

A guide for all teachers
managing attendance at work



Attendance Matters
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Inverclyde
council

A guide for teachers: managing attendance at work

Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to ensure employees are aware of Inverclyde Council's approach to Managing Attendance which is designed to provide support for employees who are ill and to improve attendance levels across the council.

Absence levels are a key performance indicator used to compare councils across Scotland. Inverclyde Council aspires to be amongst the best performing Councils and recognises the associated benefits and the importance of staff health and welfare.

This booklet concentrates on:

- Why high attendance levels are so important
- The absence reporting procedures you must follow
- Support and advice available to you during periods of illness
- How your attendance is monitored
- How our target of less than 9 days absence per year (pro rata for part time employees) can be achieved

The importance of good attendance

Inverclyde Council is committed to providing quality, effective services to all its customers and citizens. As part of this aim it is essential that all employees be committed to maintaining maximum levels of attendance. High levels of attendance lead to higher levels of service provision and heightened morale among colleagues.

You have an important part to play in achieving good attendance levels by:

- Achieving maximum attendance at work whenever possible
- Following the correct notification and certification procedures if you are ill
- Minimising the length of any absence
- Participating in meetings, occupational health reviews, and 'return to work' discussions

Implications of poor attendance

The average absence level across the council for 2015/16 was 8.58 days per employee.

This amounts to approx. 31,400 working days lost amongst staff in 2015/16.

This indicates there were approx. 120 full time employees off every working day.

These lost days across the council have a direct impact on service provision and morale.

Absence reporting

You and your head teacher or nominated representative must keep in regular contact throughout periods of absence. There is a responsibility on both equally to ensure contact is maintained.

Inverclyde Council wishes to ensure that you maintain regular contact with your head teacher or nominated representative, and have access to appropriate advice and assistance, during any periods of illness.

Notification and certification of absence

As a contracted employee you have an obligation to attend work. This section covers the steps you must take during periods of sickness absence. As an employee you must fulfil all of these requirements or you may lose entitlement to occupational sick pay and may be requested to formally account for your actions.

As per section 6.26 of the SNCT handbook, to receive sickness allowance a teacher must meet the requirements detailed in paragraphs 6.27 to 6.32, noted below:

- The employee must notify the school/council as soon as is practicable. If the employee is unable to do so due to illness, some other person may act on his/her behalf. The employee should, if possible, indicate the date of return to work
- Where the absence continues to a fourth day further notification, as above, contact should be made to the school/council
- Where the absence period is 4 to 7 days the employee will complete a self-certification form on return to work

- Where the absence extends beyond 7 days of sickness, the employee will submit a medical certificate to the school to cover absence beyond the 7 days
- In addition, a self-certification form to cover the first 7 days of absence should be completed and returned, following issue by the council;
- Where an employee has been absent for more than 7 days, the director of education, or equivalent, may require him/her to produce additional evidence of continued incapacity or submit to a medical examination by a medical officer appointed by the council
- Where an employee fails to comply with the notification and certification requirements, in respect of any day of sickness entitlement, the sickness allowance will cease for that day, unless there is an acceptable reason provided for this failure

If a teacher's fit note expires while the school is closed the fit note should be sent to a school business co-ordinator, via email to **admin.educationhq@inverclyde.gov.uk** or by post to **Education Service HQ, Inverclyde Council, Wallace Place, Greenock, Inverclyde PA15 1JB**

PLEASE ENSURE YOU HAVE A NOTE OF YOUR HEAD TEACHER'S OR NOMINATED REPRESENTATIVE DIRECT TELEPHONE NUMBER AVAILABLE AT ALL TIMES.

Return to work interview

An essential element of Inverclyde Council's Managing Attendance Policy is the return to work interview with your head teacher or nominated representative. Following each absence from work due to sickness, your head teacher or nominated representative will conduct an informal return to work interview. Ideally this takes place on the day of return and before you start to work.

The purpose of the return to work interview is to:

- Consider reason for absence
- Consider attendance record
- Listen to any concerns you may have
- Respond to any help you may request
- Ensure certification requirements are satisfied
- Update on work related matters
- Take appropriate action
- Raise profile of attendance management

You can expect your head teacher or nominated representative to enquire about the reason for absence, outlining your current attendance level and posing questions related to the points above. Providing as much information as possible will assist your head teacher or nominated representative to consider their next steps based on the information available to them.

