

## Schools can instil a new moral order

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5 The crisis is that there is now a vacuum where moral authority used to be. Historically, most societies could have relied on two different pressures to inculcate ethical behaviour. First, there would be some kind of authority, usually the church, that would be the undisputed source of moral precepts. But more importantly, social pressure could be relied on to keep most anti-social behaviour at bay. No matter what you thought of the local vicar, the fact that anything you did wrong would soon be known by everyone around the village created a strong social pressure to behave decently.

10 Both pillars of morality have been crumbling over the decades. Many conservatives argue that the right response to this is a return to traditional values and to teaching respect for old authorities again. But this not only won't work, institutions such as the church just don't have the legitimacy to take back their old role. There's no going back  
15 we have to build an ethics fit for the future.

The dangers of not doing so are clear enough. Without a clear morality, people will naturally adopt a laissez-faire relativism or opportunistic amoralism, and neither outlook promotes what Aristotle and his followers called "human flourishing".  
20 It is not just my opinion that poverty, limited opportunities, lack of education and ill health are bad for people, we have evidence that they are.

Schools have a role in teaching shared values within this inclusive, evidence-based framework. The best way they can do this is to lead by example. Schools need to  
25 embody the values with which we want children to go out into the world. A school in which respect, fairness and justice govern the behaviour of staff and pupils does more to teach children how ethics can survive the collapse of the old moral order than any amount of moral instruction.

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<sup>1</sup> Times Educational Supplement