Managing Staff Absence Policy

Version 1

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Author	CEO
Name of Responsible Committee/Individual	Trust Board
Target Audience	All staff
Date Policy Agreed	July 2026 (Version 1)
Review Date	July 2027

Contents

1. Introduction and Policy Issues 3
2. Monitoring 4
3. Short Term Absence Review Procedure 8
4. Long Term Absence Review Process 11
5. Referral To Occupational Health 13
6. Phased Return To Work 14
7. Right Of Appeal 14
BFLPT Employee Self-Certification and Return to Work Form ....

1. Introduction and Policy Issues

1.1 Principles

Our employees are the most important resource in providing quality services and, as such, it is vital that their attendance at work is managed effectively.

The Brighter Futures Learning Partnership Trust (BFLPT) has a clear written policy for handling staff sickness absence and for taking decisive action to reduce sickness absence levels which disrupt the provision of services. This includes clear procedures for the monitoring of staff absences, for taking appropriate responding action and for encouraging the promotion of good health and supporting staff who become ill.

1.2 Aims

This policy and procedure aims to:

- Encourage staff to take responsibility for their own health and attendance.
- Ensure that employees remain in work or are supported with a return to work wherever possible.
- Support staff with appropriate advice and well-being initiatives
- Help minimise the impact sickness absence may have on staff, students and the day to day running of the school/UTC.

Effective monitoring and management of attendance will help to:

- Make a positive contribution to the health and well-being of the workforce;
- Reduce costs;
- Enhance service provision;
- Identify factors in the workplace which may be affecting employee attendance.

Absence may occur for the following reasons:

(a) Physical or mental incapacity
(b) Disability
(c) Long term ill health
(d) Short term sickness

At the appropriate point in this procedure an employee may be asked to attend a Welfare meeting so that information can be gained to help manage issues of health and attendance. Any referral to Occupational Health will normally be discussed with the employee in advance and made by the HR Lead/Office Manager with approval from the Headteacher/Principal. Employees will be asked to provide consent to the referral. Where consent is withheld, the Trust reserves the right to make decisions based on the information available.

An employee has the right to be accompanied by his/her Trade Union or a colleague **at every formal stage of the procedure.** Employees must be informed of this right throughout the procedure.

1.3 Scope

The policy applies to **all** employees in the Trust. It is intended to provide a fair and consistent framework of good practice which will help managers to deal with the issues

related to absences from work, and encourage attendance, by looking for solutions to underlying problems. However, it is important to take account of the circumstances surrounding each individual case in deciding appropriate action and if the Headteacher/Principal is in doubt, they should consult Central Trust HR for advice.

Health or any other physical or mental issues which are leading to problems with attendance, should be dealt with under this policy.

This procedure does not deal with health or any other physical or mental issues which are leading to performance problems.

This policy will not apply to matters relating to conduct. The Disciplinary Procedure will be used in such circumstances.

2. Monitoring

2.1 In the first instance, the appropriate manager will:

- Ensure every employee knows what is expected of them in relation to sickness notification;
- Inform new starters, during their induction, of the importance of maintaining regular attendance;
- Monitor attendance on an on-going day-to-day basis.

Subsequently, as part of normal duties, managers will:

- Take action in line with this policy when an employee is absent from work;
- Undertake return to work discussions every time an employee returns from sickness absence;
- Conduct or participate (as appropriate) in the various stages of the Short-term Absence Review Process outlined in Section 3; which is first "triggered" when an employee has been absent for a total of 8 working days (where an employee works less than a 5-day working week then the 8 day trigger point should be pro rata-ed) or 3 separate periods in any' rolling' 12 month period, or has a pattern of absence which is causing concern;
- Conduct or participate (as appropriate) in the various stages of the long-term absence review process, outlined in Section 4 of this procedure.

2.2 Reporting sickness absence

A clear reporting process is key to helping the school/UTC make the necessary arrangements to cover staff sickness absence. This could be short-term supply cover or longer-term arrangements if an employee is absent for a longer period.

The school/UTC has a reporting procedure which must be followed by all staff in the event that they are absent due to sickness.

