CHAPTER 5 THE ROLE OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Teaching assistants (TAs) are known by various titles including classroom assistants, learning support assistants, special needs assistants and non-teaching assistants (Lee and Mawson, 1998). Clayton (1993) suggests that this multiplicity of job titles probably reflects the ad hoc way in which such teaching support has developed over the last 25 years. However, "teaching assistant" is the government's preferred generic term of reference for all those in paid employment who support teachers in primary, special and secondary schools (DfEE, 2000, p.4). Research documenting the TA role reveals its gradual development in the '90s from domestic helper to "assistant teacher", contributing to children's learning by working with small groups of children and providing individuals with more sustained and focused activity (Clayton, 1993; Fletcher-Campbell, 1992; Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997). For example, while a National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) survey based on 767 questionnaires completed by TAs revealed that most of them provided more than one type of support, 77% indicated that they worked with small groups within a class (Lee and Mawson, 1998).

The main factor behind this change in the last 10 to 15 years is the inclusion in mainstream schools of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) (Lee, 2002). The additional support these pupils need to cope in mainstream classes, as identified in their statements of SEN, was (and is) increasingly provided by TAs, often funded by the LEA on a temporary or short-term basis. The introduction of the *Code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs* (DfE, 1994) — which established that pupils with identifiable learning needs but who did not require the level of support provided by a statement should still have their needs met — "had a significant effect on the numbers of assistants employed to work in schools and the range of tasks carried out" (Lee, 2002, p.2). The number of pupils with SEN being educated in mainstream schools has risen further as a result of New Labour's inclusion agenda, especially children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, with a corresponding rise in the employment of TAs.

TAs are at the centre of the government's workforce remodelling agenda. In *Time for standards: reforming the school workforce* (DfES, 2002) the government set out its intention to transform teachers' working practices by removing from them a range of administrative tasks. At the same time, the roles of TAs and administrators were to be developed, including the introduction of higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs). The main reason given for these reforms was to take the pressure off teachers by reducing their workload and so improving their work/life balance, and increasing teacher retention. Also, if teachers could concentrate on teaching, standards of pupil attainment would be raised. *Raising standards and tackling workload: A national agreement* (DfES, 2003b) was signed by most public sector unions with members in education (with the exception of the NUT), employers and the government in 2003. It was introduced in three phases the first and second of which, although involving a range of strategies to review and reduce workloads, had major implications for the role of TAs. The first phase in 2003

included the routine delegation of 24 tasks and the third phase in 2005 introduced the allocation of 10% of teachers' time for preparation, planning and pupil assessment (PPA time). Implementing these changes continues to pose challenges to schools to train, support and remunerate TAs for their new responsibilities and to help teachers to reappraise their responsibilities and to work in different ways.

This chapter looks in detail at the increasing number and developing role of TAs, and the nature of the support they provide for primary school children and their teachers (it should be noted that while the nature of this support is reflective of recent practice, it is not necessarily endorsed by the national agreement). Considerable importance is attached to teachers' perception of the support TAs provide and their influence on classroom practice because, although research has been carried out over the last decade (Lee, 2002), only a few studies have been published since the number and responsibilities of TAs have increased. Generally these are questionnaire surveys (eg Labour Research Department, 2002; Neill, 2002; Smith, P. *et al*., 2004) which detail the frequency of types of TA support rather than what they are actually doing in schools. Where studies include qualitative data, the focus is usually KS1 (eg Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997), where TA support has traditionally been concentrated.

This chapter also provides early data on the impact of the national agreement on teachers' administrative workload and headteachers' plans to provide PPA time in relation to the use of TAs. To date research findings on these issues have only been explored through reports on projects supporting schools in restructuring their practices, such as the Transforming the School Workforce: Pathfinder Project (Butt and Lance, 2005). Finally, the chapter briefly considers the changes taking place in TA qualifications and training to support workforce remodelling. It concludes that TAs are playing an increasingly central role in shaping primary school classroom practice and culture.

The deployment of TAs

In 1991 Campbell and Neill (1994) found that, while primary teachers were assisted by parent and volunteer helpers, they had relatively little working time with paid assistants. Some 79% of 326 teachers surveyed had either no such time or only up to five hours per week. Our visits to schools and classroom observations a decade ago reflected this finding. In particular, we saw little evidence of TAs working in KS2 classrooms. Like McGarvey *et al*. (1996) we found TAs were mostly concentrated in reception and Year 1 classes. When we did encounter them in KS2 classes they tended to work as unobtrusively as possible with individual children. However, research by Galton *et al*. (2002), who surveyed 267 KS1 and KS2 teachers in 2001, found that just over half the teachers received more than five hours help per week from a paid assistant. This reveals a considerable increase since the late '90s. Owing to the government's remodelling agenda and teachers' growing appreciation of TAs' work, this trend seems set to continue, providing schools have sufficient funding.

The survey of TAs by Smith, P. *et al*. (2004) found that KS1 continued to have the highest level of pupil support, particularly in Years 1 and 2. The lowest level of support was in Years 5 and 6. This was also reflected in our data:

> *If there was spare money out there I would put it into teaching assistants. A policy which I've operated for 8 years is to put the maximum amount of teaching assistant time into reception and KS1, so KS1 get 4 days a week full time and Year 5/6 get about 2 or 3 hours. (Headteacher, 131, March 2004)*

Most schools allocated TAs to specific year groups or classes. However, small schools and those with least TA time allocated them to key stages. As the head of a primary school (328 pupils) explained: "I allocate them to key stages, so KS1 has three classroom assistants plus a nursery nurse, KS2 has the other two and the staff share their time out, and I just have a look and see how it's going." This particular primary school had no pupils with statements of SEN at the time of the fieldwork and experienced few behaviour problems, so the TAs mainly supervised groups in the classroom and carried out tasks to support the teachers. Where the number of pupils in a year group exceeded 30 but was insufficient to form two or more classes, schools had to have mixed-age classes. In such schools there was a tendency to concentrate children with SEN in specific classes and provide these with the most TA support.

In a minority of schools teachers complained about the lack of a clear timetable for when and where TAs were working, the confusion generated by working with several different TAs, and/or working with TAs for very short periods of time:

> *Last year one would appear for literacy then one for numeracy and you might even get a different one for something else. We found that not very satisfactory because there were pulls on the teaching assistant's time so now, for example, June goes to Year 3 and 4 to deliver the additional literacy strategy but she spends the rest of her time in Years 5 and 6. We try to keep them as much as possible within one team. (Science coordinator, 408, Nov 2003)*

On whatever basis TAs were allocated, it was clearly important to avoid fragmenting their role to the point where they were unable to give sufficient time to their various responsibilities, and their coming and going proved distracting for teachers. Clearly such fragmentation limited the contribution TAs could make to teaching and learning.

