



# Cowbit St Mary's Church of England School

## ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

### Introduction

Cowbit St Mary's Church of England School is committed to maintaining and promoting the health and wellbeing of all its employees. This policy provides a fair and consistent framework for supporting staff that are absent.

### ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

The school recognises that employees will, from time to time, be unable to come to work because of sickness.

This policy provides a fair and consistent framework for supporting employees who are absent due to sickness. It also applies to employees who are at work, but are unable to fulfil their duties and responsibilities in a satisfactory manner and/or fulfil their contracted working hours due to sickness.

The school is dedicated to maintaining and promoting the health and wellbeing of all its employees. Whilst the school has a supportive approach, it has to achieve a balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of the organisation.

All managers are responsible for implementing this policy to ensure the following policy objectives are met.

### POLICY OBJECTIVES

- Employees will be treated fairly, consistently and sensitively during times of sickness and are encouraged to use support mechanisms available to them.
  
- Managers have a structured framework to assist in managing sickness absence with the aim of supporting employees back to work. This includes conducting return to work interviews after every period of absence, monitoring employee sickness in accordance with set sickness triggers (it is the schools right to adjust these trigger points annually to reflect sickness absence targets), and referring to Occupational Health (OH) where appropriate.
  
- Employees understand their responsibilities and follow sickness reporting arrangements.
  
- The highest levels of quality and service are maintained to allow the school to fulfil its obligations to service users.

Managers will implement reasonable adjustments for employees, where applicable and appropriate, to enable/sustain attendance at work.

The procedure aims to support an employee's return to work. Where employees are absent from work for a considerable amount of time they will be supported and also made aware that the outcome of this procedure could be dismissal.

Employees who are either underperforming or are no longer able to carry out the duties of their role due to their medical condition(s) they will be managed through the Capability Policy and Procedure. Capability Policy and Procedure | Lincolnshire County Council

Whilst parts of the absence management process are under a formal stage, in order to minimise unnecessary formality and apprehension, the electronic, audio or video recording by any device of such meetings/hearings will not be permitted. Should an employee think that there are exceptional circumstances where this should be allowed (for instance, due to a disability) this should be raised in advance with the person due to conduct the meeting, the chair of the hearing or the relevant HR Adviser. Due consideration will then be given to the request and the employee will be advised of the outcome of that consideration.

Where the nominated notetaker at meetings and/or hearings associated with the process feels it is necessary to make an audio recording in order to support with the preparation of the notes, the requirement to make the recording will be clarified with all present at the start of the meeting.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES MANAGERS**

Three levels of management are involved in specific responsibilities within the Absence Management Policy:

- Line Manager – chairs Stage 1 of the Absence Management Procedure.
- Senior Manager – chairs Stage 2 of the Absence Management Procedure.
- A manager with authority to dismiss – chairs the Stage 3 Hearing of the Absence Management Procedure.

## **Recording and Monitoring**

Management is responsible for managing absence issues sensitively and compassionately, ensuring they follow the procedure contained in this policy and associated documents; including:

Ensuring employee sickness absence is entered on Business World On! by the 7th of each month, ensuring the payroll for the employee is accurate. See Business World On! HR User Guide Absences. For guidance on recording the reason for sickness, please refer to: Recording of Sickness Absence.

Absences for dental / medical appointments / maternity leave or parental leave should not be recorded as sickness absence.

- Recording and monitoring all activities associated with managing the employee's absences. The Action Log is a form used by managers to record all support and communication, related to the absence, between the employee and themselves in a chronological order.
- Explaining to employees the Occupational Health (OH) service and referring employees, if appropriate. Seek advice from a HR Adviser if needed.
- Ensuring employees are aware of other supporting policies such as special leave, disability leave and flexible working.
- Where absence results from a work related accident or disease (see: G4 Reporting of Work Related Injuries/incidents and Cases of Ill Health ) a PO3 form must be completed and the absence recorded as such.
- Managers should promote the confidential service of Employee, Support and Counselling to all employees when appropriate.
- Managers must ensure any information associated with the absence management procedure is transferred with the employee should they move positions within the school.

**Trigger Points:**

The school operates the following trigger points:

- 4 or more episodes of absence in a rolling 12 month period and/or
- 9 working days of absence in a rolling 12 month period and/or
- Absences in a short period warranting immediate action, e.g. 3 episodes or 6 working days in 6 months
- A pattern of absence causing concern, e.g. regular Friday or Monday absences or absences regularly occurring on a particular day/week, pre or post annual leave, school holidays, public holidays, pay day.

### **Pro-rata Trigger Points:**

Trigger points for employees working fewer than 5 days in a week need to pro rata the number of days, as detailed below, but not the number of occasions. This is calculated by  $9 / 5 \times$  working days (or average working days).

For example employee working:

- 1 day = trigger point is 2 days absence
- 2 days = trigger point is 3.5 days absence
- 3 days = trigger point is 5.5 days absence
- 4 days = trigger point is 7 days absence
- 5 days = trigger point is 9 days absence

The above is applied irrespective of the number of hours worked in a day. For those employees who condense their working weeks, for example: 37 hours over 4 days, then the trigger point would be = 7 days absence.

Where employees do not work the same amount of days each week, managers need to pro-rotate the trigger to an average working week. For example: employees who work a 9 day fortnight and work alternative 5 days one week and then 4 days the following, they would apply the average working week, which would be 4.5 days and the trigger point would be = 8 days absence.

