



Probationary Period

Approved by: Board of Trustees

Last reviewed on: November 2024

Next review due by: As Required

Policy Outline

Reviewing the Policy

Inspire Multi Academy Trust will keep the operation of this policy under review and will make such changes to the policy as deemed appropriate following consultation with the trade unions, where appropriate.

Summary of Changes

The 2023 Probationary Period policy has been reviewed and there were no significant changes made.

Equality Impact Assessment

As with all policies that affect service users, the wider community or employees, Academy Trusts should undertake an analysis of the potential equality impacts and record that assessment.

Contacts for help and assistance

Please contact the Inspire Multi Academy Trust Central Team for help and assistance in applying the content of this policy.

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 A probationary period is essentially a trial period for a new employee. The purpose of the probationary period is to ensure employees understand and are encouraged to achieve and maintain the standards of performance, conduct and attendance required by Inspire Multi Academy Trust .
- 1.2 A probationary period allows a period of time for an employee who is a new recruit to the Trust to demonstrate suitability to their role. It allows both the Trust and the employee to take into account the individual's overall capability, performance and general conduct in relation to the job in question and assess objectively if they meet the requirements.
- 1.3 Continuous reviews are a key element of probationary periods and provides the employee with feedback which gives them a fair opportunity to improve their performance or change their behaviour where necessary.
- 1.4 The Trust is responsible for ensuring new employees are properly monitored during their probationary period. If any problems arise, they should be addressed promptly with the employee. This will ensure that the employee is aware that some aspect of their performance or conduct is unsatisfactory and aims to prevent the problem from escalating.
- 1.5 It is anticipated that the majority of staff will complete their probationary period successfully and will be so advised. However, if an employee is unable to achieve and maintain acceptable standards of performance, conduct and attendance their contract may be terminated without recourse to the full Capability, Disciplinary or Attendance Procedures.

2 Employee Health & Wellbeing

- 2.1 Throughout this policy it sets out the measures which the Trust will take to support all employees in maintaining their health and wellbeing at work whilst in their probationary period. We are committed to creating an environment that promotes good mental health and where staff can thrive and feel supported. However, we recognise that during the probationary period it can be a anxious time for all staff involved.
- 2.2 Ultimately it is the Board of Trustees who are responsible for ensuring, so far as reasonably practicable, that the health and wellbeing of the affected employees is considered at all times and that the relevant officer(s) appointed to monitor and review performance are continuing to support our wellbeing strategy.
- 2.3 The Board of Trustees are also responsible for ensuring that the health and wellbeing of those officers handling probationary period matters feel supported throughout the process.

3 Scope of the Policy

- 3.1 The provisions of this policy will apply to all newly appointed **support staff** directly employed by the Trust but excludes staff who have transferred from the service of Sunderland City Council (or another Council) or maintained school.
- 3.2 This policy also applies to those newly appointed support staff employed on fixed term/temporary contracts, to ensure that probation is not overlooked in the event that their contract is extended or renewed.
- 3.3 The policy does not apply to Teachers whose probationary period should be considered in line with the Early Career Teachers (ECT) statutory guidance.
- 3.4 For those newly appointed staff to the Trust who are not subject to a probationary period and this policy does not apply (as above), the Trust will ensure that all new starters receive an appropriate induction, including support and guidance within the role. For those staff, any serious concerns or difficulties would need to be dealt with and addressed under the appropriate policy such as Capability, Disciplinary or Attendance.
- 3.5 Employees can request a copy of any additional policies referred to within the Probationary Period Policy from their line manager, school office or the Trust's central team.

4 Confirmation of probationary periods upon appointment

- 4.1 Qualifying employees (as determined by section 3 of this policy) will be subject to a 26-week probationary period and will be terminable by 4 weeks' notice by either party, which may be paid in lieu of notice.
- 4.2 At the point of recruitment, the employee should be made aware that they must serve a probationary period, and that during this period their performance will be monitored and reviewed. They should be made aware that during their probationary service, they will be expected to establish their suitability for the position, or their employment may be terminated.

5 Manager Responsibilities

- 5.1 In this Trust the line manager as referred to throughout this policy will, on most occasions, be the Headteacher, Lead Headteacher or Chief Executive Headteacher. Although this process, or any subsequent monitoring and support, may in some circumstances be delegated to the employee's direct line manager, such as, the School Business Manager or Executive Bursar. The employee will be notified at the beginning of their employment who will be responsible for monitoring and reviewing their performance.
- 5.2 The line manager will ensure that the employee receives sufficient induction, guidance, support and training during their probationary period to enable them to settle into their new role. Work objectives must be set, and training and development needs identified and progressed.

