

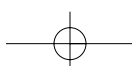
3

How schools work

This section covers:

- the school system
- primary schools
- secondary schools
- special schools
- the governing body
- the head teacher
- the deputy head & senior management
- class teachers and tutors

- subject teachers and postholders
- ethnic minority achievement teachers
- special needs teachers
- peripatetic teachers
- teaching assistants
- supply staff
- non-teaching staff
- parents



3.1

The school system

The school system in the UK is actually quite complex. This is because it has grown up over a long period of time and successive governments have made changes to it. The commonest system, known as the two-tier system consists of primary and secondary school. Primary schools take children from the age of five or "rising five" (during the term in which they will be five). Secondary schools take pupils from the age of eleven.

In some parts of the UK, however, a three-tier system exists. First schools cater for children from the age of five up to eight, middle schools take children between the ages of eight and fourteen and upper schools take children from fourteen upwards, although there are a few variations to these age bands.

Local education authorities are required by law to provide a place for every child no later than the start of the term after his or her fifth birthday. However, some education authorities also provide places for children from the age of three upwards in nursery schools.

THE TWO-TIER SYSTEM

5 – 11 Primary School
11 – 16 Secondary School

THE THREE-TIER SYSTEM

5 – 8 First School
8 – 14 Middle School
14 – 16+ Upper School.

(Children in both systems can attend Nursery School from ages 3 to 5 but this is not compulsory.)

3.2

Primary schools

Within primary schools children are divided into infants and juniors, although nowadays infants are often referred to as Key Stage 1 and juniors as Key Stage 2. (See page 39).

HOW SCHOOLS WORK

Pupils aged five to seven are known as infants and those aged seven to eleven are known as juniors. In some cases the infant and junior sections of a school may be separate, each with its own head teacher.

3.3

Secondary schools

For a long time secondary school pupils in Britain either went to grammar schools if they passed the 11-plus examination or secondary-modern schools if they did not. In the 1960s this system was replaced by a single type of school, the comprehensive school, which aimed to cater for all pupils. However, in some areas grammar schools continued to operate, as they do to this day. At the time of writing this resource there are 164 grammar schools in England. In addition, there have been religious schools in this country for many years.

More recently successive governments have made changes and additions to the range of secondary schools. The list now includes comprehensive schools, grammar schools, community schools, voluntary-aided schools, voluntary-controlled schools, foundation schools, city technology colleges and city academies. Some of these labels overlap. For example, a comprehensive school may also be a voluntary-aided school, a voluntary-controlled school or a foundation school.

Types of secondary school

Comprehensive schools

Comprehensive schools aim to cater for all pupils. They may be run by local education authorities, or religious or charitable organisations and teach the National Curriculum.* There are several different kinds of comprehensive schools, including:

- a) **Community schools**
These are the largest group of mainstream comprehensive schools. They are controlled by local education authorities. Like all comprehensive schools, they admit the full ability range of pupils and teach the National Curriculum.*
- b) **Foundation schools**
These schools have more independence than community schools. They teach the National Curriculum* but the school governors decide on the admissions policy and employ the teachers.

c) **Voluntary-aided schools**

These are run by a charitable foundation which owns the school and makes a financial contribution to running it. Like foundation schools, they teach the National Curriculum* but the school governors decide which pupils to admit.

d) **Voluntary-controlled schools**

These are owned by a charitable foundation but the local education authority employs the staff and determines the admissions policy. They teach the National Curriculum.*

Grammar schools

There are only a small number of grammar schools left in Britain. They select pupils on the basis of ability. They may be run by local education authorities, religious or charitable organisations. They teach the National Curriculum.*

City technology colleges

This is a very small group of independent schools which charge no fees run by the City Technology Trust in association with the Department for Education and Employment. Part of their funding is provided by industry sponsorship and they specialise in teaching science, maths and technology. They can pay teaching staff more if they wish.

**see page 38*

3.4

Special schools

Children who are considered to have special needs which cannot be met in mainstream schools are taught in special schools. At one time a great many children were taught in special schools but nowadays a policy of inclusive education (see page 18) means that more and more children with special needs are being educated in mainstream classrooms.

This trend was reinforced by an act of parliament passed in 2001, which makes it illegal to treat disabled pupils less favourably than other pupils and requires a school to make "reasonable adjustments" to make sure they are not put at a disadvantage. However there are still about 2000 special schools functioning in Britain at the time of writing this guide.

