their virtue literacy. The report advocated that primary schools should 'reflect critically on their curriculum to identify opportunities to teach character and virtues through existing subjects, particularly through the use of literature, such as classic stories' (2019: 21). Schools should encourage the involvement of parents in promoting virtue development and recommend the use of journaling to support critical self-reflection and the practice of virtue. The importance of pupil reflection, both 'reasoned and retrospective', using journaling and other forms of reflection such as debate, discussion and philosophical enquiry, was a key finding in the research report, *My Character - Enhancing Future Mindedness in Young People: A Feasibility Study* (2014: 9), which aimed to develop a better understanding of how interventions designed to develop character might enhance moral formation and future mindedness in young people.

The report on the *Narnian Virtues Programme* also highlighted the need for further research into the correlation between virtue literacy and behavioural application or virtue practice. This is also highlighted as a key recommendation in the research report, *Character Education in UK Schools 2015*, which involved 68 schools, 255 teachers and 10,000 students in schools throughout the UK: 'Students need help moving from motives of self-interest towards moral orientations concerned with others' (2015: 6). This is a salient point which relates directly to the promotion of taught and sought character. It raises an interesting question regarding precisely how the 'moral orientations' of pupils can be directed and shaped altruistically to go beyond themselves in the service of others. Within the context of Catholic character education, this requires knowledge,

understanding and application of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, taught as part of a distinctive and integrated Catholic approach to the curriculum. As part of the case studies, this research project will examine the methods and the extent to which character education can empower pupils to serve the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

2.8.3 Catholic Character Education

There is some commonality with the programmes previously outlined, in the themes identified in research conducted by Devanny (2018) *Catholic Character Education - Growing in the virtues and celebrating human flourishing: A Research Report,* which presents the main findings of a study that explored how character education is understood and taught in Catholic schools, exploring the impact of virtue literacy. Devanny includes the *Narnian Virtues Programme*, in its earlier phase, as part of his empirical research. The scope of the study involved six case study schools, which included semi-structured interviews and surveys with pupils, lead teachers or school leaders. The purpose of the study was based on three main research interests involving the role of school leaders in Catholic schools in their understanding of educating pupils in the virtues, explicit approaches to character education, and the development of virtue literacy (2018: 14). The research outcomes demonstrate that school *ethos* is the single most significant feature that impacts upon character education, 'characterised by a unity of purpose, high quality relationships and an emphasis on service to the community' (2018: 4). Lydon (2023: 4.5) defines ethos as 'the intellectual web or network of ideas...the foundation upon which relationships of trust can be established within an organisation.' This highlights that the true impact and value of school ethos and moral commitment is realised when it is translated into practice, evidenced in ethical behaviours and relationships.

Within the majority of schools, character education was found to be implicit (*character caught)* rather than explicit (*character taught*). In addition, there was a reliance on the language of Gospel values, rather than virtues to shape ethos (see Chapter Two, Part Two), without the explicit teaching of virtue 'in an explicit and systematic way' (Devanny, 2018: 13). According to Devanny, this impacted on the development of the virtue literacy of pupils. Stock (2012), however, refers to a subjective and relative interpretation of the term *values*, drawing upon the work of Nietzsche (1844-1900). Stock presents the view that values are given their objective expression through the Beatitudes, as they are given by Christ himself: 'Gospel values cannot therefore be values chosen subjectively from the vast corpus of the Old and New Testaments but are objective values revealed to us through Christ's proclamation' (2012: 15-16). It is interesting to note that the language of virtue is used explicitly in the *Catholic School Inspections Handbook* (2022: 9):

> Pupils understand that the school community is committed to following the teaching and example of Jesus as expressed in the Gospels, In the social teaching of the Church and in the school's own particular charism. As a result, pupils seek opportunities to grow in virtue.

Devanny (2018: 13) argues that the language of values is insufficient in that values are not 'reducible to actions' and are therefore distinct from virtues, defining the latter as 'dispositions formed by actions'. He makes a clear distinction between the terms, emphasising that the term *virtue* relates to the enactment of values, the habitual practice of good:

> The good thing is not just something to profess, but something to be put into practice: we become what we do. So, in one sense we can say, Gospel values are enacted through the virtues.

In addition to a lack of explicit teaching of virtue, Devanny's research report identified the need for more explicit opportunities within the curriculum for critical reflection in order to develop pupils' virtue reasoning. Also worthy of note is the fact that school

leaders and pupils regarded the theological and moral virtues, rather than performance virtues (except resilience), as most important to their character development and did not perceive the intellectual virtues as an important contributor to moral growth. The report identified that Catholic schools gave emphasis to the teaching of civic virtues and understood their role as a service to both the Church and to society (2018: 5).

In summary, as a result of the research findings, several recommendations were made to schools highlighting the importance of developing the virtue literacy of pupils. The report highlighted the need to create a shared vision and language of the virtues as part of its mission, including an understanding of practical wisdom, through regular and deep critical reflection on the meaning and application of the virtues, throughout the curriculum and in the totality of Catholic school life. The report also highlighted the value of biblical texts and other sources of literature, including children's classics to support character development. Another area of recommendation highlighted in Devanny's research report on Catholic character education focuses on encouraging schools to engage in self-evaluation of their provision, using the Jubilee Centre publication, *Character Education: Evaluation Handbook for Schools* (Harrison, Arthur and Burns, 2016). The Evaluation Handbook, based on an Aristotelian theory of ethics, focuses on the intellectual, moral, civic and performance virtues, and although some of the core principles and concepts are transferable to other settings, it would be necessary to be further adapted for Catholic schools to incorporate the theological virtues and contextualise the framework within a Christian *telos.* The concept of evaluation of character education will be examined in relation to both its limitations and opportunities in the next chapter, which focuses on contemporary challenges for character education.

The recommendations in Devanny's report provide a substantial basis and rationale for the qualitative data collection in this study, particularly in relation to the development of virtue literacy, virtue reasoning and virtue practice. These components of character are key areas of research interest in this study, as outlined earlier in Chapter One (see section 1.5).

2.8.4 Character Education and Modelling in a School Context

The concept of modelling, both by teachers and within the family, is a prevalent and recurring theme in this research, examined earlier in Chapter Two (see section 2.5). The synergy between the school and the family as primary educators in the development of character will form a key part of the empirical case studies in the project. Arthur (2021) highlights the importance of teacher modelling as an instrumental part of Christian pedagogy. He correlates the moral growth of students as concomitant with the teacher's display of virtues: 'Teaching is an ethical and virtue driven practice which depends on the excellence of the teacher's character' (2021: 99). American psychologist, Kohlberg's theory of moral development (1981), focusing on how children develop morality and moral reasoning within six stages of development, has been influential in the field of moral psychology. Kohlberg's work, however, has been subject to criticism in its suggestion that moral reasoning is equated with equal moral behaviour. Kohlberg's theory is concerned with moral thinking, but there is a clear distinction between the knowledge and understanding of virtue and how this is translated into practice; it cannot be assumed, therefore, that moral reasoning inevitably leads to moral behaviour.

In the view of Carr (1991, 1999), the work of Kohlberg relied upon developing children's rational capacities without providing them with a model of morality and a pathway to navigate this. Carr (1999) advocated that there are normative moral virtues and aspirations that teachers can encourage and cultivate, such as the virtues of courage, temperance, honesty and compassion. Gilligan (2016) also challenged Kohlberg's theory in relation to the suggestion that moral logic is primarily focused on seeking and maintaining justice when making moral decisions, without acknowledging the inter-relational nature of the virtues. In Gilligan's view, Kohlberg fails to address the ethics of moral reasoning, such as love and compassion, as expressed by Kakkori & Huttunen (2010: 18):

> Gilligan states that Kohlberg's construction of the highest stage of morality as reflective understanding of what is right is one-sided, because it does not leave room for care and human relationships, which are essential parts of the morals of maturity.

In providing a model of virtuous behaviour for children to aspire to and emulate, both at school and most significantly within the family, where the virtues are demonstrated, facilitates growth in, and practice of, the virtues in the lives of students, in their motivation, as well in their behaviours and relationships.

The relationship between the educator and the student is of paramount significance in the nurture of virtue, highlighted here in the words of Tigner (2000: 18):

> The teacher-student relationship is a moral one between persons, and explicit recognition of this simple fact lies the beginning of any instructor's aspiring to help students in their quest to live flourishing lives. In recognizing their stature as persons, and in modelling worthy aims and aspirations, lie the foundations for a teacher helping students raise up virtue from within themselves.

In the view of Sanderse (2013: 29), educating for character 'has less to do with explicit moral didactics...moral education does not equal 'teaching morality', but being a ''moral teacher'', which means extending everyday morality into the nuances of teaching'. Sanderse makes a salient point here which will be addressed as part of the case studies in this research, about the value and impact of the explicit teaching of character and how morality can be translated into practice within educational experience by the 'moral teacher'. The research outcomes have clearly emphasised the pivotal role of the teacher in cultivating the morality of pupils. It should be acknowledged, however, that this provides a strong case for the need for teacher training in moral education, both initial and continuing professional development, which is a key recommendation identified in the research report, *Character Education in UK Schools* (2015). This issue will be given further discussion in the subsequent chapter relating to contemporary challenges. Research suggests that some teachers feel ill-equipped to be effective in this role,

particularly regarding conversations regarding 'morality' (Birdwell, Scott and Reynolds, 2015: 65-66). This suggests a need to reshape both initial teacher education and continuing professional development to enable teachers to reflect on their own beliefs and their impact on their teaching practices and relationships with students.

This study has discussed that the Christian telos is directed towards God. The development of 'good character' is a response to God's overwhelming love both for the world and for each other. The Church's vision for education is that schools provide a model of God's unbounded, self-giving love. However, if teachers are to model God's love, as far as possible, they too need to experience and share in this love through their relationships and practices within the school community and tradition, as well as in teacher education and professional development. By logical extension, teachers who feel valued and nurtured will themselves be better equipped to value and nurture others.

Modelling of virtues is a fundamental contributory feature to character formation, discussed earlier in this review with reference to the seminal work of Aquinas on the role of the teacher. For Aquinas, God is the central aim of all teaching and learning and the acquisition of wisdom is the true goal of education, ultimately leading to beatitude. For Aquinas, teaching is vocational, a divine calling to serve humanity in which the role of the teacher is as a facilitator, accompanying the student in the search for truth and wisdom. Aquinas believed that good teaching involved guiding the imagination of the student to assist in the intellectual process of learning enhanced through reflection and questioning (*De Veritate*, q.11) so that truth is revealed to the student, whilst growing closer to knowing God. This process facilitates a journey of self-discovery and moral agency, exploring their vision of what constitutes authentic human happiness and how this can be achieved. It could be argued that the structure of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* provides a pedagogical example of this process. This research project will include an exploration of opportunities for self-discovery through the promotion of sought character, designed to build the autonomy, intrinsic motivation and aspiration of pupils in their pursuit of moral growth.

The *Jesuit Pupil Profile*, introduced in Jesuit schools in 2013, is another version of a framework for character education used in many Catholic schools. In seeking to define and articulate aspirations for children and young people, the *Jesuit Pupil Profile* (JPP) was designed to express a universal vision of a virtuous life, irrespective of religious belief or cultural background, rooted in the Gospel and inspired by the spiritual tradition of St. Ignatius. The JPP is composed of a set of virtues which offer a vision of education and formation, of 'living and learning': 'It is intended to offer a very practical model for forming and educating young people who grow to be more truly human, more fully alive, men and women for others for the greater glory of God and the common good' (JPP, 2017: 3). It is interesting to note that there is currently an absence of academic research on the impact or effectiveness of the *Jesuit Pupil Profile* in schools so this project is unable to provide an analytical commentary on this particular framework, although this would be a useful endeavour as a focus for future research.

2.8.5 Conclusion

As a result of exploring a range of research undertaken into character education in schools, this review acknowledges that although there is no single exhaustive, prescriptive or generic list of 'effective' character education provision, there are, however, clearly several distinctive, recurring themes and concepts suggested by the research outcomes. It is interesting to note that many of the outcomes explored in this chapter are reflected in, and resonate closely with, the essential elements of effective character provision developed by Lickona, Schaps & Lewis (2007) and now articulated in *A Framework for School Success: Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education*, adopted by the Character Education Partnership (CEP, 2007), now known as https://www.character.org. This framework provides guiding principles for educationalists, which the CEP suggest could be used to support planning and evaluation of character in schools:

1. The school community promotes core ethical and performance values as the foundation of good character.
2. The school defines character comprehensively to include thinking, feeling and doing.
3. The school uses a comprehensive, intentional and proactive approach to character development.
4. The school creates a caring community.
5. The school provides students with opportunities for moral action.
6. The school offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed.
7. The school fosters students' self-motivation.
8. The school staff is an ethical learning community that shares responsibility for character education and adheres to the same responsibility for character education and adheres to the same core values that guide the students.
9. The school fosters shared leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative.
10. The school engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.
11. The school regularly assesses its culture and climate, the functioning of its staff as character educators, and the extent to which its students manifest good character.

In evaluating these research outcomes, it is important to acknowledge here that every school needs to design and develop its own unique vision for character education and adopt an approach which is distinctive to their school, whether secular or Christian. This project makes no assumption that a 'blueprint' for character education can or should be applied identically and universally to schools. There can, however, be a commonality of approach, reflecting the key principles outlined here. Seider (2012: 220-222), however, cautions that the 'copying and pasting' of character education programmes within an existing school culture is unlikely to be effective. He argues that a character education

programme which is judged as successful in one school, does not imply that another school will necessarily have the same outcomes. Each school should envision a model which is responsive to the specific needs, context and characteristics of its own setting, utilising and adapting aspects of a range of approaches, programmes and frameworks which support this. Character education is a multi-faceted concept which encompasses a range of disciplines including philosophy, psychology, and education, including social and emotional learning. This demonstrates the breath of character education and the range of lenses through which it can be viewed. Berkowitz (2012) described character education as a 'semantic minefield', due to its overlapping terminology. Character education must, therefore, be given broad interpretation and not be conceptualised as a discrete subject. Instead, it should be recognised as embedded within a range of institutional cultures (Arthur et al., 2017: 10).

The concept of evaluation of character education is a complex and contentious area which will be explored within the parameters of this study in the subsequent chapter in relation to contemporary challenges. Several of the themes set out in this framework, as well as the outcomes already discussed as part of this review, will be examined in further detail as part of the empirical research later in the study, with a view to developing a distinctively Christian framework for character education in primary schools.

Finally, the research explored in this chapter provides a summary of key findings in relation to a range of ways in which character education is delivered in schools, which may include the use of frameworks, programmes and/or a range of approaches and pedagogical devices. It identifies a commonality in many of the themes which have emerged. The project acknowledges, however, that the studies explored here present a sample of the educational endeavours by schools in their provision for moral development of students, which have a scientific research base. For the purposes of this project, the outcomes of the research serve to demonstrate the rationale for this empirical case study, raising questions and issues which require further examination as

part of the data collection. The outcomes also highlight some of the key challenges facing contemporary character education which will be discussed in the subsequent chapter. This discussion will be structured in the context of the three research questions which form the basis of enquiry in this research project:

- How can Catholic primary schools promote virtue literacy?
- How can Catholic character education develop the practical wisdom of the scholar?
- How can Catholic character education empower the scholar in the practice of virtue to serve the principles of Catholic Social Teaching?

Part Four: Contemporary Challenges for Catholic Character Education

2.9 Introduction - The Contested Nature of Formation

The formation of character has historically always been the fundamentally inherent and altruistic aspiration of education. The field of character education within a contemporary context, however, whilst offering rich opportunities for a deeper understanding of the human person, as well as how morality can be nurtured and practised with the potential to impact the common good, there are a range of opposing positions on educational endeavours and approaches to character development which affect how character education is viewed, interpreted and translated into practice in schools. According to Arthur (2014: 43), traditional educational approaches to character invoking Aristotelian ethics emphasise the role of 'habit, imitation, modelling, instruction', which some have interpreted as teacher-centred and 'overtly coercive' (Arthur, 2014: 58). This is in contrast to progressive child-centred approaches to character, based on moral developmental research, which are characterised by a belief in the child's developing ability to regulate their moral behaviour under the 'explicit guidance of rational deliberation'. (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005: 141). Some would argue, however, that morality cannot be reduced purely to the rational powers on the basis that this view does not 'capture the full complexities of human character', claiming that moral action involves

the affective qualities of feelings and emotions (Nucci, 2001: 122). For Aristotle, moral virtue is innate and requires habitual practice involving both rationality and intentionality, but most crucially also requires a cognitive function, a capacity for decision making in moral choices. However, Aristotle recognises a dissonance in the human person between knowing the good and the disposition to implement it. Similarly, Aquinas also emphasised the innate ability of reason within the human person, building on this from a Christian perspective. As Arthur describes (2014: 45), Aquinas insisted upon the relation between reason and faith which mutually sustain one another (S.T. 1a, 2ae. 94. 2). For Arthur, Christianity does not view character education as an end in itself - it requires both reason and revelation: 'It is based on a teleological concept of the good life that is contained in Christian revelation and tradition.' (2014: 45) Arthur goes on to state that Christian approaches to character are often abstract, providing a lack of specific guidance to teachers about the pedagogical practices of character formation (2014: 45). This raises a key point of interest within this research study in relation to the issue of Christian pedagogy on character education in Catholic schools, which will be subsequently explored in this chapter.

It is important to understand 'character education' as a broad term which is a multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary endeavour, inviting much discordance in debate and discussion, provoked by different ideologies and philosophies of education. Kristjánsson (2013: 282) argues that the lack of a commonality of language in the field of character education is due to the fact that meaning is attributed by different people according to their varying geographical, historical and social contexts. According to Leming (1993: 35), this diversity in academic opinion is detrimental to the effective development of character education, referring to the current research field as 'disparate bits and pieces'. In response to such conflicting views, Lockwood (1997: 179) provides a tentative definition of character: 'to shape directly and systematically the behaviour of young people by influencing explicitly the non-relativistic values believed directly to bring out their behaviour'. Arthur (2014: 53) expands upon this definition to include formation as

an integral aspect to character development, a term, he states, which is not to be understood in a passive sense, but rather as the individual's 'active and conscious participation' in their own formation.

Arguably, one of the most pertinent challenges for character education in a contemporary context is the pluralistic, heterogeneous nature of modern society itself, within which a lack of consensus exists in terms of what constitutes morality. Aligned with this view is the notion of 'social causation' which it can be argued replaces belief in personal responsibility for moral character (Arthur, 2014: 51). Arthur (2005: 249) states that due to a rise in moral relativism, 'children are exposed to all kinds of opinions about right and wrong.' Consequently, such divergent perspectives on morality have led to great variation in the range of educational models employed by community schools, choosing to utilise either implicit or explicit approaches for character development, but with concern that subscribing to any particular set of values or any content-based moral education is 'deeply problematic in a pluralistic society' (Arthur, 2005: 54). As Lydon (2020: 9) notes, relativism has represented a feature of morality and ethics since Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), who emphasised the importance of freedom of choice. Their thought was influenced by a general move in the 20th century for people to have greater freedom to think autonomously. It was popularised in the 1960's by Joseph Fletcher (1906-1991). It could be argued that a plurality of positions on character education can co-exist concomitantly without consensus and this can be viewed positively as an opportunity for schools to explore models, pedagogy and practice which are effective within their own specific setting. However, the persistent challenge for schools is the concept of 'fluid morality' within modern sociocultural society, and therefore how it can be defined, characterised, taught and modelled using any form of an agreed shared language or set of rules.

For the Catholic school, however, a countercultural approach to moral education is distinctively and purposefully directed towards the Christian *telos* (end goal) of

evangelisation and transformation leading to beatific perfection. For Lickona (1994: 329), 'Traditional religion tells us who we are, why we're here, and where we're going.' However, synonymous with secular educational settings, there appears to be a lack of consistency in the view and vision of what constitutes how schools, both of a religious character and community, specifically approach and deliver character education to enable students to attain their *telos*. In the context of Catholic schools, this raises wider and more pertinent questions for character education - to what extent does faith support character? To what extent does character support faith? These questions will be explored further as part of the empirical research in this study. Arthur (2021: 97) argues that secular education promotes a form of reason without faith and a formation without religion. The challenge for Catholic schools is to ensure that faith is the nucleus of all educational endeavour, and as Arthur cautions, 'rather than attempt to constrain their faith by compromising with secularism' (2021: 97). Secular frameworks offer egalitarianism and inclusivity which have appeal in the context of the modern educational climate. This presents some degree of risk, however, that education could become independent of theology and through a 'secularisation of consciousness' lead to 'denial of the transcendent' (Arthur 2021: 5). In addressing the issue of secularisation, Arthur (2021: 98) presents the case for an 'explicit Christian theology that guides pedagogy helping us to know the good and the virtues that enable aspiration to them.'

This study seeks to explore what constitutes how Christian pedagogy guides and cultivates the development of character in Catholic schools. Boland (2012: 134) poses a key challenge for Catholic schools, 'How can a synthesis of culture and faith, faith and life be developed in Catholic schools?'. This pertinent question can be addressed, to some extent, within the remit and parameters of this study, through an exploration of how Catholic schools contribute to the formation of pupils through character education, but it also raises further questions for Christian education which require broader and deeper examination: To what extent is there a separation or a synthesis of culture and faith, faith and life in Catholic schools? What factors might contribute to this? What are

the distinctive characteristics of such a synthesis so that it is visible and identifiable in Catholic schools? What are the outcomes and impact on pupils? These questions could form the basis of, or be included in, further academic research in terms of specifically how schools determine this synthesis of culture and faith, faith and life, and how it is translated into practice as part of the integrity of their Catholic school distinctiveness and mission.

As this review of literature has demonstrated in the previous chapter, existing research which has been conducted on provision for character education, both in the UK and America, although presenting a limited scope and sample of the educational endeavours in schools, the outcomes serve to highlight common themes worthy of further exploration, which present challenges for contemporary character education in Catholic schools. In examining these challenges, this chapter will be structured in the context of the three key research questions, cited earlier, which underpin the aims and purpose of this research project, relating to the development of virtue literacy, practical wisdom and virtue practice. In addition to this, the chapter will also consider the role of evaluating provision for character education and explore how this presents a challenge for Catholic schools in the current educational climate.

2.9.1 How Can Catholic Primary Schools Promote Virtue Literacy?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the *Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools,* as part of a Neo-Aristotelian model of moral development, defines virtue literacy within three components: virtue knowledge and understanding, virtue reasoning and virtue practice which involve three domains of character: caught, taught and sought (2017: 6-7). One of key findings in the research report *Catholic Character Education* (Devanny, 2018: 4) highlighted a reliance on implicit (caught) approaches to character in the majority of schools, emphasising the importance of implementing an explicit (taught) curriculum in order to develop virtue literacy. Arthur (2014: 57),

however, argues that 'greater critical attention is needed to the kinds of educative influence that ethos might have in relation to moral character'. He points to the fact that some believe indirect methods of teaching character are more beneficial than traditional curricular based approaches. The report by Devanny (2018) recognised the significance of culture and ethos of the school in the development of character but cautioned against an over-reliance on implicit approaches without the integration of taught and sought aspects of character. This study argues for such an integration of caught, taught and sought approaches to character, which will be an integral part of the empirical case studies in this project.

The development of virtue literacy presents a range of potential challenges for Catholic primary schools in their endeavour to implement and embed character education. Although this chapter focuses on an examination of some of these challenges, it is important to recognise the rich opportunities offered by character education, set within a distinctive Catholic vision and ethos, as well as through an explicit Catholic approach to the curriculum, driven by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. The opportunities offered by Catholic character education will be explored later in this research project in response to the outcomes of the multiple case studies. As part of an examination of key areas of challenge to virtue literacy in Catholic schools, this review will begin with an exploration of mission integrity in relation to Catholic distinctiveness and the pedagogy of Catholic character education.

2.9.1.1 Mission Integrity

According to Grace (2016: 153), the fundamental purpose of Catholic school mission statements is to 'constitute a principled and comprehensive articulation of what a school claims to be its distinctive educational, social and moral purposes.' Within the context of this study, the term 'mission integrity' can be defined and understood as 'fidelity in practice… to the distinctive and authentic principles of a Catholic education' (2016: 194).

For Groome (1996: 107), the distinctive principles of Catholic education relate to the distinctive characteristics of Catholicism itself: 'Catholic schools must …give people ready and persuasive access to the legacy of scripture and tradition, which are the mediating symbols of the Christian faith' (2014: 119). These 'mediating symbols' represent the heart of the Catholic life of the school and should be reflected in the ethos and culture, as well as throughout the curriculum, which are characteristic of this distinctivity. However, in seeking to enact their mission statement, schools are presented with a myriad of challenges in relation to maintaining Catholic distinctiveness.

As cited earlier in this chapter, the pluralistic nature of contemporary society, in which individualism is prioritised over the common good, presents one of the greatest challenges for modern Catholic education. This is expressed with a tone of sombre pessimism in the conciliar document, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997a: n.1):

> First and foremost, we have a crisis of values…of subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism. The extreme pluralism pervading contemporary society leads to behaviour patterns which…undermine any feeling of community identity…We witness a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. To this we must add… a growing marginalisation of the Christian faith as a reference point and a source of light.

Grace (2016: 196) cautions that the responsibility for the preservation of mission integrity has become increasingly demanding for Catholic schools. In the midst of challenges around performativity, it is interesting to note that character education is a key theme which emerged from the *Ofsted Education Inspection Framework* (EIF) (2019), as well as its emphasis on a broad and balanced, knowledge-rich curriculum which delivers cultural capital: 'The curriculum extends beyond the academic, technical or vocational. It provides for learners' broader development, enabling them to develop and discover their interests and talents' (2019: 9). It could be argued that the Framework appears to relegate the significance of academic data and to encourage questioning of

the purpose and usefulness of internal pupil data. In relation to the category of curriculum impact, the focus does not appear to be solely on data: 'Learners develop detailed knowledge and skills across the curriculum and, as a result, achieve well' (Ofsted EIF, 2019: 9). The Framework also outlines that schools should focus on allowing learners 'to go on to destinations that meet their interests, aspirations and the intention of their course of study' (2019: 9). Similarly, according to the *Ofsted School Inspection Handbook Guidance* (2019: n.25), in relation to 'Personal Development', inspection involves making judgements across all schools dependent on 'how well leaders develop pupils' character through the education that they provide'. There is explicit reference to the development of pupils' character, defined as:

> ...a set of positive traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others. This gives pupils the qualities they need to flourish in our society.

This points to a clear expectation for an intentional, explicit curriculum and provision for character education. The recent publication of *The Religious Education Directory* (2024), with full implementation planned in Catholic educational settings in 2025, makes explicit reference to the integral mission of formation in the virtues: 'Fidelity to its mission requires a Catholic school, and the religious education it provides, to form its pupils in the virtues that will foster their life in Christ and assist them to serve the Church and society' (Stock, 2023). This translates with a similar emphasis, articulated in the *Catholic School Inspection Handbook* (2024: 13) *Grade Descriptors* in relation to the extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school:

> Pupils have a clear understanding that the school community is committed to following the teaching and example of Jesus as expressed in the Gospels, the social teaching of the Church and the school's own particular charism. As a result, pupils flourish as they seek opportunities to grow in virtue. They gladly embrace their personal responsibility to care for our common home, pursue the common good and serve those in need.

There is clearly an emphasis on the role and responsibility of Catholic schools to consider and evaluate their vision and provision for character development and how this incorporates the fundamental pursuit of social justice through Catholic Social Teaching. It also invites schools to reflect upon the extent to which the integrity of the school's unique charism is interpreted and preserved. Does the school uphold the integrity of its mission statement and if so, how? Is there an explicit planned curriculum for character? How is Catholic character developed across the curriculum and in the totality of school life? How is it modelled as an integral part of Catholic pedagogy? These key questions will be explored as part of the empirical studies in this research. In the view of Grace (2016: 154, 144-5), schools need to maintain a balance between Catholic school distinctiveness and school effectiveness, highlighting a tension between the common good and pursuit of individual interest. Concomitantly, Garcia-Huidobro (2017: 67) argues that Catholic schools' distinctiveness is undermined by secularisation, 'with far reaching consequences for both religious practice and social justice commitments.' He goes on to suggest an explanation for these circumstances could be the result of a 'disconnection between philosophers and theologians' reflecting about individualism, solidarity, and faith and educational debates' (2017: 67). For Garcia-Huidobro, in order to reach and reconnect to schools effectively, both theological and social theories need to operate cooperatively and coherently. Arguably, the direction of emphasis towards character in the Ofsted Framework (2019) presents, or even provokes, a redefinition of what constitutes academic success, or at the very least, recognition of the fact that the notion of 'success' is open to various interpretation.

Lydon (2019: 21) develops this argument further in proposing that academic standards should not be denigrated or viewed in opposition to holistic approaches to education, but rather should be understood as serving to support and promote the fundamental dignity of the human person. This integral right to an education which responds to the needs of the whole human person is expressed in *Lay Catholics in Schools* (1982: 18):

> In today's pluralistic world, the Catholic educator must consciously inspire his or her activity with the Christian concept of the human person…It is a concept which includes defence of human rights, but also attributes to the human person the dignity of a child of God.

Among the challenges facing the modern generation of young people is a crisis of disinterest and indifference to the beliefs and practices of the Catholic faith, where the search for a deeper meaning and purpose in life leading to a Christian telos is somewhat relegated, even neglected. This is articulated in *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988: n.10) as a 'radical instability', in which young people are experiencing a sense of disconnection from truly human relationships, expressed as a 'sign of the poverty of human relationships in families and in society today' (1988: n.11). Similarly, this is acknowledged in *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997a: 15) which highlights the role of Catholic schools in meeting the needs of those in emotional, material and spiritual poverty: 'To these new poor, the Catholic school now turns in a spirit of love.' For Catholic schools, this highlights a complex balance between the authentic ambition of school effectiveness and the fulfilment of the pastoral mission of the Church.

According to McKinney (2018: 97), one of the fundamental challenges for Catholic schools is in their calling to respond to the consequences of material and emotional poverty, as well as 'poverty in the faith' in an increasingly secularised society. As Buck (2020: 3) notes, these are forms of poverty 'whose origins exist outside the boundary' of the Catholic school. For Thomas Aquinas, the role of the family as the first educators of their child is of seminal significance. Aquinas refers to the innate bond between parent and child, before the child has its own capacity to exercise reason, '...before it has the use of its free-will, it is enfolded in the care of its parents, which is like a spiritual womb' (S.T. II.II, q.10, a.12). Aquinas' reference to the 'spiritual womb' provides a vivid metaphor for this intimate parent-child bond, highlighting the inherent duty and responsibility of parents to nurture the spiritual growth of their child. Several conciliar

documents make explicit reference to the role of parents in the Christian formation of their child, articulated here in *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965: 3):

> Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs.

Key empirical research undertaken by Bryk *et al*. (1993) in Catholic high schools in America identified a tension or dichotomy between the discourse of mission and the realisation of mission, which they suggest could be attributed to a range of factors including school leadership, support from the whole school community of staff, parents and governors, as well as the response from pupils, many from non-Catholic backgrounds. A significant finding was how Catholic school leaders in the study articulated and defined the 'underlying values' of the institution, which, according to Bryk et al., 'provide the animating force for the entire enterprise' (1993: 228). According to Grace (2016: 130), the predominant view was that the special mission of Catholic schools was expressed in three interrelated features, i.e. Gospel values, the teachings of Christ and the nurture of community. The significance of building community both internally within the school, and externally with parents will be explored in further detail later in this chapter. Bryk et al. (1993: 11) refer to contemporary public schooling as 'increasingly dominated by market metaphors, radical individualism, and a sense of purpose organised around competition and the pursuit of individual economic rewards'. For Bryk, it is the distinctivity of the Catholic school that focuses our attention on fostering human cooperation in the pursuit of the common good' (1993: 11).

Garcia-Huidobro (2017: 72), however, presents a critical view of the empirical studies conducted by U.S. researchers, emphasising a secular perspective on Catholic curricular, without acknowledging a 'tension between academic achievement and the spiritual and moral goals of Catholic education.' Worthy of mention here regarding the term 'tension'

in this context requires some degree of caution as it presupposes polarities between two distinct concepts. Instead, this study proposes that whilst schools should acknowledge this tension, it is important to recognise the fundamental interdependence of character education and academic excellence for developing and celebrating human flourishing as central to their Catholic mission. Similarly, Sullivan (1998: 38), in a discussion of 'twin imperatives' in Catholic education in terms of distinctivity and inclusivity, cautions against 'seeking too close a correlation' in terms of the functioning of Catholic schools in the UK and US, due to fundamental differences in 'the quality of education or commitment to mission' (2002: 39).

Grace (2002: 51) points to a risk that a market curriculum may offer enticement to teachers in contrast to the 'relatively invisible outcomes of their spiritual and moral curriculum'. Research conducted by Fuller and Johnson (2014), which focused on processes of change in a Catholic high school, found that pressure for performativity affected core Catholic features such as opportunities for service to facilitate the common good. Research by Lydon (2011: 318), however, based on an examination of the extent to which the school effectiveness agenda has compromised Salesian distinctiveness, presents a basis for a counter argument here. Lydon's research suggests there is a balance between 'academic excellence and wider aspects of formation' (2011: 39), resonating with the definition of excellence articulated by the Bishops' Conference (1996): 'Christians are called to seek perfection in all aspects of their lives. In Catholic education, pupils and students are therefore given every opportunity to develop their talents to the full'. The issues inherent in a synopsis of the arguments presented here serve to highlight the complexity of contemporary curriculum development in Catholic schools, which some argue can be attributed to the countercultural values of Catholicism within a market education system. It could be argued, however, that one area of consensus is that these conflicting perspectives in fact present a strong case for an integrated Catholic curriculum, as Garcia-Huidobro (2017: 83) posits, 'connecting

concerns for academic excellence with concerns for the moral and spiritual goals of Catholic schools'.

2.9.1.2 Curriculum Design

In a Christian school context, the concept of curriculum design raises deep philosophical questions about the purpose of education in terms of what implicit assumptions are made about what knowledge is worth knowing and in what ways the curriculum serves the aspirations of Christian telos.

Schuttlofel (1998), in an examination of the primary school curriculum of 19 dioceses in the U.S., concluded that the Catholic faith should permeate and be integrated within the whole curriculum: 'The obvious implication of the principle of coherence is that it should be possible to find evidence of Catholicity within all areas of the curriculum' (1998: 299). In defining a comprehensive approach to faith formation, Schuttlofel (1998: 302) emphasised the importance of a focus on the student's relationship with God throughout the totality of the educational experience. In pursuing the mission of integration of both faith and life, the challenge posed for contemporary Catholic education within the context of the curriculum is a fundamental understanding that 'faith formation is not an activity isolated within religious education classes' (1998: 300). In a review of conceptual studies which focused on the curriculum in Catholic schools, Garcia-Huidobro (2017: 82-84) observed that the lack of curricular integration was exemplified by a general focus on the subject of Religious Education instead of 'concern for the Catholic underpinnings of the curriculum as a whole.' Arthur (1995) identified a risk that, within a secular market curriculum, there could be a tendency for Catholic schools to emphasise academic achievement rather than focusing on the goals of spiritual and moral formation (Arthur, 2013; Grace, 2002, 2013; Walbank, 2012). This issue relates to the argument that one of the key challenges for schools is a lack of a coherent and robust theory for Catholic education (Arthur, 1995; McLaughlin, 1996; Whittle, 2014).

This leads to the view that despite the distinct benefits of an explicit curriculum designed to develop virtue literacy, provision for character education is limited and deficient without the wider building and maintaining of a distinctively Catholic curriculum, permeated by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching - a curriculum which nurtures the character of Christ in its pupils through a 'pedagogic environment involving a Catholic framing for curriculum subjects.' (Grace, 2017: 202) This is echoed in the words of Jamison (2013: 15), Catholic schools should 'create a curriculum with a Catholic heart'. However, despite the integrity of such authentic Christian mission, schools face a range of pragmatic challenges to develop, implement and sustain such a curriculum. In upholding the tradition and mission of the Catholic Church, Catholic schools are encouraged to 'project to the Catholic youth the person of Christ as the most perfect guide for living and human formation' (Grace, 2017: 225). Each school will endeavour to develop its own distinct design for character education, its unique charism, representative of its Christian mission, values and beliefs and in response to the needs of the school community of pupils, parents and staff.

In Arthur's (1995) *The Ebbing Tide*, he presents three models of education in Catholic schools - holistic, dualistic and pluralistic, which demonstrate how altering the nature of admissions may alter the distinctive Catholicity of a school, diluting its ethos and changing the Catholic identity of its educational enterprise. Arthur's (1995: 231) holistic model is dependent on the school having a significant presence of Catholic teachers and pupils:

> The Catholicity of the school depends on their being a body of people whose lives are deeply imbued by the Catholic faith, and who are therefore able to bring the light of Christ into every aspect of school life. On this model the Catholic school, together with the family and the parish, may be seen as one of the principal constitutive elements of the Church's life. Such a school would explicitly share the aims of the Church.

According to Sullivan (1998: 38), Arthur (1995) reveals a 'weakening of the Catholic dimension...a failure to permeate the curriculum with Catholic principles', which has resulted in a dilution of distinctive Catholicity. Walbank (2012: 10) challenges this view, claiming that the Catholicity of a school is not dependent upon its admissions but upon how a school 'proclaims the nature of its Catholicity'. Instead, Sullivan (1998: 38) proposes a 'fertile philosophy' of Catholic education based on an authentic relationship between faith and culture, emerging from an ongoing dialogue between all members of the educational community. He suggests a more inclusive conception than Arthur (1995) in *Ebbing Tide*, proposing the notion of a 'living tradition' of Catholicity in schools.

The Catholicity of the population in Catholic schools will inevitably have an impact in shaping their response in terms of overall curriculum design and delivery. According to the *Digest of 2023 Census Data for Schools and Colleges in England*, trends indicate that the percentage of Catholic pupils in all Catholic schools is in steady decline. In 2023, the Catholic pupil population in schools represented 56.4%, compared with 58.5% in 2022. Since the population of Catholic schools is characterised by a multiplicity of cultures and beliefs, formation in schools must be dynamic, based on an awareness of the existing pluralism, seeking to provide meaningful learning in a contemporary context (CCE, 2014: III.1h). This tangible challenge, however, also presents an opportunity for spiritual, moral and cultural enrichment through positive, diverse engagement with children of other faiths, of no faith and for those in spiritual poverty, in exposing all children to a Christian education:

> Teachers are called upon to rise up to a major educational challenge, which is the recognition, respect and enhancement of diversity. Psychological, social, cultural and religious diversity should not be denied, but rather considered as an opportunity and a gift. (CCE, 2014: 2.II.5)

In responding to the contemporary challenges of the multicultural and multireligious nature of Catholic school populations, schools should 'foster a greater cultural openness…and an equally greater willingness to act as witnesses' (CCE, 2014: III.1.i). This emphasis on engagement and dialogue between faith and cultures should be a

characteristic feature of the Catholic curriculum and reflected throughout the Catholic life of the school.

The offer of a sacramental perspective to the curriculum in Catholic schools is part of the Christian mission for evangelisation and the call to discipleship. Towey (2019: 6) observes how Lieven Boeve (2019: 37-50) has offered 'a deliberate reimagining of the educational enterprise' in his model of 'Dialogue' schools whereby:

> Rather than choosing between either Catholic identity, or openness to otherness, the Catholic dialogue school envisages, through the dialogue with the other, to stir the (re)discovery of one's own identity, and to introduce once again the Christian voice within the conversation.

This idea of '(re)discovery of one's own identity' emphasises the power of a curriculum which offers moral purpose and inspires a search for meaning and truth for all pupils. For Boeve, the context of a declining population of Catholic pupils in Catholic schools and the rise of pupils increasingly identifying as 'nones' in relation to religion allows pupils to explore Catholicism, but within a 'Boeve' matrix of inclusive conversation with others (Towey, 2019: 7). The design of a Catholic curriculum should provide a balanced integration of religious education, as well as explicit character education and faith transmission, implicit throughout the Catholic life of the school, available to every pupil, in the hope that this leads to a spiritual awakening and growth in Christian moral life. This is expressed in the conciliar document *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* (2014: 1a), which emphasises the duty of Catholic schools in extending their reach 'beyond believers' and beyond the curriculum, throughout the ethos of the school, witnessed in relationships:

> Many Catholic school students belong to a multiplicity of cultures, therefore our institutions must proclaim the Gospel beyond believers, not only with words, but through the power of our educators' lives, which must be consistent with the Gospel.

Garcia-Huidobro (2017: 83), in his commentary on the contemporary landscape of Catholic education, raises pertinent questions about how Catholic schools are facilitating

Christian formation, 'offering spiritual depth or forming students to be social justice-oriented bridge-builders'**.** For Garcia-Huidobro (2017), the 'key lever' for tackling the contemporary challenges facing Catholic schools is to shift the focus from the curriculum itself, to *how* the curriculum is taught. From this point of view, the distinctiveness of Catholic schools does not relate to specific contents or curricular, but to a Catholic pedagogy which is modelled and transmitted by the educators. Lydon (2011: 59-75) insists on the centrality of modelling ministry on Christ from biblical, historical and ecclesial perspectives, resonating with Grassi's definition of teaching as a 'lived tradition passed on in the very lives of the teachers themselves' (1973: 32). Developing this argument, Garcia-Huidobro (2017) acknowledges that although teachers are at the centre of Catholic schools' mission, 'ignoring the socialising power of the curriculum is naïve' (2017: 84). This concept of the potential of the curriculum's 'socialising power' will be explored further in relation to Catholic Social Teaching (see section 2.9.3.1) and will also be examined as part of the empirical case study.

The extent to which schools provide an explicit taught curriculum for Catholic character in addition to implicit or caught approaches is a key area of interest in the case studies for this research. However, as highlighted in the previous chapter, schools face a set of diverse challenges in providing a specific taught curriculum. In addition to the persistent challenge of performativity discussed earlier, there are practical day to day factors, such as time constraints and timetabling, which create limitations for the design and implementation of a broad and balanced curriculum, whilst striving to maintain the characteristics of Catholic school distinctiveness. In the research report *My Character* (2014), which focused on how interventions designed to develop character might enhance moral formation in young people, found that one of the key inhibitors to the development of character within the curriculum was the lack of time and space for personal exploration, moral or spiritual introspection: 'A practical problem is that there is little or no space in the curriculum for sustained periods of self-reflection' (2014: 10). The study also reported that due to a lack of rigorous research on character education

interventions, there is an absence of sufficient guidance on character education pedagogy and how this can be evaluated. In the context of Catholic schools, this highlights the need for adequate provision for training of teachers to equip them with specialist subject knowledge and skills, inspired by Christian mission and teleology, in order to deliver a comprehensive and distinctive Catholic character curriculum.

For the distinctive Catholic identity of the school to be infused throughout teaching and learning, curriculum development requires that there is a shared theory for Catholic education. According to Shimabukuro (2007: 1):

> Catholic pedagogy calls educators to transform students. We, as Catholic school practitioners, are called to conceptualise curriculum from the mere transmission of knowledge paradigm to a focus of curriculum as the design of academic processes that will empower our students to interiorize their learning.

The reference here to the role of teachers in Catholic schools designated to 'conceptualise curriculum' to enable students to 'interiorise' their learning demands a level of specialist training and experience, imbued with knowledge and understanding of a sacramental perspective to curriculum design and purpose. Lydon (2009: 54) raises the issue that as the number of religious is in decline in Catholic schools, the responsibility to provide 'a living embodiment of the charism' reverts to lay teachers. According to data in the *Digest of 2023 Census Data for Schools and Colleges in England*, the number of Catholic teachers in Catholic schools has declined steadily. In 2023, there were 56.5% Catholic primary teachers with 20.3% with CCRS (Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies). In addition, research shows the majority of teachers in Catholic schools received initial teacher training in secular settings, which has led to a deepening of a disconnect between educational theories and faith (Arthur, 2013). Inevitably, the lack of prerequisite training for teachers is one of key contemporary challenges for Catholic character education - without which there can be no shared understanding of Catholic pedagogy. There is a pertinent need for Catholic schools to be equipped with the knowledge and understanding of the pedagogy of Catholic character education in order

that they fulfil their mission to promote human flourishing in its fullest sense: 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10). However, in contemporary Catholic education there is an absence of any framework or even dialogue which contributes to a shared pedagogy of virtue literacy. In the subsequent discussion on developing practical wisdom as a key component of character education, the challenges relating to the pedagogy of Catholic character will be explored.

2.9.2 How Can Catholic Character Education Develop the Practical Wisdom of the Scholar?

Aristotelian *phronesis* or practical wisdom, sometimes referred to as prudence is 'a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man' (Nicomachean Ethics VI.5). This definition of phronesis emphasises that theoretical knowledge of virtue is sufficient; wisdom involves the translation of knowledge into virtuous action. Aristotle's view of phronesis is interpreted by Halverson (2004) as 'the experiential knowledge possessed by a particular person and used by such an individual to decide the course of his/her intentional, effective actions'. According to Aristotle, ethical understanding cannot be taught; practical wisdom is acquired through experience. This presents a fundamental challenge for Catholic schools: How can character education develop the practical wisdom of the scholar?

In examining the challenges in relation to the development of practical wisdom as integral to the formation of Catholic character, this section of the review will examine the Catholic pedagogy of character education. This will include an exploration of the significance of the mastery of virtue language, as well as issues pertaining to the role of moral exemplars in the modelling of virtue.

2.9.2.1 Pedagogy of Catholic Character

Pedagogy is defined as 'the art, occupation, or practice of teaching' (Oxford Dictionary). The term is derived from the Greek *paidagogos* - *paidos* 'boy, child' and *agogos* 'leader', meaning 'teacher of children'. Although there is an open and shared dialogue as to what constitutes effective pedagogical practices in education, it is the contention of this study that there needs to be an explicit Catholic pedagogy, integral to the Catholicity of the school. Arthur (2014:45) expresses concern for contemporary Christian approaches to character which he describes as 'often abstract and say little to teachers about the pedagogical practices of character formation'.

The notion of a Catholic pedagogy, inspired by the Gospel as the 'living centre', is articulated by Pope John Paul II in his Address to the Bishops of England and Wales on their *Ad Limina* visit (1992):

> Religious education is broader than catechesis, but it must also include catechesis, since a principal goal of the Catholic school must be to hand on the faith. The Gospel is the living centre which must animate and shape all that is said and done in the school. In such an environment, the pupils will be able to find true inspiration and freedom which alone will encourage them to set out wholeheartedly on the path of service of God and neighbour.

For the Catholic school, Christ provides the perfect model for ministry and inspiration for an understanding of the true meaning of Christian pedagogy. Teachers can learn from the saving mission of Jesus and the way he demonstrated an unconditional love of neighbour. Jesus provides a way of living sustained by faith in God (D'Orsa, 2012: 60-61). Modelling ministry on Christ is the essence of Christian pedagogy, as articulated by Healy (2022: 107):

> By modelling her ministry on Christ, the teacher will reflect the key aspects of that ministry which encompass many qualities: an invitational and inclusive approach to all, effective presence, respect for an individual's discernment and challenge, reflected in the response of the first disciples.

There is an expectation that teachers in a Catholic school act as witnesses to the faith, demonstrated not only in their classroom practice and pedagogy, but reflected authentically in their relationships throughout the educational community. Their Christian mission as both catechists and evangelists is destined beyond secular goals towards human flourishing with Christ. Parker J Palmer (1998: 2-3) offers an enlightening perspective on excellence in pedagogy, which he states cannot be reduced to technique, but is rooted in the inherent identity and integrity of the teacher, highlighting the importance of teacher self-knowledge: 'Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness…viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul.' Palmer's metaphor of the mirror provides a powerful example of how the role of the teacher is entwined in the pedagogy of character and yet there is still a lack of available education, training and professional development for teachers. The neglect of this issue is also identified by The Jubilee Centre (2017: 10).

In modern society, there is no commonly agreed set of virtues, although historically groups of virtues have emerged across diverse cultures and religions (Arthur, 2021: 84). For Plato, the cardinal virtues of temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice (*Republic* 4.435) each have a purpose in the development of human character. In Aristotle's discussion of the virtues in *Nicomachean Ethics,* he describes 18 virtues for human flourishing, categorised as social, political, intellectual and moral - all of which are interconnected and without hierarchy. Aristotle notes that moral virtues are desire-regulating character traits, a state of virtue known as the *golden mean*, positioned between two extremes, with the accompanying vices of deficiency or excess. For instance, the virtue of courage, in excess, becomes rashness and in deficiency, becomes cowardice. In terms of the pedagogy of teaching character and wisdom, this study suggests that in order to fully understand virtuous conduct and make informed moral choices, as well as develop the ability to be self-reflective, learning about moral virtue needs to incorporate knowledge of the relationship between virtue and vice in order for students to contextualise moral decision making, towards achievement of what Aristotle defined as the golden mean or 'middle way' between the extremes of excess and

deficiency. These nuances in the pedagogical understanding of moral education as part of the primary curriculum reasonably require a level of expert subject knowledge and training.

For modern character education, schools need access to training and resources to support their provision and pedagogical practice. As Arthur (2021: 99) cautions, little attention is given to the practical application of Christian pedagogy. Although there is an assortment of published schemes for character education, such as the range of materials and resources provided by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue, these are not designed specifically for Catholic schools. Arthur (2014: 50) observes a 'bewildering variety of educational schemes and curricular', questioning if this is a 'positive phenomenon or a wasteful overlapping' of resources. A fundamental concern is the lack of congruence in approach to the teaching of character in primary schools; some schools have inevitably chosen to devise their own resources in the absence of access to adequate or appropriate materials for their setting. The extent to which this issue relates specifically to schools of a religious character is of interest in this research project. The empirical study will consider resourcing as part of provision for Catholic character education and the extent to which this provision exists in the case study schools and is regarded as adequate support for the implementation of the character curriculum. This will include an analysis of how the explicit character curriculum is developed across the whole school in order to examine progression of virtue literacy throughout the primary years - Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to Year 6.

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue (2017) provides a comprehensive pedagogical framework for community schools: *A Framework for Character Education in Schools*, referenced earlier in Chapter Three. The Framework adopts a Neo-Aristotelian model of virtue ethics, promoting the pedagogy of virtue literacy, based on three domains of character 'caught, sought and taught'. The Framework is supported with a wide range of easily accessible accompanying teaching resources and materials for both primary and secondary schools in community school settings. The challenge for the

Catholic school, however, is that the Framework lacks an understanding of a Christian vision of human flourishing. For Catholic schools, the Gospel provides a firm foundation for Christian pedagogy - the most significant list of virtues is contained in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 1-12). For schools seeking to establish a pedagogy for character education in a Christian context using published materials or resources, there are limited programmes or frameworks available. The *Jesuit Pupil Profile* (2013) is an example of a framework used in many Catholic schools, seeking to express a universal vision of a virtuous life which is rooted in the Christian living tradition. However, the evident lack of academic research on the impact or effectiveness of such a framework does not enable guidance or reflection for schools in their choice or implementation of character education approaches. Similarly, the *Virtues to Live By* (2019) programme created by the Diocese of Leeds https://www.virtuestoliveby.org is another example of an endeavour to produce published curricular to develop Catholic character which has yet to be the subject of academic research.

In this discussion of Christian pedagogy for character, it is important to recognise the value of the explicit curricular *content* of what is taught, as well as *how* it is taught. This is expressed in the conciliar document *Educating for Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* (2014: n.3):

> The value of learning content must not be underestimated. If *the way* students learn is relevant, the same applies to *what* they learn… Otherwise, the risk could be to provide a kind of teaching that is only focused on what seems to be *useful* now, because it is being required by contingent economic or social demands, forgetting what is *indispensable* for the human person.

Crawford and Rossiter (1985), however, present a contrasting view in their review of the effectiveness of religious education programmes, stating concern for a focus on curriculum content instead of an analysis of pedagogical intent. Within the context of this research project, however, significance is given to the value of both curricular content and pedagogy, set within a purposeful Christian context, where character

education impacts on the 'cognitive, behavioural and affective' domains of character development (Lickona, 1991). These aspects of virtue literacy will be explored in more detail as part of the empirical school case studies.

It is of significant interest in this research project that there are currently very limited published Catholic curricular in existence for character education, apart from schemes of work for Religious Education. According to Friel (2009: 10), the absence of any detailed design of specific curriculum programmes to develop Catholic character in education presents a key challenge for contemporary education. He expresses concern that even for those schools who have adopted the See-Judge-Act methodology as part of the design of their Catholic character curriculum, there is no formalised framework for this approach to support schools.

Research conducted by The Jubilee Centre to explore effective character education pedagogies *Character Education Pedagogies: What works, where and why?* (2022) highlighted that schools reported using multiple teaching strategies across the interlinked categories of character caught, taught and sought with an emphasis on caught approaches 'deemed to be of particular importance in the early stages of the development of a whole school vision, ethos, and culture'. Character education leaders identified three strategies as central to character caught – 'a set of priority virtues, a mission statement which explicitly references character, and a whole school shared language of character'.

2.9.2.2 Mastery of Virtue Language

One of the key components of virtue literacy is to develop knowledge and understanding of virtue terms. The role of schools is to define and explore this moral vocabulary and integrate it into the totality of school life, so that virtue knowledge can be nurtured and applied. This is articulated here in the *Jubilee Centre Framework* (2017: 4):

> Schools have a responsibility to cultivate the virtues, define and list those they want to prioritise and integrate them into all teaching and learning in and out of

> school. Students therefore need to learn their meanings and identify appropriate practices in which to apply them in their lives, respecting themselves.

The mastery of virtue language is an integral part of the pedagogy of character. In a Christian context, however, it is important to caution against reductivist conceptions of character which emphasise the vocabulary of virtue through lists of virtues without an understanding which emanates from, and is embedded within, a deep vision about the place and purpose of human beings in the world: 'One contribution that the Church can make to the proliferation of lists and definitions is to keep a relentless focus on the question of ultimate purpose' (Church of England Education Office, 2015: 8). The document goes on to state that Christian faith requires 'an understanding and engagement with the virtues in appreciation of God's love and a deep reflection of what it means to be so loved' (2015: 9). A Christian teleological perspective to human existence provides children with a firm foundation upon which to build their virtue literacy and develop an enriched understanding of their relationship with God. Devanny's (2018) research report on Catholic character education highlights concern for a superficial treatment of the virtues which lacks any substantial impact on moral development: 'There was a tendency for Gospel values to be seen as platitudes which have no deliberate or significant impact on character' (2018: 4).

A key challenge for schools in the development of virtue knowledge, therefore, is that even when equipped with an understanding of the meaning of basic virtue vocabulary such as justice, self-control or courage, knowledge may not itself be sufficient to instigate and nurture virtuous conduct (explored later in Chapter Four, section 3). This argument presupposes that no conduct can be considered truly virtuous without some rational comprehension of moral terms. Lickona and Davidson (2005) highlight a distinction between moral and performance character, demonstrating that doing the good and knowing the good are not necessarily concomitant. According to Kesebir and Kesebir (2012: 9), contemporary youth are widely lacking an adequate language or vocabulary

for character and virtue. They call for a dialogue of virtue set within a 'virtue-salient culture', upon which the foundations for human flourishing can be fostered:

> If virtues are indispensable to individual and societal well-being as ancient philosophical and current empirical queries suggest… We believe that a virtue-salient culture would provide a more fertile ground for individual and societal flourishing than one where concepts of moral excellence are at the fringes of public conversation.

Similarly, research by Arthur *et al.* (2006: 2) showed a distinct lack of familiarity with or knowledge of 'the 'cognitive concepts of values and virtues'. The report strongly recommended the revival or recovery of a shared language for character. This salient point is reiterated here by Arthur (2021: 92):

> Amongst the challenges teachers have faced in character education to date is the development of a mutually intelligible discourse - many students simply do not have the language of character education or the virtues.

Catholic pedagogy needs to centralise the importance of a 'mutually intelligible discourse' for the language of character. Research by Lorimer (2014) and Vasalou (2011) has sought to 'promote the insight that a mastery of language is indispensable for a mastery of virtue' (Arthur et al., 2014: 10). As a result, one of the key aims of the *Knightly Virtues Programme* was to develop the knowledge and understanding of the language of character and virtue, not as isolated terms, but as 'implicated in a complex web of moral discourse that calls for wider or more 'holistic' comprehension' (Arthur et al., 2014: 10). The possession and exercise of moral virtue requires reason, deliberation and reflection and, therefore, without a meaningful understanding of virtue language, it is questionable as to whether conduct can be regarded as truly virtuous.

Understanding the vocabulary of virtue is a key component of virtue literacy and provides an important foundation for the cultivation of character, but it is insufficient without other key dimensions of character development: virtue reasoning and virtue

practice. One of the key challenges for modern moral education is to consider how virtue literacy correlates to virtue practice. Schools need to focus on translating a mastery of virtue language into resultant virtue behaviours. Growth in practical wisdom, through developing skills and opportunities for virtue reasoning, provides a pedagogical platform for how virtue knowledge can be translated into virtue practice. The concept of virtue practice is a key theme in this research project and will be examined more fully later in this chapter. This review will subsequently turn its focus to the role of practical wisdom in the development of Catholic character.

2.9.2.3 The Development of Practical Wisdom

The development of practical wisdom or *phronesis* is integral to the growth and nurture of Catholic character. For Aristotle, the intellectual virtue of phronesis is the supreme, integrative virtue which presides over all of the other cardinal virtues. Aristotle's virtue ethics is based on a 'phronesis guided' approach - the ability to know the good, desire the good and enact the good, leading to an Aristotelian notion of human flourishing (*eudaimonia* or happiness*),* where thoughts, feelings and actions are directed towards the good (Arthur, 2021: 37). This resonates closely with Lickona's (1991) cognitive, emotional and behavioural domains of character referenced previously. In Artistotle's *Ethics* (II, 6)*,* human character involves the capacity to exercise both reason and choice:

> Virtue then is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in the mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.

Aristotle highlights here the key role of practical wisdom in providing rationality which guides choices towards virtue. One of the significant challenges in modern Catholic education, however, as mentioned earlier, is the need for teacher education to incorporate character education in initial training, including provision for continued professional development. Schools need to consider how the overarching virtue of practical wisdom might be cultivated in both staff and pupils. The fostering of virtue

literacy, developing virtue knowledge and understanding, as well as building capacity for virtue reasoning through the nurture of practical wisdom, is essential for both educator and scholar alike. The development of the practical wisdom of students relies unequivocally upon the practical wisdom of the teacher. According to Goodfellow (2003: 58), however, practical wisdom has been neglected within the educational arena: 'Currently, little value is being assigned and little recognition given, either personally or publicly, to the importance of practical wisdom in professional practice'.

In the context of teaching, Furman (2018) refers to practical wisdom as 'robust knowing', making ethical responses to moral situations in practice. The demands upon the teacher to make continual pedagogical decisions requires a level of critical awareness to guide possible outcomes (Dolk 1997, cited in Lunenberg and Korthagen, 2009). For Stenberg and Maaranen (2020), this awareness is the essence of practical wisdom. 'Practical wisdom combines expert knowledge with sound judgement and thoughtful action' (Goodfellow, 2003: 49). Growth in practical wisdom requires experience as well as a developed level of self-awareness and capacity for critical reflection, within morally infused problem-solving contexts. Teaching is characterised by constant pedagogical decision-making which is essentially moral in nature: 'What may seem like small acts lead up to an ethical approach to the world' (Furman (2015:142). This emphasises the connectivity between the 'craft' of teaching and practical wisdom (Stenberg and Maaranen, 2020). It could be argued that wisdom can be 'infused' by osmosis in the very essence of school life, echoed by Ryan (1996: 75): 'Classroom life is saturated with moral meaning that shapes students' character and moral development'. In a Catholic context, to what extent are teachers given opportunities to reflect upon their own formation in the faith to enable a more developed consciousness of the meaning and application of practical wisdom in their role as educators within their pedagogy and practice?

This discussion serves to demonstrate the pivotal role of practical wisdom as integral to teaching and learning, impacting both the educator and the scholar. To develop wisdom

in a Catholic context, there needs to be an informed pedagogical understanding of its true nature, purpose and value - without this, the virtue of wisdom is subject to being neglected or overlooked. It is of interest in the context of this study to explore teachers' understanding and interpretation of practical wisdom, as well as how they perceive the role of practical wisdom in relation to the formation of Catholic character.

2.9.2.4 Pedagogy of Practical Wisdom

For Kristjánsson (2021: 241), the integration and harmonisation of the virtues is a key function of phronesis which demands metacognition. The implication for schools, therefore, is to explore ways to develop a metacognitive approach to virtue literacy to cultivate wise, critical and discriminating dispositions towards morality in order to integrate the virtues, leading to growth in practical wisdom.

Aristotle's cognitive model of ethics is developed by Aquinas from a Christian understanding of character virtues. For Aquinas, human flourishing is attained through divine happiness or *beatitudo*, fulfilled through an eternal life with Christ. Both Thomas and Aquinas agree, however, that virtue requires some form of training. In the view of Thomas (ST I-II q.95, a.1):

> The perfection of virtue consists chiefly in withdrawing man from undue pleasures, to which above all man is inclined, and especially the young, who are more capable of being trained. Consequently, a man needs to receive his training from another, whereby to arrive at the perfection of virtue.

Within an educational context, the need for training and habituation in moral virtue for both school leaders, staff and pupils, presents a fundamental and persistent challenge for Catholic schools. Devanny (2018: 12) argues that a culture of performance and efficiency 'arguably erodes our capacity for deliberation or discernment because reflection is understood as a momentary respite within the relentless pursuit of improvement'. He highlights that despite the role that practical wisdom plays in self-

knowledge, the Church does not give emphasis to the intellectual virtues, but instead focuses on the theological and moral virtues: 'The Church, following Thomas, accounts for the intellectual virtues when outlining the gifts of the Spirit' (2018: 12). The challenge for schools, articulated by Devanny (2018) in his report recommendations, is the need to 'integrate the intellectual virtues into the continuing formation of school leaders, staff and into character education'. In seeking to develop the practical wisdom of the scholar, there needs to be an integrated, strategic approach to character education, which embraces the whole school community. The notion of a wider approach to the development of practical wisdom will be elaborated upon as part of the case study research.

Central to the work of the case studies in this research project is an exploration of the ways and the extent to which schools seek to develop pupils' practical wisdom and its impact on the development of Catholic character. This exploration will be set within a framework of enquiry based on these key questions: How do schools establish and develop a Christian understanding of the importance of fostering practical wisdom as part of their provision for Catholic character education? How do schools interpret what constitutes practical wisdom as part of the educational endeavour? How is this translated in practice? How do schools strategically incorporate practical wisdom as part of the overall pedagogical design of the curriculum? As part of this discussion, it is important to acknowledge that wisdom and virtue are not distinct concepts in isolation from one another; they are innately interrelated, as articulated by Wren (2014: 15): 'Moral goodness and wisdom are necessary conditions for each other in that a person cannot be fully good without practical wisdom nor practically wise without also being virtuous'. Wisdom requires virtue and concomitantly, virtue requires wisdom. Human wisdom is nurtured through observation and immersion in experience which provokes an emotional response. Character is shaped by our experience of, and response to, human morality within different models of community. This is a significant theme in the work of MacIntrye (1981) who emphasises the role of narrative context in the development of character. He argues that the human person can only be understood

within a historical, cultural and social setting, advocating that 'narratives provide the logical form or contours of human self-understanding' (*Knightly Virtues Research Report*, 2014: 9).

2.9.2.5 Modelling through Moral Exemplars

This study acknowledges that a range of moral exemplars contribute to the formation of character - primarily the family, the family supported by the school, and the Church, all as communities within which character is modelled and moulded. The aspiration for schools, as articulated in *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) is that the family is 'the principal school of the social virtues …necessary to every society'. The significance of the role of the family as moral exemplars in the formation of character is a key recurrent theme in this review, discussed earlier in Chapter Two (section 2.5). According to Snarey and Samuelson (2014: 73), Kohlberg's pedagogical methods of moral education promote learning from interaction with adult role models as moral exemplars, peers and friends and the larger school community: 'He intuitively understood that observing or learning about those who practised moral principles was a more direct method of teaching than any theory could hope to attain.'

Research by North (2018) in a study conducted among young adults in England emphasised the role of family members as the 'domestic church' in terms of faith transmission. However, the most salient contemporary challenges for the family as primary educators in the transmission of faith and formation are the result of emotional, spiritual and economic poverty, expressed in the conciliar document *The Catholic School* (SCCE, 1977: 44-45): 'The Church offers its educational service to the poor, or those who are deprived of family help or affection or those who are far from faith'.

The multi-dimensionality of poverty, highlighted by McKinney (2018), inevitably impacts and inhibits the functionality of some families in fulfilling their primary, formative role as a result of their experience of emotional, spiritual and material deprivation. The Catholic school, in this sense, acts as a family for many students, 'replicating some of the

formative influences of the family environment - warmth, acceptance, caring relationships, love, positive role models' (Arthur, 2014: 57). Here, Arthur highlights the significance of the role of the school as a bridge between the Church and the family. The idea of an alliance between the family and the school is also emphasised in the conciliar document, *Educating for Today and Tomorrow* (2014: n.III):

> Education requires a strong alliance between parents and educators to present a life that is good, rich in meaning, open to God and others as well as the world; this alliance is even more necessary, since education is a personal relationship. It is a journey that reveals the transcendental elements of faith, family, Church and ethics, highlighting their communal character.

The key role and responsibility of teachers in the development of character, discussed earlier in this review, also presents distinct challenges. Outcomes of research by both Willemse et al. (2008) and Klaassen (2002: 155) conclude that moral education is largely implicit rather than explicit. The need for an explicit focus on taught and modelled character is vital for virtue education. However, worthy of mention here is research by Fallona (2000: 689-690) who empirically studied how three teachers in an American middle school exhibited moral virtues. Her research concluded that not all the virtues identified were immediately visible or observable, such as magnanimity, temperance, truthfulness and justice. Fallona's research highlights the important point for schools that the modelling of virtue, although not always explicitly observable in behaviour, can still be modelled implicitly, for example, within the classroom environment and in relationships.

In the context of the classroom, the modelling of character enables students to emulate virtuous behaviour through Aristotelian *habituation,* but a true understanding of moral character requires students to acquire for themselves the virtue that teachers embody and demonstrate. For Annas (2011: 19), this involves equipping students with a knowledge of virtue which they can apply to future moral decision making, in the absence of the teacher. This echoes the work of Bandura (1997: 90) who asserts that

children need a 'generative guide for constructing actions to fit changeable circumstances'. This view describes a level of emulation which empowers pupils to go beyond the modelled virtue that they observe and aspire to be autonomous in the enactment and pursuit of virtue.

The implication for schools is to ensure that pupils are given the opportunity to express their understanding of virtuous conduct demonstrated by moral exemplars. The curriculum design and pedagogy should plan for and facilitate discussion and debate of both virtue *and* vice that they observe, in both real and fictional contexts, so that pupils can articulate their observation and understanding of moral role models. It is pertinent for schools to consider the extent to which they actively promote autonomy in their provision for character education. Are students co-creators of their character? Arthur (2021: 91) highlights the importance of building autonomous, sought character: 'It will be up to students to make the issues their own, and to colour, detail and reshape them with the unique stories of their lives'. Within school, pupils need to be exposed to experiences which allow them to apply their virtue knowledge in real life contexts and provide opportunities which facilitate the practice of virtue, so that they can emulate modelled virtue in their own lives. This will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

2.9.2.6 Moral Exemplars in the Curriculum

In addition to the prevalence of the teacher as role model, the recent resurgence of virtue ethics provides a philosophical foundation from which to develop explicit educational strategies for character education. The use of moral exemplars from a range of sources including biblical, historical, contemporary, as well as fictional, provide rich opportunities to develop a reflective, critical and discriminating ethical approach to the pedagogy of the character curriculum. In the research report *Knightly Virtues*, Arthur et al. (2014: 9) highlight the value of role model study through literature. Study of literature invites personal response and challenge, as each individual is invited to absorb and explore the narrative in the light of their own experience:

> Children need to be persuaded of the moral force of acting virtuously and can acquire virtue literacy…through such study they gain a practical conception of what virtues look like in life and how they can be operated.

In examining the development of virtue literacy, it is important to acknowledge the need to build the affective domain of character education; children and young people need specific guidance or training, not just in moral reflection, but also in how to *feel* and *act* morally. It must be reiterated here, however, that knowledge of virtue alone will not necessarily impact upon or change behaviour. It is the application of the meta-virtue of practical wisdom which deepens the understanding of virtue and shapes choices about emotional and behavioural responses to situations, such as moral dilemmas. Studying a diverse range of role models as moral exemplars in the curriculum can provide opportunities for children to develop their virtue literacy through articulation, discussion, explanation and evaluation of moral choices and action. The need for schools to develop skills of moral discernment through virtue exemplars is articulated in the CES document, *Catholic Schools: Partners in Formation* (2022: 35-6):

> Ultimately virtues-based formation seeks to identify virtues in the lives of others, whether in the contemporary world, in history… in the school community, as well as recognising deficiencies in virtue, both in others and not least in ourselves. The conclusion of this becomes most apparent when young people make the pursuit of virtues a habit of life.

The use of moral exemplars in the curriculum provides a lived experience of the virtues which can permeate teaching and learning. For Arthur (2021: 102), a Catholic pedagogy must enable the learner to 'seek the truth and critique the prevailing culture around them. A Catholic pedagogy presents faith as a real choice'. Arthur signals here to the need for Catholic schools to encourage students to adopt a countercultural, critically reflective approach to their view of the world in the pursuit of the truth. In this way, choosing faith represents a choice towards the good, on the path to God. It is a conscious choice of commitment to a Christian way of life.

2.9.2.7 Developing Critical Reflection

In seeking to develop practical wisdom, schools need to nurture and extend children's experience of making reasoned and reflective judgements in a range of moral contexts, integrating the intellectual virtues with the moral, theological, civic and performance virtues. Through an explicit focus on skills of critical reflection towards their own formation, children can learn to use discernment through a Christian lens of moral and spiritual introspection, as well as a way of seeing and interpreting the world around them. The challenge for schools is to create a curriculum rich in opportunities for moral discernment, enabling children to become autonomous decision makers to 'allow for the empowerment of the ethical self' (Arthur et al., 2014: 9). As part of the Jubilee Centre's webinar series, *Fostering Personal and Social Virtues in Education* (2021), Arthur urges schools to encourage children to search for a deeper, fuller meaning which goes beyond statements such as 'God is good', but rather to reflect and question in the pursuit of Christian truth: 'Why is God good?' 'How is God good? 'What does good mean?' With an approach of enquiry, Arthur suggests, children can learn more about the world and about their relationship with God and neighbour.

For Arthur (2021: 4), the challenge for schools is in the nurture of formation, creating a dynamic and transformational curriculum which awakens the mind and soul:

> Education has the serious task of formation: it is an integration of personality - a character guided by the ultimate ends of life. The purpose of education is to give an individual full possession of his or her powers to see, to dream or imagine, to conceive, to judge, to reason, to feel, to create. Imagination enlivens knowledge. Imagination enables the pupil to see relationships, to ask questions, and to be creative.

