

Is Paws b making a difference in my school?

CASE STUDY SUMMARY

School:	Llwyncrwn Primary School
Location:	Pontypridd, South Wales
School Type:	Primary
MiSP Curriculum:	Paws b, SML
Age Group/s:	7-11
Author:	Matthew Jones
Role:	Acting Assistant Head
Issue/s Addressed:	Impact, continuing practice.

I trained to teach **Paws b** in 2016, and have taught the course to my class each year since then. Last summer, I completed the MiSP **School Mindfulness Lead** course, qualifying for a supported place due to the high proportion of children eligible for free school meals at my school. I currently teach a mixed age class of Year 3 and 4 children.

I'm often asked about the impact of teaching **Paws b** at my school, but I'm never quite sure how best to respond. I'll usually say something about how I've noticed improved relationships, and how the course gives me and the class a shared vocabulary that we can use when things go wrong. For example, in conversations with children following an incident, I'll refer to concepts taught in **Paws b** such as that of the

'storytelling mind', the 'fight and flight' response, or how we are using the prefrontal cortex of the brain when we are concentrating, doing our best or making good choices.

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One boy told me, after yet another crisis, "My amygdala was too quick for me!" At least now he has some understanding of what's happening to him when the panic begins. Beyond the duration of the course, though, I've never monitored whether the children continue to use the practices on their own. I request an impact survey from MiSP when the courses end, and I am always encouraged by the outcomes. Occasionally, children tell me that they have used one of the practices at home, and some have even taught their parents and siblings how to do them. But in terms of long-term impact, I've never really known how much use the children make of the practices and concepts that are taught when the course is over.

I believe that teaching mindfulness needs to be 'invitational'. During **Paws b** lessons, I encourage the class to join in with the practices as best they can. And it's fine if they choose not to, as long as they allow others to practise. At the end of the course, my approach has been to offer a drop-in **Mindfulness Club** one

lunchtime a week. Children are welcome to come along and practice together and to talk about how they use mindfulness outside the Paws b lessons. The club has a number of regular members, and we enjoy practising and talking together, but beyond this I am yet to find a way to integrate mindfulness into the teaching day that respects the wishes of all - those who are enthusiastic about the practices as well as those who are less engaged.



With this in mind, I didn't know how to respond to a request from Emma Goddard, Operations and Support Officer at MiSP, who was gathering information about how supported places are helping schools. "Do you feel that Paws b is making a difference in your school?" she asked. As usual, I didn't have a very good answer, so I resolved to find out. As I was still half way through teaching Paws b to my current class, I decided to survey children that I had taught Paws b to in previous years.

I had recently seen the post, 'Mindfulness in Schools - Seeing The Impact', on the MiSP website, and remembered reading about the charity's fundamental aims:

- For all students to know about mindfulness
- For most to enjoy it
- For many to use it now and again
- For some to practise daily
- For as many as possible to remember it.

I took these aims and created a brief online questionnaire, asking the children from my previous

classes to respond. I also used some questions similar to those used in the MiSP impact survey. The response was heartening. 95% said that they had enjoyed doing the Paws b course when they were in my class. They remembered most of the practices, and I was delighted to discover that two thirds of them still use them at least sometimes. Five children revealed that they practise daily. I had no idea.

The survey further revealed that the children used the practices to help them in many different ways. For example, they use them to help with friends and family, to cope with difficult feelings, to help with performance in sport, drama and music, and to support themselves when 'having a wobble'. Favourite practices included 'finger breathing' and the 'petal practice', although all the practices taught as part of Paws b were being used by at least some of the children.

Most revealing of all, perhaps, was the fact that only half the children surveyed knew about the Mindfulness Club - and 27 of them said they would like to come! So, there was a lesson to be learned for me about getting the news 'out there' about the opportunities for mindfulness in school. I've since relaunched the club at the Schools Sit Together activity for Children's Mental Health week 2020, using my regular club members as Mindfulness Ambassadors, and I intend to champion the club more publicly from now on.

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I was reassured to learn that the Paws b course had given the children a toolbox of strategies that many had chosen to return to. Carrying out the survey renewed my confidence that teaching mindfulness is of benefit to children, and left me feeling inspired to 'grow' mindfulness further at my school. And I'm now challenging myself to find new ways to bring mindfulness into my day to day teaching, both inside and outside the classroom.

I am thankful that I took the time to find out, because next time someone asks me if Paws b is making a difference in my school, I'll have a much better answer.