GEMS Metropole School
AL WAHA

مدرسة جيمس متروبول الواحة

Mental Health Policy

Approved by:	Mr. Jeremy Hallum
Last reviewed on:	July 2, 2025
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MISSION

Lead, nurture and succeed.

VISION

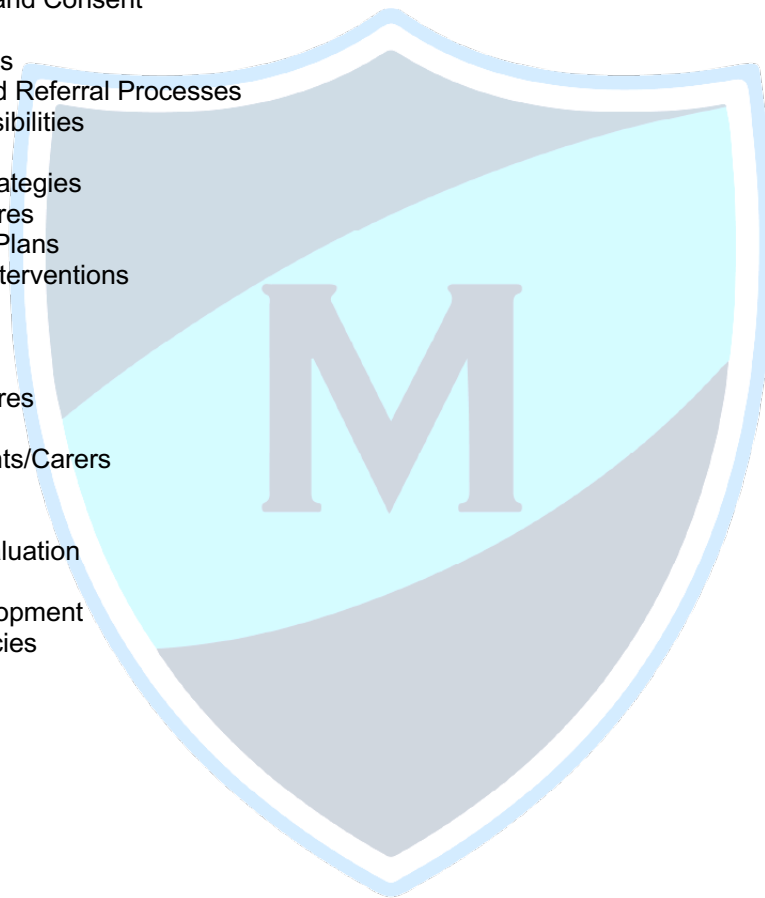A sustainable and inclusive community hub, nurturing future leaders.

Nurturing LEADERSHIP

This policy is applied at MTW alongside our school's vision, mission and values.

Contents:

1. Introduction

GEMS Metropole School Al Waha (MTW) recognises the critical importance of mental health in fostering the holistic development of our students and staff. This Mental Health Policy sets out a clear framework for promoting mental well-being, preventing difficulties, and supporting anyone in need. While aligned with national regulators (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA and MOE) and guided by international best practice, the policy reflects MTW's context, culture and core values of respect, kindness, curiosity, confidence and creativity. It underpins the inclusive ethos of the school and supports our commitment to nurturing resilient, well-rounded learners.

2. Importance of a Mental Health Policy

A clear mental health policy enables MTW to provide a structured, whole-school approach to promoting well-being. It helps cultivate an environment where every individual feels safe, supported and empowered to reach their potential. By defining roles, procedures and partnerships with families, health professionals and community organisations, the policy ensures early identification of concerns, timely interventions and consistent support for our diverse school community. It also guides the development of evidence-informed programmes such as social-emotional learning, stress-management initiatives and targeted support for students and staff who may be at greater risk.

3. Vision and Mission

"We place the greatest of importance on the simple, yet powerful human values of kindness, respect, empathy and compassion. We consider these crucial attributes that will equip our young people for the exciting yet challenging future that awaits them, enabling them to truly transform the world for the better as the change-makers they are." – Mr Sunny Varkey, GEMS Education Founder

Vision
Every member of the MTW community thrives in an environment that champions mental health, resilience and personal growth, allowing them to live our values of respect, kindness, curiosity, confidence and creativity.

