Bushey St James Trust

Stress Management and Employee Well Being Policy

Last Reviewed:	July 2025	**Next Review:**	July 2027
Approved by:	Trust Board	**Date:**	10.7.25

Rationale

Bushey St James Trust ('The Trust') recognises it has a duty of care to its employees such that they are able to enjoy a reasonable work/life balance. In a culture of care and mutual support the needs of the staff are best met.

Aims

The aim and purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on managing stress and promoting well-being in the workplace.

Practice

What Is Stress?

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as:

"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them"

This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress, which can be detrimental to health. Pressure will be present in all jobs in one form or another. Pressure and challenge, even when high, can be motivating and stimulating. However, when an individual feels pressure at a time when they cannot cope, or in some cases too little pressure or challenge, this can lead to stress. It is important to remember that the ability to cope with stress differs from person to person and it will depend on the individual how they react to stress.

The Duty of Care

All employers have a common law duty of care to their employees. That duty is not defined by legislation but by decades of precedents determined by the courts. However, there are specific requirements within the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act1974 and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations1992 which establish a statutory duty on the employer to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, a safe and healthy workplace and to assess the nature and scale of risks to employees within the workplace. There are no legal requirements that are specific to the management of stress, but the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has produced helpful guidance on standards for employers in the management of stress. These can be found at:

https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/

Signs of Stress

Some common signs of stress are listed below. However, experiencing one or more of these does not necessarily give an indication of stress. Where managers have concerns they must discuss these with the individual. Regular communication between the manager and individual and maintaining positive relationships are fundamental to supporting employee well-being.

- Persistent or recurrent moods e.g. anger, irritability, detachment, worry, depression, guilt and sadness.
- Physical effects e.g. aches and pains (headaches, back ache, neck ache), raised heart rate, increased sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, skin or sleep disorders.
- Changed behaviours e.g. increased absence levels, difficulty concentrating or remembering things, inability to switch off, loss of creativity, making more errors, double checking everything, eating disorders, covering up mistakes by lying, increased use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs.

Prolonged or extreme exposure to the possible symptoms of stress is associated with serious chronic diseases such as heart disease, back pain, gastrointestinal problems, anxiety or depression.

The Executive Principal/Headteacher/Line Managers should also be aware of the following possible signs:

- Increase in sickness absence
- Poor work performance
- Poor relationships at work
- Poor attitude and behaviour

Any concerns should be discussed with the individual at the earliest opportunity before the situation escalates to potentially trigger Disciplinary/Capability procedures.

Employee Responsibilities

There is no 'cure' for stress, but by being realistic and open about their problems, employees can learn to reduce the harmful effects of being over stressed and can maintain positive mental health. The following list gives examples of how employees can help themselves:

- Ask line manager or another colleague for help/support if you need it
- If you need something to change, find a way to make it change. Avoid sticking your head in the sand
- Own up to your problems and be honest about them
- Express your feelings and don't internalise your concern
- Don't soldier on through pretending that nothing is wrong
- Make yourself aware of the school's policies and procedures on Health & Attendance, Bullying & Harassment, Capability, etc.
- Take a break from work during the middle of the day; it is your entitlement
- Identify opportunities for development relevant to your position and take advantage of those offered by the school
- Use the performance management process to identify your achievements and establish support required to meet your goals
- Be honest about reasons for sickness absence and any requests for leave of absence

How to Manage Stressful Situations in Schools

There are many different times in the school year that can provide additional pressure to employees. These may include:

- Dealing with bad behaviour

- Ofsted Inspections
- Report writing
- Parent consultation/ open evenings
- Meeting with/ calling parents
- Accountability
- Finance
- Premises matters
- Recruitment/ staffing issues
- Conflict in the workplace

It is strongly advised that in order to combat these areas of pressure, employees should:

- Attend all relevant induction/ training/ Inset sessions that are provided so that they are aware of all school processes
- Make themselves fully aware of the procedure to follow for each circumstance, e.g. the School's Behaviour Policy, Grievance Procedure
- Know who to call on for support if they need it
- Admit that they are struggling before it becomes too difficult to cope with, and seek help and advice from their line manager or HR

Other Ways to Help Reduce Stress / Promote Positive Mental Health

The following is a non-exhaustive list of ways in which you can help to combat stress and to promote good mental health. Some of these examples may seem obvious but there are many things we can do to take care of ourselves that will help to keep us mentally healthy and it is worth noting that there is a correlation between good physical and good mental health.

