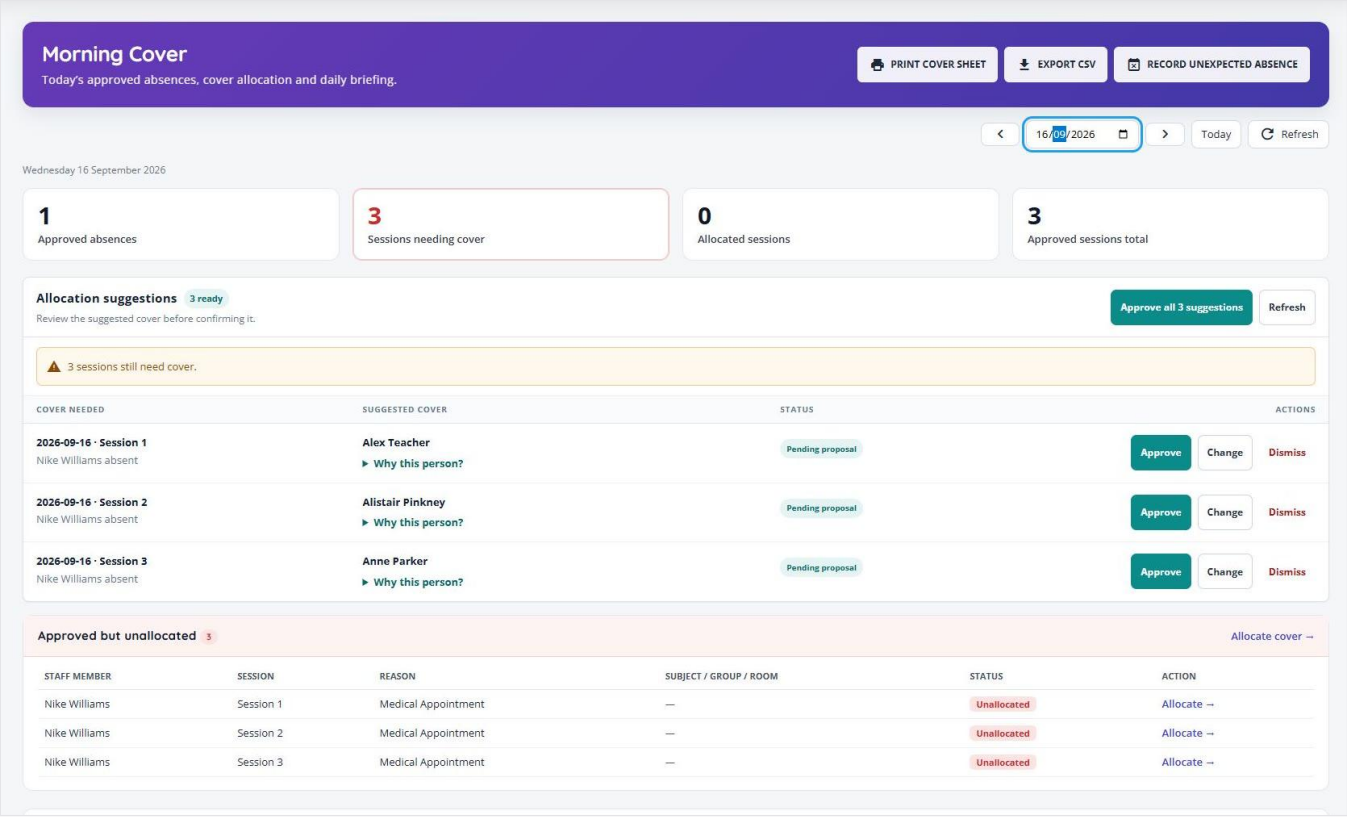
Education Host

Homefield Preparatory School

CASE STUDY

Homefield Prep halves the time it spends setting cover

How a Sutton prep school cut its weekly cover and duty administration from 11 hours 15 minutes to 5 hours 35 minutes in a four-week Cover Manager pilot.



Morning Cover: the day's approved absences, cover suggestions awaiting review and lessons still needing cover. Example data.

Cover Manager brings staff absence, approvals, cover allocation and duties into one place for UK schools. Homefield Prep piloted it in autumn 2026.

5 h 40 min
saved each week across cover and duties

10 h → 5 h
weekly time setting cover, before and after

35 staff
in a four-week pilot, 14 September to 12 October 2026

Education Host | educationhost.co.uk/platforms/cover-manager | November 2026

At a glance

At Homefield Prep, setting cover took an average of two hours a day. Carys, the school's Assistant Head Academic, sets cover and says Cover Manager has brought this down to one hour a day or less, and gives her time back for the other parts of her role.

Why setting cover takes so long

In many schools, cover runs on email and spreadsheets. Staff report their absence by email or in person. Someone checks what has been approved. The gaps are found by hand, and the day's cover sheet is built separately. The timetable sits in another system, and duty rotas sit in another spreadsheet. The same people tend to be asked to cover.

