

Thomas Coram Nursery School

Sickness Absence and Monitoring Policy

Thomas Coram Centre
and Nursery School
49 Mecklenburgh Square
London WC1N 2NY



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Reviewed bi-annually

Policy Statement

The school aims to encourage all its employees to maximise their attendance at work and will consider making reasonable adjustments to the workplace and/or working arrangements in order to facilitate this where appropriate. We expect employees to come to work to do their job but understand that if they are unwell, this may not be possible. It is recognised that a certain level of sickness absence is inevitable and it is the school's policy to support employees who are genuinely unwell. We will deal with sickness absence sensitively. We will also take action to limit the impact that sickness absence may have on the service provided by the school to parents and children.

The school recognises that sickness absence can only be effectively managed if employees are treated fairly and consistently.

This Sickness Absence Management Policy provides an overview of our approach. The accompanying Sickness Absence Management Procedure explains how sickness absence is managed.

Policy Scope

This policy deals with absence due to sickness and how it should be managed fairly and consistently. This Sickness Absence Management Policy and its accompanying procedure apply to all permanent and fixed-term employees at the school who have successfully completed their probationary period. It also applies to teachers of the school, although teachers may have other guidelines to refer to as part of this policy and associated procedure. The Probationary Guidelines should be used for employees who have yet to complete their probationary period.

Situations where ill-health impacts on an employee's ability to do their job, but does not result in absence should be discussed with HR.

Unauthorised absence is normally beyond the scope of this policy. There may be certain circumstances, for example, failure to follow the sickness absence reporting procedure, which may result in disciplinary action, or the contract of employment being terminated. HR should be contacted for further advice in cases of unauthorised absence.

Disciplinary procedures provide guidance on dealing with absence due to persistent lateness. HR should be contacted for further advice in cases such as these.

Key Principles

The main principles that underpin the school's approach to managing sickness absence are detailed below. Employees are expected to make every effort to attend work, although the school does appreciate that genuine sickness occurs from time-to-time. Whilst the school will support employees who are unwell, it does have a responsibility to manage attendance and will manage sickness absence informally in the first instance. However, if the impact of the

sickness absence becomes problematic in terms of having a detrimental effect on service delivery for example, senior leaders are expected to move to the formal procedure.

At Thomas Coram Centre, we ensure that we take a fair and consistent approach to absence management, ensuring that decisions are objective, legally compliant and non-discriminatory. The school will strive to reduce absence rates by raising health awareness, taking swift and appropriate action to assist a return to work, considering making reasonable adjustments to jobs or redeployment (where the circumstances warrant such action) and providing professional services and advice through our Occupational Health.

Reasonable workplace adjustments and/or adjustments to working arrangements may be made to support employees who are experiencing illness where it is feasible to do so.

Conducting return-to-work meetings after a lengthy or persistent absences is a key part of managing absence, whether formally or informally.

All matters surrounding an employee's health and welfare will be handled sensitively and kept confidential to the management process.

Responsibilities

Employee's Responsibilities

- To ensure that they take reasonable care of their own health and welfare;
- To follow the Sickness Absence Reporting Procedure;
- To meet with a representative from the Occupational Health provider where reasonably required;
- To take advantage of school initiatives to promote good health where appropriate.

School Leaders' Responsibilities

- To ensure that the workplace is safe and without risk to health.
- To manage the effects of sickness absence on their school;
- To make every effort to understand why an employee is absent and then provide appropriate help. The school may need to seek specialist advice from colleagues in HR, Health and Safety and Occupational Health and will need to treat sickness absence management on a case-by-case basis;
- To be open when dealing with absence; routinely monitoring absence levels and advising employees when the amount or pattern of their absence is causing concern and taking whatever action is appropriate and;
- To work with employees and other support functions as required to maximise attendance. Where employees are absent through sickness, school leaders should maintain regular contact with the employee; and
- There are a number of steps that senior leaders can take to prevent or reduce sickness absence by contacting **Specialist support units** which provide advice and assistance. These include the Health and Safety Team, HR Services and Occupational Health.

