Deployment of Teaching Assistants
Guidance Report

About the Education Endowment Foundation

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. We do this by supporting schools, colleges, and early years settings to improve teaching and learning through better use of evidence.

Acknowledgements

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Deployment of Teaching Assistants

Introduction

Teaching assistants (TAs) are crucial to the work of schools and colleges across England. Their contributions are invaluable, particularly for those pupils most in need of additional support.

The TA role is broad, changeable and context specific. Duties can include supporting pupils' readiness for learning, access to learning and recap of learning; assisting teachers in resourcing and delivering lessons; working in conjunction with families for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and leading interventions.

Many TAs play a role in supporting the inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools. This has become an area of increased responsibility for TAs as the number of pupils with SEND and complex needs continues to rise. TAs are widely seen as vital in helping schools maintain inclusivity despite resource and staffing constraints. This guidance report celebrates TAs' work in all these capacities through sharing research evidence that highlights the best of what they offer to their school communities.

However, the report also acknowledges the challenging reality that schools and colleges who value inclusion face: that supporting TAs to have maximum impact is often complex, involving a range of people and actions. To support inclusion, schools must focus on high-quality teaching as the greatest enabling factor to support all pupils - particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This requires intentional TA deployment, where TAs supplement - not replace - the teacher, as part of a learning environment that meets all pupils' needs.

For school leaders, this report identifies practices that can stand in the way of TAs' ability to help all pupils, including pupils with SEND, make progress. It also highlights research evidence that shows how good leadership decisions, including around effective implementation, can unleash the full potential of this workforce.

In line with common usage, we use the term 'teaching assistant' (TA) to cover equivalent classroom- and pupil-based paraprofessional roles, such as 'learning support assistant' and 'classroom assistant'. We also include 'higher level teaching assistants' in this definition.

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Introduction

What does this guidance cover?

This guidance report focuses on the deployment of TAs in mainstream primary and secondary schools. While the recommendations may also be applicable in special schools, alternative provision, early years settings, and colleges, it's likely that they will need to be interpreted differently to suit these contexts. The recommendations are drawn from the evidence base on TA deployment practices and how these can lead to improved pupil outcomes. This focus means that topics such as TA pay and working conditions are beyond the scope of this report.

Who is this guidance for?

Effective TA deployment is first and foremost a strategic issue.[1,2] Therefore, this guidance is aimed primarily at headteachers and other members of the senior leadership team (SLT) in both primary and secondary schools, as well as trust leaders in multi academy trusts.

Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos), who play a key role in leading inclusion in schools, should find the report a valuable resource that can prove central to supporting their vital work in schools.

Some sections of the report, notably those around deployment practices and strategies to support the learning of all pupils within the classroom, are relevant for all staff, including teachers and TAs.

Additional audiences who may find the guidance relevant include school governors, middle leaders, parents, and policymakers.

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Introduction

About this guidance report update

This is an update to a previous guidance report on the deployment of teaching assistants.[3] While many of the key messages remain the same, the updated recommendations have been created from a new review of the evidence and in consultation with an expert advisory panel.

This report draws from a review of the evidence on TAs from the EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit.[4] This looks at 52 studies identified from a systematic review,[5] guided by research questions based on the following themes: how leaders can manage and support TAs, how teachers and TAs can work to support pupils (including pupils with SEND), and which practices are effective in supporting these pupils. Additional evidence sources were considered including a previously commissioned 'SEND in Mainstream Schools' evidence review.[6] Further details of these can be found in the evidence to decision framework which sits alongside this report.

Where appropriate, this report also draws on evidence from the wider suite of EEF evidence reviews. Insights into current practice have been drawn from a range of available recent research and from the input of the guidance panel. A full list of references can be found at the end of this report and in the evidence to decision framework.

An 'Evidence to Decision' (EtD) framework is a structured and systematic approach used in evidence-based decision-making processes to ensure that decisions are transparent, consistent, and based on the best available evidence.

Summary of recommendations

Effective practices

1 **Deploy TAs in ways that enable all pupils to access high-quality teaching**

TAs should supplement – not replace – the teacher. This means that pupils who struggle most should spend at least as much time with the teacher as other pupils, if not more.

- Ensure all pupils have access to high-quality teaching with their class teacher.
- Ensure working relationships between teachers and TAs meet all pupils' needs, with the teacher retaining responsibility for all pupils.
- Support teachers and TAs to identify practices which inhibit pupil learning and engage in effective alternatives.

2 **Deploy TAs to scaffold learning and to develop pupils' independence**

Leaders should ensure TAs are prepared to engage in scaffolding practices that support pupils' learning and ability to learn independently. Supporting pupil independence should be a key consideration of TA deployment.

- Equip TAs with a range of scaffolding strategies appropriate to the age, subject, and specific individual needs of pupils they work with.
- Remove scaffolds over time to promote independent learning, with teachers supporting TAs to make those judgements.
- Ensure pupils have the opportunity to attempt tasks independently before intervening appropriately when they can't proceed.

3 **Deploy TAs to deliver well-chosen, evidence based, structured interventions where appropriate**

The evidence shows that TAs can support pupils effectively through structured interventions. However, these need to be carefully considered, monitored, and linked to the classroom to ensure positive outcomes for pupils.

- Reflect on the purpose of interventions and engage with the evidence base before deploying TAs to deliver structured interventions.
- Monitor progress to be sure the benefit of the intervention outweighs time away from the classroom.
- Support teachers and TAs to engage in bridging practices that connect learning between interventions and the classroom.

Effective implementation

4 **Prepare and train staff around effective TA deployment**

School leaders should ensure staff are on the same page about the role of the TA and how they can most effectively support pupils. Ensuring teachers and TAs are well prepared to work in these roles increases the likelihood that TA deployment can have a positive impact on pupils.

- Provide clarity on the role of the TA for all in the school.
- Enable TAs to be effective in their role and teachers to work effectively with TAs, through effective professional development.
- Develop ongoing coordination and communication so that teachers and TAs are prepared for their day-to-day roles.

5 **Engage all staff in the process of implementing effective TA deployment**

Effective TA deployment is complex and dependent on a range of factors. School leaders should focus on implementation as they look to embed effective practices.

- Ensure TA deployment is informed by both the underpinning evidence and the challenges of putting it into practice.
- Engage and align the school community to build a shared understanding of good TA practice.
- Be deliberate about deployment decisions, which should be taken in the context of the school and its current priorities.

Recommendation 1

Deploy TAs in ways that enable *all* pupils to access high-quality teaching

TAs should supplement – not replace – the teacher. This means that pupils who struggle most should spend at least as much time with the teacher as other pupils, if not more.

Recommendation 1

The following vignette demonstrates how a TA might support high quality teaching in a classroom

Ms Armstrong, a class teacher, receives training from senior leadership on why teachers in the school need to provide more direct assistance to pupils who need additional support, and how deploying TAs can support this.

Ms Armstrong considers her own class and where her own direct assistance might be most valuable. Most pupils are making good progress with their writing, but a handful have been struggling to apply techniques that are solidly understood by the rest of the class.

