

# Formative Evaluation of Mindfulness in Schools

Report prepared for Mindful Meditation Australia



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November, 2016

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The concept of mindfulness dates to ancient Buddhist practices, however has become a focus of positive psychology in recent years. To this end, a recent and growing body of research is establishing the physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual importance of mindfulness and meditation. While the definition and measurement of mindfulness is still being widely debated in the literature, there is emerging evidence of the effectiveness of mindful training for children and young people. With limited empirical evidence to support mindfulness programs in Western Australian schools, there is an urgent need to develop a stronger evidence-base to inform the future of mindfulness in schools. Commissioned by Mindful Meditation Australia (MMA), this report presents recommendations for how schools can prepare for and implement mindfulness and meditation practices. To develop these recommendations, Health Promotion Solutions (HPS) in partnership with MMA, conducted a series of case studies in Western Australian schools known to be implementing mindfulness and meditation within their school communities. This report presents the methodology used in the case-study research, the case study findings and an overarching thematic analysis and culminates in recommendation for future research and practice relating to mindfulness and meditation in Western Australian schools.

The purpose of this formative case study research was to scope current mindfulness practice in WA schools with a focus on:

- The context and need for mindfulness;
- The way in which mindfulness was introduced, diffused and implemented across the school community;
- The capacity supports required for full implementation;
- The barriers and enablers to implementation;
- The school community's use and satisfaction with the mindfulness strategies; and
- Recommendations for their own future practice and for schools undertaking mindfulness activities for the first time.

## METHODOLOGY

Given each school, its culture and community are unique, case studies were chosen as an effective method for describing how mindfulness is being implemented in each and its impact. Schools were chosen to participate based on their current implementation of mindfulness strategies and as such, were purposively sampled with the support of the Department of Education and the School Psychologists Association of Western Australia (SPA). Full approval to conduct the research in WA Department of Education schools was received from the Department and all participants received an information letter and provided signed consent. Each of the case studies were conducted within one school day to minimise the impact on each school and where possible and appropriate, morning tea was provided for

staff and incentives for students (pens/highlighters). A mixture of one-on-one interviews and focus groups were used to collect the data and all were audio recorded and complemented by detailed field notes. The data were analysed using the qualitative analytic technique of thematic analysis where recurring themes and topologies were identified.

## CASE STUDY SUMMARIES

A detailed summary of each of the nine participating schools is presented in this report with a focus on the context for mindfulness, how mindfulness is implemented, the school's process of diffusing the strategies and assessing the organisation's capacity to implement mindfulness, barriers to implementation and recommendations for future practice. Each case study summary is de-identified to protect the school's privacy.

## CASE STUDY THEMATIC ANALYSIS

A full thematic analysis of each case study is provided in this section and arranged according to three key school-based implementation theories. The theories used including the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) Framework, School Capacity and Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The HPS is a long-standing framework detailing the active components of a school which are essential in implementing successful health promotion interventions. Characterised typically by three interconnecting circles, the HPS framework encourages activity across the formal school curriculum, school policy and practices and the school-home and community links. The theory of capacity is a more recent addition to the school-based literature and focusses on the capacity supports required to enable any health intervention to be implemented. Using a model developed originally by Bosworth, three of the eight domains of school-based capacity have been extrapolated in this report and include the provision of resources such as *time*, professional learning, money and materials, *leadership* for the innovation from the school principal and a 'champion' in the school and the needs of the *implementers* which in this instance are teachers. Finally, the Diffusion of Innovation theory is used to explore how interventions are initially diffused in to a school. Key components of diffusion include the initial *knowledge* transfer to teachers, the process of *persuading* teachers of the proposed intervention, making an informed *decision* using their knowledge of the program and its benefits to then *implement* the intervention to a point of *confirmation*.

Most of the participants interviewed described mindfulness as an important tool for schools to help students navigate a world with increasing pressures. While they all agreed it was important, some respondents felt it was another 'tool in the toolkit' rather than an approach that will fix everything.

The HPS framework was overlaid on each school's description of their approach to mindfulness. On review of this mapping, it became clear that most schools used the *classroom* to implement mindfulness through a combination of explicit curriculum (usually through *MindUP*) and complemented by regular,

planned practice of mindfulness through brain breaks, colouring in, yoga, guided meditations (using *Smiling Minds*) and a variety of other strategies. In most schools the teaching of mindfulness was left up to each individual teacher to choose and plan, however where mindfulness was approached as a school-wide initiative, mindfulness was integrated in to each classroom. All teachers and staff agreed that the structured curriculum supported by regular mindfulness practice and implemented across the school would be most effective for helping students 'reset' and prepare themselves for learning each day. Where mindfulness was implemented consistently across the school, some staff and principals noted this regular practice had a flow on effect when managing student behaviour as students could begin self-regulating their thoughts, feelings and emotions.

Few schools described the integration of mindfulness in to their *policies* except for a few schools who had embraced mindfulness across the school and where the principal was the driver of the approach. Where mindfulness is written in to policies and plans, all staff are required to implement mindfulness in their classroom and time is allocated for school-wide planning. While not commonly embedded in school policies, mindfulness is firmly grounded in many school practices. School staff report the use of the school's communication channels to promote mindfulness (assemblies, newsletters, parent communication) and the physical environment modified to encourage mindful practice (dedicated 'quiet zones' in classrooms). Culture change is also achieved by ensuring mindfulness aligns with the school's current values and approach to supporting students' health and wellbeing. In many schools mindfulness has been integrated in to their behaviour management approaches. The use of mindful principles prior to addressing a child's behaviour were seen in many schools and included asking children to use a range of techniques to calm themselves including deep breathing, colouring in, sitting in a 'reset room' (especially for those who are overtly physical when angry) or simply walking with the principal or deputy principal to discuss their behaviour. Furthermore, in the process of case conferences to manage poor student behaviour, school principals and school psychologists report giving parents strategies to use at home (deep breathing, *Smiling Minds*) to assist their child regulate their behaviour.

The school-home- and community links advocated for in the HPS framework was the least well used by schools involved in these case studies. For many schools, they felt that simply using the term 'mindfulness' would put a lot of parents off as they had a poor understanding of the term and deeply established attitudes toward meditation. Thus, many schools indicated their parent body knew little about their approach. In some schools' parents were consulted through the school's Board or Council as they were asked to endorse the approach. In others, parents are informed of mindfulness when they participate in a case conference to manage their child's behaviour. For a small number of schools interviewed, parents were more actively involved. In one school, their extensive use of mindfulness is promoted widely to the external community and parents enrol their children for this reason. In others, the school's approach to mental health, including mindfulness is clearly articulated to the community which also encourages cross-border enrolments.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the thematic analyses conducted, a series of recommendations have been presented as either Preparation or Practice. Preparation recommendations relate to the overall marketing and promotion role that MMA can have in setting the agenda and changing public perception about the role of mindfulness in schools. While only a small part of the main recommendations, this community engagement strategy is vital in contributing to the community's understanding of the importance of mindfulness in schools, which will help redress some of the barriers to implementation schools articulated in the case studies.

The second suite of recommendations relate to the practice of mindfulness and meditation in WA schools. In this section, recommendations are described in line with the HPS Framework, School Capacity and Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The recommendations are best represented by Figure 1 below which puts the school's whole-school activities relating to mindfulness at the centre of the model which is then wrapped by essential aspects of a school's capacity to undertake these activities.



Figure 1: A whole-school approach to implementing mindfulness in schools

In Figure 1 the capacity supports of training, time, funding, staff and leadership are presented as the crucial elements a school must address before adopting a whole-school approach to mindfulness.

Training should be offered with the following focus:

- Increasing staff knowledge of mindfulness;
- Providing them with school-based data to demonstrate the need for the approach;
- Practicing mindfulness for themselves;
- Practicing leading mindfulness activities with others; and
- Reviewing available resources.

Time relates to the school's allocation of staff time to support the program including:

- Time for staff training;
- Time for school-wide planning; and
- Time to teach mindfulness in the classroom.

Funding is another key component for preparation for mindfulness and includes funding for:

- Professional learning;
- Resources;
- Teacher relief to enable planning; and
- Additional staffing.

Staff preparation is key in addressing a school's capacity to implement mindfulness and this includes:

- Ensuring the school has the right staff to support the process of implementation.

Leadership for mindfulness is the most pivotal capacity support as positive leadership sets the tone for the rest of the school. Leadership for mindfulness provides:

- A commitment and belief in mindfulness;
- Role modelling;
- Support for staff in implementing mindfulness; and
- Evaluation and review of the strategies.

Figure 1 also describes the way in which a whole-school approach to mindfulness should be framed. Using the Health Promoting Schools model, mindfulness should be implemented across each of the six domains in the following ways.

Formal curriculum

- Explicit teaching of mindfulness and how the brain works
- Mindful practice including brain breaks, mindful colouring, yoga, visualisations and meditation among others

## Physical environment

- A classroom which has the resources to support mindful meditation practice and respectful relationships
- An external environment which provides spaces for calm reflection rather than just advocating physical play

## School-home-community links

- Discussion and promotion of mindfulness with the parent body
- Involvement of the parent body in mindfulness activities
- Links to mindfulness in case conferences to manage poor student behaviour

## Health services

- Involvement of the school psychologist or chaplain in the mindfulness approach
- Links to mindfulness in case conferences to manage poor student behaviour

## Policy and Practice

- A clear statement of how mindfulness is integrated in to the school's policies and values
- Embedding mindfulness in behaviour management processes
- Timetabling regular 'brain breaks' and mindful practice throughout the school day

## Social ethos

- Creating a supportive school culture for mindfulness (through regular discussions, promotion and practice of mindfulness)
- Using assemblies to promote mindfulness

## NEXT STEPS

This final chapter explores the important first next steps for MMA in implementing the recommendations of this report and are intended as a guide for discussion by the Board of MMA and the Steering Committee. The next steps identified include:

- Offer training to school leaders, teachers, parents and the broader community using online and face to face methods, and evaluate each;
- Establish a 'what works' online portal of effective classroom and whole-school strategies;
- Continue promotion of mindfulness to the broader community and schools; and
- Consider testing the impact of a whole-school approach to mindfulness on children and teachers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary .....	2
Table of Contents .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Methodology .....	2
Chapter 2: Case Study Results.....	5
Chapter 3: Case Study Summary.....	61
Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations .....	70
Chapter 5: Next Steps.....	75
References .....	78

### Suggested citation

Waters, S. (2016). *Formative Evaluation of Mindfulness in Schools: Report prepared for Mindful Meditation Australia*. Perth, Western Australia.

Mindfulness and meditation have been practiced around the world for centuries and its role in improving mental and physical health, reduce stressors and anxiety, boost memory power and academic abilities and create greater self-awareness have long been understood. Only in more recent times have these outcomes been more robustly established through the theoretical and practical study of mindfulness and meditation. The impact of the practice of mindfulness and meditation in a school setting is poorly understood, and for this reason, Mindful Meditation Australia have commissioned this case study research to better understand the way in which mindfulness and meditation are currently being practiced in WA schools. This report describes the process by which case studies within schools implementing mindfulness were conducted and the findings of these case studies.

Chapter 1 outlines the methodology used in conducting this research, including the process by which schools were identified and recruited in to the study. Details of the ethics approval and participant informed consent are provided and discussion of the process by which the case studies were conducted is outlined.

In Chapter 2, a full case study summary describing each school's experience of implementing mindfulness is presented. In these summaries, all student, staff and parent views are incorporated to provide a holistic summary of the school's practice. Each school's case study comprises information relating to the context for mindfulness, the application of mindfulness in the school, the diffusion of mindfulness and the school's capacity to implement it, the way in which any barriers were overcome and recommendations and suggestions for their own future practice and that of other schools.

Chapter 3 provides an overarching synthesis of the main themes appearing across each of the nine case studies presented in Chapter 2. These main themes were derived using a thematic analysis of all interviews and case study summaries to identify recurring themes and topologies. This synthesis provides the reader with a succinct summary of the outcomes of the case study research.

Chapter 4 comprises recommendations generated from the review of each case study and the overarching synthesis of the recurring themes. These recommendations are presented as Promotion and Practice. Finally, Chapter 5 states the recommended 'next steps' for Mindful Meditation Australia in pursuing their purpose of improving the happiness and wellbeing of all Australians.

This section describes the purpose of these case studies and the way in which each was conducted and the data analysed. This formative research aimed to explore the way in which mindfulness is being implemented in Western Australian schools. Each case study sought to understand the following:

- The way in which mindfulness was introduced and diffused across the school;
- The barriers and enablers experienced by schools in establishing mindfulness practices;
- The leadership support for mindfulness;
- The success and enjoyment of mindfulness strategies across the school community; and
- Recommendations for other schools considering implementing mindfulness.

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### ETHICS APPROVAL

Full approval to conduct research in Government schools was sought from the WA Department of Education. The application provided detailed information about the recruitment and conduct of the case studies as well as copies of each interview script. Approval from the WA Department of Education was granted on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, 2016. To satisfy the Department's requirements, a full copy of the final report will be sent to the Evaluation and Accountability Directorate on completion of this project.

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### SAMPLE SELECTION

The purpose of these case studies was to explore current practice in mindfulness in Western Australian schools. As such, convenience sampling was used to identify only those schools who are actively implementing mindfulness. In the first instance, advice was provided by Coosje Griffiths, Manager Student Support: Complex Learning and Wellbeing within the Department of Education about the schools known to be implementing mindfulness to her and her School Psychologist Association colleagues. This list was further expanded through snowballing techniques and advice from the MMA's Advisory Committee.

## SAMPLE RECRUITMENT AND CONSENT

All schools identified during the sample selection stage were sent a Department of Education approved recruitment letter, a summary of the MMA and a consent form. One week after sending the letter, the Director of HPS contacted each school to ensure the letter had been received and to discuss any questions the school’s principal may have had about the research. Once agreeing to participate, school principals were asked to complete the school consent form and return it to HPS. Of the 17 schools originally approached to participate in this study, nine participated.

After agreeing to participate, the Manager of MMA contacted each school’s principal and discussed arrangements for the individual consent of students, staff and parents and the details for the conduct of each case study over one school day.

## DATA COLLECTION

All case study interviews were conducted by the Director of HPS with the Manager of MMA in attendance to oversee the interviews. Each school pre-determined the school community members to which the research team could talk to, and had interview times scheduled. One-on-one interviews were held typically with each school’s principal and then a mixture of interviews and focus groups were used to talk with other school community members as appropriate. Table 1 below indicates the interviews conducted in each of the nine case study schools.

Table 1: MMA Case Study School Participation

Schools	Principal	Deputy Principal	Coordinator	School psychologist	School Chaplain	Classroom Teacher	Students	Parents
Scotch College								
Joondalup PS								
Bramfield Park PS								
Maidens Park PS								
Djidi Djidi PS								
Mirrabecks PS								
Spearwood Alternative School								
Methodist Ladies College								

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#### DATA ANALYSIS

All interviews were audio recorded and field notes taken during each interview. After the completion of each school's case study, all recordings and field notes were reviewed and a summary of the main themes identified in each prepared. A final case study summary for each school which integrates the themes identified by each respondent group was written and includes direct quotes from interviewees to support important themes.

In this section, each school's individual case-study is presented which describes the way in which mindfulness and meditation are integrated within the school. Each case study summary explores the following components as discussed by all school community members interviewed:

- The school context;
- The context for mindfulness;
- Mindfulness in the school and its effectiveness;
- Diffusion of mindfulness across the school;
- Capacity to implement mindfulness;
- Overcoming resistance;
- Recommendations; and
- Conclusions.

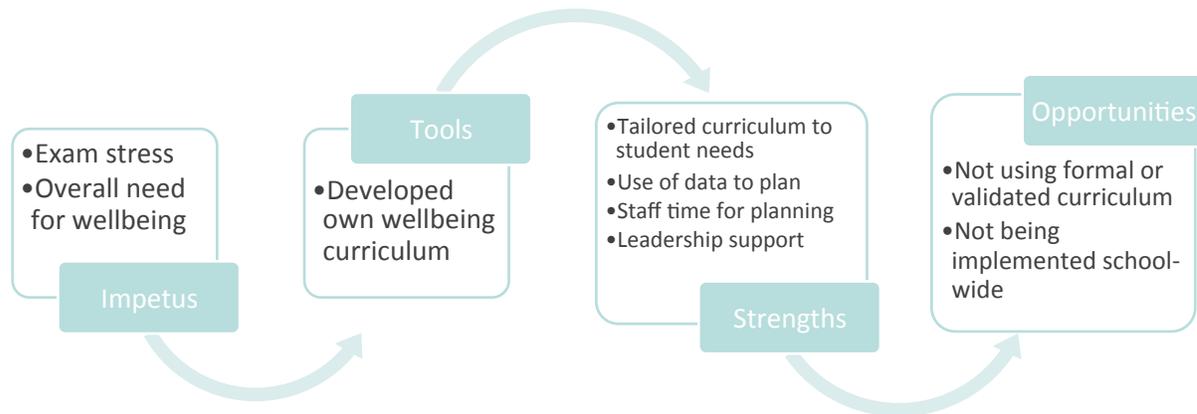
No names are used in these case study descriptions to protect the identity of each school.

