

## LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE IN DELEGATED SCHOOLS (REVISED AUGUST 2024)

Adopted by Tarleton Mere Brow CE Autumn 2024



#### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Good attendance enhances the service delivered by schools, minimises staffing difficulties and ensures best value to the school. Headteachers have an essential responsibility to monitor attendance, to control absence levels, to encourage good attendance and to support employees with difficulties. Employees have a responsibility to keep any absence to a minimum. These guidelines are intended to create an understanding amongst all employees at the school of the importance of good attendance to the operation, performance and image of the school and to show a commitment to achieving and maintaining a high level of attendance by the application of procedures which can be seen to be fair, consistent and open and within which the Trade Unions/Professional Associations are encouraged to participate.
- 1.2 These guidelines address the following areas in order to achieve significant improvement to levels of attendance.
- Appointments/Induction
  - Monitoring
  - Notification Procedures
  - Management Action
- 1.3 The procedures relating to repeated short term and repeated sickness absence and long term sickness absence are set out in separate documents.
- 1.4 A commitment to high attendance can be reinforced in a variety of ways through:
- The setting of a school policy in relation to attendance and a commitment to pursue action to achieve this from the School Leadership Team.
  - Introduction of monitoring and management procedures

- Positive promotion of good health
- Genuine concern and interest in the health and well being of employees (Further information can be found within [Lancashire Healthy Schools Programme](#), [Model Stress Policy](#), [Well-being Guide](#) and the Health and Safety Executive website ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) )

1.5 These guidelines have been written on the understanding that the day to day management of attendance is undertaken by the Headteacher, and dismissal decisions are taken by the Attendance and Dismissal Committee of the Governing Board. However, in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act 2002 and its associated School Staffing (England) Regulations 2003 & 2009, the Governing Board may elect to delegate the power to make initial dismissal decisions to the Headteacher. If this is the case, there will be no Attendance and Dismissal Committee. Instead the initial dismissal decision will be taken by the Headteacher, and the appeal referred to the Appeals Committee of the Governing Board.

1.6 If this is the case, to preserve the integrity of the managing attendance process, the Governing Board should delegate the responsibility for the day to day management of attendance to another member of the School Leadership Team, thereby leaving the Headteacher available to consider what action should be taken at the end of the formal procedures, including dismissal.

1.7 In these cases, any reference to the role of the Headteacher within these guidelines should be taken to mean the member of the school Leadership team responsible for the day to day management of attendance (identified with an asterisk (\*) throughout these guidelines).

1.8 Nothing in these guidelines shall prevent an employee from exercising their statutory rights under employment law to register a claim with an employment tribunal.

## **2. POLICY STATEMENT**

2.1 This school is committed to achieving and maintaining a high level of attendance from all employees through the application of good management practice. The School Leadership Team will monitor overall levels of sickness absences regularly, will support employees during periods of sickness and will arrange for confidential reports to be submitted to Governors. Action will be taken in accordance with the guidelines and procedures adopted by the school to deal with unacceptable levels and frequency of sickness absence. All employees must understand the importance of good attendance and ensure that any sickness absence is kept to a minimum and that during any such absence they do not undertake any activity which is incompatible with the illness or which may delay recovery.

## **3. CONFIDENTIALITY**

3.1 Management of sickness absence is a sensitive issue and everybody involved in managing absence must maintain the appropriate level of confidentiality. This means that discussions about an employee's sickness absence levels and reasons and any discussions with or reports from the Occupational Health Unit or the employee's GP should be treated in the strictest confidence and only disclosed to those that need to be aware of such information (e.g. the employee's line manager, the nominated person, the Headteacher, members of any Governors Committee convened to consider cases of repeated short term or long term absence). Personal data collected in relation to managing sickness absence should be

processed in accordance with the school's data protection policy. In addition, records relating to absence management should be stored in the appropriate place, usually the employee's personal file for paper-based records or the appropriate folder for electronic records.

