



# Absence Management Policy & Procedure

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## 1. Introduction

The Governing Board understands that employees may not be able to come to work because they are unwell and we will give them as much support as we can.

The Governing Board is therefore committed to managing absence and believe it is the responsibility of everyone to work together to promote the effective management of sickness absence.

## 2. Scope

This Policy applies to all school based employees where the Governing Board of individual schools have adopted the Policy.

Employees within their probationary period are excluded from the scope of this policy and their attendance will be managed under the probationary procedure.

## 3. Aims of the Policy

This Policy aims to set out a framework for dealing with both short and long term absence while ensuring that employees have the following:

- A supportive work environment
- Consistency and fairness in how they are managed
- Effective communication and information regarding absence targets and their personal responsibilities.

## 4. General Principles

### 4.1 Right to be Accompanied

Employees can be accompanied at all meetings referred to in this policy by a trade union representative or work colleague (not a family member), with the exception of the Return to Work Interview. Employees must be given reasonable notice in writing when they are required to attend meetings.

### 4.2 Supporting Employees with a Disability

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We will support employees who are disabled and will get advice from the Occupational Health Team and other specialist organisations as appropriate.

#### **4.3 Links to our other Policies**

There may be occasions when employees are not sick but require time away from work for personal reasons. We have a number of work life balance policies that can be used by all employees e.g. special leave, parental leave, shared parental leave, compassionate leave and flexible working. Please refer to these policies on the Intranet.

### **5. Sick Pay Entitlements**

#### **Teaching Staff**

	<u>Days paid</u>	<u>Days paid</u>
Employment up to 4 months	25 full	0 half
1st year	25 full	50 half
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	50 full	50 half
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	75 full	75 half
4 <sup>th</sup> year and subsequent years	100 full	100 half

#### **Support Staff**

During the 1 <sup>st</sup> year of service	1 month's full pay and (after completing 4 months service) 2 months half pay
During the 2 <sup>nd</sup> year of service	2 months full pay and 2 months half pay
During the 3 <sup>rd</sup> year of service	4 months full pay and 4 months half pay
During the 4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> year of service	5 months full pay and 5 months half pay
After 5 years service	6 months full pay and 6 months half pay.

### **6. Employee's Responsibilities**

Employees must familiarise themselves with the policy and ask questions if they are unsure. They need to take responsibility for their own wellbeing and ask for help early on if they need it.

Employees must follow the sickness procedure outlined below (also refer to flowchart). If they do not do so their sick pay can be suspended or withdrawn and disciplinary action may be taken.

#### **6.1 Telephone Contact**

Employees must speak to their Head Teacher/manager as soon as they can on their first day of absence to let them know they are sick. They must tell them why they are sick and when

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they are likely to return. If their Head Teacher/manager is not available, they must leave a message and call back later. It is not permitted to report an absence via text or email, or via a colleague.

Employees on flexitime must ring in before their normal start time. Those on fixed hours or shifts must ring in before their normal start time and early enough for cover arrangements to be made.

Employees must then ring their Head Teacher/manager, as often as is required, during the first week of absence. Contact must be made by the employee on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> days of absence in all cases, and at least on a weekly basis after that. If days 4 or 8 are a non-working day for the employee, the manager must agree the next appropriate day for the employee to ring.

Schools may have different arrangements in relation to the above where appropriate in line with the needs of the school. For example, it may be necessary for employees to ring their Head Teacher/manager every day for cover arrangements to be made.

If an employee becomes ill whilst at work, they must tell the Head Teacher/manager before leaving work. It will be recorded as either a full day or a half day sickness absence depending on how long they were at work. A full day of absence will be recorded if the employee left work before they had worked half a day (i.e. equivalent to half of their working day). If the employee worked for more than half a day, the absence will be recorded as a half day sickness absence. Sick pay is not paid in half days, and it is recorded as such for monitoring purposes only and deductions from sick pay entitlement will not be made.

#### **Additional Points to Consider**

It is important that employees know the procedure for ringing in sick, and that they must speak to their Head Teacher/manager ASAP on their first day of absence

Employees who do not follow the correct reporting procedure must be reminded of the procedure. If it is ongoing it should be dealt with as a conduct issue

Only when there is a school need should employees be requested to ring in daily

Employees must contact their Head Teacher/manager before they return to work from absence and must not simply report for work

Head/Teachers/managers must contact employees that do not report for work and have not been in touch to report their absence.

