

# **Teaching Assistants in Primary Schools: An Evaluation of the Quality and Impact of their Work**

**A report by HMI**

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## Introduction and Evidence Base

1. In its 1998 and 2001 Green Papers, the government set out its intention to increase substantially the number of trained teaching assistants in primary and secondary schools. Between 1999 and 2002, the government made £350 million available through local education authorities (LEAs) to recruit an additional 20,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching assistants for both primary and secondary schools and to provide induction training for them. In March 2001, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced that annual funding of about £200 million a year would be available to sustain recruitment and training until 2004. In November 2001, the Secretary of State suggested that the work of teaching assistants could be expanded to include:
  - supervising classes undertaking work set by a teacher
  - working with small groups of pupils
  - supervising lunchtime activities
  - administering tests
  - giving pastoral and other administrative support to pupils
  - covering for teacher absence.

In January 2002, the Secretary of State announced a pilot project starting in April 2002 that would involve 30 schools in exploring and pioneering new ways of working, including the use of additional support staff, to tackle excessive teacher workload.

2. Primary schools now employ significant numbers of teaching assistants, almost all of whom are women. In many schools, there are similar numbers of teaching assistants and teachers, although the ratio of FTE teachers to FTE teaching assistants is typically between two and three. The additional funding has not necessarily led to an increase in the number of teaching assistants in individual schools, since schools have often used it to increase or preserve the hours worked by existing teaching assistants rather than recruit new ones. However, it has cut the ratio of pupils to teachers and education support staff in primary schools from 17.9 in January 1997 to 15.7 in January 2001. It was expected to fall again in January 2002. Between 2000 and 2001, the proportion of lessons in which teaching assistants were present rose by about 1.5 percentage points to 41%, as shown by the evidence from about 90,000 lessons observed as part of OFSTED section 10 inspections. This proportion is likely to rise further in 2001-02.
3. In 1998, the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) was introduced, followed a year later by the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS). Teaching assistants play an important part in implementing these strategies. They support teachers and pupils in the classroom and also have a key role in the related intervention and catch-up programmes such as Early Literacy Support (ELS), Additional Literacy Support (ALS) and Springboard mathematics.

4. OFSTED's aim was to monitor and evaluate the impact of the use of primary teaching assistants on the effectiveness of the NLNS. The evaluation lasted for one year, starting in January 2001.
5. During the spring, summer and autumn terms 2001, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and Additional Inspectors visited 67 schools, focusing on the work of teaching assistants. In the spring and summer terms, they:
  - held discussions with the headteacher or person responsible for managing the work of teaching assistants
  - observed two lessons in either literacy or mathematics in which a teaching assistant was working alongside a teacher
  - held discussions with the two teachers observed
  - discussed the work of teaching assistants with a group of them, including, wherever possible, those working in the observed lessons.

In the autumn term, the structure of the visits was changed slightly to enable inspectors to focus more sharply on the effect teaching assistants were having on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

6. HMI also carried out structured telephone interviews with the headteachers of a further 35 schools. They met staff involved in working with and training teaching assistants in a small number of LEAs and attended sessions of the DfES Induction Training.
7. This report also uses evidence from OFSTED's section 10 inspections and inspection visits to schools in the national samples for monitoring the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies (NLNS).
8. During the spring term of 2002, 22 section 10 inspections of primary schools had an additional focus on the work of teaching assistants. Evidence from these will be used in subsequent reports.

## **Main Findings**

9. Teaching assistants play an important part in the implementation of the NLNS by supporting teachers and pupils in the classroom. They also have a key role in the intervention and catch-up programmes associated with the strategies.
10. Teachers value highly the support teaching assistants provide and appreciate the benefits of having another adult in the classroom to assist them.

