

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of
A Survey of Substitute Teaching
and its Management in
Northern Ireland

Inspected: September 2003–2004

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number.

GRADE

- 1 Significant strengths good (ranging to outstanding)
- 2 Strengths outweigh weaknesses satisfactory (ranging to good)
- 3 Weaknesses outweigh strengths fair (ranging to satisfactory)
- 4 Significant weaknesses poor

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Following a review of substitute teaching by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) in 2002, and by the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) in 2003, the Department of Education, Northern Ireland, requested the Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) in the academic year 2003-2004 to inspect the work of substitute teachers, and the effectiveness of their management in schools. Evidence on substitute teaching in Northern Ireland was obtained throughout 2003-2004 within the normal inspection programme in statutory nurseries (nurseries) and in the primary, post-primary and special school sectors.
- 1.2 The number of nurseries and schools inspected as part of the survey of substitute teaching was 108, including 16 nurseries, seven special schools, 69 primary schools and 16 post-primary schools.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspections, 62 substitute teachers were employed in 40 of the 108 nurseries and schools. Of the 62 substitute teachers, two (3%) were employed in nurseries; 38 (61%) in primary schools; 18 (29%) in post-primary schools; and four (7%) in special schools. Substitute teachers provided by specialist agencies were present in fewer than ten of the institutions inspected.
- 1.4 In the primary schools inspected, the average percentage of children entitled to free school meals was some 22%; across the schools, this ranged from zero to 75%. In the post-primary schools inspected, the average free school meal entitlement was approximately 20%, ranging across the schools from 3% to 40%.
- 1.5 Some 67% of the total number of days of temporary teaching used in 2002-2003 involved absences due to illness, maternity

and paternity leave, and teacher vacancies. A further 18% was used to provide cover for teachers engaged in curriculum and professional development activities.

- 1.6 Excluding the special schools whose budgets are not devolved, the employment of substitute teachers took up approximately 7% of the budget of the nurseries inspected; 5% of the budget of the primary schools (range from zero to 22%); and 2% of the budget of the post-primary schools (range from 0.20% to 4%).
- 1.7 Across all of the institutions inspected, 17% of the substitute teachers had less than one year's teaching experience; 16% had between one and two years' experience; and 53% had more than two years' experience. Of the remainder, 9% had been prematurely retired for reasons of redundancy and 5% were retired. None of the substitute teachers in this sample had been retired prematurely under the Department of Education's Efficient Discharge Scheme.
- 1.8 In the nurseries and in the special schools, all of the substitute teachers had appropriate qualifications and prior experience. Most of the substitute teachers in the primary schools had appropriate qualifications and prior experience. In the post-primary schools, almost all of the substitute teachers had appropriate prior experience of the sector; most had appropriate subject-specific qualifications and experience.
- 1.9 The period of employment available to the substitute teachers ranged from one day (in one instance) up to an academic year; 39% were employed for up to an academic year; 25% up to a month and 18% up to a term.
- 1.10 Interviews were held with most of the substitute teachers whose work was inspected; these interviews centred on their experience of working as substitute teachers and issues arising. Furthermore, interviews were held with the principals

of almost all of the nurseries and the schools to determine the nature and effectiveness of the schools' management of substitute cover and issues arising.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

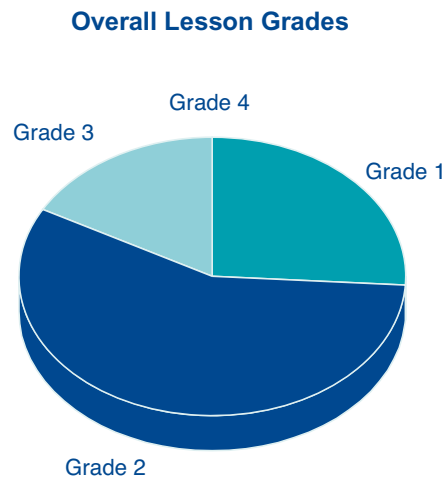
Planning

- 2.1 In most of the nurseries, primary and post-primary schools, and in the special schools inspected, the quality of planning by the substitute teachers is sound or better. The planning of just over one quarter of the substitute teachers is characterised by many strengths. None of the planning inspected reflected many weaknesses.
- 2.2 In most of the primary schools inspected, the quality of planning reflects many strengths, or the strengths outweigh weaknesses. In the main, in keeping with their own approaches and professional interests, the substitute teachers build effectively on the planning of the absent teachers. In general, their written planning is comprehensive, well organised and appropriate, and sets out clear and helpful learning outcomes; in some instances, helpful and insightful self-evaluative comment are included. In the primary schools, there are often good examples of the substitute teachers entering into joint planning with other teachers in a year group; in a few instances, the planning of the substitute teachers represented the best planning within such a year group.
- 2.3 In the minority of the primary schools where the planning reflects more weaknesses than strengths, the substitute teachers' planning is vague and unclear. In particular, a stronger and clearer emphasis is needed on promoting literacy and numeracy through the specialist subjects, meeting the needs of individual children, notably children with special needs, and identifying learning outcomes. However, these

weaknesses are not exclusive to substitute teachers; in several inspection reports on individual schools, concerns relating to literacy, numeracy, special needs, individual difference and learning outcomes were also identified as areas for whole-school attention.

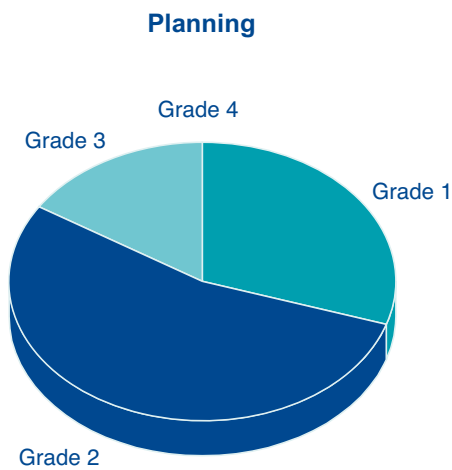
- 2.4 There is a broadly similar pattern in substitute teachers' planning in post-primary schools. In most post-primary schools, the quality of their planning reflects many strengths, or the strengths outweigh weaknesses. The planning of a significant minority demonstrates many strengths. In the best practice observed, several substitute teachers adapted skilfully the written planning of the absent teachers to suit their own teaching styles and/or to adopt a more innovative approach.
- 2.5 In a minority of the post-primary schools, the planning of substitute teachers reflects more weaknesses than strengths. Where this is the case, the guidance provided by the heads of department, or by the absent teachers, often does not support sufficiently the substitute teachers or gives them a sufficient indication of what is required. In a few schools, the substitute teachers had been provided with little more than page references from textbooks to assist them in their planning.
- 2.6 In the few nurseries and special schools employing substitute teachers at the time of the inspections, the quality of the planning was good, with particular attention being paid to appropriate individual and group activities.

