

# How to utilise TA support

**By Laura Dobson**

There has been a lot of research into the use of teaching assistants, some quite negative:

- Howes (2003) found that teaching assistants' support in class increased the amount of time pupils spent on task but did not necessarily result in an increased rate of learning.
- Blatchford, Bassett et al. (2009) – 'The more support pupils received, the less progress they made, even after controlling for other factors that might be expected to explain the relationship such as pupils' prior attainment, SEN status and income deprivation'.

More recently some positive research that looked at:

- 'Making best use of Teaching Assistants' (Sharples, Webster and Blatchford 2015)

This then fed in to 'Maximising the impact of teaching assistants' which is a nationwide programme run in schools to help make sure TAs are able to thrive in their role and contribute to positive outcomes for pupils.

The first question really is – 'What is the role of the TA?'

The Professional Standards for TAs defines the role of the TA as:

The primary role of the teaching assistant should be to work with teachers to raise the learning and attainment of pupils while also promoting their:

- independence
- self-esteem
- social inclusion

They give assistance to pupils so that they can access the curriculum, participate in learning and experience a sense of achievement.

So how can I make best use of a TA when one is in my class?

**Talk to them** – get to know their name, their interests and the subjects they feel confident in. You can then explore their experience, what they know about pupils and how you can work together.

**Prepare them for the classroom** – let them know what you are going to cover in lessons and (time permitting) discuss areas that pupils might find difficult and what you can both do to address these difficulties. This might involve role play where one of you introduces the topic then the other asks questions to seek clarification, this also sets an example for pupils that it is okay to not know and that asking questions is absolutely the right thing to do.

**Introduce them and their role** – each lesson, have the TA stand next to you when you are introducing the lesson so that you can explain what will be covered and what the pair of you will be doing during the lesson. This is a great opportunity to raise the profile of the TA so that pupils see you working in partnership and that both of you support learning.

**Check in on them** – when they are working with a group if pupils check what is happening and what the TA is doing with their group. If you haven't had time to discuss the lesson beforehand then this is a great opportunity to check the approach the TA is using and making sure it complements your own approach.

**Ensure you and your TA work with a variety of pupils** – the TA is not just there to support low attaining pupils. If these pupils are struggling, then perhaps they need more time with the teacher not less. Consider swapping groups with the TA so that you can work directly with the low attaining pupils, the TA can then work with other groups.

**Gather feedback** – when you have time at the end of the lesson or afterwards talk through what happened during the lesson, what worked well and what pupils might have found difficult, this can then extend into which pupils found specific parts of the lesson difficult. This knowledge can then support planning so that particular areas can be reinforced. If this can't be done verbally, you could develop a way that your TA could record progress throughout the lesson and pass this to you when the lesson is over.