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Absence Management Policy
School Based Staff

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and the Governing Body values the contribution made by its employees and recognises that high levels of attendance at work are a vital factor in the efficient operation of the School. The Council and Governing Body aim to provide a supportive and inclusive working environment that encourages all employees to manage their health and wellbeing and maintain their attendance at work.

For many employees work means more than just their salary, good work is proven to be good for our physical and mental health. An early, positive and proactive approach to the management of absence will not only assist the School to deliver quality services to its communities, but ensure that the health and wellbeing of its employees is treated as a key priority.

This policy, and additional guidance, is designed to help minimise disruption to work, support employees through episodes of sickness absence and enable them to return to the workplace as soon as practicable with any work place adjustments that may be necessary. At its core the policy aims to provide guidance on the management of sickness absence, and seeks to ensure that all employees are treated in a consistent, fair, sympathetic and equitable manner.

Head teachers should ensure that every employee is made aware of their obligations under the sickness absence policy, as failure to comply with its requirements could result in a loss of pay and may lead to disciplinary action.

2. SHORT TERM ABSENCE

2.1 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORTING, MANAGEMENT

All sickness absences are recorded and monitored within the Council's Vision system. This will ensure that absence levels within the School are accurate, monitored and managed consistently.

MAINTAINING CONTACT

Regular contact during an employee's absence is critical in supporting the employee to remain engaged in the workforce and enabling a speedy return to work. Maintaining contact can avoid barriers to returning to work developing.

Employees should maintain contact with their Head teacher (or designated officer) as identified below. In circumstances where contact with the Head teacher (or designated officer) may impact on the individual's wellbeing, employees should contact Human Resources to determine a suitable alternative contact. Contact should be conducted via face to face meetings, telephone calls or both with their Head teacher (or designated officer). For posts where 24 hour service provision is provided to ensure appropriate cover is in place, employees will need to contact the Head teacher if their shift pattern falls outside the hours of 8 am to 6 pm.

2.1.1 SHORT TERM ABSENCE - EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Every employee is obliged to inform their Head teacher (or designated officer), or a person nominated as being in charge in the absence of the Head teacher (or designated officer), of any sickness absence as follows:

- Employees are required to provide verbal notification of any sickness absence on the first day at the earliest opportunity, and no later than the start of the school day. Notification would usually be made by telephone calls however alternative methods may be agreed with the Head teacher (or designated officer) if there are particular circumstances that necessitate alternative methods of communication, these must be agreed with the Head teacher in advance. There may be occasions where an employee is incapacitated and a third party will need to ring in on their behalf in the first instance
- If the employee works irregular hours or shift patterns they must notify the Head teacher (or designated officer), wherever practical, no later than two hours prior to the start of their shift
- If an employee becomes ill during the working day they should inform the Head teacher (or designated officer) prior to leaving the workplace
- The employee must specify the reason for the absence and provide the anticipated length of the absence and an estimated return to work date
- If the absence continues employees must contact the Head teacher (or designated officer) again on:
    - **Day 4** to provide an update on their absence
    - **Day 7** to notify if they are returning to work or if the absence is continuing and are visiting the GP for a fit note
    - **Upon receipt of the fit note** an employee must notify the Head teacher (or designated officer)of content of fit note and the expected return to work date

- **Day 14** as the Head teacher (or designated officer) will discuss the referral to Occupational Health and Wellbeing. During this conversation the employee and Head teacher (or designated officer) should agree who will initiate subsequent contact which should ideally be on a weekly basis.

- If one of these notification periods falls on a weekend, for employees who do not normally work on the weekend, the employee should contact the Head teacher (or designated officer) the Friday before the actual notification day. More regular contact than the mandatory contact points is encouraged should the employee's medical condition support this
- Employees should be referred to the Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit for assessment at **day 14** of their absence. Early support and intervention has been evidenced as a vital factor in expediting a return to work for musculoskeletal and mental health conditions. In order to ensure that employees receive appropriate clinical support for these conditions, employees may be referred for assessment to the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit on the **first day** of the absence. For absences under 7 days employees will be required to complete a self certification form SA3 for the period of their absence
- For absences extending beyond 7 calendar days employees will be required to provide a **"fit note"** to cover the period of their absence. Please see ***Section 6*** - ***Self and Medical Certification*** for further guidance.

At each contact point employees will be required to provide an update on their reason for absence and estimated return to work date.

2.1.2 SHORT TERM ABSENCE – HEAD TEACHER (OR DESIGNATED OFFICER) RESPONSIBILITIES

Head teachers (or designated officer) are required to:

- Ensure that all absences are recorded accurately into the vision system on receipt of the notification from the employee
- Ensure that the employee is reminded of the contact points as laid down in this policy and identify if additional contact would be beneficial to support the employee's return
- Ensure that the employee has provided the reason for absence and the likely date for return

- Employees should be referred to the Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit for assessment at **day 14** of their absence. Early support and intervention has been evidenced as a vital factor in expediting a return to work for musculoskeletal and mental health conditions. In order to ensure that employees receive appropriate clinical support for these conditions, employees may be referred for assessment to the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit on the **first day** of the absence
- Head teachers (or designated officer) are required to deal with each absence in a sympathetic manner and to gain advice from Human Resources or the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit where necessary
- Where employees fail to comply with the requirements of this policy, Head teachers (or designated officer) should seek advice from Human Resources.

2.2 RETURNING TO WORK

Once it is known that the employee is fit to return to work, they should contact their manager to advise them of the position. Notification would usually be made by telephone calls however, alternative methods may be agreed with the Head teacher (or designated officer) if there are particular circumstances that necessitate alternative methods of communication, these must be agreed with the Head teacher (or designated officer) in advance. At this time arrangements will be made to interview the employee upon their return and unless wholly impracticable, within 7 days of their return to work. If practical, the return to work interview should be conducted on the first day following the absence, particularly if there are health and safety considerations.

In the case of short term absence the return to work interview provides an opportunity to review the employee's current absence and identify any support or workplace adjustments that may be required to sustain attendance. It also provides an opportunity to review patterns of absence and to identify any underpinning issues or trends in the employee's absence. Where triggers have been hit the Head teacher (or designated officer) will be required to take action in line with the trigger section of this policy.

3. LONG TERM ABSENCE

For the purpose of this policy long term absence will be classified as any absence extending **beyond 28 consecutive days.**

3.1 LONG TERM ABSENCE – EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Every employee should ensure that contact is maintained with the Head teacher or person nominated as being in charge throughout an

ongoing absence as follows:

- Employees must contact the Head teacher (or designated officer) on a minimum of a weekly basis from day 14 onwards. Employees and Head teacher (or designated officer) should agree who initiates the weekly contact.
- More regular contact than the mandatory contact point is encouraged should the employees' medical condition support this
- At each contact point employees will be required to provide an update on the ongoing reason for absence and estimated return to work date
- Employees must provide a copy of a GP "fit note" to cover the whole period of their absence. Please see ***Section 6*** - ***Self and Medical Certification*** for further guidance
- As part of their conditions of employment, employees will be required to attend Occupational Health and Wellbeing appointments, for assessments, as required.

3.2 LONG TERM ABSENCE – HEAD TEACHER (OR DESIGNATED OFFICER) RESPONSIBILITIES

Further guidance on managing long term absence is available on the RCT Source. Throughout a long term absence Head teachers (or designated officer) will be required to:

- Ensure that all absences are recorded accurately in the vision system on receipt of the notification from employees
- Ensure that the employee is reminded of the contact points as laid down in this policy and identify if additional contact would be beneficial to support the employees return
- Ensure that the employee continues to provide an update on the reason for absence and the likely date of return
- Ensure that referral for an Occupational Health and Wellbeing assessment is made at **day 14** of the absence (where the condition is not related to a mental health or musculoskeletal condition)
- This will assist the Head teacher (or designated officer) in determining the likely length of the absence and also ensure that the employee is referred into a supportive intervention earlier in their absence. ***It is the Head teachers (or designated officer) responsibility to refer on time, unless there are exceptional circumstances as to why it should be delayed***
- Ensure that employees are kept up-to-date with work developments within the team and the School
- Ensure that welfare visits are undertaken through Human Resources on a regular basis (See section on ***Welfare Visits 3.3***). Where practicable welfare visits should be undertaken with the employee as soon as it is known that the absence will extend

beyond 28 days and the report from Occupational Health has been received.

