

Greenslade Primary School

Sickness and Absence Policy and Procedures.

2022 / 2023

Based on The Royal Borough of Greenwich Policy from 2016

At Greenslade we view staff attendance as a vital aspect of our health and welfare responsibilities. A fit and healthy workforce with a consistently high level of attendance has a lasting impact on the achievement of our children and the progress they make. Consistent high levels of staff attendance also has a positive impact on the well-being and moral of all staff as people are able to focus on their own role without being asked to cover and adapt their working practice because other staff are not in school. There is also a significant impact on our financial situation if we have to fund cover for colleagues who are not in school.

Policy

Schools have a responsibility to manage attendance in a way which safeguards the interests of the pupils and other staff whilst at the same time showing understanding to the individual. We aim to achieve this by providing a healthy and safe working environment and by keeping avoidable absence to an absolute minimum. The Royal Borough of Greenwich, as a good employer, does not wish its employees to attend for work when they are too sick, but does expect its employees to take personal responsibility for their attendance and to meet their contractual obligations to work. Frequent or extended absence, even though genuine, can significantly impair the quality of the service that the school provides and affects the continuity of pupil's education.

Employees have a responsibility to be in school and attend work unless they have an authorised reason for absence.

Aim

These procedures are a blend of our school practice and the LA's Managing Sickness Absence Policy and Procedures (January 2016).

The aims of these procedures are to provide a framework to effectively and consistently manage attendance, while ensuring that all staff are treated with respect, understanding, and compassion, according to their particular circumstances. Full regard is given to all the School's policies and the Royal Borough's duty of care and welfare to its employees.

We aim to:

- effectively manage the sickness and absence of school staff so that they feel able to carry out their duties and contractual obligations,
- ensure that all members of school staff are treated fairly and equally,
- ensure staff return to work following periods of ill health as soon as it is appropriate to do so,
- ensure that children are learning effectively because they receive consistent support in their learning and to ensure that our children receive the educational experiences they deserve,
- ensure we follow the legal guidelines as defined in LA policies and procedures,
- ensure that we are able to meet our financial commitments due to appropriate financial and budgetary management.

During periods of sickness our priority is to ensure staff return to full health so that they can come back to work quickly and provide our children with the educational experiences they deserve. We strive to give all staff an appropriate level of support to promote a swift recovery.

We aim to encourage a culture where all staff feel confident about taking sick leave when it is necessary but recognise that absence has an impact on the education of our children, on other members of the school community and on the school's budget. For this reason, the school monitors staff absence and, when appropriate, takes action to reduce the amount of time staff are away from the workplace. This monitoring is carried out through the Itrent system. This includes maintaining contact with staff during absence and seeking professional advice.

We are committed to following a set of supportive but reasonable arrangements to allow the needs of both staff and school to be met.

Certification

Not exceeding 3 calendar days

- No formal notification is required.(No medical certificate)

Exceeding 3 calendar days

- DWP Self Certificate form required - available from our school office, Department for Work and Pensions Office and Doctors Surgeries..

Exceeding 7 calendar days

- Doctors medical certificate required no later than the 8th day of absence. Where more than one medical certificate is required certificates should be sent to the school as soon as soon as they are issued.

Final certificates where there has been long term illness a certificate must be obtained before an employee may resume work certifying fitness to resume duties.

Staff Absence Records

- These are maintained by the SSAO in accordance with the Data Protection Act and are available to see upon request. We use the Itrent system.
- The Headteacher, Governors and LA monitor these regularly as appropriate.
- The SSAO follows LA requirements for recording staff absence.

Returning to work after absence

We strive to carry out "Return to work Reviews" following any period of absence.

When an employee returns to work, irrespective of the duration of the absence, the Headteacher or SSAO conducts a return to work review as soon as practicable. The purpose of the review is to create an opportunity for the Headteacher or SSAO to cover the following:

- Welcome the employee back to work.
- Clarify the reason for the absence and discuss any problems and/or health concerns
- Give the employee the opportunity to raise any other concerns relevant to their return to work
- Clarify if there are any patterns to the sickness or any concerns you may have as to the reason for the absence.
- Find out if the illness is likely to recur and what this will mean in practice to the individual and service i.e. if further time-off will be necessary (e.g. for treatment).
- Establish whether the absence is related to a disability or impairment and discuss whether any reasonable adjustments are required.