11. The introduction of the NLNS has affected the way in which teaching assistants work. They now spend much more time providing learning support in literacy and mathematics.
12. As the role of teaching assistants shifts more towards providing learning support, the demands of this work compete with the time needed for teaching assistants to provide their traditional practical support for teachers, such as managing and preparing materials. In schools where these competing demands are not managed well, teachers do not experience the full benefits that support from teaching assistants can provide.
13. Section 10 inspections show that the presence of teaching assistants improves the quality of teaching. This improvement is most marked when the teaching assistant and teacher work in close partnership or when the teaching assistant is following a tightly prescribed intervention or catch-up programme. Support is least effective when teaching assistants do not have good enough subject knowledge or questioning skills, or where they have problems maintaining discipline.
14. Most schools have not yet developed ways to evaluate systematically the impact of this support on pupils' achievements in literacy and mathematics, except in some of the sharply focused intervention and catch-up programmes.
15. The way in which teaching assistants are deployed and managed in schools is improving, but few schools monitor the often fragmented work patterns of teaching assistants or include teaching assistants in their performance monitoring procedures. Similarly, few schools monitor the time that individual pupils, particularly those of low ability or with special educational needs (SEN), spend with teaching assistants rather than teachers.
16. Although the DfES Induction Training and some of the training associated with the NLNS take account of the importance of training teachers to work effectively with teaching assistants, as yet few teachers have had formal training in this.
17. Many teaching assistants have no formal qualifications but have become qualified by virtue of long experience. Increasingly, new teaching assistants are required by schools or LEAs to have appropriate formal qualifications.
18. The training which teaching assistants have received in supporting the NLNS catch-up and intervention programmes is improving significantly their knowledge of literacy and mathematics and how these are taught.
19. LEAs are responding well to initiatives to provide a national qualifications structure for teaching assistants by providing appropriate training, including the DfES Induction Training.
20. The take-up and impact of the DfES Induction Training have been patchy so far. Its effect has been greatest in schools that completed the training fully, including the school-based element. In these schools, the training improved the teaching assistants' competence and confidence, and led to better management of them within the school and by teachers in the classroom.

21. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the wider life of the school by giving generously of their time and talents, such as music or craft skills, supporting school functions or accompanying pupils on out-of-school activities. They often have an informal but influential pastoral role, and provide continuity between classes for pupils and teachers.

## **Points for Action**

### ***At national level, there is a need to:***

- ❑ monitor the effect of the increasing number of trained teaching assistants on adult to pupil ratios
- ❑ continue to simplify the funding arrangements for employing teaching assistants to enable schools to provide them with continuous employment
- ❑ co-ordinate the NLNS and other DfES initiatives involving teaching assistants to make it easier for schools to meet the training requirements and manage the work of teaching assistants efficiently
- ❑ continue to develop a structure of qualifications and career progression for teaching assistants, relating to routes for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) but focused on the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants
- ❑ ensure that newly qualified teachers are trained to work with teaching assistants
- ❑ through OFSTED, monitor the impact of teaching assistants' support on the quality of teaching
- ❑ emphasise the positive contribution which the management of teaching assistants can make to teachers' status and professionalism.

### ***In LEAs, there is a need to:***

- ❑ provide training and support for schools and teachers, linked to the support for the NLNS, in managing the work of teaching assistants effectively
- ❑ clarify the role of LEAs in the training and deployment of all teaching assistants, not just those who provide support for pupils with SEN
- ❑ develop training programmes for teaching assistants to match any proposed structure of qualifications and to facilitate career progression
- ❑ increase schools' awareness of the DfES Induction Training.

### ***In primary schools, there is a need to:***

- ❑ develop strategies for managing effectively the increased numbers of teaching assistants, including those providing SEN support

- ❑ monitor the pattern of teaching assistants' work throughout the school and review the efficiency and effectiveness of their deployment
- ❑ monitor the amount of time individual pupils or groups of pupils spend with teaching assistants
- ❑ establish appraisal systems for teaching assistants
- ❑ ensure that teaching assistants have the necessary knowledge and skills to work effectively with pupils
- ❑ identify and disseminate good practice in working with teaching assistants
- ❑ evaluate systematically the effect of teaching assistants' support on pupils' achievements
- ❑ ensure that, as teaching assistants provide more teaching support in lessons, the level of practical and administrative support for teachers does not diminish.

