A Teaching Assistant’s Guide to Primary Education

A Teaching Assistant’s Guide to Primary Education has been specially written for teaching assistants taking up posts in primary schools who are working at NVQ Levels 2 and 3 of the National Occupational Standards of Teaching Assistants.

This jargon-free book covers every area of primary education that teaching assistants will need to know about, including:

- An overview of primary education
- The role of the teaching assistant
- The information you will need
- The knowledge, skills and qualities you will need
- The children
- Learning and teaching
- The curriculum
- Managing behaviour
- Providing for all children
- Evaluation and record-keeping
- Your professional development

Written by someone who knows primary education inside-out, this accessible introduction to the teaching assistant’s role in the primary school contains lots of case studies based on real-life scenarios and should be essential reading.

Dr Joan Dean OBE is a former teacher, college lecturer, primary school headteacher, primary schools adviser and chief inspector. She has lectured in many parts of Britain and abroad, and has written numerous books on different aspects of education.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glossary</strong></td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 About primary education</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School governors</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Local Education Authority (LEA)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Department for Education and Skills (DfES)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 The role of the teaching assistant</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your work with children</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with special educational needs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care of resources</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning in nursery and reception</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record keeping</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 The information you will need</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information you will need before starting the job</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information you will need before you start work</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information you will need in your first term</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 The qualities, knowledge, skills and attitudes needed</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal qualities</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The knowledge you will need</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 The children

Physical development 29
Personal and social development 30
Language development 33
Intellectual development 35
Emotional development 36
The development of play 39

6 Learning and teaching

Types of learning 44
How children learn 45
Learning styles 47
Aspects of learning 47
Learning in groups 49

7 The Foundation Stage

Personal, social and emotional development 52
Communication, language and literacy 53
Mathematical development 53
Knowledge and understanding of the world 54
Physical development 55
Creative development 55
Baseline assessment 57

8 The core subjects: English

The National Curriculum for English 58
Speaking 61
Reading 62
Writing 64
Assessment of speaking, reading and writing 66

9 The core subjects: mathematics

The National Curriculum for mathematics 70
The use of calculators 74
Key Stage 1: the infant school 74
Key Stage 2: the junior school 74
Assessment and evaluation 76
Mathematics across the curriculum 77

10 The core subjects: science 80
   Key Stage 1: the infant school 81
   Key Stage 2: the junior school 82
   Assessment and evaluation 84

11 The foundation subjects 89
   Art and design 89
   Design and technology 90
   Geography 92
   History 93
   Information and communication technology (ICT) 95
   Music 96
   Personal, social and health education (PSHE) 97
   Physical education (PE) 99
   Religious education (RE) 100
   The role of the teaching assistant 102

12 Managing behaviour 105
   Behaviour problems 105
   Causes of misbehaviour 106
   Dealing with misbehaviour 106

13 The learning environment 112
   Caring for resources 112

14 Providing for all children 116
   Gender differences 116
   Special educational needs (SEN) 118
   Exceptional ability 120
   Ethnic minorities 122
   Differences in social background 123
Glossary

**ADHD**  Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

**Aided schools**  Church schools for which the church pays a proportion of the expenses and the LEA pays the rest.

**Code of Practice**  A code laid down by the DfES stating how children with SEN should be provided for.

**Concept**  An abstract idea, such as the classification of groups by numbers, shapes or colours.

**Controlled schools**  Church schools for which the LEA pays all expenses.

**Core subjects**  National Curriculum subjects of English, mathematics and science.

**DfES**  Department for Education and Skills.

**Equal opportunities**  Each school is required to have a policy that supports the idea that all pupils should have equal access to education.

**Foundation schools**  Schools which were grant-maintained under the last Conservative government and independent of LEAs are now again responsible to their LEA.

