

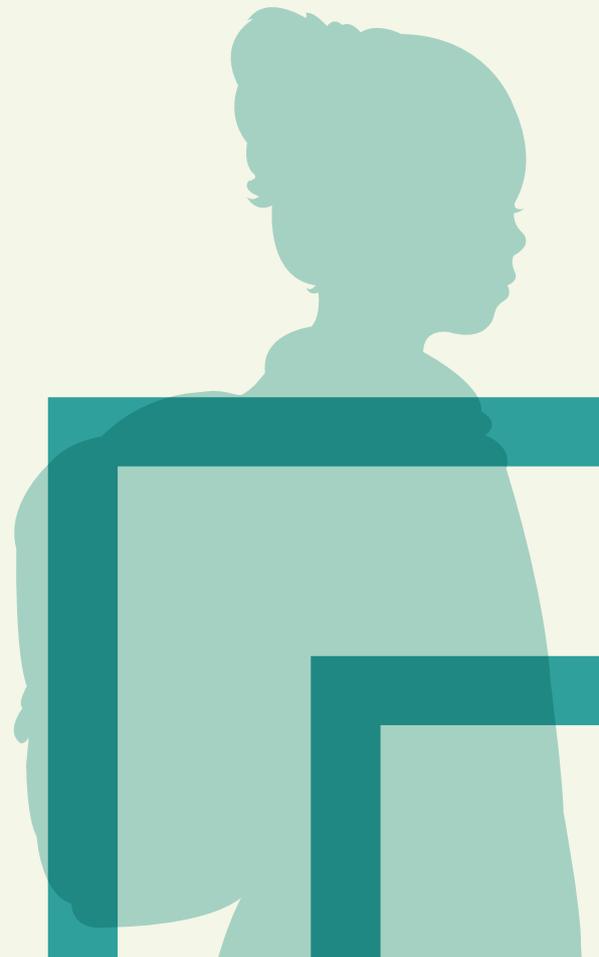


# SHAPING THE FUTURE OF TEACHING

July 2025



# REPORT



Our partners



# CHAIR'S WELCOME



I am delighted to Chair the Teaching Commission and to introduce this report to you.

No education system can exceed the quality of its teachers. They should be valued, supported and developed to their fullest potential so that their work with children and young people is most effective.

The Labour Government has a manifesto promise to recruit 6,500 more teachers and has made very positive moves to support the profession - including a 12% pay rise in the last 2 years. However, Government ministers acknowledge that there is still much to do to restore teaching to become an attractive and rewarding profession for graduates.

Unfortunately, and particularly over the past few years, teachers have left the profession earlier and earlier in their careers. 40% leave within ten years of qualifying to teach. It now takes 10 newly qualified teachers to replace every 7 more experienced teachers who leave teaching.

This rate of attrition leads to what has been called a 'weakened workforce' in which early career teachers lose the support and guidance of mid-career teachers, and it means that fewer teachers are available, or willing to become school leaders.

The Commission was also struck by the evidence presented of inequalities in the teaching workforce - in particular the barriers faced by Black and Global Majority teachers and returner mother teachers, to progress in their careers and to make the contribution they want to our education system.

The ultimate losers in this are the children and young people - and in particular those in schools in deprived areas who are the most likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers, unqualified teachers and temporary teachers.

So teacher supply is a social justice issue. The children and young people who most need experienced teachers who are qualified in the subjects they are teaching are the least likely to get them.

The Commission has cast its net wide and written this report for time poor but intellectually curious readers.

The following pages examine the needs of teachers at different stages of their careers, from early career professionals, through mid-career to leadership.

The report examines how school cultures can help, or hinder, teacher and pupil enjoyment and teachers' commitment to their profession and their learning.

It asks relevant questions - why is the education sector so far behind others in its thinking about flexible working?

And it has clear proposals on the thorny issues of accountability and funding. How can these work to support the profession?

The Commission's recommendations are far reaching and challenging. There is much that the profession can do for itself. It takes time and requires the shared commitment of leaders and teachers to work together to achieve change. There is also much that the government should do to support improved teacher supply.

This report is not a quick fix. It is a direction of travel towards the Commission's vision of the profession.

I am most grateful to all the [Teaching Commissioners](#) who have worked tirelessly and with great dedication to generating its analysis and findings, to those teachers and leaders who joined roundtables to share their reflections, and those who have provided thought-provoking [case studies](#). Thanks too to the Commission's partners who have given so generously of their time, resources and expertise, and to the many witnesses who shared their research and experience and challenged Commissioners to think deeply about the issues.

We know there are wider issues, particularly around changes in tech and AI, that we have yet to address. [So we want to hear from you](#). Is our analysis supported by your experience? What should we add or alter in our findings?

**Baroness Mary Boustead**  
**Chair of the Teaching Commission**

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

## HOW DO TEACHERS FEEL ABOUT THEIR WORKING LIVES?

- The DfE teacher working lives survey should extend its focus beyond counting working hours and the tasks that teachers are doing in those hours to measuring work quality and intensity.
- The School Teachers' Review Body should be given a remit to review the excessive working hours culture in schools and to develop proposals which place a limit on teacher and school leader contracted working time. This should go beyond the 1265 hours of directed time to account for classroom related duties such as planning, marking and data handling, behaviour management policies and leadership and management time.
- Government should commit to an annual plan to address the evidence of excessive teacher and leader working hours and excessive workload intensity and communicate it throughout the education system. Building on its workload toolkit, it should identify action to reduce work intensity as well as workload as a top priority.
- Employers and school leaders should engage with and respond to professional dialogue about working hours and work quality including, but not limited to, consultation with recognised unions on directed time.

## HOW DO PUPILS FEEL ABOUT THEIR LEARNING LIVES?

- Teachers and school leaders should be supported through sustained professional learning to develop and perfect expertise in designing curriculum and teaching approaches which are responsive to pupil needs and their contexts, motivating for pupils and support relationship building, and which value and affirm their experiences and diversity.
- Curriculum and assessment reform should address reasons for disengagement from the current curriculum offer. Significant, targeted consultation should take place with teachers and pupils in schools regarding priorities for change.

## PUPIL BEHAVIOUR

- Employers and leadership teams should regularly reflect on behaviour data, and gather feedback from teachers, school leaders and support staff on the frequency and nature of poor behaviour in their schools, and their possible/probable causes.
- High quality training to support good behaviour should be provided for all staff.
- Teachers and support staff should have regular inputs into school behaviour policies as they are the colleagues dealing most directly with pupils and the immediate effects, on themselves and their pupils, of poor behaviour. Their professional experience and expertise should be utilised effectively.
- School leadership teams should wherever possible be 'visible' in the school when pupils are in and out of classrooms leading by example to maintain a calm, purposeful and pleasant atmosphere for all pupils and demonstrating their support for their staff in helping them deal with incidents of poor pupil behaviour.
- Schools should have protocols which protect teachers from constantly having to respond directly to parental complaints to reduce the excessive teacher workload generated by dealing with behaviour incidents. Central systems of parental contact can be very valuable to protect teacher well-being and time. The DfE should provide central guidance and support on this issue.

## MEETING NEED

- Government should commit to allocating sufficient funding so that SEND policy effectively aligns with workforce training, support staff deployment and capital investment in school buildings to support inclusion of pupils with SEND.
- Mainstream schools should work closely with Special Schools to share expertise and training. Leadership training should include time spent in a Special School.
- Teachers should be given assigned periods within their



directed time for training, meetings with parents and expert practitioners and the paperwork associated with supporting pupils in their classes with SEND. Leaders should have equivalent provision in management time.

## TEACHERS AND LEADERS AS LEARNERS

- A new role of 'expert teacher' should be created to recognise and reward expertise in classroom teaching, with appropriate financial incentives to make the role attractive to teachers and the expectation that expert teachers provide models of good professional practice to colleagues within and beyond their schools. This could be linked with Chartered Teacher status. (The Chartered College's Royal Charter provides for the establishment and appointment of Professors of Teaching. This is something that will become available for applicants during 2026, signalling that teachers and leaders who specialise in pedagogy will gain the opportunity for recognition and title.)
- All teachers should be supported to maintain a learning focus on subject/age/phase/special need specialism whilst also embracing new pedagogical and assessment approaches.
- Structures should be created to enable collaborative teacher development and learning to happen, within and beyond schools, with an appropriate balance of choice and direction. Teachers are more likely to be committed to their CPD if they feel it answers their professional needs and aspirations.

## CULTURE COUNTS

- Leadership National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) should be revised to provide a focus, building on the extensive business research literature beyond schools, on the effective management of colleagues, building teams and creating professionally empowering cultures in schools.
- Employers and school leaders should engage all staff in developing school policies and in determining how to implement government policies within their context and for their pupils. Systems should be developed to keep policies and practices under review. These policies should reflect the overriding imperative to keep teachers and school leaders motivated, engaged and enjoying their professional working lives.
- Employers should conduct regular reviews into current professional culture through staff surveys or sophisticated benchmarked tools available to the sector.

- Employers should conduct exit surveys when teachers and school leaders leave, along with regular 'stay' surveys to understand what motivates teachers and leaders to stay.
- Anonymised results of these surveys should be analysed by senior leadership teams and presented to staff for discussion and action planning, and to governors/trustees, so that working practices and culture in schools can be attuned to staff well-being, professional participation and retention.

## SCHOOLS AS FIRST RESPONDERS

- The multi-agency child protection teams set up in each local authority through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2025) must be sufficiently funded from the appropriate Departmental budgets and participating colleagues from different agencies, including social workers, health professionals and education staff must be adequately resourced and trained to fulfil their safeguarding and disclosure obligations.
- Education staff who deal in the course of their work with deprivation and the harm that it does to children's well-being and potential, should be offered training and support for this demanding, and often additional role, including personal wellbeing support.
- The Government should assess whether the National Funding Formula and the Pupil Premium adequately address the additional challenges faced by schools with the highest levels of pupil deprivation. For such schools, funding must be sufficient to lower the pupil-to-teacher ratio, increase teachers' planning, preparation, and assessment time, and support recruitment and retention payments.

## EARLY DEPARTURES

- The Initial Teacher Training, Early Career Framework programme should be adaptable to Early Career Teachers' professional development needs. Fidelity to a programme should not undermine its quality and usefulness and the particular context of the school should always be considered in early career teacher training.
- The DfE should work with the Initial Teacher Training sector to ensure that the Early Career Framework is a spiral curriculum not a repetition of content covered in initial teacher training.
- The DfE should widen the evidence-base of the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework programmes to include



a wider range of theories and approaches to teaching and learning.

- Early Career Teachers (ECTs) should be entitled to professional development to advance their expertise in teaching their subject area/phase specialism. The entitlement should include schools providing opportunities for ECTs to access well-established providers of specialist professional development such as the national subject/phase professional bodies.
- Teaching adults is akin to, but not the same as, teaching children and young people. Mentor training should focus not only on how children learn, but also on developing expertise and competence in adult early career teachers.

## RETURNER MOTHER TEACHERS

- The perceived costs of supporting flexible and part time working should be balanced against increased recruitment and supply costs created by returner mother teachers and leaders leaving the profession when they have children.
- The Burgundy Book should be updated to adopt equal (to equivalent professions) and improved parental leave policies <https://www.newbritain.org.uk/missing-mothers>
- Governors and trustees should regularly audit promoted roles in their schools and adopt policies which enable experienced returner mother teachers and leaders to progress in their careers.
- Returner mother teachers and leaders should be supported in the first year of their return to work and beyond, to help them accommodate the combined demands of very small children and work. This support is particularly important to female secondary school teachers and leaders who leave their school at a higher rate than their peers in primary. <https://thekeygroup.com/news-insights/what-happens-to-teachers-after-maternity-leave>
- Schools should advertise vacancies as being open to flexible working, part time working and job share arrangements to support returner mother teachers and leaders to move between schools after having maternity leave, as well as facilitating career progression. <https://thekeygroup.com/news-insights/what-happens-to-teachers-after-maternity-leave>

## MOVE WITH THE TIMES: FLEXIBLE WORKING

- The DfE's flexible working programme should be widely promoted in the education sector.
- Teachers and leaders should be confident (they are not at present) that their right to request flexible working will be welcomed, the request properly considered and, if possible, granted.
- Requests to work flexibly should be invited from teachers and leaders on a regular basis so that those responsible for timetabling can plan for requests.
- Schools should adopt a more strategic and iterative approach to timetabling, involving multiple members of the Senior Leadership Team to ensure timetables are aligned with the school's retention strategy <https://thekeygroup.com/news-insights/what-happens-to-teachers-after-maternity-leave>

## RACE TO THE TOP

- A comprehensive anti-racism framework <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/centre-for-race-education-and-decoloniality/anti-racism-framework/> should be used to guide Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers in embedding anti-racist practices. Schools and training providers should adopt such frameworks to ensure meaningful change.
- Schools and ITT providers should explicitly commit to anti-racism in partnership agreements, ensure clear reporting mechanisms for racist incidents and involve race equity specialists in handling complaints. Tutors and mentors should be trained to offer anti-racist, culturally competent, trauma-informed support in schools and during ITT.
- The government should advance proposals to make ethnicity pay gap reporting compulsory so that employers are encouraged to identify and address disparities.
- The government should launch a campaign which supports racial justice for teachers and leaders through a celebration of the work of diverse educators and amplify the voices of Black and Global Majority teachers in recruitment materials and public engagement.
- The education sector should fund leadership development programmes including shadowing, coaching, and mentoring opportunities for Black and Global Majority leaders.



