

36. Sickness, Absences & Discretionary Leave

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Policy Statement

This policy outlines the procedures for managing sickness, absences and discretionary leave while ensuring fairness, consistency and minimal disruption to the team and pupils. Our approach aligns with the school's values of empathy, professionalism and respect, fostering a supportive and transparent work environment.

Aims

- Maintain a balance between operational needs and staff wellbeing.
- Provide clear guidance on the reporting and management of absences.
- Ensure all staff understand their rights and responsibilities regarding sickness, absences, and discretionary leave.

Sickness Absence Management

Reporting Sickness

- Staff must inform EP, HR and relevant SLT before 7:30 AM if they are unwell and unable to attend work unless in the case of emergencies.
- Notification should be made via phone call and followed by an email if necessary.
- If the absence exceeds 24 hours, staff must provide a medical certificate in 48 h of being absent.
- Long-term absences (over seven days) require ongoing communication with HR and relevant documentation from a medical professional.

Return to Work

- Staff returning from sickness leave must complete a self-certification form for absences up to seven days.
- A Return-to-Work Meeting may be conducted by EP or SLT to ensure proper reintegration and discuss any necessary adjustments.
- If the reason for absence is mental health related, a 'back to work chat' will be required with EP & HR. See Appendix A.

Monitoring & Support

- HR will monitor patterns of sickness absence and identify any underlying concerns with monthly statistics updates to EP.
- Where necessary, wellbeing support, counselling, or reasonable adjustments may be recommended.
- If absence levels become a concern, a formal meeting may be arranged to discuss potential solutions. If it's on a whole school level, survey will be conducted to explore core problems and offer solutions

Legislation & Leave Entitlements

Legal Entitlements

- According to the Labour code in Tunisia and the Sectoral Agreement for Private education in Tunisia, staff are allowed up to 13 days of paid leave per year.
- Exceeding this limit will result in salary deductions.

BIST incentive

- As part of an internal agreement at BIST, all staff are entitled to 10 days of paid leave annually, in addition to three wellbeing leave days (one per term), which can be taken without the need to provide justification. Staff members must coordinate their chosen wellbeing leave day in advance with the Executive Principal (EP). To formally request a wellbeing leave day, an email must be sent to both the EP and HR with the subject line 'Request for Wellbeing Leave Day'. Approval of the request is subject to the staff member's absence record over previous years.
- By implementing this policy, BIST reaffirms its commitment to staff wellbeing, fairness, and operational efficiency, ensuring a positive and productive working environment for all.

Planned & Unplanned Absences

Medical Appointments

- Academic staff should arrange non-urgent medical appointments outside of working hours where possible making use of the school holidays according to the annual calendar
- Non academic staff can arrange medical appointments during the work from home day to relieve the burden on the rest of the team
- Where this is not possible, appointments should be scheduled at the beginning or end of the working day.
- Time off for medical appointments must be approved by SLT and HR in advance.

Emergency Leave

- Staff requiring urgent leave due to personal or family emergencies should notify their line manager at the earliest opportunity.
- Further leave beyond the agreed period may be taken as unpaid leave or annual leave in case of the admin team.

Discretionary Leave

Bereavement Leave

- BIST recognises the emotional impact of losing a loved one and provides up to three days of paid bereavement leave for the loss of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, spouse, or child) according to the Tunisian Labour Code.
- Additional leave may be considered in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Executive Principal.

Prenatal leave

- In compliance with the Article 3 of law 44-2024 related to the organisation of maternity and paternity leaves, BIST provides for a prenatal leave of a maximum duration of 15 days preceding childbirth to be used during the last month of pregnancy (based on medical certificate mentioning the tentative date of delivery). During this leave, the employee is entitled to receive full compensation from Social Security.
- To ensure smooth planning and operational continuity, staff must notify the Executive Principal (EP) and HR via email in advance to coordinate their leave arrangements.

Maternity leave

- In compliance with Article 4 of the law 44-2024, BIST provides for a maternity leave entitlement after the delivery, of a duration of 3 months. This entitlement is increased to 4 months in cases of birth twin or handicap child or in cases of abnormalities requiring medical intervention (based on a medical certificate). During these leaves, the employee is entitled to receive full compensation from Social Security.
- To ensure smooth planning and operational continuity, staff must notify the Executive Principal (EP) and HR via email in advance to coordinate their leave arrangements.

Paternity Leave

- The father is entitled to 7 days of paid leave upon proving the childbirth. This entitlement is extended to 10 days in case of birth of twins or if the child requires medical intervention.
- The father is also entitled to 3 days of paid leave in the event of a delivery of a dead child, (based on a medical certificate).

Religious & Cultural Leave

- Staff wishing to observe religious or cultural events not covered by official school holidays should submit a leave request in advance.
- Up to two discretionary leave days may be granted per academic year.

Special Circumstances Leave

- Staff experiencing significant personal challenges (e.g., legal proceedings, relocation, or other major life events) may apply for discretionary leave.
- Requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, with decisions made in alignment with school policies and operational needs.

Annual Leave for Administrative Staff

- Administrative staff are entitled to 22 days of paid leave per year according to the Sectoral Agreement for Private Education in Tunisia. Staff must request leave 15 days in advance and ensure work coverage during their absence. Staff are advised to take leave during the school holidays for minimum disruption of operational matters.
- Leave should be planned in coordination with line EP to prevent operational disruption.

Monitoring & Review

- EP, HR and SLT will regularly review absence patterns to ensure staff receive appropriate support.
- Policies will be updated periodically based on feedback and emerging best practices.
- Staff input will be sought through surveys and discussions to improve leave management policies.

Annex A:Back to Work Chat

Back to Work Chat form	
Staff member name:	EP:
Meeting date:	Location:
List of those present at the meeting:	
Period of absence From: To: Total number of days absent in this period:	
Total number of days absent in the past year:	
Reasons for absence and other issues discussed:	

Support offered to staff member:

Actions agreed and timescales: