

## **Department for Education 'Evidence check' memorandum Teaching assistants**

### **Background**

1. Our policy defines teaching assistants (TAs) as classroom-based staff employed in roles other than instructors, teachers, student and overseas-trained teachers. TAs are also often referred to as cover supervisors, higher-level teaching assistants, learning and language support assistants.

2. The number of TAs in schools across England has increased steadily over the past few years. The number of TAs employed in publicly-funded schools was 97,000 in 2005 and more than 234,000 in 2013.

3. Over this time, the role of TAs has developed from providing general administrative and logistical support to teachers, to supporting the attainment of groups of pupils in schools. TAs are not employed simply to support the classroom teacher. They play an active role to improve children's literacy and numeracy skills and improve their behaviour; and often work tirelessly to help children with complex emotional, medical and physical needs achieve academic success.

### **Deployment**

4. The Specified Work Regulations<sup>1</sup> set out specific circumstances where someone employed in a maintained school other than a qualified teacher can teach, and where TAs can be used to cover teacher absence. Specified work is a legislative term used to describe teaching activity, including planning, delivering lessons and pupil assessment. Regulations state they may only do so where they are assisting or supporting the work of a qualified teacher in the school, and are under the direction and supervision of a qualified teacher as arranged by the headteacher. This ensures that a teacher continues to provide the leading contribution to the teaching and learning, and maintains a responsibility. The Regulations apply to maintained schools. They may be adopted by academies and free schools. The Regulations also require the headteacher to be satisfied that the TA has the appropriate skills, expertise and experience.

5. Headteachers are free to decide their own staffing structure, including how many teachers and TAs they employ, and in which subjects. They are also free to determine how to deploy those teachers and TAs to meet the needs of the school and its pupils. This ensures that these key decisions are made by those who know most about the school, the staff and its pupils.

### **Support staff pay and conditions**

6. Central government has no role in making decisions on the pay and conditions of school support staff. These are matters for:

- Individual local authorities as the legal employers of TAs in community and voluntary-controlled schools;
- Governing bodies, as employers of TAs in foundation and voluntary-aided schools; and
- Academy trusts as employers of TAs in academy schools.

### **Current government support**

7. The government provides some guidance and direction on the standards that may be applied to TAs. Currently, there is a set of professional standards for higher-level teaching assistants (HLTAs) and a set of National Occupational Standards (NOS) for supporting

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/762/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/762/contents/made)

teaching and learning in schools. The HLTA training programme no longer operates with government funding, since headteachers are best placed to identify and fund training that is relevant and benefits the school and its pupils. The NOS are lengthy and cumbersome. Being difficult to navigate and apply, they are rarely now used by school employers.

8. We have established a National Scholarship Fund for teachers and special educational needs support staff wishing to collaborate on continuing professional development in this priority area.

## **Evidence**

9. The government supports the use of TAs, and believes that they make an important contribution, often in challenging circumstances, to the teaching, effective management and organisation of a school *if they are deployed effectively*. Evidence for this comes from recent work by the department and other sources.

10. In 2013, the DfE published a review of efficiency in the schools system<sup>2</sup>. It showed that differences in the impact of TAs on attainment can largely be explained by how individual schools choose to deploy them. This finding was also supported by a report<sup>3</sup> from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) showing that TAs can improve literacy and numeracy skills when deployed well. It also suggested that, when used to support specific pupils in small groups or through structured interventions, TAs can be effective at improving attainment.

11. The department has also done internal work to survey teaching schools, the four largest academy chains, and support staff unions on effective deployment strategies. Based on the responses received, our findings were:

- The extent of the impact TAs have on attainment is linked to how individual schools choose to use them.
- Effective deployment models include: specialist small-group support; specialist subject or phase support; 1:1 support; and planned general support.

12. Good schools confirmed a number of core principles for the effective deployment of TAs. These include employing suitably qualified staff, and recognising them as professionals; implementing strong performance management systems; providing training, support and development; providing joint preparation and planning time for TAs and teachers; and continually reviewing deployment, and withdrawing TA support once aims have been achieved.

## **Next steps**

13. The government is committed to raising the status and professionalism of TAs, so that their skills and experience are used to best effect by schools. The department has commissioned the EEF to undertake an extensive review of the evidence on effective deployment of TAs to develop a robust evidence-based 'toolkit' for schools. We expect this to be available by the end of the year.

14. The department will soon announce an independent review on the development of TA standards. The aim of the review is to recommend a new set of standards which will provide a clear and concise set of expectations for all classroom-based TAs. It will recognise evidence within schools, take into account the diverse roles of TAs and different school employers, and be designed by a panel of TAs, headteachers and teachers. The new standards will be non-mandatory and take the form of departmental guidance. Use of the

---

<sup>2</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-efficiency-in-the-schools-system](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-efficiency-in-the-schools-system)

<sup>3</sup> <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/teaching-assistants-can-improve-numeracy-and-literacy-when-used-effectively>

standards would be optional, but will provide employers with a useful resource to assess performance and support them in designing procedures for recruiting, managing and developing TAs. The review should start in September and conclude by February 2015.