

St Thomas More Primary School Sickness Absence Policy



Reviewed	Approved	Next Review
March 2023	March 2023	March 2026

DEFINITIONS

In this Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure, unless the context otherwise requires, the following expressions shall have the following meanings:

- i. 'Chair' means the Chair of the Governing Body appointed from time to time.
- ii. 'Clerk' means the Clerk to the Governing Body appointed from time to time.
- iii. 'Companion' means a willing work colleague not involved in the substance of the employee's absence issues under review by this Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure, or an accredited trade union representative or an official employed by a trade union who will be expected to make themselves available for periods of time necessary to meet the timescales under this Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure.
- iv. 'Diocesan Schools Commission' means the education service provided by the diocese, which may also be known, or referred to, as the Diocesan Education Service.
- v. 'Governing Body' means the governing body of the School.
- vi. 'Governors' means the governors appointed or elected to the Governing Body of the School, from time to time.
- vii. 'School' means the school or college named at the beginning of this Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure and includes all sites upon which the school undertaking is, from time to time, being carried out.
- viii. 'Vice-Chair' means the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body elected from time to time.

1. SCOPE OF PROCEDURE

- 1.1 This Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure applies to you if you are an employee or worker at the School (hereinafter referred to as an "employee" or "you").
- 1.2 The purpose of this procedure is to establish a framework for the effective management of staff sickness absence taking into account both the welfare of employees and the requirements of the School to deliver an effective education to its pupils.

- 1.3 The Governors delegate their authority in the manner set out in this policy.
- 1.4 For the avoidance of doubt this policy may be used concurrently with the School's Capability Policy and Procedure and Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- 1.5 In this policy "working day" means any day on which you would ordinarily work if you were a full time employee. In other words it will be different for teaching and non-teaching staff but will not be different on the basis of whether an employee is full-time or part-time.
- 1.6 The School is committed to ensuring respect, objectivity, belief in the dignity of the individual, consistency of treatment and fairness in the operation of this policy.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The Governors expect the School to:

- 2.1 Never ignore sickness absence
- 2.2 Always monitor attendance
- 2.3 Ensure that short term absences do not go unnoticed
- 2.4 Take swift, supportive action if the absence is work related
- 2.5 Keep accurate, up to date, employee attendance records
- 2.6 Handle attendance problems promptly and sensitively, in a supportive manner
- 2.7 Develop and maintain an atmosphere that encourages people to come to work
- 2.8 Deal with each person as an individual
- 2.9 Treat all staff fairly
- 2.10 Keep Governors informed about the School's sickness absence rate
- 2.11 Seek support and advice from its HR provider, Occupational Health and the Diocesan Schools Commission, as appropriate

3. EMPLOYEE'S OBLIGATIONS

Employees are expected to:

- 3.1 Comply with the School's sickness notification procedure
- 3.2 Ensure medical advice and treatment, where appropriate, is received as quickly as possible in order to facilitate a return to work
- 3.3 Take and follow the medical advice and treatment offered
- 3.4 Keep in regular touch (consistent with your medical condition) and inform the Head of School, or nominated person (or Chair in the case of sickness absence of the Head of School), of any significant developments affecting the period of absence
- 3.5 Attend medical appointments promptly.

4. SICKNESS NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

- 4.1 You must contact the School in accordance with your Contract of Employment (and/or the Staff Handbook or equivalent document).

- 4.2 Brief details of the reason for absence and, if possible, some indication of a likely return to work date should be given during this contact. The position in relation to current workload should be discussed in order to help the School make appropriate cover arrangements.
- 4.3 If your absence is the result of an accident or an injury sustained at work then this information must be made known. You should indicate if the incident has been reported, when it was reported and to whom.
- 4.4 If you are still unfit for work after three successive working days you must once again contact the Head of School or nominated person on the fourth day of absence and advise them of the likely duration of your continued absence.
- 4.5 The Conditions of Service for Teachers in England and Wales (the Burgundy Book) stipulates that a self-certificate should be completed from not later than the fourth working day of absence. Teachers are required to complete a self-certificate to cover every day of absence, including half days.
- 4.6 A doctor's Statement of Fitness for Work (a "doctor's statement") must be provided by all staff where sickness absence lasts beyond 7 calendar days.
- 4.7 The doctor's statement must be forwarded to the Head of School, or nominated person, to reach them on or before the eighth day of absence.
- 4.8 If more than one doctor's statement is required for any period of absence, you must keep the Head of School, or nominated person, informed of developments on a weekly basis. The Head of School, or other nominated person, is also entitled to make reasonable contact with you during your sickness absence, whether or not you have complied with the requirement to make weekly contact. The purpose of maintaining such contact (whether on a weekly or reasonable basis) during such period of sickness absence is to ensure that the educational needs of the School are fulfilled, to give you the opportunity to indicate if there are any ways in which the School may be able to support you and to give you the opportunity (if you wish it) to be kept up to date with developments at the School.
- 4.9 The requirement that you maintain weekly contact during any period of sickness absence may be relaxed by the School if a doctor's statement indicates that such contact would hamper your return to work or, alternatively, by agreement between you and the School.

