



Managing Sickness Absence Policy

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HEMINGFORD GREY PRIMARY SCHOOL

MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE

This Policy applies to all employees of the School. It does not form part of any employee's terms and conditions of employment and is not intended to have contractual effect. It is provided for guidance only and the School reserves the right to amend its content at any time.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Sickness Absence and Sick Pay Policy.

There are four key aims of this Policy:

- To understand the causes of any absence and the effect it may have/will have on the employee's ability to carry out their job function effectively
- To provide support to employees to help them manage their health, work or welfare problems, including work-related stress
- To explore any options which could help employees to improve attendance and/or facilitate their return to work
- To outline the key stages of an absence management process and the potential outcome(s)

In addition, the School will bear in mind:

- Employees' rights to medical confidentiality
- Employees' expectation of fair and consistent treatment

The School recognises that different approaches may be required, depending on the nature of employees' absences. The procedure to be followed in the case of an acute or long term medical problem ("long term sickness absences") is set out in paragraph 3 of this Policy. The procedure to be followed in the case of persistent, intermittent short-term absenteeism ("short term intermittent absences") is set out in paragraph 4 of this Policy.

1. MEETINGS UNDER THIS POLICY

Meetings under this Policy will be arranged during your normal working hours, and therefore you should be available to attend, and must take all reasonable steps to do so. Failure to do so without good reason may be treated as misconduct.

We will notify you in writing of the time, date and place of any meeting, and why it is being held.

Meetings will be conducted by the Head teacher and will be attended by either the office manager or a member of SLT who will minute the meeting, a copy of which will be sent to you following the meeting.

All employees will have the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or an accredited trade union official at any of the following meetings: -

Long Term Sickness Absence

- Formal Absence Review Meetings
- Consideration of Dismissal Hearing
- Appeal Hearing

Short Term Intermittent Absences

- First Absence Review Meeting
- Second Absence Review Meeting
- Final Absence Review Meeting
- Consideration of Dismissal Hearing
- Appeal Hearings

Please note that the mere fact of being signed off by your GP as unfit to work does not of itself mean you are unfit to attend a meeting. Unless the nature of your ill-health is such that you are unable to attend, you would normally be expected to attend.

However, if the meeting is one at which you are entitled to be accompanied, and your companion is unavailable to attend at the time specified you should immediately inform the Head teacher who will seek to agree an alternative time within a reasonable period (normally 5 working days). If this is not possible, you would be expected to find an alternative companion.

A meeting may be adjourned if the Head teacher is awaiting receipt of information, needs to gather any further information or give consideration to matters discussed at a previous meeting. You will be given a reasonable opportunity to consider any new information obtained before the meeting is reconvened.

Confirmation will be given to you in writing as soon as reasonable practicable following a sickness absence meeting of:

- The issues discussed;

- Any decisions made or actions agreed at a meeting;
- The reasons for such;
- Any measures or support agreed;
- The consequences of failure to improve; and
- Any right of appeal.

2. DISABILITIES

We are aware that sickness absence may result from a disability. At each stage of this Policy, particular consideration will be given to whether there are reasonable adjustments that could be made to the requirements of a job or other aspects of working arrangements that will provide support at work and/or assist a return to work.

The School may also adjust the process where appropriate. For example, to accommodate an employee's disability:-

- Trigger points may be adjusted;
- Meetings may be held off-site or by telephone;
- While no right to accompaniment applies at the informal stage of the process, the School may extend this right in appropriate circumstances;
- At the School's discretion, you may be permitted to bring a companion who is not a work colleague or union representative (for example, a family member) where this will help overcome particular difficulties caused by a disability; or
- The School may, in appropriate circumstances, elect not to impose disciplinary warnings in relation to disability related absence. This shall not however prevent the absence management procedure from moving to the next stage.

If you consider that you are affected by a disability or any medical condition which affects your ability to undertake your work, you should inform the Headteacher.

3. MANAGING LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

The following paragraphs set out our procedure for dealing with long-term sickness absence. The purpose of the procedure is to investigate and discuss the reasons for your absence, whether it is likely to continue or recur, and whether there are any measures that could improve your health and/or attendance. We may decide that medical evidence, or further medical evidence, is required before deciding on a course of action.

3.1. FIT FOR WORK SERVICE (FFW)

FFW is a government-funded occupational health assessment service. The service is intended to assist employees return to work, using a return-to-work plan where appropriate. If you want to know more about FFW please speak to the Head teacher.

Once you have been absent for 4 weeks, either we or your doctor may suggest referring you to FFW. Your doctor may do this before you have been absent for 4 weeks if they think it would be beneficial for you.

If your doctor refers you to FFW please let the Head teacher know, unless you would prefer not to tell us. If your case manager at FFW wishes to speak to us, please ask them to contact the Head teacher.

