THAMESFIELD COLLEGE

CHANGING LIVES | CREATING FUTURES

Managing Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure

For implementation from September 2026

Prepared for Thamesfield College

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Managing Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure

Changing Lives | Creating Futures

Policy statement
Thamesfield College will manage sickness absence fairly, consistently and without unnecessary delay, while supporting employee health, making reasonable adjustments and maintaining safe and effective provision for pupils.

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1 Purpose and scope

This policy explains how Thamesfield College reports, records, supports and manages sickness absence. It combines the school's local arrangements with Surrey County Council's absence-management framework for maintained schools. It should be read with the employee's contract and the applicable Surrey sick-pay, leave, pension and employment arrangements.

It applies to teaching and support staff employed to work at Thamesfield College. It covers short-term and long-term sickness absence, contact during absence, return to work, medical advice, reasonable adjustments and the formal process that may ultimately lead to dismissal on capability grounds. It is non-contractual and may be amended following consultation and approval.

Poor performance while an employee is fit for work is considered under Policy 0007B. Misconduct, dishonesty about sickness, unauthorised absence or unreasonable failure to follow reporting arrangements may be considered under Policy 0007A. The correct route will be decided on the facts with advice from the school's HR provider.

2 Principles

- Sickness absence will be managed sensitively, consistently and promptly, with the employee's health and dignity treated seriously.
- The school will maintain reasonable contact, seek appropriate medical advice and consider support that may help an employee return to work and remain at work.
- Review points begin a conversation; they do not produce an automatic warning or dismissal.
- Pregnancy-related absence and agreed disability leave will not count towards formal review points. Disability-related, long-term-condition and menopause-related absence will be considered individually and review points adjusted where reasonable.
- Employees will receive clear information, a reasonable opportunity to respond and the right to be accompanied at formal meetings and appeals.
- Any decision will take account of current medical evidence, adjustments, the employee's circumstances, the operational effect of absence and the likelihood of a sustainable return.
- Dismissal is a final option after a fair process and consideration of reasonable alternatives.

3 Roles and decision making

Role	Main responsibility
Management Committee	Approves and monitors the policy. It appoints an uninvolved panel for an absence capability hearing where dismissal may be an outcome and a separate uninvolved panel for any dismissal appeal.
Chair of the Management Committee	Steve Price receives notification of the Headteacher's sickness absence and manages any formal process concerning the Headteacher with Surrey and professional HR advice.
Headteacher	Nick Elliott ensures fair and consistent application, maintains strategic oversight and will normally lead Formal Stage 2 where he has not had an incompatible prior role.
Deputy Headteacher	Dan Gunn receives first-day sickness calls and will normally lead Formal Stage 1 or appoint an appropriate manager.
Line manager or SLT	Maintains appropriate contact, conducts return-to-work discussions, identifies support or adjustments, monitors attendance and raises concerns promptly.

Role	Main responsibility
School Business Manager	Sarah Huff records absence on Arbor and through payroll, monitors certification and sick-pay administration, stores records securely, and coordinates, authorises and submits Occupational Health referrals.
Employee	Reports absence correctly, provides fit notes, maintains agreed contact, attends appropriate meetings and medical appointments, provides relevant information and engages with reasonable support and return arrangements.
Surrey County Council and HR adviser	Provide employer and professional advice. Surrey will be invited to any hearing where dismissal may be an outcome and will implement a dismissal determination in accordance with the statutory arrangements.

4 Reporting sickness absence

4.1 First day notification

An employee who is unable to work because of sickness or injury must make a voice call to Dan Gunn on 07734 695303 by 7.30am on the first day of absence. A text, email, social-media message or voicemail alone does not meet this requirement. The employee must give a general reason for absence, the likely duration and any urgent work information that the school needs. Detailed medical information need not be given on the initial call.

Where the employee genuinely cannot call personally, for example because they have been admitted to hospital, another person may make the call. The employee must contact Dan as soon as reasonably able. The Headteacher must notify Steve Price and Sarah Huff; the Chair will agree continuing contact arrangements.

4.2 Continuing updates

The employee must update Dan on days three and five and weekly thereafter unless a different frequency is agreed. The employee must also report a material change in diagnosis, expected duration, fitness for work or contact details without waiting for the next scheduled update.

