

THE CORE VALUES

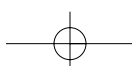
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The core values

This section covers

- Working in partnership
- Following procedures
- Supporting inclusion
- Supporting equal opportunities
- Practising anti-discrimination

- Celebrating diversity
- Promoting independence
- Respecting confidentiality
- Developing as a professional
- NVQ Awarding Bodies



2.1

What are the core values?

Every teaching assistant's job is different because every school is different, every class is different and every child is different. That is one of the things that makes the job attractive. You are working with people, so new things are always happening. But all schools subscribe to the same set of core values and all teaching staff are expected to observe them. They are basically all about fairness for the pupils and fairness for you.

2.2

Working in partnership

Everyone who works in a school is part of a teaching partnership. That partnership includes the head teacher, the class teachers, and all other teaching staff, including teaching assistants. They work together and together they are responsible for the welfare of the pupils. But this doesn't mean that everyone has the same level of responsibility. Teaching assistants aren't expected to do the job of teachers. They are there to help in whatever way is suggested but actually setting the direction of pupils' education is always the teacher's job.

You may, however, be asked to contribute to planning, to discuss your role in the class and to talk about the work the children will be doing on a particular day. Modern teaching is always very carefully planned. Teachers plan their work individually and they also meet together to plan. As a teaching assistant, your working hours are different from those of teachers and you are not required to attend all these meetings. However, you may be asked to meet with teachers during their non-contact time or during assembly and you should certainly be kept informed about what role you will have to play. In theory working as a teaching assistant, you could expect to be told what is required of you at any point during the school day. But in practice, you may have to use your initiative at times and most teaching assistants agree that this is part of the pleasure they get out of the job. However, if you are uncertain about what you should be doing at any time, you should always ask the teacher.

THE CORE VALUES

Finally, this may seem obvious but it's worth stating all the same, a teaching assistant should never act in ways that contradict or undermine the class teacher, or any other colleague. Teaching staff are expected to work together as a team and support each other at all times.

"It's important to remember that you're there to aid the teachers, not to replace them."

2.3

Following procedures

Although teaching staff have a great deal of independence, they are not free to do whatever they want with their pupils. There are a whole set of procedures and guidelines which they are expected to follow. These may vary from school to school but in many instances they are the same, because they have been laid down by law and schools are regularly inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, commonly known as OFSTED.

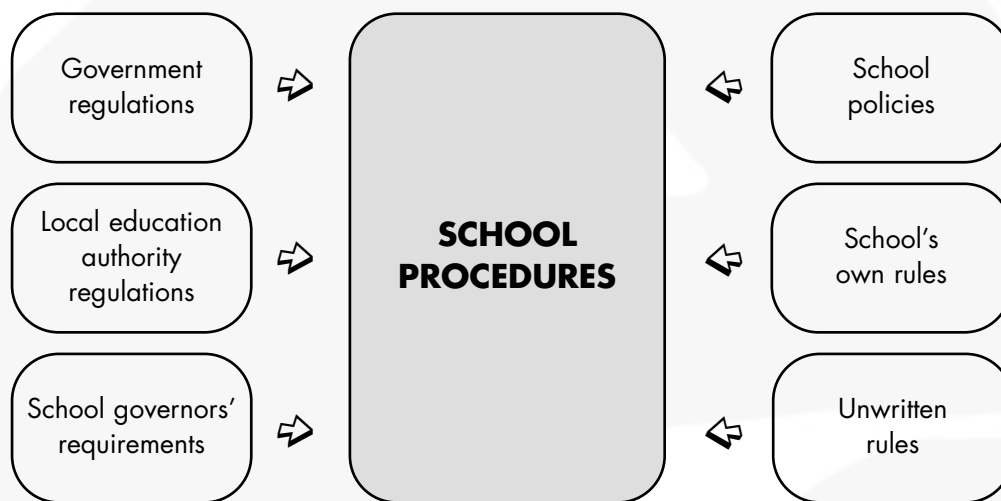
Here are four things that all state-funded primary schools in Britain are required to do:

- teach the National Curriculum (see page 38) for the part of the UK in which they are situated
- devote one hour a day to activities for developing literacy
- devote one hour a day to activities for developing numeracy
- engage in a collective act of worship once a day (this often takes the form of an assembly).