HOW SCHOOLS WORK

The pupil-teacher ratio in special schools is much lower than in other schools, typically about 6 to 1, compared with up to 30 to 1 in mainstream state schools. Special schools may be for day or boarding pupils, they may employ care assistants to deal with pupils' physical and personal needs and they will be provided with specialist equipment to assist with specific disabilities.

“Every little thing they learn is another obstacle overcome and that’s something I’m really proud of.”

3.5

The governing body

Because there many different kinds of schools, the details of how each one is managed will vary. However, all schools have a governing body which takes key decisions like appointing the head teacher, managing the school budget and deciding how many staff will be employed. The governing body is usually made up of:

- parents' representatives
- the head teacher
- teachers' representatives
- representatives of non-teaching staff
- people chosen by the local education authority
- people from the local community
- people appointed by the church or charitable organisation which set up the school.

The governing body works closely with the head teacher. It conducts its business through committees and may delegate decision-making to individuals or sub-groups. Unless you are asked to take part and accept (because serving as a school governor is entirely voluntary), you are unlikely to have much real contact with the governing body, though the decisions they take will affect your working life and, ultimately, any problem can be brought to the attention of the governing body if all the other avenues have been exhausted first.

3.6

The head teacher

Also called the head, the head teacher is the one with overall responsibility for how a school runs. He or she may not actually teach, though some do, because much of a head's

job involves administration these days. In matters of discipline he or she is the ultimate authority and no child wants to be sent to the head. But in practice the Head Teacher is involved with pupils only as a last resort because class teachers are normally expected to deal with any problems that arise. Heads will usually be involved in assemblies and will be expected to take ultimate responsibility for children's pastoral care. (See page 11).

3.7

The deputy head and senior management

The day-to-day decisions about how a school is run are often taken by the senior management team. As well as the head, this will include the deputy head and certain other teachers: for example, those with the greatest teaching experience or those who have special responsibility for some aspect of pupils' pastoral care. The senior management team will meet regularly to make decisions which are often communicated to other teachers at staff meetings.

3.8

Subject teachers and postholders

Primary school teachers are expected to teach all subjects, though individual teachers will have responsibility for the teaching and development of a particular subject. However, the other teachers in the school will also teach that subject. The teacher with particular responsibility will simply set the tone for the way it is taught. Teachers with responsibility for a particular subject are called postholders and they will be responsible for developing the school's policy on that subject. (See page 23)

3.9

Class teachers and tutors

Children in primary schools are taught in a particular classroom by the same teacher all day long. So their main point of contact with the school is either the class teacher or you, the teaching assistant. Classroom teachers are expected to deal with everything, from the

HOW SCHOOLS WORK

everyday welfare of the children in their care, to the administration of school trips. The class teacher is the person that most parents would turn to first if they had a concern about their child.

Activity **What kind of ordinary questions do you think a class of nine-year-olds might ask a teaching assistant? Think about things like lunch boxes, missing items of clothing, homework and forgotten dinner money. Make up a list of the five questions that you think you might be asked and the answers you might give.**

1.

2.

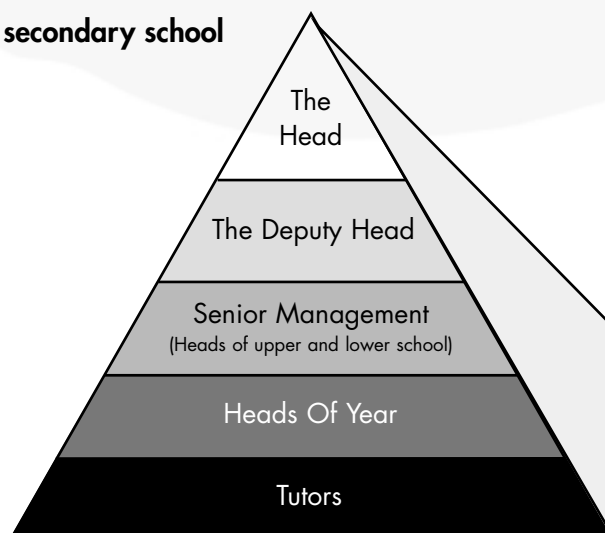
3.