4.3 Becoming unwell at work

An employee who becomes unwell during the working day must inform their line manager or a member of SLT and the school office before leaving. The office will tell Sarah so that the absence is recorded correctly. Where urgent medical attention is required, the First Aid and Health and Safety procedures apply.

4.4 Recording and certification

Sarah will record sickness absence on Arbor and through payroll using the correct category. The employee must provide a fit note for an absence lasting more than seven consecutive calendar days, including non-working days, and must keep the whole continuing absence covered. A fit note stating that the employee may be fit for work will be discussed promptly before any return.

Where intermittent short-term sickness exceeds 15 working days in a rolling 12-month period, the school may require a fit note from the first day of a subsequent absence. Any reasonable fee incurred solely because the school has imposed this additional requirement will be reimbursed in accordance with Surrey arrangements. Late or missing certification may affect sick pay.

5 Medical evidence and Occupational Health

Occupational Health advice may be sought to understand fitness for work, likely duration, the effect of a condition, workplace barriers, adjustments, rehabilitation, redeployment or ill-health retirement. A referral will be considered

particularly where absence is linked to stress or depression, is expected to reach 28 calendar days, follows a significant workplace accident, raises safety concerns or a fit note recommends changes that need specialist advice.

Sarah coordinates, authorises and submits all Occupational Health referrals. The referring manager will discuss the reasons and questions with the employee. Employees are expected to attend reasonable Occupational Health appointments and to cooperate with requests for relevant medical evidence. Consent is required before an Occupational Health report is released to the school. Where consent is withheld or evidence is unavailable, the school may make a decision using the information reasonably available after explaining this to the employee.

Where a report from the employee's treating practitioner is required, the employee will be informed of their rights under the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988. Up-to-date Occupational Health advice will normally be obtained before an absence capability hearing.

6 Contact during sickness absence

Regular contact is part of absence management. It allows the school to understand progress, explain sick-pay or procedural information, keep the employee appropriately connected with work and plan support or a return. Being signed off does not prevent reasonable contact from the school.

For short-term absence, the employee must follow the day three, day five and weekly update requirements. Once absence is likely to reach 28 calendar days, the line manager and employee will agree a reasonable method and frequency of contact, normally at least fortnightly unless the circumstances justify another arrangement. Contact may be by telephone, online meeting or an agreed face-to-face meeting. A home visit will take place only by prior agreement.

The employee must engage with agreed contact and provide reasonable updates about likely duration and fitness for work. The school will take account of the condition and may agree contact through a nominated person temporarily. If contact becomes difficult, both parties should explain this and agree a workable alternative. Persistent failure to engage without good reason may lead to decisions being taken on the available evidence and, where appropriate, may be treated as unauthorised absence or a conduct matter.

7 Returning to work

A private return-to-work check will take place after every sickness absence, normally on the first day back or as soon as practicable. It will confirm that the employee is fit to return, check the recorded reason and dates, identify any support or adjustment, confirm whether medical advice is needed and update the employee on relevant work matters.

A fuller recorded return-to-work discussion will take place after an absence of more than three working days, where a review point is approaching or has been reached, or where the reason or pattern gives cause for concern. The record will be shared with the employee and sent to Sarah for secure storage. After long-term absence, the discussion should take place before return where practicable so that adjustments can be arranged.

A return before the expiry of a fit note is permitted if the employee is well enough and the return is safe. The school may seek further advice where there is uncertainty about safety, proposed restrictions or sustainable fitness for the role.

8 Short term sickness absence

Short-term sickness absence normally means one or more periods lasting between one and 27 calendar days. The line manager will consider the overall level, frequency and pattern rather than treating every absence in the same way.

8.1 Review points

Review point	Normal threshold
Working days	10 working days or more across three or more occasions in a rolling 12-month period
Occasions	More than four separate occasions totalling six working days or more in a rolling 12-month period
Pattern	Any concerning level or pattern, including repeated Monday or Friday absence or absence around school closure, annual leave or another recurring event

Thresholds will be pro-rated where appropriate for part-time or irregular working arrangements. They may be adjusted where reasonable for disability-related, long-term-condition or menopause-related absence. Pregnancy-related sickness, disability leave, and absence connected with agreed fertility or transitioning treatment do not count towards the thresholds. The manager will also consider whether an infectious illness was acquired during a workplace outbreak.

