READING BLUE COAT

Student Wellbeing and Positive Mental Health Policy

1) Introduction

Mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, 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.
(World Health Organization).

At Reading Blue Coat (RBC), we aim to promote positive mental health for every member of our staff and student body. We pursue this aim using both universal, whole-school approaches and specialised, targeted approaches aimed at vulnerable students, through both reactive and proactive measures.

In addition to promoting positive mental health, we aim to recognise and respond to mental ill health. By developing and implementing practical, relevant, and effective mental health and well-being policy and procedures we can promote a safe and stable environment for students affected both directly and indirectly by mental ill health.

This document sets out RBC's approach to promoting positive mental health and well-being. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff (teaching and operations), including supply staff, volunteers, and Governors. It also provides information for parents and the wider community.

This policy is informed by Government guidance:

- ***Promoting Children and Young People's Mental Health: A Whole School or College Approach*** (2023).
- ***Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools*** (2018)

The importance of well-being and mental health is further underscored by concerning trends in recent studies. The Mental Health of Children and Young People in England Survey (2023) found 22% of children aged 11 to 16 years to have a probable mental health disorder. RBC aims to provide happy, supportive experiences for students, alongside effective care, to ensure as far as possible an environment of positive well-being and positive mental health.

2) Policy Aims

The aims of this policy are shaped by the eight key areas identified in *Promoting Children and Young People's Mental Health* (2023). This policy aims to:

- Set out the leadership and management of wellbeing and mental health

- Explain its place within the ethos and environment of the school
- Promote an integrated approach within curriculum and learning
- Promote student voice in shaping a culture of positive mental health
- Set out high standards for staff development in this area
- Facilitate early identification and intervention to prevent mental health issues escalating
- Set out processes for monitoring and review
- Set out ways RBC will work with families, parents, and carers
- Describe processes for targeted support and referrals

3) Staff and Lead Responsibilities

All staff have a role to play in promoting well-being and positive mental health. All teachers and student-facing staff will receive some training in this area (which is set out below). However, individuals with key responsibilities are as follows:

- Mr Pete Thomas – Head
- Dr Guy Williams – Deputy Head (Pastoral) and Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Mr Ed Clark – Chaplain
- Nurse Manager – Sheridan Buchanan
- Dr Emma Ramsey – Director of Wellbeing and Futures
- Mrs Sarah Berry – Director of Learning Support
- Mrs Claire Dance – Director of Lower School
- Mr Scott Yates – Director of Middle School
- Mr Raj Ghosh – Director of Sixth Form
- Dr Sarah Langdon – Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Mrs Maria Illingworth – School Secretary (Pastoral)

Heads of Year and other pastoral staff also have significant responsibilities for promoting student welfare, as set out in their job descriptions.

Overall lead responsibility for student wellbeing and positive mental health, and responsibility for this policy lies with Dr Guy Williams (he may be contacted via the following email address: **dhpastoral@rbcs.org.uk**). The lead Governor in this area is Mrs Anjali Mehta Chandar (she may be contacted via the following email address: **a.chandar@rbcs.org.uk**).

4) Leadership and Management

The Governors at RBC have responsibility for this area. They will:

- Ensure that there are clear policies and procedures in place for raising and managing concerns about the welfare of children
- Ensure that there is a strong values-based culture in the School, which underpins key areas such as behaviour and safeguarding, and therefore is of positive benefit to student well-being and positive mental health
- Ensure that the DSL includes information about mental health in reports to Safeguarding Committee and, as required, in reports to Full Board.

The Head will liaise with the Governors and with the Deputy Head Pastoral, to ensure continuity between strategic oversight and implementation of the School's policy. The Head has overall responsibility for the ethos of RBC and the wellbeing of students. The Head also has a practical role to play as one of the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads.

