



SAFE START SCHOOL

WILLPOWER-INITIATIVE-SUCCESS-EMPATHY-RESPECT

Employee Attendance Policy

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Written by:	Grace Speakman
Checked by:	Rachel Pilling
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Introduction and purpose

Safe Start School recognises that reliable attendance supports safeguarding, consistency of relationships, pupil learning and safe staffing. The school will manage absence fairly and sensitively, prioritising employee health, wellbeing, early support and sustainable attendance. This policy must not discourage employees from taking necessary sickness absence or seeking medical advice.

The HR Manager/Advisor includes internal HR staff and, where appropriate, external employment advisers such as Croner. Managers must consult HR before formal capability action.

Scope and relationship to other policies

This policy applies to employees of Safe Start School, whether full-time, part-time or on fixed-term contracts. Agency workers are expected to follow site notification and safety procedures, but formal absence/capability action is ordinarily managed by their employing agency. Contractors are managed under their contractual arrangements.

Sickness notification, certification, sick pay, long-term absence and Occupational Health referral processes are addressed in the Sickness Policy. This policy focuses on attendance monitoring, supportive review and the capability process where sustained attendance is in question. Leave for dependants, maternity, paternity, adoption, parental leave and authorised special leave is governed by the relevant policy and statutory rights.

Equality, protected absence and confidentiality

The school will comply with the Equality Act 2010, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees. Managers will consider the individual circumstances, medical evidence, disability-related effects, pregnancy and maternity protections and any work-related cause before applying attendance triggers or progressing formal action.

Pregnancy-related sickness must be recorded separately and must not count towards ordinary attendance triggers or disciplinary/capability sanctions for sickness absence. Disability-related absence will be identified and considered separately, and adjustments to trigger points, monitoring or procedures will be made where reasonable. A disability does not automatically prevent a supportive attendance review or capability process, but decisions must be individually assessed and legally reviewed.

Workplace injuries, assaults and stress-related absences will be reviewed sensitively, including the school's health and safety responsibilities and any reasonable adjustments. They are not automatically disregarded for every purpose; their cause and applicable legal protections must be considered before action. Authorised family or special leave is not sickness absence.

Medical information is special-category personal data and must be handled on a need-to-know basis in accordance with UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the

school's Data Protection Policy. Managers should not require unnecessary diagnostic detail.

Responsibilities

- Headteacher/senior leaders: promote a supportive culture, ensure safe staffing, monitor consistency and authorise appropriate escalation.
- Line managers: respond promptly to absence, conduct return-to-work discussions, identify workplace factors, offer support, keep accurate records and seek HR advice.
- HR: advise on legal compliance, Occupational Health, reasonable adjustments, formal meeting letters, evidence, records and appeals.
- Employees: attend work when fit, notify absence as required, provide certification when necessary, maintain reasonable contact and engage with appropriate support and review processes.

Disability leave and reasonable adjustments

Where appropriate, Safe Start School may agree to planned disability leave for treatment, assessment, rehabilitation, equipment training or workplace adjustments. Agreed disability leave will normally be granted on full pay. Its duration, pay arrangements and any applicable contractual entitlements will be confirmed in writing with HR, taking account of the employee's individual circumstances and the school's duty to make reasonable adjustments.

Disability leave is recorded separately from ordinary sickness absence and is not used as an ordinary attendance trigger. Time off to care for a disabled dependant is assessed under applicable dependants, carer's, parental or special leave arrangements, rather than automatically being treated as the employee's own disability leave.

Reasonable adjustments may include altered hours or duties, modified working environment, additional breaks, equipment, accessible communication, phased return, adjustments to trigger thresholds, temporary changes or redeployment where practicable. Decisions must be documented, reviewed and informed by the employee and relevant medical advice.

Reporting absence and maintaining contact

For unplanned absence, employees should telephone reception and select option 2 for the staff absence voicemail as soon as possible, normally at least two hours before their scheduled start time. They should give their name, that they are unfit for work or the nature of the absence, and their anticipated return date if known. Text or email alone is not normally accepted unless exceptional circumstances, disability-related communication needs or an agreed adjustment makes telephone reporting inappropriate. Managers must ensure an accessible alternative is available where needed.

