

NENE VALLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

COVERING 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 & 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 School's approach to providing high quality education for all students in the absence of teaching staff. Maintaining the quality of the students' learning experience is paramount.
- 1.3 From September 2009 onwards, teachers in this School 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 Headteacher cannot predict every possible set of circumstances. However, teachers will only be asked to provide cover where the circumstances were unforeseeable (*unless they are employed wholly or mainly to undertake cover*).
- 1.4 These changes are contractual and are specified in the current School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document. The School's intention is to ensure that, wherever possible, students 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.
- 1.5 The School'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 students;
 - b) delivering lessons to students;
 - c) assessing the development, progress and attainment of students; and
 - d) reporting on the development, progress and attainment of students.
- 1.6 The following sections summarise the policy the School will adopt in respect of short and long term absence.

2. School Calendar

- 2.1 To ensure that the system for managing cover is robust, the School will publish a calendar of foreseeable dates for each school year. This will be done, following consultation with the School staff and their trade union or professional association representatives.
- 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 Headteacher will, however, make every effort to minimise the need for changes to individual timetables in the best interests of the teacher and the students. 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 Headteacher when seeking to cover the absence of a member of the teaching staff. This is intended to allow the Headteacher to deal with teacher absence in a way that is compatible with the National Agreement and makes the best use of the School's resources. Details of the possible options the Headteacher may use are set out in Sections 4 and 5.

3.2 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 students 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.

3.3 Parents will be advised of the School's cover arrangements via the publication of this policy on the School's website at www.nenevalleyprimary.net

4. Long Term Absence

4.1 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 2 consecutive days unless the circumstances are exceptional. The final judgment on the maximum length of time rests with the Headteacher, who will take into account the issues contained in section 6 below.

4.2 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 students are paramount and absences of this kind will normally **only** be covered by a qualified teacher.

4.3 In the event of a period of long term absence, the School's normal approach will be as follows:

- short term arrangements for days 1 and 2 (see below)
- from the third day onwards, use of a qualified supply teacher.
- where appropriate, a fixed term appointment will be made
- sustaining the statutory class size limits in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1; and
- avoiding the creation of overlarge classes in Key Stage 2 as a means of securing cover.

5. Short Term Absence

5.1 The School defines 'short' term absence as follows:

- foreseeable absences e.g. professional development days/ medical appointment (if this cannot be arranged outside of the working day);
- unforeseeable absences e.g. compassionate leave for family emergencies;
- 1 or 2 days' unplanned absence e.g. short term sickness.

5.2 The School accepts that requests for serving teachers to undertake cover duties must be rare and therefore limited and may only be made where the circumstances of the absence were unforeseeable, e.g. a genuine emergency that requires a teacher to leave work during the school day. The Headteacher 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 Headteacher will report to the Governing Body on the number of times teachers, including the Headteacher, 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 Headteacher, are asked to provide cover each year.

5.5 For the purposes of this policy:

- leadership and management time can be used but will not be used disproportionately;
- 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 students. Where this is the case, the Headteacher will ensure teaching and learning takes place by one or more of the following means:

- employing a suitably qualified supply teacher
- deploying a Higher Level Teaching Assistant to take the class
- re-organising the year group so that each class is 'supervised' for part of the day and taught for the majority of it, for example in relation to a planned event.

6. Possible options for delivering supply cover

6.1 The approach to cover will be subject to consultation with the whole School staff and will take into account an analysis of the historical pattern of absence each year. Where necessary, a member of the School's senior management team will clarify the interpretation of the policy in individual circumstances. However, as indicated above, the Headteacher has discretion to deploy any or all of the following approaches in order to cover for teacher absence. The Headteacher will be expected to use his/her professional judgment 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 School will only use people who are suitably qualified. Agencies will be required to specify whether supply teachers hold QTS status. As the School believes that an unqualified teacher is likely to offer less to the students in the short term than an experienced member of the support staff who knows the students and understands the teaching plan to be delivered, we do not intend to use unqualified teachers to provide cover.

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 students. It is the responsibility of the Senior Leadership Team to ensure continuity and progression in students' 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
- a map of the school site
- information about the abilities and prior attainment of the students.
- access to relevant CPD (for longer term appointments)

6.3 Teaching Assistants

The main role of teaching assistants is to support students and assist qualified teachers to deliver effective teaching and learning. The teaching assistant role carries its own professional responsibilities recognised by the job descriptions identified for teaching assistants.

Teaching assistants may be deployed as one of the possible options for delivering cover supervision, provided they carry out work 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, compared to the experience offered by a supply teacher who is far less likely to be aware of the needs of the pupil group. The Headteacher may opt to use teaching assistants, who are at the appropriate level, for short term cover, but 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.

6.4 Cover Supervisors

Cover supervision occurs where no active teaching (i.e. 'specified work') is taking place. Cover supervision by support staff with appropriate skills and training will form part of our short term cover strategy. Cover supervisors may supervise work set by teachers but will not be involved in delivering teaching and learning. Cover supervision is appropriate for short term absence but is not considered an appropriate way to cover medium to long term absence.

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 pay and conditions will be in line with the pay & grading structure adopted by the School. 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 School recognises that cover supervision is a responsible role and the School 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 school 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. volunteer helpers).

Different arrangements may need to be made reflecting the age and organisation within the School 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 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 students 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 students' 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 students 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 teachers in relation to planning, preparation and assessment.

6.5 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, for example a colleague becoming ill during the day and being sent home, or in the event of a parent arriving unexpectedly to deal with an emergency situation. Even in these circumstances, the Headteacher will make efforts to provide cover by some other means. However, where this improves impossible, the following will apply:

- a member of the teaching team will be asked to undertake cover duties, carrying out active teaching;
- teachers will normally only be asked to cover within their own subject area, in order to encourage active teaching to take place;
- leadership and management time can be used for cover but should not be used disproportionately;
- the requirement to 'rarely cover' applies equally to all teaching staff, including the Headteacher;
- guaranteed PPA time will not be used for cover purposes.

7. Leave of absence policy

7.1 The School 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 School'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 students will not be covered by other contracted teaching staff, unless they have been specifically employed to do so.

9. Monitoring and review

9.1 The Headteacher will ensure that a record is maintained each year, showing the hours of cover worked by each teacher, including those s/he has worked personally. This will allow the Headteacher 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 School to identify the supply cover budget for the year based on sound evidence.

9.2 The Headteacher has overall responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of the cover provision and reporting annually to the Governing Body. The cover policy will be reviewed annually as part of the school's cycle of policy review and will be discussed with the school staff and their representatives. The revised policy will then be published each year.

Date agreed: November 2010

Review date: June, 2011

Signed:

(Lead Governor/Chair of Governors)

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 sources of information may assist Headteachers and governing bodies in setting the cover policy for the School.

- WAMG guidance for schools on implementing 'rarely cover', available via www.teachernet.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/teaching_assistants/