



National Foundation for  
Educational Research

# Research Digest

Summary of NFER's recent research



Issue 3, June 2025



# About us

At NFER, our mission is to generate evidence and insights that can be used to improve outcomes for future generations everywhere, and to support positive change across education systems.

Our long history, vast experience and pioneering methods have established our reputation as an authoritative, trusted and respected voice in education. Today that reputation is enhanced with an unmatched depth and breadth of specialist education knowledge, talent and methodological expertise.

We use our expertise to produce high-quality, independent, research and insights to inform key decision makers about issues across the education system, including:

- Accountability
- Assessment
- Classroom Practice
- Education to Employment
- Social Mobility
- School Funding
- School Workforce
- Systems and Structures

Our clients include government departments and agencies at international, national and local levels, third sector organisations, private and public companies, employers and other organisations with an interest in education. They all benefit from the full range of our expert and professional services.

As an independent, not-for-profit organisation we invest any surplus funds directly back into our programme of research to address key questions in education and increase our impact and support for policy makers and practitioners.



# Ethnic disparities in entry to teacher training, teacher retention and progression to leadership

*Published June 2025*

This report, funded by Mission44, follows NFER's previous research on racial equality in the teacher workforce to further explore the factors influencing ethnic disparities at three key progression points: entry into initial teacher training (ITT), progression to leadership and retention.

Commissioned by

**MISSION44**

## Key Findings

1. If applicants to postgraduate teacher training from ethnic minority backgrounds were accepted on to training courses at the same rate as their white counterparts, the system would train around 2,000 more teachers per year.
2. If UK-domiciled applicants from all ethnic backgrounds were the same age, had similar socio-economic backgrounds and types of qualifications, and applied to the same providers, the gap in rejection rates between applicants from Asian and white ethnic backgrounds would be 14 percentage points. Similarly, the gap with white counterparts would be 18, six and 18 percentage points for applicants from black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, respectively.
3. Teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds are more likely to intend to apply for promotion than teachers from white ethnic backgrounds.
4. Teachers from a black ethnic background are more likely to consider leaving teaching than their white counterparts.

## Recommendations

For Government:

1. Play a more proactive role in encouraging ITT providers, schools and trusts to adopt more inclusive recruitment practices.
2. Pilot innovative approaches to improving equity in teacher recruitment and promotion processes and rigorously evaluate their impact to build the evidence base.

For school and trust leaders:

3. Develop pathways to actively support ethnically diverse teachers who are interested in promotion, such as coaching, shadowing, or promoting leadership training opportunities.
4. Evaluate selection criteria and processes for promotions and appointments to leadership positions to ensure transparency, inclusivity and equity.

For ITT providers:

5. Provide ongoing professional development and reflection to improve equity in their attraction and selection processes.



# A decade later: Have England's youngest adults closed the international literacy and numeracy skills gap?

***Published April 2025***

The Survey of Adult Skills is part of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) led by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), measuring literacy, numeracy and adaptive problem solving skills in adults aged 16-65.

The results from cycle two of The OECD Survey of Adult Skills were published in 2024.

This compared the results of 16-24 year olds in 2012 with 25-34 year olds in 2023 to understand whether gains are consistent, or if any particular groups have been left behind, and how they compare with international peers.

## Key Findings

1. Young adults in England have made larger skill gains in their post-compulsory education and early careers than young adults in other countries.
2. The skills gap between the highest and lowest achievers has not changed significantly since 2012.
3. The highest performing adults aged 25-34 in 2023 scored 26 points higher on average than the highest performing adults aged 16-24 in 2012 in numeracy skills.
4. In 2012, 26 per cent of the youngest adults had low skills in numeracy. In 2023, this had dropped to 15 per cent in this cohort.
5. Men and women aged 25-34 in 2023 had significantly higher scores in literacy and numeracy than men and women aged 16-24 in 2012.
6. 16-24 year olds in 2012 who grew up with fewer books at home continue to have lower skills aged 25-34 than adults who had more books at home.
7. The gap between adults with the lowest levels of education and those with either upper secondary or tertiary level qualifications is substantial, and their literacy and numeracy skills remain stubbornly low.
8. Adults in the North of England aged 25-34 in 2023 had similar skills to adults aged 16-24 in 2012 in the same region.

