Nottinghamshire County Council

Misterton Primary and Nursery School
Nottinghamshire
School Policy

Effectively Managing Stress and Promoting Wellbeing in the Workplace
September 2026



HR Advice, Support and Training Service

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EFFECTIVELY MANAGING STRESS AND PROMOTING WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE POLICY – Table of Contents

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Please also note that any changes to the original policy documentation will require your governing body or trust to re-consult with the secretaries of the recognised trade unions and staff in your school.

1. Introduction

1. The governing body adopted this policy on 17 November 2026 as part of the schools' overall strategy for managing the stress and wellbeing of its staff. The governing body will review and monitor the impact of the policy with the head teacher. The next review will take place on 16 November 2027 (recommend annually).

1.1 The governing body has adopted the policy set out in this document to provide an agreed framework for the exercise of its powers and discretions in relation to all staff employed in the school and paid from within the school budget.

1.2 The governing body understands its responsibilities and is committed to taking decisions in accordance with this policy, the principles of public life as listed in DfE guidance: objectivity, openness, and accountability. Governing bodies should ensure that they are fully aware of their responsibilities under employment and health and safety law in applying this procedure.

1.3 The governing body recognises the legal requirements placed upon them by the Education Act 2002 and subsequent legislation. The governing body also recognises its legal obligations as an employer to the health, safety, and welfare of its employees under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This policy document will apply to all staff, including apprentices, directly employed by the school.

1.4 References to the governing body should be taken to refer to the entity that is responsible for exercising governance functions for a maintained school or academy, which in the case of a multi-academy trust may be the trust board. Likewise references to governors should be taken to mean whoever is responsible for fulfilling governance functions. Where maintained schools are federated under a single governing body this will be the federated governing body.

1.5 In fulfilling staffing responsibilities, the governing body may delegate its staffing functions in accordance with its articles of government. In delegating functions, the governing body must not lose sight of the fact that it retains overall accountability for the decisions made by those to whom the function has been delegated. As a result, the governing body should regularly review their arrangements for managing staffing functions and that the right people are fulfilling these roles on its behalf.

2. Advice and Support

2.1 The head teacher should ensure that all relevant senior leaders and governors who may be involved in the application of this policy understand their role and have access to appropriate support and advice.

3. Consultation and Agreement with the Recognised Trade Unions

3.1 This policy is recommended for adoption by all community, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled, academy, foundation, and trust schools who purchase their HR Service from Nottinghamshire County Council.

3.2 This policy has been agreed with all of the recognised trade unions through the normal JCNP process except for the NEU. The NEU positively welcomed the policy and whilst broadly supportive were unable to fully agree the policy.

3.3 Due to the complexities of this area of health and safety law, governing bodies are strongly advised to adopt the policy without amendment. Should, exceptionally, a governing body seek to amend the recommended policy, they will need to consult/negotiate any changes collectively with all the secretaries of the recognised trade unions and confirm any amendments to the local authority. Governing bodies are strongly recommended to seek advice from the HR service in these circumstances.

4. Equalities and Equal Opportunities

4.1 The governing body recognises its legal responsibilities to staff under the Equality Act 2010 and this policy will ensure equality and fairness regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, disability, or age. All decisions will be taken in accordance with relevant equalities legislation, the Employment Relations Act 1999, the Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 and the Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002.

4.2 The governing body is aware of its responsibilities under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to make available this policy to all staff at the school and its responsibilities to be compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations 2018.

5. Aims of the Policy

5.1 The school is committed to protecting the welfare, wellbeing and health and safety of its employees. It recognises that employee stress and wellbeing may be influenced by both work and non-work related or personal factors. The aim of this policy is to provide the school with a framework to promote the wellbeing of staff and proactively tackle workplace stress by identifying and, as far as reasonably practicable, controlling workplace stressors and promoting personal resilience.

6. Monitoring and Review

6.1 Governing bodies should regularly review the effectiveness of policies designed to reduce stress. The governing body will monitor the outcomes and impact of this policy and any resulting School /Team Action Plan as appropriate. Head Teachers or other nominated senior leader will be responsible for undertaking individual employee stress/wellbeing action plans in appropriate cases e.g. where work-related stress absence occurs.

