



Loreto High School Chorlton

Stress Policy

March 2015

STRESS IN THE SCHOOL WORKPLACE

Purpose of this Document

1. The purpose of this guidance is to assist Head teachers and their staff to work together to address the management of stress in the workplace as part of an overall strategy for a healthy school. This document offers detailed guidance and should be considered in the context of the school's overall health and safety policy statement.

Introduction

2. Loreto schools and colleges in England are centred in God, rooted in Christ and animated by the spirit of Mary Ward, the founder of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Our vision is that they will be educational communities where each person has the experience of being loved and valued as a sacred individual created by a loving God; communities where students enjoy an enriching and liberating education that helps them grow into the fullness of life and empowers them to be men and women of courage who are alive to the needs of humanity and committed to making a better world. Bringing this vision to fruition is a challenging task and one which can make demands of each member of staff involved in the mission. As a Loreto school, we are mindful of the need to value and care for all of the staff employed in this mission. Furthermore, the Governing Body as the employer in a voluntary aided school has a duty to safeguard so far as is reasonably practicable, the health (both mental and physical), safety and welfare of their staff. This means that it is important that attention is paid to all those organisational processes, which may contribute to stress in schools. It therefore follows that all staff and especially those in leadership roles are fully alert to the symptoms of work-related stress (see annex).

The Role of Governors and Headteachers

3. It is the responsibility of the governing body and the head teacher to ensure that adequate arrangements and provision are made for the management of health and safety in their school. The governing body in conjunction with the head teacher must agree and adopt an appropriate health and safety policy statement for the school.
4. The Authority has provided guidance to schools on the formulation of a health and safety policy statement to which governors and headteachers should have regard, in accordance with the Scheme for Financing Schools. The school's health and safety policy statement will define the school's policy, organisation and arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of staff, pupils and visitors to the school.

What is work related stress?

5. Most people experience stress at some point in their lives but stress affects different people in different ways, for different reasons. However, it is a major workplace issue, being the most common occupational health complaint. It is therefore essential for all those working in schools to have some understanding of the symptoms and causes of stress in order to take effective preventative measures.
6. There are many definitions of stress but the City Council has adopted the following Health And Safety Executive definition.

“Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them.”

7. This definition makes an important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge and work-related stress caused by demands or pressure that the individual perceives they are unable to cope with at that time. It is not a personal weakness to experience stress. All staff should take responsibility for their own health and well-being.

Effects of Stress

8. Work related stress is not an illness but, if it is prolonged or intense it may lead to ill health e.g. heart disease, back pain, stomach problems, anxiety and depression. Stress may also lead to other unhealthy behaviours including skipping meals, alcohol abuse and smoking. The impact of work-related stress on the day-to-day work of schools may be seen in increased absence, reduced morale, under-performance and reluctance to change established patterns of working.

Legislation

9. All employment law obligations must be met. In particular, a statutory duty is placed on the City Council to conduct risk assessments of significant hazards. In some circumstances a workplace stressor will require a risk assessment to be undertaken by a competent person. As stress can be exacerbated by poor employment practices it is essential that all those working within schools operate within a known policy framework, which sets out appropriate arrangements and practices.

Evidence

10. Research has shown that a high performance culture is best supported by effective people- management strategies. Having positive, satisfied and psychologically healthy staff will produce benefits for the school leading to improved attendance, morale, motivation and commitment.
11. The issue of staff absence is complex. There are many reasons for absence. Although diagnoses may be the same, medical practitioners can often give them

different descriptions. The data, which is available for schools, however, shows that stress is cited as the largest cause of longer periods of absence although this is not to say that all stress is work-related.

12. Schools will be aware that the importance of work/life balance has been heightened by the National Workload Agreement and is now embedded in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document. Work/life balance is about helping all members of staff to combine work with their personal interests outside work. It can help to recruit and retain better motivated staff through giving them greater control of their working lives and a stronger sense of ownership. A school that is committed to work/life balance:

- Recognises that effective practices to promote work/life balance will benefit both members of staff and pupils
- Highlights the joint responsibility to discuss workable solutions and encourages a partnership between individual members of staff and their line managers;
- Develops, monitors and evaluates appropriate policies and practical responses that meet specific needs of the school, having regard to fairness and consistency; valuing members of staff for their contribution to raising standards, not their working pattern;
- Communicates its commitment to work/life balance to its members of staff
- Demonstrates leadership and encourages senior managers to lead by example.

