

# Professional standards for teaching assistants

Advice for headteachers, teachers, teaching assistants, governing boards and employers

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## Introduction

The Professional Standards for Teaching Assistants were originally drafted by a working group set up by the Department for Education (DfE) in conjunction with organisations representing the schools workforce, practitioners and others also committed to ensuring excellence in education. After completing the standards the government decided not to publish them and so a number of organisations interested in promoting the work of teaching assistants asked the DfE for permission to publish them. Permission was granted subject to it being made clear that the DfE was no longer involved in the production of the standards, which we are happy to do.

These teaching assistant standards are non-mandatory and non-statutory, but they sit alongside the statutory standards for teachers and headteachers and help to define the role and purpose of teaching assistants to ensure that schools can maximise the educational value and contribution of employees working directly with pupils. As such, we believe that they provide a valuable tool for the whole school team. We aim for these standards to benefit you, your colleagues and your pupils.

This document provides the standards themselves as well as supporting guidance detailing how the professional standards for teaching assistants should and should not be used. The standards should help teaching assistants and their colleagues in schools define and understand their role and are enhanced when underpinned by a professional approach from school leaders to employing and deploying teaching assistants to ensure that educational outcomes are raised.

Please note these standards will be most effectively used when read and implemented alongside the materials referenced in the 'Further Information' section on page 12.

These standards could not have been published without the hard work of the original review team. The details of the original review panel's remit and members can be found [here](#).

These standards are endorsed by UNISON, NAHT (National Association of Head Teachers), NET (National Education Trust), London Leadership Strategy and Maximising TAs, with involvement and support from Rob Webster (UCL Institute of Education), Paula Bosanquet (University of East London), Maria Constantinou, schools-based practitioner, and Dame Kate Dethridge NLE, Headteacher of Churchend Academy Teaching School (home of the Reading Teaching School Alliance) and former chair of the DfE working group that drafted the standards.

## Who is this advice for?

This guidance is for:

- Teaching assistants, teachers and school leaders
- Governing boards and employers
- Local authority support services

These standards are applicable to all teaching assistants in schools, working at all levels. It is hoped these standards will support and shape positive conversations teaching assistants have with colleagues, managers and headteachers around their own roles and professional development.

Please note this advice and guidance refers to 'schools' throughout. This includes all schools whether funded via the local authority ('maintained schools' or voluntary aided schools) or via the Education Funding Agency (academy schools and free schools etc.).

## Purpose of the standards

The *Professional Standards for Teaching Assistants (2016)* defines high standards which are applicable to all teaching assistant roles in a self-improving school system. The main purpose of these standards is to raise the status and professionalism of teaching assistants and to position their role within a community of professionals, including teachers and school leaders, all working together to improve outcomes for children.

The teaching assistants' standards were developed out of a review of the teachers' and headteachers' standards by independent groups. The publication of these standards recognises that existing standards for Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) do not apply to all teaching assistants. These standards do not replace the professional standards for HLTAs; they are complimentary to them (see Further information).

National Occupational Standards for staff supporting teaching and learning provide a detailed framework for the training and development of support staff. They provide more detailed insights and guidance (see Further information).

This is a set of standards for teaching assistants that:

- are unequivocal, clear and easy to understand and use;
- can be used to inform performance management processes;
- steer the professional development of teaching assistants at all levels;
- are designed to inspire confidence in teaching assistants and ensure that schools use their skills and expertise to best effect;
- focus primarily on the key elements of their professional relationship with teachers to ensure that all pupils attain the highest possible standards.

## Overview of roles

### What is a teaching assistant?

A number of different job titles are used for staff supporting teaching and learning. This document refers to “teaching assistants” throughout and this includes staff based in the classroom for learning and pupil support, e.g. HLTAs, teaching assistants, special needs support staff, early years practitioners, minority ethnic pupils support staff and bilingual assistants. While most teaching assistants are employed directly by schools and academies, some are employed by local authority services and academy chains and work across a range of schools and settings.

### The role of the teaching assistant

The primary role of the teaching assistant should be to work with teachers to raise the learning and attainment of pupils while also promoting their independence, self esteem and social inclusion. They give assistance to pupils so that they can access the curriculum, participate in learning and experience a sense of achievement.

Teaching assistants are an integral part of the school workforce representing a substantial investment of school funding. School leaders’ decision-making about the effective deployment of teaching assistants is crucial in making a difference to pupil achievement (see Further information). Teaching assistants should act with honesty and integrity to uphold comparable standards to other education professionals, in order to make the education of pupils their first concern. By demonstrating values and behaviours consistent with their professional role, teaching assistants work with other education professionals within a common framework of expectations.

### The role of school leaders

School leaders have a crucial role to play in the raising the status of teaching assistants. These standards provide school leaders with a tool to ensure consistency for all teaching assistants, so their skills and expertise in raising pupil achievement are recognised and developed.