- On the first day of sickness absence the employee must telephone the absence line no later than the set time stipulated within their school/UTC or as soon as reasonably practicable given your hours of work.

- The employee has a duty to maintain contact with the school for the duration of their absence and will follow the procedures set out for their school.
- A self-certification note is required for all absences up to 5 working days. (This will be completed along with a return to work form during a return to work meeting with the employee and their line manager or HR Lead/Office Manager).
- If the absence persists for longer than 5 working days, the employee must submit a doctor's fit note to the school/UTC and if necessary, subsequent fit notes must continue be provided throughout the full absence period (including over school holiday periods).
- If the employee becomes fit for work on a day that is not part of their normal working week e.g. weekend or an off work day, they must notify the designated person as above, of the exact day that they became fit for work, otherwise it will be recorded as the next working day they return to work. The accuracy of these records is important to ensure that pay is correct and that trigger points are recorded correctly.

2.3 Failure to notify

Failure to notify, or delay in notifying sickness absence may result in a colleague attempting to make contact in a supportive capacity to ensure all is well from a welfare aspect.

If an employee fails to provide appropriate sickness certification, a discussion should take place with the employee to determine why they have not complied with the procedure. If the explanation is satisfactory then no action will need be taken however, if the explanation is not satisfactory then disciplinary action may be taken which may result in a variety of sanctions one of which may be the stopping of pay.

To ensure fairness and consistency of the outcomes, the Headteacher / Principal will work in consultation with Central Trust.

On return to work from absence of 5 working days or less

The employee should meet with their line manager or HR Lead/Office Manager to complete a Self-Certification and Return to Work form (see appendix 1 and 2).

2.4 Absence due to Industrial Injury

When an employee is absent from work due to an industrial injury, this will still form part of the absence review trigger points and will be included as part of the normal monitoring process to ensure that any necessary support is identified and provided.

Where absence is due to an industrial injury, and appropriate documentation has been completed, sickness pay will not be reduced to half pay and will remain at full pay for the length of sickness pay entitlement.

2.5 Absence related to a Disability

When an employee is absent from work and the absence is related to a disability the school/UTC needs to consider whether any reasonable adjustments are necessary to assist a return to work, limit future absence and support the employee in achieving an appropriate level of attendance.

Consideration of reasonable adjustments for employees with disabilities is a legal requirement of the Equality Act 2010. However, as an employer we will also extend the consideration to other employees who may not meet the definition of disabled but are either permanently or temporarily unable to undertake their job for health reasons.

If reasonable adjustments are being considered, guidance and support should be sought from Occupational Health and other external, qualified professionals. This will be taken into consideration to determine reasonable adjustments where advice is provided by Occupational Health then, except in exceptional circumstances, this should be followed. Examples of reasonable adjustments could be:

- extending trigger points;
- providing specialist equipment;
- modifying days or hours of work;
- modifying duties;
- providing additional classroom assistance

Some of these may be temporary or permanent, depending on the needs of the school/UTC.

The Trust recognises that menopause symptoms may impact attendance and wellbeing. Appropriate support and workplace adjustments will be considered where appropriate.

2.6 Keeping in touch during absence

Keeping in touch is designed to support the employee as well as get updates on prognosis and the likelihood of a return to work. The level of contact will be dependent on the anticipated duration of the absence. For long term absence, contact arrangements with the employee in terms of timing, frequency and method will be discussed during welfare meetings to ensure this is appropriate for both parties concerned. Employees are strongly advised to engage with the school/UTC throughout this process to ensure that relevant, reasonable support can be offered in order to support the employee with a return to work as soon as practicably possibly.

2.7 Return to Work Discussions

Where at all possible, within 24 hours of the employees return to work, the employee's line manager or HR Lead/Office Manager will arrange to see the employee for a return to work discussion. This will be an informal, supportive discussion to provide an opportunity for the line manager or HR Lead/Office Manager to:

- Welcome the employee back to work.
- Enquire after the employee's health.
- Give the employee an opportunity to draw their line manager's, HR Lead/Office Manager attention to any particular problems of either a work or domestic nature, which may affect their attendance. (The Headteacher/Principal **must** be made aware of any concerns to allow for further guidance to be given).
- Offer appropriate help and support e.g. access to counselling, temporary workload adjustments etc.
- Update the employee on any developments of work during their absence.

