



# **Challenging the Role and Deployment of Teaching Assistants in Mainstream Schools: The Impact on Schools**

**Final Report on the  
*Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants*  
(EDTA) project**

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**Peter Blatchford, Rob Webster and Anthony Russell**

**Dept. of Psychology and Human Development  
Institute of Education, University of London**

# Challenging the Role and Deployment of Teaching Assistants in Mainstream Schools: The Impact on Schools

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### Summary

This project was designed to address the startling results from the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project: children who received the most support from teaching assistants (TAs) made significantly less progress than similar pupils who received less support (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012). The DISS project showed that this troubling and surprising finding is explainable in terms of the ways TAs are actually deployed in schools. The extensive observation and other forms of data collection in the DISS project showed that at present TAs have a frontline pedagogical role, but an ineffective one. Problems particularly emerge when TAs are given an ill-defined remedial role. We concluded that impact and practice of TAs needs to be seen in terms of decisions made about their deployment, preparedness and their conditions of employment – things that are outside their control. We called for a fundamental reassessment of the way TAs are used in schools.

This was the background to the Effective Deployment of TAs (EDTA) project, which took place between 2010 and 2011, and is the subject of this report. We worked in collaboration with 40 teachers and TAs in ten schools in two local authorities. The way in which the project followed on from the findings from the large-scale DISS study, and the use of the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model devised in the DISS project (Webster *et al.*, 2011), gave the EDTA project a strong degree of veracity and a clear rationale for action. The aim was to develop and evaluate alternative strategies to the three main components of the WPR model: TA preparedness, deployment and practice. National, large-scale research, followed by a coherent and empirically sound explanatory model, was used as the basis for a collaboration with schools on the development of key recommendations.

There was a good deal of productive work over the school year. In terms of **preparedness**, schools found that creating time for teachers and TAs to meet had a positive effect. Primary schools created liaison time by changing TAs' hours of work, though this was still a challenge for secondary schools. The quality and clarity of teachers' lesson plans improved and plans were shared with TAs and supplemented with daily discussion, which made explicit the role and tasks of the TA for each lesson. Involvement in the project also encouraged some schools to instigate performance management processes for TAs.

With regard to **deployment**, at the school level, senior leadership teams (SLT) thought more strategically about the purpose of the TA role and expectations in terms of pupil outcomes. Many conducted some form of audit of current practices to establish the need for, and the extent of, change required. Overall, attention had been turned to how TAs

could 'add value' to the teacher's role rather than replace it. Schools formalised new models of TA deployment and implemented wider changes for the following school year (2011/12). In some schools, TAs were used as 'advocates for change', selling the benefits of doing things differently to the wider school staff. Overall, schools had challenged entrenched, unhelpful mindsets towards the use of TAs and provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN).

There were marked and productive changes to the deployment of TAs at the classroom level. TAs worked more often with middle and high attaining pupils, and teachers spent more time with low attaining and SEN pupils. This greatly improved and enriched teachers' understanding of these pupils and their needs. Careful thought had been given to less unproductive uses of TAs; for example, teachers reduced the proportion of time in which TAs were passive during lessons, and TAs more often remained in the classroom, thus reducing pupil-teacher/pupil-peer separation. In line with recommendations by Michael Giangreco and colleagues (2004), attention had also been given to alternatives to adult support, for example, through peer supports, collaborative group work and 'self help' strategies.

With regard to *practice*, there was good work at the school level on changing TAs' talk with pupils. This included encouraging TAs to consider when *not* to talk, and giving pupils time to respond. Perhaps for the first time, TAs were encouraged to adopt the pedagogical goal that interactions with pupils should be about understanding, *not* task completion. TA practice developed to support formative assessment and expansive education<sup>1</sup> initiatives. At the classroom level, there were two key developments: firstly, questioning frameworks to help pupils remain in charge of and responsible for their own learning; and secondly, strategies to help pupils become independent learners, thereby reducing dependency on adult support.

It was clear from this project that in order to bring about the necessary change, it is important that the whole school is involved and that leadership comes from the headteacher and SLT. It is not enough, as some headteachers have assumed, to assign the job of reform to the SENCo or other member of staff, especially if they are not members of the SLT. It can put such staff in a difficult position and some decisions, for example, those concerning TAs' contracts, will need to be handled by the headteacher.

The experience was professionally important for all staff. Teachers were more aware of their responsibilities to pupils and TAs, and it was clear that the TAs who took part felt more valued, appreciated, and more confident in their role and abilities.

The project has extended the messages arising out of the DISS project and has given fresh impetus to the need for policy change. We feel that it is important to address the crucial issue of TA deployment at the national level, and clarify once and for all what the broad role of TAs should be, and what it should *not* be. This is essential if schools are to establish consistency and avoid the role ambiguity that has been a major consequence of the continued failure to fully address this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Expansive education is an umbrella term describing teachers and schools that are committed to focusing on the development of useful, transferable habits of mind – alternatively defined by various programmes as 'capabilities', 'competences', 'attributes' and 'dispositions' – throughout mainstream education. Examples include programmes such as *Learning to Learn*, *Building Learning Power* and *Enquiring Minds*.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project was to develop and evaluate school-based strategies for the effective deployment of TAs in supporting pupils. Our earlier research – the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project – had shown that, despite the widely held view that pupils with difficulties in learning benefited from focussed attention by TAs, with the additional benefit that teachers could then devote more attention to the rest of the class, pupils supported by TAs actually made significantly less progress than pupils not supported by TAs. The DISS project called into question common ways of deploying TAs and suggested the value of a study that would set out to develop alternative ways of maximising the potential of TAs to help *all* learners.

This report describes the background to the research, the design of the study and the evaluation, and the main ways in which changes to the use of TAs were seen in schools. It draws heavily from the experiences of teachers and TAs in schools, before and after the trials, in order to identify some general lessons learned about alternative ways of using TAs, at both the school and classroom level.

In this report we do not cover in any detail the recommendations regarding the use of TAs arising out of the EDTA project. This is the subject of a separate handbook of guidance to be published by Routledge later in 2012 (Russell, Webster and Blatchford, in press).

### **1.1 Background**

The EDTA study (like the DISS project before it) addressed a vital, but until recently neglected, feature of current classroom life – the huge increase in classroom support staff, commonly called teaching assistants<sup>2</sup>. This increase is unprecedented and has resulted in profound changes in schools. The number of full-time equivalent TAs in mainstream schools in England has more than trebled since 1997 to about 170,000 (DfE, 2010). At the time of writing, in early 2012, 43% of the mainstream school workforce<sup>3</sup> in England are support staff, and over half of these people (54%) are TAs (DfE, 2010). TAs therefore comprise almost a quarter (24%) of the workforce in English mainstream schools: 32% of the nursery and primary school workforce; and 12% of the secondary school workforce. The most up-to-date and comparable figures for Wales show that TAs make up a third (33%) of the school workforce<sup>4</sup> in the maintained sector, and account for 75% of all support staff (Statistics for Wales, 2010). TAs make up 44% of the Welsh primary school workforce, and 17% of the secondary school workforce. In a third UK territory, Scotland, TAs<sup>5</sup> constitute a smaller, but still significant proportion of the

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<sup>2</sup> In line with common usage, we use the term ‘teaching assistant’ to cover equivalent classroom based paraprofessional roles, such as ‘learning support assistant’, ‘special needs assistant’ and ‘classroom assistant’. We also include ‘higher level teaching assistants’ in this definition.

<sup>3</sup> All full time equivalent teachers and support staff in nursery, primary and secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies in England.

<sup>4</sup> All full time equivalent teachers and support staff in local authority nursery, primary and secondary schools in Wales.

<sup>5</sup> Includes staff defined as: classroom assistants; additional support needs auxiliary or care assistant; nursery nurse; behaviour support; and foreign language assistant.

publically-funded mainstream school workforce<sup>6</sup> (17%), and account for 58% of all support staff (The Scottish Government, 2010). TAs make up 24% of the Scottish primary school workforce, and 9% of the secondary school workforce.

Perhaps not surprisingly, such a substantial part of the school workforce accounts for a significant proportion of the annual education budget. Of the £17.1 billion spent by primary schools in 2010/11, £2.8 billion (16.4%) was spent on TAs and other education support staff (e.g. bilingual support assistants). And of the £16.5 billion spent by secondary schools over the same period, £1.6 billion (9.8%) was spent on education support staff. To give those figures a little more context, in 2010/11, primary schools spent £8.7 billion (50.9%) on teaching staff, and secondary schools spent £9.3 billion (56.2%) (DfE, 2012).

Pupils in many classrooms now experience interactions with TAs as well as teachers on a daily basis. Several developments over the mid-to-late 1990s have driven this growth, including greater numbers of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools and the introduction of literacy and numeracy strategies. From 2003, the number of TAs increased further following the implementation of The National Agreement, which was a policy response to problems with teacher recruitment and retention. The Agreement had the twin aims of raising pupil standards and tackling excessive teacher workload via new and expanded support roles (DfES, 2003).

TAs have become an essential component of practice (if not policy) with regard to the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools and the delivery of interventions and booster programmes for literacy and numeracy. Almost all teachers will have daily contact with TAs and many have management responsibilities for TAs as well (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012).

Both in the UK and internationally, there is ambiguity about the TA role in relation to teachers and teaching, and the inclusion of pupils with SEN. For debates in the UK, see: Bach *et al.* (2004); Cremin *et al.* (2005); Farrell *et al.* (1999); Howes *et al.* (2003); Mistry *et al.* (2004); Moran and Abbott (2002); and Schlapp *et al.* (2003). For debates in Cyprus and Finland, see Angelides *et al.* (2009) and Takala (2007), respectively; and in the USA, see Finn *et al.* (2000) and the work of Giangreco (2003, 2009). As a consequence of this ambiguity, the largest teacher union in the UK at the time refused to sign up to the National Agreement, because they saw it as an inappropriate invasion of TAs into the professional realm of the teacher (McAvoy, 2003).

Whilst previous research provides valuable insights into the nature of TAs' work and their position in relation to teachers, it provides only limited information on the impact of TAs on teachers and pupils, and little attention has been paid to ways in which models of school leadership and classroom management should be adapted to meet the new reality in schools. On the basis of the views of headteachers, teachers and TAs, one might reasonably predict positive effects on pupil learning, and this would be supported by research on specific curriculum interventions delivered by TAs (see Alborz *et al.*, 2009 and Slavin *et al.*, 2009). But we also know that such interventions only take up a small

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<sup>6</sup> All full time equivalent teachers and support staff in local authority maintained and grant-aided primary and secondary schools in Scotland.

part of the school day – about 30 to 40 minutes (Farrell *et al.*, 2010; Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012) – and a main limitation of research on the impact of TAs is the lack of high quality studies that reflect their use under everyday classroom conditions.

### **1.2 The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project**

To address this gap the five-year UK government-funded Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project was set up to describe the characteristics and deployment of support staff in schools and to address, for the first time in the UK, their impact on teachers, teaching and pupils. This was the largest study yet undertaken on support staff and involved: over 17,800 responses to a nationally-representative questionnaire survey of headteachers, support staff and teachers; over 740 interviews with school staff and pupils; detailed analysis of the effect of support provided on the academic progress of 8,200 pupils; extensive observations of over 100 TAs; work diaries; transcripts giving systematic accounts of TA activities and interactions; and in-depth case studies. The findings have been published in a number of papers and reports<sup>7</sup>, and presented at the 2009 British Education Research Association Annual Conference in a Keynote Symposium, which received wide media coverage<sup>8</sup>. The DISS project findings are summarised in our book, *Reassessing the Impact of Teaching Assistants: How Research Challenges Practice and Policy* (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012).

Results on the impact of TAs on pupils' academic progress were clear, but surprising. It was found that pupils who received the most support from TAs made less progress in core subjects over a school year than similar pupils who received less support from TAs, even when controlling for characteristics that can affect progress and the allocation of TA support, such as prior pupil attainment and level of SEN. The results were startling, but we argue that it is not individual TAs who are at fault, but systemic, structural factors within which TAs operate and over which they have little or no control. In particular, the DISS findings suggest three main explanations.

The first explanation concerns the **deployment** of TAs. Despite much debate about the appropriate role of TAs, the DISS project findings clearly showed that TAs now have a predominantly direct pedagogical role, supporting and interacting with pupils (principally, but not exclusively, low attaining pupils and those with learning needs). Furthermore, TAs spend well over half their day in this role, far exceeding the time they spend assisting the teacher or the school. This is a productive arrangement for teachers, because TAs can provide specific support for low attaining pupils and those with SEN whilst they attend to the rest of the class. However, one consequence of this arrangement is that TA-supported pupils become separated from teachers and the curriculum.

Inadvertently, TAs have been assigned an informal remedial role and have in effect become the primary educators for supported pupils (see Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012, for a full description of these results). As Michael Giangreco in the USA has argued

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<sup>7</sup> A full list of these publications are available on our website at <http://www.schoolsupportstaff.net/otherpubs.html>

<sup>8</sup> See for example: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/8236705.stm>  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/children-worse-off-with-classroom-assistants-report-says-1781462.html> <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6022071&navcode=94>

(Giangreco *et al.*, 2005), an implicit form of discrimination has developed: the least able and most disadvantaged pupils receive less educational input from teachers than other pupils. The present default position, in which pupils *get alternative* – not additional – support by TAs, lets down the most disadvantaged children.

