



Character Education Research at Eton College



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Introduction

A growing body of research provides insights into how character skills and dispositions can be cultivated in school.¹ Eton College is committed to using this expanding field of research to understand the development of pupils' character in a way that is not just tacit but conscious so that the school can more intentionally support pupils' character development. Accordingly, the Tony Little Centre for Innovation and Research in Learning at Eton College has collaborated with academics on several research endeavors in this area. Among these collaborations, the Tony Little Centre partnered with Research Schools International (RSI) on an intervention study on growth mindset and a study exploring pupils' happiness.

Building on this work, the Tony Little Centre and RSI have recently carried out a research study on character education at Eton. This research study explores the following questions:

- Which character skills and dispositions are central to the Eton community?
- How is Eton supporting the development of these skills and dispositions?
- How can Eton further support the development of these skills and dispositions?

In the first phase of this project, we conducted a survey to identify the character skills and dispositions that are most central to the Eton community. We surveyed pupils, masters, some support staff, and dames, and explored how important they believe it is for Eton to promote a wide range of character skills and dispositions. Results indicate that the character skills and dispositions most central to the Eton community are: motivation, perseverance, happiness, gratitude, and respect. In the second phase of the project, we conducted an academic literature review to identify research-based practices known to support the development of motivation, perseverance, happiness, gratitude, and respect. Following this, we distributed a second survey to the Eton community, which was used to explore to what extent those research-based practices are currently implemented at Eton. Our study demonstrates that masters at Eton are skillfully employing many research-based practices known to support motivation, perseverance, happiness, gratitude, and respect. In addition, our study identifies areas for growth in which masters can deepen their use of research-based practices to further promote the character skills and dispositions that are most central to their community. As a follow up to this study, RSI is leading a professional development workshop for masters on the research-based practices that the study identified as areas for growth. With this work, Eton can be confident that it is indeed actively promoting the character skills and dispositions that are most central to its community.

Methods

This study consisted of two phases of research. In *Phase I*, we collected data on which character skills and dispositions are most central to the Eton community. In *Phase II*, we collected data on the extent to which research-based practices known to support these character skills and dispositions are currently employed at Eton.

Phase I

Survey

To create the survey for Phase I of this research, we first reviewed the work of several organizations that focus on the importance of character education in schools.² From this search, we created a list of character skills and dispositions to explore with the survey. In the survey, we presented the list of character skills and dispositions and we asked participants to rate how important they think it is for Eton to promote each skill or disposition. The survey for Phase I consisted of multiple-choice questions.

Participants

There were 519 pupils that participated in a survey for *Phase I*. Among this group, we found a fairly even distribution of pupils across the five year groups at Eton (Table 1). There were 144 members of staff, including masters, support staff, and dames, that completed a survey for *Phase I* (Table 1).

Role	Number of Participants	Pupil and Staff Sums
F Block	120	519
E Block	99	
D Block	91	
C Block	109	
B Block	100	
Master	110	144
Support Staff	18	
Dame	16	

Table 1. Participants on *Phase I* survey

Data Collection

We created two versions of the *Phase I* survey to administer to pupils and staff. The surveys were administered in October 2018 using the survey platform Qualtrics. All participants received an email containing a link to the survey. Participants completed the 5-minute multiple-choice survey individually and in one continuous sitting. All respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary. Survey data were retrieved directly from Qualtrics.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the survey data using quantitative methods that examined responses for the highest consistency between our participants. We explored overall ratings across all of our participants as well as disaggregated ratings among subgroups in our sample.

Phase II

Survey

To create the survey for *Phase II* of this research, we first reviewed relevant academic literature for research-based practices known to support motivation, perseverance, happiness, gratitude, and respect. We refer to this literature throughout the body of the paper. In the survey, we asked participants to rate the extent to which these research-based practices are implemented at Eton. Additionally, we asked participants to respond openly about how Eton supports the development of motivation, perseverance, happiness, gratitude, and respect, and how they believe Eton could further support the development of these skills and dispositions. The survey for *Phase II* consisted of both multiple-choice and open-ended response questions.

Participants

We had 425 pupils and 112 staff complete surveys for *Phase II* (Table 2). We again saw an even distribution of participation among pupils across the five year groups. In addition, we had a similar proportion of participants from the staff roles.

Role	Number of participants	Pupil and Staff Sums
F Block	88	425
E Block	80	
D Block	82	
C Block	88	
B Block	87	
Master	77	112
Support Staff	19	
Dame	16	

Table 2. Participants on *Phase II* survey

Data Collection

We created two versions of the survey for *Phase II* for the pupils and staff. The surveys were distributed in January 2019 using the survey platform Qualtrics. All participants received an email containing a link to the survey. Participants completed the 10-minute survey individually and in one continuous sitting. All respondents were informed of their voluntary participation. Survey data were retrieved directly from Qualtrics.

Data Analysis

Responses from the multiple-choice questions were analyzed using quantitative methods. The open-ended responses were analyzed using qualitative methods adapted from Grounded Theory Analysis. This approach involves coding the data for themes related to academic literature as well as themes that emerge from the participants' ideas.³ The thematic analysis was conducted independently by two RSI researchers to ensure inter-coder reliability.

Results and Discussion

Results Overview

In the sections below we present and discuss our findings from this research study on character education at Eton. Our results from phase one establish that motivation, perseverance, happiness, gratitude, and respect are of utmost importance to the Eton community. Phase two of this research illustrates that Eton is already supporting these skills and dispositions through use of several research-based practices, but could further develop these skills and dispositions by deepening certain research-based practices. Below we highlight each of the research-based practices that Eton is already employing and identify areas for growth.

Motivation and Perseverance

How is Eton supporting the development of Motivation and Perseverance?

Results indicate that Eton employs many research-based practices that support pupils' motivation and perseverance. In the words of one pupil, "Masters motivate many to try their best." Specifically, our results suggest that Eton fosters pupils' motivation and perseverance by *emphasizing the role of effort in success, providing the right level of challenge, offering teacher support, and using formative assessment*. We share our findings for each of these practices below.

Emphasize the Role of Effort in Success

Educators can support pupil motivation and perseverance by recognizing and rewarding pupils for their effort, not only for their performance. Doing so teaches pupils that their successes are not a result of innate intelligence or chance, but are a function of the effort they put into achieving their goals.⁴ Our findings suggest that this practice is thoroughly implemented across the years at Eton. Among our pupil respondents, 82% claim that masters emphasize "quite a bit" or "very much" the role of effort in pupils' success (Figure 1). As one pupil succinctly explains, "there is certainly an emphasis on learning, and putting effort into one's endeavors." We find similar consensus among the staff, with the vast majority (93%) of the masters, support staff, and dames indicating that they emphasize "quite a bit" or "very much" pupils' effort as a key component of their success.

Eton accomplishes this in various ways. For example, one way that Eton emphasizes the role of effort in success is by giving pupils awards for their effort. As one pupil explains: "I am a very self-

motivated individual, and this is encouraged by awards for excellent effort which help to keep me motivated.” Eton also emphasizes the role of effort in coaching on the sports field. As one pupil shares, “I have found that sport, in particular house sport, encourages perseverance.”