# Case Study Summary

## School 1

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### HIGHLIGHTS



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### SCHOOL CONTEXT

School 1 is a non-government all-boys school located in the western suburbs of Perth. The school has a long history and tradition in the WA community and has a mission to develop boys who among other things, have a passion for spiritual inquiry. The school caters for boys from Year 1 to Year 12 and has over 1500 boys enrolled and also offers boarding facilities. In this case study, only the coordinator of wellbeing was interviewed.

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### THE CONTEXT FOR MINDFULNESS

Pastoral care and students' wellbeing has always been a strong focus of this school. Supported by a well-developed House System, House Heads have responsibility of providing pastoral care for their students. In recent years, the need for a greater focus on student wellbeing, particularly among senior school students facing increased exam stress, was identified and the school established an integrated wellbeing course for Year 9 and 10 students to help prepare them for their Year 11 and 12 studies. Furthermore Year 11 students are offered the opportunity to participate in a leadership course which focusses on team work and team building, as well as developing their own sense of wellbeing. After developing and trialling a wellbeing curriculum for Year 9 and 10 boys within the House System, the school realised the potential for making the program more systematic and focusing specifically on mindfulness.

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## MINDFULNESS IN THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness in this school is currently delivered through a wellbeing curriculum which was developed by the school staff through a review of their students' specific health and wellbeing needs. In 2015 the school collected data from all students about their health and wellbeing and it was these data which identified the importance of developing a wellbeing curriculum to support students. Driven by the findings from this survey, staff 'cherry picked' curriculum materials from other resources and subsequently developed their own content to suit the specific needs of their students. Resources such as Beyond Blue was used regularly for information.

Once the wellbeing curriculum program was planned, all Year 9 and 10 students participated in one-hour sessions every fortnight during class time. The school report students had varied reactions to the lessons with much of their enjoyment grounded heavily in the person presenting the content, and the content itself. Although the school have no data to determine the success of this wellbeing curriculum, the staff report anecdotally that the content has helped the students to some extent and parents of students' dealing with anxiety appear very supportive of this approach.

This anecdotal success has led the school to appoint a coordinator for 2017 who will be responsible for developing and implementing wellbeing across the entire school and ensuring this is integrated in not only the formal curriculum, but informally through everyday practice of their teachers.

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## DIFFUSION OF MINDFULNESS ACROSS THE SCHOOL

Although in its infancy, the school have embarked on the early planning phases for a systematic diffusion of mindfulness across the school (Years 1-12). This was sparked by the apparent success of the wellbeing course and cemented through survey findings in 2015 which highlighted boys' and their parents need for this additional support in the school context. To this end, the school have recently allocated additional time for a staff member to plan and coordinate a mindfulness and wellbeing program across the school in 2017. This will enable the resultant program to be developed based on sound evidence, the needs of the boys and will be systematically implemented across the school while linked to health and other outcomes.

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## CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT MINDFULNESS

This school have extensive pastoral support networks already available to the boys' through their well-structured House System. In addition, the staff have been given *time* through a 2-day retreat to plan and implement the existing wellbeing course and with the appointment of a new role to oversee wellbeing across the school, increased capacity has been added to support this initiative to ensure its systematic implementation across the school. The school's *Principal* believes in the importance of wellbeing and mindfulness and has therefore provided the necessary time and support to help establish the course and invest in a more coordinated approach in 2017.

In appointing a staff member to *champion* and lead the strategies in a coordinated way from 2017, the school have enabled significant planning and coordination of mindfulness across the school. This staff member will have the ability to review existing programs, develop their own and work with the Director of Teaching and Learning to integrate mindfulness across the school and link it to student outcomes and the Australian Curriculum.

The school require little *financial* support for these activities, although they have invested in some *professional learning* for the new coordinator. The staff feel that the program will not need a lot of money to implement, only time for someone to plan and coordinate the key content across all year levels.

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## OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

This school report little resistance to the introduction of wellbeing and most recently mindfulness within their school due to the apparent need for these concepts as highlighted by the 2015 survey of all students. It was the presentation of these data that justified the need to all staff alongside whole-staff discussion of these data and the implications for their teaching practices.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The school recommend strongly to "*prepare the groundwork*" before implementing mindfulness in schools. They believe the data collected from students in 2015 helped to demystify mindfulness and wellbeing among staff and establish the importance for addressing these concepts. Using school-based data coupled with getting the right people with the right training on board are key components to establishing mindfulness.

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## CONCLUSIONS

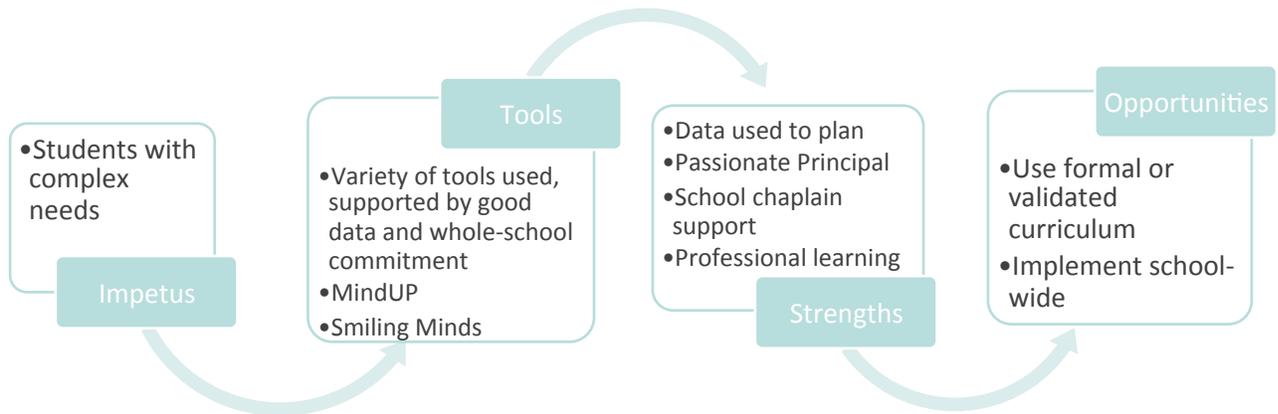
This school has a strong history of supporting student wellbeing through their pastoral care structures and programs. Most recently, and driven by student data indicating their increasing anxiety and stress, staff developed and implemented a wellbeing and mindfulness curriculum in the senior school (Years 9-12). This program was promoted to staff by first examining the student survey data to establish the need for this type of program. Once all staff were supported, the curriculum was implemented in class time. Given the anecdotal success of the program so far, the school has appointed a coordinator who is responsible for planning the implementation of wellbeing and mindfulness curriculum across all year levels at the school (Years 1-12). The school credits the use of student data to drive change, the Principal's leadership, time allocated to staff to plan and the opportunity to attend professional learning to increase staff capacity as critical enablers for success. They would recommend all schools consider mindfulness but to use student data to determine the specific needs and conclude that mindfulness is at the "*core of everything*" in a school.

# Case Study Summary

## School 2

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### HIGHLIGHTS



*“Mindfulness is just another tool in a toolkit”*

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### SCHOOL CONTEXT

School 2 is a large government co-educational school located in the northern suburbs of Perth. The school has a core focus on wellbeing and mental health and as such, attracts 38% of its enrolled students from across boundary who are seeking this pastoral care focus. The school caters for students from Kindergarten to Year 6 and has over 500 enrolled students including 30 Indigenous. The school is co-located and seamlessly integrated with an Education Support Centre catering for students with diverse learning needs. In this school the Principal, Chaplain, a classroom teacher the Chair of the Emotional Wellbeing of Kids committee and Year 2 students were interviewed.

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## THE CONTEXT FOR MINDFULNESS

For the last eight years this school have focussed on the mental health needs of their students as a priority. With the support of a clinical psychologist, the school embarked on the establishment of a screening tool to assess each child's mental health concerns. This tool is used to screen each child at the commencement of every school year as well as all newly enrolled students. The results of the screening are tabled at an EWOK committee (Emotional Wellbeing of Kids) and each child's mental health is discussed and if required, a case-management plan is put in place to support their unique needs over the year. This committee meet several times a term and together manage the mental health needs of each child. In some years the school can have 120 'blue' files which constitutes active case management (including discussions with parents, school psychologist, classroom teacher and external agencies where required) for almost 25% of the school population. It is this focus on pastoral care and wellbeing of all students that led the school to discover the potential for mindfulness to complement case management through the personal interest of a proactive Deputy Principal.

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## MINDFULNESS IN THE SCHOOL

Woven closely with the school's focus on screening, planning for and managing students' mental health is the more recent focus on mindfulness. After utilising a mental health screening tool to identify and manage students' mental health, the school's Deputy Principal introduced the idea of mindfulness to provide some proactive strategies to help improve both the mental health of those students participating in case management as well as for the remaining student population. The way in which mindfulness is implemented in the school is somewhat sporadic and the principal is clear that it is not mandated.

For *individual student case management*, mindfulness is used as one of a suite of tools available to the staff to help the student reduce their anxiety and calm in situations in which they are anxious or aggressive. Parents are also provided with strategies to use at home with their children during case management conferences.

The school has also implemented a range of *staff professional learning* (PL) opportunities to empower staff to help manage their students' behaviour and refer students on where their behaviour or complex needs exceed their professional capability. PL offered at the school includes the Brain Ambulance, Protective Behaviours, Boys' in Education, Trauma counselling and other holistic mental health PL. No explicit mindfulness whole of staff PL has been offered to date, other than training provided by the school's Deputy Principal.

The school's Principal has also implemented a range of *whole-school strategies* which reflect mindfulness practices. Each day a daily welcome notice is announced to all students which aims to empower positive thinking and mindfulness. Further, the principal and deputies use colouring books as a method of calming children who come in to the office for poor behaviour before commencing discussions with them about their poor behavioural choices. Moreover the school principal notes the office is never used for behaviour management discussions, instead these are held outside to ensure the environment is not threatening and that the principal's office is a friendly place to be. The school have also dedicated funding to support a chaplain in a part time capacity to support teachers and the EWOK committee in providing one on one and small group counselling to students requiring additional support.

The *school chaplain* leads most of the mindfulness strategies implemented at this school. She has been responsible for introducing established programs such as *MindUP* and *Smiling Minds* in some classrooms, developing her own activities such as the Lego Club for students who experience difficulty interacting with others in the playground, and using tailored mindfulness techniques in her interactions with children referred to her. Her participation on the school's EWOK committee is central to her role at the school as she meets with all of the students who are being monitored by the EWOK committee, either one on one for informal counselling or in small groups where she runs a range a different programs to support each student's unique needs. The chaplain has a suite of programs and activities she uses, most are mental health and wellbeing related and incorporate components of mindfulness and are offered during class time for those with more pressing need of support as well as at lunch time for all students to provide them with some quiet but structured down time.. Few are exclusively focused on mindfulness. These mostly include teaching anxious students deep breathing techniques and encouraging students who visit her office to colour in or play with the many toys present in order to bring them to a more mindful state. She also recommends the Smiling Minds app for parents to use at home with their children during parent meetings.

In the *classroom*, teachers are encouraged, but not required, to implement mindfulness in their daily routines. With support from the school chaplain, several staff have embraced the *Smiling Minds* program within their classrooms with success. The school's chaplain introduced the program to school staff and has made all resources available on the school's shared drive. She has implemented the program herself in around 5 classrooms and from there, teachers have embraced the content and begun implementing the strategies. One Year 2 teacher spoke of her experience and described mindfulness as ongoing and embedded in her daily practice and not simply the teaching of a lesson per week on the topic. This teacher uses mind breaks with her students at the start of every school day as well as after recess and lunch breaks to allow students time to calm and focus and become ready to learn. She has a range of coping

strategies available for students including a calming wheel, coping cupcakes and a talking stick where each child talks about two positive things they like about each other.

### *Effectiveness*

All staff interviewed noted the anecdotal evidence of mindfulness having a calming effect on students. The principal described the use of colouring books to calm students down as highly effective, and individual staff interviewed discussed the beneficial impact of 'brain breaks' after break times to help transition students from active play to being ready to learn. Teachers indicate students really enjoy the brain breaks also and can become upset if they miss a session. The school chaplain notes that for some, mindfulness can be difficult as these students have never been asked to sit quietly so it can take some time to build their expertise, however once they are familiar with the strategies, most enjoy them. The Chaplain noted that through her one-on-one work with some children, she now sees them less as they are learning to cope better with their anxiety.

Parents involved in case management are grateful for the pastoral care supports in place and often request their child be referred to the chaplain if they require support. Several have indicated to the Principal that they are using the Smiling Minds app at home and encourage their children to use the deep breathing when they are feeling anxious.

When speaking to Year 2 students, they discussed a range of different strategies their teacher had used in the classroom with them from colouring when they were feeling upset to brain breaks and meditation. Most students indicated they really liked the mindfulness strategies and would like to continue using them in class. Some mentioned they used meditation or deep breathing at home when they needed to relax. Although the students interviewed were young, they had an extraordinary vocabulary around mindfulness and were able to clearly articulate what it was, how it worked and what it did for them.

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## DIFFUSION OF MINDFULNESS ACROSS THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness is embedded in the school principal's *leadership*. The principal's commitment to mental health and individually supporting each student's unique needs sets the tone for the rest of the school. The Principal is supported by a Deputy who also believes in the importance of mental health and mindfulness in schools and have employed a part time school Chaplain to further reinforce mindfulness across the school. Led by the Principal, the school's EWOK committee screens, identifies and manages students complex mental health needs and once identified, all relevant teachers, education assistants, the school chaplain and counsellors all work in harmony to implement tailored solutions, which include mindfulness, to support each child. Alongside this case-management approach, teachers have been provided with professional learning about mindfulness and are encouraged, but not mandated, to implement mindfulness in their classrooms with the support of the school chaplain.

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## CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT MINDFULNESS

### *Time*

This school's greatest capacity comes from the time available to its staff and students through the appointed School Chaplain. While staff are not given additional time to implement mindfulness strategies, they are well-supported in their ability to do so, through a part time chaplain who is a strong advocate for mindfulness and is available to all teachers if needed.

### *Funding*

The school's principal has dedicated significant funding to mental health Professional Learning at the school. Furthermore the funding of a part time chaplain has enabled significant mindfulness strategies to be implemented within classrooms and across the whole-school. Each Phase of Learning team is also provided with discretionary funding and some are using this to purchase resources or other support materials.

### *Human*

The school's chaplain is a central source of support and information for staff to increase their capacity to implement mindfulness strategies. The EWOK committee and teachers generous giving of their own time to sit on this, is another example of the human resources this school has mobilised to enable the implementation of mindfulness across the school. The school's chaplain and teaching staff interviewed, all noted the importance of the leadership shown by the school's Principal and cited this as one of the most important aspects of the school's capacity.

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## OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

The school's principal describes the use of mindfulness in the school as one that is not mandated, however staff are offered significant amounts of professional learning as well as daily support from the school's chaplain and deputy principal to implement mindfulness if they would like to. As such, there has been little resistance from staff as only those who wish to implement mindfulness are doing so. Furthermore the deputy and chaplain are a key resource available to any staff member wanting to learn more about mindfulness.

The teachers who implement mindfulness indicate they do so as they have a personal interest in the topic coupled with a growing concern about the increasing levels of anxiety among their students. Those interviewed all noted they have read extensively about the role of mindfulness in their own time and this has been the main impetus for their integration of mindfulness in the classroom.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The school's Principal indicates that the approach the school has taken to date has been about empowering teachers to make an informed decision about using mindfulness in their classrooms. This helps overcome the issue of teachers being mandated to implement something they are not sure about. Furthermore the role of the EWOK committee in reviewing all children's mental health and monitoring those at risk has been a cornerstone of their success.

Staff interviewed were asked what they would do if they were to start this process again. Some indicated they liked the gradual transition from information and empowerment to support in implementing mindfulness, while others suggested they would like to see mindfulness more consistently implemented in all classrooms. One teacher suggested the integration of quick, incidental strategies across the school (such as brain breaks, deep breathing) would have been a good place to start.

When asked what recommendations would this school make to others considering mindfulness for their school, the Principal noted that most change will happen gradually over time, but that the initiation of the EWOK Committee was instrumental in providing the evidence for addressing mental health and for placing it at the forefront of all teachers' minds.