- Ensure a self-certification and return to work form are completed.
- Remind employees of the policy and procedures.

A brief record should be kept of this meeting (see Appendix 2), which should be agreed and signed as a true record by the employee and the line manager, or HR Lead/Office Manager conducting the discussion. If not agreed a record will be kept of both parties' views. Individual records and information about sickness absence will be managed appropriately and treated as confidential personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

The HR Lead/Office Manager will record and monitor all sickness absence and if, as a result of either the length or frequency of the employee's sickness absence they hit a trigger point, the HR Lead/Office Manager, will liaise with the Headteacher/Principal and commence with the appropriate absence review as outlined below:

Short term Absence Review Trigger Point is defined where an employee's record shows:

- 8 working days of absence, in any 'rolling' twelve month period (where an employee works less than a 5-day working week then the trigger point should be pro rata);
- 3 periods of absence in any 'rolling' twelve month period;
- a pattern of absence which is causing concern, for example, regular Friday or Monday absences or absences regularly occurring on a particular day of the week.

Long term Absence Review Trigger Point

- any period of continuous absence of 4 weeks or more.

Trigger points are management review points and do not automatically result in progression through the formal procedure. Consideration will be given to the circumstances of each case, including disability-related absence, pregnancy-related absence, industrial injury, menopause-related symptoms, and any other absence related to a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. Appropriate adjustments may be made to trigger points or monitoring arrangements where reasonable to do so.

2.8 Welfare Meetings (Informal meetings to be held prior to beginning a formal process, or during formal proceedings to provide additional support to the employee).

As a Trust we model positive wellbeing behaviours to send a clear message to staff that their wellbeing matters.

The whole purpose of a welfare meeting is to have a discussion with the employee and offer support before the issue escalates. A successful welfare meeting can unlock concerns and enable both parties to map out a way forward, and where possible, prevent any impact on the employee's ability to effectively undertake their role.

A welfare meeting will be held with an employee and the HR Lead/Office Manager for the following reasons:

- If a member of staff divulges any concerns.
- if a member of staff raises concerns about a colleague's welfare or feels they may be struggling.
- if one more absence is likely to trigger formal proceedings.
- if an employee is on long-term absence, wellbeing meetings will be held throughout the process to review Occupational Health reports and assess the employee's current health status, alongside formal meetings.

Welfare meetings are informal support meetings and do not form part of the formal absence management process.

3. Short Term Absence Review Procedure

When an employee has exceeded the short-term absence trigger points, and if no action had been previously taken, the following process will be adopted.

Note: In operating this process, care must always be taken to comply with the Equality Act 2010.

Also note that the Headteacher/Principal and HR Lead/Office Manager may exercise appropriate discretion in relation to progression through the stages of the process. Where managers exercise this discretion then approval of this will need to be given by Central Trust.

3.1 Short-Term Absence Review Procedure

Stage	When Used (Trigger)	Purpose	Possible Outcomes
Informal Welfare Meeting	2 Separate absences or 4 days of absence	To identify underlying issues, discuss wellbeing, offer support and consider reasonable adjustments before formal action becomes necessary.	• Support plan • Wellbeing support • Workplace adjustments • Occupational Health consideration • Continued monitoring
Stage 1 Attendance Review Meeting	Employee reaches a short-term absence trigger point: A further 4 working days or 2 separate absences within a total of 12 months.	To review attendance, understand the reasons for absence, consider medical evidence and identify support required to improve attendance.	• Attendance improvement plan • Occupational Health referral • Reasonable adjustments • Monitoring period (normally 6 months) • Written confirmation of expectations
Stage 2 Attendance Review Meeting	During the monitoring period following Stage 1: A further 4 working days or 2 separate absences (unless an employee has had no absences in 12 months post stage 1)	To review progress, assess support already provided, consider Occupational Health advice and determine whether attendance has improved to an acceptable level.	• Continued monitoring • Further reasonable adjustments • Occupational Health referral • Written warning • Final written warning (where appropriate) • Referral to Attendance Hearing
Attendance Hearing	Following Stage 2, where attendance remains unsatisfactory (within a 12-month period): Employees have had an additional 4 days absence or 2 separate periods of absence.	To consider all relevant information, including attendance history, medical evidence, Occupational Health advice, reasonable adjustments and operational impact before determining whether continued employment is appropriate.	• Further monitoring • Additional support measures • Redeployment consideration (where appropriate) • Dismissal on capability grounds due to unsatisfactory attendance • Right of appeal