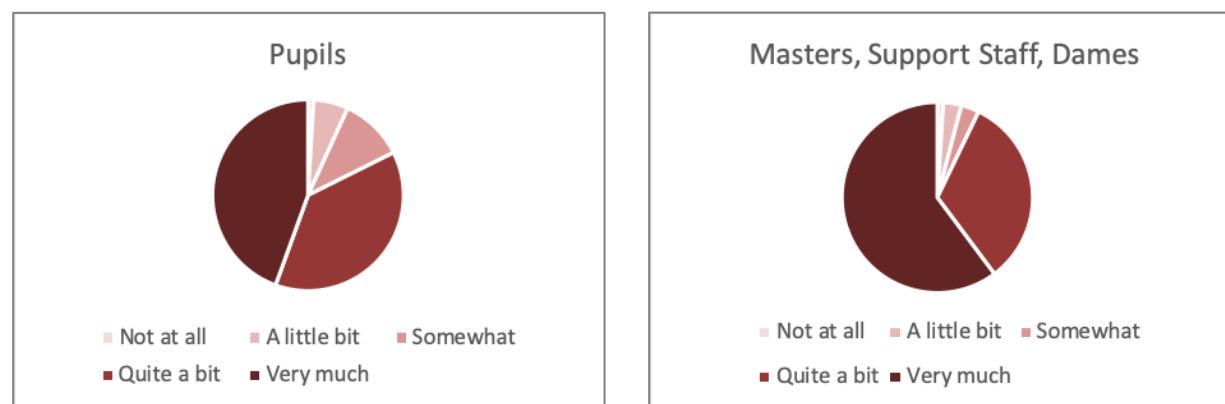


Figure 1. Masters emphasize the role of effort in boys' success

Provide the Right Level of Challenge

Appropriately managing the level of challenge in a learning experience is important for cultivating motivation. When a pupil's skills exceed the level of challenge, the pupil can feel disengaged and bored in a learning activity; likewise, when a pupil's skills are an inadequate match for the level of challenge at hand, the combination can trigger anxiety, which can also result in disengagement. In order for a pupil to be effectively motivated, the challenge and skill level must be matched.⁵ Our findings suggest that pupils at Eton receive the appropriate level of challenge in their work. Most (54%) pupils report they agree “quite a bit” or “very much” that masters provide them with the right level of challenge (Figure 2). A large percentage (91%) of respondents on the survey of masters, support staff, and dames report that they provide boys “quite a bit” or “very much” with a level of challenge that will stretch what pupils can already do.

Analysis of the qualitative data from our study further supports the notion that Eton fosters motivation by providing the right level of challenge. Pupils often explicitly state that Eton fosters motivation by “keeping work challenging.” Boys further discuss how masters at Eton reach a balance between difficulty and ease with the work they assign by considering what boys know already and pushing them to a reasonable degree beyond that point. As one pupil explains, “Good teachers encourage me to be motivated by engaging me with stuff I know and understand and enjoy which merges into more difficult stuff that I don't understand.” Another pupil shares, “[Eton] puts you in classes that are of your standard so you don't lose motivation because the content is too easy or too hard.” Masters discuss their intention to “stretch [pupils] academically.” Pupils recognize this approach, with one pupil noting, “EWs and in-div work are challenging enough that there's always more to learn.”



Figure 2. Masters provide boys with a level of challenge that will stretch what they can already do

Offer Teacher Support

Previous research has established that perceived teacher support correlates with elevated levels of motivation among pupils. That is, pupils tend to be more motivated in their work when they feel sufficiently supported by their teachers.⁶ Our survey results indicate that most Eton pupils find that their masters go above and beyond to support them. As one pupil put it, “Teachers will offer to spend some of their free time to help us.” Another pupil shares that “Teachers are willing to help you outside of schools, both by creating opportunities (such as the Computational Physics Prize) and supporting you in your own personal learning.” Our analysis shows that Eton masters provide three specific forms of support: masters support pupils by believing in pupils’ capacity to reach their learning goals, assist pupils when they are struggling academically, and encourage students to construct their own understanding during the learning process.

Our survey findings show that more than half (55%) of pupils find that their masters believe in their abilities to achieve their learning goals “quite a bit” or “very much” (Figure 3). An even larger proportion of masters, support staff, and dames (89%) indicate that they show boys that they believe in the boys’ abilities to achieve their learning goals “quite a bit” or “very much.” This finding emerged as a prominent theme in the open-ended responses where pupils describe the role masters’ support plays in their motivation. For example, one pupil notes, “Teachers always offer help and encouragement, when you’re feeling down, they help you get back to being seen and motivated.”

Further findings from our analysis show that pupils feel particularly well-supported by masters when they are struggling academically. Most of our pupil respondents (64%) report feeling “quite a bit” or “very much” supported by masters when they are struggling with an academic concept (Figure 4). Pupils value this support very much. One pupil talks passionately about how important it is to “show the pupil that he has potential in a subject even if he isn’t doing well.” A robust proportion of the staff (89%) who participated in our survey report they support boys “quite a bit” or “very much” when they are struggling with an academic concept. Recognition of masters’ attentiveness to pupils is expressed clearly in responses from pupils. One pupil shares, “...beaks are quick to support us if we’re struggling with something.” Another boy explains, “The school never comes down hard on little mistakes, instead they support you with it and show you what you can do to develop yourself.”

A deeper look at our data shows that masters are providing support by scaffolding pupils' learning. Pupils describe in their own words how masters encourage pupils to construct their own understanding. A pupil describes this approach by saying that, "[Masters] challenge us to find the right answer using as little help as possible." Another pupil explains how a mathematics teacher uses questioning to help pupils work through a problem: "My maths teacher does not tell anybody the answer to a question they may have if he believes they know it. Instead, he tries to help them to figure it out for themselves by asking questions."



Figure 3. Masters show boys that they believe in their abilities to achieve their learning goals

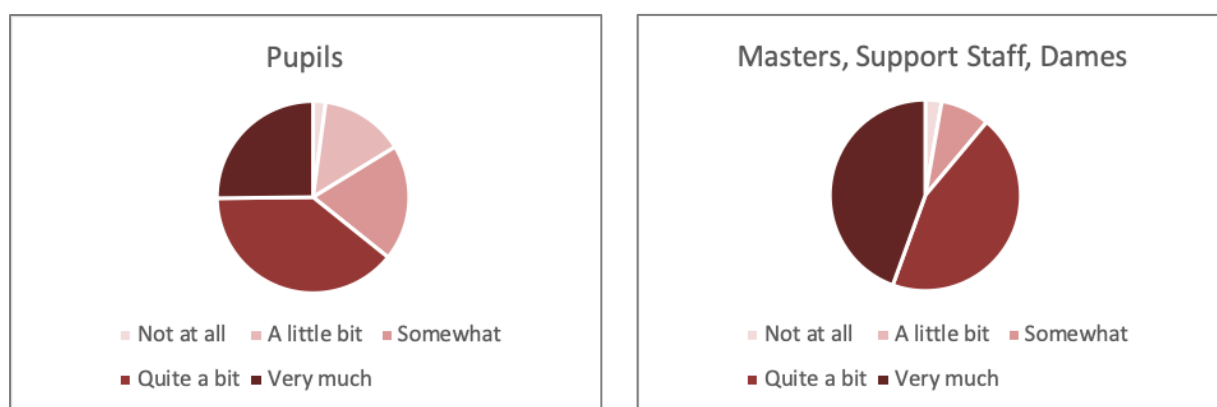


Figure 4. Masters provide support when boys are struggling with an academic concept

Use Formative Assessment

Research indicates that formative assessment is an effective tool for harnessing pupil motivation and developing perseverance in the learning process.⁷ Formative assessment involves using ongoing evaluations throughout the learning process to shape further instruction.⁸ This approach provides pupils with assessments *for* learning rather than assessments *of* learning. Results from our study show

that Eton is currently implementing several forms of formative assessment practices across the year levels including goal-setting, frequent assessments, and effective feedback.⁹

Collaborative goal-setting is an important first step in formative assessment. Here a pupil explains how Eton's use of goal-setting can deepen motivation: "Eton helps provide suitable goals with suitable rewards that help us be more motivated with our studies." Pupils appreciate the level of support received as they work towards goals as well: "[masters] keep allowing you to set targets and support them in knowledgeable, friendly, and engaging ways."