Teachers discussed the need for schools considering mindfulness to look for a simple program that is easy to implement and to get all teachers on board however the program should not just comprise explicit lessons, it should also contain information on how to embed mindfulness into their everyday program. They also noted the importance of teacher professional learning in helping to establish the need for mindfulness in schools. The chaplain suggested using Smiling

Minds as an initial introduction to mindfulness for children. However all noted the importance of implementing mindfulness to help calm students and getting them ready to learn.

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## CONCLUSIONS

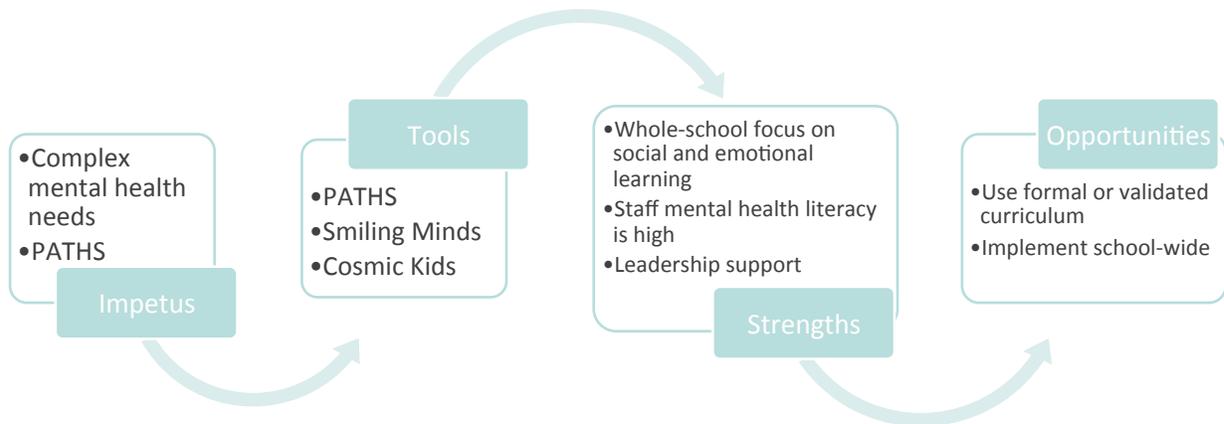
This school, led by a passionate Principal who believes in the importance of mental health as a pre-requisite for learning, has been focussing on students' mental health for almost 10 years. Over the last few years, through the initiative of a school Deputy Principal and most recently the School's Chaplain, mindfulness has become a core component of the school's approach to support their students' mental health and wellbeing. Using a mental health screening tool developed for the school, every child is screened at the beginning of the year (or at the time of enrolment) and if they appear to be at risk of mental health problems, are managed closely through the school's EWOK committee. This case-management comprises counselling, meetings with parents and teachers and referral to the school's chaplain who leads the mindfulness strategies within the school. Alongside this whole-school management approach, teachers have been provided with Professional Learning to encourage the implementation of mindfulness in their classrooms, however this is not mandated. Those who are implementing mindfulness in the class have been supported by the Chaplain and have supplemented their knowledge through reading in their own time. The school community recognise the importance of the leadership for mindfulness and the collation of data to regularly review students' needs and credit mindfulness for assisting students who are anxious and in getting all students 'ready to learn' at the start of the day. The school community encourage all other schools to consider mindfulness but are careful to note it should not be mandated, however the use of a structured curriculum alongside 'incidental' mindfulness (such as brain breaks) is the best approach.

# Case Study Summary

## School 3

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### HIGHLIGHTS



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### SCHOOL CONTEXT

School 3 is a government co-educational primary school located in the south eastern suburbs of Perth. The school caters for students from Kindergarten to Year 6 and has an ICSEA value below the national average. Almost half of all students at this school have a language background other than English and 8% of the student population identify as Indigenous. The school is an Independent Public School managed by a Board comprising parents, staff and community members. One focus group involving seven teachers, the principal and school psychologist was conducted.

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### THE CONTEXT FOR MINDFULNESS

Since 2009, this school have been implementing PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies), a social and emotional learning program for primary school aged students. PATHS is designed to be implemented 2 to 3 times per week (30 minutes per lesson) with extension of the program's key messages during 'teachable' moments in the classroom. This comprehensive approach to social and emotional learning is embedded throughout the school's planning processes and is mandated for all classroom teachers and features in school assemblies and newsletters and underpins the school's ethos. The whole-school community is therefore actively engaged in consistent social and emotional learning messages, content and language. As

advocates for the importance of mental health in young children, many staff have begun to explore the role of mindfulness in their own classrooms. Furthermore, staff stated students at this school have complex family lives and require additional support to get them ready to learn, which provided the motivation for implementing PATHS and most recently, mindfulness.

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## MINDFULNESS IN THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness in this school is implemented by interested classroom teachers who have explored mindfulness in their own personal time. While the PATHS program includes some aspects of mindfulness, the staff interviewed noted that through their own personal reading and life experience, they have found mindfulness and begun to extend the PATHS content by embracing specific mindfulness strategies. Mindfulness strategies are therefore implemented sporadically across the school by classroom teachers, the school psych and the school's leadership team when managing student behaviour.

In the classrooms, teachers from Kindergarten to upper primary discussed their use of a range of mindfulness strategies, with most being those from PATHS that are more related to emotional regulation. When describing mindfulness strategies, most used apps and programs such as *Smiling Minds* and *Cosmic Kids Yoga*, while some used their own mindfulness techniques for calming students and preparing them to learn. Teachers described specific strategies such as yoga and meditation with older students, using songs and stories to discuss mindfulness, discussing the importance of breathing and setting up 'chill out' zones where students can go if they are feeling anxious or upset. *Cosmic Kids Yoga* is used by the school's physical education teacher as well as by several additional classroom teachers during their regular classroom time. Other teachers use the *Zen Den* videos, also from Cosmic Kids to encourage relaxation through abridged, guided meditation strategies such as deep breathing, listening skills and managing thoughts.

The school's psychologist embraces aspects of mindfulness when working one on one with students in case management scenarios. Specifically, the school psychologist used visualisation with children and breathing techniques. The school's principal described the need for relaxation strategies when managing student behaviour and referred to the use of colouring books and quiet time for students who are sent to the office for their poor behavioural choices.

## *Effectiveness*

The staff acknowledge that their use of mindfulness across the school is sporadic and has not been formally evaluated. However teachers who use the *Cosmic Kids* and *Smiling Minds* resources in their classes note students really enjoy the activities, especially yoga with many students wanting to do this instead of more traditional physical education activities. Teachers who use mindfulness as a strategy for calming students after morning fitness or break times report students appear calmer and are ready to learn. One teacher noted the importance of starting meditation strategies at an early age as introducing these strategies with upper primary school students can be a challenge. There has been no specific feedback from parents about the mindfulness activities at this stage, mostly due to the school's limited use of the strategies at a whole-school level. The school psychologist mentions programs such as *Smiling Minds* to parents in case conferences and has not been met with resistance to these suggestions.

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### DIFFUSION OF MINDFULNESS ACROSS THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness is implemented on an as-needs basis by teachers within this school, however it is supported by the school's commitment to implementing the PATHS program. As PATHS is a school-wide, mandated activity and staff receive regular and ongoing professional learning relating to children's social and emotional learning, staff already have a good understanding of the importance of mental health and are therefore empowered to implement any strategy which is going to support the school's focus on mental health and social and emotional learning. Therefore, while mindfulness itself is not a mandated and school-wide focus, the commitment to PATHS across the school paves the way for mindfulness to also be embedded in to every day practice.

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### CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT MINDFULNESS

Although mindfulness is not a school focus or priority, staff within this school have significant capacity supports for its implementation. Firstly, the school has invested considerable amounts of *funding* and *time* to the implementation of the PATHS project, which has a focus on students' social and emotional learning. This investment coupled with extensive *training* for PATHS has upskilled teachers to better understand and manage students' complex mental health needs to help them become better learners. From this sound base, mindfulness has emerged as a new focus for some staff.

To date however, there has been no specific *training, time or financial support* provided to encourage teachers to implement mindfulness. The implementation of these strategies has been based on teachers own personal belief in mindfulness and from staff seeing the physical education teacher's success in integrating mindfulness activities such as yoga and meditation (through Cosmic Kids) that has sparked their interest. These activities, however sporadic they may be, are *championed* by the school Principal and psychologist's belief in the importance of addressing students' mental health.

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### OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

The staff interviewed believed there is little resistance at the school for mindfulness. This is in part due to mindfulness not being a mandated activity and most likely due to the schools' long-standing focus on mental health and developing children's social and emotional skills through the implementation of PATHS. Students appear to enjoy yoga and meditation, however some older children are a little resistant to meditation. Parents have shown little resistance although this may be due to mindfulness only being introduced to parents through case conferences. The school psychologist did note however, they do not use the term 'meditation' as they believe this may put some parents off.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

The staff interviewed described the effectiveness of the PATHS strategy as it is a whole-school, mandated program that is embedded in all that the school do. They recommended mindfulness should be viewed in the same way so that it is not just another thing that needs to be done, rather it becomes part of what they do, and is implemented consistently across the school using one program or resource. Others discussed the importance of starting small and working up to a whole-school approach to ensure all staff, students and parents were supportive. Some noted the importance of teachers' first learning about mindfulness and how to be mindful themselves before being able to implement these strategies with their students and parents and to integrate easy to understand information for families to support what the school is doing. Furthermore the staff recommend that any whole-school mindfulness strategy begins in Kindergarten and becomes embedded in the school culture to avoid resistance shown by some upper primary students, especially when being asked to try meditation for the first time.

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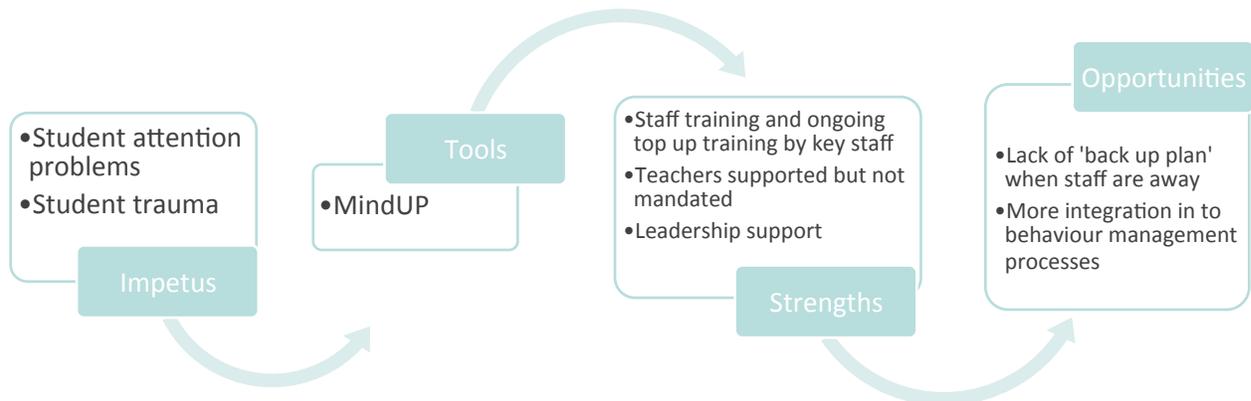
### CONCLUSIONS

This school has adopted a whole-school approach to mental health through the PATHS program. It has been integrated into the school culture and planning since 2009 and it has been this focus on mental health that has motivated some teachers to investigate mindfulness in their classroom. Given the significant time, leadership and training invested in to mental health, this school staff have an excellent understanding of the importance of mental health. Although mindfulness is currently being implemented in a more ad-hoc manner than the PATHS program, it is becoming a more regularly used strategy as more teachers see and hear the benefits of the Cosmic Kids yoga and meditation strategies being used by others in the school. The teachers interviewed recommend mindfulness as a complementary strategy to their significant focus on mental health through the PATHS program as it helps their students to become more focussed and ready to learn. They recommend all schools investigate mindfulness and start small with a view to working toward a whole-school approach that is coordinated and supported across the school community.

# Case Study Summary

## School 4

### HIGHLIGHTS



### SCHOOL CONTEXT

School 4 is a government co-educational primary school located in the South West region of Western Australia. The school is relatively small and takes enrolments from children in Kindergarten to Year 6. Its ICSEA value is well below that of the national average and over a quarter of all students are Indigenous. This school promotes positive behaviour through their four rules of Safe, Tolerant, Achieve and Responsible (STAR). As an Independent Public School, this school is managed by a School Board and has an active P&C. The school focusses on positive parent-teacher relationships and allows families to have a choice of which class their children are placed in and often remain with the same teacher over a number of years. The school's Principal and Deputy Principal were interviewed for this case study.

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## THE CONTEXT FOR MINDFULNESS

The school became interested in mindfulness after talking with their local child and parent centre about programs that would help their children to focus on learning as well as supporting those students who were dealing with significant trauma in their lives. In partnership with the Benevolent Society, this school implemented the *Shaping Brains* project which combined *MindUP*, a school-based mindfulness program with *CogMed*, a computerised program for attention problems that are linked to poor working memory.

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## MINDFULNESS IN THE SCHOOL

This school are implementing a whole-school approach to mindfulness through the *MindUP* program. The program began in 2014 through a grant from the Benevolent Society who paid for this and other schools in the area to participate in the full *MindUP* training and for all teachers to receive a copy of the classroom books. After the training, all teachers were asked to teach the *MindUP* materials in class as well as to implement the 'brain breaks' to help students focus on an upcoming task. The brain breaks vary within each class. Most are directly from the *MindUP* program, however some staff have begun to create their own unique activities. Students have been participating in breathing activities as well as understanding touch and taste, balancing tasks and many others. These brain breaks usually last between 3 and 5 minutes but appear to be sufficient to bring students to a calm state in order to focus on the next learning activity.

Alongside *MindUP* the school also implemented the *CogMed* program designed to assist children with attention problems to improve their working memory in order to carry out more complex cognitive tasks. Given the high levels of trauma experienced by some children in the school, a 'Trauma in Schools' program was also implemented.

The implementation of *MindUP* across the school is supported by a 'MindUP Team' who meet every term to discuss how the program is being implemented, which staff require additional support, how to address aspects of the program that may not be working and other issues as they arise. This team are responsible for ensuring *MindUP* remains consistently implemented and that staff feel supported in integrating it in to their classroom through ongoing professional learning updates.

With many staff on long service leave this year, the school are not as active in their explicit teaching of the *MindUP* program as the relief staff, who are not trained, don't feel comfortable teaching the content. The brain breaks however have continued in every class as they are quick and easy to do, and the students respond well to the activities.

## *Effectiveness*

The Principal and one of the Project Team members interviewed reported the *MindUP* program made an enormous difference to the calmness of the student population. They commented that students responded extremely well to the brain breaks after they completed the lessons relating to how the brain works. These staff noted that within a matter of weeks, teachers were noticing students were more aware of their emotions and were able to calm more quickly at the start of the school day and after lunch and recess in order to focus on the learning tasks ahead. This almost immediate impact gave staff the impetus to continue implementing *MindUP*. Moreover, after completing the staff professional learning, teachers described how their improved understanding of how a child's brain works helped them to manage poor behaviour more effectively. Furthermore, the school-wide focus on *MindUP* and importantly, the inclusion of families, enabled the school to better support those families who were dealing with trauma and those with children with challenging behavioural problems.

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### DIFFUSION OF MINDFULNESS ACROSS THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness at this school is embedded as a whole-school approach. In the first instance, a core team of staff received the full training from the *MindUP* team and were able to train the rest of the staff. After receiving training and a classroom booklet comprising learning activities and brain breaks ideas, all teaching staff were asked to implement the program in the classrooms. Staff are supported by a *MindUP* team who were available to teach lessons or to help teachers problem solve if required. This team regularly monitor the implementation of the program and offer refresher training when and if required.

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### CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT MINDFULNESS

#### *Time*

This school has invested significant time to support the development and implementation of the *MindUP* program. A small group of staff initially completed the full *MindUP* training, however this team now provide regular and ongoing training for the rest of the school staff. This ongoing allocation of time in a crowded staff professional development timetable is a significant investment in supporting mindfulness. Furthermore, all staff are supported by this *MindUP* team within the school should they have questions or concerns as they implement the materials. This team also meets once a term to discuss the school's mindfulness activities.

### *Funding*

The school credit the initial funding provided by the Benevolent Society in having a core team of staff trained by the Hawn Foundation in the *MindUP* program. Without this initial funding to have a team of staff trained, the school staff interviewed noted the program may not have been implemented to the extent it is today across the school. The school have not had to invest much further funding in the program as the resources are affordable and their own staff can provide top up training where required.

### *Human*

One of the key enablers for this school as the training of a core team of staff who not only train others, they also meet once a term to review how the *MindUP* program is being implemented across the school, and where they may need to invest further time or support for staff. Furthermore, the support for this approach from the school's leadership team and outside agencies such as the Benevolent Society have allowed school staff to realise the full potential of mindfulness in their classrooms.