#### **4. REASONS FOR ABSENCE**

4.1 Most of the reasons given for absence will relate to illness, but there may be other reasons for absence. In these instances, the School Leadership Team should establish the reasons why people are unable to attend. Some causes of absence may be a symptom of a problem within the school or a domestic difficulty for the employee. Managers should know their employees and be mindful of this when tackling attendance issues.

4.2 These guidelines and the associated long term and short -term sickness absence procedures are designed to deal solely with sickness absence of the employee. Any absence in relation to the relevant Leave of Absence procedures (e.g. special leave, time off for dependents etc) should be dealt with in accordance with either the procedure for teaching staff or support staff as appropriate.

#### **5. APPOINTMENT PROCESS**

5.1 Headteachers and managers should be aware of the previous attendance history of candidates for roles in School. Any information should be dealt with sensitively and obtained in a fair and open way through:

**Recruitment**

- All applicants for posts should be informed of the school policy statement on attendance.

**Following appointment**

- When a provisional offer of appointment has been made, contact any employment referees for information in relation to the candidate's attendance history over the previous 2 years and ask for details of any live disciplinary warnings for punctuality or absence. **NB In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, this information should not be sought before the provisional offer is made**

- In considering the information provided by the referees, have particular regard to any absence relating to a disability in light of the employer's responsibilities under the Equality Act.

- You may need to arrange a further discussion with the candidate to ask specific questions on the reasons for their absences or seek the advice of the Occupational Health Unit.

## **Induction**

- A copy of the school policy statement on attendance and the absence notification procedure should be made available to all existing employees and new appointments to posts at the school.
- During the induction period, reinforce the notification procedure and the consequences that follow if that procedure is not adhered to and reinforce good attendance as a positive aim of the school.
- For support staff subject to probationary periods, prior to confirmation of appointment, carefully review any periods of absence (extending the probationary period where necessary) or, in extreme cases, take steps not to confirm the appointment.

## **6. DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION - EQUALITY ACT (2010)**

6.1 The Equality Act describes a disability as *“A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities”*.

- ‘substantial’ is more than minor or trivial, e.g. it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task like getting dressed
- ‘long-term’ means 12 months or more, e.g. a breathing condition that develops as a result of a lung infection
- a person is automatically considered to have a disability from the point of diagnosis with HIV, cancer or multiple sclerosis.

6.2 Disability discrimination can occur in any of the following instances:

- When a person with a disability is treated less favourably than someone else because of their disability
- A person with a disability is treated unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of that person's disability and the unfavourable treatment is not a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. The employer must know, or could reasonably have been expected to know, that the person had a disability at the time of the unfavourable treatment for this to constitute disability discrimination.
- When there is a failure to make reasonable adjustments and take reasonable steps to:
  - avoid the substantial disadvantage where a provision, criterion or practice applied by or on behalf of the employer puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared to those who are not disabled;
  - remove or alter a physical feature or provide a reasonable means of avoiding such a feature where it puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared to those who are not disabled.
  - provide an auxiliary aid (which includes an auxiliary service) where a disabled person would, but for the provision of that auxiliary aid, be put at a substantial disadvantage compared to those who are not disabled.

6.3 Headteachers and nominated persons must be mindful of the Equality Act when dealing with sickness absence matters. Further advice and guidance can be obtained from the Schools' HR Team.

## **7. "NOMINATED PERSON"**

7.1 The school should identify a "nominated person(s)" who may be the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, or other senior person(s) from the School Leadership Team according to the size/organisational arrangements of the school. There must be clarity amongst all employees as to the nominated person(s) and the employees they are responsible for. It may be appropriate, in a large school, for more than one member of the Leadership Team to be nominated or one nominated person for teaching staff and another for support staff. Any "nominated person" will need to be sensitive to the difficulties employees face in relation to sickness absence and will need to access confidential attendance and sickness records to carry out their role. The "nominated person" may carry out the following functions for all employees for whom they have responsibility:

- be aware of the absence record of each employee – a Manager's Monitoring form for recording absence levels is contained at Appendix A
- be the contact point for monitoring/the notification procedure
- ensure that employees are aware of and comply with the absence reporting arrangements
- conduct return to work discussions with employees in respect of all absences (see paragraph 12)
- seek to assist employees in need of support
- refer to the Headteacher\* cases which are a potential cause for concern, in accordance with "trigger points" adopted by the school.

