

VOTESFORSCHOOLS & CHARACTER EDUCATION

Guidance for Education & Teaching Staff

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Character education is a vital part of a child's personal development that goes beyond their classroom learning. It is also the hallmark of excellent schools; in November 2019, the DfE updated non-statutory guidance on this area, which this guidance is based on. The How We Do It section also provides some sample answers to common inspection questions in this area.

This document outlines how VotesforSchools supports school leaders and teachers in bolstering wider personal development provision and helps them to instill core values in students.

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VotesforSchools supports a range of curriculum and policy areas; more information about these areas, which include SMSC, British Values, and the UNCRC & UN SDGs, can be found on your Teacher Dashboard.

WHAT WE MEAN

The work of VotesforSchools is rooted in a desire to bolster SMSC, Prevent and British Values education, as well as to demystify key areas of the PSHE and citizenship curriculum that are often challenging for schools to discuss, explore and develop.

A positive by-product of this approach is that character education is also significantly supported through the programme. For students, VotesforSchools resources promote the benefits of positive personal attributes, including resilience, self-confidence, self-awareness, and a strong moral compass. For staff, the programme as a whole provides a consistent and sound structure from which to deliver on these objectives through active student engagement.



WHAT WE DO

Through weekly, age-appropriate discussions about real-life issues, VotesforSchools gives students an opportunity to consider their opinions on a range of topics, from AI to incel culture, global conflict to child poverty. Over time, students are able to listen carefully to others, respectfully engage with a variety of perspectives, and reflect on their own values. VotesforSchools exists to provide children and young people with a voice on the issues that matter to them.

But the conversation doesn't stop there: at the end of the lessons, students have the chance to vote on a Yes or No question and share their reasons why with their cohort and nationally, via the VotesforSchools platform. The results of their votes are shared extensively with external stakeholders as established as Barnardo's, UNICEF UK, and the NSPCC, who then provide students with feedback. This gives students a sense of being part of something bigger, and helps them to realise their agency in the wider world.



WHY WE DO IT

Students who have been able to access a range of insights, a variety of perspectives, and consistent opportunities to make themselves heard undoubtedly make for more well-rounded, proactive citizens. VotesforSchools provides students with the confidence to engage with their communities now and in the future, whether by supporting the vulnerable in their local area, advocating for themselves when something isn't right, or heading to the polls on election day.



Weekly topics ensure consistent character development throughout the year on a whole-school level and ensures that all students are given a voice. This then contributes to a culture of holistic development that permeates the whole school and helps prepare all students for life in modern Britain.

Put simply, VotesforSchools develops students who are:

- **Confident** in their beliefs and values
- **Respectful** of others' views and backgrounds
- **Capable** of critical thinking and reasoned argument
- **Active** participants in democracy and civil society
- **Equipped** with skills for future success and wellbeing.

HOW WE DO IT

The Character Education Framework Guidance outlines some “issues to consider” for schools looking to further improve their character education. To support you with future audits or inspections, the following pages list some sample answers pertaining specifically to VotesforSchools.

What kind of school are we?

VotesforSchools supports us to be a school in which the voice of every student matters, irrespective of their background, lived experiences, or academic ability. We promote the importance of everyone being informed, curious, and heard; students are consistently open to listening to new ideas, asking thoughtful questions, and making sure they advocate for themselves and those less able to make their voices heard. These values go beyond the classroom and students feel empowered to enact them in their wider life as well as in school.

Staff also model these values, and are receptive to learning new things based on the experiences and insights of the student body.



What are our expectations of behaviour towards each other?

Respect for each other's views is central to the mission of our school, and VotesforSchools helps us to uphold this both during the sessions and within school more broadly.

