Staff Absence Management Policy

**Manchester Vocational and Learning Academy**

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| **Approved by:** | Linda Guest |  |
| **Last reviewed on:** | 1st September 2024 | |
| **Next review due by:** | September 2026 | |

This procedure and guidance applies to all employees of Manchester Vocational and Learning Academy (MVLA)

**1. PRINCIPLES**

The school recognises the importance of health and wellbeing for all employees,

however there are times when employees are not well enough to attend work.

Effective management of absence is a core management responsibility. It requires a number of key skills to ensure that absence is dealt with in a firm but fair manner, recognising the implications for the individual’s team, our students and the school as a whole. It should not be forgotten, however, that employees must be treated with respect and with a person-centred approach balanced with the needs of the organisation.

**2. THE IMPACT OF ABSENCE**

Absence has an impact throughout the school, including disruption to students’ learning, cost implications and team morale. This can be as simple as work being delayed until the employee returns, or as complex and costly as having to cover for an employee for a period of time and impacting on the education of our students.

High absence levels can also be an indicator of wider performance issues within the team, so it is important that absence is managed effectively and not just left to happen.

Potential impact of absence in the workplace:

•  Completion of work delayed

•  Cost of covering role

•  Impact on students’ learning

•  Other team members put under pressure

•  Loss of knowledge

•  Cost of sick pay

•  Cost of Occupational Health services

•  Cost of any reasonable adjustments made

•  Cost of rehabilitation programme to return an individual to work

•  Morale and motivation within the team

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It is important to acknowledge that all of us, at some point, will be too unwell to attend work. The school works from the principle that every absence should be treated as genuine, unless there is a strong belief to the contrary. Absence will be dealt with in a supportive manner, whilst understanding the implications for the school and the needs of its students.

**3. CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF ABSENCE**

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| Management Tool | Management Action |
| Absence notification | Absence must be notified by telephone to the Proprietor by 7.30 am on the first day of absence as per the Staff Handbook and on each day of absence unless the duration of the absence is known. |
| Absence Recording | All absences must be recorded accurately on the system by the school’s administrative staff |
| Medical certificates | Must be provided by employees for any absences of more than 5 working days. |
| Return to Work Interviews | This is ‘stage 1’ in the monitoring process and it must be completed for all relevant categories of absence. These must be completed by Headteacher – this task cannot be delegated to another individual. |
| Contact with employees | Regular contact will normally be kept with absent employees to help them keep in touch and ensure that the school is kept up to date with information about their absence. |
| Management of long term absences | Early contact will be made to give an indication of how long the employee will be off and how the absence and return to work can be managed. This will aim to be done sympathetically. |
| Unacceptable absence levels (short term persistent and/or long term) | Concerns about poor absence rates will be raised in a supportive manner, in the form of a meeting with the Headteacher. The purpose of this ‘stage 2’ meeting will be to discuss the employee’s attendance record and explore ways in which it can be improved. The employee can be accompanied at this meeting by either a TU Rep or work colleague. A follow up letter will be sent and kept on file. |

•  All absences will be treated as genuine (unless there is genuine concern otherwise) and handled in a sensitive manner.

•  All employees will be treated with dignity and may be accompanied by a TU or work colleague supporter at any meetings, either informal or formal.

•  Careful attention will be given to any stress absences or absences that may be covered under the Equality Act 2010.

•  Early advice will be sought from Occupational Health where this may be appropriate.

**4. ABSENCE – ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

**4.1 Employees:**

Are responsible for maintaining their own health and well-being including:

* Taking reasonable steps to maintain their own fitness for work
* Not attending work when they are genuinely ill or unfit for work
* Not to take unnecessary risks that may affect their health or well-being
* Following the school’s absence notification procedures and protocol.
* Assisting in their own recovery particularly where specific remedial action is identified
* Working with their team to encourage health and well-being

**4.2 Middle leaders, line managers and leadership team**

Are responsible for maintaining an overview of the health and well-being of their staff including:

•  Ensuring employees are aware of the absence procedures

•  Recording and monitoring attendance and absence

•  Ensuring that return to work interviews are carried out effectively and timely

•  Seeking advice from appropriate specialists (EPM’s HR, Occupational Health

etc.)

