
GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS ON COVER SUPERVISION

Introduction

- 1 This guidance is designed to provide assistance to schools who are considering using cover supervision, along with a range of other strategies, in order to deliver an effective and tailored school policy for dealing with cover. It outlines issues around determining the circumstances in which cover supervision will be appropriate, what the role of the staff who provide cover supervision might be and the skills and knowledge needed to carry out that role successfully. It also suggests ways in which schools might access appropriate training and identifies sources for case studies of schools which are already making effective use of cover supervision.
- 2 'Cover supervision' occurs when there is no active teaching taking place. Pupils would continue their learning by carrying out a pre-prepared exercise under supervision. The precise nature of 'cover supervision' is further developed in paragraph 9 of this guidance. Cover supervision does not involve carrying out 'specified work' as outlined in the Education (Specified Work and Registration) (England) Regulations 2003 and accompanying guidance.¹
- 3 Cover supervision by effectively deployed support staff with appropriate skills and training will be a fundamental part of an effective cover strategy, increasing the options available to headteachers and allowing them to deal with teacher absence in a way which is compatible with the standards agenda and the efficient use of resources. In addition, permanently appointed staff providing cover supervision will be known to pupils, will be familiar with the school's policies and procedures, and can provide continuity when the class' usual teacher returns.

Context

- 4 The term 'cover' refers to any occasion where the teacher normally responsible for teaching a particular class is absent from the classroom during the time they have been timetabled to teach.² One of the aims of the National Agreement on 'Raising Standards and Tackling Workload' is to reduce significantly the amount of cover for absent colleagues which teachers at a school are required to carry out. Cover is not an effective use of their time. From September 2004 there will be an initial contractual limit of 38 hours per year. The National Agreement makes clear that the objective in the longer term is for teachers at a school to rarely cover at all. To achieve this objective, schools will need to find new ways of managing cover.
- 5 Guidance on changes to the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document resulting from the National Agreement³ outlines the full range of cover strategies, of which cover supervision is one that schools should consider in preparation for the introduction of the contractual limit from 2004 and to meet the longer-term objective. Schools should refer to this guidance and, once they have decided on a strategy, should publicise the cover arrangements so that staff, pupils and parents are clear about the cover policy of the school.

¹ Guidance on the regulations is available via <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/remodelling/>. These regulations apply in England only. The Welsh Assembly Government is currently consulting on regulations and accompanying guidance for Wales (available at <http://www.wales.gov.uk>).

² As outlined in the guidance on the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (accessed via <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/paydoc/>).

³ See <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/paydoc/>.

What is cover supervision?

- 6 The headteacher will need to use his/her professional judgement to determine the precise responsibilities of staff carrying out cover supervision duties. Needs may differ depending on particular classes and whether the setting is a primary, secondary or special school. In whatever context, cover supervision is likely to include some core elements:
 - a) supervising work that has been set in accordance with the school policy (see 7 below);
 - b) managing the behaviour of pupils whilst they are undertaking this work to ensure a constructive environment;
 - c) responding to any questions from pupils about process and procedures;
 - d) dealing with any immediate problems or emergencies according to the school's policies and procedures;
 - e) collecting any completed work after the lesson and returning it to the appropriate teacher (see 7 below);
 - f) reporting back as appropriate using the school's agreed referral procedures on the behaviour of pupils during the class, and any issues arising.
- 7 Work should be set in accordance with the school's strategy. It is good practice to seek to agree this strategy with staff. It should be devised to ensure that the arrangements for providing appropriate work for pupils who are being supervised do not place excessive additional burdens of planning, preparation and assessment on teachers – this could include developing banks of suitable material. Work set should be relevant to the age group and the point the pupils have reached in the curriculum to assist with continuity.

When is the use of cover supervision appropriate?

- 8 Cover supervision should only be used for short-term absences. These might be known in advance (for example, where a teacher has a medical appointment or is undergoing professional development) or unexpected (for example, absence due to illness). Longer-term absence – e.g. due to long-term sick or maternity leave should be covered by a teacher.
- 9 Headteachers will exercise their professional judgement in determining what should be regarded as a "short-term" absence for these purposes. There will be a number of considerations which the headteacher will need to take into account when deciding whether the use of cover supervision is appropriate or not. The key factors are:
 - a) the extent to which continuity of learning can be maintained;
 - b) the length of time a particular group of pupils would be working without a teacher;
 - c) the proportion of the total curriculum time affected in a specific subject over the course of the term.
- 10 For example, in a setting where a class is predominantly led by one teacher for the majority of the day, it is likely that cover supervision will very quickly become "specified work" and active teaching would be required. This would therefore fall under the Education (Specified Work and Registration) (England) Regulations.⁴ In any case, it would clearly be inappropriate in such settings for a class to be 'supervised' for more than three consecutive days.
- 11 On the other hand, where pupils are only timetabled for occasional lessons which are affected by teacher absence, the use of cover supervision over a longer period of time may be appropriate.

Who should be deployed to undertake cover supervision?

- 12 Headteachers will determine the appropriate system for delivering cover supervision. Headteachers could employ new staff to the school and/or deploy existing staff to provide cover supervision. In either case, they must be satisfied that a member of staff has the necessary training and skills.

⁴ See paragraph 2 above and footnote.

