Character in the Classroom

A report on how New Zealand’s changing social values are impacting on student behaviour and how schools can meet the new challenges


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ABSTRACT

Character in the Classroom - How New Zealand’s changing social values are impacting on student behaviour and how schools can meet new challenges

Despite New Zealand being one of those countries where living standards seem to be constantly improving, there is now evidence that profound and rapid changes in the values systems of the community have come at enormous social cost leaving children more vulnerable than in the past.

This paper presents a collation and analysis some of this evidence, suggests a possible answer to these social issues in the form of character education and examines which character education classroom implementation strategies are perceived as most effective in a case study New Zealand primary school.

Of the 42 recent New Zealand statistics or pieces of research collated in this report to support the principal findings, two stand out as significant trends.

1. The New Zealand family unit is not as strong, cohesive and functioning as it once was and the focus on raising children has been weakened. With half of all New Zealand families operating as blended units and the second highest rate of single parenthood in the OECD – a figure that has tripled in the last 30 years, a direct link is being made between busy, exhausted and stressed parents and increasingly disruptive classroom behaviour. The quality of teaching and learning in New Zealand classrooms is being compromised with an increasing number of students from troubled and dysfunctional homes bringing unacceptable behaviour into schools. The number of students being removed from school rises every year with physical assault and continual disobedience the main causes. New Zealand principals now identify disruptive behaviour as the most common obstacle to learning that they have to deal within their schools.

2. An increasing number of schools are able to provide evidence of real and quantifiable success in dealing with these problems. Character education may offer schools the best hope of meeting these challenges while at the same time supporting homes in the critical role of character formation. Positive results however, seem to only occur when a whole school community agrees to proactively teach, resource and model a greater sense of respect and responsibility. This in turn can become an educational environment that allows good teachers to teach and good children to learn.

Anecdotally, schools that deliver comprehensive character education are convinced of its merit. These are schools where a clearly communicated list of specific and agreed values --defined, modelled and reinforced -- underpin the classroom and playground culture. Teachers have a framework on which to apply their behaviour management strategies, principals can attract and retain quality teachers, and boards of trustees govern schools that are more about teaching and learning than about behaviour.

However there still seems to be only limited information about how schools approach character or values education, how their provision supports their stated values, why and how they choose certain approaches and teaching strategies and what professional support is needed.

With this in mind, back grounding, describing and evaluating 20 character education implementation strategies at the case study school and discussing these within the contexts of community consultation, professional development and the provision of a teaching and learning framework has been completed by the author. This work is intended to provide insight into how character education is best taught and learnt.
The design of this investigation was discussed with the case study acting Head Teacher, staff and a supervisor and resulted in the creation of a two-part survey. Surveys were completed by teachers themselves, others by interview and observation. Part 1 of the survey was intended to gather data showing if any of 20 character education strategies had been used by each teacher and if so, how effective it was rated. Part 2 of the survey allowed teachers to more a descriptive comment to seven related implementation questions. These responses were intended to provide background to the implementation of the strategies in the areas of community consultation, professional development, level of involvement and philosophical agreement.

The practice and views of teachers at this case study school implementing character education delivery strategies reveal:
1. A high degree of philosophical agreement that character education is desirable, important, relatively simple to implement and achieves improved levels of behaviour
2. The average effectiveness rating given by teachers for the 20 character education strategies was high
3. The most effective strategies were:
   - a teaching framework of a nominated ‘value of the term’, value definitions and related teaching and learning objectives
   - reinforcement activities that involved songs, literature or written language
   - the use of pupil artwork to create ‘value of the term’ classroom and corridor displays.
4. Despite a greater emphasis and specific delivery of character education at the case study school than in many schools, all teachers surveyed describe this profile as being at an appropriate level.

As deteriorating behaviour in New Zealand schools gained widespread attention during 2007 and 2008, some of the findings of this investigation received repeated national media coverage and generated considerable mainstream political interest and action.

Because the links between behaviour and character potentially affect so much of what that happens in a school, there are numerous implications in this project for those who lead and manage school culture.

If the central problem facing societies, and the origin of it, is a moral one, then the mission and responsibility for parents and teachers to educate for character may be critical to the success of future generations.

REFERENCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Despite New Zealand being one of those countries where living standards seem to be constantly improving, there is now evidence that profound and rapid changes in the values systems of the community have come at enormous social cost leaving our children more vulnerable than in the past.

New Zealand parents now tend to be older, busier, and often emotionally, physically and financially stressed. If the family unit is less cohesive and functional than it once was - with a central focus of raising children – then there are consequences for student behaviour and success in school being put at risk. Recent statistics quoted in this report provide examples of:

- how much family life has changed
- how violent New Zealand society has become
- how many students are absent from school
- how disruptive classroom and playground behaviour has become
- how biological maturity and social maturity are becoming mismatched

The major findings of this report are:

1. That there are more New Zealand parents unable to provide a home environment where children are safe, nurtured, and provided with clear moral guidance than ever before.
2. That the difference between the behaviours modelled, taught and reinforced in the home and what is expected at school for successful and positive engagement is now greater than ever before.
3. That because an increasing number of students from troubled and dysfunctional homes are bringing practised patterns of anti social behaviour into New Zealand classrooms and playgrounds, an unacceptable number of students are being stood down from New Zealand schools for continual disobedience and violence. Defiant, disruptive and violent behaviours are interrupting the learning of all students making teaching a more difficult task than ever before.
4. That the need for character education is clear, urgent and important to the success of the present and future generations.
5. That character education is easy to implement, cost effective and successful in assisting schools to improve student behaviour, teaching and learning.

This report seeks to provide practical solutions for teachers, principals, Boards of Trustees and policymakers to consider in addressing issues of positive student engagement in New Zealand schools.
I THE PROBLEM : THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

On a warm summer afternoon during the Christmas holidays of 2006, two young boys wandered into an inner city school bored and without adult supervision. During a two hour rampage described as the worst school vandalism in Dunedin’s history, classrooms were flooded, 62 windows smashed, computers destroyed and paint splattered over ceilings, carpet and walls.

The news was made worse when I, as a school principal, learned that the leader in this act was an eight-year-old boy enrolled at my school.

School vandalism isn’t new. But many in the local community were surprised at the extent of this mayhem, the age of the offenders, and the profile of a highly dysfunctional, transient, solo-parented family who publicly accepted no responsibility either for supervision or for the consequences of the event.

Was this an isolated case of a family who couldn’t provide boundaries and support for a bored youngster? Or another example of the ever-increasing gulf between behaviours being modelled and reinforced in many New Zealand homes and those expected to be displayed at school to provide safe, positive environments for effective learning?

In his book *The Improving State of the World: Why We’re Living Longer, Healthier, More Comfortable Lives on a Cleaner Planet*, American economist Indur Goklany (2006) looks at many global trends which suggest the world is improving. He shows that in areas such as life expectancy, rates of hunger, food production, standards of living and economic prosperity, there have been, even in developing nations, spectacular improvements over the past 40 years. The world he declares, has never been in better shape.

But some writers such as Heenan (2002) have observed that despite New Zealanders enjoying all these improvements, including technological advances, there have been profound changes in the values systems of our communities - changes which have come at a huge economic and social cost.
Change has been constant for New Zealand schools in recent times. Teachers have had to cope with regular changes to the content of the curriculum and how it is delivered. Numerous changes have been made to school-based governance and management systems over the past eighteen years of educational reform known as ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’. But many now believe it’s the nature of change within our society, and the implications of who is arriving at school each day, that provides our greatest challenge.

II THE SITUATION: NEW ZEALAND’S CHANGING SOCIETY

Life for New Zealand children is unlike that of their parents and grandparents. While global differences are obvious, with advances in so many aspects of daily living, it is children’s immediate social environment that has changed radically within the last 50 years.

The composition and social dynamics of today’s New Zealand family is significantly different from the traditional groupings of the 1950s. Back then New Zealanders typically married in their early twenties, stayed married, and had three or four children with a stay-at-home mother. Recent reports on the New Zealand family reveal seven significant trends. When combined, these trends amount to deeply impacting social change.

1. Fewer New Zealanders are getting married
   - The marriage rate (per 10,000 eligible) has plummeted from 45 in 1971 to 13 in 2005.
   - One in three marriages is a remarriage for one or both partners. Many couples now live together before marrying. Twenty-seven percent of 20 to 24 year-olds cohabit, compared to 14 percent who married in this age group in 2005. The Families Commission (2005) says the rise in cohabitation is the most significant change to partnering trends in New Zealand.

