

Sheringham Woodfields School

Sheringham Woodfields School
Holt Road
Sheringham
Norfolk
NR26 8ND



ANNETTE MACONOCHIE
Head Teacher

Telephone: 01263 820 520
Fax: 01263 820 521

STEVE THURLOW
Chair of Governors

Email: office@sheringhamwoodfields.norfolk.sch.uk
Website: www.sheringhamwoodfields.norfolk.sch.uk

Registered Charity: Friends of Sheringham Woodfields School - 1127142

CAPABILITY PROCEDURE FOR SUPPORT STAFF

Approved by SMT: 25 th September 2023	Approved by Staff: 2 nd October 2023	Approved by Governors: N/A
Next Review date: Autumn 2026	Person(s) responsible for review: Head Teacher	

1. Introduction and Scope

1.1 This procedure applies to all support staff employees in school with only one exception: Support staff working their probationary period would see concerns around their performance addressed through the School's Probation policy & Procedure.

1.2 In most cases, concerns over support staff performance will be successfully addressed through day to day management support and appraisal. In more serious cases, or where day to day management support fail to bring about the required improvement in performance, this Support Staff Capability Procedure should be followed.

1.3 This procedure **must not** be used to address capability concerns with teaching staff. For teachers, concerns should be addressed through our Performance Management (appraisal) policy for teaching staff and Teacher Capability policy and procedures.

1.4 Throughout this procedure reference to companion means trade union representative, work colleague or other supporter.

1.5 In Foundation schools, Voluntary Aided Schools and Foundation Special Schools, the governing board is the employer but the power to dismiss can be delegated to the Headteacher, to one or more governors or one or more governors acting with the Headteacher.

2. Identifying the problem

2.1 In the majority of cases, informal structured support (referred to as counselling) within the appraisal process set out in appendix 3 of the Performance Appraisal policy & procedure - support staff will be appropriate before considering using this formal procedure. Where an employee may be under-performing, the Headteacher or other line manager should investigate whether this is the case and, if so, collect evidence.

2.2 Informal discussions should take place in order to determine that there is a problem and exactly what it is. There can be many sources of information and these will differ depending on the role undertaken by the employee.

2.3 Once the facts are gathered and the seriousness of the problem established there are three initial options:

- drop the matter (no case to answer or trivial)
- arrange informal structured support - counselling (see Appraisal policy & procedure (support staff) - appendix 3)
- arrange a formal capability interview - where there is insufficient acceptance of the problems or the problems are already serious (see 4 below).

3. Formal capability interview

3.1 A formal capability interview initiates the formal stage of the capability procedure. It provides an opportunity to deal with more serious problems in a structured way or to give more intensive support and monitoring where the counselling stage (informal support through the performance appraisal process) has failed to bring about the required improvement. It allows the employee to prepare a response to allegations about performance and make a case in the company of a companion.

3.2 The employee should be invited to the formal capability interview with at least five working days' notice (or seven consecutive days out of term time). The interview will be chaired by the Headteacher. The invitation should be in writing, making clear the purpose of the interview, confirming the date, time and venue, and giving details of others who will be in attendance (eg witnesses, HR Consultant). The right of the employee to be accompanied by a companion must be included.

3.3 Where representation has been notified, the companion will be consulted on the date and time of the formal capability interview although the Headteacher should not allow undue delay in starting the formal process. The statutory guidance suggests that the process should not be delayed by more than five days for the purposes of securing representation but there should be recognition of the difficulties associated with co-ordinating diaries.

3.4 A copy of this capability procedure must be attached to the invitation along with a capability report prepared by the employee's line manager (usually the appraiser where the appraisal system is in place). The report must include:

- description of the problem(s)
- information about action already taken (where appropriate)
- reference to and copies of other evidence being used to confirm problems, eg reports of observations.

The invitation must be handed to the employee by the Headteacher or posted by recorded delivery.

An extra copy of the invitation, report and other documentation must be provided to the employee for the purposes of passing to their companion. By agreement with the employee, the copy may be posted direct to their companion.

3.5 The format of the formal capability interview should normally be as follows:

- The Headteacher introduces those present and confirms the purpose of the meeting.
- The line manager outlines the review report and highlights the reasons and evidence for concerns, calling witnesses where appropriate. Written evidence from witnesses should be provided to the employee in advance of the interview.
- The employee and/or their companion may ask questions of the line manager and any witnesses.
- The Headteacher and their adviser may ask questions.
- The employee and/or their companion will present their case and will be able to refer to written evidence and/or call on witnesses of their own. Prior notice must be given and written evidence circulated before the review meeting.
- The line manager, Headteacher and their adviser can ask questions.
- Where appropriate, the line manager and employee and/or companion may summarise their cases.
- The Headteacher will adjourn the interview while they decide what action to take. The employee and their companion must be informed as soon as possible, and no later than five days after the review meeting. Normally, information will be given after the adjournment.