5. RETURN TO WORK DISCUSSIONS

- 5.1 After **every** absence your line manager (or other appointed person) must discuss with you:
 - 5.1.1 the reasons for your absence;
 - 5.1.2 whether the appropriate notification has been completed;
 - 5.1.3 your fitness to work; and
 - 5.1.4 whether there are any issues which require particular support from the School.
- 5.2 A record of this return to work discussion should be placed on your personnel file.

- 5.3 Your line manager (or other appointed person) may use the return to work discussion as an opportunity to bring you up to date with developments within the School during your absence.
- 5.4 It is anticipated that a return to work discussion would normally last up to 15 minutes, but this is an indication only.
- 5.5 Because of the nature of your medical condition you may prefer not to discuss the reasons for absence with your line manager (or other appointed person) and, in that case, you may hold the return to work discussion with a member of the senior leadership team.

6. OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH REFERRAL

- 6.1 The School may, at any time it considers appropriate, refer you to Occupational Health for an assessment of:
 - (a) Your health
 - (b) Its impact on your attendance at the School
 - (c) Its impact on your fitness to perform the duties required by your employment
 - (d) Its impact on your ability to attend formal meetings or interviews under any other procedure particularly in the light of the guidance at page 20 of the Health and Work Handbook produced by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine, Royal College of General Practitioners, Society of Occupational Medicine
 - (e) What steps the School could take to improve your health and/or attendance

A referral to Occupational Health is a supportive measure and you are expected to cooperate fully where such a referral is made. Occupational Health appointments will be scheduled during working time, where possible.

- 6.2 Before making any decision to dismiss you on notice under this Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure the School will have referred you for at least one Occupational Health assessment.
- 6.3 Notwithstanding Paragraph 6.2 above, if you decide not to engage in an Occupational Health referral the School will have no option but to proceed to make decisions without the benefit of medical advice.

7. ABSENCE REVIEWER, FINAL ABSENCE REVIEWER AND APPEAL MANAGER

The table below sets out the persons to be appointed, where possible, throughout the stages of the sickness absence review procedure depending on the person who is/has been absent from work due to sickness:

<i>Employee Level</i>	<i>Absence Reviewer</i>	<i>Final Absence Reviewer</i>	<i>Appeal Manager (re Written Warnings)</i>	<i>Appeal Manager (re Dismissal)</i>
Head of School	Chair or a non-staff Governor (other than the Vice-Chair) nominated by the Chair	Governors' Absence Panel appointed by the Vice-Chair	A non-staff Governor (other than the Chair or Vice-Chair) nominated by the Vice-Chair	Governors' Appeal Panel, appointed by the Vice-Chair
Other Leadership Spine	Head of School	Chair or a non-staff Governor nominated by the Chair	A non-staff Governor nominated by the Vice-Chair	Governors' Appeal Panel
Other Teaching Staff	A member of the Leadership Team (other than the Head of School) appointed by the Head of School or in the event that (1) above cannot be complied with, (2) A person appointed by the Head of School	Head of School	Chair or a non-staff Governor nominated by the Chair	Governors' Appeal Panel
Other Support Staff	A person appointed by the Head of School	Head of School	Chair or a non-staff Governor nominated by the Chair	Governors' Appeal Panel

NB: In law, only the Governing Body, as the employer of staff, has the power to terminate employment, so the Governing Body will need to ensure that it has delegated this power to the Final Absence Reviewer in accordance with the table above. Where the Governing Body amends the table above, it will need to ensure that it has delegated its power to dismiss to the panel of persons and/or the individual that it appoints as the Final Absence Reviewer.

8. PERSISTENT INTERMITTENT ABSENCE

- 8.1 Persistent intermittent sickness absence can be defined as frequent short-term absences from work that are normally sporadic and attributable to minor ailments, in many cases unconnected.
- 8.2 Managerial problems are created by the frequency of the absences and the reasons behind the absences. It can only be addressed effectively through proper monitoring systems and effective management action.

Triggers

- 8.3 Whilst each case of sickness absence should be considered individually and based on your working arrangements, the following triggers will normally lead to a Formal Absence Review Meeting:
 - 8.3.1 Sickness absence of 10 or more working days in any 12 month period, accrued over 3 periods of absence or more.
 - 8.3.2 Sickness absence of 6 or more days accrued over 2 or more periods in any 4 month period.
 - 8.3.3 Two periods of sickness absence both lasting 4 or more days in any 12 month period.
 - 8.3.4 Any levels of absence which show a trend or pattern e.g. Friday – Monday absences, monthly dates (e.g. last Friday every month) and any other notable dates.

