ABSENT FROM SCHOOL DUE TO MEDICAL CONDITIONS POLICY

Date of Policy Approval:	February 2022. Reviewed June 2024
Owner of Policy:	Chief Executive Officer
Authorised By:	Executive Team
Policy Review Date:	Spring 2027
Distribution:	All school based staff Websites

CONTENTS

TOPIC	Page number
Introduction	3
Purpose of the Policy	3
Legal Framework	3
LA Duties	4
Definitions	5
Roles and Responsibilities	6
Managing Absences	8
Support for Students	10
Reintegration (including following shielding due to Covid-19)	11
Information Sharing	12
Record Keeping	13
Training	13
Examinations and Assessments	13

Introduction

Bright Futures is required to have a policy that describes how we will comply with legislation and guidance in meeting the needs of children who are absent from school because of health needs. Whilst this policy describes the legal accountabilities of partner agencies (such as local authorities) we know that in practice schools will often be the place where a child and their family has a close relationship. This means that regardless of where the legal accountability sits it will be an agreed arrangement between home and school that best meets the needs of a child, especially when a child who normally attends school is absent so that they can undergo a specific course of treatment. The involvement of other agencies will often be needed, however, in order to meet the needs of children with highly specialised needs.

This policy should be read alongside the Bright Futures policy 'Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions' as there is clearly a cross over between the two. Indeed, good support for a child in school will help to reduce any period of absence. *(Where good practice is described here – as opposed to the letter of the guidance – it is written in italics.)*

What is this policy for?

Local authorities have a duty to ensure that children living in their area or who are legally in their care continue to receive a good education if they are absent from school through illness. Bright Futures Educational Trust aims to support the local authorities (LA) by ensuring that all children who are unable to attend school due to medical needs, and who would not receive suitable education without such provision, continue to have access to as much learning as their medical condition allows. This is to promote the children's well-being and participation and to ensure that they do not suffer any disadvantage by missing out on long periods of educational provision.

Due to the nature of their health needs, some children may be admitted to hospital or placed in alternative forms of education provision. We recognise that, whenever possible, students should receive their education within their school. The aim of any other provision will be to reintegrate students back into school as soon as they are well enough.

We understand that we have a continuing role in a student's education whilst they are not attending school and will work with the LA, healthcare partners and families to ensure that all children with medical needs receive the right level of support to enable them to maintain access to high quality educational provision.

Legal Framework

This policy is informed by all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Education Act 1996

- Equality Act 2010

• Data Protection Act 2018

• DfE (2013) 'Ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs'

• DfE (2015) 'Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following Trust/school-level policies:

• Attendance Policy

• Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

• Data Protection Policy

• Records Management Policy

• Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy

• Supporting Pupils at school with Medical Conditions Policy

LA Duties

The LA must arrange suitable full-time education for children of compulsory school age who, because of illness, would not receive suitable education without such provision. The Trust/Academy has a duty to support the LA in doing so. *In practice, the school will be best placed to make provision for the children they know and have a relationship with in conjunction with parents and carers.*

The guidance states that the LA should:

• Provide such education as soon as it is clear that a student will be away from school for 15 days or more, either in one absence or over the course of a school year, and where suitable education is not otherwise being arranged. They should liaise with the appropriate medical professionals to ensure minimal delay in arranging appropriate provision for the student. *(In practice much of this will happen through a good relationship and effective communication between home and the school.)*

• Ensure the education students receive is of good quality, allows them to take appropriate qualifications, prevents them from falling behind their peers in school, and allows them to reintegrate successfully back into school as soon as possible. *(Again, in most cases this will happen between home and school although there may be times where the LA will need to commission specialist provision to enable this to happen , e.g. home-based physiotherapy, on-site medical support.)*

• Address the needs of individual students in arranging provision.

• Have a named officer responsible for the education of children with additional health needs and ensure parents know who this is.

• Have a written, publicly accessible policy statement on their arrangements to comply with their legal duty towards children with additional health needs.

• Review the provision offered regularly to ensure that it continues to be appropriate for the student and that it is providing suitable education.

• Give clear policies on the provision of education for children and young people under and over compulsory school age.

The LA should not:

• Have processes or policies in place which prevent a child or young person from getting the right type of provision and a good education.

• Withhold or reduce the provision, or type of provision, for a child because of how much it will cost.

• Have policies based upon the percentage of time a child is able to attend school rather than whether the child is receiving a suitable education during that attendance.

