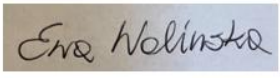
# Sickness Absence Policy

In the development of this policy consideration has been given to the impact on protected characteristics under the Equality and Act and the work life balance of employees

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| **Approved by:** **B.Suddhi** | **Date:** September 2026 |
| **Last reviewed on:** | September 2026 |
| **Next review due by:** | September 2027 |

Signed by:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Headteacher | Date: | September 2026 |
|  | Chair of governors | Date: | September 2026 |

## 1. Statement of intent

Pear Tree Infant and Nursery School is committed to promoting the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees.

The school recognises that sickness absence can arise for a wide range of reasons, including short-term illness, recurring health conditions, injury, disability, mental health difficulties and serious or long-term illness.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- provide a fair, consistent and supportive approach to managing sickness absence;
- ensure that employees are treated with dignity, respect and confidentiality;
- support employees to maintain good health and return to work where possible;
- identify and address workplace factors that may contribute to ill health or absence;
- ensure that appropriate medical advice and Occupational Health support are obtained where required;
- ensure that reasonable adjustments are considered;
- minimise the impact of absence on pupils, children, colleagues and the effective operation of the school;
- provide a clear process where attendance remains a concern despite appropriate support.

The school will seek to balance its duty of care towards employees with its responsibility to provide safe, effective and consistent education and care for pupils and children.

This policy does not form part of an employee's contract of employment and may be amended in response to changes in legislation, guidance, Local Authority procedures or school circumstances.

This should be read in conjunction with derby City Council Attendance Management Policy.

## 2. Relationship with Derby City Council procedures

Pear Tree Infant and Nursery School is a maintained school and will have regard to the employment policies, Human Resources advice and attendance management procedures of Derby City Council.

Where Derby City Council provides a current mandatory procedure, contractual provision or specific HR instruction applicable to the school, this will be followed.

The school will seek advice from Derby City Council Human Resources where appropriate, particularly in relation to:

- formal sickness absence cases;
- Occupational Health referrals;
- reasonable adjustments;
- disability-related absence;
- pregnancy-related absence;
- long-term sickness;
- potential dismissal on grounds of ill health;
- ill-health retirement;
- redeployment;
- complex employment or equality matters.

If there is any conflict between this school policy and a current statutory requirement or applicable Derby City Council employment requirement, the statutory or applicable Council requirement will take precedence.

Managers must ensure that they are using the **current** Derby City Council HR guidance and documentation when commencing formal action.

## 3. Scope

This policy applies to employees of Pear Tree Infant and Nursery School, including teaching and support staff, subject to their contractual terms and any applicable national or Local Authority arrangements.

Different arrangements may apply to:

- agency workers;
- contractors;
- supply staff;
- volunteers;
- self-employed individuals.

Such individuals should follow the absence reporting arrangements provided to them by the school or their employer.

## 4. Responsibilities

### 4.1 Governing Board

The Governing Board will:

- ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for managing staff sickness absence;
- monitor anonymised sickness absence information;
- ensure that the policy is reviewed regularly;
- ensure that formal decisions are taken fairly and in accordance with the school's delegated powers;
- provide an appropriate panel or committee where required for formal capability or dismissal decisions;
- ensure that governors involved in formal cases receive appropriate advice and support.

Individual employee medical information will not normally be reported to governors unless necessary for a specific formal employment matter.

### 4.2 Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for the overall implementation of this policy and will:

- ensure that staff understand the school's sickness absence arrangements;
- monitor absence levels and patterns;
- ensure that absence is managed consistently and fairly;
- ensure appropriate support is offered;
- ensure that Occupational Health or other specialist advice is obtained where appropriate;
- ensure that reasonable adjustments are considered;
- ensure that formal procedures are followed where necessary;
- seek HR advice in complex or formal cases;
- maintain appropriate confidentiality.
- conducting return-to-work discussions;

The Headteacher may delegate day-to-day management of absence to appropriate managers.

