



Barrowford

Primary School

Learn to Love, Love to Learn

Staff Absence Policy

This school is committed to achieving and maintaining a high level of attendance from all employees. The Headteacher will monitor overall levels of sickness absences half termly, will support colleagues through times of sickness and will arrange for confidential reports to be submitted to Governors. Action will be taken to deal with unacceptable levels and frequency of sickness. All employees must understand the importance of good attendance and ensure that any sickness absence is kept to a minimum and that during any such absence they do not undertake any activity which is incompatible with the illness or which may delay recovery.

Appointment process

Information will be obtained in a fair and open way through references:

- Questions will be asked about the length and incidence of any period of absence within the last 2 years together with reasons for any period exceeding 10 working days.
- Details will be requested for absences for reasons outside the employee's control.
- Details of 'live' disciplinary warnings for punctuality or absence
- Copies of the school policy statement will be made available to all existing employees and new appointments to the school

Nominated People

Michelle Hartley and Sarah Metcalfe

The nominated people will;-

- Be aware of the absence record for each employee
- Ensure that employees are aware of and comply with absence reporting arrangement
- Conduct discussions with employees in respect of all absences when they return to work
- Seek to assist employees in need of support
- Be the contact point for monitoring and notification procedures

In respect of the Head teacher, the Deputy Head teacher they will monitor periods of absence together with the Schools' Personnel Team.

Trigger points

The trigger points for potential causes for concern at Barrowford School, consistent with County Council practice, are:

- 10 days absence and / or
- 3 periods of absence in a rolling period of 12 months

Monitoring and Recording Procedures

Accurate records will be kept so we can determine trends of absenteeism and analyse sickness absence. The Senior Leadership Team and Governors will receive regular report on levels of sickness absence within the school.

Notification Procedures

School has in place procedures for appropriate documentation, including medical certificates, to be provided to the school office for the completion of returns which will be submitted to the Schools' Personnel Team for Payroll processing.

What will happen if an employee does not attend for work

1st working day

- Employees should contact Sarah Metcalfe and their nominated person by 8am (7:30 for teaching staff) at the latest to enable alternative staffing arrangements to be put into place.
- Employees must give details of reasons for absence and likely duration and whether the absence is related to an accident or injury at work. This information will be recorded.

After 3 days

- If absence continues, employees must make further contact with Sarah Metcalfe regarding their absence giving, if possible, an indication of likely return date
- For all absences beyond three days, including weekends, an employee must complete a self certification form on return

After 7 calendar days

- Doctor's statement must be forwarded to Sarah Metcalfe before forwarding to school office

Longer term absence

- During periods of long term absence, employees have a responsibility to keep the school informed of progress through Rachel Tomlinson (Head teacher). The school should maintain contact and, if necessary, by agreement, visit the employee. Care should not be taken not to pressurise or harass employees, bearing in mind the nature of the illness.

Return to work discussion

Following a period of sickness or unauthorised absence, employees must, immediately before or upon return to work, report to their nominated person who will:

- Be aware of the sickness record of the employee
- Discuss the reason for absence
- Seek to establish underlying problems – establish if the employee is seeking help elsewhere
- Be sensitive to the reasons for absence and be in a position to offer support, advice or practical assistance – this may require referral to other sources – Employee Welfare and Counselling Service, Teacher Associations etc
- Ensure that the employee is fit enough to return to full duties
- Brief the employee on any current work issues
- Ensure that this discussion is conducted in private at a convenient time
- Be aware that most employees are absent for reasons beyond their control and the return to work discussion will be supportive and informal. In other

instances it is an opportunity to point out the frequency or pattern of absence which may be leading to concern

- See all employees after each absence showing that there is a commitment to the management of attendance, that an explanation will be required and that there is consistency.

Causes for concern

If repeated short term absence is viewed as a cause for concern, for example, the amount or frequency of absence breaching the trigger points adopted by the school, Rachel Tomlinson (Head teacher) will arrange a meeting with the employee who may be accompanied by a Trade Union or Association representative, at which they will be:

- Informed of the level or frequency of absence and the effects on the operation of the school and on other employees
- Given an opportunity to explain the absence and identify reasons – where appropriate constructive help will be offered. In particular, attention will be drawn to the Employee Welfare and Counselling Service and the support available through Trade Unions and Teacher Associations
- Where appropriate, made aware that their level of absence is unacceptable; that improvement is necessary and that continued unacceptable absence will lead to formal warnings and possible dismissal. A review date will be set.
- The outcome of this discussion should be set out, in writing, to the employee to ensure clarity
- The position will be monitored and reviewed with a date set for review.
- Where no satisfactory improvement is achieved and there remains a cause for concern, the matter will proceed to the formal procedure.

