

Effective management of school workforce attendance



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



A summary version



Introduction

The Welsh Government want all children and young people in Wales to have the best education possible.

Estyn's report *The Impact of Teacher Absence* found that learners make less progress when the usual class teacher is absent. They also found learners' behaviour is often worse.

Schools need to have the right staff in place and manage well when staff are absent. This supports learners to make the best progress.

Schools make decisions about the staff they need. The decisions they make reflect the school's individual circumstances, resources and priorities.



The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 says everyone must think more about how decisions impact the future. Schools need to think about the long-term impact on learners and staff when managing staff attendance and absence.

When teaching staff are off work, schools need to find the right cover for classes.



This booklet explains the roles and responsibilities schools have in managing their workforce when teachers are absent.

This guidance is for:

- headteachers and staff who arrange absence cover
- governing bodies
- local authorities
- the regional consortia who work to improve the schools in their areas
- commercial supply agencies.

Understanding workforce absence

Teachers being absent can have a big impact on learners. So, schools need to manage this well.

A certain amount of absence is inevitable.



Unplanned absence.

These aren't known in advance. Managing them can be difficult, especially making sure there's the right cover to continue teaching and learning.



Planned absences.

These are known in advance. This gives the school time to find the right cover and make sure the supply teacher has all they need to support learners. Professional learning falls within this type of absence.

It's important schools have policies and systems in place to stop any negative impacts of absence.

Schools should have systems in place to monitor planned and unplanned absences. They should be able to use this data to manage and where possible, reduce absence. They need to have a robust cover policy in place to deal with all foreseeable absences.

Reducing absences

Schools need to measure and monitor absence. They should:

- look at patterns
- look at the causes
- look at absence rates in similar schools
- learn from other schools
- support their staff
- support the professional learning of all staff including supply staff
- make sure staff understand how absence impacts learners.

This helps schools to take the right action when staff are absent and look at ways to support the health and wellbeing of staff.



Preparing for absences

Schools must find the right cover for the right situation for teacher absences. This should be linked to priorities set out in the **School Development Plan (SDP)**.

Cover arrangements should focus on the lessons being taught. They should make sure teaching and learning continue and support learners progress.

NO person may carry out the specified work of a qualified school teacher unless they are qualified and registered to do so.

Schedule 3 of the Education Workforce Council (Main Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2015 explains what specified work is.

All teachers, including supply teachers, must be registered with the Education Workforce Council as a 'school teacher'.

All relevant checks must be carried out before any teaching begins.

It's the school's responsibility to give all supply staff an induction to the school.



Finding cover

Schools decide what cover they need and how they find the cover. Supply teachers should be expected to teach and not simply supervise a class.

Under rarely cover rules only in exceptional circumstances should teachers already employed by the school be used to cover absent colleagues, unless they are employed specifically to carry out cover.

School learning support workers including cover supervisors and HLTAs aren't qualified teachers. They must not be used to fulfil the role of a qualified teacher. Schools should make sure they only carry out duties and responsibilities set out in their employment contract and job description. Time spent away from their normal role can cause disruption to learning.

Headteacher absence

In most cases when the Headteacher is absent the Deputy Headteacher will cover the role.

Governing bodies and local authorities need to work together to plan cover. They must give support to the temporary Headteacher. The local authority should stay in close contact with the chair of governors and the temporary Headteacher as they cover the absence.

Finding cover continued...

Schools can:

→ **Employ a supply teacher directly.**

If the school employs a supply teacher directly they must carry out all employer checks and pay them. This must be in line with School teachers' pay and conditions (Wales) document like any other member of staff.

→ **Use a floating teacher.**

The school can decide to employ a floating or supernumerary teacher. This will help provide continuity for pupils. It also helps manage cover for planned absences and allows the regular teacher to plan and discuss lessons with them.

