

Making best use of teaching assistants:

Survey responses

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Background and aims of the survey

In February 2015, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) published a guidance report, *Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants*, written by Jonathan Sharples (Institute for Effective Education & EEF), Rob Webster (UCL Institute of Education) and Peter Blatchford (UCL Institute of Education). The guidance urges school leaders and teachers to strongly consider seven evidence-based recommendations for effective use of teaching assistants.

The seven recommendations

1. Teaching assistants should not be used as substitute teachers for low-attaining pupils.
2. Use teaching assistants to add value to what teachers do, not replace them.
3. Use teaching assistants to help pupils develop independent study skills and manage their own learning.
4. Ensure teaching assistants are fully prepared for their role in the classroom through out-of-class liaison with teachers.
5. Use teaching assistants to deliver high-quality one-to-one and small group support using structured interventions.
6. Adopt evidence-based interventions to support teaching assistants in their small group and one-to-one instruction.
7. It is important that what students learn from teaching assistants complements what they are being taught in the classroom.

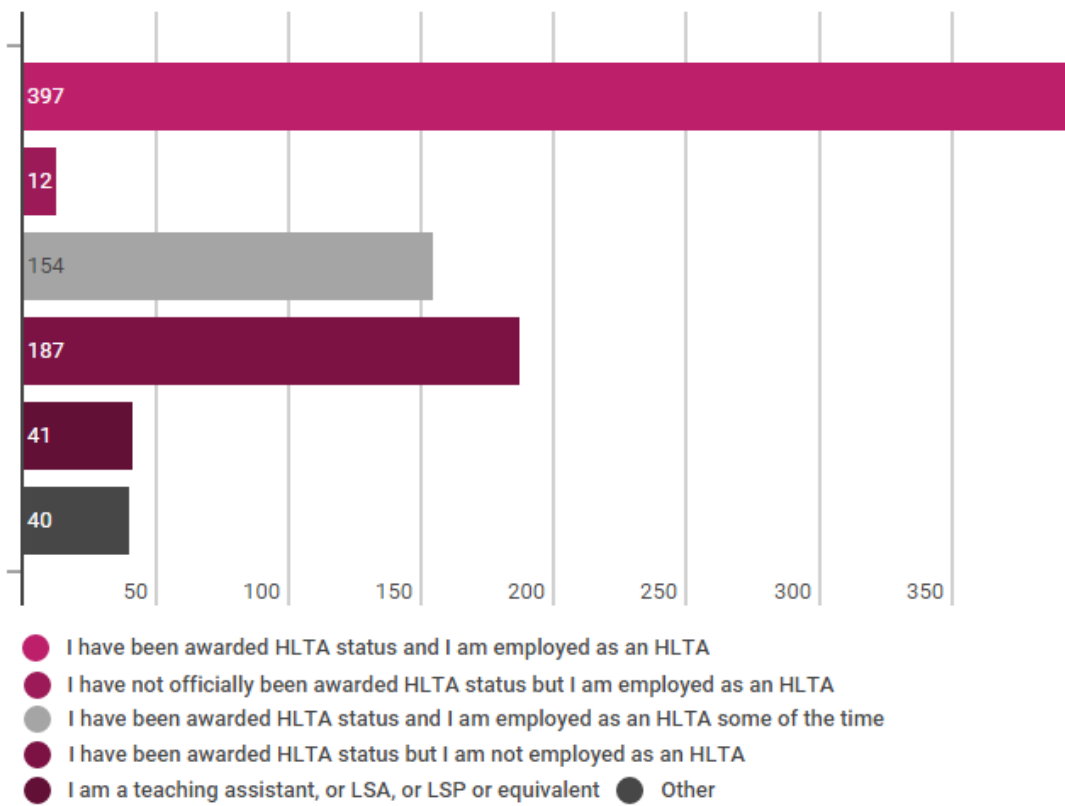
The aims of our survey

As a national provider of training and assessment for teaching assistants and Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs), and a member of the HLTA National Assessment Partnership, Best Practice Network has engaged with over 820 teaching assistants and HLTAs in a survey to focus upon the seven recommendations. The aims of the survey are to:

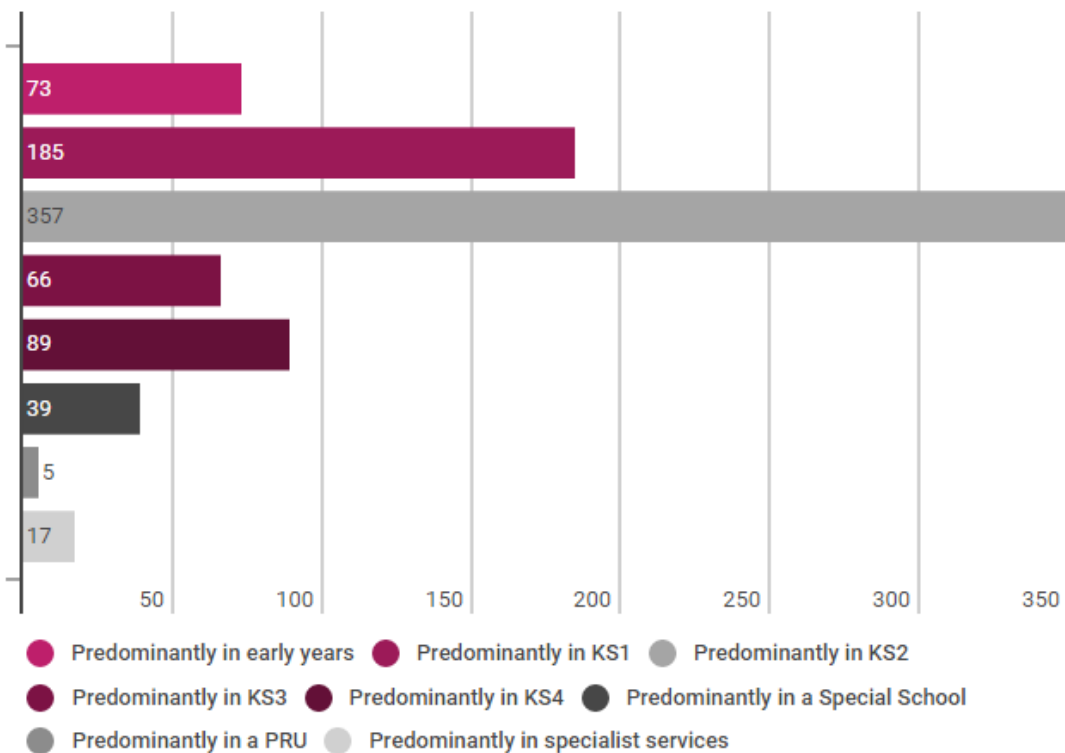
- raise awareness of the recommendations amongst school leaders, teachers and support staff
- provide a voice for teaching assistants and HLTAs
- generate discussions that promote improvements in the deployment of classroom-based support staff

Survey participant information

Participant roles



Where participants work

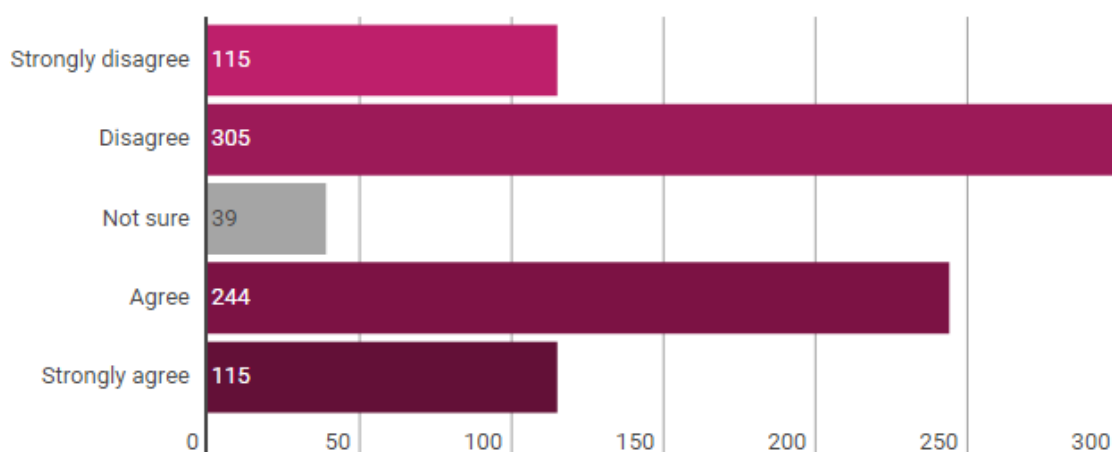


Outcomes of the survey

Recommendation 1

“Teaching assistants should not be used as substitute teachers for low-attaining pupils”

