

# Impact Evaluation for the Pause Breathe Smile Programme

December 2023



## FOREWORD

Before signing up as a mind health ambassador with Pause Breathe Smile, I wanted to be sure there was good evidence behind the programme; I was pleased to find this was definitely the case. Having now been through Pause Breathe Smile training, and seeing first-hand how our tamariki engage with the programme, I am even more convinced I made the right decision to sign up.

Pause Breathe Smile is a proven way to help our children cope in a world which is increasingly complex and confusing. For children, mastering the skills to manage ambiguity, frustration and tension, while learning how to fully celebrate the good things that happen, paves the way to a healthy and productive life as a teen and adult. Pause Breathe Smile offers simple, practical mindfulness techniques to help defuse doubt and encourage positivity at school, at home and elsewhere in the community.

This is the second report from the research team headed up by Dr Reuben Rusk. It looks at the Pause Breathe Smile programme and its effects on children, teachers and caregivers. It's exciting to see the ongoing increase in positive outcomes where students are 'flourishing' and the decrease in what is called 'languishing'.

The increases in positive behaviours and the decrease in negative behaviours are inspiring – in my view these indicate our tamariki are learning to understand and regulate their emotions, truly embrace better ways to resolve problems and to set aside poor ways to deal with conflict. It's particularly exciting to see how there is positive growth in behaviours such as being lively, focused and perseverant, with decreases in being disinterested, apprehensive, and anxious. I'm sure all of us could benefit from developing or improving the skills our tamariki are mastering!

I applaud the dedication of the Pause Breathe Smile team led by Grant and Natasha Rix. They are focused on developing the programme to enable wider access through tools such as an app and full Te Reo Māori and online versions. I also want to acknowledge and congratulate Southern Cross for prioritising the mental health and wellbeing of our tamariki for the long-term benefit of our wider community. Their ongoing investment in Pause Breathe Smile continues to make a difference and I am proud to be involved with the programme.

Sir Ashley Bloomfield  
Mind health ambassador

# SOUTHERN CROSS AND PAUSE BREATHE SMILE

Improving New Zealanders' good health and wellbeing is at the heart of the Southern Cross ethos. It makes sense to support the important work of Pause Breathe Smile to help our tamariki face the future with confidence, by giving them skills to navigate life's everyday challenges.

It is inspiring that the homegrown Pause Breathe Smile programme is proven to increase children's positive behaviours and decrease negative attitudes and actions. This report indicates this makes for a better and more productive learning environment in the classroom and it means teachers, parents and caregivers are also able to enjoy a calmer school and homelife.

Southern Cross is thankful for the dedication of the team at Pause Breathe Smile who are unwavering in their commitment to build on the programme. This year the team has focused on extending its reach, delivering online and Te Reo Māori versions, and a mindfulness app available to all New Zealanders at no cost. We are also grateful for Dr Reuben Rusk's ongoing work and the support of Sir Ashley Bloomfield as our mind health ambassador for Pause Breathe Smile.



## THE PROGRAMME

Pause Breathe Smile (PBS) is an initiative governed and delivered by the Pause Breathe Smile Charitable Trust, teaching mindfulness practices in primary and intermediate schools across Aotearoa.

The programme is taught to teachers through an educator training pathway involving an online introduction to mindfulness practices, professional learning and development, and resources including student learning journals for tamariki to record their mindfulness journey.

Originally created by Grant Rix while working for the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, Pause Breathe Smile is aligned to the New Zealand Curriculum Framework and incorporates Professor Mason Durie's model of Te Whare Tapa Whā. This model presents a holistic overview of principles essential for hauora (holistic health and wellbeing) and includes four key pou or realms: taha tinana (highlighting physical dimensions), taha hinengaro (highlighting emotional dimensions), taha whānau (highlighting social dimensions) and taha wairua (highlighting spiritual dimensions).

Through Pause Breathe Smile, children and their teachers learn different mindful practices. These include mindful breathing exercises, mindful eating, mindful movements, a body scan, mindful walking, a happy heart practice (for developing kindness) and practices for recognising the connection between oneself and the wider environment.

Pause Breathe Smile is available free of charge to any primary, intermediate school or kura as it is fully funded by Southern Cross. As at November 2023, Pause Breathe Smile has reached more than 125,000 children and 8,730 teachers and educators in more than 440 schools.