- **Where employees fail to comply with the requirements of this policy Head teachers (or designated officer) should seek advice from Human Resources**

3.3 WELFARE VISITS

The Welfare visits provide an opportunity to meet with the employee to determine how their absence is progressing. Welfare visits should take place within two working weeks of the medical advice being received from the Council's Occupational Health & Wellbeing Unit.

Human Resources will attend the welfare visit with the Head teacher (or designated officer) when an Occupational Health and Wellbeing report has been produced in order to discuss the results and establish any support, assistance or adjustments that may be of benefit to the employee during their continued absence and later, following their return to work. Human Resources will make the arrangements for these meetings.

Employees have the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or a work colleague at all times. There is no provision for any other representation. Support can be gained from Human Resources where employment or management issues need addressing.

3.4 MAINTAINING CONTACT

Maintaining contact with colleagues and the workplace can have a positive effect on the employee's wellbeing, and can contribute to an effective return to work. To support this, monthly contact with the Head teacher (or designated officer) should take place. This should be agreed with the employee and could include a face to face meeting at the employee's place of work or any other suitable Council premises (depending on the circumstances) or a telephone conversation. Any agreed meetings should be arranged by the Head teacher (or designated officer).

If the absence continues over a long period of time, it is important that monthly contact is made to monitor progress and keep the employee updated regarding workplace changes and their employment position.

Please refer to '**Managing Attendance Guide'** available on RCT Source for more information about what should be discussed during a welfare visit.

3.5 RETURNING TO WORK FROM LONG TERM ABSENCE

Sustained absences often require a number of elements to be addressed to enable the individual to return to work (for example addressing Occupational Health recommendations, agreeing a rehabilitation plan to return to work, agreeing appropriate workplace adjustments). It is recommended that a case conference approach is used to agree the actions required to support the employee back to work following sickness absence.

Once it is known that an employee is fit to return to work, they must contact the Head teacher (or designated officer) to advise them of their return. Alternative methods of notification are only acceptable where it has been previously agreed with the employee. If practicable a return to work interview should be conducted on the first day back, if not then it should be conducted within **7** days of the employee returning to work.

A return to work interview is a pivotal tool in building a relationship with the employee and establishing if there are any underlying problems and identifying if further ongoing support is required. It may be that other School policies may apply and need to be discussed with the employee for example, reasonable adjustments, domestic violence, leave of absence. The Head teacher (or designated officer) must update the Vision system with all details by completing the return to work form.

Please refer to '**Managing Attendance Guide'** available on RCT Source for more information on what return to work interviews should include

3.5.1 REHABILITATION

Employees may have sickness absences because of a variety of physical, psychological and social issues. A well managed return to work helps employees manage their symptoms or reduce their impact. Their rehabilitation may require temporary or permanent adjustments to their work, these may include:

- Different or reduced working hours
- Reorganisation or redesign of their role
- Introduction of supportive software or equipment
- Rehabilitation plan to return to work
- Training or retraining
- Redeployment to another role

Head teachers (or designated officer) must be mindful that Occupational Health advice in relation to a rehabilitation programme is a ***recommendation only*** and Head teachers (or

designated officer) should form their own judgements based on all the facts available to them. Further advice and guidance can be sought from Human Resources.

Please refer to '**Employee Support Guide'** available on RCT Source for more information about rehabilitation.

3.6 WHERE AN EMPLOYEE CANNOT RETURN TO WORK DUE TO ILL HEALTH

If the employee cannot return to work, the employer will decide how reasonable it is to maintain an employee's sickness absence. In arriving at this decision the Disciplinary and Dismissals Committee of the Governing Body will need to take into account:

- Whether, and for how long, other team members can cover the employee's workload
- Disruption caused by the employees absence
- Whether or not a temporary replacement can be recruited and how much this will cost
- The level of specialist skills

3.7 ILL HEALTH PROCESS

In some circumstances it may be determined that the employee may no longer be capable of returning to work in any capacity. In such circumstances the employee will be referred to an Independent Registered Medical Practitioner (IRMP) for a medical viewpoint on the impact of their health on their continued employment. The Council will then determine whether to terminate the employee on the grounds of ill health based on all information available.