TAs carried out a range of overlapping roles that could be broadly categorised as:

- supporting individual children with SEN
- working with groups of children with SEN
- providing classroom support for particular teachers
- providing support for the curriculum particularly in literacy and numeracy
- carrying out administrative tasks.

Generally teachers perceived TAs to be very hard working and often to be competently juggling diverse roles:

As everybody else in a small school, she's got three hats on: she's special needs support teacher and our dyslexia expert so she has a timetable and usually withdraws children at KS2. Some of them do get a little bit sensitive about doing quite different work within the classroom setting and they're more confident and speak out more in a small group. She also supports a child with behaviour problems in Year 6 and she's classroom assistant in my class every afternoon, apart from the day she does her dyslexia course. (Year 4/5 teacher, 130, Nov 2003)

The HLTA has clearly got a defined job description which is about overseeing some of the communication flow for the other teaching assistants, but the other aim is to work with the individual education plans (IEPs), help with that and monitor the progress, supporting the SENCO and special needs provision. And then there is her own role of possibly taking small booster groups — underachieving children — and she will do cover supervisory [with assistance from another TA supervising whole-class task completion following teacher input] once a week as well, so she's doing the whole lot. (Headteacher, 279, May 2005)

Several schools had a policy of monitoring TAs' roles, their strengths, weaknesses and working preferences, particularly in relation to the ages of the children with whom they worked. They were then placed according to this information as well as to teachers' perspectives and requests. Teachers thought appropriate placing to be crucial to TAs' job satisfaction and viewed good relationships between TAs and teachers as very important. Such relationships were dependent on a combination of the TA's skills and confidence in meeting the expectations of their role and compatible personalities. One head of a small school (30 pupils) emphasised this: "In a small school, probably even more than in a big school, personalities make a difference. You know it just does." Few disadvantages of working with TAs were cited but, when they were, these were related to personal traits and conflicting values; as examples, two of the teachers' comments were: "I'm the youngest in the school and asking things of older people was difficult for me at the beginning"; "Disadvantages — to be quite honest, when you have an outspoken assistant who tells you how to do your job."

Most teachers, through good fortune, request or a shared understanding built up over time felt that they had good relationships with their TAs. They often commented on how their TAs intuitively knew what they needed and were able to anticipate tasks:

She is just brilliant. She is ace. Actually she is quite perceptive with me as well. She will say, "do you want me to go do so, so and so?" and it is "oh yeah, thank you". She is reading me before I actually think of it in my head, if you understand what I am saying, because you have got one hundred and one things going on. (Acting deputy head, 280, Feb 2004)

However, a few teachers that had moved from schools with little TA provision to their present schools where they were given TA support, admitted to finding it difficult initially to work cooperatively. It took time to adjust to sharing the class and aspects of teaching with TAs and delegating responsibilities to them:

> *I think when I first came to this school I wasn't used to having any support because I'd been in a very small school and we had one nursery nurse to share between the whole school so we ended up with about an hour a week. I found it difficult when I came here because I was so used to doing everything myself and I found it hard to delegate. I must admit I resented them coming in and taking on this role. I felt very alienated with classroom assistants. Certainly, after the first year and last year I've found the advantages have been quite wide really; training them up to assess children when you are trying to teach others — they now do more highly skilled jobs than were thought of a few years ago. Also changing books and listening to children read, which are things you can't do because of literacy hour. The advantages certainly outweigh the disadvantages in my eyes. (Year 1/2 teacher, 408, Nov 2003)*

Since the expansion of the TA role, teachers in the sample schools have had to change aspects of their classroom practice in order to appreciate fully the benefits TAs can bring.

Supporting pupils with SEN

TA support for pupils with SEN was drawn from both LEA and school provision. However, increasingly schools preferred to control their own SEN provision as this enabled greater flexibility of TA deployment. For example, a headteacher described how the school (566 pupils) initially subscribed to the LEA's provision for children on School Action Plus, which entitled them to TA support all day Tuesday. However, this necessarily shaped timetabling for the whole school and, because of the timetable for the classes from which the pupils were withdrawn, these children were missing the same lessons each week. Having their own SEN support at the school meant this no longer happened. Funding and controlling such support also enabled schools to provide a programme of TA training and gave more job security for both the TAs and the school:

> *I realised that what was happening was I was spending a lot of money training up support staff but once the child with the additional needs left school I was losing them because they were dropping off the end. The LEA was holding that money, so the year that the authority delegated the money directly to school I changed it completely. I stopped the contracts for those working as special needs assistants and I redeployed them all as classroom assistants full time. If the money coming in for the special needs child was for 15 hours I put that into the school budget and topped it up from the school budget to make up the full-time equivalent and there's one lady per class now. (Headteacher, 220, Oct 2004)*

A school becoming known for providing good SEN support brought in more children with SEN, including those who had experienced difficulties elsewhere. While on the one hand this was perceived as detrimental to the achievement of high SAT results, on the other hand, if children brought the extra funding, this provided more TAs and contributed to improved teaching and learning.

As part of their role in supporting children with SEN, TAs:

- gave individual pupils one-to-one support
- monitored individual pupils' attitudes, behaviours and approaches to learning
- developed IEPs
- explained tasks
- further differentiated tasks by providing additional resources and support to meet the needs of individual children
- helped pupils to remain on task
- improved pupil motivation and self esteem
- encouraged and reinforced positive behaviour.

Typically, TAs took small, lower ability sets during literacy and numeracy lessons in the morning; in the afternoon they worked with individual children on IEP targets.

