



School sickness absence requests

Emergency Guidance

GPs are often requested to provide short term sickness certification for periods of less than 7 days when children are absent from schools usually from parents who are misdirected by their school or the local education authority.

This guidance is designed to help you to deal with such requests.

- GPs do not provide short term sickness certification for periods of less than 7 days. The child's school is obliged to accept a note from the pupil's parent or guardian during this period.
- GPs are unable to issue medical certificates for longer periods of sickness absence unless the patient was seen by the GP at the time of the illness.
- GPs are not contractually required to undertake this work and it is not part of your terms of service.
- GPs are not obliged to provide a view on a pupil who has missed a higher than average (10%) number of school days. It is the responsibility of the parent and school to ensure that this absence is legitimate. GP input into this process should not be necessary.
- GPs are not obliged to provide sickness certification for pupils who may miss an external examination (eg, GCSEs or A levels).
- GPs can request a fee under the NHS General Medical Services Statutory Instrument, Regulation 25 a.



Ensure your practice has a clear approach to dealing with requests for letters to support a child's absence from school. Ensure everyone in the practice team adheres to the practice's approach.



Use the proforma letter in this guidance to respond to requests from a school.

Appendix A: Proforma letter to schools

To head teacher of the school

2018

Dear

Requests for Medical Certificates for school children during term time

I understand that you recently asked the parents of to provide a medical certificate to validate their child's absence from school. I was unable to oblige with this request for the reasons set out below.

Non-recurrent short term sickness (less than 7 days)

I have to draw your attention to the fact that GPs do not provide short term sickness certification for periods of less than 7 days and are unable to issue medical certificates for longer periods of sickness absence unless the patient was seen by the GP at the time of the illness. GPs are not contractually required to undertake this and it is not part of their terms of service. In general GPs do not provide certificates for children as the parent's explanation of the absence is generally sufficient for the purposes of the school.

If this information is being requested, GPs are entitled to request a fee under the NHS General Medical Services Statutory Instrument, Regulation 25 a.

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".

These are by and large self-limiting illnesses and do not need any treatment. Asking for a certificate encourages dependence on the health service and also encourages sick certificate mentality in young children. In addition it means the parent has to take time off work and attend the doctor's surgery when the appointment could have been used more appropriately.

Please in future do not request certificates from school children or encourage them to miss school for minor self limiting illnesses.

Long-term illness

When a child suffers from a long-term condition, any certification will be provided by the responsible specialist and should not be requested from the GP.

Recurrent short-term illnesses

In cases where a child has recurrent short term illnesses this is a matter for very sensitive and expert management by the school and the School's Health Service in consultation with the parents and the child. The School doctor should seek any additional medical information by directly contacting the GP with the consent of the parent or the child if competent to give legally valid consent.

In cases where there is more prolonged absence the problem needs very careful assessment by the school and School Health Service to determine how best to provide education for the child. Again the School doctor may, with appropriate consent, seek any additional medical information directly from the GP. It is most important that the GP retains the full confidence of any child, but it is particularly important for those children that have problems resulting in poor school attendance where a trusted doctor-patient relationship may be critical for the child's ongoing care.

When a child misses an examination

GMS GPs are not contractually obliged to provide a sick note for pupils who are off sick from school. They are also not obliged to provide sickness certification for students that miss an exam or believe their performance was affected due to illness. The same is likely to apply to other NHS GPs. Unfortunately, many GPs still receive requests for the latter.

The BMA's General Practitioners Committee (GPC) therefore wrote to the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) about this, and has received the attached response in Appendix 1, which highlights that medical proof should not be required.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Director of Education at the Council to note.
Thank you for your assistance.

Kind regards

Insert name and practice address

CC: Council Director of Education

You can download an editable version Appendix A [here](#).

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Appendix B:

Letter from the General Practitioners Committee (GPC) to Ofqual and their reply

SMA House, Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9JP

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Andrew Hall
Chief Executive
Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency
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**General Practitioners
Committee**
Contracts & Performance
subcommittee

9 September 2009

Dear Andrew

Examinations and sickness certification

Every year, the General Practitioners Committee receive a significant number of queries relating to examinations and the provision of sickness certification by GPs. It has become apparent that the majority of these queries are the result of a widespread misunderstanding about the kind of certification that GPs provide. I write to you in the hope that our organisations can work together to negate these misconceptions and help to provide candidates with accurate information in the event that they have to miss an examination through illness.

GPs do not provide sick notes for schoolchildren. When children are absent from school owing to illness, schools may request a letter from a parent or guardian, and this is no different during an exam period. However, children who have missed exams due to illness are frequently told by schools that a note from a doctor is required; but this cannot be provided by a GP. Aside from the fact that parents/guardians are responsible for excusing their children from school, 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 not clear whether the misconceptions are the result of information provided by exam boards or whether they develop within the institutions, but I believe that it would be the benefit of all concerned for these misunderstandings to be corrected via the provision of accurate information to education institutions. In 2002 in it's 'Making A Difference – general practitioners report', the Regulatory Impact Unit's public sector team estimated that a potential 47,000 appointments could be saved by correcting misconceptions on the role of GPs in examination sickness certification.

I hope that you will agree that this is an issue that should be addressed and I will be happy to meet with you to discuss further.

Dr John Canning
Chairman of the GPC Contracts & Performance subcommittee

Isabel Nisbet
Acting Chief Executive

25 January 2010



Ofqual

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Dr John Canning
Chairman of the GPC Contracts & Performance Subcommittee
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Our ref: RS2031

Dear Dr Canning,

Thank you for your letter of 9 September 2009, addressed to Andrew Hall, which, following your second letter, sent on 15 December 2009 has been passed to me as Acting Chief Executive of Ofqual, for response.

Awarding Organisations make no requirement for pupils to obtain a medical certificate in support of an application for special consideration. Students are asked for information in support of their application, but this may take the form of a statement by the school. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) has confirmed that as far as they are concerned, if a student was absent from an examination as a result of illness and has the support of the school or centre to be absent, special consideration will be granted on that basis. Awarding organisations do not insist that medical proof is provided.

I am sure that you have considered the likelihood that the misconception stems from the conventional necessity for adults to produce a sick note after long periods of absence from work. In order to address this issue with the schools we have contacted the Department for Children Schools and Families and requested that they made local authorities aware (via their weekly email) of this message, which they have now done. We have also informed the Joint Council for Qualifications and have posted a notice on our website. In addition we will pass on this message to the teacher associations and unions.

I hope this response is useful, but I can assure you that the regulations do not ask for medical corroboration in these circumstances and that I do not believe any misconception stems from the awarding organisations.

Yours sincerely,

Isabel M. Nisbet

Isabel Nisbet
Acting Chief Executive

