

Candidate Handbook

Published by Step Teachers Ltd
December 2024



Introduction

Step Teachers is a specialist education recruitment agency, providing teaching and support staff to client schools for long term, short term, day to day supply and permanent placements. The safety and welfare of children is central to what we do.

We are committed to equal opportunities for all in our recruitment practices and oppose all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination, direct or indirect, irrespective of age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marital and civil partnerships, responsibility for dependents, trade union membership, or any other circumstances not relevant to the performance of a position.

We are proud members of the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) and adhere to their 'Code of Professional Practice'. We have held REC Audited Education Accreditation since 2012 which replaced the DfE Quality Mark which we held since 2005. We strictly adhere to rules and regulations and are always fully up to date within the education sector.

This handbook sets out clear guidelines to help you get the most out of working with us and our schools. It details what we expect from all our candidates when they are placed in a school by Step Teachers. When undertaking a role in a school, you are acting in a position of authority and have a duty of care towards the children and young people we work with. You are likely to be seen as a role model and are expected to act appropriately both inside and outside of your role.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding children must be at the forefront of everything you do and must always prioritise the welfare of all children in your care. Every child, regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation, has a right to equal protection from harm.

Always remember what Safeguarding means:

- Protecting children from abuse and maltreatment.
- Preventing harm to children's health and development.
- Ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care.
- Taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes.

Always follow each individual school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and the Step Teacher's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy as all times.

Code of Conduct:

What we expect - the things you should do:

DO always ask if you are unsure about anything. Never just wait around but seek out the cover co-ordinator (often the school office staff in a primary school) or Head of Department/Head of Year who will be able to assist you. The more proactive you are, the more the school, and ultimately the pupils, will enjoy having you with them.

DO read and adhere fully with each individual school's Safeguarding, Behaviour, Health and Safety, and Online Safety policies and procedures.

DO know the names of the Head Teacher/Deputy/Head of Year and then use them when addressing behaviour issues.

DO ensure that as well as reading and following the school's Safeguarding/Child Protection Policy, you are aware of the Designated Safeguarding Lead and their Deputy in the event you may need to make a report.

DO welcome the pupils with a smile, introduce yourself and make sure that your name is on the board and visible to the pupils. Do get to know pupil names and use them throughout the lesson – draw up a seating plan if you do not have one and/or use name labels to assist you.

DO set clear expectations and boundaries at the beginning of the lesson and adhere to them throughout your time with the class. Present yourself as firm but fair.

DO read the school's policy on physical contact with pupils before you meet the class and adhere strictly to it. Be aware that some schools have a no-touching policy. Clarify with the school if you are unsure about any part of it.

DO get to know your teaching assistant/support staff before the start of the lesson if you can. They have been in the school before you and know the rules and routines of the school better than you. Find out their responsibilities and discuss how to work together.

DO teach the work that the school has provided. Pupils will be in the middle of a scheme of work and need to progress with that during your lesson. Don't deviate unless you have been instructed by a senior member of staff. If work has not been set, write a note, and give it to a sensible pupil to take to the Head of Department/Head of Year. In the meantime, use your own resources to keep the pupils engaged.

DO always take pre-prepared work with you as a back-up in case you find that there is no work set. It is also a good idea to take a selection of board pens, pens, and pencils in case these are in short supply.

DO get up off your seat, walk around the classroom and interact with the pupils.

DO be HAPPY. Face each new challenge with a smile and be proactive – bring a sense of humour to school and a thick skin – remember that pupils don't cope with change very well. Don't take things personally.

DO dress appropriately at all times in smart/casual wear. No jeans or trainers should be worn at any time (unless teaching PE of course).

DO follow the school smoking policy at all times.

DO inform the member of staff in charge of supply if you need to leave the school grounds during lunch time break. Remember to sign out and then sign back in and report to the same person on arrival back at the school. You must arrive back at the school with time to prepare for your next lesson. Failure to be in class and fully prepared at the start of the next lesson is not acceptable.

DO ensure all pupils under your care leave safely at the end of the day – this is especially important with younger children who must not be left unattended or leave with an unidentified adult. Check the school’s end of day expectations and finish time beforehand.

DO make sure you have completed all the necessary marking and completed the handover notes for the regular teacher. This will let the teacher know how your day went, the ups and downs, and where to continue. Remember to always leave the classroom tidy. If this is done properly it will impress and increase your chance of being asked back to the school.

