



STRESS POLICY

GOVERNING BODY APPROVAL:
Autumn Term -October 20/21

COMMITTEE WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR MONITORING
AND REVIEW:
Personnel Committee

NEXT REVIEW DATE: Autumn 2021/22

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1. INTRODUCTION

This policy document outlines the health risks to staff employed in schools in relation to stress - including workplace stress - and the roles and responsibilities of the council, school, managers and employees in preventing and managing stress and its effects.

The school recognises its responsibility in controlling the risks which can lead specifically to workplace stress. The school also expects all staff to take responsibility for the management of their own stress. This policy outlines expectations for managers with regards to carrying out suitable risk assessments, as well as identifying symptoms of stress so that staff are aware of how to recognise stress in themselves and others.

2. LEGAL CONTEXT

Employers have a duty to safeguard the health and safety of their employees under Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HASWA) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Managing stress is an essential element of ensuring that the school's responsibilities for health and safety are met and managers therefore have a duty to ensure that their good practice minimises the occurrence of stress amongst employees.

In addition, the school recognises that taking steps to manage stress can:

- improve the overall morale and commitment of employees;
- improve relationships between members of staff;
- improve relationships with pupils, parents and carers;
- ensure that good management practice supports the avoidance of stress which is detrimental;
- reduce the costs associated with sick pay, replacement cover and recruitment;
- strengthen an employer's position with regard to employer's liability insurance;
- reduce the likelihood of a claim being made for a breach of a duty of care and improve defences against such claims.

3. POLICY REMIT AND DEFINITIONS

Not all stress negatively impacts on health and wellbeing, and the school recognises that employees will have individual triggers for negative stress. The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) formal definition of work related stress is outlined below:

There is a difference between stress and pressure. We all experience pressure on a daily basis, and need it to motivate us and enable us to perform at our best. It's when we experience too much pressure without the opportunity to recover that we start to experience stress. The HSE definition of stress is 'the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them'.

Staff are also affected by domestic pressures, which can impact on performance at work or mean that staff are less able to deal with work based pressures.

Managers must therefore be aware of the general symptoms of stress in order to ensure that staff who may be experiencing stress are supported appropriately and service delivery is not affected.

4. HOW TO RECOGNISE STRESS

4.1 The symptoms of stress

The following table highlights some of the emotional, mental and behavioural symptoms managers and staff should be aware of:

E:emotional symptoms include:	Mental symptoms include:	Changes in behaviour include:
Depressive feelings, anxiety, tearfulness Feeling that one can't cope Irritability, anger, frustration, over-sensitivity Loss of motivation and commitment	Inability to plan, concentrate and control work Indecisive - or making poor decisions Muddled thinking /confusion Poor memory	Comfort eating (i.e. eating when not hungry) or loss of appetite Increase in smoking or drinking Decreased productivity or deterioration in quality of work Poor relationships with colleagues or clients

Cynicism/loss of sense of

<p>humour Low self esteem/feelings of inadequacy</p>		<p>Poor time management Nervous habits (fidgeting, impatience, nail biting) Disregard for personal appearance</p> <p>Lack of confidence - socially withdrawn</p> <p>Increased sickness absence</p>
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The above list of symptoms is not exhaustive, nor are any of the behaviours in themselves necessarily indicative of an employee experiencing stress. A pattern of uncharacteristic behaviour that continues for some time may indicate an underlying medical condition or problem. Managers and employees need to be aware of and sensitive to a colleague who consistently shows any of the above changes.

4.2 Stress and other health issues

Stress and its symptoms may be caused by or exacerbate other underlying health problems, including alcohol and substance misuse. The school has a clear policy on alcohol and substance misuse in its Alcohol Drugs and Substance Misuse procedure and Code of Conduct, which should be referred to in conjunction with this policy if appropriate .

4.3 Long term effects of stress

If the signs go undetected, or are not acted upon, the long-term effects of stress will often be serious both for the individual and for the school. Health problems and diseases that have been linked to stress include:

- high blood pressure
- ulcers
- alcoholism
- asthma
- diabetes
- nervous breakdowns
- coronary heart disease
- chronic depression and anxiety

- increased bloodpressure
- skin rashes
- chronic digestive illness
- cardiovascular and heart disease

5 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Managers, employees, Human Resources, Health and Safety, and trade unions all have a role to play in ensuring that stress and any related illnesses are identified and managed as effectively as possible.

