

Great Bardfield Primary School



Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

Approved by: Elizabeth Crow (Headteacher)

Ratified by Governors: September 2024

Next review due by: September 2025

1. Introduction

This policy has been developed to manage the school's obligations to maintain the mental health and wellbeing of all staff. It covers the school's commitment to;

- provide a safe and healthy environment for all employees;
- set out the responsibilities of managers and others for maintaining good mental health and wellbeing;
- identify health promotion initiatives and training on health issues;
- set out the range of support available for the maintenance of good mental health and wellbeing; and
- the school's commitment to handling individual issues fairly and sensitively.

The aim of this policy is to set out the school's commitment to the mental health and wellbeing of employees in its broadest sense, setting out how the school fulfils its legal obligations, the responsibilities of different functions and specialists and the range of services available to help employees maintain good health and wellbeing.

The school recognises that wellbeing and performance are linked. Improving employees' ability to handle pressure and to balance work and home life will ultimately lead to improved individual and school performance including better outcomes for pupils.

1.1 Policy statement

The governing board is committed to:

- promoting positive mental health and wellbeing amongst its entire staff,
- tackling the stigma associated with mental health and the causes of work related poor mental ill health; and
- being mindful of external factors which can affect mental wellbeing and impact in the workplace.

Its aim is to provide a workplace where all staff feel able to talk openly about their mental health and not fear judgement or discrimination.

The school acknowledges its legal obligations under health and safety legislation to manage risks to the health and safety of employees. In addition to reducing safety risks, this means operating the school in a way that minimises harm to employees' mental health, for example by ensuring that the demands of jobs are not unacceptable and having policies and procedures in place to support individuals experiencing mental ill health.

These include

- Sickness Absence Management Policy
- Leave of Absence Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Grievance Policy, including bullying harassment and victimisation
- Flexible Working Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Menopause at Work Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy

The school will seek to put in place measures to prevent and manage risks to employee wellbeing, together with appropriate training and individual support where necessary. It will also seek to create a mentally healthy culture by incorporating these principles into line manager training and running regular initiatives to raise awareness of mental health issues at work.

2. Scope

This policy is applicable to all staff employed at the school.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 It is the responsibility of the governing board to:

- Monitor and review policies and procedures which safeguard the health, safety and welfare of staff and ensure they are implemented in a fair and reasonable manner and in a way which promotes positive mental health;
- Consider the impact of policies and decisions on the school workforce and seek to minimise any potential negative impact on mental health;
- Ensure effective support is available to the Headteacher/CEO to facilitate their own positive mental health and wellbeing; and
- Depute a governor to monitor the implementation and operation of the mental health and wellbeing policy.

3.2 It is the responsibility of the Headteacher and other line managers to:

- Ensure that full attention is given to staff health, safety and welfare and to develop systems of work to minimise risks to employee mental health and wellbeing;
- Act as role models to encourage healthy behaviours e.g. taking regular breaks, not working excessive hours and maintaining a healthy work life balance;
- Ensure employees understand their role within the school and receive the required information and support from managers and team members to do their job;
- Monitor and be aware of the early signs of poor mental health and take action as appropriate;
- Ensure employees are aware of support and assistance available including counselling and occupational health advice and guidance;
- Be familiar with relevant school policies and procedures on equality and diversity to ensure any inappropriate behaviour e.g. bullying and harassment is handled appropriately and staff are supported;
- Ensure performance management procedures are carried out effectively to ensure targets and objectives are clear, to identify any issues with workload and/or demands on the employee and provide support/additional training where necessary; and
- Implement school procedures fairly, sensitively and confidentially.

In particular, line managers/school leaders must ensure that they take steps to reduce the risks to employee health and wellbeing by:

- having regard to the resources available in the Department for Education school workload reduction toolkit (see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-workload-reduction-toolkit>) and using such resources as appropriate;
- ensuring that the right people are recruited to the right jobs and that a good match is obtained between individuals recruited and job descriptions/specifications;
- ensuring induction processes are robust and thorough;
- keeping employees up to date with developments at work and how these might affect their job and workload and, wherever possible, involving staff in workplace decisions that affect them;
- ensuring that employees know who to approach with problems concerning their role and how to pursue issues with senior management;

- making sure jobs are designed fairly and that work is allocated appropriately; and
- ensuring that work stations are regularly assessed to ensure that they are appropriate and fit for purpose.