13. The school's Attendance Management policy provides a range of strategies that can encourage a positive attendance culture within the workplace. It also provides helpful advice on a variety of strategies on dealing with different types of absence and the role of the Occupational Health Service in supporting schools in the effective management of attendance.

Stress Management

14. There are three types of approach to stress management and these have been termed as Primary, Secondary and Tertiary.

- a. The Primary approach targets the causes of stress at the source of the stressor by an assessment and evaluation of its impact.
- b. The Secondary approach seeks to enhance the ability of the individual to cope through training on stress awareness and relaxation techniques. It is considered that this approach is limited as it does not impact on the nature of the problem but temporarily alleviates the symptoms.
- c. The Tertiary approach promotes the rehabilitation of affected staff through assistance programmes including counselling and, in certain situations, drug therapies.

15. To maximise the effect of stress management within schools all three approaches have a role to play by identifying and addressing potential workplace stressors and raising stress awareness for all staff. When staff become unwell as a result of workplace stress the initial response should always be supportive with an early return and rehabilitation back into the workplace as the priorities.

Responsibility for managing stress

16. A school should be a safe and healthy environment for all those who work there. The prime responsibility for this rests with the headteacher and other leaders/managers working within a policy framework agreed by the governors. This requires risk assessments to be undertaken by the headteacher with support from the Management Support Adviser. In complex cases the Management Support Adviser will seek specialist advice from the Occupational Health Team.
17. In spite of the efforts of headteachers and other managers some staff may still experience the adverse effects of stress. In such cases early action may prevent sickness absence by supporting the member of staff to cope in the workplace.
18. The appropriate manager, together with the member of staff, should identify the stressors and develop an action plan to enable them to cope with reasonable work pressures. Performance against the plan should be closely, sensitively and continuously monitored, with revisions as necessary, to enhance the chance of success.
19. When sickness absence does occur it is important that contact is maintained on a regular basis, otherwise any meaningful relationship with the school can be lost. Regular contact can help to achieve an early return and rehabilitation back into school. Loss of contact can become an obstacle to an effective and speedy return to work even when the sickness itself has receded or passed.
20. One means of avoiding a loss of contact or of reducing its impact is for the school to maintain contact on a planned basis with the individual member of staff throughout the period of absence. This does not mean contacting the individual on the first day of absence but it does mean setting a trigger of a certain number of consecutive working days after which the school will take the initiative to make contact. Circumstances will vary and should be individually assessed but as a guide a trigger of not less than 7 consecutive working days or more than 10 consecutive working days would normally be reasonable.
21. In organising and managing the process of keeping in touch headteachers will need to take into account a number of relevant factors and exercise discretion and sensitivity. Only when all factors have been considered will it be possible to respond to each individual absence on its merits. A discussion of these factors follows.
22. **Who should make contact?** In most circumstances this will be the headteacher but other leadership group members might be appropriate and in some circumstances close colleagues elsewhere in the school may be better placed to help. Schools should be guided by the principle that as far as is reasonable contact should be from a senior member of staff whose intervention will be

seen as supportive. The person making the contact must at all times be willing to listen to the concerns and anxieties of the absent staff member and be prepared to take account of them when the time comes for planning a return to work.

23. **How should contact be made?** Contact can be by telephone, by letter or by visit. Over an extended period of time a combination of 2 or more may be appropriate. A home visit should **always** be preceded by prior written notification and any reluctance on the part of the staff member respected. In certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the member of staff to visit the school to meet the headteacher and other colleagues. This may be after the end of the timetabled school day.
24. A note of all contacts should be made and at the end of each contact the next contact, the method, and its date should be agreed. When a member of staff is approaching a possible return to work date a meeting to prepare the way in detail is strongly recommended. At any visit the member of staff should have the right to have a representative (probably from their professional association /trade union) present as well as a friend/partner.
25. Where the headteacher considers that a member of staff may be suffering ill health as a result of stress, (whether or not absence has occurred), immediate consideration should be given to a prompt referral to the Occupational Health Service. Such action should be seen as positive and helpful. Early interventions are much more likely to prevent absence and increase the chance of continued attendance.
26. Personal development and training plans may be needed. Supporting staff to carry out their duties and responsibilities effectively this will enable them to cope with reasonable work-related pressures, organisational and other work changes. Headteachers and other managers will also need to be alert to indications of stress, which become evident through day-to-day working relationships.

