

## Villiers Park Strategy 2020-2025

### About Villers Park

Villiers Park Educational Trust is committed to discovering untapped potential and nurturing curiosity, tenacity and creativity. We empower young people to succeed and have confident futures by discovering the skills and knowledge they need to become the leaders of tomorrow.

**Our vision is a world in which everyone can realise and fulfil their potential and lead society into an equitable, healthy future.**

We are a national charity in the UK working with 11-19 year olds from less advantaged backgrounds to raise academic achievement and enhance leadership skills.

We do this through bespoke programmes offering a unique blend of coaching, subject-specific residential courses, and student-led projects which impact on others in the learning community from primary school age upwards. Since our establishment in 1909, we have supported tens of thousands of young people through these programmes.

We also aim to influence educational practice and policy to ensure that all young people have equitable opportunities to succeed.

We work in partnership with other organisations that share our vision and values to make the biggest possible difference to young people's lives.

### A values-led organisation

We are determined to make decisions and behave in ways that are aligned to our values. We hold each other to account on doing this, even if it sometimes means doing things that are challenging.

Our values are:

**Fairness:** We strive for justice and argue unwaveringly for fairness in a world of compromise, prejudice, inequality and deeply entrenched disadvantage.

**Aspiration:** We set high expectations for our whole community. We continually seek ways to improve what we do, how we do it, and the impact we have on the world around us, particularly by working in partnership with others where this helps us make a bigger difference.

**Courage:** We create an environment where we can be courageous by speaking and listening openly and honestly. We know that courage means taking risks, and support each other to learn.

**Empowerment:** We are passionate about working with individuals to enable them to find the skills and resources within themselves to flourish and have healthy futures.

### Stagnating social mobility

Social mobility in the UK is stagnating and inequality is ever persistent.

The Social Mobility Commission's most recent State of the Nation report<sup>1</sup> makes for alarming reading. Despite increasing numbers of students from low-income families going to university, continuing structural barriers mean that they are still much less likely to do so than others, more likely to drop out once there, and earn significantly less even when they do graduate. The gaps are even wider at the most selective universities. The numbers speak for themselves:

- Only 26 per cent of young people from low-income families go to university by the age of 19, compared to 43 per cent of their better off peers.
- Only five per cent of young people from less advantaged backgrounds enter the most selective universities, compared to the national average of 12 per cent.
- 8.8 per cent of students from the least advantaged areas drop out of university, against an overall dropout rate of 6.3 per cent.
- Graduates from the least advantaged areas earn about 19 per cent less than those from the most advantaged areas after five years.

Affluent upbringings are as much the norm as ever in the higher echelons of politics, commerce, business and the media. 65 per cent of senior judges and 59 per cent of civil service permanent secretaries were privately educated. Oxbridge graduates made up 57 per cent of Theresa May's cabinet. One third of regular newspaper columnists attended both a private school and an Oxbridge university.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of young people in the UK are not privately-educated, and only a small proportion attend the most elite universities. There is a clear moral imperative to ensure that the majority are not left behind in life in favour of a minority who are lucky enough to get these opportunities. But the benefits of improving outcomes for those from less advantaged backgrounds go far beyond the benefits to individuals.

With enhanced social mobility, jobs are more likely to be filled by candidates with the greatest potential to perform well, rather than those who may be less well suited but better connected. And employees who are better matched to the job they are doing are likely to be more productive.

Evidence suggests that increasing social mobility in the UK to the level of the next best performing country, the Netherlands, could add £24 billion to the economy. Increasing to the levels seen in western Europe could mean a boost of £39 billion.<sup>3</sup>

The world is changing, and we cannot afford to stand still. The scale of global economic and environmental challenges necessitates new ways of thinking, and a truly joint effort from across society. This will only happen if people from all walks of life have equal opportunities to realise and fulfil their potential.

*Chair of the Social Mobility Commission, Dame Martina Milburn: "At a time when our country needs to be highly productive and nimble, we impede our own progress as a nation if we do not maximise the talent of all our citizens – especially those that start the furthest behind."*

<sup>1</sup> ['Social mobility in Great Britain – state of the nation 2018 to 2019'](#). Sixth annual report from the Social Mobility Commission, April 2019.

