



# An introduction to being a cover supervisor!

**This is a guide to support with your decision or transition into becoming a cover supervisor. If you require further information, please contact your consultant asap.**

If you're reading this, then you're probably someone who has worked in education or with children for a little while, and is looking for a bit of experience in charge of a classroom. This could be before you go on to train as a teacher, or before you go on to find a permanent cover supervisor role.

The main objective of this guide is to give you a better idea as to the logistics and daily responsibilities of a cover supervisor, and some strategies on how to deal with the challenges that these will bring with them. Your experience of working with (specifically secondary-aged) children, combined with your personality and ability to get on with students will be your most valuable assets, and we want to be able to help you get the best out of them.

Many of our staff have come into working as cover supervisors after working outside of schools as sports coaches, police officers, paramedics, scout leaders and youth workers, and some have come from working in schools as teaching assistants or even teachers. There isn't really a standard path to being a cover supervisor; it's about being confident in yourself, working with the instructions that the school gives you, and asking for support when you need it.

# What is a cover supervisor?

Cover supervisors came about in 2004, after a rule was put into place that teachers weren't allowed to cover more than 38 hours of other teachers' lessons due to absence. This meant that schools either had to book supply teachers, or employ their own cover supervisors to take charge of lessons that wouldn't have a teacher because of a short term absence.

Cover supervisors are there mainly to cover short term absences, and they can be deployed across the full subject range. This means that you could be covering maths in the morning, and then food technology in the afternoon, with a history lesson before lunch. You would often cover one teacher's timetable if they were off for the day, but if they have a light timetable with a lot of free lessons, then you will often end up being called on to cover other bits of absence as well.

On first appearances, a cover supervisor can look a lot like they do a very similar job to a teacher – they are both in charge of the class, and responsible for managing behaviour and achievement through the lesson. The main difference is that a cover supervisor is only responsible for students' achievement against the work that is set in the lesson, whereas the teacher is responsible for students' achievement and progress over the course of the year. This means cover supervisors shouldn't need to deal with marking, planning lessons, preparing schemes of work, reporting progress to parents and school leadership, managing coursework or exam submissions.

Just as supply teachers can get a bit of grief from students who try to take advantage of the fact that their usual teacher isn't about, cover supervisors tend to face the same problem. It takes thick skin and confidence in your ability to be able to manage lessons that aren't necessarily your specialist subject every day, with students who will often test the waters and challenge your authority. Many people manage this very well though, and if you're cut out for it, working as a cover supervisor can be really rewarding.

# A day in the life...

We asked one of our supply staff to give us a quick rundown of their day to give us a bit more of an insight into the challenges and highlights that cover supervisors can face.

**6.30am:** Wake up, shower and get dressed.



**7.00am:** Have breakfast and make a packed lunch within earshot of my mobile so I can answer it when the office calls with work.

**7.20am:** The office calls and asks me to go to a school that I went to last week for a day, and it's not too far away. I can get there by 8:00 usually, so I head out the door and go in to school.



**8.10am:** I arrive at school a little bit later than I thought, traffic was a bit busy. I speak to reception and they send me off to the cover manager, who gives me IT logins, a timetable for the day and a folder with the work for the lessons I will be covering. I've got 3 geography lessons in the morning and then an English lesson followed by 1 more geography after lunch. I'm also covering a form class, so I head to the form room ready for the students to arrive.



**8:40am:** It turns out that the students in "my" form are supposed to have assembly today, so I do the register as quickly as possible, and then get the students to take me down to the hall.

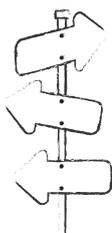
**9:00am:** There are 2 lessons of Year 7 geography to get me started off. The work for both of them is pretty good, with some worksheets based on 3 figure grid references. The lessons are an hour long, and although one or two of the students finished a bit sooner than that, I manage to think on my feet, dig out some squared paper and get them to create their own versions of the tasks on the sheet for each other to complete. Most students were pretty good, but then Year 7s are a bit easier usually. There is 1 student that I have to have a quick word with outside the lesson, and I write their name down to pass on to the class teacher.



**11:00am:** I've got a 20 minute break before the next lesson, and I'm in the same classroom, so instead of going to the staff room I have a quick tidy up and make some notes for the regular class teacher. The cover manager pops his head in to see how I'm getting on, and then rushes off.



**11:20am:** Year 10 geography between break and lunch. The students are a bit more wound up after something went on during break, but being in the classroom before them, and lining them up outside before letting them in calms them down a bit. Their work is based around their coursework, and I'm not hugely familiar with it, so I check quickly with the teacher next door, and she points me in the right direction. They've been on a field trip and they have to write it up. I've googled the coursework criteria and combined with the plans that the teacher has left, we've managed to work out what they are supposed to be doing. It's a high ability class, so everyone gets on with their work pretty well.





**12:20pm:** Lunch. Another teacher needs the classroom that I've been in all morning after lunch, which means I'm off to the staff room. I don't usually like staff rooms because the teachers usually sit with their departments or their friends, but the geography teacher in the classroom next door has a chat for a little bit, and I fill in the notes for the teacher on the class that I've just taken, and eat my lunch.



