



CHARACTER EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS

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Executive Summary

This report analyses the perceptions of school principals associated with the introduction of character education in their school. It has been found that schools that have had character education in their curriculum for some time identify this form of change as an improvement towards overall student behaviour as well as staff stability. Group A Character Education Schools were those that are known to have implemented effective approaches to character education and Group B Emerging Character Education Schools are those that have purchased resources, but not yet fully implemented Character Education programmes. Differences between the two groups of schools, (Group A: Character Education Schools and Group B: Emerging Character Education Schools), can be attributed to the fact that schools in Group A will have more of an understanding of the core values being taught through increased experience, due to the fact that these schools have had character education in their curriculum for at least two years. It should be noted that this research focuses only on schools with character education programmes and with no attempt to contrast to schools who have yet to introduce such programmes into their organisations.

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Introduction

Throughout the world, it is a well-known concept that in order to create and maintain a civil society, there has to be education for character as well as for intellect; thus education has two primary objectives:

- To help young people master the skills of literacy and numeracy, and
- To help them build good character.

“It’s hard to teach children who are hanging off the lights and have no respect for teachers or concern for anyone else. Before we begin to educate kids, we have first to instil some basic values and bottom line behaviour”

(Comment by an Auckland principal - Heenan, 2002)

Over the past few decades, New Zealand may not have been teaching and replenishing the attitudes of character that are necessary for the continuation of a civil society and liberal democracy; hence The New Zealand Foundation for Character Education Inc. through the publication of Building Character through Cornerstone Values, seeks to contribute to redressing this situation.

Defining Character Values

Cornerstone Values are principles that are consistent, universal and transcultural, and they inform and direct our behaviour and attitudes. The eight cornerstone values are:

- Honesty & truthfulness
- Kindness
- Consideration and concern for others
- Compassion
- Obedience
- Responsibility
- Respect
- Duty.

While parents are the first and foremost teachers of values and the ones best able to convey cornerstone values, the school too, has an important role to play. Homes are undoubtedly the primary place where values are taught and observed both consciously and subconsciously. In contrast, in a school, the most effective way of teaching cornerstone values is through habit, principle, and example; and because values are communicated through relationships, ‘quiet examples’ are the most powerful of the three.

Unlike character education, values education is less concerned with behavioural outcomes and more concerned with the quality of students’ thinking.

The Demand for Character Education

The Foundation recognised that there was something wrong at the core of New Zealand society. Since the 1960s, there has been a 400% increase in violent crime; a 700% increase in births outside marriage; the suicide rate of teenagers has quadrupled; our population has increased by at least 33%; there has been an extraordinary rise in sexual crimes and child abuse, as well as there being an astronomical increase in school suspensions – mostly for disobedience (Heenan, 2001).

Ministry of Education figures provided in answers to 2004 Parliamentary Questions 10043 and 10046 reveal that since 2000 in primary schools alone suspensions and stand downs have increased 31%, alcohol consumption 25%, physical assaults on staff 40%, assaults on other students 33%, sexual misconduct 21%, and sexual harassment 83%.

These are not teenagers or even intermediate school students but eight, nine and ten year olds.

Of the 2,560 removals from primary schools in 2003, 658 (13.8 %*) were for continual disobedience, 729 (33.3 %*) for physical assaults on students, 147 (40 %*)

for assaults on staff, 91 (37 %*) for verbal assaults on students and 310 (55.8%* for verbal assaults on staff.

* The percentage increase in each category from 2000 to 2003.

In former generations most primary school teachers completed a lifetime career without experiencing either a suspension or an expulsion.

There is also some further evidence to suggest that New Zealand's society is facing character deficit as a major problem. Politician Peter Dunne recently quoted the following local examples:

- New Zealand has the world's second highest rate of single parent families.
- The New Zealand family, a building block of society, is in trouble. Divorces have doubled in the last 30 years while marriages have fallen 60%. Many modern families struggle to cope financially on one income. Others rely on welfare. The number of children being raised on a benefit has doubled in the last 15 years to be currently one third of all New Zealand children
- Child assaults are up almost 200% in the last decade and 40% of our criminals are aged between 14 and 18
- Violent acts screened on New Zealand state owned television have tripled since 1995. Children's Sky channel Nickelodeon, shows 13.4 violent incidents per hour. It is estimated that by the age of 16 children have seen 200,000 acts of television violence (Courtney, 2004 and Lickona, 1991).

New Zealanders live longer, healthier lives in a nation that is wealthier and more technologically advanced than many others. Despite this, as many parents observe, it is not the same society that they were raised in. And while it is parents who must accept the role as first teachers of character, schools have historically played an important part in supporting this social development (Heenan, 2002). There is still a great need for this to happen because "there is no point," claims Jan Kerr of the Independent Schools Council, "in schools producing highly educated and qualified students if they cannot relate well to other people." (Kerr as cited in Gerritsen 2000).