Figure 1



Comment: more grade 1 outcomes in primary than post-primary; twice as many grade 3 outcomes in post-primary than in primary.

Figure 2



Comment: few significant differences in primary and post-primary outcomes.

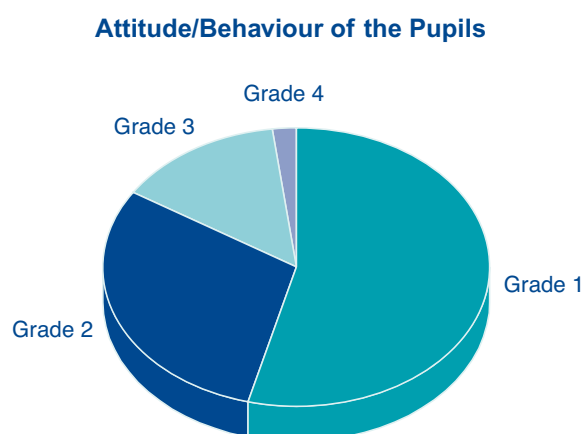
Pupils'/children's attitude and behaviour

- 2.7 In most of the primary and post-primary schools inspected, the attitude and behaviour of the pupils reflect many strengths, or the strengths outweighs weaknesses; in a majority of the schools, the pupils' behaviour and attitude demonstrate many strengths.
- 2.8 In most of the primary schools inspected, the children are keen to learn, settle well and respond co-operatively and purposefully. They relate positively to their teachers and to one another and there is much evidence of a good ethos, of well-motivated children, and of good behaviour. In some schools, the substitute teachers manage well children who, reportedly, have posed problems for the absent class teachers, or they work effectively with children whose behaviour would test experienced teachers. In the main, the substitute teachers work hard to establish effective class routines. In the best practice observed, and within very orderly and purposeful classroom environments, several substitute teachers demonstrated outstanding classroom management skills and excellent rapport with the children.
- 2.9 In a few classes, some children's disruptive behaviour challenges the teachers but, in general, they manage these situations well. In the very few instances observed where the children's attitude and behaviour were less than satisfactory, the children were very unsettled, lacked motivation and had been asked to work on tasks not relevant to their needs, or, reportedly, were part of a difficult class which had challenged the permanent teacher.
- 2.10 In most of the post-primary schools inspected, the pupils' attitude and behaviour is also of a sound or better quality. In the main, the pupils are well behaved, attentive and responsive. The substitute teachers manage their classes

well, and deal swiftly and effectively with the limited amount of unsettled behaviour they encounter. In a minority of the classes, while there is no overt poor behaviour, some pupils make little effort to complete the work they are given and are sparing in their co-operation with their teachers. In a very few classes, the behaviour and attitude of the pupils are poor.

- 2.11 In the nurseries and special schools, the children are well settled and co-operative; relationships range from good to excellent. In the special schools, the substitute teachers manage effectively the children and young people who exhibit challenging behaviours.

Figure 3



Comment: almost no differences in primary and post-primary outcomes, other than more grade 3 outcomes in primary.

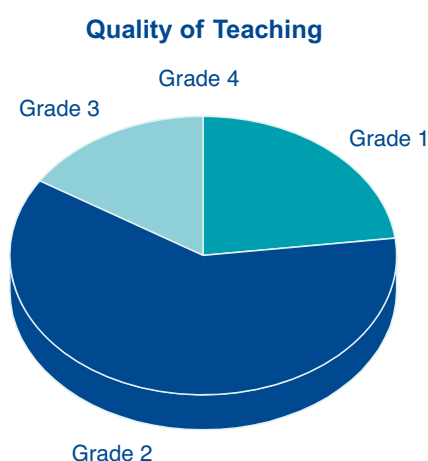
Teaching

- 2.12 In most of the primary and post-primary schools inspected, the quality of teaching of the substitute teachers is of a sound or better standard. The teaching of just under a quarter is characterised by many strengths. None of the teaching observed reflected many weaknesses.

- 2.13 In most of the primary schools, the quality of teaching is sound or better. The substitute teachers, in the main, employ a range of appropriate activities which engage the children well. They deploy a good range of teaching strategies and their work is often characterised by good pace, good use of praise, good questioning and high expectations, and by an effective matching of the children's work to their ability. The work is generally challenging and holds the children's attention and interest. The children are mostly well supported, often through effective and well-structured whole-class teaching; in some instances, at the end of the lessons, there is an effective review of the content covered.
- 2.14 In a minority of the lessons, where the work reflects more weaknesses than strengths, there is a lack of challenge, particularly when the teachers have not yet built up their knowledge of the children, or where they lack a clear understanding of the nature and standard of work required, for example, in some of the lessons with children in the early years. In those lessons where the standard of teaching requires attention, some of the children are unsettled and lack motivation; the tasks set are not related well to their abilities and need, and are unduly routine and mundane. Typically, the teaching lacks pace and challenge. There is too much exposition and the children are not involved actively in their learning. In one school, because of their prior patterns of learning, the substitute teacher experienced problems engaging children in group-work and in independent learning.
- 2.15 In a majority of the post-primary schools, the quality of the teaching reflects many strengths, or the strengths outweigh weaknesses. In a minority of the classes observed, the weaknesses outweigh strengths. None of the post-primary teaching observed reflected many weaknesses.

- 2.16 In the nurseries and in the special schools, the teaching is supportive and effective. In the nurseries, appropriately, much time is given to working with individual children as part of suitably broad and balanced teaching programmes. In the special schools, the substitute teachers are familiar with the pupils' difficulties, and deal empathetically and well with them. The work is set at an appropriate level for individual pupils; praise is used effectively to motivate and encourage. Much of the teaching centres, appropriately, on the development of the pupils' independent skills and on preparation for leaving school.