Mission
To build a proactive, inclusive and supportive system that empowers students and staff to understand, protect and enhance their mental health, enabling them to flourish academically, socially and emotionally.

4. Policy Statement

MTW is committed to promoting positive mental health and emotional well-being for all students, families and staff. We aim to create a culture of openness where everyone feels able to discuss mental health, seek help early and receive appropriate, compassionate support.

• Mental health is recognised as integral to overall well-being and given parity with physical health.
• Stigma and discrimination related to mental health are actively challenged to foster acceptance and understanding.
• Mental health strategies are embedded in daily school life, ensuring early identification and effective management of emerging issues.
• Students and staff are equipped with knowledge and practical tools through ongoing awareness campaigns, workshops and training.

5. Aims and Objectives

1. **Promote Mental Health Awareness:** Increase understanding of mental health among students, staff, and parents.
2. **Early Intervention:** Support in Identifying mental health concerns promptly.
3. **Collaborative Efforts:** Work with families, external agencies, and regulatory bodies to deliver holistic care.
4. **Policy Compliance:** Align with KHDA and MOE standards while adopting international best practices.

6. Definitions

Mental health is defined as the state of an individual's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how people think, feel, and behave, enabling them to handle life's challenges, maintain relationships, and achieve their goals. Maintaining good mental health ensures that individuals can thrive both personally and academically.

Challenges such as anxiety, depression, or other emotional difficulties can impact learning, communication, and social engagement. Early support and intervention play a key role in mitigating these effects and fostering resilience. GEMS recognises mental health as a foundational pillar for overall success.

7. Whole-School Approach

A whole-school approach integrates mental health into every aspect of school life, ensuring a collective commitment to fostering well-being. At GEMS Metropole School Al Waha, this approach includes:

- Involving students, staff, and parents in initiatives that promote mental health awareness and proactive care.
- Providing comprehensive education on mental health topics and equipping the community with self-care tools.
- Offering targeted support for those experiencing challenges while addressing stigma to encourage open conversations.

This approach creates a unified framework where early identification of needs and effective interventions lead to improved outcomes for all members of the school community.

8. Scope of Mental Health Services

Mental health services provided include:

1. **Awareness Campaigns:** Workshops and activities promoting mental health literacy.
2. **Counselling Services:** Individual and group sessions for students and staff.
3. **Immediate Wellbeing Support**: Initial response and support for students experiencing acute distress, with onward referrals where needed**.**
4. **Referral Pathways:** Collaboration with external specialists when required.
5. **Wellness Resources:** Provision of designated wellness spaces.
6. **Screening Tools:** Wellbeing Monitoring: Student emotional wellbeing is tracked through regular check-ins and the Upstrive Wellbeing app, which enables students to self-report concerns and request support in real time.

9. Framework and Guidelines

9.1 Confidentiality and Consent

- Confidentiality is maintained unless there is a safeguarding concern.
- Students are informed about the limits of confidentiality during the first session.
- Parental consent is required for primary students; informed consent is sought from secondary students.

9.2 Safeguarding

- Mental health professionals collaborate with Safeguarding Leads.
- Safeguarding concerns are reported according to GEMS Safeguarding Policy.

9.3 Ethical Practices

- Adherence to Professional Guidelines: MTW Counsellors and Wellbeing Team follow ethical standards outlined by internationally recognised professional bodies such as the British Psychological Society (BPS), the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), or equivalent regulatory organisations. Where applicable, counsellors must also comply with local UAE laws, regulations and guidelines, including those set by relevant authorities such as KHDA.
- Commitment to Continuous Professional Development (CPD): All counsellors in MTW are required to engage in regular professional development to stay updated on the latest evidence-based practices, cultural competencies, and mental health trends relevant to their diverse school communities in the UAE.
- Cultural Sensitivity: As many counsellors in the UAE come from international backgrounds, they must ensure culturally sensitive and inclusive practices that respect the multicultural and multilingual student population of the region. Our MTW counsellors adhere to the culturally sensitive and inclusive practices of the UAE.
- Professional Accountability: Counsellors should maintain active memberships with accredited professional organisations and stay informed about ethical practices in both their home countries and the UAE. This ensures alignment with global standards while meeting the unique needs of their school settings.