Staff Responsibility

27. Although there is much schools can and should do to support staff everyone has a responsibility for maintaining their own health and well being. Participating in the identification, elimination or control of work hazards will help to create healthier working environments and practices.
28. Staff should bring to the attention of appropriate colleagues or professional association/trade union the need for support when they feel that they are not coping. School based Health and Safety representatives have a key contribution to make. Staff suffering from the effects of stress have the right to expect the full support of their line manager and colleagues to help prevent sickness absence or assist in a return to work strategy. When stress is identified as the underlying problem, the member of staff must have regard to the advice given by their medical advisers and the City Council's Occupational Health Nurses and/or Physician.
29. Staff must take an active part in the development of coping strategies and action plans and afterwards make every effort to keep to them. By having ownership of the plans the likelihood of success will be significantly increased.

Summary

30. Manager

- Listen to a colleague who says he/she has a problem.
- Try to remove barriers that may prevent a colleague from being in work.
- If a colleague takes sickness/absence contact them. How can you support them to get back into work?
- Work with the member of staff to find a solution.

Find time to refer to “Managing work-related stress: a guide for managers and teachers in schools” (Published by the Education Service Advisory Committee of the Health and Safety Commission in 1998 – a free copy of which is enclosed.)

31. Member of Staff

- Tell someone if you are not coping with work.
- Stay in work, if you can.
- Take notice of the advice given by the Occupational Health Practitioners and your Doctor.
- If you take sickness absence keep in contact with your headteacher.
- Get back into work as soon as possible.
- Work with your headteacher or manager to resolve the problems.
- Contact your trade union or professional association.
- Teachers may find it helpful to contact **Teacherline on 08000 562 561** where confidential counselling, support and advice are available free of charge 24 hours a day.

Annex

Awareness and Actions for Managers and Employees

Who suffers from stress?

- Anyone! Stress is not a sign of weakness and can be the result of various causes.
- When the balance between the demands made and the ability to cope with those demands is disturbed stress can result. The demands made may be too great or too frequent to allow recovery.

What are the signs to look for?

Signs of stress may be put into two categories, Physical and Behavioural.

Physical

Headaches
Skin Rashes
Coughs and colds
Butterflies
Insomnia
Nervous indigestion
Tension and backaches
Anxiety and panic attacks
Loss of energy
High blood pressure
Ulcers
Heart disease

Behavioural

Speeding up, too busy to talk
Foot tapping
Skipping meals
Over-reacting
Behavioural changes
Irritability and impatience
Increased smoking and drinking
Forgetfulness
Tears or aggression
Unable to make decisions
Inability to cope with workload
Depression

However, just because a member of staff shows one or more of these signs does not automatically mean that he/she is suffering from stress. The symptoms may arise for other personal circumstances.

What are possible causes of stress in the workplace and preventative measures?

Potential Issue	Preventative Measures
Physical Environment	
Noise	Health & Safety compliance, law and regulations, risk assessments, safety audits, accident/incident investigation, control of contractors, consultation with employees Aids and adaptations.
High / low temperatures	
Exposure to dust or fumes	
Poor workstation design/Light	
Lack of space	
Contractual Concerns	
Job insecurity	Change management, redeployment, flexible working, maternity / paternity leave, job evaluation, consultation, personal development.
Unsocial hours	
Working time	
Pay	
Demands of the Job	
Role conflict or ambiguity	Job-description, induction, performance-management personal development plans, regular supervision, job specific training. Time management, prioritisation, delegation, setting realistic targets, Management skills training.
Pupil behaviour	
Poor supervision	
Boring or repetitive work	
Too much / little work	
Inadequate training	
Constant change	
Unachievable targets	
Work Relationships	
Bullying	Bullying & Harassment policy Officers, mediation, counselling. Personal alarms, physical barriers, assertiveness training.
Harassment	
Risk of violence	

How can the risk of stress be reduced?

