



If you are a parent of a Form 2 student, your son or daughter will participate this academic year in a mindfulness programme in the school. The new national Wellbeing curriculum on the Junior Cycle programme places a firm emphasis on supporting our students in their journey through secondary education. In response to this, the King's Hospital is deeply engaged with exploring how we can promote the long-term flourishing of all of our students, and with helping them to develop a "toolbox" of techniques that they can use inside and outside the classroom.

During the year, your child will be learning about mindfulness once a week as part of a 10-week secular classroom-based curriculum called **.b** (pronounced 'dot-be'). You may have heard of mindfulness or read some media coverage about it. A great deal of this media interest has arisen as a result of the growing body of rigorous research evidence regarding the potential benefits of mindfulness for young people. These include randomised control trials and neuroscientific studies.

In line with the Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme, the **.b** course provides tools for our Form 2 students to improve and maintain positive mental health. It helps them to understand what happens in their brains when they are going through a challenging time and empowers them to reach out and access appropriate support when they need it. Mindfulness is not a cure-all, nor is it a form of therapy. However, as Professor Katherine Weare observed in her award-winning research summary: *Evidence for the Impact of Mindfulness on Children and Young People*, schools who engage in mindfulness are likely to see '**beneficial results on the emotional wellbeing, mental health, ability to learn and even the physical health of their students.**'

We are bringing mindfulness to our students as a way to help them cultivate and maintain positive mental health in the context of the world that surrounds them in which:

- Approximately 75% of mental health disorders emerge before age 25
- 30% of adolescents show depressive symptoms ranging from mild to very severe
- 22% of adolescents suffer mild to severe anxiety
- 1 in 3 young people age between 12-25 will have a difficult mental health event in their lives
- 1 in 10 young people will suffer serious mental health issues that impair their daily lives
- 62% of adolescents rated their own mental health as average to very poor

Figures taken from Headstrong's *My World Survey* (2012) and Reach Out's *What's Wrecking Your Head* survey (2017).

At its most simple **.b** is an awareness-raising exercise to give all students a taste of mindfulness so that they know about it and can return to it later in life if they choose to do so.



.b aims to help young people:

- To improve their **concentration and focus**, in classes, in exams and tests, on the sports field, when playing games, when paying attention and listening to others.
- To **fulfil their potential** and pursue their own goals e.g. be more creative, more relaxed, both academically and personally.
- To experience **greater well-being** (e.g. feel happier, calmer, more fulfilled).
- To work with **difficult mental states** such as anxious thoughts and low moods.
- To cope with the **everyday stresses** and strains of adolescent life such as exams, relationships, sleep problems, family issues.

The feedback from students who take part in **.b** is very positive. I would encourage you to read the comments about the course's impact from last year's pilot groups in the school. I also attach this link to the page of the Mindfulness in Schools Project website where you where you can read comments from over 1400 students worldwide who have taken part in the **.b** programme: <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Website-Feedback-for-.b-NP-1.pdf>.

To learn more about the body of research evidence around the potential benefits of mindfulness for young people, please look at this page: <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/mindfulness-in-education/why-do-it/>

As part of making the practice of secular mindfulness a tool that is accessible to the whole student body, Form 1 students this year learned a quick portable mindfulness practice as part of their induction experience, and Form 4 students will encounter mindfulness in their Lifeskills modules during the year.

Finally, if you are interested in learning more about mindfulness yourself then please let me know, as greater parental involvement is one of the things we wish to explore in the future.

Susan Leahy
School Mindfulness Lead
s.leahy@thekingshospital.ie