**Foundation Stage**  The pre-school stage of education, comprising nursery classes and schools and the reception class.

**Foundation subjects**  National Curriculum subjects other than English, mathematics and science.

**GCSE**  General Certificate of Secondary Education – examinations taken at the age of 16 by all pupils.

**ICT**  Information and communication technology.

**IEP**  Individual education plan for children with SEN.

**Key Stages**  Education is divided into Key Stages. Key Stages 1 and 2 include education at the primary stage and Key Stages 3 and 4 are secondary school stages.
Kinaesthetic  Concerning movement.
LEA    Local Education Authority.
Levels  The results of the SATs tests and children’s performance in all subjects are assessed in levels. The average level at Key Stage 1 is level 2 and at Key Stage 2 the average level is level 4.
Literacy Strategy  Schools must provide an hour each day of literacy work, using a pattern laid down nationally.
LMS    Local management of schools – each school is given a sum of money to meet school expenses. This is controlled by the governors working with the headteacher.
LSAs   Learning support assistants, employed to support a child or children with SEN.
National Curriculum  All maintained schools have to follow the National Curriculum, which lays down what should be taught and learned at each stage of schooling.
NNEB   Nursery Nurses Examination Board.
Numeracy Strategy  Schools must provide an hour each day of work in mathematics using a pattern laid down nationally.
NVQ    National Vocational Qualification.
Ofsted  Office for Standards in Education. Inspectors from Ofsted inspect schools at regular intervals and report on their findings.
PE     Physical education.
PSHE   Personal, social and health education.
QCA    Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which has overall responsibility for the curriculum and examinations.
RE     Religious education.
SACRE  Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education – a committee set up in each LEA to oversee RE and to provide an RE syllabus for schools.
SATs   Standard Assessment Tests taken by all children at the ages of 7 and 11.
Schemas Mental arrangements of ideas.
SDP    School development plan. Each school, working with staff and governors is required to make an SDP for the future each year.
SEN    Special educational needs.
SENCO  Special educational needs coordinator.
STRB   School Teachers’ Review Body – the committee that decides upon school teachers’ salaries.
TTA    Teacher Training Agency.
About primary education

If you are a teaching assistant in a primary school or are thinking of becoming one you will need to know something about present-day primary education. You will have memories of your own schooldays and you perhaps have children at this stage and so you may have a good deal of information already, but education tends to be always changing in some respect or other and there is still a good deal to learn.

There are a number of different types of school serving children of primary school age. At the pre-school stage there are nursery schools and nursery classes run by the Local Education Authority (LEA) and others run privately. There are also playgroups run by parents. Many nursery classes are attached to primary schools and this can be an advantage in that the child will be partly familiar with the infant school s/he goes on to when reaching the age of 5. Local authority nursery schools are usually led by a qualified teacher and assistants often have the Nursery Nurse Examination Board (NNEB) qualification or some other qualification in childcare.

Maintained schools for children of primary school age may be infant schools catering for children from the age of 5 to the age of 7, junior schools catering for 7- to 11-year-olds or primary schools catering for the full range of primary school pupils. In some areas there are first schools catering for children from 5 to 8 or 9 and middle schools catering for children from 8 or 9 to 12 or 13. First and middle schools were developed following the recommendations of the Plowden Report published in 1967. A number of authorities since then have reverted to the former pattern of a break at 11, since this fits better with the organisation of the National Curriculum.
Primary schools may be church schools. The Church of England supported schools for children before education was provided nationally and as a result many schools, in villages in particular, are Church of England schools. These are of two kinds. Some are called aided schools. Here the local authority pays staff salaries and the running costs of the school, but the church makes a contribution when building is required. Other church schools are called controlled schools and in these the LEA pays for everything, but the church has governor representatives as it does in the aided schools. The Catholic Church also has aided schools and there are a small number of Methodist schools and Jewish schools and a very small number of Muslim schools.

Some maintained schools are called foundation schools. These schools were grant-maintained under the last Conservative government, that is, they were independent of the LEA and were funded centrally. This changed when the Labour government took over and they are now part of the provision made by local government, but have foundation governors.

The work of schools is controlled by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) at national level and by the LEA at local level. The Secretary of State for Education is responsible for:

- establishing and keeping under review the National Curriculum;
- approval of the provision and closure of schools;
- determining the standards for school buildings;
- approval of schemes for local financial management of schools;
- providing for teacher training;
- providing for the inspection of schools;
- seeing that LEAs provide an adequate system of education in their areas.

The LEA is responsible for:

- providing schools to give all children in their area appropriate educational opportunities;
- ensuring that the National Curriculum is implemented;
- establishing schemes for local financial management of schools;
- supporting schools that are in difficulties;
- appointing governors to represent the local authority;
- publishing admission arrangements for schools;
- ensuring that pupils attend school regularly.
There are three stages in primary education. The first stage is called the **Foundation Stage** and the remaining two are called **Key Stages** 1 and 2. The stages and year groups are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation stage</th>
<th>Age 3–4 years</th>
<th>Reception, Year R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Stage 1</td>
<td>Age 4–5 years</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 5–6 years</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Stage 2</td>
<td>Age 6–7 years</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 7–8 years</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 9–10 years</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 10–11 years</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children take national tests in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 and tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3. These tests are known as **SATs** – Standard Assessment Tests. The school must inform parents of the results of these tests. The results are given in **levels** 1–5 in primary schools. At Key Stage 1 the expected level is level 2 but some children may not achieve this and those with special educational needs (SEN) may only be working towards level 1. Other children may achieve levels 3 or 4. At Key Stage 2 the expected level is level 4 and here again some children may not achieve this and others may achieve a higher level. The results of Key Stage 2 tests are sent on to the secondary schools, which are expected to provide additional coaching for children who did not achieve level 4 at the end of their primary schooling. Teachers also have to assess children according to these levels and this information, too, must be given to parents.

