

MAKING BEST USE OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS

A self-assessment guide

This Red Amber Green (RAG) self-assessment guide accompanies the Education Endowment Foundation's report, Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants, which sets out seven evidence-based recommendations on the effective use of TAs.

It describes what 'ineffective', 'improving' and 'exemplary' practice can look like in relation to:

- Deployment of TAs in the classroom (Recommendation I, II)
- TAs' interactions with pupils (Recommendation III)
- Teacher/TA preparation and training (Recommendation IV)
- TAs delivering targeted, structured interventions (Recommendation V, VI, VII)

It can be used as part of an initial audit process to establish current practice (i.e. point of departure), as well as to monitor progress towards the development of more effective practice (i.e. direction of travel).

Developed by Jonathan Sharples, Education Endowment Foundation and Rob Webster, UCL Institute of Education

RECOMMENDATIONS 1 AND 2

Deployment of TAs in the classroom

Ineffective



- TAs routinely have a direct, informal teaching role with lower-attaining pupils and/or those with SEN. They regularly adopt the status of 'primary educator' to these pupils.
- This arrangement causes a 'separation' effect: high-supported pupils have fewer opportunities to engage with whole-class teaching, and have fewer interactions with teachers and peers.
- Teachers assume that a high amount of TA support meets the needs of lower-attaining and/or SEN pupils, and as a result spend less time working with these groups.
- Personal relationship may be good, but there is a lack of cohesive and effective teamwork between teachers and TAs in the classroom.
- TAs rarely rove around the classroom and support whole-class teaching (such as demonstrating equipment, or working at the whiteboard).

Improving



- There is variability in the quality and appropriateness of teachers' moment-by- moment decision-making regarding TA deployment.
- In some lessons, TAs are effectively supplementing the whole-class teaching, although this is not consistent.
- There is a tendency to drift back towards TAs working in an isolated teaching role with lower-attaining and/or SEN pupils, particularly as the lesson progresses.
- There is little or no attempt to redeploy TAs during lessons in response to the 'real time' needs of pupils.

Exemplary



- The learning needs of all pupils are met, first and foremost, through high quality teaching by the teacher. Teachers spend at least as much time working work with lower- attainers as others.
- TAs work with a range of pupils within the class and supplement and extend teachers' work, rather than replace them. Support for specific individuals or groups is structured so it helps them access general classroom teaching.
- Teachers and TAs work effectively as a team, with a shared understanding of their respective roles in achieving lesson objectives. Teachers' moment-by-moment decisions regarding TA deployment are driven by pupils' needs.
- TAs support whole-class delivery at the front of the class, rove the room or undertake administrative tasks to ease teachers' workload.

RECOMMENDATION 3

TAs' interactions with pupils

Ineffective



- TAs' interactions with pupils tend toward task completion. Key characteristics of their talk include heavy prompting and spoon-feeding.
- TAs repeat verbatim what teachers say during whole-class input, so pupils' experience of teachers' talk is disjointed.
- Pupils' talk to TAs suggests they have grown dependent on in-class support. There are signs that pupils' work is not wholly representative of their current competency (i.e. TAs do the work for them).
- TAs mainly ask closed questions. The quality of interactions suggests weaknesses or gaps in TAs' subject knowledge.
- TAs do not allow sufficient 'wait time' for pupils to consider and respond to questions.

Improving



- TAs' interactions tend toward learning, understanding and ensuring on-task behaviour, but practice is inconsistent.
- TAs withdraw from pupils or withhold support fittingly to allow them to work independently, but overall amounts of support remain fairly high.
- TAs exhibit good group management skills and subject knowledge sufficient to the task.
- TAs demonstrate frequent and appropriate use of open-ended questions.
- TAs may not leave sufficient 'wait time', and/ or supply answers or heavy clues too soon.

Exemplary



- TAs provide the right amount of support at the right time, and consistently give the least amount of help first.
- TAs ensure pupils retain ownership over their learning and responsibility for their work. Without adults present, pupils demonstrate the capacity and confidence to structure and plan their work.
- TAs actively look for opportunities to allow pupils to attempt parts of tasks independently and to experience a healthy mix of success and challenge.
- TAs are confident in their role and have good subject knowledge. Good questioning skills inform their interactions.
- TAs allow sufficient 'wait time' for pupils to think and respond (e.g. 4-5 seconds).

