

National Assembly for Wales
Public Accounts Committee

Covering Teachers' Absence

May 2014



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

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The Public Accounts Committee was established on 22 June 2011.

Powers

The Committee's powers are set out in the National Assembly for Wales' Standing Orders, with its specific functions of the Committee as set out in Standing Order 18 (available at www.assemblywales.org). In particular, the Committee may consider reports prepared by the Auditor General for Wales on the accounts of the Welsh Government and other public bodies, and on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which resources were employed in the discharge of public functions.

Current Committee membership



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Welsh Conservatives
Clwyd West



William Graham
Welsh Conservatives
South Wales East



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Jenny Rathbone
Welsh Labour
Cardiff Central



Aled Roberts
Welsh Liberal Democrats
North Wales

The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry:



Jocelyn Davies
South Wales East
Plaid Cymru



Mohammad Asghar (Oscar)
Welsh Conservatives
South Wales East

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Chair's foreword

The need for appropriate and effective cover in the classroom when teachers are absent is essential to ensure that pupils receive the best education possible. It is inevitable that not all lessons will be covered by the assigned teacher either as a result of planned or unplanned absences, but this should not mean an inevitable reduction in the quality of education the children of Wales receive.

In considering the Wales Audit Office report, the Committee was surprised by the lack of monitoring that has taken place for covered lessons. That lessons are being covered with no evaluation of the impact on the education of the pupils is a matter of concern for the Committee. To this end we welcome the acknowledgement from the Welsh Government of this issue, and the steps they are undertaking to rectify this.

In addition to a lack of monitoring of covered lessons, the Committee found that there was a lack of support available for teachers; firstly in the form of continuing professional development for supply teachers and secondly in the support for headteachers in managing teachers absence.

The Committee has made a number of recommendations in this report aimed at addressing these issues. In recognising the commitments made by the Welsh Government to act in this area, the Committee will return to this topic and we are recommending that we receive an update from the Welsh Government in January 2015.

The Committee's Recommendations

The Committee's recommendations to the Welsh Government are listed below, in the order that they appear in this Report. Please refer to the relevant pages of the report to see the supporting evidence and conclusions:

Recommendation 1. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government captures and disseminates relevant and reliable data on teachers' absence from the classroom to enable more robust monitoring of occurrences of, and the reasons for, absence. (Page 12)

Recommendation 2. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government conducts an evaluation of the effectiveness of training delivery and reports back to the Committee by January 2015. This evaluation should include the impact of different forms of training delivery on teacher absences from the classroom. (Page 13)

Recommendation 3. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government amend regulations to make it a requirement for at least one member of each governing body to be designated to lead on HR matters and that such members are suitably trained to fulfil this role. (Page 15)

Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government reviews the training (e.g through the National Professional Qualification for Headship/first year mentoring) provided to headteachers to ensure that there is a greater emphasis on managing classroom absences. This focus on managing absence should also be incorporated into the Continuing Professional Development for headteachers. (Page 16)

Recommendation 5. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government, in collaboration with local authorities, ensures that where HR services are procured by schools from local authorities, service level agreements are strengthened to ensure that headteachers and governors receive sufficient HR support, as well as appropriate training and guidance, to enable HR matters related to supply staff to be managed appropriately. (Page 18)

Recommendation 6. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government:

- a) outlines how it expects Estyn to inspect and report on cover arrangements;
- b) alters the guidance for Estyn inspections by September 2014 to explicitly require inspectors to examine cover arrangements;
- c) provides the Committee with clear evidence that this approach is working and any actions they intend to take to address any shortcomings in this approach by September 2015.

We request that an update on the details of the changes to guidance and early indications of how the revised approach is working be provided to the Committee by January 2015. (Page 22)

Recommendation 7. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government publishes a timetable for disseminating guidance on the effective management of cover and a plan for evaluating this guidance. The Committee would expect an update on this work by January 2015. (Page 23)

Recommendation 8. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government evaluates its policies; such as the development of different forms of training and Continuing Professional Development that rely less on teachers being absent from the classroom and the demands of the regional consortia on schools, and considers the impact these have had on cover requirements. We request that the outcome of the evaluation be reported to the Committee by January 2015. (Page 25)

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government takes steps to ensure that School and Local Authority Continuing Professional Development be available to supply teachers, and ensures it develops an effective mechanism for communicating these opportunities to supply teachers. (Page 27)

Recommendation 10. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with representatives from WLGA, Supply Agencies and schools in developing the specification for the retendering of the Framework contract for school supply staff, to include a requirement for supply staff to have access to Continuing Professional Development and to determine arrangements to recover from the supply agencies any additional costs for Continuing Professional Development for supply staff. (Page 27)

Recommendation 11. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government includes the costs and take up of the Masters in Educational Practice in its evaluation of the programme. (Page 30)

Recommendation 12. We also recommend that an evaluation of the mentor element of the Masters in Educational Practice programme is undertaken before the end of 2014 to address concerns that it may not be delivering value for money. The evaluation should include consideration of the utilisation of retired teachers as mentors and the impact of the extraction of experienced teachers from the classrooms to be engaged as mentors. (Page 30)

Recommendation 13. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government collects further information on the extent and cost of covering teachers' absence. We recommend that the Welsh Government publishes a timetable and plan for gathering this information and provides detail on how value for money will be monitored and evaluated. (Page 32)

Recommendation 14. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government's proposed guidance clearly addresses the identified safeguarding issues for temporary staff and that the Welsh Government develops an effective mechanism to check that the guidance is being followed. The Committee should be provided with an update on this by January 2015. (Page 33)

1. Introduction

1. The Auditor General for Wales (Auditor General) published his report '*Covering Teachers' Absence*' on 17 September 2013. The report considers whether learners, schools and the public purse are well served by arrangements to cover teachers' absence.¹

2. The arrangements for covering teachers' absence were examined by the Auditor General in partnership with Estyn – HM Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales.² The Auditor General's report concludes that arrangements for covering teachers' absence in Wales are not sufficiently well managed to support learners' progress or provide the best use of resources.

3. The report found that:

- Expenditure on supply cover is rising and learner progress is being hampered by an increasing number of lessons being covered;
- Cover arrangements are not managed well enough to ensure that learners make good progress and are safeguarded;
- The Welsh Government and local authorities do not take sufficient account of the impact of teachers' absence in their measures to help schools achieve improved outcomes for learners;
- The resources spent on supply cover are not always managed effectively.³

4. The Committee received a briefing on this report from the Auditor General, officials from the Wales Audit Office and Estyn at its meeting on 15 October 2013, and agreed to undertake a short inquiry into the findings. The Committee took evidence from the Welsh Government on 21 January 2014, and considered further evidence submitted by the Auditor General, the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). The evidence submitted by the Welsh Government included its response to the recommendations made by the Auditor General.⁴ The Welsh Government accepted the Auditor

¹ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers' Absence](#), September 2013

² Estyn, [The Impact of Teachers Absence](#), September 2013

³ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers' Absence](#), September 2013, (Summary)

⁴ Written Response, PAC(4)-02-14 (paper 1), 21 January 2014

General's recommendations in full, but notes that responsibility for some key actions also lie with others, including local authorities and consortia, schools and supply agencies.⁵

5. This report outlines the findings of the Committee's work and makes a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government which can be found in this report.

⁵ Written Evidence, PAC(4)-02-14 (Paper 1), 21 January 2014

2.Reducing Teachers' Absence

6. An important part of managing teachers' absence and the subsequent cover requirements is to consider whether it is possible to reduce, both planned and unplanned, teachers' absences. This chapter explores a number of themes around reducing teachers' absence.

Trends in teachers' absence

7. The Auditor General's report found that the number of lessons being covered has been increasing. It estimates that there has been almost a 10% increase in the number of classes covered by external supply teachers (excluding any planned internal cover arrangements that enable teachers to have planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time) from 2008-09 to 2011-12.⁶ The report estimates that pupils are likely to have just under 10% of lessons not led by their permanent teacher.⁷

8. The report also found that there was insufficient monitoring of teachers' absence by schools and local authorities.⁸ The Committee was surprised that there was so little attention paid to the level of classroom absence and the impact on learners and is concerned that the lack of monitoring makes it difficult to understand the reasons why cover is required, and therefore whether value for money is being achieved.

9. The Committee questioned the Director General for Education and Skills (Director General) about why absence levels are so high. He told the Committee that:

“The first thing is that there is inevitability about the fact that we will have a requirement for supply teachers. The workload agreement and the ‘rarely cover’ provisions, mean that, even on a day-to-day basis, just through Welsh Government interventions, we would expect some supply cover to be needed. Of course, you will always get sickness absence within, but that is not to say that we are not looking at some of the findings around the actual levels of sickness absence, particularly how it was monitored and how effective our control

⁶ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers' Absence](#), September 2013, paragraph 1.10

⁷ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers' Absence](#), September 2013, paragraph 1.11

⁸ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers' Absence](#), September 2013, paragraph 1.14

of it is. If you drill down to the bit that is almost out of our control but which we should be looking at, which is the actual sickness element, it is higher than England.”⁹

10. In follow up written correspondence, the Welsh Government accepted the finding of the Auditor General’s report that there is no routine monitoring for teachers absence, and stated that:

“We are therefore currently unable to confirm if there is a pattern of causes in relation to sickness absence taken by teachers. We will, however, raise this issue in our discussions with the WLGA to ask them to work with local authorities to establish a consistent system for the collection of this data which would allow a more detailed analysis of all absences.”¹⁰

11. While the Committee welcomes the Welsh Government undertaking discussions with the WLGA about data collection, we are not convinced this is sufficient and would like to see more urgent action as soon as possible. Effective data collection on absences is essential to ensure that appropriate solutions can be developed and put in place. Without this, it is difficult to establish whether value for money is being achieved for the significant amount invested in covering teachers’ absence.

12. The Director General explained to the Committee that the Welsh Government will be publishing guidance for schools on reducing teachers’ absence from the classroom; and intends to include the need to develop a cover policy when they revise the regulations for school development plans. He outlined that there will be a requirement for school absences to be reported by Headteachers to Governors.¹¹

13. The Committee broadly welcomes this new reporting requirement, but want further clarity on whether this will involve reporting on the type of cover used e.g. supply teacher or internal resources to be able to evaluate the value for money aspects.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government captures and disseminates relevant and reliable data on teachers’ absence from the classroom to enable more robust monitoring of occurrences of, and the reasons for, absence.