Definitions

Companion	At formal meetings, the employee may choose to bring a trade union representative, a representative from an internal self-organised employee group or a work colleague. The companion will not be allowed to speak on the employee's behalf, but may ask for clarification on questions asked.
Employee	A person with a contract of employment with the school.
Representative	At formal sickness meetings or sickness appeal hearings, the employee may be represented by a trade union representative, a representative from an internal self-organised employee group, or a work colleague. The role of the representative will be to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Address the chair of the meeting or hearing and sum up the case;• Respond on behalf of the employee to any views expressed at the meeting or hearing; and• Confer with the employee during the meeting or hearing. The representative does not have the right to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Answer any questions on the employee's behalf;• Address the meeting or hearing if the employee does not wish it; and• Prevent the employer from explaining their case.

Types of sickness absence

There are three types of sickness that lead to absence from the workplace:

Intermittent short-term sickness

This is frequent absence where there does not appear to be an underlying medical condition. For example, short periods of absence for unrelated conditions such as headaches, colds etc.

Intermittent long-term sickness (chronic illness)

This is absence that is caused by an underlying medical condition (usually a serious, continuing illness, disease or serious injury), resulting in frequent periods of short-term absence from the workplace. It is possible that this type of illness could be considered a disability in the context of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Continuous long-term sickness

This is a serious, continuing illness, disease or serious injury of a long-term nature that results in the individual being absent from the workplace for a continuous period of time, usually at least a month. It is possible that this type of illness could be considered a disability in the context of the Disability Discrimination Act.

After a significant absence i.e. long term, the head teacher/ SLT should welcome the employee back to work and meet with them for a general discussion about their health and the reason for their absence.

The length and nature of the meeting will depend on the length and reason for the absence and the senior leader may:

- Explore how the employee is feeling now;
- Ensure that the employee is fit to return to work ;
- Offer appropriate help and support;
- Offer assistance (OHU, Counselling, Workplace Risk Assessment);
- Carry out a return to work risk assessment;
- Address any concerns regarding recent absence, eg. causes, quantity and patterns;
- Update the employee on any issues that have occurred whilst they have been absent;
- Explain to the employee that their contribution has been missed and where appropriate; the operational difficulties experienced
- Encourage attendance;
- Agree next steps if necessary, eg. attendance plan.

Use of trigger points

Early involvement by Head teachers can play an important part in reducing sickness absence.

The Head teacher will can use their discretion in **considering** taking action where:

- Absence exceeds 8 days over a rolling 12 month period; or
- Absence occurs on 5 or more occasions over a rolling 12 month period; or
- A pattern emerges, e.g. absence occurs on Mondays and Fridays
- An employee has been away from the workplace for a continuous period of 4 weeks

Other trigger points are likely to be decided on a case-by-case basis. These could be following receipt of new medical information or if general levels or patterns of absence cause concern. When an employee starts to receive half pay or no longer gets any pay at all, it may be useful to review the situation.

Sometimes, a senior leader will know when to expect their employee back at work, for example after an operation or a course of medical treatment. In some cases, illnesses may be treated over a period of time and could result in intermittent attendance or there may be unexpected extensions to medical treatment. If this is the case, it will be important to use managerial judgement and there may be no need to take further action beyond keeping in touch with the individual during their absence. However, if the absence continues, further action may be necessary.

Reasons for being absent

Head teachers need to understand why an employee is absent due to sickness and try to find out if there are any underlying reasons. Confidentiality will be respected at all times where employees are disclosing personal information.

The *Disability Discrimination Act* outlines a number of conditions that can be classified as a disability. It is important to find out if the reason for absence is one of these and if it is, deal with it within the legislation. The school's HR Team can provide advice on a case-by-case basis and referral to the OHU may be necessary to confirm the effects of the disability.

