SANDWELL ACADEMY

Mental Health and Wellbeing:

Evidence-Based Practice

September 2026

Document Details

Policy Title:	Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
Policy Reference:	Sandwell Academy / Student
Description:	This document sets out how the Academy promotes mental health and wellbeing for all those within our school community.
Status:	Statutory
Category:	Academy
Contact:	Name: Mr T Byrne Title: Deputy Head Email: tbyrne@sandwellacademy.com
Version:	2.0 – September 2026
Other relevant SA polices:	Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy Special Educational Needs Information Report Behaviour Regulation and Relationships Policy Equality and Diversity Policy Exclusion Policy
Adopted by the Governing Board on:	
Date for Review:	September 2027

Contents

Document Details 2
1. Introduction 4
2. Framework for Wellbeing Provision 5
3. Leadership and Management 6
4. Curriculum Teaching and Learning 7
5. Student Voice 7
6. Staff Development 8
7. Identifying Need and Monitoring Impact 9
8. Working with Parents and Carers 10
9. Targeted Support and Appropriate Referral 10
10. Ethos and Environment 11
11. References 12
12. Appendices 13

1. Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines wellbeing as the state whereby 'every individual realises [their] own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to [their] community'. At Sandwell Academy, we believe that it is our moral imperative to promote positive mental health and wellbeing through all that we do.

Whilst we understand the positive impact that promoting wellbeing can have on all facets of Academy life – improving productivity, attainment, attendance and behaviour – we firmly believe that positive wellbeing is, in itself, a worthy endeavour.

The Department for Education (DfE) has made clear its intention for all schools to have a Designated Mental Health Lead (DMHL) by 2025, a stance predicated on the understanding that mental health provision within a school requires strategic oversight and careful co-ordination.

Currently, 1 in 8 children and young people are experiencing mental health issues, with teenagers faring worst of all. It is estimated that just over 50% of diagnosable mental health conditions have their onset before the age of 14. These figures reaffirm the need for a clear vision for wellbeing, both to promote the positive mental health of our young people, and to combat some of the known adverse effects:

- Poor attendance/persistent absenteeism
- Poor physical health
- An increase in safeguarding issues due to the implications on an individual's safety
- Poor academic performance
- A reduction in motivation
- An escalation of challenging behaviours
- Learning environments which feel unsafe
- A negative school culture
- Emotional dysregulation

Fundamentally, in tackling poor wellbeing, our collective aim is as follows:

*To **foster health and happiness** within our community, supporting everybody to **feel connected**, **develop a sense of belonging, build resilience** and **engage meaningfully** with all that the Academy has to offer.*

The provision detailed within this policy aims to create a nurturing environment within which poor mental health is prevented and individuals develop the resilience needed to manage day-to-day stressors. Nevertheless, there will be instances where issues emerge, and it important that these are recognised early to allow for timely and effective intervention.

With this in mind, the purpose of this policy is as follows:

- To outline the sources of evidence used when planning our wellbeing provision, including empirical research, theory and data gathered within our local context
- To provide a framework for a whole-school approach to wellbeing provision
- To detail how evidence has been used to inform our practice and support the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing across the Academy

This policy works in conjunction with other policies within the Academy, including:

- The Behaviour Regulation and Relationships policy
- The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities policy
- The Attendance policy
- The Safeguarding policy
- The Equality and Diversity policy

Further information, resources and links to external agencies can be found on the 'Emotional Wellbeing' page on the Academy's website.

2. Framework for Wellbeing Provision

At Sandwell Academy, all individuals within our community are responsible for promoting an emotionally supportive environment in which everybody can thrive. To this end, our provision underpins *all* aspects of Academy life, and can be broadly separated into eight strands (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Eight strands of wellbeing provision (DfE, 2021)

Figure 1 outlines the 'whole-school approach' adopted by Sandwell Academy, as per the recommendation of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). This approach is pervading, and extends beyond just traditional classroom learning to include our wider ethos and broader school opportunities.

Crucially, within this model, the voices of all stakeholders are taken into account, and co-production with parents and carers is highly valued. Support for mental health and wellbeing begins at a universal level, offering all students and staff an emotionally safe space where they feel valued and heard.

