5.5   The role of support staff

'Teachers are responsible and accountable for the progress and development of the pupils in their class, including where pupils access support from teaching assistants or specialist staff.'

- SEND Code of Practice, p99

"We have lots of different scissors at school, I can use the red ones now. I used to use the ones that have two handles so Mrs P could hold them with me"

-    Pupil from a SG primary school

Teaching assistants (TAs) can be a vital element of a child/ young person's education. They can make a strong contribution to CYP learning and achievement and can play a vital role in delivering positive outcomes. Support staff often have: a wider view of a CYP's learning experiences and relationships; more opportunities to observe CYP closely across a range of teaching, learning and other contexts and close working relationships with CYP and their families.

In order to maximise impact it will be important for schools and settings to have a shared and consistent knowledge and understanding of the role of support staff so that teachers and support staff work effectively together drawing on each other's experience, skills and knowledge.

Research from the Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants Guidance Report (Education Endowment Foundation 2015) identified 7 key factors regarding the use and effectiveness of TAs:

1. TAs should not be used as an informal teaching resource for low attaining pupils

2. Use TAs to add value to what teachers do, not replace them

3. Use TAs to help pupils develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning

4. Ensure TAs are fully prepared for their role in the classroom

5. Use TAs to deliver high quality one-to one and small group support using structured interventions

6. Adopt evidence-based interventions to support TAs in their small group and one-to-one instruction

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

What is effective additional support?

It is:

- aimed at increasing CYP inclusion in the learning of the peer group and should not result in isolating them further

- common practice within the class where the teacher and the teaching assistant frequently work with small groups of CYP as part of lesson design

- discreet so that CYP are not overwhelmed or embarrassed

- selective – used at particular times for specific purposes within the lesson, linked to learning and withdrawn for some of the time

- focused on maximising CYP'S independence through engaging them and building confidence

- planned wherever possible -the teacher and the additional adult will at least have shared planning or discussed the lesson and the roles beforehand

- informed- delivered by adults who understand the CYP's individual needs, know CYP's targets, the learning objectives and outcomes expected and how to help CYP make next steps in their learning to achieve them

- skilled – delivered by trained adults who have a good understanding of the subject and the teaching and learning strategies employed

- alert to the class teacher's agreed 'ground rules'

- able to contribute towards the assessment for learning of particular CYP through observation and feedback to the teacher and CYP

- not encouraging a dependency culture

In March 2020, the Educational Endowment Foundation released its guidance report on Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools. The report made five key recommendations which should be the focus for school improvement:

- Create a positive and supportive environment for all pupils, without exception

- Build an ongoing, holistic understanding of your pupils and their needs

- Ensure all pupils have access to high quality teaching

- Complement high quality teaching with carefully selected small-group and one-to-one intervention

- Work effectively with teaching assistants

In relation to working effectively with teaching assistants the report reiterated key findings from their 2015 report in that teaching assistants should supplement, not replace, the teacher. Ensuring that TAs have a positive impact requires careful consideration of how they are deployed. School leaders should rigorously define the roles of both TAs and teachers and specifically how they can best support children with SEND.

Further Guidance and Support

Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants Website has a range of free resources to support evidence-based TA deployment.

Whole School SEND

Teaching Assistant Deployment Review Guide supports schools in evaluating how effectively they deploys and prepare TA's and how effective these practices are children and young people, teachers and TAs.

Education Endowment Foundation

Report and poster.