2. More New Zealanders are getting divorced
   - Divorce rates have increased from 5.1 in 1971 to 12.4 in 2004, with one in three couples separating within the first 20 years of marriage.
In a Christchurch Health and Development study (as cited in Families Commission, 2005) 55 percent of remarriages broke down within five years.

3. **Children are more likely to experience a number of different family arrangements than in the past**
   - Blended families (about 50 percent of all families), step families, same-sex partners (1,356 couples with children in 2004) and children moving between households are increasingly common.
   - 33 percent of all divorced or separated women enter a new relationship within two years of separating, 74 percent within ten years.

4. **Solo parenting is common**
   - New Zealand has the second highest rate of single parenthood in the OECD. 33 percent of families had only one parent living at home in 2005 compared to 10 percent in 1976.
   - 44 percent of children were born to unmarried parents in 2003 compared to 15 percent in 1973.

5. **There are fewer resident fathers**
   - Five out of six solo parents are mothers.
   - 60,000 boys are in New Zealand households without a father.
   - It is estimated that if current trends continue, within three years 50 percent of Pakeha and 75 percent of Maori children under twelve will be fatherless.

6. **Economic pressures on solo parent families are common**
   - Single parent families are more likely to have low incomes. 43 percent of children in single parent families lived in poverty in 2003 compared to 15 percent of children in two-parent homes.
   - 30 percent of solo parents work full-time, 20 percent part-time.
   - New Zealanders lose about $2 billion a year through gambling. Families who can least afford it are losing some of that $5.5 million per day. It is estimated that up to one in three people seeking help from food banks does so because of their own or another’s gambling.
• The number of New Zealand children being raised on a benefit has doubled in the last fifteen years to be currently one child in three.

7. Parents are older
• The average age of first marriages rose from 23 in 1971 to 29 in 2000.
• Since the late 1970s the average age of women having children has continued to rise.
• Older parents contribute to the fact that since the 1980s most women have only two children.
• In 2004 over 50 percent of births were to women aged 30 or over.

III THE CONSEQUENCES: CHILDREN AT RISK

New Zealand parents now tend to be older, busier, and often emotionally, physically and financially stressed. If the New Zealand family unit is less cohesive and functional than it once was - with a central focus of raising children - more issues must be considered:

1. Family life has changed
Consider:
• New Zealand rates 24th out of 25 developed countries whose families share an evening meal together several times a week.
• Those still living at home commit much of our crime, with 40 percent of our criminals aged between 14 and 18 years of age.
• New Zealand rates 17th out of 25 developed countries when it comes to children whose parents spend time talking to them several times a week.
• Full or part-time child care is necessary for many parents, with 43 percent of the workforce in 2006 claiming they were responsible for the care of a dependent.

“The leisure society promised in the 1960’s has become instead a society of exhausted workers for whom time – time for children, time for relaxation, time for community involvement, time for sleep – seems an ever more precious and elusive commodity. Not surprisingly . . . women who work full time outside the home and had young children were most likely to be severely time stressed” (as cited in Stoll and Fink, 1996 p.8).
• Conflict between the increasing numbers of separating parents can result in an emotionally unstable environment for children. Cockett and Trip (1994) claim “children who experience family disruption are more likely to suffer social, educational and health problems than a comparable sample whose families remain intact” (as cited in Day, 1999, p46).

• Fatherlessness is regarded as the biggest predictor of delinquent youth.

• The average age of New Zealand children finally leaving home has reached 27.

2. New Zealand society has become increasingly violent

Consider:

• Reported crime doubled between 1970 and 2000. Violent offences were the largest area of growth between 1996 and 2005.

• New Zealand’s 19 prisons held 7,600 prisoners in 2006. With 180 prisoners per 100,000 population, New Zealand has the third highest prison population per capita out of 30 OECD countries.

• Violent acts screened on state-owned New Zealand television have tripled since 1995 and the children’s Sky channel, Nickelodeon, screens 13.4 violent incidents per hour. It is estimated that by the age of 16 children have seen 200,000 acts of television violence. Many even younger children have a TV set in their bedroom or unrestricted access to the Internet and choose what they watch. Violence on television and vast amounts of time spent playing violent computer games have been linked with aggressive behaviour particularly in families without strong role modelling.

