Grove Learning Trust

# Sickness Absence Policy

Autumn 2025

**Vision**

Together, we will create **remarkable** schools in which all children can thrive.

As one organisation, Grove Learning Trust, with schools that are unique and united, shares aspiration for our children, which is underpinned by a strong commitment to our values.

**Trust >> Connect >> Collaborate**

Our policies underpin our vision and set out clearly our expectations of each other.

**Principles**

1. This is the sickness absence policy of Grove Learning Trust (the Trust).

2. The purpose of this policy is for employees to understand:

    - how to report absences, including who to contact and when.
    - when a fit note is required.
    - when return to work discussions will be held and with who.
    - how and when to keep in touch.
    - how the Trust keeps track of and review absence.
    - what occupational health (OH) or other support is available.
    - how employees will be paid when off sick.

3. This policy applies to employees only. It does not apply to agency workers, consultants, self-employed contractors, volunteers or interns.

4. When making any decisions under this policy senior leaders must be aware of the particular needs and circumstances of each employee and must actively consider the duty not to discriminate on the basis of a protected characteristic. If there are any concerns about discrimination (or any other issues under the Equality Act 2010) (or if any issues are raised by an employee) then advice

should be taken urgently, for example, where a person is pregnant, then special considerations apply.

5. For Teachers their rights under the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) and the Burgundy Book continue to apply. For support staff their rights under the Green Book continue to apply.

6. When making decisions under this policy senior leaders must always act in a way that treats an employee (or anyone else involved in the process) fairly. This means giving them adequate information to be able to be able to express a view and properly considering that view.

7. This policy does not form part of any terms and conditions and may be amended by the Trust.

8. While this policy should be followed, it may be varied to meet the needs of the particular situation. For example, while timescales should be followed, if they cannot be met then reasons will be given why. If any other variation of the policy is necessary, then reasons will be given for any change, but senior leaders must take appropriate advice first.

9. When this policy is being followed detailed notes should be kept of meetings and communications with any relevant person. This can be summarised via a written communication following the meeting, sent to and agreed by all parties.

10. This policy has also had regard to the ACAS guidance available on the ACAS website.

11. The Trust values and welcomes the role of the Trade Unions when following this policy and employees are encouraged to seek appropriate advice.

12. The Trust recognises that a sickness absence process is a difficult experience for employees and will seek to provide support throughout the process. Further, employees are encouraged to seek additional support as required. Details of

the employee assistance programme will be shared with an employee. The purpose of managing sickness absence is to support employees with their health and returning to work.

**Special Circumstances During the Application of the Policy**

13. As set out above consideration should be given to any considerations under the Equality Act 2010. Where employees have long term health conditions, then particular consideration should be to whether or not an employee is or may be disabled.

14. Generally, where an employee is off sick for any reason in connection with a pregnancy then this should not be included as part of considering levels of absence.

15. Any particular circumstances such as long term and/or life-threatening conditions should be communicated with your line manager and raised as early as possible.

16. Absence due to an accident at work or contact with an infectious disease may also require special consideration. If the absence exceeds 3 days the line manager will need to record this, if more than 7 days this needs to be recorded to HSE.

17. If necessary, the Trust reserves the right to consider suspension on medical grounds. If this is considered necessary, it will be kept under regular review and all reasonable consultation with the employee shall take place.

18. It is important that employees are always honest with their line manager and the Trust. If an employee has taken unauthorised absence and/or is otherwise not honest about their absence, then this will be addressed under the disciplinary policy.

**Employee Responsibilities**

19. Employees should:

- Urgently inform their line manager if they are unable to attend work due to ill health by:

- Contacting their line manager no later than 7.00a.m. on the day of the unplanned absence.
- Should your absence be short term, please contact your line manager by 2pm daily, prior to the seventh day of absence.

- Provide a statement of fitness for work (Fit Note) by the eighth day for absences over seven consecutive days.
- Provide consecutive Fit Notes for the whole period of absence prior to any fit note lapsing, even if this covers periods of holidays or school closure.
- Maintain agreed contact with their line manager, during any period of absence.
- To maintain active communication and to attend meetings required under this procedure such as sickness absence meetings.
- To undertake any examination that the Trust may require by an approved medical practitioner nominated by the school or Trust, where prolonged or frequent absences occur.