Whoever sets cover needs to know what is approved, what is still unallocated, and that no lesson or gate is left without someone. Cover Manager puts absence requests, approvals, cover allocation and duties in one place, with the school's timetable alongside, and decisions are recorded there rather than in email.

Before Cover Manager

- Absence requests arrive by email or in person
- Cover gaps are found by hand
- The daily cover sheet is built separately
- Timetable details are checked in another system
- Duty rotas and cover lists live in a separate spreadsheet
- The same people are asked to cover again and again

The pilot at Homefield Prep

Before the pilot, absence requests, cover decisions and duties took 11 hours 15 minutes of administration a week, with setting cover taking 10 of those hours. The school piloted Cover Manager from 14 September to 12 October 2026 with 35 staff. During the four weeks, 28 staff signed in and managers approved 36 absences. Timetable data came from the school's management information system (MIS) through Wonde.

01

Staff request absence

In Cover Manager, with the line manager and approvers shown before they submit.

02

Managers approve

Requests are approved in the same place, so decisions are recorded.

03

Cover is ranked

Cover Manager lists the lessons that need cover and ranks staff by suitability.

04

Carys allocates

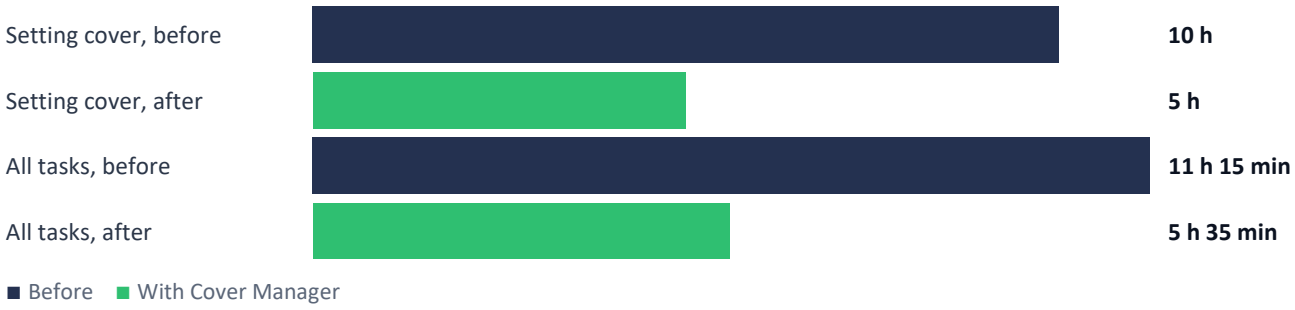
She approves each suggestion and emails the day's sheet with her own notes.

Weekly time before and after the pilot

Task	Before	With Cover Manager	Saving
Setting cover	10 h	5 h	5 h
Sending duty sheets (see note)	10 min	10 min	0 min
Managing duties	50 min	25 min	25 min
Approvals administration	15 min	0 min	15 min
Total	**11 h 15 min**	**5 h 35 min**	**5 h 40 min**

Timings are the school's own, checked by Carys after the pilot. Carys still emails the duty sheets herself so she can add notes for staff. Cover Manager can send them automatically, but no saving is claimed for that. Managers still approve absences.

Hours of administration each week



Across the pilot's 132 recorded sessions, 57 were covered and 75 were confirmed as needing no cover. If the saving holds across 39 school weeks, it comes to about 220 hours a year of staff time. That is an estimate of time, not a cash saving.

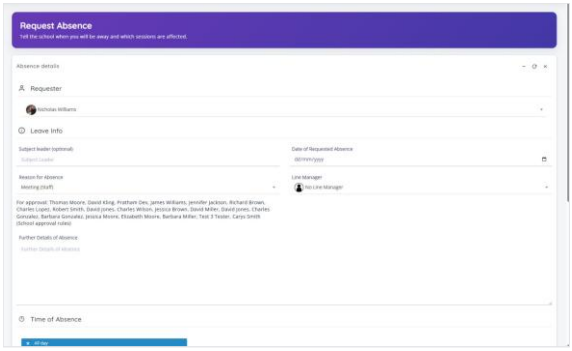
"It has reduced the time I spend setting cover from an average of two hours a day to one, or even less, which over the course of the week is a big saving. This gives me time back in the school day to carry out the other parts of my role."

Carys, Assistant Head Academic, Homefield Prep

Fewer emails and visits about absence

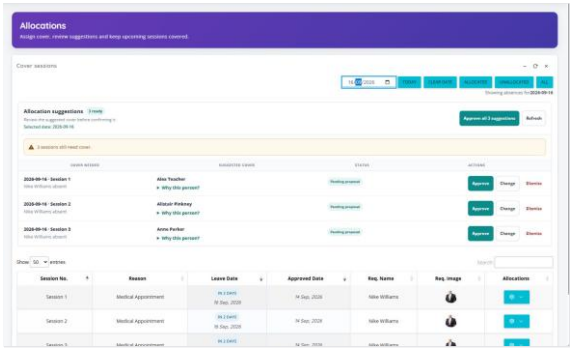
Staff request absence in Cover Manager and a manager approves it there. Cover Manager then lists the lessons that need cover, so far fewer requests reach Carys by email, and fewer staff come to see her in person to discuss cover. The request form shows the line manager and approvers before the member of staff submits.

