

Covid Recovery Attendance Policy

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Schools and Providers Standards Team 0-19
Quality and Commissioning
Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole (BCP) Children's Services

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1. Purpose Statement

- 1.1 This policy is designed to augment and improve the attendance policies of schools, colleges and educational settings so that pupils, staff and students are not further disadvantaged when they return to education after having Covid 19.
- 1.2 Its intention is to support a healthier and more resilient education workforce and to encourage children and young people in BCP to recover, thrive and be happy in their return to education, regardless of where they live or are educated.
- 1.3 The policy also identifies challenges and offers potential solutions to those suffering from ill effects, vulnerabilities and economic hardship as a result of Covid and other conditions arising from it such as Long Covid, delays in treatment/diagnosis for existing or new conditions and waiting lists for anxiety disorders/other mental health and well-being (MHWB) issues.

2. Who the policy applies to or could be used to support

- 2.1 Schools, settings, colleges and universities within and outside of BCP with children in our care or working/studying away for any reason.
- 2.2 Employees within BCP Council education family and partner organisations and companies for example where pupils or staff may be seconded or on placement.

3. This policy is an addition to schools/setting attendance management policies

- 3.1 This policy has emerged from the experience of Covid's impact on the lives of staff, pupils and students in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole from March 2020 to date.
- 3.2 It has also evolved from the experience of teams working with reduced capacity as a result of Covid and the many aftereffects of Long Covid on MHWB and productivity.

4. Context and research

- 4.1 The Council and Public Health Dorset has invested substantially in a recovery programme for children and young people, but recovery from Covid and its impact on education will take many years and demand for support will continue to rise as cases do.
- 4.2 We are still at the start of understanding Covid and its impact and what Long Covid may inflict on children and young people and staff in BCP. At time of writing cases in the school age population are double that in the community. They are also increasing in primary phase which is largely unvaccinated in terms of pupils.
- 4.3 What is Long Covid? Long Covid (LC) is recognised already by the NHS who identify a range of symptoms experienced by individuals¹. The first diagnosis of LC is for those who struggle with recovery 4 weeks after first Covid symptoms; when this extends for more than 12 weeks, this is post Covid syndrome.
- 4.4 Its symptoms include extreme tiredness, brain fog, shortness of breath and chest pain and a range of physical, clinical and psychological conditions.
- 4.5 The symptoms above tend to be reported by adults and there are already 60 clinics in England dealing with cases for [them](#); it is estimated that 10% of adults who have had Covid are likely to have extended symptoms.
- 4.6 In children and young people, there is emerging research and support in the [NHS](#) and as cases of Covid grow in pupils in every phase of education, we can expect up to 14% of them to have some more chronic symptoms, even if their initial experience of Covid itself was quite mild. With 1 in 7 according to the [BMJ](#) likely to get long-Covid, schools and parents need to be aware of how to reduce the impact of harm on education and on pupils' well-being.

¹ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/long-term-effects-of-coronavirus-long-covid/>

- 4.3 According to the BMJ, in the third wave of the pandemic 14% of CYP had symptoms that lasted 15 weeks or more² and in adults it is reported at being slightly less at 13.3%.

5. Approval process

- 5.1 Members are asked to approve the context and actions contained in this policy to further support and advise educational employers in planning for Covid educational and organisational recovery
- 5.2 The Council has a responsibility to maintained schools as an employer, but also to all educational settings in terms of the outcomes and qualifications that children achieve, to ensure that their education remains of a high standard despite Covid or other public health threats.
- 5.3 Although we are still at the start of understanding Covid and the long-term impact of Long Covid, the volume of cases, impact of staff illness on attendance and school resilience, is a threat to the Covid recovery

6. Links to Council Strategies

- 6.1 This policy supports the [The Big Plan](#), [Corporate Strategy](#) and the [Children and Young Peoples Plan](#).
- 6.2 It also relates to the Health & Wellbeing & Equality & Diversity Strategies.

7. The Policy Sickness and absence because of long COVID

Adults

This policy asks employers, leaders and managers to understand Covid and Long Covid and to adapt human resources policy to ensure that as many staff as possible do not suffer long term effects of Corona 19 and are able to return to work with support and reasonable adjustments.