TAs who provided one-to-one assistance for pupils with SEN frequently did so within the classroom situation and supported other children at the same time:

> *For the child with behavioural problems I have someone every single morning and three afternoons a week and that's fantastic because he's doing so well. She can work with another group and one of his targets is that he is gradually less supported but she's there just in case. The other two children have someone for English every day and again that's good. I think there's a lot of support for me seeing as I have such a small class but it goes with the pupils. If they were just of low ability I probably wouldn't get support but it's been great. (Year 6 teacher, 130, Nov 2003)*

TA support for pupils with SEN, particularly those with behavioural problems, was viewed as advantageous for the pupils themselves as well as saving time and reducing stress for teachers. As expressed by a teacher working in an area of social and economic disadvantage, the role of TAs was viewed as crucial both for behaviour management and to facilitate pupil learning:

> *I couldn't do without a teaching assistant. Last year for a period of time I was without a TA because my assistant had to go to another class and it was extremely difficult. We have very, very challenging children, both academically and behaviourally and so I find that, without a teaching assistant, I couldn't do half my teaching because of either behaviour problems or problems with learning. (Year 4 teacher, 180, Dec 2004)*

One headteacher of a primary school with a SEN base consisting of two classes spoke of how the 13 TAs were so vital that the school could not function as effectively without them. Consequently, when there was TA absence she employed supply TAs:

> *We always cover our TA in the two base classes and in reception. If a TA is away and the teacher says, "Oh I really needed her today", we have got two supply TAs on our books … and we are the envy of a lot of schools. We use our budget wisely, I think, and because of that our TAs input ever so much more because they feel valued … We treat them like teachers, they are respected like teachers by the kids. (Headteacher, 185, June 2003)*

As illustrated earlier, where schools had HLTAs they often provided particular support to the SENCO by overseeing other TAs providing SEN support, coordinating IEPs and assisting with other paperwork:

> *I act as SENCO for the school. My higher level teaching assistant does the paperwork associated with that but purely because of the difficulty or the nature of a lot of the case conferences I act as SENCO because I'll be representing the school for those. But my higher level teaching assistant is excellent at coordinating the IEPs and everything around school. (Headteacher, 220, Oct 2004)*

Providing in-class teaching support

Often the TAs who provided one-to-one support for SEN pupils were also employed to provide general classroom assistance, support for the teacher and curriculum support:

> *We have approximately one [TA] per year group. We have got two classes per year group but those people have to deliver the statutory provision to our three statements and they are also the same people who are delivering the support groups. They are in a year group class for approximately 14 hours a week so that is 7 hours per class in a week. When numeracy was a big focus for us we changed it so that every lesson had a numeracy assistant in it as another way of trying to push it. Then, as the focus came away from the numeracy, the staff had the freedom to say, "I would like somebody in for these lessons" and we try to organise it. (Deputy head, 450, Nov 2004)*

Teachers routinely referred to the benefits to themselves of having TAs in the classroom:

- "they make life easier"
- "for the running around"
- "two pairs of eyes is better"
- "more bodies in classrooms to help out"
- "more input is better"
- "spreading the workload"
- "someone to discuss things with".

The benefits given for pupils' learning were predominantly the additional explanations and help with, and immediate feedback on, tasks which TAs gave groups and individuals. However, by far the most frequently mentioned benefit for children was that TAs were able to listen and talk to individual children whereas teachers had insufficient time: "Just having somebody to sit down and talk to, they don't go home and sit down and talk at home"; "Children want somebody to listen to them and with the best will in the world if you are a teacher with 30 children you can't"; "Just to have somebody else there to listen to them when they're talking about something for 10 to 15 minutes, rather than you all the time, because they could take up all your time."

In our research a decade ago — and echoed in other subsequent studies (eg Osborn *et al*., 2000) — the pressure to cover lesson content combined with ever expanding workloads was drastically reducing the time teachers felt that

they had to devote to developing relationships with individual children. This situation clearly has not changed and TAs are now supplementing and/or substituting for teachers in listening, encouraging, mentoring and counselling individual pupils. It is therefore clearly important that the burgeoning responsibilities of TAs do not put them in a position where they also feel unable to give pupils sufficient personal attention.

Classroom assistance frequently took the form of supporting the teacher in whole-class teaching, working with groups within the classroom and sometimes, especially in small schools, team teaching the whole class. When a teacher was taking the whole class, the TA sometimes sat with the individuals or groups most likely to disrupt the lesson in order to reduce distractions. Alternatively, the TA sat with quiet or less confident pupils, or those of lower ability, and helped them make contributions to the lesson or drew the teacher's attention to their responses. Teachers accustomed to working closely with their TAs developed a preferred teaching style that was dependent on the TA's participation and found it difficult to teach effectively without them:

> *Last week she wasn't so well and she was away and it was a shock. It was like having your arm chopped off. Right in the middle of a lesson you don't think and you look for reassurance from your support assistant. You question one another like a role play during the lesson. (Year 4/5 teacher, 159, Dec 2003)*

As illustrated above, teachers and TAs often formed a "double act" to present material to children, repeating or rephrasing each other's questions, making comments on information and drawing children into the discussion. In one middle school a TA produced a PowerPoint presentation for a Year 4 geography lesson, comparing the village where the school was situated with Chembakolli in India. The teacher gave the presentation and the TA sat to one side. They both discussed the slides and elicited pupils' opinions on a range of issues, writing comments and questions on the interactive whiteboard over the slides and encouraging children to come out and do likewise.

TAs' contribution to supporting groups of children, which were often those of lower ability, overlapped with TA provision for children with SEN. It predominantly involved:

- supporting children's written work
- developing children's oracy skills
- providing resources for the lesson
- behaviour management
- feeding back to teachers how individuals and groups had coped with the work
- assessing pupils
- literacy and numeracy support
- supervising ICT use.

Teachers in small schools viewed TAs as particularly valuable because they enabled them to differentiate work for the pupils in their mixed-age, mixed-ability

classes and give additional support to pupils with SEN. The following two descriptions illustrate how teachers and TAs team-taught classes comprised of two or more year groups:

In a maths lesson say, you would do the mental starter and during the mental starter she [the TA] tends to take individual children out that need a bit of extra, perhaps some tables or just counting. We have got one or two with special needs that need this daily sort of practice on a one to one. Then generally for the main part of the lesson, if I start with the Year 3/4s and move onto work with the Year 5/6s then she would be supporting the Year 3/4s and making sure that I don't get disturbed. So she is supporting them during their work, or it may be the opposite in that I ask her to support the Year 5/6s while I then come back to the Year 3/4s, and maybe recap what they have been learning in that lesson and sort of do a plenary session with them. (KS2 teacher, 30, March 2004)

She usually works with one age group so it means that you can home in on catering for the needs of that age group. I plan the work and she delivers it. I mark it and we discuss together where we are moving onto, because obviously I need to see how the lesson went and I plan the next session's work for her. Throughout the year we swap so she has worked with both age groups and so have I. (Year 3/4 teacher, 70, June 2003)

This arrangement was considered to work extremely well except when the two groups proved a distraction to each other because they were involved in separate activities in a confined space. Such flexible ways of working with TAs meant that small schools could use them to provide PPA time. For example, the head of a school with 108 pupils described how she and a TA had both been trained to teach first aid. Next term the TA was going to teach this to small groups of KS2 children who would work towards achieving a certificate in first aid. As there were 70 children in the three KS2 classes, when the TA took a group out, this enabled two of the KS2 teachers to team-teach the children with the other TAs and provide the third teacher with PPA time.

