



Impact Evaluation for the Pause Breathe Smile Programme

November 2024



Executive Summary

Southern Cross' shared purpose is to enhance health and wellbeing today and for generations to come. As part of this commitment, Southern Cross Healthcare fully funds Pause Breathe Smile, a homegrown mind health programme for tamariki, so that schools across the country can access it free of charge to help their students cope with life's ups and downs.

To understand the effects of the Pause Breathe Smile programme on school communities, an independent evaluation was commissioned by Southern Cross in 2021, led by wellbeing science specialist, Dr Reuben Rusk. This is the third report to be published based on the findings of the evaluation.

In this report, the latest tranche of findings is presented, which is based on online survey responses from teachers in schools where the Pause Breathe Smile programme has been implemented.

Overall, the results suggest that Pause Breathe Smile is having a positive effect in schools. Schools that successfully embed Pause Breathe Smile practices generally report positive shifts in the wellbeing and behaviour of their tamariki.

Key findings

- Teachers were asked to rate the wellbeing, behaviours and characteristics of students before and after implementing the Pause Breathe Smile programme. One year after implementing the programme 21% of aggregate wellbeing scores had moved above the baseline average
- The measure of children 'flourishing' saw a 13% move above the baseline average by one year, while the measure of those 'languishing' saw a 10% decrease below the baseline average in the same period
- Increases in positive behaviours and characteristics among students were identified along with decreases in those considered negative. Children were significantly more self-motivated, perseverant, focused, and supportive after one year
- Teachers were more inclined to be satisfied or enjoy their work after delivering the Pause Breathe Smile programme.



Brought to schools
by Southern Cross

Pause Breathe Smile

**100%
free for
schools**

**Learn,
practise,
deliver,
embed**



Pause Breathe Smile exists to grow tamariki wellbeing throughout primary and intermediate schools and kura across Aotearoa New Zealand.

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 Healthcare.

As at November 2024, Pause Breathe Smile has reached more than 150,000 children and 10,000 teachers and educators in more than 500 schools.



Methodology

This evaluation outlines the impacts and ongoing effects of Pause Breathe Smile for students and their teachers.

In 15-minute online surveys, teachers from schools enrolled in the PBS programme were asked to describe the wellbeing, characteristics, and behaviours of children at their school.

The survey has three parts – before training (baseline), four months after programme implementation, and one year later.

Fieldwork was conducted between 9 February 2021 and 7 September 2024. Within that period, a total of 3,648 teachers responded to the baseline survey, a further 1,422 responded to the four-month follow-up, and 570 responded to the one-year follow-up.

Survey data was interpreted and analysed by wellbeing science specialist, Dr Reuben Rusk.

Dr Rusk has worked in 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 teaches students studying a Master of Applied Positive Psychology.

This report is the third to be produced since the independent evaluation commenced in 2021. The results are based on teachers' observations of their students' behaviour following the implementation of Pause Breathe Smile in their school.



Dr Reuben Rusk, PhD
Independent wellbeing
science specialist



Results

Student wellbeing

Teachers were asked to reflect on general student wellbeing, and to indicate if they saw positive or negative changes amongst students having implemented PBS in their classrooms.

After one year of PBS being implemented at the surveyed schools, significant improvements in student wellbeing were seen. There was a 21% increase above the baseline average for aggregate student wellbeing.

When teachers were asked about the level of student wellbeing at their school one year after the programme had been in place (as shown by 'Perceived student wellbeing') there was a 11.5% increase above the baseline average.

