

Guidance for working effectively with Teaching Assistants: Good practice for secondary schools

City & County of Swansea



in conjunction with



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Introduction

This guidance has been provided by City & County of Swansea to support your work with Teaching Assistants (TAs)¹. They are often referred to as *support staff* because their work involves supporting students who struggle to access the curriculum, for a variety of reasons. However TAs are also employed to support you as a teacher or SENCO², as you deliver curriculum and support student learning.

This guidance is designed to provide you with very practical advice on how you can work together with support staff, to maximise their effectiveness and yours. However, our main purpose is to maximise student learning, raise standards, and ensure a positive school experience for all students, particularly those who struggle in some way. Strategies outlined in this book will also support you in working with TAs to facilitate the setting and meeting of targets for student progress.

The challenges

We recognise that there are a number of challenges for teachers and SENCOs working with TAs in secondary settings.

* We recognise that you may not have received any guidance or training in how to work most effectively with support staff – either during your initial teacher training or subsequently. This is a common situation, particularly for teachers in secondary schools: you may feel quite unprepared to ‘manage’ the work of TAs in addition to planning for student learning.

* We also recognise that secondary schools operate quite differently from primary schools, in terms of timetabling, the number and age range of students you teach, etc. These differences obviously impact on your working relationships with TAs,

¹ Schools may use a variety of titles for these staff (LSAs, LSOs, etc.), but we have used *Teaching Assistant* as the generic term throughout, in line with Welsh Government publications and guidance.

² We are using ‘SENCO’ as a generic term to include ALNCo, Inclusion Managers and other designations used by individual schools.

many of whom may attend your classes alongside a designated student, rather than being classroom- or faculty-based. And of course there may be a large number of TAs who pass through your classes in this way during the course of a typical week.

* You may be grateful for the presence of a TA and feel reassured that the student she³ supports is more likely to be learning because of the TA. But we also recognise that you may feel uncomfortable with another adult in the classroom - even a little intimidated if that adult is older and/or more experienced than you. And it's not only the presence of another adult that may be worrying, but also the fact that they become your responsibility when they enter your classroom and need to be supervised in some way.

This guidance was written to help you with each of these challenges.

³ We will refer to TAs as 'she' because the great majority of TAs – across all phases - are female.

Structure of the guidance

In *Section I* of this guidance you will find information about Differentiation. This is very obviously because the presence of TAs in secondary classrooms is almost entirely due to the need for differentiation – the tailoring of support to meet individual student needs.

Section II of this guidance summarises a piece of research conducted in secondary schools in the City & County of Swansea in relation to the work of TAs. It forms the basis of the information contained in this guidance, supplemented by the professional literature and research of others. You may be interested to read what local TAs, SENCOs and students had to say, within the wider context of TAs working across the UK, and elsewhere.

Section III, the main part of the guidance, provides practical strategies for your work with support staff. Couched in terms of *Before*, *During* and *After*, it considers some of the issues of

- ✓ planning for the TA's presence in your lessons,
- ✓ deployment of the TA during those lessons, and
- ✓ actions you may take subsequently.

These are directed firstly to teachers, but for each area we have included a section for SENCOs, suggesting how this would apply if that is your role.

At the end of this booklet, you will find a list of *Tips for TAs*, which you can photocopy and provide to individual TAs you work with, if you feel that would be helpful.

And lastly we have included some tips for working with students with a range of conditions commonly associated with the need for classroom support:

- ✓ Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- ✓ Social Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (SEBD)

- ✓ Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD) and
- ✓ Dyslexia.

You may find these useful as background information and may also wish to share them with TAs who work in your classroom. Feel free to photocopy pages as needed.

Section I: *Differentiation*

Differentiation: What does this mean?

This section is designed to provide you with:

- A reminder of the diverse needs of learners
- a basic understanding of what differentiation is, and
- an understanding of some ways in which we can differentiate our teaching and students' learning experiences.

According to the Training and Development Agency for Schools, differentiation is the process by which differences between students are accommodated so that all students have the best possible chance of learning. So as teachers, we are required to set suitable learning challenges, respond to students' diverse needs, and overcome potential barriers to learning. This is a tall order, so what does it mean in practical terms?

O'Brien and Guiney (2001) propose a number of 'principles for differentiation' and point out that successful differentiation is not about planning to troubleshoot for some students, but must be a practice that is applied to all.

The principles they propose are:

1. all children have a right to a high-quality education
2. every child can learn
3. every teacher can learn
4. learning is a process that involves mutual relationships
5. progress for all will be expected, recognised and rewarded
6. people and learning systems can change for the better.

Differentiation is an approach to teaching that attempts to ensure that all students learn well, despite their many differences. Catch phrases which go some way to capturing this concept include: *Coping with differences*, *Learning for all*, and *Success for all*.

So how do we meet learners' diverse needs? We need to take into account the variety of factors that may affect learning, such as the ability of the students, the different ways in which students learn, and the effectiveness of the teaching approaches we choose to use.

The ability of the students

Some students may have Additional/Special Learning needs (ALN / SEN). But there will be a huge variety of abilities among any class of students. Some may struggle with particular subjects or even skills within a subject; others could be

'high flyers' in particular subjects; some will be designated 'more able and talented'.

How people learn

We know that we all learn best in different ways. If you discussed with the family or colleagues how they like to learn or study you will find preferences vary.

Do they/you like silence?

Do they/you like background noise?

Do they/you like to create a mind map?

Do they/you like to make a list?

All of these preferences feed in to the dynamics of providing for all students.

The effectiveness of teaching methods

Howard Gardiner's Multiple Intelligences are now commonly known and accepted as valid in education settings. But we should also still consider the earlier identification of learning styles or preferences based on the three modalities of visual, auditory, tactile/kinaesthetic learning.

Those with *Visual Preferences* (estimated at 60% of students) prefer:

demonstrations, descriptions, lists, reading by sight; for noise to be blocked out; they remember faces not names, and are likely to be distracted by movement.

Those with *Auditory Preferences* prefer:

verbal instructions, listening, dialogues, discussions and plays; they are likely to remember names not faces; they prefer talking through problems and work well in quiet atmosphere

Those with *Tactile/Kinesthetic Preferences*:

find it best to take notes when listening or reading; draw or doodle to remember; like hands-on activities; need to be involved and active; learn best when moving; they lose much of what is said, and may have problems sitting and reading.

It's important to note that while children do have learning preferences with regards to modalities (styles), research shows that teaching all content in their best modality does not equal greater achievement. The content's best modality is more important for achievement (Willingham, 2005). For example, as David Sousa points out, if you want students to learn and remember what something looks like, then your presentation should be visual. Orally describing the Roman Coliseum to students is not as effective as showing them a picture or model of it. Likewise,

having students read about 1920s Ragtime music would not be as effective as listening to a CD of Scott Joplin playing his famous rags.

The type of teachers we are is determined largely by the way we were taught ourselves – the research suggests this is true despite the intervening years of teacher training/education. Just think: What dangers does this pose for teaching a class of students with a variety of needs? And how on earth can we differentiate to accommodate all students' needs every lesson? Well the simple answer is: We just can't. But there are some things we can do.

Schools begin the process of differentiation by setting or streaming students according to ability. This can be based on general abilities, as well as ability in different core areas such as literacy and numeracy. Interestingly, a review of the use of setting across a school showed:

- no significant differences on overall attainment between setting and mixed ability teaching
- ability grouping does not contribute much to raising standards for all students
- lower achieving students show more progress in mixed ability classes
- higher achieving students show more progress in set classes.

