Education Support

Teaching:
the new reality

A report by Education Support | May 2023

Teaching:
the new reality

Acknowledgements

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Chief Executive's foreword

In the wake of the pandemic and in the midst of the cost of living crisis, education has rarely mattered more.

The UK needs high quality, committed teachers who are equipped to do their best work. It can be easy to lose sight of this amid competing policy priorities and the strain of poor industrial relations. The quality of classroom delivery is crucial — you can have great pedagogy, curricula and data, but it won't get anyone very far without a great teacher to bring it to life and make it meaningful on the day.

Unfortunately, too many of our great teachers are ground down by the weight of an intense, emotionally draining workload. Too many leave the profession each year. This is not the intention of education policy, but a costly side-effect.

We hold a clear view of education: children and young people should be supported to attain academically and to be healthy and hopeful for themselves, their communities and this country as a whole. But, as this report highlights, this is not the path we currently tread.

We cannot ignore this evidence. The growing mismatch between the demand on schools and the resources available to meet it is a circle that cannot be squared. For too long, the gap has been filled by education staff whose commitment to their communities trumped their personal needs — a tax on their vocation. This is self-evidently not sustainable.

It is time for change.

Sinéad Mc Brearty
Chief Executive of Education Support

Introduction

Education Support has worked closely with teachers and education staff for over 145 years. We hear their experiences daily and publish research to amplify their voices and share learning. This work is grounded in the belief that better wellbeing will lead to better outcomes for children and young people. What we know from these conversations is that there is a significant chasm between public perceptions of what it means to work in education — especially state-funded schools — and the reality of it.

This is partly due to longstanding misconceptions about how teachers and education staff work. This has been exacerbated by a lack of understanding about how working in education has changed since the pandemic.

The jobs of teachers, school staff and those working in colleges, have expanded to take on a much wider range of emotional support, pastoral care, and practical support activities. This is all aimed at ensuring that the children and young people who enter the classroom are ready to learn. Much of this is underpinned by the increase in poverty, mental health challenges and experiences of difficulty or trauma faced by children and young people through the pandemic. Teachers and school staff face these additional challenges against an existing backdrop of difficult funding, accountability and workload pressures.

This report begins to evidence a *new reality* that most people working in education will recognise, but that public perception has not yet caught up with. This stealthy expansion of responsibilities raises questions about the purpose of the education system. Are state schools the front line of social services? Should they be? Or should teachers be left to focus solely on learning?

These may be divisive questions, but it is impossible to create solutions to the problems in our education system without acknowledging the reality and impact of these changes.

We carried out this research to shine a light on the new reality faced by those working in education.

In this report we explore how working in education has changed, and unpack the nature of this change in a post-Covid pandemic world. We ask whether staff feel they have the relevant skills to keep up with demands, and how this affects their working hours. We explore the impact of all this on their mental health and wellbeing and, critically, on staff retention. We also place this in the context of rising child poverty, and ask how children and young people are affected by this new reality.

> "
> We carried out this research to shine a light on the new reality faced by those working in education, so that we might start a constructive conversation — at a policy level — on the solutions now required."

Methodology

This report brings together the findings of a number of research activities commissioned by Education Support:

- A survey of **3,082** education staff working in the UK, conducted between 21 June and 29 July 2022 with YouGov. Some findings from this research have already been reported in the Teacher Wellbeing Index (2022)[1]

- An online poll of **1,004** secondary school teachers working in England, conducted between 18 and 28 October 2022 with Public First

- A series of focus groups, held by Public First, of school teachers and senior Leaders, carried out as part of Education Support's Commission on Teacher Retention in 2023

- A literature review into "Stress, Burnout, Anxiety and Depression: How they impact on the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and on learner outcomes" published in 2021 with CooperGibson Research[2]

More details about the two surveys above can be found in the **Appendix**

Section 1
How working in education has changed

Increased needs are present in the education system

More than ever before, children arrive at school with significant needs that require attention before learning can take place.

> **"** There were **4.2 million children** living in poverty in the UK in 2021-22. That's 29 per cent of children, or **nine in a classroom of 30**."
>
> Child Poverty Action Group[3]

> **"** In 2021-2022, **22.5%** of all pupils are eligible for free school meals (a measure of those in relative or absolute poverty). This represents just under **1,900,000 pupils**[4]."

In separate research carried out in October 2022[5], and published in December 2022, we surveyed more than 1,000 teachers in secondary state schools across England. We found:

74%

often help pupils with personal matters beyond their academic work — this has increased

72%

help pupils more with non-academic matters than they did 5 years ago

Top areas where non-academic help was needed:

69%

69% help pupils to process their emotions and 69% talk to them about their mental health

41%

had bought their pupils supplies (such as pens, paper, or bags)

33%

reported helping their pupils resolve a family conflict

26%

had prepared food for pupils when they didn't have any

26%

reported signposting a family in their school to local support services (such as social housing)