Character Education

Character education is defined as the process that fosters character in individuals and helps young adults become good people and good citizens (Heenan, 2002). The following eleven principles (Character Education Partnership) serve as the criteria that schools and other groups can use to plan a character education effort and to evaluate available character education programmes, books and curriculum resources:

- Character education promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character
- Character must be comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behaviour
- Effective character education should provide an intentional, pro-active and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life
- The school must be a caring community
- To develop character, students need opportunities for moral action
- Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and helps them succeed
- Character education should strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation
- The school staff must become a learning and moral community with shared responsibility for character education and adherence to the same core values that guide the education of students
- Character education requires moral leadership from both staff and students
- The school must recruit parents and community members as full partners in the character-building effort
- Evaluation of character education should assess the character of the school; the functioning of the school's staff as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

Data

The data is derived from a survey posted out on 18th & 19th October 2004 that was open to 31 schools categorised as either "Character Education Schools" (Group A) or

“Emerging Character Education Schools” (Group B). The questionnaire¹ is comprised of fifteen sections, and each school was required to complete the questionnaire. The survey was not conducted anonymously; a list was made on which schools were sent the questionnaire and the school names were marked off on a ‘roll-list’ for quality assurance purposes – i.e. schools that did not respond were able to be identified.

Statistical Analysis

The data was comprised of both quantitative and qualitative components in the survey. It was proposed that the quantitative component be analysed using Excel, and the qualitative information be analysed by summarising the schools’ responses. From a total of 31 schools, 26 respondents were received – yielding a total response rate of approximately 84%.

The sample of 31 schools was selected in the following manner:

- 17 schools had already implemented character education into their curriculum and were known to the project coordinator, John Heenan. These schools belong to Group A – Character Education Schools.
- Schools that were known to have purchased the character education starter kit were contacted and asked whether they would participate in a survey of the effectiveness of character education. 14 schools agreed to participate, and they comprise Group B – Emerging Character Education Schools.

Section A: Information about the School/College

The first section of the questionnaire requested some basic information about school demographics. The bar graph below (Figure 1) indicates that the majority of schools were primary schools. The ‘other’ category represented one school from each of groups A (where the school was classified as both primary & secondary) and group B (the school was a composite – area school).

¹ Questionnaire attached at the back of this report

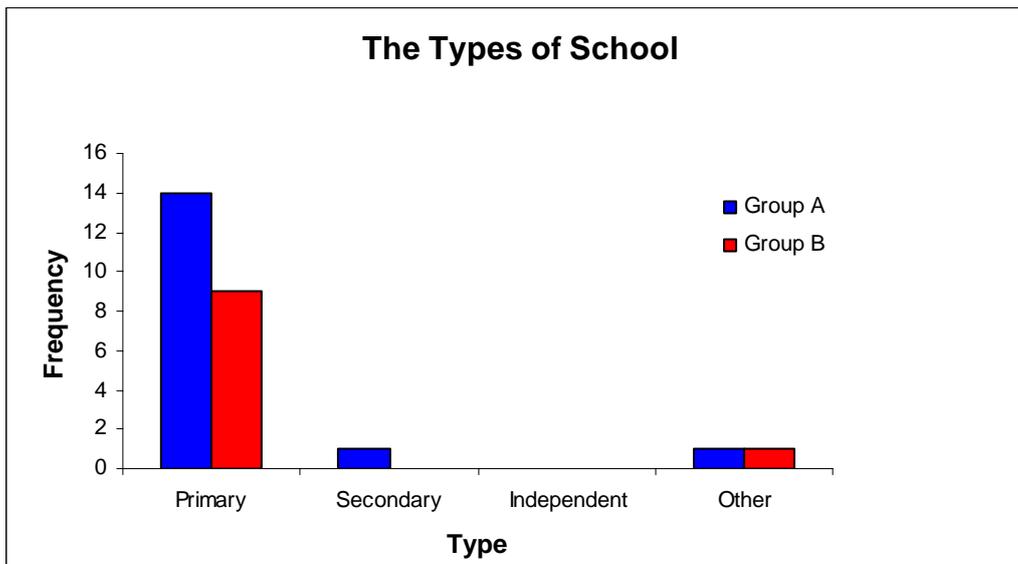


Figure 1: Respondents categorised by their school type

Figure 2 indicates the total number of students (roll) in each school. It is evident from the last column (average number of students per school in each group) that Group A has the higher average number of pupils.

