



For this year's State of Education report, The Key collected the views of more than 2,000 school leaders and governors across the country. While our 2015 survey took a sweeping look at the education landscape, this year we've delved deeper into the reality behind some of the headline issues for those leading our schools. How is population growth affecting demand for school places? Is there really a shortage of teachers? Our report attempts to unpick some of the big questions about challenges, concerns and priorities in the sector today.

So, what looms greatest on the minds of school leaders and governors for the year ahead? For many, it's the school budget and a lack of funding. This is expected to be the biggest challenge on the horizon for nearly a third of schools. It's possible that the proposed national funding formula will help, but budgets are still having to stretch further to accommodate rising costs linked to pay and pensions.

On the subject of pupil places, six in 10 school leaders told us their school was oversubscribed but we also found notable undersubscription, with one in five schools receiving fewer applications than they can accommodate. This, too, brings further budget implications.

But what about once children arrive at school? We found that in a third of primary schools more than half of new pupils are below the expected level of school-readiness. Why? Lack of social skills, delayed speech and lack of resilience are the most commonly-cited issues. If children are already behind on arrival, the challenge for our teachers is greatly increased.

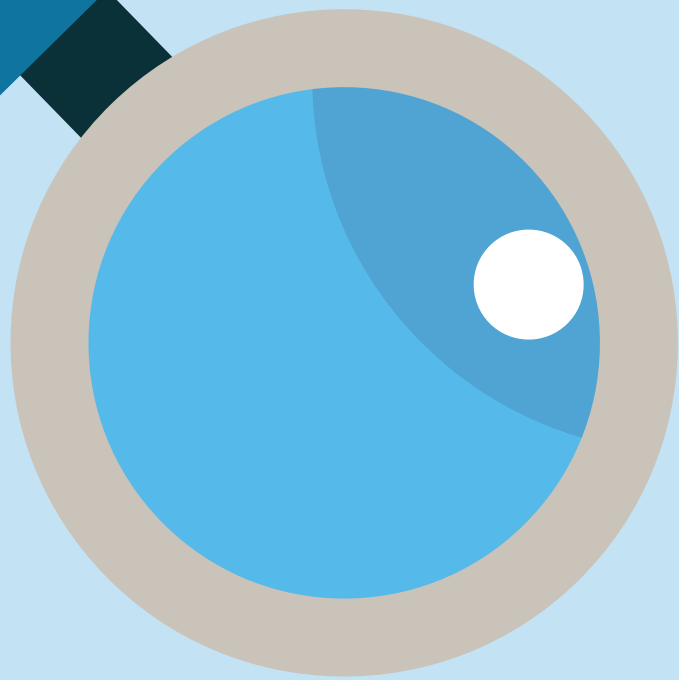
When it comes to classroom teachers, schools are struggling to recruit and retain them but our findings also suggest a more mobile workforce, where teachers are alert to opportunities elsewhere and generally leave their posts to take up jobs at other schools.

And what about school leaders themselves? Are they confident in the quality of leadership and teaching in their schools? Yes. And do they expect to be in post in three years' time? Nearly three-quarters told us that they do.

There is no professional sphere that shapes and affects lives quite like education. Despite the challenges they face, almost all school leaders (98%) feel they have a positive impact on the future prospects of children and young people, and six in 10 would recommend their job to others. Governors, too, are happy recommending their role to others, with 88% feeling they make a positive difference to their school.

Schools are central to our economy, developing the skills and qualities that individuals, and we as a country, need to be competitive. This report gives a valuable insight into what those at the front line think about the current state of education, and how they think this will develop. For many, the 2016 white paper, published since we conducted our survey, prompts more questions about quality and accountability in our changing school system. As those leading our schools navigate the increasingly complex task they're entrusted with, let's make sure that they get a voice to match. That's why we run our State of Education survey each year, and now it's time to listen to the findings and ensure we're offering the best possible support to our schools.

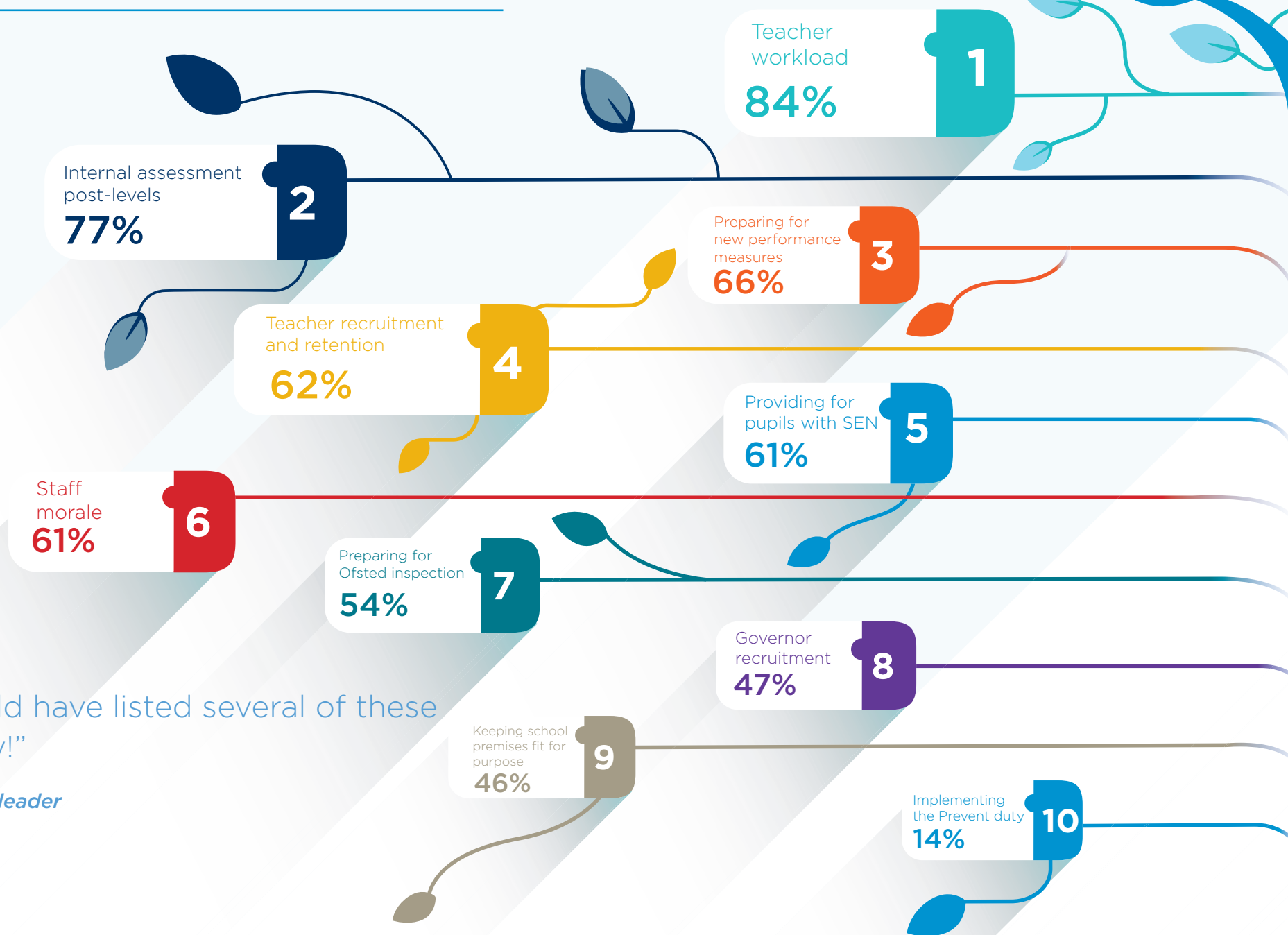
Fergal Roche, CEO
The Key



THE BIG PICTURE

School leaders are struggling with managing teachers' workload, internal assessment in a post-levels system and preparing for new performance measures. They are still finding teacher recruitment and retention tricky, but it's budget pressure that they, and governors, expect to be their greatest challenge for the next 12 months. They remain positive about the quality of teaching in their schools.

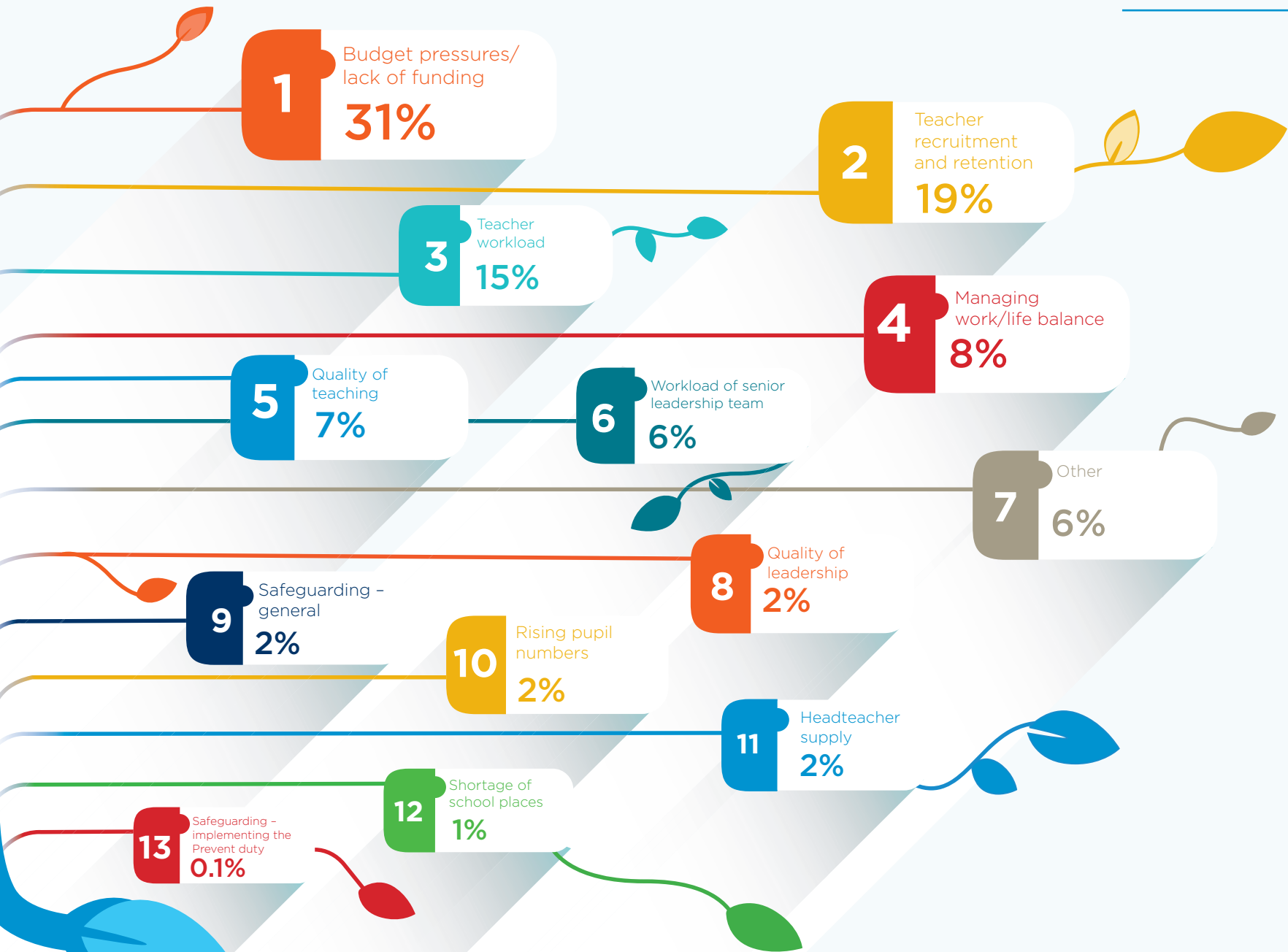
Percentage of school leaders who found the following areas of responsibility difficult to manage in their school over the past 12 months:



“ I could have listed several of these easily!”

School leader

The biggest expected challenge for schools over the next 12 months:



The teacher workload challenge

The education landscape has changed considerably in recent years, but managing teacher workload remains a challenge for most school leaders (84%). In both primary and secondary settings (83% and 88% respectively), this proved difficult for more school leaders over the past year than any other area of responsibility we asked them to choose from – echoing the findings of our survey last year¹.

Impact of assessment and accountability reforms

More than a year on from the removal of National Curriculum levels, school leaders say that managing internal assessment in their school has been challenging. Almost eight in 10 (77%) found this difficult over the past year, including a slightly higher proportion of primary school leaders (79%) than secondary (72%).