Figure 4



Comment: more grade 1 outcomes in primary than in post-primary, and more grade 3 outcomes in primary.

Learning

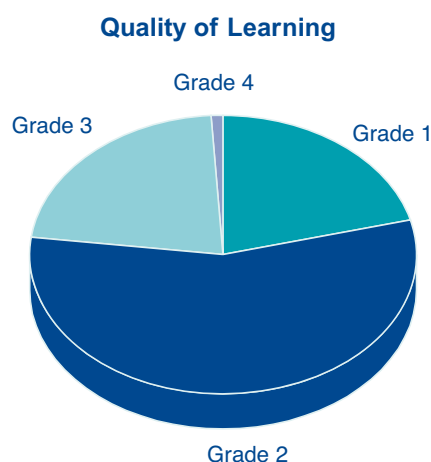
- 2.17 In most of the primary and post-primary schools inspected, the standard of the pupils' learning is sound or better. In most of the primary schools inspected, the children are responding and achieving well. They enjoy the work, settle quickly and focus effectively and with interest on what they are asked to do. A

significant minority of the lessons observed resulted in imaginative outcomes in respect of the children's work.

- 2.18 In the minority of the lessons where weaknesses outweigh strengths, or in the very few lessons where there are many weaknesses, some children are not secure in what they are doing and require more individual attention, or the more able children need greater challenge as a consequence of lesson content and activities which are not matched well to need. Typically, in lessons where weaknesses outweigh strengths, the children's learning is not consolidated and/or a stronger focus is required on improving the standard of their work. In a few of the classes observed, the substitute teachers did not deal effectively with children who had serious learning difficulties.
- 2.19 In a majority of the post-primary classes, the quality of the pupils' learning reflects many strengths, or the strengths outweigh the weaknesses. In these lessons, most of the pupils are secure in their work, show good interest and interact well with their teachers. The standard of their work is satisfactory or better and, in some classes, the pupils appreciate and respond particularly well to the expertise and enthusiasm of the teachers.
- 2.20 In the minority of classes where the standard of the pupils' learning needs to be improved, they show little interest in the tasks prepared for them. In part, these problems arise from the limited and unchallenging nature of the tasks set, especially in situations where too much emphasis is placed on transcription and similar routine and unchallenging activities. In some classes, the pupils' work contains many errors and is characterised by a lack of knowledge and understanding of the subject. In a very few classes, confrontation and a lack of co-operation by some pupils result in minimal or no learning for these pupils, and the class generally.

- 2.21 In the nurseries and in the special schools, the children participate well in the many good opportunities provided for them, and in the wide range of activities on offer. In the nurseries, there are many examples of good co-operative, purposeful and concentrated play, with the children's learning is linked well to their ages and stages of development.

Figure 5



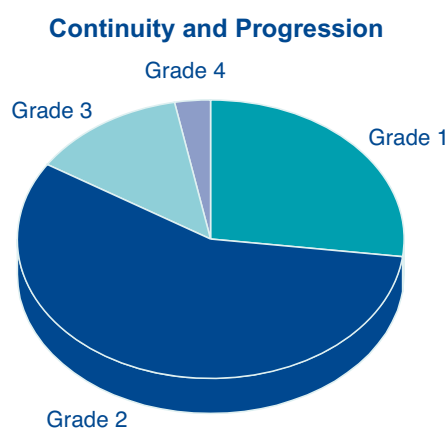
Comment: more grade 1 outcomes in primary than in post-primary, and more grade 3 outcomes in post-primary.

Continuity and progression

- 2.22 In most of the primary and post-primary schools, the substitute teachers deal in a sound or better manner with ensuring continuity and progression in the pupils' work.
- 2.23 In most of the lessons in the primary schools, the substitute teachers manage effectively these important aspects of teaching and learning. In a few lessons, it was reported that the substitute teachers managed continuity and progression more effectively than the absent teachers. Most of the children are making satisfactory or better progress; in general,

a review of the children's previous work showed evidence of clear progression in their skills and understanding.

- 2.24 In a minority of lessons where continuity and progression are not well managed, the substitute teachers do not build effectively on the children's prior learning and focus on discrete tasks which are not related well to this earlier work.
- 2.25 In a majority of the post-primary classes, continuity and progression in the pupils' work reflect many strengths, or the strengths outweigh the weaknesses. There were almost an equal number of classes observed where the work of the substitute teachers in managing continuity and progression reflected many strengths and those where the strengths outweighed weaknesses.
- 2.26 In the nurseries and in the special schools, there are similar patterns. In the nurseries inspected, attention to continuity and progression in the children's learning was never less than satisfactory and a majority of the lessons inspected reflected many strengths. In one centre, the inspection report referred to the "seamless continuity" in the children's work and noted that the principal's induction arrangements had contributed significantly to this by enabling the incoming substitute teacher to observe the work of the class teacher before that teacher left the school.
- 2.27 Across all of the nurseries and other schools, the work of most of the substitute teachers is of a sound or better standard. Just over one quarter is characterised by many strengths; just under a fifth reflects more weaknesses than strengths. None of the work observed reflected many weaknesses.

Figure 6

Comment: substantially more grade 3 and 4 outcomes in post-primary than in primary.

3. THE OUTCOMES OF THE INTERVIEWS HELD WITH THE SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS

- 3.1 During the inspections, the Inspectorate held interviews with most of the substitute teachers whose work was observed in class to review their experience as substitute teachers, mainly in the schools in which they were then working.
- 3.2 Much of what they reported is positive. Furthermore, their work contributes significantly to the effective working of the schools and nurseries, and substitute teachers represent an important resource valued by principals and by others in the education service. Many of the substitute teachers, particularly those beginning their careers in teaching, are seeking full-time permanent employment but, in the interim, see substitute teaching as a temporary but necessary step towards that end. For some, temporary employment is a major constraint, though the teachers are very conscious also of the difficulties of obtaining permanent employment at a time of demographic downturn and a reduction in the number of

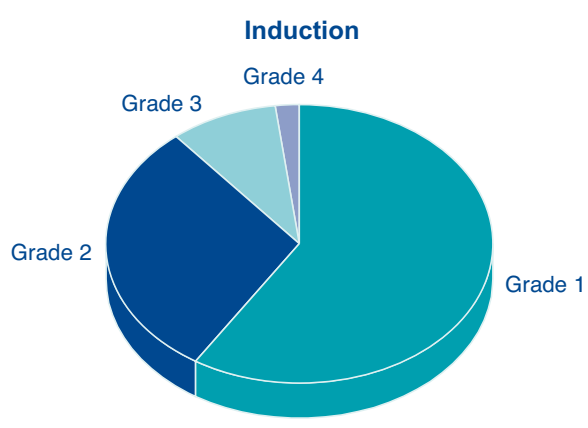
children enrolling in schools. Given this situation, the negative aspects of life as a substitute teacher were highlighted by several teachers interviewed. They identified a growing disillusionment as a result of the search for permanent employment in the years after graduation and noted also the pressure of competing against many other newly qualified teachers. Furthermore, they highlighted problems arising from lack of continuity in employment, job insecurity, and term-time only employment and salary.

