

Slide 1 – EEF Deployment of Teaching Assistants

Week 1 – Why TA Deployment Matters

“Welcome to Week 1 of our **EEF Guidance on the Effective Use of Teaching Assistants** series.

Across this series, we're going to look closely at what the evidence tells us about how teaching assistants can have the greatest possible impact on pupils.

And we're beginning with the most important starting point:

why deployment matters.

The key message today is that simply having a teaching assistant in the room does not automatically improve outcomes.

What matters is **how that support is organised, planned and used.**

Teaching assistants are often working with the pupils who need the most from us — pupils with SEND, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, pupils who may already be at risk of falling behind.

So the way we deploy support really matters.

This session is not about criticising teaching assistants.

It is not about reducing roles.

And it is not about saying that TAs are ineffective.

It is about making sure that the support we provide genuinely helps pupils learn, become more independent and maintain strong relationships with their class teachers.

Today is about understanding the **why** before we move into the **how.**”

Slide 2 – Safeguarding Spark

“Let's begin, as always, with our Safeguarding Spark.

The scenario is:

A pupil you regularly support becomes increasingly reliant on you.

They refuse help from the class teacher and say:

‘I only understand it when you explain it.’

You also notice that they are withdrawn when you are absent, seek you out at break and lunchtime, and have less direct contact with their class teacher.

There are three questions to consider.

Firstly:

Is this a safeguarding concern or a professional boundary issue?

Secondly:

What risks might this create for the pupil?

And finally:

What should you do next?

There may not be one simple label for the situation.

The important thing is that we notice the pattern.

Support has started to become **exclusive** rather than enabling.

The pupil appears increasingly dependent on one adult.

That can create emotional, relational and learning risks.

The aim of effective support should never be for a pupil to feel:

‘I can only learn if this particular adult is beside me.’

We want them to feel:

‘I can access the teaching. I can try. I can ask different adults for support when I need it.’

Slide 3 – By the End of This Session

“By the end of today's session, there are four things we want to achieve.

Firstly, to understand **why the EEF guidance on TA deployment exists**.

Secondly, to explain what the research tells us about effective and ineffective TA use.

Thirdly, to recognise how TA deployment directly influences:

pupil independence,

teacher–pupil relationships,

and outcomes for SEND and disadvantaged pupils.

And finally, to reflect on how evidence should shape everyday classroom practice.

That last point is important.

This isn't really about learning a set of recommendations and being able to repeat them.

The question is:

What might this evidence mean for what we actually do tomorrow?

Perhaps it changes where a TA sits.

Who speaks to a pupil first.

How much support is given.

How quickly that support is removed.

Or how teachers and TAs plan together.

Small deployment decisions can have a very significant cumulative impact.”

Slide 4 – Why Are We Talking About Evidence?

“Before we look at the research, take a moment to think about your own experience.

What do you think makes TA support effective?

And:

What does 'good support' look like in your setting?

Discuss that with somebody next to you.

Then add another question:

Is that view based on experience, tradition or evidence?

That is quite a challenging question.

Because many school practices develop with the best intentions.

Perhaps:

'We've always put the TA with that group.'

Or:

'They know that pupil best.'

Or:

'The TA sits beside them because otherwise they won't complete the task.'

Those approaches may feel effective in the moment.

The pupil finishes more work.

The lesson runs more smoothly.

But we need to ask a deeper question:

What is the longer-term impact on learning and independence?

Schools often deploy TAs with incredibly positive intentions.

But good intentions on their own don't guarantee positive impact.

That's why we need evidence alongside professional judgement."

Slide 5 – Who Are the EEF?

"The Education Endowment Foundation — or EEF — is an independent charity that reviews large-scale educational research and identifies approaches associated with improved pupil outcomes.

A particular focus of their work is improving outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils.

Their guidance is designed to be:

evidence-informed,

practical,

and:

usable within real classrooms.

That's important for this series.

We're not exploring TA deployment as an abstract theory.

We're asking what research means when it's 10:15 on a Tuesday morning and a child says:

'I can't do it.'

Do we immediately explain?

Do we prompt?

Do we redirect them to the teacher?

Do we wait?

The evidence gives us principles.

Professional judgement helps us apply those principles to the child and context in front of us.”

Slide 6 – Evidence-Informed Practice

“This slide is really important because it clarifies what the EEF guidance **isn't** saying.

It is not about:

blaming staff,

cutting TA roles,

or:

saying ‘TAs don't work’.

That would be a complete misunderstanding of the evidence.

Instead, the guidance is about using research alongside professional judgement to improve impact for pupils and ensuring support helps learning rather than creating dependency.