• According to Women’s Refuge, 49,000 cases of domestic violence against women were reported in 2006.

• In 2006 two school violence surveys revealed that one in seven primary teachers surveyed reported being physically assaulted and 53 percent of male and 40 percent of female secondary students surveyed reported being physically harmed at school. Common forms of physical assault were pushing, punching, striking and kicking. Most assaults on teachers were from Year 1-3 pupils. Boys were responsible for nine out of ten physical assaults. In one primary school, thirteen staff were physically assaulted and on average three to four staff per school surveyed were assaulted in 2006.
3. Many students are absent from school

Consider:

- Truancy in New Zealand schools is at an all time high, with up to 30,000 pupils missing on any given day.
- Minor crimes committed by children and teenagers is often linked to truancy.
- Numbers of New Zealand students being bullied are among the highest in the world and in 2006 bullying was nominated as the reason ten percent of missing secondary school students were absent from school on any given day.

4. There is a growing mismatch between biological maturity and social maturity of New Zealand children

Consider:

- Children are reaching puberty earlier, often by the age of ten or eleven. One British study showed one in six girls reached puberty as young as eight and suggested that in some girls this could be triggered by the presence of a non-biological father in the home.
- “Age compression” is an expression used by the toy and fashion industries that market to increasingly younger audiences. “Ironically,” writes Stirling (2002), “the same parents who see nothing wrong with kids dressing like baby Britney Spears, then drive kids to school and stop them playing in the park because it’s too dangerous. Drive down empty suburban streets and it can seem as if it’s not just the children who are gone, but childhood itself.” (p.20)
- The influence of the media is significant on young people, with international estimates in 2001 of 20,000 hours of TV watching that included 500,000 commercials, 10,000 hours talking on cell phones (it is estimated that 91 percent of twelve-year-olds in the UK have their own cell phone), and 200,000 texts or emails, all before the end of college. Reading books, estimates Marc Prensky (2001), trails miserably - 5,000 hours at most.

5. Classroom and playground behaviour is increasingly disruptive, resulting in more students being stood down

Consider:
• 47 percent of New Zealand students report the occurrence of noise and disorder in all or most maths lessons compared to the international average of 36 percent.

• New Zealand principals identify disruptive behaviour as the most common in school obstacle to learning. The numbers of disruptive students have increased by ten percent in the past five years.

• Although the number of pupils being suspended from New Zealand schools fell by 2.7 percent between 2005 and 2006, the number of pupils stood down (formal removal of a student from school by the principal for a set period) continues to rise each year. There has been a 5.3 percent increase in the numbers of students stood down since 2000. In 2006 23,488 pupils were asked to leave school temporarily as a result of a stand-down offense. The most common transgressions were physical assaults and continual disobedience.

• Of the staff surveyed in 2006 by NZEI, 58 percent of teachers and 27 percent of support staff reported aggressive verbal confrontation with children in 2006. Being shouted or sworn at were the most frequent forms of verbal aggression. Contesting directions or refusing to follow directions was a common context for verbal abuse.

It would seem that a period of relatively rapid and overwhelming social change has left New Zealand teachers and principals facing some important issues that require urgent answers.

IV A SOLUOTION: CHARACTER EDUCATION

In comparing what teachers saw as the greatest threats to the educational process in 1940 and in 1990, Dr William Kilpatrick (1992) described what many observed as examples of the moral decline in America during this period. Drug and alcohol abuse and assault in 1990 had replaced talking in class, chewing gum and littering in 1940 as the most nominated barriers to the educational process. “It is clear to anyone who has been in education for any length of time,” says Vincent (1996), “that children are now acting differently in school and in the community than children did 20 to 30 years ago.” (p10).

John Heenan, a former New Zealand school principal with 40 years in education, describes this as a quiet revolution, but claims the signs of moral decline are only the result of a more fundamental shift in responsibility. This shift, he argues, is in beliefs about concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, and whose duty it is to develop the knowledge, desire and willingness to
act out ethical behaviour. If our children’s earliest teachers, whether at home or at school, fail to accept the responsibility of pro-actively teaching ethical behaviour, we must ask what values are being taught by default, and by whom.