3.2. REFERRALS TO THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH UNIT

The School has access to an Occupational Health service and may use this to obtain expert medical advice:

- To provide appropriate support to employees
- To aid decision-making in sickness absence cases

The School may refer an employee to the Occupational Health service at any point if they are concerned about the impact of an employee's health on their work or attendance. Referrals will also take place at appropriate points throughout the process set out in this Policy.

It is likely that a referral will take place when an employee has been on sick leave for 4 continuous weeks, or the School receives a medical certificate indicating that an absence of this length is anticipated.

3.3. WELFARE MEETING

The purposes of a welfare meeting will be to discuss the reasons for your absence, how long it is likely to continue, whether it is likely to recur, whether to obtain a medical report, and whether there are any measures that could improve your health and/or attendance. Such a meeting will usually be arranged after a continuous period of 4 or more weeks' absence; however, can be arranged sooner if either party consider it beneficial to do so.

We will discuss with you:

- The reason for your absences;

- The anticipated duration of your absence;
- The treatment and care you are receiving;
- Whether it is necessary for the School to consider taking reasonable measures to facilitate your return to work;
- Whether medical evidence is required to assess your fitness to return to work and if any changes are necessary to assist you, having regard to any Return to Work plan prepared by FFW;
- If your continued absence may lead to a formal absence review; and
- A time-scale for review.

The aim of this meeting will be to seek to agree a return-to-work programme, possibly on a phased basis and consideration will be given to the above discussions to determine whether such a programme can be agreed, and if so, the various aspects of that programme, for example, a return to work date, the support measures that the School can put in place on a temporary or permanent basis and any dates for review which may be appropriate.

3.4. FORMAL ABSENCE REVIEW MEETINGS

If, after a reasonable time, which would usually be discussed with you during the welfare meeting, you have not been able to return to work, we will hold a Formal Absence Review meeting.

The purpose of the Formal Absence Review meetings will be to discuss the following: -

- The reasons for and impact of your absence;
- The anticipated duration of your absence;
- If it has not been obtained, whether medical evidence is required. If it has been obtained, the advice that has been given and whether further advice is required;
- Whether it is necessary for the School to consider taking reasonable measures to facilitate your return to work, which may include consideration of adjustments that can reasonably be made to assist you in your current role, or any possible redeployment opportunities;
- Your ability to return to your job in view of your capabilities and the School's operational needs;
- Whether the School needs to notify you that you may be at risk of dismissal if you are unable to return to work within a reasonable timeframe;
- Action that will be taken and a time-scale for review and/or a further meeting.

The number of Formal Absence Review meetings required for this process will largely be determined by the content of any medical evidence obtained, and your personal circumstances. However, if it becomes clear that you will either be unable to return to work within a reasonable timeframe, or if you are no longer able to carry out your contracted duties and consideration has been given to any adjustments or possible redeployment opportunities without success, the School will arrange a Consideration of Dismissal Hearing.

3.5. CONSIDERATION OF DISMISSAL HEARING

Where you have been notified that you are at risk of dismissal, and the situation has not changed significantly, we will hold a Consideration of Dismissal Hearing to consider the possible termination of your employment. Before we make a decision, we will consider any matters you wish to raise and whether there have been any changes since the last meeting.

Alternatively, in exceptional instances the School may receive clear Occupational Health advice that the anticipated duration of the absence means that the School would consider it appropriate to commence the process at this final stage, without it being necessary to conduct an Initial Sickness Absence meeting or Formal Absence Review meetings first.

Any such consideration will be by the Head teacher and a panel of Governors. In the case of proceedings involving the Headteacher, consideration will be by a panel of Governors.

The purposes of the hearing will be:

- To review the meetings that have taken place and matters discussed with you;
- To consider whether there have been any changes since the last meeting under this Policy, either as regards your possible return to work or opportunities for return or redeployment;
- To consider the most up to date medical evidence;
- To consider any further matters that you wish to raise;
- To consider whether there is a reasonable likelihood of you returning to work or achieving the desired level of attendance in a reasonable time;
- To consider any reasonable options for redeployment on medical grounds before making any recommendation for dismissal (where redeployment is an option identified by Occupational Health);

- To consider any reasonable options for ill health retirement before making any recommendation for dismissal;
- To consider the possible termination of your employment.

The grounds for consideration of dismissal will be that you are incapable of fulfilling your duties by reason of continued absence(s).

Any dismissal will be on notice or payment in lieu of notice.

You will have the right to appeal against any decision to terminate your employment. This is detailed below.

4. MANAGING SHORT TERM INTERMITTENT ABSENCE

The following paragraphs set out our procedure for dealing with short-term intermittent absences. When considering the absence levels of any employee, the School will have regard to absences for both sickness and non-sickness related reasons.