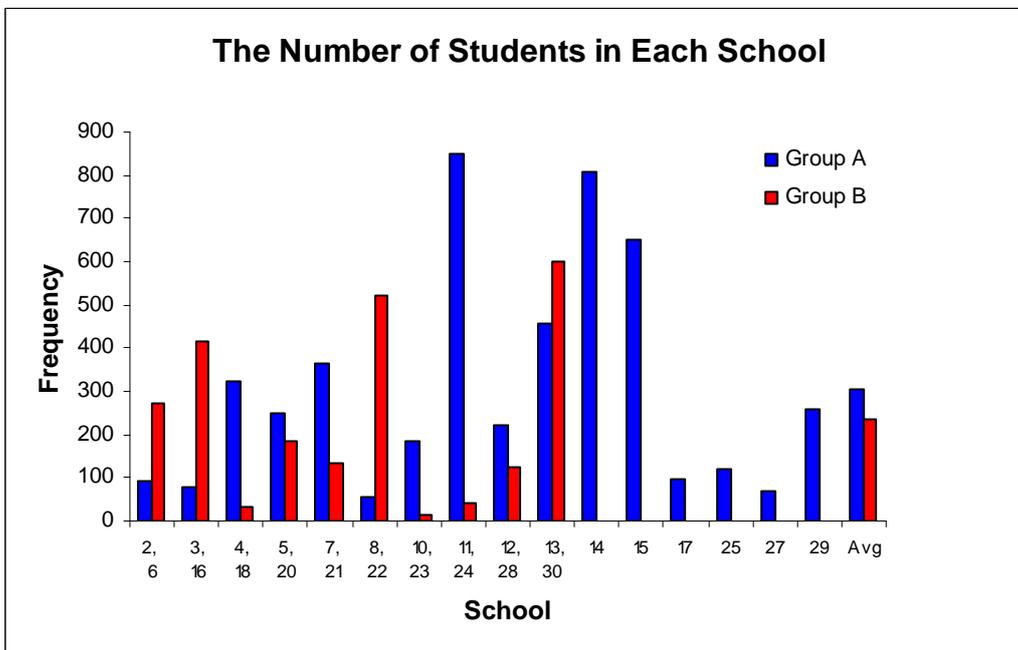


Figure 2: The total number of students in each school

Figure 3 shows the number of teaching staff (more formally known as the Full-Time Teaching Equivalent (FTTE)). The Ministry of Education² allocates a set number of teachers, which reflects the size of the school, i.e., the larger the school, the higher the FTTE. It can be seen from Figures 2 and 3 that:

- School 2 (Group A) has 91 students and a FTTE of 5.90³;
- School 6 (Group B) has 271 students and a FTTE of 11.00.

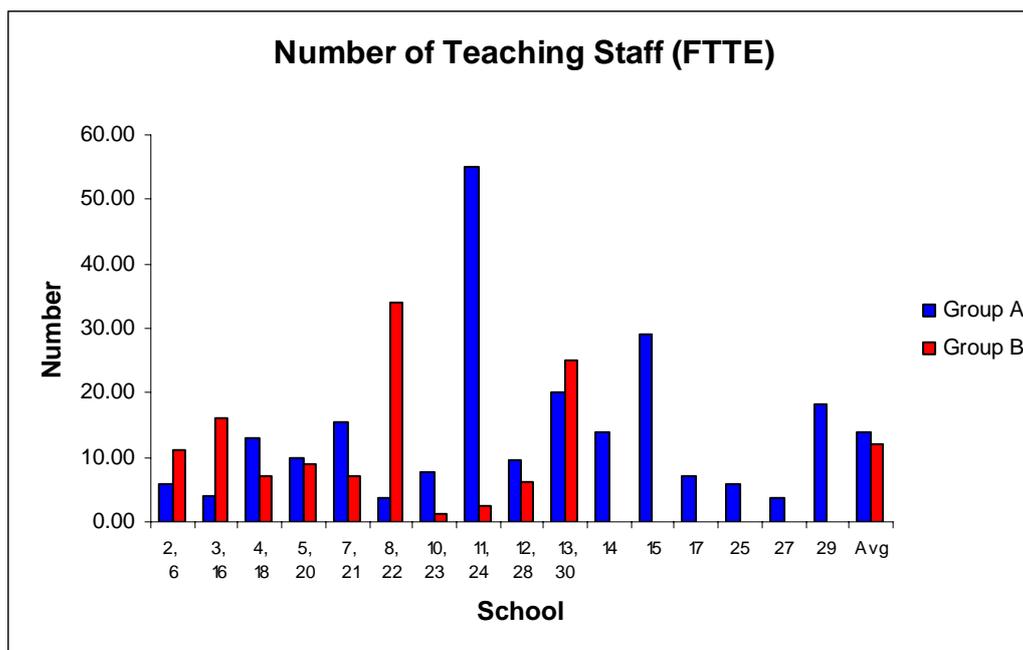


Figure 3: The Full-Time Teaching Equivalent relates to the roll of the school

A school’s decile score/classification indicates the extent to which a school draws its students from high or low socio-economic communities. There are six factors⁴ that make up the socio-economic indicator:

- **Household income** – percentage of households with equivalent income in the lowest 20% nationally
- **Occupation** – percentage of employed parents in the lowest skilled occupational groups, i.e., elementary occupations (e.g. labourers), machine operators, and assemblers

² The Ministry of Education calculates the FTTE by adding together class contact hours, dividing by 25, and rounding to two decimal places.

³ This figure is an indication of the total number of full-time, part-time, and casual teaching staff. One full-time staff member has an FTTE = 1.00

⁴ Ministry of Education, *How the decile is calculated*, <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=7697&data=l>

- **Household crowding** – number of people in the household divided by the number of bedrooms
- **Educational qualifications** – percentage of parents with no school or tertiary qualifications
- **Income support** – percentage of parents who directly received a Domestic Purposes Benefit, Unemployment Benefit, or Sickness and Invalid’s Benefit in the previous year
- **Ethnicity** – percentage of Maori and Pacific students, or students who are refugees at a school.

