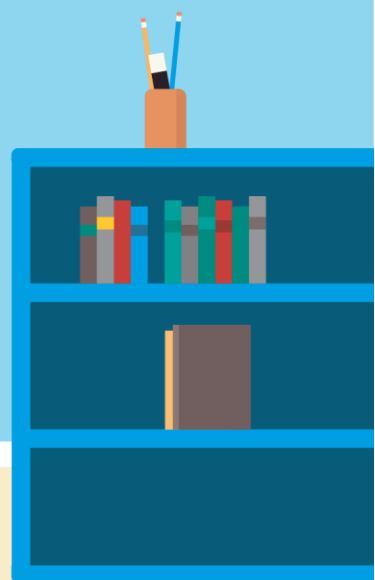


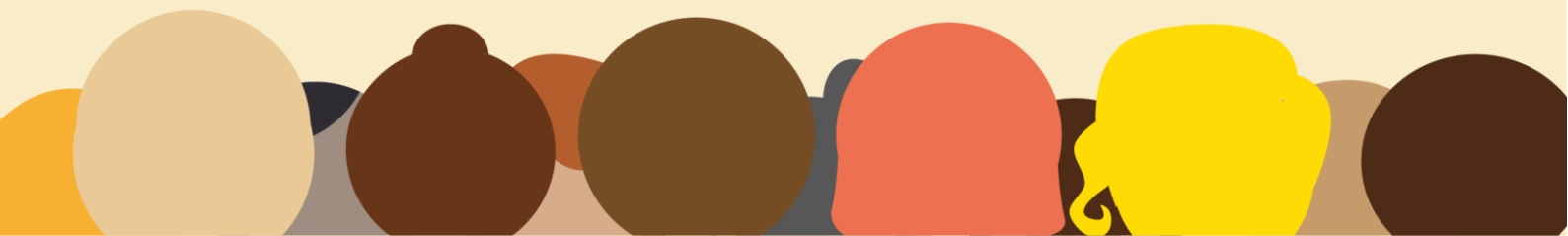


How to be a superhero supply teacher

1,885 supply teachers share their very best tips for success



Written by
the Key Portfolio community



Hello!



Want to become a super supply teacher? Help is here.

So you're a brand new supply teacher? Exciting times! We're really proud of you, actually. After all, where would schools be without teachers prepared to sit by their phone on a Monday morning? Or those who can give their heart and soul to a school for just one term?

The education system depends so heavily on supply teachers to cover illness, maternity leave, training courses and other short-term staff shortages. We have [so much admiration](#) for the people who step up to fill these gaps, ready to hit the ground running and armed with a lesson plan for every Key Stage.

You've probably chosen supply work because it gives you flexibility – [to travel](#), to look after your children, to care for family members, to pursue hobbies and creative sidelines, to build up a tonne of experience while you look for your 'forever school'. But whether you've [just left a permanent teaching position](#) or you're fresh from uni as an NQT, we know how daunting that first assignment can seem.

So, we rallied our community of experienced supply teachers and asked them to share their very best tips and advice with you.

These supply teachers have worked across all age groups, in all types of schools, in all subjects. They've taken assignments lasting one afternoon, one term and one year. They've arranged work in advance and at 7:30am that morning. They've 'seen it, done it and got the (P.E.) t-shirt to prove it,' as one teacher, Sophie Fielden, put it.

Nearly 2,000 of them responded. Keep reading to hear what they had to say, and use their advice to develop your own techniques and a supply teaching style that works for **you**.



Be prepared

“Get your game face on!”

– **Cerys Harvey** (supply teacher, Swansea)



‘Expect the unexpected and prepare for that’. Great advice from Martina Hedley to start us off.

If there’s one standout message from supply teachers up and down the country, it’s this – ‘be prepared’. Overwhelmingly, the most common tip was to prepare in advance of each placement. We heard it over and over again, and many people had advice on just how to go about it – from ‘always eat breakfast’ (Gabrielle Watts) to the essential questions to ask when you arrive at school.

Prepare some emergency lessons

‘Have a basic selection of lesson plans and resources for year groups you plan to supply in so you are prepared for any gaps in timetable or where there is no planning,’ recommends one primary teacher from London.

Won’t the school leave planning for you? Not always. But even if they do – plans change, equipment breaks down, you need a quick filler lesson before the bell... you get the idea. ‘If there is planning left, always try and stick with it,’ says Ashlyn Witts. But Lauren Davies points out that you should feel free to ‘change the activities if you don’t understand the plan. It’s always hard teaching from someone else’s plan.’ It’s okay to ‘be spontaneous and adapt given planning to your own strengths and knowhow,’ suggests one teacher with over ten years of supply experience behind her. ‘Trust your judgement to adapt a lesson if it’s not working,’ agrees someone else.

And as one teacher from Preston has learned, it helps to have extra work you can ‘get out when the pupils say “We did that last lesson”.’

For these reasons, Charlotte Hammond recommends that you ‘always have something up your sleeve for those little emergencies. A good guide is always prepared.’

So, before you go anywhere near a classroom, ‘make up an emergency bag with resources/lessons for when you get the early morning call and don’t know what you’re walking into,’ recommends William Thomas. Or as Catherine Wilkinson puts it, ‘always have an ‘instant’ lesson with you’.

One secondary school teacher recommends you ‘have something in reserve in case work hasn’t been set, such as a general knowledge quiz. This is especially useful if you have a challenging group which would exhibit poor behaviour if left without focus for long.’

Know what makes a good emergency lesson

As one teacher from York is keen to remind you, on day-to-day supply, the best lessons are ‘portable and easily resourced’. Oh, and ‘avoid things that will create too much marking if you can,’ says someone else. Another urges you to keep in mind that ‘you often have 30 minutes to photocopy everything you need for the whole day’. ‘Don’t rely on technology as often you can’t log on’ adds Susan Ealey. ‘Keep objectives simple but achievable,’ adds Andrew Durnion.

In Sarah Harrison’s experience, ‘most schools provide lesson material but it’s good to have your own resources with you if the work is finished early or technology lets you down.’ She goes on to explain that she’s ‘had smart boards that don’t work, no whiteboard or flip chart, no quick

access to a printer! So even word searches, colouring sheets, age appropriate spelling games with enough class copies on you can save your day.'



'It's easy enough to Google shed loads of work for every age group,' points out Joy Barnes.

Cover all age groups

Joy makes a good point about ensuring that your lessons cover each age group you could be asked to teach. One teacher encourages you to 'have a couple of bags ready with a great selection of lessons to go. I have a KS1 bag and a KS2 one.' 'Have files for each Key Stage arranged in subjects,' suggests another, 'with a variety of activities to dip into at the drop of a hat.' David Woollard-Kingston does similar, arriving at every assignment with 'an open mind and a briefcase full of worksheets covering different subjects and levels'.

'You need to be able to think on your feet, so have a couple of songs, games or stories in your head ready,' says one primary teacher.

Paula Briggs agrees. She suggests that you 'get a planner and, if possible, keep a portfolio of fun,

'emergency' lessons in your subject and any others you are likely to be asked to deliver. If you are covering a lesson, ask if you can keep a copy of any good quality handouts. Why re-invent the wheel?' Or as Natasha Le Sage puts it, 'magpie from every teacher you meet.'

Once you start using your favourite lessons in schools, one person (who's been supply teaching for five years) recommends that you 'keep a simple record of what resources you use where, in case you return to a school again. You don't want to teach the same thing to the same class!'

If you're thrown a curve-ball on your first day, having a bank of lessons in your bag means you'll have something in front of you that you can teach quickly. Phew!

Pack a bag

Have a 'Mary Poppins' bag' packed and ready to go, recommends Margaret De Vane. Others refer to it as their 'bag of tricks'. Whatever you call it, pick it up before you leave for an assignment, and you'll know you're ready for anything. 'You can be called very early,' one teacher reminds us. 'Be ready!'

Your lesson plans are the first thing that should go in your bag. But what else? Here are 21 ideas:

1. 'Take spare pens, pencils, paper. Have emergency lessons in case nothing is set. Take marker board pens. Take your own coffee, mug and milk.' – Vivienne Taylor

2. 'TEABAGS!' – said just about everyone. 'There's nothing worse than being made to pay for your cup of tea or finding that the staff buy their own and keep them under lock and key!' warns Nicola Stonehouse. Mary Ohana always takes an 'unbreakable beaker' too.
3. 'Buy a packet of biscuit or cakes to treat your fellow dept. colleagues' – Michael Foster
4. 'Always have stickers and a good story in your bag.' – anonymous
5. 'Always ensure you have a flask of tea or coffee, plenty of pens, pencils etc, and a great sense of humour' – anonymous
6. 'Take a bag full of different things such as pencils and little notepads, anything to be used as a prize at the end of the day. Don't forget the stickers for the younger children!' – Trudie David
7. 'Take your PE Kit' – Paul Crosby. 'And of course a whistle,' adds Mary Ohana.



"Imagine you are a mobile stationery cupboard."

