



Dame Alice Owen's School
The Dame Alice Owen Foundation - 1613

HEALTH AND ATTENDANCE POLICY

Agreed by the Governing Body Resources Committee
To be reviewed
(To be reviewed every 2 years)

Summer 2026
Summer 2028

The Professional Associations and/or Trade Unions have been consulted on this policy, and HFL Education recommends it for adoption

To be monitored by the Governing Body Personnel & Remuneration Committee

1. Acronyms and abbreviations

AIP	Attendance improvement plan
Trigger points	Absence monitoring system to highlight levels or patterns of sickness that require further attention
SSP	Statutory sick pay

2. Scope

This policy and procedure applies to all staff and workers. It does not form part of anybody's contract of employment and may be varied.

3. Introduction

The aim of this policy is to set out the School's approach to sickness absence management, including but not limited to:

- its trigger points
- the requirements for notification
- the requirements for certification
- its position on payment during sickness absence
- ensuring staff and managers are aware of their responsibilities when sickness absence occurs
- ensuring that any sickness absence is dealt with fairly and consistently
- its position on both short term and long-term absences from the workplace.

4. Definitions

This policy covers short-term and long-term absences. The definitions used in this policy are:

● Short-term absence:	frequent, intermittent, short periods of absence
● Long-term absence:	any continuous period of absence over 28 days (calendar)
● Trigger points:	absence monitoring system to highlight levels or patterns of sickness that require further attention.

5. Breaches of policy and procedure

In the case of a breach of this policy and procedure, staff may be subject to disciplinary proceedings and the possible withdrawal of sick pay.

Breaches of this policy and procedure include, but are not limited to, a failure to follow notification and certification requirements, when the School has reason to believe the sickness absence is not genuine and when the staff member is undertaking inappropriate activities, including working for another organisation, whilst off sick.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Disciplinary, Leave of Absence, policies and the School's Wellbeing statement.

6. Trigger Points

It is hoped that close monitoring and discussions regarding absence and attendance will result in an improved attendance record. However, if levels of sickness absence reach a trigger point, this may be discussed with staff and managed in line with the School's absence management procedure.

In any six-month period, the trigger points are:

- three separate occasions of sickness absence
- a continuous sickness absence of 10 working days or more
- an absence which appears to have a recurring pattern i.e., frequent absenteeism around a weekend.

These trigger points are for guidance only and the School reserves the right to raise concerns at an earlier stage where there are reasonable grounds to do so, or at a later stage, where appropriate.

7. Sick Pay

Statutory sick pay (SSP)

Subject to compliance with absence management procedures, the School will pay statutory sick pay (SSP) to eligible staff at the national rate, which is subject to the deduction of tax and national insurance contributions.

SSP is payable from the fourth day of absence and up to 28 weeks.

To qualify for SSP, staff must comply with the procedures set out in this policy.

Occupational sick pay

Subject to compliance with the School's procedures, the School will pay occupational sick pay. Eligibility for occupational sick pay including duration and level of payment is in accordance with the relevant conditions of service.

Personal appointments

Reasonable time-off may be allowed where appointments are unable to be scheduled outside of working hours. Ordinarily, time-off for such meetings is unpaid unless discretion is applied by the Headteacher.

Before arranging non-urgent medical appointments, staff should seek approval from the HR Manager and should endeavour to arrange appointments at the beginning or end of the day, or during lunchtime, to minimise disruption and the time they have to be absent from work. Evidence of the appointment may be requested.

8. Notification requirements

First day of absence

It is a requirement that **all staff** email staffabsence@damealiceowens.herts.sch.uk and their line manager to report that they are too unwell to come to work. Staff should aim to do this before 7.45am or as soon as possible before their normal start time. Staff may also telephone the school on extension 333.

In circumstances where staff are incapacitated or unable to contact the School to report their absence, their next of kin should do so on their behalf, at the earliest opportunity.

A failure to report an absence in accordance with the absence management procedure could be constituted as a breach of policy and reporting requirements. This may result in sick pay being withheld. It should be noted that there is no obligation to reinstate pay in such cases.

