



St Mary's Academy Trust

Stress Management Policy

Date agreed by HR Committee: February 2021

Date to be reviewed by: February 2023

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 St Mary's Academy Trust ensures "so far as is reasonably practicable", that no employee is subjected to a level of stress at work, which is detrimental to their health. The Trust aims to create an environment where, if work place stress does occur, it can be dealt with openly and fairly, and commits itself to investigate all claims of ill health due to workplace stress to ensure the appropriate action is taken to prevent any recurrence of the situation.

2. The Legal Position

2.1 Health & Safety Law

- Under the Health & Safety at Work Act, 1974, The Trust has a general duty to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health of our employees. This includes taking steps to make sure they do not suffer stress-related ill health as a result of their work. Ill health from stress caused at work has to be treated in the same way as health due to physical causes in the workplace.
- The Trust have a legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure that employees' health is not put at risk through excessive or sustained levels of stress arising from the way work is organised, or from the day to day demands placed upon them in their work.
- The Trust takes account of the risk of stress-related ill health when undertaking their legal duties under the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations, 1999 (Amended 2006). These include the duty to assess risk; duty to apply the principles of prevention; the duty to ensure employees' capability and to provide training and specific duties towards young people.

3. Employment Law

- 3.1 Health & Safety Law is not the only legal reason why action needs to be taken to tackle work-related stress. Examples include:

- Section 4A Public Order Act 1986 makes it a criminal offence to use threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour likely to cause harassment, harm or distress. This can be relevant to cases of bullying.
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 makes it an offence for a person to pursue a course of conduct which amounts to the harassment of another person. This harassment does not have to be motivated by a specific factor such as race or sex. This Act again may be relevant in some bullying cases.
- Employers have common law duties to take reasonable steps to ensure their employees physical and mental health at work. An employer will be liable in negligence for an employee's stress related illness provided: it was reasonably

foreseeable that the employee would suffer mental or physical illness; it failed to take reasonable steps to prevent the illness; the failure caused the ill-health.

- Within Contract of Employment (written or otherwise) there is an understanding that employers and employees will behave reasonably towards each other in a spirit of mutual trust and confidence. If an employer breaks this bond of trust by acting unreasonably towards an employee (this may include failing to act to reduce work-related stress) the employee can: sue in the courts for compensation for breach of contract resign and make an application for constructive dismissal to an employment tribunal.

3.2 There are also considerations under the Working Time Regulations governing: - number of hours worked, periods of rest, paid holidays, and time off for dependants.

4. Guidance - What is Stress?

- 4.1 If demands (stresses) and pressures (stressors) become too great, they can induce in anyone, harmful mental and physical feelings, and reactions, known as 'stress'.
- 4.2 The severity of the stress is dependent on the mismatch we see amongst the demands, our ability to satisfactorily respond to them, and also our perception of the possible consequences of failing to do so. The stress maybe affected by our fitness and resilience at the time.

5. What are the Effects of Stress?

On Individuals: -

- 5.1 Emotionally: anxiety, anger, frustration, moodiness, loss of pleasure and interest, despair, depression and impaired sleep.
- 5.2 Physically: physical effects may include a weakened immune system, raised blood pressure, heart disease, tenseness, tiredness and appetite disturbance, nausea, headaches, light headedness, and the emergence or exacerbation of symptoms in any system in the body.
- 5.3 Mentally: impairment of perception, concentration, memory, judgement, decisiveness, accuracy, motivation and creativity. Increased use / dependence on caffeine, alcohol or drugs may occur.

Interpersonally: -

- 5.4 Relationships are likely to be more difficult, both at work and elsewhere.

At Work: -

- 5.5 Attendance can become either excessive or extremely poor.
- 5.6 Regular bouts of recurring illnesses can occur and erratic time keeping.
- 5.7 Performance can be impaired and the level of accidents rises.

Possible Sources of Stress in the Workplace: -**Work Organisation and Conditions: -**

- 5.8 Continual changes in work organisation and structures; lack of participation in decision making; complexity and demands of new systems; lack of control over work; inadequate staffing; low pay or low status; job insecurity; lack of recognition or promotion prospects; lack of facilities for rest breaks; unclear reporting lines; over promotion; lone working; excessive working hours; shift working; and excessive workload.

Work Relationships: -

- 5.9 Inconsistent management; poor management communication; lack of support or assistance; bullying; lack of appropriate training; social isolation; harassment; the threat of violence; inconsiderate management; conflicting demands; tasks inappropriate to ability; surveillance; uncertainty about responsibilities; under use of skills; time pressures; and responsibility for others.

