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To Chairs of Governing Boards in Maintained Schools

A Better Deal for Supply Teachers

Dear Chair

The NASUWT knows that you will recognise that supply teachers are a valuable resource to schools, assisting them in maintaining high standards of education for all children and young people.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the effectiveness and importance of supply teachers, it has also shone a spotlight on the growing casualisation of work and the situation for supply teachers, who often have no choice but to work through a number of different supply agencies, coupled with vagaries of precarious, intermittent and insecure employment this brings.

Like all staff, supply teachers are able to work to the best of their ability when they are valued and not subjected to exploitative employment arrangements.

It is clear that the market in agency workers in education is big business. The amount spent by maintained schools on supply teachers for 2018-19 was in excess of £550 million.¹ Of this, in excess of three quarters (77%) was spent sourcing supply teachers from employment agencies. This represents in excess of £425 million.

Local authority schools are charged up to a 40% commission fee, which goes direct to the agency. This equates to over £170 million for local authority maintained schools and over £34.5 million for academies.

Your priority will be to ensure high-quality teaching while being concerned that expenditure on supply staff represents best value for money.

Unfortunately, a significant number of local authority schools fall foul of aggressive supply agency tactics which exploit the vulnerabilities of schools and exacerbate the recruitment challenges in schools to maximise their profits. Your school is not immune to this.

Schools are charged up to 40% commission fee, which goes direct to the agency when they engage a supply teacher. Some schools report transfer fees in excess of £10,000.

The lack of access to occupational pension provision is also preventing many supply teachers from making prudent financial decisions for their future. In doing so, there is increased risk of reliance on the welfare system in later life.

As teachers are on the front line of caring for vulnerable children and children of other key workers, it is time that a broken labour market, that is letting teachers down and failing our children, is fixed.

Whatever emerges from the coronavirus crisis, it must bring such practices to an end and ensure that all teachers, including supply teachers, are properly valued and recognised for the vitally important work they do on behalf of children, young people and the public.

The NASUWT would request that the school considers how it could establish the direct employment of supply teachers in order to effectively better and more appropriately manage the demand for supply teachers, in order to deliver better value when procuring supply teachers and secure improvements to supply teachers' pay and other entitlements at work.

The NASUWT very much looks forward to hearing from you on this issue.

Yours sincerely



Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/la-and-school-expenditure-2018-to-2019-financial-year>.