**Self-funded by**

# The Skills Imperative 2035: Investigating cross-country differences in young people's skill development and identifying factors associated with high-performance

*Published April 2025*

This report was the seventh working paper published in The Skills Imperative 2035 programme, funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

The report compares the socio-emotional skills of young people in England with those of other countries that participated in the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2022). It also compares young people's skills in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving at age 15/16 to those in other participating countries to identify potential areas that England learn lessons from.

Funded by



## Key Findings

1. The socio-emotional skills of 15/16 year olds in England are significantly weaker than in most other countries in the dataset, and inequalities in these skills are also particularly high in England. If this is left unaddressed, these weaknesses could have consequences for young people's future employability.
2. While the UK has made progress in supporting young people's literacy and numeracy skill development between the age of 15/16 and their early 20s, inequalities in cognitive skills amongst 15/16-year-olds have not seen the same improvement.
3. Inequalities in socio-emotional skills are also worse in England than any of the other 30 countries that gathered this data as part of PISA 2022.
4. While England previously lagged behind in post-16 numeracy and literacy skills, compared to countries participating in the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), significant improvements appear to have been made over the past 10-15 years.

## Recommendations

1. The Government should explore what more it could do to incentivise and support schools to promote the development of children's socio-emotional skills (communication and collaborating with others), as well as related self-management skills (like planning and organisation) and cognitive skills (like problem solving), as critical parts of a good education.
2. The new post-16 skills strategy should be explicit about the Government's overall vision, strategy and plans for post-16 education in England, with clarity about the contribution that each pathway makes to this vision and coherent progression routes within and between pathways.
3. Further research is needed to identify the different configurations of characteristics that are present in high-performing, and improving, education systems.

# Technical Education Learner Survey 2024 Research report

***Published March 2025***

This report described the current activities, career plans and course reflections of the second T Level cohort (2021-2023), surveyed one year after completing their course. A comparator sample of learners on A level and level 3 technical courses were also surveyed.

**Commissioned by**



**Department  
for Education**

**In partnership with**

**National Centre  
for Social Research**

## Key Findings

1. Similar to the first T Level cohort, the most common destinations for the second cohort of T Level completers were a university degree (44%) and paid work (37%), with fewer (12%) undertaking apprenticeships. Almost three-quarters (71%) of learners had remained in their T Level field, and a further 14% intended to return.
2. The minimum 45-day industry placement was the most commonly cited aspect which T Level completers thought had prepared them for their current study and/or work. As seen with the first T Level cohort, industry placements continued to be a significant route to direct employment.
3. Among learners in paid work, T Level completers were more likely to agree that their course prepared them for the workplace (71%) than level 3 technical learners studying equivalent subjects (with differences in agreement rates of between 10 and 15 percentage points across subjects).

## Recommending the course

1. One year after completing their T Levels, about three fifths (62%) of T Level completers were likely to recommend their course to others, while almost a fifth (18%) were unlikely to recommend it.
2. The second cohort of T Level learners were less likely to recommend their course than the first cohort of T Level learners (72% of 2020 T Level completers). This varied substantially by T Level route.
3. Across both cohorts, a high proportion of Education and Early Years learners were likely to recommend the course (82% of 2021 completers, 83% of 2020 completers).
4. The proportion of learners likely to recommend their course was noticeably lower in the second cohort among Digital learners (50% of 2021 completers, 71% of 2020 completers).
5. The proportion had also fallen among Construction learners (from 76% among 2020 starters to 65% among 2021 starters).

# Teacher Labour Market in England 2025

***Published March 2025***

NFER's annual Teacher Labour Market report, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, monitors the progress the education system in England is making towards meeting the teacher supply challenge by measuring the key indicators of teacher supply and working conditions.

