Children's University and the Department for Education's

Character Education Benchmarks.

In November 2019 the Department for Education (DfE) issued non-statutory guidance for schools on character education and development. This guidance included 6 benchmarks with a series of questions that school leaders can work through in order to help them reflect on their provision and plan for development. This guidance document can be read in full here.

As a Children's University school, we know you're already committed to character education and development. Using *Children's University Online*, our digital platform, you're best placed to help your students record their participation in learning beyond the classroom. It also gives you, as school leaders an insight into your provision and participation levels in learning both inside and beyond school.

If you're committed to best practice, you may want to see how your school fares with the DfE's benchmarks. Overleaf are their questions that are intended to assist schools in evaluating their own work and planning for development. The space for answers has been left blank for your own reflections, but some notes have been added for you to see how being part of Children's University supports your offer. There are also details on how Children's University could further complement your offer.

We hope you find considering these questions a useful exercise. This is also a useful tool for demonstrating to Ofsted how your school provides for character education in the new judgement on personal development.

A - What kind of school are we?

How clearly do we articulate the kind of education we aspire to provide?

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How do we ensure that all members of the school community (e.g. staff, pupils, parents/carers, governing body) understand and share our aims?

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How effectively do we create a sense of pride, belonging and identity in our school?

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Children's University notes:

As a Children's University School, you are already demonstrating a strong ethos of personal development / whole child development. You are also showing a commitment to a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

You may want to consider how you can further embed Children's University in the culture of your school to strengthen the sense of pride, belonging and identity.

Speak to your local Children's University Manager about what they can do to support you and how other schools in your area are embedding Children's University in the culture of the school.

B - What are our expectations of behaviour towards each other?

Are we clear on the importance of discipline and good behaviour in school life? How do we promote this understanding?

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How well do we promote consideration and respect towards others (pupils and adults), good manners and courtesy?

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How well do we promote a range of positive character traits among pupils?

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Children's University notes:

As a Children's University School, the activities you encourage your pupils to participate in are all validated as being quality learning opportunities that develop essential skills. Together these skills contribute to building a range of positive character traits.

The skill set used by Children's University to tag activities is defined by the Skills Builder Partnership and backed up by a robust framework. Visit www.skillsbuilder.org to find out more about the framework.

You may want to consider how you can further embed skills reflection by your pupils as part of *Children's University Online*. If you are working with pupils aged 11+ there are new developments that can strengthen this. Get in touch with Children's University Trust to find out more: contactus@childrensuniversity.co.uk

C - How well do our curriculum and teaching develop resilience and confidence?

Is our curriculum ambitious for our pupils? Does it teach knowledge and cultural capital which will open doors and give them confidence in wider society?

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Is our curriculum logically organised and sequenced, including within subjects, and taught using effective pedagogy, so pupils gain a strong sense of progress and grow in confidence?

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Children's University notes:

As a Children's University School, the activities you encourage your pupils to participate in can contribute to building knowledge and cultural capital. When your pupil's participate in activities with new people in new places, this capital is being developed.

You may want to consider how the Children's University awards scheme can be used to develop a sense of progress and growth in confidence. Children's University graduations are great opportunities to celebrate success, but you may want to consider celebrating achievements at additional points in the calendar.

D - How good is our co-curriculum provision?

Does it cover a wide range across artistic, creative, performance, sporting, debating, challenge, team and individual etc. so all pupils can both discover new interests and develop existing ones?

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Do we make use of or promote local, national or international programmes or organisations? (e.g. uniformed organisations, Duke of Edinburgh, National Citizen Service etc.)

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Is provision of high quality and does it challenge pupils and build expertise? Is participation sustained over time?

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Are there ample opportunities for pupils to compete, perform etc., and is success acknowledged and celebrated?

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Children's University notes:

As a Children's University School, once you've entered your school activities into *Children's University Online* you can view your school's provision based on categories of learning and by the skills each activity develops. Children's University is thematically agnostic, which means that no learning opportunity is favoured over another. You can also compare provision with participation and look at your strengths and areas for improvement.

Through *Children's University Online*, pupils can also see their in-school learning alongside local, national and online opportunities. As school leaders, you can also use *Children's University Online* to see what activities your pupils are engaging with beyond the school.

Sustained participation in activities can be monitored live throughout the year using the Children's University award framework.

Successes are celebrated through Children's University graduations.

If you want to find out more about these tools, speak to your local Children's University Manager.

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

Are age-appropriate expectations of volunteering and service to others clearly established?

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Are opportunities varied, meaningful, high-quality and sustained over time?

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Do volunteering and service opportunities contribute to breaking down social barriers? Are they effective in making pupils civic-minded and ready to contribute to society?

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Children's University notes:

As a Children's University School, you can monitor the provision of and participation in activities that are tagged as being linked to social action. *Children's University Online* gives you the opportunity to validate social action opportunities for your pupils, ensuring that they are high-quality and meaningful.

In 2017 the Education Endowment Foundation released a report into Children's University as a social action programme. It showed that participation in Children's University had a positive impact - two months' additional progress in reading and maths. Read more here.

Sustained participation in activities can be monitored live throughout the year using the Children's University award framework.

You may want to consider developing a culture within your school of validating more ad hoc and one-off social action opportunities. There is no need for Children's University to be solely for ongoing scheduled activities and clubs. With *Children's University Online* you can quickly add opportunities as they arise.

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

Do we understand and reduce barriers to participation (e.g. cost, timing, location, logistics, confidence, parental support etc.)?

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Do we enable young people from all backgrounds to feel as if they belong and are valued?

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Is our provision, including our co-curricular provision, appropriately tailored both to suit and to challenge the pupils we serve?

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Children's University notes:

As a Children's University School, you can monitor the provision of and participation in activities that that are available for your pupils. You can review these by category of learning and the skills each opportunity helps to develop.

You can use *Children's University Online* to review details of these activities, including whether there is a cost for activities. You can also look at your pupils and see those who are not taking part in activities. This information could be used to consider why these pupils are not participating.

You may want to consider reviewing whether your school's provision includes opportunities at different times of the day (e.g. lunch activities as well as after-school) and whether cost is a barrier.

Speak to your local Children's University Manager about what activities are available locally, online and for download that may be promoted to those pupils who otherwise might struggle to participate.

You may want to consider working with your local Children's University Manager to engage with local businesses and other organisations to tailor activities, visits or experiences for your pupils in ways that are locally relevant.