# Effect of Teaching Assistants on Teaching and Learning

## Teaching

22. The kind of support that teaching assistants provide for teachers is changing quite fundamentally. Teaching assistants now spend more time supporting pupils' learning directly and less time providing welfare and administrative support. This shift means that teachers have to do more welfare and administrative work that could be done more appropriately by teaching assistants. There are isolated examples where teaching assistants are being used to provide cover for class teachers.
23. Since the introduction of the NLNS, the kind of support that teaching assistants provide for the teaching of literacy and mathematics has also changed significantly. It is now usual for teaching assistants to be present throughout the whole of the literacy hour or daily mathematics lesson. Although a few teachers still do not expect teaching assistants to take an active part in the teaching and deploy them on other tasks, particularly during whole-class teaching, most teachers value highly the presence of another adult in the classroom. They report benefits such as:
  - help in managing behaviour
  - help in organising and managing the class, including the use of resources
  - having another pair of eyes to pick up and monitor pupils' responses
  - having another adult with whom to discuss ideas.
24. Most teachers judge that having a teaching assistant in the classroom requires them to spend additional time on planning and preparation. However, they regard this as worthwhile because the teaching assistant helps create a better working atmosphere and hence makes teaching less stressful.
25. In the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson, teachers and teaching assistants increasingly work together in whole-class teaching. The teaching assistant often makes a planned contribution, for example by joining the teacher in role-play or playing a mathematical game with pupils. More often, the teaching assistant sits alongside designated pupils, frequently SEN or lower-attaining pupils, to manage behaviour and to encourage their participation.
26. During the rest of the lesson, it is usual for teaching assistants to take responsibility for a group of pupils, again often those with SEN or with lower attainment. Teaching assistants usually follow the teacher's plans, although they may be using a tightly prescribed programme of support such as ALS or ELS in literacy, and Springboard 3 and 4 in mathematics.
27. Teaching assistants support teachers best when they work closely with them and have the knowledge and skills to carry out the tasks assigned to them. Where teaching assistants are insufficiently or superficially briefed, or have inadequate subject knowledge, they sometimes become more concerned with the



completion of the task rather than the improvement in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

*In a school where the role of teaching assistants had not been properly developed, the teaching assistant in one lesson insisted that the group of Year 5 pupils she was working with carried on to the end of a worksheet on percentages without attempting to correct the misunderstandings evident from their incorrect answers to the first few questions. Another teaching assistant in a different lesson spent considerable time ensuring cut-outs of circles, half-circles and quarters were stuck satisfactorily into Year 4 pupils' exercise books without showing sufficient concern for pupils' understanding of the fractions involved.*

28. Most teaching assistants are able to manage the behaviour of small groups of four or five pupils. Some teaching assistants welcome the challenge of taking responsibility for the whole class with the guidance and support of the teacher, but most lack the confidence to do this. In the Springboard 5 mathematics programme, for example, in which teaching assistants are expected to take charge by themselves of a group of around 10 pupils for a follow-up session, only a minority were able to manage the group effectively. Headteachers frequently arranged for a teacher to take the sessions because they were not confident in the ability of teaching assistants to do so.
29. The training for the NLNS intervention programmes, the DfES Induction Training and the Good Practice Guide prompt teachers to provide feedback sheets which structure more formally the way in which teaching assistants report on pupils' progress. The increasing use of such feedback sheets is enabling teachers to gain additional information about pupils' progress and to take account of this in their planning.
30. The presence of a teaching assistant has the potential to improve the overall quality of teaching. Recent OFSTED section 10 inspections show that, in virtually every year group and at every level of free school meal eligibility, the quality of teaching in lessons with teaching assistants is better than in those without, albeit by only one or two percentage points in grade profiles.
31. The quality of teaching is improved when the teaching assistant:
  - works in close partnership with a teacher who understands and plans well for the teaching assistant's role in the lesson
  - is clear about what she is expected to do, including how to give feedback on pupils' learning and behaviour
  - carries out competently under the guidance of the teacher a prescribed teaching programme such as ALS
  - interacts with the teacher to make the lesson more lively or to generate more challenging discussion