• Have lists of health conditions which dictate whether or not they will arrange education for children or inflexible policies which result in children going without suitable full-time education (or as much education as their health condition allows them to participate in).

Definitions

Students who are unable to attend school as a result of their medical needs may include those with:

• Physical health issues.

• Physical injuries.

• Mental ill-health, including anxiety issues.

• Emotional difficulties or school refusal.

• Progressive conditions.

• Terminal illnesses.

• Chronic illnesses.

Covid-19 - An underlying condition which would not normally prevent their attendance at school, but which causes a critical vulnerability in a time of Covid-19 outbreak.

Students who are unable to attend mainstream education for health reasons may attend any of the following:

Hospital school: a special school within a hospital setting where education is provided to give continuity whilst the student is receiving treatment.

Home tuition: some LAs may have home tuition services that act as a communication channel between schools and students on occasions where students are too ill to attend school and are receiving specialist medical treatment.

Medical PRUs: these are LA establishments that provide education for students unable to attend their registered school due to their medical needs.

Roles and Responsibilities (as stated in the guidance)

Whilst the guidance allocates responsibilities to different agencies within the system, in most cases good local management by school leaders working with parents and students will provide the most appropriate solutions for meeting needs.

The Local Governing Body is responsible for:

• Ensuring arrangements for students who cannot attend school as a result of their medical needs are in place and are effectively implemented.

• Ensuring robust systems are in place for dealing with health emergencies and critical incidents, for both on and off-site activities.

• Ensuring staff with responsibility for supporting students with health needs are appropriately trained.

• Approving and reviewing this policy at school level on an annual basis.

Covid-19 – Ensuring that leaders have sufficiently robust arrangements are in place for any student(s) who is unable to attend school because they are critically vulnerable to Covid-19 infection and therefore shielding during a period of outbreak.

Principals/Heads of School or nominated senior leaders are responsible for:

• Ensure compliance with the relevant statutory duties when supporting students with health needs.

• Working collaboratively with parents/carers and other professionals to develop arrangements to meet the best interests of students.

• Ensuring the arrangements put in place to meet students' health needs are fully understood by all those involved and acted upon.

• Appointing a named member of staff who is responsible for students with healthcare needs and liaises with parents, students, the LA, key workers, and others involved in the student's care.

• Ensuring the support put in place focuses on and meets the needs of individual students.

• Arranging appropriate training for staff with responsibility for supporting students with health needs.

• Providing teachers who support students with health needs with suitable information relating to a student's health condition and the possible effect the condition and/or medication taken has on the student.

• Notifying the LA when a student is likely to be away from the school for a significant period of time due to their health needs.

Covid-19 – Ensuring provision is in place for any student(s) who is unable to attend school because they are critically vulnerable to Covid-19 infection and therefore shielding during a period of outbreak.

Each Academy will have a named member of staff for children who are unable to attend school due to health reasons. It may be that the named member of staff changes depending on the child and their particular needs. *For example, in some cases the SENDCo would be appropriate; in other cases it may be a form tutor who has a good and established relationship with the child and family. In most cases, a small team of staff will take on these responsibilities.* They are responsible for:

• Actively monitoring student progress and reintegration into the Academy.

• Supplying students' education providers with information about the child's educational ability, progress, and outcomes.

• Liaising with the Principal, education providers and parents to determine students' programmes of study whilst they are absent from school.

• Keeping students informed about Academy events and encouraging communication with their peers.

• Providing a link between students and their parents/carers, and the LA.

Covid-19 – Identifying students who are not in school due to their condition making them highly vulnerable to Covid-19 infection and ensuring all the above measures are in place.

Teachers and support staff are responsible for:

• Understanding confidentiality in respect of students' health needs.

• Wherever possible, designing (or working with others to create) lessons and activities in a way that allows those with health needs to participate fully and ensuring students are not excluded from activities that they wish to take part in without a clear evidence-based reason.

• Understanding their role in supporting students with health needs and ensuring they attend the required training.

• Ensuring they are aware of the needs of their students through the appropriate and lawful sharing of the individual student's health needs.

• Ensuring they are aware of the any signs, symptoms and triggers of common life-threatening medical conditions and know what to do in an emergency.

• Keeping parents/carers informed of how their child's health needs are affecting them whilst in the Academy.

Covid-19 – Ensure that students shielding due to being critically vulnerable to Covid-19 infection receive continuity of provision through a blend of live on-line teaching and remote learning.

The expectations of parents/carers in these circumstances are what would reasonably be expected. However, the guidance makes explicit that parents/carers are expected to:

• Ensure the regular and punctual attendance of their child at the Academy where possible.