So some of the possible ways of grouping students (whole school or within class) might include ability, but also:

- a mix of abilities
- gender
- expertise, or
- friendship.

Then we can also differentiate in a number of other ways:

- *By task* - different tasks are given to different students to reflect their needs. These can focus upon the same topic/theme or may be entirely different work.
- *By support* - the task may be the same, but different resources can be made available for different learners (e.g. struggling learners could be given definitions for difficult words, scaffolding for writing, or sentence starters for discussions). In terms of human support, more able students could be placed within a group or the TA/teacher might work more closely with a

group of struggling students. The more able can be challenged using advanced written material.

- *By product* - The same task is given, for example to prepare a piece of writing to persuade an audience, but different learners are asked to present it in different ways e.g. in the style of a poster, pamphlet or magazine article (these require different amounts of text and different relationships between the illustrations and the text). This allows for more demanding features to be introduced for some.
- *By outcome* - Students are given the same task with the same resources but have to tackle it in their own way. The outcome shows their ability to complete the task and their understanding of it.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these methods, as you'll see in the table on the following page.

So the challenge is to do what we can to meet the diversity of student needs in our classrooms. The remainder of this guide will look at ways we can differentiate by support, making effective use of the TAs who are assigned to work with our students.

Advantages and Disadvantages of different types of differentiation

Differentiation by...	Advantages	Disadvantages
<i>Task</i>	Work suitable for each student Failure unlikely, behavioural problems might be reduced Useful for formative assessment	Labour intensive for the teacher May highlight differences Not useful for summative assessment
<i>Support</i>	All students produce the same piece of work and feel equal Failure unlikely, behavioural problems might be reduced Can be useful for summative assessment	Labour intensive for the teacher May highlight differences May not be a true reflection of ability
<i>Product</i>	All students can achieve Failure unlikely, behavioural problems might be reduced Can help students work on their weak areas	Labour intensive Difficult to provide for a class of 30 Time consuming Students might finish at different times
<i>Outcome</i>	Easy to plan Useful for summative assessment – clearly shows different levels Students could work collaboratively	Without support some students might be restricted Some students might fail Difference in abilities could be highlighted Students could finish at different times

Section II: The Research

The Research

The 2004 Workforce Remodelling agenda or National Agreement changed expectations of Teaching Assistants, with the introduction of HLTA status, and Cover Supervisor as new roles. Webster et al (2012) refer to the increase in numbers of Teaching Assistants since then as a “vital, but largely neglected, feature of modern classroom life” and they discuss the profound changes associated with having up to 15% of secondary school staff comprised of TAs.

Subsequent to the National Agreement, the large-scale DISS⁴ research project investigated the deployment and impact of TAs in schools in England and Wales over a 5-year period. Many of the research findings were unsurprising:

- teachers felt their workload had been eased;
- TAs provided support for both instruction and behaviour management.

Concerns arose, however, when it became apparent that TAs often represent an alternative rather than a supplementary provision for students, especially those with special or additional needs (SEN/ALN). And of greater concern again was the finding that

“pupils who received the most support from TAs made less progress in core subjects over a school year than similar pupils who received less support from TAs, even when controlling for characteristics that can affect progress, such as prior attainment and level of SEN.”⁵

As Webster and his colleagues point out, “problems have arisen from assuming that TA support will lead to positive outcomes for pupils.” They also noted that in many secondary schools:

“where pupils with a statement of SEN were allocated TA support, teachers shifted their responsibility for these pupils to TAs.”

This is the national context relating the work of TAs.

The Local context

The City & County of Swansea’s Education Effectiveness Service was given funding

⁴ Deployment and Impact of Support Staff

⁵ *Challenging the Role and Deployment of Teaching Assistants in Mainstream Schools: The Impact on Schools.* Final Report on the *Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA)* project. A research project funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. 2012. Blatchford, Webster and Russell. Dept. of Psychology and Human Development Institute of Education, University of London. Available at: <http://maximisingtas.co.uk/assets/content/edtareport-2.pdf>

in 2012 to investigate effective practice with TAs working in secondary schools.

Two main data collection methods were used:

1. *Questionnaires* to all TAs working in secondary schools in the authority. This consisted largely of a set of statements with a 5-point scale for responses (from *Strongly agree* to *Strongly disagree*). These statements related to:

- Expectations of the TA;
- Feeling valued;
- Planning with the teacher;
- Professional development; and
- Support received

Some of these statements invited a further open response, and were followed by 3 open-ended questions about positive and negative aspects of the TA's role, and training the TA might like to receive.

2. *Focus groups* with secondary school students. *Focus groups with students* were held in an English-medium secondary schools which houses a Specialist Teaching Facility (STF). Questions related to students' perceptions of TAs, their roles and value, and their collaboration with teachers. Three different focus groups were held: with members of the school council; with students with identified as having SEN who received support in mainstream classes; and with students who attended and received support solely in the STF.

There was also a focus group with TAs; the findings from that discussion are incorporated into the suggestions we make here.

Findings

- Questionnaires to TAs

Of the 139 secondary school TAs who responded to the questionnaire:

- About two-thirds worked in mainstream, the other third about equally divided between STFs and a combination of mainstream and STF.
- Years of experience as a TA ranged from <1 to 27 years (average 7.7).
- Average years of experience working with students with Additional Learning Needs/SEN was 6.9 (range <1 to 25 years).
- About two-thirds had attended induction training.

- Just less than two-thirds provided support at student level, the other third provided support to both students and faculty.

The predominant responses to the 21 statements are presented in the tables that follow, each one representing one of the 5 areas of focus.

Expectations of the TA

Table 1. Ratings of statements relating to *Expectations of the TA* (excerpts)

Statement	Predominant response	Percent
I am aware of what is expected of me at all times	Agree/Strongly agree	79%
I have knowledge of the children's IEPs/ Targets	Agree/Strongly agree	75%
I feel the school is aware of my strengths and skills	Agree/Strongly agree	46%
I feel the school uses my strengths and skills well	Agree/Strongly agree	45%
I sometimes feel I have too little responsibility	Disagree/Strongly disagree	42%
I am encouraged to use my initiative within my own area/child	Agree/Strongly agree	68%
I keep a record of the work I carry out	Agree/Strongly agree	60%

Feeling valued

Table 2. Ratings of statements relating to *Feeling valued* (excerpts)

Statement	Predominant response	Percent
My opinion is valued by teachers with regards to individual students	Agree or strongly agree	55%
I feel I am a valued partner with regards to the child's learning in the classroom	Agree or strongly agree	60%
I feel valued in all areas of school life	All types of response (agree / disagree / neutral) received approximately equal response	
I feel my work in school impacts on the children's learning	Agree or strongly agree	80%

Positive comments in relation to this question related to *being thanked or appreciated* by most teachers (although many commented that this varied among staff members). Less positive comments included:

- not being included in all aspects of school life
- staff not explaining expectations or sharing information
- TAs' skills being under-utilised

The most positive comments related to the STF. Additionally, 80% overall *agreed/strongly agreed* with I feel my work in school impacts on the children's learning. Open-ended responses relating to this statement included: *Providing differentiation*, and *Supporting children both academically and emotionally*.

Planning with the teacher

Table 3. Ratings of statements relating to *Planning with the teacher* (excerpts)

Statement	Predominant response	Percent
I have allocated time to plan within the school timetable	Disagree or strongly disagree	61%
I plan and evaluate with the teacher	Disagree or strongly disagree	55%

Open-ended comments supplementing these ratings related to:

- No time allocated for planning and/or evaluating with the teacher

Differences between mainstream and STF approaches were noted by a number of respondents, as also the different approaches of individual teachers.

