Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

November 2026

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1. Introduction

At Physis Academy, we are committed to supporting the positive mental health and wellbeing of our whole school community (children and young people, staff, parents and carers and members of the wider Physis Group). We have a supportive and caring ethos, and our approach is trauma informed, respectful and kind, where each individual and contribution is valued.

We endeavour to ensure that all of our pupils are supported to reach their potential or to access help when they need it. We aim to support them so that they can manage times of change and stress and to ensure that they learn about what they can do to maintain positive mental health, what affects their mental health, how they can help reduce the stigma around mental health issues, and where they can go if they need help and support.

Physis Academy is a specialist setting for pupils aged 11-18 who may be at risk or who have been victims of exploitation, trafficking, abuse, and neglect. We offer day pupil places for pupils who may be experiencing anxiety, self-esteem difficulties and or attachment difficulties. At Physis Academy we know that everyone, particularly our pupils, can have life challenges and adverse experiences that can make us vulnerable and at times, anyone may need additional emotional support. We take the view that positive mental health is everybody's business and that we all have a role to play.

Equality and Non-Discrimination

This policy has been developed with due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. The school is committed to:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation in mental health support
- Advancing equality of mental health opportunity for all pupils
- Fostering good relations through inclusive mental health practices

We recognize that mental health needs and experiences vary across protected characteristics, and that certain groups face disproportionate mental health challenges and barriers to support. This policy ensures that all pupils, regardless of their protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation), receive appropriate, accessible, and culturally sensitive mental health support.

2. Aims

The underlining ethos of the school is humanistic in that we maintain a strong commitment to our belief that given the appropriate level of engagement, support, resource, and encouragement, that children and the young people we work with can make sense of their past experiences, make full use of opportunities on offer, and subsequently live fulfilled and productive adult lives.

At Physis Academy we take a whole school approach to promoting positive mental health, aiming to help our pupils become more resilient, happy, and successful and to work in a pro-active way to avoid problems arising. We do this by:

- Creating and applying consistent ethos, policies and behaviours that support mental health and wellbeing
- Adhering to a positive, emotion coaching approach to behaviour management
- Helping pupils socially to form and maintain healthy relationships
- Helping pupils to feel comfortable about sharing any concerns or worries
- Teaching pupils' emotional skills and an awareness of mental health so that they understand their emotions and feelings better
- Promoting self-esteem and ensuring pupils understand their importance in our community and the world

- Helping pupils to become resilient learners and to manage setbacks
- Planning support to meet pupils' mental health needs, including working with our clinical services, parents/carers and other agencies involved with the young person
- Supporting and training staff to develop their skills and their own resilience
- Developing an open culture where it's normal to talk about mental health
- Recognizing and addressing the specific mental health needs of pupils with protected characteristics

Gender-Specific Mental Health Considerations

The school recognizes that mental health needs and presentations can vary by gender:

For female pupils:

- Girls typically have higher rates of internalizing disorders (anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm)
- Girls may experience specific mental health impacts from sexual trauma, exploitation, and gender-based violence
- Body image concerns and societal pressures on appearance and behaviour may affect mental health

For male pupils:

- Boys typically have higher rates of externalizing disorders (conduct disorders, substance misuse)
- Boys may be less likely to seek help or express emotions due to societal expectations around masculinity
- Boys may express mental health difficulties through anger, risk-taking, or behavioural problems rather than verbally

The school provides gender-informed mental health support that addresses the specific needs of both male and female pupils who have experienced trauma, exploitation, and abuse, while recognizing that individual pupils may not conform to typical gender patterns.

We promote a mentally healthy environment through:

- Promoting and encouraging a sense of belonging

- Promoting pupil voice and opportunities to participate in decision-making
- Celebrating academic and non-academic achievements
- Providing opportunities to develop a sense of worth through taking responsibility for themselves and others
- Providing opportunities to reflect
- Enabling access to appropriate support that is culturally sensitive and accessible to all pupils
- Mental Health and PSHE for all pupils, delivered in age-appropriate and accessible ways
- An Emotion Coaching approach

We carry out our aims through:

- A universal, whole school approach
- Support for pupils going through recent difficulties including bereavement
- Specialised, targeted approaches aimed at pupils' long-term difficulties that can be attributed to their adverse childhood experiences and may also include attachment difficulties
- Tutorials and whole school assemblies that focus on mental health, resilience and wellbeing
- Reasonable adjustments for pupils with mental health disabilities and pupils with other disabilities accessing mental health support

3. Roles and responsibilities

While all staff have a responsibility to promote the mental health of pupils, staff with a specific responsibility include:

Mental Health Lead - Domoni Supple (Assistant Head Teacher)

Attachment Lead – Katherine Mooney (Assistant Headteacher)

Designated Safeguarding Lead – James Nation (Headteacher)

These staff lead and work with all staff to co-ordinate whole school activities to promote positive mental health and wellbeing, including working with the PSHE teacher and Physis clinicians regarding teaching about mental health. They also provide advice and support to staff and organize training and updates. They

also liaise with the Physis clinician and other services for further advice and support and to make individual referrals as appropriate.