## **6.2 Keeping in Touch**

Employees are expected to keep in touch with their Head Teacher/manager and to be available for appointments/meetings while they are off sick. They are also expected to attend

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appointments with Occupational Health at the request of management in relation to their wellbeing.

Should any employee fail to attend meetings and/or appointments with Occupational Health this is a breach of the Absence Management Policy which will therefore disqualify them from their entitlement to occupational sick pay. If an employee fails to attend an appointment while they are at work i.e. at the request of management during short-term absence monitoring, they may be charged a £60.00 administration fee. Please refer to the Admin Fee Process.

### **6.3 Aiding Recovery**

Employees must do what they can to get better and they should not do anything that prevents or delays their recovery. Employees must take responsibility for their own wellbeing.

### **6.4 Fit Notes**

Employees must sign a Self-Certification Form for all sickness absences. This is within the Sickness Absence Report Form (Appendix 1) and should be completed with their Head Teacher/manager when they return to work. This will be carried out during the return to work interview.

For absences over seven days employees must get a fit note from their GP. This must be sent to their Head Teacher/manager on the eighth day or as soon as possible afterwards. Any subsequent fit notes must be planned for and provided without delay.

However, as an alternative to an employee remaining away from work on sick leave, a referral may be made to the Council's Occupational Health Service to explore whether the employee can carry out alternative duties. Should this be the case, then the fit note would need to explain that the individual is fit to be at work with adaptations.

Where a GP has indicated that an employee is not fit to undertake their current duties but has advised that they are fit to be at work, with adaptations, then this should be discussed with the relevant Head Teacher/manager. If the GP's recommendations cannot be accommodated the employee will have to remain on sick leave.

If an employee wants to return to work before the end of the period of the note from their GP, you can agree a return to work if appropriate providing any issues are discussed prior to the return to work.

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**Additional Points to Consider**

Fit notes do not need to be sent to HR Payroll and should be kept by the school.

**7. Head Teacher/Manager's Responsibilities**

**7.1 Advice and Support**

Head Teachers/managers must advise their employees about the Absence Management Policy and reporting procedures during the induction process; remind employees about Work Life Balance policies and counselling services; and provide support to employees when they are off sick.

**Additional Points to Consider**

Head Teacher/managers must make sure that employees are clear on the Absence Policy and their responsibilities

Policies must be covered during the employee's Induction with focus on any school specific arrangements

Policy/Policy Updates should be a regular agenda item during Team meetings as they are the ideal opportunity to update employees.

**7.2 Ensuring Consistency**

Head Teacher/managers must consistently apply the procedures contained within the policy with all of their employees regardless of the reason for absence. Head Teachers/managers should take advice from an HR Adviser when they are considering moving away from the procedures in the policy.

**7.3 Contact**

Head Teacher/managers must keep in touch with employees on a weekly basis, hold meetings with them and involve occupational health where necessary. If an employee's absence is not reported correctly, his or her Head Teacher/manager must try to contact them as soon as they can.

**7.4 Keeping Records**

Head Teachers/managers must record all relevant information about absences on the Sickness Absence Report Form including contact, meetings, referrals and sick pay information. Head Teachers/managers must keep the electronic absence record up to date.

**Additional Points to Consider**

Head Teachers/managers must use the Sickness Absence Report Form immediately i.e. to record relevant information from the first contact during absence. This document is a crucial source of key information and evidence at later stages of the procedures.

## 7.5 Return to Work

Head Teachers/managers must carry out a return to work interview after every sickness absence, on the employee's first day back unless there are exceptional circumstances. The purpose of the interview is to welcome the employee back, make sure they are fit for work and provide an update on work issues.

### **Additional Points to Consider**

If a Head Teacher/manager is not going to be available to carry out the return to work interview they must make arrangements for another manager to carry it out.

## 8. The Role of HR Services

### 8.1 Advice and Support

Human Resource Advisers will provide advice and support on how to manage sickness and/or health issues in the workplace. They will assist with complex sickness cases, ill-health terminations and capability dismissals.

