



ABSENCE (STAFF)

Aims

- To encourage and maintain maximum levels of attendance by all members of staff. The nature and demands of the school's activities require punctual and reliable attendance by all members of staff. Poor attendance means increased workloads and lower morale.
- To monitor sickness absences and to identify members of staff with genuine health problems, who may need help and support, and to identify individuals with unjustified poor attendance patterns, that put an undue burden on other members of staff.

The Governors of Frank Wise School broadly follow the Oxfordshire County Council's model policy and procedures for Managing Sickness Absence, a copy of which can be found on the Local Authority Intranet. It should be noted, however, that certain aspects are tailored to meet the school's needs.

Sickness Absence

It is vital that any decisions regarding action to be taken in individual cases must be made on an objective basis. In order to ensure consistency, the levels of absence set out in the following procedure will automatically trigger consideration of further action but individual circumstances will be taken into account before any such action is taken.

An individual member of staff can contact Occupational Health (OH) or Staff Care Service directly if they wish to do so via the Intranet and these will be dealt with in total confidence.

The school also purchases staff absence insurance through the Schools Advisory Service, and individual members of staff are able to access support and advice including even some services such as a physiotherapy appointment.

When a member of staff is unable to attend work because of sickness s/he will notify school in accordance with the school's adopted procedure (see Staff Handbook). A member of the administrative team may contact them during the day to find out more details about the nature of their ill health and their likely return to work. This will assist with the planning of cover as appropriate.

The school will operate an accurate and confidential system for recording all sickness absences, in accordance with LA and legal requirements.

When an employee returns to work from any absence there will be a self-certification form to complete to be authorised by their Line Manager if the level of absence has not raised additional concerns or triggered the Bradford Factor threshold (see below). If either of these is the case, a meeting will be arranged with the headteacher or member of the Senior Leadership Team. The purpose of this meeting is primarily to establish that the employee is indeed fit to return to work but also to review the reason for the absence and if any support can be offered by the school. Any actions arising from the return to work meeting will be recorded.

Annual attendance records will be kept in each employee's personnel file along with any health related papers.

Attendance records will be available to Performance Management Team Leaders to support discussion of progress towards targets.

Long Term Absences

If a single sickness absence exceeds **15 days** the headteacher will meet with the member of staff to discuss reasons for absence, whether any aspect of the work is affecting their health and whether practical steps can be taken to remove or minimise the risk and / or improve health and wellbeing.

If sickness absence exceeds a single period of **three months** the member of staff will be referred to Occupational Health. The employee will be notified that they have entered **Stage 1** of the Absence Procedure.

There then follows **Stage 2 & Stage 3** (for full details see OCC Procedure). Please note if the member of staff has fewer than 200 days entitlement to paid sickness leave, the Stage 3 Review and subsequent action may be brought forward.

Short Term Absence

Short, unplanned absences are disruptive and have a significant impact on consistency and educational progress in the classroom. For that reason, the school has adopted a range of tools to use to manage attendance and to help gain a clearer understanding of any health concerns enabling us to intervene and support if appropriate. The return to work process is an important method to gain this understanding and to help the employee understand what effect their absence has on the school. Another important aspect of absence management is identifying what levels of absence will trigger a formal review and being transparent about this. Frank Wise School uses the Bradford Factor¹ system to calculate a trigger point for the headteacher to meet formally with the employee to discuss reasons for absence, whether any aspect of the work is affecting their health and what practical steps can be taken to remove or minimise the risk and /or improve health and wellbeing. The Bradford Factor is a widely recognised tool and ensures that a fair and consistent approach is adopted for all employees. The formula is $E^2 \times D = B$, where E refers to the number of episodes of absence, and D represents the number of days absence. The data used refers to any rolling 12 month period. A score (B) above 600 (until July 2019, then 300 until July 2020) is a cause for concern that will act as the trigger for discussion with the headteacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

When the trigger is reached the headteacher or a member of the SLT will meet with the member of staff and her/his representative if desired, to consider:

- whether any aspect of the job may be affecting the employee's health
- the frequency and duration of the absences
- the reasons for absence
- the total amount of absence
- the nature of duties undertaken
- the effects of the absence on service provision
- the outcome of any previous reviews and any previous action taken
- any other relevant considerations, particularly those put forward by the employee.

