

# The DISS project: background, aims and methodology

## DISS project briefing note 1

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This briefing note summarises the background to the **Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project** and the contexts in which the study was conducted. We outline the aims of the study and present the research design that makes the DISS project distinctive. In particular, we unpack the Main Pupil Support Survey, which shows how for the first time, we have been able to produce a large scale, systematic analysis of the impact of teaching assistants (TAs) on teachers and pupils.

### The DISS project research team

Peter Blatchford, Paul Bassett, Penelope Brown, Clare Martin, Anthony Russell and Rob Webster (Institute of Education, London). With Selma Babayigit, Naomi Haywood, Maria Koutsoubou (IoE), and Christine Rubie-Davies (University of Auckland, New Zealand)

### Significance of the DISS project

- Largest study of TAs and other support staff conducted in the UK
- Tracked changes over 2003-08 following workforce reforms in England and Wales
- Covered all categories of support staff
- Analysis of effects of TAs on pupil outcomes
- Study has important implications for teaching, school leadership and education of pupils with special educational needs (SEN)
- Developed the 'Wider Pedagogical Role' model
- Contributes to research on growing use of paraprofessionals

### Background to the DISS project

#### The rise in support staff

In 2010, almost half of the school workforce (45%) were support staff. A number of developments have contributed to the growth in the range and number of support staff in schools since 1997. These include the delegation of funding for SEN, the introduction of the national literacy and numeracy strategies, and in 2003, the introduction of *'The National Agreement: raising standards and tackling workload'*, which set out to raise pupil standards and tackle teacher workload via new and expanded support roles.

#### Previous research on support staff

Much of the existing research on support staff – and in particular, those in classroom-based roles (e.g. TAs) – has tended to focus on the ambiguity of support roles in relation to teachers and teaching and/or the role of TAs in relation to the inclusion and support of pupils with SEN.

There exists in schools a generally positive view about TAs, but there are significant gaps in knowledge regarding their preparation and training, deployment and practice (e.g. their interactions with pupils). Government policy that has led to the sustained and significant increase in TA numbers, and the creation of higher-level TAs, has proceeded on the assumption that they help to raise standards for *all* pupils, not just those they support.

Although there has been some research into the impact of TAs on teachers (for example, on teacher workload), there has been little systematic research on their impact on pupil outcomes. Such evidence, as it exists, tends to be derived from small scale intervention studies, involving specific subjects and/or year groups (see Alborz et al, 2009). There is even less research over sustained periods (e.g. a school year) and under everyday classroom conditions. The DISS study was, therefore, designed to help fill these gaps.

### Aims of the DISS project

1. To provide an accurate, systematic and representative description of the types of support staff and their characteristics and deployment in schools, and how these changed over time
2. To analyse the impact of support staff on teachers, teaching and pupil learning, behaviour and academic progress

### DISS methodology: a distinctive research design

- Conducted on larger scale than previously attempted
- Naturalistic longitudinal design; not targeted interventions
- Allowed analysis of differences over time, by school type and by support staff category
- Multi-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses
- Analysis of deployment and practice based on timelogs, systematic and structured observations, and transcripts of talk
- Statistical modelling to test effects of TAs on pupils' attitudes to learning, academic progress and behaviour
- Analysis of case study data, integrating interviews and observations. Coded to allow key dimensions/issues to emerge
- First study to record and analyse TA-to-pupil interactions
- **Strand 1:** three biennial large scale, national questionnaire surveys of schools, teachers and support staff
- **Strand 2:** detailed analysis of the deployment and impact of support staff; and qualitative analysis of processes in schools connected to the deployment and impact of support staff