Physical Conditions: -

- 5.10 Excessive noise; poor ventilation; exposure to fumes, chemicals or other unpleasant substances; poor lighting; poor equipment; exposure to the elements; poor temperature control; and poor workstation design.

6. Statement of Individual's Responsibilities

- 6.1 Staff members have a duty to co-operate with their school in minimising, so far as is reasonably practicable, work-related stress. Staff members have a part to play in making reasonable adjustments which working practices have to change due to circumstances beyond the school's control.
- 6.2 Anyone who feels he/she is suffering from stress should, wherever possible, inform their line manager so that he/she will have an opportunity to resolve the problem.
- 6.3 If anyone feels that they are unable to raise the matter with their Manager/Headteacher they can contact Human Resources for advice or share their concern with a trusted colleague. Staff members should also seek advice promptly from their union/professional association.

7. Statement of the Manager's/Headteacher's Responsibilities

7.1 Managers/Headteachers at all levels have a key role to play in considering the work load and health implications of decisions involving staff. It is recognised that the style of management adopted has an impact on stress levels amongst staff. It is the responsibility of Managers/Headteachers to;

- Ensure that adequate risk assessments are carried out to evaluate stress
- Ensure that sickness absence and staff turnover is regularly reviewed and monitored to identify any problem areas
- Be able to identify and respond to issues of work-related stress
- Be aware that stress is minimised in an organisation where there exists mutual trust, promotion of self-esteem, shared objectives and common goals
- Act on information/reports received from Human Resources

8. Actions Managers/Headteachers Take to Manage Stress

A) Stress Risk Assessment

- Identification of potential causes of stress within the workplace and the taking of action necessary to reduce stress "as far as is reasonably practicable". i.e. Risk assessments – for teams & individuals

B) Information & Training

- Raising awareness of stress and helping individuals recognise it in themselves and others
- Helping individuals deal with their own stress

C) Support and Rehabilitation

- Providing support and rehabilitation for individuals and access to professional help for workplace, family or mental health problems

9. Arrangements for the Health & Safety of Employees

Risk Assessment:

9.1 Legislation necessitates that an assessment of the risks arising from work hazards must be undertaken. The assessment must include those risks which pose a threat to the psychological health as well as the physical health and safety of all employees.

Step 1. Impact Assessment:

Look for the following: -

- 9.2 Increased sickness absence - look at both long term and periods of shorter absence; a decline in productivity and / or work quality; poor time keeping; increased staff turnover; obvious decline in morale; information gained from informal talks; and information gained from surveys.

Step 2. Who Can be Affected and How:

Potentially, any employee is at risk of stress, but the following are the most likely to be affected;

- Those returning to work following a period of absence for a stress-related illness
- An employee who has recently experienced bereavement
- Any employee who may be having marital or family problems
- Any employee caring for ill family members

Employees can be affected in one or more of the following ways;

- Culture: is there a blame culture, lack of communication, and / or an expectation that staff will work very long hours?
- Demands: this can include too little and too much work, as well as insufficient training for the job
- Control: lack of control over day to day work activities
- Relationships: have you any reason to suspect that there are incidences of bullying and harassment?
- Change: look at whether there is any uncertainty about job security. Even if there is no risk to jobs, rumours can still cause damage
- Role: do employees have clearly defined job roles and know exactly what is expected of them?
- Support: do staff have adequate support and resources to enable them to carry out their role?
- Wellbeing: are staff adequately supported with their emotional wellbeing?

Step 3. Develop an Action Plan:

The content of the plan will depend on the findings of the assessment, but is likely to include some of the following measures;

- Provide opportunities for employees to contribute ideas either through existing meetings or via a suggestion box
- Foster a culture where employees feel they can approach their line manager to discuss any concerns they may have, real or perceived
- Ensure you have good lines of communication
- Encourage a good work/life balance for all employees
- Increase the scope of job roles, giving more variety and responsibility

- Provide extra training / guidance for those that need it
- Support and encourage all employees
- Prioritise tasks and avoid giving urgent work at the last minute
- Try and give employees more control over their job e.g. prioritising tasks or planning their own work
- Look at the working environment itself. Are there other stressors such as noise, uncomfortable working temperatures, risk of violence etc.?
- Look at offering some reasonable work flexibility to employees experiencing domestic/personal difficulties
- Have a clear policy on bullying and harassment and enforce it, investigating any complaints
- Ensure employees know what their role is and how they fit into the company's business objectives
- Have a clear Health and Wellbeing policy and ensure staff are aware of this

Step 4. Act:

- 9.3 The action plan will set out a list of priorities, so implement the easiest ones first. Many of the solutions outlined in Step 3 will not require the expenditure of money, so where relevant, look at putting these into place as soon as you can. For employees with mental health issues caused by stress, please see Appendix 1.

