

The Bicester School

2-page summary of key points for Cover policy as agreed via consultations, at SLT meetings and with NASUWT staff group (open to all staff).

- *'Rare cover'* does not mean *'no cover'*. We adhere to the government-published guidelines on the definition of this term. As a result of the national cuts which has seen year-on-year 'real' reductions in school finances, our budget, like many schools, is in danger of falling into deficit. We are not able to run a deficit budget as an academy without attracting a financial notice to improve from the DfE. As we have a limited budget for 2017-18, staff must recognise that unnecessary expenditures on the usage of external cover teachers will have an impact on other areas of the school (For example, the school will not be able to employ an additional business studies teacher for 2017-18.)
- We will seek to employ two full-time cover supervisors from September 2017 (This will have a financial impact on staffing in other areas of the school as stated above.). Until the full-time cover supervisors have taken up post, we will use TA's as the first port of call for cover.
- Cover must be shared equitably between teaching staff, including teaching assistants when cover supervisors have been utilised for planned covers and as much as is possible for unforeseen covers. We do not plan to use admin staff to cover classes.
- To support staff and ensure equity amongst all, we will reduce all main-scale and TLR teaching staff loadings by 1 period per fortnight. This free period will become a designated cover slot for staff to be called for cover and will not sit in a protected PPA slot. A rota will be drawn up showing staff when they could be called for cover. This does not mean that staff will be called for up to 19 covers per year; a limit will be set at 8 covers per year. Once the limit is reached we agree to pay staff £30 per cover (1 hour duration.) – This is open to all teaching staff who agree to take an additional cover in this slot. (The £30 per hour payment will not apply to any staff on leadership scale.)
- To reduce the number of unnecessary external cover teachers brought in, we will pay our staff £30 per cover, for all those who agree to take on a cover, beyond the minimum requirement. Staff can only be taken for cover in their designated cover slot.
- We are committed to allowing planned external CPD and school trips etc to take place over the course of the year but costly courses and staff-intensive trips at times may have to be reigned back and limited/rationed without support from staff teams in the manner set out below. As a principle, we will not allow any more than two planned absences per day ordinarily so that we can ensure that these can be covered by our cover supervisors. In nationally 'known' weeks of high absences, we will not allow more than one planned absence to take place per day.
- We make a distinction between short term and long term absence. See info in the expanded version of the Cover policy.

a) Usual cover arrangements for TBS – In order of priority

To minimise costs to the school, in a year when all school budgets are stretched and to avoid reducing impact on dept capitation, we will use the following procedure for cover:

1. Foreseeable cover –

(Absences for planned trips, leave of absence, CPD, sicknesses requiring medical notes etc)

- a. Use a cover supervisor or external cover teacher, if available.
- b. Allocate class to a teacher if sufficient notice is available for the lesson to be planned and will not take the teacher over maximum loadings. For example, in the case of trips, depts. will often agree to cover classes for each other, if available.
- c. Use SLT to cover the lesson

2. Unforeseeable cover –

(absences e.g. compassionate leave for family emergencies; 1 or 2 or several days' unplanned absence e.g. short term sickness. Ordinarily, once a doctor's note is required, after 5-working days, the unforeseeable 'sickness' becomes foreseeable.)

- a. Use a cover supervisor if available
- b. Use an HLTA in a non-timetabled slot or TA instead of the TA supporting a class.
- c. Use a teacher in a non-ppa slot up to a maximum of 8 per year.
- d. Use a qualified teaching staff member who has exceeded maximum covers per year but has agreed to be paid at the overtime rate of £30 per hour.
- e. Use SLT to cover the lesson

b) Cover arrangements at The Bicester School, as agreed by Headteacher and staff group

1. Where a cover supervisor or TA is not available for cover, teaching staff at The Bicester School will be used for a **maximum of 8 covers per year**, and can be called to cover in 'foreseeable' or 'unforeseeable' absences but will not be called in their ppa time. The maximum of 8 covers does not however apply to members of SLT or a TA where support for cover is stipulated in their contract.
2. Agreeing to cover for 'foreseeable' absences up to the maximum limit of 8 is seen as supportive of other staff and can enable additional CPDs, trips etc to take place.
3. Absent staff will always provide suitable cover material in the case of 'foreseeable' absences and do their best to do so in the case of 'unforeseeable' absences. Where cover work is not provided, it is the responsibility of the Hod to provide work for the students.
4. Staff who are covering for absent teachers will often be called to cover outside of their specialist areas so in such circumstances their role will be to ensure that students are safe, behave well and get through the set work.

