



Peaceful Schools Guidance Leaflet

# Peaceful Secondary Schools

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SPIRITUAL<sup>u</sup>England



# Peaceful Secondary Schools

## The author

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In July 2014 the first Beacon Peaceful School Award was presented to the Head Teacher of Woodheys Primary School in Sale, Cheshire. There is more information about the background to the Peaceful Schools Movement at the end of this leaflet and on the website: <http://www.peacefulschools.org.uk>

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## 1. Peaceful secondary schools – impossible!

You may think that a peaceful secondary school would be impossible to achieve because it might conjure up in your mind a picture of a silent, monastic type of institution where there is never any conflict! Not so! Peaceful schools are not about keeping the peace at any price, but about building a positive peace within the school and ensuring students and staff are equipped with the knowledge and tools to peacefully resolve the inevitable conflicts that arise amongst them.

A peaceful school is, indeed, relatively calm but it is not silent or boring or without conflict. Peaceful schools are creative, exciting, often noisy places but with quiet times and spaces.

In peaceful schools peace is experienced as a dynamic force for good within the school that drives the building of good relationships and team working between everyone in the school.

## 2. The four levels of a peaceful school

A peaceful secondary school works to bring about peace on four levels:

- Level one: peace at the individual level (student, teacher and other school staff);
- Level two: peace at the relationship level (pair, group and classroom);
- Level three: peace at a community level (the whole school);
- Level four: peace at a global level (around and beyond the school).

### 3. Level one: peace at the individual level

There are currently too many stressed teachers, teachers being bullied and teachers cracking up as well as students being bullied, stressed and suffering mental health problems. The foundation level for creating a peaceful school is all about the peacefulness of the individuals within the school. The aim at this level is to help students and all school staff to develop inner peace which will help them to be more peaceful, resilient and confident.

Secondary schools can help students and teachers go from stress to calmness through the experiences and activities that are made available within the school. Some of this is about the day-to-day experience of being at school. Students need to feel that they are being listened to and valued, they need to have quiet times, times of silence, opportunities for contemplation and reflection as well as being taught mindfulness, meditation or prayer and then enabled to practice this regularly.

Students also need opportunities to be involved in music as well as taking part in activities such as dance, drama, sport, yoga and Tai chi. They also need to have good quality food and rest. Many secondary students are tired and hungry during the day and this has a detrimental effect on their well-being, ability to learn and disposition to be peaceful.

There should be mentoring and counselling services available to all children in schools with someone that they can feel safe and comfortable with.

There are many organisations that you can bring in to help your school become more peaceful. For example, the organization 'Mind with Heart' offers a complete programme of training for senior management, teachers and pupils that enables everyone to find peace in themselves and in the way they relate to others. They guide and support schools through the process of integrating mindfulness and compassion into their culture, starting on an individual level with teachers and culminating in a fully integrated approach which results in a genuine shift to a more peaceful school. <http://www.mindwithheart.org>

David Rycroft of 'Mind With Heart' says: 'Schools are communities made up of people: teaching staff, non-teaching staff, pupils and parents. We are all connected in a complex network of relationships. Because states of mind and emotions are contagious, merely being in the same room as someone has a mutual impact! In fact, each time we engage with someone, that person changes as a result of our communication. So it is important that when we are communicating with others, we should model the qualities that we would like to see in our school.'

'Peaceful schools emerge when each of us models peace both in how we communicate and in our very being. Peace cannot be faked. But it can be cultivated through training. The 'Mind with Heart' approach is to see peace as the combination of three qualities: spacious ease, stability and alert presence. These three qualities can be cultivated for oneself through a sequence of mindfulness and awareness exercises. In addition, social and emotional intelligences are vital skills for relating to others peacefully. The 'Mind with Heart' exercises in empathy and compassion help staff and students cultivate these very skills.

#### 4. Level two: peace at the relationship level

This level is about the interaction between individuals whether in pairs, groups or in classes. There is a rich menu of tried and tested activities that your school can pick and mix from, to suit your school's needs and interests. These activities can be undertaken in different places within the curriculum, not just in PSHCE and RE lessons. Here are some examples of peace-building activities and resources.