Robust systems of assessment and referrals ensure that concerns for poor mental health and wellbeing are addressed swiftly, and targeted support sought at the earliest opportunity.

When planning provision, it is the aim of the Academy to target core factors related to wellbeing (Figure 2).

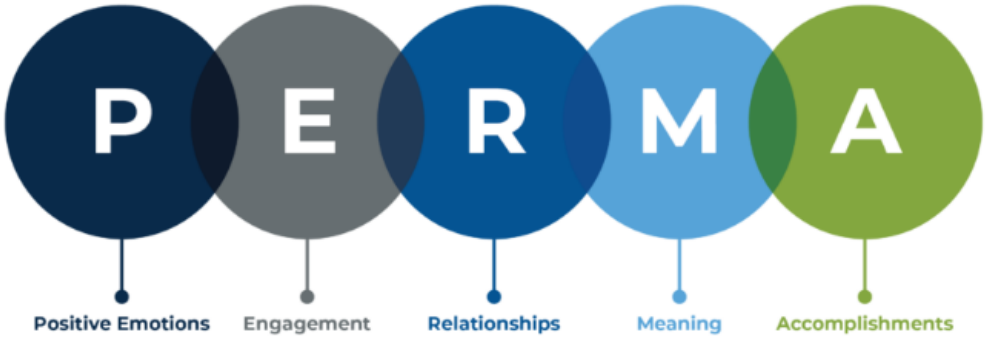


Figure 2. PERMA Model (Seligman, 2012).

First, we wish to create opportunities for **positive emotions**. This extends beyond simply feeling 'happy' to other emotions, such as interest, pride and gratitude. Second, we aim to promote thorough **engagement** and immersion in activities which target the strengths of individuals. Next, we prioritise making and maintaining **relationships**, ensuring that everybody has a supportive social network. Further, we encourage all those within our community to find purpose and **meaning** in what they do, ensuring that they feel like a valued member of our school. Finally, we promote a strong sense of **achievement**, celebrating success in all its forms.

3. Leadership and Management

Central to our mental health and wellbeing provision is our supportive team of leaders who set the tone of the Academy and model behaviours which are fitting with our values.

All leaders within the Academy have a number of core responsibilities:

- To act in accordance with our aims for mental health and wellbeing
- To actively challenge and work to eradicate threats to wellbeing
- To consider implications of their own actions on the wellbeing of others
- To consider the connection between their own area of responsibility and mental health and wellbeing
- To act as a supportive figure for those within their line management
- To be vigilant, and to report concerns using the appropriate channels

In accordance with Department for Education advice, the Academy has a qualified Designated Mental Health Lead (DMHL) who is responsible for the strategic oversight of mental health and wellbeing provision and for promoting the implementation of this policy. The current mental health lead is **Louise Scott**.

Effective leaders work collaboratively to promote positive mental health and wellbeing, and it is the intention of the Academy to ensure that leaders thoroughly consider the reciprocal relationship between wellbeing and their area of responsibility. This includes, for example:

- The impact of poor mental health and wellbeing on student behaviour
- The impact of poor mental health and wellbeing on student attendance, including the role of emotion-based school non-attendance (EBSNA)

- The impact of exam stress and anxiety on student exam performance
- The role of the curriculum, including PSHE, in promoting wellbeing
- Poor mental health and wellbeing as a safeguarding risk
- The role of CPD in providing staff with the skills to support wellbeing

4. Curriculum Teaching and Learning

A core feature of our mental health and wellbeing provision is warm and emotionally-responsive teaching (Appendix C). We believe that all students have an inalienable right to a nurturing education which is rich in opportunity. Staff work collaborative to promote a safe and inclusive learning environment, and actively challenge rare instances when this is not the case.

Key topics which are both directly and indirectly linked to wellbeing are taught explicitly through our PSHE and RSE curriculum, including strategies for managing wellbeing and mechanisms of support. However, we also understand that there are particular times throughout the academic year which are particularly anxiety-inducing, including periods of assessment and transition. We ensure that additional provision is made available for students during these times. This may include:

- Strategies for revision and managing workload
- Transition mentoring/programmes
- Peer friendship groups
- Exam-stress CBT sessions
- Pre-warning of changes to the school calendar and periods of assessment
- Dedicated spaces for quiet study
- Presence of Welfare staff at key events, such as parents evenings

Behaviour for Learning

We acknowledge that repeated instances of misbehaviour within the classroom can cause upset to others within our school community and pose a threat to relationships. This is an inherent risk to wellbeing, as positive relationships act as a protective factor for declining mental health, and are valued by staff and students alike (Graham, Powell & Truscott, 2016).

