



STRESS AT WORK POLICY

The school values its employees and accepts that fitness for work of its employees and the appropriateness of the environment in which they work are essential requirements for the efficient and effective performance of the school.

The school undertakes to provide systems of staff management and a working environment which actively promote a sound and sustainable approach to work.

Policy

The school is committed to :

- managing the causes of stress at work and maintaining well being amongst its employees
- increasing awareness and understanding of stress in the workplace
- communicating the procedures and resources dedicated to the prevention and management of detrimental stress
- eliminating or minimising the impact of detrimental stress on all employees, thereby maintaining the health and well-being of all staff and organisational efficiency and effectiveness
- the adoption of the Health and Safety Executive Management Standards approach to managing stress.

Definitions

The Health and Safety Executive define stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them'. It is recognised that everyone needs a certain amount of pressure to stay alert, motivated and productive. Not all pressure is bad. It is when demands and pressures are excessive or prolonged that some people find their ability to cope is challenged. This creates a vulnerability which can manifest itself in a range of ill health effects for the individual and can have negative consequences for the organisation in which they are employed.

Context

The school recognises that some of the duties and responsibilities undertaken by its employees have the potential to put them under pressure. These include dealing with disturbed or aggressive parents or pupils, organisational change, heavy work loads, staff shortages and procedural deadlines.

External matters over which the school has little control can impose substantial additional pressures. These include annual budget settlements, new legislation, school pupil number changes and activities of other agencies with which the school works.

Employees may have aspects of their personal lives that make them more vulnerable to pressures at work or have a temporary influence on their work performance, including illness, family problems or financial difficulties.

Responsibilities

The governing body, with the support of the head teacher, will:

- Familiarise themselves with the nature and causes of stress in the work place;
- Support, implement and disseminate the principles and aims of the Stress at Work Policy among their staff;
- Be risk aware, and take account of an employee's medical history, any traumatic events, health problems, disciplinary action, complaints about overwork and bullying, and ensure that staff have access to appropriate support;
- Ensure all their direct employees undertake risk assessments and that they take action to deal with the issues identified and minimize the risks to lessen the harmful effects as far as is reasonably practical (see appendix 1 and appendix 2).
- Consider undertaking periodic audits of stress (using the information from the above risk assessments) within the organisation and where necessary, make appropriate changes to prevent or reduce stress as much as is practical.
- Promote and maintain systems of management and behaviour at work which adhere to the principles, aims and strategies of the policy.
- Once alerted to a risk (through for example medical advice, a particular event or clear information from an employee) then steps must be taken to reduce the risks, this must not be left the employee alone to solve.
- Ensure personal fitness for work and aspire to a healthy lifestyle.

The responsibility for managing stress at work for the staff lies primarily with the head teacher although the head teacher should inform the governors of any concerns (where they can do so without breaking any confidentiality unless there is a risk to the Health and Safety of either the staff member, their colleagues, a pupil or person connected in some way to the school). Responsibility for managing stress at work for the head teacher lies with the governors.

Individual employees will:

- Familiarise themselves with the signs and causes of stress in the work place (and in their personal lives);
- Understand the Stress at Work Policy and co-operate with managers in the prevention and control of stress and in dealing with it;
- Recognise that stress is not a weakness, it is a natural reaction to excessive pressures or demands;
- Report matters of concern relating to their or a colleague's health and safety at work to the head teacher or immediate line manager;
- Aim to develop a balanced and responsible attitude to work and their personal lives to ensure that they are fit for work;
- Inform their line manager where personal stress is affecting their work.

Strategies for preventing and minimising stress at work

1. Management / organisational change

The school will:

- Consider and seek to manage the impact of proposed change on employees;
- Involve or inform employees appropriately and promptly with a view to gaining their understanding and co-operation;

2. Health and Safety Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is a vital component of this policy. It is only when possible causes of stress have been identified that preventative or management strategies can be effectively put into place.