Professional Development

Table 4. Ratings of statement relating to *Professional Development* (excerpts)

Statement	Predominant response	Percent
I am invited to attend In-School Training Sessions	Agree or strongly agree	65%
I am encouraged to attend further off-site training for professional development	Agree or strongly agree	50%
I would like to update my skills regularly by attending refresher courses	Agree or strongly agree	72%

I am encouraged to share my training with other staff	Agree or strongly agree	39%
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Support received

Table 5. Ratings of statement relating to *Support received* (excerpts)

Statement	Predominant response	Percent
I know who to approach if I have a problem	Agree or strongly agree	79%
I receive a good level of support from the SENCO	Agree or strongly agree	73%
I receive a good level of support from the classroom teachers	Agree or strongly agree	55%
I receive a good level of support from the school's Managerial Team,	Agree or strongly agree 39% Although all types of response (agree/disagree/neutral) received an approximately equal response	

As Table 5 shows, TAs generally felt confident about who could assist them if they had problems and received varying levels of support from different groups among the other staff. Table 6 gives an overview of responses to the open-ended questions.

Table 6. Responses to open-ended questions (overview)

Question	Predominant response	Also referred to...
<i>Which areas of your job do you feel you do particularly well, and what in your opinion has enabled this success?</i>	positive relationships with students or positive atmosphere at work	qualifications gained by students supporting in subjects in which they are confident understanding teacher instructions adhering to class/school rules
<i>Which areas of your work do you find difficult? Why are these difficult?</i>	lack of continuity from one lesson to the next when working with different students, or due to timetabling issues.	dealing with difficult or un-motivated children working with staff who do not use TAs effectively (including issues of differentiation) supporting in subject areas in

		which they lack confidence lack of respect from students
<i>What future training do you feel would benefit you?</i>	Majority interested in further training (esp. accredited) in: Specific difficulties such as dyslexia; Behaviour (incl. restraint); IT skills, esp. iPads; Literacy & numeracy; First aid	Respondents also noted the need for courses specifically targeting secondary practice for TAs, and the opportunity to pursue level 3 or 4 qualifications specific to learning support

TA questionnaire - summary

The overall picture which emerges suggests that:

1. A majority of TAs are aware of expectations, have knowledge of IEPs/targets, are encouraged to use initiative, and keep records of their work; less than half feel that schools are aware of and/or use their skills; and less than half feel they have too *little* responsibility.
2. A small minority categorically state that they have allocated time to plan with the teacher, or plan/evaluate with the teacher.
3. The majority feel valued for their knowledge of students and as a team member team, but the sense of being generally valued is much lower.
4. A large majority are invited to in-house in-service; half are encouraged to attend off-site in-service, although 3 out of 4 express a desire to regularly update their skills. Well under half are encouraged to share training with staff.
5. The great majority feel their work has an impact on learning, but a sense of being supported varies across staff categories.

Open-ended responses suggest that:

1. positive relationships with students and a positive atmosphere at work contribute to a sense of success, along with seeing students achieve, and working in subject areas in which they have confidence and understand what is expected
2. lack of continuity between lessons are among the difficulties TAs encounter, along with: supporting difficult or un-motivated children; members of staff who do not use TAs effectively; having to provide support in subject areas in which they lack confidence; lack of respect from students.

3. the majority would be interested in further training opportunities on a wide variety of topics, but specifically geared to supporting students at secondary level.

- Focus groups with students

School Council (No identified SEN or support from a TA)

Question 1: *What do you think TAs do? What is their job?*

Answers focused around support and help for struggling students, particularly those with learning disabilities or those who cannot work independently:

They help you if you're stuck on work and explain things in other ways

I don't think they just help the children I think they're the teacher's right hand man, doing all the extra bits for the teacher

Question 2: *How are TAs viewed by students?*

In addition to comments such as *I see them around but not very much* and *You don't even notice they're there*, responses focused on the lack of respect generally shown to TAs in secondary school, due to a perceived lack of authority.

Question 3: *What is the relationship between the TAs and the teachers?*

Students commented that they see interactions between teachers and TAs, but less so in secondary school than they were used to in primary school, including the perceptive comment, *In primary the TA is with one teacher, but in secondary they are moving around so they can't build a relationship.*

Question 4: *What is the difference between a TA and a teacher?*

Here responses highlighted differences in qualifications and pay, including interesting comments such as: *...a TA is like a step down, and*

Teachers... are viewed as doing most of the work and teaching most of the students. They're supposed to be able to control a few more people than a TA.

Question 5: *Do you think we need to improve attitudes to TAs? If so, how?*

Suggestions for how to improve attitudes included:

- *The people in the class need to know why the person has a TA... They need to understand why they're there and what TAs do.*
- *It would help if they didn't class them as TAs... If they know they're TAs they might not give them respect...teachers normally get a lot more respect.*

Mainstream students with SEN

Question 1: What do you think TAs do? What is their job?

To nag you

To help you

To be a hawk – to watch you all the time

Question 2: What is the best thing about having a TA helping you with your work?

They can answer all the questions They give you the answers

Sometimes they help you, sometimes they don't

The younger ones are nicer, they understand you more because they're more your age

They help you when you need help

Question 3: What is the worst thing about having a TA helping you with your work?

They're annoying because they keep nagging you and don't leave you alone

Don't let you sit next to your friends; they sit next to you all the time, like a shadow

Even when you don't need help they're still there helping you

They treat you like a 'thicko'; treat us like we're in Nursery

They help you more when you don't need it and then when you need the help it's like they've gone deaf

They're like another mother with you

Question 4: How do you think the teachers view the TAs? Do they speak to each other in lessons?

They talk non-stop like an old pair of ladies

My [subject] teacher doesn't respect them; if I do something naughty she'll have a go at my TA for it

They get on really well because when you need help they're talking to each other and ignore you

The teacher will come up to the TA first to talk, not in every lesson

Students with SEN who attend the STF

Question 1: What do you think TAs do? What is their job?

Responses here focused more on a nurturing, caring approach: *To look after you, help and support you, help when you're stuck, helping teachers – errands, get paper from printers.* As well as the frequent role: *Sometimes when the teacher goes out they take charge*

Question 2: *What is the best thing about having a TA helping you with your work?*

These answers highlighted the importance of relationships:

Can have a laugh with them

Get on well with them

Help you a bit more than teachers; they actually are better than teachers in my opinion - it depends which TA

But also: *A good TA is one that lets you do your work and you can ask them when you're stuck.*

Question 3: *What is the worst thing about having a TA helping you with your work?*

Always help you, at the start of the lesson they come straight over to you

They always talk so it's difficult to concentrate on work; Sometimes I'm doing work in my head and they don't realise, then they talk and I can't concentrate

If you want to be cheeky they stop you; stop you having fun

They're like spies – at dinner time they follow you and listen

Treat you like babies

Sometimes they're disrespectful, like in [subject] they say 'serves you right'

Annoying – always there sat next to you

If you make a mistake they make a bigger thing of it and make you feel stupid – 'Oh no you don't do that, don't do that, you mustn't do that'

Distract you

Help us too much and too quickly; Say you put the wrong answer down and you know it's wrong and you're about to cross it out they tell you it's wrong

Question 4: *How do TAs help you best?*

When you're stuck you could ask them to help you. We'll put our hand up if we're stuck

Keep away a bit

Question 5: *How do you think teachers view the TAs? Do they speak to the TAs in*

the lessons?