### 4.3 School Business Manager

The SBM is responsible for:

- maintaining accurate sickness absence records;
- responding appropriately when staff report sick;
- maintaining reasonable contact with employees during sickness absence;
- identifying patterns or concerns;
- supporting employees to return to work;
- considering workplace factors that may contribute to absence;
- considering reasonable adjustments;
- making Occupational Health referrals where appropriate;
- keeping appropriate confidential records;

- seeking HR advice before progressing to formal action.

Managers must deal with sickness absence sensitively and must not make assumptions about an employee's health or circumstances.

**4.4 Employees**

Employees are expected to:

- attend work when fit to do so;
- follow the school's sickness reporting procedure;
- provide appropriate medical evidence when required;
- maintain reasonable contact with their manager during sickness absence;
- attend Occupational Health appointments where reasonably required;
- engage constructively with return-to-work and absence management discussions;
- follow appropriate medical advice and treatment where possible;
- notify their manager if their circumstances change;
- inform the school if they believe their health condition may amount to a disability or may require reasonable adjustments.

Employees should not attend work when they are medically unfit to do so or where doing so would create a significant risk to themselves or others.

**5. Reporting sickness absence**

An employee who is unable to attend work because of sickness or injury must notify the Headteacher **as soon as reasonably practicable and in accordance with the school's local reporting arrangements**.

For Pear Tree Infant and Nursery School:

- employees should normally telephone Bindy Suddhi, Head Teacher on the first day of absence;
- notification should normally be made from **7:15am onwards** and before the employee's normal start time where reasonably practicable;
- the employee should speak directly to the Headteacher
- a text message, email or message through another communication system should not normally replace the required telephone notification unless the employee is genuinely unable to telephone;
- where the employee is unable to make contact personally, someone acting on their behalf may notify the school.

Employees should provide:

- confirmation that they are unable to attend work due to sickness;
- an indication, where possible, of the likely duration of the absence;
- any information about work or immediate arrangements that their manager reasonably needs;

- any information necessary to identify urgent safeguarding, staffing or operational issues.

Employees are not expected to provide unnecessary or excessive medical details when reporting their absence.

**6. Keeping in contact during sickness absence**

The school recognises the importance of maintaining appropriate contact with employees during sickness absence.

The frequency and method of contact will depend on:

- the nature and expected duration of the absence;
- the employee's circumstances;
- the employee's preferences where reasonably practicable;
- medical advice;
- the operational needs of the school.

For short-term absence, the employee should keep the school informed of their likely return date.

For longer-term absence, the manager and employee should agree an appropriate communication plan.

Contact will be supportive and proportionate and will not normally be used to place unreasonable pressure on an employee to return to work before they are fit.

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**7. Medical evidence and fit notes**

An employee can normally self-certify sickness absence for the first **7 calendar days**, including weekends and bank holidays.

Where sickness absence continues beyond 7 calendar days, the employee must provide an appropriate fit note or other acceptable medical evidence from day 8 onwards.

Fit notes may be issued by appropriately qualified healthcare professionals, including doctors, registered nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacists and physiotherapists.

Employees must provide further fit notes where their absence continues beyond the period covered by the previous certificate.

The school may request medical evidence earlier than day 8 where there is a reasonable and legitimate reason to do so. Where a charge is incurred because the school has required evidence during the first seven days, the school will meet the reasonable cost.

The school will not withhold statutory sick pay simply because a fit note is received late.

**8. Self-certification**

Employees must complete the school's self-certification process for periods of sickness absence that are covered by self-certification.

Self-certification will normally confirm:

- dates of absence;
- reason for absence;
- whether the employee considers themselves fit to return;
- whether any support or adjustment may be required.

The school will not normally require unnecessary medical details.

**9. Return-to-work discussion**

A return-to-work discussion will normally take place promptly following every period of sickness absence.

The purpose is to:

- confirm the employee has returned to work;
- confirm the reason and duration of the absence;
- establish whether the employee is fit to resume their normal duties;
- identify any support required;
- consider whether the absence is work-related;
- identify any emerging pattern of absence;
- discuss any reasonable adjustments where appropriate;
- ensure that the employee is aware of any relevant changes that occurred during their absence.

The discussion will be private and confidential.

