

Dear Head Teacher of the School,

Requests for Medical Certificates for school children during term time

I understand that you recently asked the parents of a child registered at the Greyswood Practice to provide a medical certificate to validate their child's absence from school. We were 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 at all. 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. An appointment at the surgery is taken over and could have been used for more serious illnesses.

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.

Thank you for your assistance.

Kind regards,

The Greyswood Practice