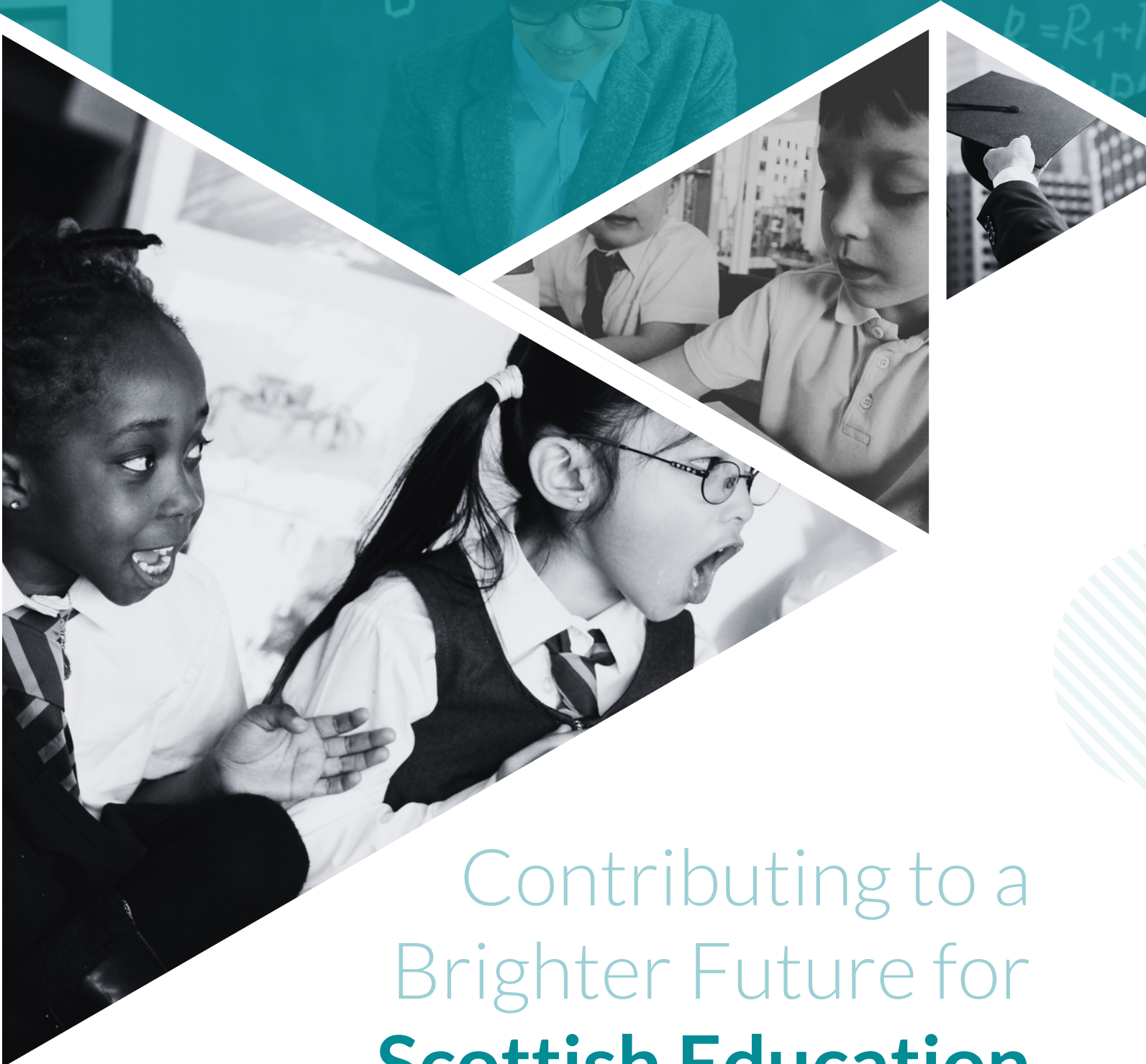




MORE THAN MINDSET



Contributing to a
Brighter Future for
Scottish Education





Growth mindset is the ingredient that enables critical elements of a learning culture to thrive. Some of the most significant ways to improve learning are reliant upon growth mindset. Feedback, for example, is more likely to be received positively and used proactively; peer-to-peer conversation improves as it focuses more on critical thinking; and metacognitive / transfer strategies grow in authenticity. Growth mindset also underpins the development of collective and self-efficacy, student agency, and resilience. ”

James Nottingham

WELCOME

Introduction

In the past decade, Winning Scotland has supported over 2500 teachers and early years practitioners in a quarter of Scotland's schools to develop a 'growth mindset' culture. Many of these education professionals have shared their experiences with us, and you will see quotes from them throughout this report* as we seek to elevate their voices in the midst of the many and varied reviews in Scottish Education over recent years.

