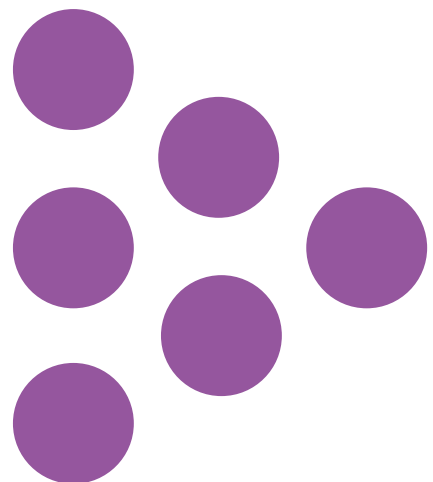




Report

Cost of living crisis: Impact on schools

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



Cost-of-living crisis: Impact on schools

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Glossary of terms

Additional support: This is defined as anything over and above the usual provision pupils might receive in relation to pupil premium and/or Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support.

Disadvantaged schools: For the purposes of this report, disadvantaged schools are defined based on the share of pupils eligible for free school meals in the school. Schools in the most disadvantaged quartile of schools have the highest rate of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS): Services that support young people experiencing poor mental health, or difficult feelings or experiences. These services were formerly known as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Education, health and care plan (EHCP): This is a legal document for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available usually. An EHCP identifies the educational, health and social needs and sets out the additional support to meet those needs.

Free school meals (FSM) eligible pupil: A pupil who meets the eligibility criteria for free school meals and whose parent(s) or carer(s) makes a claim (eligibility is not determined automatically (DfE, 2018)). The FSM rate refers to the share of FSM-eligible pupils in the pupil population.

In-year deficit (surplus): A school whose annual expenditure is larger (smaller) than their annual income by the end of the financial year.

Overall deficit (surplus): A school with negative (positive) overall revenue balance.

Pupil premium (PP) pupil: PP pupils are considered to be 'disadvantaged' and attract additional funding for their school to improve their educational outcomes. Any pupil who has been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years, has been in the care of the local authority at any point or is from a service family is PP.

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): A pupil with additional needs or disability which affects a child or young person's ability to learn. This might include behaviour or ability to socialise, reading and writing (e.g., dyslexia), ability to understand things, concentration (e.g., attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and physical abilities.

Real household disposable income: The amount of money that households have available for spending and saving after direct taxes, such as Income Tax, National Insurance and Council Tax, have been accounted for. Real household disposable income is adjusted for changes in prices over time.

Executive Summary

The cost of living has been rising sharply across England since 2021, including unprecedented increases in energy costs, rapid increases in the costs of food and significant increases in the costs of housing via higher rents/mortgage costs (Harari *et al.*, 2023). The Office for Budget Responsibility is predicting that real household disposable incomes per person (a measure of living standards) will remain below pre-pandemic levels until at least 2027/28 (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2022).

Teachers and senior leaders in schools are on the front line. They see the immediate impacts of cost-of-living increases on pupils and their households. As well as impacting households, rising costs are also impacting mainstream and special school finances, in the form of higher energy and higher than expected staffing costs. While the Government has committed additional funding for schools in 2023/24 and 2024/25 (HM Treasury, 2022), there is still a question about whether this will be sufficient (Drayton *et al.*, 2022).

Alongside cost-of-living pressures, schools are also grappling with a myriad of other pressures, including post-pandemic recovery (Ofsted, 2022a, 2022b), additional financial pressures created by the current demographic decline in primary pupil numbers (DfE, 2023i) and teacher recruitment and retention challenges (McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023).

Drawing on surveys of teachers and senior leaders in mainstream and special schools¹, this report aims to explore how the cost of living is affecting schools by establishing:

1. What impact do teachers and senior leaders report cost-of-living pressures are having on pupils and their households?
2. How has provision in schools been affected by cost-of-living increases?
3. What impact have cost-of-living increases had on school staff?

NFER collected data via an online survey sent to all state-funded mainstream primary and secondary schools and all special schools in England in April and May 2023. We received responses from 1354 senior leaders and 1317 teachers in mainstream schools as well as 87 senior leaders and 41 teachers in special schools. It is important to note that the quantitative analysis presented throughout this report is largely descriptive in nature and is not intended to be used to make causal inferences.

A degree of caution is also needed when interpreting the analysis of the special schools' surveys due to the small sample sizes² (see Appendix for further details on the methodological approach). The key findings from our research are outlined below.

¹ Mainstream surveys are weighted to be nationally representative of schools in England. Special school surveys are not weighted due to the small response rate achieved. Non-maintained special schools and special schools serving pupils with high levels of disadvantage are under-represented in our sample.

² Sub-sample analysis has not been done for special schools (i.e., by school disadvantage) as the achieved sample was not sufficiently large.

Pupils and households

- Most senior leaders (over 84 per cent across all settings) report that cost-of-living pressures have increased both the numbers of pupils requiring additional support and the level of need, particularly in the most disadvantaged schools.** Additional support was defined as anything over and above the usual provision pupils might receive in relation to pupil premium and/or Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support.

Over the last 12-months, there have been significant increases in the numbers of pupils requiring additional welfare and financial support to access learning, social and extra-curricular activities³. Pressures are greatest in special schools and the most disadvantaged mainstream schools. Special school senior leaders report particularly high levels of and large increases in support for pupil welfare needs (from 28 per cent to 36 per cent) and financial support needs (33 per cent to 43 per cent) over the last year.

- Recent cost-of-living pressures have exacerbated well-being and mental health needs among pupils.** Senior leaders report that over a quarter of pupils in mainstream schools currently⁴ require additional support for mental health and well-being, which is significantly higher than last year⁵. This is even higher in special schools at over 40 per cent. This is in line with previous research which has highlighted that children in poverty are more likely to have lower well-being and experience mental health problems (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2020; Barnardo's, 2022)
- School leaders report that recent increases in the costs of living have led to an increase in safeguarding concerns, behaviour incidents and absenteeism, particularly in secondary and more disadvantaged schools.** For example, most senior leaders (over 80 per cent in all settings) agree or strongly agree that increases in the cost of living have increased safeguarding concerns and/or incidents in their school.
- Schools have expanded the scale and range of support they have available for pupils over the last year in response to cost-of-living pressures.** Nearly all schools (at least 90 per cent) are subsidising extra-curricular activities for some pupils and providing uniforms and clothing to pupils (over 87 per cent across settings). Most settings (over 70 per cent across settings) are also providing food (through food parcels/food banks/food vouchers and subsidised breakfasts). As might be expected, disadvantaged schools and special schools are providing the most support for cost-of-living pressures to pupils.

Across most of these forms of additional support, the majority of senior leaders (at least 60 per cent) report an increase in school time and resources devoted to support their provision compared to last year.

³ Percentages of pupils are estimated by averaging the mid-point values of pre-specified ranges which senior leaders were asked to select between.

⁴ As of when the survey fieldwork took place in April and May 2023.

⁵ Senior leaders were asked to recollect the number of pupils requiring additional support in the previous year and so estimates may be influenced by factors which have affected respondents' perceptions and recall of the previous year. Significant refers to statistical significance.

- **It is not just children eligible for pupil premium who are receiving support.** In over three-fifths of mainstream schools (68 per cent of primary and 63 per cent of secondary schools), leaders report that 50 per cent or more of the pupils receiving additional support were pupils *not* eligible for pupil premium. This was true in around 42 per cent of special schools. This suggests that the current eligibility criteria for free school meals may be too restrictive.
- **Teachers feel unable to access the support they need from external agencies, with many less satisfied with support compared to last year.** Less than one-fifth of mainstream teachers and just under one-quarter of special school teachers feel supported by child and young people mental health services. Around half of mainstream teachers and nearly two-fifths of special school teachers are less satisfied with this support compared to last year.

Additionally, only a quarter of teachers in mainstream schools feel supported by their local authority (LA) education services. Around two-fifths of mainstream teachers and half of special school teachers are less satisfied than last year.

School provision

- **Most schools are making cuts to meet the direct costs of cost-of-living pressures (e.g. energy/food/salary costs) and to provide additional support to pupils.** Four-fifths of schools report reducing spending elsewhere in their budget in response *to recent increases in the cost of living overall*, while half of schools report reducing spending elsewhere in their budget *specifically to accommodate the cost of the additional support they are providing to pupils and their households*. While this may go beyond schools' statutory responsibilities, pupils whose most basic needs are not being met are less likely to attend school and successfully engage with learning.

Despite making cuts, schools are reporting that recent cost-of-living increases have had a considerable negative impact on their financial positions. While the overall schools budget is set to increase by a further £3.5 billion for 2023/24 and £1.5 billion in 2024/25^{6,7}, many schools have seen their financial situations worsen over the last year. Almost half of primary schools and special schools (at 49 and 48 per cent) and two-fifths of secondary schools (at 41 per cent) are expecting an in-year deficit in 2022/23.

⁶ This represents a 6.5 per cent year-on-year nominal increase between 2022/23 and 2023/24 and a further 2.6 per cent increase between 2023/24 and 2024/25.

⁷ The Department for Education (DfE) has also announced £482.5 million in 2023/24 and £827.5 million for schools in 2024/25 as part of funding announced in July 2023 (DfE, 2023f). This is expected to be funded from elsewhere in the DfE (including schools) budget (Martin, 2023b). It is also important to note that special schools are dependent on their Local Authority for funding and the special school funding formula differs from that used for mainstream schools. This may contribute to the funding challenges faced by special schools.

Schools are also expecting the situation to worsen next year with just under half of mainstream schools and two-fifths of special schools expecting both to have an in-year deficit and needing to make cuts to provision in 2023/24.

- **The cost-saving measures schools are taking in response to the increased cost of living are impacting directly on the teaching and learning environment of pupils.** For example, around three-fifths (62 per cent) of primary schools as well as two-fifths of secondary (at 43 per cent) and special (at 41 per cent) schools report cutting spending on learning resources (such as printed worksheets, materials for art and science and library books). Almost two-fifths (37 per cent) of primary schools, almost three-tenths (28 per cent) of special schools and a fifth (20 per cent) of secondary schools report cutting targeted learning support (e.g., tutoring).
- **Teachers and senior leaders, particularly in the most disadvantaged schools, report their teaching and learning provision has been negatively impacted by the increased cost of living.** Almost half (at least 45 per cent across all settings) of senior leaders said that the increased cost of living has negatively impacted the quality of teaching and learning in their school.
- **The cuts which schools are making in response to cost-of-living pressures are also affecting provision for pupils with SEND.** While teaching assistants (TA) often play a key role in supporting pupils with SEND, almost half (47 per cent) of primary schools, 32 per cent of special schools and 28 per cent of secondary schools report cutting TA numbers or hours. Further, almost three-tenths (28 per cent) of special schools report cutting their core specialist school offer, which includes the provision of hydrotherapy, physiotherapy and independence activities.

Most senior leaders across mainstream and special schools are concerned about their ability to fully meet the needs of their pupils and having sufficient budget to fully support pupils with SEND.

- **Over half (58 per cent) of primary schools and around a third of secondary (29 per cent) and special schools (32 per cent) are seeking additional parental contributions to accommodate cost-of-living pressures. This is happening to the greatest extent in least disadvantaged schools, where parents are most likely to be able to afford this.** For example, among primary schools, the proportion rises from 40 per cent of the most disadvantaged schools to 73 per cent of the least disadvantaged schools.

However, the least disadvantaged schools are also most likely to report facing financial challenges across both the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years. This is likely explained by the fact that the least disadvantaged schools receive the least funding relative to schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils⁸, meaning their budgets are particularly vulnerable to running into deficit in the face of increased cost pressures. This highlights that, while the least disadvantaged schools may be able to seek additional contributions from parents, all types of schools have been impacted by cost-of-living pressures.

⁸ Schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils attract higher levels of funding to reflect the greater levels of pupil need in their settings (DfE, 2022b).

School staff

- **Recent cost-of-living increases have negatively affected teachers' personal finances.** Teachers are making similar lifestyle and spending changes to the wider British population in response to pressures on their finances. Less than half of teachers can afford to pay an unexpected expense outright.
- **Teacher, teaching assistant (TA) and support staff recruitment and retention challenges have been exacerbated by recent cost-of-living pressures.** Cost-of-living increases have compounded pressures on school budgets, limiting the salaries schools are able to offer potential staff at a time when staff are having to contend with pressure on their personal finances. Salaries in schools have not remained competitive enough to attract and retain staff at a time when they are particularly focused on their incomes. Furthermore, the cost saving measures taken by schools in response to cost-of-living increases have intensified pressures on their staff and appear to be affecting staff retention.

For example, 45 per cent of secondary and special schools and 34 per cent of primary schools reported that the salaries they were able to offer were the single biggest barrier to recruiting TAs. Leaders also flagged that TAs, in particular, are likely to be seeking employment in other better paid roles (e.g., in hospitality and retail sectors), and that increasing numbers of TAs are taking on additional jobs to supplement their income.

- **Due to recruitment challenges which appear to have been compounded by the impact of cost-of-living pressures on the attractiveness of the salaries schools can afford to offer, senior leaders report that large numbers of teacher, TA and support staff vacancies are remaining vacant for more than two months.** For example, among the schools recruiting for TAs over the last 12-months⁹, only seven per cent of special schools, 23 per cent of secondaries and 45 per cent of primaries report filling all TA vacancies within two months. This is a particularly critical challenge for leaders in special schools where statutory staffing ratios are high and inadequate staffing may be unsafe.

⁹ Among those who were able to answer the question, 1006 senior leaders (92 per cent) report recruiting for TAs in the last 12-months.

Discussion

The findings in this report highlight that recent increases in the cost of living, together with existing pressures, are having a profound impact on schools. This is creating a self-perpetuating cycle of negative impacts on their pupils and settings:

1. Increases in the cost of living have amplified the level of pupil well-being, mental health, welfare and financial needs in schools, particularly in special and disadvantaged mainstream schools. This has contributed to increased safeguarding concerns, behavioural incidents and pupil absenteeism.
2. Due to a lack of capacity within and support from external agencies, schools are having to step in to meet these needs and ensure that pupils are still able to engage with learning, whilst simultaneously managing the direct impacts of cost-of-living increases on their settings.
3. Teachers, TAs and support staff are contending with increased pupil needs, reduced resources and less support from external agencies. Their own household budgets are also under increased pressure. This appears to be exacerbating staff retention and recruitment challenges.
4. Cost-of-living pressures are making it more difficult for schools to offer attractive salaries to attract new staff to the sector. Vacancies are unfilled or filled with staff who do not necessarily have comparable skills and experience (Worth, 2023b), exacerbating the pupil need and resourcing pressures outlined above.
5. Together, this means there is reduced capacity for early intervention to address pupil needs and by the time pupils access external services, their needs are more extreme. This means external services are then even less able to meet pupil need, exacerbating the cycle further.

Looking to the future, these challenges cannot be fixed by schools working in isolation

Many mainstream and special schools are providing urgent support to pupils and their families. While this may go beyond schools' statutory responsibilities, pupils whose most basic needs are not being met are less likely to attend school and successfully engage with learning. A lack of suitable wider support services and social support has left schools with little choice but to provide additional support to pupils and families to ensure their pupils can continue to attend and engage with school.

Cost-of-living pressures are affecting schools' core teaching and pastoral provision

Schools are having to make cuts, not only to extra-curricular provision, targeted learning support (such as tutoring) and overheads, but to their core teaching and learning provision. In special schools, core specialist support has also been reduced. While the overall schools budget is set to increase by a further £3.5 billion for 2023/24 and £1.5 billion in 2024/25¹⁰, many schools are still expecting their financial situations to worsen over the coming year – which is only likely to intensify the level of cuts needed. While both pupil need and teaching and learning appear to be most

¹⁰ The Department for Education (DfE) has also announced £482.5 million in 2023/24 and £827.5 million for schools in 2024/25 as part of funding announced in July 2023 (DfE, 2023f). This is expected to be funded from elsewhere in the DfE (including schools) budget (Martin, 2023b).

affected in the most disadvantaged schools, our findings highlight that all types of schools have been impacted by cost-of-living pressures.

This is likely to have a negative impact on short- and long-term pupil attainment outcomes. As the needs of disadvantaged pupils have been more affected by recent cost-of-living increases, this is likely to lead to a widening of the gap in attainment outcomes achieved between disadvantaged pupils and their more advantaged peers.

Our findings highlight that cost-of-living pressures have exacerbated existing challenges faced by both mainstream and special schools in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. This means that some of the most vulnerable pupils in the school system are not being adequately supported and have lost core parts of the support they need to maximise their development, independence and quality of life. It also risks interventions and actions not being taken in a timely manner, or to a sufficient standard, all of which can lead to pupils having deeper and more complex needs, requiring greater levels of support in the longer-term.

Recruitment and retention challenges among teachers, TAs and support staff are only compounding the situation

Recruitment and retention challenges have also been exacerbated by cost-of-living pressures as salaries in schools have not remained competitive enough to attract staff and additional pressures have affected staff retention. This is amplifying the impacts of cuts and hindering schools' ability to meet pupil need. Our findings highlight that ensuring that schools have the financial headroom to offer competitive salaries is a key part of the solution.

Recommendations

Our findings highlight that cost-of-living pressures, together with existing pressures, are having a profound impact on pupils and their schools.

Without urgent action now, recent cost-of-living increases risk having far reaching and long-lasting impacts on pupils, particularly those who are most vulnerable, across both mainstream and special school settings.

Recommendation 1: The Government should extend the current eligibility for free school meals. At the absolute minimum, this should involve uprating the income threshold for eligibility to reflect inflationary pressures since 2018/19.

Recommendation 2: In the short-term, schools need greater financial support to address pupils' pressing well-being and welfare needs, alongside meeting the additional direct costs (e.g., energy and school meal costs) associated with the increased cost of living.

Recommendation 3: In the medium term, ensuring increased capacity and responsiveness of children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) and other services around families is needed to ensure that pupils can access the appropriate support and specialist services in a timely manner, rather than schools having to step in to fill those gaps in support.

Recommendation 4: While the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan already sets out next steps for improving provision for pupils with additional needs, it should be prioritised and accelerated to ensure that schools and pupils get access to the urgent help they require as soon as possible.

Recommendation 5: The Government should prioritise the refresh of the teacher recruitment and retention strategy and extend its scope. A wider education workforce strategy is needed that has a long-term focus, and includes teaching assistants, school support staff and tutors as well as teachers and leaders. For wider support staff, this should include looking at whether pay is competitive enough to attract and retain sufficient high-quality staff.

1 Introduction

The cost of living has been rising sharply across England since 2021, including unprecedented increases in energy costs, rapid increases in the costs of food and significant increases in the costs of housing via higher rents/mortgage costs (Harari *et al.*, 2023).

While inflation has fallen from its peak in October 2022, cost pressures are set to continue (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2023). Indeed, public debate has recently raised the possibility of introducing food price caps on basic necessities to support households (Jones and Walker, 2023). The Office for Budget Responsibility is predicting that real household disposable incomes per person (a measure of living standards) will remain below pre-pandemic levels until at least 2027/28 (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2022).

Cost-of-living pressures are having profound impacts on pupils and their families. Over a third of low-income parents are cutting back on food for their children (Earwaker, 2022). There has been an increase in the number of households who are unable to afford basic items for their children (The Sutton Trust, 2022). Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of cost-of-living pressures, as they are more likely to be in lower income households and require additional care (Blackburn, Spencer and Read, 2010).

Teachers and senior leaders in schools are on the front line. They see the immediate impacts of cost-of-living pressures on pupils. Regardless of whether they have the staff or resources to do so, many may feel the need to provide urgent support to pupils and their families. While this may go beyond schools' statutory duties, the evidence suggests that pupils whose most basic needs are not being met – whether it is going to school hungry or being unable to afford the costs of transport – are less likely to attend school and successfully engage with learning (The Food Foundation, 2022).

As well as affecting households, rising costs are also impacting mainstream and special school finances, in the form of higher energy and higher than expected staffing costs. While the Government has committed additional funding for schools in 2023/24 and 2024/25 (HM Treasury, 2022), there is still a question about whether this will be sufficient (Drayton *et al.*, 2022). Some schools have raised concerns that recent cost-of-living increases are impacting on their teaching and learning provision (Martin, 2022).

Pressures on schools are likely to be exacerbated by the fact that local authority (LA) budgets are also under significant financial pressures (CCN, 2023). The effect is two-fold. Firstly, local authorities may reduce support or increase waiting/referral times for wider services that low-income families and vulnerable pupils are dependent on, which schools may then need to step in to provide. Secondly, local authorities are unlikely to be able to provide additional financial support to schools to cover additional costs.

Alongside cost-of-living pressures, schools are also grappling with a myriad of other pressures, including post-pandemic recovery (Ofsted, 2022a, 2022b), additional financial pressures created by the current demographic decline in primary pupil numbers (DfE, 2023i) and teacher recruitment and retention challenges (McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023).

Despite these challenges, relatively little is known about the overarching scale of current cost-of-living pressures in schools, how these vary across settings and groups of pupils and what steps schools are taking to mitigate the impacts of cost-of-living pressures. Drawing on surveys of teachers and senior leaders in mainstream and special schools in England (as outlined in Box 1), this report aims to fill this critical evidence gap by establishing:

1. What impact do teachers and senior leaders report cost-of-living pressures are having on pupils and their households?
2. How has provision in schools been affected by cost-of-living increases?
3. What impact have cost-of-living increases had on school staff?

It is important to note that the quantitative analysis presented throughout this report is largely descriptive in nature and is not designed to make causal inferences. While teachers and senior leaders were asked to specifically consider how cost-of-living increases have impacted their pupils and their settings, there are many other pressures affecting schools that may be difficult to disentangle from cost-of-living pressures. Findings need to be interpreted in that wider context.

A degree of caution is also needed when interpreting the analysis of the special schools' survey responses due to the small sample sizes. Findings from the special schools surveys have not been weighted to be nationally representative due to these small sample sizes (see Box 1). Further detail about the methodology can be found in the Appendix.

Box 1. NFER cost of living surveys

Sample

From 21 April to 11 May*, NFER collected data via an online survey sent to all 20,193 state-funded mainstream primary and secondary schools, and all 1756 special schools in England. We asked senior leaders (head teachers, principals, deputy head teachers and assistant head teachers) to complete the survey themselves and pass it on to one teacher from their school. We received responses from 1354 senior leaders and 1317 teachers in 1666 primary schools (including middle deemed primary) and 637 secondary schools (including middle deemed secondary and all-through schools), representing 9.9 per cent of the 16,784 primary schools and 18.7 per cent of the 3409 secondary schools in England. We also received responses from 87 senior leaders and 41 teachers from special schools, representing 6.3 per cent of the 1756 special schools** (including non-maintained specials) in England.

We weighted the data for mainstream schools to ensure that our findings are representative of mainstream schools in England. Findings from the special school surveys' have not been weighted to be nationally representative due to the small sub-samples of non-maintained special schools and the most disadvantaged special schools in our sample.

Data collected

The survey focused on three main areas: how pupils and their families are being affected by recent cost-of-living increases, and how schools are supporting them; how provision in schools has been affected by recent cost-of-living pressures and what impact these pressures have had on school staff. The survey also asked respondents for some information about themselves, including their job role, gender and age.

Analysis

The NFER team used DfE [administrative data](#) to identify the characteristics of each school, including phase, proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM), school type (local authority or academy), and region. Weighting used the distribution of the achieved sample of mainstream schools relative to the national population of school phase and FSM quintile.

The analysis used three main approaches: descriptive statistics for all of the survey questions; tests of statistical significance to identify associations between selected questions and school characteristics; and regression models. Results were considered statistically significant if the probability of a result occurring by chance was less than five per cent ($p < 0.05$).

**Note that teacher strikes in English schools took place on both 27 April and 2 May. This should be borne in mind when interpreting findings.*

*** Includes all special schools with pupils between the ages of four and 16.*

2 Pupils and families

This chapter sets out the implications of the increased cost of living on the type and level of pupils' needs. It examines what support schools are providing and explores how confident teachers are in responding to pupils' needs.

2.1 Types and level of need

Key findings

- Senior leaders report that cost-of-living pressures have increased both the number of pupils requiring additional support and the level of need among these pupils.
- Pupil well-being and mental health is an increasing and pressing concern for schools, particularly in special schools and disadvantaged schools.
- There have been significant increases in the numbers of pupils requiring welfare and financial support due to cost-of-living pressures.
- Schools report an increase in safeguarding concerns, behaviour incidents and pupil absence because of the increased cost of living, particularly in secondary schools and more disadvantaged schools.
- Special schools are concerned that their pupils do not have all the specialist equipment they need to access and engage with learning (such as wheelchairs/mobility aids; supportive software).
- Staff in both mainstream and special schools are concerned about meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. Many teachers and senior leaders in mainstream schools flagged that the incidence of SEND and/or challenging behaviours among their pupils has been affected by the cost of living, increasing in recent years¹¹.

Most senior leaders report that recent increases in the cost of living have increased both the numbers of pupils requiring additional support and their level of need.

As shown in Figure 1, most senior leaders (84 per cent or more across all settings) agree or strongly agree that increases in the cost of living have driven an increase in the number of pupils requiring additional support and the level of their needs. Additional support was defined as anything over and above the usual provision pupils might receive in relation to EHCP plans, pupil premium and/or SEND support.

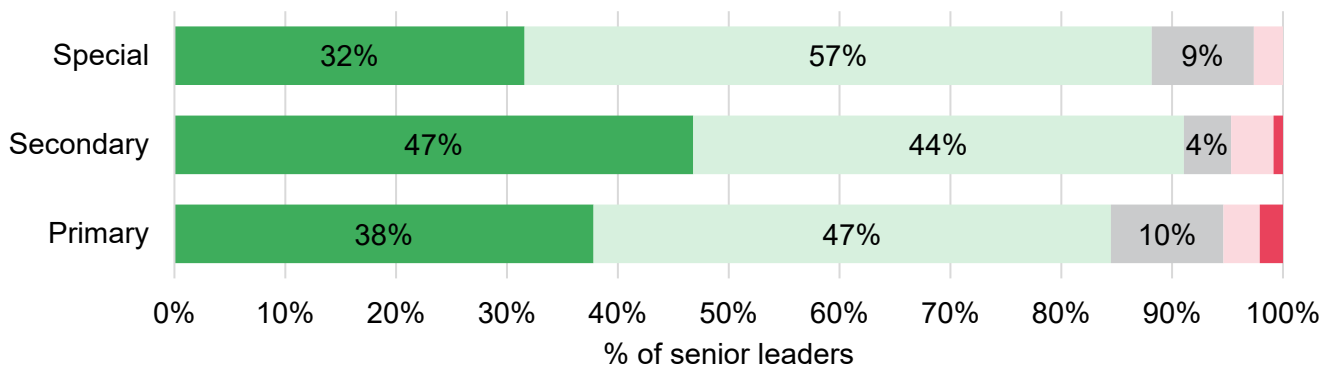
Agreeing that there was an increase in the number and level of pupils' need was more common in disadvantaged mainstream schools (i.e., schools with the highest proportions of pupils who are in

¹¹ Based on teachers and senior leaders' responses to 'Is there anything else which you would like us to know about how the cost of living is affecting you, your pupils, your teaching or your school?'

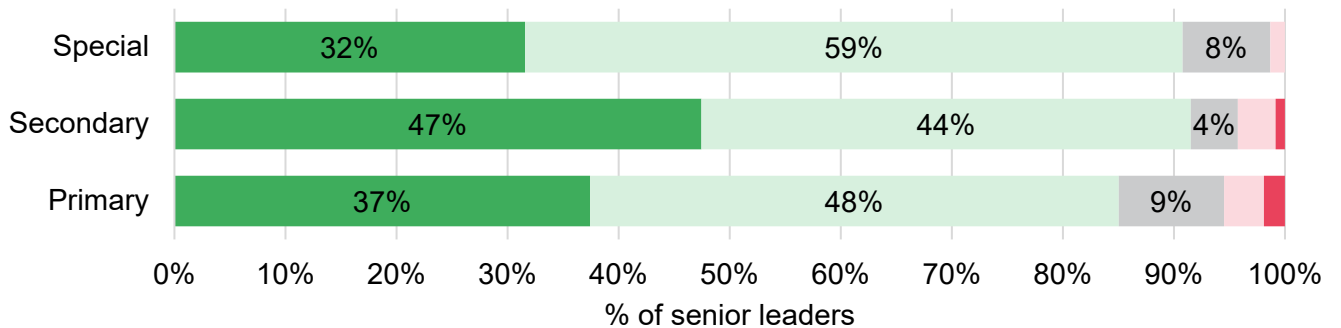
receipt of FSM pupils nationally), compared with the least disadvantaged¹². Almost all (92 per cent) senior leaders in the most disadvantaged quartile of primary schools agree or strongly agree that the increased cost of living has driven an increase in the number of pupils requiring additional support, compared with 77 per cent in the least disadvantaged primary schools.

Figure 1 The extent to which senior leaders agree that the cost-of-living increases have impacted the number of pupils requiring additional support and their level of need

Number of pupils



Level of need



■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Note: Additional support was defined as anything over and above the usual provision pupils might receive in relation to EHCP plans, pupil premium and/or SEND support. Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere

Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 1311

¹² Sub-sample analysis was not possible for the special schools sample due to the sample size achieved. All analysis presented by school-level disadvantage is for mainstream schools only.

2.1.1 Well-being and mental health

Pupil well-being and mental health is an increasing and pressing concern for schools

Figure 2 presents the percentages of pupils¹³, as reported by senior leaders, who require additional support across a range of areas both currently (i.e., in April 2023, when the survey was administered) and at the same point in the previous year¹⁴. It shows that over a quarter of pupils in mainstream schools currently require additional support for mental health (e.g., for anxiety and depression) and well-being (e.g., for difficult household circumstances or bereavement).

Mainstream senior leaders report significant increases in the proportion of pupils needing support between the two time points across both areas, suggesting that cost-of-living pressures have amplified levels of need. For example, the proportion of pupils in secondary schools requiring additional support for their general well-being increased the most, on average, with 31 per cent of pupils needing support this year compared to 21 per cent in the previous year. Previous research has shown that children living in poverty are more likely to have mental health problems and that the increased cost of living is causing stress among pupils as they worry about their care givers' ability to provide for them and withdraw from social activities in order to save money (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2020; Barnardo's, 2022)

More disadvantaged mainstream schools had a higher proportion of pupils receiving additional well-being and mental health support compared with the least disadvantaged schools. This was particularly noticeable in relation to general well-being, where pupils from the most disadvantaged quartile of primary schools are over twice as likely to be receiving support than the least disadvantaged quartile of schools (41 per cent and 18 per cent of pupils respectively). This highlights that more disadvantaged schools are having to devote more resources and time than their least disadvantaged counterparts to supporting pupil well-being and mental health needs.

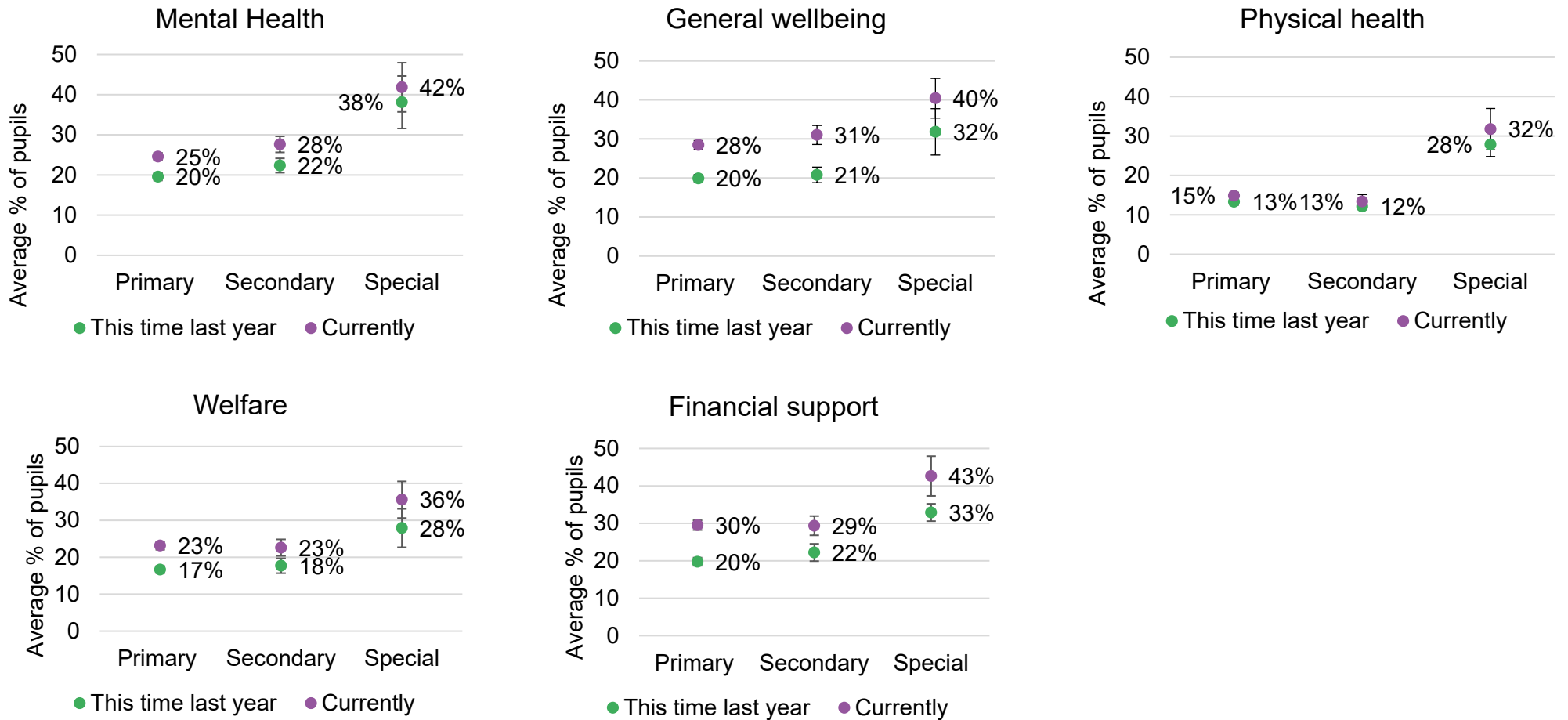
There is a particularly high level for well-being and mental health support among pupils in special schools

Figure 2 also shows that around 40 per cent of pupils in special schools require additional support related to mental health and general well-being. While special school senior leaders did not report a significant increase in need for additional mental health support in the last year, there was an increase in need for pupil well-being support (from 32 per cent to 40 per cent).

¹³ Senior leaders selected one of the following ranges: over 90 per cent of pupils, between 71 and 90 per cent, between 51 per cent and 70 per cent, between 31 per cent and 50 per cent, less than 10 per cent. Mid-points were used to estimate an average across all senior leaders (see the Appendix for more detail).

¹⁴ It should be borne in mind that, as senior leaders were asked to recollect the number of pupils requiring additional support in the previous year, estimates may be higher than if they were gathered in April 2022. This is because the estimates may be influenced by factors which have affected respondents' perceptions and recall of the previous year.

Figure 2 Average percentage of pupils requiring different types of additional support



Note: Confidence intervals have been included on the charts. Where confidence intervals do not overlap, they indicate that differences in the average per cent of pupils over time can be considered significant.

Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 1310

While the sample size of special schools is comparatively small, this highlights the particularly challenging circumstances which special schools are currently facing in supporting pupil well-being and mental health – which have been amplified by cost-of-living pressures. Previous research has also identified that pupils with SEND in specialist settings had been greatly affected by the pandemic disruption, which appears to have impacted on their mental health and emotional well-being (Skipp *et al.*, 2021).