4.

5.

Secondary school pupils are often put in tutor groups. This means that they have a teacher assigned to them who is known as their tutor. They meet with that tutor for a short time in the morning and afternoon. After that they go off to separate lessons. It's the tutor's job to take the register, deal with any problems the pupils have and to take responsibility for their pastoral care. (see page 11). The term "tutor" is also regularly used in middle schools and sometimes even in primaries.

Pastoral care in a secondary school



3.10

EAL/ESL/EMA teachers

Children whose first language is not English may be supported by teachers who specialise in this field. They are known by a number of different titles, depending on the precise details of their job description. They may be called Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) teachers (also known as EMAG and EMTAG teachers), English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers or English as a Second Language (ESL or E2L) teachers. They generally work individually or in small groups within a classroom or in partnership with the class teacher. They may also have other responsibilities such as arranging translation facilities at parents' evenings and putting up multi-cultural displays. (See page 20) EAL/ESL/EMA teachers work in schools which have high numbers of pupils whose first language is not English.

3.11

Special needs teachers

Special needs or special educational needs (SEN) teachers deal with a wide range of pupils who need support in particular ways. These might include pupils who have difficulty with communication or interaction, pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties, and pupils with sensory and/or physical impairment. Primary schools usually have one teacher who co-ordinates work with these pupils, known as the SEN Co-ordinator.

3.12

Peripatetic teachers

There are some teachers who work in more than one school. This is sometimes the case with music teachers, for example. They are peripatetic, which literally means wandering. Children may sometimes be taken out of a class individually or in small groups to see a peripatetic teacher, or that teacher may work in the classroom alongside the class teacher and teaching assistants.

3.13

Teaching assistants

And then there are the teaching assistants. There are different kinds and some have particular skills, such as bilingual teaching assistants who work in schools where there are a large number of children whose first language is not English. But most work generally to assist the teacher and support the pupils. Once fairly rare, teaching assistants are becoming an essential part of every classroom.

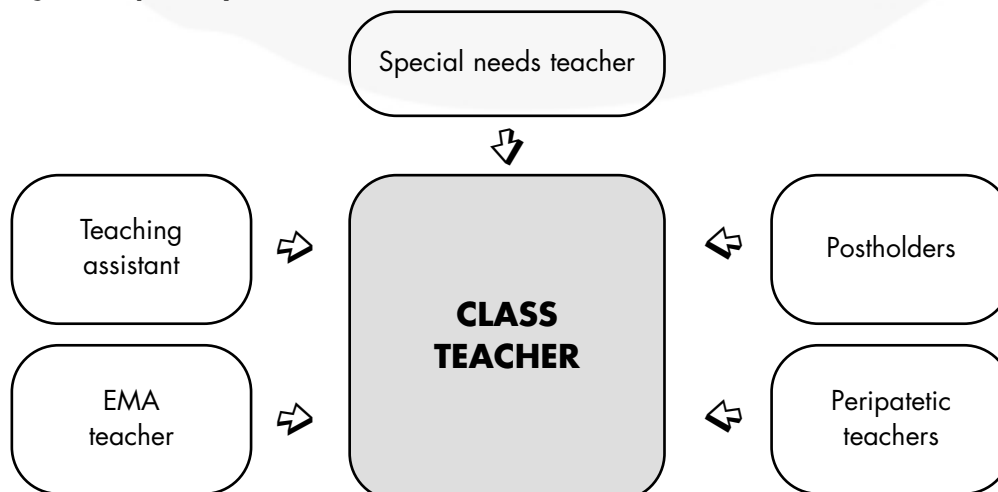
3.14

Supply staff

Staff who work on a day-to-day basis to cover absences or unfilled posts are known as supply staff. They may be provided by an education authority or by an agency and will include both supply teachers and teaching assistants.

It's not easy finding your feet if you're new in a school and sometimes other staff may not always be as helpful as you might hope. This is generally because they are so familiar with the school themselves that they do not realise how difficult it is for someone coming in for the first time to remember who everyone is, where different rooms are, what the times of lessons and breaks are and other basic information like this.

Teaching in the primary school



Someone who is working on a supply basis may encounter this problem on a daily basis. However, supply staff learn to adjust and there are certainly advantages to working on a supply basis. Supply staff will often say that they value the flexibility of their job.