Specific Responsibilities

The Mental Health Lead and Attachment Lead will:

- Ensure mental health support is accessible and appropriate for all pupils, including those with protected characteristics
- Monitor mental health outcomes across different pupil groups to identify any disparities
- Coordinate training on equality, diversity, and mental health for all staff
- Work with specialist services to ensure pupils can access culturally appropriate, LGBTQ+-affirming, and disability-accessible mental health support
- Ensure early identification systems recognize protected characteristic-related mental health risks
- Report to governors on mental health outcomes and equality considerations

4. Teaching about Mental Health

The skills, knowledge and understanding needed by our pupils to keep themselves mentally healthy and safe are included as part of our developmental RSHE curriculum, which is lead by our Mental Health Lead, Domoni Supple.

Inclusive and Accessible Mental Health Teaching

Mental health teaching will be inclusive, comprehensive, and accessible to all pupils. This includes:

Content that addresses diverse mental health needs:

- LGBTQ+ mental health, including minority stress, gender dysphoria, coming out, and where to access LGBTQ+-specific support
- The impact of racism, discrimination, and racial trauma on mental health
- Cultural differences in understanding and expressing mental health
- Gender-specific mental health issues including eating disorders, body image, impact of sexual trauma, and healthy masculinity

- Disability and mental health, including the relationship between physical/learning disabilities and mental health
- Religious and cultural perspectives on mental health
- Intersectional mental health vulnerabilities
- Age-appropriate content recognizing different developmental stages (early, mid, and late adolescence)

Accessible delivery:

- Simplified language and visual supports for pupils with learning disabilities
- Alternative communication methods for pupils with communication difficulties
- Concrete examples and practical strategies
- Culturally relevant examples and scenarios
- Materials that represent diverse pupils and experiences
- Translation and interpretation support for EAL pupils where needed

Challenging stigma:

- Addressing mental health stigma in all communities, including cultural and religious stigma
- Promoting positive representations of people with mental health experiences from diverse backgrounds
- Creating safe spaces for pupils to discuss mental health concerns

The school recognizes that mental health needs vary by age and developmental stage. Mental health teaching will be age-appropriate and developmentally sensitive, with particular attention to:

- Early adolescence (11-13): Identity formation, puberty, peer relationships, transition to secondary school
- Mid-adolescence (14-16): Increased independence, exam pressure, peer influence, risk-taking
- Late adolescence (17-18): Preparation for adulthood, leaving care planning, future anxiety

5. Assessment, intervention, and support

All concerns are reported to the designated adults within the school and needs are assessed through a triage approach with the designated adults, parents/carers, and clinical services to ensure the pupil gets the support they need, either from within the school, from the clinical services or from an external specialist service.

At Physis Academy we are able to request consultation with Physis clinicians which allows for reflective practice and discussion about specific issues and or needs.

The school will make use of Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires to assess and track wellbeing. The Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires are also completed by parents/carers and shared with Clinical Services to track wellbeing and progress.

Culturally Appropriate and Accessible Assessment

Mental health assessment will be:

- **Culturally appropriate:** Assessment tools will be culturally validated and recognize cultural differences in expressing mental health difficulties. Assessments will be available in multiple languages where needed.
- **Accessible:** Assessments will be adapted for pupils with learning disabilities, communication difficulties, or sensory needs. Alternative assessment methods will be used where appropriate.
- **Comprehensive:** Assessment will consider the impact of discrimination, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other forms of prejudice on mental health.
- **Intersectional:** Assessment will recognize that pupils hold multiple identities and may face compounded mental health risks due to intersecting protected characteristics.