Schools are ranked in relation to every other school for each of the six factors and receive a score according to the percentile that they fall into. The six scores for each school are added together to give a total. This total gives the overall standing of a school in relation to all other schools in the country. A school’s decile does not indicate the overall socio-economic mix of the school.

For the purpose of explaining Figure 4, decile 1 indicates high deprivation (lower socio-economic communities), whereas decile 10 indicates lower deprivation (higher socio-economic communities).

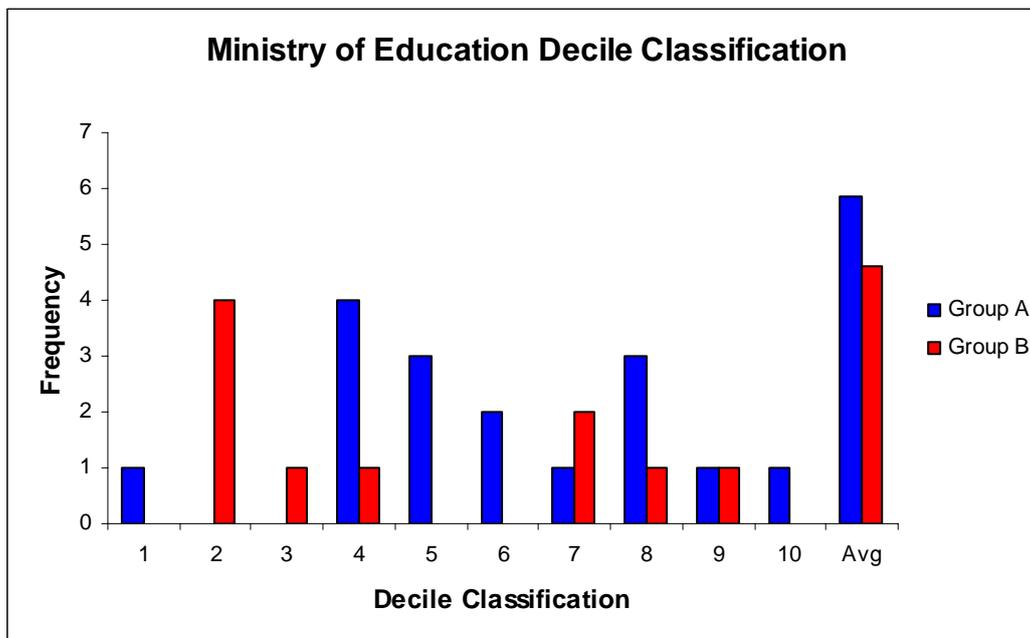


Figure 4: Total number of schools in the survey classified by decile

Table 1 provides a summary of Section A from where it can be seen that the character education schools (Group A) have the higher average number of students, hence the higher number of teaching staff.

Table 1: Summary of Section A – demographics of the schools

	Character Education Schools (Group A)	Emerging Character Education Schools (Group B)
N	17	14
n	16	10
Response Rate	94%	71%
Average Number of Students (Roll)	305.25	234.00
Average Number of Teaching Staff (FTTE)	13.85	11.91
Average Ministry of Education Decile Classification	5.88	4.60

Section B: Duration of Implementation of Character Education

From Figure 5 below, it can be seen that Group A schools have had character education in their curricula for between a range of < 1 year to over 5 years, with the highest percentile being identified in the 1 – 2 year range. As Group B schools are only introducing character education into their schools, most of them fell into the range of having implemented character education for < 1 year.

