

Towards a mindful school community

Whole school mindfulness sit

CASE STUDY SUMMARY

School:	The Dell Primary School
Location:	Chepstow, Monmouthshire
School Type:	Primary
MiSP Curriculum:	Paws b
Age Group/s:	7-11
Author:	Debbie Cass
Role:	Wellbeing / Pastoral Leader

About The Dell

The Dell Primary School (The Dell) is a two form entry mixed primary school situated in the town of Chepstow in Monmouthshire. It serves just over 420 pupils from residential areas in the town and nearby rural communities, with around a quarter of its pupils on roll as preferred placements from outside the school's catchment area. English is the predominant language spoken and the school teaches Welsh as a second language.

Championing mindfulness

My background is mental health, or mental illness to be precise. As a child with four siblings, I grew up with the stigma, lack of compassion and understanding, fear and taboo of mental illness. You spoke to no one about it, there was nobody to talk to. Seven years ago I started going to evening college to study counselling and psychotherapy, and the more I studied the more I became interested in psychosomatic, the connection between the body and the mind.

In 2016 I attended a **.b Foundations** training course delivered as part of an eight week programme to support emotional wellbeing in schools and developed my own daily mindfulness practise. Afterwards, attendees were encouraged to share what they had found most useful during the training with their colleagues back in school, which I did wholeheartedly! I recognised the potential for mindfulness to support our school, and I was committed to introducing it to our community.

I worked with our Deputy Head to plan how to introduce mindfulness as a whole school approach at The Dell. It has taken persistence and courage to constantly push this agenda but I have seen first-hand how mindfulness can help an anxious/stressed child or

adult self-regulate, by purposely focusing attention on the present moment, and I have found it has been found to be a key element in stress reduction and an overall sense of happiness. I have incorporated basic counselling skills and promoted the importance of self-care hand-in-hand with mindfulness techniques, and I am proud to say that we are now a mindful school and soon to be a mindful community.

Introducing mindfulness to our pupils

I initially trained to teach The Present curriculum but then in 2018 trained to teach **Paws b**. I now teach the **Paws b** curriculum over 12 weeks to Key Stage 2 three afternoons a week, and am currently on the sixth cycle of this. I have run whole school assemblies and have introduced 'mindful moments' in every classroom after lunch and the feedback has been extremely positive. As Mark Adams, our Deputy Head says:

"the daily mindful Moments routine gives children that calm space in their heads which has a knock-on positive effect for teachers as children are ready to start learning in the afternoon".

He has embedded mindfulness in the Schemes of Work for Key Stage 2.

The children in school all know how to use breathing techniques to self-regulate. Some have shown them to siblings who suffer from mental health issues and a few have been doing finger breathing with their grandparents!

I have also set up Mindfulness and Wellbeing pupil team (Year 2 to Year 6) that I meet with weekly. They



Year 6 mindfulness session



Year 4 mindful movement

model mindfulness techniques in class, will help gather feedback on mindfulness practice in classrooms and co-designed our 5 point model of Health and Wellbeing where Mindfulness was one of these.

Children are practicing mindfulness techniques in the playground, without being prompted, and cascading these skills to family members. Mindfulness is 'felt' at The Dell, it is authentic and very 'present': not just a 'ticking the box' exercise.

Introducing mindfulness to our adults

I am passionate about a genuinely whole school approach to mindfulness, so I have trained all staff teams including teachers, afterschool club leaders, lunchtime ladies, office staff, cleaners and caretakers in basic mindfulness techniques to use with themselves and the children. The lunchtime ladies carry a laminated 'breathing star' in their tabards to help support children in the lunch break. I have presented to our Board of Governors, and also helped the Deputy Head lead INSET days. Guiding a body scan with forty colleagues including my Headteacher was nerve racking! In 2019 I completed the week long residential training to become a School Mindfulness Lead and now teach .b Foundations myself to all staff and also offer it to parents.

I have used the school website to ensure our mindful

approach is accessible and visible, making tutorials with year 5 and year 6 doing petal and finger breathing available to parents and carers, and also I put regular updates on our twitter feed outlining our mindful activities and resources. This has been especially important whilst children and families have not been at school due to coronavirus.

Supporting mindfulness in the wider community

I was very proud that our school was used as a case study for the First Minister, Mark Drakeford, to demonstrate how mindfulness can support the new Welsh Curriculum, and I am on the 'Areas of Learning and Experience: Health and Wellbeing' team in Wales. I have also spoken about mindfulness at the Education Achievement Service (EAS) conference, which aims to raise education standards in South East Wales, and supported research into mindfulness, being observed teaching Paws b by a senior lecturer from Cardiff University for 3 days last year.

More locally, I have also given a workshop on mindfulness to the Brownies (they have got a mindfulness badge!) and I have plans to train the anti-bullying and befriending group of staff and pupils from the local secondary school, 'The Invisible Army', in mindfulness.

Last year, together with my Deputy Head I led on obtaining the Carnegie School of Excellence in Mental Health award for our school, and just as we went into

lockdown I was due to teach .b Foundations to teachers and governors from our five cluster schools. This will happen when it can!

After my evening classes, I started at the University of South Wales (aged 44!). In June 2019, I was awarded The Dean's Prize for Notable and Outstanding Achievement for my Post Graduate Integrative Counselling Course work which was amazing as they only award it to one pupil across the University each academic year, and I am now undertaking a Master's degree in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy. As part of this I have a placement as a NHS and Barnardo counsellor and I use mindfulness techniques with my clients as I know it will enable self-care. I have been interviewed by Dr Pooky Knightsmith, (Chair of the children and Young People's Mental health Coalition) for setting up emotional wellbeing check-ins for all staff in my school, and the video featured on her acclaimed You Tube channel. Additionally, I have received several Young Carer Awards for the work that I do with Young Carers, and we are the first school in Wales to achieve all three awards. I believe in the benefits of mindfulness and that is why I do what I do and will continue to do so.

The whole school approach

Mindfulness had been drip fed gently throughout the whole school these last few years, and we have embedded the values of mindfulness with all pupils and staff. Other schools now visit us to observe our practise, and I make sure all new staff are immediately trained in mindfulness techniques and understand why we use them. My Headteacher, Steve King has been overwhelming supportive of everything I do in terms of mindfulness and counselling, this support has been consistent throughout my nine years at The Dell.

Our mindfulness activities align with all of our other initiatives that support our community's health and wellbeing, such as the daily mile, our farm intervention for vulnerable children, our lunchtime nurture club, our body image workshop for year 4,5 and 6 and more... We try to ensure that we have a consistent approach which is reinforced by all staff in all classroom and across the whole school.

This has been a four year journey, but mindfulness is truly embedded and cascaded throughout The Dell, and I will continue to passionately 'fly the flag' for mindfulness and positive mental health.



Reception mindfulness session