<sup>2</sup> ['Elitist Britain 2019'](#). Detailed analysis of the educational background of business, political, media and public sector leaders in the UK, published by the Social Mobility Commission, June 2019.

<sup>3</sup> ['Social mobility and economic success: How social mobility boosts the economy'](#). Published by Oxera, July 2017.

## Realising our vision

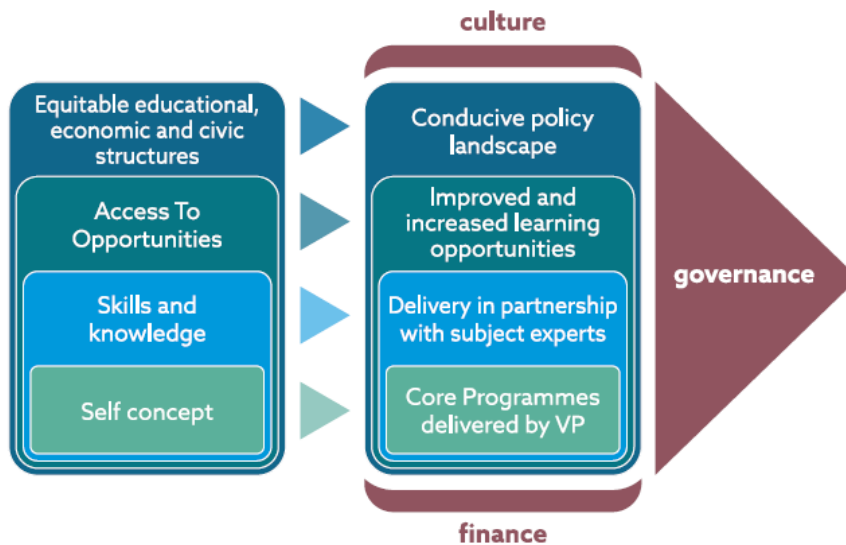
Working in partnership with others who share our vision and values, our role is to enable transformational change for less advantaged and underrepresented young people through the programmes we deliver and the influence we have on educational practice and policy.

Realising our vision relies on our thinking creatively about how we can make the biggest possible difference. This means actively seeking innovative solutions to the problems we are trying to address – through reflexive practice, evaluation and research, and being open to approaches of which we are yet to have experience.

We are tenacious about delivering our vision, bringing a vigour to our work and an impatience to achieve equitable outcomes for young people.

These cornerstones of creativity and tenacity are essential to make best use of the resources available to us, and to maintain our direction of travel towards a fairer society in an ever-changing landscape.

Humanity faces many significant global challenges. Our role is to ensure that the individuals with the capability to solve them can do so, because they have the right opportunities and skills to get into the room.



## How we work

We work with young people from less advantaged backgrounds to enable them to plan pathways to their ambitions, and develop the behaviours, skills and subject-specific knowledge they need to fulfil and realise their potential. We also work with partners to provide access to the kind of opportunities that open doors in education and employment, and work to influence policy and tackle the inequity in our society that results from some educational, economic, social and civic structures.

## Enhancing self concept

Villiers Park has a distinctive and unique approach. Our wealth of knowledge and experience – gained from over one hundred years of working with young people – shows us that everyone has a concept of who they were in the past, are now and can become in the future.

However, young people from less advantaged backgrounds often have more negative conceptions of what they will be able to achieve, or are less able to imagine different possible outcomes or different pathways to the outcomes they want to achieve.

We are the only charity working with less advantaged young people to root our work in a 'Possible Selves' framework, which focuses on people's beliefs about what they might become in the near and more distant future, and is therefore central to goal setting and motivation.<sup>4</sup>

Research shows that possible selves are malleable and can be influenced and enhanced through intervention. This is proven to lead to positive changes in academic behaviour, better academic performance and improved mental wellbeing, with effects sustained years into the future.

### **Developing behaviours, skills and knowledge**

It is well evidenced that young people from less advantaged backgrounds do not lack aspiration. What they do often lack is the opportunity – through expert teaching, advice and guidance – to develop the behaviours, skills and subject-specific knowledge that will enable them to fulfil their ambitions.