As a result, we ensure that our approach to promoting positive behaviours is relational in nature, focusing both on emotion coaching (Appendix B) and restorative practice to repair damage caused within relationships and provide reassure to all that a positive learning environment will be restored. Our Behaviour Regulation and Relationships Policy provides full details of this approach.

It is the responsibility of classroom teachers – with support from leaders where needed – to promote wellbeing within their classroom, and the Academy will provide professional development for staff in this endeavour.

5. Student Voice

At Sandwell Academy, we understand the importance of student voice in developing positive wellbeing, and feeling cared for, respected and valued (Anderson & Graham, 2015). We therefore empower students to engage actively in school life and to contribute to our evolving vision for mental health and wellbeing.

Regular student voice is gathered through a number of mechanisms, including learning walks, climate checks, student surveys and ‘termly check-ins’. This information allows us to review our practices and make amendments to provision.

The active seeking of student voice also supports our identification of students who have additional mental health needs requiring support, particularly if they do not present in a way which makes their needs identifiable by others.

Further student voice is gathered in a number of ways, including through Head's lunches, forums with Heads of Year, information gathered through mentoring and through our PT systems. Our provision is such that all students have a range of trusted adults in whom they can confide and feel heard.

For students with complex emotional needs, student voice is gathered and featured in the Pupil Profile, which is shared with all staff. This mechanism ensures that students are empowered to influence their educational experiences and self-advocate.

6. Staff Development

We acknowledge that working in schools in the current educational climate can be a challenge, and that staff are trying to balance students' welfare with supporting them to achieve positive academic outcomes (Willis, Hyde & Black, 2019). It is also understood that staff and student wellbeing are inter-related (Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011), and that strategies to improve wellbeing within schools should target everyone within the school community.

Our conceptualisation of wellbeing, using Seligman's PERMA model (2012) applies to staff in the following ways:

- We want staff to experience positive emotions, such as feelings of pride in what they do
- We want staff to feel engaged in their work, and to develop in their areas of interest
- We want staff to see the meaning in what they do, and recognise the value they add to our community
- We want staff to develop positive relationships with colleagues and student
- We want staff to feel celebrated for their successes, and to celebrate others

Central to our support system for staff is effective line-management founded on open communication and compassionate leadership. Staff can report concerns to their line manager at any time, and these can be escalated as necessary to identify further supportive mechanisms. This is supplemented through an 'open-door' policy with the Academy's Head. Staff successes are shared publicly through our 'Employee of the Week' system, ensuring that positive contributions to the Academy are celebrated.

Staff are supported to harbour their interests, and career progression is widely promoted. Our use of BlueSky for professional development records (PDRs) encourages staff to take ownership of their career development and invest in the opportunities available, including in-house CPD, external training and professional qualifications, such as NPQs. Job role opportunities are widely publicised across the school to prompt staff to consider ways in which they can further develop within the Academy.

All staff members set a professional objective each year related to mental health and wellbeing. This is to ensure that our provision is continuously developing, and staff are being up-skilled in responding to their own needs and the emotional needs of others.

We recognise that staff may need additional support for their own wellbeing outside of the classroom, and as such, we have confidential, face-to-face counselling services available for staff on-site. Where possible, we also make use of our Educational Psychologist to provide therapy sessions for staff (including Acceptance and Commitment Therapy – ACT). Staff who have roles which involve supporting the emotional wellbeing of others receive supervision from a range of professions, including Senior Leaders, psychologists and other external agencies. This is to ensure that they are emotionally reflective and do not experience vicarious trauma through their work.

Staff are supported to develop positive relationships with others within the school community. Relationships with students are central to our behaviour strategy, with structured conversations acting as a core feature of our restorative practice. Further, relationships with colleagues are promoted through staff socials and opt-in staff activities, such as staff sports, Art Club and Book Club.