## METHODOLOGY

In a 15-minute online survey, teachers enrolled in the programme were asked to describe the wellbeing, characteristics, and behaviours of children at their school. The survey has three parts – before training, after programme implementation and one year later. This is the second report to be produced.

Fieldwork was conducted between 9 February 2021 and 11 September 2023. Within that period, a total of 1,256 staff from 242 different schools responded to the 3-month follow-up, and 493 staff from 162 schools responded to the 1-year follow-up.

This report shows what teachers have noticed and how they have experienced changes due to the implementation of Pause Breathe Smile in their schools.

## PAUSE BREATHE SMILE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Southern Cross commissioned an independent evaluation to understand the effects of Pause Breathe Smile on school communities. Surveys were carried out by Dr Reuben Rusk, formerly of Mindquip, now ReubenRusk.com.

Dr Rusk has worked in the area of wellbeing science since 2009. Having earned his PhD at the University of Melbourne, he is an Honorary Fellow of the Centre for Wellbeing Science where he helps teach Master of Applied Positive Psychology. The research outlined in this report focuses on understanding the impacts and ongoing effects of Pause Breathe Smile for students and their teachers.



Dr Reuben Rusk, PhD  
Founding Director, [ReubenRusk.com](https://www.ReubenRusk.com)



# RESULTS

Teachers were asked to reflect on general student wellbeing, and to indicate if they have seen positive or negative changes since rolling out Pause Breathe Smile in their classrooms. Improvements were seen in measures for student wellbeing.

**+16.8%** (+9.5%)

+16.6%\* (+8.3%)\*

Aggregate student wellbeing score

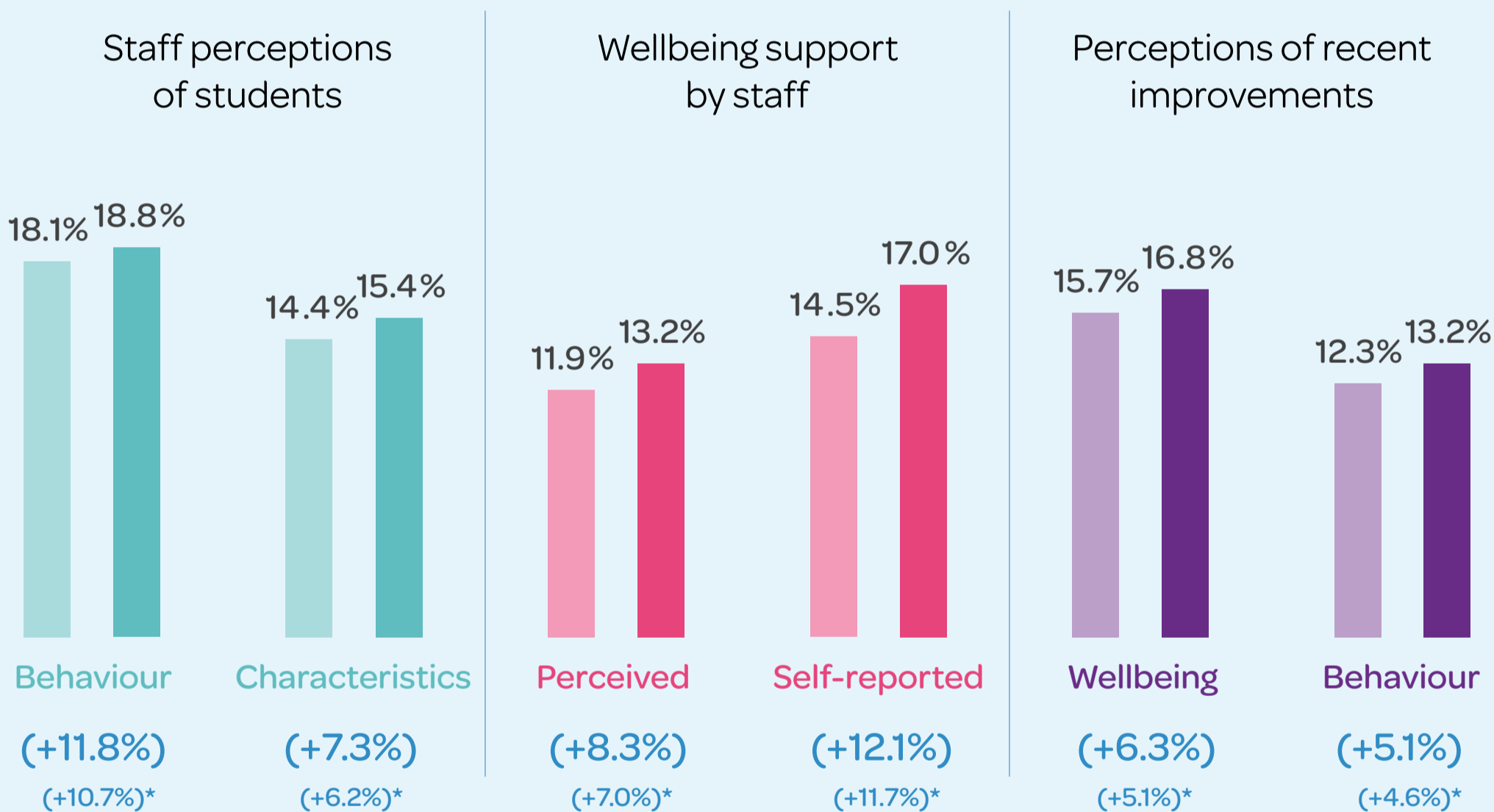
**+9.5%** (+5.7%)