With the implementation of new accountability systems drawing closer, preparing for the new performance measures proved difficult for two-thirds (66%) of school leaders over the past year – up from just under half (47%) when we asked the same question a year ago. Six in 10 (61%) of those in secondary schools found preparing for the new performance measures difficult, and nearly seven in 10 (68%) of their primary school counterparts.

How are schools faring with reforms to SEND provision?

September 2014 saw a landmark reform in expectations of provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Our findings suggest that genuine change takes time to implement and school leaders are continuing to grapple with the new system.

Eighteen months in, over half (61%) of school leaders say they have found it tricky to provide for these pupils. It seems that the younger

pupils are, the more difficult the system is for schools to navigate: nearly two-thirds (65%) of leaders in primary schools found providing for pupils with SEND difficult, compared to just under half (50%) of those in secondary schools.



There are many challenges facing education - budgets are being cut in real terms. However, teacher workload & work/life balance need addressing too.”

School leader

Spotlight on teacher recruitment and retention

With school leaders struggling to manage teacher workload and significant changes to the education system, it is no surprise to learn that six in 10 (62%) are finding it challenging to recruit and retain teachers. It was a particular challenge for secondary school leaders, with three-quarters (76%) saying they found it difficult to manage in their schools, compared to just under six in 10 leaders in primary settings (59%).

Quality of education

On the whole, school leaders appear to be confident in the quality of leadership and teaching in their schools – reported to be the biggest challenges ahead for only two per cent and seven per cent respectively.

It's also worth noting that despite the public attention that the Prevent duty has attracted, this was one responsibility on our list that was easy to manage for more school leaders (42%) over the past year, than difficult to manage (14%). Less than one per cent of school leaders anticipate that it will be their biggest challenge next year.

¹ The Key's State of Education report 2015: www.thekeysupport.com/state-of-education-2015

Looking ahead: worry over budget pressures

When we asked school leaders what they expect their biggest challenge to be over the next 12 months, from a list of 14 possible options, there was one stand-out area of concern. While for 19% it will be teacher recruitment and retention (second place overall), and for 15% teacher workload (third place), it is budget pressure that looks set to be the main challenge in the year ahead – with three in 10 (31%) school leaders selecting this from our list.

We know that, with the proposed national funding formula, schools may see their budgets change, but the increase to National Insurance contribution rates, end of contracting out of pensions and introduction of the living wage still mean that budgets have to stretch further. Worry about budget pressures is more widespread in secondary schools, where more than two-fifths (43%) of school leaders expect it to be their greatest challenge in the coming year, compared to just under a third (28%) of primary school leaders.

When looking at the results by region, budget pressures/lack of funding is considered to be the biggest challenge ahead by most school leaders up and down the country. Only those in the capital bucked this trend, placing teacher recruitment and retention as the top challenge on the horizon for their schools.

““ We are being asked to do more and more with less money. Many professionals are pushing things back to schools, and we are stretched already.”

Headteacher



What governors think

Over a quarter (27%) of governors expect budget pressures/lack of funding to be the biggest challenge over the next 12 months.

However, governors are up for the challenge: 80% are confident that their governing body can manage any forthcoming funding pressures and 92% are assured that they can oversee the school's financial performance.

““ We will manage it but it won't be easy”

Governor

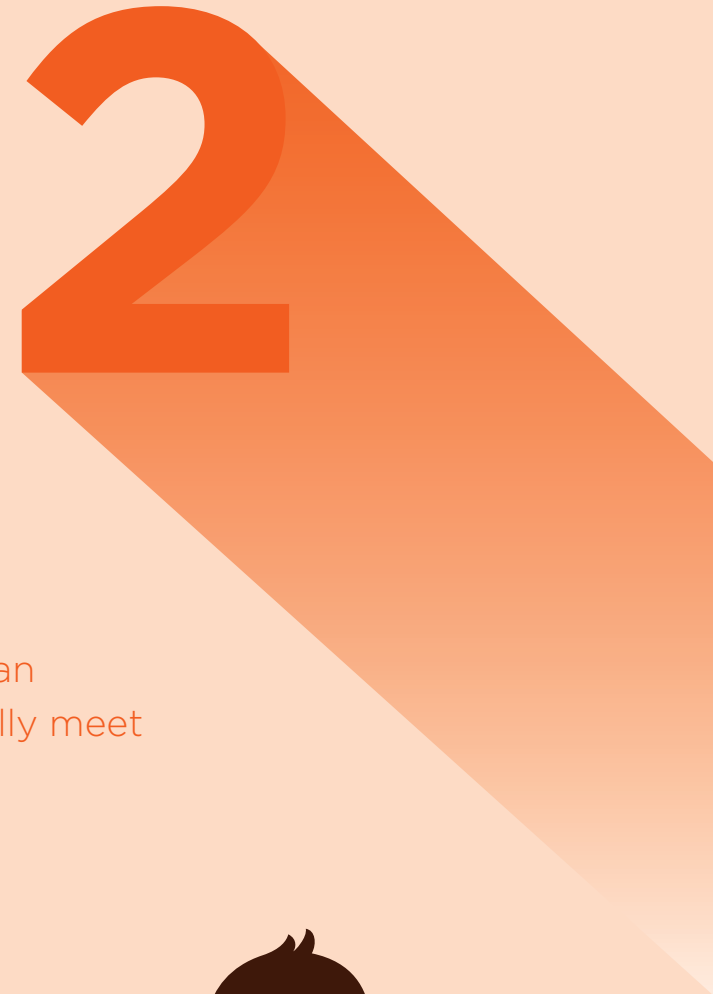
Comments:

“ These surveys are capable of giving us early insight into the state of education in a way that the time-lagged, retrospective census data collected by government cannot. The removal of levels, new SATS, GCSE and A-level reforms have combined to create ballooning workloads for teachers. Whilst some of this work is transitory, it may still cause a spike in early retirements and teacher wastage more generally. When we set this against rising pupil rolls and an improving economy, the concern is that government has created a short-term crisis in teacher retention at exactly the time when recruitment to the profession is particularly hard.”

Dr Rebecca Allen
Director, Education Datalab

“ In terms of assessment, the issue is not the increase in standards, (we all want pupils to do well), it is the way the standards have been implemented and introduced – unrealistic at best. Children have been left to manage increased expectations with literally months to respond. Teachers are left with the task of unpicking (changing overnight) heightened expectations that leave them torn between needing to teach to the test and creating meaningful, real, learning experiences that inspire pupils.”

David Sammels
Headteacher, Mayflower Community Academy



PUPIL APPLICATIONS AND PLACES

Many schools are receiving more applications for school places than they can accommodate – and where this is the case, most would find it difficult to fully meet this demand with their existing budget, buildings and facilities.



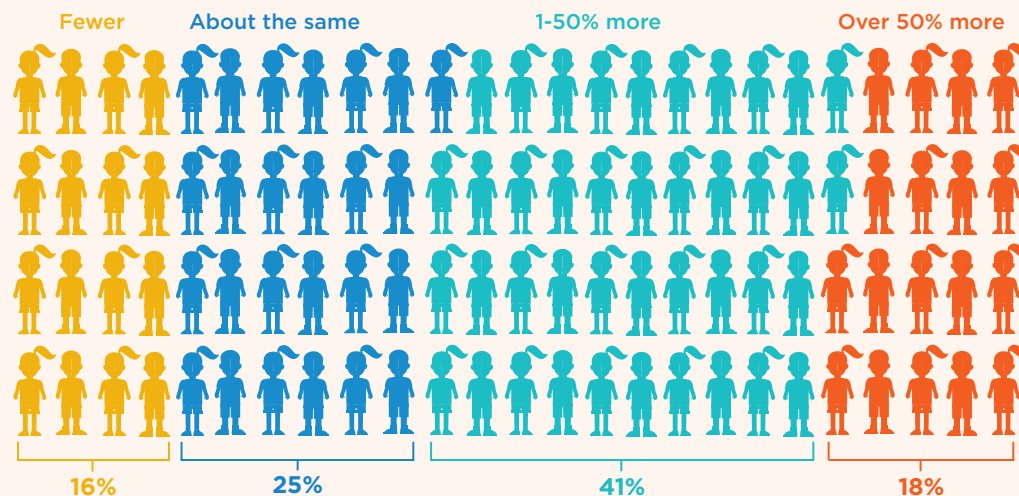


Can schools cope with the rising demand for school places?

The majority of schools were unable to keep up with demand for pupil places in the admission round for the September 2015 intake. When asked how many applications their school received versus places available, almost six in 10 (59%) school leaders told us that demand outstripped supply. Forty-one per cent received up to 50% more applications, and one in 10 (10%) received almost twice as many as they could accept.

Pressure is being felt more at the primary level, where three in five (60%) schools received more applications for places than they could accommodate for the 2015/16 intake, compared to just over half (52%) of secondary schools. These findings are not surprising with pupil numbers on the rise and an expected extra 880,000 places needed by 2023². And as pupils currently in primary schools move through the system, it seems likely that many secondary schools will be feeling further pressure for places soon.

How many applications vs. pupil places available did your school receive in the admission round for 2015/16?



This year we had 222 applications for 60 pupil places and it's been a similar story for the last few years. We could only start to meet this additional demand with the capital investment in our premises, which means we're now expecting 10 new classrooms to improve provision for our children.

That said, taking additional pupils and the associated expansion has implications outside of funding. Our school field provides plenty of play space in summer, but come winter, the hard play area is the same size as when we were a one-form-entry school and we now hold an extra four classes.

We're not only having to rethink how we manage playtimes for our growing number of pupils, but how we provide on-site parking with no space for more staff, and how we alleviate the chaos on the roads around the school during pick-up and drop-off times."

Headteacher

² Department for Education - https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/330261/SFR23_2014_Main_Text.pdf

Across the country

When we look at demand across the country, we find that London had the highest proportion of oversubscribed schools and one of the lowest rates of undersubscription. Seven in 10 (69%) school leaders in the capital told us that their school had to turn down applications, and almost a quarter (23%) of these schools received between 91% and 100% more applications than they could satisfy.

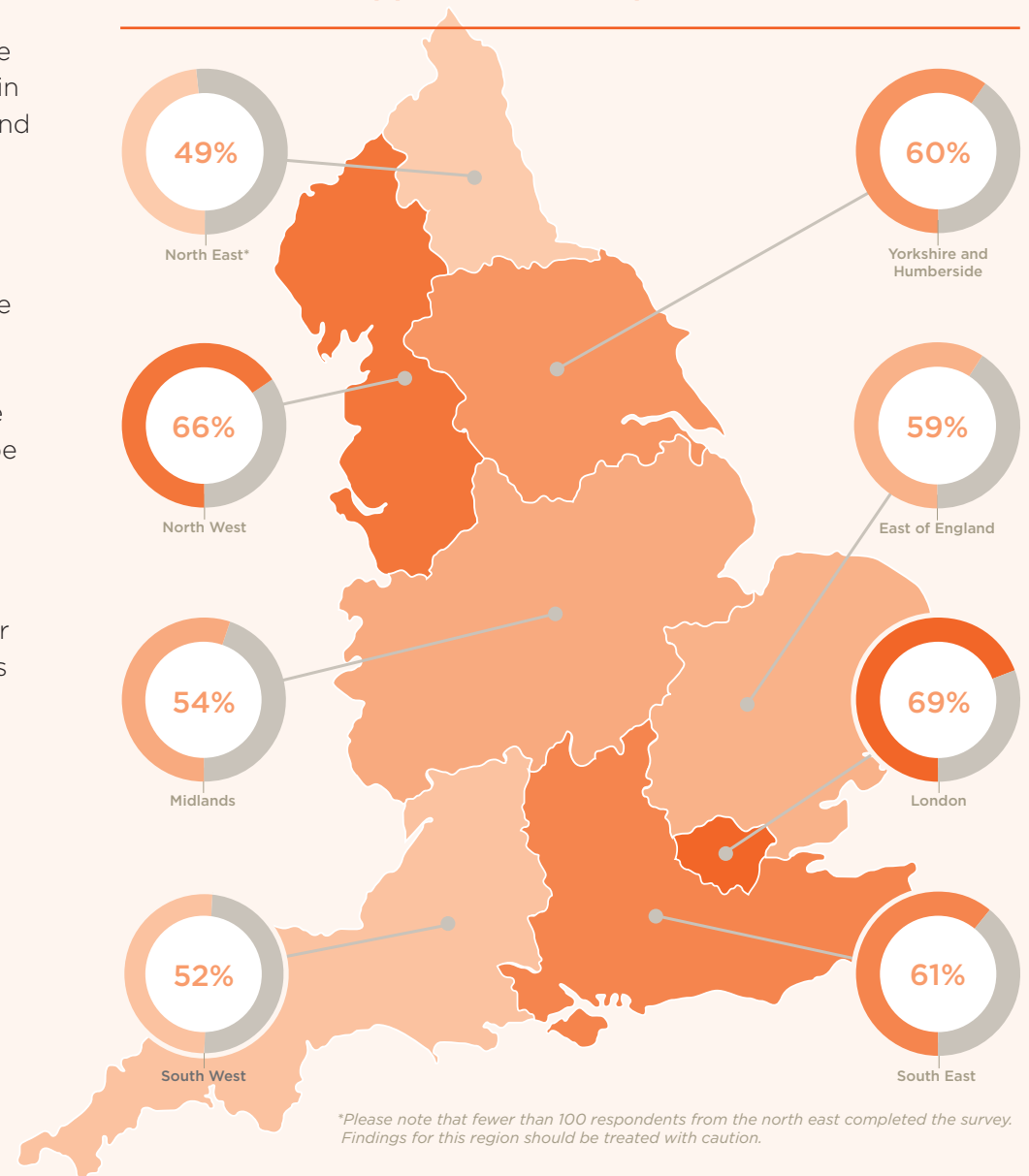
That said, almost two in 10 (16%) school leaders nationally say they received fewer applications for places than they could accommodate – for example, almost one in five schools in the south west and the midlands stated this was the case in their region. On the whole, undersubscription is more common in secondary schools, with more than a quarter (26%) of secondary school leaders reporting this to be the case compared to 14% of primary school leaders.

