If (Inner Strength)

The poem "*If*" by Rudyard Kipling is written in the form of paternal advice to the poet's son, John. It evokes a feeling of Victorian-era stoicism—the "stiff upper lip" self-discipline, which popular culture rendered into a British national virtue and character trait. "*If*" remains a cultural touchstone. It opens with the lines:

"If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you…"

What does a good education do? Granted, it challenges children to perform at their very best in academic areas. That is why we attend school, to be able to succeed in a variety of subject areas and prove that we are able to learn and apply knowledge and skills. But an education should be much more holistic. It should extend far beyond the sciences, arts or languages. It provides children with opportunities to find themselves, to understand how they behave in certain situations and to learn skills that will lead to success in their adult lives.



Personally I want my own children to be confident to be able to tackle anything that comes their way in life. If I could give them anything it would be the ability to respond appropriately and positively to anything that life throws at them. I have a very good friend who is currently having a difficult time with her health. She is an inspiration. She has taken more challenges than I care to remember and still continues to remain positive. Laughter is a great healer and she still manages to do so daily. Her determination to get well and her willingness to accept whatever is necessary in pursuit of a return to good health is relentless. Her strength is incredible. Her inner strength is key.

Where does this type of strength come from and how, if at all, can we instil it in our children? A brief search on the Internet suggests there are a multitude of ways in which we can build inner strength, such as:

- Embracing every feeling as 'good'. Feelings are not 'bad' – we must not judge our feelings.
- Having boundaries. Learn to say "no". When you feel good about yourself, it is not as hard to say "no" when something does not feel right. Being able to set a good firm boundary comes from a strong inner core. You do not worry about being rejected. You want to speak your truth.

- Bending with challenges. Life brings us challenges; sometimes unexpected, maybe painful. We need to bend with them, “go with the flow” and let ourselves move with the feelings. We need to adapt to what is happening without breaking.

Every hour of every day, people are seeking ways to pull themselves out of crisis and feel "normal" again, to feel strong. A person’s character is the essential ingredient to a successful future. Character education has been a strength at Yateley Manor for many years. Rather than being a diluted part of the curriculum, it is through the PSB that we really focus on the elements of character that build leadership, independence, collaboration and effective communication.

“*You express the truth of your character with the choice of your actions.*” (Steve Maraboli)

The Department for Education has brought out a new publication entitled “Character Education: Framework Guidance” for schools in the Maintained Sector to benchmark their provision for pupils against six expectations. At least the document acknowledges that education for character is integral to the work of excellent schools. However for many “State schools” this may be yet another initiative that causes additional stress on timetables and resources. Leading an Independent School allows the freedom to build a curriculum that suits the individual children, to prepare them for successful adult lives. We build inner strength in children by primarily developing excellent relationships with them. This provides a safe environment for the children to reflect and acknowledge their feelings. Inner strength needs to be nurtured and embraced when challenges arise. We are not bound by the DfE guidance document. In actual fact we are a long way ahead already.

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