It is not permissible to contact the School by text message or via social media without prior permission.

Ongoing absence

For each subsequent day of absence after the first day, the staff member should email staffabsence@damealiceowens.herts.sch.uk and their line manager to confirm they are still too unwell to come to work. However, managers should use their discretion and can agree different arrangements, as appropriate. A failure to report ongoing absence in accordance with arrangements agreed with a line manager could constitute a breach of policy and reporting requirements. This may result in sick pay being withheld. It should be noted that there is no obligation to reinstate pay in such cases.

9. Certification Requirements

Absence up to 7 days

Staff are permitted to self-certificate for any sickness absence up to 7 days (calendar, inclusive of bank holidays). A completed self-certification form should be provided to the School upon return to work in order for sick pay to be processed. The form will be emailed to you on your return to work. Unless specifically requested, staff are not required to provide a statement of fitness for work i.e., doctors fit note, for absences up to 7 calendar days.

Absence over 7 days

Where sickness absence lasts longer than 7 calendar days, medical evidence is required in the form of a 'fit note' and should cover the duration of the absence. If a fit note expires and the staff member is not well enough to return to work, the staff member should obtain a further fit note to ensure their absence is certified and should provide it to the School at the earliest opportunity. A failure to maintain certification in the form of a fit note for the period of absence may constitute a breach of policy and reporting requirements. This may result in sick pay being withheld and it should be noted that there is no obligation to reinstate pay in such cases. Should any staff member become aware that they are unlikely to be able to provide a new certificate in good time, they should ensure that they report this to the School at the earliest opportunity, and in any case prior to the current note expiring, with confirmation on when it can be expected.

The School reserves the right to require staff to obtain a fit note for absences of any duration. In circumstances where the staff member incurs a cost for obtaining a fit note for an absence up to 7 days, the School will reimburse reasonable costs incurred.

Certification during non-term time

Where a staff member working a 'term-time only' pattern is not fit to work on the last day of term, or half term, and is not fit for work on the first subsequent day of the new term, a fit note is required to cover the holiday period.

Sickness during annual leave

If a staff member becomes unwell during annual leave and wishes to treat this as sick leave and reclaim annual leave, they will need to provide appropriate certification as per paragraphs above.

10. Maintaining Contact

It is a requirement that a reasonable level of contact is maintained during a period of absence between the member of staff and the School.

It is anticipated that at an early stage in the absence, arrangements will be made as to the frequency and form contact is to take.

A failure by a member of staff to maintain reasonable contact may be dealt with under the School's Disciplinary policy.

Return to work following a period of absence

It is good practice for return-to-work meetings to be carried out when a staff member returns to work following a period of absence. This will be carried out by the line manager or other appropriate person.

A record of the meeting should be made. A copy of the record will be provided to the member of staff and a copy placed on the staff member's HR record file.

The purpose of the meeting is to welcome the staff member back to work and to establish that they are fit to carry out their duties. The meeting will establish the reasons for the absence and highlight any additional support required. Any concerns regarding absence from work may be raised and measures identified to support the member of staff to improve attendance and help prevent its reoccurrence.

Staff should be made aware when they are near to reaching the School's trigger points and the potential implications of this.

11. Occupational Health Referral

During any period of absence (short-term and long-term) or upon return to work, the School may require staff to engage with an occupational health provider, to obtain medical advice into their health, wellbeing or into the reason for the absence. Staff may also request a referral to occupational health services to obtain support.

Staff are expected to attend an appointment and co-operate with the occupational health professional and may be asked to provide consent for the release of medical information. The HR Manager, or other appropriate member of staff, should discuss the reason for the referral directly with the staff member before making a referral.

When to make a referral

The School may consider making a referral to occupational health in the following circumstances (this list is not exhaustive)

- where it is anticipated or known that the absence is going to last for four weeks or more (the absence need not have exceeded four weeks at the time of making the referral)
- where there is a concern over persistent short-term absence prior to or during an attendance improvement plan
- where a trigger point is met (unless a referral has already been undertaken recently)
- where there appears to be an underlying medical condition
- when a member of staff has been absent with, or appears to be suffering from, mental health issues (i.e., stress, anxiety, depression)
- where there are concerns about a staff member's health and/or safety in the workplace and medical advice is required.

