Minerva Virtual Academy

Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being Policy

Minerva Virtual Academy

KEY CONTACTS

Mental Health Team	mhsupport@minervavirtual.com

INTRODUCTION

Minerva Virtual Academy (the School) is committed to promoting the positive mental health and emotional well-being of all students, staff and parents. The following policy is a guide as to how this commitment is implemented across all aspects of MVA.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

This procedure is designed to set good practice standards. However, the School recognises that best practice develops over time and, as such, will update it regularly in the light of experience and as a result of changes in legislation or its own internal organisation and policies. The procedure will be subject to a comprehensive review on an annual basis.

Policy reviewed:	September 2026
Reviewed by:	Rob Allen, Mental Health Lead Emma Davies, Assistant Vice Principal (Designated Safeguarding Lead)
Next review:	September 2027

Minerva Virtual Academy

Contents

1.0 Policy statement
2.0 Scope
3.0 Policy Aims
4.0 Key staff members
5.0 Referrals
6.0 Teaching about mental health
7.0 Signposting
8.0 Sources of support at school
9.0 Warning Signs
10.0 Targeted support
11.0 Managing disclosures
12.0 Confidentiality
13.0 Whole school approach
14.0 Supporting Peers
15.0 Training
16.0 Policy Review

1.0 Policy statement

At *Minerva Virtual Academy (MVA),* we are committed to promoting positive mental health and emotional well-being to all students, their families and members of staff. Our open culture allows students' voices to be heard, and through the use of effective policies and procedures, we ensure a safe and supportive environment for all affected - both directly and indirectly - by mental health issues. We also proactively contribute to supporting mental health at MVA by providing and sign-posting all members of the community to resources, both in-house and external, that serve as protective factors in creating and maintaining positive psychological well-being.

Minerva Virtual Academy

2.0 Scope

This policy is a guide for all MVA's Faculty, outlining MVA's approach to promoting mental health and emotional well-being. It should be read in conjunction with other relevant school policies.

3.0 Policy Aims

- Promote positive mental health and emotional well-being in all staff and students.
- Increase understanding and awareness of common mental health challenges and of challenges that are common within our specific setting.
- Enable staff to identify and respond to early warning signs of mental ill health in students.
- Enable staff to understand how and when to access support when working with young people with mental health issues.
- Provide the right support to students with mental health issues and know where to signpost them and their parents/carers for specific support.
- Develop resilience within the community and raise awareness of appropriate resilience-building techniques.
- Raise awareness amongst staff and gain recognition from SLT that staff may have mental health issues, and that they are supported in relation to looking after their wellbeing; instilling a culture of staff and student welfare where everyone is aware of signs and symptoms with effective signposting underpinned by the general ethos of the school.

Minerva Virtual Academy

4.0 Key staff members

This policy aims to ensure all staff take responsibility to promote the mental health of students; however, key members of staff have specific roles to play:

- Mental Health Lead
- Deputy Mental Health Lead
- Designated Safeguarding Leads
- Mentors
- Heads of Year/ Pastoral staff
- Wellbeing Lead
- Mental Health Lead Mentor

If a member of staff is concerned about the mental health or well-being of a student, in the first instance, they should speak to the student's mentor, Head of Year, or a member of the Mental Health team. They will then take appropriate action, including potentially contacting the student's parents/ carer or other appropriate teams within the school. If the issue poses a safeguarding risk, then the appropriate action should be taken as per the MVA Safeguarding policy.

If there is a concern that the student is high-risk or in danger of immediate harm, the school's child protection procedures must be followed.

If the child presents a high-risk medical emergency, relevant procedures should be followed, including involving the emergency services if necessary.

Minerva Virtual Academy

5.0 Referrals

When a student has been identified as having cause for concern, a referral can be made to the Mental Health team (MHT). A link to the referral form can be found on the Mental Health area of the Staff Zone.

The form gathers information that is pertinent to the student's situation, the challenges they are facing, support that may already be in place, and suggestions about what support they would benefit from moving forward. Staff making referrals record that they have done so using CPOMS.

Referrals are discussed and assigned at the weekly MHT meeting. Referrals are roughly classed into three tiers:

Tier 1: Support for the mentor by a member of the MHT.

Tier 2: A 1-2-1 intervention by a member of the MHT for between 3-6 weeks, or a group-based 1-2-1 intervention if appropriate.