- ❑ deals with minor behavioural issues and helps maintain and encourage pupils' attention and concentration, thus freeing the teacher to concentrate on teaching the whole class
- ❑ has sufficient subject knowledge to be able to challenge and extend pupils' learning, for example by using pupils' errors as starting-points
- ❑ has good questioning skills
- ❑ is able to manage the behaviour of the pupils she is working with
- ❑ enables the teacher to use a wider range of teaching methods
- ❑ enables the teacher to organise the work of groups and individuals so as to match work more precisely to pupils of different abilities.

*In a daily mathematics lesson for Year 4 pupils, two pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties were supervised closely within the whole-class session by the teaching assistant, allowing the class teacher to focus without distraction on teaching the rest of the class how doubling and doubling again is the same as multiplying by four. Without such support the teacher would have spent a disproportionate amount of time on these two pupils.*

*In a literacy hour, the presence of the teaching assistant enabled the teacher to use a more effective method of teaching the whole class, which she could not have managed on her own. A group of pupils were holding up cards displaying parts of a sentence and punctuation for the rest of the class to see. The teaching assistant moved the pupils around within the group to make different sentences. Meanwhile the teacher discussed with the rest of the class what was happening to the meaning of the sentence as the pupils were moved around.*

*A group of pupils of average attainment in Year 1 worked with a teaching assistant on reading consonant-vowel-consonant words. The sharp focus of the reading task and the high level of individual attention the teaching assistant was able to give the pupils meant that she could identify and help them to correct their mistakes and gain confidence. The teacher, meanwhile, was able to concentrate on guided reading with a lower-ability group and supervise pupils who were working independently.*

## Learning

32. Observable gains in a pupil's learning often result from the individual attention of the teaching assistant in a particular lesson. Teaching assistants also improve learning for all pupils by helping to create an atmosphere in the classroom in which pupils can concentrate better.
33. Most teaching assistants work in close partnership with teachers to provide at least satisfactory learning support for pupils, particularly groups of pupils or individuals. There is little difference between the quality of the learning support provided for pupils in Key Stage 1 and for those in Key Stage 2. Support is generally better for pupils in reception classes.

34. An additional benefit of allocating groups or individual pupils to the teaching assistant is that the teacher is able to spend more time with the rest of the class. Reception year teachers regard this as being particularly important, especially in mixed-age classes.

35. In whole-class teaching, teaching assistants help pupils to learn better by:

- minimising distractions to the whole class by dealing with individual welfare issues and behaviour problems
- keeping individual pupils on task by prompting their responses
- repeating or rephrasing questions asked by the teacher
- providing additional or alternative explanations for individual pupils
- providing specialist support, for example for hearing-impaired pupils
- observing and noting reactions and contributions of the pupils so that the more passive members of the class can later receive extra attention
- enabling less confident pupils, or those of lower ability or with SEN, to make contributions to the lesson.

*In one school, the teaching assistant led the lowest-attaining pupils in a dramatic reading of a poem they had written with her. Her enthusiasm and extrovert delivery inspired a similar reaction in the pupils and the event was much more memorable to the pupils as a result.*

36. During group or independent work, teaching assistants help pupils to learn better by:

- providing support for an individual or a group of pupils which enables them to tackle tasks that would otherwise be beyond them
- giving more individual explanations of a task than would be possible with the whole class
- giving feedback on the pupils' learning to the teacher so that he or she can adjust the challenge or pace of learning in later lessons
- giving pupils' immediate relevant feedback on their work.

*One school has developed its own strategy of pre-tutoring the lowest-attaining pupils before the literacy hour. The teaching assistant took three boys with poor literacy skills through the content of the lesson before it began. As a result, the boys were all able to make a good contribution to the whole-class introductory work.*

*A pupil who could double single- and double-digit numbers confidently was prompted by a teaching assistant to see a pattern emerging in the numbers*

*she obtained when she doubled '2' repeatedly. This enabled the pupil to continue the process and reinforced her knowledge of doubles.*

## **Deployment and management of teaching assistants**

37. Schools still tend to deploy more teaching assistants in reception year and Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2, and more in literacy than in mathematics. The numbers of teaching assistants deployed in Key Stage 2 and mathematics is increasing, however, partly due to the introduction of ALS and the Springboard programmes for mathematics. Teaching assistants are used more widely in mixed-ability classes than in setted classes, and are present in more lessons in schools with higher percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals.
38. Teaching assistants are employed in a variety of roles. These can be categorised broadly as: SEN support, learning support and welfare support. Teaching assistants usually have at least two and sometimes all three of these roles, and are also often lunchtime and playground supervisors. The introduction of the NLNS and the additional funding have shifted the emphasis of these roles. Teaching assistants now provide more support in the literacy hour and daily mathematics lessons. Although the SEN role is undiminished, many teaching assistants have expanded their role to provide learning support for a wider range of pupils.
39. The headteacher is responsible for the overall deployment and management of teaching assistants. This role is often delegated to the deputy headteacher. In schools with substantial provision for pupils with SEN, the SEN co-ordinator is usually either strongly involved or assumes responsibility for them. In a small but growing number of schools, headteachers are creating a post of senior or lead teaching assistant to take on the responsibility of managing the work of other teaching assistants.
40. LEAs continue to play an important part in the employment of teaching assistants, particularly in relation to support for pupils with SEN. They provide employment guidance for schools and are creating hierarchies of roles and pay, with learning support meriting higher status and pay than welfare support. There is also a move towards paying more to teaching assistants who undertake appropriate training that leads to formal qualifications. At least one LEA is currently advertising for a 'teaching assistants' co-ordinator' to work in the LEA to 'lead the support, training and development of teaching assistants'.
41. Although headteachers still occasionally appoint teaching assistants informally from among parent helpers or lunchtime supervisors, most are now moving towards the use of formal selection procedures, with criteria which reflect the growing professionalism of teaching assistants. In one local authority, new teaching assistants must have GCSE or equivalent in English and mathematics. New teaching assistants are usually given an appropriate job description and the job descriptions of existing teaching assistants are being updated.

42. Most teaching assistants are women, and this kind of post is sought, in particular, by mothers of young children who wish to combine working part-time with raising a family. In affluent areas, schools have large numbers of well-qualified applicants for teaching assistant vacancies. In a school in a prosperous rural area, the headteacher was able to use the additional DfES funding to appoint graduates in science and English, and a qualified physiotherapist to three teaching assistant vacancies. In less advantaged areas, schools have greater difficulty in recruiting teaching assistants of sufficient calibre. One headteacher reported that he was losing teaching assistants to local supermarkets that were offering better pay as well as family-friendly hours. However, headteachers report that changes in the way schools are funded, enabling them to plan well ahead to maintain teaching assistant support, make employing teaching assistants much easier.
43. Schools are still developing strategies for managing teaching assistants, and responding to the changes which result from employing larger numbers of teaching assistants with increasingly diverse and changing roles. Some schools have difficulty in managing teaching assistants effectively to provide support for pupils with SEN as well as learning support in literacy and mathematics for the majority of pupils. By contrast, others are able to use the greater flexibility now available locally in the provision of SEN support to help them to do this.
44. The introduction of initiatives, such as ALS, ELS and the Springboard programmes, has made the deployment and management of teaching assistants more complex. Headteachers try to take account of teaching assistants' suitability for particular roles, although they seldom take sufficient account of their qualifications and subject knowledge. Schools often try to assign a teaching assistant to each class to ensure continuity and consistency, particularly for the youngest pupils, but teaching assistants frequently have fragmented timetables. In one school, not only did each teaching assistant work with several classes, but each class also had several teaching assistants assigned to it. Such fragmentation hinders the close working partnership between teachers and teaching assistants which is one of the key factors in ensuring that teaching assistant support is effective. Schools seldom monitor either the work patterns of teaching assistants or the amount of time which pupils spend with them. Consequently, some schools may be unaware that some pupils of lower ability or with SEN spend too much time with teaching assistants and do not receive enough skilled teaching from a qualified teacher.
45. Few schools have any formal procedures yet for monitoring the quality of the support that teaching assistants provide. If the support is monitored at all, it is usually as part of the monitoring of the teacher by the headteacher or other senior staff, or by informal feedback from teachers. This is an area, however, where there are encouraging signs of progress, influenced by the growth in the monitoring of teaching, DfES Induction Training and the DfES Good Practice Guide. Schools accredited as Investors in People often provide particularly good examples of the monitoring and appraisal of the work of teaching assistants. In addition, an increasing number of schools involve teaching assistants in performance management procedures and review their work as part of their whole-school evaluation.