They talk forever – too much talking

They get on well, that's what they are 'assistants'

They sometimes talk at the start of the lessons

Section III: *Before, During and After*

Practical everyday strategies

This section of the guidance addresses *Before, During and After* - practical strategies and suggestions for effective working with Teaching Assistants.

Before

Before any of your students enter your classroom, you engage in the planning process: what you will teach across a half-term, and then each week, what resources you'll need, how lesson periods will be divided up into different activities or content, etc. You do this so that you can present a coherent and considered set of learning activities, which will enable students to access content and concepts relating to your subject area and the prescribed curriculum in order to meet their learning objectives.

One of the resources you need to plan for is the TA who will be present in the lessons, whether they accompany an individual student to your timetabled sessions, or are assigned to your faculty or subject area. So we offer four suggestions for what you can do *before* the TA even comes into your classroom:

1. Know why students are receiving support from the TA
2. Ensure TAs have knowledge of the scheme of work (SOW)
3. Plan ahead for the tasks the TA will complete during each lesson
4. Plan ahead for how the TA will be involved in behaviour management

1. Know why students are receiving support from the TA

As part of the process of differentiating instruction to meet individual student needs, a teacher needs to know what those student needs are, and the particular need that's been identified that justifies support from a TA. Here are some aspects to consider:

- *Check student records for relevant information*

The school's record-keeping software should include information about a student that will allow you to become more familiar with his/her strengths

and areas of need. Both of these are important: knowledge of strengths that you can build or draw upon; knowledge of areas of need so that you can assess whether the student is likely to be able to access the proposed curriculum and associated activities. This will include elements such as the stage of Graduated Response (School Action, School Action Plus, Statement) which is being applied, progress data, school-based assessment data, national tests, attendance.

Many times I'll go into a classroom and get [asked by the teacher], 'Which kid are you here for?' They should know.

Secondary TA⁶

- *Be aware of the relevance of IEP targets to your curriculum area*

The IEP is a working document, with targets reviewed at least twice a year. Staff working with the student can contribute to the document and use the targets to inform their lesson planning.

For example, an R.E. or History lesson may have a high level of written content, which would present particular difficulties for students with Dyslexia (or other language-based difficulties) but also for students with Dyspraxia, Speech Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD), ADHD and ASD. The language content of secondary maths lessons also presents difficulties for many students. Understanding the needs of the student will help you plan in a way which will facilitate learning. So consider:

- ✓ the language content and difficulty of any resources you are planning to use (the level of difficulty of the questions you plan to ask, including the use of open-ended, opinion-type questions (see box on the next page)

⁶ From Webster et al (2012)

- ✓ the need for ‘thinking time (see box below) so that students can process information
- ✓ key vocabulary which may need to be presented to students and rehearsed until it is familiar enough for them to use it
- ✓ alternative means of assessment or of students showing their understanding (e.g., oral rather than written presentations)

- *Talk to relevant specialists e.g. SENCO, TA*

The SENCO is the designated specialist in the school for special or additional learning needs, and will be able to provide (or direct you to) resources and information relating to the types of difficulties some of your students may encounter. Another relevant specialist may be a teacher working in the Specialist Teaching Facility, if the school has one. But don’t forget that the TA assigned to the student may also be an expert on the relevant need. She may have supported that student for some time, and therefore be familiar with the individual student’s strengths and needs, and may well have attended training relating to that type of difficulty. She may therefore also have more generally useful information and suggestions to offer.

Thinking time

It has been suggested that our brains are like libraries with words and information categorised and stacked neatly on clearly labelled shelves. So when we require a word or piece of information we are able to access it quickly. For students with word-finding difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, SLCD) it is as if the all the library shelves have been overturned and the books scattered. Now it takes much longer to retrieve/find/access words or pieces of information. This will have a significant impact on a student’s ability to respond quickly to requests or questions.

Many students need time to think of answers to your questions. No doubt you already use the '*Don't put your hands up straight away – I want you to think carefully about your answer*' strategy, so that the speedy (or rash) students aren't the only ones called on to answer your questions. But some students need time to process the *question* before they can even think of processing an answer. So you need to be sure to provide plenty of thinking time.

And resist the temptation to repeat or rephrase the question while they are thinking, because that will interrupt the slow-processing student, and he/she will have to start again. Also, if you re-phrase the question, they may well assume they are now answering a different question – and start the thinking process all over again.

AS A SENCO...

You are likely to be the person who knows best why a particular student has been allocated support from a TA. So you will need to ensure:

1. That the supporting TA is well informed – knows enough about the student's IEP targets to provide focused support, and knows enough about the student's condition or disability that she can respond appropriately to the student's behaviour.
2. That teachers whose classes the TA will attend to support students have some idea of the students' needs and areas of difficulty.
3. That the teacher is aware of the IEP and the appropriate, practical strategies listed there to help meet the needs of the student in the mainstream class.

2. Ensure TAs have knowledge of the scheme of work (SOW)

The TA will be best equipped to support you and the students if she has a clear idea of which aspects of the curriculum are to be studied in the coming weeks and months. Otherwise she is working in the dark and has no chance to think ahead, no sense of where her work fits with the general plan.

- *Make the SOW accessible on the school network for TAs to look through*

If the Scheme of Work is available on the school network, the TA could access it that way. You would need to be sure that all Schemes of Work are up to date and stored where they are readily accessible, and check that the TA has been able to access the relevant one(s).

- *Each department to make a hard copy of the SOW accessible*

Hard copy of the SOW could be kept in the classroom in a designated place where the TA could access it easily, without interrupting you or your work. If it were pinned to a classroom notice board or kept in a folder, she could check it as often as needed.

AS A SENCO...

1. Meet with TAs on a regular basis. This will allow you to pass important information to the TAs, as well as checking there are no unresolved issues or timetabling difficulties. And with the move away from specified hours of support for individual students, you can certainly justify taking TAs off timetable for these short meetings, as they will contribute greatly towards increasing levels of TA effectiveness.
2. With the move away from one-to-one support you have also greater flexibility to deploy TAs when and where there is the greatest need, even for short periods of time, resuming normal timetables once the situation has improved. Feedback from TAs (in your regular meetings) can help you make these sorts of decisions.
3. Check that the TAs know how to access information such as SOWs on the school drive.
4. Advocate for TAs to be invited to departmental/ faculty meetings at least once per term – for the reasons described above.

- *Invite the TA to departmental planning meetings*

With the approval of the Head of Department, the TA could be invited to departmental planning meetings, at least once per term. This would serve as a means of communicating curriculum plans and expectations to the TA, and of gaining insight into how the curriculum could be made more accessible to more students. An experienced TA may have many useful suggestions to offer, based on her work with the current and previous students. These suggestions can be useful for a wide range of students, not just those allocated support.

3. Plan ahead for the tasks the TA will complete during the lesson

As you plan specific lesson content and structure

- *Know when TA support will be timetabled for your lessons*

Knowing when you will have the support of a TA will enable you to plan ahead. The presence of an extra adult will enable you to plan different types of groupings or activities that would be more difficult alone. You can be more adventurous with the types of activities you offer.

- *Decide where the student assigned a TA's support will sit in the classroom.*

Be determined not to have a designated TA chair, or to always have the supported student sitting on the periphery of the class. Ask yourself whether the best use of the TA is to have her always sit with the student. Would it improve the student's independence (and self-esteem) to be allowed to work alone for some of the lesson? Could other students benefit from the TA circulating and helping more generally?

