DEPLOYMENT AND IMPACT OF SUPPORT STAFF IN SCHOOLS AND THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL AGREEMENT (RESULTS FROM STRAND 2 WAVE 1 – 2005/06)

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Background

The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project is the largest study of support staff yet undertaken and was commissioned by the DCSF and the Welsh Assembly Government in 2004. This Research Brief describes findings on: the deployment of all categories of support staff; the impact of support staff on teachers and teaching and pupil learning and behaviour; and the impact of the National Agreement (NA) on pupils, teachers and support staff. Results stem mostly from Strand 2 Wave 1 of the project, but some results from Strand 1 Wave 2 are also included. Data were collected over the school year 2005/6. The findings from Strand 1 Wave 1 have enabled this study to classify support staff into seven categories based on the similarities in tasks they perform: TA Equivalent, Pupil Welfare, Technicians, Other Pupil Support, Facilities, Administrative and Site.

Key Findings

- Over all categories of support staff, more time was spent supporting the school than pupils (3.1 vs 1.7 hours per day on average). But results from the timelogs, systematic observations, case studies and headteachers' comments show conclusively that classroom based support staff spend much of their time in a direct pedagogical role, supporting and interacting with pupils, and this exceeds time spent assisting the teacher or the school.

- Systematic observations showed that at secondary level classroom based support staff tended to work with individuals and with different pupils as they 'roved' around the classroom, while at primary level support staff tended to work with groups of pupils.

- With teachers, pupils were more likely to have a passive role, listening to them talk, while with support staff they tended to be the main focus of attention, and have more active and sustained interactions with them.

- The main ways that teachers felt that support staff affected teaching were through: 1. bringing specialist help, 2. allowing more teaching, 3. affecting curriculum/tasks/activities offered, and 4. taking on specific pupils.

- Teachers have a generally positive view about the effects of support staff on their job satisfaction and reduced levels of stress and workloads. Case studies showed that teachers' workloads had been reduced by support staff and teachers' work/ life balance had been improved through the introduction of PPA time. However, some gains were offset by extra responsibilities for the deployment of support staff and line management.

- Systematic observation data showed that in primary schools the presence of support staff led to more individual attention for pupils, less adult dealing with negative behaviour, but less interaction with teachers. For secondary schools the presence of support staff meant that there was less dealing with negative behaviour and more teaching by adults. There was more individual attention from adults for pupils with SEN, and less interaction with teachers for the School Action and SEN groups.

- Systematic observations showed that the presence of support staff had benefits in terms of more pupil active interaction with adults, and more classroom engagement.

Teachers felt that support staff affected pupils' learning and behaviour by taking on specific pupils, bringing specialist help to the teacher & classroom, having a positive impact on the pupils' behaviour, discipline, and social skills, and allowing individualisation / differentiation.

- Support staff had a positive effect on the pupils' approach to learning (e.g., in terms of distractibility, motivation, completing assigned work and following instructions from adults), but only for the youngest pupils (Year 1).

- Generally, schools believed support staff had a positive impact on pupil attainment, behaviour and attitudes but the process of changing support staff job descriptions, contracts, hours of work, inclusion and role definitions was far from complete. Goodwill of support staff was clearly indispensable to the remodelling process.

- The increased pedagogical role of class based support staff was emerging and being defined through practice in individual schools. This was largely pragmatic, with little evidence of any pedagogical considerations playing a part in deployment decisions.

- In comparison with Wave 1, headteachers showed less goodwill and enthusiasm toward the National Agreement. Though not commonly expressed, headteachers' financial concerns seemed more acute, with worries about financing remodelling and sustaining new staffing and management structures.

1. Introduction

In the past few years there has been a huge growth in the range and number of support staff in schools. A major context for policy and resourcing involving support staff in schools was the introduction in January 2003 by the Government, local Government employers and the majority of school workforce unions, of the National Agreement (NA): 'Raising Standards and Tackling Workload'. It set out a number of measures designed to continue to raise pupil standards and tackle teacher workload, including a drive to reduce unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy, and a review of support staff roles.

