



Managing Sickness Absence in Schools – Factsheet for Employees

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Guidance for Maintained Schools and Academies

MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES

Factsheet for Employees

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INTRODUCTION

Good attendance of employees is a vital factor in the effective and efficient operation of our education provision. It is fundamental to the planning and provision of a quality service and generates high morale.

In managing attendance:

- Headteachers and Governing Bodies are entitled to expect a high level of attendance from all employees.
- All staff are entitled to be treated fairly, consistently and in a non-discriminatory manner.
- Information concerning an employee's health will be treated confidentially.

Through managing attendance strategies, the school/academy and Local Authority seeks to reduce sickness absence levels, to provide support to staff who are unwell; and where possible minimise or eliminate work-related factors which may impact on health and well-being.

- Monitoring and reviewing levels and reasons for staff sickness absence is good practice.

This has two main purposes:

- (i) so that Headteachers can be aware of actual and potential problems in running the school and can take steps to rectify these
- (ii) so that individual health problems can be identified at an early stage and medical advice sought.

When an employee is absent due to sickness there may be implications for the Headteacher and for colleagues who are responsible for covering the employee's work. Managing absence procedures provide a structure within which to discuss what action can be taken to assist an employee's health and to improve continuity. In many cases employees will approach a senior colleague to discuss sickness problems but, employees may also wish to approach their trade union representative for advice and guidance and are encouraged to do so.

This is, by necessity, a brief factsheet. Further information and guidance is available in the Management Guidelines upon request from your school/academy.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees

It is the responsibility of individual employees to:

- Attend work unless unfit to do so.
- Comply with the school's sickness absence reporting procedures, including self-certification and keep the school informed of any significant developments.
- Ensure medical advice and treatment, where appropriate, is received as quickly as possible in order to facilitate a return to work.
- Attend any medical appointments which have been arranged to assist the management in gaining medical advice, including Occupational Health.
- Raise any concerns with their Headteacher or HR Consultancy for Schools if they believe their job is making them ill or contributing to their illness so that support can be provided where possible.
- Take appropriate measures to maintain their own health and safety including avoiding any activities whilst off sick, including other paid work, which would be detrimental to their return to work.

Headteachers, Governors and the school management

Headteachers, Governors and the school management have responsibility for managing attendance at work. For further details see the full management guidance.

HR Consultancy for Schools

In addition, HR Consultancy for Schools can provide support and guidance to assist in dealing with problems affecting attendance at work.

Trade Union Representatives

Coping with a medical problem may be a difficult time for an employee and the help and support of the trade unions is often very valuable. Employees can call upon their trade union to give support and advice and to accompany them to meetings, including medical appointments, if required.

Medical Advice

You may be asked by the Occupational Health Service to attend an appointment or telephone consultation. This is so the school management may gather some medical advice as well as offer you some assistance with return to work programmes and health promotion activities, and provision of counselling and other therapies.

SHORT AND LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE PROCEDURES

The procedures are outlined below and are also illustrated in the flowcharts at the end of this document.

Normal monitoring procedures

The employee should notify the school of any absence as per the school's reporting procedure. After seven calendar days of absence a doctor's note must also be submitted.

Return to work discussion

The school management will meet with employees following their return to work to discuss the reason for absence, ensure the employee is well, update on anything that has happened during their absence and, where possible, offer any support to the employee that may be helpful.

(A) Short Term Sickness Absence

1. *Sickness Absence Monitoring Meeting (Informal Stage)*

Where the school management has concerns about an employee's level of absence an informal meeting will take place between the school management and employee to discuss this and determine whether to seek medical advice at this stage. At this point the school management may set targets for improvement, taking into account any medical advice and personal circumstances.

2. *Review of Informal Stage by Management*

To determine if targets have been met.

3. *First Formal Meeting*

If the levels of improvement have not been met, a formal meeting will take place between the employee and Headteacher. A Human Resources Adviser may be present, and the employee may be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague. The purpose is to confirm levels for improvement in attendance and set a timescale for improvement, as well as identifying any appropriate support to assist the employee to improve attendance.

4. *Review of First Formal Stage*

To determine if targets have been met.

5. *Second Formal Meeting*

If the levels of improvement set are not met a second formal meeting will take place. Again the employee may be accompanied by a trade union representative/colleague and a Human Resources Adviser may be present. The purpose of the meeting is as for the First Formal Meeting.

6. *Case Review*

If the levels of improvement set down at Stage 2 are not met the school management will undertake a case review which may involve a management meeting with the employee and their representative if appropriate.

The case review is to consider the position so far, including the cumulative absence record and the advice received from any medical adviser and for the Headteacher to determine whether he/she should recommend that the employee be dismissed on the grounds of ill-health.

7. *Dismissal Decision Hearing*

If the procedure has been exhausted and the Headteacher believes dismissal may be appropriate, he/she will arrange for a hearing to take place.

8. *Right of Appeal*

If dismissed the employee will have a right to appeal.

(B) Long Term Sickness Absence

1. *Keeping in touch and requesting medical advice*

The employee must keep in touch during any long term absence. In any case the situation should be reviewed after four weeks and as appropriate thereafter. The employee must provide sick notes to cover the absence, but discussions should take place where possible about likely dates for a return to work and whether there are any special support measures which need to be put into place to assist the employee to return.