### 8.2 Occupational Health

The role of occupational health is to provide advice and guidance on workplace health issues. They can advise on workplace adjustments, return-to-work, and ongoing employment. They also carry out pre-employment medicals and medical screening.

Occupational health advice can be sought at any time to obtain up to date advice in relation to medical and health conditions, usually via a referral for an appointment. During absence, a referral should be made immediately following the first absence meeting. If the reason for an employee's absence is stress (work and non-work related), or muscular-skeletal, a referral should be made more quickly. The referral form is at Appendix 2.

Occupational health referrals are viewed initially by the Occupational Health Nurse. An appointment will then be made with either the Nurse, or an Occupational Health Doctor and will be followed up with a report. However, if an employee is suffering with stress, then a referral may be made with the Counselling Service as well as a Doctor/Nurse.

The School may be able to provide access to a confidential counselling service for employees who are unable to access counselling via their GP. This service is not limited to employees who are absent from work. Head Teachers/managers are advised that they can make their employees aware that they can access the counselling service and raise this during staff supervision should they feel it would be helpful in keeping them at work. For example, if they are displaying signs of stress.

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## **9. Sickness During Suspension**

The school understands that employees may feel worried and anxious if they are subject to disciplinary, capability or involved in resolving issues at work proceedings, and they are encouraged to access the counselling service as a means of support. If an employee goes off sick during such a time and if they express concern that they are unwell and cannot take part in the process, the Investigating Officer will make the decision as to whether to continue with the process or whether a referral to occupational health should be made. The purpose of the referral is to get an opinion as to whether the employee is fit enough to attend meetings and continue through the process.

If the medical opinion is that the employee is not fit to attend meetings, a decision will be taken by the Head Teacher/manager as to whether proceedings can be put on hold or whether they need to progress. Further information is within the Disciplinary, Capability and Resolving Issues at Work procedures.

## **10. Dealing with Short-Term Sickness (refer to flowchart)**

### **10.1 Monitoring and Managing Absences**

To ensure consistency and fairness when monitoring sickness, trigger points are used. These are points at which an employee's sickness absence record must be examined to decide what action, if any, may be necessary. Before the Return to Work meeting is held, the Head Teacher/manager must establish whether or not a trigger has been reached. The trigger points are:

- 3 or more occasions during the past 12 months (based upon a rolling 12 month period)
- 9 days or more over the past 12 months (based upon a rolling 12 month period)
- Any other cause for concern such as a recognisable pattern of absences.

The trigger points for employees that work fewer than 5 days in a week will need to be pro-rata to the number of days, as detailed below, but not the number of occasions.

- Anyone working 1 day = trigger point is 2 days absence from work
- Anyone working 2 days = trigger point is 3.5 days absence from work
- Anyone working 3 days = trigger point is 5.5 days absence from work
- Anyone working 4 days = trigger point is 7 days absence from work.

The above should be applied irrespective of the number of hours worked in a day. Where employees do not work the same amount of days each week, Head Teachers/managers will need to pro-rata the trigger to an average working week.

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At all stages of the procedure, reasonable adjustments should be considered in relation to disability related absence. Head Teachers/managers should link in with their HR Adviser for further advice.

## 10.2 Absence Trigger Meeting

An Absence Trigger Meeting must be held every time a trigger point is reached (template invite letter at Appendix 3). Head Teachers/managers should take advice from the School's HR Adviser if they wish to use discretion in cases of serious illness.

The points to be covered at the meeting are as follows:-

- Review the absence record
- Offer support
- Discuss reasons for unsatisfactory attendance
- Arrange a referral to Occupational Health if appropriate
- Consider withdrawing the right to self-certification (if appropriate)
- Clarify outcomes
- Set expectations for required improvement in absence level.

There are two possible outcomes from the Absence Trigger Meeting:

- The employee is set a three month review period
- The employee is issued with a stage 1 absence warning, if appropriate, and is set a 12 month review period.

A record of the meeting must be made on the Sickness Absence Report Form and a follow up letter sent to the employee setting out any actions agreed (template letter at Appendix 4 or Appendix 7 to issue an absence warning).

