

COVER

The NASUWT is concerned that too many schools now are operating outside the agreed procedures for cover for absence of staff.

The contractual position – limits on cover

TNC 2011/8 the Workload Agreement can be found at www.nasuwt.org.uk/nicover and defines cover as, '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.'

The NASUWT is aware that some schools are describing cover as 'supervision' and therefore claiming it is outside of the teaching limits. However, TNC 2011/8 defines supervision as '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'.

Asking teachers to supervise on a weekly basis is **not** an exceptional circumstance. An example of an exceptional circumstance would be if teachers were absent due to extreme weather circumstances and colleagues had to supervise pupils until they could be collected by their parents.

The NASUWT is aware of the practice in many schools where teachers teach below the limit to allow a rota cover system to operate within the school. This type of rota arrangement ensures that cover can be disturbed fairly and within everyone's teaching limit.

When you can be asked to cover (Teachers' (Terms and Conditions of Employment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1988)

In schools of 222 or more pupils:

- when a colleague is absent for one or two days (subject to the maximum limit of 23.5 or 25 hours).
- for a primary 1, 2 or nursery colleague at any time (subject to the maximum limit of 25 hours).
- if it was not known that the absence would exceed 2 days - teachers can cover on the **first and second day only** (other than for primary 1, 2 or nursery colleagues).

Teachers cannot be asked to cover at all (or supervise) when it was known and agreed in advance that an absence would exceed 2 days (other than for primary 1, 2 or nursery colleagues)

Teachers in schools of **less than 222** pupils, nursery (in primary school), primary 1 and primary 2 teachers are not required to provide such cover.

If your school is not working within the contractual provisions on cover and/or you feel that there is too much cover in your school please contact the NASUWT Centre immediately for further advice.

