Mental Health and Well-Being Policy

The Board of Trustees, CEO and Strategic team are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and require all staff and volunteers to demonstrate this commitment in every aspect of their work.

This policy was created and ratified by the Trust Board on:	**December 2025**
The policy owner is:	**The PLACE (SRB) Lead and CEO**
This policy is:	**Trust Wide Policy (standard)**
This policy is to be published on the:	**Intranet**
This policy is based on:	**Other - It is a unique policy, based on the work of trauma informed experts who developed a relationship-based approach to inclusion and a Behaviour Regulation Policy Guidance, for Brighton and Hove City Council.**
This policy will be reviewed by the Trust Board in: (unless earlier review is recommended by the Trust)	**December 2027**
Policy Version:	**V4.0**
Signed by the Chair of the Board of Trustees:	**John Smith**

Introduction

At Wensum Trust we understand the importance of promoting positive mental health and wellbeing for our whole school community; our children, families and staff.

Our vision is to… *work together to help every child to develop into high achieving, confident, healthy, caring and resilient members of their family and community; creating a pathway to support their career aspirations, independence and contribution to society.*

1. Values

We value the need to develop positive relationships with every child and every family in order to achieve this vision. We aim to work together to understand and respond to individual circumstances regardless of background or early life adversities, and to offer the appropriate care during challenges along the way.

Mental health problems can affect children and adults at any time in their life, but some individuals and groups have been shown to be at more risk of developing mental health problems than others. Early life experiences and changes in lifestyles can result in a predisposition to stress and fear related behaviours, influencing mental health and wellbeing. Children's mental health is a crucial factor in their overall well-being and can affect their learning, achievement, health and behaviour. Persistent challenging behaviour is often how children communicate that something is wrong - or is a sign that they may be in distress.

The Department for Education (DfE) has identified that Children in Need, looked-after children and previously looked-after children are more likely to have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and to experience the challenge of social, emotional and mental health issues than their peers. Their experiences can have a wide-ranging impact on; the way they relate to others, their behaviour, their emotional regulation skills, their social skills and their academic skills. Schools therefore have a central role to play:

"The role that schools play in promoting the resilience of their pupils is particularly important for children with less supportive home lives, who may not have a trusted adult they can talk to. Schools should be a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging and feel able to trust and talk openly with adults about their problems" – DfE 2018

The DfE has also identified a list of factors that increase the likelihood of mental health difficulties, together with key protective factors that can enable all children to be resilient when they encounter challenges (Mental health and behaviour in schools November 2018). The balance between the risk and protective factors is most likely to be disrupted when difficult events, such as trauma and adversity happen in children's lives.

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice identifies Social, Emotional and Mental Health as one of the four areas of Special Educational Need.

The Wensum Trust views good mental health as having the capacity to live a full and productive life including the ability to:

- Feel safe and valued
- Feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions
- Form and maintain trusting relationships with others
- Know what is needed for good physical health and mental wellbeing (DfE, 2021)
- Learn and achieve
- Cope with change and uncertainty
- Enjoy friendships
- Feel a sense of belonging
- Develop talents, social and life skills
- Meet challenges, solve problems - build resilience.

In addition to promoting positive mental health and well-being, we aim to recognise and respond to mental ill health and poor well-being through additional and/or specialist support. We understand that anyone and everyone may need additional support. Positive mental health is everybody's responsibility and we all have a role to play.

2. Understanding the Importance of Relationships

We understand the complex interplay of many factors in promoting good mental health and therefore aim to support the development of the protective factors which build resilience to mental health problems.

Positive relationships in schools are key to psychological safety, central to the well-being of children, their families and staff and underpin an effective learning environment. There is now a wealth of research on the importance of connectedness in schools and on the specific qualities of in-school relationships that promote effective education.

"Every pupil should have a supportive relationship with a member of school staff" - *(*EEF Improving Behaviour in Schools)

