

# Mind the Gap

Collected essays on the  
development of character,  
non-cognitive skills,  
mindfulness and well-being

**Mind the Gap  
is published by SSAT  
and kindly supported by  
The Young Foundation.**

#### **ABOUT SSAT**

SSAT is a membership organisation for all schools. We believe that teachers make students' lives. As the world gets more complex, that vital role becomes ever more demanding. As the hub of the largest, longest-standing independent network of education professionals in England, SSAT exists to help teachers perform their job even better, more confidently and more professionally than before.

#### **ABOUT THE YOUNG FOUNDATION**

The Young Foundation is working to create a more equal and just society, where each individual can be fulfilled in their own terms. We work with the public and private sectors and civil society to empower people to lead happier and more meaningful lives.

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# Introduction

Bill Watkin,  
Operational Director  
SSAT

Few would argue with the widely shared ambition to continue to raise the bar and improve standards. Likewise, few would argue that the challenges presented to young people and their teachers in schools by the current reforms to curriculum, assessment and accountability measures will surely place additional pressure on our school populations.

If we are to remain globally competitive and successful, we must be willing to engage in a wide range of strategies that will support young people on their journey to thrive in adult life and in the workplace. For those following it, there is a more rigorous national curriculum across all key stages. We have seen a return to end-of-course and more stretching examinations as the default method of assessment, more demanding GCSE and A-level courses and assessment, and changes to the floor standards, league tables and inspection regime. All these reforms mean that the pressure on students of all ages is bound to grow.

It is in this context that we have seen the emergence of a significant focus on the development of non-cognitive skills and on emotional and mental well-being. Whether it is the importance of character in preparation for adult life, or the impact of resilience and well-being on attainment outcomes - or the need, in our bustling world, to maximise opportunities for stillness and silence through mindfulness - increasing numbers of schools are exploring and adopting strategies that address young people's needs to manage the stress and pace of our world today. If this, in turn, enables them to become successful and high-functioning contributors to our society and economy, this will be to the benefit of all.

As John Cridland, director-general of the CBI, said:

'Schools should teach pupils resilience and how to be "rounded and grounded"... and 'By character I mean resilience, humility, emotional intelligence, team spirit, someone who will go the extra mile'... and 'It is not only the disadvantaged who need help, but also G&T pupils whose schools had focused on pushing them academically, at the expense of helping them to develop social attributes.'

Not only is the business sector committed to the development of attributes that will help young people to perform effectively in the workplace, but also academics, charitable foundations and policymakers continue to pay ever greater attention to the value of non-cognitive skills in improving cognitive learning and outcomes.

The Demos call for evidence for its review of social and emotional skills describes the landscape in detail (<http://www.demos.co.uk/files/GlossaryofKeyTerms1.pdf>). It describes how the Early Intervention Foundation, the Cabinet Office and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission are conducting 'a review of the evidence base behind the skills variously referred to as Skills for Life and Work, character, social and emotional skills and non-cognitive skills, and what works to help young people develop these skills'. The EEF Review identified the following non-cognitive skills:

1. self-perceptions
2. motivation
3. perseverance
4. self-control
5. metacognitive strategies
6. social competencies
7. resilience and coping
8. creativity.

The Cabinet Office, in its work on skills for life and work, defined four competence 'clusters', drawing on work done by the Young Foundation and EEF, as follows:

1. Resilience: 'the resilient individual continues to proceed, despite the duration of risk.'
2. Self-direction: this involves interplay between the concepts of self-efficacy, self-awareness, self-control and critical thinking.
3. Communication: effective self-expression, for example, listening, recognising non-verbal cues, public speaking, explaining, presenting and questioning.
4. Forging relationships: this involves collaboration, underpinned by well-developed emotional skills, developing and maintaining a relationship, having an understanding of empathy.

The recently published report by Public Health England: The link between pupil health and well-being and attainment (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-link-between-pupil-health-and-wellbeing-and-attainment>) demonstrates the potential impact in each of the four key Ofsted judgements of supporting emotional health and well-being. The report looks at the evidence and concludes that:

1. Pupils with better health and well-being are likely to achieve better academically
2. Effective social and emotional competencies are associated with greater health and well-being, and better achievement
3. The culture, ethos and environment of a school influences the health and well-being of pupils and their readiness to learn
4. A positive association exists between academic attainment and physical activity levels of pupils.

Nicola Kershaw, of MindFull, describes on The Guardian website some tips from practising teachers for introducing mindfulness in classrooms ([www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/jul/23/how-to-mindfulness-classroom-tips](http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/jul/23/how-to-mindfulness-classroom-tips)). These include:

- don't neglect to teach the theories behind mindfulness
- address concerns that the practice will conflict with religious beliefs
- build the practice into the curriculum
- encourage random acts of kindness
- get parents involved
- it needs to begin with the teacher.

It should be said though, that there is among experts an absolute certainty that this is not something that can be rushed, it cannot be undertaken without full and expert training, and it must not become just another passing fad.

The scope of research, review and practice in this field is so extensive that it is not possible to explore all the exciting developments and activities here. In this collection of short essays from some of our leading researchers, exponents and practitioners, we seek to address, in short introductory and easy-to-read articles, some key insights into well-being, mindfulness, character and preparation for adult life. You are invited to dip your toes in the water and to consider if the time is right to go for a swim.

It is worth noting that each essay serves as a stand-alone article. The publication is not intended to flow from beginning to end, but to be a series of separate, though related, thought pieces. As such, you will find some views, ideas and information appearing more than once in the book, though each time, it will be relevant to the essay you are reading.

I am deeply grateful to all the contributors, who have generously shared their expertise and insights, in the hope that we will gain a better and broader understanding of the possibilities and a population of young people better equipped to survive and succeed in the fast-changing, fast-moving and demanding world that they inhabit.

I am also very grateful to The Young Foundation for their support in the production of this publication.

Imagine if  
every child  
could live their  
dreams...

**The Young Foundation**

Imagine... if every child and young person was supported to develop the social skills, resilience, networks and confidence to flourish as active, engaged citizens. If every family had the confidence and understanding to support their children to learn and achieve. If the dreams and ambitions of every young child could be nurtured to sustain them through to training or university as a young adult. If every pupil had an equal chance of gaining the qualifications needed for employability regardless of family income, gender, ethnicity or hometown.

Young people acquire the skills and experience they need through a variety of influences: family, friends and peers, their community, clubs and school. They are all important to a child's development and we must not focus too much on one at the expense of the others.

Not all of these influences are positive and some are relied upon more heavily than others. For some of the most disadvantaged it is their school that is the driving factor, yet they only spend 17% of their time there. By working together, we can develop an education system that creates active, informed, engaged and empowered citizens with the skills and capabilities for the 21st century.

**'We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist... using technologies that haven't been invented... in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet.'**

Karl Fisch and Scott McLeod, *Shift Happens*

### **A holistic approach**

Overcoming educational inequality will not be solved easily or quickly. Qualifications alone will not lead to a happy, fulfilled life. We believe young people need a wide range of skills and capabilities to think creatively, collaborate, empathise and be resilient in the face of the opportunities and challenges that life throws at us all.

We call these skills and capabilities the 'Four Cs':

- Character & resilience
- Context
- Content
- Contacts

The Young Academy is here to support the development and growth of social ventures that work with young people to build the Four Cs.

## **Character & resilience**

A young person's ability to apply themselves to tasks, their self-awareness and direction, self-control, confidence and ability to empathise with others.

Improving a young person's social intelligence and emotional resilience skills has been shown to be one of the most effective ways to improve their long-term chances.

## **Context**

What young people have done in their lives, where they have been and the experience they have accumulated matters.

Making sense of these experiences and knowing how to apply them in the real world can be a critical success factor.

## **Content**

The academic and vocational skills and qualifications young people have acquired through formal education and additional study.

Nationwide, children from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to underperform their peers in exams – yet we know that poverty doesn't have to equate to poor qualifications.

## **Contacts**

Who young people know and develop relationships with, who they feel comfortable interacting with, asking for advice and help from, or working alongside.

Many young people don't realise the power and scale of the networks they already have. We need to do more to empower them with the confidence to identify, broaden and use these networks to achieve their ambitions.

Young people are living, learning and negotiating their lives in an increasingly complex and challenging world. This calls for empowered, resilient young people, who play an active role in navigating their own paths.

For the past 60 years, The Young Foundation, and its predecessors and spin-offs, have worked to support young people to live fulfilled lives. The Foundation is passionate about reducing the inequality they face and works alongside governments, schools, universities, funders, charities, social enterprises and businesses to do so.

The Young Foundation is a leading independent centre for disruptive social innovation. It creates new movements, institutions and companies that tackle the structural causes of inequality. It works to create a more equal and just society, where each individual can be fulfilled in their own terms. It believes that little about the future of society is inevitable. Bound by our shared humanity, it believes we collectively have the power to shape the societies and communities we want to live in.

Its work includes Realising Ambition, the Young Persons Outcomes Framework, the seminal publication *Grit*, the pioneering of the studio schools movement, delivering Bounce Back! in schools, supporting emotional resilience for gang members in Harrow and work on 'SEED' skills.

It brings together venturing, research, practical action and networks of people to make a real difference. It brings extensive experience of supporting the replication of outstanding innovation, social investment in young people, and empowering young people to act.

The Young Foundation also runs the Young Academy, providing specialist capacity development and risk capital to social enterprises whose work raises the attainment of disadvantaged young people in England.

The Young Academy offers an intensive programme of specialist training and financial support tailored to the needs of early stage ventures working in the field of education. Over the course of its programme, the Young Academy helps participants to build their organisational capacity, strengthen their business model, demonstrate their social impact and finance their growth. The Young Academy is looking for entrepreneurs who want to transform the way young people are prepared for life. Their ambition is to create a wider movement of social ventures which share the passion and commitment to create an education system fit for the 21st century.

**Further reading:**

Realising Ambition: <http://youngfoundation.org/projects/realising-ambition>

The Young Foundation, *A Framework of Outcomes for Young People* (2012): [youngfoundation.org/publications/framework-of-outcomes-for-young-people](http://youngfoundation.org/publications/framework-of-outcomes-for-young-people)

The Young Foundation, *Grit* (2009): <http://youngfoundation.org/publications/grit-the-skills-for-success-and-how-they-are-grown/>

Studio Schools: <http://www.studioschoolstrust.org/>

Bounce Back!: <http://youngfoundation.org/projects/bounce-back/>

Emotional resilience for gangs: <http://youngfoundation.org/publications/emotional-resilience-for-gangs/>

School and  
education policy  
needs to address  
students' health  
and non-cognitive  
skills as well  
as academic  
attainment

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and Social Policy,  
and Farah Jamal,  
Research Fellow  
Institute of Education

Education policy in England increasingly encourages schools to maximise students' academic attainment but often ignores their broader well-being, personal development and health.<sup>1</sup>

There is plenty of evidence of the latter. Participation in the National Healthy Schools Programme no longer benefits from central governmental targets or funding. Ofsted reports no longer include sections on how well schools promote students' health or personal development.<sup>2</sup> Personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons remain non-statutory and schools spend less and less time teaching it because of pressure to focus on academic subjects.<sup>3</sup>

We argue that these developments are underpinned by two ideas. First, that promoting academic attainment, on the one hand, and health and non-cognitive development, on the other, is a 'zero-sum game'; more time spent on health and development results in less time for academic learning and therefore lower attainment.<sup>4</sup> Second, that improving academic attainment is singularly critical to increasing economic competitiveness.<sup>5</sup> Both these ideas are flawed.

Counter to the first idea, research suggests that education and health are synergistic. People who are well educated have better health and well-being<sup>6</sup> and students in better health have higher academic attainment.<sup>7</sup> Research on 'developmental cascades' suggests that students' accomplishment of educational and non-cognitive developmental milestones influence one another over time.<sup>8</sup> Students' non-cognitive development and well-being receives more attention in a number of countries with better overall attainment than England – Finland, Sweden, Australia and Singapore. These countries vary in whether health and development programmes are nationally or locally led, and whether provision occurs in health lessons or is integrated into subject learning. But they all place more emphasis than England on students' overall development, and social and emotional learning.<sup>9</sup> Thus, academic and broader development is not a zero-sum game.

The most powerful evidence is from experimental studies which suggest that programmes to promote students' broader well-being and development also benefit attainment. A systematic review of 'coordinated school health programmes' (which aim to promote health both through explicit teaching in the curriculum and broader work to produce a healthier school environment) suggests these have positive effects on health and attainment.<sup>10,11</sup> Meta-analyses of experimental studies also suggest that social and emotional skills curricula as well as mental health programmes in schools boost academic attainment.<sup>12,13</sup>

Counter to the second idea, that promoting cognitive development and academic attainment is all that matters for the economy, there is evidence that an effective labour force requires not only cognitive skills gained from academic learning, but also non-cognitive skills, such as resilience and teamwork.<sup>14</sup> There is also evidence that productivity is significantly improved by workers' health status.<sup>15</sup>

Within the culture of neglect of health and non-cognitive development, some schools may actually harm some students' health. For example, a systematic review of qualitative research on the school environment and health suggests that in school systems such as in England and the USA, which are characterised by performance management of schools focused narrowly on academic metrics, some schools respond by focusing resources on the more able students and failing to engage other students. This is associated with some students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, disengaging from school and instead getting involved in 'anti-school' peer groups and risk behaviours, such as smoking, drugs and violence. These function as alternative, 'anti-school' markers of status, identity and the transition to adulthood.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, research suggests that 'teaching to the test', observed in some schools, can harm students' mental health.<sup>17</sup>

Thus we argue that schools need to teach students not only academic knowledge and cognitive skills, but also the knowledge and non-cognitive skills they will need to promote their own mental and physical health, and successfully contribute to the economy and society. We now have good evidence not only for curriculum interventions suitable for PSHE but also for 'health promoting school' (HPS) interventions which combine health curricula with whole-school actions to ensure schools are health promoting settings.<sup>18</sup> Health education can be delivered not only in specific PSHE lessons but also integrated within traditional academic subjects. Education policy could be more supportive by making PSHE (and sex and relationships education) a statutory subject, and by requiring Ofsted to report specifically on health and personal development – for example, requiring schools to deploy evidence-based PSHE and HPS interventions before they can achieve 'outstanding' status overall.<sup>19</sup> Although secondary schools are increasingly academies outside local authority control, this need not be a barrier to their addressing health.

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# Character in schools

Sir Anthony Seldon,  
Master of Wellington College

Character, rather than curriculum, inspection or exams has almost overnight become the hot jacket potato. Tristram Hunt, the shadow education secretary, led the charge for Labour and now the Conservatives are falling over each other to say that character education needs to be at the very heart of schools.

Michael Gove, education secretary until this July, might have been a Johnny-come-lately to this debate, but he became a character warrior by the end, saying at *The Sunday Times* Festival of Education at Wellington College that it needed to be a core activity of schools, and that British business was suffering because school leavers lacked key character skills. Nicky Morgan, his successor, had hardly gripped the baton in her hand before storming onto the podium at the Conservative Party conference this autumn to announce that schools should offer activities that build character. But it was the Lib Dems who got there first, egged on by Richard Reeves. Expect to hear Nigel Farage shortly unveil UKIP's character in schools policy, in a document full of purple prose with an English bulldog barking on the front page.

Recognition has grown that we have 20th century schools which are not preparing our students for the 21st century world. The current obsession with just literacy and numeracy is simply not enough. We need schools that will liberate the creative spark and fire up students, if our economy is to flourish in this still new century. Character education, which challenges and stimulates young people, and develops their curiosity, resilience, responsibility and respect, lies at the heart of what is required.

One by one, the opposition has fallen away. Character education is all the rage. Even Toby Young, long regarded as an opponent of anything that watered down the academic content of schools, accepts that there may be a role for emphasising good character in schools.

Two principal points remain in contention: whether character education makes any difference, and whether there should be lessons on the curriculum specifically on character. Let's look at these.

Academic research produced by The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at Birmingham University offers conclusive evidence from research across many countries that character education is not only vital for good schools, but that it is also effective. Their website should be consulted by all who want to know more.

On the opposite side of the debate, academics argue that 70-80% of character is predetermined, and that character education is thus a waste of time for the great majority of students. But can such a determinist and fatalist view be accurate? In my experience of a lifetime in schools, education research can prove pretty much anything you want it to prove. Ditto psychological research. Yet every good teacher I have ever met in state and independent schools knows instinctively that a core part of their job is to develop the good character of their students. They don't need educational research to tell them it can't be done; neither do parents, who would laugh at the notion that the character of their children is formed before birth and that they can make no impact on it.

It is hard to read an article on education today without someone referring to Carol Dweck, so let me not disappoint by omitting her name. Her work on 'growth' as opposed to 'fixed' mindsets shows conclusively to my satisfaction that brain functioning is malleable and can be enhanced under the right stimuli. Moral awareness as well as academic ability can be raised through systematic and repetitive application. This lies at the heart of character education.

A bigger debate exists on the second area in contention: should curriculum time be given to the building of character? Some exponents of character education, including James O'Shaughnessy, David Cameron's former policy advisor who is now setting up a chain of free schools, believe that character education is so important that it should be taught in discrete lessons. Others believe that character building can be done equally well without losing valuable lesson time to special classes, by having a determined focus right across school life on the development of good character virtues, and the provision of opportunities for the young to be challenged to put these traits into operation.

I don't think we need to get hung up on this debate. It is just a sideshow. Schools should be free to decide their own allocation of curriculum time. If they choose to have lessons specifically on character, and can at the same time run orderly institutions which achieve strong results, then they should be allowed to take these decisions themselves.

Those who deny that the instilling of good character is not a job for schools are utter nihilists. They inhabit a world in which there are no moral certainties, there is no belief in human progress, no acceptance of how education is vital to human transformation and growth. Accept their philosophy, if you like. But if you do, I hope you go nowhere near schools, nor become parents, nor go within 100 miles of children and adolescents.

As philosophers from Aristotle onwards have taught, human beings flourish when they live ethically, and good character should be learned from schools, as well as parents and society. Schools have suffered woefully from the moral vacuum of the last 25 years, with government after government insisting that the only important objective of schools is good exam grades. This flawed approach has created a damaging dichotomy in the public mind: schools can either be serious about academic work, or they are engaged in fluff, which is pretty much everything that isn't connected with tests and exams. But character education, and the co-curricular activities that support it, is not fluff, and when done well, as we see in school after school, they enhance academic results rather than detract from them.

We are fast creating a rule-governed society, where people are incapable of taking moral choices and distinguishing right from wrong, and act only in accordance with the laws and their fear of punishment. We need to be doing far more in schools to develop the inner moral nature of all our young people, so that they have a strong sense of the common welfare, and seek to be positively good citizens, rather than just law-abiding ones. Untold damage has been done because of the failure of our politicians to impart a sense of moral purpose.

### **Tolerating the intolerant**

The lack of any clear understanding of universal virtues, including respect for other people and other belief systems, personal responsibility for hard work, truthfulness, integrity and kindness, has weakened our society in another way too. Those groups, including religious fundamentalists, who seek to impose their own beliefs on others, and who are prepared to use violence to do so, are tolerated. But society should not be tolerant of the intolerant. If schools taught character and virtues, there would be a far clearer understanding of this.

You do not have to be a rocket scientist, or a chief inspector of schools, to know what a good school is like. The atmosphere is orderly, the students treat each other with respect, they and the staff look smart, the environment is attractive and well presented, and the classrooms and classroom activity are purposeful. In every good school without exception, there will be a sense of respect for each other, integrity from teachers and students, a kind atmosphere, a commitment to curiosity and hard work.

Schools do what the governments tell them to do. At the moment, the overwhelming message is still 'exams are all that matters'. It is shallow and amoral of government merely to say 'schools can decide whether they want to emphasise character or not'. Nicky Morgan has taken a step in the right direction. She now needs to take a giant leap, saying without hesitation that the building of good citizens is every bit as important as exam grades. Do that, and schools will become better communities, school leavers will go on to become better students at university and employees at work, we will have a more entrepreneurial and creative economy and we will have a happier and more harmonious society.

# Fighting talk?

James O'Shaughnessy,  
Founder and  
Managing Director  
Floreat Education

Here is a comment that could radically reduce the readership of this piece: Michael Gove can lay claim to being the most successful reforming education secretary since Ken Baker, and possibly even Rab Butler. I believe that to be true. Others will disagree vehemently.