If the expected length of absence is unclear or on-going the employee may be referred for medical advice to establish:

- the likely length of absence;
- what support measures should be put in place to assist the employee to return to work;
- if the employee is permanently unfit to return to their current post; and
- to ensure the school takes into account any requirements under the Equality Act.

2. *Consideration of medical advice*

Management would consider the most up-to-date medical position, the effect of the absence on the school, and what alternative courses of action exist.

3. *Case Review*

Management will formally review the case including any medical advice. This may involve a meeting with the employee (who may be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union representative). A Human Resources Adviser may also be present at any such meeting.

The review will address the likelihood of the employee returning to work, and how this will be achieved. Alternatively the review may conclude that the Headteacher should recommend that the employee be dismissed on the grounds of ill-health.

4. *Dismissal Decision Hearing*

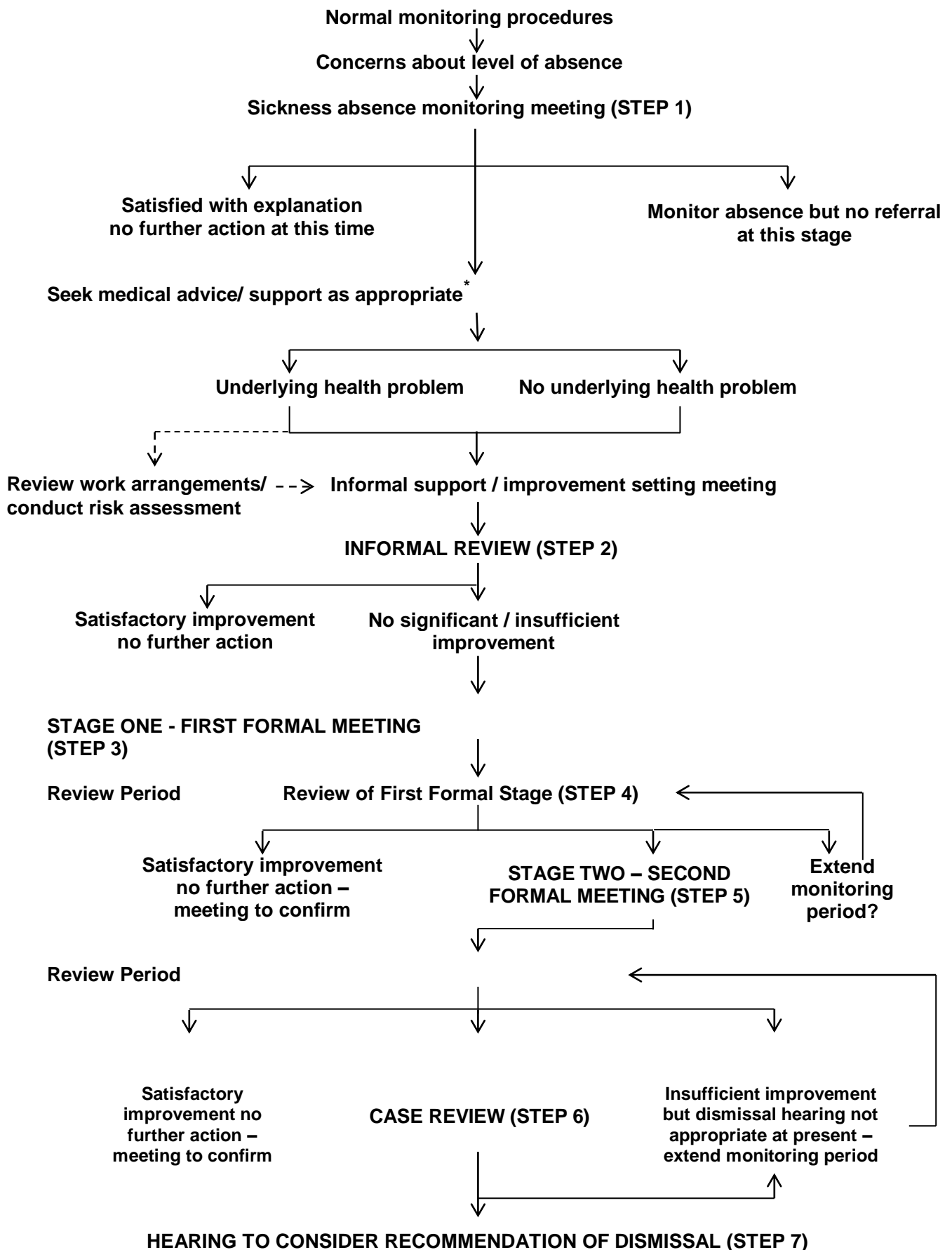
If the management believes dismissal is appropriate, he/she will arrange for a hearing to take place. The employee will have a right to make representation (with trade union representation if they so wish) against the proposal that he/she should be dismissed.

5. *Right of Appeal*

If dismissed the employee will have a right to appeal.

HR/DB/LP/(LY)/djc
June 2014 (updated May 2016)

SHORT TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE FLOWCHART



* Occupational Health/medical advice may also be sought at successive stages of this procedure.

LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE FLOWCHART (Section 17, p.17)

