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**Authorising Absences - Template Letter**

[V.6 Sept 2022]

Please copy and paste the content below then, edit and amend as necessary:

* WORDING IN RED – choose the most appropriate option
* WORDING IN BLUE – add the appropriate details
* Remove any wording or paragraphs that do not fit your situation

Dear [Headteacher’s name],

I am/ we are writing to request your support in relation to the current difficulties and barriers to attendance my/our son/daughter [child’s name] is experiencing. These difficulties relate to school-based anxiety which we think has been triggered by ……………………………………………………… [and impacted by [list any other issues or conditions].

As I am/we are sure you are aware, anxiety is a common emotion, however, when a child is experiencing severe anxiety, the feeling of anxiety is far more intense and long-lasting. A mental health difficulty of this sort can have an adverse effect on a child’s wellbeing, and if not assessed, supported, and managed appropriately, it may result in a complete inability to enter the school environment.

I/We understand that [child’s name] current absences / absence on/between the dates …………… are not being authorised. I/We ask that you reconsider this decision and amend the attendance record for [child’s name] for the following reasons.

The [Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006] are clear that where a pupil is unable to attend school by reason of sickness, their absence must be treated as authorised.

Within the Department for Education’s guidance on school attendance ‘**Working together to improve school attendance**’ (2022), it states that in relation to the use of Code I for Illness:

219. *Schools must record absences as authorised where pupils cannot attend due to illness (both physical and mental health related).*

I/we have been informed that your policy is to insist upon medical evidence for every absence, however the Department for Education state in this current guidance:

*220. In the majority of cases a parent’s notification that their child is ill can be accepted without question or concern. Schools should not routinely request that parents provide medical evidence to support illness. Schools are advised not to request medical evidence unnecessarily as it places additional pressure on health professionals, their staff and their appointments system particularly if the illness is one that does not require treatment by a health professional. Only where the school has a genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the illness should medical evidence be requested to support the absence.*

I/ we do understand the importance of taking advice from professionals with appropriate training, to prevent an escalation of the difficulties and further harm to my/our child’s wellbeing. To do this I/we have taken the following steps:

[list details of referrals or appointments with GP/ CAMHS / Paediatrician / other medical evidence/involvement……………]

Unfortunately, we are being hindered by the existing long waiting times to access this support and I/we ask that you show some understanding of the difficult situation we are currently facing due to the underfunding and high demand for CAMHS and NHS services at this time.

[If you are asked for medical evidence for every day of absence]

Furthermore, regarding your requirement for medical evidence to cover every day of absence. This issue was considered in the case of ***East Sussex County Council v Sussex Central Area Justices [2019] EWHC 164 (Admin), 2019 WL 00237607****.*

This case was an appeal brought by a local authority against a decision of a magistrates court that parents had a defence to the claim that they had failed to ensure the regular attendance at the school of their son – that defence being reasons of ill-health.

The local authority appealed the magistrates decision on the basis that parents did not have written medical evidence of ill-health for all the absences. The administrative court dismissed their appeal on the basis that written medical evidence wasn’t necessary and the oral evidence of parents and other documentary evidence was sufficient to demonstrate ill-health on the balance of probabilities.

[If you require more support from the school]

In regard to the support that can be provided within school, I/we have been advised that the following actions reflect current guidance for schools within **The Equality Act (2010)**; **The Children & Families Act (2014)**; **The SEND Code of Practice (2015)**; **DfE statutory guidance *Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions* (2017*)***;andDfE advice concerning ***Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges* (2022)**,when deciding upon the best ways for a school to help any child with mental health related needs:

* The school should make a referral to an Educational Psychologist for an assessment.
* The school should assess the child for SEND and offer support in accordance with the SEND Code of Practice (2015) as anxiety disorders are a diagnosable disability, particularly when a parent has reported this as the reason for absence.
* The school should explore the ‘Local Offer’ and make a referral to MAST (Multi Agency Support Team) who can provide strategies for attendance difficulties.
* The school can make a referral to CAMHS for an assessment if this has not already been done.
* If the school is unable to provide suitable educational provision that the child can access, they should apply to the Local Authority for an EHCP needs assessment.
* The school should provide work at home whilst the child is unable to attend. It is recognised that providing work at home supports a quicker return to school, as it prevents anxiety about catching up with missed work becoming an additional barrier to attendance. To encourage attendance, it is important for children to have a sense of belonging in their school and to feel valued as members of the school community. Schools can help to reduce this anxiety and foster a sense of belonging by sending work and other communication home.

[If your child is experiencing long term illness]

Within the Department for Education’s guidance on school attendance ‘**Working together to improve school attendance**’ it states:

*221. Pupils with long term illness or other health needs may need additional support to continue education, such as alternative provision arranged by the local authority. Local authorities are responsible for arranging suitable education for children of compulsory school age who, because of health reasons, would otherwise not receive suitable education. This applies whether or not the child is registered at a school and whatever type of school they attend. The education must be full-time or as close to full-time as the child’s health allows. DfE’s statutory guidance on ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs sets out that local authorities should provide education as soon as it is clear that the child will be away from school for 15 days or more, whether consecutive or cumulative. Local authorities should have a named officer responsible for the education of children with additional health needs.*

I/We would like to point out that the school and local authority have not carried out [any /all /most] of these actions and therefore, could be doing more to support [child's name].

I/We are aware that it is my/our responsibility as parents to ensure [child’s name] receives an education that is suitable for his/her needs and abilities. We also have a responsibility to protect and support their health and wellbeing. I/We ask you to note that I am/we are not preventing [child’s name] from receiving an education, it is the debilitating anxiety and/or [list other conditions] …… he/she is experiencing that currently prevents their attendance at school.

I/We trust that the detail of this letter [along with copies of letters from...............................] offers sufficient evidence that my/our child has a genuine reason for absence and I am/we are fulfilling our legal duties by doing everything possible to resolve [child's name] difficulties. Considering all that I/we have said about my/our child’s medical reasons for absence I/We hope you will support me/us by authorising [child's name] absence on medical grounds, and meet with me/us to discuss the best ways to support their wellbeing and learning opportunities,

Yours sincerely,