Our specific focus in an education context is to explore the difference that developing growth mindset strategies can make to wellbeing and attainment.


Based on 30 years of research, Professor Carol Dweck coined the term 'growth mindset' to describe the outlook of individuals who "believe their talents can be developed through hard work, good strategies, and input from others. They tend to achieve more than those individuals with a more fixed mindset - those who believe their talents are innate gifts. This is because they worry less about looking smart and put more energy into learning."

This report explains how developing a growth mindset culture in the classroom and wider school environment has been shown to help build resilience, self-efficacy, and self-belief, improving wellbeing for teachers and pupils.

Despite being a well-known idea, mindset is often misunderstood and improperly implemented. As a charity working with partners across many areas of children's lives, conversations with education leaders, practitioners and pupils suggest two seemingly contradictory things:

- Fostering growth mindsets in pupils, teachers, school leaders and the education system is an essential component of creating positive learning cultures, and in creating the positive changes required from early years to post-16. It's not something that is ever 'done' but is a constant practice, enabled by conscious effort and systematic change.
- 'Growth Mindset fatigue' is real; some teachers and schools hold a 'false growth mindset' and believe they have 'already done growth mindset' by attending a workshop or having posters on the walls. Others weaponise growth mindset by blaming children for their challenges - e.g. 'they just have a fixed mindset', not being aware of the part context plays in this, including their own role.





From budget concerns, teacher retention, pupil attendance, behaviour, staff and pupil wellbeing and the attainment gap, to opportunities like improving professional learning, supporting collaboration or engaging parents and families, there are no silver bullets, but considerable evidence that our mindset – as individuals and as an education collective – has a role to play.

Whether you are in education policy, school leadership or in the classroom – it's more than simply teaching our children how to 'use' growth mindset. It's about genuinely cultivating our own resilience and our own mindset, so that we too can create, innovate and improve not only the system that we work in but our own lives too.

This report considers some of the challenges ahead of us and will look at what the research around mindset in education tells us – why it matters, when growth mindset interventions and approaches work and when they do not, and why. It will look at where mindset fits within the educational landscape in Scotland, and how it can support those in education to navigate the current uncertainty within the sector and contribute to the collective vision we have for the future of education in Scotland, one where our young people are happy, healthy and thriving.

Teacher Health and Wellbeing, Workload and Retention

Cultivating a growth mindset ethos can help to improve wellbeing, self-efficacy and motivation among teachers.



Teacher working conditions are student's learning conditions. ”

Diane Ravitch,

New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

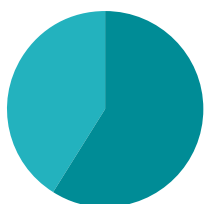


Ultimately, the quality of the schooling experience of Scotland's young people will depend on the quality of their school leaders' and teachers' working conditions. ”

International Council of Education Advisers

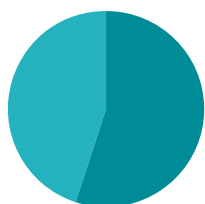


Education Support's Teacher Wellbeing Index 2022 highlighted some stark findings in relation to the wellbeing of teachers in the UK:



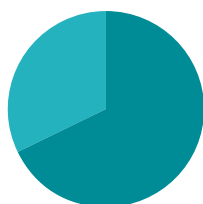
59%

of staff considered leaving the sector in the past academic year due to pressures on their mental health and wellbeing.



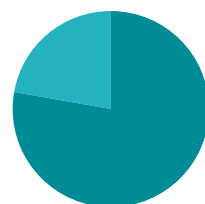
55%

actively sought to change or leave their current job.



68%

cited workload as the main reason for thinking about leaving their job.