• Work in partnership with the Academy to ensure the best possible outcomes for their child.

• Notify the Academy of the reason for any of their child's absences without delay.

• Provide the Academy with sufficient and up-to-date information about their child's medical needs.

• Attend meetings to discuss how support for their child should be planned.

Covid-19 – Ensure their child engages with live learning, remote teaching, or any other agreed provision, when shielding due to critical vulnerability to Covid-19 infection.

Managing Absences

Parents/carers are advised to contact the Academy on the first day their child is unable to attend due to illness.

Absences due to illness will be authorised unless the Academy has genuine cause for concern about the authenticity of the illness.

The Academy will provide support to students who are absent from school because of illness for a period of less than 15 school days by liaising with the student's parents/carers to arrange schoolwork as soon as the student is able to cope with it or part-time education at school. The Academy will give due consideration to which aspects of the curriculum are prioritised in consultation with the student, their family and relevant members of staff.

For periods of absence that are expected to last for 15 or more school days, either in one absence or over the course of a school year, the appropriate senior leader will notify the LA, who will take responsibility for the student and their education. *In practice it is likely that the LA will expect the school to continue organising provision except in the cases of children requiring highly specialist equipment/support to meet their needs, for example those with EHCPs.*

Where absences are anticipated or known in advance, the Academy will liaise with the LA to enable education provision to be provided from the start of the student's absence.

Effective collaboration between all relevant services (LAs, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, NHS Trusts, the student's Academy and, where relevant, school nurses) is essential to delivering effective education for students with additional health needs. This applies whether the student is in hospital or at home.

When a student is in hospital, liaison between hospital teaching staff, the LA's alternative provision/home tuition service and the student's Academy can ensure continuity of provision and consistency of curriculum. It can ensure that the Academy can make information available about the curriculum and work the student may miss, helping the student to keep up, rather than having to catch up.

The LA will set up a personal education plan (PEP) for the student which will allow the Academy, the LA, and the provider of the student's education to work together. Whilst this is an LA responsibility. *In practice this is much more likely to be provided by the school*

The Academy will monitor student attendance and mark registers to ensure it is clear whether a student is, or should be, receiving education other than at school.

The Academy will only remove a student who is unable to attend school because of additional health needs from the school roll where:

• Before ceasing to be of school age: The student has been certified by a Medical Officer as unlikely to be in a fit state of health to attend school

• After ceasing to be of school age: Neither the student nor their parent/carer has indicated to the school the intention to continue to attend the Academy.

• A student unable to attend school because of their health needs will not be removed from the Academy register without parental/carer consent and certification from the Medical Officer, even if the LA has become responsible for the student's education.

Covid-19 – Where a student is unable to attend because they are shielding as a result of being highly vulnerable to Covid-19 infection, the appropriate guidance in place at the time will be followed, taking account of advice from medical professionals about the appropriateness of in-school or remote provision – Bright Futures understands that this advice may change due to the rate of Covid incidence at any particular time.

Covid-19 - The views and wishes of parents/carers will always be taken into account when deciding on the appropriate approach to attendance for children who are highly vulnerable to Covid-19 infection. However, the general principle applies that where medical advice indicates that students are medically able to attend face to face provision they should do so.

Support for Students

Where a student has a complex or long-term health issue, the Academy will discuss the student's needs and how these may be best met with the LA, relevant medical professionals, parents/carers and, where appropriate, the student.

Local authorities will expect all schools and academies to support students with health needs to attend full-time education wherever possible, or for the Academy to make reasonable adjustments to students' programmes of study where medical evidence supports the need for those adjustments.

The Academy will make reasonable adjustments under students' Individual Health Care Plans (IHCPs), in accordance with the Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy.

Students admitted to hospital will receive education as determined appropriate by the medical professionals and hospital education team at the hospital concerned where appropriate.

During a period of absence, the Academy will work with the provider of the student's education to establish and maintain regular communication and effective outcomes.

Whilst a student is away from school, the Academy will work with the LA to ensure the student can successfully remain in touch with their school using, for example, the following methods:

• Academy newsletters

• Emails/Invitations to school events

• Cards or letters from peers and staff

• Where appropriate, the Academy will provide the student's education provider with relevant information, curriculum materials and resources.

• To help ensure a student with additional health needs is able to attend school following an extended period of absence, the following adaptations will be considered:

• A personalised or part-time timetable, drafted in consultation with the named staff member.