For primary schools in particular the pressure doesn't end with the application numbers. Almost half (45%) of primary school leaders have had to respond to upset parents whose children didn't get their first-choice placement at the school, compared to one in five leaders in secondary schools (20%).

“ We are oversubscribed and plans are in place to help for the next two years. We are already up to 590 pupils which creates a problem in old Victorian premises - like getting a quart into a pint pot.”

Governor

Percentage of school leaders, by region, who say they received more applications than places:



What are the main obstacles to meeting the demand?

Of those schools that reported facing extra demand for places, nearly nine in 10 (86%) would find the demand difficult to fully meet with their current budget, buildings and facilities; for almost six in 10 (58%) it would be 'very difficult'.

Only 14% of school leaders in oversubscribed schools say they would be able to meet the additional demand with current resources. Those in the south west are the most confident, with 15% of leaders in oversubscribed schools saying that accommodating the additional applicants would be 'fairly easy' and five per cent saying it would be 'very easy'.

In schools that would find it difficult to meet the demand, lack of space for additional buildings (25%), insufficient school budgets (22%) and school buildings not being fit for purpose (19%) are considered to be the main obstacles – ahead of staffing-related issues. The results show slightly different pictures in primary and secondary settings though: while over a fifth (22%) of secondary school leaders say that recruiting more staff to meet pupils' needs would be their biggest challenge, this is true for only one in 10 (13%) of their primary counterparts.

School leaders across both phases appear confident in the quality of education currently provided for their existing pupils, with very few (three per cent) of those whose schools couldn't meet the additional demand for places indicating this is due to the quality of provision.

Bethany Walton, researcher at The Key, explains:

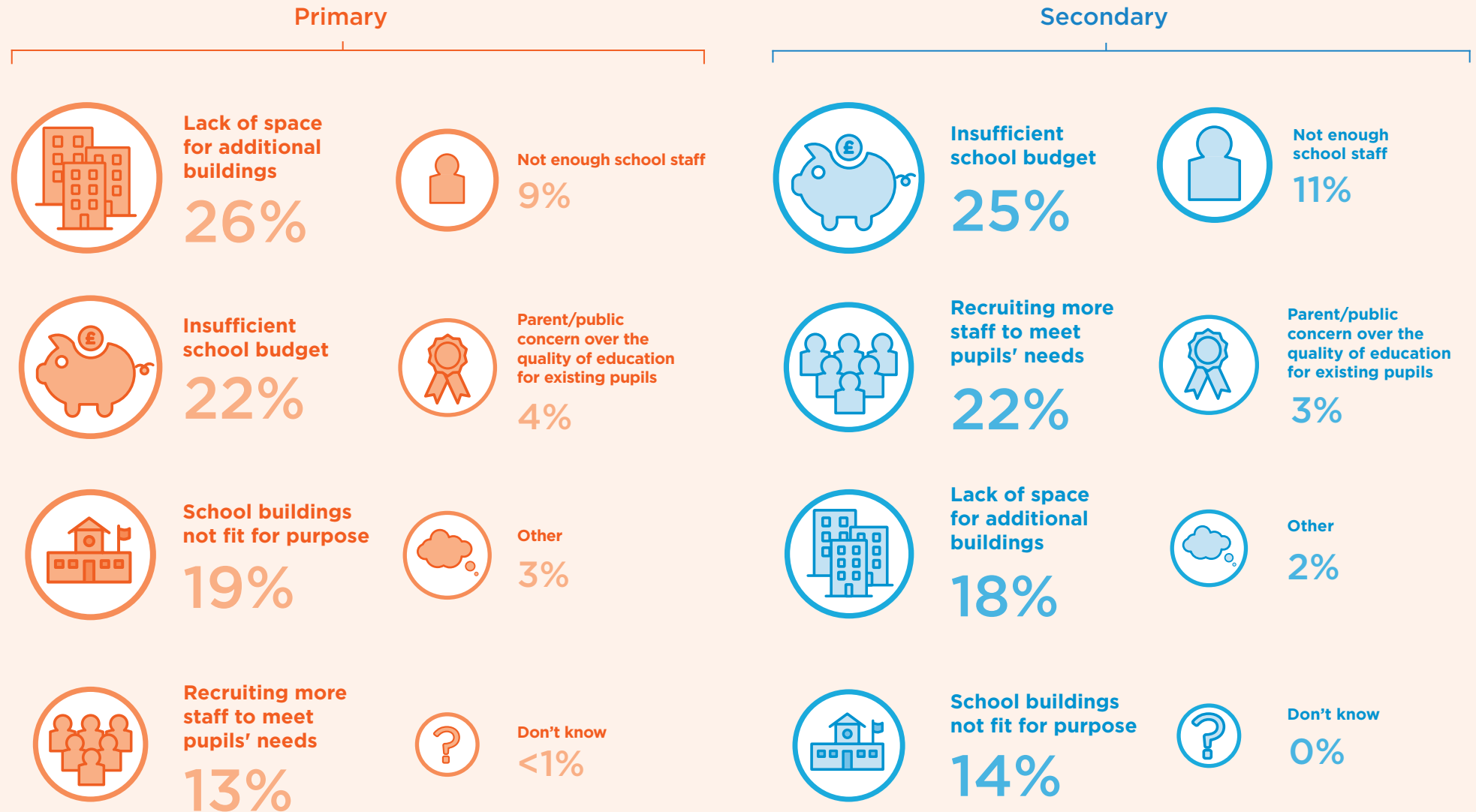


"We see concerns about sufficient school places reflected in the questions we receive from school leaders. They've been asking if and when their school must accept certain pupils, and when a local authority's direction to accept extra pupils can be challenged.

We also know that schools are increasingly having to do more with less money, and it is therefore not surprising to see 'insufficient budgets' identified as one of the main obstacles preventing schools from providing for more pupils to fully meet current demand.

However, school leaders are seeking ways of being more resourceful with their budgets – our articles on generating additional income, achieving good value for money and benchmarking spending have proven popular in the last 12 months. Rather than shrinking from the problem, school leaders are actively seeking ways to make their money go further and cope with challenging circumstances like probable increases in cohorts."

In schools that were oversubscribed and unable to meet the extra demand with their current budget, buildings and facilities, school leaders believe the following options are the main obstacles in taking more pupils:



Comments:

“ The survey response from school leaders is fully in line with current demographic modelling and school census data, which demonstrate a growth trend in England’s school-age population, unprecedented in recent years, and which is driving the surge in demand for school places in a large number of areas. It is clear that an urgent commitment of further capital funding needs to be made by the DfE in order to deliver the additional places required. Growing the number of schools required to meet demand for places can be expected to continue well into the foreseeable future.”

*Kieran McDermott
Chief Executive, One Education Ltd*

“ Issues relating to admission and pupil-place planning weigh significantly on school leaders’ minds as they strive to deliver a first-class education to their pupils. Increasingly school leaders need to be able to promptly resolve pupil placement issues whilst delivering the curriculum, often in less than ideal settings and more alarmingly without the skilled staff or finances necessary to provide educational pedagogical best practice. These issues result all too often in crisis management which can detract significantly from leaders’ thinking, time, energy and resilience; none of which is good for the profession.”

*Prue Barnes-Kemp
Executive Headteacher, Opossum Federation*

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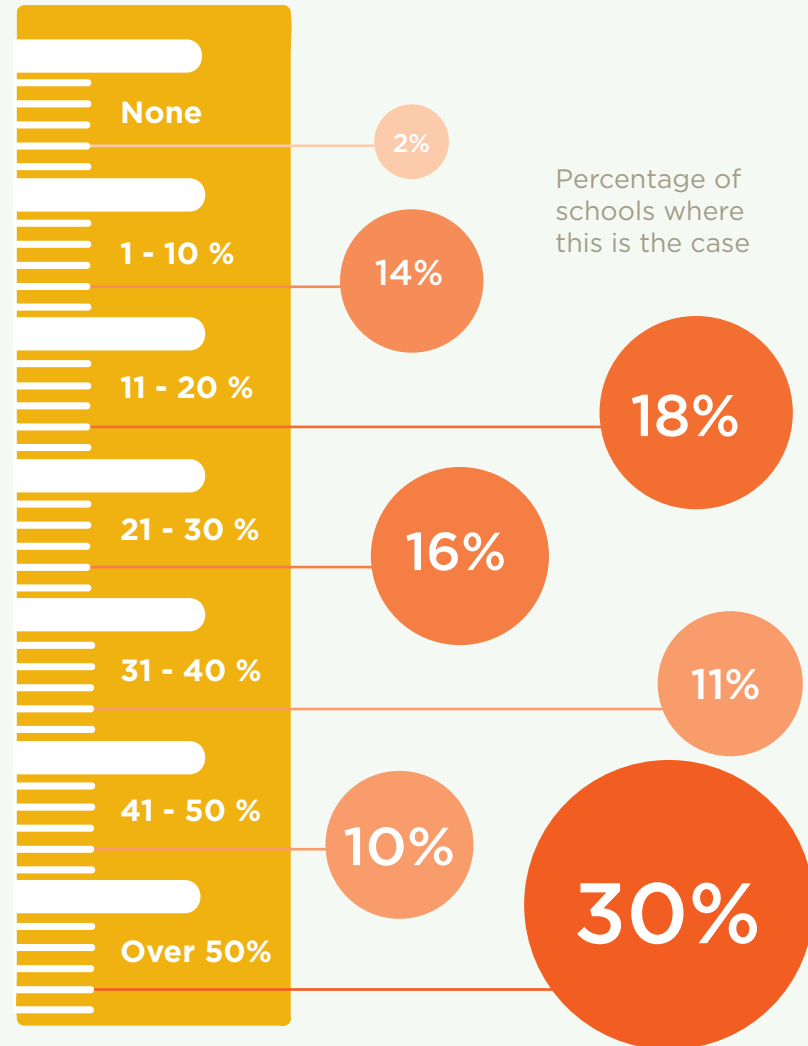
PUPILS' READINESS FOR SCHOOL

School leaders have shed new light on the scale of the task faced by teachers, with only a small minority telling us that all pupils join their school at or above the level of school-readiness they would expect. A lack of preparedness for school is more prevalent in primary settings than secondary, and while there are some differences in the most common reasons for this at each phase, poor self-help skills are apparent across both phases.



In your opinion, what proportion of pupils join your school below the level of school-readiness you would expect?

Percentage of pupils below school-readiness



Below expectations

More than nine in 10 (98%) school leaders say that a proportion of pupils join their school below the level of school-readiness they expect, and three in 10 (30%) say that more than half of pupils are below expected levels when they arrive.

This is more widespread in the primary phase, where nearly a third (31%) of school leaders say that more than half of new pupils are not school-ready. In secondary schools, the proportion of pupils below the level expected is more commonly between one per cent and 20%, but one in 10 (10%) leaders still finds that more than half of each new intake isn't ready for secondary education.

While it's common across the country for more than half of new pupil intakes to be below the level expected – affecting at least 20% of schools in each region – it is most widespread in northern regions. The north east, north west and Yorkshire and Humberside have the highest proportion of schools (between 34% and 39%) where more than half of pupils join below the level of readiness school leaders expect. London, however, is close behind, with 32% of schools taking in new cohorts where more than half of pupils aren't 'school ready'.