Access to Appropriate Support

The school will ensure pupils can access:

- Culturally appropriate mental health support that recognizes different cultural understandings of mental health, family structures, and help-seeking behaviours
- LGBTQ+-affirming support for LGBTQ+ pupils, recognizing the extremely high mental health risks this group faces
- Gender-affirming support for transgender and gender-questioning pupils, including support for gender dysphoria

- Disability-accessible support with reasonable adjustments for pupils with mental health disabilities and pupils with other disabilities
- Faith-sensitive support that respects pupils' religious beliefs while ensuring appropriate mental health care
- Perinatal mental health support for pregnant pupils and young mothers
- Age-appropriate support that recognizes different developmental stages

Addressing Barriers to Support

The school recognizes that certain groups face barriers to accessing mental health support and will actively address these, including:

- Cultural stigma around mental health
- Mistrust of mental health services due to historical and ongoing discrimination
- Language barriers for EAL pupils and their families
- Communication difficulties for pupils with speech/language needs
- Fear of discrimination from mental health services (particularly for LGBTQ+ pupils)
- Lack of culturally or religiously appropriate services

Reasonable Adjustments

The school has a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils. This includes:

- Pupils with mental health disabilities (anxiety, depression, PTSD, attachment disorders, eating disorders, self-harm)
- Pupils with other disabilities accessing mental health support

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- Accessible mental health teaching (simplified language, visual supports, concrete examples)
- Alternative communication methods (art, music, movement, visual tools)
- Sensory-friendly environments for autistic pupils
- Extended time for processing emotions

- Adapted assessment tools
- Individualized support approaches
- Quiet spaces and sensory breaks

6. Early identification and warning signs

All staff will be vigilant in identifying a range of possible difficulties that may be contributing to a pupil's poor mental health, including:

- Attendance
- Punctuality
- Relationships
- Approach to learning
- Physical indicators
- Poor behaviour patterns
- Recent bereavement
- Health indicators
- Experiencing discrimination, racism, homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, ableism, or other prejudice
- Gender dysphoria or distress related to gender identity
- Minority stress from being LGBTQ+ or from other minoritized identities
- Religious conflict or trauma
- Pregnancy and perinatal mental health concerns
- Cultural isolation or lack of affirmation of identity
- Bullying or harassment related to protected characteristics
- Forced marriage concerns

School staff may also become aware of warning signs which indicate a pupil is experiencing mental health or emotional wellbeing issues. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should communicate their concerns with the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Mental Health Lead or SENDCo as appropriate.

Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating/sleeping habits (including signs of eating disorders)
- Becoming socially withdrawn
- Changes in activity and mood
- Talking about self-harm or suicide
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness, or loss of hope
- Repeated physical pain, nausea, or illness with no evident cause
- An increase in lateness or absenteeism
- Changes in gender expression or distress about gender identity
- Expressing experiences of discrimination or prejudice
- Withdrawal from cultural or religious activities
- Expressing conflict between identity and family/community expectations

Recognizing Cultural Differences in Mental Health Presentation

Staff will be aware that mental health difficulties may present differently across cultures and for pupils with different protected characteristics. Some pupils may:

- Express distress through physical symptoms (somatization)
- Show behavioural changes rather than verbal expression of distress
- Lack vocabulary to describe mental health difficulties
- Present differently due to neurodevelopmental conditions (e.g., autistic pupils, pupils with ADHD)

Specific Safeguarding Considerations

LGBTQ+ pupils face extremely high rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation (estimated 40-50% have attempted suicide). Staff will be particularly vigilant in identifying and responding to mental health concerns in LGBTQ+ pupils, and immediate support and risk assessment will be provided.

Transgender pupils face extremely high rates of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and gender dysphoria-related distress. Gender dysphoria will be recognized as a mental health need requiring compassionate, affirming support.

Pupils from minoritized ethnic backgrounds may experience racial trauma from experiencing or witnessing racism. Racism and discrimination are significant mental health risk factors.

Pregnant pupils and young mothers face elevated mental health risks including perinatal anxiety and postnatal depression (affects 10-20% of pregnant women and new mothers).

7. Equality and diversity in mental health support

Recognition of Protected Characteristics and Mental Health

The school recognizes that mental health needs and experiences vary significantly across protected characteristics, and that certain groups face disproportionate mental health challenges:

Age

- Mental health needs vary by developmental stage (early, mid, and late adolescence)
- Older pupils approaching 18 may face specific anxieties about leaving care and transitioning to independence
- Younger pupils may lack emotional vocabulary to express mental health difficulties
- Self-harm and suicidal ideation peak in mid-adolescence

Disability

- Mental health conditions (anxiety, depression, PTSD, attachment disorders, eating disorders, self-harm) are disabilities under the Equality Act 2010 and require reasonable adjustments
- Pupils with disabilities have significantly higher rates of mental health difficulties
- Autistic pupils have higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation
- Pupils with learning disabilities may struggle to understand and express emotions
- Pupils with ADHD have higher rates of low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression
- Trauma symptoms can mimic neurodevelopmental conditions and require careful assessment