However, despite the reforms of recent years some bald facts underline just how far we still have to go to provide every child with the education they deserve: one child in five leaves primary school unable to read, write and count at the level expected of an 11-year-old;<sup>1</sup> a student from private school is five times more likely to go to university than one from an underprivileged background;<sup>2</sup> and, we are the only OECD country where the literacy of 16-24 year olds is no better than that of 55-64 year olds.<sup>3</sup> The need for further improvement is unarguable, and heads and teachers may need to brace themselves for more reforms.

We know that educational inequality is one of the most pernicious features of our school system, and that it thrives when the fundamentals of a good education – discipline, good behaviour, a knowledge-rich curriculum, high expectations – are ignored. It is only very recently, and thanks to a long campaign of reform that started with Jim Callaghan's 'secret garden' speech and has been continued by governments of every hue, that the damage done by progressive teaching approaches has begun to be reversed.

As a result, we are at last reclaiming the right for every child to be introduced to the best that has been thought and said, to use Matthew Arnold's evocative phrase. This is an advance of great significance and it will transform lives. However, to really unlock children's potential we need to go further. Academic rigour is back in vogue but that is only half the story.

The classical ideal of education, which dominated Western civilisation for millennia, valued the development of moral character as much as it did intellectual ability. This was best summed up by Martin Luther King when he said: 'Intelligence plus character: that is the goal of true education.'

Educating for character has survived in the independent sector and in some faith schools, but is often absent in the secular schools where the majority of young people are educated.

The post-war crisis of adult authority and the growth of moral relativism shunted out of classroom practice the idea that schools should purposefully and explicitly develop a range of virtues in children. But just as the extreme social liberalism of the '60s and '70s is fading and people are rediscovering the benefits of traditional norms of behaviour, so we should not be surprised that educating for character is making a comeback. Indeed, parents are crying out for it: polling by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has shown that 87% of them want schools to educate for both academic excellence and character development.<sup>4</sup>

Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman has shown that character strengths, sometimes called non-cognitive traits, are skill-like and can be positively influenced with the right instruction.<sup>5</sup> Character is not fixed and we can all become better versions of ourselves. This is a profoundly optimistic view of human potential that matches our aspirations for the academic achievement of young people.

The story of the Knowledge is Power Programme (KIPP) group of charter schools in the US, told by Paul Tough in his book *How Children Succeed*, shows why character matters.<sup>6</sup> A group of schools formed to get poor, mainly black, urban children into college, KIPP found that their no-excuses academic approach was phenomenally successful at getting children into university (up to 10 times the local average) but not great at keeping them there.

Looking back at their data, KIPP found that the best predictor of college graduation was not grades but the ability to stick to tasks. This led them to the door of the University of Pennsylvania, and Angela Duckworth in particular.<sup>7</sup> Duckworth pioneered the understanding and measurement of 'grit' in young people, and has shown that this quality – perseverance in the pursuit of long-term goals – is a better predictor of success than IQ. She helped KIPP develop their character growth report card, and KIPP's co-founder Dave Levin now talks of 'character plus academics' being the twin strands of education's DNA. My charity, Floreat Education, is taking exactly the same approach with our goal of developing both virtue and knowledge in primary school children.

The case for educating for character still has its detractors. In November this year Sir Anthony Seldon, master of Wellington College, and I debated the case for character education with Toby Young and Martin Robinson at Policy Exchange. I'm pleased to say the vote went in our favour, but Toby and Martin both made strong cases for moving ahead with caution while the science of character education is still in its infancy. That is fair, and we should always be wary of education fads (Brain Gym, anyone?) but some schemes – like the Penn Resilience Programme<sup>8</sup> – have a strong evidence base and more are emerging over time.

Moreover, even the sceptics still strongly accept the importance of moral education and limit their criticism to the specific idea of character education lessons.

It is highly significant that all three parties now seem to support the practice of character education in schools, but I don't think any future government will (or should) start mandating any particular programmes or activities. The memory and cost of social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) loom large. However, they are likely to look at 'softer' approaches to accountability in this area – for example, asking Ofsted to look at character education within their existing powers to inspect schools' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) provision – as well as injecting learning about character education into initial teacher training.

Developing young people's character virtues is an ancient practice. The traditional purpose of moral and character education – giving children the practical wisdom to make good decisions for their own benefit and the benefit of others – has never been more relevant. As Public Health England<sup>9</sup> have recently shown, the benefits of improving pupils' character strengths and well-being extend to improving academic attainment. Ensuring schools educate for character is the next frontier in school reform.

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# What is beyond 'outstanding'?

Peter Thomas,  
Headteacher

President Kennedy School

Outstanding could be (very crudely) defined as a basic education where students achieve well, are well taught, behave and are safe, in a school that is well led. Surely there must be more to education than this? As Sir Anthony Seldon, the inspirational master of Wellington College, has said:

'Education is more than a mechanistic process which achieves its highest state with the maximisation of exam performance.'

There is no doubt that Ofsted sets great store by student outcomes and rightly so, but we have to believe that schools have a wider moral purpose. At President Kennedy School we are justifiably proud of being 'outstanding' in every Ofsted category, and of our strong track record of exceptional exam results, but that is not what gets us out of bed in the morning. We are driven to develop young people who can contribute positively to society – in the words of our own motto, to 'build brighter futures'.

President Kennedy School, like many others nationally, is a genuine comprehensive with 45% eligible for free school meals and 40% with English as an additional language. Our intake comes with challenges and some vulnerable learners who require strong support. However, our parents are strongly aspirational. Like most parents they want their child to succeed, even if they do not all possess the tools to support them. The result can be an all too familiar deficit of cultural capital. Our students have often lacked confidence and a strong sense of self. This can lead to them being disadvantaged in terms of life chances, despite attainment far stronger than their peers nationally. Again, we turn to Sir Anthony Seldon for a succinct summary;

'School provides a once in a lifetime opportunity. That opportunity is all the more precious when young people come from disadvantaged home backgrounds, which do not provide the same chances... as those from more affluent backgrounds.'

Much importance is therefore placed across the school on the development of 'belonging' to the school community and the experiences it brings; this breeds confidence and self-belief.

We do not believe that the pursuit of exam performance and the pursuit of student development conflict: quite the opposite, one inevitably feeds the other, if you manage it right. In our early thinking we relied heavily on The Jubilee Centre, an interdisciplinary research centre based at Birmingham University which focuses on character, virtues and values in the interest of human flourishing. The centre maintains student development is synonymous with 'character development'; by developing character you stimulate and support attainment.

So what is character? Character for us at President Kennedy School means thinking, acting and feeling in ways that are beneficial to yourself and others; doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right way. Character is enduring; it sees you through life's

challenges and opportunities like nothing else we can provide in school. Character will endure long after the student has forgotten how to solve simultaneous equations, because it becomes part of who they are. Much of what we do in schools inherently builds student character: from learning to swallow the tough refereeing decision on the rugby pitch, to battling the nerves before public speaking; from the glow of success after answering a tricky maths question, to the target setting conversation with the teacher. What we often lack is a coherent framework or language for reflection.

The Jubilee Centre says 'good teaching is underpinned by an ethos and language that enable a public discussion of character within the school community so that good character permeates all subject teaching and learning.'

We accept that despite our natural desire as teachers to mark everything, character development cannot be graded or scored. It is developed through encouraging students to reflect on themselves and their contribution to others and the wider school community. In order to analyse and reflect on their own character development, students must have a deep-seated metacognition of the framework and language. In order to be part of the dialogue, parents also need to understand this, so the school needs to offer regular opportunities for students, parents and teachers to take part in meaningful reflection. We hold aspirations that much of this reflection will be informal: the PE teacher talking to the student about the difficult refereeing decision and why it was important that he was respectful; the parent encouraging the student to get involved in public speaking despite the nerves; the maths teacher referring to determination as part of their praise for the student answering the tricky maths question; the student taking the decision to set higher targets because they want to strive for excellence.

This aspiration is important but we also recognise that a clear mechanism is necessary to encourage and stimulate reflection in a more formal way. Younger students write reflective essays and give a reflective speech to their own parents 'showcasing' their learning at various times in the year. These events are very powerful: tissues are often needed for parents attending who simply cannot believe their children are capable of such deep reflection about themselves and their achievements.

To facilitate this kind of reflective thinking, the language for character must be pervasive all around the school; it must be part of the fabric and culture of the community. The Jubilee Centre notes: 'character virtues should be reinforced everywhere: on the playing fields, in classrooms, corridors, interactions between teachers and students, in assemblies, posters, headteacher messages and communications, staff training, and in relations with parents.'

Once our principles and values around character were established we began the search for a framework. We considered four main frameworks currently being used in schools around the world or being discussed in research papers from The Jubilee Centre, including the Wellington College Aptitudes. All four are based on significant bodies of

KIPP Schools	Penn Resilience Programme (University of Pennsylvania)	Wellington College Aptitudes	Howard Gardener '5 minds'
Zest	Well being	Moral	Disciplined
Grit	Self control	Spiritual	Synthesizing
Self control	Optimism	Logical	Creative
Optimism	Determination	Linguistic	Respectful
Gratitude		Physical	Ethical
Social intelligence		Cultural	
Curiosity		Social	
		Personal	

research and distil character into traits, aptitudes or 'minds'.

A lengthy and very fruitful dialogue with staff and students followed. Different groups of staff worked firstly to understand the existing models, and then quickly agreed that we needed to develop a President Kennedy model that was 'ours'. Over half our staff engaged strongly with the process and felt ownership of the final agreed framework before we had 'launched' it. The groups of staff, consulting with students, suggested

President Kennedy School - PRIDE	KIPP Schools	Penn Resilience Programme	Wellington College Aptitudes	Howard Gardener '5 minds'	Other ideas & concepts
P – Pride	Self Control	Well being	Moral	Disciplined	Reflective
	Gratitude		Personal	Respectful	
R – Respect	Social Intelligence	Self control	Moral	Disciplined	Conduct Manners
	Gratitude		Spiritual	Respectful	
	Self Control		Personal	Ethical	
I – Involvement	Zest	Optimism	Social	Creative Ethical	Rich and relevant experiences Thirst for knowledge Contribution
	Optimism		Linguistic		
	Curiosity		Cultural		
D – Determination	Grit	Determination	Physical	Disciplined	Independence Positivity Constant Improvement
E - Excellence	Optimism	Optimism	Logical	Disciplined Synthesizing	Leadership Reflective Aspiration Learning Achievement

that the four frameworks appeared to map well against our old student code of conduct: 'PRIDE'.