Schools must meet for at least 380 half-day sessions in each school year. The school day should be divided into two sessions with a break between them. The Secretary of State recommends the following weekly lengths of lesson time for pupils:

- twenty-one hours for pupils aged 5–7 years;
- twenty-three and a half hours for pupils aged 8–11 years.

**School governors**

Every school has its own body of governors. This is a group of people who give their time voluntarily to support the work of the
school. Some are representatives of the LEA, some are elected to represent the teachers and some the support staff, some are elected representatives of the parents of children currently in the school, some, in church schools, represent the church, some, in foundation schools, are foundation governors and some are co-opted as representatives of the wider community. Governors normally serve for a period of four years but in many cases serve more than one term of office. The headteacher can choose whether or not to be a governor but attends all governors’ meetings whether s/he is a governor or not.

**Case study 1.1**

Josie was considering whether to apply for the post of teaching assistant in her local school. She talked to various people about it, including friends, one of whom was a school governor there. She had heard of governors but didn’t know what they did. She asked her friend, Jim, to tell her about being a governor and to explain what they did.

He explained that they had a general responsibility for the school, while the head and senior staff had responsibility for day-to-day management. They made the policies that set a framework for the decisions taken by the headteacher and staff. They dealt with appeals and grievances from the staff and with the exclusion of children who behaved unacceptably. They were also responsible for the appointment of the headteacher and deputy headteacher.

They were expected to check that their policies and decisions were being carried out and that monitoring of work by the headteacher and senior staff was taking place. They might be described as being a critical friend for the headteacher and staff, providing both pressure and support. The governing body of a school provided a sort of public accountability for the spending of public money.

Josie thanked him for all this information. She thought that being a governor sounded quite demanding.

A more detailed view of the work of governors suggests that they are responsible for the following:
• Monitoring the work of the school. Governors need to see the school in action from time to time and study the results of tests.
• Making, ratifying and reviewing school policies. Some policies will be drawn up by governors, others will be drawn up by the headteacher and staff or be a joint effort between staff and governors. Governors are legally required to have policies for the following:
  – procedures for admission and appeals
  – aims and objectives of the school
  – attendance, behaviour and pupil conduct
  – charging and remissions for school activities, such as visits
  – child protection
  – complaints
  – curriculum
  – discipline and behaviour of pupils, including steps to prevent all forms of bullying
  – employment, including staff discipline, pay, competence and grievances
  – equal opportunities
  – health education
  – pupils’ records and reports
  – religious education (RE) and collective worship
  – sex education (primary schools need this only if they decide to include it in the curriculum)
  – special educational needs (SEN).
Parents are entitled to see any of these policies on request.
• Overseeing the school’s finances. Under the scheme for local management of schools (LMS) the headteacher and governors have responsibility for deciding how to spend the money available for staff, other resources, premises and other needs.
• Overseeing the state of the premises, equipment and grounds.
• Overseeing the curriculum and the teaching and learning programme. Governors are responsible for seeing that the National Curriculum is taught and in primary schools for making a decision, normally in consultation with parents, about whether sex education shall be part of the curriculum.
• Ensuring that RE is taught and that there is daily collective worship. Parents may withdraw their children from both these activities and from sex education if they wish but the school is still responsible for them.
• Ensuring that provision is made for pupils with SEN.
• Working with the headteacher and staff to formulate a school development plan (SDP). Schools must each year draw up a plan for future development, normally covering a period of about three years, and update this annually.

• Ensuring there is good discipline in the school. Governors should have a behaviour policy that sets out what behaviour is expected of pupils. They should be informed of any exclusions for unacceptable behaviour and will be involved when these are permanent exclusions and where parents appeal against the exclusion.

• Seeing that there are equal opportunities for pupils of both sexes, ethnic minority pupils, different social groups and pupils with disabilities. Governors should be made aware of any differences in performance between different groups of pupils, for example between boys and girls, or between children from different ethnic groups, and encourage improvement for the weaker groups.

