

Policy for Managing Stress at Work

This version: January 2014

Employees in any organisation are likely to experience stress at work from time to time. In addition to stress which originates from the workplace, members of staff will experience various stresses outside school which can impact their capacity to manage the pressures which accompany their work.

This school is committed to supporting all members of staff by establishing systems and a culture which minimises stress at work and provides support to staff when stress related issues arise.

What is stress?

The Health and Safety Executive defines work related stress as the adverse reaction that staff have due to excessive pressures or demands being placed on them. As the capacity for individual members of staff to cope with pressures or demands varies, it is not possible to predict the point at which stress will be experienced. A further complication is that many jobs in a school require a degree of self-organisation and management such that stress may be experienced when the demands are not excessive but the way in which the member of staff is managing the tasks or their time creates stress. Nonetheless, stress can lead to a range of emotional and medical complications which reduce efficiency or result in absence such that it is in the interests of all members of staff and the organisation as a whole to minimise stress and for support to be provided when stress occurs.

Particular issues concerning teaching

As may be the case with other jobs which include managing others, there is an unpredictability about how children will respond which can lead to a sense of a lack of control which causes stress. There are coping strategies for this but, in some cases, pupil management skills are poor, or students are particularly difficult and stress is inevitable.

The work load for teaching staff can be considerable, particularly at certain times of the year. We try to manage this with the distribution of after school commitments and providing support to encourage the use of efficient strategies for tasks such as marking students' work .

Dealing with parents can be particularly stressful. For example if a child has behaved inappropriately for which a sanction has to be applied but the parent takes the child's view that they did not behave badly which can lead to a situation of conflict with no possibility of a resolution which satisfies all of those involved.

Conflict between staff

There can be conflict, for example: where lines of responsibility are not clear; managers are over critical or unsupportive; there are issues over staff conduct. Each of these has to be dealt with individually but perhaps the key support is for staff to know that there is someone to whom they can refer and that any concerns will be taken seriously.

Managing Stress

Absence

If staff are absent, they fill in a return to work form which is countersigned by Colin Mann for teaching staff and Shane Blackshaw for associate staff.

The reason for absence is recorded on the school's administration system.

For short term absence for common non-serious conditions, there is no return to work interview.

For long term absence, repeated absence or absence which raises concern, a return to work interview takes place.

For long term absence, discussion will take place, either on the 'phone or by asking the member of staff to visit the school, to establish the reasons for the absence, likely period of absence and to offer support if necessary.

For stress related concerns we offer the school's counselling services free of charge. This is taken up from time to time.

Staff turnover

This is very low at this school. The reasons for staff leaving the school are established by the Headteacher for teaching staff and by the Finance and Business Director for support staff. If concerns are expressed by the member of staff leaving, or later, this is followed up.

Line management of staff

Heads of department and line managers have a pastoral role. This includes professional development, offering support to establish efficient working practices and offering support when difficulties are identified, including those which are stress related.

For teaching staff, key issues can be:

- matching high expectations with self-perception of performance;
- managing the work life balance, particularly for staff who have young families;

Support offered:

- On-going mentoring;
- Counselling as described above;
- For teaching staff, reduced timetable so that marking can be completed in school reducing the pressure at home – we currently have three members of staff whose contract has been adjusted on this basis.

Organisational Change

The key factors in considering significant change to the operation of the school are:

- The benefits to students' learning and achievement;
- The effect on working practices and conditions of service;
- The sustainability of the proposed change;
- The financial and other resource implications of the change;

The second bullet point above is a major consideration and fully takes into account the effect on the pressure and stress that staff are likely to experience.

Responsibilities

For Governors:

- Governors receive anonymised reports showing absence rates and reasons for absence;
- Governors receive data showing staff turnover for the last three (?) years;
- Governors receive reports outlining known stress related concerns;
- The Health and Safety Policy makes explicit reference to stress related matters.

For the management of the school:

- Establish risk assessment dealing with work related stress;
- Ensure all employees are aware of the need to report stress related illness and stress related risks which arise in the school;
- Establish the conditions under which stress is considered as a disability and then falls under the DDA;
- Ensure that line managers report concerns surrounding stress in the school to senior management;
- Make training available for line managers to support those who are experiencing stress and for employees to help them avoid or manage stress.

For employees:

- Ensure a culture which is such that employees will report to an appropriate manager aspects of the job which they feel is putting them, or other employees, under stress or unreasonable pressure;
- Suggest ways in which the school could change aspects of its operation to alleviate stress;
- Encourage staff to report medical conditions or domestic circumstances which may place them under additional stress.

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January 2014

Discussed by Health and Safety Committee: 24 January 2014

Approved by Full Governors: 26 March 2014