

Cover for Teacher Absence Policy

1. Cover for Absence - Overview

- 1.1 The National Agreement on “Raising Standards and Tackling Workload” and the School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document describe absence as occurring “when the teacher normally responsible for teaching a particular class or group 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.
- 1.2 Arranging appropriate cover is an important part of the College’s approach to providing high quality education for all pupils in the absence of teaching staff. Maintaining the quality of the pupils learning experience is paramount.
- 1.3 From September 2009 onwards, teachers in this College will only rarely be asked to cover the duties of absent colleagues. This does not mean that teachers will never be asked to provide cover as it must be acknowledged that the Principal cannot predict every possible set of circumstances. However, teachers will only be asked to provide cover when the circumstances were unforeseeable.
- 1.4 These changes are contractual and are specified in the current School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document. The College’s intention is to ensure that, wherever possible, pupils are supervised by staff known to them; staff who are familiar with the College’s policies and procedures; and staff who can provide continuity until the teacher returns.
- 1.5 The College’s approach is in line with the Education (Specified Work and Registration) (England) Regulations, which define “specified work” as:
 - (a) Planning and preparing lessons and courses for pupils;
 - (b) Delivering lessons to pupils;
 - (c) Assessing the development, progress and attainment of pupils; and
 - (d) Reporting on the development, progress and attainment of pupils.
- 1.6 The following sections summarise the policy the College will adopt in respect of short and long term absence.

2. College Calendar

- 2.1 To ensure that the system for managing cover is robust, the College will publish a calendar for each school year. This will be done, following consultation with the College staff.
- 2.2 Each member of the teaching staff will also receive an annual teaching timetable. It is accepted that teaching timetables cannot be “set in stone”, so there may need to be variations to the timetable during the year in light of significant changes that arise (e.g. a long term sickness absence, or a change in practice which is required by statute). The Principal will, however, make every effort to minimise the need for changes to individual timetables in the best interests of the teacher and the pupils. It will be important to ensure that, in the rare circumstances where changes have to be made to a teacher’s timetable during the year, this is not for reasons that compromise the spirit and intention of the National Agreement.

3. Cover Strategies

- 3.1 The Governing Body has agreed that a range of strategies should be available to the Principal when seeking to cover the absence of a member of the teaching staff. This is intended to allow the Principal to deal with teacher absence in a way that is compatible with the National Agreement and makes the best use of the College’s resources. Details of the possible options the Principal may use are set out in Sections 4 and 5.
- 3.2 As a College our key considerations will be as follows:
- The extent to which continuity of learning can be maintained.
 - The length of time the pupils will 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 concerned.
- 3.3 Parents will be advised of the College’s cover arrangements via the prospectus.

4. Long Term Absence

- 4.1 Medium and long term absences, such as maternity leave, long term illness, sabbaticals, or temporary secondments elsewhere, 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.

- 4.2 In the event of a period of long term absence, the College takes the normal approach:
- (a) Short term arrangements for days 1 and 2 (see below)
 - (b) Use of a qualified supply teacher
 - (c) Use of Cover Supervisors
 - (d) Where appropriate a fixed term appointment will be made (Maternity Leave).

5. Short Term Absence

- 5.1 The College defines “short” term absence as follows:
- (a) Foreseeable absences e.g. professional development days/medical appointment (if this cannot be arranged outside of the work day)
 - (b) Unforeseen absences e.g. compassionate leave for family emergencies
 - (c) 1 or 2 days unplanned absence e.g. short term sickness.
- 5.2 The College accepts that requests for serving teacher to undertake cover duties must be rare and therefore limited and may only be made where the circumstances of the absence were unforeseeable. The Principal will apply alternative cover strategies in all but the most exceptional cases, so that teachers are not asked to cover for the absence of their colleagues.
- 5.3 The application of the cover policy will be monitored and the Principal will report to the Governing Body on the number of times teachers, including the Principal, are asked to provide cover each year.
- 5.4 The application of the cover policy will be monitored and views will be sought from the local staff representatives before reporting to the Governing Body on the number of times teachers, including the Principal, are asked to provide cover each year.
- 5.5 For the purposes of this policy:
- (a) guaranteed PPA time will not be used for cover purposes.
- 5.6 Depending on the timetable of the absent teacher, it is likely that cover supervision will very quickly become “specified work” as defined in Section 1.5 above. Active teaching will therefore be required in the best interests of the pupils. Where this is the case, the Principal will ensure teaching and learning takes place by one or more of the following means:
- Employing a suitably qualified supply teacher.
 - Using a suitably trained Cover Supervisor.