Previous research provided only limited information on the deployment and impact of support staff in schools, and this study was designed to help fill these gaps.

The two main aims of the DISS project were:

1. To provide an accurate, systematic and representative description of the types of support staff in schools, and their characteristics and deployment in schools, and how these change over time;

2. To analyse the impact or effect of support staff on teaching and learning and management and administration in schools, and how this changes over time.

The DISS project comprises two Strands. Strand 1 addresses the first aim above and is providing comprehensive and reliable information on support staff in schools in England and Wales over a key five year period (2003-8). It involves three biennial questionnaire surveys - the Main School Questionnaire (MSQ), the Support Staff Questionnaire (SSQ), and the Teacher Questionnaire (TQ). Results from Strand 1 Wave 1 are provided in Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell, Webster & Haywood (2006) [Research Report RR776; Research Brief RB776] and results from Strand 1 Wave 2 in Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell and Webster (2007) [Research Report RR005; Research Brief RB005]. Strand 1 was also the basis for a classification of support staff into seven categories: TA Equivalent, Pupil Welfare, Technicians, Other Pupil Support, Facilities, Administrative and Site.

This report provides results from Strand 2 Wave 1 (with some additional material from Strand 1 Wave 1) and describes findings on:

1. *The deployment of all categories of support staff* in terms of a description of activities across the whole school day (a 'macro' level description based on support staff 'timelogs'), and a description of the deployment of classroom based support staff (a 'micro' level description based on systematic observations of pupils and support staff).

2. *The impact of support staff on*:
   a. *Teachers and teaching*: in terms of teaching, teacher job satisfaction, stress and workloads (from teacher views); and teacher and support staff interactions with pupils (from systematic observations of individual attention, classroom control, amount of teaching and amount of interaction with teachers);
   b. *Pupil learning and behaviour*: in terms of pupil engagement in class and active classroom behaviour and interactions with teachers (from systematic observations); pupil positive approaches to learning in terms of confidence, motivation and ability to work independently and complete assigned work (from teacher ratings); and pupil learning and behaviour (teacher views);

3. *The impact of the National Agreement (*NA) on pupils, teachers and support staff (based on case studies and headteacher views).

2. Methodology

Strand 2 Wave 1

2.1 Research design
Strand 2 Wave 1 used a multi method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, to obtain a detailed and integrated account of the deployment and impact of support staff. It had

three main components: the Main Pupil Support Survey (MPSS), a Systematic Observation Component, and a Case Study component. It focused on pupils in Years 1, 3, 7 and 10 during the academic year 2005/6. The overall Main Pupil Support Survey took place in a sample of 76 schools. A sub-sample of MPSS schools also took part in case study visits (n=47), whilst others took part in systematic observation visits (n=49).

2.2 Main Pupil Support Study (MPSS)
The main purpose of the MPSS was to allow systematic, quantitative analysis of whether support provided for pupils was impacting on pupil attitudes to learning, controlling for other possibly confounding factors (such as pupil prior attainment and Special Educational Needs status). Multilevel regression statistical analyses were used. Information was collected from teachers on the percentage of time additional support was provided for each pupil in core subjects in total, e.g., by a TA, Learning Support Assistant (LSA).

Teachers were asked near the end of the school year to assess whether pupils' positive approaches to learning had changed. The dimensions were distractibility, task confidence, motivation, disruptiveness, independence, relationships with other pupils, completion of assigned work, and follows instructions from adults. For each dimension, teachers rated whether pupils had 'improved', 'stayed the same' or 'deteriorated'. The analysis involved 304 pupils in Y1, 195 in Y3, 197 in Y7 and 205 in Y10.