+7.0%\* (+4.5%)\*

Perceived student wellbeing score

Numbers indicate the percentage of scores that shifted above (+) or below (-) the average baseline score one year (or three months) after launch.  
\*2022 data

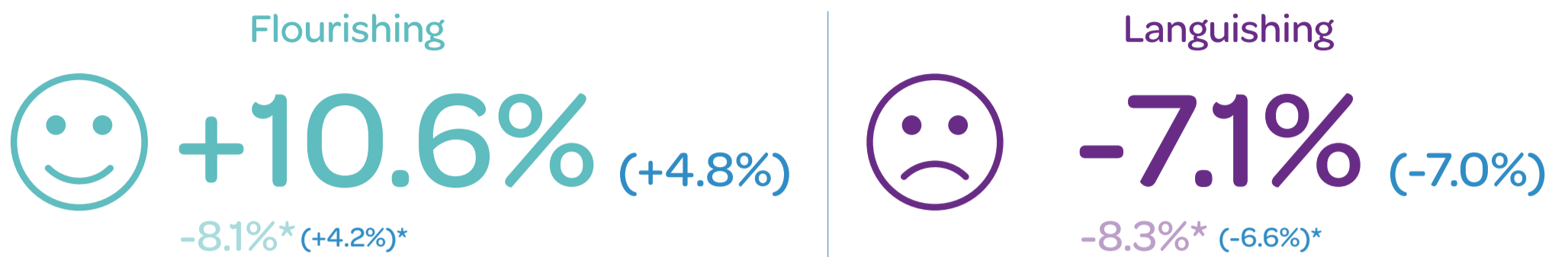
In a key result, staff described increases in desirable behaviours and characteristics and decreases in undesirable behaviours and characteristics. Perceived and self-reported support for student wellbeing by staff increased significantly.



■ = 2022 ■ = 2023

Teachers were asked how many students they perceived to be flourishing or languishing in terms of wellbeing. The results clearly indicate an improvement. Teachers reported more students as flourishing and fewer students as languishing.