## **8. TRIGGER LEVELS**

8.1 It is recommended that the school sets "trigger levels" for sickness absence. Trigger levels are the point within an employee's sickness absence record at which management action may be taken to improve attendance levels. All employees should be made aware of the trigger levels and the consequences of their sickness absence levels reaching the trigger levels. The following trigger levels are commended to schools:

### **10 working days sickness absence and/or 4 periods of sickness absence in a rolling period of 12 months**

8.2 For employees working fewer than 5 days per week, the trigger level of 10 working days should be applied on a pro-rata basis. The 10 working days represent the equivalent of an employee's working pattern for two weeks. For the purposes of the trigger levels, a working day would be any day that the employee is due to work, whether that be a full day or part of a day. For example, the trigger level for a 0.5fte employee working 2.5 days per week (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday morning) would be 5 working days or 4 periods of sickness absence in a rolling period of 12 months. However, if the 0.5fte employee instead worked 5 shorter days, the trigger level would be 10 working days or 4 periods of sickness absence in a rolling period of 12 months, because their normal working pattern is 10 working days over two weeks.

8.3 The trigger level for the number of periods of sickness absence is 4 periods within a rolling 12 month period for all employees regardless of part time or full time status.

- 8.4 If the Governing Board wishes to amend the trigger levels, then they must ensure that they consult with staff and trade unions prior to taking a decision to do that.
- 8.5 The purpose of setting trigger levels is to provide a mechanism for managing short term or repeated absence. All sickness absences, including long term absences, count towards the trigger levels. However, it may not be appropriate to take action under the Short Term and Repeated Absence Procedure against an employee who has only had one long term absence and no history of other sickness absences.
- 8.6 Disability related absences are counted towards trigger levels under the school's sickness absence arrangements. Where absences become a cause for concern, Headteachers\* need to make a reasonable decision on what, if any, action would be appropriate under school procedures. This decision will be informed by factors such as the nature of the person's condition, whether they are adjusting to the condition or to treatment for it, the frequency of absences, length or duration of absences, the nature of the job, effects on the school and other relevant factors. Headteachers\* must also consider if other reasonable adjustments might reduce the need for the person to be absent.

## 9. MONITORING AND RECORDING

- 9.1 Accurate records and meaningful, statistical information are vital to the process of managing attendance. All Headteachers\* should be able to answer the following questions:
- How much absence exists in my school?
  - What form does it take? Consider patterns of absence/reasons for absence.
- 9.2 Records will be very useful to establish whether patterns of absenteeism exist. This information can be used to determine trends in sickness absence, (e.g. persistent higher levels of absenteeism at certain times as well as potential problem areas where the frequency of attendance is unsatisfactory and may require particular attention). Appendix B provides examples of how sickness absence levels can be analysed.
- 9.3 The Senior Leadership Team/Governing Board should receive regular reports on levels of sickness absence within the school.
- 9.4 The School processes personal data, including special categories of data, collected and processed during the absence management process in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy. In particular, data collected as part of the absence management process and any subsequent stages of action under the Repeated Short Term Absence Procedure and the Long Term Sickness Absence Procedure is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of completing the procedures. Inappropriate access or disclosure of employee data constitutes a data breach and should be reported in accordance with the school's Data Protection Policy. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under the school's Disciplinary Procedure.
- 9.5 In the case of a 'mental health emergency' it may be appropriate to share information with the relevant emergency service and/or next of kin. A mental health emergency is defined by the Information Commissioners Office as *a "situation in which you believe that someone is at risk of serious harm to themselves, or others, because of their mental health. This can include the potential loss of life"*. There may

be some situations when it is **not** appropriate to share information with the employee's next of kin and therefore judgement would need to be called in each situation. More information can be found on the ICO's website here [Information sharing in mental health emergencies at work | ICO](#). Advice can also be sought from the Schools HR Team

