



Pupil Mindfulness Ambassadors

Paws b Ambassadors at Brynnau Primary

CASE STUDY SUMMARY

School:	Brynnau Primary School
Location:	Rhondda Cynon Taff, Wales
School Type:	Primary
MiSP Curriculum:	Paws b
Age Group/s:	7-11
Author:	Chevone Charman Osborne
Role:	Wellbeing Coach

My Mindfulness Role at Brynnau Primary School

Our school is a small, semi-rural, English-speaking primary school in South Wales with around 240 pupils on roll, aged 3 to 11, including part-time nursery children. The school was founded in 1904 so is well established at the centre of our village community.

I was appointed as a part-time Wellbeing Coach in January 2019. I've worked at the school since 2014 as a

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Special Needs Support Assistant, during which time I attended a Breathworks mindfulness course. I have been passionate about promoting children's emotional intelligence and wellbeing for many years and after seeing how mindfulness has supported me, in my own life, I could see the huge benefits of bringing mindfulness to the children of Brynnau Primary. Supported by my head teacher, Vanessa McCarthy, I trained to teach mindfulness curricula **Paws b** in June 2018 and The Present in July 2018. Our school has a strong commitment to wellbeing and social and emotional learning with wellbeing being at the bedrock of all we do. Embedding mindfulness in our school was a way that we could support children's wellbeing daily. I have given several presentations about the neuroscientific benefits of mindfulness to SMT, governors, and colleagues and was invited to speak about mindfulness and **Paws b** to our ELSA support cluster team. I also held an introduction assembly to

Paws b and mindfulness inspired by the film 'Inside Out' complete with water pistols! Mindfulness strategies and activities are a part of our Thrive Approach and ELSA support which works in parallel with teaching the **Paws b** curriculum to all children in Key Stage 2. We have a well-being and mindfulness section on our school website informing parents about our school's approach to mindfulness and its benefits. Introducing mindfulness into our school has meant that the language and strategies of **Paws b** are frequently used by our children and there is a greater level of awareness among the children and it's lovely to see children being able to articulate their feelings more. Whilst it has taken a lot of courage and determination to develop mindfulness in our school, it is having a positive impact on our children!

The school's commitment to wellbeing is evidenced by the funding of my post. I know I am very fortunate to be able to solely teach mindfulness to the pupils of Brynnau Primary School! The Governing body are committed to allocating funding to promote pupil wellbeing and are able to fund my post from additional income received from in-house training the school provides. Children in the foundation phase are taught The Present curriculum and pupils in years 3 to 6 are taught **Paws b** and The Present curriculum, then we revisit the **Paws b** curriculum each year from year 4 to Year 6.

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The curriculum covers the foundational skills of mindfulness, and, I'm passionate about making lessons as fun and engaging as possible, you will often see us eating mindfully or passing cups of water around the class during my lessons! I love making learning mindfulness fun and it's easy for me to add new activities onto the lessons which fit well with the learning objectives, which means we can revisit the themes time and time again. Children in my lessons will often be found exploring their breath with bubbles and feathers and the children love exploring their narrow and wide focus of attention with 'spot the difference' games and pictures. I always include fun activities, wherever possible to reinforce our **Paws b** and The Present lessons, which the children absolutely love!



Paws b Ambassadors at Brynnau Primary

Mindful eating with popping candy was one of the children's favourites! We had great fun talking about wobbles whilst eating wobbly jelly! I also run a mindfulness lunchtime club where we enjoy many mindfulness activities, our favourite being mindful slime! And it was lovely to hear that a pupil bought slime so she could do mindful slime at home during lockdown. We thoroughly enjoyed our Mindful Christmas party, which involved a lot of mindful eating and noticing, it was great fun!

We have **Paws b** displays in each junior classroom and the hall and the corridor so the children have reminders of their toolbox of strategies to help them.