46. Few schools have developed ways of evaluating the overall impact of teaching assistants' support on pupils' achievements in literacy and mathematics in a systematic way. The greater focus of intervention programmes such as ALS and Springboard, for which pupils' learning must be assessed before and after the programme, has helped put in place more formal assessment procedures.
47. Teachers are responsible for managing and organising the work of the teaching assistant in their own classrooms. Most discuss with the teaching assistants what they want them to do during lessons and include notes in their planning. Some teachers, particularly those in the reception year and Key Stage 1, give teaching assistants lesson plans which include their role, and feedback sheets for recording pupils' performance. Teaching assistants are seldom paid for non-contact time, except occasionally to attend staff meetings or school-based in-service training. This, together with the fact that most teaching assistants work part time, means that schools find difficulty in arranging meetings for teachers and teaching assistants to plan their work together, and for teaching assistants to provide oral feedback on pupils' progress. Much depends on the goodwill of teachers and teaching assistants in meeting informally for planning and discussion during break times, at lunchtime and after school. Schools with significant provision for pupils with SEN usually have well-established regular meetings between the teaching assistants and their line manager to deal with deployment and management issues. This practice is becoming more widespread among all schools.
48. Innovative practice in the use of teaching assistants in primary schools is often a feature of Education Action Zones (EAZs), where teaching assistants are used to help to raise standards in literacy and numeracy. In one Midlands EAZ, which is improving significantly the standards of literacy and mathematics in its primary schools, senior teachers work together to analyse school data in detail, identify groups of underachieving pupils and set curricular targets. The teaching assistants are then assigned to schools to work with selected pupils, whose performance is monitored.

## **Qualifications and Training**

49. Teaching assistants have a very wide range of qualifications and experience. A small number have QTS and many working in the foundation stage are qualified nursery nurses. Some teaching assistants have become qualified for the work they do by virtue of long experience; others may be graduates or hold other professional qualifications such as the specialist teaching assistant (STA) qualification, awarded by higher education institutions, often in collaboration with LEAs. Those employed to provide SEN support have often been trained by their LEA and awarded locally accredited certificates.
50. The range of training undertaken by teaching assistants has increased substantially since the introduction of the NLNS and the DfES Induction Training. Where the training, which originates from different sources, is unco-ordinated, schools have difficulty releasing staff to attend. Nevertheless, teaching assistants value highly the recognition that training gives to their role, as well as the way it increases their effectiveness.