Back in the classroom, Ms Armstrong deploys Mrs Sharp, a TA, to work across the class in a literacy lesson. She asks Mrs Sharp to support pupils as they respond to feedback and improve their writing from the previous lesson. To help Mrs Sharp, Ms Armstrong provides some key vocabulary, prompt questions, and modelled examples in the lesson plan.

Meanwhile, Ms Armstrong works closely with a group of pupils whose writing task showed the need for additional instruction, including a pupil who has an EHCP related to cognition and learning. She scaffolds the task for these pupils, addresses their misconceptions, and assesses their progress.

Call for reflection

In this example, the TA, Mrs Sharp, has been deployed in a way that leaves the teacher free to work with those pupils who most need her help.

In their schools, leaders should consider the following questions:

- Are TAs deployed in ways that enable pupils most in need of additional support to access high-quality teaching?

- What ongoing discussion, training, information, or guidance is needed to ensure that TAs are deployed to this effect?

- If you are to change the way TAs are deployed in classrooms within your setting, which adults in school can enable this change?

Recommendation 1

High-quality teaching and TA deployment

The best available evidence indicates that great teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve attainment and future outcomes.[7]

Ensuring every teacher is supported to deliver high quality teaching, and that every pupil has access to that teaching, is essential to achieving the best outcomes for all pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged.[8-10]

A key principle is that TAs should supplement—not replace—the teacher. Those pupils who struggle most should spend at least as much time with the teacher as other pupils, if not more.[11]

To ensure TAs are deployed in a way that helps all pupils access high-quality teaching, a strategic approach to TA deployment that focuses on effective TA deployment practices both inside and outside the classroom is needed. These effective practices are detailed in recommendations one, two, and three.

Supporting teachers to retain responsibility for all pupils

To achieve the best outcomes for all pupils, schools should move away from assigning TAs to specific pupils for long periods. Although TAs are often deployed to provide extra support for the pupils that need it most [12], deploying TAs to work extensively with specific pupils for long periods - outside of specialist support or targeted interventions - can unintentionally hinder high-quality teaching.[13,14]

Instead, teachers must be supported by leaders to retain responsibility for the learning of all pupils in their classroom, particularly low-prior-attaining pupils and pupils with SEND.[15,16] This includes teachers establishing a shared understanding with TAs around the clear and complementary roles that will give all pupils access to high quality teaching, including monitoring and supporting their progress.

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Recommendation 1

This first recommendation focuses on how teachers and TAs can work together to ensure access to high-quality teaching for all pupils. For this, a strategic approach to classroom organisation that prioritises teamwork and ongoing communication between the teacher and TA is needed.

Examples of what this might look like in the classroom include:[17]

1. **TAs working alongside the teacher to complement high-quality teaching. For example, by:**

   - circulating the classroom to identify pupils who may require extra help towards a specific learning goal: TAs can flag these pupils to the teacher or support them through effective scaffolding (more on scaffolding in recommendation two); or
   - supervising peer reading fluency practice, or other activities where pupils learn from each other in the classroom.

2. **TAs improving access to high-quality teaching for all pupils. For example, by:**

   - pre-teaching concepts, vocabulary, or skills before these are taught in the classroom in order to prepare pupils for learning;
   - delivering carefully chosen structured interventions that link to specific learning or wider goals (more on structured interventions in recommendation three);
   - observing and redirecting pupils who are off-task to engage in positive learning behaviours; or
   - undertaking supportive tasks inside or outside lessons. This should free up teachers to prepare or deliver high-quality teaching to those who need additional support. Although not the most important responsibility for TAs, this could include TAs working to support adaptations to a lesson, such as by identifying a range of age-appropriate reading materials for a given topic.

3. **TAs in class supervising pre-prepared learning tasks, allowing the teacher to work with specific groups of pupils. For example, by:**

   - dividing pupils in the classroom into two groups—as illustrated in the vignette—so the TA can supervise one group through a learning task prepared by the teacher while the teacher works with the other; or
   - organising flexible grouping within a lesson where pupils are allocated temporarily to groups based on different learning goals: if appropriately prepared, TAs can support group work through, for example, promoting interactions or prompting pupils.

> **"TAs are not always with the same pupils but used effectively depending on the subject, need of the class and pupils on any given day. Teachers and TAs use live assessment to consider which pupils need further support to allow them to gain a deeper understanding or to start them on a level playing field with peers in their next lesson."**

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Settrington All Saints C of E Primary School.

Recommendation 1

Are teaching assistants supplementing, not replacing, the teacher?

When teachers and TAs have clear and complementary roles inside the classroom, this supports high-quality teaching. However, competing priorities can sometimes lead to practices that may inhibit pupil learning. School leaders need to carefully consider this and guard against such practices.

We outline below some indicators that should prompt teachers and leaders to reconsider their approaches, along with some questions to help refine ways of working.

Challenge 1

'One to one support for specific pupils means they work side by side with a TA.'

> ⚠️ A pupil spends more time with a TA than a teacher.
>
> TAs are sitting with the same pupils consistently in class.

It may sometimes be necessary for a trained TA to support specific pupils and groups. However, this deployment needs careful consideration. It's important to think about how to support pupils' independence and ensure they have learning time with their teacher too.

- Is the teacher the primary educator for every pupil, particularly for those who need it most?
- How do teachers ensure the TA's role is flexible (for example, breaking off from supporting a specific pupil to roam the class while the teacher leads instruction with pupils who require additional support)?

Challenge 2

**'Some pupils are often away from their peers and out of class.'**

> ⚠️ A pupil spends excessive time with TAs outside the classroom.
>
> The TA team are unsure of the purpose or impact of their work with pupils outside the classroom.

The impact of any TA support or intervention outside the classroom should at least compensate for time pupils spend away from high-quality teaching from a teacher. It is important to consider how interventions are supporting access to learning (more on this in recommendation three).

- How are targeted one to one and group interventions planned and linked to individual needs?
- How are connections between structured interventions and classroom learning made explicit to all, especially the pupils?