8.2 Informal sickness absence discussion

Before formal action, the line manager will normally meet the employee privately to discuss the absences, any underlying factor, relevant equality considerations, support, adjustments and whether Occupational Health advice would help. The discussion and any agreed review period will be confirmed in writing. A formal meeting may be arranged without an informal review where the level or pattern warrants this and HR advice supports the decision.

9 Formal short term procedure

The employee will receive at least five working days' written notice of each formal meeting, the purpose and possible outcomes, the relevant attendance information and the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or workplace colleague. If the companion cannot attend, a reasonable alternative within five working days of the original date will be offered.

Stage	When it applies	Normal lead	Possible outcome
Informal review	A concerning level or pattern, including approaching a trigger	Line manager	Support, adjustments, Occupational Health advice and a review period
Formal Stage 1	A trigger is reached or informal support has not resolved the concern	Dan Gunn or another appropriate senior manager	No further action, or an attendance plan normally lasting up to three months and a notice to improve
Formal Stage 2	Attendance has not improved sufficiently during Stage 1	Nick Elliott or another uninvolved senior person	No further action, further medical advice, or a final improvement period normally lasting up to one month
Capability hearing	Attendance remains unsatisfactory or long-term medical evidence indicates no foreseeable sustainable return	Uninvolved Management Committee panel	Further support, continued absence, adjustment, redeployment, ill-health retirement steps or dismissal
Appeal	The employee appeals a notice or dismissal	Separate uninvolved person or Management Committee panel	Uphold, revoke or vary the decision without increasing the sanction

9.1 Formal Stage 1

Dan Gunn or another appropriate senior manager will review the attendance record, previous support, the employee's explanation, medical information and any equality or workplace factors. The outcome may be no further formal action, further support or an attendance improvement plan. The improvement period will normally last no more than three months, but may be extended where medical evidence, an agreed adjustment or another sound reason supports this.

The written outcome will normally be issued within five working days. Where a plan is set, it will state the improvement required, support and adjustments, monitoring arrangements, review date and the possible move to Stage 2. It will constitute a notice to improve, live for 12 months from the end of the improvement period. A Stage 1 review will decide whether attendance is satisfactory, whether an extension is justified or whether Stage 2 is required.

9.2 Formal Stage 2

Nick Elliott or another uninvolved senior person will normally lead Stage 2. The meeting will review the continuing concern and whether anything further can reasonably support improvement. Outcomes may include no further formal action, an updated Occupational Health referral, or a final improvement period normally lasting up to one month. A longer period may be agreed where evidence or an adjustment justifies it.

The written outcome will normally be issued within five working days and will explain that insufficient improvement may lead to an absence capability hearing at which dismissal is a possible outcome. A final notice to improve will remain live for 12 months. The Stage 2 review will determine whether attendance is satisfactory, a short extension is justified or the case should proceed to a hearing.

9.3 Recurrence during a live notice

If attendance again causes concern while a notice remains live, the school may resume at the next formal stage or allow a further improvement period, depending on the circumstances and HR advice. No automatic outcome follows from a further absence.

10 Long term sickness absence

Long-term sickness absence means a continuous absence of at least 28 calendar days. A short or unsuccessful return will not necessarily require the process to restart. The purpose is to support rehabilitation and a sustainable return while keeping the operational position under review.

10.1 Formal Stage 1 at four weeks

At or around four weeks, or earlier where the likely duration is already known, Dan Gunn, the employee's line manager or another appropriate senior manager will hold a Stage 1 meeting. It will consider current health and prognosis, medical evidence, sick pay, contact arrangements, support, adjustments and possible return arrangements. The outcome will be confirmed within five working days. The employee will be told that Stage 2 will be arranged if they remain unable to return within three months.

10.2 Formal Stage 2 from three months

Once the employee has been absent for three months, or it is known that the absence will last that long, Nick Elliott or another uninvolved senior person will hold Stage 2. Further Stage 2 reviews will normally take place every two to three months until the employee returns, medical evidence indicates that a foreseeable sustainable return or effective fulfilment of the role is unlikely, or the absence reaches 12 months.

Each review will consider updated medical advice, likely return, adjustments, phased return, temporary or permanent redeployment, ill-health retirement where relevant, support and the effect of continuing absence. The discussion and agreed action will be confirmed within five working days. Where the case may progress to a hearing, the employee will be warned that dismissal is a possible outcome.