78%

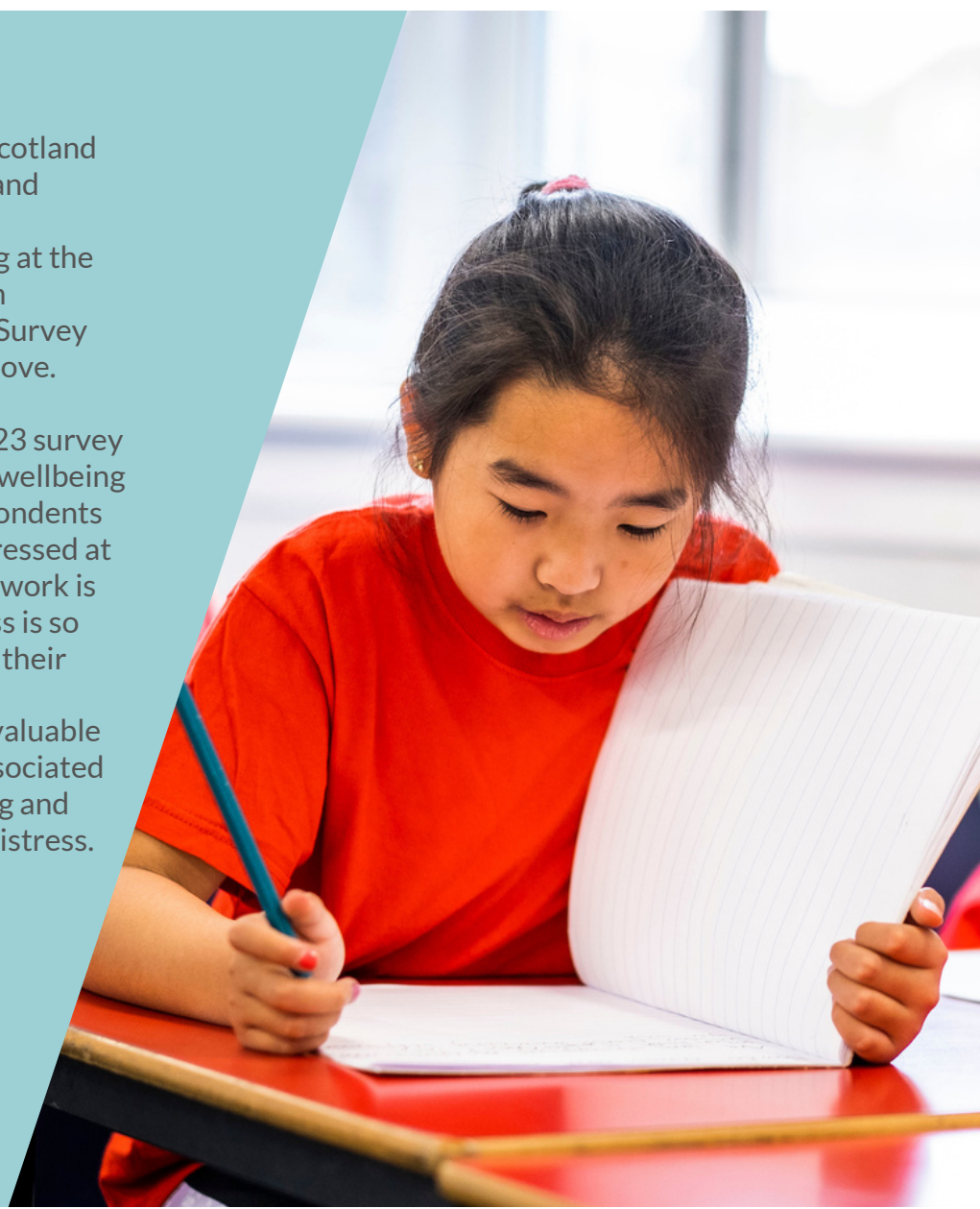
experienced mental health symptoms due to their work.



The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) states teachers' "health and wellbeing is perhaps the most important factor when looking at the sustainability of the education workforce." The EIS Member Survey 2023 supports the findings above.

44% of teachers in the EIS 2023 survey said they feel poor/very poor wellbeing at work with over half of respondents noting they frequently feel stressed at work. 34% said their stress at work is not manageable, and the stress is so bad that it negatively impacts their work and personal life.

