



UNIT-2

Working in the School

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the unique challenges of working in an educational environment
- ✓ Support the curriculum for the benefit of teachers and students
- ✓ Discuss routine and clerical tasks performed by the teachingassistant

Unit 2

Working In The School

Schools can be challenging environments to work in at the best of times. Nevertheless, working in a school can also be uniquely rewarding. There's nothing more filling than watching your hard work and input contribute to the education and development of the pupils you work with. The relationships teaching assistants build with students are special and go beyond formal education. As a teaching assistant, you form part of a team tasked with moulding and shaping every aspect of every pupil's future. As an added bonus, you also enjoy the same extensive breaks and holidays as a regular teacher.

The vast majority of your working life will be spent within a school in a classroom setting. However, some teaching assistants prefer to offer their services in preschools or private nurseries.

The rewards of working as a teaching assistant

Being Inspired

Teaching assistants must be influential and inspiring role models for pupils to look up to. However, a good teaching assistant will also *take* inspiration from the pupils they work with. When you see pupils of all ages developing their knowledge and acquiring new skills, you feel inspired to do the same. In addition, the acknowledgment of the importance of your role will naturally inspire you to continue focusing on your personal and professional development.

Feeling Rewarded

The financial rewards of working as a teaching assistant aren't the only incentive on offer. In fact, the satisfaction that comes with playing a key role in the lives of pupils you work with means so much more. Working in a school, you will help struggling students succeed, identify untapped potential and generally drive pupils towards a bright future. All of which adds up to a career considered one of the most fulfilling and rewarding in annual surveys. A career as a teaching assistant could have you looking forward to Monday mornings, rather than dreading them.

Building Relationships

As already touched upon, the relationships teaching assistants develop with pupils go far beyond formal education alone. As you get to know the pupils you work with, you'll build important bonds of trust, respect and openness. You will become less of an educator, more an all-round role model they can turn to for just about anything. Along with contributing to the education of every pupil, you will also be playing a role in their social and intellectual growth.

Focusing Outward

It's easy to become self-focused in today's hectic world. However, it's important occasionally take a step back and consider the bigger picture. As a teaching assistant, you simply will not have time to focus too heavily or excessively on yourself. Every aspect of your job will be geared towards the growth and development of pupils you work with. As a result, you will naturally become a more outward-focused individual, showing other people the priority they deserve. In doing so, you stand to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of those you work with.

Supporting the Curriculum

To support the national curriculum, a teaching assistant should:

- Ensure every pupil understands the instructions.
- Encourage pupils to take a genuine interest in their studies.
- Support pupils in respect of local and national learning strategies e.g. literacy, numeracy, KS3, early years, as directed by the teacher.
- Help familiarize pupils with appropriate computer technology and IT systems for the completion of tasks.
- Assist with the preparation of lesson plans and required materials/resources.
- Undertake programmes linked to local and national learning strategies e.g. literacy, numeracy, KS3, early years, recording achievement and progress and feeding back to the teacher.
- Implement agreed learning activities/teaching programmes, adjusting activities according to pupil responses/needs.
- Identify the special educational needs of pupils who may be struggling and provide additional support accordingly.
- Introduce and encourage extracurricular activities to enrich the learning process for pupils.
- Remain up to date with all aspects of the national curriculum at all times.

The UK School System

It is a legal requirement in the United Kingdom for children to attend school from the age of five to 16. Primary schools educate children from five to 11 years of age, after which pupils move on to secondary school.

School Types

- 1. Nursery Schools:** 3-4 year olds (EYFS)
- 2. Infant Schools:** Reception classes for 4-5 year olds
- 3. Infant classes:** For 5-7 year olds (KS1)
Most Infant schools also have a Nursery class
- 4. Junior schools:** Junior classes for 8-11 year olds (KS2)
- 5. Primary Schools:** Infant and Junior classes within the one school
- 6. Secondary Schools:** 11-16 year olds (can cater for up to 18 years old) (KS3 / KS4)
- 7. Sixth Form Colleges:** 16-18 year olds
- 8. Special Schools:** Pupils who have special educational needs
- 9. PRU:** Pupil Referral Units for excluded pupils

Primary

Nursery and preschool education are technically optional, though highly recommended by child development experts. Compulsory education in the United Kingdom begins at five years old, when children are required to attend primary school. Primary school classes focus heavily on the development of basic numeracy and literacy skills, with very little specialist subject teaching involved.

Secondary

At the age of 11, pupils are transferred from primary school to secondary school. There is still heavy focus on literacy and numeracy at secondary school level, though further specialist subjects are introduced like science, computer technology, geography, history and so on.

Special Schools

If a child is deemed to have special educational needs, it may not be appropriate to educate them in a standard school environment. Special schools provide a range of tailored educational services for

pupils with special needs, welcoming children from preschool age to 18 years. Some special schools focus specifically on certain special educational requirements, while others cover a broad range of learning difficulties for children and teenagers alike.