### DISS data collection methods and responses

<b>Surveys</b>	Responses from 6,079 schools, 4,091 teachers and 7,667 support staff
<b>Timelogs</b>	1,670 responses from individual support staff
<b>Structured observations</b>	27 TAs across 18 schools. 1,502 observations of teachers, TAs and pupils in 140 lessons
<b>Systematic observations</b>	686 pupils across 49 schools. 34,400+ observations of TA-to-pupil interactions
<b>Case studies</b>	65 schools. 591 interviews with school leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils
<b>Adult-to-pupil interaction</b>	32 lesson-length transcripts of teacher-to-pupil and TA-to-pupil talk (recorded simultaneously)
<b>Main pupil support survey</b>	8,200 pupils, in 7 year groups, across 153 schools. English, maths and science scores

### Measures of TA impact on pupils explained

- Main Pupil Support Survey analysed effects of TA support over a school year on pupils' Positive Approaches to Learning (PAL) (e.g. motivation, confidence) and academic progress
- Two waves of survey covering Years 1, 3, 7 and 10 (Wave 1), and Years 2, 6 and 9 (Wave 2)
- **PAL outcomes:** teacher ratings on whether pupils' PAL had improved, remained unchanged or decreased
- **Academic progress outcomes:** academic attainment at start and end of school year, based on Key Stage assessments, National Curriculum levels from optional tests, teacher assessments and predicted GCSE grades (Year 10 pupils only)
- **PAL and academic progress predictors:** teacher estimates of amount of TA support received, as percentage of time support was provided (0%; 1-10%; 11-25%; 26-50%; 51-75%; 75%+)
- Analyses used multi-level regression, and controlled for pupils' SEN status, prior attainment, free school meals eligibility, English as additional language, deprivation, gender and ethnicity

**Reference:** Alborz, A., Pearson, D., Farrell, P. & Howes, A. (2009) *The impact of adult support staff on pupils and mainstream schools*, DCSF/IOE

# The characteristics of support staff and preparedness

## DISS project briefing note 2

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This briefing note summarises findings from the **Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project** on support staff characteristics and the preparedness of teachers and the category of support staff that forms nearly a quarter of the school workforce – teaching assistants (TAs). We present a new typology of support staff and some broad descriptors detailing who they are. We introduce the component of preparedness and show that much work is needed in terms of improving training, communication and role preparation for teachers and TAs in order to maximise the effectiveness of TAs.

### Aim of the DISS project

To provide an accurate, systematic and representative description of the types of TAs and other support staff and their characteristics, and how these changed over time

### Characteristics of support staff and preparedness of TAs: data collection methods and responses

Surveys	Responses from 6,079 schools, 4,091 teachers and 7,667 support staff
Case studies	65 schools; 591 interviews with school leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils

### Who are the support staff?

#### Classification of support staff

- Wide variety of support staff roles, responsibilities and job titles
- New classification of support staff developed to reflect role expansion following the remodelling of the school workforce
- New typology developed through systematic grouping of post titles based on similarities in activities, using cluster analysis

TA equivalent	Pupil welfare	Technicians	Other pupil support
Teaching assistant	Learning mentor	ICT manager	Bilingual support
Higher level teaching assistant	Education welfare officer	ICT technician	Cover supervisor
Classroom asst	Welfare assistant	Librarian	Escort
Learning support assistant (LSA)	Connexions advisor	Technology technician	Midday supervisor
LSA (for SEN)	Nurse	Science technician	Midday assistant
Nursery nurse	Home-liaison		Language asst
Therapist			Exam invigilator
Administration staff		Facilities staff	Site staff
Administrator	Secretary	Cleaner	Caretaker
Office manager	PA to Head	Cook	Premises manager
Finance officer	Data manager	Other catering	
Bursar	Exam officer		
Attendance officer			

### Characteristics of support staff

- Support staff make up nearly half of school workforce (DfE, 2010)
- Almost one in four people in school workforce is a TA (DfE, 2010)
- Majority of support staff are female, white ethnic origin, aged 36+
- Men are under-represented in classroom roles (e.g. TA), but make up around 75% of site staff and around 41% of technicians
- 35% of all support staff had qualifications above GCSE-level. This proportion is higher for TA equivalent category (41%)
- 65% of all support staff had qualifications at or below GCSE-level. This proportion is lower for TA equivalent category (59%)
- Schools reported the main reasons for increasing the number of support staff between 2003-08 were: i) the rise in pupils with SEN included in mainstream settings; ii) more money to spend; and iii) the introduction of guaranteed non-contact time for teachers

