The New Walk School *Bespoke support. Brighter futures.*

Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

The New Walk School policy framework

Policy	Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy	**Version**	V1
Issue date	08 May 2026	**Next review**	08 May 2027
Policy owner	Headteacher	**Approved by**	Directors of The New Walk School Ltd

1. About The New Walk School

The New Walk School is an independent specialist day school for pupils aged 7 to 19 who have Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, autism spectrum conditions, learning difficulties and communication difficulties. The school is located on New Walk in Leicester — a setting with a long-standing association with academic life — and is operated by The New Walk School Ltd, a Company Limited by Guarantee.

The majority of our pupils hold an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and many have experienced previous educational placements that did not meet their needs. Our offer combines a broad academic curriculum with an in-built therapeutic provision rooted in the PACE model — Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy — developed by Dr Dan Hughes. PACE is a relational approach designed to build trust, regulate distress and create the safety from which learning can take place. It informs how every adult in the school speaks to, listens to and works with our pupils.

2. The PACE therapeutic model in practice

Mental health is the work, not an add-on. Every adult at The New Walk School holds the mental health of every pupil in mind. PACE is the practical mechanism by which we do this:

- Playfulness — staff use a light, warm tone to reduce shame and de-escalate distress, using humour appropriate to the pupil and the moment.
- Acceptance — pupils' feelings and inner experiences are accepted unconditionally, even where specific behaviours are not. Acceptance is communicated before any limit is set.
- Curiosity — staff seek to understand the meaning behind a pupil's behaviour rather than reacting to its surface, asking 'what is this telling me?'
- Empathy — staff name and stay with the pupil's emotional experience, communicating that the pupil is not alone with what they feel.

PACE is not a behaviour-management tool layered on top of practice; it is the relational foundation from which all other aspects of the school operate.

3. Our approach

The New Walk School takes a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing in line with the DfE's Promoting and Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools guidance and the eight principles set out in Public Health England's framework. Mental health is everyone's responsibility — not solely the remit of the therapeutic team.

4. The eight principles

- Leadership and management that supports and champions efforts to promote emotional health and wellbeing.
- An ethos and environment that promotes respect and values diversity.
- Curriculum, teaching and learning that promotes resilience and supports social and emotional learning.
- Enabling pupil voice to influence decisions.
- Staff development to support their own wellbeing and that of pupils.
- Identifying need and monitoring impact of interventions.
- Working with parents and carers.
- Targeted support and appropriate referral.

5. Universal provision

All pupils benefit from: PACE-informed relational practice; a planned PSHE and RSHE curriculum that addresses emotional literacy, resilience and help-seeking; daily check-ins with a trusted adult; access to low-arousal and sensory spaces; and clear pathways to talk to someone if they are struggling.

6. Targeted provision

Pupils whose needs require more than universal provision access: 1:1 work with the therapeutic mentor; small-group emotional regulation work; structured therapeutic input from external clinicians where commissioned in EHCPs; and tailored adjustments to their school day.

7. Specialist referral

Where need exceeds the school's offer, the school refers — with parent/carer consent — to CAMHS, the local authority Mental Health Support Team, or other specialist services. The school works in partnership with these services and ensures that information is shared appropriately to support the pupil.

8. Self-harm and suicidal ideation

All staff are trained to recognise the warning signs of self-harm and suicidal ideation. Concerns are escalated to the DSL immediately. The school follows local safeguarding and CAMHS protocols, working with the pupil, family and clinicians to put a safety plan in place. Self-harm is not addressed through punishment or removal of privilege; it is held safeguardingly and therapeutically.

9. Bereavement and loss

The school responds to bereavement and significant loss with a tailored plan, drawing on the relational team around the pupil. Resources from organisations such as Child Bereavement UK and Winston's Wish inform our practice.

10. Staff wellbeing

Adults who hold pupils need to be held themselves. The school supports staff wellbeing through reflective practice and clinical supervision for staff in front-line therapeutic roles, manageable workloads, an Employee Assistance Programme, and an open-door culture in which it is acceptable to say that the work is hard.

11. Working with parents and carers

Parents and carers are partners in their child's mental health support. The school communicates regularly, signposts to community resources, and offers parent/carer consultations with the therapeutic mentor where appropriate.

Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Headteacher in consultation with the senior leadership team and the Directors of The New Walk School Ltd. It will be reviewed earlier where there is a material change in legislation, statutory guidance or the operational needs of the school. The most recent version is held on the school's policy register and is made available to parents, carers and staff on request.

Linked policies and documents

This policy should be read alongside the school's wider policy suite, including: Safeguarding and Child Protection; SEND; Behaviour and Relationships; Anti-Bullying; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Health and Safety; Curriculum; and Complaints.