13%
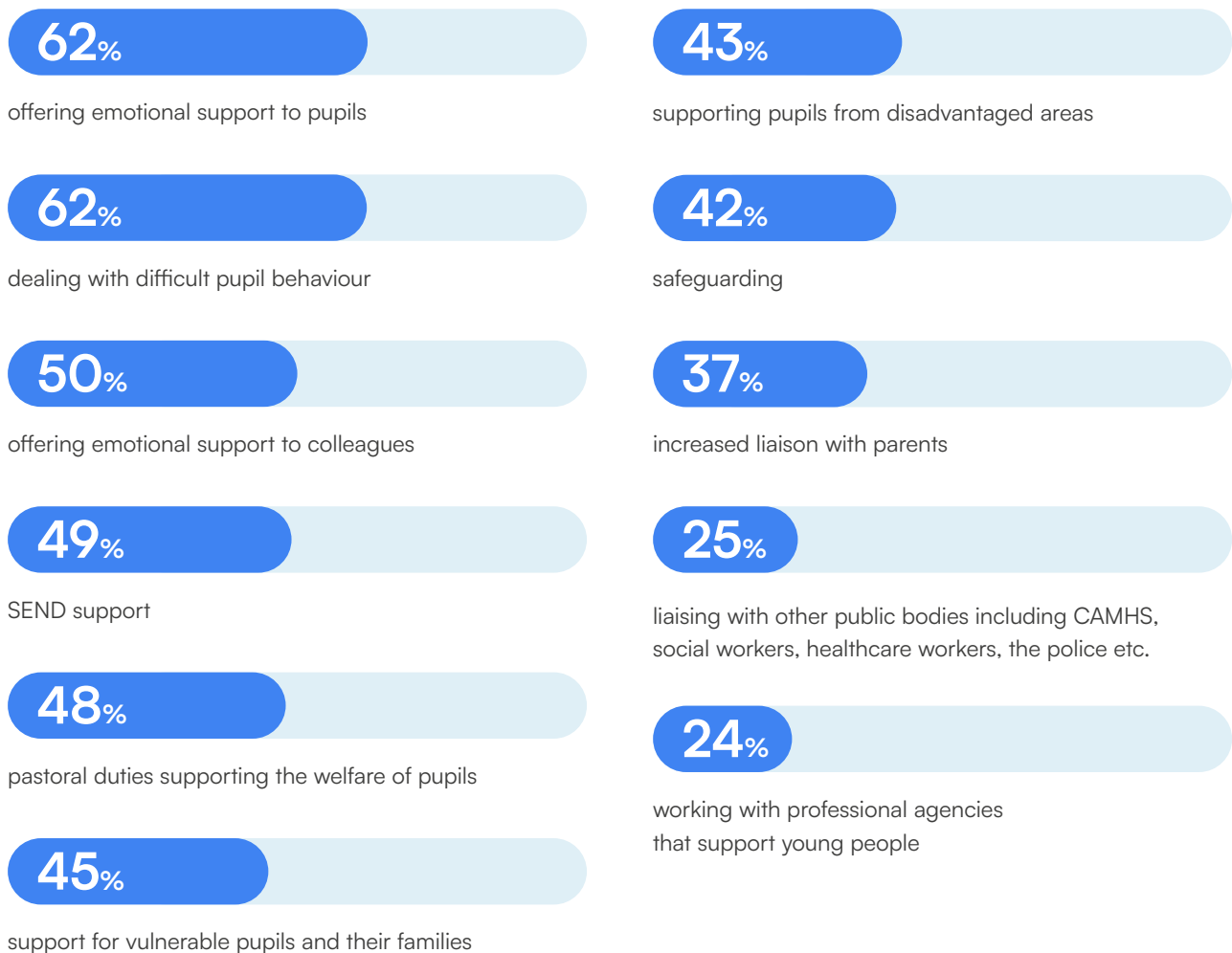
cleaned their clothes when they were dirty

10%

bought pupils parts of their school uniform

Additional responsibilities

We asked staff what the nature of this additional work is, and it is clear that much of it falls outside of tasks traditionally considered to be central to the delivery of education. This is unsurprising, given the effects of rising child poverty, the cost of living crisis and a rise in the demand for children's mental health support[6,7]. This is not 'business as usual' pastoral care: the post-pandemic level of demand is almost universally described as significantly greater than before.

This creates an additional layer of work for teachers and education staff: filling a wide range of gaps to ensure that children are ready to learn, before — or alongside — the usual work of teaching.

Additional responsibilities experienced:

62%
offering emotional support to pupils

62%
dealing with difficult pupil behaviour

50%
offering emotional support to colleagues

49%
SEND support

48%
pastoral duties supporting the welfare of pupils

45%
support for vulnerable pupils and their families

43%
supporting pupils from disadvantaged areas

42%
safeguarding

37%
increased liaison with parents

25%
liaising with other public bodies including CAMHS, social workers, healthcare workers, the police etc.

24%
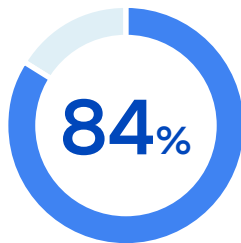working with professional agencies that support young people

Source: Education Support/YouGov research, 2022

Do staff feel that they have the skills to match their new responsibilities?

The good news is that many feel they do have the necessary skills to keep pace with additional responsibilities. A large proportion, however, do not, meaning the experiences of children and young people are subject to inconsistency. It may be that those who feel least equipped to meet the extended demands are working in the least well-resourced schools. This requires further research.

We asked staff who were doing more of these roles which ones they felt most and least prepared for.

