

## **COVER FOR TEACHER ABSENCE 2004**

*[This policy was agreed and adopted at Governors' Personnel Committee on 21 October 2004]*

### **1. Context**

- 1.1** The National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload, signed on 15th January 2003, agreed contractual changes to teachers' pay and conditions with most of the trade unions representing school employees. The contractual changes are being introduced over a three year period from 2003 onwards and are incorporated in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document issued on an annual basis. This means that changes made annually have statutory effect.
- 1.2** The changes in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 2004 include circumstances under which support staff may undertake 'specified work', including providing short term cover for teacher absence as set out under Section 133 of the Education Act 2002. The changes with regard to cover take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2004 and apply to all teachers, including teachers on the leadership spine and Advanced Skills Teachers, whether on permanent, fixed term or temporary contracts and pro-rata to teachers on part-time contracts. The only exceptions to the application of the contractual limit are teachers employed wholly or mainly to undertake cover.

### **2. Aims**

- 2.1** The term 'cover' refers to any occasion where the teacher normally responsible for teaching the class is absent. One of the aims of the National Agreement is to reduce the amount of cover for absent colleagues provided by teachers employed on contracts at the school (other than those employed wholly or mainly to undertake cover). This is because providing cover is not generally viewed as the most productive use of teaching time. A second aim is to find ways to give greater continuity of learning to pupils.
- 2.2** From September 2004 the requirements are as follows:
  - an initial contractual limit of 38 hours per year will be in place with the aim that, eventually, teachers rarely provide cover for absent colleagues at all;
  - headteachers must ensure that cover for absent teachers is shared equitably among all teachers (including the headteacher), taking account of their teaching and other duties and of the desirability of not using a teacher at the school until all other reasonable means of providing cover have been exhausted.
- 2.3** A 'no detriment' clause in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 2004 states: 'Where the burden of cover is already less than 38 hours, no steps should be taken in advance of the introduction of the contractual limit which would result in a worsening of current working conditions. Once the limit has been introduced it is not appropriate for

schools to seek to increase the amount of cover to the limit.’ This applies to the whole school, rather than on an individual basis.

- 2.4** The headteacher and governing body have discretion to make decisions on the nature of both long and short term cover policy for the School. The new legislation requires **all** schools to find new ways of managing cover, but also opens interesting possibilities for consideration. In formulating the policy for this School, note has been taken of the WAMG (Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group) Guidance on developing strategies for providing teacher cover.

### **3. Cover for Absence - Overview**

- 3.1** The School Teachers’ Pay & Conditions Document 2004 describes absence as occurring “when the teacher normally responsible for teaching a particular class is absent from the classroom during the times they have been timetabled to teach”. The absence could be for a variety of reasons, including internal and external activities as well as sickness and could be long or short term. This may include situations where pupils from the class of an absent teacher are distributed to other classes.

- 3.2** Arranging cover is a key element of the School’s whole approach to providing high quality education for all pupils in the absence of teaching staff. The headteacher and governing body believe it is inappropriate for a teacher’s absence to be covered by anyone other than a qualified teacher for more than 5 consecutive days unless the circumstances are exceptional. This is consistent with the Education (Specified Work and Registration, England) Regulations. The final judgment on the maximum length of time rests with the headteacher, who will take into account the issues contained in 4.1.

- 3.3** The following sections summarise the policy the School will adopt in respect of short and long term absence. This will be used in briefing parents via the School prospectus and the website. More extensive details are contained in Section 4 of this policy.

#### **3.3.1 Long Term Absence**

Medium and long term absences, such as maternity leave or long term illness, tend to be predictable and are therefore more manageable. The standards of teaching and learning for pupils are paramount and absences of this kind will normally **only** be covered by a qualified teacher. In the event of a period of long term absence, the School’s normal approach will be as follows:

Possible options for headteacher and governors to consider (not shown in order of preference):

- short term arrangements for days 1 and 2 (see 3.4)
- use of floating teacher
- use of shared teacher (between clusters of schools)
- from the third day supply teaching provision, supported by the LEA’s sickness or school’s own insurance scheme (if applicable).
- where appropriate a fixed term appointment will be made (particularly suitable for maternity cover)

### 3.4 Short Term Absence

The School defines 'short' term absence as follows:

*Suggestions to consider (see also Appendix 1):*

- absences known in advance e.g. professional development/ medical appointment (if this cannot be arranged outside of the working day)
- 2 days' unplanned absence e.g. staff sickness

*Depending upon the timetable of the absent teacher, it is likely that cover supervision will become 'specified work' within 5 days and active teaching would be required. In such circumstances the headteacher will ensure teaching and learning take place by one or more of the following means:*

***Possible suggestions (not shown in order of preference):***

- employing a supply teacher
- using a floating teacher
- using a shared teacher (based on clusters of schools)
- directing the Higher Level Teaching Assistant to take the class
- using a suitably trained cover supervisor
- using a learning centre under the overall supervision of a qualified teacher
- re-organising the year group so that each class is 'supervised' for part of the day and taught for the majority.

## 4. Cover Strategies

**4.1** The Governing Body has agreed that a range of strategies should be available to the Headteacher when dealing with short term absence. This is intended to allow the Headteacher to deal with teacher absence in a way that is compatible with the National Agreement and the best use of the School's resources. Details of the possible options the headteacher may utilise are set out in Section 5. As a School, our key considerations will be as follows:

- the extent to which continuity of learning can be maintained
- the length of time the pupils would be working without a qualified teacher
- the particular needs of the class concerned
- the skills and experience of the teacher / teaching assistant / cover supervisor / supply teacher / floating teacher / etc. concerned

Parents will normally be informed of the School's cover arrangements via the prospectus and details will be available via the termly newsletter and the school's website. As the arrangements will begin from September, 2004, the School intends to publicise the policy on cover by termly newsletter.

### 4.2 Current Arrangements

This section should include a brief description of the current arrangements particular to your school, for example

'The School currently uses an approach which includes a mixture of cover by existing staff, use of supply teachers and use of appropriate support staff.

Few (if any) of our teachers normally provide cover for more than 38 hours per year and it is our aim to reduce this level over time, subject to availability of resources.'

#### **4.3 Future Cover Arrangements**

The headteacher or senior manager will use his/her professional judgment to determine the precise responsibilities of staff carrying out cover for absent colleagues. This will be discussed with the whole School staff. Where necessary a member of the School's senior management team will clarify the interpretation of this policy in individual circumstances.

It is acknowledged that the National Union of Teachers has made its position on the National Agreement clear. However, as the changes are contractual and are specified in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document, all members of School staff are expected to comply with their contractual obligations. The School's intention is simply to ensure that, wherever possible, pupils are supervised by staff known to them; staff who are familiar with the School's policies and procedures; and staff who can provide continuity until the teacher returns.

### **5. Roles and Responsibilities**

As indicated above, the headteacher has discretion to deploy any or all of the following in order to cover for teacher absence:

#### **5.1 Supply Teachers**

Where supply teachers are to be deployed, the School will only use people who are suitably qualified. Agencies will be required to specify whether supply teachers hold QTS status. The School believes that an unqualified teacher is likely to offer less to the pupils in the short term than an experienced member of the support staff who knows the pupils and understands the teaching plan to be delivered.

When a qualified supply teacher is employed to provide cover, we will ensure that, as far as is reasonably possible, they will be delivering teaching and learning, not simply supervising the pupils. It is the responsibility of the Curriculum Manager to ensure continuity and progression in pupils' learning.

In order to make the most effective use of supply teacher time, the School will ensure that the following materials are available for use by each supply teacher:

- School induction pack, setting out key policies, e.g. on behaviour management
- Clearly explained lesson plans that define the teaching expectations, the resources to be used, the demands that should be made of the class and the homework to be set.
- Information about the abilities and prior attainment of the pupils.
- Access to relevant CPD (for longer term appointments)

## 5.2 Teaching Assistants

The primary function of teaching assistants is to support and assist qualified teachers to deliver effective teaching and learning. The Teaching Assistant role carries its own professional responsibilities and this School recognises the Cambridgeshire job family framework for the employment of teaching assistants.

Teaching assistants may be deployed as one of the possible options for delivering cover supervision, provided they carry out work specified in the regulations specified under s133 of the 2002 Act under the direction and supervision of a qualified teacher. This does not always require the teaching assistant to be supervised or directed by a teacher sharing the same classroom.