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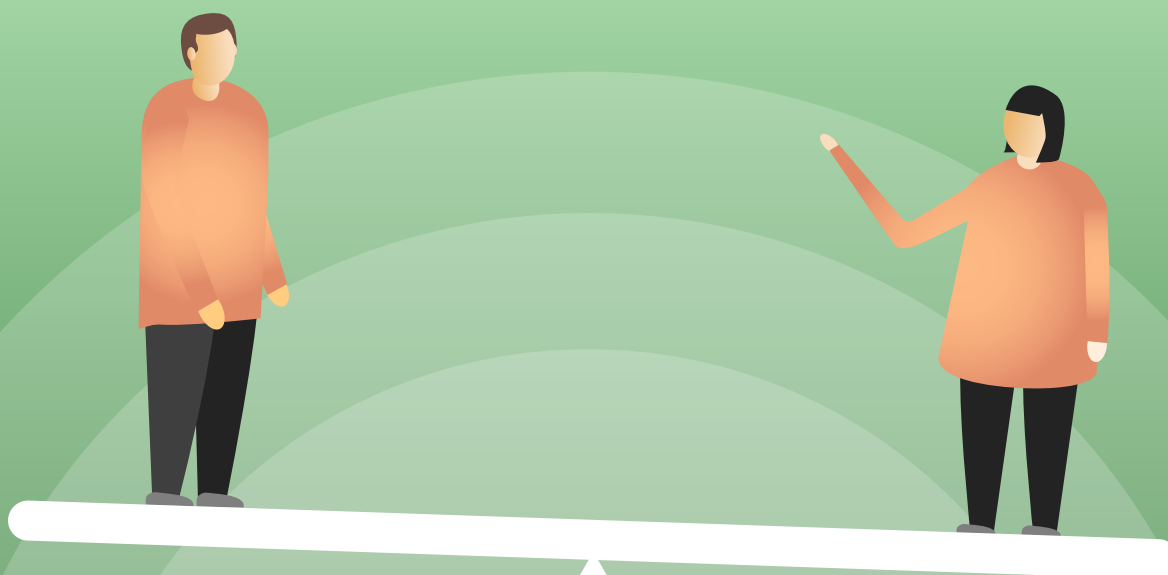
Challenge 3

'TAs supervise particular groups because they know the pupils well.'

⚠️ Unqualified TAs are covering classes.

There is insufficient time for teacher-TA liaison.

Where TAs are covering part or whole lessons this should be done judiciously, and they need to be appropriately qualified and have adequate preparation and training.

- How do teachers and trained TAs liaise to ensure they have the essential subject and task 'need to knows' and can feedback afterwards?
- How are TAs included in whole-school training as appropriate?

Challenge 4

'Pupils become overdependent on TA support.'

⚠️ A pupil regularly waits for TA input to start a task.

TAs and/or teachers cannot draw on a repertoire of techniques to scaffold learning.

It is important that TAs always supplement, rather than replace, the teacher. Planning to move flexibly between teacher and TA ensures pupils receive necessary support from both adults.

- How do you review the roles of teachers and TAs?
- How are TAs trained to avoid prioritising task completion and to ensure pupils develop independence and retain responsibility for their learning?

Recommendation 2

Deploy TAs to scaffold learning and to develop pupils' independence

Leaders should ensure TAs are prepared to engage in scaffolding practices that support pupils' learning and ability to learn independently. Supporting pupil independence should be a key consideration of TA deployment.

Recommendation 2

The following vignette demonstrates a TA working to refine their use of scaffolding

Amy enjoys English but often misunderstands a task, missing the meaning of key vocabulary and therefore struggling to succeed when it comes to independent learning.

A TA, Mr Matthews, supports Amy in an English lesson. Mr Matthews is keen to help so will sit next to Amy during written tasks. He gives her some ready-made sentences to use in her writing and numbers them so Amy can structure them into a paragraph.

When the teacher discusses the learning with Amy, she has little real understanding of the vocabulary she has used throughout her writing task.

Call for reflection

- Has Mr Matthews correctly understood the type of support that Amy needs?

- Does Mr Matthews' work help to make Amy become successful over time?

- What might high quality scaffolding look like that supports Amy to be more independent over time? What is the class teacher's role in this?

After Mr Matthews has discussed this with the class teacher, he is guided to observe the practice of other TAs, as well as engaging with the evidence around supporting independence. He also receives training in effective verbal scaffolds.

The next time Mr Matthews works with Amy, his support is focused on finding out which vocabulary Amy hasn't understood and supporting her with strategies she can use independently to find out their meaning. He then intermittently checks on Amy's application of these strategies as she completes the work independently.

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Scaffolding and pupil independence

TAs often undertake a range of practices when supporting pupil learning in the classroom. While some practices can be positive, some can be ineffective and not only inhibit progress but foster dependence.[18,19]

Leaders should make sure that TAs are prepared to engage in practices that support pupils' learning and ability to learn independently. Deploying TAs to support pupils through scaffolding is a high-quality practice in which TAs supplement – but do not replace – the teacher. Scaffolding is about giving pupils the skills and tools to help themselves in situations when they do not know what to do. Through scaffolding, pupils can be supported to engage in learning in an increasingly independent manner, allowing them to better access high-quality teaching.
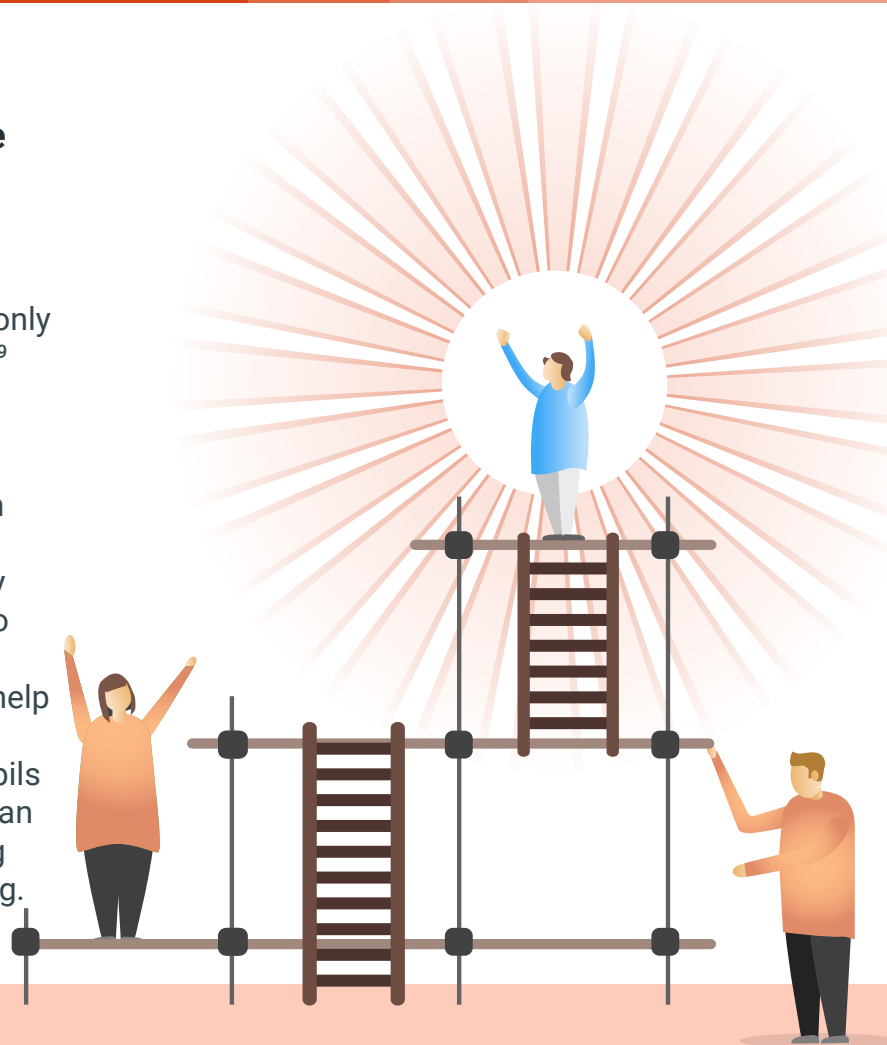
What does effective scaffolding look like?