- *Consider what mechanism you could use to gather feedback from the TA to support the student's progress*

Would you and the TA have time during the day to discuss her work? Either directly after the lesson or at another point during her paid work time?

Could you use post-its or other means of communicating? Could you devise a simple feedback sheet? And what type of information would you like her to feed back to you? There's a simple proforma at the end of this guidance that you could consider using.

- *Adjust your planning sheet to include the question: How will the TA support be used in this lesson?*

As you make a point of writing down the support you need on your planning sheets, putting the TA to good use will become a more automatic and natural part of your planning.

Make time to talk to TAs to ensure they are comfortable in carrying out assigned tasks. Consider what the TA will be concentrating on in each section of the lesson. As you plan the different segments of a lesson, consider what it would be most useful for the TA to be engaged in doing.

Bear these points in mind:

- When you're presenting important new information or instructions for an activity, the TA needs to be present and receiving the same information or instructions so that she knows what's expected of the student and can reinforce your requirements
- Where there are tasks which you will ask students to complete independently, the TA may be used to circulate and help more generally, instead of sitting next to the assigned student. That student may be a priority for the TA, but support is better given intermittently if the student is to learn to work at all independently.
- During independent tasks, if the TA is circulating to provide more general support, you will have more access to that supported student and therefore will be able to give him/her the benefit of your subject expertise more easily.

What's the worst thing about having a TA?

Secondary school students said:

Even when you don't need help they're still there helping you

AS A SENCO

1. Work with teachers...to meet the needs of the student rather than the timetable – let the work be need-led rather than topic-led.
2. Consider what you can do to build stronger relationships between teachers and TAs. Can you facilitate planning time for them? Organise joint training or planning time during INSET days?

4. Plan ahead for how the TA will be involved in managing behaviour

Managing behaviour is on everyone's list of responsibilities when they work in a school – by default, even if not specified on a job description. As you are all too well aware, if you don't manage the students' behaviour, they will willingly take over and manage yours! Among a TA's responsibilities in your classroom is the responsibility to support appropriate behaviour (and deal – where necessary – with inappropriate behaviour).

- *Devise a specific plan for students who have behavioural difficulties (SEBD)*

Check the student's IEP for any behavioural targets and strategies (there may be a Reactive Plan already in place). Work with the TA to ensure that you both

know how to respond when challenging behaviour occurs.

Consider:

- *How do you view challenging behaviour?* Your view will determine how you react to it. If you see it as a form of communication, you will try to work out what the student is trying to tell you about their needs. If you see it as 'naughty' behaviour or a deliberate attempt to disrupt, you are more likely to resort to punishment.
- *What are your behavioural expectations?* What are your absolutes on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in your classroom?
- *What are your preferred strategies for managing student behaviour?* Are you a minimalist, preferring 'The Look' to a fuss? Do you emphasize positive behaviour and try to ignore the negative unless it really gets in the way of teaching/learning?
- *What rewards and sanctions do you offer?* Which of these will your TA be authorised to offer or impose?

- *Decide how you will convey your expectations and preferred strategies to the TAs who work in your classroom.*

It may seem like an impossible task to keep all TAs who work in your classroom well informed about your expectations, but of course you only have to do this once if you jot down some simple *Please do...* and *Please don't...* statements and hand out copies to the TAs – or keep a copy in the classroom and ask them to take note of it, or place it on a shared drive (if the TAs have access to that). Most TAs will be grateful to have clear expectations, as this will give them greater confidence when working with students.

As a SENCO

1. Ensure the behaviour policy is provided for the TAs and teachers. You may not have overall responsibility for behaviour in your school, but it would be important for you to facilitate discussions between teachers, TAs and senior staff to ensure a consistent whole-school approach.

2. *Provide training for staff to realise that behaviour is a form of communication and staff need to understand what the student is saying about the learning experience through their behaviour and what staff can do to modify elements of their teaching to reduce the causes of the challenging behaviour (e.g. task difficulty, understanding of instructions, work groupings, etc.)*

Before – Checklist for planning ahead for working with your TA

- 1. Know why students are receiving support from the TA**
 - *Check student record for relevant information*
 - *Be aware of the relevance of IEP targets to your curriculum area*
 - *Talk to relevant specialists e.g. SENCO, TA*
- 2. Ensure TAs have knowledge of the scheme of work (SOW)**
 - *Make the SOW accessible on the school network for TAs to look through*
 - *Each department to make a hard copy of the SOW accessible*
 - *Invite the TA to departmental planning meetings*
- 3. Plan ahead for the tasks the TA will complete during each lesson**
 - *Know when TA support will be timetabled for your lessons*
 - *Decide where the student assigned a TA's support will sit in the classroom Consider what mechanism you could use to gather feedback from the TA to support the student's progress*
 - *Adjust your planning sheet to include the question: How will the TA support be used in this lesson?*
- 4. Plan ahead for how the TA will be involved in behaviour management**
 - *Devise a specific plan for students who have behavioural difficulties (SEBD)*
 - *Decide how you will convey your expectations and preferred strategies to the TAs who work in your classroom.*

During

From past experience you will know that careful planning does not guarantee perfect lessons. Things go wrong. Discussions get side-tracked. Students get bored. But let's assume you have been thorough in your planning and you have set things up for success. You are ready for your classes – and the accompanying TAs. Here are some suggestions for what you can do during class to make most effective use of the TA support allocated to your students.

- 1. Involve TAs in all parts of the lesson**
- 2. Include TAs in the on-going (formative) assessment process**
- 3. Show your support for the TA in the presence of students**

1. Involve TAs in all parts of the lesson

- *Acknowledge your TAs at the start of the lesson*

Sadly, many TAs have told us that they enter, work through, and leave some lessons without being addressed by the teacher at all. Surely no one is too busy to extend the courtesy of a quick 'hello' or eye-contact and a smile so that the TA's presence is acknowledged. They are, after all, part of the instructional team, part of the classroom dynamic. If they are invisible, the chances are the student they support is also off your radar

- *Give the TA specific targets for their work e.g. a certain group/individual/focus*

You have already planned for this, so make sure you convey your clear expectations to the TA. This may take the form of a sheet of instructions, or a quick exchange of ideas once the class is settled. As you and your TA become more used to working closely together a routine can develop so that

the TA knows whether to check a folder, or wait for your instructions when she comes to your classroom.

We asked TAs: If you think about the teacher you work best with, what is it they do?

TAs said:

Give you specific targets, purposeful tasks.

Make you feel valued by incorporating you in the tasks, perhaps to work with a group (not always the weaker students).

Value your opinion, use your strategies, ideas.

Thank you at the end of the lesson, show interest in you.

- *Provide prompt sheets to support the TA's work with an individual student e.g. questions they could ask students, differentiated outcomes*

As you are planning for a particular class session, you may jot down questions you intend to ask, or aspects of the topic you want to mention. Consider whether that reminder to yourself could simply be photocopied and passed to the TA. Then if she is working with an individual student (or a small group), you know that group will get the same extension of thinking as the rest of the class as you work with them.

- *Be flexible in deploying the TA during the lesson*

As the curriculum expert you are best placed to support all students in developing understanding of the content and concepts relating to your particular curriculum area. If you sometimes allocate the TA to general supervisory duties as the class completes an assigned task, you will be freed up to work with a small group of students who may be struggling. Switching

roles with the TA in this way will give you an opportunity to better understand the difficulties students may experience with your curriculum area, and it will give them the benefit of your expertise and enthusiasm for the subject area. The TA's expertise in supporting struggling students may benefit others in the class, while your expertise in the subject area benefits the students who struggle with learning in general. Supported students may also welcome the break from the constant supervision of a TA. Remember, no mainstream student should need help all of the time.

