Weobley Schools' Federation

STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY

Introduction

The schools' place a high value on maintaining a healthy and safe working environment for all its employees and it recognises its duty of care extends to mental health as well as physical health at work.

It is committed to providing a supportive working environment that maintains and promotes the health and well-being of all its employees.

The schools' are committed to implementing a stress management policy for all employees. This includes the organisational environment through effective and sensitive management, enabling individuals to cope successfully with the demands and pressures of work, and providing support for employees whose health and well-being are affected by stress.

Schools' are potentially stressful places in which to work. Large numbers of people work in very close proximity. Any schools' employee will inevitably be involved on a daily basis in hundreds of interactions with students and colleagues. Dealing with groups of adolescents will always be demanding and often stressful. The schools aim to minimise and reduce the aspects of these daily demands that could be damaging to employees.

Policy Aims

- To reduce the number of days lost by stress related absence.
- To develop and implement procedures to manage problems that occur within the work place and to support individuals who are suffering from stress.
- To increase awareness of stress and methods to combat it.
- To offer practical support to staff in managing stress in themselves and others.
- To monitor procedures and outcomes, and to annually assess the effectiveness of the policy.

Definition of Stress

There is no universal definition of stress. However, the Health and Safety Executive has defined stress as "the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them. It arises when they worry they can no longer cope". In its positive manifestation stress can act as a motivational and enabling force. In its negative format however, stress becomes harmful and disabling and therefore a potential cause of physical and mental illness.

Pressure can arise from an individual's personal life as well as from work and people vary in their capacity and ability to cope with different types of pressure. Some individuals will recognise that their health is affected and will seek help; others will not recognise or acknowledge that they are stressed although it may be apparent to their manager and work colleagues. Although in itself stress is not an illness, there is evidence that stress can lead to mental and physical ill health.

All work has its pressures. We all vary in our capacity to cope with different types of pressure. Pressures that we can respond to effectively are likely to lead to job satisfaction. However, pressures at a level we cannot cope with, even in some cases too little pressure or challenge, are likely to result in stress for the individual. This document is concerned with the negative aspects of stress.

Strategies for Dealing with Stress

Preventative Measures
The schools' will:
- Establish promote and maintain a culture of consultation, participation and open communication throughout the organisation;
- Raise the awareness of staff about stress and its causes;
- Provide opportunities for employees to maintain and promote their health and well-being.

Identification and Management
The schools' will:
- Make information available for staff on stress awareness to help them handle pressures they may encounter, and to recognise stress when it occurs in themselves and others;
- Manage workplace pressures that may affect employees by undertaking regular risk assessments and taking appropriate action to reduce stress. Participation in risk assessments by employees is to be encouraged;
- Undertake annual Performance Management reviews with each member of staff to ensure that the work role and tasks match the relevant job description, and to ensure that job descriptions are up to date.
- It is in the interests of all to recognise the possible signs of stress. These may be as follows:
  - Persistent or recurrent moods - anger, irritability, detachment, worry, depression, guilt and sadness;
  - Physical sensations/effects - aches and pains, raised heart rate, increased sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, skin or sleep disorders;
  - Changed behaviours - difficulty concentrating or remembering things, unable to switch off, loss of creativity, making more errors, double checking everything, loss of interest in sex, eating disorders, increasing use of tobacco, alcohol, coffee, drugs;
- When stress is experienced over long periods other signs can develop, for example high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, anxiety, long-term depression;
- Poor work performance - less output, lower quality, poor decision-making;
- Relationships at work - conflict between colleagues, poor relationships with children and/or parents;
- Staff attitude and behaviour - loss of motivation or commitment, poor time-keeping, working longer hours but with diminishing effectiveness.

Supportive Measures for Employees

The schools' will:

- Identify internal and external sources of assistance for employees with stress. This will include a confidential counselling scheme for all staff who request it.
- Provide stress management courses as appropriate.
- Subscribe to the Employee Assistance Programme.

Safe Systems of Work

Employee Responsibilities

All individuals should recognise the importance of training and development as a means of developing competence and well-being in the job. Individuals should take an active part in determining their own training needs in conjunction with the person responsible for his/her performance management.

If individuals believe that they are suffering from stress in their personal life they may wish to contact their line manager. If they are struggling with work based duties, then they should again contact their line manager to discuss the issues with her/him. If an individual feels unable to discuss stress related issues with their immediate line manager, they should discuss them with the member of the Senior Leadership Team responsible for their department or area of operation.

Managerial Responsibilities

The Executive Headteacher and other managers have a particular responsibility to be aware of the legal duty as an employer and also to be aware of how to recognise early signs of stress in their employees. It is important for the success of this policy that those with management responsibilities play an active role in its implementation. The responsibilities include:

- Regular workplace risk assessments must include consideration of stress-related factors and action must be taken to minimise the effects of risk upon the individual and the organisation;
- Observing and evaluating work performance;
- Providing information on the policy and where possible help individuals to overcome their problems before job performance is affected;
- Becoming familiar with this policy, and attending stress management training;
- Ensuring that absences which may have been caused by stress are acted upon sympathetically and with understanding;
- Act with sensitivity and tact when dealing with individuals either they suspect of suffering from stress, or have been diagnosed;
- Seek guidance when informed that an employee is signed off by their GP with a stress related absence;
- Ensuring staff within the management team have received training covering all relevant aspects of their work, including health and safety.

Recruitment & Selection

The full range of tasks and demands of the job should be set out clearly in the job description and should be fully discussed in the interview process. Areas of potential pressure should be identified.

All references must seek information about candidates' sickness and absence records for the previous two years and must comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Induction

All employees participate in an induction into their jobs. Starting a new job can be a stressful time and a planned induction should help eliminate any concerns.

Attendance Management

As part of professional review meetings with staff, all absences should be discussed with the staff member, and underlying reasons identified.

The Executive Headteacher will arrange appropriate communication mechanisms with an absent employee, upon receipt of a GP certificate which identifies a stress related illness, to discuss any underlying causes and to arrange support and assistance if the absence is likely to continue.

Return to Work

Before the employee returns to work the Executive Headteacher will agree a planned return to work with the member of staff.

Training & Development

Many employees experience stress through feeling that they are not adequately trained for their existing job and especially when they move into a new or changed role. The identification of appropriate training activities should be agreed at the beginning of a new post and reviewed no less than annually in line with the Performance Management Process.

Conclusion

The schools' recognises that organisational stress requires a broad–based approach to ensuring that people are valued. The Governing body will actively support all initiatives designed to promote health and reduce stress.

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