Gender Reassignment

- Transgender and gender-questioning pupils face significantly elevated mental health risks including depression (4-5 times higher), anxiety,

self-harm (40-50%), and suicidal ideation (40-50% have attempted suicide)

- Gender dysphoria causes significant distress and will be recognized as a mental health need requiring affirming support
- The school will provide gender-affirming mental health support and work with gender identity services
- Care placements will be gender-affirming
- All staff will be trained to recognize and respond to mental health needs of transgender pupils

Pregnancy and Maternity

- Pregnant pupils and young mothers face elevated mental health risks including perinatal anxiety, postnatal depression (10-15%), and social isolation
- Staff will be trained to recognize signs of perinatal mental health difficulties
- The school will work with maternity services and perinatal mental health services

Race

- Racism and discrimination are significant mental health risk factors
- Pupils from minoritized ethnic backgrounds may experience racial trauma, microaggressions, cultural dislocation, and minority stress
- Mental health support will be culturally appropriate, recognizing different cultural understandings of mental health
- The school will address barriers to accessing support including cultural stigma and mistrust of services
- Pupils will have access to mental health professionals from diverse backgrounds where possible

Religion or Belief

- Religion can be both protective and a risk factor for mental health
- Some religious communities have stigma around mental health
- Religious conflict or trauma may contribute to mental health difficulties

- Mental health support will be religiously sensitive and respect pupils' beliefs
- The school will work sensitively with pupils and families to address mental health needs in culturally and religiously appropriate ways

Sex

- Female pupils have higher rates of internalizing disorders (anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm) and experience specific mental health impacts from sexual trauma and gender-based violence
- Male pupils have higher rates of externalizing disorders and may be less likely to seek help due to societal expectations around masculinity
- The school provides gender-informed mental health support addressing the specific needs of both male and female pupils

Sexual Orientation

- LGBTQ+ pupils face significantly elevated mental health risks including depression (2-3 times higher), anxiety, self-harm (40-50%), and suicidal ideation (40% have considered suicide)
- Minority stress from discrimination, rejection, and lack of acceptance is a significant mental health risk factor
- The school will provide LGBTQ+-affirming mental health support
- Care placements will be affirming of sexual orientation
- All staff will be trained to recognize and respond to mental health needs of LGBTQ+ pupils

Intersectionality

The school recognizes that pupils hold multiple identities and may face compounded mental health risks due to intersecting protected characteristics. For example:

- LGBTQ+ pupils from minoritized ethnic backgrounds face both racism and homophobia
- Disabled LGBTQ+ pupils face both ableism and minority stress
- Transgender pupils from religious backgrounds may face conflict between gender identity and religious beliefs

All looked-after pupils have experienced trauma from the care system. Pupils with protected characteristics face additional mental health risks from

discrimination, stigma, and lack of affirmation. The school will provide intersectional, trauma-informed mental health support that addresses pupils' whole identities.

8. Working in partnership

Parents/carers can approach their child or young person's key teacher if they have mental health concerns. This information will be cascaded to the Mental Health Lead and or SENDCo for monitoring. The school will keep parents/carers informed about the mental health topics taught in PSHE and share ideas for extending and exploring this at home.

The school works closely with Physis clinicians who provide oversight to the care and supporting the needs of the pupils. There are regular meetings between Physis care homes, clinical services, and the school where any concerns can be discussed including planning support and next steps.

Partnership with Specialist Services

The school will partner with specialist mental health organizations to ensure pupils can access appropriate support, including:

- LGBTQ+ mental health services (e.g., Mermaids, Mind Out, LGBT Foundation, Stonewall)
- Culturally appropriate mental health services for pupils from minoritized ethnic backgrounds
- Disability-specialist mental health services
- Gender identity services for transgender and gender-questioning pupils
- Perinatal mental health services for pregnant pupils and young mothers
- Faith-based mental health support where appropriate and requested by pupils/families

Cultural Competence of Partners

Physis clinicians and all partner organizations will have expertise in supporting pupils with diverse protected characteristics, including:

- Cultural competence in working with pupils from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds
- LGBTQ+ affirmation and expertise in LGBTQ+ mental health
- Disability awareness and accessibility

- Understanding of intersectional mental health needs
- Training in recognizing and addressing discrimination as a mental health risk factor

Supporting Diverse Families

Mental health information and support will be accessible to all families, including:

- Translation services and interpreters for mental health meetings where needed
- Mental health information in multiple languages
- Culturally appropriate communication
- Addressing mental health stigma in culturally sensitive ways
- Recognizing different family structures and cultural approaches to mental health

9. Training

As a minimum, all staff will receive training from Physis clinicians on the Physis Recovery Model and Emotion Coaching. Staff will also receive regular training in Safeguarding which includes how to recognise and respond to mental health issues to enable them to keep pupils safe. The Minded learning portal provides free online training suitable for staff wishing to know more about a specific issue.