2.3 Systematic Observation Component (SO)
Systematic observations were carried out in Years 1, 3, 7 and 10. The observations were on a sample of eight pupils per class in three categories: 1. pupils with a statement of SEN or registered as School Action or School Action Plus (two pupils observed), 2. pupils with some support (i.e., get extra help but who are not in the SEN group, e.g, children with EAL) (two pupils observed), and 3. pupils selected at random from the class list (four pupils observed). In order to provide a clearer difference between the groups, as well as make sample sizes more equal, in statistical analysis comparisons were made between pupils in three groups: 1. with SEN and School Action Plus, 2. Pupils on School Action, and 3. pupils who were neither School Action nor SEN. There were 686 pupils observed in total. Visits lasted 4 days and observations were made in maths, English, science and Welsh lessons. Multilevel logistic regression analyses were used to assess the effect of the amount of support of observation variables, controlling for other possibly confounding factors

The observation schedule provided a quantitative account of the frequency of pre-specified categories of pupil behaviour, including the amount of time pupils spend with in three social 'modes' - with adults (teachers or support staff), with other children and when not interacting. Within each of these three 'modes' were categories that covered work, procedural, social and off task activity. Observations

were conducted on each 'target' child in turn in blocks of 10 ten-second time intervals. There were 34,420 ten-second observations in total. Categories also covered support staff activity in the same classrooms. Additional information on how much support the pupils received over the last year was also collected to supplement teacher ratings when data were missing.

2.4 Case Study component
The main purpose of the case studies was to provide an interpretive and grounded analysis of factors relating to support staff deployment and impact in schools. The case studies focused on the school rather than individual classrooms, and on all support staff in schools, not just those with a direct role in relation to pupil learning. Each case study visit lasted three days and involved semi-structured interviews and observations in teaching and non-teaching contexts. Interviews were conducted with headteachers, teachers, support staff and pupils. There were 496 in total. These were augmented by field notes, comments and summative judgements by researchers. All of these were organised in terms of the main headings or themes.

Strand 1 Wave 2

2.5 Timelogs
In this report we also include data from Strand 1 Wave 2 timelogs. The timelogs were sent out as part of the second Support Staff Questionnaire (SSQ) in 2006. The aim was to build on the earlier results presented in the Strand 1 Wave 1 report and provide a more precise account of time spent on 91 tasks. Staff ticked which tasks were carried out in each 20 minute period across one school day. A total of 1670 responses were used in analysis, which equated to 62% of the total SSQ responses.

2.6 Headteacher views on the National Agreement: The (MSQ) Question 6.
The Strand 1 Wave 2 Main School Questionnaire (MSQ) was sent to schools in the autumn term, 2005. At the end of the questionnaire, headteachers were asked to provide any information on changes to the employment and deployment of their support staff since the summer term of 2004 – the point at which the National Agreement began its second of three phases of implementation. They were asked to give details on the range of tasks taken on by support staff, and any new staffing appointments or roles that had been created as a result of meeting the policy. Of the 2071 questionnaires returned, 868 (42%) contained a response to this open question.

2.7 Teachers' views on pupil learning and behaviour, teaching, and level of job satisfaction, stress and workload. Strand 1 Wave 2 Teacher Questionnaire (TQ)
The Strand 1 Wave 2 Teacher Questionnaire (TQ) contained open questions about how support staff had affected pupil learning and behaviour, and their teaching, and how support staff had affected the teacher's level of job satisfaction, stress and

workload. Questionnaires were sent in 2006 to four teachers in each school who responded to the MSQ A total of 1,297 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 16%, a little down on the 20% response rate from the Wave 1 questionnaire.

3. Results

3.1 Deployment of Support Staff

3.1.1 'Macro' description of all support staff
In previous reports we have studied the deployment of support staff, e.g., in terms of activities undertaken, and this was the basis for the classification of support staff into seven categories. In this report we provide a more fine grained analysis of support staff deployment in terms of two different forms of methodology.

The first provides what we have called a 'macro' analysis in the sense that it stems from timelogs completed by all categories of support staff. This had an advantage over the earlier data in that it provides a detailed account of the length and frequency of activities covered over a whole day (and not just their occurrence). The range of tasks were grouped into six categories, according to who was supported and in which way:

1. Support for teachers and/or the curriculum;
2. Direct learning support for pupils,
3. Direct pastoral support for pupils,
4. Indirect support for pupils;
5. Support for the school (administrative/ communicative),
6. Support for the school (physical environment).