Greater teacher wellbeing, a valuable goal in its own right, is also associated with greater student wellbeing and lower student psychological distress. (Harding et al., 2019).



Research from the Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Team (PHIRST, via Cardiff and Bristol Universities) found that education professionals participating in Winning Scotland's Mindset in Education programme reported improved wellbeing:

“ Getting that excitement again about my own learning has made me enjoy my job again, which has definitely impacted on my mental health. ”

Class Teacher - Mindset in Education

“ With the demands of work-life balance and the pressures that having a young family brings, I feel that I had lost sight of what was important in my job, and I became rather stagnant. I have used this course for the betterment of myself as much as for the betterment of my learners. I appreciate the need to critically analyse performance, to allow my brain to be in a learning mindset. I believe that with my daily practice and what I have read, researched and learned has brought me back to practising what I preach. ”

Secondary Teacher - Mindset in Education



Pupil Health and Wellbeing

Developing a growth mindset can help to improve pupils' health and wellbeing.

Research by Tao et al. (2022) showed that university students with a predominantly growth mindset outlook scored significantly lower with regards to 'mental health issues' and 'stress due to life events', than those with a fixed mindset outlook. This research suggests this could indicate people with a growth mindset may be less likely to suffer with mental health problems.

This is particularly pertinent given the recent increase in mental health issues among young people (SPICe Briefing, 2022). Scottish Government's Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027 refers to the importance of prevention and early intervention in relation to mental health and wellbeing. In the words of Frederick Douglass, "It's easier to build strong children than repair broken men."

Recent research by Clarke and McLellan (2023) revealed growth mindset was positively associated with wellbeing and with attainment. They discuss "the importance of considering children's mindsets as psychological states deserving of investment alongside wellbeing," given that "children endorsing fixed mindsets are more likely to have lower school wellbeing and attainment." They also mention consideration for incorporating mindset into the wellbeing curriculum.

“Pupils in the class also had improved health and wellbeing because of the [growth mindset] project. Pupil behaviour showed a clear boost in confidence, as many of the shyer pupils started to answer more often. We believe this was due to the carefully selected growth mindset tasks, language and daily implementation of growth mindset learning intention and success criteria.”

Secondary Teacher - Mindset in Education

“The project helped promote good mental health in early years through building self belief and self confidence.”

Early Years Practitioner - Mindset in Education

“I think it makes a big difference to the children. It does help with their attainment but it's more about their mental health and them being able to get through the day.”

Head Teacher - Mindset in Education

Relationship Building

A growth mindset culture can help to improve relationships between school staff, parents and pupils.

The National Discussion on Education report states that “the education system is fundamentally about people and relationships.” (Scottish Government, 2023), while the Morgan Report references the Kindness Agenda which “emphasises the importance of recognising and supporting positive relationships.” (Scottish Government, 2020)



Positive teacher-student relationships are crucial in improving engagement and achievement (Thornberg et.al. 2022; Roorda et al., 2011). Research by Li (2023) showed that developing positive teacher-student relationships and growth mindset can help improve enjoyment, engagement and learning.

Furthermore, there’s a growing interest among parents and professionals working with children and young people to look at the young person and their learning and development more holistically, in terms of their social, emotional, physical, mental and intellectual growth.

Growth mindset principles, approaches and strategies enable teachers to support young people in this way. Being able to undertake challenges with confidence, having the resilience and perseverance to stick with tasks, understanding the importance of feedback and critical reflection in order to learn from mistakes, celebrating successes along the way, believing in your ability and that of others, and fostering positive relationships are all factors which growth mindset helps to develop, and which are essential for learning and growth.

Developing growth mindset strategies and tools strengthens relationships, creates supportive environments, increases confidence and resilience and, anecdotally, can support efforts to increase attendance and engagement with learning. 74% of teachers on Winning Scotland’s Mindset in Education programme say they have improved their relationship with pupils.

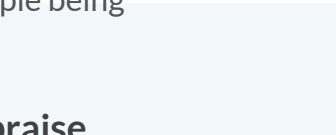




“ There was an increase in attendance from 13 out of 15 of our participants. As the target group had suffered low motivation, we believe this improved, leading to an increase in attendance.”

