Hampshire County Council

Education Personnel Services

Headlines

Issue 101 Autumn 2026



Supporting you to be **innovative**, **creative** and **inspired!**

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Contents

Welcome to the Autumn 2026 edition of Headlines	3
Actions for Schools	4
Strengthening Schools Employment Process Presentation	8
Meet the Education People Services Casework Team	12
People Services	14
Education People Services: Our Contact Model approach	16
Managing Attendance Proactively: Top Tips	19
Supporting your Staff Through the Winter Months	22

Welcome to the Autumn 2026 edition of Headlines



As we move through the first half of the academic year, it is clear that schools continue to navigate a period of significant change and increasing complexity. Alongside the day-to-day priorities of running schools and supporting pupils, there are a number of important workforce developments happening now and on the horizon that school leaders, governors and managers need to respond to and prepare for over the coming months. The articles in this edition aim to help you understand these changes and consider the actions that may be required locally.

One of the most notable themes this year is the pace of employment and workforce reform. This edition includes updates on new trade union access rights, forthcoming changes to unfair dismissal protections, developments relating to the School Support Staff Negotiating Body, and enhanced employer responsibilities in relation to preventing workplace sexual harassment and third -party harassment. Whilst some of these changes are still being implemented, it is important that schools begin to understand what is coming and consider the implications for local policies, procedures and leadership practice

As always, thank you for your continued partnership with Education People Services. We remain committed to supporting school leaders, governors and managers to navigate the many workforce challenges confidently and effectively. We hope you find this edition useful and informative as you plan for the months ahead.



Actions for Schools

This section sets out the key actions schools must take to remain compliant with current statutory requirements. These actions are mandatory and must be completed within the specified timeframes to ensure policies, processes, and records remain up to date. Failure to do so may result in legal, financial, or operational risks.

- Ensure awareness of the 2026 teacher and support staff pay awards and take any necessary action in accordance with your school's local pay arrangements and policies.

Looking Ahead: Key Changes

In addition to the specific updates covered elsewhere in this newsletter, a significant programme of both statutory and non-statutory work is anticipated during 2026/27. Schools are encouraged to remain alert to these developments and engage with updates and guidance as they are issued.

Legislation updates

This section provides a high-level overview of recent legislative development and forthcoming changes that may have implications for schools. This includes several Acts that have received Royal Assent and are being implemented on a phased basis, together with provisions that are expected to come into force through future regulations and one Bill that remains in progress through Parliament. The updates are provided for information only at this stage.

Crime and Policing Act 2026

The safeguarding changes arising from this Act have now been implemented through Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026.

New statutory right for Trade Unions to access the workforce – 30 October 2026

From 30 October 2026, trade unions will have a new statutory right to access workers, whether they are union members or not.

The right applies for the purposes of meeting, organising, recruiting, representing workers and facilitating collective bargaining. It does not include organising industrial action.

Access may take place:

- In person.
- Online.
- Through electronic communications.

Schools will need to make appropriate use of existing communication channels available for trade union communications where required.

Employers are expected to facilitate access reasonably, while trade unions are expected to minimise disruption to the workplace.

Failure to comply can lead to significant financial penalties of up to £500,000 for repeated breaches.

EPS has begun discussions with recognised trade unions to develop a voluntary agreement for Hampshire maintained schools. Whilst the agreement will be recommended to academy schools, academies will need to negotiate their own arrangements with recognised unions. Maintained schools in Oxfordshire will be notified of any agreement negotiated with recognised trade unions.

Until a voluntary agreement is finalised, interim guidance will be made available to support schools in responding consistently and appropriately to requests for access.

Unfair dismissal changes – 1 January 2027

As described in Headlines edition 100, anyone who is dismissed on or after 1 January 2027, who has 6 months' service, could claim unfair dismissal. Currently, employees would need to have 2 years' service to be eligible to make this claim if they feel they have been unfairly dismissed. The government also lifting the cap on compensatory awards for unfair dismissal claims on the same date.

New statutory obligation to inform workers of their right to join a trade union, and to regularly remind them of this – 1 January 2027

Employers will be required to inform new employees of their right to join a trade union. Employers will need to issue a standard statement and remind workers of annually of this right.

Fire and rehire protections – expected from March 2027

There are some circumstances where an employer needs to change a contractual arrangement it has with an employee, but where this doesn't amount to redundancy. Ordinarily an employer would seek to implement these changes through mutually agreeing a change with the employee. However, where mutual / voluntary agreement cannot be achieved, the employer could consider dismissing an employee and immediately offering them re-employment on the new terms and conditions.