Last year, the new Labour Government pledged to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers in key subjects over the course of the five-year parliament. The Government has a significant opportunity at the upcoming Spending Review (June 2025) to secure the resources necessary to deliver this promised improvement in teacher recruitment and retention. Since policy actions take at least a year or two to influence schools' staffing experience, this year is a crucial moment to act if the Government wants to fulfil its pledge by the end of the current parliament.

**Funded by**



## Key Findings

1. Teacher unfilled vacancy levels are at their highest rates since records began in 2010, and June's Spending Review is the Government's last chance to hit its 6,500 new teacher target.
2. Teacher leaving rates have not improved since before the pandemic. More leavers are of working age rather than those retiring.
3. This, coupled with persistently poor recruitment into initial teacher training (ITT), is leading to widespread teacher shortages, with unfilled vacancies reaching six per thousand teachers in 2023/24.
4. Ninety per cent of teachers considering leaving teaching in 2023/24 cited high workload as a factor, and pupil behaviour has become one of the fastest-growing contributors to workload since the pandemic.
5. Trainee recruitment for all, except five, secondary subjects was below the respective target in 2024/25 and NFER's latest forecast for 2025/26 shows only five subjects have reasonable chance of recruiting at or above target.

## Recommendations

1. The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) should recommend that the 2025/26 teacher pay award exceeds three per cent and/ or strongly signal that it intends to make future recommendations exceeding forecast rates of average earnings growth.
2. The Government should supplement pay rises with increases in spending on financial incentives targeting shortage subjects.
3. The Government should develop a teacher workload reduction strategy to improve retention that is fully integrated with the wider policy reform agenda.
4. Schools should consider whether and how generative AI tools such as ChatGPT could help improve teachers' planning workload.
5. The Government should develop a new approach for supporting schools to improve pupil behaviour, reinforced by improved external school support services and backed with additional funding in the Spending Review.
6. School leaders should consider adopting a wider range of flexible working practices in their schools to improve teacher retention.

# Voices from the Classroom - Understanding how secondary schools support students returning from absence

*Published March 2025*

This project aimed to understand what schools with good or improving attendance figures are doing to support students returning to school after absence. It also explored the key factors for a successful return and students' views about the impact and effectiveness of school interventions.

## Key Findings

1. Students value having trusted staff members to talk to when returning from absence, while staff emphasised the importance of tailoring support to individual students' needs.
2. Students in schools that took a supportive yet structured approach—offering recognition for good attendance alongside pastoral support - felt more motivated to come to school.
3. Students in schools that relied primarily on sanctions such as detentions, fines and phone-calls home, were more likely to perceive attendance policies as unfair, particularly when absences were due to circumstances beyond their control.
4. Some schools reported offering rewards, such as prize draws and trips, to encourage and motivate good attendance. However, both staff and students recognised that focusing solely on a perfect attendance record can be problematic.
5. Illness, mental health challenges and term-time holidays were common causes of absence in the participating schools.

## Considerations

For school leaders:

1. **Foster a welcoming and inclusive school environment:** Create an environment that motivates students to attend and fosters a sense of belonging.
2. **Ensure consistency in support provision:** This could involve setting clear, school-wide expectations for staff, ensuring that all teachers consistently provide support for missed lessons, and offering training to help staff deliver appropriate pastoral support.

For policymakers:

3. **Increase funding for attendance and pastoral support:** Providing targeted funding would help schools expand their attendance interventions and offer support to help students thrive.
4. **Champion multiagency working coupled with investment in external mental health and family support services:** Specialist support services can play an important role in addressing the root causes of severe absence.

Self-funded by



# Special Schools Workforce in England

**Published February and March 2025**

Special schools are a vital part of the education landscape in England. In this blog series, NFER looked at the workforce in state-funded schools, teacher vacancy rates and data about teachers with qualified teacher status (QTS). They also sought to understand teacher recruitment and retention in these schools by looking at the dynamics of the teacher workforce over the last five years.