Through effective partnership with subject specialists and leaders in their fields, we support our students to enhance their behaviours, skills and knowledge, empowering them to unlock their potential.

### **Providing access to opportunities**

We expect the best outcomes for our students. We know that being able to demonstrate experience is key to success, both in progressing through education and in the workplace. This is why we work with partners to ensure that our students are able to access a range of activities, such as high-quality work experience placements and visits to universities and places of historical and cultural significance.

We work with our students to ensure that they are able to identify and express how they have developed through these and other experiences so they can present themselves to those they encounter throughout life as they are: curious, tenacious and creative.

### **Tackling societal inequity**

We must not lose sight of the fact that the programmes we put in place merely mitigate the unfair outcomes caused by inequity in society. Educational, economic, social and civic structures can be very real barriers to people's ability to realise and fulfil their potential. Our mission is to be transformational across generations, including those yet to come. By using our expert knowledge and learning from more than a century of working with less advantaged young people, working in partnership with others who share our vision, and maintaining public focus on equity of outcomes for all young people, we seek to influence policy, practice and systems to the benefit of our students and society.

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<sup>4</sup> There are a lot of possible references for this (Possible Selves) – best for the experts to choose the one you want to use!

## Strategic priorities



We have six strategic priorities for the period of this strategy – three focus on the way we will drive transformational change for this and future generations, and three on the organisational health and resilience that will enable us to make the biggest possible difference.

### Driving change

We are committed to driving transformational change for current and future generations. We will do this by delivering impactful programmes that are underpinned by evidence and evaluation, increasing the number of young people and teachers we reach through our work, and influencing policy to make systems and structures work more equitably.

### Delivering programmes that work

We are highly ambitious for our students and want to make the biggest possible difference to them. We also need to ensure that students, parents, schools and funders receive the best value for their investment. To achieve these goals, our programmes must be of the highest quality.

Our longitudinal evaluation shows that our approach and programmes make a difference. We will further enhance our practice by reviewing and developing curriculum content and pedagogy, drawing on our extensive network of world-leading academics and industry experts, and making greater use of advances in technology.

We will establish a new and improved evaluation framework, helping us to demonstrate the impact of each of our interventions at every stage, and to continuously improve our practice.

Failing to deliver impactful programmes will inhibit us from making the biggest possible difference, and runs contrary to the behaviours we recognise in successful individuals and organisations: curiosity, tenacity and creativity.

By choosing to invest in reflexive practice, we can be confident that our programmes will empower young people to fulfil their potential – in whatever circumstances they find themselves – and become future leaders in their field.

### Increasing our reach

We are committed to making the biggest possible difference. This means that, over the next five years, we want to ensure that more young people transform their lives by accessing our programmes and benefiting from resources that support effective practice in the education they receive.

We know that there are many thousands of less advantaged young people with the potential for leadership. We will seek to identify and work with such students, who may also be from other underrepresented groups, such as:

- people from areas of lower higher education participation, lower household income or lower socioeconomic status groups
- some black, Asian and minority ethnic groups
- care leavers
- carers
- people estranged from their families
- people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- asylum seekers and refugees
- children of military families.

As well as increasing the number of target students we work with, we will also seek to increase our reach through working with new partners on new programmes so that we are able to offer a wider breadth of opportunities for our students and support the development of future leaders across a range of specialisms and industries.

Making greater use of technological solutions will enable us to reach greater numbers of young people than ever before, to maintain our relationship with our students even if they move location (which is highly likely for some of the groups we work with), to reduce our costs in some areas, and to target our resources more effectively.

We will increase our influence on educational practice by publishing a bank of freely available resources for teachers on our website, meaning that even young people we don't work with directly are able to benefit from our expertise.

Failing to significantly increase the number of students we work with by remaining small will prevent us from achieving transformational change for this and future generations.

By investing in evaluation and research as we grow our reach, we will gain an increasingly powerful understanding of what interventions make the most difference, enabling us to further target and enhance our offer and achieve our vision more quickly.

