A Guide to Cutting Costs by Managing Teacher Absence

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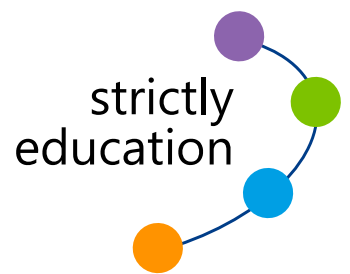
You educate, we support

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Introduction

Staff absence costs can be one of the biggest causes of budget overspend in the education sector. If you are a headteacher, school business leader or HR manager and want to be one step ahead when it comes to managing staff absence effectively, then this eBook is for you.

By taking preventative measures through early intervention strategies, you can understand and mitigate the key causes of absence in your school, helping you cut costs and build a solid reputation of high attendance.

We hope that you will find the contents helpful.

HR team, Strictly Education

How big is the problem?

Reports show it is significant

Sickness absence data collected in the November 2021 census and XpertHR Absence Rates and Costs Survey 2022 show that:

- 54% of teachers have at least one period of absence each year
- 45% took sickness absence in 2020/21
- The average time lost for an absence is 8.6 days
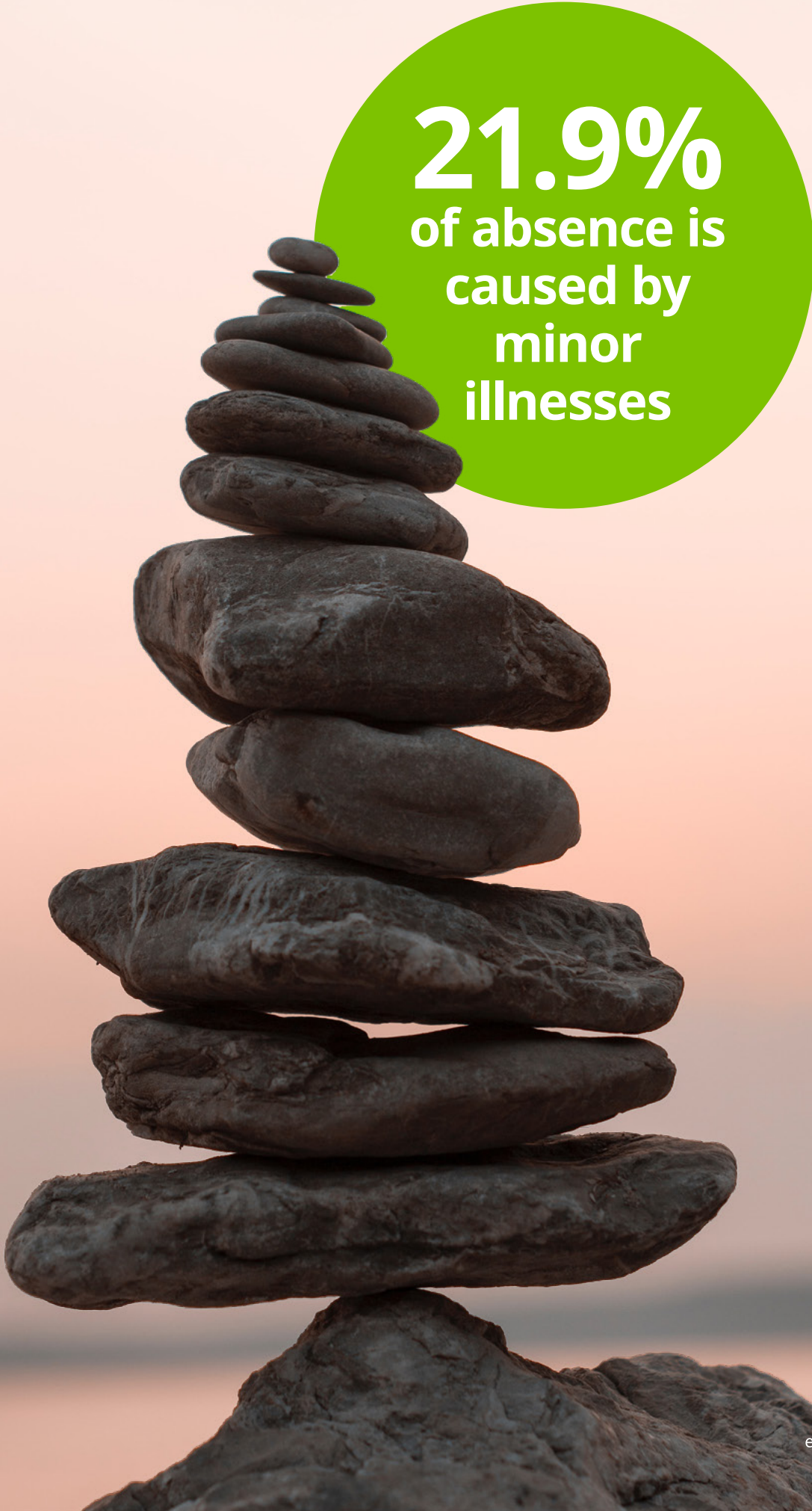- The average cost of absence was £781 per employee in 2021