Induction

- 3.3 The substitute teachers' experience of induction into the life and work of the schools is particularly positive. Across the nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools, the induction arrangements experienced by most of the substitute teachers reflect more strengths than weaknesses. For a majority, the experience reflects many strengths, especially - but not only - in the post-primary sector.
- 3.4 Typically, the substitute teachers meet with the outgoing teachers prior to taking up appointment, or - as a result of previous employment in the school, ranging, for instance, from three to seven years - they are very familiar with the circumstances of the school. In many instances, the principals provide them with a clear overview of the school, and of the class/classes they are to teach. The substitute teachers are often provided with the absent teachers' class files and whole-school documentation, including key policies, and with the education plans for those children/pupils requiring special help. A few schools have prepared a designated information pack for substitute teachers containing whole-school policies and general guidance.
- 3.5 In a minority of the schools, where the experiences of the substitute teachers reflect more weaknesses than strengths, or

many weaknesses, the teachers report that they have largely been left to their own devices and have been provided with little information about the classes they are to teach, or about the school generally.

Figure 7



Comment: more grade 1 outcomes in post-primary than in primary.

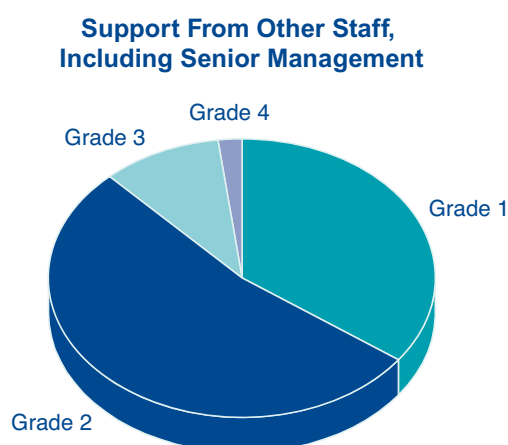
Support

- 3.6 The substitute teachers generally have a similarly positive picture in relation to the support they receive from senior and other staff. For most, this support has many strengths, or the strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 3.7 Typically, the substitute teachers highlight the good general support they receive from a wide range of staff in the schools, including principals, other senior staff, special needs co-ordinators, heads of departments, year co-ordinators and assistant teachers. Most speak very positively about the nature and quality of the formal and/or informal support they had receive across a wide range of issues, including discipline, and describe how they had been made welcome. In several

interviews, and based also on observation of their classroom practice, the high competence of some of the substitute teachers was clearly evident; these teachers often gave more to the schools in which they obtained employment, than they gained in relation to advice on approaches to teaching and learning. In the minority of schools where the quality of support reflects many weaknesses, or where weaknesses outweigh strengths, the teachers report that they have largely been left to her own devices, have been given only limited support, or, in the case of several beginning teachers, have been allocated one or more of the most challenging classes in the school.

- 3.8 In large measure, similar patterns emerge from the interviews with the substitute teachers in the nurseries and special schools. In one nursery school, for example, the substitute teacher noted that the principal was an excellent role model who set time aside each week to discuss aspects of the substitute teacher's work and address any concerns the teacher had.

Figure 8

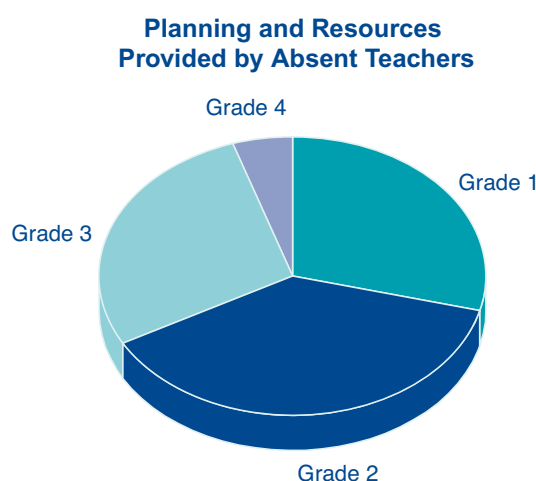


Comment: substantially more grade 1 outcomes in post-primary than in primary.

Resources

- 3.9 In a majority of the nurseries and schools inspected, the substitute teachers' evaluation of the quality of lesson plans and resources left for them by the absent teachers varied considerably. In just over a quarter of the schools, the material made available was of a particularly sound standard and reflected many strengths; in one-third of the schools, plans and resources left by the absent teachers reflected more weaknesses than strengths, or many weaknesses.
- 3.10 Difficulties in this area mostly stem from problems arising from unplanned and unexpected absences; in almost all other situations, at least adequate planning and resource materials are left for the incoming substitute teachers. A few schools have contingency packs to deal with issues arising from unplanned absences. Some substitute teachers reported that the outgoing teachers had made considerable efforts to ensure that the incoming teachers were not placed at a disadvantage; for example, it was reported that absent teachers had contacted substitute teachers by telephone. In one example offered, an absent teacher had arranged for the substitute teacher to visit her at her home to discuss the nature of the work, duties, and resources, and to suggest tasks for the children. In the post-primary schools, heads of department frequently take responsibility for providing substitute teachers with appropriate departmental planning, resources and advice.