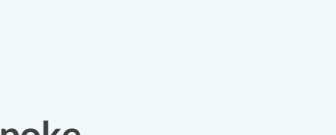
Secondary Teacher - Mindset in Education

Data insights from Planet Youth in Scotland, a community partnership approach led by Winning Scotland, looking at what is needed to keep our young people safe, healthy and happy, reveal associations between mental health and adult encouragement/belief in them. Students who agreed that “the adults at [their] school believe [they] can make the world a better place” were **70% more likely have very good mental health**. Additionally, students who agreed that “At [their] school, it is not a big deal to make mistakes while trying your best” were **94% more likely have very good mental health**. While the data only allows us to find correlations, not define causations, there is a vast body of evidence to suggest that learning takes place when people feel safe, comfortable and at ease. Being on high alert or tense, due to limited or poor teacher-student relations, could lead to young people being less able to concentrate on academic tasks, embrace challenge, learn and grow.



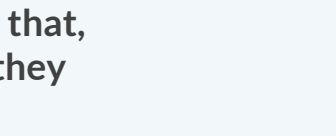
“ We observed children interacting positively, offering praise and encouragement to each other. They looked to each other for technique input and were keen to pass their learning on. ”

Primary Teacher - Mindset in Education



“ Despite being nervous, they embraced the challenge, spoke confidently, and conducted themselves well. It was an immensely proud moment for both staff and pupils. The experience allowed the target group the opportunity to lead across the school and they received positive feedback from staff and pupils. They had gained respect and trust, and it was clear that there was a shift in how they perceived their place in the school and their relationships with staff. The impact on pupil wellbeing was evident. ”

Secondary Teacher - Mindset in Education



“ The comment from [course keynote] Professor Arshad that, ‘pupils report greater wellbeing and confidence when they know teachers care,’ really struck a chord with me. ”

Secondary Depute Head Teacher - Mindset in Education





Professional Development

Growth mindset is a valuable forerunner to success for professional and personal development

Implementing ideas into practice comes with its own challenges, and as Professor Hayward put it, “will require major cultural change throughout the educational system.” (Scottish Government, 2023)

Growth Mindset strategies and tools are key to being able to learn and practice new skills and approaches, especially in challenging circumstances. Mindset in Education offers high quality accredited professional learning, however perhaps more importantly it provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate within and across schools and local authorities, discussing topics as diverse as pedagogy, unconscious bias and leadership.

“ I understood that I may not be aware of biases that influence my decisions, and I believe that’s why, as an educator, I myself must develop a growth mindset so that I may be able to reflect and adapt my thinking and actions to ensure equity in my classroom. ”

Primary Teacher - Mindset in Education

Future Skills

Developing a growth mindset is key to lifelong learning and future proofing young people's skills.

In 2015, the OECD launched the Future of Education and Skills 2030 project - a global project involving policy makers, researchers, school leaders, teachers, and students from around the world, including Scotland, that states "the wider goal of education [is] individual and collective well-being," with students learning to lead their own learning, especially through uncertain and unfamiliar contexts, allowing them to "find their direction in a meaningful and responsible way, instead of simply receiving fixed instructions or directions from their teachers." (OECD).

The World Economic Forum's "Defining Education 4.0: A Taxonomy for the Future of Learning" supports this vision. "With the growth in demand for [these] skills comes the need to adopt a holistic learning approach that includes not only concrete skills for economic success, but attitudes and values that set individuals up for a lifetime of learning.... the future of education lies in empowering young learners to embrace and develop their uniquely human qualities - those unlikely to ever be replaced by technology." It states that the attitudes and values a person holds "are essential in teaching children to adopt a growth mindset and become resilient lifelong learners." (World Economic Forum, 2023)

"It's hard to know exactly what we'll need to know in the future. Machine learning, AI, and coding are certainly the buzzwords of today - but no one can truly claim to know exactly what skills will be needed in 20 years' time. In fact, these skills might not even exist yet... curiosity - trying, failing, and learning from it - has always been key in personal and professional development. having a "growth" mindset (as opposed to "fixed")....if you want to stay current in the future of work, you need to have one." (Capita, 2020)

