

SUPPORT STAFF (ENGLAND)

SETTING STANDARDS FOR YOUR TAs: WHERE TO START?

In the absence of national standards for teaching assistants, Alex Collinson, a researcher specialising in school staffing matters at The Key, looks at resources available to help school leaders establish their own standards and release the potential of all teaching assistants to have a positive impact on pupils' learning.

Teaching assistants (TAs) form around 25% of the school workforce, yet the research available into the value they add doesn't always make happy reading. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has shown that while TAs can have a positive impact on learning, they often don't because schools aren't always deploying them in a way that maximises their impact on pupil outcomes.

This evidence has been well-publicised, so it's unsurprising that schools were eagerly waiting for promised national standards for TAs from the Department for Education. At The Key, we received a stream of questions from school leaders keen to know more about the standards. However, in October 2015, the Department decided against publishing the standards, arguing that schools were 'best placed to decide how they use and deploy TAs and to set standards for the TAs they employ'. (See www.voicetheunion.org.uk/TAsstandards.)

So how can school leaders follow this advice and establish their own standards? How do schools begin to tap in to the true potential of TAs?

Helpfully, the EEF published a report that sets out seven key, evidence-based, practical recommendations.

The report says, for example, that schools should:

- ▶ avoid using TAs as an informal teaching resource for low-attaining pupils;



- ▶ use TAs to add value to what teachers do, not to replace teachers;
- ▶ use TAs to help pupils develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning; and
- ▶ ensure TAs are fully prepared for their role in the classroom.

An important theme of the report is that TAs shouldn't be assigned to pupils with the most need while the teacher teaches the rest of the class. These roles should be reversed – with those most in need receiving the most high-quality teaching.

Further recommendations cover the role of TAs in interventions. The strongest evidence of impact is said to come when TAs deliver structured interventions in one-to-one or small-group settings. TAs in these situations should receive high-quality support and training.

It's also important to remember that there are other TA standards out there. In 2010, the then Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) developed non-statutory national occupational standards for supporting teaching and learning, reflecting the occupational roles of all learning support staff. The standards have since been withdrawn, but may be a useful reference in conjunction with the recent EEF report.

The TDA also produced standards for TAs working towards higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) status. These have been archived, but are still the most recent set of standards for HLTAs.

The Key (www.thekeysupport.com) provides leadership and management support to schools.

Further information:

'Education in 2014: the year of the TA?' *The Guardian*: www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/jan/08/education-2014-teaching-assistant-school-support-staff

Teaching and learning toolkit (EEF): www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/toolkit-a-z/teaching-assistants

Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants (EEF): www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/teaching-assistants-should-not-be-substitute-teachers-but-can-make-a-real-d

National Occupational Standards for Supporting Teaching Learning (TDA): www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239935/NOS-SUPPORT_for_supporting_teaching_learning.pdf

Guidance to the Standards for the Award of HLTA status (TDA, National Archives): http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/hlta_guidance.pdf

Derby and Durham

Voice is supporting teaching assistants and other school support staff in Derby (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/derbycc) and County Durham (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/durhamcc) undergoing job evaluation/workforce remodelling. See the website for the latest developments.