For employees on annualised hour's contracts, managers need to apply nominal working week and make adjustments during the year if needed.

### **Return to Work Interviews**

Return to work discussions must be conducted with employees after every episode of sickness absence. The return to work discussion should be recorded on the Return to Work Form on Business World On!. If the employment manual return to work form is used managers are advised to upload this form into Business World On! Guidance is available on the George Intranet.

The return to work discussion may:

- Identify support mechanisms beneficial following a return to work and any issues which may be affecting the employee's ability to attend work.
- Monitor absence levels and where an employee absence(s) reaches the identified trigger points to manage them accordingly.
- Consider reasonable adjustments for employees (where applicable), including discussing with employees advice given on a Fit Note. When the Equality Act 2010 applies managers must ensure they investigate any possible reasonable adjustments see Disabled Employees and undertake a risk assessment G1.2

Significant Findings of Risk Assessments. See reasonable adjustments guidance in Disabled Employees section of this policy.

Consider phased return to work (where appropriate) following long term sickness absence. See guidance within G10.12 Rehabilitation following Long Term Ill-Health

## **EMPLOYEES**

Employees have a duty under their terms and conditions of employment to be at work and must ensure they adhere to their responsibilities, including:

Employees must report sickness absence to the Headteacher and School Business Manager on the first day of absence and as early as possible, preferably before but no later than, one hour of their normal work starting time, unless other local arrangements have been agreed.

Employees must make personal contact (not by means of a spouse/family member/friend) and by telephone (not by text or e-mail). A contact number must also be provided in all instances. It is recognised there may be instances where employees are unable to contact the Headteacher and School Business Manager (e.g. admittance to hospital).

Employees must provide the following information:

- Employee (or person making contact) must confirm when became ill
- Broad nature of illness (e.g. migraine, chest infection)
- Whether illness is due to an accident or injury at work
- Whether employee has/will be seeking medical attention
- The likely date of return (if known)

Employees unable to speak with the Headteacher and School Business Manager must leave a message and a contact phone number, asking that it is passed on to the Headteacher and School Business Manager as soon as possible. The employee should expect and be available to receive a return phone call to discuss the above points.

Employees absent for four calendar days or more or where the absence is going to be longer than originally envisaged, must make contact with the Headteacher and School Business Manager to update them and thereafter contact to be maintained as agreed between employee and the Headteacher and School Business Manager.

Employees must obtain a Fit Note from a GP and submit this to their the Headteacher /School Business Manager on the eighth calendar day of absence.

Employees must continue to send in Fit Notes for the duration of the absence and keep the school advised of their health and progress towards returning to work. When a Fit Note expires, employees not returning to work must ensure a new Fit Note is sent to the school immediately.

- Employees must ensure medical advice and treatment is received as quickly as possible and must follow all recommended medical advice or treatment in order to facilitate a prompt return to work.
  
- Employees are encouraged to attend any OH appointments, as in accordance with their conditions of service. If employees do not attend these appointments or fail to give consent to release the report, any decisions made regarding their absence from work will be made without the benefit of this information.
  
- Employees must ensure they are contactable and available to attend absence management meetings and respond in a timely manner to any communications from the school.
  
- Employees must advise the School Business Manager of any changes to contact details occurring during an absence.
  
- Employees must advise the Headteacher of any concerns with their job/work place, which they feel are making them ill or contributing to illness/absence.
  
- Employees wishing to take time off work who are not sick, must use annual or special leave or other approved leave. All leave of absence must be approved by the Headteacher. Other types of leave must not be used to avoid sickness absence.
  
- Employees may request to take accrued annual leave whilst on long term sickness. Employees are not expected to go away on holiday when absent due to sickness unless this is supported by a GP.
  
- Employees wishing to take annual leave must obtain management authorisation and have the appropriate period of annual leave deducted their entitlement (See Further Guidance - Annual Leave in relation to Sickness Absence).
  
- Employees either at work or absent due to sickness should not undertake activities that could hinder or affect recovery. If found that employees are undertaking activities that would prevent recovery this may be managed under the Disciplinary Policy.
  
- Employees are encouraged to take advantage of Council initiatives to promote good health where appropriate.
  
- Employees are responsible for managing sickness and to taking any appropriate action, as determined by any health professional, to minimise any reoccurrence of the sickness

**NB** Failure to follow these reporting procedures may be managed under the Disciplinary Policy.

## **HR ADVISERS**

Advising managers in the application of this policy and attending meetings/hearings as required by the policy.

**TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES**

The same standards apply to Trade Union Representatives as to all other employees. However, where application of formal action (this includes Stages 1, 2 and 3) is being considered against a Trade Union Official or Representative, managers must first discuss the case with a Senior Trade Union Representative or full time Official. To avoid the action being misconstrued as an attack on the union itself or on its representation and negotiating role, and is in accordance with the ACAS Code of Practice.

**EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVES**

Employees have the right to be accompanied at Stage 1, 2 and 3 Absence Management Meetings/Hearings by a school work colleague, recognised Trade Union Officer or recognised Trade Union Representative.

**ADVICE AND SUPPORT**

Managers should contact Human Resources

Policy approved by Governors

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Signed ..... Chair of Governors

Policy for review March 2021