Many New Zealand parents and communities have apparently moved away from a traditional role in equipping future generations to take part in a just, caring and orderly world. Our pluralistic society has produced a generation that struggles to know how to transmit its cultural values without ongoing debate over which values, whose values and a fear of indoctrination. Our society is demanding better answers however, from our politicians, social analysts, communities, schools and parents on moral issues that range from child abuse to boy racers. And it’s hardly surprising that words such as values, ethics, virtues, character, citizenship, moral training and social capital create a perplexing picture for the besieged New Zealand teacher who is increasingly looking for ways to meet the challenge of our students’ changing behaviours.

Thomas Lickona and Matthew Davidson (2006) assert the development of character has always played a role in education. They claim that “throughout history, and in cultures all over the world, education rightly conceived has had two great goals: to help students to become smart and to help them become good” (p21). In passing on their cultural values to succeeding generations, civilisations have recognised character education as a way to preserve and sustain an orderly and civil society.

Even in this country the notion of instilling a set of values or building character is not new or a passing fad. Forms of character education in New Zealand can be traced back to the inception of the Curriculum in 1877. They reappeared as “moral education” in 1904, “character training” between 1929 and 1961, as “values-orientated objectives” in the syllabuses of the 1950s and 1960s, in the “Attitudes and Values” content in the 1993 Curriculum Framework and in the “Values and Key Competency” statements contained in the current revised curriculum. And despite what has been mandated formally, many school principals would admit that creating a successful school culture is about forming positive relationships in and out of the classroom. Character education is the fundamental work of school leadership.

When author Stephen Covey researched American thought over the last 200 years (in preparation
for writing *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*) he sought to discover what democratic and free people thought were the keys to successful living. Covey discovered that “*almost all the literature in the first 150 years or so focussed on what could be called the “character ethic” as the foundation of success*” (Covey 1989, p18). During this time it would have been doubtful, Covey claims, that business or community success could happen without good character. But in the last 50 years *style*, he asserts, has replaced substance. Image can often be at odds with a person’s true character.

It was also some 50 years ago that the traditional views of a school’s role in the development of character began to change in New Zealand. The “values education” movement made popular at this time with its strong opposition to instructing *which* values people should develop, is still evident. But teaching how to develop a set of values without any intended behavioural outcomes has been shown to be confusing for teachers and unhelpful in terms of actual student conduct.

By contrast, “character education,” a term which has become internationally used since the late 1980s, is about the long-term process of helping young people develop good character and acting upon core ethical values. Thomas Lickona, (1991) is adamant that this must consist of “*operative values – values in action*” (p.51). He asserts that the development of good character is made up of three attributes: knowing the good (judging what is right), desiring the good (caring deeply about what is right) and doing the good (acting out what is right).

Schools who implement effective character education have learned that any successful approach must be overt. One must be willing to describe not only what is good but also what is *not* good. And one cannot obtain respect and responsibility without the authority to insist upon it, or maintain a moral community without some limits to personal freedom.

Partly by default, partly because of a desire for effectiveness and partly because of their historical mission, it is our schools that now find themselves tasked with the increased responsibility and challenge of building character. Teachers and principals have to first find ways to increase student engagement, tackle violence, improve achievement, foster positive relationships and build student resilience in our schools. But ultimately they are also equipping the next generation with the values that will allow them to become full, positive and contributing
members of New Zealand society.

V A STRATEGY: SUCCESSFUL CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ACTION

The following nine strategies have been found to increase and/or reinforce children’s understanding, desire and display of ethical behaviour. They have been observed and evaluated (see Appendix 2) by the author in several New Zealand schools and are currently implemented at George Street Normal School in Dunedin.

Character Traits and Definition
Character traits need to be expressed in a word, or a few words, to students. For example the Cornerstone Values are respect, honesty, compassion, responsibility, kindness, obedience, consideration and duty. It’s helpful if these words and agreed definitions (see Appendix 1) are adopted school-wide, taught individually and reinforced over a set period of time such as a school term. For younger classes a more age-appropriate definition can be discussed and promoted.

Learning Intentions
Stated learning intentions allow teachers to be quite specific about increasing the understanding of a defined value. They then teach that value with examples, ideas explanations and opportunities for practise.