I am used as a substitute teacher for low attaining pupils

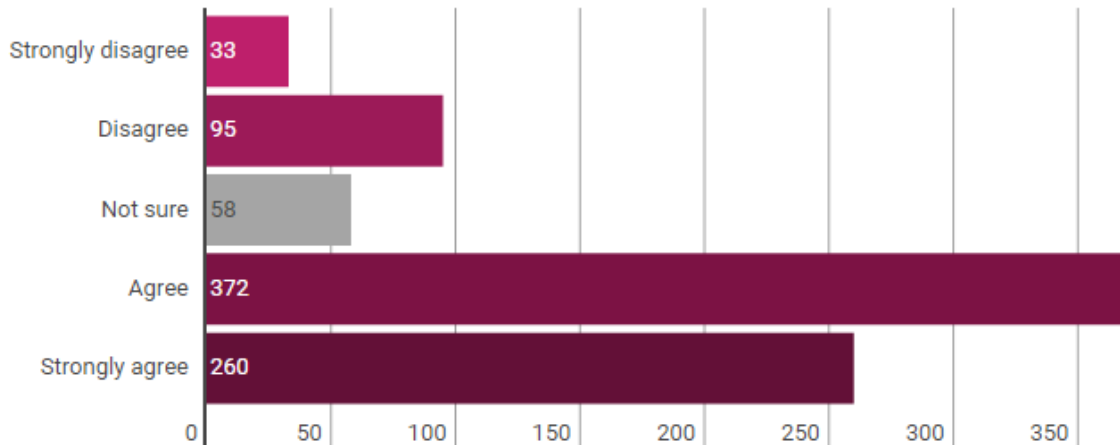


We consider this to be a key finding of the survey with respect to the high percentage (43.9%) who *agree* or *strongly agree* with this statement. Importantly, we believe that this is not necessarily an issue if the member of support staff is sufficiently trained to meet the needs of low attaining pupils. However, where these figures will be of concern, is where support staff do not have the necessary skills, knowledge or understanding to help low attaining pupils fulfil their potential. A follow up question for those who agreed or strongly agreed might be *“Do you feel you are used effectively as a substitute teacher or ineffectively as a substitute teacher for low attaining pupils?”*

Recommendation 2

“Use teaching assistants to add value to what teachers do, not replace them”

I add value to what teachers do, I do not replace them

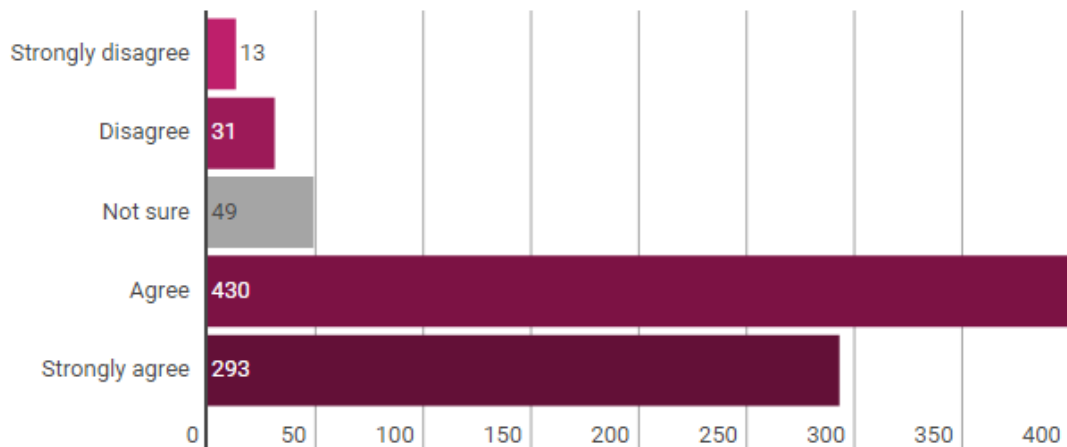


Whilst the vast majority of respondents (77.3%) *agree* or *strongly agree*, schools may wish to consider why 7% are *not sure* or why a significant minority, almost a quarter (22.7%) did not *agree* or *strongly agree* that they add value to what teachers do. We recognise that there are two questions present here; ‘adding value to what teachers do’ and ‘replacing teachers.’ It is worth considering whether the responses would have been different if the question had only focused upon one or the other.