Progression through the procedure is not automatic. At each stage, consideration will be given to the reasons for absence, medical evidence, Occupational Health advice, disability-related absence, pregnancy-related absence, menopause-related absence, industrial injury, reasonable adjustments and any other relevant circumstances before a decision is made regarding progression to the next stage.

Additional welfare meetings may be convened at any point during this procedure where there are significant concerns regarding an employee's physical health, mental

health, wellbeing or personal circumstances. The purpose of these meetings is to provide support, review the effectiveness of any interventions already in place, consider any further reasonable adjustments and ensure that the employee is aware of the support available. Such meetings are informal and will not result in formal sanctions.

3.2 Disability and Long-Term Health Conditions
Where an employee has a disability, long-term health condition, pregnancy-related condition, menopause-related condition, industrial injury, or other condition protected under the Equality Act 2010, managers must give careful consideration to the impact of the condition on attendance and make reasonable adjustments before determining whether progression through the procedure is appropriate. Occupational Health advice, medical evidence, reasonable adjustments, amended trigger points and any other relevant support measures should be considered before formal sanctions are applied. Not all medical conditions will meet the definition of a disability under the Equality Act 2010. The Trust will consider each case on its individual circumstances, taking account of available medical evidence, Occupational Health advice and the statutory definition of disability. The existence of a medical condition or illness will not automatically result in disability-related adjustments to trigger points or progression through this procedure.

Stages 1, 2 and may be repeated as appropriate.

At the appropriate point in this procedure an employee may be asked to attend an Occupational Health appointment so that information can be gained to help manage issues of health and attendance. Any referral to Occupational Health will normally be discussed with the employee in advance and made by the HR Lead/Office Manager. Employees will be asked to provide consent to the referral. Where consent is withheld, the Trust reserves the right to make decisions regarding attendance management based on the information available.

An employee has the right to be accompanied by his/her Trade Union or a colleague **at every formal stage of the procedure.** However, if the employee chooses a colleague to support them, they will only be in attendance to support, not represent the employee or be permitted to comment throughout the process.

3.2 Monitoring Periods
Following either an informal or formal attendance meeting, the individual will be advised that their absence will be monitored over the following 6 months. They will also be advised that should their absence levels reach the level equivalent to half the annual trigger point i.e. 4 days or 1 occasion, then they may be required to attend an attendance review meeting at the next stage of the procedure, or this could be an informal review.

If the employee's attendance during the 6-month monitoring period improves significantly and they do not reach the 4-day or 1 occasion trigger point, their absence level will be considered to have reached a satisfactory level. However, their absence will continue to be monitored over the following 12 month period and if they reach a trigger point during that 12 month period they will automatically re-enter the procedure at the same stage. If it can be objectively justified, for example to demonstrate a

continuing and sustained improvement in attendance, managers may consider extending monitoring periods.

4. Long Term Absence Review Process

The long-term sickness absence trigger point is any period of continuous absence of 4 weeks or more, depending on the nature of the absence.