9.4 Intervention and Referral Processes

- A tiered support system is employed:
    - **Tier 1:** Universal prevention strategies for all students.
    - **Tier 2:** Targeted interventions for students at risk.
    - **Tier 3:** Intensive support for significant mental health challenges.
- Clear referral pathways ensure timely and appropriate support.

10. Roles and Responsibilities

1. **School Leadership:** Foster a culture of mental health awareness and allocate resources for initiatives.
2. **Mental Health Professionals:** Deliver evidence-based interventions and maintain confidentiality.
3. **Teachers and Staff:** Identify and refer students showing signs of distress.
4. **Parents and Guardians:** Support mental health initiatives and maintain communication with the school.
5. **Students:** Engage in mental health programmes and seek help when needed.

11. Key Staff Members

This policy ensures all staff share responsibility for promoting students' mental health, with specific roles designated to key personnel such as:

- Mental health leads and school counsellors
- Leadership team members overseeing well-being
- Safeguarding leads and deputies
- Learning support coordinators
- School nurses or health officers
- Well-being champions
- Designated teachers or mentors

The school's mental health team works collaboratively with other staff to organise whole-school initiatives, provide training, and ensure staff are equipped with the necessary knowledge and resources to support mental health effectively. Concerns about a student's mental health should initially be directed to the school counsellors or designated leads.

For high-risk cases or situations where immediate harm is a concern, the school's safeguarding procedures must be followed.

At GEMS Metropole Al Waha (MTW), the counselling team is phase-specific to ensure developmental needs are met across the school. Our Primary Counsellor (Ms Rekha) and Secondary Counsellor (Ms Priscilla) provide accessible, targeted support for students in FS1 to Year 10. The counselling team is line-managed by the Head of Inclusion and Wellbeing Lead, who ensures strategic alignment with the school's wider safeguarding, pastoral and inclusion systems. Counsellors are visible, trusted members of the school community and collaborate closely with teachers, families and external specialists to ensure timely and holistic support.

12. Implementation Strategies

- Integrate mental health topics into the curriculum.
- Conduct regular training sessions for staff on mental health awareness and intervention.
- Establish wellness hubs and student-led mental health initiatives.
- Termly "Staff Lunch with SLT" events provide opportunities for informal feedback and strengthen wellbeing-focused dialogue between staff and senior leadership.

13. Managing Disclosures

- Students disclosing mental health concerns are supported in a confidential and non-judgemental manner.
- Disclosures are documented and shared with relevant personnel only on a need-to-know basis.
- Safety plans are developed for high-risk situations, involving parents or guardians where appropriate.

14. Individual Support Plans

When a student is identified as having significant mental health challenges or receiving external support, an Individual Support Plan (ISP) will be developed. This plan ensures that the student's needs are met comprehensively and collaboratively by involving:
- The student and their family or guardians.

- Relevant school staff, including counsellors and teachers.

- External specialists or organisations as needed, *with consent from the student's parent or guardian.*

Key considerations:

- **Severity of Challenges:** For students with severe mental health difficulties, alternative educational provisions may be explored, such as home-based tutoring or enrolment in specialised therapeutic programmes.

- **Safety and Well-being:** The safety of all students remains paramount. ISPs will outline accommodations to support the student's needs while ensuring a conducive learning environment for all.

- **Monitoring and Adjustments:** Regular reviews ensure ISPs remain effective, with adjustments made based on the student's progress and feedback.

- **Alternative Options:** Tailored learning paths, such as online programmes or therapeutic school placements, may be considered to provide a supportive environment.

15. Assessment and Interventions

GEMS addresses the mental health needs of students through:

1. **Identifying Concerns:** Through screenings and staff observations.

2. **Providing Support:** Access to counselling, therapy, and other resources.

3. **Safe Environment:** Promoting emotional support through initiatives like online courses, art therapy, and tailored resources.

4. **Collaborative Planning:** Teachers, parents, and students work together on support plans.

5. **Monitor Progress:** Regular assessments and updates ensure that interventions remain effective and aligned with the student's evolving needs.