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## OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

This school report very little resistance to the integration of mindfulness in to their school. This may be in part due to the very small number of students and staff at the school, as well as the approach the school took to introducing mindfulness. Led by a small team of staff who were trained in the *MindUP* program, all staff were supported through the implementation process and were able to seek support if they had questions as they began implementing the program and brain breaks.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

As this school has been using *MindUP* exclusively, they recommend other schools participate in the *MindUP* training and begin teaching the *MindUP* program. They also suggest starting in junior primary school and gradually working up to senior school students to avoid some of the resistance displayed by these students. The staff believe that had these upper primary students been using the *MindUP* techniques from a young age, this resistance would be minimised.

Most importantly, the staff interviewed described the importance of having all staff supportive of the approach before starting. However they caution mandating the program as some teaching staff may be resistant, but once they see the program working successfully in other classes, these teaching staff become more engaged.

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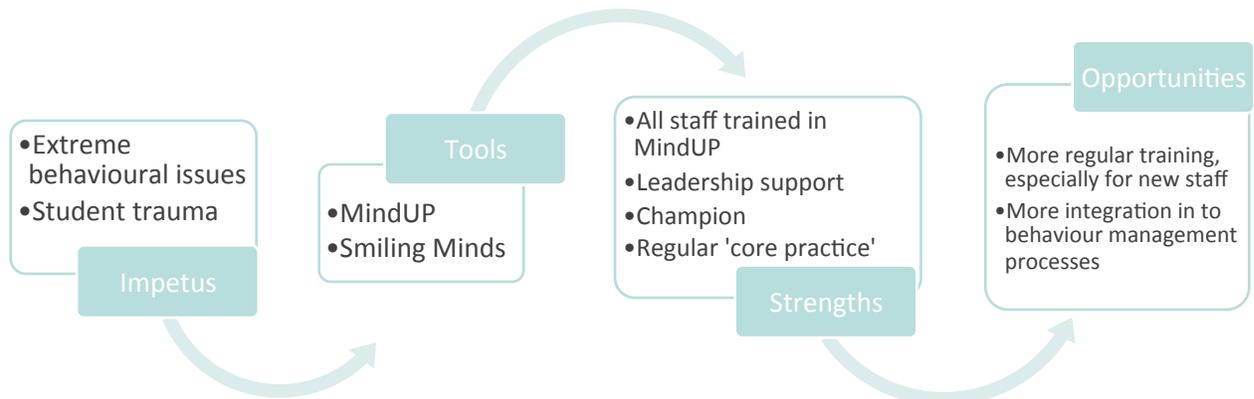
## CONCLUSIONS

This school have seen many benefits for their students and staff after receiving training in and implementing the *MindUP* program. They believe the program and its explicit teaching of how the brain works, complemented by regular 'brain breaks' has been beneficial in calming their students and preparing them for learning. The staff at the school are well-supported by a team who are responsible for overseeing the implementation of *MindUP* and this includes support from the Principal and Deputy Principal. The staff interviewed believe that the initial funding and support to attend the *MindUP* training was the most important impetus for their staff to see the benefit of mindfulness and begin trialling it in their classrooms. For this reason, the school recommend others attend training to ensure all staff are supportive of the approach and to encourage its use, but not mandate it.

# Case Study Summary

## School 5

### HIGHLIGHTS



### SCHOOL CONTEXT

School 5 is an aboriginal primary school located in the South West region of Western Australia. The school has just under 100 aboriginal students enrolled from across the large regional town. The school's ICSEA value is well below that of the national average. The school is not an independent public school due to the limited readiness of the parent body. However the school actively engages the local aboriginal community to ensure the school embeds culturally sensitive practices. Moreover, the school is one of 37 sites to host the Department of Education's pilot KindiLink program, which provides structured play and learn sessions for 3 year old aboriginal children and their parents. The school grounds and buildings were designed by aboriginal elders from the community and is just over 10 years old. At this school the Principal and Deputy Principal were interviewed along with Year 5 and 6 students and two teachers.

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## THE CONTEXT FOR MINDFULNESS

Established in 1996 to support Aboriginal students who were experience difficulty assimilating to mainstream schools, this school supports students and families with complex needs on an ongoing basis. When the current Principal arrived at the school in 2011 in the role of Deputy Principal, she noted students' aggressive behaviour and language that created a climate of violence and disrespect for staff. This was coupled with a lack of support from families who were not sending their children to school with food or adequate sleep. The school were therefore providing breakfast and lunch for most students as well as time for students to rest during the school day. In 2013 the Department of Education's Expert Review Group conducted a review of the school's performance based on many of these concerns and noted the lack of whole-school planning and staff morale. The leadership team subsequently employed a specialist GROWTH coach who had previous experience working with aboriginal students and embarked on a whole-of-staff planning process to develop and implement strategies that would foster high expectations for behaviour and learning for their students. The school were using *You Can Do It*, a values-based program and began to set higher behavioural standards and limited their ongoing free breakfast and lunch program and replaced it with support for students to purchase and make their own food at school.

At this time, the Benevolent Society in the region was offering local schools the opportunity to attend *MindUP* training. Initiated by the school's GROWTH coach (now Deputy Principal) who had seen mindfulness in practice in remote indigenous communities, the school sent all staff to this two day training session and decided to adopt *MindUP* as a whole-school approach to helping their students manage their complex emotions and be ready to learn in the classroom.

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## MINDFULNESS IN THE SCHOOL

This school have adopted the *MindUP* program and have embedded it across the school. After all staff were trained in 2014 through funding support from the Benevolent Society and additional funding from the school, each teacher was provided with a copy of the *MindUP* classroom resources and asked to teach this content as part of their Health and Physical Education time. In the first year, the school's Health committee planned the lessons using a scope and sequence within the health curriculum for students in Kindergarten to Year 6. It is now taught by teachers as needed to ensure this content remains top of mind. Much of the focus for this school was on the explicit teaching of the 'brain theory' which helped students understand what their brain was doing, or not doing, when they were angry or upset.

The explicit classroom teaching is complemented by regular 'core practice'. At this school, core practice varies in each classroom, but is a short 3 to 5 minute guided mindful meditation and breathing exercises. Some staff use relaxing music and others use online apps such as *Smiling Minds* to lead guided meditation sessions. Core practice is used at the start of every school day and after recess and lunch breaks. This is complemented by mindful breathing across the whole-school at the start of each school day.

Students described mindfulness in their school as core practice and mindful breathing. They described sitting or lying quietly for a short period of time with either music or their teacher guiding them through breathing exercises. This year students reported they had participated in the Blue Earth program which includes mindfulness strategies such as yoga.

The school have also implemented innovative behaviour management techniques that have mindfulness principles embedded within them. Due to the highly aggressive nature or self-harming tendencies of some students, the school have established a 'reset room' where children who are feeling angry, upset or are hurting themselves or others can be located and they are given sensory toys or activities that helps them manage their overt behaviours without hurting themselves or others. These toys and activities include stress balls, chewing necklaces, colouring in and magic sand. Once students have self-regulated their behaviour, then the school applies their usual behaviour management processes, in accordance with the Department's guidelines. Furthermore, these behaviour management processes and case management meetings are guided by trauma informed practice due to the high levels of stress and trauma experienced by many of the students in their home and family lives.

The *MindUP* program and behaviour management approach is managed by the Principal and Deputy Principal who both have a passion for mindfulness. In particular, the Deputy Principal supports staff in their teaching of mindfulness and their approach to behaviour management by modelling teaching or management for other staff. With this support all staff, including relief staff, implement core practice every day so that it is consistently implemented across the school.

Parents at this school are not made aware of the mindfulness practices specifically, however the School Council were approached for their support before the initial training. Staff indicated that parents were hard to engage at this school and that talking with them about mindfulness would be difficult.

## *Effectiveness*

The Principal and Deputy Principal described the effect of implementing mindfulness through the observable changes in behaviour over the last few years. In 2011 children could be found on the roof of the school, smashing windows, throwing chairs and swearing at teachers and other students. Today, the school is a calm, respectful environment. The Principal also noted suspensions at the school have decreased, referrals to the office for behaviour have gone down and Naplan data are improving. The Principal described a trend in declining student numbers which is intuitively concerning, however is led by families who are reporting they wish to send their children to their local feeder primary school as they have the resilience and self-regulation skills to now integrate in to main stream schooling and be with their neighbourhood friends.

Teachers at the school note that all students appear to enjoy the *MindUP* curriculum, primarily because of its hands on nature. They described some student's difficulty in using core practice, however this is linked mostly to their exposure to extreme trauma rather than the effectiveness of the core practice. These teachers described the important role of core practice in calming students after break times and improving their readiness to learn and note that without core practice, they would spend more time managing behaviour. One teacher spoke of her disappointment that she hadn't known about these strategies while teaching at other schools as it has made her job as a teacher much easier.

When students were interviewed, they were able to describe how the brain regulated their emotions and what was happening in their brain when they were angry or sad stating they knew they needed to "*calm my amygdala*". Their understanding of the brain's function and how it helped or hindered their emotional responses was extraordinarily high. Furthermore, almost all students said they really enjoyed core practice every day and would be disappointed if they weren't able to do it after every break time. While some upper primary school girls said they didn't really need it, they did acknowledged that it helped others to calm and become ready to learn. When asked what core practice did for them, all stated it helped calm their minds and get them ready for the class, and with some noting it helped them listen to the teacher more easily. These students did note that when they first started core practice it felt weird and strange, but now they would not want to miss out on a session.

Furthermore, some students reported they used similar strategies to core practice at home. Some used this at bed time while others said they used the breathing strategies while listening to adults argue to help calm their amygdala. Others said that if they ever moved schools and core practice was not used at the school, that they would go to the office and tell them to use *MindUP*.

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## DIFFUSION OF MINDFULNESS ACROSS THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness is embedded across the whole-school, predominantly within classrooms. All staff were trained in the *MindUP* program and provided with a copy of the classroom resources. After the initial training, all staff were supported to teach the classroom curriculum during health and were asked to use the core practice at the start of the school day and after all break times. While the school leadership team say the program is not 'mandated' there is a strong expectation that staff will use the resources and core practice on a daily basis. All staff, including relief staff and those new to the school, have access to support from the Deputy Principal to ensure they can teach the curriculum and lead core practice.

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## CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT MINDFULNESS

### *Time*

This school has invested significant time to support the development and implementation of the *MindUP* program. The entire teaching and non-teaching staff attended *MindUP* training in 2014. To aid in the teaching of the *MindUP* curriculum in class time, the school's Health Committee planned a scope and sequence for the explicit teaching of the *MindUP* classroom curriculum for all staff. Teachers also dedicate between 3 to 5 minutes at the start of school and after recess and lunch breaks to core practice to help calm students and get them ready to learn. Furthermore, the school's Deputy Principal and 'champion' of mindfulness is available to coach new, and support all staff in the teaching of mindfulness.

### *Funding*

The school credit the initial funding provided by the Benevolent Society in having a core team of staff trained by the Hawn Foundation in the *MindUP* program. Furthermore, the school committed significant additional funding to enable their entire teaching and non-teaching staff attend this training. Without this initial funding to have a team of staff trained, the school staff interviewed noted the program may not have been implemented to the extent it is today across the school. The school have not had to invest much further funding in the program as the program requires little additional resources.

## Human

The champion of mindfulness in the school is the Deputy Principal. The Principal and other staff credit the Deputy for her knowledge, passion and commitment to mindfulness. The staff interviewed specifically noted that the Deputy is available to them should they ever have any questions or concerns about mindfulness and their teaching of it. However as all staff received the initial training, the school has considerable expertise among its staff that supports the implementation of *MindUP*. Several new staff to the school have not received this training and indicated they would be grateful for some professional learning support to progress their understanding and practice.

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### OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

The staff interviewed note very little resistance to the introduction and ongoing use of mindfulness in the school. This was achieved predominantly by ensuring all staff participated in the initial training and were therefore exposed to the potential benefits of the approach for their students from the outset. Furthermore, the support of the school's Deputy Principal in assisting staff in teaching the content to students when required further helped staff overcome any apprehension they had when first teaching the mindfulness content.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

As this school has been using *MindUP* exclusively, they recommend other schools participate in the *MindUP* training and begin teaching the *MindUP* program. The Deputy Principal recommends schools start small and celebrate the small successes in the beginning to provide ongoing motivation for staff. She also acknowledged that having her as the champion for mindfulness in the school is an important support mechanism for staff as they transition in to the teaching of mindfulness and implementation of core practice.

The teachers interviewed described the importance of receiving training to first improve their own personal knowledge of mindfulness and the brain theory, before asking them to teach this content to students. They also appreciated having a champion in the school to model the activities first. These teachers suggested an online training option may be a good option for training teachers or helping them grow and refine their practice of mindfulness.

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## CONCLUSIONS

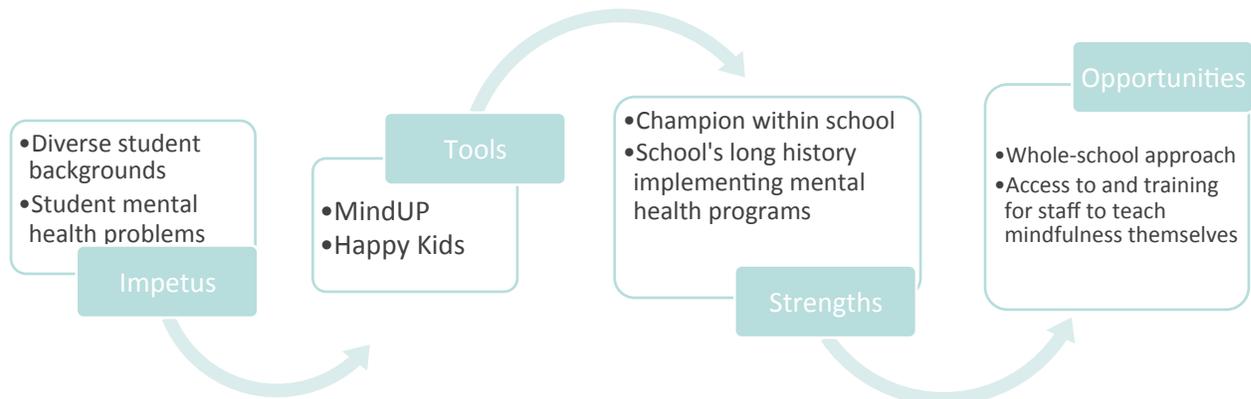
The teachers and school leadership team interviewed describe the enormous difference in student readiness to learn and behaviour from a school-wide approach to mindfulness. They acknowledge the importance of training for staff and for using a curriculum approach such as *MindUP*. Most importantly, the teaching staff interviewed described the ongoing impact of daily core practice in helping these students with complex mental health issues developed over time from their home environment, to calm, focus and be ready to learn every day. The initial funding provided through an external source to attend the *MindUP* training was credited as an important enabler for the school, as is the presence of a motivated and passionate champion within the school to help, support and motivate other staff. All staff interviewed recommended other schools try mindfulness, with the appropriate training and support in place and by starting small.

# Case Study Summary

## School 6

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### HIGHLIGHTS



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### SCHOOL CONTEXT

School 6 is a co-educational government school located in Perth's north eastern suburbs. This school is an Independent Public school and shares its grounds with the local secondary school and educational support centre. The school has close to 300 students from Kindergarten to Year 6 with an ICSEA value just below the national average. Over 80% of the students at the school speak a language other than English at home. At this school the Principal, Deputy Principal, Psychologist, classroom teachers and students were interviewed.

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### THE CONTEXT FOR MINDFULNESS

Due to the diverse backgrounds from which this school's student population are drawn, the school has had a focus on mental health for many years. Most significantly, the school has been part of a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funded research project called 'Happy Kids' for over 14 years. This project aims to empower young children to have healthy lifestyles and to make good decisions about their future. It comprises three main activities, the first being the establishment of small groups of at risk students (in this school called the 'Wish Group') who are supported to set goals and plan for their future while participating in a range of leadership and skill building activities. The group meets with the Deputy Principal daily to talk about all aspects of the lives and school experience. Their parents must attend up to two events

each year and at the end of the year the students invite their parents to a graduation dinner to celebrate their achievements. Every Friday in Terms 1 and 4 teachers from across the school run 'clubs' or activities that are non-curriculum focussed for every student in the school. These 'clubs' vary each year and can include activities such as football coaching, sewing, colouring or chess. These clubs allow students to excel at something at school that is non-academic and create meaningful relationships with teachers and students who share a similar passion. Finally, the Happy Kids project comprises a one-day health expo each year that introduces students to the most salient health topics for them. The topic of mindfulness was first introduced by the school's psychologist in 2014 where he provided some initial staff training about the concept of mindfulness and its benefits for students.