⁹ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 12

¹⁰ PAC(4)-06-17(ptn 2), 18 February 2014

¹¹ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 20

14. The Group Director for School Standards and Workforce Group (Group Director) noted that reasons for absence include not just sickness but also training and continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers. He explained that there were three levels which needed to be considered for training:

“It really is important to look at it at those three levels, namely the perspective of Welsh Government, the perspective of the local authorities and the consortia, and then within schools, so that we look at all the possible methods of carrying out professional development and that we learn from the best methods that are most effective, and then actually carry out an assessment. Therefore, at each level, we are asking people to carry out an assessment. So, for the Welsh Government, from this point onwards—in fact, it is already in operation—we are asking all programme developers and leaders to put in that they have assessed the form of delivery and that they have looked at it in terms of the cost benefits.”¹²

15. The concept of introducing an assessment to find the most appropriate method of delivery for training is a good starting point to manage teachers’ absence in this area. However, the Committee is concerned that this has the potential to become a ‘tick box exercise’ and will not bring about the required changes. In order for this to be an effective exercise, the Committee believes that the Welsh Government must build in an evaluation of the impact of these assessments.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government conducts an evaluation of the effectiveness of training delivery and reports back to the Committee by January 2015. This evaluation should include the impact of different forms of training delivery on teacher absences from the classroom.

Improving Sickness Absence Management

16. The Auditor General’s report found that teachers’ sickness absence levels were substantially higher in Wales than in England and suggested that there is scope to reduce teachers’ sickness absence in Wales. The report states that:

“By reducing the level of sickness absence in Wales to that in England, we estimate that Welsh schools could reduce the

¹² RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 17

number of days requiring cover by around 60,000, saving over £9 million a year in cover costs.”¹³

17. The Director General told the Committee that the total number of days of sickness absence has decreased by 25,000 in the last year. However, he stressed that the Welsh Government is concerned that schools need to manage sickness absence better to reduce variation between councils and between Wales and England.¹⁴

18. The Committee explored with the Welsh Government what action could be taken to address the higher average number of sick days for teachers in Wales than England. The Director General told the Committee that:

“...it is possible to bring down sickness absence through careful management, and we will be looking to share some of the better practice from areas such as Ceredigion with some of the local authorities where there is poorer provision.”¹⁵

19. The Committee welcomes this assurance that best practice will be shared between Local Authorities, particularly given the stark differences between councils detailed in the Auditor General’s report.¹⁶

20. The Committee asked the Welsh Government about whether they intended to publish data on sickness absence at a local authority level. The Director General told the Committee that:

“I think that that would be the aim, and not just at local authority level. ..., but the experience that the department has had over the past couple of years is that when we have begun the stocktakes, where we went in and looked at the data of various schools, it became fairly apparent that most individual schools were unaware of their performance vis-à-vis competing schools.

“...However, what we are seeing is that local authorities will now be scrutinised far more strictly on how their performance is against competing local authorities.”¹⁷

¹³ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers’ Absence](#), September 2013, paragraph 1.18

¹⁴ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 90

¹⁵ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 13

¹⁶ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers’ Absence](#), September 2013, page 62, figure

21. The Committee welcomes the commitment to release data on sickness absence at a school level, which will allow for greater scrutiny and benchmarking of performance. The Committee would expect as much data as possible to be published, although we do acknowledge there may be some issues around publishing data for small schools. This will allow both parents and governors to hold the school to account for its performance and hopefully drive up standards.

22. The Committee was told that the Welsh Government will be consulting on regulations for school governors in 2014 including the requirement to scrutinise teachers' absence. We were concerned that this reporting was not currently happening routinely in all schools. The Director General told the Committee that this was not happening as a matter of course because:

“One element is that headteachers would tend to react to their own experiences. The other element is that they would tend to react to the regulatory framework and what they are expected to do. The strength of understanding of what is good practice, probably, has not been established fully enough across all headteachers. The best headteachers would report to their governors as a matter of course, although I am sure that we could meet a significant number of governors who have not seen a report.”¹⁸

23. As stated earlier in this report, the Committee welcomes the intention to include the requirement for governors to receive teachers' absence information in guidance. However, we do have some concerns about whether there is sufficient support for governors to carry out this function. In order to effectively scrutinise school absences, there will be a need for governors to be adequately trained in identifying key factors in absences/performance. The Committee believes this would be best achieved via the inclusion of a governor on each body who has some expertise in HR.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government amend regulations to make it a requirement for at least one member of each governing body to be designated to lead on HR matters and that such members are suitably trained to fulfil this role.

¹⁷ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 42-43

¹⁸ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 20

24. Given the importance of the role of the Head teacher in managing sickness absence, the Committee questioned whether the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) included training on managing absence. The Deputy Director for Practitioner Standards and Professional Development (Deputy Director) told the Committee that:

“Successful award of the NPQH is dependent on providing evidence of meeting the leadership standards. The leadership standards include a section on managing the school, which includes a responsibility for managing staff. The standards do not go down to the level of detail of actually referring specifically to managing absence, but certainly include managing staff to achieve the aims and priorities of the school.”¹⁹

25. Given the importance of managing sickness absence in schools, and the potential savings that could be achieved by managing sickness levels better, the Committee believes that this should be a specific element of the NPQH. We welcome the undertaking by the Director General to look at this option and also to consider the support given to Head Teachers more generally on managing absences as part of their on-going training and development.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government reviews the training (e.g through the National Professional Qualification for Headship/first year mentoring) provided to headteachers to ensure that there is a greater emphasis on managing classroom absences. This focus on managing absence should also be incorporated into the Continuing Professional Development for headteachers.

