



Policy Document:

Sickness Absence

- Staff -

Applicable from 6th April 2026.

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Introduction

At the Meadows Day Care Centre, we know that working is an important part of your wellbeing and there will be times when you can't come to work due to illness. We want to support you and help you come back to work as soon as possible. Our Sickness Absence Policy helps you to understand what will happen when you're too ill to come to work for a period of time. We also want to give support and guidance to you if you need to improve your attendance. This policy sets out our approach to managing sickness absence.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff employed by the Meadows Day Care Centre, including fixed-term, temporary and/or directly employed agency staff with the exception of staff who are in their probationary period.

Staff who are in their probationary period need to follow sections:

- Absence Reporting – if you are unable to come into work,
- Keeping in touch,
- Sickness Certificates and
- Return to work.

Sick pay for all employees will be paid in accordance with the terms and conditions of their employment contract.

Leave for medical appointments, family emergencies, caring responsibilities or pregnancy/maternity/adoption related absences are not included for the purposes of managing sickness absence.

Additionally, any time off taken due to an accident suffered at work (e.g. an assault at work or an industrial disease) will not be counted under sickness absence monitoring and must not be considered for formal action under this policy. However, all other procedures, such as Return-to-Work meetings, Occupational Health (OH) referrals (as necessary) should be carried out as normal.

This policy doesn't form part of your contract of employment and can be amended at any time. It should, however, be read in conjunction with the 'Absence due to sickness of injury' (or similar section) contained in your employment contract.

The Centre may also vary the processes within this policy, including any time limits, as appropriate in any case.

Equalities

In applying this policy we, the Meadows Day Care Centre, will have due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and provide for good relations between people of diverse groups, in particular on the grounds of the following characteristics protected by the Equality Act (2010); age, disability, gender including non-binary, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation, in addition to offending background, trade union membership, or any other personal characteristic.

Absence Reporting

If you can't come to work, you need to let us know. You need to contact the Nursery Manager – or another designated manager - at least one hour before the time you are due to start work.

Make sure you know who you need to call if you can't come to work and have the phone numbers you need. It's important you make the call yourself and you'll need to let us know:

- why you're absent and how long you expect to be off work
- your phone number so your manager can keep in touch with you
- details of any urgent or outstanding work that needs to be picked up while you're off

We will accept texts, emails, private messages using a secure messaging service, i.e. WhatsApp, and in exceptional circumstances messages from another person if you really can't make contact yourself or if you have an agreed a 3rd party is able to make contact on your behalf. This is so that we can support you.

It's important that you follow the Absence Reporting procedure for every absence. If you don't, this may be viewed as unauthorised absence which may result in any sickness pay being withheld. This also may be viewed as a personal conduct matter, which may lead to action being taken against you under the Disciplinary Policy.

If you become ill when you are at work and need to leave, you need to let the nursery manager, or in their absence the most senior staff member on site at the time know; it's important we know you have left. For example, if we need to evacuate the building.

Keeping in Touch

During the time you are off work you need to stay in touch with the nursery manager so we can continue to support you. The nursery manager will let you know when you need to call and update them on how you are doing.

The Centre management may also need to call you from time to time and will agree with you how and when to keep in touch with you.

It's important to stay in contact with the nursery manager as well as providing Fit Notes (see Sickness Certification). When your Fit Note is due to expire, for the purposes of staff planning, you should inform the nursery manager as soon as possible to let them know if you will be returning to work; we appreciate as much notice as possible. You should also keep the nursery manager updated on any new information about your sickness and how you are progressing.

If you feel the reason for your absence is because of work, talk to the nursery manager* immediately so we can try to address any issues and help you get back to work quickly. If appropriate, we will refer you for an Occupational Health Assessment to find out what we can do to support you. We will ordinarily seek your consent before making a referral.

Sickness Certification

You can self-certify for the first seven calendar days of your sickness by completing the Centre's online sickness self-certification absence from at...<https://tinyurl.com/5j9ewfje> or by scanning this QR code.



* Nursery manager in this context can be substituted for Centre Management Committee or Trustee.

If you're going to be off for more than seven calendar days, you will need to get a Fit Note from your doctor or other medical professional to cover your absence from the eighth day onwards. You need to provide the nursery manager with the Fit Note without delay.

Your contract of employment states in the Absence due to sickness of injury section...