Top 3 responsibilities that education staff feel most prepared for:

84%
prepared for dealing with **safeguarding**
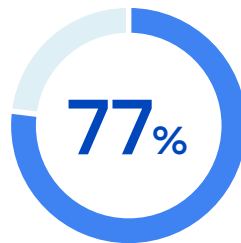
77%
prepared for increased **liaison with parents**
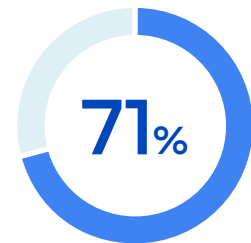
71%
prepared for working with **professional agencies that support young people**

Top 3 responsibilities that education staff feel least prepared for:
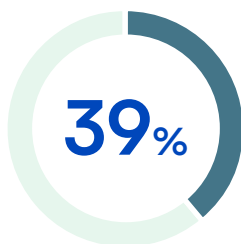
39%
not prepared for **supporting vulnerable pupils and their families**
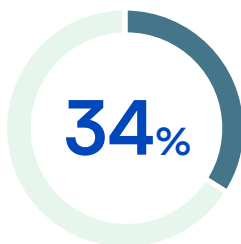
34%
not prepared for **offering emotional support to staff or colleagues**

32%
not prepared for **dealing with difficult pupil or student behaviour**

Source: Education Support/YouGov research, 2022

If policymakers believe that schools ought to be the front line of children's services, then education staff must be appropriately trained, resourced and supported. More closely integrated and accessible relationships with other bodies including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) must be facilitated to ensure that children in need of clinical support can be seen within the target timeframe.
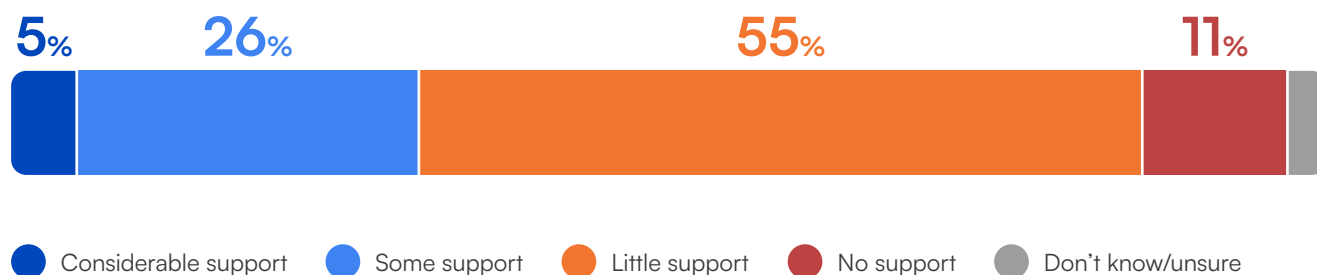
If, on the other hand, policymakers believe that the role of schools is to focus on teaching and learning, then it is vital that they are able to remain focused on that mission. They need to be able to rely on other public services to pick up the social and emotional needs of children in a timely fashion. This would allow teachers and education staff to direct children and young people with specific needs to the right support, trust that the child will receive that support, then redirect their attention back to learning, achievement and attainment.

> **At present, it has become common that schools cannot secure timely engagement from CAMHS and social services for even the most serious issues.**

Whilst it may be clear how the system ought to work, the reality on the ground is that it routinely does not. Educators do not switch off and sleep easily when they know that a child with suicidal ideation has not received professional help, or when an undernourished child leaves school on the last day of term, facing a "holiday" without reliable access to food.

The level of support public bodies (CAHMS, social services, the NHS etc) have been able to offer pupils

5%   26%   55%   11%

● Considerable support   ● Some support   ● Little support   ● No support   ● Don't know/unsure

Source: Education Support/YouGov research, 2022

Whatever our personal views on how the system should be structured — or how much responsibility schools should take — all services for supporting and protecting children and young people must be adequately resourced and funded to provide timely, and high quality services. This is not the present picture.

Working hours

We already know that education staff work long hours. Many education staff regularly work above their contracted hours.

According to the DfE's 2023 Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders survey hours worked per week by school leaders and teachers in the UK:

England (2023)[8]

School leaders reported working on average

56.8
hours a week

School teachers reported working

48.7
hours a week

Over four in ten **leaders** (**43%**) reported working at least. Two in ten **teachers** (**19%**) reported the same

60+
hours a week

According to the National Education Workforce Survey for Wales (2021) and the EIS Member Survey for Scotland (2021):

Wales (2021)[9]

Scotland (2021)[10]

School leaders reported working on average

54.0
hours a week

School teachers reported working

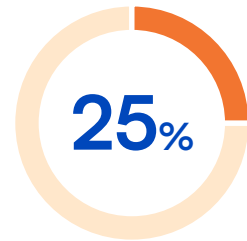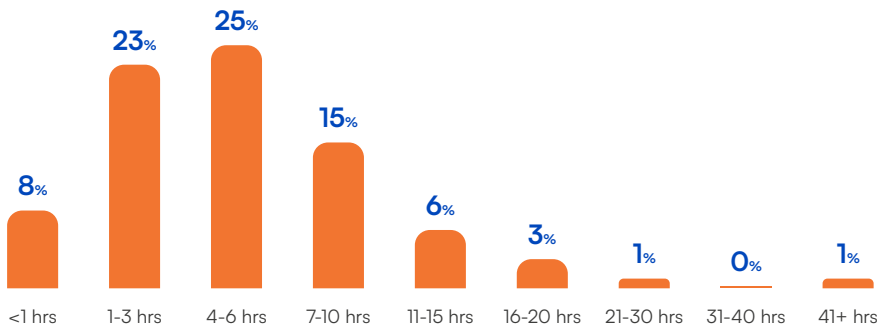**56.0**
hours a week

41% said they work more than 8 additional hours

8+
hours a week

The World Health Organisation and International Labour Organisation found in 2021 that people who work more than 55 hours a week **are at greater risk of heart disease and ischemic stroke**, compared to those who work 35-40 hours a week[11].

Despite the already high baseline, teachers and education staff told us that their working hours have increased further since the Covid-19 pandemic. Even those who feel they have sufficient skills to support children and young people are unlikely to feel that they have enough time to do so.

