

# Working with a Teaching Assistant - Secondary

**By Ben Hughes**

## **How does your TA support in the classroom?**

Teaching assistants in a secondary setting are a crucial element of a teacher's toolkit. Larger faculties may have subject specific teaching assistants which is fantastic for subject specific support. In addition to this, teaching assistants may operate out of a separate department and be linked with particular classes or individuals, following that class or individual around school. Such TAs can gain insight into a range of strategies used by teachers across the school and learn what works best for that class or pupil, making them a tremendous resource for your own learning on how best to adapt your teaching.

Subject specific teaching assistants can be a fantastic resource when deployed effectively. I regularly plan lessons alongside the TA to make the most of their valuable insights. The planning might involve the TA working with a smaller, select group of pupils, who depending on the group, either require additional challenge or require a smaller teacher:pupil ratio to provide them with adequate support to access learning. In addition to this, the role may be reversed, where the teacher works with the smaller group and the subject specialist TA leads the rest of the class. I often arrange for the teaching assistant or I to use a neighbouring classroom when working with specific groups as it allows for greater focus and therefore more rapid progress.

Working with non-subject teaching assistants has also proven advantageous as I often seek their advice on how to achieve high engagement from the class or from specific pupils. Non-subject TA's may have a greater appreciation for what works and what doesn't work, as they are with classes and/or pupils across their range of subjects. This data can make the difference between a highly engaged class making good progress and a disengaged class making little to no progress.

## **How do you prepare your TA for this?**

In secondary schools it can be a challenge to find time to meet with your TA ahead of lessons and even more so to involve them in the planning phase of your lessons.

My approach has always been to give them a copy of my planning in good time ahead of the lesson, whether it be written or slides, along with some notes on what I would like them to lead with. Typically, I send this to them via email as soon as the planning was complete to maximise the time that they have to review it ahead of the lesson. In addition, it is good practice to provide TA's with a worked example of the desired pupil response to particular activities and the over-arching big question that the lesson intends to answer. I find this gives the clarity they need to be able to support pupils in achieving the intended learning. This is especially helpful for non-subject specialist teaching assistants when teaching tricky concepts.

## **What impact does this have on pupils?**

Pupils benefit from either 1:1 or small group interaction, allowing them to ask more questions and access expert support easier.

For pupils who may find it difficult to access some learning, working with a TA who has a clear understanding of the intended learning outcomes and scaffolding strategies at the ready, supports them in making accelerated progress in contrast to how it would be if they didn't have TA support.

Pupils who are able to be stretched may be given more challenging work and benefit from accessing support from the TA if necessary. The TA ensures that they can be adequately challenged, but not to the extent that they become overloaded by the challenge. The TA may use guided questioning and prompts to support their progress.

**How do you ensure all pupils get a similar amount of support from both you and your TA throughout the day/week?**

I suppose there's no hard and fast rule about how frequently the TA's and I interact with each pupil or groups of pupils within a class.

It really is dependent upon the topic being taught, needs of classes and needs of individuals. Our ways of working are fluid and responsive to the unique context presented by each individual lesson.

If I were to offer any advice about the ratio of Teacher/TA interaction with different groups of pupils it would be to judge each lesson on its own merits as they can be influenced by so many factors such as attendance at the previous lesson, complexity of the concept being taught, needs of individual pupils and even the time of day the lesson occurs as just some examples. The most important decision is that the planning of deployment of teacher and TA reflects how their strengths can best support the learning in the given lesson.