Over all categories of support staff, the most prevalent of the six tasks was support for the school in two ways: administrative/communicative activities (1.7 hours per day on average), followed by support for the school (physical environment) (1.4 hours). Overall, support staff spent more time supporting the school than pupils (3.1 vs 1.7 hours).

Support staff varied in how many of the six task categories they covered – at the extremes pupil welfare staff covered all the six types of activity listed above, while facilities staff covered just two categories - support for the school (administrative/ communicative) and support for the school (physical environment). Administrative staff had the longest day (7 hours on average) while the shortest time was for 'other pupil support' staff (2.4 hours).

Two support staff categories were of particular interest. TA equivalent staff covered five of the task categories (the only category not covered was support for the school (administrative/ communicative), indicating they carried a wide range of activities. However, in contrast to the picture for support staff as a whole, TA equivalent staff spent by far the greatest amount of time on direct learning support for pupils (3.8 hours per day), and this exceeded work directly supporting the teacher. These results are consistent with other

results presented below, from the systematic observation and case study components, and headteacher accounts taken from the MSQ, and show conclusively that classroom based support staff spend much of their time in a direct pedagogical role, supporting and interacting with pupils, and this exceeds time assisting the teacher or the school.

Not surprisingly, the tasks carried out by administrative staff were primarily classified in the support for school (administrative/communicative) category. This took up six and a half of the 7 hours per day recorded for administrative staff. They also spent a little time in support for the school (physical environment) and support for teachers and the curriculum. In Strand 1 Wave 2 we saw that administrative support staff had largely taken on the routine clerical and administrative tasks given up by teachers. These can be seen as more broadly supporting the administrative processes of the school and offering indirect support for teachers, as opposed to direct support for teachers in terms, for example, of curriculum based activities.

3.1.2 'Micro' description of activities of classroom based support staff
The second form of analysis provided a 'micro' analysis in the sense that it described activities of support staff not through self report but detailed moment by moment observations. There were two types of analysis. The first recorded broad activities of all support staff in the classroom at the same time as the child based observations and these were divided in broad terms into those involving contact with pupils, whether working with individuals, groups or the whole class, and those when the support staff was not directly working with pupils, e.g., when working on materials, marking or talking to the teacher. We found that classroom based support staff were twice as likely to be working with pupils in comparison to not working directly with pupils.

Though support staff were observed in a range of different activities, the single most common individual activity overall was working with one pupil (29% of their time). This was particularly true of secondary schools. The next most frequent activity was listening to the teacher teach (20%), followed by working with pupils by walking around the whole class (16%) – what might be termed a 'roving' role – and again most true of secondary schools. The next most common activity was working with a group of pupils (15%) and this was much more common in primary schools. These results therefore show that at secondary level classroom based support staff tended to work with individuals and 'rove' around the classroom, while at primary level support staff worked with groups of pupils.

The second type of analysis of deployment also came from the systematic observation analysis but this stemmed from the 10 second, moment by moment, descriptions of individual pupils. This therefore provides a systematic and objective

description of support staff behaviour as experienced by pupils. Results showed a marked difference in the interactions pupils had with teachers and support staff. Pupils were six times more likely to be the focus of attention with support staff compared to teachers. Conversely, with teachers pupils were more often in 'audience' mode, i.e., listening to the teacher talk to all pupils in the class or group, or singling out another pupil. In comparison with pupils with SEN and School Action, the main group of pupils (i.e., not School Action and without SEN) interacted more with teachers, while the pupils with SEN and School Action spent relatively more time interacting with support staff. The amount of individualised attention from support staff increased with level of pupil need but all received more from support staff than teachers. Pupil interactions with support staff were also more active and more sustained, and it was the SEN pupils who engaged in most of this kind of behaviour.