- 7.1 For some people, coronavirus (COVID-19) can cause symptoms that last weeks or months after the infection. This can be called 'post-COVID-19 syndrome', 'long-tail COVID' or 'long COVID'. Find out more from the NHS about: [symptoms of long COVID and COVID-19 recovery](#)
- 7.2 Long COVID symptoms could affect someone's ability to work or cause them to take sickness absence.
- 7.3 The usual rules for [sickness absence](#) and [sick pay](#) apply when someone is off work because of long COVID.
- 7.4 Employers, educational leaders and managers will benefit from being aware that the effects of long COVID can come and go. On some days the person might seem well, but on others their symptoms can be worse and they might need to be off work again.
- 7.5 When someone is off sick with Covid or post-Covid, they might feel isolated or need support to return to work. Employers should:

² <https://www.bmj.com/content/374/bmj.n2157>

- agree how and when to make contact during any absence
- make sure their work is covered and shared out appropriately while they're off
- talk about ways to support them as they return to work where and when possible³

7.6 Staff absence related to Covid can be aggravated by stress, anxiety and concerns about lingering fatigue. Good communication is very important. From the first day that a staff member raises the prospect of Long Covid the manager or employee could discuss:

:

- getting an occupational health assessment
- making changes to the workplace or to how the employee works ('reasonable adjustments'), such as different working hours
- a phased return to work
- what they want to tell others at work about their illness

ACAS gives the following example: Bo has had severe tiredness and body aches since having COVID-19 a few weeks ago. Their doctor has diagnosed long COVID. Bo is ready to come back to work but is worried that working full time will be hard.

Bo's employer looks at the workload and is able to allocate some work to others in the team. This means they can offer Bo part-time hours to start their return to work. They put in a date to review the arrangement.⁴

7.7 Most educational staff want to return to work as quickly as possible and may even return to work when they are not well. If this leads to a revolving door of trying to return and health breakdown; employers should make sure they have done everything possible before considering a capability procedure. If an employer dismisses an employee without first carrying out a full and fair disciplinary or capability procedure, the employee could make a claim of unfair dismissal to an employment tribunal.

7.8 As well as disability, employers must be careful to avoid other types of discrimination when considering long COVID. For example, Long COVID has been found to more severely affect:

- older people
- ethnic minorities
- women

Employers must avoid discriminating by age, disability, race or sex. Find out more about:

- [discrimination and the law](#)
- [avoiding discrimination during COVID-19 from the Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)

Children and young people

This policy asks school leaders and welfare and pastoral managers to understand Covid and Long Covid and to adapt attendance policy to ensure that as many pupils and students as possible do not suffer long term effects of Corona 19 and are able to return to school/college or work from home with support and reasonable adjustments.

³ See appendix for possible letter to staff who have tested positive for Covid or have gone home with symptoms

⁴ See letter for staff in the appendices for other suggestions where you will also find the whole ACAS documentation links

- 7.9 For some children and young people, coronavirus (COVID-19) can cause symptoms that last weeks or months after the infection. This can be called 'post-COVID-19 syndrome', 'long-tail COVID' or 'long COVID'. See above.
- 7.10 Long COVID symptoms could affect pupils' ability to study, do work experience and other careers supporting activities or cause them to take sickness absence. Although these may be authorised by school and were previously covered by [X Codes](#), this is an additional worry and concern for pupils and can lead to stress and anxiety as well as being ill.
- 7.11 There is some scope at the moment for latitude and headteacher consent to absence and return to school programmes which neither negatively impact the school attendance figures nor pupils' attendance records. Ofsted has remained sympathetic to schools and pupils adversely impacted by staff and pupil absence which soared in the Spring Term 2022 to the highest ever figures.
- 7.12 Schools can contact the MIT team emergency inbox mitcovid@bcpcouncil.gov.uk or the 0-19 Team's Covid specific one schools.continuity@bcpcouncil.gov.uk for support and to answer questions about when to take a "harder line" or to demonstrate evidence of impact on schools' attendance from the teams who have monitored cases for two years.
- 7.13 Employers, educational leaders and pastoral/welfare managers will benefit from being aware that the effects of long COVID can come and go. On some days the person might seem well, but on others their symptoms can worsen. Sometimes they may not be able to cope with learning online either.
- 7.14 A system needs establishing with good home/school contact and open dialogue so that school/college is aware of changing needs and also any worsening outcomes⁵.
- 7.15 When a pupil is off sick with Covid or post-Covid, they and their family may feel isolated or need economic support. Many schools already:
- agree how and when to make contact during any absence
 - make sure they have access to work online or a welfare check in while they're off and when they are up to it
 - talk about ways to support them when they do start to return to school/college
 - using a phased return offer
 - allowing pupils to wear masks or other mitigation to help with confidence in dealing with fear of re-infection/new illnesses.
- 7.16 Pupil absence related to Covid can be aggravated by stress, anxiety and concerns about lingering fatigue or examination and assessment deadlines. Good communication is very important to returning to education and just as with employees it is important to consider reasonable adjustments.
- 7.17 Schools and colleges need to be careful to avoid undue pressure and discrimination when considering long COVID. For example, it has been found to more severely affect:
- ethnic minorities
 - vulnerable group pupils including those with SEND
 - economically disadvantaged pupils and students
 - those with underlying health issues or disabilities linked to lung function