- Assess whether an early referral to occupational health is relevant particularly in relation to mental health (stress, depression, anxiety) or musculoskeletal absences
- Advise the employee of their responsibility to maintain a satisfactory level of attendance.
- Advise the employee, if relevant, of any problems arising from the absence, the impact on the service, and potential consequences of unsatisfactory sickness absence levels.
- Ensure the employee has completed a self-certification form or where appropriate, provided medical certificates to cover the whole period of absence, including a final 'fit to work' certificate.
- Advise the employee that if the period of absence has triggered the formal sickness procedure they will be asked to attend a Stage 1 Sickness Review Hearing.
- In certain situations an employee may discuss with the Headteacher the option of seeking additional support from their Trades Union representative during the return to work process.

Local Arrangements

- Greenslade staff are expected to be in school on the days on which the school is open, on their contracted days when they are well enough to be here. This includes INSET Days.
- Notification of absence from work should be made to the Headteacher, Deputy or to the school administrative staff. A reason for the absence must be given (not just unwell or sick) and an expected return date should be given whenever possible.
- Best practice is to inform the Headteacher or Office Staff as soon as possible if a member of staff is due to be absent so that cover can be arranged if necessary. Please call the Headteacher's private mobile number at anytime after 5am.
- When a message is left on the answer phone or a text message is sent, staff must call later and speak to the Head, Deputy or SSAO.
- Notification of absence for teaching staff should be made to the Headteacher or Deputy before 7.30 am (and ideally before 7 am) for teaching staff and by 8 am for all other staff. A balance must be made between timely communication and deciding whether you are able to come in to work. Sometimes a good night's sleep can make the difference in deciding whether a member of staff is able to come into school. Any diary commitments or duties should be discussed at this time.
- On the day of an absence staff are asked to call in to the school office as close to 3.00pm as possible to discuss their progress toward returning to work and to allow cover arrangements to be made if necessary.
- Relevant phone numbers are available from the office.
- Unavoidable absences other than due to illness that are known in advance should be discussed and agreed with the Headteacher before they are recorded in the Office Diary. Absence should not be written in the diary before it is discussed with the HT. It is the responsibility of the member of staff to keep the Headteacher fully notified of "developments" affecting absence.
- Daily communication is required unless absence is covered by medical certificate or other arrangements have been made, eg during the long term care of a family member.
- Cover for absence. The SSAO Head and Deputy are responsible for organising cover for all staff. Decisions about how cover is organised will be taken on an individual, case by case basis.
- Cover for teaching staff. We strive to cover classes with a qualified teacher at all times. This is why communication about absence is vital so that this can be arranged. In "emergency" situations we will cover a teacher with a member or two of non-teaching staff who know the children and the classroom routines. We have the option of "splitting" classes but feel this is an unsatisfactory way of providing cover. We record the number of times a class is split.
- Cover for non-teaching staff.
 - Learning Support Assistants - Decisions are made by the Senior Leadership Team on an individual basis.

- Office Staff – No additional cover unless exceptional circumstances. Cover generally provided by other office staff, Premises Manager or Headteacher.
- Premises Manager - No additional cover unless exceptional circumstances. Cover generally provided by cleaners, office staff and Headteacher. Longer term cover can be provided by staff from Plumstead Manor.
- Cleaning Staff - For short term absences cleaning duties are covered internally by our existing staff (Premises Manager and other cleaners). Longer term absences will be covered by additional staff.
- Mid Day Meals Supervisors Provision of cover is dependent on the number of staff that are absent, and the weather conditions. Our day to day ratio exceeds legal requirements for the number of children we supervise. The Headteacher, members of SLT and LSAs will provide lunchtime cover if necessary.