Organisations must also consider ways to proactively create belonging for them to thrive in leadership settings. Governing bodies should be reviewed regularly to ensure they reflect the diversity of their communities and the broader society.

## ASPIRING TO LEADERSHIP

- The School Teachers' Review Body should be given a remit to review excessive working hours and provide specific protection for leaders on working time, holiday working and guaranteed access to leadership and management time.
- Employers should proactively review systems of staff deployment and promotion, to ensure that teachers from Black and Global Majority Heritage backgrounds, and returner mother teachers, are proportionately (to the teaching workforce) represented in leadership positions.

## MONEY MATTERS

- Government should give the School Teachers' Review Body a remit, as Teach First have advocated, to reach the top third of graduate earnings by 2030 to secure 'a strong pipeline of future talent'. <https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/press-release/missing-teachers>
- The 'flattening' of experienced teacher pay should be reversed in order to promote the retention of these teachers in the profession and to strengthen the 'weakened workforce' of teaching.
- School budgets should be calculated to be sufficient to accommodate the promotion of teachers and compensation, in the form of TLR payments, for additional responsibilities and management roles which are, at present, rationed in primary schools because of lack of funds.
- School budgets should reflect both their core purpose which is to educate their pupils and their additional spend on essential support for pupils and their families. Detailed analysis is urgently needed to establish the extent to which current deprivation funding streams (including Pupil Premium) are being used for core operational staffing costs.
- Government should commit to a long-term 25+ year programme of school rebuilding and refurbishment.

## MEASURING THE EFFECTS

- Accountability structures at national and school level should ensure the involvement of school leaders and teachers to develop systems that are integrated into teachers' and leader working lives in ways which promote their individual and collective agency, creativity and expertise, and are seen by them, and by parents and other stakeholders to be necessary, helpful and fair.
- Government should decide what it is possible for Ofsted to accomplish well within its current funding framework. This will mean real decisions not only on what Ofsted *can*, but also what it *cannot*, do.
- Ofsted should commission, as a matter of urgency, an independent research evaluation of the consistency, reliability and validity of its inspection judgements. This research should be widely disseminated to create informed professional debate about the future of inspection.
- The main findings of the 'Beyond Ofsted enquiry' <https://beyondofsted.org.uk/> should be implemented. Every school should conduct its own self-evaluation reported to stakeholders in a school performance review. The role of inspectors should change so that they focus on the governance of, and capacity for, school improvement and response to any challenges. For schools in a multi-academy trust (MAT), the inspection would focus on the capacity and approach of the trust to evaluating its schools' performance reviews
- An independent body should be established to manage complaints about the conduct and outcomes of Ofsted inspections.
- A review should be completed into how Ofsted handles public complaints about schools and school staff to ensure the process it adopts consistently exhibits principles of natural justice and dispute resolution.



# VISION

How should teaching be transformed so that teachers are valued, motivated, fulfilled, supported and rewarded for the essential work they do?



# The Commission Vision



## Does teaching need a Commission?

This is the question the Commissioners asked first. Commissioners examined the research on the current state of the teaching profession and found that from early career professionals through to leadership there are many systemic problems which beset the profession. Some of these problems come from government policies. But Commissioners found that too many are caused by school cultures which fail to nurture teacher expertise, support teacher experience and treat teachers as valued professional people.

This is an issue which affects every stage of teachers' journeys throughout the profession.

**So the Commission established a vision for the teaching profession.**

## The Commission's vision

- Every lesson in every school is taught by a suitably qualified specialist teacher whose knowledge and skills are supported and developed throughout their career.
- Every school leader is supported to build professionally empowering school cultures where staff and pupils thrive.

**The teaching workforce is transformed so that teachers are:**

- valued by society
- motivated by the demands of their roles and enthusiastic about their working lives
- fulfilled in their work, able to use their professional agency and to contribute creatively
- supported by their school on their professional journey
- reflecting the diversity of the pupils they teach

- enjoying good working conditions, and pay, that support their work and their professionalism
- choosing in far greater numbers to remain in teaching as a worthwhile, enriching and rewarding career

**Schools, school employers and groups of schools are persistently focused on establishing, sustaining and developing school cultures and workplace conditions in which teachers and leaders thrive, with:**

- a sense of belonging, community and relationships, based on trust, that promote professional agency and resilience
- support, mentoring and development opportunities provided by expert leaders
- access to worthwhile professional learning throughout their careers
- meaningful teacher voice in institutional decision-making
- integrated approaches to pupil behaviour, lesson design and pupil attendance which enable better experiences of school for pupils and greater job satisfaction for teachers.

Having a vision is one thing. Realising it is another, far more challenging task. This report contains the Commission's analysis and recommendations to realise its vision. These are written for time poor, intellectually curious fellow professionals.

We want to hear from you too. If you have comments on the analysis underpinning the recommendations, on the recommendations themselves, or recommendations of your own, please go to the comments, questions and responses [page](#).



# DO WE HAVE ENOUGH TEACHERS?

All the stats on teacher recruitment and retention.



# Do we have enough teachers?

Bridget Philipson, the education secretary, has welcomed a rise in teacher trainee applicants and improved retention rates, saying that this is 'turning the tide' on the recruitment crisis.

The number of applicants accepted on to postgraduate initial teacher training courses for September has risen by 8 per cent compared to the same stage last year.

There has been a near 12 per cent rise in secondary teachers, marking an increase in all but two subjects (English and Classics). Increased recruitment has been particularly high in STEM subjects – with rises of almost 50 per cent in computing and physics.

Primary recruitment is expected to beat its target and secondary recruitment is on track to hit about 86% of its target.

This turnaround is notable.

In last year's (2024/25) ITT recruitment cycle, secondary recruitment reached only 62% of target and primary only 88%.

STEM subjects, including physics, computing and chemistry, were among those that were furthest

from meeting targets. And whilst this had been the case for some time, non-STEM subjects were also affected. Modern foreign languages reached only 43% of its target, design technology 39% and business studies reached only 15%.

**So, is the problem of teacher supply solved?**

**Sadly, no.**

The long legacy of under recruitment to initial teacher training, and the ever-shorter spans of time teachers stay in the profession has created a teaching workforce which is not well enough matched to the school curriculum taught to pupils.

Over the last five years, half of secondary subjects saw a rise in the number of hours taught by non-specialist teachers. In 2023, 21.3% of design technology and 21% of French lessons were taught by non-specialist teachers. Even subjects which previously recruited well were affected. Nearly 8% of English lessons and nearly 26% of religious education lessons were taught by teachers without a degree in those subjects.

The ITT targets do not take account of the mismatch between teacher qualifications and the



**In 2023, 21.3% of design technology and 21% of French lessons were taught by non-specialist teachers. Nearly 8% of English lessons and nearly 26% of religious education lessons were taught by teachers without a degree in those subjects.**



# THE GAP BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND REALITY

How do teachers' career hopes translate into the reality of their working lives?



# The gap between expectation and reality – teacher working lives



Newly qualified teachers enter the profession with great hopes and real enthusiasm. They want to make a difference and are motivated by a strong desire to work with children and young people. They believe that education is important, powerful, and a force for good.

But we are losing far too many teachers because the reality of their working lives does not match their motivation for joining and remaining in the profession.

We must question what is happening when 85% of teachers, more than double any other profession, say that they are exhausted at the end of every single working day.

**What is causing this exhaustion and how it can be alleviated is the key concern of the Teaching Commission.**

## How does the teacher supply crisis affect teachers?

Inadequate teacher supply doesn't only affect pupils. It also makes a career in teaching, already one of the most challenging professions, even more challenging. Teaching is suffering from a 'weakened workforce' (<https://www.newbritain.org.uk/missing-mothers>) which spans the entirety of teachers' careers from recruitment and classroom teaching, through middle management, to leadership.

Early career teachers too often lack the support that more experienced teachers could give as they face the 'career shock' challenges of beginning teaching, so they leave the profession.

Mid-career teachers particularly women in their thirties, find that the demands of teaching are

incompatible with family life, so they leave the profession.

Leadership roles become unattractive because of the stress and additional workload required so it becomes ever harder to fill leadership posts.

All of which adversely affects the quality of education which pupils receive.

## The Commission's report

This report outlines the Commission's investigations and recommendations on the key issues when considering the health of the teaching profession and its recommendations chart a way out of the current teacher supply crisis.

The recommendations are aimed at two audiences:

**Government** – what are the systemic changes that should be made by government to make teaching a more attractive and rewarding profession – one that graduates want to enter and remain in?

**The Profession itself** - what changes can and should be made to the ways that teachers are employed in schools to make the job more professionally rewarding, less stressful and more family friendly?

# HOW DO TEACHERS FEEL ABOUT THEIR WORKING LIVES?

Working hours, work quality and work intensity - how do workload and work satisfaction for teachers and leaders compare with other careers and with teachers in other countries?



# How do teachers feel about their working lives?



Teachers like teaching. Nearly 80% agree that they enjoy classroom teaching all or most of the time. The majority feel that the things they do in life are worthwhile and two thirds feel valued by their school. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-lives-of-teachers-and-leaders-wave-3> Fig 8.1)

This is good news but it raises an unavoidable question: If teachers enjoy their core purpose and central professional activity, teaching their pupils, then why are fewer than half satisfied with their current job? (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-lives-of-teachers-and-leaders-wave-3> Fig 8.1)

## Counting the hours

Although recorded teacher working hours have reduced slightly, they remain high. Primary teachers worked an average of 52.5 hours in 2024, secondary teachers worked 50.3 hours, averages which are still far above the average 36.6 working hours for other workers.

One teacher, about to leave teaching after 30 years of exemplary service said to the Commission: *'There's more volunteering in teaching than in any other line of work. I just can't keep volunteering – all weekend and every weekday evening – I'm not paid for working these hours.'*

A male teacher approaching his 30s told Commissioners that he was having conversations

with his wife about whether he would stay in teaching when they started a family. He said: *'It dictates our life. The teaching day is so intense. You don't get a break from 8 in the morning to 5.30 in the afternoon. You're lucky to get 20 minutes uninterrupted at lunch time.'*

A teacher on a leadership pathway in her school told us: *'I came into teaching at 21. I know what I signed up for. But what I am doing is ten-fold. Every year there's more marking, planning, problems with parents. I am at work until 6.30 and then come in again at 7 in the morning.'*

## How do the working hours for teachers in England compare internationally?

Teachers in England top the international league table for working time outside lessons which doubles their working hours and includes general admin work, data recording and monitoring, planning lessons, marking and, increasingly, following up on and managing pupil behaviour. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-lives-of-teachers-and-leaders-wave-3> Fig 3.1)

## Quality counts

Counting the hours worked by teachers is a necessary step. But of even more importance is the quality of the work that teachers do. In general professionals feel more positive about their work, even if they have to work long hours, if they feel that this work builds upon their professional knowledge and experience and has a desirable impact. Good work is perceived by those doing it to be valuable.

Unfortunately, too much of the work teachers are required to do is not felt by them to be valuable and does not address their key professional aim – to improve their teaching and their pupils' learning.

Nine out of ten teachers report that they are required to work at very high speed, to very tight deadlines, three quarters or more of the time.



Nearly 80% agree that they enjoy classroom teaching all or most of the time

No other large occupation has shown anything like this degree of work intensification: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03054985.2020.1847719>

The intensity of teachers' work leads to very high levels of teacher stress. 89% of teachers experience stress in their work. 70% feel that their job does not leave them enough time for their personal life, 62% report that the job negatively affects their mental health and 49% their physical health. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-lives-of-teachers-and-leaders-wave-3> Fig 8.1) Teachers and leaders from Black and Global Majority groups bear the burden of exposing and challenging racism, which is an exhausting and often thankless job.

If we truly are to value teachers then we must not waste their valuable time.

### The difference in work quality between those who stay in teaching and those who leave

Those teachers and leaders who make the difficult choice to leave the profession have a much more positive view of the control they have over their workload, and the acceptability of their workload compared with those still teaching. Three quarters of leavers agree that they had sufficient control over their workload, compared with only 34% of those still teaching and whereas 79% of leavers agreed that they now had an acceptable workload, only 22% of teachers agreed that this was the case.