Active and practical application of the standards demonstrates that school leaders recognise the value and importance of teaching assistants and should ensure teaching assistants have parity of esteem with fellow education professionals. However, it should be understood that adopting and using the standards in isolation is insufficient to the overall aim of delivering good outcomes for pupils.

These standards form an essential part of wider, complementary guidance to assist school leaders’ strategic and operational decision-making, such as the *Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants* guidance report from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). This report sets out the best available evidence on the effective deployment of

teaching assistants and recommendations on how best to utilise their skills, knowledge and expertise in schools.

The effective deployment of teaching assistants, and appropriate preparation for the tasks they undertake, is the key to their success in supporting teaching and learning. School leaders should not only ensure that teaching assistants have the right knowledge and skills to provide effective teacher and pupil support, via appropriate and timely training and professional development, but also ensure that teachers are informed and equipped to fully capitalise on teaching assistants' professional learning and expertise. School leaders and teachers should work to the principle that teaching assistants should be deployed in ways that add value to what teachers do, not replace them.

Meeting these standards depends on school leaders being able to provide a climate that supports forms of collaborative working that do not burden teachers or teaching assistants; and recognising that many teaching assistants manage other staff and require the time to do this effectively. Teaching assistants require support and opportunities to reflect on their own practice in order to identify their training needs. Teaching assistants should have an appropriate career development pathway and access to training within the working day.

## The four themes

The *Professional Standards for Teaching Assistants* are set out in four themes.

1. **Personal and professional conduct**
2. **Knowledge and understanding**
3. **Teaching and learning**
4. **Working with others**

Within each theme there are several standards expected of teaching assistants.

### Why were these themes chosen?

**Personal and professional conduct** – In order for teaching assistants to provide effective support to teachers and pupils, they need to be clear about their role and responsibilities and how these fit within the wider structure of the school. In the same way as teachers, teaching assistants operate in a position of trust and are seen by pupils as role models. They should be able to maintain proper boundaries with pupils and their behaviours should reflect this responsible position.

**Knowledge and understanding** – Teaching assistants should have sufficient knowledge and skills to help teachers support pupils in achieving their maximum potential. School leaders are best placed to make judgements about the type and level of knowledge and skills that individual teaching assistants need, as this will vary according to job role. This could include: subject knowledge; specialist skills and knowledge to support pupils with

special educational needs or disabilities; knowledge of the curriculum; pedagogical knowledge; behaviour management strategies.

**Teaching and learning** – An important role of a teaching assistant is to support the teacher in ensuring the best possible outcomes for all pupils. The standards in this theme recognise that teaching assistants work under the supervision of a teacher in accordance with arrangements made by the headteacher of the school. Schools should refer to the EEF guidance report (see Further information) for ‘relevant strategies to support the work of the teacher’.

**Working with others** – Teaching assistants work with other professionals, parents, carers and outside agencies as well as with pupils themselves. Although other themes require teaching assistants to work collaboratively with others, these qualities and skills were considered so important and distinctive to the role as to merit their own theme.

## Personal and professional conduct

**Teaching assistants should uphold public trust in the education profession by:**

- **Having proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school** in which they work as professional members of staff.
- **Demonstrating positive attitudes, values and behaviours** to develop and sustain effective relationships with the school community.
- **Having regard for the need to safeguard pupils’ well-being** by following relevant statutory guidance along with school policies and practice.
- **Upholding values consistent with those required from teachers** by respecting individual differences and cultural diversity.
- **Committing to improve their own practice** through self-evaluation and awareness.

## Knowledge and understanding

**Teaching assistants are expected to:**

- **Share responsibility for ensuring that their own knowledge and understanding is relevant and up to date** by reflecting on their own practice, liaising with school leaders, and identifying relevant professional development to improve personal effectiveness.
- **Take opportunities to acquire the appropriate skills, qualifications, and/or experience** required for the teaching assistant role, with support from the school/employer.
- **Demonstrate expertise and skills in understanding the needs of all pupils** (including specialist expertise as appropriate) and know how to contribute effectively to the adaptation and delivery of support to meet individual needs.
- **Demonstrate a level of subject and curriculum knowledge** relevant to their role and apply this effectively in supporting teachers and pupils.

- **Understand their roles and responsibilities within the classroom and whole school context recognising** that these may extend beyond a direct support role.

## Teaching and learning

### Teaching assistants are expected to:

- **Demonstrate an informed and efficient approach to teaching and learning** by adopting relevant strategies to support the work of the teacher and increase achievement of all pupils including, where appropriate, those with special educational needs and disabilities.
- **Promote, support and facilitate inclusion** by encouraging participation of all pupils in learning and extracurricular activities.
- **Use effective behaviour management strategies consistently** in line with the school's policy and procedures.
- **Contribute to effective assessment and planning** by supporting the monitoring, recording and reporting of pupil performance and progress as appropriate to the level of the role.
- **Communicate effectively and sensitively with pupils** to adapt to their needs and support their learning.
- **Maintain a stimulating and safe learning environment** by organising and managing physical teaching space and resources.