"If the employee is absent for seven days, or less, he/she shall immediately on returning to work complete a self-certification form in respect of each day of absence."

Please treat this as an ongoing requirement: whenever you are absent from work due to sickness or injury, you must provide either a self-certification form or a Fit Note (as appropriate) to cover the entire period of your absence.

Any uncertified gaps may be classed as unauthorised absence.

Occupational Sick Pay

The Centre is not part of and does not offer an occupational sickness pay scheme.

Statutory Sick Pay

The Statutory Sick Pay Scheme is a government-mandated scheme that requires the Centre to pay eligible employees a minimum amount of pay when they are unable to work due to illness. It is a taxable benefit that lasts a maximum of 28 weeks.

Key details of the SSP scheme (effective 6th April 2026)¹...

- Eligibility:
 - All employment types,
 - All income levels,
 - Payable from the first day of sickness,
 - For sickness absences of less than 7 days (including non-working days) self-certification is required.
 - For sickness absences of more than 7 days (including non-working days) a Fit Note is required.
- Payment:
 - 80% of average weekly earnings, or £123.25, whichever is lower (figures correct as at time of writing but may be changed by HM Government. Check GOV.UK for up-to-date information).
- Phased return to work:
 - Employees on an arranged phased return to work period are entitled to SSP on absent days during this period.

The centre may withhold, or delay, SSP payments if...

- you don't follow this Sickness Absence policy, including the Absence Reporting procedure without good reason.
- you don't complete a self-certification form when required.
- you don't provide a Fit Note when required.
- you don't attend a scheduled Occupational Health appointment without good reason.
- we have reasonable grounds to believe that you are doing activities (other work, sports, hobbies, etc.) that may delay your recovery or make your condition worse.

¹ Employees who were already receiving SSP before 6 April 2026 and who would receive a lower amount under the new rules (because 80% of their average weekly earnings is less than the previous flat rate) will be protected by transitional arrangements.

Occupational Health

If you're off sick, we may want to refer you to Occupational Health to get advice on your condition and any adjustments that may help you return to work and/or to support you and prevent future absence. In absence cases where the reason given for absence is work related, we will ordinarily refer you to OH straight away.

Referrals to OH will not be made for short-term absences or common ailments, such as colds or flu, unless the absences are frequent or there is a cause for concern

If you have an underlying medical condition and you have made us aware, we may ask you to attend an OH assessment so that we can obtain medical advice on how to support your attendance. We will review any recommendations, consider your medical condition and the advice provided.

OH advice plays an important part in supporting you. Please be aware that if you do not engage with referrals to Occupational Health, we can only support you and make decisions based on the other information we have available.

Informal Return-to-Work Meeting

When you return to work the nursery manager* will meet with you informally on your first day back to find out how you are and if there are any support and adjustments required. The nursery manager will also update you on any important information you may have missed. If not completed prior to the meeting, at the meeting you should complete the self-certification form.

Following the return to work meeting we will let you know if you have reached an absence trigger (see Managing Absence - Absence Triggers Section below) and need to attend an Attendance Review Meeting. If you have not met a trigger but the nursery manager is concerned about your attendance, they will discuss this with you informally to identify if there are any adjustments or support you may need.

Reasonable Adjustments

Following a period of long-term absence for any employee who has health concerns (not necessarily covered under the Equalities Act), reasonable adjustments may be required. This may require facilitation by OH.

Reasonable adjustments may include, but are not limited to...

- a phased return to work for someone returning from long-term sickness;
- time-off for medical appointments that cannot be taken outside of working hours;
- more break times;
- extra or adapted equipment.

Managing Absence - Absence Triggers - Short Term and Persistent Absence

We want to support your health while keeping the Centre running smoothly. We monitor absence patterns using a tool called the Bradford Factor, which looks at how often and how many days you're off sick. This helps us spot if someone may need extra support.

Examples of When We May Check In

In a rolling 12-month period, a review may be triggered if:

- You have 3 or more separate occasions of sickness absence.

Example: Sick on 5 Jan, 12 Mar, and 20 Jun.

* If the nursery manager is unavailable, a member of the Management Committee, a Trustee or senior staff member may be substituted.

