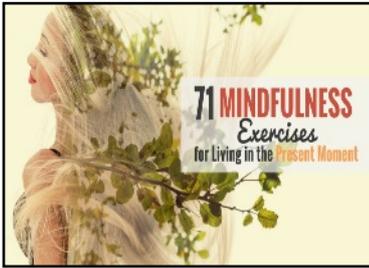


# Conscious spirituality in search of truth...



## **SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS AND MINDFULNESS**

The following online article extract was posted on Mindfulness Hamilton's web site by a school teacher, Ken Burgess, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018. The article headed "It stops the scary stuff pupils thrive with mindfulness lessons," is extremely interesting. This focused program was implemented at the English Martyrs Primary School, in Merseyside, England and has proved successful for students and teachers alike.

According to the school principal, implementing this Mindfulness program far outweighed any remuneration issues for a training educator. In my own life experience, having grown up, like many others in a socially disadvantaged in England, and also in disadvantage areas in NSW, Australia can appreciate how mindfulness exercises can advantage human development. Mindfulness programs when implemented can contribute significantly to overall wellbeing for young students—and older adults alike when these simple exercises are followed. An extract from the article written by Ken Burgess, and comments from the school's head teach Lewis Dinsdale appear below.

—Philip Crouch, Tasmania, 2020

### **KEN BURGESS: MINDFULNESS INTRODUCED INTO DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS**

#### ***...A Mindfulness Class at English Martyrs Primary School on Merseyside, UK***

'English Martyrs Catholic primary school in Litherland is a stone's throw from one of Merseyside's most notorious areas for gangs and gun crime, and most children at the school have been affected by the violence. It is an unlikely place, perhaps, to find a thriving mindfulness teaching programme. But English Martyrs is one of a growing number of schools in deprived parts of Britain that are embracing meditation techniques to help vulnerable children cope.

**"We see a lot of pressure put on children's shoulders due to family circumstances, parents losing their jobs, financial stress, anxiety about crime, fear about homelessness,"** said head teacher Lewis Dinsdale.

"Children internalise things, but what mindfulness has done is bring a number of quieter children to the surface - children who we'd never have known were going through such anxiety and stress at home. They haven't wanted to speak to their mum and dad about it but it's coming out in these sessions."

One nine-year-old-boy confided that "petal breathing" - where the children open and close their fingers in time with their breath - helped him to forget about "all the scary stuff". "If I concentrate on my breathing, the worrying thoughts just go 'pop' and disappear," he said. Nationally, the Mindfulness in Schools Project said it had trained nearly 2,000 teachers this year, a jump of 40% on last year, and much of that growth came from schools with higher than average proportions of vulnerable children.



But for cash-strapped schools, it's not cheap. Dinsdale said that he had to find £2,500 to train one member of staff. "As a head teacher you're always looking at the bottom line, and that's a lot of money," he said.'

**The investment had paid off, he said, not just helping with children's mental health but improving their academic performance too.** He described how some children used to have panic attacks when sitting SATs. One girl had been physically sick on her test paper. He was critical of Ofsted inspectors for not being more tuned in to the benefits of mindfulness. "It's frustrating because it isn't a box that they have to tick," he said.

English Martyrs head teacher Lewis Dinsdale is enthusiastic about the benefits of meditation for young children. Dinsdale has been so convinced by the positive effect that the school has now introduced mindfulness workshops for parents too. "Some mums and dads are at breaking point and they're taking it out on the children. They don't know who to turn to," he said.

**The Raise the Youth Foundation in Bolton, a non-profit independent school, teaches children who have been excluded from the education system. Many of them have suffered abuse, lived on the streets and been in and out of foster care. "We are their last hope," said Jason Steele, the school's founder.**

He said that the school brought mindfulness into the curriculum two years ago, though at the time he was far from convinced that it would have any significant effect. "I thought they'd be playing up," he said. "But what's surprised me is that all of them have taken something from it, some more than others."

Steele said children at his school were probably among the most difficult young people to care for because they were used to pushing people away. **Mindfulness, though, had built their self-esteem and was now a hugely positive force in their lives.** "It's helping them to engage with the present rather than worrying about the future or blaming the past for everything," he said.

Many of the teenagers have missed years of schooling; most have never sat exams before. He said that before mindfulness became part of the curriculum, they would do everything they could to avoid taking tests. "They would just run around school slapping people, calling them Muppets, ripping paper, just really low-level behaviour," he said.



**That type of disruptive behaviour has not gone away, but it has tailed off.** It happened because they were scared of failure, he said. That had been their life experience. “But showing them how to do meditation is helping them learn about relaxation, it’s given them a confidence they never had.”



**Suggested resources:**

Mindfulness Hamilton - *Schools and Mindfulness, 2018.*

<https://mindfulnesshamilton.ca/it-stops-the-scary-stuff-pupils-thrive-with-mindfulness-lessons>

<https://mindfulnesshamilton.ca/resources/online>

<https://mindfulnessinschools.org/>

<https://www.raisetheyouth.co.uk/>

<https://www.mindfulnesscds.com/>

<https://mindfulnesshamilton.ca/author/kgburgess>