Staff voice is collected through our staff surveys, and leaders operate an 'open door' policy, ensuring that staff feel heard and that their opinions are valued. Further, a dedicated member of staff is responsible for liaising regularly with the staff body and sharing information with leaders within the school to inform decision-making and policy within the school.

7. Identifying Need and Monitoring Impact

Timely intervention is crucial for tackling poor mental health, and all staff are responsible for being vigilant and reporting concerns in line with our referral procedures (Appendix A). Our Inclusion referral form is stored in a central area, and all staff receive training on how to report safeguarding concerns. Timely identification is supported through staff CPD on the signs and symptoms of poor wellbeing, which is reinforced regularly. At certain points throughout the year, such as transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, trained Inclusion staff are present within lessons to identify students who may need additional support at an early stage.

However, we acknowledge that sometimes, students experiencing poor mental health may not present in way which makes this observable by others, and therefore we must extend beyond staff referrals. Students can refer themselves for additional support, either through talking to one of their support roles (e.g. Personal Tutor, Head of Year or Pastoral Manager), by using our safeguarding boxes located in student toilets, or by completing a Place2Be self-referral form in Student Reception. These measures ensure that students wishing to confide in an adult can do so in a timely fashion.

Twice a year, all students within the Academy complete a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), both to identify students who may be struggling with their wellbeing without necessarily realising, and to track and monitor the impact of our mental health provision over time. This powerful data enables us to identify trends in wellbeing and target additional support where appropriate.

The Academy will also make use of other forms of data which may indicate that a young person is struggling with their wellbeing, including their behaviour log and their attendance. In these cases, further investigation will be carried out by the relevant Head of Year or pastoral manager to determine the appropriate course of action.

8. Working with Parents and Carers

A young person's emotional wellbeing is a complex issue, and it is heavily influenced by the societal contexts in which they live (Figure 3). One such influence is that of parents and carers, who can act as a vital protective factor against mental ill-health.

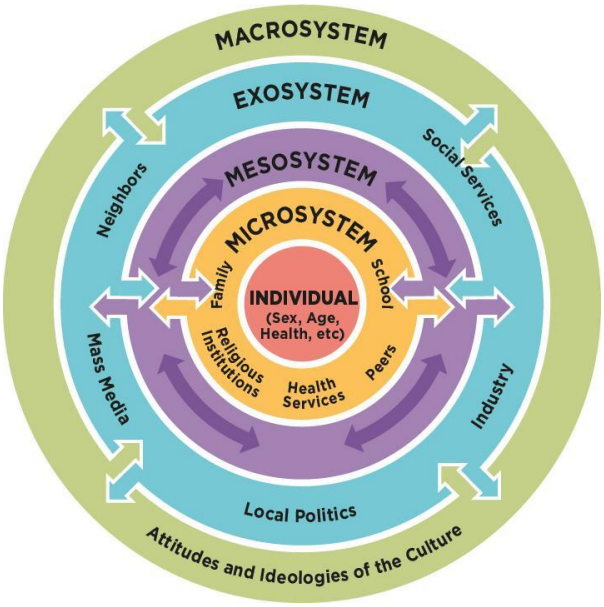


Figure 3. Bronfenbrenner Ecological System's Theory

At Sandwell Academy, we value the relationships that we have with parents and carers, and we work hard to develop these throughout a student's time at the Academy. For students identified through Year 6 transition as struggling with their mental health, a 'Meet the Team' coffee morning is held to alleviate some of the concerns that parents/carers have about such a pivotal time in their child's development. This is supplemented by numerous opportunities to meet the Inclusion and Welfare team throughout the Academic Year.

Our Personal Tutor (PT) system ensures that parents have a direct point of contact with the Academy, and communication is channelled through this system. The Personal Tutor meets with their tutees each day and provides holistic support for them during their time at the Academy.

The Welfare Team are available to meet with families who feel that they are struggling with matters related to emotional wellbeing and mental health, and support can be sought and sign-posted. Where deemed necessary, an Early Help assessment may be completed to ensure that the necessary professionals become engaged.