The purpose of the procedure is to investigate and discuss the reasons for your absences. Consideration will also be given to whether these short term intermittent absences are likely to continue and whether there are any measures that could improve your health and/or attendance. We may decide that medical evidence, or further medical evidence, is required before deciding on a course of action. The School will also give serious consideration to the impact that your absences are having on the students, your colleagues and the wider School community as a whole, and will give consideration to how to reduce any such impact and whether, as a result of any such impact, your level of absence can be sustained by the School.

4.1. TRIGGER POINTS

The purpose of the School specifying trigger points is to enable senior leaders to take prompt action to deal with absence, alert employees that their level of absence is causing concern, and identify potential problems and to deal with them effectively before they escalate.

It is not always necessary for a trigger point to be reached before action is taken. The Head teacher may take action at any time, (for example, referring an employee to Occupational Health), if they have concerns about an underlying cause of sickness and/or there is a significant impact on the service.

The School's current trigger points are:

- Either 7 or more working days absence in the preceding 12 months; or
- 3 or more absences of whatever length within the preceding 3 months; or
- Any pattern of part day absences, absences on certain days (e.g. Mondays or Fridays) or known "busy" days; or
- Above average absence levels for the School; or
- No adequate reason given for the absence.

4.2. FIRST ABSENCE REVIEW MEETING

When you have met a trigger point above or the School otherwise considers that your absence level is a cause for concern, you may be asked to attend a First Absence Review meeting with the Head teacher.

The basis for the School's concerns about your absence levels and the reason for the meeting being called will be confirmed in writing. A reasonable opportunity for you to consider this information before a meeting will be provided.

The purposes of the First Absence Review meeting will be to discuss the reasons for your absences, whether further absences are likely to occur and whether there is an medical link between the reasons for absence, which may result in the School benefiting from obtaining a medical report, and whether there are any measures that could improve your health and/or attendance.

We will discuss with you:

- The reason for your absences;
- The anticipated duration of any further absences;
- The treatment and care you have received;
- Any medication taken and any expected side effects;
- Whether it is necessary for the School to consider taking reasonable measures to assist you in the workplace and to minimise the occurrence of repeated absences;
- Whether medical evidence is required to assess your fitness and if any changes are necessary to assist you;
- What improvement is required in your attendance pattern;
- Targets to improve your attendance if necessary over a set period of time.

If you meet your attendance target during the review period set at the First Absence Review meeting, the School will arrange a meeting with you to discuss this at the end of

that review period and this procedure may be brought to an end. However, the above trigger points will continue to apply and if you reach another trigger point the School may decide to recommence this procedure at this stage, without repeating the First Absence Review meeting.

4.3. SECOND ABSENCE REVIEW MEETING

If you have been unable to meet your attendance targets during the review period set at the First Absence Review meeting, you will be invited to a Second Absence Review meeting. The purpose of the Second Absence Review meeting will be to review the discussions from the First Absence Review meeting and consider why further absences were required.

We will discuss with you:

- The reasons for and impact of your absences on the students, your colleagues and the wider School community as a whole, and what support you believe the School could offer to reduce the impact of your absences;
- If you have met the targets set at the First Absence Review meeting;
- The anticipated likelihood and duration of any further absences;
- If it has not been obtained, whether medical evidence is required. If it has been obtained, the advice that has been given and whether further advice is required;
- Any measures which were put in place following the First Absence Review meeting to assist you in the workplace and to minimise the occurrence of repeated absences, and why they may not have been successful, and whether alternative measures could be put in place that could improve your health and/or attendance. This may include consideration of adjustments that can reasonably be made to assist you in your current role, or any possible redeployment opportunities;
- Your ability to remain in your job in view of your capabilities and the School's operational needs;
- Action that will be taken and a time-scale for review and/or a further meeting. This may, depending on steps that have already been taken and the nature of the absence(s), include a first written warning.

You can appeal against a decision to give a written warning. Details of how to do so are set out below. Where an appeal is upheld, a further review meeting will be set and the procedure will be resumed at the Second Absence Review meeting stage.

If you meet your attendance target during the review period set at the Second Absence Review meeting, the School will arrange a meeting with you to discuss this at the end of that review period and this procedure may be brought to an end. However, the above trigger points will continue to apply and if you reach another trigger point the School may decide to recommence this procedure at this stage, without repeating the First or Second Absence Review meeting.

4.4. FINAL ABSENCE REVIEW MEETING

If you have been unable to meet your attendance targets during the review period set at the Second Absence Review meeting, you will be invited to a Final Absence Review meeting. The purpose of the Final Absence Review meeting will be essentially the same as the purpose of the Second Absence Review meeting, and the same issues may be discussed. However, depending on the steps that have already been taken and the nature of the absences, this may include a final written warning being issued. You will also be warned that a failure to meet the attendance targets set at the Final Absence Review meeting may place you at risk of dismissal.