2.1.2 Welfare and financial support

Senior leaders report significant increases in the numbers of pupils requiring additional welfare or financial support

Figure 2 also shows that, over the last year, cost-of-living pressures have contributed to a significant increase in the number of pupils across mainstream and special settings requiring additional support related to welfare (e.g., provision of food, clothing and warm spaces) and financial support to access learning, social and extra-curricular activities (e.g., subsidies for trips or travel, IT access, transport costs and books). For example, leaders report that the percentage of pupils in primary schools who require additional financial support has increased from 20 per cent to 30 per cent in the last year.

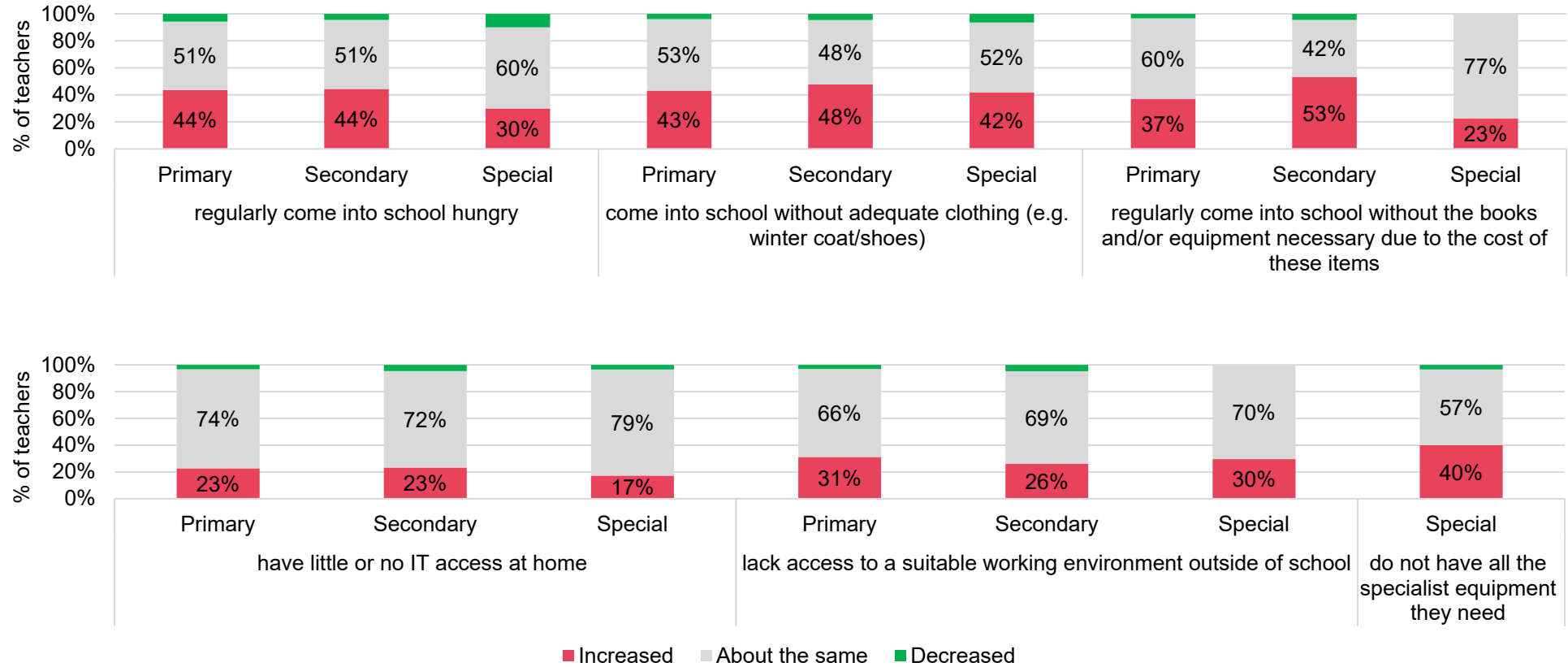
These findings reflect those from teachers, where a substantial number report an increase in the proportions of pupils coming into school hungry and without adequate clothing or equipment (as shown by Figure 3). Teachers report that an average of 20 per cent of pupils in a special school class, 12 per cent of pupils in a primary school class and seven per cent in a secondary school year group or house are coming into school hungry¹⁵. Almost half of mainstream teachers state this represents an increase compared with last year (44 per cent of primary and secondary school teachers).

Recently on a school trip we thought pupils were presenting with behaviour issues when they didn't flush [the] toilet but it turned out they are not allowed to waste water and flush at home. The same went for brushing teeth and having showers. Hygiene is really poor and getting worse. –
Special school teacher

Although my school is in a predominantly wealthy area, it has been worrying to see the increase in the number of children in other classes who were able to manage last year but are now turning up at school hungry. – Mainstream teacher

¹⁵ Teachers provided the number of pupils in their class (primary/special schools) or year group (secondary schools) who fit into these categories. The proportions of class/year groups were calculated using teachers' reported total number of pupils in their class/year group.

Figure 3 Teachers' reports of changes, compared to last year, in the proportion of pupils coming into school hungry, without adequate clothing and without adequate materials



Source: NFER survey of 1358 teachers: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 671. Apart from 'do not have all the specialist equipment they need to access and engage with learning' where 36 teachers from special schools gave a response

As with mental health and well-being support, the levels of welfare support needs in special settings was particularly high (at 36 per cent of pupils, up from 28 per cent). The same is true of financial support needs (43 per cent of pupils, up from 33 per cent). Research has identified that households of pupils with SEND face not only an income penalty (as parents and carers tend to have their ability to work restricted), but often have to meet extra costs associated with their child's SEND (Family Fund, 2022). A strong relationship has also been documented between SEND and poverty (Shaw *et al.*, 2016). This may explain why the rates of welfare and financial support appear to be greatest in the special sector, as these families are feeling the most pressure. This highlights that special schools are likely to face particular challenges in supporting financial and wellbeing needs in light of cost-of-living pressures.

Some pupils do not have access to a suitable working environment or IT at home

Periods of school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of a suitable working environment for pupils outside of the classroom. However, according to teachers, a substantial proportion of pupils do not have access to a suitable working environment (on average, 16 per cent of secondary school pupils, 22 per cent of primary school pupils and 31 per cent of pupils in special schools).

As shown in Figure 3, roughly a third of teachers report this has increased compared with last year (31 per cent of primary, 26 per cent of secondary and 30 per cent of special schools). One possible explanation for this increase is that pupils are avoiding working at home due to increased energy prices. Furthermore, increasing housing and rental costs may be resulting in families moving into smaller, lower quality housing and/or temporary accommodation. At the end of March 2023, 104,510 households were in temporary accommodation, representing an increase of ten per cent compared to March 2022 (GOV.UK, 2023). This suggests that cost-of-living pressures may be impacting pupils' ability to engage with learning at home, as well as at school.

Additionally, teachers report that around one in five pupils in primary and one in four pupils in secondary and special schools have little or no IT access at home. As shown in Figure 3, most teachers report this was about the same as last year. This suggests that, while inequalities in pupils' access to IT persist, cost-of-living pressures have not worsened the situation.

Pupils in the most disadvantaged schools are more likely to require additional support

As might be expected, teachers in the most disadvantaged primary schools are more likely to report increases in pupils with little or no access to IT equipment, coming to school hungry, without adequate clothing and/or equipment than those in the least disadvantaged schools. For example, over half (56 per cent) of primary school teachers working in schools in the most disadvantaged quartile of schools report an increase in the proportion of pupils coming to school hungry, compared with 29 per cent in schools in the least disadvantage quartile. This highlights that the most disadvantaged schools have been disproportionately impacted by cost-of-living pressures, albeit the pattern in secondary schools by level of pupil disadvantage was more mixed across different types of need.

Lack of access to specialist equipment in special schools is a particular concern

Teachers in special schools were also asked how many pupils in their class do not have all the specialist equipment they need to access and engage with learning (e.g., wheelchairs/mobility aids; supportive software; change of clothes). On average, teachers in special schools report that 24 per cent of pupils do not have all the specialist equipment that they need. As shown by Figure 3, around 40 per cent of special school teachers report this is an increase compared with the previous year, suggesting this has been exacerbated by recent cost-of-living increases.

In special schools, many pupils require access to specialist equipment in order to fully access their learning, school activities or social interactions. A lack of suitable specialist equipment is also likely to necessitate school staff providing more support to these pupils than should be needed if they had been provided with or able to afford this equipment. For example, a pupil whose wheelchair is broken or not correctly fitting will need more adult help; pupils without computer communication support will need staff to fulfil this role. Our findings indicate therefore that recent increases in the cost of living are impairing pupils’ ability to access and experience education. Additionally, it means an increased role for school staff at a time when schools’ budgets may be squeezed by other cost-of-living pressures.

2.1.3 Special educational needs

Meeting the needs of pupils with SEND was also a key issue raised by mainstream settings

In their open responses, many teachers and senior leaders in mainstream schools flagged that the incidence of SEND and/or challenging behaviours among their pupils has increased significantly in recent years and that this trend has been amplified by cost-of-living pressures.

SEND children are increasingly more complex, so need more support. Lack of school places in this sector impacts upon this. – Mainstream senior leader

We have seen a significant increase in the number of pupils entering Nursery and Reception with learning and behavioural needs. I have been in education 25 years... we have never experienced anything like what we are going through at present. Whether this is due to the cost of living, or as a result of lockdowns, or both, is hard to say, but our staff are facing challenges we have not faced on this scale. – Mainstream senior leader

My school does not have the budget to provide 1:1 support for children that have SEND thus we have to share responsibility between teacher and teaching assistant (TA). This means we can’t support the rest of the class adequately. – Mainstream teacher

2.1.4 Safeguarding, behaviour and absenteeism

Safeguarding concerns, behavioural incidents and absenteeism have increased, particularly in secondary schools

Figure 4 shows that most senior leaders (over 80 per cent in all settings) agree or strongly agree that increases in the cost of living have increased safeguarding concerns and/or incidents in the school. Senior leaders also agree there has been an increase in behaviour incidents (66 per cent

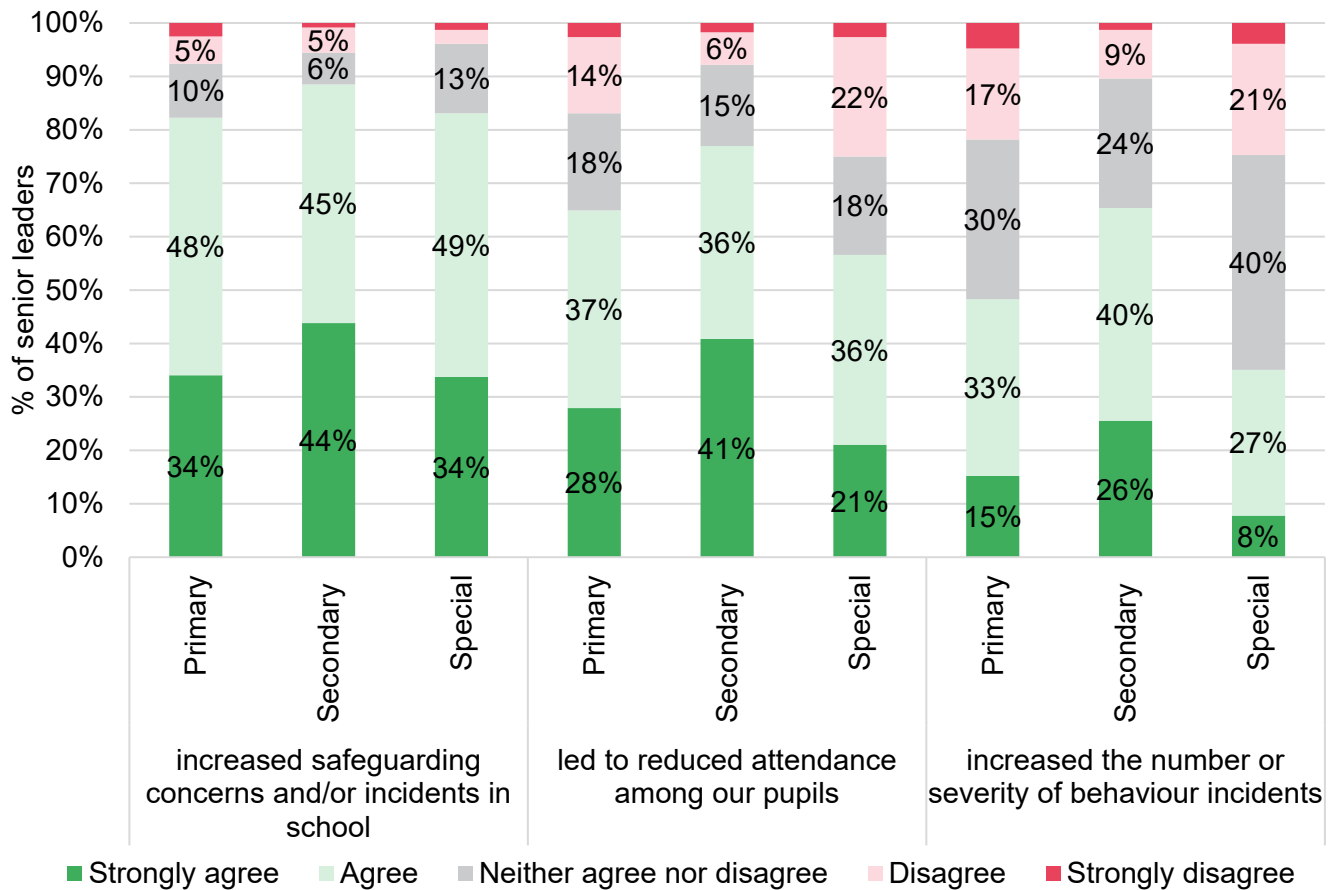
in secondary, 48 per cent in primary and 35 per cent in special schools) and a reduction in pupil attendance (77 per cent in secondary, 65 per cent in primary and 57 per cent in special schools) due to the increases in the cost of living.

Much more concerns logged regarding children's home life, lack of food or clothing, mental health problems and safeguarding generally. – Mainstream senior leader

The worst thing is the hidden poverty and the fact that we cannot support everyone. We are seeing an increase in safeguarding concerns as a result of strained parental relationships. – Mainstream senior leader

I would also say that pressure on households could be contributing to more adverse behaviour in school due to students having a less stable home life and picking up on the pressure adults in their lives are under. – Mainstream teacher

Figure 4 The extent senior leaders agree or disagree that increases in the cost of living have impacted on pupils over and above other factors (e.g., Covid-19 recovery)



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere

Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 1290

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been widespread concern about the level of persistent absence (where a pupil's attendance is lower than 90 per cent of possible sessions) in schools (Long and Danechi, 2023). Indeed, in autumn 2022/23, the persistent absence rate was 41 per cent in special schools (up from 28 per cent in 2018/19), 21 per cent in primary schools (up from nine per cent in 2018/19) and 27 per cent in secondary schools (up from 13 per cent in 2018/19) (DfE, 2023e).

Our findings suggest that, as a result of cost-of-living pressures, the task of reducing persistent absence in schools may have become even more challenging. This is because increases in absence may be related to the rise in travel costs as well as illness due to poor home conditions (including pupils being hungry, cold or damp) or not having the specialist support and equipment needed to be in school.

The cost of living is causing increase in illness due to lack of heating in homes, lack of nutrition for students and therefore decreasing attendance. – Mainstream senior leader

Some students are missing out on their education due to parents not being able to afford transportation costs when they're not entitled to free school transport, so therefore those students aren't able to get into school. – Mainstream teacher

Increased safeguarding concerns, behavioural incidents and absenteeism have most affected disadvantaged schools

For example, 56 per cent of secondary senior leaders from the least disadvantaged quartile of schools report that cost-of-living pressures have led to reduced attendance compared with 85 per cent in most disadvantaged quartile of schools. This highlights that cost-of-living pressures have disproportionately increased the challenges faced by the most disadvantaged schools.

2.2 How are schools responding to need?

Key findings

- In response to cost-of-living pressures, schools are expanding the scale and range of support they have available in school to support *both* pupils and their households.
- The most disadvantaged schools are providing the most support to pupils and their households and report the highest rates of pupil take up.
- It is not just children eligible for pupil premium who are receiving support – in the majority of schools, most pupils taking up support are not eligible for pupil premium.
- Schools are subsidising the cost of providing free schools meals from other parts of their budget, particularly in the most disadvantaged schools.

2.2.1 Range of support being provided to pupils and their households

Schools are providing a wide range of support to pupils and their households in response to cost-of-living pressures

Figure 5 presents the different types of support/services that senior leaders report their schools are providing to pupils in order to meet their needs. The most common support activities reported by schools across all phases include: providing uniform and clothing to pupils (over 95 per cent of mainstream settings and 87 per cent in special schools), subsidising extra-curricular activities (at over 90 per cent across all types of settings), subsidising breakfast (around 70 per cent of primary schools and over 80 per cent in secondary and special schools) and providing food parcels/food banks/food vouchers (over 70 per cent across all types of settings).

Although less common than other types of support, 28 per cent of secondary schools and 21 per cent of special schools are providing warm spaces/banks (compared to 17 per cent of primaries) and 39 per cent of secondary schools and 46 per cent of special schools are providing facilities for washing clothes (compared to 14 per cent of primaries).

A substantial share of schools are also providing free school meals for pupils who would not otherwise be eligible: at 39 per cent of primary schools, 49 per cent of secondary and special schools.

Many schools are not only supporting pupils, but also providing support to pupils' households. For example, around half of secondary and special schools are providing food parcels/food banks to pupils' households (50 per cent and 48 per cent respectively) and this rises to 59 per cent of primary schools. This demonstrates that schools are providing unprecedented levels of support to both pupils and their households because of the cost-of-living increases. While this may go beyond schools' statutory responsibilities, pupils whose most basic needs are not being met are less likely to attend school and successfully engage with learning.

Figure 5 Percentage of schools currently providing support/services to pupils and households



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere.

Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 1269

Disadvantaged schools and special schools are providing the most support for cost-of-living pressures to pupils and/or their households

As might be expected, amongst mainstream schools, the most disadvantaged schools are offering a greater level of support to pupils compared to the least disadvantaged schools. For example, 47 per cent of the most disadvantaged quartile of primary schools report offering subsidised breakfast to pupils, compared with 90 per cent in the least disadvantaged quartile (see Figure 43 in the Appendix). Further, around one quarter of the most disadvantaged primary schools are offering warm spaces and facilities for washing clothes. These are much less common in the least disadvantaged schools (nine and six per cent respectively).

In line with other findings, the level of need in special schools appears greater than in mainstream. As shown below in Figure 7, over half of pupils, on average, in special schools are receiving subsidised breakfasts. This compares to around a quarter in mainstream schools. Additionally, just under a half (46 per cent) of pupils in special schools are receiving subsidies for extra-curricular activities, compared to 30 per cent of primary schools and 25 per cent of secondary schools. However, it is important to note that the special schools survey sample is comparatively small.

Most of the additional support schools are offering is not new, although there are exceptions

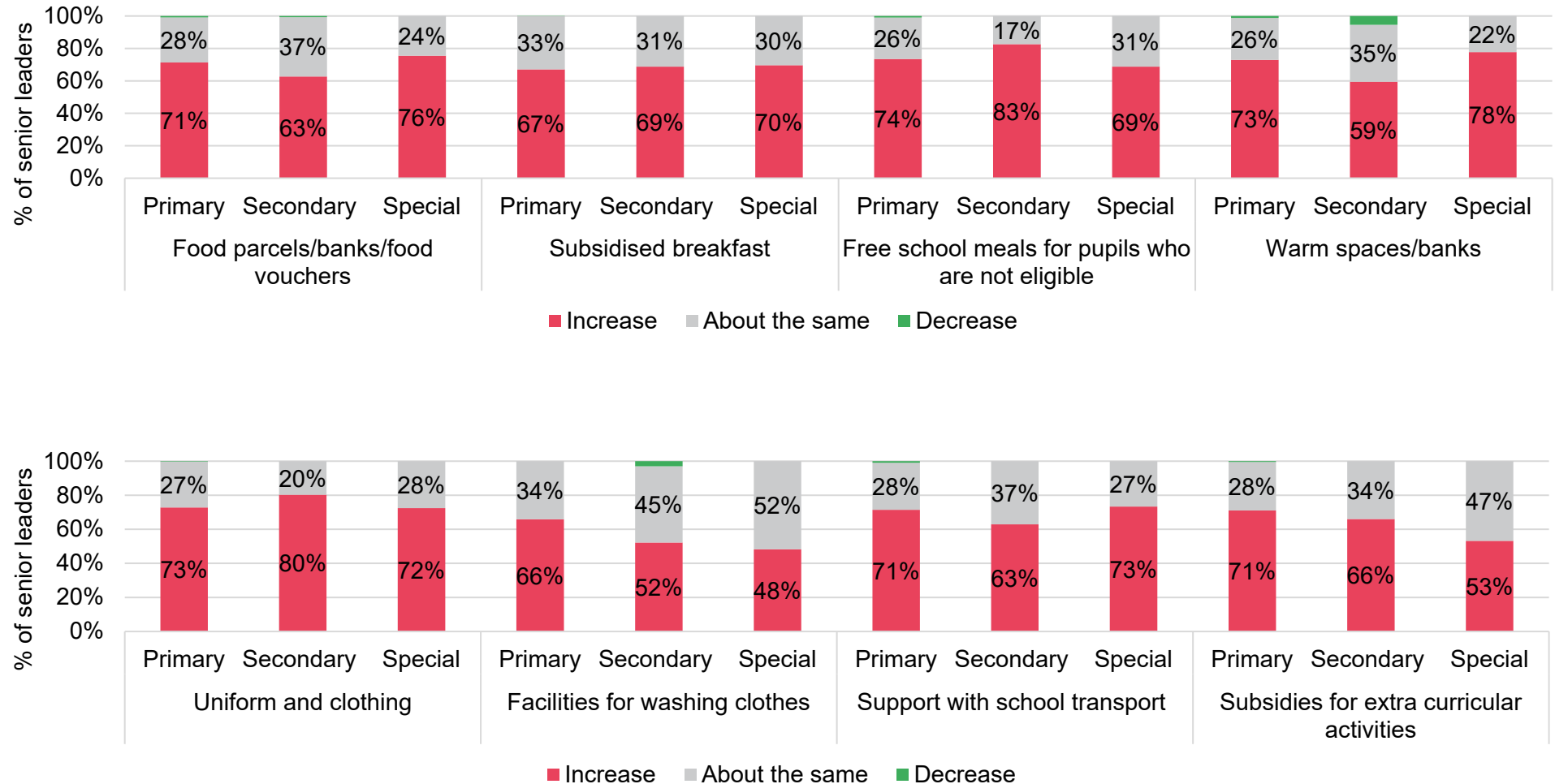
The support services most commonly reported as being newly introduced this academic year are warm spaces/banks and facilities for washing clothes. Of the schools providing warm spaces/banks for pupils, around 42 per cent only introduced them this academic year. Furthermore, 36 per cent of the primary schools offering facilities for washing clothes had started this year (albeit this was lower in secondary and special schools at 19 per cent and nine per cent respectively). These services have likely been newly introduced as a direct response to cost-of-living pressures.

Nevertheless, most senior leaders report an increase in the scale of provision across all forms of additional support

Whilst schools may have already been offering provision for additional support prior to the 2022/23 academic year, senior leaders report an increase in the amount of school time and resource dedicated towards offering different types of support compared with last year. This shows that cost-of-living pressures have led to an increase in the scale of support provided by schools.

As shown in Figure 6, most mainstream senior leaders (around 60 per cent) report an increase in school time and resources devoted to support provision and this is true across most forms of additional support. This was similar in special schools, although only around half report an increase for facilities for washing clothes (48 per cent) and in subsidies for extra-curricular activities (53 per cent).

Figure 6 Proportion of senior leaders who report an increase in the scale of provision



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 127

Our findings highlight that there has been an increase in the level of support offered by schools since last year because of cost-of-living increases. This support goes beyond schools' statutory responsibilities. Schools are having to provide welfare-related support to meet the fundamental needs of pupils (and households) such as ensuring that pupils have basic nutrition at home and at the school. This is key for enabling pupils to engage with learning. For example, there is a wealth of research on the importance of pupils' readiness to learn and international comparative studies have identified the associations between pupils regularly arriving at school hungry and having lower attainment (Mullis *et al.*, 2017, 2020).

Children need to be warm, fed and feel safe before they can learn. Fewer children are coming into school in that place so this impacts on learning. Staff spend the first part of every day checking on breakfast, suitable clothing etc before any learning can start. Whilst I would always want to be there for our families, this should not be our primary role. – Mainstream senior leader.

If you are cold or hungry, or parents are arguing about money worries, then school and learning isn't a priority. So many of our students are struggling with behaviour and mental health issues because life is harder outside school. – Mainstream teacher.

Secondary senior leaders from the most disadvantaged schools are more likely to report an increase in the scale of additional support since last year

The greatest difference is in facilities for washing clothes, where 63 per cent of senior leaders in the most disadvantaged secondary schools report an increase, compared with 30 per cent of the least disadvantaged. For primary schools, the picture is more mixed. Senior leaders in the least disadvantaged schools are more likely to report an increase for some services, such as support with school transport (79 per cent of those in the least disadvantaged quartile compared with 70 per cent in the most disadvantaged quartile) and facilities for washing clothes (100 per cent of those in the least disadvantaged quartile compared with 66 per cent in the most disadvantaged quartile)¹⁶.

2.2.2 How many pupils are benefiting from the different types of additional support?

Subsidised breakfast and subsidies for extra-curricular activities have the highest pupil take up in schools

In the previous sub-chapter (2.2.1), we showed that cost-of-living increases have led to most senior leaders increasing the scale of their additional support provision over the last year.

Figure 7 provides more detail by presenting the proportion of pupils, as reported by senior leaders, that are currently taking up support among the schools offering that type of support. The most common types of additional support (as shown in Figure 7) are those being offered to the greatest proportions of pupils. For example, in primary schools, 30 per cent of pupils are accessing

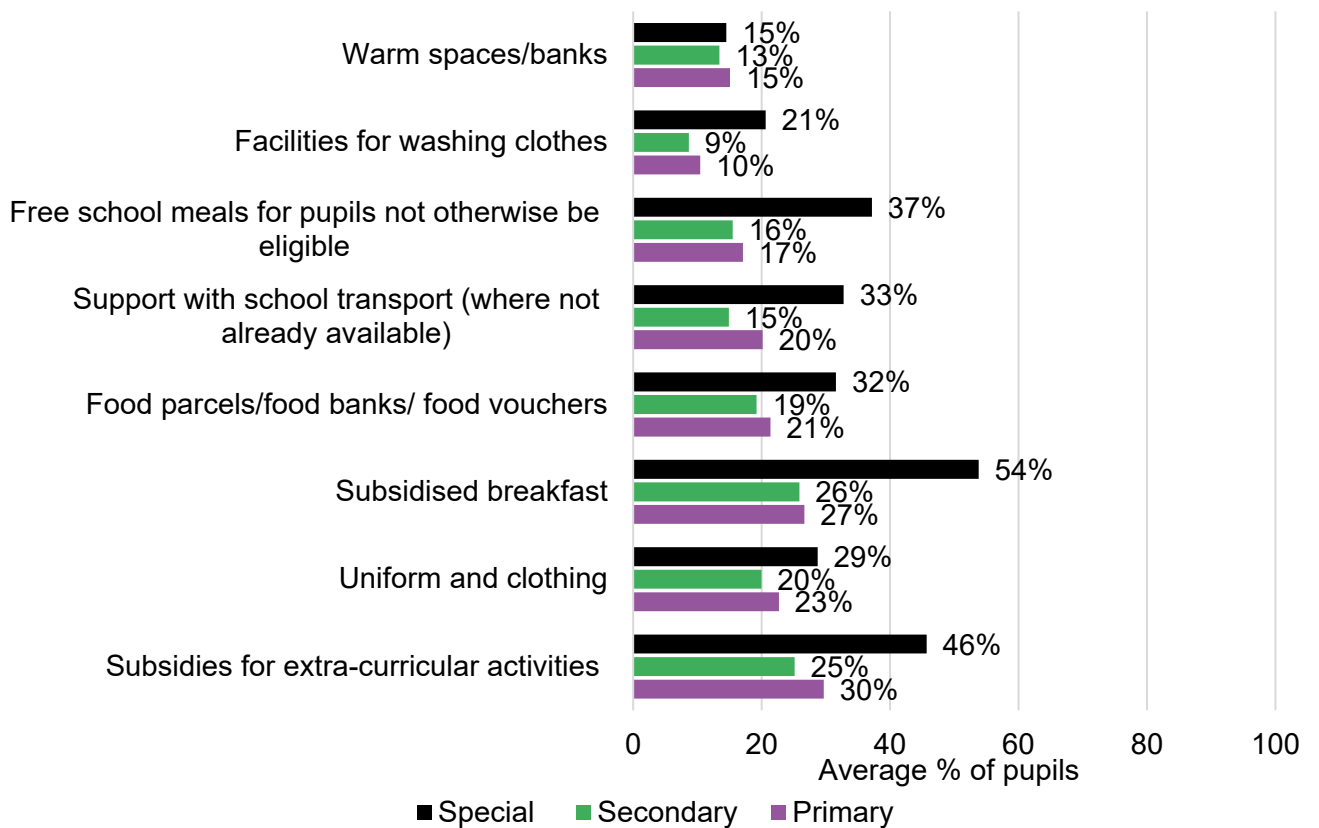
¹⁶ Note, only 81 schools are providing this support to pupils.

subsidies for extra-curricular activities, 27 per cent are accessing subsidised breakfasts and 23 per cent are accessing uniform and clothing provision¹⁷.

As might be expected, pupils in more disadvantaged schools are more likely to be taking up the support offered by schools across all settings. This was most noticeable with regards to subsidies for extra-curricular activities and subsidised breakfasts. Nearly half of pupils (48 per cent) in primary schools from the most disadvantaged quartile of schools are receiving subsidises for extra-curricular activities, compared to 17 per cent of pupils in the least disadvantaged quartile of schools.

This highlights that schools are not only providing a wide range of additional support to pupils, but that a substantial proportion of pupils are benefiting from this support. As outlined above, cost-of-living pressures have amplified the extent to which pupils are benefitting from this support.

Figure 7 Average percentage of pupils currently taking up the support that schools are offering



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 216

¹⁷ Senior leaders selected one of the following ranges: over 90 per cent of pupils, between 71 and 90 per cent, between 51 per cent and 70 per cent, between 31 per cent and 50 per cent, less than 10 per cent. Mid-points were used to estimate an average across senior leaders (see the Appendix for more detail).

There was variation in the take up of support across different regions, particularly in primary schools

In general, the proportion of pupils taking up support offered by schools is similar across regions. However, there are some exceptions to this where pupils in the North are more likely to be benefitting from support and/or have seen an increase in support compared to pupils in the South and the Midlands (as shown in Figure 42 in the Appendix A). For example, primary senior leaders in the North compared with those in the South and Midlands are more likely to report increases in the scale of support provided, including support with transport, subsidised breakfast, uniform and clothing and free school meals for pupils who would not otherwise be eligible. This is consistent with the fact that children in the North are more likely to live in poverty compared to the rest of England (NHSA, 2023). In turn, it is not surprising that cost-of-living increases may have disproportionately impacted children in these areas, leading to greater increases in the additional support required from schools.

2.2.3 Free school meals

Costs of provision

More than half of the most disadvantaged schools are subsidising the cost of free school meals from other parts of their budget

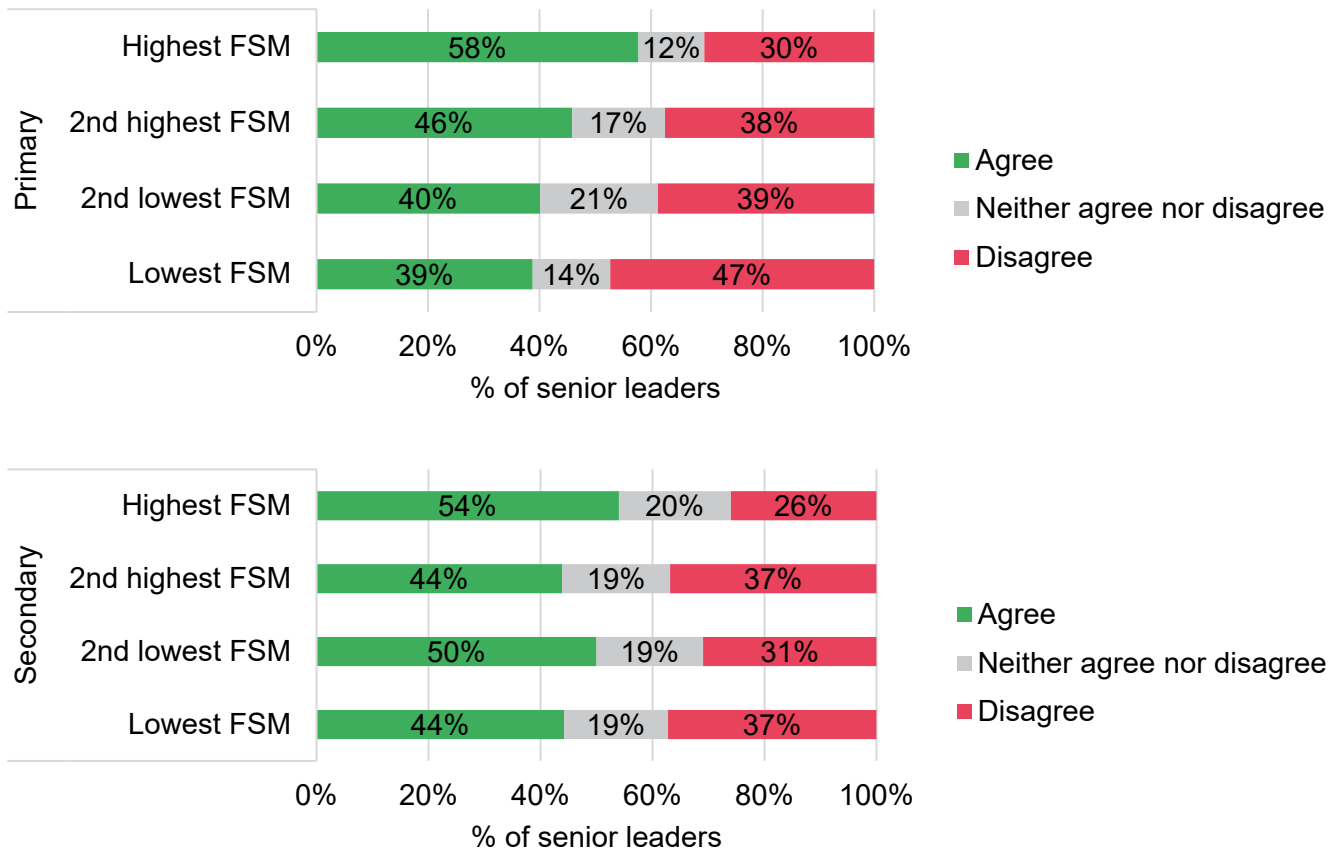
FSM help to reduce food insecurity, improve children's nutrition and alleviate some of the financial pressures experienced by families (Cribb *et al.*, 2023). Earlier in this chapter, we showed that around half of all secondary schools and special schools and 39 per cent of primary schools report providing FSM to pupils who are not otherwise eligible (Figure 5).

Since cost-of-living pressures have disproportionately impacted food costs (Scott, 2023), senior leaders were asked whether they were subsidising the cost of FSM from other parts of the school budget. Forty-six per cent of primary and 47 per cent of secondary senior leaders agreed with this statement, as did over two-thirds of special school senior leaders (69 per cent).

The proportion agreeing with this statement increases notably as schools become increasingly disadvantaged, particularly in primary. As shown in Figure 8, 39 per cent of the least disadvantaged schools are taking this step compared to 58 per cent of the most disadvantaged schools.

