

# CHARACTER, GRIT & RESILIENCE

## Pocketbook



A pocketful of  
dispositions and skills  
to deepen learning and  
help young people thrive

C J Simister

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LAUREL HOUSE, STATION APPROACH,  
ALRESFORD, HAMPSHIRE SO24 9JH UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1962 735573  
Fax: +44 (0)1962 733637  
Email: [sales@teacherspocketbooks.co.uk](mailto:sales@teacherspocketbooks.co.uk)  
Web: [www.teacherspocketbooks.co.uk](http://www.teacherspocketbooks.co.uk)

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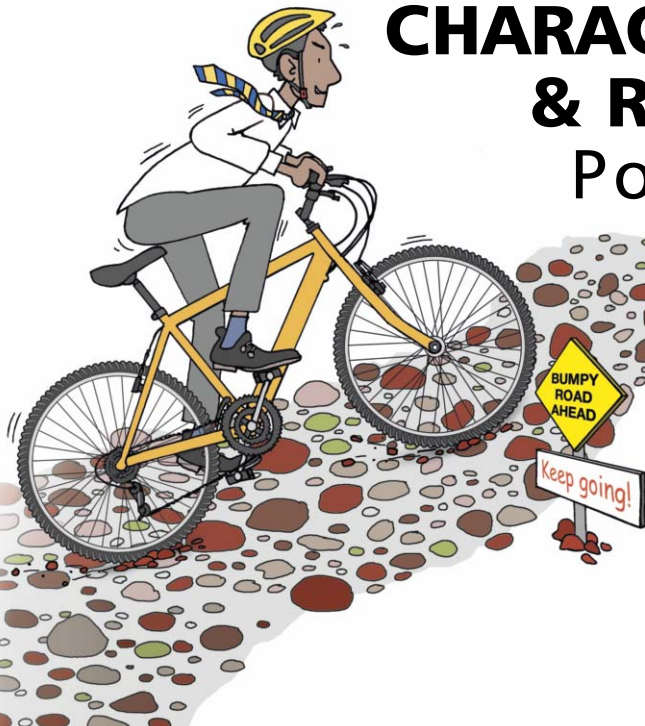
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C J Simister

Cartoons:  
Phil Hailstone



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**Teachers' Pocketbooks**

Laurel House, Station Approach,  
Alresford, Hampshire SO24 9JH, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1962 735573

Fax: +44 (0)1962 733637

Email: [sales@teacherspocketbooks.co.uk](mailto:sales@teacherspocketbooks.co.uk)

Website: [www.teacherspocketbooks.co.uk](http://www.teacherspocketbooks.co.uk)

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# Foreword

Over the last few years, we've heard versions of the same message from governments around the world, business organisations and employers, universities and researchers, psychologists and popular writers:

**Character matters. Maybe just as much as grades. Possibly even more so.**

It's a controversial topic, though – and the title of this book will provoke a mix of reactions. Some will feel genuinely alarmed: Isn't a person just born the way they're born? Surely you can't – and perhaps shouldn't even want to – *teach character*? For others, it may be anxiety: *Another* thing I'm meant to be responsible for? I hope a few will feel relieved and smile: *That's* the book I've been looking for.

Having been a teacher myself for almost twenty years, I understand the concerns. This introduction is my best attempt to address them – at least enough so that you choose to find out more. We're all in this profession because we want to give young people a great start in life. I've come to believe that character is one of the most important keys to help them unlock and grow their potential.

# Foreword

But what do we actually *mean* by character? It might be helpful here to distinguish it from 'personality'. Psychologists think of this as what is fundamental to a person, something instinctive and deeply rooted: it's what makes you *you*. Studies agree this is pretty stable from a very young age.

Character, on the other hand, is the next layer up. It's that collection of *patterns* of thinking and behaviour that drive the way we respond to situations. True, our personality is a major player here but to say it's the only one would be to disregard all that we know from psychology and neuroscience about the impact of experience and environment and the astonishing plasticity of the brain.