Scaffolding refers to a type of cognitive support which is removed as a pupil becomes increasingly independent.[20] It is an effective practice that is complementary to teaching and leads to improved pupil outcomes.[21] If done well, scaffolding helps learners to gradually reach a point where they are able to complete tasks, solve problems, and apply strategies independently, increasing their engagement in learning.[22, 23]

Evidence on the effectiveness of scaffolding highlights the need for appropriate training and guidance. Leaders should therefore ensure that TAs are trained to confidently scaffold. This may look different based on the classroom subject and on the age and individual needs of pupils.

One key principle is to give the least support first to ensure pupils have the opportunity to be successful independently before intervening appropriately when pupils demonstrate they are unable to proceed. It is important the tasks set by teachers, and supported by TAs, provide pupils with the right level of challenge.

Recommendation 2

TA teaching strategies that encourage and inhibit independent learning

Avoid	Encourage
✗ Prioritising task completion	✓ Pupils to be comfortable taking risks with their learning
✗ Preventing pupils from having enough thinking and response time	✓ Providing the right amount of support at the right time
✗ 'Stereo-teaching' (repeating verbatim what the teacher says)	✓ Pupils retain responsibility for their learning
✗ High use of closed questions	✓ Use of open ended questions
✗ Over-prompting and spoon-feeding	✓ Giving the least amount of help first to support pupils' ownership of the task

What this looks like in practice

Primary

For a pupil who finds independent writing overwhelming, a TA might anticipate the challenges and speak to them at the beginning of the writing task to help them to use self-regulation strategies.

They might ask the pupil to briefly reflect about what they found hard last time, and what they could do to overcome that. If the pupil is not responsive to those prompts, the TA, through some specific questions, could help the pupil to remember prior strategies. The pupil then remembers the strategies and puts them to use. These could include writing a positive note to themselves or writing down four key words they are going to use in the task.

Secondary

For a pupil who finds writing history essays challenging, a TA might support them by prompting them to refer to a checklist or an essay plan.

This helps the pupil independently monitor their writing and stay on track without leading to reliance on the TA. Over time, the template becomes a tool the pupil can be prompted to use themselves, without TA support.

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Recommendation 2

Scaffolding framework for teaching assistant - pupil interactions.

This practical framework is designed to help TAs scaffold pupils' learning and encourage independent learning.

More help from TA

Greater pupil independence

- Self-scaffolding
- Prompting
- Clueing
- Modelling
- Correcting
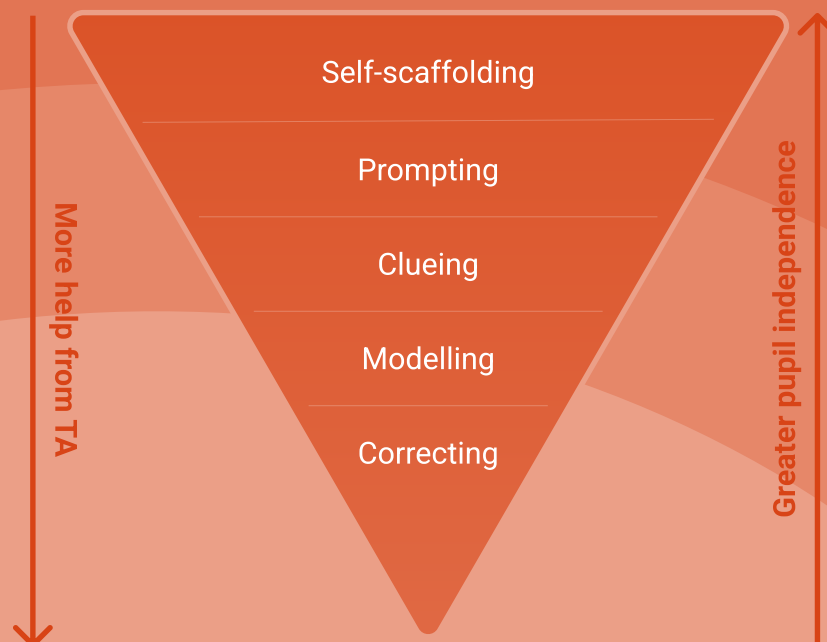
Self-scaffolding

Self-scaffolding represents the highest level of pupil independence. TAs observe, giving pupils time for processing and thinking. Self-scaffolders can: plan how to approach a task; problem-solve as they go; and review how they approached a task.

Prompting

TAs provide prompts when pupils are unable to self-scaffold. Prompts encourage pupils to draw on their own knowledge, but refrain from specifying a strategy. The aim is to nudge pupils into deploying a self-scaffolding technique. For example: "What do you need to do first?"; "What's your plan?"; "You can do this!"

Clueing

Often pupils know the strategies or knowledge required to solve a problem, but find it difficult to call them to mind. Clues worded as questions provide a hint in the right direction. The answer must contain a key piece of information to help pupils work out how to move forward. Always start with a small clue.

Modelling

Prompts and clues can be ineffective when pupils encounter a task that requires a new skill or strategy. TAs, as confident and competent experts, can model while pupils actively watch and listen. Pupils should try the same step for themselves immediately afterwards.

Correcting

Correcting involves providing answers and requires no independent thinking. Occasionally it is appropriate to do this, however, TAs should always aim to model and encourage pupils to apply new skills or knowledge first.

(Adapted from: Bosanquet, P., Radford, J. and Webster, R. (2016) The teaching assistant's guide to effective interaction: How to maximise your practice, published by Routledge.)

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Recommendation 2

Scaffolding, metacognition, and self-regulated learning

Scaffolding approaches offer targeted, temporary support to pupils. They are important for developing pupils' ability to learn with increasing independence.

This includes how pupils monitor and direct their learning (metacognition) and the extent to which learners are aware of their strengths, weaknesses, and behaviour to engage in learning (self-regulated learning).[24] This can typically be part of a gradual release approach, starting with the TA guiding practice, before fading support to encourage more independent practice.

Scaffolding can therefore be an approach that supports pupils to self-regulate. For example, a TA might:

- Model and prompt the use of planners and visual timers for pupils to monitor their learning during a task and to encourage focus and on-task behaviour.
- Support positive self-reflection by posing questions, such as 'What worked? What didn't? What would you do better next time?'
- Encourage and prompt positive self-talk to maintain motivation during a tricky task, such as getting stuck with complex word problems in mathematics.

Although the evidence is still developing, trained TAs can engage in other metacognitive and self-regulated learning approaches to support pupils such as:

- modelling strategies;
- providing feedback;
- encouraging risk-taking in a guided learning setting (allowing pupils to make small mistakes and supporting them through this to prevent larger confidence-sapping failures); and
- supporting learner self-efficacy through positive reinforcement and development of positive relationships with pupils.

