



Mr Simon Phelps  
Headteacher  
Five Acres High School  
Coleford  
Gloucestershire  
GL16 7QW

Dear Mr Phelps,

### **Association for Character Education Kitemark Assessment (September 2022)**

Following an evaluative visit to Five Acres High School on Tuesday 27 September 2022 by Tom Haigh, CEO of the Association of Character Education, and Andrew Pettit, Kitemark Assessor for the Association for Character Education, we are very pleased to confirm that your school has met the exacting standards required to be awarded the 'School of Character Kitemark Plus'.

Huge congratulations to you, your students, staff and governors. This award is testament to the values-driven commitment to personal development so evident in your school. It is clear that there is a shared sense of mission at FAHS and that, through the determined and sustained leadership of the school has continued to develop and embed a carefully planned, values-driven character education strategy which is designed to impact all aspects of pupils' academic and pastoral growth.

It is always reassuring to visit a school where values and a genuine commitment to character education are at the core of all activities and are threaded through the 'DNA' of the school. It was especially notable that the five core values adopted by the school have been shaped through careful and deliberate engagement with the identified needs of the pupils and the wider community; it is clear that at Five Acres High School, character is viewed as an instrumental part of the school's inclusive and ambitious ethos where success for all is a key driver.

It was evident during our visit that leaders have fostered a strong sense of community as well as one of nurture and support. The conceptualisation of character development as a lifelong 'journey' has clearly been internalised by both pupils and staff. It was also clear that leaders have succeeded in building a culture of trust, collaboration and mutual understanding which has helped create the conditions in which staff and students can flourish and where character development is an authentic and sustained part of what it means to be a student at Five Acres High School. There are very many strengths in the current provision, including:

#### **Identified Strengths**

- The school has a very well-embedded and well-understood set of character values (Ambition, Confidence, Creativity, Determination, Respect) and it is clear that these values form part of the pupils' everyday experiences at school.

- The PCSHE programme is strong and provides pupils with a carefully sequenced programme of study which includes some deliberate focus on character strengths and the 5 core values in particular
- The 5 character values are reinforced in a systematic way through a well-designed assembly programme and through direct links to the school's well-established and hugely popular awards and accreditation systems.
- The importance of the 5 values to school life and future life chances is further strengthened and reinforced by the fact that each member of SLT, including the Head Teacher have responsibility for leading on one of the values each year. The fact that this is operated on a rotation means there is a strength of investment in and understanding of each of the core values amongst school leaders.
- The pupils really value and strive to achieve the character badges and show a real sense of pride when receiving commendations for their character through the various postcard systems in place.
- The Character Education log books are highly effective in providing pupils with a means by which to reflect, identify gaps and set personal challenges to help them move forward in developing their character.
- The school's strong emphasis on the development of reading empowers pupils and directly addresses some of the key contextual barriers to flourishing, especially notable in the use of character-focused DEAR time.
- Pupils and staff at all levels clearly value the school's approach to positive reinforcement and the 5 core values provide a framework for and a shared language with which to address reminders about behaviour.
- The school's character ambassador programme adds real strength to its focus on character development by helping to foster positive relationships across different year groups and by helping to establish a socially collaborative, cohesive community where pupils feel empowered and directly involved in the nurture and support of others.
- There are well-established routines for the positive reinforcement of character traits including Monday 'mantras' where definitions of each of the 5 core values are recited.
- Pupils value the wealth of enrichment opportunities made available by the school and there are strong mechanisms in place for tracking pupil involvement in such activities which is used to inform strategies to further increase levels of participation.
- The fact that the school rewards pupils for taking part in a range of enrichment / co-curricular activities such as academies and societies means that pupils develop positive habits of participation.
- Strong emphasis is placed on the importance of role-modelling by staff and this is carried through in a number of ways including weekly staff accolades where staff are recognised for demonstrating one or more of the five core values through peer-nominated awards.
- The 5 character values have been embraced by staff and there is a great deal of enthusiasm and commitment to further developing subject-specific character challenges (referred to as subject 'menus') which supports deliberate and explicit reinforcement across the curriculum.
- There is a real sense of pride in the school's culture and this is reflected in the exemplary standards of behaviour and attitudes observed by the assessors throughout their visit.

- An emphasis on the importance of character and the FAHS 5 in particular is built into the school's recruitment and staff induction processes.
- Approval criteria for educational visits and trips include a specific focus on the FAHS 5.
- Governors are well-informed about the school's priorities, are closely aligned with the school's focus on and ambitions for character education.
- The provision of a link governor for character education provides for an enhanced level of QA and means that character is represented at all levels of school leadership.
- The deliberate focus on recognising achievements and activities pursued outside of school means that pupils feel valued and further strengthens the narrative developed around character as something which is just as important outside of school as it is within it.

It is clear that Five Acres High School is a community-focused school and that there is a strong emphasis on pastoral support, pupil welfare and personal development alongside an unwavering commitment to securing the best academic outcomes.

The school's values of Ambition, Confidence, Creativity, Determination and Respect, are placed at the heart of all activities and by aligning these with the core components of character development such as the tutor time programme, rewards system and subject-based character challenges, the school continues to ensure that pupils and staff benefit from an authentic and ambitious commitment to character education which is built in rather than 'bolted on'.

Five Acres High School is to be commended for its very well developed and sustained emphasis on character education and for the values-driven approach it has taken. The school's 5 character values were carefully determined in response to identified needs of pupils and the barriers to achievement that had existed historically. Since achieving the School of Character Kitemark, Five Acres has continued to deepen and enhance the ways in which character infuses the experience of being at the school for pupils, staff and parents. Indeed, it is especially notable that the school's focus on character has been instrumental in making FAHS a school of choice for so many families in the locality; the fact that the school is now oversubscribed for the first time in its 100 year history is testament to the impact and authenticity of the school's commitment to character education over the last 3+ years.

We had the privilege of meeting with a broad cross-section of pupils and staff during our visit and it was clear that they had developed a deeply internalised appreciation for the value of character and the five core values in particular. It was also evident that pupils were ready to 'go deeper' and expressed enthusiasm for being able to explore values and virtues in a more developed way which means the school is now very well placed to be able to develop and implement a taught character programme underpinned and informed by wider research. A key recommendation for the school is therefore that they now take steps to build upon the success of their assembly programme and PCSHE curriculum by devising and implementing a taught character programme for all year groups. This should be done in parallel with efforts to embed the teaching of character across the curriculum.

The assessors would also recommend that consideration is given to the following areas:

### **Recommended Actions**

- Encourage teachers to deepen and develop their knowledge of character education and its underpinning theories by accessing CPD from the Jubilee Centre.
- Build on staff role-modelling by exploring more formalised ways in which staff reflect on their own character such as through a 360 degree evaluation as part of the appraisal process.
- Consider the implementation of a peer mentoring programme with a specific focus on character development e.g. #BeMoreFive Mentors
- Explore ways in which exceptional levels of commitment and achievement in relation to character can be recognised by responding to the pupils' desire to 'go beyond gold' (This could potentially be addressed by the implementation of a #BeMoreFive mentoring scheme)

Congratulations again to you and your colleagues at Five Acres High School. We have no doubt that you will continue with your ambitious and authentic commitment to character education and would actively encourage you to share your successes with other schools on a similar journey.

Yours sincerely,



**Mr Tom Haigh**  
CEO



**Mr Andrew Pettit**  
ACE Kitemark Assessor