“ I think sometimes the value, or worth, of a school can be judged in quite a one dimensional way - “how's your attainment?” Well, we have a set of values in here that says, “it's about much more than that. ”

Head Teacher - Mindset in Education



Facing and overcoming your challenges and learning from mistakes

“

After the project, pupils were better able to articulate how growth mindset works in relation to learning, specifically in the areas targeted such as challenge and mistake making. They have a firmer grasp of growth mindset concepts, stating: ‘it is when even if you don’t feel comfortable doing something more challenging you still try it and give it your best shot.’ ”

Secondary Teacher - Mindset in Education

“

These pupils are more prepared for the self-directed learning culture that is being promoted in the school and are more able to reflect on their own learning and make steps to improve it. ”

Secondary Teacher - Mindset in Education



Learning to Learn

A growth mindset outlook encourages a love of the process of learning, regardless of the outcome.

Santiago Rincón- Gallardo (2020) states that the current education system undermines efforts to improve wellbeing in schools. He discusses how conventional schools can prioritise compliance, compartmentalise knowledge and create a fear of failure over developing self efficacy and mastery. This has negative impact on learning and wellbeing for teachers and pupils. Growth mindset has been shown repeatedly to reduce the fear of failure, and support a love of learning, as well as improve wellbeing.

“Children are much more confident. They enjoy and lead their own learning. They are open to sharing mistakes and are dying to tell you what they’ve done wrong, how they found out what they have done wrong and what they are going to do to make it better.”

Primary Teacher - Mindset in Education

Ng (2018) discusses the neuroscientific crossover between growth mindset and intrinsic motivation and the impact this can have on learning and achievement, “growth mindset has the potential to encourage intrinsically motivated behaviors in schools and promote lifelong learning.”

“It was clear that the target group was exhibiting features of intrinsic motivation. Increasingly, it was evident that there was a drive to understand and complete the task before them each week.”

Primary Teacher - Mindset in Education



Creating Culture Change

A growth mindset is key to creating sustainable culture change.

Education Endowment Fund (EEF, 2021) have said “it doesn’t matter how great an educational idea or intervention is in principle; what really matters is how it manifests itself in the day-to-day work of people in schools.....It is about making the implicit explicit, providing clarity and purpose to existing processes, and reframing what you are already doing— rather than bolting on a whole new set of procedures.”

When talking about their book, Project Habit: Making Rigorous PBL Doable, Michael McDowell and Kelley Miller discuss how people, particularly teachers can get caught up in the planning, and struggle to get to the very important ‘action’ or ‘doing’ stage. They mention how this can be partly due to the action habits being out of the people’s comfort zone, where planning feels safer and more manageable. (Changing Conversations)

This lends support for the need for teachers to learn about growth mindset and how relevant it is to their work – teachers need to be able to step out of their comfort zones and take calculated risks to apply these action habits to create impactful change.

However more pertinently, teachers must be enabled by their school leadership, and indeed the education ‘system’ for culture change to truly take shape. This includes allocating the time, resources and freedom to work in this way – and also seeing the behaviours of growth mindset endorsed and modelled by those in authority. This means head teachers, quality managers and education directors must also embrace and endorse the approach, supported by positive, aspirational messaging and policy making from groups like Scottish Government and Education Scotland. Culture change requires a shift in language, behaviours and expectations at all levels, rather than being viewed as a mandate from above.

Time is required for application of learning to be able to take place and for lasting change to occur. True learning comes from doing, rather than from just learning about the theory and principles behind something.

“ I’m not going to stop! Developing a growth mindset isn’t a short term goal but our school is definitely on the right track and I am so excited to see where it takes us. ”

Primary Teacher - Mindset in Education

“ We were keen to have more time to try out all the strategies and observe the impact they can have. It will be crucial that we do all we can to embed the practices discussed. Colleagues felt that growth mindset needs to be constantly revisited. ”

Secondary Teacher - Mindset in Education

But we've done growth mindset!

We are never just 'growth' or 'fixed' mindset, but an ever-shifting blend of both.

One factor that can hinder the development of a growth mindset culture within schools and elsewhere is the presence of a 'false growth mindset'. In an interview with *The Atlantic* in 2016, Carol Dweck describes false growth mindset as "saying you have growth mindset when you don't really have it, or you don't really understand [what it is]."