### **Enabling success through effective practice and policy**

We have over a century of expertise and experience in understanding the structural obstacles that individuals face in an inequitable society, and the practice that is effective in increasing their curiosity, tenacity and creativity and empowering them to become leaders in their field.

Throughout our history, we have seen the impact of changes in educational, economic and social policy, and understand the importance of policy that is conducive to student success.

We want to ensure that practice in schools takes a whole learner approach, meeting the broad development needs of every pupil. We will work with staff in schools to improve integrated approaches to child development, provide freely available online resources and demonstrate the benefits of our way of working through our links with the research community.

We also want the systems and structures young people navigate in education, employment and civic society to be transformed so that they meet everyone's needs, and outcomes are driven by potential, ability and ambition. We will engage with

government, policy makers and employers, and increase the spotlight on these issues through the media.

Failing to influence policy and focusing solely on intervention delivery will mean that we are only alleviating the symptoms produced by an inequitable system that develops privilege rather than potential.

By supporting and challenging practitioners and policy makers to work in more effective ways, we can ensure that all children have the opportunity to develop their curiosity, tenacity and creativity and so be empowered to have confident futures.

## **Enabling change**

We can only drive this transformational change if we are in good organisational health. We will achieve this by strengthening our finances, growing our resources, investing in developing our staff into leaders in their field, and enhancing governance to secure our sustainability.

### **Growing our resources**

Our plans are ambitious and cannot be achieved without growing our resources and continuously reviewing our stewardship of funds to ensure best value for investment. Whilst we are putting a much greater strategic emphasis on building resources through business development and utilisation of our assets, it would be prudent to plan for financial challenges given the current global economic climate and changes in education policy drawing funding away from longitudinal outreach.

Over the life of this strategic plan, the biggest part of our spending will be allocated to programme delivery, with a particular focus on increasing our use of technological solutions to maximise reach.

By strengthening our finances, we can be more resilient and maximise our contribution to achieving generational transformation.

### **Developing staff who are leaders in their field**

We want all our staff to demonstrate the behaviours and attributes we seek to develop in our students, and will support them to do so.

These behaviours and attributes are set out in our Skills4Success framework<sup>5</sup>, and are embedded in all our programmes. They can be summarised as curiosity, tenacity and creativity.

Over the period of this plan, our ambition is for all staff to develop into leaders in their field. We will invest in our staff with comprehensive training, performance management and effective systems of accountability, all delivered within the framework of our values: fairness, aspiration, courage and empowerment.

By developing highly able staff who are leaders in their field, we will have the potential to not only deliver against our aims, but exceed them.

### **Ensuring long-term sustainability**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.villierspark.org.uk/skills4success>

With over a century of experience, we are a well-established organisation with a wealth of knowledge and experience in changing lives. We want to ensure that we are still here to offer that expertise to future generations for as long as we are needed, so we need to focus on our long-term sustainability.

As we grow as an organisation, increasing the number of young people we work with and the breadth of ways we reach them, we will review and enhance our governance. During periods of ambitious and rapid growth it is essential that we remain focused on long-term resilience, financial sustainability and impact.

Our board members are proud guardians of our purpose and values, and will continue to enhance the sophistication of their approach to provide the right perspectives, skills, and access to networks that will support our sustainability and impact over the next hundred years.

By improving our governance, we can ensure that our work is continuously moving us towards our vision.

## **Measuring success**

To measure the impact of our work to **drive change**, we will:

1. Provide information on the scope of our work using output reporting data.
2. Regularly review our work to understand and share our achievements, as well as our challenges and best practice in addressing them.
3. Work with academics and practitioners in the field to build our theory of change, testing our assumptions and effectiveness to better understand how we contribute to improved outcomes for young people from less advantaged backgrounds.
4. Consult with key stakeholders to gather their insights and assessments about our work.

To measure the impact of our work to **enable change** through effective ways of working, we will:

1. Benchmark our people management – including recruitment, retention, progression and sickness absence – against sector leaders.
2. Undertake a strategic and operational review of governance.
3. Measure progress against income generation and expenditure plans.
4. Consult with staff to gather their insights and assessments about our ways of working.