9. Targeted Support and Appropriate Referral

When supporting students who are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing, timely intervention is crucial. In order for this to happen, we take measures to ensure that our referral processes are simple and efficient:

- Inclusion Referral form makes use of a 'tick-box' approach to prompt staff on what to look out for
- Students can self-refer for counselling through Student Reception
- Our information report provides clear guidance to parents/carers wanting to refer their child
- Academy's 'Emotional Wellbeing' webpage sign-posts to numerous sources of support
- Central SEN and Safeguarding email addresses to support timely triaging
- CPD on mental health and wellbeing to support staff to identify signs of poor wellbeing

Mental health support takes numerous forms within the Academy, and can be broadly separated into three distinct waves:

Wave	Description	Example
1	Universal support	• Emotionally responsive teaching • Pastoral system, including PTs, Pastoral Managers and Heads of Year • A behaviour policy which prioritises relationships, emotion coaching and restorative approaches
2	Additional support within the Academy	• Bespoke mentoring or mentoring programmes • SEMH interventions, including 'Starve the Gremlin' CBT sessions • Social groups • Lunch Club • Art or Music Therapy • Counselling, including for staff • Place2Be/Place2Talk
3	Additional support from external services and professionals	• Inclusion Support – SEMH Advisory Teachers • CAMHS • Murray Hall/Kaleidoscope/Healthy Minds • Educational Psychologist, including for staff • REACH Psychology • Professional supervision for staff from external services

10. Ethos and Environment

Whilst targeted support and intervention may be required at times, a positive school ethos and emotionally-fulfilling environment can work proactively to reduce poor mental health. At Sandwell Academy, our culture is built upon our core values:

- **To be brave** – to step outside of our comfort zone and persevere despite setbacks
- **To be kind** – to treat others with respect and to regularly demonstrate empathy
- **To be proud** – to celebrate success and to act in accordance with our personal and collective values

Our Academy building is well cared for, and we take pride in the fantastic facilities that we boast. Our corridors display photographs of student successes, including Academy performances, trips and excellent examples of work. Our Academy house system helps to build a sense of identity, with students working to contribute to a wider, collective success. School events help to build this sense of community: sports days, Sandwell Run, The Voice and other opportunities are enjoyed by staff and students alike. Students are encouraged to consider their influence on wider social causes, and charitable work is a core feature of the house system.

The Academy's Session 3 programme is designed to support students to develop personal interests and build connections with like-minded peers. Clubs such as 'Chess Club', 'Dungeons and Dragons Club' and 'Science Club' are popular amongst students.

Celebrating success is a key feature of the Academy's rewards policy, and we endeavour to create a culture in which students are regularly praised for behaving according to the Academy's values. Our 'Star Student' system highlights excellence within the Academy and promotes this through our weekly broadcasts to ensure that others within the school community can share in this.

Our ‘Oaklands Centre’ offers a dedicated space for nurturing interventions to take place. It is the hub of the Inclusion Team, and boasts areas designed specifically for mentoring and collaborative work. The Welfare Hub is also accessible to students throughout the day should they wish to report concerns or speak to our Safeguarding team.

11. References

Anderson, D. L., & Graham, A. P. (2016). Improving student wellbeing: Having a say at school. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *27*(3), 348-366.

Graham, A., Powell, M. A., & Truscott, J. (2016). Facilitating student well-being: relationships do matter. *Educational Research*, *58*(4), 366-383.

Härkönen, U. (2001). The Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory of human development.

Hascher, T., & Waber, J. (2021). Teacher well-being: A systematic review of the research literature from the year 2000–2019. *Educational research review*, *34*, 100411.