- 5.3 The line manager will review the performance, conduct and attendance of employees subject to a probationary period on at least three occasions within the probationary period. If there are any concerns about performance, conduct or attendance identified during a review which are not already being addressed, immediate action must be taken so that the matter can be resolved as quickly as possible and within the probationary period.
- 5.4 The Trust will consider the options available, including making any reasonable adjustments to ensure that a disabled employee is not disadvantaged in the application of this policy. Where it can be clearly shown that performance issues are linked to changes in an employee's disability or medical condition then medical advice may need to be sought from the Trust's Occupational Health provider to support the consideration of the reasonable adjustments which may be appropriate to help the employee undertake the role.

6 Employee Responsibilities

- 6.1 Employees are expected to attend any probationary period review/one to one meeting to which they are invited. They are also expected to co-operate with arrangements for training needed to equip them with the skills and knowledge required to perform the job.
- 6.2 Employees are required to advise their line manager of any information which could impact upon their performance; particularly any difficulties in accessing guidance and support.
- 6.3 All employees are expected to conform to the Trust's policies and procedures and the Trust's Code of Conduct.

7 Probationary Review Meetings

- 7.1 The line manager should arrange to review the employee's performance, conduct and attendance throughout the probationary period.
- 7.2 Probationary period review meetings should be arranged to take place within 2 weeks following the employee having completed 1, 3 and 5 months, with the final review meeting taking place at 5 months. However, reviews can take place at any time, if necessary, and if issues need to be addressed, the line manager should discuss the concerns with the employee as they arise rather than wait until a pre-planned review meeting, or until the end of the probationary period.
- 7.3 It is good practice to diarise and plan in advance the dates of the probationary review meetings at the start of the employee's employment with the Trust. Consideration should be given to the time of year the employee starts their employment and the need to potentially carry out a review meeting early. For example, where a school holiday falls within the probationary period.
- 7.4 The probationary review meetings will be held between the line manager and the employee. There is no legal right for an employee to have representation at these

review meetings, however both representation and HR involvement may be agreed in certain cases. This may be appropriate for example where issues have arisen during the probationary period.

7.5 The aim of the probationary review meeting is to assess the employee's ability to carry out their role. Whilst the key issues to be addressed during the meeting will depend on the level and type of role, factors which the line manager should consider include:

- Quality of work and work performance;
- Standards achieved in comparison to expected standards, or the standards being achieved by other employees doing similar jobs;
- Need for constant supervision;
- Ability to plan and organise;
- Attitudes and motivation;
- Interest in the work, effort to learn the job, and adaptability to changing situations;
- Any training needs;
- Fulfilling training required to do the job.

7.6 At each of the probationary review meetings the manager should cover the strengths, and areas for improvement of the employee's performance. These should be discussed and noted, together with ways performance could be improved. An example Review Meeting Form which could be used to record this information is attached as Appendix 1.

7.7 The line manager also has a responsibility during an employee's probationary period, to monitor the attendance of the employee and any absences which may occur, i.e., sickness absence. Whilst all sickness absences will be recorded in accordance with the Trust's Attendance Management policy and return to work interviews undertaken by the manager with the employee, the impact on the Trust or individual school must be considered and if appropriate, concern raised with the employee, giving access to the Trust's Occupational Health provider, providing direction and encouragement to improve.

7.8 An assessment must be made as to whether the overall performance is satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Where performance is unsatisfactory, managers must:

- Draw this to the attention of the employee;
- Discuss areas for development with the aim of establishing the reasons for poor performance and strategies for improving that performance;
- Restate the standards required and the consequences of failure to meet those standards;

8 Successful Completion of Probationary Period

- 8.1 The majority of employees will complete their probationary period successfully and will continue in post as a valued member of school staff. Even where this is the case and no problems are identified, the line manager should meet with the employee for the planned reviews to confirm that standards are being met and to give the employee the opportunity to discuss any queries or anxieties.
- 8.2 Following the final review meeting held within the 26-week probationary period, the line manager should confirm the successful completion of the probationary period in writing to the employee.