This process will apply to both pensionable and non-pensionable employees.

Please refer to '**Managing Attendance Guide'** available on RCT Source for more information on the ill health process.

Due to regulations within the Teachers' Pensions Scheme, all pensionable Teachers wishing to apply for ill-health retirement must be reviewed by the Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit who will discuss and assist teachers with their application, to Teachers Pensions.

The Council/Governing Body have no impact on the decision of Teachers' Pensions for release or non-release of ill-health retirement benefits. Teachers' Pensions decision is independent of the Council and should the application be turned down, employees should seek advice from their trade union representative or from their Human

Resources representative, who will then inform them of their options. If approved, a mutually convenient date for retirement will then be agreed between the Governing Body and employee.

Further information regarding ill- health retirement for Teachers can be found on the Teachers Pensions Website
http://www.teacherspensions.co.uk

4. THE EQUALITY ACT 2010

The Council and Governing Body are aware that sickness absence may be disability related. At each stage of the absence management process, particular consideration will be given to whether there are reasonable adjustments that could be made to the requirements of a job or other aspects of working arrangements that will provide support at work/or assist a return to work. Employers have a statutory duty to seek to make reasonable adjustments, what is deemed as reasonable extends beyond physical adjustments, for example, an employer funding counselling to support an employee dealing with work pressures. Any employee who considers that they are affected by a disability or a medical condition which affects their ability to undertake their work should inform the Head teacher (or designated officer). It is recognised that some employees may not know they have a disability or may choose not to disclose that they have a disability, therefore, Head teachers (or designated officer) should be alert to changes in the employee's behaviour or performance and have appropriate discussions with them.

Reasonable adjustments whether they are permanent or temporary arrangements must be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they are suitable.

Please refer to the '**Managing Attendance Guide'** available on RCT Source for more information about the reasonable adjustment policy and process.

5. DISABILITY RELATED SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Council and Governing Body are aware of its responsibilities towards disabled employees in the management of disability related sickness absence and the need to ensure sickness absence procedures do not discriminate against disabled employees. This will be taken into account when operating this procedure.

Head teachers (or designated officer) must establish through discussions with the employee if a sickness absence is related to an employee's disability and record it on Vision as a disability related sickness absence.

Please refer to the '**Managing Attendance Guide'** available on RCT Source for more information about identifying and recording disability related sickness absence.

6. SELF AND MEDICAL CERTIFICATION

Employees must cover all sickness absences with certification from day 1 of the sickness absence to ensure that access to statutory and occupational sick pay is not affected.

Day 1 to day 7 (calendar days), must be covered by the employee via completion of a self certification form (SA3) available from the Head teacher (or designated officer) if their absence is not already covered by a "fit note" medical certificate.

Day 8 onwards must be covered by medical certification known as a statement of fitness for work (fit note) issued by the employees GP. If the employee has been referred by their GP to the fit for work service, the employee must still provide a **fit note** to cover all periods of absence ***(see section 6.2 Fit for Work service*)**

Employees should ensure that medical certificates are produced to cover all periods of absence, with no gaps in cover. All certification should be provided to the Head teacher (or designated officer) on time, as failure to do so may affect sick pay entitlement.

6.1 Fitness for Work (Fit Note)

An employee's GP produces a statement of fitness for work or "fit note" which allows for the GP to advise the employer that an employee is either:

- **Not fit for work**

  - An individual is not fit for work of any kind.

OR

- **May be fit for work taking account of the following advice**

  - individuals may be fit for work, taking account of the doctor's advice in the fit note. This does not necessarily mean doing their current job. G.P's may suggest ways of assisting the employee to return to work such as:
    - A rehabilitation plan to return to work
    - Altered hours
    - Amended duties
    - Workplace adaptations.