From spring 2027, most 'fire and rehire' changes will be protected, meaning that to do so would be an automatically unfair dismissal. The government have consulted on some exceptions to this, however they have not yet published the outcome.

New statutory right to Bereavement Leave (unpaid) – anticipated April 2027

Employees will be entitled to take up to two weeks unpaid bereavement leave from April 2027. This is a 'day one' entitlement – employees do not need any continuous service.

Equality Action plans – anticipated April 2027

Large employers (>250 employees) will be required to produce an equality action plan, showing steps that they are taking in relation to

a. Action to close the gender pay gap

b. Actions to support employees going through the menopause

The government has identified a list of evidence-informed actions that employers will need to select from, along with guidance on each action.

Establishment of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) – expected Autumn 2026

The Government is in the process of establishing the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB), a statutory body that will negotiate national minimum pay and conditions for school support staff in England and advise on training and career progression. The body is expected to be established during autumn 2026, with any changes arising from its work anticipated to apply from the 2027/28 financial year at the earliest.

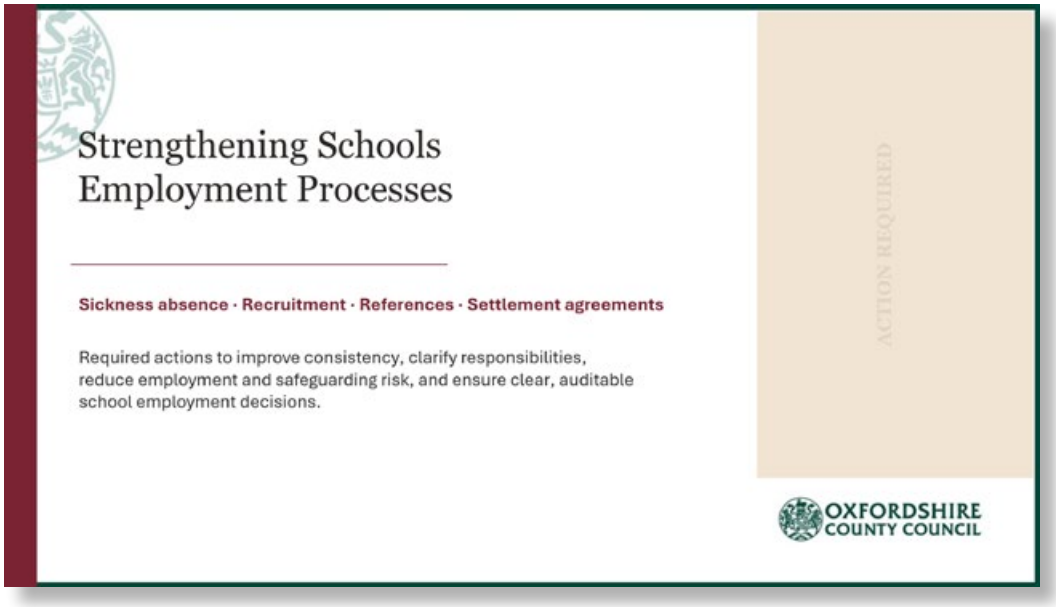
Further Employment Reforms Expected in 2027

Further reforms are expected during 2027, although implementation dates have not yet been confirmed. These include:

- enhanced dismissal protections for pregnant women and new mothers (expected from October 2027)
- regulation of umbrella companies
- changes to collective redundancy consultation requirements
- the introduction of the right to guaranteed hours and the right to reasonable notice and short-notice payments (timing to be confirmed following consultation)