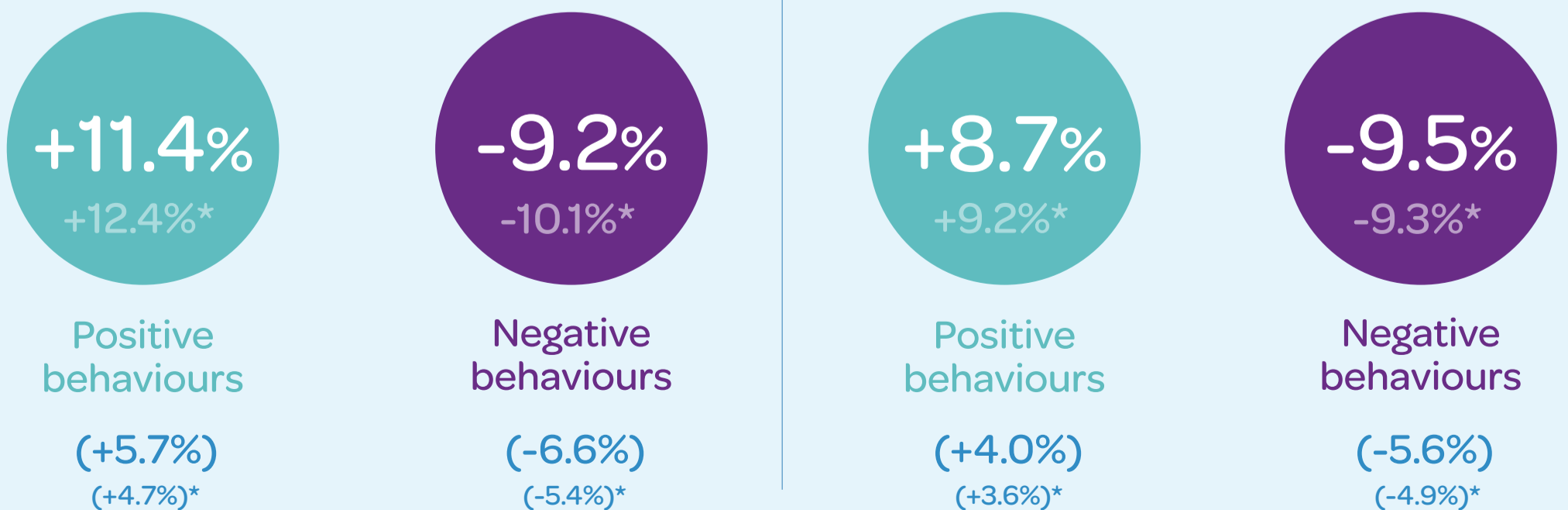
Proportion flourishing / languishing



Teachers reported seeing positive changes in students and reductions in negative behaviours or sentiment. Teachers described children as more lively, focused, perseverant and hopeful, while they indicated students are less disinterested, sad, troublesome or pessimistic.