There are many regulations which specify how schools should operate. As well as dealing with what is taught, they apply to the supervision of pupils, the provision of school meals, the condition of the school building and the way a school communicates with parents. Some of these rules may be specific to the local education authority where a school is situated.

It is the job of the school's governing body, in conjunction with the head teacher to make sure that all of these legal requirements are observed. The school governors may also lay down other rules concerning the way the school is run. For example, governors in a faith school may require a school to show more commitment to the religious education of pupils than would normally be the case.

As a teaching assistant, you are not expected to know all the rules and regulations off by heart because you are working under the direction of a teacher. However, it is important to realise that what you are doing takes place within a regulatory framework.



To give one fairly obvious example, once it was common for teachers or other staff in school to smack children who misbehaved. Nowadays this is not acceptable under any circumstances and would probably result in criminal proceedings being taken against the adult administering the smack. Other procedures are followed when a child misbehaves, and each school will have its own system of sanctions. A teaching assistant is expected to follow this system.

As well as government and local education authority rules, schools also have their own policies on contentious issues like racism, bullying or homework. The policy will have been written by a group of teachers working together, who will then have presented it to the rest of the staff. Copies of a school's policies should be available to all members of staff and a particular teacher will usually have the responsibility for each school policy. As a teaching assistant you should be aware of these policies and know who is responsible for developing and updating each policy.

THE CORE VALUES

Finally, each school has two more sets of rules all of its own. One is the set of written rules which are issued to pupils and parents. These are usually to do with things like the times of the school day, school uniform, the kind of behaviour that is expected of children and the kind that is not. Then there are the working rules which exist to keep the place running, such as not allowing pupils in a particular part of the building during the lunch hour. When you first begin working as a teaching assistant it's possible that pupils may test you out to see whether you know what is allowed and what is not. So it's a good idea to learn these rules at the beginning.

Activity

What are the unwritten rules in the school where you work? Make a list of five of them. These could include things like how members of staff are addressed (Sir, Miss, Ms Tomkins, etc.) or information about how to line up in the playground.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

2.4

Supporting inclusion

Supporting inclusion is another core value. In the past children with disabilities, learning disorders or special needs were often removed from the mainstream and taught separately. Nowadays these children are accommodated in the classroom just like the others. In practice this means that certain pupils will need to be given individual support. This may be the job of the teaching assistant. Alternatively it may be the job of the teaching assistant to deal with other children in order to free the teacher to give particular support to an individual child.

One effect of this is that at certain times in any classroom some pupils will be doing differentiated activities (activities that have been tailor-made to meet their particular needs while still covering the same area of learning that the rest of the class are studying). That's why modern teaching methods sometimes look a bit fuzzy to those who expect rows of desks with children all working along identical lines, but the modern classroom reflects the way the world is today and if it didn't, it wouldn't be right for today's children.

2.5

Supporting equal opportunities

Equal opportunities means exactly what it says. Pupils are all doing the same job – learning – and they should all be treated equally, whether they are boys or girls, whatever their race, culture or community. It's part of the teaching assistant's job to make sure this happens in practice. In the past some people were denied the opportunities that were offered to others. For example, many girls were discouraged from taking education too far, because it was assumed they would become housewives. Obviously, schools don't behave like this any more because of their commitment to equal opportunities and as a teaching assistant you are expected to support that commitment at all times in your own work and to make sure that pupils observe it as well. For example, you will be expected to notice, challenge and report any racist or sexist remarks made by pupils towards other children.