## 10. ABSENCE OF THE HEADTEACHER

- 10.1 The Chair of Governors will be the nominated person in respect of the Headteacher's absence and will monitor the absence. They should ensure that the absence is recorded in the same way as it is for all other staff, and that any referral to the Occupational Health Unit is undertaken without unnecessary delay. In addition, they should ensure that return to work interviews are undertaken after each period of absence. If queries or concerns arise in relation to the absence of the Headteacher, these should be directed to a member of the Schools' HR Team, who will liaise with the Chair of Governors regarding further action to be pursued under these guidelines and their associated procedures.

## 11. NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

- 11.1 The school must make internal arrangements to ensure that absence is recorded correctly using the online absence recording system and that the appropriate documentation relating to sickness absence, including medical certificates is obtained and maintained.
- 11.2 The nominated person should ensure that all employees are aware of the procedures to be followed when reporting their absence.

### What should happen if an employee does not attend for work?

- 1st working day**
- the employee must contact the nominated person(s)/the school office/other contact approved by the school by \_\_\_\_\_am at the latest, to enable alternative staffing arrangements to be put in place. The school will need to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place for contact to be made. ***Only in exceptional circumstances is it appropriate for someone other than the employee to contact the school to report a sickness absence.***
  - the employee must give brief details of the reason for absence, the date the absence commenced, the likely duration of the absence, whether it is related to an accident or injury at work and whether any medical attention has been sought. This information should be recorded by the nominated person and inputted onto the online absence recording system.
- After 3 days**
- if the absence continues, the employee must make further contact with the nominated person regarding their absence giving, if possible, an indication of likely return date and information relating to any medical advice that has been obtained.

**NOTE** For all absences beyond three calendar days (including weekends), the employee must complete a Self Certification Form upon their return to work.

- After 7 calendar days**
- a medical certificate must be forwarded to the nominated person, who will ensure it is forwarded to the School Office.
- Longer term absence**
- During periods of long term absence, employees have a responsibility to keep the school informed of progress through the nominated person. The school should also maintain contact and, where appropriate, arrange to meet with the employee to review the sickness absence. The purpose of such contact is to enquire as to the employee's health and recovery, to ascertain whether a return to work is likely in the near future and to identify any support or adjustments that could be made to facilitate an earlier return to work. Any contact with the employee should be handled sensitively to avoid the perception that the employee is being pressurised or harassed.

## **12. RETURN TO WORK DISCUSSION**

12.1 Following any period of sickness absence, employees must, immediately before or upon return to work, report to the nominated person, who will arrange a return to work discussion. This shows:

- a commitment to the management of attendance;
- that the employee will need to explain their absence to you;
- that you are being consistent.

12.2 The purpose of the return to work discussion is to

- discuss the overall sickness absence record of the employee;
- discuss the reason for absence;
- seek to establish underlying problems – either work-related or personal;
- establish if the employee is seeking the appropriate (medical) treatment/ intervention. Bear in mind the need for confidentiality in relation to this. An employee may not wish to disclose full details of any medical condition. If this is the case, you may wish to consider a referral to the Occupational Health Unit for advice (if appropriate);
- be sensitive to the reasons for absence and be in a position to offer support/ advice/practical assistance - this may require referral to other sources e.g. OHU, trade unions;
- if the absence is disability related, consider any reasonable adjustments that may be appropriate to enable the employee to maintain attendance at work;
- ensure the employee is fit enough to return to full duties. If there is any cause for concern, the nominated person should refer the matter to the Headteacher\* who should seek the advice of a member of the Schools' HR Team;
- If the employee has reached a trigger level, they should be informed that the matter will be referred through to the informal stage of the Short Term and Repeated Absence Procedure, known as the 'Headteacher Discussion'. If the employee is already being monitored under the informal or formal stage of the Short Term and Repeated Absence Procedure, they should be informed that further action under that procedure may follow;
- brief the employee on any current work issues.



NB. It is not appropriate to discuss other procedures (e.g. disciplinary, capability) with the employee during the return to work discussion.