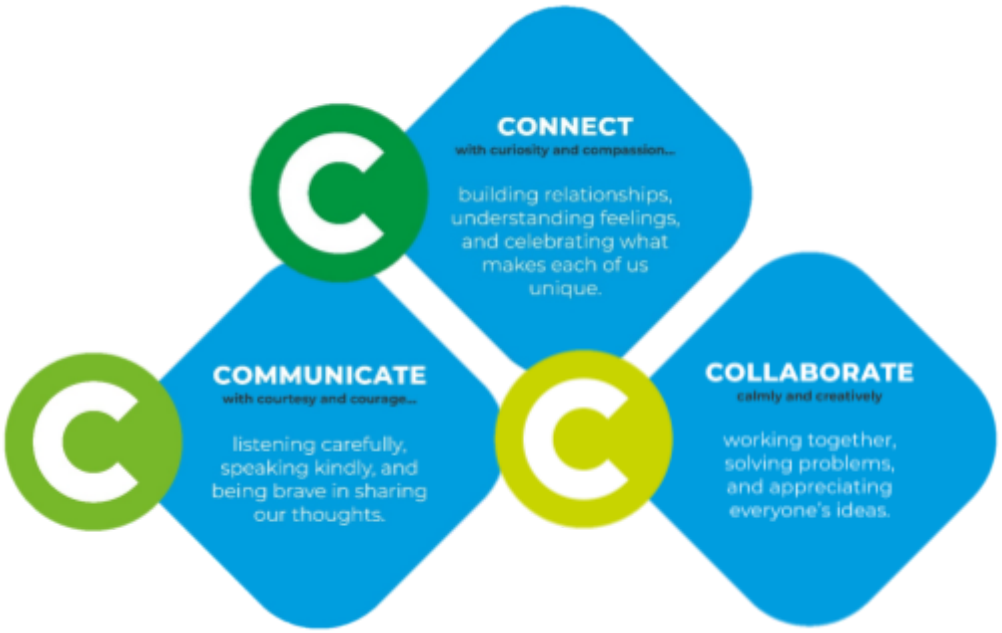
Fundamental to our aims therefore is our 'Relational Approach' - a pro-active trust wide approach to developing positive relationships with all our children, our families and all adults. This is implemented by every member of our academies:

Relational – 'We learn to build strong, positive relationships with all our children, families and communities - this is key in supporting the growth of emotional wellbeing, belonging, inclusion and achievement.'

Our Relational Approach is delivered through The Three C's – Connect, Communicate and Collaborate, along with our Qualities – we are Curious, Compassionate, Courteous, Courageous, Calm and Creative.



The Three C's help us to guide children and adults to calmly use more effective responses. It enables us to proactively model and support children to meet expectations, whilst supporting emotional literacy, relationship skills and achievement.



3. Policy Aims

The aim of our policy is to demonstrate our commitment to the mental health of our staff and children and inform our individual academies' whole school approaches and policies - in particular Behaviour and Self-Regulation Policies.

We recognise that emotional regulation supports self-regulation and the effective development of executive functions or learning behaviours – (EEF Metacognition and Self-regulated Learners)

Emotional Regulation is defined as:

> *"…the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express their feelings"*

We will always:

- Help children to understand and manage their emotions using approaches that coach emotions
- Help guide children's social skills so that they can form and maintain positive relationships.
- Recognise that behaviour is driven by emotions.
- Be curious and accepting of behaviour, ensuring children feel comfortable sharing worries with adults.
- Encourage children to be confident; help promote their self-esteem, their self-identity and optimism.
- Help children to develop resilience and ways of coping with setbacks.
- Help children learn how they can maintain positive mental health and where they can go if they need help and support.
- Recognise the importance of promoting the mental health and wellbeing of all staff

We will always promote a safe and healthy environment by:

- Ensuring an ethos, consistent policies and behaviours that support mental health and resilience
- Ensuring our staff are always positive role models for our children
- Raising awareness amongst staff and children about mental health issues; their signs and symptoms.
- Making our classrooms and the wider school environment safe, accessible, comfortable and welcoming for our children, families and staff.
- Providing quiet (as much as possible in a busy school) places of safety and available trusted adults to support emotional regulation
- Understanding children's early life stories and specific difficulties.
- Helping every child learn and succeed by identifying specific needs, providing engaging curriculums, differentiating, fostering new interests and strengths and building life and interpersonal skills.
- Celebrating academic, non-academic and other achievements
- Preparing and supporting children for transitions to new schools and times of change
- Recognising the impact on all adults of caring for and working with traumatised children or those that display extremely challenging behaviours and understanding that secondary trauma and compassion fatigue is possible.
- Training staff to develop and be confident in their knowledge of mental health and wellbeing.
- Supporting staff who struggle with their own mental health and emotional wellbeing by providing access to an employee assistance counselling and advice service.

We will support and involve our families by:

- Working in partnership with parents, sharing knowledge and experiences of their child in order to problem solve together
- Working with specialist services where necessary to plan early support for children, including to ensure the basics are in place – a safe home, food, sleep, a healthy life style etc.
- Teaching families to understand and manage their children's emotions through approaches that coach emotions.
- Providing information for parents and carers to access support for their own mental health needs.