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## MINDFULNESS IN THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness in this school is supported by the leadership team but mostly led by the school psychologist. In 2014 and 2015 the school psychologist ran training for all staff about mindfulness and offered each staff member his support to introduce mindfulness in their classrooms. With the support of a practicum student, the school psychologist introduced the concept of 'square breathing' and created a small card that would assist students to recall the four simple steps of square breathing. The school psychologist then offered all staff the opportunity for him to teach components of the *MindUP* curriculum in their classroom, particularly relating to emotional regulation and the role of the brain and complemented by the teaching of square breathing. Not all teachers in the school use the school psychologist to teach these lessons, but all are aware of the support available.

The first introduction of mindfulness to the school community was in the 2015 Happy Kids Health Expo. A specific activity was designed for students in small groups to learn about how the brain works and how to complete square breathing. Every student in the school attended this Health Expo and participated in the mindfulness activities.

The principles of mindfulness are woven in to the school's approach to behaviour management and for those who require it, case management. The practice of square breathing is commonly used when managing students' aggressive or overt behaviour to help calm them before applying the schools behaviour management policy. Furthermore, parents are provided with information about square breathing and mindfulness during case management meetings as a strategy for their children to use at home to help with their emotional regulation.

## *Effectiveness*

The effectiveness of this school's mindfulness strategies is limited by its lack of a whole-school approach. However, its extensive use with students at risk who are in the Wish Group and during behaviour management and case management settings has demonstrated some positive outcomes for students. The school psychologist, Deputy Principal and Principal all noted the improvement in some students' levels of aggression and the speed with which they can now calm after an overtly aggressive outburst. There has also been some flow on effect of introducing the concept of mindfulness to parents through case conferences and these parents have indicated their children use square breathing at home to help them manage their emotions with some parents also practicing these techniques.

Staff note the change in language of students across the school, especially in relation to square breathing, and are confident that students are aware of the benefits of using this method of controlling their breathing. Furthermore, some staff are now using square breathing and other aspects of mindfulness in their own lives and note it has helped them deal with their own stressors.

Within the classroom, teachers report students generally enjoy the mindfulness activities and the concept of square breathing. Some staff noted that for some students, the delivery of the mindfulness curriculum was at times boring however incidental teaching of the content from an adult they trust appeared more effective than scripted lesson plans. Students also indicated that some lessons were a little boring, however they enjoyed learning about the brain. In particular, students really enjoyed the mindfulness activities at the previous year's Health Expo as they found these to be interactive and really interesting compared with learning about mindfulness while sitting in a classroom with a didactic teaching approach. When asked if the students enjoyed learning about mindfulness they all indicated a resounding yes, with many finding the square breathing helped with their own behavioural self-control and they would like to continue learning about mindfulness at school.

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## DIFFUSION OF MINDFULNESS ACROSS THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness was first introduced to this school through the passion of a school psychologist who has a personal interest in the topic and had watched other schools successfully implement mindfulness across their schools. With leadership support, the school psychologist offered two 'taster' professional learning workshops with the staff at after-school staff meetings and offers his time to teach components of MindUP in each classroom. Furthermore mindfulness is embedded in the Wish Group program and in case management approaches. There is however no systematic whole-school approach to diffusing mindfulness, rather the school has provided the information for their staff and they are empowered to choose to use mindfulness in the classroom if they feel it is necessary.

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## CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT MINDFULNESS

### *Time*

This school have dedicated time for staff to learn about mindfulness in after-school staff meetings. Moreover, the school psychologist has made himself available to all staff to teach components of the MindUP curriculum in their classes, or support their own use of the materials. The Principal also provided several staff with two days out of the school to visit an aboriginal school in the South West of Western Australia to learn more about their experience of implementing mindfulness.

### *Funding*

This school have not had to provide much financial support, other than the costs associated with sending several staff to the Aboriginal school in the South West to observe their implementation of MindUP. Most other activities have been implemented with minimal cost due mostly to the important role of the school psychologist in leading training and teacher support.

### *Human*

Both the school psychologist and the Deputy Principal leading the Wish Group are the main champions for mindfulness in the school and without these two roles, little mindfulness would be implemented or supported.

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## OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

The staff interviewed all agreed there was little to no resistance to the introduction of mindfulness at this school. This was attributed to the school's gradual approach to the introduction of mindfulness through whole-staff professional learning and by not mandating the use of mindfulness at the school. Furthermore, the availability of the school psychologist and the Deputy Principal to staff should they require support in implementing mindfulness was described as an excellent strategy for overcoming resistance and any hesitation staff may have had.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

A variety of recommendations from this school were made for other schools considering implementing mindfulness. Consistently mentioned by most respondents was the theme of starting small. Within this staff described the importance of being patient and slowly introducing the topic over time if staff are resistant. They suggested a good way of overcoming resistance and introducing mindfulness as a central concept in schools is through regular professional learning. Furthermore, the Principal noted the importance of a champion within the school to help lead and motivate staff. Another staff member described the importance of the school's Principal being knowledgeable of the subject and that completing the leadership course in mindfulness is highly recommended.

Teachers interviewed recommended the implementation of a whole-school approach so all staff and students have the same knowledge and practice. This could be achieved by having strong leadership for the topic, a range of lesson plans that were interactive and delivered by people with good pedagogical skills, time to plan for mindfulness and be supported by teachers willing to share their knowledge and practice with others.

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## CONCLUSIONS

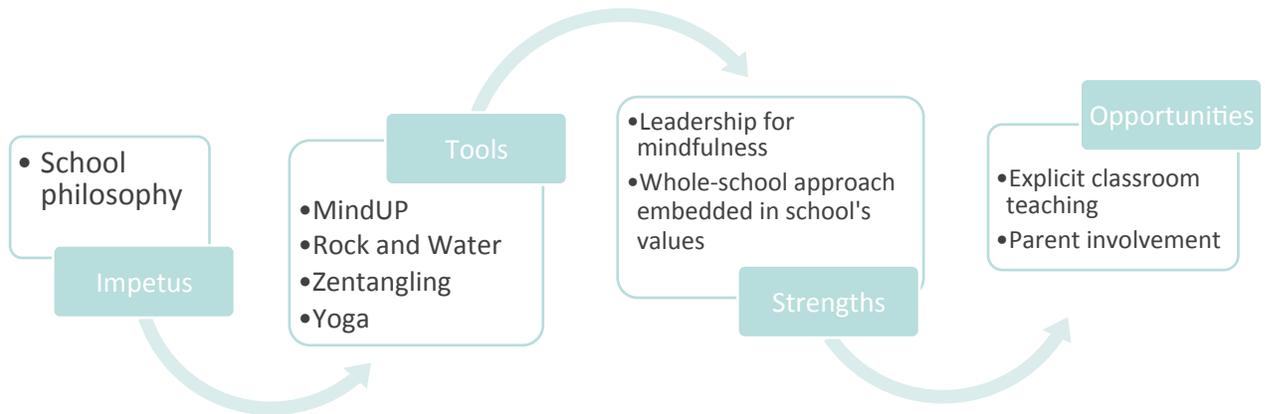
This school has a long history of promoting students' mental health through their involvement in an NHMRC funded Happy Kids mental health and resilience project. Mindfulness has been a more recent addition to the school and is currently championed by the school psychologist and deputy principal. While all staff have completed some preliminary professional learning, the teaching of mindfulness to students is left to the discretion of the teachers. Teachers are supported by the school psychologist who regularly teaches MindUP in classrooms, and all students are exposed to mindfulness through the school's Health Expo. In the future, this school note the importance of a more integrated whole-school approach to mindfulness, while cautioning that mandating the approach could be problematic for those staff who are disinterested. Most staff at the school recommend the use of mindfulness as an additional strategy to help prevent mental health problems, rather than solve them and encourage all schools to consider the importance of mindfulness for their students by starting small.

# Case Study Summary

## School 7

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### HIGHLIGHTS



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### SCHOOL CONTEXT

School 7 is a co-educational government school located in Perth's southern suburbs. This school is an Independent Public school and with approximately 100 students enrolled. The school's ICSEA value is just above the national average as the student population is drawn from a broad intake area attracting families through their distinctive purpose of *Education through community: Community through education*. The school's grounds embrace the natural bush surroundings and the school plays host to a Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden. The only person interviewed at this school was the Principal.

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### THE CONTEXT FOR MINDFULNESS

This school attracts families from a wide geographical area who are seeking an alternative experience to main stream Department of Education approaches to learning for their children. Families enrol their children in this school to experience the school's philosophy of community minded education with a particular focus on collective pastoral care and restorative practices. As a result, mindfulness is embraced throughout the school day and across the whole-school, including parents, to foster this community-minded school ethos, rather than using it to address a specific behavioural need.

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## MINDFULNESS IN THE SCHOOL

The school's current principal began teaching at the school in 1995 and soon after completed a Brahma Kumaris course at the World Spiritual University. This course introduced her to the power of mindfulness in the classroom and she began implementing strategies with her early childhood students at that time. Since becoming Principal of the school in 2002, the implementation of mindfulness has continued to evolve across the school. In this school mindfulness is truly embedded in to the way of life for students and staff.

Teachers are regularly exposed to mindfulness at staff development days to assist them in leading children through similar activities. Almost all school development days comprise some form of guided meditation by a staff member. The school have also hosted in-school professional learning relating to mindfulness such as the Rock and Water training. Further all staff are encouraged to attend external professional learning in areas they wish to learn more about.

At a whole-school level, mindfulness is integrated in to the school's approach to managing student behaviour through the use of restorative practices for resolving student conflict. The Principal and staff use restorative circles to discuss student behaviour and build respectful relationships in order to minimise the impact of the incident and the likelihood of it happening again. Furthermore, whole-school and senior student camps are held every year in regional Western Australia and aim to bring all students and their parents together to volunteer their time in a community less fortunate. In these camps, students are engaged in regular meditation practice each day.

In conjunction with restorative practices, all students participate in regular activities which promote mindfulness. All students attend a yoga class once a week with one of the school's teachers who is also a qualified yoga instructor. Further, once a week the school get together to pick fresh produce from the garden and cook lunch for all students and take a moment to pause and be thankful for the food they are about to eat. The Rock and Water program is used across the school with most teachers now trained in the program. It aims to help children understand their personal strengths and abilities and to learn how to play, work and live together in a multicultural society.

Instead of House Groups or Factions, this school has Harmony Groups. These groups include students from Pre-primary to Year 6 and they participate in collaborative activities that support the community rather than competitive sporting events. Once a week, all students come together and participate in a guided meditation. These meditations were originally led by the Principal, then a teacher, and now all Year 6 students take a turn scripting and guiding the rest of the school through a short meditation.

In the classroom, each day commences with a *Brain Gym* activity to help students prepare their brain to learn. Similarly, all students spend 10 minutes in some form of meditation after the lunch break. Each teacher is responsible for leading these sessions and they comprise a variety of activities, however every Tuesday all classes complete a *Zentangling* activity which is a silent drawing activity whereby students create and repeat patterns on a blank piece of paper without forcing or thinking about the patterns or process. Once a term the whole-school come together and complete a large *Zentangling* activity in the quadrangle area.

Mindfulness is also taught explicitly in the classroom by teachers as required. Some staff use the *MindUP* curriculum while the senior school teachers use Maggie Dent's book "*Saving our Children from Our Chaotic World: Teaching Children the Magic of Silence and Stillness*". Not all teachers use explicit teaching of mindfulness in their classrooms.

### *Effectiveness*

The Principal noted it was difficult to determine the exact effect of mindfulness on students' and staff as these practices have been in place for many years. She noted the distinct effect of the Harmony Groups on general playgroup behaviour. These groups have a focus on outward community service and regular guided meditations and the principal believes this community approach that brings the whole-school together has helped with playgroup interactions.

Anecdotal student reflections made to the Principal which support its effectiveness were also cited. Some students who have moved on to secondary school have reported back to the Principal that they use breathing techniques to help them when they get lost or stressed at their new school, while others noted they missed the meditations. The Principal also discussed how the explicit teaching of how the brain works helped one Year 4 student who was new to the school understand why he felt the way he did and stated "so I'm not dumb?". She also described the effectiveness of restorative practices and deep breathing before starting these had on the process of managing students' behaviour.

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## DIFFUSION OF MINDFULNESS ACROSS THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness has been present within this school for many years, therefore it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how it has evolved across the school. Started by the personal interest of a teacher, now the Principal, mindfulness has gradually become embedded within the everyday practice of the school. Furthermore, as the current Principal was a Level 3 teacher at the school for many years before becoming Principal, all staff and parents knew of her passion for mindfulness and could see the direction in which she would take the school as its leader. Since becoming Principal, mindfulness has been evolving by first providing professional learning for staff, then supporting these staff to implement classroom and whole-school activities to support their students.

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## CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT MINDFULNESS

### *Time*

This school allocates significant amounts of time on staff development days for professional learning and practice of mindfulness. Furthermore, staff are given additional Duties Other Than Teaching (DOTT) time to plan and reflect on their practice. Considerable time is allocated within students' school day for the practice of mindfulness and meditation, such as at the start of every school day for *Brain Gym*, guided meditation for 10 minutes after lunch and in the restorative practices used in managing student behaviour. This is complemented by weekly yoga lessons, the cooking of a weekly school lunch and Harmony Group activities.

### *Funding*

This school have not had to provide much financial support, other than the costs associated with sending staff to relevant professional development. Most other activities have been implemented with minimal cost due mostly to the passion and knowledge of the school's principal in this space.

### *Human*

The school's principal remains the most important source of support and motivation for the integration of mindfulness in the school. This is complemented by a supportive staff who are merit-selected to teach at the school to support this specific focus on mindfulness and education through community.

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## OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

The school's principal indicated there has been very little resistance to the school's focus on mindfulness. This is due in part to the school's use of mindful meditation for many years, as well as a hand-picked staff who also believe in this focus. Furthermore, parents cross usual Department of Education school boundaries to enrol their children at the school knowing mindfulness and meditation are core values. When first introduced, the Principal recalls significant communication with families to describe what the school were introducing and why, however this was a long time ago. Even with all of these enabling factors, a very small number of families over the years have left the school because they weren't comfortable with the approach. Similarly, one teacher struggled to adopt many of the school's philosophies for teaching and also left the school. Other than these few examples, all students, teachers and families welcome the approach to mindfulness.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

This school's Principal stated that mindfulness in schools is "*essential*" and that with the rising levels of anxiety and depression within our children today is "*criminal not to*". She also described mindfulness as a culture in the school rather than simply teaching a lesson in class and is inextricably linked to the Personal and Social Capabilities within the Australian Curriculum.

If starting this process again, the Principal recommends investing in professional learning for the school's leader and all staff to help each explore mindfulness for themselves and to learn how to embed this in their school or classroom. Following this, a resource such as *MindUP* would be useful to provide some explicit teaching strategies, backed by a strong evidence-base.

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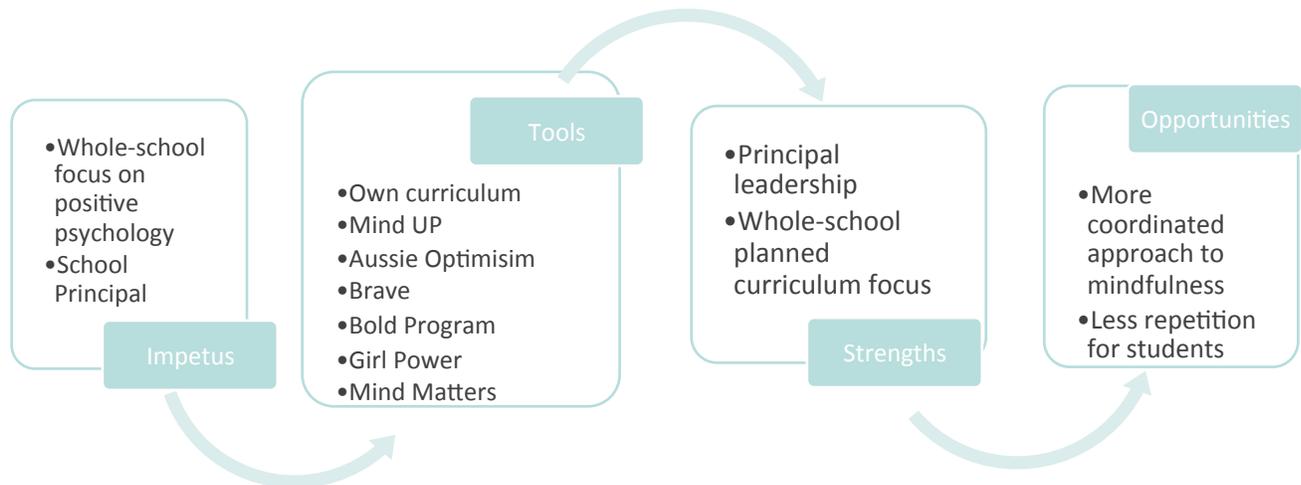
## CONCLUSIONS

This school draws families from across the southern suburbs of the Perth metropolitan area who are looking for an alternative ethos and pedagogical style to most Department of Education Schools. Their philosophy is *Education Through Community: Community Through Education* and as such, mindfulness is carefully woven through the whole-school. While some classes teach mindfulness explicitly using *MindUP*, all students participate in guided meditation or mindfulness activities at the start of the day and after lunch break. This is complemented by additional related activities such as yoga, the Rock and Water program and community connection activities within students' allocated harmony group. Staff receive ongoing professional learning at each school development day and are encouraged to participate in external professional learning opportunities. Parents are involved in school camps and are encouraged to join their students in guided mindful meditation activities so they are familiar with the school's practices. The school's Principal is committed to mindfulness, having studied it herself many years ago and inspires her staff to do the same. She recommends that all schools should be implementing mindfulness strategies to help overcome stressors present in young children's lives today and advocates for better training for school leaders and teachers.