2.6

Practising anti-discrimination

Practising anti-discrimination simply means you must not discriminate against any individual or group because of gender, race, religion, cultural or social background, disability or sexual orientation. It's important to realise that this also applies to books and resources used in the school. Although you are unlikely to bring in resources yourself, since these will be provided by the teacher, you should be aware that anything used in the classroom is expected to meet the same standard of anti-discrimination. There are no exceptions. This also applies to everyday working practices. Jokes against particular ethnic groups, for example, are simply not acceptable and someone making them within a school would soon find themselves in serious trouble. If you want to be a teaching assistant you have to be absolutely clear about this. The days of us and them are over. We are all in it together.

“Unlike some jobs, you really make an impact on other people’s lives. So it’s important to think about what you say and do.”

2.7

Celebrating diversity

The modern classroom reflects our modern society. It's multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faith. The pupils come from all sorts of backgrounds and teaching staff are expected to show that they value this diversity. That's why you will often see displays or posters celebrating cultures from all around the world and as a teaching assistant you will be expected to join in with this positive attitude.

2.8

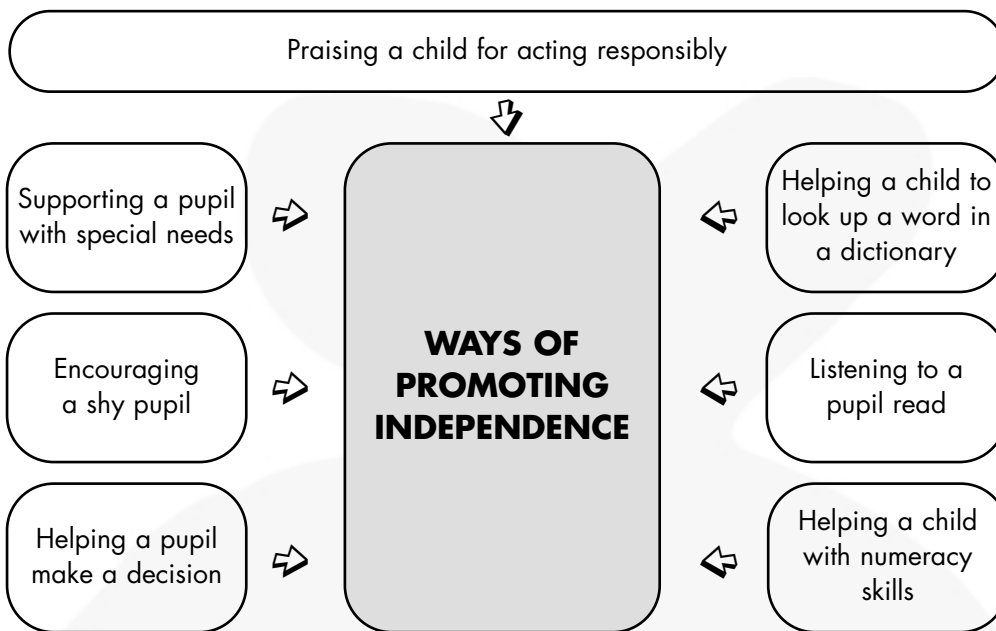
Promoting independence

Teaching children is not about telling them what to think. It's about helping them learn, showing them how to make choices and decisions by themselves, supporting them as they investigate and come to terms with the knowledge that is required of them. As a teaching assistant, promoting independence is one of the things you should always be doing. For example, imagine you are working with a pupil who has special needs of some kind, say a girl who is visually impaired. By helping that girl function in the classroom exactly like all the others, you are promoting her independence because she will be able to carry on learning and developing like everyone else.

Or imagine you are helping a boy who is very shy by listening to him read and encouraging him when he gets to the end of a sentence. In doing that you are making him more self-reliant and so promoting his independence. At the same time you are boosting his self-esteem which will make him better at taking decisions.

