

# A **BEST** Success Story

## Special Edition – Mindfulness at BEST: A Growing Legacy

Summer 2023



The BEST Executive mindfulness team with Maggie Farrar, author of *Leading With Presence: It's An Inside Job*. BEST features heavily throughout the book

Mindfulness helps us be more aware, more focused, more resilient, more joyous, and ultimately even more effective.

All Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST) staff members have an entitlement to attend a mindfulness course. Since 2020, we have offered a range of courses from beginners to postgraduate level.

The BEST Mindfulness Pathway moves through three phases: beginning, discovering and integrating.

In the beginning phase, staff are introduced to mindfulness. Mindfulness spaces are provided, either online via our trust-wide virtual community platform or on school sites through wellbeing gardens.

In the discovery phase, foundation courses are offered in mindfulness and leadership presence. These can lead to teaching qualifications or postgraduate study.

The integrating phase encourages staff to train to teach students and leaders to embed mindfulness into school culture.

Each BEST school has developed a School Mindfulness Pathway, setting its own aims and objectives based on our suite of opportunities.

Support is available to nurture bespoke school pathways through the BEST Mindfulness Coach, Will George, and our external consultant, Maggie Farrar.

As you will see, the impact of mindfulness at BEST has been huge, both in terms of the numbers completing courses and the impact of those courses.

I am thrilled that an extensive trust-wide internal scrutiny report into wellbeing concluded that: 'BEST is leading the way for wellbeing in the educational trust sector' (Juniper, 2022).

Dr Alan Lee, Chief Executive Officer, BEST

### OUR JOURNEY AT A GLANCE

- Mission to make BEST a mindful and compassionate community begins in 2020
- All staff given the chance to take part in mindfulness training – with 100+ doing so
- Growing interest across the education sector in the impact our practice is having



We are delighted to see the growth of MiSP courses at BEST and the **transformational impact they are having on pupils and staff**

– Richard Burnett, Co-Founder and Chair of MiSP

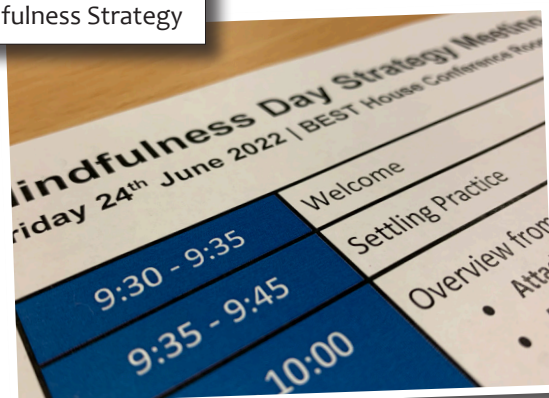
## The BEST Mindfulness Offering



Dr Alan Lee presenting to schools on the benefits of mindfulness



Trust and school leads meet regularly through the academic year to plan our Mindfulness Strategy



### The three phases of the BEST Mindfulness Pathway:

#### BEGINNING

##### Trust

- BEST Mindfulness Space on Yammer – resources and community
- Wellbeing spaces
- Introductory inset presentations
- Drop-ins

##### Schools

- Mindfulness noticeboards and displays
- Wellbeing spaces
- Introductory assemblies and experiences

#### DISCOVERING

##### Trust

- .b Foundations course
- Leadership Presence courses

##### Schools

- Teach Mindfulness Curricula: dots (3-6), Paws b (7-11), .b (11-18)

#### INTEGRATING

##### Trust

- Train to teach to pupils
- Refresher sessions
- Mindful school culture inset
- Mindfulness Coach support

##### Schools

- Mindful Champion staff role(s)
- Staff-led practice group
- Mindfulness integrated into school day
- Targeted pupil support/drop-in clubs
- Parent sessions
- PSHE mapping
- School ethos, policy and practice integration

### OUR JOURNEY AT A GLANCE

#### 2020/21:

- BEST mindfulness courses introduced
- .b Foundations course and/or Cultivating Leadership Presence offered to all staff
- New BEST value consultation process



## About... Will George

*Will has over a decade of coaching experience and trained with the Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice at Bangor University as well as the Oxford Mindfulness Centre.*

*He was appointed our BEST Mindfulness Coach in September 2022.*

## .b Foundations course

- Designed for school staff to learn the foundations of mindfulness meditation, develop wellbeing, resilience and self-compassion
- Eight weekly 90-minute classes, held online
- 'Home practice' to train the mind
- Audio resources and course book

The course is crafted by the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) to be accessible and engaging for busy staff working in school communities.

