Promoting the positive mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in schools – the governors’ role
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It is widely recognised that a child’s emotional health and wellbeing influences their cognitive development and learning, as well as their physical and social health and their mental wellbeing in adulthood.

Overall it is estimated that one in ten children and young people has a diagnosable mental disorder – the equivalent of three pupils in every classroom across the country (2004 Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain).

The school has an important role to play, acting as a source of support and information for both students and parents. Governors have a role to play in ensuring that social and emotional wellbeing features within improvement plans, policies, systems and activities and the culture and ethos of the school.

The role of the governing board

The governing board will ensure that:

- All staff have a basic understanding of the mental health and emotional wellbeing issues affecting children and young people (NICE guidance recommends – teachers and practitioners are trained to identify and assess the early signs of anxiety, emotional distress and behavioural problems).
- Teachers and practitioners have the knowledge, understanding and skills to deliver a curriculum that integrates the development of social and emotional skills. (NICE guidance)
- The school’s policy on promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing is monitored annually, reviewed and updated.
- The school’s policy on promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing together with an appropriate policy for the wellbeing of school staff amongst other things includes: acceptable use of technologies, staff/pupil relationships and communications, including the use of social media.
- The school’s policy on promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing has regard for the school’s policy on safeguarding children and will
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be developed alongside statutory guidance on “Keeping children safe in education”, supporting pupils at school with medical conditions and existing advice on targeted approaches for supporting pupils with, or at risk of, developing mental health problems.

- There is a designated governor for mental health and wellbeing and a member of the school’s leadership team appointed to the role of designated mental health and wellbeing lead. The postholder must have a clear job description and be allocated resources to fulfil the requirements of the role, reporting directly to the governing board on the implementation of mental health and wellbeing policies.

- Parents/carers are made aware of the school’s mental health and emotional wellbeing policy and procedures and that these are publicly available.

- All staff are aware of systems within the school which support positive mental health and emotional wellbeing and that these are explained to them as part of staff induction. This includes the school’s mental health and wellbeing policy, the safeguarding policy, the behaviour policy, the SEND policy, the medical conditions policy, the physical restraint policy, the staff behaviour policy (sometimes called a code of conduct) and the role of the designated lead for mental health and wellbeing.

- The designated lead for mental health and wellbeing has undertaken training appropriate to this role.

- A regular audit of mental health and wellbeing is undertaken which includes the views of children and young people in the school, the result of which is evidence that the governing board has discharged its responsibility for monitoring the implementation of any actions resulting from the audit.

- All school staff and volunteers are promoting the positive mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

- Mental health issues are discussed regularly by the governing board and that appropriate training is undertaken to ensure that they have the knowledge and information needed to perform their functions and understand their responsibilities.

- Governing boards should consider how children are taught about mental health and emotional wellbeing as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.

- The school has appropriate procedures in place to ensure safe recruitment practices and to deal with allegations against staff and volunteers.
Liaison with the Virtual School Headteacher with regard to children and young people who are “looked after”.

The governing board does not normally have a role in individual cases.

Why have a designated Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Governor?

As with other specialist governor roles, it is often useful to have one governor to champion the mental health and emotional wellbeing issues within the school, liaise with the headteacher about them, provide information to governors and contribute to audits and reports.

The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition (on behalf of Public Health England) state that “to ensure actions are integrated, sustained and monitored for impact it is important that a commitment to addressing social and emotional wellbeing is referenced within improvement plans, policies (such as safeguarding; confidentiality); personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education; social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) education; behaviour and rewards practice.