Calming – quiet background music to create calm classrooms.

<http://www.calmerchildren.com>

Relationship building - can be helped by bringing in organisations like 'Working With Others' which teaches a practical approach to building positive relationships among the whole class group, developing trust and communication skills in the classroom and also supporting teachers to plan for effective groupwork in the curriculum.

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

Learning conflict resolution techniques and approaches - through an organisation called 'Transforming Conflict' which helps people in schools: to improve the way they communicate, develop a sense of community, manage discussions and disagreements, challenge inappropriate behaviours, resolve conflicts, handle disciplinary issues and respond to complaints and grievances.

<http://www.transformingconflict.org/>

Peace education – there are many organisations that do peace education work in schools like 'Peacemakers' (based in Birmingham) which runs workshops in schools teaching peace-making skills. <http://peace-education.org.uk>

Interfaith relations – through the Peace Mala project which is an award-winning project for peace begun in 2001, in response to the racial and religious bullying of students in a secondary school that was happening after the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York. A 'peace mala' is a symbolic double rainbow bracelet that promotes friendship, respect and peace between people of all cultures, lifestyles, faiths, beliefs and none. It is a vision for the future. Wearing the Peace Mala is a promise to help create a better world. Peace Mala focuses on the Golden Rule. Its intention is to educate and remind everyone that this rule is recognised by many scholars, teachers and philosophers. It is also universal to all compassionate faiths. Simply stated, it is: 'Treat others as you would wish them to treat you.' <http://www.peacemala.org.uk/>

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a powerful way of improving the way people communicate with one another so that everyone can get their needs met and conflicts can be resolved peacefully. Marshall Rosenberg began developing Nonviolent Communication more than forty years ago in the USA, in response to the physical, emotional and spiritual violence he witnessed in society. NVC is being taken into schools around the world. <https://www.cnvc.org/about-us/projects/nvc-schools/nonviolent-communication-schools>

Nonviolent Communication is being taken into UK schools to create compassionate classrooms. Contact Penny Vine to find out more. Email - pennyv34@gmail.com or look at her website: [www.pennyvine.com](http://www.pennyvine.com) (from Jan 2015). Penny can offer you a wealth of resources and direct you towards training and people who can help your school bring in NVC.

Penny Vine, a NVC trainer in the UK, says: 'Nonviolent Communication offers school staff and students a very do-able way to express themselves, particularly about the things that matter deeply to them. It enables them to listen deeply to themselves and others, providing the tools to support them when they may be overwhelmed by powerful emotions or in the midst of conflict.'

Philosophy for Children (P4C) can be used very effectively as a structured and empowering way of talking about peaceful schools with students. SAPERE  
<http://www.sapere.org.uk>

Kindness Projects - In celebration of [World Kindness Day](#) (13th November) the organisation 'Action for Happiness' is asking school teachers to create Kindness Projects to help make their classrooms kinder places to be. Encouraging kind behaviour in schools can make a big difference and is so much more than just a 'nice to have'. Evidence shows that promoting kindness among young people directly reduces bullying and disruptive behaviour and helps to increase social and emotional wellbeing. <http://www.actionforhappiness.org/kindness-project-in-schools>

### 5. Level three: peace at a community level

The community level of a peaceful school is about the whole school community. As we all know, the ethos of a school is almost instantly felt when you enter a school and it influences how everyone within the school behaves. A proven approach to creating a peaceful whole school ethos and associated behaviours, is the Values-based Education approach pioneered by Dr Neil Hawkes.  
<http://www.valuesbasededucation.com>

I highly recommend that you read Neil's new book 'From My Heart: transforming lives through values'

Dr Neil Hawkes, Founder: International Values-based Education Trust says:  
 'In my experience a **peaceful secondary school** is one where staff and students work together in harmony. Where there is consistency of adult and student behaviour based on universal positive values such as peace, respect, compassion, responsibility and trust.'

UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Awards scheme enables schools to put the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) at the heart of a school's

planning, policies, practice and ethos. A rights-respecting school not only teaches about children's rights but also models rights and respect in all its relationships: between pupils and adults, between adults and between pupils. This provides a very good foundation for developing a peaceful school. <http://www.unicef.org.uk/rrsa>

The physical environment of the school, both indoors and outdoors, is important to how people feel and behave at school. The organisation 'Learning through Landscapes' (LTL) has some useful resources on its website <http://www.ltl.org.uk/>

Felicity Robinson, an LTL accredited professional, works with schools to help them audit and develop their grounds for learning and play, with peacefulness in its widest sense in mind. [www.landscapesnaturally.co.uk](http://www.landscapesnaturally.co.uk)

See also the Peaceful Schools Guidance Leaflet No 3 'Grounds for Peace and Learning' on <http://www.spiritualengland.org.uk/peaceful-schools/organisations/>

Felicity Robinson, Landscape Architect, says: 'Peaceful schools are, in my mind, a combination of positive relationships and positive environments for teaching, learning, play and life skills development.'

Woodheys Primary School in Sale, Cheshire is a pioneering example of a peaceful school with wonderful schools grounds. In fact it is now the first BEACON peaceful primary school: <http://www.woodheys.trafford.sch.uk>

Peaceful rooms within schools can be created to supplement the peace of the school library. Such rooms can be used for therapeutic help for children as well as places where children and the adults working in the school can escape from the noise and bustle of the school day. An organisation that is leading the way in this is 'A Quiet Place Ltd'. <http://www.aquietplace.co.uk/>

## **6. Level four: peace at a global level**

This level is about the school and its relationship with the community within which it is located and also the global networks that every school is now part of, thanks to the Internet. All are interconnected. An aspect of this that schools can consider and work on, is how children behave in their families. So for example, by enabling children to practice Mindfulness within the schools this can have positive 'spill-over' benefits for the family. Another aspect would be inviting parents and others to come into the school, either individually or in larger numbers, so they can be involved in peaceful spaces; in activities like the creation of a peaceful garden and in special events that build relationships between parents of different backgrounds, cultures and religions.

There are organisations that can help. For example, the organisation 'Facing History and Ourselves' is an international professional development organisation dedicated to working with teachers and students of diverse backgrounds to combat racism, anti-semitism, prejudice and bigotry. Through examining the choices made by people in key moments of the 20th century, such as the events leading to The Holocaust,

'Facing History and Ourselves' trains teachers in such places as USA, Canada, South Africa, Rwanda, Northern Ireland and England, to educate their students to make essential connections between the moral choices made by people in the past and the ethical dilemmas they face in their own lives. In this way they are encouraged to consider what it takes to be an 'upstander' and create a more peaceful, civil society. To learn more about 'Facing History and Ourselves' go to [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org) or contact the Senior Programme Coordinator for the UK - [Michael\\_McIntyre@facing.org](mailto:Michael_McIntyre@facing.org)

The International Peace Day is 21 September and is a great focus for peace activities. Go to the 'Peace One Day' organisation's website for a whole host of resources. They also go in to schools. <http://peaceoneday.org>

The Forgiveness Project uses real stories of survivors and perpetrators to explore concepts of forgiveness and alternatives to revenge. They work in schools. [www.theforgivenessproject.com](http://www.theforgivenessproject.com)

Secondary schools can enable their students to go out into the community as peace workers or peace ambassadors. An example of students acting this way was when secondary school students challenged arms traders at a trade fair in London. This was a Quaker youth work initiative. Another example is the 'Freedom Writers' programme in the States which is an exciting example of student-centred peace work. <http://www.freedomwritersfoundation.org>

## **7. More information and resources**

Take a look at the resources and information on the Peaceful Schools website <http://www.peacefulschools.org.uk>

## **8. Background**

The motivation to create the Peaceful Schools Movement came from the significant concerns many of us have about the negative aspects of our society and how they affect the lives of our children and young people. Negative aspects such as the conflict and violence in our inner cities, the continuing problem of bullying in schools and the high levels of domestic violence in our society. All within the context of a ruthless, consumerist culture and economically hard times. Unsurprisingly, research shows that mental health problems amongst children and young people are increasing. This, coupled with the increasing use of electronic devices, has resulted in young people being less and less in touch with their inner spiritual beings. We feel that they are missing out on sources of nurturing and spiritual development such as the comfort and calm of spending time in quiet gardens. What is more, the unremitting onslaught of media-generated images has put tremendous pressure on children and young people to conform and try to be something they are not. They so often lack the self-confidence to be themselves.