School Leaders

- Provide job descriptions that clearly identify the duties and responsibilities of the post.
- Design practical work programmes, which let staff use their skills and abilities and also allow some control over the work carried out.
- Set work targets and standards which are realistic but include an element of challenge.
- Promote good team working, including support from colleagues at times of peak workload, and encourage work-related discussions to identify and resolve problems.
- Give support through induction, effective supervision and aiding members of staff to continuously develop skills and abilities.
- Be approachable to all staff and especially those who perceive they are not coping with their work.
- Be aware of the potential symptoms of stress and also practical coping strategies.

Members of Staff

- Take responsibility for your own health and well-being.
- Try to have a healthy diet and exercise regularly. (If you have personal health concerns consult your GP before taking up exercise routines)
- Use relaxation techniques or therapies which suit you e.g. yoga, aromatherapy, reflexology.
- Drink alcohol only in moderation, it acts as a depressant.
- Support colleagues who are unwell or struggling to achieve work targets and / or standards.
- Prioritise and plan your work whenever possible. If you consider you have too much / too little work or if work demands are too high tell your line manager or headteacher.
- Accept all training that will further your personal development and help you to carry out your job with increased competence.
- If you are unwell tell your line manager, headteacher or a colleague if one or more of the symptoms may relate to stress. Do not wait until you are too ill to attend work.
- Follow the advice given by your own medical advisers and also that of the Occupational Health Nurse or Doctor
- Use your trade union/professional association as a source of support and information.

What should happen if a member of staff feels he/she is suffering from stress?

School Leaders

- Encourage the member of staff to remain at work if at all possible and to seek help.
- Absence may lengthen the recovery period.
- Talk to the member of staff and try to find out their concerns. Talking about the problem may help to get to a solution quicker.
- Consider temporary changes to work patterns/duties/responsibilities. If possible and pending medical advice, consider removing those duties that are seen as causing the symptoms.
- Consider whether an immediate referral to the Occupational Health Service would be appropriate. Discuss such a referral with the member of staff. When making a referral remember to give full information on the referral documents to avoid unnecessary delays.
- Be alert and sensitive to the individual's behaviour. It may be helpful to keep the notes from any observations so that they may be used as additional information to supply to advisers e.g. medical, Management Support, Health and Safety.
- Undertake a stress risk assessment to identify the causes and establish whether the stress is work-related or personal. For work-related stress put in place an action plan, agreed with the member of staff, and monitor performance against the plan with regular reviews. Where the causes are external or personal help the member of staff to find appropriate advisers.
- When absence occurs keep in contact, sensitively, by telephone and/or a personal visit.
- Keeping in contact will assist an early return to work.
- Try to identify those steps that will facilitate an early return to work. Explore temporary job redesign or allocating other work that eliminates the duties the person perceives are creating the problem. Use the member staff's skills and abilities to best effect.
- If the member of staff will not speak to the head teacher or manager they should be advised to ask one of their work colleagues or their professional association/trade union to make contact. On occasions school leaders/managers may be seen as part of the problem.
- Any agreed support must be maintained. Do not let the same situation happen again.

Member of Staff

It is not a personal weakness to be suffering from stress.

- Try to avoid sickness absence by telling someone as soon as you feel you are not coping.
- Tell someone you can trust, your line manager, a colleague, your professional association/trade union, a friend or relative. Your manager needs to be made aware. If you do not tell someone it is less likely that you will get the support you need.

- If you feel you are being harassed or bullied take action, read the school's policy on Bullying and Harassment, speak to your professional association or trade union.
- Discuss with your line manager the potential options that will help you to stay in work. The right support, from your headteacher, line manager and colleagues, can really help you to cope with work.
- If you have sickness absence as a result of stress make sure you keep in regular contact with your headteacher or line manager. This contact will let you discuss possible options for your return. Attend the consultation(s) arranged with the Occupational Health Nurse or Doctor, explain the problem and take notice of their advice, it will be impartial and professional.
- Participate in developing action plans that are designed to monitor your progress, build your confidence and rehabilitate you back into the workplace.
- If you continue to feel you are not coping **tell someone.**