9. LONG TERM ABSENCE

- 9.1 Long-term absence is where an employee is absent from work for a considerable number of weeks or months as the result of a serious health problem. It can normally be distinguished from persistent intermittent absence in that it tends to be continuous and usually can be traced to an underlying medical condition.

Trigger

- 9.2 An absence lasting 4 working weeks will normally lead to a Formal Absence Review Meeting.

10. FORMAL ABSENCE REVIEW MEETINGS

- 10.1 Where a Formal Absence Review Meeting has been triggered in accordance with Paragraphs 8.3 or 9.2 above, the School will appoint an Absence Reviewer in accordance with Paragraph 7. The Absence Reviewer will write to you inviting you to a Formal Absence Review Meeting. You will be given at least 5 working days notice of such

meeting. At the same time as sending you the letter inviting you to the meeting, the Absence Reviewer will also send you a copy of the Absence Report which they have prepared and which shall:

- 10.1.1 Set out your absences from work indicating your reasons given for the absence
- 10.1.2 Set out any suggestions made by you or the School to make reasonable adjustments to working arrangements that could reduce your absence or assist your return to work
- 10.1.3 Include copies of self-certificates, doctor's statements and all medical reports including those obtained from Occupational Health.

10.2 At a Formal Absence Review Meeting you will have the opportunity to:

- 10.2.1 Present any medical evidence in your possession
- 10.2.2 Make reasonable suggestions about managing your return to work including any phased return to work, change or reduction of duties and/or working hours
- 10.2.3 Make suggestions of other reasonable adjustments that could be made

11. FORMAL RESPONSES

11.1 The Absence Reviewer will confirm the outcome of the Formal Absence Review Meeting in writing within 5 working days of the date of such meeting. The Absence Reviewer may, in addition to making an Occupational Health referral, make the following formal responses:

11.1.1 Reasonable adjustments to working arrangements

These will vary on a case by case basis depending on the medical condition identified.

11.1.2 A First Written Caution

11.1.2.1 In the context of a persistent intermittent absence this is a caution that if you are absent from work for two or more days in the period of the next six months you will be at risk of a Final Written Caution.

11.1.2.2 In the context of a long term sickness absence this is a caution that if you are not fully back to work within between 4-12 working weeks there will be a further Formal Absence Review Meeting. The precise number of working weeks will be set by reference to the available medical evidence.

11.1.3 A Final Written Caution

11.1.3.1 In the context of a persistent intermittent absence this is a caution that if you are absent from work at all in the period of the next six months you will be at risk of dismissal.

11.1.3.2 In the context of long term sickness absence this is a caution that if you are not fully back to work within between 4-12 working weeks you will be

referred to the Final Absence Reviewer in accordance with Paragraph 7 which could lead to dismissal. The precise number of working weeks will be set by reference to the available medical evidence.

11.2 The Final Absence Reviewer may (in addition to the responses available to the Absence Reviewer) make the following responses:

11.2.1 Dismissal with Notice

In coming to such a decision in relation to a case of **persistent intermittent absence** the Final Absence Reviewer will consider:

- (a) The total absence and pattern of absence
- (b) The available medical prognosis
- (c) Advice from Occupational Health
- (d) The reasons advanced for the absence
- (e) How long the employee has worked for the School
- (f) Is the job a key job? If so, how long can the School effectively function without that contribution?
- (g) The additional demands the persistent intermittent absence has generated for other employees and the School
- (h) Whether other reasonable adjustments have been considered
- (i) Whether other reasonable adjustments have been made and, if so, whether they were effective

11.2.2 In coming to such a decision in relation to a case of **long term absence** the Final Absence Reviewer will consider:

- (a) The available medical prognosis
- (b) Advice from Occupational Health
- (c) Is complete recovery likely and, if so, when?
- (d) How long the employee has worked for the School
- (e) Is the job a key job? If so, how long can the School effectively function without that contribution?
- (f) The additional demands the absence has generated for other employees and the School
- (g) Whether alternative employment or a transfer is available, suitable and acceptable
- (h) Whether ill-health retirement has been explored
- (i) Whether other reasonable adjustments have been considered
- (j) Whether other reasonable adjustments have been made and, if so, whether they were effective

11.2.3 In a case where your employment is terminated, the Final Absence Reviewer will recommend to the Governing Body that your employment is terminated in accordance with your contract of employment, and the Governing Body will take appropriate steps to terminate your employment.