> "One of the biggest benefits of Cover Manager for me has been the significant reduction in emails from staff regarding cover requests. Staff can now submit their absence requests directly through the system for approval, which has saved me a considerable amount of time. Once an absence is approved, the cover requirements are automatically generated, removing the need for me to manually enter the details and select the relevant periods in SIMS."
>
> **Carys, Assistant Head Academic, Homefield Prep**



The Request Absence form shows the line manager and approvers before submission.

Choosing who covers, quickly and fairly



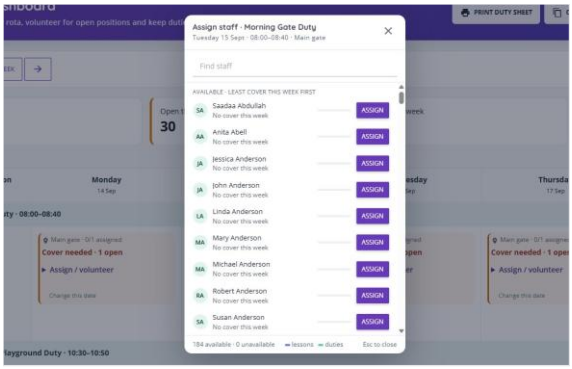
The Allocations page, with suggested staff and the option to approve each one.

For each lesson that needs cover, Cover Manager ranks staff by suitability, taking account of their teaching commitments and how much cover they have already done. Managers approve each suggestion before it is confirmed.

> "Being able to see staff ranked according to their suitability makes allocating cover much quicker and easier, whilst helping to ensure that it is distributed as fairly and evenly as possible."
>
> **Carys, Assistant Head Academic, Homefield Prep**

Duty cover that follows the school's rules

Ed, the school's Assistant Head Pastoral, assigns duty cover. When a duty needs cover, Cover Manager suggests staff, taking account of each person's teaching timetable, their clubs and how much lesson and duty cover they have done recently. Each duty can also have rules about who may cover it, for example limiting Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) duties to particular staff.



Assigning a duty: available staff are listed with those who have done the least cover this week first.

> "Assigning duty cover has been made so much easier using Cover Manager. I no longer spend a lot of time checking staff members' teaching timetable for the day, whether they have a club or not and how many lessons or duty covers they have done recently. Cover Manager takes all this into account and shows me the best suggestions to cover a duty. Being able to assign certain rules to the duties has also been a huge help, for example, only certain staff being able to do an EYFS duty to ensure we always comply with ratio requirements."
>
> **Ed, Assistant Head Pastoral, Homefield Prep**



Duty cover rules: each duty can be limited to, or kept away from, named staff.

Cover alongside the school timetable

Cover Manager pulls timetable information from the school's MIS through Wonde, so cover planning shows the subject, group, room and period for each lesson where the data is available. What is shown depends on the school's MIS, its permissions and the timetable data it holds.

> "Having the timetable information alongside cover means I can see which lessons are affected and spend less time checking between systems."
>
> **Carys, Assistant Head Academic, Homefield Prep**

Support during the pilot

Nick at Education Host supported the pilot and adjusted Cover Manager as the school's comments came in. Afterwards, Carys wrote about the support she received.

> "He has been incredibly responsive and supportive throughout, always responding promptly to any queries or issues we have raised. What has particularly impressed me is how quickly he has acted on our feedback and suggestions, making adjustments to ensure that Cover Manager works effectively for the specific needs of our school. Every issue we have encountered has been resolved quickly and efficiently. I really cannot fault the support we have received."
>
> **Carys, Assistant Head Academic, Homefield Prep**

What Cover Manager does

Morning Cover
A daily view, a printable cover sheet, spreadsheet export and “No Cover Needed” marking.

Duty Manager
Weekly duty rotas, cover for absent duty staff, a duty load report and printable sheets.

Approvals
Who approves depends on the absence reason; managers see all requests on one page.

Allocation
Cover suggestions with the reasons shown, approved by a manager before they are confirmed.

Reporting
Dashboard figures, absence trends by reason and how much cover each person has done.

iPhone and iPad app
Cover Manager for Education, available on the App Store.

Microsoft Entra sign-in
Staff see only what their role allows; accounts are linked before first sign-in.

Wonde MIS integration
Timetable data from the school’s MIS, where available.

Built for UK schools and colleges: cover managers, headteachers and senior leaders, line managers, duty managers and school administrators, teaching and support staff, and IT and MIS teams.

Sources: Homefield Prep pilot business case (16 October 2026) and later feedback from Carys and Ed. Annual figure assumes 39 school weeks. Screenshots show example data, not Homefield Prep’s records.

What to do next

To see how Cover Manager would work in your school, book a demo. Pricing is confirmed once we have talked through your school’s needs. If you would rather test it first, we can run a pilot: its dates, what counts as success and any charges are agreed with you before it begins.

Book a Cover Manager demo educationhost.co.uk/platforms/cover-manager