

Stress Policy



Approved by:

Resources Committee

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Health and Safety Unit

Stress policy for school based employees

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Ref:	HSMS/POLY/009S
Revision:	1
Date:	October 2017

Amendment register

Revision Number	Date	Details	Amended By	Approved By
0	March 2003	First issue	C Crozier	E Griffiths
1	October 2017	Revised to reflect current organisation structure, more detail added on stress awareness, risk assessment, reporting of stress, monitoring and review. List of support (App 1 amended), implementation checklist (App 2) added. Information on sources and causes of stress, legal and case study information removed (now incorporated into stress awareness materials).	K Jeavons	C Ward

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy has been developed in consultation with the Local Authorities Education Senior Management Team, Head Teachers, and Trade Unions. (Teaching and Non-Teaching).
- 1.2 The Director of Education, Skills and Employment is committed to protecting and promoting the wellbeing of all school based employees and in conjunction with other initiatives seeks to support employees experiencing work related stress.
- 1.3 It is important that stress is not seen as a personal problem, but an issue which managers, employees and the organisation as a whole are committed to addressing. We all have a role to play in managing stress.
- 1.4 To address any problem there needs to be an understanding of it. Many employees are unsure as to what to do for themselves and many managers are unsure as to what actions to take. This is particularly important when tackling work related stress – it

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requires a partnership between the employee, the Head Teacher, Governing Body and the Local Authority, a partnership based on honesty and trust where employees can express their feelings.

2. Definition of stress

2.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as;

“The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them.”

2.2 This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly and stress which can occur when pressure becomes excessive and can be detrimental to health.

3. Types of stress

3.1 Work related stress

Work related stress is directly attributable to stress caused by work, the workplace or working arrangements. It is not in itself classified as an illness but can contribute to problems with ill health and may, if severe, be the cause of disability. The Local Authority has a legal duty to manage stress in the workplace. Potential causes and triggers of stress are present in all work places and differ for every individual. Both employers and employees have a duty under health and safety law to take measures to control risks from work related stress.

3.2 Non-work related stress

Stress can be the result of a build-up of the many pressures experienced by employees at home and in everyday life resulting in stress which can manifest itself at work. Although the Local Authority has no legal obligation to protect employees outside of work, it is advised that non-work related stress is treated empathetically to avoid ill health and non-attendance. Head Teachers and nominated managers need to be vigilant and supportive of employees who are experiencing stress outside of work and offer interventions as appropriate in accordance with the Management of Absence Policy. A list of groups and

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organisations who may be able to provide assistance to the employee is also provided in Appendix 1.

4. Policy statement and commitment

4.1. The Local Authority recognises that stress can be a considerable risk to both physical and mental health. This policy explains the actions that the Local Authority will take to fulfil its duty of care as an employer with regard to stress related issues in the workplace. The aims of the policy are to: -

- Promote a good, open and supportive climate and working culture, where stress is not seen as a personal weakness.
- Provide Head Teachers with the necessary framework to actively reduce the likelihood of stress associated with work and the workplace through a risk assessment approach.
- Increase general awareness of stress and methods to prevent and combat harmful workplace stress.
- Take action to combat and prevent workplace stressors.
- Assist Head Teachers and employees in managing pressure overload in others and themselves.
- Provide appropriate awareness at all levels in identification and coping techniques.
- Manage problems that occur, along with providing a confidential counselling service and other support services.
- Manage the return to work of those who have had stress related problems.
- Monitor and evaluate stress indicators.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 Director of Education, Skills and Employment

The Director of Education is responsible for:

- Ensuring that adequate systems of monitoring, risk assessment and auditing are in place to ensure compliance with the policy;
- Providing appropriate training awareness resources and guidance to ensure schools are competent to fully undertake their role and are able to comply with the policy;
- Reviewing and revising the policy on a regular basis.