32% of career changers into teaching, responding to a Now Teach survey, said that their workload was much more than their previous profession, and 46%

agreed that the terms and conditions of their work as teachers were much worse when compared with their previous role in other industries.

### The questions that need answering

It is clearly unacceptable for teachers to be enduring these rates of mental and physical stress. It makes a rewarding but physically and mentally demanding job increasingly undoable.

**That is why a key focus of the Teaching Commission's recommendations is teacher work quality. How can teachers do less, but better, work?**

**How can schools become thriving learning communities for pupils and staff where teacher views are heard and their professional knowledge valued?**

And

**How can we make the profession more empowering and more equitable – so that all who can make a contribution, including Black and Global Majority heritage teachers, can thrive? And what resources are needed for this to happen?**

These questions are urgent. Teaching must become a more attractive profession for graduates to enter and for teachers to remain in. The dangers of a weakened workforce, where too many teachers leave too early in their careers, is that early career teachers fail to get the support they need and that leaving rates rise still further, and earlier in teachers' careers.

And let's not forget who this is for.

It is our pupils who suffer most from inadequate teacher supply. And in particular those who face

Teachers in England top the international league table for working time outside lessons



the most difficult start in life because the schools they attend find it most difficult to recruit and retain teachers.

This is a social justice challenge. Good teacher supply is essential. No education system can exceed the quality of its teachers, so we must look after the ones we have, and make the profession attractive for new entrants. The nation's children and young people deserve no less.

### Recommendations to improve teachers' working lives

- The DfE teacher working lives survey should extend its focus beyond counting working hours and the tasks that teachers are doing in those hours to measuring work quality and intensity.
- The School Teachers' Review Body should be given a remit to review the excessive working hours culture in schools and to develop proposals which place a limit on teacher and school leader contracted working time. This should go beyond the 1265 hours of directed time to account for classroom related duties such as planning, marking and data handling, behaviour management policies, and leadership and management time.
- Government should commit to an annual plan to address the evidence of excessive teacher and leader working hours and excessive workload intensity and communicate it throughout the education system. Building on its workload toolkit, it should identify it action to reduce work intensity as well as workload as a top priority.
- Employers and school leaders should engage with and respond to professional dialogue about working hours and work quality including, but not limited to, consultation with recognised unions on directed time.

The intensity of teachers' work leads to very high levels of teacher stress. **89% of teachers experience stress in their work. 70% feel that their job does not leave them enough time for their personal life, 62% report that the job negatively affects their mental health and 49% their physical health**

# HOW DO PUPILS FEEL ABOUT THEIR LEARNING LIVES IN SCHOOL?

What are the causes of disengagement and absence from school and how does this affect pupil learning and teacher working lives?



# How do pupils feel about their learning lives in school?



What is happening to pupils at a time when so many teachers are leaving the profession?

We have known for a long time that the quality of teachers is the greatest school-level factor impacting on the quality of education that a system can provide for its young people. It follows that we need to take seriously the impacts of an unstable workforce on pupil experience in the classroom and pay close attention to the evidence that tells us that too many pupils are struggling to thrive in school.

Increasing rates of pupil unhappiness, concerns about SEND, non-attendance, behavioural challenges, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and elective home education tell us about a growing pattern of disengagement from school affecting too many young people. It is very likely that such pupil disengagement reflects the struggles of teachers to pursue in practice the pro-social motivation that attracts so many into the teaching profession.

Of most concern, there is an unequal impact of teaching shortages on teachers and pupils in schools that serve the most disadvantaged communities. Teacher attrition is occurring at the same time as increasing patterns of pupil disengagement from

education and persistent gaps in attainment between the most and least advantaged in society.

The reasons for pupil disengagement are undoubtedly multiple and complex. This worrying trend among young people cannot merely be coincidental with the crisis in retaining experienced teachers who have developed expertise over time, along with rapport with pupils and their communities.

## What does the disengagement of young people look like?

The UK has the lowest average overall life satisfaction among 15-year-olds across 27 European countries. When 25% of young people report low life satisfaction, that warrants questions about their life inside school as well as in wider society. When the UK also has the largest gap in average life satisfaction between the 25% most advantaged and the 25% most disadvantaged young people, that demands change that can make school a place that fosters self-esteem, optimism and worthwhileness on an everyday basis.

In 2023-24 (the latest year for which data is available) 20% of pupils were persistently absent from school (based on the DfE definition of 'persistent'

The UK has the **lowest average overall life satisfaction among 15-year-olds across 27 European countries**



absence). Socially disadvantaged pupils have the greatest non-engagement with school: in 2023/24, 34.8% of free school meal-eligible pupils were persistently absent, compared with 14.1% of pupils who were not eligible.

Pupils with SEND support continue to be a focus of concern, with 35.5% of pupils with EHC plans in 2023/24 being persistently absent. For pupils with SEN support, persistent absence was 30.1%.

Issues around the mental health of young people and related challenges for pupils of navigating social media, misogyny and racism are well documented and have become increasingly prevalent in the everyday work of teachers. While teachers enter the profession for pro-social reasons, to 'make a difference', they need affirmation that the enormous effort is worthwhile – that the teaching they do makes pupils feel that they are valued, that lessons are injected with meaning and the goals of teaching are mutually motivating for teachers and pupils.

An important factor for retention is schools that enable teachers to find enjoyment in the everyday work of teaching itself. Teachers need agency and they respond to the autonomy they are given to teach responsively to the challenges they face so that 'making a difference' is experienced in the classroom itself, in the act of teaching.

We can't find ways to increase teacher motivation to stay in the classroom without acknowledging how too many pupils feel about being there. Likewise, we can't persuade more pupils that school is a satisfying and fulfilling place to be while so many teachers feel the need to leave.

## Recommendations to shape conditions so that both pupils and teachers can thrive in schools

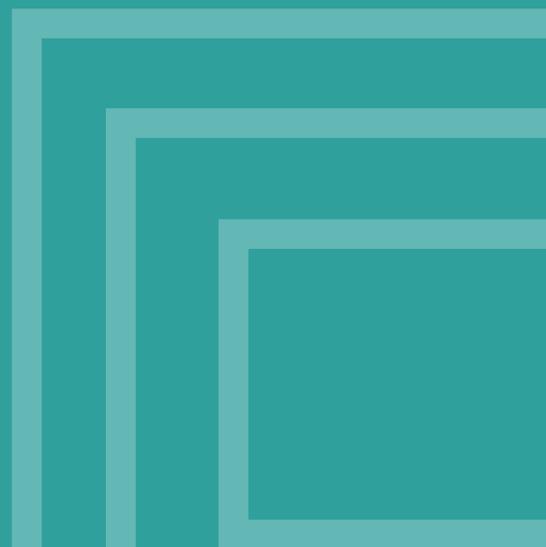
- Teachers and school leaders should be supported through sustained professional learning to develop and perfect expertise in designing curriculum and teaching approaches which are responsive to pupil needs and their contexts, motivating for pupils and support relationship building, and which value and affirm their experiences and diversity.
- Curriculum and assessment reform should address reasons for disengagement from the current curriculum offer. Significant, targeted consultation should take place with teachers and pupils in schools regarding priorities for change.



20%  
of pupils were  
persistently absent  
from school

# PUPIL BEHAVIOUR

Teachers and leaders have quite different, and opposing, views of the quality of behaviour in their schools. How can a more common approach be supported?



# Pupil behaviour



Poor pupil behaviour is an issue which greatly impacts on teachers' satisfaction with, and enjoyment of, their work. It leads to greater stress and higher workloads for teachers. Shifting behaviour from 'significantly disrupts most lessons', to 'rarely a serious problem' is equivalent to a remarkable 40% pay rise – a finding which shows just how important behaviour is to teachers.

**Supportive teaching environment**

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**Poor pupil behaviour => higher workloads and stress**

- Shifting behaviour from: 'Significantly disrupts most lessons' to 'Rarely a serious problem'
  - Equivalent to a 40 per cent pay rise
- Shifting from 'lack of support from school leadership' to 'sufficient support'
  - Equivalent to a 10 per cent pay rise

Source: RAND Europe, Understanding Teacher Retention

Interestingly, the perception of teachers and leaders varies quite significantly when it comes to their view on the issue of behaviour. The latest findings of the DfE working lives of teachers [report](#) reveals that whereas 76% of leaders felt that pupil behaviour in their school was 'very good' or 'good', only 42% of teachers agreed. And whilst around eight in ten leaders with teaching responsibilities reported that they felt always or mostly supported to deal with disruptive behaviour, teachers were less positive, with only 49% agreeing that they were always or mostly supported. There is work to be done to align

leader and teacher views on pupil behaviour.

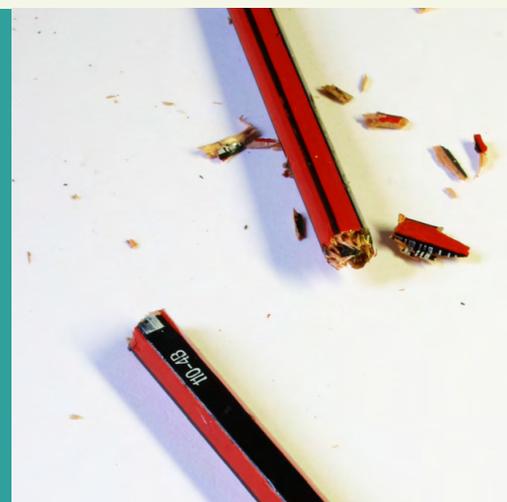
It is also clear that pupil behaviour has a direct effect on teacher workload. 60% of teachers report that they spend too much time following up on behaviour incidents – a percentage that has risen by 10 points in two years. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-lives-of-teachers-and-leaders-wave-3>

In a focus group hosted by the Schools, Students and Teachers Network (SSAT) for the Commission teachers talked about lack of support from parents when they are trying to get their support to deal with their child's poor behaviour. One said that her phone had been blocked by parents she was trying to contact. Another said that she had received a three-page email at 6.30am from a parent complaining that she had put her child in detention for disruptive behaviour.

All of the teachers in the group said that they were spending a significant amount of their time during the school day and in the evenings having telephone conversations with parents about issues with their children. And all said that it would help them greatly if parents were more supportive of their efforts to educate their children.

Research by the BBC has indicated that behaviour in schools in England is getting worse. Nearly one in five teachers in England has been hit by a pupil this year and a greater proportion of primary and

Shifting behaviour from 'significantly disrupts most lessons', to 'rarely a serious problem' is equivalent to a remarkable 40% pay rise – a finding which shows just how important behaviour is to teachers



secondary teachers reported pupils fighting, pushing and shoving compared with two years ago (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-68674568>).

New teachers, who are most concerned about poor behaviour and their ability to deal with it, do not feel they are being adequately supported to deal with disruptive behaviour.

In Commission discussions on pupil behaviour one Commissioner, a Deputy Head who teaches two days a week, spoke about the importance of the leadership team being visible everywhere on the school site. It was her school's policy for leaders to be walking the corridors at break and lunch time, and in the school grounds before and after the school day. She felt strongly that this nipped potential bad behaviour in the bud and showed teachers that the leadership team were in touch with the current realities and issues in their school.

The leadership team also kept in close contact with teachers and took time to support them in lessons when they anticipated disruption. The school behaviour policy was discussed with teachers on a termly basis, and adjustments made when it was felt they were needed and another approach could be more effective.

In a focus group of leaders Commissioners were told of one school where leaders routinely contacted parents in cases of bad behaviour. *'Dealing with difficult parents is a real issue. There's been a real change in attitude with parents demanding things that are entirely unreasonable. We don't expect our teachers to deal directly with parents. That's an SLT job and we protect our teachers from that.'*

## Recommendations to support teachers in dealing with poor behaviour and improve their retention in the profession

- Employers and leadership teams should regularly reflect on behaviour data, and gather feedback from teachers, school leaders and support staff on the frequency and nature of poor behaviour in their schools, and their possible/probable causes.
- High quality training to support good behaviour should be provided for all staff
- Teachers and support staff should have regular inputs into school behaviour policies as they are the colleagues dealing most directly with pupils and the immediate effects, on themselves and their pupils, of poor behaviour. Their professional experience and expertise should be utilised effectively.
- School leadership teams should be 'visible' in the school when pupils are in and out of classrooms, leading by example to maintain a calm, purposeful and pleasant atmosphere for all pupils and demonstrating their support for their staff in helping them deal with incidents of poor pupil behaviour.
- Schools should have protocols which protect teachers from constantly having to respond directly to parental complaints to reduce the excessive teacher workload generated by dealing with behaviour incidents. Central systems of parental contact can be very valuable to protect teacher well-being and time. The DfE should provide central guidance and support on this issue.