**Line Manager Responsibilities**

20. Line Mangers have the following responsibilities:

- To ensure that each employee is aware of this policy, understands the attendance standards required of them and the consequences of not attaining and meeting these standards;
- To create a healthy and supportive work environment where employees feel valued, want to come to work and have a good work/life balance;
- To manage the process effectively, fairly and reasonably and to adopt this procedure for the effective management of attendance and ill-health;

- To consider early intervention and support strategies, such as an occupational health referral, regular welfare meetings, clear contact arrangements, counselling, physiotherapy and implementing reasonable adjustments where necessary.
- To ensure appropriate, on-going contact whilst the employee remains sick.
- To ensure that all sickness information will be reported to the Human Resources department to ensure all the relevant systems are accurate.
- To follow up all absences with a return-to-work meeting when the employee resumes work, regardless of the length of absence.
- To ensure that all sickness information will be kept confidential and managed in accordance with data protection legislation.

**Keeping In Touch**

21. There is a shared responsibility between line managers and employees to maintain reasonable contact during periods of sickness absence. If a sick employee fails to contact their line manager, it is reasonable for the line manager (or another nominated manager) to get in touch to contact them.

22. This is to prevent the employee from feeling isolated and may provide the opportunity to:

- discuss the employee's welfare and offer support as appropriate (e.g. referral to Occupational Health, risk assessments);
- find out about a likely return date (if known) so cover can be arranged;
- agree the method and frequency of on-going contact whilst the employee remains sick;
- keep in touch and provide key work updates as necessary.

23. Any contact arrangements should be sensitive to the employee's needs and circumstances. In some cases, it may be appropriate for contact to be made

via a trade union, workplace colleague, close relative or family friend rather than direct contact by the line manager. The frequency of the contact can be flexible; however, weekly is encouraged. The frequency and method of communication should be discussed and mutually agreed between the manager and employee/employee representative.

24. It will not be assumed that an employee, whose sickness is described by the GP as stress or depression, is incapable of discussing their condition with a manager or occupational health. A referral to an employee assistance programme or occupational health service may be necessary if the employee and their GP have stated that they are unfit to attend a meeting. Additionally, a referral may be requested by the employee or line manager if it is felt that it will aid their return to work.

**Return to Work meetings**

25. A return to work meeting should be carried out after every period of absence regardless of the duration or the reason for the absence. Often, for short periods of absence, a brief, informal discussion will suffice. This includes absences related to pregnancy, disability, injury/accident at work or hospitalisation. When an employee is returning after a long period of absence or when other reasonable adjustments are under consideration, such as phased returns, the return to work meeting should take place before the return to work.

26. The line manager may combine the return to work meeting with an informal and supportive discussion about attendance. The purpose of the return to work meeting is to:

- welcome the employee back and discuss their fitness to return to work.
- clarify the reason(s) for the absence;

  ensure all relevant paperwork is complete (usually self-certificate and/or Fit Note);discuss any support or adjustments that may be appropriate.
- provide an update on work matters.

- where appropriate, discuss any previous absences (including any concerns about patterns or levels of attendance over the previous 6 months), ensure that the absence record is accurate and discuss any support or adjustments aimed at improving attendance

27. If an informal discussion about patterns or levels of attendance is taking place at this meeting, the employee should be provided with an up to date record of their sickness absences prior to the meeting. Employees do not have a statutory right to be accompanied by a Trade Union Representative. [However, any request to be accompanied by colleague or representative will be considered].

28. All return to work meetings should be confidential. A summary of the discussion should be made by the line manager on the return to work form which is then signed by the employee and stored in the employee's HR file afterwards.

**Phased return to work**

29. Depending on the nature and length of an employee's absence a phased return to work on full pay may be appropriate. Such an arrangement should be considered and discussed between the employee and their line manager, obtaining further advice from HR where appropriate before they return to work. In some instances further advice may be sought from occupational health where appropriate. This allows the employee to return to their hours of work, responsibilities and duties gradually. In these circumstances, a phased return would not normally last for more than four working weeks, although the line manager may agree with the employee to extend this period on a case by case basis and taking into consideration any other advice. A phased return may not be necessary or appropriate in every case.

30. The phrase "phased return" is also used by GPs when advising that an employee, whilst not fully fit, may be fit for some duties. During the first six months of an employee's absence a GP can recommend in a fit note that an employee may be fit to work if certain adjustments are made before the employee returns, including a phased return of up to three months. This

provision is designed to help employees return to work sooner than might otherwise have been the case. Occupational health can also make recommendations about the type and duration of a phased return to work.