6.2 FIT FOR WORK SERVICE

In 2015 the Department of Work and Pensions introduced the '***Fit for Work Service***'. A GP can refer an employee to the ***fit for work***

service if they are unfit for work or likely to be unfit for work for more than 4 weeks and for up to 3 months. The ***fit for work service*** will assess the employee and produce a return to work plan. If the employee consents the return to work plan will be shared with their GP, Head teacher (or designated officer) and the Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit. (***N.B****. An employee can only be referred once to the* ***fit for work service*** *in a 12 month period.)*

Upon receipt of a "**fit note"** or "**fit for work return to work plan"** the Head teacher (or designated officer) should:

- Discuss the advice with the employee
- Consider the advice and how it affects the job/workplace/team
- Consider if a return to work is possible in line with the School's policy
- If a return is possible - agree a return to work date and set a review period
- If a return is not possible, explain the reasons why and agree the date of the next review. During this time the employee will remain on sick leave, and will need to ensure they are covered with the necessary medical statement
- The Head teacher (or designated officer) must record discussions with the employee.

As the Fit for Work Service is a new initiative it is highly recommended that all staff and Head teachers (or designated officer) refer to the **'Fit for Work Service Guide'** available on RCT Source for more information for further information.

7. MONITORING OF ATTENDANCE

Monitoring the attendance of all employees is very important, it allows the early identification of an employee whose level of attendance has become unacceptable and who may need further attention. Head teachers (or designated officer) are required to record and monitor an employee's sickness absence using the Council's Vision system, via on going communication, welfare visits and through return to work interviews. Should a Head teacher (or designated officer) have concerns about an individual's level of absence then they have a number of options available to them depending on the employee's circumstances. However, the focus should always be on supporting the employee to improve their attendance at work.

7.1 TRIGGER POINTS

The Council and Governing Body have set the following trigger points as a guide to assist Head teachers (or designated officer) when dealing

with frequent and intermittent absence. Where an individual's absence level meets one of the following trigger points, the Head teacher (or designated officer) will review the absence levels with the employee:

- 3 or more instances of sickness absence in any 12 month period
- 10 or more days sickness absence within any 12 month period
- any other recognisable patterns, such as frequent absenteeism on a Friday, Monday or weekends. It should be noted that these trigger points are only a guide to Head teachers (or designated officer) and other patterns of absence which also cause concern can be addressed.

7.2 MANAGING SHORT TERM AND FREQUENT ABSENCES

There are three steps to managing short term and frequent absences in the School, these are:

Stage 1 – The Return to Work Interview
Stage 2 – Referral to Designated Officer for Review
Stage 3 – Disciplinary Action

Please refer to '**Managing Frequent and Short Term Absence Guide'** available on RCT Source for more information on managing frequent and short term absence.

8. REFERRAL TO THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING UNIT

In order to support an employee to prevent ill health occurring or to facilitate a return to work employees should be referred to the Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit at the following stages:

Time Period	Referrals
At any time	Whilst an employee is still in work and there are health concerns and/or support interventions required.
Day 1 of absence	Where support is required and for referrals for Musculoskeletal or Mental Health conditions.
Day 14 of absence	Referral for assessment.
Triggers have been met	• 3 or more instances of sickness absence in a 12 month period. • 10 or more days of sickness absence in a 12 month period. • Frequent absenteeism forming recognisable patterns.

N.B. All referrals should be made using the online referral process.

The Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit specialises in providing

assessments and support interventions for employees. It is important that, when dealing with an employee's sickness absence or ill health, medical advice is sought wherever possible in order to help inform the decisions that are being made relating to employment.

It is a condition of employment that the Council and Governing Body may, at any time, require an employee who is unable to perform their duties as a consequence of illness, to attend an assessment by the Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit. If an employee fails to attend this appointment, a charge for non attendance will be incurred and may be passed on to the employee.

For further information on the role and range of services available through the unit please refer to '**Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit Guide'** available on RCT Source for more information.

9. PAY ENTITLEMENT

As part of this policy, employees may (subject to a limited number of exceptions) continue to be paid full or part salary for defined periods of time while absent.