60%

of teachers report that they spend too much time following up on behaviour incidents

# MEETING NEED

How can we build a culture of inclusion for all pupils,  
without increasing work intensity for teachers?



# Meeting need



Many schools find it increasingly difficult to meet the varied and increasing needs of children and young people within the current system. This impacts on pupils' learning and also on the working lives of teachers.

## There are increasing numbers of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools

In 2023/24, over 1.6 million pupils (almost a fifth, 18.4%) in England were identified as having Special Educational Needs. This was an increase of 101,000 from the previous year. Just over 430,000 pupils had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) - 4.8% of all pupils (up from 4.3%). In state primary schools there was a 27.3% increase in pupils with SEND, and a 40% increase in secondary schools. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2023-24>

Not all pupils with needs are identified as having SEND. Boys, summer-born and looked-after children and those who are persistently disadvantaged are more likely, while children of Asian origin, those with English as an additional language and those who move schools or are frequently absent are less likely to be identified with SEND. Children living in the most deprived eighth of neighbourhoods had 300 times the odds of children in the least deprived eighth of neighbourhoods of being identified for SEN Support and 76 times the odds of receiving an EHCP.

<https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/SEND-Final-Report-version-FINAL-04.02.2024-2.pdf>

## Supporting children with such diverse needs takes its toll on teachers

In Reception, there is a reported increase in the numbers of children who are preverbal, not toilet trained and without well-developed motor skills. Schools are also seeing more children with physical disabilities and with mental health needs. One of the Commissioners spoke passionately about the impact of this increase on teachers in her school. There is a big impact on workload, from paperwork, meetings, parent support - including home visits - and planning to support children.

Times of transition, whether between year groups or from primary to secondary, also require a huge amount of staff time and planning, and too often the work happens outside the school day. But there is a bigger impact on teachers' mental health and self-efficacy, *'Every day, teachers are asking themselves, 'Will I be able to teach what I've planned today?'* Others are trying to contain children who cannot regulate themselves, and are regularly bitten, scratched and hit. More than this, teachers feel that they are failing the children they teach, and that they have to wait for children to fail before they can access the support they need.

*"I know how amazing your child is but the only way we can get the support is to prove how bad things are."*

In 2023/24, over 1.6 million pupils (almost a fifth, 18.4%) in England were identified as having Special Educational Need



“I know how amazing your child is but the only way we can get the support is to prove how bad things are.”

### Lack of external support and resources for these pupils is a barrier to inclusion

NEU’s annual State of Education report shows that 91% of teacher respondents in England believe that a lack of access to external support (eg CAMHS, Educational Psychologists, Specialist Assessment) is a barrier to inclusion in schools (68% believe it is a ‘significant barrier’). *‘We haven’t seen an Education Psychologist for months - there just aren’t enough.’* Commissioners spoke of the impact the lack of continuity of external staff has on children and families who need the most consistency. 66% of teacher respondents believe that a lack of resources is a significant barrier to inclusion. <https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/state-education-send-and-sendcos>

Teacher workload is increased because of the lack of resources and external support, but workload is also a barrier to greater inclusion. 97% of NEU teacher respondents believe that workload is either a significant or a minor barrier. SENCO workload is a particular barrier to meeting the needs of all.

### The problem is systemic

Commissioners spoke of the children who ‘can’t cope’ with the intensification of the curriculum, who are then taken out of classrooms to learn in smaller groups, often with the least qualified staff. The NEU reports 78% of teacher respondents identifying an inappropriate curriculum as a barrier to inclusion, along with 87% who believe that the assessment system, including high stakes exams, is a barrier.

A Roundtable of members from the Chartered College of Teaching suggested that the accountability system is a key driver, particularly in primary schools where children with SEND will count in performance tables even when they are unable to sit the Key Stage 2 tests.

### We need to see the person, not the label

Inclusion without increasing work intensity needs a culture shift. *‘We need to encompass everyone’s needs - whether diagnosed or ‘just going through something’. Which means we need time to build relationships.’* Commissioners spoke about changing the deficit discourse that encourages overstatement of needs, and sometimes requires exclusions, in order to access resources.

### Teachers feel unprepared for inclusion

Training for teachers (and support staff) is often focused on particular diagnoses, and while that can be helpful in the right circumstances, it is not sufficient. At the Chartered College of Teaching roundtable, teachers reflected that there is too little training on child development in ITT, so that they are not clear what is developmentally appropriate. They noted that training on particular diagnoses is often superficial and will be forgotten without opportunities to implement their learning.

This is particularly the case for ECTs, where SEND can become a flowchart - *‘if a child has this, then I need to do that’*. There is too little training to meet complex intersectional needs, for example the links between SEND and disadvantage (SENDD), and those between physical and neurological needs or disabilities.

### Recommendations:

- Government should commit to allocating sufficient funding so that SEND policy effectively aligns with workforce training, support staff deployment and capital investment in school buildings to support inclusion of pupils with SEND.
- Mainstream schools should work closely with Special Schools to share expertise and training. Leadership training should include time spent in a Special School.
- Teachers should be given assigned periods within directed time for training, meetings with parents and expert practitioners and the paperwork associated with supporting pupils in their classes with SEND. Leaders should have equivalent provision in management time.

# TEACHERS AND LEADERS AS LEARNERS

What kinds of professional learning are valued by teachers and how can these be provided?



# Teachers and leaders as learners



## The importance of professional learning

Evidence from TeacherTapp (with Gatsby) <https://teachertapp.com/app/uploads/2024/01/The-State-of-CPD-FINAL1.pdf> suggests that teachers are already working hard to get better at their jobs, although fewer than half even 'somewhat agree' that they have clear goals for improvement.

Teachers need to attain pedagogical knowledge, to develop theories of practice and to understand theories of learning. It takes years to build a strong teaching repertoire. This is why it is important to create school communities which are balanced in terms of teacher experience, so that younger teachers are part of an established, emotionally secure community where staff and children know 'this is how we work around here'.

Unfortunately, the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that teachers and leaders experience is of a varying standard, coming as it does from such a wide range of organisations. Research from the Teacher Development Trust <https://tdtrust.org/research/creating-a-cpd-entitlement-that-works-our-findings/> sets out a range of ways in which teachers access professional development, including through Inset days; specialist and statutory training (such as safeguarding training); mandatory training via Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and the Early Career Framework (ECF); government-awarded training such as National

Professional Qualifications (NPQs) and training via 'hubs'; academic or professional study including Masters and Doctoral programmes and programmes such as Chartered Status run by the Chartered College of Teaching; commercial, industry- and school-led CPD; and informal networks, peer-to-peer coaching, conferences, TeachMeets and the like.

Programmes for initial training and early career development are based around a 'golden thread' that also underpins government-led NPQs. Much has been said about 'fidelity' to these programmes, ensuring quality by expecting everyone to follow the same broad programme. But it is clear, as Commissioners explored, that professional development policy particularly within the 5-10 year career zone *'oversimplifies what teaching is really like, the complexity of how people learn and how to teach.'*

Too much of this CPD provision has become increasingly prescriptive. Teachers lack the agency, within the broader aims of their schools, to have appropriate choice over their own professional development.

Commissioners heard that one way in which schools manage the lack of experienced and subject-qualified teachers is by using scripted lessons, over-standardised classroom protocols and highly prescriptive behaviour management. The idea of 'evidence-led practice' becomes an imposition. Professional development can be limited to ensuring

It takes years to build a strong teaching repertoire. This is why it is important to create school communities which are balanced in terms of teacher expertise



that (often narrow) in-house practices are followed and that the focus is on exam preparation or readiness for inspection. Teachers can feel as if they are 'teaching by numbers', rather than actively developing pedagogy and practice to suit their pupils and their context. This limited creativity can lead new and experienced teachers to leave the profession.

### Building better professional development

Teachers and leaders need a variety of professional development that enables them to engage with research, to work with mentors, to choose their learning focus (within the direction and vision of the school), to learn within their context. They need to have opportunities to develop their intellectual curiosity.

Commissioners heard from passionate educators, inspired and energised by their teaching roles and often this has been because they have been respected and supported in their studies and career development. Chartered Teachers spoke of the importance of choosing their area of study, of learning with others, and of being supported to be intellectually rigorous in their approaches. They spoke of the impact of their study - on their classroom practice and also on their confidence to speak out, to change things, to support each other.

There are many challenges in schools and colleges, all of which require intellectual agility and openness with a clear commitment to ethical leadership. Creating a compassionate culture where everyone feels known and supported would appear to be more effective than a more factory-like approach that burns through staff in pursuit of results.

### Recommendations

- A new role of 'expert teacher' should be created to recognise and reward expertise in classroom teaching, with appropriate financial incentives to make the role attractive to teachers and the expectation that expert teachers provide models of good professional practice to colleagues within and beyond their schools. This could be linked with Chartered Teacher status. (The Chartered College's Royal Charter provides for the establishment and appointment of Professors of Teaching. This is something that will become available for applicants during 2026, signalling that teachers and leaders who specialise in pedagogy will gain the opportunity for recognition and title).
- All teachers should be supported to maintain a learning focus on subject/age/phase/special need specialism whilst also embracing new pedagogical and assessment approaches.
- Structures should be created to enable collaborative teacher development and learning to happen, within and beyond schools, with an appropriate balance of choice and direction. Teachers are more likely to be committed to their CPD if they feel it answers their professional needs and aspirations.

# CULTURE COUNTS

How does school culture affect teacher wellbeing and professional agency, and promote retention?



# Culture counts



School culture is fundamental to teacher retention and success. Teachers working in supportive professional environments develop greater expertise over time, have a shared purpose focused on what's best for their pupils and communities and see their work as fundamentally meaningful.

Teachers and schools are trusted and valued by parents and by wider society. But this trust is not always replicated in teachers' workplaces. This is very unfortunate because as Andreas Schleicher, Head of the Education Directorate at the OECD argues, 'the management of mistrust' is very expensive in education systems, causing teacher stress, teacher burnout and high leaving rates.

Leora Cruddas, CEO of the Confederation of School Trusts, told Commissioners that employers in schools have a duty of care towards the adults and children who work and learn there. She identified three interrelated leadership approaches which are integral to positive professional school cultures:

- Prioritising professional development
- Building relational trust and
- Improving working conditions

The evidence on professional development is strong. (<https://durham-repository.worktribe.com/output/1874199/reviewing-the-evidence-base-on-school-leadership-culture-climate-and-structure-for-teacher-retention>) Three leadership practices are important to support good professional development. These are:

- Providing constructive feedback to support teachers to innovate and work collaboratively to address specific challenges they may be facing.
- Giving teachers opportunities – and removing any barriers to accessing professional development opportunities and
- Cultivating leadership potential by supporting early career teachers to innovate in their practice and take part in mentoring opportunities.

Teachers work best when they know that actions are amplified through a collaborative approach. Dissatisfaction and burnout happen when teachers feel overwhelmed and that their efforts are being diverted from what really matters.

Unfortunately, the Commissioners heard, in evidence from Professor Jane Perryman, that too many schools operate within a performativity culture where teachers continually 'prove' that they are teaching, and children are learning, in the 'right' ways.

It is concerning that, compared to comparable professions, teachers work with significantly lower levels of professional agency. In particular, teachers are dissatisfied with the professional development offered to them. <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-autonomy-how-does-it-relate-to-job-satisfaction-and-retention/>

We must prioritise creating school cultures that professionally empower teachers



## Building relational trust

It is vital to create school cultures which professionally empower teachers. This means establishing school environments where teachers have space to reason, think critically, face challenges and exercise their professionalism.

Simultaneously we have a responsibility to provide teachers with the training, knowledge and expertise necessary to make informed decisions for the pupils they teach and know best.

As teachers face challenges in their working lives it is important also for them to be given opportunities to provide professional challenge to leaders, who should cultivate the qualities of responsiveness and the capacity to build professional agency, curiosity and generosity.

## Improving working conditions – consultation, communication and cooperation

It is really important for leaders to investigate, understand and act upon teacher and wider staff views when considering school policies and practices. There is always a danger that leadership perspectives of school cultures and practices are not shared by teachers – and this dislocation can result in important issues and problems remaining unaddressed. This leads to teacher dissatisfaction and a limiting of their professional agency.

Teachers and other colleagues should be regularly consulted about all the important aspects of their working lives, and the policies and practices which they are required to implement – for example behaviour policies (are they working?) Pupil attendance, the curriculum, assessment – all these and more are the ‘bread and butter’ of teacher professionalism. Schools which listen to, and value, teacher professional voices are empowering and validating places to work.

Regular, anonymised surveys should be conducted to inform leaders about teacher views work quality and workload which should then be discussed with teachers as concrete evidence that their views have been heard. These discussions, whilst sometimes challenging for leaders, provide a positive opportunity for teachers to work with them to tackle

the issues raised in the surveys. This is a very concrete way for leaders to connect with teachers and to show that they value their professional knowledge and expertise.