31. It may not be possible to accommodate the proposals made by a GP or by occupational health for a phased return to work, if this is the case, the employee remains on sick leave until they have fully recovered, or a convenient alternative such as a temporary reduction in hours with no reduction in pay, can be agreed.

32. A record of discussions with the employee about a phased return should be retained and a copy issued to the employee. It may be helpful to include the employee's trade union representative or a workplace colleague of their choice in these discussions although there's no obligation to do so. If a phased return is agreed, review meeting(s) should be arranged at appropriate points to ensure that the employee is coping. Further, any risk assessments should be carried out as needed.

**Sick Pay**

33. Support staff are entitled to sick pay in accordance with the provisions of the Green Book. Teachers are entitled to sick pay in accordance with the Burgundy Book.

34. Sick pay for both support and teaching staff may not be paid if the line manager has reason to believe that the absence of the employee is due to:

- misconduct or neglect
- non-compliance with the conditions and eligibility details referred to above
- conduct that is prejudicial to recovery
- active participation in sport as a professional, unless the school decides otherwise
- working for another employer

35. Sick pay may also be withheld or stopped if a line manager has evidence that the employee's behaviour or conduct during a period of sickness absence contradicts the given reason of their absence. Not being honest in respect of sick pay may lead to action being taken under the disciplinary policy.

36. If staff are not entitled to sick pay for any reason then they may be entitled to statutory sick pay.

**Support Available**

37. The Trust has further support available from Health Assured, which includes a range of resources to support an employee's absence.

**Formal Process**

The Trust may apply this procedure whenever it is considered necessary, including, for example, if employees have:

- have been absent due to illness on a number of occasions - 4 separate periods of absence in the previous 12 month period
- have discussed matters at a return-to-work interview that require investigation;
- have been absent for more than 10 working days, continuously
- any pattern of absence emerging
- continuous working days of sickness absence relating to a psychological issue (e.g. stress/depression), alleged work related issue or a muscular-skeletal condition

- At all stages of the process, it is important for both employees and line managers to have full communication and have a genuine conversation about needs and all options to avoid dismissal should be full considered. This may include obtaining additional medical evidence as required. Employees should be encouraged to raise

issues and give input on any potential proposals. If targets are set in respect of attendance, then particular attention should be given to special circumstances and/or any protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

- Unless it is impractical to do so, employees will be given five working days' written notice of the date, time and place of a sickness absence meeting. Employees will be provided with concerns about their sickness absence and the basis for those concerns in writing or otherwise advise why the meeting is being called. A reasonable opportunity to consider this information before a meeting will be provided.

- The meeting will be conducted by a line manager and will normally be attended by a HR representative. Employees may bring a companion with them to the meeting, such as a Trade Union representative or work colleague.

- Employees must take all reasonable steps to attend a meeting. Failure to do so without good reason may be treated as misconduct. If a member of staff and/or their companion are unable to attend at the time specified, they should immediately inform the line manager who will seek to agree an alternative time.

- A meeting may be adjourned if the line manager is awaiting receipt of information, needs to gather any further information or give consideration to matters discussed at a previous meeting. Employees will be given a reasonable opportunity to consider any new information obtained before the meeting is reconvened.

- Confirmation of any decision made at a meeting, the reasons for it, and of the right of appeal will be given to the employee in writing within five working days of a sickness absence meeting (unless this time scale is not practicable, in which case it will be provided as soon as is practicable).

- If, at any time, the line manager considers that staff have taken or are taking sickness absence when they are not unwell, they may refer matters to be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure.

**Right to be accompanied at meetings**

- Employees may bring a staff companion to any meeting or appeal meeting under this procedure.
- The staff companion may be either a trade union representative or a colleagueTheir details must be given to the manager conducting the meeting, in good time before it takes place.
- Employees are allowed reasonable time off from duties without loss of pay to act as a companion. However, they are not obliged to act as a companion and may decline a request if they so wish. Where possible meetings should be arranged at a time convenient for all parties, and causing little disruption to the working day.
- The Trust may at its discretion permit other companions (for example, a family member) where this will help overcome particular difficulties caused by a disability, or difficulty understanding English.
- A companion may make representations, ask questions, and sum up the employee's position, but will not be allowed to answer questions on an employee's behalf. Employees may confer privately with their companion at any time during a meeting.