Improving Human Resources support to schools

26. Most schools in Wales purchase human resources support from their local authority through a service level agreement (SLA).²⁰ The Auditor General’s report identified a range of problematic HR issues within schools including management of long-term absence, employment status of individuals working in school, the employment of friends and family and the agency workers’ regulations as they apply to teachers. The report also found that the schools they visited valued having access to human resource officers who were familiar with the teachers terms and conditions.

¹⁹ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 52

²⁰ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers’ Absence](#), September 2013, Paragraph 3.17

27. The Auditor General report's included a case study from Newport Council where effective HR support, through the introduction of an attendance policy and framework for action, had a positive impact on absence levels. While this is an example of good HR support, the Committee expressed concerns that possible weaknesses in the wider local authority HR support could impact on a school's ability to manage attendance effectively. In response to the Committee concerns, the Group Director said:

"There has been, in brief, a history whereby authorities have tended to centralise their HR support. So, the experts that they have are really experts very often on local government terms and conditions. Teachers' terms and conditions are very different. Therefore, the advice given to headteachers, we are told, has been much worse in some cases than in others. Therefore, the need for uniform advice by people that really understand teachers' terms and conditions has been made clear from the Robert Hill report. As an ex-headteacher and ex-director of education, I would say that it is very important to have that."²¹

28. Following the Committee's evidence session, the Auditor General wrote to the Committee and suggested that the service level agreements currently in place for HR services may be insufficient in some cases to provide the necessary support that schools need.²²

29. The Committee notes with particular concern, the findings in the Auditor General's report that not all schools understand the full impact of the Agency Workers Regulations 2010. As a result of these regulations, temporary staff may gain additional employment rights after twelve weeks working for the same employer. This is of particular concern when covering sickness absences which are unpredictable in length.

30. The Committee believes that there should be a strengthening of the arrangements for HR support via the SLAs to make sure that schools understand the Agency Workers Regulations 2010. Furthermore, we would like to see earlier contact by schools with their HR support when very short-term supply staff may have their placement

²¹ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 26

²² PAC (4)-06-14 (paper 3), 18 February 2014

extended beyond 12 weeks, as part of a continuous conversation about covering absences.

31. Robert Hill's Report on *the Future Delivery of Education Service in Wales*²³ recommended strengthening HR support in the improvement consortia, which was a recommendation supported by Welsh Government officials. However, it is not clear to us why these HR issues and those identified in the Auditor General's report could not be dealt with by generic HR specialists with appropriate knowledge of terms and conditions within the education sector.

32. The provision of appropriate HR is a matter of concern for the Committee. Although we heard little evidence to convince us about the need for specialist HR advisers for schools, we would expect the generic support to be appropriate and fit for purpose. This is something on which we would expect to see a strong lead from the Welsh Government, to ensure that the maximum value for money is achieved through the generic HR support model currently in operation.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government, in collaboration with local authorities, ensures that where HR services are procured by schools from local authorities, service level agreements are strengthened to ensure that headteachers and governors receive sufficient HR support, as well as appropriate training and guidance, to enable HR matters related to supply staff to be managed appropriately.

²³ Robert Hill - [The Future Delivery of Education Service in Wales](#), June 2013

3.Reducing the Impact of Teachers’ Absence on Learners

33. The potential impact on learners’ education of having lessons covered is a matter of concern for the Committee. It is vital that all possible steps to reduce this impact are taken, and this chapter explores some of these options.

Encouraging school leaders to take greater account of the impact of covered lessons on learners’ progress

34. The Estyn report on *The Impact of Teachers Absence* found that:

“Overall, in both primary and secondary schools, when the usual class teacher is absent, pupils make less progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding and behaviour in class is worse.”²⁴

35. The Auditor General concluded in his report that:

“The Welsh Government and local authorities do not take sufficient account of the impact of teachers’ absence in their measures to help schools achieve improved outcomes for learners.”²⁵

36. The findings of both reports suggest that the Welsh Government, local authorities and schools have not routinely assessed the impact of cover on learners. This was acknowledged by the Director General who told us that:

“We have not monitored it closely enough. I think that our suspicion was that this was not being monitored effectively and we have been proved right. We still have the issue—and this is the challenge for Welsh Government, as policy makers working with delivery partners, whom we cannot forget in this—of too much variability not just in how local authorities treat the effectiveness of cover, but how schools treat it. In some areas, the heads will take a very active role, and in some it will be left to cover supervisors. We have situations where, in some schools, for example, if a teacher is away for a day, they might

²⁴ Estyn, [The Impact of Teachers Absence](#), September 2013, page 7, paragraph 18

²⁵ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers’ Absence](#), September 2013, Page 10

bring in a high-level teaching assistant, and in others schools we have a position where it might be 10 days where the HLTA might be covering. So, we do not have that granularity, I suppose.”²⁶

37. The Committee is very concerned that the impact of cover on learners progress has not been monitored as a matter of course. Given that a significant percentage of lessons are covered, it is essential that policy makers and those implementing the policy are aware of the impact this is having on pupils in order to measure its effectiveness.