– **Robert Page**

8. 'Get a stock of coffee/tea/sugar. Get a water bottle. Always have a pencil case of supplies for the classroom. Carry a pair of trainers with you. Have change (coins) on you for drinks/food etc.' – Clare Shaw
9. 'Bring a wide range of stationery, especially a jazzy pen which little kids will love and you are less likely to lose!' – from an anonymous primary school teacher. For secondary teacher David Hutchings, it's more about the 'cheap biros'.
10. 'Build up a collection of resources for the subjects and age groups you might be teaching. Have a 'wow' object and range of supporting materials in your bag and ready to go when you get a call from an agency.' – anonymous
11. 'Make sure you have your DBS with you or agency identification.' – Mary Ohana
12. 'Have some songs in the bag and fun, educational time fillers.' – Angela Carter
13. 'If working within Foundation Stage take one of your own favourite books to share.' – Christine Collins
14. 'Word searches, fruit drops for 'best table', good work stamps' – Frances Pocrnic

15. 'Carry a bag of handy pens, sticky notes, board markers etc. Take your own lunch and drinks.' – Martina Hedley
16. 'Buy some colouring books for those who finish, it's amazing how much all ages love them!' – Anna Grange
17. 'Always carry a protein bar, a pen, some paracetamol, water and some lined paper with you.' – Claire Gibson
18. 'Always bring your pencil case' – Karina Quigley (in fact, just 'imagine you are a mobile stationery cupboard if you want to go into the classroom prepared,' says Robert Page)
19. 'Always carry a thermal mug and a whistle' – Julie Burkinshaw
20. 'Buy a clipboard and keep loose paperwork attached to it' – anonymous
21. 'Take your own flashcards so you don't have to find theirs. Playing cards are an instant maths lesson.' – anonymous

Once you're all packed, you might decide to copy Lynda Hibbert, who suggests leaving your 'box of resources in the car, just in case.'



Oh, and one last thing to throw in your bag before you leave in the morning – 'if you have time, make a packed lunch' suggests Tessa Triumph. 'Don't fall foul of the catering arrangements,' warns Adrian Lyon-Joyce, and remember that 'many schools have a cashless canteen these days' as Gillian Foster points out.

Do your research

'Research the school as best you can before you go there,' recommends Adrian Queen.



Lots of supply teachers suggest looking at the school's website and Ofsted report, and asking your agency. This helps you 'to get a feel for the school before you go', says Carol Camozzi-Ward. Plus, you can sometimes find out 'handy info such as timings of the day,' adds one teacher, who's often in different schools every week, and 'copies of school policies to read in advance'.

Don't forget to 'ask the agency when the [school] day starts so you get there well before the children arrive,' suggests one supply teacher.

Also, 'do research about what supply teaching is all about. Join a forum to get support and ideas when you need them,' recommends Sadiya

Abbasi. It can help to 'attend agency work get-togethers to meet other supply teachers,' says one person. 'Speak to as many other supply teachers as you can,' agrees Sara Nathan. She might be thinking along the same lines as another contributor, who recommends you 'make sure you have a friend who is a supply teacher so you can share the ups and downs.'

'If you aren't from the United Kingdom then learn about basics by asking questions about [the British system](#) before going in the first day,' recommends Jodi Holtz. 'I did not and they said to "take the register" first thing and I didn't know what that was. Throughout the day there were many words and common procedures I didn't know.'

"Always carry a protein bar, a pen, some paracetamol, water and some lined paper with you."

– Claire Gibson

Plan your route

Minimise your rush hour stress by knowing exactly where you're going. This starts with noting down the exact address and postcode of the school and if you've got time to plan your route ahead of time, do so. From one voice of experience: 'Don't just rely on satnav in case that is the day it can't pick up a signal!'

In fact, Daryl Newey has a policy of 'only accept[ing] work that is organised in advance, therefore I have time to research the school's

own website and plan my route prior to commencing the placement. Being prepared is the best advice for anyone: plenty of paper, pens and ideas of tasks for pupils in case no work is left for you!'



But that level of preparation may not be possible. You'll likely find yourself taking late assignments at least from time to time, but there are still steps you can take to get organised beforehand:

- ⊖ Make a list of your local schools and give some thought to the route you'd take from home. Why not [pin them on Google Maps](#) so you can access them quickly when you get a call?
- ⊖ 'Learn the tube map,' recommends one Londoner
- ⊖ 'Get a good local map and satnav,' suggests an anonymous contributor
- ⊖ Download any apps that will help you get where you're going – we had recommendations for [Citymapper](#), [Trainline](#) and [Google Maps](#). If you're called out to a last minute assignment, you should be all set to plug in a postcode and go.

After you've done all of that, one teacher from London has some wise advice: 'Leave early. Don't trust the journey time in school time traffic. Going into London is going to take much, much longer. Find out about parking if you drive.'

Arrive early

'Give yourself enough time at the beginning of the day to look at the planning and generally prepare for the day,' says one experienced supply teacher. 'It's less stressful that way!' 'It also helps just in case the school are not fully prepared and you need to plan things off the cuff,' agrees Scott Willis.

As Seema Bhupla says, 'there's nothing worse than feeling unprepared and suddenly the bell goes and you're in panic mode as the children are walking into the classroom!'. That's why Mary Ohana suggests that if possible, you should 'arrive early so you can get your bearings and locate resources'.

"If you get the register right the rest of the day should go well." – Sophie Unwin

Aim to 'make sure you are in school an hour before the children, unless you are called late,' recommends a supply teacher from Manchester. If you're on day-to-day supply, 'get ready to leave by 7:15am and wait near the phone' suggests Patricia Shaw.

One contributor explains that, at this time of day, 'it's the small details that count e.g. timetable of the day, lunch menu, how many in class, TA's

name, children who have medical issues/behaviour issues. Then planning and resources – focus on the morning first (glance at the afternoon too, but read [the planning] in full at lunch – you won't be able to keep it all in your head).'



Don't forget to 'make notes of any information which can be offloaded to you in the first 10 minutes before the class teacher goes off to his or her day elsewhere,' says Mary Ohana. If it helps, 'make notes on Post-it notes to remind you of timings throughout the day,' suggests someone else.

Don't hesitate to ask for anything you need to make your day run more smoothly. Tracey Twidale suggests you 'always have a list of questions to ask about where toilets are, where the hall is, times of play-times, etc. because some schools will show you the classroom and leave you there before you have time to catch your breath!'

'Ask the person giving you the outline for work that day to start from the beginning of the day e.g. how is the register done,' suggests Sophie Unwin. 'If you get the register right the rest of the day should go well.'

Ask the essential questions

If the school doesn't automatically provide this info, our community suggests asking for:

- ⊖ 'A seating plan for every new class and request named class list photos (on SIMS or handouts).' – anonymous
- ⊖ 'Always know how many makes a full class and how many are present, in case of a fire, plus know exit routes and place of line up in case the alarm goes off.' – Mary Ohana
- ⊖ 'A map of the school campus.' – anonymous
- ⊖ 'Always ask what the behaviour policy is so you know how to handle the difficult students.' – Maria Luisa Ferreira Da Silva Mota
- ⊖ 'Ask about challenging children before the day starts.' – anonymous
- ⊖ 'Ask what you should do with disruptive children and don't be afraid to do it!' – Robert Cruise
- ⊖ 'Find out who and how to contact someone if you have behavioural issues you cannot manage, and need support.' – Heather Martin
- ⊖ 'Find out if at all possible if anyone has any extra needs before going into the classroom.' – Joanna Daoud
- ⊖ 'Familiarise yourself with the marking policy and follow it.' – Ian Shearer
- ⊖ 'Ask for 'access to the IT system used by teachers.' – anonymous
- ⊖ 'Ask about the mobile phone policy, if they are allowed to listen to music while they work and if they may go to the toilet. They will always say they are allowed even if they are not.' – Ann Cooke
- ⊖ 'Ask about the class, SEN, EAL children, how many kids and behavioural needs before the day starts.' – anonymous

When you're early, it sets you up to tackle the day ahead. It helps you make a good first impression by giving you time to chat to staff, ask questions, absorb information, look over the lessons and form an action plan for the day.

Plus, you'll be better placed to follow Margaret De Vane's advice to 'have a warm, welcoming, reassuring smile, lots of patience and try, every day, to be the teacher you would have liked to have been taught by when you were a child.'



Once it's time to get started, with your prep completed, you can focus your efforts on getting to know your class to ensure the day goes smoothly. As Dipa Odedra says, 'it's going to take a while in the morning to get to know the new class', so make sure your preparation gives you the best possible start.

One teacher sums it up like this: 'Arrive early, be meticulously organised and spend a short time talking to your class before you start to clarify 'your rules' for the day. Smile and tell them you are going to have a great day!'

And with all the preparation you've done, we're sure you will.

'If for any reason you are delayed (which has sometimes happened to me through no fault of my own), phone to let the school know the reason for your delay,' recommends Margaret Smedley. 'Honesty goes a long way.'

“Try, every day, to be the teacher you would have liked to have been taught by when you were a child.” – **Margaret De Vane**



Be calm and confident

“Go in like a hero.”

– **Kerry Hadley-Pryce** (supply teacher, Birmingham)



'Feel the fear and do it anyway! I was really nervous even though I've been a teacher for nearly 30 years. Then I did some really last minute jobs in year groups I haven't taught in years and now feel more confident to take jobs in KS1.'