•  Providing appropriate support when team members are unwell or unable to

attend work due to ill health or injury

•  Working in conjunction with EPM’s HR and Occupational Health Advisors where

there are long-term absences or other concerns

•  Identifying opportunities to improve the health and well-being of their team

**5 ABSENCE NOTIFICATION PROCESS**

**5.1 First day of absence**

If a member of staff is going to be absent they must notify the Proprietor, by 7.30 am on the first day of absence as per the protocol in the Staff Handbook. Staff must call in on each subsequent day of absence unless they have clearly stated a definite period of absence or return date on their first day of absence.

Staff must, wherever possible, notify the Proprietor no later than one hour before their normal start time. In exceptional circumstances, where this is not possible, contact should be made as soon as is practically possible. If necessary, contact can be made by a partner or other relevant person.

The following information should be established:

•  The date that their absence started

•  A basic understanding of the nature of the absence

•  The likely duration of the absence if possible (if the illness is likely to last more

than 7 calendar days then they must ring in on the 7th day and a medical

certificate must be sent in)

•  Whether contact with their GP has been made

•  Whether or not the absence related to stress, an industrial injury or accident at

work.

The above steps will be handled sensitively with a genuine concern for the employee's health. Exceptionally, the employee may arrange for someone else to phone on their behalf, following the principles above.

If an employee becomes unwell whilst at work, and feels unable to continue, the Headteacher should give permission for the individual to leave work, ensuring that the employee is able to return home safely. This person should take note of the absence and record as appropriate.

**5.2 Certificates**

It is important that absence certification procedures are followed, as failure to complete either the self-certificate or forward a doctor’s certificate may result in loss of sick pay or action under the Capability Procedures.

Continued unauthorised and unexplained absences can amount to misconduct and in such cases it may be appropriate to instigate proceedings under the school’s Capability Procedures.

**For absences of 7 calendar days or less** (including weekends) a self-certificate form should be completed on the first day of return to work as part of the return to work interview. Self-certificates are filed and stored confidentially and securely.

**If the employee is absent for 8 calendar days or more** a medical certificate must be obtained, usually from the GP and forwarded on to the without delay. For continuing absences, concurrent medical certificates must be sent to the Headteacher, covering the whole period of absence.

As part of the approach set out in this document, in exceptional circumstances, if the school is concerned with the frequency or genuineness of absence, the Headteacher may request that a medical certificate from the GP is submitted by the employee, rather than a self-certificate. This may be requested from their first day of absence. The cost of the medical certificate will be reimbursed.

When an individual returns to work after any absence which has not been pre- authorised, a Return to Work Interview will be conducted (Stage 1 of the informal procedure). These will be conducted by the Headteacher. The purpose of the interview is to welcome the employee back to work and enable a wider discussion on the employee's general health or other problems which may be making it difficult for him / her to attend for work.

Where it is established that there are underlying reasons for absence that may be appropriately addressed using other policies or procedures, a discussion will take place with the employee to explore options.

**5.3 Trigger points**

The following have been agreed as trigger points within the absence data to prompt a (Stage 2) meeting with the Headteacher:

•  An absence of more than ten working days or three episodes in a rolling three month period;

•  An absence of more than fifteen working or four episodes in a rolling six month period;

•  An absence of more than twenty working days or five episodes in a rolling twelve month period;

•  Long term absences as appropriate (over 20 working days)

•  Unacceptable patterns of absence (e.g. regular Friday and/or Monday

absences)

•  Special leave absences will not usually be included in these criteria

**5.4**

Following a ‘stage 2’ meeting with the Headteacher, attendance will be monitored over approximately six weeks. If a member of staff’s attendance continues to be of concern during that period, the school would seek further advice from School’s HR to determine the best way forward for both parties. A further meeting (stage 3) will be held between the Headteacher (with another member of the Leadership Team) and the member of staff, who should be advised of his/her right to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union representative.

If a second trigger is hit within 12 months of the end of the six week monitoring period, this will also result in a stage 3 meeting.

**Some of the possible outcomes of the stage 3 meeting are outlined in points 6 & 7 below and other options may be more applicable in specific circumstances.**

**6 ONGOING ABSENCE**

**6.1 Contact during absence**

Contact will be maintained with the employee throughout their absence – particularly for the longer-term absences. There may though be special circumstances where contact may not be as appropriate. It helps to keep them in touch with what is happening. It also provides updates on absence and its likely duration and what additional support can be provided to facilitate an effective return to work, or indeed if a return to work is feasible.