Introducing Brynnau Pupil Mindfulness Ambassadors

As all our children in Key Stage Two have been taught the **Paws b** curriculum and have a good understanding of what mindfulness is and how to practice it, in September 2020 I recognised that there was an opportunity for children to be leading each other in mindfulness practices throughout the school day. Introducing **Mindfulness Ambassadors** was part of our ongoing wellbeing plan and as schools fully reopened to all pupils in September 2020 this seemed like an ideal time to further support the children's wellbeing by embedding daily mindful breathing practices into each of the key stage 2 classes. So it was decided that we would start our journey of recruiting Brynnau Primary Paws b Ambassadors!

These are the steps we took to introduce the role of Mindfulness Ambassador in our school:

• Job Description:

I created a job description and began to 'advertise' for applicants, beginning with year 6, I wanted to make sure the children understood that this was a really special job with important responsibilities which would be highly valued. I put up posters in each class and told the children all about the role when I visited their classes.

• Applications:

I was truly amazed by the number of children that showed interest in applying for the role. In year 6, 16 children applied for the role. Some children were ideal candidates to be excellent Ambassadors and some children applied as they recognised that they needed mindfulness to help them with their feelings. One pupil applied but was very anxious about leading the class in a practice. In year 4/5 an incredible 31 children applied and currently in our other year 4/5 class we have 30 ambassadors in training! All of our children take their responsibilities of being mindfulness ambassadors very seriously and we have regular catch-ups with children and class teachers to see how the ambassadors are getting on. We offered the position to all of the children who applied as we firmly believe that the role is suitable for all children regardless of their needs. It is a fully inclusive role and I was able to adapt the level of support in ambassador training to match the needs of each child who applied.

• Interviews:

I invited all applicants to join me in a casual interview where I asked them to share their knowledge and understanding of **Paws b** and how it has helped them in their everyday lives. So many children were using their breathing practices to help them with everyday issues they were having such as difficulties with schoolwork, tests, friendships, siblings, sport, and other competitions. One applicant told me how he had been teaching his sister the **Paws b** breathing exercises as he had recognised that she was 'stressed' during the first lockdown. We discussed the important qualities that were needed to make a good **Paws b Ambassador**, including their willingness to share mindfulness with others and set a good example in school. The majority of the applicants suggested that a mindfulness Ambassador needed to be friendly, kind, helpful, and compassionate! We have such lovely children in our school!

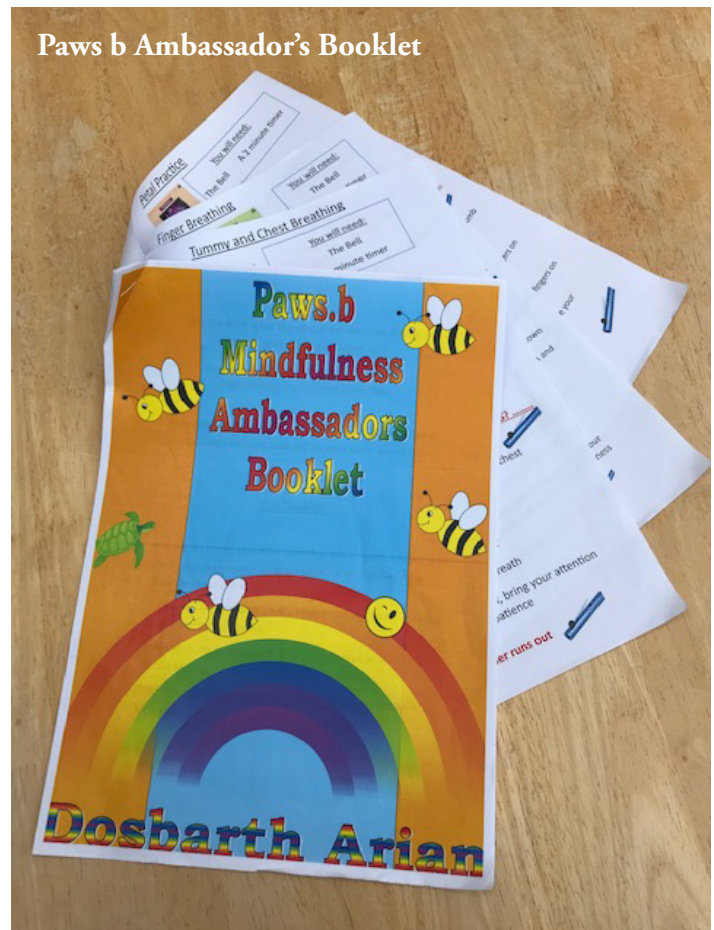
• Appointments:

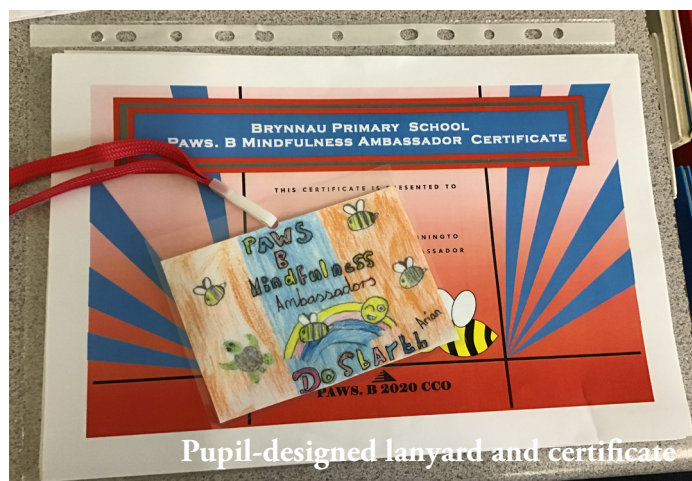
After the interview process, all applicants were appointed to the role and training began. This meant that we had 16 Ambassadors in Year 6, 31 Ambassadors in our Year 5/4 class, and 30 Ambassadors in our Year 4/5 class. Meaning that we currently have 77 **Paws b Mindfulness Ambassadors** sharing mindfulness in their classes each day! How Amazing!

• Training:

I worked with each class for 4-6 weeks and divided the children into groups of 6. Ambassador training took place in the afternoons. I split the Ambassadors into groups of 6 and each group would come out of class for 15-30 minutes for each training session. To begin, we spent some time exploring the scripts and discussed the type of voice needed to use when delivering the breathing practices. We spent a lot of time learning the scripts for each practice although I also make sure the scripts are always available when practices are being led. Our **Paws b Ambassadors** are trained to deliver three breathing practices: Tummy & Chest, Finger Breathing, and Petal Practice. Each Ambassador was given support on how to lead a mindfulness practice with their class.

Paws b Ambassador's Booklet





Pupil-designed lanyard and certificate

For some children who needed extra support with reading the scripts, they just learned how to deliver the Tummy & Chest breathing practice (with another Ambassador in the group available to support them, if needed). I offered extra reading support on top of the training sessions for some children so they were confident and comfortable speaking out loud. Training was also given on ringing the bell (each class has its own Vibratone bell) and timing the sessions (each class has a set of 1, 2, and 3 minute timers). Towards the end of the training, the Ambassadors were put into groups of 3 for the three roles required when delivering a breathing practice to the class:

1. Reading the script
2. Ringing the bell
3. Using the timer to time the breathing practice

Training was given on posture, tone and volume of voice, speed of reading, and working as a team. Once each group became confident in their delivery they practiced delivering the **PAWS b** breathing practices to each other to build up their confidence enough to be able to deliver the breathing practices to the whole class. Each class also got to produce a design that would become the class's own Ambassadors logo that could be used on their lanyards and anywhere else it was needed.

I made sure they understood that they were very important role models, and we worked on posture, speaking practice and went through all the practical considerations of standing up in front of the class with minimum disruption. I worked with all the Ambassadors to ensure the role was manageable within their capabilities. Each class had an award ceremony where each Ambassador was awarded a certificate and a lanyard with their class design on it and a little bag of sweets to celebrate their efforts!