As this teacher points out, it's natural to lack confidence at first, but you'll get past it. Preparation definitely helps, but our supply teachers had lots more practical advice on how to power through the nerves and gain control of your class straight away.

Own the classroom

'Always smile when you first arrive' says Anne Woodward. 'It gives the impression that you are pleased to be there and that you respect the school.' Gillian Harris recommends 'walk[ing] into the classroom like you are a member of staff at that school. First impressions count. Children will sum you up in the first few minutes. Be and sound confident.'



'Walk into the room like you own the place,' is Erik Houlihan-Jong's advice. 'The kids will never know the difference!' Leesa Henderson agrees –

'walk in the classroom with your head held high,' she encourages you. 'Ooze confidence,' as Luke Bosman puts it.

Master the intro

Ben Riley's advice is to 'master the intro. If you nail the intro to the class, it's plain sailing.' Hopefully the advice in this section will help you put together an intro that works for you and the year groups you teach.

"Master the intro. If you nail the intro to the class, it's plain sailing." – Ben Riley

'It's all about setting a good tone as soon as pupils start arriving outside your classroom,' says Philippa Tudor. 'Don't let it slip no matter how much they are playing up or misbehaving. Maintain a positive and level tone.'

'The moment you enter a classroom, smile and be at ease,' says Karen Carney. 'Chat for a few seconds, let the class know you are happy to be their teacher and look forward to working with them.' 'Be (or seem) as relaxed as possible' at this point, one secondary teacher from Norwich says. 'Be brave!' urges Laura Thomas.

'Make up your own three simple rules and begin the day with your rules,' says Denise Armstrong. 'List tasks to be completed on the board so that pupils know what they need to have completed by the end of the lesson,' suggests someone else.

Michael Jarvis suggests you 'always introduce yourself to the class. Never write your name on

the board. Stand up as default. Move around the room.' Which contradicts another teacher's advice to 'always write your name on the white board,' but we guess it's about finding an approach that works for you.

'Start the day on the right foot,' says Christina Tatham. 'Children must enter your classroom in an orderly fashion,' agrees another contributor. Then 'do the register calmly and with children in silence,' continues Christina. 'It really sets you up as the person 'in charge'. 'You're aiming for 'calm but assertive,' says someone else.

Get off to a smooth start

Now might be the time to dip into your supply bag. As Susan Ealey says: 'Have a starter lesson ready while you sort yourself out if a late assignment comes in and you feel stressed and unprepared for the day'. A good starter activity can help 'keep them busy whilst you find the register,' agrees a secondary teacher.

One primary teacher thinks you should 'always make time to find out about the children in your class when you first meet them. Even if it's just them telling you their favourite colours, it still shows that you value their thoughts and ideas.' A KS1 teacher has similar advice: 'First introduce yourself and your rules. Then give them name labels and play a name game.'

But what works in one school or age group doesn't always work in another. That explains why Georgina Lines tends to go down a different route: 'Be the strictest teacher you can be for the first 20 minutes - it gives the pupils the immediate impression they cannot mess you around. Own the classroom - it's now YOUR teaching space. Own it and enforce your

expectations.' Similarly, someone else told us their approach is to 'never smile before break time.'

Overall, aim to set the expectation that 'what you say goes, regardless of "Miss doesn't do it that way!" type comments,' says one primary teacher from Liverpool.

'Have a good sense of humour and laugh with them,' Karen Carney suggests. 'But also make it clear to them that learning can be fun but work has to be done and that these two concepts can work together. If they know you respect them, it is often returned.'

Let's end with some motivating words from Christie Lowe: 'Be brave and confident. You are an amazing teacher and you can do it!'

Brush up on behaviour management techniques

'Supply teaching will develop your skills in behaviour management faster than anything else,' according to Dipa Odedra. Mary Ohana recommends getting 'ready for challenging children and all they can throw at you' while another teacher points out that 'it's as tricky for children as for you - not being their permanent teacher you are kind of a 'friendly stranger'.'

So, 'don't expect the kids to behave as though their regular teacher is there,' says Ann Cooke.'

You can 'create a good impression by having a well-managed class as much as possible,' recommends Hannah Walker. But how?

Start as you mean to go on

First things first. 'Always sort out classroom behaviour before you can even get started on the teaching side of things,' says Steven Rigg. 'Don't stand for any nonsense!' urges someone else. 'Have a million different behaviour strategies up your sleeve,' recommends Simon James.

'With every new class, always go through expectations for behaviour at the very beginning of the day,' recommends Sarah Jack, a primary teacher from London. 'Get the children to tell you what rules they think they need to keep them all safe, happy and so they can do their best learning. Be fair and consistent with behaviour rewards and sanctions.' In this way, 'the children usually carry the whole day along,' adds Jenny Cox. 'They love telling you about their routines and rules.'

Carol Collett takes a similar approach. She suggests: 'Listen to the children but let them know you are working on behalf of their teacher and you expect them to behave and work as well as or better than usual. Behave in a manner that you would want a supply teacher to behave in your class.' You might want to 'make it clear if they give you problems, you will report it to their teacher and leave them with problems,' suggests Shoaib Khan.

"Supply teaching will develop your skills in behaviour management faster than anything else." – Dipa Odedra

'Don't be afraid to take control of a classroom that isn't yours and manage behaviour effectively, as if it were your class, but in line with what the class teacher usually does,' says Catherine Cook.



'Be rigid with the behaviour policy,' agrees Alexandra Phillips. 'You need them to know you are boss straight away – no matter how long you have been a teacher, many see having supply as a chance to mess around.'

Tried and tested techniques

For Amy Parsons, the key to supply teaching success is simple: 'behaviour management, behaviour management, behaviour management.'

'Nip any issues in the bud early,' she says.

In the 'Be Prepared' chapter, we heard about the importance of learning the school's behaviour policy inside out and 'stick[ing] to it as pleasantly as you are capable of' (as Jason Croasdale puts it). With that knowledge under your belt, our supply teachers have some further techniques and strategies to help you keep an unfamiliar class under control:

- ⊖ 'Keep calm with students. Never get into any confrontations. Your key phrase to close the confrontation down is, "Yes, maybe you are right, but..."' – anonymous
- ⊖ 'Don't meet trouble half-way, but do be quite abrupt and uncompromising when you feel a line has been crossed/some action is needed. In most situations, less is best in terms of interacting, with groups, with individuals. But be as candid, straight, positive, unsuspicious, even friendly, as possible, in your interactions, unless and until there's unmistakable reason to be otherwise. Often, when they are expected to be getting on quietly with their work, looking as if you are getting on intently with work of your own can be an effective strategy. Don't be in a hurry to, but do recognise when it's sensible to send out for help. Most schools are fine with this.' – anonymous

"Your key phrase to close the confrontation down is, 'Yes, maybe you are right, but...'" – anonymous

- ⊖ 'Learn the behaviour policy well and don't be afraid to use it. If you hold back even once it won't work. Having a treasure chest and doing a 'good behaviour' raffle is accepted in nearly every school. Having one can really help encourage good behaviour. It might be

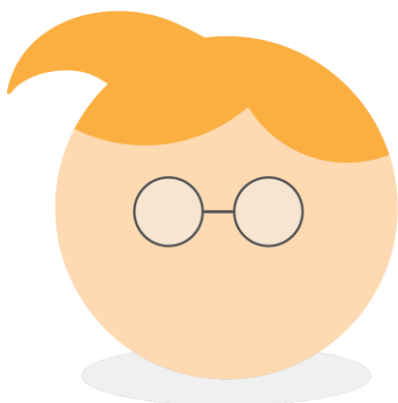
bribing, which isn't advised, but honestly if you are only in that school a day it is a very quick way to gain some respect from the kids and saves you a lot of stress!' says one anonymous teacher. With a raffle-based system, Bruce Butler adds that you should 'keep it mysterious at first. It attracts the child's curiosity and has never failed to work!' Just make sure it's something that 'can be carried out in one day'.