What's the worst thing about having a TA?

Secondary school students said:

They sit next to you all the time like a shadow.

AS A SENCO...

1. Provide training for teachers on differentiation, including differentiation by support, which would highlight the variety of ways in which a TA could be deployed to support teaching and learning in the classroom.
2. Provide training for TAs on effective questioning techniques, to develop thinking skills, so they'll be better equipped to support increased learning, participation and engagement as well as raising student self-esteem.
3. Provide training to teacher-TA teams on effective collaboration. This might include: Clarifying roles and expectations, Building working relationships, Monitoring and evaluating progress towards learner outcomes. Teacher PPA time could be used for this, and would be well justified as it would contribute to preparation and planning.

2. Include TAs in the on-going (formative) assessment process

As you know, formative assessment is the ongoing process of monitoring student understanding so as to inform your teaching, and allow you to make adjustments as necessary to accommodate student needs. TAs can provide you with support for that formative assessment in the following ways:

- *Encourage TAs to feed back on learning outcomes and student responses to tasks*

If you provide students with the learning outcomes for a lesson (by writing them on the board, for example), you can ask the TA to comment against the learning outcomes. Once the TA is familiar with the Learning Outcomes for a lesson, together with the student's IEP targets, she should be able to give you very specific feedback on the student's achievements, noting areas of particular success or difficulty. If there is no time for a conversation as one class leaves and the next arrives, you can set up a system where the TA leaves notes for you – using a feedback proforma as suggested in the previous section, or by making entries in a log (see box)

The Teacher-TA log

Some teacher-TA teams who have difficulty finding a time to meet and discuss student progress or concerns use a log where each jots down brief pieces of information. The teacher may make a note for the TA to focus her attention on a certain aspect of the lesson which she would like dealt with in a particular way, or to notify her of a change in what was originally planned. The TA may be asked to leave a brief note about how the student managed during class, or whether there have been particular difficulties, etc.

If the log is left in a specific place, the TA can collect it at the beginning of the lesson, complete it during the course of the lesson, and leave it in the designated place as she leaves the classroom.

- *Ask the TA to carry out observations of students*

Periodically you might ask the TA to carry out an observation during part of the lesson, so that you have very specific formative data on which to base your future planning. This observation could focus on particular behaviours (on-task, responding to questions, collaborating with peers on an assigned task) or more generally observe how a student spends their time during the 20 minutes or so of the observation. The target of the observation could be an individual student or a group of students – it would not have to be the student receiving TA support.

The Welsh Assembly Government produced guidance on *Observing Children* which you could use to help prepare the TA to conduct a systematic observation.

- *Ask the TA for suggestions on how to enhance students' learning experiences*

The TA may accompany the student to a variety of lessons and may therefore have experience of a wide variety of strategies which have already been used with the student. These would therefore be useful questions to ask a TA: *What seems to work for him/her in other settings? How does he/she manage in other subject areas?*

Other useful questions that acknowledge the TA's knowledge of the student's strengths and needs might include:

- *I'm planning on doing [a particular sort of activity] this morning. Does he usually cope OK with that sort of thing?*
- *If we do some group work, does she generally do better just in a pair, or is she OK with a larger group?*
- *What types of situations/activities does he find particularly difficult / enjoyable?*

-What do you usually do if... (e.g., the student can't manage the work or starts behaving badly)?

These are of course the sort of questions you could ask the student in some cases.

3. Show your support for your TA in the presence of students

- *Make sure you support her if she has difficulties with a student who doesn't wish to comply with her requests.*

Statements to the student such as *If Mrs ... asks you to do something I expect you to do it please. She stands in for me when she's working with you. Please show her proper respect* clearly display that you have confidence in the TA, and that the students will not be able to ignore her requests without negative consequences.

AS A SENCO...

1. Ensure there is a procedure in place for TAs and teachers to provide feedback relating to IEP targets. This might be in the form of a comment sheet, attached to the IEP, a separate booklet, or via the school intranet. In every case feedback needs to be comprehensive and the procedure must be easily accessible to everyone, without duplication.
2. Provide training for TAs in how to conduct observations of students in different settings and formats, with an emphasis on how to collect objective data (for example, *He completed 6 out of the 10 problems set by teacher* as opposed to *He was really good in Maths this morning*).

During – Checklist for working effectively with the TA during lessons

1. Involve TAs in all parts of the lesson

- *Acknowledge your TAs at the start of the lesson*
- *Give the TA specific targets for their work e.g. a certain group/individual/focus*
- *Provide prompt sheets to support the TA's work with an individual student e.g. questions they could ask students, differentiated outcomes*
- *Be flexible in deploying the TA during the lesson*

2. Include TAs in the on-going (formative) assessment process

- *Encourage TAs to feed back on learning outcomes and student responses to tasks*
- *Ask the TA to carry out observations of students*
- *Ask the TA for suggestions on how to enhance students' learning experiences*

4. Show your support for your TA in the presence of students

- *Make sure you support her if she has difficulties with a student who doesn't wish to comply with her requests.*

After

So you have delivered your lesson – as planned. The class has left, and the TA with them. What now? Your next class may already be waiting outside the door. How does the TA feature in what you do as follow-up to lessons? We suggest that you:

1. Encourage feedback

2. Show that you value your TAs

1. Encourage feedback

- *Ask the TA to make brief notes about any issues during the lesson*

As previously mentioned, TAs are well placed to provide feedback on the details of a student's work and levels of understanding. Your planning can include mechanisms for gathering this type of feedback, whether that be in person (outside of lesson time), or via post-it, log or feedback proforma.

- This is a good reminder of the need to check: *Does the TA have email access? Does she have your email address and you hers?*

Providing your work email to the TA is another signal that you are open to questions and willing to communicate. It allows her to address those questions as they arise, rather than only during class time.

- *Let the TA know when you're available for further discussion*

Be aware that TAs often have other duties, and are certainly not paid to stay behind after school – so you will need to be creative about finding time to get together to discuss lessons or students, or to engage in parts of the planning process together. Let her know when your PPA time is scheduled; she may be able to negotiate time to meet with you then, as the need arises.

- *Consult the TA if you have to prepare information for reports or reviews on any students*

The TA may know more about student in a variety of contexts and subject areas. She will also have more details of a student's attitudes and understanding if she works closely with him/her in your classroom. This information can be recorded in the IEP (if the student has one).

AS A SENCO...

1. Ensure that TAs have email access in school.
2. Depending on school policy, it may be possible to invite the TA to review meetings, although it would be advisable to brief her beforehand, to agree on what information she should and should not share in the meeting. A person-centred approach requires that anyone working with the student be present
3. Provide training for TAs – and any teachers who may be involved – in the Person Centred Planning approach.

See <http://gov.wales> for further information

And <http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/> for resources

2. Show that you value your TAs

- *A thank-you goes a long way!*

In the same way that a simple greeting takes little or no time, as the TA leaves the room a simple *Thank-you* quickly acknowledges the contribution she has made to the lesson, especially if you have had no opportunity during the lesson to exchange remarks. You may also want to consider whether a simple gift would be appropriate at Christmas time to express thanks for ongoing support.

