

**National Assembly for Wales
Children, Young People and Education Committee**

ST 09

Inquiry into Supply Teaching

Evidence from : Supply Teacher

Consultation questions

Question 1 – What are your views on whether there is a prevalence in the use of supply teachers on a planned and unplanned basis?

Some schools do have to use a high number of supply staff because they have a high rate of staff illness. This is usually caused directly or indirectly by stress caused by workload, behaviour and unsupportive management.

If you believe that this results in problems (for example, for schools, pupils or teachers), how do you think they could be resolved?

Sometimes pupils may have almost every lesson in a day with a supply teacher. This in itself shouldn't be a problem, if supply teachers are teaching their own subject, if senior staff are supportive with behaviour issues and if the work is properly set. However this is rarely the case.

There is a culture of pupils behaving badly for supply teachers and teachers / senior management tacitly accepting this, which means that learning will be affected.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 – This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 – This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	yes
<i>3 – This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 – Not a problem.</i>	

Question 2 – What are your views on the circumstances in which supply teachers are used for example, the types of classes they cover; the types of learning activities which take place under the supervision of supply teachers; whether they are qualified to teach relevant subjects?

Often schools do not ask for subject specialists to cover so supply teachers are usually doing general cover – not their own subject. Increasingly schools ask agencies to send ‘supply cover supervisors’ so either the agency sends people who are not qualified teachers, or they ask teachers to go in at cover supervisor rates of pay, and when work is in short supply teachers are forced to do this and work for these reduced rates.

At key stage 3 most teachers can effectively cover most subjects, with the exception of languages, and PE. At GCSE however, pupils really need subject specialists, unless they are carrying on with independent coursework.

The biggest problem is that work is often very badly set. This means pupils do not take the work seriously, because they know that their regular teacher will not even look at the work they do, never mind mark it. Doing posters, non-specific ‘revision’, worksheets that they have done before etc are typical examples. Work is also often unsuitable for the class, e.g. text book work suitable for a top set being given to a bottom set, or work that has no relation to what pupils have been learning in previous lessons, so that they cannot do the work. Often work is done on paper, rather than in the pupils’ books, so they know it will go straight in the bin and not be marked. Permanent teachers could help by always marking work done when the class has been taught by a supply teacher, and setting detentions for those who have not done the work, or making them do it for homework. Unfortunately this very rarely happens.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Trainee teachers should be taught at college how to set good work for cover lessons. Ideally they should have to teach a few cover lessons so they have some idea of how hard it is to teach a lesson with poorly prepared cover work.

Senior management should have to do a few days supply every year as part of their CPD so they realise the problems supply staff have and then try to address these problems in their own schools. Clearly this is not likely to happen, but they should show more willingness to at least talk to supply staff and find out what the problems are!

More support should be given with behaviour. Too often, supply teachers are abandoned in a classroom with a difficult class, with no teachers in neighbouring classes, and no safe or reliable way of calling for help. Sometimes when a supply teacher does call for help, the offending pupil is not even removed from the lesson, or if they are removed, they do not receive any further punishment.

Full-time school staff should show more respect to supply staff. Pupils can't be expected to show respect to supply staff when they see regular staff treating them in a dismissive way, or talking about them in a derogatory way. Supply staff should be given fobs/keys and the same colour badges as regular staff, so they are not obviously seen as inferior.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	yes
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	

Question 3 – What are your views on the impact of the use of supply teachers on the outcomes for pupils (including any impact on pupil behaviour)?

Because behaviour is so poor for supply teachers, pupils' learning is going to be affected. The worst affected are those pupils who want to learn and do their work, and who ask for help, but the teacher is so busy dealing with the bad behaviour that they can't give the others the help they want.

But the main reason that pupils' learning will be affected is because the work set is so often poor, so no useful learning can take place.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

More support with poor behaviour.

It would be easier for teachers to set good work if they had good quality text books.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

yes

3 - This is a minor problem

4 - Not a problem.

Question 4 – What are your views on the Continuous Professional Development of supply teachers and the potential impact of the National Professional Learning Model?

Supply teachers can't afford to attend CPD courses, as they cannot afford the cost of the course, and they can't afford to take a day off work.

However supply teachers learn a great deal simply by visiting so many

different schools / departments and pick up a lot of good ideas and strategies. This is something that full-time staff in schools could benefit from if they had time to talk to supply teachers.	
If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?	
Grants for supply teachers to attend CPD courses during term time.	
How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)	
<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	yes
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	
Question 5 – What are your views on performance management arrangements for supply teachers?	
Well, there aren't any, are there?!	
If you think there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?	
How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)	
<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	yes
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	

Question 6 – Do you consider that local authorities and regional consortia have sufficient oversight of the use of supply teachers?

No

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Local authorities should run their own not-for-profit supply agency. Supply teachers would earn better rates, and the local authority would be more aware of what is going on.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 – This is a key, urgent problem.

2 – This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

3 – This is a minor problem

yes

4 – Not a problem.

Question 7 – Are you aware of any local and regional variation in the use of supply teachers and if so, are there any reasons for this?

I have no knowledge of supply teaching outside my own area, although I have heard anecdotal evidence that suggests there is more supply work in some areas than others.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 – This is a key, urgent problem.

2 – This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	yes
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	
Question 8 – Do you have any views on supply agencies and their quality assurance arrangements?	
<p>'Quality assurance' is a meaningless phrase and doesn't mean a supply agency is any good.</p> <p>We have to work through supply agencies because little or no work is available through the local authority.</p> <p>While supply agencies are bad in many ways they are providing what the schools ask for. If the schools are only prepared to pay for 'cover supervisors' then the agencies will ask qualified teachers to work all day for as little as £55 a day, and if we won't do it we might not be offered any other work. If schools are asking for supply staff to go in for one or two lessons rather than paying for a half days work, that is what the agencies will ask us to do.</p> <p>Agencies are a bad thing in that they obviously take a big cut from what they charge the school, meaning supply staff get paid very badly. They also use umbrella companies to process pay, meaning staff have to pay a fee just to get paid. There is also no holiday pay, sick pay or pension contribution for supply teachers.</p> <p>However, to be fair, agencies are convenient for schools and supply teachers to use, getting the staff for schools and the work for the supply teacher.</p> <p>One problem is that because pay is so low, many experienced supply teachers turn down longer term work because the extra work involved in planning and marking is not recompensed. So pupils whose teacher is off for a long time may not get an experienced teacher to teach them for a long period of time. (Agency workers regulations are supposed to mean that after 12 weeks supply staff get the same pay as full-time staff but agencies and schools have ways of wriggling out of this.)</p>	

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Setting limits to the amount of commission agencies can earn off a days work, and setting minimum rates for supply staff.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	yes
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	

Question 9 – Are you aware of any specific issues relating to Welsh medium education? If so, what are they?

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	

Question 10 – If you had to make one recommendation to the Welsh Government from all the points you have made, what would that recommendation be?

Local authorities to run their own supply teaching agencies.

Question 11 – Do you have any other comments or issues you wish to raise that have not been covered by the specific questions?

Supply teachers are often scapegoats for issues that are not their fault.

A classes' poor performance or behaviour might be blamed on 'oh they had a supply teacher all term' rather than looking at the school's behaviour management or a weak Head of Department.

In a BBC Wales news item recently, supply teachers were blamed for costing schools thousands of pounds and affecting pupils' education. No mention was made of the fact that up to half the money paid by schools for supply staff goes to the agencies, not the teachers. And if schools have a lot of staff absence then they should be looking at supporting their own staff better.

Pupils who want to learn can be taught just as well by a supply teacher as their regular teacher – sometimes better!