- ⊖ 'Have your own kind of reward system [e.g. stickers]' suggests one contributor. 'Take a prize bag and choose 2 winners each day. It's a good incentive to run alongside class incentives. Kids always remember me because of my bag!' says Hannah Doyle.
- ⊖ 'Have a secret weapon to engage the children from the beginning and use it to support behaviour management. e.g. A puppet, wand and stickers. This works for me in every class I work in (EYFS)' – anonymous
- ⊖ 'Don't try to be a rigid disciplinarian – be bright, positive, enthusiastic, encourage the children through positive reinforcement, and present yourself as

if you assume they all want to learn and succeed and you want to help them do well. If they're not working, initially approach them as if there is some problem preventing them from starting work and you're keen to help them overcome it. View every piece of work completed by every pupil and a positive success – forget about the negatives.’ – anonymous

- ⊖ ‘Be confident and tell children your rules for the day; try to relate them to the class/school rules and let them know that you will be in contact with their class teacher and she/he is looking forward to hear how brilliant they have been.’ – Kay MacKenzie
- ⊖ ‘Never judge a young person on what someone else tells you – don't be judgmental – offer every child, even the most difficult, the opportunity of a new beginning. In my long experience I've learned that children who are bruised and almost broken but given a shoulder to lean on often give so much more back than they ever received. Be unafraid, robust and creative.’ – anonymous



- ⊖ ‘Practice the death stare – it can usually stop a child in its tracks. Have plenty of games and jokes. And if all else fails, a box of chocolates on the desk for the best behaved child is guaranteed to work. Otherwise just teach them!’ – anonymous

“You have to be in control of your class as they arrive for your lesson.” – Alison Flynn

- ⊖ ‘You have to be in control of your class as they arrive for your lesson. Seat students into a plan so you can name each student. It's your lesson, you are responsible for the teaching that goes on in this lesson so take responsibility for it.’ – Alison Flynn
- ⊖ ‘Don't be afraid to escalate and ask for help.’ – anonymous
- ⊖ ‘Identify the challenging pupils – I always introduce myself (sometimes before the lesson) and give them a compliment or a job. It gets them in the right mindset to listen to you.’ – Georgina Lines
- ⊖ ‘Don't shout at kids if they are going wild, things will get even worse if you do. Try to be calm and smile, smile, smile – even if you haven't got any reason to laugh. Defeat rudeness with kindness. Be so kind and nice to kids to the extent of exaggeration, so that you will get sick of it yourself.’ – Gosha Gibek-Brand

- ⊖ 'In secondary I wouldn't go in so strict as the children do not respond well to this (especially the older students) and will try to take advantage of the fact that you aren't their permanent teacher.' – anonymous

Make sure you 'follow up on any incidents,' says one teacher. 'It will pay dividends on your next visit' to that school. 'The next time they see you they'll think you're a soft touch and behaviour will be tougher to manage,' agrees Hannah Walker.

If you'd like to feel more confident, try to 'attend a behaviour control seminar or inset at the least,' suggests Sadaf Khan. 'Or read up on behaviour management and attend courses if at all possible – the NUT runs some good courses,' suggests Mary Woods.

And if it all goes wrong? 'A glass of wine at the end of a bad day is ok!' Cheers, Charlotte Hammond.

Rachel Dallimore advises that on those days you should 'accept it will be tough, but then go home and forget about it – you never have to return to a school you don't like again'. 'All students will try it on with a supply teacher; it is not personal,' adds another contributor. It's inevitably a case of 'when the cat's away, the mice will play' agrees Olufunke Williams. 'If it's challenging, you're learning something,' points out Andrew Staples.

“Be unafraid, robust and creative.” – anonymous

On the other hand, Ghyda Senussi keeps it in perspective: 'Don't let the first hurdle stop you from going in the next day. Teaching is hard but immensely rewarding. Remember that you are enriching the lives of tomorrow's doctors, artists, architects and of course, teachers'.

'Remember tomorrow is a new day, most likely in a different school,' points out one supply teacher from Preston.



Get a seating plan

'Behaviour management is much easier if you can praise the ones doing well and give warning to those who are not behaving well,' says one primary teacher.

'Get a seating plan done before ANYTHING!' advises someone else. Once you've got it, 'use at least 3 names in the first 5 minutes' recommends Ernald Johnson (according to another teacher, this 'makes them wake up and behave better!').

'Knowing a child's name is invaluable and allows you to build up a relationship quickly,' adds Patricia Nickle.

As a starting point, always ‘ask for a seating plan for every new class and request named class list photos (either on SIMS or handouts),’ recommends a teacher from York, with five years of supply experience behind her.



If that isn't available, then ‘scribble down a named seating plan as you take the register,’ suggests someone else. Or just ‘ask them when they arrive,’ as another teacher does. Alternatively, ‘Ask a pupil or teaching assistant to write you one,’ says one Durham teacher. This task might be easier if you first ‘quickly draw out a plan of the classroom,’ suggests another contributor.

Depending on the age group, you might be able to ‘make a game of learning the children's names straight away,’ as one teacher told us. ‘For secondary schools,’ says Ian Young, ‘make sure you make plan of classroom and get names from students. Don't rely on seating plans (which never exist anyway).’

Or copy Patricia Nickle, who tends to ‘give each child a piece of paper to fold in half, and stand on their table.’ Another teacher always takes ‘a roll of sticky labels on which to write the pupils' names’.

The goal is to ‘learn children's names as quickly as possible (by breaktime!)’ according to one teacher. At the very least, ‘memorise a few children's names and refer to them,’ says Mayso Kumar. ‘It shows that you know them.’ It's especially important to ‘get good at remembering kids names if you're staying long term,’ points out Clare Shaw.

And even if it's a struggle at first, Dipa Odedra assures you that ‘you will become a pro at learning new children's names and faces in an amazingly short space of time.’

Fake it till you make it

‘Children respond to confident teachers,’ points out Katie Knowles. But what if you're feeling anything but?

At the start of each day, ‘always look at yourself in the mirror and say what a brilliant teacher you are,’ suggests Kathryn Trout. ‘Smile and be positive. Believe in yourself and you'll be able to rise to any challenges that you may face,’ adds Maria O'Reilly.

‘Just go for it!’ one contributor urges. ‘Chat to everyone and ooze confidence (even if you have to fake it till you make it!).’ Kerry Hadley-Pryce absolutely agrees. ‘Go in like a hero’ she says. ‘You're vital. Without you those pupils would be teacher-less.’

“Keep calm and pretend it's on the lesson plan.” – **anonymous**

With that attitude, you'll be able to 'act confident even if you feel like you are out of your depth,' as one teacher recommends and also help you follow Hannah Gilpin's advice to 'always act authoritatively even if inside you feel a bit nervous.' She adds that, 'children can sense nerves!'

**“Once you are teaching, all your worries disappear because you get absorbed in teaching.” –
Sonia Dosanjh**

This might be easier to achieve when you 'remember that even though you're new to that school, you are the teacher, the adult – act like it and smile at anybody and everybody you see,' as Kirsty McKenzie recommends. 'Always remember YOU ARE IN CHARGE!' adds Juneille Smith.

'Keep calm and pretend it's on the lesson plan,' is the catchphrase of another teacher.

If you can, 'begin working in year groups that you are most comfortable/confident in first to build your confidence even further,' suggests Seema Bhupla. 'Try to find a long-term supply position as soon as possible,' adds Sheila Faber. 'The continuity will build your confidence and that helps students.'

On the other hand, another supply teacher recommends you 'make sure you visit several schools before committing yourself to just one or two.' Her feeling is that 'the experience is

valuable and it's good to be known in different places.'

'Don't over think it,' urges Franck Legeai. 'Be your friendly approachable self; facilitate, support and the students might eventually let you teach them.' And then, 'once you are teaching, all your worries disappear because you get absorbed in teaching,' adds Sonia Dosanjh.

A final word of reassurance from Dipla Odedra, who wants you to know that 'when you start it's all about faking it till you make it. But don't worry... YOU WILL MAKE IT!'

Enjoy it

When asked for her top tips, Sara Allott said 'Be smiley, have fun and most of all enjoy your day.' There's lots to enjoy about supply teaching, and remembering that can help you to put any challenges in perspective.

For some, like Fiona Gosden, it's a chance to 'learn from all the different experiences.' 'Enjoy the variety' agrees James McAlpine. You should 'enjoy the experience of seeing how different schools operate,' adds another contributor. 'Go into places with an open mind and enjoy the new characters you meet,' says Hannah Gilpin.

It's also a chance to 'enjoy the moment and do what you love to do,' says one teacher. 'Remember why you do it,' adds Caroline Simpson. 'Enjoy meeting lots of children from lots of backgrounds and be their teacher for the time you're with them.' 'Relax and enjoy the opportunity to influence a young mind,' agrees Angela Young.

Michael Rose recommends 'enjoy[ing] meeting new children and making a difference today.' So go in with 'a good attitude, because your mood will determine the whole day,' points out one London primary teacher.

Oh, and 'keep your sense of humour at the ready,' says someone else.

A final word from Lesley Pegler: 'Enjoy the experience, and if you don't enjoy it, learn from it.'

Have realistic expectations

As one teacher from Bath told us, try to 'stay calm and don't worry. You can't be on top of everything with a class you don't know. Take it one step at a time.'

All you can do is your best. Claire Bird puts it like this: 'Remember you're not their class teacher and you're not expected to be their class teacher. Teach what you're asked, be friendly and kind, be firm but fair (take away play time if naughty but play a game if good), mark everything you do and leave an honest note for the teacher about the lessons, achievements and behaviour. Don't worry about being perfect!'

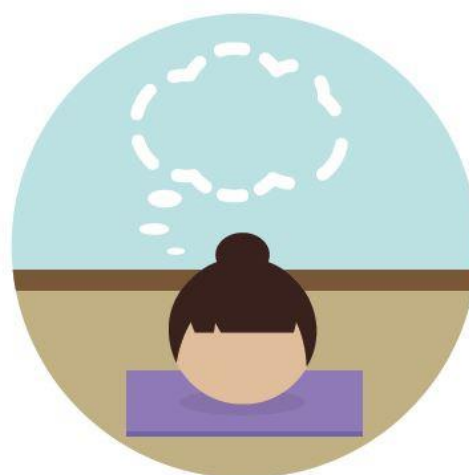
'Being a supply teacher for a day or two is completely different from having your own class,' points out one contributor. 'As a supply teacher, be especially kind, friendly, enthusiastic and positive to make the children comfortable and accepting of a new face.'