NFER's Senior Economist, Michael Scott, has written two blogs:

1. Exploring the special schools workforce: What's the current picture? (Published late February 2025).
2. Special School Teachers: Where do they come from? Where do they go? (Published early March 2025).

Funded by



## Key Findings

1. State-funded special schools face distinct workforce challenges because of the higher staff to pupil ratio needed. Special schools have around four times more staff on a per-pupil basis than primary or secondary schools.
2. Special schools are vulnerable to funding pressures when the government provides additional funding for pay rises for teachers but does not do the same for pay rises for support staff.
3. Special schools employ teachers without Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) more often than mainstream schools. This suggests special schools are more willing - or need - to use a wider pool of candidates when recruiting teachers.
4. Special schools do not recruit their teaching staff from ITT routes as much as primary and secondary schools, suggesting more could be done within the existing ITT system to improve the flow of trainees into special schools.
5. The current system seems to rely on teachers developing experience with SEND pupils in the mainstream sector before moving to special schools.

## Recommendations

1. Special schools should always be fully funded to increase support staff pay. Funding allocations that only fund pay increases for teachers (and not support staff) will particularly disadvantage special schools and alternative provisions (AP) settings, who spend a higher proportion of their budgets on support staff.
2. Work should be done to understand why around 10 per cent of teachers in special schools do not have QTS, compared to the national average of three per cent, and remedies are implemented where this is driven by shortages in teachers with QTS.
3. DfE should conduct more deliberate workforce planning for special schools (and AP), in line with existing processes for primary and secondary school teachers.
4. There should be an emphasis on SEND in the Early Career Framework and the role nearby special schools can play in helping build up experience across the teacher workforce.

# The Skills Imperative 2035: The implications of research on childhood skills development for addressing future skills needs in England

***Published February 2025***

This report was the sixth working paper published in The Skills Imperative 2035 programme, funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

The research identified the factors that are most predictive of young people's cognitive and behavioural outcomes as they progress through childhood.

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## Key Findings

1. Cognitive and behavioural skills gaps which emerge in early years - if identified and addressed as children progress through education - could support improved labour market outcomes.
2. Inequalities in cognitive and behavioural outcomes in young children become more established and harder to impact as they get older. However, there are significant possibilities to influence young people's outcomes at an older age.
3. Differences in children's material, emotional and educational environments at home influence not just their starting points when they enter school but also their progress through every stage of primary and secondary education.
4. Differences in school performance (based on the average progress pupils make in a school) can compound inequalities in children's cognitive and behavioural outcomes that predate their start at school.

## Recommendations

1. Government should create a clearer narrative linking their growth strategy with their mission to break down barriers to opportunity.
2. All schools, supported by the Government, should explicitly support the development of essential / transferable skills as critical for a good education, and conducive to the activation and application of knowledge. These skills should include socioemotional skills (like communication and collaboration) self-management skills (like planning and organising) and cognitive skills (like problem solving).
3. Researchers, with government support, should incorporate measures of a broader range of socioemotional skills (like communication and collaboration), self-management skills (like planning and organising) and cognitive skills (like problem solving) into cohort and longitudinal data collections and programme and policy interventions.

# ChatGPT in lesson preparation - A Teacher Choices Trial

***Published December 2024***

This report, funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, examined the effect on workload of science teachers using ChatGPT for lesson and resources preparation compared to preparing lessons without using any form of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI).

## Key Findings

1. Teachers using ChatGPT - alongside a guide to support them to use it effectively - can reduce their lesson planning time by 31 per cent. It brought their timing down to 56.2 minutes per week compared to 81.5 minutes.
2. There was no noticeable difference in quality of lesson planning between using GenAI and using no GenAI.
3. Teachers confident in physics and/or technology were more likely to use ChatGPT for lesson planning, while those with high confidence in their science subject knowledge used it less.