Figure 9



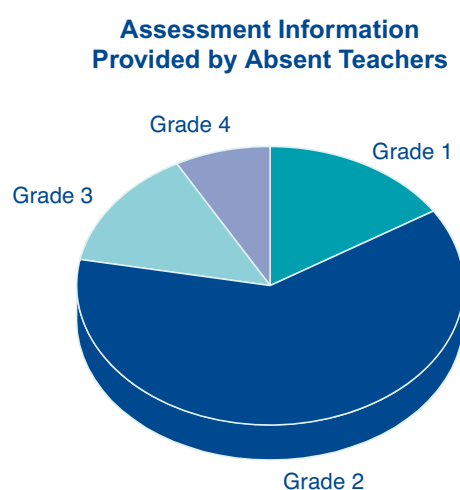
Comment: more grade 1 outcomes in post-primary, and more grade 3 outcomes in primary.

Assessment information

- 3.11 The quality of assessment information (about classes and individual children/pupils), left for the substitute teachers by the absent teachers, varies considerably. In most of the nurseries, special schools and schools, the quality of assessment information provided is of a sound or better standard; in a minority of the primary and post-primary schools, this information reflects many strengths. In just under a quarter of the schools, the quality of information left for substitute teachers reflects more weaknesses than strengths, or many weaknesses. Unexpected and unplanned absences cause particular problems and, in several schools, the incoming substitute teachers receive no information at all about the pupils' level of attainment. In some post-primary schools, substitute teachers obtain little more than broad outlines of patterns of attainment from discussions with other teachers, or the information left relates to the general ability of the class but does not clarify sufficiently the strengths and/or weaknesses of individual pupils.

3.12 In the best practice, the absent teachers had arranged for the substitute teachers to receive detailed and helpful information on class and individual levels of attainment. In addition, substitute teachers often noted that they had received appropriate information in respect of children/pupils with special needs. In two post-primary schools, for instance, the substitute teachers were advised how to access the schools' computerised record systems to obtain the education plans for pupils with special needs and assessment/attainment data for pupils generally.

Figure 10



Comment: substantially more grade 3 and 4 outcomes in post-primary than in primary.

Professional development – external

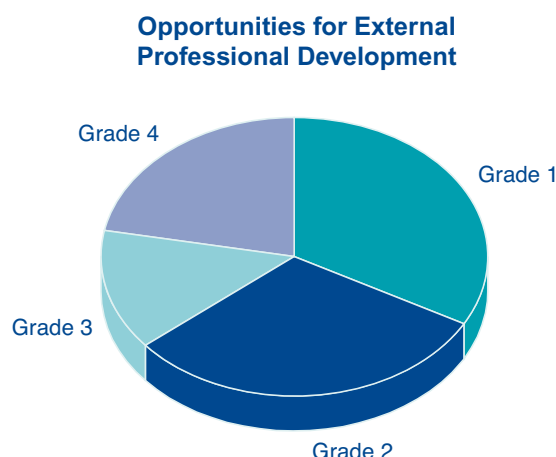
3.13 Broadly similar patterns emerged from the interviews with substitute teachers in respect of their access to, and experience of, external professional development opportunities. The issue of access to professional development is a matter of considerable significance to those substitute teachers who are beginning teachers, or in the early stages of their professional development. Some 18% of the substitute teachers observed in the primary schools had less than one year's experience

while a further 12% had between one and two years' experience. In the post-primary schools, 22% had less than one year's experience while a further 17% had between one and two years' experience.

- 3.14 The experience was positive of a majority of the substitute teachers interviewed ranging from those in their first year of teaching to retired teachers. One-third reported that their experience of external professional development was very positive and reflected many strengths; just under one-third felt that strengths outweighed weaknesses. In contrast, just over one-third felt that weaknesses outweighed strengths; within this latter grouping, almost a quarter felt that their access to and experience of external professional development were problematic or worse and reflected many weaknesses.
- 3.15 This important area of experience was affected considerably by the period of appointment of the substitute teachers; often, though not always, the best opportunities were linked to periods of employment of up to an academic year.
- 3.16 In the best practice, the substitute teachers are facilitated extensively by the schools and are encouraged to engage in external professional development. Some have completed their beginning teacher/induction programmes while others have embarked on the next stage of their early professional development training. Other more experienced substitute teachers report that they have good access to external training and, in several cases, have been helped by the schools to attain a level of proficiency warranting a Threshold payment. Several substitute teachers also report that they have made useful individual contact with the curriculum and advisory officers of the local education and library boards. In one instance, a substitute teacher is taking a two-year externally certified course in effective supply teaching.

- 3.17 In the less effective or highly problematic practice, substitute teachers in the primary and post-primary sectors report that they have limited or no access to external training, or are unable to complete induction or early professional development training. In just over half of the post-primary schools inspected, lack of access to external training for substitute teachers is a matter of concern.
- 3.18 In many schools, and, for example, in the experience of half of the post-primary substitute teachers interviewed, these problems stem from a lack of continuity in their employment, and its often short-term nature. While it is recognised that substitute teachers are entitled to the same in-service training provision as permanent teachers, constraints such as these have created significant difficulties; for example, several substitute teachers serving in primary schools reported that, because of fragmented service, they had not experienced induction or early professional development training even though up to four years had passed since they graduated from college. Some of the teachers reported that they had not drawn this difficulty to the attention of the schools in which they had worked, or the schools had not raised the matter with them. In one primary school, when the teacher's lack of access to early professional training became known, the principal made immediate contact with the local education and library board to arrange support. The absence of payment for attendance at external and internal in-service training was also identified as a significant constraint.

Figure 11



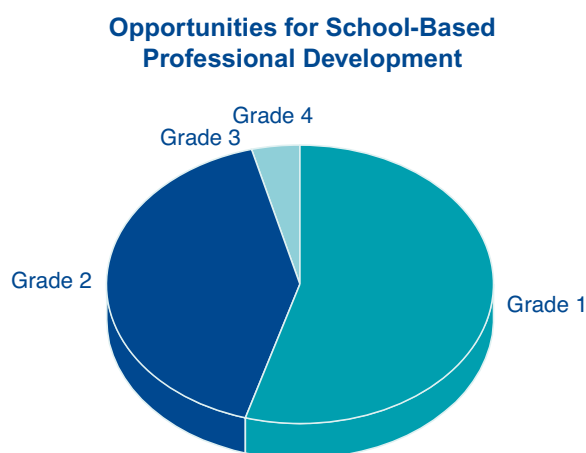
Comment: significant differences in primary and post-primary outcomes. For example, 9% grade 1 outcomes in post-primary compared to 39% in primary, and 55% grade 4 outcomes in post-primary compared to 13% in primary.