12.3 The nominated person should

- ensure that this discussion is confidential and conducted in private at a convenient time;
- be aware that the return to work discussion should be supportive and informal. Although in some cases it is an opportunity to point out the frequency/pattern of absence which may be leading to concern;
- Ensure that a record of the return to work discussion is taken (an example form to use can be found at Appendix C).

12.4 In the case of absences of the Headteacher, the return to work discussion should be conducted by the Chair of Governors, following the guidance outlined above.

**13. OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH UNIT (OHU)**

13.1 The role of OHU is to provide advice and guidance to managers to assist in the management of sickness absence cases. Once a referral to OHU is made, an assessment of the employee will be made either face to face or over the telephone. A report of the assessment will be provided. OHU can also undertake ergonomic risk assessments within the employee's workplace if appropriate.

13.2 An employee may be required to attend an appointment with OHU where it is considered that their illness/injury negatively impacts on their ability to attend work or undertake their duties. Referrals to OHU can take place in cases involving both long term and short-term sickness absence. The OHU is generally able to carry out the appointment within 14 days of referral.

13.3 In order to go ahead with the appointment, OHU will ask the employee if they consent to the appointment and therefore it is advised that the following guidance is adhered to prior to the referral being submitted to reduce the risk of the OHU cancelling the appointment due to a lack of consent:

- Have a clear reason for the referral and discuss this with the employee, including what background information will be supplied (e.g. absence record, any specific concerns about performance or work capability and/or conduct that could be underpinned by a health related issue) and the types of questions that are being asked. Ideally provide this information in writing to the employee and ask for them to reply so that there is no dispute regarding what had been discussed with them in advance and whether they have consented, however at the very least consent must be given verbally. Remember OHU will share this information with the employee, therefore it is crucial that the employee has been informed about the reasons for the referral and confirmed that they agree to the referral process.
- Provide the employee with information regarding what will happen at the appointment;
- Advise the employee to ensure they have use of a private room and that they have details of their medication and medical appointments;

- Obtain both a landline and mobile number for the employee which they are happy for OHU to use;
- If the employee uses a 'call barred list' on their phone, advise them to review the settings to ensure the OHU number is not barred. Ensure the employee is aware that the call will be from an unknown number;
- Explain to the employee that on receipt of the report a meeting may be arranged which may require sharing the report with a HR colleague;

13.4 If the employee does not consent:

- Explain to the employee that it is part of their Terms and Conditions of employment to engage with the Occupational Health process;
- Explain that if they don't attend the appointment or if they withdraw their consent then management decisions may need to be made regarding their capability for their role without the benefit of medical advice which is unlikely to be in their best interest (consideration of support and adjustments may be more limited without greater knowledge of their health);
- Explain that if there is insufficient evidence to support their ability to sustain regular attendance or return to work (if they're on long term sick) then decisions may need to be made based on the employee's absence record/performance to date, without the benefit of medical advice, which could ultimately put their employment at risk.

13.5 When referring an individual for an OHU appointment, the arrangements set out in Section 4 of the Long Term Sickness Absence Procedure should be followed. The Schools HR Team have also provided some additional guidance on making an effective referral to OHU [here](#).

13.6 Any medical report should be considered when deciding future management action. The contents of the report can be shared with the employee if requested.

## 14. FURTHER ACTION

14.1 Absence levels/patterns giving cause for concern will usually fall into 3 categories:

- Repeated or frequent sickness absence which may include short and long term periods of absence
- Long term absence due to permanent incapacity
- Longer term absence where condition is not of a permanent nature

14.2 These cases will be dealt with under the Short Term and Repeated Sickness Absence Procedure or under the separate Long Term Sickness Absence Procedure as appropriate.

