

## **Effective use of teaching assistants under everyday classroom conditions**

There is an apparent misconception and widely implemented ineffective practice regarding the deployment of teaching assistants.

There is substantial evidence, going back over a decade, that schools' use of teaching assistants to support pupils' learning needs effectively varies considerably. For example, in their influential study, 'Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS)', Blatchford et al. (2009) observe that:

*"There was a consistent negative relationship between the amount of support a pupil received and their progress in English and mathematics ... even after controlling for pupil characteristics like prior attainment and SEN status. The more support pupils received, the less progress they made".* (emphases added)

(Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A., & Webster, R. (2009).

Research brief: Deployment and impact of support staff.)

There is significant research into how schools better deploy teaching assistants. One of the findings is that the deployment of TAs needs to be carefully considered by school leadership. Otherwise, it can have negative impacts on pupils' learning and well-being. We must adopt an evidence-based approach. In practice, most TAs spend most of their time working in a direct but informal instructional role with pupils on a small-group or one-to-one basis. This occurs because those pupils spend less time in whole-class teaching, and TAs become primary educators for those most in need. We must ensure interventions and support from teaching assistants and other professionals are targeted and never used as a replacement for high-quality teaching.

EEF (2021) Special educational needs in mainstream schools: Guidance report makes five recommendations for improving the effectiveness of provision for pupils with SEND, which are evidence-based, including:

- 1. Build an ongoing, holistic understanding of your pupils and their needs.**
- 2. Ensure all pupils have access to high-quality teaching.**
- 3. Create a positive and supportive environment for all pupils, without exception.**
- 4. Complement high-quality teaching with carefully selected small-group and one-to-one interventions.**

This recommendation should be strongly considered regarding the deployment of Teaching Assistants. As research proves:

- Small-group and one-to-one interventions can be powerful but must be used carefully. Ineffective use of interventions can create a barrier to the inclusion of pupils with SEND
- High-quality teaching should reduce the need for extra support, but some pupils will likely require high-quality, structured, targeted interventions to make progress.
- The intensity of intervention (from universal to targeted to specialist) should increase with need.
- Interventions should be carefully targeted through identification and assessment of need.
- Interventions should be applied using the principles of effective implementation described in the EEF's guidance report Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation.

The SEND Code of Practice is clear: 'The quality of teaching for pupils with SEN, and the progress made by pupils, should be a core part of the school's performance management arrangements and its approach to professional development for all teaching and support staff.

Regarding TA deployment, we must challenge ourselves and answer honestly the following questions.

Can we provide the support required for our staff to implement those interventions well?  
Do our staff have a good understanding of the teaching strategies required in those interventions?

Effective deployment of trained teaching assistants is critical in providing outstanding education to pupils with SEND.

### **5. Work effectively with teaching assistants.**

Effective deployment is essential, so school leaders should pay careful attention when finalising the roles of TAs to ensure they positively impact pupils with SEND. They should supplement and not replace teaching.

The EEF's guidance report, Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants, provides detailed recommendations, including:

- 1. TAs should be used as something other than an informal teaching resource for low-attaining pupils.**
- 2. Utilise TAs to help pupils manage their learning and develop independent learning skills.**
- 3. TAs should add value to teachers' performance and not replace them.**
- 4. Ensure TAs are fully prepared for their role.**
- 5. Adopt evidence-based interventions to support TAs.**
- 6. Ensure explicit connections are clear between classroom teaching and outside interventions.**
- 7. Use TAs to deliver high-quality one-to-one and small-group support using structured interventions.**

There are additional resources available to support effective TA deployment:

- 1. A draft agreement for teacher-TA interactions.**
- 2. A self-assessment guide for schools.**
- 3. A draft TA policy template.**
- 4. An online course. The Maximising, the Impact of Teaching Assistants website (<http://maximisingtas.co.uk>) is a rich source of free resources to support evidence-based TA deployment.**

5. **Professional standards for TAs.**
6. **Guidance for leaders and managers in the further education and training sector of effective TA deployment created by the EEF and the Education and Training Foundation.**

**EEF (2021) Maximising the impact of teaching assistants (MITA): Evaluation report**, Available at [Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](https://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/Maximising-the-Impact-of-Teaching-Assistants-EEF) [Links to an external site.](#) Accessed 01.09.2023.

**EEF (2021) Special educational needs in mainstream schools: Guidance report**  
Available  
at [EEF Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools Guidance Report.pdf \(d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net\)](https://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/Special-Educational-Needs-in-Mainstream-Schools-Guidance-Report-EEF). [Links to an external site.](#) Accessed 01.09.2023.

**EEF (2018) Making best use of teaching assistants**  
Available at: [Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](https://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/Making-Best-Use-of-Teaching-Assistants-EEF) [Links to an external site.](#) Accessed 01.09.2023.