Structure of the school year

A typical school year in the United Kingdom lasts 39 weeks, running from September until July and divided into three seasonal terms, as follows:

School Terms

Autumn Term: First week in September to third week in December

Spring Term: First week of January until Easter

Summer Term: Two weeks after Easter until third week in July

Most schools follow the same basic holiday structure, made up of two weeks at Easter, two weeks at Christmas and six weeks over the summer. There may also be additional half-term breaks of a week, two or three times a year.

Outside these official school holidays, parents are now forbidden from taking their children out of school for non-authorized reasons. Fines have been introduced for parents who take their kids on holiday during term time, even if doing so means missing no more than a couple of days of school.

Structure of the school day

Primary School

There are no formal restrictions placed on the typical school day structure for primary schools. However, the vast majority begin classes between 8:00 AM and 9:00 AM, finishing around 3:00 PM or 4:00 PM. The one requirement is that all state school timetables must feature both the statutory numeracy hour and literacy hour. Other than this, primary school teachers and teaching assistants are required to create their own lesson plans and structure the rest of the school day accordingly. Working as a teaching assistant, you will play a key role in determining how each school day in a primary school setting looks.

Sample breakdown of a day at a primary school:

9.00am	Registration
9.10am	School Assembly
9.30am	Literacy Hour
10.30am	Break time
10.45am	Numeracy Hour
11.45am	Subject class
12.15pm	Lunch
13.30pm	Afternoon Registration
13.35pm	Classes
14.45pm	Break time
15.00pm	Classes
15.30pm	End of school day

Secondary School

There is also a fair amount of variation with secondary schools, though most begin the school day around 8:00 AM and finish around 4:00 PM. Some secondary schools implement a one-week timetable revised once or twice a year, others a two-week timetable. Break times and lunch periods are also designated by each school individually – usually a short break in the morning, an hour for lunch and a second short break in the afternoon.

Sample breakdown of a day at a secondary school:

09.00am	Registration
09.20am	Period 1
10.00am	Period 2
10.40am	Break
11.00am	Period 3
11.40am	Period 4
12.20pm	Lunch
13.20pm	Registration
13.40pm	Period 5
14.20pm	Period 6
15.00pm	Period 7
15.40pm	School ends

The National Curriculum

The National Curriculum provides a formal outline of pupils' statutory learning entitlement and requirements in the United Kingdom. Roughly translated, it specifies the subjects that must be taught at each key stage level, educational targets that must be met by the school and all current standards for assessing and reporting students' performance.

From September 2002, the National Curriculum included citizenship as part of the statutory curriculum for secondary schools.

The National Literacy Strategy and Numeracy Strategies were introduced in the 90s, which apply exclusively to primary pupils. If your goal is to become a teaching assistant in a primary school setting, it is important that you familiarize yourself with these formal educational frameworks.

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is the statutory framework that outlines a series of standards that must be met by educators of early years pupils, ensuring the quality of their education and overseeing their safety and wellbeing. The regulations exist to ensure children are adequately prepared for school, beginning the formation of a broad knowledge base and skills set.

Key Stages

The curriculum defines four 'key stages', and ten statutory subjects:

- **Key Stage 1:** up to age seven
- **Key Stage 2:** seven to eleven
- **Key Stage 3:** eleven to fourteen (pre-GCSE)
- **Key Stage 4:** fourteen to sixteen (preparation for GCSE and equivalent vocational qualifications).

Key stages one and two are the primary phase, and key stages three and four constitute the secondary phase. There are three 'core' subjects, which are:

- English
- Mathematics
- Science
- (In Wales Welsh is a core subject in Welsh speaking schools).

There are seven other 'foundation' subjects which are:

- Design Technology

- History
- Geography
- Music
- Art and Design
- Physical Education
- A Modern Foreign Language – French, Spanish, German, Italian
- In Wales (Welsh is a foundation subject in non-Welsh speaking schools).

During key stages 1 to 3, pupils are required by law to study the first 9 of the subjects outlined above. Upon reaching key stage 3, students are then required to study a foreign language. Between the ages of 14 and 16, all core subjects must be studied alongside physical education, a modern foreign language and technology, plus either geography or history. Some schools give pupils the option of studying both history and geography at a slightly lower level.

School Staff

Head teacher

The head teacher of the school performs a largely administrative function, overseeing how the establishment runs and monitoring its general performance. Despite the name, it's actually comparatively rare for a head teacher to be involved in any classes directly.

Deputy Head

Reporting directly to the head teacher, the deputy head usually plays a more hands-on role in running the school. The vast majority of their duties are administrative, but most deputy heads are experienced teachers who continue educating students alongside their office duties.

Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator is responsible for coordinating and implementing the school's SEN policy and for co-ordinating provision for pupils with SEN. The SENCO gives SEN staff valuable information and support, helping with the school's SEN procedures, policy and support timetables. They may also play a role in identifying pupils with special educational needs, organizing meetings with parents and generally supervising the education and development of pupils with SEN.