TAs often supervised an ICT component to a lesson, sometimes working in another room or a corridor bay. Also, as discussed in the previous chapter, a small minority of schools had designated ICT assistants:

I've an ICT assistant who works full time and supports class computer work. What happens is the class will go to the ICT room, the teacher explains the task to all the children, they go back to their classroom, she splits them into a manageable-sized working group and says, "Right, go to the ICT room and do that task"…. the ICT assistant picks them up and makes sure that task's done. Then they go back and the next 10 go along and it works very effectively. (Headteacher, 220, Oct 2004)

Teachers also used TAs in a range of other ways to support class activities. For example, TAs worked with children doing activities in which they might hurt themselves. As a class teacher explained: "Like at the moment we are cutting out Christmas cards, they are using Stanley knives and you can't have a lot of children doing that at once so we have two or three children with a support assistant." TAs were also invaluable to teachers when children were doing

complex practical activities or ones with the potential for making a mess of the classroom, and when they took children out of school on visits:

We are making money containers for Christmas and… you are hairless if you try and do it yourself. You know you plan around it [the TA allocation] and I think it is a balance. I would say that half the time they are preparing the stuff that you need and the rest of the time they are supporting you in what you are doing. Going on school trips and things like that, all that has to be taken into account because we can't pay them to do it, so you just have to think, "Well I will save my time up [with the TA] and can you come on the trip with us". It is times like that when they are really, really valuable. (Year 4 teacher, 391, Oct 2004)

TAs' specialist skills and knowledge were also used to contribute to extra-curricular school activities, for example a TA in a small school who was an accomplished musician led the production of the Christmas concert and the musical aspects of other whole-school plays and performances.

Lesson planning

Smith, P. *et al*. (2004) found that the main difficulty adversely affecting teachers and TAs working cooperatively was lack of time to plan and prepare together for lessons. A minority of the teachers we interviewed, particularly where they shared a TA with other teachers, only managed to brief TAs in snatched time. This was usually just before the start of the lesson which limited the ways in which they could be deployed:

We don't have a chance to plan with them. Usually once I am on an activity then we sort of share the support around. We will both do the same things and I don't often specifically set them up with a group. I do sometimes. I might say, "Please can you sit with that group and support them on this activity". Otherwise we will both go around the classroom and I get my assistant to mark, write in their books, give them smiley faces and so they are on a sort of par with me at that point, after having listened to the initial input. Often I will just catch them before a lesson and say... "Can you take them out and do this activity with them for the first 10 minutes of the lesson whilst I am doing some more mental work?" (Year 5 teacher, 470, Oct 2003)

Similarly, lack of time for discussion between teachers and TAs also meant that feedback on the progress of individuals and groups on the tasks set was passed on through brief exchanges at the end of lessons. However, most teachers had an agreed time for shared planning with TAs, even though this was often considered insufficient. For example, in several schools TAs started work at 8.30am in order to be briefed by teachers, who in varying degrees of detail went through the work they had planned with them:

I've got a teaching assistant from 9 till 12, so Monday morning we'll go through the planning and what we're doing … she has a teaching group and so sometimes she will take her group out and sometimes she will stay in. Usually we do the input all together and she will take her group out or sometimes she just takes them out straight away and does the teaching for that group, and I make sure that I have that group at least once a week so that I don't lose touch with them, and we swop over like that. (Year 4 teacher, 180, Dec 2004)

Ofsted (2002b) has drawn attention to the fact that extensive TA support for particular groups, usually of lower ability, can lead to SEN pupils seldom receiving teaching and individual support from the teacher. Heightened awareness of this issue led some teachers, like the one quoted above, to ensure that they regularly exchanged groups with TAs in order to monitor the needs and progress of all the children in the class through direct contact. In addition to discussing plans in advance, some teachers also provided the TAs with a list of the days' activities "so that they know what the purpose is, what we are aiming to achieve and who will be doing what, and when we will be doing it — then they have got a clear overview". Particularly in relation to planning, TAs were generally regarded as both saving work and creating it. As the KS2 teacher in a small school of 33 pupils explained, while she spent large amounts of time planning the teaching of the TA who worked with her four days a week, without her assistance she would still have had to do considerable additional planning in order to cater for the wide range of ages and abilities in her KS2 class.

Intervention strategies

Ofsted's (2002b) evaluation of the work of TAs found that the training they were undertaking in how to support literacy and numeracy was "improving significantly their knowledge of these subjects and how they are taught" (p.1). In the majority of our sample schools TAs had been trained for and become involved in delivering and/or leading one or more of a range of intervention programmes particularly in literacy, such as Additional Literacy Support (ALS), Early Literacy Support (ELS), Further Literacy Support (FLS), Better Reading and Talking Partners. As one deputy head explained, this gave TAs considerable extra responsibility that teachers were unaccustomed to TAs exercising. As these initiatives came on stream in quick succession, teachers were not necessarily familiar with what they involved. Schools had not always got systems in place for monitoring this work, linking it to children's individual targets and keeping class teachers informed. As a result to begin with:

> *The initiatives were all over the place, we didn't have any tracking of who had done what initiative and some of the teachers weren't expecting to take seriously the work that the support staff had done. So they might do better reading or nine recovery levels but when the children went back to class the class teacher would still be letting them read at the previous level. So a lot of the support staff felt very undervalued because they were doing a good job. (Deputy head, 564, June 2003)*

However, this issue had been addressed over time by ensuring that TAs and class teachers shared knowledge of participating children's achievement levels, enabling them to decide jointly on what needed to be done to get individuals to the next level.

Where TAs led such intervention strategies, headteachers generally praised their skills and commitment:

Now two of the staff have actually been trained for doing this … and they have taken great pride in actually doing it [the intervention work]. To the point, and it was even their suggestion, that we couldn't find time in the timetable so they said, "Can we not do it at dinner time?" and "Could we do 15 minutes at dinner time for that and actually bring them out of the lesson for 15 minutes so that we have got a half hour slot?" The reason for it is that last year we identified six children that we thought are not going to achieve level four. We decided that they would be the six that we target and out of those six, five of them got level four. Now that gave the support staff such a buzz that they have actually got a Year 6 group and a Year 5 group because they want to do an extended input themselves. (Headteacher, 113, Feb 2005)

Administrative tasks

Ofsted (2002b) warns schools of the need to make sure that, as the amount of learning support provided by TAs increases, "there is no reduction in the administrative, practical and welfare support that they have traditionally provided" (p.4). Certainly, the growing complexity of TAs' roles could cause such a reduction as was the experience of a Year 5/6 teacher who explained that, while her TA the previous year used to do administrative tasks, particularly photocopying: "My present TA hasn't got time because she is also our speech and language assistant so she is preparing her own work and she has no free time to give to me." However, the majority of teachers appeared satisfied with the classroom and teaching assistance provided by the TAs allocated to work with them. Often TAs also helped teachers by taking on specific administrative tasks that were closely allied to the classroom support they provided. For example, one teacher described how her workload had been reduced by her TA taking responsibility for facilitating and recording home reading:

She also runs, more or less by herself and she consults with me, the home reading side — the books the children actually take home to read. She is the one who changes them and she is the one who, during the week, will hear them read as individuals at least once during the week to keep that going. She will be the one who monitors whether parents are hearing them read. If they are not, she will tell me and we will do something about it, so she has a very, very valuable role. It is something I would find very difficult with all the other jobs I am trying to juggle and I know that I can rely on her and trust her to do that very competently. (Deputy head, 250, July 2004)

In a small minority of schools TAs were also used to collect data to inform staff monitoring and understanding of aspects of their teaching. For example, in one primary school (226 pupils) the head explained how a TA studying for her HND had produced a highly informative piece of research on circle time, and this had alerted him to their potential to contribute to action research in the school. Consequently, they were being used to collect data for teachers on the nature of the teachers' closed and open questions, and on the language and strategies they used to positively reinforce pupil behaviour and improve motivation for learning.

Our fieldwork coincided with the implementation in 2003 of the first phase of the national agreement involving the delegation of the 24 administrative tasks.

In the minority of schools where little or no progress had been made in relieving teachers of these tasks, they were sceptical as to whether it might ever happen and concerned that, if TAs were deployed to carry out the tasks, this would adversely affect the time that they had for supporting children's learning:

I would just love to know where this time's coming from, I really would. I cannot in all honesty see that I'm going to take my classroom assistants away from working with children to go and do all my display, or to stand there doing photocopying. They need somebody extra to do that. I don't want to have to decide between the two. It's wrong to take it away from the children. (Literacy coordinator, 131, March 2004)

By the 2004 visits, the majority of schools had put strategies in place to relieve teachers of these tasks. However, a few heads commented that teachers had chosen to use the extra TA help given them to reduce workload to instead provide additional support for children: "Staff are dreadful; you give them all TA time and they just use it to help the children, which is wonderful, rather than let the TA do displays and things — so there's quite a dilemma."

Headteachers reported how teachers were now provided with considerable extra administrative help, as is illustrated in the following two descriptions:

I mean the classroom assistants do an awful lot: collecting money, contacting parents if the children aren't in on time. We have a display team who will actually rotate around the school saying, "Is there something you need doing and updating". Working with small groups, changing books, photocopying, laminating — they do all of that. The staff will simply say, "Right, I have got a plan. I have left it on your desk. Would you mind doing that for us as I would like it by next week if possible?" They have taken an awful lot of that on board. (Headteacher, 113, Feb 2005)

We've introduced a PA [personal assistant] for the teachers, so one of our teaching assistants does two hours a day, every day, of anything teachers want. It can be phoning up, ordering goods, photocopying, filing resources — you name it, she does it.… One of the other teaching assistants has taken over the money, so there's a post box and the children post their money in an envelope in the post box and the teaching assistant takes it out and checks it off.… And the teaching assistants do all the sort of — typical stuff for primary schools — ticking off lists of children who've brought in their photos and children who haven't filled in a form, so we're not doing badly. (Headteacher, 249, June, 2004)

Notwithstanding their complaints about workload, for a variety of reasons teachers did not always choose to make use of the TA help provided. During the course of the fieldwork many teachers were observed doing some photocopying, usually before school or during breaks. The reasons given were generally that asking a TA to do it required advance planning and the photocopying was required that day, and/or it would take too long to explain or write instructions. For example, one teacher, who was observed briefly leaving a TA overseeing the class while she did some photocopying, was asked whether she would usually leave the TA with the class rather than ask her to do the photocopying:

Yes, she does do jobs for me. You know she backed some boards this week, she has cut out some lettering for me, but it is like I say… for the bit of photocopying that I was doing I was taking three different sheets and chopping them up and rearranging them. So by the time I could explain to her what I wanted her to do, it was quicker to do it myself. (Deputy head, 250, July 2004)

As well as considering it was often quicker and easier to do a task rather than explain it to a TA, the slowness with which some TAs accomplished tasks was also given as a disincentive:

We have done a whole corridor in Year 4 with cave paintings that the kids have done and she backed all those, but that is all she did for the week. I am actually finding that because of the speed that she works at, I am now doing my own photocopying because she just doesn't get things done. She is too slow so if you are relying on something you are in trouble. (Deputy head, 580, Jan 2004)

Furthermore, the willingness to delegate tasks was often linked to confidence in the TA's ability to carry them out. This was particularly in relation to putting up displays, a task that teachers both enjoyed doing and that was seen as an integral part of the teaching process:

I can't imagine a primary school teacher not doing display. That is part of your teaching and learning because it's not just displaying the children's good work; it's a display for teaching purposes, so it's part of your teaching to do it. I couldn't imagine why I wouldn't do that. (Year 6 teacher, 470, Oct 2003)

However, some teachers admitted they needed to be better organised to be able to identify in advance appropriate tasks to delegate.

Increasingly schools were offering facilities and clubs out of school hours; for example, one school in a very disadvantaged area offered a breakfast club on a Monday and Friday morning and two TAs came in at 8am on those days to run it. TAs were viewed by headteachers as able to play a very valuable role in such extended day activities. However, depending on the extent to which schools received additional funding for these, TAs' participation could be at the expense of supporting children and teachers during school time. Consequently as one head, whose school provided extended school activities owing to its involvement in an Education Action Zone, speculated:

I think we've got to start looking at whether teaching assistants and teachers need to be working at the same time all the time. A lot of schools have got into provision after half past three — targeting children who need additional support and using classroom teaching assistants in that role to give children sort of basic support then, and enable them during the day not to be deprived of the broad curriculum. (Headteacher, 185, Oct 2004)

If TAs are used to enable schools to engage in more activities than they could otherwise do, then arguably not only could cooperative working between TAs and teachers start to decrease and recent gains for children and teachers be

lost, but staff generally could find themselves facing greater, rather than reduced, workloads.