So if research identifies concerns about some models of deployment, the response should not be:

‘TAs are the problem.’

The better question is:

‘What is it about the way the role has been organised that might be limiting impact?’

That's a much more productive conversation.

It puts responsibility on the system of deployment rather than blaming the individual member of staff.

And that's the lens we need throughout this series.”

Slide 7 – What Does the Evidence Say About TA Impact?

“The central research message is nuanced.

Teaching assistants **can** have a positive impact.

But that impact depends heavily on **how they are deployed**.

The key finding highlighted in this presentation is that when TAs are used as informal, general support without sufficient structure, pupils can make less progress than their peers.

Now that can sound alarming.

But we need to be very clear about what the evidence is and isn't saying.

It is not:

‘The TA has caused the child to do worse because the TA is ineffective.’

The issue is the deployment model.

For example, if the pupil who finds learning most difficult consistently receives less direct teaching from the qualified teacher and more informal adult support instead, over time they may experience a different quality of instructional input.

So the question becomes:

Are TAs supplementing high-quality teaching — or unintentionally replacing access to it?

That distinction is fundamental.”

Slide 8 – Two Very Different Models of TA Support

“This slide contrasts two different models.

Let's begin with **Model A: Generic Support**.

The TA sits beside the same pupil.

Re-explains the teacher's instructions.

Completes tasks with the pupil.

And gradually becomes that pupil's main point of contact.

That can feel supportive.

The pupil may even produce more work.

But over time, it can reduce independence and reduce direct interaction with the teacher.

Now compare that with **Model B: Targeted and Structured Support**.

Support is planned around lesson objectives.

The TA scaffolds and then gradually fades help.

Interventions are delivered with appropriate training.

And the aim is explicitly to encourage independence.

The difference is not simply:

‘TA present’ versus ‘TA not present’.

The difference is the **purpose and structure of the support**.

One model can unintentionally create dependency.

The other is deliberately designed to help the pupil become less dependent over time.”

Slide 9 – Primary vs Secondary: How This Can Look

“Let's make this practical.

In the primary example, a TA always supports the same child during phonics.

The child begins waiting for prompts before attempting anything.

And the teacher rarely works directly with them.

Now think about what that pupil may gradually learn.

Not just phonics.

They may also learn:

‘I wait until my adult helps me.’

‘The teacher teaches everybody else.’

‘I am someone who needs extra help before I begin.’

The secondary example looks different, but the pattern is similar.

A TA is permanently assigned to one pupil across subjects.

The pupil disengages when the TA is absent.

And teacher questioning and feedback become limited.

Again, the support is well meant.

Nobody intends to restrict the child's progress.

But the structure can unintentionally do exactly that.

So a useful reflection is:

What messages might our deployment be communicating to pupils about themselves as learners?”

Slide 10 – SEND & Disadvantaged Pupils: Why This Matters Most

“This matters particularly because pupils with SEND and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are often the pupils receiving the greatest amount of TA support.

The presentation highlights several potential consequences of over-support.

It can reduce resilience.

Lower expectations.

And limit access to high-quality teaching.

Let's think about expectations.

If an adult constantly simplifies the task before a pupil has tried, we may unintentionally communicate:

‘This is probably too difficult for you.’

If we answer the question rather than scaffold thinking, the pupil succeeds at the task but misses the opportunity to succeed at the **learning**.

And if the pupil regularly spends less time interacting with the class teacher, they may lose access to the person with overall responsibility for their learning and curriculum.

Effective deployment should therefore create:

equity, not dependence.

It should protect access to expert teaching.

And it should focus on long-term outcomes rather than short-term task completion.

Sometimes a pupil completing less work independently is more valuable than completing every question with heavy adult support.”



Slide 11 – Pause & Watch

“We're going to pause here and watch the selected video or example.

As you watch, don't simply look for things you agree with.

Use three questions.

What challenged your thinking?

What felt familiar?

And:

What might need to change in practice?

You might recognise something you've done yourself.

That's okay.

The aim of evidence-informed CPD is not to make people feel uncomfortable about past practice.

We work with the knowledge available to us at the time.

The useful question is:

What do we know now, and what might we do differently because of it?

Perhaps you notice that the adult in the example gives the pupil much more thinking time.

Perhaps they redirect a question back to the teacher.

Maybe they use a prompt rather than an explanation.

Keep one thing in mind that you could apply.”

Slide 12 – Linking TA Deployment to School Improvement

“Effective TA deployment isn't a small operational issue.

It connects directly to wider school improvement.

The presentation identifies potential benefits including:

improved pupil progress,

stronger teacher–TA collaboration,

better use of Pupil Premium and SEND funding,

and practice grounded in evidence.