From here the groups of staff, again working with students, developed language to explain each element of PRIDE. This 'agreed' language is now pervasive in assemblies, classrooms, and all around the school. Students are beginning to engage with it and can already reflect on themselves and their character with some accuracy. In a pilot in year 7 and 8 our 'academic review' curriculum includes engagement with the PRIDE language, which is also a strong feature of the pastoral curriculum in all our colleges.

Like most schools many of our 'moments' of character development take place in our enrichment programme, where some of our students' missing cultural capital is built. We believe firmly in the enriched curriculum and set strong expectations for students to engage in our programmes. We focus on the three traditional enrichment areas followed by most top public schools:

- Sport and physical education (e.g. sports academies, sports experiences, sports teams, Duke of Edinburgh awards)
- Performance (e.g. performing arts in its widest sense, including public speaking)
- Service (e.g. student leadership, peer support, gardening club, Duke of Edinburgh etc).

The development of character now takes place across the school, although we would say we have made no more than a sound start. We have many miles left to travel on our journey of character development – but we do have a community that have agreed upon a language for student character development and a set of principles on which to operate. We are still outstanding and we still work exceptionally hard to achieve our exam results every year. However, at President Kennedy School, we strongly believe there is more to education than exam results.

For more information and reading see:

[www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk)

[www.wellingtoncollege.org.uk](http://www.wellingtoncollege.org.uk)

# What 'works' in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health problems in schools?

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*This paper is a summary of a longer piece published by the National Children's Bureau.*

### **The impact of work on well-being and mental health in schools**

The last 30 years has seen an exponential growth in programmes and interventions in what are sometimes called the 'non-cognitive' aspects of schooling. They go under a wide range of overlapping and related titles including well-being and mental health, and also social and emotional learning, personal, social and health education (PSHE), and resilience. These developments have been the focus of a considerable amount of evaluation, including in the UK, and there have been several comprehensive reviews and meta-analyses<sup>1</sup>, including several by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)<sup>2,3</sup>.

The evidence concludes that, when well designed and implemented, interventions and approaches impact on:

- academic learning, motivation, and sense of commitment and connectedness with learning and with school<sup>4</sup>
- staff well-being, reduced staff stress, sickness and absence, improved teaching ability and performance<sup>5</sup>
- pupil well-being including happiness, a sense of purpose, connectedness and meaning<sup>6</sup>
- the development of the social and emotional skills and attitudes that promote learning, success, well-being and mental health in education, and throughout life<sup>7</sup>
- the prevention and reduction of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and stress<sup>8</sup>
- improving school behaviour, including reductions in low level disruption, incidents, fights, bullying, exclusions and absence<sup>9</sup>
- reductions in risky behaviour – such as impulsiveness, uncontrolled anger, violence, bullying and crime, early sexual experience, alcohol and drug use.<sup>10</sup>

A meta-analysis (a type of study which brings a range of reviews together and calculates the overall impact of interventions numerically) in the US summarised research on 207 social and emotional interventions. It suggested that schools with effective programmes showed an 11% improvement in achievement tests, a 25% improvement in social and emotional skills, and a 10% decrease in classroom misbehaviour, anxiety and depression<sup>11</sup>.

### **What schools need to do**

There are no one-off simple solutions. What is needed is a joined up, coherent approach across many fronts. There is clear evidence from well conducted systematic reviews to support the schools in the following actions. Schools should:

## What 'works' in promoting social and emotional well-being...?

- Prioritise this area as part of their core, being confident that social and emotional well-being and mental health are not luxuries, but are essential to help schools and pupils realise their central goals, including sound learning and academic achievement.<sup>12</sup>
- Start from a focus on well-being and positive mental health for all, building on strengths and capacities, rather than focusing on deficiencies and problems.<sup>13</sup>
- Ensure a positive, warm, well-structured and safe classroom and school climate and ethos – where people feel listened to, empowered, have a sense of connection and belonging<sup>14</sup>, where emotions and vulnerabilities are recognised and accepted, where bullying is not tolerated, and where prejudice and stigma, including around mental health, are robustly tackled.<sup>15</sup>
- Actively help all pupils cope with the normal but sometimes stressful changes and transitions involved in growing up, including those that are part of their predictable journey through the education system.
- Raise staff awareness about the alarming extent of mental health problems in children and young people (e.g. 1 in 10 with a clinically diagnosed disorder) and the school's clear responsibility to respond.<sup>16</sup>
- Keep abreast of the rising tide of mental health problems – such as cyberbullying, isolation, self-harm, suicide and addiction – caused by the rapid growth of new technologies such as the internet, digital media, and social networking.<sup>17</sup> Provide robust education to help young people and their parents / carers manage these shifting challenges positively, and identify concerns and casualties quickly.
- Identify and understand risk factors that come from pupils' home lives, situations and contexts – such as poverty, deprivation, disability, dysfunctional families, being part of the care system, abuse and violence.<sup>18</sup> This is not as an excuse for fatalism but to identify pupils at risk, intervene early, provide support and help pupils to develop the resilience to overcome adverse circumstances.
- Inform themselves about child and adolescent development (currently neglected in teacher education) in order to be clear what is 'normal' and what is a cause for concern, so they are in a position both to help young people develop positively and identify difficulties early.
- Respond wisely to 'difficult' behaviour – dealing with it robustly, but also looking behind it to the child and young person within; understanding its context, meaning and emotional and social roots; and being alert for any undetected emotional, learning or personal difficulties.<sup>19</sup> Respond to incidents proportionately, taking opportunities to teach positive alternatives and model calm and reflective behaviour, while maintaining a warm relationship with the child or young person.

- Schools need to promote staff well-being, address stress and help staff gain a sense of control. This involves developing personal skills, providing sound leadership and personal and professional supports, continuing education, reward and recognition, and the encouragement of home/work balance. Enable staff to feel mentally healthy themselves before they can help others: however current stress levels are out of control, with 80% of teachers reporting annually that stress affects their work, 50% 'severely'.<sup>20</sup>

### **The research also shows:**

- Skills are at the heart of the mentally healthy school environment and ethos.<sup>21</sup> However, the teaching of skills, e.g. in PSHE, is too often optional, uncoordinated and badly taught – a 'Cinderella' subject. Schools need to prioritise the explicit teaching of core skills, attitudes and values that promote well-being, learning and success in life. Skills that have been shown to make a difference include: self-efficacy and accurate self-concept; emotional awareness and control; mindfulness (being in the moment, open-mindedness, focus); resilience, persistence, and optimism; and social and relationship skills, empathy and compassion. These skills need to be taught by well trained, experienced and enthusiastic teachers, in ways that children and young people find relevant and engaging.
- Social and emotional skills are of limited use if they are confined to PSHE lessons. Skills need also to be integrated into the everyday life of the school and classroom, into the curriculum, the process and challenges of learning and teaching, relationship building, the (self) management of behaviour and targeted work for those with difficulties. Only when they become 'mainstreamed' in this way do they start to have serious impact.<sup>22</sup>
- A sense of connection with school underpins resilience and is a clear predictor of academic and personal success. Schools need to encourage pupil voice and authentic involvement in decision making and reflective learning, and the use of peer-led approaches in which pupils teach and help one another.<sup>23</sup>
- School and home need to work together to promote well-being and tackle mental health problems. Vigorous actions are needed to engage parents, families and communities in genuine participation. Parenting programmes and family outreach workers are especially helpful.<sup>24</sup> Particular efforts need to be made with the families of pupils in difficulties, who can feel marginalised, blamed and stigmatised.<sup>25</sup>
- Too often problems are left too late, until they are entrenched. Schools need to start early – with their social and emotional learning programmes, preventive work, the rapid identification of difficulties and targeted interventions – when a light touch may work.<sup>26</sup> They also need then to work intensively, coherently, and carry on for the long term.

- Educational, preventive and therapeutic programmes and interventions need to be implemented with care.<sup>27</sup> They need a solid theory, specific and well defined goals and rationale, a direct and explicit focus on achievable outcomes, and the strong commitment of the senior management team and school governors. They need careful quality control, including adequate staff training, use of outside experts when interventions are new and specialised, ongoing support, close adherence to guidelines and careful evaluation and monitoring.
- Pupils with greater difficulties need more intense help, including one-to-one, group work and therapeutic work, preferably in a school setting, but with expert involvement, for example of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) when needed.
- When providing targeted help for pupils in difficulties, clear and widely understood procedures are needed, including designated responsibilities; pathways for assessment, plans and review; and a coherent teamwork approach to progress the treatment of difficulties quickly and effectively. This includes the close involvement of parents / carers, the young people themselves, the school SENCo, GP, voluntary agencies, and CAMHS.<sup>28</sup> Responses should be as low key as is compatible with safety and effectiveness, and based within the school or home wherever possible, but with specialist/medical involvement and advice and referral where needed and in a timely manner.

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# Mindfulness for young learners: reflecting the importance of mental well-being in addressing the attainment gap

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and Mags Parker

Mindful World

‘The present is the only time that any of us have to be alive – to know anything – to perceive – to learn – to act – to change – to heal.’

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness’s origins lie in the Eastern meditative traditions. It was first introduced to a Western audience by Jon Kabat-Zinn, professor of medicine at the University of Massachusetts’s medical school, in the 1970s to help people manage and cope with chronic pain, stress and anxiety. Further research into the wider applications of mindfulness led Mark Williams, professor of clinical psychology at Oxford University, and colleagues to conclude that mindfulness could be more effective than antidepressants in treating bouts of recurrent depression. In 2004 the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommended mindfulness as a treatment available on the NHS. Subsequent and ongoing research supports the view that there is strong evidence for the positive impact of mindfulness on a wide range of physical and mental conditions, as well as social and emotional skills, learning and cognition and people’s well-being and quality of life.

