

Mindfulness at a Pupil Referral Unit

CASE STUDY SUMMARY

School:	Dacorum Education Support Centre
Location:	Hertfordshire
School Type:	Pupil Referral Unit
MiSP Curriculum:	Paws b and .b
Age Group/s:	5-16
Author:	Clare Winter
Role:	KS3 Leader / SENDCo

Dacorum Education Support Centre (DESC) is a pupil referral unit working with young people, their families, schools and other professionals. DESC works with around 50 vulnerable young people across KS1 – 4 in centre, and around 130 in the local primary and secondary schools. All students are at risk of, or have been, permanently excluded from at least one school. Often from disadvantaged and disenfranchised backgrounds, they may have difficulty concentrating, anger management issues, low resilience or a lack of emotional awareness and have usually faced huge challenges in life already. These young people need special support and a clear framework around them.

I am Clare Winter, KS3 Leader and SENDCo. I had previous experience of meditation throughout my

childhood but came to mindfulness through my interest in attachment theory and the work of Dr. Dan Siegel. I was initially employed at DESC to develop a 12-week nurture-based programme for hub groups of KS3 students who would then reintegrate back to mainstream school. In my research on adolescent brain development I discovered what Dr. Siegel called *mindsight*. I used his guided mindfulness meditations which then led me on to discover more about the development of mindfulness by Jon Kabat-Zin. Having previously lived in Korea and attended temple stays in a number of Buddhist monasteries my interest grew. I could see the benefit my students would gain from attention training and how this would help with some of their barriers to learning. It was also very apparent that a lot of my students lived in chaos and may have experienced adverse childhood trauma which created difficulty and a discomfort when sitting in strong silence.

Starting our journey...

I began to introduce mindfulness at DESC in January 2015. I started small by using short guided meditations with my nurture group. I also introduced mindful activities such as silent, focussed colouring, listening to ambient music and creating fuse bead art. We slowly built up from two minute silences to being able to lie still for a 15-minute body scan. This seemed to be some kind of magic! There were secondary affects too; I realised that students were beginning to identify emotions more easily and their self-regulation at stressful times improved.

Developing our mindfulness culture...

I took a proposal to the Head to introduce mindfulness as part of whole staff and student development and wellbeing. We held an on-site MBCT course in autumn 2015 which was attended by 16 staff. One of the staff attending that course was Trevor Adams, an Outreach Caseworker, who I now work closely with to embed mindfulness across DESC. Over the past five years we have gently increased the provision offered by DESC:

Our onsite activities...

- KS1 receive short stillness sessions where they can practise paying attention through mindful colouring exercises and other activities. Paws b is delivered to our KS2 cohort. The S.T.I.L.L Awards take place throughout these sessions (Sitting/Standing well, Take a breath, Inhale/Exhale, Let go/Let be, Looking after yourself and others). Students who follow instructions well get a raffle ticket added to the box and a chance to win a prize at the end of each half term. They are very motivated by this
- Students in KS3 nurture hubs undergo the .b programme
- All KS3 students begin the day with 10 minutes of stillness in the form of guided meditations or silent, focussed activities
- Mindful Poetry sessions on topics the students all agree on, e.g. my favourite place/space. This gets their creative juices flowing and they can focus on rhyming couplets or free verse poetry, on their own or in collaboration. We encourage them to pause and take a breath when they struggle to find words
- During outdoor learning with vertical learning groups of KS1-3 we have a stillness session. We use mindful movement to bring awareness to the sensations in the body or we spend time noticing the natural world around us
- We encourage staff and students to use the Action for Happiness calendar. It is displayed in our staffroom and student kitchen. We bring attention to it daily for students during shared mealtimes
- I send a weekly email to centre staff with quotes, poems, practices or mindfulness info
- We regularly spend some time in our staff meeting time pausing for a brief practice and all staff have



Clare Winter

received the **.b Foundations** taster session. These are always very well received with many staff who were initially sceptical telling us they benefit immensely from them

Our outreach in schools...

- Through our outreach service we are able to offer **Paws b** and **.b** to classes, small groups or individuals in our stakeholder schools. Schools usually refer for support with class groups that are unsettled or those having difficulty working harmoniously
- **Paws b** can be offered as a package with parenting workshops in order to embed the language of mindfulness and encourage shared discussion and experiences
- Those students who have completed **.b** that would value further support are offered **.b²**
- We will also be offering **.breathe**, particularly for the numerous students we support through the difficult transition from primary to secondary

Additional offers...

- In April 2019 I attended the **School Mindfulness Lead** training retreat. I am now able to offer **.b Foundations** to staff in our stakeholder schools as part of our role in the Teaching School Alliance. I have completed two rounds of delivery so far and the feedback has been outstanding. This has allowed us to train our own staff and meet their appraisal targets, and also to offer training to other school staff for their own wellbeing or to those who aspire to train to teach **Paws b** or **.b**. This has the dual benefits of creating a sustainable model for delivery and provides an income stream to further train our own staff and prepare for succession planning
- We offer bespoke workshops for local schools and stakeholders which meet the needs of their brief. This helps ensure we become the local specialist and go-to provider for mindfulness

Our advice...

We are still developing our mindfulness activities at DESC, but can already recommend some top tips for other schools looking to embed mindfulness:

1. You need an enthusiastic champion who needs to get support from your Head and SLT.
2. Develop your own mindfulness practice initially – young people can sense if you don't practice what you preach.
3. Expect this to take time. We are five years into our journey at DESC and initially, many of the staff were resistant. Now some staff have signed up to the **.b Foundations** course and have even made it an appraisal target. Offer regular practices in staff meetings and mention mindfulness in conversation!
4. Learn the teaching material off by heart or as much as possible, so delivery doesn't appear too scripted or wooden.
5. Keep training. I went on the **School Mindfulness Lead** course so that I can deliver the 8-week **.b Foundations** course to adults so ensuring that we don't have to bring an external trainer in (at core cost). I deliver this now to our own staff and those from our link schools.

This is what we advise to our stakeholder schools:

The 11-Step Approach...

Action 1: Do your research then put together a proposal for mindfulness to the Headteacher and SLT. Writing a formal proposal and highlighting the wellbeing benefits to staff and students will help. Try to link the proposal to the Ofsted Framework, SDP and curriculum offer. Including costings and potential savings is helpful

Action 2: Ask management to add it to the School Development Plan. Sell them the idea of why you believe mindfulness would have a positive impact on our young people. That way you will have the backing of SLT, who essentially are responsible for rolling it out to the rest of the staff from a top down level

Action 3: Run taster sessions to all staff during CPD meetings to plant the seed

Action 4: Send a generic email out to staff; inviting them to join an 8-week course. Ensure staff are aware of the commitment involved

Action 5: After the course, identify key members of staff who will push the mindfulness programme forward and undertake further training. Consider incorporating this in to their appraisal targets

Action 6: Develop formal and informal practice across the staff and student group – embed the language of mindfulness through discussion and displays

Action 7: Send the key staff identified on **Paws b** training and **.b** training

Action 8: Drip feed mindfulness by feeding back the **Paws b** or **.b** training to staff during CPD

Action 9: Think about further ways to embed mindfulness in your school as part of staff wellbeing and workplace team building. Consider training on the **School Mindfulness Lead** course

Action 10: Send out **MiSP** promotional flyers and letters to Link Tutors, SENDCo's etc. as part of networking and boundary spanning

Action 11: Set up meetings with the aforementioned – a personal approach to selling mindfulness courses to stakeholders