

# Charterhouse pupils taking 'mindfulness' course

By [Joanna Till](#)

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PUPILS at Charterhouse are taking meditation classes in a bid to cut stress and improve their grades.

As part of 'groundbreaking' research at Oxford University, the group of about 20 15-year-olds are devoting 40 minutes a week to a mindfulness course, learning ways of increasing their concentration and reducing anxiety.

At the end of the eight-week programme, experts will compare the results of the Charterhouse study with two other public schools that are taking part, in the hope of developing a programme that could be rolled out for free across the country.

Dr Christopher O'Neill, who teaches theology, philosophy and ethics at Charterhouse and has spent time researching adolescent developmental psychology, said he believes the course could be of great benefit to young people.

"We have started with Year Ten pupils because that can often be when we start to see pupils getting stressed as they begin exams," he added.

"I think in many ways teenagers do have to cope with more worry and more pressure than perhaps people of their age did in the past.

"So far we have gotten very positive feedback from those who are taking part in the mindfulness programme. They seem to be enjoying it, which is very promising indeed."

Dr O'Neill said classes have so far included breathing exercises and techniques for focussing the mind, and he said he believes the course will help to increase the pupil's attention spans and concentration, develop awareness and emotional intelligence and reduce stress.

He said mindfulness was originally developed in Massachusetts in America as a way of helping patients with chronic depression, but that experts are now investigating using the theories to help manage mental health problems before they develop.

"The emphasis is now certainly on prevention rather than cure," added

Dr O'Neill, who is also a trained counsellor.

“This is an exciting thing to be involved with. It does feel quite groundbreaking. It is early days yet, but we are investigating the idea of creating a programme that is available online for free for anyone to download.”

Pupils at Tonbridge School in Kent and Hampton School in Middlesex are also taking part in the research, which is being run by the Mindfulness Centre at Oxford.

Experts are getting together in March for a conference to discuss how the classes have been going at the different institutions and to pool ideas for future courses, and Dr O'Neill will also produce a report as part of a two-year project he is doing at Oxford University.

“We are also very interested in feedback from the pupils so we can carry on developing the course,” he added. “It is under review all the time.”

Charterhouse was founded in London in 1611, and moved to its current 215-acre site in 1872. The school has about 740 pupils, from age 13 to 18, and is opening a new day house for sixth formers later this year.