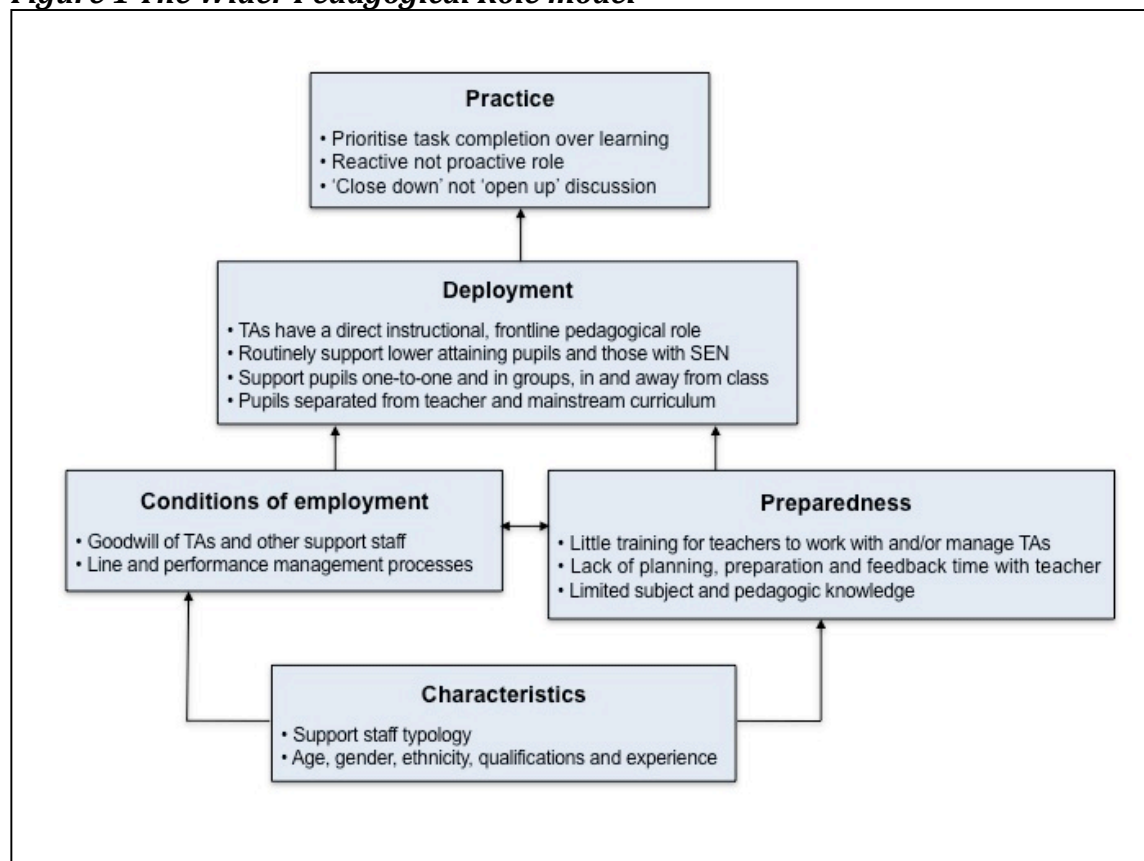
The second main explanation concerns, what in the DISS project, we called the ***preparedness*** of teachers and the TAs who work with them. It was found that only one in four teachers have allocated time to communicate with TAs and prepare them for the tasks they delegate to them, or for TAs to feed back potentially useful information about pupils to teachers; in the case of secondary schools this figure dropped to one in 20. We also found that only one in four teachers had had training to manage TAs, despite the fact that the vast majority work everyday with TAs and are expected to organise their work.

The third explanation for the negative results relating to impact of TAs we have called ***practice***, by which we mean the nature of the interactions between TAs and pupils. Detailed systematic classroom observations and analysis of audio transcripts (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012; Radford, Blatchford and Webster, 2011; and Rubie-Davies *et al.*, 2010) showed that TAs' interactions with pupils, compared with teachers, were:

1. Less academically demanding,
2. Had a greater stress on completing tasks rather than ensuring pupil learning or understanding
3. More reactive rather than proactive in directing learning (most likely reflecting the lack of pre-lesson preparation they receive)
4. Tended to 'close down' rather than 'open up' talk linguistically and cognitively.

We have conceptualised these three components in the form of the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012; Webster *et al.*, 2011), which is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 The Wider Pedagogical Role model**



### ***1.3 The Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project***

The DISS project findings show that it is often children in most need who are being let down by current methods of deploying TAs. This led us to conclude that retaining the status quo with regard to TA deployment is no longer an option for schools. It is clear that urgent action needs to be taken to develop guidance for schools on the preparedness, deployment and practice of TAs. Whilst a number of practical guides for TAs and teachers have been published, these are not typically grounded in rigorous research evidence. The book by Vincett, Cremin and Thomas (2005), *Teachers and Assistants Working Together*, which discusses different models for working with TAs, is an exception. However, the publication of the DISS project findings has provided the educational world with a platform for developing new guidance, and we argue that the WPR model offers a conceptually and empirically robust framework to structure this work.

A careful case study of the impact of the DISS study<sup>9</sup> found that the project findings have had a number of influences, including informing the Lamb Inquiry (2009) on parental confidence in the SEN statementing process and the highly regarded Cambridge review of primary education (Alexander, 2009). In 2011, the findings were referenced in guidance from Ofsted (2011) and influenced the coalition government's Green Paper on SEN (DfE, 2011). Whilst we welcome the fact that the Green Paper addressed the

<sup>9</sup> Institute of Education (2010) *Case study on the impact of IOE research: The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project*, London: IOE, available at <http://www.schoolsupportstaff.net/impact.pdf>



contribution of support staff to the education of pupils with SEN, we are concerned that it does not offer any challenge to the status quo, in terms of how TAs are deployed to support such pupils. We are concerned that the failure to fully engage with the fundamental questions raised by the DISS project will reinforce current models of practice, which continue to let down pupils with SEN.

If, therefore, we are serious about addressing the persistent and well known tail in educational (under)performance, then we should take very seriously the educational experiences of pupils supported by TAs, and the ways in which current methods of deploying TAs do not seem to be helping their educational progress as much as we may have thought. At the time of writing, it does not look as if there will be a specific lead offered by the coalition government or its agencies on TA deployment.

In 2011, the coalition government introduced the Pupil Premium: a £1.25 billion fund to assist schools to provide 'additional provision' for pupils from low income families known to be eligible for free school meals, and looked-after children<sup>10</sup> – a group of pupils whom are known to overlap considerably with low attaining pupils and those with SEN. The coalition has made it clear that whilst individual schools can decide how to spend their allocation, they will be held accountable for their spending. Whilst this funding is to be welcomed, there is a risk that without guidance on how to derive best value from the money, simplistic and incorrect judgments about cause and effect will be made when government analysts come to examine the impact of various interventions. If, for example, schools decide to spend money on increasing TA hours and pupils eligible for Premium funding show negative academic progress, there is a danger that without an understanding of *how* schools prepared and deployed TAs, misleading and damaging judgments will be made about their effectiveness, even though they themselves are blameless.

Following the DISS project, there were strong views expressed about the appropriateness of retaining 'cost-ineffective' TAs expressed in independent reviews of UK public sector spending, following the global economic crisis (for example, Bassett *et al.*, 2010). Given that we now know the full extent of the problem and what we can do to remediate it, unless schools are provided with strong guidance on how to prepare and deploy TAs, it will be much harder to defend further accusations that TAs represent wasteful public spending.

Our work in schools has made it clear that many schools, some working in difficult circumstances, would struggle to cope without TAs. More importantly, the DISS project suggests that TAs have untapped potential that could be released if they were to be used in different ways to those that are commonplace at the moment. This is supported by more positive findings from the DISS project on the impact on teachers' workload, stress, job satisfaction, and classroom discipline and the quality and amount of teaching teachers are able to achieve with a TA present (Blatchford *et al.*, 2009; Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012). Moreover, evidence from the DISS project results on TA impact on what we called pupils' 'positive approaches to learning' (e.g. confidence, motivation, and other dispositions towards learning, often referred to as 'soft' skills) showed a clear and

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/premium/a0076063/pupil-premium-what-you-need-to-know>

positive effect for pupils in Year 9 (13-14 year-olds); the effect was neutral for other year groups. Other evidence from the systematic observations conducted as part of the DISS project revealed positive effects of TAs, in terms of classroom organisation and control. One advantage of having TAs in classrooms is that they can help address what Ofsted (2005) identified as the main behaviour problem in schools: 'persistent, low level disruption of lessons that wears down staff and disrupts learning'.

The potential positive role of TAs is also revealed in the systematic review by Alborz *et al.*, (2009) and a literature review by Slavin *et al.*, (2009), which show that TAs have a positive impact on pupil attainment when they are specifically trained and prepared for curricular interventions (mostly for literacy), and have support and guidance from the teacher and school about practice. However, the DISS project examined the effect of the amount of TA support as it occurred under everyday conditions, and found that TAs leading interventions were rarely well prepared, monitored or supervised in relation to this role. It is, therefore, the preparation of TAs (and teachers to manage TAs), and their deployment and practice that now needs urgent attention.

So, in the absence of any substantive response or guidance from the Government or other bodies, the research team embarked on the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The EDTA project involved collaboration with a number of schools, with the aim of devising and trialling alternative ways of preparing TAs and teachers, deploying TAs in classrooms, and developing the type of talk TAs engage in with pupils.

The EDTA project was based on the view that problems have arisen from assuming that TA support will lead to positive outcomes for pupils, and recognising that there has been a collective failure to develop effective strategies to ensure this happens. We argue that there is a pressing need for clear, well-informed guidance on effective ways of deploying and preparing TAs and teachers, and the DISS project, and the WPR model derived on the basis of the DISS study results, clearly suggested where changes are needed.

The EDTA study's aims were:

- To work in collaboration with headteachers, class teachers and TAs to develop school-based strategies for effective TA preparation, deployment and practice in mainstream schools
- To evaluate the strategies and the processes by which they were introduced and developed, identifying what worked well in the local implementation process
- To produce a handbook of guidance detailing the resulting framework and providing examples of good practice drawn from participating schools, so that the most effective practice can be replicated in other schools. As noted above, this handbook will be published separately, later in 2012.

The study had two integrated phases: a development phase and an evaluation phase.

### **1.3.1 Development phase**

The main strategy was to work with schools, teachers and TAs over a school year (2010/11) through a series of 'developmental' school-based meetings with the research team and 'knowledge exchange' meetings with other practitioners taking part in the study, at the local authority level. We followed in certain respects the model used in the ESRC-funded SPRinG project<sup>11</sup>, in which the research team worked collaboratively with teachers to develop strategies for the successful use of group work founded on the best research evidence available (Baines *et al.*, 2008; Blatchford *et al.*, 2006). The EDTA study was designed to involve schools in the examination of the conceptual and practical aspects of TA deployment and – in collaboration with the research team and a small community of practice – develop and evaluate clear strategies for improving TA effectiveness.

The intervention took place in ten schools in two local authorities (LAs) in England: six primary and four secondary schools. Two pairs of teachers and TAs, plus at least one member of senior staff (e.g. headteacher, deputy head, assistant head or SEN co-ordinator) were enlisted from each school.

The framework for the work in each term was provided by the Wider Pedagogical Role model, and staff in each school developed practices to trial each term best suited their own context and staffing structures. This work was then supported in schools by the research team and, at the end of each term, there was a collective regional meeting at which we gave a summary of the trials and fed back conclusions and recommendations to be included in the handbook of guidance. The meetings also provided the opportunity for staff to reflect on how the trials had gone and lessons learned. In this way there was a collaborative and incremental building of practices, informed by a general research framework, trialled locally, which led to recommendations at the whole school and classroom levels.

We aimed to empower schools to re-imagine aspects of TA deployment and move towards significant changes in TAs' routine day-to-day preparation, deployment and interactions with pupils. Discussions with earlier working groups of school staff, set up to discuss the implications of the DISS project findings in autumn 2009, made it clear that it would be a mistake to assume that every school can adopt exactly the same policies – a so-called 'one size fits all' policy. By employing a bottom-up approach, the developmental work took place in the everyday context of the participating schools and was able to reflect each school's individual priorities and contextual factors. In this way, guidelines formulated within overarching principles tested locally helped us develop strong suggestions about effective methods of TA preparation and deployment.

#### **1.3.1.1 Procedure**

Two pairs of teacher-TA teams were recruited from ten schools in two LAs. Visits were made to the school before the end of the summer term in 2010 to meet with the participants, plus headteacher or SENCo, to explain involvement in the study. Following the 'pre-test' visits to the schools in September 2010 (see below), we held two meetings for senior leaders (e.g. headteachers and SENCos) and teachers in each LA, at which we

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<sup>11</sup> Social Pedagogic Research into Group-work project. See <http://www.spring-project.org.uk>

presented in full the DISS project findings, plus the rationale and aims of the EDTA study. We also hosted two meetings for TAs to impart the same information.

We found that working with a sample of this size was appropriate for the development phase: productive relationships could develop between the school and the research team, plus a deeper understanding of the school, the classroom and working contexts meant that we could become more informed and able to make more constructive comments when working with teachers and TAs. Additionally, more visits to the same schools allowed the researchers to develop strong professional relationships with staff and draw more detail and meaning from the observations, in terms of the impact the trials were having. This in turn made the end of term LA meetings more productive. It was also felt that this sample size would allow the quantity and depth of information necessary for the evaluation phase of the study.

The research team helped to oversee and advise schools on their chosen development trials. The three core components of the WPR model were focal points for each term of the school year. We began with preparedness in the autumn term, 2010; addressed deployment after Christmas (spring term, 2011); and following Easter (summer term, 2011), we encouraged schools to focus on practice.

Over the school year, there were four LA practitioner meetings, where teachers and senior leaders from the schools in each region met with the research team to discuss and share practice. At the LA meeting in October 2010, the team set out the problems regarding existing approaches to preparedness revealed by the DISS study findings and participants worked on the strategies that would be trialled in their schools over the term. The strategies were set out on a pro forma and copies were made for each school and the research team for later reference. Similar LA meetings were held in December 2010, April 2011 and July 2011, at which there was a debriefing by the research team on the previous term's work and, in the case of the December and April meetings, preparation for the next term's work on, respectively, the themes of deployment and practice.

There were also three visits by the research team to each school to support and help refine practice at the school level, and to collect data to evaluate the trials. Half way through each term, a member of the research team visited the school to observe and discuss with each teacher-TA pair the progress of the trial they had been working on. The researcher fed in useful comments where possible (e.g. lessons learned from other schools).

The debriefing meetings at the end of each term allowed the team to collate and present strategies adopted in schools and share our observations and conclusions. This led to further discussion about lessons learned from the term and recommendations for the handbook. At the final LA meeting there was a presentation and discussion of final recommendations arising out of the project, and a chance for further discussion and suggestions. On the basis of this work, we have drawn up an agreed set of key principles and suggested policies and practice to feature in the forthcoming handbook.

### **1.3.2 Evaluation phase**

Here, we first describe the overall research strategy and then give more detail of the methods of data collection and analysis. The EDTA study adopted a within-school comparative approach to the evaluation, evaluating practice before and after the introduction of the development trials. The evaluation sought to compare new models developed through trials with existing models of TA deployment and teacher-TAs working together, as observed in the pre-test visits (conducted early-autumn 2010). The main research question was whether involvement in the project led to more effective deployment, preparation and practice of TAs.

