

WHO ARE THE SUPPLY TEACHERS?



Recommendations for practice
for supply managers in schools
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The MirandaNet Fellowship is working in partnership with Select Education to build a supportive community of supply teachers. In this research report, which was undertaken as part of the three year research and development project, MirandaNet Fellows worked with supply teachers to identify their main characteristics and their professional needs.

Three research methods were used which provided different kinds of data to give a many faceted picture of the characteristics of supply teachers, their concerns and the kind of support that they would like. The three sources were: the database held by Select containing data on 6,687 individuals registered with them as supply teachers; answers to a questionnaire sent to all registered supply teachers and teaching assistants which had 1,810 returns, and two different kinds of focus group. One was composed of 32 supply teachers who had answered advertisements asking for their views. The other focus group was a group of 16 supply teachers who were recruited through national advertising to set up an e-mentoring service for their colleagues.

The evidence from the Select database shows that supply teachers cover a wide range of age and experience, from those just starting out in their careers to teachers who have held significant responsibilities in the schools they have served. Over half the registered supply teachers wish to work in secondary schools and over half of these offer shortage subjects. Most supply teachers are well qualified and many have interests and skills that could be harnessed to enrich pupils' and teachers' experience and expertise. This includes the one fifth of supply teachers who are not British nationals and who bring with them experience of other cultures and languages.

The questionnaire responses suggest that a search for permanent work is low on the agenda of most supply teachers: the school environment, pay and conditions are the factors that they rank most highly. The questionnaire also reveals a desire for continuing professional development (CPD) and a particular need for CPD in the areas of the use of ICT, Special Educational Needs, behaviour and classroom management. The focus groups helped to put these findings in the context of supply teachers' experience. While the groups enjoyed being supply teachers they were concerned about the limited opportunities for professional development and worried about their employment rights. They revealed some of the difficulties that they face and proposed some creative solutions.

The focus group evidence indicated that there are several simple steps that schools can take to ensure that supply teachers are able to teach effectively and that pupils' benefit from the experience. Most important of these is ensuring that supply teachers have brief but essential information about the pupils and lessons they are to teach. They also need information about practices that are important to the ethos and smooth running of the school, such as the rewards and sanctions used as part of the school's approach to behaviour management.

Overall the findings present a rich pool of available talent which schools can use more effectively if they think more creatively about the way supply teachers are, or could be, deployed instead of seeing them simply as a stop-gap solution to staffing problems. A detailed series of recommendations for practice aimed at helping school managers get the best out of supply teachers is extropolated from the data analysis.

The report ends with the researchers' discussion about new areas for investigation into teaching assistants and the ways in which the next stages of the research can be extended and improved.

Who are supply teachers?

Supply teachers range from those just starting out in their careers to very experienced teachers who have held significant responsibilities in the schools that they have served. Most supply teachers are British but about a fifth are not, bringing with them experience of other cultures and languages. Some supply teachers are very highly qualified and many have interests that could be harnessed to enrich pupils' and teachers' experience and expertise. The profiles below illustrate something of the experience and expertise that supply teachers have to offer.



Jacob

Jacob is 49 and has a BA degree, a PGCE and eight years experience teaching History, English and RE in his homeland of Zimbabwe. Since his arrival he has taught in several London secondary schools and just last year he

successfully completed a part-time Masters degree in education. Apart from his main teaching subjects, he is keen to teach citizenship and willing to undertake general cover duties.



Gail

Gail completed her NQT year last July on a one-year contract and since then has taught on short-term supply in several secondary schools. She is 23, with a BA degree and a PGCE in music. Music is her main love but she also

speaks good French and Spanish and is comfortable teaching these subjects or English at Key Stage 3. Gail is an enthusiastic proponent of the value of music for pupils with EBD or MLD and she worked very successfully with groups of such pupils during her NQT year. She would like a position which could offer her the opportunity to extend this area of expertise.