Another formative assessment practice that Eton uses is giving frequent assessments to inform pupils of where they are in the learning process. One pupil eloquently explains, "[Eton] often provides goal-orientated exercises to allow yourself to check how effectively you have learned a topic; i.e., they give you tests after every section of the syllabus rather than just at the end of term." Eton pupils are cognizant of the benefits of using ongoing assessments to shape learning; as one pupil puts it, "We are reminded that weekly learning (continuous small term assessments) will make the learning process much easier and more effective."

Finally, pupils remark that masters offer effective feedback on how they can improve and move forward. For example, one pupil explains, "[Eton] gives you [the] freedom to try again and tells you how to do it better." Another pupil shares that one way he receives support to persevere in the learning process is from "good feedback where areas for improvement are clearly highlighted." Together, emphasizing the role of effort and using formative assessment practices support pupils to be motivated and to show perseverance in the face of challenges.

How can Eton further support the development of Motivation and Perseverance?

While the above section details how Eton fosters motivation and perseverance among pupils, our analysis also identifies research-based practices known to support these skills that are currently less prevalent across the school. Results suggest that Eton can further support the development of motivation and perseverance by providing pupils with more choice in their schoolwork, highlighting how classroom learning is relevant pupils' lives outside school, and cultivating a growth mindset across the year levels.

Provide Pupils with Choice

An extensive body of research demonstrates that when pupils experience a sense of autonomy in their schoolwork, they tend to be more motivated.¹⁰ One key way to promote a sense of autonomy is to offer pupils meaningful choice in their work so that their work resonates with their values and interests.¹¹ While Eton may support pupils' autonomy in some ways, our research reveals that 42% of pupils indicate that they have freedom of choice "not at all" or "a little bit" in their learning process (Figure 5). With this finding we discover an opportunity for Eton to increase pupils' sense of autonomy.

One way for Eton to enhance agency among pupils is to provide choice in the topic of academic work assigned. In our survey, a large majority (83%) of pupils claim that masters provide them with choice in the topic of their academic work “not at all” or “a little bit” (Figure 6). Additionally, most (64%) of participants on the survey of masters, support staff, and dames indicate that they provide boys with choice in the topic of their EWs, projects, and other assignments “not at all” or “a little bit.” Although Eton offers some opportunities for boys to choose the topic of their work, when asked how Eton could further develop motivation among boys, numerous pupils explicitly request more opportunities to choose the topic of their work. For example, a pupil explains how selecting their own topic can lead to greater degree of motivation: “Give us more freedom in choices (e.g. write essays on titles that we pick) as, because we are more passionate about the assignment, we would be more motivated to complete it effectively.” Another pupil makes a similar suggestion: “When doing a research project, allow a wider scope and more options of things to look up and then each person explains to everyone else their part of the task/topic which they prefer.”

Similarly, another way to provide pupils with more autonomy is to offer choice in the medium of their academic work. We observe 69% of our pupil respondents claiming that masters provide them with choice in the medium of their academic work “not at all” or “a little bit” (Figure 7). Likewise, 57% of the staff that were surveyed claim they provide boys with choice in the medium of their EWs, projects, and other assignments “not at all” or “a little bit.”

Findings from our open-ended responses parallel this result. A pupil directly suggests varying the medium of academic work: “perhaps give more choice on medium of EW from time to time. This may however be practically difficult to carry out.” Another pupil offers a similar recommendation, “More diverse activities and ways of presenting and getting information across, and EWs that aren't always going over what has been done in the same format, e.g. always doing a poem and writing an essay about it.” Responses from masters also raise the idea of providing pupils with more choice in academic work in order to further develop motivation and perseverance. For example, here a master suggests, “allow [pupils] greater freedom in some EWs for finding out things they want to find out.”

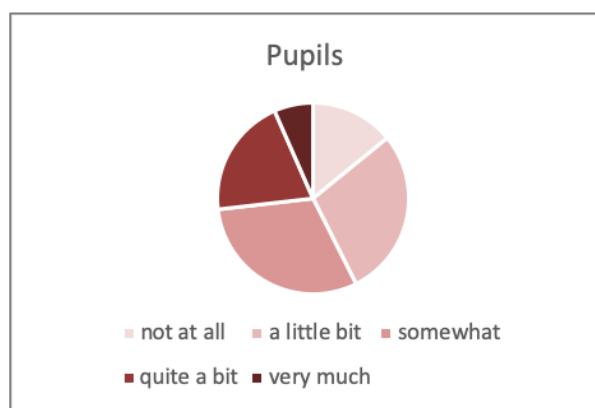


Figure 5. Boys have freedom of choice in their learning process



Figure 6. Masters provide boys with choice in the topic of their EWs, projects, and other assignments



Figure 7. Masters provide boys with choice in the medium of their EWs, projects, and other assignments

Highlight How Classroom Learning is Relevant

Teachers can further support pupils' motivation and perseverance by highlighting how classroom learning is relevant to pupils' lives outside school. Previous research demonstrates that pupils tend to be more motivated when it is clear to them how their learning in school is related to their interests, life outside school, and future.¹² We offer three strategies to encourage pupils to see how their learning in school is relevant based on our research: ground classroom content in real world issues; highlight how pupils may apply knowledge and skills learned now in their future beyond Eton; and incorporate pupil interests into classroom instruction.

Masters can help pupils see the relevance of their learning by explicitly connecting academic content to the real world. Our results show a discrepancy between pupils and staff on their perception of the extent to which this occurs at Eton. Almost half (44%) of our pupil participants find that masters connect classroom learning to the real world “not at all” or “a little bit” (Figure 8). We find further

emphasis on this in the open-ended responses from pupils. For example, one boy suggests, “Talk about and explain relevant topics in the news [related] to the subject.” On the other hand, the vast majority (80%) of staff indicate that masters connect academic content to the real world “quite a bit” or “very much.” Given this discrepancy, we recommend masters make the connections between academic content and the real world more explicit for pupils.

An additional approach Eton may take to deepen real-world relevance for pupils is to demonstrate to pupils how the knowledge and skills they are building now may be applied in the future. When pupils are asked how Eton can further support motivation and perseverance, a common suggestion from pupils is to connect schoolroom content to their life beyond Eton. Boys make suggestions such as, “discuss the effects of what I am learning,” “show us how skills learnt can be useful later on,” and “teach things which will affect us in real life and help us in professions.”

Another way Eton can make learning more relevant is to support more deliberately pupils’ interests in the main curriculum. While boys have many opportunities to pursue their passions in the co-curriculum, we find 62% of pupils claim that masters incorporate their interests into schoolroom instruction “not at all” or “a little bit” (Figure 9). The distribution of responses from staff differs as only 37% claim they incorporate boys’ interests into schoolroom instruction “not at all” or “a little bit,” but we still see room for growth here. Incorporating interests emerges as a prominent theme in the open-ended responses from pupils. A pupil reflects, “I feel that there could be a lot more effort in terms of making people’s learning experience more in line with their passions.” Other pupils make suggestions such as, “incorporate more personal interests in an EW or assignment,” and “allow more individuation in work to allow people to find their interests more readily.”