The School recognises the value of the continuity of the learning experience teaching assistants can bring for short term cover purposes, in relation to the experience offered by a supply teacher who is less likely to be aware of the needs of the pupil group. The Headteacher will seek to balance their regular use in this way against the educational desirability of removing them from other planned activities with the teachers with whom they normally work.

## 5.3 Cover Supervisors

Cover supervision by effectively deployed support staff with appropriate skills and training will form part of our short term cover strategy. Cover supervisors may be wholly or mainly employed to undertake this role, (*for example a suitably trained technician or administrator already working in the school might also be employed as a cover supervisor*). Job descriptions, person specifications and salaries will be in line with the LEA's standards and pay & grading structure.

Cover supervision is a responsible role and the School will ensure that staff undertaking such cover will:

- have an enhanced disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau
- be familiar with the full range of school policies, particularly those regarding Health & Safety, Equal Opportunities and Special Needs
- have the necessary skills to manage classroom activities safely
- understand and be able to use a range of strategies to deal with classroom behaviour as a whole and also individual behavioural needs
- understand the line management structure and their role in relation to other adults in the classroom (e.g. volunteer helpers).

Different arrangements may need to be made reflecting the age and organisation within the School but core activities will be:

- short term supervision of work that has already been set as part of the normal curriculum in accordance with school policy. Teachers will not be expected to prepare additional material specifically for cover supervisors to use during their absence. They will, however, be expected to act professionally in preparing material as part of normal lesson planning, which could be used by other staff undertaking cover duties as appropriate.

- managing the behaviour of pupils in line with our policies whilst they are undertaking this work to ensure a constructive environment
- whilst there is no active teaching taking place, responding to pupils' questions, for example about process and procedures
- dealing with any problems or emergencies according to the School's policies and procedures
- collecting any completed work after the lesson and returning it to the teacher
- reporting back as appropriate using the school's agreed referral procedures on the behaviour of pupils during the class and any issues arising
- marking work where this can be undertaken by reference to an answer grid, e.g. in multiple choice questions.

The School will agree strategies for setting work so that this does not place excessive burdens on a teacher's planning, preparation and assessment.

Cover supervisors, whether currently employed or future recruits, will be an integral part of all staff development and will receive specific training for their role. The support system for these staff will be as follows:

*Suggestions:*

- supervision and management by Assistant Principal and senior staff on duty
- professional development (CPD)
- school's own mentoring system
- appraisal and performance management system

Training materials could include those used to assist teaching assistants e.g.

- Teaching Assistant Induction Training
- Support Staff introductory training
- LEA/Private organisation training
- School's own training
- HLTA training as appropriate

#### **5.4 Floating Teacher**

Where a floating teacher is employed, the School will specify the basis on which the floating teacher is employed and how s/he may be deployed. If his/her duties are specifically designed to cover for the absence of other colleagues, the 38 hour cover limit will not be applicable. In all other cases the 38 hour limit will apply.

#### **5.5 Shared Teacher**

This option will only apply in certain areas, where schools have chosen to share the costs of employing a teacher on a shared (cluster) basis as a resource for all. Typically, the teacher will be employed on the payroll of one of the schools, but a service level agreement or a protocol will need to be in place to ensure a fair distribution of the available teaching time. If the teacher is employed solely to cover the absence of other colleagues, the 38 hour limit on cover duties will not apply. It would be feasible to use the shared teacher to develop a bank of learning resources for other staff to

draw on in the event of staff absence. Care should however be paid to the teacher's professional development.

## **5.6 Timetabled cover (subject to maximum of 38 hours)**

From 1st September 2004, requests for serving teachers to undertake cover duties must be limited to a maximum of 38 hours per year. The School will abide by the 'no detriment' clause contained in the National Agreement and described above. The School's policy on cover has been less than 38 hours and the School will not seek to increase the amount of cover or worsen current working conditions as a matter of policy.

There is no weekly or termly limit on the allocation of cover within the 38 hour maximum, but the Headteacher will make all reasonable efforts to ensure an even spread of cover throughout the term. For the purposes of this policy

- All cover duties undertaken by teachers count towards this limit, including any non-contact periods specifically designated for cover.
- Leadership and management time can be used but will not be used disproportionately. This time also counts against the 38 hour limit.
- The guaranteed PPA time (which will form part of legal conditions of employment as from September 2005) cannot be used.
- There may be occasions when classes are doubled or a class is split between other staff. This arrangement is not in line with the aims of the National Agreement but may have to be used when all other options have been exhausted. Any hours worked on this basis will count towards the 38 hour limit.