We aimed to assess the extent to which the following elements of classroom practice had changed as a result of the development trials:

#### ***Preparedness***

- The degree of TAs' pre-lesson preparedness, in terms of which pupil(s) will be supported, with which tasks, and understanding of the anticipated outcomes
- TAs' subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge

#### ***Deployment***

- Teachers' deployment of TAs, in terms of which pupils are supported (e.g. pupil attainment level), in which contexts (e.g. one-to-one or in groups; in or away from the class), with which tasks (e.g. differentiated) and for how long
- The teachers' role relative to the role of the TA; again which pupils are supported by the teacher, and for how long
- The distinction and clarity between the teachers' role and the TAs' role in terms of defining a clear purpose for TAs and boundaries

#### ***Practice***

- The nature of TAs' interactions with pupils; promoting an emphasis on understanding rather than task completion.

##### ***1.3.2.1 Methods of data collection***

The EDTA study used amended versions of data collection tools that were used in Strand 2 Wave 2 of the DISS project (Blatchford *et al.*, 2009). The evaluation was based on the collection of information from audits, structured observations, semi-structured interviews, and researchers' notes and conclusions. The aim was to compare the situation at the beginning and end of the year through numerical data from the audits, interviews and structured observations, and to augment this with information on the processes that inhibited or enabled successful practice from the interviews and researchers' notes.

##### ***1.3.2.1.1 Audits***

At the start and end of the school year 2010/11, we collected baseline and end of project data from audits completed by the participants. There were three different audits: one each for senior leaders, teachers and TAs. Leaders were asked to assess teacher/TA preparation and TA deployment and practice at the school level, while the teachers and

the TAs who worked in their classes were asked to assess their preparedness, deployment and practice at the classroom level. In some cases the school level view was not provided by the headteacher, but by the deputy or assistant headteacher or the SENCo.

Assessments were made in the form of a series of scales. Each criterion on the scale was illustrated by a situation or scenario, with each criterion building on the last; so points at the lower end of the scale (e.g. a score of one or two) were associated with the least effective practice, and the points further up (e.g. a score of four or five in most cases) were examples of effective practice. In addition, as part of the deployment audit, teachers and TAs were also asked to estimate the proportion of time they spent each working in particular contexts (e.g. supporting groups; working one-to-one with pupils; leading the whole class, etc). Respondents were asked to identify the points on the scales which best matched their own experience. The audit acknowledged that the situations described in each scale were likely to be much more complex in real life, and so respondents were asked to choose the position on the scale that had the best fit with their own situation, adding any additional explanatory comments. The focus was quite specific, asking respondents to complete the audit with one particular class in mind (e.g. year group and subject) in which the teacher and TA worked together.

The audits were sent to schools at the start of the school year, so, for understandably, a number of teachers and TAs made estimates based on experiences from the previous school year. In some cases, these estimates related to a different teacher/TA partnership than the one participating in this study (TAs, for example, provided estimates based on working with a different teacher). In a few cases, some teachers and TAs provided a 'best guess' estimate based on experiences so far in the early weeks of the current school year.

For the pre-test audits, all audits were returned, providing a sample of ten senior leader audits and 20 teacher audits and 20 TA audits, across six primary schools and four secondary schools, in two local authorities. We did not receive a full complement of audits back from participants at the post-test phase, partly because one secondary school unfortunately dropped out of the project during the spring term. For the post-test audits, we received nine senior leader audits, 17 teacher audits and 16 TA audits, across six primary schools and three secondary schools.

#### 1.3.2.1.2 Structured observations

One method for assessing the effects of the trials on TA deployment and practice was through quantitative observation data. The EDTA study adopted the quantitative observation component developed for the Strand 2 Wave 2 case studies of the DISS project (see Blatchford *et al.*, 2009) and gave a systematic account of each teacher-TA pair at work. Researchers observed at least one lesson per pair (typically one hour in length) and summarised classroom activity within two-minute blocks using an observation pro-forma.

The data from the observations enabled us to describe differences and changes in the amount of interaction pupils had with teachers and TAs, and in which contexts (e.g. on a one-to-one basis, as part of a group, or as part of the whole class audience; and in or away from the classroom). We also used these data to describe changes in the amount of support pupils of all abilities received from TAs, and whether pupils with learning needs worked on tasks that were differentiated or different from those the rest of the class

were undertaking. As in the DISS study, the structured observations helped to inform the interviews (see below).

In total, there were 904 observations in the pre-test phase (655 at primary and 249 at secondary) and there were 449 observations in the post-test phase (307 at primary and 142 at secondary). These data were analysed using SPSS.

#### 1.3.2.1.3 Interviews

Following the structured observations of teacher-TA pairs, an interview with each participant was conducted on a one-to-one basis. These were conducted at the beginning and the end of the project. Researchers used the interviews to discuss responses to the audit (e.g. where the teacher's response to one question was markedly different to the TA's response, and vice versa) and to obtain more detailed information that had arisen from the observations. Researchers also used the interviews to gather data that was missing on the audits and to encourage respondents to commit to an answer for scales for which they had circled multiple options. The post-test interviews were used to ask staff about how their trials had gone in their schools and their overall thoughts about and experiences of taking part in the project.

The interview schedule was based on the framework of the audits, and so the WPR components and audit subheadings provided a structure for a thematic analysis of the interview data.

#### 1.3.2.1.4 Analysis of TA-to-pupil talk (practice)

In order to obtain information on TAs' talk to pupils (or 'practice' as we call it), we made use of qualitative observation notes on TAs' interactions with pupils, which were made at the same time as the structured observations, and also comments from teachers and TAs during the interviews.

As part of the DISS project Strand 2 Wave 2 case studies, we collected of audio recordings of TA-to-pupil and teacher-to-pupil talk. In the EDTA study we did not conduct such an analysis, because it is a very labour intensive activity and provided a level of detail beyond that required for the project. Instead, we used data from observations and interviews to address the talk between TAs and pupils. We were interested in how TA-to-pupil talk developed in response to changes to other components of their work (e.g. their deployment and preparedness).

#### 1.3.2.1.5 Researchers' notes

In addition to this more formal evaluation, researchers asked teacher-TA pairs to evaluate the trials they had undertaken during the discussions held as part of the half-termly visits to schools. Teachers and TAs were encouraged to make frequent comparisons between practice before and during the periods of intervention. Based on this and their own judgements from mid-term visits to schools, researchers drew together a document describing the main conclusions from the trials. The discussions with teacher-TA pairs also explored the nature of any facilitative or inhibiting factors to each trial's success. All of these experiences were collated and fed back to participants at the end of term LA meetings.

The school visits therefore served a dual purpose: as well as being the mechanism for the research team to work directly with teachers and TAs on the development trials, they

provided the opportunity to collect the data required to evaluate them. The evaluation was conducted at the same time as the development trials in order to inform and mutually benefit each other: information collected during the visits to schools helped inform the kinds of activities and practice presented and developed in the work with teachers and TAs and the LA meetings, and these in turn acted as the basis for revisions for future use and evaluation in schools. The evaluation was, therefore, formative and an integral part of the development of the handbook of guidance.

#### *1.3.2.2 Data analysis and write up*

As we describe below, the elements of the WPR model were used to organise the data. The structured observations and audits were analysed numerically with appropriate statistical procedures and tests.

Given the relatively small sample size, audit responses from primary and secondary schools were combined in the analysis, and so an overall picture is provided. However, there are some noteworthy differences between the phases regarding TA deployment, which are identified in the commentary below.

The main bulk of the results are a thematic analysis of the data from the audits and interviews and observations in schools, organised in terms of the three main components of the WPR model (deployment, preparedness and practice), and designed to show the changes that took place as a result of the work conducted in each term, and cumulatively over the school year.



## **2. Results**

As we have just described, the overall strategy adopted in reporting the results from the EDTA project was to work through key results from the three key components of the WPR model, illustrated with comments from the interviews and the audits (the audits had spaces provided throughout for respondents to add any additional comments). We deal with each area by presenting first the baseline data, and then, for comparison, how the situation had changed by the end of the year following the intervention. In some cases, data from two or more audit scales have been aggregated together (we indicate where this is the case). Readers may also notice that the total responses vary from table to table, indicating missing data. This is because some participants did not provide an answer for some audit questions.

### ***2.1 Background characteristics***

#### ***2.1.1 Teachers' and TAs' length of service***

The pre-intervention audits collected background details about teachers' and TAs' experience, in terms of their length of service overall and service within their current school. There was a mix of overall experience among teachers and TAs. At the start of the project (September 2010), the bulk of teachers (75%) and TAs (74%) had been in their respective professions for at least four years. In terms of their length of service at their current schools, a greater proportion of TAs (72%) had been in post for at least four years, compared with teachers (55%).

#### ***2.1.2 TAs' highest qualification***

The pre-intervention audits also asked TAs to indicate their highest qualifications from a list. For the purposes of reporting, qualifications can be divided between those at or below GCSE level and qualifications above GCSE level. On this basis, the majority (72%) have qualifications at or below GCSE level, whereas 28% had qualifications above GCSE level (indeed, all these respondents had an undergraduate degree). These findings on TAs' qualifications can be seen as fairly typical of the national picture. A similar binary scale was used in the analysis of similar data collected from over 1,800 TAs for the DISS project, and in which it was found that majority (59%) had a highest qualification that was at or below GCSE level.

In addition to academic qualifications, we found that one primary TA and two secondary TAs in the EDTA project sample had higher level TA (HLTA) status, and two primary TAs were qualified teachers (they had obtained QTS).

### ***2.2 Preparedness of teachers and TAs***

In this section, we first report on findings from the audit scales concerning three aspects of preparedness:

1. The opportunity for, and quality of, pre-lesson planning and post-lesson feedback between teachers and TAs
2. TAs' subject and instructional knowledge
3. TAs' performance management

We then draw on the pre- and post-intervention interviews and open-ended comments from the audits to provide a more nuanced picture of the issues connected to these themes.

### **2.2.1 Planning and feedback between teachers and TAs**

There were five scales covering the opportunity for, and quality of, pre-lesson planning and post-lesson feedback between teachers and TAs. The criteria of each scale were collapsed into two categories which can be broadly characterised as being more or less effective forms of preparedness, in terms of the extent to which teachers and TAs had allocated time to meet, plan, prepare and discuss, and the quality of information exchanged (e.g. vague or detailed lesson plans). Table 1 collates these data and shows the respective views of school leaders, teachers and TAs on their perceptions and experiences of preparation.

**Table 1**

	School leader view		Teacher view		TA view	
	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>
Little or no opportunity to meet, limited information shared	40 (82%)	22 (50%)	64 (67%)	38 (49%)	73 (75%)	41 (54%)
Allocated time to meet, detailed information shared	9 (18%)	22 (50%)	32 (33%)	40 (51%)	24 (25%)	35 (46%)
<b>Total<sup>12</sup></b>	<b>49 (100%)</b>	<b>44 (100%)</b>	<b>96 (100%)</b>	<b>78 (100%)</b>	<b>97 (100%)</b>	<b>76 (100%)</b>

#### **2.2.1.1 Pre-intervention**

At the pre-intervention stage, the majority of school leaders (82%) characterised the overall situation regarding lesson preparation and feedback at the school level practice as less effective. Reflecting on their own experiences, teachers and TAs expressed a slightly more positive view, though the majority (two-thirds of teachers and three-quarters of TAs) characterised their lesson preparation and feedback as less effective.

We now turn to the qualitative data collected as part of this project in order to describe the two key areas of preparedness that schools sought to address and improve via the development trials: i) time for teachers and TAs to meet; and ii) the quality of information shared.

The lack of opportunity for teacher-TA communication was reflected in the pre-intervention interviews with project participants. Some primary schools tried to ensure that TAs were able to meet with teachers during their planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time; however, for timetabling reasons, this was difficult to replicate in secondary schools.

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<sup>12</sup> Totals indicate total number of responses to the five scales on the audit concerning planning and feedback between teachers and TAs, which are aggregated in this table.

*It was suggested...because most teachers...have their PPA time, then maybe that would be the time that they could meet with the LSAs. But it didn't go down too well and I think people were concerned about the logistics of it – and it never ever got off the ground.*

Secondary school leader

*Even if I wanted to give them a brief overview [of the lesson], again, it's not possible from the time that we've got... It's just not realistic. And I know that I should, and I know that it would make for a more beneficial lesson, it's just not practical.*

Secondary teacher

As noted above, nearly all TAs indicated that they voluntarily worked additional hours for which they were not paid. In the majority of cases, TAs did this in order to create communication time with the teacher. This was particularly the case in primary schools.

*The teacher emails me the plans every Sunday. And so I have a copy of the plans. And if I have anything that I want to question or have or say, "Should I make these resources for it?" etc... I come in at 8.30 – or 8.00 every morning, so we have plenty of time. I'm paid from 8.30. I choose to come in at eight.*

Primary TA

*I normally come in about eight, or just after, in the morning. I think we're actually meant to start at nine, but realistically there's no way you could come in at nine, go into a classroom and start work... I couldn't be unprepared. I'd hate to come in and not know what I was doing or...because at the end of the day it's the children then that would suffer, isn't it?*

Primary TA

#### 2.2.1.2 Post-intervention

At the post-intervention stage, the general view among participants was that the systems of lesson preparation and feedback had improved over the year (see Table 1). Not only was there much more consistency among the views of the participants (indeed, school leaders, teachers and TAs often spoke of 'singing from the same hymn sheet' as a consequence of engaging in the demands of the project), but there was agreement across the board that opportunity for, and quality of, pre-lesson planning and post-lesson feedback between teachers and TAs had improved over the course of the school year.

The post-intervention results, based on the audit scores shown in Table 1, might suggest a modest impact. Overall, opinion is split more or less evenly: half of participants report a positive view of TA preparedness. While this suggests that there is still room for improvement, these data do not capture the full magnitude of change. The full extent of the impact of the trials that enabled the creation of liaison time was revealed through the post-intervention interviews with participants. In primary schools in particular, this had been achieved by either finding time within the school day or modifying TAs' hours of work.

*Preparedness – that's been the biggest one for us, I think. Changing the hours and giving them [TAs] an extra half hour... That has been the biggest impact.*

Primary SENCo

*That's been a big positive thing. That's really helped. Although we would always talk about the day, sometimes it was just a snatched five minutes; whereas now we've always made sure that we're sat down and we have our half past eight slot.*

Primary teacher

*Having the 15 minutes before school is invaluable to both the TA and me. I don't know how I'd ever cope if it was taken away!*

Primary teacher

*We changed the break times; that's one of the major changes and major impact. Because before we never saw our TAs... I think something I've learned from this whole process is teacher/TA talk time is so vital.*

Primary teacher

*Communication has improved since taking part in this study. We do understand the importance of finding time to meet before lesson to discuss the content and pupils.*

Secondary teacher

*The preparation time...has totally changed my role... Just having that time to know exactly what is expected of me every day, within the classroom, with different groups of classroom, with individuals...it's just turned my job, my role, upside down – for the better; it really has.*

Primary TA

*Meeting with the teacher once a week to plan for the next lesson has really helped me. I now go into this lesson knowing what they are doing.*

Secondary TA

Participants in primary schools found it somewhat easier to create and sustain these changes compared with their colleagues in secondary schools, which is perhaps not surprising given that TAs in secondary schools are deployed to work with a greater number of classes and teachers across the week.

