



DIOCESE OF SOUTHWELL  
& NOTTINGHAM  
MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

## **DIOCESE OF SOUTHWELL AND NOTTINGHAM MULTI ACADEMY TRUST**

### **SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following SNMAT policies as well as any relevant local academy policies:

Data Protection Policy

Equality Policy

<b>Policy:</b>	Sickness Absence Policy
<b>Approved by:</b>	SNMAT Board of Directors
<b>Date:</b>	March 2023
<b>Review cycle:</b>	3 years

VERSION CONTROL			
VERSION	DATE	AUTHOR	CHANGES
1	22 March 2022	JS/JS/BJ	New policy
	08 June		Issued to academies
	09 December 2022	RS	<p>Section 10 - Added information on informal sickness meeting</p> <p>Changed wording on 5.6.1 to say inform Office Manager or HR</p> <p>Changed wording on 5.8 &amp; 12.2 that certificate is required from day 1</p> <p>Changed wording in section 6.5 to clarify understanding</p> <p>Section 13 – New section on informal sickness meeting</p> <p>Changed wording on 14.3 – meeting conducted by HT/Principal or other manager who is delegated this responsibility</p> <p>Section 19 – changed wording on appeals to any stage of the formal procedure</p>
	10 February 2023	RS	<p>Following consultation with the Trade Unions the following updates have been made:</p> <p>Added in section 1.7</p> <p>Amended section 4.2 to include higher trigger points</p> <p>Added in a new section 4.2</p> <p>4.2 now becomes 4.3</p> <p>Amended section 5.2 to include reported and recorded in accordance with Academy</p>

			<p>Amended section 7.1 – may has replaced will</p> <p>Added in section 7.4</p> <p>Removed last sentence from section 9.4.3 and moved it to section 2.3</p> <p>Amended section 14.2 to say you will be given 10 days’ notice and taken out ‘reasonable opportunity for you to consider information before the meeting’ as it will be given 10 days before.</p> <p>Added in also into section 15.4</p> <p>Added in section 18.2.1 that if appropriate we may request a more up to date OH report</p> <p>Section 19.3 deleted unless it is not practicable</p> <p>Section 19.5 deleted where practicable</p>

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out our procedures for reporting sickness absence and for the management of sickness absence in a fair and consistent way.
- 1.2 Sickness absence can vary from short intermittent periods of ill-health to a continuous period of long-term absence and have a number of different causes (for example, injuries, recurring conditions, or a serious illness requiring lengthy treatment).
- 1.3 We wish to ensure that the reasons for sickness absence are understood in each case and investigated where necessary. In addition, where needed and reasonably practicable, measures will be taken to assist those who have been absent by reason of sickness to return to work.
- 1.4 The policy has been implemented following consultation with staff and recognised trade unions. It has been formally adopted by the SNMAT Board of Directors.
- 1.5 This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time following consultation. We may also vary the procedures set out in this policy, including any time limits, as appropriate in any case.
- 1.6 As part of the application of this policy, the Academy/Trust will collect, process and store personal data and special categories of data in accordance with our data protection policy. We will comply with the requirements of the **Data Protection Legislation** (being (i) the General Data Protection Regulation ((EU) 2016/679) (unless and until the GDPR is no longer directly applicable in the UK) and any national implementing laws, regulations and secondary legislation, as amended or updated from time to time, in the UK and then (ii) any successor legislation to the GDPR or the Data Protection Act 1998, including the Data Protection Act 2018), in relation to how we collect, hold and share special category personal data. Records will be kept in accordance with our Data Protection Policy and in line with the requirements of Data Protection Legislation.
- 1.7 The Academy/Trust recognises its legal responsibilities to staff under the Equality Act 2010 and this policy will ensure equality and fairness regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, disability or age. All decisions will be taken in accordance with relevant equalities legislation, the Employment Relations Act 1999, the Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 and the Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002.

## 2 Scope and purpose

- 2.1 This policy has been agreed following consultation with the recognised trade unions and covers all employees at all levels and grades regardless of status except those employees who are in their probationary period.

