The impact of support staff on teachers, teaching and pupils

DISS project briefing note 5

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This briefing note summarises findings from the **Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project** on the impact of all support staff on teachers, and in particular, the effect of teaching assistants (TAs) on pupil outcomes. The increase in the number of TAs and the expansion of their roles can be seen to have beneficial effects for teachers, in terms of their workload, stress and classroom control. However, despite the assumption that TAs help to raise standards for all pupils, the DISS project found that the support provided by TAs had a negative effect on pupils' academic progress.

Aim of the DISS project

To analyse the impact of TAs and other support staff on teachers, teaching and pupils' learning and behaviour

Impact: data collection methods and responses

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Teacher survey	4,091 responses from individual teachers
Systematic observations	686 pupils across 49 schools. 34,400+ observations of TA-to-pupil interactions
Main pupil support survey	8,200 pupils, in 7 year groups, across 153 primary and secondary schools

Impact on teachers and teaching

26 tasks: teachers' routine administrative duties

At Wave 3 (2007/08), administrative staff performed half of the 26 tasks (e.g. collecting money, photocopying), many of which were previously undertaken by teachers in Wave 1 (2004/05)

Teachers' job satisfaction, stress and workload

• **Positive effects of support staff on job satisfaction and stress**
• Less pronounced reductions in workload, but still positive
• Results consistent at each wave (Wave 2 results below)
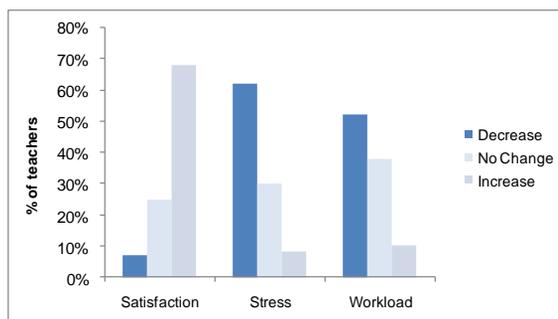
Impact of support staff on teaching

Findings from **teacher surveys** showed that TAs in particular had a positive impact on teaching in terms of:

• Bringing specialist help
• Allowing more teaching
• Affecting the range of curriculum, tasks and activities offered
• Removing administrative and routine tasks
• Taking on specific pupils
• Allowing more teacher time for planning and preparation

Systematic observations showed TAs in classrooms led to:

• Better classroom control in primary and secondary classes
• More individualised attention for pupils, but less overall interaction with teacher, in primary classes
• More overall teaching, but less individual attention and less interactions with teachers, in secondary classes

Impact on pupils' learning, behaviour and progress

Impact of TAs on pupils' learning and behaviour

Findings from **teacher surveys** showed that TAs in particular had a positive impact on pupils' learning and behaviour in terms of:

• Taking on specific pupils
• Bringing specialist help (e.g. technology skills, counselling)
• Pupils' behaviour, discipline, social skills and/or behaviour
• Allowing individualisation and differentiation of tasks
• Improving pupils' attitudes and motivation
• General positive and/or indirect effect on learning and behaviour

Systematic observations showed TAs in classrooms led to:

• More active pupil role in interaction with adults in primary classes
• More classroom engagement for primary-aged pupils without SEN
• More active pupil role in interaction with adults, and more classroom engagement, for pupils with SEN in secondary classes

Impact of TAs on pupils' attitudes and academic progress

Little evidence TA support received by pupils over a school year improved their Positive Approaches to Learning, expect in Year 9

Year	Not distracted	Confident	Motivated	Not disruptive	Independ't	Relat'ship with peers	Completes work	Follow instruction
1	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓n	✗	✗	✗
2	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
3	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓n	✗	✓n	✗
6	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
7	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
9	✓p	✓p	✓p	✓p	✓p	✓p	✓p	✓p
10	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

The *more* TA support pupils received, the *less* academic progress made. Effect of support did not vary for pupils with and without SEN

Year	English	Mathematics	Science
1	✓n	✓n	✗
2	✓n	✓n	✓n
3	✓n	✓n	✗
6	✓n	✓n	✓n
7	✓n	✓n	✗
9	✓n	✓n	✓n
10	✓n	✗	✗

✗ = No significant effect of TA support; ✓n = Significant negative effect of TA support; ✓p = Significant positive effect of TA support

Both sets of findings for PAL and academic progress could not be explained by potentially confounding pupil characteristics (e.g. SEN status, prior attainment, deprivation), which were controlled for in the analysis, nor fully by properties of TAs (e.g. qualifications)

Furthermore, contrary to teachers' views, there was little consistent sign that pupils who received little or no TA support made any academic progress in classes where other pupils did receive TA support, particularly in Year 9 where there was a negative effect of TA support across all three core subjects.