### Support staff's conditions of employment

#### Job satisfaction

- 89% of support staff were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with their job
- Support staff reported high levels of satisfaction with their contracts and working arrangements (around 77%)
- Support staff were more satisfied with training they received (76%), than with training opportunities available to them (62%)
- Over time, support staff's level of satisfaction with how much they felt appreciated by the school declined (69% at Wave 3)
- 44% of support staff reported dissatisfaction with their pay

#### Goodwill of support staff

- **At Wave 3, 71% of support staff reported working extra hours**
- Support staff were three times more likely to work extra hours **voluntarily**, than because they were **required** to by a member of staff (e.g. TAs meet with teachers in their own time after school)
- Half of support staff (largely TAs and pupil welfare staff) were not paid for the extra hours they worked

### Preparedness

#### Preparedness 1: training for TAs and teachers

- Most support staff (84% at Wave 3) had attended Inset or some other training event within the past two years
- Some TAs criticised the higher level TA accreditation process, citing poor administration and that it did not lead to promotion
- **At each wave, 75% of teachers reported never having had any training to help them work with TAs or other support staff**
- Yet teachers' involvement in directly training or developing support staff increased at each wave, to 55% at Wave 3
- Two-thirds of teachers who line managed support staff had not received any training or development to help them in this role
- Majority of teachers who had had training for either working with or line managing support staff said it had lasted only one day or less. Only half of teachers rated these types of training as useful

#### Preparedness 2: Teacher-TA planning and feedback

##### Main findings from the surveys

- **75% of teachers had no allocated planning or feedback time with TAs.** This figure was 95% for secondary school teachers
- Teacher-TA communication was ad hoc, occurring at lesson change-over, before/after school, and/or at break/lunch times
- Communication relied on the goodwill of TAs (e.g. unpaid hours)

##### Main findings from the case studies

- Many TAs were not involved with lesson planning and felt under-prepared for tasks they supported pupils with
- TAs picked up subject and pedagogical knowledge by 'tuning in' to teachers' delivery to the whole class
- TAs 'frustrated' that information fed back to teachers was not used (e.g. integrated into future lesson planning)

### Recommendations

- Schools must ensure the goodwill of TAs is not abused, and that they are appropriately rewarded for the work they do
- More needed to prepare teachers to work with and manage TAs
- More time is needed for teachers and TAs to have joint planning and feedback time, particularly in secondary schools

Reference: DfE (2010) *School workforce in England* [SFR 11/2010]

# The deployment of teaching assistants

## DISS project briefing note 3

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This briefing note summarises findings from the **Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project** on the deployment of teaching assistants (TAs). TAs make up around a quarter of the school workforce, but there remains much debate about their appropriate role. There is ambiguity, because in one sense, TAs can help pupils *indirectly* by assisting the school in order to enhance teaching (e.g. by doing teachers' clerical tasks). But many TAs have a *direct* role supporting pupils (e.g. leading literacy interventions). Here we draw on the DISS data to show what do TAs do, and the effects of their deployment.

### Aim of the DISS project

To provide an accurate, systematic and representative description of the deployment of TAs and other support staff in schools

### Deployment: data collection methods and responses

<b>Timelogs</b>	1,670 responses from individual support staff (19% of responses from TAs)	<b>Case studies</b>	65 schools; 591 interviews with school leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils
<b>Observations</b>	67 schools; 221 hours of systematic and structured observations of teachers, TAs and pupils	<b>Adult-to-pupil interaction</b>	32 lesson-length transcripts of teacher-to-pupil and TA-to-pupil talk (recorded simultaneously)