5.1 Employees

Employees are supported in and encouraged to:

- Take responsibility for their own health and take steps to prevent stress from negatively affecting their wellbeing;
- Raise any issues relating to stress with line managers, union representatives or Human Resources staff. Where the Head is experiencing stress, this should be referred to the Chair of Governors;
- Take active steps to access support services early on if they recognise their wellbeing is becoming affected (e.g. their GP or the school's Employee Assistance Programme);
- Urge colleagues to seek help if they are affected by stress or its effects;
- Use other appropriate procedures if necessary to ensure they receive adequate support.

5.2 Headteacher /Line managers

Headteacher /Managers will:

- Avoid instances where stress negatively influences wellbeing through good management practice;
- Conduct stress risk assessments with staff if they are exhibiting symptoms (see paragraph 4.1), or if a member of staff raises the issue of stress. Otherwise stress should be considered as part of any normal risk assessment process;
- Ensure good communication and consultation between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes, and foster an environment in which stress can be discussed openly;

- Ensure staff are fully trained to undertake the tasks associated with their job roles;
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities;
- Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded;
- Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not routinely overworking;
- Monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement;
- Attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety;
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated;
- Be vigilant and offer additional support - including Occupational Health referrals where appropriate - remembering that stress can originate from situations outside of work;
- Seek guidance from Human Resources if necessary on the above.
- Provide an Occupational Health service which is available to all employees subject to appropriate referrals;
- Ensure staff have access to free and confidential support services.:

5.3 Human Resources

Human Resources will:

- Provide advice to line managers to assist them to identify and manage stress related health and performance issues amongst their staff. This includes advice on the process of carrying out individual stress risk assessments;
- Ensure its risk assessment procedure incorporates the assessment of risk factors which could cause stress or exacerbate existing stress issues experienced by staff.

5.4 Health and Safety

The Health and Safety service will provide advice and signpost you to tools/solutions which aim to minimise the impact of stress on individuals in identified 'stress hotspots' (see paragraph 6.3), and will advise on whole school/team issues.

The service also provides detailed advice and guidance on how to carry out risk assessments of the workplace to ensure adequate control measures are in place when staff, pupils and visitors are carrying out tasks and activities, to ensure that no one gets hurt or becomes ill.

Refer to the School Health and Safety service pages on the Extranet for further information.

5.5 Trade unions

The role of the trades unions is to represent the views and interests of their members on this policy and associated procedures, as a need arises, and to advise and represent individual members as appropriate.

5.6 Governing Body/Management Committee (Community schools)

The Governing Body is responsible for agreeing, monitoring and reviewing a policy on stress, ensuring that the school implements its own policy and procedure with the use of this guidance.

The Governing Body and Headteacher are committed to meeting their legal duties and obligations. They recognise their general duty to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees and other members of the school community affected by the work they do.

6 MANAGING STRESS

6.1 Risk Assessments

A proactive approach must be taken to manage stress amongst all employees. Where appropriate to the job role employees should conduct a thorough risk assessment with their line manager including the assessment of any workplace stressors.

Additionally, line managers will meet with employees if they have concerns about any employee exhibiting symptoms or signs of stress, or who they think may be at risk of stress. If necessary, the manager and employee in question will then complete a stress risk assessment. Any reasonable controls should be identified and recorded on the risk assessment, along with any other practicable actions. Any control measures or other actions which arise as a result of the risk assessment must be actioned within a reasonable time frame (usually 1 month).

The risk assessment is a live document and should be revisited and revised as and when deemed necessary by the individual employee.

In addition, all staff should be encouraged to raise any stress-related issues as they arise. If staff raise issues, or managers become aware of symptoms in stated in paragraph 4.1 which they feel may be stress related, managers should then follow the procedure outlined in 6.4.

6.2 Stress triggers in the workplace

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has produced Management Standards and guidelines on work-related stress for employers and employees and their representatives. The Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence (demands, control, support, relationships, role and change). In other words, the standards cover the six primary sources of stress in work.

When undertaking the stress risk assessment, managers and employees should consider the following stress triggers which can occur in the workplace:

- **Demands** of e.g. workload, work environment, work patterns;
- Lack of **control**, e.g. how much say an employee has in how they do their work;
- Lack of adequate training, lack of constructive advice/feedback, lack of general managerial **support**;
- Bullying, harassment or other negative **relationships** with colleagues or residents;
- Any conflict or ambiguity around an employee's **role**;
- Organisational **change**.