How much staff workload has increased due to additional responsibilities (additional hours worked per week)

8%	23%	25%	15%	6%	3%	1%	0%	1%
<1 hrs	1-3 hrs	4-6 hrs	7-10 hrs	11-15 hrs	16-20 hrs	21-30 hrs	31-40 hrs	41+ hrs

Source: Education Support/YouGov research, 2022

25%

Overall a quarter (25%) staff told us they now have an additional 4-6 hours a week

Teachers and education staff told us how many hours they are working due to the additional responsibilities they have taken on in the academic year 21/22. Given the timing of our research, these additional hours may be included in the hours reported by the DfE Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders survey.

We asked education staff, who now have additional responsibilities in their role, how much their workload has increased

Senior leaders are the most likely to report working the highest number of additional hours

27%
4 to 6 extra hours a week

33%
7 to 15 extra hours a week
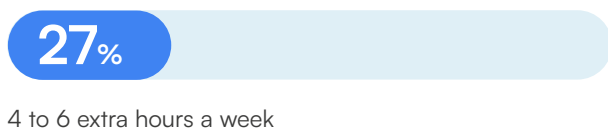
School teachers are also working longer each week

25%
4 to 6 extra hours a week

17%
7 to 15 extra hours a week
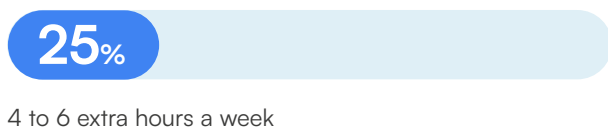
Support staff also reported an increase

38%
4 to 6 extra hours a week

9%
7 to 15 extra hours a week
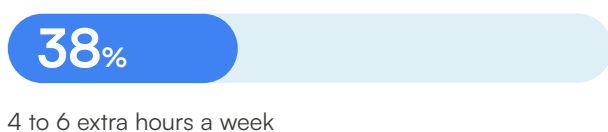
Source: Education Support/YouGov research, 2022

Case study

Janet Smith*

Pupil Premium Intervention Teacher,
recently retired after 32-years in education

The job of teaching is completely different to when I started my career. There's so many expectations put on teachers. We're not just there to teach. We're there for the whole child, and often the family too.

When I started out, I would have perhaps one child in the class who had special educational needs or had a challenging home life. Nowadays, it's common to have 25% of the class fit that category. This was the case in my final school, and that was just a council primary.

In my last role I focused on supporting pupil premium children. I would often handle families' anxieties over whether they could afford to feed their children over the holidays. You can't help but think about think about these children and families. They're still on my mind now and I left in November.

The stress and emotional toll of constant worry and care is huge. It's hard to switch off from that. It's not just me. I have known class teachers to personally provide food and clothes for pupils. That isn't something we should be doing. The impact is constant exhaustion and not being able think clearly, not having emotional space for other things in your life, or time for yourself. It's all consuming.

There used to be a lot of support from the LA. There would be subject specialists, educational psychologists, behaviour and SEN experts. They'd come in quickly and be supportive. None of this is available now, so we often have children who are not potty trained, or who can't speak. Teachers take on all those roles. We are stand in social workers and SEN specialists, all without the relevant training, and on top of the usual curriculum responsibilities.

And, of course, the kids pick up on all of the pressure we're under. Teachers who are short and sharp don't make classes fun. Teaching was fun when I started, but the fun has gone. Teachers are too exhausted to plan lessons that are fun and engaging. They're spread thin and spinning a million plates. I can't begin to imagine the drudgery of education that kids experience now. I used to be energised and inspiring, I couldn't be that now.

> 66
>
> **The stress and emotional toll of constant worry and care is huge. It's hard to switch off from that. It's not just me. I have known class teachers to personally provide food and clothes for pupils."**

*Pseudonym

Section 2
Impact on staff mental health and wellbeing

Impact on individuals

**Poor mental health costs the education sector £1,288 per employee[12].
We asked education staff, who now have additional responsibilities
in their role, about the impact this has on their mental health.**

71% of all staff told us their additional responsibilities
have had a negative impact on their mental health

81% of senior leaders

70% of school teachers

55% of support staff

Source: Education Support/YouGov research, 2022

We know from the World Happiness Report[13] that there is a dynamic relationship between
happiness and employment, and that it runs in both directions. Satisfaction at work can
raise our overall wellbeing. Stressful work experiences can diminish our overall wellbeing.

Teachers and education staff describe a deep commitment to children and young people.
For many, this is a vocation and their strong sense of purpose makes a significant contribution
to their overall wellbeing.

For many, this sense of vocation can become something of a trap. The idea of a vocation
is imbued with notions of service, in this case service to the needs of children and young people.
This can become a problem if the wellbeing needs of teachers and education staff become
obscured by their focus on being of service — either by themselves or their organisational culture.

It is not in the current culture of the teaching profession to boundary the service offered.
If children have a need, the reflexive response is to respond again and again. This lack of
limit, coupled with the relentless demand from our communities can lead to exhaustion,
demoralisation and ultimately burnout.

**The World Happiness Report[14] flags work-life balance as the strongest workplace driver
of a person's individual, subjective wellbeing:**

> **"** Workers who report that their job interferes with their ability to
> spend time with their partner and family, as well as those who
> 'bring their job home' with them by worrying about work matters
> even when they are not at work, report systematically lower levels
> of subjective wellbeing."

That's why we asked staff whether they can switch off in the evenings. The wider range of responsibilities staff face are laced with emotional demand, leaving staff vulnerable to not being able to leave their work behind at the end of the day. This in turn reduces their wellbeing.