7. Stress and Wellbeing

7.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other type of demand placed on them. This makes an important distinction between reasonable pressure, which can be positive if managed properly, and stress which is a natural but distressing reaction to demands or pressures that an individual cannot cope with”.

7.2 There are three elements for the school to consider in the management of stress:

1. A fundamental requirement to identify and take action to prevent work-related stress, where reasonably practicable. A risk assessment is an important tool to achieve this but there are other management systems that should already be in place to enable Head Teachers, managers, and supervisors to identify and respond to signs of stress amongst the employees they are responsible for (e.g. appraisal),
2. A need to promote individual, personal resilience to increase the awareness of influencing factors to enable staff to develop coping skills, and
3. The provision of support and rehabilitation where identified.

7.3 Ofsted’s Education Inspection Framework requires schools to consider staff wellbeing and to engage with staff to better understand the pressures they experience in their role as well as to take action to protect them from bullying and harassment. Schools should have separate procedures in place to address complaints of a bullying and / or harassment nature.

7.4 The HSE Stress Management Standards sets out the six key areas of work that, if properly managed, can help to reduce work-related stress:

- Demands – such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- Control – how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- Support – includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- Relationships – includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- Role – where people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
- Change – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated within the organisation.

7.5 More in depth information and explanation about the standards can be accessed via the HSE website.

7.6 The HSE have also produced a document 'Talking Toolkit: Preventing Work-Related Stress in Schools' which considers stress management from a school perspective. The document can be accessed via: Talking Toolkit for a PDF version or via the schools portal for an editable version.

8. Early Indications that stress could be a problem

8.1 As employers, schools are required by law to take pro-active action to identify and act on any stress risk within the workplace. Alongside pro-active action, the school should also recognise and be reactive to indicators of stress on an individual basis as indicated through:

- High levels of sickness absence – checking the reasons given for the absence, in a sympathetic manner and in line with the schools Managing Attendance Procedure, may help to identify the cause. Creating a culture in school where all staff recognise that undertaking return to work discussions after each absence is the norm and can ensure causes are understood at the earliest opportunity. Such a return-to-work discussion may simply require a quick 'check-in' that an employee is recovered and well enough to be in work. Governing bodies should have an overview of staff absences and general absence data and be satisfied those cases are being managed and staff appropriately supported.
- Conversely, "presenteeism", where an employee attends work when they are ill, is associated with common mental health conditions including stress, so can be a sign that an employee is experiencing stress.
- Low productivity or concerns regarding performance – talking to employees informally and formally through appraisal and supervisory discussions at an

early stage should enable head teachers and managers to explore the reasons behind this and help identify any steps required to support employees.

- High employee turnover – head teachers and managers should explore the reasons for employees leaving the school using exit discussions. Governing Bodies should have an overview and where appropriate examine turnover rates to identify any issues of concern for management to review and address.
- Appraisal (for teachers) and supervision (for support staff) reviews – provide an opportunity to have a one-to-one discussion about work and professional development in line with their job description, responsibilities and the relevant professional standards, and to explore whether employees in school are experiencing excessive pressure.

8.2 Schools will be aware that absence and stress has a significant impact in terms of cost (through absence and cover costs), performance, productivity, and continuity within a school and associated disruption to classes, pupils and colleagues, time spent in management of stress-related issues and absences in school and ultimately the wellbeing of the workforce which can lead to high turnover levels and high levels of dissatisfaction.

8.3 Positive outcomes of effectively managing stress can include increased attendance, increased productivity and quality of work, increased retention, engagement and motivation of staff, a healthier workforce, improved teamwork and communication, greater development of skills and legal compliance.