Overall, then, we have found from detailed observations that pupils have very different types of contact with teachers and support staff. With teachers they are more likely to be one of a crowd, and this applies particularly to the pupils without SEN or School Action status, while with support staff they tend to be the main focus of attention, and have more active and sustained interactions with them, and this applies particularly to pupils with higher levels of need. Given that we also found in the systematic observation results that the amount of contact with teachers tended to decline when support staff were present, there are grounds for conceiving of interactions between support staff and pupils as an *alternative,* as much as an *additional,* form of support.

3.2 The impact of support staff on teachers and teaching

3.2.1 The impact of support staff on teaching
In the earlier CSPAR study we found that teachers felt that support staff made a positive contribution to schools (Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown and Martin, 2006). In Strand 1 Waves 2 we were able to assess more specifically the degree to which teachers felt support staff had made a significant contribution to their teaching and levels of job satisfaction stress and workload. Analysis of over 1000 questionnaires from teachers showed that they were mostly positive about the impact of support staff on teaching. The main ways that teachers felt that support staff affected teaching were by bringing specialist help (25% of responses); allowing more teaching overall (14% of responses); affecting the curriculum/tasks/activities offered (6% of responses); and taking on specific pupils (6% of responses).

We also found that support staff had led to positive effects on teacher's job satisfaction (88% of teachers), and decreases in stress and workload (77% and 59% of teachers respectively). There was a good deal of overlap between outcomes in the reasons for the beneficial effect of support staff.

From a teacher's point of view, support staff have led to a decrease in workloads, mainly through taking over clerical and routine tasks. In their own words, this allowed teachers to be 'released' to focus on pupils and teaching. This is in line with results also from Strand 1 Wave 2 on the extent to which teachers still carried out a list of 26 routine clerical and routine tasks. At Wave 1 in 2004 it was noticeable that there appeared to have been very little transfer of tasks. However by Wave 2 (in 2006) there was a clear change with most tasks no longer being performed by teachers.

In a minority of cases support staff were reported by teachers to have led to more work because teachers had to do more planning and preparation. However, the positive effects of support staff seemed to far outweigh this.

3.2.2 Impact of support staff on adult pupil interactions: systematic observations
We were also able to address the impact of support staff on teachers through the use of detailed systematic observations. These results indicated that the presence of support staff had a beneficial effect on interactions in two ways. First, support staff allowed more overall *individualisation of attention* from adults, as seen in the greater amount of individual attention ('focus'). Second, support staff presence seemed to have benefits in terms of *classroom control*, with reductions in the amount of time dealing with negative behaviour. These benefits are similar to those found in studies of the effect of class size reductions on pupil behaviour (Blatchford, Bassett and Brown, 2005).

There were several differences between primary and secondary schools and differences between pupils with and without SEN. In primary schools all pupils seemed to benefit from support staff presence in terms of: more individualised attention for pupils, and reduced need for classroom control. At secondary level all pupils benefitted again in terms of reduced need for classroom control and also more overall teaching. For School Action/SEN pupils there was more individualised attention. This last result reflects other results from the study which indicated that the deployment of classroom based support staff varied between the two sectors. While support staff in primary schools were more likely to be classroom based and interact with other pupils in a group, as well as those they were supporting, in secondary schools support staff tended to interact more exclusively with the pupil they were supporting. In such circumstances it is no surprise if the supported pupils showed most effects.

However, the presence of support staff also led to supported pupils having less overall contact with the teacher and less individual attention from them (at secondary level), showing that individualization of attention was provided by support staff at the expense of teachers.

These observation results are valuable in that they provide systematic data on the effects of support staff on interactions, but results are still at a general level, necessary when conducting on the spot

observations. Though some effects of support staff have been found, it is also important to examine in more detail the dialogue between classroom based support staff and pupils, and contrast this with teacher–pupil dialogue. This will be conducted in Strand 2 Wave 2 (2007/8).

3.3 Impact of support staff on pupils

3.3.1 Impact of support staff on pupil engagement and active interaction with adults: systematic observations

These results indicated that the presence of support staff had an effect on pupils in two ways: 1. support staff seemed to allow pupils to have a more *active role in interactions with adults*, as seen in the extent of beginning interactions, responding to adults and sustaining interactions over 10 seconds. 2. However, as with results on individual attention, the amount of active interactions with teachers was reduced as a result of support staff presence, showing that it was support staff who were involved in active interactions, at the expense of interactions with teachers.