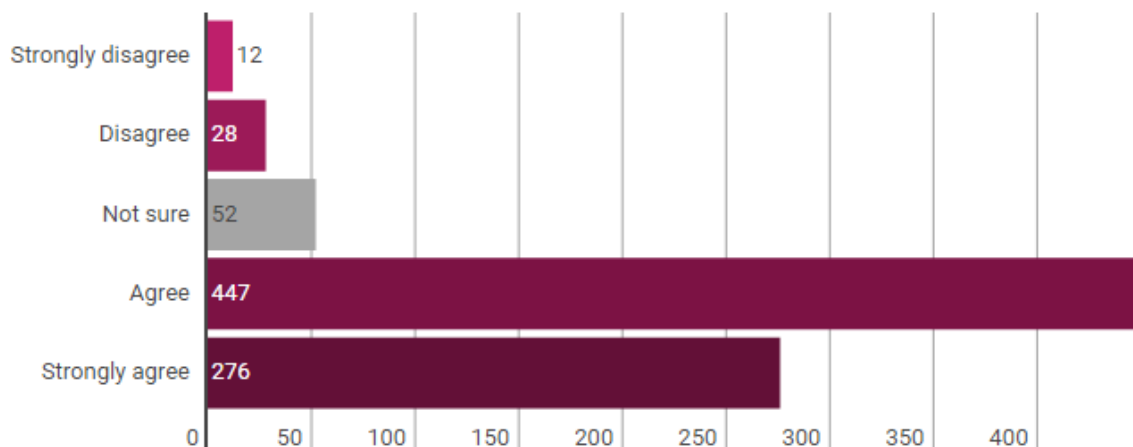
Recommendation 3

“Use teaching assistants to help pupils develop independent study skills and manage their own learning”

I help pupils develop independent study skills



I help pupils manage their own learning

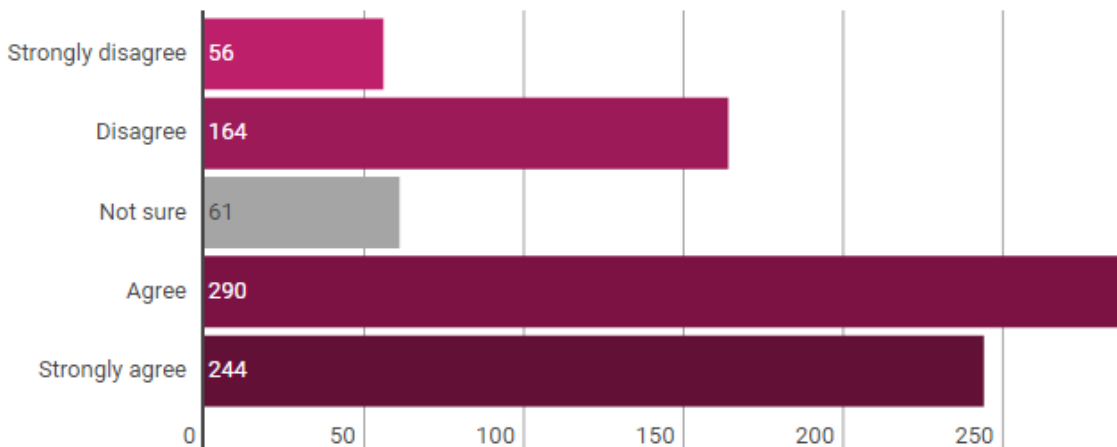


It is not too surprising that there is a strong correlation between the responses to these two questions. A further question worth consideration for schools is *“How can policy and practice be developed to ensure that all respondents agree or strongly agree with this statement (the majority of which strongly agreeing)”*.