'Stay calm and take your time,' recommends a supply teacher from Bristol. 'There is nothing worse than getting in a flap if you are unsure about something. Take time to ask members of staff for help about routine and work set. They are usually happy to help!'

Alasdair Douglas reminds you that with supply teaching, you have 'a clean slate every day'. 'Stay calm and carry on - the school day is short!' adds Maria Luisa Ferreira Da Silva Mota. 'Enjoy the knowledge that if it's awful, you never have to return to that school,' says someone else.

'Don't beat yourself up after a bad day,' urges Lesley Pegler. 'A class will come with a history and you are only a small part of that journey.'

'Deep breath!' says Hayley Pryke. 'Think of what you're going to have for dinner that night and do the best you can.'

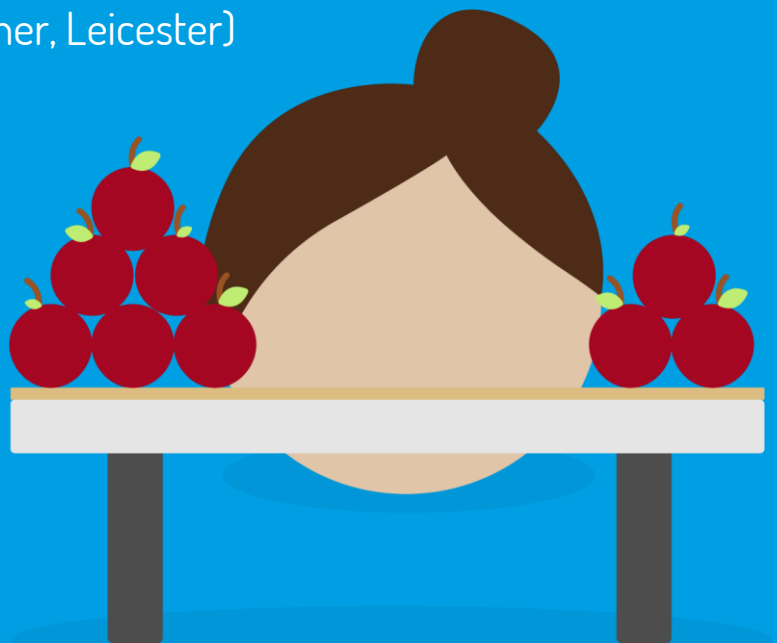




Make a good impression

“Bend over backwards to be the sort of supply teacher you’d like to have in your own classroom.”

– **Jane Linnett** (supply teacher, Leicester)



You'll be keen to impress your agency and the schools you visit, because it increases your chances of repeat bookings. Our supply teachers are full of tips on how to achieve this.

Dress appropriately

The first rule of successful supply teaching is to 'get the basics right,' says Gareth Davies – 'Dress smartly.'

But just how smartly? 'Dress smartly, but not in a tie,' suggests Andrew Milnes. And definitely 'don't wear jeans,' adds Brita Maus. If in doubt, 'turn up well dressed,' says another contributor. That way, 'you can always dress down once you see what the staff are wearing.'

And 'wear a watch!' adds Christopher Bray.

The most important thing? 'Wear comfortable shoes,' according to one primary teacher.

Get your marking pens out

'Do as much marking and note making/feedback as your time allows so the class teacher has something to work on upon their return,' recommends one contributor from Sheffield.

Ian Shearer agrees. 'Familiarise yourself with the marking policy and follow it.'

To make things easier and potentially shave some time off the end of your day, Georgina Lines champions the 'tick and flick' method. 'Mark as you go,' she says. 'Do a tick and flick as you move round the classroom.'

Lisa Copeland recommends you 'have filler activities ready and websites with stories and short films you can show while you mark work, that way you can leave on time.' Another teacher suggests that you 'mark through your lunch.'

'Do ALL the making before you leave,' says Paul Crosby. 'Make sure the regular teacher has a classroom that is ready for them to work in if they arrive back the following day. How would you want your classroom to be treated and left at the end of the day?'

Go the extra mile

'Treat it like a long term job interview,' advises Alyson Barratt. 'Be prepared to go the extra mile,' adds Paul Roach. 'It pays dividends in so many ways.'

Another teacher's top tip is to 'ask lots of questions and appear keen. You don't know what it could all lead to.' Be 'committed to the school you're supporting and game to do anything,' adds Juliette Ribb.



Christine Thomas agrees that you should 'try your hardest to make a good impression.' For her, that means 'always mark any lessons you've

covered and be willing to undertake playground duties.’ Another way you can impress schools is to ‘offer to help out if you are not needed for a lesson,’ suggests someone else.

Continuing the theme, Carolyn McFarlane recommends that you ‘do all of the marking according to the school’s marking policy, leave the classroom tidy and ensure that letters have been given out.’ And ‘try to get at least one item on a display,’ suggests Ian Grant.

One teacher told us she has a simple checklist for the end of each day: ‘Only leave when you’ve marked everything, tidied up and left a positive note.’ ‘Always leave with a thank-you and a smile,’ adds Mary Ohana.

“Be prepared to go the extra mile. It pays dividends in so many ways.” – **Paul Roach**

‘Bend over backwards to be the sort of supply teacher you’d like to have in your own classroom,’ advises Jane Linnett, who was an experienced teacher before moving to supply. ‘Do anything you can to make the teacher’s life easier. Remember how it feels to be hideously stressed and buried under a huge mountain of paperwork.’

One supply teacher recommends you keep in mind that ‘your role is to make sure pupils’ education is not disrupted and to make the life of staff who deal with the absence as stress free as possible.’

‘Do your job wholeheartedly so others are inspired by your passion,’ suggests another. ‘That includes the students!’

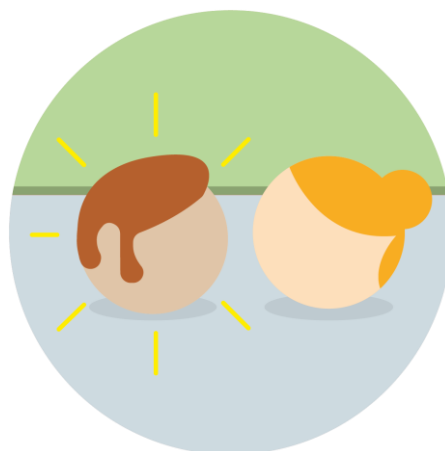
‘Be yourself’ with the students, says secondary school teacher Robert Farrow. ‘But remember you must be hugely engaging as you have 10 mins to win them over and 45 mins to have them wanting to work.’

One Manchester-based primary teacher summarises it by saying: ‘Think of the children as you would in your own class and always leave the class as you would like to find it.’

Be friendly

‘Smile. And don’t stop smiling until you’re in your car, driving home,’ is Roseanne Soar’s approach.

‘Treat everyone you meet with respect and friendliness,’ suggests one contributor – good advice for supply teaching, as well as general life. ‘Interact with staff in schools, even if you are only there one day,’ adds Caroline Callaghan. ‘Smile, be friendly and remember, you are an equal!’



‘Speak to everyone,’ says another teacher. ‘Get to know all staff from the office, canteen,

caretakers etc. as well as regular teachers and pupils.'

Stuart Chorlton recommends that in particular, you should 'take time out to say hello to the office staff and the TAs in the classroom. These are the people who will recommend you for future appointments. You want to get to the top of the supply lists at the good, most friendly schools!' Nicola Hughes agrees: 'Smile when you meet the office staff- their acceptance of you is essential to giving you further work.'

Despite being 'pretty much brand new to this' herself, one teacher says that her 'biggest bit of advice is get to know the supply organisers and the office staff. Most will be extremely helpful if they can.' Another teacher agrees. 'Be nice to the office staff and you'll find yourself returning to that school,' she says.

And say hi to your HOD too. 'Get to the school early, introduce yourself to the head of any department you work in, and be friendly at all times,' says one contributor. Also try to 'get to know the name of the Head/Deputy Head and introduce yourself to him/her,' suggests Gerard Holliday. Don't forget to 'chat to people in the staffroom,' says someone else. 'Show an interest in what the teachers are doing,' adds Philip Shirley.

'Have an enthusiastic and friendly approach to schools,' as Allison Lane puts it. 'They tend to treat you the same way. Also be professional and punctual. Leave a good impression and you will get asked back to the school again.'

In Andrea Smith's experience, if you're 'friendly and get to know as many colleagues as possible, you can gain a more honest view of the school.'

But 'do not get involved in school politics,' warns Paraskevas Corellis. 'Remain neutral at all times.' 'Don't pass judgement or speak badly about the school to anyone,' says Lesley Pegler. Another teacher agrees. 'Don't get involved with internal problems with the staff and management.'

'Be friendly and confident, but respectful to the permanent staff. It's their school, so don't openly criticise,' adds someone else. 'Make an effort to fit in and take the initiative to speak to them.'

'Think about 'offer[ing] to contribute to the tea/coffee/milk supplies,' suggests Michael Foster, especially if you're there long-term.



And at the end of the day, 'always thank any TAs who have worked with you,' says another teacher.

'Interact cheerfully with the pupils' too, says David Hutchings, 'and [supply teaching] can be great fun.'