If an employee has a pregnancy related illness, the senior leader should consider how this could affect them doing their job. Medical information should still be obtained but these absences should be recorded as 'pregnancy related' and dealt with carefully in consultation with the Schools HR Team. These illnesses are of a temporary nature and the law gives extra rights and protection to these pregnant employees. Illness could also trigger an early start to maternity leave.

Informal Action

Where sickness absence levels are causing concern and are having a detrimental effect on service delivery, Headteachers will deal with this on an informal basis through the return to work meetings and 1:1 sessions. This would involve talking to the employee, seeking explanations and trying to identify what factors may be contributing to the absences, taking account of comparative sickness absence levels in the school. Headteachers must make sure that the employee is aware that they may need to take formal action under the procedure if the absences continue.

By looking at reasons and patterns of absence, it should be possible to tell if there is likely to be an underlying medical condition. Depending on the nature of the condition, the employee may not be able to reduce their levels of absence and setting targets may be inappropriate. However, they should be made aware of the impact that their ongoing absence is having and that there may be a need to begin the formal absence procedure if there is no improvement.

If the employee does not appear to have an underlying medical condition that links the absences, they will be informed that the number and frequency of their absences is not acceptable. In exceptional circumstances, senior leaders may wish to consider requiring sickness certificates for every period of absence. However, this should never be an automatic step and the school has a duty to reimburse the employee for the cost of obtaining certificates if required by the GP.

It may be helpful for the Head teacher to produce an attendance plan for the employee and advise them that there may be formal action taken under the procedure if targets are not met and absences continue. If formal action is to be taken, the Head teacher may require the

Occupational Health Unit to provide guidance on whether there could be an underlying medical condition.

Using attendance plans

Attendance plans can be very helpful in dealing with short-term absences. They will only be used if levels or patterns of absence cause concern and where it is not apparent that there is an underlying medical condition.

Attendance plans and targets must be set giving thought to the school, the post and what can be done. They show an employee what level of attendance is needed and how it will be reviewed. If informal attempts to reduce absence levels are not successful, the senior leader will then invite the employee to attend a formal absence review meeting.

If an employee does have an underlying medical condition or disability that results in sickness absence, the Head teacher will still monitor the situation, including the impact on the school. Absences unconnected to the condition can be dealt with using attendance plans.

Obtaining information about an employee's health

It is important to obtain up-to-date medical information to provide a clearer understanding of the symptoms and effects. It will also be necessary to obtain advice on whether the condition is covered by the Disability Discrimination Act, what assistance could be provided to the employee, how the employee can be helped to return to work effectively etc.

Very rarely, an employee may not provide permission for the school to obtain medical information about them. It is important to understand why an employee might have concerns about this. The employee should be advised that being provided with the medical information may assist a return to work and that in the absence of that, decisions will have to be taken based on the information that is available, which could have implications for their continuing employment with the school.

Referral to the Occupational Health Unit

A Head teacher might have enough information from discussions with the employee to be able to deal with sickness absence effectively. However, often the Head teacher may want some further medical advice and guidance and the employee may need to be referred to the Occupational Health Unit. Employees should only be asked to attend the OHU if it is considered necessary and never just because a trigger has been reached.

The Occupational Health Unit should be able to advise on:

- Whether there is an underlying medical condition or disability;
- The need for additional information and advice about an employee's medical condition;
- An employee's concerns about their health and the working environment;
- Accidents in the workplace which may or may not be an industrial injury;

- Returning to work following a long-term absence;
- Temporary or permanent adjustments to working arrangements, including the suitability of ill-health redeployment, which would enable the employee to return to work;
- Disability issues and reasonable adjustments;
- The likely duration of an absence and when the employee should be fit to return to work;
- Ill health retirement.

Medical information can be obtained in different ways. An Occupational Health Advisor could talk to the employee either on the telephone or face-to-face, or Occupational Health could write to the employee's GP / medical specialist.