Recommendation 4

“Ensure teaching assistants are fully prepared for their role in the classroom through out of class liaison with teachers”

I am fully prepared for my role in the classroom through out of class liaison with teachers

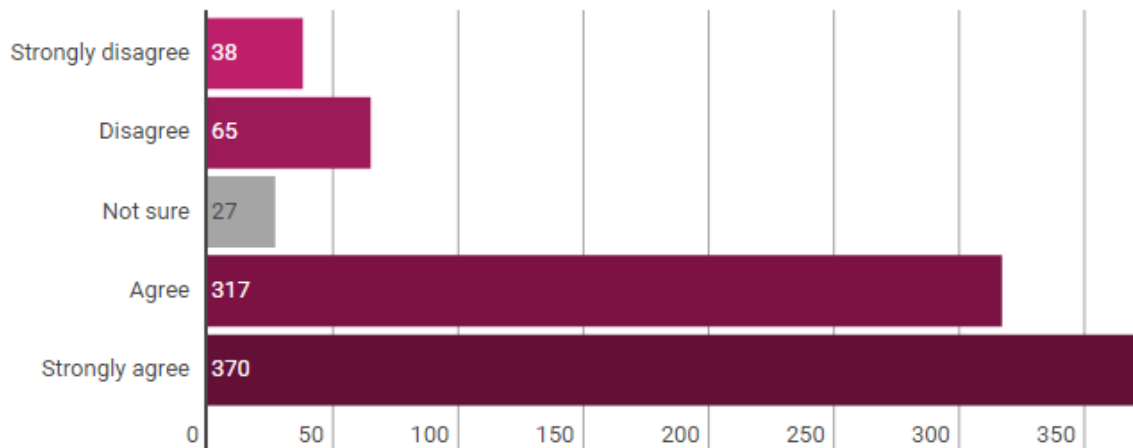


It is not too surprising that this particular recommendation is one that has a relatively low percentage who *agree* or *strongly agree* (65.5%). Time for discussion, reflection and planning is very often a challenge in many schools and perhaps we are to feel reassured that 65% do feel fully prepared. This does leave a significant minority who did not feel fully prepared which can only be to the detriment of the pupils they work with and is an area that schools can focus on for improvements.

Recommendation 5

“Use teaching assistants to deliver high-quality one-to-one and small group support using structured interventions”

I deliver high-quality small group support using structured interventions

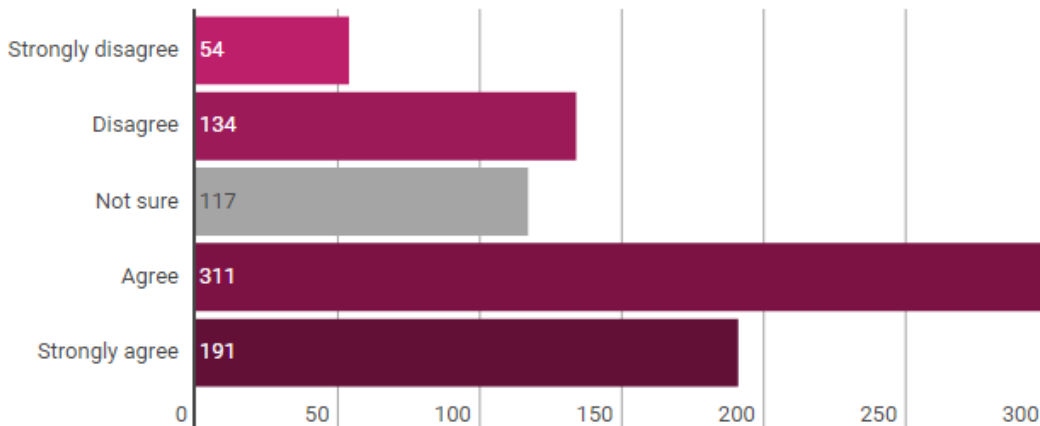


We recognise that it is difficult to draw conclusions from this particular question; it is not possible to determine whether the 103 participants (12.6%) who answered *strongly disagree* or *disagree* are stating that they do not deliver 1:1 and/or small group interventions at all, or that they do but don't consider these to be structured interventions that lead to high quality delivery. Notwithstanding this, it is reassuring that such a high percentage (84.1%) responded with *agree* or *strongly agree*. This suggests that schools are successful in selecting interventions and deploying support staff to good effect.