- Your total sickness adds up to 8 or more days.
Example: Sick for 3 days in Feb, 2 days in May, and 4 days in Sept (total 9 days).
- You reach a high Bradford Factor score because you have several short absences.
Example: Sick for 1 day in Jan, 1 day in Feb, 1 day in Mar, 1 day in May — total 4 days, but 4 separate occasions give a high score.

Stages of Attendance Review...

Stage 1 – Informal Attendance Review Meeting

A supportive discussion with the nursery manager to understand any issues and agree on ways to improve attendance.

The meeting will discuss your absences and the following with you:

- next steps from previous attendance review meetings (if applicable).
- Occupational Health report (if applicable).
- what, if any, adjustments and/or support is in place, and if this needs to be reviewed.
- additional adjustments and/or support you may need.

Stage 2 – Formal Attendance Review Meeting

If patterns continue, a formal meeting with the nursery manager and either another Senior Staff member or member of the Management Committee to discuss concerns, offer further support, and agree a plan.

The meeting will discuss the following with you:

- your absences that have given cause for concern.
- what, if any, adjustments and/or support is in place, and if this needs to be reviewed.
- next steps from previous attendance review meetings (if applicable).
- Occupational Health report (if applicable).

After a full discussion, the meeting will be adjourned. This gives the Centre management time to decide what the outcome of the meeting should be. The meeting can have one of three outcomes:

- No further action
- Next steps – the Centre management may give you next steps to complete to try to help you improve your attendance. Attendance will continue to be monitored within an agreed timescale.
- Formal action, this will be:
 - First written warning –the warning will be live on your record for 6 months. Attendance will continue to be monitored.
 - Final written warning –The warning will be held on you record for 12 months. Attendance will continue to be monitored.
 - Where there is a possibility of dismissal, the process will be progressed to Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Formal Attendance Review Meeting with Centre Management and Trustees

For ongoing or serious absence patterns, a formal meeting with a panel made up of the nursery manager, and at least two other members of the Centre management team; Management Committee including Trustees; to review next steps and potential outcomes.

After a full discussion of the situation and to give the panel time to decide and agree on an outcome, the meeting will be adjourned. The meeting can have the following outcomes:

- Further supportive action, within an agreed timescale, to try and address the attendance issues. This is only applicable where there is clear belief that further action is likely to lead to an improvement even where it has not done so previously.
- You are offered a change your contract of employment for example, permanent changes to working hours. This would need to be agreed by you but only offered on the basis that attendance will improve.
- Employment is terminated with full notice or payment in lieu of notice.

Important Notes...

- In all cases, where a formal meeting is arranged...
 - you will receive written notice of the meeting - minimum of five working days for Stage 2 and ten working days for stage 3.
 - you can be accompanied by a trade union representative or a Meadows work colleague. You may request a postponement of five days for a meeting at stage 2 and ten days for a meeting at stage 3 to facilitate this.
 - the trade union representative will be allowed to put and sum up your case, respond on behalf of the employee to any views expressed and confer with the you during the meeting. The representative will not have the right to answer questions on your behalf, address the meeting if you do not wish to or prevent you from explaining its case.
 - a formal stage three meeting will only proceed following up to-date OH report and advice.
 - the outcome of a formal meeting may initially be communicated verbally but will always be communicated in writing.
- The Centre may, at all stages, seek advice from a HR specialist on the application of the policy. The HR specialist has the right to attend if asked by the Centre at all meetings in the formal stages of the procedure.
- Long-term illnesses are treated fairly and may not be counted in Bradford Factor calculations.
- Pregnancy-related sickness, disability-related absence, mental health related absence and long-term illnesses are treated fairly and may also be excluded.
- Reviews are supportive conversations, not punishments.
- We focus on helping you stay well, including offering reasonable adjustments, flexible working, or other support.
- Each trigger will be looked at on a case-by-case basis.
- Formal procedures will not be treated as disciplinary procedures unless the Centre has reasonable grounds to believe that the sickness absence procedure has been abused; in which case formal warnings will be issued as a matter of course and the disciplinary policy will be invoked instead.

Long Term Absence

Long term sickness absence is where you are absent for a period of more than 4 weeks. If you are unable to return after 4 weeks the nursery manager will arrange a review meeting with you to discuss your ill health and the support we can offer to help you return to and remain at work. We will work with you throughout your absence and will implement reasonable adjustments where possible.