9. Responsibilities

9.1 Governing Body

The Governing Body has an overarching responsibility to ensure that there are measures in place to support the wellbeing of all staff in the school. The governing body (and the Chair of Governors in particular) has specific responsibilities to manage and monitor the stress and wellbeing of the head teacher. The Chair of Governors (or other agreed governing body member) needs to respond appropriately where it becomes evident that the head teacher may be suffering from stress or where wellbeing issues are identified. It is important for discussions to take place regularly, and where issues are identified to seek advice from the schools HR Business Partner as soon as possible. Paragraph 7.6 provides a useful tool for Chairs of Governors as a starting point to ensure the school meets its duty of care to their headteacher (See also 10.1). The governing body should regularly review the workload and wellbeing of their headteacher. Where support and guidance are required, the Chair of Governors is strongly advised to contact their named schools HR Business Partner (add in as a link)

9.2 Head teachers, managers and supervisors will, within the managerial and financial constraints of the school:

- Have an individual responsibility for their own wellbeing by developing support networks and strategies and where issues are not resolved in the short term to seek support from their line manager in the first instance (or Chair of Governors in the first instance in the case of the headteacher).
- Consider the existence of occupational stressors through a risk assessment process. A Wellbeing Survey has been developed by Nottinghamshire County Council, based on the HSE's approach (see toolkit).
- Once stress risks are identified, implement effective measures to mitigate risk.
- Encourage and support early referrals to occupational health and / or counselling services where appropriate to minimise the impact of employee absences and thereby the operational and financial impact on the school.
- Access learning in good management practice for example personal resilience, mental health awareness and wellbeing.
- Practice good communication between management and employees, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Provide regular and effective supervision and appraisal where wellbeing issues can be discussed and then managed.
- Ensure employees are inducted, supported, and appropriately trained (where required) to perform their duties.
- Ensure that job descriptions are clear, and employees understand the tasks and duties of their roles.
- Monitor workloads to ensure that they are manageable.
- Monitor working hours and holiday to ensure that individuals work appropriate hours and take regular breaks.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated, ensuring appropriate action is taken and employees are aware of their entitlement to raise concerns under the relevant procedure.
- Be vigilant and offer additional support where appropriate and available to an employee who is experiencing stress outside work e.g. bereavement or separation.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress on an individual and whole school basis.
- Monitor sickness absence data in accordance with the school attendance management policy and take effective action and provide support where required.
- Respond appropriately to noticeable changes in an employee's performance or behaviour.

9.3 Employees

It is recognised that identifying and managing stress needs the co-operation, understanding and involvement of employees so that supportive actions taken by school are viewed positively and not seen as punitive measures (for example referral to Occupational Health). Employees should be encouraged to:

- Have an individual responsibility for their own wellbeing and take reasonable care of their own health and safety (e.g. developing their own personal resilience, not working excessively long hours, managing their own time effectively and taking prescribed rest breaks) and the health and safety of the people with whom they come into contact.
- Raise any concerns about work or home pressures with their head teacher or manager, or other appropriate person. In the case of a head teacher, this should be the chair of governors so that support can be provided.
- Work collaboratively with school leaders by co-operating and assisting head teachers and managers in helping to identify any causes of stress at work.
- Where stress hazards are identified, play an active and positive role in helping to identify and implement workplace changes to reduce the risk from stress.
- Consider asking their head teacher (or chair of governors in the case of head teacher) or manager to refer them to Occupational Health and / or the school's counselling provider where health issues exist
- Seek the advice and support of their trade union representative as required (please see 'additional sources of support').

9.4 The NCC Occupational Health Service, if purchased, will:

- Provide specialist clinical advice on managing stress absence in a positive and constructive way.
- Provide advice on return-to-work plans, phased returns, and reasonable adjustments, where appropriate.

9.5 The HR Service will:

- Support governors, head teachers and managers to consider ways to improve workplace wellbeing for individual members of staff, including the headteacher.
- Offer targeted support where a school identifies high absence levels (individual or staff groups) including stress absence.
- Support schools with and encourage early referral to Occupational Health and / or for counselling support where appropriate.
- Support chairs of governors, head teachers, managers, and individuals in facilitating Occupational Health advice regarding next step actions; return to work planning; implementation and review.
- Expect schools to monitor and report on sickness absence statistics to the governing body and support the head teacher to take effective action.
- In respect of whole school, team or individual risk assessments, support head teachers and senior leaders to determine and evaluate the reasonableness of proposed practical actions to mitigate stress risk.

