

Working with Support Staff, Educational Professionals and Parents

Chapter Aims

- To gain an understanding of how to work with Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) effectively when supporting SEND pupils, which is rooted in evidence-based practice and research.
- To have an overview of the different roles in education that might work together to support SEND pupils.
- To consider approaches to working with parents and carers of SEND pupils, and consider their perspectives and concerns.
- To understand how collaborative working is key in supporting SEND pupils.

Links to the Core Content Framework (CCF)

High Expectations

- **Learn that** a culture of mutual trust and respect supports effective relationships.
- **Learn how to** seek opportunities to engage parents and carers in the education of their children (e.g. proactively highlighting successes) with support from expert colleagues to understand how this engagement changes depending on the age and development stage of the pupil.

Adaptive Teaching

- **Learn that** pupils with special educational needs or disabilities are likely to require additional or adapted support; working closely with colleagues, families and pupils to understand barriers and identify effective strategies is essential.
- **Learn how to** make effective use of teaching assistants and other adults in the classroom under supervision of expert colleagues.

Professional Behaviours

- **Learn that** effective professional development is likely to be sustained over time, involve expert support or coaching and opportunities for collaboration.
- **Learn that** building effective relationships with parents, carers and families can improve pupils' motivation, behaviour and academic success.
- **Learn that** Teaching Assistants (TAs) can support pupils more effectively when they are prepared for lessons by teachers, and when TAs supplement rather than replace support from teachers.
- **Learn that** SENCos, pastoral leaders, careers advisors and other specialist colleagues also have valuable expertise and can ensure that appropriate support is in place for pupils.
- **Learn how to** discuss and analyse with expert colleagues how experienced colleagues seek ways to support individual colleagues and working as part of a team.
- **Learn how to** observe how expert colleagues communicate with parents and carers proactively and make effective use of parents' evenings to engage parents and carers in their children's schooling and deconstructing this approach.
- **Learn how to** prepare teaching assistants for lessons under supervision of expert colleagues.

Introduction

Part III of this book takes what you have learnt so far about SEND and the broad areas of need, and begins to consider further applying these skills, and putting them into practice alongside learning new information and strategies, such as working collaboratively and assessing pupils using the graduated approach.

This chapter focuses on collaborative working, working with your support staff (Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs)), wider educational professionals, and parents and carers.

Working with Teaching Assistants and Learning Support Assistants

In a primary school, it is likely that if you have SEND pupils in your class, that you will also have a TA or LSA working with you for either part of the day, or all of the day.

So, what is their role?

Reflect

Think about your teacher training classroom.

- Do you work with a TA/LSA?
- Do you have the same one, or more?
- Are they there within your class all of the time?
- What role do you think they have?
- How does your mentor direct them?
- What sort of jobs or teaching and learning do they do?

If it's possible, discuss this with some of your teacher training colleagues. You may find that there will be differences in roles and expectations from school to school. We will discuss why this is now.

Let's start by outlining the difference between a TA and an LSA.

A TA will tend to work across the whole class offering academic support to all pupils and being a good role model to them, they are directed by the class teacher to work with different groups depending on the focus.

An LSA will more often work one-to-one with pupils, they may also have a pastoral role, and they may support or lead on the implementation and conducting of specific interventions.

There are many similarities between the two roles, and often the terms of the two roles will be used interchangeably. The role definition will depend upon the contract of the support worker, and therefore the role that the TA or LSA will be undertaking in your individual school. It is always best to find out what this is, and what the expectations are for the role in your own host school, so that you know the type of work you should be directing your TA/LSA to be doing.

It is likely that as a class teacher you won't be line managing your LSA/TA, that is normally carried out by the SENCo, or a head of inclusion or pastoral care or someone that is part of the senior leadership group. However, you will be directing the work that they do within the classroom to support your pupils, so you will need to develop your working relationship with them and take on leadership qualities to do this effectively.