14.3 In circumstances where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the employee is abusing the sickness absence scheme, normal disciplinary procedures will be applied. Examples of such circumstances include:

- failure to follow the sickness notification procedure without good reason

- failure to provide medical certificates when required to do so
- falsification of self-certification or medical certificates
- undertaking other employment or engaging in any activity incompatible with the illness or which may delay recovery or aggravate the illness
- failure to attend the OHU when required without an acceptable explanation

14.4 Such circumstances may also lead to the cessation of pay under the Occupational Sick Pay Scheme.

## **15 CRITICAL OR TERMINAL ILLNESS**

15.1 School may be informed that an employee has been diagnosed with a critical and/or terminal illness in a number of ways, e.g. by the employee themselves, their spouse, a colleague or OHU. Headteachers are advised to think carefully about where the information has come from and how reliable and accurate it is before considering what action may be necessary.

15.2 Whilst employers have no (absolute or contractual) right to know confidential medical information about an employee's illness, Headteachers are advised to seek appropriate medical advice in order to determine what support may be available to the individual, whether they are attending work or absent. It is therefore imperative that employees are referred to OHU at an early stage. Advice should also be sought from a member of the Schools' HR Team.

15.3 It is important that the referral to OHU is discussed with the employee and to outline the reasons for the referral and to provide as much reassurance as possible that the referral is a supportive measure for the employee.

15.4 In addition, Headteachers are also advised to ask the employee directly what support they may require from the school. Any supportive measures will depend on whether the employee is continuing to attend work or if they are absent and may include:

### Employees attending work whilst suffering from a critical and/or terminal illness:

- A discussion with the employee about how much information they would like colleagues to know and how they would like this to be communicated.
- Referral to OHU and an open discussion with the employee regarding the OHU report
- It is likely that the condition will fall within the scope of the definition of disability within the Equality Act 2010 and therefore you must seek advice on what, if any, reasonable adjustments should be made to the workplace (see paragraph 6 above regarding the Equality Act and reasonable adjustments). Advice can be sought from OHU regarding reasonable adjustments.
- Hold regular discussions with the employee in order that you can review the support being provided in light of any changes to their condition. Keep a record of these discussions and support offered.
- Maintain honest and open communication. There may come a point when it becomes no longer feasible for the employee to remain in work and it is important that this is handled sensitively and in accordance with the sickness absence procedures adopted by your school.

- Allow time off for medical investigations and treatment.
- **If the employee is terminally ill or is likely to become, or becomes, permanently unfit for work they should be advised to seek advice regarding their pension from their relevant pension provider. Headteachers should seek advice from the Schools' HR Team and arrange a meeting as per paragraph 15.6 below.**

Employees absent from work as a result of suffering from a critical and/or terminal illness:

- Contact with the employee should be maintained and the method of contact (e.g. telephone, home visits, cards, e-mail), frequency of contact and contact person at school should be agreed with the employee. In some cases it may be that the employee does not wish to have direct communication with the school and in those circumstances agreement should be reached with the individual as to who should maintain contact on their behalf (e.g. relative, friend or Trade Union Representative).
- A discussion with the employee about how much information they would like colleagues to know and how they would like this to be communicated.
- Referral to OHU and an open discussion with the employee regarding the OHU report.
- Advise the employee to contact their Trade Union for advice and guidance in relation to their employment situation. The Schools' HR Team work very closely with the recognised trade unions and would encourage their involvement in any discussions regarding an individual's future employment. All employees are procedurally entitled to be represented at any formal meetings which may be convened to discuss an employee's absence from work.
- **If the employee is terminally ill or is likely to become, or becomes, permanently unfit for work, they should be advised to seek advice regarding their pension from their relevant pension provider. Headteachers should seek advice from the Schools' HR Team and arrange a meeting as per paragraph 15.6 below.**
- If the employee is deemed fit for work, either because they are recovering from their illness or they are receiving treatment which has brought the condition under control to the extent that they are able to return to work, then further advice should be sought from OHU as to what support can be offered to the employee on their return and what reasonable adjustments may be required. It may also be advisable to arrange for OHU to conduct a Workplace Assessment with the employee upon their return to work.

15.5 The above list of suggestions is not exhaustive. There are many other ways to demonstrate support such as sending cards or flowers, inviting the employee to special events and encouraging other colleagues to keep in touch if the employee wishes.