⁵ At least 1 of BCP's child hospitalisations was a younger child with severe Long Covid symptoms

8 How to use this policy

- 8.1 This policy is designed as an educational, iterative and constructive document to help manage outbreaks of Covid and the Long Covid and staff attendance issues that ensue from 23 months of pandemic working.
- 8.2 Covid management has been a collaborative effort between Public Health Dorset, BCP Education Teams particularly the 0-19 Team and school, college and university settings.
- 8.3 This policy is only part of a formal framework with maintained schools in BCP, however it is recommended to academies, multi academy trusts, post-16 settings and independent schools.
- 8.4 Governing bodies can book onto relevant training programmes via CPD online and should adapt to their settings and budgets. There will also be workshops for educational leaders to accompany it.
- 8.5 The Dorset Health Protection Board has fed back on this document and supports its proposals.
- 8.6 Discuss with parents and staff how this could be used to help get the organisation back to academic and physical recovery.

9 Roles and responsibilities

- 9.1 The headteacher or principal of the school/setting is responsible for the attendance recording, reporting and action in their establishment.
- 9.2 The Council is responsible for the maintained schools in BCP but also for the learning outcomes and quality of education of all 45,500 pupils in the area and has maintained support and help for the schools and settings in BCP to manage Covid and mitigate educational impact.
- 9.3 Public Health Dorset and the 0-19 Team in BCP manage the day inboxes that manage and escalate cases and suggest policies and systems to improve disease management and educational continuity.
- 9.4 The Health Protection Board helps co-ordinate support across pan-Dorset for Covid 19 Management and proactive prevention.

10 Enforcement and sanctions

- 10.1 The vast majority of adults and children who report health issues as a result of Covid will see them fade between 5-14 days after a positive test/symptoms. Most parents want to see their child in school and for education to remain open.
- 10.2 For those parents who are fearful of Covid and where children are deemed to be avoiding attendance the sanctions/support in place can include:

- Inviting them in to see Covid safety mitigation in practice
- Allowing them to use confidence building measures, such as mask wearing and access to vaccination boosters
- Contact with the Inclusion Team or Early Help's Team Around the School to discuss support for a phased return
- Attendance sanctions can now be used if despite supportive measures that parents refuse to send pupils in

10.3 Most of this policy is about support and persuasion. The *rush slowly* approach to a return to school with support is less likely to see longer term health issues and a faster emotional and educational recovery.

10.4 Staff absence was very high in the Spring Term this year and was caused by Omicron, reinfection of senior and other staff teaching large classes to avoid groups being sent home. Primary phase pupils remain largely unvaccinated and this leaves schools susceptible more than most of other workplaces. Staff may need longer off to recover and this places stresses and vulnerabilities on those still in school.