9 Formal Probationary Review Meetings

- 9.1 If issues have been raised informally via review meetings and addressed but no improvement is forthcoming, the employee should then be requested to attend a formal review meeting without delay. This formal meeting may take place at any stage of the probationary period, so long as sufficient evidence is available.
- 9.2 The employee should be given written notice (at least 5 working days) of a formal review meeting with the line manager. The employee must be advised of their right to be represented at the meeting by either a work colleague or trade union representative. It would also be appropriate for a HR representative to attend the meeting in order to provide advice and support. The manager should include in the letter of invite, the issues which are to be discussed at the meeting.
- 9.3 The manager should begin the meeting by outlining the concerns around the unsatisfactory progress, remind the employee of the standards required and seek to confirm with the employee's agreement that there is a shortfall. Evidence should be provided in the form of notes of meetings, targets, reviews etc. and the employee should be asked for their comments. The manager will listen to any reasons given by the employee and be prepared to adjourn the meeting, if necessary, to investigate any points raised. It is important that the employee is given the opportunity to explain anything that may be affecting their employment. Where there are issues regarding attendance, skills, performance, capability or general conduct then the employee should be reminded that failure to improve could ultimately lead to the probation period not being confirmed and lead to termination of their employment.
- 9.4 Where the reason for unsatisfactory performance is due to a lack of the required skills, the employee should be assisted through training and be given reasonable time to reach the required standard of performance, within the probationary period. If it is a question of lack of tools or other resources or facilities, attention should be paid to this, and assistance provided where appropriate. [Appendix 2](#) can be used to document areas which require improvement.
- 9.5 Any formal meeting must be followed up immediately by a letter reminding the employee of any remaining concerns, confirming what improvement is expected, and the timescale in which it must be achieved. An action plan could be used at this point to provide a timetable for improvement. It is important that the manager monitors

performance against the plan on a regular basis in order to provide support and guidance to the employee. They should also be advised that if the required improvement is not achieved, their contract will be terminated in line with their contract, with a minimum of 4 weeks' notice.

- 9.6 Should an opinion be needed from the Trust's Occupational Health provider; the manager should make a referral promptly and should also refer to this in the outcome letter issued to the employee. When making a referral to the Occupational Health provider it is important that the referral includes a thorough and accurate account of the issues and specific questions required to be answered in the Occupational Health report.
- 9.7 A further formal review meeting should then be arranged to be held at the end of the set review period or at the end of the probationary period to review the improvement made against the targets set. It is extremely important that the final review meeting is held before the end of the agreed probationary period. If the formal meeting is taking place near the end of the 6-month probationary period, an extension to the review period may necessitate an extension of the probation period. See [Section 10](#). If improvements have not been made and demonstrably sustained at the end of this review period, the employee's contract may be terminated (see [Section 11](#)) or in exceptional circumstances the review period may be extended (see [Section 10](#).)
- 9.8 It is not always necessary to wait until the end of the probationary period to consider termination of the contract. If it is clear during the first formal meeting that further training or support will not alter the situation and that the employee is wholly unsuitable for the role, and sufficient evidence is available to demonstrate this, the line manager should consult with their HR provider with a view to earlier termination. [Section 11](#) should be followed in these circumstances.

An example order of proceedings for a Formal Probationary Review Meeting is attached at [Appendix 3](#).

Serious misconduct

- 9.9 If an instance of serious misconduct occurs during probation, it may be appropriate to proceed straight to a dismissal hearing under this procedure. See [Section 11](#).

10 Extending probationary periods

- 10.1 If, following a formal probationary review meeting, it is decided that the employee's performance is unsatisfactory, or in cases where the employee has been absent from the workplace for an extended period, an extension of the probationary period may be appropriate. An extension should normally be sought only where there are special circumstances that justify this.
- 10.2 Probationary periods should only be extended where managers feel that there is a realistic prospect that the employee will reach the required standard within the extension period. In certain exceptional circumstances it may be appropriate to extend the probationary period for other reasons. Such cases should be discussed with the Trust's HR provider.

10.3 Where it is agreed that an employee's period of probation will be extended the extension period will not exceed 6 weeks. It will be important for the manager to set out the terms of the extension in writing. It will be important to state clearly:

- The length of the extension and the date on which the extended period of probation will end;
- The reason for the extension - for example that the employee's performance has fallen short of certain standards, but the manager reasonably believes that an extension of time will be effective in allowing the employee to achieve these standards;
- The performance standards or objectives that the employee is required to achieve by the end of the extended period of probation;
- Any support - such as further training that will be provided during the extension period;
- Clarification that if the employee does not meet fully the required standards by the end of the extended period of probation, their employment will be terminated.