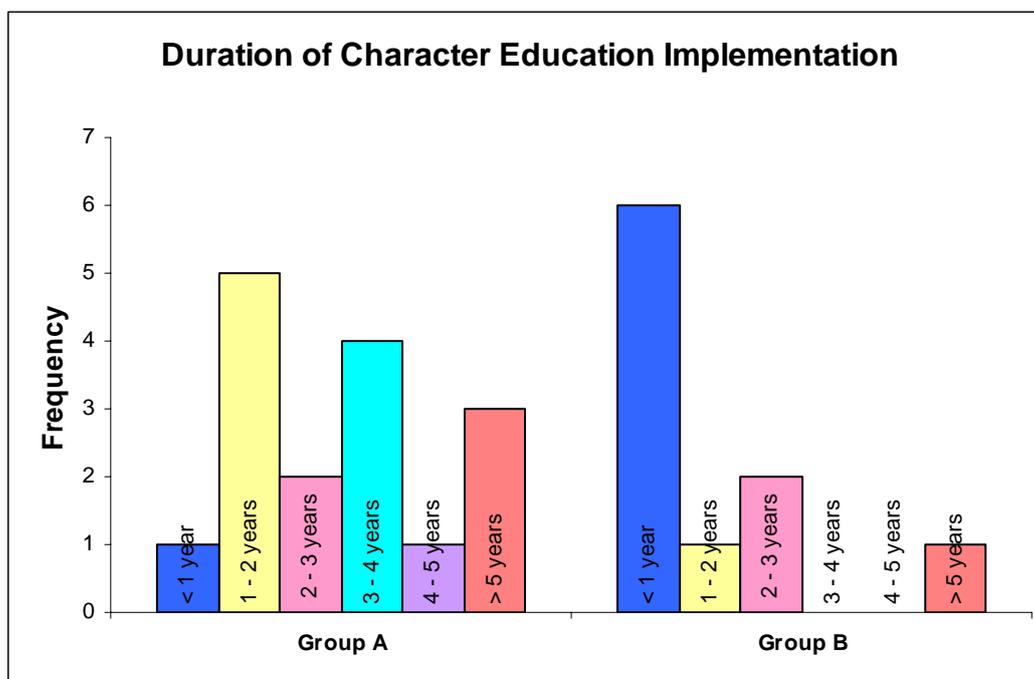


Figure 5: Implementation of Character Education

Section C: Detail of Approach to Character Education

Figure 6 shows that between 85 – 100% of the schools (amongst Groups A and B) identified the following characteristics as being included in their curriculum as a part of its approach to character education:

- Definitions of core values provided and taught
- A focus of one core value per term
- School and class displays on core values (Group A only)
- Core values featured in the school assembly
- Staff supported by appropriate resources and training
- The core values being taught are communicated to parents
- Character education supported by parents (Group A only)
- Hard data on incidents of unacceptable behaviour recorded (Group A only)
- The disciplinary process supports core values (Group A only).

The lowest emphasis (amongst Groups A and B) was placed on “A Board of Trustees policy supporting character education”.

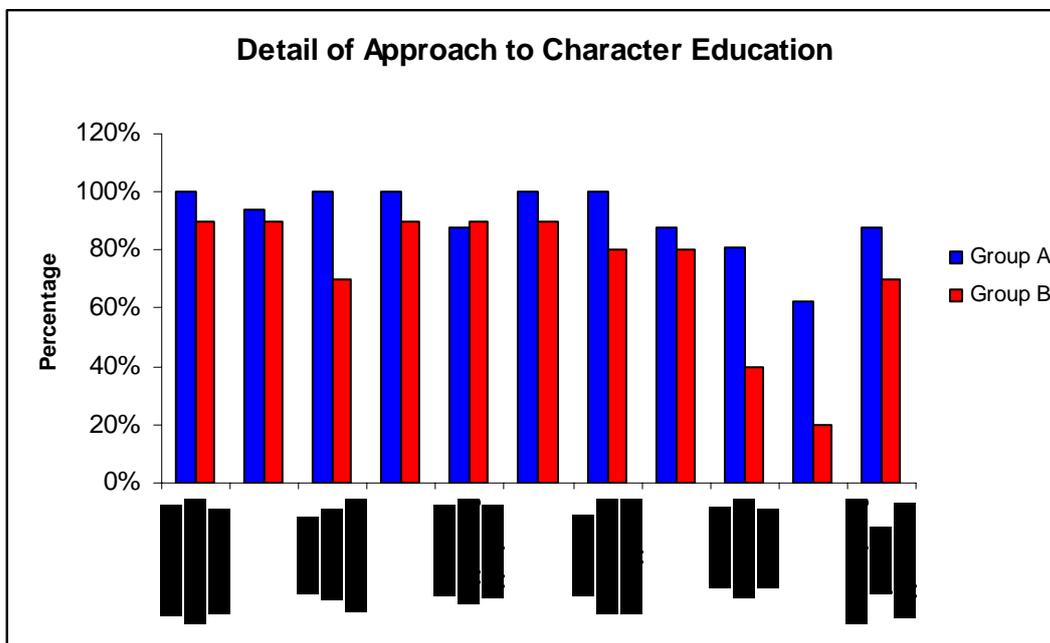


Figure 6: How each school approaches character education in terms of teaching details

Section D: Motivation for Character Education

From Figures 7 and 8, it can be seen that the school’s principal provided both the main motivation for the initiation and the continuation of character education. In Group B (emerging character education schools), a large number of staff members also played a vital role in this process. The ‘other’ category in the two groups corresponds to senior management, team leaders, and deputy principals who were also identified as being motivators for implementing character education into schools.