The HSE information and guidance on the management of stress can be found at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm>

6.3 Stress hotspots

It is also important that to be able to identify areas - or hotspots - where large groups of staff are experiencing or are likely to experience stress. The Headteacher will monitor incidences of reported stress to identify any teams/areas where high incidences of stress related absences are occurring, or situations which are likely to put staff in stressful situations. Headteachers/managers will also notify Health and Safety if they identify a potential/current stress 'hotspot'. If such an area is identified Headteachers/managers will be expected to work with Health and Safety to take appropriate action.

6.4 Managing employees who are experiencing stress

Despite efforts to control the risk of stressors emerging in the workplace, many employees will experience stress at some point in their careers, much of which will not be negative or detrimental. If managers become aware that a member of their staff is experiencing stress which is having a detrimental impact or notice that one of their staff is persistently exhibiting the symptoms outlined in 4.1 above, they must ensure that adequate support is in place by following the procedure outlined below:

- Hold a meeting with the individual as soon as possible in a suitably private location to discuss the issue;
- If appropriate, refer the individual to the school's Employee Assistance programme for support (or equivalent);
- If appropriate, recommend the individual sees their GP and/or make a referral to Occupational Health;
- Identify the cause(s) of the individual's stress including any specific work-based factors that may be contributing to an employee's stress and record appropriately using a stress risk assessment;
- Work with the individual to identify any changes or adjustments that can be made to support the employee, and explore actions the employee can take to manage their own stress and identify coping strategies;
- Monitor any changes made to ensure they are effective, review the plan or risk assessment regularly to ensure that measures identified are addressing the issue. Include the employee in any further conversations about their health;
- Seek advice and guidance from Human Resources as required.

A stress risk assessment template can be found in Appendix one 'Individual Stress Risk Assessment'.

Additional sources of guidance and tools for carrying out an individual stress risk assessment can be found on the HSE website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/inde.htm>

6.5 Employee Assistance Programme *[Note: delete paragraph if not provided]*

This school provides access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and this is a free, confidential and professional support service available to all staff.

The EAP offers impartial advice and support - including telephone counselling - to all staff. There is no limit on how frequently employees can use the service. All employees experiencing stress should be encouraged to contact the EAP to discuss what support may be available. More information is available in the staff handbook.

6.6 Occupational Health Service

Occupational health services are available to school employees subject to referrals made by managers in conjunction with HR advice. Confidential counselling services are offered and schools can refer to this service via Employee Health.

6.7 Rehabilitation of an individual following absence through sickness

When an employee returns to work following stress related sickness absence it is important to:

- make sure the individual feels they are welcome back;
- conduct a thorough stress risk assessment making sure the individual is not exposed to the same factors that originally caused the stress; if this is not possible, make reasonable adjustments to reduce stressors;
- make arrangements for the individual to have an early return-to-work interview - at the interview focus on the individual rather than any work problems that may have arisen during the absence;
- communicate regularly with the individual to make sure there are no further difficulties; ensure that regular review meetings are put in place and timescales for actions are agreed.

A HSE template which may be used during a return to work discussion can be found in Appendix two 'return to work questionnaire'.

7 FURTHER INFORMATION

Any clarification in respect of the application of this policy should be sought from your line manager who may then consult with Brent HR Service (or your school's HR provider) or Brent Health and Safety team.

APPENDIX 1

Individual Stress Risk Assessment

[Staff name _____ | Date: _____

Prioritised Issue	Solutions/adjustments	Who will take the action forward and by when?	Review of effectiveness

Name:		Job Title:		Signature:	
Name:		Job Title:		Signature:	

Date to be reviewed: _____

APPENDIX 2 -

HSE 'return to work questionnaire'

Return to work questionnaire	Question	Was it a problem for you?	What can be done about it?
Demands	Did different people at work demand things from you that were hard to combine?		
	Did you have unachievable deadlines?		
	Did you have to work very intensively?		
	Did you have to neglect some tasks because you had too much to do?		
	Were you unable to take sufficient breaks?		
	Did you feel pressured to work long hours?		
	Did you feel you had to work very fast?		
	Did you have unrealistic time pressures?		
Control	Could you decide when to take a break?		
	Did you feel you had a say in your work speed?		

Have enough opportunities to question managers about change		
Do you feel consulted about change at work?		
When changes were made at work, were you asked how they would work out in practice?		
Do you have enough opportunities to question managers about change initiatives?		