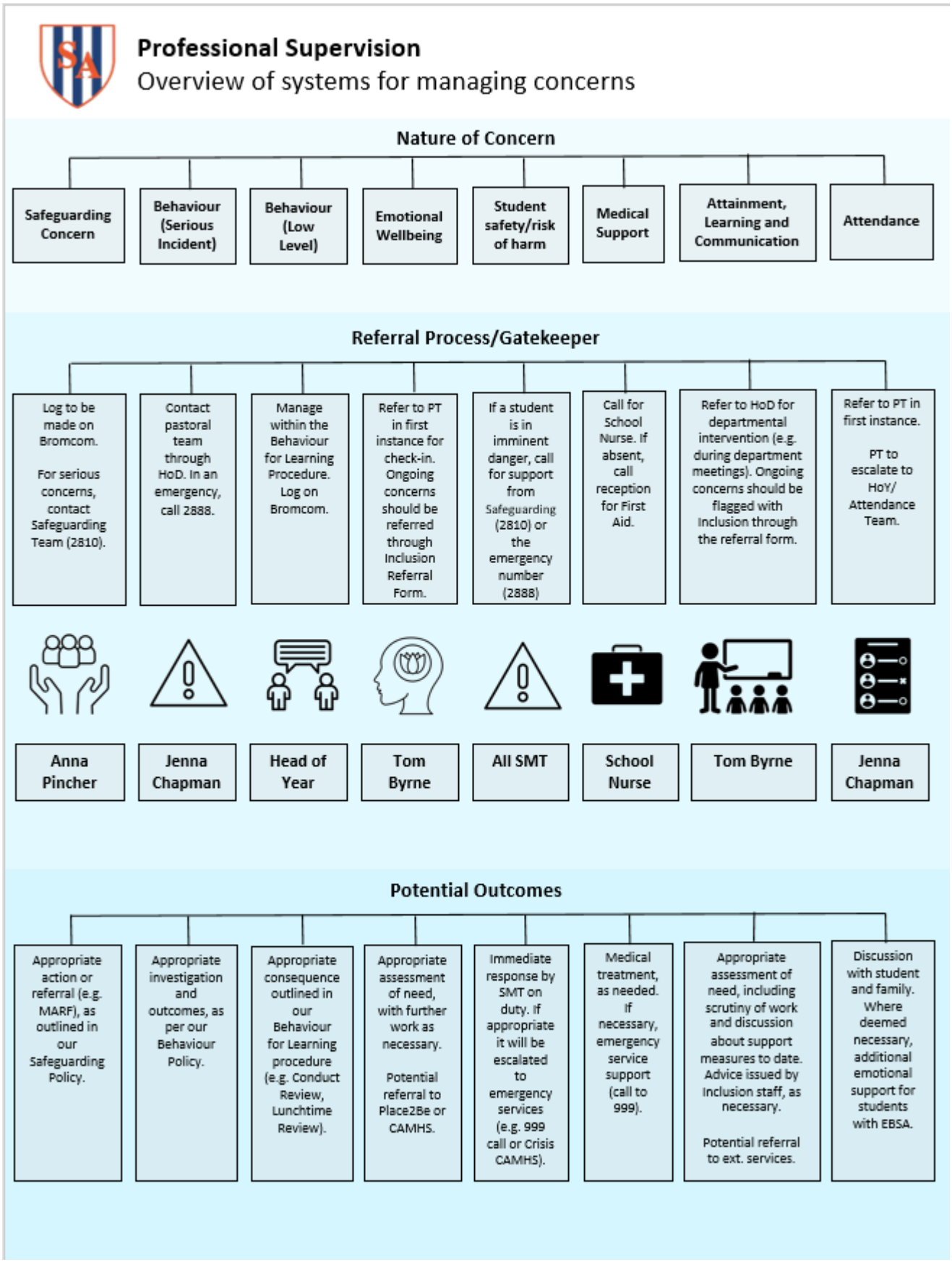
Kern, M. L., Waters, L. E., Adler, A., & White, M. A. (2015). A multidimensional approach to measuring well-being in students: Application of the PERMA framework. *The journal of positive psychology*, *10*(3), 262-271.

Spilt, J. L., Koomen, H. M., & Thijs, J. T. (2011). Teacher wellbeing: The importance of teacher–student relationships. *Educational psychology review*, *23*, 457-477.

Willis, A., Hyde, M., & Black, A. (2019). Juggling with both hands tied behind my back: Teachers’ views and experiences of the tensions between student well-being concerns and academic performance improvement agendas. *American Educational Research Journal*, *56*(6), 2644-2673.