6 Possible Options for Delivering Supply Cover

6.1 The approach to cover will be subject to consultation with the whole College staff and will take into account an analysis of the historical patterns of absence each year. Where necessary, a member of the College's Senior Leadership Team will clarify the interpretation of the policy in individual circumstances. However, as indicated above, the Principal has discretion to deploy any or all of the following approaches in order to cover for teacher absence. The Principal will be expected to use his professional judgement to determine the precise responsibilities of staff carrying out cover for absent colleagues.

6.2 Supply Teachers

Where supply teachers are to be deployed, the College will only use people who are suitably qualified. Agencies will be required to specify whether supply teachers hold QTS status. As the College 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, we do not intend to use unqualified supply teachers to provide cover.

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

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

- College induction pack setting out key policies
- A map of the College site
- 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)

6.3 Cover Supervisors

Cover supervisors may be wholly or mainly employed to undertake this role. Job descriptions, person specifications and pay and conditions will be in line with the pay and grading structure adopted by the College. 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 College recognises that cover supervision is a responsible role and the College will ensure that staff undertaking such cover will:

- Have an enhanced disclosure certificate from the Criminal Records Bureau
- Be familiar with the full range of the College policies, particularly those regarding Health and Safety, Equal Opportunities and SEN policy.
- 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. Teaching Assistants).

Different arrangements may need to be made reflecting the age and organisation within the College but core activities for a cover supervisor will be:

- Short term supervision of work that has already been set as part of the normal curriculum in accordance with College 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 College's policies and procedures.
- Collecting any completed work after the lesson and returning it to the teacher.
- Reporting back as appropriate using the College's agreed referral procedures on the behaviour of pupils during the class any issues arising.
- Marking work where this can be undertaken by reference to an answer grid e.g. in multiple choice questions.

The College will agree strategies for setting work so that this does not place excessive burdens on teachers in relation to planning, preparation and assessment.

6.4 Timetabled Cover

As indicated earlier serving teachers will only rarely be asked to provide cover for absent colleagues. This means that teachers will only be asked to cover in unforeseeable circumstances. Even in these circumstances, the Principal will make efforts to provide cover by some other means. However, where this proves impossible, the following will apply:

- A member of the teaching team will be asked to undertake cover duties, carrying out active teaching where appropriate.
- Teachers will normally only be asked to cover within their own subject area, in order to encourage active teaching to take place.
- The requirement to “rarely cover” applies equally to all teaching staff, including the Principal
- Guaranteed PPA time will not be used for cover purposes

7. **Leave of Absence Policy**

7.1 The College has a clear Leave of Absence policy, which sets out the circumstances, criteria and procedures that will apply when staff wish to take paid or unpaid leave of absence. Any changes to the policy will take into account the nationally agreed criteria set out in the Burgundy book and any local agreements made following consultation with the teacher associations and support staff unions. The policy will be kept under review in the light of the requirement that teachers should only rarely provide cover for absent colleagues.

8. **Educational Visits**

8.1 Educational visits are planned activities when a teacher may be absent in order to participate in the activity of another class. These will be planned well in advance, as part of the College’s calendar, so should form part of the timetable for any teacher who is accompanying the group. Arrangements for covering the teacher’s own class or group will also feature on the timetable. As visits are planned events which can be readily foreseen, the absence of a teacher accompanying a group of pupils will not be covered by other contracted teaching staff, unless they have been specifically employed to do so.

9. **Gained Time**

9.1 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 leave. Such time is known as “gained time”.

9.2 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 a Principal to direct teachers to undertake. A typical list of activities is shown below:

- Developing or revising department or 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 coursework
- Undertaking planned activities with pupils who are transferring between year groups or from primary schools
- Where the College has a policy for all staff to release them for CPD during school sessions, gained time may be used for such activities.

9.3 Gained time will not be used for providing cover but should be clearly accounted for in the teacher's timetable.

10. Monitoring and Review

10.1 The Principal will ensure that a record is maintained each year, showing the hours of cover worked by each teacher, including those s/he has personally worked. This will allow the Principal and the Governing Body to analyse patterns of absence, whether planned or unplanned and identify the levels of cover required, in order to inform the review of the cover policy each year. In turn, this will allow the College to identify the supply cover budget for the year based on sound evidence.

10.2 The Principal has overall responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of the cover provision and reporting annually to the Governing Body. The cover policy will be reviewed during the summer term each year.

Appendix 1

Possible situations where cover may be required

The following list is not intended to be exhaustive and the Principal will use his judgement 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 College 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 2

The following sources of information may assist the Principal and Governing Body in setting the cover policy for the College.

- WAMG guidance for schools in implementing “rarely cover”, available via www.teacher.gov.uk or www.socialpartnership.org
- School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document 2009 available via www.teachernet.gov.uk/pay
- Role of support staff: www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/teachingassistants