The school should ensure that all employees undertake appropriate risk assessments (Appendix 1) at least once each year (during Terms 5 and 6), and more often if:

- Levels of stress related sickness absence and/or staff turnover are significantly high;
- There are prevailing hazards, such as aggressive / violent pupils or heavy workloads;
- There are high or increased levels of formal/ informal complaints;
- A staff group or health and safety audit requests this to be done.

Where stress is identified, an appropriate action plan will be drawn up (Appendix 2), in consultation with the employee.

The school should seek advice from the OCC Health and Safety Department or from the HR team if necessary and take measures that are appropriate to address the risks that have been identified.

In carrying out risk assessments, the school should be aware that:

- Stress at work can result from a single incident or an accumulation of incidents over time, and should seek to minimise both types of risks;
- Stress-related ill health might be caused by personal circumstances, which in turn may have a detrimental effect on an individual's ability to cope with work demands;
- Employees with confidential or sensitive personal issues that could cause stress should be referred to the Occupational Health Service.

Communication

The governors and employees are encouraged to adopt and adhere to effective two-way communication for the prevention and control of stress.

Employees should report to their line-manager any issues of concern relating to excessive pressure or stress. Managers should listen to, and give appropriate consideration to, comments and representations from employees.

Job Design / Workload Management

Line managers should:

- Analyse jobs to ensure a reasonable degree of variety and control for the post holder;
- Avoid placing unreasonable demands on employees, by prioritising and delegating appropriately;
- Respect others' time and seek to negotiate an efficient and effective solution to workload problems;
- Ensure that employees take work breaks at appropriate times in order to avoid fatigue.

Recruitment

The school should:

- Provide adequate information for candidates as part of the selection process regarding working conditions, including special features of the job such as tight deadlines, working patterns and dealing with disturbed or aggressive parents and children;
- Appoint to all posts by reference to the job description and job specification, which should take into consideration the ability to meet any special requirements of the job;

- Provide adequate information to new recruits, through the induction process, and nominate a colleague as a reference point for further support;

Learning and Development

The school will ensure that employees:

- Are adequately trained to fulfil their duties and responsibilities;
- Are trained, as appropriate in dealing with potential health and safety hazards that may be associated with the job they do;
- Are encouraged to develop stress and time management techniques.

Supervision

Line managers will:

- Agree clear objectives with a reasonable timescale, taking care to explain how duties and responsibilities fit into the wider work context;
- Ensure regular supervision in order to respond quickly to problems;
- Provide positive feedback and recognition of good performance promptly and when appropriate;
- Discuss poor performance promptly, honestly and constructively to agree appropriate action using the agreed steps to manage poor performance;
- Undertake regular staff development and performance review meetings in accordance with the school's Performance Management Policy.

Dealing with stress

Recognising the symptoms of stress

Some of the recognised symptoms are tiredness, aching muscles, disturbed sleep, loss of appetite, indigestion, stomach problems, dependence on alcohol or drugs and excessive smoking. Also headaches, inability to relax, poor concentration and indecisiveness, excessive worrying, increased irritability, feeling anxious and changes in attitude to work and colleagues, increased evidence of minor sick leave.

Recognising the signs of stress in the work place

Some of the possible signs of stress include:

- Increase in overall sickness, particularly short-term absences;
- Poor work performance: low output, lower quality, poor decision making;
- Relationships at work: conflict between colleagues, poor relationships with pupils and parents
- Loss of motivation and commitment
- Poor time keeping
- High accident rates.

Employee Counselling / Critical Incident Management

The school will:

- Ensure that employees are aware of the support available to them;
- Be aware of their own limitations in advising employees with problems;
- Refer employees for appropriate counselling.

Review

The head (or Governors) will, as part of this policy:

- Conduct return to work interviews following sickness absences, seeking to identify whether work related stress is a factor, and where it is, agreed what needs to be done with the employee;
- Review workloads periodically and consider elements of job design, work organisation and demands.

Monitoring

The school will monitor and record stress related sickness absences and the head and Governors will liaise to ensure proactive intervention when appropriate.

The school will undertake periodic staff / organisational stress audits and take action when necessary.

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment Form**Appendix 2: Risk Assessment Action Plan**