Our findings highlight that funding for free school meals in mainstream schools has not kept pace with recent increases in food prices. Similarly, while special schools do not receive any separate funding for providing free school meals, our findings show that funding increases have not been commensurate with the cost pressures they are facing. This is likely to be contributing to schools' budget pressures, which are discussed further in Chapter 3 of this report. It also suggests that, if the costs of providing free school meals are not uprated in-line with inflation, schools may need to compromise on the quality of school meals.

Figure 8 The extent to which schools are using other parts of the school budget to fund free school meal provisions for pupils otherwise not eligible



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1058 gave a response

Eligibility

It is not just pupil premium children receiving support related to the increased cost of living

Any pupil who has been eligible for FSM at any point in the last six years is also a pupil premium (PP) pupil. This means that they attract additional funding for their school (in 2022/23, schools received £1385 for every primary age pupil and £985 for every secondary age pupil¹⁸) and will be counted as disadvantaged in measures of pupil attainment outcomes.

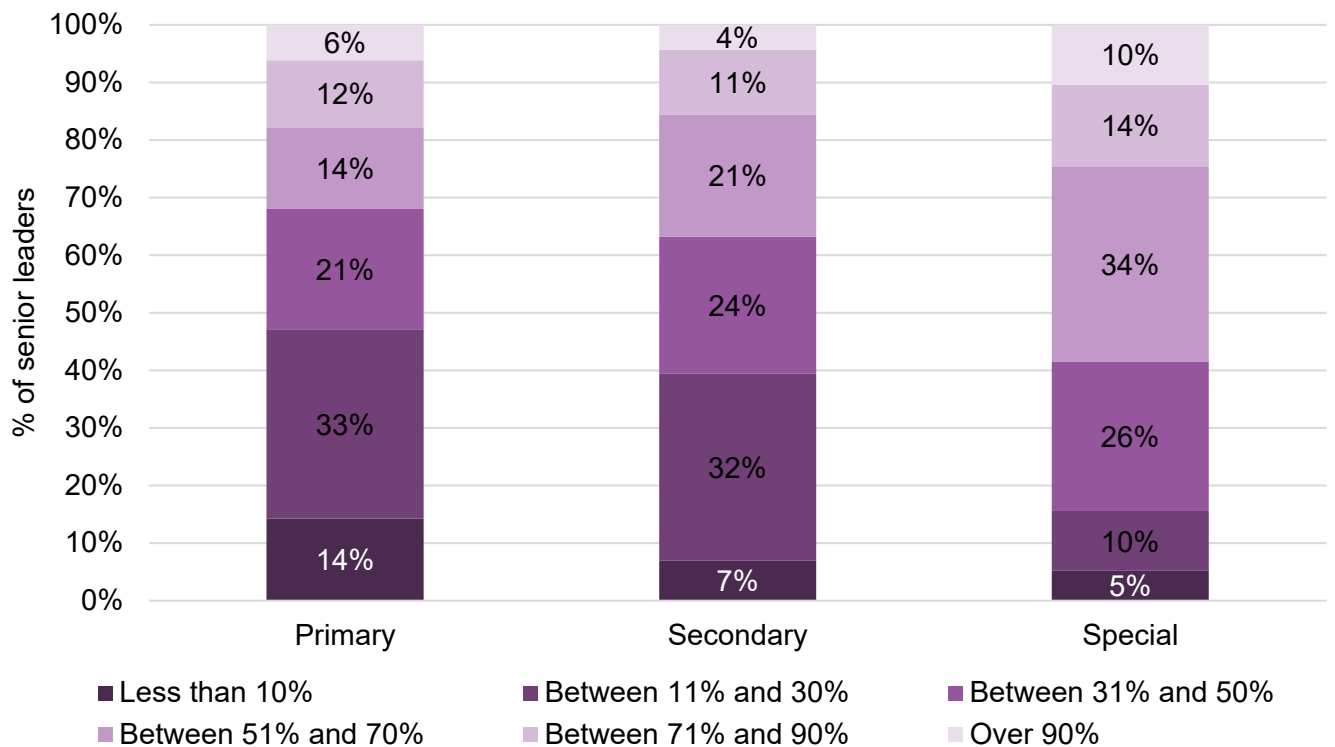
It might be expected that most of the additional support related to the increased cost of living is targeted towards PP pupils. However, senior leaders indicated that many of those receiving support are not eligible for pupil premium (see Figure 9). In only a minority of schools do senior leaders report that the vast majority (i.e., more than 90 per cent) of pupils receiving the additional support are eligible for pupil premium (in six per cent of primary schools, four per cent of secondary

¹⁸ From September 2023, schools will receive £1455 for every primary age pupil and £1035 for every secondary age pupil.

schools and ten per cent of special schools). In over three-fifths of mainstream schools (68 per cent of primary and 63 per cent of secondary schools), senior leaders report 50 per cent or more of the pupils receiving additional support were pupils *not* eligible for pupil premium. By comparison, this was true in around 42 per cent of special schools.

This suggests that the current eligibility criteria for free school meals may be too restrictive. Currently, a family who receives Universal Credit must have a net income of £7,400 or less per year to be newly eligible for FSM. This income threshold has not changed since 2018/19, even though prices have increased significantly since then. If the threshold had kept pace with inflation, it would now be around £8,700 (Cribb *et al.*, 2023). In light of the additional numbers of pupils who are not eligible for PP which schools are having to support and the extent to which cost-of-living pressures have amplified pupil needs, there is a compelling case for revisiting the current eligibility criteria.

Figure 9 The extent to which pupils receiving support related to the increased cost of living are eligible for pupil premium funding



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere
Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1301 gave a response

2.3 Teacher confidence in supporting pupils' needs

Key findings

- Most teachers feel confident in meeting pupils' well-being needs but do not feel confident meeting pupils' financial support needs. This is concerning, given the increase in pupils' need and that teachers are having to deal with these issues more often because of cost-of-living pressure.
- Mainstream teachers do not feel confident meeting the needs of pupils with SEND and feel they would benefit from more internal SEND support.
- Teachers feel unable to access the support they need from external agencies.

2.3.1 Teacher confidence

Teachers are confident in meeting pupils' well-being needs but less so in meeting financial support needs

Teachers were asked to report the extent to which they feel confident meeting the needs of pupils requiring support in mental health, physical health, general well-being, welfare, financial support to access learning, social and extra-curricular activities or for special educational needs and disabilities. This is crucial given the level of need that schools, and therefore teachers, are contending with in light of cost-of-living pressures (as shown in sub-chapter 2.1).

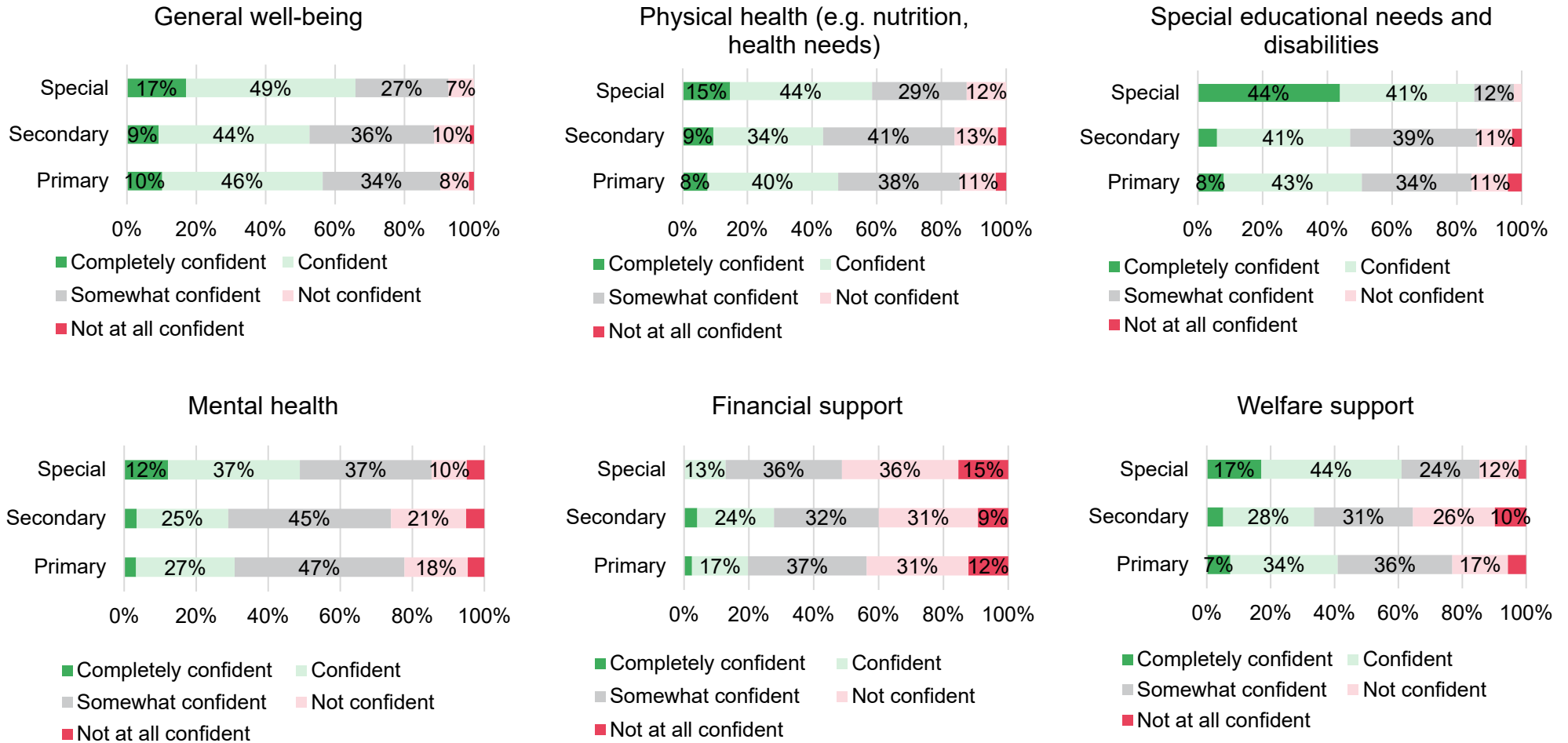
Figure 10 shows that teachers are generally confident in meeting the needs of pupils requiring support related to their general well-being (e.g., safeguarding, difficult household circumstances, bereavement). Over half of mainstream teachers (56 per cent of primary teachers and 53 per cent of secondary school teachers) and two-thirds of special school teachers (66 per cent) report they are confident with this.

Teachers appear to be less confident in supporting pupils' mental health needs (e.g., anxiety, depression), particularly in mainstream schools. Only around three-tenths of mainstream teachers are completely confident or confident about meeting pupils' mental health needs, while around one-quarter are not confident or not confident at all. Teachers in special schools, however, appear to be more confident, with nearly half confident or completely confident.

Additionally, teachers are less confident in meeting pupils' specific needs with regards to financial support to access learning social and extra-curricular activities (e.g., subsidies for trips or travel, IT access). At least two-fifths of teachers across settings are not confident or not confident at all in meeting pupils' needs in this area (40 per cent in secondary, 43 per cent in primary and 51 per cent in special schools).

In the context of the increased levels of pupil need resulting from cost-of-living pressures, it is clear that teachers require more training and/or specialist external support in order to confidently support pupils with their additional support needs.

Figure 10 The extent that teachers feel confident meeting the needs of pupils requiring support



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere. All percentages are presented as a percentage of teachers who provided a response
Source: NFER survey of 1358 teachers: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 1281

Half of mainstream teachers do not feel confident in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND

As would be expected given their role, teachers from special schools are generally confident in supporting pupils with special education needs and disabilities (85 per cent of teachers are confident or completely confident in doing so). However, mainstream teachers are much less confident (only 51 and 47 per cent of primary and secondary school teachers said they are confident or completely confident).

Together with the fact that the qualitative evidence suggests that SEND needs in mainstream schools may have increased with cost-of-living pressures (see sub-chapter 2.1), this suggests mainstream teachers need more training, resource and support in this area.

Teachers from more disadvantaged secondary schools report greater confidence in meeting pupils' well-being and welfare needs.

Figure 11 presents teacher confidence in supporting pupils' general well-being and welfare by the disadvantage level within mainstream schools. It shows that the proportion of teachers who are confident or completely confident in meeting pupils' needs across general well-being and welfare increases with the level of disadvantage in schools. One possible reason for this is that teachers in more disadvantaged schools have more experience of supporting pupils facing these challenges. This shows that, while more disadvantaged schools may be facing the greatest levels of additional support needs in light of cost-of-living pressures, their teachers may be best placed to meet those needs.

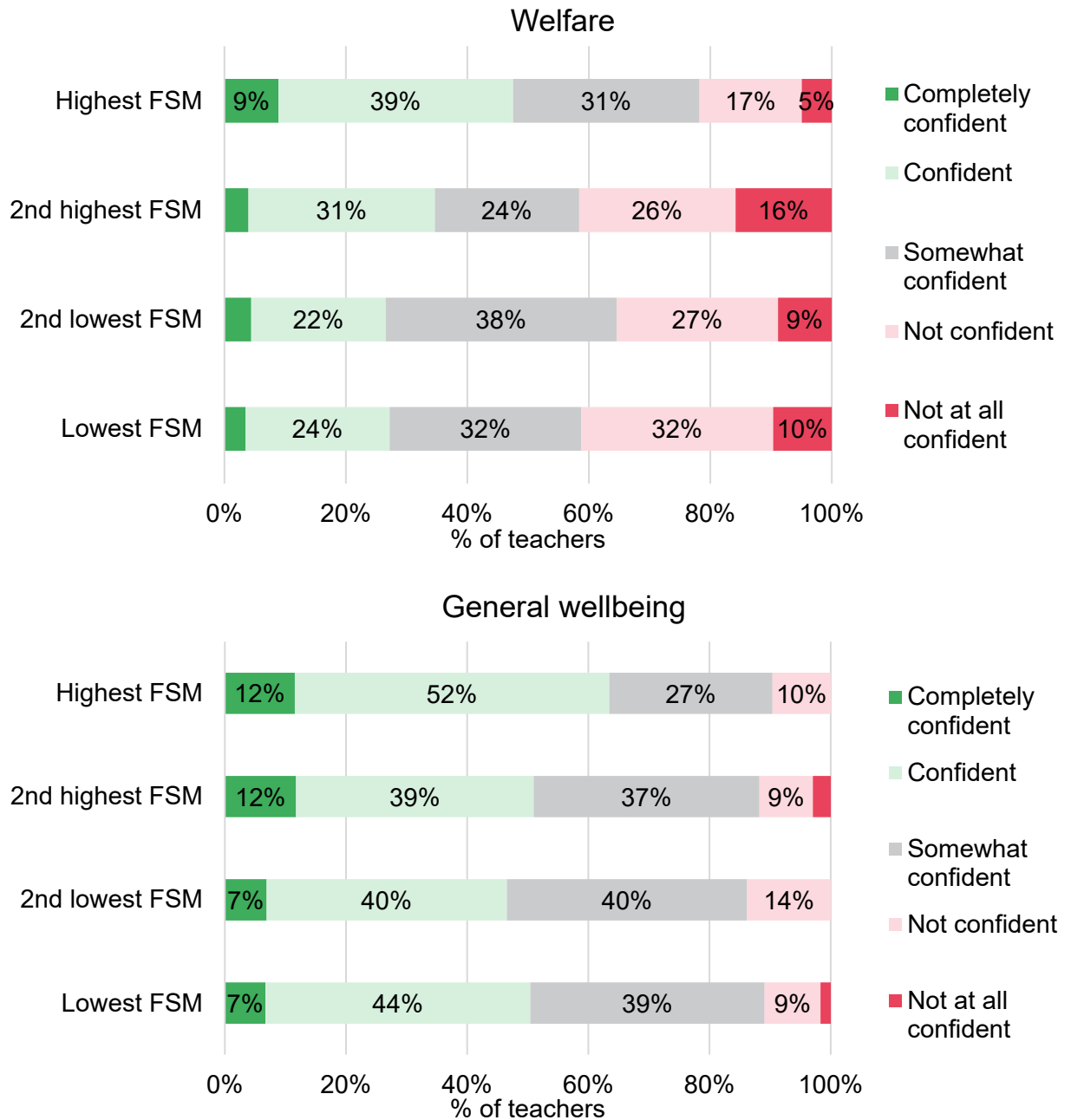
There are no clear patterns in teacher confidence in supporting mental health, financial support and SEND across schools facing different levels of disadvantage.

Teachers' confidence in signposting pupils and families to the right support was mixed

Over half of secondary school teachers (51 per cent) and just under half of primary and special school leaders (at 48 per cent and 44 per cent) said they did not feel confident in signposting pupils and families facing difficulties due to the increased cost of living to the right support.

While this may go above and beyond a teacher's responsibilities, in the context of schools already providing extensive support in response to increased levels of pupil need resulting from cost-of-living pressures, this may be an area where schools would benefit from additional support.

Figure 11 The extent that teachers feel confident meeting the needs of pupils requiring support by school disadvantage



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere

Source: NFER survey of 1358 teachers: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 1281

2.3.2 Support available to teachers

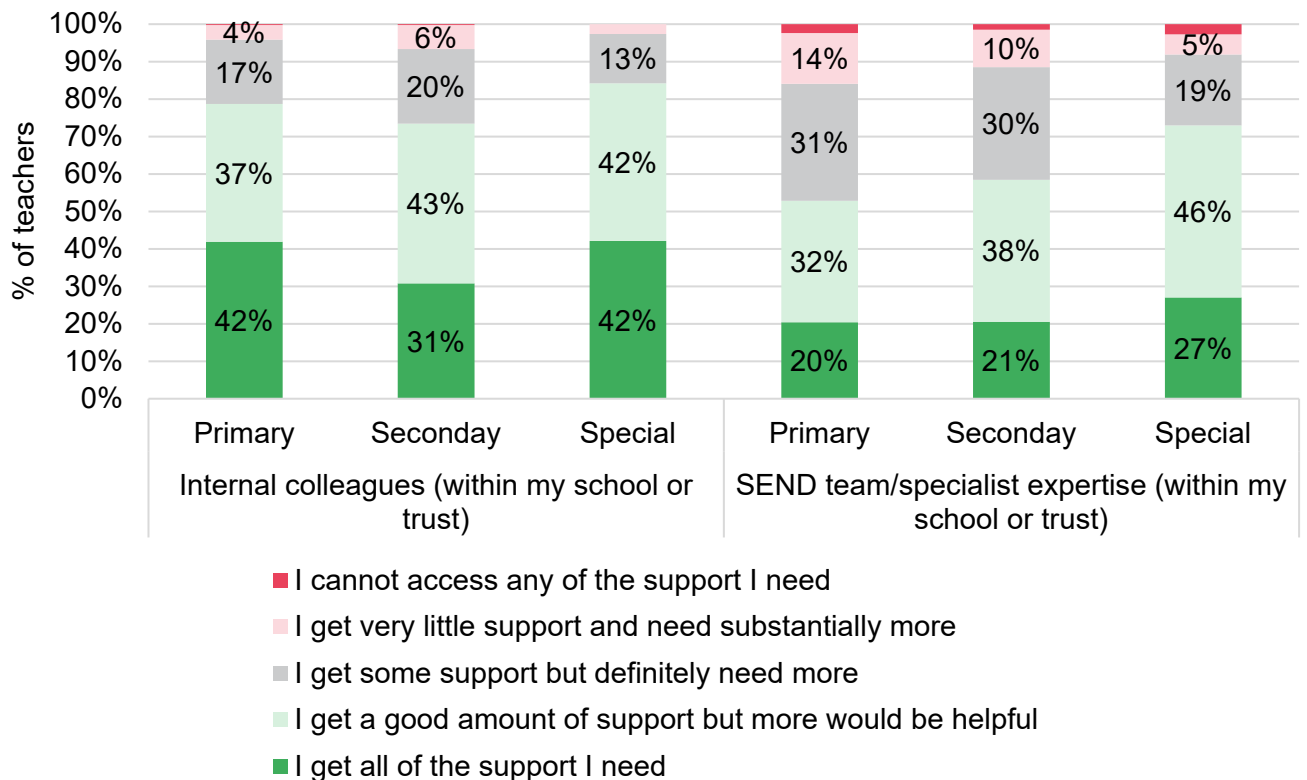
Teachers generally feel supported by internal colleagues, although mainstream teachers may benefit from more internal SEND support

Teachers were asked to describe the level of support they are able to access from a variety of sources and how this has changed over the last year. Given the added pressure which teachers and schools are experiencing because of cost-of-living increases, it is crucial that schools feel supported to meet pupils' needs.

Figure 12 shows that, generally, teachers feel supported by internal colleagues, with over 70 per cent of teachers reporting they get all or a good amount of support from their internal colleagues. Most teachers (over 70 per cent across all settings) report being about as satisfied with the level of internal support as last year.

There is little difference in how supported teachers felt by school type. Teachers in academies feel as supported by internal colleagues as those from local authority (LA) maintained schools.

Figure 12 The level of support felt by teachers from internal colleagues and teams



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere

Source: NFER survey of 1358 teachers: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 1252

However, teachers felt less well supported internally when asked to consider the support they receive from the SEND team/specialist expertise within their school or trust. Only 52 per cent of primary teachers and 59 per cent of secondary teachers report getting a good amount of support from their internal SEND specialist colleagues. This compares to 73 per cent of special school teachers. However, this has not changed as a result of recent cost-of-living increases: most teachers (again at around 70 per cent across all school settings) said this was about the same as last year.

In light of the reported increases in the incidence of SEND and/or challenging behaviours among pupils resulting from cost-of-living pressures (as noted in sub-chapter 2.1.3), this suggests, while this maybe not a new issue, teachers would benefit from more internal SEND support (coming in the form of expertise, such as a SEN coordinator (SENCO), or help from the likes of a TA).

However, teachers are unable to access the support they need from external agencies

As shown by Figure 13, teachers feel less supported by external services. This includes CYPMHS (Children and Young People’s Mental Health Services)¹⁹ and other mental health services, LA services, social and welfare services, external SEND teams/specialist expertise and physical health services.

For CYPMHS and mental health services, less than one-fifth of mainstream teachers and just under one-quarter of special school teachers feel supported. Furthermore, around half of mainstream teachers (50 per cent in primary and 54 per cent in secondary) report being less satisfied with CYPMHS and mental health services compared to last year. This is slightly lower in special schools at 39 per cent.

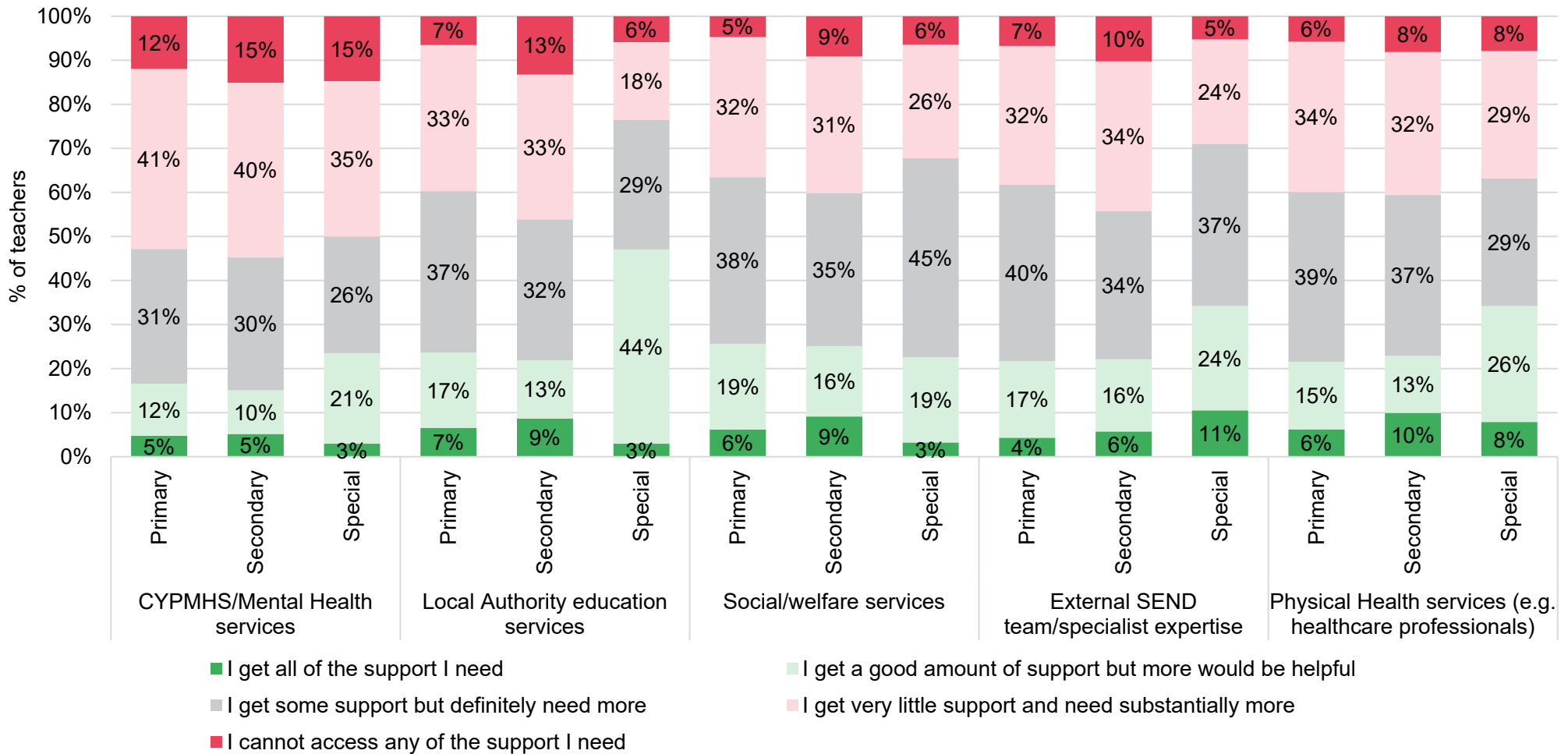
Only around one-quarter of teachers in mainstream schools feel supported by LA education services. Further, around two-fifths of mainstream teachers are less satisfied with the support compared to last year. Teachers in special schools appear to feel more supported by LA education services with 47 per cent responding that they get all or a good amount of support. However, once again, nearly half (47 per cent) were less satisfied with this support than last year.

This highlights that, at a time when schools are contending with greater levels of pupil need as a result of cost-of-living pressures, they are being less well supported by external services. This is likely to reflect both a higher demand for those services, and that they services are themselves being impacted by cost-of-living increases.

Together with our findings from sub-chapter 2.2, this demonstrates that, as a result of cost-of-living pressures, schools are being forced to increasingly plug gaps left by other services in order to ensure pupils can continue to engage in education. For example, in their open responses, teachers and leaders report having to support more pupils and/or support pupils to a greater extent with their mental health needs due to the gaps in external mental health services.

¹⁹ Previously referred to as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Figure 13 The level of support felt by teachers from external agencies



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere
Source: NFER survey of 1358 teachers: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 866

The impact of cuts to other services such as Social Care and CAMHS is having a massive impact on us all, as we have to pick up this work, and keep referring and supporting families with greater intensity than before. – Special school senior leader

We have to take on the burden of completing lengthy forms with families in order for them to access children's services family support. We are not trained social workers yet we are being asked to do this work. – Mainstream teacher

[We need] better services in place for families to access without it coming from school resources especially social care, mental health services as family breakdown, DV [domestic violence] and substance abuse is now far more common due to pressures they are facing. – Special school senior leader

Teachers in secondary academies feel less supported by external agencies than those in LA maintained schools

There are significant differences across different types of secondary school in the proportion of teachers responding that they get very little support and they cannot access any of the support they need, as shown in Figure 14.

In general, teachers working in secondary school academies feel less supported by external agencies than those in LA maintained schools. There are notable differences in relation to social/welfare services, where 45 per cent of academy teachers did not feel supported, compared with 31 per cent of teachers in LA maintained schools, as shown in Figure 14 .

Additionally, over half (52 per cent) of secondary school teachers in academies did not feel supported by LA education services compared with 33 per cent of LA maintained schools. It is not unexpected that academies would get less support from their LAs (as key services that LA schools receive, academies would have to pay for separately). However, the figure suggests a greater misalignment among teachers in academies in the support they are expecting compared to what they are receiving.

Our findings suggest there may be a need for greater stronger collaboration and alignment between external agencies and academies in order to meet increased levels of pupil resulting from cost-of-living increases. However, the same pattern was not observed by school type for primary schools.

Figure 14 The level of support felt by secondary school teachers from external agencies, by school type



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere
Source: NFER survey of 1358 teachers: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 835

2.4 Discussion

Pupil well-being and welfare continues to be an increasing and pressing concern for schools. Many mainstream and special schools are providing unprecedented urgent support to pupils and their families. While this may go beyond schools' statutory responsibilities, pupils whose most basic needs are not being met – whether it is going to school hungry, being unable to afford the costs of uniform or transport costs – are less likely to attend school and successfully engage with learning. Schools are being faced with little choice but to provide additional support to pupils and families to ensure their pupils can continue to attend school and engage in their learning.

Our findings also highlight that many of the pupils who are in need of additional support do not currently attract any additional funding such as PP for their schools. This suggests that the criteria for being eligible for the free school meals need to be reviewed.

Looking to the future, these challenges cannot be met by schools working in isolation. A lack of suitable wider support services and social support is leading to schools needing to step in to fill this void. With living standards set to remain lower for years to come, a system-wide solution which goes beyond schools is clearly needed to address these challenges.

In the short term, pupils and their families are still likely to require urgent support as cost-of-living pressures continue. Unless other support is provided, schools will face little choice but to continue to step in to ensure their pupils can engage with learning. Action is also needed to look at how families can be better supported (e.g., via the benefits system) through the current circumstances.

3 School provision

This chapter sets out the how the increased cost of living is influencing schools' everyday provision, including any trade-offs schools may be making as to what they are able to deliver in response to increased costs. It also examines the impact of recent increases in the cost of living on schools' budgets.

3.1 Day-to-day provision

Key findings

- Four-fifths of schools have made cuts to provision in response to the increased cost of living.
- The cost-saving measures schools are taking in response to the increased cost of living are impacting directly on the teaching and learning environment and experiences of pupils. Cost-saving measures include spending less on learning resources, reducing the core specialist school offer and cutting staff, targeted learning support and wraparound care.
- Teachers and senior leaders, particularly in the most disadvantaged schools, agree that their teaching and learning provision has been negatively impacted by the increased cost of living and commensurate cost-saving measures.
- Most senior leaders are concerned about their ability to fully meet the needs of their pupils and having sufficient budget to fully support pupils with SEND.
- More than half of schools are keeping classrooms colder and seeking additional parental contributions.

Only around a fifth of schools have not made cuts to any areas of their provision in response to the increased cost of living

We asked senior leaders what, if any, cost-saving measures their school had taken in the 2022/23 academic year in direct response to the increased cost of living. This could include cuts made due to higher running costs and overheads (e.g., energy, food and salary costs) as well as the costs of supporting pupils and their households.

While 25 per cent of special schools and 22 per cent of secondary schools report not making any cuts to their provision, only 15 per cent of primary schools report not cutting spending in any areas of school provision.

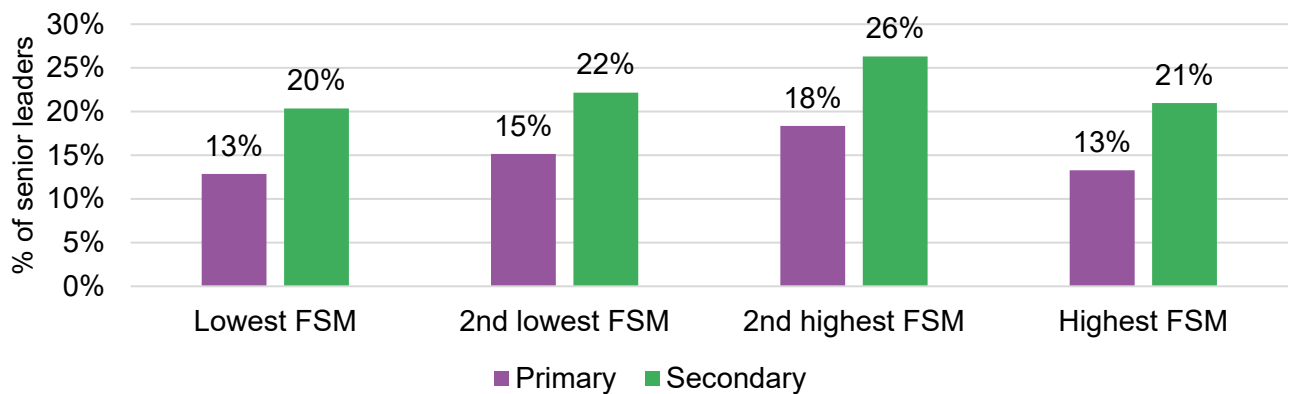
That said, as shown in Figure 15, across primary and secondary schools, it appears that the most and least disadvantaged²⁰ schools (as opposed to those with middling levels of disadvantage) are more likely to have reduced spending in at least one area of their budget due to cost-of-living pressures, albeit differences are small²¹. In the case of the most disadvantaged schools, this may

²⁰ Where school disadvantage is measured by eligibility for free school meals (FSM).

²¹ Sub-sample analysis was not possible for the special schools sample due to the sample size achieved. All analysis presented by school-level disadvantage is for mainstream schools only.

reflect the fact that schools with the highest proportions of FSM pupils have seen the sharpest increase in the level and extent of need among pupils and are seeking to provide the highest level of support to pupils and their households (as shown in Chapter 2). While in the case of the least disadvantaged schools, one possible explanation is that they receive comparatively less funding²² and therefore have less space within their budgets to accommodate the cost pressures that have arisen due to the increased cost of living.

Figure 15 The proportion of schools not reducing spending in any areas of their budget in direct response the increased cost of living by school disadvantage



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1291 gave a one response

Half of schools report reducing spending elsewhere in their budgets specifically to accommodate the costs of providing cost of living support to pupils and their households

This highlights that the cuts schools are making in response to the increased cost of living are partly driven by the additional cost of living support which schools are providing to pupils and their households (see Chapter 2). While this may go beyond schools’ statutory responsibilities, pupils whose most basic needs are not being met are less likely to attend school and successfully engage with learning.

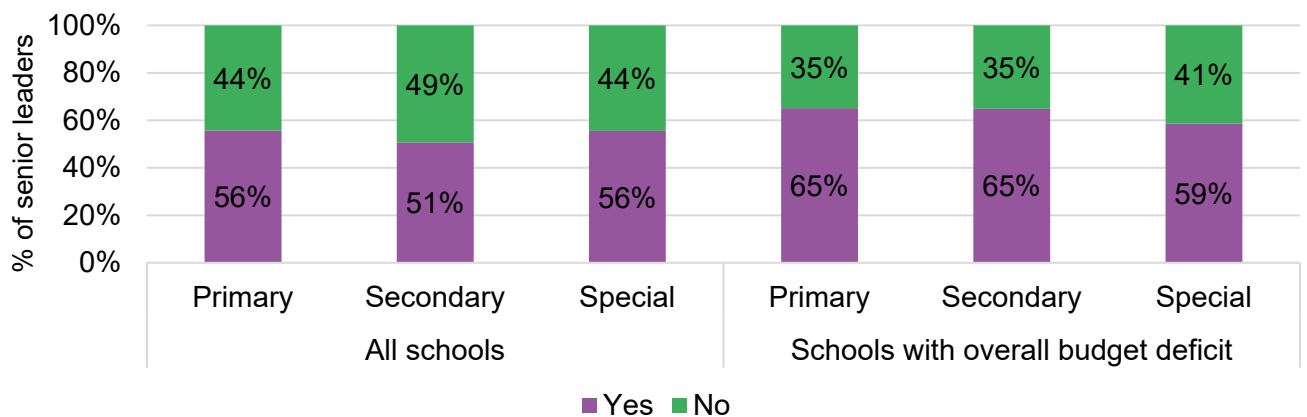
Secondary schools are slightly less likely to report cutting their budgets to accommodate providing cost of living support compared to primary and special schools. This may reflect secondary schools having larger total budgets owing to their generally higher pupil numbers and therefore may be able to accommodate more costs without cutting spending elsewhere. It may also reflect the fact that, alongside cost-of-living pressures, some primary schools are also facing increased financial challenges as a result of declining pupil numbers (DfE, 2023i).