3.15

Voluntary helpers

Voluntary helpers are usually members of the local community who give their time to help children with skills like learning. They are not paid but work for the satisfaction of helping others. Many teaching assistants begin as voluntary helpers and find that the experience of working in a classroom is easier and more enjoyable than they had anticipated. There is a new kind of helper called a mentor – someone from outside the school who works on a one-to-one basis with a pupil.

3.16

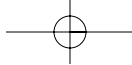
Non-teaching staff

Schools employ secretarial staff to process the vast amount of administration and paperwork that is involved in running a school. The school office is often the place to sort out minor problems and as a teaching assistant you may find yourself passing messages to or from the school secretary. As well as secretarial staff, schools employ meals assistants, playground supervisors, librarians, caretakers (also known as premises officers), cleaners and others.

3.17

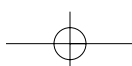
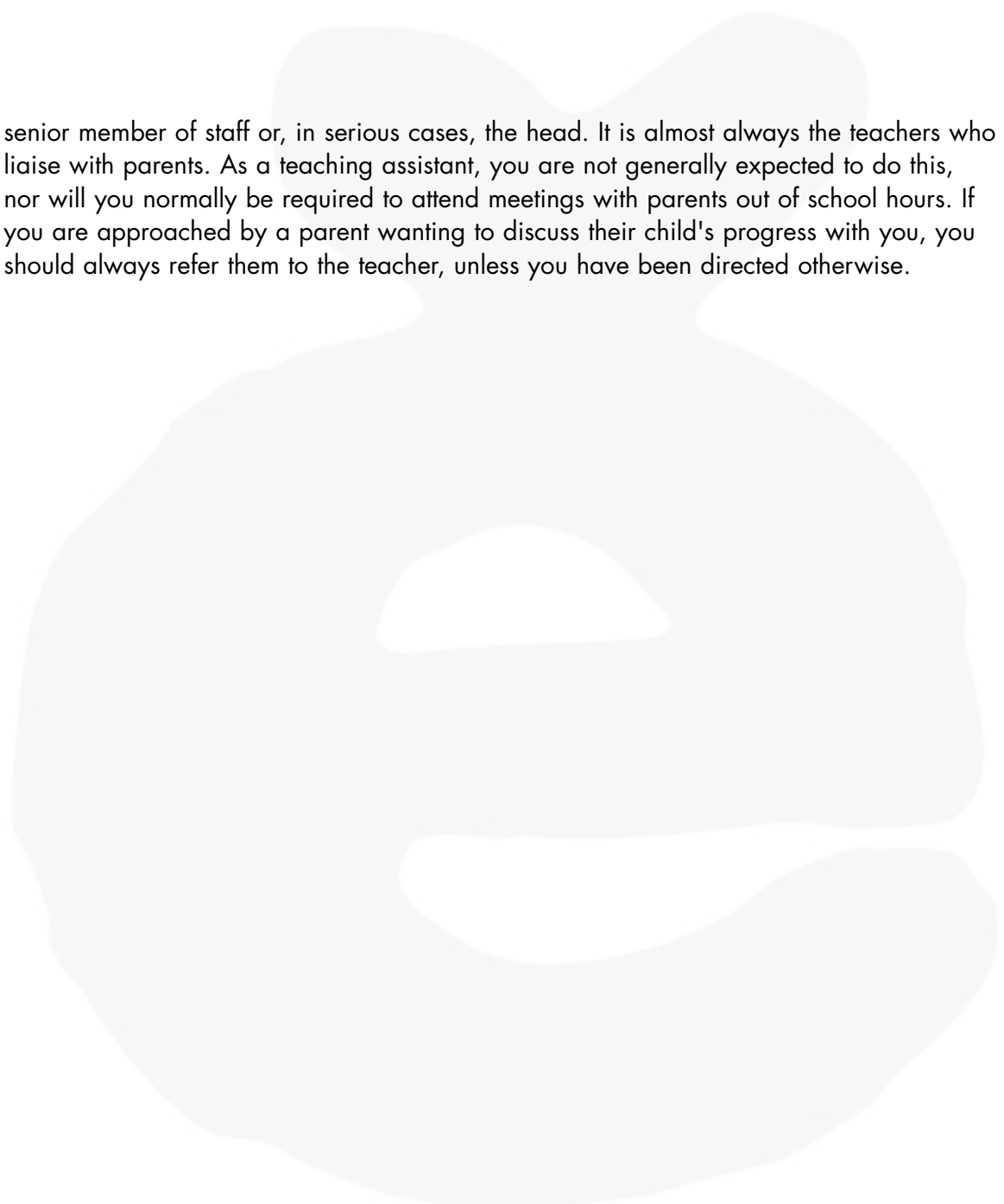
Parents

