



STAFF ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES

1. Introduction

This document sets out Family Futures Community School's (FFCS) policy on employee sickness absence and the procedure to be applied when an employee's attendance falls below acceptable standards (see point 6 below). Its aim is to promote the health and well-being of employees through the early identification of problems which the Headteacher and the individual can jointly address. The policy applies to all employees of FFCS.

2. Principles

The policy and procedures set out in this document are based on the following principles:

- employee absence due to sickness has a direct impact upon the school including disruption for learners, loss of output and an increased workload for colleagues;
- the Headteacher will take positive action to monitor employee absence, whilst taking a consistent, sensitive and supportive approach towards employees who are absent from work due to ill-health;
- all reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that employee health issues, and any associated factors in the work environment, are identified at an early stage, and that appropriate action is taken to address these.

There may be occasions where an employee's actions in relation to absence warrant action under the Disciplinary Procedure. These include:

- failure to follow the sickness absence reporting procedures;
- falsification of self-certificates or statements of fitness for work (potentially regarded as gross misconduct);
- abuse of the sickness scheme, including engaging in activities which may delay recovery.

3. Notifying Absence

a) Employees must telephone or email the Headteacher on the first day of absence by 6.15am. They should also inform their line manager.

b) Exceptionally, if an employee is unable to telephone in person, he or she must arrange for someone else to telephone on his or her behalf. The employee must make direct contact with the Headteacher or other designated person as soon as possible thereafter.

c) If the absence continues, further notification as to the nature and probable duration of the illness should be provided to the Headteacher.

d) Employees should maintain at least weekly contact with the Headteacher, unless otherwise agreed, during ongoing periods of absence.

e) Depending on the circumstances of each individual case, if an employee fails to comply with the requirements for notifying absence, the absence may be considered as unauthorised, resulting in loss of pay and possibly disciplinary action.

4. Absence Certification and Recording

a) All sickness absences should be either self or medically certified.

b) For absences of up to 7 calendar days a Self-Certification form should be completed on return to work and given to the Headteacher.

c) For absences of more than 7 calendar days a doctor's statement of fitness for work is required. This should be obtained as soon as the absence exceeds 7 calendar days and sent as soon as reasonably practicable to the Headteacher. Further statements should be submitted if the absence extends beyond the date recommended for return to work.

d) The Headteacher is responsible for passing all self-certificates and statements of fitness for work to the appropriate administrator for the purposes of recording the absence and sick pay entitlement.

e) Where the doctor states that an employee may be fit for work subject to some adjustment(s) to the job or working conditions (such as a phased return to work, amended duties, altered hours of work or workplace adaptations), these will be discussed with the employee. Where it is reasonably practicable for the adjustment(s) to be made, a return to work date will be agreed with the employee and arrangements put in place for the situation to be monitored.

f) There may be occasions when it is not reasonably practicable to accommodate the adjustments recommended, in which case, unless alternatives can be agreed, the employee will be informed that the absence will be treated as if the doctor had signed the statement that the employee was not fit for work.

g) An employee may return to work before the date recommended on the statement of fitness for work, but the school reserves the right to require the employee to remain on sick leave if in the Headteacher's opinion, an early return would impact on the health and safety of the employee and/or colleagues.

5. Return to Work Discussion

A return to work discussion will be initiated by the Headteacher as soon as possible after the employee has returned to work. The nature and duration of the discussion will vary depending on the length and cause of the absence, and will be based on concern for the health of the individual and any underlying causes which may affect health or performance.

6. Trigger Points

Absence trigger points assist the Headteacher to focus on dealing with both short term absence, and early intervention in situations of possible long term sickness absence. The trigger points at which the Headteacher is required to review the employee's absence are:

- three periods of absence within a six-month rolling period; or
- absences appearing to have a recurring recognisable pattern, for example frequent absenteeism around a weekend or particular special events; or
- continuous absence for a period of at least 28 consecutive calendar days.

The Headteacher will be responsible for maintaining records of absence.

7. Managing Frequent, Short-term and Persistent Absences

a) If a trigger point is reached, the Headteacher will consider whether in the circumstances a review meeting with the individual should be held to discuss the level of absence and to ascertain whether there are any underlying causes for the absences.

b) As a result of the discussion the Headteacher may indicate that an improvement in attendance is required, that monitoring will continue and that a follow-up meeting will take place. A written summary of the outcome of the meeting, including the date for the follow-up meeting, will be placed on the employee's personal file and a copy given to the employee to ensure a shared understanding of outcomes.

c) The Headteacher should hold the follow up meeting as arranged, even if the employee's absence level has improved sufficiently. This provides an opportunity to acknowledge the improvement and to indicate to the individual that monitoring has taken place. The individual should be advised that the improved attendance level needs to be sustained.

d) If there is insufficient improvement as a result of informal support and guidance, formal action, which could lead to dismissal, will be taken in accordance with the Capability Procedure.

e) If it is considered that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the employee's absences are not sickness related and the scheme is being abused, the case will be dealt with as a conduct issue under the Disciplinary Procedure.

8. Managing Long-term Absences Due to Ill Health

If the trigger point of continuous absence for 28 consecutive days is reached, the Headteacher should fully investigate the situation and arrange a suitable time and place for an informal meeting with the employee as soon as possible. Sensitivity is required in making the arrangements, and a meeting may be arranged at the employee's home (with the employee's agreement) or other suitable venue as appropriate, and the employee may be accompanied by a professional representative, work colleague and/or family member.

At the meeting the employee should be asked for the assessment of the situation and the Headteacher should ask for the employee's permission to seek medical advice from an occupational health adviser. The Headteacher and employee should agree to meet again to discuss alternative options once the medical report has been obtained. A written summary of the outcome of the meeting, including the date for the follow-up meeting, will be placed on the employee's personal file and a copy given to the employee to ensure a shared understanding of outcomes.

At the follow-up meeting the following points would normally be covered:

- the Headteacher's assessment of the situation,
- the employee's assessment of the situation,
- a discussion of the possible outcomes eg return to full duties, reasonable adjustment to job role or responsibilities, re-deployment, early retirement etc,
- an appropriate course of action, which may include further meetings.

9. Right of Appeal

Rights of appeal are in accordance with the Capability Procedure.

10. Gender

On occasions employees may not feel comfortable discussing a particular health problem with a manager of different gender. Whilst the nature of any discussion should concentrate on the effect of an individual's illness on his or her ability to work rather than the details of the condition itself, managers are asked to consider making an arrangement for a manager of the same gender to interview the employee in appropriate cases, so as to avoid any unnecessary embarrassment.

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