A return-to-work discussion is intended to be supportive and should not automatically be treated as a formal absence management meeting.

**10. Illness or injury arising from work**

Any accident, injury, occupational illness or suspected work-related condition must be reported promptly in accordance with the school's Health and Safety procedures.

The school will investigate relevant incidents and will consider whether:

- additional control measures are required;
- a risk assessment should be completed or reviewed;
- Occupational Health advice is required;
- adjustments to duties or working arrangements are necessary;
- the incident is reportable under applicable health and safety legislation.

Where an employee believes that their health condition has been caused or contributed to by their work, they should inform their line manager or Headteacher as soon as reasonably practicable.

**11. Occupational Health**

The school may refer an employee to Occupational Health where specialist advice would assist with managing sickness absence or supporting a return to work.

An Occupational Health referral may be appropriate where:

- absence is long-term;
- there are repeated or persistent periods of absence;
- the underlying cause of absence is unclear;
- a health condition may amount to a disability;
- reasonable adjustments need to be considered;
- a phased return may be appropriate;
- there are concerns about an employee's ability to undertake some or all of their duties;
- medical redeployment may need to be considered;
- further medical advice is required before a formal decision is made.
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The employee will normally be informed about the purpose of the referral and the questions being asked.

Occupational Health advice is advisory. The school will consider the advice carefully alongside all other relevant information.

**12. Confidentiality and medical information**

Information concerning an employee's health is sensitive personal information and will be handled confidentially and in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Medical information will only be accessed or shared where there is a legitimate reason to do so.

Managers should:

- keep medical information secure;
- only record information that is necessary;
- avoid unnecessary detail in general personnel records;
- restrict access to appropriate staff;
- avoid discussing an employee's health with colleagues without a legitimate reason.

The school will retain sickness absence information in accordance with its data retention arrangements.

**13. Short-term and persistent sickness absence**

Short-term sickness absence normally refers to individual periods of absence of less than 28 calendar days.

The school recognises that occasional sickness absence is normal and does not automatically indicate a problem.

However, a pattern or level of absence may require further discussion where it begins to affect the employee's ability to perform their role or the effective operation of the school.

As a guide, the school will normally consider an informal sickness absence review where an employee has:

- **10 working days' sickness absence within a rolling 12-month period; or**
- **5 separate occasions of sickness absence within a rolling 12-month period; or**
- **a pattern of absence which causes reasonable concern.**

These are **review triggers, not automatic grounds for formal action**.

Managers may arrange an informal discussion before a trigger is reached where there is an emerging pattern or other legitimate concern.

The manager will consider the individual circumstances, including the reasons for absence, before deciding what action is appropriate.

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**14. Pregnancy-related sickness absence**

Pregnancy-related sickness absence will be treated sensitively and separately from ordinary sickness absence where appropriate.

The school will consider the specific circumstances and will not automatically count pregnancy-related sickness absence towards sickness absence triggers.

The school will ensure that appropriate pregnancy-related risk assessments are undertaken and reviewed where necessary.

Managers should seek HR advice where pregnancy-related sickness absence becomes significant or where formal absence management is being considered.

**15. Disability-related absence**

The school recognises its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Where an employee is disabled, or may be disabled, the school will consider whether sickness absence is related to the disability and whether reasonable adjustments are required.

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- adjustments to working hours or patterns;
- changes to duties;
- temporary or permanent workplace adjustments;
- additional equipment;

- changes to the workplace;
- changes to absence review or trigger arrangements where reasonable;
- phased returns;
- additional support or supervision;
- disability-related leave where applicable under relevant arrangements.

The school will consider each situation individually.

Absence related to disability will not automatically be disregarded, but the school will consider whether adjustments to the way absence is monitored or managed are reasonable. ACAS guidance confirms that adjustments may include changes to absence trigger points where appropriate.

HR advice should be obtained before formal action is taken in circumstances involving a disability.

**16. Mental health and wellbeing**

The school recognises that mental health conditions can contribute to sickness absence. Managers will seek to create an environment in which employees feel able to raise concerns about their wellbeing.