11.3 In the event that your employment is terminated in accordance with Paragraph 11.2 above:

- 11.3.1 If your contract of employment contains a garden leave clause the Governing Body may exercise that clause so that you are not required to attend the School during your notice period but remain employed and so bound by the terms of your contract of employment until the expiry of the notice period; or
- 11.3.2 If your contract of employment contains a payment in lieu of notice clause the Governing Body may exercise that clause to bring your contract to an end with immediate effect.
- 11.4 You may appeal against a First Written Caution or a Final Written Caution by writing to the Clerk within 5 working days of being sent the relevant caution.
- 11.5 You may appeal against a dismissal with notice by writing to the Clerk within 10 working days of being sent the notification of termination.
- 11.6 Any appeal letter lodged in accordance with Paragraphs 11.4 or 11.5 above must set out the grounds of your appeal in detail.
- 11.7 The fact of the appeal does not delay the commencement of any period under any caution or of any notice period.
- 11.8 Any appeal should normally be heard within 20 working days of the Clerk receiving your appeal letter.
- 11.9 The Appeal Manager is not required to hear oral evidence and may rely on written evidence.
- 11.10 If the Appeal Manager does decide to hear oral evidence, you will be given an opportunity to comment on it either by (a) attending the meeting or (b) reviewing the notes of that oral evidence after the meeting (if you were not present at the meeting where such oral evidence was given). In the event of (b) you must provide any response to the notes of the oral evidence within 5 working days of receipt of the same.
- 11.11 The Appeal Manager will confirm the outcome of the Appeal Meeting in writing to you within 5 working days of the date of the Appeal Meeting. The decision of the Appeal Manager is final and there will be no further right of appeal. The outcomes of the Appeal Meeting are that:
- (a) the Appeal Manager may uphold the decision of the Final Absence Reviewer; or
- (b) the Appeal Manager may uphold the employee's appeal, overturn the decision of the Final Absence Reviewer and refer the matter back to the Final Absence Reviewer for reconsideration.

12. GOVERNORS' PANELS

- 12.1 Governors' Absence and Appeal Panels shall comprise three non-staff Governors not previously involved in the matter and shall not comprise the Chair or Vice-Chair unless there are insufficient numbers of non-staff Governors not previously involved in the matter,

in which case the Chair and/or Vice—Chair may be appointed to a Governors' Absence or Appeal Panel.

- 12.2 In the event that there are insufficient numbers of Governors available to participate in a Governors' Absence or Appeal Panel, the Governing Body may appoint associate members to solely participate in the appropriate Governors' Absence or Appeal Panel on the recommendation of the Diocesan Schools Commission.

13. COMPANION

- 13.1 If you are the subject of any Formal Absence Review Meeting and subsequent appeals, you may be accompanied by a Companion.
- 13.2 You must let the relevant Reviewer or Manager know who your Companion will be at least one working day before the relevant meeting.
- 13.3 If you have any particular reasonable need, for example, because you have a disability, you can also be accompanied by a suitable helper.
- 13.4 Your Companion can address the meeting in order to:
- (a) put your case;
 - (b) sum up your case;
 - (c) respond on your behalf to any view expressed at the meeting; and
 - (d) Ask questions on your behalf
- 13.5 Your Companion can also confer with you during the meeting.
- 13.6 Your Companion has no right to:
- (a) answer questions on your behalf;
 - (b) address the meeting if you do not wish it; or
 - (c) prevent you from explaining your case.
- 13.7 Where you have identified your Companion and they have confirmed in writing to the relevant Reviewer or Manager that they cannot attend the date or time set for the meeting, the relevant Reviewer or Manager will postpone the meeting for no more than five working days from the date set by the School to a date or time agreed with your Companion provided that it is reasonable in all the circumstances. Should your Companion subsequently be unable to attend the Formal Absence Review Meeting, it may be held in their absence or written representations will be accepted.

14. TIMING OF MEETINGS

Meetings under this procedure may:

- 14.1 need to be held when you were timetabled to teach.
- 14.2 exceptionally be held during planning, preparation and administration time if this does not impact on lesson preparation.
- 14.3 be held after the end of the School day.
- 14.4 not be held on days on which you would not ordinarily work.

14.5 Be extended by agreement between the parties if the time limits cannot be met for any justifiable reason.

15. VENUE FOR MEETINGS

The relevant Reviewer or Manager can hold the meeting off the School site to minimise any distress to the employee.

16. ASSISTANCE

In all cases involving any cautions in relation to the Head of School or to a person on the leadership spine, or to potential or actual dismissal of any other member of staff, the Diocesan Schools Commission (and for maintained Schools, the Local Authority) may send a representative to advise the Absence Reviewer, the Final Absence Reviewer or the Appeal Manager.

17. REVIEW OF THIS PROCEDURE

This procedure produced by the Catholic Education Service (CES) for use in Catholic Voluntary Aided Schools in England, was amended in September 2013 and updated in June 2016 following consultation with the national trade unions. It may be adapted, as appropriate, for use in joint Church schools subject to the approval of the CES on referral by the relevant Catholic diocese. This procedure will be reviewed in readiness for the academic year 2018/2019.