The nominated governor will therefore:

• Provide an important link between the governing board and the school staff
• Ensure that mental health retains a high profile in the school and is discussed regularly at governing board meetings
• Monitor key aspects of mental health and emotional wellbeing and be aware of what is being done to promote a positive environment for children and young people
• Keep up-to-date with national and local developments in mental health and emotional wellbeing
• Contribute to reports to the governing board.
Some suggestions for working as an effective Mental Health and Wellbeing Governor

- Provide a link between the governing board and the school staff by:
  - Liaising regularly with the headteacher and the school’s designated mental health and wellbeing lead
  - Keeping abreast of and understanding the school’s policies and practice in relation to mental health and emotional wellbeing
  - Discussing how the school’s aims, vision, ethos and curriculum support positive mental and emotional wellbeing

- Ensuring that mental health and emotional wellbeing retain a high profile in the school and are discussed regularly at governing board meetings by:
  - Making sure the appropriate policies are regularly reviewed
  - Stimulating interest and involvement within the governing board about how policies to promote positive mental health are put into practice
  - Ensuring that the governing board gives an appropriate priority to the resources required

- Providing a channel for initiatives both locally and nationally

- Monitor key aspects of the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people by:
  - Discussing the monitoring and evaluation of the school’s mental health and emotional wellbeing activities and ensuring that the voice of the child/young person is included (perhaps through a audit of wellbeing in the school).
  - Gathering information through school visits and discussions with the headteacher and designated mental health and wellbeing lead
  - Assisting in the assessment of policies and practice on mental health and emotional wellbeing within the school

- Keeping up-to-date with developments on mental health by:
  - Being aware of staff training undertaken
  - Attending governor training sessions on mental health and emotional wellbeing
  - Being aware of documents produced nationally and locally relating to mental health and emotional wellbeing
Mental health and emotional wellbeing in schools is everyone’s responsibility

If you think a child or young person is at risk of mental health issues or is suffering as a result of poor mental health or emotional wellbeing you should contact the designated mental health and wellbeing lead in your school.

Some useful questions

To perform your role as mental health and emotional wellbeing governor successfully, you may find some of the following questions helpful in promoting discussions with the headteacher and/or designated member of staff:

- When were policies relating to mental health and emotional wellbeing last reviewed?
- What information do staff receive on mental health and emotional wellbeing as part of their induction?
- Do staff have an opportunity to positively influence the range of policies which contribute to promoting positive mental health?
- What records are kept in relation to the mental health of individual pupils?
- How many referrals has the school made to CAMHS during the last term?
- How does the school gather children and young people’s views on mental health and emotional wellbeing and when was this last done?
- How does the school ensure timely identification, support and mentoring of vulnerable children and young people who may benefit from targeted support?
- What does the school do once children and young people with mental health and emotional wellbeing issues have been identified - and what is the outcome of these actions?
- When was the last time an audit of mental health issues was undertaken?
- What training have staff undertaken to ensure that they can identify and respond to a child or young person with mental health issues? How and where it is recorded?
- Does the school have a designated mental health lead and what resources are allocated to this role?
- What support does the school provide parents on dealing with a child or young person with a mental health concern?
- Does the school’s vision, aims, ethos and culture promote an environment that instigates positive emotional wellbeing?
• What focus is given within the curriculum to social and emotional learning and promoting personal resilience, and how is learning assessed?
• How do school staff promote positive mental health and emotional wellbeing?
• How does the school minimise the impact of peer on peer abuse?
• How does the school work in partnership with parents and carers to promote emotional health and wellbeing?
• How are staff supported in relation to their own health and wellbeing in order to be able to support student wellbeing?

Useful contacts:
CAMHS referral line – 01908 725372
MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) - 01908 253196/253170
MKC Leadership and Governance Team - 01908 253787

Guidance
Supporting Mental Health in Schools and Colleges (2017) DfE
Mental health and behaviour in schools (2016) DfE

Preventing and tackling bullying (2014) advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies DfE
Keeping children safe in education (2016) DfE
Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions (2014) DfE
Future in mind-promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing (2015)
Children and Young People’s Mental Health Wellbeing Taskforce – Dept of Health

Information about resources for schools and links to external providers can be found on the following websites:
www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/leadershipandgovernance