38. In considering whether Head Teachers understand the impact of cover on learners the Director General told the Committee that:

“I think that the best headteachers do. The headteachers who are not among the best do not. As in every field, some people will understand more quickly than others. At the end of the day, much of the improvement that we expect from schools comes from the headteacher, and, therefore, we have to ensure, once again, that there is some sort of scrutiny of how they are looking at these issues within their schools, but also that we look at how we try to help those headteachers to understand that this is important and that these are the types of things that they should be looking at. Therefore, one of the things that we would hope will come out of changing the framework and the way that Estyn goes in to inspect schools is that headteachers and governors will look in much greater detail at how dealing with absence works in schools.”²⁷

39. The Director General also told the Committee that information on managing cover will be part of a suite of indicators which they intend to produce and make available to Governors and parents. He explained that he was keen to “make sure that parents have a significant role, as well as the governors, in holding schools to account for their performance.”²⁸

40. The Director General told the Committee that the Welsh Government:

²⁶ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 39

²⁷ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 64

²⁸ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 49

“...are working with Estyn at the moment to ensure that its inspection framework actually does peer into how effective the use of cover by supply teachers is.”

41. The Welsh Government informed the Committee that these changes would be implemented in September 2015, after changes to the inspection framework. The Committee were also told that there was an intention to conduct a thematic review, on the changes to the inspection guidelines in 2016-17. The Group Director informed the Committee that:

“We have given it two years to embed in there. This will pull everything together in one source”

42. Following the evidence session, the Committee sought advice from the Auditor General about whether changes needed to be made to the inspection framework, prior to cover becoming an integral part of Estyn inspections, as we were concerned about the length of time for this change to be introduced. The Auditor General found that:

“The current inspection framework for schools does not rule out consideration of cover arrangements but it does not specifically refer to them. Therefore, to ensure that staff absence and cover arrangements are given more specific consideration, Estyn would not need to change its inspection framework; it would only need to amend the guidance.”

43. The Committee welcomes the intention that Estyn inspections give a greater focus to cover arrangements. We believe this will encourage Head Teachers and Governors to pay greater attention to the efficiency and effectiveness of cover arrangements. Furthermore, we welcome the undertaking to prepare and publish more information on managing cover. This will allow for greater scrutiny of the arrangements, and hopefully, better provision for learners.

44. The Committee is, however, concerned about how this will work in practice and ensuring that the changes result in the desired outcomes. We would like to see changes to guidance made in time for September 2014, with a review undertaken, and any subsequent changes made, by September 2015. This would ensure that the Government could satisfy themselves about the effectiveness of arrangements for supply as soon as possible. The Committee will be seeking an update on progress on this in due course.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government:

a) outlines how it expects Estyn to inspect and report on cover arrangements;

b) alters the guidance for Estyn inspections by September 2014 to explicitly require inspectors to examine cover arrangements;

c) provides the Committee with clear evidence that this approach is working and any actions they intend to take to address any shortcomings in this approach by September 2015.

We request that an update on the details of the changes to guidance and early indications of how the revised approach is working be provided to the Committee by January 2015.

Managing cover better to minimise its impact on learners

45. In addition to schools needing to have a better general understanding of the impact of cover on learners' progress, the Auditor General found that schools could do more to manage cover more effectively, and minimise its impact. The report found that schools rarely evaluated the effectiveness of cover supervisors and High Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) posts in terms of their impact on learners. It also found that Local Authorities did not evaluate the effectiveness of the cover support it provided.

46. In their written evidence, the WLGA accepts that effective management of cover is crucial in minimising impact and states that:

“...the WLGA is seeking to identify good practice within Wales with regards to covering teacher absence, including strategies to manage the use of supply teachers from private sector agencies.”²⁹

47. The Welsh Government undertook in its written response to the Committee to work with partners to disseminate guidance for schools, local authorities and consortia on the effective management of cover, including model policies.³⁰

48. Again, the Committee welcomes the undertakings to disseminate guidance and good practice in this area, but is concerned about how effective this will be. It is essential that the effectiveness of cover is

²⁹ Written Evidence, PAC(4)-02-14 (Paper 3), 21 January 2014

³⁰ Written Evidence, PAC(4)-02-14 (Paper 1), 21 January 2014

monitored to ensure that value for money is achieved, and the Committee will return to this in the future.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government publishes a timetable for disseminating guidance on the effective management of cover and a plan for evaluating this guidance. The Committee would expect an update on this work by January 2015.

The impact of cover for absence relating to Welsh Government policies and initiatives

49. A significant amount of classroom absence, and therefore the need for cover, is as a result of Welsh Government policies and initiatives. The Auditor General found that:

“One reason for teacher absence from the classroom (and a driver of the need for cover) is to enable teacher participation in events linked to government policies and initiatives. The Welsh Government pays grants for supply cover to encourage schools to release teachers to attend relevant training, meetings and conferences, and for non-teaching time. Fourteen local authorities provided information about how much expenditure on cover was reimbursed from grants. The information suggests that about one sixth of expenditure on cover is re-imbursed by Welsh Government Grants.”³¹

50. In their written evidence, the Welsh Government acknowledged these issues and said it would review the extent to which its policies create cover demands and consider the implications for cover in guidance on future grant schemes.³² When the Committee questioned the Welsh Government on this further, the Director General said:

“Obviously, we do not apologise for increasing considerably the amount of training that we are funding through the various grants and programmes, but we realise that it is putting pressure on schools and causing unnecessary absence. There is better planning. As I have said, we now also have a portfolio across the department, so, when a new or existing grant is going out, we need to have shown that we have looked at the sort of impact that that will have. So, for example, on the pupil

³¹ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers' Absence](#), September 2013, page 34, paragraph 3.3

³² Written Evidence, PAC(4)-02-14 (Paper 2), 21 January 2014

deprivation grant, and on the schools effectiveness grant, we are introducing criteria retrospectively to try to support the minimisation of teachers being away.”³³

51. The Director General informed the Committee that consideration was being given to developing training mechanisms that do not take teachers out of the classrooms, such as school-to-school support and peer Support. The Group Director told the Committee that:

“The development of those alternatives and the use of twilight sessions, as well as the closure days within schools, are important. Elements of current Welsh Government programmes use those alternative methods, one of which is the national support programme for the literacy and numeracy framework, which involves a lot of in-school support within classrooms.”