Teaching the whole class

Smith, P. *et al*. (2004) reported that 55% of headteachers and 58% of teachers felt that teaching assistants never provided whole-class cover in the absence of a teacher, while 38% of headteachers and 32% of teachers felt that TAs were occasionally asked to provide cover. They found this contrasted with the view of TAs as 50% of them claimed to provide cover occasionally. However, according to the TAs in their study, the circumstances leading to such cover were predominantly: while a teacher deals with an incident elsewhere (85%); and unplanned teacher absence (49%). Generally these findings reflect the situation described to us. For example, in a small school (33 pupils) on the morning of the fieldwork, the teacher who normally took science in KS2 was away and the TA, who was accustomed to supporting the class during science, took the lesson that the teacher had planned.

In small schools the culture of team teaching by teachers and TAs gradually evolved into TAs occasionally teaching a whole class. Teachers were comfortable with this and believed pupils benefited from the TAs' skills. For example, in one small school the TA took Year 5/6 children for art:

> *On a Wednesday afternoon it is a whole Key Stage 2 art afternoon except for small computer groups which he [Year 5/6 teacher] withdraws from. The children rotate so they all get an intense computer session. Even though he is officially the teacher, he is working with say six children on the computers in the big classroom. How it has evolved is she [the TA] works totally with the Year 5 and 6 children in the big classroom and does the art work, and I work in here. I plan it all and we discuss it, but she delivers it and does all the teaching in there for art under no direct supervision because I am in here and he is busy doing his computing…. She has got a very good eye for art and it is very beneficial to us. I would say it is a positive. She likes doing it because I am sure it gives her job satisfaction and I think that she gets good results from the older children. She really gets the best out of them. I think that she is more artistic probably than I am and she draws on that strength. (Year 3/4 teacher, 70, June 2003)*

It was interesting that the headteacher of the small school referred to above, while full of praise for the work and commitment of the TAs, was adamant they should not take classes to release teachers. Perhaps because of the flexible way in which staff worked, she did not view the TA as fulfilling a whole-class teaching role. Maybe the fact that the teacher of the Year 5/6 class was also teaching, albeit engrossed in teaching another subject, meant that the TA was not regarded as being in charge of the class. An alternative explanation, and one that seems to underpin teachers' understandings generally of whether or not a TA is teaching a whole class, is that a TA delivering a lesson planned by a teacher is "delivering" not teaching. In the above scenario the Year 3/4 teacher planned the art work that the TA delivered.

A few headteachers in the sample, who did ask TAs to teach a whole class,

made use of a TA's particular subject or cross-curricular expertise. For example, a TA in one school who had undertaken a considerable amount of training in philosophy for children taught the reception class one afternoon a week.

Releasing teachers for PPA time

The majority of teachers in this study totally disagreed with the notion that TAs might take whole classes on a regular basis to release teachers for PPA time. They viewed it as devaluing their professionalism:

> *When it comes to asking classroom assistants to teach, I do not agree. I think that devalues me as a teacher if a classroom assistant can come in and take my class without any training…. We're not being fair to the kids. These people do not have the skills and experience to teach in the way they should be taught, so we're short-changing children when staff are off. It's teaching on the cheap and we're not being fair to them. They're doing a teaching job for half my salary and, no, I can't agree with that. It's happening, and it will happen more and more, but I can't agree with that. (Year 3 teacher, 647, July 2005)*

Whole-class teaching by TAs was characterised as "second-rate teaching":

> *They are very good at what they do but there's a world of difference between doing what they do and taking a class. I mean, they are wholly unqualified and unequipped to do that and I think it would be detrimental to them as professionals, detrimental to the children and detrimental to the whole school because if it's not done right … it's going to create catastrophic problems. (Deputy head, 329, Nov 2003)*

Deciding which aspects of teaching were the least important from a teachers' perspective and therefore could be delegated to TAs caused considerable debate:

> *I just feel it would be very difficult for me, and I am on the remodelling committee by the way and I have the greatest respect for the classroom assistants, but I think that it would be very difficult for me to spend an afternoon out of the classroom and not know what went on. It is not like a supply teacher where you know that it is a one-off and you will be back in tomorrow and that is okay. I mean what would I leave for them to do? What is not important? Some people have said circle time — to me that is probably the most important time in my week! Okay there is one [TA] who is very keen on music and so I will give them the music session for the week, but what do I know about them musically? … So I think that it is very difficult and I can't see it happening. (Year 4 teacher, 391, Oct 2004)*

The value of having PPA time was generally regarded by teachers as likely to be offset by the planning, preparation and marking generated by the TAs' lessons. On their return to the classroom, they also anticipated difficulties arising from inadequate discipline:

> *They were saying about reducing workload by having a CSA [classroom support assistant] or somebody different, but you still have to prepare the lessons. So if you have spent the time preparing them then you want to do them. You will still have the marking to do. They are going to give you an hour off but you will be doing a lot*

more work anyway. Then there is a discipline problem and I don't think that the CSAs can handle a class; the children aren't going to see them as teachers being able to look after the whole class. If it is just them baby minding, doing a task that is so easy that they don't need to be taught, then there is no point in them doing it anyway. (Science coordinator, 566, June 2003)

There were exceptions to teachers' generally negative response to TAs taking classes. In the two schools where TAs were openly acknowledged to take classes occasionally, this was not viewed as a problem. Moreover, because of their knowledge of the children and the school they were perceived as preferable to supply teachers for providing staff cover:

If I go sometimes on a course on an afternoon, she's done it [taken the lesson]. Or if I've had to be called out because sometimes I'm the named teacher in charge and I've had to go out of the classroom and just left her and she's been fine. … I wouldn't say at first she would have been confident in doing it but as she's gone on, she is now confident, maybe because we've had that class, this is the second year. It's better having a classroom assistant who knows the children teaching them or taking over, instead of getting a supply teacher in sometimes, because the supply teacher does not know the children and the children will play them…. Whereas with her they won't because they know she's like me; she works similar to me now and she won't stand for any nonsense. (Year 4 teacher, 220, Oct 2004)

In discussing the potential role of teaching assistants, 27 of the 50 headteachers specifically addressed the issue of whether teaching assistants should be able to teach whole classes. Fifteen thought that they should not, 6 felt they should and 6 were unsure, giving reasons both for and against. Those headteachers who were against the notion of TAs being used to provide PPA time held similar views to those expressed by teachers:

A teaching assistant cannot take the place of a teacher and teach whole classes. I find that… I think that is taking away the professionalism of the teacher and it is degrading isn't it? No… degrading is not the word I mean… lowering the role of the teacher… It is outrageous to think that teachers have three years training to be a teacher and people think you can just put a teaching assistant without any training in front of a whole class and they can teach them – No! (Headteacher, 70, Dec 2003)

However, in the two schools with experience of TAs taking classes, headteachers perceived TAs providing cover for PPA time as unproblematic:

Remodelling the workforce to be absolutely honest has not been an issue in this school because we have a really outstanding team of support assistants [nine TAs]. When we looked in the art room, neither of the two members of staff in there are teachers; both of them are classroom assistants. When we looked at the display of wheeled vehicles on the wall and we looked at the masks, all those displays were put up by support assistants; they weren't put up by teachers. (Headteacher, 280, Feb 2004)

In terms of whether headteachers had plans for TAs to take classes in the near future, 6 said yes, 16 said no and 5 were unsure. Those headteachers

categorised as unsure could see both positive and negative sides to giving TAs such additional responsibility:

> *The majority of teachers are very good but we will have at least one or two teachers, no more than two, who are not as good as one or two teaching assistants. So the gap, divide between the two, is diminishing and the teaching assistants are all very keen and very enthusiastic and have a lot to offer. … It is not totally negative and I can see positives and I can see some value in what the teaching assistants are currently doing; some have more skills to offer than they are actually doing. To some extent you are looking at a model almost like an apprentice, where the person is learning the job actually in situ as opposed to being … The problem being is how much theory are we going to provide, have we got the time and have we got the skills to do that and probably the answer is no. (Headteacher, 315, Feb 2005)*

However, those headteachers thought they might decide to use TAs if, for financial reasons, that was the most feasible option for providing PPA time. While they could conceive of using TAs to release teachers of the younger children, they thought it might be impractical in KS2, particularly in Years 5 and 6, "because whilst the younger children will accept and work for teaching assistants, the older children will see it as 'soft soap' time because they have not been used to it".

When headteachers were specifically asked how they proposed to implement the PPA time from October 2005, the most common heads' response was that they could not see how it could be done without the government making available extra resources. However, a few heads had either already implemented PPA time or had clear plans to do so. Various solutions were planned to provide PPA time that did not involve TAs taking whole classes, such as appointing an extra teacher to provide cover:

> *When we saw the way the land lies, we decided that we would employ another teacher. The other reason for that was that we feel in a middle class area like this, it's going to go down better with the parents if somebody who is teaching their children all the time is a qualified teacher. I think some schools will always have resistance, particularly in areas like this, if parents get the idea that somebody's just been dropped in who's not properly qualified. (Headteacher, 328, July 2005)*

The most common solutions planned, with some schools intending to use a combination of two or more of these, were:

- bringing in extra specialist staff (such as music, PE/sport, art) to take a class or classes together
- the head taking classes to release teachers
- appointing new teachers
- using existing staff in a different manner (eg combining classes to make larger groups for some sessions)
- using supply cover.

In only 6 of the 50 schools were there plans for TAs to provide PPA time which were dependent on one or more TAs achieving HLTA status:

Two of our teaching assistants have been assessed as higher level teaching assistants and in September they are going to be responsible for releasing teachers for PPA time. So two of them are doing 16 hours…. One in Key Stage 1 and one in Key Stage 2, both comfortable with the areas that they are going to teach. Jill has worked in Key Stage 1 for the five years that she has been here and she is very confident with the children she is going to be working with. Sonia is going to work with Key Stage 2 children. She is going to work mainly with literacy because that is her strength. She operates a lot of our programmes at the moment, our special needs programmes, so she is very into literacy. She will mainly be doing literacy, but two sessions of RE. ….Our teachers are very, very happy and having the HLTAs doesn't worry them at all. (Headteacher, 391, May 2005)

She is actually training to be a high level assistant and the assessor is coming in next week to assess her. Now I think that she will definitely get it and so that means I could use her to actually help with classes … as long as the teacher has planned the work. (Headteacher, 218, Jan 2004)

One headteacher, while outlining her strategy for introducing the use of TAs to provide PPA time, shared the belief held by the majority of headteachers who were against the notion that this was in conflict with the drive to raise standards:

I was anxious to maintain standards of teaching and learning and I do profess that it is "maintain" standards. I don't see how you can raise standards of teaching and learning when you are asking to bring in people who haven't had three years training and haven't unpacked the QCAs and done everything. I don't know, but "maintain": I think that is a reasonable objective. I've written a development plan and done observations in the afternoons and there's been one or two issues coming out, but they're not issues that I wouldn't perhaps see in an NQT. They're just developmental and some training may be needed, perhaps, in just basic skeletal knowledge of why we structure things in objective-led ways because they are still task orientated. (Headteacher, 279, May 2005)

The headteacher quoted above explained how, through discussion with the governors, teachers and TAs, she had drawn up a plan whereby TAs had detailed job descriptions, were paid accordingly and could benefit from interesting and varied work, giving them career progression while contributing to reducing teacher workload and providing PPA time. Whereas parental responses to TAs teaching classes were a concern to headteachers who viewed the prospect negatively, she had kept parents involved with developments and did not anticipate any parental dissent:

Parents have been informed as soon as we had somebody who achieved HLTA. I have written and we have congratulated them in the newsletter. So it is high profile and after the holiday I am writing to the parents to give them more detail as to what will be happening in September and we will give them the opportunity if they need to ask more questions about it. Now because those two people have worked with children at our school the parents know them. They know how highly regarded they are. I can't see anybody who would say, "Why is our child being educated by a HLTA and not a teacher?" (Headteacher, 391, May 2005)

TA qualifications and training

In the 50 schools, the TAs had a wide range of qualifications derived from LEA-accredited TA training courses, City and Guild Certificates in Learning Support, Specialist Teacher Assistant (STA) courses, National Vocational Qualifications levels 2 and 3, based on the national occupational standards for TAs developed by the Local Government National Training Organisation and the TDA standards for HLTA status. One outcome of the workforce remodelling agenda was that TAs' qualifications were recognised and encouraged by headteachers. However, it was acknowledged that not all TAs wanted to study and to make a career of their work:

> *We have got a highly motivated, highly trained set of teaching assistants in the school. The one who left wanted more hours, but only as a classroom assistant and she knew that she couldn't do that, but there were many more specific jobs to be given to people and so she didn't want to train any more. So it was by mutual agreement that she decided the job had changed so much and she didn't want to do that job. She had been here for 15 years and loved it, but the job had changed and so now we only have highly trained people. (Headteacher, 108, June 2003)*

If, in the future, schools increasingly seek only to employ highly trained TAs to contribute directly to teaching and learning, this could reduce the provision by TAs of traditional practical classroom support for teachers, and even encroach on administrative assistance with the 24 tasks.