Tony Rushworth July 2017

Cover Policy (Expanded version)

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, as is ensuring their safety on site.

1.3 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:

- planning and preparing lessons and courses for students;
- delivering lessons to students;
- assessing the development, progress and attainment of students; and
- 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 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. Necessary considerations for 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 safety of the students
- 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

3.3.1

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. Sudden teacher illness that was not known about in time to make other provision for and a genuine emergency that requires a teacher to leave work during the school day.

3.3.2

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.

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 long term absences 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 approach will be as follows:

- a fixed term appointment will be made- this will be the normal strategy
- a suitably qualified/unqualified teacher will be used.

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 or several days' unplanned absence e.g. short term sickness. Once a doctor's note is required, after 5-working days, the unforeseeable 'sickness' becomes foreseeable.

5.2 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.

5.3 Covering for absences - unforeseeable

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 (not shown in order of preference):

- employing a supply teacher, budget permitting, and consideration for health and safety and emergencies
- directing a Teaching Assistant to take the class
- using a suitably trained cover supervisor
- using teachers already employed at the school, including unqualified teachers. (In the case of cover for unforeseeable absences, it is anticipated that the school will fix the number of covers per annum at a ceiling which approximates to the current average for staff covers in 2016-17. Beyond this number, qualified teaching staff, except those on leadership scale, may opt in to 1 paid cover per fortnight at a rate of £30 per hour.

6. Options for delivering cover, other than in-house teachers

6.1 Cover Supervisors

Cover supervision usually 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 usually only supervise work set by teachers but some will also be involved in delivering teaching and learning.

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;
- where 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;

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.

The cover supervisor will be line managed by the member of SLT responsible for organising cover.

6.2 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 that 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.

6.3 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.

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 Head of Faculty/Department to ensure continuity and progression in students' learning, meaning the setting of work for absent colleagues in cases where they have been unable to in the first instance.**

In order to make the most effective use of supply teacher time, the School will ensure that the supply teacher has all necessary resources.

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. Planned absences (foreseen absences)

8.1 – Short term planned absences - The principles for short term planned absences apply to all types of short term planned absences as in the example below.

For example - 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, usually 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 it is an emergency, the staff member has been specifically employed to do so or the dept have agreed to cover within the team to enable the trip, CPD etc to take place.

The school will not ordinarily permit any more than two planned absences per day as this is the extent of internal provision via cover supervisors or teaching assistants that the school has budgeted for. It is at the discretion of the Headteacher to allow the maximum limit of two to be exceeded but in such circumstances may involve either support from the dept in covering for the absent member or willingness from SLT etc to step in for the colleague. In seasons of high absence a maximum of 1 planned absence will be allowable.

In conclusion, stakeholders must be aware that with the huge pressures on school budgets, it is becoming increasingly difficult to fund short term planned absences without a financial impact on whole staff budgets.

8.2 Long term planned absences

In such cases, the absent member of staff will be covered by 1) a supply teacher 2) A fixed term short term contract to cover the period of absence 3) A teaching colleague within school who has capacity on his/her timetable. Please note, the maximum loading for staff will never be exceeded.

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 students being on study or examination 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 headteacher to direct teachers to undertake. A list of typical activities is shown below:

- developing or revising departmental 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 students who are transferring between year groups or from primary schools; and
- 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.

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 Headteacher will ensure that a record is maintained each year, showing the hours of cover worked by each teacher. 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.

10.2 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 during the summer term each year and will be discussed with the school staff and their representatives. The revised policy will then be published with the school calendar each year.