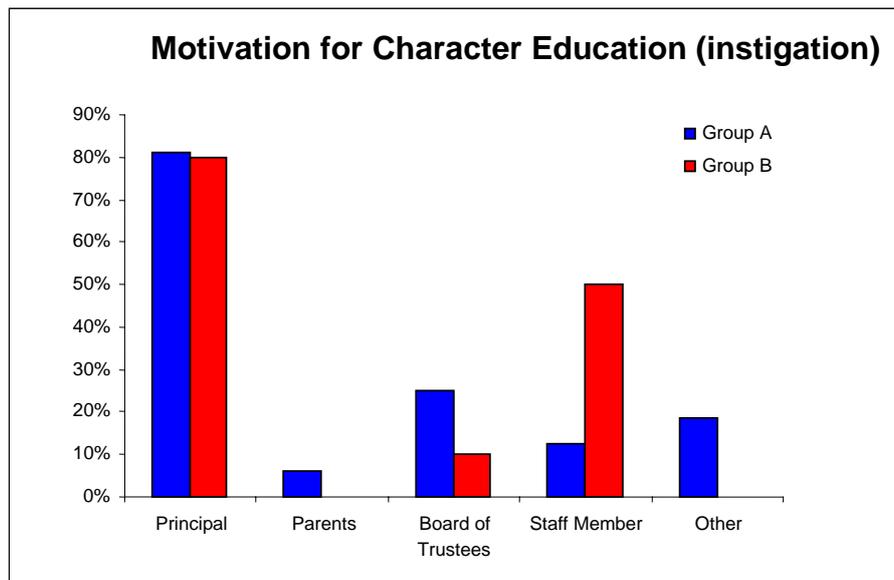


Figure 7: Motivation for the initiation of character education

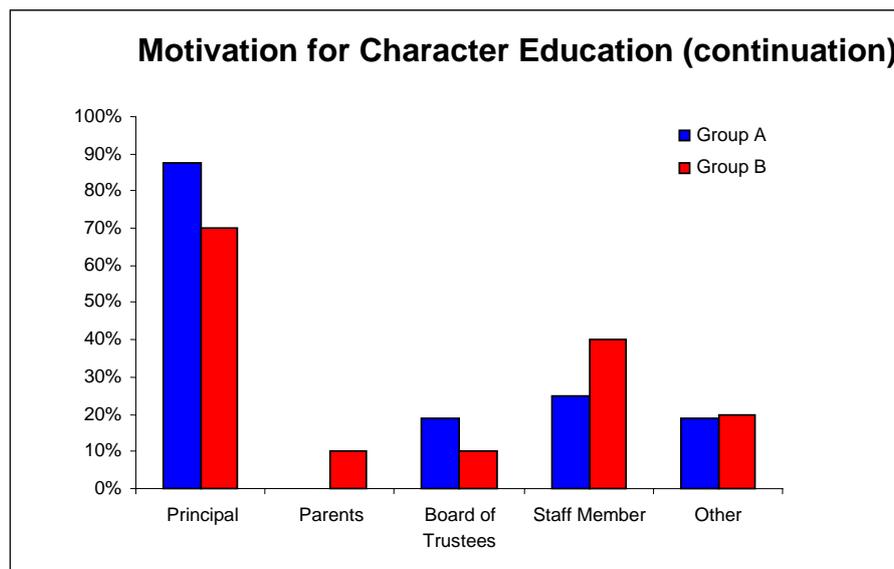


Figure 8: Motivation for the continuation of character education

Section E-N: Relationships–Use of Specialist Services & Agencies

The score sheet below (Table 2) provides a summary of the views expressed by each of the schools on a specific area within each category. Within the questionnaire, some questions had three response categories. For example, in Section E (relationships) were categorised as ‘improved’, ‘about the same’, or ‘no improvement’. The three groups were condensed to form two groups (a positive & negative factor), i.e. using ‘improved’ = positive factor and is coded ‘1’; ‘about the same’ & ‘no improvement’ = negative factor and is coded ‘0’. If the positive and negative factors sum up to be equivalent, this is said to be neutral and is denoted by ‘½’.

In terms of character education having a positive impact on the school, it is evident from the score sheet that both groups noticed a marked improvement in most of the core values being taught.

With respect to relationships, the improvements noticed by the principal, staff, students, and parents were:

- Mutual respect
- Commitment to success
- More awareness of doing the right thing
- Students more supportive and caring
- Parents more involved in school events.

The schools also noticed a significant improvement in student behaviour, which was reflected by:

- Fewer detentions
- Fewer recorded incidents
- Continual decline in aggressive behaviour.

Discipline within the school also showed an improvement, where students were considered to be:

- More aware of core values
- More responsible for their decisions

- Aware that discipline is no longer a programme – but rather a way of life.

There has been a notable improvement in the schools as caring communities. The following comments were received:

- More respect and care for the school and each other was evident
- Children were being more cooperative in the playground
- There was positive support for one another across age ranges
- Senior students were more willing to take the juniors under their wing.

There has been a significant improvement (especially in Group A) in staff stability, where notable enhancement has been the result of:

- Positive way of dealing with behaviour ‘management’
- Awareness of key positive characteristics (and strengths) in one another
- Staff now have a common moral literacy
- Teachers readily admit to the advantages and satisfaction of teaching in a school with overt, proactive, specific character education.

Group A have conveyed that student attendance is improving, where the following comments were communicated:

- Parents chose this school because we teach values
- Character education plays an important role in the increasing number of students.

Schools from Group A stated that their most recent ERO report had positive feedback on the school’s approach to character education. Comments included:

- “Positive atmosphere, friendly & courteous children”
- “... school was a safe place for all students and they knew what to do if they needed help”
- “Warm, caring environment”.