### Key findings on TA deployment

#### Timelogs: general activities of TAs

- Support staff recorded which of 91 tasks they did every 20 minutes for one working day in the academic year 2005/06
- Respondents recorded duration of each task per 20 min slot
- The 91 tasks were grouped into six categories for analysis

#### Main findings

- **TAs spent over half their day in a direct pedagogical/instructional role, supporting and interacting with pupils**
- Administrative support staff spent 6.5 hours a day carrying out admin/communications support for the school

#### Timelog results for TAs (time spent on tasks)

Direct learning support for pupils	3.8 hours
Support teachers/curriculum	1.4 hours
Direct pastoral support for pupils	0.3 hours
Indirect support for pupils	0.3 hours
Support for the school site	0.3 hours
Admin/comms support for the school	0 hours
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.1 hours</b>

#### Structured observations of TAs and teachers

- 27 TAs in nine primary and nine secondary schools were shadowed for one day each. Over 1,500 observations took place in 140 lessons, both in and away from the classroom
- Predominant activities of teachers and TAs were recorded at five minute intervals, along with the context and task TA-supported pupils carried out

#### Main findings

- Teachers' interactions with pupils were weighted towards whole class contexts in both primary and secondary schools
- TA-to-pupil interactions occurred at group level (particularly in primary) or individual level (particularly in secondary)

Context of support	Primary		Secondary	
	Teacher	TA	Teacher	TA
One-to-one	2%	<b>19%</b>	11%	<b>63%</b>
Group work	8%	<b>67%</b>	8%	<b>18%</b>
Roving classroom	<b>23%</b>	7%	<b>28%</b>	19%
Leading whole class	<b>67%</b>	7%	<b>52%</b>	0%

#### Systematic observations of pupils

- 686 pupils in Years 1, 3, 7 & 10 were observed for two days in English, mathematics and science lessons
- 49 schools (27 primary and 22 secondary) were involved
- Over 34,400 observations were made in ten second intervals

#### Main findings

- **Majority of support provided by TAs, both in and away from the classroom, was for low ability/SEN pupils**
- Teachers provided less support to low ability/SEN pupils than TAs
- TA interaction with pupils increased, and teacher interaction decreased, as pupil level of SEN increased

Interaction by pupil level of SEN	Teacher	TA
Non-SEN	<b>55%</b>	27%
School Action	24%	32%
School Action Plus or SEN statement	21%	<b>41%</b>

- **Pupils were nine times more likely to have sustained interaction with TAs than with teachers (63% vs. 11%)** (e.g. where pupil was the focus of TA attention for more than ten seconds)
- Pupils were six times more likely to be actively involved with TAs than with teachers (44% vs. 5%) (e.g. interaction was begun, responded to and sustained for at least ten seconds)

Pupil role in interaction with adult	Teacher	TA
Pupil focus of adult – short ( $\leq 10$ seconds)	6%	<b>19%</b>
Pupil focus of adult – long ( $> 10$ seconds)	5%	<b>44%</b>
Pupil part of group audience	2%	17%
Pupil part of class audience	<b>85%</b>	19%

#### Conclusions: TA support can lead to pupil separation

- Pupils tend to miss out on everyday teacher-to-pupil interactions
- **TA support is an 'alternative', not 'additional', to teacher input**
- TAs are given responsibility for pupil tasks and interventions
- With TAs, pupils do differentiated or different tasks when away from the class, so spend less time in mainstream curriculum coverage

#### Recommendations: improving TA deployment

- Pupils in most need should not be routinely supported by TAs
- Teachers to take responsibility for lesson-by-lesson curriculum and pedagogical planning (including interventions) for *all* pupils

# Practice: interactions between teaching assistants and pupils

## DISS project briefing note 4

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This briefing note summarises findings from the **Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project** on the interactions between teaching assistants (TAs) and pupils. We use the generic term 'practice' in a pragmatic way to cover the classroom interactions of both TAs and teachers with pupils. The DISS project was the first study to record and analyse TAs' interactions with pupils and compare them with those of teachers. Here, we report the results of two complementary analyses of the classroom talk data in order to reveal quantitative and qualitative differences between the talk of TAs and teachers.

