



Symphony Learning  
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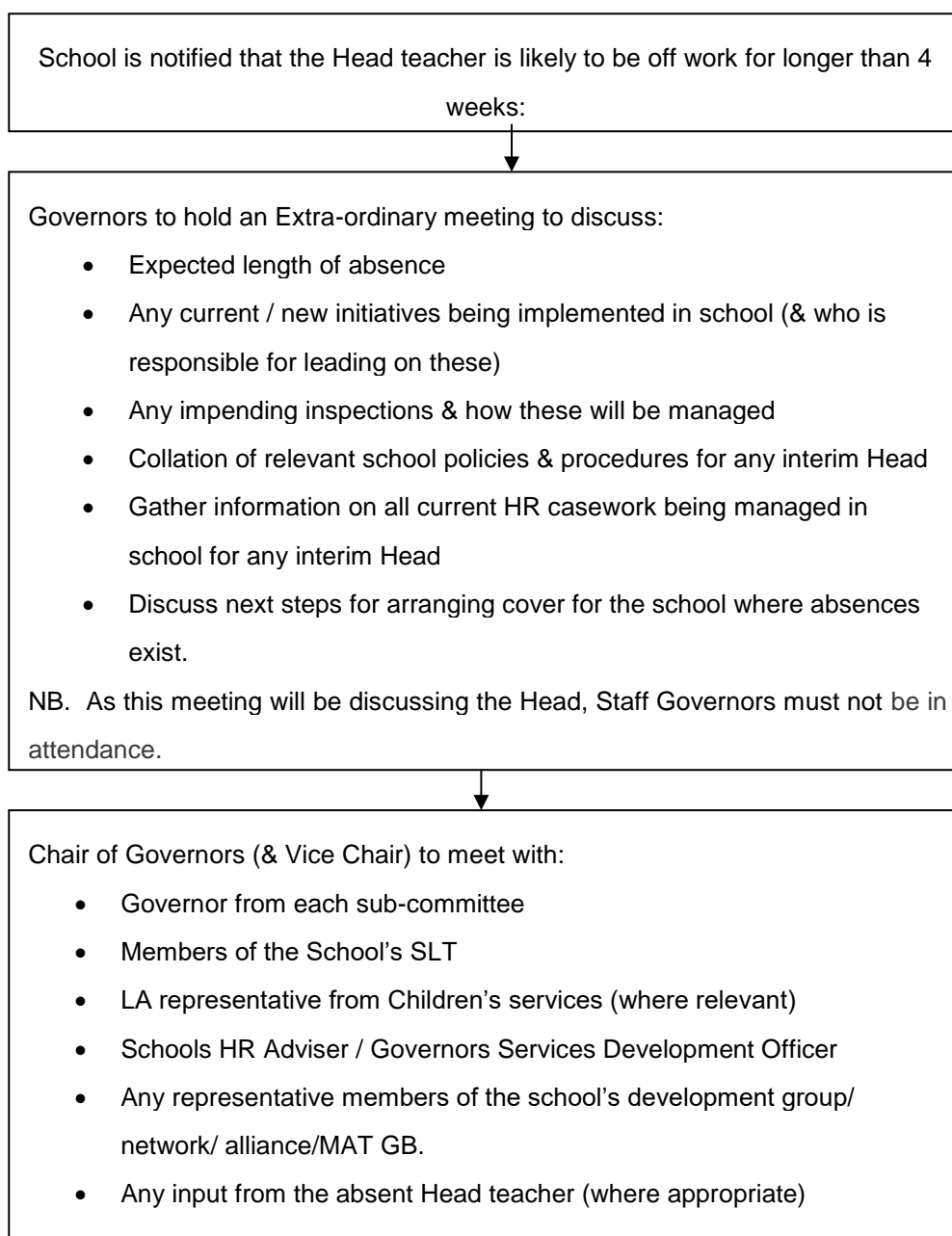
# Absent Head Teacher Policy and Guidance

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First adopted by Symphony Learning Trust on	Spring 2020
Version	1

This guidance is intended for use by maintained, Single Academy Trust and Multi Academy Trust schools in the event of the long-term absence of the substantive Head teacher. Where a MAT is in place, in the first instance, consideration should be given to providing cover for an absent Head teacher by utilising existing staff within the MAT arrangement.

During their absence, the absent Head Teacher can in no circumstances be expected to complete leadership/management tasks; however, situations may arise where the absent Head teacher wishes to remain in contact with the school. In such circumstances, the absent Head must seek advice from their GP and/or Occupational Health to confirm a level of engagement with the school/Governors (in relation to their role) that is appropriate. The level of engagement must be kept under review and adjusted as and when required.