In both the primary and secondary phases, schools without financial reserves are more likely to be making cuts to accommodate cost of living support activities. As shown in Figure 16, the share of schools reporting reducing spending rises notably to almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of primary and secondary schools with a self-reported overall budget deficit for the 2022/23 financial year.

²² Schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils attract higher levels of funding to reflect the greater levels of pupil need in their settings (DfE, 2022b).

More disadvantaged schools are also more likely to report reducing spending to accommodate cost of living support activities compared to the least disadvantaged schools. Indeed, 49 per cent of primary schools and 48 per cent of secondary schools in the least disadvantaged quartile of schools report reducing their spending for this reason compared to 61 per cent of primary schools and 59 per cent of the most disadvantaged secondary schools. This is consistent with findings presented previously that disadvantaged schools have seen the biggest increases in pupil need and are providing the most support to pupils and/or their household under pressure due to the increased cost of living. As such, these findings suggest that disadvantaged schools are more likely to explicitly reduce their spending in other areas to accommodate cost of living support to pupils and their households, whereas the least disadvantaged schools appear to be making cuts to accommodate broader cost pressures (such as increased energy costs) and less so to accommodate cost of living support for pupils.

Figure 16 The proportion of schools reducing their spending specifically to accommodate the costs of providing cost of living support to pupils and their households by financial position



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1221 gave a response

These findings are largely confirmed by a regression model (see Box 2) exploring the factors that are associated with schools’ reducing their spending in other areas of their budget to accommodate the cost of providing cost of living support to pupils and households. School-level disadvantage did not emerge as significant in the regression model as it is mediated by the inclusion of survey variables capturing the number of pupils in schools requiring additional support. The model also confirmed that schools with higher levels of need among pupils, particularly in mental health and physical health, are significantly more likely to reduce spending to accommodate cost of living support for pupils and households.

Box 2 Which factors are most closely associated with schools reducing spending in order to accommodate the cost of providing cost of living support to pupils and their households?

We used regression techniques to examine the association between different variables and whether schools had reduced their spending to accommodate the cost of providing cost of living support, over and above other factors.

Our modelling accounted for:

- School characteristics (phase, region, FSM quintile, SEND quintile)
- Whether schools feel the increased cost of living has increased the level of need among pupils requiring additional support
- The number of pupils requiring additional support with their mental health, physical health, general well-being, welfare or financial support
- Schools' in-year budget status for 2022/23 and expected budget status for 2023/24
- Whether schools had increased their self-generated income
- Whether schools accessed funding for energy efficient upgrades
- Whether schools are experiencing difficulty recruiting teachers and TAs.

We tested a large number of variables in our modelling, many of which did not appear to be significantly related to schools reducing spending for this reason (see Appendix for more detail on the methodology).

The final model identified the following factors were most closely associated with the likelihood of schools reducing spending to accommodate the cost of providing cost of living support.

Factors associated with schools not reducing their spending	Factors associated with schools reducing their spending
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary schools (compared to primary schools) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools with a deficit at the end of the 2022/23 financial year (compared to schools breaking even or with a surplus) • Schools expecting a deficit at the end of the 2023/24 financial year (compared to schools breaking even or with a surplus) • School in which between 11 per cent and 70 per cent of pupils require additional mental health support (compared to schools in which 10 per cent or less of pupils require this support) • Schools in which over 90 per cent of pupils require additional physical health support (compared to schools in which 10 per cent or less of pupils require this support) • Schools agreeing the increased cost of living has increased in the level of need among pupils requiring additional support overall (compared to schools who neither agree nor disagree)

The cost-saving measures which schools are taking in response to the increased cost of living are impacting directly on the learning environment and experiences of pupils

We asked senior leaders about the cuts which schools are making in direct response to the increased cost of living and found that schools are cutting provision in a range of areas, including staffing and teaching and learning provision²³. This is shown in Figure 17.

Staffing

Schools of all phases are making cuts to staffing. Secondary schools are most likely to report cutting teaching staff costs with almost a quarter (23 per cent) of secondary schools cutting teacher numbers or hours. This compares to 15 per cent of primary schools and 11 per cent of special schools. Among secondary schools, the proportion of schools cutting teacher numbers/hours increases among least disadvantaged schools, doubling from 15 per cent of schools in the most disadvantaged quartile of schools to 30 per cent of schools in the least disadvantaged quartile of schools. Among primary schools, the proportion of schools cutting teacher numbers/hours is largely comparable across all disadvantaged quartiles.

In comparison, primary schools are significantly more likely to report cutting teaching assistant (TA) numbers of hours (at 47 per cent), compared to 32 per cent of special schools and 28 per cent of secondary schools. Once again, higher proportions of the least disadvantaged primary schools (52 per cent) cut TA numbers/hours than the most disadvantaged primary schools (46 per cent).

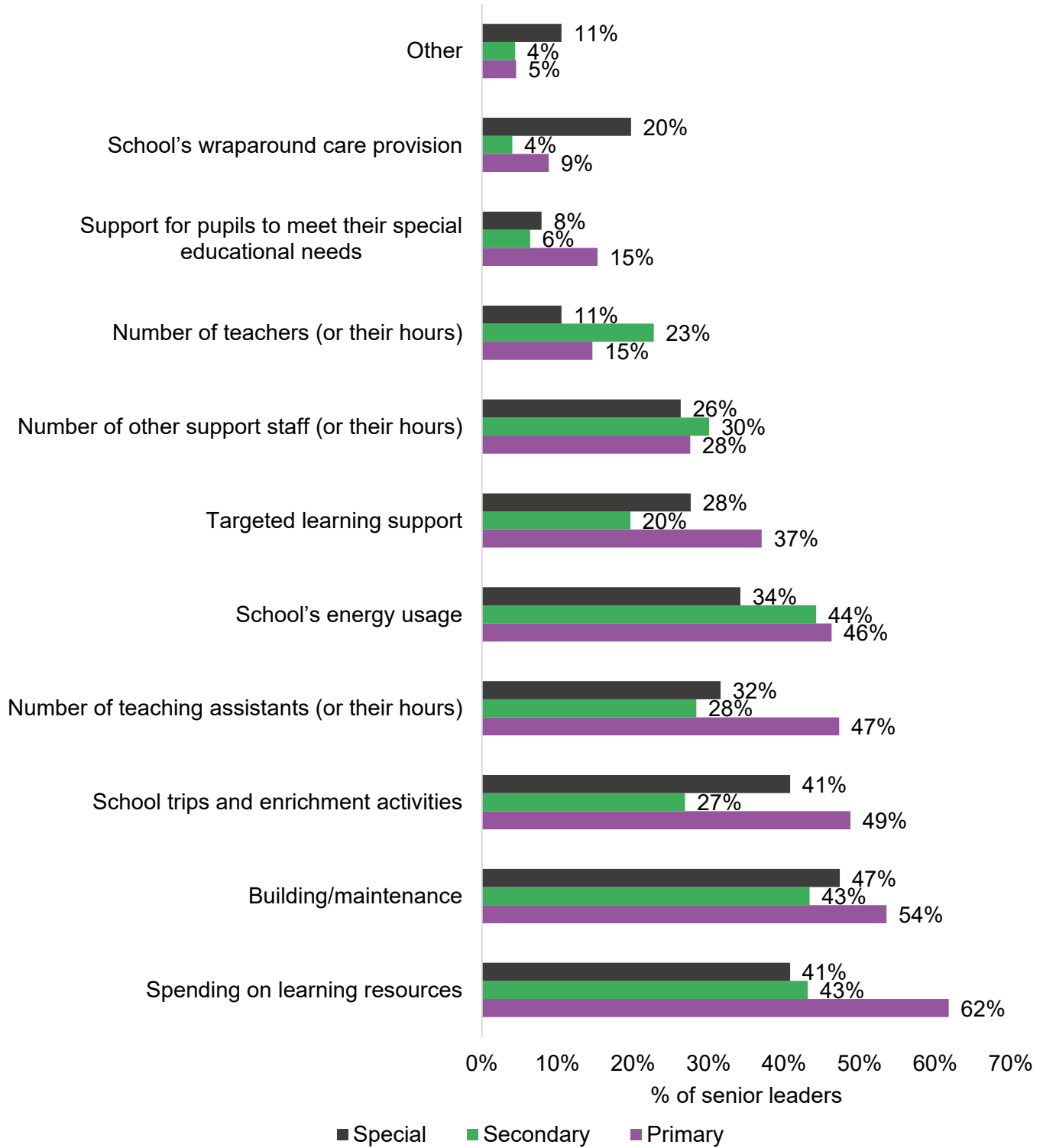
Furthermore, just under three-tenths of schools across all phases are cutting the number/hours of other support staff (such as administrative staff, cleaners or business managers). These findings indicate that the increased cost of living has directly influenced how leaders are staffing their schools and suggest that the least disadvantaged schools are more likely to reduce their staffing expenditure in response to the cost pressures that have arisen from cost-of-living pressures.

Increased costs in relation to running the school have forced us to end three fixed term contracts for excellent TAs. We really need their support to meet the needs of our pupils but cannot afford to pay their salaries anymore. – Mainstream senior leader

Our budget is so tight that where we have lost staff we have not been able to recruit...so we are running on a skeleton staff. As such, additional support is just not now available in the way we would want it to be, or it should be. – Mainstream senior leader

²³ While schools were asked to only report cuts they had made in direct response to the increased cost of living, some schools may have also reported the implications of these cuts on other areas of provision, particularly in relation to staffing cuts. For example, schools may have cut the number of TAs because they can no longer afford these members of staff but then may have also had to cut targeted learning interventions because they are no longer able to staff these interventions.

Figure 17 The areas of spending schools are making cuts to in response to the increased cost of living



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1291 gave at least one response

Teaching, learning and enrichment provision

Schools are also cutting learning resource provision, particularly in the primary sector. Around three-fifths (62 per cent) of primary schools cut spending on learning resources (such as printed worksheets, materials for art and science activities and library books), compared to two-fifths of secondary and special schools.

Teachers highlighted in their open responses²⁴ feeling pressure to buy items for their class from personal funds and/or feeling unable to claim expenditures. This suggests that in some schools cost-saving measures are causing teachers to spend more or continue spending their personal funds on classroom resources at a time when they can least afford it themselves. Other teachers report that the scale and impact of school cuts to learning resources is exacerbated by the fact that teachers often no longer have the personal funds to purchase learning resources for their classroom themselves where they once would have done.

As a teacher it has always been very common to provide resources... for the classroom. I am now in a position where we often go without and lessons are basic due to the lack of disposable income I can spend on other things, like the classroom. – Mainstream teacher

Cost cutting for school essential resources. Shamed by school business manager for requesting glue sticks and whiteboard pens. So made to buy them myself. – Mainstream teacher

I am spending far more of my own salary purchasing class resources including cooking ingredients and stationary. As our school is now cashless we get no refund. – Mainstream teacher

I am trying hard to claim back all my additional expenses or not make them as I cannot prop up the school when my salary is not increasing at the level everything else is. – Mainstream teacher

Many of the children in my class do not have breakfast before they come to school and are less able to concentrate. I provide biscuits from my own pocket but I am struggling financially as well, and struggling to make ends meet. I want to help the children I teach but this is becoming increasingly difficult. – Mainstream teacher

In addition, just under half (49 per cent) of primary schools and two-fifths (41 per cent) of special schools cut spending on school trips and enrichment activities compared to 27 per cent of secondary schools. In their open responses, teachers and senior leaders identified that this was limiting the wider learning and life experiences of their most disadvantaged pupils.

Furthermore, large shares of schools are cutting their targeted learning support (such as small group interventions or tutoring). As shown in Figure 17, almost two-fifths (37 per cent) of primary

²⁴ Teachers and senior leaders were asked 'Is there anything else which you would like us to know about how the cost of living is affecting you, your pupils, your teaching or your school?'

schools, nearly three-tenths (28 per cent) of special schools and a fifth (20 per cent) of secondary schools are cutting targeted learning support. This is particularly striking considering the ongoing Covid-19 recovery work in schools and the current emphasis on small group interventions and tutoring such as the National Tutoring Programme (NTP). The NTP is an important part of the Government’s Covid-19 recovery programme in England and is designed to help schools respond to the disruption to learning caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The NTP was launched in 2020/21 to establish tutoring as an effective tool schools can use to help disadvantaged pupils catch-up on missed learning and reduce the attainment gap (DfE, 2020). In 2022/23, NTP funding from the Department for Education (DfE) could be used to cover 60 per cent of the costs schools incurred and schools were then expected to incorporate the rest of their expenditure within their school budget (DfE, 2023c). Further discussion of these issues can be found in NFER research on the sustainability of tutoring (Moore and Lord, 2023).

Collectively these findings demonstrate that schools are changing how teaching and learning is delivered in school by reducing the variety and richness of their provision and scaling back targeted support in direct response to the increased cost of living.

We have had to reduce the number of trips we take the children on or workshops we have, as parents cannot pay for these. Affects cultural capital and wider aspects of learning. – Mainstream teacher

We have had to cut the school library service, subscriptions to learning platforms and reduce spending on everyday essentials such as paper, glue and pencils. – Mainstream senior leader

With the cost of everything going up significantly I have had to cut teachers and TAs which impacts on learning, learning outcomes, staff workload. – Mainstream senior leader

Special schools

While special schools are typically making cuts in similar areas to mainstream schools, there are some key differences. A fifth (20 per cent) of special schools report cutting their wraparound care (e.g., before and after school care for pupils) compared to less than 10 per cent of primary and secondary schools.

Another key difference is the proportion of special schools cutting their energy usage. While just under half of primary and secondary schools are cutting their energy usage, only a third (34 per cent) of special schools are doing so. It is likely this difference at least in part reflects some schools simply being unable to reduce their energy consumption due to the care needs of pupils in their school.

Further, almost three-tenths (28 per cent) of special schools report cutting their core specialist school offer, which includes the provision of hydrotherapy, physiotherapy, independence activities and life skills activities.

Together, the cuts being made by special schools – reducing their school’s offer, reduced wraparound care and reduced enrichment – are concerning because they form core parts of the

support for pupils with SEND, to maximise their development, independence and quality of life as well as providing respite for families. The cuts to these aspects of provision also have important implications for the ability of schools to meet all the statutory requirements in pupils' EHCPs.

Having to carefully consider everything that is spent and whether we need it. Seriously considering whether we can afford to keep our swimming pool running with energy costs, chlorine, maintenance, staffing etc. – Special senior leader

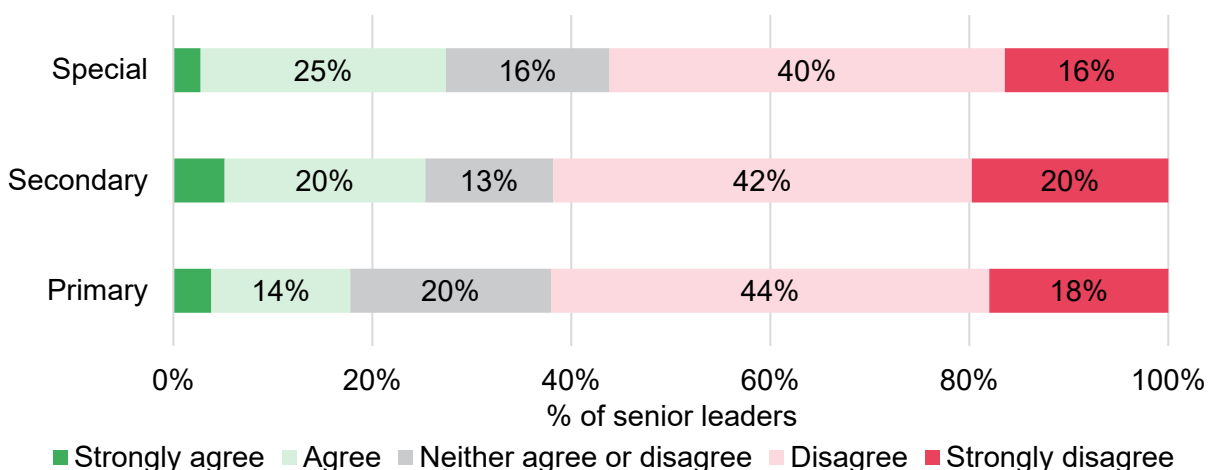
Salaries, pension contributions and building overheads have significantly impacted on our development plans. We decided to withdraw the teacher vacancy, with the headteacher taking more lessons to limit the expenditure. This has an impact on the leadership capacity. – Special senior leader

Class budget is reduced so buying/making resources is harder – this impacts on teaching and ensuring accessibility. – Special teacher

A fifth of schools report that they have reduced their curriculum breadth

Special schools and secondary schools are more likely to have cut their curriculum offer than primary schools - over a fifth of special and secondary school and just under a fifth of primary school senior leaders agreed they have reduced their curriculum offer compared to the 2021/22 academic year, as shown in Figure 18. This indicates that, while senior leaders have made cuts to teaching and learning provision, many have so far protected their core curriculum. There are no clear trends by school disadvantage.

Figure 18 The extent to which senior leaders agree/disagree that their curriculum offer has been reduced compared to last academic year



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1271 gave a response

3.1.1 Impact on teaching and learning

Teachers and senior leaders nevertheless report their teaching and learning provision has been negatively impacted by the increased cost of living and commensurate cost-saving measures

Around 46 per cent of primary, 48 per cent of secondary and 45 per cent special school senior leaders agree that the increased cost of living has negatively impacted on the quality of teaching and learning in their school²⁵.

Figure 19 shows that higher proportions of leaders in the most disadvantaged schools report the quality of teaching and learning in their school has been negatively impacted by the increased cost of living than leaders from the least disadvantaged schools. For example, the proportion of primary senior leaders agreeing that teaching and learning had been negatively impacted rises from 39 per cent among the least disadvantaged schools to 52 per cent among the most disadvantaged schools.

Furthermore, as might be expected, schools facing greater financial pressures are more likely to report that cost-of-living pressures are having a negative impact on teaching and learning. Indeed, 51 per cent of primary and 57 per cent of secondary senior leaders from schools with an overall budget deficit at the end of 2022/23 report there has been a negative impact on teaching and learning in their school, compared to 36 per cent of primary and 48 per cent of secondary senior leaders from schools with an in-year surplus for 2022/23.

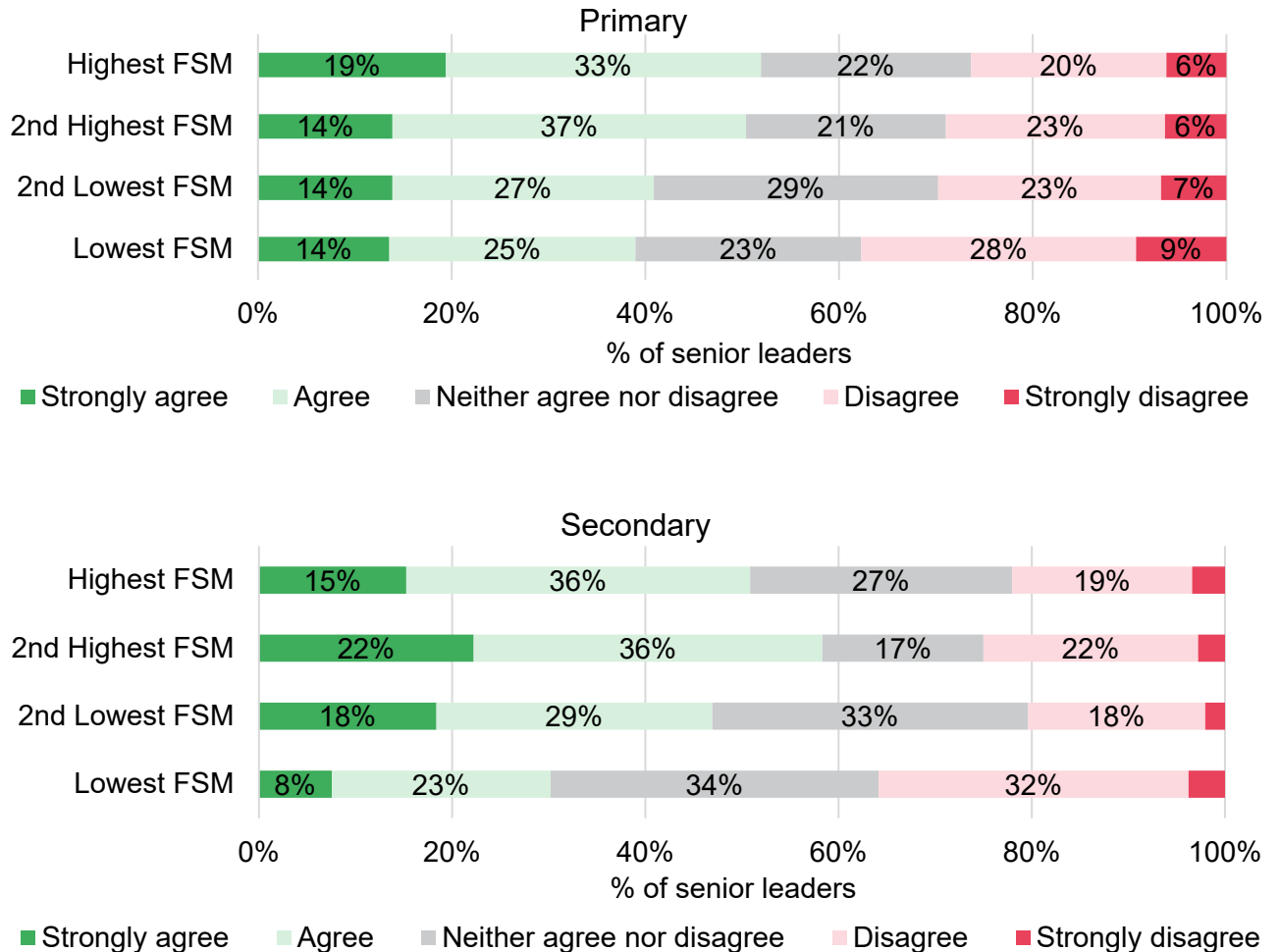
The cost of the basic supplies in school is meaning that we are having to limit what is used in the classroom which impacts upon the children's learning. – Mainstream senior leader

Due to a very tight budget we are not able to replace staff who are leaving - this is having a detrimental effect on the support and teaching that we are able to provide for the children at our school. – Mainstream senior leader

Budget cuts in school have negatively impacted the quality of lessons because we cannot get the resources we need. – Mainstream teacher

²⁵ Similar findings emerged among teachers when asked whether cost-saving measures taken in response to the increased cost of living had negatively impacted on their teaching and learning.

Figure 19 The extent to which senior leaders agree/disagree that their teaching and learning provision has been negatively impacted by the increased cost of living



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1234 gave a response

We also produced a regression model (see Box 3) to explore the factors that are associated with senior leaders reporting that the increased cost of living has negatively impacted on the quality of teaching and learning in their school, over and above other factors. The results confirmed the findings reported above, that schools with higher proportions of FSM pupils are significantly more likely to agree that there had been a negative impact.

The model also found that schools reducing spending on supporting pupils with SEND and reducing spending to accommodate cost of living support are significantly more likely to agree teaching and learning quality had been negatively impacted, as are schools who agree the increased cost of living has driven an increased in the numbers of pupils requiring additional support. Finally, schools reporting difficulty recruiting teachers in the last 12 months are also significantly more likely to feel teaching and learning had been negatively impacted by the increased cost of living.

Box 3 Which factors are most closely associated with schools agreeing that the increased cost of living has negatively impacted on the quality of teaching and learning provision in school?

We used regression techniques to examine the association between different variables and whether schools agree or disagree that the increased cost of living has negatively impacted on the quality of teaching and learning provision, over and above other factors.

Our modelling accounted for:

- School characteristics (phase, region, FSM quintile, SEND quintile)
- Whether schools agreed the cost of living had driven an increase in the number of pupils requiring additional support
- The number of pupils requiring additional financial support
- Whether schools reduced spending to accommodate the cost of providing cost of living support
- Whether schools reduced spending as a direct result of the cost of living
- Whether schools are experiencing difficulty recruiting teachers and TAs.

We tested a large number of variables in our modelling, many of which did not appear to be significantly related to schools reducing spending for this reason (see the Appendix for more detail on the methodology).

The final model identified the following factors were most closely associated with the likelihood of schools agreeing that the increased cost of living has negatively impacted on their school’s teaching and learning provision.

Factors associated with schools disagreeing the quality of teaching and learning had been negatively impacted	Factors associated with schools agreeing the quality of teaching and learning had been negatively impacted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools who have not attempted to recruit TAs (compared to schools who have found TA recruitment neither easy nor difficult) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools in the 2nd highest FSM quintile (compared to schools in the lowest FSM quintile) • Schools that have reduced spending to accommodate the cost of additional support being provided to pupils and household to help with cost of living issues (compared to schools who have not reduced spending for this reason) • Schools that have reduced support for pupils to meet their special educational needs this year as a direct result of the cost of living (compared to those who have not) • Schools who have found teacher recruitment difficult over the last 12 months (compared to those who have found teacher recruitment neither easy nor difficult) • Schools agreeing the increased cost of living has driven an increase in the number of pupils requiring additional support (compared to schools who neither agree nor disagree)

3.1.2 Impact on schools meeting additional needs

Most schools are concerned about having sufficient budget to fully support pupils with SEND

Three-quarters (75 per cent) of secondary leaders and almost nine-tenths (87 per cent) of primary leaders disagree that they currently (i.e., in April 2023, when the survey was administered) have sufficient budget to fully meet the needs of their pupils with SEND this year, as shown in Figure 20 The extent to which senior leaders agree/disagree they have sufficient budget to meet the needs of their pupils with SEND this year. This was strongly reflected in teachers and senior leaders' open responses where many stated that one of the key pressures they are dealing with was how to best support learners with suspected or identified SEND in their mainstream settings without sufficient funding or access to specialists at a time when they are reducing staff, most notably TAs. School staff report that they are trying to manage levels of increased need with limited additional support or professional advice. Some felt this to be unsafe for the pupils with additional needs, their peers and staff.

Furthermore, two-thirds (66 per cent) of special school senior leaders also disagree that they currently had sufficient budget to fully meet the needs of their pupils with SEND this year. This suggests that current SEND funding is insufficient, with the amount of money allocated per pupil to their setting being insufficient to meet what it is their statutory legal duty to provide (i.e., the support that is set out in each pupil's EHCP).

While these issues are not new, our findings suggest that cost-of-living pressures have both amplified the level of need and impacted on schools' ability to meet need within their existing budgets.

It is increasingly difficult to manage the needs of children with SEN with budget. Support staff are leaving but we cannot afford to replace them. – Mainstream senior leader

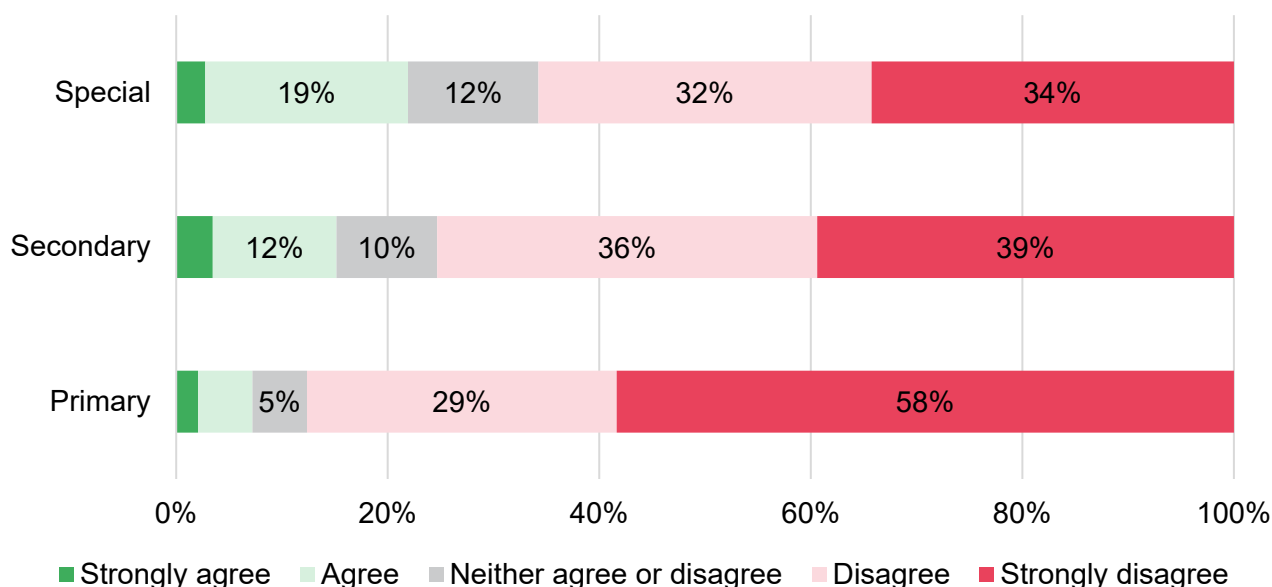
We worry about being able to support an increasing number of vulnerable pupils as SEND needs have increased as a result of school closures (particularly in Infant age groups) and we cannot recruit staff at all, let alone recruit staff who have the experience and skills that is required. – Mainstream senior leader

Lack of funding for the increased number of SEND children requiring support is impacting on the support available for the most needy children. – Mainstream senior leader

SEND funding is a huge issue and this really needs deep investigation as a whole. This is the single biggest factor affecting school finance, after insufficiently funded salary increases and energy costs. – Mainstream senior leader

The only possible way I can reduce this much spending is by cutting jobs but this will result in an unsafe environment for children, particularly those with extreme need and those in the same classes as children with extreme need. – Mainstream senior leader

Figure 20 The extent to which senior leaders agree/disagree they have sufficient budget to meet the needs of their pupils with SEND this year



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere
Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1271 gave a response

There is also widespread concern among senior leaders of all phases about their ability to fully meet the needs of their pupils

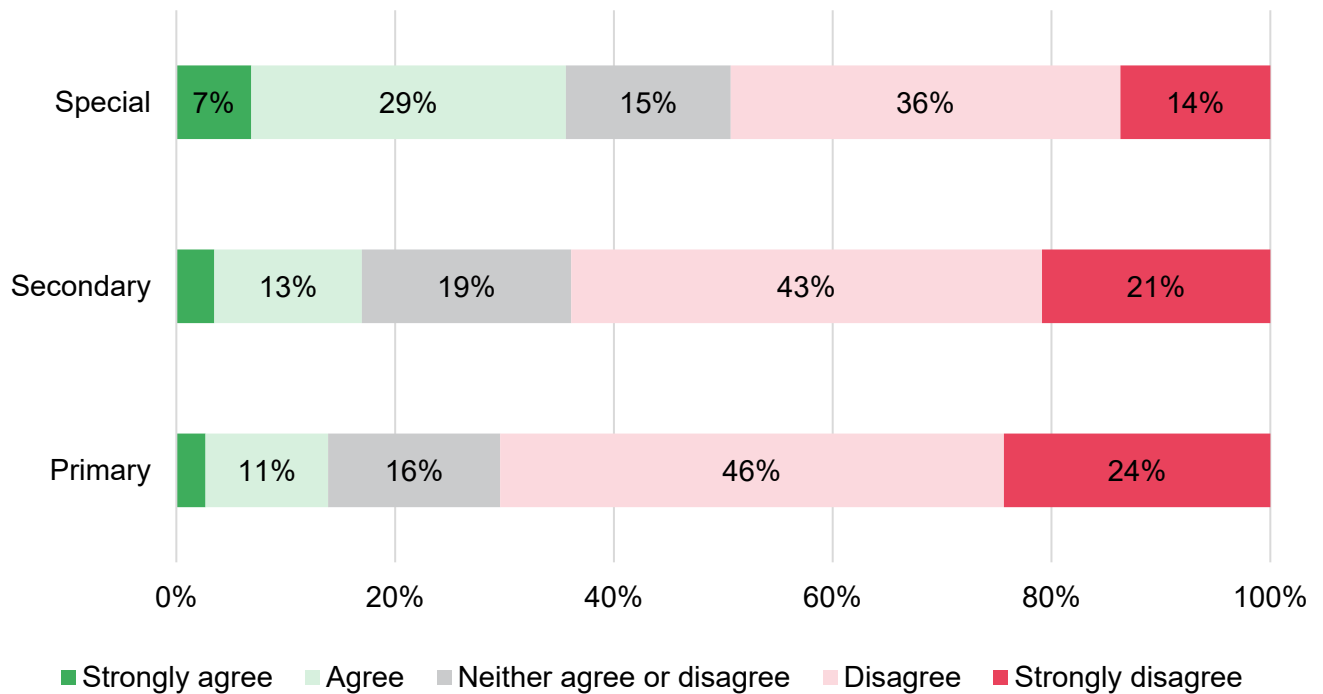
About 70 per cent of primary senior leaders and 64 per cent of secondary senior leaders report not feeling confident that their school is able to fully meet the needs of all their pupils, as shown in [Figure 21](#).

Among secondary schools, this appears to be driven by disadvantaged schools. About 60 per cent of secondary senior leaders in the least disadvantaged schools are not confident about fully meeting pupils’ need compared to 73 per cent of secondary senior leaders in the most disadvantaged schools. However, there was no clear pattern among primary schools.

In contrast, only about half (49 per cent) of special school senior leaders report not feeling confident about their schools’ ability to fully meet the needs of their pupils. Staff in specialist settings are more accustomed to supporting wider needs amongst their pupils by the nature of the provision they provide, which may explain why they feel more confidence in their ability to meet all needs.

However, as discussed above, this remains concerning as both mainstream and special schools have a legal statutory duty to meet each pupil’s need as set out in their EHCPs and funding is intended to be sufficient to facilitate this in school. These findings add further weight to concerns that current SEND funding is insufficient, and that cost-of-living pressures are impacting on SEND provision as well as teaching and learning.

Figure 21 The extent to which senior leaders agree/disagree that they are confident their school is able to fully meet the needs of all their pupils



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere
Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1274 gave a response

A regression model found that schools anticipating an in-year deficit in the 2023/24 financial year are significantly less likely to feel able to meet pupils’ needs, again suggesting that funding pressures are a key barrier to schools meeting all pupils’ needs. Details of this regression model exploring other factors that are associated with senior leaders not feeling confident in their school’s ability to fully meet the needs of all pupils, over and above other factors, can be found in the Appendix.

We are unable to meet the needs of all our children because we will have to reduce staff so as to reduce our deficit. – Mainstream senior leader

We are very inclusive and try our very best to meet the needs of all our pupils but we have had to cut teaching staff next year in order to balance our budget and this means it is virtually impossible to meet the needs of all our pupils effectively. This is the biggest impact on pupils, staffing, progress, mental health and achievement. – Mainstream senior leader

3.1.3 Steps taken by schools to mitigate cost-of-living increases

More than half of schools are keeping classrooms colder

In addition to adjusting their expenditure on teaching, learning and staffing, schools are implementing a variety of approaches to reduce running costs and increase revenue.