• Access to additional support in school

• Online access to the curriculum from home

• Movement of lessons to more accessible rooms

• Places to rest at school.

• Special exam arrangements to manage anxiety or fatigue

Covid-19 – Where a student is unable to attend due to critical vulnerability to Covid-19 infection, provision will be put in place to ensure that there is continuity of education through live lessons and remote learning.

Reintegration (including following shielding due to Covid-19)

Please reference the policy on 'Supporting Students with Medical Conditions'

When a student is considered well enough to return to school, the Academy will develop a tailored reintegration plan in collaboration with the LA.

The Academy will work with the LA when reintegration into school is anticipated, to plan for consistent provision during and after the period of education outside school.

As far as possible, the student will be able to access the curriculum and materials that they would have used in school.

If appropriate, the school nurse will be involved in the development of the student's reintegration plan and informed of the timeline of the plan by the appointed named member of staff, to ensure they can prepare to offer any appropriate support to the student.

The Academy will consider whether any reasonable adjustments need to be made to provide suitable access to the school and the curriculum for the student.

For longer absences, the reintegration plan will be developed near to the student's likely date of return, to avoid putting unnecessary pressure on an ill student or their parents in the early stages of their absence.

The Academy is aware that some students will need gradual reintegration over a long period of time and will always consult with the student, their parents and key staff about concerns, medical issues, timing, and the preferred pace of return.

There is no need to make the planning over bureaucratic – first and foremost, it needs to support the successful reintegration of student. The reintegration plan will include:

• The date for planned reintegration, once known.

• Details of regular meetings to discuss reintegration.

• Details of the named member of staff who has responsibility for the student.

• Clearly stated responsibilities and the rights of all those involved.

• Details of social contacts, including the involvement of peers and mentors during the transition period.

• A programme of small goals leading up to reintegration.

• Follow up procedures.

The Academy will ensure a welcoming environment is developed and encourage students and staff to be positive and proactive during the reintegration period.

Following reintegration, the Academy will support the LA in seeking feedback from the student regarding the effectiveness of the process.

Information Sharing

It is essential that all information about students with health needs is kept up to date.

To protect confidentiality, all information-sharing techniques, e.g. staff noticeboards/medical files, will be agreed with the student and their parent/carer in advance of being used.

All teachers, TAs, supply, and support staff will be provided with access to relevant information, including high-risk health needs, first aiders and emergency procedures, via the agreed Academy procedures.

Parents/carers will be made aware of their own rights and responsibilities regarding confidentiality and information sharing. To help achieve this, the Academy will:

• Ensure this policy and other relevant policies are easily available and accessible.

• Provide the student and their parents/carers with a copy of the policy on information sharing.

• Ask parents/carers to sign a consent form which clearly details the organisations and individuals that their child's health information will be shared with and which methods of sharing will be used.

• Consider how friendship groups and peers may be able to assist students with health needs.

When a student is discharged from hospital or is returning from other education provision, the Academy will ensure the appropriate information is received to allow for a smooth return to the school. A nominated member of staff will liaise with the hospital or other tuition service as appropriate.

Covid-19 – During periods of Covid-19 outbreak, academies will keep in regular contact with parents/carers and, where appropriate, medical professionals, in order to ascertain the most appropriate provision at any given time. Provision for these students will be kept under constant review.

Record Keeping

In accordance with the Supporting Students with Medical Conditions Policy and Administration of Medicines Policy, written records will be kept of all medicines administered to students.

Proper record keeping protects both staff and students and provides evidence that agreed procedures have been followed.

All records will be maintained in line with the Records Management Policy.

Training

Staff will be trained in a timely manner to assist with a student's return to school.

Once a student's return date has been confirmed, staff will be provided with relevant training before the student's anticipated return.

Healthcare professionals should be involved in identifying and agreeing with the school the type and level of training required.

Training will be sufficient to ensure staff are confident in their ability to support students with additional health needs.

Parents/carers of students with additional health needs may provide specific advice but will not be the sole trainer of staff.

Examinations and Assessments

The named member of staff will liaise with the alternative provision provider over planning and examination course requirements where appropriate.

Relevant assessment information will be provided to the alternative provision provider if required.

Awarding bodies may make special access arrangements for students with permanent or long-term disabilities and learning difficulties, or temporary disabilities and illnesses.

Applications for such arrangements will be submitted by the Academy/examination centre (or LA if more appropriate) as early as possible.

Special arrangements for National Tests may also need to be considered.

Further Information

Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions: click here