10.4 Regular monitoring and progress meetings should continue during the extended probationary period. Further formal review meetings may be required, and a further final review meeting should be arranged towards the end of the extended probationary period.

10.5 An employee's period of probation, in most circumstances, will not be extended more than once.

11 Termination of Employment

11.1 In order to give an employee a full opportunity to come up to the required standards, termination of employment will normally be considered towards the end of the probationary period when the individual has been made aware of the standards of behaviour and performance required and allowed a period to rectify this. However, it may not be necessary to wait until the end of the probationary period to consider termination of the contract so long as sufficient evidence is available.

11.2 In these circumstances, an employee should be requested to attend a formal probationary review meeting with the Personnel and Performance Management Committee of the Board of Trustees. The employee should be given at least 5 working days' notice and be advised of their right to be represented at the meeting by their trade union representative or a work colleague. A representative from the Trust's HR provider should also attend the meeting.

11.3 The written invitation should include the management state of case and details of the unsatisfactory performance during the probationary period and support provided to assist improvement. Evidence should be provided in the form of notes of meetings, action plan etc. The employee should be advised that an outcome of the meeting could be their dismissal.

- 11.4 During the meeting the Personnel and Performance Management Committee will consider the proposal to dismiss and will hear evidence from the line manager and the employee. The employee should be given an opportunity to respond to the management statement of case and explain anything that may be affecting their employment.
- 11.5 If the employee has not met the required standards, despite help and support, the Personnel and Performance Management Committee may take the decision to terminate the individual's contract of employment with a minimum of 4 weeks' notice from the date of the meeting, which may be paid in lieu of notice.
- 11.6 If the employee is dismissed, they have the right to appeal the decision and an appeal should be considered in line with Section 11 of this policy.
- 11.7 The Personnel and Performance Management Committee may, in light of the evidence presented, determine that the employee should be offered an extension of no more than four working weeks, if the evidence demonstrates that the employee has been prevented from improving during the review period and they believe that there is a genuine likelihood the employee can achieve and maintain acceptable standards. However, if the required standards are not achieved and sustained throughout the remaining period, the dismissal decision meeting should be reconvened, and the dismissal confirmed.

12 The Appeal Process

- 12.1 To appeal, an employee must notify the Clerk to the Board of Trustees in writing setting out that they wish to appeal the decision within 5 working days.
- 12.2 An appeal hearing will be arranged without unreasonable delay. The employee will be invited to the appeal hearing in writing, which will include notification of their right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or an appropriate work colleague. The manager who made the decision at the previous stage may be present at the appeal hearing to explain their decision.
- 12.3 The following procedure will be followed by the Appeal Hearing:
- Both parties to enter the meeting;
 - The employee or their representative to present the employee's case for the appeal;
 - The manager who made the decision at the probationary review meeting to explain their decision;
 - The members of the Appeal Committee shall have the opportunity to ask questions of both parties;
 - The employee or their representative shall have the opportunity to sum up the case;
 - Both parties to then withdraw from the hearing;
 - The Appeal Committee make the decision;
- 12.4 The decision made by the Appeal hearing shall be confirmed in writing to the Appellant within five working days of the meeting. The decision of the Appeal Committee is final with no further internal right of appeal.

- 12.5 The appeal committee may uphold the dismissal or give an extension of up to four working weeks to the review or probationary period to allow the employee to reach an acceptable standard. This may necessitate reinstating the employee if their contract has already been terminated.
- 12.6 Reinstatement would take effect from the date of dismissal so there is no break in service and any period between cessation and reinstatement would be paid and count as reckonable service.
- 12.7 Where a probationary employee's performance, attendance or conduct remains unsatisfactory following management support and intervention taken as the result of a successful appeal, the dismissal decision hearing is to be reconvened and, other than in the most exceptional circumstances, must invariably confirm the decision to dismiss. There is no further right to appeal.
- 12.8 It is essential that any problems should be addressed and resolved within the probationary period and, where possible, an appeal against dismissal should be heard within the 6-month probationary period. Where an extension to a review or probationary period has been given by the line manager and/or on appeal the total probationary period must not exceed 9 months.

Probationary Review Form

Review Stage:	1		3		5	
Staff Member:						
Date review meeting held:						
Start date:						

Excellent = excellent in key areas and consistently meeting or exceeding expectations

Good = making a positive contribution and meeting expectations. Minimal action required.

