

Shellybanks ETNS Staff Absence Procedure

Teaching and admin staff may be absent from school for a variety of reasons. Teachers and staff may apply to the Board of Management (BOM) for the following types of Leave of Absence. These include: career breaks, teacher exchange, secondment, study leave, parental leave, unpaid leave, job-sharing, career's leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, adoptive leave, force majeure etc. Often these are planned and have been pre-approved by the Board of Management. Teachers are also entitled to take EPV (Extra personal vacation) days. These are days that can be taken in lieu of attendance at a summer course.

In the interest of the Educational welfare of the pupils and stability of the school team the BOM has implemented these procedures and regularly reviews them, to promote understanding among all staff and to ensure consistency in interpretation and implementation of the various Circulars and statutory instruments which govern the granting of and entitlement to each leave. The educational welfare of the pupils will at all times take precedence in the case of consideration of applications.

Unplanned absences mainly relate to sickness or force majeure. For some absences the Department of Education and Skills (DES) sanction a substitute to cover. For many other absences, the DES do not provide substitute cover.

In the case where a substitute teacher is allowed for and can be secured, this is arranged in advance where possible. However, given that this is a day-to-day arrangement, even if it has been pre-arranged, there is no certainty that the substitute teacher will still be available on that day.

In the case where a substitute teacher is not sanctioned, the DES suggests that schools to split the class into different classes and provide them with a work pack.

Short Term Absences:

In the event that a class teacher is absent and there is not substitute cover, the school has an agreed set of procedures to deal with this:

1. SET (Special Education Teachers) teachers are assigned to different classes on these days to help organise the children.
2. The class teachers always have a 'Split Pack ready'. This includes three days of work ready and available for the children, a class list, collection arrangements,

medical/allergy information and a suggested 'split list'. These packs are reviewed regularly.

3. The 'Split list' is used by the SET teacher to divide the class between the other classrooms.
4. The children are brought into their room, the roll is taken, work packs are distributed and children are escorted to their rooms for the day.
5. All class teachers are encouraged to include these children in their class routines where possible eg. During art and PE lessons.
6. The SET teachers collect the children at the end of the day again, return to their classroom and bring them to the yard for pick up.

In the event that substitute teacher is available for more than one day's cover:

1. The substitute teacher meets with the partner class teacher and goes through the weekly plan. These plans are prepared in advance.
2. The substitute teacher is shown how to log into online subscriptions, online teaching resources, classroom timetables, supervision timetables etc. They meet with the partner teacher at the end of each day to recap and feedback what material was covered. Management regularly check in with substitute teachers and the children throughout the week.
3. At the end of the week, the substitute teacher writes a summary of all of the work covered and issues that may have arisen. This is left for the class teacher when they return.

Long term absences:

The nature of the long-term absence determines whether or not the school is in a position to secure a substitute teacher. For example, if a teacher is on maternity leave or career break, the school can recruit a substitute teacher for the duration of this leave. If a teacher is on sick leave which is being re-assessed in a regular way, the school can only recruit a sub on the basis of the doctor's certifications.

The uncertainty around these absences make it difficult to secure a substitute teacher as the school is not in a position to guarantee hours because we simply don't know for certainty the length of the absence.

In the event that a substitute teacher is secured for long term absences:

1. For planned absences such as a maternity leave- there is a very detailed handover to the substitute teacher. This teacher meets with the teacher going on leave to go through curriculum planning, needs within the class, upcoming events, ongoing projects etc. This substitute teacher then takes on all class teacher responsibilities for the duration of the leave. All new staff are assigned to work with a 'partner teacher', who is a more senior member of staff and acts as a mentor for their first year in school.
2. For substitute teachers who do not have the opportunity to meet the original class teacher, they work closely with the 'partner teacher' and the SET teacher (where necessary) to get a good understanding of the needs within the class. The substitute teacher plans with the 'support teacher' weekly. Both teachers work together to ensure that all of the material outlined in the curriculum termly plans are covered. These meetings take place before and after school.

Consistency for the classes is the most important priority for the school. Classes where teachers are on long term absences, are prioritised when limited substitute teachers are available.

