

## The Challenge Academy Trust: Emergency Staff Absence Management Policy **INTERIM**



This policy note outlines the Trust’s approach to the management of attendance during the current Covid-19 pandemic. It replaces some of the current policies, procedures and practices in place at each Academy and therefore anything written within this policy note will override current policy until such time as deemed appropriate by the Trust Board. Anything not covered in this policy will remain as per existing policy and procedure.

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGERS & EMPLOYEES**

Managers will:

- ensure that employees are aware of and understand this emergency policy
- encourage all employees to follow the appropriate government advice in place at any given time
- report and record all absences on a daily basis and in accordance with the procedures and timescales laid down in this policy
- maintain regular contact with any of their direct reports who are working from home or are who are unfit for work, as per the procedures laid down in this policy

Employees will:

- ensure that they are aware of and understand this emergency policy
- follow the appropriate government advice in place at any given time
- be available to work, either within the workplace or remotely, if they are fit and able to do so
- notify their line manager as soon as possible if they are required to self-isolate in line with government advice (but are fit to work from home)
- notify their line manager as soon as possible if they are unfit to work for whatever reason
- provide information, if required, with regard to skills and abilities relevant to any possible alternative job roles
- maintain regular contact with their line manager

### **WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**

During any ‘term time’ partial closure period, all employees are required to be available for work in the same way that they would be if Academies were fully open. Some employees will be required to attend their normal workplace in order to maintain provision for those pupils attending school, but the majority of staff will be working remotely, as far as practically possible.

As the pandemic continues, there is a risk that the number of employees available for work on any given day may reduce. Therefore employees within each Academy should be placed within the following categories, and this information recorded daily:

Employees fit and available for work	Those who have no symptoms / not classified within the ‘vulnerable group’ and would therefore be fit to attend work / work remotely;
Those employee ‘self-isolating’ in line with guidance but otherwise fit to work.	<p>a) Those who are classified as being within the ‘vulnerable group’ and are therefore self isolating but are otherwise fit for work from home (but would not be able to attend their normal place of work)</p> <p>b) Those who are displaying ‘mild’ symptoms and are therefore self-isolating but are otherwise fit for work from home (but would not be able to attend their normal place of work)</p>
Those employees who are unfit for work in any circumstances	a) Those who are displaying more severe symptoms and are therefore self-isolating, and are unfit to work (Covid-19 related)

	b)Those who are unfit for work for some other reason (not Covid-19 related)
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It is imperative that employees notify their manager should there be any change to their categorisation (i.e. they develop symptoms that require isolation, or any symptoms become more severe).

It may still be appropriate to record this information once schools are fully reopened, should the government advice with regards to self isolation for vulnerable people / those displaying symptoms still be in place.

### DEALING WITH SICKNESS ABSENCE

During the period that this emergency procedure is in place, the process for notification and management of all sickness absence will be as follows:

- Employees should notify their line manager (or other nominated officer at their place of work) as soon as they are aware that they will not be fit to attend work / work remotely
- The reason for the absence should be clearly confirmed in order to determine if the absence is Covid-19 related
- Employees can self-certify for a period of seven calendar days, after which they will require medical evidence of their absence from their GP (Med 3 form/ 'fit note'). However it is recognised that there may be delays in obtaining 'fit notes' due to a lack of GP appointments. Therefore:
  - In cases of Covid-19 related absence an 'isolation note' can be obtained from [www.111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/](http://www.111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/). Should Covid-19 symptoms require hospitalisation certification can be obtained upon discharge
  - In cases of non Covid-19 related absence 'fit notes' should be obtained at the earliest available opportunity, ensuring that any periods of absence are covered by the note (backdated where required).
- It is important that employees and managers agree at the outset when contact will be made. Any contact should be regular in order for an employee to provide management with an update on their situation
- Should a Covid-19 absence extend beyond four weeks (i.e. become a long-term absence) formal absence management processes will be relaxed. Therefore 'welfare visits' and formal absence review meetings will not be undertaken but regular contact via telephone or video call should be maintained. Should a Covid-19 related sickness absence extend beyond eight weeks advice managers should seek advice from HR on how to progress
- Formal absence management for non Covid-19 related absences should continue as much as reasonably possible, subject to any social distancing measures that may be in place at any given time
- Formal return to work interviews will be suspended in all cases although a brief informal interview to ensure fitness to return as far as reasonably possible and whether any support is required should be undertaken on the date of return (regardless of whether the employee has returned to their normal workplace or is working from home)
- Sickness absence due to Covid-19 will not count towards any triggers under the relevant Managing Attendance Policy and therefore no formal warnings will be issued in relation to absences attributed to Covid-19
- Normal attendance management provisions will continue to apply to absences that are not related to Covid-19. However, it may not be possible to arrange formal Attendance Review Meetings until Academies re-open so therefore formal meetings may not be held within the required ten days of a return to work. Where an Attendance Review Meeting would be required, the manager should write to the employee to inform them that the meeting will be deferred to a later date, reminding them that they will have the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or a workplace colleague

