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## The educational experiences of pupils with a Statement for special educational needs in mainstream primary schools: results from a systematic observation study

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Findings from the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project showed that day-to-day support for pupils with special education needs (SEN) in mainstream UK schools is often provided by teaching assistants (TAs), instead of teachers. This arrangement is the main explanation for other results from the project, which found TA support had a more profound, negative impact on the academic progress of pupils with SEN than pupils without SEN. There is, however, surprisingly little systematic information on the overall support and interactions experienced by pupils with the highest levels of SEN attending mainstream schools (e.g. those with Statements). The Making a Statement project was designed to provide such a picture in state-funded primary schools in England (e.g. schools attended by children aged between five and 11). Extensive systematic observations were conducted of 48 pupils with Statements and 151 average-attaining 'control' pupils. Data collected over 2011/12 involved researchers shadowing pupils in Year 5 (nine- and 10-year olds) over one week each. The results, reported here, show that the educational experiences of pupils with Statements is strongly characterised by a high degree of separation from the classroom, their teacher and peers. A clear point to emerge was the intimate connection between TAs and the locations, in and away from the classroom, in which pupils with Statements are taught. The currency of Statements – a set number of hours of TA support – is identified as key factor in why provision leads to these arrangements, and appears to get in the way of schools thinking through appropriate pedagogies for pupils with the most pronounced learning difficulties.

**Keywords:** inclusion; pupil experience; Statement; teaching assistants

### Background

Since the 1980s, the number of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) educated in mainstream UK schools has greatly increased. The 1981 Education Act gave legal weight to the recommendations of the Warnock inquiry into SEN and also introduced a system of statutory assessment for pupils in England with the highest levels of need. Assessment leads to a 'Statement' setting out a pupil's SEN alongside the provision required to meet those needs.

The Statementing process is overseen by local authorities (LAs), which have the responsibility for carrying out government functions at a regional level (e.g. large

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cities or counties). LAs determine provision, by drawing together evidence and recommendations from education, health and social care professionals known to the child. Provision is taken to mean provision that is additional to, or otherwise different from, that normally available to children in mainstream settings.

More recently, whilst the combined number of pupils in state-funded primary schools in England identified as having an SEN has fallen from 20% to 18.5% (around 780,000 pupils), the proportion of pupils with Statements has remained stable at 1.4% (58,535 pupils) (DfE 2012a).

The long term increase in the number of pupils with SEN being included in mainstream schools has been accompanied and assisted by an increase in the number of classroom- and pupil-based support staff, known as teaching assistants (TAs) or learning support assistants (hereon referred to in this paper as TAs<sup>1</sup>). The number of full-time equivalent TAs in mainstream schools in England has almost doubled since 2000 to 199,000. TAs now comprise 32% of the primary school workforce<sup>2</sup> (DfE 2012b). Expenditure on TAs in 2010/11 constituted around 16% of the £17.1 billion spent by primary schools, or £2.8 billion – a third of what was spent on teachers (DfE 2012c). Paraprofessionals have increasingly become a feature of education systems elsewhere in the world (Giangreco and Doyle 2007), but it seems that no country has gone as far in its use of TAs as the UK territories.

On the face of it, investment in TAs seems worthwhile; primary headteachers report that one of the main reasons for the increase in TAs (and other support staff, such as bilingual support assistants) is that inclusion policies would be impossible to implement without them (Blatchford, Russell, and Webster 2012). However, results from the longitudinal Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project, which was designed to provide much needed information on the use and impact of TAs, raised serious questions about the way TAs have become closely connected to policies of including pupils with high-level SEN in mainstream schools.

Results from the DISS project showed that TAs in English and Welsh schools have a predominantly pedagogical role, spending most of their time supporting pupils with SEN and lower-attaining pupils (Blatchford, Russell, and Webster 2012). This has obvious benefits because it allows hard-pressed teachers to devote their time to the rest of the class, in the knowledge that the most needy pupils receive potentially valuable individual attention from TAs.

Yet, the DISS project also found that there are serious unintended consequences. There was a negative relationship between the amount of TA support received and the progress made by pupils, and in particular those with the highest levels of SEN (Webster et al. 2010). The more support pupils received from TAs, the less progress they made, and this was not explained by pupil characteristics, such as prior attainment, SEN status or income deprivation. This finding was found over four primary school year groups and three secondary school year groups.

Drawing on extensive data collected through observations, surveys, interviews and lesson recordings, the main explanation for these results appears to be the way TA-supported pupils spend less time interacting with the teacher and become separated from the teacher and curriculum. Effectively, the least qualified staff (TAs) have been assigned primary educator status for the pupils in most need. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that pupils with SEN tend to make less progress than their peers (Blatchford, Russell, and Webster 2012). In a similar way, Klassen (2001) found pupils with Statements for specific literacy difficulties or dyslexia, and who were assigned TA support for literacy, made less progress than their unsupported peers.