"I was peaceful, and I wasn't concerned anymore."
(Year 3 tamariki)

"It's about looking after yourself and if you are sad or mad you can make yourself peaceful."
(Year 3 tamariki)

Aggregate student wellbeing score

+21.1% (+16.8%)*

Perceived student wellbeing score

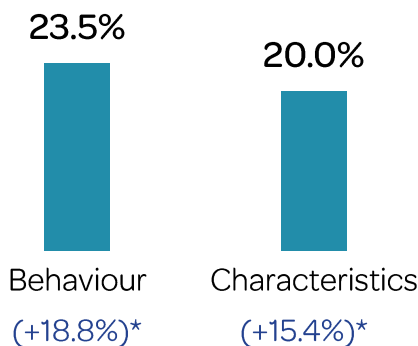
+11.5% (+9.5%)*

*2023 Pause Breathe Smile Impact Evaluation Report

Numbers indicate the percentage of scores that shifted above (+) or below (-) the average baseline score one year after launch.

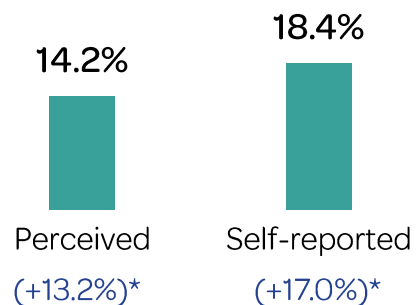
Staff perceptions of students

Behaviour and characteristics measures were each based on reported levels of 10 positive and 10 negative aspects.



Wellbeing support by staff

Perceived support indicates how much teachers thought their school supported student wellbeing. Self-reported support is based on teachers' assessment of their own actions and behaviours to support student wellbeing in the school.



*2023 Pause Breathe Smile Impact Evaluation Report

Flourishing and languishing

Teachers were asked how many students were flourishing or languishing in terms of their wellbeing. The results clearly indicate an improvement, with more students described as 'flourishing' and fewer students as 'languishing'.



*2023 Pause Breathe Smile Impact Evaluation Report

Positive and negative behavioural shifts

Teachers reported seeing positive changes in student behaviours and reductions in negative behaviours one year after PBS had been implemented.

Significant improvements were seen across all positive behaviours, but the highest increases were in focus, perseverance and self-motivation. These results suggest that meaningful increases in

student wellbeing occurred.

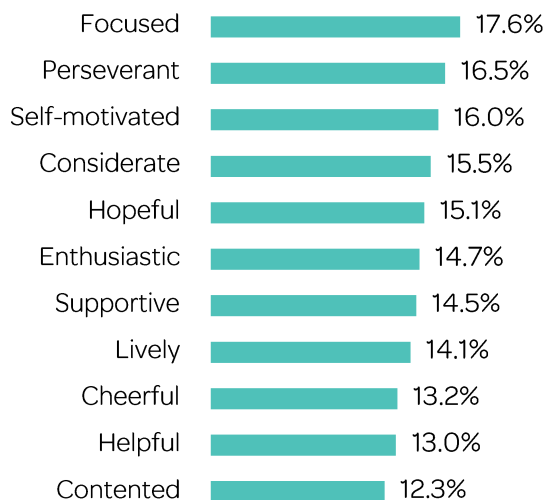
Teachers reported reductions in negative behaviours after one year of PBS being implemented. In particular, there were significant reductions in children being disinterested, troublesome and irritable. These results suggest decreases in negative emotions that impact wellbeing.

Frequency of behaviours



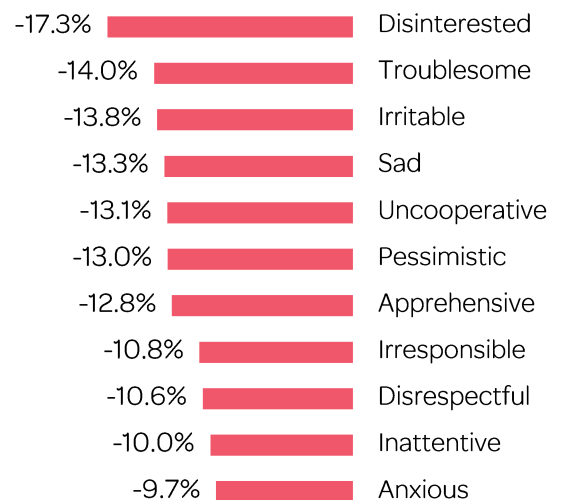
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Positive descriptions



Students were...