**Stage 1: first sickness absence meeting**

- The purposes of a first sickness absence meeting will follow the procedure as set out above and may include:

- Discussing the reasons for absence.

- Where staff are on long-term sickness absence, determining how long the absence is likely to last.
- Where staff have been absent on a number of occasions, determining the likelihood of further absences.
- Considering whether medical advice is required.
- Considering what, if any, measures might improve staff health and/or attendance.
- Agreeing a way forward, action that will be taken and a timescale for review and/or a further meeting under the sickness absence procedure.

**Stage 2: further sickness absence meeting(s)**

- Depending on the matters discussed at the first stage of the sickness absence procedure, a further meeting or meetings may be necessary. Arrangements for meetings under the second stage of the sickness absence procedure will follow the procedure set out above and on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied at sickness absence meetings.
- The purposes of further meeting(s) may include:
- Discussing the reasons for and impact of ongoing absence(s).
- Where staff are on long-term sickness absence, discussing how long the absence is likely to last.
- Where staff have been absent on a number of occasions, discussing the likelihood of further absences.
- If it has not been obtained, considering whether medical advice is required. If it has been obtained, considering the advice that has been given and whether further advice is required.

- Considering the employee's ability to return to/remain in their job in view both of their capabilities and the Trust's business needs and any adjustments that can reasonably be made to the job role.

- Considering possible redeployment opportunities and whether any adjustments can reasonably be made to assist in redeploying staff.

- Where employees are able to return from long-term sick leave, whether to their current role or a redeployed role, agreeing a return-to-work programme.

- If it is considered that employees are unlikely to be able to return to work from long-term absence, whether there are any benefits for which employees should be considered.

- Agreeing a way forward, action that will be taken and a timescale for review and/or a further meeting(s). This may, depending on steps we have already taken, include warning that an employee is at risk of dismissal.

**Stage 3: final sickness absence meeting**

- Where employees have been warned that they are at risk of dismissal, they may be invited to a stage 3 meeting. Arrangements for this meeting will follow the procedure set out above on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied at sickness absence meetings.

- The purposes of the meeting will be:

- To review the meetings that have taken place and matters discussed.

- Where staff remain on long-term sickness absence, to consider whether there have been any changes since the last meeting under stage two of the procedure, either in respect of a possible return to work or opportunities for return or redeployment.

- To consider any further matters that staff wish to raise.

- To consider whether there is a reasonable likelihood of staff returning to work or achieving the desired level of attendance in a reasonable time.

- To consider the possible termination of employment.

    - Termination will normally be with full notice or payment in lieu of notice. Ill health retirement should always be considered as an option prior to dismissal depending on individual circumstances.

**Appeals**

- If employees are not satisfied with a formal outcome (such as dismissal or other formal decision) this procedure they may appeal in writing, stating the full grounds of appeal, to the HR Department within seven days of the date on which the decision was sent to them.

- Unless it is not practicable, employees will be given written notice of an appeal hearing. This will normally be within seven days after written notice has been given. In cases of dismissal the appeal will be held as soon as possible. Any new matters raised in an appeal may delay an appeal meeting if further investigation is required.

- Employees will be provided with written details of any new information which comes to light before an appeal meeting. Employees will also be given a reasonable opportunity to consider this information before the meeting.

- Where practicable, the appeal meeting will be conducted by a senior manager who has not been previously involved in the case and is senior to theindividual who conducted the previous meeting. A member of the Human Resources Department AND/OR of the senior manager(s) who conducted earlier sickness absence meeting(s) will also usually be present. Employees have the right to bring a colleague or trade union representative to the meeting as set out above.

- Depending on the circumstances, an appeal meeting may be a complete rehearing of the matter or a review of the original decision.
- The final decision will be confirmed in writing, if possible, within one week of the appeal meeting. There will be no further right of appeal.
- The date that any dismissal takes effect will not be delayed pending the outcome of an appeal. However, if the appeal is successful, the decision to dismiss will be revoked with no loss of continuity or pay.

## Version Control

| Version | Date | Status | Author (AU) / Approver (AP) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Draft 01 | Sept 23 | Completion of first draft | PHP (AU) |
| Final – A | Autumn 23 | To be ratified by the Board of Trustees | BOT(AP) |
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