### Adult-to-pupil interactions and effective teaching

Study of adult-to-pupil interactions is important because models of effective teaching, as well as a common sense view, see interactions between educator and pupil as being at the heart of the pupil's educational experience and their learning. Views vary, but it is possible to identify several features of effective teaching, such as:

- Orientating pupils to lessons and making links to prior learning
- Checking pupil understanding when introducing new concepts
- Asking questions that require pupils to engage in higher level thinking
- Providing pupils with frequent feedback about their learning
- Ensuring pupils are motivated to learn and are not just on-task, but are cognitively engaged

The interactions teachers have with pupils have long been recognised as playing an important role in pupil learning. However, to date, very little is known about the dialogue between TAs and pupils. To address this gap, we conducted two analyses of the data on adult-to-pupil talk.

### Analysis 1: instructional talk analysis

Instructional talk analysis was used to provide a general comparison of the main forms of teachers' and TAs' talk as they related to everyday, educationally-relevant interactions with pupils.

### Methodology and sample

- 42 simultaneous audio-recordings were made of teacher-to-pupil and TA-to-pupil talk in the same class
- From this, 32 lesson-length recordings from English and mathematics were selected for analysis: 16 teacher talk; 16 TA talk
- Audio-recordings were transcribed and then coded using a coding frame designed to capture all interactions of teachers and TAs with pupils, and based on research from the effective teaching literature
- Unit of analysis was an 'utterance' (a segment of talk) to pupils, which was meaningful in terms of educational and linguistic form, and was frequent enough to be subjected to numerical analysis
- There were 5,226 teacher utterances and 2,295 TA utterances

Comparisons of frequencies of each code are somewhat misleading, as differences may simply reflect the fact that teachers spoke more than twice as much as TAs. To address this, comparisons are made between the percentage each type of talk occurred relative to the total number of codes for each session for each adult.

Type of interaction	Teacher		TA	
	Freq	Mean%	Freq	Mean%
Organisation of pupils	683	16	302	15
Organisation of materials	75	2	13	1
Explanation of concept	421	7	116	4
Statements as prompts	254	4	339	16
Types of questions	912	16	542	24
Response to pupil answers	541	9	222	7
Feedback on learning/task completion	275	5	84	3
Use of praise/rewards/criticism	272	5	99	4
Behaviour management: preventive	53	1	10	<1
Behaviour management: reactive	347	7	60	5
Introduction to lesson focus	69	2	2	<1
Links to prior/future learning/knowledge	130	3	23	1
Motivation/engagement: cognitive focus	409	8	63	3
Motivation/engagement: task focus	785	15	420	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,226</b>		<b>2,295</b>	

### Summary of the key findings

Strict comparisons between teacher and TA practice need to be treated cautiously, as the contexts within which talk occurs were not equivalent (see briefing note 3). Yet this analysis reflects the kinds of talk pupils experience on a daily basis with teachers and TAs.

Overall, teachers were more likely to show aspects of effective teaching in their interactions with pupils, while TAs did not appear to use effective techniques for scrutinising pupil understanding nor usefully scaffold learning. We found that:

- Teachers spent more time explaining concepts than TAs, and TAs' explanations were sometimes inaccurate or confusing
- Teachers used prompts and questions to encourage pupil thinking and check understanding, while TAs more frequently supplied pupils with answers and completed tasks for pupils
- Teachers tended to use feedback to encourage learning, while TAs more often were concerned with task completion
- Teachers, more than TAs, linked the current lesson to pupil prior knowledge, and attempted to promote pupil thinking and their cognitive engagement in a task
- Teachers promoted pupil engagement and encouraged them to develop their own ideas far more often than TAs did

### Analysis 2: conversation analysis

Following the publication of the DISS project, a second analysis of the data on adult-to-pupil talk was conducted. The main purpose of this analysis was to explore how teachers and TAs used language and the effects of various strategies on pupils.