Generally headteachers spoke very positively about growth in knowledge and skills that TAs had acquired through their training. They were particularly supportive of those using the role as a career path into teaching, with several headteachers pointing out teachers who had first come to their schools in support roles and identifying TAs who were working towards becoming teachers. However, headteachers raised three main concerns. First, if in the future schools sought to appoint TAs who already had qualifications rather than, as traditionally had been the case, recruiting them from keen and able parent volunteers, this would deny such volunteers access to career opportunities. Second, putting TAs into a hierarchical structure was viewed as potentially divisive since the perception is that only qualifications were rewarded and not depth and breadth of expertise. Third, the growth of HLTAs who could take classes was regarded as likely to adversely affect the employment prospects of supply teachers.

Whether or not TAs received different levels of remuneration to reflect their qualifications varied from school to school and reflected the advice, or lack of it, from LEAs. The following two examples illustrate the differing practices seen during the research period. In a school of 566 pupils there were 14 TAs (2 per year group) who provided at least 5 hours support to each teacher. These TAs ranged from those with considerable experience but no qualifications to one TA who was a qualified teacher. However, in June 2003 they were all receiving the same level of pay. In another school (200 pupils) the HLTA was paid as an NQT for the two days she did HLTA work, and at the same rate as the other TAs

when providing general or SEN classroom support. If a teacher was absent and she covered their class, she claimed for the extra time at her HLTA rate.

In addition to undertaking training for specific qualifications, TAs went on courses to develop expertise in assisting children with particular learning and behavioural or emotional difficulties on topics such as first aid, health and safety and child protection, or on subjects of particular interest to them and their schools. As mentioned earlier, many TAs had been on LEA training to assist with the implementation of the NLS and the NNS. In the majority of schools training in literacy and numeracy had been consolidated by advice and/or further school-based training from literacy and/or numeracy coordinators. As pointed out by teachers, TAs also continually learned from the teachers they supported, who provided an ongoing form of training by modelling approaches to teaching: "It is important for them to listen to how you are teaching a lesson in maths so that they know then how to do the same with the children they are helping."

Smith, P. *et al*. (2004) found that 39% of primary school TAs claimed they were always invited to whole-school training. In our sample schools some headteachers said they invited TAs to all staff meetings/training on a voluntary basis, anticipating that they would only attend those sessions of particular relevance to them and that the more committed or ambitious TAs would put in a more regular attendance. Generally heads felt that TAs were much more likely to attend school-based training than they had been in the past:

> *They now come to things like whole school training — they're very much part of the team. Hopefully we treat them the same as the teachers and they're valued. There's a lot of knowledge now. One of the TAs has probably got more knowledge of special needs than the teachers have, absolutely fantastic — and they're so committed and loyal to the school. So we're very lucky. (Headteacher, 155, July 2005)*

Particularly in schools with a large number of part-time TAs (eg one large school of 430 pupils employed 17), it was extremely difficult to get them all together for training and too costly to pay them for other than specific TA meetings. Cost was a major constraint on involving TAs in whole-school training. As a result most schools identified a few meetings of particular value for TAs and for which they were prepared to pay them to attend:

> *If I want non-teaching assistants to come then I have got to pay them for that day because their contracts are on so many hours. The things that we discuss in the staff meeting on training days and very often after school as well are curriculum things that wouldn't always particularly involve all of the teaching assistants. So we do invite them to some meetings and not to others…. We have also got their line manager who is the senior admin. officer who has staff meetings with them. So now the senior admin. officer comes to the training day staff meeting where we look at the organisation and determine curriculum matters, and she then has a meeting with the teaching assistants and they go through the same things. (Headteacher, 580, Jan 2004)*

A few schools addressed the issue of paying TAs for undertaking training by reducing their working hours in any week when time had been spent on school-based training.

Some schools described how they were providing training specifically linked to workforce remodelling. For example, in one primary school the coordinators were cooperatively providing a series of workshops to give TAs ideas, practical hints and tips on producing displays of the quality required by teachers. In one of the schools where an HLTA was going to cover for PPA time, individual training was being provided on teaching RE:

So for RE she has needed training and she has needed time with the RE coordinator to work through the programmes and the planning is all there. This week is her week of observation and she is in classes observing teachers, seeing what happens, how it is going to be, and in September when it starts we will need to just check and monitor that things are fine. (Headteacher, 391, May 2005)

Most schools had introduced performance management with "a fairly light touch". This was more usually referred to as review or appraisal and was generally the responsibility of the deputy head, the key stage coordinators and/or HLTAs. In addition to enabling TAs to talk about their work and develop/evaluate their job descriptions, this provided an opportunity for them to discuss their training needs.

Conclusion

The rapid expansion in the numbers and responsibilities of TAs, particularly in response to the government's remodelling agenda, is bringing about a fundamental change in the culture of primary schools. Unlike a decade ago, support staff often outnumber teachers, considerably increasing the number of adults in the school community with whom both pupils and teachers can interact. TAs bring different and additional priorities, interests and expertise to primary teaching. It is now commonplace for primary teachers to share their classrooms for all or part of each day with one or more TAs, who contribute to whole-class teaching and work with individuals and groups.

Teachers perceive the support that TAs give pupils as promoting the latter's self esteem, motivation and achievement. Increasingly they regard TAs' contribution as crucial to effective classroom management and teaching. On the one hand, the work of TAs and teachers is viewed as becoming more interchangeable, with headteachers claiming their TAs are "treated like teachers" and "indistinguishable from teachers" when viewed in the classroom. On the other hand, the increased numbers of TAs in the classroom give teachers additional status as managers and demand of them new skills such as cooperation, delegation and mentoring. The workforce remodelling agenda is viewed both as a threat to teacher professionalism and as a means to enhance it by opening up new possibilities. As one deputy head expressed it:

I am all for teaching assistants. They are a very under-used resource really and I think we are at the stage now that we are sort of visioning and saying: "We have got 12 teaching assistants; what do we really want and how are we going to use all this?" … "How are we going to do it?", and it is actually quite liberating to think that we can change all of this now. So we are in an exciting phase really. (Deputy head, 470, Oct 2003)