- 2.2 The purpose of the policy is to ensure that staff understand the expectations of the Academy/Trust in terms of attendance at work. In applying this policy, we aim to ensure that attendance is managed appropriately and consistently and that employees receive relevant support.
- 2.3 In some circumstances disciplinary action may be taken where you do not cooperate with the sickness absence process.

### **3 Definitions**

- 3.1 Short-term sickness absence - any absence that lasts between half and 20 days (four working weeks).
- 3.2 Long term sickness absence - any absence that lasts for a continuous period of longer than four working weeks.

### **4 Disabilities**

- 4.1 We are aware that sickness absence may result from a disability. At each stage of the sickness absence meetings procedure (set out in paragraph 14 of this policy), particular consideration will be given to whether there are reasonable adjustments including higher sickness absence trigger points and other adjustments that could be made to the requirements of a job or other aspects of working arrangements that will provide support at work and/or assist a return to work.
- 4.2 In accordance with the disability provision of the Equality Act 2010, at least some disability-related sickness absences will be disregarded for Attendance Management purposes. Disability-related absences will be counted separately from other absences unrelated to the staff member's disability.
- 4.3 If you consider that you are affected by a disability or any medical condition which affects your ability to undertake your work, you should inform your line manager.

### **5 Sickness absence reporting procedure**

- 5.1 All employees are required to follow the reporting procedure set out below.
- 5.2 If you are taken ill or injured while at work, you should report this to your line manager or an appropriate member of staff, and this must be reported and recorded in accordance with the required procedures within the Academy/Trust. Managers should contact an appropriate member of staff to make arrangements for anyone who is unwell to be accompanied home and/or to receive medical treatment where necessary.

- 5.3 If you cannot attend work because you are ill or injured, you should normally telephone your line manager or the person in school who arranges cover, as early as possible and no later than a suitable time for the operational needs of the academy, e.g. 7.30 am (details of the procedure for reporting absences will be available in the academy/given at induction). The following details should be provided:
  - 5.3.1 The nature of your illness or injury.
  - 5.3.2 The expected length of your absence from work.
  - 5.3.3 Contact details.
- 5.4 Any outstanding or urgent work that requires attention, including information in relation to student work that needs covering.
- 5.5 You must advise the academy of your absence using their preferred method of notification.
- 5.6 Managers should ensure that:
  - 5.6.1 Any sickness absence that is notified to them is recorded on the payroll portal via the Office Manager or HR.
  - 5.6.2 Arrangements are made, where necessary, to cover work and to inform colleagues (while maintaining confidentiality).
- 5.7 You should expect to be contacted during your absence by your line manager/Head Teacher/Principal who will want to enquire after your welfare and be advised, if possible, as to your expected return date. It is recommended that a balanced approach is taken. The frequency of the contact can be agreed in consultation with your line manager/headteacher/principal, dependent upon individual circumstances. It is advised that line managers and employees agree a preferred method of contact, however there may be circumstances when this is not possible, for example if the line manager/headteacher/principal needs to make urgent contact then this may be done via telephone. See section 9.
- 5.8 If you are ill or injured during a period of pre-arranged annual leave you may elect to treat the days of incapacity as sickness absence instead of annual leave. In order to do this you should provide a medical certificate to cover all of the days you are treating as sickness absence. You must inform your manager of your incapacity and its likely duration as soon as possible even if you are abroad.

## **6 Evidence of incapacity**

- 6.1 For sickness absence of up to seven calendar days you must complete a self-certification/return to work form which is available from your line manager **OR** the school office.