You can appeal against a decision to give a written warning. Details of how to do so are set out below. Where an appeal is upheld, a further review meeting will be set and the procedure will be resumed at the Final Absence Review meeting stage.

4.5. CONSIDERATION OF DISMISSAL HEARING

If you have been unable to meet your attendance targets during the review period set at the Final Absence Review meeting, you will be invited to a Consideration of Dismissal hearing.

Alternatively, in exceptional instances the School may receive clear Occupational Health advice that the likelihood of continued high absence levels means that the School would consider it appropriate to commence the process at this Consideration of Dismissal stage, without it being necessary to conduct the First, Second or Final Absence Review meetings.

The purpose of the meeting will be:

- To review the meetings that have taken place and matters discussed with you;
- To discuss the impact that your absences are having on the students, your colleagues and the wider School community as a whole, the steps the School has taken to reduce that impact and whether these steps can be maintained;

- To consider whether there have been any changes since the last meeting under this Policy, either as regards your likelihood of further periods of absence or opportunities for redeployment into a role which would be less impacted by your absences than your current role;
- To consider any further matters that you wish to raise;
- To consider whether there is a reasonable likelihood of you achieving the desired level of attendance in a reasonable time;
- To consider whether you may be eligible for permanent health insurance or retirement on ill-health grounds;
- To consider the possible termination of your employment, having considered whether your high absence levels can continue to be sustained by the School, taking account of the impact of those absences.

Any such consideration will be by a panel of Governors. In the case of proceedings involving the Headteacher, consideration will be by a panel of Governors.

The grounds for consideration of dismissal will be that you are incapable of meeting the School's expectations regarding attendance levels and that your absences are having an unsustainable impact on the students and/or your colleagues and/or the wider school community as a whole.

Any dismissal will be on notice or payment in lieu of notice.

You will have the right to appeal against any decision to terminate your employment. This is detailed below. The date that any dismissal takes effect will not be delayed pending the outcome of an appeal. However, if the appeal is successful, the decision to dismiss will be revoked with no loss of continuity or pay.

5. APPEALS

You can appeal any written warning or decision to terminate your employment, within 10 working days of receiving written confirmation of such a decision, to the Chair of the Governing Body in accordance with the disciplinary appeals procedure set out in the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

6. UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

Cases of unauthorised absence will be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.

Absence that has not been notified according to the sickness absence reporting procedure will be treated as unauthorised absence.

If, at any time, the Head teacher considers that you have taken or are taking sickness absence when you are not unwell, they may refer matters to be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.

7. ILL HEALTH RETIREMENT

Where the relevant employee is a member of the LGPS or the TPS, the School will consider whether ill-health retirement may be an appropriate course of action before making any recommendation for dismissal.

For all staff, the Headteacher should have normally have met with the employee and their representative to discuss the options including the ill health retirement process.

If ill health retirement is confirmed by Occupational Health the Headteacher will confirm the decision in writing.

7.1. SUPPORT STAFF

In accordance with the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), the Headteacher will satisfy him/herself that they have exhausted all reasonable options in accordance with this procedure, including consideration of a phased return/adaptations to duties/working patterns/alternative employment, before requesting an assessment under ill health retirement. If on the basis of the facts it is evident that there is not likely to be a return to work in the foreseeable future and no likelihood of being fit, the employer may consider make a referral to Occupational Health for ill health retirement.

7.2. TEACHERS

In accordance with the Teachers' Pension Scheme, the request for an assessment under ill health retirement should be issued by the Headteacher. In that case, the Headteacher has to satisfy him/herself that they have exhausted all reasonable options in accordance with this procedure, including consideration of a phased return/adaptations to duties/working patterns/alternative employment. If on the basis of the facts it is evident that there is not likely to be a foreseeable return to work in the future and no likelihood of being fit, the School may consider making a referral to Occupational Health for ill health retirement. However, in addition the Teachers' Pension Scheme also allows the ill health retirement process to be

instigated by the teacher themselves. Teachers who may be eligible to apply for ill health retirement should initially advise their Headteacher of their situation.

8. SICKNESS ABSENCE AND ANNUAL LEAVE

While it is recognised that during a period of sickness absence, time away from home for example going on holiday or visiting family may be therapeutically helpful, you are required to seek prior approval from the School. A decision to take time away from home during a period of sick leave without giving prior notice to the School may result in a loss of your Occupational Sick Pay during that period.

If, during a period of sick leave you would prefer not to be contacted by the School or required to attend meetings as part of this procedure for a period of time, we can discuss treating that period as annual leave or unpaid leave, at the School's discretion.

Please note that the requirements in your employment contract regarding requesting annual leave will continue to apply during any period of sickness absence.