Referrals may not be necessary for routine procedures which require a fixed period of

convalescence, unless complications arise.

Occupational health recommendations

The recommendations contained within a report from an occupational health provider are advisory.

The report may contain recommendations of support and reasonable adjustments including a phased return to work or temporary/permanent adjustments to a staff member's role. The report should be discussed with the staff member and the School should decide whether recommendations are reasonable, sustainable and can be implemented.

In the event that the staff member is unable to fulfil the role, retirement or termination of employment on ill health grounds capability may be considered.

12. Informal and formal absence management procedures

The management of absence is based on the principle that, whilst absence due to ill health will not usually be the fault of a staff member, there may come a point where the staff member is deemed incapable of undertaking the role they were employed to do.

The point at which the Headteacher moves a staff member to commence the formal process will vary from case to case.

Timescales for each stage will depend on individual circumstances and some sickness absence issues may be dealt with over a longer or shorter period than others.

Right to be accompanied

The member of staff has the right to be accompanied at a formal meeting by a trade union representative or appropriate work colleague.

The staff member should provide the name of the companion within 3 school days of the meeting. Where the chosen companion is unavailable on the day scheduled for the meeting, the staff member may request the meeting is rescheduled within 5 school days of the original date. If the staff member is unable to attend the meeting in this timeframe, the meeting may take place in a timeframe at the discretion of the School. If the companion remains unavailable, the staff member may be asked to choose another companion.

There is no right to be accompanied at informal meetings. This will only be permitted where it is deemed to be in the interests of an early resolution and where there are particular circumstances in which a staff member needs additional support. In such cases an independent note-taker may also be present. A delay to enable the attendance of a companion to an informal meeting will be discretionary.

During the meeting the companion may put the staff member's case forward and confer with the member of staff but they may not answer on the staff member's behalf or address the attendees if the staff member does not want this.

Informal absence review meetings

Informal absence review meetings should be arranged to gather information and discuss, with the staff member, the cause of the absence, anticipated return to work, fitness for duties, support, and reasonable adjustments.

The staff member should be advised of any sickness absence concerns and feedback should be constructive, with the emphasis being placed on finding ways to support the staff member and improve attendance wherever possible. The staff member should be given the opportunity to provide feedback and to respond to any questions from the manager.

An attendance improvement plan (AIP) may be an outcome of an informal meeting in cases of persistent short-term absence or a series of intermittent absences. An informal meeting will not result in any formal warnings being given to the staff member.

Attendance improvement plans (AIP)

An attendance improvement plan is a tool used to record the attendance level a staff member will need to achieve. It is used to improve and maintain attendance to an acceptable level and can be implemented in both informal and formal management procedures.

The AIP can be used to re-align expectations around attendance standards, measure progress against those standards and put in place specific support mechanisms to ensure that a more consistent and effective level of attendance is achieved.

The AIP should give the staff member adequate time to demonstrate attendance has improved in a sustainable manner and should include details of the support that can be offered to help improve attendance levels.

Throughout the review period, the staff member's progress will be reviewed to assess if any further action and/or support is required. If the staff member's attendance levels have not improved to an acceptable standard within the period agreed, consideration will be given to the management of the absence moving forward, including escalating the process to the formal stage.

Formal meetings

If a staff member's absence is of concern and/ or informal action has not succeeded in improving attendance to an acceptable level, consideration will be given to whether there are grounds for commencing the formal procedure. This can be applied to cases of frequent short-term and long-term sickness absence.

The purpose of the formal process will be to give a staff member support to help them to achieve the expected attendance levels. If improvement is not made or maintained, formal sanctions may be issued to manage the absence and communicate expectations.

At formal meetings, the staff member will be given the chance to state their case and raise any factors they wish to have considered.

At every stage of the formal absence management procedure, the staff member will:

- be given advance notice of any formal meeting in writing
- be advised in writing of the nature of the attendance concerns
- have the right to be accompanied by their professional association/ trade union representative or appropriate work colleague
- have a right of appeal against any decision made.