- 6.2 For absence of more than a week you must obtain a certificate from your doctor (a 'Statement of Fitness for Work') stating that you are not fit for work and the reason(s) why. This should be forwarded to your line manager **OR** school office as soon as possible. If your absence continues, further medical certificates must be provided to cover the whole period of absence.
- 6.3 If your doctor provides a certificate stating that you 'may be fit for work' you should inform your line manager/Headteacher/Principal **OR** school office immediately. We will discuss with you any additional measures that may be needed to facilitate your return to work, taking account of your doctor's advice. This may take place at a return to work interview (see paragraph 10.1). If appropriate measures cannot be taken, you will remain on sick leave and we will set a date to review the situation.
- 6.4 Where we are concerned about the reason for absence, or frequent short-term absence, we may require a medical certificate for each absence regardless of duration. In such circumstances, we will cover any costs incurred in obtaining such medical certificates, for absences of a week or less, on production of a doctor's invoice.
- 6.5 Where an employee is absent immediately prior to an Academy closure period, they will be deemed as being absent for the purposes of recording sickness during the closure period until the end date of absence is confirmed. When the employee returns after the closure period, the amount of absence recorded will be confirmed in the return to work interview. If the employee is still absent when the Academy reopens the usual requirements for self-certification and medical certificates in this policy will apply.
- 6.6 If you are undergoing an elective or cosmetic surgery or procedure for which you will be absent from work, then any entitlement to Trust sick pay (as set out in paragraph 8) will be subject to receipt of satisfactory medical evidence. This medical evidence will need to be in the form of a report from your doctor or a specialist confirming that you are undergoing the procedure on medical advice. You may be required to take annual leave for any absence related to a purely elective procedure.

## **7      Unauthorised absence**

- 7.1 Cases of unauthorised absence may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.
- 7.2 Absence that has not been notified according to the sickness absence reporting procedure will be treated as unauthorised absence.
- 7.3 If you do not report for work and have not telephoned your line manager or the school office to explain the reason for your absence, your line manager or the headteacher will try to contact you, by telephone and in writing if necessary. This should not be treated as a substitute for reporting sickness absence.
- 7.4 If an emergency situation occurs i.e. you are taken into hospital and you are too ill to make contact with school, someone else should do this on your behalf and advise the reason for this.



## **8 Sick pay**

- 8.1 You should refer to your contract for details of the sick pay to which you are entitled.
- 8.2 Failure to properly report your absence or to provide medical or self-certification could lead to your pay being suspended.

## **9 Keeping in contact during sickness absence**

- 9.1 If you are absent on sick leave you should expect to be contacted from time to time by your line manager or Headteacher/Principal in order to discuss your wellbeing, expected length of continued absence from work and any of your work that requires attention. Such contact is intended to provide reassurance and will be kept to a reasonable minimum. See section 5.7.
- 9.2 If you have any concerns while absent on sick leave, whether about the reason for your absence or your ability to return to work, you should feel free to contact your line manager and/or Headteacher/HR at any time.
- 9.3 We offer access to confidential counselling through Health Assured, details are available on request. For further information and access the Employee Assistance Programme please contact the school office or HR.

### **9.4 Medical examinations**

- 9.4.1 We may, at any time in operating this policy, ask you to attend a medical examination by our Occupational Health Department and/or a doctor nominated by us (at our expense).
- 9.4.2 You will be asked to agree that any report produced in connection with any such examination may be disclosed to us and that we may discuss the contents of the report with [our advisers and] the relevant doctor.
- 9.4.3 Failure to agree to a reasonable request may result in decisions being made in the absence of any medical information.
- 9.4.4 In the event of a difference of opinion between an employee's GP and the Trust's occupational health advisors, regarding an employee's fitness for work, functional capacity or the existence of an underlying medical condition contributing towards persistent absences, the OH advisor's advice will normally take precedence. In some cases, an independent medical advisor may be asked to give a second opinion.
- 9.4.5 This process is in line with our Workforce Privacy Notice which sets out how we will gather, process and hold special category personal data of individuals during employment.

## **10 Return-to-work interviews**

- 10.1 If you have been absent on sick leave we will arrange for you to have a return-to-work interview with your line manager or an appropriate person in the academy e.g HR Officer.
- 10.2 A return-to-work interview enables us to confirm the details of your absence. It also gives you the opportunity to raise any concerns or questions you may have, and to bring any relevant matters to our attention.
- 10.3 Where your doctor has provided a certificate stating that you 'may be fit for work' we will usually hold a return-to-work interview to discuss any additional measures that may be needed to facilitate your return to work, taking account of your doctor's advice.
- 10.4 If necessary, at this meeting your absence levels will be discussed. If your absence levels are close to the absence triggers - see section 14.1 you may be advised that further absence could trigger the Sickness Absence Meeting procedure.