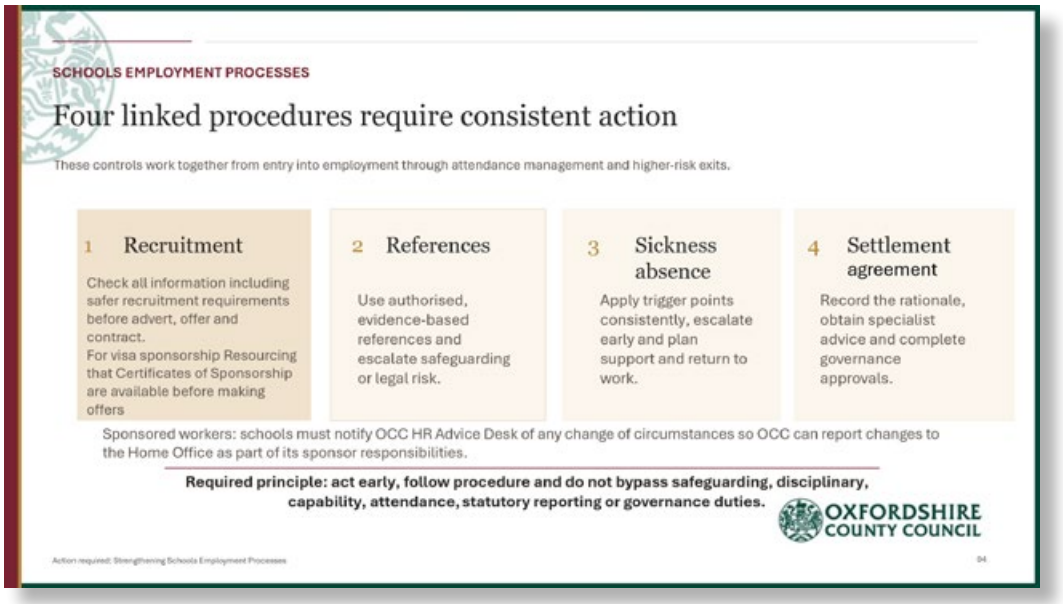
Strengthening Schools Employment Process Presentation

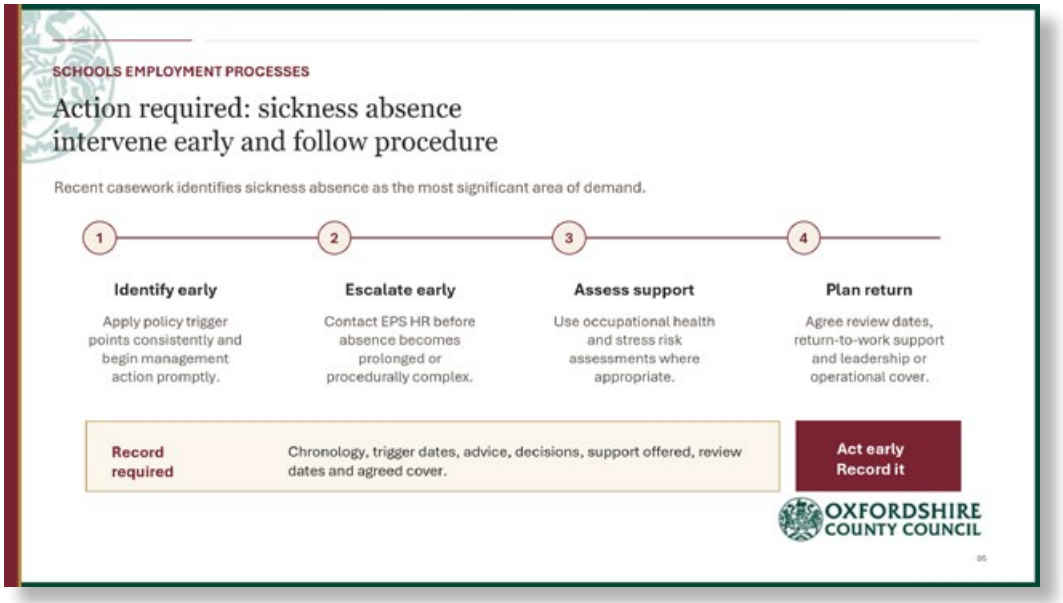
The following slides have been submitted by OCC to remind schools on how they can strengthen their employment processes