70% of all staff find it hard to switch off in the evenings

Senior leaders find it hardest to switch-off from work related issues

46% not at all easy

36% not very easy

School teachers find it hard to switch-off from work related issues

30% not at all easy
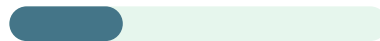
39% not very easy
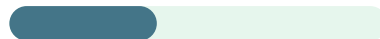
Support staff can also find it hard to switch off from work related issues

22% not at all easy

32% not very easy

We also asked staff if they would describe themselves as emotionally exhausted and found that many felt this way. This is true of school leaders in particular.

71% of all staff stated they were emotionally exhausted[a]

83%

of **senior leaders** are either somewhat or very emotionally exhausted

70%

of **school teachers** are either somewhat or very emotionally exhausted

55%

of **support staff** are either somewhat or very emotionally exhausted

Source: Education Support/YouGov research, 2022

[a] Describing themselves as somewhat or very emotionally exhausted

Being unable to switch off is correlated with lower wellbeing. Emotional exhaustion is an indicator of burnout. Lack of control over workload and pace is also a risk to wellbeing.

Whilst for some this may be mitigated by the wellbeing boost gained through vocational satisfaction, for most the scales have now tipped too far. The current combination of high levels of socio-emotional demand presenting unpredictably in schools, combined with low levels of capacity and resource to respond, puts staff at risk of significant stress. The cumulative impact of this situation (since the first Covid lockdown in March 2020) means that many education staff are now at real risk of chronic stress and burnout, with all the long term health implications this implies.

To be clear, we do not see this inability to switch off as a failing on the part of individual teachers. The prevalence of these issues across the sector point to the systemic nature of the issues now visible across education.

> **In 2022 the Health and Safety Executive named the teaching profession as the third most stressful, behind public administration or defence and human health or social work. It also confirmed that education staff have higher than average rate of work related stress, depression or anxiety[15]. This is in line with our Teacher Wellbeing Index (2022)[16] findings, and DfE Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders Survey (2023)[17] which both reported that education staff had lower wellbeing scores than the general population across the period 2019-2022.**

The health risks of chronic stress are well understood. Risk of high blood pressure[18], diabetes[19], heart disease[20], a suppressed immune system[21] and musculoskeletal conditions are greater when the body is in a long-term state of stress. The human body simply isn't designed to endure the presence of stress hormones for long periods of time.

We often hear teachers and education staff talk about the impact of long working hours on their social lives, existing families or plans to have families. These are important considerations, because of the consequences for people's wellbeing. We seldom, however, hear teachers and education staff talk about the impact of their job on their health, and we hope to work with school leaders and educators to change this.

Without health, there is no wellbeing. The first step is to raise awareness and acknowledgement and then to make improvements. In this way, we can secure the long-term attractiveness of the teaching profession, ensuring that future generations of children will learn in schools staffed by high quality, productive educators.

Impact on teacher recruitment and retention

The pressure and intensity of working in education is widely recognised and normalised by many working in, and alongside, the education sector. In 2022, Deloitte reported that "turnover rates [in education] are among the highest with 70% reporting mental health as a key reason for leaving or planning to leave the job."[22]

> " I think that a lot of other professions are expected to kind of go above and beyond, but they're rewarded with payment for doing those extra hours... I just think that the expectation is that these things have to get done and, you know, it's in your own time, and there's no reward for that, essentially."
>
> Female teacher (focus group, February 2023)

Beyond the obvious impact on the lives and health of individuals currently in the sector, we are reducing the attractiveness of teaching as a potential career path for bright and talented people. This is not the result of discussing and acknowledging these issues publicly. The pressure in the system is visible to anyone with a personal relationship with a teacher. The impact will be significant in the long run as children and young people experience a reduced quality of education, driven by high staff turnover, gaps in subject-specific expertise and an ever-decreasing experience and skill base in the workforce.

32.51%
of all staff are actively seeking to change their job*

29%
2022/23
The Government's post-graduate Initial Teacher Training recruitment target for 2022/23 **was missed by 29%**[23]

Postgraduate Initial Teacher Training recruitment target for secondary level has **not been met since 2012/13**[24]

Intention to leave[b]

55% of education staff in the **UK** who wanted to leave told us they were actively seeking to leave their job[25]

39% of education staff in **Scotland** who wanted to leave told us they were actively seeking to leave their job[26]
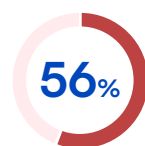
53% of education staff in **Wales** who wanted to leave told us they were actively seeking to leave their job[27]

56% of education staff in **England** who wanted to leave told us they were actively seeking to leave their job[28]