There was also evidence that the presence of support staff increased the amount of *classroom engagement*, as seen in the increase in 'on task', and the reduction in 'off task', behaviour.

There were again several differences between primary and secondary schools and differences between pupils with and without SEN. In primary schools all pupils seem to benefit from support staff presence in terms of a more active pupil role in interaction with adults. Children with no SEN showed more classroom engagement. For secondary schools there was more total on task behaviour for School Action and SEN groups, and less total off task behaviour for the SEN group only. There is therefore a strong suggestion that the presence of support staff at both primary and secondary school is of particular benefit in improving the attention of children in most need.

3.3.2 Impact of support staff on pupil behaviour and learning

We analysed over 1000 questionnaires from teachers and they were mostly positive about the impact of support staff on pupil behaviour and learning. They felt that support staff affected learning/behaviour through taking on specific pupils; bringing specialist help to the teacher and classroom: e.g., technology skills, counselling, careers advice; having a positive impact on the pupils' behaviour, discipline, social skills or behaviour; and by allowing individualisation and differentiation. One can see again that the benefits of support staff, from a teacher's point of view, stem largely from their function of taking on particular pupils and allowing the teacher to spend more time teaching the rest of the class.

It is noticeable that teachers tended not to refer to pupil attainment and learning, when addressing the benefits and effects of support staff, even when they were specifically asked to consider effects on pupil

behaviour and learning. Instead we found that three of the main factors concerning effects on pupils are more about effects on teachers and teaching than pupil outcomes. Even when asked to address pupil outcomes, teachers therefore tend to see the positive effects of support staff on teaching and on themselves.

3.3.3 Impact of support staff on pupils' approach to learning

We addressed the impact of support staff on pupil approaches to learning through analysis of teacher ratings of their progress over the school year. The results showed a generally positive effect of support on improvements in pupils' behaviour for the youngest age group (Year 1). Increases in the amount of support led to improvements over the school year in: pupil distractibility, motivation, disruptive behaviour (SEN group only), working independently (for a medium level of support), completing assigned work and following instructions from adults. Thereafter results were not so clear or consistent.

Though it is impossible to be sure, there may be a developmental explanation for these findings in the sense that support is likely to be of most value to younger pupils, who are finding their feet, and where support staff can have a positive effect.

3.4 The wider pedagogical role of support staff in terms of lesson and curriculum delivery

Overall, therefore, we have found that support staff have had a beneficial impact on teachers and pupils in several different ways. Teachers felt that they had had a positive impact on teacher job satisfaction, stress and workload, and on teaching. Though it is not possible to be absolutely sure about causal direction, when dealing with correlational data, it seems fair to conclude from results presented here that support staff also had a positive effect in terms of increased individualisation of attention, pupils' active role in interaction with adults, easier classroom control, and increased classroom engagement. With more support there was a beneficial effect for the youngest pupils studied (Year 1) in terms of positive approaches to learning (e.g., in terms of motivation, working independently, completing assigned work and following instructions from adults).

It seems likely that the positioning of support staff close to students they support is the reason for the positive effect, at least with regard to the outcomes considered so far. In this way support staff can help limit instances of negative behaviour and help pupils remain engaged without interrupting the flow of the teacher's delivery to the class. They can help to clarify and translate information and instructions being given by the teachers. This no doubt explains the positive effect on behaviour and participation. This is in line with studies of support provided for pupils with SEN, e.g., Werts et al (2001) and Loos, Williams and Bailey (1977) found that classroom engagement and on task behaviour increased when support staff were close to pupils (with disabilities). However, there are also concerns that proximity

may have unintended consequences. It was found, for example, in the systematic observation study that the presence of support staff led to supported pupils having less contact with the teacher, particularly less individual attention and less active interactions with the teacher (at secondary level). Some researchers and commentators have been concerned that increased support, though beneficial in some ways, may not translate into better pupil learning (Ofsted, 2006; Loos et al, 1977). It is important therefore to examine the impact of support staff across a number of areas: behavioural, attitudinal and also learning and attainment before a general judgement about the impact of support staff on pupils can be made. This will be done in Strand 2 Wave 2.