We are having more and more children entering our early years stage with delayed speech and a lack of school readiness. I feel much of this is down to challenging family circumstances alongside the rise of mobile phones and other mobile technology, which means parents are more often to be seen on the phone than talking to their children.”

School leader



“ Four year-olds know how to swipe a phone but haven't a clue about conversations.”

School leader



“ Why, in the 21st century are children still arriving in school nurseries aged three or above without being toilet trained?”

School leader

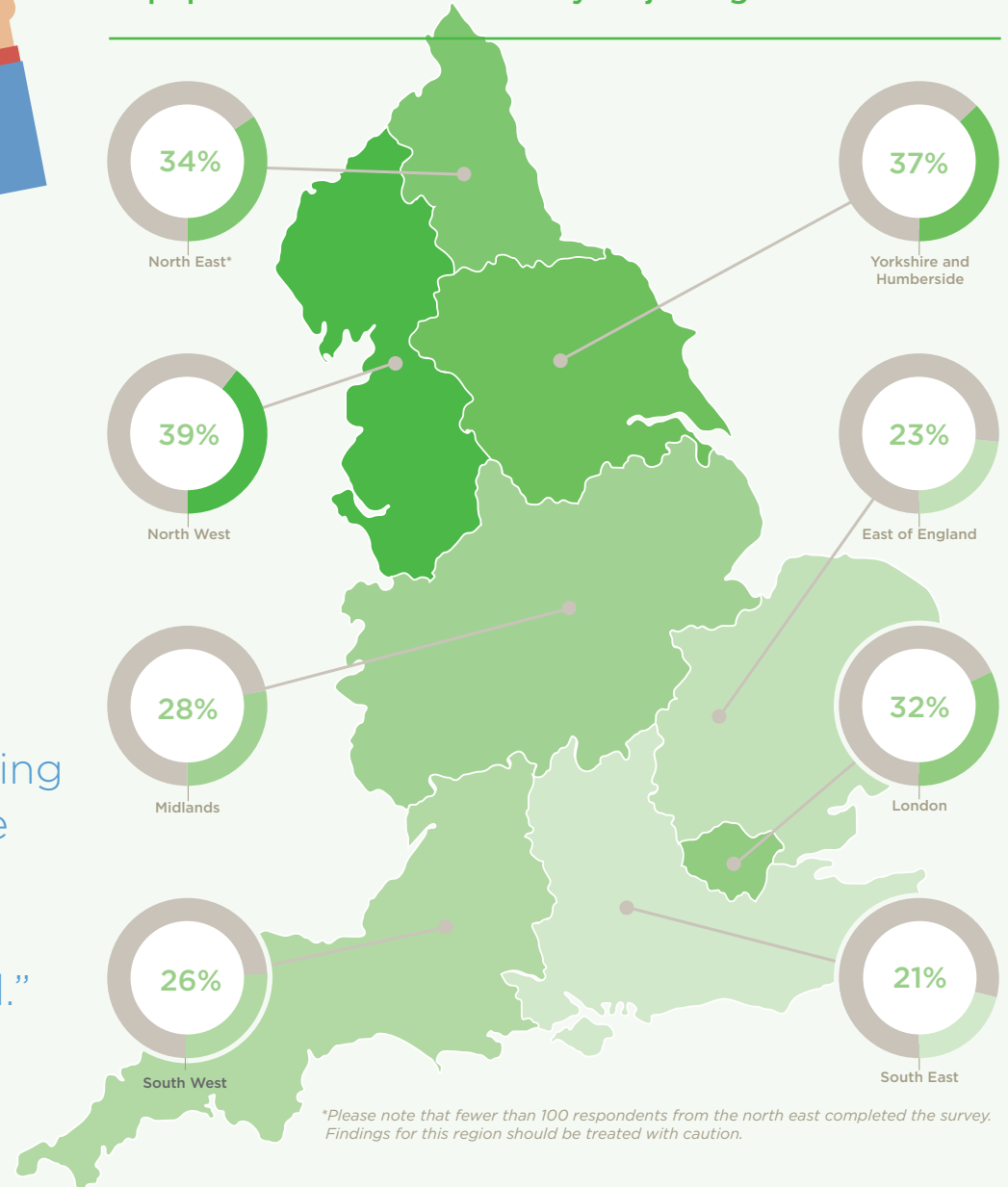


Perhaps we should be providing more support for prospective parents and helping them understand what we hope to see when children join school.”

School leader

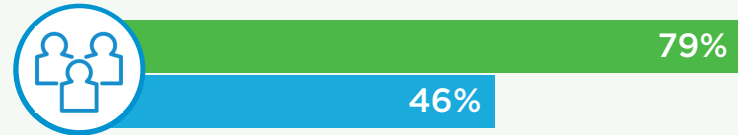


Percentage of school leaders by region who said over half of pupils were not school-ready on joining their school

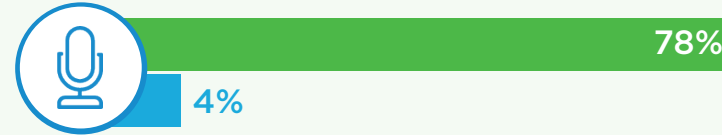


In your opinion, what are the most common reasons for children not being at the expected level when they enter your school?

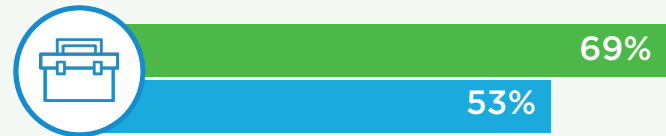
Primary
Secondary



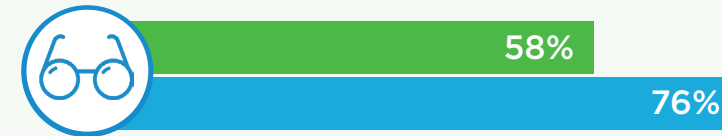
A lack of social skills



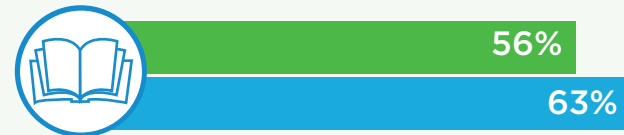
Delayed speech



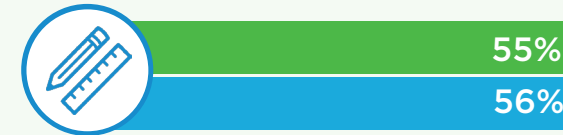
A lack of self-help skills/resilience



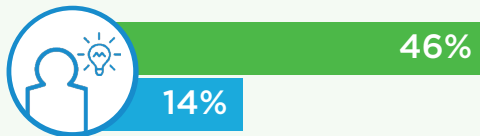
Lower than expected reading levels



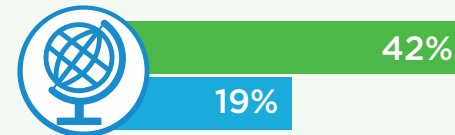
Lower than expected writing levels



Lower than expected numeracy levels



Delayed understanding



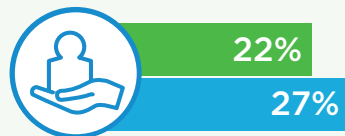
A lack of world awareness



Low self-esteem/confidence



Other special educational needs or a disability



Mental health needs



Other health needs

Why aren't pupils' school-ready?

We listed some reasons why children might not be at the expected level when they enter school, either at primary or secondary stage, and asked school leaders to tell us which reasons most commonly apply in their setting. Overall, a lack of social skills is the most-cited reason when responses are pooled from both phases, with almost three-quarters (72%) of school leaders selecting it from our list. The next most-cited reasons are a lack of self-help skills/resilience (66%) and delayed speech (65%).

When comparing the experiences of the different phases, we see that lower than expected academic levels are the most common reasons for poor school-readiness among pupils entering secondary school. Lower than expected reading levels is cited by over three-quarters of secondary school leaders (76%), followed by lower writing levels (63%) and lower numeracy levels (56%).

At primary level, more school leaders considered a lack of social skills (79%) to be one of the most common reasons for children not being at the expected level when they join; delayed speech (78%) and a lack of self-help skills/resilience (69%) were the next most selected options.

Both primary and secondary school leaders say that low self-esteem is in part responsible for pupils not being school-ready. A third (33%) of primary leaders cite it as a contributing factor, and more than four in 10 (47%) of those in secondary settings.

“ More needs to be done to help parents understand what ‘school ready’ means and what they can practically do to help. Language and socialisation would be at the top of the list for most schools but we need to be specific and clear about what to work on.

Perhaps schools need to build relationships with families much earlier. In many cases parents have a clear idea which school their children will attend. Perhaps we should be providing more support for prospective parents and helping them understand what we hope to see when children join the school.

We live in a very different world from the one we grew up in, where screen time is increasingly replacing social interaction as a way of spending time. Resistance is futile on this one, so we have to find ways to use technology healthily to promote language development and interaction skills. We also need to help parents understand just how valuable and enhancing real-life interactions are. There is no substitute for story reading or playing a board game which requires discussion, but technology can still enhance these activities.

As in so many aspects of learning, the key is to build a trusting, non-judgemental partnership between school and home.”

Andrew Teale
*Headteacher, St Paul's Church of England
Primary School and National Leader of Education*

Comments:

“ It’s concerning to see school leaders report that so many children are starting primary school without the skills they need. Parents play a crucial role in supporting their child’s early language and communication development, but many lack confidence in how to support their child’s early learning.

Early years practitioners can provide valuable guidance to parents and help families to build rich home-learning environments. The National Literacy Trust’s Early Words Together programme brings together practitioners and volunteers to engage and empower parents with ideas, tools and confidence to support their children’s development, which has a positive impact on their school readiness.”

*Clare McGread, Head of Communities and Early Years,
National Literacy Trust*

“ It is deeply worrying that this survey highlights the extent to which children are arriving at school without the expected level of speech, language and communication skills. The findings show the fundamental impact that these skills have on school-readiness and ultimately, pupils’ life chances. School leaders have identified delayed speech specifically as a barrier to school-readiness, but also highlight a range of other issues which depend heavily on a foundation of strong communication skills: resilience, social skills, literacy and numeracy.

Policy and practice which recognise and support the development of communication skills from the very earliest years, are vital to ensuring all children can achieve their full potential at school and beyond. The Communication Trust is committed to working with partners like The Key to make this a reality.”

*Octavia Holland,
Director, The Communication Trust*

4

WORKLOAD AND MORALE

School leaders expect managing teacher workload to be a challenge over the next 12 months - and at the same time, most feel guilty if they leave work on time and say their family life has been negatively affected by their role. School leaders remain committed to their roles, and the majority expect to be in post for the next three years, but governors are worried that the demands of headship are an obstacle to headteacher recruitment. Nonetheless, school leaders have not lost sight of their ultimate motivation and aim, with almost all feeling that they have a positive impact on the future prospects of children and young people.



Maintaining a healthy work/life balance

School leaders are continuing to struggle with teacher workload, with more than eight in 10 (83%) telling us that this was difficult to manage over the past year. When looking ahead to the next year, they do not anticipate much change: managing teacher workload ranks third among the biggest challenges school leaders expect to face during this period, behind budget pressures and teacher recruitment and retention.

Our survey shows that school leaders are also struggling to maintain a healthy work/life balance themselves. More than seven in 10 (73%) feel guilty if they leave work on time, and more than three-quarters (78%) say their family life has been negatively affected by their role. Furthermore, nearly six in 10 (57%) say that their role has had a negative impact on their mental health. This is more prevalent among school leaders in primary settings (59%) than secondary (47%).

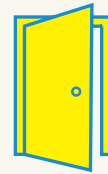


The job is rewarding and can be very enjoyable. However, there is a perception that unless we are all near to breaking point we aren't doing our jobs properly, which is ridiculous. School staff feel they have to keep on working until they drop under the constant threat of the ever-changing DfE directives and initiatives which are never left long enough for impact to be measured.”

School leader



More than seven in 10 (73%) feel guilty if they leave work on time



“There is no ‘on time’ for me to leave school!”

