

## “Virtues to Live By” Key Word List

**Virtue** is not a word in common use in society at large, but it is common to hear parents, teachers and children talk about being loving, respectful, honest, thankful, brave, fair, compassionate, forgiving and so on. A virtue is a quality of good character, character which is shaped by the performance of virtues: one honest act does not make a person honest, but a determination to be honest performed in a series of honest acts throughout one's life makes one an honest person: we are what we *repeatedly* do! A virtue is a habitual way of behaving, a disposition, that forms good character and, at the same time, constitutes a particular kind of community. Virtues build ethos.

**Why virtue not value?** It is common to hear the language of value used in our culture: Gospel values, British values, family values, my values, your values etc. However, values are subjective - they cannot be applied to everyone - and they need to be personally lived out. To the extent that some values are lived out they become virtues. Virtues are more holistic than values. Virtues constitute the person in two ways: they unite 'who I am' (identity) with 'how I am' (how I try to live).

**Virtue Literacy** has three components: (i). Virtue Perception, (ii). Virtue Knowledge and Understanding and (iii). Virtue Reasoning. The first component is concerned with noticing situations in need of virtues. The second component involves acquiring the language of virtue through familiarity with virtue terms. The third component concerns making judgements which includes the ability to explain differences in moral situations. This emphasis on acquiring judgement must be reflective and so allow each person to make ethical decisions in a variety of situations. It is crucial, therefore, that alongside virtue literacy, schools must provide opportunities for children to exercise the virtues because virtues only exist in their performance: they make a person both who and how they are: they are constitutive of the self. (See 'A Framework for Character Education' Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham online at: <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf>)

**Character** understood in its positive mode is a set of personal qualities, dispositions or virtues that give rise to specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct.

**Whole Person:** the education of the whole person is one of the principles of Catholic education. Education must be a humanising activity, one that does justice to all dimensions of the person. This is why Catholic education cannot be simply utilitarian nor about the pursuit of knowledge simply for personal and material success. It must always be understood as a call to serve and an engagement with the world through solidarity with others, especially the most vulnerable.

**Human flourishing** is the translation of the Greek *Eudiamonia*, which indicates that the goal of human life is to flourish. It chimes well with the Christian insistence that Jesus came to offer humanity 'life to the full' (John 10:10). The virtues constitute the means by which each person can begin to participate in that abundant life.