Once the Occupational Health Unit has the necessary information, they will write to the senior leader with a summary of the effects and implications of any medical condition. This may not include full details, as medical information must be treated confidentially. Depending on the information provided, action may or may not be needed. The Occupational Health Unit will give guidance and advice on possible next steps, but it is the Head teacher's responsibility to make the decisions.

If the employee is absent from the workplace on an ongoing basis and their medical condition prevents them from attending a meeting at work, the senior leader should speak to the employee and, with their agreement, arrange to meet them at their home or at a neutral venue to talk.

If levels of absence continue to cause concern after informal discussions and initial adjustments being made to assist the individual in returning to and remaining at work effectively, the Head teacher will invite the employee to attend a formal absence review meeting with their Trades Union representative.

Redeployment

If it is decided that an employee cannot continue doing their current job, even with reasonable changes, a redeployment to an alternative job within the school may be considered.

Arranging an Absence Hearing

If all other action has failed the Head teacher may decide to refer the matter to the Governing Body. The Absence Hearing panel will consist of three Governors nominated by the Governing Body. None of the three will have had any prior executive role in, or detailed knowledge of, the management of the case to be heard. Governors will have the support of an adviser from Schools HR team.

The employee will be given seven working days' written notice of the date, time and place of the Hearing. This notice will be sent to the employee's normal address. It is the responsibility of the employee to ensure that the Governors are given accurate address information.

The employee will be advised that they may be represented by a 'friend' or Trade Union representative at the Hearing.

The employee will be provided with a copy of the management submission to the Governors, the names of any witnesses to be called by management and a copy of this procedure, at least five working days before the date of the Hearing.

The employee will be advised that they may submit a written response in advance of the Hearing, together with copies of any documentation and the name and designation of any representative. This should be sent to the Governors at least two working days before the date of the Hearing and will be copied by the Governors to the line senior leader presenting the management case.

Where an employee is to be accompanied or represented, they should provide relevant details to the Head teacher sufficiently in advance of the meeting. If copy documentation is requested directly by their representative or companion, the senior leader should ensure that this has been done with the permission of the employee.

The Head teacher and the employee should try and agree a convenient time for a hearing in advance. The employee must make every reasonable effort to attend formal meetings and hearings. Governors may postpone the hearing once before deciding to proceed in the absence of the employee. In these circumstances the employees' representative can attend in place of the employee.

The Absence Hearing

- The Chair of the panel will introduce those present and clarify their respective roles.
- The Governors will hear the management case and consider all documentation submitted in support of the case. The Head teacher and any management witnesses may be questioned by the Governors and the employee or, if represented, their representative.
- The Governors will then hear the employee's response and consider all documentation provided. The employee or their representative and any witnesses may be questioned by the Governors and the line senior leader.
- When all the submissions have been concluded, the head teacher, then the employee or their representative, will be invited to make a short summary of their case. They will then withdraw while the Governors consider their decision.
- A note of the hearing will be taken on behalf of the Governors, being a summary of the main points put forward. It will not be a verbatim record. This note will be made available to the employee as soon as possible.

Reaching a Decision

The Governors will consider all the evidence submitted. They will consider, particularly, any evidence that relates to the employee's ability to return to work to carry out the full duties and responsibilities of their post. The Governors will seek advice on the implications of any decision with respect to the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act, especially

regarding the duty to carry out reasonable adjustment to enable the member of staff to carry out their duties.

The following options, although not exhaustive, are among those that might be chosen by the Governors when making a decision:

- The employee will be allowed a further period in which to recover her/his health, particularly if relevant medical opinion suggests this may occur within a reasonable timescale. The line senior leader would be asked to monitor the situation and report back to Governors at an agreed date;
- The Governors would need further medical evidence before coming to a decision. The employee would be required to comply with any reasonable request to allow this evidence to be obtained. The Governors would defer a decision pending this evidence being presented'.
- The employee is deemed unfit to carry out the full duties and responsibilities of his/her current post, but the Governors are able to transfer the employee to a suitable alternative post within the school, bearing in mind the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act.
- The employee is deemed unfit to carry out the full duties and responsibilities of his / her post but no suitable alternative employment can be found. The Governors would then determine that the employee is to be dismissed.