The situation described above raises both significant concerns about the support given to pupils with SEN and concerns about fairness and discrimination in education. As Giangreco et al. (2005) have argued, it is unlikely that we would allow such an educational regime for pupils without SEN.

### **This paper**

There is nothing new about a concern with the education of pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties. There has, for example, been a good deal of interest in appropriate pedagogies for pupils with SEN (Gersten and Edwards Santoro 2007) and on school policies of inclusion and school leadership (Ainscow 2007). However, there is surprisingly little systematic research on some of the more fundamental organisational aspects of the support in place for pupils with SEN, and specifically those with Statements.

One exception to this lack of research is the early observation study of pupils with SEN in 1981: the One in Five study (Croll and Moses 1985). This research was concerned with describing the behaviour and interactions of pupils with SEN (as defined by teachers) and how these differed from pupils without SEN. Though it is valuable, this research represents a picture that is now 30 years out-of-date. Results from other notable observation studies, such as ORACLE (Galton et al. 2002), School Matters (Mortimore et al. 1988) and PACE (Pollard et al. 2000) and the Class Size and Pupil Adult Ratio (CSPAR) project (Blatchford, Edmonds, and Martin 2003), describe life in the primary classroom, but do not differentiate sufficiently between the experiences of pupils with and without SEN.

Together, these studies show that, since the 1980s, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of time pupils, in general, spend in whole class teaching contexts; that is, as part of the class audience. The amount of time spent working in groups has also increased, whilst time spent working alone has fallen. We also know from the DISS project that pupils with SEN are often withdrawn from the mainstream class to work with TAs (Blatchford, Russell, and Webster 2012). However, exactly how much time they spend away from the classroom is unknown. Given the impact TA support has on pupils with SEN, there is a clear need for more information on the locations and social contexts within which these pupils are taught and learn.

Following the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 and the national literacy and numeracy strategies in 1998, teachers increasingly moved away from working with individuals to working at the class level (Pollard et al. 2000; Galton et al. 2002). So, whereas the proportion of time pupils spend interacting with the teacher is, overall, greater today than it was 30 years ago, it is predominantly of a one-way nature (teacher-to-pupil).

The rapid rise in TA numbers in primary classrooms over the 2000s, on the other hand, has increased the amount of one-to-one and group-based interaction with pupils. As we have said, the DISS project showed that it tends to be pupils with SEN – and in particular those with Statements who are allocated TA support as part of their provision – who interact with TAs more frequently than pupils without SEN (Blatchford, Russell, and Webster 2012). As Giangreco et al. (2005) note, such support ‘can create physical or symbolic barriers that interfere’ with interactions with classmates. As far as we know, there have been no systematic studies of the frequency of interactions pupils with high-level SEN have with their

peers. Therefore, more fine-level information is needed on just how much interaction pupils with Statements have with TAs, and what implications this has for the amount of interaction they have with teachers and with their peers.

The DISS project results also drew attention to the learning tasks given to pupils with SEN, relative to the tasks given to pupils without SEN. Data on pupil tasks, however, were collected from the perspective of TAs, providing a partial picture of the situation; therefore, systematic pupil-level data is needed. A Statement often suggests that a separate or differentiated curriculum is required, and many recommend one or more intervention programmes be put in place to help develop basic literacy, language and/or numeracy skills. So an important issue, on which there is no up-to-date information, is whether the activities pupils with Statements undertake in core subjects are sufficiently accessible or differentiated to meet their needs.

### ***The policy context***

This paper reflects the situation in the UK, specifically England. SEN systems in Wales and Northern Ireland are broadly similar to England, although both territories have their own codes of practice. Separate arrangements exist in Scotland.

A key feature of Statements is that provision is often expressed in terms of a number of hours of TA support. Hours have become the accepted currency of Statements, with rather less attention given to the nature of the provision itself. It is little wonder that this is the case, given that parents and schools describe the Statementing process as a long, stressful battle with the local authority (Jones and Swain 2001; Hartas 2008; Lamb 2009; Penfold et al. 2009). Once a Statement is awarded and hours specified, parents and schools have a tangible return on their effort, which they rigorously defend.

Winning this battle is too often seen as the conclusion of the process rather than just one phase in providing what is needed for the child. The 2009 Lamb Inquiry into parental confidence in the SEN system found parents were broadly satisfied with their child's current placement (though less so with the assessment process). Yet in a 2006 report, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), which regulates education in England, concluded that there was a misconception that support from TAs ensures good quality intervention or 'adequate progress'. Results from the DISS project show Ofsted's concerns to be well founded.