Although the research into mindfulness with children and young people is not as extensive as that with adults, Professor Katherine Weare of the University of Exeter concluded in a 2012 report:

‘Mindfulness is therefore likely to have beneficial effects on the emotional well-being, mental health, ability to learn and the physical health of school students. Such interventions are relatively cheap to introduce, have an impact fairly quickly, can fit into a wide range of contexts and are enjoyable and civilising, for pupils and staff.’

So what is mindfulness? Mindfulness is a skill. Mindfulness practice involves training our attention capacity to be aware of the thoughts, body sensations and feelings that make up our experience of the present moment, without judgement or evaluation.

This training progressively strengthens our ability to respond with awareness rather than reacting in an unconscious or automatic manner. It strengthens our connection to the present moment, to our senses, to our environment and to other people. Neuroimaging studies have shown that mindfulness training results in the strengthening of the attentional and executive command areas of the brain. This alters our habitual responses to emotional challenges by increasing the probability that more adaptive, alternative neuronal pathways are used.

Mindfulness has been described as ‘falling awake’. When we are mindful, we are fully alive, and we know it. We are able to act consciously and thoughtfully and from deep inside, rather than reacting automatically.

'Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.'

Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2009

Mindfulness training has been taken up by many diverse organisations including Google, Transport for London, Pricewaterhouse Coopers and the Home Office to help with the increasing stresses and pressures of modern day working and information overload. The Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London is running courses in mindfulness to improve stage presence. In the government, 70 MPs have taken a mindfulness course and an all-party parliamentary group on mindfulness has been launched. Schools minister David Laws has said 'mindfulness could enhance children's learning, motivation and attitudes'.

One of the primary ironies of modern education is that we ask students to 'pay attention' dozens of times a day, yet we never teach them how. The practice of mindfulness teaches students how to pay attention, and this way of paying attention enhances both academic and social-emotional learning (Saltzman, 2011).

The modern secular mindfulness training programmes that have been developed use modern scientific language and should be taught and practised in ways that are relevant to local cultural contexts. When applied in schools, mindfulness increases both children's self-esteem, attentional systems, emotional regulation and performance in class.

Claire Kelly, a mindfulness practitioner who is now involved with the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP), a not-for-profit body that runs an eight-week mindfulness programme in schools, says,

'I used to teach at a highly academic independent girls' school, and I found that by introducing mindfulness into lessons, it had a profound effect on the students' anxiety levels, their confidence and their concentration.... I think mindfulness training should be made available to every child. Once you've seen the tangible effect it has on behaviour and performance, it makes complete sense to incorporate it into school life and beyond.'

As Dr Amy Saltzman has pointed out, in school settings children are asked to pay attention a number of times per day, but are hardly ever trained how. Mindfulness provides the missing link in this relationship between attention and learning. William James, a father of modern psychology, wrote in *Principles of Psychology* in 1890 that an education that taught young people how to focus their attention would be 'the education par excellence'. Its value extends far beyond the classroom.

The influence of social media, the demands of the exam system, body image pressures and family breakdown are causing teachers to become increasingly concerned about the psychological challenges their pupils experience, and about the alarming rise in those suffering from significant mental health disorders. Depression now affects children as young as 13 and eating disorders, acute anxiety, stress and addictive behaviours are on the rise. Stress inhibits key parts of the brain that are necessary for learning. Children and young people with less stress in their lives, and importantly those who can focus and handle stress, outperform their peers. This is one cause of the achievement gap, which widens continually as children grow.

There are well-established links between positive mental health, social and emotional competence, and academic achievement (Manley, 2009). In addition, research suggests that mindfulness practice also has more direct benefits on academic achievement, including an increased ability to transfer previously learned material to new situations. Stress and anxiety are associated with being distracted and unable to concentrate.

‘There is a very strong case for mindfulness to be integrated as a practice within education settings, since learning and attention go hand in hand.’

Professor Weare

Sir Anthony Seldon, master of Wellington College in Berkshire, who has pioneered mindfulness techniques for all his pupils says:

‘As a head teacher, I have seen the pressures grow steadily from schools, parents and, above all, from the children. The frenetic daily dash from home to school, often after too little sleep, a day of ceaseless activity, and then an evening trying to juggle homework with chatter from electronic devices, proves too much for many. The young desperately need calm in their lives.’

The UK All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Wellbeing report, 11 September 2014, stated:

‘Mindfulness in schools is held back by the perception that well-being is irrelevant to the core business of the education system, despite its clear link with academic achievement. Nurturing children’s emotional well-being must be given much greater priority.’

The Mindfulness in Schools Project in the UK is leading the way in training teachers to introduce mindfulness into the classroom. Mindfulness in Schools runs an eight-week course called .b — pronounced ‘dot be’, which is shorthand for ‘stop, breathe and be’.

The course aims to help children in a variety of situations, whether it be facing exams or bullying, or getting ready for a performance in the concert hall or on the sports field. Research by Oxford, Bangor and Exeter universities has found that .b can reduce depressive symptoms and lower stress levels. Among the benefits the project claims are the ability to 'concentrate and listen better, get on better with others, feel happier and calmer... and cope better with stress and anxiety.' The .b course has spread into UK schools and is being taught in 11 other countries.

Claire Kelly from the Mindfulness in Schools project states: 'Teaching mindfulness to young people gives them crucial tools to deal with the pressures of life. It's empowering, and once they know how to do it, they can draw on it whenever they need to.'

Toluca School in the USA uses mindfulness training in an effort to combat increasing levels of anxiety, social conflict and attention disorder among the children. A session consists of 45 minutes of exercise/practice focusing on breathing, listening, movement and reflection. At different points the children are asked to gauge their feelings – calm, neutral or restless. There is no right or wrong way, just observations. The session ends with the children lying quietly, contemplating peace within themselves and their community. Seven year-old Emily sums up her experience: 'I like the class because it make me calm and soft inside. It make me feel good.'

Teachers also benefit from mindfulness training. Not only does mindfulness lead to stress reduction and positive emotions in adults, but in one study teachers who underwent mindfulness training also reported that they were more alert and attentive, less reactive, less judgemental, and more patient. Such effects will have flow-on benefits for students by strengthening positive teacher-student relationships.

Professor Katherine Weare concluded in her 2012 report that the weight of evidence from the studies indicates that:

'Mindfulness for young people is easy to carry out, fits into a wide range of contexts, is enjoyed by both students and teachers, and does no harm. ...Mindfulness can contribute directly to the development of cognitive and performance skills and executive function. It can help young people pay greater attention, be more focused, think in more innovative ways, use existing knowledge more effectively, improve working memory, and enhance planning, problem solving, and reasoning skills.'

However, Professor Weare warns that the effects of mindfulness will be diluted unless it is taught by properly trained teachers who practice mindfulness regularly themselves. And there is a danger, as society becomes ever more frenetic, of trying to squeeze

mindfulness training into shorter and shorter bits – thereby losing some of the core aspects of mindfulness, the pausing and stopping.

Among the many teachers to attest to the benefits of mindfulness in their work in schools, Tom Burnside from Forest School in North East London says:

‘As teachers who lead very busy, active and challenging professional lives, we are well used to reacting to situations on autopilot, so mindfulness practice helps in carving out the space required to respond in a more aware way. Teachers should model what they expect from their pupils, so it makes perfect sense to me that if we want them to be able to focus, concentrate and pay attention, then we should do the same. Mindfulness helps us to learn to pay attention and to be in the moment.’

For more information see [mindfulworld.co.uk](http://mindfulworld.co.uk)  
or contact Dr Maya Campbell or Liz Straker at [info@mindfulworld.co.uk](mailto:info@mindfulworld.co.uk)

# Mindfulness in schools

Richard Burnett,  
Co-founder  
and Creative Director

Mindfulness in  
Schools Project

Kaitlyn stayed behind at the end of her second .b lesson; that she had dawdled a little and been the last to pack away her things suggested there was something she wanted to discuss. She was one of a class of 25 14-year-olds learning about mindfulness as part of PSHE. In the first lesson she'd learned what mindfulness was and why it was worth learning; in the second she'd learned that the mind is a bit like a puppy: it bounces around all over the place, makes messes and needs training. But this was only lesson three – their puppy training had just begun – and I was surprised Kaitlyn already wanted to chat.

She was very candid and direct, as teenagers often are. Her parents, particularly her mother, would regularly shout – even scream – at her at home. It would probably happen again when she got home this evening. She hated it and it made her angry; she didn't know what to do. Kaitlyn wanted something – anything – that would help her get through it when she got home.

My suggestion wasn't rocket science, and nor was it a long-term solution. I asked a few questions to see how serious it might be and made a mental note to speak with her form tutor; there were broader issues that needed addressing. But in the short term all Kaitlyn wanted was a coping tactic...

The next time she shouts at you, I suggested, try doing a .b: drop your attention into your feet; even stretch the toes a little and gently clasp the floor so that you feel grounded right there, in the midst of it. And then turn your attention to your breathing, noticing how it is without any compulsion to change it. The old adage is that 'what you can breathe with, you can be with'.

The idea, I explained, is to see if you can step back and observe how your body reacts when it is confronted like this, rather than being swept up in the drama and carried away by it. I played to her teenage sense of rebellion and mischief by reminding Kaitlyn that her mum need not have any idea she was doing this. It could be her little game. But this was 'a big ask' and I encouraged her to try it without any expectation that it might work.

One week later, at the end of the next lesson, Kaitlyn once again stayed behind. She'd had a go and it had completely transformed the experience; the sting had been taken out of her mother's habitual evening ambush. Had it healed the rift with her mother once and for all? No, but a more balanced and measured response from Kaitlyn might prompt her mother to reappraise things too. Did Kaitlyn's response turn her into a passive and uncomplaining victim of abuse? Only if her mother's actions were to continue unabated, but when I checked in with Kaitlyn at the end of the course things seemed to have improved. Greater equanimity and perspective makes reconciliation a possibility, even if it is far from guaranteed.

This story highlights two important themes in mindfulness with young people. Firstly, that kids want solutions to problems and they want them NOW! 'What's in it for me' is their natural question, and if they don't taste the benefits quickly they'll move on. But as soon as mindfulness makes an exam less terrifying, a classmate less irritating or a good night's sleep more likely, then they're in. Every now and again a kid is hooked and 'gets' that 20 minutes a day of proper mindfulness can be a life-changer; they are transformed. More often than not, however, pupils 'deploy' mindfulness in pressure situations rather than cultivate it gradually over time.