Professional development – school-based development activities

- 3.19 The situation is much more positive in relation to the experiences that substitute teachers have of school-based development opportunities, including their involvement in whole-staff, faculty, departmental and year group meetings, and in other forms of school-based development work.
- 3.20 In almost all instances, the substitute teachers interviewed reported that their access to school-based development activities is sound or better. Just over half of the teachers report that their experience of this is good, particularly in the primary schools. Many report positively that they are treated as any other member of the teaching staff. In one pre-school centre, for example, the substitute teacher felt integrated fully into the staff and joins in all internal staff development activities on a weekly basis.

- 3.21 A substantial number of the primary teachers interviewed reported that they attend all/most school-based development activities; many noted that their attendance is expected. Some attend only major staff meetings and are not involved with other development activities or with staff working groups held after school.
- 3.22 A particularly problematic issue for substitute teachers is that their attendance at school-based development activities is unpaid; for example, during exceptional closure days, or at external in-service training. For some, lack of payment is not an issue and they avail of all possible opportunities for internal professional development. For others, lack of payment is a major constraint.

Figure 12

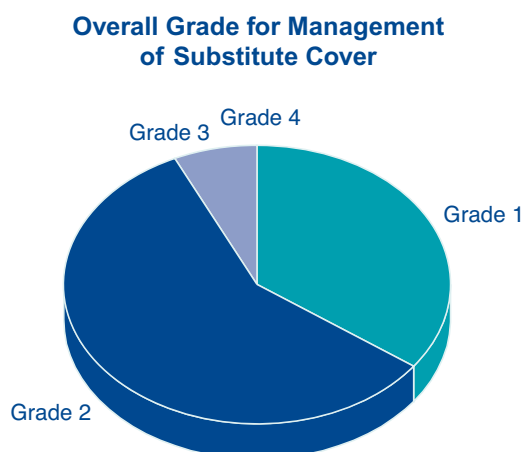


Comment: substantially more grade 1 outcomes in primary than post-primary (63% compared to 36%) but more grade 4 outcomes in primary.

4. THE MANAGEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE COVER: THE OUTCOMES OF THE INTERVIEWS WITH PRINCIPALS

- 4.1 The Inspectorate held interviews with most of the principals of the nurseries, special schools and schools inspected to ascertain their experience of working with substitute teachers, and to determine the nature and quality of their management of substitute cover. These interviews explored a wide range of issues including recruitment, induction, monitoring and evaluation, and the extent to which the schools complied with Department of Education regulations and guidelines in respect of the vetting of substitute teachers and related matters. Most of the principals interviewed present a generally positive picture of substitute cover and its management. In broad terms, the principals' evaluation of the strengths and areas for improvement in respect of substitute cover and its management reflects that of the Inspectorate.

Figure 13



Comment: no significant differences primary and post-primary, other than more grade 1 outcomes in primary.

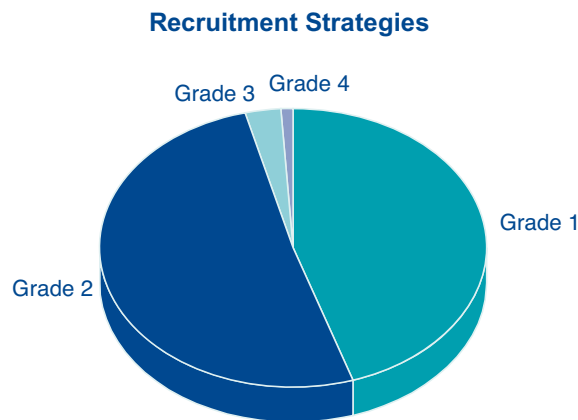
Nature and effectiveness of the recruitment strategies employed by schools

- 4.2 In almost all of the schools inspected, the nature and effectiveness of the strategies used to recruit substitute teachers are sound or better.
- 4.3 Especially in primary schools, substitute teachers are frequently experienced teachers well known to the senior staff, to the teachers generally, and to the children. Alternatively, the principals rely on their contacts with other schools to identify suitable substitute teachers. The substitute teachers employed range considerably in experience and background. A minority, approximately one-seventh, employed in the primary and post-primary schools are retired. The personal circumstances of others (often with young families) mean that they do not want permanent appointments. Many of the substitute teachers are young, recently graduated from college, but have experienced (often considerable) difficulties in obtaining permanent employment. A few schools reported that they employ retired teachers because they know the school well and are available at short notice. In other schools, the principals prefer to employ newly qualified teachers and maintain close links with them in anticipation of future possible employment opportunities.
- 4.4 In the nurseries, several principals reported difficulties in obtaining suitable substitute cover in relation to teachers with early years experience. In the special schools, the principals noted that they prefer to employ substitute teachers known to the school and who have experience of pupils with severe learning difficulties.
- 4.5 Across all of the institutions inspected, very limited use is made of agencies to recruit substitute teachers; for those who do, the experience is mixed and ranges from complete

satisfaction with the teachers recruited to disappointment. Most principals reported that they prefer to draw upon the own lists of known substitute teachers, or used lists obtained from the education and library boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, or from the teacher unions.

- 4.6 In a minority of the schools, the principals reported that they experience considerable difficulties in obtaining substitute teachers. The reasons for this varies but includes, in disadvantaged urban areas, the perceived reputation of the school, and in rural situations, the availability of suitable substitute teachers in the local area. Financial pressures result in some principals having to employ young, less expensive and less experienced substitute teachers. It was also reported that principals prefer to employ young teachers but these are not always available, especially if the period of employment offered is considered by the teachers to be too short. The principals also noted the difficulties in obtaining appropriate substitute cover in the case of short-term and/or, emergency appointments. In several schools, it was reported that, in particular emergencies, the principals opt to employ unqualified teachers for short periods. A small number of the post-primary schools reported difficulties in recruiting teachers for particular subjects, especially mathematics, home economics, science and technology, and modern languages.

Figure 14



Comment: no significant differences between primary and post-primary.