- *Acknowledge TAs outside the classroom environment*

Again, a simple greeting when you pass the TA elsewhere in the school acknowledges their presence and contributions. It is also important that you back her up if she is having to deal with difficult students around the school.

- *If you see inappropriate behaviour or interactions from a TA, express your concerns to the SENCO and request training*

Where the SENCO has overall responsibility for TAs, it makes sense to let the SENCO know if there are concerns about a TA and advocate for training for her. This the same sort of formative feedback loop you use in your teaching – you spot an error or lack of understanding on the part of a student, and intervene to correct that misunderstanding or error so that it is not perpetuated, and the student can move on in the right direction. See this as a professional development opportunity for the TA.

- *Invite your TAs to social events*

If staff are getting together socially, for example on a departmental basis, remember to invite the TAs who work in the department, as a mark of their inclusion in the instructional team.

- *Raise the issue of TAs at meetings where they are not included*

There may be staff or faculty meetings to which TAs are not invited, but where topics discussed are of interest and relevance to TAs. Don't forget to ask: *How will the TAs get this information? Will the TAs be included in this initiative/project/training?* This is especially important when the discussion relates to behaviour. If a TA is seen to be ill-informed about changes in policy or procedure it undermines her authority with students.

AS A SENCO...

1. Use the audit *How inclusive is your school in relation to TAs?* (below) to carry out a self-evaluation.

2. Discuss the results of the audit in relation to inclusion and TAs with the school SEN team, and put together an action plan to make improvements.
3. Provide training for TAs in areas highlighted by the audit, or those requested by teachers.

After – Checklist for actions to be taken after lessons which include a TA

1. Encourage feedback

- *Ask the TA to make brief notes about any issues during the lesson*
- *This is a good reminder of the need to check: Does the TA have email access? Does she have your email address and you hers?*
- *Let the TA know when you're available for further discussion*
- *Consult the TA if you have to prepare information for reports or reviews on any students*

2. Show that you value your TAs

- *A thank-you goes a long way!*
- *Acknowledge TAs outside the classroom environment*
- *If you see inappropriate behaviour or interactions from a TA, express your concerns to the SENCO and request training*
- *Invite your TAs to social events*
- *Raise the issue of TAs at meetings where they are not included*

In conclusion

Having read this guidance, reflected on your own practice, and seen some of the proposed strategies, what can be done, what will be your next step? We hope that you will now feel more confident and empowered to take action and make a determined effort to make changes where necessary to the way you work with Teaching Assistants.

We know that the suggestions here do make a difference – to working relationships between teacher and TA, and a difference to students.

You may feel daunted by the task, especially if you work with a number of TAs, so we suggest that you start with one TA and one class. As you become more confident and see positive results from using the suggestions and strategies, we hope you will be spurred on to incorporating them into your everyday classroom practice.

As a SENCO...

You provide support to both teachers and TAs, and can facilitate this process of teachers working more effectively with TAs. We acknowledge that being a SENCO in a large secondary school can be challenging, but also rewarding as you act as a facilitator for teachers and TAs leading to improved performance in the classroom.

If you have examples of good practice in relation to teachers working with TAs – or other feedback on this publication – please forward your comments to the School Effectiveness Team.

Appendix:

Tips for TAs

Top tips: ASD

Top tips: SEBD

Top tips: Speech Language and Communication Difficulties

Top tips: Dyslexia

Top tips: Asking Questions

Proforma for feedback from your TA

Further resources

Tips for TAs

Here are some suggestions for TAs that teachers /SENCOs can photocopy for their Teaching Assistants. This list could also form the basis of a staff appraisal or professional development session.

1. You'll hear teachers/SENCOs talk about Differentiation. If you really don't know what that mean, then ask. Ask the meaning of any of the education jargon you hear that you don't understand.
2. Be sure you know why a student is receiving support from you – ask the SENCO about the student's individual education / behaviour plan, or other justification for the support you provide so that you know what targets the student has and the challenges he/she faces.
3. Ask individual teachers about the Scheme of Work (SOW) they're following, so that you have an idea of the content and skills that the student should be acquiring.
4. If you don't know what you're expected to do during a lesson, ask the teacher for guidance.
5. Make sure you know the teacher's preferences for managing behaviour and the sort of rewards and sanctions available for you to use to promote positive behaviour in the students you work with.
6. If you're expected to sit and listen while a teacher gives an initial presentation to the whole class before you support your assigned student, make good use of the time by:
 - a. Learning more about students. Observe your assigned student or other students – Are they engaged in the presentation? How are they behaving? Who's volunteering answers to questions and

who's not? How does your assigned student's behaviour compare with the behaviour of other students in the class?

- b. Learning from an expert. Observe what the teacher does – How does he/she present new material? What does he/she do to keep students' attention or discourage restless behaviour?
 - c. Be part of the on-going (formative) assessment process that's an essential part of good teaching – make written notes of what you observe, and leave those notes for the teacher so that he/she can see that you're taking initiative, that you're not wasting time, and can benefit from your extra pair of eyes.
7. Observe the courtesies and act professionally – put your phone on silent (better still: turn it off!), greet the teacher as you enter the room and thank him/her as you leave; make sure you're always in class on time; be willing to take direction from the teacher.
8. Remember that one of your tasks is to help the student develop as an independent learner. So encourage the student to: think for himself, work out the answers for himself; use strategies he's used in the past that have helped; make some of his own decisions (even if that means he makes mistakes).

Top Tips

ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorders)

1. Make a visual timetable for the child to know exactly what is going to happen and in what order
2. Provide visual prompts during individual work sessions
3. Help the child to express his/her feelings using pictorial or visual aids e.g. feelings fans, traffic lights
4. Always pre-warn the child of changes that are likely to occur e.g. a fire alarm, change in staffing, Xmas concert, etc.
5. Be predictable, consistent and reliable
6. Encourage the wider social circle to adopt the same approaches
7. Give the child time to process language – wait for a response - and check for understanding
8. Avoid abstract terms, jokes, figures of speech or sarcasm
9. Keep instructions as simple as possible
10. Begin an instruction with the child's name. Individuals with an ASD may not think of themselves as 'Everyone' or 'Class'
11. Provide opportunities for the transfer of skills; these will not be automatically be transferred from one subject to another
12. Provide alternative activities at break and lunch times. Many individuals find these times very stressful.
13. Transition between lessons- and in particular changing for P.E. - can also cause anxiety, so make flexible arrangements
14. Give rewards that are motivational for the individual e.g. time on the computer or examining a special interest. Conventional rewards such as certificates or stickers can be meaningless to individuals with ASD
15. Involve home - create a home-school diary
16. Examine the environment for sensory aspects – lighting, seating, smells, textures - that may cause distress
17. Be sensitive to issues such as lining up or eye contact – close physical proximity and eye contact can be very uncomfortable for students with ASD

Top Tips

SEBD (Social, Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties)

1. Make rules and expectations clear, check that children and young people understand how to meet these.
2. Make instructions or requests specific, preface them with the child or group's name, and use phrases such as 'I need you to....., thank you' or 'I want you to,thanks'.
3. Allow time for compliance by turning away and coming back later to check that they have responded
4. Use least-intrusive approaches to poor behaviour first – for example, proximity control (moving closer to the inattentive student), proximal praise (praising others who have responded to requests), refocusing a child's attention on the task, or restating rules and expectations – in a calm and positive manner, to the whole class
6. Do not engage in arguments with students but use techniques such as 'partial agreement' e.g. 'I understand that might be so, but I need you to sit quietly now, thank you.'
7. Give a clear warning before providing a sanction and follow up on it
8. Rebuild relationships after giving a sanction. Look for and acknowledge more positive behaviour.
9. Use 'I' messages to remind ('I'm disappointed that...') and 'You' messages to encourage ('You know so much about...' 'You make me laugh when...')
10. Do not take poor behaviour personally; calm yourself before responding to behaviour that challenges you
11. Seek the support of colleagues, ask for positive strategies that others have found useful