Table 2: 'Score' sheet

	Group A: Character Education Schools	Group B: Emerging Character Education Schools
E). Relationships:		
1. Between principal & staff	0 ⁵	0
2. Between students	1 ⁶	1
3. Between the school & parents	1	0
4. Between the staff & students	1	1
<i>Total Score</i>	3	2
F). Student Behaviour:		
1. Overall student behaviour	1	1
2. Playground behaviour	1	1 ⁷
<i>Total Score</i>	2	1
G). Discipline:		
1. Within the school	1	1
2. Effect on the number of stand-downs, suspensions, & expulsions	0	0
<i>Total Score</i>	1	1
H). Vandalism within the school	0	0
I). Student Attendance	0	0
J). The school as a caring community	1	1
K). Staff stability:		
1. Impact on staff stability	1	0
2. Reduction in staff turnover	1	0
3. Improving staff morale	1	1
4. Character education attracts & retains good teachers	1	0
<i>Total Score</i>	4	1
L). Enrolments	1	0
M). ERO Reports	1	0
N). Use of specialist services & agencies to support behaviour management	0	0

⁵ 0 = about the same/no change

⁶ 1 = improved

⁷ 1⁷ = improved = about the same/no change

Section O: Impact of Character Education

Each of the tables below (Tables 3, 4 and 5) relate to the impact that character education has had on the school. It is evident that Groups A and B differ markedly in their responses. With respect to Table 3, Group A (character education schools) stated that the overall impact of character education has been highly significant; whereas Group B (emerging character education schools) identified it as being significant.

Table 3: Impact of character education on the school

How would you rate the impact of character education on the school?	Highly Significant (n, %)	Quite Significant (n, %)	Significant (n, %)	Of Little Significance (n, %)	Not Significant (n, %)
Group A	11, 68.8	2, 12.5	3, 18.8	0	0
Group B	1, 10	3, 30	5, 50	1, 10	0

Table 4 shows the majority of schools in Group A being identified within the band of ‘quite significant’ in terms of the management of the school becoming easier after the implementation of character education; Group B portrayed little significance on this matter.

Table 4: Management of the school

Do you consider that the management of the school has become easier since the implementation of character education?	Highly Significant (n, %)	Quite Significant (n, %)	Significant (n, %)	Of Little Significance (n, %)	Not Significant (n, %)
Group A	4, 25	6, 37.5	5, 31.3	0	1, 6.25
Group B	0	0	3, 30	4, 40	3, 30

Table 5 yields similar results to Table 4, where Group A states that there has been a significant improvement in the effectiveness of teaching and learning since the implementation of character education; Group B still has character education as a ‘prototype’ – these schools are yet to see whether the implementation of character education has in fact made an improvement on teaching effectiveness.

Table 5: Improvement in the effectiveness of teaching

Do you consider that there has been an improvement in the effectiveness of teaching and learning since the implementation of character education?	Highly Significant (n, %)	Quite Significant (n, %)	Significant (n, %)	Of Little Significance (n, %)	Not Significant (n, %)
Group A	3, 18.8	6, 37.5	6, 37.5	1, 6.25	0
Group B	0	0	5, 50	4, 40	1, 10

Conclusions

“Character Education creates the climate for all learning and caring in schools.”

(Lickona, as cited New Zealand Foundation for Character Education, 2003, p.2)

“No schooling is values free” cites the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (MOE, 1993, p.21) with encouragement for all schools to reflect what society and the school community value. While there will be an ongoing values debate over content and how prescriptive any Government can be in a pluralistic society, there is certainly a renewed interest in one of the greatest challenges facing our schools today. It is a challenge, however, that many are accepting. Patrick Lynch predicts that there are currently 30% of New Zealand schools implementing an identifiable character education approach and expects this to rise to over 50% within the next two years.

To sum up, this report analysed the responses from two groups of schools in New Zealand, where Group A were character education schools, and Group B were emerging character education schools. The data used for this report was gathered from a survey that was open to the 31 schools, from which 26 schools aired their comments/feedback; thus yielding a high response rate of approximately 84%.

Generally speaking, schools that had had character education as part of their curriculum for over two years, seemed to show notable improvements within the school-learning environment. Such improvements included improved behaviour, fewer disciplinary actions, increased staff stability, and increased student attendance. Thus, the findings of this study support the benefits of implementing character education into schools.

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WHAT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS ABOUT:

The New Zealand Foundation for Character Education Inc. is interested in the results of the implementation of character education in New Zealand schools and colleges. This questionnaire, which is to be completed by the principal of each participating school/college, is designed to collect data that will enable an assessment to be made of the outcomes of the implementation of character education.

HOW TO FILL IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE:

- Answer the questions based on your experience in your school/college
- Indicate your response by either *ticking* the appropriate box or *circling* the selected ranking numeral
- Make your responses to the open-ended questions as specific as possible.

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT:

Your individual organisation's responses will remain confidential. We are interested in the aggregate responses of the sector.