- 13 When existing members of support staff are carrying out cover supervision duties, formal recognition should be given to the extended role and the terms of their contract should be reviewed in accordance with the first guidance note issued by the Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group (April 2003).⁵ Any revision of job description should normally be agreed between the headteacher and the member of staff. Factors which the head should consider are the suitability of the task to the member of staff's current role, the impact on their workload, whether additional training is needed and any implications for pay and grading.
- 14 When considering the grading of staff undertaking cover supervision, headteachers will want to seek advice from their local authority before advertising a post or regrading an existing one. The National Joint Council for Local Government Services has produced model job profiles for support staff.⁶ These assume that those undertaking cover supervision and who are carrying out the kinds of tasks set out in paragraph 6, would meet level three within a range of four skill levels.
- 15 There are a number of possible ways of deploying staff to undertake cover supervision which may be the basis of a role in its own right, although it will usually be more appropriate as an element of a wider role within the school. A clear and well-publicised system should be put in place to outline which members of staff should be approached – and at what stage – to provide cover supervision:
 - a) schools may wish to employ staff for whom cover supervision and possibly other types of supervisory activity forms the core part of their role. On occasions where they are not needed for cover, they might be released to provide additional support to teachers in classrooms, or to carry out administrative tasks, or they may have management responsibilities within the school;
 - b) schools may want to employ staff for whom cover supervision is only one element of a wider, more varied, range of duties. This approach will require particularly careful handling to make sure that the requirement to provide cover is not at the expense of other elements of their job. One option might be to ensure that the job description includes some tasks which can be deferred if the member of staff is required for cover duties. Alternatively, a limit could be agreed on the amount of cover that can normally be expected by one individual member of staff;
 - c) small schools may decide to employ staff to undertake cover supervision on a shared basis between a cluster of schools – schools may wish to seek advice and support from their LEA to facilitate such arrangements;
 - d) some schools have chosen to use appropriately qualified persons who are available on a casual, as required, basis. However, such provision may present problems of availability at short notice and lack of familiarity with the pupils and school policies and procedures.

Skills, knowledge and training

- 16 Cover supervision is a responsible role, involving as it does taking sole charge of a group of pupils. Schools should therefore take care to ensure that staff have the necessary skills and knowledge before being given charge of a class. Given the nature of the work likely to be carried out by staff working regularly with children, it is strongly recommended that an enhanced disclosure, the same as required for teachers, is requested from the Criminal Records Bureau. The school's public liability insurance policy should already cover staff to a level appropriate for the work they are undertaking.
- 17 In particular, staff undertaking cover supervision should:
 - a) be familiar with the full range of school policies, particularly those regarding health and safety, equal opportunity issues and special educational needs (SEN);
 - b) have the necessary skills to manage safely classroom activities, the physical learning space and resources for which they are responsible;
 - c) understand and be able to use a range of strategies to deal with classroom behaviour as a whole and also individual behavioural needs.

⁵ Also available at www.teachernet.gov.uk/remodelling

⁶ The job profiles are available at <http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk/conditions/education/support/index.html>

- 18 In many cases staff will already have some of these skills/knowledge because of previous experience in the school or elsewhere. However, it is likely that specific training will be needed. It will be the responsibility of the headteacher to satisfy him/herself that an individual has the skills required, and to ensure that they receive such appropriate training. A cover supervision role could provide the basis for progression into other areas, for example more advanced roles in relation to the guidance and supervision of pupils.
- 19 In England, funding will be available to LEAs through the Standards Fund in order to develop training for staff for whom cover supervision is part of their job remit. Relevant training materials which LEAs might choose to build on are those used to assist teaching assistants in meeting the National Occupational Standards⁷ with particular reference to standards 3-1 'Contribute to the management of pupil behaviour'; 3-10 'Support the maintenance of pupil safety'; and 3-5 'Assist in preparing the learning environment'.
- 20 Other suitable training might include:
- a) TA induction training (in England only) – in particular the sessions on “Strategies and approaches for positive behaviour management” and “Effective Practice in Action”.⁸ However, it should be noted that this in itself will not be sufficient. In particular, further training in behaviour management will be required;
 - b) support staff introductory training (launched October 2003 in England only) – in particular the modules on “Behaviour Management”, “Inclusion, SEN and Disabilities” and “Risk and Reflection”. Again it should be noted that this introductory training in itself will not be sufficient;
 - c) training provided locally by LEAs or by private organisations (there are a number of organisations currently offering training for cover supervisors);
 - d) training in school, especially on relevant policies and procedures;
 - e) Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) training – to be rolled out nationally from April 2004 (in England only at the time of publication). The HLTA standards⁹ are considerably broader in scope than is needed for cover supervision and therefore the training will not necessarily be appropriate for someone whose main role is to be a cover supervisor. However, anyone who meets the HLTA standards will, as a matter of course, have the necessary training and skills for cover supervision if that is to be part of their role.

Case studies

- 21 Many useful case studies – including those of staff already successfully undertaking roles which involve cover supervision – can be accessed via the National Remodelling Team’s website <http://www.remodelling.org/index.php>.

⁷ Available to view via <http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk/skills/teaching/download.html>.

⁸ Further information about TA induction training and the way in which they link to the National Occupational Standards can be found at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/teachingassistants/training/>.

⁹ The HLTA standards can be accessed via <http://www.hta.gov.uk/about/hta/index.htm>.