*I haven't found the extra time as much as I'd like to say that I have... Some of that is because the time isn't there, and some of it is because – if I'm totally honest – I have thought about it occasionally and then something else has come up and that's taken priority.*

Secondary teacher

*I think the communication side of it is vital between teacher and LSA. [But] as much as we want it to happen, it does not happen because we just haven't got time on our timetables.*

Secondary TA

However, it should be noted that at the post-intervention stage there had been little change in the proportion of TAs reporting that they voluntarily worked additional hours weekly, if not daily, typically in order to have planning and discussion time with teachers.

*I would say every day I do half an hour extra.*

Primary TA

On the basis of findings from the DISS project, and in line with the broad definitions of effective and less effective forms of preparedness used to interpret the audit data, situations where the goodwill of TAs is essential in creating preparation time is characteristic of less effective practice. It is perhaps for this reason that the magnitude of impact, as revealed through the audit data, appears less than that demonstrated by the comments above.

Creating time to meet remains a perennial problem for schools, tied to TAs' contracts and, moreover, salaries; creating time to meet was associated with extending TAs' hours and thus increasing their pay. However, as one primary school leader explained, it is by reconfiguring, rather than expanding, existing hours that may potentially contribute to improving TAs' effectiveness.

*At the moment, with money at a premium, you employ TAs for direct contact with children. But if that's not having an effect, maybe then taking quarter of an hour off that and giving them a quarter of an hour at the beginning of the day to talk to teachers about what they want them to do, might have a better impact anyway. And I think that's something we've learnt from doing it.*

Primary school leader

### **2.2.2 The quality of information shared**

The second area of preparedness that was a factor in effective TA preparation, and which was addressed via the development trials, was the quality of information shared. Principally this refers to the information flowing from the teacher to the TA in the form of lesson plans and other documentation.

#### **2.2.2.1 Pre-intervention**

As the results from the audits show, the quality of lesson planning was also considered a greater issue for TAs than teachers. This is not surprising given the comments from the pre-intervention interviews, of which the one below was a typical example.

*We always go into classes blind. You can just get two minutes maybe with the teacher to say, "Right, we're doing this. Could you work with that child?" There you go. Get on with it.*

Secondary TA

Consistent with what we have already stated, a lack of time was cited in almost every event as the reason why TAs found themselves in this position. The situation seemed most acute in secondary schools.

*In an ideal world I would love to give my LSAs a lesson plan, but to be honest, I don't do a lesson plan for every single lesson I teach; it's not possible... I do know that when I'm being observed, and when Ofsted are in, all of a sudden, I – and the rest of the school – do a fantastic lesson plan and I hand it to the LSA the day before. And then I go to her and I say. "Look, I'm being observed tomorrow. Can you do this, this, this and this?", which is what I should be doing every single day.*

Secondary teacher

After a lesson, TAs tended not to provide feedback on pupils to teachers in any great detail. Again, the reason for this was principally lack of time.

*Although I should imagine that some teachers would feed back to their TAs and expect TAs to feed back to them, but I wouldn't necessarily think that that is true of all teachers and TAs and lessons that happen across the school.*

Primary school leader

Some interviewees described written shorthand systems that allowed TAs to impart basic feedback to teachers via pupils' workbooks, and which may be followed up with further discussion.

*If she's [TA] worked with a certain group...[she will indicate in the pupils' books] objective achieved; working towards; needs support; doesn't understand...and then she'll have discussion with me and I'll say, "How did your group get on?", and she'll pinpoint kids who didn't get to it, or the ones that did and need reinforcement. And then I'll be able to see that as well from her marking.*

Primary teacher

In a few cases, however, teachers did not actively seek feedback from TAs.

*I don't feel like I'm not encouraged to say, but it's just that's not a daily thing that [teacher] would say to me, "How is so-and-so doing on that?" or "Can you give me some feedback on that?" If I'm honest, that doesn't happen.*

Primary TA

It is worth noting that the pre-test situation regarding preparedness found in the EDTA study are in many ways consistent with findings from the DISS project on the same theme: both the time for and quality of pre-lesson preparation for TAs was extremely limited, and TAs frequently went into lessons 'blind' (see Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012 for more).

#### 2.2.2.2 Post-intervention

At the end of the project, the view among participants was that the quality of lesson preparation and feedback had improved over the year. TAs in both phases had benefited from teachers providing more detailed lesson plans and, in some cases, additional material in advance of lessons. Teachers, through their lesson plans, not only made their expectations of TAs clearer, but avoided situations where TAs went into lessons blind.

*There's now something on the planning that says what I want [TA] to focus on...which group she's working with on the group part, and which children to focus on. So she's got a more specified focus. And that's something we've changed in the whole school actually.*

Primary teacher

*I think we are better now at planning. I think we always knew what we were doing, but we didn't actually break it down specifically.*

Secondary teacher

Any concerns that having to give greater thought to the TA's role in the lesson, and having to set this out in the form of a lesson plan, created extra work for teachers was offset by the advantages teachers had noticed as a result of making this effort.

*I think the benefits outweigh any extra work... I think to start with, it's a short-term steep learning curve, and then when you actually see the benefit and you think, 'How could I ever go back?' No way. I couldn't at all actually!*

Primary teacher

The effect this had on TAs was profound. The following comment was typical of the views expressed by TAs in the post-intervention interviews.

*I think with [teacher] sharing the lesson plans... I'm just noticing I feel more confident with the way I deal with the pupils, because I feel more secure in what I'm expected to do. Sometimes you know, occasionally when you come in cold, you feel unsure and you don't know what to say to the children so much... So I think sharing the learning objectives and what needs to be achieved and who to focus on, just means I'm just much more aware of where to be.*

Primary TA

### 2.2.3 TAs' subject and instructional knowledge

Table 2 collates audit ratings from three scales addressing TAs' subject knowledge, general instructional techniques and strategies for SEN (referred to collectively here as 'knowledge'). Responses were grouped into four levels that described the main ways in which TAs obtained knowledge, ranging from picking things up from teachers' whole class delivery (considered least effective practice), through reading lesson plans, to informal and formal types of training (considered most effective). The table presents the respective views of school leaders, teachers and TAs on their perceptions and experiences of the ways in which TAs acquire knowledge.

**Table 2**

	School leader view		Teacher view		TA view	
	Pre-intv	Post-intv	Pre-intv	Post-intv	Pre-intv	Post-intv
TAs gain knowledge by listening to teachers' delivery	4 (13%)	0 (0%)	20 (34%)	8 (15%)	16 (27%)	10 (20%)
TAs gain knowledge from lesson plans and other documentation	5 (17%)	1 (4%)	12 (20%)	10 (19%)	12 (20%)	7 (14%)
TAs gain knowledge by talking to teacher and/or other (SEN) specialist	10 (33%)	11 (41%)	20 (34%)	27 (51%)	25 (42%)	23 (47%)
TAs gain knowledge from targeted training or high level qualification	11 (37%)	15 (56%)	7 (12%)	8 (15%)	6 (10%)	9 (18%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 (100%)</b>	<b>27 (100%)</b>	<b>59 (100%)</b>	<b>53 (100%)</b>	<b>59 (100%)</b>	<b>49 (100%)</b>

#### 2.2.3.1 Pre-intervention

The results show that 70% of school leaders' responses suggested that TAs' preparation is at the more effective end of the scale, with knowledge being gained from discussions with teachers and SEN specialists and targeted training. However, this was not

completely shared by teachers and TAs, whose responses were fairly evenly split between less effective and more effective forms of gaining subject and instructional knowledge.

Responses from teachers and TAs suggest that talk is the favoured method of knowledge exchange, with TAs' tending to tune in to teachers' classroom talk and conversations with teachers and SEN specialists (68% of teachers' responses and 69% of TAs' responses). A similar picture was found in the earlier DISS study and is reported in Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012).

As indicated above, comments from the pre-intervention interviews revealed that TAs tended to go into lessons blind, and further comments supported the view that TAs had to rely on tuning in to the teacher's delivery in order to pick up the subject knowledge required to support pupils on the lesson.

*There is an assumption that you should just know. You're to come into a classroom, you listen to the twenty minutes of teaching, and from that – if you didn't know, you should know now. And then you're to feed in on the children... It's scary. It frightens me to have an acknowledgement that there's just an assumption you should know.*

Primary TA

*I was teaching Romeo and Juliet, as I was teaching it, they [TAs] would learn the plot, theme, characters, as the kids learn it – which again isn't ideal.*

Secondary teacher

### 2.2.3.2 Post-intervention

As previously noted, the perception among participants was that trials undertaken by schools had the effect of improving the preparedness of TAs. This was achieved by improving the quality of information provided to TAs before lessons (e.g. in the form of a detailed lesson plan and/or a pre-lesson meeting), and avoiding – or at least reducing – instances of TAs having to tune in to teachers' whole class delivery.

Of all the post-intervention audit responses (see Table 2), it is those from teachers and TAs that give the clearest and most reliable indication of this impact. The perceptions of school leaders, which also suggest movement in a positive direction, are somewhat less instructive, given their greater distance from the classroom experience. Encouragingly, the post-intervention responses from teachers – and more importantly – TAs suggest fewer instances of 'tuning in' to the teacher's whole class input compared with the start of the project (teachers' responses: 34% vs. 15%; TAs' responses: 27% vs. 20%).

In addition, the responses from teachers suggest that, at the end of the project, they felt that TAs received a greater proportion of their subject and instructional knowledge from documentation and conversations with professionals, compared with the situation at the beginning of the project (70% vs. 54%). However, the views of TAs were more or less constant (62% vs. 61%). The point of note here is that acquiring knowledge from lesson plans and other documentation can be viewed as a more effective model of preparation if – as appears to be the case in this study – the quality of the material provided is greatly improved.



#### 2.2.3.4 Training received by TAs

##### 2.2.3.4.1 Pre-intervention

In terms of training for TAs, the pre-intervention interviews revealed that nearly all TAs received regular training, mostly connected with SEN (e.g. strategies for supporting pupils with autism) and interventions.

*TAs had specific targeted things on lots of different interventions, lots of different teaching strategies; whole class and interventions. So she [TA] knows how to do catch-up type things; she knows how to do Springboard [maths intervention]; she knows how to teach guided reading. So a varied and wide-ranging training I would say.*

Primary teacher

*Because we're doing an NVQ, it's giving us so much information that we can access; and that is how we're picking up information about how to deal with special needs. Yes, that is actually helping us as a department.*

Secondary TA

##### 2.2.3.4.2 Post-intervention

At the post-intervention stage, the evidence from the interviews revealed that involvement in the project had helped identify areas of training for TAs and ways in which this could be delivered.

*It has been recognised, as an outcome from our involvement in this project, that there are specific areas of training that can be developed. A working party has been established to review and improve on existing practices.*

Secondary school leader

*People definitely will observe each other more and do more in-school training. When we did our questionnaires and interviews – like within the project a while ago – people said we want more training; but didn't really specify what kind of training they wanted or like what they wanted to be trained more in. So we've got maybe [to] try and do a bit more in-school training; maybe giving them some ideas of questioning, attitudes and things.*

Primary teacher

#### **2.2.4 Performance management arrangements for TAs**

The audit included a scale asking school staff about the extent to which TAs were involved in appraisal and performance management process. The pre-intervention responses, shown in Table 3, revealed that most school leaders, and the vast majority of teachers, said that there was a formal process of review in place for TAs. The audit defined a 'formal process' as akin to the professional review procedures that teachers are subject to.

**Table 3**

	School leader view		Teacher view		TA view	
	Pre-intv	Post-intv	Pre-intv	Post-intv	Pre-intv	Post-intv
No process in place	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)
Informal process in place	4 (40%)	2 (22%)	2 (11%)	4 (24%)	4 (20%)	5 (33%)
Formal process in place	6 (60%)	7 (78%)	17 (89%)	13 (76%)	14 (70%)	10 (67%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 (100%)</b>	<b>9 (100%)</b>	<b>19 (100%)</b>	<b>17 (100%)</b>	<b>20 (100%)</b>	<b>15 (100%)</b>

*We've tied the TA appraisal system into the whole school support staff system... But that has been very much mirrored on the teacher one with three objectives.*  
Secondary SENCo

*I don't remember having any appraisal meetings... "Whereabouts are you? Do you need some training?" Occasionally that happens. But as for performance management, I don't ever remember receiving any of it.*  
Primary TA

By the post-intervention stage, there was a greater consistency among participants' responses in terms of whether some form of performance management for TAs was in place. The project had the effect of instigating more rigorous performance management processes in several schools.

*There's never been performance management. So the performance management of the teaching assistants will begin in November, following teachers in October. This year, it will be the first time.*  
Primary school leader

### **2.2.5 Key findings on preparedness**

- The creation of time for teachers and TAs to meet had a positive effect on participants' perceptions of TA preparedness
- Primary schools created teacher/TA liaison time by reconfiguring TAs' hours of work. Finding time to meet remains a challenge for secondary schools
- TAs' goodwill remained a factor in creating time for preparation and meeting time with teachers
- The quality and clarity of teachers' lesson plans improved over the year, and reduced instances of TAs going into lessons blind or relying on picking up information via teachers' whole class delivery
- Involvement in the project had the effect of instigating a rigorous performance management process for TAs.

## **2.3 Deployment**

In this section, we primarily report on how, over the school year, schools challenged existing rationales and models of TA deployment at the school level, and at the more detailed class level, how teachers changed the ways in which they used TAs in the classroom. We do this mainly by drawing on the interview data and open-ended comments from the audits, but our explanation of changes at the classroom-level also makes use of findings from the structured observations on the activity of teachers and TAs.

### **2.3.1 School level deployment**

#### **2.3.1.1 School policy on TA deployment**

The audit asked school leaders, teachers and TAs whether their school had a formal written policy on the deployment of TAs. The DISS study found that very few schools had one. The audit responses are shown in Table 4. Interestingly, when asked at the start of the project, all school leaders claimed that they did not have a policy, yet only around two-thirds of their staff agreed. When surveyed again at the end of the project, there was little significant variation in responses. However, it should be noted that a number of respondents indicated on their audit form that although they did not currently have a policy, the school was in the process of developing one.

