



Practising the tiger posture.

Making time for the mind

Jan Downey writes about her experiences of yoga at her school.

It was the third day of term at my new school. The timetable I had been given by the head on the Inset day two days earlier read 'Wednesday, 10.30, Yoga'. Well, I had done a few yoga classes myself, but had never before seen it on a primary school timetable. I was intrigued to say the least.

When I arrived at school that Wednesday, the hall had already been transformed, with carefully positioned yoga mats forming a large, yet somehow cosy, circle. In the middle was a tower of large, colourful foam bricks. To one side was a visual timetable showing what the first session would entail. Apart from the mats, it certainly didn't look like any yoga class I'd attended, and I was thoroughly looking forward to 10.30.

That day was five years ago. We still have weekly yoga sessions for all classes from nursery to year 6.

When new staff join or colleagues in other schools hear about it, some are as intrigued as I was, others are more sceptical. But once they have observed just one lesson, they are all convinced of the benefits of yoga at school.

Want to know more?

For more information email info@yogaatschool.org.uk or go to www.yogaatschool.org.uk. Find a review of Michael's children's yoga storybook on page 38.

Modern life is hectic. Not only for us. Children are busy people. Think how life for a ten-year-old has changed since we were that age. They are dropped off at breakfast club before school, attend the after-school club until early evening, then have homework, computer games to play, reading with parents, siblings to argue with, football club and Brownies.

Often they have no time to relax, no time to reflect on their learning and their friendships, no time to simply be still, calm and quiet.

Our weekly yoga lesson provides pupils with skills to enable them to take time out to consider their choices. It gives them techniques they can use to calm themselves down and deal with feelings of stress, sadness and uncertainty. Pupils return to class after their yoga lesson in a better frame of mind for learning. In fact, they often perform better in assessments following a yoga session – a handy tip there for SATs week!

But it's not all about 'self'. Each lesson contains a strong element of teamwork and emphasises the importance of needing other people to complement an individual's own work and achieve shared goals. Pupils are encouraged to praise each others' efforts and achievements, pinpointing precisely the successful aspect observed.

Amazingly, they don't just say well done to their friends. Praise is truly meant and so really matters to the recipient. Teamwork in yoga builds individual self-confidence.

The skills our pupils acquire in yoga help in all aspects of their life at school, and hopefully extend beyond school as well, but most importantly – they really enjoy it.