## Ways to implement this in schools

- The [ChatGPT guide](#) is available online. This resource provides technical support on getting started on ChatGPT, teacher-led demonstration videos, and example scripts showing the prompts that a user entered. It aims to support teachers to find activity ideas, adapt materials for their pupils and find effective examples and ready-made practice questions and model answers
- Teachers in this trial tended to use ChatGPT for one or two activities rather than across the lesson, most commonly for creating questions/quizzes or finding new ideas for activities.
- Teachers may wish to consider allowing additional time for planning when first using GenAI. In this trial, teachers in the ChatGPT group were given a five-week learning period (weeks 1–5) to familiarise themselves with the ChatGPT guide and practice using ChatGPT to plan lessons, before their planning time for relevant classes was recorded in weeks 6–10.

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# How to recruit 6,500 teachers? Modelling the potential routes to delivering Labour's teacher supply pledge

***Published December 2024***

In 2024, the new Labour Government pledged to recruit 6,500 new teachers in key subjects over the course of the five-year parliament.

This report, funded by the Gatsby Foundation, explores the role of financial policy levers - pay, bursaries and early career retention payments (ECRPs) - as well as non-financial measures, such as workload reduction, in meeting the teacher supply target.

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## Key Findings

1. Achieving the supply target will require new policy measures that are additional to business-as-usual and add to what is already enacted.
2. Many of the current policy measures would not be sufficient to meet the supply target in isolation, unless they were taken to unrealistic extremes.
3. The government would need to increase teacher pay by nearly 10 per cent a year, for three years, to reach the 6,500-teacher target, if using pay as a sole incentive. This would cost the government £7.7 billion per year from 2027/28 to finance.
4. Scenarios with lower costs are those that either rely on cost-effective spending on targeted measures aimed at shortage subjects, particularly bursaries and early-career retention payments (ECRPs), or on non-financial measures such as reducing workload or improving continuing professional development (CPD).

## Recommendations

1. The Government should publish a comprehensive strategy for how it defines and plans to meet the 6,500-teacher supply target, with sufficient funding to deliver it.
2. The Government should invest in deepening the evidence base of interventions that can improve recruitment and retention.

# Evaluation of the early roll-out of the Early Career Framework

***Published October 2024***

The Early Career Framework (ECF) outlines what early career teachers (ECTs) should learn and practice at the start of their careers. It was introduced as part of the Department for Education's (DfE) Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy to improve ECTs' teaching quality, job satisfaction, well-being, and commitment to the profession.

Funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, the evaluation assessed the impact of the ECF early roll-out (ERO) on ECT retention after two years. It also looked at retention after one year, retention within initial schools, and perceptions of teaching quality, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy.

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## Key Findings

1. After two years of induction, ECTs in schools who participated in the ECF ERO were as likely as comparison ECTs to remain in the state-funded sector. While the retention rate of participating ECTs was slightly lower than the retention rate of comparison ECTs, the uncertainty around this estimate suggests the ERO of the ECF had a null effect on retention. These results have a low to moderate security rating.
2. Participating ECTs were more likely to stay in their original induction school after two years of induction compared to the comparison group. This result has a low to moderate security rating. Survey and interview findings suggest that the ECF ERO enabled deeper ECT–mentor relationships, which may have strengthened the bond between ECTs and their schools.
3. Perceived benefits of the ECF ERO included an improvement in ECTs' teaching practice, self-efficacy, confidence, and job satisfaction, as well as mentors' skills and confidence in coaching.

## Recommendation

1. Future research could look to explore the impact on longer-term teacher retention, using longitudinal follow-up data in future School Workforce Census (SWC). Given the longitudinal linkage of the SWC, new waves of data are released each summer, providing ongoing opportunities for exploration. While the national ECF roll-out from 2021 means subsequent cohorts of new teachers have received the intervention, the ERO comparison group cohorts will remain an untreated comparison group.

# An exploratory study of employers' recruitment practices

**Published October 2024**

This report presents the findings of a small-scale study exploring employers' use of qualifications - particularly technical and vocational qualifications - within the recruitment process.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Quantify the proportion of job postings that list qualifications in their adverts and explore how this varies by industry sector.
- Understand employers' motivations and decision-making when hiring to fill vacancies and any barriers to the inclusion of technical and vocational qualifications within their recruitment process.