## **WORKING FROM HOME & OTHER LEAVE**

Whilst employees of the Trust are designated as 'key workers' the Trust recognises that many employees will be required to look after their own children during period of school closure, whilst continuing to work from home. It is also acknowledged that employees may be required to care for family members who are ill or isolating in line with government guidelines. The Trust is supportive of employees with such responsibilities and will fully consider flexibility around working arrangements at home, such as adjustments to hours of work where operational commitments allow. Any such variations should be agreed between employees and their managers.

However, should the need to provide support/care to a dependent make it operationally difficult for the employee to undertake their duties at home consideration will be given to employees taking time off from work, either by taking annual leave or unpaid leave.

Existing provisions with regard to Special Leave (including bereavements) will not be affected by this policy.

## **MEDICAL SUSPENSION**

Where an employee reports for work, but the manager has concerns about their fitness for work and the spread of infection the manager may, on the basis of a risk assessment, decide to medically suspend the employee on normal pay. The employee should then remain in daily contact to update the manager on their progress until such time as it is agreed by both parties that the individual is fit to return to work. If available, OHU advice may be sought in such cases if deemed necessary by the manager, who should contact HR in the first instance.

## **ALTERNATIVE WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

During the period of a full/partial school closure, it may not be possible for all employees to undertake their duties remotely. Therefore employees may also be asked to undertake duties they would not normally be required to do, provided they are competent and confident to do so, following any necessary training. The level, content and delivery of the training will be determined by the nature of the role undertaken and appropriate provision will be put in place as required.

Where staff are asked to work flexibly to cover other jobs (for example through redeployment, and potentially redeployment to another school) volunteers should be sought in the first instance.

If they are asked to work in roles which have increased risks, a health and safety risk assessment must be carried out before they start and the appropriate personal protective equipment provided. Where an alternative role involves working with children or vulnerable adults normal safeguarding procedures will apply.

Employees should not suffer any detriment in pay and conditions for the period of any temporary changes that are introduced.

## **ANNUAL LEAVE**

Annual leave for support staff that has been approved in advance of any school closure will be expected to be taken, unless it can be demonstrated that the reason for cancelling leave is due to the employee needing to undertake essential work. Employees will still be able to submit annual leave requests in line with existing arrangements and all employees will be expected to take their full annual leave entitlement by the end of their normal leave year, where operational needs allow.

Employees who take annual leave are entitled to either 25 or 30 days annual leave (pro rata for part time employees) plus 8 public holidays and are expected to take 20 days minimum of annual leave with a maximum of five being permitted to be carried forward to the following leave year, subject to agreement.

Where the needs of the Academy prevent an employee taking their statutory leave entitlement (i.e. 20 days leave plus the 8 public holidays [pro rata]) as a direct result of Covid-19 they will be permitted to carry the unused days forward to the following two leave years, in addition to any current carry forward arrangements.

## **REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed, as and when further information is available from Central Government and in consultation with recognised trade unions and other relevant parties.