

# SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL MEDICAL COMMITTEE

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## Sickness Certification Notes for Children

South Staffordshire LMC understands that schools are under pressure to reduce non-attendance and for that reason may make contact with parents/guardians to get medical information from their doctor.

However, for the parents/guardians to turn up asking for a letter, we fear may avoid the dialogue which may be in the child's best interest and how the school could accommodate the child in spite of possible on-going health needs or problems.

Hence unless there is a safeguarding issue where GP input would indeed be helpful and needed (is the parent keeping the child home to act as a carer or other role, for example?), we would not normally expect GPs to be asked to be involved in providing information regarding children being unable to attend school for health reasons.

Should the child have an enduring health problem that would be helped by involvement of the education authorities (every child has a right to an education), such report would best provided by the responsible specialist rather than from a generalist.

However, should a GP agree to provide the school with information about long or short term absences of children, the GP is entitled to request a fee under the NHS General Medical Services Statutory Instrument, Regulation 25 a, as it is not part of our core GMS work:

1. "The contractor may demand or accept a fee or other remuneration  
a) from any statutory body for services rendered for the purposes of that body's statutory functions".

Your LMC feels that the best way to approach this would be, if the school requesting such information writes to the doctor directly setting out what information is required and with the appropriate consent to release this kind of information attached. Should the GP agree to provide this information, on receipt of that request, the practice would then invoice the school for providing the information in the requested format and we advise that the practice provides the information only once payment has been received, just as they would do with any other non-contractual correspondence.

- It is the responsibility of the school (not parents) to decide whether a pupil's absence should be marked as authorised or unauthorised.
- 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 do not provide sick notes for children to excuse absence from school. 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 may request that parents provide medical evidence (not a doctor's sick note), although GPs are not contractually obliged to provide sick notes for pupils, who are off sick from school or sickness certification for students who miss an examination or believe their performance was affected by illness.
- GPs cannot provide retrospective sickness certification.
- When a child is absent due to a long term medical condition, any certification should be provided by the responsible specialist. In such circumstances, the school must consider if it can meet the child's health needs and enable the child to continue to access education and return to school. If this is not possible, a referral to the Local Authority's Alternative Provision Service may be required.
- It is estimated that many thousands of appointments could be saved by correcting misconceptions on the role of GPs in issuing sickness certification and GPs should not be asked for appointments for children that do not need to see the doctor.
- When a pupil has excessive absence due to illness and the school has concerns, including concerns about appropriate sickness certification, they should also contact their school nurse for assistance.