



Sickness and Absence Policy

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1. Purpose and scope

ReFocus aims to support employee health, maintain safe and effective staffing and manage sickness absence fairly, consistently and without unlawful discrimination. The policy applies to employees directly employed by ReFocus. Agency workers, contractors and volunteers should follow their own employer's arrangements and ReFocus reporting and safeguarding requirements while on site.

This policy is non-contractual unless an employment contract expressly states otherwise. Contractual and occupational sick-pay entitlements are determined by the employee's contract and applicable terms. ReFocus may adapt timescales or stages where reasonable, while maintaining procedural fairness.

2. Legal framework and principles

This policy reflects the Employment Rights Act 1996, Employment Rights Act 2025 provisions in force by September 2026, Equality Act 2010, Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Statutory Sick Pay legislation, Employment Relations Act 1999, Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR, Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, RIDDOR 2013 and current ACAS, HSE and DfE guidance where relevant.

- Sickness will be managed sensitively and on the facts of the individual case.
- Attendance trigger points prompt a review; they do not automatically result in a warning or sanction.
- Pregnancy-related sickness and statutory family leave will not count towards attendance triggers. Disability-related absence and other exceptional circumstances will be considered individually and triggers may be adjusted as a reasonable adjustment.
- Managers will seek to understand possible work-related causes and consider support, medical advice and reasonable adjustments before formal action.
- Deliberate dishonesty or failure to follow reporting rules without good reason may be considered under the disciplinary procedure, separately from genuine ill health.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 Headteacher and designated HR lead

The Headteacher is responsible for consistent implementation. The designated HR lead will advise managers, support formal processes, liaise with payroll and occupational health and maintain appropriate records. The proprietor will ensure suitable governance and delegated authority for any dismissal and appeal.

3.2 Line managers

- maintain reasonable and supportive contact, protect confidentiality and complete return-to-work discussions
- identify patterns, work-related factors and possible disability or pregnancy issues without making assumptions
- consider adjustments, occupational-health or other medical advice and support plans
- keep factual records and escalate concerns consistently under this policy.

3.3 Employees

- follow the reporting and certification arrangements and keep the school reasonably informed
- engage with return-to-work and review processes and provide relevant evidence or consent for medical advice where reasonably requested
- tell the manager about work or safety factors requiring attention; employees are not required to disclose more medical detail than is reasonably necessary
- participate in agreed support and reasonable-adjustment reviews.

4. Reporting and certification

4.1 First day and continuing absence

An employee who cannot attend work must personally telephone their line manager, or the main office if the manager is unavailable, as soon as reasonably practicable and normally no later than one hour before their working day. Email or text alone should be used only where agreed or where speaking is not reasonably possible. If the employee is too unwell, another person may report on their behalf.

The employee should give the general reason for absence, likely duration, contact details and any urgent operational or safety information. The manager and employee will agree proportionate contact. Contact is for welfare, planning and return-to-work support; an unwell employee will not normally be expected to undertake work.

Absence for up to seven calendar days may be self-certified. For absence lasting more than seven calendar days, the employee must provide a fit note as soon as reasonably practicable and continuous fit notes thereafter. ReFocus may accept other appropriate evidence where obtaining a fit note is delayed or impracticable.

Where a fit note says the employee may be fit for work, ReFocus will discuss the suggested adjustments. If safe and reasonable arrangements cannot be made, the employee will remain on sick leave and the position will be reviewed.

4.2 Illness at work and unauthorised absence

An employee becoming unwell at work should inform their manager. ReFocus will arrange safe departure or medical assistance where necessary. If an employee does not attend and no report is received, the manager will make reasonable welfare contact. Continued absence without explanation may be unpaid and managed under the disciplinary procedure, but safeguarding, health and other reasonable explanations will be considered first.

5. Sick pay

5.1 Statutory Sick Pay

For sickness absences beginning on or after 6 April 2026, Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is available to eligible employees regardless of earnings and is payable from the first full qualifying day of sickness. It is paid for up to 28 weeks at 80% of average weekly earnings or the applicable statutory weekly flat rate, whichever is lower. Transitional rules may apply to absence beginning before 6 April 2026. Payroll will apply current legislation and rates.

5.2 Occupational sick pay and pensions

Any occupational sick pay is governed by the employee's contract and applicable scheme. Pension contributions during paid sickness absence will follow the relevant pension scheme rules. Employees will be informed promptly of any material change to pay.

5.3 Third-party injury

An employee should tell the designated HR lead if absence results from an incident for which compensation may be claimed. ReFocus will seek recovery or repayment only where an express contractual right applies and after taking appropriate advice. The employee will not be required to compromise their own claim.

6. Supporting a return to work

6.1 Return-to-work discussion

The line manager will hold a proportionate return-to-work discussion after each sickness absence, normally on the first day back. It will confirm fitness to return, the reason and dates of absence, any work-related cause, support or adjustment required, relevant trigger information and any follow-up. Appendix A may be used. It is not a disciplinary meeting.