Frequency of behaviours

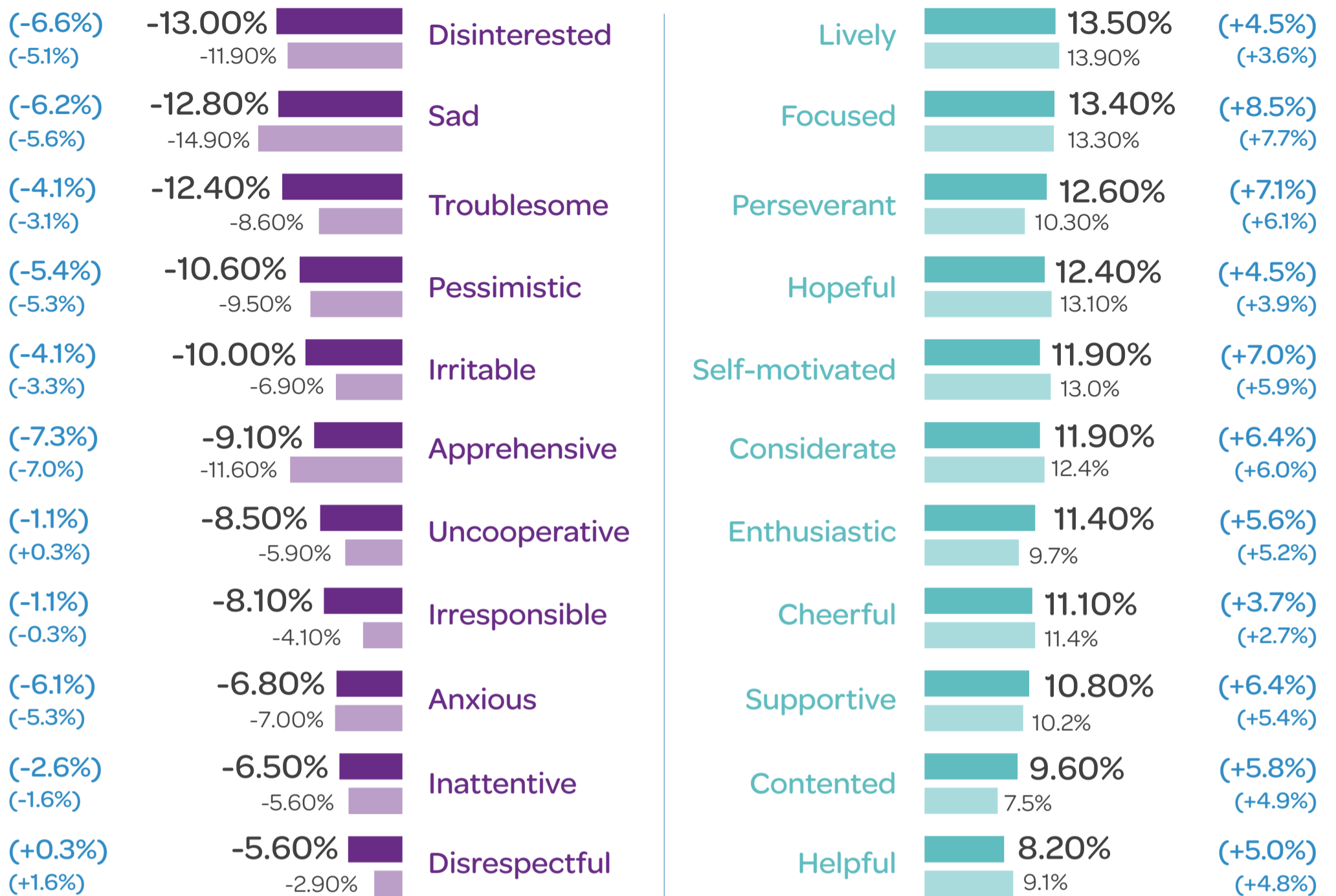
Proportion showing behaviours



## Negative descriptions

## Positive descriptions

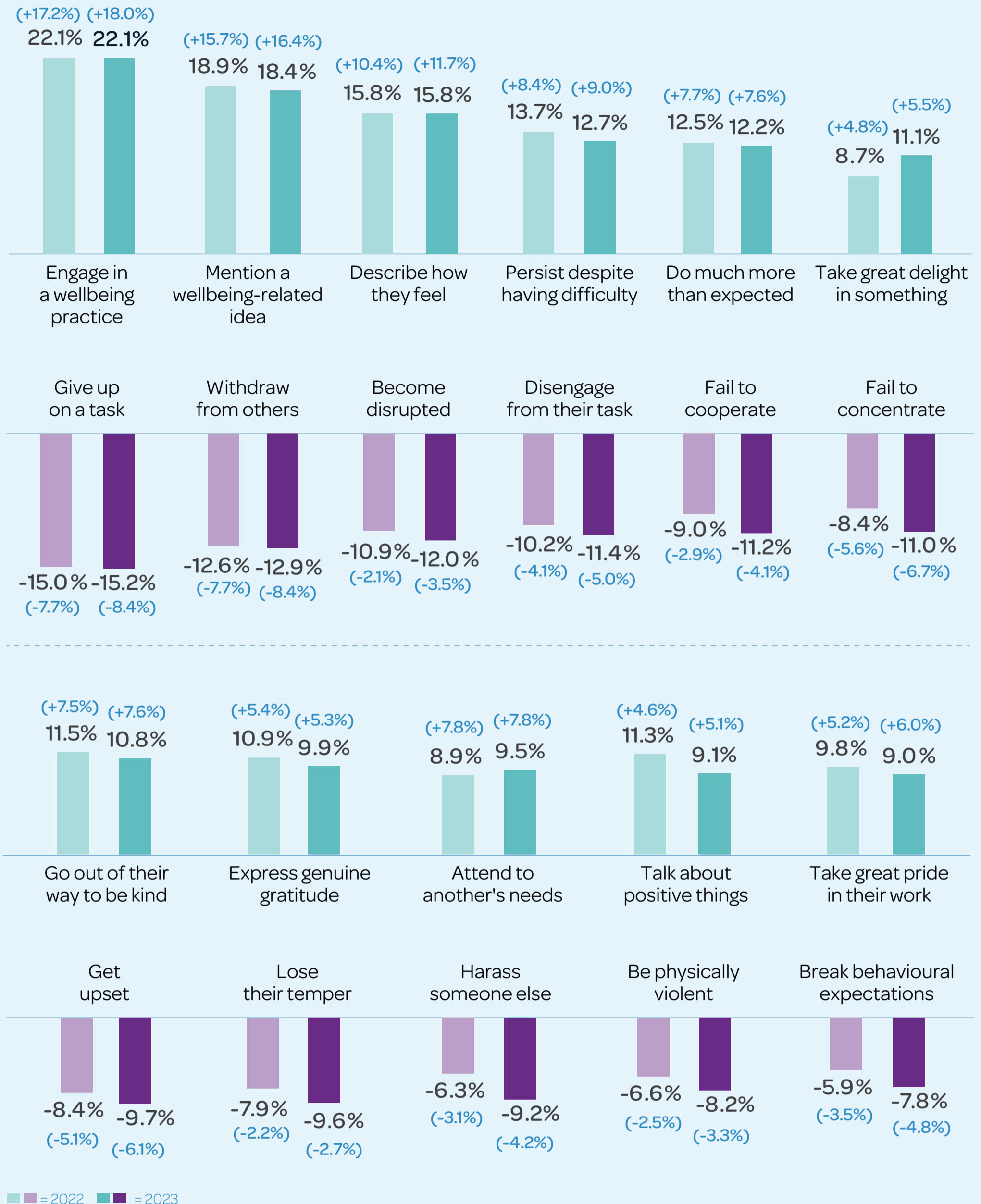
### Students were...