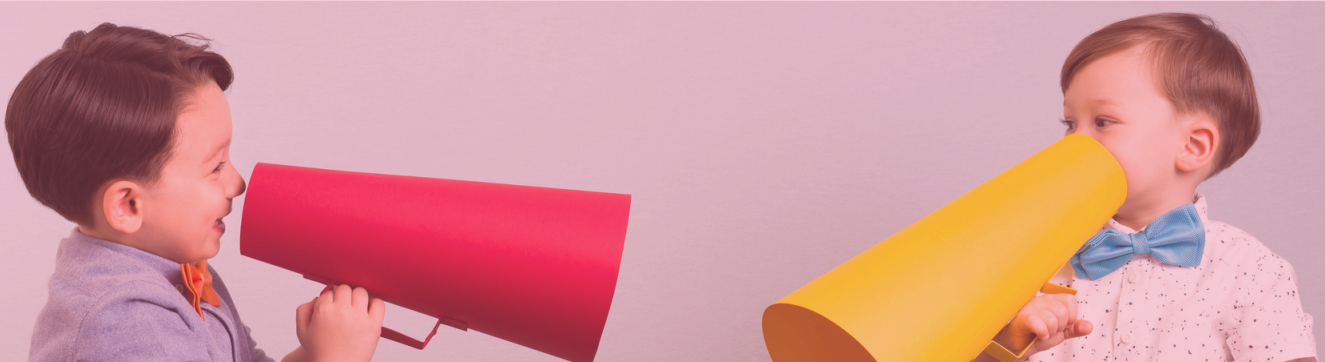
Whether we are discussing global conflicts, ultra-processed food or general elections, students are active and empathetic listeners who know how to disagree respectfully and critically assess the information or opinions presented to them. This builds a sense of mutual understanding and openness from which all students benefit.



How do our curriculum and teaching develop resilience and confidence?

Every week, students have the opportunity to share their views on key contemporary issues such as misogyny, knife crime, or deepfakes. In addition to enhancing existing knowledge about the wider world, there is a further dual benefit afforded to students by following the weekly VotesforSchools programme:

- **Resilience** is developed in two ways. Firstly, it is contextualised through the topics that students have the chance to openly discuss week-to-week, which are as various as coping with exam stress, bouncing back from failure, recognising the signs of exploitation, or navigating the Youth Criminal Justice System. This helps students to recognise coping mechanisms that they may wish to adopt for themselves. Secondly, resilience is developed in the literal sense, as the very act of discussing these issues opens students up to the possibility of being challenged by their peers' or wider society's views. As a result, they are able to build courage in their own convictions and/or become more resistant to adverse influences.
- In terms of **confidence**, the weekly VotesforSchools resources help them to be more capable consumers of news and other media, and they are more readily able to differentiate between fact, opinion, and altogether false information. Additionally, their confidence in speaking up and having their say is naturally developed by having a vote on a key issue every week. Their oracy, public speaking and listening skills are all improved through the use of VotesforSchools.





How good is our co-curricular provision?

VotesforSchools supports our broader aims as a school to develop well-rounded, proactive students who have a meaningful stake in their wider community. The weekly resources regularly present students with opportunities to participate in wider VotesforSchools initiatives such as their Youth Advisory Board and their contributing writers' scheme.

What's more, the resources showcase external events such as Black History Month, Anti-Bullying Week and Earth Day, which encourages students to consider their own extra-curricular initiatives such as school councils, student advocacy groups, or in-school clubs.

Lastly, VotesforSchools also supports schools in achieving other external accreditation such as the Rights Respecting Schools Award from UNICEF UK or the SMSC Quality Mark.



How well do we promote the value of volunteering and service to others?

Many of the VotesforSchools topics covered throughout the academic year are linked to altruistic initiatives and local events. These make explicit the benefits of being an active member of the community, whether in school or beyond.

On a more implicit level, VotesforSchools also imparts the consistent message that helping others - whether by using your voice, taking democratic action or simply being an upstander rather than a bystander - makes for a better world and is an important character trait for all students to develop.

How do we ensure that all our pupils benefit equally from what we offer?

VotesforSchools is designed to be accessible for all students. As a whole-school solution, it means that everyone is having the same conversation throughout the school at any given time, bringing a sense of cohesion amongst students. The voting mechanism also indicates to students that every voice carries equal weight, and that theirs is a necessary part of the national conversation. Feedback from external stakeholders is also directed at all students, showing that their views have made a difference.

WHERE TO FIND US

If you would like to know more about the information outlined above, please contact us:



info@votesforschools.com



www.votesforschools.com



VotesforSchools

124 City Road

London

EC1V 2NX