Tier 3: Meeting with the parents/ carers to discuss next steps, sign-posting to external services, and support with accessing these services.

When a student is assigned to a member of the team, they will take steps to approach the mentor and/ or parents (as appropriate) before formulating a plan of action. This may involve working with the mentor to provide support, providing a direct 1-2-1 intervention, or meeting with parents to signpost them to external support services.

These actions are recorded at each stage of the process, and there is an opportunity at the weekly MHT meeting to discuss case-work and gain advice.

Please note that, in line with the ethical position of the BACP, the MHT will not provide 1-2-1 support for students already receiving external counselling support. This is to avoid emotional conflict for the student.

Also, all students referred for 1-2-1 support must be aware of the referral and have agreed to meet with a member of the team prior to the referral being made.

When the team member's work with the student is completed, the referral is formally closed, and the date of closure is recorded.

A student who has been previously referred to the MHT may be re-referred in future, but not necessarily at the same tier.

6.0 Teaching about mental health

The skills, knowledge and understanding our students need to keep themselves - and others - physically and mentally healthy and safe are included as part of our Wellbeing (PSHE) curriculum.

We follow the guidance issued by the PSHE Association, alongside the guidance from the Department for Education (DfE), to prepare us to teach about mental health and emotional health safely and sensitively. We also use this guidance to ensure we meet statutory content guidelines as set out in this policy.

Incorporating this into our curriculum at all stages is a good opportunity to promote students' wellbeing through the development of healthy coping strategies and an understanding of students' own emotions as well as those of other people.

Additionally, we will use such lessons as a vehicle for providing students who do develop difficulties with strategies to keep themselves healthy and safe, as well as supporting students to support any of their friends who are facing challenges.

We regularly signpost our students to age-appropriate and relevant organisations that can provide further external support, as well as signposting students internally to members of staff who are available to support student mental health.

Our curriculum offers discrete, embedded mental health and wellbeing learning, alongside bespoke units on the subject to offer appropriate and carefully considered information to our students.

See Section 14 for Supporting Peers

7.0 Signposting

The MHT ensures that staff, students and parents/carers are aware of the support and services available to them, and how they can access these services. The MHT regularly refers members of the community to external services on the internet by providing them with information and digital links.

Within the school, Canvas is used to share resources with students and staff by having a designated area in each year group area and in the Staff Zone.

The aim of this is to ensure students understand:

- What help is available
- Who it is aimed at
- How to access MH support

- When should they access MH support
- Why should they access MH support
- What is likely to happen next

8.0 Sources of support at school

Mentor support:

Every MVA student is allocated a mentor who meets with them one-to-one, usually every week. The mentor is the first line of support to students, and they work to mediate between them and the wider school community. The MH team provides resources and training to support mentors in their work and to help them provide effective care. When necessary, the mentors are aware of where to direct students and their parents for extra support.

Referrals

Please see item 5.0 above for information on this.

Daily Drop-ins

The MH team provides two drop-in slots for students each day. These are accessed via a link on the year group page in Canvas. Students can self-refer and book themselves in using the

online booking system. This sends a link both to the student and to the MH team. Meetings take place via Google Meet and are a 1-2-1 meeting between the student/ parent and a member of the MH team.

Clubs/ activities

MVA provides a variety of clubs and activities that are aimed at supporting specific vulnerable groups, for example neurodivergent students and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Students are informed about these regularly and encouraged to participate.

9.0 Warning Signs

Staff may become aware of warning signs that indicate a student is experiencing mental health or emotional well-being issues. These warning signs should always be taken seriously, and staff observing any of these warning signs should alert the MHT and/ or the Safeguarding team (if appropriate).

Possible warning signs, which all staff should be aware of, include:

- Physical signs of harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental
- Changes in eating / sleeping habits
- Increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn
- Changes in activity and mood
- Lowering of academic achievement
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Changes in clothing – e.g. long sleeves in warm weather

- Secretive behaviour
- Repeated physical pain or nausea with no evident cause
- An increase in lateness or absenteeism

10.0 Targeted support

We recognise that some children and young people are at greater risk of experiencing poorer mental health. For example, those who are in care, young carers, those who have had previous access to CAMHS, those living with parents/carers with a mental illness, those living in households with a history of domestic abuse, those who are neurodivergent, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and those with a school-based or other history of trauma.

The MHT works closely with key staff and families in supporting the emotional and mental health needs of students by identifying issues early, determining potential risks, and providing early intervention to prevent issues from escalating.