Equality, Diversity, and Mental Health Training

All staff will receive comprehensive training on equality, diversity, and mental health, including:

LGBTQ+ Mental Health:

- Understanding extremely high mental health risks for LGBTQ+ pupils (self-harm, suicide, depression, anxiety)
- Recognizing and responding to minority stress, gender dysphoria, and coming out
- Providing LGBTQ+-affirming support
- Understanding the impact of discrimination and lack of acceptance

Racial Trauma and Cultural Competence:

- Understanding racism and discrimination as mental health risk factors

- Recognizing racial trauma and its impact on mental health
- Providing culturally appropriate mental health support
- Understanding cultural differences in expressing and understanding mental health
- Addressing cultural stigma around mental health

Disability and Mental Health:

- Recognizing that mental health conditions are disabilities requiring reasonable adjustments
- Understanding higher mental health risks for disabled pupils
- Adapting mental health support for pupils with specific disabilities (autism, ADHD, learning disabilities)
- Providing accessible mental health teaching and support

Gender-Specific Mental Health:

- Understanding gender-specific mental health patterns (internalizing vs. externalizing disorders)
- Recognizing that boys may be less likely to seek help
- Understanding the impact of sexual trauma and gender-based violence on mental health
- Addressing eating disorders, body image, and healthy masculinity

Intersectional Mental Health:

- Understanding compounded mental health risks from intersecting protected characteristics
- Recognizing that all looked-after pupils face trauma PLUS additional risks from protected characteristics

Religious and Cultural Considerations:

- Understanding religious factors in mental health (protective and risk factors)
- Providing religiously sensitive mental health support
- Working with faith communities

Perinatal Mental Health:

- Recognizing signs of perinatal anxiety and postnatal depression
- Supporting pregnant pupils and young mothers

Unconscious Bias:

- Recognizing unconscious bias in mental health assessment and support
- Ensuring equitable access to mental health support for all pupils

Specialist Training

The Mental Health Lead and Attachment Lead will receive specialist training on supporting pupils with diverse protected characteristics, including advanced training in LGBTQ+ mental health, racial trauma, cultural competence, and disability and mental health.

10. Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, by the Headteacher or other appropriate member of the school's senior leadership team. The policy will also be approved by the school's Governing body.

Equality Monitoring of Mental Health Outcomes

The school will monitor mental health outcomes by protected characteristics where data is available and appropriate. This will include monitoring:

- Rates of mental health difficulties by protected characteristics
- Access to mental health support across different pupil groups
- Effectiveness of mental health interventions for different groups
- Pupil satisfaction with mental health support
- Any disproportionate mental health outcomes or barriers to support

The school will identify and address any disproportionate mental health outcomes or barriers to support for pupils with protected characteristics.

Pupil Voice

Pupil voice on mental health support will include pupils from diverse backgrounds to ensure their needs are met. The school will:

- Conduct pupil voice surveys on mental health support (disaggregated by protected characteristics where appropriate)

- Consult with LGBTQ+ pupils, pupils from minoritized ethnic backgrounds, disabled pupils, and other groups about their mental health needs
- Act on feedback to improve inclusivity and accessibility of mental health support

Reporting to Governors

Mental health outcomes and equality data will be reported to governors annually, including:

- Mental health outcomes by protected characteristics
- Access to mental health support across different groups
- Actions taken to address disparities
- Compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty
- Progress on implementing equality recommendations from the Equality Impact Assessment

Policy Review

Policy review will include:

- Analysis of equality monitoring data
- Consultation with pupils, staff, and families from diverse backgrounds
- Review of partnership arrangements with specialist services
- Assessment of training effectiveness
- Evaluation of whether mental health support is meeting the needs of all pupils

This policy demonstrates Physis Academy's commitment to providing inclusive, accessible, and culturally sensitive mental health support for all pupils, recognizing and addressing the specific mental health needs of pupils with protected characteristics

Signatures:	
Headteacher:	
Chair of Governors:	