## Conclusion

Creating professionally empowering school cultures presents both an opportunity and an imperative. By prioritising teacher agency alongside professional development we can build environments where teachers thrive, develop expertise and remain committed to the profession. This, in turn creates the conditions for exceptional student learning and long-term educational success.

## Recommendations

- Leadership National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) should be revised to provide a focus, building on the extensive business research literature beyond schools, on the effective management of colleagues, building teams and creating professionally empowering cultures in schools.
- Employers and school leaders should engage all staff in developing school policies and in determining how to implement government policies within their context and for their pupils. Systems should be developed to keep policies and practices under review. These policies should reflect the overriding imperative to keep teachers and school leaders motivated, engaged and enjoying their professional working lives.
- Employers should conduct regular reviews into current professional culture through staff surveys or sophisticated benchmarked tools available to the sector.
- Employers should conduct exit surveys when teachers and school leaders leave, along with regular ‘stay’ surveys to understand what motivates teachers and leaders to stay.
- Anonymised results of these surveys should be analysed by senior leadership teams and presented to staff for discussion and action planning, and to governors/trustees, so that working practices and culture in schools can be attuned to staff well-being, professional participation and retention.

We must prioritise creating school cultures that professionally **empower teachers**. This means establishing environments where teachers have space to reason, **think critically, face challenges, and exercise their professionalism**. Simultaneously, we have a responsibility to provide them with the training, knowledge, and expertise necessary to make informed decisions for the students they teach and know best.

# SCHOOLS AS FIRST RESPONDERS

Schools are extending their role to address the social and emotional needs of pupils, students and their families. How can they be supported as 'first responders' in ways which protect teachers and their colleagues from the effects of daily encounters with child poverty and need?



# Schools as First Responders



During austerity schools became, for many families, the last public service still standing. Schools evolved into 'First Responders' extending their role beyond core education to address the social and emotional needs of students and families. During the pandemic schools assumed responsibilities typically beyond their scope delivering meals to pupils, providing daily touch points and conducting home visits.

Schools regularly address a wide range of social need in their communities including social care, mental health, housing, poverty and medical concerns. The responsibility of meeting these needs may not officially sit within their remit but schools are uniquely positioned to identify such issues and often have existing relationships with families enabling them to undertake this vital work.

Schools are increasingly finding ways to maximise their resources efficiently for this work. Many now employ dedicated family support staff. School leaders also recognise the role they can play in bringing services and institutions through the school gates to support families and students by inviting, for example, local colleges to deliver ESOL classes, or the NHS to educate families about oral health.

Often small actions by schools can have a significant impact on the communities they serve. There is an increasingly good understanding of what this work can meaningfully look like at school level.

New responsibilities will be laid on schools and other professions – including health, social care

and the police, to form multi-agency child protection teams to ensure effective safeguarding of vulnerable and at-risk children.

## The effects of child poverty on school staff

Child poverty affects all school staff. Teachers cannot ignore its effects because they witness the damage that poverty inflicts on young lives every working day. One of the main motivations for becoming a teacher is to help children and young people and to prepare them for their future lives. But when those futures are damaged and denied through poverty then education staff carry that burden with them throughout the day and into their home lives.

Teachers told us:

*'The poverty gap has clearly got bigger. The number of students displaying difficult behaviours has increased and poverty is certainly a factor.'*

*'Food banks are an everyday necessity, as is the market for either free or second-hand uniform. Parents have no spare money and children are suffering.'*

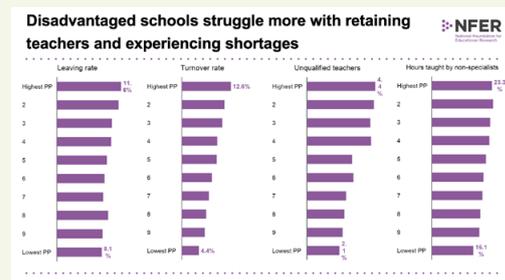
*'Children coming to school with holes in their shoes or cheap shoes which are not weather-proof. Children attending school with no coats, no shoes and without other essential items of clothing.'*

**'Food banks are an everyday necessity, as is the market for either free or second-hand uniform. Parents have no spare money and children are suffering.'**



## The poorest children suffer the most from inadequate teacher supply

These realities, and the challenges that poverty places on schools in deprived areas, result in poorer and more unstable teacher supply to their schools. The slide below shows the evidence which most shocked the Commissioners:



Schools with the highest proportion of pupil premium pupils and who serve the most disadvantaged areas in the country have the highest teacher leaving rate, the highest turnover rate, use the highest percentage of unqualified teachers and have the highest teaching hours taught by non-specialist teachers.

## Poor pupils are taught a narrower curriculum by less experienced teachers

Poor teacher supply also narrows the curriculum for deprived pupils who are proportionately less likely to be offered physics as a subject option and to be taught by teachers who are experienced and qualified in the subjects they are teaching. (See [‘Do we have enough teachers’](#)).

This is why teacher supply is a social justice issue. The poorest pupils already have an unequal start in life. 40% of the educational attainment gap between advantaged and deprived children emerges before they start school. <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/grammar-schools-social-mobility/>

If schools are to be required to compensate for the effects of child poverty and deprivation they need

the resources – both human and capital – to do so. At national level, whilst the work that schools and their staff do to alleviate child poverty and to support families is recognised, schools have yet to receive frameworks, training or meaningful support on how to approach these expanded responsibilities.

The roles that schools can play in their local communities and how they can maximise their impact whilst also ensuring that supporting services integrate effectively into these practices must be clarified. Only through this carefully connected work can we achieve the impact that pupils and their families deserve.

## Recommendations

- The multi-agency child protection teams set up in each local authority through the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2025) must be sufficiently funded from the appropriate Departmental budgets and participating colleagues from different agencies, including social workers, health professionals and education staff must be adequately resourced and trained to fulfil their safeguarding and disclosure obligations.
- Education staff who deal in the course of their work with deprivation and the harm that it does to children’s well-being and potential, should be offered training and support for this demanding, and often additional role, including personal wellbeing support.
- The Government should assess whether the National Funding Formula and the Pupil Premium adequately address the additional challenges faced by schools with the highest levels of pupil deprivation. For such schools, funding must be sufficient to lower the pupil-to-teacher ratio, increase teachers’ planning, preparation, and assessment time, and support recruitment and retention payments.

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# EARLY DEPARTURES

How effective is the Early Career Framework and what can be done to support beginner teachers and their mentors?



# Early departures



## Why early-career teachers are more likely to leave and how to support them to stay

Too many early career teachers (ECTs) leave teaching. The latest figures [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2023](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2023) show that 11.3% leave after only one year, just over a quarter (25.9%) leave within three years and, a third leave within 5 years (32.5%).

These numbers reflect a divide between the hopes and expectations of early career teachers, and the reality of their working lives in schools.

The previous government introduced 'Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (ITTCCF)' and 'Early Career Framework (ECF)', now the combined ITTECF but recent data from the Education Endowment Foundation and NFER has indicated that whilst the ECF has been mostly successful in improving early career teachers' confidence and self-efficacy it has not significantly improved retention rates in the short term. ECTs are not more likely to stay in teaching beyond their first or second year (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/early-career-framework-early-roll-out>).

Early career teachers value the structured mentoring and professional development the Early Career Framework provides. They report feeling more confident, especially in areas such as lesson planning and classroom management. The structured guidance offered by mentors is seen as a critical factor in helping them navigate the early years of their teaching career. Deep conversations with mentors are empowering.

However early career teachers also report feeling constrained by what they feel is its overly

prescriptive framework and there are concerns about its rigidity, its repetition from ITT and its failure to account for subject/phase-specific needs (<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/blogs/the-early-career-framework-key-findings-for-policymakers-and-school-leaders-from-the-early-roll-out-evaluation/>).

The impact of the introduction of the 'golden thread' as a three-year entitlement for new teachers has also had mixed reviews. Data from Teacher Tapp highlighted dissatisfaction with materials and training amongst ECTs and their mentors, along with complaints about additional workload (<https://teachertapp.com/publications/early-career-teachers-the-story-so-far/>).

We heard evidence of ECTs feeling their training is repetitive and patronising ('*Oh, not this again*') and mentors 'being taught to suck eggs'. New teachers from Now Teach, who had enjoyed successful former careers before entering the profession, spoke to Commissioners about the way their prior experience had been disregarded, '*There are many transferrable skills I possess from my old job which mean I bring something valuable to teaching but I was firmly made to feel by leaders that I was a complete novice and that none of those skills mattered*'.

Two different Gatsby Foundation and Teacher Tapp reports emphasised the overlap between initial teacher training and the ECF, timetabling issues, and a lack of subject- and phase-specific content.

<https://teachertapp.com/publications/where-next-for-the-early-career-framework/>

<https://teachertapp.com/publications/early-career-framework-the-first-18-months/>

There is also a perception amongst some new teachers of a lack of agency where they feel they must teach in prescribed ways and are not sufficiently able to adapt to the needs of

**11.3% leave after only one year, just over a quarter (25.9%) leave within three years and, a third leave within 5 years (32.5%).**

These numbers reflect a divide between the hopes and expectations of early career teachers, and the reality of their working lives in schools.



their classes. Commissioners heard evidence of an ECT who had been called into a Head of Department's office because they were two PowerPoint presentations behind everybody else in the department. They explained that their class had struggled with a concept, and they needed to re-teach responsively, but were told that if they did this again, they would be given a warning.

Whilst the Commissioners hoped that this was an isolated example of poor practice, they heard too often in focus groups of similarly constraining whole school policies which undermine teacher professionalism and a sense of job satisfaction which comes through the exercise of professional knowledge and choice.

### Time and reward for mentors

New teachers value the support from more experienced colleagues who mentor them. Mentoring can be formal – with an agreed role and time allocation, and informal – perhaps a quick but invaluable chat in the staffroom. Effective systems for mentoring are embedded in the school's professional development culture, and the Commission heard evidence from a school that has developed a strong ECT framework that reflects its context, pupils and staffing.

Mentoring can be a really enjoyable and rewarding role for more experienced teachers, particularly where it encourages reflective conversations and learning for mentors as well as mentees. But even the most accomplished teachers can find it challenging to explain why they adopt particular teaching approaches which come naturally to them in the course of their daily work.

Mentors need time and professional development to develop their abilities to judge what form of support their mentees need at different times and how to assess their progress, but they report that the time allowed for the role does not sufficiently cover the demands of mentoring alongside full teaching duties (<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/blogs/the-early-career-framework-key-findings-for-policymakers-and-school-leaders-from-the-early-roll-out-evaluation/>).

The Commission was struck by evidence presented

by Melanie Renowden, CEO of the National Institute of Teaching, who revealed that the perceptions of levels of support for mentoring differed significantly amongst teachers and leaders.

The Commission heard from Emma Hollis of NASBTT that ITT providers are finding it difficult to find mentors for trainees, due to the workload demands.

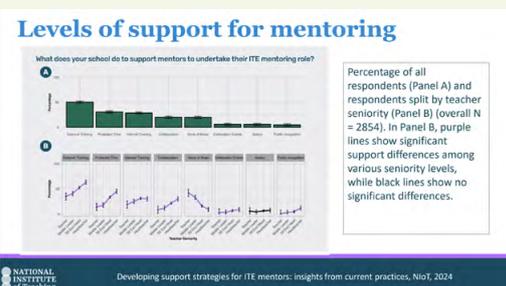
It is also replicated for mentors of ECTs. This has a negative impact on the system's capacity to recruit and train new teachers.

Instead of centring mentor training around current, narrow definitions of novice and experts, the training should be underpinned by principles of adult learning (<https://www.tes.com/magazine/leadership/strategy/training-of-teacher-mentors-for-early-career-framework-ecf-must-change>). Mentoring should also be positioned as a leadership development pathway for experienced teachers, building school and trust-level capacity to retain talent and develop future leaders.

### Recommendations

- The Initial Teacher Training Early Career Framework programme should be adapted to Early Career Teachers' professional development needs. Fidelity to a programme should not undermine its quality and usefulness and the particular context of the school should always be considered in early career teacher training.
- The DfE should work with the Initial Teacher Training sector to ensure that the Early Career Framework is a spiral curriculum not a repetition of content covered in initial teacher training.
- The DfE should widen the evidence-base of the Initial Teacher Training Early Career Framework programmes to include a wider range of theories and approaches to teaching and learning.
- Early Career Teachers (ECTs) should be entitled to professional development to advance their expertise in teaching their subject area/phase specialism. The entitlement should include schools providing opportunities for ECTs to access well-established providers of specialist professional development such as the national subject and phase professional bodies.
- Teaching adults is akin to, but not the same as, teaching children and young people. Mentor training should focus not only on how children learn, but also on developing expertise and competence in adult early career teachers.

