

Tools of yoga and mindfulness help create classrooms where children feel safe, supported and ready to learn, says Hannah



# ‘I FEEL GREAT and my mind is clear and happy’

Taking schoolchildren from anxiety to confidence in the classroom is at the heart of yoga teacher **HANNAH BUTTERILL’S** work in Yorkshire. She shares her experience

**WORDS:** Hannah Butterill, founder of The School Yoga Project

**A**cross Yorkshire, teachers are navigating one of the most pressing issues in education today: emotional regulation. Since the pandemic, schools have seen a marked rise in anxiety, overwhelm and behavioural challenges among pupils. Teachers are doing everything they can to hold the emotional weight of their classrooms but many feel the need for more practical, accessible tools that genuinely help young people calm their bodies, focus their minds and build resilience.

In schools today, many children and teenagers are living in a heightened state of stress. Busy schedules, social pressures, digital overload and post-pandemic aftershocks all play a part. When young people feel overwhelmed, their ‘fight or flight’ response is triggered, making it harder for them to listen, learn or connect with others.

Yoga, breathwork and mindfulness offer simple, science-backed strategies for regulating the nervous system. Slow breathing activates the parasympathetic system, helping the body shift from stress to calm. Mindful movement releases tension and builds body awareness. Affirmations help reshape unhelpful thought patterns.

Together, these tools give young people something many struggle to access on their own: a sense of internal control.

Across the Yorkshire schools I work with (primary and secondary settings), I’ve seen how quickly these skills can influence the learning environment. After just a few sessions, teachers report calmer transitions, improved attention and a more settled start to the day. Over time, pupils begin to use the techniques independently; before tests, during friendship conflicts, or when they feel overwhelmed.

Yoga in schools is not about perfect poses. It’s about helping children and teenagers understand what calm feels like, how to access it and how to stay there for longer.

## A TEN-YEAR-OLD’S JOURNEY FROM ANXIETY TO CONFIDENCE

Earlier this year, I worked with a 10-year-old girl at Tockwith Primary School, near York, who was experiencing significant anxiety. Mornings were especially hard; she often arrived feeling worried, unsettled, and on the verge of tears. Her teacher explained >

that she frequently needed to step out of the classroom to regulate her emotions.

Together, we began my six-week yoga and mindfulness programme for children, which combines breathwork, positive affirmations, mindful movement, relaxation techniques and guided meditations. Week by week, her confidence grew. She learned how to slow her

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breathing before school each morning, how to use affirmations when negative thoughts crept in and how to recognise the early signs of overwhelm.

By the end of the programme, she was calmer, more focussed and able to stay in class without needing to step outside. Her teacher noticed a marked improvement in her resilience and her ability to manage big feelings independently.

In her own words: ‘I love Miss Butterill’s yoga classes. If I could rate it, I would give it a million stars out of five because it helps me get rid of stress and anxiety. When I walk out, I feel great and my mind is clear and happy.’

Her journey reflects what I see time and time again: when children are given the right tools, they thrive.

## WHY THIS BELONGS IN EVERY SCHOOL

Yoga and mindfulness in education aren’t quick fixes, they’re long-term investments in emotional literacy. These practices teach young people to:

- understand their feelings
- calm their bodies
- make thoughtful choices



Children take some time out for relaxation sessions at school

- build resilience
- cultivate compassion

For teachers, it means fewer disruptions, smoother routines and a more harmonious learning environment.

For pupils, it means confidence, connection and a skillset they can carry into adulthood. Alongside working directly with pupils, I provide CPD training for school staff so they can confidently deliver yoga, breathwork and mindfulness sessions themselves. Teachers often share that these practices improve not just the classroom atmosphere, but their own wellbeing too. When staff feel equipped and empowered, wellbeing

becomes part of the school culture – not just a one-off intervention.

As conversations around mental health continue to grow, there has never been a more important time to embed wellbeing practices into the school day. The tools of yoga and mindfulness are simple, inclusive and adaptable. They help create classrooms where children feel safe, supported and ready to learn.

Yorkshire schools are already leading the way. With the right training, support and vision, these practices can become the norm and our young people will be all the better for it. ●



Hannah leads one of the sessions

## THE SCHOOL YOGA PROJECT

The School Yoga Project is a York-based wellbeing initiative supporting children’s emotional health through yoga, mindfulness, and cognitive behavioural techniques. Founded by primary school teacher and yoga educator Hannah Butterill, the programme is delivered in schools across Yorkshire and focuses on developing emotional regulation, resilience and focus in children aged 8 to 16.

Sessions include breathwork, mindful movement, positive affirmations, relaxation techniques

and guided meditations, all adapted to the developmental needs of KS2, KS3 and KS4 learners. The School Yoga Project also offers CPD training for teachers, enabling staff to embed these calming strategies into daily routines and classroom practice with confidence.

The aim is simple: to make yoga-based wellbeing an accessible and practical part of the school day, supporting pupils and teachers to feel grounded, calm and ready to learn.

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