10.3 Earlier hearing

The school may move to an absence capability hearing earlier, including as the first formal meeting, only in limited circumstances and with HR advice, for example where current Occupational Health evidence indicates no return in the reasonable and foreseeable future. The employee will still receive the evidence, notice, accompaniment right and a fair opportunity to respond.

11 Return adjustments and redeployment

11.1 Phased return

A phased return may involve temporarily reduced hours, duties, workload or another agreed arrangement. It will normally last no more than six weeks unless an extension is agreed because medical advice or the duty to make reasonable adjustments supports it. The written plan will state hours, duties, pay arrangements, review dates, progress measures and the person to contact if difficulties arise. If the return is not progressing, further Occupational Health advice will be considered.

11.2 Temporary adjustment or redeployment

Where available and agreed, duties may be adjusted temporarily or the employee may be temporarily redeployed to support recovery. Temporary redeployment will normally last no more than three months unless an extension is agreed. Existing contractual pay will be protected during a temporary medical redeployment in accordance with Surrey arrangements.

11.3 Permanent redeployment and ill health retirement

Permanent redeployment will be considered where medical advice indicates that the employee is unlikely to return to the substantive post but may be able to undertake another available suitable role, including where redeployment is a reasonable adjustment. The school is not required to create a role, but will make a reasonable search with Surrey and will discuss any suitable opportunity with the employee.

Ill-health retirement is determined under the applicable pension scheme and requires the relevant independent medical certification. It is not a management sanction. Where it may apply, appropriate advice will be obtained and the option discussed before a dismissal decision is made.

12 Equality and particular circumstances

12.1 Disability and long term conditions

The school will focus on barriers and support rather than requiring an employee to prove a diagnosis. It will consider reasonable adjustments to work, the workplace, contact, meetings, evidence requirements and review points. Agreed disability leave applies where an employee is fit for work but needs time away for disability-related treatment, rehabilitation or another qualifying reason; it is recorded separately and excluded from formal review points.

12.2 Pregnancy fertility transitioning treatment and menopause

Pregnancy-related sickness will be recorded separately and excluded from formal review points. The school will complete or review relevant risk assessments and consider adjustments. Pregnancy-related sickness in the final four weeks before the expected week of childbirth may start maternity leave under the applicable rules. Agreed absence for fertility or transitioning treatment will also be recorded separately and excluded from review points. Menopause-related sickness will be identified where disclosed, appropriate support considered and review points adjusted where reasonable.

12.3 Work related ill health and stress

An accident or incident connected with work will also be recorded under Policy 0006 and, where relevant, Policy 0004. Work-related stress or depression will prompt early consideration of Occupational Health advice and a stress risk assessment. The normal absence procedure still applies; recording an illness as work related does not determine legal liability.

12.4 Infectious illness and safe attendance

An employee who may present an infection risk must seek advice and follow current public-health, medical and school-control measures even if they otherwise feel able to work. The school may require the employee to remain away from site, work differently where this is practicable, or obtain medical clearance where necessary to protect pupils and staff.

12.5 Medical dental and treatment appointments

Routine GP, dental and other appointments should be arranged outside working hours where reasonably possible. Unavoidable hospital, specialist, therapy or treatment appointments during work must be agreed in advance with the line manager or SLT and supporting appointment information may be requested. Time will be recorded under the applicable Surrey leave and pay arrangements; disability leave will be considered where it is a reasonable adjustment.

12.6 Terminal illness

Where an employee has a terminal illness, the school will act with dignity and sensitivity, take account of the employee's wishes and obtain specialist advice on support, work, leave, benefits and ill-health retirement. The timescales in this policy may be adjusted accordingly.

13 Capability hearing dismissal and appeal

13.1 Hearing arrangements

An uninvolved Management Committee panel will hear any case where dismissal may be an outcome. The employee will receive at least five working days' written notice, the absence report and relevant evidence, the possible outcomes and the right to be accompanied. Surrey and the school's HR adviser will be invited. The panel will consider the employee's representations, length and effect of absence, prognosis, medical advice, equality duties, support and adjustments, phased return, redeployment, ill-health retirement where relevant and whether a reasonable solution remains available.