School leader



More than three-quarters (78%) say their family life has been negatively affected by their role



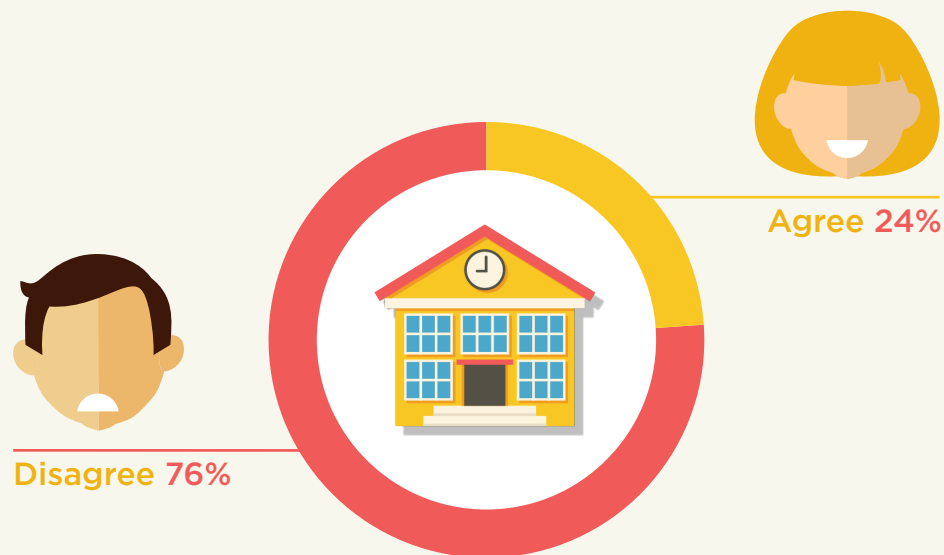
Nearly six in 10 (57%) say that their role has had a negative impact on their mental health

What's to blame?

When considering why school leaders find it difficult to switch off from work, over three-quarters (76%) cited the demands of the profession rather than the culture of their school. This suggests that school leaders believe workload problems can only be addressed at a sector-wide level.

This view is more widespread among primary school leaders than secondary, with 78% and 69% respectively believing that it is not the culture of the school, but the demands of the profession that determines their workload.

It is the culture of my school, not the demands of the profession that determines my workload



The culture of the school can alleviate some of the stresses of the workload but cannot eradicate them completely."

School leader

Jenny Moore, senior researcher at The Key, says:



"A lot of the questions we're asked by our members tend to be about teacher workload, but school leaders should remember

that they need to think about their own work/life balance too. While changes to education policy undoubtedly create work for school leaders and teachers, the leadership team can take some control of workload and set a positive culture – and set an example of good work/life balance – for all staff in their schools."

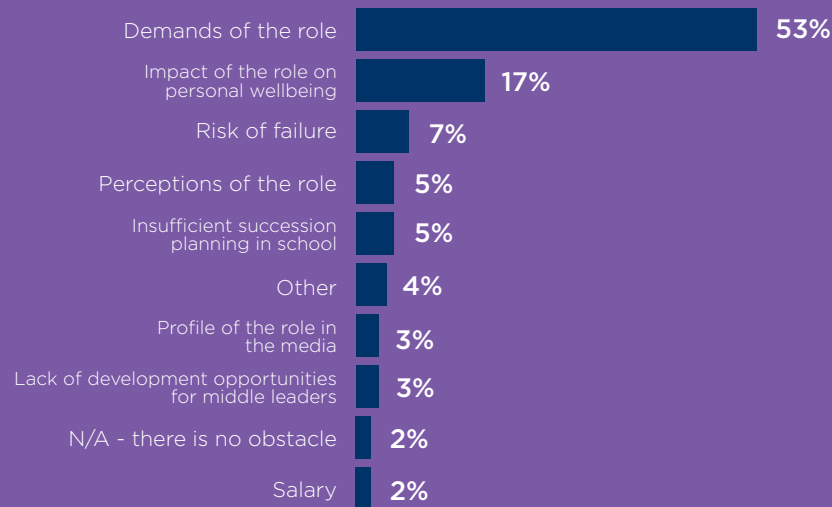


Headship as a career choice: what governors think

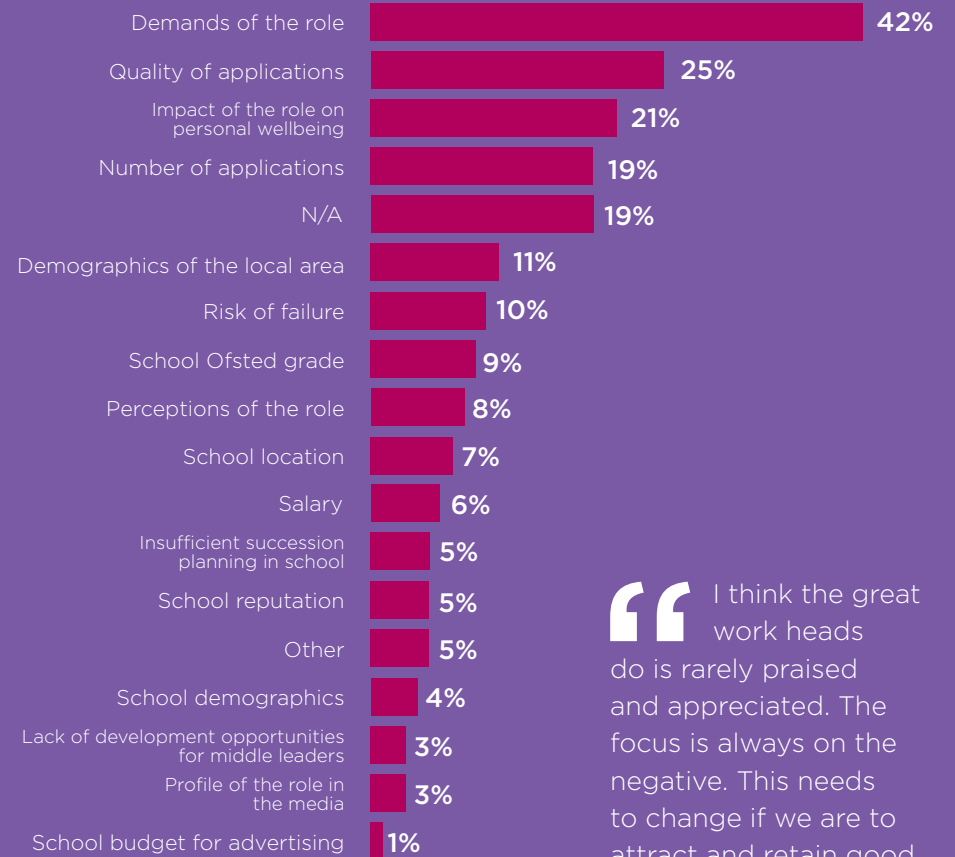
Seven in 10 (70%) governors think the attractiveness of headship as a career choice has got worse over the past five years.

A quarter of governors (25%) found it difficult to recruit a headteacher or other senior leader in the past 12 months and almost one in five (15%) is concerned about the recruitment of heads in the next 12-24 months. The majority of school governors in each case believe the demands of headship is the biggest obstacle to the national supply of headteachers and one of the biggest challenges to recruiting a new head in their own school.

In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to the national supply of headteachers?



In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges to recruiting a new headteacher in your school?



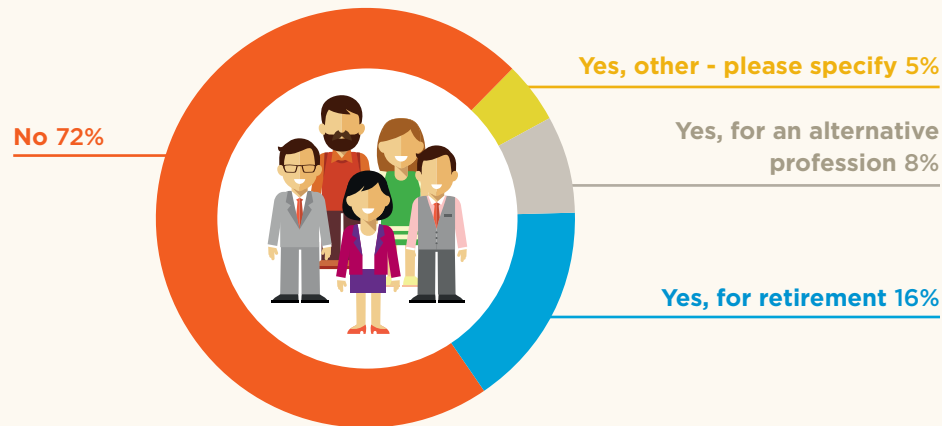
“ I think the great work heads do is rarely praised and appreciated. The focus is always on the negative. This needs to change if we are to attract and retain good calibre headteachers.”

Governor

So, are school leaders leaving?

Our findings also show that almost three-quarters (72%) of school leaders do not plan to leave the profession within the next three years – and where they do plan to leave, the main reason is retirement. Fewer than one in 10 (8%) intends to leave their post to take up an alternative profession.

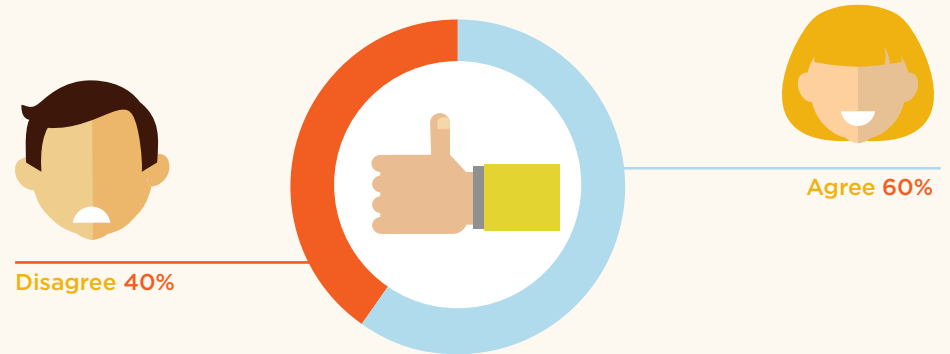
Do you plan to leave the profession within the next three years?



The best job, bar none, in the world (for the right person).”

Chris Dyson, Headteacher

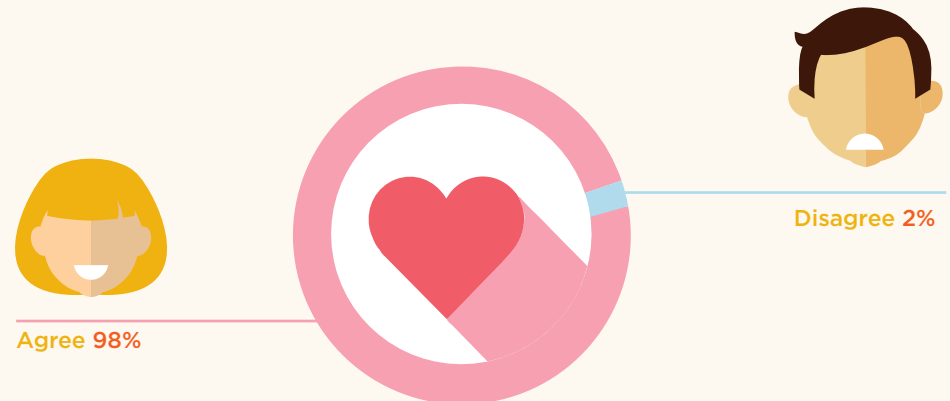
I would recommend my profession to others



At the heart of it all ...

But in spite of the challenges, school leaders remain optimistic. Almost all (98%) school leaders feel they have a positive impact on the future prospects of children and young people, and six in 10 (60%) would recommend their profession to others. Views on this were consistent among leaders in different school phases, types and regions.

I feel I have a positive impact on the future prospects of children and young people



Comments:

“ The Key’s State of Education report has become an annual touchpoint for teachers, leaders, researchers and policy makers to pause and consider the current and future direction of education policy and practice. Within the current climate of reform, the report gives as much food for thought as worry. It is agreed that school leaders are integral to the success of a school. Their role in supporting teachers is pivotal not only in enhancing the quality of teaching but creating professional educational lives that make teachers want to remain in the profession. This is becoming more challenging year on year. If the role of school leaders is increasingly less sustainable for the leaders currently in post, it will remain unattractive for future generations of leaders. The profession is at a breaking point. It is my hope this annual report serves to galvanise a wider discussion and strategy to address the identified issues of teacher and leader recruitment and retention.”

*Dr Karen Edge
Reader, Educational Leadership, UCL Institute of Education
Pro-Vice Provost (International), University College London*

“ I very much welcome The Key’s 2016 State of Education survey report as it clearly identifies the major issues exercising school leaders today. Finding enough teachers, managing reducing school budgets and managing teacher workload are the issues at the top of all school leaders’ hit lists. It is clear from the report that the job of leading a school has become increasingly complex and demanding; however, the fact that school leaders’ remain optimistic is reassuring, with 98% feeling they have a positive impact on the future prospects of children and young people.

It is however concerning that school leaders are reporting that it is difficult to maintain a healthy work/life balance. One of the issues I stressed in my annual conference speech this year was the need for school leaders to look after themselves. That isn’t being selfish. We need strong, healthy, confident leaders if we are going to continue to raise standards in our schools and colleges.”