Parents play their part in schools. They are often active in fund-raising, they are represented on the governing body, they receive regular reports on how their children are getting on and they are invited to open evenings to meet the teachers and discuss progress. They may also be invited into the school in other ways, as members of a Parents' Association for example, and of course if there are particular difficulties with a child, parents will be asked to come in and discuss the matter with the class teacher, a



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senior member of staff or, in serious cases, the head. It is almost always the teachers who liaise with parents. As a teaching assistant, you are not generally expected to do this, nor will you normally be required to attend meetings with parents out of school hours. If you are approached by a parent wanting to discuss their child's progress with you, you should always refer them to the teacher, unless you have been directed otherwise.



*Survival information***3.18****PHOTOCOPIABLE PAGE**

When you arrive in a new school, you need to discover certain basic information quickly and write it down so that you will remember it. This checklist will help you get through that initial period of finding out how a school works.

Name and address of school

.....

.....School phone number

Head teacher's name

Deputy head's name

Class teacher's name

Other teachers/TAs you will be working with

Teacher responsible for Key Stage 1 pupils

Teacher responsible for Key Stage 2 pupils

Time staff are expected to arrive in schoolTime children arrive in classes.....

Morning playtime (upper school)(lower school)

Lunchtime (upper school)(lower school)

Afternoon playtime (upper school)(lower school)

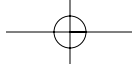
School endsYou are responsible for children until

Assembly is held onstartsfinishes

Meeting times

Names of children to remember

.....



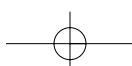
4

Learning in schools

This section covers

How children learn
The National Curriculum
Literacy and numeracy
The rest of the curriculum
Circle time
Assembly
The Literacy Hour
Reading

Spelling
Writing
The Numeracy Hour
Mental arithmetic
Facts about numbers
Helping with mental maths
Written calculations
The timetable



4.1

How children learn

Just as schools have changed considerably, so has our thinking about how children learn. Only a few decades ago, for example, there was a common view that children were simply to be filled up with facts and sent out from school to get on with their lives. Parents were often relegated to the sidelines when it came to supporting their children's development. All of this has now changed.

Here are five key points for you to think about.

1. *It is important to connect with children if you are going to engage them in learning.* This does not mean that you suddenly have to start knowing everything about current youth sport and music. But it will be helpful if you try to connect with things they already know. So, when working through sums to do with money, you might want to get them engaged by finding things that they are interested in buying.
2. *The mind works best when it is given the big picture first.* Have you ever tried to solve a jigsaw puzzle without using the picture on the lid? If so, you will understand how difficult this is. It is the same for learning. You need to give a child enough of a picture to allow them to see how the things they are learning fit in. Of course once you know where you are going, you can then break any task down into smaller chunks of activity.
3. *Effective learning involves understanding, not just facts.* Clearly it is important to know certain facts but real learning takes place when children begin to understand the concepts or patterns between different facts.
4. *Learning that is experienced is more likely to stick.* Children remember things that they have experienced more than those which they have simply been told about. Discovery is a key word in learning and teaching.

LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

5. *Learning is learnable.* It is possible to become better at learning. By suggesting ways of coping when a pupil gets stuck with a problem – asking for help or thinking back over previous experiences, for example – you can help pupils realise this.

Activity Select something that you are going to "teach" as part of your work as a teaching assistant. Use this model to break it down to the five stages outlined above. Make a note of what you would do for each of them.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

4.2

The National Curriculum

The curriculum is the name we give to what is taught in schools. All state-maintained schools, including special schools, teach the National Curriculum for the part of the United Kingdom in which they are situated. There are three different curricula for the UK. They are:

- the National Curriculum for England & Wales
- the Scottish Curriculum
- the Northern Ireland Curriculum

The National Curriculum for England & Wales is organised on the basis of four key stages (sometimes abbreviated to KS), according to the ages of the pupils.