Webster, Blatchford, and Russell (2013) carried out some research in relation to the use of TAs specifically. They looked at the effectiveness of the use of TAs, how they were deployed, and the sort of tasks they were doing. They concluded that when TAs were trained to deliver specific intervention programmes, this worked well, but when TAs taught classes, this was not effective. So, there was support for highly focused intervention programmes for pupils delivered by TAs, but there was also a very clear message that TAs should not be teaching whole classes (they haven't been trained for this). However, there are many other aspects that TAs and LSAs are responsible for within the classroom, so what about these?

The Education Endowment Foundation (2018) reviewed the research around the use of TAs and agreed with Webster, Blatchford, and Russell (2013) that there were positives and negatives around how they were being used. They stated that the current model did not support pupil progress effectively and could even be detrimental to pupils if they became reliant on support and developed a dependency on a one-to-one TA. However, positives were seen in many areas, such as TAs supporting motivation, confidence, and self-esteem in pupils, and they eased workload for teachers, and enabled the teacher to focus more time on the teaching (Alix, 2023b).

TAs/LSAs come to this role with a range of qualifications and experience, some with a great deal of experience (and they may make you feel like a novice in the classroom as a trainee teacher, compared to their own experience), and others will be new to education altogether. There can also be little training and induction for TAs/LSAs, with time short in the day, and a lack of money for training. You will need to consider your role in directing and supporting them in the classroom, to ensure that pupils are in turn supported to make the progress that they can.

The EEF (2018) outline seven recommendations of how best TAs/LSAs should be used within schools, the link to this document is in the further reading section at the end of the chapter. There are seven recommendations:

- 1 TAs should not be used as an informal teaching resource for low attaining pupils.
- 2 Use TAs to add value to what teachers do, not replace them.
- 3 Use TAs to help pupils develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning.
- 4 Ensure TAs are fully prepared for their role in the classroom.
- 5 Use TAs to deliver high quality one-to-one and small group support using structured interventions.
- 6 Adopt evidence-based interventions to support TAs in their small group and one-to-one instruction.

- 7 Ensure explicit connections are made between learning from everyday classroom and teaching and structured interventions.

The Neurodiversity Handbook for Trainee Teachers (Alix, 2023a) examines these in turn in relation to working with neurodivergent pupils, including case studies, reflections, and discussions around these. This chapter in this book will take a different focus, and is going to look at some specific strategies that you can support your TA/LSA in developing when working with your SEND pupils as this will impact directly upon their developing practice and expertise as a TA/LSA. The relevant recommendations in relation to this are selected:

4. Ensure TAs are fully prepared for their role in the classroom.

It will be part of your role as the class teacher to direct the work of your TA/LSA, and give them clear direction and support. This is one of the Teachers' Standards that will need to be met at the end of your teacher training.

It is not just giving a TA/LSA a lesson plan and asking them to sit with a group, as I am sure that you have realised by now! So, what sort of things will you be expecting them to do on a daily basis to support your pupils? It might include:

- Directing them to check in on a child and set out the expectations and timetable for the day, ensuring that the pupil understands what is to follow throughout the day and what lessons will be taking place.
- Asking them to support the facilitation of the unstructured times of the day such as the transition times between lessons, break times and lunch times.
- Direct them to give hover support, when a pupil is working on a task in class, checking in with them, looking over what they are doing, where they are at, and offering encouragement and praise to keep them on track or to stay motivated. You are working towards independence (one of the previous recommendations), so the balance of this may change from lesson to lesson and over time. As a teacher you may need to model this if this is something that your TA/LSA is unfamiliar with doing.
- Demonstrate how hover support may include some taught elements when needed.
- Ensure that you share and discuss the pupil's IEP or EHCP targets, and how what you and your TA/LSA are doing is supporting them in working towards these.
- Ensure regular communication and feedback between yourself and your TA/LSA on the work that they have been supporting. Your pupil is your responsibility, not your TA's/LSA's. Communication between you and your TA/LSA is key so that informed decisions can be made around reviewing their progress, and adjusting the provision that they are receiving.

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

As you have read from previous chapters in Part II of this book, some pupils could have language and comprehension barriers, not understand phrases being used, jokes that are

made by others, or have difficulty with the construction and process of a conversation; for example, turn taking, listening, waiting, pausing for breath, using facial expressions and being polite. Each of these could lead to challenges when your TA/LSA is working with groups of pupils, and your TA/LSA may need support in developing strategies to work with your SEND pupils in this way.

