



**stresscontrol**

Face your fears; be more active; boost your wellbeing



# Killing three birds with one stone: Stress Control in schools for pupils, parents and teachers.

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## THE PROBLEM

### Adolescents

CAMHS and educational psychology see only the tip of the iceberg. As a result, teachers are having to deal with large numbers of pupils with significant mental health problems. In addition, there is little early intervention or prevention for those teenagers who may go on to develop problems (50% of adult mental health problems begin before the age of 15).

### Parents

Many parents may be suffering from common mental health problems and unable (or, due to stigma, unwilling) to access evidence-based therapy (1 in 7 adults in Scotland are currently prescribed an antidepressant). Thus, stressed parents and stressed children may end up feeding each other's difficulties.

### Teachers

Levels of stress among teachers rise year on year, resulting in absenteeism and, much more commonly, presenteeism.

This project looked to provide pragmatic help to those children:

- who are unable to access CAMHS services (intervention)
- who have significant problems but who would not reach criteria for referral (early intervention)
- who, while coping well now, may be at risk of developing problems in the future (prevention)

### Three Birds

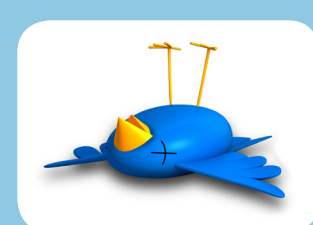
If, at the same time as the pupils were receiving Stress Control, parents were offered the evidence-based adult version of Stress Control in the evening in the school, would this provide a common language around mental health and would teaching them the same skills result in a synergic effect? If teachers were offered the same class, could it help reduce absenteeism and presenteeism?

## STRESS CONTROL®

'Stress Control' is a CBT psychoeducational 'class', developed by Jim White, a consultant clinical psychologist. It is widely used in the NHS and across the world. It teaches participants skills to control the common mental health problems frequently found together: anxiety, depression, insomnia, panic, low self-esteem, low self-confidence and poor wellbeing. There is no discussion of personal problems and the class aims to 'turn you into your own therapist'. Independent NHS research shows the adult version works as well as individual therapy (Firth et al, 2015; Delgadillo et al, 2016; Burns et al, 2016) and is hugely more cost-effective – The Burns (Sheffield NHS) study had, on average, 74 people attending each class.