## **11 Returning to work from long-term sickness absence**

- 11.1 We are committed to helping employees return to work from long-term sickness absence. As part of our sickness absence meetings procedure (see section 14), we will, where appropriate and possible, support returns to work by:
  - 11.1.1 Obtaining medical advice;
  - 11.1.2 Making reasonable adjustments to the workplace, working practices and working hours, including a time-limited phased return to work.

A phased return to work will often be a recommendation of an occupational health advisor or the employees GP.

Employees will receive their full pay on the phased return. Phased returns to work should be for a maximum of 6 weeks. Some discretion may be applied depending upon individual circumstances. In the event an employee requests that the phased return is extended, a dialogue should be held with the employee in regards to a temporary contractual change being made to their working hours to accommodate the request and their pay adjusted accordingly.
  - 11.1.3 Considering redeployment; and/or
  - 11.1.4 Agreeing a return to work programme with everyone affected.
- 11.2 If you are unable to return to work in the longer term, we will consider whether you are entitled to any benefits under your contract and/or any insurance schemes we operate.

## **12 Sick Leave and Annual Leave**

- 12.1 If you become sick or injured while on annual leave such that you would be unfit for work you may ask us to treat the period of incapacity as sick leave and reclaim the annual leave.
- 12.2 To be able to claim contractual sick pay you must notify your Line Manager/Headteacher or the School Office of your incapacity immediately. You should provide a medical certificate to cover all of the days you are treating as sickness absence.
- 12.3 If you are on sick leave you may choose to cancel any pre-arranged annual leave that would otherwise coincide with your sick leave. You should notify your line manager/Headteacher or the School Officer as soon as possible that you wish to do this.
- 12.4 If your period of sick leave extends into the next holiday year, or if there is not enough time left in the current holiday year to make it practicable to take your remaining holiday entitlement, you can carry any unused holiday entitlement over to the following leave year up to a maximum of 20 days to be used within three months of your return to work.

## **13 Sickness Absence Informal meeting**

If it is necessary to implement the Sickness Absence Meeting Procedure (section 14) it should come as no surprise to the employee. Therefore, if an employee is close to the absence triggers then an informal meeting should take place with the employee to advise them of their absence levels. The sickness absence meetings procedure should be discussed with them so they are aware of the process. This meeting can also be done as part of a return to work interview (see section 10).

## **14 Sickness Absence Meetings Procedure**

- 14.1 We may apply this procedure whenever we consider it necessary, including, for example, if you have been absent due to illness on a number of occasions in line with the following triggers\* for action
  - Four or more occasions in any rolling 12-month period
  - 12 or more days in any rolling 12 months and/or where the number of absences in a short period warrants immediate action, eg – 3 episodes or 9 days in 6 months
  - Or any other pattern that causes concern
  - The policy may still be applied where the employee persistently falls just below the trigger points and where the absence is perceived to be a problem.

It is recognised that some conditions can cause increased levels of absence and in these situations, it may be appropriate to raise the trigger points.

*\*These triggers should be pro rata for part time employees and consideration should be given to adjusting triggers for employees with a disability. Pregnancy related absences should be discounted when calculating triggers*

14.1.1 Have discussed matters at a return to work interview that require investigation; and/or

14.1.2 Have been absent for more than 4 weeks or more.

14.2 We will give you ten working days written notice of the date, time and place of a sickness absence meeting. We will put any concerns about your sickness absence and the basis for those concerns in writing and advise why the meeting is being called.

14.3 Meetings will be conducted by the Headteacher/Principal or any other manager this responsibility has been delegated to. The meeting may also be attended by another member of staff (e.g Business Manager, SLT or an HR Advisor). You may bring a companion with you to the meeting (see paragraph 15).

14.4 You must take all reasonable steps to attend a meeting. Failure to do so without good reason may be treated as misconduct. If you or your companion are unable to attend at the time specified you should immediately inform the Headteacher who will seek to agree an alternative time.