**1:00pm:** PM Registration. This is with "my" form again. We do the register and I let them chat amongst themselves for a bit. It says on the form notice board that they do an equipment check, so I make sure everyone has a pen and a homework planner, but there isn't much I can do about those that don't have them.



**1:20pm:** Year 11 English. This is at the other end of the school, so it is a bit harder to get there before the students, but they are waiting outside. The work is practising exam questions about Romeo and Juliet, which I did at school as well, so I can remember the odd bit to help out. The students get a bit bored of this by the end of the lesson, so I end up using the last 15 minutes to make them read each other's answers to the exam questions, and try to give them some tips. The school uses WWW (What Went Well) and EBI (Even Better If) in all their marking, so the students mark each other's work in that format.



**2:20pm:** Year 10 geography, which is the same work as earlier on today. I'm a bit more confident with the coursework now that I've already done it once, which is just as well because this class is a bottom set and they push it with behaviour. There is a TA attached to the class, and he is really good at dealing with certain students who won't do the work, but we end up having to call the SLT number, and get a deputy head to take one of the girls out who is making it impossible for everyone else. Everything calms down a bit after that, but they are still worlds away from the class before lunch.



**3:20pm:** End of the school day. I stay in the classroom and have a bit of a tidy up, then fill in the notes for the class teachers of the lessons that I had after lunch. I pop down to the cover manager and hand over all my lesson feedback, and have a quick chat about the behaviour in the last lesson. He knows the class, and said he understands that these things happen. I say thanks and ask them to call if they ever need me again, and then head home at about 3:50.



**4:45pm:** I've made it home, and I call the office to let them know how I got on. They had feedback from the school as well, who said that I had a tough class this afternoon but dealt with it well, which makes me feel a lot better. No work for tomorrow just yet, but apparently the school is likely to call again in the morning, so I set an alarm and get ready to go again tomorrow.

# 10 tips for cover supervisors

- Get to school as early as possible – you want to make sure you have enough time to get the materials you need for the day. It can be very stressful if you get to school without enough time to look through the cover work before actually teaching it.
- The best way to manage students' behaviour is to keep them busy. Looking at your cover work before you teach it means you have a chance to work out how you're going to pace the lesson, and whether you need to do a quick google search for more activities.
- Have a few generic starters, plenaries and extension tasks up your sleeve (or on a USB). These will help you manage the brighter students, and keep everyone busy at the start of lessons whilst you get everything organised (more on this later).
- Learn names as soon as you can, and use them. If you need to, draw a quick plan of the classroom and fill it in as you do the register.
- Praise students wherever possible. It's really important to catch them being good, as well as to call up poor behaviour. It will make the classroom a nicer place to be, and you'll feel a lot better about your day as well.
- Find out what the school's behaviour policy is, and the language that is used when enforcing it. You'll get much more of a response if you refer to consequences in the correct terms.
- Don't be afraid to get students out of the classroom if you need to remove their audience. A quiet word outside is a lot more effective than a telling off in front of everyone.
- Use teaching assistants if you have them in your class. Find out how this lesson usually goes, and where any potential pitfalls might lie.
- Record feedback for the cover manager/class teacher on how each lesson went. Did any students stand out for the right (or wrong) reasons? Did you get all the work done? Did you have to put in extension tasks?
- Speak to the cover manager at the end of the day and return any keys/books/other materials that you need, and (diplomatically, if necessary) give them a rundown of your day. It's always worth leaving a good impression with the school.

# 8 tasks to keep them going

It's always worth thinking about what you'll do if students run out of work, and there are some ideas here. They are good starting points, but change them around and adapt them if you need to. Some of these will work better than others depending on the subject you're working in.

1. Literacy plenaries – get students to explain what they did last lesson/this lesson, but they have to use every letter of the alphabet in their explanation.
2. Charades – students mime a concept that they have learned from the unit of work or dealt with in that lesson. This could be specific words in MFL, characters from texts in English, geographical terms, historical figures etc etc. You could also do Articulate or Pictionary for this.
3. Beat the teacher – works well in maths if you have some spare time – get a student to set a question, then you have to beat the rest of the class in solving it (use with caution if maths isn't your strongest subject!).
4. Top tips for... – students write 5 tips for the next year group who will be studying this topic. This could be peer assessed as well.
5. Write their homework – get students to create a piece of homework for someone else in the class based on the topic you're studying. If there is time, then pair them up and get them to complete each other's homework.
6. Just a minute – students have to try to speak on one of the concepts in the lesson without repetition, hesitation or deviation for 60 seconds.
7. Hot seat – one student sits in the hot seat at the front of the class, and students take it in turns to ask them questions about the topic from the lesson. If they can't answer it, then the student who asked the question goes in the seat.
8. Topic Tennis – students have to take it in turns to explain something about a set topic, until they run out, a bit like Mallet's Mallet, but with no hammer!