While around half of schools report keeping some or all of their classrooms colder than usual to reduce costs, this is driven by mainstream schools as opposed to special schools. Around 55 per cent of primary schools and 51 per cent secondary school schools report having colder classrooms compared to 38 per cent of special schools. This may reflect some special schools feeling unable to reduce classroom temperatures due to the needs of the pupils in schools (such as pupils in wheelchairs or with mobility issues and with complex or medical needs).

In contrast, only a small proportion of schools have change how they deliver learning or set-up the school day to reduce running costs, though special schools are much more likely to have implemented this measure. Around 23 per cent of special schools report taking this step in comparison to 14 per cent of secondary schools and 13 per cent of primary schools.

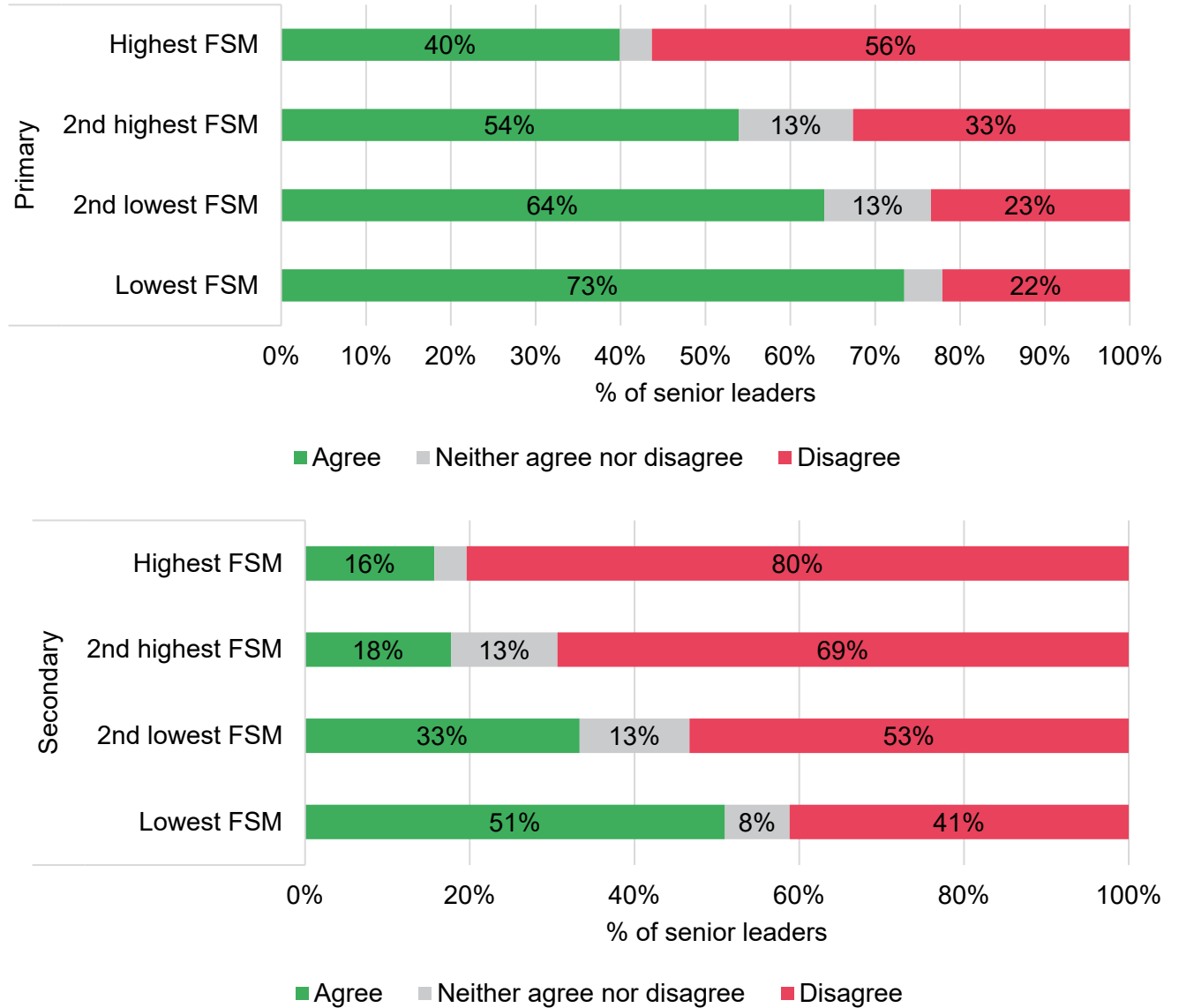
In addition, large shares of schools sought to access additional funding and/or increase their self-generated income. Around half of mainstream schools (49 per cent of primary and 52 per cent of secondary) and 43 per cent of special schools have accessed funding for energy efficiency upgrades in school from the DfE. Furthermore, around 44 per cent of primary and secondary mainstream schools and 38 per cent of special schools increased their self-generated income (e.g., by renting our facilities to others, selling property or selling energy back to the National Grid).

More than half of primary schools are seeking additional parental contributions to accommodate cost-of-living pressures

Around half of schools are seeking more contributions from parents, although there is notable variation by phase. Only 32 per cent of special schools and 29 per cent of secondary schools report asking for increased contributions compared to 58 per cent of primary schools. As shown in Figure 22, among primary schools, the proportion of schools asking for additional contributions rises from 40 per cent among the most disadvantaged schools to 73 per cent among the least disadvantaged schools. Similarly, among secondary schools, the proportion triples from 16 per cent of the most disadvantaged schools to 51 per cent of the least disadvantaged schools. It is likely that this reflects higher proportions of disadvantaged schools feeling unable to ask their pupils' households for more contributions due to the financial pressures on households rather than disadvantaged schools having less need for parental contributions.

We have just seen an increase in families being unable to cover costs of extra-curricular visits which in the past we would have funded through school budgets but now are unable to do so now due to increased costs within our own school budgets so we are having to think very carefully about what we are asking parents for financially and give them enough time to pay for things. – Mainstream senior leader

Figure 22 The extent to which schools agree or disagree that their schools is asking for more contributions from parents (including PTAs/friends of the school groups)'



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1142 gave a response

3.2 Finances

Key findings

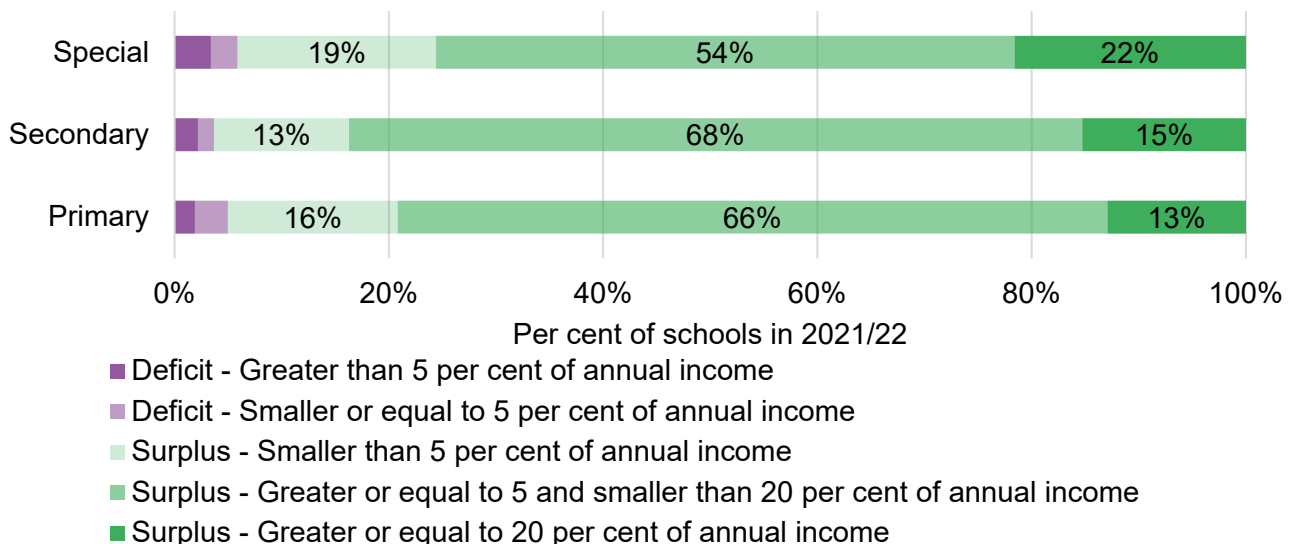
- Despite making cuts, schools are reporting that recent cost-of-living increases have had a considerable negative impact on their financial positions.
- The least disadvantaged schools, particularly among secondary schools, are most likely to report in-year and overall budget deficits for the 2022/23 financial year than the most disadvantaged schools.
- Just under half of schools are expecting both to have an in-year deficit and needing to make cuts to provision in 2023/24, with higher proportions of the least disadvantaged schools anticipating deficits in 2023/24 than the most disadvantaged schools.

3.2.1 Schools' financial positions in 2022/23

Prior to cost-of-living pressures, around five per cent of schools had an overall budget deficit

This is shown in Figure 23 and reflects the fact that schools' budget positions generally improved during the pandemic. Between 2021/22 and 2022/23, the schools' budget also increased by a further £4 billion for 2022/23 (HM Treasury, 2022). This represented a 6.8 per cent increase in funding for mainstream schools (DfE, 2023h).

Figure 23 The state of schools revenue reserves as a proportion of annual income in 2021/22



Source: NFER analysis of DfE School Financial Benchmarking

Note: Estimates for academy and local authority (LA) maintained schools are not directly comparable. The figures for academies are approximate, they operate different financial years and are generally part of a larger trust, where resources can be more easily moved between schools to cover deficits.

However, schools have faced significant cost pressures as a result of recent cost-of-living increases

In the last 12 months, schools have had to contend with the significant financial pressure brought about by unprecedented increases in energy costs and rapid increases in the cost of food (Harari *et al.*, 2023). Collectively, increased heating, electricity and food bills have dramatically increased schools' running costs, which are not accounted for in the additional funding given to schools as part of a three-year funding increase intended to return schools to 2010 funding levels (HM Treasury, 2022). In the same period, schools have also had to accommodate increases in teacher pay, reductions in wider services provided by local authorities and local authorities not being able to provide financial support to schools to cover costs.

Responses to open response questions in our survey illustrate that schools are facing a wide array of financial challenges.

The lack of funding from the government to cover teacher and TA pay rises had had a huge deficit on the budget so has the increase in energy costs. We have spent very little on the curriculum this year apart from the very basics. – Mainstream senior leader

Our utility bills have increased by 1000%! We are looking at a substantial deficit budget in the next two academic years. We will be facing redundancies if this cost-of-living crisis continues. – Mainstream senior leader

The cost of school meals is 58p per meal more than the universal infant free school meal grant which is an annual bill of £37,200 for my school. This along with last year's unfunded pay increases will put my school into deficit at the end of 2023/24. The unfunded pay increases have led directly to my in year deficit in 2023/24. – Mainstream senior leader

Over a third of schools report deficits on their overall school budgets at the end of 2022/23

Senior leaders were asked about their anticipated/realised in-year and overall budget including any previous deficit or surplus they had accrued by the end of the 2022/23 financial year. The financial year for LA maintained schools runs from March to April, whereas for academies it runs from September to August. As the surveys were administered from late-April to mid-May, LA maintained schools answered having recently finished the 2022/23 financial year while academies reported whether they were on track for a surplus, to break even or have a deficit.

The following data is self-reported and was collected concurrently with an industrial dispute over teacher pay (Martin, 2023a), as such the following findings may in part reflect wider debate within the sector about the sufficiency of school funding. Caution is needed when interpreting these findings and they are like to over-estimate the impact of cost-of-living pressures on school budgets.

Overall, around a third of schools across all settings report accruing a deficit on their overall school budget by the end of the financial year. By phase, as shown in Figure 24 we see that almost two-fifths of primaries report accruing an overall deficit. This decreases slightly among secondary schools where 31 per cent report overall deficits. Our data suggest that special schools are in the

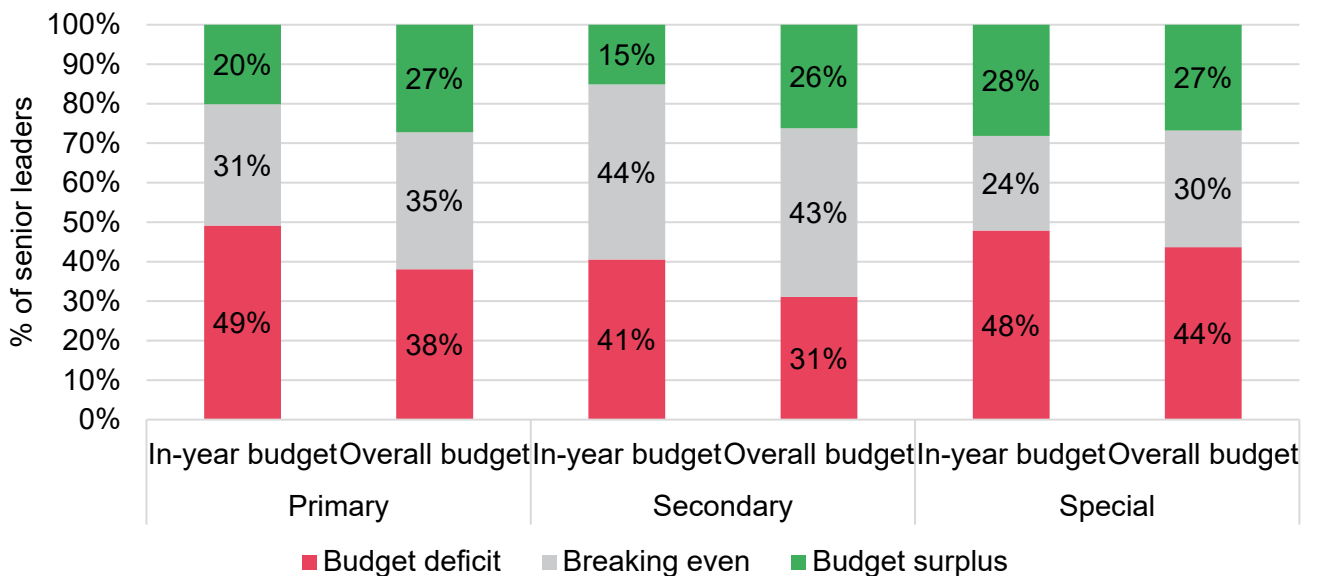
most challenging financial circumstances overall – almost half (44 per cent) of special schools report now having an overall budget deficit. While this is self-reported data and academies are reporting anticipated rather than realised deficits, this data nevertheless indicates that there has been a large increase in the number of schools now carrying deficits compared to a year ago.

As any school running an overall deficit is expected to take steps towards returning to a neutral financial position, many schools are likely to need to make further cuts in the coming year in order to balance their finances.

As would be expected, it is schools with the weakest financial positions in 2021/22 (already in deficit or without large reserves) who were most likely to report having a deficit in 2022/23 (see Figure 44 in the Appendix for further details).

Furthermore, an even higher proportion of schools report an in-year budget deficit. Primary and special schools are slightly more likely than secondary schools to report an in-year deficit. Almost half of primary schools and special schools (at 49 and 48 per cent) report an in-year deficit compared to 41 per cent of secondary schools. The majority of schools report they have used school reserves to cover costs incurred due to the increased cost of living. This highlights the scale of the difficulty schools have experienced trying to deliver their provision within budget this financial year.

Figure 24 Schools overall and in-year budget status by the end of the 2022/23 financial year



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 1209

While this data suggests that schools have largely sought to absorb the short-term increase in expenditure resulting from the increased cost of living at least in part by drawing on their existing reserves, senior leaders highlight in their survey responses that this is not sustainable and reserves are rapidly being depleted.

Although we had a surplus budget at the end of the financial year, this was because we have strictly monitored spend and actively cut costs and because we had reserves to dip into. If this had not have been the case, we would have had a deficit budget. – Mainstream senior leader

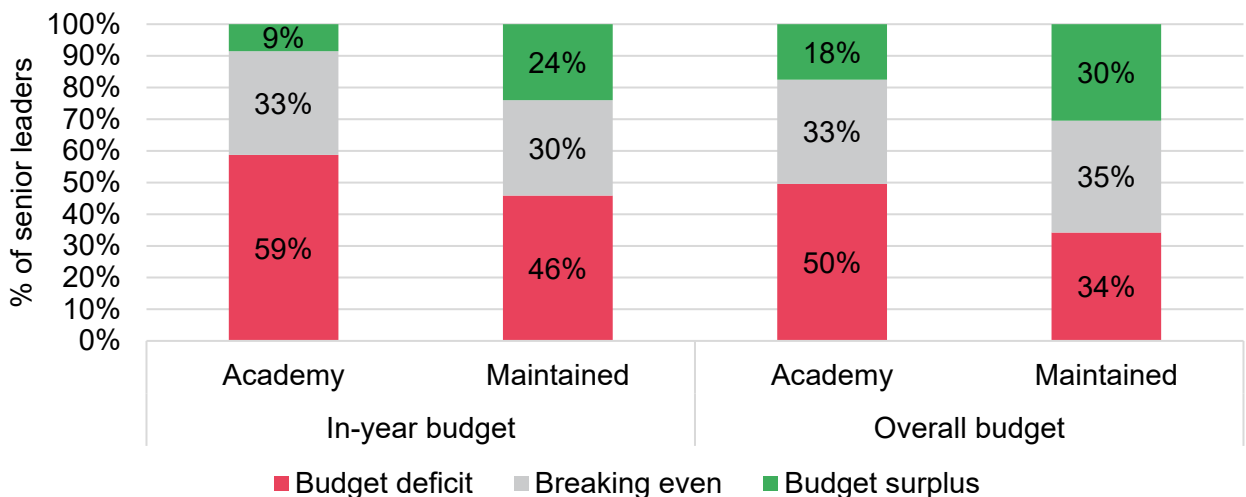
Our school is very well run, financially, and we have been fortunate to be able to meet children's needs where this has been in excess of funding received. We can no longer do this, all reserves are gone and we have had to make serious cut backs. – Mainstream senior leader

Higher proportions of primary academies report in-year and overall deficits than LA maintained primary schools

Our analysis found that, among primary schools, academies report overall and in-year budget deficits in higher proportions than LA maintained schools, as per Figure 25. Around 50 per cent of primary academies report an overall deficit compared to 34 per cent of LA maintained primary schools. Similarly, around 59 per cent of primary academies report an in-year deficit compared to 46 per cent of LA maintained primary schools. A similar trend was observed among secondary schools though the differences are smaller.

These findings may in part reflect the differences in the timing of the financial years for academies compared to LA maintained schools. For example, the 2022/23 teacher pay rise came into effect in September 2022, which is the beginning of the financial year 2022/23 for academies but part way through the financial year for LA maintained schools. As such, academies responses reflect a full year of elevated salary costs.

Figure 25 Primary schools in-year and overall budgets by the end of the financial year 2022/23 by school type

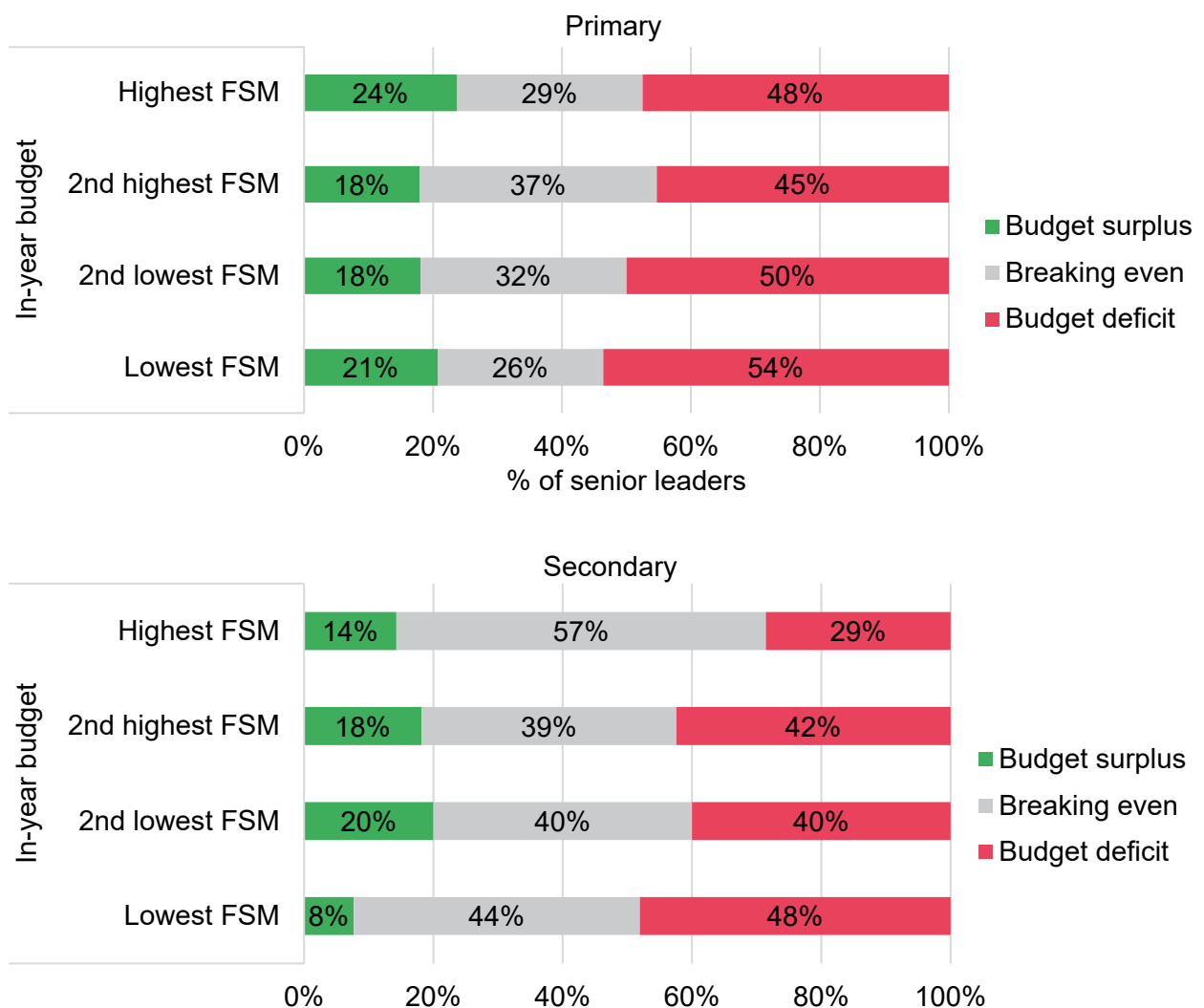


Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 930

The least disadvantaged schools are more likely to report an in-year and overall budget deficit for the 2022/23 financial year than the most disadvantaged schools, particularly among secondary schools

While the most disadvantaged schools have been most impacted by increases in the level and extent of pupils need (as discussed in Chapter 2), Figure 26 shows that cost pressures arising from the increased cost of living are being felt across all schools, including the least disadvantaged schools.

Figure 26 Schools in-year budget status by the end of the 2022/23 financial year by school disadvantage



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1149 gave a response

Among secondary schools, 48 per cent of schools in the quartile with the fewest disadvantaged pupils report an in-year deficit compared to 29 per cent of schools in the most disadvantaged quartile, as shown in Figure 26. Similarly, for primary schools, 54 per cent of schools in the least

disadvantaged quartile of schools report an in-year deficit compared to 48 per cent of schools in the most disadvantaged quartile.

A similar trend was identified among secondary schools regarding their overall budgets. Our analysis found that 25 per cent of secondary schools in the most disadvantaged quartile report an overall deficit compared to 37 per cent of secondary schools in the least disadvantaged quartile. Among primary schools, there was very little variation by school-level disadvantage.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, these observed patterns may be partly explained by the fact that least disadvantaged schools receive the least funding relative to schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils, meaning their budgets are particularly vulnerable to running into deficit in the face of increased cost pressures. They show that, while teaching and learning may have been most impacted in the most disadvantaged schools, the least disadvantaged schools have also been affected.

3.2.2 Expectations for next year

Just under half of schools are expecting both to have an in-year deficit and needing to make cuts to provision in 2023/24

We asked senior leaders about what they anticipate in terms of surplus/deficit for the 2023/24 financial year. When responding to this question, senior leaders were asked to answer excluding any possible future costs associated with the changes to teacher pay currently under negotiation.

At the time of the survey fieldwork, school leaders were still waiting for the Government to confirm the teacher pay increase for 2022/23 – with 4.3 per cent, the latest offer made by the Government at the time of the fieldwork, having been rejected by the education unions (Walker, 2023). This has now been confirmed to be 6.5 per cent (DfE, 2023b). Out of which, 3.5 per cent will need be covered by existing school budgets (the remaining three per cent will be funded from elsewhere in the DfE's budget) (DfE, 2023f).

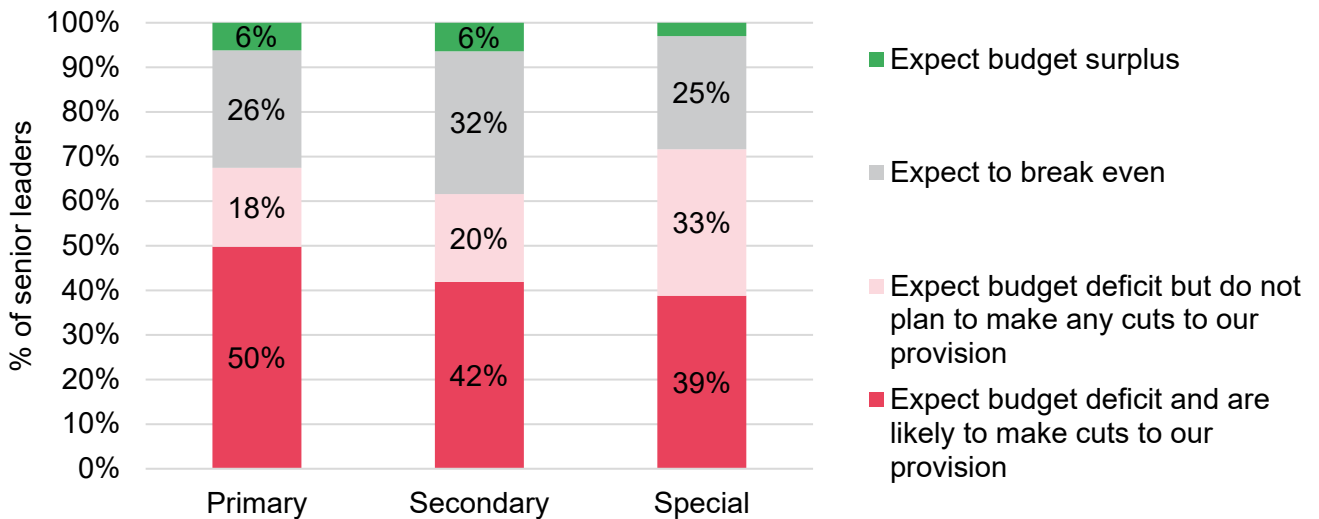
At least three-fifths of senior leaders across all settings are currently expecting an in-year deficit for their 2023/24 budget, with only a very small proportion (less than a tenth) expecting a surplus. As shown in Figure 27, there is variation by phase in the proportion of schools anticipating a deficit as well as the proportion of schools expecting to make cuts in response to their expected deficit. While 72 per cent of special schools expect an in-year deficit next financial year, only around half of these schools expect to make cuts to provision. In contrast, most primary and secondary schools anticipating a deficit next financial year also expect to make cuts to their provision.

The schools budget is set to increase by a further £3.5 billion for 2023/24 and £1.5 billion in 2024/25 (alongside aforementioned funding to cover three percent of teacher salary increases²⁶). While these funding uplifts represent significant increases, these increases were only intended to return schools to 2010 funding levels and will not get as far in the context of unprecedented increases in running and salary costs. It is also important to note that special schools receive funding via their LA and that the funding formula used for special schools differs from that used for

²⁶ The Department for Education (DfE) has also announced £482.5 million in 2023/24 and £827.5 million for schools in 2024/25 as part of funding announced in July 2023 (DfE, 2023f). This is expected to be funded from elsewhere in the DfE (including schools) budget (Martin, 2023b).

mainstream schools (it has a large historical component). This may contribute to the funding challenges faced by special schools. For example, not all special schools will receive the full amount of aforementioned funding to cover the three percent of teacher salary increases.

Figure 27 Schools expectation for their budget and provision for the 2023/24 financial year

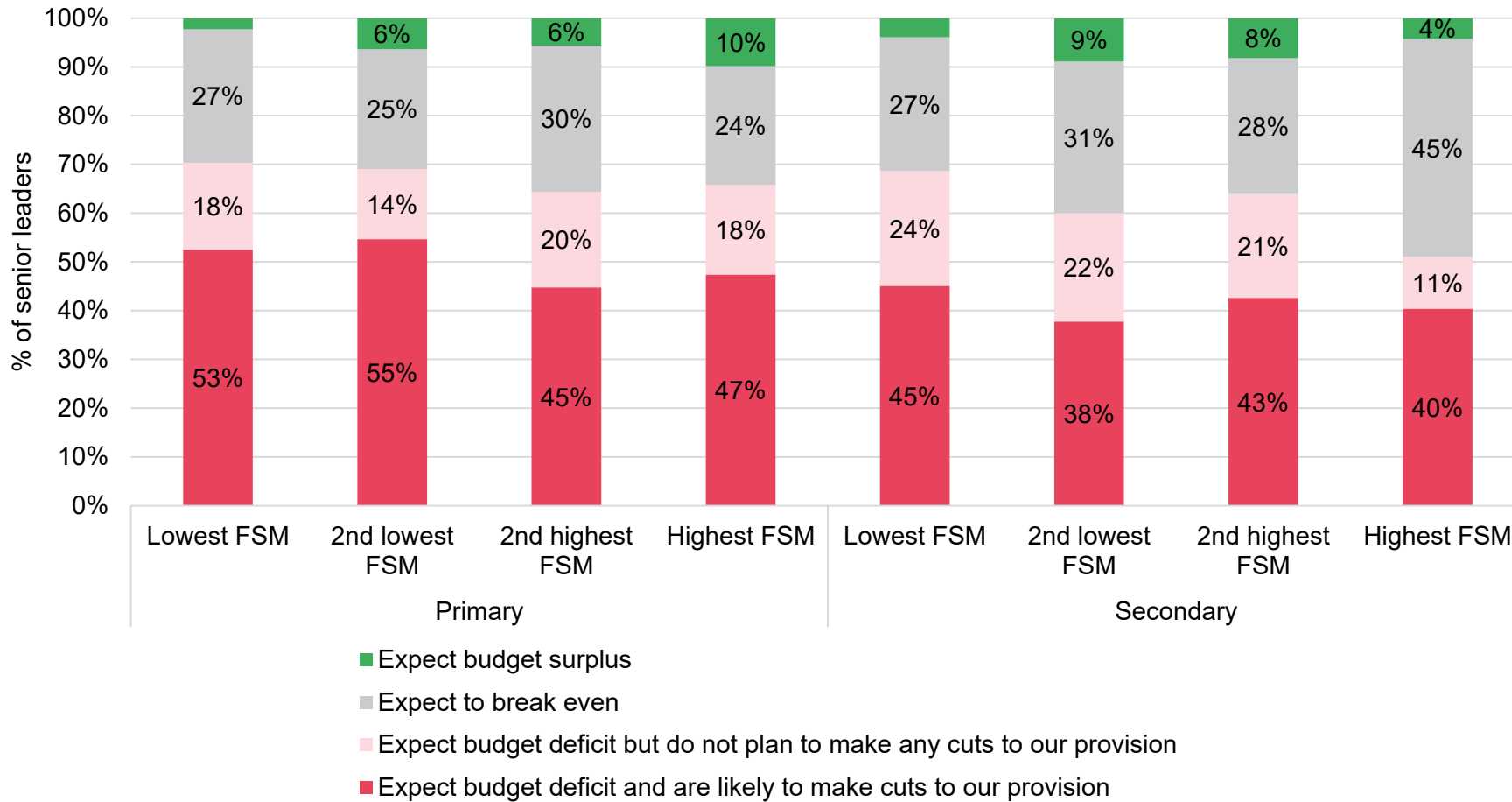


Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1193 gave a response

Higher proportions of the least disadvantaged schools are anticipating deficits in 2023/24 than disadvantaged schools

This trend is particularly evidenced among secondary schools. As shown in Figure 28, around 69 per cent of the least disadvantaged quartile of secondary schools expect to run an in-year deficit, compared to 51 per cent of the most disadvantaged quartile of secondary schools. This finding is consistent with the data presented earlier in this chapter showing that more non-disadvantaged schools are reporting in-year and overall budget deficits at the end of the 2022/23 financial year compared to more disadvantaged schools. These findings also highlight that not only do schools expect sustained pressures on their budgets next academic year, but that the least disadvantaged schools remain particularly vulnerable to running into deficit in the face of increased cost pressures.

Figure 28 The proportion of senior leaders expecting surplus or deficit in 2023/24 by school disadvantage



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1124 gave a response

3.3 Discussion

Schools have not been able to accommodate the increased costs which have arisen due to cost-of-living pressures purely via financial reserves. Most schools are making cuts, not only to extra-curricular provision, targeted learning support (such as tutoring) and overheads, but to their core teaching and learning provision. In special schools, core specialist support has also been reduced. Schools are only expecting their financial situations to worsen over the coming year – which is only likely to intensify these cuts further. Many school leaders are facing impossible trade-offs.

This is likely to impact pupil attainment outcomes in both the short - and longer-term. Together with the additional pressures faced by disadvantaged pupils' due to recent cost-of-living increases, this is only likely to lead to a widening of the gap in attainment outcomes achieved between disadvantaged pupils and their more advantaged peers.

Furthermore, our findings highlight that the cost-of-living pressures have exacerbated existing challenges faced by both mainstream and special schools' in meeting additional needs. This means that some of the most vulnerable pupils in the schools' system are not being adequately supported and have lost core parts of the support they need to maximise their development, independence and quality of life. It also means families may have lost access to important respite opportunities.

Without urgent action now, our findings highlight that the cost-of-living pressures risk having far reaching and long-lasting impacts on pupils, particularly those who are most vulnerable, across both mainstream and special school settings.

4 School staff

This chapter discusses how the increased cost of living is influencing recruitment and retention in schools. It also sets out the impact of recent increases in the cost of living on the personal circumstances of teachers, including how teachers are responding to cost pressures on their household finances.

Our findings highlight that cost-of-living pressures are compounding existing recruitment and retention challenges by placing additional pressure on personal and school budgets, alongside placing wider pressures on school staff (e.g., in meeting pupils' additional needs). This means staff and potential applicants are more likely to be looking for higher paying and less pressurised jobs at the same time as budget pressures are limiting the extent to which schools can afford to offer higher salaries.

4.1 Personal circumstances of teachers

Key findings

- Less than half of teachers can afford to pay an unexpected expense outright.
- Teachers are making similar lifestyle and spending changes to the wider British population in response to pressures on their finances.

The median salary for a classroom teacher in a state-funded school in England in 2022 was £40,251. Median salaries were highest in secondary schools at £41,624, compared to £38,810 in nursery/primary schools and £40,701 in special schools.

Nonetheless, roughly one in six classroom teachers across these settings earned less than £30,000 per year (DfE, 2023g). This compares to a median salary of £33,000 for a full-time employee in England (ONS, 2022).

Less than half of teachers can afford to pay, outright, an unexpected expense

While the typical classroom teacher may earn more compared to other professions, when asked about their ability to afford an unexpected necessary expense of £850, less than half of primary and special school teachers in our survey could afford to pay this expense outright (40 per cent and 31 per cent respectively, as shown in Figure 29). Around 30 per cent of teachers, in both settings, could only afford to pay it if they could borrow the money.