Further action

Absence levels and patterns giving cause for concern will usually fall into 3 categories:

- Repeated short term absence
- Long term absence due to permanent incapacity
- Longer term absence where the condition is not of a permanent nature

These cases will be dealt with under the repeated short term absence procedure or under the separate long term sickness procedures.

In circumstances where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the employee is abusing the sickness absence scheme, normal disciplinary procedures will be applied. Examples of such circumstances include:

- Failure to follow the sickness notification arrangements without good reason
- Failure to provide medical certificates when required to do so
- Falsification of self certification or medical certificates
- Undertaking other employment or engaging in any activity incompatible with the illness or which may delay recovery or aggravate the illness.

Repeated Short Term Absence Policy and Procedure

Repeated short term absence may arise from a health problem, domestic or work related difficulties or may be unjustified. Each case will need to be considered on an individual basis having regard to:

- The nature of the illness or disability
- Frequency and pattern of absence
- Overall absence record
- Operational needs of the school
- Impact of absence on other employees

Where necessary, professional help should be sought to deal with specific problems.

It is not necessary to obtain medical evidence confirming the employee's condition when first applying this procedure. In instances where short term, unrelated illnesses are the reasons for absence there is nothing to be gained by obtaining a doctor's opinion. If however, the illnesses indicate that there could be an underlying cause which has not already been addressed, then medical advice may indicate a course of action which could result in an improvement in attendance.

The overriding concern is the extent to which the absence, attributable to illness, is affecting the operation of the school. It is inevitable; therefore, that this procedure will be applied to employees with genuine health problems and the various steps as set out should be handled sympathetically.

If it becomes clear, at any stage in the application of this procedure, that permanent incapacity to carry out the appointed duties on ill-health grounds is the underlying issue then these guidelines will be suspended, independent medical advice sought and the normal long term sickness procedures followed. Similarly, an employee, whilst not permanently incapacitated may be absent due to a specific condition which may result in a lengthy absence, but which is obviously finite and where the application of the formal stages of this procedure is not appropriate. The purpose of this procedure is to provide a framework within which the school is able to exercise discretion according to the particular circumstances of the absence.

It must be recognised that the final outcome of a process for dealing with repeated short term absence may, in some circumstances, result in dismissal. Whilst warnings and cautions may, initially, seem incompatible with sickness absence, they are essential when the end result might be termination of that employment. There comes a time when any reasonable employer is entitled to decide that termination of employment is the only reasonable course of action, providing the employee has been given sufficient warning that this may be the outcome if attendance does not improve and that a period of time over which to improve attendance has been specified and exhausted to no avail.

Any decision to terminate employment arising from this procedure must be preceded by:

- A review of the employee's attendance record and reasons for absence
- A medical report
- Opportunity for the employee to make representations regarding sickness absence
- Appropriate warnings that dismissal may occur if attendance does not improve within a specified period

This process is separate from the normal disciplinary procedures.

Medical reports

An employee may be required to submit to an examination by the Authority's nominated Medical/Occupational Health Adviser where that employee is considered to be unable to perform her/his duties as a consequence of illness.

An opinion may, in some instances, be helpful when dealing with difficulties associated with persistent sickness absence and some General Practice/Occupational Health Units are willing to carry out independent medical examinations at short notice. The GP will not be the employee's own doctor. Arrangements for this should be made through the Schools' Personnel Team Leader.

When referring an individual for an independent medical report, the arrangements set out in the long term sickness absence procedure will be followed.

Any medical report, when received, will be fully taken into account in deciding future management action. The contents of the report will be shared with the employee unless the doctor specifies otherwise.

Formal action

Set out below is a procedure of three stages, which will be followed if formal action is considered necessary. It is intended to provide fair and effective arrangements with clarity of the rights and responsibilities of School Management, employees and Professional associations and trade unions. It is stressed that there must be consistency of approach and standards in dealing with all employees absence issues.

Normally the stages below will be followed sequentially. However, if an employee has progressed through some stages and action has ceased following satisfactory attendance within the review period, and if within a 12 month period of the date of the satisfactory review further action is again considered necessary, the procedure may be recommenced at the appropriate stage. Where there has been a 12 month period of acceptable attendance any subsequent action would recommence at Stage 1.