Where appropriate, the school may consider:

- Occupational Health;
- wellbeing support;
- workload or workplace adjustments;
- stress risk assessment;
- reasonable adjustments;
- phased return;
- temporary changes to duties;
- support from the employee's GP or other healthcare professional;
- other appropriate support available through Derby City Council or the employee's employment arrangements.

A mental health condition will be managed in the same supportive and confidential manner as physical health conditions.

**17. Long-term sickness absence**

For the purposes of this policy, long-term sickness absence will normally mean an absence lasting **28 calendar days or more**.

Long-term absence will be managed on an individual basis.

The manager will maintain reasonable contact with the employee and will consider:

- the nature and likely duration of the illness;
- available medical information;

- Occupational Health advice;
- the employee's role and duties;
- the impact on the school;
- possible reasonable adjustments;
- a phased return;
- temporary amended duties;
- alternative duties or redeployment where appropriate;
- whether ill-health retirement may be relevant;
- whether there is a realistic prospect of a return to work within a reasonable timeframe.

The school will not make assumptions about an employee's ability to return based solely on the length of their absence.

**18. Phased returns**

A phased return may be appropriate following a period of long-term sickness absence or where recommended by medical or Occupational Health advice.

A phased return may involve:

- temporarily reduced hours;
- a gradual increase in hours;
- amended duties;
- reduced workload;
- additional supervision or support;
- temporary workplace adjustments.
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The arrangements will be agreed with the employee and reviewed regularly.

The length of a phased return will depend on the individual circumstances and medical advice. A phased return will normally be temporary and will include an agreed review date.

Pay arrangements during a phased return will be determined in accordance with the employee's contractual sick pay entitlement, working arrangements and applicable Derby City Council guidance.

**19. Employees returning with a 'may be fit for work' fit note**

Where a fit note states that an employee **may be fit for work**, the manager will discuss the recommendations with the employee.

The school will consider whether the suggested adjustments can reasonably be accommodated.

Possible measures may include:

- altered hours;
- amended duties;
- a phased return;

- workplace adaptations;
- temporary changes to workload;
- additional support.
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The school will consider its legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

A fit note stating 'may be fit for work' does not require the school to implement every recommendation where this is not reasonably practicable, but the advice must be considered carefully.

**20. Returning before a fit note expires**

An employee may return to work before the end date on a fit note where they believe they are fit to do so and the school is satisfied that they can safely return.

Where appropriate, the school may undertake a risk assessment and/or seek Occupational Health advice before the employee returns.

**21. Informal sickness absence review**

Where a sickness absence trigger has been reached, or where there is another reasonable concern about an employee's attendance, the manager will normally arrange an informal sickness absence review.

The employee will be informed of:

- their absence record;
- the reason for the meeting;
- any concerns identified;
- the purpose of the discussion.

The manager will:

- listen to the employee's explanation;
- consider the reasons for absence;
- identify any underlying health or workplace issues;
- consider whether medical advice is required;
- consider reasonable adjustments;
- consider whether additional support is required;
- agree an appropriate monitoring or review period.

The employee should be given an opportunity to explain any relevant circumstances.

The meeting will normally be supportive rather than disciplinary.

**22. Monitoring following an informal review**

Where appropriate, the manager will establish a monitoring period.

The monitoring period will be reasonable and proportionate to the circumstances and may vary depending on whether the absence is short-term or long-term.

The employee will be informed:

- what improvement is expected;
- how attendance will be monitored;
- how long the review period will last;
- what support will be provided;
- what may happen if attendance does not improve.

Where the employee's attendance improves and remains satisfactory, the matter may be closed.

Where concerns continue, the manager may recommend progression to the formal procedure.

**23. Formal sickness absence procedure**

Formal action will only normally be considered after appropriate informal steps have been taken, unless the circumstances justify progressing directly to the formal stage.

Before formal action is taken, the school will consider:

- the employee's complete absence record;
- the reasons for absence;
- medical evidence;
- Occupational Health advice;
- whether the employee may have a disability;
- reasonable adjustments;
- pregnancy-related considerations;
- workplace factors;
- support already offered;
- whether further support or adjustments could reasonably be provided;
- the likely prospect of improved attendance or return to work;
- the impact of the absence on the school.