# Case Study Summary

## School 8

### HIGHLIGHTS



### SCHOOL CONTEXT

School 8 is an Independent all-girls boarding and day school located in the Perth metropolitan area. The school caters for students from Pre-Kindy (3 years of age) to Year 12 and has a student body with an ICSEA value of 1187, well above the national average of 1000. Furthermore, 80% of its students are located in the top quarter of the ICSEA scale, compared with the expected 25% nationally in this quartile. At this school, 5% of students speak a language other than English at home. The school's mission is to mentor motivated learners to choose purposeful futures. At this school Year 9 students were interviewed along with over 10 teaching staff, including the school's clinical psychologist and the Principal was also interviewed.

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## THE CONTEXT FOR MINDFULNESS

This school has a reputation for high academic standards, which is an important consideration for parents when choosing to enrol their child in this school. However this school has an equally strong focus on the development of each student's health and wellbeing through positive psychology. Firmly embedded in their new 10 year strategic plan and led by the school's principal health, wellbeing and positive psychology now form a priority focus for the school which has facilitated the integration of mindfulness over the past year.

The school Principal's philosophy for learning is that of the pure engagement of the head, the heart and the hands. This philosophy is supported through the employment of two full time clinical psychologists and one school psychologist. These three staff work closely with students and their families in need, but also with teaching staff to plan and implement strategies to help prevent mental health problems and promote positive psychology. These staff are further supported by pastoral care structures including Heads of Year levels and 'Mentors' who lead each home room group. Students meet with these mentors at the start of every day and during the week for two, one hour sessions with the focus being pastoral care.

The cornerstone of the school's approach to mindfulness has been the development, mapping and implementation of the *Thrival Curriculum* across the school. This curriculum represents a planned and sequential approach to developing health and wellbeing through positive psychology of the students at the school from Kindergarten to Year 12. The school's *Thrival Committee* reviewed their existing health and wellbeing curriculum content across the school and looked for areas of repetition and gaps, then used their school-based data and knowledge of each year group to develop a curriculum that met the unique needs of all students.

The school's extensive pastoral care structures and use of two full time school clinical psychologists and a school psychologist, coupled with the planned and sequential *Thrival Curriculum* and focus on values across the school community, enables the school to deliver holistic approaches to promoting mental health and wellbeing while identifying and supporting students who may not be coping with the stressors of school and life. To complement this embedded approach to mental health and wellbeing, the school engage continuously with different external programs to support their students. Those not specific to mindfulness, but related through their focus on mental health and wellbeing include:

- The BRAVE program;
- BOLD Warrior;
- Mind Matters;
- Aussie Optimism; and
- Girl Power.

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## MINDFULNESS IN THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness in this school has evolved through the Principal's personal reading and belief in the important role of mindfulness in addressing the health and wellbeing of children and young people. After recently articulating the school's new 10 year plan and embedding health, wellbeing and positive psychology in that plan, the school have begun to implement mindfulness in the classroom, the school's values, behaviour management practices and in practice with staff and parents.

The school's new *Thrival Curriculum* provides a robust base from which teachers can begin to implement mindfulness. While this curriculum does not solely address mindfulness, it provides a springboard for teachers to try new strategies with their classes. Inspired by professional learning and the Principal's regular role modelling of mindfulness with the staff, teachers are encouraged to implement mindfulness in ways that work best with their students, as long as it aligns with the outcomes described in the *Thrival Curriculum*. Some teachers reported they used MindUp curriculum materials while others integrated brain breaks to help students prepare to learn. Some teachers described the use of Yoga and guided meditation sessions during exam weeks and during times of significant school transition points.

The school's values and focus on health, wellbeing and positive psychology are expressed throughout the school in varying ways. The Principal explores relevant values or social issues with students at assemblies to help challenge student beliefs. In 2015 the school implemented 'Mindful May' where a range of activities were on offer across the school for students to become aware of mindfulness and the different ways in which they can practice mindfulness that is most meaningful for them such as yoga, meditation, brain breaks and colouring in. Furthermore a range of mental health, resilience and positive psychology programs are offered at the school across the school community, which may not be specific to mindfulness, but help to promote the values of the school.

The school's Principal and other leadership staff discuss mindfulness at parent meetings, especially as it relates to the school's 10 year plan and *Thrival Curriculum*. The staff at the school described the importance of providing information to parents through as many forums as possible so that they can support their child's practice of mindfulness at home.

While a range of programs both in and out of the classroom are offered, all of these activities are underpinned by extensive staff professional learning and role modelling at staff meetings. The Principal has implemented a considered approach to providing information about mindfulness from a range of sources which is complemented by the opportunity for staff to practice mindfulness for themselves. These small steps or ‘tasters’ formed part of a deliberate gradual approach to achieving culture shift among the staff, before asking them to address mindfulness with their students.

The Principal explained her approach to walking the talk and therefore integrates mindfulness in to her engagement with the staff. This was supported by the teaching staff who described the use of ‘stillness’ before leadership meetings and the regular role modelling of mindful practice during staff professional learning days. The school has also participated in a positive psychology course (through The Pacific Institute) and other professional learning such as protective behaviours.

The school also embraces mindfulness practices in their approach to managing behaviour. Staff described the process for managing behaviour as a guided reflection of how the student’s actions did not live up to the college values and how their actions impact on the positive values of the school and their fellow students. This is favoured over a more punitive approach to punishing students for poor behavioural choices.

### *Effectiveness*

The school is currently working to create a more focussed approach to mindfulness that will sit alongside its *Thrival Curriculum* and support the school’s values. The staff therefore noted that as their current approach to mindfulness is still in its formative stages it is difficult to describe wide-spread changes to students, staff and parents. However, those staff who are actively using specific mindfulness strategies such as brain breaks at the start of a class indicate these brief mindfulness interventions have been successful in helping students prepare to learn. Further, the success of these brain breaks when used before a test or exam situation were articulated by students after finishing the test, noting they felt they could focus clearly on the assessment.

The school's principal described the change in language of students and the pedagogy of staff as the main successes of their approach to mindfulness to date. She also described parents increasing appetite for understanding more about the school's implementation of mindfulness and attendance at parent meetings as well as a reduction in time managing poor behaviour.

The students interviewed indicated varying levels of satisfaction with the mindfulness strategies implemented to date. Among these older students, it was clear that students reacted differently to each of the specific mindfulness strategies used. Some students really liked colouring in to help take their mind off a test or exam, however another noted colouring made her more anxious as she was worried her colouring would not be perfect. Similarly, some students really enjoyed yoga, while others did not. Furthermore, students also described their frustration at covering similar topics each year and/or completing the same external programs several times with different teachers. When asked about whether they would like to continue with mindfulness they all agreed they would, but that it should be used more sparingly and include outdoor activities and during break times as well. Most students however were able to describe the powerful role of mindfulness in helping them rationalise, distance themselves from problems and reduce their levels of stress prior to exams.

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#### DIFFUSION OF MINDFULNESS ACROSS THE SCHOOL

This school's approach to diffusing mindfulness across the school community is still in its infancy. Initiated largely by the Principal, the concept of mindfulness was gradually introduced to the staff to first provide them with the knowledge of mindfulness and an opportunity to experience mindfulness themselves. Teachers mirrored these sentiments of the Principal and explained the process of diffusing mindfulness as starting with general conversations about the topic, trialling different strategies for themselves and experiencing strong leadership for the approach by the school's Principal. Regular conversations at staff meetings, practicing 'stillness' and sharing information among staff was used as a first approach by the principal which was complemented by professional learning delivered by outside experts, such as The Pacific Institute and other external service providers.

All staff described the important role of the school's Principal in setting the tone for mindfulness. The Principal's commitment to mindfulness is demonstrated through its inclusion in the school's 10 year plan and her ongoing modelling of mindfulness across the school community including students, teachers and parents. While acknowledging the importance of the 10 year plan, the Principal noted the most significant enabler for the school was the appointment of a clinical psychologist who brought with her a well-developed understanding of mindfulness and how it may be implemented in a school setting. Staff also agreed, noting they could call on either of the clinical psychologists to support their teaching or practice of mindfulness in the classroom.

The explicit teaching of mindfulness in the classroom has been enabled by the development of the school's *Thrival Curriculum* which provides a planned and sequential approach to mental health, wellbeing and positive psychology across the school. This school-wide planning ensures mindfulness is introduced in a variety of ways in to every year level in a coordinated and developmentally appropriate way.

The diffusion of mindfulness was made simpler in this school due to its close links with their values system and priority for pastoral care. The school's values are closely aligned with the principles of mindfulness which enabled the initial discussions and staff training relating to mindfulness less challenging to introduce. Furthermore, the school's extensive pastoral care supports including 'Mentors' for each student became a logical place to introduce daily mindfulness practices when students meet with their mentor at the beginning of each day.

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## CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT MINDFULNESS

### *Time*

This school has provided a significant investment of time to introduce mindfulness and is best exemplified by the time allocated to a committee who mapped the health and wellbeing curriculum content across the school and developed a refined, sequential curriculum for health, wellbeing and positive psychology. Staff have also received significant professional learning opportunities, both through the role modelling of the principal at staff meetings as well as through external professional learning. The Principal described time as the greatest capacity input as "*time to educate, time to plan, time to adjust and time to timetable*".

### *Funding*

The school has funded some external professional learning workshops however most of the activities to date in developing an approach to mindfulness at this school, have involved releasing current staff from their teaching duties to attend professional learning and plan for the implementation of the *Thrival Curriculum*.

### *Human*

The appointment of two Clinical Psychologists and a School Psychologist who all have a passion for positive psychology has provided significant human capacity for the school to plan for mindfulness and to support all staff, students and parents in its implementation. Furthermore, the school's Principal who is leading mindfulness from the top is the most influential component for the implementation of mindfulness at this school.

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### OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

The school's Principal noted there was no resistance to the implementation of mindfulness, but it did require some time for "*re-education of staff*" in the importance of mindfulness for children and young people. She described the impact of this re-education on staff awareness as critical for motivating them to integrate mindfulness in to their everyday practice and with their students. Similarly teachers felt there was little resistance as they received significant professional learning and role modelling support from the Principal and the clinical psychologists at the school that provided "*tasters*" for mindfulness that encouraged them to start small and practice strategies in the classroom and reflect on their success. Further they felt that the Principal's commitment to mindfulness and positive psychology flowed through all communication within the school which enabled a gradual but whole-school language change. Staff also believed that the initial focus on their own wellbeing through mindfulness empowered them to implement mindfulness for themselves and their students with one staff member describing the school's approach as "*flourishing students led by flourishing teachers*".

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The staff at this school all recommended that starting small and providing significant time and professional learning investment in staff is the most important first step in a whole-school approach to mindfulness. They also described the importance of having opportunities for staff to practice mindfulness for themselves before working with students and starting with younger aged students while they are still receptive to new ways of thinking and being. Throughout the staff discussion, the importance of the Principal's commitment and leadership for mindfulness was evident. Staff were motivated and inspired by the Principal and therefore reported very little resistance to the approach.

Students interviewed enjoyed varying activities offered by the school and were able to indicate the importance and purpose of mindfulness, however they also cautioned they didn't want to focus too much on mindfulness as it became repetitive.

The school Principal recommended using *"frameworks, models and strategies"* rather than an off the shelf program. *"Off the shelf has an impact but it is limited... To me, the greatest thing for teachers is giving them a big repertoire and choice"*. Similarly, teachers also described the need to understand mindfulness for yourself before you can practice it in a classroom setting: *"Bring your own experience in it and if you know the girls, well you'll think well that's not going to work and change it"*. Another noted *"(It has) got to be authentic and address the needs of the girls at the time so you can't just have a one size fits all, it needs to be reviewed"*. Finally another staff member stated *"Knowing what you can grab to use is probably the key to success"* indicating that off the shelf programs are less helpful than having a full repertoire of strategies to choose from.

Furthermore the Principal noted the importance of ensuring all staff had the correct understanding of mindfulness before asking them to implement it in their classroom and to continually check in on their practice and understanding. Similarly the Principal suggested schools only take on mindfulness if it is congruent with the school's philosophy and values.

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## CONCLUSIONS

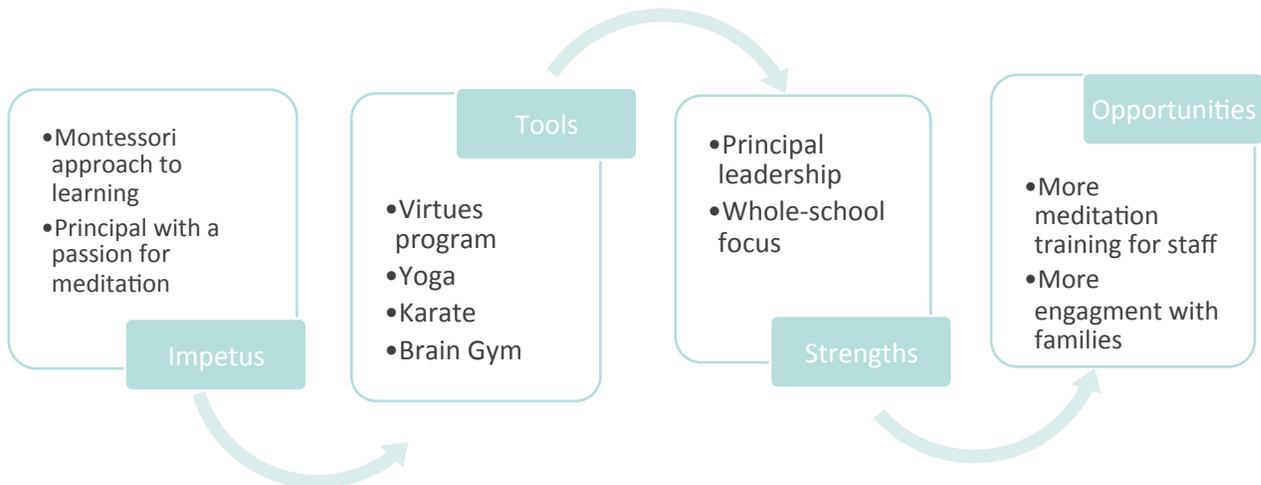
This school has a coordinated, planned and structured approach to positive psychology that is embedded in the school's long term plan, is led by the Principal and supported by a significant investment in clinical and school psychologists on staff. Mindfulness is a relatively recent addition to the school context and began as a focus of discussion at staff meetings that evolved in to professional learning delivered by external experts and continues today with the implementation of mindfulness practices in staff meetings. Staff were encouraged to find ways to embed mindfulness in to their teaching and learning alongside the school's newly developed *Thrival Curriculum* which promotes health, wellbeing and positive psychology across the whole-school. Mindfulness is implemented within the curriculum but also in the form of brain breaks, yoga and guided meditation, colouring and other activities implemented as needed by each teacher. The students interviewed understood the purpose of mindfulness and could articulate the role it played in assisting them to reduce their anxiety, however they reported mixed feelings about the range of strategies implemented, indicating among the older age groups, that a variety of mindfulness approaches may be needed. The school note little resistance from staff, students and parents due to the gradual, informed nature of the introduction of mindfulness in the school. They recommend other schools start small and focus on upskilling and motivating the staff before introducing mindfulness in the classroom, and that any attempt should begin in the younger year levels. Furthermore, the teachers and principal at this school all advocate for the upskilling of staff such that they have a repertoire of mindfulness strategies to use rather than a structured one-size-fits-all curriculum.

# Case Study Summary

## School 9

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### HIGHLIGHTS



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### SCHOOL CONTEXT

School 9 is an Independent Montessori school located in metropolitan Perth comprising more than 200 children from kindergarten to year 10. The school's ICSEA value is 1174, well above the national average of 1000. The school's approach to learning follows that of the Montessori philosophy where the focus of the school is on developing the whole-child by focussing on their academic achievement, social development, emotional resilience, physical growth and spiritual or moral development.