## STRESS CONTROL SCHOOLS®

### The Project



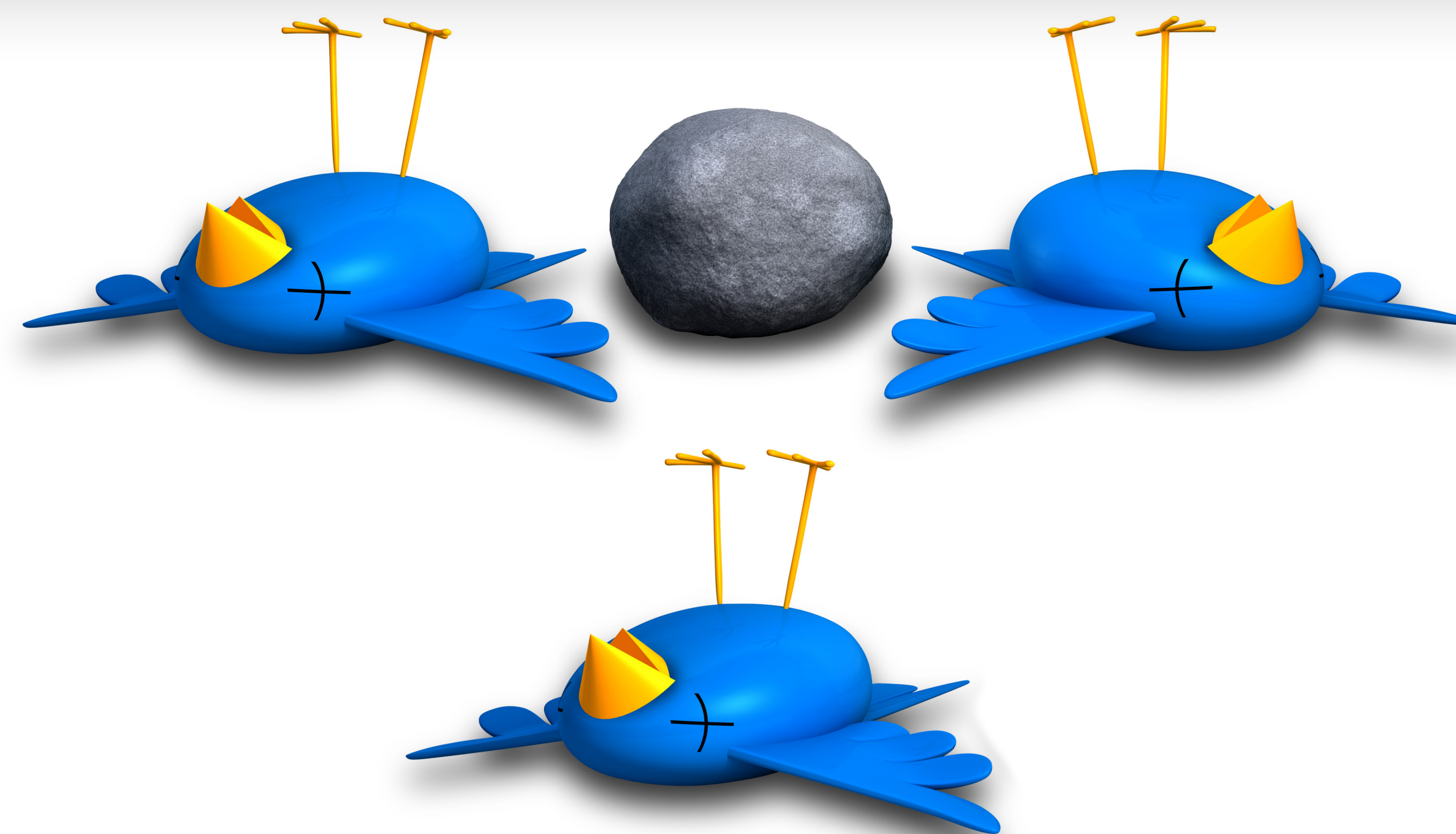
First bird

This study looked at a dedicated version for 15 year olds (4th Year in Scotland). To tackle the problems noted above, the class was adapted and Personal and Social Education teachers in St Pauls High School, Glasgow (in one of the most deprived areas in the country) were trained, over 5 hours, to deliver the class over eight weekly single PSE periods to all 4th Year pupils (thus ensuring 'hard-to-reach' pupils were reached). For more information, see White (2017).

The sessions were:

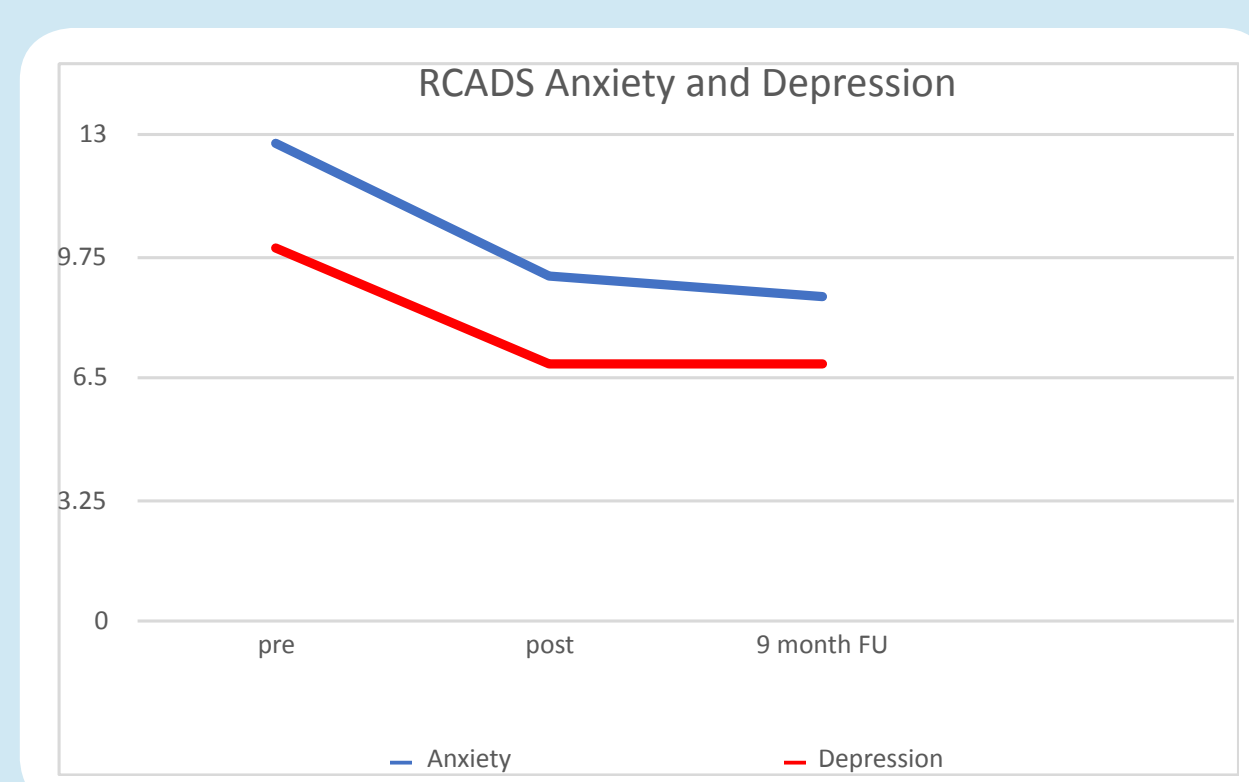
- 1) **What is stress?** Information about common problems around anxiety and depression
- 2) **Controlling your body:** exercise, caffeine, diaphragmatic 3/5 breathing ('belly breathing') - a variation of 7/11 breathing - and progressive relaxation
- 3) **Controlling your thoughts:** everyday mindfulness
- 4) **Controlling your actions:** face your fears and problem solving
- 5) **Controlling panicky feelings:** combining the skills and prevention skills
- 6) **Getting a good night's sleep:** sleep hygiene
- 7) **Boost your wellbeing:** '4 a day', gratitude and compassion
- 8) **Tying it all together** and **Controlling your future**

No jargon was used; text on PowerPoints was kept to a minimum; audio and video were used to make the sessions more interesting. Session handouts were written at a 'very easy to understand' level and comprised a double sided A4 colour sheet with slide 1 recapping on information in the session and side 2, the skills to be practised. Relaxation and mindfulness exercises were available on a free-to-use website, allowing pupils to download these to their phones. Teachers, using the 'think, pair, share' concept encouraged pairs, small groups or whole class tasks. No discussion of personal problems was allowed.