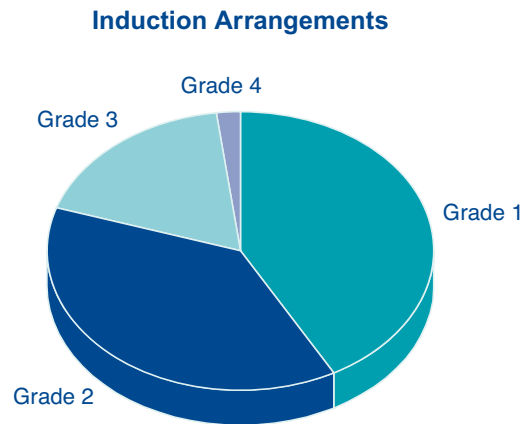
Induction Arrangements

- 4.7 In the interviews with the principals, in the main, the nature and quality of induction arrangements made by the nurseries, by the special schools, and by the primary and post-primary schools, reflect well the positive views of induction expressed by the substitute teachers. In most of the schools, the induction arrangements reflect many strengths, or the strengths outweighed weaknesses. In a fifth of the schools, weaknesses outweigh strengths; in a very few schools, there are many weaknesses in the induction arrangements.
- 4.8 Where the arrangements are effective and efficient, short and long-term planned absences are managed well. Unplanned absences are often dealt with effectively by vice-principals, year teachers, teachers with responsibility for the schools' mentoring systems, heads of departments, and by key stage co-ordinators. Some principals drew attention to induction leaflets and packs specially prepared for substitute teachers and highlighted arrangements for unplanned absences whereby the absent teacher typically makes contact with the

substitute teacher by telephone to give guidance and instructions. In those few schools where arrangements are much less effective, little has been done to anticipate problems arising from unplanned absences and, in these situations, substitute teachers have to fend for themselves.

- 4.9 In the best practice, good support is provided for the substitute teachers who, for example, on arrival at the school, receive from a vice-principal an itinerary for the day and materials to familiarise them with the school's policies and procedures as well as class lists and the names of class tutors and form tutors. In one of the nurseries, for example, prior to taking up post, the substitute teacher had met with the principal, shadowed the outgoing teacher for a day to observe routines, and met the other staff. In a special school, a very helpful booklet on induction has been prepared; in addition, the substitute teacher is provided in advance with individual pupil profiles and also meets with classroom assistants and other teachers.
- 4.10 Problems can occur, however, even where arrangements are generally secure or better. In a few inspections, parental questionnaires and interviews with the pupils resulted in concerns being expressed about the perceived excessive use of substitute teachers, for example in GCSE classes, and there were occasional parental complaints about what was perceived as the inadequate teaching of substitute teachers.

Figure 15



Comment: no significant differences between primary and post-primary.

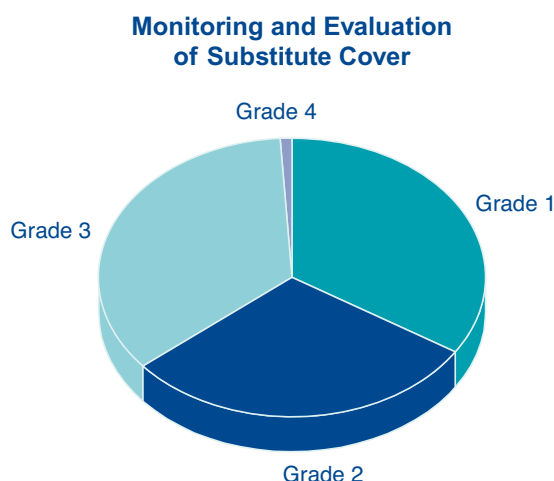
Monitoring and Evaluation

- 4.11 Across all of the schools, nurseries and special schools inspected, monitoring and evaluation arrangements are sound or better in one-third. In just under one-third, strengths outweigh weaknesses; in just over one-third, weaknesses outweigh strengths. In almost all of the nurseries, for example, monitoring and evaluation arrangements reflect many strengths.
- 4.12 This overall positive picture masks considerable variations in the nature and effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation arrangements in the primary and post-primary schools inspected. While more post-primary than primary schools have developed procedures with significant strengths, the monitoring and evaluation of substitute teachers reflect more weaknesses than strengths in two-fifths of the primary schools and in half of the post-primary schools. In these schools, monitoring and evaluation arrangements are too informal and ‘ad hoc’.

- 4.13 In the primary and post-primary schools inspected, substitute teachers are often provided only with informal feedback on the quality of their work. Particularly in small rural primary schools with teaching principals, little formal monitoring is carried out and much reliance is placed instead on informal discussion and the informal sharing of experiences. Some principals of primary schools have developed more formal approaches to monitoring and evaluation including reviewing the written planning of substitute teachers, checking the children's written work, and occasional class visits; such visits, however, do not always result in appropriate feedback.
- 4.14 Where classroom visiting is most effective, some primary principals provide substitute teachers with a written report which includes comments on the quality of their work across a range of issues (including, for example, marking) and on the standard of the children's work. In one school, where arrangements are well organised and effective, the substitute teacher is initially visited twice daily; further classroom visiting is on a less frequent basis. A few primary schools have developed a classroom observation programme involving regular visits by senior staff or by key stage co-ordinators. There is occasional evidence of the use of mentoring systems to support substitute teachers and to provide a mechanism for the review of their work.
- 4.15 Monitoring and evaluation arrangements in those post-primary schools where weaknesses outweighed strengths are too often informal and limited in scale and scope. Where more thorough and effective arrangements are in place, notably where substitute teachers have been appointed to extended periods of employment ranging up to an academic year, more formal, rigorous and appropriate systems are in use and involve, typically, visits to classes and consideration of the pupils' written and practical work by senior staff and/or heads of departments. Some principals also interview the substitute

teachers about their work in the school. On occasions, post-primary schools obtain informal feedback on the quality of the substitute teachers' work from the pupils and from other teachers.

Figure 16



Comment: no significant differences between primary and post-primary, other than more grade 1 outcomes in post-primary.

Department of Education Guidance: vetting and employment of retired teachers

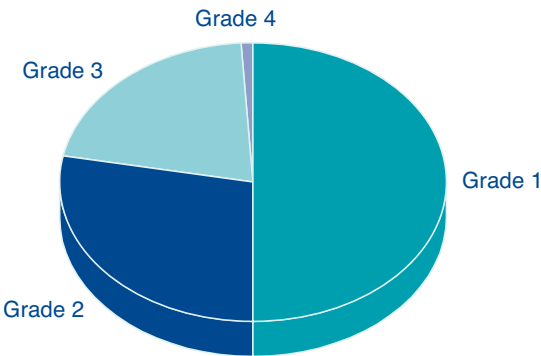
- 4.16 The extent to which the nurseries, special schools, and the schools comply with the Department of Education's guidance on the vetting of substitute teachers and the employment of retired teachers varies considerably. In half of all of the institutions combined, the arrangements reflect many strengths; in just over a quarter they reflect more strengths than weaknesses. In one-fifth of the institutions inspected, weaknesses outweigh strengths; in only one school are there many weaknesses.