■ = 2022 ■ = 2023



## Positive / negative behaviours



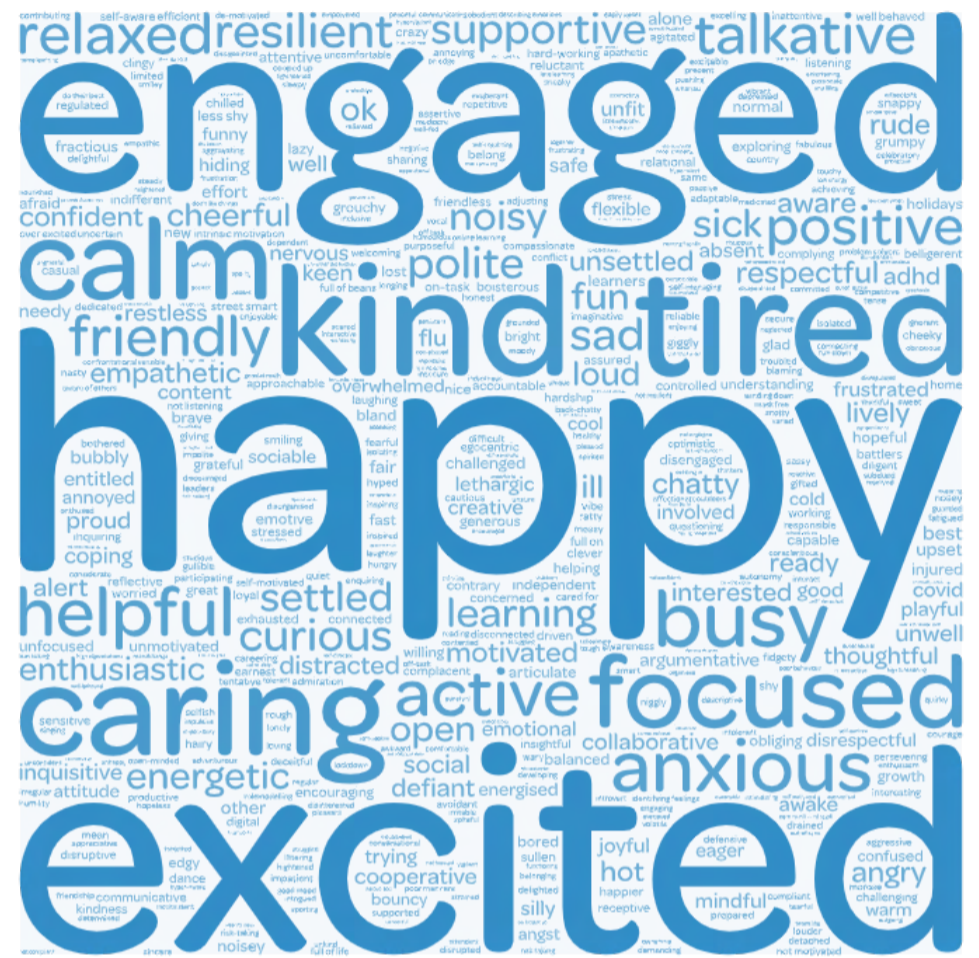
■ = 2022 ■ = 2023

Given the opportunity to use any words to describe the children and their behaviours, teachers used more positive descriptions in the follow-up. These open text responses were consistent with the other responses in the survey, and are visualised below.

