

School's Attendance

A new Model School's Sickness Absence policy has been introduced to all schools for adoption.

The School's policy falls in line with the Authority's sickness policy as reflect the same triggers which are:

- 4 occasions in a 12 month rolling period;
- The equivalent of 3 normal working weeks absence, continuous or otherwise, in a 12 month rolling period;
- Or any other unacceptable pattern of absence e.g. frequent occasions of absence abutting annual leave or bank holidays.

We have seen a positive result across the Authority since its introduction in January 2014, with our best ever results being recorded. It's is hoped that if schools adopt the model policy this will have an improvement in their results. We are at the early stages of the new policy but year on year* comparison for the schools are as follows:-

| | 2014/2015 | 2015/2016 |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Secondary Schools | 6.22 fte | 5.67 fte |
| Primary Schools | 4.42 fte | 5.31fte |

**Please note the figures above are based on April to November figures for both years*

Key Features of the new sickness model policy are:

Employee Support Meeting

If an employee has 3 occasions of absence in a rolling 12 month period the line manager should convene an 'employee support review meeting'. Managers should also hold the employee support meeting if they feel an employee is moving towards another formal trigger, including those who are on continuous absence. This should mean that additional support will be offered to employees at an early stage to help them back to work and or achieve more regular attendance.

The meeting is for managers and employees to explore their concerns, and support should be offered with the aim of assisting employees to achieve better attendance at work in the future.

Also there is no differential between long and short term sickness

A series of workshops with Head Teachers and Deputy Heads, School Senior administration staff and Chair of Governors, took place during the summer, the

feedback has been extremely positive and the schools have asked for further workshops.

The focus of the initial workshops was general attendance management and discussing the support available to the Head Teacher who is managing the sickness case and for employees.

Schools have been issued guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government on Effective Management of school workforce attendance and in an attempt to reduce unplanned absence in the classroom, they should

- *Follow attendance management procedures using return to work interviews for example to address the cause of sickness absence*
- *Support employee well being with stress management and rehabilitation programmes*
- *Supporting the use of Occupational Health and Access to work schemes*
- *Checking absence rates and benchmarking with similar schools*
- *Review historical patterns of absence and examine the cause of absence*
- *Raise awareness with employee on the level of absence in the school and the associated impact in the classroom*

Guidance Welsh Government 178/2015

It is believed that the new policy is a step in the right direction and by the nature of some of the initiatives should raise awareness within the school. Carmarthenshire can also provide all the support suggested in this document.

Occupational health services have an important role in rehabilitating employees after sickness or injury in order to facilitate a return to work as soon as possible. Occupational Health services will be instrumental in ensuring that proactive health strategies are in place.

An employee can be referred by their manager to Occupational Health Services at any time, be that prior to a likely absence, during or following a period / periods of absence. Managers are encouraged to refer to Occupational Health services early in the process so that the appropriate medical opinion can be sought and any reasonable adjustments can be identified. Appointment are undertaken with our team of specialist which include OH Physicians and Consultants, our Stress Management team, which includes Occupational Therapists and Mental Health Nurses, our Occupational Health Advisor and Nurses and our Physiotherapists.

OH liaises with GPs and specialists to ensure we have a full medical history and give medical opinion on the employee's fitness to work; we also advise if the employee needs adjustments in the work place.

HR supports the manager, when needed, in terms of management of the return to work and the reasonableness of any adjustments in line with the Equality Act.

We (PMP) have been scoping the introduction of a Mutual Fund Scheme. Currently schools source their own provision for staff absence, with numerous suppliers being used across the county. The specification of these insurance policies varies greatly, as do the costs and the benefits.

We have developed a specification and are now ready to start consultation early next year, with the scheme starting in April 2016.

This is a non profit making scheme for those who join.

Key features will be:

- All stress related absence will be covered
- Reoccurring illness will be covered.

The school will need to evidence that the sickness cases are being managed in line with the sickness policy and that OH and HR intervention are in place. This is to ensure timely referrals are made to OH and that appropriate support is in place to facilitate timely return to work.

This is being included to ensure Schools better manage the staff attendance.

It is inevitable that absence will occur and in some cases supply cover will be needed. The National Procurement Service has awarded a framework agreement for a Managed Service for all provision of Agency Workers including Supply teacher to reflect the individual requirement of the school workforce. The Contract was awarded to New Directions. Whilst schools do not necessarily have to consider New Directions, the award of this contact is such that the Agency comply with the appropriate checks for safeguarding and qualifications. The Procurement Service also ensure that the provider met the quality required which included regularly reviewing the professional development needs of the individual ensuring that they have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to carry out the role effectively.