### Methodology and sample

- Four of the 16 pairs of transcripts used for the instructional talk analysis were selected. Lessons focused on mathematics
- Analysis used techniques of conversation analysis (CA) in order to gain detailed insights into pedagogical discourse

### Summary of the key findings

The key difference between teachers' and TAs' talk to pupils, revealed via CA, was that teachers generally '*open up*' the pupils, whereas TAs '*close down*' the talk linguistically and cognitively.

Overall, within each lesson, teachers used at least some strategies that foster pupil independence and encourage pupils to think for themselves. TAs used closed questions to support and encourage pupils to complete written tasks. Yet there was minimal exploration of concepts, thus a valuable opportunity to make the best use of one-to-one support was missed. When pupils struggled, through error or failure to find the answer, TAs readily supplied the answer or corrected immediately.

### Conclusions: differences in classroom practice

- Teachers are more focused on learning and understanding, while TAs are more focused on completing tasks
- Teachers are proactive, while TAs are in a reactive role
- Teachers '*open up*' the pupils, while TAs '*close down*' the talk

**References:** For more on Analysis 1, see Rubie-Davies, C. M. *et al* (2010) *Enhancing learning? A comparison of teacher and teaching assistant interactions with pupils, School Effectiveness and School Improvement*  
For more on Analysis 2, see Radford, J., Blatchford, P. and Webster, R. (in preparation) *Opening up and closing down: comparing teacher and TA talk in mathematics lessons*

# The impact of support staff on teachers, teaching and pupils

## DISS project briefing note 5

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This briefing note summarises findings from the **Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project** on the impact of all support staff on teachers, and in particular, the effect of teaching assistants (TAs) on pupil outcomes. The increase in the number of TAs and the expansion of their roles can be seen to have beneficial effects for teachers, in terms of their workload, stress and classroom control. However, despite the assumption that TAs help to raise standards for all pupils, the DISS project found that the support provided by TAs had a negative effect on pupils' academic progress.

### Aim of the DISS project

To analyse the impact of TAs and other support staff on teachers, teaching and pupils' learning and behaviour

### Impact: data collection methods and responses

<b>Teacher survey</b>	4,091 responses from individual teachers
<b>Systematic observations</b>	686 pupils across 49 schools. 34,400+ observations of TA-to-pupil interactions
<b>Main pupil support survey</b>	8,200 pupils, in 7 year groups, across 153 primary and secondary schools

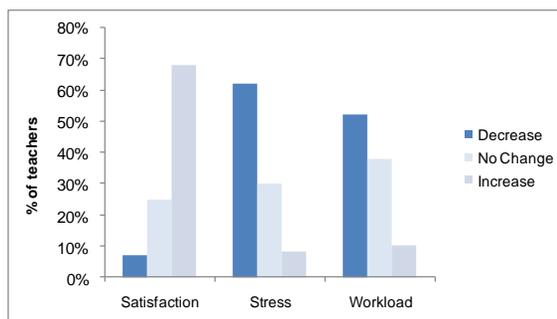
### Impact on teachers and teaching

#### 26 tasks: teachers' routine administrative duties

At Wave 3 (2007/08), administrative staff performed half of the 26 tasks (e.g. collecting money, photocopying), many of which were previously undertaken by teachers in Wave 1 (2004/05)

#### Teachers' job satisfaction, stress and workload

- Positive effects of support staff on job satisfaction and stress
- Less pronounced reductions in workload, but still positive
- Results consistent at each wave (Wave 2 results below)



### Impact of support staff on teaching

Findings from **teacher surveys** showed that TAs in particular had a positive impact on teaching in terms of:

- Bringing specialist help
- Allowing more teaching
- Affecting the range of curriculum, tasks and activities offered
- Removing administrative and routine tasks
- Taking on specific pupils
- Allowing more teacher time for planning and preparation

