

Summary of recommendations

The effective use of TAs under everyday classroom conditions

1 

TAs should not be used as an informal teaching resource for students who are low attaining

The evidence on TA deployment suggests schools have drifted into a situation in which TAs are often used as an informal instructional resource for students in most need. This has the effect of separating students from the classroom, their teacher and their peers.

Although this has happened with the best of intentions, this evidence suggests that this is an ineffective way of deploying TAs.

School leaders should systematically review the roles of both teachers and TAs and take a wider view of how TAs can support learning and improve attainment throughout the school.

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2 

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

If TAs have a direct instructional role it is important they add value to the work of the teacher, not replace them – the expectation should be that the needs of all students are addressed, first and foremost, through high quality classroom teaching. Schools should try and organise staff so that the students who struggle most have as much time with the teacher as others. Breaking away from a model of deployment where TAs are assigned to specific students for long periods requires more strategic approaches to classroom organisation. Instead, school leaders should develop effective teams of teachers and TAs, who understand their complementary roles in the classroom.

Where TAs are working individually with students who are low attaining the focus should be on retaining access to high-quality teaching, for example by delivering brief, but intensive, structured interventions (see Recommendations 5 and 6).

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3 

Use TAs to help students develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning

Research has shown that improving the nature and quality of TAs' talk to students can support the development of independent learning skills, which are associated with improved learning outcomes. TAs should, for example, be trained to avoid prioritising task completion and instead concentrate on helping students develop ownership of tasks.

TAs should aim to give students the least amount of help first. They should allow sufficient wait time, so students can respond to a question or attempt the stage of a task independently. TAs should intervene appropriately when students demonstrate they are unable to proceed.

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4 

Ensure TAs are fully prepared for their role in the classroom

School leaders should provide sufficient time for TA training and for teachers and TAs to meet out of class to enable the necessary lesson preparation and feedback.

Creative ways of ensuring teachers and TAs have time to meet include adjusting TAs' working hours (start early, finish early), using assembly time and having TAs join teachers for (part of) planning time.

During lesson preparation time ensure TAs have the essential 'need to knows':

- Concepts, facts, information being taught
- Skills to be learned, applied, practised or extended
- Intended learning outcomes
- Expected/required feedback.

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The effective use of TAs in delivering structured interventions out of class

5 

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

Research on TAs delivering targeted interventions in one-to-one or small group settings shows a consistent impact on attainment of approximately three to four additional months' progress (effect size 0.2–0.3). Crucially, these positive effects are only observed when TAs work in structured settings with high quality support and training. When TAs are deployed in more informal, unsupported instructional roles, they can impact negatively on students' learning outcomes.

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6 

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

Schools should use structured interventions with reliable evidence of effectiveness. There are presently only a handful of programs in the UK for which there is a secure evidence base, and fewer in Australia, so if schools are using programs that are 'unproven', they should try and replicate some common elements of effective interventions:

- 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 this 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
- TAs closely follow the plan and structure of the intervention
- Assessments are used to identify appropriate students, guide areas for focus and track student progress. Effective interventions ensure the right support is being provided to the right child
- Connections are made between the out-of-class learning in the intervention and classroom teaching (see Recommendation 7).

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Integrating learning from work led by teachers and TAs

7 

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

Interventions are often quite separate from classroom activities. Lack of time for teachers and TAs to liaise allows relatively little connection between what students experience in, and away from, the classroom. The key is to ensure that learning in interventions is consistent with, and extends, work inside the classroom and that students understand the links between them. It should not be assumed that students can consistently identify and make sense of these links on their own.

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