Key stages of the National Curriculum for England & Wales:

Key Stage	Age	Year group
1	5 to 7	1 & 2
2	7 to 11	3 to 6
3	11 to 14	7 to 9
4	14 to 16	10 & 11

It consists of fourteen subjects, three of which are known as core subjects, the other eleven being referred to as foundation subjects. In Wales, Welsh is taught as a second language in secondary schools and in some primary schools. In Welsh-speaking schools it is the language through which all subjects are taught.

Core subjects

- English
- mathematics
- science

Foundation subjects

- design and technology
- information and communication technology
- history
- geography
- modern foreign languages (KS 3 & 4)
- art and design
- music
- physical education
- personal, social and health education and citizenship (KS 1 & 2)
- citizenship (KS 3 & 4)
- personal, social and health education (KS 3 & 4)

4.3

Literacy and numeracy

As part of the government's National Literacy and National Numeracy strategies, primary schools devote an hour a day each to literacy and numeracy since these two skills are fundamental to making progress in any subject. Pupils in a typical primary school spend the morning on literacy and numeracy and the afternoon learning other subjects. Teaching assistants are often employed on a part-time basis simply to help with the Literacy and Numeracy Hours (see below) because these are times when a lot of small group and individual support from adults is called for.

4.4

The rest of the curriculum

Most people agree that the primary school curriculum is a bit overcrowded. Even before the Literacy and Numeracy Hours came in, there was a lot to cover. Now there are two fewer hours a day to fit in science, history, geography, information and computer technology, art and design, design and technology, music, PE, religious education, personal, social and health education and any other things not covered already, like story time or circle time (see below).

In a secondary school, subjects are taught in individual blocks and a pupil deals with each subject on a lesson-by-lesson basis, moving around the school. A teaching assistant will often find that he or she is following a pupil throughout the school and enabling that pupil to access the curriculum.

4.5

Circle time

Circle time is something that is practised in many primary schools. It's a way of catering for pupils' pastoral needs. During circle time pupils sit in a circle and discuss with the teacher how things are going and any problems there might be. Typically, pupils might pass round a toy and the child holding the toy will speak.

In a secondary school pupils spend some with the teacher responsible for their tutor group (or form teacher) in their tutor group room (or form room). This time is used for registration, giving out notices, and it is an opportunity for pupils to bring any problems to the teacher's attention.

4.6

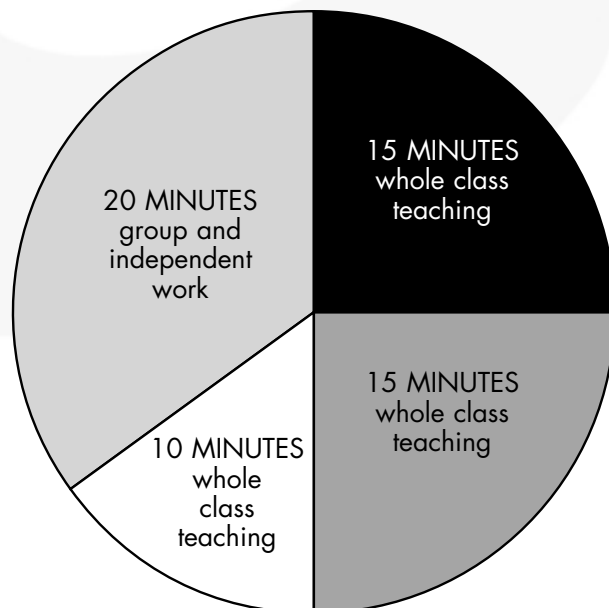
Assembly

Schools are required by law to have a corporate act of worship with some religious content, when the whole school gets together. In practice this may consist of an assembly with the head teacher reading a story which has some sort of moral. Assemblies are also used as opportunities for pupils to display their work to others, especially in the primary school. As a teaching assistant you might find yourself helping a group of pupils to give a demonstration of what they have learned.

4.7

The Literacy Hour

The literacy hour focuses on reading, writing and spelling. The way these activities are taught during this time has been set out in the government's National Literacy Strategy and is very structured. Even the way the time is divided up is expected to be the same all over the country. There are four sections which last 15, 15, 20 and 10 minutes. During the first two fifteen minute periods and the last ten minute period the class is taught as a whole. During the twenty minute period pupils break up for small group and independent work.



LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

During the Literacy Hour children work on three areas of study: word level, sentence level and text level. Word level work includes learning the sounds letters make when they are used together (known as phonics), recognising different words, learning how to spell them correctly and building up a vocabulary. Sentence level work includes learning how sentences are constructed, understanding grammar and punctuation. Text level work means reading and understanding passages of writing (texts) including fiction (stories) and non-fiction (factual writing).

Areas of study during the Literacy Hour

word level work	phonics, word recognition, vocabulary, spelling
sentence level work	grammar, punctuation
text level work	reading and understanding texts, answering questions about texts, writing texts

Pupils are also encouraged to develop listening skills and to practise planning, drafting and proof reading. This applies even to very young children who may be asked to put pictures in sequence to develop their story-telling skills.

4.8

Reading

As a teaching assistant working in a primary school during the Literacy Hour, you are likely to be involved in helping children with their reading. Three different kinds of reading activity take place. They are shared reading, guided reading and independent reading.

- Shared reading: The whole class or a group of children read a large text with a teacher.
- Guided reading: A set of books of the same text is read by a group of pupils who are all at a similar stage of reading. They read on their own while the teacher goes round and listens to each one.
- Independent reading: A child reads on his/her own.

4.9

Spelling

Activity One of the most important ideas behind the Literacy Hour, and something that is at the heart of how spelling and reading are taught nowadays, is phonics. As well as being taught the letters of the alphabet, pupils are taught about the sounds they make both individually and when used together. These are called phonemes. For example the phoneme "sh" make the sound at the beginning of ship. They are then taught spelling patterns. For example, the sound "ea" is the same in the words "bread", "thread" and "dead". So a part of your job as teaching assistant might be to encourage children to sound out words that they are unsure of and see if they can get the spelling right by thinking about other similar words.

Letters used together to make particular sounds are called phonemes:

sh	ship	shoulder	shove
ea	bread	dead	head
ow	cow	now	how

Activity Find out more about phonics and the teaching of spelling by talking to a teacher or by getting a book about the subject.

4.10

Writing

Pupils have to do a lot of different kinds of writing as part of the Literacy Hour. As a teaching assistant you might be involved in helping to keep them on task, helping them think of ideas or helping with spelling. You might also encourage them to read through their work afterwards, checking that it makes sense, that no words are left out and that the pupil is happy with the spelling, and encouraging them to think of ways to improve their work by adding more interesting vocabulary. Teaching assistants who are supporting pupils with writing difficulties may act as scribes, using the computer to put words on screen while the pupil dictates a story.

4.11

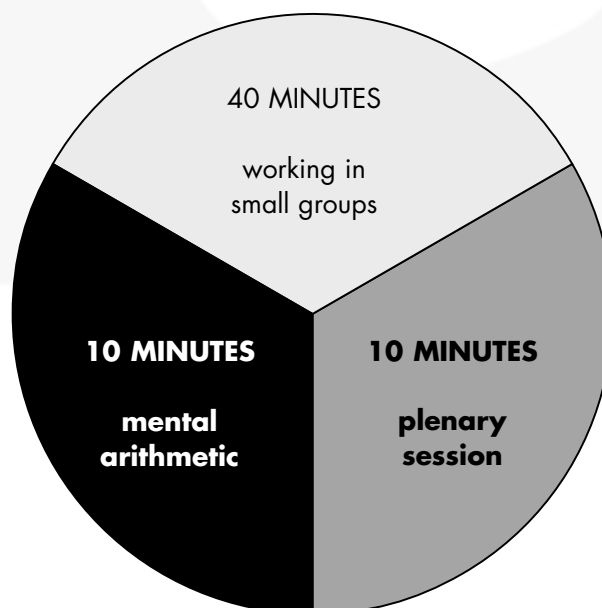
The Numeracy Hour

The Numeracy Hour is less rigidly structured than the Literacy Hour. Indeed, it may not even last an hour. But what has to be taught is set out very clearly in the government's National Numeracy Strategy. A teacher working with younger children might spend only forty-five minutes a day on numeracy.

But a typical numeracy session might consist of ten minutes spent on mental arithmetic, forty minutes with the class working in small groups and a ten minute plenary session. A plenary session is when the whole class reports back to the teacher, describing what they have learned and how they have gone about it.