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5.2 Governing Body

The Governing Body has a responsibility to:

- Recognise and accept their role and responsibilities in providing a safe and healthy workplace for all school based employees including the Head Teacher;
- Be aware of the impact of their decisions and how they affect all school based employees;
- Having a role in offering support to all employees and referring them to other support systems;
- Endorse and adopt this policy and receive regular reports to enable them to monitor, evaluate and review the stress policy
- Ensure that all school based employees are provided with the opportunity and facilities to receive adequate information, instruction and training to ensure compliance with the policy;
- Monitor and review workloads and take steps to ensure that they do not become excessive. The Governing Body should manage poor performance and attendance in order to prevent unnecessary pressure on other members of staff;
- Ensure the Head Teacher has received the appropriate training and guidance so they are competent to fully undertake their role;

5.3 Head Teacher

The Head Teacher is responsible for:

- Ensuring there are adequate systems for risk assessment and monitoring are in place to ensure compliance with the policy within their school;
- Having a role in offering support to employees and referring them to other support systems;
- Encouraging all members of staff (teaching and non-teaching) to undertake stress awareness training;
- Being able to identify any employees who may be showing the symptoms of pressure overload;
- Not regarding stress as a weakness and to encourage open discussions of “sources of pressure” at staff meetings;
- Monitoring levels of absenteeism in accordance with the School’s Management of Absence;

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- Bringing issues to the attention of the Governing Body or the Director of Education, Skills and Employment, which require action beyond their control;

Note: Head Teachers can delegate responsibility within the management structure of the school but retains the accountability for ensuring that the responsibilities are discharged.

5.4 School human resource consultants

School Human Resource Consultants will:

- Support the Head Teacher or nominated manager in dealing with employees who are experiencing stress related symptoms
- Ensure Schools are aware of the need for employees to have access to a counselling service.
- Support/arrange referrals to the occupational health service

Note: schools that that choose not to buy into the LA HR services need to ensure that their provider of HR services satisfy these responsibilities.

5.5 Local Authority Health and safety officers

The LA Health and Safety Officers will:

- Provide risk assessment advice when requested;
- Advise on continuous development of policy and practice.

5.6 Employees

Employees have a personal responsibility to

- Be aware of their levels of stress and to take action to prevent deterioration in their health;
- Identify the early signs of stress in colleagues and offer support;
- Recognise their own training and development needs with the assistance of their line manager;
- Seek professional help/support at the earliest time.
- Co-operate with any support signposted by the Head Teacher

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- Ensure adequate engagement with their Head Teacher (along with the support of their trade union representative or fellow work colleague as appropriate) to enable stress related symptoms that affect attendance and/or performance at work to be addressed.

6. Wellbeing Management and Stress Prevention

6.1 Wellbeing Management

Wellbeing is concerned with the presence of positive emotions and moods rather than negative concerns such as depression and anxiety.

Good wellbeing gives a general sense of fulfillment and positive functioning demonstrated by feelings of contentment, happiness, energy and feeling healthy.

Work related stress is one of the major reasons employees report absence from work. This, impacts on individuals in terms of their health and life in general and on organisations in service delivery and financial terms.

It is always going to be better to manage the organisation so as to reduce the impact of work related stress than to react to dealing with the impacts of sickness absence.

Schools should consider adopting a proactive approach to enhance “wellbeing”. This being based on the view that it is in everyone’s best interest to maximise employee wellbeing. This approach identifies ways to create a healthy workplace rather than waiting until a problem has occurred.

There are a number of tools that can be adopted within a wellbeing approach and these could include:

- Promoting a climate in which it is acceptable to think and talk openly about stress;
- Providing opportunities to discuss proposals for change within the school environment;
- Ensuring there is planned provision to be accessible for employees to discuss problems;

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- Being seen to provide appropriate support to school based employees experiencing difficulties with pupils or who have been victims of verbal or physical assault by pupils and/ or parents;
- Encouraging managers to use opportunities to discuss individuals job performance, skills development, job enrichment and career path planning,
- Implementing effective induction programmes for all new employees, (not just newly qualified teachers)
- Considering training issues specifically for stress awareness, relaxation techniques, assertiveness, anger management etc.

6.2 Positive measures to reduce stress

Employees can help at work by: -

- Talking to the Head Teacher or line manager, if managers don't know there's a problem, they can't help;
- Asking a trade union representative or other workplace colleague to raise the issue on their behalf if they don't feel able to talk directly to the employer or manager,
- Depending on the issues discuss with the Head Teacher the possibility of a review of the employee's workload or a temporary adjustment to their job or additional training and support if appropriate
- Seeking stress counselling support through the school (LA or school's alternative provision) or by seeking support via their GP or other medical practitioner
- Speaking to their GP if they are worried about their health

7. Training and awareness

Training awareness is required to ensure there is an understanding of the issues that cause stress, what the signs and symptoms of stress are and what can be done, both from an organisational and personal level to manage work related stress.