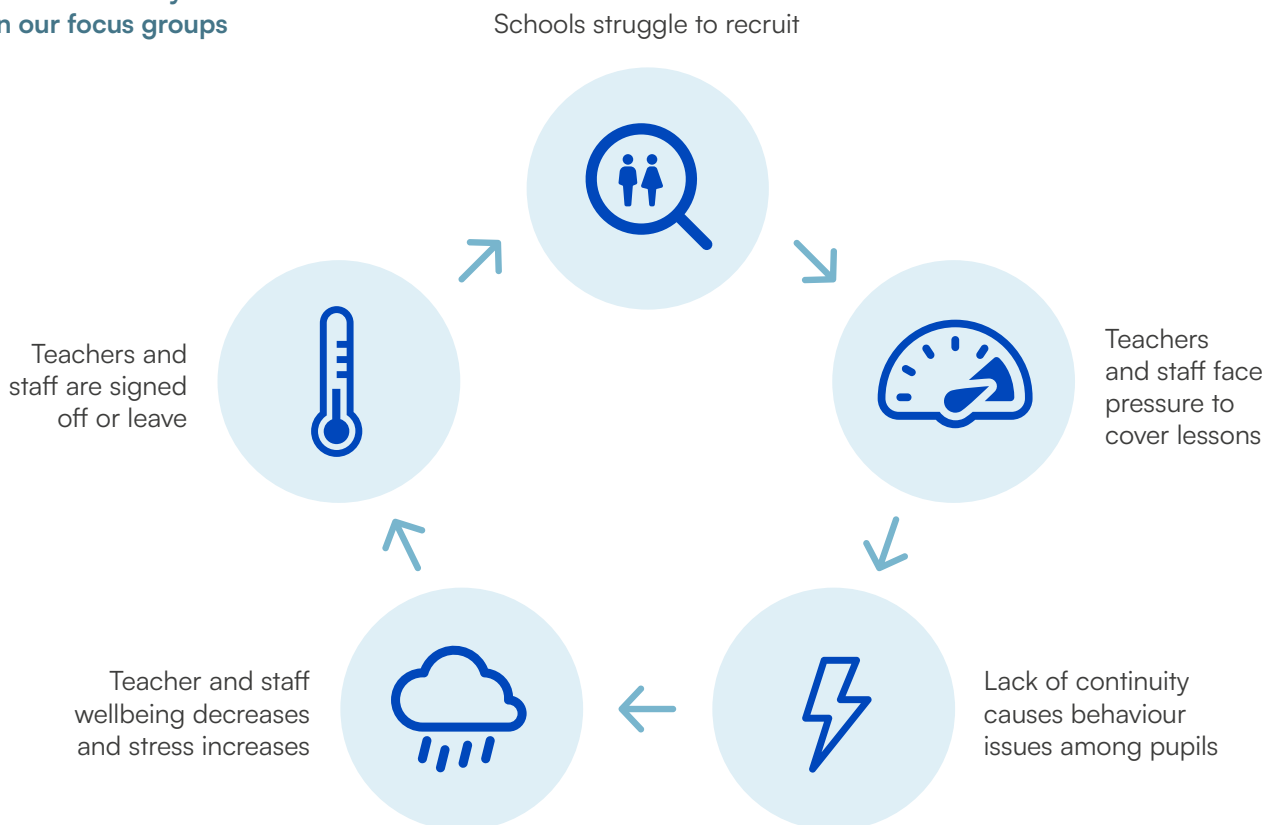* See Teacher Wellbeing Index 2022 for more information
[b] Percentages for Northern Ireland are not shown due to its small dataset

The most recent DfE workforce data showed that
36,262 education staff left the sector between 2020 and 2021[29]

According to a recent Freedom of Information request, teachers have spent at least 1.5 million days off work owing to stress and mental health issues.[30] This leaves many classes being covered by supply teachers or other colleagues who are already stretched.

In a recent focus group held with senior leaders[31], participants raised recruitment issues without prompting. Leaders described staff shortages and difficulty recruiting, saying it contributes to a "pressure cooker" of other challenges, ultimately leading to further staff attrition. They described a vicious circle in which an inability to recruit teachers affects pupil behaviour, staff wellbeing and staff retention. This fits with OECD data[32] showing that teachers who perceive there to be staff shortages at their place of work tend to be less satisfied with their profession.

Recruitment and retention cycle as described by school leaders in our focus groups

Schools struggle to recruit

Teachers and staff face pressure to cover lessons

Lack of continuity causes behaviour issues among pupils

Teacher and staff wellbeing decreases and stress increases

Teachers and staff are signed off or leave

The systemic drivers of staff stress in the education system (as noted above) are feeding the recruitment and retention crisis. As a result, pupils — especially those in the most deprived areas — are more likely to experience teacher churn or be taught by cover staff. This can lead to inconsistencies, reduced quality of learning, less secure relationships between pupils and staff and ultimately worse outcomes than could be achieved with more stable staffing.

Case study

Stephanie McCarthy*

Teaching assistant in a large
primary school in the Midlands

**Teaching assistants have always worked
with SEN pupils but the behaviour needs
of the children we are dealing with has
become more acute in recent years.**

These pupils needs specialist support that staff
are just not trained to provide. The training we
get is superficial and does not recognise the
reality of the behaviour we have to cope with.
We used to get specialist training on a regular
basis but our school can no longer afford this.
There was previously much more support from
external agencies, whether that is social
services, speech and language or educational
psychologists. This does not happen anymore.

We frequently have classes with three or four
children with extreme behaviour needs and
not enough support for them. These children
are swearing, throwing things and can be
violent. Teaching for the rest of the class is
often disrupted whilst the needs of these
three or four pupils are addressed.

> **66**
>
> **I often come home feeling
> that I haven't been able to
> support the children the best
> that I can because of the
> hundreds of other things
> happening in the classroom."**

This impacts the academic progress of the class
and teachers are being blamed.

At the moment I am acting up as teacher
without being paid to do so. I feel supported by
my colleagues but not senior leaders. They want
staff to learn new schemes and implement new
processes but we are already struggling with the
day to day. There is no acknowledgement of
that. I just don't think they understand the reality
we have to deal with.

I often come home feeling that I haven't been
able to support the children the best that I
can because of the hundreds of other things
happening in the classroom. There is no one
else to help because everyone else is in under
the same pressure.

Our school is really struggling to recruit teaching
assistants and teachers. We've been through
three rounds of interviews and we've not
employed anybody. This is mainly to do with the
pay on offer. In the cost of living crisis, people
are going to go for the jobs paying more.

