

Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants: Improve outcomes for SEND pupils across all key stages by maximising the impact of teaching assistants in the local authority to give better TA deployment and better skilled TAs. Consequently pupils with SEND having more exposure to teachers

Overview

This project aims to address persistent problems relating to TA deployment and preparation and to ensure that TAs thrive in their role and contribute to improved outcomes for SEND pupils in mainstream schools by:

- Utilising the TA Review Toolkit developed for Whole School SEND by the Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants (MITA) team at UCL Institute of Education;
- Using the outcomes of this to inform a developmental programme for schools based on the MITA programme. Each school receives a comprehensive pack of high-quality resources and tools to support the processes of review and implementation.

Good practice to share with others interested in running school improvement projects to ensure projects deliver the intended outcome.

Ensuring school leaders had a clear understanding of the project, the reasons for doing it and the intended impact/outcomes was important. We ran a series of road shows where we shared the research underpinning the project that we had quoted in our bid so school leaders had a clear understanding of the why of the project. We also made very clear the commitment expected from schools and used a timeline as part of the presentation, outlining how many meetings heads and SLT members would be expected to come out of school for and how many review visits they would need to be available for in school. Because the project ran over four terms, leaders could see their commitment was not onerous in terms of time.

The most important issue to get across in the road shows was that the project was not just about TA development, which many had assumed it was. Success depended on a change in the strategic management of TAs so a commitment from leaders to make that change was necessary if the project was to succeed. It was vital schools understood this before making a full commitment to the project.

We also devolved funds to each school to enable the release of school leaders to engage fully in the programme. It was made clear that if schools failed to attend mandatory sessions, the funding would be clawed back and schools removed from the project. We issued a contract outlining the commitment from both sides to support this and was signed by both parties.

Setting up a residency model for training almost 600 TAs from over 40 schools was a huge success but required a lot of planning and managing. TAs were expected to attend two half day training sessions with gap tasks between. We ran two blocks of two weeks with concurrent sessions in 3 localities. Training two of our own practitioners with UCL as licensed trainers for the MPTA sessions gave some flexibility and enabled us to run some mop up sessions around the MITA team availability. As for the school leader development sessions, these training sessions were mandatory for schools. Issuing TAs with workbooks containing the slides from the PPTs and gap tasks and references to the supporting handbook was greatly appreciated by the TAs. The handbooks helped them share the information back in schools and show teachers and school leaders what they had been covering in the sessions. UCL had supplied two TA handbooks per school as they cost almost £30 per copy but it became apparent that this was not enough for the numbers of TAs trying to access the supporting materials. We were able to allocate some of the project funding (with permission from DFE) to purchasing 600 copies of the handbooks so all TAs had access to a copy. This was welcomed by schools and the handbooks will remain a valuable resource for the future.

UCL MITA team trained a team of reviewers specifically on the MITA/MPTA programme and we built in additional review visits to the project in order to keep schools on track. The reviewers built up a good rapport with their schools and so we were able to have a dialogue with any schools that had issues affecting their engagement/capacity to continue. The project manager attended the termly headteacher meetings and was able to update heads and keep up a dialogue about the project. The project manager also attended all the MITA sessions for heads along with the review team so there was a common understanding of what was delivered. This helped when reviewers went out to schools as they were able to clarify/ refer to points from the heads briefings.

The project manager also sat in the TA sessions. This proved important as there were issues with a number of TAs being directed to attend, who clearly thought they didn't need the training. Also, a minority of TAs thought the exercise was linked to school restructures and thought they would lose their jobs. The project manager was able to liaise with school leaders following TA sessions as well as being able to talk with the TAs at the start of each session. Informal discussions over the coffee breaks were also a good source of feedback on how the TAs were finding the training. The engagement with heads and TAs in meetings and training sessions did take up a lot of time but really helped with the success of the project.

The original intention from the MITA team was that materials would be developed to allow heads to deliver a staff training twilight in their schools so teachers had an understanding of how we were training TAs to promote independent learning and how to make better use of TAs in the classroom. We changed this as we could not guarantee a consistent delivery across all the schools. We built a training session for our review team into the programme and then had our review team deliver the twilight sessions in the

schools. The materials were left in the schools so heads could review them in future meetings with staff if necessary.