New teachers value the support from more experienced colleagues who mentor them.



# RETURNER MOTHER TEACHERS

What are the barriers to career progression for women teachers with children and how can these be overcome?



# Returner mother teachers. How can they be encouraged to stay in teaching?



*'I never would want to put my kids before my pupils – but I couldn't work like I do now and put my kids last either.'*

*'People say that teaching is a vocation but to what extent when it comes to having and raising a family?'*

These are the comments made by a focus group of teachers with five to ten years' teaching experience, all of whom are on a future leaders programme.

There were seven women teachers in their 20s and one man. Remarkably, when asked whether they could see themselves working in their current full-time roles if they had children, none, including the male teacher, thought this was possible.

Their views were echoed in the evidence given to the Commission by Anna McShane, one of the authors of the [Missing Mothers report](#) which showed that teacher mothers who had left state school teaching identified workload and family commitments as the main drivers for leaving. The two were, she argued, incompatible.

Women in their thirties are the single biggest group leaving teaching each year (and have been since 2017). This is not the highest proportional leaving rate – that belongs to teachers in their twenties, but as women in their 30s represent 25% of the workforce, the numbers leaving create a large hole in the teaching workforce. In 2023, 9,147 women between the ages of 30 - 39 left the state education system.

As Anna McShane argued, this attrition rate leads to a 'weakened workforce' where early career teachers lose the support of experienced teachers who would be able, if they remained in teaching, to support and mentor their younger colleagues and stem the highest tide of teacher leavers in their 20s who suffer career shock in their early years in the profession.

Teacher maternity pay and leave compares very poorly with other graduate professions.

*'I never would want to put my kids before my pupils – but I couldn't work like I do now and put my kids last either.'*

Comparative analysis of maternity leave policies

Employer	Full Pay	90%	Half Pay	Total Weeks (Paid at Enhanced Rate)	Equal Pay Offered to Both Parents?
Metropolitan Police	30	0	0	30	No
Department for Education	26	0	0	26	Yes
Deloitte	26	0	0	26	Yes
					No (but 12 weeks offered to partners at full pay)
Linklaters	26	0	0	26	Yes
Natwest	24	0	0	24	Yes
NHS	8	0	18	26	No
Burgundy Book	4	2	12	18	No

Flexible working, including part time working, is particularly important to returner mother teachers ([See move with the times](#)). They, quite reasonably, want to fulfill their professional duties well and have time to look after young children and be there for them at important moments in their life and development. They do not expect fully remote working but they are looking for some flexibility and adaptability.

An important new report by The Key Group (<https://thekeygroup.com/news-insights/what-happens-to-teachers-after-maternity-leave>) finds that teachers who go on maternity leave are proportionately more likely than the rest of the profession to remain in their school in the medium term if they work part time. Teachers are twice as likely to be in a part-time role four years on from starting maternity leave compared to their colleagues in the teaching profession as a whole.

Just 32% of teachers quit their school within four years of starting maternity leave if they switch to a part time role, compared with 45% of returner mother teachers who come back to full time work. A 15% reduction in their leaving rate, achieved by their ability to work part time, would seem to be an important step that schools could take to retain these teachers.

But the report found that schools and trusts are failing to hold onto teachers in their first year back from maternity leave. 17% leave their school - much higher than the 12% on average of teachers who leave their school each year.

London secondary schools suffer from a particularly poor retention rate after maternity leave and primary schools do better at retaining mother teachers.

So part time and flexible working are particularly

important for mother teachers looking to combine working with family life. If schools are able to accommodate these patterns of working they are more able to retain experienced teachers and to avoid having a ‘weakened workforce’ of predominantly inexperienced and unqualified teachers.

### What kind of flexible working do teachers want?

According to the Missing Mothers report <https://www.newbritain.org.uk/missing-mother> mothers in particular want more timetable flexibility (68% of respondents in a 2024 survey) so that they can start or finish at different times, along with the ability to attend significant events in their children’s lives (63%). Commissioners heard in particular about the need to build relationships with their children’s teachers in the way that their own schools were focused on relationships with parents. 32% of respondents suggested that the ability to work part-time might have helped them to stay in teaching.

It should not cost teachers their career to be mothers.

But returner mother teachers pay for the flexibility they need to continue teaching with greater barriers to promoted posts. New research by the National Education Union reveals that male teachers in their thirties are 6% more likely to be promoted to leadership roles.

And it is important to note that around three quarters of teachers are women – so men are more likely to be promoted in greater numbers from a much smaller cohort.

It should not be, but too often is the case that career-progression is ruled out for women, as more senior posts are viewed as irreconcilable with family roles. This denies legitimate progression for qualified professionals and limits the pool of available expertise. <https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/Review-of-flexible-working-approaches.pdf?v=1747220262>

### Recommendations

- The perceived costs of supporting flexible and part time working should be balanced against increased recruitment and supply costs created by returner mother teachers and leaders leaving the profession when they have children. [See Move with the times – flexible working](#)
- The Burgundy Book should be updated to adopt equal (to equivalent professions) and improved parental leave policies <https://www.newbritain.org.uk/missing-mothers>
- Governors and Trustees should regularly audit promoted roles in their schools and adopt policies which enable experienced returner mother teachers and leaders to progress in their careers.
- Returner mother teachers should be supported, in the first year of their return to work and beyond, to help them accommodate the combined demands of very small children and work. This support is particularly important to female secondary school teachers who leave their school at a higher rate than their peers in primary. <https://thekeygroup.com/news-insights/what-happens-to-teachers-after-maternity-leave>
- Schools should advertise vacancies as being open to flexible working, part time working and job share arrangements to support returner mother teachers and leaders to move between schools after having maternity leave, as well as facilitating career progression.

Just 32% of teachers quit their school within four years of starting maternity leave, if they switch to a part-time role

# MOVE WITH THE TIMES

Education cannot afford a 'computer says no' attitude to flexible working. What are the barriers and how can they be overcome?



# Move with the times – flexible working



*There are friends who are working the same hours but their compensation is higher. My house mate is a civil servant – he can work from home and he gets hours worked over his weekly limit back.’ (Teacher with 5 years’ experience)*

*We need a change of mind set in the education sector. We have to calculate the time and cost of enabling flexible working against how much we spend on supply and recruitment costs, otherwise we will keep going in circles of finding staff and trying to keep staff and failing. (MAT CEO)*

*What is remarkable is how far the sector is behind in this regard. The conversation isn’t happening about flexible working. (MAT CEO)*

*When someone has a free period why do they need to be in the building? (MAT CEO)*

If we are to retain more teachers, we need to support a balance of work within the rest of life. This is complex but not impossible.

## Lack of flexible working leads many teachers to leave teaching

Many graduate-level roles are increasingly flexible, both in terms of hours worked and location.

According to the Labour Force Survey, around 44% of ‘similar graduates’ now work mainly from home. While teachers know they are unlikely to be able to work from home for much of the time, many are looking for flexibility in their work.

62% of teachers who leave teaching for another job are likely to be working flexibly. This compares to 46% of teachers (in 2023/24), suggesting that a desire for flexibility may be a factor in some

teachers’ decisions to leave.

<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2025/>

Teaching is a predominantly female profession, and for mothers aged 30-39, 56% cited lack of flexible or part-time working arrangements as a key factor in their decision to leave teaching.

## Why do teachers request flexible working?

Too often, the real and perceived experiences of teachers are that the job is incompatible with family life: extensive home-working into the evenings and weekends; insufficient access to dependent leave; incompatibility with childcare provision. Around half of teachers with parental responsibility request flexible working. Because women are still more likely to take on the bulk of parenting responsibilities, more women than men request to work flexibly.

Seeking a better work-life balance was the second most likely reason for a request - most often for parenting or other caring responsibilities, but sometimes in order to pursue other interests, further study or parallel careers.

For older teachers, phased retirement was sometimes cited as a reason, enabling them to manage the transition from full-time working to not working at all.

<https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/Review-of-flexible-working-approaches.pdf>

While career changers into teaching feel that part-time working is more accessible than in their previous careers (mainly because there will always be someone responsible for your classes when you’re not there), according to Now Teach they also feel a lack of any other kind of flexibility, and miss the autonomy to balance work and life.

**When someone has a free period why do they need to be in the building? (MAT CEO)**

## Teaching is becoming (slightly) more flexible

Since the pandemic, opportunities for flexible working in teaching have increased. According to NFER analysis, 46% of teachers had some form of flexible arrangement in place in 2023/24 including part-time, PPA off-site, and varied start and finish times. This is up from 40% in 2022/23. <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2025/>

However, flexible working is more common in primary schools than secondary, more common for women than men, and appears to be less common in schools serving disadvantaged areas. <https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/Review-of-flexible-working-approaches.pdf>

## Attitudes towards flexible working in education remain negative

Despite clear initiatives from DfE to promote flexible working, such as Flexible Working Ambassador Schools, leaders and teachers continue to view it negatively. In 2023/4 only a fifth of teachers and leaders would feel confident requesting flexible working, and only a fifth believe that working flexibly would not affect career progression. Only a third believe that flexible working is compatible with a career in teaching. <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2025/>

## Many schools find it hard to offer flexible working

Teaching needs teachers to be physically present in classrooms, and a reasonable proportion of adults in schools to ensure students' safety and wellbeing. In-person work is also important for building relationships with students and colleagues, and forming collaborative learning cultures,

The perceived barriers to schools offering flexible working include timetabling issues and the need for additional staff (and therefore cost) in order to enable part-time or job-share positions. For some schools, concerns around consistency of provision and relationships with parents are cited as barriers.

The benefits are harder to quantify. Perceptions include an increase in wellbeing and agency for teachers in schools with a culture of flexibility, leading to less absence and greater retention, which is beneficial for pupils and saves money over the long term. There is also evidence that flexibility

leads to greater capacity, diversity of staffing, and increased expertise.

<https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/Review-of-flexible-working-approaches.pdf?v=1747220262>

## Recommendations:

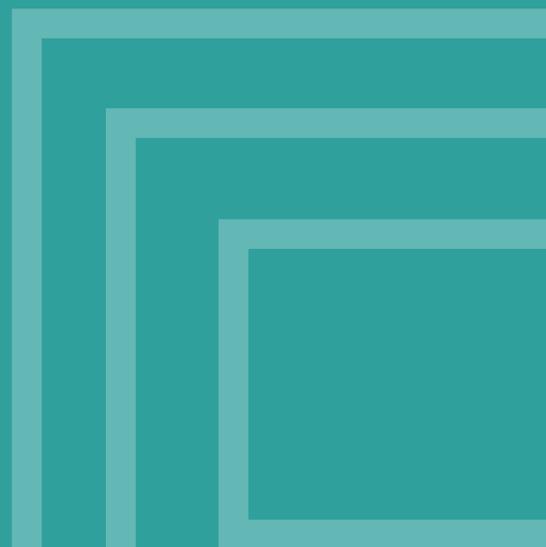
- The DfE's flexible working programme should be widely promoted in the education sector.
- Teachers and leaders should be confident (they are not at present) that their right to request flexible working will be welcomed, the request properly considered and, if possible, granted.
- Requests to work flexibly should be invited from teachers on a regular basis so that those responsible for timetabling can plan for requests.
- Schools should adopt a more strategic and iterative approach to timetabling, involving multiple members of the Senior Leadership Team to ensure timetables are aligned with the school's retention strategy. <https://thekeygroup.com/news-insights/what-happens-to-teachers-after-maternity-leave>

**We need a change of mind set in the education sector. We have to calculate the time and cost of enabling flexible working against how much we spend on supply and recruitment costs, otherwise we will keep going in circles of finding staff and trying to keep staff and failing.**

(MAT CEO)

# RACE TO THE TOP

Why are Black and Global Majority teachers underrepresented at all stages in teaching? How can the teacher and leader workforce be more representative of the diversity of the pupil community?



# Race to the Top



## The teaching profession cannot afford to scale back Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work.

Addressing the teacher recruitment and retention crisis demands that we acknowledge the experiences of Global Majority teachers and leaders. Government data from June last year shows that 37.4% of primary and 36.6% of secondary school pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds yet only 10% of teachers identified as being from Black, Asian or Mixed Heritage backgrounds. The teaching workforce should better represent the diversity of the pupil intake in our schools.

NFER research ([Ethnic Diversity in the Workforce, 2024](#)) found that while people from Asian, Black, mixed, and other ethnic backgrounds are over-represented in initial teacher training (ITT) applications, they are disproportionately likely to be rejected. This higher incidence of rejection continues throughout their careers, as is reflected in their under-representation in promoted posts.

Despite this clear trend, there is no system-wide approach to tackling racial inequities in education.