Class Teacher

Primary school teachers are sometimes referred to as 'class teachers'. The class teacher takes complete responsibility for the education, discipline and general welfare of the children in their class. They are also expected to educate children across a broad range of subject areas, rather than specializing in one specific subject.

Subject Teacher

Classes in secondary schools are taught by subject teachers, who will typically specialize in just one primary subject. Pupils will therefore encounter several different teachers during the average school day. Some secondary school teachers cover more than one subject area, but this is comparatively rare.

School Governing Bodies

Every school is overseen by a governing body – a non-profit, 100% objective enterprise that ensures the school and its staff are getting the job done properly. The governing body is usually composed of teachers, administrators, parents, teaching assistants and external parties. The body is responsible for making important decisions on behalf of the school, such as budget allocation, recruitment, improvement to facilities and so on. School governing bodies have legal obligations to fulfil, but all members of the body provide their services purely on a voluntary basis.

EAL/ESL/TESL Teachers

It has become increasingly common for schools in the United Kingdom to accept children for whom English is not their first language. In which case, it may be necessary to hire an English as an additional language teacher (EAL), English as a second language teacher (ESL) or Teaching English as a second language teacher (TESL).

EMTAG Teachers

The Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Grant is provided to help schools work with pupils from ethnic minorities or travel communities, who may otherwise struggle to gain access to quality education. Special education and training is required to become a EMTAG teacher.

Peripatetic Teachers

While most teachers work which is one school, others support any number of schools on a day to day basis. This is sometimes referred to as peripatetic teaching – which simply means ‘wandering’. Some schools prefer to work with these kinds of teachers as a flexible alternative to hiring permanent members of staff. Teachers of highly specialist subjects may also work for several schools, due to limited demand for their services during the average school day.

Support Staff

The term ‘support staff’ encompasses just about anyone in an educational environment that isn’t a teacher or leadership figure. Examples of support staff in a typical school may include teaching assistants, subject specialists, learning mentors, learning support assistants and general administrators. Every member of the team within a school plays an invaluable role and makes a direct contribution to the education and development of its pupils. There is no such thing as an ‘unimportant’ role in a school.

Planning Preparation and Assessment (PPA) Time

PPA time was formally introduced in 2005, requiring that at least 10% of the teacher's working hours must be dedicated to planning, preparation and assessment activities. The legislation was introduced to lighten the load for busy teachers, who often found themselves with no time available for PPA.

However, the new legislation has placed further pressure on the schools themselves, which still need to cover pupils' learning requirements while ensuring this 10% mandatory minimum is met. This is one of the reasons why cover supervisors and teaching assistants have become so commonplace in schools across the UK. Having a teaching assistant on hand to cover classes when teachers are absent or otherwise engaged can be a godsend. Particularly if the teaching assistant in question has the experience and acumen needed to conduct full classes on the teacher's behalf.

Not all teaching assistants are considered suitable for independent class supervision – a decision that will normally be made by the head teacher, rather than the teacher of the class. Newly-qualified teaching assistants and those who lack experience may be restricted to more basic class supervision in the presence of the teacher.

Routine and Clerical Tasks

In a typical school, the vast majority of clinical and administrative duties that don't need to be carried out directly by a teacher are delegated to support staff. Working as a teaching assistant, you can expect to handle an extensive range of routine and clerical tasks on a daily basis. The nature of which will vary significantly from one school to the next, but will almost certainly include several of the following tasks:

1. Monitoring attendance rates and absence
2. Passing attendance information to teachers and head teachers
3. Bulk photocopying
4. Copy typing
5. Writing and mailing letters
6. General filing duties
7. Creating and displaying materials around the classroom
8. Assisting with the production of learning materials
9. Assigning tasks and collecting assignments
10. Data entry and basic data analysis
11. Liaising with parents and third parties
12. Writing emails and memos
13. Ordering equipment and consumables
14. Classroom cleaning and organization
15. Contacting businesses to organize work experience placements
16. Supervising exams and formal classroom tasks

17. Stocktaking and inventory management
18. Reporting ICT issues to the relevant parties
19. Attending meetings, workshops and seminars
20. Assisting with the organization of special events
21. Planning and supervising extracurricular activities
22. Organizing school trips and obtaining parental authorization
23. Supervising break times and lunch periods
24. Covering for teachers in the case of absence
25. General filing and office admin duties
26. Chatting with pupils about general day-to-day issues
27. Organizing meetings with parents and guardians
28. Ensuring all equipment in the classroom is safe and up to date
29. Basic accountancy duties
30. Organising transportation for pupils where required

It's important to remember that however mundane the task may be, it's an essential task nonetheless. Once again, everything you do as a teaching assistant will contribute to the education and development of the pupils you work with. Each and every day, you are helping every pupil build a bright and successful future.

The extent to which basic admin duties are covered by the teaching assistant varies significantly from one school to the next. Some spend the vast majority of the time in the classroom, others may find 50% of their time goes to admin. In any case, any office skills and admin acumen you have will serve you well, when applying for a job as a teaching assistant.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Allyson Hadwin, Susan Wilcox, (2000), A Handbook for Teaching Assistants.*