16. Signposting
To ensure staff, students, and parents are aware of available support and resources:
- Information on mental health services is disseminated through newsletters, websites, and noticeboards.

- Key details include:

  o **What help is available.**

  o **Who the support is aimed at.**

  o **How to access it.**

  o **Why support is beneficial.**

  o **What to expect next.**

17. Warning Signs

Common mental health warning signs include:

o **Mood Changes:** Increased irritability, anxiety, or prolonged sadness.

o **Behavioural Changes:** Withdrawal from social activities, eating or sleeping disturbances.

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o **Difficulty Concentrating:** Noticeable decline in academic performance.

o **Loss of Interest:** Reduced engagement in previously enjoyed activities.

o **Expressions of Self-Harm or Suicidal Thoughts:** Immediate action is required in such cases to ensure safety.

18. Targeted Support

Support for students at greater risk includes:

- **Safe and Supportive Environment:** Fostering inclusivity and a sense of belonging.

- **Counselling Services:** Tailored interventions for students facing challenges.

- **Collaboration with External Agencies:** Working with community resources for additional support.

- **Education and Awareness:** Training staff to identify and address issues specific to at-risk individuals, including those affected by domestic violence or familial mental health challenges.

19. Managing Disclosures

When students disclose mental health concerns, staff ensure:

- Support is calm, non-judgemental, and confidential.

- Necessary steps are taken to involve relevant stakeholders while maintaining trust.

- Documentation includes the date, the name of the staff member involved, and agreed next steps.

- Parents and guardians are informed when appropriate and involved in the support process.

20. Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality is critical in mental health care:

- Information is shared only on a need-to-know basis to ensure privacy.

- Students are informed about:

  o **Who** will receive the information.

  o **What** will be shared.

  o **Why** sharing is necessary.

  o **When** the information will be disclosed.

- Confidentiality fosters trust, encouraging students to seek help.

21. Working with Parents/Carers

Parents play a crucial role in supporting student mental health. When engaging with parents:

- Consider the meeting venue, attendees, and expected outcomes.

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- Provide resources and guidance to help them support their child.

- Maintain open communication and schedule follow-ups to address ongoing concerns.

22. Supporting Parents

The school works in partnership with parents to promote emotional health and well-being:

1. Providing access to resources that promote social and emotional well-being.

2. Sharing information about mental health issues through newsletters, websites, and events.

3. Offering parenting programmes led by community nurses, counsellors, or other trained professionals.

23. Supporting Peers

Peers of students experiencing mental health challenges may need support. GEMS provides:

1. **Guidance for Peers:** Conversations with the affected student and their family to determine:

   o Appropriate support methods.

   o What peers should and should not know.

   o Warning signs indicating their friend needs further help.

2. **Peer Support Sessions:** Individual or group sessions to address concerns and offer guidance.

3. **Education and Resources:** Ensuring peers know where to access help and understand their role in providing support.

24. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Regular assessments and reviews ensure the effectiveness of mental health services.

- Annual policy reviews incorporate new research, regulatory updates, and feedback from stakeholders.

- Data-driven improvements ensure the policy adapts to the evolving needs of the school community.

- Student, parent and staff voice are gathered annually through surveys and focus groups, and findings are used to inform wellbeing priorities in the School Development Plan.

25. Training

Training for staff and students includes:

1. Understanding mental health issues and recognising signs.

2. Managing stress and promoting well-being.

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3. Supporting peers and creating an inclusive culture.

4. Emergency protocols for mental health crises.

5. Ongoing professional development for staff directly supporting students with mental health challenges.

6. Collaboration with mental health professionals and organisations for enhanced support.

All staff at MTW receive regular training on mental health awareness, with a particular focus on early identification and supporting vulnerable groups through inclusive classroom practice.

26. Professional Development

- Staff workshops focus on mental health awareness, resilience building, and intervention strategies.

- Training opportunities with external organisations to improve skills and access additional resources.

- Regular sessions to update staff on best practices for supporting mental health.

27. Links to Other Policies

This policy is supported by:
- GEMS Counselling Policy

- GEMS Safeguarding Policy.

- GEMS Wellbeing Policy.

- GEMS Inclusion Policy.