

Life / work balance charter for BDMAT staff

Introduction

The Birmingham Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust has at its foundation the principles of the Christian faith and is particularly guided by the statement in John 10:10 where Jesus proclaims, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*". The Trust directors have therefore used this quote from the gospel to guide its first vision statement – life in its fullness, for all. We want all our pupils AND our staff members to be able to experience life in its full; for this to occur staff must have a good life / work balance. This charter therefore sets out our commitment within the organisation at all levels to ensure that staff feel they have the right balance in their lives; to reinforce this we have used the phrase life / work balance rather than work / life balance to reiterate the need to prioritise our whole lives rather than the work element. We believe that this charter not only supports our Christian mission but also ensures we are a good employer to our staff, therefore helping to promote retention of colleagues.

Ways in which we will help to protect your life / work balance

- We ask that Central Staff and school leaders do not routinely send emails to staff after 7pm in the evening or before 7am in the morning, at the weekends or during school holidays – there are systems within Outlook, such as Boomerang which allows staff to write messages and send them at more convenient times. Leaders in schools should develop their own policy on emails with their staff
- We will operate a Staff Forum in order that staff in schools can communicate directly with the Chief Executive Officer in the Trust regarding any working conditions in their schools that they feel they cannot bring to the attention of the headteacher directly
- We will work in conjunction with unions and professional associations in order to support staff life / work balance and reduce stress in the workplace
- We will consult with staff on an annual basis through a staff questionnaire to ensure that we are getting a clear picture of working conditions
- We will put in place IT systems to reduce duplication of work in regard to assessment data so that headteachers do not have to transfer data into a different system to complete returns to the Central Team
- We will ensure that all staff have access to the BDMAT 'whistleblowing' policy on our website if they feel unable to raise concerns directly with school leaders

Sources of support

At times, despite the best efforts of managers staff may feel stressed for a number of reasons. If staff do feel stressed it is important that they seek support to try and alleviate the symptoms as quickly as possible. There are a number of options available:

- 1) Speak with their line manager / headteacher – requesting a confidential meeting with them to discuss the issue.
- 2) Speak with their own GP.
- 3) Speak with one of the mental health first-aiders within the school who will be able to signpost them to support outside of the organisation, if they are feeling they need to speak with someone unconnected to BDMAT.
- 4) You could consider approaching the Chair of Governors or the parish Vicar who is likely to be a school Governor.
- 5) Ask their line manager / headteacher to make a referral for them to speak to an Occupational Health nurse or examine the options for counselling provided by the Trust.
- 6) Headteachers and chairs of governors experiencing stress should speak about their concerns with the CEO who will either support them individually or sign-post them to additional services.

Issues that staff report are impacting on their life / work balance and stress

Members of the Staff Forum were asked to consult with colleagues in schools in June 2019 and reported the following concerns:

- Headteachers can set unrealistic timescales for returning information to them, especially pupil assessment data following assessments;
 - In some schools this had been helped by the headteacher cancelling the staff meeting during the assessment week to allow staff more time to mark and process assessments
- The behaviour of parents and pupils can cause significant stress to staff;
- Recent national cutbacks have led to a reduction in teaching assistants which is increasing pressure on other staff in schools – it has also led to a reduction in the pastoral systems in place in schools;
- Support staff often get stressed as they are left out of communications or informed at the last minute about changes;
- Teaching assistants don't always feel that sufficient time is given for them to collect resources and prepare for activities; and

- Some staff report that they are often very driven by their own 'perfectionism' which creates greater work and stress for them; managers therefore need to work with staff to ensure they are setting realistic expectations for themselves.

Our next steps

We see this as an initial start of a charter for life / work balance and want to expand upon our current work in this area. Some of the areas that we are considering for the future are:

- Commission a consistent MAT wide out-sourced system for staff counselling;
- In consultation with the Staff Forum and professional associations create a MAT wide stress reduction policy;
- Sharing good practice in our schools;
- Working with headteachers to reduce the workload of teachers;
- Examine IT systems to allow staff in different schools to collaborate and share planning and resources;
- Commission staff training across schools to help staff combat and deal with stress;
- Producing a model marking policy that reduces expectations of staff; and
- Examine how annual reports to parents can be 'streamlined'.