For the Christian, the pursuit of truth leads ultimately to formation - fulfilment found in Christ. Astley (2018: 24), however, advises cautious use of the term 'formation', on the basis that Catholic schools are often criticised for indoctrination, instead advocating a balance which emphasises development of critical thinking (2018: 22). Critics suggest

that Catholic education hinders freedom and autonomy, 'preventing students from thinking and failing to cultivate intellectual virtues' (Arthur 2021: 14). Returning to the Latin definition of the word *education* as *educare*, meaning 'to bring out', offers insight into the true purpose of education as inherently moral. It is, therefore, the responsibility of Catholic schools as 'profoundly humanist institutions' to promote moral introspection and autonomy which leads to growth in practical wisdom and in intrinsically motivated sought character:

> Christ is the universal norm of all human ethical action – as the 'new Adam', He redefines what it means to be human. Therefore, it is the responsibility of Catholic schools to 'bring out' this humanist vision…Catholic schools are institutions which encourage the school community to discover what is contained in the depths of every human heart. (CES, 2022: 34-5)

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the development of an integrated Catholic approach to the curriculum, supported by a distinctive and enriched Christian pedagogy, are foundational in the development of character. This study advocates the development of practical wisdom through promoting opportunities for critical thinking and reflection which serve to foster a 'Christian humanist vision' of the world. The subsequent section of this chapter will explore the important challenge for schools to endeavour to engage pupils in the practice of virtue in order to promote the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, as well as to encourage rich discourse of virtue language, understanding and reasoning.

2.9.3 How Can Catholic Character Education Empower the Scholar in the Practice of Virtue to Serve the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching?

As discussed earlier in this review, the development of virtue literacy is based on three related components: virtue knowledge and understanding, virtue reasoning and virtue practice, as defined by the Jubilee Centre's *Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development* (2017: 6-7) Although distinct, these domains are critically linked and the determination of virtue literacy requires all three components:

> A child may acquire some cognitive understanding of what would be the desirable virtue to display in certain circumstances but be unable to translate this knowledge and reasoning into virtuous action. Virtue practice, therefore, constitutes the desirable and observable attitudes and behaviours demonstrated by a child. (Arthur et. al, 2014: 9)

In developing virtue literacy, an obvious challenge facing schools is the translation of pupils' understanding of virtue into virtuous behaviour, '...then there is the further practical question of how to translate responsible commitment into effective action' (CCE, 1988: n.21). To what extent is there a correlation between virtue literacy and behavioural application? In the view of Arthur (2021: 100) schools are limited in their offer of practical opportunities to experience practising the virtues. Uttley (2018: 144) urges Catholic schools to build on their tradition of outreach beyond the school by moving 'from theory to practice of virtue by filling our teaching, pastoral life and liturgies …to the pursuit of justice', suggesting **t**hat children need to be offered insight into and experiences of justice and injustice, poverty and disadvantage in order that they may be moved by their encounters. The implication for Catholic schools is to determine and evaluate to what extent their implicit and explicit approaches to character education serves to promote a social ethic, inspiring and motivating the desire to serve others. This is similarly reflected in research by Bryk et al. (1993: 10), highlighting the need for Catholic schools to 'foster an appreciation for their social connectedness and individual responsibility to advance social justice.'

In a Catholic context, virtue practice should be interpreted through the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, which act as a moral compass for the Christian, guiding choices and actions. As articulated by Devanny (2018: 8), Catholic schools are authentic expressions of the mission of the Church in seeking to embody the Church's social teaching within their ethos. The Church's mission for social justice is not peripheral, it is fundamental:

> It is at the very heart of the Church's ministry of service: with her social doctrine the Church proclaims God and his mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals man to himself. (CCE, 2004: 67)

2.9.3.1 Catholic Social Teaching - Immersion in a Living Faith

The mission of the Catholic school reaches beyond the spiritual development of the individual, involving wider goals of social responsibility - the essence of Catholic Social Teaching (CST):

> Education is not just knowledge but also experience. It encompasses the affective and emotional domains and is also endowed with an ethical dimension: knowing how to do things and what we want to do, daring to change society and the world, and serving the community. (CCE, 2014: n. III)

Catholic Social Teaching can be defined as 'a way of thinking, being and seeing the world. It provides a vision for a just society in which the dignity of all people is recognised, and those who are vulnerable are cared for' (CSSA, 2022). As part of the living tradition of the Catholic faith, Catholic schools recognise the sacredness of human life and the inherent dignity of all humanity, as well as a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable is at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching: 'The call to respect the dignity of every life also has a profound impact on the social responsibility of school communities.' (Sands, 2018)

The common good can be defined as 'the sum total of social condition which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily' (Vatican Council II, 1965, n.25). For the Catholic school, virtue formation is concerned with developing the character of Christ in pupils, not purely for the benefit of the individual but for the good of society. Aquinas advocated the social dimension of education as the pursuit of the common good, also reflected in *Romans* 12:5, 'So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another'. In the words of Arthur (2021: 3):

> Education advances us towards wisdom and is about 'becoming who we are'...in the fundamental sense of human awakening. Education in this sense is an endless process of becoming' in this life.

Through encouraging and promoting virtues, schools can facilitate an understanding of the common good and the relational significance of the human person, the community and the wider world. Pope Francis (2018) connects action for social justice with the call to holiness, invoking a communal responsibility for social justice. Through Catholic Social Teaching, Christians are called in discipleship to work for the common good of all, advocating for a just society in which all people, particularly the socially disadvantaged and vulnerable, may be enabled to flourish. In the words of St. Paul, social action is 'faith working through love'.

Catholic education seeks to form the religious and spiritual dimension of the human person. Without such formation, society produces people with technological and scientific knowledge and skill, in the absence of moral and ethical principles to apply their knowledge for the common good: 'If religion is neglected or set aside in the educational process that forms a nation's heart and soul, then a morality worthy of man will not survive; justice and peace will not endure' (Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops of Westminster*, 1988, n.2). This view is also expressed by Cooling (2010: 13-14) in his advocacy for a Christian interpretation of acquired knowledge. His report *Doing God In Education* (2010) argues that the goal of education is to make judgements about the meaning and significance of what is learnt. The implication for Catholic schools, therefore, is in developing a curriculum rich in opportunities and experiences which immerse students in a living faith, confronted with concrete issues of social justice, provoking thought, feeling and action. The connection between the cognitive, emotional and behavioural domains (Lickona, 2001) impacts upon the motivation of students to engage in the practice of virtue, relating to the real-life contexts within which they belong:

> When students have the opportunity to experience how important what they learn is for their lives and their communities, their motivation does change. It would be advisable for teachers to provide their students with opportunities to realise the social impact of what they are studying, thus favouring the discovery of the link between school and life, as well as the development of a sense of responsibility and active citizenship. (CCE, 2014: n.4)

In order for children to be equipped with the moral and intellectual capacity to respond to issues affecting social justice, Catholic schools need to explicitly teach the principles of CST, such as solidarity, subsidiarity and stewardship, so that children can develop knowledge and understanding of the meaning and significance of these principles, illuminated by their Christian faith, and how they can be applied in their own lives, in their communities and in the wider world.

Boland (2007) poses fundamental questions for Catholic schools to reflect upon how living faith is sustained: 'How do Catholic schools keep faith alive? What is a modern conception of a living faith?' These questions provide scope for deep reflection on how faith is manifested and nurtured within contemporary Catholic education. One of the greatest challenges for 21st century Catholic schools is to maintain faith and service as the focus amidst a revolutionary age of individualism. According to Grace (2017: 60) this requires Catholic schools to act as 'a countercultural force to strengthen the spiritual and moral culture in society, to keep alive notions of the common good and of social justice and to inspire and prepare young people to defend Gospel values in an age in which they are under threat.' Grace (2013: 104) highlights an urgent need for Catholic schools to resist reductionism and to 'strengthen the Catholic cultural content of the curriculum… to prevent a process of incorporation into a secularised and technicist educational culture', claiming that most Catholic schools have instead focused on the pursuit of academic results and relegated the significance of Catholic Social Teaching, particularly aspirations for the common good. As referenced in greater depth earlier in this review (see Chapter Two, section 2.9.1.1), Lydon (2019: 21) challenges this position, proposing that the pursuit of academic standards contributes to the promotion of human dignity, enabling an equitable education for all. The contemporary challenge for Catholic schools

then, is in finding a balance between performativity and distinctivity, whilst acknowledging that these concepts are neither opposed nor polarised. Whilst maintaining the highest academic standards and expectations to enable every child to fulfil their potential, Catholic schools must continue their pursuit of the common good, through a commitment to character formation, supported by the underlying principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

Aligned with the view of Grace, Rossiter (2022) calls for an enhancement of the capacity of the curriculum to promote a search for meaning and purpose in its educational endeavour. He remarks on the need for 'more issue-oriented content that is pertinent to contemporary life, including spiritual and moral issues and study of the search for meaning in a secularised, consumer society' (2022: 165). These arguments are further supported by three articles from the United States, which advocate for the need for a Catholic curriculum which is social justice oriented in all academic subjects, permeated by Catholic Social Teaching (Elias 2005; Horan, 2005; Riley & Danner-McDonald, 2013).

Through the vehicle of Catholic Social Teaching, pupils are provided with a way of viewing the world through a countercultural moral lens, inspired by the Gospel and motivated by a commitment to social justice. According to Devanny (2018: 8) social action, in the context of human formation, is a specific calling to faith and a commitment to action. It is vital, however, that pupils are given meaningful opportunities and contexts to explore the principles of CST and its relevance in the modern world to provoke a sense of social conscience and responsibility so that the 'socialising power' (Garcia-Huidobro, 2017) of the curriculum can be discovered. Pupils should be taught the importance of subsidiarity - the fact that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to decisions that affect them. They should understand how solidarity seeks unity for the disadvantaged and vulnerable. They should be taught the importance of care for creation in recognition of our connectedness to our common home, as reflected in Pope Francis' (2015) Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*. The recent conciliar document *The Identity of the Catholic School: For a culture of dialogue* (CCE, 2022: n.18), highlights the witness and

dynamism of the Catholic school in providing a countercultural response to contemporary society, whist upholding its Catholic distinctivity:

> The Catholic school lives in the flow of human history. It is therefore continually called upon to follow its unfolding in order to offer an educational service appropriate to the present times. The witness of Catholic educational institutions shows on their part a great responsiveness to the diversity of socio-cultural situations and readiness to adopt new teaching methods, while remaining faithful to their own identity.

Catholic school leaders need to consider the nature of this responsiveness and the challenge it represents within the context of their schools. How can the principles of Catholic Social Teaching support schools in providing a countercultural response? On a pragmatic level, for CST to be reflected in the ethos of the school and embedded throughout the curriculum, schools need to receive appropriate training to ensure there is a depth of understanding among staff about the purpose and meaning of the principles and how they serve to foster a living faith among pupils. In addition, some schools may benefit from support in planning and implementing these principles as part of their educational endeavour, to offer Catholic Social Teaching as part of an explicit Catholic approach to the curriculum. This research study will explore the ways in which schools advance the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in response to the call to holiness throughout teaching and learning, as well as in the totality of school life: How is the commitment to Catholic Social Teaching translated into practice in Catholic schools? How does this contribute to Catholic character formation?

2.9.3.2 Faith in Action

The tradition of Catholic Social Teaching encourages the process of See-Judge-Act as part of a Christian teleological view of the world. The principles of CST provide a basis for evaluating unjust situations and identifying actions aimed at promoting justice. As referenced earlier in this review, Cardinal Joseph Cardijn's See-Judge-Act methodology, originally relating back to the philosophy of Aquinas, provides a Christian lens through which to view the world and respond in the light of faith, illuminated by the Gospel. Pope

John XXIII (1961: n.236) in *Mater et Magistra* makes reference to the process of 'observe-judge-act' as a way of applying the principles of the Church's teaching on social matters to concrete situations:

> The teachings in regard to social matters for the most part are put into effect in the following three stages: first, the actual situation is examined; then, the situation is evaluated carefully in relation to these teachings; then only is it decided what can and should be done in order that the traditional norms may be adapted to circumstances of time and place. These three steps are at times expressed by the three words: observe, judge, act.

Brigham (2018) endeavours to explore examples of social injustice to demonstrate this methodology in real life contexts and experiences such as poverty and homelessness. She defines three dimensions to the See-Judge-Act methodology involving social analysis, ethical reflection and acts of charity and justice (2018: 23-25). Although they are distinct - charity and justice are also critically interdependent virtues and are incomplete without the other. For the Church, charity is 'an indispensable expression of her very being' (Benedict XVI, 2005: 25a). Charity responds to people's immediate needs - it is an act of compassion, emanating from a spirit of altruism and generosity. Justice, however, explores and seeks to address the reasons why people are without adequate resources. The pursuit of justice is motivated by a sense of obligation to a vision of goodness and fairness. Brigham (2018: 25) provides a useful distinction between the virtues here:

> When charity is seen as a starting point for fostering solidarity, it can be an effective way to promote empathy across social divisions and respond to people's immediate needs. However, charity without justice can ignore the structural inequalities that set up the need for charity in the first place and even reinforce unjust relationships.

This inductive method of social analysis contributes to character formation through the application and practice of key virtues such as charity and justice in real life contexts. The See-Judge-Act approach contributes towards the distinctive identity of the Catholic school curriculum, enhancing Catholic pedagogy, encouraging empathy, discernment

and responsive action to issues involving social justice. The most pertinent challenge presented to Catholic schools, however, is the absence of a published curricular for the See-Judge-Act methodology or any available training to support schools in implementing and developing this methodology as part of the curriculum, as highlighted by Friel (2019). In addition, there is currently a lack of published academic research into the use of the See-Judge-Act approach in Catholic primary schools, which will be addressed as part of the empirical case studies in this research project.

2.9.3.3 Building Community Within

Through promoting the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, the Catholic school is an extension of the Church's reflection on how Christians should live their vocation for the common good in the world. The ethos of Catholic Social Teaching unifies Catholic schools with its universal principles which promote social responsibility and communal commitment to a Christian calling. With Christ at the centre, Catholic education 'sees schools as communities where the spiritual, cultural and personal worlds are brought together and where values, motivations, aspirations and moral imperatives develop pupils' actions as persons and inform the choices they make for the rest of their lives' (CES, 2022: 22). This presents a view of the Catholic school as a cohesive community within which faith and life can be harmonised and unified. The Catholic school creates 'true communities out of a common effort for the common good' (SCCE, 1977: 46-47).

The role of community in the formation of character, discussed in earlier chapters, provides a climate conducive to the promotion of virtue through observing modelled behaviours. According to D'Orsa (2012), the Catholic school curriculum enables students to engage constructively and meaningfully with the wisdom and faith of the community, 'living as they do in a particular cultural and historical setting with the life chances this setting has to offer, and the constraints that it imposes in the process of establishing their identity as individuals and as members of the community.' D'Orsa (2012) emphasises here the impact of community on character formation, in creating a sense of identity and belonging. Catholic teachers and leaders are called as witnesses to Christ

in the vocation of education, accompanying students on their journey to be disciples. Schools need to reflect on how their communities within are developed and nurtured to reflect the Catholic ethos and mission of the school.

In their salvific mission of educating for transformation, it is vital for Catholic schools to recognise the significance of modelled virtue by all members of its community. This should be exemplified by leaders and all staff and demonstrated in the quality of the relationships. This requires, however, both commitment and investment by the school, and particularly, a focus on the development of leadership virtues combining intellectual, spiritual, moral, civic, performance and spiritual virtues. As expressed in the conciliar document *Educating for Today and Tomorrow* (2014), Catholic schools educate through their living context: 'This climate is pervaded not only by the values that are being expressed…, but also by the values that are lived out, by the quality of interpersonal relations between teachers and students, and students amongst each other' (CCE, 2014: n.2.II.1). The conciliar declaration *The Identity of the Catholic School* (2022: n.I.16), places a strong emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Catholic school as a *community*, more than an institution, 'in preparing pupils to exercise their freedom responsibly, forming an attitude of openness and solidarity'.

The implication for the Catholic school is in its endeavour to establish effective partnerships within the broad educational community of parents, teachers, school leaders and students 'called upon to work together with Church institutions …to focus on the promotion of a just community based on solidarity', sensitive to individual needs, especially poorer families (CCE, 2014: n.III.1b). The Church bestows upon the Catholic school the responsibility to act as 'the first social setting after the family…in which the individual has a positive experience of social and fraternal relationships as a precondition for becoming a person capable of building a society based on justice and solidarity' (2022: n.19). Huffman (1994) advocates an all-encompassing approach to character education that focuses on the moral impact of the school community. Although character formation relies upon synergy from such partnerships between the school and

the home, Arthur (2021: 102) expresses concern that Catholic schools and families 'are not always sites of this ecclesial communion.' A key challenge for Catholic school leaders is in their strategic endeavour and persistent pursuit to develop collaborative partnerships with parents. Where there is an absence of virtue role modelling within the family, through providing immersion in the living faith, enhanced through opportunities for pupil leadership, the Catholic school can seek to address this imbalance.

2.9.3.4 Synodality as Part of a Culture of Encounter

Catholic schools need to consider their provision beyond the formal academic curriculum to offer a range of enrichment opportunities which facilitate character development. The Salesian notion of accompaniment referenced earlier (see Chapter Two, Part 1) describes the process of 'being with' another as part of a pastoral community on their journey to Christ, a model which provides inspiration to the salvific mission of Catholic education today. Fundamental to St. John Bosco's pursuit of salvation of the youth is in seeking the integration of both faith and life, through an emphasis on establishing pastoral relationships in a spirit and environment animated by love, characteristic of the Salesian charism (Lydon: 2011: 101). Catholic schools should reflect on the ways in which Salesian accompaniment is translated into practice in a contemporary context, including in their provision for extracurricular activities, and how these serve to enhance character formation holistically.

Through modelling and fostering relationships nurtured by love, the Catholic school can offer a vision of a fulfilling life with Christ both within and beyond the classroom which can awaken moral purpose. It is important for schools to provide opportunities for children to engage in leadership roles and responsibilities in their school communities so that the sacred voice of the child can be heard and represented. In this way, schools can encourage children to be autonomous in their pursuit of virtue, contributing to the development of sought character. Central to the mission and purpose of Pope Francis' Synod (2021-23) *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission,* is an

invitation to the Catholic community worldwide to 'journey together' through engaging in a synodal process of listening and dialogue. The principle of synodality invites pupils to be innovators in their own formation. The contemporary challenge for schools is to reflect upon how they will shape synodality within their own settings and how, through 'journeying together' within communities, students are enabled to explore their faith and deepen their communion with both the Church, and with one another, which is the very essence of Catholic character formation.

2.9.4 Evaluating Character

The evaluation of character education, referenced previously in Chapter Three, presents a series of challenges for contemporary Catholic schools. The most pertinent issue is clearly the lack of an existing 'coherent corpus of research-based knowledge' in schools in the UK to evaluate character education (Ryan, 2014: 4) and, therefore, the absence of any robust scientific evidence as to what constitutes effective character education. Leming (1996) cautioned that 'if research is to inform the practice of character education, more and better evaluation of existing programs is needed'. One of the key findings in the Jubilee Centre's *My Character* (2014) research report highlighted that most of the research in the field of character education has been conducted in the United States, suggesting an urgent need for a 'reinvigorated conscious focus' on research in the United Kingdom (Arthur et al, 2014: 10).

Due to the complex nature of character development, at a student level it cannot be easily 'measured', and would require longitudinal study to evaluate development over prolonged time scales. In addition, there are a myriad of variables as to how virtue may be understood and demonstrated, rendering it difficult to apply any objective measure. Each child's journey in virtue literacy is entirely unique: for example, one child may have developed knowledge and understanding of a specific virtue but not shown how this learning has been in practice, others may have developed more maturity in their reflective capacity or in virtue practice.

Schools may decide, however, to engage in self-evaluation methods, as well as student self-assessment using, for instance, reflective journals in order to build practical wisdom. One potential limitation to student self-assessment is the reliability of the outcomes, as some students will not have developed the levels of capacity to reflect sufficiently on their own virtue literacy - this requires time, patience and guidance, enhanced through experience and practice. There are more formal school evaluation methods available for schools in the UK, such as the *Association of Character Education (ACE) School of Character Award*, which provides a generic school self-assessment model to support the evaluation process, albeit aligned more aptly to provision in community schools, rather than faith affiliated schools. Another point worthy of mention here, as Arthur (2014: 58) notes, is the fact that due to the nature and scope of character education, it is difficult to evaluate programmes *en masse*, therefore schools need to be evaluated individually in relation to their specific context.

The Jubilee Centre's *Evaluation Handbook* is a detailed resource for evaluating provision for character within the formal and non-formal curriculum based on a model of caught, taught and sought approaches. This model, however, is designed with community schools in mind, and would therefore need to be adapted, and to some extent reinterpreted, in the context of Christian settings. There is currently a lack of school self-evaluation tools and materials for Catholic character education in the UK, which needs to be urgently addressed and prioritised by dioceses to support schools to engage in this process. This significant issue will be included as part of the future recommendations proposed as part of this research study.

The subsequent chapter will provide an in-depth exploration of the methods and methodology used for the empirical research in this project.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

'Making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding'.

(Proverbs 2:2)

3.1 Introduction

The fundamental research design for this project, which aims to examine the extent and ways in which character education impacts upon children's formation in primary schools, is based on a case study which includes three research case study sites of primary schools in England. This research project aims to explore, analyse and build upon existing research to identify and evaluate how character education can promote the pursuit of social justice through the development of virtue literacy and practical wisdom. In a discussion of Christian pedagogy and moral theory, Arthur (2021: 99) posits: 'There is little attention given to its practical application in concrete educational situations'. This study will explore effective practice and pedagogy, identify challenges in the field and make proposals based on the outcomes of a robust and comprehensive review of literature and a multiple case study approach, to contribute to and influence practice in the field of Catholic character education. The research was designed to address three key research questions which served the overall research purpose and created the foundations upon which the methodological assumptions were based:

- How can Catholic primary schools promote virtue literacy?
- How can Catholic character education develop the practical wisdom of the scholar?
- How can Catholic character education empower the scholar in the practice of virtue to serve the principles of Catholic Social Teaching?

The methodology employed includes a detailed review of relevant literature in the field of character education research. Emergent themes from a critical analysis of the

literature provided significant qualitative data in response to the research questions. This project's primary methodology was based on a qualitative research paradigm, extended and enhanced with the use of quantitative data, adopting a mixed methods approach, which will be explored in more detail subsequently in this chapter.

3.2 Case Study Design

This study utilised case study as the overarching research design, adopting a mixed methods approach focused on how character education is taught within Catholic primary schools, examining the extent to which character education impacts upon children's formation. Case study can be defined as 'an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence' (Robson and McCartan, 2016: 150), involving asking questions, observing and analysing (Bassey, 1999). It is important to give careful consideration to the nature, size and scale of the case study, as highlighted by Bell and Waters (2014: 12). They caution about the need to be both realistic and specific in the selection of an aspect of a particular case, echoing Yin's (1994: 137) reference to focusing on 'specific propositions' within the case study design in order to maintain 'reasonable limits' or parameters. As part of this research methodology, strategic planning and awareness of feasibility and manageability for a single researcher was central to the research design and influenced decision-making at all stages of data collection and analysis. This involved refining the size and scale of the project to focus on three Catholic primary schools in the southeast England as the multiple cases to be investigated.

Some critics suggest that case studies lack generalisability. The unique case-specific identity of single case study research presents a challenge in terms of ensuring consistency of approach across cases to enable cross-case comparison (Ashley, 2021: 137). Denscombe (2010: 60-61), suggests that for data outcomes from a single case to be generalisable, the researcher should demonstrate how wider inferences can be made

from the case example in relation to other similar cases. Bassey (1981: 85), however, regards relatability as more important than generalisability. He argues that cases are valid forms of educational research if they are conducted 'systematically and critically, if they are relatable, and if by publication they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge' (1981: 86). Worthy of note is that Bassey (1999: 12) later acknowledges a distinction between two types of generalisations: 'statistical' and 'fuzzy', relating to quantitative and qualitative data respectively. Bassey distinguishes here between 'statistical' generalisations which have 'an x or y per cent chance of what was found in the sample will also be found throughout the population' and 'fuzzy' generalisations which 'arise from studies of singularities and typical claims that it is possible, or likely or unlikely that what was found in the singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere' (1999: 12).

One of the key advantages of a multiple case study, utilised in this research design, is that the findings can be applied beyond the parameters of one specific case. Patton (2014) advocates the use of multiple case study, with reference to a strategy of 'maximum variation' for case selection to enable the identification of common patterns, as well as variation across cases. For this study, three Catholic primary schools in the southeast of England were chosen as the cases to be studied in depth, whilst also providing a breadth of understanding through investigation of each specific case. The case studies focused on the relationship between character education and formation, with the intention that the resultant data would be both relatable for other Catholic primary schools and other educational settings. Case study schools were selected to provide variation in the extent to which provision for character education was implemented and/or developed; there was also variation in the socio-economic demographics of the school recruitment. A further detailed discussion related to sampling will be discussed later in this chapter.

For Yin (2018), there is a duality of purpose in the rationale for using multiple cases, instead of a single case, in that it allows for the identification of comparisons between cases which may lead to either similar findings or reveal different findings for specific reasons. In terms of validity, although case studies are not designed to be generalisable, the outcomes do not need to be restricted to the findings of a specific case and may have a broader application and relevance. As Ashley (2021: 137) states:

> The very selection of a case indicates that the researcher is connecting it to a broader phenomenon or group of cases of its kind and to a collective understanding of that phenomenon.

This relates to Yin's (2018: 175) argument that case study enquiry may lead to 'analytic generalisations' that facilitate causal inference from case study findings. Case studies have the potential to provide a rich depth of data which utilise either or both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Triangulation of multiple methods increases the validity of the case outcomes and serves to highlight contradictions and areas for analysis through 'awareness of anomaly' (Kuhn, 1970: 52). According to Thomas (2010: 576), however, the validity of case study emanates from its offer of 'exemplary knowledge' gained through phronesis (practical wisdom), rather than from its theoretical analysis and generalisability. He defines his use of the term 'exemplary' as relating to 'a particular representation given in context and understood in that context' which, he states, is only interpretable in the context of one's own experience and phronesis, rather than theory (2010: 578). In his view, authentic case study validation arises from the 'connections and insights' which emerge from phronesis - connections which can be applied to one's own situation (2010: 579). In the context of this project, a case study model of enquiry across multiple settings was chosen to create the potential for meanings to be discovered and interpreted across varieties of experience.

3.2.1 Qualitative and Quantitative Research Paradigms

The discovery of the concept of a 'paradigm' is commonly associated with Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996), an American philosopher of science, who believed a paradigm to be 'a set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provided a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organised study of that world' (Waring, 2021: 17). For Kuhn, paradigms are a feature of the natural and not the social sciences which represent 'a person's conception of the world, its nature and their position in it, as well as a multitude of potential relationships with that world' (Waring 2021: 17). Kuhn (1970) argued that science does not evolve towards the truth but remains constant and objective before experiencing a paradigm shift, when current theories are unable to explain some phenomenon due to anomalies, and as a result, a new theory is proposed. In this way, paradigms provide 'a concrete exemplar that functions as a guide to future research' (Wray, 2011). Pizorelli (2021) highlights the purpose of the paradigm as 'a solution to a concrete problem that serves as a standard for solving new problems'.

Within a quantitative research paradigm, there is truth and objective knowledge about the world which exists independent of values, beliefs or perceptions. Its aim is to make generalisable explanations and predictions and to propose and test hypotheses. A quantitative paradigm typically uses statistical research instruments which can be used to measure and prove theories, such as surveys. As explained by Punch (2005: 28), quantitative researchers use 'numerical data and typically… structured and predetermined research questions, conceptual frameworks and designs.' One of the key advantages of using quantitative measures for research purposes is that data focuses on objective numerical data from randomized samples, generating generalisable conclusions. Quantitative data can be collected, tabulated and analysed efficiently and is therefore less susceptible to misinterpretation.

One of the key limitations to a quantitative research instrument, however, is that the questions posed do not facilitate the depth of discussion or the level of engagement required to explore, articulate or reflect, which is characteristic of qualitative approaches. Within this research project, a range of qualitative measures were utilised including semi-structured interviews for teachers and leaders, as well as pupil and parent focus groups. These instruments served to mitigate the limitation of the quantitative measure through a deeper critical exploration of themes in the context of an interactive group dynamic or individual interviews. The use of focus groups and semi-structured interviews are explored in more detail later in the chapter (see sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3).

The qualitative paradigm reflects a phenomenological perspective which seeks to study phenomena according to the individual perceptions, experiences, ideas and opinions of the respondents, without an emphasis on statistical or verifiable data. Qualitative research therefore reflects an interpretivist paradigm where 'logic flows from specific to general and that knower and known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 14). Punch (2005) highlights that a distinctive characteristic of qualitative research is that 'it not only uses non-numerical and unstructured data but also, typically, has research questions and methods which are more general at the start, and become more focused as the study progresses' (2005: 28). In this way, qualitative approaches have the capacity to be responsive and adaptive throughout the research investigation, providing the researcher with an opportunity to react to data outcomes, shift direction or nuance where necessary within the parameters of research purpose, and identify areas or themes which require a deeper or broader scope of enquiry. Lydon (2011: 39) highlights a key strength of qualitative research where there is typically 'less tendency to impose a rigid structure on the design of the research instrument', in comparison to quantitative approaches.

Husserl (1889-1938), the influential German philosopher and founder of phenomenology, described phenomenology 'as a science of essential Being (as *eidetic*

Science); a science which aims exclusively at establishing 'knowledge of essences' (*Wesenserkenntnisse*) and absolutely no 'facts' (Husserl, 2002: 44). Phenomenology as a form of inquiry requires 'a new way of looking at things… to move freely along this new way without ever reverting to the old viewpoints…to learn to see what stands before our eyes' (Husserl, 2002: 43). Lydon (2011: 37) expands on this definition: 'Phenomenology must describe what is given to us in immediate experience without being obstructed (mediated) by preconception and theoretical notions.' Phenomenology searches for the reality of a set of human experiences, discovered through subjective descriptions of a sample group (Creswell, 1994). This approach is based on the primary aim of 'establishing the truth of things' (Moustakas, 1994: 57). A critical feature of phenomenology is the use of *epoche,* which Patton (1990: 408) describes as an 'ongoing analytic process' throughout the research enquiry. *Epoche* can be defined as the suspension of judgement, where the phenomenologist is required to consciously abstain from preconceptions, based on their previous knowledge, experience and beliefs, in an attempt to mitigate bias in the collection and interpretation of data. According to Bednall (2006), the challenge for a researcher is to 'allow the voices of subjectivity to emerge authentically' through the personal accounts of the respondents, expressed through the data collection devices.

Pring (2000a: 55) posits that the perceived polarity between quantitative and qualitative paradigms represents a 'naive realism' as new experiences serve to continually shape understanding. He argues for an 'interpretative and hermeneutic tradition in which we seek to understand things from the perspective of the participants'. For Pring (2000b: 501), educational research must acknowledge the complex transaction between teacher and learner and should adopt a 'philosophically reflective approach, focusing on 'aims, values and processes'.

In contemplating a methodology for this project, based on the outcomes from the pre-research critical review of literature and the intended pursuit of the research focus, a

qualitative framework was chosen as the dominant characteristic of the research, using semi-structured interviews and focus groups as primary instruments. This methodology was determined to be the most apposite approach for the nature of the study to authentically reveal the personal perspectives of participants, with an emphasis on subjectivity and interactivity. The potential of the phenomenological method was recognised due to its capacity to provide subjective, non-rational data from the participant sample groups in the case study settings.

Waring (2021: 15, 20) acknowledges the complexity of research in an educational context and its associated terminology which continues to be a subject of debate, suggesting the definition provided by Cohen et al. (2018: 1) as both acknowledging and accommodating the divergent views relating to educational research:

> [Educational research] is the systematic and scholarly application of the principles of a science of behaviour to the problems of teaching and learning within education and the clarification of those issues having a direct and indirect bearing on those concepts.

Although a detailed discussion of the debate surrounding the nature of educational research is beyond the remit of this study, this project will, however, examine the methodological assumptions which underpin all research. Regardless of the choice of educational enquiry adopted, all research efforts should involve conscious consideration and reflection upon how the research process is determined through generating a range of assumptions. Grix (2018) proposes that research is framed by a series of 'related assumptions' which he refers to as the four building blocks of research: *ontology* (nature of the social world), epistemology (how assumptions can be known), methodology (choice of procedure or logic) and methods (data collection techniques). Grix (2018: 53) refers to ontology as the starting point in research, from which epistemological and methodological positions follow. Blaikie (2000: 8) defines ontology as the study of 'what we believe constitutes social reality.' In relation to ontological assumptions, this research project is based on a case study approach which adopts a constructivist methodology.

Constructivism defines reality as constructed by individual perceptions, in contrast to realism, which attributes singular objective truth to define reality. In terms of epistemological assumptions, this project adopts an interpretivist approach, based on developing knowledge through a process of interpretation and observation, rather than a positivist perspective, based on the belief that knowledge is achieved through direct observation. Interpretivism is subjectivist, involving interactivity between the investigator and the object of the investigation. The methodological assumptions in this project are a reflection of constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology which, in the view of the researcher, were most appropriately suited to the nature of this educational research endeavour. As Waring (2021: 17) states, the fundamental relationship between the epistemological and methodological assumptions informs the choice of methods used to gather data.

Worthy of mention here is the view that dichotomies or 'polarities of paradigms' can be problematic, as expressed by Creswell and Poth (2017: 36) and similarly expressed by Silverman (2014: 27). Instead of a distinct separation of paradigms, they propose a focus on the 'process of enquiry' rather than aligning research methodology to one particular paradigm. Biesta's (2010) advocacy of a mixed methods approach involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches to generate a more enhanced understanding of social phenomena than using one single approach. It could be argued that a mixed methods research approach offers pacification in the paradigmatic debate (Biesta, 2021: 186). Using mixed methods serves to widen the paradigmatic lens, incorporating a blurring of boundaries and shifting of paradigms. Waring (2021: 19), however, regards this combination of methodologies as ambiguous, which in his view, creates confusion in terms of meaning and application. Biesta (2021: 186) argues that mixed methods allow research to be driven primarily by the aims, objectives and research questions, rather than affiliated to the *a priori* choice of a particular paradigm. Mixed methods as an approach has developed through the concept of triangulation, which can be defined as the convergence and corroboration of results from different

methods and designs studying the same phenomenon (Greene et al, 1989: 256). As there are inherent limitations within each design method, it is logical to suggest that using a mixed methods approach to study phenomenon serves to mitigate this and therefore enhances the validity of the research outcomes.

This subsequent section explains the rationale for the chosen research methodology, design and methods used for this project to address the research question with integrity of purpose. At each stage of the research planning, the researcher made conscious decisions based on a commitment to the overarching purpose of the study, whilst seeking to retain the ethical validity at each stage of the research enquiry.

3.2.2 Research Methodology and Methods

Lydon (2011: 30) regards research methodology as a 'dialogue between literature and qualitative and quantitative research'. It is important to acknowledge the relationship between outcomes from the critical retrieval of literature and empirical data. The outcomes of the critical review of literature, which examined an extensive range of relevant primary and secondary sources, contributed a significant intellectual value to the research, enabling both a breadth and depth of balanced academic enquiry. There was a committed and sustained focus on the research questions which formed the basis of the study, which informed the approach to academic discourse throughout the critical review of literature. The methodology, in the first instance, involved familiarisation with and reflection upon a range of primary sources, such as Biblical texts and conciliar documents. This was followed by a subsequent examination of secondary sources to identify, explore and reflect upon emergent themes and issues across both sources. This enabled the researcher to frame and develop coherent arguments supported by evidence from different types of sources, which consequently provided a rich basis upon which to collect the empirical data.

The design of the research project predominantly used interpretative, qualitative measures as the primary research element. Quantitative measures, through the use of questionnaires, were also used to provide a broader triangulation of data from the pupil sample group. The rationale for these choices will be subsequently explained in the context of this research study. This chapter will also discuss awareness of fundamental limitations of methods used and acknowledge areas in which the research methodology and methods could be modified to enhance validity and integrity.

To summarise, this research enquiry adopts a predominantly interpretivist and constructivist methodology, using a range of qualitative methods including interviews and focus groups within a multiple case study design. The study also employs a quantitative, positivist perspective using questionnaires as a research instrument, offering a mixed methods approach to the study. The concept of mixed methods will be explored in more detail in the subsequent section.

3.3 Research Design

The use of mixed methods research enabled a robust approach to data collection through a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Arthur et al. (2014: 11) acknowledges the challenges associated with measuring character, but advocates the use of mixed methods, allowing for the possibility of triangulation. As Biesta (2021: 186) highlights: 'Triangulation seeks the convergence and corroboration of results from different methods and designs studying the same phenomenon'. In considering justification for the rationale of a mixed methods approach, triangulation provides convergence with other sources of evidence within the research context which also supports the plausibility of outcomes. For Flick (2018: 3), triangulation is used to 'extend the range of insights and knowledge' produced through a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, making the research more valuable. In this project, triangulation enabled the researcher to elicit a broad range of views from across

the school community, which included senior leaders, teachers, parents and pupils within each of the case study schools using a range of instruments. A more detailed explanation and justification of each of these research instruments is provided subsequently.

3.3.1 Pupil Questionnaire

Questionnaires as a quantitative research instrument provide standardised responses, yielding statistical data, from a large sample population on a range of topics. The data produced can be more efficiently analysed than qualitative data as there is greater clarity in numerical outcomes. Since the purpose of this study focused on examining factors contributing to children's formation, the use of a pupil questionnaire provided a larger scale opportunity for pupil voice to be optimized.

However, the researcher acknowledges a range of limitations in the use of surveys as a data method of data collection. Firstly, the design of a survey is controlled by the researcher. Questions devised may reflect bias based on the researcher's own assumptions or prior knowledge and experience of the field of study. In addition, data outcomes indicate the responses based only on the questions asked, without providing any other information or further detail about the respondents' answers. 'If all the questions and all the possible answers are determined in advance, the element of discovery is much reduced' (Gillham, 2007: 2). To this extent, the superficiality of the data outcomes from a questionnaire presents a limitation to the credibility of the research if reliant on the survey as a single research instrument. This provides the basis for justification of a mixed methods approach to enhance the scope and richness of the data, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

In this project, questionnaires were used with a sample of Year 6 children in each case study school to provide triangulated data combined with the qualitative measures used.

Children were chosen as one of the sample groups in this research as this research enquiry identified pupil voice to be of significant value in addressing the research purpose. As discussed later in the chapter (see section 3.4.3), Year 6 pupils were regarded as the most suitable sample in terms of levels of maturity and experience with the target content, as well as their ability to formulate and articulate responses to the research questions.

The use of questionnaires as part of the pupil data collection was chosen as a research instrument to be examined concurrently with the pupil focus group data, within an embedded 'nested' approach (see section 3.8.1). The online surveys were designed to elicit data from a large number of pupil participants across multiple schools (up to 32 respondents in each setting - a maximum combined total of up to 96 respondents). The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide comprehensive statistical data which could be efficiently analysed. The question schedule was designed to elicit the subjective insights of pupil participants in relation to their experiences with character education and their perceptions of influencing factors and impact based on the three domains of character- caught, taught and sought. This combination of approaches generated a breadth of findings which were subsequently examined alongside the pupil focus group outcomes in order to provide triangulation and increase validity.

Another challenge in the use of questionnaires as a method of data collection is the planning of the design and format, ensuring that it can be easily accessible and interpreted by the participants. Prior to planning the questionnaire, it was essential to establish clarity of purpose guided by the research question at all stages in the design and development of the survey. During the design stage, it was necessary to give careful consideration to the selection and formulation of questions in terms of how each question related to the research purpose, as well as how the intended outcomes from the questionnaire would be interpreted (Bell, 2016: 156). Methods of data analysis employed in the project will be discussed later in the chapter (see section 3.8).

The use of children as the target sample for the research presented challenges in terms of ensuring that questions were formulated based on clarity, accessibility, sensitivity and at an age-appropriate level of language and content, focused on the overall research question. There is no opportunity for the researcher to offer explanation of misunderstandings or misinterpretation of the survey questions after the data collection (Gillham, 2007: 10) and therefore vigilance in question selection was vital. Another factor to be considered was the manageability of the activity for the sample group; it was anticipated that the questionnaire would be conducted within a maximum of thirty minutes, including time for the respondents to reflect on the questions. In terms of semantics, it was important that language was clear and concise to minimise confusion, ambiguity or alternative interpretations. The use of a pilot study, discussed later in this chapter, was a useful tool to reduce susceptibility to these issues (see section 3.6).

The questionnaire was structured into three sections based on the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2017: 9) three domains of character: caught, taught and sought character. Participants were asked questions which related to each domain: the aim of the taught section was to elicit pupils' experience of taught character and their perceptions of the impact it has had on their character development. The caught character questions focused on the impact of culture and ethos on character development, including the role of school and the family. The sought character questions explored pupils' perception of leadership opportunities and how pupils' experience of character education had impacted on their autonomous pursuit and practice of virtue. These domains of character were used as the basis for comparative analysis across schools using a one-way ANOVA.

The pupil questionnaire was designed using a Likert rating scale, designed to measure perceptions or opinions. Participants indicate strength of agreement with each statement on an ordinal scale to reflect their attitude toward the issue (Joshi et al., 2015: 397). This is consistent with Oppenheim's (1992: 187-188) 'assumption of

unidimensionality,' which suggests that a rating scale should measure only one dimension at a time. In this study, the Likert scale enabled differentiation in responses which provided subtle distinctions for the purpose of analysis.

During formulation of the questionnaire, the researcher decided to include an asymmetrical ipsatic (forced) rating scale of four items (rather than a symmetrical 3 or 5 rating scale) in order to encourage respondents to commit to a rating which would more clearly indicate strength of inclination towards a particular response, rather than offer the possibility of a neutral stance (Joshi, 2015: 398). However, as the respondents in the survey were children, they were advised prior to completion of the survey that they did not need to answer all questions if unable or unsure how to respond (Tymms, 2021: 279). The researcher was fully committed to the decision to involve pupils as respondents in the research, acknowledging the additional complexity in gaining ethical approval as a result. The researcher believed that engaging with pupil voice afforded children agency in the research and would provide significant qualitative and quantitative data, highly relevant to the topic of study. Gaining greater knowledge, understanding and insight into pupils' attitudes and perceptions offered valuable and authentic contributions to the research questions which underpinned the study.

Another aspect of data collection using questionnaires is the rate of response, which if low, will 'threaten the validity of the information which they collect' (Tymms, 2021: 282). In this study, this issue was mitigated as a result of administering the pupil survey in the classroom context within the case study school so that the sample group were in a familiar but controlled environment, with time allocated within the school day for the children to complete the questionnaire at the same time as a class. An explanation of how the pupil survey was administered as part of this research project is discussed more fully later in this chapter (see section 3.7).

3.3.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups study the interactions and communication dynamics of groups and are regarded as an increasingly popular method of data collection among qualitative researchers (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013: 374). The purpose of focus groups is to gain collective views on a particular research topic within a group setting, generating data based on the synergy of the group interaction which stimulates discussion (Green et al. 2004), providing collective rather than individual responses (Gibbs: 2021: 243). Denscombe (2014: 189) highlights the uniqueness of a focus group as its reliance on the interpersonal dynamics and synergy of group interaction which is distinct from other methods of data collection.

Focus groups were selected instruments in the research design for this project as they provided information about the participants' ideas and feelings about a range of issues and illuminated differences in perspectives among the participants (Rabiee, 2004: 656), relating to aspects of Catholic character education and its relationship to, and impact upon, children's formation, in a context which would not be feasible using other methods. It was important for the facilitator to gain a clear insight into the participant's perceptions and opinions in a non-evaluative and non-judgemental style to create an environment which was conducive to an open and candid interaction among the group.

One of the key advantages of focus group study is that it provides multiple perspectives where participants are organised with ease of accessibility for research purposes and is therefore an efficient method of data collection (Gibbs, 2021: 240). In contrast to one-to-one semi-structured interviews, focus group data emerges as a result of the participants' interaction with each other, rather than with the interviewer and provides a variety of perspectives, rather than that of a single respondent. However, according to Guest et al. (2017: 693), other researchers argue that individual interviews produce greater detail than focus groups and therefore provide a richer insight into a

respondent's personal thoughts, feelings, and world view (citing Knodel, 1993). Empirical comparisons between focus groups and interview data demonstrate that they both generated similar concepts or conclusions, with some variation in breadth and depth of data collected (Guest, 2017: 694). This study employed both methods so that the focus group data could complement other outcomes, serving as an opportunity to further explore themes and issues which emerged from the pupil questionnaires and school staff interviews within a group dynamic context.

As highlighted by Halcomb et al. (2007: 7), a significant level of skill is required by the facilitator of the focus group, 'listening and probing and encouraging participants to explore their perceptions of the topic'. In this study, the researcher decided to act as a participant observer in this process. Due to the large amount of data generated, facilitator notes were written both during and immediately after the focus group interviews. The researcher recruited a non-participant observer in the interests of impartiality, to take notes during the discussion in order to enhance the independence and validity of the outcomes. The additional observational notes were used to provide supplementary data, including non-verbal communication, alongside the recorded audio transcripts and group facilitator notes. A debrief between the focus group facilitator and the non-participant observer immediately following the session provided recency and detailed exchange of information enabling comparison to refine accuracy. It is important to acknowledge that the researcher is a member of the teaching staff/senior leadership in one of the case study schools. In this context, the pre-existing relationship between the researcher and respondents could generate a sense of trust and confidence for the participants. It must also be acknowledged, however, that this could have had a potentially adverse effect on the confidence and candour of participants in terms of their willingness to disclose information and trust in the confidentiality of their contributions. In addition to this, there is a potential issue of confidentiality among participants in terms of contributions and disclosures made within the group (Halcomb et al., 2007: 9). Although the focus groups were selected based on homogeneity, it is important to

consider that not all participants may have felt confident or comfortable to engage openly within a group context which presents a potential impediment to the validity of outcomes.

Although focus group interviews facilitate collection of a large amount of data in a short time frame, the amount of data yielded can present challenges in terms of manageability, relevance and interpretation for the purposes of data analysis. There is susceptibility of the focus group discussion to detract from the question schedule, as well as the issue of the group dynamics leading to non-participation or participant dominance, all of which require skilful facilitation and management (Cohen, 2017: 533). In addressing the challenges associated with the complex role of the facilitator, the researcher decided that this responsibility should be conducted by the researcher who had expert knowledge of the field and prior experience in leading focus group discussions within educational settings.

As the sample in one of focus groups involved children, the researcher made conscious decisions at the planning stage to ensure how the session was conducted would be apposite for the age of the respondents. It was of paramount importance that there was a relaxed and congenial atmosphere which felt comfortable and non-threatening, although with a balance of formality appropriate to the age of the group in order to create a sense of the importance of the task. In the words of Solberg (2014: 234), it is the responsibility of the researcher to 'invite rather than over-rule the informants'. The focus group interviews took place on the school site with the class teacher present throughout which provided a familiar environment for the children to engage in the research activity. Different methods of communication of ideas were invited through a combination of written and spoken activities, as well as the use of media stimulus to provoke ideas and generate discussion. The use of simple age-appropriate language was considered key to ensure clarity in the questions posed. The duration of the pupil focus group was limited

to a maximum of thirty minutes as a reasonable measure in the interests of the children's levels of concentration and engagement.

The focus group schedule of questions for both the parent and pupil forums were thematically aligned with each other, as well as the semi-structured interview schedule for the teachers and school leaders, with some variation based on relevance and applicability to the participant sample. As part of the focus group schedule, the researcher explored the views and perceptions of both pupils and parents across a range of areas relating to character education in the home, school and community. Both parents and pupils were asked a set of questions with a commonality of themes relating to:

a) Interpretation of the term 'virtue'
b) Perception of what constitutes 'good character'
c) Understanding the purpose of character education
d) Challenges for character education

These areas were explored specifically with pupils:

e) Virtue practice and serving the principles of Catholic Social Teaching
f) Perceptions about the impact of character education
g) Perceptions about who/what has made the most impact on their formation

These additional areas were explored specifically with parents:

h) How the difference between right/wrong is taught at home
i) Moral development and support at home
j) Communication with school regarding character education

The subsequent section will discuss the use of semi-structured interviews which were used with a different sample to the focus groups, involving teaching staff and school leaders.

3.3.3 Semi-structured Interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews contributed a significant proportion of data in the research as part of an interpretative research methodology. The aim of the interviews was to elicit the experiences, perceptions and opinions of the respondents through purposeful interactions in relation to the topic of study to gain a greater insight and understanding of another's perspective through a process of discovery: 'At the heart of in-depth interviewing is an interest in other individual stories because they are of worth' (Siedman, 2019: 9). Lydon (2011: 31) refers to interpretative research as generating 'levels of meaning' which require the researcher to analyse and reflect upon to construct new understanding of educational phenomena.

Qualitative analysis of the interview data revealed detailed perceptions and reflections of staff and leaders in relation to the key research questions which this project addresses within the participant schools. Interview schedules were piloted in advance and contained questions about the participants' understanding of character education within the context of their school setting and its relationship to children's formation. The interview schedules were semi-structured which facilitated a more interactive and flexible approach to questioning, enabling the interviewer to pursue and further probe areas of interest that emerged during the interview.

The interview schedule for senior leaders and staff was devised to address the key research questions with planned prompts to assist the researcher to extend questioning to gain deeper insights or further clarification if necessary. The interviews included questions based on the following themes, whilst ensuring emphasis and commitment to

the study's main research question: 'To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England?' The schedule comprised a total of eight questions which aimed to probe participants' perceptions based on key areas of interest in the study:

a) Understanding of the distinctive nature of Catholic character education
b) Purpose of Catholic character education
c) Provision for Catholic character education
d) Understanding of formation and its meaning
e) Influential factors on children's formation
f) Understanding of how children develop wisdom
g) Assessment of impact of character education
J) How Catholic Social Teaching is promoted
k) Challenges for Catholic character education

3.4 The Sample

The three main research instruments used in this research involved interviews, focus groups and a pupil questionnaire. Table 1 below shows the actual sample size used in each research instrument in each case study setting. Despite some variation in sample size, particularly in relation to Coastal School with fewer pupil participants in the online questionnaire, this variation was mitigated by the multiple data collection methods used and the quality of the responses across the data sets which captured a rich diversity of outcomes.

Table 1. Actual number of participants in case study data collection

	Interviews	Parent focus groups	Pupil focus groups	Pupil Online Questionnaire
Sample	Senior leaders/ teachers	Parents of Key Stage 2 pupils	Year 6 pupils	Year 6 pupils (one class per school)
Coastal	3	6	6	25
Urban	3	5	6	28
Semi-Rural	3	6	6	32
Total	**9**	**17**	**18**	**85**

The selection of the samples used in the data collection predominantly involved purposive sampling, although other forms of selection were also employed, retaining a consistent focus on research purpose at each stage of the data collection. Purposive sampling involves the intentional selection of participants by the researcher to gather information in a research context with a specific area of interest. This method of sampling focuses on specific characteristics in a targeted population group related to the nature of the investigative study. As defined by Oliver (2006: 245), purposive sampling is:

> …a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research.

As purposive sampling involves the intentional recruitment of participants by the researcher, it is more likely to provide relevant data which addresses the research purpose, which is the primary justification for the use of this type of sample in this study. As indicated by Devine and Heath (1999: 57), a randomised sample would potentially result in fewer relevant respondents. This would be detrimental to the research endeavour and was therefore not applicable as a method of sampling in the study.

As part of the ethical considerations for this project, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the selection criteria used in purposive sampling with full transparency. The subjective nature of purposive sampling creates a source of potential selection bias,

which presents a threat to the validity of research outcomes. As highlighted by Oliver (2006: 245), it is important to mitigate such threat through ensuring a consistency between the purpose and epistemological basis of the research, and the criteria used for selecting the purposive sample. The subsequent section of this chapter will examine the criteria and processes involved in the recruitment of the participants in the study.

3.4.1 Case Study Recruitment

As an initial stage, the researcher recruited participant schools through communication with all Catholic primary schools in the southeast of England. A letter of invitation was circulated within the diocese by the Director of Education. The researcher has used purposive selection of participants through intentionally recruiting schools which expressed an explicit interest in the proposed research on Catholic character education, in response to a letter of invitation to schools to participate in the study. The intended aim of the researcher was to recruit up four schools with an existing embedded and intentional character education provision, as well as recruiting contrasting case study schools with less developed provision in order to make evaluative comparisons. Of the four schools who expressed initial interest, three schools returned the permission letters required for ethical approval. Since the study relied on the interest and willingness of schools to participate, it may be subject to convenience and self-selection bias.

It is also important to acknowledge here that the researcher was employed as a member of the senior leadership team at one of the participant schools and was responsible for leading and developing character education in that setting. This is an example of both purposive as well as convenience sampling, enabling ease of access for data collection within a familiar context. The duality of the role of researcher as practitioner in one of the case study schools inevitably presents a potential subjectivity bias which was managed and mitigated proactively, adhering to stringent ethics protocol. It is also important to acknowledge the limitations created due to the close involvement of the researcher at all levels of data collection and how this could influence the perception of

participants involved in the study. Respondents may have felt limited or inclined to provide answers to the benefit of evaluative outcomes for the school which they perceived to be desirable. This bias was mitigated through self-assessment by the researcher as well as conscious planning, dialogue and critical reflection at all stages of the study to preserve the integrity and validity of the research. Participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their individual responses as part of the information provided to participants prior to engagement in the data collection. Despite these potential limitations, a key advantage of this position is that the researcher had an established pre-existing relationship with one of the participant schools in terms of relevant experience in the field, as well as convenient access for data collection purposes.

The researcher selected the other two case study schools as they had both expressed interest in participation through responding to the initial communication via the diocese. This enabled three schools to be part of the study which the researcher regarded as a sufficient and feasible number within a case study design which relied predominantly on qualitative approaches. Prior to accepting the schools as participants, the researcher engaged in a detailed analysis of school websites to gain an insight into character education provision. The deliberate selection of contrasting levels of experience across the participant schools was intended to enhance comparison and provide a richer variation in evaluation. The second stage in selection involved conversations, using a combination of face to face and online meetings between the researcher and individual schools based on accessibility and convenience for the participants, to enable assessments as to feasibility for the study. The schools selected for the case study were able to explain a range of contexts in which character education was implemented. Through liaison with each of the case settings, the researcher was able to arrange a dedicated facilitator to act as a named contact in each of the schools who assisted in the recruitment of participants for the research. This assisted with access and

communication with each school throughout the research process which impacted positively on the efficacy of the research endeavour.

3.4.2 Participant Sample - Interviews

The number of participants to be interviewed was selected within a range of 3-4 participants from each of the case study schools (a maximum total of up to 12 interviewees) to enable a sufficient amount of data to be collected which would represent the topic of investigation through a range of lenses, including members of the senior leadership team, as well as teaching staff. The participants were chosen purposively across all three schools to include the Headteacher, a senior leader or senior teacher (either of which may include the Character Education Lead if one is designated and/or the RE Lead) and up to two members of teaching staff, dependent upon the school staffing structure in each setting. The participants selected for the study were considered 'information rich cases' (Patton, 2014: 230) by the researcher, chosen intentionally for their capacity to share their individual expertise, knowledge, experience and perspective on the topic of study.

3.4.3 Participant Sample - Pupil Questionnaire

The researcher selected one class of Year 6 pupils (up to 32 pupils) in each of the case study schools, as respondents for the online questionnaires. Actual sample: Coastal *n*.25; Urban *n*.28 Semi-Rural *n*.32, a total of 85 pupil participants. The 10–11-year-old age group was chosen by the researcher as the target sample due to their level of maturity, experience and ability to articulate their ideas, opinions and understanding. As acknowledged by Docherty and Sandelowski (1999: 177), children are 'the best sources of information about themselves'. This research adhered to the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018: 24) which endorses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989):

> The best interests of the child are the primary consideration, and children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity.

At all stages in the design, implementation and evaluation of the research, sensitivity to the safety and best interests of the children involved in the study as research participants was an ethical priority and treated with vigilance and sensitivity. Ethical considerations are given a more detailed explanation subsequently (see section 3.5).

3.4.4 Participant Sample - Pupil and Parent Focus Group

The pupil focus group sample was selected by the participant school through random selection by the school from across the Year 6 cohort at the request of the researcher. However, there is potential that the method of selection in fact related more to applicability, in that participants could have been selected by the school based on their knowledge of the study area (Rabiee, 2004: 656). Although representative samples of pupils were requested from the participant Year 6 classes to engage in the pupil focus group, it must be acknowledged that schools may have invited participation from specific pupils based on their level of interest and commitment to the topic of study or their ability to articulate or another criteria unknown to the researcher, in order to provide more positive outcomes for the schools, rather than purely random selection. Another factor worthy of consideration is the fact that any data collected from the pupil sample relied upon prior parental consents being provided and therefore pupil participation was dependent upon receipt of relevant permissions.

The participants in the parent focus group were selected through invitation to participate with a limit of between 4-6 respondents in each group from each school. The actual focus group sample size generated 17 parent participants and 18 pupil participants across the three schools.

Another limitation relating to sample selection was the issue of self-reported evidence by the respondents. The data may also be contaminated with self-confirmation bias, which involves participants' responses being influenced by prior beliefs, consciously rejecting any contradictory content and therefore not receptive to new learning (Wittebols, 2020: 1). As a result of these issues, there is a possibility that qualitative data provided through interviews and focus groups may have been exaggerated or misrepresented to some extent, or potentially even falsified in order to generate outcomes towards a particular orientation, which do not fully represent a candid account from the participants and therefore affect the validity of the evaluative outcomes of the data collection.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is 'a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others' (Cavan, 1977: 810). Hammersley (2021: 58) identifies three aspects of what he defines as a 'relatively standard set of principles' which should inform a researcher's ethical approach and decision making: minimising harm, protecting privacy and respecting autonomy.' Educational researchers have a responsibility to act with integrity and sensitivity guided by ethical considerations, at all stages in the research process, upholding the dignity of the participants. This research project has adhered to BERA's (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* at all stages of planning, data collection, analysis and evaluation. BERA guidance (2018: 12) states that educational endeavours should be undertaken within an 'ethic of respect':

> For any persons – including themselves – involved in or touched by the research they are undertaking. Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice, in recognition of both their rights and of differences.

The BERA guidance provided a criterion upon which to structure a discussion of the ethical considerations which will be explored subsequently in this chapter, in terms of their relation and relevance to the context of this research study.

3.5.1 Responsibilities to Participants

Participants involved in the research were fully and explicitly informed as to how ethical protocol has been stringently followed at all stages in the study. A detailed and comprehensive ethics application was submitted to the Ethics Committee at St. Mary's University, Twickenham, for each of the data collection methods (see Appendix I). Ethical approval was granted following this application (see Appendix II). The researcher regards adherence to ethical considerations as essential in all research pursuits. This is especially pertinent in the context of this research project given the fact that a significant proportion of the data collection involved primary aged children as participants. The researcher ensured that all participants fully understood their voluntary involvement and expectations in the project prior to engagement, as well as their right to withdraw at any point in the research by completing a withdrawal form. The Headteacher from each of the case study schools was required to agree to the nature of the project and was requested to provide a written permission letter for their staff and pupils to be involved (see Appendix III). All research respondents were provided with comprehensive participant information sheets and consent forms explaining the nature of the study and the data collection involved, as well as withdrawal information, prior to data collection (see Appendix IV – VIII).

Participants were invited to voluntarily opt into the study and to provide informed consent prior to completion of the online surveys or engagement in an interview or focus group discussion. 'Voluntary informed and ongoing' consent can be defined as 'the condition by which participants understand and agree to their participation, and the

terms and practicalities of it, without any duress, prior to the research getting underway' (BERA, 2018: 9).

Participants were advised that all data would be treated confidentially, and any potential identification of participants was avoided through the anonymisation of interview transcripts, survey and focus group responses. As indicated in accordance with the BERA guidelines, the researcher acknowledges a duty of care to all participants in the study, especially those who are vulnerable, 'to minimise and manage any distress or discomfort that may arise' (BERA, 2018: 19). As a large proportion of the participants in the study were children, the researcher engaged in a range of processes to ensure safeguarding with vigilance. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the case study, including teachers and school leaders for the semi-structured interviews as well as the Year 6 pupils who participated in the questionnaire by reading the information and ticking a consent box on page 1 before proceeding to the questionnaire. Written consent was also obtained from the pupil participants in the focus group and their parents/carers. Participants were given two weeks to read the information sheet before consent was required. It was necessary to obtain a DBS certificate which was made available to the schools involved in the study and evidenced as part of the Ethics Application documentation, as well as on entry to the case study schools during visits.

3.5.2 Responsibilities to the Community of Educational Researchers

The researcher acknowledges the important duty to the community of educational researchers to 'protect the integrity and reputation of educational research by ensuring that they conduct their research to the highest standards.', in accordance with the BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018: 28-9). The researcher has worked with integrity of intention throughout the research process, engaging in all aspects of the study with professionalism and awareness of responsibilities within the educational research community, as outlined in the BERA guidance.

3.5.3 Responsibilities for Publication and Dissemination

The responsibilities for publication and dissemination were given careful consideration to preserve the integrity of the research as well as the confidentiality of the participants. The schools and all participants in the study were coded with pseudonyms to anonymise their identity and preserve confidentiality. For the online questionnaires, each participant was allocated a unique identifier code on completion of the questionnaire.

The researcher intends to publish the study in the future following successful completion of the doctorate in the form of international peer-reviewed articles, chapters in edited volumes and possibly a monograph.

All electronic data were stored on St. Mary's University servers, in adherence to General Data Protection Regulations as stated in the Data Protection Act 2018. In the event of any potential future publication, the data collected will be stored safely and securely for a period of 10 years. This will include password protected computers and locked filing cabinets. Data collected was stored on St. Mary's OneDrive during the period of research investigation and was transferred to my PhD supervisor's Microsoft OneDrive upon completion of the study. Data were stored and handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations, under the regulations set out in the Data Protection Act 2018. Only the researcher and supervisory team had access to the data. The published results anonymised the identity of the case study schools as well as the names of all participants. The participants were informed of this in advance as part of the consent agreement.

Schools involved in the study were provided with a summary of findings which may benefit their school in relation to the field of study. Individual schools chose their method and format of dissemination of key findings to parents.

3.5.4 Responsibilities for Participants' Wellbeing and Development

As outlined as part of the ethics application for the project, the nature of the research does not concern sensitive or personal content and there were no potential risks or adverse effects anticipated. The content of the material used for the data collection was devised with respect and sensitivity, with the intention to avoid any distress or upset to the participants involved. The participants' right to withdraw at any point in the study was explained clearly from the outset and included in the Participant Information sheets provided for all participants. Participants were informed that any decision to withdraw would be entirely respected as the choice of the participant and without consequence or adverse effect. Pupil participants were informed that support would be available from any member of the teaching or pastoral staff within the school. Teaching staff and school leaders were also informed that they could contact their designated staff wellbeing lead for support or the Staff Welfare Team as appropriate.

3.6 Pilot Study

A pilot study can be defined as 'a research study that tests the feasibility of an approach that will later be used in a larger study' (Rutherford-Hemming, 2018: 1253). The use of pilot study in this project enabled the researcher to refine aspects of the research instruments and make improvements to ensure greater accuracy, clarity and consistency. Pre-tests of the interview schedule, focus group questions and questionnaires were conducted using a purposive selection of sample groups, replicating the actual sample group used as closely as possible, as well as regular and transparent discussion between the researcher and stakeholders throughout the data collection process. The pilot study enabled the researcher to assess how the measurement instruments selected for the study performed prior to the larger scale study.

As part of the data collection planning phase, the interview schedules were reviewed by non-participants who were experienced educationalists with expert knowledge in the field of study. The interview questions were also piloted with senior colleagues within the researcher's current school setting based on convenience, accessibility and efficiency. The researcher decided to choose the same interview questions for both staff and leaders as this would provide a consistency of data relevant to the research question and generate responses which could be evaluated using a consistent evaluative framework. Using different questions for teaching staff and school leaders would have generated a greater variation in responses between interview participants but could not be justified in relation to the research intentions in this study which required specific lines of enquiry to be pursued. It was important to gain an understanding of the perceptions and perspectives of all stakeholders, despite differences in their roles and responsibilities, to make evaluative comparisons between the responses to each question. During the pilot of the interview schedule, it was useful to include prompts as this enabled the researcher to guide the interviewee where further clarification or explanation was needed and to allow the researcher to probe deeper to enrich the data collected. As a result of the interview pilot feedback, it was decided that the interview schedule would be made available to participants a week prior to the research activity so that they were familiar with the content and would have time to reflect on the questions and their responses. Although the detrimental aspect of advance disclosure of the interview schedule could result in a loss of spontaneity of response, as well as the possibility that responses could be researched prior to the interview, it was decided by the researcher that sharing the schedule in advance would provide clarity and optimise quality of responses, increase participants' confidence in engaging with the interview, as well as in the pragmatic interests of time efficiency.

In relation to the pupil questionnaire and pupil focus group, conducting a pilot study enabled the researcher to check understanding of key concepts and vocabulary used in the survey and ensure that the language and format was accessible and age appropriate

in terms of comprehension and ease of use. The pilot was conducted with a focus group of 12 Year 6 pupils who were members of the school's *Oscar Romero Faith in Action Committee* in one of the selected case study schools within a familiar classroom setting within the school day. This group of pupils was selected as a purposive sample by the researcher from the current 2021-22 cohort and therefore would not be involved in the actual case study. This enabled the pilot study to closely replicate the actual research context. The pupils involved in the pilot were known to the researcher, who was also their Year 6 teacher and *Faith in Action* Programme Leader. This provided the researcher with confidence in the pupil selection in terms of their motivation and willingness to engage with the task. Due to the existing relationship between the researcher and pilot study group, the pupils were able to offer critical insights on the questions included in the pupil questionnaire and pupil focus group with an openness and honesty which was actively encouraged. However, it must be acknowledged that there is a possibility that participants in the pilot may have felt inclined to offer responses they perceived to be desirable or were reluctant to make suggestions or offer ideas which could be perceived as derogatory or unpopular. As a result of the group discussion and constructive feedback based on each question, it was evident that some changes were required in relation to semantics and the simplification of certain vocabulary. Necessary amendments were also made to avoid repetition across some survey questions.

The schedule for the parent focus group was not piloted with parents as it was not feasible to gain access to do this. However, instead of using the target sample group, the questions were shared with members of the teaching staff and senior leaders, some of whom were also parents, who offered their insights and opinions. It was suggested that parents should also be provided with the question schedule to allow time for the formulation of ideas and preparation of responses.

3.7 Research Processes and Procedures

The intended plan for the primary phase of the data collection involved conducting interviews and the online pupil questionnaire. The individual interviews of staff and school leaders were conducted by the researcher in a single visit to each of the participant schools, or via online video conferencing, over a period of two weeks across each of the case study schools during November 2022. The average duration of each interview was 30 minutes (up to a maximum of 50 minutes), which provided a total number of 7 hours of recorded data across all settings. Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed and checked to ensure they reflected an accurate representation of data collected.

The online questionnaires were conducted within a classroom setting within the school day to increase response rates. The questionnaire was administered by the class teacher to maintain a familiar environment for the pupils. The researcher acted as facilitator in the administration of the questionnaire to assist the class teacher where required and provided an opportunity for the participants to ask any questions or seek clarification. Participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form two weeks prior to the research activity, as well as required written parental consents.

It was decided, through agreement with each participant school, that the parent and pupil focus group data would be also collected on the initial data collection visit based on convenience and efficacy. The pupil focus group consisted of a total of 18 Year 6 pupil participants and a total of 17 parents in the parent focus groups across all three schools.

In the second phase of the data collection, the researcher visited each of the three case study schools for follow up data to gather further factual information and documentation, including policies, inspection reports and awards. The follow-up visits to

each school also provided further evidence relating to the physical environment through school tours.

3.8 Analysis of Data

This project generated predominantly qualitative data using semi-structured interviews and focus groups as the main research instruments as part of an interpretivist and constructivist methodology. The methods used to analyse and interpret this data will be discussed in the subsequent section, followed by a discussion of approaches to the quantitative data analysis of pupil questionnaires. It was essential to consider the analysis and interpretation of data as a key part of the research design and planning process as this impacts upon the credibility of claims made by the research: 'Anticipating such claims, and optimising their strength and applicability are features of good design planning' (Coe, 2021: 43).

The process of data analysis began with 'preliminary exploratory analysis' (Creswell, 2008: 243) for the researcher to become familiar with the data set, followed by coding and categorising of emergent themes. To engage in deeper data analysis, all collected data, including interview and focus group transcripts, field notes, and relevant documentation, were collated and subsequently edited to identify and exclude redundant information. The researcher adopted a hybrid approach to coding using a combination of both deductive and inductive data analysis. The researcher incorporated deductive analysis of the data by creating a previously derived set of *a priori* codes (deductive) derived from the literature review before beginning data analysis. Using the data collected, emerging codes and sub-codes were subsequently analysed, evaluated and categorised into key themes (inductive).

The researcher acknowledges the significance of a dynamic interaction of all the data sets so that they link together to create a comprehensive and collaborative synergy and

are therefore in dialogue with each other. This intention supported the structure and process of the subsequent data analysis.

3.8.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves the method and process of moving from data to understanding, explaining and interpreting findings (Taylor and Gibbs, 2010: 1). It focuses on in-depth, context specific, rich subjective data and meanings by the participants in the situation' (Cohen, 2017, 643). There are several approaches to the analysis of qualitative data employed by researchers. As acknowledged by Green & Thorogood (2004) most researchers use a combination of approaches. In this research project, however, qualitative outcomes were evaluated through thematic analysis (TA) using coding, following the principles of Braun and Clarke (2006: 87) to identify prevalent themes and patterns across data sets and within the *data corpus* (2006: 79). Using this framework for thematic analysis provided a structured approach to evaluation of data outcomes. Braun and Clarke (2006: 86) emphasise the importance of a flexible application of the thematic analysis guidelines, which they assert should be understood as a recursive process, rather than a linear one. Their guidelines involve six phases of TA which include: familiarisation; generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report.

This study used a concurrent nested strategy (Terrel, 2012) in which the quantitative data were embedded within the primary qualitative data collection approach and mixed during analysis. As Terrell (2012) explains, the embedded approach seeks to provide a broader perspective rather than reliance on the predominant data collection method only and enables the study to address different research questions. The advantage of this approach was in harnessing both qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as enabling simultaneous data collection which proved efficient for data collection. The challenge it presented was in terms of integrating the two types of data during the

analysis phase. The researcher acknowledges potential bias in this approach in relation to prioritisation of the predominant data collection approach.