Issues that can arise that impacts our ability to ensure we can implement these procedures:

- *Nationwide substitute crisis-* inability to secure a substitute teacher, even when one has been sanctioned by the DES.
- *No substitute teachers sanctioned by the DES for many absences* eg. EPV Days, Training days, self-certified sickness, attending a funeral etc
- *More than one staff member being absent.* For example, if one staff has been sanctioned leave to attend a course and another class teacher is sick on the same day. Two classes cannot be split, for health and safety reasons. Substitute teachers are not sanctioned for either of these absences. As a school we need to look at the SET team and if there is a possibility of SET teachers sharing the teaching duties for the day. However, this has a detrimental effect of the work of the SET team and is avoided if at all possible. When SET timetables are affected, in-class support teaching, small group teaching, literacy groups and one-to-one withdrawal are all affected. This has an impact on everyone in the school. This is very difficult to balance. Therefore, when days like these arise, where more than one staff member is absent, we look at classes which have been disrupted recently and try to be fair to all children.

- *Substitute teachers who are not Garda vetted-* very strict vetting procedures are now in place. Unless a substitute teacher's vetting is up-to-date and registered with the teaching council, they cannot be employed for substitute teaching.
- *Illness within the school-* illnesses such as tummy bugs, colds, chest infections etc are rampant in schools, particularly in younger classes during the winter months. Due to the interactive nature of teaching, teachers are often more susceptible to contracting coughs/colds/bugs etc from the children in school. We encourage parents not to send children to school if they are sick. We also encourage good hand hygiene practices to try and curb the spread of infection for both the children and staff.

SNA Absences:

Short term SNA absences are dealt with on a case by case basis, depending on the needs of the child/children the SNA is working with. For example, if a child has a medical condition and very specific training is needed to work with that child, one of the other SNAs who is appropriately trained will work with this child. This will mean changes to the timetables of the other children with SNA access. In this event, we shuffle SET support timetable to cover as many changes as possible.

In the event of long term absences that have been pre-planned and we are in a position to find a suitable substitute SNA, parents may need to be contacted to inform them of the upcoming changes.

In the event that both SNAs are absent on a given day and a child has a specific medical illness/care need that cannot be adequately catered for by the class teacher/SET teacher, a parent/guardian may need to be available to perform these duties. Parents will be given as much notice of this as possible.

Secretary Absences:

In the event of short-term absences for the secretary, currently the Principal takes on the crucial day-to-day admin duties of the secretary eg. checking doors, signing children in/out, collecting the post, taking deliveries, answering the phone (where possible). *Emails, letters, payments and all other non-urgent issues will be dealt with upon the return of the secretary.*

In the event of a long-term planned absence, a replacement secretary will be employed, where possible.

Principal Absences:

The Principal may be absent from the school for a variety of reasons- personal leave eg. illness, attending a course, various meetings, recruitment, training, BOM business etc. These may be for the full day or for part of the day,

In the absence of the Principal, the Deputy Principal, assumes the Principal's responsibility. However, for the majority of short-term absences, the Deputy Principal is still continuing with their classroom teaching duties. All non-urgent queries and issues will be dealt once the Principal returns.

In the event of a long-term absence, the Deputy Principal will be released from their classroom duties, once a suitable substitute has been found. They will take on the full-time duties of the Principal until their return.

All staff voluntarily take on additional duties when teachers are on leave. These include but are not limited to:

- Additional supervision
- Supporting the Learn Together curriculum
- Additional planning time with the substitute teacher
- Additional support for the teaching of Gaeilge
- Help with running school initiatives eg. Green school, student council, Creative schools, active schools, assembly preparation, co-ordinating GAA/Hockey etc etc

Communication with parents:

- **When staff are going to be on planned leave eg. Attending a course, EPV day etc, parents will be informed the day before, by their class teacher.** Parents can use their own judgement as to whether this information will be helpful for their child or not.
- Where teachers are absent for more than a few days, parents will be emailed to inform them of the plans for the class. We will inform parents if there will be a substitute teacher or if the class will continue to be split.

- When staff are going to be on long-term planned absence eg. Maternity leave, parents will be informed in advance. Information about the teacher who will take over will be shared with parents as soon as arrangements have been secured.
- Staff will not be responsive parent emails/communication during a leave of absence.