In this book, I define character as qualities like curiosity, initiative, good judgement, self-discipline, resilience and flexibility of mind. Take any one of these and ask yourself: Do I believe this is 100% fixed from birth (or at least from a very early age)? If the answer is 'probably not', then these become *learnable* dispositions which means that teachers may have a role to play.



# Foreword

So what can we do? There's surprisingly little straightforward, concrete advice and that's where this book comes in. It's the product of years of investigation, the last five of which have been spent working with thousands of inspirational teachers and school leaders to develop ways to turn all of the theory (and there's a lot of it) into something that's manageable, that works on the ground, that's *exciting* as well as effective.

What I'm interested in is identifying simple, practical things that teachers across the 3 to 18 age range can do to ensure that the environment they create and the learning experiences they design give young people the *best possible opportunity to grow the broadest possible range of helpful character dispositions*. This is too important to leave to chance.

Two of these dispositions – grit and resilience – receive a more in-depth look. Often near the top of teachers' wish-lists for their pupils, they're a little trickier in my experience and so benefit from that bit more thought.

Let's get started! I hope you enjoy the book.



**Making Sense  
of it All**



Creating a  
Character Culture



Character and  
the Curriculum



The Gritty Detail



Resilience Matters



Recognise,  
Celebrate...  
and Measure?



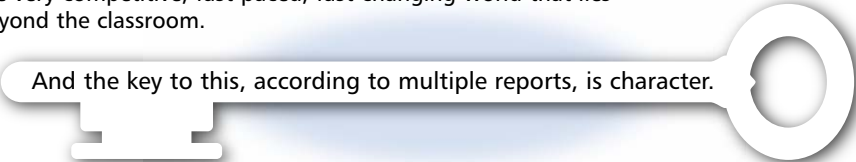
# Making Sense of it All

# 1. The case for character – tomorrow's world



No one can perfectly predict the future. The children of today will experience a life that's beyond anything we can imagine. Issues such as globalisation and economic uncertainty, income inequality and environmental change, the rise of technology and synthetic intelligence are all likely to play a part.

It's vital that we do our best to prepare young people to flourish in the very competitive, fast-paced, fast-changing world that lies beyond the classroom.



And the key to this, according to multiple reports, is character.

Collaboration, adaptability, creativity, aspiration, initiative, empathy, confidence, resilience, flexibility of mind... These traits will be increasingly valued and valuable. Sought after by employers, they also help people more generally to respond positively to whatever challenges and opportunities lie ahead.

## 2. The case for character – right here, right now



Developing character is not just for the long term. Children who...

- Are genuinely **curious** and ask deep, probing questions
- Are **persistent** and enjoy grappling with difficult problems
- Demonstrate **originality** through their perceptive ideas and responses
- Show **initiative** and **focus**, taking responsibility for their learning

...are more likely to engage with their subjects in an active, thoughtful and enthusiastic way, developing a more profound and lasting understanding. This is backed up by a growing body of research that shows a clear link between character and performance in school.

If you've been struggling to help your pupils become more active, independent, skilful learners, then taking a step back and looking at the qualities that *underpin* this may provide a powerful new approach.





### 3. The case for character – a fair chance



*'Whatever qualifications you might have, where you are on the character scale will have a big impact on what you can achieve in life.'* **APPG on Social Mobility, 2014**

While no one would want to underplay the very real obstacles that inequality places in the way of the less privileged, helping children develop a broad range of valuable personal qualities is one of the most important ways that we can improve their life chances. Character increases the odds of poorer children breaking free of deprivation and going on to get a 'top job'.

Research published in 2015, jointly funded by the Early Intervention Foundation, the Cabinet Office and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission supports this view, as does author and broadcaster Paul Tough, who asserts:

*'There is no anti-poverty tool we can provide for disadvantaged young people that will be more valuable than the character strengths...conscientiousness, grit, resilience, perseverance and optimism.'* **How Children Succeed**