Considerations for Governors when seeking an Acting Head to cover a period of absence:

- Who will maintain contact with the absent head teacher – a member of SLT or a member of the GB (if this has not already been agreed)?
- How & where will the Governors find an Acting Head to cover (internally / externally)?
- Considering the SLT within the school, is there any capacity for existing members of the SLT to take on additional responsibilities?
- Where a collaboration is agreed with a neighbouring school or members of the SLT are “acting up” in to the Head teacher role what are the cost implications to the school?
- What support will be put in place for the Acting Head? Will there be an additional mentor/support from the school’s network / alliance etc? Who will be responsible for going through this protocol with the Acting Head?
- How will Governors ensure that they monitor the effectiveness of the interim arrangements?
- Who will be accountable for decision making and actions taken during the absence of the Head teacher?
- What work needs to be covered during the remaining academic year?
- What roles and responsibilities can be delegated to the remaining members of the SLT?
- Who will responsible for safeguarding in school?
- Performance Management of staff – requirement to ensure robust PM of staff continues during the Head teacher’s absence.
- Governors must ensure that they oversee all actions and monitor the situation to ensure the school continues to operate effectively.
- A full record of actions taken and agreed should be made to be shared with the absent head teacher at an appropriate time.

**Additional Points for Governors:**

If strategic plans have not been made in advance of the absence period to establish *in-school* leadership/management arrangements, Governors should take into consideration the capacity of other members of the Senior Leadership Team as well as the senior leadership structure when making decisions on cover. This should be kept under review as details emerge as to the HT’s anticipated return date and issues which arise in the school. Senior Leadership Team workloads will need particular attention to avoid inappropriate stress levels and specific attention given to a member of the Senior Leadership Team who undertakes the acting head teacher role.

If an *external* head is to be involved in the leadership of the school the acting head should at all times work from a respectful stance with regard to existing development plans and practice in the school. A professional approach and perspective should be maintained at all times, taking into account the individual ethos and culture of the school.

Governors should also ensure that the Interim Head teacher continues to participate in any collaborative schools' networks / alliances of which the school is currently a member, to ensure the school remains up to date with developments and new initiatives that occur within the group. Where appropriate, a mentor from this group may be assigned to the Interim Head teacher to assist them with their role.

Confidentiality: Any Information with regard to school business shared with governors, other schools teaching alliances or other parties must be handled appropriately with regards to professionalism, sensitivity and confidentiality.

Where key events occur within a school during the absence of the substantive head teacher, for example, an inspection, staffing issues or Academisation, Governors must ensure that they respond to these issues and where necessary liaise with relevant contacts, such as the LA, Governors Services, HR and so on and ensure longer term strategic planning.

### **Returning To Work**

At the end of the substantive head teacher's absence, the Chair of Governors MUST arrange a return to work meeting in accordance with the Attendance Management Policy; it is recommended that this should be followed at the earliest possible opportunity by a meeting with the Chair of Governors, Senior Leadership Team and the returning Head teacher. At this meeting the Head teacher should be fully briefed on all matters that have occurred during their absence, to include but not limited to:

- a full report on the current situation in school,
- details of any new initiatives that have been implemented and the rationale behind them,
- any changes that have been made to policies and procedures,
- up to date pupil progress information and how any issues identified are being rectified, and
- an update on all HR matters and the status of Performance Management of staff.

**If a representative of the LA has been involved in support or intervention for the school, they should also attend this meeting or arrange an individual meeting at the earliest opportunity.**

There would be a reasonable expectation that representatives from the different networks to which the school belongs should make successful efforts to meet with the returning leader as soon as possible to share information face to face about initiatives, events etc that have taken place in the leader's absence. This would also give an opportunity to identify possible support that might be offered during the initial weeks of their return to work.

**The above will be essential to the returning head teacher's reintroduction to work. Their performance and that of the School during the period of absence cannot be judged on decisions or consequences of actions taken by others during their absence.**

### **Debriefing for acting leaders (internal appointments)**

Where an existing member of the Senior Leadership Team has been in the position of "acting head teacher", a debrief meeting with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Governors should be held so that any issues / concerns from either party can be reflected upon. This will allow Governors and the acting head to discuss their leadership performance and opportunities for future development. It is not the responsibility of the returning head teacher to hold this final meeting, although the delivery of it may be delegated to them by the governing body. In this event, the returning headteacher should be fully briefed on the evidence upon which any recommendations have been made.

### **Where the Substantives Head teacher does not return.**

In cases where the substantive Head teacher indicates that they do not wish to return to their role following their absence or where a return to work is not possible, the Governors should liaise with the LA and Strategic HR services to discuss continued cover and recruitment to the vacancy.