Secondly, mindfulness is not enough on its own; it is no silver bullet. Schools are complex places and people more complex still – teachers, pupils and parents alike. Mindfulness must be part of a broader pastoral net, not only in terms of social and emotional learning, but also child protection. Kaitlyn's form tutor and I knew about the situation at home, as did the designated officer for child protection and safeguarding. As it happened, she was fine; that is not always the case.

*Richard is a teacher and boarding housemaster at Tonbridge School. He has taught .b to hundreds of adolescents and his Master's paper on the subject, Mindfulness in Schools: Learning lessons from the adults, secular and Buddhist, was published in 2011. Mindfulness in Schools is a not-for-profit organisation specialising in mindfulness training for school communities – not only the pupils but the teachers, parents and others who care for them.*

[mindfulnessinschools.org](http://mindfulnessinschools.org)

# Why do we have a mindfulness strategy at Corsham School?

Katie Norton,  
Head of PSHEe

The Corsham School

Mindfulness programmes normally offer attentional training alongside the cultivation of certain attitudes towards experience (such as curiosity and acceptance). Mindfulness is a skill and a process: 'paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally' (Jon Kabat-Zinn). So, for example, I might bring my attention now to the movement of fingers typing, body posture and eyes focusing on the marks of the page, while also being aware of thoughts forming into words.

Mindfulness is becoming a bit of a buzz word. But at its simplest, it is the body and mind fully inhabiting the present moment – not worrying about the past or fretting over the future. That this kind of state can lead to greater well-being is a well-established belief.

Mindfulness could be described as non-cognitive in the sense that it views physical and emotional aspects of our experience as equally valid to cognition. Yet it is perhaps better known as 'metacognition' as it also helps us to view all experience – physical sensations, emotions, thoughts and behaviours – from a slightly elevated, observer's point of view.

For example, in one mindfulness lesson a group of students were worried about the upcoming sports day. As they explored this further, they were able to observe their thoughts – 'people are going to laugh at me', or 'I'm going to fall over'; body sensations (tightening muscles and heat); emotions (fear and worry); and likely behaviours, such as shouting at people or forgetting kit. Through such an awareness activity, participants can learn to self-regulate better. They start to understand that they don't have to follow the habitual reactions that these thoughts and feelings can lead to, and have freedom to make other behaviour choices, thus lessening reactivity.

### **Mindfulness at Corsham**

The Corsham School (TCS) started offering mindfulness courses to students in 2012. Students are taught the '.b' programme (short for 'stop, breathe and be') which has been adapted for teenagers by the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP).

After a successful pilot, delivering the eight-week course through fortnightly PSHE lessons to year 9, it was rolled out to other key stages. Now all students take the course in year 9; KS4 can take after-school refreshers in the build-up to exams; and KS5 can elect to take it as an option as part of their 'enrichment' curriculum. A version of the adult mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) courses is offered after school to staff; those who have completed the course meet weekly to refresh and discuss their practice.

These different strands of training form part of the 'mindfulness strategy'. The strategy's aim is to promote mental and physical well-being, to enhance teaching and learning, and to reduce the pressures all of us involved in education can experience, over and above the normal stresses of daily life.

### **Why does TCS have a mindfulness strategy?**

(i) To reduce stress and difficulty

A little stress is necessary in life: good stress ('eu', in the mindfulness vocabulary) motivates us to get up in the morning and get things done; it helps us to create, achieve and move forward.

However, there is a point where people move from feeling energised and motivated to feeling overwhelmed by expectations, workload or commitments. This is the kind of stress that can prevent both staff and students from achieving their potential.

Schools across the UK are reporting more instances of poor emotional and mental health, including rises in specific issues such as self-harm and depression. The Corsham School's leadership team has always valued social and emotional learning programmes that enhance a student's mental and emotional health, so mindfulness training fitted in well with the existing culture of caring for young people's well-being.

The '.b' and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programmes discuss the psycho-physiological impacts of long-term stress and offers participants strategies and skills to deal with current stressors in their lives. Recent large-scale research into the '.b' programme showed that students who trained in mindfulness reported lower stress and fewer depressive symptoms (Kuyken et al., 2013).

(ii) To improve teaching and learning

It is known that mental attitude has an impact on how well learners learn. Inevitably, if students are distressed and unable to cope they can't access learning opportunities at school.

Deleterious stress levels impair executive functions in the brain such as focused attention or emotional control, however mindfulness courses train participants to notice stress reactions and 'respond rather than react' to them. So instead of automatically clicking into unproductive behaviour (over-worrying, becoming aggressive or disengaging), young people have the freedom to choose more creative responses.

Studies report that training in mindfulness in schools can help students concentrate and learn better (Semple et al., 2010). For example, one high-achieving student at TCS who experiences anxiety reflected 10 months after taking the course: 'I use the .b strategies in times of high stress: for example, if I get a bad mark, I will use the thought bus to carry the worry away and replace it with "maybe next time".' Instead of over-worrying about the 'bad mark', she is able to put her thoughts about it into perspective and refocus on the task in hand.

Equally, the school's mindfulness strategy recognises that staff well-being is a vital resource and must also be a priority. The courses offered to school staff allow them to better deal with stress and difficulty in their working life. All staff who took the course in the summer term of 2014 reported positive outcomes. This was a typical response from one participant: 'I am much more positive and much better able to cope with daily stresses and anxieties.' Despite involving after-school commitments and requiring time for 'home practice', the waiting list for the next course is nearly full, so teachers value this training too.

Teachers practising mindfulness also has an impact on students. Teacher participants report that being calmer and using mindfulness skills has enabled them to be more 'present' with their students and to better meet their needs, as well as helping them to manage their own workload and deal with stress better. This then has a positive impact on teaching and learning in schools.

(iii) To increase well-being

Studies have shown that mindfulness training can allow young people to feel happier, calmer and more fulfilled (Kuyken et al., 2013), and also correlates well with positive emotion, popularity and friendship-extensiveness (Miners, 2008). Other studies report links between mindfulness and increased self-esteem, better sleep, more self-regulation and less impulsivity (Biegel et al, 2009; Saltzman and Goldin, 2008).

The school is aware however that there are occasions when a student's circumstances (such as recent trauma or a depressive episode) will mean that time for reflection and quiet isn't appropriate.

The school's mindfulness strategy has now led to two members of staff being trained in '.b' in order to teach all year 9s, as well as a number of staff taking the adult courses. Eventually, we hope to have more trained '.b' teachers and to be able to offer it to other groups in the school community, such as parents and governors.

Mindfulness training isn't a panacea for adolescent mental health issues and it can't remove the stressors inherent in the education system or in daily life. But it is something that can create more ease, space and freedom during a school day as well as invaluable life skills. As one year 9 student put it: it can be 'a life medicine'.

Reflections  
on three years  
of the New  
Philanthropy  
Capital's  
well-being  
measure

Dan Corry  
and James Noble

New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)

Researchers generally agree that young people's well-being is linked to their school achievement<sup>1</sup>, and it is a key assumption of many in the education system that improving well-being is worthwhile and has a positive impact on academic success and long-term prospects.

Given the importance of well-being we ought to have a reliable way to measure it.

Unfortunately, and despite attempts by organisations like the Children's Society, progress towards a national well-being measure for children and young people has moved in fits and starts. Ofsted have periodically considered it<sup>2</sup>, but despite increasing public and political focus on well-being, have downgraded their interest since 2011, focusing on 'academic excellence' rather than 'peripherals'.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, while the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has started regularly measuring adult well-being, it is still considering how it can be applied to children and young people.<sup>4</sup>

NPC (New Philanthropy Capital) is a charity consultancy and think tank which aims to help other charities to be as effective as possible. We promote the importance of research and impact measurement in the charity sector and have been interested in young people's well-being for many years. Being free of political and institutional constraints, we have pressed ahead with developing our own well-being measure. This was launched in 2011 after three years of development and piloting, with funding from a variety of charitable organisations.

The measure is an online questionnaire for 11-16 year olds that includes 40 carefully designed and validated questions covering eight aspects of well-being (self-esteem, resilience, emotional well-being, friends, family, community, school and overall life satisfaction). It takes an entirely subjective approach, so young people are asked to record how they rate aspects of their lives. Charities and schools typically use it to measure well-being before and after an intervention so as to get some sense of impact. In contrast, ONS's proposals are to focus on mostly objective measures like sports participation and health. There's merit to both objective and subjective methods, and ideally we would combine them, but it is worth noting that there has been increasing recognition of the value of subjective approaches in recent years.<sup>5</sup>

Crucially, our well-being measure has allowed us to collect national baseline data so organisations can see how their young people compare to the average. To date, the findings have provided evidence to help organisations improve their services and demonstrate impact to funders. It has been used by organisations such as the Outward Bound Trust, Toyne Hall and Save the Children as well as by a number of schools.

Young people's self-ratings are more polarised than adults'. Over the first three years of the well-being measure we have built up a database of c7,000 questionnaires completed by young people in the UK, which means we can start to look in detail at the findings.

Of course this sample is not representative of all young people. Rather, it has been determined by the organisations we have worked with and the young people that have used their services. Nonetheless, the patterns in the data give us insights into the factors associated with well-being and how it varies between young people.

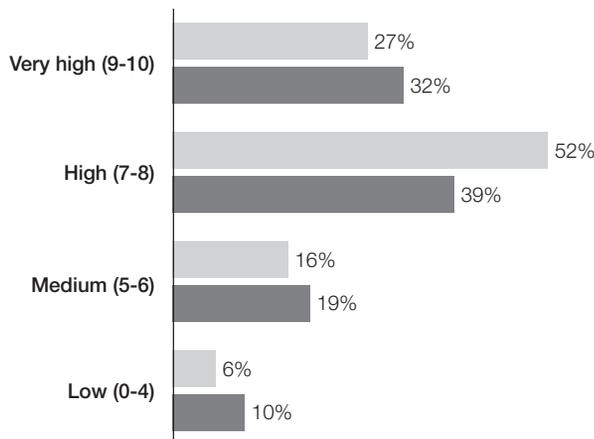
We feel confident because at the top line our findings are consistent with previous research. For example, our approach to measuring overall well-being is to use a scale from 0–10 (represented as a ladder<sup>6</sup>). This is similar to the approach used by ONS with adults and to that recommended by the Children’s Society in their 2012 report.<sup>7</sup> As the chart below shows, the mean score for the young people we have surveyed is 7.35, which is broadly consistent with the Children’s Society result of 7.8 and the average for adults (7.5 in 2014).