BEST has run eight course cohorts (and counting!) – afterwards, staff are offered regular refresher sessions to support them in maintaining and deepening their mindfulness practice.

## Cultivating Leadership Presence

- A programme of four to six online sessions
- Designed to help attendees develop leadership from the inside out
- Helps BEST leaders to cultivate resilience, habits of mind, leadership renewal and the courage to be compassionate

## Deepening Leadership Presence

- A programme of four online sessions for those who have completed Cultivating Leadership Presence
- Helps deepen practice and strengthen the application of mindfulness to attendees' leadership from the inside out
- Connects leaders in developing mindfulness pathways



## About... Maggie Farrar

*Maggie has worked in schools as a teacher and leader for over 40 years, and was also a director at the National College for School Leadership in England.*

*A trained mindfulness teacher and practitioner, she was awarded the CBE for services to education in 2014.*

“ Mindfulness helps us to be fully present to children and colleagues at school, and to our families at home. In this way, **we become more effective and our wellbeing improves, since we become less distracted**

– Steve Adams,  
Principal, Pix Brook Academy



## Training our teachers

- We support staff who complete the .b Foundations course if they wish to train further to cascade their knowledge and teach mindfulness in the classroom
- With ongoing personal practice and age-specific training via MiSP, staff have the opportunity to sew

the seeds of mindfulness to pupils of all ages

- dots (age 3-6 years), Paws b (7-11) and .b (11-18) curricula on offer
- Vital to embody qualities such as open-minded curiosity and patience – because mindfulness and compassion are 'caught' as much as they are 'taught'



# Encouraging our students to engage in mindfulness practice at an early age

BEST staff who have taken part in mindfulness training are reaping the benefits – both on a personal level and passing on the practice to pupils, too.

Melissa Godfrey, a pastoral support officer at Samuel Whitbread Academy, was in one of our first cohorts of Will George's .b Foundations course.

She said: "I encourage students on a daily basis to look after their wellbeing and having the experience and understanding of mindfulness has been a great asset to have.

"It allows me to share the benefits of mindfulness and encourage young people to engage in a positive practice at an early age.

"The .b course really sparked my interest in teaching

mindfulness to young people, so I have since completed additional training to be able to share with students."

Stefania Sacco-Farag, an academic mentor at Pix Brook Academy, said: "I feel privileged to have attended two courses through MiSP – .b (Stop and Breathe) for my own personal development, and afterwards, I attended the Teaching Mindfulness to 11-18 year olds.

"Both courses offered a myriad of tools that can be used in everyday life to continue my journey.

"They have also definitely helped me become more aware of my thoughts and how these thoughts have an effect on my behaviour.

"I firmly believe mindfulness is a technique I want to continue practising and sharing its benefits with others."

It is terrific to see the benefits mindfulness is having on the BEST community, as we continue to work in partnership welcoming staff to our postgraduate courses

The BEST Board has encouraged and supported our schools, and our CEO Dr Alan Lee, on this exciting adventure.

Dr Alan Lee has completed both the Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma courses at the University of Aberdeen, and is currently finishing off his MSc.

And in the summer of 2022 he represented BEST at the Centre for World Peace on Holy Isle, off the west coast of Scotland, *right*. There, he met with leaders in



mindfulness and discussed its impact across international boundaries.

– Prof G Nixon,  
Programme Director  
Studies in Mindfulness  
University of Aberdeen

## OUR JOURNEY AT A GLANCE

### 2021/22:

- BEST value 'We will have the courage to be compassionate' adopted
- Mindfulness Strategy Group established
- Developing Leadership Presence launched
- Staff wellbeing gardens project started



BEST Chair of Trustees  
Ilona Bond and  
Vice Chair Paul Walker

# I'm calmer, less anxious, more aware

Course feedback from BEST staff

Mindfulness is awareness. The practice enables us to notice challenge in self and others. This is the first step in developing a culture of compassion. Compassion is at the heart of everything we do at BEST. Together as one, we accept that we all struggle from time-to-time and we work hard to support each other to success.

**Alison Wilshaw**  
BEST Director  
of Education

The impact of mindfulness is felt throughout the whole of BEST – with our Board of Directors giving its full backing to our journey.

Both Chair of Trustees Ilona Bond and Vice Chair Paul Walker have taken part in the courses on offer to enhance their own practices.