It's also false in the sense that nobody has a growth mindset in everything all the time. Everyone is a mixture of fixed and growth mindsets. You could have a predominant growth mindset in one area, such as creative writing or arithmetic, but there can still be things that trigger you into a fixed mindset, like spelling or fractions. Something really challenging and outside your comfort zone can trigger a fixed mindset, or, if you encounter someone who is much better than you at something you pride yourself on, you can think "Oh, that person has ability, not me."

Dweck goes on to explain how she believes false mindset has developed within education, "I think a lot of what happened is that instead of taking this long and difficult journey, where you work on understanding your triggers, working with them, and over time being able to stay in a growth mindset more and more, many educators just said, "Oh yeah, I have a growth mindset" because either they know it's the right mindset to have or they understood it in a way that made it seem easy."





You may also see false growth mindsets appear where schools just use posters and tangible resources for example, but do not actually put in that deeper, challenging and continuous work on applying growth mindset strategies and approaches across all their work. The messaging may be there, but pupils may still be reluctant to admit when they're struggling or own up to a mistake. Dweck notes it can also appear when teachers put the blame on students for having a 'fixed mindset' "without understanding instead that, as educators, it is our responsibility to create a context in which a growth mindset can flourish."

There may also be conversations about growth mindset in classrooms, but little evidence of it in staffrooms or in a school's policies, structures and systems – leading to confusing and inconsistent environments for pupils.

Within the wider mindset research, variability between mindset interventions in terms of delivery, target groups involved and length of time of delivery, has led to varied results with regards to the effectiveness of mindset interventions. While short, in some cases one-off sessions on growth mindset have shown some positive impact on changing the mindsets of the young people involved, particularly in the short-term, it has been revealed that the mindset interventions with the greatest impact appear to come from those that take into account contextual effects and changing teachers' mindsets too - "mindset plus supportive context", particularly with regards to sustained impact (Yeager et al. 2022).

“ I do think that a lot of people already think they are embedding a growth mindset, but I don't think it's actually being done, not properly. It's become a buzzword that's thrown around. ”

Class Teacher - Mindset in Education

“ Growth mindset was something that we've always looked at. We've scratched the surface here but it was the fact it was a proper programme which gave us structure, improved our wellbeing, and was CPD meant it was interesting. ”

Class Teacher - Mindset in Education



Mindset in Education

“ Learning is an active process. We learn by doing... only knowledge that is used sticks in your mind. ”

Dale Carnegie

Winning Scotland's Mindset in Education has had a profound impact on the teachers, pupils and schools who have taken part:

79%

believe the programme will make them a better teacher

74%

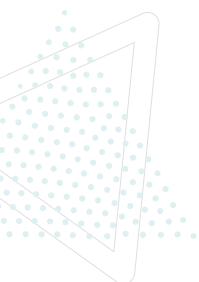
feel their relationship with their pupils has improved.

80%

of schools report improved pupil resilience, persistence and work ethic.

“ One colleague suggested that we look at how we could incorporate growth mindset into our existing communication across the school, and another suggested that we could incorporate it into behaviour management conversations with students. It was good to receive suggestions like this as it indicated that the work done on my project had encouraged colleagues to consider the ways in which growth mindset was more than tools to use in the classroom, but that could be integrated into almost all interactions we have with pupils. ”

Secondary Teacher - Mindset in Education



Key findings from the PHIRST evaluation of Winning Scotland's 'Mindset Teams' programme conducted from 2021-23, revealed:

- The programme is highly valued by teachers, pupils, and wider stakeholders, providing an opportunity to support children's education and wellbeing needs.
- Teachers' attitudes and knowledge of growth mindset were shown to improve after completing the Mindset Teams training programme.
- School-level data showed some indication that in Mindset Teams schools a slightly higher percentage of pupils were achieving the expected Curriculum for Excellence level in writing, compared to schools without the programme, one year later.
- The importance placed on the role of the programme in supporting children's wellbeing, with accounts of improved children's wellbeing and social skills, enhanced engagement with learning and support for future aspirations.
- Embedding growth mindset within school-level policies and ensuring resource allocation were found to be key facilitators across programme uptake, delivery, and sustainability in schools. [Link to evaluation report - Winning Scotland](#)

(Note: This evaluation focused on primary schools, with some general insight from secondary schools.)