The school will obtain HR advice before progressing a formal case.

**24. Formal Stage 1 meeting**

Where formal action is considered appropriate, the employee will receive written notice of the meeting.

The written notification will normally include:

- the date, time and location of the meeting;
- the reason for the meeting;
- the concerns regarding attendance;
- relevant information and documentation;

- the possible outcomes;
- the employee's right to be accompanied.

The employee will normally be given reasonable notice to prepare.

At the meeting, the manager will:
- explain the concerns;
- review the employee's absence record;
- consider medical and Occupational Health information;
- consider support and adjustments;
- allow the employee to respond;
- consider any mitigating circumstances;
- agree appropriate attendance objectives or a review period where appropriate.

A written outcome will be provided following the meeting.

**25. Right to be accompanied**

An employee attending a formal sickness absence meeting or hearing will have the right to be accompanied by:
- a recognised trade union representative; or
- a workplace colleague.

The companion may support the employee, make representations and confer with the employee, subject to the normal requirements of a fair meeting.

The employee should notify the school of their chosen companion within the reasonable timeframe specified in the meeting invitation.

**26. Formal monitoring period**

Following a formal Stage 1 meeting, the employee may be placed on a formal monitoring period.

The school will specify:
- the attendance improvement required;
- the period over which attendance will be reviewed;
- the support available;
- any adjustments in place;
- the date of the review.

The length of the monitoring period will depend on the circumstances.

The school will not set an unrealistic attendance target where the employee's disability or other medical circumstances require a different approach.

**27. Stage 2 / capability hearing**

Where attendance has not improved sufficiently following appropriate support and monitoring, or where there is no reasonable prospect of an employee returning to work within a reasonable timeframe, the matter may progress to a formal capability hearing.

Dismissal will only be considered after:

- appropriate medical advice has been obtained where necessary;
- reasonable adjustments have been considered;
- alternative work or redeployment has been considered where appropriate;
- the employee has been given a fair opportunity to respond;
- the school has considered all relevant circumstances;
- appropriate HR advice has been obtained.

The employee will be given written notice of the hearing and informed that dismissal on the grounds of capability due to ill health is a possible outcome.

**28. Stage 2 outcomes**

Following a formal capability hearing, possible outcomes may include:

- no further action;
- an extended monitoring or review period;
- additional support or adjustments;
- consideration of alternative duties or redeployment;
- consideration of ill-health retirement where applicable;
- dismissal on the grounds of capability due to ill health.

The decision-maker will consider all relevant information before reaching a decision.

Where dismissal is being considered, the school will ensure that the appropriate governing board delegation and HR advice are in place.

**29. Ill-health retirement**

Where an employee is a member of an applicable pension scheme and ill-health retirement may be appropriate, the school will provide information about the relevant process.

For employees in the Local Government Pension Scheme, eligibility and medical assessment will be determined under the rules of the scheme.

Ill-health retirement will not be assumed or promised by the school and will be considered separately from the sickness absence management process.

**30. Alternative work and redeployment**

Where an employee is unable to return to their substantive role because of ill health, the school will consider whether suitable alternative work or redeployment is reasonably available.

This may include consideration of:

- permanent changes to duties;
- alternative roles within the school;
- suitable vacancies elsewhere within the Local Authority where applicable;
- reasonable adjustments;
- medical advice.

There is no automatic entitlement to redeployment.

**31. Dismissal on grounds of ill health**

If dismissal is considered necessary, the decision will be made in accordance with the school's delegated powers, applicable employment procedures and HR advice.

The employee will receive written confirmation of:

- the decision;
- the reasons for the decision;
- the effective date;
- the notice entitlement;
- their right of appeal.

The school will ensure that the decision is reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances.

**32. Appeal against dismissal**

An employee dismissed on grounds of capability due to ill health will have the right to appeal. The appeal must normally be submitted in writing within the timescale specified in the dismissal letter and should set out the grounds of appeal.

Appeals will be heard by an appropriate person or committee with sufficient independence from the original decision, in accordance with the school's delegated powers and applicable Derby City Council HR procedures.