If an employee is required to attend Occupational Health as a result of their Absence Trigger Meeting, the Head Teacher/manager should adjourn the meeting until the advice from Occupational Health is available and can be considered and discussed with the employee at a reconvened meeting.

### **Additional Points to Consider**

Although there is the option to issue an absence warning as an outcome from the Absence Trigger Meeting there must be justification

Head Teacher/managers will be required to provide justification which will become vital as the absence progresses.

## 10.3 Absence Trigger Review Meeting

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A formal Absence Trigger Review Meeting must be held at the end of the review period to consider whether the employee has improved their attendance (template invite letter at Appendix 5). It would be held at the end of a three month or a 12 month review depending on the outcome of the trigger meeting.

The Head Teacher/manager has the right to bring forward the review meeting where the employee's attendance is not showing signs of improvement during any review period.

There are four possible outcomes at the meeting:

- If the absence has not improved for an employee on a three month review, they may be issued with a Stage 1 Absence Warning and will be set a 12 month review
- If the absence has not improved for an employee on a 12 month review that has already been issued with a warning, they may be issued with a stage 2 absence warning and set a further 12 month review
- If the absence has improved there will be no further action. However, if attendance levels fall again within the next 12 months consideration will be given to moving to the next stage of the formal process.
- Due to extenuating circumstances, a decision may be taken to continue with the review period.

A record of the meeting must be made on the Sickness Absence Report Form and a follow up letter sent to the employee setting out any actions agreed (template at Appendix 6 or Appendix 7 when an absence warning is issued).

The employee needs to have the opportunity to improve their attendance at stage 1 and stage 2.

**Additional Points to Consider**

Meeting outcomes must be reasonable and appropriate to the situation. Head Teachers/managers should contact an HR Adviser for advice.

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#### 10.4 Next Stage in the Process

The next stage in the process will depend on which stage the employee is currently at. Please refer to the Short-term Sickness Absence Flowchart.

#### 10.5 Final Stage Absence Hearing

If an employee fails to achieve the required improvement in attendance during the period of the stage 2 absence warning, a formal Final Stage Absence Hearing must be arranged (template letter at Appendix 9). The Final Stage Absence Hearing should be heard by the Governing Board.

At the hearing, the Head Teacher/manager will present their case which will include detailed absence information including details of support that has been given and will include an up to date medical assessment from occupational health, and any other relevant information. The employee and/or their trade union representative or work colleague will of course be given an opportunity to present their case.

The hearing will be arranged to establish whether or not the absence levels of the employee are unacceptable. If they are, the possible outcome of the hearing is that the employee is dismissed on the grounds of capability (template letter at Appendix 10).

The employee must also be advised of their right of appeal.

##### **Additional Points to Consider**

The Head Teacher/manager must provide detailed information about the absence/s that led to the Final Stage Absence Hearing. The information must clearly show that the absence management procedures have been applied in line with the Policy and in a supportive way

Head Teachers/managers must take advice from and involve an HR Adviser at this stage in the process, if they are not already involved.

#### 10.6 Right of Appeal

Where an employee has been issued with a formal warning at any stage in the process, they have a right of appeal. Any appeal should be made in writing, stating the grounds of appeal to the appropriate Governor Support Officer within 5 working days of receiving the formal warning letter.

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Where an employee has been dismissed on the grounds of capability, they have a right of appeal. Any appeal should be made in writing, stating the grounds of appeal to the Governor Support Officer within 5 working days of the dismissal taking place. The appeal will be heard by the Governing Board's Appeal Committee who will conduct a full re-hearing, without unreasonable delay. The decision reached by the committee is final.

## **11. Dealing with Long Term Absence (refer to flowchart)**

Any sickness absence, or expected absence, of four consecutive weeks is classed as long-term.

### **Additional Points to Consider**

When an employee provides a fit note from their GP for four weeks or more the absence should be classed as long-term  
Head Teachers/managers must agree a contact plan with employees i.e. they may agree that the employee rings on a set day each week

It is important that there is an understanding that employees who are covered by a fit note from their GP must still follow the absence procedures.