The EEF's guidance report, 'Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning' has further recommendations on how schools can support pupils to develop these skills.[25]

Recommendation 3

Deploy TAs to deliver well-chosen, evidence based, structured interventions where appropriate

The evidence shows that TAs can support pupils effectively through structured interventions. However, these need to be carefully considered, monitored, and linked to the classroom to ensure positive outcomes for pupils.

Recommendation 3

The following vignette demonstrates how a school leader might help teachers and TAs to deliver more effective structured interventions.

Mrs Shah, a classroom teacher, recognises that Jamie is struggling to keep up with his peers during whole-class reading. She asks Ms Green, a TA, to provide some additional support. Ms Green takes Jamie to the library twice a week so he can choose a book and read it aloud to Ms Green, who is able to provide some correction where needed.

Call for reflection

- Has Ms Green been given the information she needs to deliver support that can develop the child's reading ability?

- What more could be done to make sure links are made between what happens in the classroom and what happens during the intervention?

Following work to improve TA deployment, Ms Thompson, the deputy headteacher, asks Mrs Shah to dig a bit deeper to understand what Jamie finds difficult about reading. She also asks what Mrs Shah is doing to ensure Jamie is keeping up with learning he is missing when he is outside the class.

After reviewing Jamie's progress and assessments, Mrs Shah notices some gaps in his phonics knowledge and recognises that he struggles to comprehend the meaning of certain conjunctions.

Mrs Shah works closely with Mr Prasad, another TA, who is already skilled at delivering daily phonics catch-up sessions. Mrs Shah shares what she's noticed about Jamie's progress and gives Mr Prasad a list of conjunctions that she would like him to work on with Jamie, and suggests some ways to work on them with him. Mr Prasad takes Jamie out of the whole-class reading time each day for 15 minutes but they continue to read the same book as the rest of the class.

In this example, the deputy headteacher has empowered Mrs Shah to be the driving force behind a programme of clear and structured interventions.

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Recommendation 3

High-quality structured interventions

Evidence indicates that one way for TAs to supplement - but not replace – the teacher is through delivering high-quality structured interventions.[26] Deploying TAs to deliver structured interventions can support pupils in targeted ways and allow them to build on or better engage in what is being taught in the classroom.

Deploying TAs in this way involves TAs helping a small number of pupils with their learning within a structured programme. Research suggests that well-chosen interventions, delivered by TAs, can have a positive impact on academic and wider pupil outcomes, irrespective of the age of the pupils, the number of pupils receiving the intervention, and whether pupils have special educational needs.[27,28]

In general, interventions are delivered away from the classroom. Leaders must be confident about an intervention's impact and objectives to ensure it is being used to supplement and not replace high quality teaching. Leaders need to consider the relative benefits and limitations of pupils receiving the intervention over classroom instruction and prioritise the option that will benefit pupils the most.

This relies on leaders having oversight of the interventions being delivered in their schools and taking steps to make sure that these are evidence-based, relevant, and targeted. This responsibility extends to interventions that are already in place, which need to be monitored to ensure they are meeting clear objectives and are being delivered consistently.

Engaging in the evidence

One key challenge for schools is selecting evidence-based interventions. Leaders can be bombarded with information about interventions making impressive claims, but this may come from companies with vested interests in selling their products. Alternatively, interventions may come recommended solely from a colleague who reports that it had good outcomes in their school.

Selecting interventions in this manner can lead to implementing interventions which may have no—or even negative—impacts on pupil learning. Leaders must engage in the evidence base before choosing interventions. Leaders can refer to the EEF's concise guide to using research evidence which helps leaders to navigate the complexities of engaging in the evidence.

Recommendation 3

Selecting the right intervention

The following three principles should guide leaders in selecting and deploying the right interventions within their schools.

(Re)explore whether an intervention is necessary

Leaders should always take time to assess whether a structured intervention is necessary and whether it meets the identified need of the pupil. This is true for existing interventions as well as new ones being considered. An informed approach to selecting interventions improves the chances of having a positive impact on pupils.

Some questions can help guide this process.[29]

- Who is this intervention intended to support?
- What are their needs?
- What school-level or pupil-level data indicates that there is a need that an intervention could meet?
- Can pupils' needs be met in the classroom through high-quality teaching? Can current practices be adapted to support these needs?
- What is the desired outcome of the intervention? How will we monitor progress to know when an intervention has been effective?
- How can this intervention supplement high-quality teaching in the classroom?
- How will it allow pupils to better access what is being taught?
- Will we be able to dedicate the staffing, time, and resources required to implement the intervention well?

Recommendation 3

Engage with the evidence base when selecting an intervention

Once leaders have determined that an intervention is necessary and what the objectives of it should be, the next step is choosing or designing the right intervention. Research evidence can help here. Leaders should:

See which interventions have been independently evaluated

The EEF has funded a number of independent evaluations of TA-led interventions, many of which use gold standard methods to see whether these interventions have an impact on pupil learning. The results of these findings are on the 'Projects' page of the EEF website. Leaders should check whether any interventions being considered—or programmes with similar features—have been independently evaluated and, if so, whether they have a positive impact.

Understand whether interventions are drawing on evidence-based approaches

Many programmes have not been independently evaluated so leaders will need to conduct further research into the evidence underpinning them. In these cases, leaders should consider the evidence base of the intervention's approaches. For example, for pupils who struggle with reading in secondary schools, the evidence base behind reading comprehension strategies and phonics both offer areas for supporting interventions with high impact based on extensive evidence. See the EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit for a summary of approaches and the evidence base behind them.

Understand whether components of interventions are likely to be effective when implemented in your school

It's just as important to think about how an intervention will be used as it is to consider which intervention to select in the first place. Leaders should consider the following common elements of effective interventions.

- Intervention sessions are often brief (15–45 minutes), occur regularly (3–5 times per week), and are maintained over a sustained period (8–20 weeks). Careful timetabling is in place to enable consistent delivery.

- TAs receive extensive training from experienced trainers and/or teachers (5–30 hours per intervention).

- The intervention has structured, supporting resources and lesson plans, with clear objectives and possibly a delivery script.

Recommendation 3

Monitor intervention progress and delivery

It is important that schools use assessments to monitor the progress of pupils receiving interventions. This is true for existing interventions as well as those a school is introducing. Assessments will be linked to the intervention's aims, so could relate to a pupil's reading speed, emotional awareness, readiness for learning, or vocabulary development. Leaders should:

Monitor progress towards learning objectives to build an evidence base of what works in your school

It can be helpful to monitor pupils' progress towards pre-established goals at regular intervals (i.e. termly) and consider if the additional support is achieving what was intended. This allows schools to develop their own evidence on whether an intervention works in their setting, for whom, and in what way.