At the time of writing, the function of the Statement is at the heart of the English government's plans to bring about 'the biggest shake up of SEN in 30 years' (Ward and Vaughan 2011), prompted in part by the Lamb Inquiry and by further concerns raised by Ofsted (2010) regarding the over-identification of pupils as having SEN 'when they simply need better teaching and pastoral support' (8).

Over and above any current policy changes, a broader justification for the research reported in this paper is that there is always likely to be a group of pupils who will have difficulties in accessing everyday classroom learning experiences. Therefore, obtaining systematic empirical evidence of what pupils with Statements experience moment-by-moment, day-to-day, in terms of the contexts in which they learn, their interactions and packages of support, is essential to improving practice. Without being clear about what these pupils experience, we cannot make effective judgments about which provisions, and the structural and classroom processes through which they are delivered, work best.

### ***The Making a Statement project***

The results reported in this paper are drawn from the Making a Statement (MAST) project, which was set up to obtain systematic data on the composition of the every-day educational experiences of primary-aged pupils with Statements, relative to pupils without SEN. As such, the study's main research questions were:

- (1) What proportions of the school week do pupils with Statements spend interacting with teachers, TAs and peers, and in which locations and social contexts do interactions take place?
- (2) To what extent are tasks for pupils with Statements differentiated from, or different to, tasks for pupils without SEN?

### **Methodology**

To answer the research questions, a particular fine-grained approach to classroom observation was adopted. Detailed observations were carried out involving 48 pupils in Year 5 (nine- and 10-year olds) who had a Statement for either moderate learning difficulties<sup>3</sup> (MLD) or behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). These categories of SEN were selected as they are commonly occurring, and were also likely to detect school support factors connected to problems with learning and classroom engagement. Other categories of SEN (e.g. hearing or visual impairment) were more likely to be affected by, and be seen by schools, in terms of within-pupil factors.<sup>4</sup>

The research team, in collaboration with colleagues in six LAs, identified pupils who met the above selection criteria. With the help of the LAs, we approached the headteachers of the schools these pupils attended to recruit them for the study. We followed up expressions of interest from headteachers, who then facilitated the process of securing permission from parents/carers and obtaining the necessary consents and ethical clearances. The school visits were carried out in the 2011/12 school year.

A researcher shadowed a Statemented pupil for a week, collecting data using an extended version of the data collection tools used in the DISS project (Blatchford et al. 2009, 2012). The MAST study's multi-method approach combined quantitative systematic observations from the pupil's perspective, with contextual data drawn from interviews and general qualitative observations drawn together in the shape of a detailed pupil-based case study. The tools formed part of a tested methodology, adapted to serve the purposes of the study.

Findings from the analysis of the case study data, which address a second aim of the MAST study – stakeholders' perceptions of provision – are presented in Webster and Blatchford (in preparation). In this paper, we report results from the study's main method of data collection, the systematic observations.

### ***Systematic observations***

The systematic observation schedule described the activities of pupils with Statements and control pupils on a minute-by-minute basis. The aim was to provide a rigorous, objective and replicable description of behaviour. The method used has its origins in earlier schedules used in the earlier CSPAR and DISS projects (Blatchford, Edmonds, and Martin 2003; Blatchford et al. 2009). It used a category

system determined prior to data collection with explicit and rigorous definitions and criteria for classifying behaviour and contexts. Observers recorded behaviour in the moment according to explicit decision rules.

Despite criticisms of the validity of data collected using systematic observation (Delamont and Hamilton 1986), this method can be valuable where data are needed on relatively easily observed activities and behaviours (Croll 1986; McIntyre and Macleod 1986). This method was used in the One in Five study.

### Sample

Observations were coded at minutely intervals over the course of the week. Overall, across Statemented and control pupils, there were 38,865 data points collected over 648 h of classroom observation. On an average, there were 810 data points per pupil. The equivalent of 13.5 h of classroom observation was conducted over a school week. A total of 886 lessons were observed, with an average duration of 44 min.

*Pupils with statements.* Observations were made of 48 pupils who were in Year 5 and who had a Statement for either MLD or BESD. Five pupils had a somewhat more complex composition of difficulties, of which one of the main presenting needs was either MLD or BESD. A breakdown of the pupil sample is shown in Table 1.

Data from the Department for Education on pupils in English schools collected during the school year, our research was conducted, (DfE 2012a) show that over this period, there were 58,535 primary school-aged pupils (those aged between five and 11) who had a Statement (1.4% of all pupils attending state-funded primary schools). Just under 10,000 pupils (17%) were in Year 5. Of these Year 5s, 74% were boys and 26% were girls. Nationally, of all primary pupils with Statements, 78% are white and 22% are defined as being in another ethnic group.

As can be seen from the data in Table 1, our sample was very consistent with this national picture. Primary-aged pupils with Statements known to be eligible for free school meals were over-represented in our sample (46 vs. 29% nationally). Although not shown in Table 1, pupils whose first language is known or believed to be one other than English were under-represented (6 vs. 15% nationally).