We all know that the things we find out for ourselves are the ones we really value, and the whole thrust of modern teaching is about helping children to learn for themselves, rather than just trying to stuff them full of knowledge or tell them the answers. You're there to encourage children to become independent learners. And of course the more they learn, the more self-reliant they become.

Along with independence comes responsibility of course, and pupils are expected to learn to take responsibility for their actions. That's another one of the reasons you're there. As a teaching assistant you are another responsible adult presence in the classroom and a role-model for the pupils.



Activity Choose one of the examples illustrated here. Make a list of three helpful things you could do or say to promote a child's independence.

1.

2.

3.

2.9

Respecting confidentiality

Many workers have to maintain confidentiality about the information they come across in the course of their jobs. It's an everyday matter for those in the health service, banking or

THE CORE VALUES

counselling and so on. But if anything, it is even more important for a teaching assistant because a school is a community and as a teaching assistant you will be aware of a great deal of information about the members of that community - pupils, their families and your work colleagues. So it is absolutely essential that you understand the school policy on discussing information and stick to it at all times.

This may be more difficult if you are someone who has a child at the school or someone who mixes socially with other parents. In this case, you might encounter a disgruntled parent who would like to draw you into a dispute or who would love to hear the inside story or the news from the staffroom. Obviously, this is a temptation you are obliged to resist. Failure to do so would make life very difficult for those around you and could easily cost you your job.

2.10

Developing as a professional

Schools are all about learning and that goes for the teaching staff as well as the pupils. Teachers regularly attend courses at teaching centres, or hold in-service training sessions at their schools. They are encouraged to look at the way they and their colleagues teach and to constantly find ways to improve. As a teaching assistant, you too are expected to take advantage of any opportunities your school provides for professional development, and also to be aware of how you do your job and how you might get better at it.

Asking for advice or support is part of this process because, just like the pupils in your care, you only learn by finding things out. So it's important to realise that being unsure of the best way to do any part of your job is not necessarily a sign of weakness. A teaching assistant is expected to assess what he or she is doing all the time and to develop with experience.

One way in which you can develop as a professional is by obtaining National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). These are government-backed qualifications that are awarded to people who have demonstrated they can work to agreed standards of competence in a particular job. There are two levels of NVQ for teaching assistants, levels 2 and 3. (The job of teaching assistant is regarded as being beyond the requirements of level 1.)

Unlike many other qualifications, NVQs are not examination-based. A person taking the NVQ has to provide evidence from real work situations that he or she has fulfilled the requirements for the desired level. The requirements take the form of units of competence. The units of competence required for level 2 are dealt with in detail in section 6 of this resource. The units of competence for level 3 are dealt with in section 7. A summary of the complete list for both levels can be found on pages 51-53.

Check out your skills

2.11

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Assignment: Examining a school policy

School policies are put in place to help deal with difficult issues like racism, bullying or homework. But do they work? Read this excerpt from a specimen school policy and ask yourself the following questions. Who is it aimed at? What is it for? Would it be better just to leave an issue like this to people's common sense? How can it help me as a teaching assistant?

SCHOOL POLICY ON BULLYING

Aims of this policy:

- to promote a secure and happy environment for our pupils that is free from bullying
- to inform pupils and parents of the school's expectations
- to make staff aware of their responsibilities with regard to bullying
- to take positive measures to prevent bullying
- to show commitment by practising zero tolerance of bullying.

Definition of bullying:

Bullying occurs when power is exerted by an individual (or group) over another weaker individual (or group) by the use of threats, insults, physical assault or social exclusion. The bully may be unaware or only partly aware of what he (or she) is doing. It is a form of behaviour that is learned from others and can, therefore, be unlearned.

Staff responsibilities:

When encountering an incident of bullying, members of staff will:

- listen to all parties concerned
- investigate the incident thoroughly
- take appropriate action or refer the matter to another member of staff
- record what has happened
- inform parents about what has taken place.