*Malcolm Trobe
Interim General Secretary,
Association of School and College Leaders*



TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

School leaders report shortages of teachers – particularly in secondary schools and certain regions of the country – and expect teacher recruitment and retention to be a challenge in the year ahead. The quality of applications is typically the biggest obstacle to recruiting teachers, and where teachers are leaving their posts it is most commonly because they are moving to other schools rather than leaving the profession.

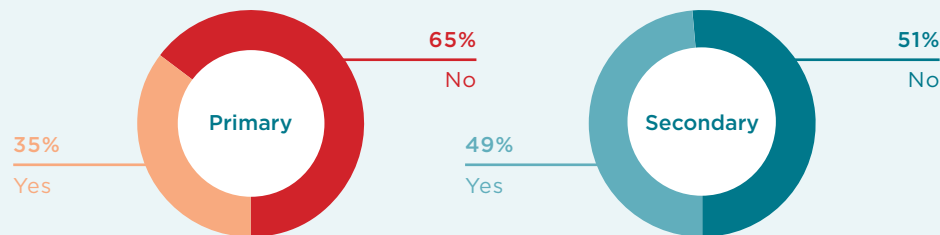
Are schools facing a shortage of teachers?

Our survey shows that over a third (37%) of schools are facing a shortage of teachers – and even in some schools where teaching posts are filled, leaders found recruiting and retaining teachers difficult to manage in the 12 months preceding our survey. More than six in 10 (62%) school leaders experienced this problem, and nearly one in five (19%) expects it to be the biggest challenge over the next year – second only to budget pressures.

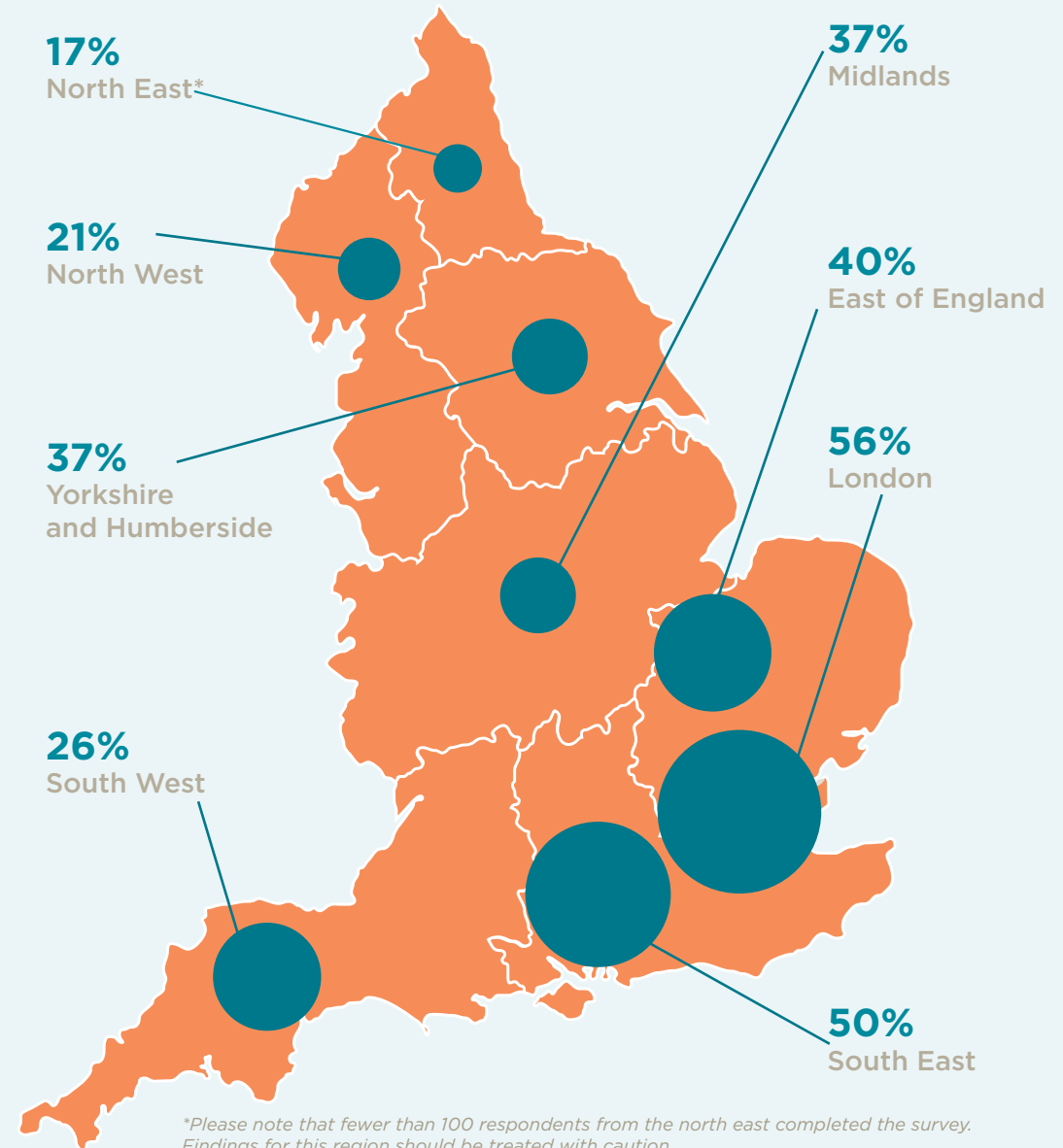
The problem appears most acute in London, with more than half (56%) of the capital's school leaders stating that they are facing a shortage of teachers. The picture is similar in the south east, with reported teacher shortages in 50% of schools.

It is also more acute in secondary settings. Just over a third (35%) of primary leaders say that their school is facing a shortage of teachers, in comparison to almost half (49%) of secondary school leaders. It is little surprise, then, that recruiting and retaining teachers has also been a particular challenge for secondary settings. Almost eight in 10 (76%) secondary school leaders found teacher recruitment and retention difficult to manage over the past 12 months, in comparison to six in 10 (59%) leaders in primary schools.

Is your school facing a shortage of teachers?



Is your school facing a shortage of teachers? (% who said yes)

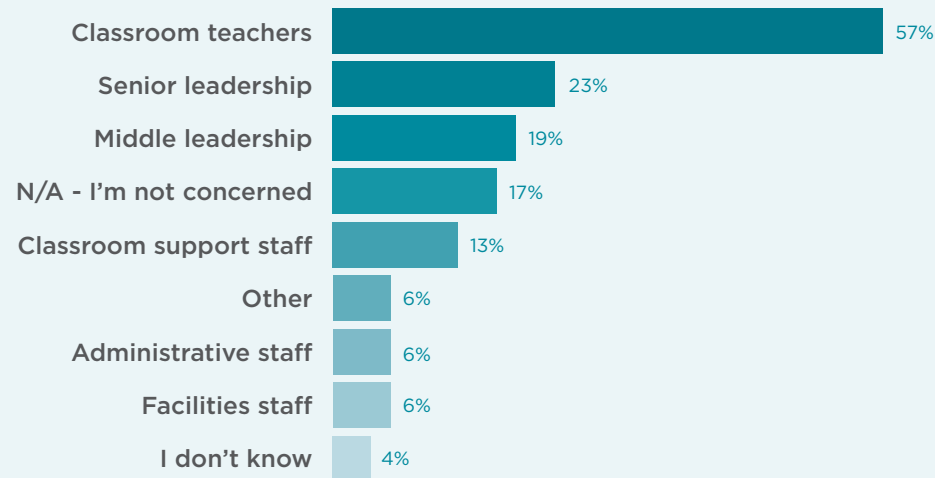


Roles of concern

When we asked school leaders which roles, if any, they were concerned about recruiting for in the next 12-24 months, classroom teachers topped the list. Almost three in five (57%) leaders say it's a role they are worried about filling, and again we see a higher proportion of those in the secondary phase (71%) struggling with this than their primary colleagues (54%).

Conversely, a quarter (25%) of primary school leaders are worried about filling senior leadership roles, in comparison to just one in 10 (9%) leaders in secondary schools.

Which, if any, of the following roles are you concerned about recruiting for in your school over the next 12-24 months?

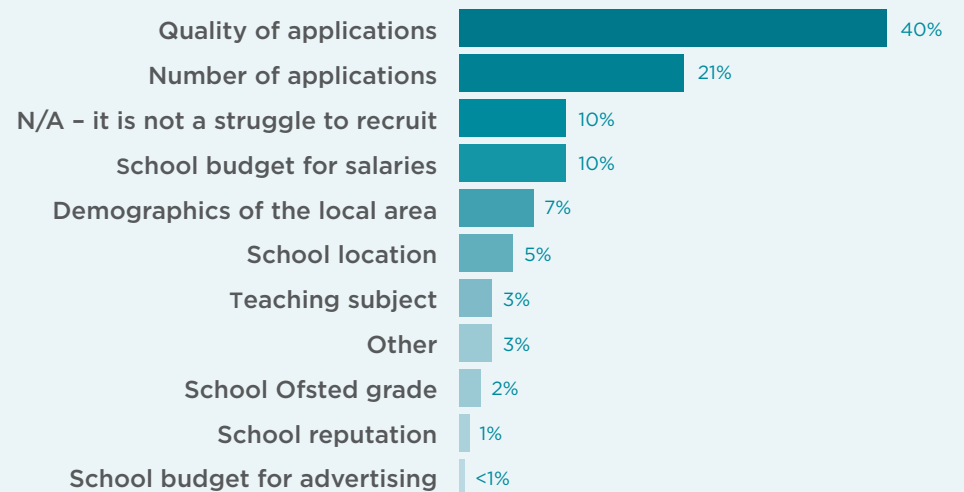


³ NAO - <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/training-new-teachers>

Why is it difficult to recruit teachers?

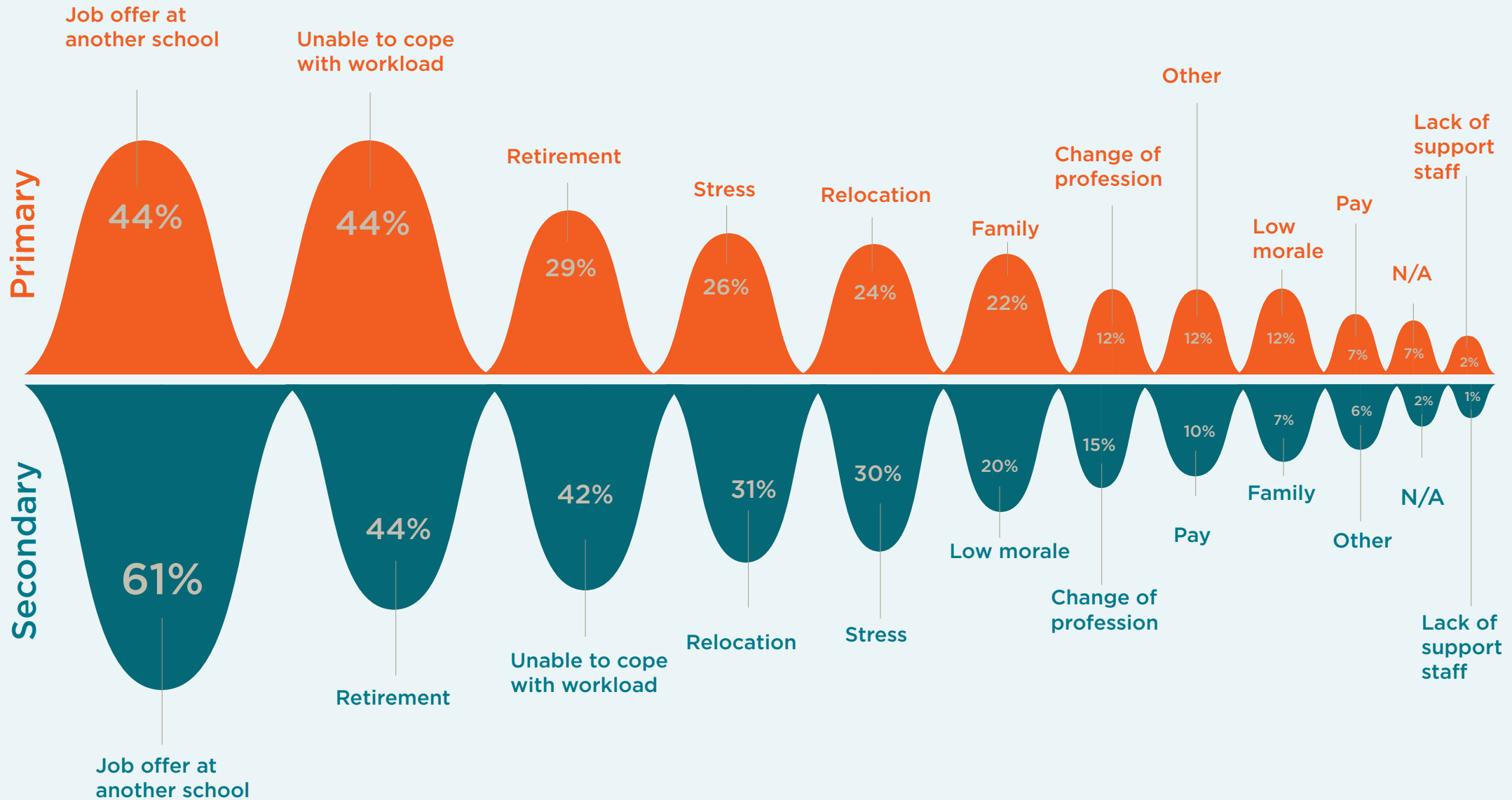
We listed some factors that might affect the recruitment of classroom teachers and asked school leaders which was the biggest challenge in their school. Four in 10 (40%) identified the quality of applications as the biggest challenge. Findings in the Training New Teachers report³, published by the National Audit Office (NAO), also reveal that more classes in secondary schools are being taught by teachers without a relevant post-A-level qualification in their subject.