4.1 Summary of Long-Term Absence Review Process

Stage	When Used (Trigger)	Purpose	Possible Outcomes
Informal Welfare Meeting	Following 2 weeks of continuous absence, or earlier where there are significant welfare concerns.	To maintain supportive contact, understand the employee's circumstances, discuss wellbeing, likely return to work timescales and identify any support required. This meeting is informal and does not form part of the formal absence management process.	• Welfare support • Occupational Health consideration • Discussion of likely return date • Workplace support measures • Continued welfare contact
Stage 1 Long-Term Absence Review Meeting	Following 4 weeks of continuous absence.	To review the employee's health, medical advice, likely prognosis and any support that may facilitate a return to work.	• Occupational Health referral • Supported return to work plan • Workplace adjustments • Risk assessment • Temporary adjustments to duties or hours • Redeployment exploration • Continued monitoring
Stage 2 Long-Term Absence Review Meeting	Where the employee remains absent for another 4 weeks following Stage 1. This may be extended to provide sufficient time to obtain Occupational Health advice up to a maximum of 6 weeks. After 8 weeks a welfare meeting should have been convened.	To review medical evidence, Occupational Health recommendations, support provided and the likelihood of a return to work within a reasonable timescale.	• Further Occupational Health referral • Phased return plan • Additional reasonable adjustments • Temporary or permanent redeployment consideration • Ill-health retirement consideration (where applicable) • Continued monitoring

Stage 3 Long-Term Absence Review Meeting	Where the employee has been absent from work for another 4 weeks. This may be extended to 6 weeks if the Trust or employee is awaiting medical information or assessment.	To review prognosis, operational impact, reasonable adjustments, redeployment opportunities and whether a return to work is likely within a reasonable period.	• Further monitoring where return appears likely • Redeployment arrangements • Agreement of final support measures • Notification that continued employment may be at risk if no sustainable return is achievable
Attendance Hearing (Capability Hearing)	Where the employee remains unable to return to work and is absent for an additional 8 weeks (24 weeks in total); and medical evidence indicates no reasonable prospect of a sustainable return within a reasonable timescale; and/or all reasonable adjustments, Occupational Health recommendations and redeployment opportunities have been fully considered.	To consider all relevant evidence before determining whether continued employment remains reasonable.	• Further monitoring • Additional adjustments • Redeployment • Ill-health retirement (where applicable) • Dismissal on the grounds of capability due to ill health • Right of appeal

If at any stage during the short or long-term absence review process, the employee's medical adviser states that they are not well enough to attend a meeting then it may be appropriate to postpone this meeting. However, alternative attempts should be made to gather information in order to help the HR Lead/Office Manager manage the absence appropriately. This may include meeting with, or speaking to, the individuals representative; contacting the employee in writing to ask for a written update; or seeking information via Occupational Health.

Where employees do not attend, the Trust will review whether the meeting will go ahead or not based on individual circumstances.

The employee will be advised that it is in their best interest to engage with the managing attendance process to allow for the best offer of reasonable adjustments and support to be provided, in the hope of the school/UTC being able to support a return to work for the employee as soon as is feasibly possible.

Progression through the long-term absence procedure is not automatic. At every stage, consideration will be given to medical evidence, Occupational Health advice,

the employee's prognosis, the likelihood and sustainability of a return to work, reasonable adjustments, disability-related absence, pregnancy-related conditions, menopause-related conditions, industrial injury, redeployment opportunities and any other relevant circumstances before a decision is made regarding progression to the next stage.

The Trust may arrange additional welfare meetings at any stage of this procedure where there are concerns regarding an employee's physical health, mental health, wellbeing or personal circumstances. Welfare meetings are intended to provide support, review any assistance or reasonable adjustments that may be required and discuss Occupational Health recommendations. Welfare meetings remain informal and do not form part of the formal absence management process.

5. Referral To Occupational Health

Making a referral to Occupational Health at the appropriate time is essential to ensure timely provision of medical information to support effective management of employee absence/attendance at work. Employees who are being referred to Occupational Health must be informed by the Headteacher/Principal or HR Lead/Office Manager prior to a referral form being submitted. The outcome of the report will be discussed at the next review meeting.

Reason for referral

- They hit a trigger point under the short or long term absence review process
- They have a pattern of absence which is causing concern, for example, regular Friday or Monday absences
- They appear to have an ongoing medical condition which is causing regular absence but not necessarily causing trigger points to be hit
- It is known that an employee is going to require time off work for health related issues, e.g. elective surgery
- Your job requires some health surveillance to take place, e.g. for hand/arm vibration syndrome
- Employees with illness related to mental health (e.g. stress, anxiety, depression) may be referred as soon as this is established as reason for absence.