Possible outcomes include further medical advice or review, continued sickness absence where an approximate return is identifiable, a return or adjustment plan, temporary or permanent redeployment, steps towards ill-health retirement, or dismissal on capability grounds. The decision and reasons will normally be confirmed within five working days.

13.2 Dismissal

Dismissal will be considered only where attendance or fitness means that the employee cannot fulfil the role within a reasonable period and reasonable alternatives have been exhausted or are not available. If the panel determines that the employee should cease to work at Thamesfield, Surrey County Council will be notified without delay and will issue the formal termination in accordance with the statutory maintained-school arrangements and applicable notice requirements.

13.3 Appeals

An appeal against a Stage 1 or Stage 2 notice must be submitted in writing within five working days. It must explain a material procedural defect or relevant new evidence that could have changed the decision. An appeal against

dismissal must be submitted in writing to the Clerk to the Management Committee within ten working days and may also challenge an unreasonable finding or outcome.

An uninvolved person of appropriate authority or, for dismissal, a separate uninvolved Management Committee panel will hear the appeal. The employee will receive at least five working days' notice and may be accompanied. The appeal may uphold, revoke or vary the decision but will not impose a more severe outcome. The final decision will normally be confirmed within five working days.

14 Additional procedural arrangements

14.1 Attendance at meetings

Meetings will be arranged with regard to the employee's health and may take place at school, another suitable venue or remotely. Reasonable adjustments will be made. If the employee cannot attend, the school will consider an alternative date, written representations, representation by the companion and medical advice. Where the employee does not engage after reasonable attempts, the meeting may proceed and a decision may be made on the available evidence.

14.2 Confidentiality records and recording

Sarah will retain absence and medical records securely with access limited to those who need the information for management, payroll, occupational health, governance or legal duties. Health information will not be included in routine communications. Written notes will be taken at formal meetings. Audio or video recording is not normally permitted but may be agreed as a reasonable adjustment or for another justified reason.

14.3 Unauthorised absence

Failure to report or maintain contact may initially be treated as unauthorised absence. The school will make reasonable welfare and contact enquiries and consider whether health, disability or another serious circumstance explains the failure. If not resolved, pay may be withheld for unauthorised time and the matter may transfer to Policy 0007A following HR advice.

14.4 Grievances

A concern about the application of this procedure will normally be considered within the relevant meeting or appeal. Policy 0009 may be used separately where that is necessary for fairness, particularly for an allegation of discrimination or bias. An unrelated grievance will not normally delay the absence process.

15 Approval monitoring and review

The Management Committee approves this policy. The Headteacher and School Business Manager will monitor sickness levels, formal cases, timescales, equality considerations and outcomes, reporting anonymised themes to the Management Committee. The policy will be reviewed annually and sooner following a change in law, statutory guidance, Surrey policy or evidence that it is not operating fairly or effectively.

	Name and role	Signature and date
For the Management Committee	Steve Price, Chair of the Management Committee	
For the school	Nick Elliott, Headteacher	

Appendix A Employee reporting requirements

First day	Voice call to Dan Gunn on 07734 695303 by 7.30am
Information	General reason, likely duration and urgent work information
Updates	Days three and five, then weekly unless another arrangement is agreed
Fit note	Required once absence lasts more than seven consecutive calendar days; continuing absence must remain covered
Unwell at work	Tell the line manager or SLT and the school office before leaving
Headteacher	Notify Steve Price and Sarah Huff
Return	Take part in a private return-to-work check; a fuller record is required after more than three working days or where there is a concern

If the employee cannot call personally because of a genuine emergency, another person may call. The employee must make contact as soon as reasonably able.

Appendix B Return to work record

Employee	
Role and site	
Manager	
First day absent	
Date returned	
Working days absent	
Reason recorded	
Fit note received	Yes No Not required
Fit and safe to return	
Support or adjustment discussed	
Review point or pattern discussed	
Action and review date	
Employee comments	
Manager signature and date	
Employee signature and date	

A signature confirms receipt and discussion, not necessarily agreement. A copy must be shared with the employee and sent to Sarah Huff for secure storage.

Appendix C Long term contact record

Employee	
Manager	
Absence start date	
Preferred contact method	
Agreed frequency	
Nominated contact if applicable	
Known medical or fit-note review date	
Occupational Health referral or appointment	
Next formal review	

Contact log

Date and method	People involved	Summary and employee update	Agreed action and next contact