



## Lancashire Pennine Local Medical Committee

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**To: All School Headteachers in BwD Borough Council area**

Dear Headteacher

### **Schools' requests for medical evidence to support pupils authorised absence due to illness**

As I am sure you are aware, it is the responsibility of schools (not parents) to determine whether a pupil's absence should be recorded as authorised or unauthorised in the attendance register. Authorised absence means that the school has either given approval in advance for a pupil of compulsory school age to be away, or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as justification for absence.

The Department for Education's advice explains that it is a matter for schools to decide if they require evidence to support the authorisation of an absence. The DfE advice for schools on the use of absence codes for recording illness states:

*Code 1: Illness (not medical or dental appointments): Schools should advise parents to notify them on the first day the child is unable to attend due to illness. Schools should authorise absences due to illness unless they have genuine cause for concern about the veracity of an illness. If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, schools can request parents to provide medical evidence to support illness. Schools can record the absence as unauthorised if not satisfied of the authenticity of the illness but should advise parents of their intention. Schools are advised not to request medical evidence unnecessarily. Medical evidence can take the form of prescriptions, appointment cards, etc. rather than doctors' notes.*

GPs receive a significant number of requests for medical certificates or appointment cards for school children. GPs do not provide sick notes for school children. When children are absent from school owing to illness, schools may request a letter from a parent or guardian. Where this includes sickness during an exam period, or if the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, schools can request that parents provide medical evidence (not necessarily a doctor's sick note) as per the DfE guidance above.

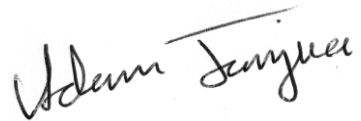
Please note that GPs cannot provide retrospective sickness certification in the same way as Headteachers' cannot give retrospective approval for a family holiday taken in term-time. When a child suffers from a long-term condition, any certification to support approval of absence will be provided by the responsible specialist.

It is estimated that a potential 47,000 appointments could be saved by correcting misconceptions on the role of GPs in issuing sickness certification. GPs unfortunately will not sign sickness certificates

for less than the statutory requirement and should not be asked for appointments for children that do not need to see the doctor. However, where a pupil has excessive absence due to illness and school has concerns, they should contact the school nurse for assistance and support for the pupil.

We are happy to discuss further with a representative group of schools.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Adam Janjua**  
**LMC Chief Executive**



**Jessica Byrne**  
**Head of Service – Education Excellence**  
**Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council**