Classroom Displays
Related children’s art or language work, along with the focus value and its definition, can be displayed in classrooms and corridors during the term. These displays can be an effective reminder to all who come into the room of what is being taught. Displayed poems, posters, fables, letters, drawings and stories show students’ understanding of doing the right thing.

Literature
Literature is vital for effective character education. Stories teach by attraction rather than compulsion and capture the imagination of what is possible, reinforcing nominated character traits without imposing or moralising. A carefully chosen book, read aloud, is an easy and subtle
way to get children thinking. Some schools sort relevant library books by character traits for ease of use. These books can be labeled on the cover with the value, for example kindness, and contain a précis of the story, how the value is portrayed, and possible class activities. All the relevant books and school journals for the term can be conveniently placed in the staffroom.

**Character Songs**
Songs that describe an aspect of the focus value can be a fun way to reinforce positive messages as part of a classroom music programme, at the start or end of the day, or in school assemblies.

**Community Class Project**
Learning through service involves adopting a practical, community-based project. This allows children to practise the value of the term first-hand.

**School Newsletter**
The school newsletter can introduce and background the value being emphasised that term. Some schools also provide a weekly “Hot Tips for Parents” section, featuring a quote, helpful hint or a description of a current topic which illustrates the focus value.

**School Assembly**
School assemblies are an important school bonding occasion, providing an opportunity to reinforce school culture. A simple address, some advice, someone to congratulate or a small story are commonly used to introduce or reinforce an aspect of the value currently being studied.

**Role Models**
Adults in schools have a special responsibility to exemplify desirable character traits, and this is vital for effective character education regardless of any other strategies. The principal and staff are key role models at school. Other role models can be found inside or outside the classroom and can be discussed in social studies. A “hero” could be a student or a member of the local community who is not necessarily famous but is known for doing the right thing.

While some of these strategies already exist in many schools, it is when they are combined, made highly visible, intentional and school wide that character education becomes embedded. But this is not intended to be a definitive list and we risk making it too prescriptive. Character education
is most successful when it’s integrated into every aspect of school life as the principal and staff understand and act on ethical principles rather than follow a stated policy or programme.

**VI THE EVIDENCE : CHARACTER EDUCATION WORKS**

In the 2005 report to Parliament on the compulsory school sector, strong links were made between the Government’s goal of transforming New Zealand into a knowledge-based economy and improving student behaviour. Education Minister Maharey stated: “Although most New Zealand students are actively engaged in education, a number of challenges remain for educators, especially around issues of a disciplining nature, including student safety, school climate and managing difficult behaviours.”

While the answers to these problems are complex, they might not be as expensive or hard to implement as the Government imagines.

Anecdotally, schools that deliver comprehensive character education are convinced of its merit. These are schools where a clearly communicated list of specific and agreed values --defined, modelled and reinforced -- underpin all that happens. Teachers have a framework on which to hang their behaviour management strategies, principals can attract and retain quality teachers, and boards of trustees govern schools that are more about teaching and learning than about behaviour.

The New Zealand-developed *Cornerstone Values* approach to building character has been found not only to restore desirable behaviour but also to proactively conserve what a school already does well and wants to retain. Below are comments from some of the 26 schools that evaluated the effectiveness of the Cornerstone Values approach in 2006:

- “Far fewer incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Fewer stand-downs and less vandalism.”
- “Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour have noted a change in attitude and culture of the school. Visitors and community report the positive feel. Even a letter to the local paper.”
- “Reduction in issues dealt with by staff.”
• “Children get the same message and expectations from all staff.”
• “Children are making better choices about their behaviour, taking responsibility and accepting consequences for their actions.”
• “Teachers and other staff treat each other based on the values and prefer to work in a values-based environment.”
• “Parents enthusiastically believe in these values and support the programme.”
• “There is a lower incidence of negative behaviour in class.”
• “Our recorded playground incidents are much fewer.”
• “Relieving teachers are happy to come here and say the school has a great feeling.”
• “Values programme has been particularly successful in promoting good relationships and preventing bullying.” (ERO)
• “Most frequently nominated strength of our school in parent surveys for three years in a row.”

