

The impact of adult support staff on pupils and mainstream schools

What do we want to know?

What is the impact of adult support staff on the participation and learning of pupils and on mainstream schools? What are the support processes that lead to these outcomes?

Who wants to know and why?

This information is helpful for the government and local authorities, to assess whether the employment of greater numbers of support staff has been worthwhile. It is also of benefit to school leadership and teachers, providing information on the types of positive impacts support staff have and how these are achieved. Other people interested in improving the quality of education for all children will also be interested in the impact of support staff.

What did we find?

Pupils: Literature suggests that trained and supported teaching assistants (TAs) can have a positive impact on the progress of individual or small groups of children, in the development of basic literacy skills. In addition, 'sensitive' TA support can facilitate pupil engagement in learning and social activities, with the class teacher and their peers; that is, sensitive TA support can both facilitate interaction, and also reflect an awareness of times when pupils need to undertake self-directed choices and actions. Evidence suggests that TAs can promote social and emotional adjustment in social situations, but that they are not very successful in undertaking therapeutic tasks aimed at supporting children with emotional and behavioural problems.

Schools: Use of TA support allows teachers to engage pupils in more creative and practical activities and to spend more time working with small groups or individuals. Class-related workload is somewhat reduced when working with a TA, but the teacher role may become

more managerial as this workload may increase. An adult presence in classroom makes teachers feel supported and less stressed. The knowledge that pupils were receiving improved levels of attention and support was also reported to enhance job satisfaction for teachers. 'Team' teaching styles, involving TAs and work with small groups, can promote learning support as a routine activity and part of an 'inclusive' environment in which all children are supported. TAs can act as an intermediary between teachers and parents, encouraging parental contacts, but care is required to ensure that appropriate contacts with the teacher are maintained.

What are the implications?

The review suggests the deployment of the TA workforce has been successful in providing support for teachers on a number of levels and in delivering benefits to pupils. To enhance these impacts, it is necessary to ensure effective management and support for TAs, including effective training and clear career structure. Collaborative working is required if TA support is to be employed to its best effect. Teachers therefore need to be trained in these approaches and the ongoing effect of this emphasis needs to be monitored in professional standards for teachers.

Progress was more marked when TAs supported pupils in discrete well defined areas of work or learning. Findings suggest that support to individual pupils should be combined with supported group work that facilitates all pupils' participation in class activities. The importance of allocated time for teachers and TAs to plan programmes of work was apparent. Support, embedded as 'standard' school practice, with the type and extent of support provided planned on an individual basis, has implications for the stigmatisation of supported pupils.

How did we get these results?

The systematic review identified 232 studies, of which 35 were selected for in-depth review.



Where to find further information

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The results of this systematic review are available in four formats:

SUMMARY

Explains the purpose of the review and the main messages from the research evidence

REPORT

Describes the background and the findings of the review(s) but without full technical details of the methods used

TECHNICAL REPORT

Includes the background, main findings, and full technical details of the review

DATABASES

Access to codings describing each research study included in the review

These can be downloaded or accessed at
<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=2438>

Reports published by the EPPI-Centre in April 2009.

The EPPI-Centre's reference numbers for the reports of this review are 1702T (Technical Report) and 1702R (Report). The full citations are:

TECHNICAL REPORT

Alborz A, Pearson D, Farrell P, Howes A (2009) The impact of adult support staff on pupils and mainstream schools. Technical Report. In: *Research Evidence in Education Library*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

REPORT

Alborz A, Pearson D, Farrell P, Howes A (2009) The impact of adult support staff on pupils and mainstream schools. Report. In: *Research Evidence in Education Library*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

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