



SAFE START SCHOOL

WILLPOWER-INITIATIVE-SUCCESS-EMPATHY

Fitness for Work Policy

Date:	November 2026
Reviewed by:	Grace Speakman
Verified by:	Rachel Pilling
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Purpose and scope

We support staff to work safely while protecting pupils, colleagues and others. Fitness for work means being able to carry out agreed duties safely, with appropriate support or adjustments. Staff do not need to be free from every health condition to work.

This policy applies to employees, agency staff, contractors, trainees and volunteers. For non-employees, the school will coordinate with their employer or agency as appropriate. It covers illness, injury, medication effects, alcohol and drug use, fatigue and physical or mental health concerns.

Responsibilities

Staff must tell their line manager promptly if their health, injury, tiredness or medication effects could affect safe working. They should explain relevant functional restrictions rather than disclose unnecessary medical details, follow agreed safety measures and medical advice, and report concerns about a colleague privately. Concerns about the Headteacher should be raised with the proprietor.

Managers must respond sensitively, assess the actual duties and risks, consider adjustments and seek HR or occupational health advice where needed. A diagnosis, disability or mental health condition alone must not be treated as evidence that a person is unsafe.

Illness injury and returning to work

Staff must follow the school's sickness reporting procedure. Sickness absence of seven calendar days or fewer can be self-certified; a fit note is normally required for absence lasting more than seven calendar days, including non-working days. Fit notes may be issued by an authorised healthcare professional, not only a GP.

Staff do not need to be signed back to work or obtain a GP certificate declaring them fit. They may return before a fit note expires following discussion and agreement about safe working. Managers must consider the advice on the fit note and any relevant restrictions; where uncertainty remains, seek focused medical or occupational health advice.

Where a fit note says "may be fit for work", discuss suitable changes such as amended duties, altered hours, workplace adaptations or a phased return. If suitable changes cannot be agreed or provided, treat the note as evidence of being unfit for work for sick pay purposes; a replacement note is not required. Consider reasonable adjustment duties before reaching that decision.

Before return, or before continuing work where an injury or illness affects safety, record a proportionate risk assessment and agreed plan. Consider mobility, stairs, evacuation, pupil supervision, lone working, driving, manual handling and responding to incidents. Specify duties allowed or restricted, support, hours and a review date.

For example, a staff member using a boot or crutches may be able to undertake suitable seated duties. Staff must not discard prescribed supports or disregard medical restrictions simply to attend work. If the need for a support is unclear or has changed, seek clarification. A staff member's willingness to work, financial concerns or a disclaimer does not remove the school's safety responsibilities.

Reasonable adjustments and support

The school will make reasonable adjustments for disabled staff in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. Temporary support may also help staff with shorter-term conditions. Discuss options with the individual and review their effectiveness. Adjustments may include rest breaks, equipment, changed duties or hours, and a supported return.

Obtain appropriate consent before seeking a medical report or occupational health assessment and explain its purpose, questions and who will receive it. Respect applicable rights concerning medical reports. If advice is declined, explain that decisions may have to be made on available information. Do not automatically treat this as misconduct.

Alcohol drugs medication and fatigue

Staff must not consume alcohol, use illegal drugs or misuse other substances during work, or undertake duties while impaired by any substance, including prescribed or over-the-counter medication. This applies during school activities, trips and work-related driving. Staff should check relevant medication warnings and seek advice from their pharmacist or prescriber where necessary.

Managers should explore signs such as unusual drowsiness, confusion or reduced coordination without assuming their cause. Fatigue may relate to workload, health or personal circumstances. Persistent lateness or absence alone is not proof of impairment. Staff seeking help with substance misuse will be offered support and signposting, alongside necessary safety controls.

This policy does not establish routine or random drug and alcohol testing. Any proposed testing requires HR advice, a justified and proportionate basis, an applicable communicated procedure and the individual's consent. Arrangements must address reliable testing, confidentiality and confirmation or challenge of results. A refusal or positive screening result must not automatically be treated as proof of misconduct.

Responding to a concern

1. Protect people immediately. Pause unsafe duties, arrange pupil cover and provide first aid or emergency assistance where needed. Do not allow someone believed to be impaired to drive; arrange safe onward travel.
2. Discuss the concern privately. Record factual observations, listen to the person's explanation and consider relevant advice and adjustments. Do not attempt to diagnose a condition.
3. Agree and record action. Options include continuing safely, changing duties, temporary removal from particular duties, sickness absence or further advice. Set a review date. Where the school prevents attendance despite the employee saying they are fit, obtain HR advice on the appropriate employment status and pay; do not automatically impose unpaid leave or classify this as sickness.
4. Review and follow up. Check that support and controls are effective. Health-related capability and alleged misconduct must be considered under the appropriate separate procedure, with a fair investigation and any reasonable adjustments. Escalate any pupil safeguarding concern promptly to the DSL and follow safeguarding procedures.

Confidentiality monitoring and references

Health information is special category personal data. HR and managers must collect only what is necessary, use appropriate lawful bases and safeguards, restrict access and retain records under the school's retention arrangements. Colleagues should normally receive only the practical information needed to implement support safely.

Read alongside the Health and Safety, Staff Code of Conduct, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Equality, Sickness Absence, Safeguarding, Data Protection and Disciplinary policies or procedures. The Headteacher oversees implementation; the proprietor reviews this policy annually or sooner if needed.

References: Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974; Equality Act 2010; UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018; GOV.UK fit note guidance; HSE guidance on return to work and substance misuse.