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Teacher Support Network

Mental health problems: supporting school staff

The Teacher Support Network has been involved with a new publication from the Department for Children, Schools and Families: 'Common mental health problems: Supporting school staff by taking positive action'¹.

The document – which was written in cooperation with Teacher Support Network – outlines how to deal positively with common mental health problems amongst teachers and other school staff.

Mental health charity Mind have reported that a quarter of adults in the UK will experience some kind of mental health issue. Because of the demanding nature of working in education, teachers and school staff take the demands placed upon them with an exceptional sense of personal commitment and responsibility that can exacerbate any problems they may be having. When it comes to mental health, their dedication can work against their ability to cope.

As a survey conducted by the Teacher Support Network last year demonstrates, such problems are widespread among teachers. More than two-thirds of those questioned had seen their physical health, professional performance and personal life suffer as a result of stress and over a third had taken time off work to cope.

As well as inflicting anguish on individual teachers, staff absences caused by such health problems have a profound effect on how much pupils learn. A 2002 Ofsted report stated that the quality of some pupils' work worsened by half when a regular teacher was away from the classroom for

significant periods of time.

Teacher Support Network Chief Executive Patrick Nash said: "We welcome the publication of this guidance and are very happy that we could play a significant part in its production.

"We help tens of thousands of teachers every year and a worrying amount are struggling to cope with mental health issues that result from the unique pressure their profession face.

"We urge all those working within schools to take on board this guidance and take positive action in order to support those who go through such conditions."

Research conducted last year by Birkbeck College and Worklife Support demonstrated a clear link between teacher wellbeing and pupil performance as assessed by SATs and value-added measures². The study involved 24,000 school staff and researchers Professor Rob Briner and Dr Chris Dewberry said: "The major implication of these findings is that if we want to improve school performance, we also need to start paying attention to teacher wellbeing."

References

1. Department for Children, Schools and Families: 'Common mental health problems: Supporting school staff by taking positive action' (2008).

Download pdf file from:-

<http://www.teachersupport.org.uk/files/Mental-Health-guidance.pdf>

2. Birkbeck College and Worklife Support: 'Staff wellbeing is key to school success' (2007).

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<http://www.worklifesupport.com/index.cfm?p=1241>