Step 5. Evaluate and Review the Assessment:

- 9.4 Talk to employees and involve them in the process to see if the improvements made are addressing the problems. Monitoring staff turnover and sickness absence will also help.

10. Responsibilities of Employees Who Feel They May be Suffering from Stress:

- 10.1 All employees have a legal obligation to report any illness or injury, which they feel, may be caused or exacerbated by work. This holds equally well for a psychological injury as for a physical injury. Additionally, the Trust cannot respond to alleviate a stress situation until it is made aware that such a situation exists. By the time an employee is medically diagnosed as suffering from stress by their G.P, injury may have already been sustained. Employees who believe they may be suffering from stress in the workplace must bring this to the attention of the company by one of the following means:

- Alert their Manager to the situation
- Contact HR

- 10.2 All cases will be dealt with sympathetically and in the strictest confidence. It may be necessary to make a referral to occupational health.

11. Reporting Cases of Work-Related Stress Absence

- 11.1 Where the Manager/Head Teacher/HR receives notification that an employee's absence is attributed to 'work related stress', either on the sick note or at an absence review meeting the Headteacher must report this immediately to the Chief Executive. This will allow an immediate investigation into the circumstances relating to the injury/illness to take place. This is essential if the employee is to be prevented from returning to the same situation, which led to the initial bout of absence.
- 11.2 Under no circumstances will an employee suffer victimisation as a result of reporting that they are suffering from stress.

12. Investigation of a Case of Work Related Stress Absence:

- 12.1 There is a requirement to investigate all incidences of injury or illness caused or exacerbated by work. This requirement holds as equally true for psychological injury as it does for physical injury. The CEO will determine the most appropriate person to lead the investigation. In all cases the individual leading the investigation will regularly update the employee of the progress made. The investigation should seek to establish the following points;
- Is the absence genuinely related to stress generated in the workplace?
 - What is the nature of the 'stressors' involved? (e.g. harassment, environmental, workloads, professional or work relationships, etc.).
 - Have existing company procedures (e.g. Grievance Procedure) been utilised where appropriate?
 - Are other people affected or likely to be affected by the absence or the situation causing the absence?
 - Are the 'stressors' still at a level where they are likely to cause further injury?
 - Have steps been put in place to eliminate, or reduce the 'stressors' to an acceptable level?
 - Where this is not practicable, has the individuals' task been re-designed to remove them from the 'stressors'?
 - Alternatively, has the individual received training to enable them to deal with the 'stressors'?

13. Developing a 'Return to Work' Strategy:

- 13.1 The 'return to work' strategy should consider the results of the absence investigation and be agreed with Human Resources. The arrangements may involve an initial return to work on a limited number of days per week or hours per day building up to a return to work full hours and, or with temporary restrictions on particular duties that have previously posed difficulties for the injured member of staff may also be considered.

- 13.2 At the return to work meeting, both the line manager and the employee should formally agree that they understand the measures, which are being put into place. Human Resources will facilitate these meetings. A Trade Union representative may be present if the member of staff so wishes.

14. Managing Attendance Policy

- 14.1 It must be acknowledged that this policy operates in conjunction with the Trust's Managing Attendance Policy.

15. Information, Instruction and Training

- 15.1 The Trust will ensure that training courses are made available to assist staff in managing personal stress and to assist managers in managing stress in the workplace.

16. Monitoring and Reviewing

- A) HR will study absence statistics and compile a periodic report on possible stress related absence. These statistics will be discussed with the Trust Board, HR Committee and any actions required will be agreed and implemented.
- B) In light of the information obtained from the monitoring procedures, the Trust will amend or review the workplace stress policy as required.

17. Data Impact Assessment

- 17.1 At all stages of this procedure, data obtained will be used only for the purpose which it is intended and will be stored securely with restricted access to those involved in the process. Following the process data will be stored on the electronic personal file for the duration of the teacher's employment with the Trust and for 6 years thereafter. The data will be destroyed at this time using a confidential shredding service.

18. Equality and Diversity

- 18.1 This policy has been impact assessed by the HR Committee, if on reading this policy you feel there are any equality and diversity issues, please contact HR who will if necessary ensure this policy is reviewed.