



LESSON COVER AND VISITS POLICY

Status	Approved	Approval	Full Governing Body
Maintenance	Full Governing Body	Role(s) responsible	Head Teacher
Date Effective	December 2021	Date of last review	July 2025
Date of next review	September 2026	Date withdrawn	Not Withdrawn
Lead Professional	Assistant Headteacher	Location of policy	www.coltonhills.co.uk

COLTON HILLS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Policy for Lesson Cover and Visits

Rationale and Principles

This policy will formalise the processes for the covering of lessons when there is teacher absence at Colton Hills. It seeks to build on existing strategies and processes, sharing these in a transparent way which can be easily understood by all stakeholders. It also seeks to put contingency plans in place for periods of extremely high staff absence, to ensure that quality of service and cost-effectiveness is maintained above all else. As a High Performance Learning School, student performance is our most important priority and maintaining excellent classroom provision even when staff are absent is paramount.

As with all policies at Colton Hills, we will ensure that the Policy for Lesson Cover and Visits is rooted in our school **PRIDE** values, particularly – in this case – in the values of **Integrity** and **Excellence**. Ensuring effective lesson cover arrangements safeguards the classroom experience of all students at Colton Hills, which means that we can continue to maximise attainment by delivering quality education for **Every Child, Every Lesson, Every Day**. We know that high-quality teaching is what makes the biggest difference to the attainment of students, so this is the guiding principle behind this policy.

In summary, our central aim will be to reduce – and, if possible, to eliminate – the need to have external agency cover at Colton Hills. We firmly believe that students' experiences are better if they are led by teachers, and so the processes outlined below seek to ensure that there is a qualified specialist teacher in front of students at every possibility, always securing the highest quality of provision possible for our students.

Key Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following terms are used and therefore need to be clearly defined:

Cover supervisor – An employee of Colton Hills Community School who is deployed to cover for teacher absence. They are deployed on a day-to-day basis by need.

External cover – An agency member of staff who is called in on either a pre-prepared or day-to-day basis to cover lessons if – and when – internal systems are unable to handle this.

Internal cover – An overarching term to mean any cover carried out by a Colton Hills member of staff.

Long-term cover – A period of known or suspected cover longer than a couple of weeks, which will need a more long-term solution that may be sought from outside of the school.

PPA (Planning, Preparation and Assessment) time – Protected time in a teacher's timetable, in which they can carry out other parts of their role outside of the classroom. This is no less than 10% of a teacher's timetable.



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Summary of Cover Processes

Preventing the need for cover

The Senior Leadership Team seeks to prevent excessive cover by carefully managing the school's calendar and ensuring that events planned in school and visits out of school do not put pressure on staffing levels.

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that all prospective events or visits are discussed and approved at SLT meetings
- Ensuring that existing known absence is always taken into account when approving additional events or visits in the school calendar
- Protecting students' lesson experiences as a priority before allowing other events to happen
- Sharing the school calendar for the next academic year before the summer term

The SLT will also seek to maintain that staffing levels in the school are always sufficient to ensure that we can offer protection to the core curriculum, and to support contingency processes whenever they are needed.

Assessing the extent of cover needs

In ensuring that cover is managed effectively, the school will use a triage system to assess the challenges likely to be posed by absence on any given day. This will be assessed and updated on a daily basis by the Administration staff responsible for the operational management of cover.

In summary:

GREEN COVER	The timetable can be protected comfortably with the current level of absence. The expected levels of absence are low, with between 0 and 4 teachers being absent. Internal cover processes can be enacted, and lessons can be covered with relative ease.
AMBER COVER	The absence levels pose more challenge to the protection of the existing timetable, and additional measures are likely to be needed. This is likely to be caused by between 5 and 8 teachers being absent, and usual cover arrangements being insufficient.
RED COVER	Absence levels pose a significant risk to the timetable and to students' experiences. This situation necessitates a more extreme response to covering lessons, likely caused by 9+ teachers being absent. All contingency strategies will be considered at this stage.

When the absence levels move the situation into **Amber** or **Red** cover levels, the Deputy Headteacher – Outcomes will be informed, and will support the Administration staff in looking at possible solutions for the next day or ongoing period. This will often involve liaising with the rest of the SLT and Curriculum Leaders to enact contingency plans to best protect the timetable and students' experiences.

Cover priorities

In organising our cover systems, we are being as transparent as possible about our priorities. As outlined above, our central priority at Colton Hills is to put **Students First**, and that we seek to maximise attainment of all students so that they can achieve highly and have the best life chances possible. We believe that every lesson is vital, and that we cannot waste any time in getting students to learn. Too many cover lessons – particularly when external cover is brought in – are of low quality, and do not allow students to learn effectively.