Notifying the Employee

Where possible, the Governors will inform the employee verbally of their decision. In any event, the employee will be informed in writing of the decision within five working days of the date of the Hearing.

Arrangements for Appeal

- The employee will have the right of appeal to the Governing Body against any decision taken at the III Health Hearing.
- The Appeal panel will consist of three Governors nominated by the Governing Body. None of the three will have had any prior executive role in the management of the case or will have taken part in the Hearing.
- The appeal must be made in writing to the Appeal panel within five days of the written notification of the outcome of the Absence Hearing. The employee must set down very clearly the grounds for appeal.

- The Appeal hearing will be convened as soon as possible and the employee will be given seven working days' notice of the time, place and date of the Appeal Hearing.

The Appeal Hearing

- The Appeal panel will consider all relevant evidence presented by the employee or her / his representative and a representative, usually the Chair, of the Health panel. This will consist of the facts presented at the Health Hearing and any new evidence. Notes of the meeting shall be taken and a copy supplied to the employee.
- The Appeal panel will decide whether or not to uphold the decision reached at the Hearing. The panel may also decide to vary the original decision downward, e.g. to await further medical evidence rather than dismiss.
- Where possible the Appeal panel will inform the employee verbally of the decision. In any event, the employee will be informed in writing of the decision within five working days of the date of the Hearing.
- The decision of the Appeal panel will be final.

Dismissal

Following an unsuccessful appeal against dismissal by an employee who is employed solely at that school, the Governors of Community schools must inform the Director of CSF of the details of the case and why dismissal is required. The Director of CSF will then effect dismissal. This dismissal will be with notice.

Following an unsuccessful appeal against dismissal by an employee who is not employed solely at that school, the Governors of Community schools must inform the Director of CSF of the details of the case and request the removal of the employee from the school. They will also make any recommendation for dismissal.

In these circumstances, the Director of CSF will consider each case on its merits and decide whether or not to dismiss the employee. The employee will be given the opportunity to present a written statement to the Director before a decision is taken. If the decision is to dismiss, the dismissal will be with notice.

Following an unsuccessful appeal against dismissal by an employee who is employed by the Governors of a Voluntary Aided school the 'Governors will dismiss the employee and provide written reasons for dismissal. The dismissal will be with notice.

Governors consider their decision. A note of the hearing will be taken on behalf of the Governors, being a summary of the main points put forward. It will not be a verbatim record. This note will be made available to the employee as soon as possible.

The Formal Absence Management Procedure

1st Absence Review Meeting

If informal efforts to improve an employee's sickness absence levels have not been successful, or if an employee's absence is having a significant adverse impact on the department, then the Head teacher should consider inviting the employee to attend an absence review meeting. This should be confirmed in writing to the employee, giving at between 5 and 8 working days' notice of the meeting from receipt of the letter. An employee has the right to be accompanied at an absence review meeting.

The employee must make every reasonable effort to attend absence review meetings. The meeting may only be postponed for up to five working days (beginning with the day after the day on which the meeting was originally convened), and only for reasons of non-availability of a companion. One postponement of a meeting on these grounds may be allowed. If the employee fails to attend a reconvened meeting, it may be held in his or her absence.

The written notice will:

- Confirm the meeting is being held at stage 1 of the absence management procedure;
- Give a short but clear outline of absence levels and reasons for concern, for example that there is an impact on service delivery and / or colleagues;
- Remind the employee that they can bring a trade union official, a representative from a self-organised employee group or a work colleague;
- Confirm who will be attending;
- Enclose a copy of the absence management procedure;
- Advise that the employee may provide evidence in advance and call witnesses;

The purpose of the meeting will be for the Head teacher to:

- Review the sickness record, ie. number of days and any patterns of absence.
- Discuss the symptoms and reasons for absence.
- Consider any relevant medical information available (and organise obtaining further medical information, or guidance from the OHU if deemed necessary).
- Identify/discuss the employee's ability to do their job, the impact on the service delivery and/or on work colleagues who are required to cover the absence (identification of impact should have been done prior to this meeting).
- Discuss any information the employee has to offer (eg. personal, domestic, welfare issues, that the absence was connected to an industrial injury).
- Establish whether the employee may be fit to undertake duties at some date in the future.
- Discuss the prognosis and timescales for improvement.
- Establish the likelihood of future reoccurrences affecting the employee's fitness for work, including the anticipated frequency and duration of such occasions.
- Decide whether the employee could/should be considered for redeployment.

- Establish where possible whether the employee has a disability as defined by the DDA.

Short-term sickness with no underlying medical condition

If the Head teacher decides the level of absence is unsatisfactory they will advise the employee:

- That there is a need to improve;
- That a timescale is identified during which absence levels will be monitored and a target for reduction set, as part of an attendance plan;
- The consequences of failure to reduce the level of sickness absence ie. that they will move to a hearing with the governors;
- Whether they will receive a formal notification of concern letter, which will remain on file for one academic year;
- The right to appeal to the chair of governors against a notification of concern.

Long-term sickness (Intermittent or continuous)

In particular, it is very important to deal sensitively with individuals who are suffering from an underlying medical condition that is causing their absence from the workplace, either continuously or for frequent short periods. However, if, following the review meeting, the senior leader decides that the impact on service delivery and/or colleagues is not reasonable or sustainable and is likely to continue, they will advise the employee that there will be a monitoring period during which one or a combination of the following may be explored as appropriate (this list is not exhaustive):

- Make any reasonable adjustments to working arrangements, possibly under the DDA as advised by risk assessment.
- Practical advice or support, eg. counselling.
- Referral to the Occupational Health Unit or specialist advice taken.
- Examine redeployment opportunities
- Adjustments to the post e.g. temporary variation to duties/hours on full contractual pay to support the employee's re-integration into the workplace, i.e. a phased return

The individual should also be informed:

- Whether they will receive a formal notification of concern letter, which will remain on file for one academic year;
- That if there is an ongoing impact on service delivery and / or colleagues during the monitoring period, the matter may be referred to governors
- That they may ask for a review of the decision if they fulfil the requirements of the accepted grounds for appeal

2nd Absence Review Meeting

This meeting will be held in the following circumstances:

- Sickness absence has exceeded the target set in the attendance plan; or
- the initial improvement achieved at the end of the monitoring period has not been sustained over the following term; or
- the long-term sickness is having an ongoing impact on service delivery and/or colleagues; or
- where temporary arrangements e.g. a phased return to work have not facilitated a return to the full requirements of the role

The options for action could include:

- a further monitoring period with review (managed through an attendance plan)
- a final notification of concern letter, which will remain on file for 18 months
- referral to governors

The final decision must be confirmed in writing as above.

Employees have a right to appeal against a notification of concern.

The employee will be made aware at this stage that unless their attendance improves sufficiently, they may be asked to attend a governors hearing where their continuing employment with the school will be considered which could result in dismissal.

If the employee's attendance improves to a satisfactory level during the monitoring period, the Head teacher must confirm this in writing. What constitutes satisfactory improvement should be made clear to the employee by the Head teacher, together with any specific target for reduction of sickness absence to be maintained on an ongoing basis.

Hearing with Governors

This stage is reached in the following circumstances:

- sickness absence has exceeded the target set in the attendance plan; or
- the initial improvement achieved at the end of the monitoring period has not been sustained; or
- the long-term sickness is continuing to have an impact on service delivery and/or colleagues
- where temporary arrangements e.g. a phased return to work have not facilitated a return to the full requirements of the role

The letter inviting the employee to attend the hearing will cover the same issues as earlier stage letters. On this occasion, it must be made clear that this hearing will be a review of their continuing employment and could result in dismissal.