“Another aspect that should not be underestimated is the impact of web-based learning in terms of exemplar materials from school to school. That involves film footage, interactive footage, webinar discussion groups, et cetera; they are very powerful tools in terms of moving teacher practice forward. We have certainly definitely seen that in terms of our work with 16-year-olds to improve mathematics teaching.”³⁴

52. Schools have a number of INSET days on which staff are expected to complete training or administrative tasks. The Committee questioned whether schools could manage the impact of the need for some cover through the more effective use of INSET days. The Deputy Director told the Committee that:

“...we asked Estyn to look at within the last year or so was how schools use their statutory INSET days. On the whole, it has provided quite a positive report about how schools were already using their INSET days, because I think that, anecdotally, we have occasionally received the opposite views. So, that was reassuring.”³⁵

53. In addition to the training requirements, concerns were also expressed that the development of regional education consortia has

³³ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 140

³⁴ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 140 -141

³⁵ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 144

been drawing on teaching resources and creating an additional need for cover.

54. The Committee welcomes the move by the Welsh Government to being less reliant on training that takes staff out of the classroom as this will reduce the need for cover for lessons. We would encourage the Government to explore all possible options such as twilight sessions and e-learning. In addition to this we would expect the Government to look at all their policies, such as the development of regional consortia, to consider the impact on cover requirements.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government evaluates its policies; such as the development of different forms of training and Continuing Professional Development that rely less on teachers being absent from the classroom and the demands of the regional consortia on schools, and considers the impact these have had on cover requirements. We request that the outcome of the evaluation be reported to the Committee by January 2015.

Improving the continuing professional development of supply teachers

55. As well as managing the need for cover, it is important to ensure those providing cover are able to access continuing professional development to ensure there is a minimal impact on learners in terms of quality of teaching.

56. The Auditor General reported that schools do not always provide supply teachers with sufficient support to enable them to do their jobs to the highest standard. He found that supply teachers rarely received meaningful feedback on performance and there are barriers to their participation in learning and professional development.³⁶

57. In written evidence, the WLGA agreed with the Auditor General's report findings that supply teachers should be well trained and that they should be included in the regular cycle of training in schools where they are covering planned or long absence.³⁷

58. It was unclear to the Committee as to why supply teachers should not have the opportunity to attend school's training events. The

³⁶ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers' Absence](#), September 2013, paragraph 2.15-2.24

³⁷ Written Evidence, PAC(4)-02-14 (Paper 3), 21 January 2014

Committee asked the Welsh Government about this, and the Deputy Director told us that:

“I do not think there is any reason why that should not happen. One of the difficulties that we have is actually making contact with supply teachers. Obviously, most teachers can be contacted through their school; it is a little harder to make contact with supply teachers. We discussed with the GTCW what level of access we could have to contact information for supply teachers that it holds on its register, and that would at least enable us to then start providing supply teachers with tailored information and perhaps invitations to particular events.”³⁸

59. The Committee is concerned about the barriers, identified in the Auditor General’s report, to supply teachers participating in training such as timing, cost and losing paid work. These need to be addressed if supply teachers are likely to take up the opportunity to attend training from schools.³⁹ The Committee is also concerned that there is no effective way for the Welsh Government to communicate directly with supply staff. It is essential, for initiatives in this area to work, that the message can be passed on to supply teachers.

60. The Director General told the Committee that

“One of the things that came out of the work of the Children and Young People Committee was that there were suspicions that the agencies in particular saw CPD as something that related only to safeguarding, health and safety and so forth.

“There is much more to do with CPD than those two subjects, and one of the discussions that we will have with the agencies next month is how we can improve that.”⁴⁰

61. The Committee welcomed the assurance from the Director General that, in addition to discussing this with the agencies, the Welsh Government and WLGA would be working to include more requirements for CPD in the re-tender for the national Framework contracts for supply teachers taking place in 2015.

³⁸ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 192

³⁹ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers’ Absence](#), September 2013, paragraph 3.7-3.8

⁴⁰ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 71

62. It was suggested by the Welsh Government that schools could have a role in raising standards by increasing their expectations of supply teachers and requesting higher standards of training and CPD for staff from supply agencies. The Deputy Director told the Committee that:

“Schools hold the key to this because they are the ones that commission the supply worker agencies to provide them with people. They are asking the local authorities to send them people from their pool. Through our guidance, we hope to encourage headteachers to raise their expectations and to become far more fussy about the quality of the practitioners who come into their school, and for them to take the line that anyone standing in front of their pupils is an important person who will have an impact on the quality of learning and the quality of learner outcomes. That starts to send a message back to the employers of those supply workers that they need to provide people who are equipped with the appropriate skills and training to provide the services required at schools.”