The Deputy Head (Pastoral), who is also the DSL, will ensure that this policy is relevant to students' needs and is regularly updated, and that it is effectively implemented. The Deputy Head Pastoral manages other key staff involved in the implementation of the policy. As the senior lead, it is also their responsibility to develop a 'whole-school approach' through:

- Nurturing a culture in the whole School community that is supportive and caring, and does not stigmatise mental ill-health
- Making and monitoring arrangements for effective training of staff and education of students, regarding wellbeing and mental health
- Ensuring a strong culture of early help and a community of practice among pastoral staff of identifying and supporting students through early intervention
- Keeping accurate and orderly records of student mental health concerns and how they are managed, and using those records for analysis and improvement;
- Managing the provision of counselling, mentoring, and other services allied to promoting or supporting mental health at RBC
- Managing other pastoral staff where they are supporting student mental health
- Reporting to Governors and assisting them with oversight and monitoring of provision for mental health at RBC.

Directors of Section and Heads of Year are responsible for monitoring and supporting the mental health of the students in their Section / year group, liaising with the Deputy Head (Pastoral) as needed. All staff have an important role to play in supporting the aims of this policy and they are expected to be observant of students and communicate their concerns effectively.

Students are also leaders in the School and it is important to acknowledge the power of peer-to-peer messaging about topics such as mental health. Student voice will be promoted and utilised to ensure the best possible leadership in the domain of this policy. The Deputy Head (Pastoral), Directors of Section, and Heads of Year will ensure that this takes place.

6) Ethos of the School

The promotion and support of wellbeing and positive mental health are rooted in the five core values of the School:

- **Aspiration** – to pursue excellence in well-being, building a happy community
- **Courage** – to support those in need, facing the challenges of difficult emotions
- **Compassion** – to recognise and act upon the suffering of others
- **Service** – to offer care to one another in words and deeds, and fulfil responsibilities
- **Integrity** – to be open and honest about needs and feelings, and practice self-care

RBC also has a long tradition of offering all-round excellence in academic work, co-curricular activities, service, and care. The ethos of the School is weighted towards the idea that a balanced life in which a child is exposed to multiple opportunities and interests is one that is conducive to wellbeing. Students are advised to support their mental health through a holistic view of life: through fresh air and exercise, appropriate sleep, and good diet, in addition to personal and academic successes. The School

puts in place systems, in accordance with its ethos, to ensure that students have access to a wide range of enriching activities (academic, cultural, adventurous, sporting), with the explicit understanding that this offering is beneficial to mental health.

7) Curriculum and Learning

Wellbeing and positive mental health are mapped onto the curriculum for Wellbeing and Futures. It is the responsibility of the Director of Wellbeing and Futures, with oversight from the Deputy Head (Pastoral), to ensure that this provision is high-quality, relevant to the School and its context, up-to-date, and embedded across year groups. The overview of curriculum content is published as an appendix to the RBC *PSHE Policy*. Topic are addressed through a 'spiral curriculum' in which, for example, mental health and wellbeing are considered in an age-appropriate way and with lesson plans that are matched to the needs of specific year groups.

The Deputy Head (Pastoral) will maintain a Pastoral Calendar and coordinate with pastoral staff to ensure that other opportunities for mental health education are provided at key moments, e.g., in World Mental Health Day assemblies.

The Deputy Head (Pastoral) is also responsible for coordinating sensitive handling of material in the curriculum which may provide challenges for those with mental health difficulties, asking staff to be mindful of the needs and circumstances of students. Heads of Year will share information about specific students with teachers and other staff, where there is a proportionate need to do so.