3.3 It is the responsibility of all staff to:

- Take responsibility for managing their own health and wellbeing, by adopting good health behaviours (for example in relation to diet, exercise, alcohol consumption and smoking);
- Comply and co-operate with the sickness absence management procedure where they are absent due to mental ill health, including the sickness absence reporting procedures;
- Inform their line manager or mental health champion in general terms as soon as reasonably practicable of any mental health issues (both where the issue arises from an external source or if they believe work or their work environment poses a risk to their health) and update the school on a periodic basis in line with this policy. Any health-related information disclosed by an employee during discussions with mental health champions/first aiders, managers, the HR department or the occupational health service will be treated in confidence;
- Ensure medical or other mental health advice and/or treatment, where appropriate, are received as quickly as possible.

4. Promoting good mental health

4.1 Health Services

4.1.1 Occupational Health Service

- Occupational health professionals will provide support to schools to help employees stay in work, or to return to work, after experiencing mental health problems. This may include preparing medical assessments of individuals' fitness for work following referrals from line managers liaising with GPs and working with individuals to help them to retain employment.
- Occupational health professionals will provide guidance and support for employees returning to work after absences related to mental ill health, and work with GPs and line managers on possible adjustments/adaptions to working environments/arrangements to assist with a successful reintegration into the workforce. Occupational health professionals may also provide guidance and support on managing pressure and ongoing health conditions at work.

4.1.2 Counselling Service

- Counselling can be provided where appropriate through Place2Be. This will be a confidential, independent service using professionally qualified counsellors.

Staff can access the Counselling Service by contacting the school mental health practitioner, Suzanne Broomfield.

4.2 Data and Monitoring

The school will monitor wellbeing through informal and day to day interactions with staff and through formal monitoring for example:

- staff wellbeing surveys
- performance management
- absence data
- exit interviews/questionnaires

and will use this information to inform policy and practice.

4.3 Health promotion initiatives

- 4.3.1 The school will develop and run a range of health promotion initiatives designed to raise awareness of health and lifestyle issues affecting mental health and wellbeing as appropriate.

School leaders will have primary responsibility for leading these initiatives, but line managers and employees will be expected to participate. These initiatives will be evaluated to determine their effectiveness.

The initiatives may cover:

- stress management;
- disability awareness;
- bullying and harassment;
- handling traumatic incidents at work;
- mindfulness and meditation; and
- physical activity and fitness.

Employees will also be encouraged to establish clubs and groups designed to facilitate wellbeing and good mental health, for example lunchtime walking or fitness clubs.

- 4.3.2 Other measures available to support employees in maintaining health and wellbeing include

- a mental health practitioner on site three days a week
- clear procedures for reporting and handling inappropriate behaviour (for example bullying and harassment);
- leave of absence arrangements;
- opportunities for flexible working;
- support for workers with disabilities; and
- the grievance procedure.

4.4 Training and communications

The school is committed to providing all staff and governors with appropriate training on mental health awareness.

Line managers and employees will regularly discuss individual training needs to ensure that employees have the necessary skills to adapt to ever-changing job demands. An examination of training needs will be particularly important prior to, and during, periods of organisational change.

Line managers will receive appropriate training and support to enable them to manage employees who have mental ill health issues and to assist them to spot the signs of possible mental ill health at an early stage and identify appropriate support.

Managers and employees are encouraged to participate in communication/feedback exercises, including stress audits and staff surveys.

All employees are expected to be aware of the importance of effective communication and to use the media most appropriate to the message, for example team meetings and staff development sessions, one-to-one meetings, electronic communications and school-wide methods. The school will ensure that structures exist to give employees regular feedback on their performance, and for them to raise concerns whether formally or informally.

4.5 Employee concerns and absence from work due to mental ill health

If employees believe that they are suffering from poor mental health resulting from an external issue or that their work, or some aspect of it, is putting their wellbeing at risk they should, in the first instance, speak to their line

manager or the school's mental health practitioner. The discussion may cover external factors causing poor mental health or internal factors such as workload issues, poor relationships with colleagues or training needs.

Where an employee is absent from work due to mental ill health, the school will maintain regular, open and meaningful communication with the employee by an agreed method and at agreed intervals. The employee must continue to follow the absence reporting requirements set out in the Sickness Absence Management Procedure including those relating to FIT notes.

The school may, as appropriate, make a referral to an occupational health advisor where an employee's absence or other issues indicate a potential mental health concern. In certain circumstances, particularly those involving stress or depression, a referral should be made as early as possible, usually after two weeks absence from work, as evidence suggests that early intervention increases the chance of a successful return to work.

Where a referral is made, the employee will be advised of the process and the reasons for the referral. Discussions between employees and the occupational health professionals are confidential, although the occupational health advisor is likely to provide a report on the employee's fitness to work, and any recommended adjustments/adaptations to the working environment, to the line manager.

Further information on occupational health referrals and reasonable adjustments are set out in the Sickness Absence Management Procedure.