*We're definitely going to continue [implementation] next year; and definitely making a new policy will really help as well to what we expect from teaching assistants.*

Primary school leader

*TAs' roles are under review at school currently. We are looking at drawing up a policy and making more specific, defined roles, drawing on TAs' strengths from the audit and their individual skill sets.*

Primary teacher

**Table 4**

	School leader view		Teacher view		TA view	
	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>
School has a policy on TA deployment	0 (0%)	2 (22%)	7 (37%)	5 (31%)	6 (32%)	4 (33%)
School does not have a policy on TA deployment	10 (100%)	7 (78%)	12 (63%)	11 (69%)	13 (68%)	8 (67%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 (100%)</b>	<b>9 (100%)</b>	<b>19 (100%)</b>	<b>16 (100%)</b>	<b>19 (100%)</b>	<b>12 (100%)</b>

In line with results from the DISS project, comments from interviewees at the pre-intervention stage revealed a lack of a consistent school-wide agreement on the role and use of TAs in many schools. The situation in secondary schools was most acute, with many comments revealing the absence of even a basic, common understanding among teachers about what TAs should do in classrooms.

*I think some teachers aren't sure how they're going to use a TA, and so they presume the TA's just going to come in and know exactly what to do... And I don't think they know what they want them to do. I think they presume they're just going to go up to any kid that's struggling and help them out... Some teachers don't want them; some teachers don't even want them in their lesson.*

Secondary SENCo

*I think...the teachers assume that TAs know what they're doing basically as well. So I think a lot of it is assumption to be honest.*

Secondary TA

Comments from some secondary school TAs especially revealed how they felt that their primary role was to manage behaviour.

*My focus is on the disruptive people, because the teacher wants it that way, instead of being more focused on learning. Confidentially, we call it 'crowd control'. We're put in there to control the crowd and not help them learn.*

Secondary TA

*There are certain lessons where I feel like part of my role is to control the behaviour of some students. There's one child here who is very disruptive and it not only impacts on his learning, but the students around him as well and the ability of the teacher to actually deliver the lesson.*

Secondary TA

Perhaps not surprisingly, the lack of agreement over the purpose of the TAs' role led to inconsistency and variation in the way teachers deployed TAs.

*[In] science, I really feel like I'm used and I do have a role to play. But then you can go to another lesson and it feels completely different.*

Secondary TA

### *2.3.1.2 TAs and SEN provision*

In the minds of many secondary school staff, the purpose of the TA role was inextricably connected with meeting the needs of low attaining pupils and, in particular, those with SEN. There was a view among teachers that meeting the needs of pupils with SEN was seen as the responsibility of the Learning Support (LS) department – the base in and from which TAs worked, and where these pupils attended to do curriculum interventions (e.g. for reading). This prevailing view among some teachers in some schools was also informed by the ways in which the needs of pupils with a statement of SEN were met. The common practice was to attach a TA to a pupil(s) and this, in the minds of teachers, gave them the license to shift the responsibility for these pupils from themselves to TAs.

*There is a view – not everywhere – but there's a view that grows up [among teachers] that actually, if I've got a pupil who's not very bright or who has needs, then I need an LSA, and basically I can farm that child off to the LSA. And we do have that; I'm not going to lie about it. And it is about challenging that culture.*

Secondary school leader

*Some of them [pupils], especially in certain lessons, don't even need a TA in there; however, by law, I have to provide that support [for a pupil with a Statement of SEN].*

Secondary SENCo

The main effect of these practices, and the views that underpinned them, was that secondary teachers became distanced from the experiences of pupils with challenging learning needs.

*They [teachers] have nothing to do with [curriculum interventions] and probably, even though there is a whole school provision, they probably haven't looked at it. They've probably got an idea of what goes on.*

Secondary SENCo

*What you'll find is, if they're having an observed lesson, or if Ofsted are coming in...all of a sudden you get teachers more interested in SEN and more interested in speaking to the TAs, and saying "What can I do about this?" But on the day-to-day [basis], they don't.*

Secondary SENCo

With teachers increasingly unaware of how to meet the needs of pupils with SEN through their own teaching, they became more dependent on TAs.

*Many times I'll go into a classroom and get [asked by the teacher], 'Which kid are you here for?' They should know.*

Secondary TA

*I am hearing things and seeing things from teachers who are essentially giving up and just saying, "I don't know what to do with them. That child is your [TAs'] responsibility. I don't know how to include them in my lesson"...passing it on to the TA... And it's not good enough to say to a TA: "Well, they don't fit in my lesson plan, so you're going to have to do something else with them".*

Secondary TA

There was also evidence of a separation between teachers and pupils with SEN in primary schools, although to a lesser extent compared with the situation in secondary schools. As the TA's comment below shows, very often TAs' involvement in curriculum interventions extended beyond delivery.

*We write the IEPs as teachers...the TAs are told this is who you need to focus on and this is what you need to be doing. But they're not involved in any of the planning of that.*

Primary teacher

*Last year, with all the Wave 3 [intervention] programmes that I was working on, it was all done solely by myself. I implemented it, recorded, and then reported back to [the SENCo] – not the teacher.*

Primary TA

### 2.3.1.2.1 Changes over the school year

At the end of the school year, it was clear that the process of participating in the project had had a profound effect on school leaders and teachers in terms of the ways in which they conceptualised TA deployment. It would have been overambitious to expect involvement in the project to completely transform TA deployment at that school level, but the process of the intervention had led all school leaders to review and appraise TA deployment. Many school leaders described how they, together with their senior leadership team, had thought more strategically about the purpose of the TA role and expectations in terms of pupil outcomes.

*At the end of the day, what has become most clear is that the TAs are doing what the teachers ask them to do... If the TA is doing [a particular thing], it's because the teacher has either not directed them properly, or the teacher has even asked them to do it... I need to train my staff better to look at it like that. How is that person going to help me to get around all these children better? How can I deploy them so that I am omnipresent in this class for every child?*

Primary school leader

*[Previously] teaching assistants could take off a different group and do a different input matched to their needs... They could pitch it at that level and then they join the lesson for the main part. And we were doing that; but then the argument comes again of how trained are these TAs? They're not teachers. Should we be expecting them to do those sorts of things?*

Primary SENco

As we will describe in the following section on TA deployment at the classroom level, the project had led teachers to develop models of deployment that addressed some of the issues connected with teachers' separation from low attaining pupils and those with SEN, as detailed above. One way in which secondary schools were attempting to address this issue was to alter the function of the LS department and to relocate TAs to subject faculties. The intention was to ensure that teachers took the lead responsibility for meeting the needs of pupils with SEN within the classroom, rather than rely on the LS department. To do this, schools planned to provide subject departments with additional TAs and guidance on the alternative models of TA deployment within the classroom developed through the project (more on which below).

*This project has contributed significantly to the remodelling of the provision provided by our LS team. Our aim is to decentralise to departments whilst retaining SEN expertise and CPD [continuing professional development]. From September, TAs will be routinely deployed in departments. Subject areas and TAs will be given time to explore the outcomes of this project and its recommendations. These shall be used to inform the direction of future policy.*

Secondary school leader

*Although [heads of department] will see it as a great thing that we've given them these more staff...in return we want you now to commit to understanding how better to deploy them.*

Secondary school leader

Schools overall did not choose to address the broader issue of fundamentally challenging the engrained practice of meeting the needs of pupils with SEN primarily or even exclusively, through the means of a TA.

Secondary schools described remaining fettered by their 'statutory obligation' to provide adult support for pupils with a statement of SEN in the form of a TA, despite the guidance in the SEN Code of Practice (DfES 2001) being quite unequivocal that such models of support are only advisory – not mandatory. It should be noted that such impressions might come about because the statementing process occurs at the local authority level, away from the school. In this sense, schools may be the unwitting agents of a decision taken elsewhere, based on a mistaken belief about mandatory TA support for pupils with statements. This possibility is an area requiring further investigation.

*Majority of time [TAs support] statemented students, as we have statutory obligation to provide a minimum number of additional adult hours per student.*  
Secondary school SENCo

Again, despite the alternative ways of deploying TAs in classrooms developed through the project, there remained a sense from TAs that they were needed to work with low attaining pupils and those with SEN. To appropriate a term used by one interviewee, we refer to the 'hard-wiring' of the TA mindset.

*I still would help the weaker ones get going, or they'll just waste five minutes... So I get them going and keep an eye on them.*  
Primary TA

*There are particular children...who you just can't leave them...because they just don't have the grasp of what's going on. It's like they keeping letting go of the balloon all the time.*  
Secondary TA

*People who come to work with children are genetically hard-wired to help them.*  
Primary school leader

Participants recognised that entrenched attitudes regarding the use of TAs in relation to the provision for pupils with SEN still existed at the end of the project. Altering these attitudes over the course of the school year was an ambitious task and not one that we expected schools to fully achieve. Nonetheless, secondary schools had, as hoped, begun to address this over the course of the year by planning some significant restructuring changes aimed at addressing teachers' separation from, and (at worst) abdication of responsibility for, pupils with SEN. For this, they must be given considerable credit.

#### *2.3.1.3 Sustaining the changes: wider implementation within schools*

As described above, by the end of the project, all of the schools were preparing to spread the practice developed through the trials more widely across the school in the forthcoming school year. Participants commented on the formal and informal ways in which they would do this.

*It's actually gone on our school development plan for next year: how we make the most of the provision of support in our classrooms. So for us as a school it's become quite a big issue... Obviously for us, through this project, it's happened in quite a small-scale way; it's maybe kind of filtering through.*

Secondary teacher

*You know we won't win everybody, but I think if we can win groups who can see the value in it, then...we just hope that we can cascade that out... It may be that we run some CPD sessions for heads of department in the first instance, to give them the background to the project so that they can see where we're coming from.*

Secondary school leader

*What I'd quite like to do is talk to some of the teachers I know [TA] is going to be with [next year]...and [give them] guidance and recommendations.*

Secondary teacher

A number of participants felt that TAs could be used as 'ambassadors for change', advocating the benefits of the changes brought about by the project. In particular, TAs who experience both new and old models of deployment were said to have a unique viewpoint that was worth sharing.

*[TA] has been perfect because she's been in the situation where she's been able to plan with somebody, and then she's been in the situation where she hasn't been able to plan with somebody. And the comparison, she said, is just huge. She'll go into Year 3, she knows exactly what she's doing... [But] she can go into the Year 4 class and not have a clue... So then you've got the knock-on effect, haven't you? She's not questioning properly; she's not prepared at all; then you've got the ineffectiveness of the TA.*

Primary SENCo

The issue of challenging and changing the embedded models of deployment and 'hard-wired' tendencies for TAs to support low attaining pupils and those with SEN – often in ineffective ways (e.g. prioritising task completion) – was acknowledged by several participants as part of the move towards implementing new models of deployment across the school. The legacy of existing models of TA deployment was seen as presenting a particular challenge.

*I think if you spend so long working in a culture where you're working with lower ability kids, I think some TAs have got to a point where they think that's all that kid can ever do... We would never suggest it's a criticism of them [TAs]. It is trying to coax them to think in a different way.*

Secondary school leader

*Selling [new models of deployment] to the support assistants...[is] a bigger change, because they've been working in a way where they have been following a particular child...from subject to subject... I think, the thought of being allocated, or being put, in a particular department, is making them nervous, because the culture has been the opposite for so long.*

Secondary school leader



One secondary school leader acknowledged the role that management have in providing direction and support as the changes are implemented.

*I think that's where we've [SLT] got to come in... We need to be very clear from the beginning in terms of what our objectives are about how it's got to work... It's not about just giving more bodies for you to work with. It's about, we're now giving you more bodies, and it's an opportunity to do something different... I genuinely believe that being involved in this project...has had an influence, and I think it has helped to accelerate [change]; it's given a rationale.*

Secondary school leader

### **2.3.2 Classroom level deployment**

In this section, we present data from the structured observations in order to provide a more detailed description of the roles of teachers and TAs in the classroom, and how this changed as a result of involvement in the project. We illuminate these findings with more descriptive data from the interviews and open-ended comments from the audits in order to show the extent and effect of the changes that took place.

#### *2.3.2.1 TAs' working week*

The audit asked teachers and TAs to estimate the proportion of time TAs spent in and away from the classroom in a typical school week. Estimates were fairly consistent, with the majority of both teachers and TAs suggesting at the pre-intervention stage that TAs spent 76%+ of the week in the classroom and a quarter of the week working away from the class. Teachers' estimates at the post-intervention stage were largely unchanged, but a slightly higher proportion of TAs estimated that they spent more time in the classroom than out.

The structured observations showed that in total 86% of all observations took place in the classroom, and 14% took place away from it. There was no significant change at the post-intervention stage.

The results presented in Table 5 are based on the data collected from the in-class observations only, although later in this report we provide a commentary on the observations of TAs working away from the class. In the vast majority of the in-class observations (95%), TAs were observed working with pupils. In the remaining five per cent of instances, which were excluded from the analysis, TAs were observed not working with pupils (e.g. doing administrative tasks, tidying, preparing or handing out resources).

#### *2.3.2.2 Contexts in which TAs and teachers worked with pupils*

The findings from the DISS project on how teachers and TAs spend most of their time in classrooms were integral to the explanation of why pupils with the most support from TAs do the least well academically. In the DISS project, we found that teachers in primary and secondary classes worked in fairly similar ways. For the most part they either led the whole class or roving the class, helping pupils as they went. In contrast, TAs tended to support pupils in one-to-one, small group or medium group contexts. Primary and secondary TAs differed in that primary TAs tended to support small groups, whereas secondary TAs tended to support individual pupils.

Full results are available in Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012), but to summarise: teachers spent just 14% of their time working with individuals and groups, whereas TAs spent 81% of their time in these contexts. An understanding of the results we found in the DISS project and the pre-test phase of the EDTA study are crucial to appreciating the change made as a result of this project, and in particular the changes to the way in which teachers' spent their time.

The findings from pre- and post-intervention in-class observations (shown in Table 5) revealed that TAs overall spent 46% half their time working with individual pupils and groups. There were clear changes to TA deployment over the school year. Secondary TAs moved from working mainly with individuals to working with small groups, and primary TAs' spent more time working with individuals (thereby somewhat reversing the trend found in the DISS project). TAs also did more roving, especially those in secondary classrooms.