6.2 Phased return

A phased return may adjust hours, duties, location, workload or support for a defined period. It will be individually agreed, risk assessed where necessary and recorded using Appendix C. It will normally be reviewed at least weekly. Pay will be confirmed in writing before the arrangement begins, taking account of contractual sick pay, SSP, hours worked and whether the arrangement is a reasonable adjustment. No automatic period of full pay is created by this policy.

7. Equality, pregnancy and treatment-related absence

7.1 Disability and reasonable adjustments

ReFocus will make reasonable adjustments where the Equality Act duty applies and will keep them under review. Adjustments may include duties, hours, equipment, location, communication, a phased return, disability leave or adjusted attendance triggers. Disability-related appointments and absence will be considered individually; there is no fixed numerical limit in this policy. Medical or occupational-health advice may be sought with the employee's informed consent where appropriate.

7.2 Pregnancy-related sickness

Pregnancy-related sickness will be recorded separately and excluded from attendance triggers and formal attendance notifications. The employee will receive their usual sick-pay entitlement. If pregnancy-related sickness begins during the four weeks before the expected week of childbirth, maternity leave may start automatically in accordance with statutory rules. Evidence will be requested only where reasonably necessary and the school will consider pregnancy health-and-safety adjustments.

7.3 Gender reassignment, fertility treatment and other treatment

An employee will not be treated less favourably for absence connected with gender reassignment than they would be for absence caused by sickness or injury. Fertility-treatment and other sensitive medical information will be handled confidentially. There is no general statutory right to paid IVF appointments before pregnancy, but ReFocus will consider reasonable flexibility, contractual rights, equality implications and medical evidence. Pregnancy protections apply once the employee is pregnant.

7.4 Medical appointments and elective treatment

Routine appointments should be arranged outside working hours where reasonably possible. Necessary specialist, disability-related, pregnancy or urgent appointments will be considered individually. Evidence of the appointment may be requested without requiring unnecessary clinical detail. If an employee is medically unfit for work following surgery or treatment, the normal sickness procedure will generally apply; managers will not determine clinical necessity themselves.

7.5 Stress and mental health

Mental and physical ill health will be treated consistently. Where stress or illness may be work-related, the manager will investigate sensitively, complete an individual stress or health-and-safety risk assessment where appropriate, address identified causes and consider workload, supervision, counselling, occupational health and reasonable adjustments. A grievance may be raised separately where required.

8. Managing attendance concerns

8.1 Review indicators

A review will normally be considered where, in a rolling 12-month period, an employee has four separate sickness absences totalling six working days, or nine working days in total, or where a pattern or other concern is identified. The manager will first check accuracy and consider pregnancy, disability, work-related injury, statutory leave, bereavement and other exceptional circumstances. Managers may decide that no further action is appropriate.

8.2 Informal attendance review

The manager will meet the employee to understand the absence, wellbeing, likely future attendance, work-related factors, treatment, support and possible adjustments. Medical or occupational-health advice may be agreed. A written support and review plan may set a reasonable review period and expectations. Appendix B may be used.

8.3 Formal attendance review

If concerns remain following appropriate informal support, the employee may be invited to a formal review with normally five working days' written notice. The invitation will explain the concerns, evidence, possible outcomes and right to be accompanied. The meeting will consider current evidence, adjustments, support and the impact on the school.

- Possible outcomes include no action, further support or medical advice, an extended review period, an attendance notification or progression to a final review.
- An attendance notification will state the required improvement, support, review period, duration on file and possible next stage. It is not a disciplinary warning.
- A final attendance review may recommend an ill-health capability hearing only after the relevant alternatives and adjustments have been explored.

9. Long-term sickness and ill-health capability

- Long-term sickness is normally an absence of four weeks or more. The timing and frequency of welfare and review meetings will reflect the prognosis, treatment and employee's circumstances rather than fixed automatic intervals. ReFocus will normally seek occupational-health or other current medical advice, with informed consent, and will give the employee an opportunity to comment on it.
- Reviews will consider prognosis, likely return date, treatment, safe adjustments, phased return, alternative duties or suitable vacancies, retraining, ill-health retirement where applicable and operational impact.
- Where consent to medical advice is withheld, ReFocus may make a decision using the information reasonably available after explaining the possible implications.
- Dismissal on capability grounds will be considered only when consultation is meaningful, current evidence has been considered and reasonable adjustments and suitable alternatives have been exhausted or are not viable.

10. Formal meetings, decisions and appeals

10.1 Long-term sickness and ill-health capability hearing

A long-term sickness and ill-health capability hearing will be conducted by the proprietor or a person/panel with delegated authority who has not made the recommendation. The employee will normally receive at least five working days' written notice, the evidence and confirmation that dismissal is a possible outcome. They may attend, submit written evidence or, where health prevents attendance, request a reasonable alternative such as remote attendance, postponement or representation.

Possible outcomes include further review, a return-to-work or redeployment plan, other reasonable action, ill-health retirement where the scheme permits, or dismissal with contractual or statutory notice and outstanding entitlements. The reasoned decision will normally be confirmed within five working days.

10.2 Accompaniment

ReFocus permits an employee to be accompanied at formal meetings and appeals by a workplace colleague or trade-union representative. This is a policy right and does not imply that every meeting carries a separate statutory right. A reasonable request for another companion will be considered as an adjustment or where it would help the employee participate fairly.