4.6 The interview may provide new information or put a different slant on evidence already collected. If it becomes clear that further investigation is needed the interview should be adjourned for an appropriate length of time to allow this to happen.

4.7 There are four options at the formal capability interview:

- drop the matter
- structured support - counselling/informal coaching (except where already undertaken without improvement)
- oral or first written warning
- final written warning.

The first two are only relevant where new information, a different slant on the information collected, or further investigation suggests the matter is not as serious as it first seemed.

The third and fourth options are relevant in any case where continued concern about the standard of performance is justified. The decision on which level of warning to issue will depend on the level of seriousness of the problem:

- An oral warning should not normally be necessary in cases where counselling has already taken place.
- If performance is unsatisfactory a **first written warning** will normally be the appropriate step (which will invoke an assessment period of up to ten weeks).
- In cases of particularly serious concern, perhaps where the finances or security of the school are in jeopardy, it is possible to move directly to a **final written warning** (which will invoke an assessment period not normally exceeding four weeks). In these extreme cases it will be important to consider (before a decision is made about issuing a final warning) how the employee's performance has dipped significantly if, for example, they have recently passed a probationary period or had a successful appraisal assessment (if the appraisal system is in place).

3.8 Any decision on the level of warning should be made after all the facts and any representations from the employee and/or companion have been considered. The Headteacher should adjourn the meeting briefly to consider the appropriate option before delivering a decision to the employee.

3.9 Where a formal warning is issued, the Headteacher should use the remainder of the meeting to agree an action plan to:

- identify the professional shortcomings
- give clear guidance on the improved standard of performance needed to end the capability procedure
- explain the support that will be available, and how performance will be monitored over the following weeks
- depending on the level of warning issued, to identify the timetable for improvement and agree a date for the next/final evaluation meeting
- make it clearly understood that failure to improve may ultimately lead to dismissal.

3.10 A letter, along with the agreed action plan, should be sent to the employee immediately after the formal interview recording the outcome, the main points discussed at the meeting, confirming the decision, and where a warning is issued, giving information about the handling of the formal stage and the appeals process. The letter must state that if there is insufficient improvement in the capabilities of the employee by the end of the stated period, this could lead to further action under the formal procedure including dismissal for lack of capability.

3.11 Any appeal against a warning must be submitted within five working days (or seven consecutive days out of term time), and ideally heard within ten working days (or 14 consecutive days out of term time) of notification of appeal, and must not interrupt the progress of the procedure, unless the appeal decision leads to the matter being reconsidered. This appeal is heard by an appeal committee.

3.12 First assessment stage

Weeks one to ten (up to ten weeks but no less than four) - Regular observation, monitoring and evaluation of performance, with guidance, training if necessary, and support to the employee. This will include the need for regular, perhaps weekly, feedback to the employee on their progress so they can be clear on whether they are making the improvements required. It would be helpful to the process if such regular feedback is through a written note detailing where improvement has been made, and where progress still needs to be made.

This timescale is not prescriptive. It will depend on the role and the tasks required. For some groups of staff ten weeks may be too long. An assessment period could be anywhere from four to ten weeks; it will be for the Headteacher to decide what the most appropriate timescale would be.

If at any point during this stage the circumstances suggest that a more serious problem exists, the Headteacher may take the decision to bring forward the planned evaluation meeting to consider whether a **final written warning** should be issued sooner. If a final warning is given following such a brought forward evaluation meeting, there will normally be a maximum period of four weeks allowed following that evaluation meeting before a final evaluation meeting is held.

Week 10 (up to ten weeks no less than four) - **Evaluation meeting** to assess performance over the previous weeks.

The evaluation meeting should be convened by the Headteacher by circulating, at least five working days (or seven consecutive days out of term time) in advance, a summary report which contains:

- the original target setting letter
- details of help and guidance provided and results of monitoring
- copies of evidence from observations and other relevant evidence
- a clear assessment by the Headteacher of the progress made
- confirmation of the employee's right to be accompanied by a companion.

If it is found that the level of performance has been satisfactory and confidence that it can be sustained, the capability procedure can end with a confirmation letter from the Headteacher. Within a reasonable time frame, if the employee's performance becomes unsatisfactory again (in the same way that it was before), the employee would re-enter this procedure at the point where they left it i.e. consideration as to whether a final written warning is issued (see below).

If it is found that performance continues to be unsatisfactory a **final written warning** should be issued. Formal monitoring, evaluation, guidance and support will continue for a further (four week) period. Arrangements for this should be explained at the meeting. The decision and main points of the meeting must be recorded in a letter to the employee. The employee must be told clearly that failure to achieve an acceptable standard by the final evaluation meeting, with confidence that it can be sustained, may result in dismissal. Any appeal against the final written warning must be made within five working days (or seven consecutive days out of term time), and ideally heard within ten working days (or 14 consecutive days out of term time) of notification of appeal, and must not interrupt the progress of the procedure, unless the appeal decision leads to the matter being reconsidered.