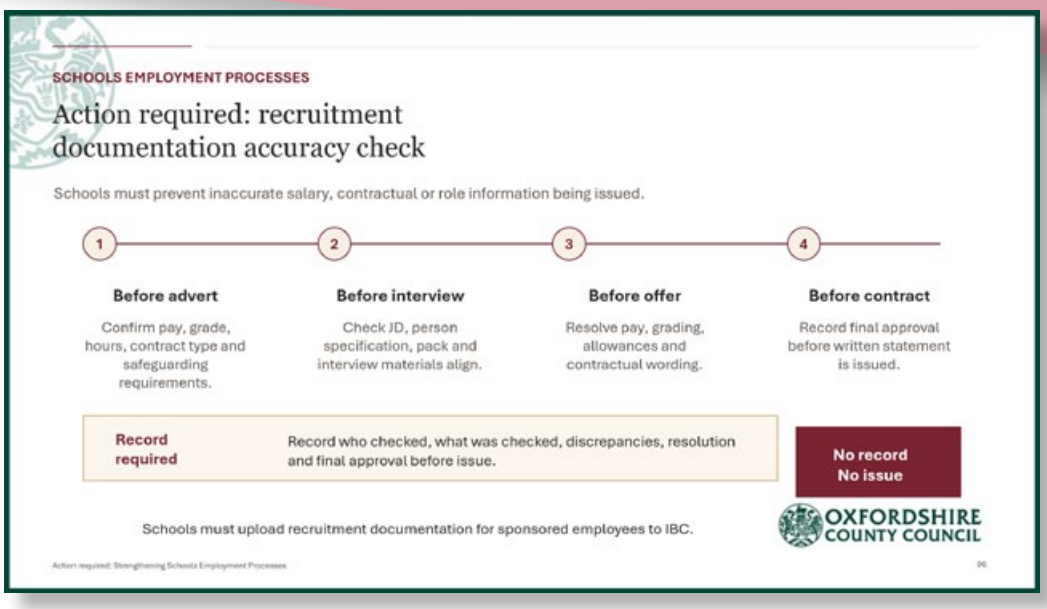


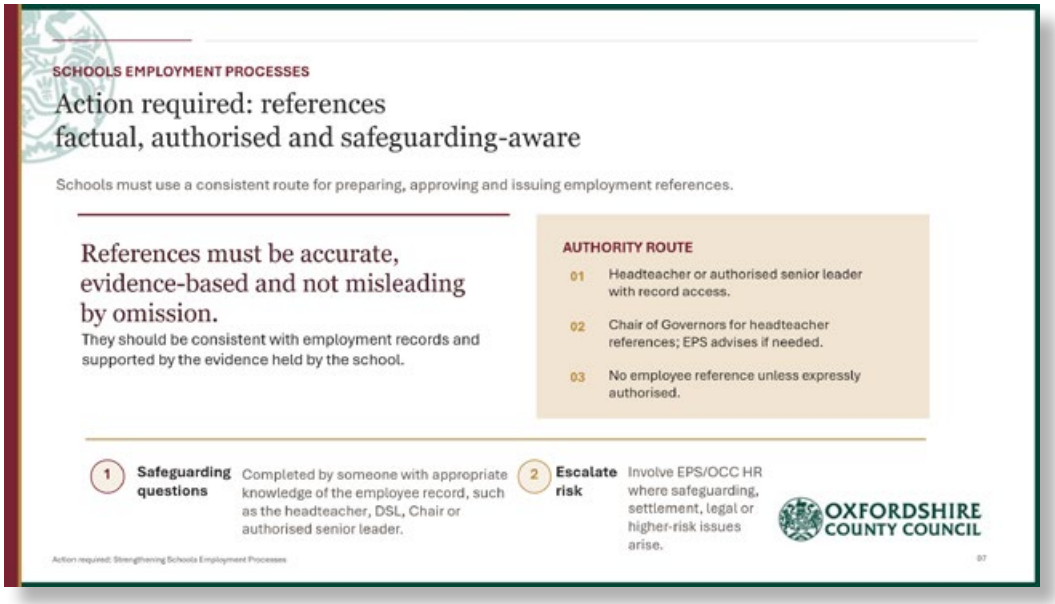



SCHOOLS EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES
Current issues create avoidable risk
Recent employment matters identify four recurring gaps at critical decision points.
01 Inaccurate recruitment information
Salary, grade, terms or qualification requirements issued before checks are complete.
For visa sponsorship, not checking with OCC Resourcing that Certificates of Sponsorship are available before making offers.
02 Unclear reference authority
Uncertainty over who may provide references and what information may be included.
03 Inconsistent absence management
Trigger points vary and complex cases reach HR/EPS late, increasing prolonged absence and procedural drift.
04 Escalation and settlement audit trail
Higher-risk matters need timely specialist input, written rationale and recorded approvals.
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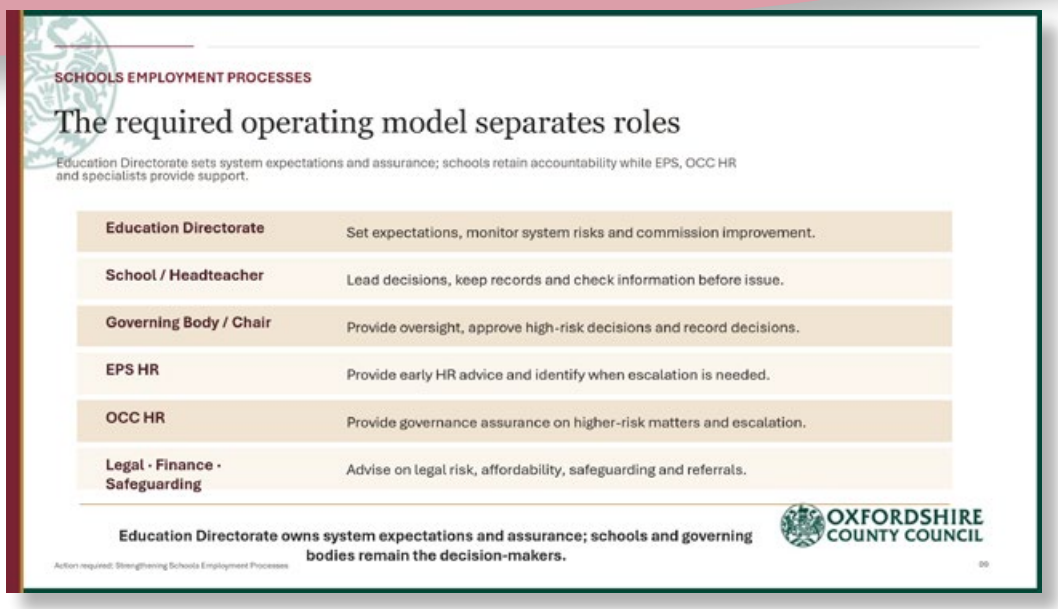

SCHOOLS EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES
Four linked procedures require consistent action
These controls work together from entry into employment through attendance management and higher-risk exits.
1 Recruitment
Check all information including safer recruitment requirements before advert, offer and contract.
For visa sponsorship Resourcing that Certificates of Sponsorship are available before making offers
2 References
Use authorised, evidence-based references and escalate safeguarding or legal risk.
3 Sickness absence
Apply trigger points consistently, escalate early and plan support and return to work.
4 Settlement agreement
Record the rationale, obtain specialist advice and complete governance approvals.
Sponsored workers: schools must notify OCC HR Advice Desk of any change of circumstances so OCC can report changes to the Home Office as part of its sponsor responsibilities.
Required principle: act early, follow procedure and do not bypass safeguarding, disciplinary, capability, attendance, statutory reporting or governance duties.
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SCHOOLS EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES
Action required: sickness absence intervene early and follow procedure
Recent casework identifies sickness absence as the most significant area of demand.
1
Identify early
Apply policy trigger points consistently and begin management action promptly.
2
Escalate early
Contact EPS HR before absence becomes prolonged or procedurally complex.
3
Assess support
Use occupational health and stress risk assessments where appropriate.
4
Plan return
Agree review dates, return-to-work support and leadership or operational cover.
Record required
Chronology, trigger dates, advice, decisions, support offered, review dates and agreed cover.
Act early
Record it
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SCHOOLS EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES
Action required: recruitment documentation accuracy check
Schools must prevent inaccurate salary, contractual or role information being issued.
1
Before advert
Confirm pay, grade, hours, contract type and safeguarding requirements.
2
Before interview
Check JD, person specification, pack and interview materials align.
3
Before offer
Resolve pay, grading, allowances and contractual wording.
4
Before contract
Record final approval before written statement is issued.
Record required
Record who checked, what was checked, discrepancies, resolution and final approval before issue.
No record
No issue
Schools must upload recruitment documentation for sponsored employees to IBC.
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SCHOOLS EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES
Action required: references factual, authorised and safeguarding-aware
Schools must use a consistent route for preparing, approving and issuing employment references.
References must be accurate, evidence-based and not misleading by omission.
They should be consistent with employment records and supported by the evidence held by the school.
AUTHORITY ROUTE
01 Headteacher or authorised senior leader with record access.
02 Chair of Governors for headteacher references; EPS advises if needed.
03 No employee reference unless expressly authorised.
1 Safeguarding questions
Completed by someone with appropriate knowledge of the employee record, such as the headteacher, DSL, Chair or authorised senior leader.
2 Escalate risk
Involve EPS/OCC HR where safeguarding, settlement, legal or higher-risk issues arise.
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SCHOOLS EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES
Action required: settlement agreements clear rationale, approvals and safeguards
Schools must follow governance controls while retaining school and governing body accountability.
Non-negotiable guardrail
Settlement must not be used to avoid safeguarding, disciplinary, capability, attendance, statutory reporting or referral duties.
1 Written rationale
Employment context, options considered, risks, costs, funding source, legal considerations and proposed terms.
2 Specialist advice
Legal before terms are proposed or agreed; Finance confirms affordability and best value; Safeguarding input where concerns or referrals may arise.
3 Governance approval
School or governing body decides whether to pursue settlement, subject to required approvals and a clear audit trail.
Reference alignment
Any agreed reference must be accurate, evidence-based and consistent with the separate reference procedure.
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SCHOOLS EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES
The required operating model separates roles
Education Directorate sets system expectations and assurance; schools retain accountability while EPS, OCC HR and specialists provide support.
Education Directorate
Set expectations, monitor system risks and commission improvement.
School / Headteacher
Lead decisions, keep records and check information before issue.
Governing Body / Chair
Provide oversight, approve high-risk decisions and record decisions.
EPS HR
Provide early HR advice and identify when escalation is needed.
OCC HR
Provide governance assurance on higher-risk matters and escalation.
Legal · Finance · Safeguarding
Advise on legal risk, affordability, safeguarding and referrals.
Education Directorate owns system expectations and assurance; schools and governing bodies remain the decision-makers.
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SCHOOLS EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES
Required actions before implementation
Put the procedures, responsibilities and supporting templates into operational use.
REQUIRED ACTIONS
1 Confirm responsibilities
Nominate who leads absence cases, checks recruitment information and approves references.
2 Apply absence procedure
Use trigger points consistently and escalate complex cases to EPS HR early.
3 Introduce templates
Accuracy checklist, absence case record, reference forms and settlement business case.
4 Brief decision-makers
Headteachers, Chairs, governing bodies and relevant school leaders.
5 Publish support route
Set the implementation date and signpost EPS training, advice and escalation.
Action required now
Start early absence intervention and a recorded recruitment accuracy check. Confirm authorised reference and settlement routes.
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Meet the Education People Services Casework Team