Following the principles Braun and Clarke (2006), as part of the thematic analysis used for this project, the researcher identified emergent themes in the data, which involved a focus on 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). This process assisted clarity of understanding in interpreting the data, as well as a strategic method for manageability of data outcomes. After an initial familiarisation with the data, the researcher consequently began to generate a range of initial codes for each data set collected. The next stage in the process of analysis involved the identification of emergent themes across the codes, interacting with *a priori* codes to provide an initial framework. This review involved combining and separating codes as applicable in order to devise a comprehensive and coherent overall coding table (see Appendix IX). The researcher then engaged in a process of reviewing the identified themes to examine internal and external heterogeneity (Patton, 2002: 122). This helped to determine the relevance and coherency of themes in relation to the research questions which served the overall research purpose.

In discussing approaches to qualitative data analysis, it is important to reiterate here the issue of researcher subjectivity across a data set. Strauss & Corbin (1998) describe analysis as an 'interplay between researchers and data', acknowledging that there is an extent of subjective selection and interpretation of data. It is important for the researcher to take a vigilant approach to data analysis through self-awareness and reflexivity to ensure that the data outcomes are not susceptible to misrepresentation and therefore lead to unstable findings.

Due to the volume of qualitative data collected, it was necessary to determine relevance and identify repetitions in the data in the interests of manageability. Krueger (1994) suggests the notion of 'theoretical saturation', by which patterns and repetitions become

apparent through familiarisation with the data. When data reaches saturation, new narratives are unable to provide any further insights for the researcher and are therefore redundant (Paul, 2017). In this study, any redundancies identified were eliminated so that the researcher could channel focus on the salient aspects of the data. This enhanced efficiency of data analysis and ensured focus on the research question was maintained.

According to Yin (1989), in order to address the purpose of the study, data analysis consists of a number of stages, i.e. examining, categorising and tabulating or recombining the evidence. Similarly, Krueger & Casey (2000) emphasise that the fundamental purpose of the research should drive the data analysis and suggest that evaluation should be systematic, sequential, verifiable, and continuous. The process of qualitative analysis involves the search for meaning and understanding, rather than an objective truth which is the emphasis of quantitative research.

3.8.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

The pupil survey as a research instrument formed the qualitative data in this study, based on a survey of Year 6 pupils in three different primary school settings (see Appendix X). The survey consisted of 18 questions using a Likert scale (1-4) in a positive direction to establish a level of agreement in response to each question from the participants. During survey design, questions were categorised into three aspects of character: taught (questions 1-6), caught (questions 7-13) and sought (questions 14-18) to support clarity of analysis of outcomes. There was variation in the number of participants in each setting: Coastal (n = 25), Urban (n = 28) and Semi-Rural (n = 32) as a result of the number of pupil consents received and pupil absence on the scheduled day of the data collection visit. Data collected from the Year 6 pupil survey were entered into Excel to create horizontally stacked bar charts for each school. Likert scale responses were represented using a colour key (‘strongly agree’ shown in dark green to ‘strongly disagree’ shown in red). Percentages on each horizontal bar show variation in levels of agreement.

In the next stage of analysis, data were then transferred to SPSS for data checking, cleaning and analysis, which included statistical analysis of variance (ANOVA). To explore the relationship between aspects of character in each of the school locations in further detail and determine if there was a statistical difference across the three school settings for taught, caught and sought character, a one-way ANOVA was conducted on each characteristic. A full presentation of the quantitative data is included in Appendix XI.

3.9 Limitations

The research design for this project used a constructive epistemology and interpretative methodology through multiple case study, which provided a wealth of rich data for collection and analysis. The project adopted a mixed methods approach to data collection utilising both qualitative and quantitative paradigms. The data outcomes form the basis of recommendations for further future research and aims to inform and enhance knowledge, understanding and practice across Catholic dioceses in relation to character education in primary schools. In defending the validity of this research study, it is important to acknowledge the limitations to the research methodology.

The researcher used purposive sampling to select schools in the multiple case study which already had a strategic and embedded character education provision, as well as schools with less developed or less explicit provision, which enabled comparison between cases. The study acknowledges that the majority of data collected involved an emphasis on the self-reported data of participants which may be subject to bias. The researcher sought to mitigate this limitation through careful explanation and introduction of the surveys, interviews and focus group research activities. The positionality of the researcher raised the issue of subjectivity and unconscious bias in terms of how the view and position of the researcher could influence the totality of the research process. These factors were mitigated at each stage of the planning and conducting of the research, through an explicit, self-conscious and reflexive approach.

This study adopted a comprehensive approach to data collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative outcomes which supported the interpretation of findings through generating a dialogue between data types. This interaction across data types enabled a deeper and more coherent level of analysis.

The subsequent chapter will present the empirical findings of the three case studies which provided the contexts for the analysis of character education in each setting.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

'Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from Him'. (Psalm 62: 1-2)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a synthesised presentation of findings of three case studies to address the research question concerning Catholic character education and its impact on children's formation, including both qualitative and quantitative outcomes. This multiple case study was conducted in three Catholic primary schools in England between Autumn 2022 and Spring 2023. Schools were selected to enable comparison between cases. Each school offered different provision for character education bespoke to their individual setting and were at varying stages of development in their character education journey. Variation in data findings across a range of areas will be presented in this chapter subsequently. As part of the data analysis, individual strengths and areas for development in each case will be explored in detail in Chapter Five, where explicit and evaluative comparisons between cases will be suggested.

The primary data collected in each school included semi-structured interviews of school leaders, as well as pupil and parent focus groups as qualitative measures. Data were analysed using manual coding of identified themes and patterns in the data following the principles of Braun and Clarke (2006). A detailed and comprehensive presentation of qualitative outcomes was conducted for each individual case study setting with regard to each research instrument used. Due to the extensive volume of qualitative data, the full presentation of findings has been included in Appendix XII. The subsequent summarised presentation of data has been categorised into five key emergent themes from across data sets relating to strategic leadership, school environment, curriculum design, the role of partnerships and approaches to staff formation. The presentation of data relating to contemporary challenges for character education has been interwoven throughout the five thematic areas of qualitative data.

4.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Data

4.2.1 Primary Qualitative Data

The three qualitative primary research instruments used included interviews with senior leaders and pupil and parent focus groups. Participant responses were recorded digitally with additional notes made during the session by the researcher. Responses were later transcribed (see Appendix XIII) and subsequently coded to identify emergent themes in the data. Each research instrument utilised a semi-structured question schedule to enable consistency and flexibility (see Appendix XIV – XVI), aligned to the key research themes. A detailed explanation of the implementation of each instrument is included in Chapter Three (section 3.3).

4.2.2 Secondary Data

It is important to acknowledge that in addition to the primary qualitative collection methods already described, other important secondary data were collected during the school visits and as a result of follow up visits. This included informal conversations with staff and pupils, as well as information gained from school tours, learning walks, school website, policies and other secondary documentation such as pupil work samples.

The identity of each case study has been anonymised for confidentiality and as a result, each school will be coded as follows:

Case Study 1: Coastal School
Case Study 2: Urban School
Case Study 3: Semi-Rural School

4.3 Case Study 1: Coastal School

4.3.1 Introduction

Coastal School is a two-form entry primary school which has a dual split site for Reception/Year 1 and Years 2-6. Although it is located within an area of socio-economic deprivation, based on the *English Indices of Deprivation* (2019), academic attainment demonstrates excellence, exceeding national averages. The school's extensive provision for pastoral support for both children and their families was regarded as a strong and significant dimension to its character education provision. School leaders attributed the school's academic performance to the priority given to the school's emphasis on a preferential option for the poor, extended through pastoral provision and engagement with families.

The school was selected for the case study as it was identified for its advanced provision for character education which was embedded in practice across the whole school and throughout the totality of school life. Coastal School was a strong example of an integrated model of implicit and explicit approaches to character education, reflected in the Catholic culture and ethos, strategically in the school's vision, pedagogically through integration across the whole curriculum, as well as through established partnerships, which resulted in external recognition with awards.

Following a rigorous process of external validation, Coastal School was awarded a Quality Mark Plus by the Association of Character Education (ACE) in March 2022, its highest accreditation. Coastal School was also part of the ACE Regional Hub for Character Education, sharing best practice with other schools nationally:

> It is impressive that the leaders of the school consulted widely with many stakeholders to bring about an effective fusion of character and Catholic values to produce a clear description of the school's vision to produce citizens of character living in the image of Christ…The combination of committed academic research and carefully produced practical materials has produced a well-rounded programme focused on the needs of the school community and represents exemplary practice. (ACE Quality Mark Plus, Accreditation Report Extract, 2022)

The Catholic mission of the school was driven by the strategic vision of governors and school leaders, committed to evangelisation and the advancement of social justice. Coastal School was the first school nationally to be awarded Innovator Level in October 2024, the highest accreditation of the 'Oscar Romero Award', in recognition of its commitment as a missionary school in the pursuit and promotion of social justice, impactful both within and beyond their school community, 'actively transforming its culture to challenge inequality' (Oscar Romero Award, 2024). Coastal School had organised and hosted its second annual Social Justice Conference for pupils in September 2024, with 15 participating primary schools in attendance, engaging pupils to work collaboratively through interschool action planning for social justice.

The 'Oscar Romero Award' provides a framework 'that supports Catholic schools to recognise and celebrate what they do to promote CST and challenge them to weave CST into the culture and ethos of the school – strategic planning, curriculum development and practical choices' (Oscar Romero Award, 2024). There are three levels in this award:

1. Participator - This preliminary level of award is based on the school's self-assessment of existing provision and practice regarding lived mission as a Catholic community.
2. Developer - The school community is challenged to develop existing provision, focusing on a 'preferential option for the poor' and the impact on the school community.

3. Innovator - The school community is challenged to become a 'missionary centre' to promote and embed CST within and beyond the school, actively transforming its culture to challenge inequality.

In 2023, Coastal School employed a full-time lay school Chaplain to support both staff and student formation, working alongside the RE Leader to lead Prayer and Liturgy across the school. The school Chaplain was also involved in promoting pupils' engagement in social action and service across local and global communities. The school built a chapel dedicated to St. Raphaela Mary on the school site in 2023 to provide a sacred space for members of the school and parish community to gather for prayer, reflection and worship, enhancing spiritual development.

4.3.2 School Mission/Vision

Coastal School's mission statement was integral to the culture and ethos of the school as part of the tapestry of the school's Catholic identity: 'Joyfully, unique in Jesus' family, we learn to use our special gifts to love, serve and make the world a better place.' The mission statement was a familiar language articulated and celebrated across the school community. Coastal School adopted ten Gospel virtues which represented a reflection of the school's Catholic mission and vision. The school had a distinctive Catholic identity, characterised by its Christ-centred learning community formed and led by the school's Mission Statement:

> The living out of this Mission Statement challenges each and every one of us on a daily basis and our aim is to practise what it says. Every human being is created in God's image and likeness and therefore is valuable and worthy of respect. (Coastal School Prospectus, 2023)

Character education featured explicitly on the School Development Plan (2019-2022) over three consecutive years, building on the school's focus to envision a distinctively Catholic approach to the curriculum (see Appendix XVII). The school had explicit and

embedded character education provision across the whole school, both within and beyond curriculum, as well as a committed investment in a continuous programme of quality professional development to support staff formation. A strategic emphasis on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) was integral to the school's vision for Catholic character education, with Catholic Social Teaching at the heart of school development.

Coastal School's journey in developing a taught curriculum for character education was evidenced in its School Development Plan, in terms of intent, implementation and impact over a sustained period of three years. Prior to this, in 2017-2018, the school had begun its development of caught character through a reformulation of the school's mission statement and the creation of the school's ten Gospel virtues, which formed the foundation of the taught character curriculum. The school Gospel virtues were visibly prominent in the physical environment across both school sites and reflected the school's commitment to Catholic character education.

Pupils were actively involved in living the school mission through a range of leadership roles across the school, including Oscar Romero Faith in Action Committee, Mini Vinnies, Caring Cadets, Laudato Si team, School Council, Arts Council, Pupil Chaplains, House Captains and Sports Leaders. These pupil leadership roles contributed to and enriched the Catholic life of the school. Coastal School also achieved the Eco Schools Green Flag Award in 2023 in recognition of its commitment to stewardship.

4.3.3 Values/Virtues

The whole school community collectively and collaboratively selected ten Gospel virtues as the basis for character education through a process of consultation which began in 2018 and were implemented across the whole school in the subsequent academic year 2019-20. The Gospel virtues - Faith, Love, Justice, Courage, Humility, Stewardship, Self-control, Integrity, Compassion, Forgiveness - formed the foundation for the school's

formal character education curriculum. The school's bespoke explicit character curriculum was evidenced in whole school planning documentation (see Appendix XVIII).

Character education was reflected throughout the totality of the Catholic life of the school, through whole school and class worship, within RE and throughout the wider curriculum, which emphasised Catholic Social Teaching as integral to the Catholic identity of the curriculum. Character education was integral to the school's restorative and reflective approach to behaviour management:

> We respect each other and try to be followers of Christian principles bound in the faith. There should be an atmosphere of trust and respect for all the pupils and staff based on our living faith. (Coastal School, Behaviour Policy, 2023)

It is of significance that the school intentionally chose the shared language of Gospel 'virtues' instead of 'values', the former of which the Headteacher described as 'values in action', emphasising subjective practical application rather than the objective approach of values.

4.3.4 Secondary Data

It was found that character education was integral in school policies and explicit within staff appraisal and induction. As part of the appraisal process, there were clear expectations of high standards of personal and professional conduct framed by the Catholic ethos of the school, evidenced in Performance Management documentation (see Appendix XIX).

The school website provided comprehensive information on the school's approach to character education, and this was also communicated through letters and fortnightly newsletters. The school actively sought partnership with families as part of their character education offer and produced Gospel Virtue Home Learning, based on the

virtue studied each half term (see Appendix XX). The School Prospectus also contained specific reference to character education:

> We aim to educate and inform children so that they can take their place in society with an attitude of service and commitment to the common good. Our school community worked together to identify the virtues that should be our focus, both in our learning, and in our interactions with one another and the wider community. We explicitly teach character education through these agreed Gospel Virtues and our Catholic approach to the curriculum. (Coastal School, School Prospectus 2023)

The school's emphasis on 'commitment to the common good' was conveyed at a strategic level, translated throughout the Catholic life of the school and reflected in the School Development Plan, policies, appraisal and decision making at all levels. The school's O*fsted Short Inspection Report* (November 2018) acknowledged the distinctive Catholicity of the school and how leaders had responded to the needs of the community, commending the high expectations of leaders:

> A skilled and passionate team of leaders supports you well and shares your vision and purpose. Leaders' priorities are well balanced between providing the best care for pupils and holding high expectations for their achievement.

The Inspection Report (2018) also commended the quality of pastoral provision for children and their families: 'Leaders go to great lengths to provide additional pastoral support that is carefully matched to the needs of pupils and families'.

Since the 2018 Ofsted inspection, Coastal School had implemented an explicit character education curriculum, reflected as a significant strength in the school's most recent Ofsted Inspection Report (December 2024):

> The school has thoughtfully considered with research their approach towards the development of character education…Pupils benefit from a meticulously planned programme to develop them beyond the academic.

Coastal School was awarded a grade of 'Outstanding' in its most recent Section 48 Validation Report (2020). The integrity of Coastal School's mission was transmitted throughout all aspects of school life within 'a loving and trusting environment, reflected through relationships, with all members of the community taking an active part in living it out' (Section 48 Validation Report, 2020). The report also highlighted strengths in pupils' application of learning in Religious Education:

> Children's knowledge and use of scripture is a key strength. Pupils are able to take the key messages from the Gospel and apply them to real life situations... There is a strong commitment to Catholic Social Teaching throughout the whole school community.

4.4 Primary Empirical Qualitative Data: Coastal School

The following represents Coastal School primary empirical findings in relation to broad thematic areas of significance which emerged during data analysis: strategic leadership, the role of environment, curriculum design, partnerships and approaches to staff formation.

4.4.1 Strategic Leadership

The strategic leadership of character education in Coastal school was a key characteristic of its effectiveness as an advanced model of character education. This involved the critical contribution of governors and senior leaders as part of the strategic vision of the school and its commitment to the development of character education.

4.4.1.2 Role of Governors and Senior Leaders

From its earliest stages of development, Coastal School's journey in developing character education had been strategically led by governors and the senior leadership team, with

a systematically planned implementation over a period of five years. Senior leader participants expressed the necessity for a strategic vision for character education, involving the governing body and Headteacher to drive the vision of the school motivated by a genuine belief in its purpose and translated in the School Development Plan, for it to be implemented effectively.

> I think it has to come from the Governing Body and be driven by the vision of the school. That has to be in place first…if it's not part of the vision and the School Development Plan, then it's more difficult to implement. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

Data outcomes demonstrated that strategic leadership and vision for character education, rooted in the school Catholic ethos and mission, was a significant factor in the effectiveness of provision. Senior leader participants shared the view that the involvement of key stakeholders was instrumental in directing the vision of the school, with belief in the goals of formation: 'The challenges are that you need your leaders, particularly governors and the Headteacher to actually believe this makes a difference' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

Coastal School's character education journey began with a re-evaluation of the school mission statement and the introduction of ten school Gospel virtues. The Headteacher emphasised the importance of the involvement of the whole school community in the development of character education: 'All stakeholders were involved - Governors, SLT, teaching staff, parents, and of course, most importantly, the children' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

Governors and the Headteacher had attended a Schools' Diocesan Conference on Catholic character education in 2019 which inspired the school's explicit approach, building upon its distinctive Catholic mission and ethos to directly impact the curriculum and wider opportunities. Senior leader participants were able to articulate a clear vision

for the purpose and direction for character education, focused on children's holistic development as part of the school's distinctive Catholic identity. Coastal School demonstrated a commitment to character education through dedicated leadership in the appointment of a designated Character Education Lead.

As part of its strategic planning, Coastal School invested in ongoing professional development opportunities which involved attending and presenting at national conferences as well as hosting interschool character education conferences for pupils.

4.4.1.3 Pupil leadership

It was found that opportunities provided for pupils to engage in social action both locally and globally led to an aspiration to serve, providing a sense of emotional and spiritual fulfilment and a deepening of faith. The role of pupil leadership was a strong feature of the school's 'caught, taught and sought' character, upholding the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Coastal School provided a broad range of pupil leadership opportunities across the school, demonstrating a commitment to discipleship 'which [pupils] embrace and value with enthusiasm' (Section 48 Validation Report, 2020).

i*) Global Citizenship*

Character education was integral to the distinctive Catholic mission and identity of Coastal school, promoting 'living faith' as global citizens through deepening relationship with Christ. Pupils' involvement in charitable action and volunteering represented 'faith in action', fostering the practice of virtue to serve both local and global communities in pursuit of the school's mission to 'use our special gifts to make the world a better place'. One significant example of global citizenship was the school's promotion and fundraising for 'Mary's Meals', a charity dedicated to tackling world hunger:

> This shows both charity and love… but also brings justice. To give these children an education is to break the cycle of poverty to be able to go on and reach their potential in life. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

In Coastal School, the charitable endeavours led by pupils represented examples of the school's commitment to social justice through local and global participation. Engagement in different forms of service was recognised as contributory to pupils' formation journey through enriching encounter with Christ.

ii) *Relationship between Taught and Sought Character*

Pupil participant perceptions demonstrated the impact of pupil leadership in terms of the application of virtue learning and social justice. Responses indicated pupils' desire to use their knowledge of virtues and the principles of CST to apply not just in their own lives, but in society and in the wider world through social action and service: 'I will use virtues to make a difference in society and in the world. I can do fundraising and donate to food banks' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School). Pupil participant responses demonstrated the relationship between taught and sought character, linking virtue learning to the autonomous pursuit and practice of virtue: 'I want to give up my time to help other people who really need it' (Anna, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

iii*) Character Development and Faith*

Biblical teaching provided a theological foundation for the explicit character curriculum in Coastal School, providing moral nourishment and navigation in the faith. The significance of the role of scripture in children's formation was similarly articulated by a parent participant: 'The Bible navigates us to show them how to behave, so if we rely on the Bible, then we can navigate our children.' One pupil participant also referred to the

impact of learning about virtues to support his own emotional fulfilment, promoting a sense of joy and a resultant desire to spread kindness to others:

> I can use the virtues and all the things I have learnt to make me feel happier and more positive. It will help us to be kinder to others and will encourage and inspire us to make the world a better place. (Michael, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

This was similarly reflected in the response from a parent participant who expressed the view that the impact of living virtuously is relational to obtaining a Christian view of happiness:

> At this school, the virtues are important... as they are a foundation not only for our children but for us as adults, in terms of how we live our lives...Virtues are the basis to live a happy and responsible life. (Nick, Parent Governor, Coastal School)

There is an inference here that character education enables a flourishing life, filled with hope and optimism, sustained through faith. Another pupil participant made explicit reference to the link between character education and the development of faith, describing how the virtues and principles of Catholic Social Teaching 'can help us for the future so we do not stray away from our faith and can keep our faith burning' (Esther, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

4.4.2 The Role of Environment

The environment for character education in Coastal school permeated the Catholic culture and ethos of the school contributing to its distinctive Catholic approach, primarily through the quality of relationships modelled on Christian virtue. Character education was also reflected throughout the physical environment of the school with a strategic emphasis on representation of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) to reflect the diversity of the school community.

4.4.2.1 Culture and Ethos

The distinct Catholic identity of Coastal School was strongly reflected in the culture and ethos. Central to the Christian ethos of the school, senior leaders highlighted the significance of modelled virtue on the inculcation of character, based on the example of Christ, reflected in the behaviour and the quality of relationships between all members across the school community:

> The role of the teacher in pupils' formation is key as a role model who lives out the gospel virtues in their everyday interactions with colleagues, pupils and parents. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

i) *Modelling as Witnesses*

Leaders acknowledged the importance of the role of the teacher in children's formation through modelling as witnesses. The Headteacher emphasised the responsibility of the Catholic educator to model Christ's example**:**

> The role of the teacher is vital. Every staff member in school is the teacher. It is not just the person who stands in the classroom...we are all witnesses to Christ. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The significance of the Eucharist was integral to the Catholic identity of Coastal School, reflected in the totality of the Christian life of the school through its culture and ethos, as well as integral to the design of the character curriculum: 'The charism of our school is to be Eucharistically Christ-centred' (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School). When invited to elaborate on the use of the concept of 'charism' here, the participant explained:

> Charism is the particular Catholic identity of our school based on Jesus Christ - the guide to everything we are and everything we do…it is the spiritually inspired core values that underpin the essence of our school. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

ii) *Reciprocity of Staff and Pupil Formation*

Leaders recognised the seminal role of staff formation in order to provide effective character education, emphasising the importance of the reciprocity of both staff and pupil formation, demonstrated in the quality of relationships across the school community and reflected in standards of behaviour:

> Teachers model compassion and love and always respect the dignity of each pupil, which in turn is reflected in the behaviour of pupils towards each other. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

Senior leader participants emphasised the goals of character education as contributory to the formation of both pupils and staff, towards becoming joyful witnesses of Christ:

> ...to understand what He wants us to do, how He wants us to serve and live this life. We want to be Christ's hands, feet and mouth in what we say, in what we do and how we feel. We do it with joy and we do it with happiness. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The Headteacher went on to describe character education as a guide to Christian living: 'Ultimately, we want to form the children. We want them to build a deeper relationship with Christ and to participate and live fully in Christ.'

iii) *Catholic School Distinctiveness*

The pivotal significance of virtue as integral to the Catholic distinctiveness of Coastal School emphasised how Catholic character education reflected the Catholic identity of

the school: 'It is what defines us as a Catholic school to ensure that our children are following the virtuous path given to us in the Gospel' (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School).

In relation to conceptions of Catholic ethos and culture, it was significant that one senior leader participant made a distinction between the goals of character education in a community school compared to a school of religious character, emphasising the Catholic mission of formation:

> In a non-faith based [community] school, character education may focus on, for example, resilience… In a Catholic school, we focus more on following Jesus' commandments and growing as virtuous people…Character education is therefore very important - we support all our pupils in growing in the virtues. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

There is an inference here that the participant has identified a contrast between the categories of performance and moral virtues, discussed further as part of the interpretation of findings in Chapter Five (see section 5.4.1).

Aligned to the characteristics of Catholic school distinctiveness, there was a strong belief among senior leaders that through focusing on providing a preferential option for the poor facilitated equity, the fundamental goal of Catholic educational mission:

> We do focus on the vulnerable pupils, we do not let anyone slip through the net, and in that way, we offer a preferential option for the poor...This shows that the school is truly outstanding. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

One senior leader, however, indicated concern that external competing pressures, such as Ofsted and demands upon academic attainment, can present challenge for the contemporary Catholic school through a negative impact on the integrity of Catholic mission, leading some schools to lose focus on the importance of character education.

iv) *Christian Tradition and Practice*

Character education was infused throughout school life, both within and beyond the curriculum, through the Christian environment and ethos, as well as through formal Christian practices and traditions, such as acts of worship and whole school mass. There was also an emphasis on the celebration of Catholic character endeavour for pupils exemplifying the school Gospel virtues through their behaviour and attitudes. Children were awarded Gospel Virtue Certificates and half termly 'Golden Apple' awards as part of whole school worship, which were centrally displayed on a 'Virtue Awards Tree'.

Engagement in Christian practice, in particular the development of prayer life, was integral to the distinctive Catholic ethos and culture of Coastal School. Knowledge of the Bible was referenced by the Inclusion Leader as foundational for character education in a Catholic school, but with an emphasis on the purpose of this knowledge to impact upon living a Christian life in its fullest sense: 'We want them to learn from His teachings and have a good knowledge of the Bible - but not just knowledge. We want the Bible to impact their everyday life'. She went on to describe the importance of developing Christian practices so that pupils can be sustained by their faith and experience a vital sense of belonging:

> We want the children to leave with good practices so that they are reading the Bible and praying, so they can maintain that relationship and develop a healthy spiritual lifestyle. We want the children to be plugged into the church and to feel a sense of belonging. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

v) *Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion through Representation*

Senior leader participants emphasised the importance of diverse representation as integral to the school's Christian vision and ethos, so that all members of the school community can identify and recognise their cultural backgrounds, as part of the school's

agenda for social justice, affording 'dignity for all'. The school's commitment to EDI and its mission for social justice were inextricably linked:

> To me, [representation} is part of social justice…they should believe that they too can make a difference in this world... to go on to reach their potential, have a voice, be listened to and become leaders with integrity. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

4.4.2.2 Physical Environment

i) *School Gospel Virtues*

The Catholic ethos in Coastal School was impactful throughout the physical school environment. The ten school Gospel virtues which formed the foundation of the school's explicit approach to character education, were reflected prominently in the school environment across both school sites. Each classroom displayed the school's Gospel virtues and their meanings. Coastal School adopted a consistent approach to classroom displays across whole school to enhance the prominence of character education through the Curriculum Enquiry Question and Gospel Virtue signage, as well as the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, so that the school's explicit Catholic approach to teaching and learning was reflected clearly within the environment of every classroom.

ii) *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

The school's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion permeated the school's physical environment to reflect the school's culturally diverse community:

> We have a wide range of children and staff from different nationalities. We need to allow our children to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and around the school. Representation is very important. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The significance of EDI as an integral part of the identity of Coastal School was clearly evidenced in the Gospel Virtue Role Model Galleries, as well as through high quality displays and a literature spine. Coastal School had also commissioned a local artist to create an infant playground wall mural to celebrate its diverse and inclusive Christian identity.

iii) *School Chapel*

The recent introduction of a new chapel on the school site, with a newly appointed lay school chaplain, provided a sacred space for both staff and pupils to gather, reflect and pray, further enhancing the school's commitment to the spiritual formation of the school community.

4.4.3 Curriculum Design

Coastal School leaders described the distinctively Christian curriculum which transcended knowledge, centred on developing relationship with Christ, empowering children to serve and contribute to society:

> A curriculum that draws you closer to Him and makes you more Christ-like...Catholic education is distinctive in the fact that at the heart of it isn't knowledge - the heart of it is relationship. And, therefore, you can have a higher level of impact on others, the wider environment and community. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

In expressing the distinctive nature of Catholic education, the Headteacher specifically referred to the 'pursuit of truth' as synonymous with social justice in the context of the school's Catholic approach to the curriculum: 'The pursuit of truth is our social justice'. When invited to expand upon the use of this term, the Headteacher defined 'truth' as an

illumination of injustices in our world which can be interpreted through a See-Choose-Act methodology:

> A Catholic approach to a curriculum must value that through the curriculum, pupils can develop a critical consciousness grounded in their understanding and engagement with difficult histories and current topics. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The concept of developing pupils' 'critical consciousness' is given further treatment in relation to the See-Choose-Act methodology subsequently in Chapter Five. Notably, the school's most recent Ofsted Inspection (December 2024) highlighted the impact of developing pupils' skills of discernment in terms of forming and interpreting their relationship with the world: 'Pupils show great compassion for the world around them…Pupils learn powerful messages that help them to develop a sense of self and place in the wider world'.

4.4.3.1 Explicit Character Curriculum

Coastal School had an embedded and comprehensive approach to character education through an integrated combination of 'caught, taught and sought' approaches, based on a distinctively Catholic adaptation of the 'Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development' (Jubilee Centre, 2017). Character education had been developed progressively over a period of three years as an explicit curriculum in each year group, as well as integrated into the wider curriculum through an Enquiry Question model with a social justice orientation. The curriculum design was based on an explicit model of character education, using the school Gospel virtues as the foundation, focusing on one virtue each half term over a cycle of two years linked to the liturgical calendar. The Character Education Lead provided staff training half termly to introduce the virtue studied to support character curriculum planning as well as staff formation. From Reception to Year 6, there was an introductory character education lesson and a reflection lesson at the

beginning and end of each half term respectively. Teachers optimised opportunities to link the curriculum Enquiry Question to virtue study where appropriate.

The character curriculum was designed to promote the development of virtue literacy as a progressive model through the exploration of model texts, relevant scripture, hymns and Christian songs, as well as virtue role model study (both historical and contemporary), reflecting the school's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. Responses demonstrated a clear connection between pupils' knowledge of role models of virtue and behavioural application, with explanations of how learning directly influenced action:

> My learning has helped me understand the works of God and the rules and values he has set for me. The role models I have learnt about in my years at this school have influenced me to do the things that I have done. (Esther, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

It was found that an explicit reference to virtue, embedded throughout the curriculum, including engagement with global issues such as sustainability and refugees, led to pupils' autonomous pursuit of virtue practice beyond the curriculum, with self-initiated examples such as writing letters of petition to Members of Parliament regarding treatment of refugees or to local companies concerning environmental sustainability. Pupils' aspiration to serve was articulated in terms of a 'seeping out' of virtue:

> You start to see children wanting to be more…It starts to seep out in many different ways. First of all, as local community citizens and then as global citizens… thinking about the whole world and the impact on everybody. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

School leaders emphasised the importance of character education in helping to prepare pupils to become global citizens of the future, following Jesus' commandment, with a desire to contribute to society with an awareness of poverty, in its many forms, especially the disadvantaged and vulnerable:

> We want [children] to live lives to the full, to contribute towards the whole of society, to have the poor in the forefront of their minds and have knowledge of who the poor are…not just those without money. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

The concept of the multi-dimensionality of poverty will be given further treatment subsequently in Chapter Five (section 5.7.6.2).

Direct reference was made to the relationship between developing children's virtue literacy as preparation for their development as global citizens:

> Catholic schools need to cultivate the four cardinal virtues, centred around supporting pupils to grow as virtuous people, so they leave school ready to live as global citizens following Jesus' commandment. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

It is important to acknowledge here, however, that despite the positive correlation between virtue literacy and moral behaviour reflected in the data, outcomes also revealed a dissonance in the translation of virtue learning into virtue practice. One pupil participant highlighted the challenge that virtues can present in daily lives and relationships:

> I sometimes find it difficult to forgive someone who is rude to me or doesn't care especially when I don't think they are sorry. I know it's the right thing to do so I forgive them anyway. (Anna, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

The issue of discord between virtue learning and behavioural application is explored further in Chapter Five (section 5.7.4).

4.4.3.2 Critical Reflection

Critical reflection was a significant feature of the school's pedagogical approach to teaching character both in the explicit character curriculum and in the wider curriculum through a See-Choose-Act methodology. According to the Headteacher, critical

reflection serves to provoke an emotional response which 'allows room for the heart to ponder on the journey of becoming more virtuous and God-like' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School). Parent participants highlighted the importance of discussion and reflection about moral choices in order to learn from mistakes and initiate a change in future behaviour: 'Reflection can be a lesson on how to change' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School). Another parent participant stated that learning about virtue 'opens your mind to become someone better, to make the right choices in your life and to choose the right pathway' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School). In this sense, it was perceived that virtue education nurtured moral reflexivity.

4.4.3.3 Catholic Social Teaching

Integral to the school's Catholic approach to the curriculum, there was a robust emphasis on the school's mission to advance social justice, with Catholic Social Teaching (CST) at the heart of curriculum design. The language of Catholic Social Teaching permeated the physical environment, reinforcing the school mission for social justice. Coastal School demonstrated an explicit commitment to the promotion of CST, through a planned systematic approach, evidenced through explicit links to social justice principles in curriculum planning, primarily through subjects such as Religious Education, English, History and Geography, enabling a greater immersion in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Senior leaders articulated the belief that developing awareness and understanding of social justice contributed to pupil formation and aspirations to serve as global citizens:

> Through Catholic character, we want to form children in the beliefs of the church and enable them to grow as citizens of the world who will go out and make a difference. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

From the perspective of pupils, the integration of CST throughout the curriculum impacted upon their formation as servant leaders, following the model of Christ:

> When we read the Bible, we can look back over what Jesus has taught us and every time we can think of something new we can do which is similar to what Jesus did. (Michael, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

Pupil leaders focused on the active and dedicated implementation of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching through raising awareness of issues relating to social justice, both in local and global contexts. Pupil leaders were engaged in virtue practice through various acts of voluntary charitable service, as referenced in section 4.4.1.3. In terms of pedagogy, Coastal School adopted a 'head-heart-hands' approach to character education, reflected in the school's adoption of a 'See-Choose-Act' methodology, which underpinned its educational endeavour to promote social justice.

4.4.3.4 See-Choose-Act Methodology

Coastal School utilised a See-Choose-Act methodology, particularly in Key Stage 2, to develop pupils' skills of critical thinking and moral reflection through a Christian lens. This was an integral feature of the school's pedagogical approach to virtue education in seeking to build children's phronesis (practical wisdom), with the ultimate goal of human flourishing. This approach was based on the 'Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development' (Jubilee Centre, 2017), referenced earlier in relation to curriculum design (see section 4.4.3.1). The See-Choose-Act methodology was integrated into curriculum planning which provided structure to support pupils to articulate their response to their curriculum Enquiry Question at the end of each half term unit of learning. This approach positively influenced pupils' understanding, reflection and response to social injustice through the development of observation, discernment and action. Pupil participants referenced the impact of the See-Choose-Act methodology with regard to supporting moral decision making and motivation to promote social justice, illumined by the light of their faith: 'We learn about See-Choose-Act so if we see something, we decide if it is right or wrong, and if it is wrong, we try to help by acting' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

It was significant to note that the building of wisdom, fundamental to the purpose of Catholic character education, was referenced explicitly by only one senior leader participant:

> We make sure that the children understand that good virtue is a balance and to understand when to stand up and be courageous and how to do that. Really what we are doing is building wisdom (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

An earlier reference was made to practical wisdom in relation to understanding of formation. There were other more discreet references to building wisdom, albeit more inferential, in response to the distinctive nature of Catholic education regarding developing a 'critical consciousness' as part of the See-Choose-Act methodology.

4.4.3.5 Curriculum Enrichment

The Headteacher expressed a deep sense of obligation, rooted in Christian faith, to provide a range of extracurricular opportunities to broaden and enrich the school's educational endeavour through a range of stimulating, multicultural experiences and recreational opportunities, such as through art, music, languages, physical education and computing: 'Unless we can give [pupils] a rich education in these areas, they may miss out on these experiences and appreciating other cultures' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School). The scope of enrichment was regarded as constitutive of Catholic school distinctiveness:

> Catholic education is distinctive in the fact that it goes through the whole curriculum, through everything that happens in school, including extracurricular and after-school wraparound care' (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School).

Coastal School provided a culturally rich learning experience, ensuring equality of access for all children to a diverse, exciting and inspiring curriculum, closely interconnected with

the school's mission for social justice with an emphasis on preferential option for the poor.

Coastal School was committed to the holistic development of pupils, with extensive provision for pastoral support for children and their families, as well as in the school's wider offer of Wraparound After-School Care and Breakfast Club. The school's pastoral endeavour extended to a wide range of personalised provision as part of its holistic approach to character education, providing a programme of enrichment for children with specific social, emotional, physical and mental health needs. The role of accompaniment as contributory to formation in virtue was acknowledged by one parent participant: 'When you do activities with them, you communicate what is wrong and right through action' (Nick, Parent Governor, Coastal School).

4.4.4 Partnerships

Outcomes demonstrated the role and impact of external partnerships and communities of practice on the development of character with an emphasis on the advancement of social justice.

4.4.4.1 External Partnerships

Coastal School was a pilot school for the Oscar Romero Innovator Level Award in recognition of its endeavour as a missionary school. At this level, the school community is challenged 'to become fully alive, working to promote CST principles in and beyond the school' (Oscar Romero Award, 2024). As part of its journey in developing its scope and endeavour for outreach, Coastal School developed the concept of a Social Justice Conference for pupils, demonstrating a dynamic approach to establishing effective interschool partnerships to promote social justice across the diocese and beyond. The new role of the lay school chaplain was designed to support new partnerships in the

mission for social justice, as well as extending existing partnerships through the work of the Mini Vinnies and the Oscar Romero Faith in Action Committee.

Coastal School was awarded the Association of Character Education (ACE) Quality Mark Plus in 2022. The school actively engaged in outreach efforts as part of its role as a Regional Hub School, fostering connections with both Christian and secular schools, through sharing best practice across a range of settings nationally.

Coastal School's community outreach, led by pupil leadership groups such as the Mini Vinnies and the Oscar Romero Faith in Action Committee, involved fundraising for local charities, such as 'Michael House' and 'Hope for Food' to support the homeless, as well as an international charity, 'Mary's Meals', in response to the world hunger crisis. These partnerships reflected the school's advocacy for social justice through both local and global participation.

As an extension of the school's commitment to EDI, Coastal School established a partnership with 'Schools of Sanctuary' to develop its culture of welcome and inclusivity, reflected explicitly in the physical environment, curriculum and throughout school life. This was further enhanced through connections with 'Asylum Speakers' (2024), a charity dedicated to supporting refugees and asylum seekers globally, to develop pupils' understanding and empathy through exposure to authentic personal narratives based on real life experience.

4.4.4.2 The Role of Communities of Practice

The importance of the role of community in the development of character through the family, school and the church was a recurrent feature across data sets. It was significant that all participant groups referenced factors within the community which they perceived to contribute to children's formation, particularly the role of the family, school and church. Responses from pupil participants demonstrated that there is no single

influence on character formation, but rather an interplay between different communities of practice working synergistically - the family, school and church, all of which contribute to growth in virtue. This was expressed with poignancy by one pupil participant:

> I think everything around me has influenced the way that I love God now - my teachers, my church leaders, my family - all of them have led me to make good decisions and I am happy in my life right now. (Esther, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

i) *The Role of the Family as Primary Educators*

Senior leaders referred to the importance of the role of the school and church in children's formation but acknowledged that this largely relied on the support and commitment of the family:

> The family are vital and are primary educators. For Catholic character education - part of it is school, part is church, but the main part of it is the family. They have the biggest influence in bringing their children closer to Jesus Christ. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

Adversely, however, the concept of the family as primary educators can pose a formidable challenge to children's moral development, discussed further in Chapter Five (section 5.7).

ii) *Communication with Parents*

In order to sustain and develop effective partnerships with parents in relation to character education, Coastal School used a range of specific initiatives to engage parents including hosting termly Parent Forums, Open Days and school tours. Coastal School communicated with parents regarding its provision for character education through a

range of media channels such as the school prospectus, school website, vertical display banners, fortnightly newsletters and half termly Gospel Virtue Home Learning.

iii) *Parish Links*

Coastal School demonstrated a close connection with the local parish. The role of the parish church, through pupils' experience of Christian tradition and practice, was recognised as a positive influence on their holistic and spiritual development: 'The church is calling you' (Sophie, Parent, Coastal School). Pupils attend weekly parish Mass with their families, as well as a dedicated school Mass held in the church each half term. As the local parish church is adjacent to the school site, pupils attend a weekly whole school Mass as part of the school day. The parish priest was also a school governor and had an active presence within school, visiting classes to support preparation for the Sacraments, as well as to support the delivery of aspects of the Religious Education curriculum.

4.4.5 Approaches to Staff Formation

4.4.5.1 Continued Professional Development

An integral feature of the advanced model of character education within Coastal School was its investment in provision for expert professional development at the start of the school's character education journey. The preliminary training focused on the nature and purpose of character education, specifically in relation to the school's Catholic identity and mission. Continued provision for staff training, led by the school's Character Education Lead, focused on each school Gospel virtue each half term, which contributed to staff formation through the exploration of virtue literacy and virtue reasoning. Materials from The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue (2017) were utilised to introduce research based pedagogical approaches to support staff training. The Jubilee

Centre Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development (2022:21) was adapted by the Character Education Lead to envision a Catholic approach to character. Staff training also involved shared opportunities for discussion, prayer and reflection in the context of Catholic mission, with an emphasis on Catholic Social Teaching. Further staff training on CST was also delivered by expert external partners such as CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development) and CSAN (Caritas Social Action Network) in the first year of implementation.

4.4.5.2 Research-based Pedagogy

Senior leaders advocated for investment in professional development as contributory to the formation of staff, emphasising the need for teachers to be educated in the purpose and pedagogy of character education through research-based knowledge:

> The development of character education has to come from knowledge, research and a deep understanding (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School).

Coastal School demonstrated commitment to developing the proficiency of leaders and staff through further education and continued professional training. Two members of the Senior Leadership Team had undertaken a Masters degree in Catholic School Leadership and one senior leader had undertaken study of character education at doctoral level. The prioritisation of staff training and higher education opportunities and further study ensured that there was a secure level of competence in pedagogical knowledge and understanding among staff to enhance the quality of character education, as well as staff confidence in the delivery of the explicit curriculum.

4.4.6 Summary: Coastal School

Coastal School presented as an advanced model of Catholic character education adopting a holistic integrated approach to formation for both staff and pupils primarily

through its strategic vision, effective partnerships and explicit character curriculum, framed within a distinctively Catholic ethos and culture. Pastoral support and engagement with families was regarded as a vital dimension of the character education provision in Coastal School. Coastal School offered a challenging purposeful curriculum with a social justice orientation, designed to provoke critical thinking and moral reflection. Despite the evident sophistication of embedded provision and practices in Coastal School, senior leaders recognised the need to sustain and further enhance work in the field of character education. As part of its school self-evaluation, Coastal School identified key areas of development, referred to subsequently.

i) *Strategic Leadership*

Senior leaders articulated plans to further develop strategic provision to promote a culture of welcome and inclusion for refugees and those seeking asylum. Coastal School planned to pursue an application for the 'Schools of Sanctuary Award' in January 2025. Coastal School expressed an intention to continue its commitment to pursue social action to promote social justice, primarily through pupil leadership and service, enhancing its outreach within the local community through developing existing partnerships to support disadvantaged families and homeless charities. The school also planned to develop its global outreach through a sustained partnership with 'Mary's Meals', and continued support for its Catholic twinnage primary school in India.

ii) *Environment*

Coastal School was keen to further develop the culture of welcome and inclusion to ensure that this commitment is reflected throughout the physical environment of the school through signage and dedicated displays to exemplify CST in action. At a strategic level, the school planned to work in partnership with the parish priest and other local chaplaincies to explore the use of the newly built school chapel to enhance the spiritual development of all members of the school community.

iii) *Curriculum Design*

Coastal School indicated their intention to further enhance the role and impact of performance virtues through enhanced provision for the development of oracy skills so that children have increased opportunities and experience of debating and public speaking, particularly within the context of social justice.

iv) *Partnerships*

Coastal School expressed a desire to engage in further outreach as a missionary school building upon existing partnerships with schools both within and beyond the diocese, through sustaining and developing their innovative model of an annual Social Justice Conference for pupils. As an enhancement to its Oscar Romero Innnovator Award status, the school was keen to develop further partnerships with parents through the implementation of a Parent Committee for Social Justice.

v) *Approaches to staff formation*

Coastal School aimed to maintain a focus on staff formation linked to an explicit commitment to the promotion of staff mental health and wellbeing as a reflection of its Catholic ethos and mission. Coastal School also planned to establish the role of the school's newly appointed lay chaplain to support the formation of both staff and pupils.

4.5 Case Study 2: Urban School

4.5.1 Introduction

This school is a two-form entry Catholic primary school (Reception to Year 6) set within an urban area of social deprivation in the southeast of England, based on the *English Indices of Deprivation (*2019). The school is part of a federated partnership of six settings under the leadership of an Executive Headteacher and Executive Board, comprising three maintained primary schools, two Voluntary Aided primary schools, one Maintained (birth to 5 years Nursery) and an Early Years Centre. Urban School is one of only two Catholic schools within the partnership. The strategic leadership of the Executive Headteacher, however, demonstrated a strong commitment to the promotion of the Catholic distinctiveness of the school: 'The personal witness to the faith provided by the Executive Headteacher and Head of School provides a strong vision and direction for the work of the school' (S48 Validation Report, June 2022).

The distinctive Catholicity of Urban School provided a strong foundation for the school's approach to character education which focused on the holistic development of pupils, enhanced by the support of pastoral staff. The school, led by a Catholic Executive Headteacher, had developed the implementation of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) since 2019. The school's strategic vision for character education permeated the Christian life and mission of the school and was integral to the overall curriculum intent and design. Character education was delivered implicitly through CST within the wider curriculum, designed to inspire social action for the common good. Although Urban School did not have an explicit formal curriculum for character education, it was found that there were many positive features of the school's approach, which contributed to and impacted on pupils' formation journey.

Urban School demonstrated key strengths in character education primarily in relation to the Catholic life of the school through mission integrity as its basis for character

education, curriculum design focused on CST, as well as its endeavours to establish strong and effective partnerships with parents and the local community. The school had not pursued the 'Oscar Romero Award' at the time of the research study but had planned to initiate an application at the preliminary Participator level in the future.

The school expressed interest in participating in this case study as an opportunity to engage in and contribute to an academic research project on character education, as an area which the school was keen to develop further and make more explicit, particularly in relation to Catholic Social Teaching. Urban School received a grade of 'Outstanding' in its most recent Ofsted Full Inspection Report (March 2019) and was awarded a grade of 'Outstanding' in its Diocesan S48 Validation Report (June 2022), acknowledging the school's commitment and fidelity to its mission statement, transmitted throughout school life:

> The mission statement, 'God, love and family', is central to the life of the school. The vision of a faith filled community striving to live out the values and virtues of the Gospel so all, regardless of starting point or background, can succeed is inspiring to all in the community.

4.5.2 School Mission/Vision

There was a tangible commitment that all educational endeavour was motivated by the school's overarching vision to 'empower children to become architects of a better world'. This vision was at the heart of the school's commitment to Catholic character education and the promotion of social justice, reflected in School Development Plans (2022-24) over two consecutive years (see Appendix XXI). Within Urban School, interpretation and translation of the school's mission statement, 'God in our hearts, love in our words and family in our actions' underpinned the school's approach to character education. Urban School was committed to fostering children's holistic development, driven by Christian purpose and the mission of evangelisation.

Senior leaders articulated a comprehensive understanding of the distinctive Catholic identity and mission of Urban School and the importance of a clear, shared collaborative vision across the school community. As an outcome of their latest Section 48 Diocesan Inspection (2022), Urban School had focused on fidelity to its Christian mission through immersion in the curriculum, the environment and reflected throughout the totality of school life.

Integral to the school's vision, Urban School aspired to provide a rich learning experience where pupils were encouraged to become successful learners and responsible citizens within the context of 'a happy, exciting and successful learning community with Jesus at the centre' (Executive Headteacher, Urban School website, 2023).

4.5.3 Values/Virtues

The school had a distinctive Catholic identity underpinned by Gospel values and characterised by its Christ-centred learning community which 'engenders a happy, inclusive, family atmosphere'. The Executive Headteacher described the school's mission to 'shine a light of goodness into our community and live our lives by the principles of Truth, Honesty, Peace and Justice for all'. There was a focus on the nurture of character which underpinned the school's ethos to prepare children to be 'architects of a better world':

> We care for each child's individual needs, building their confidence and encouraging them to be creative and independent to prepare them for their life beyond primary school. (Statement from Executive Headteacher, Urban School Website, 2023)

4.5.4 Secondary Data

The school's distinctive Catholic identity was reflected throughout key policies, such as the Behaviour Policy, Equality Policy and Learning Policy, as articulated in its policy introductory statement:

> Our schools have a strong Catholic ethos which underpins everything we do. Knowing we are guided by God, we aspire to live our mission of truth, honesty, justice, and peace for all. Catholic Social Teaching permeates through our curriculum, interactions, and relationships. This is all manifested through God, Love and Family. (Policy Introduction Statement)

The school's *Ofsted Full Inspection Report* (March 2019) acknowledged the 'exceptional leadership' of the Executive Headteacher, 'modelling exemplary practice' for her team. As part of the summary of key findings, the report commended the school's provision for the personal development of pupils:

> There are many opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. This helps to sustain a nurturing environment in which pupils can thrive and which prepares them well for life in modern Britain. (Ofsted Report, 2019)

Urban School received a 'Schools of Sanctuary Award' in 2018, in recognition of its commitment to 'fostering a culture of welcome, belonging and solidarity for those seeking safety' (City of Sanctuary, 2024). The school was committed to its Catholic mission for evangelisation, serving its diverse community, which one pupil participant described as 'one global family'. Behaviour and attitudes were 'underpinned by their knowledge and living out of the school's mission statement' (Diocesan Section 48 Validation Report, 2022).

4.6 Primary Empirical Qualitative Data: Urban School

The following represents Urban School primary empirical findings in relation to broad thematic areas of significance which emerged during data analysis: strategic leadership, the role of environment, curriculum design, partnerships and approaches to staff formation.

4.6.1 Strategic Leadership

4.6.1.1 Role of Senior Leaders

Character education was strategically led by the governing body, the Executive Head and Head of School. The school's *Ofsted Full Inspection Report* 2019) acknowledged the 'exceptional leadership' of the Executive Headteacher. Leaders articulated a distinctively Catholic vision for education, highlighting the responsibility of Catholic education leaders and educators 'to provide opportunities for children to grow in faith… to nurture their spiritual development and to understand and develop their relationship with God' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). The distinct emphasis on the holistic development of pupils was regarded as integral to the distinctiveness of the Catholic school: 'What we are looking to do is develop the child's character holistically throughout everything that we do at school' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

The implementation of character education, primarily through the vehicle of Catholic Social Teaching, was driven by the Vice Principal, supported by the RE and pastoral team. The pastoral role of the school ELSA Lead was akin to that of a lay school chaplain, supporting the emotional and spiritual development of pupils across the school. The committed Christian leadership of the ELSA Lead directly contributed to the holistic formation of pupils and included supervising the roles and responsibilities of the Pupil Chaplains, as well as planning and leading class prayer and liturgy across the school.

i) *Mission Integrity*

The integrity of the Catholic mission of Urban School was reflected throughout the educational enterprise, environment and in the fullness of the Christian life of the school. One senior leader participant expressed the view that a distinctive characteristic of Catholic education is in fostering an understanding of human purpose: 'Humans are being put here with a very particular role and purpose' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). In authentic fulfilment of Catholic mission, senior leaders expressed understanding of the importance of the process of the discovery of meaning and purpose through a Christian lens, to enable pupils to explore their faith and deepen their relationship with Christ.

4.6.1.2 Pupil Leadership

Pupil participants in Urban School were able to articulate their understanding of 'good character' in a Christian context: 'To be faithful in Jesus and to live out the Beatitudes and his Word' (Samira, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Pupils articulated this fidelity as relational, showing loving to one another, 'To follow God's ten commandments and love one another as a neighbour' (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). This was expanded upon by another pupil who described her perception of good character in relation to servant leadership: '...loving others, caring for others and helping others' (Evie, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

i) *Relationship between Taught and Sought Character*

There was a clear emphasis on the goal of character education as the translation of virtue learning into practice, providing pupils with contexts for social action to make a positive impact within their own community and in the wider world, which was integral to the school's overarching vision: 'Character education provides empowerment and prepares pupils for their future lives and their lives now' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

Urban School provided a range of roles and opportunities for pupil leadership to inspire and enhance children's involvement in the school mission for social justice, such as Pupil Chaplains, School Council, Eco Ambassadors, Caritas Champions, House Captains and Play Leaders. The role of pupil leadership was regarded as a significant contributory factor to pupils' formation through providing opportunities to apply their learning in meaningful, motivating contexts as part of living an altruistic faith-filled life. It is important to note that although not all pupils engaged in designated pupil leadership roles, the Catholic mission of Urban School was invitational for all, woven throughout the ethos of the school.

One pupil participant made reference to the explicit relationship between virtue knowledge and virtue practice, highlighting the purpose and impact of learning about virtue is 'so that we can carry it out in our everyday lives' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). This is a significant point in relation to the translation of virtue learning into behavioural application. Through engagement in social action, there was a tangible impact upon pupils' sense of empowerment leading to the autonomous, altruistic pursuit of virtue.

ii) *Character Development and Faith*

There was a correlation between the development of character and the development of faith, demonstrating the impact of Christian virtue education on pupils' formation. The purpose of learning about virtue was expressed by one pupil participant as 'important to the faith and why we are here because Jesus represents the virtues in all he does' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). A similar view was provided by another participant's response: 'To show us how to love and help each other and teach others to be Jesus' disciples and follow Jesus' (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

The role of pupil chaplains in Key Stage 2 in Urban School involved sharing biblical stories and prayers with younger children daily in a dedicated prayer space which contributed to an explicit culture of spiritual peer mentoring in the style of accompaniment.

4.6.2 The Role of Environment

4.6.2.1 Culture and Ethos

Urban School had a distinctive Catholic identity underpinned by Gospel values and characterised by its Christ-centred learning community which sought to 'engender a happy, inclusive, family atmosphere' (Statement from Executive Headteacher, School Website, 2023). The mission statement is translated and reflected throughout the school community in relationships, behaviour and attitudes. As expressed by the Headteacher, Urban School is a 'unique and special community…which forms the foundations for us to be able to engage in Catholic character education' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). There was an implicit focus on the nurture of Catholic character which underpinned the school's ethos to prepare children to be 'architects of a better world':

> We care for each child's individual needs, building their confidence and encouraging them to be creative and independent to prepare them for their life beyond primary school (Statement from Executive Headteacher, School Website, 2023).

Urban School celebrated children's endeavour to demonstrate aspects of Catholic character as a lived mission through weekly 'Mission Statement Hero' awards.

i) *The Significance of Modelling*

Staff formation was regarded as foundational in supporting children in their formation journey. School leader participants recognised the integral role of the teacher as an exemplar of Christian virtue, evidenced through modelled behaviour and in the quality

of relationships. There was consistency across participant responses highlighting the importance of modelled virtue on pupils' moral development: 'If we are showing our mission statement is alive in us and permeated through us, then hopefully it's imprinting on the children as well' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School). The magnamity of modelled virtue was expressed by another senior leader in light of some of the key challenges posed for contemporary character education, providing a sense of constancy:

> We are role models for everything…children have all different kinds of backgrounds. We don't know what home life is like sometimes and it's important that they have constant role models in their life that they can refer to (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

Parent participants expressed an analogous view in relation to the role and impact of children's exposure to moral exemplars: 'Everything that is going on around them now is building their character' (Anna, Parent, Urban School).

ii) *Christian Tradition and Practice*

The Catholic culture and ethos of Urban School was reflected through Christian tradition and practice, particularly through the significant role of prayer and reflection. The whole school community attended weekly Mass in the parish church. In addition to this, the parish priest had an active role in the Christian life of the school, leading fortnightly collective worship, as well as supporting class prayer and liturgy. Whole school collective worship and class worship was an integral part of the Catholic life of the school. Liturgical themes were further developed through planned opportunities to explore Gospel readings and facilitate questioning, reflection and deeper understanding. Further consolidation and reflection activities were provided for pupils to embed and extend learning. Prayer life and opportunities for moral and spiritual reflection was an integral feature of the school's Christian practice:

> We have prayer intentions alongside our daily prayers. The children write down things that are important to them that they want to pray to God about… it can be really meaningful for the children (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

4.6.2.2 Physical Environment

The school's distinctive Catholic identity and mission was reflected consistently throughout the school environment through classroom and communal displays, particularly its commitment to Catholic Social Teaching. Pupils were exposed to opportunities to explore the meaning and purpose of the mission statement throughout curriculum learning, as well as reflected prominently in the physical environment to increase exposure and immersion: 'We wanted the children to absorb the Mission, so it is now a prominent focus in every classroom' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

The school's emphasis on promoting the spiritual formation of pupils pervaded the physical environment. The school had four house groups based on the saints of the Holy Family (St. John, St Joseph, Our Lady and the Sacred Heart), with dedicated displays in the main school hall. The saints were celebrated as part of the Catholic life of the school through weekly House Worship and dedicated masses throughout the academic year.
There was also a dedicated indoor prayer space facilitated by pupil chaplains. In the external grounds, there was a dedicated 'Marian Prayer Garden' and a large wooden garden chapel as place of sanctuary.

4.6.3 Curriculum Design

The school's overarching aspirational vision 'to empower children to become architects of a better world' framed the school's curriculum intent and design to inspire and empower pupils to explore their role and purpose as Christians in the pursuit of social justice. Key facets of the curriculum design in Urban School were its distinctively Catholic

approach to the curriculum, characterised by critical thinking and reflection, as well as the integration of associated principles of Catholic Social Teaching within the wider curriculum, although this was an identified area for further development to achieve a more embedded approach.

4.6.3.1 Catholic Approach to the Curriculum

The design of Urban School's curriculum had a distinctive and purposeful Catholic approach, enriched by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. The school's approach to teaching and learning was characterised by a 'Why? How? What?' model, based on Simon Sinek's (2015) 'Golden Circle' to develop pupils' understanding of the meaning, purpose and significance of their learning in relation to all aspects of the curriculum. The School Development Plan referred to the implementation of a 'compassionate curriculum' designed to inspire and sustain active compassion in the school, local community and the wider world. It was significant that character education was not taught as a distinct or explicit programme, but primarily through the instrument of CST, woven throughout the curriculum. There was a conscious crafting of curriculum design to integrate opportunities to enhance pupils' spiritual development so that pupils could apply their learning related to CST to meaningful and relevant contemporary contexts. However, senior leaders identified the need to ensure that opportunities for CST were fully optimised throughout curriculum design to promote social conscience and motivate social action.

Data outcomes demonstrated the impact of pupils' knowledge and understanding of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching as a key dimension of the curriculum in relation to their view of themselves and their interpretation of the world through a Christian lens. One pupil participant articulated a salient point that, in his view, learning about virtue and CST had enriched his perspective about others and enabled a deeper understanding and reflection of Christian purpose in relation to 'how you think of others and what is

important about life itself' (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Pupil responses showed an authentic awareness and understanding of discrimination and a resultant desire for the pursuit of justice, expressed by one pupil participant in relation to the meaning of equality:

> People get seen differently because of who they are or where they live. Some people live on the streets but are judged because they don't have anything…Equality is not treating people differently because of how they act and where they come from. (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School)

Whole school and class worship was an integral part of the Catholic life of Urban School. Themes were further developed through planned opportunities to explore Gospel readings and facilitate questioning and reflection. As part of the school's Catholic approach to the curriculum, scripture was integrated within each curriculum subject across the school, as well as opportunities to study significant role models of virtue. Senior leader participants emphasised the importance of providing a meaningful, contextual curriculum to support pupils to reflect and explore their role and purpose as Christians:

> We are always looking at how the curriculum can be applied to the context that the children are living in right now, enabling them to identify as being here with a particular role and purpose to fulfil, supporting and guiding them on their journey towards identifying what that is. (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School)

4.6.3.2 Performance Virtues through Oracy

Urban School curriculum was designed to promote purposeful learning which fostered skills of critical thinking and reflection based on relevant current affairs, both locally and globally, to inspire and motivate children to respond through social action. The contextual design of the curriculum provided opportunities to develop performance virtues, in particular, skills of oracy through discussion, debate and public speaking.

Outcomes demonstrated that providing platforms for pupil voice facilitated empowerment in the pursuit of social justice. For example, as part of their learning in History, pupils in upper Key Stage Two engaged in discussions within the context of a 'mock' United Nations Conference, allowing them to experience challenging discussions and explore resolutions: 'The children are given a fictional state that has an issue and have to work together as the UN to try to resolve the issue' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

The wider curriculum was designed to facilitate planned opportunities to discuss and reflect on real world events within a contemporary context which instigate social action: 'It's good to have dedicated time to talk about global issues, as well as local issues, that the children quite often will use as part of their writing' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School). She provided the example of written speeches on the theme of discrimination which pupils recorded and presented to promote Black Lives Matter.

4.6.3.3 Virtue Literacy and Virtue Practice

In Urban school, outcomes highlighted the potential impact of the curriculum as transformational. One pupil participant articulated his belief in the correlation between virtue learning and how this is translated through behaviour and action in fulfilment of Christian mission: 'We could use it through our actions, having hope in each other, spreading the word and loving each other' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Extending this point, another participant referred to how virtue learning provided inspiration to imitate the exemplar of Christ: **'**So we can spread the word of God, showing other people how this inspires us and showing them to act' (Rose, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

However, pupil participants also highlighted the challenge of plurality of values with reference to variance with the values of others: 'When we try to build virtue, sometimes it can be hard for other people because they don't have that value (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Another participant referred to a lack of understanding as a potential

barrier to virtue learning: 'Maybe it could be difficult because you have to understand it' (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

One pupil participant highlighted the importance of the explicit teaching of character education to develop an understanding of purpose and meaning:

> It could be hard to understand a virtue because some people don't know how to understand … they need it explained in more detail about how virtue can impact their lives and make a better way of living (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

It was significant that all the pupil participants agreed that values or virtues need to be explicitly taught, although the view was expressed that receptivity may be a challenge to formation: 'Some people might not be open to listen yet' (Rose, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

There was also reference to the impact of virtue learning on the enrichment of personal prayer life: 'We can use it when we pray to God about helping each other' (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Similarly, another pupil articulated his view of how Jesus' teachings had enhanced his understanding of challenges in the world and strengthened his faith:

> Jesus, the prophets and disciples have taught me a lot about how the world can sometimes be wrong and how to be able to grow your faith so that your faith is strong in Jesus. (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School)

The role of prayer and engagement with scripture in fostering faith was a significant feature of data outcomes and reflected the distinctive Catholicity of Urban School.

4.6.3.4 Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

An explicit emphasis on Catholic Social Teaching as part of the spiral curriculum in Urban School characterised the school's approach to character education. There was an

aspirational commitment to developing pupils' empathy and action for social justice embedded within curriculum design to empower pupils as citizens of the future. In the absence of explicit provision for character education based specifically on Gospel virtues or values, there was an emphasis on social justice within the curriculum, taught through the principles of CST as the essence of the school's approach to character education. At the time of the initial data collection visit in 2022, provision for Catholic Social Teaching had not been formalised within curriculum design and were, therefore, found to be more *ad hoc* subject links rather than explicitly planned opportunities as part of a whole school approach. It was significant to note, however, that despite the absence of formalised provision for CST within curriculum design, pupil participants were able to articulate their understanding of the principles of CST as a result of their learning through liturgy, RE and the wider curriculum. Pupil participant responses demonstrated a moral view of the world, expressed with a genuine sense of compassion and empathy and a desire for a fairer world for all:

> We have learnt about human dignity in most of our years and why it's really important. We want to be equal in life, so there is no racism and everyone should come together as one family. (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School)

The school had identified Catholic Social Teaching as an area for future whole school curriculum development, reflected in the School Development Plan 2023-24. During a follow up school visit in 2024, the school had initiated a specific focus on CST across the curriculum in areas such as RE, Science and Humanities to develop a more comprehensive and progressive approach to explicit curriculum design. The mission for pupils to aspire to become 'architects of a better world' was underpinned the school's curriculum intent to inspire and empower pupils to explore their role and purpose as Christians in the pursuit of social justice.

4.6.3.5 Critical Thinking and Reflection

As part of the Catholic pedagogy in Urban School, there was a strong emphasis on questioning and reflection focused on fostering conceptions of Christian purpose and mission for both pupils and staff. This was considered an area of strength in terms of the school's Catholic approach to character education. The intent of curriculum design was framed around 'posing the right questions at the right times and in the right context... and to have conversations with staff and children around centering back into why we're here and what our purpose is' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). Through facilitating opportunities for deep personal reflection in relation to Christian telos, pupils were invited 'to reflect on who they want to be, what qualities they believe are important, how they want others to see them, and how they want to influence the world around them' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). In this sense, pupils were able to create a vision for their own formation and explore their interpretation of human flourishing through reflection, questioning and introspection.

As part of the pedagogical approach to character education, pupils were encouraged to engage in a 'reflective response' to their learning as part of a review of the impact and progression of Catholic Social Teaching in the curriculum across the whole school:

> We would like to audit all of the individual activities and response reflections together to make sure that they are progressive, in line with children's growing understanding and knowledge. (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School)

4.6.4 Partnerships

Urban School engaged in a range of key partnerships which made a positive contribution to its approach to character education. In addition to the formation of partnerships within its own federation, Urban School focused on engagement with families through enhanced pastoral provision and developing the connection between the school and parish church.

4.6.4.1 Partnership of Schools

Urban School was part of a federated partnership of schools which consisted of two Catholic schools and three community schools. The school endeavoured through outreach to share its Christian mission with the community partnership schools in order to influence them, particularly regarding Catholic Social Teaching. In collaboration with its partnership schools, Urban School engaged in projects to promote social justice, such as providing regular donations to the local 'Rotary Club Shoebox Appeal' for disadvantaged and displaced children in deprived areas of the world. In addition, Urban School worked in partnership with CAFOD to develop the school's explicit curriculum provision for CST through staff training and resourcing.

4.6.4.2 Role of the Community: School Connections with Families and Local Parish

i) *Composition of the Catholic School Community*

Developing partnerships between the school and parish was identified as a characteristic strength of Urban School. It was noteworthy that one senior leader observed a 'decline in the depth of faith and values' across the school community (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School). The participant felt strongly that the school's intentional commitment to nurture pupils' spiritual and moral development sought to mitigate the challenge of a diminished number of Catholic families attending:

> A lot of our children aren't faith believers, and parents at home don't believe… we are getting the children on board from such an early age. They're able to pass that onto their parents… not just that they're going to church on a weekly basis, but passing on a kind, caring, loving attitude and respect, walking in the footsteps of Jesus and God, being compassionate, loving people (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

ii) *Environmental Factors*

Urban School demonstrated a strong commitment to establishing and sustaining partnerships with parents, acknowledging the vital role of parents as primary educators. Although the school is situated in an area of social deprivation, one senior leader commented on the charitability of the local community:

> We're in an area of deprivation…and with the current climate…we have a lot of families who are so kind and giving. A lot of what comes in goes to our families. (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School)

A further challenge expressed across participant groups related to the inconsistency of moral messages that children are exposed to as result of the influence of media technologies, thus emphasising the importance of fostering positive partnerships between the school, families and the church in order to reinforce a consistent Christian interpretation of virtue:

> A huge challenge is social media… it's difficult to monitor everything they are watching. Sometimes it will be giving a different message to what we are as parents, or as a school are. (Lena, Parent, Urban School)

iii) *Communication with Parents*

Although the school did not make explicit reference to Catholic character education in its policies or school marketing, the school website provided comprehensive information on the Catholic life of the school, which was also communicated formally through letters and monthly newsletters. Urban School actively sought partnership with families as part of their character education offer and provided a 'Wednesday Word' newsletter for the school and parish community.

Through investing in developing partnerships with families through communicating information, parents felt able to actively engage and support their child's learning in relation to both the curriculum and the wider provision for character education:

> Knowing what is taught in the curriculum and what they've been learning about has helped...In RE, they learn the morals behind the stories in the Bible. My son tells me what he's been learning in RE because he really enjoys it. (Lena, Parent, Urban School)

Whilst outcomes clearly acknowledge the school's endeavours to create successful partnerships with parents, outcomes also revealed the challenge of incongruence between the values taught at school and those modelled at home for some children:

> Sometimes the children don't have the same role models at home that they have at school, so that can be difficult trying to teach them something when they might be hearing other messages at home. (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School)

iv) *Pastoral Provision*

The quality of pastoral support provided for children and their families enriched the school's holistic approach to character education and was identified as a significant strength of the school's provision. Worthy of note here was a strength of feeling among parent participants who unanimously expressed a highly positive view of the school and the support they had received regarding their child's moral and emotional development: 'I am so blessed for my children to come through here' (Anna, Parent, Urban School). Another parent praised the school for their 'encouragement of curiosity and the uniqueness of each child' (Julie, Parent, Urban School). Parent participants commended the school staff on their accessibility and approachability which reflected the Catholic ethos and culture of the school. One parent participant expressed a strong belief in the level of pastoral support she had received from the school as a parent of a child with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND): 'The school as a whole supported me

and helped me support her…She is always treated with a great amount of patience and love' (Mary, Parent, Urban School).

v) *Role of the Church*

There was an established link between the school and the parish church through weekly mass, enhanced by the active role and presence of the parish priest within the school. One parent participant recognised the importance of the role of the Church in supporting children's moral learning but expressed the view that this was dependent upon the endeavour of parents to establish a relationship: 'You need to be interacting with the Church...you need to build a relationship with the Church' (Julie, Parent, Urban School). There is an inference here that for engagement with the church to be impactful, there needs to be receptivity or 'openness' to faith.

4.6.5 Approaches to Staff Formation

Senior leaders acknowledged the diminished number of Catholic families attending the school, as well as the challenge of a reduced number of baptised Catholic teachers across the staff team. Leaders identified the need to develop secure teacher subject knowledge relating to the Christian faith and were committed to exploring provision for professional development and staff formation to seek to address this:

> One of the main challenges can be our non-Catholic staff and their confidence levels… they have to have difficult conversations but also respond to difficult questions. You have to become more experienced as a Catholic staff. (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School)

Although there had been no explicit character education training for staff in Urban School, staff had received training on Catholic Social Teaching delivered by the RE Lead through a sequence of staff meetings, as well as through CAFOD partners. The RE Lead regularly modelled practice in prayer and liturgy in each year group across the school to

develop teacher's understanding and confidence in the preparation and delivery of liturgical worship.