Negative descriptions

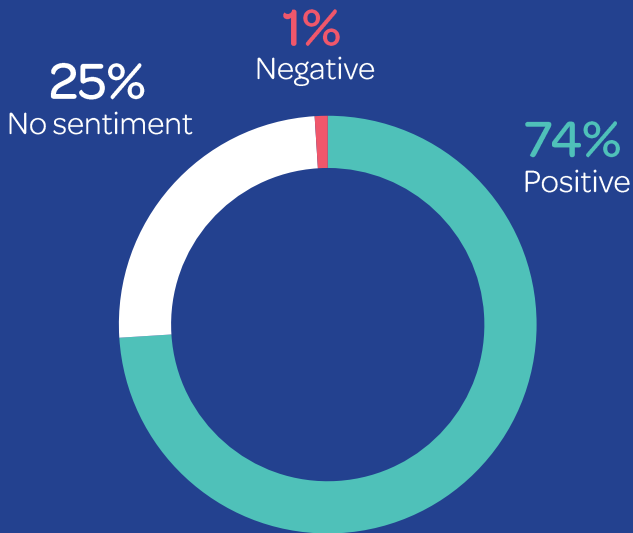


Commentary from teachers

When teachers were asked about the impact the PBS programme was having at their school, they provided a range of comments which have been summarised and grouped into key themes.

After one year of PBS being in place at schools, 74% of teachers indicated the programme had delivered a positive impact for their students.

Follow-up response sentiment



The following themes were evident in the feedback provided by teachers:



Regulation

Students showed improved self-regulation of emotions and behaviour, greater calmness, and better focus



Pro-social

Students displayed more pro-social behaviours such as kindness and respect



Emotional literacy

Students demonstrated an improved awareness and understanding of emotions and greater ability to articulate them



Resilience

Students demonstrated greater resilience to adversity



Commentary from teachers

Teacher feedback about Pause Breathe Smile continues to be positive. The comments below indicate how the programme has made a meaningful difference in classrooms across Aotearoa New Zealand.



"PBS is a great programme which supports all ākonga in our kura – it gives even very young tamariki the tools to identify their own emotions."

"PBS is an awesome programme for all kura in New Zealand. It has helped my tamariki so much with their emotions and forming good friendships."

"There is no school which has no need for PBS; it is not limited to managing behaviours or fostering wellbeing, it is a holistic philosophy which will enrich and empower your staff and your students to be the best they can be for the rest of their lives!"

"I believe that the programme is having a positive effect on our students. More so than I thought it would....I was sceptical to start with."

"Great programme. Have observed a definite change in the attitude with the boys who were too 'cool' for it initially. They now participate without trying to disrupt others by giggling and being silly."



"It is changing the language we use as teachers."

"I really do think it's a great programme with easy to apply strategies and practical ideas to use in the classroom that don't take too much time out of the daily routines."

"I think the programme is great but needs the backing of the senior leadership team to be effective."



Acknowledgements

Southern Cross

Southern Cross is committed to supporting the mental wellbeing of children. In 2020 Southern Cross Healthcare partnered with the Pause Breathe Smile Trust and the Mental Health Foundation to make this locally designed and internationally recognised schools' mindfulness programme freely available to all school children aged 5 to 12.

southerncross.co.nz

Dr Reuben Rusk

With over a decade of expertise in wellbeing science, Reuben is a fellow at the Centre for Wellbeing Science at the University of Melbourne.

He was involved in developing and implementing the Pause Breathe Smile programme evaluation survey. Experienced in psychometrics, statistics, and data analysis, he is uniquely placed to monitor and assess its impact.

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 New Zealand children in primary and intermediate schools.

pausebreathesmile.nz

