

Introduction of “Fit Note” – Statement of Fitness for Work

Guidance for Headteachers

With effect from 6 April 2010, the sick note/medical certificate has changed to become a “fit note” (Statement of Fitness for Work).

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

1. The decision to change the system is based on the recognition that many people with health conditions can, with some basic help from their employer work as they recover from their condition. Work can aid recovery and it also benefits the employer by reducing sickness absence.
2. To help employees obtain the support they need to get back to work the new fit note system means that doctors can advise you that your employee is either:
 - unfit for work; or
 - may be fit for work

A sample copy of the fit note is attached at Appendix 1.

3. A doctor will provide a “may be fit for work” statement if they think their patient’s health condition may allow them to work with suitable support from you. If an employee is too ill to work the doctor will advise this just like with the sick note.
4. The option of certifying a person as being ‘fit for work’ has been removed. This means that employees will no longer be able to provide final sick notes prior to returning to work after a prolonged period of sick absence.
5. Doctors have space on the fit note to advise you on how your employee’s condition will affect what they do and there are helpful tick boxes for doctors to use to suggest common ways you may help a return to work (e.g. a phased return to work, amended duties, altered hours and workplace adaptations).
6. When your employee presents a fit note stating that they “may be fit for work” you should arrange to discuss this with them. The purpose of the discussion will be to consider the doctor’s comments and attempt to agree any temporary changes to their job or hours, what support will be provided and for how long as well as confirming a return to work date. In cases of long term sick absence this discussion can be covered in the “return to work meeting” in accordance with the Authority’s Caring About Sickness policy for schools. If you cannot make the adaptations or adjustments that have been recommended in order to facilitate a return to work you should explain the reasons for this to the employee, agree a

review date and use the Statement (fit note) as if the doctor had advised “not fit for work”. **Please note that the employee does not need to go back to the doctor for a new Statement confirming this.**

A flow chart explaining what to do if you receive a “may be fit for work” statement is attached at Appendix 2.

7. Where the doctor recommends that the employee would benefit from a gradual build up of their duties or working hours over a period of time – a phased return to work – this should be treated as a normal phased return in accordance with the Caring about Sickness policy for schools and a detailed programme should be approved. Headteachers are reminded that under the Schools’ Staff Sickness and other Absence Insurance scheme it may be possible to re-claim any additional cover costs for the first four weeks of the phased return period.
8. It will clearly not be possible to routinely obtain advice from the Occupational Health Service for every case requiring temporary adjustments to hours, conditions or workplace adaptations so a planned return to work should be based on common sense and agreement with the employee. For specific occupational health guidance, cases should be formally referred using the Occupational Health Referral Form. General advice can be obtained either from the Occupational Health Service on (01743) 252833 or by contacting your Human Resources Officer.

You are strongly advised to read the full advice including guidance on workplace adjustments and case studies contained in the Department for Work and Pensions publication ‘*Statement of Fitness for Work – A guide for employers*’
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/fitnote-employer-guide.pdf>