3.13 Appeals against warnings

Any appeal submitted by an employee regarding a first written warning or final written warning will normally be heard by a panel of three governors (the Appeal Committee) although this can be reduced to a minimum of two where a governing body has a shortage of eligible governors.

Notice of at least five working days (or seven consecutive days out of term time) must be given for an Appeal Committee hearing.

The School's Procedure at staff dismissal and appeal committee hearings should be followed for appeal hearings.

The outcome of the Appeal Committee hearing must be confirmed in writing to the employee within five working days.

3.14 Second assessment stage

Weeks 10 - 14 (up to 10 - 14, but no less than 4 - 8) Regular monitoring and evaluation of performance, with guidance, training if necessary, and support to the employee.

Week 14 (up to 14, no less than 8) **Final evaluation and decision meeting** to report the assessment of performance over the previous weeks.

The final evaluation meeting should be convened by the Headteacher, where the Headteacher has the authority to dismiss (if the Headteacher does not have the authority to dismiss see para 1.5). At least five working days (or seven consecutive days out of term time) in advance, details of the time and place of the meeting will be given and the employee advised of their right to be accompanied by a companion. A summary report which contains:

- the original target setting letter
- details of help and guidance provided and results of monitoring
- copies of evidence from observations and other relevant evidence
- a clear assessment by the Headteacher of the progress made
- confirmation of the employee's right to be accompanied by a companion.

The invitation to a final evaluation and decision meeting should make it clear who will be in attendance and who has the authority to dismiss. It is expected that in most cases, authority to dismiss has been delegated to the Headteacher and the Headteacher therefore conducts the meeting and makes the decision about dismissal. The final evaluation and decision meeting (where the Headteacher has authority to dismiss) will follow the same format as the formal capability interview (para 3).

If it is found that performance has been satisfactory, and there is sufficient confidence that it can be maintained, the capability procedure can end here. Within a reasonable time frame, if the employee's performance becomes unsatisfactory again (in the same way that it was before), the employee would re-enter this procedure at the point where they left it i.e. consideration as to whether the employee will be dismissed.

If it is found that performance is unsatisfactory, a decision will be made that the employee should be dismissed or required to cease working at the school. The employee will be informed as soon as possible of the reasons for the dismissal, the date on which the employment contract will end, the appropriate period of notice and their right of appeal.

If authority to dismiss has not been delegated, the Headteacher will conduct the final evaluation meeting and then make a recommendation to the Staff Dismissal Committee. A decision meeting is then conducted before a Staff Dismissal Committee, comprising of three governors (or two where there is a shortage of eligible governors). The procedure for a capability hearing, follows the school's procedure for Disciplinary, Dismissal and Appeal Committee hearings.

3.15 Dismissal Appeal Committee stage

If the employee appeals the decision of the Headteacher or Staff Dismissal Committee, the governing body should set up a Dismissal Appeal Committee to hear the appeal.

The paperwork referred to in 3.10 should also be provided when calling an appeal hearing along with a copy of the outcome statement from the decision meeting/Staff Dismissal Committee hearing. Again, the employee should be given five working days' notice along with confirmation of their right to be accompanied by a companion.

A copy of the information sent to the employee should be passed to each member of the Appeal Committee and their adviser in advance of the hearing.

The Appeal Committee should consist of three governors. This can be reduced to two where a school has a shortage of eligible governors but should never be less than the number used for the Staff Dismissal Committee.

None of the governors on the Staff Dismissal Committee should be on the Dismissal Appeal Committee.

Notice of at least five working days (or seven consecutive days out of term time) must be given for an Appeal Committee hearing.

The outcome of the hearing must be confirmed in writing to the employee within five working days. If the Appeal Committee confirms dismissal, the employee has no further right of appeal.

4. Post dismissal actions

4.1 There is currently no requirement to make referrals to other agencies where a member of support staff is dismissed for lack of capability. The only exception to this is likely to be where the capability of an individual is such that it may make them unsuitable for work with children (in which case a referral to the Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) may be appropriate). The HR Consultant supporting the school through the dismissal process will give appropriate advice.

5. Data Protection

The school processes any personal data collected during the capability procedure in accordance with its data protection policy. Any data collected is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of completing the capability procedure. Inappropriate access or disclosure of employee data constitutes a data breach and should be reported in accordance with the school's data protection policy immediately. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under the school's disciplinary procedure.

6. Associated documents

- Capability guidance - support staff G329
- Performance Appraisal policy & procedure - support staff for all staff
- F329 Personal Action Plan