

January 2022

GUIDANCE ON COVER SUPERVISION FOR CLASSROOM-BASED STAFF

COVER SUPERVISION

The following is taken from the NJC School Support Staff Job Profiles.

Teaching Assistants- Level 3 and Level 4

“Provide short term cover supervision of classes.”

Higher Level Teaching Assistants

“Plan, prepare and deliver assigned programmes of teaching and learning activities to individuals, small groups and/or classes modifying and adapting activities as necessary under the overall direction and supervision of a teacher.”

“Use teaching and learning objectives to plan, evaluate and adjust lessons/work plans as appropriate within agreed systems of supervision”

Cover Supervisors

“To supervise whole classes undertaking pre-prepared activities provided by a teacher during the short-term absence¹³ of a classroom teacher. The primary focus is to maintain order and to keep pupils on task.”

These definitions are useful in understanding the remit of the roles and there are limitations on the ways in which teaching assistants can be used in providing cover.

Importantly, **any cover of absence should only be short-term.**

Cover supervision is needed for a teacher's short-term absence from the classroom, where the absence was not known about in advance. Given the ongoing nature of the pandemic, absence because of Covid-19 is foreseeable and should be planned for accordingly. If you are asked to provide cover supervision, you should only do so if you are suitably trained/qualified and confident and happy to do so. **Any proposal for a change of responsibility or duties should be discussed and agreed.** Although there is no definitive guidance on the time limits of cover, and it is at the discretion of Head teachers, GMB would advise that cover should not really be for more than 5 consecutive days and most definitely should not be on an indefinite basis. Longer-term absence, e.g. due to long-term sick or maternity leave, should be covered by a teacher.

Cover supervision involves ensuring pupils carry out a pre-prepared exercise under supervision **and no active teaching takes place.** The duties of cover supervision can be summarised as:

- Supervising the work that has been set on the lesson plan provided, using the necessary resources that have also been provided.
- Managing the behaviour of pupils in line with the school's behaviour policy.
- Responding to any questions that pupils might have about the process.
- Dealing with any immediate problems or emergencies in line with school policy and procedures.
- Collecting any completed work at the end of the lesson and returning it to the teacher.
- Reporting back as appropriate on any issues that arose during the lesson.

WORKLOAD

If any cover you are being asked to provide is making your workload excessive, then this is a health and safety issue. Unreasonable or unmanageable workloads can have a negative effect on both physical and mental wellbeing and your employer has a duty of care to protect your wellbeing and welfare. If you are experiencing stress, or any other

effect caused by your workload, speak to your manager and your Local GMB Branch or schoolsteamlondon@gmb.org.uk.

LONE WORKING

When teaching assistants cover teacher absences, they often become the only adult in a classroom. Lone working in a school can come with additional risks such as making staff vulnerable to malicious allegations; making staff more at risk from violence from students; causing staff to feel stressed and isolated and lack of support in event of accidents/emergencies needing evacuation or first aid. The key principle which underpins the law is that lone workers should not be placed at greater risk than any other worker and you should not feel vulnerable or unsafe at work. Risk assessments should be carried out to suitably and sufficiently address risk and your employer should be ensuring your health, safety and welfare.

STRONGER TOGETHER

Concerns surrounding cover and its associated issues can be addressed collectively by GMB members. Support staff can come together to discuss concerns and problems and raise them with their Head Teacher as a collective. Quite often there will be a quicker and more effective response to issues raised by GMB members as a group than there is to individual concern.

For further advice on any aspect of providing cover, or for support on how to collectively organise please contact your Local Branch, Regional Organiser or schoolsteamlondon@gmb.org.uk.