4.6.6 Summary: Urban School

The distinctive Catholicity of Urban School permeated the totality of school life. The school's holistic approach to character education through high quality pastoral provision was a key characteristic strength, as well as the establishment of effective partnerships with parents and the parish community. Despite the absence of an explicit character education curriculum, the school had integrated Catholic Social Teaching principles throughout the curriculum to promote the mission for social justice. Urban School identified key areas in which to focus planned development in the future with regard to its character education endeavour:

i) *Strategic Leadership*

Urban School planned to enhance opportunities for children to engage in leadership responsibilities to promote social action inspired by Catholic Social Teaching within the school and wider community. Leaders expressed a desire to enable children to become increasingly spontaneous in the leadership and planning of worship.

ii) *Environment*

Urban School was keen to further promote children's aspiration to develop their sense of social responsibility within and beyond the life of the school, as a reflection of the Catholic vision and mission of the school.

iii) *Curriculum Design*

Urban School identified the need to embed the principles of Catholic Social Teaching through identifying and making explicit links across all curriculum areas as part of a more systematically planned approach the Catholic design of the curriculum. The school planned to focus on evaluation of the impact of CST in the curriculum in terms of progression in pupils' reflectional responses.

iv) *Partnerships*

Urban School aimed to develop the impact of its outreach within their partnership of community schools to promote social justice. The school intended to actively pursue the 'Oscar Romero Award' at the preliminary Participator Level in recognition of the school's commitment to promote social justice.

v) *Approaches to Staff Formation*

Urban School identified the need to provide regular staff training and support to develop teachers' knowledge and confidence in their role within Catholic education with a focus on developing understanding of prayer and liturgy. The school indicated their intention to develop a more strategic approach to professional development through further expert led CPD focused on Catholic Social Teaching to meet the training needs of new and non-Catholic staff.

4.7 Case Study 3 - Semi-Rural School

4.7.1 Introduction

Semi-Rural School is part of an Academy Trust which comprised a total of five other local Catholic primary schools. The school is situated in the southeast of England in an area of mixed economic prosperity according to the *English Indices of Deprivation* (2019). The school consists of a single site building for children aged 3-11 years with the local church easily accessible from the school site. The school is committed to inclusivity, serving a diverse community of families: 'Many of the pupils at the school come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The school welcomes all such pupils and their families, and this diversity is a cause of celebration' (S48 Validation Report, May 2022).

It was found that explicit provision for character education in Semi-Rural School was at a preliminary stage of development, although through outcomes of school self-evaluation, key areas for future development had been identified by governors and senior leaders. Senior leaders planned to implement a formal curriculum for character education in the subsequent academic year (2024-25). Semi-Rural School had expressed interest in participating in the case study as an opportunity to explore the concept of character education as an explicit curriculum, which was new to the school.

Semi-Rural School was awarded a grade of 'Good' in its most recent Diocesan S48 Validation (May 2022), achieving 'Outstanding' in the categories of 'School and Wider Community' and 'Moral Development' with specific reference to standards of behaviour and the quality of relationships:

> Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. The children are kind, courteous and friendly…They have a keen sense of right and wrong, underpinned by a maturing understanding of Gospel values and they consistently demonstrate this through their very positive relationships. (Section 48 Validation Report, 2022)

In recognition of the school's work to promote social justice, the school achieved the Oscar Romero Participator Level Award in 2022, the preliminary award of three award levels in recognition of its introduction of Catholic Social Teaching within the curriculum, as well as its fundraising and outreach endeavours in the community, such as food bank donations. The Mini Vinnies had organised inter-generational events, visiting residents from local care homes and had recently established links with 'Rosie's Rainbow', a local charity which provides support for children in hospital with long-term illness. The school's charitable efforts extended globally through fundraising in support of the 'Corpus Christi Africa Fund' for Our Lady of Nazareth Catholic Primary School in Nairobi, with a view to developing further links to share cultural experiences across the school communities.

The school was inspected by Ofsted in February 2023 and received an overall grade of 'Good', with recognition of outstanding provision in behaviour and attitudes. The report highlighted the translation of the school's mission motto, 'SAINTS Beatitudes', across the school community:

> Smiles greet you everywhere... Pupils are happy, articulate and polite. Staff and pupils model the school 'SAINTS Beatitudes' of 'strive, accept, integrity, nurture, talent and service' through all aspects of school life. Together, everyone contributes passionately to this culture (Ofsted Report for Semi-Rural School, February 2023).

4.7.2 School Mission/Vision

Semi-Rural School was committed to the holistic development of pupils as the foundation for human flourishing, with a strong emphasis on the recognition and celebration of the uniqueness of every child as part of the school's culture of inclusivity, serving a richly diverse community. The Catholic mission of the school was led by the strategic vision of governors and school leaders. The school's distinctive Mission Statement - 'Safe, Happy and Successful together with God', was explicit throughout the

school environment and articulated across the school community. The school's mission motto 'SAINTS Beatitudes' (Strive, Accept, Integrity, Nurture, Talents, Service) provided the foundation for the school's approach to character education. Semi-Rural School had created its Catholic mission and motto initially through consultation between the Headteacher and parish priest, which was subsequently extended for consultation with all stakeholders across the school's community, including governors, parents and pupils. In its preliminary stages, the 'SAINTS Beatitudes' mission motto was delivered through a series of whole school assemblies to introduce ways to live out each Beatitude, as an integral part of the school's Christian evangelising mission.

The school mission was translated and modelled through a variety of pupil leadership roles across the school including Mini Vinnies, Pupil Chaplains, Laudato Si' representatives, Head and Deputy Boy/Girl, School Council, House Captains, Healthy School Representatives, Digital Leaders, Peer Mediators, Playground Pals and a Music Captain.

4.7.3 Values/Virtues

Semi-Rural School did not adopt the language of specific Gospel values or virtues as the basis for its Catholic character education. Rather, the school had introduced a distinctive Catholic mission motto, 'SAINTS Beatitudes', integral to its living Christian commitment, which reflected biblical principles.

The school motto was central to the lived Catholic ethos and culture of the school and constituted its fundamental framework for character education. Each of the six 'SAINTS Beatitudes' were revisited individually through whole school worship, referred to throughout learning and in all aspects of school life to reinforce understanding and application across the school community:

> We try to reflect on them as often as possible…at the start of the year we always revisit them to remind pupils of the behaviours we can show to help the school be a safe and happy place. (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

4.7.4 Secondary Data

The distinctive Catholicity of Semi-Rural School was characterised by a strong sense of community through lived mission, acknowledged in the school's latest Section 48 Diocesan Inspection (May 2023):

> [This school] is a school which truly lives out its mission statement. Safe, happy and successful together with God', with every member of the school community exemplifying a Christian witness, which permeates the whole community.

Semi-Rural School's commitment to character education through values based 'Beatitudes' was explicit within the school's Behaviour Policy (2022), which made specific reference to Gospel values as the basis for the school values:

> Our school values have been developed alongside the Gospel Values and serve as a compass for our actions and how we behave…Teachers should encourage ownership of values using class rules and class-based PSHE/discussion on a regular basis and through modelling, reinforcement and direct teaching. Our SAINTS Beatitudes should be referred to when correcting and praising individual/group behavior.

4.8 Primary Empirical Qualitative Data: Semi-Rural School

The following represents Semi-Rural School primary empirical findings in relation to broad thematic areas of significance which emerged during data analysis: strategic leadership, the role of environment, curriculum design, partnerships and approaches to staff formation.

4.8.1 Strategic Leadership

4.8.1.1 Role of Governors and Senior Leaders

The strategic leadership of character education in Semi-Rural School was centralised through the role of governors and core members of the senior leadership team, comprising of the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher. The school's provision for character education was based principally on implicit and discrete approaches, influenced by the distinctive Catholic ethos and culture of the school. The school was committed to an ambitious vision for the holistic formation of pupils:

> [Character education] is not just understanding and knowledge...but how to behave, how they treat others, how they pass that on and how to stand up for it too, over many of the challenges they face. (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

The Deputy Headteacher went on to emphasise the role of the school's 'SAINTS Beatitudes' as integral to the strategic leadership of and vision for character education: '[The Beatitudes] underpin absolutely everything in the school'.

The Chair of Governors expressed the aspiration of a familial atmosphere, involving all members of the school community, as a key goal of Catholic education: 'We want to create a family'. She went on to explain the importance of the active participation and responsibility of the whole school community in upholding the integrity of the school mission, characterised by 'the involvement of parents, governors, staff and pupils in the whole ethos... whether that's learning, teaching, supporting, governing' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

In terms of strategic leadership, senior leaders, including the Deputy Headteacher as RE Lead, had a pivotal role in the vision and implementation of the school's approach to character education. The school's vision for character education was intentional but had

not been formalised on the School Development Plan in terms of an explicit character education curriculum. In her role as RE Lead, the Deputy Headteacher was instrumental in facilitating opportunities to develop Catholic Social Teaching in the curriculum and had identified this as an area for future training and development. The Headteacher described the school's strategic vision for the impact of Catholic character education:

> When they leave here, I want them to be able to access their learning… to be confident in themselves, to be independent learners that have the belief that they can do anything that they put their minds to. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

The significance of modelled virtue was integral to the distinctive Catholic identity of Semi-Rural School, reflected in the school's most recent Section 48 Diocesan Inspection: 'The school community as a whole is one that is united and cohesive. Leaders exemplify positive Christian values which permeate all aspects of school life' (Section 48 Validation, May 2022).

4.8.1.2 Pupil Leadership

Semi-Rural School was committed to nurturing aspirations for pupils to engage in experiences which promoted social action through a range of leadership opportunities across the school which contributed to the Catholic distinctiveness. The role of service to others was found to be an impactful dimension to the school's provision for character education through translation and modelling of the school's mission statement. One pupil participant referred to the impact of virtue learning on her faith: 'It will not only teach you to be a follower of God, but if you know what they [virtues] are and how you should be acting, you can help other people (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

i) *Sought character*

Leadership roles afforded pupils with a sense of agency to become actively involved in decision making across various aspects of school life. The roles and responsibilities of both Playgrounds Pals and Peer Mediators helped the children to demonstrate the ability to nurture and care for one another. The school also offered opportunities for pupils to support the spiritual development of their peers through activities such as cross-phase prayer partner reading. Other roles, such as the Mini Vinnies and Pupil Chaplains, provided children with the opportunity to demonstrate their philanthropy through social action, exploring ways to support the disadvantaged and vulnerable. As a result of fundraising for the 'Corpus Christi Africa Fund' and endeavours to build connections with local care homes and charities, there was a tangible impact upon both local and global communities. The Headteacher remarked upon the significance of relationships as integral to the process of formation, promoting an intrinsic motivation to serve: 'These children already understand the importance of relationships, helping each other and caring for each other' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Worthy of note here is the fact that parent participants felt strongly supported in developing their child's character through the school's commitment to promoting opportunities for sought character: 'The children are offered many different experiences throughout their school life to engage in charitable missions to help our wider community' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

ii) *Pupil Agency*

Empowering pupils to engage in different types of service and volunteering led to a sense of agency and altruism directed to the fulfilment of Christian mission, promoting a sense of responsibility, aspiration and self-belief:

> You have to tell children you believe in them. You can do anything... Your voice is important, so we have lots of roles and responsibilities in the school (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

The Deputy Headteacher expressed a salient point that engagement in social action contributed positively to children's formation journey, promoting empowerment as agents of change: 'It makes them want to help and be involved… they feel empowered in that, knowing that they can change the future'. She went on to emphasise the significance and impact of opportunities for pupil voice, motivated by a sense of social conscience and responsibility:

> You can go forward in the world, believing that what you say matters and people can listen to you…it's representing the fact that they can stand up for themselves and put things right if things aren't right. (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

4.8.2 The Role of Environment

4.8.2.1 Culture and Ethos

Key strengths were found to be the school's implicit approaches to character education, reflected in the integrity of the school mission statement which permeated the Catholic ethos and culture of the school, translated through their 'SAINTS Beatitudes' motto, a distinct and familiar vocabulary articulated and modelled across the school community. Although Semi-Rural School did not have an explicit character education curriculum, their Catholic mission motto permeated the Catholic life of the school, reflected in acts of worship and within the Religious Education curriculum.

i) *Mission Integrity*

The vocabulary of the 'SAINTS Beatitudes' mission motto provided the basis for an exploration of the traits of Catholic character. Each theme of the motto acronym was explored in-depth as part of prayer and liturgy each half term so that children were immersed in the meaning and significance of the school mission and in this way, provided a framework for Catholic character education, contributing to formation:

> A virtue to us is a value… we have the SAINTS Beatitudes which help us be better people by teaching us how to do the right thing and to be kind to one another. (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School)

There was a strong consensus among pupil participants of a correlation between the understanding of virtue in relation to the integrity of the school mission motto and a deepening of relationship with God:

> [Virtues] helps us to get closer to God when you follow the SAINTS Beatitudes as the way to go in life...The values show us how to treat others and help us to follow God and make the right choices. (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School)

The school's mission motto had clearly impacted upon pupils' moral and spiritual formation, providing a sense of hope in a flourishing life with God: 'It can lead us onto God's path and eventually lead us to Heaven' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

ii) *Modelled Virtue*

The school motto was central to the lived ethos and culture of the school which transcended all educational endeavour. Senior leaders recognised the importance of an education in virtue which was translated through modelled behaviour across the school community. Pupils received character awards based on exemplifying the values of the 'SAINTS Beatitudes' as part of whole school Celebration Assembly.

The role of the teacher was perceived as a facilitator to support pupils' formation journey in the style of accompaniment, encouraging and provoking questioning and moral reflection. The fulcrum of Catholic education, as expressed by the Chair of Governors, centers on 'the Catholic faith of love one another', reflected through lived virtue and demonstrated through interactions and relationships across the school community: 'It's those principles that we should live by on a daily basis…in the behaviour of the children, behaviour of the staff, the whole way in which we interact' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

There was a clear understanding of the significance and impact of modelled virtue on the character development across participant responses in each research instrument. Participants expressed the view that children learn through observations of interactions and behaviour:

> First of all, [the teacher] has to be a good role model… because the children, through everything that we do here and every interaction we have with children and with each other, they are going to learn from. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

Parent participants presented a similar view of modelling Christian character: 'All staff in the school support the children's moral development by leading by example and teaching them how to be good citizens by following Christ's action' (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Pupil participants felt that their teachers had a significant impact on their spiritual growth: 'I think my teachers have had a big impact on my learning about Christ because they really influence me and help me to grow in my faith' (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

iii) *Community Within*

It was significant to note that research participants across all groups expressed the idea of the interconnectedness of the whole school community as a key strength of Semi-

Rural School in relation to its Christian mission of formation: '[Character education] is overarching… you see it day in, day out **…** all the staff know, the children know… it's a one big family' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School). The concept of a 'community within' was also reflected in pupil participant responses:

> This school as a community has really helped me, especially the SAINTS Beatitudes. They have helped me grow and spread the word of God. (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School)

Parent participants perceived character education as implicit within the environment of the school: 'You could see there was a caring environment that the children could flourish in…the behaviour of the children here is impeccable' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

It is also important to acknowledge here that whilst participants identified the role of community as a positive impact on character development, they also articulated the view that external environmental factors presented a challenge to the application of virtue learning. One pupil participant referred to the challenge of peer pressure: 'Sticking up for a friend who has done something wrong is not being honest… when they are trying to persuade you to protect them' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

iv) *Christian Tradition and Practice*

The characteristics of Catholic school distinctiveness were translated throughout the Catholic life of the school. One school leader participant stated that Christian practices, such as Mass, whole school and class worship promoted character education in an implicit sense: 'Worships and discussions are the biggest tools we use to explore [the SAINTS Beatitudes]' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School). Outcomes revealed that engagement with scripture contributed to pupils' faith formation. One pupil participant explained how biblical teachings provided a source of inspiration to

serve: ‘Hearing from the Bible what Jesus and the disciples have done, makes me want to do more’ (Freya, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

4.8.2.2 Physical Environment

The school mission statement was explicitly displayed throughout the school environment, evident in every classroom and on communal displays. There was a central dedicated Catholic Social Teaching display for which every pupil in the school had contributed a reflection on how they could demonstrate their allocated principle. The school’s 3D liturgical calendar was referred to during whole school liturgies and photographs of significant religious events were added so that children could link these to the liturgical seasons.

The use of Catholic symbolism throughout the school environment contributed to the Catholic distinctiveness of the school. Within the building, stained glass windows depicted six significant saints: St. Catherine, St. Gemma, St. Francis and St. Thomas (house team saints), St. Teresa and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, representing the school’s patron saint and the patron saint of the Academy. There was a large altar dedicated to Mary in the hall entrance where pupils could pray throughout the day. In the external grounds, there was a small prayer garden dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which pupils visited throughout the year. Pupils were invited to create displays for significant events, such as Remembrance Day and as part of their Marian procession.

4.8.3 Curriculum Design

It was found that explicit provision for character education in Semi-Rural School was at a preliminary stage of development, adopting a discrete approach rather than a formal curriculum for character, underpinned by the school’s Mission statement ‘Safe, Happy and Successful together with God’, translated through the ‘SAINTS Beatitudes’ mission motto. Although provision for character education in Semi-Rural School relied

predominantly on implicit approaches, the school had initiated a curriculum focus on Catholic Social Teaching at the time of data collection, although this had not been fully implemented across whole school.

4.8.3.1 Mission-Led Curriculum

The centrality of the school mission motto pervaded the Catholic life and curriculum approach to character education in Semi-Rural School. The adoption of 'SAINTS Beatitude' as the basis for character education provided an aspirational values-based framework. Senior leaders expressed a view of formation as developing a sense of morality which would inform moral choices and actions, 'so that they know how to behave and they know the difference between right and wrong' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School). Pupil participant responses demonstrated a clear correlation between the impact of virtue learning and spiritual formation: 'It has taught me how to respect one another and how to respect the Earth' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). Another pupil participant referred to the school's 'SAINTS Beatitude' of 'Talents', expressing the view that 'we all have talents and can use them to help each other in different situations' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). One pupil participant described how virtue learning had impacted his spiritual development and desire for God: 'It will help us and guide us to God and to heaven' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

4.8.3.2 Catholic Approach to the Curriculum

Character education at Semi-Rural School was delivered partially through its curricular, but predominantly as part of the wider Catholic life of the school through Christian practices such as Mass and whole school worship. However, there was also discrete provision for character education through Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Religious Education (RE). The school's Catholic approach to the curriculum was

framed within a Christian vision for human flourishing, built upon the foundation of the goals of formation: 'We do not just teach them the basics of Maths, English and other subjects, it's about how we develop them as these human beings of the future' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

It was of significant interest that senior leaders reflected on the absence of explicit provision for character education and identified this as an area for future curriculum development:

> This is something we could be more explicit with...maybe we're not selling it as much as we could do or educating the children enough on this… that's definitely something I'd like to consider for the future. (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

4.8.3.3 Role Model Study

Opportunities were provided for children to study role models of virtue linked to wider curriculum learning, although the school planned to develop this further to reflect more contemporary exemplars who would be more relatable and enhance moral aspiration. One senior leader participant acknowledged that current provision required some development:

> I don't think that's reflecting as well as it could do…to real life role models, people around them…making sure it's modern and up to date for them, which they respond to much better naturally... it then makes it more obvious that they could be one of those people. (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

4.8.3.4 Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

Semi-Rural School promoted the principles of Catholic Social Teaching as part of its Catholic approach to the curriculum. However, it was found that these were discrete

opportunities rather than as part of a planned curriculum, 'making links when opportunities arise' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School). Although Semi-Rural School had initiated incorporating aspects of Catholic Social Teaching into curriculum planning as its basis for character education, it was acknowledged by senior leaders that the school's mission motto did not sufficiently promote the principles of CST. Integration of CST within curriculum design was a key area which required further development to establish more explicit learning opportunities: 'Looking at social justice, I think it is something we fall down on quite a bit...maybe our SAINTS Beatitudes don't necessarily cover that' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

4.8.3.5 Critical Reflection and the Role of Accompaniment

According to one senior leader participant, the primary role of the teacher is to 'guide and assist' the child. She clarified, however, that this sense of accompaniment should allow children time to reflect as part of their spiritual development journey:

> Whilst we are there to guide them in the right way and teach them, it's very much about allowing them to have the time to individually take things on board and come to terms with their own spirituality. (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

Reflecting upon her personal experience of her own faith journey, she went on explain the importance of a 'gentle approach' without an obligation for compliance in order to provoke children's engagement and reflection:

> The first thing you do when things are forced upon you, is you try to stand up against it...what we are doing in a gentle, subtle way is actually making children think and engage. (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

Pupil Chaplains act as prayer partners in the context of a peer mentoring role, enabling older children to support younger children as a form of accompaniment: 'They're

facilitating them and questioning them, but also teaching them as prayer partners' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Discussions about behaviour contributed to pupil formation in developing capacity for critical reflection 'so that the children understand and can reflect on how they can live more like Jesus' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School). One pupil participant expressed how he would use his learning through an explicit reference to the virtue of forgiveness, highlighting the importance of reflection on moral choices:

> In life, if you've ever done something wrong and you've learnt, then you know how to make it right and not to do it again. You can ask for forgiveness at any time. (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School)

The impact of moral reflection was similarly highlighted by another pupil participant who explained how specific staff members had supported her faith journey and capacity for moral reflection and growth:

> They help us understand how to be a follower of Jesus. If you've done something wrong… they will help you think about it so you don't do it again and make the right choice. (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School)

4.8.4 Partnerships

The school's endeavour to establish effective partnerships with families, the parish community and the Catholic Academy Trust was identified as a notable strength of the school's approach to character education which contributed to the holistic formation of pupils.

4.8.4.1 Catholic Academy Trust Partnership

Semi-Rural School was part of a Catholic Multi-Academy Trust within the diocese. As there were plans for the school to enter a new Academy Trust, senior leaders identified

the importance of establishing partnerships across schools as an area for future development, specifically with regard to staff formation.

4.8.4.2 Role of the Community: School Connections with Families and Local Parish

The strength of community characterised the ethos and culture of Semi-Rural School, reflected in the data outcomes across participant groups: 'A sense of community is the basis of everything we do' (Hannah, Parent, Semi-Rural School). The school actively sought partnership with families as part of its mission to ensure children are 'Safe, Happy and Successful together with God'. Semi-Rural School had a familial atmosphere which encouraged active participation and responsibility of the whole school community as part of its mission integrity.

Another parent participant articulated the concept of social responsibility linked to belonging to a community: 'There's a responsibility that comes with it, as a parent, as a member of society, whatever community you live in' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Through a range of pupil leadership endeavours, children had been engaged in social action to serve the needs of their communities, establishing meaningful links and developing a sense of connectedness between the school and parish, involving charitable projects with groups such as St. Vincent de Paul, The Catenians and The Salvation Army.

Communication with parents regarding aspects of character education fostered effective partnerships through fortnightly newsletters linked to liturgical themes, as well as information related to Catholic life in the school prospectus and on the school website.

4.8.4.3 Family and School Cohesion

Although research outcomes acknowledged the impactful role of the family in the formation of Catholic character, senior leader and parent participants also expressed

concern that the family may also present as a challenge: The Headteacher raised the issue of parents' lack of understanding of the Catholic faith as 'one of our biggest challenges':

> They don't understand the faith element…and so the children don't want to engage…I can understand that if it's never been part of their life. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

With reference to the declining number of Catholic families, the Headteacher expressed concern regarding a lack of aligned values which, in her view, had impacted upon children's engagement in the Catholic life of the school and demonstrated some discordance of values between home and school:

> In the past, parents have bought into what you're saying…so when you refer to Gospel values, [parents] had an understanding, whereas now they don't, it's not important to them. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

This concern was reiterated by another participant in terms of a lack of continuity of moral education between what is taught at school and how this is translated within the family environment: 'To me, it's about the behaviour of the family... Are these values continued to be embedded at home?' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

4.8.4.4 Embracing Community Diversity

Semi-Rural School was committed to inclusivity, embracing and celebrating the faith and cultural diversity of its community through representation. Whilst acknowledging the challenge of reduced numbers of baptised Catholic pupils at the school, the Headteacher presented a highly positive view of diversity as an opportunity. She explained that the school had recently hosted a 'One World Week' so that pupils could immerse in the uniqueness of different cultures: 'Our children are very good at accepting others and celebrating that everybody is different' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

4.8.4.5 Attendance at Mass

The school adopted a proactive and pragmatic approach in response to declining numbers of families attending Mass. The Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher developed and led the First Holy Communion programme at the Church, working alongside the parish priest to develop children's understanding of the Mass and aspects of Christian practice within it:

> Due to the falling numbers of children attending Mass… we unpicked every part of the Mass and focused on what the Mass means… [the children] could ask questions, they were happy to ask anything. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

The Headteacher stated that as part of her role, in addressing the challenge of attendance at Mass, she had a responsibility to 'ensure children are growing spiritually... receiving these values..., knowing that for the majority of the children here, they haven't got that added supplemental teaching from a priest' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

The Deputy Headteacher referred to the countercultural nature of Catholic education which may lack relatability for the modern Catholic youth: 'Going to church is not necessarily cool… if it's not relatable to them, they're not going to pay any attention' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School). Given the challenges that confronted school leaders, it was imperative for the school to actively seek ways to prioritise the role of Christian practice within the daily life of the school to guide and accompany pupils, through experience of daily prayer and liturgy, to nurture their spiritual and moral development.

4.8.5 Approaches to Staff Formation

The school recognised the importance and value of staff formation through providing training to support and develop teachers' confidence and capacity to nurture children's spiritual development. Senior leaders expressed commitment to provide professional development to support formation due to the number of new staff of other Christian denominations, faiths or belief systems. This intention was motivated by the integrity of the school's Christian mission of evangelisation 'through bringing all on a journey to drive their spiritual development' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School). Although not all staff were baptised Catholics, this did not detract from their commitment to the Catholic ethos of the school:

> They are not all necessarily believers … but they can still act and do work in such a way that brings out the ethos… they can enact the Beatitudes as they are all encompassing as to how we want people to behave. (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School)

First year induction training involved coaching, mentoring and modelling best practice in Religious Education and leading prayer and liturgy to support the formation of both staff and pupils: 'It was about forming them [the teachers] …so they could pass that on to the children' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

4.8.6 Summary: Semi-Rural School

Character education was reflected through the distinctive Catholic life and mission of Semi-Rural School, characterised by the strength of community partnerships and enhanced by the role of pupil leadership promoting social action and service both locally and globally. Despite the absence of an explicit character education curriculum, the school was in the initial stages of implementation of Catholic Social Teaching in curriculum design during the data collection phase of this study. As a result of school

self-evaluation, governors and senior leaders had identified key areas in which to focus planned development for character education:

i) *Strategic Leadership*

Semi-Rural School identified the need to further develop opportunities for pupil leadership of prayer and liturgy across the school. Leaders also planned to continue to develop opportunities for global social action, particularly the 'Corpus Christi Africa Fund'.

ii) *Environment*

Semi-Rural School expressed commitment to promoting CST in the physical school environment with more prominence throughout the school site in order that pupils could be immersed in CST within real life contexts.

iii) *Curriculum Design*

Semi-Rural School planned to integrate and embed Catholic Social Teaching principles more explicitly into curriculum design, linking scripture to wider curriculum study. The school also intended to review and develop current provision for role model study across the curriculum to support the implementation of a more explicit approach to character education.

iv) *Partnerships*

Semi-Rural School planned to pursue the 'Oscar Romero Award' Developer Level in recognition of its commitment to promote social justice. The school identified the need to strengthen the partnership between the school and the church through a joint

community project to design and build a dedicated prayer garden for the pupils and parishioners.

v) *Approaches to Staff Formation*

Semi-Rural School planned to evaluate the effectiveness of induction training of new members of staff and those who are non-Catholic or of other faith denomination with a view to adopting a more strategic approach to professional development for character education. The school intended to develop links with new Academy partnership schools to enhance character education through developing staff formation.

4.9 Empirical Quantitative Data

Although qualitative data was the primary method of data collection, as part of a concurrent nested approach (Terrell, 2012), a survey was utilised as a quantitative measure to gain a broader, more comprehensive understanding of the research area from the perspective of pupils. An online survey was conducted with one class of Year 6 pupils in each case study school. Data were collated initially using Google Forms as an accessible platform for the respondents and subsequently exported to SPSS for deeper comparative analysis of statistics across the three schools. As discussed in Chapter Three (section 3.8.2), data collected from the Year 6 pupil survey were entered into Excel to create horizontally stacked bar charts for each school. Likert scale responses were represented using a colour key, with 'strongly agree' in dark green and 'strongly disagree' in red.

In essence, while the quantitative data does not constitute the primary research instrument, it does essentially corroborate the findings emergent from both the critical retrieval of literature and the other research instruments adopted. It highlights especially the strengths of character education in 'caught, taught and sought' approaches in each

of the three case study settings. Instances where the quantitative data provided slight divergence from the qualitative data, could be partially explained due to the nature of their methodological differences. The pupil focus group provided deeper insights into individual perspectives, using a selected sample group of participants interested in the field of study, whereas the quantitative data utilised a larger sample which provided broader, more generalised outcomes. Although some discrepancies between qualitative and quantitative data were identified during analysis, particularly in relation to aspects of caught character in both Urban and Semi-Rural School, findings from both instruments can be viewed as complementary in that outcomes from the qualitative data enhanced the survey outcomes, providing deeper exploration and explanation through personalised responses. A full presentation of quantitative data is included in Appendix XI.

The subsequent chapter will provide a critical analysis of the research findings in relation to the research questions which form the basis of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself'. (Luke 10:27)

5.1 Introduction

In an exploration of the impact of character education upon children's formation in Catholic primary schools, the empirical outcomes in this multiple case study research project were designed to address three key research questions which framed the intent:

- How can Catholic primary schools promote virtue literacy?
- How can Catholic character education develop the practical wisdom of the scholar?
- How can Catholic character education empower the scholar in the practice of virtue to serve the principles of Catholic Social Teaching?

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive presentation of findings through classification of the data outcomes relating to the ways in which character education contributes to children's formation in the context of three Catholic primary school case study settings. This chapter aims to provide an interpretation of the main findings in light of the review of literature in the field of Catholic character education.

There are six key findings in this study, outlined below, which reflect the thematic outcomes from the data. These findings will be given a more detailed exposition subsequently.

Finding 1: The role of strategic leadership and vision in the context of the characteristics of Catholic school distinctiveness has a significant impact on character formation through an integration of both implicit and explicit approaches.

Finding 2: The environment of the family, school and church are recognised as key 'communities of practice' which have a significant impact upon Catholic character formation.

Finding 3: The design of a Christocentric curriculum with a social justice orientation supports the development of virtue literacy in a Catholic context through explicit provision for Catholic character education, enhanced by a wider Catholic approach to the curriculum through the promotion of Catholic social teaching.

Finding 4: Character formation is enhanced and supported through the establishment of partnerships, particularly in relation to the role of the family.

Finding 5: Strategic commitment to the development of approaches to support staff formation contributes to the formation of pupils through the modelling of ministry.

Finding 6: The countercultural nature of Catholic education presents a myriad of challenges to formation, particularly in relation to contemporary conceptions of human flourishing.

5.2 Strategic Leadership in the Context of the Characteristics of Catholic School Distinctiveness

The nature of strategic school leadership was found to be a critical variable in the effectiveness of character education in each of the three case study settings, and integral to the characteristics of Catholic distinctiveness in terms of how the school lived as a Catholic community, in fulfilment of the Church's educational mission. Senior leaders across the three schools demonstrated a tangible commitment to the integrity of the school's vision and mission, with an emphasis on the advancement of social justice

through the promotion of Catholic Social Teaching, albeit each school was at different stages of development. More advanced models of character education involved strategic whole school development with the engagement of stakeholders across the school community involved in the vision. Strategic approaches to character education were reflected in whole school development plans, school policies and explicit curriculum design in more advanced models, such as that presented in Coastal School. In each of the schools, although there was evident variation in the distribution of leadership of character education due to the school's individual leadership and management staffing structure, there was concomitance in that each school's implementation of character education had been strategically envisioned by governors and was led and implemented by senior leaders. A committed and strategic approach to character education was fundamental to the impact on pupils' formation. This is reflected in the Congregation's document, *The Religious Dimension of the Catholic School* (1988: n. 99), which cautioned against 'sporadic, partial, or uncoordinated efforts… which will interfere with, rather than assist, in the students' personal development'. The strategic vision for the goals of Catholic character education in the context of human flourishing was aspirational in each of the settings.

The extent of the school's strategic commitment to Catholic character education was reflected through the distribution of leadership. Notably, however, a specific designated responsibility for leadership of character education was singularly distinctive in only one of the case study settings. In Coastal School, the Assistant Headteacher had been assigned a dedicated role as Character Education Lead and had received training through expert CPD and attendance at character education conferences and webinars in order to support the implementation and development of an explicit curriculum for character education. Systematic provision of staff training in Catholic character education was an integral part of the strategic approach to character education in Coastal School, contributing to staff formation, further evidencing the school's prioritisation of character education as part of its model of strategic leadership. The distribution of key

responsibilities to middle leaders in terms of the implementation of CST throughout Subject Content Overviews linked to School Development Plan priorities, was instrumental in developing a Catholic approach to the wider curriculum, fostering a sense of valued engagement and empowerment for staff.

In the other two case study settings, however, more implicit approaches to character education were evident, which will be explored further in relation to the development of culture and ethos (see section 5.3). Despite the absence of an explicit curriculum for character education in both Urban School and Semi-Rural School, there was an intentional emphasis on provision for Catholic Social Teaching reflected in School Development Plans, which had been led and implemented by senior leaders.

5.2.1 Catholic School Distinctiveness

Five characteristics of Catholic distinctiveness were articulated in the literature review, based on documents published by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales (1996 & 2014) which, in essence, represent a deepening of the principles of the Second Vatican Council. Empirical outcomes in this case study demonstrated that these characteristics were prevailing areas of prioritisation as part of the strategic leadership approach to character education in each of the three schools. These characteristics emerged thematically throughout data outcomes and will be discussed subsequently.

5.2.1.1 Search for Excellence

The search for excellence is an aspiration of all educational endeavour, but within the context of the Catholic school, the goal of academic excellence has a deeper significance. Catholic education seeks to promote human dignity through the delivery of equitable education, which Buck (2020) describes as ‘justice of the educational experience’. In this case study, two of the three schools served socially deprived communities and yet both

schools exceeded above national average attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 SATS, in consecutive years (2022/23). In Coastal School, in particular, a strategic commitment to providing a preferential option to the poor was evidenced in school development plans, throughout policies and was clearly articulated by senior leaders as integral to the identity of the Catholic school.

All three schools in this study demonstrated clarity in their mission of evangelisation, through both explicit and implicit approaches to character education, aspiring to the Christocentric goal of educating for transformation. The overarching purpose of the acquisition of knowledge transcended self-fulfilment, promoting altruism and the desire to use this knowledge meaningfully to serve the common good, discussed further in relation to pupil leadership and the design of a Christocentric curriculum (see sections 5.2.2 and 5.4). The challenge this presents for contemporary Catholic education is in maintaining a balance between sustaining Catholic school distinctiveness and performativity, a concern expressed by Grace (2002) and Arthur (2013), referenced earlier in the literature review. Data outcomes in this study, however, revealed that, in essence, it is the nature of the school's approach to character education itself which is a significant contributory factor in enhancing academic attainment, analogous to the impact of extracurricular activities in a Salesian pedagogical context:

> Children who know they are loved and know they are here for a purpose and that God has a plan for them, will naturally do better academically. You see that in our data…what we do for them in formation through Catholic character education will have a higher impact on data than anything else we do. (Inclusion Leader)

Coastal School's commitment to academic excellence for all pupils was largely attributed to the quality of pastoral provision for the most disadvantaged pupils:

> We live in an area of high social deprivation and yet our academic results are outstanding…through pastoral support and engagement with our families, especially those who are more vulnerable or considered more difficult to reach, we never give up on them. (Deputy Headteacher)

5.2.1.2 Uniqueness of the Individual

Inherent in the mission of Catholic education is ultimately to seek to enhance the celebration of the uniqueness of every child, upholding the dignity of the human person through fulfilment of each child's potential, using the unique gifts bestowed upon them by the Holy Spirit: 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good' (1 Corinthians 12: 4-7). The models of strategic leadership in all three schools showed an explicit commitment to promote human dignity, reflected in the articulation and translation of the school vision and mission. The language of the mission statements in both Coastal and Semi-Rural School included explicit reference to developing the unique gifts and talents of pupils to serve the common good, reflecting their focus on fostering the development of each child's own personality, creating a sense of empowerment through faith and service, directed toward a Christian telos. In Urban School, their ethos was translated through an aspiration for the children to 'become architects of a better world', promoting autonomy and altruism, integral to the school's overarching vision. This vision was articulated to reflect each child's unique journey of personal and spiritual development

> We're always looking at how it can be applied to the context that the children are living in right now, enabling children to identify as being here with a particular role and purpose to fulfil…supporting and guiding them on their journey towards identifying what that is. (Headteacher)

Similarly in Semi-Rural School, data outcomes emphasised the value and significance of teaching children to recognise, celebrate and use their God-given gifts and talents for the common good. Integral to the school's implicit approach to character education was a commitment to 'teaching children over the time they're with us how to recognise their own talents, what they are good at and what they can give to the world' (Headteacher).

5.2.1.3 Education of the Whole Person

Case study outcomes revealed a strong belief in the value of a deeply holistic approach to the cultivation of character in all three schools, as integral to Christian formation. School leaders articulated the importance of a holistic approach to character education, with an emphasis on nurturing intellectual, spiritual, moral, emotional and social facets of the human person. This resonates closely with the work of Bryk et al (1993) which demonstrated the vital interconnectedness of the spiritual, moral and social dimensions to character formation, as described by Grace (2007: 92). This is also reflected in the Congregation's (1988: 99) document, which defined the Christian formation process as 'an organic set of elements with a single purpose: the gradual development of every capability of every student, enabling each one to attain an integral formation', emphasising that 'the process must be harmonious, so that Christian formation takes place within and in the course of human formation' (ibid: 98).

The goal of holistic formation emerged as a pivotal and consistent theme across the data in this case study, expressed by senior leaders as a significant aspect of Catholic school distinctiveness. This was fostered primarily through a strategic and robust approach to pastoral provision, particularly in Urban and Coastal School. The earlier review of literature explored the Salesian educative relationship between animator and student in relation to the notion of accompaniment as part of a 'hidden curriculum' for character education (Vojtas, 2018). Fr John Lemoyne (ed.) (1989) described the primary duty of the animator to be affective: '...to find that responsive chord in the young person's heart' (MB, Vol. III, pp. 236-237). Empirical research outcomes in this study demonstrated a range of extracurricular opportunities were offered in all three schools, although no explicit correlation or reference was made to the term 'accompaniment'. In the context of Coastal School, the strategic intent for extracurricular provision was articulated as an enhancement of arts and culture, with a strength of commitment to the prioritisation of a preferential option for the poor: 'We have an obligation to give children wide

experiences that they may not receive outside of school, particularly in recreational, extracurricular activities'. The role of accompaniment was recognised as contributory to Christian formation: 'We must be there with them… guiding them with this, as an important part of their formation' (Headteacher). Analogously, in Semi-Rural School, accompaniment was expressed in terms of the duty of the teacher to 'guide and assist' the child to support reflection as a key facet of their spiritual development:

> Whilst we're there to definitely guide them in the right way and teach them, it's very much about allowing them to have the time to individually to come to terms with their own spirituality. (Deputy Headteacher)

Referencing the earlier review of literature, Don Bosco's educational philosophy focused on the seminal importance of the relationship between educator and student, based upon the foundation of 'amorevolezza' or loving kindness. According to Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, it is a 'capacity of the heart that makes the closeness possible' (2013: 171.ll). The outcomes in this case study, particularly in Coastal and Semi-Rural School, endorse the significance of the role of accompaniment and its relationship to Christian character formation.

5.2.1.4 Education for All

The Catholic schools in this case study authentically reflected the cultural diversity of their communities as a celebration of their inclusivity, which formed a significant part of how an education for all was manifested. In each of the three schools, there was a distinct commitment by senior leaders to foster the development of an inclusive culture and ethos through creating opportunities for successful representation of their diverse communities, reflected in both the curriculum and the physical environment. The Catholic identity of the schools was characterised through the committed promotion of equity for socially and economically disadvantaged pupils across the school settings, redolent of the idea of acquiring and expressing love of 'universal neighbour' (Grace, 2010). In the earlier review of literature, McKinney (2018) referenced the multi-

dimensionality of poverty, encompassing cultural, emotional and spiritual forms of poverty, including those marginalised. Empirical outcomes in this study demonstrated that a distinguishing feature of Coastal School was an abiding commitment to social justice, articulated by senior leaders as an expression of inherent human dignity, as part of a preferential option for the poor. This is especially significant in the context of embedding equitable education for all pupils:

> To develop dignity for all is a vital part of good character…with good character education comes a desire to serve. An important part of being Christian is to be thankful and to serve others. (Headteacher)

5.2.1.5 Moral Principles

This research study explored the extent to which Catholic character education developed the moral and spiritual dimension of pupils to create a 'disposition towards the good' (CBCEW, 2020). Through modelling witness to the faith, moral principles could be instilled across the school community, reflected throughout relationships:

> By being a good witness to parents, to staff, to the community, you will have virtuous character…you will see the benefits just in how everybody treats each other. (Headteacher)

The significance of the role of relationships within and across the educative community is discussed subsequently in relation to the role of environment on the development of character (see section 5.3).

There was a distinct commonality in the Catholic mission of each of the schools in their strategic prioritisation of the nurture of moral and spiritual character, evident throughout all aspects of school life. In both Urban and Semi-Rural, the mission was predominantly translated through implicit approaches. Coastal School, however, demonstrated a more integrated approach through the implementation of an explicit

curriculum for character, as well as a distinct Catholic approach to the wider curriculum, which inculcated the development of practical wisdom through a See-Choose-Act methodology, characterised by an emphasis on critical thinking and reflection. Curriculum design in Coastal School built upon implicit approaches to facilitate deeper immersion in a Christian view of learning, fostering the Christian formation of pupils. The development of phronesis will be given further treatment subsequently in section 5.4 with regard to aspects of curriculum design.

5.2.2 Pupil Leadership

The embedding of collaborative ministry through provision for a wide range of opportunities for pupil leadership was a distinctive feature in all three case study school settings as an example of the synthesis of faith and life and in fulfilment of an eternal destiny, contributing significantly to Christian formation. This case study found a direct correlation between pupils' engagement in Christian service and the development of an autonomous desire to serve, promoting the altruistic pursuit of virtue, reflecting the 'caught, taught, sought' model of character development established by the Jubilee Centre (2017: 9). Active participation in leadership roles and opportunities to serve contributed to the formation journey of pupils and enriched the Catholic mission of schools.

Empirical outcomes revealed that pupil leadership endeavour supported the translation of virtue literacy into virtue practice, aligned with Archbishop Miller's insistence that 'the inspiration of Jesus must be translated from the ideal into the real' (2006: 4). Engagement in pupil leadership amplified understanding of the meaning and significance of global citizenship within a Christian context, promoting pursuit of social action and fostered a vital sense of agency and empowerment among pupils as curators for the common good. This provides an optimistic response to Arthur's (2021: 86) concept of 'ethical deficit' referenced earlier. According to Arthur (2021: ibid), education should not be restricted to the transmission of knowledge but should be concerned with the 'search

for meaning and moral purpose in life'. This further illustrates the significance of developing the 'affective and emotional domains' of character (CCE, 2014: n.III) as integral to holistic development, reflected in data outcomes in this study: 'Learning about virtue will help us to be kinder to others and it will encourage and inspire us to make the world a better place' (Michael, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School). There is a strong inference in this response in the belief that character education enables a flourishing life, sustained through faith. This view was corroborated by another pupil participant with reference to the significance of virtue education in relation to Christian telos:

> Virtue is another way of understanding how Jesus fulfilled what he was meant to do. It's important to the faith and why we are here because Jesus represents the virtues in all he does. (Year 6 pupil)

It was notable that pupil participant responses across all three settings in the study demonstrated ability to articulate a theological understanding of Christian mission and motivation.

5.2.2.1 Global Citizenship

Engagement in leadership and service created a partnership of missionary disciples who, through transmission of their faith, were empowered to act as global citizens, using their unique gifts and skills to promote social justice, both within their local community and in the wider world. Each of the schools shared this commitment to collaborative ministry which reflects the evangelising mission and purpose of Catholic education:

> The mission of the Church is to evangelise, for the interior transformation and the renewal of humanity. For young people, the school is one of the ways for this evangelisation to take place. (CCE, 1988: 66)

The development of pupil leadership and opportunities for pupil voice served to broaden children's understanding of disadvantage, discrimination and inequality through

developing awareness of the needs of others within the context of an international society, inspiring them to act for the common good as one united family in Christ. In each of the settings, pupils' response to Catholic Social Teaching, evidenced in their pro-active pursuit of social justice in both local and global contexts, contributed to their spiritual formation through developing a Christian view and vision of the world.

5.2.2.2 Social Action

Pupils' active engagement in Christian service to advance social justice was found to be integral to the translation of virtue literacy into virtue practice in each of the three schools, promulgating the mission of the Church. The development of moral character was supported through extended opportunities for the intentional habituation of the practice of virtue. Children were challenged in their role as missionary disciples to strive to think, feel and act in ways which contributed to their Christian formation. The orientation of pupils towards service, enlightened by faith, enabled them to respond to their call as Christians 'to develop a willingness to embrace life, and also his or her own unique vocation, as a fulfilment of God's will' (CCE, 1988: 76).

5.2.2.3 Pupil Agency

The impact of engagement in a range of pupil leadership roles in each of the settings enabled pupils to feel a tangible sense of empowerment, supporting their moral growth and capacity to translate mission into action through purposeful collaboration with others, such as charity promotion, fundraising and other acts of service to support the local community and beyond. Pupil leadership roles promoted crucial opportunities for the voice of the child to be given an elevated platform to be directly involved in decision making on aspects of school life, contributing to the enhancement of school culture. Pupil leadership was found to be a powerful form of agency, fostering intrinsic motivation, aspiration and self-belief in their capacity to effect change in their

community and the wider world, for the common good. Leadership opportunities engaged pupils as active agents of change, invoking a 'head, heart, hands' approach to character education, evocative of Pope Francis' desire for the integration of thinking, feeling and doing, reflecting the unity of the human person: 'We have to see clearly, choose well and act right' (2020: 7). The empirical outcomes of this case study in relation to the impact of pupil leadership resonate with Likona's cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions of character education (2001: 4). It can be deduced from the data that engagement in pupil leadership contributed to pupils' formation in enabling a flourishing life in Christ through love of neighbour and service to others. Findings demonstrated that the role of pupil leadership bridged the dichotomy between the theory and practice of virtue, as advocated by Uttley (2018: 144). As reflected in empirical outcomes, facilitating pupils' experience of virtue practice enhanced and deepened virtue literacy:

> To teach knowledge of virtues…you also need to give children the opportunity to be able to express and feel what virtue looks like so they can experience it... and give them opportunities to practice it…that's faith in action. (Headteacher)

Pupil leadership was a seminal aim embedded within the educational philosophy of St. John Bosco, reflecting Grech's reference to Bosco's empowering of young people to mature in responsibility and spirituality through the medium of service. The range of pupil leadership endeavour across the schools in this study, for example, the Mini Vinnies, Pupil Chaplains and Faith in Action groups, could be regarded as mirroring Bosco's sodalities in their commitment to serve their communities and beyond.

The subsequent section explores the role of the environment through an exploration of the impact of school culture and ethos, as well as the physical school environment, on the cultivation of Catholic character.

5.3 Role of the Environment in Character Formation

Data outcomes demonstrated that the environment of the school was a significant factor in character education. In the context of this study, the use of the term 'environment' relates to aspects of the school's distinctive Catholic culture and ethos, as well as features of the school's physical environment which enhanced and celebrated the ethos. It is important to acknowledge here that although both explicit and implicit approaches to character education are discussed separately, the outcomes of this study reflect that these aspects of character education are interconnected and mutually reinforce each other.

5.3.1 Culture and Ethos

The culture and ethos of all three schools in the study was characterised by a distinctive Catholic clarity of mission, translated throughout the Catholic life and community of each school and strongly reflected through lived mission and the modelling of relationships. The divine centrality of Christ is the most characterising feature of Catholic education: 'Everything that happens in a Catholic school… should lead to an encounter with the living Christ' (CCE: 2014). In the context of this study, the encounter with Christ is realised in the context of lived mission, personal witness and modelling of relationships and through the role of the educative community. It was significant that the impact of implicit character education, imparted through culture and ethos, was described by one senior leader participant as 'a seed that will grow ...and fully flourish over time', highlighting the challenge of immeasurability of the full extent of impact of character education in the short-term: 'It's hard to tell until they are adults about how much of an influence faith is' (Headteacher). The extent to which the ethos and culture of Catholic primary education impacts on pupils' character formation will be referenced subsequently in the context of recommendations.

5.3.1.1 Lived Mission

In each of the schools, the Catholic school culture was firmly built upon the foundational goal of formation. This was explicitly evident through committed witness to the school mission statement and motto, translated through a holistic approach to character education, encompassing Christian practices and pedagogy, as well as pastoral care, as part of the whole process of formation. In the uniqueness of each school setting, the inspiration of Jesus was reflected through love of neighbour and commitment to service. The interpretation of lived mission was translated as the pursuit of social justice. In Coastal School, the Christian pedagogy was distinctly characterised by a See-Choose-Act methodology, enhanced by an explicitly taught programme of character education, to seek to 'deepen relationship with Christ' through development of a learning environment aimed at 'the pursuit of truth… particularly where the most vulnerable are affected' (Headteacher). This reflects Aquinas' account of teaching and learning which emphasises that ultimate truth derives from God's divinity: 'God is truth, and the true God is the one who is the cause of all truth' (ST.I.16. I).

5.3.1.2 Modelling of Relationship

Outcomes across data sets in each school highlighted the significance and impact of modelled virtue on the inculcation of character, based on the example of Christ, reflected in the behaviour and quality of relationships across the school community. The significance of ethos and culture was demonstrated primarily through 'daily witness', reflected in the Congregation's 1988 document:

> The religious dimension of the school climate is expressed through the celebration of Christian values in Word and Sacrament, in individual behaviour, in friendly and harmonious interpersonal relationships…Through this daily witness, the students will come to appreciate the uniqueness of the environment to which their youth has been entrusted. (CCE, 1988: n.26)

The effectiveness of character education was profoundly influenced by the personal witness of the teacher, reflecting the Christian ethos of the school. Through personal witness to Christ, 'harmonious relationships' in schools exemplify modelled virtue: 'We are all witnesses to Christ' (Headteacher). In defining the role of the teacher, one parent participant expressed the causal relationship between what is observed and learnt: 'Modelling your virtues so they can develop theirs' (Parent). The capacity of teachers to be living witnesses to Christ is redolent of the notion of the 'synthesis of faith and life' (SCCE, 1977: 37), referenced in the earlier literature review. Schools in this study demonstrated an aspiration and expectation to model behaviour on Christ's ministry across the school community, inspired by Gospel values, so that faith is lived and translated through loving relationships. This was articulated in terms of the role of educators as Jesus' 'hands and feet', translated as sharing the love and goodness of God 'through sharing with others what God shared with us' (Inclusion Leader). This is evocative of Ephesians 2:10: 'For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.'

Through abiding love as the foundation for the relationship between educator and student, the Catholic educator can contribute to pupils' formation:

> The teachers love their students and show this love in the way they interact with them. They take advantage of every opportunity to encourage and strengthen them in those areas which will help to achieve the goals of the educational process. (CCE, 1988: 110)

5.3.1.3 Educative Community

The effectiveness of character education was characterised primarily by the collaborative influence of the educational community, comprising governors, senior leaders, teachers, parents and pupils, as well as the pivotal role of the church and parish, to create a deeply formative environment. The combined synergy of these relationships across the school community enabled an 'environment permeated with the Gospel spirit

of love and freedom', inspired by the 'living presence of Jesus' (CCE, 1988: 25). The authentic commitment to character education by senior leaders was a pivotal feature of the findings with an emphasis on establishing and promoting a distinctively Catholic culture and ethos that promotes character education. In all three schools, the approach to character education demonstrated that positive relationships flourish in a positive culture and environment. Referencing the earlier literature review relating to the impact of immersion in modelled Christian virtue, Hauerwas (2010: 95) notes: 'There is no substitute for learning to be a Christian by being in the presence of significant lives made significant by being Christian'. MacIntyre (2007: 221) highlights the significance of the historical and social context within which human actions occur, which in his view, are inextricably linked to the communities within which the individual derives his or her identity: 'The self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities'. The profound impact of community upon character development was a significant theme across outcomes in this study. The cohesiveness of the school community was aptly expressed by a parent participant: 'We are strong together. You need to be together to be strong' (Parent). The notion of belonging within a community was articulated throughout data outcomes, and in particular, the impact of knowing and feeling love: 'Love is essential in your life. Everyone needs love....no-one wants to be lonely, especially a child, if they cannot feel part of something' (Parent).

5.3.2 Physical Environment

As part of the secondary data collated as a result of school tours and follow up visits in each of the schools, there was a distinct commonality in the attribution of value to the significance of the physical environment as a reflection of Catholic school distinctiveness. However, it was noteworthy that the role of the physical environment was not explicitly articulated in terms of its impact on children's Catholic character development in any of the case study settings. The intentional commitment of all three schools was reflected throughout the internal and external grounds of each school in different ways, such as

through the adornment of religious imagery, provision for dedicated spaces for liturgical worship, relationship with the local church, the role of stewardship, as well as the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion.

5.3.2.1 Religious Imagery

The use of religious imagery through a variety of sacred signs and symbols such as crucifixes, stained glass windows, statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and images of saints, adorned the physical environment of the schools in this study. This imagery represented an expression of Catholic faith and culture, enabling a 'new way of seeing', where faith perceives 'the Invisible in the visible' (Pope Benedict, 2000: 133). In each of the schools, there were dedicated spaces for liturgical worship, in the form of an onsite chapel in Coastal School and a garden chapel and pupil-led prayer space in both Urban and Semi-Rural School. The features of religious imagery were an integral characteristic of the distinctive Catholic identity and culture of each school and were symbolically representative of the evangelising mission of the Church. The use of religious imagery served to bring the presence of Christ alive, to enable pupils to see their faith reflected symbolically throughout the physical environment of the school.

The visible presence of Catholic priests to lead prayer and liturgy, visit classes and engage with both pupils, staff and families, particularly within both Semi-Rural and Coastal School, was found to be a positive contributory factor to formation. In order to address the challenge of declining numbers of families attending Church, one senior leader participant expressed the view that the ecclesial presence within school supported the spiritual development of pupils:

> I have to look at a way, as a Headteacher, of ensuring those children are growing spiritually, developing and receiving the values that I want them to take into life. (Headteacher)

Establishing and effectively utilising a partnership between the church and the school supported schools in the fulfilment of their mission of evangelisation, reflected in the Congregation's (1982: 43) document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*:

> The more fully the educational community represents the richness of the ecclesial community, the more capable it will be of fulfilling [the apostolic mission] of the Church.

The challenge for the modern Catholic school is to ensure that approaches to staff formation adequately prepare teachers to act as lay witnesses in their educative role, discussed subsequently in section 5.6.

5.3.2.2 Proximity of Church and School

It was found that those schools in the study which were in close physical proximity to a church, in the case of both Urban and Coastal School, created a sense of belonging to a community so that the church became a familiar and not an extraneous setting. Both parish churches in these settings facilitated dedicated weekly school Masses with the aim of developing a culture of welcome and inclusivity and fostering the cohesiveness of the school and local church community. The experience of traditional Christian practice, particularly through weekly school Mass, provided opportunities for a deeper immersion in the faith, enabling a vital sense of connection within a community. One parent participant referred to the impact of the school's fundraising endeavour for the 'Corpus Christi Africa Fund' through the school Chamber Choir, demonstrating the interconnectedness between the parish and school: 'The school comes together as a family, as a community' (Parent). There was a tangible sense of spiritual and moral nourishment provided by the environment of both the school and the church: 'You can see there is a caring environment that the children could flourish in…you can see it at school Mass' (Parent).

The notion of the impact of the environment on character development discussed here is redolent of Aquinas' understanding of the human person as relational, as belonging within a community in their search for truth and wisdom: 'For Aquinas, human beings see truth when it is in some kind of community - it is only a truth when it is shared' (Boland, 2007: 67).

Whilst the findings in this study demonstrate that the synergy between the school and parish church in two of the three schools led to an effective partnership which enhanced children's learning and experience of the Catholic faith, it is also important to caution against generalisability nationally in relation to the interconnection between close proximity to the church building and the establishment of effective links.

5.3.2.3 Stewardship

As part of their approach to character education, schools in the study fostered a sense of ecological awareness among pupils through Catholic Social Teaching which contributed to and extended understanding of moral and social responsibility to care for our common home. All three schools promoted stewardship through liturgical worship, as well as through opportunities within the wider curriculum. However, in both Coastal and Semi-Rural School, there was a dedicated focus on virtue practice through pupil leadership groups, such as Laudato Si teams and gardening clubs, which actively focused on care for the environment, both within and beyond the physical environment of the school. In Coastal School, stewardship was promoted through the school's commitment to sustainability, such as beach cleans, gardening and recycling projects, as well as a whole school focus on energy conservation.

5.3.2.4 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Reflected in the School Environment

A notable feature of the physical environment of each of the schools in this study was a commitment to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), as an extension and enhancement of explicit curriculum learning and as part of their wider implicit provision for character education. The physical environment of each school reflected its Catholic identity and mission, which served to 'strengthen the quality of the formation process' (CCE, 1988: 103). It was significant that in Coastal School, there was a more strategic emphasis on developing the school's culture of EDI throughout the curriculum as well as reflected in the school environment. The school promoted a visible culture of welcome

through signage and central displays, celebrating the multicultural school community and its distinctive identity as a 'School of Sanctuary'. This will be discussed subsequently in relation to partnerships (see section 5.5). In addition, the Gospel Virtue Role Model Galleries across both school sites provided strong exemplification of successful EDI representation raising children's aspirations to have societal impact, inspired by role models of virtue. In all three schools, the physical environment represented and celebrated the unique and richly diverse multicultural communities that the schools served.

5.4 A Christocentric Curriculum

Fundamental to an analysis of curriculum design for Catholic character education is cognisance of the core intent of the curriculum in a Catholic school, or perhaps in a broader interpretation, the primary theological purpose of Catholic education itself. As highlighted in *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965: 8), the function of the Catholic school is to foster the acquisition of knowledge 'illumined by faith'. Catholic education should provide a Christocentric curriculum which prepares pupils 'for service in the spread of the Kingdom of God, so that by leading an exemplary apostolic life they become, as it were, a saving leaven in the human community' (ibid: 8). In accordance with this mission, it is pertinent that in framing their curriculum, schools should consider the kind of people they aspire for their pupils to become in order that they may truly experience human flourishing. For Aquinas, human flourishing is a gift from God, revealed by Christ: 'I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10). The evangelising mission of Christian education emphasises the significance of design of a Gospel-inspired curriculum, one which generates desire for service, motivated ultimately by Christian telos - the pursuit of a supernatural destiny with Christ: 'Knowledge is not to be considered as a means of material prosperity and success, but as a call to serve and to be responsible for others' (SCCE, 1977: 56).

Interpretations of curriculum design in this case study were shaped in light of Christian mission in order to fully comprehend their significance. The mission of building the kingdom of God through Catholic education, as referred to earlier in the literature review, proclaimed in Mark 1:15, invites us all to share in the redemption of Christ: 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!' Seeking to build God's kingdom here on earth fundamentally reflects Christian telos. Catholic schools, as an instrument of the Church, are co-creators in building the kingdom of God on earth in their evangelising mission (Okafor, 2019). In this study, analysis of curriculum design demonstrates the transformative endeavour of Catholic schools to build God's kingdom through the distinctive Catholicity of their curriculum, resonating closely with the concept of the 'socialising power of the curriculum' (Garcia-Huidobro, 2017: 84) referenced earlier in Chapter Two (section 2.9.1.2).

It is significant that a fundamental feature of commonality between the schools in this case study, was their commitment to develop a distinctively Catholic curriculum through Catholic Social Teaching. Although there was clear variation in pedagogical approach and aspects of prioritisation in overall curriculum design, all three schools were committed to the promotion of social justice, evidenced in their curriculum provision and through pupil leadership endeavour involving social action and service, as discussed earlier in section 5.2.2. The curriculum design provided schools with a fertile opportunity to impart knowledge which contributed to the building of wisdom through nurturing pupils' moral and spiritual growth, as well as the development of conscience. This case study found that the transmission of knowledge, however, was not singularly sufficient to form Catholic character - it was rudimentary that there was capacity within the curriculum to build wisdom through the development of critical thinking skills, as well as opportunities for moral reflection. This corroborates research findings by Devanny (2018), referenced subsequently.

5.4.1 Virtue Literacy

While the *Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education* (2017) presents a secular model of character, it has the potential to be adapted through a Christian lens for Catholic schools. In discussing categories of virtue, it is important to note that an understanding of virtue literacy should encompass a holistic, non-compartmentalised interpretation of virtue, viewed as interdependent and in totality, a 'profound integration of the spiritual, intellectual, emotional and volitional life' (Vogler, 2020: x). The notion of the interrelation between the virtues was expressed by a parent participant in the study: '[The virtues] all connect. They couldn't exist without each other. They are like a chain…' (Parent). This is a significant point which expresses the fundamental connectivity between the virtues which contribute to holistic formation.

The Jubilee Centre's 'Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development' (2017: 21) provides a conceptualised pathway for moral development which, for the purpose of this study, facilitates aspects of comparison between schools in relation to their provision for character education. It is also important to acknowledge here that although curriculum design is a key constituent of explicit character education, the impact of character education must be interpreted holistically in relation to interaction with implicit approaches.

The development of virtue literacy, therefore, requires the interplay between three dimensions of character education involving 'caught, taught and sought' approaches (2017: 12), which are fundamentally interconnected dimensions of virtue education. As referenced in the *Jubilee Centre Framework*, the concept of virtue literacy as a pedagogical basis for character education refers to the development of virtue perception, virtue knowledge and virtue reasoning (2017: 10). The outcomes of this study demonstrate the range of ways in which primary schools developed aspects of

virtue literacy as part of their overall curriculum design and provision for character education.

The design of the curriculum for Catholic character education was the most distinctive area of contrast between the schools in this case study, particularly in relation to explicit 'taught' curriculum provision for character education. Empirical research outcomes by Devanny (2018), which Towey (2019) described as having a 'nascent edge', highlighted that character education in the vast majority of schools was found to be 'implicit – a matter of character caught – not explicit – character taught'. It was significant, therefore, that in this research study, a distinguishing characteristic of Coastal School, unlike the Urban and Semi-Rural School, was the implementation of a formal progressive curriculum for virtue education. The explicit character education curriculum was based on the school's ten Gospel virtues as the foundation of taught character, focusing on one Gospel virtue each half term over a two-year cycle, linked to the liturgical calendar. Coastal School's conscious commitment to employ the language of Gospel virtues, instead of values, is noteworthy here in relation to Devanny's (2018) research which found that the development of pupils' virtue literacy was hindered by an over-reliance on Gospel values, in the absence of explicit, systematic teaching of virtue.

Coastal School adapted the Jubilee Centre's secular model of virtue, 'The Building Blocks of Character' (2017: 9), reinterpreted through a Christian lens to focus on theological, moral, intellectual and civic virtues as the basis of their character curriculum. Performance virtues had been omitted from the original design of the explicit character curriculum in Coastal School, a finding which superficially aligns with Devanny's (2018) research which found that theological and moral virtues, rather than performance virtues, were regarded by participants as most important to character development. However, it is important to note that as part of its strategic development of provision, Coastal School later integrated performance virtues throughout growth mindset approaches to teaching and learning, as well as through a whole school focus on the

development of oracy throughout the wider curriculum, with an emphasis on debating using the curriculum Enquiry Question as a platform to raise awareness of social justice issues, such as homelessness, migration and sustainability.

The school's bespoke character curriculum was designed to promote the development of virtue literacy through the exploration of high-quality model texts, scripture, role model study (biblical, historical and contemporary), as well as through hymns and Christian songs. The Jubilee Centre *Knightly Virtues: Enhancing Virtue Literacy Through Stories Research Report* (2015) advocated the use of 'imaginative sources of literature' as integral to character education, providing a rich abundance of moral exemplars in a range of fictional contexts, offering a parallelism to the moral secular challenges of the modern world. This is redolent of MacIntrye's view of the role of narratives as 'the logical form or contours of human self-understanding' (Carr & Harrison, 2015: 2). In this case study, it was notable that none of the schools adopted specific literature-based published programmes as the basis for character education. In Coastal School, however, the use of model texts formed a core part of the bespoke virtue curriculum, linked to the curriculum Enquiry Question. Literacy texts in Urban and Semi-Rural School were used on an incidental basis to support moral learning throughout the curriculum, rather than as part of a planned programme.

There was commonality between all three schools in their use of role models to promote virtue literacy. In Coastal School, virtue role model study was a characteristic feature of the explicit character curriculum which an emphasis on EDI representation. In Semi-Rural School, role model study was incorporated into wider curriculum planning, although the senior leaders identified this was an area which required modification to incorporate more contemporary, relatable role models to enhance moral aspiration. In Urban School, there were opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to explore and reflect upon role models of virtue, particularly the lives of saints and modern heroes, 'as inspiration for how to live our lives and how to get to heaven' (Phase Leader).

Coastal School's formal, structured model of character education facilitated progression of virtue literacy across learning phases, adopting the Jubilee Centre's categories of virtue knowledge and understanding, virtue reasoning and virtue practice (2017: 21) which provided a criterion on which to plan descriptors for the development of virtue. In Coastal School, virtue learning was incrementally structured to build knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist and its relationship to growth in virtue from Reception to Year 6, with a particular focus on the Sacrament of the Eucharist in Years 3 and 4. Virtue reasoning was developed further in upper Key Stage 2, challenging pupils to differentiate between the excess and deficiency of virtue, based on Aristotle's 'golden mean' (Brown, 2009), leading to a more meaningful depth of analysis and contributing to the building of wisdom in a way that was relatable to pupils' experience of moral decision making. It was significant that investment in the pedagogy of virtue reasoning impacted upon virtue practice, where pupils were actively encouraged to reflect critically on their moral attitudes, choices and behaviour. Despite the absence of an explicit curriculum for character in both Urban and Semi-Rural School, both schools demonstrated a commitment to moral reflection as distinctive to Religious Education and as part of Christian ethos and practice.

5.4.2 Catholic Approach to the Curriculum

5.4.2.1 Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

Each of the schools in this study adopted a distinctively Catholic approach to the design of their curriculum through the instrument of Catholic Social Teaching. In Coastal School, explicit virtue learning was further embedded and enhanced through optimising opportunities to link with wider learning, anchored by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching through the curriculum Enquiry Question, utilising a See-Choose-Act methodology to promote discernment and action for social justice. It was notable that

in both Urban and Semi-Rural School, however, without an explicit taught component, the curriculum for character education was delivered primarily through identifying and incorporating links with the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. These links were integrated throughout subjects such as Religious Education, PSHE, History and Geography, albeit with varying methods of application and at different stages of implementation.

Notably, in Urban School, there was a strategic commitment to integrated, planned opportunities for CST across the curriculum. This commitment was reflected in the School Development Plan, with a view to developing how this was translated through social action and service, exemplifying understanding of the vital interplay between virtue literacy and virtue practice. The Catholicity of the curriculum in Urban School was distinctive in design through its emphasis on social justice, with scripture at its heart. The wider curriculum design facilitated discussion and reflection on local and global issues which inspired social action. It was noteworthy that Urban School expressed an intention to explore the impact of pupils' moral and spiritual reflectional responses as part of their future school development.

In Semi-Rural School, however, opportunities for Catholic Social Teaching had been integrated into the curriculum on an informal basis, identifying and utilising meaningful links *extempore*, rather than systematically planned as part of curriculum design. School leaders identified the need for more distinct provision for character education, as well as a more explicit integration of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching across the curriculum, as part of their school self-evaluation. It is important to note here that outcomes in relation to the curriculum revealed an interest in and commitment to evaluation of character education, as well as a deep sense of reflection about practice, pedagogy and provision from senior leader participants in all three settings.

It was significant to note that in Semi-Rural School, pupil participants regarded the school's 'SAINTS Beatitudes' mission motto, which formed the core basis for implicit virtue learning, as impactful to their formation: '[The Beatitudes] have helped us to look to God to see how He would want us to act in the situation' (Year 6 pupil). It is of interest to note here that Towey (2019) identified a dissonance between religious teaching and practice of the faith, creating 'a genuine mismatch between aspiration and actuality' as a consequence of reliance upon 'caught' approaches to Catholic character. It is of interest that this study found that in those schools without an explicitly planned virtue curriculum, endeavours to integrate Catholic Social Teaching, although at different stages of implementation, facilitated capacity for vision to be translated into action. This is evidenced through the strength of pupil voice, leadership and service in all three schools.

A key finding in this case study, therefore, is that even in schools without an explicit curriculum for virtue learning, the emphasis upon CST, in combination with implicit 'caught' approaches, provided rich opportunities to enhance pupils' moral development and inspired Christian service. This is evocative of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales document, *The Common Good in Education* (CES, 1997) which regarded schools' engagement with CST as '...vital for the moral and spiritual nourishment of its pupils. Education is about the service of others rather than the service of self' (1997:13).

The outcomes highlight the fact that the principles of CST are a fundamental expression of the virtues, resonant with Mele (2016) who proposes that CST is essentially a 'virtue-based approach', in which virtues are 'intertwined with [CST] principles, with four basic ethical values: love, truthfulness, justice, and freedom'. He asserts that Christian charity forms the essence of CST, 'animating and inspiring all other virtues and principles'. This case study found that the impact of curriculum design on character education involved the holistic integration of virtue learning, enriched by an understanding of the principles

of CST which promote Christian formation, guided by the overarching intellectual virtue of phronesis, discussed subsequently in section 5.4.3.

5.4.2.2 Curriculum Approaches to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

One of the distinctive features of the schools in this case study was their commitment to creating a culture of welcome and inclusivity, reflected throughout the curriculum, albeit with differing approaches and levels of emphasis. In Coastal School, there was an explicit, strategic promotion of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) embedded in the design of the curriculum, which was shaped in an intentional and systematic way through diverse representation, reflected in the School Development Plan, EDI policy and throughout the school environment. The Headteacher emphasised the importance of diverse representation as integral to the school's Christian vision and ethos, so that children and staff can identify and recognise their cultural backgrounds, as part of the school's agenda for social justice, affording 'dignity for all'. There were examples of planned opportunities to reflect EDI within curriculum design in both Semi-Rural and Urban School, but these approaches were not systematically embedded throughout the curriculum at the time of the study.

5.4.3 Building Wisdom

The philosophy of the Jubilee Centre is underpinned by a belief that the purpose of education has deeper significance than purely the transmission of knowledge; it is concerned with the search for meaning and purpose. Referenced in the earlier literature review, Cooling (2010:14) argues that the aim of Christian education should be to develop pupils' discernment about the meaning and significance of learning which 'radically influences their values and behaviour'. The development of the intellectual virtue of phronesis, equips pupils with the skills of moral wisdom 'to perceive, know, desire and act with good sense', through enabling growth of 'ethical insight' (2017: 5,7).