DO speak to your school contact before you leave and report any incident, however minor (or earlier, if necessary, especially if there are any child protection concerns) and thank them for the day. If you have had a good day or were particularly impressed by something, say so. Compliments and courtesy can go a long way.

DO let us know if any changes are made to your booking directly with you or the school. Our timesheet process requests that you notify Step Teachers immediately if any days/hours you work vary from those identified in the booking confirmations we sent to you.

DO ask whether you are required back the next day.

DO contact us immediately should you encounter any problems during an assignment and report any incident to your Step Teachers consultant at the end of the day.

DO contact Step Teachers if for any reason you cannot make an assignment that you have been booked in for. Please let us know as soon as possible but before 7.15am on the day of the assignment at the latest.

DO remember to notify us of any changes to your personal details/circumstances as soon as they happen so that our records are up to date, and any necessary action taken.

What we don’t expect - the things that you shouldn’t do:

DON’T ever leave pupils in the class unsupervised under any circumstances. Always send the teaching assistant (if present) or a sensible pupil to get assistance.

DON’T highlight you are in the school on a short-term basis. This gives pupils the impression that they do not need to be concerned about you in the long term.

DON’T give your pupils the impression you are there just to supervise them – remember you are there to teach (unless you are there in a Cover Supervisor or Teaching Assistant role).

DON’T be alone in a classroom with a pupil. If a pupil wants to talk to you on a 1-to-1 basis, tell a permanent member of staff beforehand. If they agree to this, always have the classroom door open and make sure others know exactly what the situation is. Inform the pupil in advance that even if they speak to you in confidence, you will need to report details of the conversation to the relevant safeguarding lead in the school.

DON’T turn your back on pupils especially in a small environment such as stock rooms or store cupboards.

DON'T ever shout, scream, lose your temper, or swear at a pupil or class – if a pupil swears at you, do not swear back. Always avoid any action or tone that may be interpreted as aggressive or confrontational.

DON'T use slang words or phrases as these can be misinterpreted and cause offence. Never use sarcasm as it will be misinterpreted. Be aware that the pupils do not know you or your sense of humour. Comments such as “are you stupid” are strictly forbidden however they are meant.

DON'T have your phone switched on during your lesson, never answer a call, send texts, surf the internet, or take photos/videos under any circumstance. Never show pupils any photos or videos on your phone. Don't befriend any pupils on social media.

DON'T talk about your personal life as this compromises your professional persona and can leave you in a difficult situation. Very often details of these conversations are passed onto regular staff members and are heavily frowned upon.

DON'T consume alcohol or any recreational drugs on school premises or attend school whilst under the influence of these.

DON'T lock pupils in the classroom, no matter what their behaviour. If you are having problems controlling a class, send a sensible pupil for assistance.

DON'T read during the class; you are there to teach not read. If the class is settled and working, circulate the class and keep all the pupils on track. This will lead to a better working environment and a productive lesson.

DON'T leave the school early; if you find that you have a free period at the end of the day, remain at the school. If you leave the school early without their consent, you may not get paid for the full day. Use the time to speak to useful contacts at the school, complete your handover notes and ask if there is anything else you can do to help.

DON'T let the class out early. Always follow the school timetable and wait for the bell to sound before the class can go.

DON'T discuss or share your personal religious beliefs or political opinions with pupils nor question any pupils' religious beliefs or political opinions. This also applies if you are teaching a Religious Education or Politics class. You are not there to preach religion or politics. You must always remain impartial.

DON'T listen to music during your lesson nor wear in-ear headphones or air phones. You are there to teach and to give the class your full attention. It is very unprofessional and unacceptable behaviour.

Online Tutors must also:

Candidates assigned work for online tutoring must also:

- Treat all pupils fairly and without prejudice or discrimination.

- Ensure that whilst online your environment does not display any inappropriate images or documentation capable of being viewed by the pupil or parent/responsible adult.
- Always ensure that the language used is appropriate and not offensive or discriminatory.
- Ensure that any conduct with the pupils is appropriate to their role as a tutor and confined to the relevant lesson session.
- Not make any improper suggestions to the pupil.
- Not send personal or unsolicited communications via any means to the student or parent/responsible adult.
- Value and take the pupil's contributions seriously.
- Report any emergency, dispute or incident with a pupil or parent/responsible adult to Step Teachers in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Report any inappropriate behaviour or illegal activity identified within a lesson session by the student or third party in accordance with the Step Teachers Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Continue to be aware of signs a child may be at risk and report any such concerns appropriately.
- Be aware that online tutoring sessions are recorded for the safety of all users.