As our aim was to track pupils with Statements for particular categories of SEN, our sample cannot be seen as representative of all pupils with Statements. We note, however, that MLD and BESD are two of the most commonly occurring categories of SEN under which Statements are awarded. Nationally, pupils with

Table 1. Pupils with statements.

	Statement type		Gender				Ethnicity				Eligible for free school meals	
			Boy		Girl		White		Other			
MLD	29	60%	18	50%	11	92%	24	65%	5	45%	10	45%
BESD	14	29%	14	39%	0	0%	12	32%	2	18%	8	36%
Composite	5	10%	4	11%	1	8%	1	3%	4	36%	4	18%
Total	48	100%	36	75%	12	25%	37	77%	11	23%	22	46%

Statements for MLD and BESD comprise, respectively, 11 and 13% of all primary-aged pupils with Statements. The most commonly occurring type of SEN for which Statements are awarded is speech, language and communications needs (SLCN) (24%). The main reason we chose not to focus on this group of pupils was because there is a distinct psychological literature on them (e.g. Lindsay, Dockrell, and Strand 2007) and because colleagues from the Institute of Education, London and the University of Warwick were undertaking a study of provision for pupils with SLCN<sup>5</sup> over the same period as the MAST project was conducted.

*Control pupils.* Observations were also collected on ‘control’ pupils. The aim was to observe a sample of pupils – average in the class in terms of their academic attainment – in order to provide a comparison and point of reference for the results on the pupils with Statements. Teachers were asked to identify at least three average-attaining pupils in the Statemented pupil’s class, and one of these pupils was used as the control for each in-class observation. These pupils were rotated to extend the numbers observed, and also to accommodate possible absences. For the sake of simplicity, control pupils were matched to the pupils with Statements only in terms of gender. Limiting the criteria for matching in this way ensured that there were no difficulties in ensuring a sufficient quota of control subjects for observations over the week. There were 151 control pupils in the sample: 115 boys and 36 girls.

*School staff.* Researchers noted the composition of teachers and TAs present during each observation. In 73% of observations, there was one teacher present, and in 82% of observations there was at least one TA present. Interestingly, the historical classroom arrangement (i.e. one teacher, no TAs) occurred in only 14% of observations – a tangible sign of how much the presence of TAs has become an established feature of classroom life. The most common compositions of adults across the observations were one teacher and one TA (30%), and one teacher and two TAs (25%).

*Schools.* Researchers visited a total of 45 schools in six LAs. Thirty schools were located in two large LAs (17 in one; 13 in the other), and 15 schools were located across four London boroughs (the most schools visited in any one borough was five). The majority of schools in the two large LAs were situated in urban areas, with seven in rural or semi-rural areas. Schools in all six LAs served communities in deprived/low socio-economic status areas, and mid- to high-socio-economic status areas. About half of the schools ( $n=22$ ) were two-form entry primary schools. There were nine single-form entry schools and nine schools with three- or four-form entry. Five schools had an additional resource provision (ARP) attached, which the Statemented pupil attended for at least part of the week.

#### *Systematic observation schedule*

The main focus of the observations was pupils with Statements. In order to assess how far these pupils’ experiences differed from the average pupil experience, in every fifth minute of each observation, the focus moved from the Statemented pupil to the ‘control’ pupil. The logic of shadowing Statemented pupils across the week inevitably resulted in observations being carried out away from contexts where

control pupils could also be observed. As very few observations of control pupils were made away from the classroom, these were discounted from our analyses.

Observations were coded on a minute-by-minute basis. Researchers observed for the first 10 seconds of each minute, then coded the interactions, activity and contextual information in operation during these 10 seconds. The main observation categories are summarised below.

- Location: where pupil was observed (in class, out of class or ARP).
- Pupil context: social context pupil was in (e.g. part of the whole class; in a group; one-to-one with adult; alone).
- Group attainment: attainment level of group pupil was in, as defined by the teacher.
- Interactions: ‘social modes’ of pupils’ interactions: interacting with an adult or peer, or not interacting (Blatchford 2003).<sup>6</sup>
- Pupil task: extent to which physical task (e.g. a worksheet) was the same as, differentiated from, or different to the task given to the majority of the class.

#### *Inter-rater reliability analysis*

Two rounds of inter-rater reliability checks were made near the start and mid-point of the main phase of data collection. The method for conducting the inter-rater checks involved the lead researcher (R1) spending half a day with the other full-time researchers (R2 and R3) in school, coding observations contemporaneously. Data were entered into SPSS and reliability coefficients (kappa) were calculated for the main mutually exclusive categories.