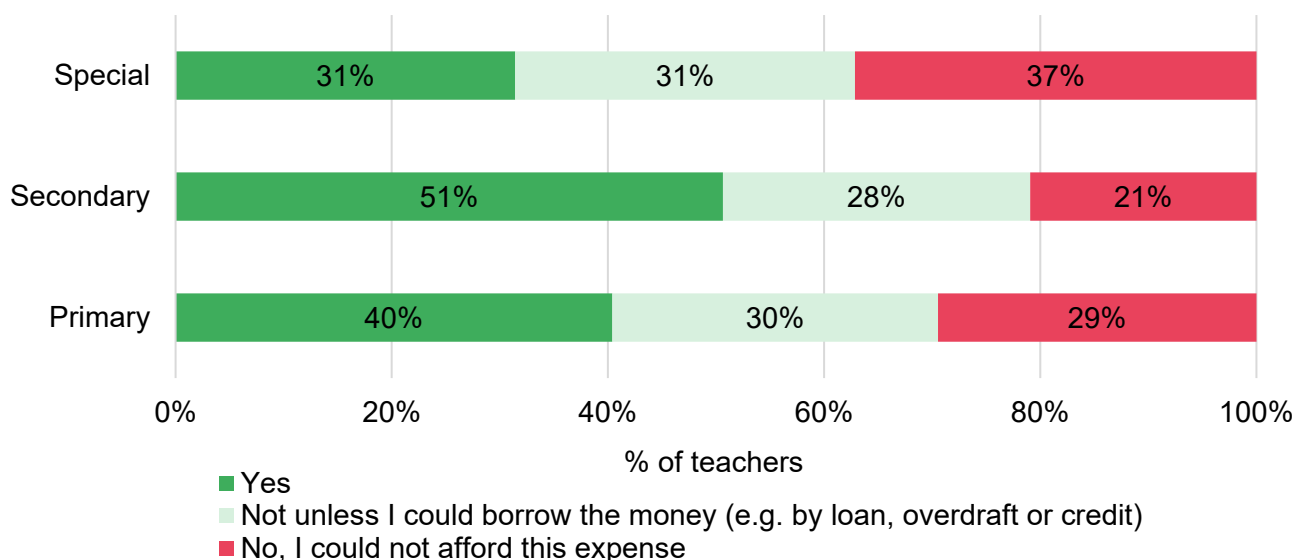
In comparison, around half (51 per cent) of secondary school teachers could pay this expense outright with a further 28 per cent able to if they could borrow the money. Secondary school teachers in our survey generally had a higher annual gross household income compared with primary and special teachers, which is likely to explain why they are typically more able to meet an unexpected expense.

These findings are largely in line with the wider British population, as indicated by a similar question used in the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey from the Office for National Statistics (ONS,

2023) where 59 per cent of people could afford it and 29 per cent could not²⁷. However, these findings highlight that many teachers are not in a position to easily meet additional costs that are arising as a result of cost-of-living pressures.

As would be expected, teachers with higher annual household incomes are more likely to report they could afford an unexpected expense question. Additionally, the more children in teachers' households, the less likely they are to report that would be able to afford an unexpected expense.

Figure 29 The percentage of teachers who could afford to pay an unexpected expense



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere

Source: NFER survey of 1358 teachers: 1196 gave a response

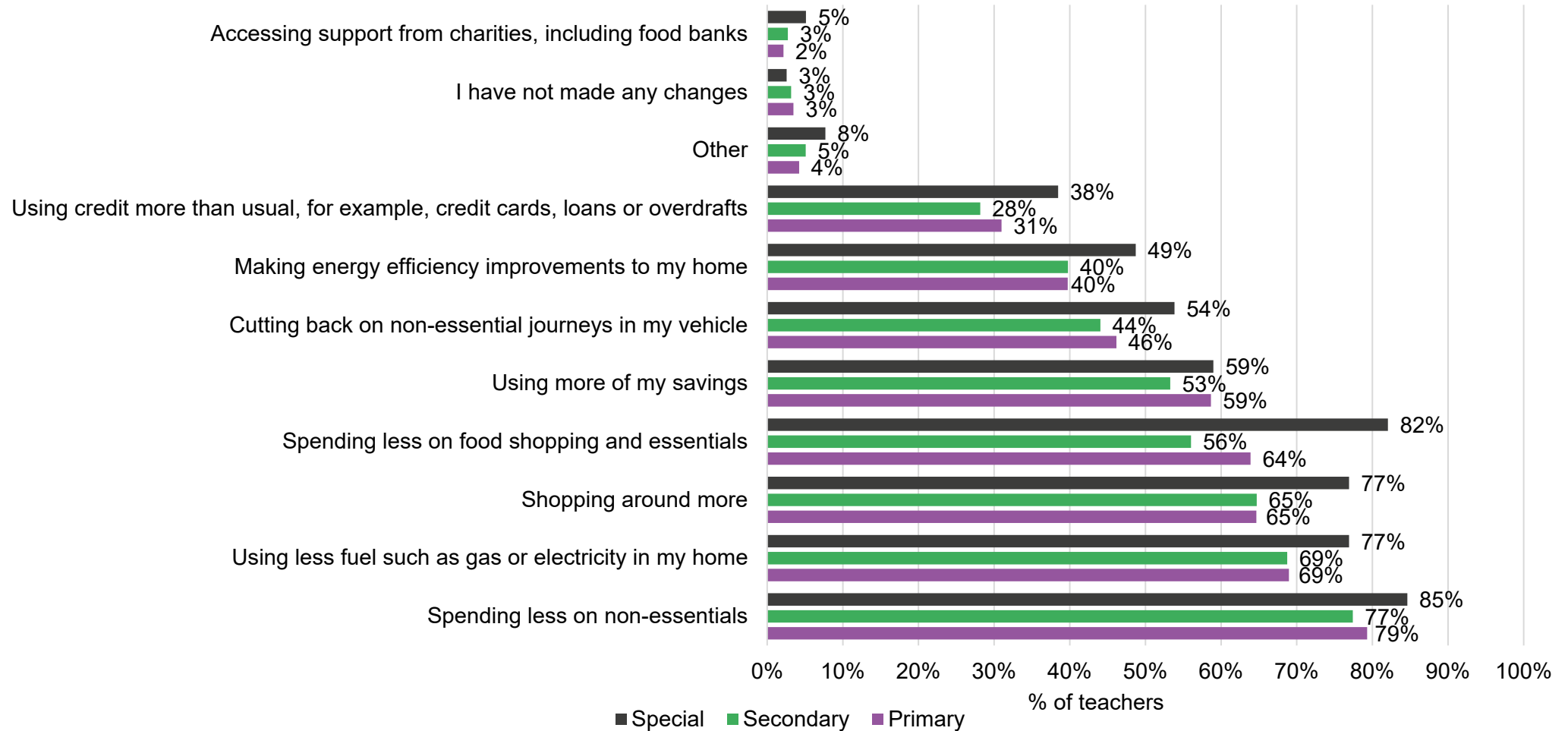
Teachers are making similar changes as the wider population in response to cost-of-living pressures

Teachers were also asked what changes they had made in the last year as a result of recent cost-of-living increases. The most common changes are spending less on non-essential items, shopping around more and using less fuel such as gas or electricity in homes, as shown in Figure 30. Teachers in special schools are also commonly spending less on food shopping and essentials.

These findings are again in line with the wider British population (ONS, 2023). Only three per cent of teachers across all settings had not made any changes, slightly lower than nine per cent of the British population overall (ONS, 2023).

²⁷ Those who responded 'Not unless I could borrow the money' in our survey have been interpreted as 'Yes' for the purpose of comparing with the ONS findings.

Figure 30 Lifestyle changes made by teachers in response to recent cost-of-living increases



Source: NFER survey of 1358 teachers: 1295 gave at least one response

Recent cost-of-living increases are impacting on teachers' personal lives

The findings above highlight that, while teachers may earn more than the median full-time employee, they are nonetheless facing pressures on their personal finances because of cost-of-living pressures. Indeed, in their open responses²⁸, some teachers highlighted that increases in the cost of living are affecting them in the same way as pupils and their households. Younger teachers, in particular, are likely to report that they were struggling to afford their living costs – food, housing and heating.

While teachers should not be required to supply resources for their lessons in the first place, a number of teachers stated that they could no longer buy equipment or resources they needed to deliver their lessons. This chimes with the findings presented in Chapter 3 which showed that the financial pressures faced by schools are impacting on teaching and learning provision.

The fact that increases in the cost of living are affecting teachers' personal finances is not only likely to place additional pressure on staff already contending with levels of increased need among pupils but is also likely to affect both retention and recruitment to the profession, as discussed in the following sub-chapter.

Cost-of-living increases have significantly affected the quality of life for myself and my colleagues. Affordability of basic foods / services has resulted in no saving and therefore no safety net. We cannot plan for a future and any unforeseen costs e.g., car or boiler repairs results in going into debt. This is not a sustainable way of living and the take home pay should be more reflective of current cost of living. – Mainstream teacher

I'm definitely feeling the effects of cost of living. Worrying about money and how I'm going to pay bills or having to go without food and essential items has an impact on my mental health. Not being able to afford leisure activities, eating out, new clothes, haircuts makes me feel frustrated as a professional working long hours and only just being able to make ends meet. – Mainstream teacher

It has affected me personally a lot. I am a single household and are struggling to pay the bills such as council tax. I am also more reluctant to get resources for the kids in class now as it affects me more financially. – Special school teacher

Taking on a second / third job to afford my bills. This is on top of working full time. I constantly worry about money. I have starting growing food. We look at the bargain section first. We don't socialise because we can't afford it. We don't see family or friends as much as we would like because we can't afford it. – Mainstream teacher

I am worried about how I am going to be able to afford rising travel fares in the long term as well as rising cost of electricity and heating. Because of this I try to do as much work from school so that I do not have to use more energy at home. – Mainstream teacher

²⁸ Teachers and senior leaders were asked 'Is there anything else which you would like us to know about how the cost of living is affecting you, your pupils, your teaching or your school?'

4.2 Retention

Key findings

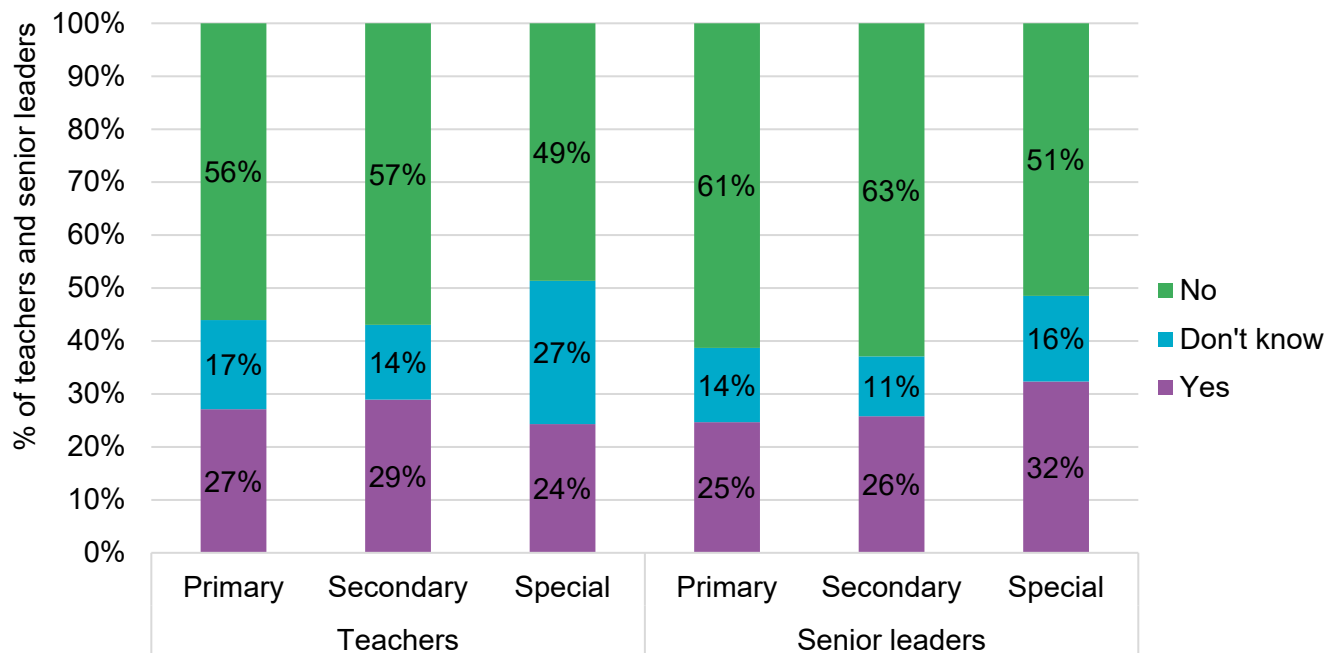
- The percentage of senior leaders and teachers considering leaving the profession (over one in four) has returned to 2019 (pre-pandemic) levels.
- School leaders report teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) leaving school because they can earn more in other jobs and that TAs are taking second jobs alongside their TA role for the first time.

4.2.1 Teachers

The percentage of senior leaders and teachers considering leaving the profession has returned to 2019 levels

Figure 31 shows that 27 per cent of primary, 29 per cent of secondary and 24 per cent of special school teachers are considering leaving the profession next year. While similar proportions of primary and secondary senior leaders are considering leaving the profession (25 per cent and 26 per cent respectively), a notably higher proportion (32 per cent) of leaders from special schools are considering leaving the profession.

Figure 31 The percentage of teachers and senior leaders considering leaving the profession next year



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1170 gave a response and 1358 teachers: 1242 gave a response

While the levels of teachers and senior leaders considering leaving teaching is high, particularly compared to during the pandemic, these are similar to the proportion considering leaving the profession in 2019 when around 26 per cent of senior leaders and teachers report considering leaving. While retention rates had improved during the pandemic, our findings suggest that cost-of-living pressures are exacerbating ongoing retention challenges in education.

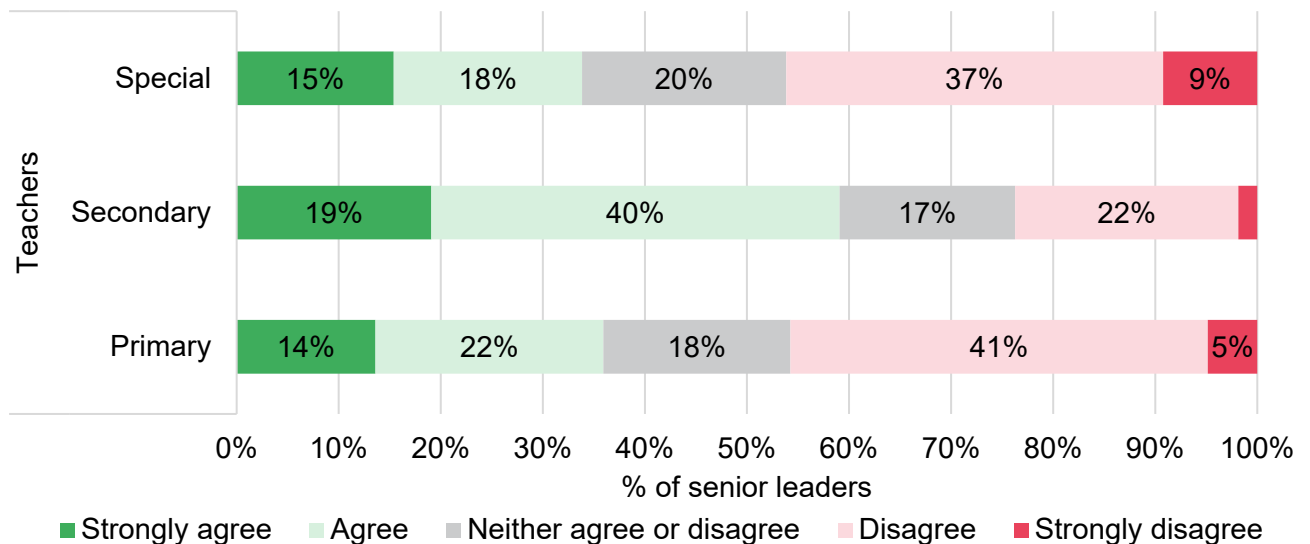
The impact of cost-of-living pressures on retention is evidenced by leaders reporting that teachers are leaving schools because they can earn more in other jobs

While teacher retention was already challenging before recent cost-of-living increases, our findings suggest that these increases have made teaching a less attractive career option for households contending with cost-of-living pressures.

Around 59 per cent of secondary senior leaders report teachers leaving to earn more elsewhere compared to 36 per cent of primary schools and 34 per cent of special schools, as shown in Figure 32. This is likely to reflect the fact that that secondary school teachers are more likely to be able to transition into industry or other sectors related to their subject specialism with higher associated earnings (Worth and McLean, 2022).

Senior leaders in the South are also more likely to report teachers leaving school to earn more in another job compared to the Midlands and the North. This is likely to reflect the overall higher costs associated with living in the South and the higher salaries, particularly in areas like London, compared with the Midlands and the North.

Figure 32 The proportion of senior leaders who agree or disagree that teachers are leaving the school because they can earn more in another job



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere
Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1125 gave a response

In their open responses, teachers and leader again highlighted that the increased cost of living was putting pressure on staff personal finances. This was giving some staff no choice but to move on into higher paying jobs. Others indicated that it was the combination of pressure on finances in

conjunction with the workload, low morale and lack of classroom support that was making it challenging to retain staff in school.

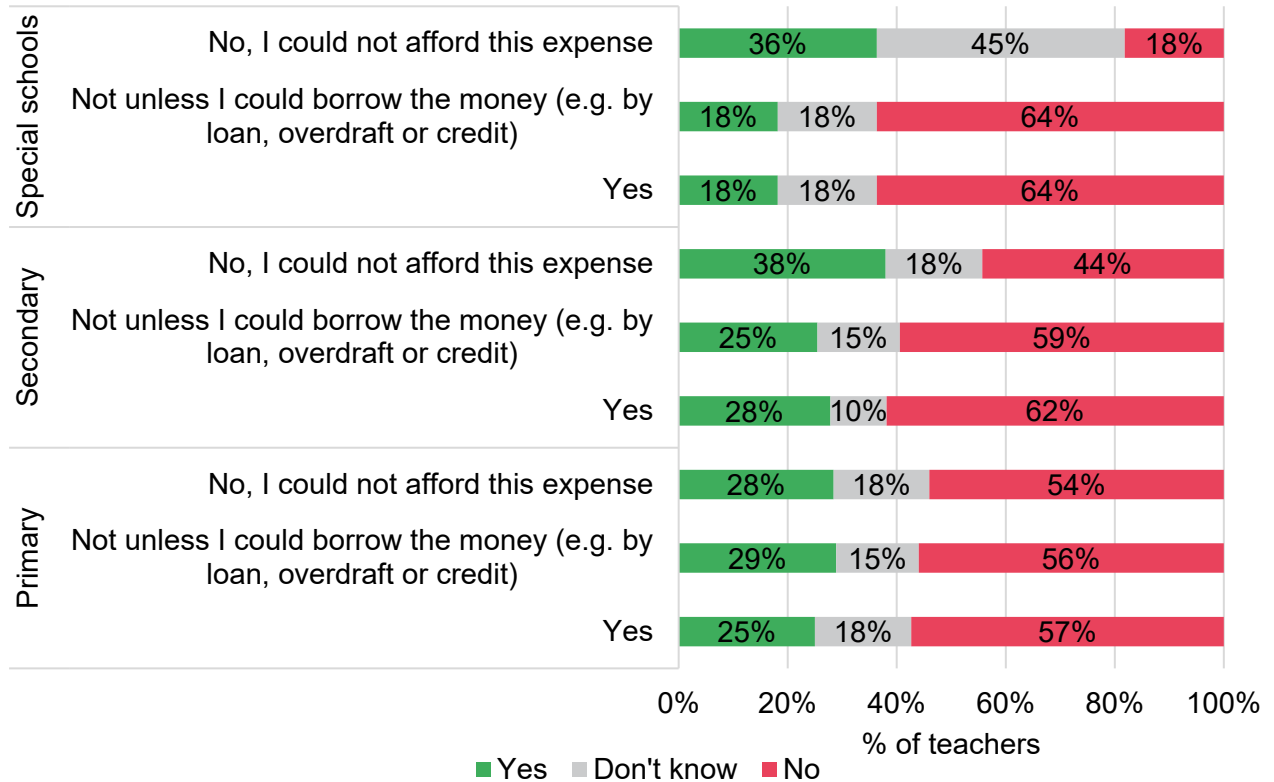
Morale is low with staff as everything in life has gone up and salaries just don't match it. Private sector is beginning to look more and more appealing because they pay properly. – Mainstream senior leader

Teaching salary now requires topping up from other sources e.g., renting our property out on the weekend. I have chosen to leave teaching at the end of this academic year with [classroom challenges] and falling real term salaries being key reasons. – Mainstream teacher

Teachers unable to afford an unexpected expense are more likely to say they are planning to leave the profession, particularly in secondary and special schools

As shown in Figure 33, 38 per cent of secondary and 36 per cent of special school teachers who could not afford an unexpected payment are also considering leaving the profession within the next school year. This was in contrast to those who could afford the payment at 28 per cent of secondary school teachers and 18 per cent of special school teachers. However, this will partly reflect an age effect, as younger teachers are both more likely to have a lower salary and to be thinking of leaving the profession.

Figure 33 The percentage of teachers who could afford to pay an unexpected expense and their intention to leave the profession



Source: NFER survey of 1358 teachers: 1146 gave a one response

4.2.2 Teaching Assistants and other support staff

As was the case for teachers, senior leaders also feel that TAs are leaving schools because they can earn more in other jobs

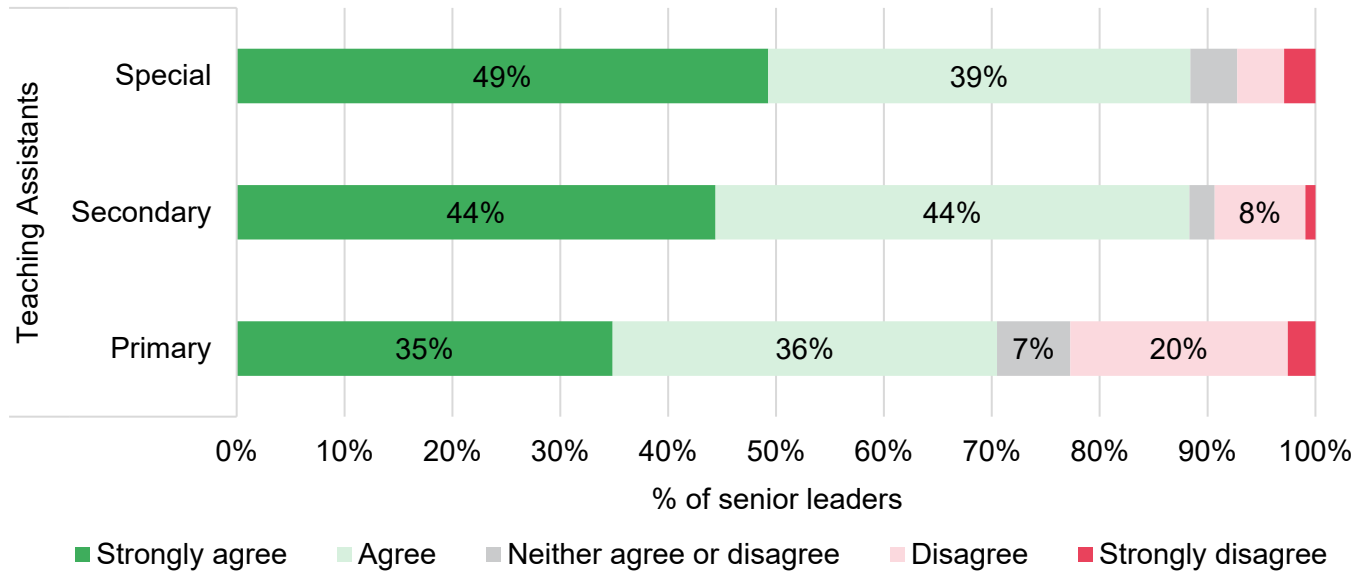
While sub-chapter 4.1 demonstrated that cost-of-living pressures are having significant impacts on teachers' household finances, similar impacts have been experienced by other school staff, particularly TAs whose starting salaries in 2022 were just over £20,000²⁹ (NEU, 2023).

Over 70 per cent of senior leaders across all settings report TAs are leaving the school because they can earn more in another job, though there is some variation by phase. Almost nine-tenths (88 per cent) of secondary schools and special schools agree TAs are leaving schools to earn more in another job compared to 71 per cent of primary schools, as shown in Figure 34.

As was the case for teachers, schools in the South are more likely to report TAs are leaving to earn more in another job than in the North or Midlands.

²⁹ This is based on local government pay scales which are only used by a subset of schools.

Figure 34 The proportion of schools who agree or disagree that TAs are leaving the school because they can earn more in another job



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1179 gave at least one response

In their open responses, teachers and leaders highlighted that the impact of the increased cost of living on the personal finances was particularly acute for TAs. As such some TAs are leaving school in favour of job opportunities in other sectors (such as roles in hospitality and retail) that offer either increased pay or opportunities to work more hours. Leaders highlight that this only intensifies workload pressures on remaining staff.

TA pay is appalling. We cannot offer salaries that are an incentive. The school budget cannot sustain the increase in costs without letting high quality staff members leave. – Mainstream senior leader

The support staff are leaving in large numbers as they can earn significantly more in other settings. There are also fewer qualified staff available to fill these posts. – Mainstream senior leader

Support staff are leaving because they can get higher paid jobs in other sectors. TA vacancies remain unfilled due to a lack of suitable applicants. Lack of TAs impacts on teacher workload and teacher well-being. SEND children are increasingly more complex, so need more support. It feels like a vicious cycle. – Mainstream senior leader

TA recruitment is even worse. Since the cost of living has increased we have lost TAs to work in supermarkets, fast food restaurants, hotels and other such roles. We cannot recruit or retain young people into the roles. – Mainstream teacher

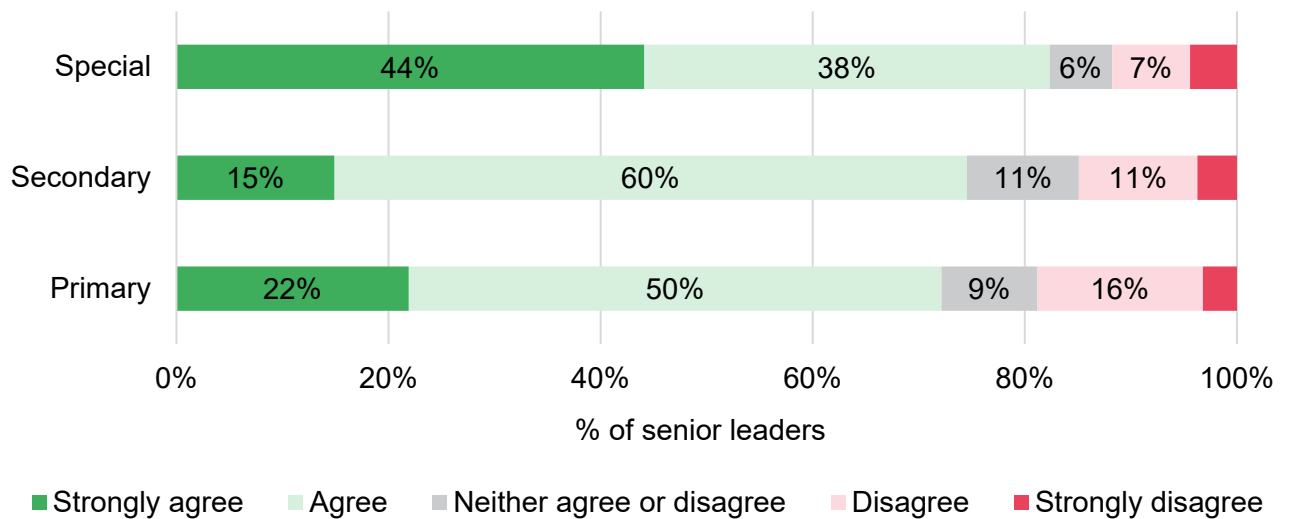
The majority of schools report TAs are taking second jobs alongside their TA role for the first time especially among special schools

As shown in Figure 35, 82 per cent of senior leaders from special schools report that some of their TAs are taking second jobs for the first time compared to 75 and 72 per cent of secondary and primary senior leaders respectively.

In addition, among primary schools, higher proportions of leaders in the South report TAs taking second jobs for the first time (at least 76 per cent across all settings) than among leaders in the North (at least 71 percent across all settings) or Midlands (at least 68 percent across all settings). Among secondary schools, the same pattern was observed, but differences between the regions were smaller. Furthermore, significantly more primary leaders report TAs taking second jobs among more disadvantaged schools³⁰ (as measured by eligibility for free school meals (FSM)) (at 77 per cent) than the least disadvantaged schools (at 63 per cent). There is no clear pattern among secondary schools.

These findings highlight that cost-of-living pressures have led many TAs to supplement their income via other sources and suggests that pay for TAs should be revisited in light of these pressures.

Figure 35 The proportion of schools agreeing or disagreeing that some TAs in their schools are taking second jobs alongside their TA role for the first time



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1036 gave at least one response

³⁰ Sub-sample analysis was not possible for the special schools sample due to the sample size achieved. All analysis presented by school-level disadvantage is for mainstream schools only.

4.3 Recruitment

Key findings

- Among the senior leaders who recruited teaching staff in the last 12-months, nearly all (88 per cent) secondary schools report that teacher recruitment was difficult over the last year. Only a fifth of secondary schools who tried to recruit teachers managed to fill their vacancies within two months.
- A substantial proportion of primary and special senior leaders also reported facing difficulties recruiting teachers, albeit lower than in the secondary sector (59 per cent of primary and 77 per cent of special senior leaders).
- The overwhelming majority of schools are also struggling to recruit TAs and other support staff. Large numbers of TA and other support staff vacancies remained vacant for more than two months, especially among special schools.
- Salaries, insufficient numbers of applicants and a lack of applicants with the required skills are the biggest barriers to the recruitment of teachers, TAs and other support staff.
- Half of schools across all settings are struggling to recruit teachers with the required specialist skills and experience. Similarly, around three-quarters of schools are unable to recruit TAs with the required specialist skills and expertise.

4.3.1 Teachers

Schools' recent recruitment experiences

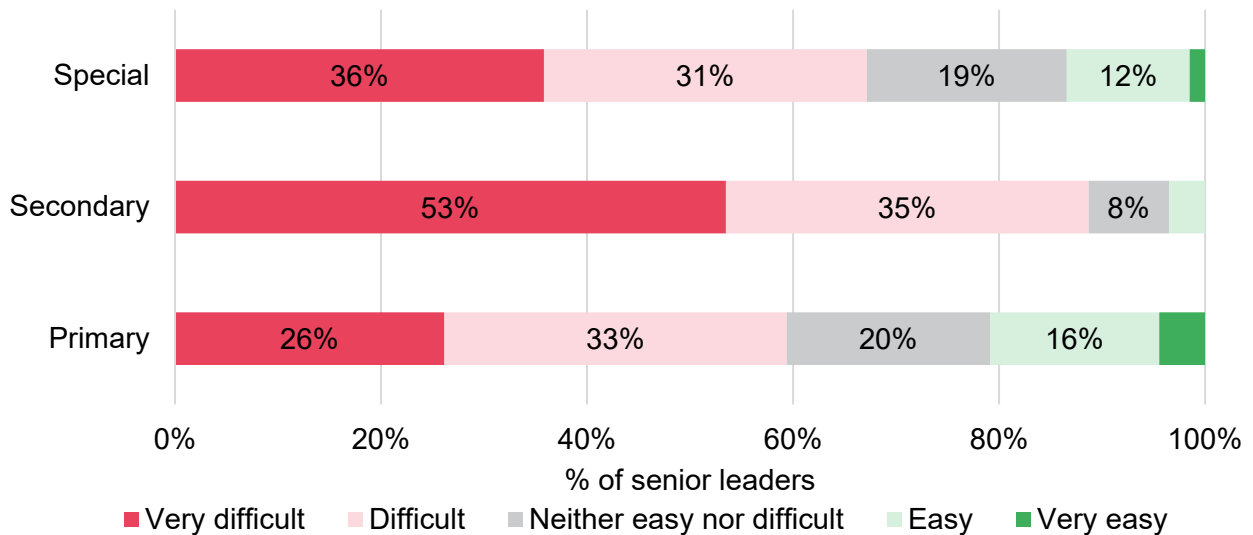
Nearly all (88 per cent) of the secondary senior leaders who tried to recruit teachers report finding teacher recruitment difficult over the last year

This is shown in [Figure 36](#), which presents how easy or difficult different senior leaders report finding it to recruit, among schools who had to recruit new teachers over the last 12-months³¹. It also shows that there was considerable variation by phase: primary schools are least likely to report experiencing difficulties at 59 per cent, compared to 67 percent of special senior leaders and 88 per cent of secondary senior leaders.

As with retention (as discussed in sub-chapter 4.2), it is likely that the scale of recruitment challenges in schools have been exacerbated by the effects that cost-of-living pressures have had on the relative attractiveness of teaching as a profession.

³¹ Among those who were able to answer the question, 1012 (83 per cent) of senior leaders reported recruiting teachers in the last 12 months: 792 primary senior leaders, 228 secondary senior leaders and 68 special senior leaders report attempting recruitment.

Figure 36 The proportion of schools finding teacher recruitment easy or difficult over the last 12 months



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere
Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1012 gave a response

A regression model confirmed that secondary schools are significantly more likely to report experiencing difficulty recruiting teachers, as are schools with a ‘requires improvement’ Ofsted rating (compared to an ‘outstanding’ rating). The model also found that schools in London are more likely to experience difficulty recruiting than schools in the North, Midlands or elsewhere in the South. Further details can be found in Appendix C.

Furthermore, the increased cost of living is also likely to have contributed to historically low initial teacher training (ITT) recruitment in 2022/23 (McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023). NFER forecasts show that ITT recruitment in 2023/24 is also likely to be significantly below target. Applications received up to April 2023 suggest that less than half of the secondary teachers that schools need are expected to be recruited (Worth, 2023a). This evidence demonstrates that the pipeline of new teachers has deteriorated and is likely to place even further strain on schools attempting to recruit in the coming years.

Barriers to recruitment

Salaries, insufficient numbers of applicants and a lack of suitable applicants with the required skills continue to be significant barriers to teacher recruitment

Among senior leaders who had recruited for teachers, the most reported biggest barrier is having too few applications, followed by the salaries they can offer and applicants lacking the required skills. This suggests that the recruitment challenges outlined above have been amplified by the impact that cost-of-living increases have had on salaries in the wider economy and on household finances. It chimes with the findings presented in sub-chapter 4.2 which show that senior leaders feel teachers are leaving the profession due to insufficiently competitive salaries.