## Working with others

### Teaching assistants are expected to:

- **Recognise and respect the role and contribution of other professionals, parents and carers** by liaising effectively and working in partnership with them.
- **With the class teacher, keep other professionals accurately informed** of performance and progress or concerns they may have about the pupils they work with.
- **Understand their responsibility to share knowledge** to inform planning and decision making.
- **Understand their role** in order to be able to work collaboratively with classroom teachers and other colleagues, including specialist advisory teachers.
- **Communicate their knowledge and understanding of pupils** to other school staff and education, health and social care professionals, so that informed decision making can take place on intervention and provision.



## **Supporting guidance**

### **Who are the standards for?**

The standards are a tool for teaching assistants and for teachers and members of a school leadership team responsible for managing their work. They are also intended to help employers and governors when recruiting support staff, and defining the job roles of teaching assistants. They may also be useful to local authority support services and multi academy trusts which employ teaching assistants. They are core standards for all teaching assistants working across all phases in mainstream and specialist settings.

### **What are the standards for?**

These core standards are intended to raise the status and professionalism of teaching assistants. They define characteristics that all teaching assistants can demonstrate regardless of their working context. The standards are designed to ensure that the skills and experience demonstrated by teaching assistants help to support high-quality teaching, learning and social inclusion.

The standards have been written to reflect the diversity of school employers and the wide-ranging responsibilities of teaching assistants working with pupils and teachers in a variety of contexts. They are designed for all teaching assistants and for schools to adapt to their own context.

The standards are complementary to the existing standards for Higher Level Teaching Assistants (see Further information), rather than a replacement for them. The standards provide clear and concise expectations for all teaching assistants, working at all levels, and a framework to strengthen their status as education professionals.

The standards may be used as a tool to support the performance management of teaching assistants, although employers are free to decide the standards against which teaching assistants are assessed.

### **What are the standards not for?**

Whilst the standards may be used in support of any recruitment exercise, they should not be used as a checklist. The standards are not appropriate for job evaluation; instead the role profiles developed by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services role profiles can be used (see Further information). The standards are generic and broad based – they do not specify requirements for staff recruited to specialist roles.

The standards should be considered as a whole. Although some standards may be more important in some contexts, the professionalism and contribution of teaching assistants needs to be recognised in its entirety rather than under specific themes. The weight given to each element will vary from school to school and will depend on the individual job role and responsibilities.

## Using the standards

The standards can be used:

- **For teaching assistants, to shape their own practice and professional development, within and beyond the school**

Self-evaluation in a supportive context is key to the development of all education professionals. These standards can be used by teaching assistants as a focus for reflection on their own practice.

Teaching assistants can use the standards to have a constructive conversation with headteachers, teachers and others about areas where support is needed for professional development. Teaching assistants should feel empowered to seek such support. School leaders are expected to provide such training and support as may be necessary for the support staff in their schools, as possible within the financial constraints in which they operate.

- **For teachers or other line managers, to inform the appraisal of teaching assistants**

There is no mandatory requirement to use the standards for this purpose, but they provide a useful framework for appraisal discussions. These standards should not be used as prescribed objectives. Objectives must be relevant to the context of the individual school and teaching assistant.

They may be used to support and supplement existing appraisal frameworks, but are not designed as a sole tool for performance management.

The standards should not be used to assess the performance of teaching assistants in the way that teachers' performance is assessed. The standards are not part of a statutory framework and teaching assistants do not have the same sort of pay and career structure as teachers. The standards should not be used for the purposes of accountability. Teaching assistants should not be expected to provide evidence against each of the standards for appraisal

- **For employers to support the recruitment and appointment of teaching assistants**

The standards are not an off-the-shelf job description or a person specification, but they can be used to underpin and shape both of these documents.

It is important to focus on the context of the individual school. Different schools and teaching assistants within each school will have different levels of responsibility and so require different skills and experience.

- **For employers to evaluate their induction arrangements and provision of continuous professional development (CPD) for teaching assistants**

The standards should inform schools' processes for identifying training and development needs. Schools need to have CPD policies which effectively address the needs of the whole workforce and should use their own and external training budgets to this end.

## **Further information** (web links below)

### Teaching assistant deployment

[Education Endowment Foundation Guidance report: Making effective use of teaching assistants](#)

[Department for Education Effective deployment of classroom staff](#)

[Education Endowment Foundation Teaching and learning toolkit](#)

[Ofsted Deployment and impact of support staff \(from 2010, not linked to current inspection framework\)](#)

[Maximising TAs](#)

### Existing standards for teaching assistants

[HLTA standards](#)

[National Occupational Standards](#)

### Teaching assistants – careers, training and development

[Skills for schools](#)

### NJC job profiles

[NJC model role profiles](#)

### Teachers' and headteachers' standards

[Teachers' Standards](#)

[Headteachers' Standards](#)

### Other resources

[Statutory policies for schools](#)

[Keeping children safe in education](#)

[SEND Code of Practice](#)

Professional development standards for teachers (to be published 2016)