Schools must offer compulsory qualifications in good manners and self control

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University of Birmingham Priestley Lecture

Schools should offer compulsory qualifications in good manners and self control according to Dr Anthony Seldon, Britain's best known Headmaster and the acclaimed biographer of recent prime ministers.

Delivering the University of Birmingham's annual Priestley Lecture in the School of Education on Wednesday 23rd January, Seldon will set out why the development of character is more important than exam results in schools.

In a landmark lecture, Dr Anthony Seldon, Master of Wellington College, says character development is the vital missing link in the government's education policy.

His solution is that British schools offer a compulsory 'GCCE' (General Certificate of Character Education) alongside GCSE.

"All schools must offer this qualification, and all students must take this qualification, which will be as prized by future employers, and even by Higher Education, as highly as GCSE," Seldon will say.

"Schools are rightly emphasising exam results and academic attainment. They need also to emphasise the development of good character, which is essential for the smooth running of schools, for future employability, for higher education and for good citizenship."

Seldon discusses the work of four British state schools and one in the USA, which emphasise the development of good character and achieve strong academic results:

The schools are:

Kings Langley School in Hertfordshire

King Solomon Academy in London

West Kidlington Primary and Nursery Schools in Oxford

Kings Science Academy in Bradford

Riverdale School in New York City

"It used to be the case that the public (i.e. independent) schools emphasised the development of character. Now the best state schools are leading the way. They are teaching their students character – good manners, self-control, self-reliance, responsibility, punctuality, determination, resilience, appreciation, kindness and tidiness. The impact is dramatic," Seldon will say. "The government wants to build on a big society. But they are not doing enough to build capacity amongst young people when they are at school. The emphasis has tilted too far to exam preparation and too far away from developing the child."

He points to numerous academic studies by Park and Peterson (2006); Weber and Ruch (2012); Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn and Smith (2003); Lovat, Toomey (2009); Caprara, Barbaranelli (2000); Durlack, Weissberg (2011); and Snyder, Vuchinich (2012), which show than an emphasis on character development makes schools better communities and builds better citizens.

"Education Secretary, Michael Gove, and Chief Inspector, Michael Wilshaw, are transforming schools in Britain. They need now to turn to giving character education a higher priority. They have seen it as an alternative to, and even a threat to, academic attainment. In fact, it is the vital concomitant of good results and all that schools should aspire to be," Seldon will say. "If all schools offered the GCCE (General Certificate of Character Education), and all children took it, we would have much better schools in Britain, and they would go on to build a much better society."

Professor James Arthur, Head of the School of Education, University of Birmingham, said: "We are delighted to have Anthony Seldon give our annual Priestley Lecture in the School of Education, University of Birmingham. It is a coup for the School of Education to have an educationalist of such standing, speak on such an important topic."

Registration is essential to attend this event. If you would like to attend please register online here: **http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/oncampus/lectures/priestley-lecture2012.aspx (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/oncampus/lectures/priestley-lecture2012.aspx)**

Note to editors

Dr Anthony Seldon will give the School of Education Priestley Lecture at the University of Birmingham on Wednesday 23rd January 2012 at 5.15pm

Sir Raymond Priestley was the Vice-Chancellor of The University of Birmingham from 1938 to 1952. He was a great supporter of the education of teachers and in 1959 it was decided to name this annual lecture after him.

For media enquiries please contact Deborah Walker, press office, University of Birmingham, 0121 414 9041 or mobile 07776 465138 or email d.s.walker.1@bham.ac.uk

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