All staff working within the school are required to take their holiday entitlements during the scheduled school holidays. This includes all scheduled INSET Days that are published in advance of the time of booking. The Premises Manager may be an exception depending on school requirements, if for example a large scale building project is planned during the holidays. Staff cannot build-up “time in lieu” unless this is agreed in advance with the Headteacher.

Compassionate leave with pay is granted in accordance with guidance from the LA. Staff must speak directly to the Headteacher regarding matters that may require compassionate leave.

Leave without pay will not be granted unless on compassionate grounds or in exceptional circumstances requested in advance and in writing. Forms for this (pink) are available from the SSAO.

Family Commitments

We try to support all staff with their various family commitments. We are aware that staff at Greenslade are entirely committed to the education of our children and many frequently work beyond their contracted hours. We aim to acknowledge this by supporting our families as much as possible.

However we have a duty to provide a high level of education and expect staff to make appointments and arrangements outside of school time.

Leave to look after family members will be unpaid unless exceptional circumstances apply and an agreement has been made with the Headteacher.

If a family member is unwell we expect staff to make a balance between the support they give and that which other members of their family give. If repeated time is needed to support with home or family issues, we ask staff to consider ways that this time can be made up. For example by taking work home or making up hours at other times so that we can reduce any negative impact on the education of our children.

Non sickness related absence must be discussed with the Headteacher and will normally be taken as unpaid leave. This is not however to be treated as a regular “option” and all staff are expected to work on their contracted days when the school is open.

Maternity, Adoption and Parental Leave

All employees are entitled to leave as set out in the Maternity, Adoption and Parental Leave Scheme of the London Borough of Greenwich. Copies are available from the office.

Religious Festivals

Staff must make every effort to attend religious services out of school hours where possible. Leave for religious celebrations are granted at the discretion of the Headteacher or Governing

Body and is dependent on other staff absences and the continuity of provision for our children. Requests will be considered on a case by case basis and decisions will not be viewed as setting precedents for future requests.

Sabbatical Leave

Staff eligible for sabbatical leave must follow LA procedures for application. Refer to relevant sections of the Personnel Manual kept in the school office.

Discretionary Leave

Absence to go for interviews or to view schools with regard to applying for a job, absence for moving house and other similar absences will be granted at the discretion of the Headteacher. Absence for attending funerals (and payment) will be discussed on an individual basis. Advanced warning is needed to ensure cover arrangements are made.

Occasional Days

We have always tried to be supportive to staff in terms of leave related to building work and deliveries. However, Greenslade staff are expected to be in school on the days on which the school is open and employees should make arrangements for appointments to be made outside of their contracted working hours. However where this is unavoidable these days will be taken as unpaid leave in accordance with LA guidance on such issues.

With all matters related to absence it is important that we strike an appropriate balance. We must ensure that our staff are fit and healthy as much as we can by making their jobs manageable and enjoyable. We must ensure that people are confident to take time off if they are unwell or need to have leave for other genuine reasons. We must however provide the high quality education and continuity of learning that our children deserve. This can only be achieved by having a full workforce who are consistently in school and are aware of how vital their presence is to our children and other staff.

We must also be mindful of our budget and the financial challenges that we face as a school.

Staff must be aware that unacceptably low levels of attendance at school will be challenged and managed using the procedures set out by the Local Authority.

Triggering the Formal Attendance Management Procedure

The Formal Sickness Absence procedure is triggered when:

- the employee's pattern of sickness absence reaches 9 working days sickness absence (continuous or cumulative), or 3 periods of absence totalling 5 working days or more in a 12 month period. Or
- an employee's pattern of sickness absence gives rise to managerial concern (e.g. causing on-going service delivery issues). Alternatively, where there are trends of absences occurring (e.g. particular days of the week, times of the term, or linked to certain tasks/weather conditions).

Triggering the Formal Procedure occurs automatically, but the decision following the review will depend on the individual circumstances and merits of the case. Care is taken to ensure that formal meetings are conducted in a supportive rather than adversarial manner especially where there is an underlying medical condition. All formal meetings may be attended by trade union representative. A work colleague may attend as a representative if the employee wishes. Five working days' notice of the meeting will be given. If the representative is not available on the given date of the hearing the employee is entitled to propose a reasonable alternative date, which may be up to five working days after the original date. After this period the Headteacher is entitled to hold the meeting

irrespective of whether or not the employee attends. Outcomes from formal meetings should be confirmed in writing within ten working days.

