

Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants

March 2022

The number of full-time equivalent TAs more than trebled in the period from 2000 to 2018, when the second edition of [Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants](#) was published. By that point Teaching Assistants comprised over a quarter of the workforce in mainstream schools in England: 35% of the primary workforce, and 14% of the secondary school workforce

Schools in 2018 were spending approximately £4.4 billion each year on TAs, corresponding to 13% of the education budget. This situation has not significantly changed since then – and neither have the research headlines about what constitutes effective practice, meaning that this Guidance Report is still both relevant and valuable. The additional resources and tools which support schools in implementing the recommendations have also been updated more recently.

The existence of such a large staff resource presents an excellent opportunity for improvements in practice and outcomes for pupils, without increasing expenditure when budgets are increasingly tight.

So what does the Report recommend?

MAKING BEST USE OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS
Summary of recommendations

Sections are colour coded for ease of reference

The effective use of TAs under everyday classroom conditions

- 1 TAs should not be used as an informal teaching resource for low attaining pupils**
The evidence on TA deployment suggests schools have often put TAs in a situation where they are often used as an informal instructional resource for pupils in need. This has the effect of separating pupils from the classroom, their teacher and their peers. Although this has happened with the best of intentions, this evidence suggests that the same can no longer be applied. School leaders should systematically review the role of both teachers and TAs and take a wider view of how TAs can support learning and support attainment throughout the school.
- 2 Use TAs to add value to what teachers do, not replace them**
If TAs have a direct instructional role it is important that we value the work of the teacher and not replace them – the expectation should be that the results of all pupils are addressed, first and foremost, through high quality classroom teaching. Schools should be clear on the role of TAs and ensure that the pupils who struggle most have as much time with the teacher as others. Ensuring every child has a model of behaviour where TAs are assigned to specific tasks for long periods requires more strategic approaches to classroom organisation. Instead, school leaders should establish effective teams of teachers and TAs, who understand their complementary roles in the classroom. Where TAs are working individually, one clear strategy is to ensure that the focus should be on releasing teachers to high quality teaching, for example by delivering half, but ensuring structured interventions (see Recommendation 5, and 6).
- 3 Use TAs to help pupils develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning**
Research has shown that supporting the nature and quality of TAs' talk to pupils can support the development of independent learning skills, which are associated with improved learning outcomes. The schools, for example, be trained to avoid promoting task completion and instead concentrate on helping pupils develop ownership of tasks. The aim should be to give pupils the most amount of help that they should allow full own work time, so pupils can respond to a question or attempt the steps of a task independently. They should intervene appropriately when pupils demonstrate they are unable to proceed.
- 4 Ensure TAs are fully prepared for their role in the classroom**
Schools should provide sufficient time for TA training and for teachers and TAs to meet out of class to consider the necessary lesson preparation and feedback. Creative ways of ensuring teachers and TAs have time to meet include adjusting the working hours start time, lunch, early, using assembly time and having the job teachers for part of Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time. During lesson preparation time areas TAs have the essential 'need to know':
 - Contexts, facts, information being taught
 - Skills to be learned, applied, practised or rehearsed
 - Intended learning outcomes
 - Expected learning feedback.

The effective use of TAs in delivering structured interventions out of class

- 5 Use TAs to deliver high quality one-to-one and small group support using structured interventions**
Research on TA delivery targeted interventions in one-to-one or small group settings shows a consistent impact on attainment of approximately three to four additional months' progress (effect size 0.2-0.3). Crucially, these positive effects are only observed when: The work in structured settings is high quality and supported with high quality support and training. When TAs are deployed in more informal, unstructured settings, they can impact negatively on pupil learning outcomes.
- 6 Adapt evidence-based interventions to support TAs in their small group and one-to-one instruction**
Schools should use structured interventions with reliable evidence of effectiveness. These are generally a structured programme that are 'evidence-based' in that they are based on some common elements of effective intervention:
 - Sessions are often held (20-30 minutes) once weekly (2-5 times per week) and are conducted over a sustained period (8-20 weeks). Careful thought should be given to the structure of the intervention.
 - The intervention is supported with appropriate resources and lesson plans, with clear objectives.
 - The closely follow the plan and structure of the intervention.
 - Assessments are used to identify appropriate pupils, guide what to focus on and track progress. Effective interventions ensure that the right support is being provided to the right child.
 - Checkpoints are made between the out-of-class learning in the intervention and classroom learning (see Box 7).

Integrating learning from work led by teachers and TAs

- 7 Ensure explicit connections are made between learning from every day classroom teaching and structured interventions**
Interventions are often quite separate from classroom activities. Lack of links for teachers and TAs to make a reliable connection between what pupils experience in and away from the classroom. The key is to ensure that learning in interventions is connected with, and extends, work in the classroom and that pupils understand the links between them. It should not be assumed that pupils can connectively identify and make sense of these links on their own.

The effective use of TAs under everyday classroom conditions

1. TAs should not be used as an informal teaching resource for low attaining pupils
2. Use TAs to help pupils develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning
3. Use TAs to add value to what teachers do, not replace them
4. Ensure TAs are fully prepared for their role in the classroom

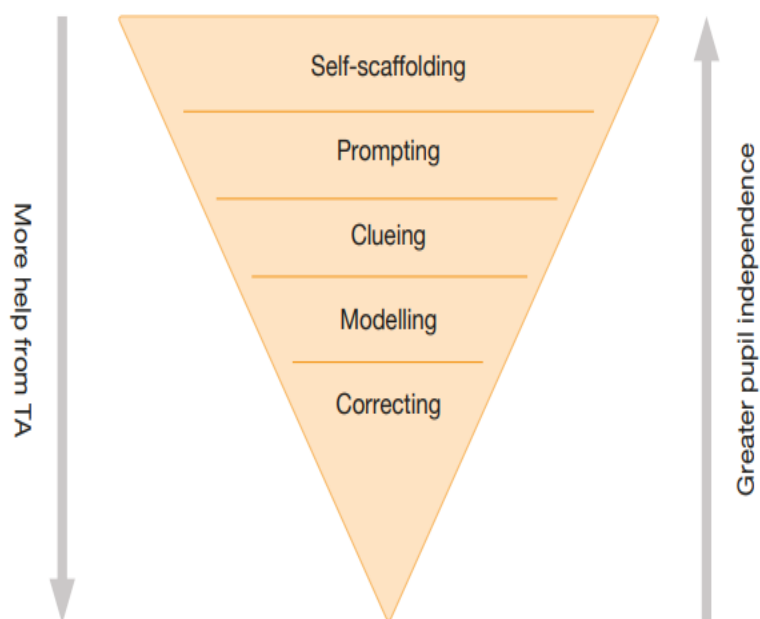
The effective use of TAs in delivering structured interventions out of class

5. Use TAs to deliver high quality one-to-one and small group support using structured intervention
6. Adopt evidence-based interventions to support TAs in their small group and one-to-one instruction

Integrating learning from work led by teachers and TAs

7. Ensure explicit connections are made between learning from everyday classroom teaching and structured intervention

As usual with the EEF, the full Guidance Report expands, in practical ways, on each of these and the website also provides a number of linked implementation tools and resources. We will now explore just three examples, linked to recommendations 2 and 3 and to recommendations 5,6 and 7.



First is the *Scaffolding framework for teaching assistant-pupil interactions* which helps TAs recognise their role and develop their skills in scaffolding pupils' learning and encouraging independent thinking.