Monitor intervention delivery

When overseeing delivery of an intervention with an established evidence base, leaders must check that the intervention is being followed with fidelity. If it says to deliver sessions every other day for 30 minutes to groups of no more than four pupils, this is what should be happening. If the programme is not followed faithfully, the impact of the intervention may not be as intended. Leaders should carefully consider how any changes to the delivery of the intervention might influence its impact and keep in mind common elements of effective interventions (above).

These three principles should help make sure that TA deployment to support pupils through structured interventions is effective and supplements high-quality teaching.

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Ensure connections are made between out-of-class learning and classroom teaching

One key consideration for interventions that lead to time away from the class teacher is ensuring connections between what happens inside and outside the classroom – this connection will minimise any possible unintended negative consequences.

Out-of-class interventions can often have little connection to pupils' experiences in the classroom. This can make it difficult for them to connect their learning from these sessions to the wider curriculum coverage, and vice versa. This difficulty extends to non-academic interventions such as behavioural or social and emotional learning interventions where pupils may learn strategies they are then not encouraged or enabled to apply in the classroom.

Both teachers and TAs must support pupils to make the necessary connections between structured interventions and classroom learning. Teachers should have clear oversight of interventions taking place outside the classroom and ensure they can consolidate and encourage what is being taught or developed in these sessions.

Finally, teachers and leaders should ensure TAs engage in 'bridging' practices to help pupils link their learning. This can be done by referencing classroom learning in interventions (and vice versa):

- *Try to remember what you practiced with Mrs Rashbrook.'*
- *'Doesn't Mrs Hamid always remind us to start with…?'*
- *'How do you think we can get you back in the right zone for learning?'*
- *"Remember when we read aloud in the library? How did we do that successfully?"*
- *"What can we do when we get stuck with a word problem in algebra?"*

What a promising structured intervention looks like

Reciprocal Reading is a structured programme that helps pupils improve their reading comprehension. It is designed for teaching assistants (TAs) to deliver in small groups, with two 20–30 minute sessions per week over twelve weeks. The approach focuses on key reading strategies like questioning and summarising, using discussion-based activities with challenging curriculum texts.

TAs receive structured training to help pupils to apply these strategies effectively and can use bridging activities to support pupils when they encounter tricky texts in the classroom—for example, prompting them to ask questions about the text or summarise key points. Clear resources, including a manual, ensure the programme is delivered consistently, and a school coordinator—ideally a senior leader—oversees its implementation.

Reciprocal Reading has been independently trialled by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), which found it had a positive impact on pupil attainment. As a result, it has been rated a Promising Programme[30] for improving reading outcomes.

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Recommendation 3

Dos and don'ts for interventions

Do	Don't
Carefully assess the needs of pupils in your setting.	Select interventions without exploring the evidence base and feasibility.
Explore interventions that have been evidenced to be effective or have elements of effective interventions.	Select interventions based solely on personal preference.
Assess who is best placed to deliver the intervention: teacher or TA?	Expect TAs to be able to deliver interventions effectively without suitable training and ongoing support.
Train TAs to deliver the intervention and provide the necessary resources and ongoing support.	Assume an intervention is having more impact than if the pupil(s) had remained in class.
Limit the time that pupils spend away from high quality teaching in the classroom.	Deliver interventions in isolation.
Maintain fidelity to the intervention.	Deliver interventions for an indefinite amount of time.
Make links to the learning taking place in the classroom.	
Monitor the delivery and impact of the intervention.	
Stop interventions if they are not having the desired impact over a sustained period.	
Revisit whether pupils who have made progress still require the intervention.	

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Recommendation 4

Prepare and train staff around effective TA deployment

School leaders should ensure staff are on the same page about the role of the TA and how they can most effectively support pupils. Ensuring teachers and TAs are well prepared to work in these roles increases the likelihood that TA deployment can have a positive impact on pupils.

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Recommendation 4

Ensuring preparedness for effective TA practice

The first three recommendations of this report look at how to deploy TAs effectively and outline the practices that will best support pupils' learning. However, the evidence suggests that these recommendations will only be effective if leaders take steps to facilitate their implementation. This means making sure that staff are prepared and best practice is embedded across the school. The last two recommendations focus on actions leaders can take to ensure teachers and TAs can engage in effective practices.

First, leaders need to ensure TAs are well-prepared so they can be effective in these roles.[31-33] This includes making sure everyone is clear about what their role is, that they receive the necessary training, and day-to-day preparedness.

Role clarity

All school staff should be clear about the purpose of the TA role and what it involves. This is essential if teachers and TAs are to be able to work together in complementary ways, as detailed in recommendations one, two, and three.

It's the job of school leaders to make sure that staff are on the same page about how TAs can most effectively support pupils' learning, whether they are working inside the classroom or supporting pupils in structured interventions.

Professional development

Once there is shared clarity on the role of TAs, leaders should ensure that teachers and TAs are trained to be effective in these roles. This starts with establishing a common understanding of how to work together in effective complementary roles, such as those in recommendation one.

Leaders should ensure that teachers receive the right professional development to feel confident and competent in working alongside TAs. Alongside support from SENCos, this should enable teachers to retain responsibility for the learning of all pupils, including pupils with SEND. Professional development for teachers could include training teachers in curriculum adaptation, how to use different strategies or interventions, and developing their understanding of pupil needs. In addition, leaders, including SENCos, should empower teachers to understand that effective teaching for pupils with SEND is effective teaching for all, and that such teaching is firmly based on strategies that will either already be in the repertoire of every mainstream school teacher or which can be relatively easily added to it.[34]

Leaders should ensure that TAs are appropriately trained to do their work.[35,36] Professional development is essential if TAs are to engage in the effective practices detailed earlier in this report. If a specific strategy, such as scaffolding, is being used, TAs should be trained to fully understand the principles of the approach and the techniques required to apply it. This training also has the potential to improve how valued TAs feel within the school.[37]

> "At Werneth Primary, our SEND learner profile revealed key challenges: a high proportion of pupils with English as an Additional Language, eligibility for Pupil Premium, and poor attendance patterns. Communication and interaction were the most common areas of need... Staff training empowered teachers to better deploy teaching assistants in scaffolding learning. Leaders continuously evaluated whether SEND learners were accessing the best possible teaching, considering if provision matched needs and identifying areas for professional development.

Jonathan Bell
Principal of Werneth Primary School, Oldham.

Day to day preparedness

As well as having overall clarity about their role, TAs also need to have an understanding of it on a day-to-day basis. In order for this, teachers should share key 'need to knows' with TAs in advance of a lesson, including what the lesson entails and what the TA will be asked to do. If TAs will be providing support to specific pupils, they should be given information on these pupils and how to support them. This is particularly essential for TAs working with pupils they are unfamiliar with.

Leaders should consider developing guidelines on how teachers and TAs are expected to communicate and prepare for lessons, and should set out how the school will support these processes. The EEF has developed an Effective teacher-TA partnership tool to help with this, which can be found alongside this report.

Focus on the systems and structures that support TAs

Leaders should consider the systems and structures that need to be in place in school for TAs to be trained and prepared appropriately. This might involve adjusting timetables or even TAs' contracts to make time for this work.