The LA provides two self-learning resources to fulfil this requirement;

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- 7.1 **“Work related stress a briefing for Head Teachers and Governing Bodies”** – outlines the business case for taking stress seriously and managing stress to reduce its impact on schools and outlines the LA policy requirements and resources available to implement the policy.
- 7.2 It is a requirement of this policy that Head Teachers and Governing Bodies of Sandwell community schools go through the briefing so that they are aware of what is required to implement the policy.
- 7.3 **“Stress and Wellbeing – raising awareness for Sandwell school employees”**. This is a resource for all school employees that outlines what stress is and what causes stress, the signs and symptoms of stress and includes reference to strategies to promote self – help, wellbeing and build resilience.
- 7.4 Head Teachers are expected to positively encourage all employees to complete the stress and wellbeing awareness resource.
- 7.5 School Governing Bodies may offer other learning and awareness resources as appropriate providing they meet the standards set in the resources provided by the LA.

8. Risk assessment

Schools are required to undertake a stress risk assessment to identify the factors contributing to stress and to determine what can be done to manage stress.

A risk assessment for stress must be carried out for the whole school and for individuals where necessary.

8.1 Whole school stress risk assessment

A whole school risk assessment is required to identify the stressors present on a day to day term by term basis and the things the school are doing to manage these so that stress does not become a major problem to the school and its employees.

The LA has developed a model whole school stress risk assessment as part of the resources provided to schools to fulfil this requirement.

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Head Teachers are required to review and adapt the model risk assessment so that it reflects local circumstances.

This requires the school to review the model risk assessment in discussions with a representative number of school employees to confirm, amend, delete and/or add to so that the risk assessment is adapted to suit local circumstances.

When this has been completed the findings of the risk assessment are to be shared with all employees.

The whole school risk assessment should be kept under periodic review to ensure it remains valid, this should be done over a 18mth/3year cycle to allow actions taken as a result of the risk assessment to show effect.

An earlier review of the whole school risk assessment may be required where results of monitoring activity indicate this to be the case (see section 14.2).

8.1 Individual stress risk assessment

Risk assessments for individual employees may be required where individuals report that they are experiencing stress whilst remaining at work or report that stress is the cause of sickness absence (see 10 for more detail).

9. Information

Head Teachers must make all employees aware of the findings of the whole school risk assessment so that they are aware of the things the school are doing to manage stress.

Employees should also be given information on other support and opportunities available to help with the management of work related stress i.e. the LA stress awareness resource and LA counselling service (or schools alternative provision) along with other Council policies that can be used to help people manage issues contributing to stress.

10. Reporting incidents of work related stress

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- 10.1 Employees who feel they are suffering from work related stress may want to consider discussing this with their Head Teacher or line manager so that discussions can take place to identify causes and the measures that can be taken to help manage these.
- 10.2 The Individual work related stress questionnaire (HSMS/FORM/038S) can be used to inform and record the discussion about the potential causes of work related stress and the agreed actions for the individual.
- 10.3 Where the incident of work related stress results in time off work the employee must complete the P70 Notification of Sickness Form.
- 10.4 When returning to work, the Head Teacher/line manager must arrange for a return to work interview to take place to identify contributory factors and actions to reduce further sickness, see return to work below. In these cases, the Individual work related stress questionnaire (HSMS/FORM/038S) must be used.
- 10.5 If an employee feels they cannot discuss the issue with their Head Teacher or nominated manager, they should consult with their trade union representative or a fellow work colleague as appropriate so that concerns can be raised on their behalf.
- 10.6 During any period of absence caused by stress whether this is work related or personal factors Head Teachers need to ensure the requirements of the management of absence policy are taken account of.
- 10.7 Depending on the circumstances this may mean seeking advice from Occupational Health, arranging informal welfare meetings and using an alternative suitable manager to maintain contact where the Head Teacher or line manager is perceived to be the cause of the stress.

Note: Work related stress is at present not reportable to the HSE under the Reporting of injuries, diseases, and dangerous occurrence regulations 2013.