14.5 A meeting may be adjourned if the Headteacher is awaiting receipt of information, needs to gather any further information or give consideration to matters discussed at a previous meeting. You will be given a reasonable opportunity to consider any new information obtained before the meeting is reconvened.

14.6 Confirmation of any decision made at a meeting, the reasons for it, and of the right of appeal will be given to you in writing within five days of a sickness absence meeting (unless this time scale is not practicable, in which case it will be provided as soon as is practicable).

14.7 Formal warnings issued for sickness will remain live for a period of 12 months from the date of issue, during which time further absences beyond the review period would be dealt with either at the next stage of the procedure or by an extension of the current live warning. If further absences occur shortly after the end of the 12-month period (or any extended warning), we reserve the right to deal with the matter at the same stage of the procedure and not return to earlier stage.

14.8 If, at any time, the Headteacher considers that you have taken or are taking sickness absence when you are not unwell, they may refer matters to be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.

## **15 Right to be accompanied at meetings**

- 15.1 You may bring a companion to any meeting or appeal meeting under this procedure.
- 15.2 Your companion may be either a trade union representative or a work colleague. You should provide their details to the Headteacher conducting the meeting, in good time before it takes place.
- 15.3 Employees are allowed reasonable time off from duties without loss of pay to act as a companion. However, they are not obliged to act as a companion and may decline a request if they so wish.
- 15.4 We also may at our discretion permit other companions (for example family members) where this will help overcome particular difficulties caused by a disability or difficulty understanding English.
- 15.5 Some companions may not be allowed: for example, anyone who may have a conflict of interest, or whose presence may prejudice a meeting.
- 15.6 A companion may make representations, ask questions, and sum up your position, but will not be allowed to answer questions on your behalf. You may confer privately with your companion at any time during a meeting.

## **16 Stage 1 Sickness Absence Meeting**

- 16.1 This will follow the procedure set out in paragraphs 14 and 15 on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied at sickness absence meetings.
- 16.2 The purposes of a first sickness absence meeting may include:
  - 16.2.1 Discussing the reasons for absence.
  - 16.2.2 Where you are on long-term sickness absence, determining how long the absence is likely to last.
  - 16.2.3 Where you have been absent on a number of occasions, determining the likelihood of further absences.
  - 16.2.4 Considering whether medical advice is required or, if already obtained, what that advice is.
  - 16.2.5 Considering what, if any, measures might improve your health and/or attendance.
  - 16.2.6 Determining a way forward, action that will be taken and a time-scale for review, and/or a further meeting under the sickness absence procedure.
  - 16.2.7 Issuing a written notification that your employment may be at risk if your attendance does not improve.

## **17 Stage 2 Sickness Absence Meeting**

- 17.1 Depending on the matters discussed at the first stage of the sickness absence procedure, a further meeting or meetings may be necessary. Arrangements for meetings under the second stage of the sickness absence procedure will follow the procedure set out in paragraphs 14 and 15 on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied at sickness absence meetings.
- 17.2 The purposes of further meeting(s) may include:
  - 17.2.1 Discussing the reasons for and impact of your ongoing absence(s).
  - 17.2.2 Where you are on long-term sickness absence, discussing how long your absence is likely to last.
  - 17.2.3 Where you have been absent on a number of occasions, discussing the likelihood of further absences.
  - 17.2.4 If it has not been obtained, considering whether medical advice is required. If it has been obtained, considering the advice that has been given and whether further advice is required.
  - 17.2.5 Considering your ability to return to/remain in your job in view both of your capabilities and the needs of the Academy/Trust and any adjustments that can reasonably be made to your job to enable you to do so.
  - 17.2.6 Considering possible redeployment opportunities and whether any adjustments can reasonably be made to assist in redeploying you.
  - 17.2.7 Where you are able to return from long-term sick leave, whether to your job or a redeployed job, agreeing a phased return to work programme.
  - 17.2.8 If it is considered that you are unlikely to be able to return to work from long-term absence, whether there are any benefits for which you should be considered.
  - 17.2.9 Determining a way forward, action that will be taken and a time-scale for review and/or a further meeting(s). This may, depending on steps we have already taken, include warning you that you are at risk of dismissal.
  - 17.2.10 Issuing a final written notification that your employment may be at risk if your attendance does not improve.