What is the biggest challenge you face when recruiting teachers?



'Number of applications' ranked second on our list - the biggest recruitment challenge for one in five (21%) school leaders. A further one in 10 (10%) say that budgets for salaries is their school's main challenge when recruiting teachers, but other school-specific factors on our list, such as reputation and local demographics, are particularly problematic for only small percentages of schools.

What do you consider the three main reasons teachers leave your school to be?



Why are teachers leaving their schools?

We know that some schools are facing a shortage of teachers, and findings from the NAO⁴ show that the recorded rate of vacancies and temporarily-filled positions doubled between 2011 and 2014 (from 0.5% of the teaching workforce to 1.2%). Yet the NAO says that the overall number of teachers has kept pace with changing pupil numbers, and the retention of newly-qualified teachers has been stable.

So where are teachers going? Are they leaving the profession? We asked school leaders to identify the three main reasons teachers leave their school, choosing from 12 options. According to almost half (47%) of school leaders, one of the main reasons teachers leave is to take up a job offer at another school. Inability to cope with the workload also ranked highly, selected by more than four in 10 (42%) leaders, followed by retirement (32%).

Moving between schools is more prevalent in the secondary phase, with more than six in 10 (61%) secondary school leaders citing this as one of the three main reasons their teachers leave their posts, compared to around four in 10 (44%) primary school leaders. Teachers in secondary schools also seem more likely to leave their post to retire than those in primary schools (44% and 29% respectively).

Interestingly, a change of profession comes low down the list of reasons why teachers are leaving their posts: just over one in 10 (13%) school leaders believes this to be one of the main motivations.

Our findings suggest a profession that is more mobile and seeking better opportunities: although we didn't include it as an option on our list, many school leaders commented that getting a *promotion* at another school was the main reason teachers are moving on.

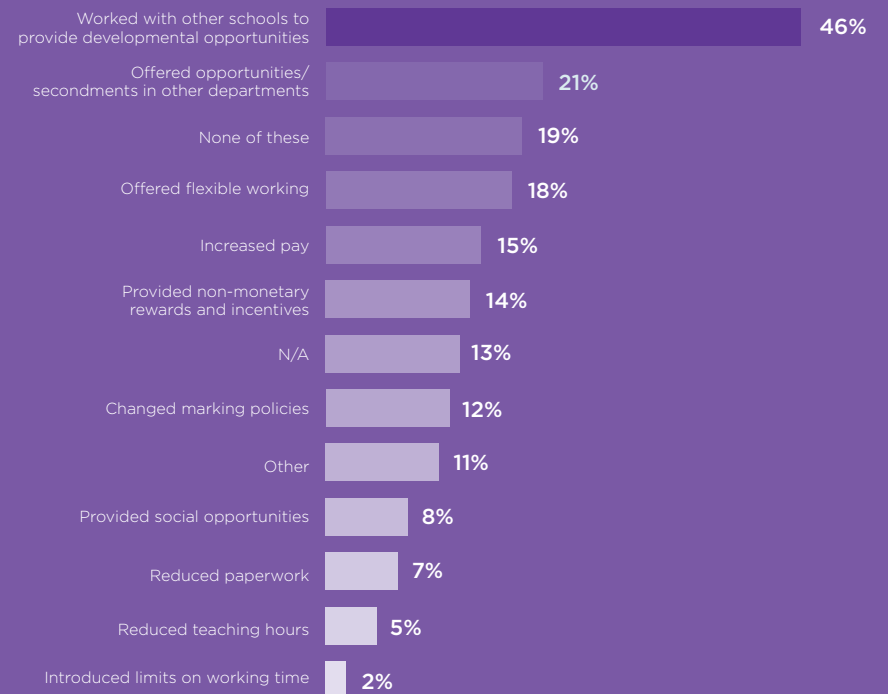
⁴ NAO - <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/training-new-teachers>



What governors think

Almost a third (30%) of governors think their school is facing a shortage of teachers. When we asked what roles governors were most concerned about recruiting for over the next 12-24 months, 'classroom teachers' (44%) came out on top. More than four in 10 (46%) governing bodies have worked with other schools to provide developmental opportunities that may help to retain teaching staff, and one in five (21%) has offered opportunities/secondments in other departments.

Which, if any, of the following steps has your governing body taken to retain teaching staff?



Comments:

Nathan Easey, insights manager at The Key, says:



"Recruitment is one of the more popular topics on The Key for School Leaders website. In January 2016, one-third of schools using The Key viewed articles about recruitment and induction. The most popular requests we receive linked to this topic are for suggestions of interview questions and tasks. We also see that school leaders are responding to workload and wellbeing challenges, with examples of staff questionnaires being popular in this section of our website."

Oliver Kean, senior researcher at The Key, says:



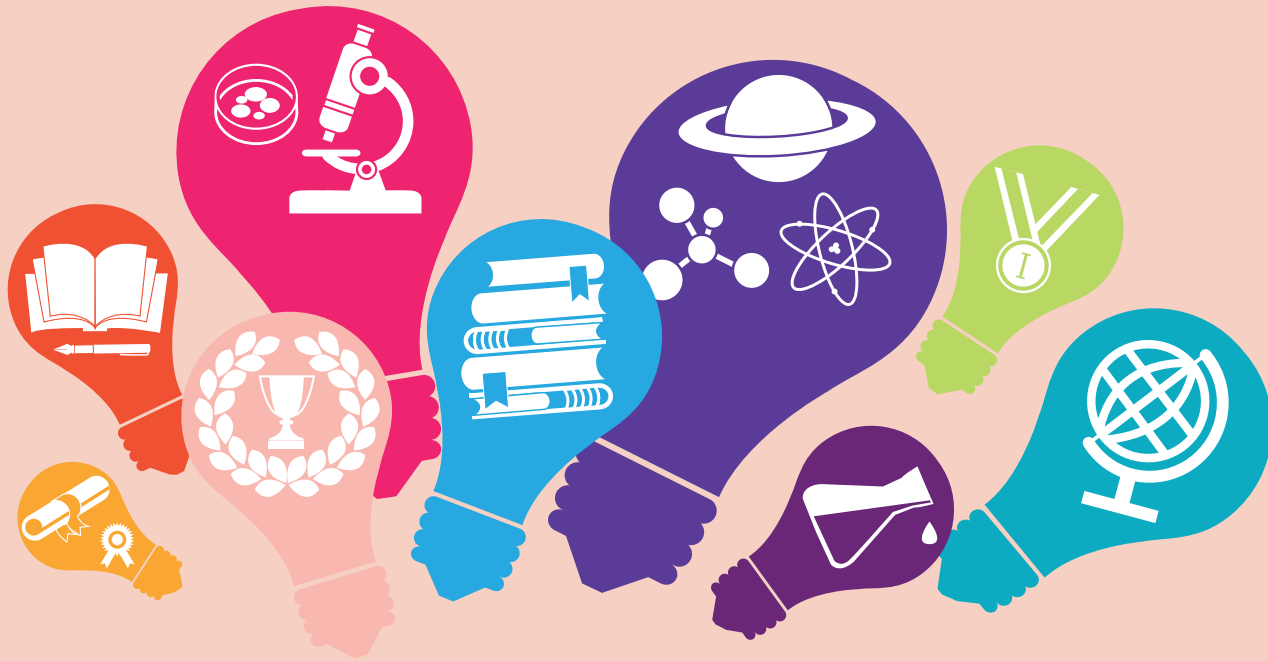
"It's apparent from our survey that the teaching profession is increasingly mobile, and many schools are finding it hard to recruit in a job market that's becoming more competitive. While many governors say they are thinking creatively about how they attract and hold on to staff, a significant proportion say they are not doing anything differently. This could be for a number of reasons, including budget constraints, challenging school circumstances or locations, lack of knowledge about how to best address the issue, or perhaps reluctance to innovate. But what seems clear is that while some schools are reaping the benefits, others are missing out."

“Several recent reports have highlighted difficulties with recruitment and retention so it is encouraging to see that many schools are proactively giving teachers reasons to stay and progress. The fact that 46% of governors said they had worked with other schools to provide CPD could make a real difference, particularly for younger teachers who, according to our research, are highly influenced by such opportunities[1]. Offering secondments is also valuable since our previous research has revealed an unmet appetite for such initiatives[2]. Hopefully, by next year, the majority of schools will be doing this.”

Loic Menzies
Director, LKMco

[1] <http://whyteach.lkmco.org/>

[2] <https://www.lkmco.org/building-the-leadership-pool-in-london-schools/>



6

CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

While primary school leaders are not feeling positive about reforms to primary assessment and accountability, those in secondary schools are optimistic about new secondary performance measures in place from 2016. The majority of schools offer extra-curricular activities that, as governors tell us, help to prepare pupils for their futures. There are, however, concerns over a perceived narrowing of the curriculum. While there's positivity about the introduction of 'short' inspections, compulsory academisation remains unpopular and school leaders generally feel that support for struggling schools is inadequate.

How do school leaders feel about the balance of the curriculum?

We asked school leaders which subjects, if any, they think receive too little focus in schools. While nearly a third (32%) believe that all subjects have enough focus, a similar proportion (31%) think that personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education isn't given enough attention.

More than a quarter of school leaders think that art and design (29%), music (27%) and drama (27%) are neglected subjects. Although this view is held more widely among primary school leaders than those in secondary schools, it aligns with wider concerns voiced by the profession over the lack of creative subjects in the English Baccalaureate⁵.

At the secondary phase, nearly a third (31%) of school leaders think there's not enough focus on sex and relationship education (SRE) and only slightly fewer (29%) say there's too little focus on PSHE. It's likely, then, that many school leaders are unhappy with the government's recent decision against making PSHE and SRE compulsory.

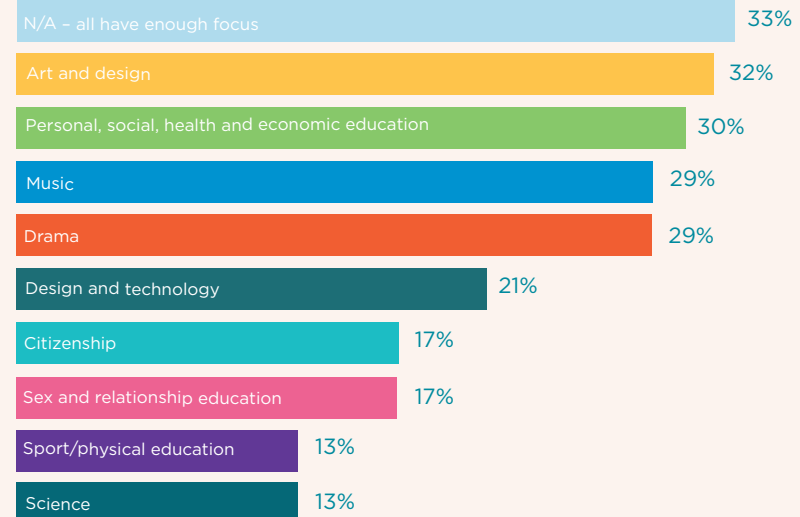
Almost one in five (18%) secondary school leaders think there's too little focus on PE/sport, and 13% of primary leaders agree. School leaders in primary settings, however, are more likely to think that art and design doesn't have enough focus in schools – almost a third (32%) say this, in comparison to fewer than one in five (18%) leaders in secondary settings.

Despite science being a core subject, 13% of primary school leaders think it doesn't have enough focus.