As part of this, space needs to be created specifically for teachers and TAs to collaborate, discuss their roles, and carry out preparation. This could be part of an INSET day, team meetings, or – if feasible - during PPA time.

The EEF's guidance report, 'A Schools Guide to Implementation' further details how systems and structures can support effective implementation around TA deployment.

Education Endowment Foundation

Louise Quinn, Director
Shotton Hall Research School

Alicia McKenna, Director of Research & Training
Shotton Hall Research School

An example from practice

Across our region, we identified a need to develop Year 7 pupils' reading fluency to support access to the secondary curriculum. Partnering with North East Combined Authority, we focused on equipping TAs with the necessary skills and knowledge.

We designed a TA-led reading intervention with training on fluency and prosody. The training for TAs covered key concepts, their importance, and effective approaches like repeated reading and precise feedback.

A key element was video exemplification, allowing TAs to see fluent reading in practice and model effective techniques. We included structured pause points for reflection and discussion to reinforce learning.

To support implementation, we created guidance documents for quick reference. A 2-page feedback scaffold outlines common challenges and suggested responses, while audio recordings demonstrated texts being read aloud by pupils.

Two weeks post-training, we met to address challenges, encourage peer support, and troubleshoot. After three weeks, we conducted low-stakes observations with formative feedback to celebrate progress and refine training.

To aid long-term implementation, we send weekly 'implementation reminders'—concise, bullet-pointed key messages—helping TAs stay prepared and confident in supporting reading fluency.

Recommendation 5

Engage all staff in the process of implementing effective TA deployment

Effective TA deployment is complex and dependent on a range of factors. School leaders should focus on implementation as they look to embed effective practices.

Recommendation 5

Implementing effective TA practice

In addition to teacher and TA preparedness, the evidence suggests that the likelihood of effective TA deployment practices being embedded is increased if leaders take steps to facilitate their implementation.

Clare Lamb, Headteacher and SENCo
All Saints' CEVC Primary School, Lawshall, Suffolk

An example from practice

In our small primary school, TA deployment is a specific responsibility for our senior team. The head and SENCo review provision alongside English and maths leads. Shared responsibilities help make sure that TA training is aligned to our school priorities.

The team meets regularly to bring together analysis of data, pupil progress meetings, and teacher assessment. This forensic look at our data, linked to teachers' knowledge of the children, enables a holistic approach to TA deployment.

The senior team makes sure that teachers and TAs are supported to enact distinct, well understood roles. Metacognition is a focus of our school development plan so all staff have training to develop a shared language. We've recently focused on developing pupil independence through 'I do, we do, you do' and being explicit about how this is used in class.

In all lessons, teacher and TA are a 'teaching team', offering 'think alouds' together. For 'TA helicopter support', we're deliberate about choosing when and where to 'land'. This is guided by our children being well versed in using the 'five Bs' when they're working independently: Brain, Board (where they see a worked example), Book (have I done this before?), ask a Buddy, and finally ask the Boss (teacher or TA). TAs watch, monitor, and ask probing questions to inform decisions around where to target support.

A collective, shared understanding of high-quality teaching, and the role of the TA team, has evolved as our leaders monitor and evaluate interactions and impact. The perspectives of pupils, teachers, TAs, parents, and governors inform and guide next steps for implementation. Our Head leads structured, termly conversations that are informed by teachers and TAs. We also survey our TAs every year, which helps inform priorities and future training.

Our visible staffing structure now includes the expertise of all TAs. For example, who leads interventions, or speech and language support. We look at existing skills to decide on recruitment and deployment in conjunction with insights from pupil progress meetings. Our culture and relationships are paramount, so we prioritise mutual respect for both TA and teacher knowledge.

Recommendation 5

While the specific research here is still limited, several key principles to implement effective TA deployment practices are emerging from the evidence base.[38-44] Leaders should consider these alongside the EEF's guidance report 'A School's Guide to Implementation', which can help schools to introduce and sustain changes in TA deployment.

1. Embed a wider school culture focused on high quality teaching and inclusion

The way in which TAs are deployed should reflect a school's wider values and vision, in particular its commitment to inclusion and ensuring access to high quality teaching for all pupils. Leaders must set the tone for a school culture that encourages and enables all staff to support outcomes for all pupils.

Within this culture, TAs will be able to share their views on pupil progress, including challenging deployment practices where they feel pupils are overly dependent on their support. Finally, this culture can allow TAs to develop pupils' self-regulated learning, as they empower pupils to challenge themselves and take risks in their learning and learn from these.

2. Engage the school community in effective TA deployment

As part of effective TA deployment, leaders need to engage relevant members of the school community and unite understanding around what this means in their setting.

A necessary first step is ensuring a member of the senior leadership team has clear responsibility for TA deployment in the school and is guiding changes in practice. The time, commitment, and influence of this person is key to supporting implementation and sustaining change.

Research projects suggest that where someone not on the senior leadership team was tasked with actively guiding change, they 'lacked the authority to drive decision-making for implementing change across school', resulting in changes not being made or sustained.[45]

> In terms of an enabler you'd need a willing person on SLT. It needs leadership, just like anything, it needs bold leadership. The leadership needs to be at a senior level who can influence.

Headteacher
From the evaluation of the TA scale-up campaign[46]

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Recommendation 5

As part of engaging and uniting staff, leaders should seek to understand current practice, for example:

- *Which pupils do TAs tend to work with most?*
- *What kinds of support are being provided by TAs?*
- *What support and training exists for TAs, and what are teachers' levels of confidence around effective deployment?*
- *How do school leaders, parents, pupils, and other stakeholders feel about TA practices?*

Such engagement can help leaders to hear several perceptions of how TAs are prepared, deployed, and managed, which often differ depending on the nature of the person being asked. This is especially important as TAs can sometimes lack a voice in schools, which means that difficulties relating to their deployment can be hidden from leadership.[47,48] This engagement can also be an essential step in engaging and uniting around a desired change, supporting colleagues to feel valued.

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3. Plan for effective deployment and ensure TA role clarity

While teacher deployment may be similar across settings, TA deployment depends significantly on local priorities, context, and school structures. This means that, where appropriate, TAs may undertake a variety of important roles in schools, from pastoral, to fostering independence, to supporting learning.

When planning for TA deployment, a key consideration should be outlining what the role entails within the context of that school. Leaders should provide clarity on the primary and secondary responsibilities of TAs and protect them from role creep (the gradual expansion of their roles and responsibilities). They should ensure there is a shared understanding around what TAs are expected to do across the school and in the classroom. This clarity allows for TAs to be trained and prepared for the specific roles they will undertake.

Finally, there should also be clear line management for TAs as this can sometimes fall into a grey area of responsibility (sometimes with a class teacher or SENCO in primary or a Head of Department or SENCO in secondary.[49,50]). While there is no clear evidence to suggest that a specific person should undertake this role, the person in question should be able to work closely with the senior leader who has responsibility for TA deployment in the school. A shared understanding of who this is ensures TAs can be supported appropriately.