8) Promoting Student Voice

Student voice plays an important, positive role in nurturing a culture of wellbeing and positive mental health. It is the responsibility of the Deputy Head (Pastoral), alongside Directors of Section and Heads of Year, to ensure that appropriate systems are put in place to promote student voice, listen to feedback, and utilise the voice of students in giving authentic support to important messages about mental health. The following measures will be implemented to promote the role of student voice in this domain:

- Appointing Pastoral Prefects each year, to be a visible group of empathetic students who can help communication of student concerns and perspectives to staff; student leaders are also appointed in younger year groups, including Lower School Ambassadors and Middle School Leaders.
- Providing Mental Health First Aid Training to Pastoral Prefects, Heads of School, and House Captains to facilitate peer-to-peer care.
- Encouraging students to speak in assemblies and other public occasions concerning mental health and other associated topics, to promote positive peer-to-peer messages.
- Advertising to students the many ways to reach out for support and to raise their concerns, whether speaking to a member of staff, using the anonymous Worried@ Form on SharePoint, or leaving a note in the Worries Box by the Wellbeing Centre.
- Gathering student feedback through data gathering tasks (i.e., Teams Reflect) focus groups and surveys, and using this information for analysis and improvement of the provision both for individuals and cohorts of students at RBC.
- Asking students to take part in meetings of the Wellbeing Action Group, with parents and staff.

9) Staff Development

All staff are required to undertake basic child protection and safeguarding training, prior to commencing work and, thereafter, each September. This training will include the safeguarding risks associated with poor mental health, as identified in statutory guidance. For example, *all* RBC staff (on reading *Keeping Children Safe in Education*) are expected to know that:

- Mental health conditions increase vulnerability to abuse, neglect, exploitation
- They *may* be an indicator that abuse, neglect, or exploitation has taken place
- A mental health condition should lead to a child and their family receiving 'early help' from the School and, if appropriate, from the Local Authority
- Only mental health professionals should attempt to offer mental health diagnoses
- Some mental health issues may also be regarded as safeguarding concerns, i.e., a child may be in need or at risk as a result
- Children facing adversity or trauma are more at risk of other harms, including mental ill-health
- Poor mental health is often associated with lower levels of school attendance and risks of students being absent or missing in education
- In cases where it is necessary to use 'reasonable force' with students, it is imperative to consider the additional risks associated with students with a SEND condition or mental health difficulties

RBC staff may also gain further in-depth understanding of how to support students by means of a variety of courses and resources available through the School's TES-Educare account. The Deputy Head (Pastoral) is able to advise staff as to options and opportunities for such further professional development.

The Deputy Head (Pastoral) will also liaise with the Deputy Head (Staff Development) to ensure that the regular INSET days for staff rotate through a variety of topics, which include mental health. The Deputy Head (Pastoral) will also ensure that enhanced training is provided for key pastoral staff, e.g., training seminars for Heads of Year. This will include provision for approved Mental Health First Aid training for a significant number of teaching and operations staff.

10) Monitoring and Review

Responsibility for monitoring mental health concerns lies with the Deputy Head (Pastoral). Specifically, this includes the following tasks:

- Participating in Section meetings, to ensure that lower level and emerging mental health concerns are in focus and that early interventions are being implemented where possible
- Monitoring lower-level welfare and mental health concerns, which are recorded in Section notes by Directors of Section
- Monitoring significant concerns that are raised on MyConcern, the School's safeguarding management system
- Monitoring the uptake and progression of counselling and mentoring sessions, and the mental health factors which lead to a student needing counselling
- Liaising with pastoral staff (e.g., Heads of Year) as required, to ensure suitable information sharing about students with mental health difficulties

- Producing summaries of mental health concerns for Governors in reports to Safeguarding Committee

The Deputy Head (Pastoral) will also monitor and review the effectiveness of provision for wellbeing and positive mental health through promoting student voice (see Section 8, above).

11) Working with Families, Parents, Carers

The best way to support students in meeting their mental health needs is coordinated action, ideally with a partnership between the student, their family, and the School. The default expectation for pastoral staff who encounter mental health concerns in students should be to raise them with the student's parents and carers. However, any decision to share information should be made carefully and in consideration of the full range of factors. Factors influencing this decision include:

- The severity of the concern
- The age, maturity, and wishes of the student
- Professional advice
- The role of parents/carers in the concern itself
- Any actions already undertaken to support/mitigate

Guidance for information sharing and referrals to external agencies can be found in the RBC *Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy*.