Monitoring and recording of sickness absence

It is the responsibility of head teacher or nominated representative's to ensure that their employees' absences are recorded and monitored on an ongoing basis. To assist all employees to achieve the council's target for absence of less than 9 days absence per year (pro-rata for part time employees) trigger points have been established:

- 4 separate episodes of absence or more in a 12 month period
- 6 days of absence or more in a 12 month period
- 4 weeks of absence or more
- An absence due to a musculoskeletal condition, or a mental health problem (e.g. stress anxiety, depression)

These trigger points are designed to encourage early intervention and investigation into the causes of absence and ill health. Appropriate communication will ensure that absences do not drift along without being supported by a plan of action which is clearly developed on a case by case basis.

Short term persistent absence

If you are often absent from work for short periods you should anticipate your head teacher or nominated representative conducting a more thorough discussion about your attendance record during your return to work interview. This could result in procedures being instigated for dealing with poor attendance. Your head teacher or nominated representative has authority to issue you with an initial letter of concern as a means of providing an opportunity for you to improve your attendance without the requirement to take disciplinary action. This letter will remain live on your personal file for 3 months whilst improvement is sought. Failure to improve may result in disciplinary proceedings.

Long term absence

If you are off work on a long term basis an appropriate frequency and method of contact will be agreed between you and your head teacher or nominated representative. It is likely that you will meet with or speak with your head teacher or nominated representative on a regular basis to keep up to date with progress and identify areas for support.

Should the cause of your absence dictate that:

- You are likely to be off work for a long time
- You are unlikely to return to your own post

Your head teacher or nominated representative, in conjunction with human resources, will discuss with you any appropriate action that may be taken.

Various options may be available including:

- Changing some elements of your job to allow a return to work where possible
- Making adjustments to your working hours, working pattern, or location to allow you to make a contribution to work
- Looking for alternative employment to allow you to return to work
- Ill health retirement
- Termination on grounds of capability due to ill health

This list is not exhaustive, may be subject to a medical opinion, and is underpinned by the belief that it is in the interests of both the employee and the council that, where appropriate, the length of the absence is minimised.

Independent medical assessment

As a result of persistent short term absence, or any episode of long term absence, you may be required to attend a medical examination with the council's occupational health advisor. This referral is a contractual obligation and is designed to provide guidance on the impact of your ill health on your ability to undertake your duties and to determine what measures can be put in place to support you. Such referrals are considered at various stages of an absence dependent on the circumstances.

Occupational health may seek an opinion from your own GP which requires your agreement by signing a mandate. Should agreement not be reached then decisions will be made with reference to the information available.

Failure to attend may result in occupational sick pay being stopped.

Employees who are off sick should be available to attend any occupational health appointments made for them and if they are unable to they must contact their head teacher or nominated representative to inform them.

In most cases there is usually an agreement between the employee's GP and the occupational health advisor and cases where there is disagreement about an employee being fit or not fit for work tend to be the exception.

The council's occupational health advisor will fully consider the employees remit, any reasonable adjustments, lighter duties and whether the employee may be fit to return to work in some capacity. The occupational health advisor's medical opinion will form a significant part of the council approach in such cases taking into account all of the circumstances including where any specialist medical information has been provided by an employee together with any advice provided by the GP on the employees fit note.

Employees citing work related stress as the reason for absence maybe asked to complete a stress questionnaire.

Employees who have a disability that can make work challenging may be able to gain assistance from the access to work scheme. This scheme provides practical advice and support to help employees to overcome work-related obstacles. Contact details for access to work can be found at the back of this booklet.

Winding down is a phased retirement option which offers those members approaching their retirement age, the opportunity to continue in employment on a part-time basis whilst protecting their overall final retirement pension entitlement. Please refer to the council's Pension and Retirement Policy for further details on eligibility.