We ensure timely and effective identification of students who would benefit from targeted support and facilitate the appropriate referral to support services by:

- Providing specific help for those young people most at risk (or already showing signs) of social, emotional, and behavioural problems.
- Identifying and providing support for young people who are showing early signs of anxiety, emotional distress, or behavioural problems.
- Discussing options for tackling these problems with the young person and their parents/carers.

Minerva Virtual Academy

11.0 Managing disclosures

Please see the MVA Safeguarding Policy for information on how to manage disclosures made by students.

12.0 Confidentiality

If a member of staff feels it is necessary to pass on concerns about a student to the MHT, then this will ideally be first discussed with the student so they know:

- Who we are going to tell
- What we are going to tell them
- Why we need to tell them
- When we're going to tell them

Ideally, consent should be gained from the student first; however, there may be instances when information must be shared in order to safeguard their well-being.

Information about the students the MHT works with is only shared on a 'need-to-know' basis. The team discusses the students they are working with during the weekly team meeting.

In most cases, parents will always be informed about a concern, but students may want to tell their parents themselves first. If this is the case, a timescale of 24 hours is recommended to share this information before contact is made with the parents/carers.

If a student gives us reason to believe that they are at risk or there are child protection issues, parents should not be informed, but the relevant child protection procedures should be followed.

As supporting students with mental health issues can be stressful, it is also important to safeguard staff emotional well-being. The MHT offers weekly Staff Drop-In sessions for those who want to discuss their work with students, their work-life in general, or a personal issue.

These sessions are confidential, unless the individual discloses that they intend harm to themselves, another person, or that they are involved with a serious crime. The relevant safeguarding procedures are then followed.

13.0 Whole school approach

13.1 Working with parents/carers

We are mindful that hearing about their child's issues can be upsetting and distressing for a parent/ carer. They may therefore respond in various ways, which we should be prepared for and allow time for the parent to reflect and come to terms with the situation.

Signposting parents to other sources of information and support can be helpful in these instances. At the end of the meeting, lines of communication are kept open should the parents/ carers have further questions or concerns. If appropriate, a follow-up meeting or phone call is arranged.

Details of meetings with parents are recorded on CPOMS.

13.2 Supporting parents

We recognise the family plays a key role in influencing children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing; we will work in partnership with parents and carers to promote emotional health and wellbeing by:

- Ensuring all parents/carers are aware of and have access to school resources promoting social and emotional well-being and preventing mental health problems;
- Ensuring that the MHT can be reached via a dedicated email address by parents wishing to discuss their child or a specific issue.
- Meeting with parents/ carers to discuss issues face-to-face.
- Highlighting sources of information and support about common mental health issues through school communication channels;
- Offering direct support to parents/ carers who are facing particular issues in supporting a child's mental health ;
- Providing parents/ carers with access to the Classlist community, which has a dedicated space for those wishing to discuss or to gain/ provide support around mental health from other parents/ carers.
- The MHT runs regular events for parents/ carers on key issues related to mental health and well-being.

14.0 Supporting Peers

When a student is suffering from mental health issues, it can be a difficult time for their friends who may want to support them but do not know how. We consider on a case-by-case basis which friends may need additional support. Support might be provided by the mentor, Head of Year, MHT, or a member of the pastoral team. Key considerations at these times include:

- What it is helpful for friends to know and what they should not be told
- How friends can best support
- Things friends should avoid doing/saying that may inadvertently cause upset
- Warning signs that their friend needs help

Minerva Virtual Academy

Additionally, we will want to highlight with peers:

- Where and how to access support for themselves (e.g. the daily drop-in service)
- Safe sources of further information about their friend's condition
- Healthy ways of coping with the difficult emotions they may be feeling

15.0 Training

The MHT provides training videos and resources for staff on a broad range of topics that can be accessed via the Staff Zone in Canvas. These are regularly updated and added to.

In addition, the MHT regularly leads live staff training sessions, in coordination with the wider programme of in-house professional learning and development.

The MHT regularly meets to discuss with individuals aspects of their work with specific students and provides them with resources to assist them with this.

The MHT ensures that staff are aware of what training resources are available and how to access them.

16.0 Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every year as a minimum. The next review date is September 2027

In between updates, the policy will be updated when necessary to reflect local and national changes. This is the responsibility of the Mental Health Lead and Deputy Mental Health Lead.