Preparing for your assignment

Before attending a school, you must carefully read the provided assignment confirmation you will be sent. It will provide you with important information, including the name of who you should report to at the school; your pay; start/end time; any health and safety measures; as well as other information you need to be aware of before starting your placement at the school.

Ensure that you plan your journey in advance and make sure you arrive at least half an hour before the day starts on your first day at the school. Being punctual goes a long way in showing you are committed, hardworking and have a good work ethic. It will also allow you time to speak to your school contact, meet other staff, familiarise yourself with the school, and plan your day accordingly.

You will be required to take your DBS certificate and your Step Teachers ID badge with you to every school, as well as any other additional ID your consultant has requested. This is a specific requirement from the school, you will be sent home without it and without remuneration.

Information you need to know

It is important that you know the following information before you take your lesson. If you are not provided with this, you must ask for the following:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection policy
- Behaviour policy

- Online Safety policy
- Health and Safety policy
- Whistleblowing policy
- Name of the Head Teacher; Designated Safeguarding Lead; Key members of staff; Head of Department
- Who to report to in case of incidents e.g. discipline, accident, etc
- School site map, class seating plan, location of staff room and toilets, break and lunch times
- Fire assembly points, offices, and emergency policy, how to access first aid
- Security codes, key fobs or passes you need to access staff-only areas
- Lesson requirements and instructions, additional requirements such as SEN, behaviour issues

It is very important that you have all the above information so that you are fully prepared for your day at the school. If you are unclear about anything, please ask, the school would rather you ask them instead of just assuming or guessing.

Lateness/Sickness/Absence

If you are sick or unable to get to the school for whatever reason, it is imperative that you let us know as soon as possible. If it is for a same day assignment, please make sure that you notify us no later than 7.15am. We will contact the school and organise alternative cover if required. Please do not send emails or texts as these can be missed – calling the office to let us know is much more reliable. If you are going to be absent for more than one day, please call the office before 5.30pm to let them know of your ongoing absence and potential return to work date. We have an on-call service so you can reach us out of working hours for urgent queries.

Timesheets

You are responsible for notifying Step Teachers immediately if the days/hours you work vary from those identified in your 'Assignment Confirmation'. Failure to do so may result in underpayment if you did any additional days/hours of which Step Teachers was not aware.

Where we have not been able to properly authenticate the days/hours you have worked, we will, in a timely fashion, investigate what's happened. This may delay any payment due to you as we cannot pay you for days you have not worked. Remember you can contact your consultant if you have any queries.

StepPerks

As a valued member of Step Teachers, we try to add value to your lives through complimentary health and lifestyle perks that improve your wellbeing while keeping engagement and motivation high through our StepPerks portal. You will be provided with login details once you are cleared for work.

Our StepPerks portal includes qualified medical assistance through a 24/7 GP hotline (online consultations and specialist referrals are also available), care support for your loved one's needs, a confidential helpline that provides

practical and emotional support, insurance products, discounts at over 3000 gyms, an online health assessment, real-time access to your payslips and pension performance. Best of all, everyone gets to enjoy discounts and special offers on hundreds of well-known brands, averaging savings of £1200.00 annually.

Changes to your personal information

It is important that you notify Step Teachers of any changes to your personal details i.e. name, address, or bank details, and if there are any changes to the information you provided at registration. Notification is especially important if you become subject to any kind of investigation or prosecution relating to a criminal act which could lead to a conviction, as soon as they happen.

IT and Social Media

Step Teachers acknowledges that social networking sites provide a number of benefits, but all candidates should be aware of the many challenges and potential difficulties associated with electronic communication and social media. The aim of this policy is to provide clear guidance to all candidates whilst engaged in schools, alternative provision, online tutoring, and private nurseries.