Ilona said: "Since taking part in the BEST mindfulness programme I have come to realise that I needed to take a step back and truly look at myself and evaluate where I am in my life.

"I now acknowledge that being present isn't just about a physical presence but an awareness of who you are and those around you.

"I am really looking forward to seeing how mindfulness continues

to develop across our BEST community and believe it can only enhance what we already offer our young people and those who serve them."

Paul said: "The BEST mindfulness sessions on Zoom were instructive, thought-provoking and served as a useful reminder to improve and re-establish my focus routine on a regular basis.

"I am proud of BEST's position as an early adopter and enthusiastic adopter of mindfulness practice in its schools.

"I would encourage others within the BEST community – staff, students, governors, parents and carers – to consider adopting the practice."

## 'Mindful approach to work is improving my effectiveness'

*BEST Chief Operating Officer and Deputy CEO Craig Smith writes...*

My mindfulness journey has evolved over the last three years, firstly from a curious but non-committed position through discovery and now to acceptance and impact.

Central to this has been regular practice but also

individual coaching from Maggie Farrar. This aspect has been tremendously useful – helping me understand and internalise my relationship with mindfulness.

I have already seen significant impact in both my professional and personal life and am now confident a mindful approach to my work is improving my effectiveness in the workplace and my worklife balance.

## IN NUMBERS

# 750

All BEST staff entitled to mindfulness training

# 108

Staff who have completed training programmes



# I've taken back control of my time and feel more confident

Course feedback from BEST staff

## A virtual community to share thoughts and our journeys

At the start of the 2022/23 academic year we launched a new virtual space to help our BEST mindfulness community to grow and thrive.

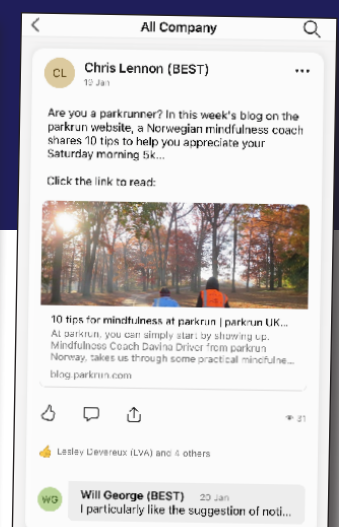
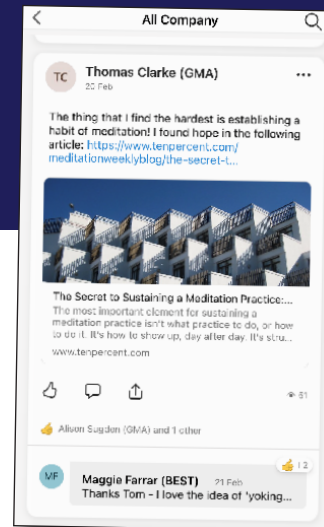
With the majority of communication previously issued via email, the introduction of Yammer – Microsoft's

social networking platform (*being rebranded to Viva Engage in 2023*) – gave our staff a dedicated area outside of their inbox.

It has given community members a chance to share and celebrate their practice, find information on

mindfulness and wellbeing, and ask any questions they may have.

Our .b Foundations and Leadership Presence cohorts also have the ability to download their course notes, chat and watch recordings of their online sessions, too.



Pupils across the BEST family of schools taking part in mindful activities to mark World Meditation Day



Pupils at Campton Academy taking part in a mindful eating session and discussing how mindfulness helps them to be calm and relax

### OUR JOURNEY AT A GLANCE

**2022/23:**

- BEST Mindfulness Coach appointed
- Virtual community on Yammer launched
- BEST Mindfulness Pathways created
- CEO invited to be keynote speaker at the Inspiring Leadership Conference at the ICC

‘ I realised that if I was to continue to be effective – and become a wholesome leader, I needed to look at, and change, from the inside

– Dr Alan Lee, writing in *Leading With Presence*

In the autumn of 2022, Maggie Farrar published her leadership development book *Leading With Presence: It's An Inside Job*.

Inspired by her work with thousands of school leaders and drawing on her training with the Oxford University Mindfulness Centre, the book seeks to give leaders practical strategies to understand their inner world and develop a powerful leadership presence.

BEST features prominently throughout, with many of our trust and school leaders providing compelling and thought-provoking insight into how mindfulness has shaped their own journeys.