'Race to the Top' is a commitment to justice. Real progress means embedding racial equity into every policy, training programme and practice, so that the priorities of our profession reflect and uplift the experiences of Black and Global Majority pupils and educators. Putting race at the top means building an education system and a teaching workforce that truly values and serves all children. Racial justice is not a special interest. It is a safeguarding issue. It is a care issue and it is a societal responsibility.

**37.4% of primary and 36.6 percent of secondary school pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds yet only 10% of teachers identified as being from Black, Asian or Mixed Heritage backgrounds.**

## Institutional silence

In giving their evidence to the Commission, Professors Vini Lander and Heather J. Smith along with Alison Wiggins highlighted a systemic failure to address racism at policy levels. This significantly impacts recruitment, retention, and racial literacy within the profession.

Key policies such as the teacher standards, the Initial Teacher Training Early Career Framework (ITTECF) and the inspection framework all fail to mention race, racism, or anti-racism. As Professor Smith noted, "*absences in social policy betray and authorise symbolic value regarding what is and is not important.*" This omission signals to institutions that racism is not a priority, making it less likely to be addressed.

Racism is often framed as an individual issue rather than a structural one, meaning systemic barriers remain unchallenged.

## Prejudiced from the Start

Global Majority trainees frequently experience racism and microaggressions during their training, including being treated as second-class citizens, subjected to harmful assumptions, and having their experiences dismissed. Some Global Majority trainees experience racist incidents in their school placements only to be told by course tutors that nothing can be done and that it is "*part of the experience.*"

If new entrants to the profession are treated this way, it is no surprise that long-serving Global Majority teachers experience similar discrimination, hindering their career progression. The issue is not a shortage of Global Majority teachers but a system that fails to support and retain them.

## The burden of illiteracy

Teachers and leaders from Black and Global Majority groups bear the burden of exposing and challenging racism—an exhausting and often thankless job. Despite decades of data showing the persistent underrepresentation of Global Majority teachers and



leaders, the profession has failed to tackle the issue in a meaningful way.

Over a quarter of Black and Global Majority teachers (28%) reported workplace discrimination as a major source of stress, three times the rate of white teachers. <https://neu.org.uk/latest/library/black-teachers-pay-and-progression-report>

Professor Lander highlighted that the under-representation of Global Majority teachers has been a “*pervasive and perpetual issue for at least 40 years.*” Why this has been tolerated for at least 40 years, and why institutional racism in teaching and Initial Teacher Training remain unaddressed are fundamental questions for the profession. Simply put, our profession cannot afford to privilege whiteness. Challenging this requires white teachers and leaders to recognise their role as allies and advocates. This notion was also reinforced by Fellows and Members at a Chartered College of Teaching roundtable in March 2025.

Racism in ITT must be tackled, and projects like the one led by The Chartered College of Teaching, Chiltern Learning Trust and Being Luminary, funded by Mission 44, do just that. With the goal of increasing the proportion of Global Majority teachers, they are working with School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers and school placements to provide expert coaching and personalised anti-racism training to identify and address the explicit and implicit racism that ITT applicants and trainees may face. The project also aims to provide racial literacy training for schools, ITT providers and Higher Education Institutions to consider their marketing and recruitment practices.

### Rethinking representation: addressing structural barriers to leadership

Representation matters but it cannot be performative or tokenistic for educators as well as the young people we serve. Diversity in school leadership is powerful for the children and young people as well as for the recruitment and retention of Black and Global Majority teachers.

Even when diverse leaders achieve leadership roles, they are often the minority or the only one. Being the only person from a minority ethnic group is an emotional and professional burden. The emotional labour of being a role model, managing microaggressions and repeatedly proving legitimacy cannot fall solely on Black and Global Majority colleagues. This underrepresentation is not a pipeline issue, it is a structural one as the current system of access and progression is not meritocratic.

### Reclaiming space: building a future where Global Majority educators thrive

The responsibility for this does not and cannot lie with Global Majority teachers. They are not missing from the ranks of applicants. They are dealing with systemic barriers that exclude them from the profession and hamper their opportunities to thrive. We must address the daily microaggressions, career roadblocks and institutional failures that perpetuate this situation. Without immediate and sustained action, we will continue to lose talented educators from the Global Majority, perpetuating a system that does not serve all its pupils equally.

### Recommendations

- A comprehensive anti-racism framework should be used to guide Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers in embedding anti-racist practices. Schools and training providers should adopt such frameworks to ensure meaningful change.
- Schools and ITT providers should explicitly commit to anti-racism in partnership agreements, ensure clear reporting mechanisms for racist incidents, and involve race equity specialists in handling complaints. Tutors and mentors should be trained to offer anti-racist, culturally competent, trauma-informed support in schools and during ITT.
- The government should advance proposals to make ethnicity pay gap reporting compulsory so that employers are encouraged to identify and address disparities.
- The government should launch a campaign which supports racial justice for teachers and leaders through a celebration of the work of diverse educators, and amplify the voices of Black and Global Majority teachers in recruitment materials and public engagement.
- The education sector should fund leadership development programmes including shadowing, coaching, and mentoring opportunities for Black and Global Majority leaders. Organisations must also consider ways to proactively create belonging for them to thrive in leadership settings. Governing bodies should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they reflect the diversity of their communities and the broader society.

The responsibility for this does not and cannot lie with Global Majority teacher

# ASPIRING TO LEADERSHIP

Why is the supply line to leadership drying up  
and what can be done about it?



# Aspiring to leadership



## School leadership should be an inspiring and attractive prospect.

Good leadership is fundamental to teacher retention. We heard evidence that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in influencing pupil learning, and that it is essential to school improvement. It is vital for the health of the system that teachers aspire to become leaders.

Effective school leaders develop and sustain a shared vision for their school. They are leaders of teaching and learning, supporting both pupils and teachers to engage and to thrive. Many leaders recognise the huge importance of their role, which is often why they work such long hours, and attempt to absorb the pressures to protect their staff. The role of headteacher, once seen as the pinnacle of an educational career, is now increasingly viewed as unappealing and unsustainable. This has significant implications for the quality of education and the future of the profession.

Only 42% of deputy and assistant heads say they aspire to become a headteacher, citing workload, accountability, and lack of support. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/released-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-in-2025-002-1.pdf> In 2024, 34% of teachers and leaders indicated that they were considering leaving the English state school sector in the next 12 months, for reasons other than retirement. Only 26% were considering applying for promotion in their current school. The most common reason for not seeking promotion was concern about the impact on work-life balance. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67852c953a9388161c5d2335/Wave\\_3\\_Summary\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67852c953a9388161c5d2335/Wave_3_Summary_Report.pdf)

School leadership is second only to classroom teaching in influencing pupil learning, and it is essential to school improvement

## Why has headship become unappealing?

The average working week for full-time leaders in 2024 was 57.6 hours. Leaders reported feeling that they spent too much time responding to government policies (52% felt this), carrying out administrative work in school (53%), and administration and management with external bodies (41%). [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67852c953a9388161c5d2335/Wave\\_3\\_Summary\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67852c953a9388161c5d2335/Wave_3_Summary_Report.pdf)

Budget constraints are forcing leaders into difficult decisions. Nearly half (45%) of secondary headteachers anticipate reducing teaching staff likely due to financial pressures, even though overall pupil numbers at secondary have not yet started to fall <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/released-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-in-2025-002-1.pdf>.

There is growing pressure to recruit less experienced (and therefore less expensive) teachers to fill any gaps. This increases workload for remaining staff and affects the quality of provision. Leaders are left to manage growing expectations with fewer resources, and as we heard from Commissioners, the increasing feeling of not being able to meet pupils' needs has a negative and damaging impact on teachers' and leaders' feelings of self-efficacy and wellbeing.

## Leadership inequalities

According to NFER, in 2020/21 there were known to be 719 Black and Global Majority headteachers working in state-funded schools in England, representing 3.6% of 20,192 headteachers. For comparison, a total of 3,379 Black and Global Majority headteachers would be needed to be representative of the national population (16.7%). <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/ethnic-diversity-in-the-teaching-workforce-evidence-review/>

And while 77% of teachers are women, only 68% of headteachers are women. According to data



from NAHT, the gender pay gap between male and female headteachers in 2023/24 has risen by nearly 6% compared to 2022/23, at £8,648. <https://www.naht.org.uk/News/Latest-comments/Press-room/ArtMID/558/ArticleID/2659/Gender-pay-gap-has-widened-warn-school-leaders-on-International-Women%E2%80%99s-Day>

Evidence from Missing Mothers presented to the Commission suggested that senior leadership roles were seen as irreconcilable with family roles.

### Leadership in disadvantaged schools

The effects are worse in schools serving disadvantaged communities. These schools face higher turnover and have more difficulty attracting experienced leaders - in 2023/24, heads in the most disadvantaged secondary schools had, on average, 3 years less experience than those in the most affluent schools. <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EPI-Report-workforce-quality-gap.pdf>

### We need better leadership training

The Commission heard evidence of the differences between leadership and management, and that while good leaders change organisations, great leaders change people.

Unfortunately, we also heard that the leadership national professional qualifications do not focus on the leadership of adults and the development of positive workplace culture. *“Leaders teach teachers like they would teach children. We need to train school leaders to lead adults.”* Evidence from Now Teach also suggested that some school leaders are unable to benefit from the expertise of those who may have had leadership roles in previous careers.

### We need strong leadership networks

Leadership can be isolating. Without strong networks school leaders often feel they shoulder the burden alone. In some regions, particularly the North West, West Midlands, East of England and South East, headteachers risk isolation from collaborative professional networks <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/networks-of-headteachers-and-schools/#:~:text=A%20new%20report%20by,headteachers%20movements%20throughout%20their%20careers>. These connections matter—support and knowledge-sharing reduce pressure and boost morale.

### Recommendations

- School Teachers’ Review Body should be given a remit to review excessive working hours and provide specific protection for leaders on working time, holiday working and guaranteed access to leadership and management time.
- Employers should proactively review systems of staff deployment and promotion, to ensure that teachers from Black and Global Majority Heritage backgrounds and returner mother teachers are proportionately (to the teaching workforce) represented in leadership positions.

Heads in the most disadvantaged secondary schools had, on average, 3 years less experience than those in the most affluent schools

# MONEY MATTERS

How should schools be funded to ensure adequate teacher pay and reward, school buildings that are fit for purpose, and to fulfil their roles as ‘first responders’?



# Money Matters



*'Declining real-terms schools budgets and the associated drive for 'efficiencies' are directly associated with increased teacher contact time in the classroom, suppressed rates of pay, reduced levels of support staff, escalating class sizes, reduced access to resources, limited availability of pay allowances (TLRs) for additional responsibilities and declining state of buildings and classroom repair and decoration.'* (School leader)

The government is clear that its key mission is to promote economic growth. Education is key to that mission, but it has historically been underfunded, and particularly during the period of austerity brought in by the Coalition and Conservative governments, when government spending on schools was cut by 9% in real terms (between 2009/10 and 2019/20).

The DfE's report on schools' responses to financial pressures found that 44 per cent of primary and 32 per cent of secondary schools were under financial pressures which required substantial changes to spend profiles. Education spending has also fallen

as a share of national income, from about 5.6% of national income in 2010/11 down to about 4.1% in 2023/24.

The latest spending review (June 2025) has increased the core schools budget by £4.2 billion in cash terms between 2025 and 2029 which equates to a 3% rise in spending per pupil over the spending review period. Taken together with past rises in per pupil spending since 2019 this more than reverses past cuts.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) comments, however, that *'the underlying picture will be a lot tighter than that'*.

The IFS points to an 80% increase in pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) since 2018 which has led to a rapid increase in school costs – about half of the overall increase in school spending since 2019 has been absorbed by rising SEND costs.

The government forecasts that spending on SEND will rise by over £2 billion in real terms between 2025 and 2028. If this happens the best schools can hope for is a real-terms freeze in mainstream school funding.

**44 per cent of primary and 32 per cent of secondary schools were under financial pressures which required substantial changes to spend profiles.**

## Lower teacher pay and higher teacher workload

The evidence given to this Commission shows that teachers are highly skilled, knowledgeable and hard-working professionals. England's teachers work more unpaid overtime than any other profession: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/uk-workers-put-31-billion-worth-unpaid-overtime-during-last-year-tuc-analysis>

But, even with a 12% pay rise over the past two years, teacher pay has lagged earnings growth in the wider labour market since 2010/11 and the drive for a flatter pay scale since 2017 has left experienced teacher pay further behind.

The combination of lower pay combined with the amount of hours worked, at high pace and under significant pressure, is a strong factor in the decision that teachers make to leave the profession.