Open-text student descriptions -  
Baseline 55.9% positive



Open-text student descriptions -  
At 3 month follow-up 75.0% positive



Open-text student behaviours -  
Baseline 46.6% positive



Open-text student behaviours -  
At 3 month follow-up 57.4% positive







Teacher feedback about Pause Breathe Smile continues to be positive. Comments below indicate the programme has made a difference in their classrooms.

#### Selected comments from staff

"It has definitely helped us practice some mindfulness techniques that have calmed a lot of the kids down after lunch."

"Thanks for giving our tamariki a useful programme for positive wellbeing."

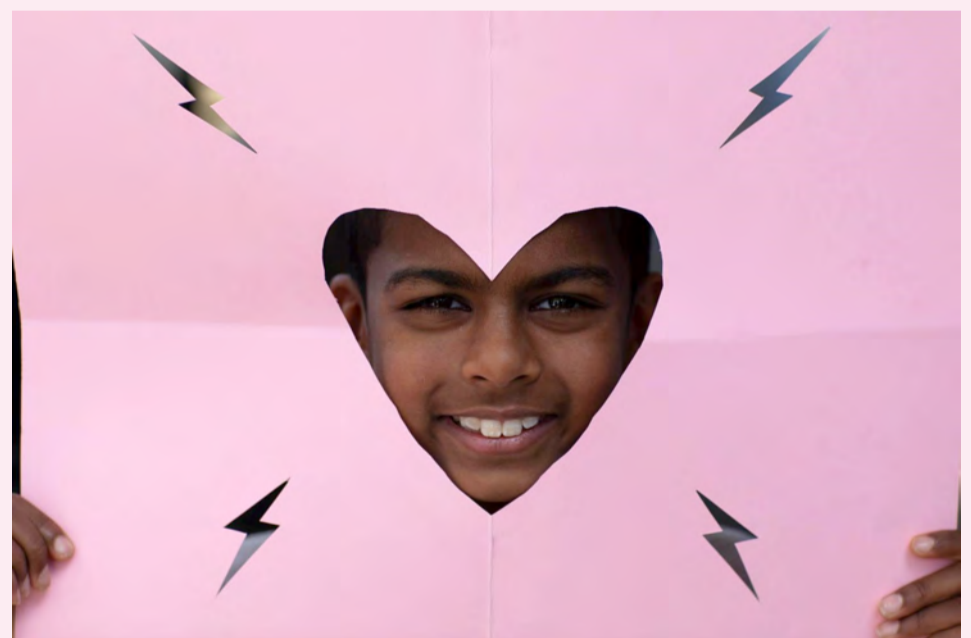
"If everyone is on board, this practice is amazing. I think it should be mandatory for teachers to participate just as much as the tamariki do."

"In the times and society we live in now, this type of explicit wellbeing teaching and practice is essential for the positive health of our communities."

"Really good programme that is easy to use and effective."

"Thank you for making this important practice accessible to all."

"Thank you for this fabulous programme."



"Encourage other schools to join in the programme. It helps the children as well as the teachers."

# SUMMARY

Overall results suggest that Pause Breathe Smile is having a positive effect in schools where it has been implemented. Teachers enjoy delivering the programme and they also enjoy seeing the results on the mental wellbeing of the tamariki in their charge.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Southern Cross

Southern Cross is proud to partner with the Pause Breathe Smile Trust and the Mental Health Foundation to make the locally designed and internationally recognised schools' mindfulness programme freely available to all school children aged 5 to 12. Pause Breathe Smile equips tamariki with tools to manage the ups and downs of life and set them up for a healthy future.

[southerncross.co.nz](http://southerncross.co.nz)

### ReubenRusk.com (formerly Mindquip)

In the last 20 years, cutting-edge scientific research in the field of wellbeing science has shed light on how individuals and organisations function best. Much of this information is not accessible, though. Mindquip was founded in April 2015 by Reuben Rusk, PhD to provide individuals and organisations with insight and tools based on this research so that they can benefit.

[reubenrusk.com](http://reubenrusk.com)

### Pause Breathe Smile Trust

The Pause Breathe Smile Trust has a vision of achieving Half a Million Healthy Minds. Half a million being the approximate number of Kiwi kids in primary and intermediate schools.

[pausebreathesmile.nz](http://pausebreathesmile.nz)