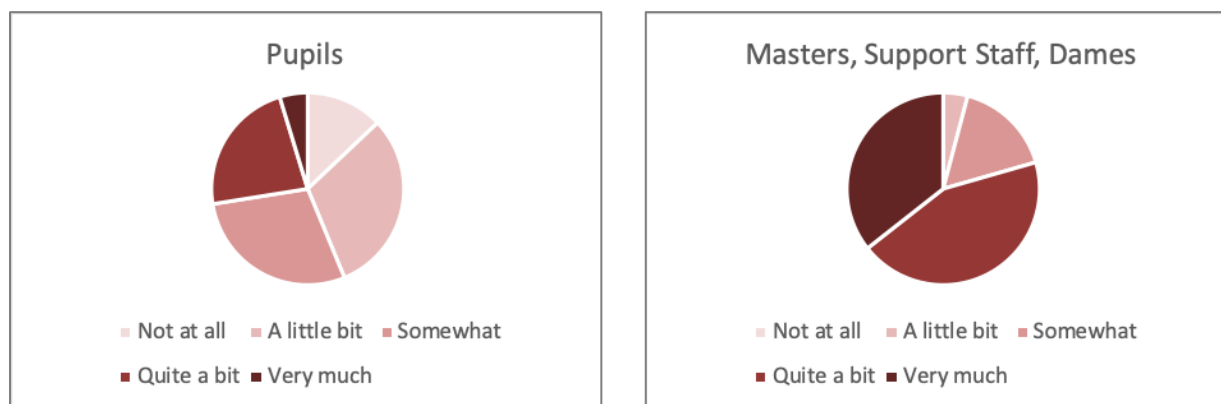


Figure 8. Masters connect schoolroom learning to the real world

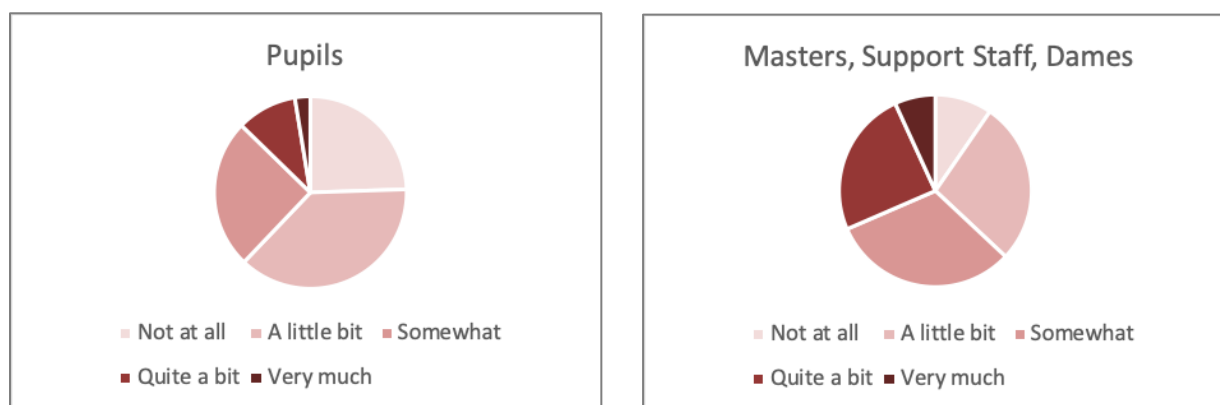


Figure 9. Masters incorporate boys' interests into schoolroom instruction

Cultivate Growth Mindset Across the Year Levels

Pupils who have a growth mindset believe that they can improve their abilities through hard work.¹³ Previous research has established that explicitly teaching pupils about growth mindset (i.e., that their abilities are malleable) promotes motivation and persistence.¹⁴ Our findings at Eton illustrate that instruction around growth mindset is not yet implemented fully across the year levels (Figure 10). When we examine our data at the year level, we find that the majority of pupils in each year group report they have not received explicit instruction on growth mindset. The exception to this result is with C Block, where we observe the majority of pupils indicating they have received instruction on growth mindset. Eton can further support motivation and perseverance by explicitly teaching growth mindset across the year levels. One way to do this is to have pupils who have already learned about the concept teach pupils who are less familiar with it about it, which has been shown to be an effective strategy for deepening the knowledge of both groups of pupils.¹⁵ Some pupils already advocate for teaching about growth mindset, with one pupil calling for explicit instruction about it: "Talk about the growth mindset explicitly."

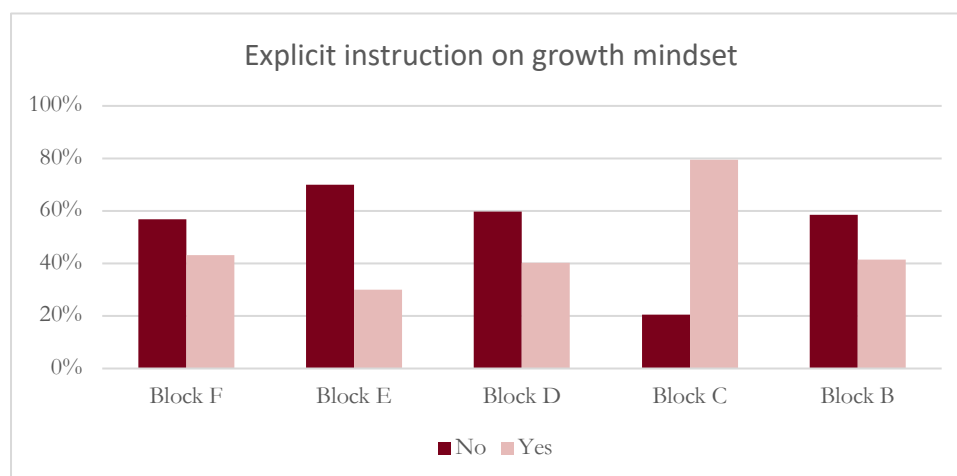


Figure 10. Pupils receive explicit instruction on growth mindset

Another way Eton can support growth mindset is by emphasizing that mistakes are opportunities for growth. One boy nicely captures this idea, urging masters to “encourage the idea of productive failure.” Similarly, other boys discuss the value of helping boys see setbacks as “bumps in the road” rather than roadblocks. For example, one pupil suggests, “help [boys] to see beyond setbacks” during the learning process.

Research shows that another way to promote growth mindset, motivation and perseverance is to teach pupils how the brain changes as we learn.¹⁶ Results reveal a strong consensus among our respondents that this is not currently a common practice at Eton. Among our pupil participants, 70% claim they have not learned about how the brain changes (Figure 11). Similarly, 73% of the masters, support staff, and dames respond that they have not taught boys about how the brain changes as you learn.



Figure 11. Pupils learn about how the brain changes as they learn

Happiness and Gratitude

How is Eton supporting the development of Happiness and Gratitude?

Through this research, we discover that Eton is implementing several research-based practices that support students' gratitude and happiness. The good work in this area has not gone unnoticed. When pupils are asked how Eton could further support happiness and gratitude, several pupils make comments such as, “not much – already doing enough!” and “I think they should just keep it up.” The Eton community supports happiness and gratitude by *cultivating positive relationships*, *encouraging boys to be grateful*, *urging boys to exercise*, and *supporting boys to develop their passions*. Below we share our findings on how Eton is implementing these practices.

Cultivate Positive Relationships

Research has shown time and time again that positive relationships are fundamental to happiness. In fact, the most significant predictor of a person's happiness is the quality of their relationships.¹⁷ Given this, it is essential for schools to create an environment in which positive relationships can flourish across the school community. Our findings indicate that Eton shines at cultivating positive relationships both between masters and boys and between boys.

The majority of pupils surveyed (56%) agree that masters build positive relationships with boys “quite a bit” or “very much” (Figure 12). Echoing this finding, most of the masters, supports staff, and dames (87%), believe they “quite a bit” or “very much” build positive relationships with boys. As one pupil shares, “One of the greatest things about this school is the relationships which may develop between boys and beaks.” He goes on to mention that these positive relationships can engender feelings of gratitude and encourage boys to express those feelings, noting, “[These relationships] are so important for encouraging expression of gratitude.” Another pupil reflects a similar sentiment, explaining one way that Eton supports happiness is that, “[Masters] build positive connections with the class.” Masters, too, comment on the importance of positive relationships between pupils and masters at Eton, with one remarking, “boys are encouraged to build good relationships with adults both in and out of the schoolroom, showing gratitude for what is done for them. Many of the adults in the community go 'the extra mile' for the boys and this is appreciated.”