Referring to the *Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education*, phronesis underpins virtue reasoning. The acquisition of practical wisdom relies upon critical reflection to allow 'empowerment of the ethical self through autonomous decision-making' (2017: 7). Devanny (2018: 4) identified that although schools practised reflection as part of liturgical worship, there was a lack of explicit opportunities for critical reflection across the curriculum. His findings also indicated that schools did not attribute significance to the role or value of intellectual virtues as part of character development. Whilst the findings in this case study corroborate these concerns to an extent, it is significant that this study also provides a positive degree of divergence from Devanny's findings in relation to the building of wisdom through promotion of the intellectual virtues.

5.4.3.1 Critical Reflection

Two of the three schools in this case study demonstrated distinctive explicit features of critical reflection as a feature of their curriculum design. Despite the absence of an explicit curriculum for taught character, Urban School utilised a pedagogical model of 'What, How, Why' based on Sinek's (2015) concept of 'The Golden Circle' to foster skills of questioning, critical thinking and reflection throughout learning. The implementation of written reflectional responses linked to Religious Education and liturgical worship provided pupils with opportunities to reflect on their spiritual and moral learning, with a view to evaluating impact on the formation of pupils. Within Coastal School, opportunities for critical reflection were a distinctive feature of the design of its formal character curriculum.

In the case of Semi-Rural School, in contrast to Coastal and Urban School, although there was a less developed model of critical reflection, which relied predominantly upon caught approaches to character, reflecting Devanny's (2018) findings referenced previously, it is important to acknowledge the value and potential impact of such approaches. Semi-Rural School was committed to optimising opportunities to develop

spiritual and moral reflection through liturgy and acts of worship, linked to their 'SAINTS Beatitudes': 'Worships and discussions are the biggest tools we use to explore our mission motto' (Deputy Headteacher). As part of the school's approach to behaviour, pupils were regularly encouraged to reflect upon their moral choices, developing their capacity for critical reflection 'so that they can understand it and reflect on how they can live more like Jesus' (Deputy Headteacher). Within Urban School, the importance of facilitating discussions 'which promote a deepening of thinking and reflection in pupils' was regarded as an important aspect of how teachers supported children in their formation journey. The significance of the role of the teacher to 'impart wisdom' in a meaningful way, as well as receptivity to 'challenging conversations' contributed to pupils' experience and skills of critical reflection (Headteacher).

Although there was evident variation in the use and extent of explicit opportunities for critical reflection in the curriculum design in each of the three schools in this study, outcomes demonstrated that all endeavours, both caught and taught approaches, or in combination, were intentionally adopted in order to contribute to pupils' formation journey.

5.4.3.2 See-Choose-Act Methodology

In seeking to build phronesis, Coastal School utilised a See-Choose-Act methodology, as an integral facet of its Christian pedagogical approach to virtue education. This approach was based on the school's bespoke adaptation of the *Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development* (2017), as referenced earlier in section 3.1. The See-Choose-Act methodology had positively influenced pupils' understanding, reflection and response to social injustice through the development of observation, discernment and action to awaken a sense of 'critical consciousness', illumined by faith. In Key Stage 2, the See-Choose-Act methodology was integrated throughout curriculum planning to develop pupils' response to the curriculum Enquiry Question. This model enhanced the

development of both intellectual and performance virtues through framing wider learning, facilitating critical thinking, oracy, debate and reflection with a social justice orientation: 'Not only should children know about injustices, but they should feel it in their hearts and have the experience of acting upon it' (Headteacher). The See-Choose-Act methodology developed an explicit capacity for critical reflection throughout the curriculum. This integrated approach to learning served to nurture the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains of moral character, provoking a meaningful response in pupils which 'allowed room for the heart to ponder on the journey of becoming more virtuous and God-like' (Headteacher).

Despite the strong Christian foundation upon which the See-Choose-Act methodology is based in the building of wisdom, it is noteworthy that only one of the three schools in this study adopted this approach as an integral feature of its character education wider curriculum design. Other schools in the study did not articulate awareness of this methodology. As aforementioned in the earlier review of literature, Friel (2009: 10) raises concern about the absence of this pedagogical approach as an 'established feature of mainstream Catholic education in England'. The challenge, as Friel suggests, is the lack of any detailed design of specific curriculum programmes to develop Catholic character education. It was notable that both Semi-Rural and Urban School expressed intention to develop their provision through a more explicit approach. Empirical findings clearly highlighted the need for schools to access resources and materials distinctively framed through a Christian perspective to support this endeavour. This is referred to subsequently in Chapter 6 (section 6.5.3) in relation to recommendations.

5.5 Formation through Partnerships

The Catholic school prioritises the importance and role of community in developing morality in the interests of the common good: 'Society can take note from the Catholic school that it is possible to create true communities out of a common effort for the

common good' (SCCE, 1977: 46-7). Referencing MacIntyre and Hauerwas earlier, communities have a profoundly formative role in shaping the ethical dimension of the human person; human character is relational to the environment within which it exists and develops. MacIntyre highlights the significance of the historical and social context within which human actions occur, which are inextricably linked to the communities within which the individual derives his or her identity. 'The self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities' (MacIntyre, 2007: 221). Empirical outcomes in this case study demonstrated the role of community upon the inculcation of character through the consistent endeavour of schools to establish and maintain effective partnerships with families, the church, as well as the local and wider community through engagement with external partnerships. Sanders (2001: 20) defines partnerships as 'connections between schools and community individuals, organisations, and businesses that are forged to promote students' social, emotional, physical and intellectual development' (Sanders, 2001: 20). In the context of Christian school partnerships, this definition can be extended to incorporate promotion of pupils' spiritual development. This study demonstrated the potential for Catholic schools to create effective external partnerships to support and contribute to the holistic development of pupils in their mission of evangelisation, enabling them to thrive in the fullness and likeness of Christ.

Whilst this study acknowledges the significance of the role of family at the heart of character education, with the school and church as collaborators, outcomes also evidence that the responsibility for influencing pupils' character formation extends beyond parents and the educative community, invoking the engagement of a range of external partnerships within the broader community. Each school in the study strategically instigated engagement with different institutions to strengthen and enhance character education provision. Aligned with the strategic vision of each school, the choice of external partnerships was designed to influence the evangelising Christian

mission of the school, through enhancing children's understanding of CST, social justice and promoting and celebrating equality, diversity and inclusion.

Lickona (1996) claims that the effectiveness of school-parent partnerships in promoting ethical values will be enhanced with the involvement of the wider community, such as businesses, religious institutions, youth organisations and the government. In the context of this study, external partnerships in each school provided a collaborative relationship, united by a commonality of shared goals and objectives. Through establishing dynamic partnerships, schools were able to gain leverage to utilise specialist training and support, resources and opportunities offered by the partner organisation with strategic application.

In the context of this case study, Coastal School represented an advanced model of character education. As a part of its role as a Regional Hub School for the Association of Character Education (ACE), Coastal School shared best practice in character education with other schools across a range of settings nationally. Coastal School's collaboration with ACE demonstrated the impact of partnership with an external institution in terms of accessibility to specialist training and resources, expanding school outreach and creating networking opportunities.

Coastal School's partnerships with Catholic aid agencies such as CAFOD and Caritas served to enrich curriculum provision for Catholic Social Teaching, raising awareness of emergency aid relief and fair trade through workshops and assemblies. In addition to developing pupils' knowledge and understanding, pupils' reflectional responses indicated a genuine desire to change behaviour, demonstrating how these dynamic partnerships impacted upon pupil motivation, dialogue and aspiration. Partnership with Caritas contributed to a deepening of awareness of the principles of CST, encouraging pupils to reflect and plan how the school's vision for CST could be translated in practice across the school community. This partnership fostered a sense of agency and

empowerment for pupils led by their Laudato Si team, supporting stewardship endeavour through initiating conservation and sustainability projects.

As part of its Christian mission to promote a culture of welcome and inclusivity, Coastal School aspired to become a 'School of Sanctuary' and had initiated strategic planning, beginning with self-evaluation to identify key areas for development. This led to the formation of a new connection with a local charity, International Care Network (ICN), an organisation which supports refugees and asylum seekers. Outcomes of this collaboration included the development of a Sanctuary staff team, whole school action planning linked to the School Development Plan and the involvement of the school's Mini Vinnie Committee to create welcome packs and organise fundraising endeavours.

The partnership between Coastal School and the 'Oscar Romero Award Trust' provided a strong example of the impact of collaboration through the aligned mission of both institutions to advance social justice, referenced earlier in Chapter Four (section 4.4.4.1). The 'Oscar Romero Award Trust' partnership supported the school in developing its scope and endeavour for outreach, which led to the introduction of an annual Social Justice Conference for pupils. This initiative demonstrated Coastal School's innovative and dynamic approach to interschool collaboration to promote pupils' understanding of social justice and consider ways in which to effect change in both the community and wider world. The school's lay chaplain was committed to sustaining and developing both local and global charity partnerships through the work of the Mini Vinnies and the Oscar Romero Faith in Action Committee, supporting a local homeless charity, as well as fundraising for 'Mary's Meals', a charity providing a daily meal for hungry children around the world at their place of education.

A strong feature of Urban School, reflected across data outcomes, was the consistent endeavour to develop community partnerships, driven by an abiding commitment to serve both the local and wider community. The distinctive Christian mission of Urban

School to nurture pupils' aspiration to become 'architects of a better world' framed the entirety of the school enterprise, including a range of collaborative partnerships to advance social justice. In partnership with a local University, pupils in Urban School participated in the 'IntoUniversity' programme designed to develop education and career aspirations for disadvantaged pupils. This was an example of an institutional partnership which promoted the Catholic ethos of the school to provide a preferential option for the poor. The Urban School community worked in close partnership with 'City Mission', a local Christian charity, to provide donations of essential items, including food, toiletries and clothing for people in need across the city. The school's connection to this partnership enabled pupils to understand the needs of the disadvantaged within their own community and to be directly involved in social action to seek to address these needs. Through such acts of service, pupils were working as agents of change driven by love, compassion and respect for human dignity. In this way, pupils were actively seeking and building God's kingdom here on earth, just as Matthew (6: 33) invites: 'Seek first the kingdom of God'.

Similar to Coastal School, Urban School benefitted from an established, embedded partnership with both CAFOD and Caritas, utilising these key partnerships to promote social justice within and beyond their school community in pragmatic ways which would have a direct and tangible impact, serving the needs of the disadvantaged and marginalised. Caritas collaborated with Urban School to initiate plans to create an open access Family Hub within the school grounds to serve the needs of the school community providing food, clothes, secondhand uniform and books for families. Pupils also engaged in school based environmental projects with Caritas.

It was significant to note that two of the three schools in this study belonged to interschool partnerships which created a potential for synergy in addressing shared goals. Urban School, part of a federated partnership of six schools under the leadership of an Executive Headteacher and Executive Board, remained one of only two Catholic

schools within the partnership. Through outreach, Urban School was committed to sharing its Christian mission with its partnership schools, particularly regarding Catholic Social Teaching. In collaboration with its partners, Urban School engaged in projects to promote social justice such as providing regular donations to the local 'Rotary Club Shoebox Appeal' for disadvantaged and displaced children in deprived areas of the world. Semi-Rural School had recently joined a Catholic Academy Trust, comprising five other local Catholic primary schools. Senior leaders identified the importance of collaboration across schools as an area for future development, specifically with regard to staff formation. Semi-Rural School benefited from an existing partnership with CAFOD involving liturgical assemblies, use of curriculum resources and fundraising projects. The school had an established partnership with the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) through the active work of the school's Mini Vinnies, which involved visits to local care homes and food bank donations to 'The Salvation Army', as well as global charitable outreach including the 'Corpus Christi Africa Fund' and Our Lady of Nazareth School in Nairobi.

In this study, whilst external partnerships which provided an affiliated award such as the 'Schools of Sanctuary Award' and 'Oscar Romero Award' provided recognition of endeavour, more significantly, for those schools that had engaged with such partnerships, it facilitated self-evaluation opportunities to strategically address specific areas of identified school development. The evaluation tools created scope for in-depth analysis of current provision, encouraging critical reflection involving all stakeholders across the school community to identify strengths and areas for development in relation to their schools' broader mission of social justice. The process facilitated the creation of designated staff teams to engage in collaborative action planning and review of impact and effectiveness.

In summary, education is an interactive endeavour involving the collective responsibility of families, educational professionals as well as community partners to provide the skills, resources and expertise to enhance/contribute to the character formation of children.

Schools in this case study had selectively sought and established a range of external partnerships aligned with their vision to promote their Christian ethos and mission, particularly in relation to social justice. The benefits of forging collaborative partnerships were reciprocal for both the organisation and the school due to shared goals and commonality of purpose. Crucially, the external partnerships were nurtured through directly involving pupils in the development of ideas and project creation so that they were empowered as agents of change in the interests of the common good. It was significant that the partnerships impacted upon pupils' character development in enabling the translation of virtue knowledge into practice so that virtue literacy had a behavioural application. Partnerships contributed impactfully to develop pupils' social capital through building meaningful connections with organisations, enriching their understanding of issues of social injustice, such as hunger and homelessness, motivating them in their desire to fulfil their Christian mission to act as disciples of Christ, serving the disadvantaged and marginalised.

5.6 Approaches to Staff Formation

As Pope Benedict XVI states, 'every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God'. The role of the educator in a Catholic school is vocational, 'a unique participation in the prophetic mission of Christ' (CCE, 1982:16). The Catholic teacher must seek to 'consciously inspire his or her activity with the Christian concept of the person grounded in the Gospel and the teaching of the Church' (ibid:18). The duty upon lay Catholic educators to be imitators of Christ, to model and infuse Gospel virtues among pupils is a divine calling, a vocation committed to the distinctive nature of Catholic educational mission.

For the purposes of this section, staff formation encompasses both spiritual and professional formation, reflecting Lydon's point that 'there is no distinction between

having a vocation and being a professional, both being two aspects of discipleship'. (Lydon, 2011: 330)

5.6.1 Significance of Lay Ministry

Lydon (2009: 51), in his exploration of the Salesian charism, describes the Christocentric exemplar of the teacher, based on Bosco's model of pastoral care: 'The teacher is, in effect, a sign, or sacrament, of the presence of Christ among young people'.

Extensive reference has been made throughout this study in relation to the role of witness through modelling Christ's ministry. Arthur (2024: 21) raises the issue of how Catholic schools transmit their values in a context of religious pluralism 'where non-Catholics, sometimes the majority, make up the population of Catholic institutions'. Arthur (2024) presents a pertinent challenge here for contemporary Catholic education in light of how schools approach the mission of evangelisation in religiously diverse contexts. In this study, it is pertinent to note that there was significant variation in the composition of baptised Catholic teaching staff across the three primary school settings (Coastal 62%; Urban 40.9%; Semi-Rural 27%). Coastal School had a significantly higher proportion of baptised Catholic teaching staff compared to the other two schools, as well as the highest proportion of baptised Catholic pupils (64.3%). The Year 6 pupil survey in Coastal School indicated high levels of positive agreement among pupil participants in response to the statement: 'My teachers are an example of the character of Christ' (76% Strongly Agree; 24% Agree), compared to Urban School (25% Strongly Agree; 46.4% Agree; 21.4% Disagree; 7.1% Strongly Disagree) and Semi-Rural School (28.1% Strongly Agree; 46.9 %; Agree 25% Disagree). See Appendix XI for a full presentation of Year 6 pupil survey data.

5.6.2 Professional Development in a Catholic Context

As part of a critical analysis of the data outcomes discussed previously, it is important to understand the nature and level of provision for staff formation in each school and how they identified and planned to manage the challenges faced. Approaches varied depending on the specific staff training needs in each school and the level of prioritisation at a strategic level.

The significance of professional development focused on formation is reflected in the *Catholic Schools Inspectorate Inspection Handbook* (2024) as part of the 'Grade Descriptors' for how well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for collective worship: 'Leaders, including governors, place the highest priority on inspirational professional development of all staff that focuses on liturgical formation' (2024: 72).

For each of the settings in this study, school leaders had invested in the specific professional development needs of their staff in response to areas of prioritisation on their school development plan in relation to aspects of character education. Although each case study school represented a different stage of implementation of character education, senior leaders identified the need to provide regular staff training to support catechesis, as well as staff formation. A characteristic strength of the model for character education adopted by Coastal School was its strategic approach to professional development, through the appointment of a designed Character Education Lead who provided continuous planned provision for staff training, ensuring a secure level of pedagogical knowledge and competence among staff. It was noteworthy that although both Urban and Semi-Rural School provided support for staff through coaching and mentoring, both schools expressed the intention to adopt a more strategic approach to professional development through further expert led CPD focused on Catholic Social

Teaching for the purpose of induction training and to support the ongoing professional development of all staff.

Despite evident variation in the approach of each school to continued professional development and its contribution to staff formation, all three schools in the study demonstrated a vocational commitment to the goal of Christian formation of the school community, seeking to address and mitigate challenges faced in their settings. Leaders recognised the significance of modelling relationships and behaviour on the exemplar of Christ as fundamental to the Catholic mission of the school. Leaders expressed their educative role as a sacred vocation, where the teacher acts as a facilitator, accompanying the student in the search for truth and wisdom.

In order to fulfil the Catholic mission of the Church, schools must endeavour, through a strategic commitment to professional training within a Catholic context, to develop a vision and methodology for formation, focused on the nourishment and growth in wisdom of both staff and pupils. Developing teachers' secure knowledge of the doctrine of the Church, strengthened by moral and spiritual formation to ensure the promotion of Christian ethos, pedagogy and practice, will help to preserve the integrity of the Catholic school as a place of evangelisation.

5.7 Contemporary Challenges

This study identifies a range of challenges that exist for contemporary Catholic character education which have been analysed in relation to empirical outcomes and in light of the literature reviewed.

5.7.1 The Nature of the Catholic School Community

According to Arthur (2024: 22), the evangelising role of the Catholic educator requires that 'they are receptive to the doctrinal teachings of the Church', ensuring that diversity of beliefs and philosophical perspectives on Catholic education are 'commensurable' with the Catholic faith. With acknowledgement that religious pluralism provides opportunity for rich diversification and inclusivity, Catholic schools are entrusted by the Church to promote the spiritual formation of both staff and pupils. The evident decline in the population of baptised Catholics across the Catholic school community nationally presents a significant challenge in relation to retention of the distinctive identity of the contemporary Catholic school, particularly in fulfilment of its aspiration to nurture the faith and formation of both pupils and staff. For this aspiration to be translated into practice, schools need to reflect upon a Christian interpretation of human flourishing, creating a pathway to beatitude through formation which is based upon developing a relationship and closeness with Christ.

As the population of the Catholic school is characterised by a multiplicity of cultures and beliefs, formation in schools must be both inclusive and dynamic. Interpretation of findings in the study propose that the challenge of pluralism provides opportunity for spiritual, moral and cultural enrichment:

> 'Teachers are called upon to rise up to a major educational challenge, which is the recognition, respect and enhancement of diversity. Psychological, social, cultural and religious diversity should not be denied, but rather considered as an opportunity and a gift (CCE, 2014: 2.II.5).

Outcomes of this study highlight that a fundamental challenge exists for Catholic schools to extend their reach, proclaiming the Gospel 'beyond believers' (CCE, 2014: 1a).

This study highlighted the significance of the lay ministerial role of the teacher in modelling the integration of faith and life. As referenced in the earlier literature review,

Lydon (2011: 75) explores the concept of the sacramental perspective which emphasises the centrality of the relationship between the educator and the student in terms of formation. Referencing St. Paul's invitation, 'be imitators of me as I am of Christ' (1 *Cor* 11:1), reflected in the Salesian vision of education, it is incumbent upon the Catholic school to be a locus of transformation in Christ. School leaders and dioceses must continue to explore ways to ensure that teachers are equipped with the professional knowledge, skills and capacity to actively support and engage with the vital mission of evangelisation, as well as be receptive to growth in terms of their own spiritual formation. This study firmly acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between staff and pupil formation - through observing and experiencing behaviours modelled on Christ, pupils can become witnesses and be immersed in a living faith.

5.7.2 Moral relativism

As previously referred to in the earlier literature review, the issue of relativism arguably presents one of the most pertinent challenges for character education in a contemporary context, characterised by a lack of consensus exists in terms of what constitutes morality. According to Arthur (2005: 249), as a result of the rise in moral relativism, 'children are exposed to all kinds of opinions about right and wrong.' This concern highlights the need for Catholic schools to educate beyond the transmission of knowledge, to seek positive engagement with families and to provide stability and coherency in moral messaging through the religious dimension of the school, illuminated by faith and inspired an integration of 'caught, taught and sought' approaches to virtue education.

This study explored the view and vision of what constitutes how schools, both of a religious character and community schools, specifically approach and deliver character education to enable students to attain their *telos*. In the context of Catholic schools, this raised questions of theological enquiry relating the extent to which faith supports

character and character supports faith. Arthur (2021: 97) argues that secular education promotes reason without faith and a formation without religion. This study found that a profound challenge for Catholic schools is to ensure that the development of faith is sustained at the heart of the Catholic life and mission of the school, nurturing relationship with Christ. Whist this study firmly advocates for inclusivity and celebration of diversity, aligned to the view of Arthur (2021: 5), in the context of the Catholic school, it cautions against secularisation, leading to 'denial of the transcendent'.

5.7.3 Curriculum for Character

Approaches to curriculum provision for character education, discussed comprehensively in this study, highlight key issues which confront schools in terms of developing Catholic character education. Friel (2009: 10) expresses concern for the absence of specific programmes for character education beyond the RE curriculum, advocating for a See-Judge Act methodology. Similarly, Arthur (2021: 98) presents the case for an 'explicit Christian theology that guides pedagogy'. Empirical outcomes in this study emphasise the need to develop an explicit curriculum for character education based on Catholic pedagogy, as evidenced in Coastal School, so that provision does not rely upon the impact of implicit approaches alone. Although the Jubilee Centre 'Framework for Character Education in Schools - Neo-Aristotelian Model for Moral Development' (Jubilee Centre, 2022: 21) provides a pedagogical approach for schools, it requires adaptation through a Christian lens, which will be discussed further in relation to recommendations in Chapter 6.

5.7.4 Catholic Character Education – A Countercultural Approach

According to Gesing (2016: 1), the fundamental challenge for Catholic educators consists in 'communicating faith to young people who are happy to live without it'. Contemporary culture is characterised by technological advancement, elevating the role

of media influence, contributing to a reframing of what is regarded as desirable and/or meaningful in modern society. It is a culture motivated by individualism, promoting a materialistic view of happiness, contrary to the interests of the common good:

> What distracts us from God is peer pressure. We see other people have things, we get jealous… and we get the urge to have it. Then after a while, we realise we don't need it anymore. (Year 6 pupil)

The countercultural nature of Catholic education was regarded as antithetical to contemporary conceptions of happiness, focused on consumerism and the transience of material satisfaction:

> Catholic character is anti-worldview. It goes against what we are told about loving ourselves first and getting more. We see it constantly in the media - if you get this, it will make you happy. (Inclusion Leader)

Pupils' exposure to antithetical views of morality was identified as a challenge for character formation across participant groups: 'The biggest challenges are the different voices the child hears in their lives...the voice of the parent might not be valued as much as other voices' (Parent Governor). Clearly, the concept of values conflict presents a challenge for contemporary Catholic character education. However, it can be deduced from this study that concomitantly, there is scope for values dissonance to be regarded as a potential opportunity to share and widen knowledge and understanding of virtue learning. As Nyberg (1990) observes, 'we will always have to live with conflict'. This highlights the responsibility of schools to introduce pupils to such values diversity and utilise this as a foundation upon which to build rich dialogue about morality and beliefs in order to foster a 'synthesis between culture and faith' (John Paul 11, 1995: n78). Catholic education must aspire to inform culture: 'Faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived" (ibid). Embracing the challenge of diversity of beliefs and morality within contemporary culture provides an opportunity for schools to enrich understanding, enhance tolerance and deepen pupils'

moral and spiritual growth. Referencing Kohlberg (1975) and Berowitz (1985), Hands (2006: 53) notes that experience of values conflict can be beneficial to moral development through exposure to diverse values and contradictions in relation to one's own moral views and that of others through recognition of differences. Exposure to values diversity as part of character education encourages pupils' capacity to make informed choices when encountering conflicting values.

5.7.5 Receptivity

According to Pope Francis (2013: n. 171), an openness of the heart enables 'genuine spiritual encounter' which reflects a vision for Christian formation. Data outcomes in this study highlighted the view that although values or virtues need to be explicitly taught and modelled, receptivity to formation presents a challenge to character education: 'Maybe people aren't ready' (Year 6 pupil). An analogous view was articulated in relation to the receptivity of staff:

> Senior leaders can offer formation to all staff and should do so...how receptive staff are to this is individual and depends on many factors. (Deputy Headteacher)

Aligned to Hauerwas' (2009: 28) view of the human being as self-determining, receptivity to formation can therefore be regarded as the responsibility of the agent - a conscious choice to open oneself to deepening relationship with God. Empirical outcomes in this study demonstrated that schools were committed to an exploration of ways to inspire and cultivate connection to faith in order to encourage openness to God.

5.7.6 Contemporary conceptions of human flourishing

The challenge for Catholic schools is in exploring the meaning and significance of beatitude through examining what constitutes a Christian view of human flourishing. It was significant that participant groups across settings expressed concern regarding how happiness is defined and sought in a contemporary context, where environmental

influences, such as the role of peer pressure, as well as multiple types of media, promote values contrary to Catholic doctrine:

> There are lots of challenges which could stop us from increasing our faith in God because there are things we are bound to love and so it is then harder to put God first in our daily routine. (Year 6 pupil)

The promotion of individualism was regarded as antithetical to the development of virtue and the pursuit of altruism: 'I find it hard to put others first and not just doing things for myself ...instead of doing something to help others' (Year 6 pupil).

Catholic education offers a Christian interpretation and vision of happiness, with Christ at the centre: 'The fullness of life is to be found when Christ is at the centre of our lives' (Stock, 2018: 7). This study asserts that although counterculture presents a challenge to Christian formation, it also offers the gift and hope of sanctification.

Data outcomes highlighted pupils' exposure to the promotion of individualism and the resultant experience of values conflict. As highlighted in the Congregation's 1988 document, contemporary youth face an 'uncertain future…influenced by a world in which human values are in chaos because these values are no longer rooted in God' (CCE, 1988: 12). Empirical findings demonstrate concern regarding a contemporary understanding and view of happiness in the context of modern society. The role of Catholic school is to provide pupils with an enduring sense of meaning and mission; the challenge for the Christian education is therefore in 'helping these young people discover something of value in their lives' (CCE, 1988: 13). In response to a saturation of individualism in contemporary social culture, it is the responsibility of Catholic schools to raise awareness of disadvantage and poverty in the community and the wider world and to instigate a desire for social action and service inspired by Christian faith.

This study demonstrates the endeavour of each of the schools in seeking to provide an education which promotes understanding and application of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching as a significant feature of character education provision. Through a challenging curriculum designed to shape moral and social conscience towards building wisdom, pupils can develop critical skills of discernment and empathy, promoting gratitude and altruism with a desire to view the world through a Christian lens.

5.7.6.1 Influence of Mass Media and Media Technologies

Reflecting earlier concerns regarding moral relativism, responses from parent participants highlighted the complexities and influence of modern media technology, expressing the view that moral boundaries have become more indistinct: 'As a society, children are exposed to so much negative information, it's getting harder to choose what is wrong and right' (Parent). This view was expanded upon by another participant highlighting a shift in perceptions of morality, including interpretations of virtue role models:

> We are exposed to fake news. Morals of society change – people who aren't good role models are becoming them now. We live in a society where we don't know who to trust now. (Parent)

Concerns regarding the role of media technology were reiterated throughout data. This emphasises the pivotal role of the modern Catholic school in the fulfilment of its mission to address this imbalance, redirecting focus towards God so that pupils are immersed in Christian teaching and the message of salvation.

It should be acknowledged here that although the data outcomes in this study present media as a negative influence on formation, the study also recognises that media platforms have the potential to be used positively to build online religious communities sharing religious teachings and facilitating dialogue, although this view was not articulated in research outcomes.

5.7.6.2 Multi-Dimensionality of Poverty

With reference to contemporary conceptions of human flourishing, a key challenge facing Catholic schools is a crisis of indifference to the beliefs and practices of the Catholic faith, where the search for a deeper meaning and purpose in life leading to a Christian telos has become neglected. This 'radical instability' (CCE, 1988: n10) experienced by the modern generation of young people is translated as a 'sign of the poverty of human relationships in families and in society today' (CCE, 1988: n11). In addressing this poverty, in all its forms, the Catholic school must face its greatest challenge in seeking to reach and reconnect with the modern generation of children and their families through building relationships based upon Christian love and in fulfilment of a Christian vision of formation.

Senior leader participants in the study referred to experiences of poverty, such as emotional, spiritual or economic poverty, which have the propensity to impact character development. Rejection or trauma within the family can cause a detachment from love of and for others, and from God:

> If a child doesn't feel loved, it can make it harder sometimes for them to experience God's love and to trust the people in school who are telling them they are loved. (Inclusion Leader)

Participants expressed the value of belonging and connection to a community as a fundamental aspect of moral orientation and growth: 'People want to belong. If you don't belong, you don't find your place…you can be drawn to something that's more negative in your life (Parent).

5.8 Engagement with Families

Despite the indubitable influence of community upon character development, in particular the role of the family, schools in this study expressed challenges relating to composition of the school community and the resultant impact on children's formation in the faith:

> We have a number of non-Catholic parents and an increasing number of other faiths so it's harder to engage them and bring them along with us on that journey' (Deputy Headteacher).

Senior leaders articulated the view that parent education was a pertinent focus for the school: 'It's making sure I can reach the parents and get them on board… it does mean that you are educating the parents as well as the children' (Headteacher). Despite these challenges, however, one pupil participant provided a poignant testimony of faith: 'There is always a way to go to church and you always have to try to find that way' (Year 6 pupil).

Acknowledging the various forms of poverty which may exist within the family, the Church promotes a preferential option for the poor including 'those who are deprived of family help or affection or those who are far from faith' (SCCE, 1977: 58). Aligned with a Salesian vision for education, in seeking to mitigate these challenges, the primary duty of the Catholic school is to create a familial spirit and a 'serene environment' (Lydon, 2011: 101) so that pupils can experience a living encounter with Christ.

5.9 Conclusion

Although it is beyond the parameters of this study to address the myriad of contemporary challenges encountered by the Catholic school, the outcomes do, however, strongly advocate for the promotion and integration of 'caught, taught and sought' approaches to Catholic character education as key contributors to the formation

of pupils, enhanced by the distinctive 'ecclesial experience' (CCE, 1997: n.12) offered by the Catholic school. It is essential that the contemporary challenges and concerns expressed as part of this study are mitigated at least in part, through an understanding of Catholic character education as fulfilment of the mission of the Church, emphasising the role of the educator as integral to human formation. As Arthur (2024: 48) advocates, the nature of formation offered to students must transcend the transmission of knowledge and lead ultimately to human flourishing:

> Educating the young always involves more than simply sharing facts…it's about forming the mind with a framework of meaning…The main goal of education is therefore to help human beings become more fully human.

The subsequent chapter concludes the study by discussing the implications of the key findings and makes recommendations for potential future research in the field.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

'As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'.
(Matthew 25: 40)

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to explore and analyse the nature and impact of character education in Catholic primary schools on children's formation, building on the limited existing research in this field. The schools in the multiple case study represented a range of models of provision for character education at different stages of implementation and development, ranging from preliminary, discrete approaches to more advanced models with explicit and embedded programmes of Catholic character education.

The study identified and evaluated the ways in which character education promotes social justice through the development of virtue literacy and practical wisdom, exploring characteristics of effective practice across three case study settings, as well as identifying challenges for contemporary Catholic character education. The intention of this study was framed around three overarching research questions which underpinned the qualitative and quantitative research methods:

- How can Catholic primary schools promote virtue literacy?
- How can Catholic character education develop the practical wisdom of the scholar?
- How can Catholic character education empower the scholar in the practice of virtue to serve the principles of Catholic Social Teaching?

6.2 How Can Catholic Primary Schools Promote Virtue Literacy?

The retrieval of literature focused on an exploration of existing research on how schools educate for character which demonstrated the multi-faceted nature of character education, delivered through a myriad of approaches, frameworks, practices and programmes. Whilst empirical outcomes in this study also reflected the multifarious nature of provision, with variation in terms of each school's prioritisation of implicit and explicit approaches to the development of virtue literacy, it was significant that schools were unified in fidelity to a Christian vision of formation and mission of evangelisation and attributed emphasis to a holistic approach to character education, characterised by pastoral support and interventions.

This study examined how schools promote virtue literacy, encompassing the development of virtue knowledge and understanding, virtue reasoning and virtue practice through the implicit culture of school life as well as the explicit curriculum, aligned to the model of 'caught, taught, sought' character developed by the Jubilee Centre (Jubilee Centre, 2022: 21). Although this study acknowledges the significant contribution of school culture and ethos in Catholic character formation, in some schools there was an over-reliance on implicit approaches in the absence of an explicit planned curriculum for character education. It was significant that Coastal School, as an advanced model of character education, demonstrated a holistic integration of caught, taught and sought approaches. All three schools demonstrated commitment to the promotion of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, with the most innovative provision characterised by schools which adopted CST as integral to curriculum design through a systematic planned approach, capitalising on the curriculum as a conduit for the promotion of social justice, rather than more discrete approaches through informal *ad hoc* opportunities as demonstrated in Urban and Semi-Rural School. Whilst the evident commitment to Catholic Social Teaching in all three schools was commendable, there was an unfulfilled potential in explicit curriculum provision in two of the three schools

in relation to character education, where capacity to explore moral and theological virtues was not fully optimised. In the case of Coastal School, which represented a sophisticated and embedded model of Catholic character education, emphasis on the explicit teaching of Gospel virtues as the foundation of the character curriculum, provided a spiritual tenet for a deeper understanding and application of the principles of CST.

Research by Devanny (2018) revealed the need for an explicit curriculum for character education in order to develop pupils' virtue literacy. Findings in this study corroborate this proposal, highlighting the significance of fostering pupils' knowledge and understanding of a shared language of virtue as a foundation for developing the pupils' skills and capacity in the application of virtue. A Christian interpretation of virtue literacy must involve a testimony of faith and belief. It is, therefore, vital that Catholic schools adopt a strategic and sustained commitment to the holistic formation of the whole school community, including staff, pupils and parents so that the language of virtue permeates the environment and can be articulated by all stakeholders.

The earlier literature review highlighted the significance of the modelling of virtue on the inculcation of Catholic character based on the establishment of communities and their synergistic interaction, prominent in the work of MacIntrye (1981) and Hauerwas (1983). This study highlighted the seminal role of the family as primary educators, as well as the influence of the axial partnership between the family, the school and the church on children's formation. It is the responsibility of the Catholic school to foster a vital sense of belonging within a community through recreating 'a family atmosphere animated by love' (CCE, 1965: n.3). The experience of belonging fosters a fundamental sense of connection, providing both purpose and meaning. Research outcomes in this study reflect a Salesian vision of education, characterised by the centrality of the teacher as a role model of virtue. In exploring the concept of the sacramental perspective, which 'constitutes modelling ministry on Christ' (Lydon, 2011: 75), this research demonstrated

the significance of the lay ministerial role of the teacher in the development of Catholic character, acknowledging the challenge this presents to schools with regard to the declining population of baptised Catholic teaching staff, reflected in Catholic schools nationally. Outcomes highlighted the need for the Catholic school to invest in processes and approaches directed to support teacher formation.

6.3 How Can Catholic Character Education Develop the Practical Wisdom of the Scholar?

The literature review highlighted the significance of growth in wisdom in the development of Catholic character. As Arthur posits, 'education advances us towards wisdom', and in a Christian sense of human awakening, 'becoming who we are' (Arthur, 2021: 2). Schools in this study sought to promote pupils' growth in the intellectual virtue of wisdom through providing curriculum opportunities and contexts for critical thinking and reflection to nurture skills of discernment, contributing to the formation of moral conscience. In the case of Coastal School, the design of a challenging Gospel-inspired curriculum, framed by an Enquiry Question focused on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, invited pupils to discipleship, translating belief into action. This relates to Aquinas' definition of the purpose of wisdom to enable action in accordance with divine rules. It was notable that the curriculum intent of both Urban and Semi-Rural School clearly expressed a commitment to developing pupils' skills of critical thinking and moral reflection, emphasising the affective aspects of character, although this had not been fully implemented or embedded as part of curriculum design at the time of the study. However, data outcomes in all three schools clearly demonstrated the significance of the role and contribution of Catholic culture and ethos on the formation of pupils.

In Coastal School, an explicitly Catholic approach to the curriculum, utilising a See-Choose-Act methodology, facilitated a Christian understanding of the world which attributed purpose to the curriculum beyond knowledge, nurturing 'a heart which sees'

(Pope Benedict XVI, 2005: 31). The totality of the educational enterprise of Coastal School immersed pupils in a Christian vision of reality as integral to the school's pedagogical approach to virtue education in seeking to build phronesis, with the ultimate goal of human flourishing. The curriculum design in Coastal School was invitational, crafted to develop pupils' moral conscience and capacity as critical thinkers to notice, discern and desire to act, inspired by the Gospel: 'The formational process often involves the head – knowledge of the faith, the heart – experience of living the faith, and the hands – the practice of enacting the faith (Arthur, 2024: 22). A curriculum which captures both the heart and the mind, enabling a Christian view and vision of the world, facilitates empowerment to build God's kingdom here on earth. This reflects Kolvenbach's (2000: 10) view of Christian formation, emphasising the impact of the affective domain on character development: 'When the heart is touched by experience, the mind is challenged to change'.

The salvific mission of Catholic education welcomes pupils to enter into friendship with Christ, and through personal encounter, to experience transformation. Cooling (2010: 13) posits that Christian education must invoke the desire to discover the 'meaning and significance' of learning. The outcomes in this study exemplified the strengths of design of a Catholic approach to the curriculum which seeks to challenge through the promotion of critical thinking and reflection so that students are invited 'to consider a spiritual grounding for their lives in the world' (Groome, 2021). The explicit missionary motivation of curriculum design in both Coastal and Urban School, focused on the use of acquired learning for societal benefit to serve the common good, contributed to the development of phronesis. Through developing enquiring minds in the context of faith, Catholic education can 'facilitate transformation of the heart and mind in God' (Towey, 2019: 7).

6.4 How Can Catholic Character Education Empower the Scholar in the Practice of Virtue to Serve the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching?

As demonstrated across the schools in this study, character education was integral to the distinctive Catholic mission and identity of the school, through deepening relationship with Christ, promoting 'living faith' as global citizens: 'The Church's social doctrine indicates the path to follow for a society reconciled and in harmony through justice and love' (CCE, 2004: 82). In this study, the role of pupil leadership was a significant feature of character provision, which facilitated opportunities for the practice of virtue through the promotion of social action, upholding the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Empowering students in the autonomous pursuit of virtue translated a Christian vision of human flourishing, 'becoming a person capable of building a society based on justice and solidarity' (CCE, 2022: 19). Empirical outcomes demonstrated that a meaningful, contextual curriculum which provided opportunities to develop virtue literacy through an integration of moral, theological, intellectual and performance virtues, deepened knowledge and understanding of CST and fostered desire to enact the virtues in pursuit of social justice. The development of performance virtues, in particular, skills of oracy through discussion, debate and public speaking, inspired the courageous pursuit of social justice, enabling pupils to act as a 'voice of the voiceless' (St. Oscar Romero, 1985).

This project explored how schools 'listen' to young people and encourage dialogue in seeking to renew contemporary moral culture and support young people to be awakened and transformed through responding to God's call. Lydon (2011: 97) describes the Salesian approach as one of empowerment for students, based on 'self-sacrificing love... openness, capacity for dialogue'. Pope Francis (2020) highlights the importance of synodality through listening and engaging in dialogue with young people so that the Church can learn from their voice: 'They have asked us to walk alongside them - not behind them or ahead of them but at their side'. Empirical outcomes in this study

demonstrated the impact of synodality and how, through 'journeying together', schools can contribute significantly to Catholic character formation through promotion of pupil leadership and experience of service and providing purposeful platforms for pupil voice to promote the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

This study highlighted the countercultural nature of Catholic character education and the challenge this presents for the contemporary Catholic school, to an extent characterised by dissonance between virtue knowledge and understanding and virtue practice. In exploring the relationship between belief and action through an examination of how virtue literacy contributed to the enactment of virtue, this study found that an effective dimension to character education in all three schools was an emphasis on the promotion of pupil agency. Through providing an arena for the precedence of pupil voice, each of the schools facilitated a sense of empowerment and autonomy among pupils, inducing altruism through providing a range of opportunities for Christian service in both local and global contexts. In the translation of belief into action, there was a conscious choice among pupils to participate in living mission inspired by faith.

The individual schools in this study interpreted their mission as a Catholic school through the promotion of CST within the curriculum, as well as throughout the wider life of the school, through pupil leadership, service and social action in the interests of the common good, reflected as part of the distinctive Catholic identity of each school. As Bishop Marcus Stock (2024) explains, in expressing the message of the Jubilee Year 2025 'Pilgrims of Hope': 'Life is the gift of a loving God who calls us to love, peace and justice in this world, and eternal communion with Him in the next'. Through a distinctively Catholic approach to character education, enriched by the knowledge and application of Catholic Social Teaching, and in fulfilment of the educational mission of the Church, schools can support pupils to encounter Christ so that they may live flourishing lives: 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10).

6.5 Recommendations

This study has presented an interpretation of the culmination of the research findings offering a vision of the potential contribution of Catholic character education to the moral and spiritual formation of pupils in Catholic primary schools. Based on the outcomes of a comprehensive review of literature and a multiple case study approach, the following recommendations are proposed to contribute to and influence practice in the field of Catholic character education. These recommendations are intended to support Catholic school leaders, teachers and Catholic dioceses, as well as other relevant institutions and settings, in the implementation and development of their approach to character education in the context of their school communities and within a distinctively Christian vision and interpretation of human flourishing.

6.5.1 Strategic Leadership

The first recommendation is for schools to develop a strategic vision for and leadership of character education within the context of their school, through a shared understanding of the nature and purpose of character education and how this vision is articulated and translated in the context of their Catholic school mission. This involves strategic senior leadership and governance of character education, with sustained commitment to the formation of staff, adaptive to the needs of the school community. As part of the prioritisation of character education, it is the responsibility of schools to ensure that staff have pedagogical knowledge and competency of how character develops in a Catholic context and the influential factors constitutive to character development. The significance of the quality of relationships between members of the educational community is integral to the promotion of virtue education to provide models of Catholic character.

6.5.2 Christocentric Curriculum Design

The second recommendation links to design of the curriculum for character education in order to promote the virtue literacy of pupils, as well as understanding and application of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, as part of a wider Catholic approach to the curriculum. This study advocates for the integration of the See-Choose-Act methodology as integral to pedagogical approaches, inviting schools to explore its potential as part of a challenging and aspirational Christocentric curriculum design.

In seeking to develop approaches, the Jubilee Centre's 'Framework for Character Education in Schools - Neo-Aristotelian Model for Moral Development' (Jubilee Centre, 2022: 21), based on the components of virtue knowledge and understanding, virtue reasoning and virtue practice, although a secular model, provides a strong pedagogical basis for a holistic understanding of character education upon which schools can make adaptations to reflect the characteristics of their bespoke Catholic approach to the curriculum in the context of their school setting. This study supports Arthur's (2021: 16) vision for a 'virtue-based framework' for Christian education. Character education in Catholic schools must be guided by the fulfilment of beatitude for pupils to explore the true meaning of human flourishing in their own lives. There should be a robust emphasis on the school's mission to advance social justice, with CST at the heart of curriculum design in order to harness the potential 'socialising power of the curriculum' (Garcia-Huidobro, 2017: 84).

Conceptions of Catholic of character education must involve understanding of the interrelational nature of the virtues, translated through an explicit character curriculum. Catholic schools should give emphasis to a holistic approach to character education which seeks to develop the emotional, social, academic and spiritual facets of human development. Understanding of the pedagogy of character must be rooted in an exploration of the emotional, cognitive and behavioural strands of character

development (Lickona, 2001), with a focus on the building of Christian wisdom through opportunities for critical thinking and reflection integrated into an inspiring and challenging curriculum with a social justice orientation. The foundational principles of Christian curriculum design must seek to transcend knowledge to encompass divine mission. Catholic character education must endeavour to awaken pupils' sense of Christian purpose and bring meaning to their lives, promoting autonomous altruism, bound by a desire to build God's kingdom on earth.

Curriculum design for character education should seek to nurture pupils' growth in practical wisdom and inspire altruism through an explicit character curriculum built upon an integrative model of moral, theological, intellectual, performance and civic virtues. It is incumbent upon the Catholic school to go 'beyond knowledge' in the pursuit of truth, as part of a culture of invitation to respond to the call to holiness: 'The curriculum must help the students reflect on the great problems of our time, evaluating the facts in the light of values' (CCE, 2013: 66). As part of a Catholic approach to the curriculum, virtue education should permeate the wider curriculum, incorporating the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, as well as reflecting the totality of school life. Catholic schools should utilise a rich source of literature, including biblical texts as integral to virtue education and other sources of literature, to deepen their knowledge and understanding of virtue within a range of contexts. The character curriculum should incorporate opportunities for the study of saints, as well as other role models of virtue, including both historical, contemporary and religious figures, to deepen moral learning and inspire faith in action.

6.5.3 The Role of Phronesis in the Development of Character

The third recommendation proposes that schools focus on the development of the intellectual virtue of phronesis as integral to a Christian vision for moral development, through the promotion of virtue reasoning. This requires consideration to pedagogical

approaches for the development of intellectual character, to provide a systematically planned approach to integrating opportunities for critical thinking and deep reflection throughout the curriculum to develop understanding and application of moral conscience in real world contexts. The adoption of a See-Judge-Act methodology will support schools in the realisation of their Catholic mission to promote a Christian view of the world, fostering pupils' skills of discernment and a desire for meaning and purpose, illuminated by the teachings of the Bible. In this way, schools can foster pupils' intrinsic motivation to pursue beatitude, inviting them to explore a Christian definition of what it means to be fully human. This study advocates that schools recognise the impact of developing intellectual character to shift the educative goal to one that transcends the transmission of knowledge to invest in how pupils develop themselves as children of God.

6.5.4 A Culture of Encounter

The fourth recommendation proposes a culture of encounter as integral to Catholic character education in order to promote a vital 'synthesis between culture and faith' (John Paul 11, 1995: n78). This study promotes the importance of dialogue, incorporating listening and hearing as requisite to Catholic pedagogy. In developing pupils' faith formation, it is important for schools to promote awareness of the faith and traditions of other religious communities through celebration of the rich diversity of the Catholic school population of both staff and pupils. As Towey (2019:7) advocates, schools should foster 'inclusive conversation with others' to allow pupils to explore Catholicism.

This study recommends the promotion of the role and impact of performance virtues through enhanced provision for the development of oracy skills so that children have increased opportunities and experience of debating and public speaking as a platform for the promotion of social justice. It is important that schools seek to develop the

relationship between the performative and other virtues. Schools should aspire to be missionary schools through an innovative approach to educational enterprise, such as interschool pupil conferences, exploring ways to enable opportunities for dialogue, debate, discussion and reflection among pupils concerning real world contexts of social justice, both within and beyond the parameters of their school communities.

6.5.5 Evaluation of Character Education

The final recommendation relates to the need for the development of self-evaluation tools for character education, designed specifically for Catholic schools. The Jubilee Centre's *Evaluation Handbook for Schools* (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, 2016) provides criteria for the evaluation of character through caught and taught approaches, as well as student self-reflection but is limited in terms of its application to the evangelising mission of Catholic schools. This study acknowledges the complexity of evaluating character but recommends that schools explore ways to reflect upon their strategic provision so that both implicit and explicit approaches can be evaluated and developed within a Christian context.

6.6 Recommendations for Future Research

With acknowledgement of the limitation of the size and scale of this research endeavour, this study recommends larger scale studies of character education in Catholic primary schools, including the implementation and impact of specific interventions for character education adopted by Catholic schools.

Despite the complexity of endeavours to evaluate character education, there is a lack of existing research in a UK context involving longer term studies in Catholic education, in relation to an evaluation of the impact of character education from primary years, tracking pupils' experience throughout secondary education, and more ambitiously,

beyond education into adult life. This is of particular interest in terms of how the application of virtue is translated into virtue practice, a recommendation also endorsed by Devanny (2018). The Jesuit Schools Network of the USA, however, introduced *Grad at Grad*, a publication which analyses the extent to which graduates lived out, beyond graduation, the characteristics and goals of a Jesuit High School.

Research is currently limited in the field relating to curriculum provision for character education, specifically in relation to explicit programmes in Catholic schools. It is anticipated that implementation of the revised Religious Education Directory in 2025, which contains a renewed emphasis on a Catholic understanding of virtue and Catholic Social Teaching, will provide fertile ground for new insights into the role of religious education on Catholic character formation, providing opportunities for future research in the longer term.

Future research using larger scale studies is also required in relation to evaluation of the impact of character education in a Christian context, specifically in terms of the translation of virtue knowledge into virtue practice.

6.7 Limitations of the Study

The most pertinent limitation in this research is the nature of the topic of study. Although empirical outcomes provide detailed insights into the perception of participants regarding the impact of character education on pupils' formation, the study recognises that formation involves a lifelong process of inner transformation and cannot be measured in finite terms. However, the study has identified key contributory factors to formation and indicators of spiritual growth.

The case study design for this research study enabled deep and intensive exploration of three school settings in relation to Catholic character education. In terms of validity,

although case studies are not designed to be generalisable, the outcomes of this study may have a broader application and relatability for other Catholic primary schools and educational settings through evidencing practical examples of approaches and models of character education at different levels of development.

In defending the validity of this study, it is important to acknowledge the methodological limitations which confronted the research, including implications in terms of positionality. Intentional efforts were made to mitigate these factors through a reflexive approach and a transparent process of data collection and analysis, to ensure that the integrity and reliability of outcomes could be defended with authenticity.

Although the study acknowledges the risk of potential bias through the use of purposive sampling for school selection, in the context of this research, this facilitated rich comparative study through variation between cases in relation to provision for character education.

As a predominantly qualitative study, the majority of data collected involved an emphasis on the self-reported data of participants which may have been subject to bias. The researcher sought to mitigate this limitation through using a combination of multiple data sources including interviews, focus groups, observations and document analysis.

6.8 Conclusion

This study provides a distinctive contribution to the minimal existing research relating to character education within the Catholic education system in England and Wales to provoke further reflection, discussion and research within the field. The study explored the extent to which character education contributes to the formation of pupils in primary schools. The study concludes that the complex process of character

development is strongly supported and enriched through interaction between significant communities of practice – the family, the school and the Church, which collectively impact upon the formation of the hearts and minds of young people through what is taught and modelled.

In the context of the Catholic school, the study advocates for school leaders to articulate a shared strategic vision and direction for formation translated through both implicit and explicit approaches to character education, strengthening their provision and practice to support pupils' journey of Christian formation. This process should be enhanced through engagement in self-evaluation of provision to implement and embed a holistic approach to moral development within a Christian context through the promotion of Catholic Social Teaching. This study proposes a reappraisal of the Catholic curriculum, through an aspirational enquiry-based design, with a social justice orientation which transcends knowledge, contributing to a transformative spiritual journey. The study determines that schools should engage in a critical re-examination their Catholic approach to the curriculum to ensure that opportunities for Catholic character education are optimised, incorporating critical thinking and reflection as integral to Catholic pedagogy. In addressing the contemporary challenges encountered by the Catholic school, this study finds that schools must seek to adopt an integrated approach to formation, promoting moral, theological, intellectual, performance and civic virtues through its educational framework and as part of the distinctive charism of each school.

Finally, character education must actively reflect Pope Francis' call to synodality, fostering the promotion of pupil agency to translate belief into action. Conceptions of Catholic character education must be built upon understanding of the principal role of communities of practice on formation. The summation of findings in this study requires further exploration and commitment from Catholic dioceses, school leaders and practitioners and all those involved in the educative process.

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Appendix I. St. Mary's University, Twickenham - Ethics Application Form

St Mary's University Twickenham London

1. Name of proposer(s)	Kerry Macfarlane
2. St. Mary's email address	702368@live.stmarys.ac.uk
3. Name of supervisor	Professor John Lydon
4. Title of project	**To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England?**

5. Institute or Service	☐ Business, Law & Society ☒ Institute of Education ☐ SAHPS ☐ Theology & Liberal Arts ☐ Service
6. Programme	☐ UG ☐ PG (taught) ☒ PG (research) Name of course: PhD in Education
7. Proposer status	☐ Staff ☐ UG student ☒ PG student ☐ Visiting ☐ Associate

8. Confidentiality	
Will all information remain confidential in line with the Data Protection Act 2018?	☒ Yes ☐ No

9. Consent	
Will written informed consent be obtained from all participants/participants' representatives?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable
10. Pre-approved Protocol	
Has the protocol been approved by the Ethics Sub-Committee under a generic application?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ Not applicable Date of approval:
11. Approval from another Ethics Committee	
Will the research require approval by an ethics committee external to St. Mary's University?	☐ Yes ☒ No

12. Identifiable risks	
a. Is there potential for physical or psychological discomfort, harm, stress or burden to participants?	☐Yes ☒ No
b. Will your research involve persons under 18 years of age or vulnerable adults?	☒ Yes ☐ No
c. Are participants over 65 years of age? If 'Yes' this could imply vulnerability, therefore please clarify at section 18.	☐Yes ☒ No
d. Do participants have limited ability to give voluntary consent? This could include cognitively impaired persons, prisoners, persons with a chronic physical or mental condition, or those who live in or are connected to an institutional environment.	☐Yes ☒ No
e. Are any invasive techniques involved? And/or the collection of body fluids or tissue?	☐Yes ☒ No
f. Is an extensive degree of exercise or physical exertion involved?	☐Yes ☒ No

g. Is there manipulation of cognitive or affective human responses which could cause stress or anxiety?	☐Yes ☒ No
h. Are drugs or other substances (including liquid and food additives) to be administered?	☐Yes ☒ No
i. Will deception of participants be used in a way which might cause distress, or might reasonably affect their willingness to participate in the research? For example, misleading participants on the purpose of the research, by giving them false information.	☐Yes ☒ No
j. Will highly personal, intimate or other private and confidential information be sought? For example sexual preferences.	☐Yes ☒ No
k. Will payment be made to participants? This can include costs for expenses or time.	☐Yes ☒ No If yes, provide details:
l. Could the relationship between the researcher/ supervisor and the participant be such that a participant might feel pressurised to take part? If 'Yes' please state where this issue is addressed in the application.	☐Yes ☒ No
m. Are you working under the remit of the Human Tissue Act 2004?	☐Yes ☒ No
n. Do you have an approved risk assessment form relating to this research?	☐Yes ☒ No

13. Proposed start and completion date
Indicate as precisely as possible: • When the study is due to commence. • What data will be collected, how and when. • The expected date of completion of the study. Ensure that your start date is at least five weeks after the submission deadline for the Ethics Sub-Committee meeting.

Collection of questionnaire data: 19th September 2022-19th October 2022
Collection of interview data: 1st November 2022 – 1st December 2022
Collection of focus group: 9th January 2022 – 31st January 2023

14. Sponsors/collaborators

a. Give names and details of sponsors or collaborators on the project. This does not include your supervisor(s) or St. Mary's University.

- Sponsor: An individual or organisation who provides financial resources or some other support for a project.
- Collaborator: An individual or organisation who works on the project as a recognised contributor by providing advice, data or another form of support.

b. Explain their roles in the research.

All Hallows Scholarship provides for tuition fees but does not control the topic of the research.

15. Other Research Ethics Committee Approval

Please indicate whether:

- additional approval is required or has already been obtained (e.g. an NHS Research Ethics Committee).
- approval has previously been given for any element of this research by the University Ethics Sub-Committee.

Please also note which code of practice / professional body you have consulted for your project.

Non-applicable

16. Purpose of the study

In lay language, provide a brief introduction to the background and rationale for your study. Ensure you cite sources/previous research for any assertions that you make, where necessary ***[150 word limit]***

At present, there is minimal research relating to character education within the Catholic education system in England and Wales. It is therefore of keen interest within this project to address this gap in existing research with a specific focus on evaluating the holistic impact of Catholic Character Education on the formation of children in Catholic primary schools in England. There has been a recent national insurgence in research into character development. This renewed attention to Character Education led to its explicit inclusion in recent educational policy. This project will explore, through a multiple case study design, how Catholic primary schools promote virtue literacy through an examination of caught, taught and sought approaches to character development. The data collection will be based on a mixed methods approach, using predominantly qualitative data (interviews and focus groups). There will also be quantitative data (questionnaires).

17. Study design/methodology

In lay language, provide details of:
a. The design of the study (qualitative/quantitative questionnaires etc.)
b. The proposed methods of data collection (what you will do, when you will do this, how you will do this and the nature of tests).
c. The requirement of the participant i.e. the extent of their commitment and how much of their time will need to be given to data collection. Consider using charts or diagrams/illustrations to aid clarity.
d. Details of where the research/testing will take place, including country.
e. State whether the materials/procedures you are using are original, or the intellectual property of a third party. If the materials/procedures are original, describe any pre-testing you have done or will do to ensure that they are effective. Provide any surveys or interview questions and name the platform you will use for any online questions e.g. Jisc Online Surveys.

a. This study will take a mixed methods approach utilising quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
b. The proposed methods of data collection will include quantitative closed question questionnaires for children in Year 6 i.e. 11 years old and parents) qualitative semi-structured interviews (senior leaders, teachers and Chair/Foundation Governor) and focus groups (children).
c. Jisc online questionnaires will take 20 minutes to complete. One-to-one Interviews will be at least 40 – 60 minutes. Focus groups will last up to 30 minutes.
d. Research will take place on site in the case study schools in the UK. Confidential meeting rooms will be designated for this purpose.

e. The research instruments will be original to my study (please see draft questionnaire, schedule of questions for semi-structured interviews and focus groups **attached.** A pilot study will be conducted to test the instruments.

18. Participants

Please mention:
a. The number of participants you are recruiting and their specific age or sex. Justify your sample size.
b. How they will be recruited and chosen.
c. The inclusion criteria
d. The exclusion criteria.
e. For internet studies, clarify how you will verify the age of the participants.
f. If the research is taking place in a school or organisation then include (or forward later) their written agreement for the research to be undertaken.
g. State any connection you may have with any organisation you are recruiting from, for example, employment.

a. In each of the three schools, data will be collected from one Year 6 cohort i.e. up to 32 children (online questionnaire), focus groups of 6 children, focus group of up to 4 parents and 3 interviews with senior leaders and teachers. Therefore, each school will have 45 participants in total, so the total for participants overall will be 3 schools x 45 participants = 135 overall. This is a feasible sample size which represents all the stakeholders in the school community and gives voice to all. This is also manageable for me as a sole researcher in terms of data collection and analysis.
b. The sample will be a purposive one as participants must work or be a current pupil in, or a parent/carer of a pupil in one of four case study schools.
c. The inclusion criteria concern participants with knowledge of character education within their educational setting. They will be representative of the school community but not the general population. There will be no inclusion criteria related to the adult participants related to age, gender, experience, ethnicity or religion. Child participants will be drawn from Year 6 because of their level of maturity and ability to articulate their understanding of character education.
d. In terms of exclusion criteria, younger children will not be included due to manageability of sample size as well their ability to articulate their understanding of this complex topic. Those of the general population are excluded due to need for knowledge of the research topic in a particular educational setting.
e. For the online Jisc Questionnaire to parents, they will have to tick a box to confirm they are aged over 18 to continue to the survey. Children will complete the form using computers supervised by a responsible adult who can verify they are in Year 6 i.e. aged 10 or 11 years.

f. Please find written agreement letters attached from primary schools.
g. At one of the case study schools, I am employed as a member of the senior leadership team.

19. Consent

If you have any exclusion criteria, ensure that your Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet clearly makes participants aware that their data may or may not be used.
a. Are there any incentives/pressures which may make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part? If so, explain and clarify why this needs to be done.
b. Will any of the participants be from any of the following groups?

- Children under 18
- Participants with learning disabilities
- Participants suffering from dementia
- Other vulnerable groups.

c. If any of the above apply, state whether the researcher/investigator holds a current DBS certificate (undertaken within the last 3 years). A copy of the DBS must be supplied **separately from** the application.
d. Provide details on how consent will be obtained (e.g. written/online) and how long participants will have to read the Information Sheet before consenting. This includes consent from all necessary persons e.g. participants, guardians etc.

a. There are no incentives or pressures which would make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part. Participation will be by invitation and voluntary.
b.S ome of the participants in the study are under 18. They are Year 6 pupils (aged 10 or 11 years) in the schools which are part of the case study.
c. The researcher has a current DBS certificate (See certificate number and date of issue) DBS Certificate No: 001789995059 Date of Issue: 18.7.2022
d. Written consent will be obtained from all participants in the case study. This includes the individual **pupils in the focus group as well as their parents/carers. In addition, the parents/carers** who participate in a focus group will also be asked to provide consent. It will also include written consent from the **teachers and leaders who will be interviewed**. Written consent will also be obtained from the pupils who will engage in the electronic questionnaires by reading the information and ticking a consent box on page 1 before proceeding to the questionnaire. Participants will be given two weeks to read the information sheet before consent is required.

20. Risks and benefits of research/activity
a. Are there any potential risks or adverse effects (e.g. injury, pain, discomfort, distress, changes to lifestyle) associated with this study? If so provide details, including information on how these will be minimised. Consider any risk there may be to the researcher as well as the participants. b. Identify any risks / effects which will be difficult to completely eliminate or minimise. c. Does the study involve any invasive procedures? If so, confirm that the researchers or collaborators have appropriate training and are competent to deliver these procedures. Please note that invasive procedures also include the use of deceptive procedures in order to obtain information. d. Will individual/group interviews/questionnaires include anything that may be sensitive or upsetting? If so, clarify why this information is necessary (and if applicable, any prior use of the questionnaire/interview). e. Describe how you would deal with any adverse reactions participants might experience. Discuss any adverse reaction that might occur and the actions that will be taken in response by you, your supervisor or some third party (explain why a third party is being used for this purpose). f. Are there any benefits to the participant or for the organisation taking part in the research?
a. There are no potential risks or adverse effects anticipated as the nature of the study does not concern anything sensitive or personal. b. There are no identified risks or effects of the research activity. c. There are no identified invasive procedures involved with the research activity. d. There will be no sensitive or upsetting content to the questionnaires, focus groups or interview schedules. Questions will be prepared which are respectful and sensitive for all participants and will not intend to cause any distress or upset. e. An anticipated adverse reaction could be that a participant/s chooses to withdraw from the research activity, as it will be made clear from the outset that they have the right to withdraw at any point in the study and participation is entirely voluntary. This will be respected as the choice of the participant and there will be no consequence or adverse effect as a result. Pupils will be informed that they can receive support from any member of teaching or pastoral staff. Staff will be informed that they can contact their designated wellbeing lead in the staff for support or the Staff Welfare Team. f. The intended benefits of this research to participants are to enhance the formation of pupils through the provision for character education in primary schools. Schools that participated in the study will receive a summary of findings which may benefit their school in relation to the field of study.

21. Confidentiality, privacy and data protection
a. What steps will be taken to ensure participants' confidentiality? b. How will data, particularly personal information, will be stored e.g. using MS Teams or One Drive (please state that all electronic data will be stored on St. Mary's University servers). c. If there is a possibility of publication, state that you will keep the data for a period of 10 years. d. How you will identify participants who request their data be withdrawn, such that you can still maintain the confidentiality of theirs and others' data? e. Do you have a data management plan? If so, please attach. f. How do you plan to store the data once the project has ended (for example, transferring it to your supervisor's One Drive)? g. State that data will be stored and handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations brought in under the Data Protection Act 2018. h. Who will have access to the data (normally yourself and your supervisor)? i. Will the published results (e.g. in a dissertation, thesis, journal article or conference presentation) include information which may identify people or places? j. If so, how will the persons or places (e.g. organisation) be made aware of this in advance?
a. All participants will remain anonymous - names will not be recorded. The online questionnaires will be identified by a number instead of names. b. All electronic data will be stored on St. Mary's University servers c. Data will be stored on supervisor's St. Mary's One Drive. General Data Protection Regulations brought in under the Data Protection Act 2018 will be followed. In the event of any potential future publication, the data collected will be stored safely and securely for a period of 10 years. This will include password protected computers and locked filing cabinets. d. Participants will be given a number so that their contribution is anonymous so that it can be withdrawn at a later date. For questionnaires, this will be a unique identifier code on completion of the questionnaire given to participants and for interviews, I will have the key of codes table to remove interview data as necessary. e. Data management plan - see Gantt research chart

Gantt research chart:

	ITEM	Start	Finish	Duration (days)
1.	Pilot questionnaire and focus group questions	15/6/22	30/6/22	15
2.	Analysis of pilot study - rewrite focus group questions	1/7/22	14/7/22	14
4.	Collection of questionnaire data	19/9/22	19/10/22	30
5.	Collection of interview data	1/11/22	1/12/22	30
6.	Collection of focus group	9/1/22	31/1/23	22

f. Data will be stored on my St. Mary's OneDrive during my PhD and transferred to my PhD supervisor's MS OneDrive upon completion of my study.
g. Data will be stored and handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations brought in under the Data Protection Act 2018.
h. Only myself and my supervisors will have access to the data.
i. The published results will anonymise the identity of the case study schools as well as the names of all participants
j. The participants will be informed of this in advance as part of the consent agreement.

22. Feedback to participants

Please give details of how feedback will be given to participants:
a. As a minimum, it would normally be expected for feedback to be offered to participants in an acceptable format, e.g. a summary of findings appropriately written.
b. Do you intend to provide feedback to any other individual(s) or organisation(s)? If so, what form this would take.

a. Feedback will be given to participant schools as an appropriately written summary of findings.
b. A written summary of key findings in the form of a research report paper will be made available to Catholic dioceses in England and Wales

Appendix II. St. Mary's University, Twickenham - Ethical Approval Letter

St Mary's University Twickenham London

03 October 2022

Dear Kerry

I am writing to confirm that your application for ethical approval of your research enquiry has been approved at Level 2.

Researcher's name: Kerry MacFarlane

Regnum: 702368

Title of project: To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of children in primary schools in England?

Supervisor: Prof John Lydon / Dr Caroline Healy

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

M Mihovilović

Dr Mary Mihovilović
Institute of Education Ethics Sub-Committee Representative

St Mary's University, Waldegrave Road, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, London TW1 4SX
Switchboard 020 8240 4000, Fax 020 8240 4255, www.stmarys.ac.uk

St Mary's University, Twickenham. A company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales under number 5977277
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Appendix III. Permission Letters from Case Study Schools

[redacted]

Joyfully, unique in Jesus' family, we learn to use our special gifts to love, serve and make the world a better place.

Professor John Lydon
Institute of Education
St Mary's University
Twickenham
London TW1 4SX

4th July 2022

Dear Professor Lydon,

Re: Permission to complete research fieldwork for Doctoral Degree

Please accept this letter as confirmation that [redacted] has given permission to Kerry Macfarlane to base her research study at our school. This study is part of her research examining 'To what extent, and in what ways, does character education impact upon the formation of children in Catholic primary schools in England?

I understand that the school will be anonymised; all information will be securely stored during the time of the research or will be kept for ten years for publications purposes; all data will remain confidential at all times and the outcomes will be summarised for us.

We grant permission voluntarily and are aware of the school's right to withdraw from the study at any point during the research process.

We look forward to participating in this research project.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Headteacher: [redacted]

Professor John Lydon
Institute of Education
St Mary's University
Twickenham
London TW1 4SX

15/07/2022

Dear Professor Lydon,

Re: Permission to complete research fieldwork for Doctoral Degree

Please accept this letter as confirmation that [redacted] has given permission to Kerry Macfarlane to base her research study at our school. This study is part of her research examining 'To what extent, and in what ways, does character education impact upon the formation of children in Catholic primary schools in England?

I understand that the school will be anonymised; all information will be securely stored during the time of the research or will be kept for ten years for publications purposes; all data will remain confidential at all times and the outcomes will be summarised for us.

We grant permission voluntarily and are aware of the school's right to withdraw from the study at any point during the research process.

We look forward to participating in this research project.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]
Headteacher

Ofsted Outstanding 2009 2010

[redacted]

IN CORDE IESU

[redacted]

Professor John Lydon
Institute of Education
St Mary's University
Twickenham
London TW1 4SX

27/06/22

Dear Professor Lydon,

Re: Permission to complete research fieldwork for Doctoral Degree

Please accept this letter as confirmation that [redacted] has given permission to Kerry Macfarlane to base her research study at our school. This study is part of her research examining 'To what extent, and in what ways, does character education impact upon the formation of children in Catholic primary schools in England?

I understand that the school will be anonymised; all information will be securely stored during the time of the research or will be kept for ten years for publications purposes; all data will remain confidential at all times and the outcomes will be summarised for us.

We grant permission voluntarily and are aware of the school's right to withdraw from the study at any point during the research process.

We look forward to participating in this research project.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Appendix IV. Participant Information Sheet for Parent/Carer Focus Group

Title of Research Project: **To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England?**

My PhD thesis research study, which is being completed at St. Mary's University, London, following ethical approval, will be focused on to what extent to which Catholic character education contributes to the formation of pupils in Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Portsmouth. It aims to seek perspectives from school leaders and teachers, as well as pupils and parents. The purpose of the research is to enhance the formation of pupils through character education, providing recommendations for Catholic primary schools on how to develop their distinctive provision.

An executive summary of the findings will be available to all participants of the school, principal/headteacher and governors, so that the results may support future planning and provision for character education within Catholic primary schools in the UK. A copy of the completed thesis will be stored in St. Mary's University Open Research Archive (SORA). Data will be stored safely for 10 years as material may be published from this research.

You have been invited to take part voluntarily as a parent/carer of a child in the school, in which the research will take place, after being provided with this Participant Information Sheet and an Individual Consent Statement, that you must agree to by ticking a box, before participating in the focus group. If you agree to take part in the project, this research take about 30-45 minutes on the school site. All information provided will be anonymous and remain strictly private and confidential and will be stored securely for 10 years for publication purposes.

You are invited to participate voluntarily but have the right to withdraw from this research study at any point. If you experience an adverse reaction during the completion of the focus group, you should stop immediately.

I look forward to you participating in my project but if you have any further questions, you can contact me at 702368@live.stmarys.ac.uk or Professor John Lydon, my thesis supervisor at St. Mary's University in Twickenham, London, john.lydon@stmarys.ac.uk

Appendix V. Participant Information Sheet for Semi-structured Interviews (Staff)

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Title of Research Project: **To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England?**

My PhD thesis research study, which is being completed at St. Mary's University, London, following ethical approval, will be focused on to what extent to which Catholic character education contributes to the formation of pupils in Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Portsmouth. It aims to seek perspectives from school leaders and teachers, as well as pupils and parents. The purpose of the research is to enhance the formation of pupils through character education, providing recommendations for Catholic primary schools on how to develop their distinctive provision.

An executive summary of the findings will be available to all participants of the school, principal/headteacher and governors, so that the results may support future planning and provision for character education within Catholic primary schools in the UK. A copy of the completed thesis will be stored in St. Mary's University Open Research Archive (SORA). Data will be stored safely for 10 years as material may be published from this research.