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## THE CONTEXT FOR MINDFULNESS

In developing a learning environment where children's social, emotional and spiritual development sit alongside intellectual development, Montessori education provides a seamless link to mindfulness and meditation. Mindfulness therefore at this school is not new. Firmly embedded in the Principal's own personal view of the world, mindfulness has been actively practiced at this school for over 30 years. To support the approach to mindfulness this school have a virtues program which focusses children on different virtues and how they are expressed in the world.

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## MINDFULNESS IN THE SCHOOL

The school's principal has been working in the school for the last 33 years, with most of this time as the principal. Inspired by her Montessori training and reading of Buddhism, the principal has been teaching and now leading the school through the lens of mindfulness for many years. Soon after taking on the role of principal, the principal asked all staff to consider implementing mindfulness into the daily routine at the school for a six month period. Primarily the school's focus at that time was on visualisation and breath meditation. After some initial modelling provided by the principal, all teachers were asked to lead these activities in the classroom and the approach has been in place across the school since.

Today, mindfulness appears across the school in a number of ways, mostly within each classroom. Every day after lunch time (the school's only free play time) every class participates in some form of mindfulness or meditation to help students calm down from the unstructured play and be ready to learn. The activities vary across each classroom and across the year levels and includes guided meditation, yoga, walking meditations and breathing. At other times during the day each class undertakes additional mindful activities such as implementing the virtues program, discussing respect and how to treat others, practicing affirmations, walking on the beach and karate. Each week a community meeting is held with all students where they learn to give and receive compliments. In all classrooms a peace table is provided for students to talk with their peers about problems or worries, or for a student to spend some quiet time alone.

Staff are trained in the Montessori approach and therefore are attentive to the importance of children's social, emotional and spiritual development. They have been supported by the principal who models mindfulness and leads guided meditations at staff meetings. Parents are aware of mindfulness and meditation in the school, however they note this has come largely from their children and not through structured communication from the school or principal.

## *Effectiveness*

As the school's approach to mindfulness is intricately woven with the Montessori approach and the school's vision and has been in place at the school for a long time, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of these mindful strategies. The staff interviewed noted that students at the school were able to manage their emotions and peer relationships well, due mostly to the school's virtues program and approach to conflict resolution. Students were able to articulately describe their mindfulness activities as well as the impact it has on them personally. All enjoy the range of mindfulness activities on offer within the school and many indicated they used some strategies such as breathing, visualisation and meditation at home. Parents reinforced this and described their children's active use of mindfulness at home. Teachers noted that some upper primary students were a little harder to engage in mindfulness, however with regular review and rotation of mindfulness activities and a focus on yoga, karate and creative verbal expression, the students still appeared receptive to mindfulness. Junior primary teachers all described their students' enjoyment and eagerness to participate in a wide range of mindfulness activities.

When asked what students have learnt from the school's approach to mindfulness, each student in the group described a broad range of benefits. Almost all indicated mindfulness after the lunch break helped set themselves up for learning with others indicated mindfulness is useful for calming and relaxing them and letting go of their problems. Some described it as a 'reset' tool and being mindful made them more aware of their own and others emotions. At home, some students use mindfulness before sleep or at times when they need to reset. Parents described their children's use of meditation, breathing before sleep and visualisation before sporting or competitive events.

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## DIFFUSION OF MINDFULNESS ACROSS THE SCHOOL

Mindfulness is seamlessly diffused across the whole-school after many years of implementation and the personal passion of the school's principal continually driving the approach. The principal has been largely responsible for mentoring and encouraging staff to implement mindfulness in their classrooms and has provided professional learning opportunities where available. Regular practice of meditation at staff meetings has further assisted the school to maintain regular mindful practice across the school. Parents interviewed were aware of the mindfulness and meditation approaches of the school, but that this came from discussion with their children rather than formal communication with the school.

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## CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT MINDFULNESS

### *Time*

As mindfulness is so congruent with the Montessori approach, there is sufficient time available to staff to implement mindfulness within their usual school day. This is further reinforced by the school's principal who has set an expectation of her staff to regularly implement mindfulness. Furthermore, the school has allocated a short amount of time after the lunch break where all classes are expected to practice some form of mindfulness or meditation to enable students to 'reset' and be ready to learn.

### *Funding*

The school has funded some external professional learning workshops however most of the training has been provided by the school's principal. The school have purchased resources such as CD's for guided meditations, books including Brain Gym and Yoga Pretzel cards.

### *Human*

The school have had limited upskilling of the staff as they come to the school with a background in mindfulness through their Montessori training. The principal has worked with staff to model meditation and mindfulness and support staff in attending professional learning where required, however she noted that further training and practice for teachers to become meditators themselves would improve their teaching of it to students.

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## OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

As mindfulness has been an ongoing part of the school for many years, there is currently little resistance. The Principal recalled some initial resistance from parents in the beginning however this didn't last long. Teachers also described little resistance as the approach to mindfulness is so closely aligned with the approach to Montessori education, they expect to be using mindfulness when working in this educational setting. Furthermore, the 'newest' member of staff has been at the school for over five years, so the staff are long serving.

Some teachers described a little resistance among upper primary students, however with a more flexible approach to mindfulness, such as using community meetings and the virtues program to discuss their feelings and gratefulness these students were able to more meaningfully experience mindfulness.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The principal and staff at this school hold an educational philosophy that is so closely aligned to mindfulness that they all believe mindfulness is an integral part of teaching. Teachers described mindfulness in schools as *“all or nothing”* implying that you can’t use mindfulness in an ad-hoc way. The principal holds a similar view noting that mindfulness is *“...as more important than any other area in schools”*, and *“... more important now than any other time”*. She further suggested that mindfulness itself is not enough in schools, it has to be complemented by a staff belief in the approach along with a strong values program that is entrenched within the school’s culture. Teachers described the need to not underestimate the potential of a child in being able to meditate from a young age as young children enjoy the routine and ceremony found within an approach to mindfulness.

The school’s principal described the need for affordable and regular training opportunities for school staff to learn about and practice meditation for themselves. She firmly believed the most significant factor influencing teachers’ use of meditation in the classroom is their own limited practice and skills. The teachers interviewed echoed this sentiment suggesting they would like more opportunity to practice meditating at staff meetings.

Parents and students all described their satisfaction with the school’s approach to mindfulness with parents noting they would like some additional support in learning more about mindfulness and how to support their child at home.

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## CONCLUSIONS

Mindfulness and the Montessori philosophy for learning are intricately connected which is evident within this school's embedded approach to mindfulness across the whole-school. Led by the Principal, mindfulness and meditation are one of the school's main priorities in their aim to support students' social, emotional and spiritual development alongside their academic achievement. The school's success is underpinned by the principal's personal belief and practice in meditation which has filtered through the entire school. This is supported by staff who are trained in the Montessori educational approach and the school's active Virtues program. Staff participate in guided meditations at staff meetings and the principal supports their teaching of meditation in the classroom by modelling these techniques where required. Mindfulness and meditation are present in the classroom after lunch time every day and in other opportunities throughout the school week. Students enjoy the range of mindfulness and meditation activities the school offers and report an excellent understanding of the benefits of being mindful in their personal and academic lives. Parents are equally supportive of the approach and expect it as part of their child's Montessori education. All staff at the school believe mindfulness is integral to a child's education and that any school wishing to undertake mindfulness should fully commit to the approach with sufficient training and time to practice meditation.

Each individual case study is summarised in detail in the previous chapter. In Chapter 3, an overarching summary of the main themes which emerged across each of the case studies is presented. These themes are arranged in accordance with the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) Framework, as a way of framing the themes within a well-known framework for planning and implementing school-based programs. This is complemented by the Diffusion of Innovation theory and the theory of Organisational Capacity to undertake new innovations. Prior to describing the main themes, each of the relevant theories used in the report are described.

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### THE HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK

The Health Promoting Schools (HPS) Framework is a long standing theoretical description of the active components of a school which contribute to achieving meaningful change in health outcomes. First developed over 30 years ago, the HPS Framework began as three interconnecting circles, as presented in Figure 2.

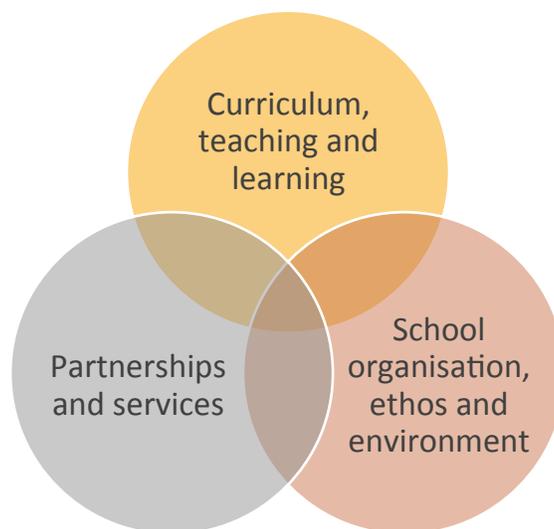


Figure 2: Health Promoting Schools Framework

In 1997, Booth and Samdal recommended an expansion of the HPS Framework to provide a more holistic approach to planning and implementing school-based health interventions. Using the latest implementation and health promotion evidence available at the time, Booth and Samdal expanded both the school organisation, ethos and environment component and the partnerships and services component to provide more detail in these important, but largely under-emphasised areas of influence.

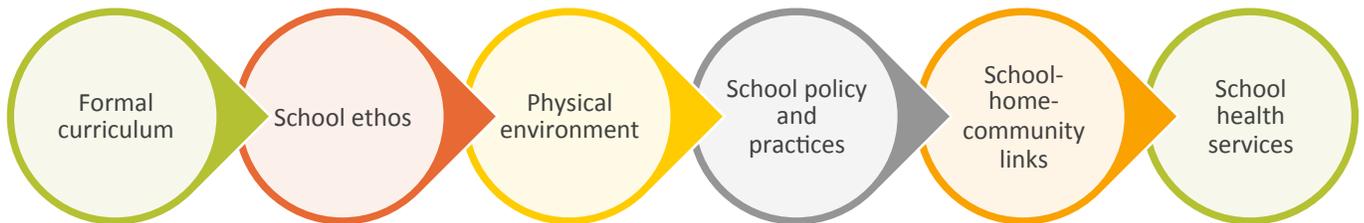


Figure 3: Revised Health Promoting Schools Framework

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#### DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION

The theory of the Diffusion of Innovations was first introduced by Rogers in 1962, and has been modified and refined since this time. This theory suggests that a new innovation must move through a series of stages before reaching a stage of complete implementation within an organisation. The theory of Diffusion of Innovations describes knowledge as the initial precursor for the implementation of a new intervention, whereby an individual or organisation is first exposed to the innovation, but lacks the information about how and why this innovation may be implemented. Persuasion relates to the stage where interest in the innovation is peaked and the organisation seeks to learn more about what the innovation may look like in their school. Decision is the point at which an organisation debates the advantages and disadvantages of the innovation and makes the decision to adopt or otherwise. Finally, once a decision is made an organisation moves to the implementation stage and then to the confirmation stage where there is widespread agreement in the commitment to this new approach.



Figure 4: Diffusion of Innovation

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## ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

Much of the school-based implementation literature describes the important influence of a school's capacity to implement a new program. The Bridge-It tool, first developed in America in 1999 identifies three (of a total of eight) key organisational level capacity factors important to predicting future implementation of a health intervention (Roberts-Gray, Gingiss & Boerm, 2007). These include access to resources (including time, materials, staffing, funding and planning) the school-based leadership for the intervention and characteristics of the implementers (teachers) such as their professional learning, skills, willingness and compatibility with their job expectations.

Resources	Leadership	Implementers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Time</li><li>•Materials</li><li>•Staffing</li><li>•Funding</li><li>•Planning</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Principal engagement</li><li>•Champion</li><li>•Importance to principal</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Professional learning</li><li>•Skills and experience</li><li>•Willingness to try</li><li>•Compatibility with job expectation</li><li>•Compatibility with personal beliefs</li></ul>

Figure 5: Organisational capacity

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## MAIN THEMES

The following discussion describes the main themes arising from the nine case studies relating to the way in which mindfulness is being implemented in Western Australian Schools. First, the implementation of mindfulness across the school community will be described using the HPS Framework. Second the themes emerging across all case studies which describe the way in which mindfulness was diffused are presented, followed by the organisational capacity supports identified by schools.

## ROLE OF MINDFULNESS IN SCHOOLS

In all case study schools' mindfulness was described by many as an *essential requirement in schools today* to assist children with complex needs and a variety of external stressors. They further pointed to mindfulness being a useful strategy, but not the only one needed in schools. One principal described mindfulness as another tool in his school's toolkit for addressing mental health.

In schools where mindfulness was most successfully integrated in to the school, these staff indicated that *mindfulness is most successful when it mirrors the school's overall philosophy and values*. This was evident in schools where mental health was already an important aspect to the school's operation and approach to education. While other schools didn't discuss this theme directly, the limited coordination across the school was evident in the school's prioritising of mindfulness and its congruency with the school's focus.

### WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

Once again, schools where mindfulness appeared most embedded were characterised by a whole-school approach. Those schools implementing *curriculum-based* content only reported less prominent changes in student and staff outcomes compared with schools who taught mindfulness explicitly and complemented this with *whole-school policy and planning*, embedding mindfulness in to the *behaviour management processes*, addressing mindfulness through the *whole-school ethos* and *broadly discussing* mindfulness with parents, staff and students wherever possible. In these schools where a true whole-school approach, including regular implementation of mindfulness in the classroom was evident, students reported the greatest impact and enjoyment with mindfulness. Where implementation was more sporadic, students were less likely to describe their enjoyment and need to continue to the use of mindfulness strategies.

### FORMAL CURRICULUM

In schools where mindfulness was implemented in a coordinated way, teachers had participated in *specific and ongoing training* by external providers and topped up by in-house 'champions'. These champions often modelled effective teaching of mindfulness for teachers who felt less confident with the content. This was seen as a significant support for schools in implementing mindfulness across the whole school. After being trained, most teachers reported using a combination of *explicit teaching* of mindfulness supported by *mindful practices woven in to an everyday routine* such as using 'brain breaks' to help focus students on an upcoming task. A range of formal curriculum materials were used by staff in these case study interviews, however *MindUP* appeared to be the most popular with *Smiling Minds* an equally popular resource for guided mindful meditations.

When making recommendations for future practice, staff were also adamant that the combined approach of a structured 'off-the-shelf' curriculum complemented by mindful practices would be the best approach. In discussing this, teachers who had used *MindUP* suggested this was an excellent resource, however they had expended a lot of time searching for incidental mindfulness approaches they could use in their class. Many teachers also noted the importance of starting early in a child's schooling career to introduce and embed mindfulness as usual practice. Some resistance was reported and observed by older students who have had to challenge their previously established beliefs about mindfulness and meditation at a time where peer influence is most prominent. Older students described their need for a variety of strategies so they could choose the ones that suited them most closely, while younger primary school

aged students all liked the regular and consistent approach to brain breaks and guided meditations to which they had become accustomed. It appeared as though the more consistently mindfulness was implemented within the school, the more students wanted these strategies to continue.

### SCHOOL ETHOS

Many schools described their use of *whole-school communication channels* to promote mindfulness as part of the school's ethos or culture. School principals used *assemblies* as an opportunity to speak with the whole-school community about mindfulness and its principles, with others using *newsletters, parent evenings and camps*, through *behaviour management* procedures and *daily notices* or messages with students. Two schools featured mindfulness in whole-school events and provided opportunities for students to try different mindfulness techniques in a fun and practical way. The students who participated in these events recalled their enjoyment in using mindfulness in a hands-on way outside of the classroom. Where mindfulness was clearly a whole-school approach and the school's culture centred within this value framework, teachers and students all described greater satisfaction with mindfulness as it was a way of life for the staff and students at the school.

### PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Very few schools discussed a modification to the school's physical environment as a strategy for promoting mindfulness. One school spoke of reframing their 'time out' room for managing student behaviours which included soft-fall matting for students who were self-harming, sensory toys for those whose anger was best managed by touch, sight and taste and colouring for students who found this mindful exercise useful for managing their emotions. Some teachers also described the friendly and welcoming classroom environment they created as an important component of mindfulness, including designated spaces within the classroom for relaxing and calming activities. One principal demonstrated his use of the external physical environment to 'walk and talk' with students about their behaviour, rather than managing it from behind his office desk. Indeed, this principle noted he did not manage any behavioural issues within his office to ensure this space was only ever associated with positive outcomes.

### SCHOOL POLICY AND PRACTICES

Few schools have implemented mindfulness in to their *policies*, which may be more of a reflection of the relative infancy of mindfulness in these schools. One school specifically addressed mindfulness within their new *10 year school plan*, which empowered teachers to integrate mindfulness in ways that were relevant to their students. Others have embedded mindfulness across the school and as such, has become ingrained in their approach to behaviour management policies.