Some suggestions to work with your TA/LSA on:

Create group rules or an agreement of expected behaviours for the group, this will provide some boundaries and safety points to refer to when needed. Rules could include:

- taking turns;
- listen when someone else is speaking;
- be respectful of other pupils' ideas;
- encourage and support other pupils to contribute and join in;
- take responsibility for a role within a task;
- if you want to disagree, disagree politely, and give a reason why you disagree;
- listen to feedback and act upon it.

These strategies will support you as a developing teacher, but will also be useful for you while working with your TA/LSA.

When carrying out group work:

- Consider where pupils are sitting, think about the pupils within the group and which pupils might work better with each other.
- Think about their strengths and challenges, how might you use these within the group working?
- Consider the type of task that pupils are doing, are there any pupils who will be better taking a lead role or encouraging other pupils to join in?
- Are there pupils within the group that are stronger with their reading skills or discussing ideas?
- You may want pupils to work in pairs within the group rather than all pupils contributing to the discussion or task. The TA/LSA will still be able to listen and support each of the pairs within the group.

A further overview of some possible interventions is outlined in the next section.

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

Working in Pairs

Working in pairs can help to develop skills in preparation for group work and has many benefits. One idea to support this development that you may have already seen being used in class is think-pair-share.

Think-Pair-Share is a strategy that is designed to encourage student involvement. First, participants listen to the teacher's question. Then they think of a response. They pair up with someone and discuss their responses. Finally, they are asked to share their responses with the whole group. This can be implemented within your small group working.

Think-Pair-Share is usually referred to as a Kagan structure, but it was developed originally by Frank Lyman and Arlene Mindus in 1977 and adapted as part of the Kagan Structures.

Kagan Structures promote four major principles, following the acronym PIES:

- Positive Independence.
- Individual Accountability.
- Equal Participation.
- Simultaneous Interaction.

The above principles support pupil engagement and pupils taking responsibility for their own learning. There are some links in the further reading section of the chapter for you to explore Kagan strategies further.

There are many types of intervention programmes that may be happening in your schools. Here is an overview of some of the interventions that may be taking place.

• Behaviour interventions

A TA/LSA could carry out intervention work relating to specific strategies for a pupil to recognise when they are beginning to dysregulate, and when emotions are becoming unmanageable and therefore affecting their behaviour in the classroom. The TA/LSA should be trained in working with the pupil on strategies, and a support plan should be in place that gives clear guidance on the process and strategies to be used. It is important to remember that for the behaviour seen, there is an underlying issue or barrier that needs to be investigated or addressed too such as SEMH needs.

• Classroom-based interventions

Classroom-based interventions can be an effective strategy to support the development of pupils in a structured way without being removed from the class base. This can have positive effects on pupils as they are not seen as being singled out for additional support in the same way as when they are removed from the class. It also minimises disruption for the pupils as part of their day. However, distraction from other pupils and other teaching that may be happening at the same time will need to be considered. Pre-teaching could take place as a classroom-based intervention.

• Collaborative interventions

Group interventions will enable groups of pupils to rehearse subject content and knowledge through group discussions and teamwork. Pupils will be given the opportunity to listen to the contribution of other pupils, which can help them to generate or confirm

their own ideas, or to challenge their thoughts and develop new thinking around a topic or area of discussion.

Group interventions will be delivering a specific programme based around gaps in curriculum knowledge and skills.

- *Social, emotional and well-being interventions*

Some interventions will not be based on academic progress, and will be centred around pupils' SEMH needs. These groups may include a grief or loss group, a nurture group, an exam anxiety group, or a communication skills group. These are just a few examples.

CASE STUDY

From Allaya an LSA.

Allaya worked as an LSA in a Year 5 class. She supported a range of pupils with additional needs, and was not fixed to working with a particular pupil on a one-to-one basis. Allaya often worked with groups of pupils, on specific skills or knowledge that had been identified. Sometimes her focus was supporting the class teacher through pre-teaching subject specific language prior to a lesson, at other times it would be working with a group relating to the lesson content.