The morale in our school is awful. In 12 years
of working in schools, I have never known
staff morale to be so low.

There's nobody I know that's particularly happy
in the job. My colleague is in her second year of
teaching and said that if she could go back she
would not have become a teacher, she said it is
just not worth it.

*Pseudonym

Section 3
How pupils are affected

It is clear that the current status quo is not serving children and young people, or the education staff who are committed to teaching, guiding and inspiring them.

1 in 5

parents in Great Britain said they have struggled to provide sufficient food due to the current cost-of-living crisis.

26%

Over a quarter (26%) said their child's mental health has worsened due to the situation.[33]

Schools and colleges are communities. If the wellbeing of one group in a community is negatively affected, this will have an effect on other groups. Schools and colleges are no different.

No one can do their best work when they are mentally and emotionally depleted. In the case of teacher and educator mental health, we can no longer continue to deny the reality that stressed and overwhelmed teachers and educators are less likely to deliver the high quality education that children and young people deserve. In March 2022, Deloitte reported that staff in education had the highest levels of presenteeism in the public sector, with individuals 'always' or 'often' going to work while ill or with poor mental health.[34] This is neither a moral nor professional failing. It's the predictable outcome of teachers working in overly stressful and pressurised environments.

"

We don't know the full extent of what they've been through in lockdown. But for a lot of them, it's coming out in their behaviour. A lot of them, you can see it's anger and fear and frustration. And with my Year 10 group, and my colleague with her Year 11 group, there's like a complete sense of apathy."

Female teacher (focus group, February 2023)

"

I don't know if this is COVID, but something shifted quite recently in [terms of teachers'] pressures. Someone said to me recently... people have got angrier... We're more privy to parental pressures and dealing with a lot of people's very challenging backgrounds with a lot of very complex young people. So I think that's where the pressures come in, really, more than a kind of workload in the day. Then, combine that with [the] external pressure of Ofsted."

Female senior leader (focus group, February 2023)

Below we have included a summary of relevant research that supports the idea that there is relationship between teacher and mental health, and pupil outcomes, as well as pupil wellbeing. More research is needed, and we are interested in hearing from academics and organisations that are researching this area.

Teacher wellbeing and pupil attainment

Our literature review, published in October 2021[35], highlighted emerging evidence of an association between teacher stress, burnout, depression and anxiety with poorer academic achievement and pupil engagement (including concentration, satisfaction rates, motivation and behaviour). The OECD indicates that "stressful working environments affect teachers' motivation, self-efficacy and job commitment, which can in turn affect the educational system as a whole and students' learning outcomes."[36]

Teacher burnout

There is evidence to suggest that if teachers are suffering from burnout their pupils may perform less well in exams, are more likely to show signs of stress and their motivation may be affected.

There is also evidence to suggest that teachers living with burnout are less able to prepare for classes or control pupil behaviour.[37]

Staff engagement and pupil wellbeing

Not only does poor teacher mental health have a relationship to children and young people's ability to learn, but there is increasing evidence that it affects pupil wellbeing too. Impact Ed recently published Working Well: exploring staff engagement and pupil wellbeing in English schools.[38]

The research indicates that staff engagement and pupil wellbeing are correlated, with teachers' perceptions of school behaviour systems being the factor most associated with pupil wellbeing. Leadership and management was also strongly associated with pupil wellbeing.

This suggests that in schools where staff perceive the nature of their work more positively, pupil wellbeing tends to be higher. It, therefore, benefits no one — least of all children and young people — to overload teachers and ask them to power through, or to compensate, for system-wide failings.

> **Children and young people living in poverty are 72% more likely than other children to be diagnosed with a long-term illness. One study has shown by the age of 11 they are four times more likely to develop mental health problems.**[39]

Epistemic trust

Leading psychoanalyst, clinical psychologist and CEO of the Anna Freud Centre for Children and Families, Peter Fonagy[c], has written and talked extensively on the idea that children learn best when they feel emotionally safe, and treated as individuals. He refers to this state as 'epistemic trust'. It is in this state of safety that the vulnerable act of learning can best take place.[40]

Conversely, a child who feels unsafe and unrecognised is more likely to feel distrustful, and less likely to gauge new information as relevant and worth learning. This is referred to as 'epistemic vigilance'. This state is more likely to exist in children and young people who lack trust in the consistency and competence of their primary caregivers. This could, for example, include those where abuse, substance misuse, poverty or other sources of trauma exist.

Given the significance of good quality relationships between education staff and children, there is an opportunity for further research here. In particular, we would value future research to establish the extent to which the epistemic trust of children is compromised by high levels of staff turnover or staff presenting at work with symptoms of chronic stress, exhaustion or burnout.

> Teachers with unmanageable workloads and a poor work-life balance are likely to have fewer emotional resources available to make pupils feel safe and seen, in a way that promotes both their wellbeing and learning.

[c] annafreud.org/training/training-and-conferences-overview/tutors/f/professor-peter-fonagy/

Case study

Peter Robertson*

Headteacher of a primary school

Since the pandemic, I have seen a significant increase in parents struggling with their own mental health issues. This has a massive impact on the children, including increased mental health and behavioural issues. This is all against a backdrop of fewer services to support families. There is increased demand and a waiting list for support. In the meantime, schools are filling the gaps and we're overwhelmed. We have significantly less funding for support too.

Increasingly my time is taken up dealing with safeguarding issues and children and families in crisis. Generally there is less resource and more need!

The thresholds for access to support from CAMHS, social services are higher, but at the same time the number of children and families in need has increased. Of course, I understand that these bodies are under resourced and under-staffed too but this is incredibly frustrating for schools.