Looking at the chart we can see that as well as having slightly lower than average well-being the young people in our sample are more polarised; there are more young people than adults who rate their lives as both 9-10 and below 6 out of 10.

### Overall Wellbeing Rating

**NPC question:** The top of the ladder ‘10’ is the best possible life for you and the bottom ‘0’ is the worst possible life for you. In general, where on the ladder do you feel you stand at the moment?

**ONS question:** Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Please answer on a scale of 0-10 where 0 is ‘not at all’ and 10 is ‘completely’.



■ UK adults 2013-14. Average: 7.5      ■ NPC Wellbeing Tool 11-16 year olds 2011-14. Average: 7.35.

Base: 6768 NPC Wellbeing Measure questionnaires completed (2011-14), 165,000 ONS wellbeing questionnaires (2013-14)

The data also enables us to look in more detail at which aspects of their lives young people are most and least happy with. At the top it is friends and family. Across all 40 questions the highest scores are found for ‘I have a lot of fun with my friends’ (93% answer positively) and ‘my friends are great’ (90%), followed closely by ‘my parents

treat me fairly' (86%) and 'I enjoy being at home with my family' (84%). At the bottom are dissatisfaction with their local community and feeling anxious; only 48% of young people agreed 'there are lots of fun things to do where I live', 35% said they 'worried a lot' and 24% agreed 'I am nervous or tense'.

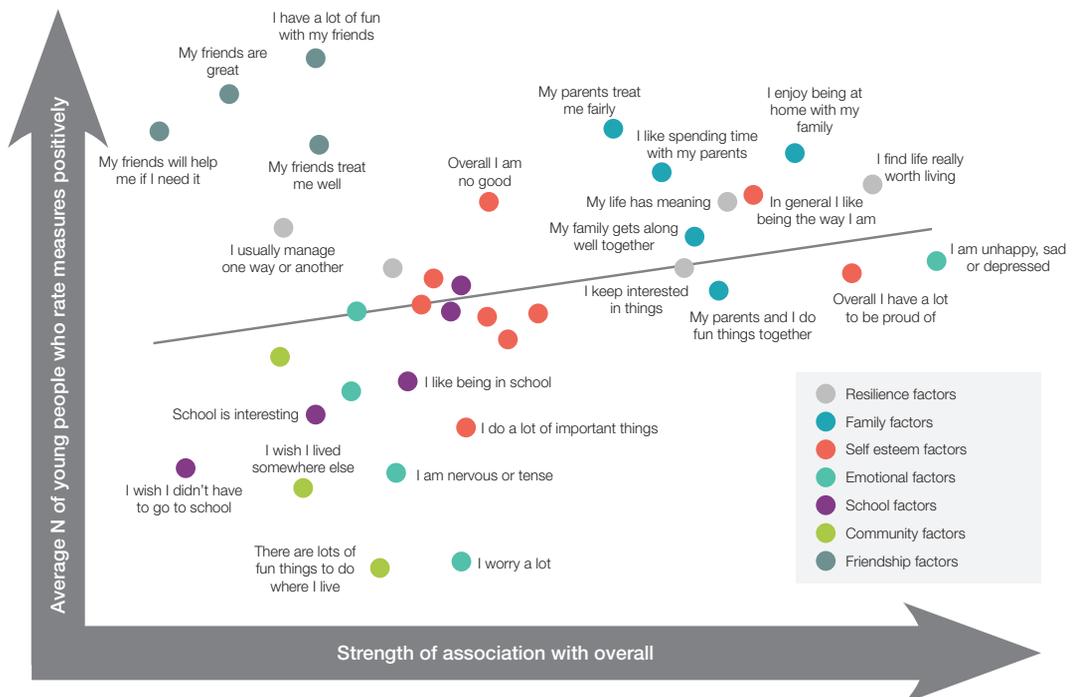
Where it gets really interesting is when we look at the strength of association between these factors and overall well-being. Here we find three particularly important clusters.

- what we call resilience factors, such as 'I find life really worth living' and 'my life has meaning'
- self-esteem factors like 'Overall I have a lot to be proud of' and 'In general I like being the way I am'
- family factors, in particular 'I enjoy being at home with my family'.

In the diagram below each circle represents a measure of well-being we asked about. Those placed towards the right of the chart are the most strongly associated with overall well-being, while those placed towards the top of the chart are those that young people rate most positively. To stop the chart being too cluttered we have labelled only the standout measures, however the colour coding highlights the broad factor they all fall under.

**NPC question:** The top of the ladder '10' is the best possible life for you and the bottom '0' is the worst possible life for you. In general, where on the ladder do you feel you stand at the moment?

**ONS question:** Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Please answer on a scale of 0-10 where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely'.



Base: 6768 NPC Wellbeing Measure questionnaires completed (2011-14)

It shows that measures to do with friendships, their local area and school are generally less important to overall well-being (hence to the left of the chart). We also find that while many young people say they 'worry a lot' it doesn't necessarily have a major impact on their overall well-being (it only had a medium level association). The policy implications are that if we really care about well-being then we should look to the right of the chart; self-esteem should be an important focus, along with efforts to give young people purpose / meaning and ensuring that family lives are happy.

We have also been using the data to compare well-being by age group and gender. Our earlier report, *Measure What You Treasure*<sup>8</sup>, described how well-being falls progressively from the ages of 11 through to 16, particularly among girls (whose emotional well-being and self-esteem show a particularly marked fall). This clearly has major policy implications.

We are continuing to develop the well-being measure and apply it in new settings. In 2014 we have been working with the London Mayor's Fund to measure change among young people involved in their Spirit of 2012 programme, and with the 'tri-borough' London authorities to develop and adapt the measure so it can be used by children with special needs.

### **Linking with academic achievement**

We also think it has potential for use by schools, perhaps as part of pupil monitoring systems that combine well-being with existing management information data. So far the main interest has come from the private schools sector, although a number of academy chains are showing interest. Perhaps state schools, which are under pressure to optimise league table places, will show more interest if we can achieve the holy grail: linking measures of well-being to academic achievement data on a large enough scale to explore the relationship in detail and help design policies that focus on the most important variables and the young people with greatest needs.

This could also link with another area of NPC's work, which is aimed at opening up official data. We are talking to DfE about the prospect of a 'Data Lab' that would enable charities and others to evaluate their interventions using longitudinal data on education and employment outcomes for young people they have worked with, and so allow them to secure a real measure of their impact – along the lines of the existing award-winning Justice Data Lab run by the Ministry of Justice.

Few would deny that the increasingly sophisticated use of pupil data by schools and others over the last 10-15 years has delivered real benefits for the education system and pupils. In our view, approaches that focus on softer outcomes, like the well-being measure, along with better access to official data will be the next stage of this journey.

1. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/197650/DFE-RB253.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/197650/DFE-RB253.pdf)
2. [www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/m/Measuring%20happiness.pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/m/Measuring%20happiness.pdf)
3. [www.theguardian.com/education/2012/jan/16/children-well-being-schools-ofsted](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/jan/16/children-well-being-schools-ofsted)
4. [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_355140.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_355140.pdf)
5. [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/well-being/publications/measuring-subjective-well-being-in-the-uk.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/well-being/publications/measuring-subjective-well-being-in-the-uk.pdf)
6. Taken from the work of Professor Hadley Cantril, a psychologist at Princeton University in the 1950s: [www.well-beingmeasure.com/acknowledgements](http://www.well-beingmeasure.com/acknowledgements)
7. [www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/research\\_docs/Developing%20an%20Index%20of%20Children's%20Subjective%20Well-being%20in%20England.pdf](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/research_docs/Developing%20an%20Index%20of%20Children's%20Subjective%20Well-being%20in%20England.pdf)
8. [www.thinknpc.org/publications/measure-what-you-treasure/](http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/measure-what-you-treasure/)
9. The Justice Data Lab enables charities (and other providers) to compare the reoffending rates of their service users with those of a matched control group of 'similar' offenders. to test how effective an intervention has been on reducing reoffending.

What can schools do to ensure that students leave as self-aware, driven, resilient, self-assured young people able to succeed in all aspects of life?

**Jackie Beere OBE**

What can schools do to ensure that students leave ... able to succeed in all aspects of life?

Are a fistful of good exam results a sure sign that your students are the self-aware, self-motivated, resilient young people that would impress any employer?

The pressure to achieve outcomes has encouraged schools to use a range of interventions beyond the classroom including cramming sessions, breakfast, weekend and holiday revision, mentoring and coaching, one-to-one tutoring and changing exam boards and entry points. But many teachers worry that all this intervention can lead to a learned helplessness, making it more likely students will suffer in future from fragile confidence, lack of initiative and be prone to anxiety and mental illness.

How can we make sure that, as well as that clutch of good exam results, our youngsters leave school as resilient self-managers, adaptable, determined, courageous and curious, confident communicators and effective learners? This has been my lifetime career mission.

Very young children are more likely to be passionate about learning – learning to walk, talk and find out about the world. In the right environment some children learn to be confident, resilient, self-motivated, continually curious and courageous risk-takers in learning. But many teachers tell me that more children are starting at reception unable to dress themselves, let alone pick up a pencil. At the other end of the spectrum are children with parents so over-protective they would rather their child wasn't forced to do maths or PE because it upsets them; or so over-ambitious they continually demand to know why their child isn't top of the class. Combine this with constant testing and the growth of peer pressure and social media, and the result may be children with performance anxiety, more concerned with getting it right than stretching themselves and risking learning something new. This does not develop the habits of the best learners.

Carol Dweck's research shows successful learners have a growth mindset, who know that resilience, effort and getting it wrong are part of the path to mastery. Hard work and 'purposeful practice' as the route to success is also promulgated by Matthew Syed in his book *Bounce*, in which he also challenges the myth of innate talent.

If we want a school that delivers the exam results and nurtures a growth mindset in every classroom, what are the essential strategies required?