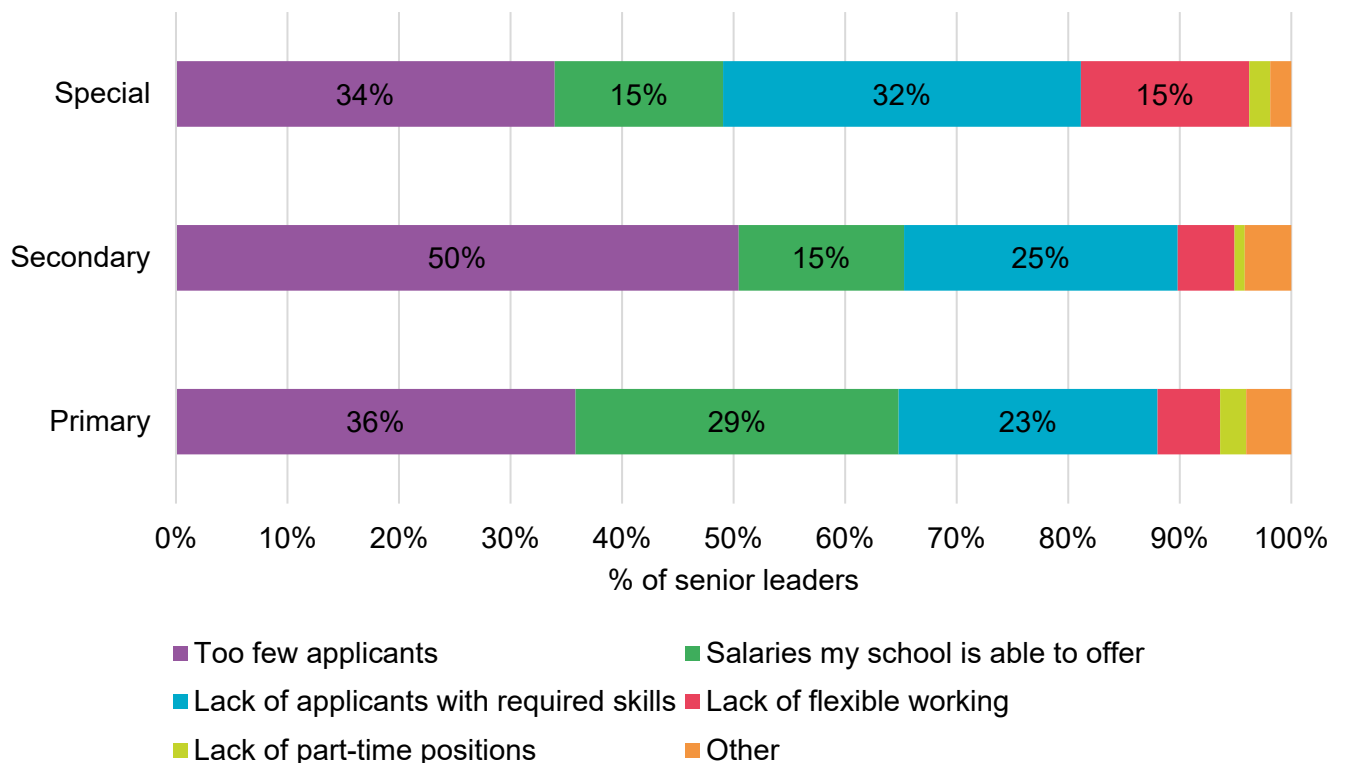
There is some variation by phase. As shown in Figure 37, the proportion of primary schools who report salaries as the biggest barrier to recruitment is almost double that of secondary and special schools (29 per cent compared to 15 per cent).

While previous evidence has demonstrated that the quality and quantity of applicants as well as budget pressures are long-standing barriers to recruitment (Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2022), this data highlights that the increased cost of living and its pervasive impacts on schools may only be exacerbating these issues.

Teaching salaries are very low compared to train drivers, senior NHS workers and private sector colleagues. There is no incentive [now] to teach. – Mainstream senior leader

As a school in London the salaries are the biggest issue. With the exception of experienced teachers the salary doesn't cover the rent, bills and travel costs required with living in London. – Mainstream senior leader

Figure 37 The single biggest barriers for recruiting teachers reported by senior leader who had recruited for teaching staff



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 908 gave at least one response

Impact of recruitment challenges

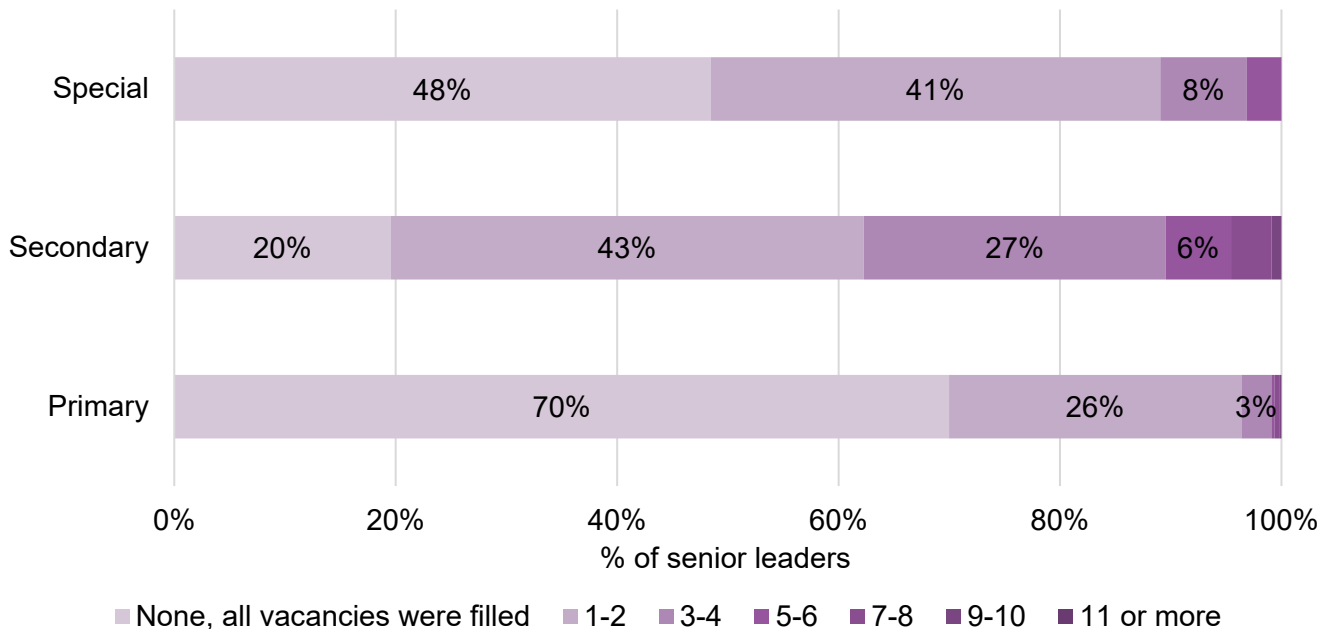
Due to recruitment challenges which appear to have been exacerbated by cost-of-living pressures, only a fifth of secondary schools filled all teacher vacancies within two months

When asked how many of their teaching posts remained unfilled for a period of two months or more during the current academic year, among those schools who had recruited in the last 12-months, only 20 per cent of secondary schools report that all teacher vacancies were filled within this timeframe. As shown in **Figure 38**, this compares to 70 per cent of primary schools and 48 per cent of special schools filling all teacher vacancies.

Furthermore, one in ten (11 per cent) of secondary schools report that at least five of the posts they were recruiting for this academic year remained unfilled for two months or more.

In general, the least disadvantaged mainstream schools report fewer difficulties in filling their teacher vacancies within two months. Among the least disadvantaged quartile of schools, 76 per cent of primaries and 33 per cent of secondaries report filling all vacancies within two months. In comparison, this falls to 67 per cent of primary schools and 19 per cent of secondary schools among the schools in the most disadvantaged quartile of schools (as shown in **Figure 45** in the Appendix).

Figure 38 The number of teaching posts schools were recruiting that remained unfilled for a period of two months or more during the current academic year



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 944 gave at least one response

Half of schools report struggling to recruit teachers with the specialist skills and experience required to meet the needs of pupils

This rises to around two-thirds (67 per cent) of secondary schools, compared to 53 per cent of special schools and 48 per cent of primary schools.

These findings highlight that cost-of-living increases, together with existing pressures faced by schools, have meant that schools are not only finding it difficult to recruit, but are struggling to find staff with the appropriate specialist skills and experience.

In their open responses, senior leaders report having to go without staff and relying on TAs or supply staff to cover gaps in teaching provision. They also report senior leaders taking on larger teaching commitments. For some schools, this is due to an inability to recruit while other schools report taking this step because they cannot afford to recruit staff (as discussed in Chapter 3, some schools have had to reduce teacher numbers in response to cost-of-living pressures on their budgets). Other steps schools report taking in response to staffing difficulties include recruiting a lower calibre of staff and amalgamating classes. Senior leaders also highlight that the combined impact of cost of saving measures, together with recruitment challenges, is resulting in increasing workload, poorer teaching and learning provision and lower morale among school staff.

This shows that cost-of-living increases are not only compounding recruitment challenges, but that recruitment and retention challenges are themselves amplifying the impacts of cost-of-living pressures on schools.

Only way to reduce debt is to reduce staffing through recruiting less skilled staff and not replacing some staff when they leave. Impact is negative on the workload of others and also ability to meet post-pandemic challenges. – Mainstream senior leader

We're having to use staff from supply agencies and often they have little or no experience working in schools with children so aren't really able to add to the quality of teaching and learning for the children. – Mainstream senior leader

We worry about being able to support an increasing number of vulnerable pupils as SEND needs have increased and we cannot recruit staff at all, let alone staff who have the experience and skills that is required. – Mainstream senior leader

4.3.2 Teaching assistants and support staff

Schools' recent recruitment experiences

The overwhelming majority of schools are also struggling to recruit TAs and other support staff

Figure 39 presents how easy or difficult different senior leaders report finding it to recruit TAs and other support staff (e.g., business managers, administrative staff and cleaning staff) among schools who had to recruit staff into these roles over the last 12-months.

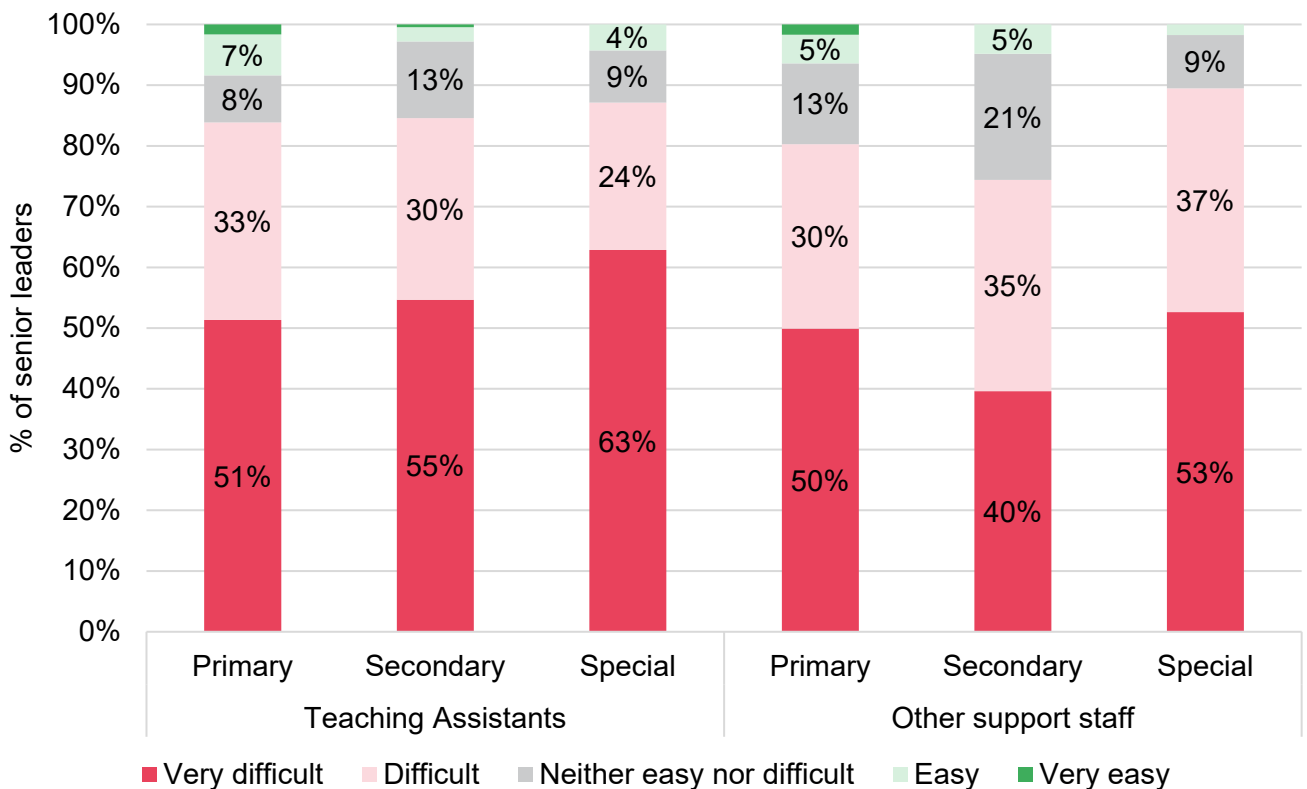
Special schools are finding recruitment particularly difficult – 87 per cent report difficulty recruiting TAs (compared to 84 per cent of primaries and 85 per cent secondaries) and 90 per cent report

difficulty recruiting other support staff (compared to 80 per cent of primaries and 75 per cent of secondaries). As already discussed in relation to teacher recruitment and TA retention, the fact that recent increases in cost of living have put pressure on household finances is likely to have resulted in individuals looking for roles with higher, more competitive salaries.

The implications of the recruitment difficulties which special schools are experiencing is particularly concerning given the pupil ratios these schools tend to require and the additional responsibilities these staff members often have for supporting pupils and meeting their needs while in school. The lack of support staff contributes to the reduction in the core specialist school offer described in Chapter 3 – therapy pools cannot operate if there is no cleaner; interventions for social and communication development cannot happen if there are no staff to deliver them; even handling and personal care cannot take place unless suitable adults are available.

However, the lack of TAs in mainstream settings is also likely to be affecting pupils with SEND and those who would most benefit from tailored interventions, given that this is a large part of how TAs are deployed in schools (Skipp and Hopwood, 2019).

Figure 39 The proportion of schools finding the recruitment of TAs and other support staff easy or difficult over the last 12 months



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 856

We also estimated a regression model which explored the factors that are associated with senior leaders reporting experiencing difficulty recruiting TAs across mainstream schools in the last 12 months, over and above other factors. The model showed that there are no clear patterns which

explain why some mainstream schools are finding TA recruitment particularly difficult. The results can be found in Appendix C.

Barriers to recruitment

Salaries, insufficient numbers of applicants and a lack of applicants with the required skills are also the biggest barriers to the recruitment of TAs and other support staff

As shown in Figure 40, among senior leaders who had recruited for TAs, salaries and a lack of skilled applicants are the most frequently reported barrier to recruitment. For other support staff, salary is reported most frequently as the biggest barrier to recruitment. This is consistent with the findings and existing evidence on teacher recruitment presented above. It demonstrates that the increased cost of living is making TA and support staff recruitment increasingly challenging for schools just as is the case for teacher recruitment as they are not able to offer competitive salaries relative to other sectors.

There is some important variation by phase. As shown in Figure 40, salaries are more often perceived as the single biggest barrier to recruitment among secondary and special schools (at 45 per cent of senior leaders) than primary (at 34 per cent), particularly in relation to TA recruitment.

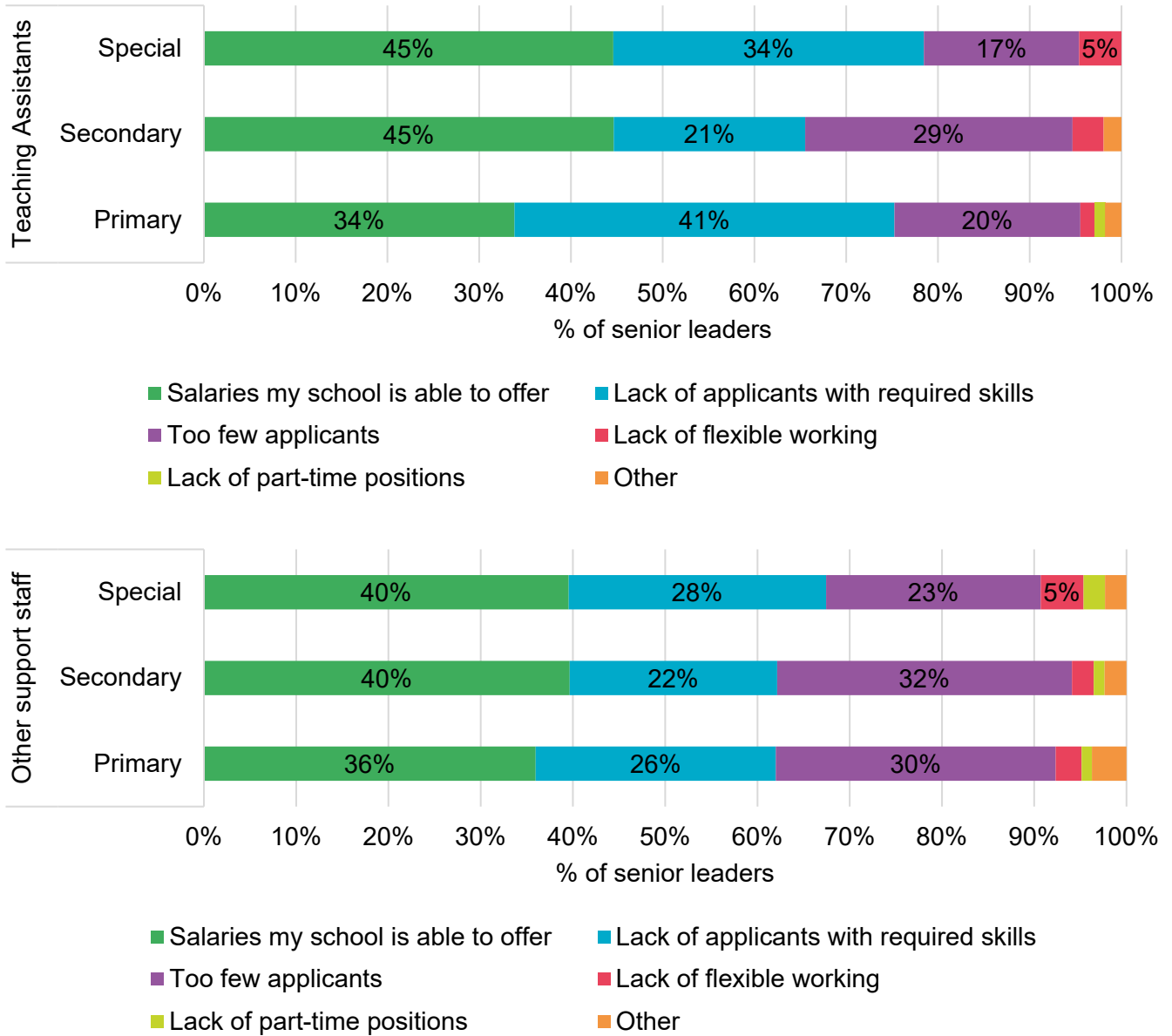
As was the case for teachers, schools in the South, particularly in London, are more likely to report salary as the biggest barrier to recruitment for TAs and other support staff compared with the Midlands and the North. This is likely to reflect the overall higher costs associated with living in the South and the higher salaries, particularly in areas like London, compared with the Midlands and the North.

In their open responses, leaders highlight that the increased cost of living putting pressure on individuals' finances is causing potential applicants to look to other sectors for work as other sectors are often able to offer higher salaries, particularly in comparison to TA and support staff salaries.

The problem with TAs is that their salaries are pro-rotta meaning they would earn more in M&S or Costa coffee because they would be paid for 12 months of the year, as opposed to 44 weeks.
– Mainstream senior leader

We cannot recruit cleaners etc, as it is not viable when transport costs are factored in. Salaries for support staff means that we struggle to employ TAs when jobs become available. Unless possible recruits need school term only working, the salaries do not stack up for many, supermarkets offer far more and with perks. – Mainstream senior leader

Figure 40 The single biggest barriers for recruiting staff by role type as reported by senior leaders who had reported for these roles



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 744

Impact of recruitment challenges

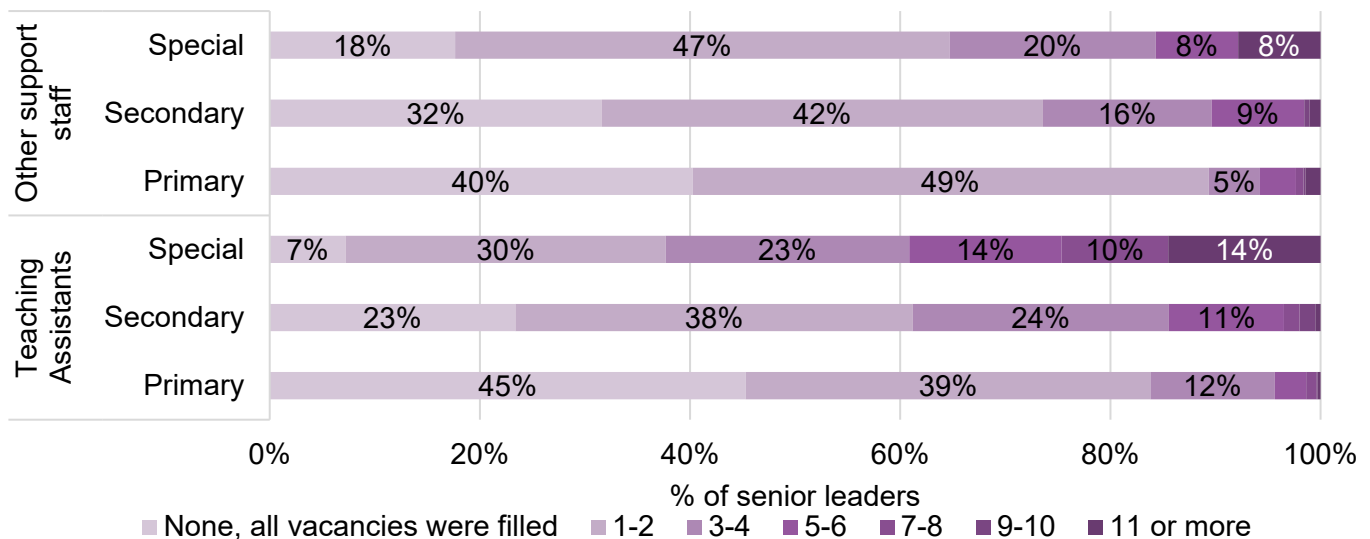
Large numbers of TA and support staff vacancies in schools – particularly in special schools – are remaining vacant for more than two months

Among the schools recruiting for TAs over the last 12-months³², only seven per cent of special schools report filling all TA vacancies within two months compared to 23 per cent of secondary and 45 per cent of primary schools, as shown in Figure 41. Two-fifths (40 per cent) of special schools report having five or more TA vacancies left unfilled for a prolonged period. By comparison, 14 per cent of secondary schools and just four per cent of primary schools report having at least five vacancies for a period of two months or more.

A similar trend was observed in relation to support staff. Among the schools who had recruited, around 18 per cent of special schools filled all support staff vacancies within two months compared to 32 per cent of secondary and 40 per cent of primary schools. In addition, 16 per cent of special schools report five or more vacancies compared to 10 per cent of secondary schools and six per cent of primary schools.

These findings highlight that difficulties in recruiting TAs and other support staff, which are likely to have been exacerbated by cost-of-living pressures, are leading to schools having to contend with large numbers of unfilled vacancies.

Figure 41 The number of posts schools were recruiting that remained unfilled for a period of two months or more during the current academic year by role type



Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere

Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given to an individual item was 797

³² Among those senior leaders who provided an answer the question, 1006 (92 per cent) report recruiting for TAs during the last 12-months.

Across mainstream schools, more disadvantaged schools report being unable to fill TA vacancies within two months compared to the least disadvantaged schools. For example, among schools in the least disadvantage quartile, 55 per cent of primaries and 32 per cent of secondaries report filling all TA vacancies within two months. This falls to 41 per cent of primary schools and 15 per cent of secondary schools among schools in the most disadvantaged quartile.

The same trend was observed for secondary schools recruiting other support staff. Among schools in the least disadvantaged quartile, 40 per cent report filling all support staff vacancies within two months but this decreased to 21 per cent among the most disadvantaged quartile. It is, however, important to note that the converse is true among primaries where 38 per cent of least disadvantaged schools report filling all support staff vacancies compared to 43 per cent of the most disadvantaged schools.

Around three-quarters of schools are unable to recruit TAs with the specialist skills and expertise required to meet the needs of pupils

Similar proportions of schools across all phases are struggling to recruit appropriately skilled and/or experienced TAs, with 70 per cent secondary, 71 per cent of special schools and 76 per cent of primary schools reporting this difficulty³³.

While large shares of all schools are struggling to fill all their TA and support staff vacancies, these findings highlight the particularly stark staffing challenges which special schools are currently experiencing. TAs in special schools will often need to have particular skills to appropriately support specific pupils with SEND, yet their pay may not reflect these requirements. The slow speed at which special schools are able to fill vacancies is particularly concerning given the statutory responsibilities of special schools. If schools cannot fill vacancies, this not only potentially compromises pupil safety, but it may also mean special schools risk being in breach of their legal responsibilities if they cannot meet pupils' needs.

We are now appointing support staff who we would have been unlikely to interview 18 months ago. – Special senior leader

We are a good school that has historically been easy to attract staff to. There has been a marked decrease in the number of candidates applying for positions and those with the necessary skill sets to meet the needs of the pupils within the school and effectively support high quality teaching and learning. – Mainstream senior leader

There are fewer specialists within our school because they can get better pay and conditions elsewhere. There are fewer TAs because we do not offer good enough pay and conditions. – Special school teacher

[We need] fully funded salary increases for TAs so we can attract and retain quality staff. – Special senior leader

³³ All senior leaders were asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'We are able to recruit TAs with the specialist skills and experience required to meet the needs of our pupils'. 1157 senior leaders gave a response.

In response to recruitment challenges, over three-quarters of schools are changing how TAs are deployed in school

Some 75 per cent of secondary senior leaders, 79 per cent of special senior leaders and 82 per cent of primary senior leaders agree that they have changed how TAs are deployed in schools in response to recruitment pressures (which are in themselves related to cost-of-living pressures). This included using them as staff cover and to carry out more of the school's pastoral work.

We are trying to reduce cover costs and use higher level TAs to cover planning, preparation and assessment and staff absences. – Mainstream senior leader

4.4 Discussion

Schools were already facing significant challenges recruiting and retaining teachers before recent cost-of-living increases (McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023). Our findings demonstrate that cost-of-living pressures have only exacerbated these challenges. Salaries in schools have not remained competitive enough to attract staff, while additional pressures are affecting staff satisfaction and retention. With schools facing considerable challenges in filling roles with staff with comparable skills and experience, this is only amplifying the impacts of cuts and hindering schools' ability to meet pupil need.

A greater focus is also needed across the sector on ensuring that TAs and non-teaching support staff (such as school business managers) are attractive roles. Primary and special schools, in particular, are facing major challenges in recruiting support staff. Our findings highlight that ensuring that schools have the financial headroom to offer competitive salaries, not only to teachers, but to TAs and wider support staff is a key part of the solution.

5 Conclusions

Even before recent cost-of-living increases, schools were already contending with the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on pupil development, well-being, attendance and attainment (Nelson, Lynch and Sharp, 2021; Kuhn *et al.*, 2022; Ofsted, 2022). This is alongside longstanding teacher recruitment and retention pressures (McLean, Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2023) and the financial pressures created by the current demographic decline in primary pupil numbers (DfE, 2023i) .

The findings in this report highlight that cost-of-living pressures, together with existing pressures, are having a profound impact on schools

This is creating a self-perpetuating cycle of negative impacts on their pupils and settings:

1. Increases in the cost of living have amplified the level of pupil well-being, mental health, welfare and financial needs in schools, particularly in special and disadvantaged mainstream schools. This has contributed to increased safeguarding concerns, behavioural incidents and pupil absenteeism.
2. Due to a lack of capacity within and support from external agencies, schools are having to step in to meet these needs and ensure that pupils are still able to engage with learning, whilst simultaneously managing the direct impacts of cost-of-living increases on their settings.
3. Teachers, TAs and support staff are contending with increased pupils needs, reduced resources and less support from external agencies. Their own household budgets are also under increased pressures. This appears to be exacerbating staff retention and recruitment challenges.
4. Cost-of-living pressures are making it more difficult for schools to offer competitive salaries to attract new staff to the sector. Vacancies are unfilled or filled with staff who do not necessarily have comparable skills and experience (Worth, 2023b), exacerbating the pupil need and resourcing pressures outlined above.
5. Together, this means there is reduced capacity for early intervention to address pupil needs and by the time pupils access external services, their needs are more extreme. This means external services are then even less able to meet pupil need, exacerbating the cycle further.

The cost of living has been the last straw on the camel's back for my school. We have been underfunded for many years... You add Covid, Brexit... and it is all impacting on our already vulnerable families and our staff whose job is already very difficult – Special senior leader

Support staff are leaving because they can get higher paid jobs in other sectors. TA vacancies remain unfilled due to lack of suitable applicants. Lack of TAs impacts on teacher workload and teacher well-being. SEND children are increasingly more complex, so need more support. It feels like a vicious cycle – Mainstream senior leader

Many mainstream and special schools are currently providing urgent support to pupils and their households

While this may go beyond schools' statutory duties, pupils whose most basic needs are not being met – whether it is going to school hungry or being unable to afford the costs of transport – are less likely to attend school and successfully engage with learning. Schools are being faced with little choice but to provide additional support to pupils and their households to ensure their pupils can continue to engage with learning.

Our findings also highlight that many of the pupils who are in need of additional support do not currently attract any additional funding for their schools. This suggests that the criteria for being eligible for the free school meals needs to be reviewed.

Recommendation 1: The Government should extend the current eligibility for free school meals. At the absolute minimum, this should involve uprating the income threshold for eligibility to reflect inflationary pressures since 2018/19.

Looking to the future, these challenges cannot be fixed by schools working in isolation

A lack of suitable wider support services and social support is leading to schools needing to step in to fill this void. With living standards set to remain lower for years to come (as outlined in Chapter 1), a system-wide solution which goes beyond schools is clearly needed to address these challenges.

In the short term, pupils and their families are still likely to require urgent support as cost-of-living pressures continue. Unless other support is provided, schools will face little choice but to continue to step in to ensure their pupils can engage with learning. Action is also needed to look at how families can be better supported (e.g., via the benefits system) through the current pressures.

Recommendation 2: In the short-term, schools need greater financial support to address pupils' pressing well-being and welfare needs, alongside meeting the additional direct costs (e.g., energy and school meal costs) associated with the increased cost of living.

Recommendation 3: In the medium term, ensuring increased capacity and responsiveness of children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) and other services around families is needed to ensure that pupils can access the appropriate support and specialist services in a timely manner, rather than schools having to step in to fill those gaps in support.

Cost-of-living pressures are affecting schools’ core teaching and pastoral provision. This is only likely to widen longstanding attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers

Our findings highlight that most schools have not been able to meet increased cost of living costs purely via financial reserves. Schools are having to make cuts, not only to extra-curricular provision, targeted learning support (such as tutoring) and overheads, but to their core teaching and learning provision. In special schools, core specialist support has also been reduced. Schools are expecting their financial situations to worsen over the coming year and for further cuts to be necessary. While both pupil need and teaching and learning appear to be most affected in disadvantaged schools, our findings highlight that all types of schools have been impacted by cost-of-living pressures.

This is likely to impact pupil attainment outcomes in both the short and longer term. Together with the additional pressures faced by disadvantaged pupils’ due to recent cost-of-living increases, this is only likely to lead to a widening of the gap in attainment outcomes achieved between disadvantaged pupils and their more advantaged peers.

Our findings highlight that cost-of-living pressures have exacerbated existing challenges faced by both mainstream and special schools in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. This means that some of the most vulnerable pupils in the schools’ system are not being adequately supported and have lost core parts of the support they need to maximise their development, independence and quality of life. It also risks interventions and actions not being taken in a timely manner, all of which can lead to pupils having deeper and more complex needs, requiring greater levels of support in the longer-term.

Recommendation 4: While the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan already sets out next steps for improving provision for pupils with additional needs, it should be prioritised and accelerated to ensure that schools and pupils get access to the urgent help they require as soon as possible.

Recruitment and retention challenges among teachers, TAs and support staff are only compounding the situation

Recruitment and retention challenges have also been exacerbated by recent cost-of-living increases as salaries in schools have not remained competitive enough to attract staff and additional pressures have affected staff retention. This is amplifying the impacts of cuts and hindering schools’ ability to meet pupil need.

A greater focus is needed across the sector on ensuring that TAs and non-teaching support staff (such as school business managers) are attractive roles, such that schools can compete for potential applicants with other similar professions and roles. Our findings highlight that ensuring that schools have the financial headroom to offer competitive salaries is a key part of the solution.

Recommendation 5: The Government should prioritise the refresh of the teacher recruitment and retention strategy and extend its scope. A wider education workforce strategy is needed that has a long-term focus, and includes teaching assistants, school support staff and tutors as well as teachers and leaders. For wider support staff, this should include looking at whether pay is competitive enough to attract and retain sufficient high-quality staff.