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Understanding the causes of absence

There are four main reasons

Minor illnesses are commonly responsible for short term absence, whilst the other top reasons result in both short and long term absence depending on the condition and whether it reoccurs.

The latest figures from the ONS show that:

- Minor illnesses, including coughs, colds and flu: **21.9%**

- Other conditions (which includes accidents, infectious disease, diabetes and other reasons not covered elsewhere): **26.9%**

- Musculoskeletal problems (e.g. back pain): **13.4%**

- Mental health conditions, including stress, depression, anxiety and more serious problems: **9.8%**

21.9% of absence is caused by minor illnesses

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Monitoring absence

Insight can help drive a preventative approach

Monitoring the reasons for absence will help identify if there are any trends which could be tackled with a preventative approach.

For example:

➕ A high level of stress related absence may point to problems with workload*

➕ High levels of musculoskeletal problems might highlight that manual handling procedures aren't effective or DSE workstations need reassessing*

The MAT Leaders' Survey Report 2022 [link] https://www.strictlyeducation.co.uk/ebooks/multi-academy-trust-leaders-survey-report identified that staff workload and stress was one of the biggest non-academic management challenges facing schools in the future, and that 89% of respondents said they felt stressed at work.

EduPeople's absence management tool gives you valuable insights and allows you to easily identify and monitor trends, helping you keep track of staff absence. Find out more **here**.

* Sickness Absence in the UK Labour Market, 2020

Mental health and long term absence

Promoting staff wellbeing

Staff wellbeing is enhanced where:

➕ Staff perceive a level of control over how to do their job and a degree of control over issues within the workplace

➕ There is a variety of work, job security and career prospects

➕ Expectations of performance are clear and there is a perception of fairness

➕ Training is available with the opportunity to use and develop skills

➕ There is positive interpersonal contact and social support

➕ There is physical security, in terms of safety, appropriate equipment and a pleasant working environment

➕ The individual perceives that their job role is significant, both within the organisation and within society as a whole.

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How to write an absence policy

Be comprehensive and clear

Having an absence policy is necessary so all employees understand how to address and take responsibility for their absence. The policy should contain:

✓ **The reporting procedure -** how and when to report sickness absence

✓ **Evidence -** what's required for self-certification and when medical evidence is required, as well as any requirements to undergo examinations

✓ **Trigger points -** the number of absences which would cause concern

✓ **Unauthorised absence -** the consequences of failure to follow the procedure and/or to provide evidence

✓ **The return-to-work process –** getting back to work quickly and efficiently

✓ **Pay –** if eligible, what payments will be received

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How to prevent sickness absence

Promoting wellbeing checklist

Effective absence management involves promoting wellbeing, good communication and employee engagement

✓ Communicate with staff regularly about their wellbeing needs

✓ Provide resources e.g. fitness, nutrition advice

✓ Implement wellbeing initiatives e.g. mindfulness training, flexible work hours

✓ Conduct a **Staff Health & Wellbeing Survey**

✓ Create/implement an **Employee Assistance Programme**

✓ Having a **system** that monitors your staff absence

Set expectations checklist

Set expectations from the start and build an atmosphere that encourages attendance by:

✓ **Consistent policy application**

✓ **Staff induction and handbook**

✓ **Ensure absence is certified**

✓ **Return to work interviews**

Maintain records checklist

In order to understand and tackle trends at both individual and whole staff levels you need to:

✓ **Log all absences**

✓ **Monitor staff absences against trigger points in your policy**

✓ **Keep records of return to work interviews**

✓ **Regularly review trends and patterns**

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Return to work interviews (RTW)

Significantly reduce levels of absence and show staff that absence is taken seriously

✓ Undertake consistently for all absences

✓ Be sensitive to staff's issues and needs

✓ Encourage, but not force, discussion

✓ Aim to understand causes of absence

✓ Agree when to review actions

Occupational Health (OH) advice

Significantly reduce levels of absence and show staff that absence is taken seriously

In some circumstances you may need to seek professional medical advice from an OH provider to agree how some conditions can be managed.