The employee will have the right to be accompanied by a recognised trade union representative or workplace colleague.

The appeal decision will normally be final within the school's internal procedure.

**33. Meetings where an employee is too unwell to attend**

Where an employee is unable to attend a sickness absence meeting because of their health, the school will consider reasonable alternatives.

Depending on the circumstances, this may include:

- postponing the meeting;
- holding the meeting remotely;
- holding the meeting at an alternative location;
- allowing written representations;

- allowing the employee to be represented or accompanied;
- obtaining further medical advice.

The school will seek to avoid unnecessary delay while ensuring that the employee has a fair opportunity to participate.

A meeting should not normally proceed in an employee's absence without careful consideration of whether they have had a reasonable opportunity to engage.

**34. Home visits**

A home visit will not normally be required as part of sickness absence management.

Where a home visit is considered appropriate, the employee will normally be consulted in advance and the purpose of the visit explained.

Any home visit by management will be undertaken sensitively and with appropriate consideration of the employee's privacy and wellbeing.

Where appropriate, two members of management may attend.

An employee may request that a companion or representative is present where reasonably practicable.

**35. Trade union representatives**

The school recognises the legitimate role of recognised trade unions.

Trade union representatives are subject to the same sickness absence procedures as other employees.

Where formal action is being considered against a recognised trade union representative, the school will seek appropriate HR advice and, where appropriate, liaise with the relevant full-time trade union official.

The employee's trade union activities will not be used as a reason for treating them less favourably.

**36. False information and abuse of the procedure**

Employees are expected to provide honest and accurate information concerning their sickness absence.

Deliberately providing false information, fraudulent medical evidence or otherwise abusing the sickness absence process may result in disciplinary action.

The school will investigate concerns fairly and will not assume wrongdoing without appropriate evidence.

**37. Sickness during annual leave**

Where an employee becomes unwell during annual leave, they should notify the school in accordance with the normal sickness reporting procedure if they wish the period to be treated as sickness absence.

Appropriate medical evidence may be required.

Any entitlement to take annual leave at a later date will be managed in accordance with statutory requirements, the employee's contractual terms and the school's annual leave arrangements.

**38. Sickness absence during school closure periods**

Employees remain responsible for complying with the school's sickness reporting requirements during school closure periods, including school holidays, unless alternative arrangements have been communicated.

Where sickness absence continues during a school closure period, employees must continue to provide appropriate medical evidence where required.

The school will ensure that absence and pay are managed in accordance with the employee's contractual entitlement and applicable Local Authority arrangements.

**39. Data protection**

Sickness absence records and medical information will be handled in accordance with:

- UK GDPR;
- Data Protection Act 2018;
- the school's Data Protection Policy;
- applicable Derby City Council data protection arrangements.

The school will ensure that only appropriate information is recorded and shared.

Anonymised sickness absence information may be reported to the Governing Board for monitoring purposes.

Individual medical information will not normally be included in governor reports.

**40. Monitoring sickness absence**

The Headteacher will monitor sickness absence across the school to identify:

- overall levels of absence;
- short-term and long-term absence;

- patterns of absence;
- recurring issues;
- potential workplace factors;
- areas where additional support or intervention may be appropriate.

Absence monitoring will be used to support staff wellbeing and effective management rather than simply to reduce absence figures.

Where patterns indicate a potential workplace issue, the school will consider appropriate action, including risk assessment or review of working arrangements.

**41. Confidential reporting to governors**

The Headteacher may provide anonymised sickness absence information to the Governing Board.

Information may include:

- overall absence levels;
- comparison with previous periods;
- short-term and long-term absence trends;
- broad reasons for absence where appropriate;
- impact on school operations.

Information will be presented in a way that protects individual employee confidentiality.

**42. Review of the policy**

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner where necessary following:

- changes to employment legislation;
- changes to statutory guidance;
- changes to Derby City Council employment procedures;
- significant case law or legal developments;
- changes to school staffing arrangements;
- lessons identified from the operation of the policy.

The school will ensure that managers use the most current Derby City Council and HR advice and documentation when managing individual sickness absence cases.

**Next review: September 2027**