Our survey results also demonstrate that Eton is cultivating positive relationships between boys. Among our pupil respondents, most (51%) report that the Eton community encourages them to build positive relationships with other boys “quite a bit” or “very much.” Similarly, the vast majority of our masters, support staff, and dames (78%) report they encourage boys to build positive relationships “quite a bit” or “very much” (Figure 13). This perspective appears throughout the open-ended responses across our whole sample. For example, a master notes, “Eton provides plenty of time for boys to develop friendships.” The boys also remark on this support noting, “Eton is pretty good at fostering good relationships between boys” with another sharing, “Teachers are always making sure boys are kind to each other.”



Figure 12. Masters build positive relationships with boys



Figure 13. Eton community encourages boys to build positive relationships

Encourage Boys to be Grateful

Research shows that practising gratitude increases how grateful one feels in various areas of one's life, which also boosts happiness.¹⁸ Our character study shows that masters at Eton support boys' gratitude and happiness by encouraging them to be grateful as well as by modeling gratitude. In addition, Eton provides boys with opportunities to volunteer, which pupils feel supports gratitude as well.

Respondents on our surveys by and large agree that gratitude is encouraged at Eton. Around half of the pupil participants (51%) and three-quarters (74%) of the staff indicate that Eton encourages boys to be grateful "quite a bit" or "very much." The open-ended responses suggest gratitude is part of the ethos at the school. For example, a pupil explains, "Gratitude is expected at Eton which is great at preparing you for the outside world." Another pupil shares a similar observation: "I think that overall everyone at the school has a great deal of respect for each other and the school encourages pupils to express gratitude by returning favors or simply saying thank you." Additionally, a master comments on the presence of such encouragement, sharing, "I can think of individual occasions in which members of staff encourage boys to say 'thank you' to people who have given talks at society meetings."

The survey responses also suggest that Masters encourage gratitude through modeling. For instance, a pupil explains, "Masters thank you at the end of the lesson, encouraging you to thank them as well." Furthermore, we learn that pupils feel that a sense of gratitude is developed through volunteering opportunities. For example, one pupil shares, "Through the work of charities and various organizations the school supports, we are reminded of the importance of gratitude." By cultivating positive relationships and encouraging boys to be grateful, Eton supports pupils' gratitude and happiness.



Figure 14. Masters encourage boys to be grateful

Urge Boys to Exercise

Physical well-being is widely recognized as having an important influence on happiness. Research has continued to exhibit positive correlations between physical exercise and mental health outcomes, including happiness.¹⁹ Moreover, behavioral interventions that involve exercise routines have been shown to increase happiness.²⁰ We find resounding consensus among our participants that exercise plays an important role in school life at Eton. Among our pupil respondents, 74% claim that Eton encourages boys to exercise “quite a bit” or “very much” (Figure 15). Nearly all of the staff members we surveyed (94%) find that exercise is encouraged “quite a bit” or “very much.” Eton supports exercise among pupils by offering ample options for sport. As one master observes, “[Eton provides] good sports opportunities,” another noting, “[Eton provides time] to play sport.” In our open-ended responses, we find a good understanding among the Eton community of the link between exercise and happiness. For example, one boy notes, “I think that the school’s encouragement of sport in general is healthy and leads us boys to happiness.” Reflecting on ways in which Eton supports happiness and gratitude, one master points out, “boys are encouraged to exercise both individually and in teams which helps keep the mind healthy.”



Figure 15. Eton encourages boys to exercise

Support Boys to Develop their Passions

Schools can support pupils' happiness by guiding pupils to pursue their passions and the work they find meaningful.²¹ Our survey findings show that 56% of pupils indicate that Eton supports boys to develop their passions “quite a bit” or “very much” (Figure 16). As one pupil explains, “They encourage us to strive to be the best we can and encourage us to pursue things we are interested in.” An even larger proportion (90%) of the respondents on the masters, support, staff, and dames survey believe that Eton supports boys' passions “quite a bit” or “very much.”

One of the most prominent ways Eton helps boys develop their passions is through offering a diverse array of activities. Both pupils and masters alike comment extensively on this characteristic of Eton when discussing how Eton supports the development of happiness. For example, one boy explains, “You always have the chance to find something you are interested in, be it sport, music, reading, the arts and beyond.” Another boy also notes that Eton provides “a wide range of activities so that there is something for everyone – so many opportunities.” In addition, many comments from masters note the significant variety offered at Eton. Here one master observes, “[Eton provides] fabulous facilities and expertise on tap to pursue interests and develop talents.”

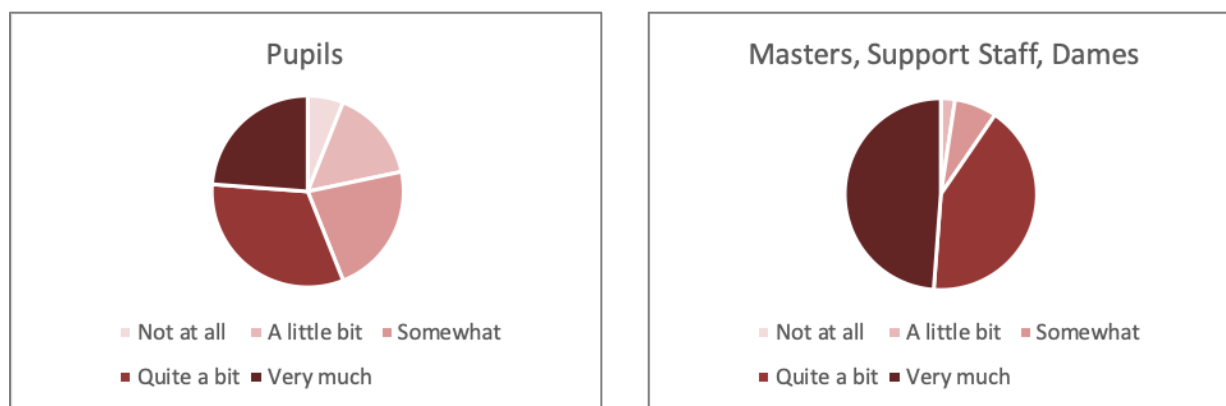


Figure 16. Eton community supports boys to develop their passions

How can Eton further support the development of Happiness and Gratitude?

In the above section, we demonstrate how Eton is supporting happiness and gratitude by *cultivating positive relationships, encouraging boys to be grateful, urging boys to exercise, and supporting boys to develop their passions*. In addition to keeping up with these approaches, to further support the development of happiness and gratitude, we recommend that Eton *provide structured opportunities for boys to practise gratitude, offer opportunities to practise mindfulness, encourage boys to reflect on their accomplishments, and support boys to shape negative thoughts into a positive path forward*. Below we discuss our findings for each of these practices.

Provide Structured Opportunities for Boys to Practise Gratitude

While our results indicate that Eton encourages boys to be grateful in many tacit ways as discussed above, our results suggest that there are few structured opportunities for pupils to show appreciation. We observe that 76% of boys find that their masters “never” or “rarely (1x a term)” provide structured opportunities for boys to show appreciation, and 62% of our staff respondents indicate that they “never” or “rarely (1x a term)” provide structured opportunities for boys to show appreciation (Figure 17). Research indicates that practising gratitude in structured ways not only deepens a sense of gratitude across many areas of life, but also boosts happiness.²² We therefore recommend that Eton provides pupils with structured ways to practise gratitude, including inviting boys to keep a gratitude journal, write thank you notes, and reflect on what they have going well in their life.

