

VbE Early Years Quality Mark

Accreditation: Embrace, Empower, Embolden

*Recognising exceptional practice in Early Years settings
through Values-based Education*

Bridget Knight, CEO Values-based Education, September 2025

What is Values-based Education?

Values-based Education is a transformative improvement strategy - heart, mind and soul.

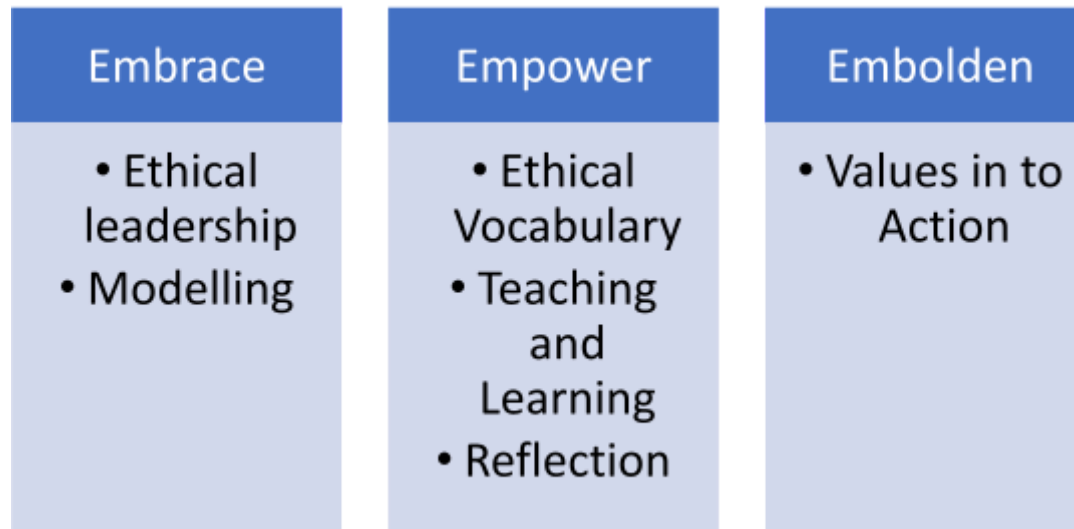
Our Vision: The setting is a microcosm of the world. What is created in our setting today can provide a glimpse of how our world can be tomorrow.

What are values and what do they do?

To **value** something is to consider it with respect to worth, excellence, usefulness, or importance so we use values like kindness, respect and hope to see, reason and eventually become. They bring a universal objectivity with them: 'care' means caring for me, for you, for the world... it can apply to everything. When we start noticing values in different places, we start to build a jigsaw in our brain...our brains like having puzzles to solve... then we start to find meaning, and when we start to find meaning, we start to care... this changes our outlook and behaviours. The **vocabulary of values** develops ethical habits and patterns of thinking, speaking and behaving that make for successful learning and living.

Explicitly naming and living by a values-based vision breathes those values into life. In so doing, we transform outlook, attitudes and prospects for every single learner.

Values-based Education is an intentionality. This systemic values-based approach works through 3 essential themes that are supported by 6 concepts.



Why does it work?

It reduces the challenges learners face in order to succeed. It's a truism that 'being nice' creates fewer impediments, irons things out, smooths the path, makes problems disappear. Working together through prosocial values results in an enabling culture - which makes people feel safe, and then they can build trust, and then they are able to flourish. Really simple yet really profound, it establishes a great, diverse 'normal'.

Theme 1: Embracement

Creation of a values-based culture within the setting for every single person

- Of belonging
- Of emotional safety
- Of unconditional positive regard
- Of prioritising positive relationships, with self, one another and the world
- Of building self-worth.

This theme is supported by the concepts of ETHICAL LEADERSHIP for ETHOS and CULTURE shown in an explicit commitment to the chosen or open values in both policy and practice and of CONSISTENT MODELLING of these values in outlook and behaviours and RELATIONSHIPS.

What does that look like?

- A carefully conceived and strongly stated vision sets the direction of travel.
- The vision is enacted through chosen prosocial values.

For example:

- Vision and values are explicitly stated on the website and in displays, inside and outside.
- Vision and values explicitly frame and guide all policies.
- Individuals feel valued.
- There is visible leadership of values in all adults and learners, inside and outside.

Theme 2: Empowerment

Through both taught and caught skills that purposefully develop intellectual, ethical, spiritual and critical thinking

- Through building and using a shared ethical vocabulary.
- Through exploring values as part of subjects and topics in the curriculum.
- Through teaching and facilitating opportunities to ponder, explore, question and debate.
- Through planned moments to tune into our innate wisdom.

This theme is supported by the concepts of ETHICAL VOCABULARY, TEACHING AND LEARNING and REFLECTION.

What does that look like?

- Quiet areas offered in play rooms.
- Lots of circle time and Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) activities.
- Bespoke support for children who need additional learning support or emotional assistance.
- Book corners with values-based reading.
- Staff modelling trust and connection.
- Staff using emotionally safe language with one another and with children.
- Staff using values language to help children self-regulate, conflict solve and find resolution.
- Teachers and other staff tuning in to children, offering individual support for welfare and helping them achieve their trajectory.

- Curriculum subjects threaded through with opportunities to learn about values.
- Storytimes centred around the values theme, deepening understanding progressively.
- Group time and times in the day offer moments to engage in reflection

Theme 3: Emboldening

Themes 1 and 2 embed so that we live our lives naturally and authentically through our values. This builds to agency so that our impulse is to use our values to help those around us. When we continue to facilitate this agency, it can surpass all expectations.

Settings build this

- Through sharing understanding of values beyond the setting, working with their local community.
- Through sharing with parents.
- Through initiating charitable or altruistic actions.

This theme is supported by the concepts of VALUES IN TO ACTION.

What does that look like?

- Opportunities for children to take their understanding beyond the setting and engage with community national and international issues. Families might get involved with charitable causes, both raising money and exploring the underlying themes.
- Opportunities for children to take on areas of responsibility, such as becoming friends for others.
- Opportunities for children to practice hospitality for others – hosting tea/coffee mornings to combat loneliness

in the local area, for example.

- Opportunities for children and families to take part on a national stage

Impact:

- People see their lives in terms of their values and realise the impact – this helps us to learn emotionally and intellectually and face the challenges that we face in our lives.
- It becomes the way we see ourselves and our lives.
- People act from a values base, sharing their ideas.
- The values approach realises a level of agency in the world that involves self value as well as an ethical stance.