The hearing will need to cover the same issues that are recommended for the earlier meetings. The employee and/or their representative will be given an opportunity to put forward any information they feel is relevant to the process.

Dependent upon the outcome of the hearing and after considering the previous monitoring period and any medical information available, governors will need to decide what further action to take.

This could include:

- recommending a further period of monitoring

- concluding that the stage has been reached where the employee's sickness record is such that they are incapable of satisfactorily performing the job for which they are employed and therefore will be dismissed (with notice or pay in lieu of notice). In such circumstances consideration should also be given to whether the employee is in the pension scheme and whether ill-health retirement may be a possibility, accessing advice from the OHU.

Before making any decision to dismiss, governors should be certain that:

- recent medical information has been reviewed, including what is likely to happen in the future
- meetings have been held with the employee to discuss their sickness absence
- all possible ways to help an employee return to, or remain in work have been considered, for example, making reasonable changes to the workplace and looking at whether the employee could be redeployed to a different job
- the impact of the employee being away from work on service delivery and/or colleagues has been assessed
- the employee has been told what could happen if they continue to be absent from work, including that they may not continue in employment

Additional details on procedural issues

Notifications of Concern

A notification of concern letter is used to let the employee know formally that there are concerns over their absence levels and that this will be kept on file for a stated period of time. However this does not preclude further action being progressed under this procedure if absence levels do not improve before the end of that period. A notification of concern signifies that an individual's level of absence is not acceptable and that if continued may, as a last resort, having exhausted all other options, result in their employment coming to an end.

Monitoring periods

If the employee successfully completes the absence monitoring period, their senior leader should write to confirm this. However, the notification of concern stays on their file for the specified period of time and is only then destroyed if absence levels remain acceptable.

As part of the day to day management of the school, the Head teacher should ensure that records of all staff absence are maintained and should monitor the levels of staff absence on a regular basis. Monitoring the absences of staff will ensure that any repeated pattern of absence becomes apparent. This may reveal an underlying cause of the absence.

Staff should be asked to complete a self-certification form for any absence between 1-7 days and should produce a doctor's certificate after 7 or more days. Certificates should be produced where employees are absent either side of a school holiday. It should be noted that weekends are included in the number of days sick.

Visiting the employee

The senior leader must do everything that is reasonably required to help the employee return to work. This might mean meeting the employee at home (with their agreement), in the workplace, or at a neutral venue to discuss matters. The employee may be advised to visit the

workplace if possible, to help them still feel part of the team and Council. If a formal absence review meeting is being held under this procedure, the employee must receive the written notice in advance, making this clear.

When meeting an employee, the senior leader must be accompanied by a work colleague or a member of the Local HR Team. Employees have a right to be accompanied at formal meetings. How many meetings are held depends upon the individual circumstances of a case. Meetings must be held in a supportive way, with the aim being to discuss matters openly and honestly and agree the next steps.

Case Summaries

The case summary is the formal record of what happened at the absence review meeting. It should give a brief summary of the case, outline the decision made and give justification for coming to the final decision.

The length and level of detail will depend on the nature and seriousness of the case and a summary for a hearing that resulted in a notification of concern will usually be shorter than one involving a complex case of dismissal.

The case summary will be used for future reference if there is an appeal hearing. It will also be relevant in evaluating consistency of decision making across the Council.

The employee should receive a copy of the case summary within 10 working days of the hearing. If the employee disagrees with the record of the meeting, they can ask for their comments to be noted for future reference even if they are not appealing against the decision.

Specific advice for dealing with long-term continuous absence

Keeping in touch with absent employees

If an employee is continuously absent from work, the senior leader must keep in frequent contact with them, they must keep accurate records of when and how they have contacted them and what has been said.

When an absence is long term, keeping in touch includes:

- talking on the phone
- visiting the employee at home or elsewhere
- being aware of the latest medical information
- being aware of any dates when the employee is hoping to come back to work
- ensuring that the employee continues to submit medical certificates for their ongoing absence

Also, depending on the employee and the reason why they are absent from work, a senior leader may wish to keep the employee updated developments at work and invite them to important work meetings or social outings.

