

The impact of regular mindfulness practice on staff and pupils at Abbey School

- Mindfulness is being increasingly used as therapeutic tool throughout school and in class settings. Colleagues from other areas have been to observe my class practising mindfulness and, informally, it has been noted by others that daily mindfulness has a significant impact on the behaviour for learning and atmosphere of my current class.
- I have a large amount of “soft” evidence that mindfulness is a valuable resource and a practice that merits further research and implementation.
- Mindfulness is evidenced on Pupil Premium Plans and EHC plans and Mindfulness is becoming part of the school ethos and common language
- Mindfulness is being used in some forms in all classes
- Mindfulness “tasters” have been offered to parents.
- Some members of staff that attended dotB “Mindfulness in Schools” program have continued to develop a personal practice.
- It has proved very difficult to collect “hard” empirical due to a range of confounding variables, such as mindfulness being practised at times when behaviour incidences may be higher.



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Summary of the Project

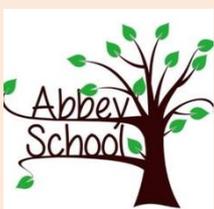
“Children’s mental health is at the core of the curriculum (at Abbey).”

The World Health Organisation recently stated that by 2030, mental health issues will form the biggest burden on health care resources including heart conditions and cancer (cited in The Telegraph, Woods, J. 2014)

“Adolescence is a vulnerable time for the onset of mental illness: 75% of mental disorders begin before the age of 24, and half by age 15. By promoting good mental health and intervening early, particularly in the crucial childhood and teenage years, we can help to prevent mental illness from developing and mitigate its effects when it does (Department of Health, 2011). Citation Kuyken et al (The Oxford Mindfulness Centre; Myriad project).

Rationale:-

- There is a strong school ethos of supporting emotional well-being in order to facilitate learning.
- However, measuring the progress made in “soft” areas was an area for improvement in the last Ofsted report.
- We have a large number of pupils who do not have the tools to regulate and manage strong emotions.
- Several members of staff attended .B “Mindfulness in Schools” training and the impact of this should be cascaded through school.
- Some students have mindfulness on their personalised intervention timetable and the impacts of this need to be measured.
- Evidence suggests that mindfulness is a statistically significant successful intervention in other schools (Weare , 2012; Roeser et al., 2012)
- Mindfulness has low on costs (after initial training) and therefore represents “good value” in terms of impact on progress relative to per capita investment.



Recommendation 1

Continue to promote and develop mindfulness with pupils because:-

- All teachers and TAs asked reported that mindfulness has a positive impact on at least some of the class.
- Pupil Feedback responses included:-
- “It is amazing. Nice. I love doing it” “You can chill and relax your brain from all the mischief you have done.” “It helps me calm down after break” “it really takes my mind off what has happened” “It helps me think” “Calms me down when I am hyper”
- In addition, a growing body of research in other settings suggests that “Mindfulness is therefore likely to have beneficial effects on the emotional wellbeing, 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.” Weare (2012)

Recommendation 2

Extend the offer of mindfulness training to parents and carers for the following reasons:-

Mindfulness has had a significant impact on one family at the school because of the beneficial impact it has had on one pupil's sleep patterns, thus improving a significant lifestyle parameter for the entire family.

Research is accumulating, particularly in the U.S., that a highly significant outcome of MT is the potential impact on the quality of care given by parents and care-givers because of the impact parameters such as emotional regulation and empathy. Benn et al (2012).



Recommendation 3

- *I recommend that mindfulness training for staff is facilitated in order to increase staff wellbeing, decrease the potential for burn out and improve emotional intelligence, communication and awareness competencies specific to teaching.*
- The researchers found that those who received the mindfulness training displayed reductions in psychological stress, improvements in classroom organization and increases in self-compassion. Flook et al (2013)
- Post course feedback of the dotB Mindfulness in Schools course suggests that some of the participants felt that mindfulness was a valuable tool for home and work (4/6) However, many participants did not complete the feedback and compliance at home as not been as strong as regular practice at school.
- A randomized controlled study assessed the efficacy of a 5-week MT program for parents and educators of children with special needs and concluded that “MT significantly influenced caregiving competence specific to teaching. Mindfulness changes at program completion mediated outcomes at follow-up, suggesting its importance in maintaining emotional balance and facilitating well-being in parents and teachers of children with developmental challenges. Benn et al (2012).



How the project effected my practice

- I have become a strong advocate for mindfulness in schools but initially this was a largely intuitive feeling. Therefore it has been very rewarding to begin to collect a body of evidence to suggest that it can have several positive outcomes.
- The research I have undertaken has opened up new, exciting lines of enquiry about potential positive impacts on staff and parents and care givers. I feel inspired by the potential impact on school and community.
- I have greatly enjoyed the opportunity to re-connect with aspects of scientific research and enquiry. I am deeply interested in continuing and expanding research into mindfulness in our setting.



Next Steps

1. Establish a mindfulness mandate group to further develop and enhance mediation practice within school.
2. Develop and deliver a mindfulness course to parents and carers.
3. Use long term case studies and assessments of psychological parameters to assess the impact of mindfulness interventions.
4. Make connections with other schools for the purposes of sharing research, ideas and resources.
5. Create mindfulness lion leaders amongst pupils. Investigate possibility of a lunch-time or after school club led by pupils.
6. Further investigate other methods of practising mindfulness, such as Yoga to include as many pupils as possible.
7. Create a mindfulness resource hub on the school website and investigate the possibility of developing a mindfulness blog.



References

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