### **11.1 Absence Support Meeting**

After four weeks, regardless of the reason for absence, Head Teachers/managers must arrange to meet the employee at work or at an agreed alternative place (template letter at Appendix 11). If an employee is absent because of stress (work and non-work related), an earlier meeting is advised to identify suitable support for the employee.

A record of the meeting must be made on the Sickness Absence Report Form and a follow up letter sent to the employee setting out any actions agreed (template at Appendix 12).

Throughout the absence, the Head Teacher/manager and employee need to keep in touch through regular phone calls, at least on a weekly basis. Regular meetings must be held throughout the period of absence, at least every four to six weeks.

### **11.2 Occupational Health**

As set out on page four, a referral to Occupational Health should be made immediately following the first absence meeting. If the reason for an employee's absence is stress (work and non-work related), or muscular-skeletal, a referral should be made more quickly.

Occupational health will assess the employee taking into account their current medical or health condition and advise on their fitness for work.

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#### **Additional Points to Consider**

When making the referral Head Teachers/managers need to carefully consider what information and advice they need. The information required may include the likely duration of absence; adjustments that may be required to facilitate a return to work; whether the employee has a disability and is covered by the Equality Act 2010; recommendations relating to redeployment and ill health retirement.

Occupational Health involvement is not optional for employees.

After a Head Teacher/manager has made a referral to Occupational Health, the medical situation may change prior to the appointment therefore any key updates should be sent to the Occupational Health Referrals inbox to be passed onto the doctor or

### **11.3 Support for Employees on Long Term Absence**

The Council will support individuals to return to work by considering the following:

- Adjustments to their duties – we have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to support employees with a disability under the Equality Act 2010. Refer to an HR Adviser for further information.
- Phased return to work – further information below
- Redeployment – further information below.

### **11.4 Phased Return**

A phased return to work is in place to help employees ease themselves back into work. It can include reduced working hours/days, gradually increasing up to the normal working hours or pattern of work. Or it may be a return to specific duties with the remainder of duties gradually being phased in.

The maximum period for a paid return to work is four weeks. Employees will be paid as if they had returned to work, however they may be required to use their annual leave to accommodate this.

The maximum four week phased return will only be given when the employee has been absent for a considerable period of time. For example, an employee who has been absent for six months may require a longer phased return than an employee who has had an absence of six weeks.

#### **Additional Points to Consider**

Use of annual leave to support phased return is intended to be used when an employee has a large amount of annual leave to take due to a lengthy sickness absence.

Each case will be different therefore the Head Teacher/manager will need to consider each case and use their discretion.

Employees will not be expected to use annual leave that they have not yet accrued.

### **11.5 Redeployment**

Redeployment should be considered when an employee cannot return to their usual job due to a medical or health condition. It is important to note that the redeployment process is time limited as it is usually carried out during the employees notice period.

Please refer to the School's HR Adviser for further information.

### **11.6 No Prospect of a Return to Work**

If the medical advice is that there is no prospect of a return to work within a reasonable period, the employee must be told that their employment may be at risk.

If an employee is unable to return to work they will be dismissed through ill health retirement or on the grounds of capability. Contracts will normally be terminated straight away and the employee will be given a payment in lieu of notice. Please refer to the School's HR Adviser for further information.

### **11.7 Annual Leave**

An employee may go on holiday when they are off sick, if this aids the employee's recuperation and is supported by their GP. They should take care that this does not put their return to work at risk. Approval must be obtained from the Head Teacher/manager prior to taking annual leave. The annual leave will be deducted from the employee's leave entitlement.

Where an employee's period of sickness absence overlaps with pre-booked annual leave that they cannot take due to their sickness, the annual leave will be cancelled and the days taken at a later date. The employee must comply with the sickness absence reporting procedure and still be available for contact and meetings when absent, as well as supply a Fit Note to cover the period they wish to reclaim.

Annual leave continues to accrue during periods of sickness absence. Any unused annual leave can be carried over from one leave year to the next. Where annual leave is carried over into the next leave year, employees should take this leave within the first three months of their return to work date and to assist with a phased return to work.

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## 12. Equality and Diversity Statement

The Governing Board is committed to promoting equality and valuing diversity. An equality check for this policy was carried out in 2018. No equality implications were identified in this policy.

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Date of next review :	February 2025
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