Practical Issues/ logistics

With so many children applying for the role I had to devise a clear framework to roll the Ambassadors training programme out, with clear tasks and a rota system for implementation:

- Each classroom has a box with their equipment: a Vibratone bell, a timer, a script, a sign for the door so the class is not disturbed for the duration of their breathing practice. There is also a timetable in the box for each day of the week and pictures of sloths and slugs to remind the children to read nice and slowly! They love these pictures!!
- The script for each practice is modelled on the script in the **PAWS b Teacher Booklets**, but with simplified wording suitable for reading levels.
- Each class has a different daily team of three Ambassadors for each day of the week. For our 5/4 and 4/5 class they have a two-week timetable as there are so many Ambassadors.
- The Ambassadors each take a turn at the tasks for each practice:
 - Ringing the bell to mark the start and end of the practice
 - Verbally leading the practice
 - Timing the practice and turning the sign on the classroom door.
- The practices take place at three set times of day in each class:
 - After morning registration – the team leads the Tummy and Chest practice
 - After morning break – the team leads the Finger Breathing practice
 - After lunchtime registration – the team lead the Petal Practice
- We allow 1 to 2 minutes for each practice this has been negotiated with each class teacher to suit the needs and timings of the daily class routine.
- Each class designed their own Mindfulness Ambassador lanyards and the daily Ambassador team wear their lanyards when leading the practice.
- I devised a rota for each class and there is a copy of the rota in each box and on the wall in each class. This includes stand-in Ambassadors in case a child is absent. Each week, each class has 15 Ambassadors on duty!

- Year 5/4 and 4/5 have a designated lead ambassador who has the role of organising and prompting the Ambassadors on their designated days. This is a huge help as it is quite a challenge managing so many Ambassadors in one class plus these children are slightly younger than the year 6 pupils, who can independently manage their Ambassador roles.

It is important to say that the children themselves (not their class teachers) are fully responsible for leading the mindfulness practice three times a day. The first week of rollout presented me with several challenges to overcome. Children were learning how to do their Ambassador jobs for the very first time and this was time-consuming and it took a week or two until they got the hang of it. But by the end of the first week, each practice was delivered more efficiently and class teachers knew what to expect, and very soon these practices were taking place 'automatically' three times a day!

Inclusion

It was really important that all children who wanted to undertake this role could do so in a way suitable for them. This means that:

- Some children, who have lower literacy skills, have had extra reading support sessions. For these children, they have only learned to read the Tummy & Chest breathing practice. These children are in a group with a designated pupil who will help them if they need support to read the script. It's lovely to see children supporting each other.
- Some children, who find it difficult to speak in school, have opted not to verbally lead the practice; they do the other jobs (ringing the bell and timing the session) with the hope of building up to reading the scripts at some point if they feel comfortable to do so.
- Some children, who are neurodiverse and find some days more challenging than others, can opt-in or out of different jobs within the Ambassador role depending on their day. To accommodate this, some of the mindfulness teams have four children in them. They are very mature and understanding and can lead the daily practices smoothly allowing the flexibility of some of our pupils to join in when they feel they are able to.

It has been wonderful to see so many children successfully included in this initiative, and particularly rewarding to see children who find some aspects of school life difficult being equally involved.



The Impact

We started the Ambassador scheme when the children returned full time in September 2020. After a small break for the second lockdown Ambassador training resumed in April 2021. We are aiming to have trained Ambassadors in all our Key Stage 2 classes by the end of the summer term. The children are becoming more and more aware of their thoughts and feelings. They are becoming more and more familiar with using the **Paws b** breathing practices to help them manage their emotions. The children (on the whole) practice when led by their peers in these slots, and class teachers find it settles the children ready for their learning.

So many children regularly share with me how the breathing practices help them on a day to day basis, for instance: before maths work, tests, hard tasks they are set, friendship difficulties, or if they are having a difficult day. One child explained to me how she is "so grateful for mindfulness" as she uses her breathing practices so much to help her with lots of big feelings she's currently experiencing. Another child (a year 6 Ambassador) told me how she used her breathing practices at the start of everyday throughout the second lockdown to help her cope with her online schooling. In time we aim to see that implementing this will have even more positive effects on our children's well-being

Continuing the journey

We are driven and passionate, to continue developing our mindfulness journey here at Brynnau Primary School! By the end of the summer term, we are looking to have **Paws b Mindfulness Ambassadors** in each Key Stage 2 class. We are also currently working on extending the Ambassador's role into lunchtime to support children during these social situations, which can be a difficult for some. We are also going to look at involving parents in our approach and look at running some Mindful Parenting sessions in the future too!