Below are some of those extracts from *Leading With Presence*, reproduced with kind permission from Maggie.



Through these practices I am much more able to handle stress.

I have also been able to recognise when others are dealing with stress and anxiety and I feel more comfortable checking in on them.

In the past I might have asked about what they were 'doing', now I balance that with how they are feeling.

**Michael Warlow**  
Leadership Team,  
Gothic Mede Academy

I have learnt to deliberately 'switch mode' at the end of the day. When I switch off the car engine outside my house, I deliberately orient to the family.

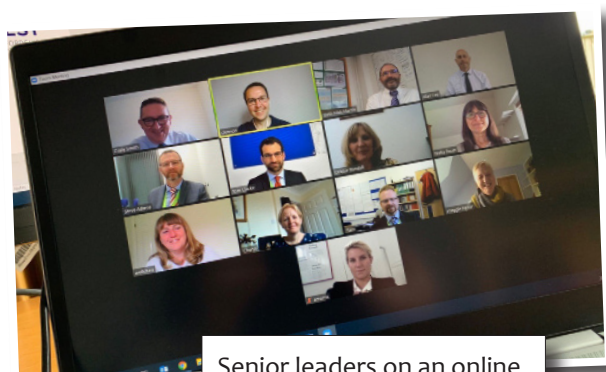
I now notice the pull of unsent emails and accept that sense of urgency, telling myself 'there is time for that later – now is the time to greet my children'.

**Sarah Fraher**  
Principal, Campton Academy

I am learning the value of being more aware of what I am doing and finishing what I am doing before my mind moves on to the next thing.

I feel that now I am living at a better pace. My focus, as well as my awareness, has improved.

**Nafia Baust**  
Chief Financial Officer



Senior leaders on an online Leadership Presence course

I am now more in control of my mind at times of stress and anxiety. I tend to overthink and in the past I haven't slept well. Now I centre myself on the breath. I watch my wandering mind. I can now notice what's happening and wind back down much more easily.

**Nick Martin**  
Principal,  
Samuel Whitbread  
Academy

## IN NUMBERS

6

Mindfulness Strategy meetings... so far!

10

Inset presentations to introduce mindfulness to all BEST schools



## IN NUMBERS

9

Staff trained  
to teach  
mindfulness  
to pupils

Senior leaders  
receiving 1:1  
mindfulness  
coaching

3

2 Postgraduate  
mindfulness  
courses  
completed



Staff from Langford Village and Gravenhurst Academies are presented with certificates to mark the completion of their .b Foundations course – they were among the first cohorts

## Schools embracing practice in variety of different ways

The staff wellbeing garden at Etonbury Academy has given the school's mindfulness lead a chance to reset – and introduce the practice to colleagues, too. Joya Brahmachari-Limb said: "I often visit a retreat in Rutland to reboot and reset ready for the busy week ahead.

"The garden at Etonbury mirrors this experience and is a mini retreat for me.

"It has created a sacred space in the workplace where I can now go to reset for 5-10 minutes in my busy day."

Debbie Randall, Principal of Langford Village and Gravenhurst Academies, said introducing mindfulness into her schools was the main aim of her journey – with many staff signing up for our training.

She said: "Mindfulness has real benefits for the wellbeing of my staff and I believe over time this will also benefit the children.

"I make sure I have pauses in my day which helps me to concentrate on the task at hand and I encourage my staff to do the same."



Etonbury Academy staff gather in the school's wellbeing garden for a meditation practice

## Where next for BEST's mindfulness journey?

The impact mindfulness has had at BEST will come under the spotlight at the Inspiring Leadership Conference in the summer of 2023.

Dr Alan Lee and Maggie Farrar will be among the keynote speakers at the annual event, and will reflect on our trust's journey so far.

The conference, attended by

thousands of senior leaders from schools in the UK and overseas, takes place at the ICC in Birmingham in June.

Beyond this, we are keen to connect with other schools and MATs across the country (or further afield!) to share our impact and help establish this growing legacy.

[www.inspiringleadership.org](http://www.inspiringleadership.org)

Inspiring Leadership  
Conference 2023

ICC, Birmingham

8 - 9 June



Book now.

Inspire yourself, Inspire your school.

## JOIN OUR MINDFULNESS COMMUNITY

If you are interested in mindfulness and want to find out more about introducing the practice at your school or trust, contact BEST CEO Dr Alan Lee on [alee@bestacademies.org.uk](mailto:alee@bestacademies.org.uk)