Communicating with parents

When changing how TAs are deployed within a school, parents and guardians may sometimes have questions or ask for reassurances about what this means for their child's learning. Communication that highlights the benefits of high-quality teaching and independent learning is key to making sure that parents are aware of any changes and are more likely to support them.

The EEF's guidance report 'A School's Guide to Implementation' further details key 'behaviours' that drive effective implementation, including engaging people to shape what happens within implementation and uniting people around what is being implemented and why it matters. This guidance report also covers areas beyond the scope of this report, such as reflection and the process of planning implementation. Leaders can use the 'A School's Guide to Implementation to apply the recommendations in this report and develop an evidence-informed approach to effective TA deployment.

Helpful resources and support

A School's Guide to Implementation guidance report
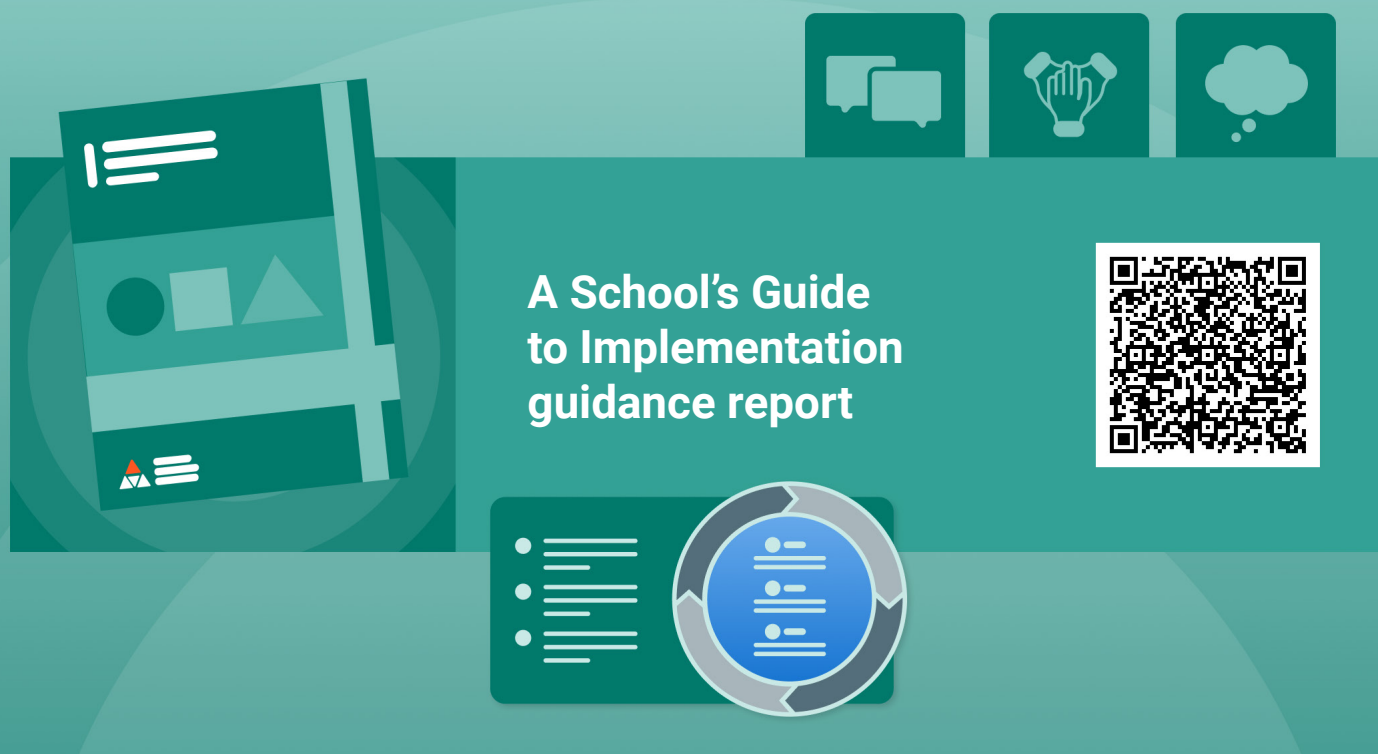
What support is available for using this guidance?

A School's Guide to Implementation

A culture shift is occurring in English schools towards widespread engagement with research, with school leaders increasingly using evidence-based resources to inform their decision-making.[51] Yet simply being aware of the evidence does not necessarily lead to improved outcomes. Evidence-based practices must also be implemented effectively (alongside sound professional judgement) if schools wish to see tangible changes in practices and pupil outcomes.[52,53]

Turning the recommendations of this report into sustained actions is a key part of improving TA deployment within schools. However, this is a complex task. In order to change established habits to align with the effective practices detailed here, school leaders will need to find ways of uniting values and ways of working, helping staff to reach a common understanding, while retaining flexibility in how teachers and TAs work together.

It is crucial that leaders understand the principles of how to effectively implement change in schools.[54] While some aspects of this report speak directly to implementation issues, the EEF's guidance report 'A School's Guide to Implementation' goes into more comprehensive detail and should be consulted to support changes to TA deployment.
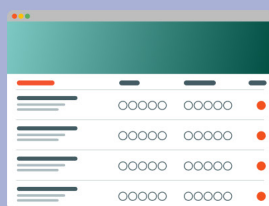
Helpful resources and support

These resources - all of which can be found on the EEF website - provide further support for the effective deployment of teaching assistants.
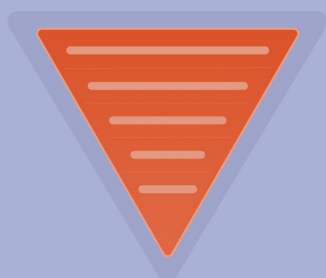
A School's Guide to Implementation

EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit

Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning

Scaffolding additional tool and supporting resource

Effective teacher-Teaching Assistant partnerships

Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools

The 'Five-a-day' principle to support pupils with SEND

Reflection document for TAs to support the 'Five-a-day' principle

Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools

Helpful resources and support

Other support

A range of additional practical resources are available to help leaders apply the strategies and recommendations in this guidance report within their contexts, such as the effective teacher-TA partnership and scaffolding tools. Search 'EEF Teaching Assistants' to download these resources.

For the early years and reception, the EEF's Early Years Evidence Store[55] details effective practices that teaching assistants can engage in.

The EEF is also collaborating with a range of organisations across England to further support schools to implement this guidance more effectively.

The Research Schools Network is a collaboration of 33 schools across England supported by the EEF. These Research Schools work with schools, colleges, and early years settings in their regions to champion the use of evidence and improve teaching and learning with a focus on socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people.

More information about the Research Schools Network and how it can provide support on the use of EEF guidance reports can be found at **https://researchschool.org.uk.**

Work with us

If you are interested in working with the EEF to develop additional resources or training based on guidance recommendations, or you have examples of a recommendation that has been effectively implemented in your school, then please get in touch: info@eefoundation.org.uk

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