At Education People Services (EPS), we recognise that managing employee relations and staffing matters can often be challenging, complex, and time-sensitive. Our dedicated Casework Team is here to provide expert support, guidance, and practical solutions to help schools navigate a wide range of workforce issues confidently and effectively.

Who Are We?

The Casework Team consists of experienced HR professionals who work closely with school leaders to provide advice and support across all areas of employee relations. From attendance management and performance concerns to disciplinary, grievance, safeguarding, organisational change and capability matters, our team is committed to helping schools achieve positive and timely outcomes.

Our approach is centred on providing clear, pragmatic advice with risks and options, while ensuring compliance with employment legislation, policy and best practice.

Team Updates

This month, I am pleased to share several positive developments from a staffing perspective within the wider EPS Casework Team.

We are delighted to welcome back Alisha Rogers, Senior HR Adviser, following her maternity leave. Alisha's return brings valuable experience and expertise back into the team, and we are pleased to have her supporting our schools once again.

We are also looking forward to welcoming two new colleagues, who will be joining EPS as Senior HR Advisers and commencing their induction during October. Their appointments further strengthen our capacity to support schools and reflect our continued investment in delivering a high-quality service.

At the same time, Verity Reynolds, Senior HR Advisor will be leaving the team in October to take up an exciting 12-month secondment opportunity with the Leadership and Organisational Development Team. Whilst Verity will be missed, we are delighted to see her taking on this development opportunity and look forward to welcoming her back to EPS at the conclusion of her secondment.

You can meet the EPS team here:

Meet the Education Personnel Services team | Education and learning | Hampshire County Council

We're Here to Help

Whether you are dealing with a complex employee relations matter or seeking early advice on a developing issue, the Casework Team is here to support you.

We look forward to continuing to work with headteachers, senior leaders and governing bodies to build positive workplace cultures, support effective people management and achieve the best possible outcomes for schools and their employees.

PEOPLE SERVICES

VIRTUAL TRAINING SESSIONS FOR OXFORDSHIRE MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Education People Services, who are working in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council, are offering on-line training sessions for Oxfordshire Schools

From January 2027

We have developed bite size training workshops to enable you to access the support you need. All sessions will be held using Microsoft Teams and will be 45 minutes with 15 minutes available for questions at the end.