Students who are experiencing mental health difficulties or conditions should expect a clear and coordinated plan that is devised in partnership between home and the School (assuming that it is appropriate to share information with parents/carers). Typically, this liaison will be carried out by the student's Head of Year, though other pastoral staff or the Learning Support Department may take the lead, as required. This communication will help to ascertain:

- Any relevant previous history of mental health at home, previous schools
- How the student's mental health presents at home and other out-of-school contexts
- Communication between families and other external bodies / practitioners
- Clinical and medical information (to be shared with the Nurse Manager)
- Ways risks are managed at home
- Strategies that have been attempted at home, their successes and failures
- Opinions and perspectives of family members, as well as the child

Pastoral staff should in such cases also relay similar information back to the parents/carers, so that all parties have the most complete picture. There should be clear actions from discussions with parents/carer and clear expectations for further communication.

Notes from meetings and conversations with parent and carers, which may include students, should be stored securely on MyConcern.

Where discussions of mental health concerns with families, parents, and carers are not yielding the outcomes that pastoral staff would like to see, the issues should be raised with the Deputy Head (Pastoral), who will assist with resolution. It may be appropriate to seek external advice or, for significant concerns, make a referral to agencies (Children's Services, CAMHS). Any such decisions and communication should be recorded on MyConcern.

In working with families, parents, and carers, it should also be noted that there are significant overlaps between mental health and medical needs. Families of students joining RBC are asked to provide relevant medical history, to assist the School in caring for children, and these submissions will be reviewed by the Nurse Manager and Wellbeing Centre Team. Families are asked to give full and open disclosure, including mental health needs, to ensure that appropriate care can be provided. Where further clarification or information is required, the Nurse Manager will contact families and arrange a phone call, and this will include a discussion of mental health concerns where relevant. This information will then be disseminated by the Nurse Manager by contacting the student's Head of Year.

Parents are also invited to participate in meetings of the Wellbeing Action Group, so that they can discuss the culture of wellbeing at Blue Coat with key staff and students, and so that their views are considered in the development of policies and procedures.

12) Identifying, Communicating, Supporting, Referring

12.1 Identifying Concerns

All staff have a role to play in identifying mental health concerns, communicating effectively, and ensuring that appropriate support is put in place. It is the role of the Deputy Head (Pastoral), assisted by other pastoral staff, to lead and support colleagues in these responsibilities.

In terms of identifying mental health concerns, it is important to acknowledge that such issues are diverse and manifest themselves in different ways; staff are not expected to have detailed knowledge of all possible concerns and their symptoms. However, staff should be aware of common mental health concerns and common indicators for possible mental health problems. Common mental health problems experienced by young people in the UK include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Sleep problems
- Self-harm
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Eating disorders
- Emotion challenges posed by managing neuro-divergence

Common indicators of possible mental health problems include:

- Presentation of emotion, appearing distressed
- Mood and behaviour changes
- Physical indications of self-harm
- Unexpected physical changes, such as weight loss/gain
- Poor behaviour and/or academic performance
- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns, and associated difficulties
- Social changes / problems, isolation
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide
- Changes in clothing – e.g., long sleeves in warm weather
- Missing PE/Games or getting changed secretively
- Lateness to or absence from school
- Repeated physical pain or nausea with no evident cause

- An increase in lateness or absenteeism

Further information can be found in the Childline mental health resource bank **here**. The use of such resources is strongly recommended to staff, as it enables them to understand how specific indicators may relate to distinct mental health conditions or challenges.

While it is important that staff are vigilant and attempt to identify possible mental health concerns, it must be emphasised that staff should not attempt to diagnose specific conditions or advise how to respond to them; such tasks should be strictly limited to trained professionals. The best approach is to refer to concerns in generic terms and promote wellbeing and self-care. This could lead to a referral and a diagnosis at some later point. Students who receive diagnoses for specific mental health conditions can then be supported according to the advice given by professionals.