Reliability was calculated by taking the observations for each minute as the unit of analysis and examining the extent of agreement between the codes recorded by R1 and R2, and by R1 and R3. Each analysis was based on three hours of observation. Results showed a consistently high or very high agreement for pupil context, group attainment and pupil task, with kappa scores of 0.80 or higher. The kappa score for interactions coded by R1 and R2 was higher (0.80) than for those coded by R1 and R3 (0.69), but overall, inter-rater agreements were substantial.

## **Results**

We now work through the main categories of pupil location, pupil context, interactions and learning task, compiling a picture of the educational experiences of pupils with Statements over a school week, and how these experiences compared with those of average-attaining control pupils. Our initial analyses of the observations data produced four sets of results for pupils with Statements for MLD, BESD and composite needs, and the control pupils. However, as we found very few differences between the results for the pupils with Statements, we combined the three SEN groups for the analyses presented here.

At any given moment, a pupil can be in one of three ‘social modes’: with an adult; with a peer or peers; or on their own and not interacting. One way to present the data on pupils’ experiences is in a composite table, which presents results in terms of these three modes. In addition, interactions with adults are separated into those with teachers and those with TAs, and are further sub-divided into the three

main contexts for interaction (class, group and one-to-one). Observations are further separated in terms of location; whether they took place in or out of the classroom. These codes are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Data are presented in Table 2 as a proportion of all observations and offer a comprehensive picture of how control and Statemented pupils spent their time in school. As pupils with Statements, unlike control pupils, were observed both in and away from the classroom, location results are presented separately (observations out of class and in ARPs are combined).

A chi-square test was conducted to examine whether there was a relationship between pupil group (control vs. Statement) and each in-class context permutation (e.g. TA interaction as part of a group). A statistically significant relationship between variables was found in all but two cases.

### ***Location***

Firstly, we look at the extent to which pupils were in or out of the classroom when the observations took place. As the main focus of the study was on pupils with Statements, observations of the control pupil could not be made when they were in a different location. This is one reason for the smaller total of observation points for control pupils. It was very rare that both pupils were simultaneously observable in out-of-class contexts. For the purposes of analyses that relate to pupil location, we have used only the observations for control pupils made in the classroom.

The results in Table 2 show a large difference between pupils with Statements and control pupils. As expected, pupils with Statements spent much less time in the classroom compared with control pupils. In a small percentage of instances, pupils with Statements were observed working in an ARP attached to the school (2%). Overall then, in over a quarter of all observations (27%), pupils with Statements were observed in locations away from the mainstream class.

### ***Pupil context and interaction***

It can be seen in Table 2 that compared with control pupils, those with Statements spent a lot less time interacting with the teacher in whole class contexts, compared with control pupils (35 vs. 22%). For both groups of pupils, 3% of all in-class interactions were with the teacher on a one-to-one basis. Control pupils had a slightly greater proportion of class-based interactions with the teacher as part of a group, compared with Statemented pupils (2 vs. 1%). For interactions across all locations, however, we found that Statemented pupils had, overall, twice as many interactions with teachers in one-to-one and group contexts, compared with control pupils (8 vs. 4% overall).

Whilst control pupils almost never interacted with TAs, pupils with Statements interacted with TAs almost as much as with teachers (31% with teachers, 27% with TAs). Overall, Statemented pupils' interactions with TAs – both in and out of the classroom – were most often on an individual basis (19%). Interactions away from the class tended to be with TAs rather than teachers (13 vs. 5%). Interestingly, there were no recorded instances of teachers or TAs working on an individual basis with Statemented pupils in ARPs; interactions were predominantly at the group level, and were mostly with teachers rather than TAs.

Table 2. Composition of all pupil interactions by location and pupil context.

	Control		Statement					
	In class	In class	In class	Out of class/ ARP <sup>a</sup>	Total	Total		
Teacher & pupil	Part of class	1489	35%	6659 <sup>c</sup>	22%	426	7085	23%
	Part of group <sup>b</sup>	79	2%	454	1%	759	1213	4%
	One-to-one	109	3%	915 <sup>c</sup>	3%	342	1257	4%
	Total	1677	40%	8028 <sup>d</sup>	26%	1527	9555	31%
TA & pupil	Part of class	42	1%	609 <sup>d</sup>	2%	15	624	2%
	Part of group <sup>b</sup>	26	1%	1054 <sup>d</sup>	3%	924	1987	6%
	One-to-one	25	1%	2857 <sup>d</sup>	9%	2984	5841	19%
	Total	93	2%	4520 <sup>d</sup>	15%	3923	8443	27%
Peer interaction		1361	32%	4114 <sup>d</sup>	13%	1396	5510	18%
No interaction		1102	26%	5856	19%	1418	7274	24%
Total		4233	100%	22,518	73%	8264	30,782	100%

<sup>a</sup>2% of all observations were made in an ARP. <sup>b</sup>Results for medium (7–11 pupils) and small groups (2–6 pupils) are combined. <sup>c</sup>Difference from control pupils statistically significant at  $p \leq .005$ . <sup>d</sup>Difference from control pupils statistically significant at  $p \leq .000$ .