RECOMMENDATION 4

Teacher/TA preparation and training

Ineffective



- TAs are generally unprepared for their role, both in terms of background training and day-to-day preparation.
- TAs have limited opportunities to participate in CPD and/or the performance review process.
- Teachers receive little or no training in how to manage, organise and work with TAs.
- Teachers have no allocated planning or feedback time with TAs. Communication is largely ad hoc and informal, taking place between lesson changeovers or before/ after school.
- TAs report going into lessons 'blind'. They 'tune in' to teachers' delivery to pick up vital subject knowledge, tasks and instruction.
- There is a lack of cohesive and effective teamwork in the classroom. Personal relationships may be good, but TAs have limited awareness of lesson objectives, expected outcomes, subject knowledge and instructional techniques relevant to the lesson and individual pupils' needs.

Improving



- Teachers' planning suggests TAs' skills sets and levels of training are underused. Assigned roles are not always commensurate with TAs' capabilities.
- TAs receive some professional development (e.g. on providing feedback, managing behaviour, building subject knowledge) but this is patchy and not sustained.
- Teachers receive little formal support on how to work effectively with TAs, and they rarely participate in training together.
- Teachers plan TAs' role in lessons and this is usually (but not always) communicated to TAs beforehand.
- TAs generally understand their role in relation to lesson objectives, but a lack of dynamic communication means teachers' receive little or no feedback on pupils' needs/ learning within or after lessons.
- Teachers and TAs have good professional relationships, although this may not be consistent throughout the school.

Exemplary



- TAs are fully equipped with the skills to support learning for pupils across the attainment range, consistent with teachers' intentions. Their skills and particular specialisms are understood and maximised by the teacher.
- Teachers have received extensive and on-going training on how to manage, organise and work with TAs.
- Teachers and TAs have allocated time to plan and review lessons, and feedback on pupils' learning in structured interventions. SLT have clear expectations on how joint preparation time is used.
- TAs enter lessons with a clear understanding of the concepts and information being taught, skills to be learned/applied, intended learning outcomes and specific learning needs of pupils they work with.
- Mechanisms are in place to capture meaningful feedback for teachers, which inform the next stages of learning within and/or after lessons.

RECOMMENDATIONS 5, 6 AND 7

TAs delivering targeted, structured interventions

Ineffective



- TAs deliver mainly unstructured interventions, for which there is little reliable evidence of effectiveness. TAs may deliver commercial intervention programmes, but in an unstructured way (e.g. not as prescribed by the developer).
- Intervention sessions are long (>30mins), poorly timetabled and irregular. Consequently, pupils routinely miss significant portions of classroom teaching.
- TAs have little formal training in delivering interventions. Limited structured resources mean that sessions often have vague objectives and are slowly paced. As such, they may not be adequately compensating for the time pupils spend out of class.
- Teachers have little or no awareness of the structure and coverage of intervention programmes.
- Teachers rarely plan or review intervention sessions with TAs and there are few opportunities for meaningful feedback after sessions.
- It is left largely to pupils to make the links between what is covered in interventions and their learning in general classroom teaching.

Improving



- TAs deliver some well-chosen interventions that have the potential to effectively supplement classroom learning, although this is not always occurring (e.g. use of assessments to monitor impact and inform next stages of development is inconsistent).
- Although interventions are structured, they are not always delivered as intended. Timetabling of sessions is reasonable although sessions are sometimes missed.
- Some TAs have received training on intervention programmes, although this may need updating.
- Teachers have limited awareness of the structure and coverage of intervention programmes.
- Teachers and TAs meet occasionally to review the coverage and impact of interventions. Practice across the school is inconsistent.
- Pupils receive some assistance in applying their learning from interventions to the wider curriculum, although again this is inconsistent.

Exemplary



- TAs deliver one or two evidence-based and structured interventions, chosen to deliberately complement and extend class-based teaching and learning.
- Intervention sessions are brief (<30mins), regular and sustained, with clear objectives and expectations. Sessions are well-paced, well-resourced and carefully timetabled to minimise time spent away from general class teaching.
- TAs are extensively trained to deliver interventions faithfully (i.e. as intended by the developer), and over time develop deep expertise in the approach.
- Teachers have good awareness of the structure and coverage of intervention programmes.
- There are regular opportunities for teachers and TAs to plan and review learning taking place in interventions, with regular assessments in place to guide this process.
- Teachers and TAs both help pupils make connections between the learning in interventions and the wider curriculum.