It is important for staff to create safe and encouraging spaces, to 'start the conversation'. Staff should also find ways to speak to students that are appropriate for their age, understanding, background, and emotional state. Best practices that should be followed include:

- Create an environment in which talking about mental health is accepted and supported, speaking to students in large and small groups, and one-to-one
- Draw on examples of mental health conditions in Wellbeing and Futures lessons to help de-stigmatise
- Use the tutoring system, particularly through one-to-one conversations, to help build habits of speaking with staff with confidence that they will listen
- Start-up conversations about feelings, challenging events and experiences, bullying and online concerns, relationships, family, friendships
- Give students a range of opportunities to speak out and help them to identify various trusted adults so that they feel they have 'options' in terms of who to talk to
- Ensure that SEND students are listened to with patience and awareness that they may express themselves in different ways, getting support from the Learning Support department as needed

Where a student tells a member of staff of their mental health concerns, the approach of listening to students as set out in the *Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy* should be followed. Confidentiality should not be offered, and staff should be honest about:

- Who they are going to talk to
- What they are going to tell them
- Why they need to tell them

Ideally, a student's consent to share the concern should still be sought and, where they are unwilling for it to be shared, the member of staff should still inform them of their intention and the reason for it, in line with the School's policies.

12.2 Communicating Concerns

The communication of concerns about student wellbeing and mental health follows the same procedure as in the *Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy*. The same policy also provides guidance as to how to listen to students and record what they say. Low-level observations should be passed on to the student's Tutor and Head of Year for further investigation. Significant concerns about students should be raised through a summary submitted on MyConcern, which will automatically notify the DSL and DDSLs. Information sharing among staff is an important element in communicating concerns,

as support for mental health may require coordinated action from, for example: the Nurse Manager, the Director of Learning Support, the Chaplain, a counsellor or centor.

Where a student presents as in need of urgent care or is at immediate risk (e.g., expressing suicidal intentions), it is imperative that staff ensure the student's immediate safety and contact the DSL without delay. The DSL is Guy Williams: **dhpastoral@rbcs.org.uk** and can be found in the Messer Building. The School Secretary (Pastoral) (Maria Illingworth: **mci@rbcs.org.uk**) can be found in the School Office and may assist in making urgent contact with the DSL or a DDSL.

12.3 Supporting Students

All staff have an important role to play in supporting wellbeing and positive mental health. All staff are expected to respond to concerns in a way that is kind and supportive, and concerns reported by students should always be taken seriously. Staff will offer encouragement to students and reassure them that support for mental health is available. Low-level welfare issues will be managed by a student's Tutor, with support from their Head of Year. Support for escalating and mental health concerns will be managed by a student's Head of Year, with support from the Director of Section (who is also a DDSL). Acute concerns will always be raised by the DSL, who will coordinate a team response to support the student (or ensure that a DDSL has a clear remit to do so). Strategies that will be used to support students may include the following:

- Welfare conversations with Tutors and Heads of Year
- Conversations with specialist staff (e.g., Director of Learning Support, Nurse Manager)
- Counselling sessions
- Adjustments to routines and expectations, to be agreed by the Deputy Head (Pastoral)
- Meetings with family and pastoral staff
- Plans to improve self-care and wellbeing
- Referral to external advice sources (e.g., Childline: 0800 1111)
- Referral to external agencies: Children's Services, CAMHS
- Recommendation that external, clinical help is sought (GP, private practices)

The pastoral team also publish a 'Wellbeing Directory' for students, to provide all the information they need to access support within and outside of Blue Coat.

Where a student is experiencing acute difficulties, they will also be supported through risk management planning. Such plans will be discussed by pastoral staff and (usually) parents, and the strategies agreed will be recorded on MyConcern. In the case of any diagnosed mental health difficulties, it is best practice for the school and families to be in dialogue about individual care plans and risk management measures, including:

- Details of a student's condition
- Special requirements and precautions
- Medication and any side effects
- What to do and who to contact in an emergency
- The role the school can play

13) Policy Review

Author(s):	Guy Williams (Deputy Head [Pastoral])

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