

Staff Absence Policy

Introduction

In order for us to provide a top-quality education for the pupils at Queen Elizabeth's it is important that staff attendance is at as high a level as possible. If staff should feel that certain individuals are taking time off unnecessarily it can lead to discontent and a feeling that not everyone is pulling their weight.

Health and Safety legislation requires that employers are responsible, so far as is reasonably practicable, for the health, safety and welfare of their employees. The leadership team of the school is convinced of the need to manage properly the levels of sickness absence which may occur, not least for reasons of staff welfare, and to try to ensure that where staff are experiencing problems relating to sickness absence, we are able to provide the appropriate support.

There are a number of benefits to be gained from the proper management of sickness absence. Not only can staff welfare and support be provided but the highest level of continuity can be achieved, both for the school and for the pupils.

The financial implications of sickness absence are inescapable and, whilst this is certainly not the paramount issue, it would not be right for us to ignore such implications.

The principles of this policy are to be applied to all staff employed at Queen Elizabeth's Grammar, Alford – teaching and support staff.

Objectives

The main objectives are to try to achieve full attendance and to manage cases of absence properly.

These objectives will be underpinned by the following principles:

- Staff will be treated fairly and compassionately, with all appropriate support being given
- SLT will be consistent in their approach to the procedure for dealing with individual cases
- High standards in health, safety and welfare will be a constant objective for all
- Any information received during the application of the procedures involved in absence management will be treated sensitively

Leave of Absence

Paid leave of absence is given for serious illness / death of family or close friends, births, family graduation ceremonies, family weddings, moving house, hospital appointments and attendance at interviews.

In all cases, leave of absence must be formally requested from the headteacher.

In exceptional circumstances, unpaid leave may also be granted.

Doctors' and dentists' appointments should be made out of school hours or in non-teaching time if at all possible.

When absence is necessary due to illness, staff should contact the Assistant Head (BA) as soon as possible and wherever possible ensure that appropriate work is set. When this is not possible then it is the responsibility of the Subject Leader (or most senior in the department) to liaise with the Assistant Head, set work for the classes involved and assist cover/supply staff.

Self-certification/doctor's note

For any absences due to illness, staff should complete a yellow self-certification form (available in the staff room and from Bev Allen) for the first five working days. After this a doctor's note will be required.

Monitoring of Sickness and Absence

Proper absence management can only occur if the appropriate monitoring of absence takes place.

The responsibility for monitoring staff absence will be with the Assistant Headteacher, liaising closely with the Headteacher.

Her role will be to:

- ensure that a procedure for the reporting of absence has been agreed and is followed
- ensure that both the duration and the reasons for absence are recorded
- conduct return-to-work interviews
- monitor absences, analysing the appropriate information in order to identify any problems which may develop regarding the employee's absences.

NB: Monitoring of the absences of the Headteacher will be undertaken by the Governing Body.

Return-to-Work Interviews

On the day a member of staff returns to work from sickness absence, the Assistant Headteacher (or Headteacher) will conduct a return-to-work interview with the member of staff; when appropriate, in a private environment with their attendance record available for discussion.

Whilst such interviews may only last for a few minutes they will provide the Assistant Head and Headteacher with key information to help manage absence and try to improve attendance.

The results of these interviews can be one or more of the following:

- establish cause of absence, which will need to be recorded on the self certification form (yellow), signed by both the member of staff and the Headteacher;
- re-affirm the school's interest in the welfare of the member of staff;
- provide an opportunity for discussion on the general attendance record of the member of staff;
- allow the member of staff to inform the Assistant Headteacher if there is an underlying medical problem;
- enable the Assistant Head/Headteacher to reinforce the aim for high attendance levels;

- identify any areas where the school can assist the member of staff eg with work related/personal problems and to encourage staff to have a positive attitude towards their own welfare.

Review of Absence Records and Further Action

Sickness absence records for each member of staff will be maintained and the Assistant Headteacher and Headteacher will review these records every two terms. Each record will provide details of the number of occasions the member of staff has been absent, the total number of days for each absence, and a running total of that member of staff's level of absence. Reasons for absence will also be maintained on these records.

The review of each absence record will be carried out with a view to deciding, where appropriate, that measures need to be taken regarding individual cases, and what those measures should be.

It is recognised that it is of paramount importance to ensure that any decisions regarding action to be taken in individual cases are made on an entirely objective basis. In order to ensure consistency and objectivity, when absence records are reviewed, a comparison of each record will be made against standard, agreed levels of absence. Those levels when reached will 'trigger' an automatic consideration of further action in those particular circumstances.

It is intended that these agreed 'trigger' levels will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Headteacher and Assistant Head and will be the subject of consultation with staff and trade unions.

Initially the following levels of absence will indicate the need to consider further measures:-

In any one 12 month period

7 or more separate periods of sickness absence

or

a total of 20 working days' absence

Where the level of absence in a particular case has reached that where further action is to be considered such action will depend on the circumstance of the case, including:

- The frequency and duration of absences
- The reasons for absence
- The nature of duties undertaken and the effects on service provisions
- The outcome of any previous reviews and any previous action taken

It will be for the Headteacher, in reviewing an individual case, to try to establish whether the absence record of a member of staff consists of persistent short-term absence or whether an underlying medical problem is indicated by their absence record.

If an underlying medical problem is perceived, then help may be sought through the Occupational Health Adviser, via the County Council's Employee Support and Counselling Service.

Where an absence record does not obviously indicate an underlying medical problem or where it is felt that such a problem may be evident but has not been dealt with appropriately, the Headteacher will conduct an interview with the member of staff concerned.

At this interview the Headteacher will examine, with the member of staff (who may be accompanied by a friend or trade union representative) the circumstances of the absences, any medical or welfare assistance which may be of help and the effect of the absences on the duties of the member of staff.