You have been invited to take part voluntarily as an employee of the school in which the research will take place, after being provided with this Participant Information Sheet and an Individual Consent Statement, that you must agree to by ticking a box, before taking part in the interview.

If you agree to take part in the project, this research will be in a format of a short interview (40 minutes maximum). This interview will take place on a conveniently agreed date and video conferencing which will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be saved securely on my St. Mary's OneDrive during the completion of the project and transferred to my supervisor's St. Mary's OneDrive following completion of my PhD and stored safely for possible publication purposes. After 10 years, all digital data and transcriptions will be deleted permanently. All identifiable information provided will be anonymised and remain strictly private and confidential and will be destroyed safely and securely following publication.

You have the right to not participate in the interview and withdraw from this research study at any point. If you wish to withdraw your data subsequently, please contact me

or my supervisors and we will withdraw your data by referring to our key of anonymised codes for participants. If you experience an adverse reaction during the completion of the interview, you can stop immediately. You can contact your designated wellbeing lead in the staff for support or the staff welfare team.

I look forward to you participating in my project but if you have any further questions, you can contact me at 702368@live.stmarys.ac.uk or Professor John Lydon, my thesis supervisor at St. Mary's University in Twickenham, London, john.lydon@stmarys.ac.uk

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET TO KEEP TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

Appendix VI. Participant Consent Form

Name of Participant: (Print full name)…….

Title of Research Project: To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England?

Main investigator and contact details: Kerry Ann Macfarlane 702368@live.stmarys.ac.uk
Members of the research team: N/A independent PhD study
Supervisor(s): Prof. John Lydon john.lydon@stmarys.ac.uk / Dr Caroline Healy caroline.healy@stmarys.ac.uk

I agree to undertake in the above research. I have read the Participation Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

1. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
2. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
3. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
4. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant: (print)…….

Signed:……. Date:…….

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator via email to Kerry Ann Macfarlane 702368@live.stmarys.ac.uk

Title of Project: To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England?

Participant Withdrawal from Research

I WISH TO WITHDRAW AS A PARTICIPANT FROM THIS RESEARCH STUDY WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT.

Name of participant: ……

(print): ……

Signed: …… Date: ……

Appendix VII. Pupil Information Sheet and Consent Form

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Catholic Character Education Project - Information for Pupils

Dear Year 6 Pupils,

About me
My name is Kerry Macfarlane and I am a teacher in a primary school in a different area. I am collecting some information to be used in a project which I hope you can help me with.

What is the project about?
As part of the project, I would like to find out more about character education and your school is helping me to do this. I would like to ask you some questions about your ideas and opinions on the topic of character education. There are no right or wrong answers and this is **NOT** a test.

What will happen?
During our group discussion, we will have a conversation about this topic in a small group with some other Year 6 pupils. I will make some notes on what you say to help me to remember it afterwards.

Can I choose to take part?

Yes, it is up to you if you would like to take part or not. Your parent/carer will also be asked to complete a form to give you permission to take part. If you change your mind at any time, and no longer wish to take part, then please let either your teacher or myself know and your parent/carer.
If you would like to take part, please fill in the form below.
Thank you.

……

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Year 6 Focus Group Discussion – Pupil Consent Form

Name: …… Class: ……

Signed: …… Date: ……

Appendix VIII. Parental Consent Form Template for Pupil Focus Group

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Name of Child: ……

Name of Parent/Carer ……

Title of the project: To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England?

Main investigator and contact details: Kerry Ann Macfarlane
Email: 702368@live.stmarys.ac.uk
Members of the research team: N/A Independent PhD study

1. I agree to my child taking part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my child's role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw my child from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I and my child provides will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I and my child have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of Parent/Carer: (print)……

Signed…….. Date……

St Mary's University Twickenham London

If you wish to withdraw your child from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: To what extent, and in what ways, does Catholic character education contribute to the formation of pupils in primary schools in England?

I WISH TO WITHDRAW MY CHILD FROM THIS STUDY

Name of Child:

……

Name of Parent/Carer: (print) ……

Signed:…… Date: ……..

Appendix IX. Coding Table

1. Perceptions of formation
1.1 Understanding of the nature of Catholic character education **1.2 Integration of formation into school mission/vision** **1.3 Understanding the language of virtue**
2. Influences on formation
2.1 Caught character - link to mission/vision, include the physical environment 2.1.1 Factors which influence formation in the family 2.1.2 Factors which influence formation at school 2.1.2.1 Modelling of Christian character **2.2 Taught character** 2.2.1 Christian practices/totality of school life i.e. whole school and class worship/Mass/Sacraments 2.2.2 Explicit curriculum for Catholic character education 2.2.3 Wider curriculum - role of Catholic Social Teaching on Catholic formation **2.3 Sought character** 2.3.1 Pupil Voice - agency, empowerment 2.3.2 Pupil Leadership - social action, volunteering, autonomous pursuit of service
3. Contemporary challenges for character education
3.1 Over-reliance on character caught 3.2 **Lack of explicit character curriculum provision**, incl. application of CST 3.3 **Translation of virtue knowledge to virtue practice** 3.4 **Influence of media technologies** on aspirations/relationship with God 3.5 **Composition of Catholic school community** 3.5.1 Professional training for staff and ECTs in relation to Catholic character 3.6 **Evaluation of character education**
4. Opportunities for character education
4.1 **Development of Christian citizenship** 4.1.1 Partnership between school, parish and community 4.2 **Development of social conscience/inspiration for social action** 4.3 **Promotion of encounter and dialogue** - celebration of cultural and religious diversity

Appendix X. Quantitative Data: Year 6 Pupil Survey Template

Page 1 of the pupil survey will include information about the project and a consent box to be ticked before proceeding to the questionnaire.

Section 1 **1.1 About you**						
Gender *Please tick a box*	Female		Male		Prefer not to say	

Section 2 **2.1 Taught character**					
Please tick one box for each of the statements below		**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
2.1.1	I have grown in my knowledge and understanding of Gospel virtues				
2.1.2	At school, my learning about Gospel virtues helps to strengthen my faith				
2.1.3	At school, my learning helps me to think and question more deeply about what is happening in the world around me				
2.1.4	At school, I learn about what social justice means and why it is important				
2.1.5	At school, I learn about role models of virtue				
2.1.6	At school, I learn how to develop my ability to reflect on my moral choices				
2.2 Caught character					
2.2.1	My family has a positive impact on my character development				
2.2.2	The school has high expectations of behaviour				

2.2.3	The school mission statement helps to guide my moral choices				
2.2.4	My teachers are an example of the character of Christ				
2.2.5	My teachers have a positive impact on my character development				
2.2.6	The relationships between teachers at my school provides an example of how to treat others with love and respect				
2.2.6	The school provides a range of extra-curricular activities for all children				
2.3 Sought character					
2.3.1	The school listens to and values my ideas and opinions				
2.3.2	The school provides opportunities for pupil leadership				
2.3.3	My learning has helped me to want to serve others for the common good				
2.3.4	My learning inspires me to put my faith into action, shown in the choices I make				
2.3.5	My learning inspires me to want to make the world a better place				

Appendix XI. Quantitative Data for Case Studies

Case Study 1: Coastal School

As shown in Figure A1, Coastal School survey results clearly show that there are high levels of agreement among participants (*n* = 25) in Coastal School in a consistently positive direction across all three dimensions of character: taught, caught and sought. This aligned with findings from the qualitative data to reflect the view that Coastal School as a highly developed model of character education.

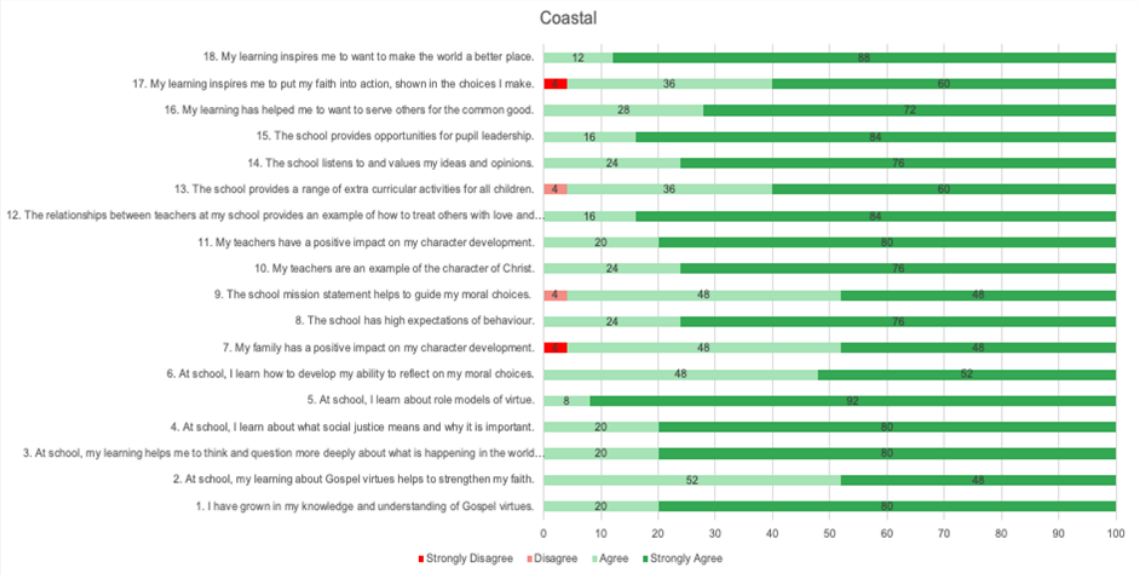

Figure A1. Year 6 Pupil Survey Responses from Coastal School

Coastal School - Taught character

Survey results for taught character unanimously showed high levels of positive agreement across all six questions. 100% of pupil participants either strongly agreed or agreed with all six statements within the category of taught character, as shown in the table below (See Table A1 below). The survey results directly supported the outcomes of the qualitative data, highlighting the strength and impact of Coastal School's explicit curriculum for character education and wider curriculum design encompassing Catholic Social Teaching. This included the school's provision for the development of pupils' virtue literacy and social justice through an emphasis on explicit virtue study and the development of critical thinking skills, as well as opportunities for moral reflection.

Table A1. Responses from Coastal School for Taught Character

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1. I have grown in my knowledge and understanding of Gospel virtues	80%	20%	0%	0%
Q2. At school, my learning about Gospel virtues helps to strengthen my faith	48%	52%	0%	0%
Q3. At school, my learning helps me to think and question more deeply about what is happening in the world around me	80%	20%	0%	0%
Q4. At school, I learn about what social justice means and why it is important	80%	20%	0%	0%
Q5. At school, I learn about role models of virtue	92%	8%	0%	0%
Q6. At school, I learn how to develop my ability to reflect on my moral choices	52%	48%	0%	0%

Coastal School - Caught character

In the area of caught character, pupil participants' responses to all seven questions showed highly positive levels of agreement with minimal variation, reflecting pupils' perception of the impact of the Catholic culture and ethos of Coastal School on their character formation (see Table A2 below). For all seven questions, the pupil participants' responses showed high levels of agreement in the domain of caught character which reflects the strong Catholic ethos and culture of Coastal School. These outcomes were

congruent with the outcomes of the qualitative data, particularly in terms of the perception of senior leader participants regarding the importance and impact of role modelling in the inculcation of virtue.

Data showed that 96% to 100% of pupils either strongly agreed or agreed with all survey questions. There was minimal disagreement indicated by 4% of participants (represented by 1 pupil) who strongly disagreed in relation to question 7, and 1 pupil disagreed with questions 9 and 11. Data does not indicate if this was the same pupil in each case. No other pupil participant responses indicated disagreement.

Table A2. Responses from Coastal School for Caught character

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q7. My family has a positive impact on my character development	48%	48%	0%	4%
Q8. The school has high expectations of behaviour	76%	24%	0%	0%
Q9. The school mission statement helps to guide my moral choices	48%	48%	4%	0%
Q10. My teachers are an example of the character of Christ	76%	24%	0%	0%
Q11. My teachers have a positive impact on my character development	80%	20%	0%	0%
Q12. The relationships between teachers at my school provides an example of how to treat others with love and respect	84%	16%	0%	0%
Q13. The school provides a range of extracurricular activities for all children	60%	36%	4%	0%

Coastal School - Sought character

Pupil survey data clearly showed that there were also high levels of agreement from pupil participants regarding the domain of sought character. Data demonstrated that 96-100% of pupils strongly agreed or agreed with the statements in a positive direction. Only 4% of participants (represented by 1 pupil) strongly disagreed in relation to question 17. No other pupil participant responses indicated disagreement (see Table A3 below). The survey outcomes highlight the impact of Coastal School's provision for character education in relation to sought character, inspiring children to translate their learning into practice through social action to serve others and the common good. This includes the impact of pupil leadership opportunities provided by the school as well as the influence of children's explicit learning in relation to virtue study and social justice. The pupil survey outcomes align with the outcomes of qualitative data, in particular, with the views articulated by both senior leader participants' responses, as well as reflected in the pupil focus group data.

In summary, the Year 6 pupil survey outcomes demonstrated high levels of agreement in a positive direction across the three domains of character in Coastal School - taught, caught and sought. Data outcomes were harmonious with qualitative data findings and served to support and strengthen the authenticity and reliability of those findings. It was notable that there was consistency between the quantitative and qualitative data outcomes in relation to Coastal School.

Table A3. Responses from Coastal School for Sought Character

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q14. The school listens to and values my ideas and opinions	76%	24%	0%	0%
Q15. The school provides opportunities for pupil leadership	84%	16%	0%	0%
Q16. My learning has helped me to want to serve others for the common good	72%	28%	0%	0%
Q17. My learning inspires me to put my faith into action, shown in the choices I make	60%	36%	0%	4%
Q18. My learning inspires me to want to make the world a better place	12%	88%	0%	0%

Case Study 2: Urban School

As shown in Figure A2, survey results clearly show that there are higher levels of agreement among pupil participants (*n* = 28) in Urban School in a positive direction for both taught and sought character. However, there were higher levels of disagreement in relation to aspects of caught character. It was significant to note that the pupil survey outcomes with regard to caught character demonstrated some inconsistency with the qualitative findings across all data sets, including the pupil focus group outcomes.

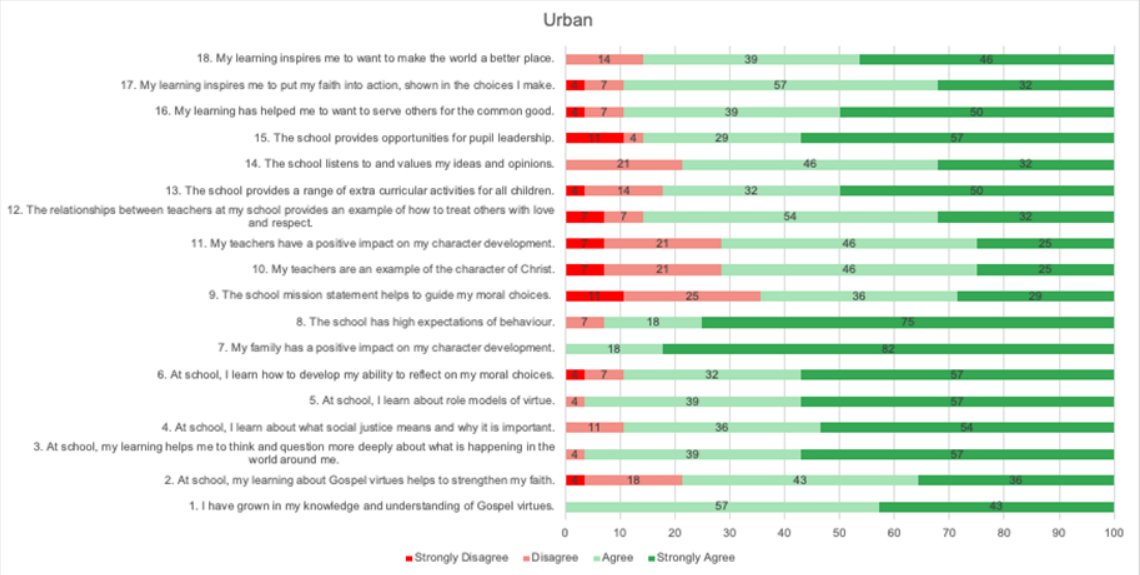

Figure A2. Year 6 Pupil Survey Responses from Urban School

Urban School - Taught character

Survey results demonstrated that pupils perceived taught character to be impactful on their character development in the majority of areas. As shown in Table A4 below, data showed high levels of positive agreement (80% of participants or above selected 'agree' or 'strongly agree') with the exception of Question 2, which related to pupils' perception of the impact of learning about Gospel virtues on faith formation. 96% of pupil participants strongly agreed or agreed that their learning supports their capacity for critical thinking about real world issues and involves role model study. 89% of pupils strongly agreed or agreed that they understand the meaning and significance of social justice.

It was significant that 100% of pupils either strongly agreed or agreed that they had developed their knowledge and understanding of Gospel virtues, but this was not reflected in participant responses in terms of the relationship between the teaching of Gospel virtues and the growth of faith. Although this observation is speculative, it could

be inferred that if Urban School had an explicitly taught curriculum for Catholic character, results may have shown greater correlation in this area.

Table A4. Responses from Urban School for Taught Character

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1. I have grown in my knowledge and understanding of Gospel virtues	43%	57%	0%	0%
Q2. At school, my learning about Gospel virtues helps to strengthen my faith	36%	43%	18%	3%
Q3. At school, my learning helps me to think and question more deeply about what is happening in the world around me	57%	39%	4%	0%
Q4. At school, I learn about what social justice means and why it is important	54%	36%	10%	0%
Q5. At school, I learn about role models of virtue	57%	39%	4%	0%
Q6. At school, I learn how to develop my ability to reflect on my moral choices	57%	32%	7%	4%

Urban School - Caught character

As shown in Table A5 below, survey data demonstrated that 100% of pupil participants strongly agreed or agreed that the role of family was a positive contributor to their character formation. 93% of pupil participants strongly agreed or agreed that the school has high expectations of behaviour. There were, however, higher levels of disagreement in relation to aspects of caught character, particularly with regard to the impact of the school mission statement and the role of teachers on their character formation. This finding was inconsistent with qualitative outcomes across Urban School data sets in this study, including pupil focus group outcomes.

Table A5. Responses from Urban School for Caught Character

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q7. My family has a positive impact on my character development	82%	18%	0%	0%
Q8. The school has high expectations of behaviour	75%	18%	7%	0%
Q9. The school mission statement helps to guide my moral choices	29%	36%	25%	10%
Q10. My teachers are an example of the character of Christ	25%	47%	21%	7%
Q11. My teachers have a positive impact on my character development	25%	47%	21%	7%
Q12. The relationships between teachers at my school provides an example of how to treat others with love and respect	32%	54%	7%	7%
Q13. The school provides a range of extracurricular activities for all children	50%	32%	14%	4%

Urban School - Sought Character

Data demonstrated that sought character is a strength of character education in Urban School. As shown in Table A6 below, 89% of pupil participants strongly agreed or agreed that their learning inspired them to put their faith into action and pursue service in the interests of the common good. This highlights the impact of the role of pupil leadership in Urban School which is reflected synonymously across data from other participant groups. Despite the positive levels of agreement in relation to pupil leadership, there was a degree of inconsistency in relation to pupil voice. It was notable that 21% of pupils disagreed that the school listens to and values their ideas and opinions.

Table A6. Responses from Urban School for Sought Character

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q14. The school listens to and values my ideas and opinions	32%	47%	21%	0%
Q15. The school provides opportunities for pupil leadership	57%	29%	3%	11%
Q16. My learning has helped me to want to serve others for the common good	50%	39%	7%	4%
Q17. My learning inspires me to put my faith into action, shown in the choices I make	32%	57%	7%	4%
Q18. My learning inspires me to want to make the world a better place	46%	40%	14%	0%

Case Study 3: Semi-Rural School

Pupil survey outcomes in Semi-Rural School (*n* = 32) demonstrated high levels of positive agreement in aspects of taught, caught and sought character. However, it was interesting to note that there were higher levels of disagreement in relation to some aspects of caught character, particularly regarding pupil perceptions of the impact of the school mission statement and the role of teachers on their character formation (as shown in Figure A3). This finding was replicated in Urban School which was inconsistent with qualitative outcomes across data sets in both schools, including pupil focus group outcomes. However, levels of positive agreement within caught character also highlighted key areas of strength in Semi-Rural School including the quality of relationships, high expectations of behaviour and opportunities for pupil leadership.

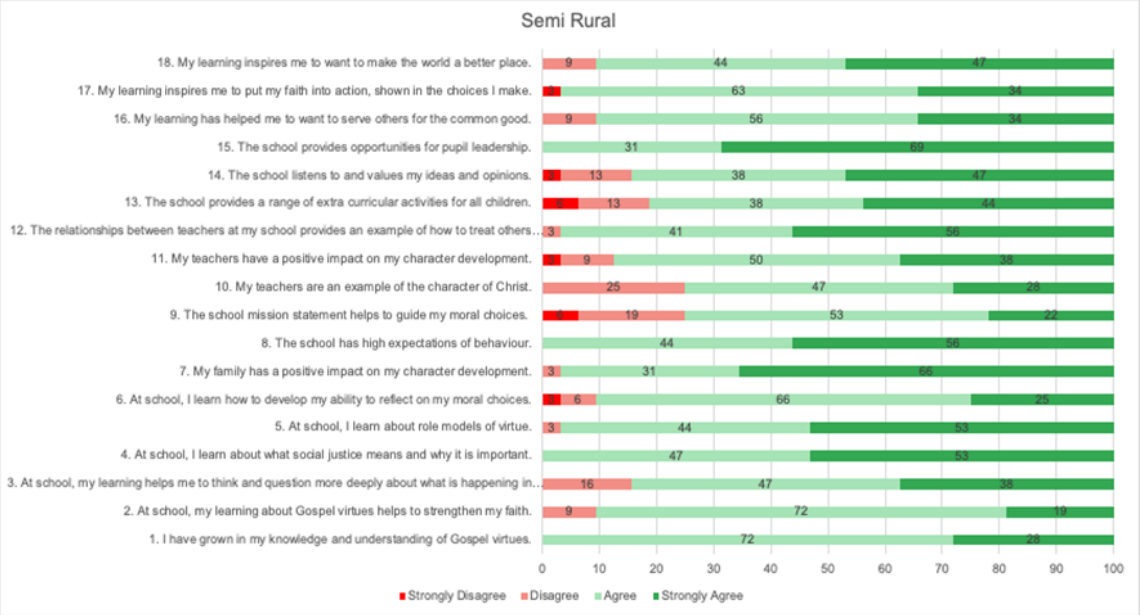

Figure A3. Year 6 Pupil Survey Responses from Semi-Rural School

Semi-Rural School - Taught character

As shown in Table A7 below, the majority of participants' responses indicate that levels of agreement among participants in Semi-Rural School in a positive direction for taught character. 100% of pupil participants strongly agreed or agreed that they had developed their knowledge and understanding of Gospel virtues, including learning about role models of virtue and had an understanding of social justice and its significance. Despite the absence of an explicit curriculum for character education, data outcomes demonstrate that one of the strengths of provision in Semi-Rural School was their distinctively Catholic approach to teaching and learning. 91% of pupil participants either strongly agreed or agreed that their virtue learning helped to strengthen their faith. Another area of strength in terms of taught provision related to pupils' views of the impact of their learning in developing their capacity and skills for moral reflection.

Table A7. Responses from Semi-Rural School for Taught Character

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1. I have grown in my knowledge and understanding of Gospel virtues	28%	72%	0%	0%
Q2. At school, my learning about Gospel virtues helps to strengthen my faith	19%	72%	9%	0%
Q3. At school, my learning helps me to think and question more deeply about what is happening in the world around me	38%	47%	15%	0%
Q4. At school, I learn about what social justice means and why it is important	53%	47%	0%	0%
Q5. At school, I learn about role models of virtue	53%	44%	3%	0%
Q6. At school, I learn how to develop my ability to reflect on my moral choices	25%	66%	6%	3%

Semi-Rural School - Caught character

As shown in Table A8 below, survey data demonstrated that 100% of pupil participants strongly agreed or agreed that the school has high expectations of behaviour. 97% of pupil participants strongly agreed or agreed that the role of family was a positive contributor to their character formation. 97% of pupil participants strongly agreed or agreed that the quality of relationships between teachers at the school provided an example of how to treat others. However, in response to Question 10, 25% of pupils disagreed that their teachers modelled behaviour on the example of Christ. It could be inferred here that pupils' responses reflected the complexity of the question. Pupils may not have had a clear conception of how Christ would be exemplified by their teachers through behaviour. Worthy of note here is that 97% of pupils agreed or strongly agreed that their teachers provided an example of how to treat others with love and respect.

88% of pupils felt that their teachers impacted positively on their character development.

Table A8. Responses from Semi-Rural School for Caught Character

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q7. My family has a positive impact on my character development	66%	31%	3%	0%
Q8. The school has high expectations of behaviour	56%	44%	0%	0%
Q9. The school mission statement helps to guide my moral choices	22%	53%	19%	6%
Q10. My teachers are an example of the character of Christ	28%	47%	25%	0%
Q11. My teachers have a positive impact on my character development	38%	50%	9%	3%
Q12. The relationships between teachers at my school provides an example of how to treat others with love and respect	56%	41%	3%	0%
Q13. The school provides a range of extracurricular activities for all children	44%	38%	13%	5%

Semi-Rural School - Sought character

Aspects of sought character were identified as an area of strength in Semi-Rural School which demonstrated the impact of pupils' learning upon their character formation (see Table A9 below). The highest levels of positive agreement (strongly agreed or agreed) were in relation to pupil leadership and the translation of virtue learning into aspiration to practice virtue. 100% of pupil participants strongly agreed or agreed that the school

provides opportunities for pupil leadership. 97% of pupils strongly agreed or agreed that their learning inspires virtue practice. 91% of pupil participants felt that their learning inspired service in the interests of the common good. 91% of participants also related their learning to an aspiration to make the world a better place.

Table A9. Responses from Semi-Rural School for Sought Character

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q14. The school listens to and values my ideas and opinions	47%	38%	13%	2%
Q15. The school provides opportunities for pupil leadership	69%	31%	0%	0%
Q16. My learning has helped me to want to serve others for the common good	35%	56%	9%	0%
Q17. My learning inspires me to put my faith into action, shown in the choices I make	34%	63%	0%	3%
Q18. My learning inspires me to want to make the world a better place	47%	44%	9%	0%

Appendix XII. Qualitative Data Presentation of Findings

Case Study 1: Coastal School

Senior Leader Interviews

Question 1: What is the distinctive nature of Catholic education?

School leaders expressed their understanding of the distinctive nature of Catholic education as fundamentally Christ-centred, based on deepening children's relationship with God. Leaders identified a range of themes in their explanations of the distinctiveness of Catholic education which have been categorised subsequently.

i) The pursuit of truth

School leaders described the distinctively Christian curriculum which transcends knowledge, centred on developing a relationship with Christ, empowering children to serve and contribute to society:

> A curriculum that draws you closer to Him and makes you more Christ-like...Catholic education is distinctive in the fact that at the heart of it, isn't knowledge - the heart of it is relationship. And, therefore, you can have a higher level of impact on others, the wider environment and community. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

In expressing the distinctive nature of Catholic education, the Headteacher specifically referred to the 'pursuit of truth' as synonymous with social justice in the context of the school's Catholic approach to the curriculum: 'The pursuit of truth is our social justice'.

When invited to expand upon the use of the term 'pursuit of truth', the Headteacher defined 'truth' as an illumination of injustices in our world which can be understood through developing a 'critical consciousness' in pupils throughout the curriculum through a See-Choose-Act methodology:

> A Catholic approach to a curriculum must value that through the curriculum, pupils can develop a critical consciousness grounded in their understanding and engagement with difficult histories and current topics. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The Headteacher expressed his belief that as part of the school's See-Choose-Act methodology, 'not only should children know about injustices, but they should feel it in their hearts and have the experience of acting upon it'. He described the key purpose of Catholic education to seek to 'deepen relationships with Christ, create an academic

learning environment aimed at the pursuit of truth (allowing open discussions where injustices are talked about, felt and acted upon)'. He went on to further explain his understanding of the 'pursuit of truth' as a Christian mission 'to shine a light on injustices, particularly where the most vulnerable are affected - all reflected in Gospel values' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

ii) Holistic development

One senior leader described the role of Catholic schools in children's holistic development. Providing support to parents in their responsibility for the academic, physical, spiritual, moral and religious education of their children, alongside the teachings of the Church, was described as central to the mission of the Catholic school:

> Catholic schools were established to support Catholic parents in their responsibility for the academic, physical, spiritual, moral and religious education of their children, with the teachings of the church. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

iii) Service to others to promote social justice

Senior leader participants believed that developing awareness and understanding of social justice was characteristic of character education as part of the distinctiveness of the Catholic school:

> Through Catholic character, we want to form children in the beliefs of the church and enable them to grow as citizens of the world who will go out and make a difference. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

The role of service was further emphasised in the context of the significance of gratitude:

> I think with education, with good character education, comes a desire to serve and to serve others and have gratitude for what they have in life. So, I think an important part of being Christian is to be thankful, be thankful and to serve others. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

Commitment to providing a preferential option for the poor was described as a key characteristic of the Catholic school: 'The distinctive nature of Catholic education, in my opinion, centres on the preferential option for the poor' (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School).

The Catholic school has a distinctive mission in terms of children's formation in the beliefs of the church and enabling them to grow as active and responsible citizens of the world. Responses from the school leaders emphasised the importance of nurturing a

desire to serve among children. Through generating an aspiration for social justice, children can gain a deeper sense of gratitude which is formative.

iv) Broader curriculum

In relation to extracurricular activities and character education, the Headteacher remarked: 'We have an obligation to create a stimulating learning environment, giving children wide experiences that they may not receive outside of school. And that particularly is in recreational, extracurricular activities' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

> Catholic education is distinctive in the fact that it goes through the whole curriculum, through everything that happens in school, including extracurricular and after-school wraparound care. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

The Headteacher described the strategic vision of the Catholic school curriculum as an obligation to provide a range of extracurricular opportunities to broaden and enrich the school's educational endeavour through a range of stimulating, multicultural experiences and recreational opportunities, such as through art, music, physical education and computing.

> We need to give them the best experience in Art and Culture, Music, Drama, PE and Computing. Unless we can give them a rich education in these areas, they may miss out on these experiences and appreciating other cultures. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

v) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Data demonstrated the school's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion which is woven into the curriculum and intended to reflect the school's culturally diverse community, as expressed by the Headteacher:

> We have a wide range of children and staff from different nationalities. We need to allow our children to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and around the school. Representation is very important.

The Headteacher expressed a link between the school's commitment to EDI and its mission for social justice:

> To me, that's part of social justice…they should believe that they too can make a difference in this world... to go on to reach their potential, have a voice, be listened to, and become leaders with integrity. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The Headteacher emphasised the importance of diverse representation as integral to the school's Christian vision and ethos, so that children and staff can identify and recognise their cultural backgrounds, as part of the school's agenda for social justice, affording 'dignity for all'.

Interview Question 2: What are the goals of character education in a Catholic school?

Responses from participants were categorised into three key areas: staff and pupil formation, knowledge of the Bible and becoming global citizens, outlined subsequently.

i) Staff and pupil formation

School leaders identified a direct correlation between character education and formation for both children and staff. The Headteacher describes the goals of character education as helping the school community in their journey to becoming joyful witnesses of Christ, 'to understand what He wants us to do, how He wants us to serve and live this life, and we're all on a journey with that. We want to be Christ's hands and feet and mouth in what we say, in what we do and how we feel. We do it with joy and we do it with happiness'.

According to the Headteacher, there are two goals of character education in a Catholic school: 'Ultimately we want to form the children, and we want them to build a deeper relationship with Christ and to participate and live fully in Christ.' He emphasises that character education is for the purpose of both student and staff formation: 'Ultimately, for our school, Catholic character education is about being more virtuous, we want the children to be more virtuous, we want the staff to be more virtuous, we want to be witnesses of Christ'. The Headteacher further articulated the goal of character education as 'a guide to Christian living, 'which helps with their moral compass' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

Another participant made a distinction between the goals of character education in a community school compared to that of a religious school:

> In a non-faith based [community] school, character education may focus on, for example, resilience…in a Catholic school, we would focus more on following Jesus' commandments and growing as virtuous people…Character education is therefore very important - that we support all our pupils in growing in the virtues… courage, humility, compassion, love, faith. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

There is an implication here that the participant has made a contrast between the categories of performance and moral virtues.

ii) Knowledge of the Bible

Knowledge of the Bible was referenced by the Inclusion Leader as an important part of character education in a Catholic school, but with an emphasis on the purpose of this knowledge to impact upon living a Christian life in its fullest sense: 'We want them to learn from his teachings and have a good knowledge of the Bible - but not just knowledge. We want the Bible to impact their everyday life - everyday living'. She went on to describe the importance of developing Christian practices so that they can be sustained by their faith:

> We want the children to leave with good practices so that they are reading the Bible and praying, so they can maintain that relationship and develop a healthy spiritual lifestyle. We want the children to be plugged into the church and to feel belonging in the church and within the Catholic, or other denomination Christian background. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

iii) Becoming global citizens

School leaders articulated the relationship between character education and the goal of supporting pupils to grow in virtue and become global citizens of the future:

> We want them to live lives to the full, to contribute towards the whole of society, to have the poor in the forefront of their minds and have a knowledge of who the poor are…not just those without money. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

It could be suggested that this participant infers here that as well as contributing to society, children need to be made aware of different types of poverty, not just economic poverty, as one of the goals of Catholic character education, which will be given fuller treatment in the subsequent chapter which provides an analysis of findings.

Direct reference was made to the relationship between developing children's virtue literacy as preparation for their development of global citizens:

> Catholic schools need to cultivate the four cardinal virtues, centred around supporting pupils to grow as virtuous people, so they leave school ready to live as global citizens following Jesus' commandment. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

School leaders emphasised the importance of character education in helping to prepare pupils to become global citizens of the future, following Jesus' commandment, with a desire to contribute to society with an awareness of poverty, in its many forms, and especially the disadvantaged.

Interview Question 3: Describe your understanding of 'formation'.

School leaders were able to confidently articulate their understanding of formation. Responses reflected the distinctive Catholic vision and mission of the school, as well as the importance of reflection as an integral part of Christian formation.

i) In relationship with Christ

Formation was defined as 'deepening our relationship with Christ' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

One school leader considered formation to be in terms of 'God as the potter and we are the clay…We are privileged to have a part and be his hands and feet…through sharing with others what God shared with us. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

Formation was described by the Deputy Headteacher as 'a lifelong process of growing closer to God'. Another senior leader emphasised the important role of prayer in formation as well as making time for spontaneity to encourage dialogue with one another, especially in times of need to share God's word with others. 'Learning and sharing what we've learned with others, praying with others, praying for others…that needs to be a priority. There needs to be time for it… Catholic schools need to be places where those kinds of conversations are going on at every level' (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School).

ii) Pursuit of truth

> Building a relationship with Christ and the pursuit of truth are the two key aspects of formation...When we're looking at social justice, we're particularly looking at the most vulnerable. Who in this world is not getting a fair deal? Ultimately, we want them to have justice. The Catholic Social Teaching principles are invaluable when understanding social justice and we are trying to understand how we can be part of that. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The Headteacher identified a link between formation and the 'pursuit of truth', which he synonymised with social justice for the most vulnerable, through the school's endeavours to understand and apply the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. The Headteacher referenced the use of a See-Choose-Act methodology here as part of the school's approach to social justice: 'We want to form pupils, but we also want to help them articulate their thoughts. We do this through a See-Choose-Act methodology'. The impact of character education could also be expressed through the vehicle of pupil voice; children should be able to articulate their beliefs and opinions and understanding of their own formation.

iii) Opportunity for reflection

One senior leader participant referred to the role of critical reflection in supporting formation through the development of phronesis: 'Ultimately, critical reflection leads to the development of practical wisdom and human flourishing' (Headteacher, Coastal School).

Another participant expressed the role of reflection in relation to their own personal formation journey, emphasising the importance of both reflexivity and receptivity:

> Being brought up as a Catholic I just accepted being Catholic - then through my life I've grown, as an RE leader and RE Inspector. I've grown in my understanding, and it's about taking time to reflect. I think there has to be a readiness to be formed. As I have grown in my life, I feel I have possibly grown closer to God by giving time to that. (Teresa, Deputy Head, Headteacher, Coastal School)

Interview Question 4: What is the role of the teacher in children's formation?

Participants articulated three areas to explain the role of the teacher in children's formation - modelling as an exemplar of virtue, the relationship between staff and pupil formation and how the curriculum itself serves to support formation.

i) Modelling

Leaders acknowledged the importance of the role of the teacher in children's formation through role modelling as witnesses to Christ. The Headteacher emphasised that modelling Christ's example is the responsibility of every staff member for Catholic character education to contribute to formation:

> The role of the teacher is vital. Every staff member in school is the teacher. It is not just the person who stands in that classroom, we are all witnesses to Christ. Children will listen to teachers who are witnesses and not necessarily listen to teachers who do not actually put what they say into action. Role modelling is a vital part of this. If staff are not practising this with each other and not showing good character education themselves, it doesn't matter how much we teach the children, it will not work. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The Inclusion Leader described this as 'living and modelling by example', and with awareness of one's own and each other's human imperfection: 'There is no perfect teacher, there is no perfect human. We will model our mistakes as well as we will model the things that we get right'.

Modelling Catholic character was expressed in an explicit sense through reading and studying the Bible and sharing sound subject knowledge and understanding in the teaching of Religious Education, as well as in Christian faith and practice:

> I think the children need to see you opening the Bible with them every day, praying with them, teaching these Christian practices is really important. It's important to prioritise the teaching of RE so that teachers have a good subject knowledge and there is a secure curriculum. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

This point is also articulated by another participant who emphasised how children learn from modelled virtue, particularly through observation of relationships:

> The role of the teacher in pupils' formation is key as a role model who lives out the Gospel virtues in their everyday interactions with colleagues, pupils and parents…Children learn from what they see. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School).

ii) Staff formation

Senior leaders advocated for the importance of staff formation and referenced the impact of this upon pupils' formation: 'It is important that staff understand the ethos of the school and are formed themselves in order to form pupils' (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School).

> It's the role model and the witnessing that's vital. Formation of staff is really important. They need to know what virtue looks like, have opportunities to practise it and they need to feel it as well. I cannot understate the importance of staff formation in order to have good character… We are all on a journey trying to deepen our relationship with Christ and trying to understand what He wants us to do, how he wants us to serve and live this life. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The Deputy Headteacher referred to the importance of readiness to be formed, reiterating that formation depends on the degree of receptivity of the person:

> This happens to all of us to varying degrees throughout our life…it is a journey of growth in getting to know Jesus better. Senior leaders can offer formation to all staff and should do so. How receptive staff are to this is individual and depends on many factors. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

Modelling Christian character was described as a requirement of every staff member, not exclusively teachers, so that there is a visible congruence in both words and actions. Formation of staff was regarded as significant in order that staff understand how to grow

as witnesses and to have opportunities to practise and model virtue. In this sense, character education is implicit through the demonstration of virtue woven into school ethos and culture, visibly seen through relationships between staff and relationships between staff and pupils, as well as with parents.

iii) Teaching and learning

One senior leader acknowledged the impact of teaching and learning on children's formation, describing the 'plentiful opportunities' in the curriculum as a vehicle to 'understand their love by God, deepen their relationship with God and the Holy Spirit and know that they are saved by God' (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School).

Another participant expressed the view that formation can be 'taught' through different aspects of the curriculum: 'Formation can also be taught explicitly through RE lessons, character lessons, PSHE though not solely in these subjects' (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School).

Interview Question 5: How do you educate for character?

School leaders provided a range of responses in relation to the ways in which the school educates for character. This included a balanced explanation of both implicit and explicit provision as necessary for effective character education.

i) Implicit character education

Participants articulated implicit character education in relation to school ethos, strategic whole school development, Christian practices and traditions, school environment and a shared language of virtue.

School ethos

'Character education is sold through the ethos and through how everybody lives and how everybody acts' (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School). Character education is implicit in the sense that it is integral to the totality of the Christian life of the school through its culture and ethos: 'It's the ethos of the school, the charism of our school is to be Eucharistically Christ-centred.' When invited to elaborate on the use of the concept of 'charism' here, the participant explained:

> Charism is the particular Catholic identity of our school based on Jesus Christ - the guide to everything we are and everything we do. Charism is the core values to a school and in a Catholic school it is the spiritually inspired core values that underpins the essence of our school. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

Strategic whole school development

The development of character education was strategically led by Governors, the Headteacher and the senior leadership team, which also involved the whole school community on the journey: 'The whole school came together to create the virtues… It really has to come from the top - the governors are very involved and take a big lead on this as well' (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School). The Headteacher also emphasised the importance of the involvement of the whole school community as stakeholders: 'We have an explicit Catholic character curriculum…All stakeholders were involved - Governors, SLT, teaching staff, parents, and of course, most importantly, the children' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

It was found that strategic decisions in designating an experienced leader of character education who would share belief in its importance, contributed to the successful development of the character curriculum:

> One of the most important things was identifying the right person to lead this, to bring staff on board and bring children on board. We identified someone who was experienced, proven to be a very good leader and would believe in the importance of Christian character education. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

Christian practices and traditions

One school leader described how character education was infused throughout school life, both within and beyond the curriculum, through the Christian environment and ethos as well as through formal Christian practices and traditions, such as acts of worship and whole school mass:

> It's not just what's in the curriculum. It's the extra things like the Golden Apples, the virtues that we have up and around the school so that we can refer to those and praise the children for using them. It's in our acts of worship, and in mass, it's in our mission statement… it's in the way we treat each other. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

'Our weekly worships and class worships are strongly linked to the virtues' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

School Environment

The Headteacher explained the rationale for the school Gospel Virtue Gallery, evident in school corridors throughout both school sites, ensuring that the range of Gospel virtue role models are representative of the school's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

> You will see the virtues and the understanding behind the virtue. For example, one of our virtues is justice with an explanation as to action against corruption and oppression in Key Stage 2. The role models are from different continents around the world… so there's representation... and the children can see that. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

Shared language of virtue across the school community

There is a clear shared language of virtue used across the school community, evidenced in the rewards system as well as dialogue around behaviour management. The school's ten Gospel virtues form the basis for special character awards known as 'Golden Apples', based on demonstration of a particular virtue. The virtues also impact upon the way in which behaviour is both managed and rewarded by staff, which involves engaging with the virtues as part of discussion about behaviour, encouraging pupil self-reflection, as well as celebrating exemplification of virtue through behaviour:

> Every half term, we have a very special Golden Apples award, linked to the virtue studied. It's also linked to behaviour, so if a child was to make a wrong choice, whether in class or around the school, staff are well-versed in the language of virtue…which virtue they struggled with, and how they could make a better choice next time. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

ii) Explicit character education

Explicit character education was articulated by senior leaders in terms of pedagogical approaches, the building of wisdom and the role of critical reflection.

In Coastal School, character education is planned and taught explicitly, using the school's ten Gospel virtues as the foundation of virtue study throughout the school from Reception to Year 6. There is a focus on one Gospel virtue each half term on a two-year cycle, with an emphasis on age-appropriate progression in the pedagogy:

> We teach [character education] in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 at a very basic level to develop their understanding of that virtue. In Years 3 and 4, we particularly link it to the Eucharist and the origin of the virtue in Christ. In Years 5 and 6, we look at 'the Golden Mean' where we explore the vice and virtue, in deficiency and excess. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The content of the explicit lesson was expanded upon by another participant: 'There's a focus on the virtues in the explicit lesson and on role models and Scripture, and in relation to today's life' (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School).

Pedagogy for character

According to the Headteacher, educating for character involves three key areas - knowledge of virtue, understanding of how virtue feels, and opportunities to practice virtue. This resonates with a head-heart-hands approach to character education: 'It is to teach knowledge of virtues to children. You also need to feel it and give children the opportunity to be able to express and feel what virtue looks like so they can experience it' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

The goal of character education is to foster an aspiration in pupils to flourish in Christ, through contributing and being impactful through service in society:

> It's really important that in Christian character education we have an aspiration for our pupils to be the best they can be - to reach their full potential to go and make this world a better place…We need to form Christian character in the children so that they aspire to be doctors, teachers, MPs, leaders … they need to be a real asset to serve in society. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

Building wisdom

Although this is a major aspect of the purpose of character education, explicit reference was made by only one of the school leaders regarding the relationship between character education and the building of wisdom: 'We make sure that the children understand that good virtue is a balance and to understand when to stand up and be courageous and how to do that. Really what we are doing is building wisdom' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School). An earlier reference was made to practical wisdom in relation to understanding of formation. Data also showed that there were other more discreet references to the building of wisdom, albeit more inferential, in responses to the distinctive nature of Catholic education regarding developing a 'critical consciousness' as part of the See-Choose-Act methodology.

The role of critical reflection

Critical reflection is an integral part of the school's pedagogical approach to teaching character. According to the Headteacher, critical reflection serves to provoke an emotional response which 'allows room for the heart to ponder on the journey of becoming more virtuous and God-like' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

Another participant explained that children are invited to reflect upon their virtue learning and the impact it has had: 'At the end of each half term, there is a lesson on virtue reflection and its implications' (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School). Although critical reflection is an integral part of the school's pedagogical approach to teaching character, only one participant made explicit reference to this.

Catholic approach to the curriculum

In addition to the explicit curriculum for character, it was found that an understanding of social justice was integral to the curriculum design, explored through curriculum Enquiry Questions. In this way character education permeates the whole curriculum endeavour:

> Alongside this (explicit character curriculum), we have a curriculum Enquiry Question which has a social justice orientation. The virtues will link to this naturally - or ideally, the current virtue that they study would link to that. Social justice is a very important part of that Enquiry Question. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

He went on to explain that social justice is explored through the curriculum Enquiry Question using a See-Choose-Act methodology:

> We want to help form children, particularly in Key Stage 2, to be able to articulate their thoughts. ''Choosing'' very much sits in the bible, in quotes from our Christian leaders, and other role models who inspire us. Once we feel it, we choose how we want to act, then we act upon that in different ways across the curriculum, so we have a very explicit Catholic character education strongly linked to the whole curriculum. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

iii) Partnership with parents

Developing partnerships with families was found to be a significant factor in the school's endeavour to develop Christian character, as mentioned earlier. This partnership is sustained through weekly whole school Mass with the school and parish community: 'We go to church weekly and pray with the community.' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

In addition to this, the school gave emphasis to the importance of communication with parents regarding character education through letters, newsletters, invitations to parent forums and visible on the school website, as well as through half termly Gospel Virtue Home Learning activities.

> We invited parents in… we wrote to parents to explain our curriculum. We send home Gospel Virtue Home Learning every half term. When we have studied each virtue, we send home information on the virtue…the pedagogy behind the virtue and relevant scripture…This is for the family so that both the parent and the child can work on this virtue at home. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

iv) Outreach in wider community

The school has developed its outreach through establishing partnerships with the parish and wider community and actively seeks to educate for character through its response to world events:

> It's in our outreach, like with our Mini Vinnies and in our relationship with the parish and the wider community, and in our response to world events. It's in the way we treat our refugees coming in, for example, and how we are going to become a 'School of Sanctuary'. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

The Headteacher described the importance of providing opportunities for service to enable the practice of virtue to serve both local and global communities, which represents faith in action:

> When there's a crisis, we will join with the community and do what we can for that crisis. It is very important to work with our local community to enhance it, but we also have to look at the global community. For example, recently we participated with another Christian organisation to deliver parcels to countries where children may not receive a parcel at Christmas…. that helps the children understand that they're actually part of a wider global community'. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The school's development of character is demonstrated in a range of outreach opportunities. Pupil leadership groups, such as Mini Vinnies and the Oscar Romero Faith in Action Committee, support both local and global charities such as 'Mary's Meals', in response to the world hunger crisis. These charitable endeavours represent examples of the school's commitment to social justice through both local and global participation. The Headteacher described this as 'a very important part of the 'doing' in character education:

> Mary's Meals is an organisation that tries to keep children around the world in education and the only way they can feed themselves is to go to work and therefore they miss education. This shows both charity and love…, but also to bring justice. To give them an education is to break that cycle of poverty to be able to go on and reach their potential in life. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

v) Staff professional development and training

School leaders advocated for continuous provision for staff formation as part of its endeavour to promote character education. Prior to each half termly Gospel virtue study as part of the explicit character education curriculum, staff are given a formation session on the whole school virtue:

> The Character Education Lead first focused on forming the staff with really excellent staff Insets at the beginning of each half term for each new virtue studied. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

The school had invested in staff professional development and training to enhance specialist subject knowledge and pedagogical understanding. This included two members of the senior leadership team who had studied an MA in Catholic School Leadership, as well as another senior leader who had undertaken PhD research in character education. One school leader explained the importance of specialist knowledge and research into character education pedagogy, which led to the development of an explicit curriculum for character education:

> Educating for Catholic character in our school didn't just happen. I think that's important for any school embarking on this journey - you can't just jump into it. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

As part of the school's mission for social justice, the school had focused strategic development of provision for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and is currently engaged in the process of application as a 'School of Sanctuary' for refugees.

Interview Question 6: How does character education impact on children's formation? How do you know?

School leaders were able to articulate their view of the relationship between character education and formation, which in their view was evidenced through relationships and behaviour, pupils' personal formation journey, awareness of social justice, pursuit of service and social action, academic achievement and the physical school environment.

i) Relationships and behaviour

The Headteacher expressed the view that formation is observed through behaviour and the quality of relationships between all members of the school community:

> [Virtue] is how staff treat each other, how staff treat the children and how the children treat each other...that's the strongest way you can see it - through their actions with each other. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

The Headteacher went on to emphasise the importance of human dignity as integral to Catholic character, to be upheld and modelled, as witnesses to Christ:

> When staff treat each other with dignity, children will start to treat each other with dignity and fairness… If you treat others with dignity, you care for the person, you try to understand them, you try to build a relationship with them, you treat them with respect… By being a good witness to parents, to staff, to the community …you will have good and virtuous character …you will see the benefits in how everybody treats each other. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

Growth in virtue could be observed through the quality of relationships across the school community, and reflected in standards of behaviour, as evidence of a tangible impact on children's formation, as expressed by one senior leader:

> Teachers model compassion and love and always respect the dignity of each pupil, which in turn is reflected in the behaviour of pupils towards each other. This has been commented upon on numerous occasions from external visitors, including new parents, teachers and other professionals. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

ii) Personal journey with Christ

It was acknowledged that despite variation in levels of engagement with the Catholic faith and religious practice when children begin school, it was important to recognise the uniqueness of each child's formation narrative. It was felt, therefore, that formation could be shown in each child's individual progress on their personal journey as a witness to Christ: 'Children who know they are loved, know they are here for a purpose, and that God has a plan for them' (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School).

> Children will come in at different starting points because family has such a huge impact on formation. Some children may not have been through any trauma and come in with parents who have been taking them to church every week, reading the Bible with them, praying with them daily. Some children come in not knowing the name of Jesus ...but they're all on their own journey. What we want and do see in our children is that they're further along that journey when they leave us, than when they join us, and I think that's where the evidence is. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

iii) Awareness of social justice

School leaders' perspectives on the impact of character education could be evidenced through children's awareness of social justice: 'If you look at what our children are like when they leave us, you know the sense of social justice that they have and the love that they show for one another and for the poor…wanting to positively impact the world and others' (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School). Pupil leadership groups, which focus on social action demonstrate this, such as the Mini Vinnies and the school's Oscar Romero Faith in Action Committee.

iv) Pursuit of service and social action

It was found that an explicit reference to virtue embedded throughout the curriculum dealing with global issues, such as sustainability and refugees, led to pupils' autonomous pursuit of virtue practice through service and social action beyond the curriculum, with examples such as writing letters of petition to Members of Parliament regarding treatment of refugees or to local companies seeking explanation about their consideration for environmental sustainability. The aspiration to serve was articulated in terms of a 'seeping out' of virtue:

> I think what it brings about is you start to see children wanting to be more … have more action outside of the school.… It starts to seep out in many different ways. First of all, as local community citizens and then as global citizens… thinking about the whole world and the impact on everybody. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

v) Academic achievement

The school's extensive provision for pastoral support to both children and their families was regarded as a strong and significant dimension to its character education provision. School leaders attributed the school's academic performance to the priority given to pastoral provision and engagement with families. Despite the social demographic of the school as within an area of social deprivation, academic results demonstrate excellence:

> We live in an area of high social deprivation, and yet our academic results are among the top in the borough. A lot of that is through pastoral support so no child is left behind, and engagement with our families, especially those who are more vulnerable or who may be considered more difficult to reach… we never give up on them, and that makes a big difference. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

The Inclusion Leader described passionately the impact of fostering a faith-filled relationship with God on children's capacity for learning:

> Children who know they are loved, know that they are here for a purpose, and that God has a plan for them will naturally do better academically, you see that in our data. What we do for them in formation, in Catholic character education, will have a higher impact on the data than anything else. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School)

This senior leader participant also explained the development of character as a gradual process of formation through the building of relationships, beginning from the earliest pre-school years through to secondary school transition:

> From even when they are in nurseries and pre-school providers, the fact that we reach out to start to build those relationships, right through until when they leave us, and we reach out to their secondary school and make that transition. (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School).

vi) Environment

Leaders described the value of visible character education as a distinctive part of the physical environment, reflected in displays of the school mission statement and Gospel virtues as contributory to the development of character, as well as evident in policies and on the school website: 'You can start by walking around the school. You can see the mission statement and the virtues - you can see all of those displayed, which is a real strength in this school' (Teresa, Headteacher, Coastal School). The embedded nature of character education was expressed by the Headteacher:

> Character education is very noticeable both when you virtually take a tour of our school on the website, in the policies and in the information given to children and parents. When you physically take a tour, Catholicity is reflected in the environment. Our mission statement links to our Christian purpose. Our children know our mission statement off by heart - they are able to name the virtues and sing the mission statement, so it is everywhere and embedded. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

Interview Question 7: What do you perceive are the challenges for Catholic character education?

School leaders identified a range of contemporary challenges for Catholic character education which included the countercultural nature of Catholic education, the role of community, strategic leadership, professional development, external factors and the impact of world events.

i) Catholic education as countercultural

The countercultural nature of Catholic education, fundamentally presenting an 'anti-worldview', was regarded as a key challenge: 'Catholic character is anti-worldview. It goes against what we are told about loving ourselves first and getting more. We see it constantly in the media - if you get this, it will make you happy' (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School).

Concern was expressed regarding how happiness is defined and sought; multiple types of media which present a materialistic view of happiness, with a diminished emphasis on the biblical principles which express the need for 'deep joy and to experience the fruit of the Spirit in our lives'. It was suggested that media could be used as a positive influence

to support evangelisation through broadcasting church services and Masses. Concerns regarding safeguarding relating to social media influences were also mentioned.

ii) The role of the community

Leaders referenced a range of factors within the community contributing to children's formation, including the family, school and parish.

The role of the family in children's formation was acknowledged by all school leaders as the most significant factor as primary educators. The Headteacher presents a strong belief in the seminal role of the family in children's Christian formation:

> The family are vital and are primary educators. For Catholic character education - part of it is school, part of it is church, but the main part of it is the family; they have the biggest influence' Although he acknowledged the role of the school and the parish, he went on to reiterate the role of the family 'in bringing their children closer to Jesus Christ and forming them in Jesus Christ. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

Concomitantly, however, the family can present as one of the greatest challenges for character education. Experiences of poverty, such as emotional, spiritual or economic poverty, have the propensity to impact, to varying extents, their character development. Experiences of rejection or trauma within the family can cause a detachment from love of and for others, and from God: 'If a child doesn't feel loved, it can make it harder sometimes for them to experience God's love and to trust the people in school who are telling them they are loved' (Catherine, Inclusion Leader, Coastal School). The Inclusion Leader provided an example of the impact of attachment difficulties upon children's level of trust and their ability to form relationships: 'These children need to be consistently shown God's love and told about it.'

Leaders also referred to the importance of the role of the school and church in children's formation but that this largely relied on the support and commitment of the family: 'Family is an important part of the formation of a child and plays an important part in bringing their children closer to Jesus Christ' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

iii) Strategic leadership

Another challenge expressed by leaders was the necessity for a strategic vision for character education, involving the governing body and the Headteacher to drive the vision of the school based on a genuine belief in its purpose, and for this to be integral to the school development plan for it to be implemented effectively.

> I think it has to come from the Governing Body and has to be driven by the vision of the school. That has to be in place first - if that isn't there, it's not part of the vision and the School Development Plan, then it's more difficult to implement. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

It was also recognised that having a belief in the purpose of character education was essential but also presented a potential challenge for schools:

> The challenges are that you need your leaders, but particularly Governors and the Headteacher to actually believe this makes a difference… that is a challenge because if you have a Headteacher who doesn't believe in this, then I think it's going to be very hard to implement in a school. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

iv) Investment in professional development and training

Senior leaders advocated for investment in professional development of all staff, emphasising the need to be educated to develop knowledge, based upon research, to form a deep understanding of character education.

'The development of character education 'has to come from knowledge research and a deep understanding' (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School).

Reference as also made regarding the need for leaders to evaluate the impact of character education as part of professional development and training:

> To believe in this, they need to be educated in it. They need to understand it at a deeper level and that takes really good professional development. We need new material and evidence that this makes a difference, and our leaders having opportunities to study the difference that this makes, to really have an impact. (David, Headteacher, Coastal School)

v) External factors

One school leader expressed concern that the pressures of Ofsted and demands upon academic attainment can lead some schools to lose focus on the importance of character education. Referencing Amanda Speilman's 'substance of education' (2021), one leader expressed the view that character education provides this substance: 'What better way to show substance than Catholic character education in schools' (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School).

There was a conviction that through focusing on a preferential option for the poor facilitated equity for the vulnerable which is the essence of the purpose of character education, allowing disadvantaged children to access academic standards as well:

> We do focus on the vulnerable pupils, we do not let anyone slip through the net, and in that way, we offer a preferential option for the poor. This shows that the school is truly outstanding. (Teresa, Deputy Headteacher, Coastal School)

vi) World events

Beyond the parameters of the school and local community, the impact of global events and the character modelled by world leaders was also identified as a challenge for contemporary character education: 'There are many challenges outside of school. We are dependent on world leaders, leading by example…and if they promote self-interest, that makes [character education] more difficult' (David, Headteacher, Coastal School).

Pupil Focus Group

Question 1: What do you understand by the term 'virtue'?

Pupil participants' responses referenced three key themes to explain their understanding of virtue: moral choice, moral growth and aspiration as well as social action.

i) Moral choice

Two of the pupils described their understanding of the term 'virtue' in relation to an understanding of the moral dichotomy between right and wrong, with an emphasis on choice:
'Virtue means choosing what is right or wrong' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
'Virtue means choosing what is right or wrong and following in the right path. Each of us are God's disciples and we should know what is right' (Keiran, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

ii) Moral growth and aspiration

Three of the pupil participants referred to virtue as transformative to character, described by one pupil as: 'Virtue is something that someone has, and it changes their character. It can make them better people' (Kane, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
Another pupil referenced virtue as a gift from God: 'Using our Gospel Virtues is like using a gift given by God' (Anna, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
The term 'virtue' was also explained as a goal, a moral aspiration to be applied in our lives: 'Virtue is something that we focus on. It's like a goal and we use it throughout our lives' (Michael, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

iii) Social action

Understanding of the meaning of the term 'virtue' was explained by one pupil as: 'Something that you stick to so that you can make a change in the world. We have ten

Gospel Virtues that we follow to make ourselves and others better' (Esther, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

Question 2: What is good character?

Pupil participants defined 'good character' as behaviour which seeks to imitate that of Christ. It was also defined as a capacity to learn from mistakes in the pursuit of moral growth.

i) Imitation of Christ

Explanations of 'good character' were described as an imitation of Christ as an exemplar of virtue: 'Good character is showing and doing good deeds and following the example of Jesus' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
'When Jesus was alive, he showed many good deeds to others' (Kian, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
'Good character means following in Jesus' footsteps' (Michael, Year 6 pupil Coastal School).

ii) Moral growth

In addition to explanations of good character as 'becoming better', there was also a strong emphasis in pupils' responses which indicated their perception of good character as the capacity to learn from mistakes to facilitate moral growth: 'Good character is helping both yourselves and others become a better person, avoiding bias and helping us to look forwards after making a mistake' (Esther, Year 6, Coastal School). Reference was also made to the relationship between moral growth and behavioural application in the wider world: 'Good character is learning from mistakes and trying to use them to make the world a better place and trying to remember that God will always forgive us' (Anna, Year 6, Coastal School).
'Good character is about being a good person, helping to make the world a better place and learning from mistakes' (Kane, Year 6, Coastal School).
'Learning from mistakes makes you a better person' (Michael, Year 6, Coastal School).

Question 3: What is the purpose of learning about virtue?

Pupil participants explained their view of the purpose of learning about virtue in relation to developing a relationship with God and to provide a moral compass to navigate decision making.

i) Developing a relationship with God

The purpose of learning about virtue was explained in terms of developing a closer relationship with God: 'Learning about virtue helps you to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and guides us to grow closer to God' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
'When we learn about virtues it teaches us what being in God's family truly is. We are brothers and sisters, and we have to care for each other' (Michael, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
'When we learn about virtues it brings our hearts closer to God and turns us into better people' (Anna, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

ii) Moral compass

Pupils' experience of explicitly learning about Gospel virtues was described as providing a 'guide' or moral compass, informing and influencing future moral choices and action:
'Learning about virtues helps us in the future as the things that we do have greater consequences when we are older. Knowing about the virtues can help us change our ways' (Esther, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
'The virtues guide us to be the best person we can be and to follow in Christ' (Kane, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
Further reference is made to the importance of learning from mistakes as an integral part of moral growth, 'We can learn from our mistakes which guide us for what we can do in the future' (Keiran, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

4. How will you use what you have learnt about virtues and Catholic Social Teaching in the future?

Pupil participants identified three areas in which they would apply their learning about virtues and social justice in the future which related to participation in social action and service, as well as personal fulfilment and the strengthening of faith.

i) Social action and service

Pupils referred to the impact of virtue education, as well as the principles of Catholic Social Teaching which strongly resonated with the vocabulary of their school Mission Statement: 'Joyfully, unique in Jesus' family, we learn to use our special gifts to make the world a better place.' Responses indicated pupils' desire to use their knowledge of virtues and the principles of CST to apply and impact not just in their own lives, but in society and in the wider world: 'I will use virtues to make a difference in society and in the world. I can do fundraising and donate to food banks' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

> I can use the principles and virtues we have learnt in the future because I think it is important when we get older to think about the things we can do to make the world a better place. (Keiran, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

All responses to this question demonstrated the relationship between taught and sought character, where pupils expressed interest in the autonomous pursuit of meaningful opportunities to practice virtue. One pupil described their desire to volunteer in the future: 'I want to give up my time to help other people who really need it' (Anna, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

ii) Personal fulfilment

One pupil also referred to the impact of learning about virtues to support his own emotional fulfilment, promoting a sense of happiness and positivity and a resultant desire to spread kindness to others: 'I can use the virtues and all the things I have learnt to make me feel happier and more positive. It will help us to be kinder to others and it will encourage and inspire us to make the world a better place' (Michael, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School). There is an inference here that character education enables a flourishing life, filled with hope and optimism, to be sustained due to a strong faith.

iii) Strengthening faith

One pupil made explicit reference to the link between character education and the development of faith, describing how the virtues and principles of Catholic Social Teaching 'can help us for the future so we do not stray away from our faith and can keep our faith burning' (Esther, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

5. Has your learning helped you? If so, in what ways?

Pupil participants' responses included reference to the inspiration of virtue role models, opportunities for the practice of virtue and understanding of servant leadership.

i) Inspired by role models of virtue

The impact of learning about the role models of virtue is a prevalent theme which has emerged in responses from all the pupils. The role models are described by the participants as both inspirational to their learning as well as aspirational, in that pupils express a desire to emulate the examples they have provided, such as St. Oscar Romero: 'My learning has helped me because when we learn about role models, we try to be like them. St. Oscar Romero has inspired me' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

ii) Virtue practice

Responses demonstrate a clear connection between pupils' knowledge of role models of virtue and behavioural application, with explanations of how their learning has directly influenced actions:
'My learning has helped me understand the works of God and the rules and values he has set for me. The role models I have learnt about in my years at this school have influenced me to do the things that I have done' (Esther, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
'My learning has helped to make myself a better person. We have lots of role models in our world who show us our school virtues, how to do it and what it means' (Keiran, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
'My learning has helped me to remember the important role models who have shown kindness to others who need it' (Anna, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

iii) Observation, discernment and action

Another pupil participant referenced the school's See-Choose-Act methodology through which pupils view the world through a Christian lens to support their moral decision making and action for social justice, guided by the light of their faith: 'We learn about See-Choose-Act so if we see something, we decide if it is right or wrong, and if it is wrong, we try to help by acting' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

iv) Servant leadership

One pupil referred to how the Bible has provided a guide for how to act in recalling the life and teachings of Jesus: 'When we read the Bible, we can look back over what Jesus has taught us and every time we can think of something new we can do which is similar to what Jesus did' (Michael, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

6. What do you think are the challenges to developing in virtue?

Pupil participants' perceptions of challenges involved awareness of factors which led to distraction from God. Responses also referred to capacity to practice virtue and the role of peer pressure.

i) Distraction from God

Pupils' responses highlighted that one of the main challenges they perceived was in relation to how materialism has the potential to distract focus away from God, which is detrimental to faith development and diminishes the importance of God:

> There are lots of challenges which could stop us from increasing our faith in God because there are things we are bound to love and so it is then harder to put God first in our daily routine. (Keiran, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

Two of the pupils' responses regarding challenges infer the countercultural nature of Catholic character education: 'The challenges are distractions, things like electronics and things that make you a 'cool' person' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School). There is a strong sense of self-awareness and reflection in this pupils' response, where the ability to acknowledge distraction can reveal the 'core' of what is truly loved and valued, as expressed by another pupil participant:

> I think there are lots of challenges in our current day that are stopping us from growing closer to God, such as peer pressure, being cool... material things like shoes, electronics, cars, houses can distract people from going to Church and not spending enough time with God, which is the core thing we are meant to do. (Esther, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

ii) Practice of virtue

One pupil highlighted the challenge that virtues can present in our daily lives and relationships indicating that it is not always easy to translate the virtues into practice: 'I sometimes find it someone who is rude to me or doesn't care about it especially when I don't think they are sorry. I know it's the right thing to do so I forgive them anyway.' (Anna, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School). Significantly, this response suggests that one of the challenges for contemporary character education is that there can be a dissonance between virtue literacy and virtue practice.

iii) Peer pressure

Responses indicated the influential role of peer pressure as a challenge to growth in virtue: 'Some people can be rude about our choices, and we could be easily distracted by the things we want and we might feel influenced by other people' (Kane, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School). There is also an awareness here of the transience of material satisfaction:

> When we try to get new things, we have a feeling that it will make us cooler but then the feeling goes away. What distracts us from God is peer pressure… we get jealous with the things others have and we get the urge to have it. Then after a while, we realise we don't need it anymore. (Michael, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

7. Who/what has made the most impact on your learning about virtue?

Pupil participants identified three key areas of impact on their virtue learning relating to the school community, the family and the church.

i) Communities of practice

Pupils identified a range of interactive factors which they perceived to have influenced their moral development. Responses demonstrated that there is no single influence, but rather an interplay between different communities of practice working synergistically - the family, school and church, all of which contribute to growth in virtue. This is expressed with poignancy by one pupil participant:

> I think everything around me has influenced the way that I love God now - my teachers, my church leaders, my family - all of them have led me to make good decisions and I am happy in my life right now. If those weren't here for me, I don't know what I would do and I don't know if my connection with God would be as strong as it is now. (Esther, Year 6 pupil, Coastal Church)

ii) School community

The pupil participants' responses demonstrate a range of areas within the school community which pupils attributed as most impactful upon their virtue education: the explicit character education curriculum, incorporating role model study; the partnership between home and school; the quality of relationships between teachers, pupils and parents.

iii) Explicit character education curriculum

Reference was made to the impact of the explicit curriculum for character education on the development of pupils' virtue literacy: 'I think the school has made the biggest impact as in school we have character education lessons and they explain everything about the virtues in a way that we understand easily' (Karol, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).
'My parents sent me to a Catholic school which teaches me a lot about virtues' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School). Pupils also identified role model study, particularly the lives of saints, which is part of the explicit curriculum, as a significant influence on their moral development:

> I think role models have played a significant part of my life because if I am on the path of doing something wrong, I remember them and it encourages me to keep going and know that I am on the right path, especially St. Oscar Romero, St. Teresa of Calcutta and St. Vincent de Paul. (Keiran, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

One pupil referred to the school's Gospel Virtue Home Learning, which is an extension of the character curriculum, indicating the importance of a home-school partnership in moral growth in providing an opportunity for further discussion and reflection within the family setting:

> We are assigned Gospel Virtue Home Learning which teach us about the virtues so we can reflect on our learning and think about how we can use it to help us each day. (Michael, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

iv) Quality of relationships

One pupil commented upon the impact of the quality of relationships between members of the educational community, stating that her observations of how both teachers and parents interact with one another has provided an important exemplar of virtue:

> Everyone who has helped me get this close to God, it is not just through their relationship with me, but through their relationships with others. You see and watch relationships between teachers and with my parents which has given me an example of how I should act with other people. (Esther, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School)

v) The role of the family

Two pupils made explicit reference to the significance of the role of the family upon moral development: 'My family has had a huge impact on me taking me to Church to pray and learn about God. Then we have fun at home thinking about what God has done for us' (Anna, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School). The family is mentioned here in relation to their role in supporting faith development through attendance at church, as well as encouraging the importance of daily prayer: 'My family are the biggest influence for me as they take me to church every week and we pray every day' (Alicia, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

vi) The role of the Church

Although the role of the Church is referenced earlier in relation to the impact of the family in moral development, one pupil describes his experience of how attendance and participation at Church as an altar server has helped to support his moral growth and strengthen his faith. He also referred to the influential role of the parish priest: **'**Sometimes I do altar service at our school Mass which has helped me grow in my faith. I think that Father Peter is a good influence on our character as well' (Michael, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School).

One pupil highlighted the challenge that virtues can present in our daily lives and relationships indicating that it is not always easy to translate the virtues into practice: 'I

sometimes find it difficult to forgive someone who is rude to me or doesn't care about it. I know it's the right thing to do so I forgive them anyway' (Anna, Year 6 pupil, Coastal School). This response indicates that one of the challenges for character education is that there can be a dissonance between virtue literacy and virtue practice.

Parent Focus Groups

Question 1: What do you understand by the term 'virtue'?