A well-established approach for practising gratitude is to keep a gratitude journal in which one reflects regularly on aspects of one’s life for which one is thankful.²³ We find that this practice is not yet in place at Eton as nearly all of our participants claim that boys do not currently keep a gratitude journal. Specifically, we find that 96% of pupils indicate they are not asked to keep a gratitude journal and 94% of staff indicate that they “never” ask boys to keep a gratitude journal (Figure 18).

The act of writing thank you notes not only promotes an atmosphere of appreciation within a community, but also deepens one’s own sense of gratitude and happiness.²⁴ While there is not robust agreement among the staff on the regularity of this practice, a large majority of boys (72%) find that this practice happens “never” or “rarely (1x a term)” (Figure 19). Overall, these results suggest there is room for growth with this practice. One pupil notes that staff do encourage this practice, but they could emphasize its importance even more: “If you go on a tutorial outing or to a society supper, you are encouraged (not enough) to write a card or email.”

Eton can further support gratitude by providing structured experiences for boys to reflect on what they have going well in their life.²⁵ Our quantitative and qualitative findings show that the majority of pupils (76%) and staff (53%) find that pupils are “never” or “rarely (1x a term)” asked to reflect on what they have going well in their life (Figure 20). In the open-ended responses on the surveys, we find pupils requesting more discussion and reflection time for these purposes. For example, one pupil suggests, “have more discussions (e.g. in tutorials) about things we enjoy/have enjoyed” while another makes a similar request: “have more time to be mindful and just pause and reflect on how things are going.” Pupils recognize how important it is to feel and practise a sense of gratitude in their life. Here a pupil reflects on this, stating, “Though I feel that it is a blindingly obvious point in such a privileged school such as Eton, there are absolutely no moments where we are asked to think along these lines.”

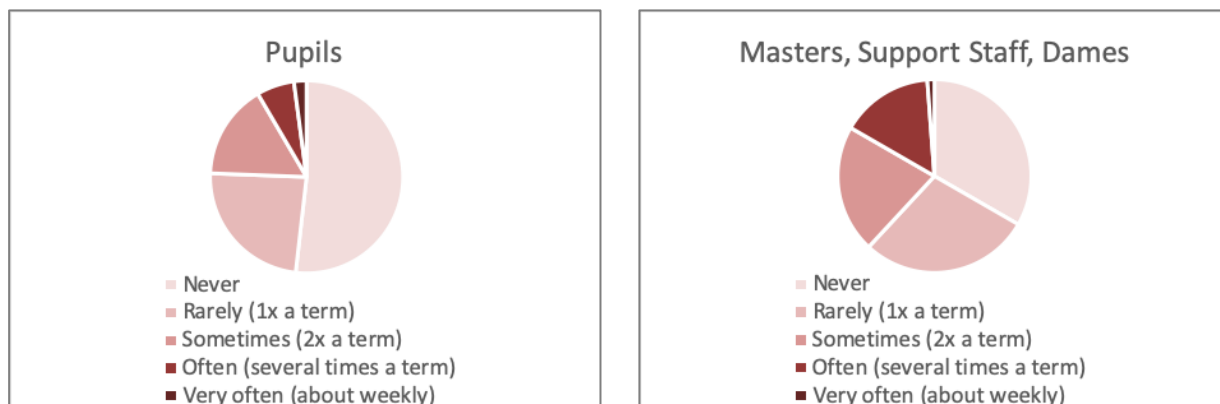


Figure 17. Masters provide boys with structured opportunities to show appreciation

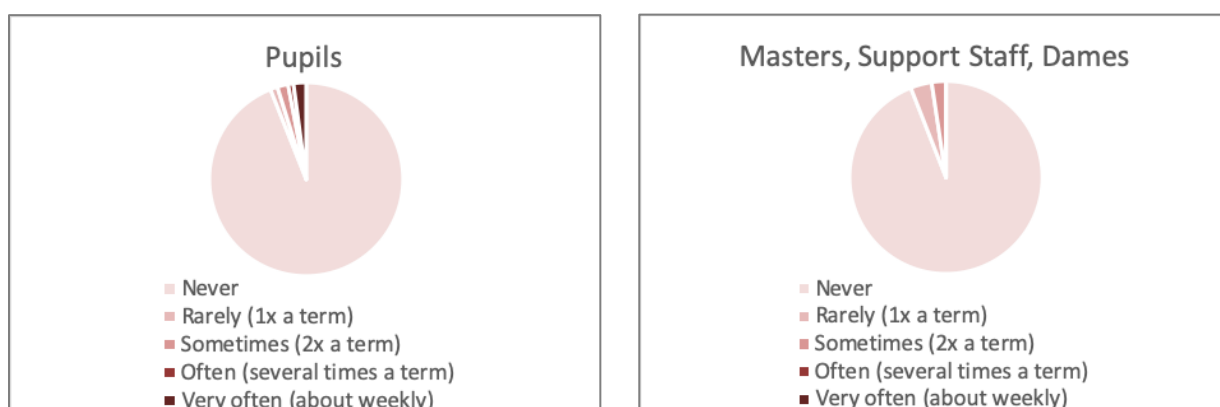


Figure 18. Boys are asked to keep a gratitude journal

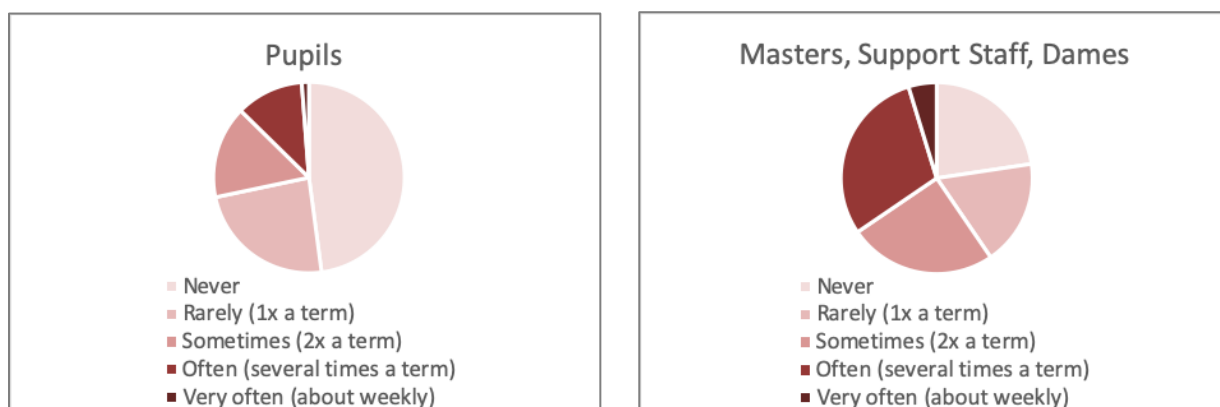


Figure 19. Masters ask boys to write thank you notes or cards



Figure 20. Masters provide structured opportunities for boys to reflect on what they have going well in life

Offer Opportunities for Boys to Practise Mindfulness

Mindfulness practices offer a wide range of benefits to various aspects of well-being, including stress reduction, emotional regulation, and self-compassion, among others. Recent research has shown that engaging in mindfulness practices is also a predictor of happiness.²⁶ We find strong agreement among the surveyed pupils, masters, support staff, and dames that providing time to practise mindfulness could be more prevalent across the college. Eighty-two percent of pupils report that masters “never” or “rarely (1x a term)” provide time to practise mindfulness (Figure 21). Similarly, 79% of staff claim that they “never” or “rarely (1x a term)” provide pupils with an opportunity to practise mindfulness. Interestingly, in the open-ended responses, many pupils request that Eton offers more mindfulness opportunities to support happiness. For example, one pupil recommends, “more time for mindfulness and specific relaxation in the half.” Another pupil makes a similar suggestion, “[More] emphasis on helping the mind and body relax, especially in the evenings. The yoga brought in at the end of last term was a good example of the number of boys wanting to do this but how limited it is at school.” Many boys find mindfulness practices to be effective at reducing stress, with one noting, “breathing exercises for 30 seconds-ish does really help with stress.”

