

SESSION 1

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND COMMUNICATION

Part 1: Prioritising strengths

The first part of this training session allows you to establish what strengths teaching assistants need. Show **Presentation 1**, which lists a number of different strengths. Ask the group to prioritise the strengths needed by teaching assistants to work alongside teachers effectively. Allow them to do this on their own for a couple of minutes, and then in groups of three. Ask them to try to reach some kind of consensus.

10-20 mins

Through a brief discussion, ask the group to tell you their suggestions. Use a flip chart/whiteboard to list the strengths in the group's priority order. Identify why each strength is important. Debating which strengths are the most important will be useful and will, if there is agreement, give a sense of unity to the group. There is, of course no definitive answer. It is important that the views of each teaching assistant in the group are listened to and accepted, but ensure that some or all of the following points are made:

- **Flexibility** – The needs of individuals, groups and classes change – often rapidly – so what works one day or one week may not necessarily work the next. Teachers have to make changes quickly if certain things aren't working. Teaching assistants need to be part of those changes.
- **A sense of fairness** – Pupils have an innate sense of what is fair. All adults need to treat pupils with a sense of equality and have no favourites.
- **Patience** – Pupils do not always do what they are asked and can be difficult to deal with, both for their behaviour and the standards of their work. Adults working in school need patience so that they can use different strategies over a period of time.
- **Sensitivity** – Pupils have all kinds of social and educational needs and all kinds of problems which they need help to solve.
- **Versatility** – There is always something different happening in school and different tasks that need completing in all subjects and all kinds of situations.
- **Practical skills** – Talents such as the ability to play a musical instrument, artistic ability, DIY skills, an interest in amateur dramatics, etc are all useful skills to share with teachers and pupils.
- **A sense of humour** – A smile is better than a frown, and pupils recognise and appreciate an adult who is able to find something to laugh at during busy days.
- **Ability to follow instructions** – In certain lessons, for example, Numeracy/Maths and Literacy/English, teachers want a particular kind of support to be offered to specific pupils, and will tell teaching assistants what it is that they have to do.

- **Ability to use initiative** – During open and practical lessons, such as Design and Technology, it is useful for teachers if teaching assistants are able to choose resources, help pupils who need support, and prevent pupils from inappropriate behaviour without having to check with the teacher.
- **Assertiveness** – Confident, assertive adults who are able to exude this confidence and not be fazed or put down by pupils' own confidence are much more effective than shy, unassuming adults.
- **Trustworthy** – Teaching assistants will obtain information about pupils which is confidential; the mark of a professional is to respect confidentiality at all times.

 10-15 mins

Part 2: Teacher support

The relationship between teachers and teaching assistants is a two-way process; there are certain things that teachers can do to make the relationship more effective.

Show **Presentation 2**, leaving it on display for the whole of the activity.

Give a copy of **Handout 1** to each person. Get them to work in pairs (or threes if this is easier) and ask them to make notes in the spaces about each of the five statements from **Presentation 2**.

 30 mins

When everyone has had time to complete **Handout 1**, it is important to debate the issues raised. Take each statement in turn and ask a different pair or three to tell the group what they have written. Allow others to comment and to add their own ideas. Use a flip chart to synthesise the ideas that are given.

 30 mins