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11. Return to Work

- 11.1 Return to work interviews are an essential element of managing sickness absence as they help identify the reasons for absence and determine any actions necessary for the school and employee to take to prevent further absence. This is particularly relevant in cases where work related stress is cited as the reason for sickness absence.
- 11.2 It is important that return to work interviews are carried out as soon as possible after the employees return to work; ideally this should be on the day they return to work or within the first 5 working days of returning
- 11.3 It is important that the arrangements put in place for employees to have a return to work interview take into account the factors (if known) that caused the employee to be absent.
- 11.4 The following points should be considered when conducting return to work interviews;
- At the interview, it is important to focus on the person rather than any work problems that have arisen due to an absence.
 - Ensure that the employee who has been off with a stress related illness is made to feel they are welcomed back;
 - Ensure that the employee is not placed in a situation, which contains the same factors that led to the absence;
 - If it is identified that sickness absence is attributed to work related stress the Individual work related stress questionnaire (HSMS/FORM/038S) should be used to inform and record a discussion about the potential causes of stress related absence and the agreed actions for the individual.
 - It is also recommended that the whole school work related stress risk assessment is available at the return to work interview to identify to the employee what the school is already doing to manage work related stress and whether any additional action is required.
 - Having completed the risk assessment, agree with the employee the adjustments required to facilitate and sustain a return to work.

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- This may include short term amendments to responsibilities, alternative work patterns, providing training, support (such as mentors and coaches) or gradually reintroducing the employee back to work.
- Be aware that employees may feel uncomfortable if they think they are receiving special treatment or they are not being given enough to do. It is important to consider the range of duties expected of the employee, whilst considering the elements of work that were excessive and contributed to the illness;
- The school should consider steps which may already have been taken such as ensuring recommendation made from referrals to occupational health have been acted upon such as phased return to work or other interventions which could encourage a return to work and help sustain this.
- Ensure employees understand that they are expected to cooperate with the school by following the agreed interventions put in place by the school and any advice given from Occupational Health such as accessing counselling support.

11.5 Where employees have been on long term sick leave as a result of a stress related illness they have available to them through the Management of Absence procedures the possibility of a return to work plan. If this option is taken up the return to work plan should be carried out prior to the return to work interview.

11.6 This enables both employer and employee to obtain clear objectives and time frames, and will in the medium to long term have considerable benefits for both parties. The employee should be consulted by the Head Teacher (or representative) about their wishes and should have the opportunity to discuss them with their trade union representative or other work colleague present.

11.7 The Return to Work Plan should include: -

- The rehabilitation programme;
- A phased return;
- The time scales and dates for review;
- The possibility of specific support on return to work;

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- The management of reduced duties/responsibilities, taking into account that it does not increase the workload of other employees.
- Any financial implications for the employee;
- Any other concerns.

11.8 Benefits to the Employer: -

- The potential to reduce the period of absence of the employee;
- Retains the employee's skills and experience;
- Financial savings in the medium and long term;
- Demonstrates commitment to duty of care and is evidence of action to avoid putting the employee at risk of further stress;
- Builds staff morale.

11.9 Benefits to the Employee: -

- Supports the return to work;
- Contributes to the recovery process;
- Continuing support of colleagues/working relations
- Maintenance of self-esteem;
- Addresses financial worries/crises;
- Continuation of employment.

12. Counselling services

12.1 Schools are required to provide employees with access to a confidential counselling service.

12.2 The Local Authority contracts with an external provider of counselling services for schools and schools that wish to use this service must buy into to gain access.

12.3 Details of the service is communicated to schools through the relevant HR channels, but details can also be obtained from the schools HR consultant.

12.4 Schools that choose not to buy into the service provided by the local authority must make suitable alternative provision available for employees.

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12.5 Employees who require time off during working hours to access the counselling service should liaise with the Head Teacher/line manager so that appropriate arrangements can be made. If employees do not want the Head Teacher/line manager to know that they are using the service, access to the service must be made in the employees own time.

13. Confidentiality

Strictest confidentiality will be observed by all persons involved at all times, when dealing with stress related issues. It is important that employees are provided with an environment where they feel free to discuss their problems with their Head Teacher/immediate line manager or with the Employee Counselling Service.

14. Monitoring and review

Monitoring and review is required to establish that the policy is being implemented, is having a positive impact on the level of stress and remains valid.