**Systematic observations** showed TAs in classrooms led to:

- Better classroom control in primary and secondary classes
- More individualised attention for pupils, but less overall interaction with teacher, in primary classes
- More overall teaching, but less individual attention and less interactions with teachers, in secondary classes

All DISS project research reports and summaries, and briefing notes, are available to download from [www.schoolsupportstaff.net/DISS.html](http://www.schoolsupportstaff.net/DISS.html)

The DISS project was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Welsh Assembly Government

### Impact on pupils' learning, behaviour and progress

#### Impact of TAs on pupils' learning and behaviour

Findings from **teacher surveys** showed that TAs in particular had a positive impact on pupils' learning and behaviour in terms of:

- Taking on specific pupils
- Bringing specialist help (e.g. technology skills, counselling)
- Pupils' behaviour, discipline, social skills and/or behaviour
- Allowing individualisation and differentiation of tasks
- Improving pupils' attitudes and motivation
- General positive and/or indirect effect on learning and behaviour

**Systematic observations** showed TAs in classrooms led to:

- More active pupil role in interaction with adults in primary classes
- More classroom engagement for primary-aged pupils without SEN
- More active pupil role in interaction with adults, and more classroom engagement, for pupils with SEN in secondary classes

#### Impact of TAs on pupils' attitudes and academic progress

Little evidence TA support received by pupils over a school year improved their Positive Approaches to Learning, expect in Year 9

Year	Not distracted	Confident	Motivated	Not disruptive	Independ't	Relat'ship with peers	Completes work	Follow instruction
1	*	*	*	*	√n	*	*	*
2	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
3	*	*	*	*	√n	*	√n	*
6	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
7	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
9	√p	√p	√p	√p	√p	√p	√p	√p
10	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

The **more TA support pupils received, the less academic progress made**. Effect of support did not vary for pupils with and without SEN

Year	English	Mathematics	Science
1	√n	√n	*
2	√n	√n	√n
3	√n	√n	*
6	√n	√n	√n
7	√n	√n	*
9	√n	√n	√n
10	√n	*	*

\* = No significant effect of TA support; √n = Significant negative effect of TA support; √p = Significant positive effect of TA support

**Both sets of findings for PAL and academic progress could not be explained by potentially confounding pupil characteristics** (e.g. SEN status, prior attainment, deprivation), which were controlled for in the analysis, nor fully by properties of TAs (e.g. qualifications)

Furthermore, contrary to teachers' views, there was little consistent sign that pupils who received little or no TA support made any academic progress in classes where other pupils did receive TA support, particularly in Year 9 where there was a negative effect of TA support across all three core subjects.

# The Wider Pedagogical Role model: summing up the DISS project

## DISS project briefing note 6

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This briefing note sums up the key messages from the **Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project** and introduces the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model developed through study. The DISS project has produced results on all categories of support staff in terms of their characteristics and conditions of employment, and in particular, the preparedness, deployment, practice and impact of teaching assistants (TAs) (see briefing notes 2 to 5). Taken together, these components provide the basis for the WPR model – a new model for conceptualising the role and impact of TAs.

### Aims of the DISS project

1. To provide an accurate, systematic and representative description of the types of support staff and their characteristics and deployment in schools, and how these changed over time
2. To analyse the impact of TAs and other support staff on teachers, teaching and pupils' learning, behaviour and progress