Parent participants described a range of responses to express their understanding of the term 'virtue' including reference to the language of virtues/values. Responses also linked the acquisition of virtues to a flourishing life and as an integral part of Catholic school distinctiveness as well as contributing to a holistic view of formation.

i) The language of virtues and values

Two parent participants made reference to the term 'value' in their explanation. The term virtue was regarded as synonymous with the term value but no explicit distinction or further explanation was given: 'Virtues for me are like values' (Serena, Parent, Coastal School). Another parent participant expanded on the definition of virtue as 'a value that is put in action… it is the way we live according to a moral code' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School). Virtues were also described as 'a guide we can follow every day' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School).

Another parent participant highlighted the involvement of the school community in the shaping of which virtues would guide our school's mission:

> The virtues that we have in this school were actually developed by the children and are developed by our Gospel values. I would like to add that it was all stakeholders involved and these virtues came from our children which is very important. (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

ii) Flourishing lives

One parent participant expressed the view that the impact of living virtuously is relational to obtaining happiness:

> At this school, the virtues are important which I really like as they are a foundation not only for our children but for us as adults, in terms of how we live our lives, in terms of courage and compassion. This is how we can live a happy life - virtues are the basis to live a happy and responsible life. (Nick, Parent Governor, Coastal School)

iii) Catholic identity

One parent participant highlighted the pivotal significance of virtue as an integral part of Christian faith identity and distinctiveness of a Catholic school: 'It is what defines us as a Catholic school to ensure that our children are following the virtuous path given to us in the Gospel' (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School).

iv) Holistic approach to formation

Reference was also made to the importance of allowing God to permeate our lives so that children can be formed as virtuous citizens who can contribute in society:

> It is important that we bring God into our everyday life so we are not just educating our children academically, but we are also educating our children so that they can take their place in society as good citizens following the virtues that they have been taught at our school. (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

Question 2: What is good character?

The responses from participants provided a range of perspectives incorporating conceptions of moral virtue as the basis for good character, reference to the individuality of character/personality, the influence of environment on the inculcation of good character and an acknowledgment of the dynamism of character in terms of its capacity to be shaped and formed.

i) Moral virtue and performance virtue

One parent participant defined character directly in relation to moral virtue: 'Good character is someone who lives according to the virtues' referencing the Bible as a source of moral inspiration and exemplar: 'In the bible, there are examples of good moral behaviour' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School). In agreement, another participant added, 'We can find this (good character) in the bible…. love, courage, justice' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School). This response was further expanded upon by another participant, 'One of the school virtues is faith - complete trust in God - so we can follow the bible and all of the examples of virtue' (Sophie, Parent, Coastal School).

One parent participant made a sophisticated distinction between aspects of performance virtue and moral virtue in the definition of good character which will be explored further in the subsequent chapter. In his view, Christian character involves developing moral virtue, which is distinct from strength of character in terms of mental resilience: 'You can have two types of character… character building is building a person who will have the mental capacity to go out and be someone who is a strong person… but the character we are talking about is virtuous character'. He defines moral character

as ‘something you want to instill in somebody to guide them and form them on the virtuous side’ (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School).

There could be a suggested inference here in the participant’s explanation of the term ‘character building’ to ‘have mental capacity’ and be ‘a strong person’ towards performance virtue skills, such as resilience, in the participant’s definition of ‘strong’ character, whilst highlighting that ‘virtuous’ character has its foundation in moral virtue leading to formation.

ii) Personality and character

One parent participant expressed the importance of the recognition of individuality in the development of character, with specific mention of understanding children’s individual personalities in order to optimise growth in virtue:

> I think it’s important to say that every child is different… If we are talking about good character, we have to make sure that we teach children how to follow the school virtues but also remember their own personalities as well, making sure that we try to get as much as we can from our children, but in different ways for every child. (Serena, Parent, Coastal School)

There is an indication here of the importance of inclusivity in respecting the dignity of each individual in their formation journey.

iii) The role of environmental context

One parent participant highlighted the significance of the role of environmental context and experience on character formation, providing a poignant example of courage demonstrated in the lived experiences of Ukrainian children during the war:

> For me, every person in the world has courage. I believe that our courage is based on the environment that we are in. For example, imagine for children growing up in Ukraine during the war now, I think they have great courage. I think the environment you grow up in and the experience that you face also builds our character, for every one of us. (Nick, Parent Governor, Coastal School)

iv) The dynamism of character

As part of his explanation of ‘good character’, one participant used a simile to compare growth in moral character to the planting of seeds to grow a tree, highlighting that character needs to be ‘fed’ with virtues. In this sense, ‘good’ character is interpreted as malleable and capable of dynamic change:

> I think it is important to nurture character… like putting seeds in the ground to grow a tree. As with character, for every one of us… character is not static, it's dynamic, it's always changing…This is where the virtues come in - they are important to feed into the character in the desired direction. (Nick, Parent Governor, Coastal School)

Question 3: What is the purpose of learning about virtue?

Parent participants' responses regarding the purpose of virtue education included providing children with a sense of 'moral compass'. Responses also made reference to the fact that formation of character is an integral part of parental responsibility, equipping children with understanding about moral strategies to apply in real life contexts. Explicit reference was also made to the need for virtue education as an instrument to mitigate the challenges of the contemporary social culture that children experience.

i) Moral compass

One parent participant indicated the importance of developing virtue literacy in order to equip children with knowledge and understanding of virtues which would serve as a moral compass to support them in the future to navigate situations which require moral decision making:

> It's like giving them strategies to help them to be in different situations. For example, one of the virtues is self-control - how do they need to behave? What kind of strategies could they use if they have some problems to solve? The same with love - why is love so important for us? Why do we need to forgive people? Learning about the virtues gives them different strategies to help them. (Serena, Parent, Coastal School)

Another parent participant stated that learning about virtue 'opens your mind to become someone better, to make the right choices in your life and to choose the right pathway' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School). Virtue learning offers the opportunity to understand the difference between right and wrong moral choices: 'Some children might be stuck and not realise what is wrong and what is good, so having these virtues relating to them will actually help them to make the right choice.' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School).

One parent participant's response revealed the view that there is a deeper layer to the purpose of virtue education in terms of a sense of reliance on virtues as part of living: 'How would we live without justice? Everyone needs love in their life' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School). There was also an indication that learning about virtue helps to facilitate 'becoming better': 'They can become better people in the future with the compassion that they need' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School). Similarly, another participant remarked that virtue learning 'helps us to teach them and give them examples in faith, love,

forgiveness, self-control - we can follow these to make them a better person' (Sophie, Parent, Coastal School).

Another parent participant made a direct correlation between moral education and the teachings of the Catholic Church: 'It relates to the church and the rules we follow within the church as a Catholic society' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School).

ii) Parental responsibility

One parent participant stated that the purpose of learning about virtue is part of a parental responsibility which contributes to their formation: 'I think that we have a responsibility to shape the character of our children' (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School).

iii) Addressing the challenges of environmental context

Reference was also made to the importance of virtue education as mitigative to the countercultural influence to the challenges presented by the external influences within the environment which children encounter. One participant acknowledges that 'there may be quite a number of opposing factors that may bring a negative aspect to an individual's character… we are battling with that type of environment…we should be aware of the outside influences our children are encountering every day.' He goes on to say that providing a moral education creates an opportunity to address these challenges: 'By teaching them the right choice…is the importance that we would play in order to combat all those other factors (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School).

This parent participant advocated for character education as contributory to children's journey in formation:

> If we don't teach them, they will learn things by osmosis but they may be negative. We have to form our children and that's why I think that learning about virtue is part of that journey. (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

This view was supported and extended by another parent participant emphasising the range of 'voices' which children are exposed to, in particular because of technological advancement, such as the influence of social media. He highlighted the need for parental voice to be heard above other influences to ensure that children receive an education in virtue:

> Children are exposed to lots of voices - social media, peer pressure… now with the internet, with advances in technology, with phones. There are plenty of things they learn through the different voices. Parents have a voice to ensure our children grow up to be the type of people that we want them to be. (Nick, Parent Governor, Coastal School)

Another parent participant shared the view that the role of parents is to address the challenges of external influence such as the internet, through dialogue and a search for balance:

> Nowadays the internet has become a big influence in our lives and how often children can see things that may not be true, but if someone has got a lot of 'likes' they just follow it, so it's about a conversation with our children to find the right balance for everything. (Serena, Parent, Coastal School)

Question 4: How do you teach your child the difference between right and wrong?

Parents expressed a range of views about how their children are taught morality. It was agreed among participants that the difference between right and wrong is taught primarily through role modelling, as well through biblical teaching. Responses also referenced the importance of developing quality relationships based on mutual respect and nurturing a dialogue about virtue between parent and child, the role of extracurricular activities as a vehicle to explore moral behaviour and the role of community.

i) Role modelling

The parent participants unanimously felt that leading by example is central to teaching morality. All the other participants agreed that this was an important part of how to teach the difference between right and wrong:

> Immediately what comes to mind is example. If you are an example of good behaviour and good values, they can see that in you. You would hope they would be influenced by that and that would start their journey. I think that role models are very important for children. (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

The parent participant highlighted the seminal influence that parents have on their child's formation as a role model, 'I think a parent's example in the way they conduct themselves is paramount in shaping your children. If they are doing something wrong, you have to explain they are doing something wrong'. In consonance with this view, another participant remarked: 'It's about being a role model to your children' (Serena, Parent, Coastal School).

Another parent participant acknowledged the importance, as well as the challenge, for parents in endeavouring to be a role model of good character:

> As parents, we know it can be tricky to follow the right thing but we try our best and we try to be people of good character… Showing a good example, going to church, praying to God, following the Gospel virtues, having a good moral code in our lives, showing the children what's wrong and what's right, making choices. (Meena, Parent, Coastal School)

ii) Relationships based on dialogue and mutual respect

In addition to referencing the importance of role modelling, one participant expressed the view that the relationship between parents and their children was fundamental, rooted in mutual respect and understanding. In this way, character development is a 'two-way dialogue':

> **I** think that leading by example is key and two-way respect between the parent and the child and understanding it from the child's point of view as well, trying to influence them in whatever way. It's a two-way dialogue - character development. (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

iii) Biblical teaching

Two of the parent participants expressed the view that the teachings in the Bible provide moral nourishment and navigation: 'The Bible navigates us to help us show them how to behave, so if we rely on the Bible, then we can navigate our children'. She also highlighted the significance and indubitable truth provided by the Bible, 'we can open the Bible, it happened, it's true' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School). Another participant recommended 'going back to the bible where there are parables which show the children how to behave and what we should do' (Sophie, Parent, Coastal School). Expressing a concomitant view, the Bible was recognised by another participant as an essential source of virtuous teaching, a 'moral code we should all follow' that serves to make the world more harmonious so that 'we wouldn't have crisis, we wouldn't have war'(Meena, Parent, Coastal School).

iv) Reflection

Four of the parent participants highlighted the importance of communication through discussion and reflection about moral choices to learn from mistakes and initiate a change in future behaviour: 'Reflection can be a lesson on how to change next time' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School).

> As parents we all have different values in our home and it's about following these values and making sure we teach them the right things…it's also about talking about the wrong choices. We all make wrong choices and need to make sure we communicate these with our children. (Serena, Parent, Coastal School)

> We want to teach them to learn from their mistakes. If you make a wrong choice, you can reconcile and ask for forgiveness. If you are a reflective person, you have a higher moral code, I believe. (Meena, Parent, Coastal School)

> Reflection gives them time to think about what they have done. It helps adults as well as children. Sometimes we need more time to understand what we have done…They learn from this kind of behaviour how to react the next time. (Sophie, Parent, Coastal School)

v) Accompaniment and extracurricular activities

The importance of engaging with children in extracurricular activities was also expressed as an opportunity to teach morality:

> When you do activities with them, you communicate what is wrong and right through action. For example, if you are playing football and someone is kicking someone, explain that it is wrong. Use it as an opportunity to explain right and wrong to them by engaging in activities with them. (Nick, Parent Governor, Coastal School)

vi) Alignment of values

One parent participant felt that immersion in the shared values of the community was a source of support in the moral development of children:

> Surrounding ourselves with people from the same society - this school would be a good example of people having the same values. We are all here, so we want to teach our children the right choices by being surrounded by people of the same values. (Meena, Parent, Coastal School)

Question 5: How are you supported in developing your child morally?

The parent participants identified five key areas which they felt supported them in nurturing their child's moral development: the role of the family, the impact of the school environment, partnership between school and home and attendance at Mass and teachers as role models.

i) Role of the family

One of the parent participants made the point that family is a fundamentally influential factor, beginning with the parents' own upbringing, indicating also however that these influences may not always be positive to character formation:

> I think it is also how the parent has been supported in the past in their upbringing. A parent will have been formed by their parents and what they learnt in their journey. They might have learnt some not very good virtues. The support that you would get from a family would have quite an influence on that. (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

He goes on to highlight that the family, broadly defined to incorporate extended family, plays an influential role in promoting character development:

> It's very difficult to raise children and you do need support. People use grandparents, aunties and uncles. If those are also good role models, then that will support the parent in bringing up the child. The wider family will also have a big influence in shaping a child. (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

ii) School environment

Two of the parent participants referred to the visibility of the language of virtue in the physical school environment - the virtue signage as well as specific reference to the Gospel Virtue Role Model Gallery across both school sites: 'The children can follow them [the role models], they can be inspirational for them' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School).

'The children learn from these people, follow their example and aspire to become like them… It's an example to follow. It's easier to understand what the virtues are when they can read about someone and what they did' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School).

'I like the [virtue] signs in school as we can see them…the school Gospel virtue cross that we have on the walls is amazing as we can always remind ourselves…you can reflect about what you see every day' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School).

One parent participant felt strongly that the virtues have a deeper meaning linked intrinsically to Christian faith:

> Some people just see them [virtues] as words - justice, forgiveness… but when you believe in God with faith - you see a completely different picture of this world… deeper. (Sophie, Parent, Coastal School)

This point of view was expanded upon by another participant, highlighting the link between virtues and biblical narrative: 'It's amazing as we have the proof of it - we see the words and come back to the Bible - God said…''. She went on to clarify that a virtue is 'not just a word on a wall - there is a story behind it. Virtues are not just words - there are examples in the Bible' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School).

iii) Partnership between school and home

Responses from parent participants identified a range of ways in which the school's endeavours to promote home school partnership has supported them in their child's moral development. These included welcoming parents to school events, the taught character curriculum, family pastoral support and virtue rewards, communication about character learning including Gospel virtue home learning,

Invitation to participate in the Catholic life of the school

One parent participant stated that being welcomed into school through invitations to attend whole school events contributed to the support the school provides them in developing their child morally: 'Parents are welcome to attend the school Masses and invited to special celebrations e.g. Nativity plays, Easter plays' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School).

Taught character curriculum

Reference was made to the school's character curriculum by one of the participants: 'We study them [the virtues] one by one and they are encouraged to use them all'. The participant also indicated that there is a helpful reciprocity in the virtue study both for the children and the parent, 'when children are learning, we are learning with them' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School). As an extension to this point, another participant remarked that the school's character curriculum supports both parents' and their children's moral growth in response to societal demands: 'Society has a big impact on us and on our children as well, so having these values and morals helps us to make the right choices' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School).

Another parent participant stated that, in his view, the teaching of Christian character has supported their child's virtue education, reinforcing the moral messages communicated by parents at home:

> The school through teaching character with a Christian lens is really helping the parents because it's reinforcing what the parents are saying so they are getting it from home, and they are getting it from school as well. (Neil, Grandparent, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

This view was echoed by another participant: 'We mentioned the virtues, knowing about what the children are learning is something we could use at home' (Serena, Parent, Coastal School).

In addition to the character lessons, one parent participant expressed the view that she also felt supported in developing her child morally 'through RE lessons' and when 'the whole school goes to the church every Wednesday' (Sophie, Parent, Coastal School).

Family pastoral support

Another parent participant remarked on the support provided by the pastoral team, who are visible and accessible to parents:

> We have pastoral workers who you can talk to… I like the idea that they stand at the gate in the mornings so that parents who are shy or who speak a second language can come and ask something. (Kate, Parent, Coastal School)

Virtue learning and behaviour

One parent participant commented on the link between virtue learning and behaviour. They explained that the school provides specific awards for aspects of character which children demonstrate to reflect the school's Gospel virtues: 'They follow the virtues to help with their behaviour and to make sure they are using their faith. Children get rewards for following the Gospel virtues, so they feel appreciated' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School).

Communication about virtue learning

Two of the participants referred to the explicit teaching of character education through virtue study which is communicated to parents via termly Gospel Virtue Home Learning:

> Knowing what the children are doing at school is supporting me as a parent. For example, knowing that my child is learning about forgiveness this half term, I could use that to support his learning about it and to talk with my child, especially if there is an issue with it at home. I definitely find it a support. (Serena, Parent, Coastal School)

The Gospel Virtue Home Learning was referenced again by another participant as a further example of way in which the school communicates regarding character education: 'Each half term, we study a Gospel Virtue. They make art, posters, homework, behaviour' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School). The school was acknowledged for its efforts to

communicate with parents regarding character education who receive 'all the information on Catholic learning' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School).

Another parent participant presented a positive view of the school's development of character education with an explicit virtue curriculum:

> I need to praise the school as I have seen for many years how it has developed. In the past, we had values, and we have changed them into virtues, so I can see the clear development of our school in Catholic education. I know our children are learning about virtues. (Meena, Parent, Coastal School)

iv) Attendance at Mass

Specific reference to Christian teaching received at Mass was expressed as one of the ways in which parents felt supported in promoting their child's character development:

> I try to go to church every Sunday. There are lots of teachings at mass through the homily …and through interacting with people of the same values, this is one dimension of support - through the Church. (Neil, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

Attendance at Mass was regarded by one of the parent participants as a way in which parents are supported in developing their child morally through the experience of Christian practice and tradition within the Church: 'If you go to church with the children, you can teach them what to do, how to react, when to kneel, how to behave…' (Sophie, Parent, Coastal School).

v) Teachers as role models

One parent participant commented on how teachers are perceived as role models by children which serves to support parents in the moral development of their child:

> So often the teachers are role models for the children especially when they are younger… They treat the teachers as role models so they will listen to what the teachers are saying. (Serena, Parent, Coastal School)

<u>Question 6: How does the school communicate regarding character education?</u>

Parent participants explained a range of ways in which the school communicates regarding character education including newsletters, letters, parent consultations, virtue home learning activities, as well as through engagement of families in Christian practices and as part of whole school character education events.

i) Direct/formal communication

Parent participants were able to identify and explain explicit methods through which the school communicated directly with parents about character education via the school newsletter, the school website and through parent-teacher consultations:

> The newsletter is one way the school informs about character education. There are also parent teacher meetings which cover character education. If there is a specific issue, the school or parent would raise this. There could be a physical meeting or a telephone meeting to communicate about character education. (Nick, Parent Governor, Coastal School).

'Newsletters weekly, information on the school website and different events taking place in school' (Serena, Coastal School).

The school also engages with parents as part of its endeavour to evaluate provision for character education through parent forums and surveys: 'We have parental meetings where we can find out more and questionnaires that are sent home' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School)

ii) Virtue home learning

All participants presented a notably positive view of the impact of the school's use of Gospel Virtue Home Learning in communicating about how the school's explicit curriculum for character through virtue study is supporting their child's formation journey: 'What the children are bringing back home in their homework will also demonstrate what the school is doing in order to shape the children' (Neil, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School). The school's communication about character education was also mentioned by another participant: 'In newsletters, you always have the information about the Gospel virtue we are going to learn this half term. The children have half-termly homework when they work on the virtue studied' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School).

One parent participant highlighted the point that moral character is developed effectively through a congruence of influences, from both school and home, which he described as 'one voice':

> I agree it's important to nurture the virtues at home and to link what is happening in school with home. The development of the child is not separate at school and home, it is one. So, if there is one voice about virtues there is a chance it will grow within the child. (Nick, Parent Governor, Coastal School)

Participants commented on the variety of virtue home learning activities which related to a range of children's skills and interests. One participant remarked: 'Children have a variety of activities they could complete, and it can relate to their passions - they can choose artwork, writing…' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School). The home learning provided an impetus for discussion and reflection about aspects of character through role model study:

> The character learning - for example, courage, looks at role models to encourage children to think about things they don't feel brave enough to do, and to show them resilience to do it. (Sophie, Parent, Coastal School)

As a result of their child's engagement with the Virtue Home Learning, one participant remarked: 'Discussion is very interesting - they come out with thoughts that we wouldn't think they would have' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School).

iii) Christian practices

One parent participant, who was also Vice Chair of Governors at Coastal school, expressed the view that the school communicates regarding character education through participation in Christian practices such as attendance at weekly school Mass, invitations to class worships and whole school events, such as multicultural days:

> Attendance at Mass and listening to the homilies is always shaping the children in doing the right thing…When parents are invited to assemblies and worship, there is always a theme taken from the Gospel. I think that is another opportunity where parents will be able to see how the school is doing that particular work [character education]. (Neil, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

The importance of parental engagement in the Christian life of the school was echoed by another participant as one of the key ways in which the school communicates regarding character education: 'Assemblies and worships where we show the virtues and our faith is very important' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School).

iv) Policy

One parent participant, in his role as Vice Chair of Governors, had an extensive knowledge of the school at strategic level. He referred to the school's policy for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion which is translated into practice through character education and whole school events. He described this as 'a virtuous policy, demonstrated in our multicultural days… Parents can see the different cultures… those are tangible events that parents can see happening' (Neil, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School). None of the other participants referred to policies relating to any aspect of character education.

Question 7: What do you think are the challenges in developing Catholic character education?

Parent participants identified a range of extrinsic factors relating to environmental context as one of the most pertinent challenges that children face in contemporary society, as well as constraints within family life itself.

i) Environmental context

As echoed in earlier responses, participants raised concerns about the role of negative extrinsic influences in the environment on their child's moral development. One participant expressed a salient belief that 'the biggest challenges are the different voices the child hears in their lives'. For example, he said, 'There is peer pressure from other children… the environment in which they are growing up… the internet…', therefore, he felt strongly that 'the voice of the parent might not be valued as much as other voices so that brings challenge'. He concluded that, 'no matter what we say about virtues, there may be voices which are opposing our voices as a parent which will make the child confused - they don't know which is right or which is wrong - as there are many voices saying different things' (Nick, Parent Governor, Coastal School).

This resonated closely with the contribution of another participant who also expressed concerns about potentially negative factors in the environmental context which children are exposed to:

> If you are in the wrong company, you will get the wrong behaviour patterns…. it's all about peer pressure. I think that the internet and so many other outlets that these children have…are challenges which you have to understand and try to sort out. (Neil, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

Another parent participant expressed the view that moral boundaries have become more indistinct: 'As a society, children are exposed to so much negative information, it's getting harder to choose what is wrong and right… Children are influenced by negativity through media and technology - they spend more and more time doing other things' (Serena, Parent, Coastal School).

Two of the participants also raised the issue of diminishing trust because of exposure to the negative influence of social media: 'Social media is taking over and we are losing our trust' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School). This view was expanded upon by another participant to highlight a shift in perceptions of morality, as well as virtue role models, as a result of media influence:

> We are exposed to fake news. Morals of the society change - people who aren't good role models are becoming them now. We live in a society where we don't know who to trust now. (Meena, Parent, Coastal School)

ii) Contemporary family life

One parent participant expressed the challenge of a busy family life as an obstruction to focusing on faith: 'We have busy lifestyles which for us is the biggest challenge. Sometimes there is just not enough time to focus on the values of the Gospel' (Serena, Parent, Coastal School).

This view was also reiterated by two other participants in relation to commitment to Christian practice and the challenge of choice:

> My child wants to go to a sports event, and I want to go to church but we have to make a choice. I want my child to be happy. I want to use the Gospel Virtues. I want to go with him to church, but I know he doesn't want that, so we have to make a choice. (Kate, Parent, Coastal School)

'Most of us work five days a week and on that day off you want to do something with your family. Life happens, you have to prioritise well' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School).

iii) Maturity and independence

One parent participant expressed the view that as children mature, their choices reflect their developing desire for independence, which may involve a distancing from faith: 'I think many people go away from their religion now and with children getting older now they develop their own set of thinking' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School). In agreement, another participant made a similar observation: 'Coming back to church every Sunday is getting harder as they are getting older' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School).

iv) Need for reflection

One parent participant presented the view that reflection is required in order to gain moral perspective: 'They don't have the reflection that maybe we should step back a bit to help us to find the path we should have' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School).

v) Belonging and connection

Responses from two of the parent participants presented the view that a sense of belonging and connection to a community is a fundamental aspect of moral growth. One participant emphasised that belonging to a community provides 'a sense of safety and we all need to be safe'. She explained that 'we are social beings, which is how we have developed as a society, as humans, so we want to belong to something'. She also cautioned how a lack of belonging can present a challenge to morality:

> People want to belong. If you don't belong, you don't find your place…If you haven't got good morals, you can be drawn to something that's more negative in your life. Once you're in a bad place, it's really hard to get out of it without the right support. (Meena, Parent, Coastal School)

Two of the parent participants felt that learning about virtue, especially knowing and feeling love, can directly impact on emotional and mental wellbeing:

> Love is essential in your life. Everyone needs love and if we can't feel it, it can be very lonely…No-one wants to be lonely, especially a child, if they cannot feel part of something… they can get depressed because they can't cope with their emotions. If we are not belonging to anything or anyone, we feel we are being left. (Kate, Parent, Coastal School)

The parent participant poignantly expressed the binding, integrative nature of the virtue of love: 'Love is the virtue which is closest to my heart because it connects us with other people. We want to be together' (Meena, Parent, Coastal School). Participants also presented a shared view of the virtues as interconnected: 'They all connect. They couldn't exist without each other. They are like a chain' (Kate, Parent, Coastal School).

vi) Opportunities

In response to questions regarding challenges to character education, some of the participants identified opportunities to help mitigate these issues. In acknowledging the challenges, one participant remarked that through developing a partnership between school and home, the challenges of modern family life can be mitigated and supported:

> If parents are engaged with what the school is doing in terms of forming these children in the right way, that will help the challenges that parents face at home because it's a partnership between school and home…we have to take every opportunity to be able to demonstrate good behaviour in school to help with the challenges that parents have at home. (Neil, Vice Chair of Governors, Coastal School)

Another parent participant highlighted the importance of 'the connection between the school and the church' in supporting children to deal with contemporary challenges. The participant expressed the view that the church welcomes the community:

> The church is calling you - 'Come to us - come to our church'…many parents and friends consider this as important. The school goes to weekly mass which is connected with our virtues and our faith. (Sophie, Parent, Coastal School)

Case Study 2: Urban School

Senior Leader Interviews

<u>Interview Question 1: What is the distinctive nature of Catholic education?</u>

School leaders identified a range of themes in their explanations of the distinctiveness of Catholic education which will be discussed subsequently.

i) Unique community

The distinctive nature of Catholic education was described as a 'unique and special community…which forms the foundations for us to be able to engage in Catholic character education' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School).

ii) Christian mission

School leaders explained that a distinctive Christian mission was integral to the identity of their school. As an outcome of a previous Section 48 Diocesan Inspection, the Deputy Headteacher stated that the school endeavoured to 'absorb the children within the Mission Statement' throughout the school environment using Mission Statement boards: 'We wanted the children to absorb the Mission, so they are now a prominent focus in every classroom.' Immersion in the Mission Statement is also related to the use of positive praise in the celebration of character focusing on 'praising the child and seeing the positivity in what or who they are'. He went on to explain that character is celebrated through special 'Mission Statement Hero' awards for children who 'show God in their hearts, love in their words, and family in their actions' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

Another participant stated the importance of consistent reference to the school's mission throughout the curriculum and all aspects of school life so that 'it's constantly something that we're coming back to, and constantly talking about… as well as the curriculum, it's thinking about the way that we deal with behaviour and the way that we get the children to lead in the school' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

iii) Growth in faith

One participant stated the view that part of the distinctiveness of Catholic schools is the responsibility of Catholic education leaders and educators 'to provide opportunities for children to grow in faith… to nurture their spiritual development and to understand and develop their relationship with God' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School).

iv) Exploration of human purpose

One senior leader expressed the view that a distinctive characteristic of Catholic education is in fostering an understanding of human purpose: 'humans who are being put here with a very particular role and purpose.' She also emphasised the importance of providing opportunities for meaningful reflection about aspects of character and self-perception, 'to reflect about who they want to be, what qualities they believe are important, how they want others to see them, and how they want to influence the world around them' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School).

v) Holistic development

One participant articulated the role of holistic development as an integral part of the distinctiveness of Catholic schools: 'What we are looking to do is develop the child as a character holistically throughout everything that we do at school' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School). Another participant stated the view that Catholic education supports children's holistic development, enabling teachers to 'guide the children in what the Bible teaches us on how to live our lives' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

vi) Curriculum design and social justice

The design of the curriculum was described as contributing to the Catholic distinctiveness of the school. According to the view of one participant, character education is taught throughout the curriculum, beyond Religious Education, as well as throughout school life:

> This [Christian character education] isn't just a link to RE lessons…this is what we do throughout English, Maths, Science, History. It's what we do at break time and lunchtime, at the start of the day, when the children are on the playground, when we come in for our assemblies. (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School)

Further to this point, another senior leader explained that the emphasis on social justice within the curriculum, taught through the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, is a key constituent part of the school's distinctiveness: 'We deliver and plan the curriculum based on Catholic Social Teaching principles…we thread it throughout the curriculum' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

<u>Interview Question 2: What are the goals of character education in a Catholic school?</u>

Senior leader participants articulated the primary goals of character education as nurturing relationship with Christ, the translation of virtue learning into virtue practice and empowering pupils to act with social conscience inspired by Christian faith.

i) Spiritual development

Whilst acknowledging some overlap in her response to the previous question, the Headteacher expressed the view that the purpose of Catholic character education is primarily 'to understand the teachings of the Bible and for children to develop their own unique relationship with God'. She referred to the need to develop children's 'sensitivity' through opportunities to communicate and reflect 'for it to be truly unique…and treated as a very personal aspect to their spiritual development'.

ii) Virtue practice

One senior leader referred to the fact that, in his view, religious education as a curriculum subject contributes to character education. He stated that one of the key goals of character education is the translation of learning into virtue practice:

> We see the child as their whole journey, we don't want character education to just be a focus in religious education, we want to make sure that it is the embedded through the child, during their time here…through their secondary school life, and through what they do as an adult as well. (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School)

The Headteacher extended this view in terms of the importance of providing a meaningful, contextual curriculum which will support children to reflect and explore their role and purpose as Christians:

> We're always looking at how the curriculum can be applied to the context that the children are living in right now, enabling them to identify as being here with a particular role and purpose to fulfil, and supporting and guiding them on their journey towards identifying what that is. (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School)

iii) Empowerment as citizens of the future

Two senior leaders remarked on a similar theme regarding the goal of empowering students to translate their virtue learning into practice both at school, at home and throughout their lives so that they can have a positive impact within their own community and in the wider world. She described the goal of character education as the opportunity 'for children to be able to apply the principles and values of their faith as citizens of their class family, their school community, their family at home and the wider community'. She explained that an integral part of the school's 'overarching vision is to empower children to become architects of a better world' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). This vision underpins the school's curriculum intent and design, as well as providing the foundation for wider learning opportunities. The Headteacher expressed a strong belief that character education is strengthened because it pervades the

curriculum: ‘Character education is right the way through the curriculum which strengthens it’ (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School).

Another participant presented a similar view of the purpose of Catholic character education: ‘Character education provides empowerment and prepares pupils. To give them an understanding of how to follow the Catholic Social Teaching principles and why it's important’ (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

Interview Question 3: Describe your understanding of ‘formation’.

School leaders described their perception of the meaning of ‘formation’ in terms of the factors which influence formation, rather than a specific definition of the term itself. Responses referred to shared vision and purpose, living faith, understanding and application of social justice and the role of Christian tradition and practice.

i) Shared vision and purpose

One senior leader participant explained their understanding of formation in terms of creating a shared, collaborative vision and the importance of communicating and reflecting upon this across the school community: ‘[Formation means] identifying a clear, shared vision for our purpose and then facilitating pupils to understand and to own their journey towards that vision’. She went on to explain that this involves ‘posing the right questions at the right times and in the right context, to have conversations with staff and children around centering back into why we’re here and what our purpose is’ (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School).

ii) Living faith

One participant responded with an explanation of the relationship between character education and formation: ‘Character education is how you do it and formation is the what and the why’ (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School). She expanded upon this response using an example of how children respond to liturgical themes in collective worship, which she regarded as ‘explicit character education’, which serve to encourage reflection about faith and virtue, leading to the application of this learning in their own lives: ‘Using what the Bible teaches them to be able to apply it to their own life or learning, noticing that what's going on in the world isn't fair (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

iii) Mission for social justice

One of the participants articulated a link between formation and the understanding and application of Catholic Social Teaching principles:

> The children understand the Catholic Social Teaching principles more in depth and apply it to their own lives using their voice to talk about things that are unjust in the world and knowing that they can have an impact…the importance of identifying it, acting upon it, and knowing that actually they can make a difference. (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School)

iv) Christian practice

Although no specific definition of the term formation was provided, one of the participants referred to the importance of 'exposing them to as many different things as possible' to influence formation. He made explicit reference to the role and impact of prayer and collective worship upon children's formation. He explained that children are given a range of leadership opportunities to share the Gospel across the school community, such as prayer leaders and pupils leading whole school worship as well as school hymns. He also stated that the school has a 'very strong link with the church' through weekly mass and the active role and presence of the parish priest within the school (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

Interview Question 4: What is the role of the teacher in children's formation?

Participants articulated a range of areas to explain the role of the teacher in impacting upon children's formation relating to key aspects of teaching and learning and the significance of modelling virtue.

i) Teaching and learning

Curriculum design

One participant explained that in her view, an explicit curriculum design which 'exposes children to a curriculum that allows for lots of opportunities that build towards character development' contributes to children's formation journey (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School). A similar point was made by another participant in relation to the importance of the crafting of curriculum design: 'It is important for them to use opportunities to enhance pupils' spiritual development… being aware at the stage when they are designing and thinking about their curriculum' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). In addition, the importance of teachers' knowledge about local and global current affairs was also identified as an important aspect to the role of the teacher in supporting formation so that children can relate and apply their learning on Catholic Social Teaching in meaningful and relevant contexts: 'I think really good knowledge of what is current is really important, and being able to link that to the Catholic Social Teaching principles and making that really explicit' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

Teacher as facilitator

One of the participants referenced the importance of the role of the teacher as facilitator in responding to some of the challenging questions which may be raised by children as part of their faith learning journey: 'I think sometimes there can be some difficult questions that the children raise around faith… it's important that we address those questions and talk about them' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School). However, with further elaboration, the participant expressed concern regarding the issue of teachers' subject knowledge, especially with Early Career teachers (ECT's) and non-Catholic/Christian teachers in their confidence and ability to respond: 'Teachers who are coming into Catholic schools who aren't Catholic and don't have the subject knowledge that maybe other [Christian] teachers do…that's probably something that they would find difficult' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School). Another participant response to this question pointed to the challenge of diminishing Catholicity among staff and the importance of 'seeking clarification and advice' to build confidence to address challenging questions:

> One of the main challenges to me can be our non-Catholic staff and their confidence levels…they have to have difficult conversations but also respond to difficult questions. You've got to become more experienced as a Catholic staff. (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School).

Critical thinking and reflection

The importance of facilitating discussions 'which promotes a deepening of thinking and reflection in pupils' was regarded as an important aspect of how teachers can support children's formation. In addition, it was felt that there needs to be a readiness to 'impart wisdom…talking about their own experiences or feelings or relationships in a very neutral way that makes it meaningful for the children …and prepared to have challenging conversations' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). The Headteacher also referred to the need for 'maximising their opportunities, thinking ahead as to when those opportunities may present themselves…ready to give those questions, or those conversations, the time that they deserve'.

Opportunities for pupil voice

One participant expressed the view that pupils need opportunities both within the curriculum and beyond, to express their beliefs and opinions about issues which are relevant to them. She provided examples such as writing speeches on Black Lives Matter and writing persuasive letters on local conservation issues: 'I think it's teaching the children how to use their voice' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

ii) Modelling

The view of the teacher as a role model featured significantly in the responses from senior leader participants):

> We are role models for everything…children have all different kinds of backgrounds. We don't know what home life is like sometimes and it's important that they have constant role models in their life that they can refer to. And particularly for children, they spend more time with us than they do at home. (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School)

Another participant raised the issue of mission integrity, expressing a strong opinion that the school mission should be evidenced through how teachers behave and interact across the school community: 'If we are showing our mission statement is alive within us, and permeated through…then hopefully it's imprinting on the children as well' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School). The participant also identified a link between staff and student formation, highlighting that modelling is not only a teacher-student dynamic, emphasising that staff formation is an important part of the Christian life of the school: 'I don't feel like it is just something for the children, but it's something that we do as well'. He provided examples of staff briefings, prayers and mission statement celebrations to expand this point.

Interview Question 5: How do you educate for character?

School leader participants provided a range of responses in relation to the ways in which the school educates for character framed within the context of implicit and explicit provision. Senior leaders also referred to the role of critical reflection, opportunities for engagement in social action and service as well as outreach endeavours.

i) Implicit character education

Participants identified a range of implicit approaches to character education including the school Mission statement, school environment, ethos and Christian tradition and practice.

Mission statement

The Headteacher expressed the view that the school's mission statement is an established 'terminology' at the centre of school life which the school community are most familiar with: 'We have, I believe, a clear, moral purpose in our mission statement… embedded with the children' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). She further explained how the mission statement is celebrated weekly through Mission Statement Heroes and celebration assembly.

Another participant explained that although the school's endeavour with character education is not rooted explicitly in Gospel values or virtues, but instead is based on the interpretation and translation of the school's mission statement: "We don't have Gospel Virtues - just our mission' as the basis for how the school educates for character, 'God in our hearts, love in our words and family in our actions' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

The mission statement is referred to throughout all aspects of school life as part of the children's moral learning journey: 'It's such a lovely one that you can go back to for everything…we can always go back to the mission statement and ask: 'Which part of our mission statement do you think that you have/haven't shown today?' I think the mission statement is probably a strength' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

Environment

One participant stated that the mission statement and Catholic Social Teaching is explicitly evident throughout the school environment in classrooms, communal areas and central displays: 'When we go into the classrooms, Catholic Social Teaching will be up around the classroom, as well as our displays in the hall'. He explained that this supports children's exposure to the mission statement so they are familiar with it and immersed in it: 'It's just them getting it without even knowing it, so that children can recite it because it's up there all the time (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

Promoting ethos through relationships

One participant expressed a sense of pride in how the mission statement is translated and reflected throughout the school community in relationships, behaviour and attitudes. Throughout the school, he explained that 'you would see how the children interact with each other and with the class teachers…it is just very calm and loving' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

Christian tradition and practice

Whole school and class collective worship is an integral part of the Catholic life of the school. Themes are further developed through planned opportunities to explore Gospel readings and facilitate questioning and reflection: 'There's a lot of talking, discussion, questions and listening, as well as follow up activities to embed/extend learning' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

The whole school community attends weekly Mass in Church. In addition, the parish priest leads fortnightly collective worship within school. Prayer and reflection are integral to the school's Christian practice: 'We have things like prayer intentions alongside our daily prayers. The children will write down things that are important to

them, that they want to pray to God about… it can be really meaningful for the children' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

Another way in which the school has developed its Catholic approach to the curriculum is to link scripture to topics within each curriculum subject: 'We often look at how particular pieces of scripture can be linked to topics in History and Science and in our Writing unit. It's a carefully, thoughtfully designed curriculum' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School).

ii) Explicit character education

Catholic approach to the curriculum

The design of the school's curriculum has an explicit and purposeful Catholic approach, underpinned by Catholic Social Teaching principles: 'We've spent lots of time looking at our curriculum and how the Catholic Social Teaching principles in particular can be thread through all areas of the curriculum' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). She explained that the school has been supported by CAFOD to develop planned provision for CST across the school 'identifying one opportunity in each unit, in each curriculum area'.

Another participant provided a similar view stating although there is no explicit character education curriculum, it is delivered discreetly throughout opportunities across a range of curriculum subjects: 'We would try and weave it in throughout…it's the same with the Catholic Social Teaching principles. It's just to try and weave them in and get them in where we can' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

In describing how the school educates for character, one participant articulated the intention for the school's endeavours, referring specifically to the Catholic life of the school, including its approach to the curriculum: 'We want the children to be able to apply those inside school, outside school, every time that there's issues on the playground…'(Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School). In addition to curriculum provision, she also highlights the importance of dialogue and discussion regarding character development: 'It's what we teach in class …but it's also daily conversations that we have with the children.'

The curriculum is designed to facilitate planned opportunities to discuss and reflect on local and global issues which promote social action: 'It's good to have dedicated time to talk about global issues as well as local issues that the children quite often will use as part of their writing' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School). She provided the example of writing speeches which were recorded and presented based on their learning on Black Lives Matter.

Performance virtues through oracy

The school has also developed the use of oracy, particularly through debating and public speaking within the History curriculum, to enable children to engage in discussions within the context of a 'mock' United Nations Conference, allowing children to experience challenging discussion and seek resolution: 'The children are given a fictional state that has an issue and have to work together as the UN to try to resolve the issue' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

Virtue role models

There are opportunities within the curriculum for children to explore and reflect upon role models of virtue. Linked to explanation text writing, for example, children in Year 5 studied the lives of a range of saints to explore the meaning of the Beatitudes and 'how we can use the Saints… modern day heroes, as inspiration for how to live our lives and how to get to heaven' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

iii) Reflection and response

Pupils are encouraged to critically reflect on their learning relating to Catholic Social Teaching. The Headteacher was keen to explore evaluation of the impact of the Catholic Social Teaching in the curriculum in terms of the outcomes of pupils' 'reflectional response' to consider progression across whole school:

> We would like to audit all the individual activities and response reflections together to make sure that they are progressive, in line with children's growing understanding and knowledge. (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School)

iv) Social action

As explained by one of the senior leader participants, the purpose behind the school's Catholic approach to the curriculum is to inspire social action for the common good of both the local and global community. She expressed the view that it is fundamental 'to consider how we use that and how our actions influence our immediate surroundings, and then how that influences beyond the community and globally'. She emphasised the importance of engagement, action and impact: 'We are always thinking about how we engage with God and how we engage with each other in terms of how that influences our impact on the world' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School).

The school engages in a range of fundraising endeavours for charities which the children are actively involved in:

> Before Christmas, we did a food bank donation. The children all brought in different items of food, then we distribute those to some of the families who are most in need. We always send out Christmas food hampers for the most vulnerable families. (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School)

v) Outreach across school partnerships

As the school is part of an Academy trust, which include three community schools, the school endeavours through outreach to share its Christian mission with these schools to influence them, particularly regarding Catholic Social Teaching:

> The notion of tying in Catholic Social Teaching has meant that we've been able to influence our non-Catholic schools…who are now doing the same thing with social justice principles…to influence beyond the children...and they are maintained community schools. (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School)

Interview Question 6: How does character education impact on children's formation? How do you know?

School leaders were able to articulate their view of the relationship between character education and formation and provide their interpretation of the ways in which this impact is evidenced. Responses referred to the significance of receptivity, capacity for reflection, behaviour and relationships and holistic development.

i) Receptivity

The Headteacher explained that in her view, 'a lot of it depends on how open the pupil is to receiving character education and what kind of external influences might impact that'. She expressed her hope for the impact of character education using the metaphor of a seed that will grow and flourish over time:

> I think it certainly helps to shape who they are as people... the Catholic character. My hope is that at some point, if they're not baptised or practising, that there is something that will resonate. There'll be a seed that will grow… just the green shoot that stays there will fully flourish over time. I think it's hard to tell until they are adults how much of an influence Church is. (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School)

ii) Capacity for critical reflection

The Headteacher expressed a sense of pride in the impact of the school's endeavours regarding faith formation in terms of knowledge and children's capacity for critical reflection. As an outcome of recent observations in Year 6, 'their knowledge and

reflection blew me away. Without a doubt, there is a progression that happens there and then influence' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School).

iii) Behaviour and relationships

One participant remarked that behaviour is an indicator of the impact of children's moral learning: 'I think the way in which they behave can be a result of how well they can apply their understanding of what we're teaching them' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School). A similar view was presented by another participant who felt that the impact of character education can be observed through relationships: 'We're just trying to be kind, caring, compassionate people as we're walking in the footsteps of Jesus and God'. He provided an example of a recent collective worship where the children reflected on aspirations to become a 'modern-day saint' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

iv) Holistic development

One of the participants acknowledged that it is important to take a holistic view of children's formation with awareness of an interplay of factors: 'You have to take into consideration the whole child, other influences and what home life is like'. She went on to explain that 'we have a responsibility to make sure that they are getting the best education they can, and we are being the best role models and helping them to develop their formation'. She referred to the school's vision which provides a legacy of being 'architects of a better world…and I suppose the legacy is when they're older… are they architects of a better world? Are they happy?' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School).

Interview Question 7: What do you perceive are the challenges for Catholic character education?

School leaders identified a range of contemporary challenges for Catholic character education. Key themes which emerged included alignment of values, the role of external factors such as media technologies, the impact of social deprivation, Catholicity of the school community and attendance at Mass.

i) Alignment of values

The Headteacher identified the issue of potential incongruence/dissonance between the values taught and promoted at school and 'family beliefs, if they're not in line or supported at home' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School). A similar view was presented by another participant who acknowledged that 'our families are great, and they're really supportive'. However, she raised the issue that it can be a challenge for teachers in educating for virtue as there may be an inconsistency between role models at school and at home:

> It's difficult because sometimes the children don't have the same role models at home that they have at school so that can be difficult trying to teach them something when they might be hearing other messages at home. (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School)

ii) External factors/media technologies

Only one of the participants stated the view that there may be social, external factors which present challenges for virtue education: 'I think that external influences - social expectations …social media, TikTok present challenges for children' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School).

iii) Social deprivation

One of the senior leaders highlighted the issue of the school context as an area of social deprivation, acknowledging the support of the community to provide charitable donations: 'We're in an area of deprivation…with the current climate, we have a lot of families who are so kind and giving.' He explained that donations to create hampers have directly benefited the school and parish community: 'A lot of what goes in, comes to our families' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School). He further explained that in collaboration with their partnership schools within the Academy, the school also regularly provides 'Rotary Club' Shoebox donations.

iv) Catholicity of school community

One senior leader stated that he had observed a 'decline in the depth of faith and values' across the school community (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School). He felt strongly that the intentional endeavour of the school to develop the children spiritually sought to mitigate the challenge of a diminished number of Catholic families attending the school. According to school admissions data (2022-23), 34.2% of pupils are baptised Catholics:

> A lot of our children aren't faith believers, and parents at home don't believe… we are getting the children on board from such an early age. They're able to pass that onto their parents… not just that they're going to church on a weekly basis, but passing on a kind, caring, loving attitude and respect, walking in the footsteps of Jesus and God, being compassionate, loving people (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

He also acknowledged the fact that there was diminished Catholicity across the staff. With awareness of this issue, he went on to explain how the school uses house competitions to promote charitable action and develop pupils' social responsibility. He explained that as part of the school's Catholic mission, children are encouraged to use

these opportunities to reflect upon 'what are they going to do to make a difference and make a change' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School).

Teachers' subject knowledge

One senior leader participant raised the potential issue of a lack of capacity and confidence of staff not of Catholic faith 'to navigate those challenging conversations' (Lucy, Headteacher, Urban School), as a potential challenge to character education.

Another participant identified the challenge of lack of teachers' subject knowledge relating to Christian faith, especially regarding Early Career Teachers, in terms of 'being able to respond to questions that the children have that arise…there are some ECT's that might not be confident with their subject knowledge' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School). The participant did not indicate if this view was also in relation to whether teachers are of Catholic faith or not.

v) Attendance at Mass

The issue of attendance at Mass was raised by one participant as a challenge: 'I don't think that all families go to the Church'. However, she provided a counter argument here stating that 'we make up for that because we try and get the children there as much as possible. [The parish priest] is a constant around the school as well, and I suppose we're doing our best to try and address that' (Seema, Phase Leader, Urban School). A similar view was expressed by another participant who stated that parent invitations to liturgical school events, which their children were involved in, encouraged families to attend Church: 'If they know that their child is there, parents are more likely to come' (Samson, Deputy Headteacher, Urban School). He also praised the active role and presence of the parish priest in serving the school community.

Pupil Focus Group

Question 1: What do you understand by the term 'virtue'?

Only three of the six pupil participants engaged in a response to this question in which they described virtue and value as synonymous. It was of interest to note that this was the only question to which pupils found it difficult to articulate a response.

i) Synonymy of values and virtues

Responses demonstrated a synonymous understanding and use of the language of value and virtue. One pupil participant expressed virtue as 'a value of Jesus and his disciples' (Evie, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Another participant provided an example of this as 'a value could be love, hope or forgiveness' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). According

to the view of another participant, developing knowledge and understanding of virtue enables you 'to see the good in others and to help them to fulfil what they want to do in life' (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

2. What is good character?

Pupil participants defined good character in relation to fidelity to Christ and moral decision making.

i) Fidelity to Christ

Good character was described by one pupil in terms of fidelity to Christ and his teachings, 'To be faithful in Jesus and to live out the Beatitudes and his Word' (Samira, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Pupil participants articulated this fidelity in relation to showing loving to one another: 'To follow God's ten commandments and love one another as a neighbour' (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). This was expanded upon by another pupil as 'loving others, caring for others and helping others' (Evie, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

ii) Moral choice

One pupil participant expressed good character as demonstrated through 'good or bad' moral decision making: 'Good character is how you react to certain situations and if how you're acting is in a good or a bad way' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). This moral decision-making included resistance to temptation: 'Good character is being cleansed from everything that tempts you to do evil' (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

3. What is the purpose of learning about virtue?

Pupil participants described the purpose of virtue education in relation to virtue practice, discipleship, evangelisation and the imitation of Christ.

i) Application of virtue

One pupil participant referred to the explicit relationship between virtue knowledge and virtue practice, highlighting the purpose of learning about virtue is 'so that we can carry it out in our everyday lives' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

ii) Relationship with God/discipleship

The purpose of learning about virtue was defined by one pupil as enabling us to 'help others and be closer to Jesus' (Evie, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). A similar view was provided by another participant's response: 'To show us how to love and help each other

and teach others to be Jesus' disciples and follow Jesus' (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

iii) Evangelisation

One participant expressed a salient point regarding the importance of teaching virtue as part of a Christian mission to evangelise:

> Virtue is another way of understanding how Jesus fulfilled what He was meant to do. When He was crucified, He took away sin and so we have to teach future generations why it is important for virtues to even matter. (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School)

An analogous point was made by another participant: 'To be able to teach the next generation how we should be loving and how we should treat other people' (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

iv) Imitating Christ

The purpose of learning about virtue was described by one pupil participant as 'important to the faith and why we are here' as Jesus is an exemplar of virtue, '[He] represents the virtues in all he does' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Extending this point, another participant referred to how virtue learning provides inspiration to imitate Christ: **'**So we can spread the word of God, showing other people how this inspires us and showing them to act' (Rose, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

4. How will you use what you have learnt about virtues and Catholic Social Teaching in the future?

In reflecting upon how their learning would impact them in the future, pupil participants referred to the practice of virtue, impact upon prayer life, understanding of Christian purpose and the role of CST, as well as how learning had inspired a shift in outlook towards altruism.

i) Virtue practice

One pupil participant articulated his belief in the correlation between virtue learning and how this is translated through behaviour and action: 'We could use it through our actions, having hope in each other, spreading the word and loving each other' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Other responses referred to examples of how virtue learning could be demonstrated throughout relationships: 'I think it's helped me to have more forgiveness towards others' (Samira, Year 6 pupil, Urban School) and 'It's helped me to include more people in the things that I do' (Rose, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

ii) Strengthening prayer

Another pupil expressed a belief that his prayer life was enhanced because of virtue learning: 'We can use it when we pray to God about helping each other' (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). The role of prayer in fostering faith is a significant feature of data outcomes.

iii) Understanding of Christian purpose

One pupil participant articulated a salient point that, in his view, learning about virtue and Catholic Social Teaching has enabled him to enrich his perspective about others and develop a deeper understanding of Christian purpose: 'How you think of others and what's important about life itself' (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

iv) Pursuit of altruism

One pupil participant expressed a shift towards greater positivity in his approach to adversity and challenge, adopting a more altruistic outlook: 'Sometimes when bad things happen in your life, you have to try to be positive and see how it could change our lives and make a difference in the world' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Another participant made an analogous point regarding positivity: 'It's helped me to change my actions and try to be more positive' (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

v) Understanding of Catholic Social Teaching

Specific reference was made by another pupil participant to the CAFOD Catholic Social Teaching principles, displayed as 'keys': 'We have these keys in our classroom which say what we should do to help in the world, for example, human dignity or participation' (Evie, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). This area is expanded upon in the responses to the subsequent question.

5. Has your learning helped you? If so, in what ways?

Pupil participants identified aspects of moral virtue and some of the key areas of Catholic Social Teaching as part of their description of how their learning has helped their moral growth.

i) Growth in moral virtue

Five of the six participants' responses specifically referred to growth in empathy and compassion as outcomes of their virtue learning: 'My learning has helped me to relate to people better especially when they are upset' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

‘It’s helped me to support people who are going through bad times or who are upset’ (Evie, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

‘To become a better person and love each other and help each other when in hard times’ (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

‘[My learning] can help me understand more about them and what they are going through so I could maybe help them (Samira, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

‘It could help you understand how people feel emotionally’ (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

Another pupil reflected upon his learning about promoting peace through forgiveness: ‘We learnt about how Jesus forgave others’ (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

ii) Understanding of Catholic Social Teaching pillars

Pupil participants identified areas of their learning relating to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in which they felt impacted upon their understanding.

Human dignity

A significant point was raised by one of the pupil participants regarding the importance of their understanding of human dignity: ‘We have learnt about human dignity in most of our years and why it's really important. We want to be equal in life, so there is no racism and everyone should come together as one family’ (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Another pupil described human dignity in terms of how relationships are valued: ‘In Years 1 and 2, we were taught to treat each other in the way you want to be treated’ (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

Solidarity

One pupil expressed their understanding of solidarity as ‘giving people a chance if they are poor …a chance to do something’ (Rose, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Another pupil referred to the parable of the Good Samaritan as a reminder about ‘how we are supposed to help’ those who are in need (Evie, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

Care for creation

One pupil offered her definition of the common good as ‘caring for our home and the Earth’ (Rose, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

Preferential option for the poor

One participant articulated his understanding of the meaning of equality in terms of the ways in which disadvantaged people are viewed and treated within society:

> People get seen differently because of who they are or where they live. Some people live on the streets but are judged because they don't have anything…Equality is not treating people differently because of how they act and where they come from. (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School)

6. What do you think are the challenges to developing in virtue?

Pupil participants discussed a range of challenges which could inhibit their moral development including variance in values, receptivity, Christian practice and distractions from faith.

i) Plurality of values

One pupil participant highlighted one of the potential challenges as variance or incongruence with the values of others: 'When we try to build virtue, sometimes it can be hard for other people because they don't have that value, so they need to improve on that' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Another participant referred to a lack of understanding as a potential barrier to virtue learning: 'Maybe it could be difficult because you have to understand it' (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

One pupil participant highlighted the importance of explicit teaching of character education to develop an understanding of purpose and meaning:

> It could be hard to understand a virtue because some people don't know how to understand…they need it to be explained in more detail about how virtue can impact their lives and make a better way of living. (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School)

ii) Receptivity

All pupil participants acknowledged the importance of being taught values or virtues, although the view was expressed that receptivity may be a challenge to character education: 'Some people might not be open to listen yet' (Rose, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). An analogous view was expressed indicating readiness to learn as an important factor in moral growth, 'Maybe people aren't ready' (Evie, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

iii) Christian practice

Pupils recognised that attendance at Mass presents a challenge for character education due to other commitments and responsibilities within the family, 'Some people might find it hard to go to church because of their jobs' (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Despite these challenges, however, another pupil argued that 'there is always a way to go to church and you always have to try to find that way' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). Another pupil expressed concern that even for families who are attending Church, there needs to be a more sustained focus on listening to the Word:

> People can go to Church, but they don't pay attention to what's happening and the Sermon. They are spending too much time on electronics, bringing phones and books to church instead of concentrating on what the parish priest is saying. (Samira, Year 6 pupil, Urban School)

This point was extended by another pupil who expressed a deeply reflective and mature view of an analogy between not being fully present in Church to not receiving the bread of Christ: 'If they go to Church, they might not see what is happening. It's like taking your First Holy Communion but never actually receiving the bread'. He went on to express concern that 'if you don't focus, you are losing your spiritual connection with God and Jesus' (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

iv) Distractions from God

Another pupil participant referred to other factors which may serve as a distraction from God, such as 'homework or playing video games' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). A similar view was expressed by another pupil: 'People can get distracted with work and may not be close with their family and God' (Samira, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

7. Who/what has made the most impact on your learning about virtue? Give examples.

Pupils identified the power of faith, as well as the communities of family, school and church as key influential factors on their virtue learning.

i) Faith

One of the pupil participants expressed a strong belief in the power of faith as a significant contributory factor in his moral growth: 'I think faith is really powerful. It says in the Bible that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed you can tell a mountain to throw itself in the sea' (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

Similarly, another pupil articulated his view of how Jesus' teachings have enhanced his understanding of challenges in the world and strengthened his faith: 'I think it has been

Jesus Christ because Jesus, the prophets and disciples have taught me a lot about how the world can sometimes be wrong and how to be able to grow your faith so that your faith is strong in Jesus' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

ii) The family

One pupil described how regular attendance at Church from a young age has impacted her moral development: 'Since I was born, I have been going to Church and going to Sunday school from a very young age' (Rose, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). A similar view was expressed by another pupil: 'My parents encourage us to go to Church and Sunday school' (Thomas, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

Another pupil described how his family has encouraged daily Bible study as part of his moral learning journey: 'My parents have always encouraged me to be able to read the Bible every day and so far I have completed reading the Bible' (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

One pupil participant expressed a salient point regarding how his family has supported him to understand the importance of interfaith dialogue to develop understanding across faiths:

> My family has helped me to read the Bible in different languages. I have read half of the Arabic Bible and it's about understanding what is important about the different faiths, even though you have your own faith, to help to educate others. (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School)

iii) The school

One pupil felt that opportunities for discussion within RE lessons supported moral development: 'When we discuss with each other in RE lessons, you can have an in-depth conversation' (Joseph, Year 6 pupil, Urban School)

Another pupil described how religious teaching at school has developed his faith: 'The school helps me to understand why God sent his only Son… it develops my understanding of how you can use what has happened in the past (like the story of the Good Samaritan). Faith is really powerful in some ways' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

iv) The church

Two of the pupil participants referenced the role of the church as an area of impact on their growth in virtue through Christian teaching: 'The parish priest has told us a lot of stories' (Samira, Year 6 pupil, Urban School). This view was developed by another pupil who indicated that the priest provides moral guidance on 'how God wants you to act

throughout your day and that can help you see and study the Christian faith' (Isaac, Year 6 pupil, Urban School).

Parent Focus Group

Question 1: What do you understand by the term 'virtue'?

Parent participants articulated their understanding of the term 'virtue' in relation to 'good' moral characteristics and behaviour which is directly learnt.

i) Good 'taught' characteristics

One parent participant offered a definition of virtue as 'the morals and qualities of the way we should live our lives' (Lena, Parent, Urban School).

Another participant described virtues as 'good characteristics', emphasising that these should be taught in school. As part of her explanation, she expressed a strong belief that 'all schools are supposed to encourage character education, not just Catholic schools. It's part of the curriculum' (Mary, Parent, Urban School).

ii) Modelled behaviour

There was a strength of feeling among participants that virtue is learnt behaviour. According to one parent participant, virtue is learnt through witnessed behaviour, emphasising the importance of 'modelling what you want to see', expressing the view that there is a longevity to virtue learning: 'It's going to have a big impact for a long time to come…Everything that is going on around them now is building their character' (Anna, Parent, Urban School). An analogous view was presented by another parent who stated the causal relationship between what is observed and learnt, 'modelling your virtues so they can develop theirs' (Julie, Parent, Urban School).

Another parent participant described the importance of awareness of their own character development in terms of impact. In their view, virtue learning is absorbed through exposure to the environment within which they are exposed to: 'A child will mimic what you experience at home and at school, how you react and behave - it directly comes from the adults and the people you spend your time with' (Mary, Parent, Urban School).

Question 2: What is good character?

Two of the participants offered their perception of the concept of 'good character' in terms of moral compass and the attribution of specific aspects of virtue.

i) Moral compass

One participant defined their view of good character in terms of the development of a 'moral compass', which supports navigation 'between what's right and wrong and what you think is acceptable and what isn't' (Mary, Parent, Urban School). This was similarly articulated by another participant as 'knowing the difference between right and wrong and making the right choice' (Lena, Parent, Urban School).

ii) Aspects of moral virtue

In their explanations of good character, parent participants provided examples to describe aspects of moral virtue, such as the importance of the virtue of humility: '[Good character] is thinking about others before yourself' (Melanie, Parent, Urban School). Two of the participants referred to the virtue of compassion as a key component of good character: 'To have empathy… treating others how you want to be treated' (Julie, Parent, Urban School) and being 'caring and compassionate to others' (Anna, Parent, Urban School).

Question 3: What is the purpose of learning about virtue?

Parent participants' responses regarding the purpose of virtue education related to the development of virtue knowledge and understanding, the development of wisdom and experience, as well as preparation for future moral challenges.

i) Growth in wisdom

One parent participant referred to the impact of virtue learning on the development of moral wisdom, expressing the view that young people can lack experience and emotional maturity and therefore become 'wrapped up in the immediacy of their feelings'. As a result of this, there may be a lack of understanding or awareness of cause and consequence of their actions: 'They are not always able to look at the bigger picture or have the wisdom or processing stages of thinking 'if I say or do that, that might cause that to happen'. She went on to explain the importance of virtue education for her child who has Special Educational Needs: 'My child is autistic so it is more important for her because quite often she can't think outside of her own experience - she's hyper-empathetic and needs a lot of guidance'.

Another parent shared an analogous perspective highlighting the importance of moral education to provide support for their lack of experience: 'They haven't had the experience, so it doesn't exist for them' (Julie, Parent, Urban School).

ii) Virtue literacy

Parent participants acknowledged the importance of virtue learning in order to develop a necessary understanding of its significance: 'They need to learn about virtues to know what they are and why they are important' (Julie, Parent, Urban School). This view was expanded upon by another participant in relation to the development of virtue literacy:

> We need to learn about it to know how to make those right choices. You can't be expected to just know them, you need to be taught them from a young age…or you can't consciously make that right choice, if you don't know the difference between right and wrong. (Lena, Parent, Urban School)

Another parent referred to the relationship between virtue learning and development of empathy as an integral part of their child's moral development: 'I ask how do you think that person might feel because she doesn't always necessarily see that' (Mary, Parent, Urban School).

iii) Preparation for future challenges

One parent participant felt that exposure to moral learning serves to provide preparation for some of the future challenges that young people will encounter. Her view supported a holistic approach to virtue learning: 'It can't just come from parents or the school, it needs to come from every direction'. She expressed concern that 'otherwise they go with the easy option and when they get older, they will have peer pressure' (Melanie, Parent, Urban School).

Question 4: How do you teach your child the difference between right and wrong?

Parents explained a range of ways in which their children are taught the difference between right and wrong. There was consensus among participants that good character is taught primarily through role modelling. Responses also referred to the importance of developing skills of empathy, communication and reflection, as well as related virtue learning.

i) Role modelling

One parent participant stated the importance of 'trying to lead by example' (Lena, Parent, Urban School).

This view was expanded upon by another participant who explained some of the specific ways in which virtue can be modelled as a parent: 'You need to show them how to behave, how to speak, your values and your beliefs…a lot of it is copying your parents at home. If you do the right thing, they will follow you… It's role modelling' (Anna, Parent, Urban School).

ii) Developing empathy

One parent referred to nurturing skills of empathy as a significant factor in developing understanding of right and wrong: 'I think it's talking them through 'How would you feel if that happened to you? (Mary, Parent, Urban School).

iii) Communication and reflection

Parent participants shared the view that it was important to acknowledge their own mistakes in order to open a dialogue about moral choices through a process of discussion and reflection with their child: 'When you are wrong, admit you are wrong' (Anna, Parent, Urban School). The importance of honest communication was expressed by another parent participant, with a sense of personal moral reflection and accountability: 'I say sorry when I shout and when I don't always get it right. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes and I try to have that conversation' (Mary, Parent, Urban School). Another parent emphasised the value of 'communicating with them if they do make wrong choices, explaining to them that the choice they have made is wrong' (Lena, Parent, Urban School).

iv) Related learning

One parent participant highlighted the importance of reflection upon prior moral learning at school and related experience: 'You can refer to what you know they have been doing at school. If they were to make the wrong choice, you can relate it to other experiences' (Lena, Parent, Urban School).

Question 5: How are you supported in developing your child morally?

The parent participants identified three key areas which, in their view, supported their child's moral development: the role of the family, the school and the Church.

i) Role of the family

One parent participant felt that she gained support from both family and extended family members: 'If there was an issue, I've always got my husband at home to discuss things with and get his opinion. My parents are close to our family and helped raise our children as we are both working parents, so they have had an impact on things'. She explained the positive influence of her extended family as role models for her children's moral development: 'They've learnt their view of morals and good behaviour' (Lena, Parent, Urban School).

ii) Role of the school

There was a strength of feeling among parent participants who unanimously expressed a highly positive view of the school and the support they had received regarding their child's moral and emotional development: 'I am so blessed for my children to come through here' (Anna, Parent, Urban School). Another parent praised the school for their 'encouragement of curiosity and the uniqueness of each child' (Julie, Parent, Urban School).

Partnership between school and home

One parent participant praised the school curriculum and the information provided by the school to support a home school partnership: 'Knowing what is taught in the curriculum and what they've been learning about has helped'. In her response, Religious Education lessons were referenced as an example, rather than explicit character education lessons: 'In RE, they learn the morals behind the stories in the Bible. My son tells me what he's been learning in RE because he enjoys it' (Lena, Parent, Urban School).

Behaviour expectations

One of the parent participants felt that the school's approach to behaviour management supported children's moral development through clear explanation of expectations: 'If they see a child doing something that isn't right', there is an emphasis on 'explaining it in words that they will understand and explaining the consequences to a certain extent as well' (Julie, Parent, Urban School).

Another parent shared her observations of a calm atmosphere across the school: 'This is a very calm place… there is never a raised voice' (Mary, Parent, Urban School).

Teachers as role models

There was unanimous agreement among parent participants that teachers act as role models to support the moral development of pupils: 'What your teachers do now and how they are around you impacts you for a long time…' (Anna, Parent, Urban School).

Family pastoral support

One parent expressed a strong belief in the level of pastoral support she has received from the school as a parent of a child with autism: 'The school as a whole supported me and helped me support her… She is always treated with a great amount of patience and love' (Mary, Parent, Urban School).

Accessibility and approachability of staff to provide support to parents was recognised as a strength of the school: 'They will always make time for a chat' (Anna, Parent, Urban School). Reference was also made to the value of staff presence and visibility: 'They are in the playground in the morning and are visible' (Melanie, Parent, Urban School).

iii) Role of the church

One parent participant recognised the importance of the role of the Church in supporting children's moral learning but expressed the view that this is dependent upon the endeavour of parents to establish a relationship to engage with Church: 'You need to be interacting with the Church. You can't expect the Church to say this is what you do, you need to build a relationship with the Church'. In her view, the relationship between the school and the Church was previously 'a bit strained', but she spoke positively of the progress that has been made, 'it has now improved and is still improving' (Julie, Parent, Urban School).

Another parent described her child's reluctance to attend Church due to her anxiety which was transformed by experiencing a Service: '[My child] has always been scared of going to Church... she went for her first visit which was really powerful, as it reassured her that's exactly how it would be' (Mary, Parent, Urban School).

Involvement of the parish priest

Parent participants recognised the role and presence of the parish priest within school for weekly collective worship as an important aspect in supporting their child's moral development through relatability: 'When he says masses, he makes it relevant as he will come down to their level' (Julie, Parent, Urban School). Another parent participant expressed her view that the role of confession has supported her child's spiritual growth, as well as her emotional wellbeing: 'I think going to confession helps her because she can offload' (Melanie, Parent, Urban School).

Question 6: How does the school communicate regarding character education?

Parent participants described some of the key ways in which the school communicates regarding character education including both formal and informal opportunities, virtue home learning, mission statement celebrations and pupil leadership.

i) Formal and informal communication

Parents receive information through formal communication, such as the school website and letters:

> There is information on the school website which tells you what they are learning about in each year group. If there are particular events going on, we might have letters home, for example, charity competitions. (Lena, Parent, Urban School)

One parent participant expressed appreciation for the informal opportunities to be invited into school, praising the approachability of staff: 'They are open and easy to speak to - there are new coffee mornings each Thursday' (Melanie, Parent, Urban School).

ii) Virtue home Learning

The weekly virtue newsletter, 'Wednesday Word', was highlighted by one parent as a significant part of the school's communication to parents regarding character education: 'It's relevant to the Gospel and there will be focus questions. There is a school, parish and family version… we can access more information from the website' (Julie, Parent, Urban School).

iii) Mission statement celebrations

Another way in which the school communicates regarding children's virtue learning is through weekly whole school celebration, linked specifically to the school mission statement as an award: 'There is a 'Mission Statement Hero' certificate every week' (Anna, Parent, Urban School).

iv) Pupil leadership

During the discussion, parents unanimously felt that the role of pupil prayer leaders was an effective way of developing virtue learning through sharing Biblical stories and prayers with children of all ages across the school in the dedicated Prayer Corner: 'The prayer corner is good because the older ones bring the younger ones' (Mary, Parent, Urban School). Although the role of pupil prayer leaders was not an explicit method of communication regarding character education, it could be suggested that parents presented this view as one of the implicit ways in which they felt informed of the school's provision.

Question 7: What do you think are the challenges in developing Catholic character education?

Parent participants discussed some key ideas relating to environmental context as one of the most pertinent challenges that children face as part of modern life, as well as the role of Christian practice.

i) Environmental context

Role of social media

All parent participants agreed that the influence of social media affected children's moral development. Concern was specifically expressed regarding the challenge of controlling exposure to inappropriate content:

> You can put settings on but there are still ads that are inappropriate so that's the biggest battle. You can try to control it but unfortunately, they come into school and mix with other people who have it. (Mary, Parent, Urban School)

Another parent commented upon the inconsistency of moral message that children are exposed to as result of the influence of social media: 'A huge challenge is social media…it's difficult to monitor everything they are watching. Sometimes it will be giving a different message to what we are as parents or as a school are' (Lena, Parent, Urban School).

Peer influence

The role of environmental context was also part of the dialogue among parents in relation to the influence of older children, especially after transition to secondary school. One parent articulated concern regarding exposure to variance in moral messages: 'If they are at this school, they are surrounded by people who have the same message morally'. However, she expressed concern that at secondary school, 'the influence of older children on younger children is then a bit detrimental'. She felt that during the primary years, 'perhaps you are more sheltered from things', but as children get older 'they are exposed to different situations' (Lena, Parent, Urban School). An analogous view was expressed by another parent: 'When you've got older ones, they are exposed to a lot' (Anna, Parent, Urban School). It was felt by another parent participant that application of moral learning was more challenging for older children: 'It's easier at primary school but it's harder at secondary school' (Julie, Parent, Urban School).