## The pressure on school budgets and its effect on teacher workload

There is recent evidence that school leaders are reporting that secondary teacher recruitment activity is significantly lower than in recent years. Job advertisements for secondary school roles are down 31% compared to last year, and 22% lower than in the pre-pandemic 2018/19 academic year. 44% of secondary headteachers expect to reduce their teacher headcount in September, suggesting a contraction in the workforce may begin even before student enrolment numbers fall. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/released-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-in-2025-002-1.pdf>

Teachers we talked to in focus groups talked about 'temporary tables' being put in their classes to accommodate increased class sizes, and the pressures of managing unqualified colleagues on temporary contracts for extended periods of time. Secondary class sizes are at their highest since records began and primary class sizes are the highest in Europe. Increased class sizes are a significant factor in increasing teacher workload.

## Schools – the 4th emergency service

A school leader told the Commission that his finances did not recognise that his school was more than a traditional school. *'We have a family liaison team, we run parenting courses, we have a food bank network and run extra reading classes. We are absolutely an anchor in our communities.'*

In addition to the extra costs for schools in disadvantaged areas support their pupils and families living in poverty, disadvantaged schools with higher rates of teacher turnover and staff absence are spending more money on supply staff than other schools and the sums are increasing rapidly. The most disadvantaged secondary schools are spending 150% more in per pupil terms on supply cover than the least disadvantaged schools. <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/blogs/nfer-dashboard-highlights-why-teacher-shortages-are-a-key-challenge-facing-government-s-opportunity-mission/>

## School buildings that are fit for purpose

Capital investment in school buildings was cut by 50% in real terms by the Coalition and then Conservative governments just as many buildings were nearing the end of their life cycle. 38% of school

Secondary class sizes are at their highest since records began and primary class sizes are the highest in Europe.

buildings are beyond their initial design life. 700,000 pupils are learning in environments that require refurbishment.

In its 2024 budget the Labour Government reversed the previous administration's cuts to spending on school buildings and allocated £2.1 billion to improve and maintain school and Sixth Form buildings. In the June 2025 spending review a further £6.8 billion rising to £7.7 billion in 2028 to 2029 in cash terms was allocated to school capital spending.

The DfE estimates that £5.3 billion annual funding is required to maintain schools and to mitigate the most serious risks of building failure. <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/condition-of-school-buildings/>

All those working, and learning, in school buildings which are not fit for purpose have their working, and learning, lives disrupted. One in six pupils are studying in schools that either need major work or are in a relatively poor condition. Almost half of those were in schools that the government or regulatory body has deemed to be unsafe or ageing and in need of major refurbishment.

Poor working environments have a profound impact on those who work in them. Daily frustrations of classroom windows which don't open or close, leaking roofs, ineffective heating systems in the winter and poor heat ventilation in the summer make unattractive working conditions in too many schools – and these are in stark contrast to the working conditions of other graduate professions. If teachers

and leaders, and their colleagues and pupils are to feel valued their working conditions must improve.

## Recommendations

- Government should give the School Teachers' Review Body a remit, as Teach First have advocated, to reach the top third of graduate earnings by 2030 to secure 'a strong pipeline of future talent'. <https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/press-release/missing-teachers>
- The 'flattening of experienced teacher pay should be reversed in order to promote the retention of these teachers in the profession and to strengthen the 'weakened workforce' of teaching'.
- School budgets should be calculated to be sufficient to accommodate the promotion of teachers and compensation, in the form of TLR payments, for additional responsibilities and management roles which are, at present, rationed in primary schools because of lack of funds.
- School budgets should reflect both their core purpose is to educate their pupils, and their additional spend on essential support for pupils and their families. Detailed analysis is urgently needed to establish the extent to which current deprivation funding streams (including Pupil Premium) are being used for core operational staffing costs.
- Government should commit to a long-term 25+ year programme of school rebuilding and refurbishment.



# MEASURING THE EFFECTS

What are the effects on teachers and leaders of the current accountability framework and how can it be reformed?



# Measuring the effects



## How school accountability shapes teaching and leadership and how to reform it

English schools operate, in international terms, under a heavy and extensive accountability system.

National tests on pupils at primary and secondary level are published by government and the results turned into league tables published by the national and local press. These results are widely regarded as an important marker of a school's quality.

Schools are also inspected by Ofsted, the national inspection agency whose role has greatly expanded during the past 20 years. During the same period Ofsted's funding has been cut by 75% in real terms.

The challenge of an extending remit and decreasing funding was highlighted by Lord Jim Knight, previous schools minister and Chair of an enquiry into the agency:

*'We ask too much of Ofsted; it is under-resourced for the high-stakes job it is expected to do. As a result, the quality of inspection has diminished and become inconsistent. The profession works in fear of these erratic judgements. With their careers on the line, head teacher behaviour can be distorted away from what might be best for the children in their school; that alienation from their vocation is one of the reasons why people are leaving teaching and school leadership.'* <https://beyondofsted.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Beyond-Ofsted-Report.pdf>

At no time in its history has Ofsted undertaken any work to demonstrate that its inspection judgements are valid, consistent or reliable – a remarkable failing for an organisation which claims that its judgements are good indicators of a school's quality. As Professor John Jerrim argued recently: *'It's a real failing we know so little'*.

It is clear from DfE data that teachers and leaders have strong, and negative views on the quality of Ofsted's inspection judgements - 72% disagreed that the school inspection regime provides a fair assessment of school performance. It is also clear that Ofsted is a major influence on teacher and leaders' decisions on whether, or not, to stay in

the profession. 69% cited 'other pressures relating to pupil outcomes/inspection (e.g. Ofsted)' as a reason for considering leaving the state education sector. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67852c953a9388161c5d2335/Wave\\_3\\_Summary\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67852c953a9388161c5d2335/Wave_3_Summary_Report.pdf)

Teachers and leaders report hugely increased stress in the 'inspection window' – the time when an inspection is likely to take place. But the stress and increased work attributed by the profession to inspection is constant, as in-school accountability processes increase teacher stress and workload. England came second in the OECD international league tables in terms of the volume of feedback received by teachers, including lesson observations, the external results of students and self-assessment of teachers' work and yet at the lower end of the OECD league table for teachers who report that this feedback has a positive impact on their work. <https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en>

It is a hard ask for a regulator to be liked by those it regulates – but, as Professor Jane Perryman reported in her witness evidence to the Commission, Ofsted is a major source of fear for teachers and leaders leading to increased work and stress, which, combined with a loss of professional agency and creativity, is a significant factor in so many leaving the profession.

## The pressure on school leaders

School leaders are under the highest pressure in this system of accountability. Their professional careers can be ended or greatly damaged by a poor Ofsted judgement so it is understandable that the pressure they feel to 'perform' in the accountability framework is passed on to the teachers in their schools.

There is a danger that schools become 'a marvellous machine' in the quest for constant improvement. Compliance to what leaders perceive that 'Ofsted wants' can lead to a negative impact on their own and their teachers' agency and creativity and an increase in what they experience as 'busy work' – done not to improve standards of teaching



and learning, but to ‘cover their backs’ in readiness for the next inspection.

This workload is compounded by the too frequent changes in Ofsted’s inspection framework which create new criteria and different demands for evidence. Ultimately, for too many leaders and teachers, the Ofsted mantra that inspection should create no extra work is regarded as a ludicrous statement.

This is particularly the case for schools in deprived areas which, research evidence has shown, are significantly more likely to be judged as in special measures, or requiring improvement, even when they are making significant value added gains terms of pupil achievement. Conversely, schools serving more advantaged pupil intakes which, over a 3 year period, made significant declines in pupil value added achievement were likely to be judged by Ofsted as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’. Most damningly of all, the researchers concluded that Ofsted was better at judging the characteristics of a school’s pupil intake than the quality of the education it provides. <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/school-inspection-in-england-web.pdf>

This makes the hard job of working in schools in disadvantaged areas even harder. In addition to trying to compensate for their pupils’ poverty (*Schools as first responders*), teachers and leaders are not recognised, or rewarded, for their efforts and achievements in helping their pupils to overcome the disadvantages which affect every other area of their lives, and for whom school may well be the only place of refuge and positivity in their lives. The lack of a level playing field, in terms of inspection outcomes, for these schools, is likely to be a factor in their inability to attract, and retain, teachers and leaders.

Ofsted is in need of significant reform and has recognised some of the criticism it faces in its proposals for a new inspection framework which moves away from a one-word judgement on a school’s quality. This framework does, however, require inspectors to make judgements on schools on eight areas, plus safeguarding and to rate each using a five-point, traffic light system.

These proposals raise one key question – how is Ofsted, with its current level of funding, going to make consistent, valid and reliable judgements with a much more complicated inspection framework and no extra time in school or greater resources to support inspector training and development?

## How to reform school accountability and inspection

- Accountability structures at national and school level should ensure the involvement of school leaders and teachers to develop systems that are integrated into teachers’ and leaders’ working lives in ways which promote their individual and collective agency, creativity and expertise, and which are seen by them, and by parents and other stakeholders to be necessary, helpful and fair.
- Government should decide what it is possible for Ofsted to accomplish well within its current funding framework. This will mean real decisions not only on what Ofsted *can*, but also what it *cannot*, do.
- Ofsted should commission, as a matter of urgency, an independent research evaluation of the consistency, reliability and validity of its inspection judgements. This research should be widely disseminated to create informed professional debate about the future of inspection.
- The main findings of the Beyond Ofsted inquiry <https://beyondofsted.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Beyond-Ofsted-Report.pdf> should be implemented. Every school should conduct its own self-evaluation reported to stakeholders in a school performance review. The role of inspectors should change so that they focus on the governance of, and capacity for, school improvement and response to any challenges. For schools in a multi-academy trust (MAT), the inspection would focus on the capacity and approach of the trust to evaluating its schools’ performance reviews.
- An independent body should be established to manage complaints about the conduct and outcomes of Ofsted inspections
- A review should be conducted into how Ofsted handles public complaints about schools and school staff to ensure the process it adopts consistently exhibits principles of natural justice and dispute resolution.

# ANNEX

## COMMISSIONERS

Baroness Mary Bousted, Chair

Nansi Ellis, Project lead

Helen Arya, Chief Education Officer, Oasis Community Learning

Robin Bevan, Education Leadership specialist

Yamina Bibi, Coach and consultant, former deputy headteacher

Professor Caroline Daly, Director of the Centre for Teachers and Teaching Research, UCL Institute of Education

Catherine Dowell, Deputy headteacher, Grove School

Jess Edwards, Primary teacher and NEU Executive

Russell Hobby, CEO Teach First

Professor Haili Hughes, Director of Professional Development, All Saints MAT and Professor of teacher coaching & mentoring, Academica University OAS

Angelina Idun, Director of School Improvement, SSAT

Natalie Perera, Chief Executive, Education Policy Institute

Alison Peacock, CEO Chartered College of Teaching

Sara Tanton, Deputy Director of Policy, ASCL

Paul Whiteman, General Secretary, NAHT

## WITNESSES

Alice Bailey, teacher with Chartered Status

Yamina Bibi, coach and consultant, experienced senior leader

Graihagh Crawshaw-Sadler, CEO of Now Teach

Leora Cruddas CBE, Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts

Professor Caroline Daly, Professor of Teacher Education and Director of the Centre for Teachers and Teaching Research at UCL Institute of Education

Catherine Dowell, experienced teacher and school leader

Macrui Dostourian, teacher with Now Teach

Professor Qing Gu, Professor of Leadership in Education at UCL Institute of Education

Emma Hollis, CEO of the National Association of School Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT)

Professor Haili Hughes, Director of professional development, All Saints MAT and Professor of teacher coaching & mentoring at Academica University OAS

Professor Vini Lander, Professor Emerita at Leeds Beckett University, and formerly Director of the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality

Anna McShane, Director and Founder of The New Britain Project

Deepika Narula, teacher with Chartered Status

Shuna Neave, teacher with Chartered Status

Alison Peacock, CEO of the Chartered College of Teaching

Professor Jane Perryman, Professor of Sociology of Education at UCL Institute of Education

Melanie Renowden, CEO of the National Institute of Teaching (NIoT)

Professor Heather Smith, Professor of Race and Language Equality in Education at Newcastle University

Professor Becky Taylor, Professorial Research Fellow in the Centre for Teachers and Teaching Research and Academic Head of Engagement and Impact at UCL Institute of Education;

Alison Wiggins, Race and Equality lead on the Secondary PGCE at UCL Institute of Education

Jack Worth, Lead Economist at NFER

The Commission also held online roundtable discussions with teachers and school leaders, supported by the Schools, Students and Teachers Network (SSAT) and the Chartered College of Teaching:

- What do school leaders say about teacher recruitment and retention (SSAT)
- What do early career teachers say about teacher recruitment and retention (SSAT)
- The SEND crisis and teacher retention: understanding the impact and solutions (Chartered College of Teaching)
- The retention and recruitment of Global Majority teachers (Chartered College of Teaching)
- How to raise the status of the profession and increase the attractiveness for those joining the profession later or from other industries (Chartered College of Teaching)
- How to focus on, and improve, teacher impact in schools (Chartered College of Teaching)



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