63. The Committee would like to see an improvement in access to continuing professional development for cover teachers. We believe this will help to address the concerns raised by the Director General that some covered lessons were more about *‘keeping a class quiet’* than anything else, as the cover teachers will be more engaged and this should improve quality of teaching. While the Committee agrees with the idea that schools should be demanding a better quality practitioner, we remain concerned that supply teachers do not have access to the appropriate training.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government takes steps to ensure that School and Local Authority Continuing Professional Development be available to supply teachers, and ensures it develops an effective mechanism for communicating these opportunities to supply teachers.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with representatives from WLGA, Supply Agencies and schools in developing the specification for the retendering of the Framework contract for school supply staff, to include a requirement for supply staff to have access to Continuing Professional Development and to determine arrangements to recover from the

supply agencies any additional costs for Continuing Professional Development for supply staff.

The effectiveness of arrangements for newly qualified teachers undertaking induction and the Masters in Educational Practice by the supply route

64. The Welsh Government introduced new arrangements in September 2012 to allow newly qualified teachers to complete their statutory induction while working as supply cover and to access the new Masters in Educational Practice (MEP).⁴¹

65. The Welsh Government reported to the Committee that 534 supply teachers have registered with the General Teachers Council Wales as undertaking their induction and 13 supply teachers are currently registered for the MEP.⁴²

66. The Committee questioned the Welsh Government on whether they had any expectations about the proportion of supply teachers registered as participating in statutory induction. The Deputy Director told the Committee that:

“It is a requirement on all registered teachers now to have undergone induction. In that sense, that has not changed. What we have done is to introduce a number of measures to improve access to induction for supply teachers. We have made it much easier for supply teachers to register short-term periods of employment as part of their induction period, whereas, previously, anything short of a term could not be counted. They can now count each session, which is a half day, towards their induction period. Therefore, over an extended period of time, they can achieve the necessary number of sessions to meet the induction requirement.”⁴³

67. However with regards to the changes to the induction process, the Auditor General found in his report that:

⁴¹ Welsh Government, [*Masters in Educational Practice*](#), September 2012

⁴² Written Evidence, PAC(4)-06-14 (Paper 2), Item 5, 18 February 2014

⁴³ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 128

“...most of the supply teachers that we spoke to in Autumn 2012 as part of this study were unaware of the changes despite a consultation process in Spring 2012.”⁴⁴

68. The Committee welcomes the changes to induction for supply teachers, which should result in more being able to complete their induction and access the support that comes with that. However, we would welcome a reassurance from the Welsh Government that this is now being effectively communicated to all newly qualified teachers including supply teachers.

69. The Deputy Director explained to the Committee that there would only be limited numbers of supply teachers undertaking the MEP because:

“... although supply teachers have the same access, in theory, to the Master’s programme as other teachers, they all have to meet the same eligibility criteria, and passing those eligibility criteria requires a minimum length of contract, and employment at the particular time of year when the Master’s programme starts. The length of contract stipulation is really to reflect the practice-based nature of the MEP programme, which requires extended contact with the same groups of pupils, which, of course, is a difficulty for some supply teachers.”⁴⁵

70. The MEP also has an impact on teachers’ absence as it requires experienced teachers to act as external mentors. This role requires teachers to be absent from their substantive role for periods of time and can create an additional need for supply cover.

71. The Committee raised concerns that these experienced teachers were being removed from the classroom to act as external mentors for the newly qualified teachers, but were not being used fully in this mentoring role. In addition to this, the Committee were concerned that recently retired teachers were being overlooked for mentoring roles in favour of experienced teachers who needed to be extracted from classroom roles, which could impact on the effectiveness of schools. When questioned, the Welsh Government told the Committee that this was an area of activity being investigated. The Committee would like to see value for money being considered in these investigations,

⁴⁴ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers’ Absence](#), September 2013, paragraph 3.16

⁴⁵ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 135

particularly in terms of extracting external mentors. The Committee believes that there is value in the mentoring scheme; however the current arrangements give rise to a number of concerns. Even where an absence has been covered effectively or recently retired teachers act are used, not utilising these mentors fully raises questions about the value for money of this programme.

72. The Welsh Government will be undertaking a formal evaluation of the MEP in 2015. The Committee were provided with information on the initial feedback on the MEP. This included feedback from the participants and mentors but no analysis of take up or costs of the MEP or analysis of the extent of classroom absence arising from the programme. These must be built into the evaluation of this programme in 2015 to ensure that value for money can be assessed.⁴⁶ The Committee would also like to see further consideration being given to the mentoring programme, to ensure that it is being used to its full potential.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government includes the costs and take up of the Masters in Educational Practice in its evaluation of the programme.

We also recommend that an evaluation of the mentor element of the Masters in Educational Practice programme is undertaken before the end of 2014 to address concerns that it may not be delivering value for money. The evaluation should include consideration of the utilisation of retired teachers as mentors and the impact of the extraction of experienced teachers from the classrooms to be engaged as mentors.

⁴⁶ Written Evidence, PAC(4)-06-14 (Paper 2), 18 February 2014

4. Cost Effective and Safe Cover Arrangements

73. In using cover arrangements to manage teachers' absences it is important that the arrangements are both cost effective and safe. This chapter explores these themes in more detail.