We'll let Nicola Hughes have the final word: 'Always go the 'extra mile' to complete all work to the very best of your ability. Be a great ambassador for your agency. Be polite to

everyone, be prompt and 'do your homework' – particularly if it is your first placement in a new school.'

Be flexible

'Roll with the punches,' as one supply teacher puts it. This applies to the type of work you accept, as well as in the classroom.

You might surprise yourself

'Be willing to try anything,' says one teacher. 'You never know, you could like it. I never wanted to do secondary even as a last resort... now I love it!' It was a similar experience for Amy Jones, who urges you to 'have an open mind. I was posted to a notoriously difficult primary academy and I am loving it.' Lesley Pegler's approach is to 'give everything a go and if you don't like a school, don't go back'.

'Have courage,' adds Bernadette Smith. 'Don't turn a job down because you lack confidence. Go for it!'

Andrew Staples is in complete agreement – at least in the early days. 'Take every opportunity that comes your way at the beginning. [It helps you] get know to your agency, consultants and schools. After a year you can start to get picky about where you go.'

Watch your diary fill up

This attitude might help you pick up more work too, as Kathryn Mortimer notes. 'The more willing you are to be flexible and work between different year groups or change schools at short

notice or work half a day instead of a full day, the more work you will get in the long run.'

Emma Ali agrees: 'Teach other age groups and travel further, as it makes your agency more likely to call.'

Learn all that you can

Plus, you give yourself as many opportunities as possible to learn as much as you can. As Kerrie Donohue says, 'be as flexible as you can be and enjoy and take in all of the skills of the fantastic people around you.' Make sure you 'absorb the variety of teaching styles,' you'll come across suggests one supply teacher. 'Listen to other educators you meet.'



While you have the chance, 'take lots of photos of useful displays/resources,' suggests Mary Richards. But 'check with the school first that it's ok to do so!'

'Use [supply work] to enhance and broaden your own knowledge and skills in teaching,' says one teacher. 'Enjoy the stimulation of working with and getting to know many different people and children.'

Gain experience

At each school, 'be adaptable and willing to learn new routines,' says Terry Katebe. 'Time your activities to match the class dynamic,' suggests Luchiya Wyer. 'Look at the big picture not just the cover lesson and ensure to bring all your skills and knowledge into the lesson.'

Susan Wickstead finds that 'in some way you are like an Ofsted (sorry, rude word!) inspector without the clipboard. You visit a school and can form an opinion. There is no perfect school - all have their strengths and weaknesses. All children are the same; it is their background and life experiences that change them.'

'You will get used to the schools you go to most often,' adds Louise English. Inevitably, 'you will love some but hate others.'

And if you do come across a school you feel that strongly about, Adrian Queen is keen for you to remember that 'money isn't everything. Don't just accept any assignment. You need to enjoy teaching and avoid becoming cynical about teaching. Some schools will cause you a lot of stress but there are some great schools out there!'

'Some days will be hard and shatter your confidence,' agrees Katie Knowles. 'But others will be confidence boosting. Make sure you're doing more of the latter.'

For Dipa Odedra, supply teaching is 'one of the best ways to get an experience of all three key stages so you can make decisions about which age range you enjoy teaching. You can experience so many different schools without being committed to them... once you wow them

then they will be wanting you back and offering you jobs!'

Another bonus of being 'flexible and willing to try out year groups you haven't done before,' according to Louise Simpkins, is that 'it'll fill out your CV for future employment.'



'If you do find yourself in a good school,' says David Fowler, 'Bother them for more work and make yourself indispensable.'

Try your hardest

'Act like a real teacher and not a child minder,' recommends Kenneth Terry. 'The school and the students will love you for it.' 'Pull your weight, work hard and be part of the team,' agrees another teacher. 'Remember you can make a difference,' adds Andrew Wooldridge.

Katrina Gilmore is of the same opinion. 'Take it seriously because you are impacting children's lives. Don't act like it's just glorified babysitting.' She goes on to add: 'don't be afraid to ask questions if it means you will be better at your job.'

Asking questions will help you to 'do as the school seems to want you to do,' which is one tip from Keith Hodgekins. 'You must fit in so leave your perceptions at home. Adaptability is important.' Anthony McManamon agrees. 'Always be professional and seek to match the needs and requirements of the school.' Take care to 'adapt to the school rules,' adds another teacher.



But at the same time, 'don't be afraid to express your opinions and show your imagination and creative side,' says one Design and Technology teacher from Salisbury. 'Try your hardest, make sure you are truly organised and don't forget to smile and enjoy your time.'

'Teach to the best of your ability in your situation. It's more rewarding and the children will respond better,' points out Fiona Gosden.

Venrease Sturlong agrees. 'Try to engage and interest students when you meet them. This will make your stay a lot more enjoyable and satisfactory.' 'Try to be enthusiastic about each subject and convey that to the children,' adds Nicholas Lusher.

Another teacher told us you should 'always show interest in whatever children tell you about their

lives; it makes them feel valued.' And Jane Hickey suggests that you 'make a point of showing children that you care about their work.'

Empathy is important too. 'Remember, the kids may be worried about why their normal teacher is missing,' points out Abigail Webster. 'Create a relationship with the children and you'll all be able to enjoy the lesson,' says Laura Perez-Ferrandiz. 'Understand different personalities in the children. Listen to them so you can understand their views. Make them important as they are the reason for you to be there.'

'Enjoy the children. Smile, give them what they need. Stay firmly but compassionately in control. Always be positive, even in negative situations. Keep an open mind and don't judge - you do not know the background of children or adults,' says Stephanie Wyatt.

'Impress your authority in the classroom, but add a little humour to the situation,' is Judith Murray's approach. 'Smile a lot and remember you are dealing with little children.'

On a different topic, 'know the curriculum inside out, so you can look at planning and know exactly what the objectives/ requirements of the lesson are,' recommends one primary school teacher from Birmingham.

"Remember, the kids may be worried about why their normal teacher is missing."

- Abigail Webster

If you're an NQT, have been out of teaching for a while or will be teaching unfamiliar age groups or subjects, 'familiarise yourself with the NC and key vocabulary,' suggests Satvinder Virdee. 'Particularly in Maths.'

'Know your curriculum strengths, and find out about those you need to brush up on so that you are ready to teach all year groups you are prepared to cover,' agrees another teacher.

If you know what you'll be teaching beforehand, 'get as much of the topic/subject revised in advance,' says someone else. 'Especially if it is not your usual subject.'

The 'majority of students want to learn,' points out Clyde Green. 'Your job is to make it happen.'

'Do your best, wherever you are and make a lasting impression,' summarises Caroline Efevbera. And if you're there for a while, one teacher suggests that you 'show the head of department examples of work students have done, so they can see that progress is happening and that you are doing what you are there for.'

Leave feedback

It's important to 'keep the class teacher up to date,' says Mary Ohana.

So 'leave a short message for the class teacher [to read] on their return, if you are unable to give them feedback in person,' recommends one contributor. 'Leave an honest note about the lessons, achievements and behaviour. Don't worry about being perfect!' agrees Claire Bird.



Do it 'even if that teacher doesn't leave you any work,' encourages someone else.

For one Winchester teacher, part of her home-time routine is to 'leave a brief handover note for cover supervisor/relevant teachers before you leave.'

Reflect

'At the end of each day, work out what has gone well and what has not,' suggests Fiona Finch. 'Over time you will build a profile of what your skills and strengths are. You will also build up an idea of the type of school you would like to stay in. You will gain experience that looks good on application forms. You will also get your face noticed by schools.'

At the same time, 'never dwell on yesterday's mistakes,' as Tansy Pye reminds us.

It might also help to 'keep notes on the schools and classes you go to,' says another teacher. 'I have found these handy to refer back to and remind myself of staff names, what I taught the children, etc.'

These notes can also be useful if 'the school passes on any feedback via your agency,' and you need a reminder of what went on that day, suggests someone else.

Louise Simpkins advises you to 'enjoy the chance to try out lots of different schools and ideas. Take those ideas that work well to other places.'

One supply teacher in Manchester agrees that you should 'make the most of the opportunity to broaden your experiences. No two schools are the same - look for the good things from the better schools you are in and use these experiences to develop and improve your own practice.'



Be resourceful

“Always have a Plan B, C
and possibly D.”

– **anonymous** (supply teacher, Plymouth)



In an ideal world, of course you're fully prepared for each assignment. But if you're rushing out the door after a 7am phone call from your agency, this just isn't possible. And if the school's needs change, 'expect to adapt on the spot,' as one teacher puts it. 'Yes you may be booked to teach a certain year group but just smile if it's different when you get there and get on with it.'

Try to keep an open mind and have a variety of tricks and resources on hand to help you make the most of whatever your day may throw at you.

It's why Matthew Charles warns 'don't over prepare. Try to relax and go with the flow: inevitably your plans will change.'

Join sites for teaching resources

'Have a couple of useful subscriptions', recommends one teacher, so you'll always know where to go for a last-minute lesson. For KS1 and KS2, she 'wouldn't be without [her] subscriptions to [Phonics Play](#) and also [Twinkl](#)'. Another teacher recommends that you 'join [TES Resources](#) for emergency resources'.