The findings presented here suggest the value of more detailed study of what might be called the 'wider pedagogical role' of support staff. This would situate the interactions between support staff and pupils and teachers into a wider context, by examining the planning of lessons, support staff role in the lesson, support staff understanding of the purpose of the task and their role, their pedagogical and subject knowledge in relation to the lesson, and communication and feedback between support staff and teachers. This will also be undertaken in Strand 2 Wave 2.

3.5 Impact of the National Agreement: results from the case studies

3.5.1 Teacher workload
Teachers' workloads were the first target of National Agreement and the case studies found that in many schools the 25 tasks had been largely transferred to support staff. As we also found in Strand 1 Wave 1, this process of transfer was found to have been started in some schools well before the statutory obligation was introduced in 2003, whilst in others the process was recent and, to an extent, on-going. Some tasks were commonly being retained by teachers for professional as well as pragmatic reasons – classroom displays being the most frequently reported example. However, teachers' work-life balance had been improved more through the introduction of PPA time than through task transfer, since it reduced the need for them to work in their own time. The great majority of instances reporting workload decrease were in primary schools. The provision of cover for absent teachers – the third strand of the National Agreement – was found to be largely done by support staff, with a much smaller proportion still in the hands of teachers.

Teachers were clearly appreciative of support staff help in reducing workloads. However, the impact varied across types of school and across individual schools within each type. Primary, secondary and special schools were each at different stages of moving in the direction of the reforms, before they became statutory. For example, primary and special school teachers were not in the habit of covering for absent colleagues, as there were no 'free periods' in their timetables, whereas their secondary colleagues had traditionally been called upon to 'give up' such periods. So, the impact of implementing the cap on time spent covering lessons had been different in each type of school. Apart from this historical situation, which pre-dated the National Agreement, individual schools had often made changes as part of their own attempts to improve the management of the school, so when the reform was introduced, they were already some way down that road. The case studies and the MSQ also indicated that in some local authorities, the Agreement has been implemented alongside other policies connected with remodelling and workforce restructuring.

One particular aspect of the changes has been the increasing involvement of teachers in taking charge of the day-to-day deployment of support staff who worked with them and being responsible for the formal aspects of their line management or their performance reviews or appraisals (e.g., 36% of teachers line managed TA Equivalent staff). This had added new tasks to the workload of teachers, which by their nature were more demanding of skills and knowledge than the mainly administrative tasks removed from them in the first phase of the National Agreement. In this regard, however, the Strand 1 Wave 2 report (2007) made clear that three quarters of teachers had not had any training to help them work with support staff in the classroom.

3.5.2 Pupil outcomes
Improvements to pupil outcomes – in terms of attainment, behaviour and attitudes – was the second broad aim of the National Agreement and the case studies attempted to address them through observations and interviews. The situation was different across the school types, as many special schools had a long established pattern of one-to-one support for pupils, whilst primary and secondary in-class support staff tended to be deployed more with several different groups or individuals. The overall impression created by field work was that although classroom based support staff had many opportunities to have an impact on pupil outcomes most of the evidence available was indirect, impressionistic and consequently hard to interpret. The general view in schools was that support staff did have an impact on pupil attainment, behaviour and attitudes; the problem headteachers faced was proving it.

3.5.3 Support staff outcomes
Results revealed the wide range of experiences support staff were having across the schools included in the case studies. One common thread was change in support staff roles but the nature and the rate of the changes varied enormously and there was still a lot to be done in adjusting to such things as job descriptions, contracts, hours of work, inclusion of support staff and role definitions.