4. Related Policies and Documents

- School Behaviour and Self-Regulation Policies
- School Accessibility Plans
- School Equality Plans
- Trust Equality Policy
- School SEND Policy
- School RSE Policy
- School Safeguarding Inc. Child Protection Policy
- School Looked After Children Policy
- Trust Flexible Working Policy
- Trust Staff Code of Conduct
- DfE Early Career Teacher Framework
- DfE Teacher Standards

5. Identifying Needs and Warning Signs of Poor Mental Health, Poor Well-being or Emotional Dysregulation

The World Health Organisation (WHO) describe good mental health as:

> *"A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community"*

Wellbeing is defined as:

> *"The state of **being** comfortable, healthy or happy. ... Even though happiness is an integral part of your personal **wellness**, it includes other things such as the fulfilment of long-term goals, your sense of purpose and how in control you feel in life"*

Warning signs will always be taken seriously and staff will communicate these to the appropriate person whether their concerns relate to children or staff. They may include the following:

- Physical signs of harm
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Increased isolation from friends and family and becoming socially withdrawn
- Changes in mood
- Changes in behaviour

- Talking and/or joking about self-harm and/or suicide
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Feelings of failure, uselessness, and loss of hope
- Secretive behaviour
- Negative behaviour patterns, e.g. disruption, angry outbursts, anxiety, withdrawn
- Failure to regulate behaviour and emotions

Staff will also be able to identify a range of issues, including:

- Attendance and absenteeism
- Punctuality and lateness
- Changes in educational attainment and attitude towards education
- Family and relationship problems
- Any additional needs arising from difficulties that may impact a child or colleague's mental health and wellbeing, such as bereavement, family circumstances and health difficulties

6. Philosophy and Approach – Understanding Behaviour

Thinking of a child as behaving badly disposes you to think of punishment. Thinking of a child as struggling to handle something difficult encourages you to help them through their distress.

All our schools have Behaviour and Self-Regulation Policies and we expect that these policies maintain a consistent approach in line with the philosophy of this policy

We promote certain approaches in this guidance (e.g. taking a non-judgemental, curious and holistic stance when trying to make sense of behaviour; ensuring opportunities for reparation, especially following exclusions). We also warn against certain practices that can be emotionally harmful (e.g. public shaming- both verbal and non-verbal, (i.e. the use of sad faces against names on classroom boards to highlight poor performance) and practices which favour typical minds and non-disabled bodies (ableism).

Key premises of our approach include:

- Putting relationships first. This requires a school ethos that promotes strong relationships between staff, children and their parents/carers. It also relies on creating a positive school culture and climate that fosters connection, inclusion, respect and value for all members of the school community.
- Recognising that behaviour is a form of communication. The change in terminology in the 2014 Code of Practice of Special Educational Needs (SEN) - which replaces the Behaviour and Social Difficulties (BESD) with Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties – helps to promote a shift towards viewing behaviour as a communication of an emotional need (whether conscious or unconscious), and responding accordingly. This is also evidenced in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation stage 2021 and the Early Career Teacher Framework Standards 2021.
- An awareness of what the stress response can look like in children and adults – (See Beacon House Resources https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/
- Knowing our children. It is vital that we see children as individuals, taking steps to understand their life story and lived experiences; understanding they have had a unique set of circumstances and experiences; have individual strengths, interests, weaknesses and triggers and may be at developmentally younger emotional and social stages.

> *"**Managing** a child's misbehaviour does not necessarily lead to that child learning: they may be quieter, but not necessarily engaging with the content of the lesson. Instead, research suggests that when children improve their learning behaviours, this skill set can improve both academic achievement and cognitive ability."* – (Improving Behaviour in Schools EEF, 2020, p. 16)

A learning behaviour is any behaviour that is necessary in order for a child to learn effectively in a group setting or classroom and be a **'self-regulated learner'** i.e. emotional regulation (managing strong feelings e.g. shame, sadness, anxiety, frustration, excitement and anger), attention skills, executive functioning skills, forming trusting relationships, social skills, sensory processing difficulties and coping with transitions and change. **Identifying needs and key skill deficits will enable a child to be supported appropriately, which in turn will reduce their fear and stress levels.**

- Knowing not all behaviours are a matter of 'choice' and not all factors linked to the behaviour of children are within their control. When rules have been broken, the child should be supported to reflect, repair and problem solve to help them meet rules and expectations. Consequences will still be applied consistently wherever appropriate, in line with school policies, however, individual circumstances will be considered.