The biggest area of achievement across all schools was in the practice of mindfulness. Even where mindfulness was not implemented in to a school's policy or plan, it was evident in their daily practices. Schools spoke of a range of strategies implemented beyond the formal curriculum that supported mindfulness which included discussion at assemblies and whole-school gatherings, in daily notices given at the start of the day over the PA system, during behaviour management procedures and within parent presentations and meetings. Most significantly however, the schools where mindfulness appeared to be

embedded within the school's every day practices used daily brain breaks for all students across the school. In this approach, all teachers used short breaks, usually after break times and at the start of the school day, to allow students to prepare themselves for learning. Teachers used a variety of strategies within these brain breaks including guided meditations (using Smiling Minds or their own scripts), deep breathing, colouring and yoga.

### SCHOOL-HOME-COMMUNITY LINKS

Except for two schools interviewed, most had not yet discussed mindfulness in detail with the parent body. Many indicated this was due to parents' limited understanding of mindfulness and their potential biases towards the approach based on their poor understanding. For many schools using mindfulness within behaviour management processes, parents of these children were supported to introduce simple mindfulness techniques at home such as using the Smiling Minds app or simple breathing techniques for calming when in a heightened state.

Schools where mindfulness was embedded within their behaviour management policies were more likely to discuss mindfulness with parents in case management meetings addressing a student's poor behaviour. When mindfulness was advocated in this setting, the school staff interviewed agreed parents were usually receptive to the idea of mindfulness and willing to support their child to practice mindful strategies at home.

### SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

One of the most significant enabling factors for many schools is the integration of school health services in to their approach for mindfulness. This was typically the school psychologist or school chaplain and in schools where these roles were engaged, mindfulness was most successfully implemented across the school. When used effectively, the school psychologist or chaplain was engaged to lead the teaching of mindfulness in the classroom to support teachers and in using mindfulness in their work with individuals or groups of students with behavioural needs.

### DIFFUSION OF MINDFULNESS

Successful schools studied during the case study interviews described a planned and staged implementation process for mindfulness that was *largely organic, rather than mandated*. Most started with *professional learning* for staff and used *school-based data* to demonstrate the need for mindfulness in their school. After deciding to implement, these schools found that for most staff the decision to take on mindfulness in their classrooms was grounded in this initial knowledge and sustained by a *supportive teaching context* where other staff were available to assist them in their mindfulness teaching and practice.

Although not explicitly stated in the interviews, principals of schools who were implementing school-wide mindfulness activities spoke of the importance of getting their staff ready for the change by providing training, making their processes congruent with the needs of mindfulness program and keeping parents informed of the process. Therefore, while these high implementing schools were not following the process of diffusion per Rogers initial theory, they were intuitively preparing the organisation for change before asking their staff to implement a new concept. It is in these schools where mindfulness can be seen across the school.

## SCHOOL CAPACITY

### RESOURCES - TIME

One of the most consistent themes to emerge from these case studies was the need for *time*. Some schools described how the allocation of time enabled the success of their strategies while others lamented the lack of time available. The way in which time was used also varied across schools. Some used their time to *plan* how mindfulness was implemented in their school. This was done in varying ways. Some schools allocated *time to staff to write and develop a scope and sequence of health curriculum* materials that addressed mindfulness alongside a range of health and wellbeing outcomes. Others used *time to upskill their staff* through professional learning or time to *review students' mental health needs*. Many schools described how they allocated *time in the normal school day to either teach explicit lessons* relating to mindfulness or to *practice mindfulness* using brain breaks, deep breathing and yoga.

### RESOURCES - FUNDING

All schools described the importance of funding to assist them in establishing a whole-school approach to mindfulness, especially in funding what is typically expensive professional learning in this area. Some schools were fortunate to receive funding from not for profit organisations to participate in mindfulness training and credit this external funding support as the initial impetus for their approach. Most schools noted curriculum materials were affordable for them, however they lacked the funding to adequately support professional learning which was the critical first step in setting the scene for mindfulness and creating supportive teacher attitudes.

### RESOURCES - MATERIALS

Schools participating in the case study interviews identified a range of materials being used by their teaching staff to implement mindfulness. The two most popular programs were *MindUP* for explicit classroom curriculum and *Smiling Minds* for guided meditations. In schools where mental health was more of the focus (and mindfulness a component of), a host of different programs which aimed at improving students' resilience, health, wellbeing and social and emotional skills were used. Other schools have commenced writing their own mindfulness curriculum content by 'cherry picking' resources from the internet.

All teachers interviewed noted they like off-the-shelf curriculum materials such as *MindUP* however they also sought out incidental approaches to integrating mindfulness such as how to facilitate brain breaks. When asked if a stand-alone curriculum (such as *MindUP*) is sufficient or if curriculum and a suite of tools to be used incidentally was preferred, all teachers and principals agreed with the latter. Some interviewees described the curriculum as simply not sufficient and that the incidental supports are the most active components in a classroom, but are hard to find.

Although not an off-the-shelf resource, several schools spoke of the importance of using data to motivate staff to try mindfulness in their classrooms. The data used included behavioural data, mental health screening scores, suspension records and NAPLAN results. When using data to present the need to staff, there appeared to be little resistance from the staff for taking on this approach. Schools described the need for further help in using data to motivate their staff for action.

### RESOURCES – PEOPLE

Having the right people available at the school to lead, implement and evaluate mindfulness was identified by many schools as an important component of their approach. In most schools the involvement of the school's psychologist or chaplain gave the approach credibility and provided leadership for mindfulness. Furthermore, principals described the importance of having a motivated and committed staff who believed in mindfulness and its impact on children and young people as critical for whole-school implementation. While professional learning can assist in changing staff attitudes, some principals described an inevitable turnover of staff when their personal views were no longer congruent with the schools. Other principals in schools where mindfulness was left as an optional and not mandated approach, reported some resistance and opposition to mindfulness from staff for whom mindfulness is less congruent with their personal beliefs, however as mindfulness was not mandated, these staff were less likely to leave.

### LEADERSHIP

One of the most critical components of successful implementation of mindfulness within the case study schools was strong leadership support for mindfulness. This was evident in varying ways, however where a school principal was passionate about mindfulness and 'walked the talk', a greater investment in mindfulness was evident across the school. Furthermore, those schools with a 'champion' to provide leadership were also extremely successful. While this person did not always hold a leadership role, they were viewed as an 'expert' in the school on the topic and were available to support teachers as they implemented mindfulness.

## *IMPLEMENTERS*

All schools spoke of the need and importance of training all staff about mindfulness before asking them to implement such an approach in their classroom. Although professional learning is important, many schools described the need for consistent professional learning to ensure mindfulness remains top of mind and to upskill new teachers as they enter the school.

Furthermore, the purpose of training was not to simply provide knowledge about mindfulness, its purpose should also be to create supportive teacher attitudes towards the approach. One principal cautioned that professional learning alone may not be sufficient for all teachers to develop supportive attitudes and recommended principals 'check in' with their staff to ascertain their level of support for and understanding of mindfulness.

After careful review of all nine case studies conducted and considering the programs available to schools to currently, the following recommendations are made for Mindful Meditation Australia's approach to working with schools to promote mindful meditation.

These recommendations are organised in two core components: Preparation and Practice. In the Preparation stage, recommendations for how to prepare the community for the need and ability to implement mindfulness are discussed. The Practice recommendations are those which are specific to a school's practice of mindfulness and the key active ingredients to facilitate this practice.

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### PREPARATION

#### AWARENESS RAISING

MMA can play a significant role in positioning the importance and evidence behind mindfulness within the broader community. Furthermore, this general awareness raising will reach teachers, parents and general community members who have links with schools and provide motivation for them to raise the idea of mindfulness within their school context. Awareness raising can take the form of:

- E-Newsletters to the MMA database;
- Position pieces on the website;
- Spokesperson in the media in response to relevant issues; and
- Conference presentations.

#### TRAINING

To motivate and prepare the community for the integration of mindfulness in schools, MMA should consider a suite of face to face and online training options to achieve raise the awareness of the role of mindfulness in schools to:

- Parents and caregivers;
- Teachers; and
- General community.

These training sessions should be brief and focus predominantly on raising the awareness of mindfulness in a school setting and providing advice on how their school can become involved.

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## PRACTICE

MMA can have a significant impact on the practice of mindful meditation in Western Australian schools. The following recommendations are presented considering the relevant theories describing the diffusion and implementation of interventions in schools and the application of the health promoting schools model in developing a whole-school approach to mindfulness.

Figure 6 presents the recommended approach to implementing and sustaining mindfulness practices in schools. The Figure is grounded in three key theories of school-based capacity, the Health Promoting Schools Framework and Implementation Science. The relevance of each of these key theories to the recommended approach to implementing mindfulness are explored below.



Figure 6: A whole-school approach to implementing mindfulness in schools

## CAPACITY SUPPORTS

On the outside perimeter of the model are the recommended capacity supports that should be addressed prior to implementing mindfulness in schools. These include time, having the right staff, sufficient funding, supportive leadership and regular professional learning.

### *TIME*

Schools should allocate time to sufficiently integrate mindfulness in to their school plans, conduct training for all school staff and be allocated time within the school day to teach explicit mindfulness content as well as practice mindfulness during the day.

### *MOTIVATED STAFF*

Schools will be more successful in integrating a whole-school approach to mindfulness when their staff believe mindfulness is important. Moreover, these staff need to have favourable attitudes to mindfulness, have the skills to implement it and feel supported in their approach. They also need the opportunity to practice mindfulness for themselves prior to working with students.

### *FUNDING*

Adequate funding should be allocated for the purchase of materials and in particular, training for all staff. This funding should be allocated prior to commencing a whole-school approach and should be made available over the course of the program to ensure sufficient resources are available as required.

### *LEADERSHIP*

Having a committed and motivated school principal who believes in the importance of mindfulness and its role in improving students mental health is the most important characteristic for a successful mindfulness program. Specific professional learning and support for school principals is a vital first step in promoting mindfulness in Western Australian schools. Furthermore, the role of 'champion' for mindfulness in the school is an additional requirement for a successful whole-school approach. This person can be a school psychologist or chaplain, school leadership team member or classroom teacher. Their position in the school is not as important as their passion for mindfulness and ability to support others in their practice.

### *PROFESSIONAL LEARNING*

Professional learning is a central component to any new initiative undertaken in schools, however none more so important for the concept of mindfulness. To successfully implement mindfulness across a school, all staff should have the opportunity to learn about mindfulness, examine their school's data to determine the need and have an opportunity to practice mindfulness for themselves. Furthermore, teachers should receive ongoing coaching support to assist them as they transition in to using mindfulness in their classroom and to discuss with other more experienced practitioners, how to navigate road blocks in the classroom. This professional learning should also be regularly repeated.

## HPS FRAMEWORK

Once all capacity supports are in place within the school, the inner circle of Figure 1 explores the core components of a whole-school approach to mindfulness.

### *FORMAL CURRICULUM*

A structured and formal curriculum should be introduced across the school which explicitly discusses mindfulness and how it works. This curriculum should be expressed as a scope and sequence over the year levels of the school to ensure it remains developmentally appropriate and not repetitive. Where possible, curriculum materials that have an evidence-base are preferred. Teachers are encouraged to integrate the practice of mindfulness within their classroom through regularly scheduled brain breaks and other mindful activities such as yoga, colouring in and deep breathing.

### *POLICIES AND PRACTICE*

Mindfulness should be included in the school's planning processes to demonstrate the school leadership's commitment to the approach. Once embedded in the school plan, relevant policies should be amended to reflect mindfulness, especially in managing student behaviour. Whole-school practices should be adopted to support the school's approach to mindfulness.

### *PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT*

The school's physical environment should be congruent with the school's approach to mindfulness and offer students appropriate facilities to practice mindfulness.

### *SCHOOL ETHOS*

A school where all staff support the approach to mindfulness and students are encouraged to participate in whole-school activities is pivotal to success. A school ethos can be addressed by regular discussions at school assemblies, in school newsletters and staff meetings, with parents in case conferences and with students during behaviour management discussions. Furthermore, the use of posters and artwork that support mindfulness and celebrations of key achievements and mindful activities are encouraged.

### *SCHOOL-HOME-COMMUNITY LINKS*

Establishing sound links between the school, families and the broader community in relation to mindfulness are essential. In doing this the school provides adequate information and opportunities for training for families to become familiar with mindfulness and to implement mindful strategies in the home. This consistent approach at school and home holds the most promise for the long term sustainability of any school-based program.

## *HEALTH SERVICES*

The integration of school health services such as the school psychologist or school chaplain in the implementation of mindfulness strategies can provide credibility to the approach as well as an important referral source for students in need.

## *DIFFUSION*

The Diffusion of Innovation theory explores the stages required of a school in the early stages of considering whether to adopt mindfulness in their school. It encompasses some of the School Capacity and HPS Frameworks but is an important implementation 'checklist' for ensuring the approach to mindfulness is staged and considered.

## *KNOWLEDGE*

All staff in the school should have sufficient knowledge of mindfulness and how it is practiced in a school setting.

## *PERSUASION*

Once appropriately skilled, staff should have the opportunity to see how implementing mindfulness can influence student health, academic and social outcomes and what it might look like in their school.

## *DECISION*

During this decision-making stage, staff are actively encouraged to explore how the investment in mindfulness across the school is different to their current practice and whether the additional investment in time, funding and resources is advantageous over their current practice.

## *IMPLEMENTATION*

Once the school staff agree to implement mindfulness, the program commences full implementation, although likely in a staged manner.

## *CONFIRMATION*

After being implemented successfully over several years, the school can begin to make small changes to the approach to ensure mindfulness remains relevant for the school community.

This chapter describes the recommended next steps for Mindful Meditation Australia as they move forward in achieving their mission of improving the happiness and wellbeing of all Australians. These next steps refer specifically to mindfulness in a school setting.

**OFFER TRAINING AND EVALUATE**

Both theoretically and as evidenced in these case studies, training for school staff is the most important first step for implementing mindfulness effectively in schools. Therefore, the MMA is uniquely positioned to be able to offer a range of training options for school leaders, teachers and the broader community. Given the limitations of time, funding and some school resistance, it is recommended that MMA develop different levels of training and different mechanisms for accessing it. These are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Proposed training models

	Online		Face to Face			
	10-minute overview	One hour introduction	Half day awareness raising	Full day knowledge and practice (offsite)	Follow-up half day	In-school tailored coaching/training as needed
<b>Whole-school</b>						
Leaders						
Whole-school staff						
Project Team						
<b>Individuals</b>						
School Leaders						
Teachers						
School psychologist / chaplains						
<b>Community</b>						
Individuals						

For all school, individual and community training a combination of online and face to face offerings should be provided. The online training should be brief and intended to provide a ‘taster’ to generate interest in the full training programs. Training offered face to face should also be structured to provide initial information only sessions that are short (half day) and expand to full day training models with follow-up.

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#### ESTABLISH A ‘WHAT WORKS’ ONLINE PORTAL

School staff interviewed discussed the difficulties in finding information about how to integrate mindfulness in to their classrooms online. Therefore, the development of a ‘what works’ online portal which provides a range of strategies schools and classroom teachers could try would be beneficial. The database could be searchable and include information about each strategy such as where it has been used, the evidence for it and a space for comments from teachers who have tried it in the past. These strategies should be arranged by the HPS Framework in to Classroom, School Ethos, Physical Environment, Policy and Practice, School-Home-Community Links and School Health Services. Many of the strategies identified in the main body of this report could be written up for inclusion in this ‘what works’ database.

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#### CONTINUE PROMOTION

Continued promotion of mindfulness within schools and the broader community is a crucial next step in helping to change community perceptions of mindfulness and generate interest in it as a school-based initiative. This can be achieved in several ways as described below:

- Present case study findings at education and psychology conferences;
- Host a booth at education and psychology findings where you can promote training and resources;
- Disseminate regular e-Newsletters that are tailored to different user groups (parents, teachers, school leaders, general community, psychologists);
- Write opinion pieces and publish on the MMA website and e-Newsletters; and
- Respond to discussions of meditation and mindfulness in the media by sending media statements regularly to local news outlets. This will help establish MMA as the content expert in the field.

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## CONSIDER TESTING THE 'IMPACT' OF A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO MINDFULNESS ON CHILDREN AND TEACHERS

There is a limited evidence-base in Australia and indeed the world of the role of a whole-school approach to mindfulness. Therefore, the next important step for MMA will be to conduct a robust study of mindfulness as it is implemented across the whole-school under ideal 'test' conditions of a research study. The research should aim to determine what the impact of a whole-school approach to mindfulness is on student outcomes (health, academic, readiness to learn, mental health etc) and teachers (student readiness to learn, health, academic, mental health outcomes).

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