Fair = performance acceptable but action required within an agreed timescale to develop further or to improve performance in this area to a more satisfactory standard.

Poor = performance unacceptable and causing concern. Immediate action and improvement required

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Quality of work				
Performance				
Attendance				
Timekeeping				
Teamwork				
Communication				
Skills				
Comments:				

Actions Agreed: I agree with the comments detailed on this form and any timescales or targets have been mutually agreed.

Manager signature:		Date:	
Employee signature:		Date:	

Final review (month 5 only)

Do you recommend that this employee has satisfactorily completed his/her probation period and that the post should be confirmed?

Yes		No	
Manager signature:			

Probation period to be extended? (Following discussion with HR)

Yes		No	
If probation should be extended, state improvements required (with timescales), any additional support needed and timetable for review (to be followed up in writing):			
Date extended to:			
Further review date:			

Training and/or Development Needs identified:

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Manager signature:		Date:	
Employee signature:		Date:	

The employee should be provided a copy of this form and the original form should be filed securely within the employee's personnel file.

PROBATIONARY PERIOD REVIEW ACTION PLAN – TEMPLATE

Employee:		Position:		
Start Date:		Probationary period ends on:		
MONTH:				
OBJECTIVE	HOW	BY WHEN	OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED?	AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT
<i>1) To understand your role and role of the section.</i>	Read section of work procedures/guidance/job description, attend meeting with manager, sit with colleagues.			

END OF MONTH REVIEW:

General comments on progress and any further action identified/carried forward (use additional sheets where necessary):

Manager (Name): _____

Employee Name: _____

Manager (Signature): _____ Date: _____

Employee (Signature): _____ Date: _____

Probationary Period FORMAL Review - Order of Proceedings (Example)

Present:

- 1) Employee**
- 2) Employee's Representative**
- 3) Manager (or their representative)**
- 4) Representative from HR**

- 1) Introductions and explanation of roles at the meeting
- 2) Check if the employee has brought a representative or would like to have a representative present.
- 3) Check that employee has received all of the paperwork as stated in the letter inviting them to the meeting.
- 4) If there has been an investigation and a subsequent report then check with employee that they have received the report also.
- 5) If employee has not received the above (where applicable) then provide a copy and ask if they wish to adjourn the meeting in order that they can read the relevant paperwork.
- 6) Confirm the purpose of the meeting and read from relevant paragraphs in the letter sent to the employee.
- 7) Confirm that employee should be aware of the need to establish their suitability for the post during the probationary period and has been informed of this need. Refer to 'statement of particulars', letter of appointment etc.
- 8) Discuss issues of importance which could be related directly to the post i.e. ability to perform tasks or other important issues such as time keeping.
- 9) Give details of the monitoring/reviews that have taken place up to the present day. Confirm any extensions of probationary period and reasons for this. Refer to any additional training that has been given and the outcome of this training i.e., not enough improvement. Confirm to the employee how the performance, or other, has been measured and why this is below the required standard etc
- 10) Discuss any associated issues – requirements of the post/code of conduct/reporting arrangements/etc

- 11) Ask employee if they wish to comment or add anything to the above.
- 12) Adjourn the meeting so that the matter can be considered, and a decision taken.
- 13) Reconvene meeting and deliver decision to employee.
- 14) Explain how you have come to your decision taking into account the relevant factors and any mitigating circumstances.
- 15) Explain the importance of the role within the school. Consider any risks to the school if the job is not carried out satisfactorily.
- 16) State that you have considered the reasons given by the employee and whether you agree or disagree i.e., do the reasons given by the employee satisfactorily explain the reason for underperformance.
- 17) Conclude that:
 - i) the employee will be given further training and that the probationary period has been extended and a further review meeting will be convened in the near future. They should also be made aware of the fact that failure to improve and meet the required standards may result in their dismissal.
 - or
 - iii) the employee has not demonstrated their suitability for the post during the probationary period and that as such their employment is to be terminated, this meeting should be chaired by an appropriate manager as outlined within the scheme of delegation. Inform employee this will be their last day of employment but that that they will receive pay in lieu of notice in line with their contract of employment.
- 18) Inform the employee that they will receive a letter within the next few days confirming the outcome of the meeting. If the contract of employment has been terminated then explain that they have a right to appeal against this decision and if they wish to exercise this right of appeal then they are required to write to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees in line with this policy.
- 19) End of process.