Ensuring that resources spent on supply cover are managed more effectively

74. More than £50 million was spent by schools on cover in 2011. However, the Auditor General's report found that local authorities do little to monitor the cost effectiveness of their arrangements. The report states that:

“Assessing the cost effectiveness of cover arrangements requires careful monitoring and analysis to ensure that the extent of cover is minimised, and that supply arrangements deliver the best progress for pupils at minimum cost. However, we did not find any examples of schools or local authorities where this type of analysis is routinely taking place.”⁴⁷

75. The Committee questioned Welsh Government officials about whether school governing bodies and local authorities are monitoring spend on cover. The Director General told us:

“I would be surprised—although, sometimes, I should not be—if headteachers were not monitoring the spend. I think that it is more about the effectiveness. We have struggled sometimes with the local authorities aggregating up those data to see what the total picture is. So, even now, I think that the Wales Audit Office struggled with two or three local authorities to get accurate data and what they are. One of the things that will hopefully improve through this process is that they will monitor the spend not only at the school level, but what is aggregated up and will see whether there are any issues on a local authority basis. I think that local authorities will have to get more cognisant of what their benchmark spend is against other areas, and whether that constitutes effective value for money, or not.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers' Absence](#), September 2013, page 41, paragraph 4.3

⁴⁸ RoP, Public Accounts Committee, 21 January 2014, paragraph 163

76. The Committee believes it is not acceptable for there to be no handle on the cost effectiveness of cover arrangements at any level (school, local authority or national government). Without this, it is very difficult to assess whether value for money is being achieved from these significant sums of public money. The Committee expects the Welsh Government to take a strong lead in requiring an evaluation of the cost effectiveness to be regularly undertaken and considered.

77. The Committee notes that teachers' pay and conditions are not devolved to Wales, and that the Welsh Government has no control over agency pay, and is unable to direct how schools source their supply staff. However, the written response from the Welsh Government states that it will work with the WLGA to identify any quality assurance measures that should be in place in any future specification for framework contracts.⁴⁹

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government collects further information on the extent and cost of covering teachers' absence. We recommend that the Welsh Government publishes a timetable and plan for gathering this information and provides detail on how value for money will be monitored and evaluated.

Keeping pupils safe

78. The Auditor General's report found that not all schools ensured that safeguarding procedures were in place for temporary staff. The report found that:

“There is no clear instruction for schools in Wales setting out the enquiries that schools should undertake before employment commences.”⁵⁰

79. The Welsh Government's written response notes that schools and local authorities must have regard to the Welsh Government's guidance on safeguarding arrangements. It goes on to say it will work with the WLGA, the General Teaching Council for Wales and Estyn to identify any additional measures needed to ensure schools comply fully with safeguarding procedures.⁵¹

⁴⁹ PAC(4)-02-14 (Paper 2), 21 January 2014

⁵⁰ Wales Audit Office, [Covering Teachers' Absence](#), September 2013, paragraph 2.28

⁵¹ PAC(4)-02-14 (Paper 2), 21 January 2014

80. This is a matter of serious concern for the Committee. The Auditor General's report found that only the agency holding the two national contracts has to meet any specific requirements for pre-employment checks, since the abolition of the quality mark in 2010. This means that there are a number of other agencies supplying staff that are not required to carry out any checks.

81. The Committee raised concerns that schools and governors are not fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities with regard to pre-employment checks and providing cover staff with necessary safeguarding information. When asked about safeguarding guidance, the Director General assured the Committee that:

“That guidance exists, but we will be bringing it together in the consolidated guidance.”⁵²

82. It is essential that the safety of learners in school is not compromised by the need for cover in the classroom. The need to complete the necessary safeguarding checks must be clear in all guidance. This guidance needs to be straightforward and accessible, to ensure that the safeguarding responsibilities are undertaken.

83. Given the duty on Welsh Ministers to pay due regard to the rights of the Child, the Committee believes it is essential for the Welsh Government to monitor the impact of guidance issued to make sure the necessary safeguards are in place.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government's proposed guidance clearly addresses the identified safeguarding issues for temporary staff and that the Welsh Government develops an effective mechanism to check that the guidance is being followed. The Committee should be provided with an update on this by January 2015.

⁵² RoP, Public Accounts Committee, paragraph 203

Witnesses

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in full at

www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?lId=1311.

Tuesday 15 October 2013

Huw Vaughan Thomas	Auditor General for Wales
Stephen Martin	Performance Audit Manager, Wales Audit Office
Meilyr Rowlands	Strategic Director, Estyn

Tuesday 21 January 2014

Owen Evans	Director General, Education and Skills, Welsh Government
Dr Bret Pugh	Group Director, School Standards & Workforce Group
Phil Jones	Deputy Director, Practitioner Standards & Professional Development

List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All written evidence can be viewed in full at

www.senedd.assemblywales.org/ielIssueDetails.aspx?Ild=7550&Opt=3

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Owen Evans, Director General, Education and Skills, Welsh Government	PAC(4)-02-14 Paper 1
Huw Vaughan Thomas, Auditor General for Wales	PAC(4)-02-14 Paper 2
Dr Chris Llewellyn, Welsh Local Government Association	PAC(4)-02-14 Paper 3
Owen Evans, Director General, Education and Skills, Welsh Government	PAC(4)-06-14 Paper 2
Huw Vaughan Thomas, Auditor General for Wales	PAC(4)-06-14 Paper 3
Owen Evans, Director General, Education and Skills, Welsh Government	PAC(4)-08-14(ptn1)
Dr Chris Llewellyn, Welsh Local Government Association	PAC(4)-09-14(ptn3)
Huw Vaughan Thomas, Auditor General for Wales	PAC(4)-09-14(ptn4)