Allaya was having difficulty when working with a particular group of pupils, with one pupil being quite challenging for her. When Zain was within the group, Allaya found that she spent a great deal of time managing disagreements rather than working with them on the things that she needed to.

Allaya met with the class teacher (Martha) during an assembly time to discuss the challenges she was having which was starting to cause her some concerns and anxiety around taking the group. Martha worked with Allaya to unpick what was happening, and suggested she observe the group dynamic while Allaya was taking them. This was in a supportive way and not a critical way, as the teacher knew that Zain could present with challenging behaviour if he became agitated or misunderstood the content of the lessons, and she empathised with Allaya. They decided to work on this collaboratively through discussion and planned a way forward.

Martha observed two group sessions from a distance while she was supporting and facilitating a task with other groups. She noticed that Zain was fine when he was working on his own, but when they were asked to discuss ideas within the group, arguments arose. Martha decided to explore this further with Zain and Allaya. They spoke with Zain to find out his perspective on how he felt when working within a group. Zain had a diagnosis of autism, and he would find turn taking in games difficult, he had on-going interventions to support and develop his skills in this; however, these didn't seem to be transferring over to his group work and discussions within the classroom. Zain said that he didn't always agree with other pupils' ideas, and some of them were silly and this annoyed him, and he preferred to do things on his own as they were his ideas which he liked. It was decided that to begin with, Allaya would enable Zain to write his discussion points on a whiteboard

(Continued)

by himself while the rest of the group discussed their ideas. This would give Zain the opportunity to explore his ideas within the time that he had. Martha also arranged for Allaya to join in with the intervention group that Zain was attending so that she could bring back some of the ideas, strategies and learning from the intervention, and apply them within her group work.

Allaya saw instant improvements for Zain and the group when he could work on his own, and she also began to develop her own skills and strategies to bring back to her group work from shadowing the interventions group. These included:

- setting up group rules to include being respectful of each other's ideas;
- taking time to facilitate each pupil to express their ideas, and not hurrying them;
- giving pupils roles within a task;
- modelling how to disagree politely and to give reasons why you disagree;
- using paired work within the group, rather than all pupils contributing to the whole group discussion.

Allaya was then able to apply these strategies across her teaching too.

- *One-to-one intervention*

This targeted support identifies specific areas of content knowledge and skills in which a pupil has gaps. These interventions provide the opportunity for a pupil to work directly and individually with a TA or LSA on very personalised targets, and there is greater scope of achievement and of accelerated learning via one-to-one interventions. These types of interventions are normally implemented in short bursts of approximately 20 minutes a session with several sessions a week.

The EEF (2021) outline that to implement this individual support in schools effectively, the following should happen:

- The accurate identification of the pupils who need the additional support. This could be done through the graduated approach, and pupils would be identified by the class teacher and the SENCo. This will be explored further in Chapter 8.
- The understanding of the learning gaps that each individual pupil has, and that the additional tuition is applied to address these gaps in curriculum knowledge and content.
- Ensure that the deliverer of the intervention is well prepared and having high-quality interactions with pupils such as giving well-planned feedback.
- Assessment from this should then be given to the class teacher on pupil progress and the tuition then needs adjusting accordingly to the needs of the pupil.
- One-to-one tuition should be well linked to the classroom content and must allow time for the teacher and the tutor to discuss the tuition, so that these links can

- be made. This will ensure the knowledge and skills are being transferred from the tuition back into the classroom, and across curriculum content and subjects.
- The one-to-one tuition may be delivered by teachers, trained teaching assistants, academic mentors or tutors. Interventions are typically delivered over an extended period, often over several weeks or a term.

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

When pupils are attending structured interventions, it is really important that this learning is then transferred across the curriculum. Making cognitive links are essential for application across the curriculum and strategies for the retrieval of knowledge and skills and then application need to be applied. Work with your TA/LSA to look at how these skills can be recalled and applied back in the classroom.

The EEF (2021) have an on-line toolkit for working with pupils on a one-to-one basis and implementing specific targeted interventions and tuition. Their research focus is based upon interventions that are being delivered to develop curriculum knowledge and skills.