→ **Work with other schools.**

Schools can choose to work together to share the cost of absence cover. They can employ a qualified and appropriate member of staff to work across a group of schools. Normally they would be employed by a lead school. There would be an agreement in place to make sure they're available to work across the schools as needed.

→ **Use a commercial supply agency.**

Schools can get supply teachers through a commercial supply agency. The contract is then between the school and commercial supply agency. Commercial supply agencies are the employer and must carry out all employer, qualification, registration and safeguarding checks. This should be shared with the school.

In 2019 the National Procurement Service (NPS), on behalf of Welsh Local Authorities, awarded a managed service provision for the supply of agency workers to 27 commercial supply agencies. Should schools wish to commission supply teachers through an agency they should use a framework agency.



Monitoring absence

Teachers can be off work for different reasons at different times.

The Attendance Policy tells staff how absence will be managed. It should:

- say how short-term and long-term absence will be monitored and managed
- have information on return to work interviews
- explain what support is available.

Schools want to look after the wellbeing of all their staff. Monitoring absence shows:

- if there's a pattern
- if absences rise at more stressful times of the year
- if the school needs to review any policies or procedures.

For more information on workforce absence, see section 1 of the full guidance.

Roles and responsibilities

It's important everyone understands their role and responsibilities for managing absence and staff wellbeing.

Managing absence and finding the right cover is necessary so it doesn't impact negatively on learners' outcomes.

Code of Practice: Ethical Employment in Supply Chains.

It's important when managing absence and staff that everyone follows the Code of Practice Ethical Employment in Supply Chains. The Code focuses on making sure employees involved in the public services are guaranteed good employment practices and conditions. Schools and commercial supply agencies are expected to follow the code.

The Welsh Government

We're responsible for all education across Wales. We do things like:

- set strategic direction for schools through regulation, guidance, policies and on-line resources to improve education and support our workforce
- write and review education policies and issue guidance
- engage practitioners in developing future policy and reducing avoidable staff absence
- publish absence data on a local authority level
- check and challenge how absences are managed and the support available.



Governing bodies

Governing bodies along with school leaders run schools. They must:

- have enough school staff to meet the needs of the school
- make sure the most appropriate cover arrangements are in place
- have key policies in place relating to absence management and workload
- be responsible for monitoring financial costs
- agree the methods of cover used by the school
- manage any absence of the Headteacher
- make sure the Headteacher follows safe recruitment practices for all workers, including temporary workers
- get reports on staff attendance and consider the impact of classroom absence
- make sure the Headteacher is managing staff attendance
- seek HR advice and support from their local authority as appropriate
- make sure the Headteacher gets HR advice and support when needed
- make sure healthy working practices are in place so staff can have a healthy work-life balance
- follow the School teachers' pay and conditions (Wales) document rules, Working Time Regulations and agency worker regulations.

Some schools have a designated governor for staff absence. An array of publications to assist governors can be found on gov.wales/roles-and-responsibilities-for-school-governors

Headteachers

The Headteacher leads the school and makes decisions. They must:

- use school and local authority policies and procedures
- report on staff attendance to the governing body and ensure all staff follow school absence management policies
- take part in training about managing absences
- set attendance targets, using data from their school and other comparable schools.
- work with HR provider (in most cases this will be the local authority) to review sickness data so they can make informed decisions
- promote activities to support staff
- follow the School teachers' pay and conditions (Wales) document rules and Working Time Regulations.
- create opportunities for staff to discuss anything that impacts their health or wellbeing
- follow the Education Workforce Council (Main Function) (Wales) Regulations 2015 on who can provide cover
- make sure anyone providing cover gets the support and information they need
- check and monitor the costs and quality of cover especially where a commercial agency is used.



There are a range of options for headteachers finding cover.

Schools may employ supply teachers directly. They can also use local authority supply lists where these exist or use a commercial supply agency.

When using commercial supply agencies, headteachers should ensure that the principles in the Code of Practice in Ethical Employment in Supply Chains is adopted and consider the National Procurement Service framework.