- 4.17 Where arrangements are not secure, much is taken on trust. There is a general assumption that if the substitute teacher has been employed previously in other schools, comes from an agency, from an education and library board list, and/or has a teacher reference number, then that is sufficient security. Principals indicated that, at times, they rely upon the information provided on the relevant form by the substitute teacher on his/her first day.
- 4.18 On occasions, such reliance can lead to difficulties. During the survey, incidents which gave cause for concern were the non-declaration of an unsatisfactory teaching record, and, separately, of a criminal record.
- 4.19 The principals noted that, at times, and notably in emergencies when they cannot find readily a satisfactory alternative, they have little or no option but to employ retired teachers. Despite this, relatively few retired teachers are employed, and in the institutions inspected, the number was just under 9%.
- 4.20 Many of the problems the principals experience in recruiting and vetting substitute teachers should be reduced considerably as a result of the introduction in March 2004 of the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR). This is a free on-line and telephone service, supported by the Department of Education in partnership with the five education and library boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, the voluntary grammar school sector, Irish-medium schools, and the teacher unions; it is also endorsed by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland. The service enables all schools in Northern Ireland to arrange for substitute cover by holding details of substitute teachers' availability and updating automatically once bookings are confirmed. All substitute teachers registering are vetted and this will remove much of the uncertainty, as described in this report, which principals

have experienced in terms of vetting arrangements. The teachers on the register have the benefit of standard terms and conditions and of pay rates with pensionable service. They are also able to stipulate in advance where and when they wish to work and, if they wish, to limit their work as substitute teachers to nominated schools only.

Figure 17

Adherence to Department of Education Guidance re Vetting and the Employment of Retired Teachers



Comment: no significant differences between primary and post-primary, other than more grade 1 outcomes in post-primary.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The work of substitute teachers in Northern Ireland contributes significantly to the effective running of the schools and nurseries, and substitute teachers represent an important resource valued by principals and by others in the education service. In the main, substitute teaching and its management in Northern Ireland operate in an efficient and effective manner.
- 5.2 Most of the substitute teachers observed in class and interviewed during this survey have appropriate qualifications

and prior experience. In most nurseries and schools, their planning and teaching, and the quality of the pupils' work and behaviour, are of a sound or better standard. The substitute teachers report in a generally positive manner about their experiences in the schools and in the nurseries and, in most instances, comment favourably about the support and advice they receive. Their largely positive evaluation also matches, in large measure, the views of the principals.

- 5.3 There is room for improvement, notably in aspects of planning, classroom practice, the induction of the substitute teachers into the schools, and also in respect of the monitoring and evaluation of their work by senior management. Consideration also needs to be given to improving substitute teachers' access to external professional development opportunities and to in-service training; many substitute teachers experience considerable problems in accessing these important areas.
- 5.4 The recent introduction of the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register should also improve significantly many of the problems substitute teachers experience in obtaining temporary employment and should also help to reduce the difficulties principals have experienced in recruiting substitute teachers and in carrying out required vetting procedures.

6. STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

6.1 Strengths

In most nurseries and schools, the substitute teachers employed have appropriate qualifications and prior experience.

In most nurseries and schools, the quality of planning by the substitute teachers is generally sound or better and builds effectively on the work of the absent teachers.

In almost all nurseries and schools, the pupils respond well to the substitute teachers and there is much evidence of good relationships, well-motivated pupils and good behaviour.

In most nurseries and schools, the quality of substitute teaching is of a sound or better standard; the teaching of just over a quarter is characterised as of a high quality.

In most nurseries and schools, the standard of the pupils' learning is sound or better. Most of the pupils are secure in what they are learning, show interest in their work, and achieve satisfactory or better outcomes.

In most primary schools, and in a majority of the post-primary schools, substitute teachers manage effectively continuity and progression in the pupils' work and most of the pupils are progressing in a satisfactory or better manner.

Most substitute teachers report that much of what they experience while working in nurseries, and in schools generally, is positive. Their work contributes significantly to the effective working of nurseries and schools, and substitute teachers are a valuable and important resource valued by principals and by others in the education service.

Induction arrangements for substitute teachers are mostly effective and reflect many strengths, or the strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The support arrangements available to most substitute teachers are of a satisfactory or better quality. Most substitute teachers spoke very positively about the nature and quality of the formal and informal support they received and of the manner in which they had been made welcome in the schools.

The school-based training and development opportunities available to substitute teachers are of a sound or better quality.

The recruitment and induction strategies employed by principals in respect of substitute teachers are mostly effective. In a majority of the nurseries and schools, the monitoring and evaluation of the work of substitute teachers by senior management are effective.

6.2 Areas for Improvement

Greater emphasis should be given to key aspects of planning, particularly the clearer promotion of literacy and numeracy, the better identification of learning outcomes, and to meeting more explicitly the needs of individual pupils, especially those who require special help with their learning.

In the minority of classes where the standard of the pupils' work needs to be improved, too much attention is given to unchallenging tasks which take insufficient account of the pupils' needs and their levels of ability.

In a minority of the schools, induction arrangements for substitute teachers require attention, notably in the need to improve information and guidance on planning, classroom resources and assessment information about the pupils in the class or classes they are to teach.

Substitute teachers often encounter difficulties when covering for teachers following unplanned and unexpected absences. Schools should take steps to minimise such problems by preparing contingency information and resource material to assist substitute teachers taking up positions in such circumstances.

A significant minority of substitute teachers, and especially those on short-term appointments, have problems accessing external professional development opportunities, or have limited or no access to such training. Employing authorities, and the curriculum and advisory services of the education and

library boards, should make arrangements to meet more effectively the external training and development needs of substitute teachers.

In a significant minority of the schools, the monitoring by senior management of the work of substitute teachers is unduly informal and 'ad hoc' and substitute teachers are not provided with a sufficiently thorough evaluation of their work.

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