Title of Policy/Procedure	Blue Kite Academy Trust Staff Wellbeing and Mental Health Policy
Reviewer(s):	Head of HR
To be read in conjunction with the following policies:	Managing Sickness Absence Policy School marking and workload policies
Consultation Process	Policy to be agreed with TU's at The Blue Kite Academy Trust JCC
Policy Date:	1 April 2022
Review Date:	1 September 2024
This policy is to be ratified by:	People and Culture Committee

Contents

1.0	**Introduction**

1.1 At the Blue Kite Academy Trust (BKAT) we believe that good mental health and wellbeing of our staff is vital to the success of our organisation. We recognise that working in schools is challenging and fast paced. Schools need to respond quickly to national and local changes as well as striving for high academic outcomes.

1.2 We also know that in order for staff to support the ongoing mental health of our children, it is essential that we support our workforce in the same way

1.3 A healthy, happy workforce will support in:

- reducing sickness absence and staff turnover
- enhancing our reputation as an employer who cares
- improving staff morale and performance
- better supporting our children to learn and succeed.

1.4 The World Health Organisation's definition of mental health and wellbeing is "a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential and can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community".

1.5 We want our staff to:

- Enjoy working in a safe, open and supportive workplace environment and culture that supports mental health, overall wellbeing and prevents discrimination
- Be aware of mental health and wellbeing issues and behaviours
- Feel supported during times of personal or work stress
- Maintain a healthy work life balance
- Have opportunities to engage in initiatives that support mental health and wellbeing
- Feel confident and empowered to talk about their problems to colleagues and or managers as appropriate;
- Have positive and healthy relationships at work.

2.0	**Roles and Responsibilities**

2.1 It is the responsibility of all employees to engage in all activities to enable positive mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

2.2 BKAT will look to all line managers within the Trust to manage staff in a manner which is not detrimental to mental health and which, at its best, can positively promote mental health and wellbeing.

2.3 All staff should strive to achieve a healthy work life balance by regularly taking uninterrupted lunch breaks, refraining from sending work-related emails out of hours, taking annual leave and resting after busy periods, with very senior staff leading by example. Weekend and evening emails should be kept to a minimum and only sent where it is absolutely necessary for the smooth running of the schools or where there is an urgent reason for doing so.

2.4	All employees have a responsibility to promote a positive working environment that aims to help them and their colleagues feel included, supported and empowered to talk about mental health openly and without judgement.
2.5	Employees are also responsible for accessing support when they need it and raising any concerns with their line manager.
2.6	Each school across the Trust has a senior mental health lead. These are specially trained members of staff across the Trust, their role is to:

- Lead and work with staff to coordinate whole school activities to promote positive mental health and wellbeing;

- Provide advice, support and signposting to staff;

- Organise training and updates.

3.	**Recruitment**
3.1	Supporting mental health starts with getting the right person for the job. If there's a mismatch between a new recruit and our workplace, or their skills and abilities or the Trust's vision, it can lead to stress. As a Trust we will always be realistic about the role in interviews, and be careful to select people on their skills and competencies, or realistic potential.
3.2	We will state clearly that reasonable adjustments are available – for the interview and the job itself – so applicants understand why disclosure might be beneficial. Someone applying for a job may be worried about sharing information about their mental health. They may be anxious their mental health problems will lead to them being rejected, or that the interviewer will view them in a negative light. Therefore, it is important that as a Trust, we provide a fair and unbiased recruitment process. We will ensure people can disclose confidentially and that any information about health or disability is kept separate from the application form, so the recruitment panel does not see it.
3.3	Since the Equality Act 2010 came into force, it is unlawful for employers to ask questions about health before making a job offer, including about mental health. However, there are ways to support people to disclose their mental health problems lawfully. This helps ensure they have equal access to job opportunities and are offered the support they need without discrimination.
3.4	Recruitment decisions should always be based on whether candidates have the necessary qualifications and competence for the job, without making assumptions about health or disability. If there are concerns about whether health or disability will affect their ability to do the job, recruitment managers should assess these with the legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people.
4.	**Mental health support to staff**
4.1	Often the early signs that an individual may be experiencing the beginnings of mental health may be noticeable to the people around them. Signs can include:

- An increase in unexplained absence and sick leave
- Poor timekeeping
- Changes in behaviour
- Sudden decline in performance
- Displays of emotion

We recognise that many behaviours and emotional problems can be supported either within the Trust or with advice from external professionals.

| 4.2 | If a mental health disclosure is made by a member of staff, it is imperative that line managers have an early conversation about the person's needs. Managers should find a safe, quiet place to talk to the individual about their needs so that the right level of support can be arranged, including necessary adjustments. |

| 4.3 | This is where good people management skills, plus basic empathy and common sense, are essential. Managers need to ensure they are seen as approachable and listen when staff ask for help. They should also be mindful of whether people would feel safe sharing their problem at work. Trained Mental Health Leads may be called upon if necessary to provide specific support. |

| 4.4 | There are, however going to be occasions where staff may need more intensive support, and there are a range of mental health professionals and organisations that are available to staff within our Trust alongside our senior Mental Health leads. |

| 4.5 | Sources of other relevant support include: |

- Occupational Health support provided by Safewell ltd
- by Bespoke counselling and mindfulness through SAS Wellbeing
- Additional support services/wellbeing clinics/menopause support through SAS wellbeing – please click here for details.
- Education Support Partnership which provided 24/7 advice and support to education staff
- NHS mental health services
- MIND
- Samaritans

Other online / telephone helplines and charities eg.Cruise

| 4.6 | Regular 1:1 meetings are encouraged across the Trust as they have significant benefits for employers and employees. They give managers opportunities to speak regularly with staff about how they're doing both at work and at home, and explore with them what might be impacting on their mental wellbeing. Whilst 1:1's are not always possible due to teaching schedules and working times, clear and regular lines of communication are essential, especially for those working in isolation, for example regular telephone catch ups. |

| **5.0** | **Supporting employees during the menopause** |

| 5.1 | Note every woman is affected by the symptoms of menopause and not all women will want support or help during this time. Up to 75% of women do experience menopausal symptoms and 24% of these can be considered severe. |

5.2	The symptoms of menopause can be both physical and psychological and can include hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, anxiety and difficult sleeping.
5.3	Not all women will want to discuss symptoms or ask for help but line managers should be aware and willing to have open conversations and treat the discussions sensitively and professionally. Paragraphs 4.3 – 4.6 will help in managing these discussions and offering support.

6. Supporting an employee when they are unwell and off sick

6.1	Sometimes an employee may be so unwell they need time off work to recover. How efficiently this is managed is key in shaping how well and how quickly people are able to return to work and get back to feeling healthy and able to work again. Refer to the Trust Managing Sickness Absence procedure.

7. Supporting people to return to work

7.1	Effective return-to-work interviews can ensure mental health problems are identified at an early stage before they get worse. However, to be effective, managers must understand how to use them to build trust and engagement. Before the interview, managers must always tell people what they can expect in advance and make it clear that the return to work interview is a supportive way to help them make a successful and lasting return to the workplace and address any on-going health needs. See **here** for a Return to work guidance form.

8. Workplace adjustments

8.1	Workplace adjustments for mental health are often quite small, simple, practical and cost-effective changes. They can include anything from offering rooms for quiet work, to starting a buddy system. Often the change isn't physical, but about attitude, expectation or communication.
8.2	Employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments once they are aware something about work is causing a problem for an employee with a disability.

9. Building wellbeing and mental health understanding

9.1	Building wellbeing and mental health means boosting employees' knowledge and skills so they better manage their own mental health and improve their ability to support that of others. Ensuring staff and managers have a good understanding of mental health, and the factors that affect workplace wellbeing, is essential for building a healthy, happy and productive workforce.
9.2	As a Trust we will do this by:

- Raising the profile of mental health by opening talking about positive mental health in team meetings, PDMs and whole Trust days
- Conducting an annual staff survey on staff wellbeing and acting on feedback
- Training of senior mental health leads across schools to promote wellbeing
- Making the most of internal communications and raising awareness

Offering training to line managers where appropriate to ensure they are fully supported in their role.