Absence Management

The main message is that absence can be effectively managed and is aimed at providing strategies for managing the impact of long term and short-term absence with a view to improving attendance levels.

Managing Performance for Teaching Staff and Support Staff

This session is designed to enable managers, who will be conducting reviews of staff, to identify and develop the skills they will need to do this effectively, with focus on the management of performance and capability concerns.

Staff Restructuring

To consider the process and timeline that is required to successfully achieve a change in the staffing structure to meet the operational requirements of the school, whilst ensuring support in place for staff etc.

HR and Up and Coming Legislation

Looking at some of the key OCC HR Policies how they can assist you in managing staff effectively. How to manage when issues do arise and exploring new key employment legislation to help you are confident in how you manage staff but also that if an issue does arise you are confident in managing HR concerns.

The dates of training are below. To book a space on any of these workshops please. contact us via **hrbusinesssupport@hants.gov.uk** where colleagues will be able to assist you. Once registered you will be sent an invite to the Teams meeting. Please note this is a discretionary service so a charge of £35 per delegate is applicable.

Date	Time	Course
13 Jan 27	10.30 am	HR and upcoming legislation
27 Jan 27	14.30 pm	Managing Performance
3 Feb 27	10.30 am	Staffing Restructures
23 Feb 27	14.30 pm	Absence Management
3 Mar 27	14.30 pm	Staffing Restructures
17 Mar 27	14.30 pm	Managing Perfromance
25 Mar 27	10.30 am	Absence Management

Education People Services: Our Contact Model approach

Since September, Education People Services has been operating an updated contact model designed to ensure schools receive the right support through the most appropriate channel.

Following feedback from schools, we have reviewed the model and made some adjustments. Whilst the changes have helped ensure urgent and complex employee relations matters receive timely support; we recognised that schools would welcome greater flexibility to discuss a wider range of issues by telephone.

As a result, schools can now contact us by telephone for a broader range of employee relations enquiries, making it easier to access advice when a conversation is the most effective way to resolve an issue.

These refinements reflect our commitment to listening to schools and continually improving our service. Our aim is to provide accessible, practical and responsive support whilst ensuring Schools can access advice in the way that best meets their needs.

What Has Changed?

Whilst urgent, sensitive and complex employee relations matters should still be raised by telephone, we have expanded the range of enquiries that can be discussed directly with an adviser. The telephone service is no longer solely focused on the most critical cases. In addition to urgent and complex matters, schools can now contact us by telephone for a wider range of employee relations enquiries where discussion with an adviser would be beneficial.

Ways to Contact Us

Telephone

You can still use the telephone service for urgent or complex employee relations matters but in addition you can also contact us via telephone for the following queries,

- Requires urgent advice or a prompt response.
- Relates to complex employee relations cases.
- Involves sensitive or confidential matters.

- Needs detailed discussion to establish the facts and determine next steps.
- Requires escalation due to risk, seriousness, or potential impact.

This could include but is not limited to:

- Potential misconduct /gross misconduct concerns
- Capability (including transition from informal to formal stages)
- Safeguarding / allegations against staff
- Resolving workplace issues (grievances)
- Whistleblowing
- Bullying and harassment
- Discrimination
- Any risk of underpayment
- Complex absences
- Significant professional
- Resilience concerns
- Significant performance concerns
- Fettered resignations
- Any other urgent matter
- Any other complex or critical matter



Online Form

Use the online form for non-urgent enquiries, requests for support, and matters that require documents or information to be submitted.

You should use the online form when your query:

- Is not urgent and does not require an immediate response.
- Involves submitting information or supporting documents.
- Requires a request to be logged and allocated to the appropriate team.

- Relates to routine casework support or advice requests.

This could include but is not limited to:

- Absence / attendance queries or new cases including reasonableness of adjustments (unless complex)
- Organisational change
- Pay (professional advice not transactional processing)
- Initial performance concerns unless significant)

Service Update

We are continuing to invest in and expand our team to improve the service we provide. To support the increased flexibility within our contact model, we have recruited four new Senior HR Advisers to strengthen our service. New colleagues joined the team in October, with further colleagues due to start in January next year. This additional capacity will help ensure schools continue to receive timely, high-quality advice and support across a broader range of employee relations matters.

As we welcome and embed our new colleagues, there may occasionally be periods where response times are longer than usual. We appreciate your patience and understanding during this time.

If you are unable to get through by telephone, please leave a voicemail and a member of the team will return your call as soon as possible.

Thank you for your continued support and cooperation.