• Receiving and acting upon inspection reports. Schools are inspected at regular intervals and once the report is received governors with the headteacher and staff are responsible for drawing up and implementing an action plan. Parents must be sent a summary of the report.

• Setting annual targets for the school. Governors are required to set targets for the percentage of pupils attaining level 4 or above in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2.

• Providing an annual report to parents on the work of the school and governing body. The annual report should be discussed at an annual meeting of parents. It must contain information about pupil performance against the targets set.

• Providing a home/school agreement. All schools should have an agreement signed by parents, a representative of the school and, with older children, by the pupil.

• Marketing the school to the local community. Schools are financed according to the number of pupils they attract. It is therefore essential that the school considers how to present itself to the local community.

Parents

Parents are obliged, by law, to see that their children are educated, either by sending them to school or by some other means, perhaps teaching them at home. In practice, very few parents opt for this.
Schools have a legal obligation to provide parents with certain information about the progress their children are making each school year, starting with the reception class. For all children it must include:

- brief comments on the subjects studied as part of the school curriculum, particularly English, mathematics and science, noting the child’s strengths and achievements and suggesting areas where there needs to be improvement;
- details of the child’s overall progress with comments on behaviour and attitudes to school and the contribution s/he has made to the life of the school and any special achievements;
- information about the arrangements for parents to come to the school to discuss the report and the child’s progress with his or her teachers;
- a summary of the child’s attendance record.

**The Local Education Authority (LEA)**

The task of the LEA is to see that the law on education is complied with by providing schools for the children of people living within its area. The finance for this provision is partly provided by government and partly by the local council tax. A large proportion of this money is passed on to the schools on the basis of the number of pupils on the roll and the schools then have to meet running costs, including staff salaries. The LEA is responsible for school premises but, in the case of church-aided schools, part of the money for premises is raised by the church.

Each LEA will have an Education Committee composed of locally elected councillors and teacher and church representatives. This committee appoints a Chief Education Officer or Director of Education to run the education service and a number of officers to support him or her in this work.

Each LEA also appoints a number of inspectors or advisers whose task is to monitor and support the work of schools. They are sometimes called inspectors and sometimes advisers, but the work they do is roughly the same. The members of this service will provide advice and training opportunities for teachers as new developments come along and advice to headteachers and governors on making appointments to the teaching staff of the school. LEAs also provide training for governors and governing bodies need to encourage their members to take advantage of these courses.
LEAs also employ a number of educational psychologists who support schools in various ways but particularly in helping them to provide for children who have learning or behaviour problems. A psychologist may test such children and advise schools on how best to provide for them. S/he will also advise the Authority on the need for extra resources in certain cases, such as learning support assistants (LSAs) for such children, or particular equipment needed.

Another group of LEA employees are the education welfare officers – social workers who are responsible for seeing that all children in the appropriate age group attend school and for helping to sort out any difficulties.

The LEA is also responsible for providing home-to-school transport where this is needed.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

The DfES has overall responsibility for education and makes the laws governing it. It has to compete with other departments for funding for education, much of which is then transferred to LEAs. It has a number of semi-autonomous bodies that help in the process of overseeing the education service. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is responsible for curriculum and examinations. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is responsible for school inspections and for keeping the Department informed about the state of education in the schools. The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) oversees teacher training and the School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB) recommends the levels of teacher salaries. The Department also commissions research into the education system from time to time.
Chapter 2

The role of the teaching assistant

Teaching assistants have a variety of titles – classroom assistant, learning support assistant (LSA), special needs assistant and probably others, but they are all concerned with supporting teachers and children. Usually as a teaching assistant in a primary school, you will work with just one classroom teacher, but sometimes your services may be shared by more than one classroom teacher. LSAs or special needs assistants are employed to provide support for a particular child or children who have SEN, but, if you have particular responsibility for helping the learning of one or more children, you should be prepared to help other children from time to time so that the child in question does not feel too singled out. You also want to avoid the child becoming too dependent on you and your help should always involve him or her in making decisions about the work in hand.

Your work with children

Working with only one teacher makes it easier for you and the teacher to work as a team, agreeing your planning together each day and supporting each other. Where you need to work with more than one teacher, it is still important that you are a team in which you share planning and discuss what has happened together. It is just a matter of finding time to do this, which isn’t always easy!

In a team you need to agree what is to be done and build a climate of trust between you and the teacher and between you and the children. You need to be clear about the boundaries of your responsibility and when you need to refer something to the teacher. When you are new to the job you may need a good deal of support from the teacher while learning how to work with the