BELS
Barnet Education & Learning Service

Specialist Teaching Team, Vision

Guidance for Support Staff (Teaching Assistants) working with Child or Young Person with a Visual Impairment

Clarity of roles

The Teaching Assistant (TA) is part of a wider team supporting the pupil's learning and well-being and it is important to be clear how this role differs to that of the class teacher.

The TA's support is focused on improving the skills and access of the pupil so that they become increasingly independent as a learner. The TA may be involved in some direct teaching under the guidance of the QTVI, class or subject teacher.
The class or subject teacher is responsible for the overall teaching and learning of the pupil. This includes planning the TA's role in lessons; ensuring lesson plans are suitably differentiated and are clear about outcomes. The teachers, in liaison with the SENCO, TA and QTVI will:

- Agree when and if the pupil might be withdrawn from a lesson for one to one or small group support including the objectives for such withdrawal;
- Agree whether pre-lesson or post-lesson reinforcement is required;
- Be involved in the evaluation of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of the support provided to the pupil, monitoring progress towards targets and outcomes.

The role of the TA facilitates two main strategies

Access to learning

It is important that the TA provides the pupil with experiences and resources to establish the most direct route to learning.

Learning to access

It is equally important that the pupil is encouraged to develop the skills to access the curriculum independently. The TA's role is to provide opportunities so that the pupil develops the ability and confidence to become an independent learner.
The balance between these two strategies should be planned to shift over time from 'access to learning' to 'learning to access' so that pupils become increasingly less reliant on adult support as they grow older.
TA support is intended to enable pupils to experience achievement, independence and self-determination. It is not intended to develop an expectation of full-time support and an attitude of 'learned helplessness'. This means that TAs should not simply support the content of lessons but may also:

- Work outside lessons modifying curriculum materials to enable the pupil to access information in an appropriate format;
- Spend time reinforcing learning and skills with a pupil so that their understanding, visual and communicative development are enhanced.

Main Responsibilities and Duties of the Teaching Assistant

Supporting the Teacher in the planning, delivery and evaluation of lessons

1. Work in partnership with the teacher in the planning of lessons including the adaptations, materials and direct support that visually impaired pupils will need to be included and make progress.
2. Adapting resources and teaching materials as necessary so that the pupil is able to access the lesson and achieve the objectives set for him/her as independently as possible.
3. Developing skills in the use of specialist formats (e.g. Braille) as appropriate.
4. Supporting the pupil in participating in class teaching activities, providing support for group work to encourage independence and social interaction.
5. Using praise, assistance and encouragement to motivate the CYP and help them stay on task.
6. Support understanding of any follow up tasks set by the teacher.
7. Oversee practical activities where safety is a consideration e.g. food technology, PE etc.
8. Provide feedback to relevant colleagues about CYP progress towards targets, effectiveness of the programme and CYP engagement.

Facilitating independence and independent learning

However, it is very important to facilitate ways in which your CYP can become an independent learner. Consider some of the following:

Ways to Step Back

We should, of course, be available to students when they need us, but also need to avoid teaching them to be overly-dependant. Here are some strategies that may help:

1. Acknowledge your impulse to make students' days go smoothly. There's a reason you chose the helping profession.

2. Pause before answering or helping.

3. Sit on your hands for a whole task while you practice giving verbal instead of touch cues.

4. The disability associated with vision loss only stems from lack of information. Pat yourself on the back every time you help with seeing but resist helping with thinking.

5. Schedule in advance a brief task or time period when you commit to no intervention…no matter what (unless safety is compromised.) See what happens. Reintroduce assistance only as needed.

6. Sit further away. If you have been within arm's reach, sit just within earshot. If you have been sitting just within earshot, sit across the room.

7. Take data instead. Keep a tally of the number of times in a lesson student appropriately go to their Classroom Teachers instead of other adults.

8. Call on students' learning partners or sighted guides.

9. Unless you are the Classroom Teacher, catch yourself before you correct students' work. Remember, this is about student's skills…not yours.

10. Teach students to decline assistance: "Thanks, but please let me try it by myself."

11. Phase out cues.

12. Have students discreetly ask their classmates for information (what page they are on what is the school lunch, who the teacher is talking to, etc.) Coach them to do this on the telephone in the evening as well as during school hours.

13. Remind yourself that you stepping back so that students can become independent. It's harmful when you cover for them. Don't be responsible for holding them back in this area.

14. Make sure that team members (especially the principle) know your reasons for stepping back so it doesn't seem like you are shirking your responsibilities.

15. Clock how long it takes for student to do things independently. The extra time to start zippers, pick up dropped papers, or find page numbers may seem eternal but actually last only a few seconds.

16. Tell other adults in the classroom that you're going to step back and ask them to remind you when you should do this.

17. Let Classroom Teachers serve as clearinghouse for all questions or needs. Students ask their Classroom Teachers. The Classroom Teachers then decided to (a) respond themselves, (b) delegate other adults or students to help, or (c) ask students to try and work it out alone.

18. Let your students make mistakes and get into trouble. It's part of the human experience!

19. Post a sign, "Could I be doing less?"

Using Technology to Support CYP's Learning

Support the use of technology and optical aids to promote CYP learning by:

1. Checking any equipment is functioning properly and ensuring problems are reported promptly.
2. Develop skill in the use of specialist equipment including software applications.
3. Support CYP to use specialist equipment independently.

Supporting CYP's Emotional and Social Development

Support CYP's social and emotional development by:

1. Supporting positive behaviour, giving praise and encouragement to build confidence and self-esteem.
2. Provide support to enable the CYP to have opportunities to participate in all school activities, to make choices and take decisions for themselves.
3. Encourage CYP to evaluate their own progress and where appropriate take an active part in reviews of progress.
4. Be observant of how CYP express their feelings and emotions and be able to relate feedback to teacher or SENCO recording any findings accurately.
5. Encourage other pupils to develop an understanding of the skills and needs of a VI CYP.