Think about the investment schools make in teaching assistants.

That investment is not only financial.

It's also an investment in staff expertise and pupil support.

So we should be asking whether we're using that capacity in the most effective way.

And the line at the bottom of this slide captures the point:

This is not about doing more — it's about doing the right things, in the right way.

We don't necessarily need more interventions.

More adult support.

More one-to-one time.

Sometimes we need to use the support we already have differently.

That can be a far more powerful change.”

Slide 13 – Key Takeaways from Session 1

“Let's bring together the main messages from today's session.

Firstly:

The way TAs are deployed matters as much as the support itself.

It is not simply the presence of an additional adult that makes the difference.

Impact depends on how support is planned, structured and integrated into teaching and learning.

Secondly:

Unstructured support can limit progress.

When support is reactive, informal or focused mainly on getting the task completed, pupils can become over-reliant on adults.

And thirdly:

Structured, planned, evidence-informed approaches are associated with stronger outcomes.

The TA's role should be clear.

Support should connect to the lesson objective.

Scaffolding should build independence.

And understanding the evidence matters because it prepares us for the practical recommendations we'll explore in later sessions.

Today has been the **why**.

Later sessions will increasingly focus on the **how**.”

Slide 14 – Optional Extension Task

“If you have additional time, there are three useful reflection activities on this slide.

Firstly, think about **one pupil you regularly support**.

Ask:

‘Where might my support be creating dependency?’

That's not an accusation.

It is a professional reflection.

Perhaps the pupil always waits for you to begin.

Perhaps they automatically look at you when the teacher asks a question.

Perhaps you're doing more of the thinking than they are.

Secondly, observe a lesson and ask:

‘Who does this pupil interact with most?’

The teacher?

Peers?

Or almost exclusively the TA?

And thirdly, discuss with a teacher:

‘How is TA support planned before lessons?’

That conversation is really important.

Effective deployment cannot sit entirely on the shoulders of the TA.

Teachers and TAs need shared understanding of:

the learning intention,

likely barriers,

what support might be needed,

and when that support should be reduced.”

Slide 15 – Reflection

“Before we finish, I'd like you to think about your own classroom or the pupils you support.

Ask yourself:

When I support a pupil, what am I ultimately trying to achieve?

Is it:

‘Get this task finished.’

Or:

‘Help this pupil become more successful at learning.’

Those goals can lead to very different adult behaviours.

Task completion might lead me to explain quickly.

Point to the answer.

Correct mistakes immediately.

Keep the pupil moving.

Learning might require me to pause.

Prompt.

Ask what they already know.

Allow some productive struggle.

And sometimes deliberately step away.

The challenge is that the first approach can look more successful in the short term.

The page gets completed.

But the second may create greater independence in the long term.

So perhaps one of the most important questions from today's session is:

‘Am I measuring the success of my support by the amount of work completed — or by the amount of thinking the pupil is increasingly able to do without me?’

Slide 16 – Spark Forward

“This week's Spark Forward is deliberately small.

Choose **one pupil you support regularly**.

During one lesson, pay attention to how the support works.

Notice:

Who do they look to first?

Who explains the learning?

Who asks most of the questions?

Who does most of the thinking?

And how quickly does adult help arrive?

Then choose **one tiny adjustment**.

Perhaps wait five seconds longer.

Redirect one question back to the teacher.

Give one prompt instead of an answer.

Or step away briefly once the pupil is successfully started.

Then observe what happens.

The goal is not to remove support.

It is to begin making support **more intentional**.

One small tweak this week:

support the learning, but leave as much of the thinking as possible with the pupil.”

Slide 17 – Further Reading & Closing Thought

“The presentation includes further links to the full EEF guidance on the **Deployment of Teaching Assistants**, a summary of the recommendations, the EEF explanation of the evidence base and evidence relating to TA-delivered interventions.

But the main message from Week 1 is straightforward.

Teaching assistants matter enormously.

Their expertise matters.

Their relationships with pupils matter.

And their role can make a significant difference.

But impact is not created simply by putting an adult beside the pupil who is struggling most.

The aim should always be to use additional adult support in a way that protects access to high-quality teaching, builds independence and helps pupils become increasingly successful without that support.

So as we move through the rest of this series, keep one question at the centre:

‘Is this support helping the pupil become a more independent learner?’

If the answer is yes, we're moving in the right direction.

If the answer is:

‘They can do it, but only when I'm sitting next to them,’

then there may be something worth changing.

Because effective TA support should not make the adult indispensable.

It should help the pupil become increasingly capable without them.”