Time for training and support for TAs/LSAs in school is short, some schools have very little availability for this (if any) and further needs to be done in this area to support schools with funding and training. A recommended text to pass on to your TA/LSA is *The Neurodiversity Handbook for Teaching Assistants and Learning Support Assistants; A guide for Learning Support Staff* (Alix, 2023b), which highlights supporting strategies from the perspective of a TA/LSA.

Working with Educational Professionals

Reflect

Name and list the educational professionals that you have either worked with, or heard of in school so far.

Are there any other professionals that you know of, and do you know what their roles are? As we work through the next section, make a note of any that you have not heard of before, and follow up with some additional reading of what that role looks like within your Local Authority (LA).

In education, we work with many different professionals to support SEND pupils. We work beyond delivering lessons in classes and become part of a multi-agency team to support pupils. Within each Local Authority (LA) some roles may look slightly different in the way that they are structured, or implemented, so it is important to find out what these roles look like within your own LA. Some may have slightly different names and titles too.

- Behaviour Support: this team will consist of advisors who will come into schools and support with strategies to implement as a teacher with your pupils. The team will also work closely with Behaviour Support Workers who work directly with parents and carers in the home, to join up the thinking around the strategies and support between the home and the school. Behaviour support advisors and behaviour support workers will collaborate closely together.
- Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS): the mental health team may support pupils for mental health concerns or anxiety. Pupils may be referred to CAMHS via the school SENCo, a GP, or parents. The pupil may attend group or individual sessions, which are normally over an allotted period of time, for example 6–8 sessions.
- Educational Psychologist (EP): the EP may assess a pupil in school, and within this assessment they might conduct tests and assessments to provide a report on the areas of difficulties for a pupil, and then provide a set of recommendations and supporting strategies and resources.
- Education Welfare Officer (EWO): an education welfare officer is responsible for monitoring pupil attendance at school. They may support SEND pupils, parents and schools when attendance is low. They may also attend multi-agency meetings to discuss pupil progress with attendance, and they can work with schools and LAs to issue penalties for absence if holiday is taken during term time.
- Medical Professionals: you may work with a range of medical professionals such as a GP, consultant or specialist nurse. It is likely that they may provide a support plan, guidance or attend multi-agency meetings around a specific medical care need.
- Specialist Teachers: these will be within a certain area, for example autism, neurological, or hearing or visual impairments such as the Qualified Teacher for the Visually Impaired (QTVI). They will visit the school and work directly with pupils on areas of need that have been included within their IEP or EHCP.
- Speech and Language Therapists: an outline of this role was given in Chapter 3.
- Social Worker: a pupil or family may be under the care or support of a social worker who will monitor the safeguarding of the pupil.
- Virtual Headteacher: this is a headteacher who oversees all of the Looked After Children (LAC)/ Children in Care (CiC) that are in care within their Local Authority (LA).

PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSION

Discuss with your mentor and SENCo whether you are able to shadow (or be an attendee) at a multi-agency meeting, so that you can begin to understand and see in practice how the services and professionals work together, to formulate support plans and provide services for SEND pupils.

Working with Parents and Carers

It can be a little daunting working with parents and carers as a trainee teacher. In a primary school, you will have quite a lot of contact with parents, and you will soon settle into this. You will have more contact in the earlier years, and less frequent contact as you enter Years 5 and 6 if pupils are able to take themselves to and from school, but regular contact with parents of your SEND pupils is important to maintain.

You may have contact during:

- school drop-off and collection times;
- parents' evening or open days;
- SEND review meetings including one-plan or EHCP reviews;
- family open events such as the school fete and festival performances.

Some of these interactions will be more informal, and others formal.

It is important that you build relationships with parents and be open to listening to them. Often this can be at the start or the end of the day and it can be a quick catch up, passing over of information, or letting a parent know how their child is getting on. At other times there will be more formal reviews of progress made towards targets and plans for the next steps of support.