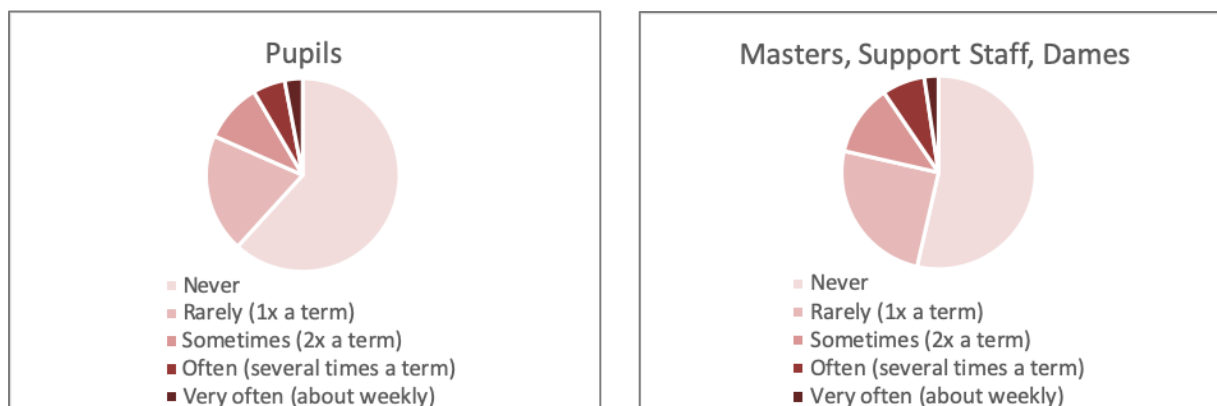


Figure 21. Masters provide boys with time to practise mindfulness

Encourage Boys to Reflect on their Successes

Research indicates that recognizing one’s accomplishments through ongoing reflection can lead to greater sense of happiness.²⁷ While the responses from staff are quite split regarding how often they ask boys to reflect on their successes, we find agreement in boys’ responses (Figures 22 and 23). The majority of boys (68%) in our sample report that they are “not at all” or “a little bit” asked to reflect on their successes in life. Similarly, most boys (55%) also say they are “not at all” or “a little bit” asked to reflect on their successes at Eton. These findings suggest there is room for deepening a regular practice of reflecting on accomplishments in one’s life and at Eton. Boys and masters note this in their short-answer responses. For example, one boy calls for more routine around acknowledging accomplishments, suggesting, “Remind us occasionally how far we have come.” Likewise, a master makes a similar recommendation: “Focus on what [boys] have done right instead of what they may have done wrong (within reason).” Given these findings, Eton may consider implementing a way for boys to reflect on their successes both in life and at Eton.



Figure 22. Masters ask boys to reflect on their accomplishments in life

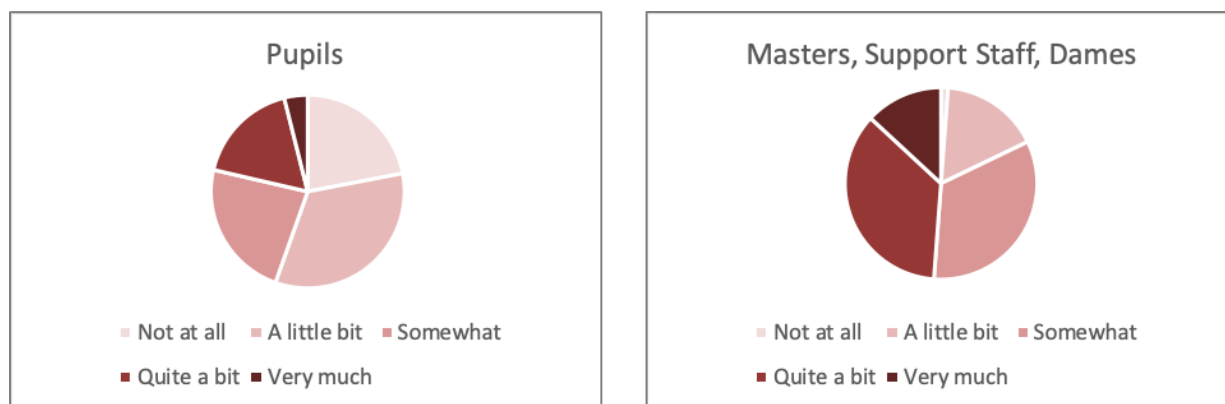


Figure 23. Masters ask boys to reflect on their accomplishments at Eton

Support Boys to Shape Negative Thoughts into a Positive Path Forward

Research in neuroscience demonstrates that when individuals reframe negative thoughts into a positive path forward, it is correlated with changes in the brain that are associated with a more positive emotional experience.²⁸ While most of the staff members (52%) report that they are supporting boys to shape negative thoughts into a positive path forward “quite a bit” or “very much,” their support in this area may often go unnoticed, as boys express a different perception regarding the extent to which this practice takes place. Most of the pupils surveyed (52%) indicate they have support in shaping negative thoughts into a positive path forward “not at all” or “a little bit” (Figure 24). Both boys and masters suggest this practice in the open-ended responses. For example, a boy offers the following recommendation for how Eton can further support happiness: “focus on making negative experiences positive and allow us to reflect.”

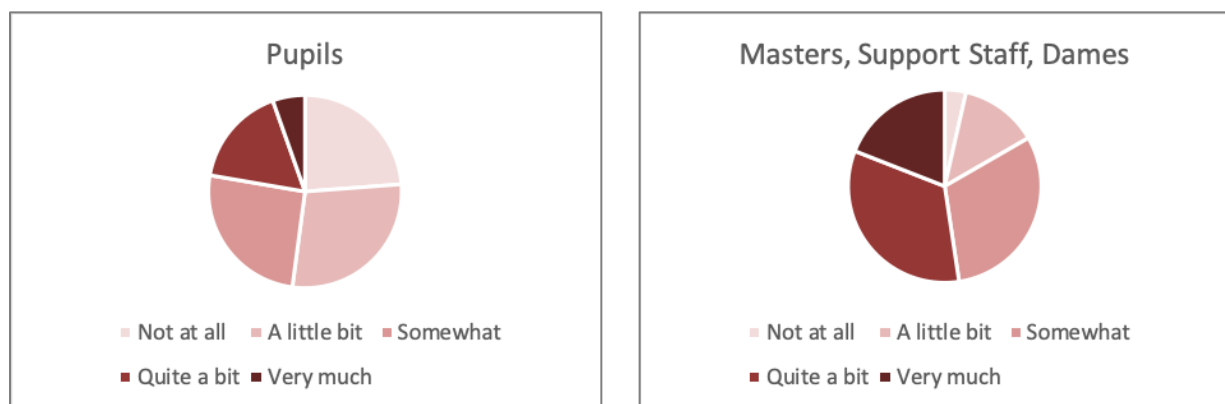


Figure 24. Masters support boys in shaping negative thoughts into a positive path forward

Respect

How is Eton supporting the development of Respect?

We find several research-based approaches known to support respect at Eton. Specifically, Eton is actively fostering respect by encouraging boys to respect differences in perspectives, beliefs, and backgrounds, and establishing boundaries for respect. In this section, we provide our findings which include examples of how Eton is implementing these approaches.