51. The training for intervention programmes such as ALS, ELS, and Springboard makes a significant contribution to the training of teaching assistants. Most of it has the advantage that teachers and teaching assistants are trained together for at least part of the time; this also happens in the DfES Induction Training, introduced in 2000. This centrally provided training, organised and delivered mainly by LEAs, places a much-needed emphasis on developing teaching assistants' subject knowledge in literacy and mathematics. As the first of the intervention programmes, ALS is now well established in schools and has led to significant improvements in teaching assistants' knowledge of how to improve pupils' literacy, especially through using phonics, and in teaching assistants' confidence in working with groups of pupils. The newer ELS and Springboard programmes are beginning to improve teaching assistants' knowledge of early literacy and mathematics. The DfES Induction Training includes a very useful module on behaviour management, which is highly regarded by most teaching assistants. Teaching assistants usually participate in school-based in-service training for the strategies and in training for information and communication technology (ICT). This is in addition to the training traditionally provided by LEAs and other agencies, particularly for SEN.
52. Although the training teaching assistants undertake is often related to the school's needs, for example SEN support or intervention programmes, it is seldom based on any systematic identification of teaching assistants' own needs. Most schools claim to appraise teaching assistants informally and some set up professional development interviews with varying degrees of formality. A few schools are beginning to encourage teaching assistants to compile portfolios of their qualifications and experience. The best practice is in schools accredited as Investors in People. The DfES Induction Training and Good Practice Guide are also beginning to have an effect in this area.
53. At present, training for teaching assistants, much of which is provided by LEAs, does not fit into any national framework of qualifications and standards and is not accredited. However, the Local Government National Training Organisation has developed a set of national occupational standards for teaching assistants which has been published recently and award bodies are developing national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 based on these. LEAs are increasingly setting up progressive, structured training programmes, and higher education institutions, sometimes in association with LEAs, are now starting to offer two-year foundation degrees for teaching assistants which can be built upon for the award of QTS. A new pilot foundation degree offers practitioners working in early years education an alternative higher-level qualification; it introduces a new career grade known as 'senior practitioner', which could be a stage towards becoming a fully qualified teacher, specialising in early years education. Some schools continue to fund teaching assistants to follow the STA training programme. Teaching assistants and teachers speak highly of this programme, particularly the way in which it develops teaching assistants' knowledge and confidence.
54. The take-up of the DfES Induction Training has been patchy. Of the schools visited or telephoned in the spring term, about one third had taken part in the DfES Induction Training. By the summer, this proportion had risen to nearly one

half. In the autumn term, about one third of schools were still unaware of the training.

55. The minority of schools which completed the programme as intended found the training beneficial. This involved sending new teaching assistants and a senior teacher designated as their mentor to the training and then following it up in school. It was particularly helpful to schools in that it led to greater recognition and understanding of the role of teaching assistants, as well as highlighting issues about their management and deployment. Teachers and the teaching assistants commented on the improvement the training had made to teaching assistants' subject knowledge and their ability to manage pupils' behaviour.
56. Schools in which the training has had less impact include:
- those which sent highly-experienced teaching assistants to the training who did not therefore learn much that was new to them
  - those which did not send a teacher of sufficient seniority as a mentor, or which did not send a mentor at all
  - those whose headteachers did not recognise fully the demands of the training on teachers and teaching assistants, and the importance of the school-based element
  - those which were unable to make arrangements for their teaching assistants to carry out all of the school-based activities properly.
57. Teachers often commented upon the usefulness of the training file, particularly in helping them to understand better the role and responsibilities of teaching assistants. A deputy headteacher reported that it helped her to realise that working intensively with individual pupils or small groups requires particular skills and strategies, and she was then able to train teaching assistants more effectively.
58. Most teachers provide informal on-the-job training for teaching assistants. One teacher, working with an inexperienced teaching assistant, kept a particularly close eye on the group of pupils writing with the teaching assistant and intervened to help her to manage the behaviour of a boy who was becoming disruptive. After the lesson, the teacher discussed with the teaching assistant how she could link the writing task more closely to the boy's interest in animals to increase his motivation and concentration.
59. Although the DfES Induction Training and some of the training associated with the NLNS take account of the importance of training teachers to work effectively with teaching assistants, this is an area in need of development, particularly in initial teacher training, where at present such training is very limited. Some schools commented on the benefits gained from working towards the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) Quality Mark. In a small number of schools, national literacy or numeracy consultants have provided school-based training on how teachers and teaching assistants can work effectively together.