Stage 1 Review – Short Term Absence

As soon as the trigger is reached a Stage 1 review is the first formal step in addressing sickness absence. The purpose of the meeting will be to:

- Review the sickness absence record and the impact the absence is having on the service and colleagues. At this stage consideration may also be given to historical patterns of absence in previous years (normally up to five years).
- Consider any relevant medical information that is available and obtain further medical information if deemed necessary by referral to Occupational Health. This is essential where there is underlying medical condition but early referral may also be useful in other cases, in particular stress related issues.
- Discuss the reasons for absence and any relevant information the employee has to offer (e.g. personal, domestic, welfare issues, that the absence was connected to a disability).
- Take into account any disability related absence and consider, with the employee, whether reasonable adjustments are required, which may assist them in reducing their sickness absences (e.g. change in hours, working arrangements, alternative or temporary duties, redeployment bearing in mind the needs of the service).
- The implications of further periods of absence.
- The outcome of the meeting will depend on the circumstances but will normally include the employee being advised that their attendance will be monitored for a defined period of time, with a view to reducing their level of absence to one that falls below the trigger points. There is no appeal to a Stage 1 outcome.
- During the monitoring period the Headteacher will ensure regular contact with the employee to discuss their attendance /sickness and progress.

Further actions may also include:

- Agreeing any reasonable adjustments to working arrangements.
- Further referral to Occupational Health.
- Requiring sick notes for any further periods of absence, regardless of duration.
- Considering other types of support that may be available and/or appropriate (eg undertaking stress risk assessments where appropriate).
- If a satisfactory level of attendance has been achieved at the end of the monitoring period the employee will be advised in writing and reminded of the need to sustain their level of improvement.
- If the level of improvement is subsequently not maintained, the absence procedure will move to Stage 2. Previous sickness records can be considered in any subsequent process as long as they do not exceed two years.

A record of the review will be placed on the employee's personnel file. This will be disregarded for the purposes of this procedure after a period not exceeding two years of satisfactory attendance.

Stage 2 Review – Short Term Absence

Stage 2 is reached in the following circumstances, either:

- When the initial monitoring period has failed to achieve a satisfactory reduction in the level of absence such that it falls below the defined trigger points.
- The initial improvement achieved at the end of the monitoring period at Stage 1 has not been sustained.

A further meeting will be arranged by the Headteacher to review the employee's sickness record and will also be attended by an HR Advisor. The outcome will depend on the circumstances of the case but will normally include setting a further monitoring period for improved attendance within a specified timescale.

The employee will also be advised that their employment is at risk (EAR) and failure to reduce their level of sickness absence will result in them moving to Stage 3 of the procedure where a decision to dismiss may be made. This will be confirmed in writing. There is a right of appeal against a decision to issue an EAR.

A record of the review will be placed on the employee's personnel file. This will be disregarded for the purposes of this procedure after a period not exceeding two years of satisfactory attendance. During the monitoring period the Headteacher or SSAO will maintain regular contact with the employee to discuss their attendance /sickness and progress toward returning to work.

Further actions may also include:

- Agreeing reasonable adjustments to working arrangements.
- Further referral to Occupational Health.
- Requiring sick notes for any further periods of absence, regardless of duration.
- Considering other types of support that may be available and/or appropriate.

If a satisfactory level of attendance has been achieved at the end of the monitoring period the employee will be advised in writing and reminded of the need to sustain their level of improvement. If the level of improvement is not maintained the absence procedure will result in progression to Stage 3.

Stage 3 Review – Short Term Absence

Stage 3 is reached when:

- The employee has failed to achieve a reduction in absence since the Stage 2 review such that it now falls below the defined trigger points.

OR

- The initial improvement achieved at the end of the monitoring period set at Stage 2 has not been sustained.