### Summary of the DISS project findings on TA impact

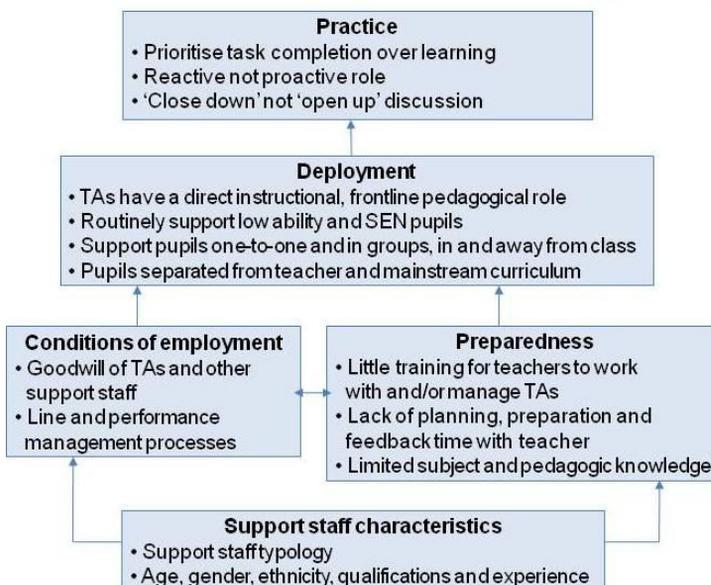
- Positive effects on teachers' job satisfaction, stress and workload, and their teaching and classroom control (e.g. less disruption)
- Positive effects on pupils' Positive Approaches to Learning, but only for Year 9. No effect for pupils in other year groups
- Systemic negative effect on pupils' academic progress in English, mathematics and science across all years groups
- Negative effect in terms of reduced teacher-to-pupil interaction

### Explaining the findings on pupils' academic progress

The statistical analysis of the pupil attainment data was such that any factor influencing the negative relationship between TA support and progress would have to be related to both attainment **and** the awarding of TA support. As the analysis controlled for pupil factors that typically affect progress (e.g. SEN status, prior attainment, deprivation, gender and ethnicity), these factors can all be ruled out. What, however, *could* explain the findings on pupils' progress?

### Introducing the Wider Pedagogical Role model

The WPR model (below) shows the key facets and effects of TAs and the support they provide, and how these components relate to one another.



### The WPR model and TA impact

The WPR model seeks to show that the effects of TA support on pupils' academic progress is not simply about the individual characteristics of TAs or pupils. To assume that it is seriously underplays the situational and structural factors within which TAs work and which affects their capacity for positive impact.

Instead, as the DISS study concludes, the findings on TAs' impact on pupils are more appropriately explained in terms of the decisions made regarding TAs' deployment, preparedness and conditions of employment, which are outside of their control.

There is a complex interplay of relationships between the components of WPR model which informs how impact can be explained and understood. For example, the lack of time for teachers and TAs to plan and feedback is determined to a large extent by TAs' contracted hours of work. The fact that teachers and TAs have any time at all to communicate is frequently down to TAs' goodwill (working extra unpaid hours).

It was not possible to test these explanations in the DISS study, and so more research is needed on the relationships between the components of the WPR model and the effects on pupils.

### Modifying models of educational effectiveness

The increase of TAs in English and Welsh schools, the widening of their roles and responsibilities, and most significantly, their impact on pupil outcomes as revealed through the DISS project, demands that models of school and teacher effectiveness be modified to include TAs.

In particular, the extent to which teachers interact with, manage and organise the work of TAs demonstrates a clear need to account for this changed reality and how these factors affect pupil outcomes, in terms of attitudes to learning, behaviour and academic progress.

Ideas about effective teaching also need to be applied to TAs, as they clearly have an instructional/pedagogical role. First, however, fundamental questions about the appropriateness of such a role need to be explicitly raised and explored.

### Implications for pupils with SEN

The issue of the appropriateness of a pedagogical role for TAs is particularly important given the implications the DISS project findings have for pupils with SEN. The DISS project has called for schools to evaluate their current deployment of TAs and ensure that they do not routinely support low ability/SEN pupils and risk pupils' separation from the teacher and the curriculum.

Plus, teachers should take responsibility for the pedagogical planning of pupils supported by TAs, and not hand the planning, delivery and assessment of interventions to under-prepared and inadequately-supported TAs.

At the school-level, TA support must be explicitly set out in relation to anticipated academic outcomes for pupils with SEN.