Jane

Jane has taught in primary schools since she completed her B.Ed eleven years ago. She gained a post graduate certificate in counselling six years ago and for the past three years has undertaken supply teaching to give her

more time to devote to counselling activities. Now

33, Jane has experience teaching all year groups, from Year 1 to Year 6 and was a special educational needs co-ordinator for two years.



Jill

Jill, 48, has had twenty years experience of teaching science. After a break to spend time with her children while they were young, she continued her career, spending five years as head of department in a medium

sized secondary school. She gained an MSC three years ago in order to explore different teaching approaches in her subject. Shortly after this, Jill and her husband moved to a new area of the country. Having left her old job, Jill decided that she wanted to reduce her working hours and so has opted to take on supply work rather than look for a full-time teaching post.



Malcolm

Before Malcolm became a teacher he was an engineer and spent several years working in India. Now 56, he was awarded his PGCE at the age of 45 and has taught maths and science in secondary and middle schools

ever since. When his school merged with another last year he decided not to apply for one of the posts but to take on temporary supply work instead, with a view to spending more time at the house he and his wife had recently bought in France. Apart from maths and science, Malcolm is prepared to undertake general cover work or to make use of his linguistic skills in French, German, Urdu and Bengali.



Anna

Anna is 31 and Spanish. She gained the Spanish equivalent of a PGCE and is recognised as a qualified teacher by the DFES. She has taught history and Spanish in several secondary schools since she came to the UK two years

ago. Because she is keen to extend her experience she is willing to teach Humanities, Key Stage 4 English or to provide general cover in secondary schools.

Recommendations for practice

MirandaNet Fellows have been working with supply teachers for over a year building a supportive community. From this experience in conjunction with the detailed data held by Select, the questionnaire responses and the themes highlighted by the focal group discussion recommendations for practice emerged. These recommendations are aimed at senior school managers. Some of these recommendations follow directly from the reported research findings, others make more of a creative leap based upon an intuitive response to the findings from experienced teacher educators in the light of discussions with supply teachers and engagement with their world. To give more context to these recommendations we begin the 'Recommendations for practice' section of this report with some profiles of supply teachers.

Getting the best from supply teachers

Engaging supply teachers to provide cover for staff absence sometimes results in someone *mind*ing rather than *teach*ing pupils until their regular teacher returns. With a little forethought, this need not be so. Supply teachers offer a range of expertise and experience which can be employed to the benefit the pupils and staff in their host schools. In some cases this can be achieved by providing supply teachers with brief but essential information about the pupils they are to teach and important school policies and practices they will be expected to uphold. In others, greater consideration of what supply teachers have to offer can lead to creative deployment that benefits all concerned.

There are a number of things that schools can do to make sure that they, and more importantly their pupils, benefit from having supply teachers working in the school.

- Only engage trusted supply teachers who are known to the school or are registered with a reputable teaching agency.
- Be specific about your requirements so that the teaching agency can match the supply teacher to your needs.
- Provide brief but accurate information about the age of pupils and the subjects/topics to be taught so that the supply teacher can prepare effectively. Don't change these at the last minute.
- If possible, provide the supply teacher with lesson plans or outlines of current work so that pupils' progress is not disrupted. If the supply teacher is to be engaged for more than just a few days, ensure that they have relevant schemes of work/syllabi and are involved in normal planning processes.
- Consider making it a requirement that regular staff keep basic information, such as pupil groupings, notes on pupils with special educational or medical needs and planning documents in an easily accessible file in the classroom or on the school network.
- Ensure someone is tasked to meet the supply teacher on arrival and show him/her the location of key places, e.g. teaching room(s), staffroom, toilets, resource stores.
- Make sure the supply teacher has a named contact in the school and that they meet prior to the start of teaching so that responsibilities, important school policies and issues of concern can be explained, e.g. regarding duties, behaviour management, pupils with medical needs, parental custody issues.
- Make sure the supply teacher has all the information they need to enable them to be teaching the right pupils the right subject at the right time and in the right place, eg school plan, timetables.
- Clarify with the supply teacher the resources that are available to support their teaching and how they can access them. Make sure that they are shown how to access ICT resources on the school's systems as the way these are set up varies from school to school.
- Find out the strengths and breadth of expertise of your supply teacher and, especially if he or she is to be in school for more than a few days. Think creatively about how you can use their expertise and integrate them within the school. Sponsorship of NQT accreditation can be very welcome for example.
- Ensure a mechanism is in place for supply teachers to report back on pupils' achievements and on any issues arising which the regular teacher can follow up.
- Be aware of pupils' attitudes towards supply teachers and recognise that it may be necessary for a senior or respected teacher to reinforce the behaviour that is expected of them and the sanctions that will operate if they misbehave or treat the supply teacher disrespectfully. Short-term supply teachers do not have the opportunity that permanent staff have to establish a working relationship with pupils. Even the best of them may need support initially.
- Invite supply teachers to join in any staff meetings or professional development opportunities provided within the school.
- If you engage supply teacher from a teaching agency, provide feedback on their performance. Supply teachers can choose where they work. If working in your school is not a pleasant experience or they feel unsupported, you are unlikely to be able to encourage the good ones to come back. In the end, it's your pupils who suffer.

Using supply teachers creatively

Typically, supply teachers are employed to provide short-term cover for absences or long-term cover for illness, unfilled vacancies, maternity leave, etc. In some cases, the expertise of the teacher engaged is well-matched to the pupils and lessons to be taught in terms of their subject and sector specialism. In other cases the teacher may be providing general cover, including teaching outside their specialist areas.

Schools can derive significant benefit from using supply teachers creatively. Many supply teachers are well qualified and have a broad range of expertise and experience to offer.

Other forms of deployment, used on their own, or in conjunction with the more typical deployment patterns, can contribute to school improvement plan priorities:

Raising standards:

- Enable more flexible grouping of pupils, e.g. splitting three classes into four sets.

- Boost subject expertise available to the school and possibly share with another schools.

- Suitably experienced teachers provide an increased level of specialist teaching to pupils during practical and creative activities.

Improving inclusion by promoting individual achievement:

- Provide focused teaching for pupils with SEN or EAL or who are gifted or talented in class or in withdrawal groups or releasing existing staff to do this – may involve team-teaching.

Enriching the curriculum

- Engage an overseas teacher for specific lessons to add a different dimension, e.g. on citizenship, language and literacy, geography.

- Extend the curriculum, eg provide foreign language teaching for older primary pupils.

- Run before/after school and lunchtime clubs, e.g. in music, a foreign language or environmental activities.

Contributing to curriculum development

- Provide subject specialist input to planning.

- Release members of staff to undertake curriculum review and revision.

- Release members of staff to enable them to implement curricular initiatives.

Supporting management

- Provide specialist cover for subject coordinator or head of department to allow him/her to monitor teaching, pupils' standards and achievement, effectiveness of resource provision and deployment, etc.

- Provide cover for performance management observations and interviews.

Improving pupils' personal development

- Reduce group sizes to give pupils more structured individual teaching.

- Conduct individual or group counselling sessions with selected pupils.

- Run a lunchtime club for pupils who have difficulty coping with social situations.

- Set up a pupil mentoring system and train mentors.

Professional development

- Team-teach with a weaker teacher as part of a short-term support mechanism, or to release expert member of staff to do so.

- Provide training for staff on techniques for dealing with pupils experiencing problems.

- Provide input to training sessions on different ways of teaching aspects of a subject.

- Provide release time for teachers so that they can engage in professional development activities, such as observing others in their own or a different school, teaching alongside a colleague, undertaking research.

Reducing workload

- Provide timetabled cover across a range of subjects to help a school implement workforce reforms.



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