

Covid-19: Impact on staffing and when Remote Learning applies



DE GUIDANCE AND PHA ADVICE CONTINUES TO INFORM THE HEALTH AND SAFETY STEPS A SCHOOL MUST BE FOLLOWING - THESE INCLUDE:

- Ensure all mitigations are in place - social distancing, ventilation (**revised guidance**), regular cleaning, and hand sanitisers are the key elements of these mitigations.
- Indoor events which are unavoidable (business critical) must be fully risk assessed and mitigations put in place to ensure the safety of all present
- Risk assessments are legally required to be done in consultation with staff.
- Changes, including the 'scaling back' of mitigations, can only be made through the review of risk assessments or when new guidance from DE or the PHA has been issued - otherwise, the existing mitigations must remain in place.

Where a school is facing staff shortages which impact safe staffing levels, they must actively consider remote learning (**see below**).

If the school remains open, they must comply with the Workload Agreement TNC 2011/8 regarding cover.

IN DEALING WITH SHORT TERM ABSENCES PRINCIPALS WILL MAKE DECISIONS REGARDING THE COVER OF ABSENT COLLEAGUES BASED ON:

- the extent to which continuity of learning can be maintained.
- the length of time the pupils would be working without a qualified teacher.
- the needs of the class concerned.
- the skills and experience of the teacher concerned.

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Such arrangements will include:

- Compositing of classes providing this is for a short period and does not exceed Departmental guidance on class size.
- Employment of a teacher from the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR).
- Utilisation of Classroom Assistants or other non-teaching staff, in a supervisory capacity, in emergency situations or exceptional circumstances only, where the absence is unexpected and for a short period of time (*in relation to cover by Classroom Assistants or other non-teaching staff, "a short period of time" should not be more than an hour*).
- Use of teaching staff from within the school to cover classes.

The Classroom Assistant Job Description states the following points:

- Supervise groups of pupils, or individual pupils on specified activities including talking and listening, using ICT, extra-curricular activities, and other duties, as directed by the class teacher/officer.
- Provide continuity of adult care of e.g., supervising play and cloakrooms including hand washing, toileting etc.
- Such other duties as may be assigned by the principal/outreach teacher/education authority officer within the level of the post.
- Classroom Assistants should not be asked to provide cover outside of the scope of their job description and should not be asked to provide extended cover - for example whole classes for periods of a day. [Click to see EA Guidance.](#)

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Teacher asked to Cover

The term '*cover*' refers to any occasion where the Teacher normally responsible for teaching the class is absent and a teaching colleague is required to teach the class.

Cover therefore is included within the teaching limit of 25 hours in any week in a primary school or special school and 23.5 hours in any week in a secondary school, as specified under the 1987 Regulations.

If you are asked to cover for a colleague who is off with Covid or any other absence greater than 2 days, you should refuse to do it - this includes arrangement where some year groups are off while others are in school.

TNC 2020/1 is clear that the rules on cover also apply to supervision.

- Can you be directed to supervise pupils whose teacher is off for more than 2 days (from day one)? No
- Can you be directed to supervise pupils who have been added to your class whose teacher is off more than 2 days (from day one)? No
- Can you be directed to supervise when supervision is not on your time budget? No

The term '*absence*' refers to a situation where the Teacher normally responsible for teaching a particular class 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.

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Short Term Absence is defined as follows:

- absences known in advance e.g., professional development/medical appointment **(if this cannot be arranged outside of the working day)**.
- 1 or 2 days unplanned absence e.g., staff sickness.
- It is expected in these circumstances that cover will be undertaken by a qualified Teacher.

Cover Strategies

In dealing with short term absences Principals will make decisions regarding the cover of absent colleagues based on:

- the extent to which continuity of learning can be maintained.
- the length of time the pupils would be working without a qualified Teacher.
- the needs of the class concerned.
- the skills and experience of the Teacher concerned.

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.
- Employment of a substitute teacher from NISTR.
- Where appropriate a fixed term appointment will be made **(particularly suitable for maternity)**.

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Supervision – Teaching Staff

Supervision occurs when a teacher is asked to engage in activities outside of the classroom where there is no active teaching taking place.

Supervision may include tasks such as morning and afternoon breaks, wet break times, arrangements for the arrival and departure of pupils, bus supervision, school assembly, examinations etc.

It is recognised that classroom supervision is not an effective use of a teacher's time. However, in exceptional circumstances, a teacher may be required to supervise, as distinct from teach, the class of an absent colleague.

'Remote Learning'

Since the beginning of the 2020/21 academic year, the Department has asked schools to have contingency plans in place for the delivery of remote learning. In the event of a school closure, or if a class or any larger group of pupils across a year group need to self-isolate.

School leaders have the flexibility to utilise remote learning in the following circumstances:

- where a group of pupils or a class are required to self-isolate due to COVID-19.
- where schools are experiencing staff shortages and have not been able to secure sufficient substitute teaching cover to operate classes effectively; and
- where schools are experiencing support or ancillary staff shortages which may compromise the safe and effective operation of the school.

Circular 2020/5 - Guidance for Schools on Supporting Remote Learning