Section A: Information about School/College

A1. Type

- Primary Secondary Independent

A2. Roll _____

A3. Number of Teaching Staff (FTE) _____

A4. Ministry of Education Decile Classification _____

Section B: Duration of Character Education Implementation

B1. How long is it since the implementation of character education in your school/college?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> < 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 – 4 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 – 2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 – 5 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 – 3 years | <input type="checkbox"/> > 5 years |

Section C: Detail of Approach to Character Education

C1. Which of the following are included in your school/college's approach to character education? (You may tick more than one box)

- Definitions of core values are provided and taught
- There is a focus on one core value per term
- There are school and class displays on core values
- The core values are featured in the school assembly
- The staff is supported by appropriate resources and training
- The core values being taught are communicated to parents
- Character education has the support of parents
- Hard data on incidents of unacceptable behaviour is recorded
- Character education is evaluated
- A Board of Trustees policy supports character education
- The disciplinary process supports core values

Section D: Motivation for Character Education

D1. Who provided the main instigation for character education in the school/college?

- Principal
- Board of Trustees
- Staff Member
- Parents
- Other, please specify _____

D2. Who provides the main motivation for the continuation of character education in the school/college?

- Principal
- Board of Trustees
- Staff Member
- Parents
- Other, please specify _____

Section E: Relationships

For the purpose of this question, relationship is defined as mutual respect, trust, and openness.

E1. Do you consider the relationship between the Principal and the staff to have improved since the implementation of character education?

- Improved
- About the same
- No improvement

What aspects of this relationship have changed?

E2. Do you consider that relationships between students have improved since the implementation of character education?

- Improved About the same No improvement

What aspects of these relationships have changed?

E3. Do you consider that the relationship between the school/college and parents has improved since the implementation of character education?

- Improved About the same No improvement

What aspect of this relationship has changed?

E4. Do you consider that the relationship between the staff and students has improved since the implementation of character education?

- Improved About the same No improvement

What aspect of this relationship has changed?

Section F: Student Behaviour

For the purpose of this question, behaviour is defined as conduct that conforms to the core values taught in the school/college.

F1. Do you consider that student behaviour has improved since the implementation of character education?

- Improved About the same No improvement

What tangible evidence have you that student behaviour has changed?

F2. Do you consider that the playground behaviour has improved since the implementation of character education?

- Improved About the same No improvement

What tangible evidence have you that playground behaviour has changed?

Section G: Discipline

G1. Do you consider that discipline within the school/college has changed since the implementation of character education?

- Improved About the same No improvement

What aspects of discipline have changed?

G2. What has been the effect on the number of stand-downs, suspensions and expulsions?

- A decrease No change An increase

What aspects of the suspension/expulsion process, if any, have changed?

Section H: Vandalism

H1. What impact has character education had on the incidence of vandalism within the school/college?

- Less vandalism No change More vandalism

If there has been less vandalism, by approximately what percentage has vandalism decreased?

H2. In what type of vandalism has there been the most change?

Section I: Student Attendance

I1. What impact has character education had on student attendance?

- Improved No change More absenteeism

In what areas have you noticed the most improvement/deterioration?

Section J: The School/College as a Caring Community

J1. Do you consider that the school/college has become a more caring community since the implementation of character education?

Yes

No change

No

If 'yes', in what areas have you noticed change?

Section K: Staff Stability

K1. Do you consider that the implementation of character education has had an impact on staff stability?

Yes

No

K2. Do you consider that the implementation of character education has reduced staff turnover?

Yes

No

K3. Do you consider that the implementation of character education has had an impact on improving staff morale?

Yes

No

In what aspects of staff stability have you noticed change?

K4. Have you any evidence that character education attracts and retains good teachers?

Yes

No

If 'yes', in what areas has there been a change?

Section L: Enrolments

L1. As a result of character education, have enrolments at the school been affected?

- Yes No

If 'yes', in what way have enrolments been affected?

Section M: ERO Reports

M1. Did the most recent ERO Report comment on the school/college's approach to character education?

- Yes No

If 'yes', what aspects of character education did ERO comment on?

Section N: Use of Specialist Services and Agencies

N1. What effect has the implementation of character education had on the school/college's use of special education services or external agencies to support behaviour management?

- Use has decreased No change in use Use has increased

N2. In regard to special education services, in what area(s) have you noticed the most change?

N3. If these changes have impacted on the school's budget, what approximate financial change has there been?

Section O: Impact of Character Education

Please use the scale of Highly Significant (1) – Not Significant (5) to indicate how you feel about each statement and circle the number that corresponds to your answer.

Statement	Highly Significant	Quite Significant	<i>Significant</i>	Of Little Significance	Not Significant
O1. How would you rate the impact of character education on the school?	1	2	3	4	5

In what areas have you noticed a change?

Statement	Highly Significant	Quite Significant	Significant	Of Little Significance	Not Significant
O2. Do you consider that the management of the school has become easier since the implementation of character education?	1	2	3	4	5

What aspects of the management of the school/college have become easier?

Statement	Highly Significant	Very Significant	Significant	Of Little Significance	Not Significant
O3. Do you consider that there has been an improvement in the effectiveness of teaching and learning since the implementation of character education?	1	2	3	4	5

What aspects of teaching and learning have improved the most?

Thank you for your time and co-operation in completing this questionnaire 😊