McDonald’s (Heenan, McDonald, Perera, 2004) research into the work of New Zealand schools implementing the Cornerstone Values approach supports these comments, concluding that notable improvements1 were made in the school learning environment. These included:
• Improved student behaviour
• Fewer disciplinary actions
• Continual decline in aggressive behaviour
• Increased staff stability
• Increased student attendance
• Students being more supportive and caring
• Parents being more involved in school events

We acknowledge that character education and any positive results such as those listed above did not begin or exist only at school. Parents have always been the first and most important teachers of moral behaviour and many, despite facing daily pressures, are doing a fine job.

1 A follow-up study can be viewed at www.cornerstonevalues.org
But while many families in New Zealand still function successfully, in recent times we have witnessed rapid and profound social change leaving our children more vulnerable than in the past. The difficulties and insecurities of post-modernity have impacted on families and are now challenging our schools.

While returning to the structure and associated social benefits of the traditional nuclear family may not be an option, schools may best address the challenges of changing circumstances by providing comprehensive character education. This fits with the revised New Zealand curriculum’s key competencies, is easy to implement, cost effective and increasingly important. Also, *it works*.

While the emphasis on academic achievement and improvement in student outcomes is admirable, history reminds us of the need to balance intelligence with character. This was a lesson learned from Nazi Germany, from Columbine, and from the events known as 9/11. Despite any ability to learn successfully and to utilise new knowledge, intelligence without character is our schools’, communities’ and world’s worst nightmare.

If the central problem facing our schools, and the origin of it, is a moral one, then the mission and responsibility for New Zealand teachers to educate for character is our most important work.

**VII THE WAY FORWARD: PRINCIPAL FINDINGS**

1. That there are more New Zealand parents unable to provide a home environment where children are safe, nurtured, and provided with clear moral guidance than ever before.

   **Recommendation:** That an investigation be carried out to examine how parent education courses can be made more accessible to those most in need.

2. That the difference between the behaviours modelled, taught and reinforced in the home and what is expected at school for successful and positive engagement is now greater than ever before.

   **Recommendation:** That further research be commissioned to investigate the relationship between behaviours in the home and behaviours at school and how parents and teachers can be further supported.
3. That because an increasing number of students from troubled and dysfunctional homes are bringing practised patterns of anti social behaviour into New Zealand classrooms and playgrounds, an unacceptable number of students are being stood down from New Zealand schools for continual disobedience and violence. Defiant, disruptive and violent behaviours are interrupting the learning of all students making teaching a more difficult task than ever before.

**Recommendation:** That targeted programmes of professional development be designed and delivered to schools to support teachers in restoring and conserving appropriate behaviour. This would include ways to integrate relevant Key Competencies within the context of character development with new resources and examples of good practice to be published.

4. That the need for character education is clear, urgent and important to the success of the present and future generations.

**Recommendation:** That the term character education be officially adopted to describe the process of teaching and acting out ethical behaviour in New Zealand schools.

5. That character education is easy to implement, cost effective and successful in assisting schools to improve student behaviour, teaching and learning.

**Recommendation:** That character education be formally implemented in all New Zealand schools.
Appendix 1

**The Eight Cornerstone Values**

1. **Honesty and Truthfulness**
   Willingness not to steal, cheat, lie or be unfair

   This means telling the truth

2. **Kindness**
   Willingness to help, show concern for and be friendly to others

   This means being a friend

3. **Consideration**
   Willingness to be kind, thoughtful and consider the interest of others before self

   This means thinking of others

4. **Compassion**
   Willingness to help, empathise with, or show mercy to those who suffer

   This means helping those in trouble

5. **Obedience**
   Willingness to obey rightful authority

   This means doing what you are asked for those who care

6. **Responsibility**
   Willingness to be answerable, to be trustworthy and accountable for one’s conduct and behaviour.

   This means being trustworthy

7. **Respect**
   Willingness to treat with courtesy; to hold in high regard; to honour; to care about yourself and others

   This means being caring

8. **Duty**
   Willingness to do what is right or what a person ought to do; obligation

   This means doing the right thing

*Resources to support the Cornerstone Values approach to building Character are available from [www.cornerstonevalues.org](http://www.cornerstonevalues.org)*
## Appendix 2

Character Education Implementation Strategies

**RESULTS SUMMARY**

Usage and Effectiveness (from most to least)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY TITLE</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>USAGE %</th>
<th>EFFECTIVENESS %</th>
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<tbody>
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REFERENCES


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