Employees, who follow the correct sickness absence reporting procedures and provide fit notes as required, may receive occupational sick pay dependant on their continuous service, in accordance with the following scales:

Support Staff

Length of service	Full Pay	Half Pay
0 to 4 months	1 month	None
4 to 12 months	1 month	2 months
During 2nd year of service	2 months	2 months
During 3rd year of service	4 months	4 months
During 4th year of service	5 months	5 months
During 5th year of service	5 months	5 months
After 5 years service	6 months	6 months

In calculating your entitlement, all previous sickness absence for the preceding twelve months will be deducted from your maximum entitlements. Any full or half pay entitlements are subject to deductions of sickness benefit or Statutory Sick Pay, which you may receive.

Teaching Staff

Length of service	Full Pay	Half Pay
0 to 12 months	25 Working Days	None in first 4 months. 50 Working Days 4 to 12 months.
During 2nd year of service	50 Working Days	50 Working Days
During 3rd year of service	75 Working Days	75 Working Days
During 4th year of service	100 Working Days	100 Working Days

10. ANNUAL LEAVE AND SICKNESS FOR NON TERM TIME EMPLOYEES

10.1 Sickness During Holiday

Where an employee falls sick or is injured while on holiday, they will be allowed to transfer annual leave to sick leave and take replacement days for holiday at a later time. This should be recorded in the Vision system and is subject to the following strict conditions:

- The total period of incapacity must be fully certificated by a qualified medical practitioner, self certification is not appropriate in this situation.
- The employee must contact the Head teacher (or designated officer) by telephone, on the first day of any period of incapacity during a holiday, in accordance with the Council's normal sickness procedure. Notification would usually be made by telephone calls however, alternative methods may be agreed the Head teacher (or designated officer) if there are particular circumstances that necessitate alternative methods of communication, these must be agreed with the Head teacher in advance.
- Should the period of sickness extend beyond the first day, then the employee will be required to follow the normal reporting process.
- The employee must submit a written request no later than 10 days after returning to work setting out how much of the holiday period was affected by sickness and the amount of leave that they wish to take at another time.
- Where the employee is overseas when he/she falls ill or is injured, evidence must still be produced that they were ill by way of either a medical certificate or proof of a claim on an insurance policy for medical treatment received at the overseas location.
- All costs of medical certification are to be borne by the employee.

10.2 Holiday Entitlement and Long Term Sick Leave

An employee who is absent on sick leave will continue to accrue his/her contractual holiday entitlement. In addition, where the employee returns to work following long term sick leave, contractual holiday entitlement accrued should be taken in the same leave year where practicable.

However, where the employee is absent for the whole leave year or there is insufficient time for the leave to be taken in the same year, the employee will only be permitted to carry forward the statutory element of any untaken accrued leave in to the next leave year. This should be recorded in the Vision system.

Employees on paid or unpaid sick leave are permitted to travel for holidays or other purposes, as long as this is not inconsistent with their stated reasons for sickness absence and is aimed at assisting with their recovery. Should this result in worsening of their illness or prolonging their absence, then the Head teacher, in consultation with the Director of Human Resources (or their representative), reserves the right to stop statutory sick pay and/or occupational sick pay, and in some cases this could result in disciplinary action.

11. ELECTIVE SURGERY

Elective surgery is surgery that is not considered to be medically necessary. This includes cosmetic surgery, which is concerned with the enhancement of appearance through surgical and medical techniques, e.g. face-lifts or breast implants. It also includes other medical procedures such as laser eye treatment.

Time off for elective surgery will be unpaid or the employee can take leave. The time off requested will cover both the procedure and post operative recovery time.

However, where the employee suffers an unexpected injury/illness as a result of the procedure, then the Council's normal sick pay will apply, following receipt of the relevant fit note certificate.

This policy does not cover gender reassignment surgery, which is dealt with under a separate policy.

12. CONCLUSION

The management of sickness absence can be time consuming and complex. Effective communication between all parties is essential in managing the impact of sickness absence both on the individual and the organisation and can be key to reducing the impact of absenteeism on the Council and Governing Body.