Employees have the right to consult and to be accompanied by a representative at any interview carried out under these procedures. If any employee considers that he/she has been treated unfairly or inconsistently under this procedure, he/she has the right to pursue a grievance under the school's Grievance Procedures. It should be noted, however, that the submission of a grievance will not result in this procedure being halted.

Stage 1

The employee will be invited in writing to an interview with Rachel Tomlinson (Head teacher.) The invitation should state the absence details and the opportunity to consult and to be accompanied by a representative. A reasonable period of notice will be given.

At interview

- Attention will be drawn to the absence pattern, the reasons given for absence and the implications for the school

- A discussion to clarify any underlying causes and to seek to deal with these, drawing attention to the Employee Welfare and Counselling Service and the support from professional organisations
- If there is no acceptable explanation the employee will be issued with a formal warning that
 - The level of attendance is unacceptable
 - Improvement is essential over a specified period – eg. 12 weeks, 1 term, ½ term
- Agreed review period and review interview date set
- Employee informed that further deterioration in absence frequency or levels during the review period, exceeding that in previously monitored period will result in review date being brought forward and that continuing unacceptable absence will lead to action under the next stage of the procedure

Following interview

- Outcome confirmed in writing with a return slip to acknowledge warning. A reminder that further deterioration over previous levels will result in bringing forward of review date and that continuing unacceptable absence will lead to action under next stage of procedure

End of monitoring period

- If, at the end of the review period, attendance has been improved and is within acceptable levels, no further action will be taken other than to confirm in writing to the employee concerned that attendance is now considered satisfactory and to advise the employee that if further action is deemed necessary under this procedure within the following twelve months, such action may begin at Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2

If there has been no acceptable improvement after Stage 1, then a further interview with Rachel Tomlinson (Headteacher) will be held. The employee will be invited to attend and the letter will include details of the absences including the review period, the reason for interview and the right for the employee to consult with and to be accompanied by a representative of their choice.

At interview

- Attention will be drawn again to absence patterns including the review period
- Discussion again to clarify underlying causes and to seek to deal with them, involving Employees Welfare Service and other agencies as appropriate
- A reminder of the implications of continued excessive absence – effect on pupils, other employees, budget implications
- If no acceptable explanation, a final written warning will be issued stating that:
 - Levels of attendance are unacceptable
 - Significant and sustained improvement is required
- A further interview date will be agreed and targets set for improvement
- Confirmation that, if no significant and sustained improvement is shown, the outcome could be a recommendation for dismissal on the grounds of incapacity to maintain an acceptable level of attendance

Following interview

- Confirmation of final written warning, in writing, with receipt slip to acknowledge receipt
- Reminder of possible outcome if significant and sustained improvement not achieved

- Reminder that further deterioration over previous levels will result in the bringing forward of review date

End of monitoring period

- At the end of the further review period, if the attendance has improved to within acceptable levels then no further action should be taken other than to inform the employee in writing of this fact and to advise the employee that if further action is deemed necessary under this procedure within the following 12 months such action may begin at Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3

If there has been no acceptable improvement after Stage 2, then the final interview will take place. Rachel Tomlinson (Head teacher) will discuss the circumstances of the case with the Senior Personnel Officer prior to arranging any further meeting with the employee and his/her representative.

If there is no current medical report available, then an independent medical report will be obtained through School' Personnel Team prior to the interview.

Whilst every effort will be made to ensure the medical venue is mutually convenient, in extreme cases, where the employee either refuses to attend the medical or does not attend on more than one occasion, progression to Stage 3 will not be delayed. In such instances, the employee will be informed that the Governing Body will have to proceed without a medical report for reference.

The letter inviting the employee to attend the interview will:

- Set out the attendance record including that over the review period
- Advise of the right to be accompanied by a representative of his/her choice
- Specify the reason for the interview
- State that a recommendation to the Governing Body for dismissal could be the end result of the meeting

At interview

- Any new information regarding ill health or change in nature of sickness absence will be considered
- Medical advice will be considered (the interview will be suspended if further advice is thought necessary arising from interview discussion)
- Following consideration of any representation, Rachel Tomlinson (Head teacher) will make a final decision regarding the submission of a report which may recommend termination of employment to the Attendance and Dismissal Committee of the Governors. Any appeals against dismissal will be to the full Governing Body excluding the members of the Attendance and Dismissal Committee if they took the original decision to dismiss

Following interview

- The outcome will be confirmed in writing with return slip to acknowledge receipt
- Arrangements for meeting of Attendance and Dismissal Committee

Michelle Hartley