Already having a relationship with the schools was important as we knew their circumstances well. Adapting the 'off the shelf' MITA programme to make it work for us was a factor in the success, along with the willingness of the MITA team to work flexibly with us. We not only adapted the programme before we started but as we went along. We found that schools did not all progress uniformly as expected due to circumstances in schools that impacted on capacity etc. Being willing to allow four schools to access the training sessions but leave reviews etc took the pressure off and enabled their continued engagement in the project. That flexibility was important throughout the project.

Our team of SLEs who had the responsibility for carrying out the school reviews had school-based and independent members. It soon became apparent that whilst we had intended every reviewer to take a number of schools each, the school-based SLEs were restricted by availability for time out of school so were unable to take as many schools as we had hoped. The independent SLEs had the availability and flexibility to work across a number of schools. Without these members of the team, we would not have fulfilled the commitment we made to the number of review visits built into the programme. The team carried out a total of 247 days work to support the project for 44 schools, which included training for reviewers/MPTA delivery and time to write reports. We had costed this support into the project but it did account for around 20% of the allocated funding.

What the project may do differently in the future

The monitoring and evaluation process was not too onerous. There was an issue at the start of the project with staffing changes in the DfE team, which meant we had 3 different people looking after our project. Each time there was a change, we had to spend time explaining our set up and what we were doing.

Fortunately, the third member of staff has remained with us for most of the project. It was really helpful that the DfE team visited us and sat in one of the headteacher sessions. It gave them a good understanding of the project, which helped when colleagues in the DfE were reviewing our evaluations and asking questions about activities they did not understand. The DfE staff member was able to field some of these questions and take the pressure off us. It also gave that staff member the opportunity to engage with some of the headteachers and get some feedback on their thoughts about the project.

The biggest problem with completing the termly monitoring reports is the structure of the Excel form. It is very difficult typing into the boxes in the way they have been set up as it is impossible to expand the rows on the worksheet. Consequently, text disappears. Also, some boxes have been formatted so text is very small and difficult to see and starts on the bottom line

- as in box one on this page. A more user friendly form would be appreciated.

Sustainability measures taken by projects to ensure improvement are sustained beyond the funding period.

We have over 200 review visit reports from the project which shows progress from the baseline in each school. Key points from these reports will be summarised and distributed across all schools in the project. The celebration of achievement event was cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions and school closures. Schools would have shared successes and ideas during this day. We do have the evidence from the review reports and can identify schools that have excellent practice that can be shared with others. Once we are in a position to allow visits, schools will be approached to see if they would like to be included in a directory of good practice. Particular features they have introduced will be listed and people will have the opportunity to contact schools for a visit or more information. A number of schools have already indicated they would like to share their practice.

33 schools had completed posters in the MITA 3 session. These posters outlined key learning from the project along with what is working well and evaluations of impact to date. Unfortunately, due to home working and the UCL office being closed, the team at MITA are unable to locate these at present. The plan is to bind these together and circulate to schools. We are currently waiting for UCL to let us know what has happened to this paperwork.

Prior to lockdown, we had already had discussions with UCL about becoming a hub for the region for the MITA programme. The teaching school is still keen to achieve this. We have two licensed practitioners for the MPTA training and are already offering this as part of our CPD programme. We can link with UCL to provide the complete MITA/MPTA programme locally. The project also highlighted the need locally for much more TA CPD to be available. We realise this is a niche for the teaching school and will have a focus on this going forward. We will speak to HEI about steps we could take to develop an accredited CPD programme for TAs.

Our team of 15 reviewers are now very familiar with the MPTA/MITA requirements and have carried out over 100 reviews in schools so are very experienced and could be used to support the programme in neighbouring areas. All reviewers have been trained to deliver the MPTA staff meetings. Schools could request follow up staff meetings if they want a refresher at any time but would have to self fund and activity beyond the project. We have the template for the lanyard cards used by TAs following their training so can continue to produce these. We have already had interest from outside the local authority in the programme. The issue for schools would be funding the programme.