### **1. Classroom teaching that celebrates the struggles, processes and strategies inherent in learning**

Teaching which encourages children to thrive on the challenge to make progress, even when it's hard and scary. Teachers who have high expectations of every pupil, challenging them to grow their brains by developing strategies to overcome mistakes and bounce back from failure by:

- giving 'tough love' feedback on pupils' work, highlighting specifically what is needed for improvement and making sure they act on it
- reflecting on and discussing the learning journey and the learning strategies employed that could be used next time
- Doing more of what they find the hardest to make sure they improve through 'purposeful practice'
- creating an atmosphere of unconditional support for each other's progress in the classroom so that peer learning can occur and peer assessment is critical yet supportive
- rewarding and praising effort, not just outcome – recent research has confirmed that over-praising average work can be detrimental to pupil progress
- encouraging pupils to take responsibility and ownership of their development as a learner.

### **2. Effective teaching, research and evaluation**

A school that learns from its own mistakes and rigorously self-evaluates at all levels will get no surprises from Ofsted visits. All teachers and teaching assistants should be involved in mini research projects evaluating what is and isn't working in the classroom, from seating plans to revision classes, questioning techniques to behaviour regimes. This research would include asking students, teachers, teaching assistants and parents: 'How are we doing?' 'How do we know?' 'What else can we try?' – and sharing this on a regular basis with staff. In this way staff can develop a language for learning to share with pupils.

### **3. Train teachers and TAs to model growth mindset themselves by being the best learners in the class**

Encourage this with performance management that rewards teacher growth and development. Use lesson observation as a learning opportunity rather than a judgement tool and encourage more frequent peer observation. The research projects should create learning forums that everyone can be involved in so that all teachers are constantly adapting their practice and learning from each other. Peer coaching is a highly effective tool for supporting this practice.

**4. Have a vision for excellence in academic achievement alongside personal development – and involve the whole community**

Demonstrate this with a website that has downloadable revision sessions, extra-curricular activities, learning forums, student blogs and lesson videos, international Skype debates, mindset workshops and anything else that holds up a mirror to your eclectic offer. Invite parents to join lessons and run regular workshops for them on emotional intelligence and 'how to support your child as a learner' that encourage the growth mindset at home.

**5. Teach children (and staff) about how their brain works, what anxiety is and how to channel stress to make it useful**

Show staff and pupils how to manage their thinking and why CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy) works. Teach strategies for self-management and metacognition through off-timetable days and programmes within PSHE to complement the growth mindset culture of the classroom. Have additional sessions for those with extra needs. A child who lacks empathy will benefit from direct instruction on seeing another point of view. There are plenty of resources out there to help – I have summarised many in my books full of lessons and projects.

**6. Develop a full and engaging extra-curricular programme beyond the regular sports and clubs**

Insist that all children take part in events that really challenge them to move out of their comfort zones, for example:

- sports challenges where we really celebrate winners and losers
- 'Strictly dancing' events for those that can't dance
- challenging projects such as rocket building or creating a school garden
- business enterprise challenges where children set up their own companies
- ensuring that every child takes part in volunteer or charity work in the community
- interviewing for and appointing a student Ofsted team to inspect the school and report back to staff
- provide a variety of performance opportunities, from pantomime to Shakespeare, so that every child can be involved
- create a reward system for effort and persistence in the above programmes.

## **7. Every teacher or TA needs to model standard English and ensure that reading, writing and communication skills are continually improving**

Literacy across the curriculum is now an expectation in every school. Communication skills are the key to high achievement and self-confidence. If children can communicate their feelings, they are less likely to suffer in silence when anxious and stressed, which can add to those negative emotions.

For too many children, school isn't a place where they develop confidence as speakers and writers. Putting literacy and communication skills at the heart of the school growth mindset culture should mean that every child can blog, debate, present, pitch, coach, discuss and indeed teach on a regular basis in the classroom and in a more public arena. Developing their public speaking skills – even if they find it as scary as I did for many years – builds confidence and flexibility. School productions are often a catalyst for children finding their voice, so it should be the mission of every school to provide such opportunities for performance.

It is ironic that when we try to protect children from tough experiences such as getting it wrong, coming last or failing an exam, what we actually do is make them more vulnerable to anxiety. When we struggle, and celebrate it, we develop strategies for coping that immunise us against future challenges and build our resilience.

Our schools need to have a relentless determination to achieve outstanding progress in fulfilling a child's academic potential. The most powerful and productive way to do this is to empower every child, from the most able and privileged to the most disadvantaged, to be the most resilient, determined learner they can be.

### **Further reading:**

Jackie is presently writing *Love Teaching... GRIT* (published by Crownhouse Ltd) which explores how we can develop more resilience in classrooms.

Jackie Beere and Terri Broughton: *The Perfect Teacher Coach*

Jackie Beere: *The KS3 Learners Toolkit* and *The Primary Learners Toolkit*

Sean Covey: *The 7 habits of Highly Effective Teenagers*

Charles Duhigg: *The Power of Habit*

Carol Dweck: *Mindset: The psychology of success*

Paul Ginnis: *The Teacher's Toolkit*

John Hattie and Gregory Yates: *Visible learning and the Science of How We Learn*

Matthew Syed: *Bounce*

Dr Steve Peters: *The Chimp Paradox*

# The best kept secret: youth work

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A recent contributor to the National Youth Agency's (NYA) 50th anniversary celebration collage *50 Faces of Youth Work* described the power of youth work as one of the best kept secrets, and he should know because his own future, in one of Edinburgh's most deprived peripheral housing estates, was transformed by his engagement with youth workers.

Within the profession our understanding of the impact of youth work is clear: at the NYA we define youth work as:

'an educational process that engages with young people in a curriculum built from their lived experience and their personal beliefs and aspirations. This process extends and deepens a young person's understanding of themselves, their community and the world in which they live and supports them to proactively bring about positive changes. The youth worker develops positive relationships with young people built on mutual respect.'

Traditionally youth workers have operated in a variety of settings, open access youth clubs, detached workers on the streets, in targeted projects and programmes, and in some places in schools. Youth workers are valued in these settings because of their capacity to build positive relationships with young people and because there is a strong and growing evidence base highlighting the vital role youth workers can play in building critical 'soft skills'. This is something of a misnomer perhaps, as developing these skills in young people lacking confidence, motivation, resilience and social awareness is not an easy task.

The Young Foundation's Outcomes Framework, produced on behalf of the Catalyst Consortium to help youth work demonstrate its impact, illustrates that capabilities such as resilience, communication and negotiation are increasingly being cited as foundations of employability. Certainly the growing number of major corporates prepared to invest in youth work programmes that support soft skill development suggests the business world understands this.

The government's now seemingly abandoned youth strategy 'Positive for Youth' talked about the importance of personal and social development as a core outcome of youth work. It stated that every young person should 'have the opportunity to reach their full potential in their personal and social development – through opportunities for personal challenge and responsibility, including work experience, and relationships with adults they trust that help them develop the character, qualities and capabilities that they need to learn, build relationships, make informed choices, and become employable'.

In NYA however, we have always felt that young people were best served when the offer to them was holistic, bringing together the impact of great teaching, with the supportive and developmental impact of youth work. And so, in the autumn of 2013 we established a commission to examine the role of youth work in formal education. We wanted not only to better understand that relationship, but also to gauge the extent and range of existing collaboration and highlight any barriers and obstacles. Our ambition was finally to encourage policymakers to recognise the value of youth work in schools and provide guidance to both sectors on how they should and could collaborate.

The commission was chaired by the former children's minister Tim Loughton. Commissioners included Baroness Beverly Hughes, who had been minister with responsibility for youth in the previous government, and representatives from the Association of Directors of Children's Services, Teach First, the Children's Society and British Youth Council. A call for evidence of current practice amazed us by resulting in nearly 700 responses and we were further surprised by the number of these responses that came from schools as opposed to youth work organisations. Subsequent evidence sessions and visits revealed, as we had suspected, that a significant number of school leaders recognised the value of youth work and were commissioning services of youth workers directly or working in partnership with local agencies to ensure their young people had access to this additional level of support and development.

We found that the youth work in / with schools fell into a number of broad categories, including targeted / referral programmes where young people with particular issues were given additional support by youth workers, and open access / drop-in provision where young people in effect self-referred. We found youth workers in the classroom delivering PHSE and citizenship as well as complementary programmes such as Duke of Edinburgh Awards and ongoing information advice and guidance. We also heard from a number of schools that engaged youth workers with particular expertise to ensure real pupil voice and engagement in decision-making.

In reading and hearing the evidence it was clear that some school leaders were very committed to the involvement of youth workers with their pupils. I particularly liked the school that offered a level two qualification in youth work, delivered by a youth worker, not only as a vocational option but also to build a culture of peer support and mentoring. A headteacher from Redcar and Cleveland, in partnership with the police, commissioned detached youth work on the streets in her local community in the evenings and at weekends. She explained her motivation for so doing with the simple but obvious statement that what happened on the street corner on a Friday night had as much impact on outcomes and attainment for her pupils as what happened on a Monday morning in the classroom.

However, amid all this positive evidence we also found things to concern us. We were surprised that youth workers themselves were not particularly good at explaining what they had to offer. Some teachers were very unclear about what youth workers did and what contribution they could make. Mutual understanding was discouraged, rather than embedded, in initial training.

All our findings led to a series of recommendations which were submitted to the government, which has now articulated a new priority: 'to support schools to prepare well-rounded young people for success in adult life.' It represents a new opportunity, I believe, to reinvigorate the growing engagement of youth workers in school settings and in communities supporting young people's engagement, attainment and progression.

**Further reading:**

NYA, *2020 Vision for Youth Work* (2014): <http://www.nya.org.uk/resource/nya-vision-youth-work-2020/>

Young Foundation, *Framework of Outcomes for Young People* (2012): <http://youngfoundation.org/publications/framework-of-outcomes-for-young-people/>

Cabinet Office, *Positive for Youth* (2010): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/positive-for-youth-a-new-approach-to-cross-government-policy-for-young-people-aged-13-to-19/positive-for-youth-the-statement>

NYA, *Commission into the role of youth work in formal education* (2013): <http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Commission-into-the-role-of-youth-work-in-formal-education.pdf>





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