## **18 Stage 3 Sickness Absence Meeting**

- 18.1 Where you have been notified that you are at risk of dismissal and the improvement has not been made, we may invite you to a meeting under the third stage of the sickness absence procedure. Arrangements for this meeting will follow the procedure set out in paragraphs 14 and 15 on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied

at sickness absence meetings however the meeting will be conducted by a panel of three made up of Governors/Directors. A format for the meeting is attached at Appendix 1. If appropriate a further updated OH report may be required.

**18.2 The purposes of the meeting will be:**

- 18.2.1 To review the meetings that have taken place, the matters discussed and warnings issued.
- 18.2.2 Where you remain on long-term sickness absence, to consider whether there have been any changes since the last meeting under stage two of the procedure, either as regards your possible return to work or opportunities for return or redeployment.
- 18.2.3 To consider any further matters that you wish to raise.
- 18.2.4 To consider whether there is a reasonable likelihood of you returning to work or achieving the desired level of attendance in a reasonable time.
- 18.2.5 To consider if ill health retirement is a possibility where medical advice is clear it is unlikely that an employee will be fit to return to their role in the near future.
- 18.2.6 To consider the possible termination of your employment (Where all other options have been exhausted).
- 18.2.7 Termination will normally be with full notice or payment in lieu of notice.

## **19 Appeals**

- 19.1 You may appeal against the outcome of any stage of the formal procedure and you may bring a companion to an appeal meeting (see paragraph 15).
- 19.2 An appeal should be made in writing, stating the full grounds of appeal, to the Headteacher within fourteen days of the date on which the decision was sent to you.
- 19.3 You will be given ten working days written notice of an appeal meeting. In cases of dismissal the appeal will be held as soon as possible. Any new matters raised in an appeal may delay an appeal meeting if further investigation is required.
- 19.4 You will be provided with written details of any new information which comes to light before an appeal meeting. You will also be given a reasonable opportunity to consider this information before the meeting.
- 19.5 An appeal meeting will be conducted by a different panel of Governors/Directors not previously involved.
- 19.6 Depending on the grounds of appeal, the appeal hearing may be a review of the fairness of the original decision in light of the procedure that was followed and any new information that may have come to light (in which case the format would be reversed

in that the employee would present their appeal first). This will be at the Governors'/Directors' discretion depending on the circumstances of the case.

- 19.7 Following an appeal, the original decision may be confirmed, revoked or replaced with a different decision. The final decision will be confirmed in writing, if possible, within five days of the appeal meeting. There will be no further right of appeal.
- 19.8 The date that any dismissal takes effect will not be delayed pending the outcome of an appeal. However, if the appeal is successful, the decision to dismiss will be revoked with no loss of continuity or pay.

## **20 Review of policy**

This policy is reviewed annually by the Trust in consultation with the recognised trade unions. The application and outcomes of this policy will be monitored to ensure it is working effectively.



## **Appendix 1 - Format for stage 3 sickness absence meeting**

1. Welcome by chair of panel:
  - a. ask everyone present to introduce themselves and explain their role
  - b. explain purpose of meeting
2. Presentation of management case by the Head Teacher/Principal including: The nature of the attendance/ill health issue, impact of absences, the actions/support already implemented/ considered, the improvements required, the medical evidence (from OHU) and the recommendations.
3. The employee will be given the opportunity to ask any questions in relation to information presented.
4. The employee will then be invited to state his/her case or respond to the information presented.
5. The panel will ask questions/seek clarification as necessary in relation to the employee's case.
6. The Head Teacher/Principal to be given an opportunity to make a closing statement.
7. The employee to be given an opportunity to make a closing statement.
8. Meeting adjourned for decision
9. Employee notified of outcome
10. Notes from the meeting are used to confirm outcome in writing and sent to employee within the timescale set out in the policy