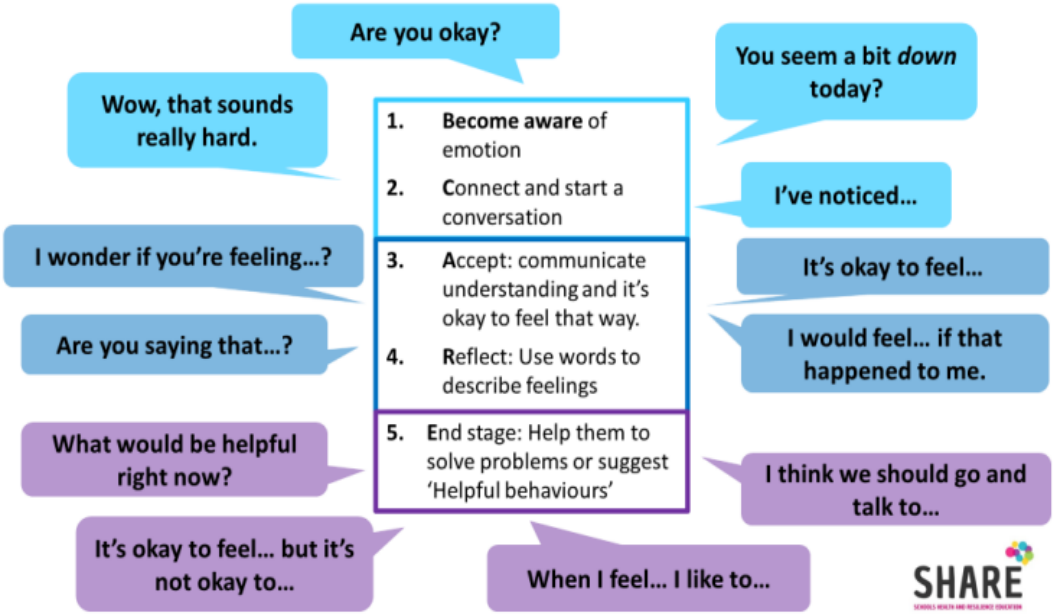
12. Appendices

Appendix A – Academy Referral Processes



Appendix B – Emotion Coaching Script

1. **Become aware of emotion.** Especially if it is low intensity (such as disappointment or frustration).
2. **Connect.** View their emotions as opportunities for connection and teaching.
3. **Accept.** Listen and accept their emotions: avoid judgement.
4. **Reflect.** Help them use words to describe what they feel.
5. **End stage.** If appropriate, help them to problem solve. You may also communicate that all wishes and feelings are acceptable, but some behaviours are not.



Promoting Wellbeing in the Classroom – Teacher Tips

Seligman's PERMA Model of Wellbeing (2012) is useful in conceptualising the specific components which contribute to how we feel. According to this model, we require the following:

Positive Emotion – including pride, joy, happiness, gratitude, amusement and compassion
Engagement – living in the moment and focusing on the task at hand
Relationships – feeling supported, loved or valued by those around you
Meaning – the need to have or find a sense of value or meaning in what we do
Achievement – working towards and meeting goals, mastering skills and finding motivation

What can we do to support students' wellbeing?

Positive Emotion
- ✓ Make praise a consistent and regular feature in your lessons
- ✓ Be understanding and approach management of lessons with empathy (start challenging conversations from a point of concern – 'I'm worried that your behaviour is _____ which is unlike you' – rather than disapproval/annoyance)
- ✓ Encourage students to reflect on successes within the classroom regularly

Engagement
- ✓ Research shows that people who take part in activities which play to their strengths for a week show a marked improvement in their wellbeing. Try, as far as is practicable, to include short activities in your lessons which are targeted to students' strengths. This will improve their motivation for the subsequent, more challenging activities

Relationships
- ✓ Reaffirm to students that your role is one of unconditional support, regardless of instances where behaviour management is needed
- ✓ Take the time to ask students about their experiences/their day, and show a genuine interest

Meaning
- ✓ Encourage students to join Session 3s/clubs to build a sense of belonging
- ✓ Reaffirm that within their class/PT, they are part of a team
- ✓ Encourage participation in house activities and praise this

Achievement
- ✓ Create an opportunity for success in each lesson, and build opportunities to reflect on previous successes
- ✓ Set appropriate and measurable targets, and limit these so that students can experience regular success
- ✓ Praise students' endeavours – achievement is relative to each child