- Ask for the school's IT policy and procedures for the use of equipment and make sure you are familiar with it; you are expected to abide by this whilst working in the school.
- Social networking sites **should not** be visited during the school day for personal use. You **should not** use the school's computers to send or receive personal emails.
- If you need to access the school's network as part of your role at the school, ensure you use the username and password provided to you by the school. **Do not** use your personal account details nor those of another person.
- **Never** share your password with other members of staff or pupils. Always lock your computer if you are walking around the classroom and always log off after each lesson. If you suspect that someone knows your details, report it as per the school's IT policy.
- If you need to use the internet as part of your lesson, research, or planning, make sure you only use sites that are relevant. If you accidentally visit a site that could be considered inappropriate, immediately exit the site and report it as per the school's IT policy.
- If you believe that the school's computers have been used to access inappropriate material previously, report it as per the school's IT policy.
- If you ever need to send emails on behalf of the school you should use appropriate language, be professional and make sure your email could not be misconstrued.
- Protect your mobile phone, laptop, and computer with a PIN whilst in school to protect access to its content and potential misuse and **never** have your mobile phone visible during a lesson.
- **Do not** exchange private texts, phone numbers, personal email addresses or photos of a personal nature with pupils or parents and carers. Turn off your bluetooth setting on your mobile phone while at the school.

- **Never** take photos or videos of pupils and never take any photo or video on school grounds using your mobile phone. If you need to photograph or video anything as part of your role at the school, use the school's device and ensure that you have permission to do so before hand.
- Working in a school or tutoring a child online places you in a position of trust, which means there are specific boundaries between teacher/support staff/tutor and pupils that you **must** follow in the classroom and online. You **must** always maintain a professional tone online. Use of expletives, sexual content or any form of discrimination or harassment is always unacceptable.
- **Do not** allow pupils or parents and carers to make you their online 'friend' and **do not** instigate any befriending yourself. This includes Facebook/Twitter/Instagram/YouTube/Tiktok/MySpace or any other social network sites. Parents and carers should be encouraged to use formal channels to contact you.
- Differentiate friends from professional connections by using access and privacy settings. Keep these under review and regularly audit and re-evaluate the information about you and who has access to it.
- Headteachers, parents, pupils and prospective employers may look you up on social media. Ask yourself if you would be comfortable about your content being viewed. If not, remove any dubious material.
- **Do not** engage in online activities that may bring yourself, the school, alternative provision, nursery, or the agency into disrepute. Derogatory, defamatory, or offensive comments about pupils, parents and carers or colleagues must not be posted.
- **Do not** allow others to tag you in photos without your permission – this needs to be agreed with your friends, especially on a night out.
- **No** confidential information about pupils, parents and carers or colleagues should ever be disclosed on social networking sites.
- **Do not** use networking sites to raise concerns about work or your colleagues – use the appropriate internal channels or call your Step Teachers consultant.
- If you do post your opinions online, make it clear that these are your personal views and not those of your employer by adding a statement to that effect.
- Contact your consultant if you come across any material that is likely to reflect badly on yourself, the school, or Step Teachers.

Incidents and Allegations

All candidates working with Step Teachers are expected to act appropriately and maintain high standards of conduct, professionalism and safeguarding when working with children and young people.

If at any time whilst working with Step Teachers should an incident take place or an allegation be made against you, we will follow a set procedure which is detailed below. This procedure has been designed to ensure consistent and fair treatment for all and to establish the facts quickly. No action will be taken until the matter has been fully investigated.

- If a school informs us of a particular incident or allegation, but they do not wish to take the matter further, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will call you to arrange a meeting to discuss the incident or allegation.
- You will not be offered any further work until after the meeting and will not be paid by Step Teachers during this time.
- During the meeting you will have the opportunity to discuss the incident and put forward your version of events. After the meeting a decision will be made regarding whether you can continue to work for Step Teachers.
- Where it is decided that further work will be offered, it is expected that additional training will be completed before recommencing work.
- If a school informs us of a particular incident or allegation and they are taking the matter further, the school will inform the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and the school will investigate the incident or allegation.
- If the incident or allegation reaches the LADO threshold, a position of trust meeting will be organised, where representatives from Step Teachers, the school, and in some instances, the police and social workers meet with the LADO to discuss the incident or allegation.
- Depending on the incident or allegation, we may need to meet with you to discuss this and you will have the opportunity to put forward your version of events. Notes will be taken of this meeting and shared with all the parties involved.
- This process can be lengthy, and you will not be offered further work until the conclusion of this process. You will not be paid by Step Teachers during this time.
- We will keep you informed of the progress throughout the matter and offer you support.
- Our decision regarding whether to work with you again will be based on the outcome of this process. Outcomes will be one of the following:
 - **The allegation is malicious** – you can continue working through Step Teachers.
 - **The allegation is unsubstantiated** – you can continue to work through Step Teachers. However, it is expected that additional training will be completed before recommencing work.
 - **The allegation is unfounded** – you can continue working through Step Teachers.
 - **The allegation is substantiated, and the harm test has been reached** – you will not be able to continue being registered with Step Teachers and we will have a legal obligation to make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service and Teaching Regulation Authority (if applicable).
 - **The allegation is substantiated but the harm test has not been reached** – you will be invited to a safeguarding review meeting and a decision will be made as to whether you can continue working through Step Teachers.