The case study results, as well as data from Strand 1 Wave 2, show that much of the improvement in teacher's workloads (in terms of routine and clerical tasks), which the National Agreement addressed,

had shifted from teachers to administrative staff. Class-based support staff were also found to be coping with work in excess of their paid time, as they became more drawn into lesson planning, preparation and feedback, in direct and indirect support of the teachers with whom they worked. Though many support staff were positive about their posts, this expanded role, whilst welcomed by many individuals, was not often matched with higher rates of pay, increased hours of paid work, inclusion in meetings and decision-making, or opportunities for training in preparation for their new roles. In practice, the goodwill of support staff was indispensable in making the policy work.

It was in classrooms where the issues of role clarity, boundaries, overlap, collaboration and sharing were seen most sharply, as a consequence of deploying support staff to work directly, rather than just, as in the past, indirectly with pupils.

Teachers were largely left to define their own roles and those they assigned to the support staff deployed to work with them in lessons. Practice was approached in a pragmatic way, rather than on the basis of pedagogical considerations, and varied widely, with responsibility levels and degrees of autonomy ranging across a wide scale.

The redistribution of tasks had left some administrative and technical staff unsure over their responsibilities. For some support staff, confusion over role clarity had led to a reduction in their self-confidence and sense of value within the school team.

3.6 Headteacher views on the deployment of support staff in the context of the National Agreement

Headteachers' accounts showed that the process of role change had produced a range of outcomes in schools. The emphasis of what the policy has demanded of schools had shifted from non-teaching (administrative) tasks to those of a pedagogical nature. Furthermore, there had been a growth in the deployment of some support staff to lead whole classes as well as their work supporting lower ability pupils and those with SEN. The widening of support roles had also extended to pastoral responsibilities.

A comparison of headteachers' views in Strand 1 Wave 1 and 2 suggests that much of the goodwill and enthusiasm regarding the National Agreement had been reduced over the course of its implementation. Though not generally common, the nature of headteachers' financial concerns seemed more acute than at Wave 1. Comments on finances were often made in connection with broader concerns with the National Agreement, particularly regarding financing remodeling and sustaining new staffing and management structures.

4. Future plans for the DISS project

The second wave of Strand 2, which will take place over 2007/8, will include a replication of the MPSS study on impact (i.e., collecting information from schools on support for pupils and relating it to measures of pupils' approaches to learning and academic progress), but the systematic observation and case study components will be adjusted to provide more detailed analysis of 1. the interactions between support staff and pupils, to better understand how pupils' errors are dealt with, how much and what kinds of 'scaffolding' take place, and how the adults assess pupils' difficulties/ misunderstandings; and 2. the wider pedagogical role of support staff in terms of lesson and curriculum delivery. It will focus in particular on classroom based support staff because with a few exceptions the results from other parts of the study suggest most key issues relate to such staff.

The other remaining component of the DISS project is the third wave of Strand 1 (i.e., the third MSQ, TQ and SSQ) which will take place over the 2007/8 school year.

The two Strands together are providing much needed, comprehensive and systematic information on the deployment and impact of support staff over a crucial period (2004-2008).

References to the DISS Project
Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A., Webster, R., & Haywood, N. (2006) The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff in Schools. Report on the Findings from Strand 1, Wave 1. Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Research Report 776
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Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A., and Webster, R. (2007) The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff in Schools: Report on findings from the second national questionnaire survey of schools, support staff and teachers (Strand

1, Wave 2, 2006). Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Research Brief 005
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RB005.pdf

Reports and Research Briefs for the Support Staff (DISS) project can be accessed through:
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/programmeofresearch/projectinformation.cfm?projectid=15254&resultspage=1

The web site of the Support Staff (DISS) Project can be found at: www.supportstaffresearch.org.uk

Additional Information

Copies of the full report (DCSF-RR027) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.

Cheques should be made payable to "DfES Priced Publications".

Copies of this Research Brief (DCSF-RB027) are available free of charge from the above address (tel: 0845 60 222 60). Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at www.dcfs.gov.uk/research/

Further information about this research can be obtained from Jim Foley, 2F Area B, DCSF, Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road, Darlington, DL3 9BG

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