All contact – whether by email, telephone or a personal visit - will be handled in a sensitive manner. Where an employee is a member of a Trade Union, contact via the Trade Union representative may be an interim option if the employee agrees or requests this. It is important the individual does not feel harassed by contact and the Headteacher needs to make a judgement on this.

Contact could be maintained through:

•  When medical certificates are received

•  Periodic ‘keeping in touch’ calls or cards and emails

•  Contact regarding expiry of a medical certificate if a replacement has not been sent

•  In advance of an Occupational Health referral/appointment being made

•  By prior arrangement

•  Where there is a legitimate need to update the employee e.g. if specific actions have been agreed or if specific information is received.

**7. RETURN TO WORK**

If an employee is unable to return to work immediately in their current contractual role or hours, advice will be sought about the most appropriate return to work programme, to assist the individual gradually back into work.

There are a number of options available to assist in returning employees to work and these include:

**7.1 Phased Return**

This is usually as directed by Occupational Health or the GP and is designed to reintegrate the employees into their own job over a fixed period (usually 2 to 6 weeks) starting with short periods and building back up to the contracted hours.

It is actively managed and reviewed regularly by the school and the member of staff (and sometimes by Occupational Health). The intention is to define a period with support. The period could possibly be extended beyond 6 weeks where this is recommended. The employee will receive their full contractual pay for the agreed initial period of the phased return.

**7.2 Temporary Reduction in Hours**

This may occur when a phased return is planned over a longer period. The school can agree with the employee an extended phased return on a temporary contractual variation to their hours with a change in pay. This is then jointly reviewed and hours adjusted back to full contractual hours. If the rehabilitation phase is expected to continue for a significant period of time it may be appropriate to consider a permanent change to the employee’s terms and conditions and advice from our HR advisor will be sought. Any change will be discussed and agreed in advance with the employee.

**7.3 Permanent Reduction in Hours**

This is contract variation in the current role (like a flexible working request). It is usually on the advice of Occupational Health or at the request of the employee and must be agreed by all parties prior to implementation and must meet the needs of the school.

**7.4 Reasonable Adjustments**

In some circumstances reasonable adjustments (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) are required and these can include varying the work, work pattern or role. Where this cannot be accommodated in the current role, or is recommended by Occupational Health as unsuitable in the current role, redeployment will be considered wherever possible. The employee must recognise there are constraints that can mean some adjustments are not viable or feasible.

**8 RETIREMENT ON THE GROUNDS OF ILL HEALTH**

There may be some instances, where the prognosis is that the employee's absence will be for a significant period, or that they will be unable to return to work in any capacity. In these circumstances, it may be appropriate for retirement on the grounds of ill health to be considered.

The need to use the ill health retirement procedure may arise from the following situations:

•  If it appears obvious that an employee’s medical condition is such that they will never be fit again to undertake the duties of their current post

•  If redeployment has already been considered (where appropriate)

•  If, after a period of significant absence, doubts arise as to the employee’s likelihood of returning to work at all in the foreseeable future or where almost

immediately the medical prognosis is that the employee will not return

Through regular referrals to Occupational Health and with guidance from the school’s HR advisor, an agreement should be made whether Ill Health Retirement is an option.

Occupational Health grants the ability for someone to retire on the grounds of ill health via a certificate of permanent incapacity; however, the decision to release pension benefits is that of the County Council for Support Staff and Teachers’ Pensions for teachers.

**9 DISMISSAL ON THE GROUNDS OF ILL HEALTH**

There may be some instances where Occupational Health is unable to provide a Certificate of Permanent Incapacity, but the absence is likely to continue for a considerable period of time.

In these instances, advice will be sought from the school’s HR advisor and, where appropriate, the possibility of dismissal on the grounds of Ill Health will be explored.

Long-term absence can be a reason for dismissal. However the school will carry out the following as a minimum:

•  Consult the employee regularly and ensure they are kept informed about any proposals regarding their employment

•  Review the employee’s absence record to assess whether it justifies dismissal

•  Obtain up to date medical advice before taking any decision to dismiss

•  Review whether there are any other jobs that the employee could do prior to taking

any decision to dismiss including Occupational Health report.

•  Act reasonably towards the employee throughout