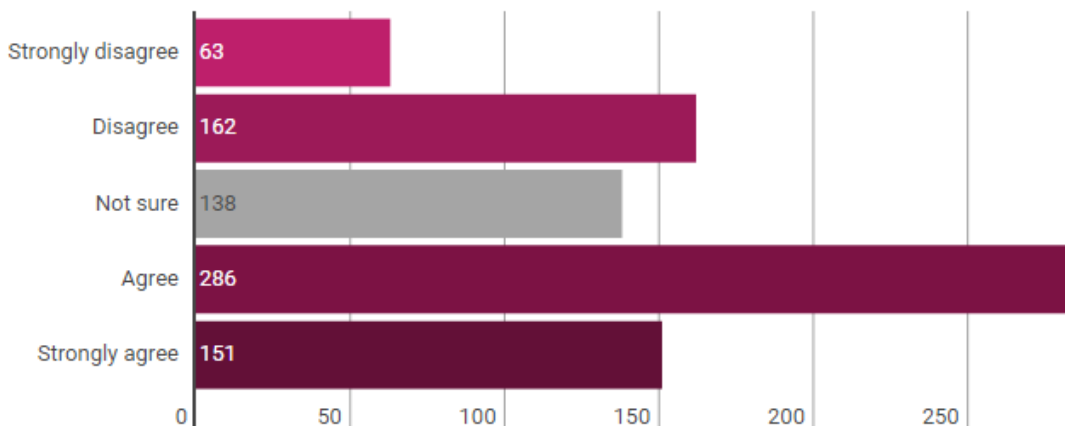
Recommendation 6

“Adopt evidence-based interventions to support teaching assistants in their small group and one-to-one instruction”

Evidence-based interventions are adopted by the school to support me in my small group instruction



Evidence-based interventions are adopted by the school to support me in my one-to-one instruction

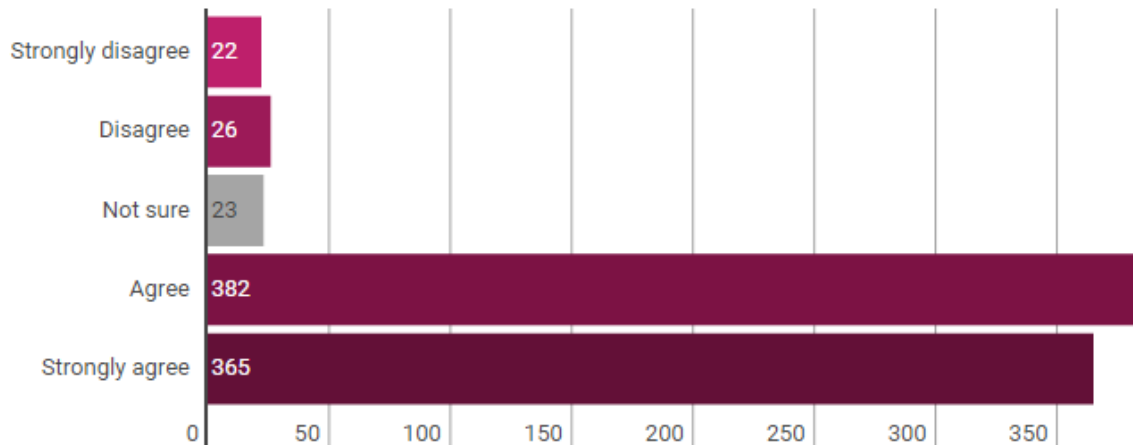


An interesting comparison to make here is that a total of 807 of the 830 survey respondents answered this question for ‘group instruction’ whilst only 800 survey respondents answered this question for one-to-one instruction. Schools should be encouraged to consider best use of classroom based support staff in terms of deployment for 1:1 support and small group support, taking into account research evidence of the effectiveness of particular strategies and interventions. This is where the [EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#) can be particularly useful to schools.

Recommendation 7

“It is important that what students learn from teaching assistants complements what they are being taught in the classroom”

What students learn from me complements what they are being taught in the classroom



A high percentage of agreement from respondents (91.3%) that suggests schools are achieving good levels of performance in ensuring that what children learn from TAs and HLTAs is complementary to what they are learning from the class teacher. We acknowledge that the vast majority of those who responded to this survey are already deployed as HLTAs or have gained the status and so one would expect that the respondents themselves would feel positive about this question. A key question for schools would focus on the extent to which all classroom based support staff either feel they complement what is taught in class or indeed, actually do complement what is taught in class.