This has led to us re-addressing our cover priorities, which are summarised in the diagram below. Beginning at the top of the pyramid, we will seek to use own resources of internal cover (whether by cover supervisors or available teaching staff) before first combining classes together with specialist teachers and then teaching in large groups in spaces such as the Theatre. All of these potential avenues will be explored before bringing in external cover from agencies, which we acknowledge to be of relatively quality and greater expense. This should be seen very much as a last resort.



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Cover processes

Given these priorities, in this next section we will outline the processes for the organisation of covering lessons at the three levels of potential cover need outlined above. These processes should be considered by no means exhaustive and cannot seek to possibly cover every potential scenario which may arise. However, they are a good faith effort to outline the thinking of the school and its priorities and will be adhered to in all but the most extreme of circumstances.

Our processes, in summary, are:

GREEN COVER – In the main, **Green Cover** will be organised by the Administration staff, and will require little or no input from the Senior Leadership Team.

The Administration staff will have access to the available range of teachers that they can use in the timetable, which will be made up of Cover Supervisors and any teaching staff who are not up to their full allocation in the timetable. All teachers will have clearly identified PPA periods, all other periods on your timetable will be blank and may be used for 'rarely cover' If you are under teaching allocation, teachers should be ready to cover lessons, even at short notice. During these periods of time, teachers should expect to be ready to cover lessons – even at short notice – during this time, and are asked not to organise meetings or anything else that might limit their availability.

Wherever possible, this cover will be pre-arranged if absences are known about, and will be communicated to teachers as early as possible so that they can be best prepared. Equally, where possible teachers will be used within their own subject area or a related subject area, though there is no guarantee of this being the case due to the nature of the timetable.

It is the stated aim of the school to always remain within Green Cover status, including by denying opportunities to take out visits or to organise special events if it is likely to move the school into an **Amber Cover** situation. We are determined that the taught timetable will always remain our highest priority, to maximise lesson quality and, ultimately, student attainment.

AMBER COVER – In the situation of **Amber Cover** being declared by the Administration staff, the Deputy Headteacher – Outcomes will be informed of the situation and become involved in organising cover. In line with our priorities outlined earlier in this document, this level of absence requires decision-making about the best interests of students, so it is vital that the Senior Leadership Team take accountability for these decisions.

Amber Cover will include all of the processes outlined within the **Green Cover** section, but will likely necessitate further measures to be taken. If full deployment of available internal cover has not allowed the timetable to be protected, the next stage is to explore the options of groups being combined together or split so that the maximum number of students are able to be taught by a specialist teacher or appropriately senior member of staff. PPA time should continue to be protected unless absolutely necessary, and any infringements upon teacher PPA should be acknowledged, with time given back to them at the next available opportunity.

The Deputy Headteacher – Outcomes, will ensure that an appropriate plan is in place for the successful running of the school day, and decide – with the SLT – which deployment of staff will best achieve the priorities outlined above. This will likely involve directing Curriculum Leaders to organise the combining of classes, and to ensure that resources are in place to maintain students' learning experiences to the highest possible standards.

As outlined in the Green Cover section, the intention will be for as much of this to be pre-arranged before the day as possible, so that the day can run as smoothly as possible.

RED COVER – This level of staff absence is rare, so **Red Cover** should very much be considered a contingency plan for extreme levels of absence. In these circumstances, it is likely that the absence has grown over several days, including **Amber Cover** arrangements being place, so these situations can often be anticipated and pre-



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empted. Wherever possible, we will be over-cautious in our preparations, rather than waiting for the day of extreme absence to have to quickly put these contingency plans in place. These arrangements will be managed entirely by the Senior Leadership Team, led by the Assistant Headteacher – Raising Achievement.

In these circumstances, we will look at particular points of challenge within the timetable to put other arrangements in place and will ensure that we follow the priorities outlined above, with external cover being only used as a last resort once all other options have been explored. In preference, we will organise opportunities for large group teaching, where a number of classes within a year group will be put together in a large space such as the Theatre or Dining Room (if available), to be taught by a senior member of staff. This is likely to be a member of SLT or senior Curriculum Leader, and the session will be supervised by as many available members of staff as possible.

In order to facilitate this arrangement, we have organised the following infrastructure:

- A skeleton timetable of SLT availability to lead large sessions, which is held by the Assistant Headteacher – Raising Achievement for when needed
- Provisional venues for this to take place – largely the Theatre and Dining Room (except for P4)
- Equipment to enable this to take place – clipboards, resource packs, lessons to be available
- Alternative venues for the lessons timetabled into the Theatre if needed

As stated previously, we will protect the prioritising of lessons in Key Stages 4 and 5 where we can, with students in Key Stage 3 more likely to have a large group teaching lesson if necessitated by staff absence.

Exception: Long-Term Cover

When faced with an extended known – or likely – absence of a member of staff for more than two weeks, we will seek to put more permanent arrangements in place. In these circumstances, we intend to use our agency contacts to seek a suitable longer-term arrangement, which will put in place an appropriate subject specialist to ensure that students have continuity of experience and quality of delivery. This arrangement will sit outside of the cover strategy outlined above, and the member of agency staff appointed will pick up the timetable of the member of teaching staff who is absent.

