

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL MEDICAL COMMITTEE

'Suite 5b' Anson Court, Horninglow Street, Burton on Trent, Staffs DE14 1NG

Tel: 01283 534384 Fax: 01283 562824

Email: enquiry@sslmc.co.uk

Website: www.sslmc.co.uk

Dear Head Teacher

Re: Requirement for medical evidence to support authorised absence due to illness

It is the responsibility of schools (not parents) to decide whether a pupil absence should be marked as authorised or unauthorised. Authorised absence means that the school has either given approval in advance for a pupil of compulsory school age to be away, or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as justification for absence.

The Department for Education guidance explains that it is a matter for schools to determine if they require evidence to support the authorisation of an absence in the form of a prescription or appointment card. The guidance relating to the marking of registers for illness and medical appointments states:

Code 1: Illness (not medical or dental appointments)

Schools should advise parents to notify them on the first day the child is unable to attend due to illness. Schools should authorise absences due to illness unless they have genuine cause for concern about the legitimacy of an illness. If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, schools can request parents to provide medical evidence to support illness. Schools can record the absence as unauthorised if not satisfied of the authenticity of the illness but should advise parents of their intention. Schools are advised not to request medical evidence unnecessarily. Medical evidence can take the form of prescriptions, appointment cards, etc. rather than doctors' notes.

GPs receive a significant number of requests for sickness certificates or appointment cards for school children. GPs do not provide sick notes for school children. When children are absent from school owing to illness, schools may request a letter from a parent or guardian. Where this includes sickness during an exam period, or if the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, schools could request that parents provide medical evidence (not a doctor's sick note) as per the DfE guidance above. GPs cannot provide retrospective sickness certification. When a child suffers from a long-term condition, any certification will be provided by the responsible specialist.

It is estimated that a potential 50,000+ appointments nationally could be saved by correcting misconceptions on the role of GPs in issuing sickness certification. GPs unfortunately will not sign sickness certificates for less than the statutory requirement and should not be asked for appointments for children that do not need to see the doctor. However, where a pupil has excessive absence due to illness and school has concerns, they should contact the school nurse for assistance and support for the pupil.

Yours sincerely

D. Dickson

Dr D Dickson
South Staffs LMC Sec