15.6 **If the employee is terminally ill or is likely to become, or becomes, permanently unfit for work, a meeting with the employee and their family/representative may be arranged and advice sought from a member of the Schools' HR Team. This should be done as soon as**

**practicable to ensure that the employee and their family and dependents are able to access pension benefits as soon as possible.**

- 15.7 In order for employees in the Local Government Pension Scheme and the Teachers' Pension Scheme to access an ill health retirement, medical evidence needs to be provided. In cases of terminal illness, the medical information needs to indicate life expectancy. Further guidance on ill health retirement and how to apply is on the Schools Portal ([Teachers](#)) ([Support Staff](#)).
- 15.8 Approaches may be made by other parties enquiring about the health of the employee, e.g. parents, pupils, external visitors, members of the public and the media. Any enquiries should be handled in such a way as to maintain confidentiality and to protect the dignity of the employee concerned. Any enquiries from the press must be directed to the County Council's Corporate Communications who will deal with such enquiries on the school's behalf.
- 15.9 Do not underestimate the impact the situation will have on other colleagues. They are likely to be distressed by the news that a colleague is seriously ill and may react in unexpected and uncharacteristic ways. They may also be distracted by the news and therefore it is imperative that such news is delivered in such a way as to protect the health and safety of children within their care.
- 15.10 Consideration should also be given regarding any additional duties staff may need to carry out as a result of their colleague being absent or changes to their duties/working arrangements.
- 15.11 Returning to work after a cancer diagnosis or a long term critical illness can seem daunting and stressful. Many employees may not receive medical advice about when to come back and so are left to make this decision alone. Getting the right support from school can make a big difference to the success or otherwise of a return to work.
- 15.12 Prior to holding a return to work meeting with the employee (see paragraph 12 above), it is advisable for Headteachers to arrange a meeting with the employee a week or two before their return to help alleviate any concerns they might have about returning to work and agree a return to work plan. It may be the case that the employee can only undertake restricted duties initially and a phased return to work may be appropriate. A referral to OHU will inform the basis for the return to work and it may be appropriate to arrange for a workplace assessment to be conducted with the employee upon their return to work.
- 15.13 In the event of death, Headteachers need to be mindful of the impact this could have on colleagues some of whom may be affected more than others. It is therefore important to ensure that news of this nature is shared in a sensitive and timely manner taking into account the likely impact on staff and pupils. Any unnecessary activities that are due to take place imminently should be postponed wherever possible to allow staff and children time to come to terms with the news. In some cases it may be appropriate to seek support from the Local Authority's **Critical Incident Psychological First Aid team**.
- 15.14 Trauma support and trauma focused counselling can also be accessed by the County Council's OHU provider, Optima Health. This can be provided on an individual or team basis. For full details of how to access and make use of this service see [here](#)
- 15.15 Employees can also be directed to [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) a national charity providing bereavement support by telephone, email or website.

15.16 In addition, it is also important to contact the Schools' HR Team for further advice in relation to commencing the Death in Service procedure and in order to ensure the employee's salary and pension are dealt with appropriately and promptly.

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS**

**MANAGER'S MONITORING FORM**

**TEAM/DEPARTMENT .....**

**MANAGER'S NAME/DESIGNATION .....**

**EMPLOYEE'S NAME.....**

| <b>DATE(S) OF SICKNESS ABSENCE</b> | <b>REASON</b> | <b>TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKING DAYS</b> | <b>CUMULATIVE TOTAL</b> |
|------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
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**NOTES**

- 1. The current trigger levels recommended to schools by Lancashire County Council are either 10 working days and/or 4 periods of absence in any rolling 12 month period. (See section 8 for further details relating to part time employees).

2. For the purpose of monitoring sickness absence on this form count only actual working days lost (excluding weekends/bank holidays).



## **ANALYSIS OF SICKNESS ABSENCE**

These calculations should be made using periods of sickness absence only and not leave of absence, which should be dealt with under the appropriate Leave of Absence procedure for teachers or support staff.