Continuity of moral learning

Parent participants also expressed the view that a lack of continuity of moral learning from primary to secondary school presents a tangible challenge for children's character development. One parent expressed gratitude to the school for their child's holistic education: 'I'm very impressed with what my children have learnt at this school…I think it has helped them be a more rounded person because they have had that influence'. However, she also felt that this impact was disoriented because of a lack of continuity of their moral learning once children transitioned to secondary school: 'I think it's a shame that in primary school they have all this impact, but when they leave and go to secondary school, it's lost' (Lena, Parent, Urban School).

One parent stated that, in her view, there is a greater clarity of moral learning at primary school which is to some extent diminished as children grow up: 'The messages they are taught are easier for them to understand…that there is a clear line between good and bad'. She went on to explain her concern, however, that the moral learning 'becomes blurred' as they are exposed to experience within other communities:

> As they grow up, they are exposed to so many different situations that the lines become blurred and it's harder for them to tell the difference. They do different things; they are with different people. As a parent you have less control over that and you lose that a little bit. (Lena, Parent, Urban School)

ii) Christian practice

One parent recognised lack of attendance at Mass as a challenge, but despite this, felt that the school had supported her child's moral and spiritual education: 'we don't attend Church regularly but I'm glad my children have come to a school where they have learnt so much about religion and the Catholic religion… I think they have got some of what they have missed out on'. She acknowledged that regular attendance at Mass would have provided 'more of a sense of community…perhaps then it would be all around them, as opposed to just having it as school'.

Case Study 3: Semi-Rural School

Senior Leader Interviews

<u>Interview Question 1: What is the distinctive nature of Catholic education?</u>

i) Christian ethos

In the view of the Headteacher, the distinctiveness of Catholic education is reflected in the school through its Christian ethos being 'lived out': 'It's the feeling you get when you're in the building, it's what you see, it's those Gospel values being lived out.' The participant explained that the ethos is demonstrated in the quality of relationships among all members of the school community:

> It just becomes an automatic part of the way, not only the children, but the staff behave. For me it's all about our relationships, our interactions with each other, the respect we show for each other, with all members of the community, and it's those values that underpin and drive everything that we do in the school. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

She went on to highlight that, in her view, the lived Christian ethos of the school transcends all other educational endeavours, '...and that comes way before anything academic… it's our life'.

A similar view was shared by the Chair of Governors, who articulated the importance of an education in virtue which is translated in practice, as the essence of Catholic school distinctiveness:

> For me it's very much about promoting the Gospel values and the Catholic ethos… we are differentiating ourselves from a number of the other schools in the area. So, for me, it's about how we educate the children in these values and how they actually, on a daily basis, act out those values. (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

Analogously, another senior leader participant presented the view that the school's ethos is pivotal to the totality of the Catholic life of the school:

> The biggest thing that stands out is the ethos of the school, which drives everything…is something that really underpins everything we do with the children, whether it be curriculum based or extracurricular. It's something that we really strive to make sure is the bedrock and foundation of everything we do. (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

ii) School community

The Headteacher articulated her view with a heartfelt sense of pride in the connectedness and inclusivity of the school community: 'We are a family here…when you go around the school, you feel that we are completely entwined.' She accentuated that irrespective of whether pupils are Catholic or not, there is a commonality which binds the community together irrespective of faith denomination, 'we all have shared values' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Holistic formation

The Headteacher emphasised the importance of the holistic development of children as a fundamental dimension of Catholic school distinctiveness, elevated above academic goals, prioritising the essence of character education:

> My role I believe is to form the whole child. I'm forming someone who is going to turn into an adult, and I just want all of them to leave this school knowing right from wrong, how to treat people, how to do good in the world, and how to be the very best person they can be. But it's more about them as a person, not what SAT results they get.

The senior leader participant highlighted the importance of celebrating children's altruistic contribution, beyond academic performance as integral to the school's Christian identity: 'It's not all what you get in a test. What do you bring to life? What do you bring to our community? Let's celebrate that…that's what we're about here, we're about developing the whole child' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

This view was supported by another senior leader participant who felt that one of the distinctive characteristics of Catholic education is the commitment to holisitic development, 'making sure that they are secure with a good moral education rather than just the curriculum. I think we dig deeper and help to form the whole child' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

iv) Mission-led

The Headteacher stated that the school mission is driven by high expectations: 'I have the highest expectations of myself, of the staff, of the children'. She explained that the mission fundamentally underpins all decision making to serve every child, 'because I honestly believe every child in this school deserves the very best every day…every decision I make is what's right for the children' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

v) Pupil leadership

The Headteacher articulated the impact of pupil leadership opportunities within the school as contributory to the Catholic distinctiveness of the school. She described some examples of how pupil voice provides a platform for the children to enact the Catholic mission of the school through developing relationships across the school, for example, cross-phase prayer partner reading. She remarked upon the intrinsic motivation for pupils to serve and volunteer to support others with relationships at the heart: 'These children already understand the importance of relationships, helping each other and caring for each other' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Interview Question 2: What are the goals of character education in a Catholic school?

i) Moral and spiritual formation

One senior leader participant defined the goals of character education in terms of moral and spiritual development, concerning 'formation of the whole child, character education is not just understanding and knowledge of certain activities, but how to behave, how they treat others, and how they pass that on…and how they stand up for it too, over many of the challenges they face.' She went on to explain the role of the school's 'SAINTS Beatitudes' 'which underpin absolutely everything in the school… from behaviour, spiritual and moral development…We spend a lot of time on the spiritual

development of the children, focusing on our Gospel values' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Living the mission

The fulcrum of Catholic education, as expressed by the Chair of Governors, pivots around 'the Catholic faith of love one another', reflected through lived virtue and demonstrated through interactions and relationships across the school community: 'It's those principles that we should live by on a daily basis and we should see them coming through in the behaviour of the children, behaviour of the staff, the whole way in which we interact' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

Another senior leader participant emphasised the role of the school's 'SAINTS Beatitudes' as a framework for its Catholic character education. She explained the importance of the school mission motto as a lived experience, rather than just displayed in the physical environment: 'It's easy to have these on a sheet and put them up across school'. She insisted that the meaning of the mission motto needs to be explored regularly across the school: 'Each half term we have a focus, particularly in our worships and our liturgy' to develop a depth of understanding of each of the SAINTS Beatitudes so that they can be both understood and lived out.

iii) Nurturing aspirations to serve

One senior leader participant described the goal of Catholic character education in terms of fostering an education in virtue, giving the children 'qualities and values':

> When they leave here…I want them to be able to access their learning…to be confident in themselves…to be independent learners that have the belief that they can do anything that they put their minds to. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

She reiterated a point previously made in response to Question 1 in terms of the range of pupil leadership opportunities the school provides so that children can be given a sense of agency and empowerment, directed to the fulfilment of Christian mission through generating a sense of responsibility, aspiration and self-belief: 'You have to tell these children you believe in them. You can do anything. So, we have lots of roles and responsibilities in the school.' Promoting subsidiarity, through the vehicle of pupil voice, provides children with the opportunities to serve:

> It's really important their voice is heard - even from Year One, your voice is important, and you can do a job. You can take on a role or responsibility and that continues through the school. It's very much listening to the children and encouraging them to speak out. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

The importance of nurturing the role of service as one of the key goals of Catholic character education was highlighted by the Headteacher in her account of how the school responded to the crisis in Ukraine:

> The children here are so good at responding independently. When the war in Ukraine began, a number of our children straight away came in and said we need a meeting to talk about Ukraine and what we're going to do. That's powerful, that doesn't happen everywhere else. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

As part of her response, the Headteacher went on to provide an anecdotal account of her own personal experience of service when she visited the opening of a village school in Gambia which her family had supported, which she shared with the children. She described the pride she felt as a result of the pupils' fundraising response, concluding that, in her view, Christian service exemplifies the goal of character education: 'So, it's just reinforcing in lots of different ways…I think that's what sets us apart from other schools - our SAINTS Beatitudes… this is how I live my life to be a disciple of Jesus' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

With reference to the schools 'SAINTS Beatitude' mission motto, the Headteacher described the importance of fostering a sense of self-awareness in pupils so that they can recognise their divine call as disciples to contribute to Christian service, specifically in relation to the beatitude 'Talent': 'It's teaching the children over the time they're with us how to recognise their own talents, what are they good at and what can they give to the world' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

iv) Growing in faith

The importance of growing faith and understanding was identified by another senior leader participant as a key goal of character education in a Catholic school. In response to declining numbers of families attending Mass, the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher developed and led the First Holy Communion programme at the Church, working alongside the parish priest to develop children's understanding of the Mass and aspects of Christian practice within it:

> Due to the falling numbers of children attending Mass…we unpicked every part of the Mass and focused on what the Mass means…[the children] could ask questions, they were happy to ask anything. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

The Headteacher articulated that as part of her role, in addressing the challenge of attendance at Mass, she has a responsibility of 'ensuring children are growing spiritually... receiving these values..., knowing that for the majority of the children here, they haven't got that added supplemental teaching from a priest' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

This view was also reflected in the response provided by the Chair of Governors in relation to the goal of character education as holistic development: 'I think we're trying to achieve rounded human beings'. Using the school's 'SAINTS Beatitudes', the participant explained: 'We want to nurture our children…we want our children to nurture their friends, to nurture one another and to nurture their family…We want to bring out the best in our children's talents' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

v) Community

The Chair of Governors expressed the aspiration of a familial atmosphere, involving all members of the school community, as a key goal of Catholic education: 'We want to create a family'. She went on to explain the importance of the active participation and responsibility of the whole school community in delivering the integrity of its ethos: 'What's quite important for us is the involvement of parents, governors, staff and pupils in the whole ethos and the way in which we carry out our daily activities, whether that's learning, teaching, supporting, governing' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

Interview Question 3: Describe your understanding of 'formation'.

i) Holistic development

One senior leader participant described her perception of formation as 'shaping the future of that person... building their character, personality, nature, and their spiritual and moral development... It's probably the most important job that we have as teachers' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School). It is important to acknowledge here that the participant did not expand upon the terms used, which required further elaboration to be understood and interpreted fully. The quotation demonstrates that a range of ideas have been brigaded together as if synonymous, although they do not specifically relate to character education, which presents an issue within this field.

Another school leader participant expressed her understanding of formation as the way in which the school nurtures children's holistic development and provides a foundation for human flourishing. In her view, this is achieved through 'how we develop, encourage and educate them in such a way that they come out…we're giving them the jumping point of the future'. Formation was defined as a long-term view of the human person's development - supporting and preparing children for the significant transition to secondary school and then into future life: 'They're moving on as well-rounded children, as 11-year-olds into secondary schools. We're working with them. We're preparing them for life' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Moral compass

According to the Chair of Governors, formation was defined widely as encompassing the totality of the Catholic life of the school: 'It is the Catholic foundation that we educate on'. In her view, formation involved understanding and developing a sense of morality which would inform moral choices and actions, 'so that they know how to behave and they know the difference between right and wrong' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Celebrating uniqueness

The Headteacher articulated that, in her view, formation involved a recognition of uniqueness, attributed to each individual, by God: 'I think it comes back to them recognising they are a gift from God… they are all unique… be yourself, be your best self. God made you as you'. She emphasised the importance of the celebration of uniqueness: 'Let's celebrate being unique, be proud to be yourself, be proud to be your own person'. She shared her belief in the diversity of the school which, in her view, creates a learning opportunity for all which contributes to formation: 'We are an incredibly rich, diverse school… we learn so much from each other.'

Interview Question 4: What is the role of the teacher in children's formation?

i) Role modelling

According to one participant, the role of the teacher has a profound influence on children's formation: 'I think it's massive…it's absolutely fundamental. For me, it's the most important role'. She referred to the role of the teacher with regard to conscious 'moral messaging' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Urban School). An analogous belief was shared by another participant, highlighting that children learn from is modelled through what they observe from interactions and behaviour: 'First of all, [the teacher] has to be a good role model… because the children, through everything that we do here and every interaction we have with children and with each other, they're going to learn from' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Another senior leader participant stated: 'It's about being a role model and showing respect…passing on that information'. She went on to explain that, in her view, an important dimension to the role of the teacher is facilitating access to understanding within an environment which supports and encourages questioning: 'Whilst [the children] may not believe… it's making sure that children have access to what they need, but also that they're not afraid to ask questions' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Although each of the school leader participants recognised the role of the teacher as fundamental to children's formation in relation to the teacher as a role model, the

Headteacher also emphasised that, in her view, all stakeholders in the school community have an influential role: 'It doesn't just come down to the teachers. Yes, they're forming the academic side, but then it's all those other people in our school that have the responsibility to form the whole child'. She conveyed a strength of belief that there is a communal responsibility regarding formation:

> It's making sure that everybody in this building understands that we all have a part to play, every single staff member…no matter what their role is, feels valued and appreciated and knows they have a part to play with these young people. (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

The Headteacher expressed the concept of the interconnectedness of the whole school team in relation to its Christian mission of formation: 'it's a team - it's not me, it's not my school, it's our school because it's not just me that can give these children what they need. I need all of these people working with me and to believe in what I believe to deliver it.'

ii) Relationships

One senior leader participant highlighted the importance of the role of relationships in formation in terms of knowing and understanding each individual child: 'The first thing is they need to get to know the children. But secondly, for me, it's about the way in which they can individualise those children and educate in the right way'. She expanded upon her response to explain her belief that relationships need to be built upon perceptivity and sensitivity to the needs of each child: 'It's about how they understand what each individual child needs or a group of children needs' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Staff formation

In her explanation of the role of the teacher, one senior leader participant indicated the importance and impact of staff formation as contributory to children's formation journey: 'The benefit of having non-Catholic teachers in a Catholic school is you're bringing all on a journey to 'drive [their] spiritual development…' In her view, focusing on staff formation through 'giving them the tools' will facilitate teachers' confidence and capacity to nurture children's formation: 'You just need to question the children and guide them, let them come to terms with their own spiritual journey… so its formation for the teachers and the children' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

She also remarked upon the need to provide professional development to support staff formation due to the number of new non-Catholic teachers who had joined the school. The first-year induction training involved coaching, mentoring and modelling best practice in Religious Education and in liturgical worship, with a focus on reflection: 'It

was about forming them [the teachers] …so they could pass that on to the children' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

iv) Accompaniment

According to one senior leader participant, the primary role of the teacher is to 'guide and assist' the child. She clarified, however, that this sense of accompaniment should allow children time to reflect as part of their spiritual development journey: 'Whilst we're there to definitely guide them in the right way and teach them, it's very much about allowing them to have the time to individually take things on board and come to terms with their own spirituality' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Reflecting upon her personal experience of her own faith journey, she explained the importance of a 'gentle approach' without an obligation for compliance in order to provoke children's engagement and reflection: 'The first thing you do when things are forced upon you, is you try to stand up against it...what we are doing in a gentle, subtle way is actually making children think and engage' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

v) Inspiring faith into action

As part of her response regarding the role of the teacher, one of the senior leader participants also referenced the role of service to the community as impactful upon children's formation. She explained that the community projects the school had engaged with, particularly during Covid-19 pandemic, 'helped to build our relationships in the community', supporting children's formation through acts of altruism and voluntary service, 'because we focused very much on how to care for people'. The school's Mini Vinnies planned the projects, including writing letters to local care homes, collecting winter coats and food banks donations. She emphasised children's leadership of these initiatives: 'It very much comes from the children. We let them drive that… we're simply there just to facilitate it for them' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Interview Question 5: How do you educate for character?

i) Implicit approaches

Responses from senior leader participants clarified that the school had adopted a discrete approach to character education, rather than a planned explicit curriculum, through a range of implicit approaches. According to one participant, '[character education] is overarching… you see it day in, day out **…** all the staff know, the children know… it's a one big family' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School). A similar view was expressed by another school leader in relation to the role and impact of school ethos: 'I think it works really well in the ethos at the school. I think that's one of our successes and I think it's clear there' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Mission motto

The school's mission motto 'SAINTS' Beatitudes provides the basis for the school's approach to character education: 'We try to reflect on them as often as possible…at the start of the year, we always revisit them to remind them of the behaviours we can show to help the school be a safe and happy place'. She acknowledged that although the vocabulary of the mission motto is regularly used throughout school life, it is not as part of an explicit curriculum: 'You'll often hear teachers using those words… reminding them that they're striving, they're showing their talents' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Catholic approach to the curriculum

In the view of one senior leader participant, the school addresses character education partially through its curricular, but predominantly as part of the wider Catholic life of the school: 'There are some formal ways of teaching, but it's more about everything that we do outside of that' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School). A similar view was expressed by another participant in relation to the Christian mission which underpins the school's educational endeavour: 'We do not just teach them the basics of Maths, English and other subjects, but it's about how do we develop them as these human beings of the future' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

The school uses the principles of Catholic Social Teaching as part of its Catholic approach to the curriculum as one of the ways in which it provides virtue education. According to the Deputy Headteacher, the role of Catholic Social Teaching in their curriculum 'is more about making links when opportunities arise'. It was acknowledged that Catholic Social Teaching (CST) was an area which required further development within the curriculum: 'Looking at social justice, I think is something that we fall down on quite a bit'. She indicated that the school's mission motto did not sufficiently promote the principles of CST: 'Maybe our SAINTS Beatitudes don't necessarily cover that' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

She went on to explain that, in her view, there was discrete provision for character education through Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Religious Education (RE), but acknowledged that 'this is something we could be more explicit with'. She reflected on the idea that the school needed to adopt a more explicit approach to character education: 'Maybe we're not selling it as much as we could do or educating the children enough on this…that's definitely something I'd like to consider for the future' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Christian tradition and practice

One school leader participant stated that Christian practices, such as Mass and whole school/class worship promote character education in an implicit sense: 'Worships and

discussions are the biggest tools we use to explore [the SAINTS Beatitudes]' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Another participant described the school's approach to character education as a 'drip feed' approach, 'so it's through the liturgies that we do, it's when we're having conversations with children' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School). Another participant also expressed the role of worship as contributory to formation through 'liturgy, prayers and every classroom has their own prayer corner… it's part of their daily lives' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

Pupil leadership and service

Pupils are given a range of leadership opportunities across the school, as referenced earlier. One participant described this responsibility as an 'opportunity to let the children develop' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School). The Headteacher also explained that although there is 'some formal teaching in relation to character education, 'it's more about drip feeding it every day, so that service becomes part of daily life… I give to others because that's the way I should live my life and should aim to live my life' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Role model study

One senior leader participant felt that current provision required some development as it did not reflect contemporary role models: 'I don't think that's reflecting as well as it could do…to real life role models, people around them… making sure it's modern and up to date for them, which they respond to much better naturally'. She expressed the view that more contemporary role models would be more relatable and enhance moral aspiration, '... it then makes it more obvious that they could be one of those people' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Interview Question 6: How does character education impact on children's formation? How do you know?

School leader participants articulated their view of the relationship between character education and formation and provided their interpretation of the ways in which this impact is evidenced.

i) Holistic development

The Headteacher emphasised that, in her view, the impact of character education is demonstrated through the development of the whole child and in their readiness for the transition to secondary school: 'I think when you see the children, when they leave us, and the whole child that they are' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School)

ii) Behaviour

One school leader participant felt that the impact of character education on children's formation is shown through behaviour. She also remarked on communication from the local secondary school on the behaviour of previous pupils who had attended the school: 'the feedback we get from our local secondary schools is you can spot a pupil [from our school]...the way they hold themselves, the way they behave' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

This view was aligned with that of another school leader participant who emphasised behaviour, as well as participation: 'You see it in the behaviour, you see it in them wanting to sing, you see it in them wanting to participate'. She also commented upon the importance of respect as part of what she described as 'traditional values': 'If you walk around the school, they'll hold the door open… for me it's about their manners' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Building aspiration

Responses from two of the school leader participants focused on the development of confidence and self-belief, providing a sense of aspiration for pupils: 'I believe that they can achieve anything, and that's a massive focus we have here - building children's confidence and self-esteem. If we can do that, they can go on to achieve anything' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

'We'll always have children who are less confident and need more nurturing…for me it's about developing their confidence and developing their belief in themselves' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

iv) Quality of relationships

The Chair of Governors shared her observations of peer support within lessons: 'When I've been in classes, I've observed the children wanting to help others who are struggling'. She also commented on the quality of relationships based between pupils and teachers, based on trust: 'If they are worried about something, they're not afraid to approach the teacher' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

Another school leader participant provided examples of the quality of relationships between pupils which are nurtured throughout the life of the school. There are mixed year Prayer Partners so that younger children can be supported by older children in the school: 'They call them their big brothers and sisters. They meet at various times and it's lovely to see, especially when they sit in liturgies together'. The Prayer Partners provide a peer mentoring role, enabling older children to support younger children as a form of 'accompaniment': 'They're facilitating them and questioning them, but also teaching them as prayer partners' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

v) Empowerment through service

The school has provided a wide variety of pupil leadership roles. One school leader participant made specific reference to the role of peer mediators in terms of their role in character education: '[They] focus on moral development… talking through bad choices and how we can turn that around, and behaviour in the playground at lunch and break times' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

The Deputy Headteacher also expressed her view that the opportunities to serve in leadership roles contributes positively to children's formation journey as it encourages engagement in social action and promotes empowerment: 'It makes them want to help and want to be involved… they feel empowered in that, knowing that they can change the future'. She made specific reference to the school's endeavour to tackle climate change, emphasising that pupils 'want to be responsible, to show how they can improve it, but also shape each other' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

She went on to emphasise the importance of opportunities for pupil voice across the school, with specific reference to the role of the School Council: 'Pupil voice is the big thing. Go forward in the world, believing that what they say matters and people can listen to them…it's representing the fact that they can stand up for themselves and put things right if things aren't right' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

vi) Critical reflection

Children are encouraged to reflect critically upon their behaviour and consider how they can aspire to be more like Jesus, as expressed by one school leader participant: 'We always dig a little deeper and say…but what does that mean? What behaviours can you show? How can we be like Jesus or that key person today?' She explained that through questioning, children are given opportunities to reflect upon and explore their moral choices: 'Can you think of a time when you've already displayed that? Or maybe when you fell victim to issues like this?' In her view, this contributed to children's formation in developing children's capacity for critical reflection 'so that the children understand it and can reflect on how they can live more like Jesus' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Interview Question 7: What do you perceive are the challenges for Catholic character education?

School leaders identified a range of contemporary challenges for Catholic character education, discussed subsequently.

i) Role of the family

One school leader participant cautioned that in order for the school's SAINTS Beatitudes to be impactful as part of the school's approach to character education, 'the children need to really buy into them in order for them to work' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School). Another participant raised a salient point with reference to the role of the family as a potential challenge in terms of a lack of continuity of moral education between what is taught at school and how this is translated at home 'To me, it's about the behaviour of the family and does that continue at home? Are these values continued to be embedded at home?' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Engagement of families

The response of one of the school leader participants indicated a dissonance between the engagement of families at school Mass and Sunday parish mass: 'When we go to Mass as a school, it is very different; the children are really involved, engaged… singing hymns that they know and we discuss things a lot more'. However, she commented that at Saturday or Sunday parish mass, 'there's not quite the connection we have when we go as a school. There's a bit of a disconnection somewhere where we're not engaging the children as much as we could' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Regarding the issue of declining numbers of families in attendance at Mass, she went on to explain that parents are more likely to attend sporting or other events that they are invited to in school rather than religious events: 'So you just wonder how much focus they have at home'. In seeking to address this challenge, the school provides Gospel liturgy 'which mirrors what happens in church so they're learning the processes and responses as well to help their spiritual development' which she felt, 'they can't get elsewhere' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Role of social media and access to information

The Deputy Headteacher expressed concern regarding the role of social media and the scope of information which is accessible to children: 'I think they've got too much access to lots of information out there that's not necessarily positive…you see it on social media'. She referred to the countercultural nature of Catholic education which may lack relatability in a contemporary context: 'Going to church is not necessarily cool… if it's not relatable to them, they're not going to pay any attention' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Another senior leader participant acknowledged the idea of the social pressure children experience, sharing her view that the school endeavours to re-centre the focus in the direction of God: 'There's so much pressure on these poor young people… I think we have to allow them to be… but bringing it back to 'God made you different to everyone else'' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

iv) Staff of other Christian denominations, faiths or belief systems

One school leader participant stated that although not all staff are baptised Catholics, this did not detract from their commitment to the Catholic ethos of the school: 'They are not all necessarily believers … but they can still act and do work in such a way that brings out the ethos… they can enact the Beatitudes as they are all encompassing as to how we want people to behave' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

v) Decline of baptised Catholic children attending

School leaders acknowledged a decline in numbers of baptised Catholic children attending the school. The Deputy Headteacher commented: 'It's very tricky because we have a number of non-Catholic parents and an increasing number of other faiths so it's harder to engage them and bring them along with us on that journey'. Although this issue was identified as a challenge, the participant provided an optimistic perspective: 'I know they're very appreciative of it and I think they'd be able to tell you what it is we do here'. However, she felt that there was discrepancy in the 'buy in' from parents: 'I don't think they'd buy into it themselves. Not all of them. There are some who do, but I think that's something that's growing' (Patricia, Deputy Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

With reference to the declining number of Catholic families, the Headteacher expressed concern regarding a lack of aligned values which, in her view, had impacted upon children's engagement in the Catholic life of the school: 'In the past, parents have bought into what you're saying…so when you refer to Gospel values, [they] had an understanding, whereas now they don't, it's not important to them'. She felt that the discordance of values between the home and school also translated into levels of pupil resilience: 'The parents are not encouraging their children to be as resilient as we are'. As part of the school's endeavour to promote character development, she stated: 'They need to be resilient in this life; that's a big challenge because we're trying to form these characters, and we have these high expectations' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

She also raised the issue of parents' lack of understanding of the Catholic faith: 'They don't understand the faith element of it.. that's really hard because I have had children that then don't want to engage… I understand that if it's never been a part of their life'. This was identified by the Headteacher as 'one of our biggest challenges' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

In seeking to address the issue of declining numbers, the Chair of Governors remarked: 'The things we're doing are engagement and outreach and how do we retain Catholics coming to the school?' She went on to express an optimism that despite these challenges, 'what's great about the Catholic schools is we've got an opportunity' (Moira, Chair of Governors, Semi-Rural School).

This idea of opportunity was developed by the responses provided by the Headteacher regarding the diversity of faith and belief across the school community. Whilst acknowledging reduced numbers of baptised Catholic children at the school, the Headteacher presented a highly positive view of the school's endeavours to embrace and celebrate the faith and cultural diversity of the school community. She explained that the school had recently hosted a 'One World Week' as an opportunity for children to immerse in the experience and uniqueness of different cultures. She stated that 'our children are very good at accepting others and celebrating that everybody is different'. However, she felt that parent education was a pertinent focus for the school: 'It's making sure I can reach the parents as well and getting them on board… it does mean that you are educating the parents as well as the children' (Nuala, Headteacher, Semi-Rural School).

Pupil Focus Group

Question 1: What do you understand by the term 'virtue'?

Pupil participants' responses referenced two correlated themes to explain their understanding of virtue: moral growth and understanding and the notion of human flourishing, related to the school's mission motto: 'SAINTS' Beatitudes.

i) Moral growth and understanding

One pupil participant described a virtue as 'an understanding of what's good and what's not' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). Another participant explained that the school's mission motto provided guidance to support moral growth: 'a virtue to us is a value… we have the SAINTS Beatitudes that are 'Strive, Accept, Integrity, Nurture, Talents and Service' and they help us be better people by teaching us how to do the right thing to be kind to one another' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).
One of the pupil participants expressed her understanding of virtue in relation to rules which facilitate moral growth: 'Virtues are like the rules we live by. They help us to be better people and to show kindness and love to one another' (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Human flourishing

Pupil participants made explicit links to their understanding of virtue, in relation to their school motto 'SAINTS' Beatitudes, as a way in which to deepen a relationship with God: '[Virtues} helps us to get closer to God when you follow the SAINTS Beatitudes as the way to go in life. It teaches us how to live life and be a good person' (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

A similar view was described by another pupil participant: 'If we follow the Saint's Beatitudes then we will be 'Safe, happy and successful together with God' because we are following His path' (Freya, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

One of the pupil participants expressed his understanding of virtue with an indirect yet poignant reference to human flourishing, in relation to the hope of life after death in heaven: '[Our school motto means]…if you're safe and you've had a good life you can die knowing that you're going to go to heaven' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). The notion of human flourishing is also referenced in the responses provided to Question 3 regarding the purpose of learning about virtue.

Question 2. What is good character?

Pupil participants' understanding of good character was expressed in terms of Christian virtuous living in accordance with God.

i) Living virtuously

One of the pupil participants articulated his view that good character involves leading a faithful life to God, filled with love for one another: 'Good character to me is when you respect one another. You are showing that you are a good person, believing in God and loving your neighbour' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Another reference was made to the notion of human flourishing by one pupil participant in her explanation of good character: 'Good character is when you have lived your life to the fullest and you've done lots of good things in your life' (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Responses made explicit reference to virtuous characteristics: 'I think good character means honesty and to be kind and humble' (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

There was also an implied reference to key biblical messages, such as in the story of the Good Samaritan: 'It means treating others how you would like to be treated and not doing things that you wouldn't like if someone did that to you' (Freya, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Question 3. What do you think is the purpose of learning about virtue?

Pupil participants identified two key areas related to the purpose of virtue learning which involved the development of moral compass and how spiritual growth contributed to conceptions of human flourishing.

i) Moral compass

One pupil participant felt there is an explicit link between virtue knowledge and virtue practice: 'If you learn about values, then you know what values are to be expected' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). This view was developed by another pupil in terms of how this supported moral growth: 'When we grow older and we become adults, it would be good to have that understanding so you know how to treat other people around you and you know what is right and what is wrong (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Human flourishing

Other responses explained how virtue education helps to facilitate spiritual development in terms of human flourishing: 'The values will show us how to treat others and help us to follow God and make the right choices' (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).
There was a strong sense of how the school's mission motto had impacted upon understanding of virtue, as well as provided hope of a flourishing life with God: 'It can lead us onto God's path and eventually lead us to Heaven' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). This view was echoed by another pupil participant: 'If you follow the SAINTS Beatitudes and expectations, you'll be able to reach heaven and be able to live happily and freely…' (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Question 4. How will you use what you have learnt about virtues and Catholic Social Teaching in the future?

Pupil participants explained a range of ideas about how they would use their learning about virtues and Catholic Social Teaching. It is of interest to acknowledge that the participants did not make specific reference to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching as part of their responses.

i) Spiritual development

One pupil participant felt that his virtue learning had impacted upon his spiritual development and desire for God: 'It will help us and guide us to God and to heaven' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

ii) The enactment of virtue

Other participants emphasised how their learning had provided them with a foundation for moral living: 'When you get older and you've learnt quite a lot in your Catholic school then you know how to act with people and be good' (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). A similar view was also expressed by another participant: 'Later on in life… we will always need our virtues to help us get through what we need to do and be kind to everyone' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Social action

Another participant referred to the impact of virtue learning on her faith and in particular, the role of service to others as an outcome of her learning: 'It will help you not only teach you to be a follower of God, but if you know what they [virtues] are and how you should be acting, you can help other people as well (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Another pupil provided an example of service to the community she had been involved in at a local care home: 'I'm part of the Chamber Choir and it was around Christmas time…we went to sing for them as we thought it would be nice to do something to cheer them up' (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

In his role as a Pupil Chaplain, one of the participants explained his involvement with liturgies and how he had been inspired to serve: 'Every Monday morning we lead a liturgy …we take it in turns to do lots of the different things…we try to do things in the community for everyone' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

iv) Critical reflection

One pupil participant expressed how he would use his learning through an explicit reference to the importance of forgiveness, highlighting the importance of reflection on moral choices: 'In life, if you've ever done something wrong and you've learnt, then you know how to make it right and not to do it again. You can ask for forgiveness at any time' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). A similar point was made by another pupil who explained the need to adopt a resilient approach to challenges, using and applying previous learning through critical reflection: 'When things get difficult, we can think about what we have learnt in our lives before… all the teaching - stay calm and just think' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). Another pupil participant expressed a mature understanding of the importance of reflection as integral to moral learning and growth: 'If someone has done something, you should make sure they have thought about it instead of just telling them off because they might just carry on doing it, which might just make them angry instead of guilty' (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

v) Advocacy

One of the pupil participants expressed the concept of advocacy in relation to adopting a bold approach to stand up for injustice: 'Be bold in life … don't just hold back. If someone is getting treated unkindly… you shouldn't just stand and watch… you should stand up for them' (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). Another pupil's response suggested that her virtue learning had impacted on her way of thinking, acting and communicating with others: 'It teaches you how to act and think and how to talk to people' (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Question 5: Has your learning helped you? If so, in what ways?

Although there was a degree of overlap in responses to Question 4, pupil participants focused their responses on explanations of the meaning of the school's 'SAINTS Beatitudes' mission motto (Strive, Accept, Integrity, Nurture, Talents, Service) and the various ways in which the school mission had supported their character development.

i) Conflict resolution

Pupils explained how the school's 'SAINTS Beatitudes' had a positive impact on their relationships through helping them to resolve conflicts: 'It helps us now because when we have arguments, we can sort it out ourselves' (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). Another participant expressed a similar view, linking this to her faith: 'It has helped us to try to solve things ourselves more independently and to look to God to see how He would want us to act in the situation' (Freya, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Peer mentoring

One participant described how her virtue learning enabled her to support younger pupils in their moral development: 'Now that we are in Year 6, the Saints Beatitudes help us to be involved with the younger children and show them how they should act' (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Respect for others and our world

Three of the six pupil participants specifically referenced how their learning had a positive effect on their respect and compassion for others and the environment: 'It has taught me how to respect one another, how to respect the Earth' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). This view was shared by another participant who stated: 'I treat other people how I would want to be treated. With the environment… I know that it is God's creation and I don't want to harm it' (Freya, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). The desire to care for creation was also echoed by another participant: 'Nurture' is to take care of others and the environment and looking after God's creation in all its glory' (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). Another participant expressed his view in terms of acceptance of others: 'When I looked at the Saints beatitudes… 'Accept' really helped me learn how to treat others, how everyone likes to be treated nicely, rather than being hurt and called names' (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

iv) Using talents

One of the pupil participants referred to the school's SAINTS beatitude of 'Talents', expressing the view that 'we all have talents and can use them to help each other in different situations' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

v) Serving others

One pupil felt that his learning had impacted upon his desire to serve others. He explained his understanding of service as 'doing something without being asked to or expecting a reward' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Question 6. What do you think are the challenges to developing in virtue?

Pupils identified a range of challenges to their character development including the role of family, perceptions of Catholic identity, the pursuit of altruism and the impact of peer pressure.

i) Family relationships

One of the pupil participants felt that family relationships at home presented a personal challenge for her: 'I find it hard because I have a younger sister as she gets most of the attention. I have to still be kind to her if she gets upset'. She explained that she felt it was unfair when she was blamed, 'it makes me feel upset and angry sometimes' (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Another pupil described her perception of how parental expectations have created at atmosphere of competition with her sibling: 'I have an older brother who is really clever and we are both very competitive and I don't want to get lower than him because I don't want my parents to think he is better than me' (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

ii) The pursuit of altruism

One pupil candidly expressed her view of the challenge of living altruistically: 'I find it hard to put others first and not just doing things for myself and not being selfish and instead doing something to help others' (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Catholic identity

One pupil participant identified a lack of understanding of the Catholic faith as a personal challenge he had experienced:

> People in my football team don't know what a Catholic is. I started missing a few matches because of my First Holy Communion. I told them we believe in one God, everyone is equal, even if we are different religions, different colours... we are all equal and all made to be different. (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School)

He went on to articulate the Christian mission of evangelisation: 'God wants us to go out and spread the good news' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

For another participant, lack of understanding and acceptance of other faiths and beliefs provided a potential source of discrimination: 'If someone was rude to me or unkind about my religion or someone else's religion, I would feel discriminated against' (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

iv) Peer pressure

One of the pupil participants described her experience of peer pressure in social situations which presented a challenge to her moral decision making: 'I have a friend who really influences how I act'. Another participant explained that his experience of peer pressure led to the challenge of temptation. In the example of peer pressure that he described, he felt that he compromised his morality for loyalty: 'Sticking up for a friend who has done something wrong is not being honest… when they are trying to persuade you to protect them' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Question 7. Who/what has made the most impact on your learning about virtue? Give examples.

Pupil participants identified three key sources of impact on their moral education involving the family, the school and the church.

i) The family

One pupil participant acknowledged the role of the school on her virtue learning but felt that her family had the most significant impact, encouraging moral reflection and forgiveness: 'My family mostly do. So does the school but at home when I don't do something right, I have to really think about it and say sorry and try to seek forgiveness' (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). Another pupil participant expressed how one of his close family members had a significant role in his faith development: 'For me, it's my grandmother - she helps me pray every day, she's very religious and she gives me a massive understanding about Jesus… she really inspires me' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

ii) The school

The role of the teacher

Pupil participants felt that the school had a significant impact on their spiritual growth: 'I think my teachers have had a big impact on my learning about Christ because they really influence me and help me to grow in my faith' (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). Another pupil explained how specific staff members had supported her faith journey and capacity for moral reflection and growth:

> They help us understand how to be a follower of Jesus. If you've done something wrong… they will help you think about it so you don't do it again and make the right choice. (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School)

Christian practice

Another pupil stated that the role of whole school and class worship encouraged reflection and developed understanding: 'We have to reflect on what it's saying and that really helped me to understand the Catholic faith' (Grace, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Religious education

One of the participants specifically referenced the role of Religious Education as influential on his understanding and practice of virtue: 'Every teacher I have had has taught me RE at some point and they have always given me something to think about and bring forward into my life that I have learnt from the lessons' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

School community

Another pupil identified the school community as influential, particularly the school's mission motto in relation to their moral development, as well as inspiring their capacity to evangelise: 'This school as a community has really helped me, especially the SAINTS Beatitudes. They have helped me grow and spread the word of God' (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

iii) The Church

Responses from pupil participants related to how the Church encouraged reflection, supported emotional wellbeing and motivated a desire to serve.

Motivates Reflection

One pupil felt that the liturgies in Church inspired a sense of deep reflection: 'The Gospel readings help you to reflect on what people have done before you and what massive impact they have made for the world' (Harry, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). Another pupil also felt that attending Church inspired reflection so that 'you can reflect on your actions and be forgiven (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Emotional Wellbeing

Three of the pupil participants' responses related to the impact of the church on their emotional wellbeing. One pupil felt that church provided personal preparation and had

a calming influence: 'It relaxes me when I am stressed. Going to church calms me down and prepares me for the new week ahead' (Jacob, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). An analogous view was shared by another pupil: 'it relaxes me and prepares me' (Flora, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School). Another pupil described an emotional connection through the music and singing in Church, which she stated 'makes me joyful' (Mia, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Inspires Service

One pupil remarked that attending Church 'helped me to be a better person'. She explained how the teachings of the Bible provided a source of inspiration to serve: 'Hearing from the Bible what Jesus and the disciples have done, makes me want to do more' (Freya, Year 6 pupil, Semi-Rural School).

Parent Focus Groups

Question 1: What do you understand by the term 'virtue'?

i) Pursuit of truth

One of the parent participants defined her understanding of virtue as the pursuit of truth: "It's very simple for me - virtue equals truth' (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School). A similar theme was referenced by another parent to express her understanding of virtue: 'Finding your own truth and your values and how you want to lead your life' (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Moral compass

All the participants defined their perception of the meaning of virtue in relation to moral guidance which navigates behaviour. One parent described virtue as 'values that guide behaviour' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Another participant linked virtue to moral choice, 'what is morally the right thing to do' (Hannah, Parent, Semi-Rural School). The term 'virtue' was defined in relation to 'principles which guide us in our daily life' (Sandra, Parent, Semi-Rural School) and 'good principles for life' (Sara, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Responsibility to the community

Another participant raised the concept of social responsibility as part of belonging to a community in her explanation of virtue: 'There's a responsibility that comes with it as

well, as a parent, as a member of society, whatever community you live in' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

Question 2. What is good character?

Parent participants provided a range of descriptions of good character which are categorised as:

i) Moral living

One parent participant defined good character as 'someone who respects others and tries to love others without judgement' (Sara, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Another participant referred to an expectation of moral reciprocity: 'Someone who treats others how they want to be treated with love and care' (Hannah, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Specific moral attributes were regarded as constituent of good character such as 'authentic, honest, reliable, loyal' but cautioned that interpretation should involve awareness of moral context: 'Depending on the context it might mean something different' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School). One parent participant based her response specifically on moral action: 'Doing the right thing' (Hannah, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Steadfastness of belief

One participant raised the point that good character requires strength and courage to adhere to one's beliefs: 'It's the confidence to be that way - not being something that others want you to be but having that strength to be able to do that' (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Citizenship

The role of citizenship was raised by one of the participants in her definition of 'good character' as 'someone who adds value to society in a positive way' (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

iv) Faith into action

One participant defined good character as moral alignment of word and deed: 'living the faith in what you do and say' (Sara, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

This point was extended by another participant in terms of the fulfilment of Christian identity and mission: 'It is trying to be the image of God to others; to make choices in Christian ways - what would God want me to do?' (Sandra, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

v) Alignment between moral knowledge and behaviour

One parent participant stated that good character means to 'practise what you preach' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Another participant felt that good character required consistency of morality across all the communities: 'To be the same in church, in school, in work and in your family' (Sandra, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

Question 3: What is the purpose of learning about virtue?

Three key areas were identified by parent participants to explain their understanding of the purpose of character education:

i) Moral framework

The purpose of virtue education was explained by one parent participant in terms of providing 'a framework of what is right and wrong' so that children have 'a guideline in terms of how to live life in a truthful, moral way with Christian values and a solid structure' (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Another parent expanded upon the idea of a moral framework, which could be applied in decision making in their future lives: 'They can learn things in school and take them outside of school to decide what is right and wrong' (Sara, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Understanding 'the why'

One of the parent participants expressed the view that children need to 'understand the why behind it'. She felt that understanding the purpose of virtue education supports moral choice and motivation: 'It's important to know why we need to exhibit certain values or characteristics that are not just commanded or told' (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Shared core values

One parent participant expressed the importance of shared core values within a community of faith:

> You would hope that we all have some shared core and therefore we want children to share in that core and understand why we have that core and then to propagate it in their lives. We all have an interest in living in a society that is amenable - we look after each other, directly or in a bigger picture. We want children to grow up finding that the normal - it's the compass, the framework within which they grow so that it becomes second nature. (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School)

Question 4. How do you teach your child the difference between right and wrong?

This question provoked a fruitful discussion among participants based on their personal parenting views and beliefs within their own family and cultural contexts.

i) Commonality of interpretation

One participant opened her response with the remark: 'That's assuming we have the same interpretation of what is right and what is wrong' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School). It is important to acknowledge here that although there was some variance in viewpoints among participants in the discussion, there was a common shared view of the importance of raising children with a moral outlook based on Christian living.

ii) Daily moral nurture

One parent participant explained that she endeavours to nurture her children's moral understanding 'through everyday living… I try to direct them in the correct path to understand what is right and wrong. It's quite functional - not specific structured rules' (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School)

iii) Developing empathy

The importance of developing empathy was expressed by another participant in terms of encouraging critical reflection of moral choices and their consequences: 'At some level it's putting it back to the question- ''How would you feel if someone had done that to you?'' It's trying to look back and dissect what they have done and what the implications of that are' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

iv) Role modelling

Participants discussed the influential impact of role modelling on children's understanding of morality. One participant stated: 'They are meant to follow your example' (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School). However, another participant expanded upon this view to remark that: 'It's important not to be hard and fast in terms of black and white…I think children need to learn that there is grey in the middle' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School). She went on to state that, in her view, it is important to avoid judgement based on differences in how morals are modelled: 'This is the way we do it… and there are some people who do it in a different way and they have their reasons why they do it'. She cautioned against adopting a polarised view of morality in terms of a right/wrong dichotomy, suggesting that instead that is more important 'to tell them not to judge and to understand the reasons why we act the way we do, based on what we teach them and what the school teaches them'. She felt strongly that moral teaching will vary within families and those differences should be respected: 'People do have different ways and I think you need to respect that' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

An analogous view was presented by another participant with regard to differences of moral modelling within families: 'As they get older, they see how different family groups work'. She went on to explain that despite what is observed in other family settings, it is important to acknowledge difference but to adhere to personal moral values: 'In life there are always going to people who do things in a different way and they have to make a choice for themselves about what is right and wrong' (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

This view was corroborated by another participant, with an acknowledgement of children's developing maturity and need for autonomy: 'As you get older, you decide what you want to do, it's not fixed. You have to respect what other people do in their own families' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School)

v) Moral reflection

Parent participants raised the point that moral digression provided a valuable learning opportunity through moral reflection: **'**Everyone makes mistakes… we are not all perfect, we are all living. It's important for them to understand that a mistake was made and why and what can we do differently next time' (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School). In agreement, another parent emphasised the importance of asking for forgiveness as an important outcome of this reflection: 'I need to let them make mistakes; you can say sorry as this is the way that we learn' (Sara, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

The idea of developing capacity for reflection as a positive pathway to moral growth was shared by another participant: 'We can't change the past; it's what you do moving forward from that which counts' (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

vi) Biblical teaching

Another participant explained the impact of the moral inspiration she gained from attending Church: 'We go to Church on Sunday and take the message forward during the week… I will try to get my children to live like that (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

vii) Hope of redemption

The idea of developing an understanding of redemption as an integral part of children's holistic development was raised by one of the parent participants: 'My daughter asks me if people will still go to heaven if they do wrong. She is trying to make a relation between a sin and the result of that' (Sara, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Another participant also expressed the importance of belief in redemption: 'My children are young but as they get older they will understand that God did this to save the world because people made mistakes' (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

Question 5. How are you supported in developing your child morally?

All parent participants made reference exclusively to the role of the school in supporting their child's moral development. Participants unanimously felt well supported by the school's endeavour due to a variety of factors including school mission, role model exemplars, opportunities for pupil leadership and service, as well as engagement with parents.

i) School mission

One parent participant expressed the view that the school's mission motto (SAINTS Beatitudes) and character awards provide scope to be reinforced within the home: 'We are made aware of the SAINTS Beatitudes and discuss these at home with the children. We celebrate with them when they receive a certificate for displaying these actions' (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Another parent felt that the school's approach to character education through living the school mission, developed children's moral compass: 'The children have an enormous sense of what is right and wrong and are able to identify and discuss issues that they spot in school or their community' (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Role modelling

The significance of modelling Christian character was referenced by another participant: 'All staff in the school support the children's moral development by leading by example and teaching them how to be good citizens by following Christ's action' (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

iii) Commitment to the role of service/social action

One parent felt strongly supported in developing their child's character through the school's commitment to promoting opportunities for sought character through the role of service: 'The children are offered many different experiences throughout their school life to engage in charitable missions to help our wider community' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School). She provided examples of charitable engagements the children had been involved in, including: St.Vincent de Paul Society, The Salvation Army, local care homes and foodbanks. She also referenced examples of global charitable outreach including: 'Corpus Christi Africa Fund', Our Lady of Nazareth School in Nairobi and CAFOD.

iv) Engagement with parents

Parents praised the school's endeavour to engage them to be involved in their child's learning: **'**Parents are invited to share in many learning opportunities or school events throughout the year to engage with our children's learning. This allows us to understand

how we can support their learning and experiences at home' (Sara, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

One participant specifically praised the school's communication with parents regarding supporting their child's moral development. She referenced the school's behaviour policy and the way in which the school manages behaviour incidents:

> When an incident occurs and our child might have done something wrong, the staff talk us through the incident, explain what the next steps are and always suggest a way we can support the child at home. (Sandra, Parent, Semi-Rural School)

Another participant felt that school staff were approachable, and this was a significant factor in terms of supporting their child's moral development: 'The school is very supportive and we are able to discuss any concerns with them without feeling judged' (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

Question 6. How does the school communicate with you regarding character education?

Parents described a range of ways, both formal and informal, in which the school communicates regarding aspects of character education. A significant point observed here was that participants did not refer to any communication regarding aspects of character education as part of the curriculum.

i) Informal/implicit communication

One parent described the discrete nature of the school's approach to character education communication: 'I don't think it's obvious… its inferred' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Similarly, another parent felt that character education was observed throughout the life of the school as 'ingrained in the everyday' (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Parents identified three areas of implicit communication - community events, quality of relationships and the relationship between the school and the Church.

Community events

Parent participants attributed a deep sense of value to the school community, as distinctively characteristic of the way in which the school communicates regarding character education: 'A sense of community is the basis of everything we do' (Hannah, Parent, Semi-Rural School). This view was supported by another parent participant who made the salient point that: 'We are strong together. You need to be together to be strong' (Sara, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

Parents felt that the school community events were one of the implicit ways in which the school communicated with them regarding character education: 'It's good because the school comes together as a family, as a community' (Sara, Parent, Semi-Rural School). One parent provided the example of fundraising events: 'Last year, the Mini Vinnies collected food for the foodbank and this year they are thinking about what they can do for the community' (Sara, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Another participant mentioned the school's Chamber Choir which sang for the Africa Fund, which is one of the charities which the Church supports' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School). Participants also referred to regular organised events, such as quiz nights: 'Something is happening every two weeks' (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

Quality of relationships

One of the participants commented upon the quality of the relationships within the school community: 'When I came to see the school, it was obvious that the teachers all had a good relationship with the children and the children all had a good relationship with the teachers'. She went on to observe that character education was implicit within the environment of the school: 'You could see there was a caring environment that the children could flourish in…the behaviour of the children here is impeccable' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

Relationship between the school and the Church

One parent felt that her children were able to articulate their moral learning because of school Mass, as well as the direct involvement of the parish priest in the life of the school: 'The school is close with the Church- the children talk with us about it. [The priest] speaks to the children and then they will tell us at home' (Sandra, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

ii) Formal communication

Parent participants identified three explicit modes of communication regarding character education - character awards, newsletters and the school website.

Character awards

One parent commented that the school communicates through the character awards that the children receive, which are based on the school's mission motto 'SAINTS Beatitudes': 'The certificates reflect that they get awards for displaying the school's Beatitudes' (Mairaid, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

Newsletters

The school produces a fortnightly newsletter for parents, linked to the weekly liturgical message at Mass. It also informs parents about aspects of character education, such as

leadership opportunities and extracurricular activities: ‘We hear about the different clubs and roles and responsibilities that they can sign up to’ (Betty, Parent, Semi-Rural School). One participant remarked that The Church also produces a weekly newsletter focusing on a Gospel virtue theme: ‘This week it was forgiveness - the message comes from the liturgy of the week (Sonia, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

School website

One participant referenced the school website as a source of curriculum information. However, it is important to reiterate here that the school did not have a formal curriculum for character education at the school: ‘The class pages on the website give you a termly information about what they are doing in each year group’ (Hannah, Parent, Semi-Rural School).

Appendix XIII. Coastal School: Interview Transcript Example

Speaker	Transcript
S1	So, this is a staff interview with the Deputy Headteacher who is also the RE Leader. Thank you for taking part in this interview. The first question on Catholic character education is: **What is your understanding of the distinctive nature of Catholic character education?**
S2	Okay, well, thank you. So, the distinctive nature of Catholic education first, in my opinion, centres on the preferential option for the poor and the Catholic schools were established to support Catholic parents in their responsibility for the academic, physical, spiritual, moral and religious education of their children, with the teachings of the church. Through Catholic character, we want to form children in the beliefs of the church and enable them to grow as citizens of the world who will go out and make a difference.
S1	**What do you think are the goals of character education in a Catholic school?**
S2	I think character education is critical actually in all schools. However, when you look at the goals of character education in a Catholic school, I think they mainly need to cultivate the four Cardinal virtues. And it's centred around supporting pupils to grow as virtuous people. And they leave school ready to live as global citizens following Jesus' commandment. So, I think in a non-faith based school, character education may focus on, for example, resilience, and while in itself a good thing, in a Catholic school we would more focus on following Jesus commandment, growing as virtuous people. And as we know, character is so very important that we support all our pupils in growing in the virtues, be that courage, humility, compassion, love, faith.
S1	**What is your understanding of what formation means?**
S2	Formation for me is a lifelong process of growing closer to God. You know, in myself, brought up as a Catholic and basically just accepting being a Catholic. Then through my life, I've grown as the **RE** leader and as an RE Inspector, I've grown in my understanding, and it's about taking time to reflect. I think one of the main things is there has to be a readiness to be formed. So, as I have grown in my life, I feel I have grown closer to God by giving time to that. So, I think formation is the process of growing closer to God. The teacher has to be ready to be formed. This happens to all of us to varying degrees throughout our life. It is a journey of growth in getting to know Jesus better. Senior leaders can offer formation to all staff and should do so. How receptive staff are to this is individual and depends on many factors.
S1	**What is the role of the teacher in children's formation?**
S2	The role of the teacher in pupils' formation is key as a role model who lives out the Gospel virtues in their everyday interactions with colleagues, pupils

	and parents. Children learn from what they see. Formation can also be taught explicitly through RE lessons, character lessons, PSHE though not solely in these subjects. It is important that staff understand and support the Catholic ethos of the school and are formed themselves in order to form pupils.
S1	Thank you. So, the next question: **How do you as a school educate for character?**
S2	Well, we made the decision a few years ago and then through a lot of research, two members of the SLT had Masters in Catholic School Leadership and another member of staff was embarking on her PhD so a lot of research went into this. In educating for Catholic character in our school, it didn't just happen and I think that's important for any school to embark on this journey, you can't just jump into it. We developed a curriculum that teaches virtues both explicitly and implicitly. The Character Lead first of all, focused on forming the staff with really excellent staff insets at the beginning of each half term. Each half term, the whole school focuses on one virtue, the school came together to come up with the virtues ... it really has to come from the top. The governors were very involved and the governors take a big lead on this as well. So basically, I suppose it's the ethos of the school. The charism of our school is to be Eucharistically-centred. There's a focus on the virtues in the explicit lesson, with a focus on role models and scripture, and in today's life. At the end of each half term, there is a lesson reflection and its implications. And then implicitly, of course, it's sold through the ethos and through how everybody lives and how everybody acts.
S1	[Further probing]: Please could you expand on your use of the term 'charism'?
S2	Charism for me is the particular Catholic identity of our school based on Jesus Christ - the guide to everything we are and everything we do. Charism is the core values to a school and in a Catholic school, it is the spiritually inspired core values that underpin the essence of our school. While all Catholic schools will have a charism, it is important that each school can articulate what their particular charism is and what makes that school distinct from other schools while all being based on the teachings of Jesus Christ.
S1	**How do you think character education impacts on children's formation and how do we know?**
S1	How does it impact on children's formation?
S2	So, I think the impact can be seen in the children in our school. We live in an area of high social deprivation, and yet our results academic results are among the top in the borough, and a lot of that is through the pastoral support. So, no child is left behind, and the engagement with our families, and especially those who are more vulnerable, maybe considered more

	difficult to reach, we never give up on them, and I think that makes a big difference.
S1	**How do you know it impacts on formation?**
S2	Behaviour incidents are recorded on an internal safeguarding system in school (My Concern) and the Behaviour Lead has been able to track a significant decrease in behaviour incidents over a period of two years. A few pupils have multiple recorded incidents and these pupils are on a behaviour plan and receive additional support from the Pastoral Team and the Inclusion Team. In classrooms, teachers model compassion and love and always respect the dignity of each pupil, which in turn is reflected in the behaviour of pupils towards each other - this has been commented on on numerous occasions from external visitors (including new parents, teachers and other professionals).
S1	And the last question: **What do you perceive are the challenges to promoting Catholic character education?**
S2	Well, I think there are a number of challenges. I think it has to come from the governing body that has to be driven by the vision of the school. So, and I think that has to come from knowledge research from a deep understanding. So, that has to be in place first, I think if that isn't there, then if it's not part of the vision and the school improvement plan then it's more difficult to implement. However, I suppose some people would talk about the pressure of Ofsted and say, oh you know, we haven't got time for that because of Ofsted. However, in my opinion, Amanda Spielman talks about 'substance' and substance is character education. So, what better way to show substance than Catholic character education in schools. Other schools may think well, no, we need to focus on academic results. But actually, I think we've proven that in our school, as I mentioned, it's an area of high social deprivation, and yet our results are outstanding. So, I think that we do focus on the vulnerable pupils, we don't let anyone slip through the net, and in that way, we provide a preferential option for the poor, showing that actually the school is truly outstanding.
S1	Thank you.
S2	Oh, you're very welcome. It was a pleasure.

Duration 25 minutes and 35 seconds

Appendix XIV. Semi-structured Interview Schedule (Staff and Leaders)

Section 1 Key Research Question: How can Catholic primary schools promote virtue literacy?

1.1 What is your understanding of the distinctive nature of Catholic character education?
1.2. What are the goals of character education in a Catholic school?
1.3. How do you educate for character?
Prompts:

- *In what ways do the wider aspects of Catholic school life promote the development of character?*
- *How does CCE contribute to the Catholic distinctiveness of the school?*
- *Are there examples of character education in the curriculum or in explicit lessons and in other aspects of school life?*

Section 2 Key Research Question: How can Catholic character education develop the practical wisdom of the scholar?

2.1 Describe your perceptions of formation (What does formation mean?
2.2 Describe who or what, in your view, influences/impacts upon children's formation? (role of parents/role of the teacher/role of the church)
2.3 How do you think children grow in wisdom?
Prompts:

- *Describe any training you have received in relation to character education.*
- *How is the relationship nurtured between parents and the school?*
- *What do you perceive to be the role of community on character? How is this developed?*

Section 3 Key Research Question: How can Catholic character education empower the practice of virtue to serve Catholic Social Teaching?

3.1 How does character education impact upon children's formation? How do you know?
3.2 How do you promote Catholic Social Teaching?
3.3. What do you perceive are the challenges for Catholic character education?
Prompts:

- *How do you evaluate character education?*
- *How do you develop the concept of social conscience?*
- *How is the curriculum designed to support character development?*
- *What opportunities are there to practice virtue?*
- *What opportunities are there for pupil voice/pupil leadership? How do you think this impacts on character development?*

Appendix XV. Focus Group Question Schedule (Pupils)

1.	What do you understand by the term 'virtue'?
2.	What is good character?
3.	What is the purpose of learning about virtue?
4.	How will you use what you have learnt about virtues and Catholic Social Teaching in the future?
5.	Has your learning helped you? If so, how?
6.	What do you think are the challenges to developing in virtue?
7.	Who/what has made the most impact on your learning about virtue? Give examples.

Appendix XVI. Focus Group Question Schedule (Parents)

1.	What do you understand by the term 'virtue'?
2.	What is good character?
3.	Why is the purpose of learning about virtue?
4.	How do you teach your child the difference between right and wrong?
5.	How are you supported in developing your child morally?
6	How does the school communicate with you regarding character education?
7.	What do you think are the challenges in developing your child's Catholic character?

Appendix XVII. Coastal School: School Development Plan 2019 – 2022

SDP Year	Vision/Intent	Implementation	Overall Impact (Success Criteria)
2019-2020	To have a broad curriculum with a Catholic approach that meets the needs of all our children. To embed a Catholic approach to the curriculum (incorporating CST). To provide a Catholic education based on the values of the Gospel. To educate and inform children so they can take their place in society with an orientation towards service and commitment to the common good.	Introduction of a Curriculum Enquiry Question in all year groups linked to social justice.	Teachers will deliver the curriculum in a manner which reflects our Catholic understanding of the world.
		To introduce See-Choose-Act methodology through staff training.	Explicit opportunities for See-Choose-Act in curriculum planning. Staff will have the deeper understand of the principles of CST.
		Curriculum plans to be centred around an Enquiry Question, incorporating the principles of See-Choose-Act methodology (including School Virtues, character education and Catholic Social Teaching).	See-Choose-Act methodology adopted in KS2 to strengthen commitment to the common good. Catholic Character Education curriculum will form part of the school's wider PSHE provision.
	To introduce an explicit curriculum for character education. To promote engagement with families in relation to character education.	Introduction of an explicit Catholic Character Education Curriculum through staff meetings and specialist CPD. To create Gospel Virtue Home Learning for each virtue studied half termly.	Pupils will develop their virtue literacy. Staff will develop their knowledge and understanding of the pedagogy of Catholic character. Professional development in

			character education will contribute to staff formation. Families are informed and engaged with their children's virtue learning.
SDP Year	**Vision/Intent**	**Implementation**	**Overall Impact (Success Criteria)**
2021-2022	To embed and develop Catholic character education into all areas of the curriculum.	Curriculum development by specialist teachers in arts and culture. Subject leaders to incorporate CST and Gospel virtues into subject content overviews.	Curriculum planning will reflect character education in the wider curriculum.
	To actively commit to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) throughout our school community and beyond.	Provision for EDI whole staff CPD. Develop a literature spine to reflect EDI and protected characteristics. Create a Gospel Virtue Role Model gallery in both school sites focused on EDI representation.	All staff have received training in EDI (unconscious bias). Successful representation of diverse role models across the curriculum. EDI is reflected in the physical environment.
	To promote a lifelong love for learning and enjoyment of arts and culture through a range of experiences and opportunities for all children.	Explore options to allow for sufficient provision of pastoral support throughout the day, including Art Therapy and pastoral groups. Monitor participation of pupils with PP in extracurricular activities (led by PE Lead).	Catholicity reflected in the Arts and music curriculum. 100% of children in receipt of Pupil Premium engaged in extracurricular activities.

Appendix XVIII. Coastal School: Character Education Curriculum Overview Template

Catholic Character Education - Curriculum Planning Overview Template

Our School Gospel Virtue:					
Year Groups	**VIRTUE INTRODUCTION Week 1** **(Link to Enquiry Question)** Key questions	**VIRTUE MODEL TEXT** **Explore moral dilemmas** e.g. through stories, classics, fables, news stories, Biblical sources (parables etc)	**VIRTUE ROLE MODEL** e.g. from Biblical source, historical or modern life, recent news etc	**SONG/HYMN** Celebration of the virtue e.g. explore lyrics	**VIRTUE REFLECTION LESSON** **Week 6** e.g. letter to self, journaling, art work, presentation, pledge, prayer KS2 -Link to See Judge Act outcomes
1/2	Yr 1: **ENQUIRY QUESTION- What was it like where we live in the past?** **Intro Key questions:** *TASK:*	Biblical source: Other:			**Reflection Key questions:** *Relate to ENQUIRY Question:* TASK:
	Yr 2: **ENQUIRY QUESTION** **Intro Key questions:** *TASK:*	Biblical source: Other:			**Reflection Key questions:** *Relate to ENQUIRY Question:* TASK:
3/4	Yr 3: **ENQUIRY QUESTION-** **Intro Key questions:** *TASK:*	Biblical source: Other:			**Reflection Key questions:** *Relate to ENQUIRY Question:* TASK:
	Yr 4: **ENQUIRY QUESTION** **Intro Key questions:** ***TASK:***	Biblical source: Other:			**Reflection Key questions:** *Relate to ENQUIRY Question:* TASK:
5/6	Yr 5: **ENQUIRY QUESTION** **Intro Key Questions:** TASK:	Biblical source: Other:			**Reflection Key questions:** *Relate to ENQUIRY Question:* TASK:
	Yr 6: **ENQUIRY QUESTION** **Intro Key questions:** ***TASK:***	Biblical source: Other:			**Reflection Key questions:** *Relate to ENQUIRY Question:* *TASK:*

Appendix XIX. Coastal School Appraisal Document Extract

Appraisers Comments for staff on '*contribution or high value*' stage (performance of their role and responsibilities against their objectives and the relevant standards below)

High Standard of personal and professional conduct:

A teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct. Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by:

- Having high regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions.
- Treating all members of the school community with dignity, building relationships rooted in our School Gospel Virtues, modelled on the character of Christ.
- Being sympathetic to and promoting the school's commitment to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and reflecting the school's mission statement.
- Showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others upholding fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- Observing proper professional boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position.
- Ensuring that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability or might lead them to break the law.
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the Catholic ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach, and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality.
- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

Appendix XX. Coastal School: Gospel Virtue Home Learning Example

KS2 – Gospel Virtue Home Learning

FORGIVENESS

This term, we will be focusing on our school Gospel Virtue of FORGIVENESS.

Sharing the Eucharist, the Body of Christ, is a source of forgiveness, healing and grace.

TALK ABOUT

FORGIVENESS TOGETHER

With the grace and mercy shown to us by God, we are always able to start anew.

Everyone makes mistakes, it's part of being human. Sometimes our mistakes hurt others and then we need to say sorry. Sometimes mistakes made by other people hurt us. When this happens we need to be able to forgive. Forgiveness can be difficult, but without it a new start is impossible.

Talk together about:

- A time when you needed to say sorry
- A time you didn't say sorry but wish you had
- A time when you had to forgive someone who had hurt or upset you
- How it feels when you are given a new start because someone has forgiven you

READ TOGETHER...

Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

Zacchaeus was a little man. He was a tax collector and had become rich by making others pay lots of money in taxes to the Romans and to him. He didn't have many friends.

When Zacchaeus heard Jesus was in town, he wanted to see him. But Zacchaeus was short and Jesus was always surrounded by a crowd. So Zacchaeus decided to run ahead of the crowd and climb a sycamore tree. From there he could watch for Jesus. As Jesus drew closer, he held his breath excitedly until Jesus stopped right beneath his tree. Jesus looked straight up at him! "Zacchaeus," said Jesus with a smile, "come on down. I want to stay at your house today!"

Zacchaeus hopped down. "You are welcome at my house, Jesus," he said with a huge grin.

But others grumbled, muttering to each other. "Why does Jesus want to go home with the rich, cheating tax collector? He isn't good enough for Jesus to come and stay at his house."

Zacchaeus heard what the people were saying about him and he wanted to put things right. He turned to Jesus and said, "Master, here and now, I promise to give half of my money to the poor. If I have cheated anyone in taxes, I will pay them back four times that amount."

Zacchaeus wanted to turn over a new leaf because Jesus believed that everyone deserved a new start and now Zacchaeus believed it too!

Reflect: What does this story teach us about God's love?

Bible story based on Luke 19:2-10

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

What is forgiveness?

- You give someone another chance after they have done something wrong so that they can make a new start
- You let go of your feelings of sadness, anger and revenge
- You show love for the person rather than focusing on the wrong
- You also forgive yourself so that you do not give up when you have done wrong or made a mistake, but have the courage to act differently and have faith that, with God's help, you can change.

One of the greatest modern day role models of forgiveness is Nelson Mandela. He believed that everyone should be treated the same. He chose to forgive others because he knew that forgiveness provides freedom.

SCRIPTURE

Let's reflect upon some of references made to forgiveness in the Bible including:

'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.' (Luke 6:36)

'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.' (Luke 23:34)

"You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call you." (Psalm 86:5)

Role Models

Desmond Tutu - (1931 - 2021)

Desmond Tutu was Archbishop of Capetown from 1986 to 1996. Throughout his life, Desmond Tutu worked tirelessly against apartheid in South Africa. Apartheid was a system that treated people differently because of the colour of their skin. They had to live where the government told them to, they were not allowed to vote, had to use separate transport, go to different beaches and use separate sports facilities.

There was much violence and oppression in South Africa during the years of apartheid, and when it finally ended in 1992, some people were left feeling bitter and angry and wanting revenge. In order to give everyone a chance to talk about what happened, Desmond Tutu set up the 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission'. Many people who had behaved badly could hear from those they had hurt. There was the chance to say sorry and sometimes receive forgiveness. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission helped to provide an opportunity for a new beginning for South Africa, a chance to build what Desmond Tutu called a 'Rainbow Nation' in which everyone had the same chance in life, where diversity is celebrated.

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Dear God,

Thank you for the gift of forgiveness.

Please guide and strengthen my faith, especially in those times when I struggle to forgive. Help me to choose to forgive those who have hurt me and those I love.

Help me to offer mercy in the face of every wrong I encounter, just as You have forgiven me.

Amen

REFLECT:

How can we show others that we are sorry for the times we have made the wrong choices?

Have you shown forgiveness?

What can help you when you find forgiveness difficult?

St. STEPHEN

Feast Day: December 26th

St. Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit of God; he was humble and pure in heart. He forgave those that stoned him to death.

What else can you find out about St. Stephen?

What other saints or role models teach us about forgiveness?

HOME LEARNING SUGGESTIONS:

Please choose and complete at least one task.

- *Read and discuss the suggested Scripture*
- *Research saints and other role models who demonstrated forgiveness*
- *Reflect on things you have said or done which you want to say sorry for who should you say sorry to*
- *Design and make a cross to represent forgiveness, perhaps using words*
- *Write a prayer or poem about forgiveness*
- *Design a rainbow wordle using words that make you think of forgiveness*

Bring in your home learning to celebrate your work with your class by Monday 5th February 2024.

Appendix XXI. Urban School Development Plan 2022-2024

SDP Year	Vision/Intent	Implementation	Overall Impact (Success Criteria)
2022-2023	To continue to effectively implement principles of Catholic Social Teaching in the curriculum. To further promote pupils' understanding of social justice to inspire and sustain active compassion in our school, local community and the wider world.	The curriculum needs to act compassionately towards the child, as well as encouraging the child to act compassionately towards others. Principles of CST and social justice to be explicitly evidenced across the curriculum and can be articulated by the children. Curiosity and inspiration is evidenced through CST teaching. CST principles are implemented in the curriculum through enquiry and dilemma based learning. CST conceptual links are evident across different areas of the curriculum.	All teachers will have an increased confidence in the depth of knowledge and understanding of CST that their children have mastered. All teachers will explicitly plan links with CST as part of a spiral curriculum approach. All pupils can confidently articulate CST with examples of where they have gained knowledge and acted compassionately.
	Children are empowered to positively impact the world in which they live through applying CST to support the local and global community.	Active compassion builds on the knowledge we have learnt and the empathy we feel for a given social justice concept.	Pupils can instigate acts of compassion that impact on themselves, the school, the local community and the wider world to become architects of a better world.

SDP Year	Vision/Intent	Implementation	Overall Impact (Success Criteria)
2023 - 2024	Further deepen pupils' understanding of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), through identifying and making explicit links across all curriculum areas. Further develop CPD opportunities for staff, which link explicitly to the Catholic nature of the school. Enable pupils to be increasingly spontaneous in their planning and leading of worship. Enhance opportunities for children to engage in leadership responsibilities.	Identify opportunities for children to reflect on CST across the full curriculum range. Each taught unit across the full curriculum range, will include a planned opportunity to explore a link to CST. As this develops, pupils will begin to identify links independently. Curriculum books will evidence developing links between CST and the wider curriculum. Develop the leadership roles of pupils to increase their motivation to serve. Ensure pupils are familiar with a range of resources, which can be drawn upon to support their independent planning of worship.	All pupils will speak confidently about how they reflect on our mission throughout the wider curriculum. Pupils have clear understanding of the impact of how CST principles are embedded throughout the school and community. Pupil Leaders are highly valued across the school and all members of the community have a clear understanding of their function. Pupil Leaders make an active contribution to social justice within school and the wider community.