**Table 5**

	Primary TAs		Secondary TAs		Total	
	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>
One-to-one	92 (17%)	64 (25%)	68 (33%)	19 (16%)	160 (22%)	83 (22%)
All groups	162 (31%)	77 (30%)	18 (9%)	44 (37%)	180 (24%)	121 (32%)
Small group (2-5)	91 (17%)	63 (25%)	14 (7%)	44 (37%)	105 (14%)	107 (29%)
Larger group (6+)	71 (13%)	14 (5%)	4 (2%)	0 (0%)	75 (10%)	14 (4%)
Roving classroom	8 (2%)	13 (5%)	3 (1%)	12 (10%)	11 (1%)	25 (7%)
Leading whole class	0 (0%)	1 (<1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (<1%)
Passive active	109 (21%)	53 (21%)	52 (25%)	22 (19%)	161 (22%)	75 (20%)
Passive inactive	160 (30%)	48 (19%)	66 (32%)	21 (18%)	226 (31%)	69 (18%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>531 (100%)</b>	<b>256 (100%)</b>	<b>207 (100%)</b>	<b>118 (100%)</b>	<b>738 (100%)</b>	<b>374 (100%)</b>

Post-intervention observations additionally revealed that teachers' own deployment had changed as a result of involvement in the project, as Table 6 shows. At the start of the project, and much in line with the DISS project findings, teachers spent the majority of their time working at the whole class level (70%). By the end of the project, secondary teachers were spending less time leading the whole class and far more time working with small groups.

**Table 6**

	Primary teachers		Secondary teachers		Total	
	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>	<i>Pre-intv</i>	<i>Post-intv</i>
One-to-one	63 (12%)	38 (14%)	11 (5%)	10 (7%)	74 (10%)	48 (12%)
All groups	127 (24%)	37 (14%)	25 (12%)	36 (26%)	152 (20%)	73 (18%)
Small group (2-5)	70 (13%)	28 (10%)	21 (10%)	36 (26%)	91 (12%)	64 (16%)
Larger group (6+)	57 (11%)	9 (3%)	4 (2%)	0 (0%)	61 (8%)	9 (2%)
Roving classroom	38 (7%)	35 (13%)	38 (18%)	19 (14%)	76 (10%)	54 (13%)
Leading whole class	311 (58%)	164 (61%)	133 (64%)	71 (52%)	444 (60%)	235 (57%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>539 (100%)</b>	<b>274 (100%)</b>	<b>207 (100%)</b>	<b>136 (100%)</b>	<b>746 (100%)</b>	<b>410 (100%)</b>

Table 6 also shows that at the post-intervention phase, primary teachers were spending more time roving the classroom than working with groups. On the face of it, this may suggest that there had been little change in the way primary teachers' deployed themselves, however, this would be to underplay something quite significant. Drawing on researchers' qualitative notes of classroom observations, we noted that when roving, teachers tended to interact with individuals and small groups of two or three pupils, and interacted with more pupils over the duration of the lesson. A common model of classroom organisation in secondary schools was for the teacher to work with an individual or group while the TA kept order by roving around the classroom.

Given the smaller number of data points for the post-intervention observations, the results above do not do justice to the changes to teacher and TA deployment observed and described. The value of teachers having more opportunities to interact with a greater number of pupils during lessons, and indeed across the week, was truly revealed through the post-intervention interviews.

*The TA and teacher have worked on a model of deployment where the teacher works with a small focus group and the TA roves the classroom, addressing general needs and ensuring children are on task. This has taken time to embed, but it works well.*  
Primary teacher

*I definitely feel that there is more opportunity for me just to sit and talk to a pupil or a group of pupils, and not feel like I need to be the one controlling everything. That actually [TA] is happy to do some of that... I am aware that I need to spend more time just sitting still in the classroom with the pupils.*  
Secondary teacher

*[Teacher] spends more time now sitting with individual pupils. And whenever she's doing that, I sort of keep an eye on what's going on generally.*  
Secondary TA

*We would like [TAs] to shift more to whole class support, to allow a teacher to [working with individuals and groups].*  
Secondary school leader

Returning to the changes made to TA deployment, perhaps the most significant difference between the pre- and post-intervention observations was the way in which TAs were more active in lessons. As noted earlier, the structured observation system used in the EDTA project was based on that used in the DISS study, but was refined in such a way that it could capture more reliably instances where TAs were 'passive' – that is, instances when the teacher was leading the whole class. There were two ways that TAs are passive when teachers are teaching:

1. *Passive active*: this is when the TA is listening to the teacher teach, and intermittently interacts with a pupil(s)
2. *Passive inactive*: this is when the TA is listening to the teacher teach, but not interacting with pupil(s).

The pre-intervention observation data in Table 5 revealed the extent to which TAs were passive during lessons. Primary TAs were active passive in 21% of instances, and

secondary TAs were active passive in 25% of instances. When instances of TAs being passive inactive are added, the percentages grow to 51% for primary and 57% for secondary. Therefore, at the start of the EDTA project TAs were passive for half the time they were in the classroom. This is largely explainable in terms of the extent to which teachers spent more than half of their time leading the whole class (60% overall). In such circumstances, the teacher is the focus of attention for all pupils, and so the TA's role with regard to direct pupil support is restricted.

*If you're just kind of not doing anything, and the teacher's stood there reading from a book and things like that, and then they'll start asking them questions...you know you can't really do an awful lot, can you? If that goes on for near enough the whole lesson, what can you do?*

Secondary TA

The post-intervention observations revealed that there were far fewer instances of TAs being passive inactive during lessons (18%, compared with 31% at the pre-intervention stage). This was significant, as teachers had reduced – from almost a third to less than fifth – the proportion of time in which TAs were essentially idle during lessons.

### 2.3.2.3 Which pupils did TAs and teachers work with?

The pre-intervention observations of adults' activity in the classroom were very much in line with findings from the DISS project: TAs tended to work with low achieving pupils and those with SEN (61% for all observations; though 82% for secondary TAs only); and opportunities to work with high attaining pupils were rare (see Table 7).

*I very rarely...we [TAs] very rarely...get the opportunity to work with even the middle groups and particularly not the high ability groups.*

Primary TA

*If I'm perfectly honest, in my experience, when you walk into a classroom...99% of the time you'll find that the group you end working with is the low ability group.*

Primary TA

However, in perhaps one of the most significant findings from this project, by the post-intervention stage primary TAs were spending over half their time working with middle and high attaining pupils (59%). In secondary schools, TAs continued to support low attaining pupils and those with SEN, though it should be noted that setting was used in all secondary schools and TAs were rarely, if ever, deployed to work with the top sets. However, as in primary classrooms, TAs in secondary classrooms were more likely to work with pupils (in this case, a mix) other than the low attaining pupils and those with SEN.

**Table 7**

	Primary		Secondary		Total	
	Pre-intv	Post-intv	Pre-intv	Post-intv	Pre-intv	Post-intv
High attainment	24 (7%)	51 (26%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	24 (5%)	51 (18%)
Middle attainment	118 (34%)	64 (33%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	120 (26%)	64 (22%)
Low attainment/SEN	191 (54%)	68 (35%)	98 (82%)	46 (47%)	289 (61%)	114 (39%)
Mixed attainment	18 (5%)	10 (5%)	19 (16%)	51 (53%)	37 (8%)	61 (21%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>351 (100%)</b>	<b>193 (100%)</b>	<b>119 (100%)</b>	<b>97 (100%)</b>	<b>470 (100%)</b>	<b>290 (100%)</b>

These changes to the ways teachers and TA worked in the classroom had a knock-on effect in terms of the type of pupils who received more contact from teachers. As TAs worked more often with middle and high attaining pupils, or a mix of all pupils (as they did in a total of 61% of observations), it created the opportunity for teachers to spend more time working with low attaining pupils and those with SEN.

*[TA] was always with the lower group. You very rarely see that now.*  
Primary SENCo

*That's how our role has always been perceived: you get sat with the lower ability and you constantly work with them. Well, that doesn't happen now with [teacher] and I. I interacted with the tops, she then had the opportunity as well to go and sit with the lower ability.*  
Primary TA

As the comments from the post-intervention phase above show, breaking the conventional and ingrained models of TA deployment helped teachers challenge their own practice and consider how the classroom could be organised more effectively in order to ensure that pupils receive equal amounts of teacher time across the school week, and thereby mitigate some of the negative effects of having too much adult support (e.g. dependence). This was the experience described in particular by primary school staff.

*It doesn't matter what level they are, they will always get me at some point in the week and [TA] at some point in the week; and my focus children will probably get a little bit more of me... [And] everyone has a chance to work independently.*  
Primary teacher

*I think for me personally, I need to make sure that the TA's not always working with the same group. I try to do that more, but that's something that I need to get my head round a bit more, so that I'm working across the board more.*  
Primary teacher

*It is nice to work with other groups. I think for that bottom group as well, it's probably nice to get rid of me for a session, because they must get bored, mustn't they?! And they do get reliant as well on one person.*  
Primary TA

The process of changing TA deployment also reminded teachers that they are responsible for the learning of *all* pupils in the class; or as it states in the SEN Code of Practice, in

italics for greater emphasis, 'all teachers are teachers of children with special educational needs' (DfES, 2001). The alternative models of TA deployment introduced through the project greatly improved and enriched teachers' understanding of the learning needs and progress of low attaining pupils and those with SEN, who previously worked more often with the TA than the teacher.

*[Teacher] has said to me: 'I know my children inside out this year. Previous years I could tell you probably the ones at the bottom I would not have necessarily known as well as the other children; whereas I know those children inside out this year, because I've worked with them consistently as well through the year'.*

Primary SENCo

*[The project has] actually made me more aware of how TAs can be used in a more productive way. Rather than sticking [TA] with the lower attaining [pupils]... I've really enjoyed sitting with specific groups through either literacy or maths...because I get so much more feedback... By the end of the month I've seen and sat with everybody. That's been so great, so beneficial. So that's a real positive.*

Primary teacher

*[Teacher] had written all her reports over the holiday and she said: 'For the first year ever I was able to sit down and I was able to write those reports on all the less able, confidently; because I'm aware of their ability, their strengths and their weaknesses. Whereas, in the past I've always had to go to the TA and say, 'OK, give me an update. Tell me what they can and can't do'. But she's totally aware of it now, and that's because of this complete change in my role.*

Primary TA

#### 2.3.2.4 TAs and teachers working with pupils: task differentiation

As part of the structured observations, researchers noted the types of tasks TAs supported pupils with. The tasks were categorised in terms of being the same, differentiated or different from the task the majority of the pupils in the classroom were doing at the time of the observation. The observation results, shown in Table 8, reveal that, overall, TAs mainly worked with the pupils on the same task as their peers (81%). In only 19% of instances were TAs observed supporting pupils with a differentiated task.

These results are very much in line with what we found in the DISS project. At the post-intervention phase, there were proportionately fewer instances of pupils being supported by a TA to do a non-differentiated task. Instead, there were instances of some primary teachers giving pupils a different task (e.g. from the same subject, but a different topic), and more instances of secondary teachers producing differentiated material.

**Table 8**

	Primary		Secondary		Total	
	Pre-intv	Post-intv	Pre-intv	Post-intv	Pre-intv	Post-intv
Non-differentiated task	278 (75%)	125 (60%)	133 (94%)	82 (85%)	411 (81%)	207 (68%)
Task-related/differentiated	91 (25%)	50 (24%)	7 (5%)	15 (15%)	98 (19%)	65 (21%)
Different task	0 (0%)	33 (16%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (0%)	33 (11%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>369 (100%)</b>	<b>208 (100%)</b>	<b>141 (100%)</b>	<b>97 (100%)</b>	<b>510 (100%)</b>	<b>305 (100%)</b>

The pre-intervention interviews were helpful in revealing the extent to which teachers – particularly those in secondary – differentiated tasks (e.g. providing a worksheet that is visibly different from the one given to the majority of the class).

*I do a lot of differentiated starters, where, for example, students might do a cloze exercise; some of them are doing sort of more complex [tasks...and in that case [TA] would obviously be working with the low ability students whose work is differentiated, but is not different.*

Secondary teacher

*Maybe this is wrong...I know some people do [but] I wouldn't produce different sheets for different kids; just because it then obviously singles out certain kids... I just think then you start to get an atmosphere and it's difficult.*

Secondary teacher

*Some of the teachers...won't differentiate or anything like; they'll just say, "Will you work with that child?", or something like that... They don't know how to differentiate, some of the teachers.*

Secondary TA

As the TA's comments above suggest, in many cases teachers relied on the TA to differentiate tasks verbally.

*Because these [pupils] have to be level threes...I've got to pitch [the lesson content] high, and they've [low attaining pupils] got to have the support there with the language to be able to access it.*

Primary teacher

*I don't do that [differentiate] every lesson, again, because I haven't got time... I kind of use [TA] to do that for me.*

Secondary teacher

Despite TAs often being deployed to deliver interventions and booster sessions in schools, there were no instances observed of this taking place in classrooms. This, as observations conducted for the DISS project showed, is more likely to occur away from the classroom.

The post-intervention interviews were not particularly instructive in terms of gauging change over the school year with regard to the tasks TAs supported pupils with. However, it is likely that the improvements made to TA preparation described earlier

were likely to have had an impact in this area. In other words, it is less the nature of the task being supported, but the quality of preparation beforehand that is the key factor in evaluating change. We argue that this, when combined with the more effective patterns of TA deployment within lessons, can lead to more effective support for pupils.

The picture derived from the pre-intervention interview data was that differentiation was typically done 'on the fly' by TAs in the classroom, having had little or no sight of the task or lesson plan prior to the lesson. By the end of the project, teachers provided TAs with more detailed information before the lesson, often supplemented with some conversation or discussion. In this way, TAs were clearer about their role in the lesson and therefore less reactive in their interactions with pupils. If verbal differentiation from TAs remained the predominant way in which pupils received differentiated material at the end of the project, as it appeared to be at the start, then improved preparation is more likely to result in this too being more effective than if TAs continued to enter lessons blind.

#### *2.3.2.5 TAs working away from the classroom*

As noted earlier, 14% of all pre- and post-intervention observations were made in contexts away from in the classroom, and the majority of these (79%) were made in primary schools. These observations were roughly evenly split between TAs working with pupils and doing something else (e.g. tidying). The number of instances recorded of TAs working with pupils was too low to allow any meaningful interpretation of these data, although we note that, in such contexts, primary school TAs worked predominantly with groups of pupils. At the start of the project, TAs were observed working with low attaining pupils and those with SEN outside the classroom, but in line with the in-class observations, by the end of the project, TAs worked more often with middle attaining pupils.

In the pre-intervention interviews, primary school staff referred to withdrawing pupils from the classroom in terms of providing them with the opportunity and space to receive 'catch-up' input with TAs or work on a separate task.