If the member of staff suggests that an underlying medical problem may be a contributory factor then he/she may be referred to the Occupational Health Adviser and consent to medical review should be obtained.

In all other cases the member of staff will be informed that the level of absence is considered to be unsatisfactory and s/he shall be informed that an improvement is required and that further monitoring of the absence level will take place over a specific period. The member of staff shall also be informed that failure to improve will result in referral to a Disciplinary Panel of the Governing Body.

Long Term Absence Cases

For the purpose of this policy, long term absence cases will be defined as those where an employee has been absent for a period of 13 weeks (either in one continuous period or in total over a 12 month period) or where it is known that he/she is likely to be absent for such a period.

Where such cases occur formal contact must be made at the earliest opportunity by the Assistant Headteacher/Headteacher who will ascertain the likely length of absence and offer any appropriate advice and assistance to the employee.

A home visit by the Assistant Head/Headteacher can be arranged with the consent of the employee.

Where an employee is absent on long-term sickness it is important that contact with the school is maintained. The Assistant Headteacher/Headteacher will therefore make formal contact with the employee at least monthly, following the initial formal contact.

When it is clear that an employee has been or is likely to be on long-term absence the case should be reported to the Governors. The Headteacher will arrange a formal meeting with the employee to:-

- discuss the nature of the problem
- ascertain the likely prognosis
- explain the medical review procedure to the employee and seek their consent for access to their medical records
- inform them of the dates that their entitlement to full and half pay expire

The Occupational Health Adviser may be asked to advise on the health of the employee and their fitness for work. Apart from these issues the Occupational Health Adviser may suggest amendments to working practices or that certain duties should not be carried out by an employee, in order to facilitate their return to work.

In cases where it becomes clear that an employee is permanently incapable of undertaking their duties on medical grounds the next step will be for the employee to discuss their situation with the county support and counselling services.

The purpose of this interview will be to review the case and to decide on the next step. It may be that the employee does not wish to retire on the grounds of ill health but wishes to seek redeployment. If the employee is medically suitable for and expresses an interest in redeployment, the Governing Body/Headteacher will advise the employee with regard to possible redeployment opportunities.

If the employee is not seeking redeployment, or where possibilities for redeployment have been exhausted by the Governing Body, they will write formally to the employee notifying them of the proposal to terminate their employment on the grounds of ill health and informing them of their right to representations and appeal against this proposal.

Referral of Cases to the Governors' Disciplinary Panel

Where, upon review of an individual absence record, the Headteacher considers the record to be unsatisfactory, an interview will be held. If, following that interview, the Headteacher decides that improvement in the employee's absence record is necessary, this will be required with the proviso that should the improvement not be forthcoming the case would be referred to the Governors' Disciplinary Panel for their consultation.

Where a case is referred to the Disciplinary Panel, a formal hearing will take place at which the employee may be represented and at which formal action may be taken against the employee.

The procedure for such hearings will be as follows:

- The employee will be informed, in writing, of the date, time and place of the hearing and will be given at least 10 days' notice of the hearing. The employee will be provided with a written statement of the case to be presented together with any documents to be presented at the hearing.
- The employee shall be given the right of representation at the hearing, either by a friend or trade union representative.
- The Panel conducting the hearing will consist of 3 Governors, who may be advised by an Officer of the County Council's Personnel Services Division.
- The facts of the case will be reported orally to the Panel by the Headteacher, who will refer to the written statement and supporting information.
- The Panel will ask any questions as necessary.
- The employee and/or their representative will present their case.
- Questions will be asked, as necessary, by the Panel and the Headteacher. The Headteacher will sum up the case against the employee. This will be followed by a summing up from the employee and/or their representative.
- The Panel will consider their decision and inform the employee before the hearing closes, confirming their decision in writing within 3 days.

Following consideration of the facts, the Panel will convey their decision to the employee.

A range of actions will be open to the Panel, depending upon the circumstances of the case. Action, if taken, may range from the following:-

- Formal written warning
- Final written warning (this will only follow where a Formal Warning has previously been issued and required improvement is still not forthcoming)
- Dismissal – this will only occur where a Final Written Warning has previously been issued and required improvement is still not forthcoming.

In some cases the Panel may decide not to take any formal action but to continue to monitor the absence record of the employee.

In all cases where formal action is taken by the Governors' Disciplinary Panel, the employee will have the right of appeal to the Governing Body's Appeals Committee. The appeal is to be made within 10 days of the notification to the employee of the original decision. The reasons for the appeal should be set out in writing and sent to the Clerk to the Governors.

The procedure for the hearing of appeals will be as follows:-

- The Panel shall consist of 3 governors who may be advised by a Personnel Adviser. They will not have been involved in any previous hearing involving the case.
- The Headteacher shall report the circumstances of the case orally supported by written statement and the medical report in the presence of the employee.
- The employee or representative shall then be given the opportunity to question the Headteacher regarding the case.
- The Governors hearing the appeal shall then have the opportunity to question the Headteacher regarding the case.
- The employee or representative shall then put his/her case and explanation of the circumstances of the absences.
- The Headteacher shall then have the opportunity to question the employee.
- The Governors hearing the appeal shall then have the opportunity to question the employee.
- The Headteacher shall then sum up, followed by the employee or representative.
- The Panel will consider their decision and inform the employee before the hearing closes, confirming their decision in writing within 3 days.

Review of Policy/Procedures

The content of this policy and the procedures contained herein have been the subject of consultation with school staff and relevant trade union representatives. Regular review of the policy and procedures will take place on a yearly basis where comments will be sought regarding the application of the policy and how improvements may be made if appropriate.

Reviewed July 2011