Results on the direction of interactions with adults (not shown in Table 2) revealed that for both groups of pupils, there were far fewer interactions from pupils to adults than from adults to pupils. Interestingly, though, it was pupils with Statements who, relative to control pupils, directed more interactions toward adults (8 vs. 1%). We also found that pupils with Statements directed thrice as many of their adult-focussed interactions to TAs than teachers (6 vs. 2%).

Interactions with TAs seemed to be at the expense of interactions with the teacher and, more so, with peers. Overall, Statemented pupils had far fewer peer interactions as control pupils (18 vs. 32%). For in-class observations only, the proportion of peer interactions involving pupils with Statements was less than half the proportion for control pupils (13 vs. 32%). Results on the direction of interaction (not shown in Table 2) found that for both groups, there were around twice as many peer-to-pupil interactions as pupil-to-peer.

Finally, average-attaining control pupils were more likely to not interact when in class, compared with those with Statements. When not interacting, pupils could be harmlessly off-task (e.g. fiddling or daydreaming). The observation schedule allowed researchers to code whether pupils were broadly speaking, on-task or off-task. In the vast majority of cases, when not interacting, pupils were on-task, quietly getting on with their work on their own. Pupils with Statements were not interacting and off-task in 8% of all observations, compared with 5% control pupils.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Attainment level of pupils' groups*

Researchers recorded the attainment level of the groups within which pupils were seated or worked (higher-, average-, lower-attaining or mixed), and distinguished between medium (7–11 pupils) and small groups (2–6 pupils). Of the two, pupils worked in small groups far more often than in medium groups. We found that pupils with Statements spent far more time in small groups of lower-attaining pupils, whilst control pupils spent far more time in small groups of mixed attaining pupils.

These results for control pupils are not unexpected; they were chosen because teachers identified them as average-attainers, and the attainment of pupils with Statements tends to be lower by comparison. Nevertheless, the results provide a clear picture of the social contexts within which pupils with Statements work and socialise, and the extent to which it tends to be homogeneous in terms of comprising similarly lower-attaining pupils.

#### ***Pupil task***

The Statements belonging to pupils in the MAST study sample very often indicated that they ought to have a separate or different curriculum in place, and almost all specified at least one intervention was required (mostly for literacy or language). Therefore, the physical tasks given to Statemented pupils were of interest, insofar as whether they were the same as, differentiated from, or different to the tasks given to other (control) pupils in the class.

A 'differentiated task' was defined as being a task that had been modified or simplified in some way from the core task (invariably the task given to the control pupil). A 'different task' was defined as a task connected to another topic or

curriculum subject. Researchers could alternatively record whether the pupil was engaged in a task connected to an intervention. Interventions were defined as self-contained programmes of learning aimed at developing literacy, numeracy or speech and language skills, social interactions and emotional literacy, or motor function. Control pupils tended not to be involved in interventions.

It is important to note that this analysis did not take account of any differentiation that was expressed through the nature of the talk from adults to pupils, and is therefore likely to underestimate the overall amount of differentiation taking place. The analysis reported here is solely about physical tasks (e.g. worksheets).

As control pupils were not observed out of the class (see above), only data collected from observations in the classroom were included in the analysis. Furthermore, as the focus of this analysis is on how the tasks undertaken by pupils with Statements differ from the tasks undertaken by control pupils, we can assume that tasks for control pupils were not differentiated. In fact, these data were recorded and, in line with expectation, this was the case in 94% of instances.

The results, shown in Table 3, are presented in terms of four curriculum categories. The core subjects of English and mathematics were separated from all 'other subjects' on the National Curriculum (e.g. science, history, art, PE, etc.). A fourth category – 'non-curriculum' – covered observations made in contexts where there was no obvious connection to a curriculum subject (for example, registration or social skills interventions).

With reference to the total column on the far right of Table 3, we can see that most of the tasks undertaken by pupils with Statements in the classroom were undifferentiated; that is, it was the same task that the control pupils were doing. Looking at the results by curriculum area, we can see that pupils with Statements were more likely to do the same task when the subject focus was something other than English or mathematics. Despite there being a clear need for differentiated activities for pupils with Statements, differentiation overall was quite rare, though it was more common in mathematics (25%) than in English (12%).

We note that with the more nuanced expression of differentiation absent from the analysis, the extent of differentiation overall is likely to be underestimated in the observation results. In Webster and Blatchford (in preparation), we provide a fuller treatment of differentiation through an examination of results from the MAST project case studies, which shows that differentiation through interaction is a key feature of Statemented pupils' moment-by-moment experiences with TAs.

Table 3. Pupil task by subject (in class observations of pupils with statements only).