There has also been a significant increase in children with diagnosed special educational needs. Schools are also under pressure not

to exclude pupils. So we are left with dealing with very challenging behaviours without the capacity or resources to do so properly. Often these pupils need to be in special schools but there are no places available.

There is not nearly enough support for staff. They need more training but there is no capacity in the system for them to take the time to actually be trained. There is no flex in the system and it is impossible to get supply cover. There has been some additional funding and training but it is not enough. I'd say it feels tokenistic. The increased challenges have had a big impact on me personally. I have found the pressures on schools and school leaders during the pandemic to be immense. The stress meant I needed to take time off work to recover.

My staff are also leaving due to the pressures they're under. A teacher in the school recently left due to mental health issues and others are finding things difficult and are considering leaving. Many are also reassessing teaching as a career and finding it doesn't stand up when compared to other professions in terms of pay and flexibility. The demands are huge and parents' expectations have increased significantly since I started working in education. It often feels relentless.

There needs to be a change in the incentives for those working in areas of greater need. Currently the inequalities that existed pre pandemic are increasing. This will not change without additional funding and support for schools that serve communities with increased challenges.

> **66**
>
> **Many are also reassessing teaching as a career and finding it doesn't stand up when compared to other professions in terms of pay and flexibility."**

*Pseudonym

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The popular view of a school-based career in the UK is often set in sunlit uplands, filled with eager learners and inspired teachers, long holidays and four o'clock finishes. The reality has much sharper edges.

Alongside the rigour and demands of academic achievement, education staff are now routinely dealing with pupils who face complex social, emotional and mental health issues. They are grappling with complex barriers to learning that are not adequately supported. They are acutely aware of growing material need, with, on average, almost one third of every class living in poverty. Added to this, many teachers report apathy and disaffection among young people post-pandemic.

As the demands on education staff have grown in volume and complexity, they are working longer hours and reporting higher levels of stress, exhaustion and burnout. In popular culture and mainstream media they are misunderstood, underappreciated and taken for granted. Unsurprisingly, attrition from the profession is growing whilst recruitment into teacher training provision is declining.

And all the while, the life chances of this generation of children and young people decline. They are growing up through austerity, Covid, and cost of living crisis. They have lived through challenges unprecedented in lifetimes of anyone working today. That they should have increased needs, complexity and requirements for care is not surprising.

As a society, we cannot continue to expect teachers to meet these needs on top of their day job. It is time to recognise this new reality and to respond with the attention, care and investment that our future deserves.

Recommendations

1. **It's time to decide whether schools are the front line of children's services, or whether they are specialists in education.**

   The status quo is failing children and education staff. If we cannot provide this level of clarity, we should plan for increased attrition from and recruitment into the profession. The attractiveness of working in education is declining rapidly, due to the consequences of this lack of clarity.

2. **Wherever policymakers land on this issue, there must be well resourced services for children and families.**

   We must ensure that there is sufficient support in the system over the next five years whilst improvements are made. This should include supporting educators through ring-fenced funding for reflective practice or professional supervision for those in roles most at risk of emotional exhaustion (i.e. DSLs/DSPs, SENDCOs/ALNCOs or SLT).

3. **Education departments need robust recruitment and retention strategies that reflect this new reality.**

   By systematically addressing the drivers of poor wellbeing, a range of changes can be mapped and implemented to improve the attractiveness of the profession. Compared to the cost of attrition in the workforce, we believe that these changes can be comfortably cost neutral.

4. **Training frameworks (i.e. ITT/ITE, ECF/ECT/NQT and NPQs) are essential to the profession, but will only continue to be effective if they reflect the reality of life in schools.**

   The frameworks should be updated to reflect the new reality of life in schools — with the necessary time and resources provided — equipping teachers and leaders with the skills they need to stay well and stay in the job for the long run.

5. **Resources, and responses to the needs of children and young people, must be prioritised in the least well-resourced areas.**

   Schools in the least well-resourced areas experience these issues more intensely than elsewhere.

6. **Policymakers need to listen closely to teachers and leaders currently working in ordinary (not extraordinary) schools, to ensure that policies are grounded in reality. For example:**

   - Education departments could run regular 'Big Ask' type surveys to gain real insights that inform policy development.
   - An annual assembly of education staff (based on the citizen assembly model) could be established to support policy decision-making, with schools generously compensated and adequately forewarned when their staff participate.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Methodology

This report includes the findings of two research studies. The methodology for each is shown below, together with links to further information about each study.

Teacher Wellbeing Index 2022 (Savill-Smith and Scanlan, 2022)

The Teacher Wellbeing Index is an annual research study conducted for Education Support by YouGov with education staff from its online panel. A total of 3,082 education staff working in the UK completed the survey, which was conducted between 21 June and 29 July 2022.

The sample included all job roles within the education profession from senior leaders through to support staff. Respondents worked in a variety of settings including early years, primary, secondary, further adult and vocational education sectors.

More information about the respondents by sector, region, gender age and time spent working in education can be found in Appendix B of the Teacher Wellbeing Index 2022. The Teacher Wellbeing Index can be found at educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-organisations/research/teacher-wellbeing-index/

Teacher Retention Commission Poll (Dorrell et al, 2022)

The Teacher Retention Commission was formed in December 2022, in association with Education Support, to examine the drivers behind why so many secondary school teachers are leaving the profession, and what would make them stay? Public First is leading the research for the Commission.

The first component of the research comprised an online poll of 1,004 secondary school teachers working in England, which was conducted between 18 and 28 October 2022. A full breakdown of the findings of the poll can be found at publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Education-Support.pdf

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