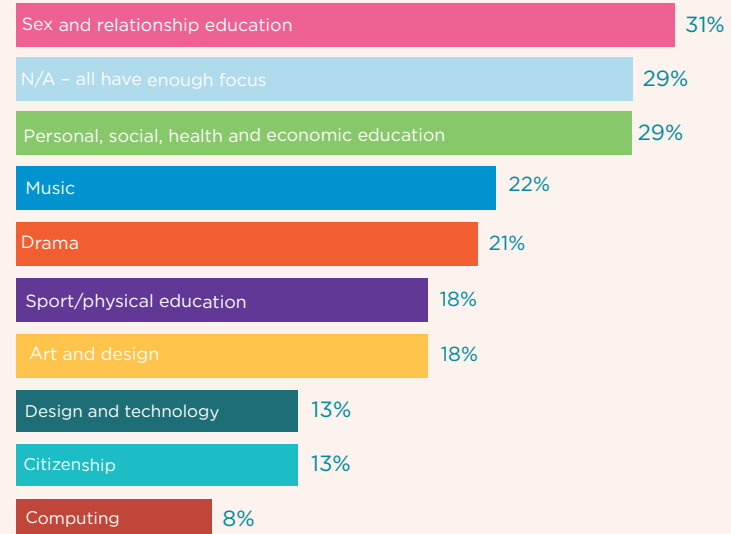
⁵TES - <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/headteachers-oppose-making-ebac-gcses-compulsory-new-poll-finds>

In your opinion, which, if any, of the subjects below is there not enough focus on in schools?

Primary (Top 10 subjects)



Secondary (Top 10 subjects)





We provide lots of clubs, some in lunchtime and some after school – gardening, storytime, Forest School, French, football, tag rugby, athletics, cookery, choir and various music clubs.”



School leader

Looking at differences in the results between different types of schools, overall, school leaders in academies are more likely to think that certain subjects receive too little focus. This is particularly true among secondary school leaders, with one-quarter (26%) of these in academies thinking that all subjects have enough focus compared to two in five (40%) of those in the maintained sector.

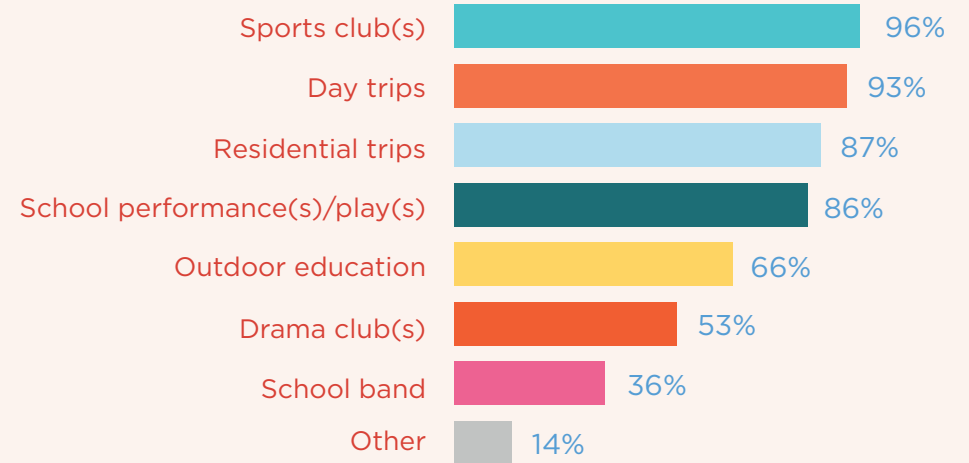
Spotlight on extra-curricular activities

Many schools appear to promote a holistic education by offering a wide variety of extra-curricular activities.

Almost all (96%) schools run at least one sports club and nine in 10 (93%) organise day trips for pupils. Over half (53%) have a drama club and more than four in five (86%) put on school performances.

When school leaders were asked why they aren't able to provide all of the extra-curricular activities they might want to, just under a third (32%) put this down to staff skills, while 30% said a lack of budget. Around a quarter of respondents listed a lack of space/facilities (26%) and staff shortages (25%) as the reasons why they don't provide certain activities.

Which, if any, of the following extra-curricular activities do you provide in your school?



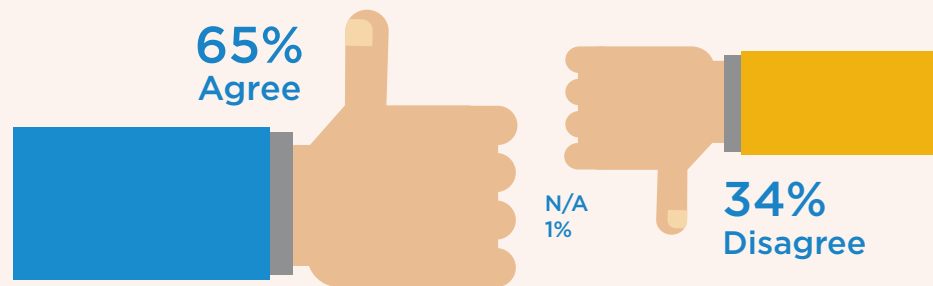
Nearly nine in 10 (87%) school governors think their school's balance of curricular and extra-curricular activity sufficiently prepares pupils for their futures.

How are school leaders feeling about assessment and accountability?

New arrangements for assessment remain a concern for school leaders. Managing internal assessment after the removal of National Curriculum levels proved difficult for more than three-quarters (77%) of school leaders over the 12 months preceding our survey. One-third (34%) of leaders are still not confident that their school's internal assessment system is accurately assessing and tracking pupil progress.

Primary leaders are not convinced by the new National Curriculum tests at Key Stages 1 and 2, from 2016. More than nine in 10 (93%) do not believe that these will have a positive impact on pupil attainment at their school, and some voiced frustration about the delay in availability of guidance and exemplification materials. These concerns chime with union criticisms of the new primary assessment system for raising expected standards of achievement without allowing schools enough time or support to adapt⁶.

I am confident that my school's internal assessment systems are accurately assessing and tracking pupil progress following the removal of National Curriculum levels



⁶NUT - <http://www.teachers.org.uk/education-policies/primary/key-stage-1-and-key-stage-2-assessment-bad-plan-chaotically-implemented>



The difficulty for schools is that no-one knows what the impact will be of their own assessment systems or the new testing because we have not yet experienced it. We are working in the dark at the moment.”

School leader

Secondary school leaders are also unconvinced about the reforms to GCSEs, with three-quarters (74%) saying that they do not believe the reforms will have a positive impact on their pupils' attainment.

There is strong feeling about the proposal to reintroduce formal, externally marked testing of seven year-olds, with more than nine in 10 (91%) primary school leaders opposing this. Over three-quarters (78%) of secondary leaders state that they, too, aren't in favour, despite it having no immediate bearing on them.

Looking ahead to the new performance measures being implemented as part of accountability reforms, we see a split in opinion between primary and secondary school leaders.

The majority (80%) of primary leaders do not think that changes to attainment and progress measures for primary schools from 2016 will more accurately reflect their school's overall performance. In contrast, secondary leaders are mostly positive about the new progress 8 measure, with seven in 10 (69%) agreeing that it will more accurately capture the overall performance of their school.

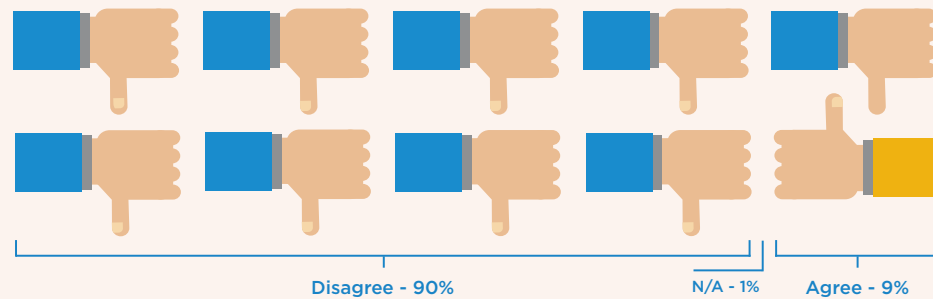
School improvement and inspection

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of school leaders do not think that there is enough support for schools deemed to be 'inadequate'. School leaders also show dissatisfaction with the government's approach to improving standards in these schools: nine in 10 (90%) disagree with forced academisation and nearly two-thirds (64%)

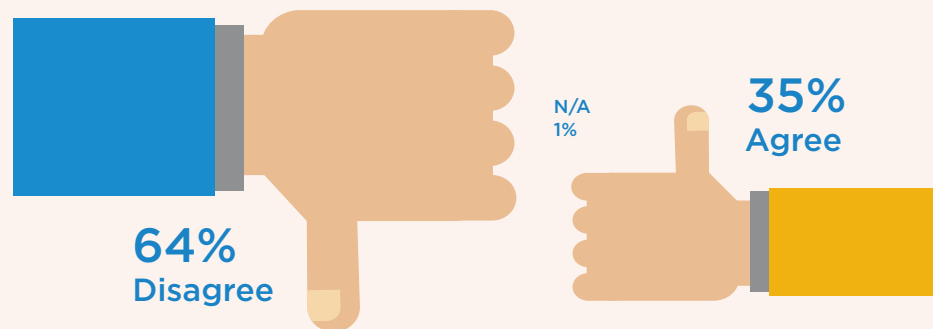
are not in favour of intervention by regional schools commissioners in 'coasting' maintained schools and academies. It's unsurprising, then, that there has been some discontent around the government's proposals for a fully-academised system by 2022.

Despite this, school leaders are positive about short inspections for 'good' schools, with almost nine in 10 (89%) stating that they're in favour of this recent change to the inspection system.

I am in favour of compulsory academisation of maintained schools deemed to be 'inadequate'



I am in favour of intervention by regional schools commissioners in 'coasting' maintained schools and academies



What governors think

Governors are particularly concerned about changes to assessment and school structure. Monitoring school performance under the new performance measures is expected to be governors' second biggest challenge over the next 12 months, behind budget pressures (27%) and ahead of changing school status (i.e. converting to academy status) (13%).

More than half of governors (52%) are not convinced that the new performance measures for primary schools and progress 8 measure for secondary schools will more accurately reflect their school's overall performance. Likewise, two-thirds (66%) of governors do not think the new National Curriculum tests at Key Stages 1 and 2 or the GCSE reforms will have a positive impact on pupils' attainment.

More than eight in 10 (82%) governors disagree with the compulsory academisation of maintained schools deemed to be 'inadequate', and almost three-quarters (73%) think there isn't enough support for schools in this situation.

Meanwhile, governors are in favour of both short inspections for 'good' schools and intervention by regional schools commissioners in 'coasting' maintained schools and academies, with 86% and 60% of governors showing their support for these respectively.

Comments:



These survey results reveal the effects of changes in the balance of freedoms and responsibilities in schools. After 25 years of a National Curriculum, what difference does it make if a subject is compulsory or not? Academies are exempt and no one has ever inspected compliance, so leaders are free to provide the curriculum their students need. The survey suggests there are doubts as to whether the curriculum can include PSHE and SRE and whether all young people can fully experience the creative arts. The pressures of testing and examinations cannot be allowed to deprive young people of these vital subjects. The National Curriculum is dying; long live the broad and deep curriculum in every school."

Sue Horner
Chair, RSA Academies Trust



If a headteacher feels that an area of the curriculum is important then they should ensure that it is encompassed into the schools ethos. We have the flexibility to work how we want if we are brave enough."

School leader

Kate Gilliford, senior researcher at The Key, explains:



"Assessment and accountability reforms have brought a lot of uncertainty to the sector, and have made many school leaders question their curriculum offer.

School leaders have asked The Key many questions about the reforms, and the sense I get from them is that they are worried they will not be able to cover the content of new GCSEs without taking time from other curriculum subjects. Until the exam and accountability reforms are embedded, I think school leaders will feel like they have to make a choice between core subjects like English and maths, and what may be seen as nice 'extras' like PE and art."

About the survey

The Key surveyed school leaders and governors in January and February 2016. The questionnaire for this study was designed by The Key and conducted online using Survey Monkey. 1,188 school leaders and 979 governors completed the full survey. The data has been weighted to match the population profile of schools in The Key's database in terms of region, school phase and school type. The data described in this summary can therefore be taken to represent the views of school leaders and governors on The Key's database, which in turn provides an indication of the opinions of school leaders and governors in mainstream schools across England.

About The Key

The Key provides impartial, trusted leadership and management support to nearly half of schools in England. Our market-leading information services and events help busy school leaders and governors work with increased confidence, knowledge and capacity. At the heart of everything we do is a passionate commitment to supporting schools in delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

For more information please go to www.thekeysupport.com



*This report was written by
Amy Cook, blog editor and
senior researcher at The Key*