4.5.1 Co-operating with a referral to an Occupational Health Adviser

Employees are obliged to attend appropriate appointments with an Occupational Health Adviser. Where an employee refuses to consent to the Occupational Health Adviser contacting their GP, decisions, which may have implications for their future employment, will be taken on the basis of the information available at the time.

4.5.2 Medical suspension

In certain circumstances, where it is felt that an employee is not fit to attend work due to their mental ill health, the headteacher or chair of governors may suspend an employee on medical grounds. Any such suspension will be on full normal pay. Further details on medical suspension can be found in the Sickness Absence Management Procedure.

4.5.3 Disabled Employees

There may be cases where the mental health issue could amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010. This will depend on the nature of the mental ill health and whether it has a substantial long-term effect on the employee's ability to carry out day to day activities. The legal definition of a "disability" is wide and managers should seek advice from the school's HR/legal advisers as to whether an employee falls within this definition. In such cases, the employee's manager should seek HR/Occupational Health advice as early as possible.

Further information on disabled employees can be found in the Sickness Absence Management Procedure.

4.5.4 Reintegrating employees into the workforce following absence

The school will take all reasonable steps to support an employee returning from absence due to mental ill health and to assist them with reintegration into the workforce. Employees will be kept up to date with any developments in the workplace during their absence. The process of reintegrating staff will differ depending on the length of absence and nature of their mental ill health and any treatment they are receiving.

5. **Record retention and data protection**

Any medical/health information concerning employees collected will count within the "special categories of personal data" and as such will be kept confidential and stored securely in line with the school's retention schedule in the "restricted access" section of the personal file.

Any personal data collected/recorded in line with this policy will only be processed in line with the schools' data protection policy/policy on processing special categories of personal data. Further information on retention

periods and data protection requirements regarding health-related data, including FIT notes, meeting minutes and referrals to occupational health, can be found in the Sickness Absence Management Procedure.

6. Sources of information

6.1 Sources of information for employees

When a member of staff is experiencing mental ill health, they may benefit from seeking external support. There are a number of services that may be able to help.

These include:

- Access to work can provide advice and an assessment of workplace needs for individuals, with disabilities or long-term health conditions, who are already in work or about to start. Grants may be available to help cover the cost of workplace adaptations that enable an employee to carry out their job without being at a disadvantage. These might be used to pay the costs of adapting equipment or buying special equipment for the employee, the cost of getting to work if they cannot use public transport and/or disability awareness training for colleagues. For more information, go to www.gov.uk/access-to-work
- Mind is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales. Their helpline and website provide information and support to empower anyone experiencing mental ill health and general advice on mental health-related law. For more information, go to www.mind.org.uk or call 0300 123 3393.
- NHS choices has a website that offers information and practical advice for anyone experiencing mental ill health. For more information, go to www.nhs.uk/livewell/mentalhealth
- Remploy offers a free and confidential Workplace Mental Health Support Service for anyone absent from work or finding work difficult because of a mental health condition. It aims to help people remain in, or return to, their role. For more information, go to www.remploy.co.uk or call 0300 4568114.
- Rethink Mental Illness is the largest national voluntary sector provider of mental health services, offering support groups, advice and information on mental health problems. For more information, go to www.rethink.org or call 0300 5000 927.

6.2 Sources of information for managers

There are a range of organisations and programmes to help an employer and its managers.

ACAS website provides information and guidance to help support and manage staff experiencing mental ill health. For more information, go to www.acas.org.uk/managingmentalhealth

Employee assistance programmes can provide round-the-clock support for staff dealing with personal problems that might adversely impact their job performance, health, and wellbeing. This includes issues such as relationship problems, money worries and other pressures. An employer can join an EAP for a fee. For a list of providers, go to www.eapa.org.uk

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England offers courses that can help managers and/or HR staff identify, understand and help a person who may be experiencing mental ill health. There is a MHFA Line Managers' Resource available at <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/resource/mental-health-first-aid-line-managers-resource/>.

Some Professional Associations/Trade Unions offer training such as managing stress in the workplace and MHFA for members

- Mindful Employer is a UK-wide, NHS initiative. It is aimed at increasing awareness of mental health at work and providing support for businesses in recruiting and retaining staff. For more information, go to www.mindfulemployer.net or call 01392 677064.

- Time to change can help organisations develop an action plan, set objectives and activities that will be undertaken to achieve them. For more information, go to www.time-to-change.org.uk
- Mind is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales. The Government's independent review, Thriving at Work, includes six core and four enhanced standards for how organisations can better support employees' mental health. <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/25263166/how-to-implement-the-thriving-at-work-mental-health-standards-final-guide-online.pdf>.