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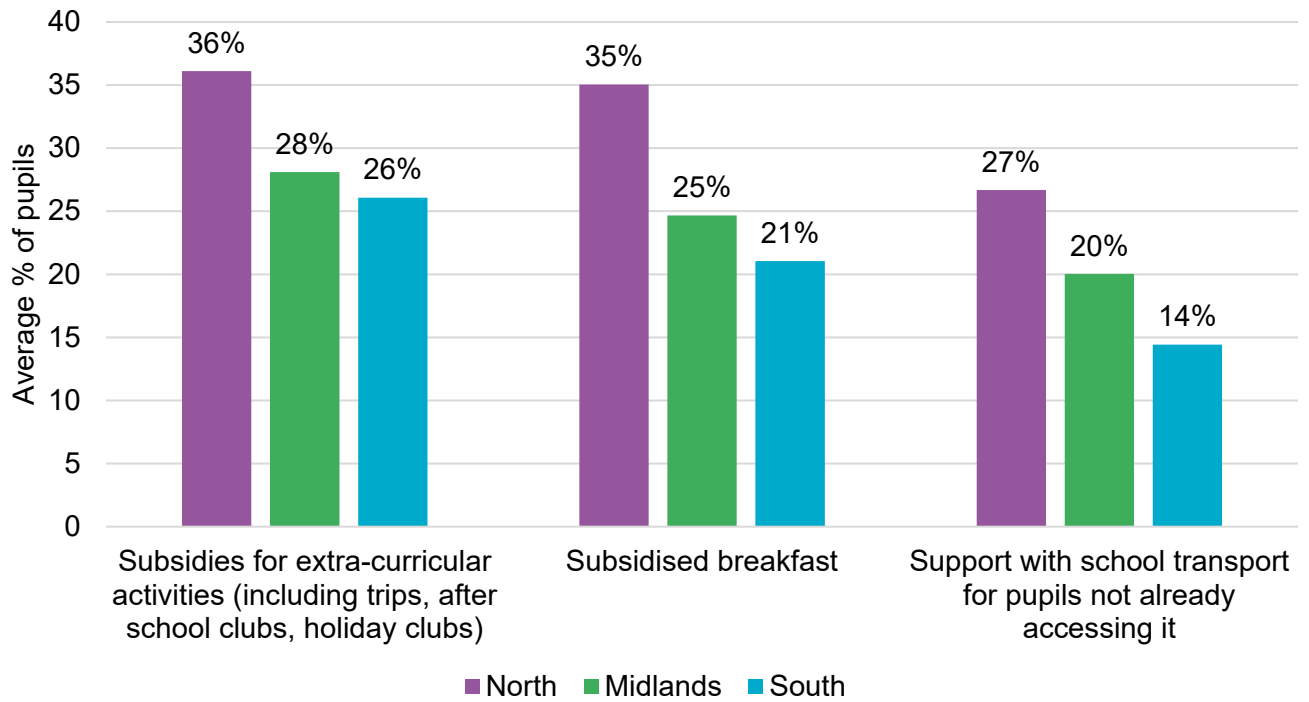
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Appendix A: Additional figures

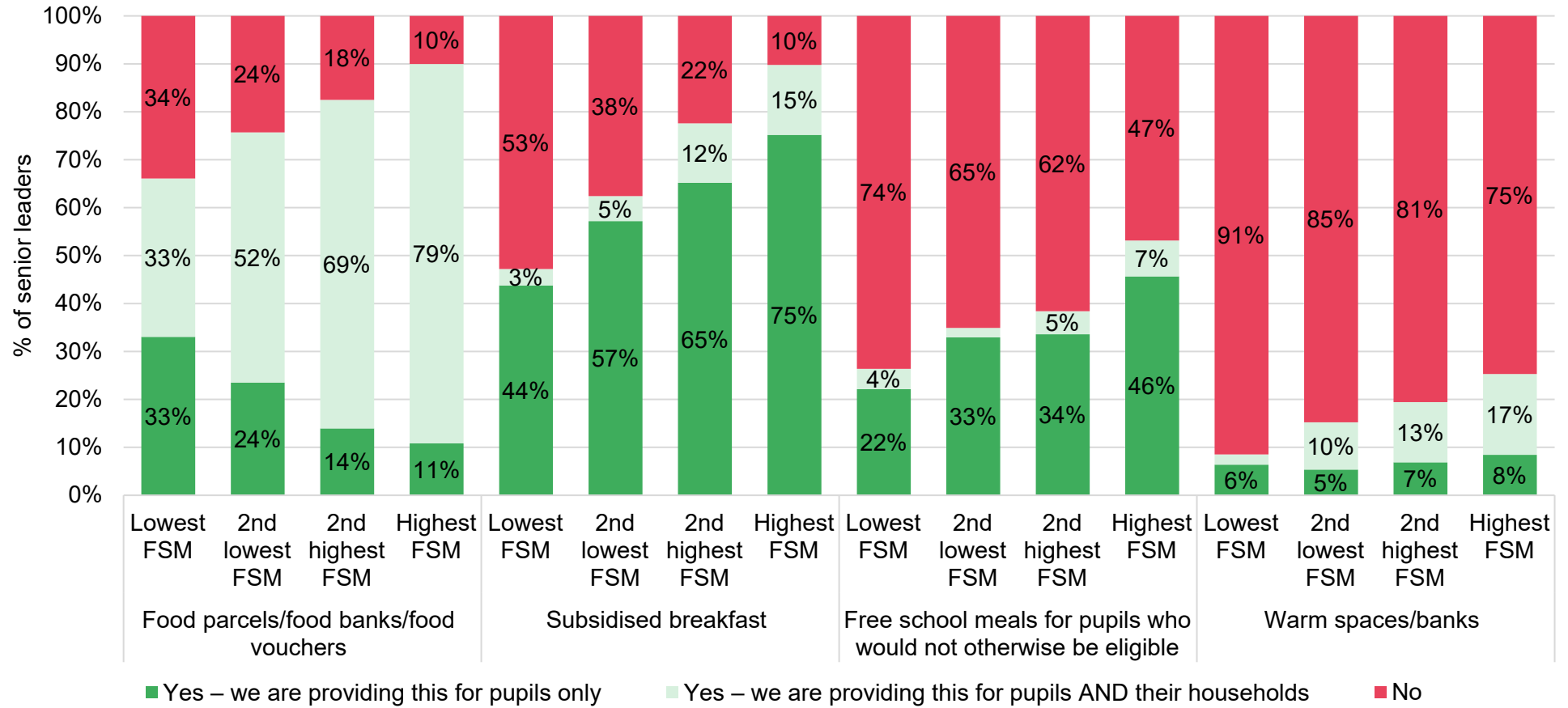
Figure 42 Average percentage of pupils currently taking up support by region

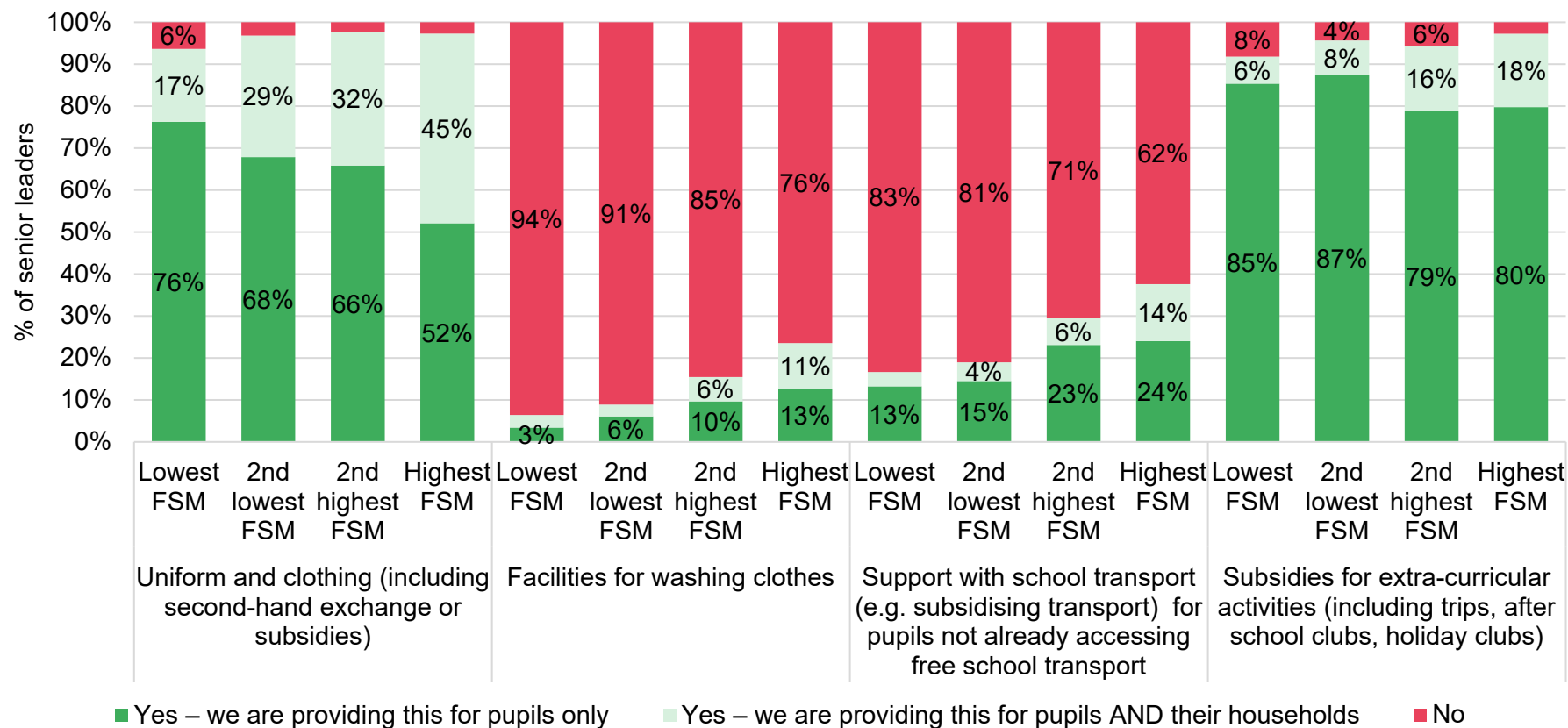


Note: 'North' includes North West, North East and Yorkshire; 'Midlands' includes West Midlands, East Midlands and East of England; and 'South' includes London, South West and South East.

Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given was 404

Figure 43 Percentage of primary schools currently supporting or providing services to pupils and households by school disadvantage





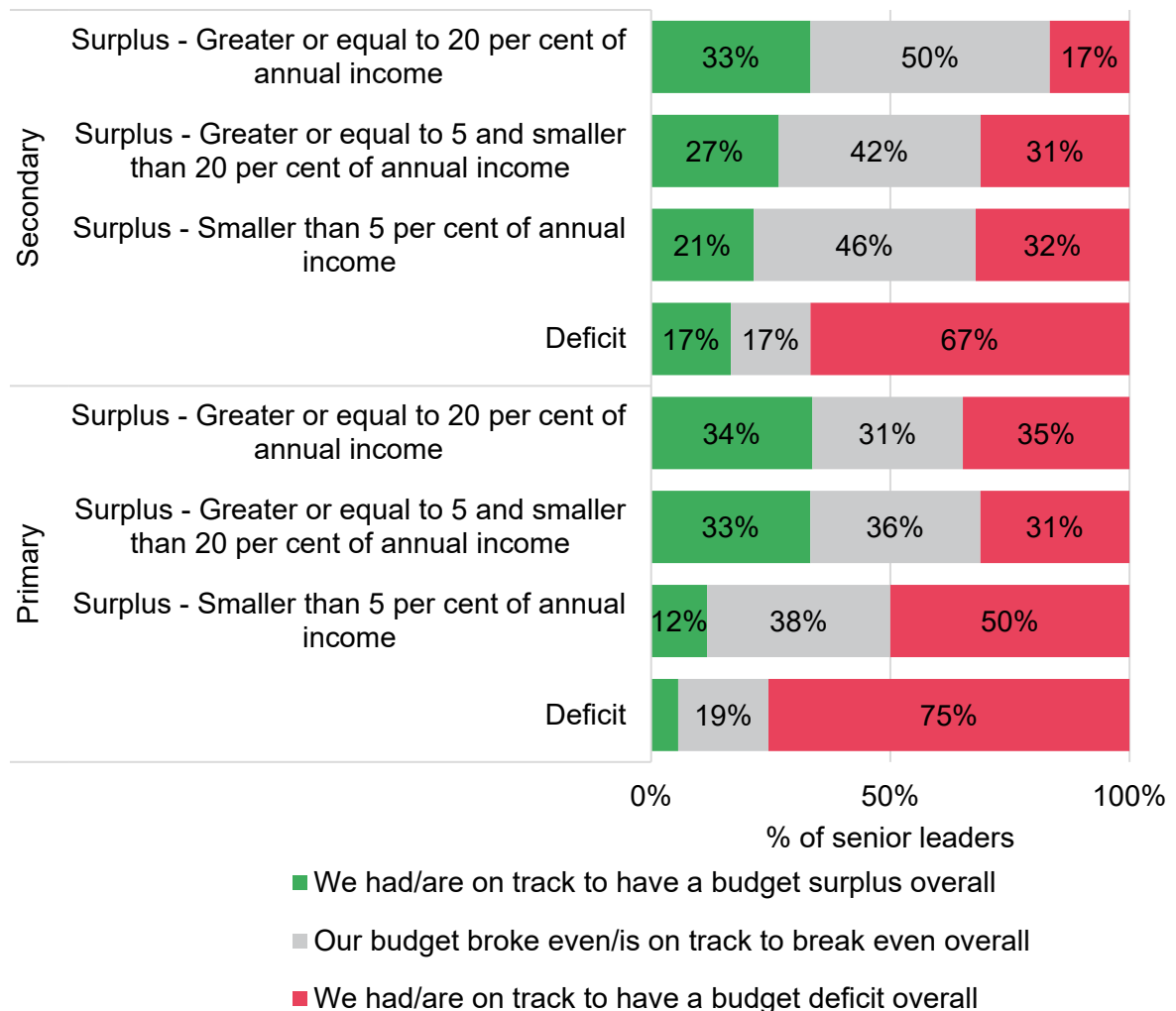
Note: Due to rounding errors, figures may not match breakdowns presented elsewhere
 Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: the minimum number of responses given was 1269

A note on school budget deficits

We find that it is largely the schools already in deficit or without large reserves in 2021/22 who report running a budget deficit in 2022/23. This is shown in Figure 44 below which presents the level of budget surplus/deficit in 2021/22 against the overall budget position in 2022/23.

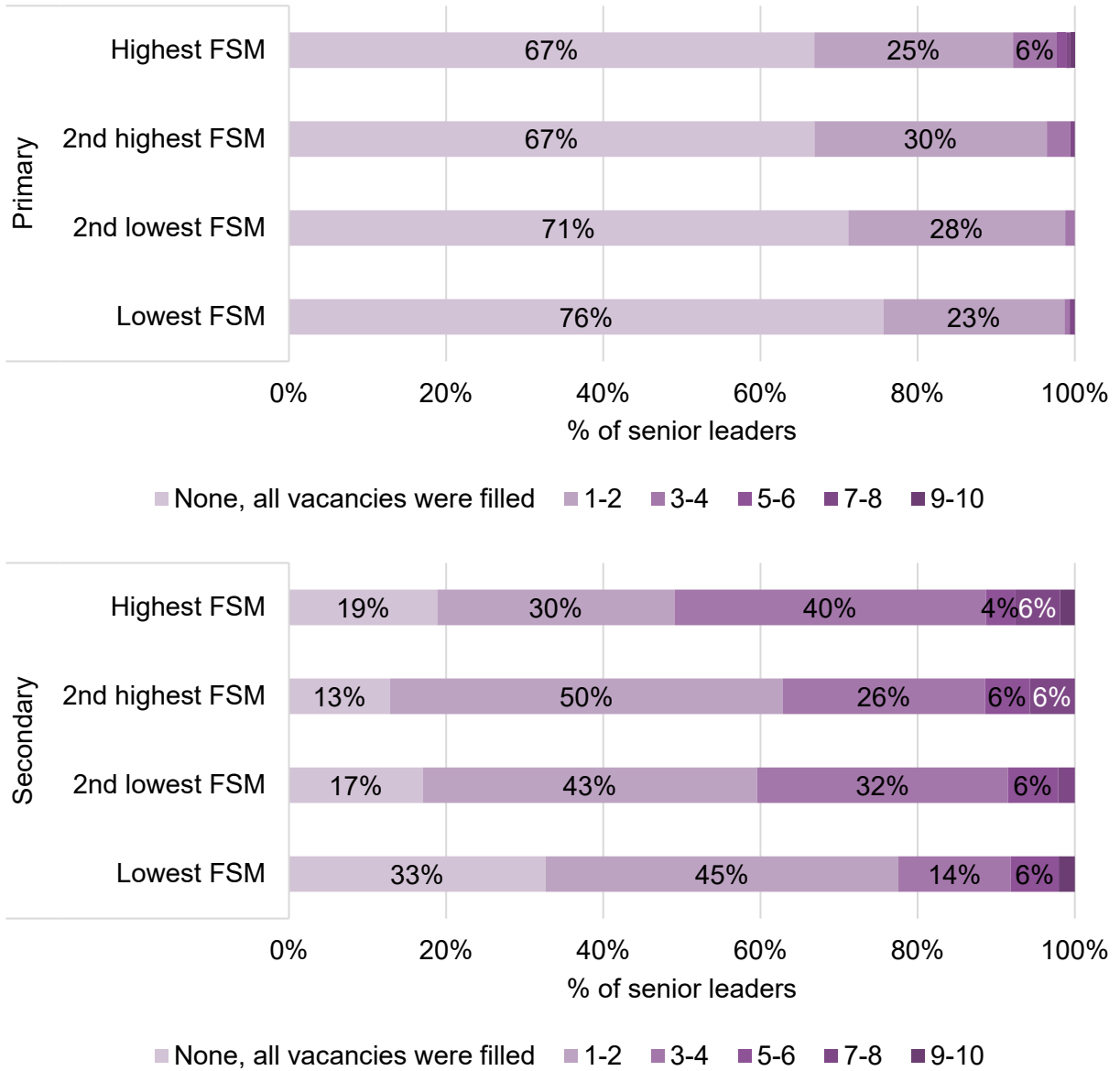
Schools with large financial reserves are much less likely to report having a deficit in 2022/23, albeit a small number do. While it is surprising that the financial positions of these schools could have changed so considerably over the course of the last year, these represent a small share of the schools reporting an overall deficit in 2022/23.

Figure 44 Overall budget status by the end of the 2022/23 financial year by budget status in 2021/22



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 1069 gave a response and had financial data which could be matched for 2021/22

Figure 45 The number of teaching posts schools were recruiting that remained unfilled for a period of two months or more during the current academic year



Source: NFER survey of 1441 senior leaders: 880 gave at least one response

Appendix B: Methodological approach for descriptive analysis

Linking to administrative data sources

Our survey data was linked to a range of administrative data sources. The Department for Education's (DfE's) [Get Information About Schools](#) (GIAS) data was used to identify school-level characteristics such as type of school, geographical information (Department for Education, 2022). Historical school finance information was drawn from the School Benchmarking Service data (Schools financial benchmarking, 2023) and local authority (LA) high needs funding information was drawn from the planned school and LA funding publication (DfE, 2022a).

A note on derived variables

We created free school meals (FSM) quartiles by identifying the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM in the population of mainstream and special schools respectively, split by phase (primary and secondary, with all-through schools treated as secondary). Based on this, we then split schools into four evenly sized groups known as quartiles by phase and school type.

Quartiles are used in presenting descriptive analysis, rather than quintiles for ease of presentation. Quintiles are used in the regression modelling (see below).

We created the overall region variable by grouping Government Office Regions as follows: North (North West, North East and Yorkshire), Midlands (West Midlands, East Midlands and East of England) and South (London, South West and South East).

In order to estimate the number of pupils in need of additional support across different areas, senior leaders were asked selected one of the following ranges: 'over 90 per cent of pupils', 'between 71 and 90 per cent', 'between 51 per cent and 70 per cent', 'between 31 per cent and 50 per cent' and 'less than 10 per cent'. Mid-points were used to estimate an average across senior leaders currently (as of April 2023) and compared to the same point last year.

In order to estimate the proportion of pupils coming into school hungry, without adequate clothing and without adequate materials, teachers were asked to provide the number of pupils in their class (primary/special schools) or year group/house³⁴ (secondary schools) who fit into these categories. The proportions of class/year/house groups were calculated using teachers' reported total number of pupils in their class/year/house group.

A note on sample weighting for mainstream schools

For mainstream schools, we created a variable that identifies whether a school is a primary or secondary school (with all-through schools treated as secondary) and its quintile level of FSM eligibility. This created a 12-category variable of phase and quintile, including two missing categories. We compared the distribution of the responding schools to the population distribution and used a chi square test for independence to determine if weighting was required. Weights were then constructed to ensure that the sample was representative across both phase and free school meal quintiles.

³⁴ Secondary teachers were only asked to provide a response to this question where they were either a head of year or a head of house.

Representativeness of the special school sample

The special schools sample was not weighted due to the small response rate achieved. Special school responses will best reflect the experiences of a maintained special school with an average level of pupil disadvantage: non-maintained special schools, schools in the North and the most disadvantaged special schools are all under-represented in the data as shown by Table 1 below. Special schools included in the data covered a wide range of SEND specialisms.

Table 1 Characteristics of the special school survey

Category	Population (%)	Sample (%)
Type		
Non-maintained	41	17
Maintained	59	83
Region		
South	40	45
Midlands	31	35
North	28	20
Disadvantaged		
Lowest FSM quintile	20	21
2 nd lowest FSM quintile	20	20
Middle FSM quintile	20	23
2 nd highest FSM quintile	20	22
Highest FSM quintile	20	15

Source: Based on pooled responses from 87 senior leaders and 41 teachers from special schools. Population proportions are based on data from 1756 special schools

Appendix C: Regression methodology

Approach

We estimated five statistical models to provide more detailed insights into the drivers and determinants of cost-of-living pressures to address the following research questions:

1. Which factors are most closely associated with schools reducing spending in order to accommodate the cost of providing cost of living support to pupils and their households?
2. Which factors are most closely associated with schools agreeing that the increased cost of living has negatively impacted on the quality of teaching and learning provision in school?
3. Which factors are most closely associated with schools feeling able to meet pupils additional needs?
4. Which factors are most closely associated with schools facing difficulties in recruiting teachers?
5. Which factors are most closely associated with schools facing difficulties in recruiting teaching assistants (TAs)?

All statistical models were unweighted and estimated on mainstream senior leader responses only. As all outcome variables were modelled as binary variables, all estimates were derived using a logistic regression approach with marginal effects estimated at means.

All categorical variables were turned into dichotomous variables and, where appropriate, responses were grouped to reduce the set of factors included in the modelling. As there were only small numbers of independent variables with missing observations, these were included in models using dichotomous dummies to avoid sample attrition.

The set of factors included in each model was tailored to the outcome variable of interest, and included school characteristics (i.e., Ofsted rating, school phase, SEN quartile, FSM quintile, region, whether the school was urban or rural, whether the school was an academy), wider factors (i.e., LA high needs fundings) alongside other relevant questions asked as part of the survey.

The set of independent variables for each model was refined using multi-collinearity tests. Where collinearity between variables was identified, the set of variables to be included in the models was refined using a general to specific approach.

Models

Our model findings are presented in Tables 2-7 below. Two tables (a basic and extended model) are presented for the first model, both with and without wider survey variables. This is to reflect the fact that some of the survey variables tested for inclusion are mediators for the impacts of schools characteristics.

Table 2 Basic model related to schools schools feeling the quality of teaching and learning provision being negatively impacted by cost-of-living pressures

Variable		Average Marginal Effect	Standard error	Level of significance
FSM quintile	Lowest - Middle 20%	0.020	0.043	0.653
	Middle 20%	0.049	0.045	0.273
	Middle - Highest 20%	0.142	0.046	0.002**
	Highest 20%	0.099	0.049	0.043*
Phase	Secondary	0.018	0.036	0.623
Region	Midlands	0.039	0.049	0.424
	North	0.070	0.050	0.156
	South	0.026	0.051	0.616
SEN quartile	Lowest - Middle 25%	0.040	0.041	0.338
	Middle - Highest 25%	0.014	0.044	0.752
	Highest 25%	0.085	0.046	0.064

Notes: All marginal effects measured relative to the lowest FSM quintile, primary schools, schools in London, schools in the lowest SEN quartile.

*** denotes significance at 1% level, ** denotes significance at 5% level and * denotes significance at 10% level

Source: Based on a regression analysis conducted on a sample of 1253 responses

Table 3 Extended model related to schools feeling the quality of teaching and learning provision being negatively impacted by cost-of-living pressures

Variable		Average Marginal Effect	Standard error	Level of significance
FSM quintile	Lowest - Middle 20%	-0.019	0.044	0.677
	Middle 20%	0.038	0.047	0.402
	Middle - Highest 20%	0.100	0.050	0.042*
	Highest 20%	0.014	0.056	0.8
Phase	Secondary	-0.012	0.039	0.841
Has your school reduced school spending in any other areas in order to accommodate the cost of any additional support you are currently providing to pupils and their households to help with cost-of-living issues?	Don't know	-0.012	0.063	0.808
	Yes	0.093	0.034	0.008**
Has your school had to reduce school spending in any of the following areas this academic year as a	The number of teaching assistants (or their hours)	0.042	0.033	0.203
	Support for pupils to meet their special educational needs	0.159	0.047	0.001***

Variable		Average Marginal Effect	Standard error	Level of significance
direct result of the cost of living?	The number of teachers (or their hours)	0.057	0.041	0.168
	Spending on targeted learning support (e.g. small group interventions or tutoring)	0.054	0.034	0.118
	Spending on learning resources	0.024	0.032	0.414
How would you describe your overall experience of recruiting each of these groups of staff over the last 12-months? - Teachers	Difficult	0.096	0.043	0.031*
	Easy	-0.060	0.054	0.279
	Not applicable – we have not attempted to recruit staff of this type in the past year	0.053	0.052	0.237
How would you describe your overall experience of recruiting each of these groups of staff over the last 12-months? - Teaching assistants	Difficult	-0.031	0.054	0.563
	Easy	-0.083	0.082	0.308
	Not applicable – we have not attempted to recruit staff of this type in the past year	-0.124	0.067	0.049*
How many pupils in your school currently require additional support in each of the following areas - Financial support to access learning, social and extra-curricular activities (e.g., subsidies for trips or travel, IT access, transport costs, books)	Between 11% and 30%	0.039	0.041	0.382
	Between 31% and 50%	0.032	0.050	0.526
	Between 51% and 70%	0.143	0.082	0.079
	Between 71% and 90%	0.169	0.130	0.189
	Over 90% of pupils	-0.052	0.125	0.674
	Don't know	0.075	0.065	0.26
The increased cost of living has driven an increase in the number of pupils requiring additional support	Agree	0.187	0.049	0***
	Disagree	-0.039	0.077	0.635
	Don't know	0.098	0.142	0.475
Region	Midlands	0.074	0.049	0.138
	North	0.078	0.049	0.126
	South	0.052	0.051	0.316
SEN quartile	Lowest - Middle 25%	0.000	0.042	0.959
	Middle - Highest 25%	0.004	0.044	0.901
	Highest 25%	0.028	0.046	0.52

Notes: All marginal effects measured relative to the lowest FSM quintile, primary schools, schools in London, schools in the lowest SEN quartile. Questions with responses of 'Yes' are compared to a baseline of 'No'. Questions where respondents are asked to select a response are compared to a baseline of not selecting that response. Questions on an agree-disagree scale are compared to a baseline of 'Neither agree nor disagree'. Questions on an easy-difficult scale are compared to a baseline of 'Neither easy nor difficult'.

Questions with responses of 'Between 11% and 30%', 'Between 31% and 50%', 'Between 51% and 70%', 'Between 71% and 90%', 'Over 90% of pupils' are compared to a baseline of 'Under 10%'

*** denotes significance at 1% level, ** denotes significance at 5% level and * denotes significance at 10% level.

Source: Based on a regression analysis conducted on a sample of 1133 responses

Table 4 Extended model related to schools reducing spending in order to accommodate the cost of providing cost of living support to pupils and their households

Variable		Average Marginal Effect	Standard error	Level of significance
FSM quintile	Lowest - Middle 20%	0.045	0.044	0.305
	Middle 20%	0.058	0.045	0.204
	Middle - Highest 20%	0.028	0.048	0.561
	Highest 20%	0.015	0.052	0.776
Phase	Secondary	-0.116	0.038	0.002**
Thinking about the 2022/23 financial year, please choose which of the following statements applies best to describe your in-year budget	Don't Know	-0.064	0.103	0.536
	Negative	0.079	0.032	0.015*
Thinking about 2023/24 financial year, please choose which of the following statements is mostly like to apply to your in-year budget for that year	Don't Know	-0.065	0.095	0.49
	Negative	0.093	0.034	0.007**
How would you describe your overall experience of recruiting teachers over the last 12-months?	Difficult	0.028	0.044	0.523
	Easy	-0.060	0.056	0.29
	Not applicable – we have not attempted to recruit staff of this type in the past year	0.020	0.051	0.692
How would you describe your overall experience of recruiting TAs over the last 12-months?	Difficult	0.093	0.054	0.089
	Easy	0.074	0.081	0.361
	Not applicable – we have not attempted to recruit staff of this type in the past year	-0.016	0.066	0.805
How many pupils in your school currently require additional support in mental health (e.g., anxiety, depression)	Between 11% and 30%	0.093	0.042	0.025*
	Between 31% and 50%	0.128	0.053	0.015*
	Between 51% and 70%	0.217	0.086	0.011*
	Between 71% and 90%	-0.035	0.135	0.798
	Over 90% of pupils	-0.245	0.243	0.313

Variable		Average Marginal Effect	Standard error	Level of significance
	Don't know	0.215	0.224	0.336
How many pupils in your school currently require additional support in physical health (e.g., nutrition, mobility, physiotherapy)	Between 11% and 30%	0.056	0.035	0.115
	Between 31% and 50%	0.096	0.065	0.137
	Between 51% and 70%	0.122	0.100	0.223
	Between 71% and 90%	0.331	0.170	0.051
	Over 90% of pupils	0.507	0.020	0***
	Don't know	-0.171	0.172	0.321
	The increased cost of living has increased the level of need among pupils requiring additional support	Agree	0.174	0.053
Disagree		-0.087	0.079	0.266
Don't Know		-0.058	0.131	0.658
Region	Midlands	-0.020	0.050	0.692
	North	0.028	0.051	0.587
	South	-0.073	0.053	0.167
SEN quartile	Lowest - Middle 25%	-0.035	0.042	0.405
	Middle - Highest 25%	-0.048	0.045	0.289
	Highest 25%	0.003	0.046	0.942

Notes: All marginal effects measured relative to the lowest FSM quintile, primary schools, schools in London, schools in the lowest SEN quartile. Questions with responses of 'Yes' are compared to a baseline of 'No'. Questions where respondents are asked to select a response are compared to a baseline of not selecting that response. Questions on an agree-disagree scale are compared to a baseline of 'Neither agree nor disagree'. Questions on an easy-difficult scale are compared to a baseline of 'Neither easy nor difficult'. Questions with responses of 'Between 11% and 30%', 'Between 31% and 50%', 'Between 51% and 70%', 'Between 71% and 90%', 'Over 90% of pupils' are compared to a baseline of 'Under 10%'. Questions with responses of 'Negative' are compared to a baseline of 'Positive' or 'Break Even'

*** denotes significance at 1% level, ** denotes significance at 5% level and * denotes significance at 10% level.

Source: Based on a regression analysis conducted on a sample of 1072 responses

Table 5 Extended model related to school confidence in their ability to fully meet the needs of all their pupils

Variable		Average Marginal Effect	Standard error	Level of significance
FSM quintile	Lowest - Middle 20%	-0.008	0.043	0.85
	Middle 20%	0.006	0.044	0.895
	Middle - Highest 20%	0.003	0.046	0.94
	Highest 20%	0.020	0.049	0.675
High Needs Funding	Lowest - Middle 20%	0.022	0.044	0.621
	Middle 20%	-0.041	0.046	0.375
	Middle - Highest 20%	0.025	0.043	0.549
	Highest 20%	0.008	0.043	0.851
2021/22 in-year balance	Negative	0.044	0.028	0.115
Phase	Secondary	-0.076	0.039	0.053
At the end 2022/23 financial year, which of the following statements best describes your schools financial situation	Don't Know	-0.118	0.100	0.236
	Negative	0.022	0.033	0.509
Thinking about 2023/24 financial year, please choose which of the following statements is mostly like to apply to your in-year budget for that year	Don't Know	0.022	0.100	0.83
	Negative	0.117	0.033	0***
How would you describe your overall experience of recruiting each of these groups of staff over the last 12-months? - Teachers	Difficult	0.069	0.044	0.121
	Easy	0.011	0.056	0.848
	Not applicable – we have not attempted to recruit staff of this type in the past year	0.081	0.051	0.113
How would you describe your overall experience of recruiting each of these groups of staff over the last 12-months? - Teaching assistants	Difficult	0.089	0.056	0.113
	Easy	0.094	0.079	0.233
	Not applicable – we have not attempted to recruit staff of this type in the past year	-0.057	0.069	0.41
The increased cost of living has increased the level of need among pupils requiring additional support	Agree	0.103	0.054	0.057
	Disagree	0.043	0.079	0.585
	Don't know	-0.098	0.138	0.478
Region	Midlands	-0.045	0.049	0.358
	North	-0.055	0.049	0.26

Variable		Average Marginal Effect	Standard error	Level of significance
	South	0.016	0.050	0.754
2021/22 Financial reserves	Negative	-0.003	0.065	0.963
SEN quartile	Lowest - Middle 25%	0.067	0.042	0.107
	Middle - Highest 25%	0.045	0.045	0.317
	Highest 25%	0.071	0.046	0.126

Notes: All marginal effects measured relative to the lowest FSM quintile, primary schools, schools in London, schools in the lowest SEN quartile. Questions with responses of "Yes" and "Don't know" are compared to a baseline of "No". Questions with responses of "Disagree", "Agree" and "Don't know" are compared to a baseline of "Neither agree nor disagree". Questions with responses of "Easy", "Difficult", "Don't Know" and "Not applicable – we have not attempted to recruit staff of this type in the past year" are compared to a baseline of "Neither easy nor difficult". Questions with responses of "Between 11% and 30%", "Between 31% and 50%", "Between 51% and 70%", "Between 71% and 90%", "Over 90% of pupils", "Don't know" are compared to a baseline of "Under 10%". Questions with responses of "Negative" and "Don't know" are compared to a baseline of "Positive or Break Even".

*** denotes significance at 1% level, ** denotes significance at 5% level and * denotes significance at 10% level.

Source: Based on a regression analysis conducted on a sample of 1072 responses.

Table 6 Extended model related to schools facing difficulty recruiting teachers

Variable	Variable label	Average Marginal Effect	Standard error	Level of significance
Establishment Type	Local authority maintained schools	-0.024	0.033	0.473
FSM quintile	Lowest - Middle 20%	-0.051	0.050	0.304
	Middle 20%	0.028	0.050	0.577
	Middle - Highest 20%	0.064	0.051	0.209
	Highest 20%	0.065	0.056	0.244
Latest Ofsted Rating	Good	0.003	0.049	0.947
	Inadequate	-0.249	0.210	0.236
	Requires improvement	0.146	0.066	0.027*
Phase	Secondary	0.285	0.031	0***
Priority Education Investment Areas (EIA) ³⁵	Yes	-0.015	0.061	0.813
Region	Midlands	-0.112	0.048	0.02*
	North	-0.219	0.051	0***

³⁵ Education investment areas (EIA) are the third of local authorities in England where educational outcomes were weakest based on low performance across key stage 2 and key stage 4 between 2017 and 2019, alongside areas previously identified as requiring additional support (known as opportunity areas) (DfE, 2023a). These areas are receiving additional support from government. In 2022, 24 of these EIAs were identified as priority EIAs and so receive additional funding and support over and above what is provided to all EIAs (DfE, 2023d).

Variable	Variable label	Average Marginal Effect	Standard error	Level of significance
	South	-0.130	0.050	0.009**
SEN quartile	Second 25%	0.005	0.046	0.912
	Third 25%	0.021	0.050	0.675
	Top 25%	0.035	0.050	0.489
Urban or Rural	Urban	-0.003	0.037	0.938

Notes: All marginal effects measured relative to the lowest FSM quintile, primary schools, academies, schools in London, outstanding schools, non-priority EIAs, rural schools and schools in the lowest SEN quartile. A model with interaction terms between region and FSM was also tested, but all factors remained statistically insignificant

*** denotes significance at 1% level, ** denotes significance at 5% level and * denotes significance at 10% level.

Source: Based on a sample of 904 senior leaders. Schools who had not recruited teachers in the last 12-months are excluded

Table 7 Extended model related to schools facing difficulty recruiting teaching assistants

Variable	Variable label	Average Marginal Effect	Standard error	Level of significance
Establishment Type	Local authority maintained schools	0.021	0.027	0.432
FSM quintile	Lowest - Middle 20%	0.006	0.040	0.88
	Middle 20%	0.025	0.040	0.525
	Middle - Highest 20%	0.015	0.043	0.73
	Highest 20%	0.066	0.043	0.123
Latest Ofsted Rating	Good	-0.016	0.037	0.664
	Inadequate	-0.121	0.167	0.469
	Requires improvement	-0.028	0.056	0.613
Phase	Secondary	0.021	0.030	0.487
Priority EIA	Yes	-0.053	0.045	0.237
Region	Midlands	-0.064	0.047	0.173
	North	0.030	0.045	0.505
	South	0.038	0.045	0.401
SEN quartile	Lowest - Middle 25%	0.038	0.036	0.289
	Middle - Highest 25%	0.026	0.040	0.508
	Highest 25%	0.023	0.041	0.584
Urban or Rural	Urban	0.004	0.029	0.894

Notes: All marginal effects measured relative to the lowest FSM quintile, primary schools, schools in London, outstanding schools, academies, non-priority EIAs, rural schools, schools in the lowest SEN quartile. A model with interaction terms between region and FSM was also tested, but all factors remained statistically insignificant

*** denotes significance at 1% level, ** denotes significance at 5% level and * denotes significance at 10% level.

Source: Based on a sample of 954 senior leaders. Schools who had not recruited TAs in the last 12-months are excluded.

Evidence for excellence in education

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