Ensure referrals are made to OH in no later than four weeks after absence has commenced or earlier if work due to related stress. Occupational Health (OH) advice.

Key questions to ask Occupational Health:

✓ Is the employee well enough to attend a formal review meeting at work?

✓ Are there any reasonable adjustments we can make to facilitate and maintain a RTW?

✓ Is the employee fit to carry out the full duties of their role?

✓ Are they likely to be able to return in the reasonably foreseeable future?

✓ Does the employee qualify for an ill health retirement assessment?

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Act fairly and reasonably

Top tips when dealing with OH:

✓ Don't allow procedures to drag on and make sure you plan dates for reviews

✓ Key decisions should be based on a range of evidence, such as OH reports, information about treatment and previous absence history

✓ If the employee reacts with stress related absence caused by the absence management process, refer to OH for advice

✓ Where reasonable, follow recommendations from OH, which may include a phased return to work

✓ If moving to the formal stages of your policy, note the operational impact of the absence(s)

How Strictly Education can help – One system

Save precious time on people management

With one employee record at its core, EduPeople is a single HR, payroll and pensions system and service, specifically designed for the education sector, that saves time and costs, and improves strategic decision making.

EduPeople:

✓ Easily identifies trends in absence and retention

✓ Automates processes, enabling your school staff to handle contract admin, staff issues and absence more effectively

✓ Enhances your strategic decision making through a single view of your workforce

✓ Reduces your HR administrative workload saving you time and money

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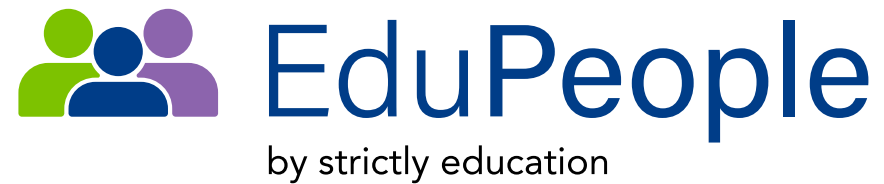
How Strictly Education can help – EduPeople

One place, one view of your people; puts you in control

The Opportunity for All white paper, published by the DfE in March 2022, encourages schools and trusts to scale and grow into at least 10 schools or 7,500 pupils, however, growth is not without its difficulties. With more staff to recruit, manage and pay, Multi-Academy Trusts face real challenges with expansion.

EduPeople, designed specifically for the education sector, makes viewing your people data easy from a MAT-wide view all the way through to a single establishment.

EduPeople features

✔ Employee self service	✔ Absence management reporting	✔ Contact administration	✔ Case management	✔ Production of single central record
✔ Pre-employment checks	✔ Gender pay gap reporting	✔ Recruitment onboarding	✔ Learning & development	✔ Perrcormance management

Driven by one employee record, EduPeople significantly eases the burden of managing the school workforce for both school leaders and their administrative staff by:

➕ **Saving time and cost in HR administration**

➕ **Enhancing your strategic decision making through a single view over your workforce**

➕ **Helping you scale and grow at your own pace with its modular platform**

➕ **Integrating with other school business systems, without having to duplicate data entry**

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How Strictly Education can help – Services

Services to promote wellbeing and minimise absence

✓ **EduPeople** With one employee record at its core, EduPeople is a single HR, payroll and pensions system that saves time, saves costs and improves strategic decision making when it comes to monitoring absences

✓ **Staff Absence Management** a review of your absence data with recommendations around individual issues and an action plan for managing and reducing absence in your school

✓ **HR Comprehensive SLA** unlimited advice from a named consultant, attendance at formal meetings and access to over 1,000 HR resources through our Education HR website subscription

✓ **Employee Assistance Programme** offers confidential freephone helpline 24/7 for employees and their families with up to six remote or face to face counselling sessions

✓ **Occupational Health SLA** provides unlimited management referrals, pre employment health screenings and medical advice on long and short term absence issues

Find out more about EduPeople

watch the video ▶

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