Sickness absence can be recorded and analysed in a number of ways and the approach taken by an individual school will depend very much on the staff complement.

The most straightforward method of making comparisons is:

### **Average annual days absence per employee over a period**

$$\frac{\text{Total sickness absence days}}{\text{Total number of employees}}$$

- NOTE**
- (i) Include all employees both full-time and part-time.
  - (ii) It can be helpful to break this down by Department/categories of employees/male/female.

There are other methods which can provide more sophisticated analysis. Examples of these include:-

### **Percentage of total time lost in a specified period (a term/a year) due to sickness (Lost Time Rate).**

$$\frac{\text{Total days sickness absence}}{\text{Possible total working days available}} \times 100$$

- NOTE**
- (i) Figures should be calculated in respect of all days' absence/availability for both full-time and part-time employees.
  - (ii) Each employment category will have to be calculated separately - Possible working time available excludes average annual leave, weekends, statutory and extra-statutory holidays
  - (iii) This figure can be broken down by Department/employment category/male/female.
  - (iv) Short term and long term absence percentages can be calculated by viewing all absences of for example three weeks or less as short term

### **Average number of separate absences per employee irrespective of duration (Frequency Rate)**

- this indicates whether absence is due mainly to long term or short term absence

$$\frac{\text{Number of spells of sickness absence in period}}{\text{Total number of Employees}}$$

**NOTE** (i) This figure can be broken down by Department/employment category to provide more meaningful comparison

**Number of employees who had any period of absence over the period shown as a percentage (Individual Frequency Rate)**

- This indicates whether absences are spread or concentrated with a small number of employees.

$$\frac{\text{Number of employees having one or more periods of sickness absence in the period}}{\text{Number of employees}} \times 100$$

**APPENDIX C**

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS**

**RECORD OF RETURN TO WORK DISCUSSION**

**EMPLOYEE'S NAME** .....

**ROLE** .....

**DATES OF SICKNESS ABSENCE:** FROM ..... TO .....

**SELF CERTIFICATION FORM COMPLETED FOR ABSENCE YES / NO\***

*\*If NO, has a medical statement of fitness for work been provided* YES / NO

**INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY** .....

**NUMBER OF PERIODS OF SICKNESS ABSENCE IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS** .....

**NUMBER OF WORKING DAYS LOST TO SICKNESS ABSENCE IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS** .....

*NB: Trigger Levels: 4 periods of absence or 10\* working days (\*pro rata for employees who do not work 5 days per week) within a rolling 12 month period.*

The employee should be invited to express any concerns that they may have which might have caused the absence, including any longer term disability issues. Refer to the guidance notes overleaf when conducting the discussion and completing this form.

A) Summary of interview comments: (Please continue on separate sheet if required)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

B) Action discussed with employee:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

I confirm that this is a true and accurate record of the return to work discussion.

Signed: ..... (Line Manager) Date: .....

Signed: ..... (Employee) Date: .....

## GUIDANCE NOTES

This form should be completed by the line manager and signed by both parties to confirm that it is a true and accurate record. A copy of the form should be provided to the employee if requested.

### Section A

In accordance with the School's Sickness Absence Procedures, an employee must report to their line manager (or other nominated contact, who may be the Headteacher) following any period of sickness absence.

At Section A, the manager should:

- ensure that the employee is fit to return to work
- discuss the reason for absence, and whether it is related to previous absences
- discuss whether work was in any way a contributory factor and if so, any measures that can be used to mitigate this in the future (if appropriate)
- discuss any support or assistance that can be provided to the employee to enable them to sustain regular attendance in the future (if appropriate)

*tick when completed*

### Section B

Describe here any action discussed with the employee e.g:

- employee to seek medical advice from their own GP to determine why symptoms recur (if appropriate).
- consideration of any reasonable adjustments to the work situation.
- OHU referral (if appropriate).
- Inform the employee if they are approaching or have met the trigger levels and of the consequences of this

### Confidentiality

This document should be retained on the employee's personal file. If the document is retained electronically, it should be retained in the appropriate file/folder.