11 Further information and evidence and appendices

10.1 Although we are in the early stages of research into Long Covid and other impacts on the workforces and pupil/student attendance, there are many excellent resources for schools, colleges and settings on how to manage both this and other attendance challenges:

- [ACAS](#) is an excellent resource for fair approaches for employees and employers
- NHS has responded quickly to needs around Long Covid and symptoms etc can be accessed [here](#) with support for patients with it is outlined [here](#)
- There is a very active research, campaigning and support group with an active and friendly footprint in Dorset; [Long Covid Kids](#)
- Another very supportive website specific to children is Great Ormond Street which has reports on new conditions for children from Covid including [PIMs](#)

10.2 Useful support for educational settings and employers in accessible, trusted language and also in non-English languages can be found [here](#)

10.3 Dorset and BCP support can be found [here](#)

Appendix 1a

Correspondence that might help with Covid and Long Covid Management

Sample letter for staff who have gone home with symptoms or are ill with it following a positive test:

Dear.....

We are sorry to hear that you have Covid and acknowledge that your isolation period is due to end on **INSERT DATE**.

Symptoms vary by age of person who is ill, variant and any underlying conditions. Do not hesitate to contact 111 or your GP if any of your symptoms concern you. There is advice on the NHS website about how to self-treat the main symptoms of [Covid](#) at home.

It can be a lonely experience as people may need to keep their distance and we would like consent to arrange to call you to check in with you on **INSERT DAY OF THE WEEK/DATE**.

Although your isolation is scheduled to last until the date above and of course you will test to ensure you are negative before you return to school, we would like you to be aware of how you are feeling and to come back when you are ready.

The only symptom you are advised not to return with is a fever, but we want to ensure that you take manageable steps back into school/the workplace after you're better; you are more likely to be able to recover well if you don't rush back into all your commitments.

We have agreed that when you return you will:

INSERT AGREEMENT ABOUT ANY ADAPTATIONS ON RETURN TO WORK. There are many options here but could include one or some of the following:

- No after work meetings in **INSERT NUMBER** first/second etc week
- Work 2.5 days week 1, 4 days week 2 or other partial/phased return
- Finish at 2.20pm on your first week back

Things that are reported to help improve outcomes for those who have recently had Covid can include:

- Rushing slowly into activity& exercise routines, take your time
- Check out the NHS recovery pages by symptom [here](#)
- Be kind to yourself it can take 2-3 weeks to recover from fatigue
- Don't be embarrassed if symptoms persist-your cough will not be infectious but can linger for example

A small minority of people have symptoms including some new ones that persist longer than 4 weeks. If you don't feel better stay in touch with your GP and ask for help in understanding whether this is a new condition or you may have Long Covid.

We have a policy in place to support you if your post-Covid recovery takes longer than average and we will discuss working arrangements and support again on an ongoing basis if needed; your contact for that will be **INSERT NAME**.

Appendix 1b

Correspondence that might help with Covid and Long Covid Management

Follow up letter for parents/carers who have a child who is positive for Covid or has gone home with symptoms or is ill with it following a positive test:

Dear.....

We are sorry to hear that **INSERT NAME** has tested positive for Covid/has symptoms that are likely to be Covid 19.

Symptoms vary by age of person who is ill, variant and any underlying conditions. Do not hesitate to contact 111 or your GP if any symptoms concern you. There is advice on the NHS website about how to self-treat the main symptoms of [Covid](#) at home.

It can be a lonely experience for a family and a child, as people may need to keep their distance and we will arrange a call you to check how **INSERT NAME** is on **INSERT DAY OF THE WEEK/DATE** before your child is scheduled to return.

Hopefully symptoms will be mild and the only symptom they are advised not to return with is a fever, but we want to ensure that your child takes manageable steps back into school when they are better; they are more likely to be able to recover well if they concentrate on coming back into school and don't overdo their out of school commitments.

Things that are reported to help improve outcomes for those who have recently had Covid can include:

- Not rushing into activity & exercise routines, but taking your time
- Check out the NHS recovery pages by symptom [here](#)
- Be aware it can take 2-3 weeks to recover from fatigue
- Make your child aware they don't need to be embarrassed if symptoms persist - a cough will not be infectious but can linger for example.

A small minority of children have symptoms including some new ones that persist longer than 4 weeks. If your child doesn't feel better stay in touch with your GP and ask for help in understanding whether this is a new condition or they may have longer lasting Covid symptoms.

We have a policy in place to support you if post-Covid recovery takes longer than average and we will discuss attendance arrangements and support again on an ongoing basis if needed; your contact for that will be **INSERT NAME**.