Someone else urges you to 'think creatively and make the most of online resources (e.g. [BBC Bitesize](#) activities) to make your lessons more interesting. You need to take the initiative to keep pupils on board.'

'I download videos from the [Literacy Shed](#),' says another contributor. 'They're always popular.'

A word of warning from Christine Collins however, 'always have a plan B for when technology lets you down.' 'Often you can't log on' agrees Susan Ealey.

Try new things

A supply teaching assignment can last as little as one day, so in many ways the pressure is off. That's why so many supply teachers urge you to relax, 'just go with it' and keep a variety of different techniques up your sleeve.



'Treat each new school and position as an adventure; you do not know what the day will hold,' recommends someone who, having spent the past 10 years in an SLT position, says she's now 'thoroughly enjoying being a supply teacher'.

Another teacher shares her thinking. 'The teaching aspect is fantastic without all the paperwork,' he says. He sees it as an opportunity to 'feel relaxed and get to know lots of different strategies.'

**“Play the Ukulele, learn origami,
be a good story teller.” – Andrew
Milnes**

Marilyn Hunter advises you to ‘be professional and enjoy the fact that you do not have overall responsibility over the year.’ For her, supply teaching is a chance to ‘enjoy teaching for the love of it not because you are jumping through hoops to satisfy Ofsted.’ It also means that you can ‘start each new day with a fresh and open mind,’ says Mary Ohana. For many supply teachers, this provides an opportunity to get creative and try new things.

As one teacher explains: ‘Try as many teaching methods as possible in different schools and get as much experience in different schools as well. Always have a smile on your face.’

Especially on day-to-day supply, you have the chance to ‘try out things that you probably never have time for as a full time classroom teacher, like having lunch with kids you are teaching,’ says one primary teacher. And Andrew Milnes offers some creative advice: ‘Play the Ukulele, learn origami, be a good story teller.’

Brita Maus urges you to ‘have fun teaching your new class. You’re only there for a day so try new techniques and change things up. It’s important to be professional but don’t stress if you didn’t cover all the work.’

The experience ‘will help you to mould your teaching styles and techniques,’ says Quasma Saeed.

‘Go in with an open mind,’ says Harpreet Jassar. ‘Don’t try and stick to what you are always used too; think outside the box. If you’re not passionate about teaching, simply find another job! PS. never have favourites!’

‘Be bold and creative in the way you teach,’ is Nichola Marsh’s top tip.

Chantal Heaven takes it even further with her suggestion to ‘try and change the dynamic in the school and stamp your own authority and culture on the place. Leave a lasting impression of joy and love for knowledge amongst all whom you meet: both the students and the teachers!’

Budget wisely

Resourcefulness extends outside the workplace too. ‘Please, please, please budget your money sensibly,’ says one teacher with three years’ supply teaching behind her. ‘You don’t get paid in the holidays!’ Louise Simpkins agrees that it’s important to ‘set up a budget to manage your income as it can be unpredictable.’



'Always put money aside when there is work coming in,' suggests Robert Wood. 'There can be lean periods.' Michael Coleman recommends you 'save money for at least 3 months of no pay'.

This advice was echoed by another teacher whose top tip is to 'save. It's difficult financially over the holidays. Save a little money weekly to cover those "dry periods".'

Mary Richards tries to 'book holidays for Sept/Oct because there's less work around after big holiday anyway'.

And 'get a pension!' says Margaret England.



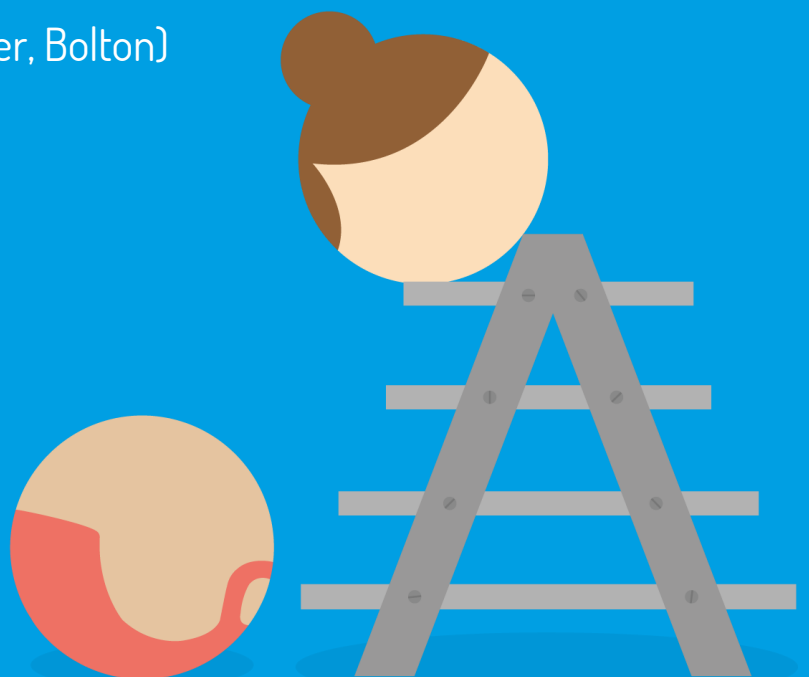
If you struggle with not always knowing if you'll be working each day, Clare Longstaffe wrote a whole article for us about [how to deal with uncertainty in the world of supply teaching](#). Also, the Education Support Partnership offers some [useful advice if you're having money difficulties](#).



Don't be afraid to ask for help

“There are thousands
of amazing people
working in schools!”

– **anonymous** (supply teacher, Bolton)



One wise contributor said it best: 'Ask for help if you need it – don't pretend you know what you are doing if you don't.' If things aren't quite going to plan in the classroom, or it's just that you've forgotten where the toilets are, there will always be someone who has your back.

Ask fellow teachers

Mary Ohana says that you should 'always ask for help when needed ... don't struggle in silence, let someone know.' So, as much as you can, 'talk to staff in the school,' recommends Brenda Turnbull. 'They're often very busy but ready to help if you ask questions or need help. They're a mine of information about individual kids, for example, and it can help your confidence to know that permanent staff also have trouble with some students or classes.'

Definitely 'try to get to know your next door colleague when you arrive in a school, for any support you'll need through the day,' suggests another teacher.



It can also help to 'try and visit the staffroom, as it is the hub of the school and you can often gain good information from other staff members to help you in the class,' says Ruth Williams. This

can also help you 'get known', as Elysa Alton points out.

When you first arrive at school, 'see what work has been left by the class teacher and check that you have all the books, paper and equipment you need as early in the lesson as possible,' recommends one contributor. 'It's easier to ask the teacher next door for help if they haven't started their lesson yet.'

But as Christina Tatham advises: 'Even if people are in the middle of something just ask nicely and generally people are happy to help. Don't feel like you have to solve everything plus deal with behaviour on your own.' 'Don't be afraid to ask for assistance from HOD' either, adds someone else.

'Most staff in schools are very kind and helpful,' confirms another supply teacher, with three years' experience behind her. When you get to know people, you can 'ask someone friendly in the school for tips,' as someone else suggests.

'Be positive about every assignment you do and take on board all the ideas schools offer,' recommends one teacher. 'There are thousands of amazing people working in schools and I've had my eyes opened!'

Ask your teaching assistant

'Your teaching assistant is your best friend in the classroom,' says Claire Stephens. 'They know the children, the routines and have often been there for any prior learning.' Another teacher feels the same – 'they are often a fountain of knowledge about the class and the work.' They 'know the

children, the school and how the day goes,' adds another. 'They can really support you.'

'Always use the teaching assistant,' agrees Ruth Ford. 'They are fantastic!'

'Use TAs to find out more about the children's behaviour,' suggests Ashla Abrahams. 'The teacher may not necessarily cover these areas if they are in a hurry to leave.'

One primary school teacher from Bradford adds that 'your teaching support will be your best ally in the classroom. Do what you can to make them happy and also earn their respect. They are an invaluable resource.' This is echoed by Carol Collett, who also suggests that to earn your TA's respect, you should 'empower them, and listen to them as well'.

As someone 'who knows parents/guardians, ask [your TA] to help you at pick up time,' suggests Tacita Styant, who teaches in primary schools.

Another teacher helps put things in perspective when she says 'if things don't work out - if you have a rubbish day - learn from it but don't lose sleep over it.'

Ask the pupils

In certain situations, your pupils can help you out too. 'If you get lost [when you first arrive at the school] and can't see another teacher (it happens when in a school for the first time) choose a pupil, and just ask,' suggests one secondary school teacher in London. 'Never be frightened.'

However, in one Bristol primary school teacher's experience, it's better that you 'never ask the children to help you with the school routine.' Instead, 'always show them that you know the "rules".'