*[Speaking as if the teacher] "In my mental warm-up I'm going to be working with the whole class on this, but I want you [the TA] to extract [pupil X, Y and Z] because my assessment from yesterday showed that they did not get such-and-such. So could you extract that group...and could you please reiterate yesterday's teaching?"*

Primary school leader

*To give those children just a bit more space and for those children that are lower ability, it's confidence; it's giving them that quiet time outside so that they can kind of speak out loud in front of other children.*

Primary teacher

However, the view expressed by some TAs regarding withdrawal was described in terms of a strategy used by teachers to cope with the pressure of getting through the curriculum and ensuring the majority of pupils in the class attained their expected levels of progress. TAs were seen as vital to managing and supporting pupils who may otherwise get left behind.



*[TAs] are needed by the teachers to remove those low attaining pupils and those with SEN] children from the classroom to go and work with them one-to-one. To basically just take them out of the class so that the teacher can focus on the rest; and it's just part of our role... I suppose teachers are focused, aren't they, on levels and pushing their top ones, pushing the middle ones; the lower ones can be a bit disruptive and can't focus for very long and it's very much, "Get them out".*

Primary TA

The problem is that removing pupils from a lesson in order to provide remedial input had the effect of both pupil and TA missing lesson content, and making their reintegration back into class more problematic – an issue identified in the DISS project and described in Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012).

*It's awkward sometimes...if there's a child who hasn't understood something in maths, instead of them doing the normal input they might...I might have to sit outside with them and go over what we'd done the day before. So when we come in, I might have missed it [the lesson input].*

Primary TA

When working with pupils away from the classroom, primary school TAs were very often observed delivering intervention or booster sessions for low attaining pupils and/or those with SEN.

*Every afternoon there will be interventions... Not in class... So you've got: Springboard, which is a scheme of work; Catch-Up is a scheme of work; Number Box is again a scheme of work.*

Primary TA

*I spend mornings in class supporting as directed by the teacher. I also pick up some children for Precision Teaching or any other quick interventions first thing, before registration. In afternoons, I work away from classroom taking interventions.*

Primary TA

We noted above that TAs were very often given the responsibility for planning and assessing these sessions, and this remained the case at the post-intervention stage. It remained a matter of concern for some TAs that teachers were still distanced from the learning of some of their most needy pupils.

*My only concerns regarding deployment of TAs are that too often booster and intervention programmes are left solely down to TAs to plan, deliver with little or no qualified teacher input.*

Secondary TA

As described above, involvement in the project had led to teachers working more often with low attaining pupils and those with SEN, and they thereby developed a greater understanding of their needs and progress. The models of deployment that enabled this reduced instances of the most obvious form of pupil-teacher separation – pupils working in physically different locations to their teacher and peers. The comment below captures the importance of what we might call a more faithful model of inclusion; that is, pupils being educated in the mainstream classroom.

*Having [TA] in the classroom...was the one I felt the most uncomfortable about doing... I'm so used to saying, 'Goodbye. See you later', and off they [TA and pupils] would go... I didn't feel that I had a real grasp on where those lowers were last year compared to this year.*

Researcher: Is that because you're spending more time with the lower performing pupils?

*Definitely. Because they're in the classroom; they're not saying goodbye.*

Primary teacher

### **2.3.3 Key findings on Deployment**

#### ***School level deployment***

- School leadership teams had thought more strategically about the purpose of the TA role and expectations in terms of pupil outcomes
- The positive experiences of participation in the project prompted schools to formalise new models of TA deployment and implement wider changes in the following school year
- Schools brought to the surface and had begun to challenge entrenched and unhelpful mindsets towards the use of TAs in general, and in relation to the provision for pupils with SEN.
- The creation of time for teachers and TAs to meet had a positive effect on participants' perceptions of TA preparedness

#### ***Classroom level deployment***

- TAs worked more often with middle and high attaining pupils
- Secondary school TAs moved from working mainly with individuals to working with small groups, and primary school TAs' time spent more time working with individuals.
- TAs did more roving, creating the opportunity for teachers to spend more time working with low attaining pupils and those with SEN
- Teachers had reduced – from almost a third to less than fifth – the proportion of time in which TAs were 'passive inactive' during lessons
- Alternative models of deployment reduced pupil-teacher/pupil-peer separation; pupils spent more time in the mainstream classroom
- The alternative models of TA deployment greatly improved and enriched teachers' understanding of the learning needs and progress of low attaining pupils and those with SEN.

## **2.4 TA Practice**

The final section of the pre-intervention audit covered TAs' practice; that is, their interactions with pupils. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of one to five (one being the lowest) the extent to which TAs' interactions with pupils had a high to low emphasis on behaviour, instruction and pupils' approaches to learning. School leaders were asked to give an indication of TA practice at the school level, while the teachers and the TAs who worked in their classes were asked to provide details at the classroom level.

In order to corroborate the extent to which the perceptions of staff, as shown through the audits, reflected the actual TA practice in classrooms, we made use of qualitative observation notes on TAs' interactions with pupils, which were made at the same time as the structured observations. Here, we bring together these data with comments from the pre-intervention interviews in order to describe the situation at the pre-intervention stage, before using the post-intervention observations and interview data, plus open-ended comments from the audits, to describe how the development trials changed TAs' practice.

The process of verifying the perceptions revealed in the audits focussed on the types of TA-to-pupil talk found to be ineffective in the DISS project (Rubie-Davies *et al.*, 2010; Radford *et al.*, 2011), and therefore likely to account (at least in part) for the negative relationship between TA support and pupil progress shown in the DISS project findings. Using this previous work from the DISS project as a basis, the key features of effective and ineffective types of talk of interest in this study are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2 The main features of TA talk**

<b>Effective features of TA talk</b>	<b>Less effective features of TA talk</b>
Opening-up talk (e.g. questions and statements to promote cognitive focus and task engagement)	Closing down talk (e.g. closed questions and leading statements; supplying answers)
Providing accurate and clear explanations of instructions, processes and concepts	Providing inaccurate or vague explanations of instructions, processes and concepts
Checking pupil understanding	Stereo teaching (e.g. repeating, more or less exactly, teacher talk, moments after teacher has spoken)
References to prior learning or knowledge	
Dealing with off-task behaviour and ensuring on-task behaviour	Emphasising task completion rather than learning and understanding

### **2.4.1 TAs' talk to pupils regarding behaviour**

At the pre-intervention stage, the majority of school leaders and TAs (both 70%) indicated that TAs' talk to pupils had a high emphasis on managing behaviour (e.g., scores 4 or 5), whereas the majority of teachers felt that the emphasis was slightly less; 45% of teachers chose scores of 4 or 5.

The impression derived from classroom observations suggested that TAs dealt with off-task behaviour and frequently tried to ensure on-task behaviour. TAs dealt with behaviour more often during teacher input, compared with instances during the main learning task, and was somewhat more noticeable in secondary schools. Indeed, we noted

earlier that TAs in secondary schools felt that behaviour management, rather than learning, was the primary purpose of their role in classrooms. The comment below was fairly typical of TAs' descriptions of the type of talk they engaged in with pupils regarding behaviour and supporting the teacher with classroom management.

*If there was a bit of trouble going on I would have a quiet little word. You know, if they're still not then maybe I'd take them outside and say, "Calm down. What's going on?"... "Deep breath. Let's go back and start again".*

Secondary TA

#### **2.4.2 TAs' talk to pupils regarding instruction**

Again, at the pre-intervention stage, the majority of school leaders, TAs and teachers (90%, 80% and 70% respectively) believed that TAs' talk to pupils had a high emphasis on instruction (e.g. scores 4 or 5).

The impression obtained from observations was that – and as predicted – TA-to-pupil talk typically reflected two of the main findings found in the DISS project analyses: firstly, that TAs tend to prioritise task completion over learning and understanding; and secondly, that TAs tend to 'close down' the talk to pupils, rather than open it up.

In primary schools, the tendency towards 'stereo teaching' was particularly noticeable, most likely as a result of the TA sitting next to pupils during the teacher input. Stereo teaching describes the phenomenon, particularly noticeable in primary classrooms during observations for the DISS project, whereby intermittent talk from the TA to the pupil effectively separates the pupil from the teacher during the teacher's delivery to the whole class. In such instances, the pupil was in effect hearing the voices of two adults talking simultaneously, very often about the same thing. In secondary schools, TAs tended to situate themselves at the side of the room whilst the teacher addressed the class, and so were often too far away to have such interactions.

Observations revealed few attempts overall to open up pupil talk by TAs, though TAs had fewer opportunities than teachers to engage in this sort of talk (e.g. when the teacher is addressing the whole class, of which the TA is part, this type of more expansive talk is less appropriate). Therefore, interactions with pupils (typically those with SEN and low attaining pupils) tended to consist of simplifying language and making the teacher's talk more accessible.

*Rephrasing; trying to simplify it a little bit for them.*

Primary TA

*It's sort of like repeating what the teacher said, but...bringing it down to their level. You know, like maybe changing the wording a little bit or something like that.*

Secondary TA

The interview data revealed that compared with TAs, school leaders were more aware of TAs' tendency to provide answers or heavy prompts, rather than making the most of opportunities for learning. In some cases, this ran counter to whole school aims to develop independent learning skills.

*The teacher's trying to see if they've learnt anything, whereas the TA's trying to see if they've done anything.*

Secondary SENCo

*You get that tension, because you've got a teacher who's trying to develop this learning power and this independence, and you've got an LSA who's not schooled in it, who is giving them the answers.*

Secondary school leader

However, in some schools, it was clear that there was a wider 'battle', as one SENCo described it, to encourage teachers to acknowledge and address the communicated and uncommunicated messages they give to TAs about their contribution to the classroom.

*Often it's not through any fault of the teaching assistant, but that the teacher isn't quite there yet in being able to see what's the important thing to conclude at the end of a lesson about how the children were learning... We're finding lots of directions [from teachers to TAs] about task completion, because teachers are still in that mindset.*

Secondary SENCo

As far as TAs were concerned, prompting and (on occasions) providing pupils with answers to the teacher's questions during her input was associated with facilitating inclusion.

*I'll often give him the answer, suggest it, simply to get him to put his hand up so that [the teacher] will ask him, so we can encourage him to participate.*

Primary TA

The intentions behind this were well meaning, but as another TA pointed out, there were obvious concerns in cases where this practice had become the norm.

*I think there's a tendency to do too much for them too, which I see; and that's why [the DISS project] findings didn't surprise me too much. The year before I was with a visually impaired Year 9 boy...in the first couple of weeks, he said to me, "What's the answer to this?... Aren't you going to tell me?... My helper always tells me".*

Secondary TA

Overall, observations revealed few instances of TAs providing substantive explanations, though when they did, explanations were almost always accurate and, for the best part, clear. There were instances where, in the main learning task context, TAs used the same explanation given by the teacher earlier during their input, which was positive in terms of consistency.

Attempts to check pupil understanding were also limited, not just in number, but in depth. The context in which TAs checked understanding most was during the main learning task, so although there was greater opportunity for more in depth probing and clarification of learning, it was generally not taken. However, this is not to suggest that every check a TA made needed to be pursued in detail.

### **2.4.3 TAs' talk to pupils regarding pupils' approaches to learning**

'Approaches to learning' were defined as the types of talk that help pupils to become more confident, to work independently, and motivated to learn. At the pre-intervention stage, most teachers and TAs (60% and 70% respectively) felt that TAs' talk to pupils had a high emphasis on developing pupils' approaches to learning, (e.g. scores 4 or 5). School leaders, however, did not agree, with only 20% choosing the same scores.

The reality of the prevalence of this facet of TA-to-pupil talk, as revealed through the classroom observation, was more in line with the view of school leaders. There was evidence of TAs promoting pupil independence by withdrawing more often and using prompts to remind pupils of alternative strategies of self-help (e.g. checking that they had thoroughly read the question, or asking a peer for help). TA also gave lots of praise, which could be seen as helping to build pupil confidence. In schools where such practices were less common, there was at least an understanding that TAs needed to develop skills that allowed them to promote independence.

*We're in danger of not making some of these children independent enough...the TA's always there. This is where it comes down to the questioning, I think, and the TA being able to walk away from them and let them have a go at what they're doing rather than constantly being there all the time.*

Primary SENCo

### **2.4.4 Changes to TAs' practice**

At the post-intervention stage, school leaders, teachers and TAs remained largely unchanged in their views on TAs' interactions with pupils. The audit scores are not particularly instructive in terms of describing the changes to TA practice that took place over the year, although the TAs' role had remained a largely pedagogical one; there had been no significant challenge to the fundamental nature and purpose of TA deployment, which was raised as part of the intervention. There was a sense that there could be resistance to change because TAs' practice was so ingrained. The comments below exemplify TAs' 'hard-wired' mindset.

*TAs aren't likely to leave their comfort zone of behaviour, motivation and repeating of chunks of instructions.*

Secondary SENCo

*I think there's still a bit of a tendency...I know when I speak to [TA], she feels really responsible to get the students to do their work and there is more focus on task completion than the questioning. So I think it should be probably emphasised...the fact that we talked about the key learning being more critical than actually getting five questions out of five done. I do think that needs to be a stronger focus definitely.*

Secondary teacher

Encouragingly, however, the post-intervention interviews revealed that involvement in the project appeared to have a positive effect on improving the quality of TAs' interactions.

*I've picked up improved language and support and independence of pupils... [TA] has just come on in leaps and bounds with her confidence with her questioning. Because she'll often listen to how I question the children and then I notice then she'll use that with the groups and individual children.*

Primary teacher

*We've had two meetings with [school leader] and we've looked at the importance of questioning. Every TA has been given a selection of prompt questioning words and what might be appropriate, what might not be so appropriate, and how we can broaden – depending on the topic or the theme that we're looking at – to stimulate the children; not to give them answers.*

Primary TA

*Without realising it I was quite often using closed questions... A lot of the time, because the kids that I'm working with often struggle, you just want them to feel like they're progressing or achieving. But actually when you think about it, for that minute or second when you've virtually given them the answer they might be feeling a bit better, but if you look at the big picture, it's not helping their progress.*

Secondary TA

#### **2.4.5 Key findings on TA practice**

- The quality of TAs' questioning in their interactions with pupils improved
- TAs promoted pupil independence by withdrawing more often and reminding pupils to use self-help strategies.

### **2.5 The impact of the project on individuals who took part**

To conclude the results section, we present some of the comments from the post-intervention interviews and open-ended comments from the post-intervention audits, describing the impact the project had on the individuals who participated in it.

#### **2.5.1 The impact on teachers**

As we have seen, challenging existing models of TA deployment, then thinking through and implementing alternative models challenged teachers to evaluate the impact of their own practice. Several teachers acknowledged the way in which the experience of taking part in the project had given them the opportunity to do this.

