



Workforce restructuring

Your school, like all others, is now obliged to undertake a full staff review, in which it looks closely at exactly how staff are used, and especially at their effect on raising standards. This process of review and restructuring has to be completed by 31 December 2005. It is linked to workforce remodelling, which has had a profound effect on teaching assistants and other support staff, in terms of both what they do and how they are expected to do it.

What should you be aware of?

Headteachers and senior managers, including your mentors and line managers, should be involving you in discussions and decisions about the following:

- Is PPA working, bearing in mind that it is in its infancy and may well need several adjustments?



- Do the teachers you work with have more time for lesson planning and preparation?
- Are support staff being used to reduce teachers' workloads?
- If your role has changed, are you now part of a new pay and career structure?
- Are you involved in the school's performance management strategy, and are your training needs identified?

Good leadership and management

Good schools with good managers want to get the best out of everyone who works in them. They recognise that everyone is part of the drive to raise standards, and that it is in the whole school's interest to make sure that every adult is used effectively and feels part of the organisation.

Here are some questions that you may wish to ask your school leaders. If the answers are less than flattering, perhaps changes need to be made.

- Is there a culture where all staff are encouraged to work together?
- Are competent people recruited to appropriate jobs?
- Is the working environment managed so that pupils and adults are able to work effectively together?
- Is change managed by using the expertise and strengths of all staff?
- Is there a culture of openness that embraces both teaching and non-teaching staff?
- Are the headteacher and senior managers accessible to all staff when appropriate?
- Is there a collaborative ethos in which all staff are respected as responsible professionals?
- Do senior staff and line managers recognise and promote a healthy work-life balance?
- Are all staff actively encouraged and helped to manage their workload?

Helping pupils understand

What we teach and what pupils learn are not necessarily the same thing! For a lesson to be effective, it has to be planned. There is a lot of truth in the saying 'If you fail to plan, you plan to fail'. The key to successful planning is to make sure that the lesson objective is simple and is understood by everyone in the classroom.

However, pupils' understanding still cannot be guaranteed. A wide range of skills is needed to explain what the lesson is about. You should try to develop some of the following strategies:

- **Telling it straight**
Explain facts in a straightforward way, for example, 'Water freezes at zero degrees centigrade'.
- **Asking it straight**
Ask a question that demands a factual, right or wrong answer. For example, 'What temperature is the freezing point of water?'
- **Opening out questioning**
Ask for information from more than one pupil so that the pupils learn from each other. For example, 'What does anyone know about how water freezes?', 'Can anyone explain what happens and what we need to look for?', etc.

- **Rewarding the correct answer**
Pupils listen better, and answer more eagerly, if they know they will get an instant verbal reward, for example, 'Well done'.
- **Repeating the answer**
After receiving the correct answer and giving instant praise, ask the question again. Repeating the answer will aid understanding.
- **Coaxing**
This involves almost dragging the answer out from individuals or the whole class. For example, 'Yes, that's almost right, can you correct yourself?'
- **Providing concrete experiences**
For example, do a practical experiment.
- **Using examples**
Provide real examples such as 'An elephant is a mammal' or false examples such as 'Is a spider an insect?'. Follow up with questions such as 'How do you know?'

- **Providing opportunities for recording**

Pupils should record what they learn. This gives you the opportunity to assess what the pupils have understood. Recording should vary and could include writing, modelling, diagrams, drawings, answering multiple-choice questions, etc.

For all lessons to be really effective, you and the teacher will need to have a flexible idea of the questions and explanations that you will use. Lessons don't always go to plan, and you will need to recognise when it is time to change pace or activity.

After all, pupils need to be alert to be able to understand – this will only happen if they are kept interested by the constantly changing rhythms of a well-planned lesson.



SEN – Dyslexia

Pupils with dyslexia have:

- difficulties in learning to read, write and spell
- possible short-term memory, concentration, personal organisation and sequencing difficulties
- a weakness in the processing of language.

The Dyslexia Institute (www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk) suggests that dyslexia can occur at any level of intellectual ability and that it is not the result of poor motivation, emotional disturbance or lack of opportunities. Each dyslexic person also has an individual pattern of strengths and weaknesses.

So what can what can be done to help dyslexic pupils?

- Learn about the condition and make sure any pupil with suspected dyslexia is on the school's SEN register.
- One-to-one support including withdrawal from the classroom may be necessary.
- A multi-sensory approach may be useful, involving looking, listening, saying and doing.
- Develop a good cursive style of handwriting.
- The pupil will need constant reassurance that their difficulties are not their fault.

- Praise the pupil constantly for their effort.
- Encourage hobbies that don't need much reading or writing.

The learning environment can also make a difference. Within a quiet and organised classroom there are a few further dos and don'ts, many of which also apply to any pupil who finds learning difficult:

DO

- Find something that the pupil is good at.
- Give less homework – certainly with less reading and writing.
- Mark written work on content not spelling – tick what's right instead of crossing out what's wrong.
- Assess on oral responses.
- Help the pupil pronounce words correctly.
- Put them in a place in the classroom where help is easily given.
- Make sure they understand and remember instructions.
- Make important words easily accessible (using whiteboard/ICT, etc).
- Check whether they know the alphabet, common sequences such as days of the week and months, and can tell the time.



DON'T

- Make the pupil read aloud if they are reluctant.
- Ridicule or employ sarcasm.
- Give long lists of spellings to learn.
- Make the pupil write out work again.
- Constantly compare them with others in the class.

It is important to remember that a pupil with dyslexia may:

- tire more easily
- read a passage but not get the sense of it
- have difficulty in learning a foreign language
- omit words when writing or write the same word twice
- suffer from a constant nagging uncertainty
- not be able to take useful notes
- find it difficult to listen and write at the same time
- read slowly so always be under time pressure
- be forgetful and possibly clumsy.

CPD opportunities

As well as accredited training courses and courses organised by your LEA, your training needs should also be met by the school in terms of continuing professional development (CPD).

What your school is able to offer will largely depend on the needs of its support staff and the expertise and commitment to training of the teachers and managers. It is important that you discuss your training needs and wishes with senior managers because there may be opportunities for you that you were unaware of.

Here are some suggestions for good CPD practice:

- An induction programme needs to be in place for all new support staff and for those whose roles have changed significantly.
- Mentors or managers should be allocated to support staff.
- All support staff, especially teaching assistants, should be able to observe and work alongside other colleagues in ways that will help them improve.
- Support staff should be encouraged to attend relevant meetings.
- The performance management process should allow support staff to set targets, have those targets reviewed and identify training needs.
- Self-evaluation should be encouraged and performance evaluated in terms of whether support staff have aided school improvement.
- Support staff who work with SEN pupils should be encouraged to take a full part in review meetings.
- Continuing training in ICT is essential.
- Developing a professional portfolio will be necessary for further training, especially in accredited courses such as NVQs.
- The school should make sure that support staff are familiar with policies ranging from broad issues such as health and safety, behaviour and anti-bullying to more specific issues related to teaching and learning.
- Support staff should be encouraged to play a full part in the school by becoming governors and members of appropriate working parties.



Qualifications for teaching assistants

If you are interested in improving your career prospects, taking on more responsibility, or just improving your knowledge so that you can do a better job, there is a range of LEA and local college-based courses such as:

- NVQs 1 to 4
- NNEB courses
- Open University teaching assistant courses
- Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA)
- Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) – one year working in school for those who already have a first degree
- Registered Teacher Programme (RTP) – two years working in school towards the qualification.

Some of these qualifications require Level 2 Maths and English (ie GCSE at grade C or equivalent).