Managing Attendance Proactively: Top Tips

Spot Concerns Early

Attendance issues rarely appear overnight. Frequent short-term absences, changes in behaviour, reduced engagement, performance deterioration, or signs of wellbeing concerns can all be indicators that support may be needed. Seasonal factors, work pressures and underlying health conditions may also contribute. Early conversations can prevent issues escalating or becoming entrenched and demonstrate that support is available.

Follow the School's Absence Reporting Procedures

- Consider when, how, and who staff should contact. Text messages can seem efficient, but a phone call is generally considered to be the most appropriate/ effective method.
- Ensure requirements are documented and have been communicated to staff.
- Be consistent in application, unless there is a justifiable reason to deviate.

Make Return-to-Work Meetings Count

- Welcome the employee back.
- Satisfy yourself that they are fit to be in work.
- Identify any ongoing support needs.
- Explore emerging attendance patterns as appropriate.
- Reinforce attendance expectations.
- Document the conversation
- When undertaken consistently, these conversations help create a culture where attendance matters and employees feel supported.

Support First (see also our article on Supporting Staff Through the Winter Months)

Before considering formal action, managers should explore what support may help an employee improve or sustain attendance. This could include where appropriate reasonable workplace adjustments, early referral to Occupational Health, flexible working arrangements, and signposting well-being support.

Early support can often prevent attendance concerns from escalating and may help employees remain in or return to work successfully.

If attendance does not improve sufficiently through support, follow the informal stages of your School Policy before moving to the formal process.

Formal Action: Top Tips

- Act promptly - avoid allowing concerns to drift or escalate.
- Evidence/document the support provided - conversations, adjustments and referrals.
- Focus on attendance, not blame - keep discussions factual and professional.
- Consider individual circumstances - including disability and extenuating circumstances.
- Be clear about expectations - employees should understand the improvement required and potential consequences if attendance does not improve.

Formal action should never come as a surprise. It should be the next step in a supportive, fair and consistent process.

Helpful Questions for School Leaders

3. Is there leadership oversight of attendance, e.g. reviewing data available to identify any trends/concerns?

4. Are return-to-work meetings taking place after every absence?

5. Are managers addressing concerns early?

6. Do employees know what support is available if health or wellbeing starts to affect attendance (and/or performance)?

To run reports on your schools absence go to **School reports - attendance and absence | Staff and managers**

Key Message

Successful attendance management is about clear expectations, early intervention, meaningful conversations and consistent application of policy. Schools that get these basics right are best placed to support employee wellbeing whilst minimising disruption for pupils and colleagues and are more likely to avoid the need for formal processes. For practical ideas on promoting wellbeing and supporting staff during periods of increased seasonal absence, see our article *Supporting your Staff Through the Winter Months*.





Supporting your Staff Through the Winter Months

As we move into the winter months, schools often experience higher levels of staff absence due to seasonal illnesses, alongside the additional pressures that colder weather and shorter days can bring. This makes it particularly important for school leaders to focus on both staff wellbeing and proactive support measures.

Creating a healthy and supportive working environment is not only beneficial for employees but also helps schools maintain continuity for pupils and minimise disruption to learning.

Promoting Attendance Through Support

Colds, flu and other winter illnesses are unavoidable at times. While good attendance remains important, sickness absence should be managed consistently and supportively, recognising that staff may occasionally need time away from work to recover. Education People Services provides guidance which highlights the importance of maintaining communication with employees, providing appropriate support, and helping staff return to work successfully.

School leaders should remain alert to signs that staff may be struggling, whether through physical illness, stress, fatigue or wider wellbeing concerns, and ensure support is offered at an early stage.

The winter months can affect wellbeing in many ways. Reduced daylight and increased personal commitments can all contribute to increased stress and reduced resilience.

Occupational Health Support

Where a health condition is affecting an employee's attendance or ability to undertake their role, school. may wish to consider a referral to their Occupational Health provider. Occupational Health can provide independent advice on workplace adjustments, fitness for work and support measures to help employees remain in or return to work safely. Early referrals can often prevent issues from escalating and support positive outcomes for both the employee and the school.

What Schools Can Do

Simple actions can make a significant difference. Schools should regularly promote available support services, encourage healthy working practices, hold wellbeing conversations and recognise the contribution staff make throughout the year.

By ensuring staff are aware of what they can access for support and maintaining a supportive culture, schools can help staff remain healthy, resilient and engaged throughout the winter months.