9.6 The Health and Safety Service will:

- Provide advice on the use of the Health and Safety Executive Management Standards Indicator Tool and School Stress and Wellbeing Survey.
- Provide practical advice to school leaders and governing bodies in respect of resulting action plans, including advice on what are reasonable and realistic actions.

10. Undertaking assessments to measure stress risk and wellbeing

10.1 There are two approaches to assessing stress risk and wellbeing within the school: (a) measuring across a team / school or (b) on an individual basis. The associated toolkit to this policy provides recommended mechanisms for assessing risk across a team / school and on an individual basis.

(a) Team / School Assessment

10.2 Understanding of the factors affecting employees requires a partnership approach, based on openness, honesty, and trust. In undertaking either an individual or whole school / team survey, governors and head teachers will need to ensure that employees are consulted and involved in the process, and fully understand the reasons for the anonymous assessment. In respect of team assessments, Head teachers will also need to be clear with the governing body prior to undertaking the survey, how the information, once obtained, will be used, how staff will be informed of the outcome and importantly that they will be and are involved in identifying the action required to address any identified risks.

10.3 This policy does not seek to prescribe the tool a school should use to undertake a team or school assessment, however to support schools in this area, the Health and Safety Team and HR Service have worked jointly to produce a new resource for schools to support the management of stress and to promote a culture of improved wellbeing. The tool is intended to provide a whole school or Team Wellbeing Survey and has been developed based on the HSE Stress Management Standards. The tool can be accessed via the toolkit: *link*

10.4 The school should use the results of a survey undertaken to identify appropriate actions, and in the case of a team or whole school survey may produce an action plan. The action plan will be practical and identify realistic timescales agreed with employees, be effectively communicated with relevant parties, and include opportunities for review. The toolkit provides a suggested format.

(b) Individual Assessment

10.5 Where appropriate, stress risk assessments can also be undertaken at an individual level and are completed jointly by the head teacher / line manager and employee. There is no prescribed way to have the discussion; it can fit into existing one-to-one discussions or be discussed and completed in a separate meeting. There is also no prescribed time when a risk assessment might be

undertaken on an individual level; it may be particularly useful in planning a return to work following a stress related absence but can be used at any time where it is apparent that stress may be impacting on an individual. If being considered in relation to stress-related absence, it should be provided to, discussed, and completed with the employee prior to their return-to work. The purpose of this joint review is to discuss and agree possible practical ways in which measures could be implemented to help alleviate stress at work.

11. Additional Sources of Support

Making Data work	Making Data Work
Mental Health Foundation – practical advice to help your mental health and wellbeing	https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/
MIND – advice and support from the leading mental health charity to help anyone experiencing a mental health problem	https://www.mind.org.uk/
NASUWT – a number of resources on stress management, a mental health and work-related stress toolkit and further information on the causes and signs of stress at work	https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/sitewide-search.html?q=stress
National Education Union (NEU) – The NEU Trade Union offer advice to employees and employers and support to their members on ensuring that work does not cause or contribute to ill health. Their charter and associated guidance, including risk assessments, can be found via the link provided	https://neu.org.uk/advice/neu-mental-health-charter
NHS Moodzone – practical information, interactive tools, and videos from the NHS to help you look after your mental health and avoid common problems like depression, anxiety, and stress	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/
Rethink Mental Illness – provides expert advice and information to everyone affected by mental health problems including a Nottingham based support group	https://www.rethink.org/
Unison – offer advice and support to employees and employers on stress and work-related stress	https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/knowledge/health-and-safety/stress/
Wellbeing (Schools Portal) – a wealth of resources to support employees.	Employee Wellbeing | NCC Schools Portal (nottinghamshire.gov.uk)

Document History	
Document produced:	**April 2024**
Document updated:	
JCNP Staffing Regulations Working Party	**28 March 2024**
Senior HR Business Partner	**Andy Wilson**
Lead HR Business Partner	**Emma McGeown**
Lead Health and Safety Business Partner	**Angela Howat**
Date policy updated	**April 2024**
Review date	**April 2025 or sooner in the event of legislative changes**