Sometimes parents can become frustrated by the lack of progress made by their child, or feel that the support that is in place isn't enough for them. Often it can be a misunderstanding regarding expectations in the classroom, and if difficult conversations are needed with parents regarding your SEND pupils, then you need to seek support and guidance from your SENCo who can support you in explaining how provision is allocated. Parents may also have their own barriers to education and to engaging with schools, such as having their own poor literacy skills, or fears due to their own negative experiences of school.

There are many positive things that you can do to develop your relationships with your SEND pupils' parents including:

- consider parents as partners in your pupils' education and progress;
- ensure that you allocate time to share positive information about your pupil with them regularly;
- make time to listen to their concerns;
- develop a relationship that has mutual respect;
- smile and use open body language;
- find out more about their child, ask questions about their routines, and what works well for them at home;
- invite parents in to join the class for parts of the end of the lesson to understand what the classroom looks like for their child;
- arrange for parents to meet with other SEND parents through school coffee mornings that may be in place;

- do not contradict a diagnosis; pupils may show things differently at school and home and parents may see different behaviour. You are not qualified to diagnose;
- use appropriate language and terminology about SEND, never joke about a child's needs.

Parents may need support with:

- preparing to talk or give information at a more formal meeting or review;
- understanding terminology relating to education and SEND;
- expressing themselves or with language if English is not their first language;
- sharing their own perspectives and thoughts.

They may need:

- time to prepare for meetings;
- a friend or family member to accompany them;
- accessible information in a format that is suitable for them;
- professionals to avoid jargon or explain terms that are used.

As part of your teacher training course, you will begin to develop your relationships with the parents of the pupils in your class. The more you have contact time with them, and get to know their child, the more confident you will be in discussing their progress, and any challenges with them. You will shadow parents' evenings in terms one and two and you may lead on some pupils' parents' evening discussion as you move to term three of your training.

Activity

Discuss with your mentor to attend and shadow any review meetings that you can.

You may also be asked for your input during these as you move into your final teaching block and take responsibility for pupil learning and progress.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has looked in detail at working with TAs and LSAs to support your SEND pupils. The section has given you strategies on how to support your TA/LSA in working with your SEND pupils. It has considered the EEF (2018) recommendations on good practice and use of TAs/LSAs and discussed areas of these to focus on when supporting TA/LSA practice.

The case study examined how a teacher supported their LSA to work with a challenging group of pupils, and you can reflect upon your developing role and the teachers' standard relating to working with support staff.

The next section gave an overview of working with other educational professionals. This will be an important element of working with SEND pupils, and you will need to develop your experience here as you move through your Early Career Teacher (ECT) years and take full responsibility for your class and SEND pupils.

The final section looked at working with parents and carers with a focus on developing positive and open relationships with them.

Glossary of Key Terms

- Teaching Assistant (TA) – A member of support staff that will work across the whole class offering academic support to all pupils and being a good role model to them. They are directed by the class teacher to work with different groups depending on the focus.
- Learning Support Assistant (LSA) – A member of support staff that will often work one-to-one with pupils, they may also have a pastoral role, and they may support or lead on the implementation and conducting of specific interventions.

Further Reading

- Alix, S. (2023a). *The Neurodiversity Handbook for Trainee Teachers*. London: Sage.
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- Education Endowment Foundation (2021). One to One Tuition. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/one-to-one-tuition>
- Iris Connect, How I support SEND Pupils. <https://blog.irisconnect.com/uk/send-teaching>
- Kagan cooperative learning structures. <https://education.wm.edu/centers/sli/events/ESL%20101/kagan-cl-structures.pdf>
- Kagan, it's all about engagement. https://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/dr_spencer_kagan/264/The-quot-E-quot-of-PIES

Links to the Teachers' Standards

- 5. *Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils*; have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils' ability to learn, and how best to overcome these; have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs; those of high ability; those with English as an additional language; those with disabilities; and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them.
- 8. *Fulfil wider professional responsibilities*; make a positive contribution to the wider life and ethos of the school; develop effective professional relationships with colleagues, knowing how and when to draw on advice and specialist support; deploy support staff effectively; take responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development, responding to advice and feedback from colleagues; communicate effectively with parents with regard to pupils' achievements and well-being.

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