The headteacher or member of the SLT will discuss with the member of staff what help might be available to assist with a return to full health and fitness and to improve the level of attendance. A record of the discussion will be kept on file and a copy sent to the employee.

The headteacher or member of the SLT will refer the employee to Occupational Health (OH) if the absence record indicates that there is a persistent short term absence problem or long term health issue. The OH professional will be asked to give advice on any measures which may be taken

¹ Bradford Factor replaces the trigger detailed in the OCC Procedure in section 29

by the school or the employee to help the employee improve and maintain a satisfactory attendance.

In all cases where referral to OH is not indicated, the member of staff will be informed in writing that their level of absence is considered to be unsatisfactory, that further monitoring of absence levels will take place over a specified period and that further action may result.

In all cases covered above, the employee will be notified that they have entered Stage 1 of the absence policy. Progressive review meetings will be held and the member of staff's attendance record will be considered at each stage. If this record has improved sufficiently, at any stage, the employee will be informed that no further action will be taken at this time.

If the member of staff's attendance record continues to cause concern and the Stage 3 Review Meeting is reached, the meeting will be conducted by a panel of the governing body. The member of staff will be invited to attend and to bring a union representative or work colleague. Notice of at least 5 working days will be given. If dismissal is likely, the representative of the Director for Children's Services will also be invited to attend, however, if not in attendance, this does not prejudice the ability to proceed with the meeting and to confirm that the employee has been dismissed. The outcome of the meeting will be one or more of the following :

1. No further action
2. A further warning
3. Further support to encourage attendance, including possible adaptations to the job
4. Redeployment to another suitable post within the school (if available)
5. Dismissal with notice
6. A request to the LA that redeployment elsewhere within OCC be considered.

Dispute

Where it is suspected that a staff member has fraudulently claimed their absence from work is due to sickness incapacity, this will be investigated by the headteacher and if reasonable belief is established, then the school reserves the right to remove any benefit to sickness payments whether statutory or otherwise and the absence will be treated as unauthorised.

Where an OH or GP report or certificate gives advice about any assistance that the school might provide to facilitate a return to work, the headteacher or member of the SLT will conduct a risk assessment and the school's decision will prevail. Where it is regarded that light duties or amended hours are not appropriate, the staff member will continue to remain on sick leave.

Where a staff member is absent from work yet the headteacher believes that he or she may benefit from, and can facilitate, some work, he will seek consent from the staff member to communicate with the GP or OH to establish if a return to work is possible with some adjustments. Staff are expected to participate in such situations with a common aim of minimising absence whilst ensuring the safety and welfare of all staff and pupils.

In the event that there is any ambiguity between the OCC procedure for Managing Sickness Absence of School Employees and the Frank Wise School Absence (Staff) Policy, the Frank Wise School Policy wording will prevail.

The School does not intend to deny any staff member from receiving their full entitlement to sick pay. However, where it is clear that the staff member will not be able to return to work in any capacity in the foreseeable future the school reserves the right to dismiss on the grounds of capability before the sick pay period has been exhausted.

Review

This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure its continued effectiveness. In particular, the headteacher and governing body aim to reduce sickness absence to below the national average in order to minimise the impact of sickness absence on consistency and the students' educational progress. The Bradford Factor threshold will be reduced over a period of time to achieve this. The standing aims are:

- September 2019 until July 2020 - Bradford Factor Threshold of 300
- September 2020 until July 2021 - Bradford Factor Threshold of 100

The viability of these planned threshold alterations for supporting our aims will be reviewed annually and may be adjusted as part of this process. Any revision of these planned alternations will be published in the Absence (Staff) Policy and staff will be notified of the reissue of the policy via a Staff Meeting.