Staff should make all reasonable efforts to attend meetings convened under this policy. If the staff member fails to attend without good reason or is persistently unable to attend due to health issues, a meeting may be convened, and a decision taken based on the available evidence in the absence of the staff member.

Formal meeting conversation

The following matters, depending on the nature of the case, may be discussed during formal meetings:

- circumstances of the absence and actions taken to date, including a summary of absence records
- the reason for the absence, how much longer it is likely to persist and if the staff member will be able to return to their job
- the operational impact of the absence
- the contents of any occupational health reports and/ or medical evidence and whether there is a requirement for further occupational health input
- relevant risk assessments or other plans implemented as part of the informal process
- attendance improvement plans and whether the targets were met
- relevant issues or representations raised by the staff member.
- grounds for concern and appropriate action
- reasonable adjustments and/or redeployment
- if the ongoing absence could result in termination this should be disclosed
- timescale for further meetings
- any other reasonable areas for discussion.

Formal meeting outcomes

Formal meetings will adjourn in order for those hearing the case to consider whether a sanction should be issued to the staff member. The outcome can either be communicated to the staff member after the adjournment on the same day, or alternatively, the staff member can be written to and informed of the outcome, if the duration of the adjournment is likely to be lengthy.

The type of sanction issued will be based on the specifics of the absence. A series of warnings are not fault-based sanctions for absence, but an indication that ongoing absence could result in the termination of employment.

The outcomes of a formal meeting can include:

- first written warning and/or an attendance improvement plan
- final written warning and/ or an attendance improvement plan

- dismissal: where the staff member has been issued with formal first and final written warnings and continues to be unable to exercise their duties
- dismissal: where the staff member has not been issued with a first or final written warning but is unable to exercise their duties due to ill health capability.

Prior to a dismissal of this nature, the following will be taken into consideration if the staff member has been absent on a long-term basis:

- if a reasonable period of recovery has been given
- if medical advice has been sought and considered
- if a return to work in the short-term is unlikely
- if there are reasonable adjustments that would enable the staff member to return to work
- if the School can demonstrate that a longer period of absence cannot be sustained operationally.

Duration of warnings

In circumstances where a warning is issued, it will be 'live' for a period of 12 months, unless the staff member is notified otherwise.

Appeal

The staff member has the right to appeal against any formal sanction. To exercise this right, they must write to the person specified clearly stating the grounds for appeal, within 7 school days from receipt of the letter.

An appeal will be heard by an appropriate person who was not involved in the original meeting.

At the discretion of the School, the appeal will be a rehearing or a review of the original decision.

New evidence will only be considered if relevant and there is sufficient reason why this was not referenced earlier.

13. Ill health retirement

Ill health retirement can be considered before the decision is taken to terminate employment. Ill-health retirement is subject to the eligibility criteria being met, as set out by the relevant pension provider.

For support staff, in some circumstances, it may be possible to mutually agree a date that employment will end, avoiding the need for a formal hearing, however the end of employment must still be treated as a dismissal.

APPENDIX 1 - Sick Pay Entitlement (teachers under the ‘burgundy book’)

Teachers	
During the first year of service	Full pay for 25 working days and after completing 4 calendar months’ service half pay for 50 working days
During the second year of service	Full pay for 50 working days and half pay for 50 working days
During the third year of service	Full pay for 75 days and half pay for 75 working days
During the fourth year and successive years	Full pay for 100 working days and half pay for 100 working days

Note 1: For teachers, working days are the days defined as “directed time” (currently 195 per academic year). Years of service are based on aggregated service.

APPENDIX 2b - Sick Pay Entitlement (support staff)

During the first year of service	1 Month full pay and, after completing 4 months' service, 2 months half pay
During the second year of service	2 months' full pay and 2 months' half pay
During the third year of service	4 months' full pay and 4 months' half pay
During the fourth & fifth year of service	5 months' full pay and 5 months' half pay
After 5 years' service	6 months' full pay and 6 months' half pay
Note 1: Entitlement is based on continuous service.	