During your absence, the nursery manager will hold review meetings with you regularly. There are no set timescales for review meetings – it depends on your medical condition and your circumstances.

The nursery manager will arrange to meet you at appropriate times as your absence progresses. This may be for example, after receiving an OH report or if you have met with your GP or specialist.

The meeting is a two-way discussion between you and the nursery manager. The nursery manager will discuss the following with you:

- your health conditions and what progress you are making.
- what, if any, adjustments and/or support is in place, and if this needs to be reviewed.
- next steps from previous attendance review meetings (if applicable).
- Occupational Health report (if applicable).
- if you can return to work in the near future.
- options that may be available if you are unable to return to your role or to the Meadows.

If after a prolonged period it looks unlikely that you will be able to return to work in a reasonable timeframe, we will invite you to a formal meeting. We will only do this if we have:

- gathered all relevant medical information
- considered reasonable adjustments, phased return and redeployment
- discussed ill-health or early retirement (if appropriate)

If having explored the above, you are still unable to return to work in a reasonable timeframe the outcome of the final review meeting is likely to be that we will end your employment on the grounds of capability.

We may also invite you to a final review meeting at any point during your absence if you have had previous long-term sickness absence and have not been able to remain in work.

Appeal

You have the right to appeal against any formal action taken. Our Disciplinary and Appeals Policy sets out what you need to do and how we will deal with your appeal. The Disciplinary and Appeal Policy is available from the Centre Office or at www.meadowsdaycare.org/policies.

Pregnancy Related Sickness

If the reason you are sick and absent from work is related to you being pregnant, the nursery manager or another individual as detailed above will still hold a return to work meeting with you on your first day back to ensure you are well enough to return and to put in place any reasonable adjustments you may need. Pregnancy related absence will be excluded when calculating absence triggers.

Sickness and Holidays

If you're off sick and have pre-booked holiday (during term-time) that you're too unwell to take, you can ask for the holiday to be cancelled so you can take it another time. If you are already on holiday (during term-time) and you become so unwell that you wouldn't have been able to attend work, you can ask for these holidays to be cancelled if your illness seriously disrupts your holiday. You will need to follow the absence reporting procedure and get a Fit Note from your doctor covering the entire period of holiday you were unwell (including the first seven calendar days).

If you are on sick leave and you want to go on holiday you need to let the nursery manager know. We may want to refer you to Occupational Health to ensure going on holiday will not be detrimental to your recovery. Where an absence is broken by a period of annual leave the sickness before and directly after the period of annual leave will be treated as a single absence.

When you are off sick you continue to accrue annual leave. You will not accrue bank holiday leave unless this would take you below your statutory leave entitlement of 5.6 weeks per year.

If you are off sick for an extended period of time and are unable to take all your annual leave before the end of the holiday year, we will work with you to make suitable alternative arrangements.

Sickness During Unpaid Leave

If you are sick during a period of authorised unpaid leave where your contract has been suspended (e.g. for a career break) you won't be entitled to SSP.

Medical Suspension

If by being at work we believe you pose a risk to yourself or others, we may suspend you on medical grounds. This is to allow us to obtain medical advice to confirm if you are or aren't fit to be at work. This is not a sanction against you, it is a precautionary measure, and you will receive your normal pay.

Substance Misuse

If your sickness absence is due to substance misuse, our Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs policy may apply, additionally action may be taken under our Disciplinary and Appeals Policy if you are found to have contravened sections of your contract of employment. Copies of these policies are available from the Centre Office or at www.meadowscare.org/policies.

Personal Conduct Matters

In some cases, the Disciplinary and Appeals Policy may apply rather than, or as well as, the Sickness Absence Policy. Such conduct matters include, but are not limited to:

- If you don't follow the absence reporting procedure.
- If you don't follow the Keeping In Touch procedure.
- If we have reasonable grounds to believe that your sickness absence isn't genuine.
- If you give inaccurate or misleading information about your sickness absence.
- If we have reasonable grounds to believe you are doing activities (other work, sports, hobbies, etc.) that may delay your recovery or make your condition worse.
- If you undertake any other employment, whether paid or unpaid without prior consent.

This policy has been written using the following sources:

- GOV.UK
- www.pricebailey.co.uk/blog/statutory-sick-pay-changes/
- NEU Model Policy – Sickness Absence
- NHSBAS Sickness Absence Policy