  > *"Universal behaviour systems are unlikely to meet the needs of all your students. For pupils with more challenging behaviour, the approach should be adapted to individual needs".* (EEF Improving Behaviour in Schools)

- Being 'fair' is not about everyone getting the same (equality) but about everyone getting what they need (equity) (Rick Riordan 2020).
- Taking a non-judgmental, curious and empathic attitude towards behaviour. We encourage all adults in schools to respond in a way that focuses on the feelings and emotions that might drive certain behaviour, rather than the behaviour itself. Behaviour (whether it is disruptive, aggressive, hyperactive, anxious, depressed or otherwise) may be the result of a current or childhood trauma, relate to unmet mental health needs, such as anxiety or an unidentified learning difficulty. Children with behavioural difficulties therefore need to be regarded as vulnerable rather than troublesome, and we all have a duty to explore this vulnerability.
- Maintaining clear boundaries and expectations around behaviour. Changing how we respond to behaviour does not mean not having expectations, routines or structure. In order to help children feel safe, their educational environment needs to be high in both nurture and structure. Children working at younger developmental social and emotional stages may need support to understand and meet our rules and expectations. We therefore need to scaffold, model all learning – social, emotional, academic, and behaviour.
- Understanding children's individual strengths, interests and needs and providing curriculums that help to engage these. All children, but in particular those children classed as disadvantaged, should be encouraged to access activities, hobbies and sports to identify and build on talents, build self-esteem, self-identity and help them feel that they belong.
- Providing children with predictable routines, expectations and responses to behaviour. These must be in place and modelled appropriately, within the context of a safe and caring school environment.
- Always viewing behaviour systemically and within the context of important relationships. Encouraging parental engagement and involvement is crucial when addressing and planning support for a child's social and emotional needs.
- Knowing that a Whole School Approach starts with creating an inclusive and positive school ethos around behaviour and is something that must be driven by a school's senior leaders in order to be endorsed by, and embedded across, the whole school community.
- Preparing and supporting children for all transitions whether these are during the course of the day, to new schools or times of change.

7. Supporting staff wellbeing

We recognise that education staff experience frequent change, alongside high workloads where they are often juggling many different demands, whilst also being responsible for some of our most vulnerable children whose behaviour can be challenging. The wellbeing of all of our staff is therefore essential and we see this as fundamental to promoting a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing.

We have a shared responsibility to support, care for and educate all the children on role at our schools. To do this, our staff need to fully understand and carry out their role and responsibilities in an environment where they feel psychologically safe. Psychological safety is the atmosphere where staff feel valued, trusted, can have open, honest and reflective discussions (with both colleagues and leaders), and be able to set appropriate boundaries to avoid overwhelm if needed, without fear of retribution. (Education Support)

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families states:

"It is important for the [school] leadership team to build a culture of trust where staff feel valued, can be open about their health and wellbeing and know how to access support if they need it. For all of this to happen, it is essential for the head teacher and the leadership team to model good mental health and wellbeing behaviour and practice.

It is also important for head teachers to remember to look after their own mental health and wellbeing alongside that of their staff."

We promote openness and self-awareness about mental wellbeing and view it as every member of staff's responsibility to manage their wellbeing, know how to safely, and appropriately talk about their mental health and know where to seek further support, if they need to.

Education Support (A Charity for Everyone Working in Education) emphasise that:

"*Building mental health literacy means boosting employees' knowledge and skills so they can 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 high performing school."*

8. Sustaining our Approach

- All staff to have an understanding of the impact of attachment and trauma difficulties, the stress response, self-regulation and executive function difficulties
- Schools and trust to embed and monitor our Relational Approach and The Three C's
- Schools will continue to foster an environment of psychological safety and encourage in-house knowledge and support via trained Mental Health Champions and Mental Health First Aiders
- Schools will continue to look to engage children's individual learning by supporting their understanding of learning needs through the 7Cs work led by Judith Carter.
- School leaders and the Trust will support staff with additional training and support as required.
- School leaders will identify the signs of stress, provide reflective opportunities for staff discussions and know when to signpost staff, if needed.
- The Wensum Trust will provide access to and employee assistance programmes
- Schools will look to signpost children in need of specialist help by engaging with professionals at the earliest opportunity.

- Schools understand that the identity and mental health of people from minority groups who are exposed to discrimination and social exclusion based on race, socio-economic backgrounds, disabilities, gender and sexual orientation, is more likely to be impacted and in different ways. Schools will therefore ensure our curriculums enable all children to value diversity from the earliest opportunity
- Schools will continue to look to engage children's individual learning needs by organising different learning opportunities through extra-curricular activities, events, visits and trips as deemed appropriate by the school and through our Strategic Partners.