## Support for Schools

60. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the wider life of the school and are often very active members of parent-teacher associations, giving generously of their time and talents to support fund-raising events and school productions. They accompany pupils on out-of-school day and residential trips and help with breakfast and after-school clubs and sports days.
61. As teaching assistants become better trained in information and communication technology (ICT), increasingly they are taking on defined roles in managing and supporting the use of ICT. They are also often involved in looking after the school library. Some of them are timetabled specifically to provide school administrative support, in addition to supporting teaching.
62. Teaching assistants often provide continuity between classes for both pupils and teachers and help to maintain the stability of relationships that pupils need, particularly where the turnover of teachers is high. They often have a strong pastoral role and community links which are more informal than those of the teacher and which can increase the teacher's awareness and understanding of pupils' difficulties. The relationship which teaching assistants develop with pupils, for example through playing playground games, is often that of a friendly adult who can help pupils to communicate problems and difficulties.

*We shall miss our teaching assistant very much when she retires. She was originally appointed as the part-time school secretary, long before either of the other teachers or I joined the school. Over the years she has done more and more for the school. As well as being secretary, she now also plans and organises the teaching of music throughout the school, works with pupils following the Springboard 3 and 4 mathematics programmes, teaches the pupils maypole dancing, and lots more besides. She lives in the village and knows all the children and their families well.*

Headteacher of a small rural primary school

## Conclusion

63. The increase in government funding for the training and recruitment of teaching assistants represents a very large investment. It has been accompanied by a marked change in the expectations of teaching assistants as providers of learning support in the classroom. Teaching assistants are responding well to these expectations, within a climate that has come to acknowledge the important part that teaching assistants play in raising standards.
64. This report identifies a number of improvements brought about by recent changes in the work of teaching assistants. They are making a valuable contribution to the teaching of literacy and numeracy through the support they provide for pupils, including through the intervention and catch-up programmes associated with the NLNS. Also, the importance of the support to the teacher

from the 'extra pair of hands' that a good teaching assistant can provide in the classroom should not be underestimated. Apart from the obvious improvement in adult to pupil ratios, teaching assistants' management of pupils' welfare and behaviour helps to create a better learning atmosphere in which everyone, including the teacher, can concentrate better and get on with teaching and learning. The evidence from inspection, that the presence of a teaching assistant in the classroom improves the quality of teaching, is very encouraging.

65. The benefits which better trained teaching assistants have brought to primary classrooms have done a great deal to influence opinion about how teaching assistants can help raise standards. Although no one should pretend that teaching assistants are teachers, when they are most successful they show many of the skills characteristic of good teachers: an understanding of children and their needs and behaviour; an ability to interact effectively with them to promote learning; and the ability to assess where the pupils are in their learning and what they need to do to make further progress. Making the most of such abilities should certainly not threaten the professionalism of teachers; rather, it should be encouraged and developed to the full.
66. The substantial increase in the number of teaching assistants in schools and the corresponding increase in our expectations of what they do, not surprisingly, has made the management of teaching assistants more complex. Schools are still coming to terms with how best to monitor and evaluate their impact on teaching and learning. Some teaching assistants have work patterns which are much too fragmented, and schools are not always aware that there are pupils who are spending more time than they should with teaching assistants rather than teachers. This report draws attention to the effect on teachers' workloads brought about by the shift towards teaching assistants spending more time on learning support, rather than on the traditional mix of helping with welfare, preparation of materials, administration and learning. Schools will need to manage these competing priorities carefully to ensure that teachers' workloads do not increase at a time when strenuous efforts are being made nationally to reduce them.
67. Some of these issues can be tackled by action at national and local level through funding arrangements and through developments in the training, qualifications and conditions of service of teaching assistants. It is action at school level, however, which is likely to be most significant in continuing to improve the quality of support which teaching assistants provide for teachers and pupils.
68. OFSTED will continue to monitor the work and impact of teaching assistants in 2003. This will focus on the work patterns of teaching assistants, the extent to which schools monitor these patterns, the quality of teaching assistants' work and the links between their training and appraisal. The capacity of schools to provide support for SEN pupils as well as support for all pupils in literacy and mathematics will also be inspected.