Mindset in Education looks at how growth mindset research can be applied in the most meaningful and sustainable way, supporting education professionals to cover:



Theory:

An initial focus on ensuring a deep, detailed understanding of Professor Dweck's research and all the variables and implications within.



Context:

With this knowledge, considering how mindset behaviours manifest in the learning environment and all the factors that can influence them – from classroom behaviour to staffroom culture to local demographics.



Practice:

Taking their understanding of the needs and issues in their specific context, teaching professionals undertake practitioner enquiry to address them, supported by experienced tutors.



Measurement:

Evaluating the impact, both positive and negative, of their intervention to understand what works, what can be changed and what to do next.



Teamwork:

Throughout, practitioners engage with their colleagues, leadership and peers from other schools to share knowledge and compare practice.



Culture change:

With this experience 'banked', the next step is to learn from it and grow the impact. If it worked in one class, try it in another. If it helped with numeracy, try it with literacy.

Ultimately, professional learning is only the beginning of an ongoing process to shift attitudes, behaviours, language and culture.



The powerful impact of this approach can be explored in Winning Scotland's Mindset Library, which houses more than 100 examples of growth mindset practitioner enquiries covering an array of subject matters from fractions to French, attainment to attendance and self-belief to self-learning. With around half-a-million words of enquiry conducted by Scottish teachers, it is believed to be the largest research bank of growth mindset practice in education in the world.

Teaching professionals who complete this process are inducted into Winning Scotland's 'Mindset Ambassadors' network – a group of practitioners who continue experimenting with and learning about how mindset applies in the school environment.

“ I would like to think that it will become part and parcel of what we do at the school. That is, we have a growth mindset, we know how to be resilient, we know how to help ourselves, and we have our learning tools. It's not just a programme, it's the way it's going to be. ”

Member of Senior Leadership Team - Mindset in Education



Conclusion

For some, there is fatigue around the concept of mindset in Scottish education, but the truth is that believing mindset to be something that you 'do' and eventually 'finish' is simply evidence of a fixed mindset towards the research and its potential impact. There is always potential for growth.

Winning Scotland have supported hundreds of schools across the country. The one constant we hear from practitioners and leaders is that it is something that needs to be practised every day, and supported by systems and processes that foster the development of growth mindset behaviours.

We see this in our work across all sectors; we need to start with a solid understanding of the science and theory behind it, consider how it applies in a given context, and test it through practical application. But above all, there is always a need to add refreshers, build in peer support, implement systems change and take positive accountability.

Whether it's Winning Scotland's More Than Mindset course, Dundee-based Get Set Yeti! Or the fantastic work going on in individual local authority areas (like Glasgow Counts), there is still a place for consistent and cross curricular application of growth mindset in all settings.

We know from years of anecdotal and internal evidence that growth mindset approaches, when implemented correctly, are truly impactful, and we now have external evidence to support this. 'Mindset in Education' aligns with current national priorities, as well as the future direction of education, and can benefit teachers, pupils, and school communities overall, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing.

The educational landscape in Scotland is going through a period of substantial change just now, which is creating a level of great uncertainty within the sector. While growth mindset may only be part of the answer to the issues within education, it can certainly help with many of them, including dealing with uncertainty itself, as it helps develop the confidence, self-belief, and resilience to overcome challenges.

If you are interested in learning more about growth mindset and how it can support you and your school community, or your work in education, to develop teacher and pupil wellbeing, to improve relationships, and create positive environments where learning can flourish, then we would love to hear from you.

If you would like to discuss any of the topics within this report, or how we can work together with your organisation to improve the lives of young people in Scotland, please get in touch.

You can contact us at info@winningscotland.org or go to our website [Winning Scotland - Home](#)



About Winning Scotland

We're a charity that acts as a catalyst for change. Working with like-minded partners, we build confidence and resilience in all of Scotland's young people.

Collaborating with a range of partners we collectively develop innovative resources and practical solutions that improve outcomes for children in Scotland.

Through our work we aim to engage and empower the individuals and groups who have the greatest influence on young people, giving them the tools and knowledge to create sustainable impact.

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