Staff must follow the Sickness Policy for self-certification, fit notes, ongoing reporting and sick pay. Managers should arrange reasonable welfare contact during longer absences, normally weekly unless another frequency is agreed, taking account of medical advice and the employee's wellbeing. Contact should be supportive rather than intrusive.

Return-to-work discussions and fitness for duty

A return-to-work discussion will normally take place after each sickness absence, as soon as practicable. The manager will confirm dates and records, welcome the employee back, discuss any necessary workplace update, ask about support or adjustments, review relevant fit-note/OH recommendations and agree actions. A record will be shared with the employee.

Employees may ask to discuss sensitive medical information with HR or another appropriate manager. Where there is a genuine concern that the employee cannot safely carry out duties, particularly safeguarding, supervision or physical tasks, the manager must assess the risks, consult HR/OH where appropriate and consider adjusted duties. A fit note stating that an employee “may be fit” does not itself determine safety; a “fit for work” note is not routinely required by law. Any decision to send an employee home must be documented with clear arrangements for pay and further assessment.

Employees may request a colleague or trade union representative to accompany them to a return-to-work discussion; formal meeting accompaniment rights are set out below.

Monitoring attendance and review triggers

The school monitors sickness absence to identify emerging concerns and offer early support. It will consider frequency, duration, patterns, workplace factors, disability, pregnancy, relevant medical evidence and individual circumstances. Triggers are indicators for review, not automatic sanctions.

Trigger	Ordinarily prompts supportive review
Frequency	Three or more sickness absence episodes in a rolling six-month period
Duration	Six or more sickness absence days in a rolling six-month period
Pattern	A concerning repeated pattern (for example, particular weekdays or key dates), assessed without assumptions of misconduct

Pregnancy-related sickness is excluded. Disability-related absence and agreed disability leave are considered separately, and trigger thresholds or the process will be adjusted where reasonable. Managers should avoid treating an absence pattern as proof of dishonesty. Informal support will normally be considered first, with a review period typically four to eight weeks, adjusted to circumstances.

For part-time employees, absence duration thresholds will be applied proportionately to their contracted working pattern. Managers will consider the number of scheduled working days or hours missed, rather than calendar days, to ensure consistent and fair treatment. Where a proportionate duration threshold is required, HR will calculate this using the employee's normal contracted working days or hours compared with the equivalent full-time working pattern. The calculation will be explained to the employee and recorded before the threshold is applied.

Attendance triggers will be applied flexibly, taking account of individual circumstances,

disability, pregnancy-related absence and any reasonable adjustments.

Short-term/intermittent attendance management procedure

Stage 1 – Informal attendance meeting

Following a return-to-work discussion or a trigger, the manager may invite the employee to an informal meeting. The employee can check the absence record, explain relevant circumstances, identify work-related issues and suggest support. The manager considers adjustments, OH advice where indicated and an appropriate review period. Agreed actions and a written summary are provided. Informal discussions are not disciplinary warnings.

Stage 2 – First formal attendance review (line manager)

If concerns continue despite support, the employee receives a written invitation explaining the attendance record, purpose, possible outcomes, relevant evidence and right to be accompanied. The meeting considers the employee's explanation, medical/OH evidence where appropriate, reasonable adjustments, alternative duties and a proportionate review period. The outcome is confirmed in writing, including expected improvement, support and possible progression to Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Second formal attendance review (Headteacher or uninvolved senior manager)

Where attendance remains unsustainable, the Headteacher or another authorised uninvolved senior manager reviews previous actions, up-to-date information, reasonable adjustments, OH advice and the prospect of sustained attendance. A further review period, changed duties, redeployment or other support may be appropriate. If a final capability hearing is contemplated, the employee is warned in writing that dismissal may be an outcome.

At the conclusion of each formal review period, the manager will assess whether attendance has improved sufficiently and whether any agreed adjustments or support measures have been effective.

Where attendance has improved to a sustainable level, the employee will normally exit the formal attendance procedure, although appropriate monitoring and support may continue.

Where attendance remains a concern, the manager will consider whether to extend the review period, provide further support or progress to the next stage. Any decision to escalate must be proportionate, supported by evidence and confirmed in writing.