However, there are positive signs of the dawning of a more peaceful age. It is argued that there is a global desire for change. This is encapsulated by the words of the universally acclaimed spiritual leader - the Dalai Lama: 'There is a great and growing

desire for change in the world. Change that ushers in a renewed commitment to ethical and spiritual values, that resolves conflicts peaceably, employing dialogue and non-violence, that upholds human rights and human dignity as well as human responsibility.'

## **9. Developing our thinking around the peaceful schools concept**

The Peaceful Schools Strategy Group believes that it is time to take a radical look at what kind of schools we need for the 21st Century. The current picture is that of a fraught, over-stressed, over-politicised education system obsessed with targets and performance, with too many stressed teachers and head teachers and stressed students. Does it have to be like this? Why couldn't our schools be places of peace and joy where teachers and students are happy to spend time cooperating creatively and learning together?

We encourage head teachers to look afresh at their schools from a new standpoint - to look at how to make education holistic and inclusive of spirituality and well-being, as well as practical and person-centred. We are working together to explore how we can create nurturing and valuing school communities in which each individual is nurtured and valued. Our belief is that schools can and should be places where everyone is happy most of the time.

## **10. Students' views**

A couple of years ago, Lindsay Ullmann, author of 'Teen Spirit' a book for advice for teenagers and I (Anna Lubelska, the author of this guidance, went into three classes in Eggar's Secondary School, Hampshire to research students' views about peaceful schools. We spent time in two Year 9 classes and one Year 11 and found that many of the young people were enthusiastic and inspired about the idea of creating peaceful schools. Students wrote comments such as: 'Having teachers who are less stressed and more relaxed would help', 'If we could get up later and finish later, that would stop us feeling so tired during the day', 'Less homework' and 'More food breaks as we are always hungry'. This shows that for young people a peaceful school isn't just about creating a quiet place somewhere within the school - it's about the nuts and bolts of how the school is run.

To our surprise a few young people were against the idea of having peaceful schools! The girls especially said things like: 'School might be even more boring if it was peaceful – there would be nothing for us to gossip about. We can be peaceful at home! We come to school to have some excitement.' Although this is an understandable view, many children warmed to the idea of having a less stressful environment around them during the time they are in school.

The idea behind creating peaceful schools is not about a boring, mundane and lifeless environment. It is about creating an environment where children and young people can get on with growing and developing and where they can find acceptance and support within their peer group and in the wider school community. Some of the students commented on the need for a less stressful environment and less stressed-out teachers. Many children complained that they were fed up of bullies and tired of not being accepted for who they were.

Schools can be daunting places and by creating peaceful schools we can not only help young people feel grounded, but we can also reach into their hearts and souls so that they come to realise: 'Hey, we don't have to fight, we don't have to disagree. We can still like each other and disagree and, please, let's just accept each other'. Not only will this help pupils but it will also help teachers.

## **11. Research underpinning**

In arguing the case for making schools peaceful places, we need more research to help provide more evidence of the benefits. So far, one study stands out. A research study was set up, overseen by Professor Peter Fonagy from University College London and his collaborators in Houston, Texas, when trials of an in-school anti-bullying programme suggested that it may be worthwhile to concentrate efforts on creating a peaceful learning environment rather than entirely on tackling the behaviour of the individual bully. The trial in 9 schools in the US mid-west showed that the programme: 'Creating a Peaceful School Learning Environment' (CAPSLE), was effective in reducing aggression and victimisation.