Accountability and Monitoring

The responsibility for organising the logistics of cover arrangements is the responsibility of Assistant Headteacher – Raising Achievement, and the timetabling of cover is the responsibility of the Deputy Headteacher – Curriculum as part of the regular maintenance of the timetable.

The quality of cover arrangements should be quality assured by the Deputy Headteacher – Curriculum to ensure quality of delivery and to address any issues with performance in the classroom. Any external cover provided should be evaluated by the respective member of the Senior Leadership Team with a responsibility for the department, supported by the Curriculum Leader of the department if appropriate. This quality assurance will ultimately be managed by the Deputy Headteacher – Curriculum, who will report to Governors on this as part of the Curriculum Committee Governors' meetings.

The Business Director is accountable for the line management of the Administration staff who manage the cover process, as well as the school's staffing budget, in concert with the Headteacher. Our measures of success, as well as student attainment, will be financial, in seeking to better make use of our resources, and to recoup money into the school's budget which has been used for external cover in previous academic years.



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Setting cover work for planned absence: Expectations

When a teacher is not in the building to take their lessons for a planned absence, they are expected to set appropriate cover work. The work should be attached to the teacher desk in the room where the lesson or lessons will take place along with a paper copy of the seating plan. The work should be accessible to the students and the member of staff who would be taking the class who is likely to not be a subject specialist. PowerPoints may be sent too but, unless already confirmed, a teacher who is absent with a planned absence should never presume that cover teacher has access to a laptop.

Setting cover work for unplanned absences

- The Curriculum Leader should set cover work (check the covering member of staff has access to a laptop)
- If the Curriculum Leader is absent, the Assistant Curriculum Leader would set the cover work
- If the Curriculum Leader is absent and there are no ACLs, the SLT link would set with the support of any members of the department

Appendix: Visits Process and Cover Implications

Visits are an important part of school life, and we seek to give students valuable opportunities outside of the normal taught curriculum when they add value to a student's school experience. However, we will seek first and foremost to protect the core taught curriculum and to ensure that there is continuity and quality of experience in school. Visits, though desirable, cannot mean that the school day is disrupted for large numbers of students.

The process for visit approval:

1. Prior to the academic year, the SLT put together the calendar for the year, and ask Curriculum Leaders to put forward any visits that they would like to be considered. These are considered for their viability, and if considered viable they are provisionally calendared
2. When a visit nears (at least 4 weeks before), the members of staff involved should submit a Permission to Disrupt the Curriculum form to THO, so this can be brought to the SLT for final approval.
3. All forms must include details of staff who will be involved in the visits, cover required, transportation if needed, and details of the visit (200 words) which can be used in the school's promotional work
4. A summary of the approval process is as follows:
 - The Permission to Disrupt the Curriculum form is presented to the SLT Line Manager for signature, which is given if the SLT member believes that the visit is viable against our criteria (outlined below)
 - The form is given to THO, who will check the existing cover which already might be needed
 - The request is brought to the Monday tactical SLT Meeting, where it will be discussed against the criteria and considered against the calendar
 - The request will either be approved, denied or sent back for further information as needed. If approved, the visits planning process can then be undertaken with SPA, our EVC. It will be confirmed in the school calendar and shared with all members of staff
5. The visit can still be cancelled in extreme circumstances of staff absence, as outlined in the RED cover situation earlier in this document



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Criteria for visit approval

All visits are different and must therefore be considered on their individual merits. However, to support staff in ensuring that they provide visit experiences which are viable and likely to be approved, the SLT supplies the following guideline criteria to ensure that there is consistency in how visits are approved:

GREEN Visits likely to be approved	Visits are likely to be approved if: ✓ They are essential to the delivery of a qualification ✓ They meet a statutory requirement of the curriculum ✓ They are deemed as being of 'high value', such as fulfilling a need in the School Improvement Plan ✓ They take place outside of the school day (evenings/weekends) ✓ They have been calendared before the beginning of the year ✓ They generate very little or no teaching cover ✓ They avoid calendar clashes with pre-existing events
AMBER Visits may not be approved	Visits may not be approved if: - They do not have obvious significant value to students' education or wider personal development - They are not planned with significant notice (at least four weeks) - They have a significant impact on teaching cover by using a number of teaching staff within the school day - There is already significant pressure from other calendared events, or planned absence for a number of staff
RED Visits will not be approved	Visits will not be approved if: - X They do not have any educational value - X They generate a significant amount of teaching cover by not using available non-teaching members of staff - X Very little notice is given of the visit (fewer than three weeks) - X Criteria of the Permission to Disrupt the Curriculum form has not been met, or SLT links have not given approval - X There is significant pressure on the school due to staffing issues, significant absence or other factors which threaten the timetable. It is worth noting that this could happen even at late notice, though this will only be in extreme circumstances