10.3 Appeal

An employee may appeal an attendance notification, final notification or dismissal in writing within five working days, stating the grounds. The appeal will be heard without unreasonable delay by a person or panel not previously involved and with authority to change the outcome. The employee may be accompanied. The appeal decision will be final and normally confirmed within five working days.

11. Other health- and absence-related provisions

11.1 Work-related injury and RIDDOR

Work-related injury or illness must be reported promptly under the Health and Safety Policy. The designated health-and-safety lead will determine whether the incident is reportable under RIDDOR; not every workplace injury or illness is reportable. Absence caused by work will be considered sensitively when applying review indicators.

11.2 Early career teacher induction

Independent schools are not required to offer statutory ECT induction. Where ReFocus chooses to do so, it will comply with the 2012 Regulations and June 2026 statutory guidance. An ECT's induction is normally extended when non-exempt absence reaches 30 days in an induction year. Maternity, paternity, adoption, shared-parental, parental-bereavement, carer's and neonatal-care leave are treated under the statutory-leave rules, under which the ECT may choose whether to extend induction. The appropriate body will be notified as required.

11.3 Bereavement, compassionate leave and pregnancy loss

Requests for bereavement or compassionate leave will be considered sensitively under the Special Leave arrangements, taking account of statutory parental-bereavement rights and the individual circumstances. A miscarriage before 24 weeks is not currently covered by statutory parental-bereavement leave, although compassionate or sickness leave and support may apply. Wider statutory bereavement leave, including pregnancy loss, is expected during 2027 and is not stated as an existing September 2026 entitlement; this section will be reviewed when commencement details are final.

11.4 Jury service, magistrates and trade-union duties

Employees must notify ReFocus promptly of a jury summons. ReFocus may ask the employee to apply for deferral where operational impact is serious but cannot require them to ignore a summons. Pay and court allowances will follow the employee's terms and confirmed school arrangements. Reasonable time off for magistrate duties and statutory time off for recognised trade-union duties will be provided in accordance with the law; whether time is paid will depend on the applicable right and school arrangements.

12. Confidentiality, records and review

Health information is special-category personal data. ReFocus will identify an appropriate lawful basis and condition, minimise information, restrict access, store it securely and use it only for legitimate employment, safety, equality and legal purposes. Basic absence records and detailed medical evidence will be separated where practicable and retained in accordance with the Records Retention Schedule rather than automatically for one blanket period. The Staff Privacy Notice explains employee rights.

The Headteacher will review this policy annually and sooner following material legal change or identified procedural learning. The policy must also be reviewed when the 2027 statutory bereavement provisions are introduced.

Related documents

- Staff Code of Conduct and Staff Handbook
- Data Protection Policy, Staff Privacy Notice and Records Retention Schedule
- Health and Safety Policy and First Aid Policy
- Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures
- Equality, reasonable-adjustment and Staff Wellbeing arrangements
- Family Leave and Special Leave arrangements
- ECT Induction Policy, where statutory induction is offered.

Appendix A: Return-to-work discussion form

Complete proportionately. Do not record unnecessary diagnostic or clinical detail.

Employee name	
Role / manager	
Absence dates	From: To: Working days:
General reason for absence	
Self-certificate / fit note	☐ Self-certified ☐ Fit note received ☐ Not required
Fit to resume normal duties?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ With agreed support
Work-related factor identified?	☐ No ☐ Yes – details/action below
Pregnancy- or disability-related?	☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Employee prefers to discuss privately with HR
Support or adjustment requested	
Attendance review indicator reached?	☐ No ☐ Yes – individual circumstances considered below
Agreed actions and review date	
Employee comments	
Signatures	Employee: _____ Manager: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Attendance support and review plan

Employee / role	
Manager / meeting date	
Meeting stage	☐ Informal review ☐ Formal review ☐ Final review
Companion, if applicable	
Absence record considered	
Excluded/adjusted absences	Pregnancy, disability adjustment, statutory leave, work-related or exceptional circumstances considered:
Employee's explanation and outlook	
Medical / occupational-health advice	
Work-related factors and risk assessment	
Reasonable adjustments considered	
Support and agreed action	
Attendance expectation	
Review period and review date	
Possible next stage explained	
Employee comments	
Outcome confirmed by	Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Phased return-to-work plan

Complete before the phased return begins and review at the intervals agreed. Confirm pay separately in writing.

Employee / role	
Manager	
Plan start and end dates	
Medical or occupational-health advice	
Normal hours and duties	
Temporary adjustments	Hours, duties, location, workload, equipment, supervision or breaks:
Safety or wellbeing controls	
Pay arrangement confirmed separately	☐ Yes Date confirmed: _____
Review frequency	
If the plan is not working	Contact / escalation arrangements:
Final review and next steps	
Agreement	Employee: _____ Manager: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Phased return-to-work plan — weekly schedule

Use this continuation sheet to record and review the agreed phased-return arrangements.

Weekly schedule

Week	Days / hours	Location	Duties and adjustments	Review / outcome
1				
2				

3				
4				