A safeguarding review meeting will be held by the Designated Safeguarding Lead and a note taker. As agency workers are not employees, you do not have the right to be accompanied. However, in the interest of general fairness we will allow a trade union representative or another person to accompany you if you feel that is necessary. If you intend to be accompanied, then advance notice must be given.

Please note that if you become the subject of an allegation or investigation by another agency, employer, TRA, DBS, police or any other body, you must notify your consultant immediately.

Low-Level Concerns

The term 'low-level' concern does not mean that it is insignificant. A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt' – that an adult working in or on behalf of a school may have acted in a way that:

- Is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work and
- Does not meet the harm threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to LADO.

We ask that you make considerations of our Safeguarding Policies and Code of Conduct in this handbook alongside that of the client school.

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- Being over friendly with children.
- Having favourites.
- Taking photographs of children on their mobile phone, contract to school policy.
- Engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door.
- Humiliating children.

Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum, from the inadvertent or thoughtless, or behaviour that may look to be inappropriate, but might not be in specific circumstances, through to that which is ultimately intended to enable abuse. It is important that you are clear about what appropriate behaviour is and are confident in distinguishing expected and appropriate behaviour from inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour, in yourself and others.

Low-level concerns can be self-referred, where for example you have found yourself in a situation which could be misinterpreted, might appear compromising to other and/or on reflection you believe you have behaved in such a way that you consider it falls below the expected professional standards/code of conduct.

Low-level concerns should be shared confidentially with the Head Teacher of the school and the Step Teacher's Designated Safeguarding Lead. Low-level concerns should be recorded in writing and should include details of the concern and the context in which the concern arose.

Designated Safeguarding Lead

Step Teacher's Designated Safeguarding Lead with overall safeguarding responsibilities is Paris Ellis-McLeggan. The Deputy Safeguarding Lead is Nicholas Howson. They can be contacted on Tel: 020 8343 5469 – Email: safeguarding@stepteachers.co.uk in the event that you have any safeguarding concerns.

Harassment of our Employees

Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our employees is essential. We expect all our candidates to treat our employees respectfully at all times and take very seriously any threatening, abusive or violent behaviour against any of our staff.

We operate a zero-tolerance policy with regard to harassment. This includes both verbal and physical harassment in person, over the phone, via email or letter, through messaging apps, or any other forms of communication.

Any candidate found to be harassing any of our employees will automatically be permanently struck off our database and we will make the necessary referrals to the police.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to Step Teachers and it is the only way for us to continually improve and update our services by listening to the people who work for us. It is important you tell us what you think of us.

We will periodically ask you to take part in our 'Candidate Customer Survey' which gives you the chance to grade different aspects of our service and add your own comments and suggestions. We also make a £1 donation to the Step Teachers [Charity of the Year](#) for each completed survey.

Complaints

If you have a complaint about Step Teachers, we want to hear about it and we will do our best to put it right. We treat any complaint in a prompt and efficient manner. In the first instance we ask that you speak to your consultant or their manager who will try to resolve the matter. If you would like to pursue a formal complaint, please refer to our Complaints Policy for full details or speak to your consultant for further information.

Whistleblowing

If you have any concerns about malpractice or wrongdoing within Step Teachers, we encourage you to raise any concerns in line with our Whistleblowing policy. If you have any concerns about malpractice or wrongdoing within a certain school you are working at, we encourage you to raise any concerns in line with the that school's Whistleblowing policy.