In these circumstances the employee must be referred to Occupational Health for a report to be provided to the Headteacher. In the light of the medical report, which should normally be no more than six weeks old, a decision will be made on how to proceed.

Options may include:

- Consideration of any recommendations Occupational Health may make in relation to reasonable adjustments, redeployment or ill health retirement.
- No further action at this time, but a further monitoring period to be set on attendance levels.
- A further meeting being arranged (chaired by Headteacher/Governor with the authority to dismiss) to consider dismissal on absence grounds. An HR representative must attend this meeting.

If dismissed an employee's appeal rights will be in accordance with Appeal against decision to dismiss.

Stage 1 Review – Long Term Absence

- Long-term sickness absence may be identified at Stage 1 (once the trigger is reached) when the case is reviewed and if there is an indication that the absence has been caused by an underlying medical condition. It is therefore essential that at this stage the employee is referred to the Medical Adviser for assessment no later than three weeks after the beginning of the absence period.
- The employee will be advised that the stage 1 meeting will be re-convened once the report has been received from the Medical Adviser. On receipt of the medical assessment a copy will be sent to the employee by the Headteacher.
- The case will then be reviewed in light of the medical information, the on-going impact on service delivery and other factors set in the paragraph regarding short term absence.

- The employee will be required to meet with their Headteacher to discuss the situation and any options that may be available. This may also include any phased return to work.
- If the employee is unable to attend any formal sickness review, they have the option of providing relevant information to the Headteacher for consideration or asking their trade union representative to represent them in their absence.

Stage 2 Review – Long Term Absence

Where an employee's sickness absence has continued to be a cause of concern, it is important that this is kept under regular review by the Headteacher. This includes maintaining contact with the employee to see how they are progressing, further referrals to Occupational Health and case reviews with HR and Occupational Health where appropriate.

At an appropriate stage, the Headteacher will make an assessment of the position based on the following factors:

- The nature of the illness and any medical information available.
- The likely length of the continuing absence and the likelihood of a return to work.
- Any other relevant circumstances including any adjustments that can be made to job duties/hours/etc, or other support if the employee can return to work (including stress risk assessments where appropriate).
- Any recommendation from Occupational Health of redeployment/ill health retirement.
- Any phased return to work where this is supported by medical advice or is appropriate in the Headteacher's opinion.

It is important at this stage that the employee understands the serious concern, which exists about the length of their sickness absence and is given reasonable opportunity to discuss with the Headteacher any factors or personal circumstances, which they would like taken into account in the overall assessment of their absence.

If the Headteacher decides, in light of all the information, that it is not reasonably practicable to wait any longer for the employee to return to work or if the employee has returned but the subsequent level of absence has been unsatisfactory, the Headteacher should first consult the HR Advisor before taking any further steps. If it is decided to proceed the Headteacher should meet the employee (and confirm in writing) to advise them that their employment is at risk (EAR) and a failure to reduce their level of sickness absence will result in the decision to dismiss being considered at a formal meeting. There is a right of appeal against a decision to issue an EAR.

The EAR letter will be placed on the employee's file, but will be disregarded for the purposes of this procedure after a period of two years of satisfactory attendance.

Stage 3 Review – Long Term Absence

When an employee does not return to work, or does not sustain an acceptable level of attendance following the issue of an EAR, a further meeting at an appropriate time will be arranged to consider dismissal on absence grounds. It is essential that up to date Occupational Health advice is obtained including whether the employee will be able to return to work or sustain regular attendance within a period of time that the Headteacher considers to be reasonable or whether they recommend that the employee can no longer carry out their duties and should not return to their existing post. If dismissed an employee's appeal rights will be in accordance with Appeal against decision to dismiss employee on sickness absence grounds. The Formal minutes taken at all of the reviews must be shared with all parties present, including the employee and their representative within 2 weeks of the date of the hearing. Copies of the minutes are for information only and no invitation to comment should be made. If the employee and

their representative do wish to comment on the minutes they should make their comments in writing which should then be retained and noted for the records.

Please refer to the Local Authority Documentation:
Attendance Management Procedure January 2017

This policy will be reviewed in December 2023.

David Ashley

Headteacher