Stage 4 – Final capability determination hearing

Only after reasonable support and alternatives have been considered may the school convene a final capability hearing. The proprietor or authorised decision-maker appoints an impartial panel or appropriately authorised manager, avoiding prior substantive involvement. The panel considers the evidence, current prognosis where available, equality obligations, adjustments, redeployment and proportionality. Outcomes may include further support/review, agreed contractual change, or termination on capability grounds with

contractual/statutory notice or pay in lieu where lawful. The employee receives a reasoned written decision and appeal information.

An updated OH opinion should normally be obtained before a possible dismissal where medical prognosis or fitness is material; if not available, the decision-maker must consider carefully whether proceeding is fair and adequately evidenced. The school will not insist on an OH report where it is not appropriate or possible, nor treat refusal to consent as automatic grounds for dismissal.

Dismissal on the grounds of capability will only be considered as a last resort, where the school has reasonably concluded that the employee cannot sustain the attendance required for their role within a reasonable timeframe, despite appropriate support, consideration of reasonable adjustments and exploration of suitable alternatives.

The decision-maker must consider the impact on the employee, the operational requirements of the school and whether any further reasonable measures could enable continued employment.

Formal meetings: procedural safeguards

- Provide at least five working days' written notice for ordinary formal meetings and normally ten working days for a final capability hearing, unless another reasonable period is agreed.
- Supply relevant absence records, available medical evidence and information about potential outcomes in advance.
- Allow accompaniment by a trade union representative or work colleague. Where the chosen companion is unavailable, consider a reasonable alternative date in accordance with statutory rights and reasonable adjustments.
- Allow the employee to respond, provide evidence, suggest adjustments and correct factual inaccuracies.
- Consider remote meetings, an alternative venue or written representations when illness or disability makes attendance difficult.
- Keep accurate confidential notes and communicate the decision, reasons, actions, review period and appeal route in writing.
- Consult HR before formal sanctions or dismissal. Genuine illness is managed as capability; suspected deliberate dishonesty or abuse may be investigated separately under the Disciplinary Policy, with evidence and a fair process.

Long-term sickness absence

The Sickness Policy is the primary procedure for long-term sickness absence, medical certification, Occupational Health referrals and return-to-work planning. This Attendance Policy may apply where an employee returns but cannot sustain attendance, or where medical advice supports a discussion about future attendance and capability. Any transition between policies must be explained, documented and compliant with equality obligations.

Flexible working

Employees have the statutory right to request flexible working from the first day of employment. Requests will be managed under the school's Flexible Working Policy and

current legislation. The school will consult the employee before refusing a statutory request, consider it reasonably and provide a decision within the applicable statutory period unless an extension is agreed. Requests are considered in light of pupil safety, staffing and operational needs, and any separate duty to make disability-related reasonable adjustments.

Appeals

Employees may appeal formal outcomes, including capability dismissal, by writing to the proprietor or designated appeal contact within ten working days of receiving the decision, stating the grounds. An appeal will be heard by a person or panel not previously involved in the substantive decision and with appropriate authority. If the governing board cannot provide an independent panel, an uninvolved director/proprietor or suitable external independent chair may be appointed in accordance with governance and contractual arrangements.

The relevant appeal contact and submission arrangements will be confirmed in the written outcome letter. Where the appeal concerns a decision made by a proprietor/director, an alternative uninvolved person will be identified to receive and coordinate the appeal.

The employee may be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague. The appeal may uphold, overturn or vary the decision, or remit it for further consideration. The decision will normally be communicated within seven working days of the appeal hearing and concludes the internal process.

Monitoring, wellbeing and review

HR will review anonymised attendance trends and the consistency and equality impact of decisions, including potential links with workload, workplace stress, safety incidents and bullying. Managers will consider workplace stress risk assessments where indicated and use findings to improve support. Personal information will only be shared on a lawful and proportionate basis. This policy is reviewed annually and earlier if law or school procedures change.

Related documents

Sickness Policy; Flexible Working Policy; Equality Policy; Special Leave Policy; Family Leave Policy; Dependants/Carer's Leave Policy; Disciplinary Policy; Grievance Policy; Data Protection Policy; Health and Safety Policy; Staff Attendance Flowchart; Absence Manager Process.