If an app based matching service is used, headteachers should be aware that the school will normally become the employer and will need to undertake relevant checks.

The Headteacher must:

- have all the information and documents they need
- have all the right checks and references
- check the supply teacher is registered and has Qualified Teacher Status.

The school workforce

Everyone working in school has a duty to look after their own health and wellbeing. They must:

- follow the school's Management of Attendance policy
- make sure any professional learning fits the school's goals
- consider the impact of planned absence by making sure arrangements support learners' progress
- discuss with the Headteacher anything that impacts health or wellbeing
- take part in return to work interviews.

The local authority

The local authority is the overall employer in law for most school employees. Management of staff is the responsibility of schools. Local authorities should:

- have employment policies and procedures for school-based staff
- give the school support, advice and information on HR, finance and procurement issues if requested by schools
- collect and check information on absence
- check arrangements for managing cover budgets
- make sure governors and headteachers know their responsibilities for staff wellbeing.



The Regional Education Consortia (EAS, ERW, CSC & GwE)

Regional consortia work to improve schools by providing support, challenging performance and driving up standards. They have responsibility to:

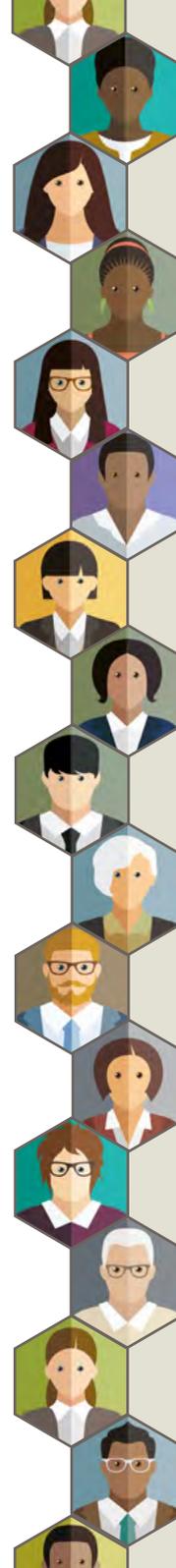
- consider the impact of supply cover and the risks of quality of learning on school improvement
- create opportunities to support supply teachers to develop
- provide training especially for supply teachers during school holidays, weekends or evenings
- make sure they challenge staff absence and identify effects on school performance.

Commercial supply agencies

These companies provide schools with temporary staff for a time limited or specific role. These agencies are the employer. They must:

- do the required checks:-
 - carry out references
 - check their teachers and learning support workers are registered with the Education Workforce Council
 - make sure any teacher offered to a school holds Qualified Teacher Status
 - make sure the individual has the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to carry out the role
- review the professional learning needs of supply teachers
- provide high quality professional learning
- work with schools and give supply teachers information about the school and the class they're covering
- make any expectations and cover requirements clear to supply teachers
- meet regularly with local authorities and schools to discuss contracts and share information.

For more information on responsibilities, see section 2 of the full guidance.



Quality assurance

It's important learners can continue learning and reaching their goals. To help this, schools have quality assurance policies and measures in place. Whatever option a school chooses to cover staff absence, they need to consider these when managing staff absence.

This includes making sure:

- everyone knows it's their job to keep learners safe
- everyone follows the 'Keeping Learners Safe' guidance
- safe recruitment procedures and registration checks are carried out
- effective cover arrangements are put in place
- all staff are offered professional development opportunities
- all staff performance is managed appropriately.

For more information on managing performance, see section 3 of the full guidance.

Thanks for reading this

You can read the full guidance here:

gov.wales/school-workforce-attendance-guidance

There are some self-reflection questions in Annex A of the full guidance. These help school leaders, governing bodies and local authorities think about how they manage staff absence, the impact it has on learners, any actions or ways to improve cover and other issues.



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