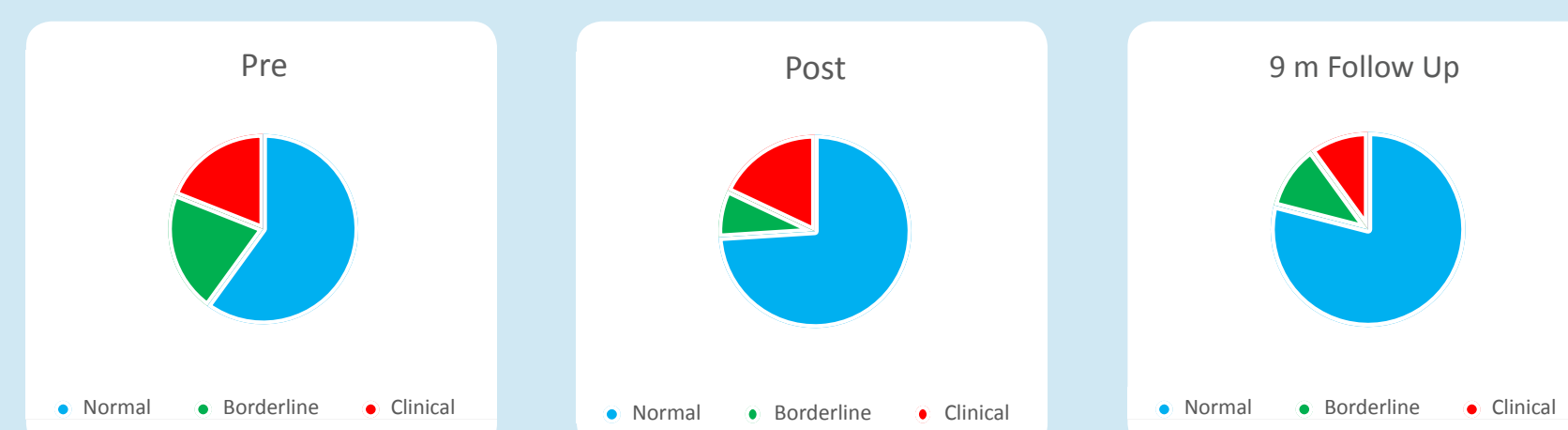
## RESULTS

All 4th year pupils (around 15 years old) took part (n=114). 97% of pupils had home addresses in the two most deprived deciles (SIMD). The Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) and The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) showed highly significant change at post-intervention. These improvements were maintained at 9-month follow-up. Follow-up scores dropped below average for 15-year olds.



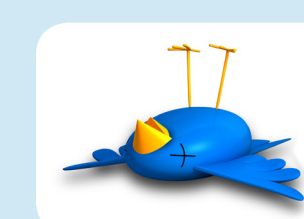
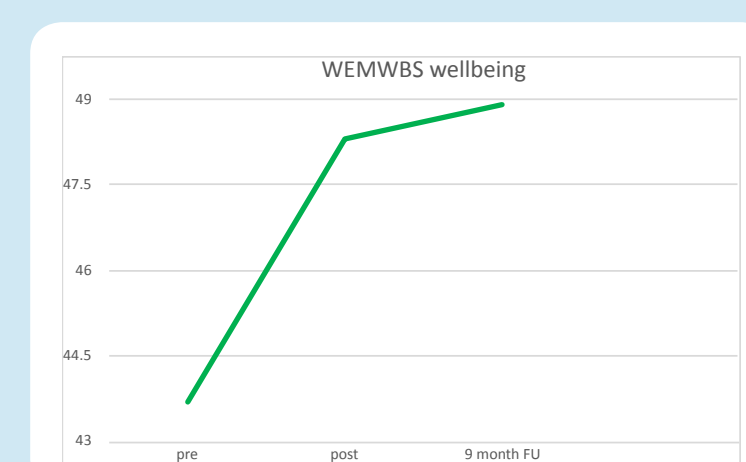
### RCADS Category change

RCADS (combined anxiety and depression score) places individuals in 'normal', 'borderline' and 'clinical' categories. Note 40% of pupils scored in either 'borderline' or 'clinical' at the start of the project.



