

How can we maximise the impact of our teaching assistants?

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Background context:

Following the much publicised criticism of the impact of teaching assistants in school by Michael Gove in 2015 we undertook research to look at how we can ensure that our teaching assistants are ensuring that they add value to the progress of students in class.

Dene Magna School has 29 students who have a Statement or Educational Health Care Plan and a significant part of the staffing budget has been allocated to this support. Historically, nearly all teaching assistants have been allocated to work alongside a student across all lessons. Exceptions have been the allocation of Higher Level Teaching Assistants (of which we have four) and general teaching assistants who often found themselves supporting students due to staff absence.

In September 2015 we moved to a department based allocation of TAs following the outcomes of initial research and the new demands placed on students in KS3 and 4. We were aware that this was a first step and that further work would be needed to ensure that we were making the most of this change.

Meetings took place with the SENCO and teaching assistants were consulted on the work ahead and asked to join the working group. The working group consisted of a mixture of staff including the Headteacher, SENCO, HLTAs, TAs and some teaching staff members.

Reading:

Initial analysis took place of the findings of the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff Project (DISS project) which was a compilation of the work of Peter Blatchford, Paul Bassett, Penelope Brown, Clare Martin, Anthony Russell and Rob Webster (2009) done on behalf of the Institute of Education, University of London.

This report gathered reliable data on the current workings of support staff and allowed us to unpick the key findings that affect the staff and students at Dene Magna. The main areas identified that provoked thinking were:

- The majority of teachers had not had training to help them work with support staff in classrooms
- The majority of teachers did not have allocated planning, feedback or other allocated time with support staff they work with in the classroom
- At secondary level the more contact pupils had with support staff the less individual attention they had from the teacher
- TAs interactions...tended to be more concerned with completion of tasks rather than learning and understanding
- TAs tended to reactive rather than proactive.

These findings led us to look at the work of the Sutton Trust and Education Endowment Fund who published guidance from their research on ‘Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants – Recommendations Summary’.

We began to build a picture of how this linked to our own practice and we then looked at the work of Webster, Russell and Blatchford (2015) in Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants to see if there are areas we can develop.

Following this research which not only backed up the DISS report findings but also added evidence of a ‘velcro effect’ with students learning helplessness when working 1:1 with a TA we analysed the findings of the EEF Toolkit to look at which strategies added most value to learning in schools.

Strategies:

We needed to get a clear picture of what was happening in school and so all TAs were observed twice to build a comprehensive picture of the current workings of a TA.

These findings were then broken into sections so that we could analyse the picture for 1:1 TAs as well as Department based TAs.

	Working 1:1 with pupil	Working with group of pupils	Roving classroom	Listening to teacher teach	Other (tidy, admin etc...)
Combined	37%	15%	16%	24%	8%
1:1	41%	9%	7.5%	36%	6.5%

Department	35%	20%	22%	14%	9%
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An area that has been highlighted is the amount of time a 1:1 TA is spending listening to a teacher teach. This has led to discussions and plans for the coming year.

It was agreed that TAs need specific training in developing the best strategies and that staff would need to have more awareness of the role of the TA.

Next steps:

The group is now researching how it can develop training sessions on the EEF 'most effective' strategies in the class and we will roll out a Toolbox programme for TAs throughout the year that is led by TAs and teachers. The aim will be to skill up the TAs in how to apply these theories into practice in the classroom.

There will be whole staff training on the findings during the September INSET and staff will have clear guidance for how to work in the most effective way with the TA. This will build in elements of our findings such as:

- How do we reduce the time a TA spends listening to the teacher?
- How do we ensure that teachers get excellent feedback from TAs?
- How do we ensure that TAs are confident in applying the best practice methods in class?
- How do we ensure that all teachers effectively communicate the upcoming work with the TA so that they can support straight away?

The team will continue to meet to drive forward this agenda and support all staff in making the best use of TAs.

References:

Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A., and Webster, R. (2009) The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff in Schools Project, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Research Report 2009

Sharples, J., Webster, R., Blatchford, P., (2015) Making Best Use Of Teaching Assistants. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Campaigns/TA_Guidance_Report_MakingBestUseOfTeachingAssistants-Printable.pdf

Webster, R., Russell, A., Blatchford, P. (2015) Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants: Guidance for school leaders and teachers.