



## MINDFULNESS IN WALES: A Toolkit for Introducing Mindfulness in Education

### Executive Summary

The Mindfulness Toolkit sets out to provide the information an education setting might need to develop a strategic mindfulness journey to embed high quality mindfulness across the institution in a sustainable and effective way. It is designed to support the wellbeing of staff and learners in any education setting in Wales as well as implementation of the Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing and the new curriculum for Wales, particularly the four purposes of education and the health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE).

It has been developed from good practice in Wales and elsewhere with input from as many sectors and relevant organisations as possible. It forms part of a wider 'living strategy' for mindfulness in Wales which is developing to include health, public service and other workplaces, community and more, which will support the aims of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The involvement of wider society in Wales will amplify the work in education settings and contribute to making Wales a kinder, more compassionate and responsive nation.

We have looked at the potential for mindfulness in all sectors of education to support the concerns about children and young people's emotional and mental health. We know that 50% of mental health problems begin before the age of 15 years and 75% by age 24 years so early prevention is important. This work has been given even greater significance by the experiences of learners, staff, leaders and families in response to Covid-19 as well as the systemic change required to implement the transformation agenda and the far-reaching new curriculum.

### Mindfulness in an Education Context

For all of us in education mindfulness can help us cope with the pressures and uncertainties of life and work, connect with people and places, flourish through appreciating ourselves, others and the world around us, and provide the perspective and vision to empower us to change what isn't working for us. These four aspects are key to our wellbeing.

**COPE - CONNECT - FLOURISH - EMPOWER CHANGE**

The Toolkit draws on the good practice criteria identified in the Estyn Review *Healthy and Happy: School impact on pupil health and wellbeing* which also forms an important element of the draft Statutory Guidance in The Whole School Approach.

The key aspects of good practice identified in the Estyn review which can be applied to mindfulness in education for all age groups and settings in Wales include:

- ☐ quality consistent training for staff

- ❑ ongoing support in schools/clusters/colleges/universities/areas
- ❑ embedding mindfulness in a whole school/college/university or setting approach
- ❑ cross curriculum application
- ❑ a spiral curriculum throughout education
- ❑ involving families where possible

We know that many schools have introduced entry-level or mindfulness-inspired activities perhaps using Apps or staff experience of mindfulness. Staff and learners generally enjoy these activities and learners will have various responses. They may be more aware of their current emotional state, they may feel calmer, more focused and able to concentrate or more able to make effective choices. These can be a great introduction to mindfulness but may not give learners the more sustainable understanding, the range of skills and the self regulation to embed mindfulness in their lives. The difference between mindful activities and a high quality mindfulness curriculum is like the saying “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, but teach him to fish and you feed him for life.” In line with the criteria set out in Estyn’s *Healthy and Happy* Review we make a distinction in this Toolkit between mindfulness-inspired activities and the high quality mindfulness programmes available which will contribute effectively to the Health and Wellbeing AoLE and the Whole School Approach.

## Cost Effectiveness

In order to introduce and sustain mindfulness in an effective way to enable to full benefits, including training as many staff as possible in an 8 week course and supporting key staff to access the further training to teach one of the learners’ programmes there is an up-front cost (guide costs are set out in Annex 2 of the Toolkit). Once staff have been trained there is minimal ongoing cost in supporting staff and providing the curriculum.

Training staff who go on to deliver a high quality mindfulness programme to learners over five years reduces the cost per head to around £5. But perhaps the greater cost effectiveness relates to staff themselves, especially in these challenging times. Research by Katherine Weare *Evidence for Mindfulness: Impact on the Wellbeing and Performance of School Staff (2014)* found:

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| <b>Increased:</b><br>Wellbeing<br>Mindfulness<br>Self-compassion<br>Sustained attention<br>Emotional regulation<br>Teaching efficacy | <b>Decreased:</b><br>Stress<br>Anxiety<br>Depression<br>Demotivation<br>Time-urgency<br>Burnout symptoms |
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This could have a significant impact on staff absence and quality of teaching providing a cost benefit in terms of cover costs and performance.

## How Mindfulness fits with other Initiatives

We recognise that there is no room or time to pursue initiatives that do not form part of a coherent and complementary whole. We have set out how mindfulness links to and supports a range of activities already being implemented in education settings. Mindfulness

can be a significant contributor to the curriculum in its own right but can also be an enabler for learners in all aspects of their lives.

## Mindfulness Embedded for All

Mindfulness provides skills and understanding which are relevant to all ages and abilities. We have a range of programmes that have the potential to make mindfulness accessible for a wide range of additional learning needs. The programmes identified in the Toolkit are designed for whole class teaching and the aims of cope, connect, flourish and empower change are relevant for all learners, especially as part of the new curriculum.

## Good Practice Examples

We have drawn on the developing good practice in a range of settings in Wales where mindfulness has been introduced in different ways and in various contexts. These case studies are intended to provide examples which might help other settings in starting their own strategic mindfulness journey. We look forward to collecting others as more settings develop their strategic mindfulness journey.

## Costs and Models of Implementation

The Toolkit sets out the programmes currently available which best meet the criteria set out in the Estyn Review *Healthy and Happy: School impact on pupil wellbeing*. It demonstrates the training routes education staff would be able to take to develop their own mindfulness and to enable them to access training programmes which would equip them to teach high quality programmes to learners and includes guide costs to inform ongoing strategic planning.

## Links with the New Curriculum

Annex 3 sets out how mindfulness can support the four purposes of education and the What Matters Statements of the Health and Wellbeing AoLE.

## Evaluating the Impact of Mindfulness in Education

We need to be sure our good intentions translate into practice and actually make a positive difference to the adults and learners we work with. This Toolkit (Annex 4) identifies a range of measures which are available to help us demonstrate the impact of mindfulness for adults and learners in education.

Evaluating impact suggestions included here fall into three main categories:

1. Evidence and observations directly related to mindfulness in the classroom
2. The contribution made by mindfulness to the Progression Steps for the Health and Wellbeing AoLE and the Whole School Approach
3. More formal research and validated tools for measuring wellbeing

We will continue to work with settings to identify ways to capture the developing understanding and skills without adding to the assessment burden. We believe the new assessment arrangements and evidence from some of the existing tools in common use will be important in this task and provide some examples of how they have been used to date.

## Conclusion

Introducing and embedding a range of mindfulness practices and understanding some of the underpinning neuroscience over time help develop focus and attention, regulate emotions and calm ourselves, connect with others and encourage curiosity, kindness, appreciation and gratitude. Mindfulness is much more than coping strategies – it's about empowerment, self-awareness and creativity.

These strategies are as important for staff as they are for learners, as we move forward into a period of significant systemic change as part of the National Mission for Education. We believe mindfulness can support education staff to cope with the challenges they are facing due to the impact of COVID-19, and to help strengthen their resilience to take forward the exciting new developments. We hope it will give as many learners as possible the tools which might enable them not only to cope better with the world in which they are growing up but also perhaps the skills, awareness and perspective to change it for the better.



Please see the full document

[MINDFULNESS IN WALES: A Toolkit for Introducing Mindfulness in Education](#) for more detailed information.