Absence to Support Others

Staff sickness absence is confined to the incapacity of the member of staff only and not the ill health of dependants or other family members. In entering a contractual agreement to become an employee of the school, it is expected that arrangements are made to ensure dependents and other family members can be cared for, should the need arise, in the vast majority of circumstances, in order to facilitate maximum attendance for the contracted hours. It is understood that occasions may arise in which a member of staff may need to request emergency compassionate leave, either to put standing arrangements into action, because standing arrangements have broken down or because the specific nature of the circumstances require it to be the member of staff themselves who cares for the family member or dependent. It is expected that these occurrences are kept to an absolute minimum in order to reduce as far as is possible the impact of absence on consistency and the students' educational progress. Leave of absence to care for a dependent or another family member will be unpaid, but discretion may be applied by the Senior Leadership Team as a panel, especially when an emergency has arisen unexpectedly.

Absence for Medical/Dental Appointments

All medical/dental appointments should be made beyond contracted hours wherever possible. If it has not been possible to achieve this, the evidence of a clinic appointment letter should be attached to a request for leave form and submitted for authorisation. Leave for medical/dental appointments for employees will be paid, but those for dependents and other family members will not.

Absence for Other Reasons

A request may be made for leave of absence for the follow reasons. Decisions are at the discretion of the headteacher and will be made on a case by case basis. Leave for these reasons will be unpaid.

- In order to take an examination for a qualification
- In order to attend an interview for a course or a new job
- For religious observance
- In order to attend a funeral

Absence for Exceptional Circumstances

When employed in a role at Frank Wise School, the contracted hours are during the school's published term times. It is expected that any personal arrangements, including appointments and holiday bookings, are made after school hours, at the weekends or during the school holiday periods. It is the employee's responsibility to communicate this to close family members so that they too understand this contractual commitment and do not make arrangements on the employee's behalf.

It is understood, however, that an occasional event may arise over which the member of staff has no control. It is also appreciated that our staff work incredibly hard and are committed to their contracted hours and duties. Members of staff therefore have the right to request exceptional leave for up to two half days per academic year. A request can be submitted for one whole day or two half days and should be made using a request for leave form along with the additional form for this type of request.

Agreement is discretionary and made on a case by case basis. The request will be considered by the Senior Leadership Team as a panel and a joint decision will be made within four term time weeks of the written application having been received.

A range of factors will be taken into account which will include:

- The absence rate of the member of staff requesting exceptional leave
- The commitment to the contracted role of the member of staff
- The commitment to the contracted hours of the member of staff, including punctuality
- The commitment to the school beyond their contracted role of the member of staff
- Any previous requests for exceptional leave
- The impact of staff absence across the school as a whole on the day/half days in question or period of the school year
- School diary commitments on the day in question
- Other factors pertinent to the case at the time of the request

Extended Leave for Continuing Professional Development

Frank Wise School believes that, in order to deliver high quality, individualised, stimulating and challenging education, its staff must be engaged in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that is also of a high standard. We acknowledge that there are times when professional development may need to occur over more extended periods of time and during term time, which will have implications for a staff member's ability to commitment to contractual duties for a temporary period. The school is committed to the ongoing learning of its staff, particularly within the field of education, and so all requests for extended unpaid leave for CPD, submitted on the form specified for this purpose, will be given careful consideration. Agreement is discretionary and made on a case by case basis. The request will be considered by the Senior Leadership Team as a panel and a joint decision will be made within four term time weeks of the written application having been received.

Reporting

The headteacher may report absence statistics for all types of absence at staff meetings and governing body meetings, but will ensure anonymity is maintained in all public documents and only demographic statistics are published.

Reviewed by: Heidi Dennison

Date: October 2019

Approved by Governors: 

Date: 5 November 2019