In a good school you should be involved in numeracy planning. The Department for Education and Skills states that involving teaching assistants in planning is one of the factors that promotes a high standard of numeracy.

A typical Numeracy Hour



4.12

Mental arithmetic

Crucial to the thinking behind the Numeracy Hour is the importance of what used to be called mental arithmetic but is now more commonly known as mental calculation. It is the main focus of teaching up to Year 3. It means the ability to work with numbers in your head, remembering number facts without hesitation. This involves remembering facts about numbers. In some ways this is an old-fashioned approach to numeracy because it requires pupils to learn by heart.

But it goes further than that. It requires pupils to be able to use the four rules (adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing) to carry out operations in their head. They have to be able to know that $24 \div 4 = 6$ and that this means that $6 \times 4 = 24$.

The four basic mathematical operations

adding	subtracting	multiplying	dividing
+	-	x	÷

4.13

Facts about numbers

Of course that's not all there is to it. Pupils also have to use number facts they already know to help them work out new facts. An example the government gives is that they should be able to use the fact that $8 + 6 = 14$ to work out $80 + 60 = 140$. They should also be able to work out calculations like $81 - 26$ or 23×4 in their heads, and they should be able to solve problems such as, "Will I be able to buy three packets of crisps at 35p each for a pound?"

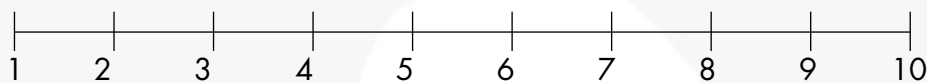
"Working in the Numeracy Hour, you become so much more numerate yourself. You find you're really noticing the way numbers work."

4.14

Helping with mental maths

As a teaching assistant working in the Numeracy Hour you might find yourself helping a child with counting, using operations (see above), using a number line or number square. A number line is exactly what it says, a line of numbers. A number square is a set of numbers in rows and columns, like the one below. Children use them both to work out relationships between numbers and to help them carry out mathematical operations.

Example of a number line and a number square



1	2	3	4	5	6
2	4	6	8	10	12
3	6	9	12	15	18
4	8	12	16	20	24
5	10	15	20	25	30
6	12	18	24	30	36

Activity

Talk to children you know. Ask them about the kinds of things they get asked to do in their heads. Get them to pretend to be a teacher and "test" you!

4.15

Written calculations

Once pupils have been firmly grounded in mental calculation, they begin to use written methods. They start by filling in boxes, e.g. $4 + 3 = \square$, then they move to the horizontal format, e.g. $56 - 3 = 53$, and beyond that to vertical calculations.

A vertical calculation

$$\begin{array}{r} 479 \\ - 236 \\ \hline = 243 \end{array}$$

Pupils start by using different methods of writing calculations, first using expanded methods that show systems of "carrying" or "borrowing" numbers and gradually refining the process. Eventually pupils move to what is known as a compact standard method. After that they move on to working with larger numbers and decimals.

4.16

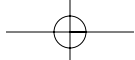
The timetable

Primary schools vary in the way they operate but a common model is to have the Literacy and Numeracy Hours in the morning, either side of the mid-morning break, and to devote the afternoon to dealing with the rest of the curriculum. Some of the afternoon might also be used for other additions to the curriculum (sometimes called extra-curricular activity) such as story time or circle time.

Typical Key Stage 1 timetable

9.00	Registration
9.15	Assembly
9.30	Literacy Hour
10.30	Playtime
10.50	Numeracy Hour
11.50	Handwriting
12.05	Tidying up
12.10	Lunch
13.25	Registration
13.30	Science and other (foundation) subjects
14.45	Playtime
15.00	Story time/circle time
15.25	Time for tidying up
15.30	School finishes

Key Stage 2 pupils are likely to have a shorter lunch break and no afternoon break.



Literacy Hour activity

4.17

Photocopiable page

Helping in the Literacy Hour

The activity sheet reproduced below has been adapted from resources produced for teaching assistants by the Department for Education and Skills as part of its Early Literacy Support Programme. Either on your own, or with colleagues, decide how you could use it to help children with their literacy.

WORD CARD

Name:

We are learning these words:

like

away

said

My first try

My second try

My third try

my fourth try