- Good diet (e.g. eat breakfast and lunch)
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day
- Learn to manage your time effectively
- Adapt healthy behaviours e.g. balanced diet and take exercise
- Relaxation sessions
- Meditation
- Massage
- Take time out and make time for yourself (e.g. don't work all weekend)
- Avoid procrastination
- Make sure you have enough sleep

Other Support

The Trust aims to promote well-being initiatives across the schools and a culture of positive mental health. Free gym membership is available to all staff to promote physical activity and fitness and an Employee Assistance Programme is available to help staff deal with events and issues in their everyday work and personal life. This programme of information and services includes a confidential telephone help-line with experienced counsellors and advisors for support on a range of issues including health, legal, bereavement and personal matters.

Executive Principal/Headteacher Responsibilities

As highlighted in section 5, the Executive Principal/Headteacher is responsible for the leadership, internal organisation, management and control of the school, all of which lay a huge amount of pressure on them. It is important that the Executive Principal/Headteacher, with support of the Trust and Governing Body, ensures that strategies are developed to guarantee that as far as possible, employees do not become over stressed. The list below shows how this could be achieved. It may be necessary for the Executive Principal/Headteacher to delegate some of these responsibilities to other senior members of staff.

- Create reasonable opportunities for employees to discuss areas of concern in an environment where stress or poor mental health is not considered as a weakness or failure
- Monitor sickness absence (in line with the Health & Attendance Policy)
- Ensure that staff are fully trained and provided with opportunities for development in line with the schools' priorities
- Monitor workloads, working hours etc. to ensure that people are not overworked.
- Ensure there is clear communication between management and staff
- Offer support to staff experiencing stress or poor mental health out of the workplace, e.g. health related issues, financial pressures, bereavement etc.
  N.B. all cases for advance payments due to extreme hardship will be referred to the Executive Principal and the Trust Board and will be considered on a case by case basis, with repayment terms agreed to at the time of authorisation.
- Discuss with applicants to posts of responsibility, the extra pressure that the post may carry with it. It is crucial that when appointing or accepting an appointment to a position of responsibility, it is made clear the extra responsibility may carry with it additional pressure. It is advised that this is discussed at interview

The Trust and Governing Body's Responsibilities

The Trust Board and local Governing Bodies must ensure that clear processes and procedures are put in place. This will minimise, as far as possible, the levels of stress and anxiety caused to staff when following a formal procedure such as Disciplinary or Capability. Unambiguous procedures for Health & Attendance, Grievance and Harassment & Bullying can offer clear guidance to staff when they most need it.

Wellbeing of the Executive Principal/Headteacher

The Executive Principal/Headteacher is responsible for the leadership, internal organisation, management and control of the school which puts upon them an enormous amount of pressure. Specific provisions have been put in place through regulations made under section 21 of the Education Act 2002 which put a responsibility on the relevant body to have regard to the desirability of the Executive Principal/Headteacher being able to achieve a satisfactory balance between the time required to discharge his/her professional duties and the time required to pursue his/her personal interests outside work.

Trade Unions & Professional Associations

All employees who are members of a Union or Professional Association are advised to contact them for support and guidance.

Relationship with other Policies

The Staff Stress Management and Wellbeing Policy is complimented by other policies and procedures such as the Health and Attendance Policy, Staff Leave of Absence Policy and Flexible Working request Procedure.

Further Support

www.educationsupport.org.uk Charity dedicated to improving the mental health and well-being of teachers and entire education workforce. Free, confidential telephone help-line 08000 562 561.

Review

This policy will be reviewed by the Trust Board every 2 years.