

# Mindfulness – is daily meditation an essential life-skill for our pupils?

By Jayne Wright – Wellbeing Consultant

The 'Mindfulness All Party Parliamentary Group' that met six years ago, in October 2015 released their report, following their consultation with numerous experts in their field. The 'Mindful Nation UK' report became the first policy document of its kind, seeking to address mental and physical health concerns in the areas of education, health, the workplace and the criminal justice system. This report was developed in response to the growing mental health crisis in young people seen in the UK outlined in statistics on Mind's website: [https://www.nhsconfed.org/~media/Confederation/Files/Publications/Documents/MHN%20key%20facts%20and%20trends%20factsheet\\_Fs1356\\_3\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.nhsconfed.org/~media/Confederation/Files/Publications/Documents/MHN%20key%20facts%20and%20trends%20factsheet_Fs1356_3_WEB.pdf) (Page 6)

It reported on the application of mindfulness-based interventions in these settings and has set the scene for an explosion in interest in the application of mindfulness in our schools, in recent years.

The report was produced following a 12-month inquiry involving eight hearing events in the British Parliament. It made some key recommendations:

1. "The Department for Education (DfE) should designate, as a first step, three teaching schools to pioneer mindfulness teaching, co-ordinate and develop innovation, test models of replicability and scalability and disseminate best practice.
2. Given the DfE's interest in character and resilience (Character Education Grant programme), we propose a comparable Challenge Fund of £1 million a year to which schools can bid for the costs of training teachers in mindfulness.
3. The DfE and the Department of Health (DOH) should recommend that each school identifies a lead in schools and in local services to co-ordinate responses to wellbeing and mental health issues for children and young people<sup>117</sup>. Any joint training for these professional leads should include a basic training in mindfulness interventions."



"Emotional buoyancy, coping skills, the capacity to manage difficulties and the ability to form constructive social relationships are all important aspects of children's flourishing and there is evidence that mindfulness contributes to each. These positive effects are often apparent three years after taking a course and relatively short inputs produce discernible results."

'Mindful Nation UK'

Report by the Mindfulness All-Party  
Parliamentary Group (MAPPG)

The evidence-based recommendations were sourced directly from feedback from scientists and experienced mindfulness practitioners working in these environments, who reported notable success in their respective fields. The report urges policymakers to invest resources in further pilot studies and increased public access to qualified teachers.

It is interesting however to note that whilst 'mindfulness' has not been specifically recommended in the new 'Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education' statutory status document, work around mental health and wellbeing are seen as central to school's meeting its statutory needs in the curriculum.

Since 2015 schools have become increasingly interested in the benefits that mindfulness for pupils, (and staff) with the mental health benefits it has to offer. So, what is mindfulness? The report states that "Mindfulness simply means paying attention to what is happening in the present moment in the mind, body and external environment, with an attitude of curiosity and kindness."

In a busy school, how realistic is calmness, pausing, stillness and observing the world unfolding through the senses? With improvements in stress reduction, increased focus, a greater appreciation of the 'little things' in the world, amongst other benefits, have made it attractive as a preventative education technique. Mindfulness is believed to allow people, including children, to develop responsive, calmer, healthier, more compassionate, altruistic responses to their own experience, as well as to events in their lives in general and to the lives of the people around them.

There has been a huge increase in academic research on the subject with more than 500 peer-reviewed studies. One finding of a more recent 2019 investigation has added weight to the Mindful Nations UK report. Promising evidence that mindfulness training has been shown to enhance 'executive control' in children and adolescents in line with adult evidence. What is of particular interest is that those with the lowest levels of executive control and emotional stability are likely to benefit most from mindfulness training. This research study looked at the effects of several interventions. (See figure 1 from the study): ['Mindfulness-Based Program Embedded Within the Existing Curriculum Improves Executive Functioning and Behavior in Young Children: A Waitlist Controlled Trial'](#)

One school, during play-time instigated 'mindful eating' which they called "munch and crunch" time. Children were encouraged to notice the fruit and the experience of eating, savouring flavours and smells. In other activities the children focused attention on their breath. Imagining blowing a bubble gently filled with their thoughts, that simply drift away. They were also encouraged to imagine a bubble filling in their tummies when they breathed in. The process of imagining a bubble requires attention and therefore 'executive control' and focus. Other activities happening in schools, involve developing and expanding sensory awareness by activities such as conducting a class clap and noticing the tingling sensations in their hands until that faded or finger tracing the in and out breath. Also, a lovely summer activity involves a being outside experience, lying on the grass 'cloud watching', each of which provide the opportunity to develop focused attention and to foster, as the report finds, 'cognitive flexibility'.

How can teachers implement mindfulness in an already packed curriculum? The [mindfulness approaches](#) taken from the study provides ideas for schools to implement including focusing on a mindfulness gong noise, balloon belly breathing, rainbow walking and creating a glitter jar to visually represent the thoughts swirling, then settling, in our heads.

Initiatives that involve a degree of stillness and pause are very welcome in a busy school day. The focus needed during a meditation is useful when applied to learning challenges too. The curiosity that children are invited to develop is, again, hugely welcome in the academic arena. If just one child per class can be saved from future debilitating anxiety and possible panic attacks, then surely schools' work to implement mindfulness within their curriculum and whole school approach is not just justified, but is an absolutely vital life-skill...

**Jayne Wright**

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

**Email:** [info@flourishingschools.co.uk](mailto:info@flourishingschools.co.uk)



**@FlourishingFut4**



**Flourishing Schools**

**Jayne is the Founder of 'Flourishing Schools' wellbeing training and consultancy. She has launched the 'Mindfully Flourishing in Schools' package of training workshops for school staff in over 150 schools nationwide and now also runs 'Chilled Children & Flourishing Teens' courses.**