Top Tips:

Speech, Language & Communication Difficulties

1. **Check the child's hearing.** Even low levels of hearing loss prevent children hearing the subtleties of language, especially initial consonants and endings of words. [GIVE EXAMPLES]
2. **Don't make assumptions.** Speech and Language difficulties can be associated with both expressive and receptive language. A student may be articulate (expressive language), but that doesn't necessarily mean she is able to process what you're saying (receptive language).
3. **Modify your language.** You can adjust your vocabulary, the length of your sentences or the speed of delivery.
4. **Chunk instructions.** Avoid giving strings of instructions. Better to have a student respond to one or two successfully, then receive the next instruction.
5. **Observe, observe, observe children.** You can gain a great deal of useful information through careful observation.
6. **Allow extra time to enable children to process information.** All students can benefit from 'wait time' to allow them to think things through thoroughly and at their own pace.
7. **Provide either/or answers.** This allows the student to recognise a correct answer, rather than always having to produce it.
8. **Use visual aids where/whenever possible.** This is general good practice as it allows more students to access more of the curriculum more of the time.

Top Tips: Dyslexia

Because Dyslexia affects students in a variety of ways there are implications for all subject areas. Here are some context-specific suggestions.

Copying from the board

This is a *very difficult* task for many students, so avoid whenever possible - give a handout instead, or have them copy from an individual whiteboard.

If you ask the student to put a coloured dot at the start of each sentence, it's easier to track progress through a text.

As the Interactive Whiteboard produces 'glare,'change the background colour to off-white.

Reading

Avoid asking a student to read aloud unless you know they have both the skill and the confidence.

If there's an audio version of a book available (some are on Youtube), make use of it before asking the student to read.

Provide key vocabulary at the start of each topic – it won't solve all issues (students don't necessarily understand just because they know word definitions) but it should help.

Use coloured overlays – try a variety of colours and ask the student which works best for him/her.

Writing

Provide an example of a finished piece of work so the student can see how to present their work.

Break tasks down into sub-tasks or steps.

Use writing frames to help structure what the student wants to say

Use word processing whenever possible as hand-eye coordination may be very poor.

Provide personalised word banks and high-frequency word lists.

Handouts / worksheets

Comic Sans, Times New Roman and Century Gothic are good examples of plain fonts and the student may find it easier to read a larger font.

User a highlighter to focus on the most important information.

Use bold font for headings and subheadings to help show structure of the task/information.

Try not to photocopy a photocopy otherwise quality deteriorates which can makes the writing more difficult to read.

Photocopy onto pastel coloured paper if possible.

Keep white space on the page: overcrowded pages are likely to be confusing.

Use visuals whenever possible.

Organisation

Label resources for easier identification, using visuals /symbols where possible.

Vary style of presentation to cater for different learning styles.

Devise a prompt card for procedures that are often repeated (e.g. the structure of an essay).

When giving instructions only give one or two at a time; ask the student to repeat instructions back to you so that they both hear and say them.

Maths

If you can, use a maths book with larger squares to allow for larger handwriting.

Work with the student to develop a multiplication square that he/she can then use.

Use a number line to help with sequencing.

Use hands-on, concrete resources to help develop conceptual understanding e.g. Dienes

Use interactive maths games to practice number skills.

Many advanced maths problems require good literacy skills. Where possible simplify the language or break the problem down into steps.

Check that students understand the basic maths vocabulary of the lesson you are supporting.

Make sure the student understands the maths symbols they're using.

Focus on the 2, 5 and 10 times tables as they can be used to build the others; you may have to allow the students to use a tables square or calculator for the others.

Low self-esteem

Turn mistakes into learning opportunities; help the student understand that an error can help them know what to do next time.

Overlearning is essential – what a student has learned one day they may not remember the next.

Resources

Have resources ready to hand so that no time is wasted in getting organised.
Think about:

Highlighters – colour will help students to focus and remember

Spare pens/ pencils – not bringing supplies is a classic work-avoidance strategy!

Blank cards – useful for making memory joggers (e.g. key words, phonic rules, number facts, subject vocabulary)

Mini whiteboard – to simplify instructions, or for the student to copy from

Rewards – stickers, etc.

General approach

The ultimate goal is to encourage independent learning. Support only as needed, provide challenge and always have high expectations

Make the links for the student between current work and other subject lessons, e.g. in a Humanities text, point out elements of spelling or grammar – so that knowledge isn't kept in separate boxes in the student's mind.

Make sure you know the objectives for each lesson so that you can simplify or re-phrase instructions and break tasks down into manageable chunks and the student will more likely meet the learning objectives.

Praise the student's efforts (as this is something he has control over) and highlight what has been achieved.

Scribe for the student only if that's your assigned role but make sure the student does the thinking and dictates the text.

Top tips: Asking questions

1. Low-level questions ask *When? What? Who? How much?* and generally have very specific correct answers. They're referred to as low-level because they 'just' require recall and memorisation of facts.
2. High-level questions ask *Why? How? What do you think?* They require students to consider facts and make sense of them – to synthesise and predict and draw conclusions.
3. Even young children can answer high-level questions. Their logic may be flawed (because their knowledge and understanding is immature) but we should not make the mistake of only asking them low-level questions that only require knowledge of facts.
4. And think for a moment what happens if you only use low-level questions with the student with poor recall, such as the dyslexic student. Such students may never get the low-level questions right, and may therefore be considered incapable of answering higher-level questions which require analysis of the facts.
5. A key skill is the development of higher level thinking, so you can use the type of open-ended higher-level questions that allow all students to answer – and be correct? Questions such as: *Why do you think...?* or *What do you think will happen next?*
6. The answers you get may not strictly be correct but they offer all students a chance to answer, and have their ideas considered. Be prepared for some off-the-wall logic, because the most inventive and interesting responses may well come from students you consider to be less able – because they think differently. It can take a while for students to get used to this approach, but it's worth persisting because it will involve more students in the long run, and allow more students to air their ideas – and be 'right.'

PROFORMA FOR FEEDBACK FROM YOUR TA

Lesson	Date/ time
TA:	Teacher
Year group/students supported	
Activity	
Comments If appropriate, comment on individual students' IEP targets	

Other Resources

nasen has developed a Quick Guide *Effective Adult Support* which can be accessed at: <http://www.sendgateway.org.uk/resources.effective-adult-support.html>

www.tafocus.co.uk is a relatively new website about and for TAs, which has links to a variety of resources, articles about different aspect of a TA's role, and an associated Facebook page.

Observing Children is the 2008 WAG publication referred to in Section III (*During*)

www.maximisingtas.co.uk Provides information about the *Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants* (MITA) project and other research relating to the work of TAs, as well as downloadable guidance and proforma for conducting a school audit on the deployment of TAs.

Hertfordshire County Council (2012) Support Staff Appraisal Handbook. Available at: <http://onslow.herts.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Supportstaffappraisal-handbook.pdf>

Russell, A. Webster, R. & Blatchford, P. (2012). *Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants: Guidance for school leaders and teachers*. Routledge.