Coming back to work after long term sickness absence

Assistance will be provided to employees returning to work after a long absence. When an employee wishes to return to work after a long period of sickness absence, it is important that they are ready to return and are fit to do their job.

The senior leader might want to consider:

- talking to the Occupational Health Unit and organising a workplace assessment
- making changes in the workplace to help the employee
- phasing the employee's return to work, either by reducing their hours of work, duties or both for a short time
- redeploying the employee to an alternative job. Medical advice must support this.

Phasing the return to work

Sometimes a phased return to work for someone returning from long-term absence is appropriate. This recommendation will usually come from the Occupational Health Unit. This may take the form of a structured return to work plan over a number of weeks with regular reviews of progress incorporated and can mean working reduced hours, or carrying out fewer/different tasks (or both). The employee will receive full pay for the agreed period with expectation that progress will be made to full work duties within a reasonable timescale. Progress will be reviewed regularly during the phased return to work plan. Pay implications of not returning to full duties at the end of the phased return to work should be advised.

At the end of the return to work plan there will be a review meeting to establish whether the employee is ready to meet the full requirements of their role, if they have not already done so. The result could be moving to the next stage of the absence management procedure, which could include a formal review of ongoing employment.

If necessary, the Head teacher will take further advice from the OHU and, in liaison with Schools HR Team, consider options such as ill-health redeployment.

If the requirement for reduced hours is likely to continue, then it may be appropriate to consider voluntary reduced work-time with the employee, in which their salary will be reduced to reflect the work they do and the hours they work. Other options under Camden's flexible working scheme may be appropriate.

Serious Illness

On some occasions an individual may be suffering from a serious illness and it will be necessary to use this procedure. Although it will be very important to deal with such cases with tact and sensitivity, it is not possible for exemptions to be made for specific illnesses. Each case will be assessed and managed according to its particular circumstances and senior leaders will need to consider the possible effects of taking formal action. Where all possible adjustments have been offered or made and redeployment has been sought but unsuccessful, it may be necessary to terminate employment if there is no prognosis for a return to work in the near future and the ongoing absence is continuing to have a detrimental effect on the service delivery and colleagues. Further information is should be sought from Schools HR Team.

Terminal Illness

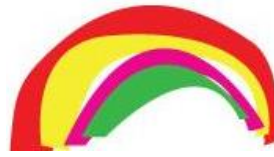
It will be particularly important to deal with cases involving terminal illness with sensitivity and understanding and senior leaders should contact schools HR Team for advice in these circumstances. In these situations, it will be particularly important to explore options available to employees who are members of the pension scheme.

When an employee decides to leave

If an employee decides to resign whilst they are absent due to sickness they still need to provide their contractual notice. During the notice period, they will be paid according to the provisions of the occupational sick pay scheme.

Appendix 1- Informal Absence monitoring letter

Thomas Coram Centre and Nursery School
49 Mecklenburgh Square,
London WC1N 2NY
020 7520 0385
Head Teacher: Perina Holness
perina.holness@thomascoram.camden.sch.uk



Date

Dear,

RE: Informal Review - Absence Monitoring

Our records indicate that you have had the following absence due to sickness in the last 12 months.

Days:

The school aims to encourage all its employees to maximise their attendance at work. We recognise that a certain level of sickness absence is inevitable.

It is the school's policy to support employees who are genuinely unwell.

Whilst the school will support employees who are unwell, it does have a responsibility to manage attendance.

In the first instance, sickness absence is managed informally.

I have allocated the following time for you to come and see me to discuss your absence.

Date/ Time

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss your sickness record and to identify reasons for your absences, to ensure that I am fully aware of your health situation and to ensure we do everything we can to help you.

I look forward to meeting with you and in the meantime if you have any queries or concerns relating to this letter please do not hesitate to contact me. Please confirm your attendance.

Yours faithfully