14.1 Policy implementation

Head Teachers and Governing Bodies are required to monitor implementation of the policy in line with the school's policy review cycle. A checklist is provided in appendix 2 as a guide to and record of monitoring the status of implementation.

The LA will also monitor implementation of this policy through the school health and safety audit programme.

14.2 Policy effectiveness

Monitoring sickness absence related to stress is one way of measuring the effectiveness of the policy and schools are encouraged to do this. Where reduced and falling absence due to stress is seen this could be a positive indicator that things are working well.

Measuring sickness absence however only gives one measure of the success or otherwise of the policy. It will not give a complete picture

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as some employees may not realise they are experiencing stress or may not report the fact that they feel stressed.

To give a wider view on stress, schools need to consider the use of tools such as stress surveys to gather employee perceptions of how stress is considered and managed in the school.

To facilitate this the LA has provided an employee stress survey toolkit which includes instructions on how to use the tool kit.

Times when such surveys should be used include, when absence due to stress is rising, employees request a survey to be undertaken, senior leaders in school have concerns about the level of stress

It is important that stress surveys are not used when there are obvious reasons for elevated stress in schools, this might be when the school is subject to interventions or significant changes at management. In these cases, the normal management functions should be used to keep employees informed of the reasons for and potential impact of change and ensure channels of two-way communication are open during such times.

14.3 Review

The school central safety committee will periodically review this policy for effectiveness and to ensure it remains valid through the review of information such as results of audits, sickness absence information and information from occupational health, human resources and union safety representatives.

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Appendix 1 - Useful contacts and information

Sandwell Council contacts

Health and Safety - 0121 569 3931 or 3789
health_safety@sandwell.gov.uk

HR - 0121 569 3300
hrrschools_consultancy@sandwell.gov.uk

Occupational Health - 0121 569 5266
occupational_health@sandwell.gov.uk

Unions

ASCL 01162991122 or 02476676293

GMB 0121 569 5990

NAHT Local 01384 254 368
Member support 0300 30 30 333
NAHT Counselling, information and support helpline
0800 917 4055

NASUWT advice line 0333 01 45 550

NEU (NUT/ATL) Local 0121 567 5446 sandwellnut@btconnect.com
National advice line 020 3006 6266

UNISON 0121 569 5999

UNITE 0121 569 6143

Emergency contacts

For support or advice in an emergency situation you can contact the Emergency planning team as follows:

- During office hours call 0121 569 3313/3983.

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- For out of hours support please call our Community Alarms service on 0121 569 6800 who will contact the Duty Emergency Planning Officer.

Other sources of information and support

MIND - a leading charity that provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. Campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding

<http://mind.org.uk/>

NHS choices – the NHS web site giving advice on numerous health issues the link below is to the “understanding stress pages”

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/understanding-stress.aspx>

Education Support Network (previously known as “teacherline”), telephone number 08000 562 561 provides a free confidential 24 hour 365 days’ help line, which offers counselling, support and advice.

Further information can be obtained from their website

www.educationsupportnetwork.org.uk

The Stress Management Society a not for profit organisation dedicated to helping people tackle stress

www.stress.org.uk

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Appendix 2 – Stress policy implementation checklist

Item	Date completed	Comments
Awareness		
Head Teacher reads LA stress awareness resource for HT and GB's		
Governing body members reads LA stress awareness resource for HT and GB's		
Local authority resource "Stress awareness for Sandwell school based staff" made available to staff. How?		
Employees complete LA stress awareness resource "Stress awareness for Sandwell school based staff"		
Risk assessment		
Model whole school risk assessment discussed with representative group of staff.		
Model whole school risk assessment adapted to local requirements		
Findings of model whole school risk assessment shared with staff		
Action plan arising from the whole school stress risk assessment developed and being implemented.		
Whole school stress risk assessment under review (18mth/3yr).		
Monitoring		
Monitor completion of whole school stress risk assessment action plan.		
Monitor stress absence in school.		

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Under take school staff survey (optional based on outcome of monitoring and/or request of staff).		
Support for staff		
Counselling service available to school based staff		
Staff given information about counselling service		
Individual risk assessments completed where necessary for staff who report experiencing stress.		
Individual stress risk assessment used in return to work interviews where necessary		