	English		Mathematics		Other subjects		Non-curriculum		Total	
Same task	6416	78%	3400	67%	7722	92%	983	78%	18,521	81%
Differentiated task	1022	12%	1255	25%	583	7%	4	<1%	2864	12%
Different task	389	5%	402	8%	115	1%	208	16%	1114	5%
Intervention	401	5%	1	<1%	17	<1%	71	6%	490	2%
Total	8228	100%	5058	100%	8437	100%	1266	100%	22,989	100%

### *Interventions*

In 17% of all observations (both in and away from the classroom), pupils with Statements were engaged in an intervention. If we deconstruct this 17%, we find that 13% of interventions were carried out away from the classroom (e.g. in shared areas between classrooms, corridors or other rooms), and a further 2% were carried out in ARPs. The remaining 2%, as Table 3 shows, were conducted in the mainstream class.

The observations of interventions can also be deconstructed in terms of curriculum subject. Interventions were most likely in English (9%), then mathematics (4%). Interventions in non-curriculum areas (3%) commonly related to the development of pupils' social skills or motor skills. The remaining 2% of observations concerned interventions in other curriculum subjects (e.g. science).

### **Discussion**

The results show that the educational experiences of pupils with Statements are strongly characterised by a high degree of separation from the classroom. These pupils were found to spend over a quarter of their time away from the mainstream class and their teacher and peers. Separate analyses of case study data from the MAST project showed that even within the class, pupils were found to experience segregation in terms of having an individual workstation away from others (Webster and Blatchford in preparation). The observation findings give formal expression to the trend regarding the physical separation of pupils with SEN from the class and teacher observed in the DISS project (Blatchford, Russell, and Webster 2012).

Another clear point to emerge from the analyses was the almost constant accompanying presence of a TA wherever Statemented pupils were. There is, in other words, an intimate connection between TAs and the locations, in and away from the classroom, in which pupils with Statements are taught.

Observation results from the MAST study extend what was found in the DISS project in terms of how interactions with TAs cut across, replace and reduce opportunities for pupils with Statements to interact with the teacher and their peers, representing a more subtle expression of separation. Furthermore, the findings provide systematic evidence of this situation as it relates to the group of pupils who experience the highest amounts of (mainly one-to-one) TA support: those with Statements of SEN. Pupils with Statements interacted on a one-to-one basis in a fifth of observations. Compared with their non-SEN peers, Statemented pupils were found to experience less whole class interaction with teachers, and far fewer peer interactions, as a result of being spoken to, and speaking to, TAs.

A broader point to emerge from the analyses is the extent to which the role of pupils in the classroom is passive. In line with other research (Pollard et al. 2000; Galton et al. 2002), we found that pupils spend much of the time listening to the teacher teach the whole class. The results from the present study confirm what was said in the introduction – that classroom talk is mostly a one-way affair – and this too has been found in other observations studies (Blatchford 2003; Blatchford, Russell, and Webster 2012). That said, if pupil-to-adult interactions are a sign of a more active form of engagement in interactions, then our finding that pupils with Statements have a more active role with TAs than they do with teachers suggests that compared with control pupils, pupils those with Statements have a slightly less passive experience of school overall. Despite this, it has been found that the quality

of TAs' pedagogical practice is questionable. Compared with teachers, TAs are more likely to supply answers, give inaccurate or misleading explanations, and prioritise task completion over learning and understanding (Radford, Blatchford, and Webster 2011; Rubie-Davies et al. 2010).

Despite the wording of Statements of SEN often indicating that a different curriculum ought to be in place, four out of five observations showed pupils with Statements were given the same task to do as control pupils. However, almost all Stated pupils were observed receiving at least one intervention programme, which were often delivered by TAs away from the class. Just under one in five observations were of Stated pupils engaged in an intervention. That such a small proportion of observations should involve differentiated material was somewhat surprising, but as our analysis of the qualitative case study data collected alongside the quantitative observations shows, pupils received a high amount of verbal differentiation from TAs (Webster and Blatchford in preparation).

Indeed, the case study data enrich the overall picture provided through the extensive observations, and a brief summary of the findings reported in Webster and Blatchford (in preparation) is helpful for contextualising the implications for policy and practice that follow. Firstly, TAs were found to have taken on much of the responsibility for planning and teaching pupils with Statements, adapting tasks set by the teacher and making moment-by-moment decisions. Secondly, though well intentioned, the appropriateness and quality of TAs' contributions were questionable. Finally, we found that having a specified number of hours of TA support seemed to get in the way of schools thinking through appropriate pedagogies for pupils with pronounced learning difficulties.

Taken together, the findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses of data from the MAST study provide a finer picture of the situation found in the earlier DISS project. What we describe in this paper can, therefore, be seen as further evidence of the unintentional drift toward a model of TA deployment that while conducted with the best of intentions has resulted in unintended consequences.

