

# Values: Building a Community of Character

## Introduction

In a school like Haberdashers', it would be easy to fall into the trap of believing that busy lives and excellent examination results together constitute good education. But that would be a very limited vision. A truly educated person is one who has been prepared to go out into a complex and changing world, not just with the necessary intellectual equipment, but also with the personal qualities which will enable them to apply their education in a morally responsible manner, recognising that their personal fulfilment and flourishing cannot be separated from the flourishing of the communities of which they are part.

Holistic education (education which genuinely prepares young people for life and not just for examinations) will thus be concerned with **values**; with those principles, ideals and standards which positively shape our interactions with others, which inspire us to become the best we can become, both intellectually and in our relationships, and which ultimately shape the character out of which we act. The development of good **character** is at the heart of good education, and so we should articulate and aspire to live by a set of values which will build good character. The values outlined here are consistent with both the historical Christian foundation of the school and the intention of the Haberdashers' Company to '*encourage the full development of the individual*'. Our aspiration towards **wisdom**, in the sense of living well in the world, is an appropriate contemporary expression of our founder's original intention. Robert Aske's vision was of a school where good learning and service of others were inseparable.

**Humility, Integrity and Wisdom** are our three core values, qualities of character by which we hope members of this community can be recognised. Every member of the school community is encouraged to embrace and model these values.

## Humility in Learning

If character is firmly at the heart of the Habs community there will be a huge impact on learning. Central to this is the value of **humility**. This is especially important in relation to learning since it involves making a balanced and realistic appraisal of one's own strengths and weaknesses. Humility is about having respect for one's place in context, thinking neither more nor less of ourselves than is appropriate. Humility is the proper starting point for learning since it leads to a willingness to acknowledge what is not known as well as what is. Once the limitations of our knowledge become clear the proper response is a genuine desire to learn.

Having established **humility** as a foundational value, learning can then be characterised by the pursuit of **Truth** and the practice of **Tolerance**. Pursuing **truth** flows from our desire to learn which results from an acknowledgment of what we don't know. All learning assumes that there is something to be learned,

whatever the discipline. Whilst recognising that we cannot learn exhaustively we should still retain confidence in our ability to learn truly.

Practising **tolerance** also emerges from realising the limited extent of our knowledge and the corresponding responsibility to engage with others. We will listen to others in the hope that we might learn from them or that our thinking might be stimulated through courteous and friendly disagreement. Our engagement will be *respectful* (because we are aware of our own limitations) and *anticipatory* (since our interaction with others may aid us in the pursuit of truth). Thus learning becomes a reciprocal process, between and amongst staff and students. Humility helps to protect us from the intolerance which arises when we are unwilling to learn from others. The pursuit of **truth** and the practice of **tolerance** are a balancing pair; they emerge as we adopt a stance of humility towards the great adventure of learning.

### **Integrity in Relationships**

**Integrity** is of particular importance in *relationships*: it is at the heart of building character and community, and also the key to effective education. Teachers do not simply 'deliver' the curriculum but rather mediate it through their love of the subject. Thus teaching is about relationship. Furthermore, the life of the community as a whole is greatly enriched by strong relationships. **Integrity** in relationships requires that each person acts towards another in a manner which is honest, *faithful* and *straightforward*, living out the moral values they advocate and leaving no space in which hypocrisy might take hold. The educational process is enhanced by **integrity** in relationships.

Acting with **integrity** requires that we should balance **justice** with **forgiveness** in our dealings with one another. A concern with **justice** should lead us to strive for an inclusive community where we value each other, genuinely *celebrating diversity* as we treat one another with *respect*, *courtesy* and *fairness*. When a member of the community falls short of expectations, our dealings with them should be tempered by an awareness of our own failings. Respect for the dignity of each person will include the assumption that they can accept responsibility for their actions. The intention should always be to *heal broken relationships* and restore individuals to the community by practising **forgiveness**. **Justice** without **forgiveness** can be harsh and dispiriting; **forgiveness** without **justice** can fail to challenge the individual to develop good character.

**Integrity** concerns our self-understanding as well as our relationship with others. This should be a community in which we honour those who act **courageously** in facing challenges, fears and anxieties. We encourage taking risks for good ends, including taking risks in learning, knowing that both endeavour and failure can help build character. Aware of our own needs and struggles, we should attempt to stand imaginatively in other people's shoes and show **compassion** to any in need, both within our own community and beyond. **Courage** and **compassion** are closely linked: **compassion** should move a person to **courageous** engagement.

## **Wisdom**

As values shape the character of this community we aspire to **wisdom** which will enable us to live well in the world. The learning we engage in should raise awareness of our own privilege and bring with it a sense of appreciation and thankfulness. We seek to look beyond ourselves and use the benefits of education not only for our own enjoyment but also in the service of others, making a positive difference in the world.