Equality Act (2010)

The council will ensure that in the event of an employee being considered to have a protected characteristic as described by the Equality Act (2010), and are unable to satisfactorily perform their duties due to this, options such as the re-allocation of duties, retraining, redeployment or the making of reasonable adjustments will be fully explored and discounted as being impracticable before considerations are given to the options of early retirement or dismissal on the grounds of incapacity. This is in line with the councils Equal Opportunities Policy.

Occupational sick pay entitlement

Entitlement to occupational sick pay (OSP) depends on length of continuous service as defined in the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers as follows:

Service at first day of sickness	Full Allowance	Half Allowance
Less than 18 weeks	Nil	Nil
Over 18 weeks but less than 1 year	1 month	1 month
1 year but less than 2 years	2 months	2 months
2 years but less than 3 years	4 months	4 months
3 years but less than 5 years	5 months	5 months
5 years or more	6 months	6 months

Abuse of sickness provisions

It is important for you to know that Inverclyde Council consider all absences as genuine until such time as details emerge which demonstrate the contrary. Employees who abuse the generous sickness absence provisions will be requested to account for their actions and may be subject to the disciplinary process and the occupational sick pay element of the last incident of absence which led to the hearing may be recovered from an employee's next pay normally up to a maximum of 5 days. Recovery of occupational sick pay will be considered on a case by case basis. Wherever possible employees should avoid any actions deemed detrimental to their health/recovery.

Other absences

Annual leave

The annual leave entitlement of a teacher or music instructor shall be the balance of days beyond the working year (as set out in Section 3 (working week and working year) paragraph 3.2 of SNCT) and excluding Saturdays and Sundays. Public holidays are included in this entitlement. A teacher or music instructor working for an entire school session will accrue a full leave entitlement.

Special leave

Inverclyde Council are justifiably proud of the range of options available to our employees to allow a proper work life balance to be achieved for further, refer to the Family Friendly and Work Life Balance Policy.

Medical appointment

Medical appointments will not be considered as sickness absence, however the following guidance applies:

Doctor/dentist or similar appointments

These types of appointments should be made, where possible in your own time. Where this is not possible we request that they be made either at the beginning or towards the end of your shift to avoid disruption to the working day.

Hospital/specialist or similar appointments

We appreciate that, on most occasions, hospital type appointments cannot be organised by the employee, and that they have to accept allocated appointments. As such, time off to attend such appointments will be granted by the council on the provision that evidence of an appointment card/letter is provided to your head teacher or nominated representative detailing the date and time of the appointment.

Supporting good health at work

The Council is committed to encouraging healthy working lives, and as such, provides a number of support mechanisms for staff experiencing ill health or challenges which may affect their ability to attend work or provide an effective service.

Some of these are outlined below, the list is not exhaustive. If you feel the council can be of any assistance to you by providing access to any of these services, please speak to your head teacher or nominated representative in the first instance:

- Mental health first aid training
- Anti-suicide prevention training
- Stress management classes
- Self-harm awareness course
- Motivational courses
- Assertiveness courses
- Access to independent counselling services
- Access to physiotherapy
- Access to an occupational nurse
- Medical assessments
- Occupational health drop in service

Each of the above is subject to certain provisions, details of which can be obtained from your head teacher, nominated representative or human resources. Head teachers or nominated representative should also consider whether any of these courses would be beneficial to their employees.

Your role as an employee

- Follow correct notification procedure
- Agree and maintain regular contact as outlined on page 3
- Provide appropriate and timely certification of absence
- Attend review meetings as requested by the head teacher, nominated representative or human resources
- Attend appointments with the occupational health advisor as requested by your head teacher or human resources
- Take responsibility for personal level of attendance at work
- Ensure you have contact numbers for your head teacher or nominated representative available at home

Useful contacts

Stepwell Street Management

01475 724038

Breathing Space

0800 83 85 87

Samaritans

116 123

Inverclyde Council Domestic Abuse

01475 781689

Inverclyde Women's Aid

01475 888505

Victim Support

01475 787300

Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)

01475 784555

Childline

0800 11 11

Education Support Partnership

08000 56 25 61

Inverclyde Physiotherapy (Occupational Health)

01475 725285

Human Resources

01475 712740

Access to Work

0141 950 5327

Your Voice

01475 728628

