

# Temporary teaching staff: a 'sticking plaster' or a real opportunity?

First Class Education Solutions is working hard to give teachers the best possible chance of succeeding every time they enter a classroom. Peter Cobrin explains how



Wouldn't it be great if supply teaching agencies disappeared because there was no demand for their services? Some chance!

The problem is most acute in inner London where just 57 per cent of teachers who qualified in 2012 were still working in the classroom by 2017. But don't be complacent elsewhere, only 74 per cent of newly qualified teachers in the east Midlands and the north-east were still in service after five years.

## Ensuring quality learning

So here we are – supporting schools in ensuring continuity of quality learning in classrooms. One of the challenges when providing interim staff into a school is to avoid the trap of "supply for supply's sake". There is a vacancy, there is a candidate, put

them together – job done. No! It's definitely not done. At all levels, nursery, primary and secondary, we have to focus on the quality of that individual experience, and this experience starts the moment the classroom door opens.

## Supply teaching

For most career teachers, that first lesson with a strange class in a strange school happens very infrequently – especially if they stay in the same school! For the supply teacher, it can be almost a daily occurrence. I have experienced both so I speak from long experience.

I can remember my first lesson as if it were yesterday. It was in fact January 5 1981. What I learnt that day was a very simple lesson and one every supply teacher should remember if they remember nothing else. When you meet a new class, you have to exceed expectations, and one way of doing so is to ensure that your tool-bag of "stuff" is full to the brim with surprises, and that you are ready to deliver the moment you walk through that door, because it's those opening seconds that can make or break the lesson.

The answer is partly in the way we as a company manage relationships with a school, and that means in some cases a

degree of handholding. We know they want a supply teacher to be as effective in the classroom as is possible, but what do they need to do to achieve this, and what can we do to ensure they do?

## First Class Education Solutions

For our part, at First Class Education Solutions, we are working hard to give our teachers the best possible chance of succeeding every time they enter a classroom. Temporary teachers are an essential part of school life, just as locums are in a general medical practice. But there the comparison breaks down. The locum GP deals with one patient at a time and has access to all medical records. The supply teacher will meet typically five classes of up to 30 in a day, sometimes without even a list of names.

The world of supply teaching is changing, and demand continues to rise. As the arguments about costs and mark-ups run their course, the recent tender for a supply teaching procurement framework is failing miserably, despite well-publicised promises [www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-44334806](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-44334806) from the Department for Education. Agencies I have spoken to have seen barely a handful of enquires through this new procurement framework and schools are blissfully unaware of it.

Schools want to deal with companies who focus on the quality of the teaching and learning experience, and this ill-conceived exercise addresses neither. So our focus will remain first and foremost on putting schools and learners first.

*Peter Cobrin entered teaching by accident in 1981 to provide cover for a few days and stayed at the same school for 15 years first as a teacher of history and politics, then head of department and de facto head of sixth form. Later in his career he was a lead adviser in the Building Schools for the Future programme and now he is a key member of the First Class Education Solution family, focusing on innovation, special projects and above all, delivering fully-funded leadership and management training for schools. ■*



## FURTHER INFORMATION

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