## **5.7 Learning resource centre**

Cover supervision can be particularly beneficial where work has been carefully pre-set or where pupils can undertake effective self-directed study. Using a learning resource centre to support self-directed study might work well where ICT-based learning is employed. Any arrangements to be made must avoid placing burdens on teachers, but it may be feasible to develop banks of appropriate materials which could be supported by other staff in a learning resource centre setting.

## **5.8 Other**

School to determine but we recommend that the headteacher seeks advice from the School's personnel provider before including other categories in the policy.

## **6. Educational visits**

- 6.1** Educational visits are planned activities when a teacher may be absent in order to participate in another class's activity. If a member of the teaching staff is used in a cover capacity on the visit, i.e. by effectively committing non-contact time to school visits, this will count towards the 38 hour limit (bearing in mind the commitment to 'no detriment').

## **7. Gained Time**

- 7.1** During the academic year, particularly in the summer term, teachers who take examination classes or groups are often released from some of their timetabled teaching commitments as a result of pupils being on study or examination leave. Such time is known as 'gained time'.
- 7.2** There are activities directly relevant to teaching and learning for which it would be appropriate and desirable to use gained time and which it would be reasonable for the headteacher to direct teachers to undertake. A list of typical activities is as follows:
- Developing/revising departmental/subject curriculum materials, schemes of work, lesson plans and policies in preparation for the new academic year. This may include identifying appropriate materials for use by supply staff and/or cover supervisors.
  - Assisting colleagues in appropriate, planned team teaching activities
  - Taking groups of pupils to provide additional learning support
  - Supporting selected pupils with course work
  - Undertaking planned activities with pupils transferring between year groups or from primary schools
  - Where the school has a policy for all staff to release them for CPD during school sessions, gained time may be used for such activities.
- 7.3** If teachers are directed to cover for absent colleagues during gained time, it must count towards the 38 hour limit.

## **8. Monitoring**

- 8.1** The Governing Body will ensure that a log is maintained of the hours provided for cover purposes by each teacher, including those worked by the Headteacher. The Headteacher has overall responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of provision and reporting annually to Governors in his/her report.
- 8.2** This policy has been agreed by the Governing Body.

Date agreed: 21 October 2004 Review date:

### **Appendices :**

Appendix One: Situations where cover may be required  
Appendix Two: Reference sources

## **Appendix One**

### **Possible situations where cover may be required.**

The following list is not intended to be exhaustive and the Headteacher will use his/her judgment on whether additional reasons for absence should be included within the spirit and intention of this policy.

- Short term illness
- Attendance at meetings (internal and external)
- Medical appointments (where these cannot be arranged outside school hours)
- Professional development activities (CPD)
- Domestic reasons (for which compassionate leave may have been granted)
- Parental leave (unpaid)
- Religious observance
- Educational visit
- Long term illness
- Bereavement
- Maternity/paternity/adoption leave
- Unfilled teaching post
- Other

## **Appendix Two**

The following reference sources will assist headteachers and governing bodies in setting the cover policy for the school.

### **Time For Standards: Remodelling Cover Resource Pack:**

Contents:

1. Guidance For Schools on Cover Supervision. WAMG
2. Time for Standards : School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document 2004
3. Time for Standards : Cover Strategies – Good Practice
4. Time for Standards : Cover Strategies – Overview & Toolkit
5. Local examples of short term cover strategies

### **Useful websites :**

1. Guidance on the regulations: [www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/remodelling/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/remodelling/).
2. School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document : [www.teachernet.gov.uk/paydoc](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/paydoc)
3. Role of Support Staff : [www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/teaching\\_assistants/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/teaching_assistants/)  
[www.teachernet.gov.uk/aprilpackage](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/aprilpackage).
4. Case studies : [www.ccc.education.net/remodelling](http://www.ccc.education.net/remodelling)
5. DfES video : 'Working with Teaching Assistants in Primary Schools'  
DfES/0114/2003