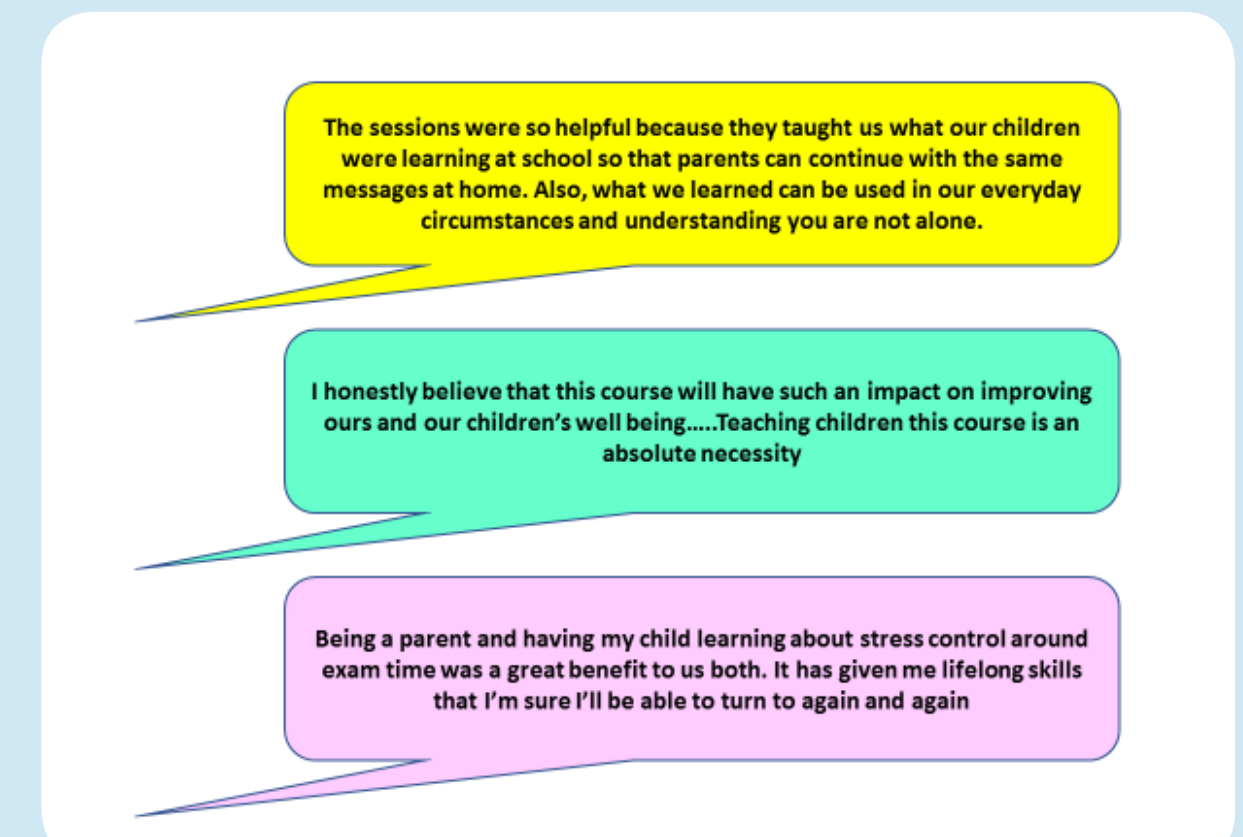
### Wellbeing

Reflective of a highly deprived area, initial wellbeing scores were far below Scottish average (50.3) and, despite highly significant change, remained just below this at 9-month follow-up.



Second & Third Birds

22 parents and teachers took part in an evening adult version (six session) Stress Control class which ran in the school at the same time as pupils received their class. It was led by JW. There was no drop-out and comments included:



Anecdotally, the class was seen, by both parents and teachers, as a success. We have been told that many more teachers would attend if we ran separate parents' and teachers' classes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results from this study suggest that PSE teachers can be easily, and quickly, trained to deliver the 8 period schools version of Stress Control within the existing timetable. These results suggest teachers can provide CBT/wellbeing skills to deal with pupils with existing problems and maybe help prevent problems in the future as young people take away skills to 'nip problems in the bud'. The parents and teachers evening class appears to have been a success (we have a more detailed evaluation running this year) and the school has now commissioned 'three bird' Stress Control (separate parents and teachers classes) to run each year.

### Developments: Stepped-care

We are now looking at a first-step Primary 7 (11-year olds) version to help with the often-stressful transition to High School. Once in High School, PSE teachers could teach linked stress management skills building year-on-year, to allow pupils, by the time they leave school, to have a comprehensive knowledge of, and skills to tackle, mental health and boost wellbeing.

A Ph.D. Educational Psychologist in Ireland is currently testing a clinical version for children stuck on long waiting lists for CAMHS services.

As 21% of pupils remain in the 'borderline' or 'clinical' categories, St Pauls is now testing a more involved class, run by PSE teachers, targeting those pupils who require more than the basic class but who are unlikely to meet criteria for CAMHS.

A detailed website is being built for those pupils, parents and teachers who want to learn more.

**For more information, please contact [jim@stresscontrol.org](mailto:jim@stresscontrol.org) 07966 704 194**

### References

- Burns, P. et al. (2015). "Stress Control" as a Large Group Psychoeducational Intervention at Step 2 of IAPT Services: Acceptability of the Approach and Moderators of Effectiveness. Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy, doi:10.1017/S1352465815000491
- Delgadillo, J. et al. (2016). A multi-service practice research study of large-group psychoeducational cognitive behavioural therapy. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 87, 155-161.
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- White, J. (2017). Killing three birds with one stone? Stress Control in schools for pupils, parents and teachers. Division of Clinical Psychology – Scotland Review, British Psychological Society, 16, 26-31.