Findings and conclusions presented in this paper are based on data collected on a particular sample: pupils in Year 5 with Statements for MLD and BESD attending mainstream primary schools in England. But on the basis of our other research in the DISS project and the Effective Deployment of TAs project (Webster, Blatchford, and Russell 2013), there was little to suggest that practice is significantly different in other primary years, or indeed, that practice differs by geographical (e.g. LA) area. Replication studies involving pupils in secondary schools or with other forms of SEN (e.g. SLCN, autism spectrum conditions, hearing and/or visual impairments) might produce different results, and are obvious candidates for further research.

Since the introduction of TAs into mainstream settings, TAs have become an essential way in which teachers deal with problems connected to the inclusion of pupils with Statements, their workloads and job satisfaction, and challenges posed by curriculum initiatives and behaviour in school (Blatchford, Russell, and Webster 2012). Thus, whilst the drift we describe is understandable, significant concerns are raised about the support given to pupils with Statements and about a form of educational discrimination that applies only to them.

This said, it would be misleading to suggest that the schools we visited had 'given up' on the pupils who find learning and/or engaging with learning more of a challenge than others. Spending a week at a time observing at close quarters, and discussion with practitioners and parents/carers, brought home how schools were

making every effort to attend to the needs of pupils with Statements, amid a period of intense flux and uncertainty, in terms of funding shortages, high stakes school accountability, the implementation of numerous new policy initiatives, and the unclear future of long-standing support services provided by LAs.

### ***Implications for policy and practice***

At the time of writing, far-reaching changes are being proposed to the function of Statements of SEN by the coalition government in England. The results presented in this paper have implications for the way in which support for pupils with high-level SEN are specified and quantified in Statements, in both their current and new form (so-called, Education, Health, and Care plans).

We found that expressing support in terms of a set number of hours appears to exert a particular power over the provision put in place. Common practice is for schools to convert the hours given on a Statement into hours of support from a TA. This paper has made clear the problems that follow from this arrangement; therefore, we argue that the main expression of support should be in terms of pedagogy, rather than hours. Emphasis should be on identifying the pedagogical processes and strategies to meet carefully defined educational outcomes.

This recommendation links to a wider and perhaps more important point about how schools meet the needs of pupils with SEN. Whether or not we label this particular group of pupils as ‘Statemented’ is perhaps a side issue to the main challenge of what provision schools should put in place for pupils with SEN, and which structural and organisational processes facilitate this effectively.

A key message from the MAST project in terms of practice is that schools need to rethink their approach to the way they provide support to pupils with Statements, and in particular, to fundamentally reconfigure the role of the TA. Firstly, school leaders and class teachers need to ensure that TAs do not routinely support pupils with SEN, and the issues of pupil separation (from class, teacher, and peers) that characterise the day-to-day experiences of pupils with Statements must be addressed (Russell, Webster, and Blatchford 2013).

Secondly, teachers taking on the primary responsibility for planning and teaching pupils with Statements must become the norm, not the exception. In the best examples we have seen, teachers do not routinely direct or allow TAs to withdraw these pupils from the class, and they organise the classroom in ways that enable them to work with pupils with SEN (Russell, Webster, and Blatchford 2013). More research on effective pedagogical approaches for pupils with SEN and dissemination via initial teacher training is essential.

Finally, schools need to move away from models of SEN provision that rely heavily on the employment and deployment of TAs. We should make it plain that we do not see TAs themselves as the problem, but the way in which schools misuse this valuable resource. Schools need to explicitly develop pedagogical supports in relation to anticipated academic outcomes for pupils with SEN (with and without Statements) of which TAs are but one approach.

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## Notes

1. In line with common usage, we use the term ‘teaching assistant’ to cover equivalent classroom-based paraprofessional roles, such as ‘learning support assistant’, ‘special needs assistant’ and ‘classroom assistant’. We also include ‘higher level teaching assistants’ in this definition.
2. All full-time equivalent teachers and support staff in publicly funded schools, including all local authority maintained schools and academies.
3. Pupils with MLD have much greater difficulty than their peers in acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills and in understanding concepts. They may also have associated speech and language delay, lower self-esteem, lower levels of concentration and under-developed social skills, compared to pupils without SEN.
4. It is noted that whilst the same can be said for pupils with a Statement for BESD, effort was made to select pupils whose Statement also covered learning difficulties connected to BESD, and whose needs resembled, or were consistent with, those defined as having MLD.
5. Better Communications Research Programme. <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/cedar/better/>.
6. Researchers also coded the direction of interaction (e.g. adult-to-pupil; pupil-to-adult; peer-to-pupil; or pupil-to-peer).
7. Inter-rater reliability. Kappa scores for on-task and off-task behaviour were consistent between pairs of observers: 0.61 for R1 and R2; 0.60 for R1 and R3.

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