*It has made me take a step back and be a bit more thoughtful... Are we doing things to the best that we can, as a whole team?... How can we change what we're doing to make it better?... I think we've got a lot of really good things in place, but I still think there are things we can change.*

Primary teacher

*I think this has been good because it's made you analyse yourself and what you do, which is always a good thing. You get into habits, don't you, and you don't think about what you're doing.*

Secondary teacher

Involvement in the project had provided teachers with the opportunity to develop a meaningful understanding of the TA role and the issues associated with working as a TA. This can be seen as particularly valuable in terms of highlighting problems and identifying ways in which teachers can ameliorate the effects of their own practice on TAs.

*If I'm totally honest, I hadn't really thought before how difficult it must be for an LSA to go between subject to subject to subject, teacher to teacher to teacher, and sit in a classroom not really knowing what's going on... I guess that's the big thing that's probably come out of it for me really, is that awareness.*

Secondary teacher

### **2.5.2 The impact on TAs**

Perhaps one of the most significant areas of impact that involvement in the EDTA project achieved was in terms of the impact on TAs. In particular, the profile and status of TAs had been raised, and their confidence had increased, not least as a result of improved preparation and a much clearer understanding of their role and what they were expected to achieve.

*I think I've got a clearer understanding of what my role is. And how wasted I can be if I'm not used properly – either because I don't understand what I'm doing, or the teacher's not using me, or maybe there's not even a child in that class that needs me... There's a lot more discussion of what's expected of us and how we should be consistent...which I feel has really helped.*

Secondary TA

*I think what has been really beneficial for us is the change in [TA] from a TA who I think was probably dissatisfied with her job – wasn't enjoying it, didn't really know what she was doing; just coming in and going through the motions – to now. She's always smiling, loves doing what she's doing; loves being in the class with [the teacher]; is prepared.*

Primary SENCo

*I think the teaching assistants absolutely loved being developed in this way and felt it was very worthwhile... They're using skills that they never knew they had before.*

Primary school leader

*The more involved in the classroom my TA has become – team teaching, feeding back to children their next steps – the more respect the children have shown towards them. Better working relationships have been developed.*

Primary teacher

Although it was not the aim of this project to test whether the trials had improved learning outcomes for pupils, it was the view of a number of participants that this was



much more likely having had the opportunity to examine and address the critical issues of TA effectiveness via the project invention.

*I've totally enjoyed it; and [TAs'] enjoyed it, and I know the kids are way better off having two people that are confident... And I will do more – I will do more of this. Yes, it's just great. It's been fun.*

Secondary teacher

*I believe that when I completed my first audit I expressed concerns about a change in my deployment (i.e. spending time supporting subjects other than humanities). In fact, it has proved to be a positive and enjoyable experience. Working outside my 'comfort zone' with different teachers has, I believe, given me a chance to reflect on my role and improve my effectiveness as a TA (hopefully).*

Secondary TA

### **2.5.3 Key findings on impact**

- The process of challenging existing models of TA deployment and developing alternatives prompted teachers to evaluate the impact of own practice and develop a meaningful understanding of the TA role
- The project trials helped raise the status of TAs and greatly improve their confidence.

### 3. Conclusions

#### ***3.1 The DISS project***

A key conclusion from the DISS project was that there was a negative relationship between TA support and pupils' academic progress, and this reflected an independent effect of support by TAs. Children who received the most support from TAs made significantly less progress than similar pupils who received less support. This is a troubling and, at first glance, surprising finding, though one that is understandable and explainable when we look more deeply at the ways in which TAs are actually deployed in schools. As one secondary teacher said to us: "So kids that get help do worse? Well, that's ridiculous! But actually, when you think about it, it makes obvious sense why they do".

The extensive observation and other forms of data collection in the DISS project showed that at present TAs have a frontline pedagogical role, but an ineffective one. We concluded that TAs' impact and practice need to be seen in terms of decisions made about their deployment, preparedness and their conditions of employment – things that are outside their control.

There was, therefore, a clear and consistent message coming out of the DISS project that a fundamental rethink was required if schools are going to get the best use from their TAs – and help pupils. There is a legitimate question, given what we know from the DISS project, concerning whether TAs *should* have a pedagogical role. There are alternatives we could consider that might, for example, be reflected in having an indirect effect on pupil learning by helping with: supporting teachers and routine tasks; supporting classroom organisation, (e.g. to help with controlling off-task behaviour); and supporting the development of 'soft' skills like confidence, motivation, and attitudes toward learning.

But if, as we found, the most common approach in schools is to assign TAs to a pedagogical role, then the nature of this pedagogical role needs careful thought if the negative effects found in the DISS project are to be avoided. Clarity is needed over what is expected of TAs. We have seen that TAs have inadvertently become primary educators of pupils they support, especially pupils with SEN, but it is unreasonable to expect TAs to produce similar learning outcomes as teachers. Problems emerge when TAs are given an ill-defined remedial role.

The DISS project findings also indicated that we need to address the teacher's role as well. We will have to work through a more inclusive pedagogical strategy in which teachers deal with the learning of all pupils and take responsibility for lesson-by-lesson curriculum planning for *all* pupils in the class, including those supported by TAs. Overall, the aim must be to reduce separation between teacher and pupils with SEN.

The fundamental review we propose will need to involve teachers and TAs, but it is important that the review is conducted throughout the whole school, and appropriate action taken.

### **3.2 The Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants project**

The powerful and unignorable DISS project findings provided the background to the present EDTA project. We worked in collaboration with 40 teachers and TAs in ten schools in two local authorities to develop and evaluate alternative strategies to TA preparedness, deployment and practice. We achieved this via development trials on these three components, conducted by participating schools. The idea was to arrive at creative solutions using existing resources, replicating the likely scenario that any centrally driven reform to TA deployment in general, that might come from government, is unlikely to come with funding attached, given the austerity measures currently affecting public services in the UK. The ultimate aim was to use this work as the basis for a handbook of guidance for schools to use. The way in which the project followed on from the findings from the large-scale DISS study, and the use of the Wider Pedagogical Role model devised in the DISS project, gave the current project a strong degree of veracity and a clear rationale for action.

Many of the participants in the EDTA project felt that the way the research linked to the large-scale DISS project, and the empirically sound explanatory model that was derived from it, gave credibility and a sound basis to the collaborative work conducted with schools. This process of involvement allowed a long-term iterative process of research-led development trials, followed by reflection and further strengthening of key conclusions, so that we finally arrived at firm, ground-tested strategies, thematically linked, and connected to overall pedagogical aims and policy.

There was a good deal of productive work over the school year. In terms of ***preparedness***, schools found that creating time for teachers and TAs to meet had a positive effect. Primary schools created liaison time by changing TAs' hours of work, though this was still a challenge for secondary schools. The quality and clarity of teachers' lesson plans improved and plans were shared with TAs and supplemented with daily discussion, which made explicit the role and tasks of the TA for each lesson. Involvement in the project also encouraged some schools to instigate performance management processes for TAs.

With regard to ***deployment***, at the school level, senior leadership teams had thought more strategically about the purpose of the TA role and expectations in terms of pupil outcomes. Many conducted some form of audit of current practices to establish the need for, and the extent of, change required. Overall, attention had been turned to how TAs could 'add value' to the teacher's role rather than replace it. Schools formalised new models of TA deployment and implemented wider changes for the following school year (2011/12). In some schools, TAs were used as 'advocates for change', selling the benefits of doing things differently to the wider school staff. Overall, schools had challenged entrenched, unhelpful mindsets towards the use of TAs and provision for pupils with SEN.

There were marked and productive changes to the deployment of TAs at the classroom level. TAs worked more often with middle and high attaining pupils, and teachers spent more time with low attaining and SEN pupils. This greatly improved and enriched teachers' understanding of these pupils and their needs. Careful thought had been given to less productive uses of TA time; for example, teachers reduced the proportion of time in which TAs were passive during lessons, and TAs more often remained in the

classroom, thus reducing pupil-teacher/pupil-peer separation. Attention had also been given to alternatives to adult support, for example, through collaborative group work and 'self help' strategies.

With regard to *practice*, there was good work at the school level on changing TAs' talk with pupils. This included encouraging TAs to consider when *not* to talk, and giving pupils time to respond. Perhaps for the first time, TAs were encouraged to adopt the pedagogical goal that interactions with pupils should be about understanding, *not* task completion. TA practice developed to support formative assessment and expansive education initiatives. At the classroom level, there were two key developments: firstly, questioning frameworks to help pupils remain in charge of and responsible for their own learning; and secondly, strategies to help pupils become independent learners, thereby reducing dependency on adult support.

As a result of their involvement in the EDTA project, schools made better use of their TAs. This was seen, for example, in the marked reduction in the passive behaviour of TAs, particularly during teacher-led whole class input sessions. The project helped call into question the established practice in schools that had developed over time, and which, on reflection, can be seen to be a waste of resources. By rethinking the use of TAs, schools were increasing the active, productive uses of teaching and support staff.

Those involved in the project called into question how TAs were deployed, so they were far less likely to spend time just interacting with pupils with SEN or those having difficulties in learning, usually on a one-to-one or small group basis. By the end of the project, TAs worked with middle- and high-attaining groups, or more often took on a roving role, thereby allowing the teacher to devote attention, at least for some of the time, on those pupils in most need.

The picture derived from the pre-intervention interview data was that differentiation was typically done 'on the fly' by TAs, who had little or no advanced sight of lesson plans. By the end of the project, teachers provided TAs with more detailed information prior lessons, often supplemented with some conversation or discussion. In this way, TAs were clearer about their role in the lesson and, therefore, more proactive in, and confident about, their interactions with pupils.

We were delighted with the coherent picture that emerged as a result of the EDTA study, in terms of the ways in which schools and teachers changed the preparation, deployment and practice of TAs. Our collaborative work with schools has helped extend the Wider Pedagogical Role model and, as a result of this project, we have been able to identify valuable recommendations for schools, teachers and TAs. It was gratifying to collaboratively develop and validate these recommendations with the participating schools. As mentioned, these recommendations are currently being organised into a handbook of guidance to be published later in 2012 (Russell, Webster and Blatchford, in press).

We were also very impressed with the engagement of school staff in the project, their support, and their willingness to trial alternative ways of working with TAs. It needs to be emphasised that there is an understandable resistance to efforts to change the current status quo regarding the use of TAs – where TAs have a largely remedial role with pupils with SEN. It was, therefore, encouraging that school staff felt empowered to

fundamentally review their methods of deploying TAs. As a result, there were widespread changes in schools, and at the local authority (LA) meetings and school visits we shared with participants, there was a constant refrain that there would be 'no going back to how things were'.

Successful change in the project seemed more likely when the headteacher or deputy headteacher was involved in the LA meetings and was able to validate, sanction and encourage the fundamental review process. In fact, it is our experience that in order to bring about the necessary change, it is vital that the change process is led and driven by the headteacher and SLT. It is not enough, as some headteachers have assumed, to assign the job of reform to the SENCo or other member of staff, especially if they are not members of the SLT. It can put such staff in a difficult position and some decisions, for example, those concerning TAs' contracts, will need to be handled in any case by the headteacher. In this sense, reassessing the use of TAs is part of the broader process of school improvement.

The experience was professionally important for all staff. Teachers were more aware of their responsibilities to pupils and TAs, and it was clear that the TAs who took part felt more valued, appreciated, and more confident in their role and abilities. The experience was liberating for some of them, because they realised that they were now working with pupils in more effective ways, as part of a co-ordinated staff approach. Teachers, too, questioned earlier assumptions and moved on professionally in productive ways. The experience was also important at the school level; headteachers and senior managers were confident that the changes made were having a positive effect on the school.

The experience of change can be challenging. In some schools there were some difficult decisions made concerning TA deployment. Reassessing habitual ways of operating meant that some convenient practice had to be challenged and not every TA was willing or capable of changing. In one school at least this led to difficult decisions about TA contracts.

The findings from the EDTA project have significance for initial teacher training (ITT) and continuing professional development. The DISS project showed that many teachers were unprepared for working with TAs, and it is important that more should be done to ensure that organisers of ITT and professional development courses devote more attention to changes needed to current practice. The work of the EDTA project has gone some way to remediating the problems uncovered through the DISS project, which we argue, are the underlying causes for the initially surprising, but ultimately explainable, negative effects of TA support on pupil learning. We also believe that there is enough evidence from both the DISS and EDTA projects to suggest that some practitioners – from NQTs to experienced teachers – would benefit from retraining to change their views on TAs and their own roles, especially towards pupils with SEN.

The project has extended the messages arising out of the DISS project and has given fresh impetus to the need for policy change. It is worth noting that the EDTA project did not ask schools to examine their SEN provision *per se*, although choices relating to how money attached to SEN statements is spent on TA support were questioned by some school leaders in light of the known concerns about the cost-effectiveness of this approach. With respect to the Green Paper on SEN, it is worth saying something on this issue, given that existing service delivery relies so heavily on the employment and use of

TAs. The Green Paper states – rightly in our view – that school leaders are best placed to make decisions about: a) how children with SEN receive “the best quality teaching” (DfE, 2011); and b) TA deployment and responsibilities. Local problems required locally derived solutions. But if the Government is serious about this, then we feel that it must address the crucial issue of TA deployment at the national level, and clarify once and for all what the broad role of TAs should be, and what it should *not* be. This is essential if schools are to establish consistency and avoid the role ambiguity that has been a major consequence of the continued failure to fully address this issue.

The value of the EDTA project is that it has allowed us to go beyond identification of the problem concerning TA deployment, towards clear recommendations concerning how schools can change practice. In the current political climate, change seems ever more likely to be delegated to individual schools, and so we hope that our work is of assistance to headteachers looking for a framework for change.

The EDTA project is significant internationally too. It is becoming apparent that there are problems with the use of paraprofessionals in classrooms in other countries. Conversations with academics and policy makers from other countries has shown us that the use of TAs (or their equivalent in their countries) is growing, but as in England and Wales, largely taken for granted. We are aware of interest in support staff in schools in Australia, Italy, Sweden, Canada, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Cyprus, Malta, New Zealand and South Africa, as well as the USA. TAs, therefore, appear to be a growing part of the school workforce in many countries. There has been interest from policy makers in South Korea and Hong Kong, which, like other countries, have begun to consider the use of paraprofessionals in classrooms. They are interested in the DISS study because it is far in advance of any comparable research anywhere in the world, and provides clear messages about policy. We are delighted to now add the more positive findings from the EDTA project to this corpus of research.

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