5.1 Capability and Medical Evidence

When considering an employee's ongoing employment during the long-term absence review process, the Trust will take account of all relevant information, including medical evidence, Occupational Health advice, the employee's prognosis, the likelihood and sustainability of a return to work, the effectiveness of any reasonable adjustments, redeployment opportunities, and the operational impact on the school or Trust. Decisions will not be based solely on levels of absence and all reasonable alternatives to dismissal will be fully considered before any decision is made.

5.2 Stress Related Absence

Where an employee's absence is identified as being related to work-related stress, anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns, the Trust will normally undertake a stress risk assessment. The purpose of the assessment will be to identify any workplace factors which may be contributing to the employee's absence and to

consider appropriate support measures, reasonable adjustments or workplace interventions.

The assessment may consider workload, working relationships, organisational change, working environment, management support, role clarity and any other relevant factors. The outcome of the assessment will be considered alongside any medical evidence and Occupational Health advice when determining appropriate support and any ongoing attendance management arrangements.

The completion of a stress risk assessment does not prevent the application of this procedure but is intended to ensure that appropriate support and reasonable steps have been considered before decisions are made regarding progression through the attendance management process.

6. Phased Return To Work

During the review process for long-term absence, it may be recommended that a phased return to work would be beneficial. The Headteacher/Principal will decide whether this phased return should be with normal pay or pro-rata pay. A phased return to work may include modification to days or hours of work **or** adjustment to duties.

7. Right Of Appeal

Employees have the right of appeal against any formal warning. All possible alternatives to dismissal will be thoroughly explored with the employee and their trade union.

Appeals should be put in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the letter and will be heard no sooner than 10 working days after the appellant is notified of the arrangements of the appeal (unless the appellant agrees to a shorter notice). Appeals should be sent to the Trust HR Manager (based in the Bungalow at Hungerhill School) by emailing **denton.k@brighterfutureslpt.com** and Appeals will be heard by an appeal panel constituted in accordance with the Trust's Scheme of Delegation. Members of the appeal panel will have had no prior involvement in the matter.

The appeal letter should contain the following:

- action being appealed against;
- reason for the appeal;
- the name and address of their representative (where applicable).

If the appeal letter does not contain the above, the Trust HR Manager will write to the employee requesting the information.

An appeal with be heard within 15 working days from receipt of notification from an employee of their intention to appeal the outcome of the attendance hearing.

The outcome of the appeal will be given orally at the end of, or as soon as reasonably possible after the hearing and will also be confirmed in writing by special delivery.

To ensure that the correct HR Panels and levels of authority are adhered to throughout this policy procedure, please refer to p31 of the Trusts Scheme of Delegation to ensure that the correct delegation models are applied where appropriate.

Managing Staff Absence Policy Version 1 Agreed at Trust Board July 2026

BFLPT Employee Self-Certification and Return to Work Form

Legally compliant with UK Employment Law and Data Protection requirements

Employee Details			
Full Name			
Job Title			
Absence Details			
First Day of Absence			
Last Day of Absence			
Date Returned to Work			
Total Days Absent			
Note: Absences longer than 7 days require a Fit Note			
Reason for Absence			
Cold / Flu		Yes ☐ (✓)	No ☐ (✓)
Gastrointestinal illness		Yes ☐ (✓)	No ☐ (✓)
Injury		Yes ☐ (✓)	No ☐ (✓)
Migraine / Headache		Yes ☐ (✓)	No ☐ (✓)
Other (If other, please stipulate what)			
Return-to-Work Discussion			
Do you require workplace adjustments?		Yes ☐ (✓)	No ☐ (✓)
If yes, provide details			
Healthcare Support (Westfield Health) accessed within the last 12 months			
GP Access		Yes ☐ (✓)	No ☐ (✓)
Flu Vaccination		Yes ☐ (✓)	No ☐ (✓)
Counselling Services		Yes ☐ (✓)	No ☐ (✓)
Therapy Treatments		Yes ☐ (✓)	No ☐ (✓)
Declaration			
I confirm the information provided is accurate. Data will be processed in line with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018			
Employee Signature			
Date			
Manager Review			
Return-to-work discussion completed		Yes ☐ (✓)	No ☐ (✓)
Manager Name			
Comments			
Manager Signature			
Date			