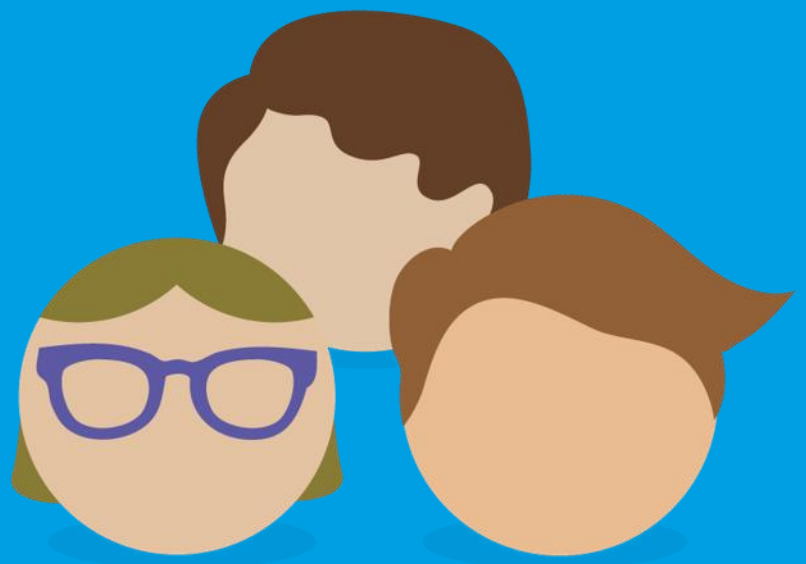




Assemble a great support team

“Get them working for you.”

– **Philip Shirley** (supply teacher, Chelmsford)



As a supply teacher, you can get professional support, advice and services from recruitment agencies and umbrella companies. With the right team behind you, you can concentrate on teaching and avoid having to worry about what's happening with your next contract or payment.

Join a good agency

'Make sure you're with a good agency. I am and it makes a difference,' says one teacher. In fact, 89% of our supply teachers told us that their recruitment agency plays a valuable role in their career. But what exactly makes a good one? Florence Villenave has this to say: 'Choose an agency that pays you well; finds you work every day; looks at your CV and knows your skills well. An agency that listens to you and sends you to a school close to your home and that recognises your skills.'



There are many different agencies to choose from, and you should have no problem locating one near your home. To narrow down your options, 'check out the [Rate my Teaching Agency](#) website' recommends one teacher, whereas someone else prefers to go with her 'gut feeling – it MATTERS'. Rachel Thompson used

[indeed.co.uk](#) and other similar sites to gauge who the main recruiters are.'

You can find a list of all the education agencies who are registered with the Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) in their [member directory](#).

In fact, consider joining more than one

'If you join a teaching agency, join two or three, as you're more likely to get work. It is better to be waiting for three phone calls about work than one,' says David Blackwood. But 'be honest that you have, that way they know the situation'. And if you ever find yourself in a scenario where you've accepted work from one agency and are then offered work by the second agency for the same day, you must turn it down – even if it's more highly paid. This way, all of your agencies 'know that they can trust you when you say that you will work for them'.

"It is better to be waiting for three phone calls about work than one." – David Blackwood

'Join as many agencies as possible in the beginning,' (suggests one teacher in Bradford) but you might find that over time, your list reduces. Francesca Eckersley explains: 'Sign up for no more than 3 agencies [at first] so you can work out who you like working with best, and

which schools you like being sent to. Then you can make your decision to go with one or two of them later on, when the agency have had a chance to get to know you, and when you have had a chance to get to know them.'

'Sign up with a few agencies. It might be hard to fill up a full week's work straight away so it's best not to put all your eggs in one basket,' says Emily Johnson.

Build a good relationship with your consultant

Your recruitment consultant will support you from when you first register with their agency to the day you walk through the gates of your first school, and beyond. A good relationship with them can make for a much smoother supply teaching experience and help you find your ideal assignments. So, Philip Shirley advises you to 'get your agency working for you'.



"If you have any questions, ask your agency. Keep asking if you're not sure – people are usually very helpful." – Tania Hales-Richardson

'Foster good relations with them, be clear about your wishes/preferences and be prepared to decline a placement if it does not match them,' adds one teacher. 'Be clear about the area and the schools you wish to work in,' adds another.

When you're offered an assignment, Tania Hales-Richardson recommends that 'if you have any questions, ask your agency. Keep asking if you're not sure – people are usually very helpful.'

After the assignment, your feedback can help them understand what you like and dislike. As Mary Ohana says, 'if the school was not what you expected, then ring the agency and ask not to go there again and on the other hand if the school was great let the school and the agency know this.'

Another teacher finds it helpful to 'be honest and open to your agency and speak about difficulties you may be experiencing at certain schools.'

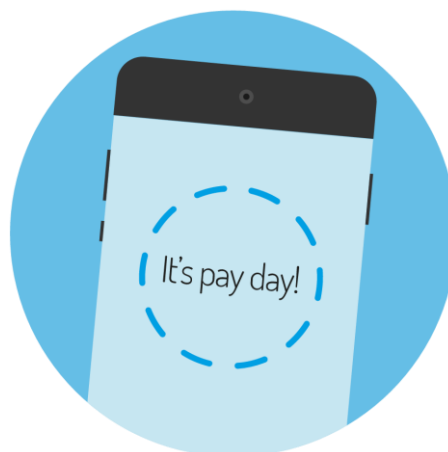
Someone else recommends you 'praise those [schools] you really enjoyed and politely request not to be sent back to others (which happens rarely – only once for me).'

And 'call your agencies regularly!' recommends our final contributor in this section. 'Make sure they remember your name.'

Join an umbrella company

For one contributor, supply teaching is pretty straightforward: 'Sign up with an umbrella company, join a union, have a back-up lesson in your bag and you're ready to go.'

An umbrella company is an employer for people who work on temporary assignments, like supply teachers. When your agency finds you an assignment, your umbrella company will pay you for it. They'll also employ you, and with that comes a range of employment-related benefits, protections and support – like sick pay, maternity pay, a pension, professional advice, and often extra perks like shopping discounts. If you take the advice to join multiple agencies, the umbrella will centralise all your income into one weekly payment, process it under one tax code and detail it on one payslip.



'Not all umbrella companies offer the same level of service,' warns one teacher from Southampton. 'So pick a good one with reliable payments and friendly staff who know what they're talking about.'

When you're looking for an umbrella company, we hope you'll consider [Key Portfolio](#). We'd love to welcome you to the gang.

Good luck!

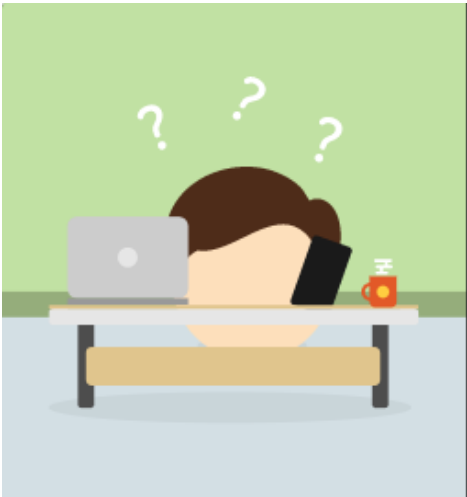
'There is a long journey in front of you, a learning experience for yourself and others, but without it you might not be able to fully understand teaching,' says one supply teacher.

Kerrie Donohue agrees. 'I believe everyone in education should do at least a year's worth of supply. It really is invaluable!'

We hope this book is a useful resource for your career ahead, and suggest that you pick and choose from the advice offered to develop your own approach to supply teaching – one that works for you, your agencies, your schools and your pupils. All of the tips came from real supply teachers in the UK, but we of course recommend that you use your own professional judgement when deciding whether or not to follow a particular suggestion.

Once you've got a few assignments behind you, [tweet us](#) using the #SupplyTeacherTips hashtag or email hello@key.co.com to share some tips of your own. They might end up in the next edition of this e-book.

One final word from Martin Breeze before we go – 'Oh! And have a great day!'



Curious about Umbrella?

Our advisor will help you decide if our Umbrella service, Key Portfolio, is right for you.

[Book a telephone consultation](#)

3 cheers for the Key Portfolio community!



Key Portfolio employs thousands of supply teachers in the UK – providing them with a reliable payroll service, employment rights and additional perks while they work on agency assignments.

Thanks to everyone in our community who has so willingly taken time out to share the benefit of their experience with fellow supply teachers – and demonstrated such wisdom, wit and empathy in the process. We wish we had room to share all the contributions that we received word-for-word, but we did read every single tip and they all helped to shape this book in some way.

Thanks especially to those whose advice we quoted. Some of them gave us permission to publish their names and some didn't, but we're equally grateful to all of them.

Thank you to our contributors...

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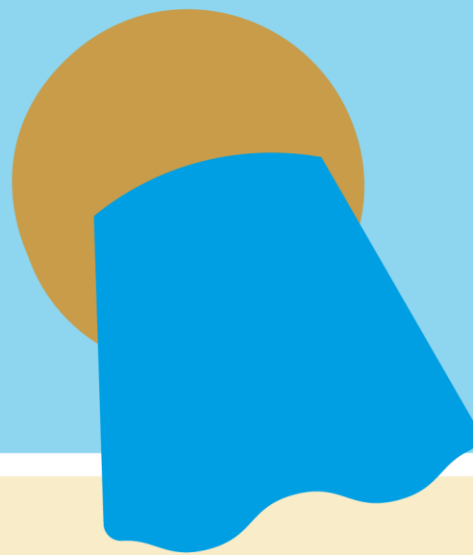
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