Support Boys to Respect Differences in Perspectives, Beliefs, and Backgrounds

Creating a culture of respect begins with engendering a capacity to respect differences between those in the school community.²⁹ We find that Eton supports a culture of respect across the school specifically by encouraging pupils to respect differences in perspectives, beliefs, and backgrounds.

The vast majority of pupils (62%) and staff (84%) report that respect for differences in perspectives is encouraged at Eton “quite a bit” or “very much” (Figure 25). Many participants emphasized that Eton encourages boys to be open to different points of view in group discussions. One pupil describes how respect for different points of view is cultivated through debate, explaining, “In a debate, during a scenario where there isn’t a right or wrong answer, one is not discouraged to share their view and others tend to be taught to respect that point of view.” Another boy shares that this practice of respect is consistent across lessons, stating, “We are encouraged to respect each other’s ideas and points in almost every div.”

We find consensus among our participants that Eton encourages boys to respect differences in beliefs. Among the pupils, 60% find that masters “quite a bit” or “very much” encourage respect for different beliefs. Furthermore, 81% of our staff respondents indicate that they “quite a bit” or “very much” encourage respect for differences in beliefs among pupils (Figure 26). A pupil shares in his own words, “[In] divinity [we talk] about respecting beliefs and understanding not everyone thinks like you.”

Finally, our results demonstrate that Eton supports boys to respect different backgrounds. Most pupils (57%) indicate that masters “quite a bit” or “very much” support them to respect differences in backgrounds. The majority of participants on the masters, support staff, and dames survey (80%) also agree that masters “quite a bit” or “very much” support boys to respect different backgrounds (Figure 27). Put simply by one pupil, “Eton teaches well about the values of respect, especially for those who are different to you.” Eton fosters a culture of respect for different backgrounds by providing opportunities for pupils to build relationships with people from different backgrounds. Here a pupil explains, “In my house there is a scheme where we invite members of the wider Eton community to lunch... it teaches people to respect them.” With this practice, pupils have the opportunity to get to know members of the community from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, which nurtures mutual respect. By encouraging pupils to consider different points of

view and build relationships with people from different backgrounds, Eton builds a community characterized by respect.



Figure 25. Masters support boys to respect different perspectives



Figure 26. Masters support boys to respect different beliefs



Figure 27. Masters support boys to respect different backgrounds

Establish Boundaries for Respect

In the survey responses, the Eton community emphasizes that establishing a set of boundaries and expectations for how to treat one another is an important step for creating a foundation of respect in a community.³⁰ Respondents often discuss how setting such expectations and holding individuals to these standards creates a sense of trust. In observation of the responses from our surveys, we find that Eton is fostering respect by correcting pupils on disrespectful behavior. The vast majority of pupils (74%) find that masters correct disrespectful behavior amongst the boys “quite a bit” or “very much.” Put simply by one pupil, “Beaks correct boys when they aren’t being respectful.” Similarly, we find that nearly all of the staff (91%) believe they correct boys when they witness behaviors of disrespect “quite a bit” or “very much.”

The open-ended responses portray a commitment to expectations and follow-through in regard to treatment of others. As one pupil explains, “There are sanctions in order to make sure you know that disrespecting is wrong, in and out of school.” Another pupil explains that there is a good level of follow-through in holding boys to these expectations: “Our housemaster will call out disrespectful behavior and deals with complaints very seriously. He constantly encourages boys to be respectful and this is to a fair degree carried out by the boys of the house.” Another pupil comments on the degree of accountability, “there is simply a very enforced set of rules to follow which disciplines us to respect.” With these results, we find that Eton is supporting respect by setting expectations and following through with accountability when boys fall short of the guidelines that have been set.



Figure 28. Masters correct disrespectful behavior among boys

How can Eton further support the development of Respect?

In this study, we learn that Eton is fostering respect by *supporting pupils to respect differences in perspectives, beliefs, and backgrounds* as well as by *establishing boundaries for respect*. Our analysis also reveals two ways in which Eton can further support respect across the college. Specifically, we recommend Eton deepen its practice around *reflecting on what it means to be respectful* and *encouraging boys to connect with pupils*

outside their circle of friends. Below we offer examples of approaches Eton may consider taking to deepen respect among pupils.

Reflect on What it Means to be Respectful

Engaging in explicit and ongoing dialogue about what respect means is an effective way to generate an understanding of and an atmosphere of respect in the school setting.³¹ We learn in our surveys that there could be more explicit discussion around what respect means. Among our pupil respondents, we find that 53% claim that masters “not at all” or “a little bit” explicitly discuss with them what it means to be respectful. One boy even suggests, “Explain how to properly treat others.” Our responses from staff show less congruity on the frequency of explicit discussions around what respect means, but we still see over half (54%) indicating that they carry out this practice “not at all,” “a little bit” or “somewhat” (Figure 29). One member of staff reflects on this in the open-response section noting, “[There is] no definition between the adults (teachers, dames, support staff) what respect means, nor reflection on what respect should be within the Eton community.”

One way that Eton may structure dialogue around respect is to develop a definition of respect in collaboration with boys. We find 63% of pupils reporting that they have never developed an explicit definition of what respect means in any of their Eton school experiences. Similarly, 76% of respondents on the masters, support staff, and dames survey indicate that they have never done this with pupils (Figure 30). One member of the staff suggests having more dialogue around respect as a way to further support respect across the school, stating, “engage boys in dialogue far more.”

Another approach Eton could take in their discussions with boys about respect would be to prompt boys to articulate ways in which they can show respect toward others. In our survey, 60% of pupils report they are asked to articulate the ways in which they can show respect toward others “not at all” or “a little bit.” Furthermore, nearly half (48%) of the staff indicate they ask boys to articulate how they can show respect toward others “not at all” or “a little bit” (Figure 31). The following suggestion from a staff member calls for this practice: “discuss how to be respectful and why it is important.” These findings demonstrate that Eton may deepen its culture of respect by engaging in explicit discussion around what respect means, developing a definition of respect in collaboration with boys, and by asking boys to articulate ways in which they can show respect towards others.



Figure 29. Masters explicitly discuss with boys what it means to be respectful



Figure 30. Masters develop a definition of what respect means in collaboration with boys



Figure 31. Masters ask boys to articulate ways in which they can show respect toward others

Encourage Boys to Connect with Pupils Outside their Circle of Friends

An effective way to cultivate respect for others is to connect directly with individuals outside of your circle of friends. Expanding connections with others can open new channels of understanding and lead to deeper respect across the community.³² We find that pupils at Eton could be more encouraged to connect with pupils outside their circle of friends. Among the pupils we surveyed, 55% of boys feel that masters encourage them to connect with pupils outside their circle of friends “not at all” or “a little bit” (Figure 32). While our responses from staff to the multiple-choice question on this topic are more varied, encouraging boys to connect more with others emerges as a prominent theme in the open-ended responses from staff. Another staff member notes, “we have quite a number of boys who glide through school life with very little real knowledge or interest in anyone other than themselves and immediate circle of friends.” Here a staff member suggests, “even more frequent, meaningful engagement with students from partner schools” as a way to further develop respect in boys at Eton. Finally, another staff member suggests, “more structured activities around showing respect for all different people in the Eton community.”



Figure 32. Masters encourage boys to connect with pupils outside their circle of friends

Conclusion

Through this work with the research team at RSI, Eton is ensuring that they are intentionally nurturing the character skills and dispositions most central to their community. By implementing the research-based practices discussed above, educators at Eton are supporting pupils to grow into individuals who are motivated and persevere in the face of challenges, who are grateful and happy, and who are respectful of different perspectives, beliefs, and backgrounds.

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