**Funded by**



## Key Findings

1. Between April 2016 and December 2023, around eight per cent of job adverts referenced a qualification of any kind and less than five per cent referenced a technical or vocational qualification.
2. The employers taking part in the focus groups reported that they typically did not mention qualifications in their job adverts because they were concerned about reducing their applicant pool and did not want to deter applicants without a specified qualification from applying who would otherwise be excellent candidates.
3. Employers typically prioritised looking for evidence of candidates' experience and essential skills during recruitment rather than seeking specific qualifications.
4. The employers who took part in the focus groups had little appetite to increase their use of qualifications in recruitment.

## Quotes from Employers at the Focus Groups



There are certain roles that require young people to have qualifications, and, for other roles, you are looking more at experience or, if it's entry level, you might be willing to take a gamble on someone.



*We do require qualifications, but it's not a showstopper. We can put our engineers on the courses ourselves.*



*If we want somebody to be a project director, we may ask for a project management qualification. It would be desirable. But it depends. If somebody has the experience over a qualification, then we would also consider that.*



*High qualifications don't necessarily mean the better person.*



# Impact of Covid-19-related school closures in Key Stage 1 on attainment and social skills of pupils in Year 4 and Year 5 in academic year 2023/2024

**Published October 2024**

This longitudinal study follows a group of the youngest school-aged children during and since the Covid-19 pandemic to understand the long-term impact of Covid-19 related disruption to schools on pupils' attainment and social skills. This report represents the findings from the fourth year of the study, with pupils in this year's study in Years 4 and 5 (in 2023/24).

The research has been conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), published and funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

**Funded by**



Education  
Endowment  
Foundation

## Key Findings

1. Overall, the Covid-19 gap\* appears to have closed, on average, in both reading and mathematics for the Year 4 and Year 5 pupils in our study.
2. Tracking the same group of pupils each year in the study shows the Covid-gap has reduced across the length of the study from spring 2021 to spring 2024 for both year groups and subjects.
3. However, the disadvantage gap remains wide. For both reading and maths, disadvantaged pupils in Year 4 were on average seven months behind their non-disadvantaged peers. Disadvantaged pupils in Year 5 were, on average, six and seven months behind their peers for reading and mathematics respectively.
4. The most common challenges reported by schools now relate to the longer-term fall out of the Covid pandemic including pupil wellbeing/behaviour, staff workload relating to pupil wellbeing/behaviour, difficulties obtaining external support for pupils, and wider concerns about pupil absence.

## Recommendations

1. Senior leaders should consider which pupils are likely to benefit from regular tutoring and concentrate the tutoring hours they are able to offer on a smaller number of pupils.
2. The Department for Education (DfE) should seek to further build the evidence base around how to optimise the delivery of tutoring to maximise impact.
3. If there is going to be continued funding for tutoring, consideration should be given to focussing it on maths and English in primary school.
4. DfE should consider alternative approaches to closing the socio-economic attainment gap.

**\*Covid-19 gap:** The difference between the mean scores of pupils in the 2023/2024 academic year and those of pre-pandemic samples

# National Pupil Projections

**Published September 2024**

The Department for Education (DfE) has recently revised its national pupil projections. The number of pupils in a school is very important as this impacts the amount of funding it receives, as well as the shape of the school system. The new projections now forecast a less dramatic decline in state primary pupil numbers than previously anticipated.

NFER has written a series of three blogs:

1. “Just a little drop?” - Pupil numbers are falling slower than previous expectations. (Published early September 2024).
2. What happens when pupil numbers fall? (Published late September 2024).
3. Fewer pupils, more unfilled places, increasing deficits: What can be done? (Published early October 2024).

Self-funded by



## Key Findings

1. The number of pupils in state schools is set to start falling slowly. Primary pupil numbers are falling slowly, and the Department for Education (DfE) expects this to continue. Secondary numbers have increased sharply since 2019, but DfE's latest projections indicate this growth will stop soon.
2. Schools affected by falling rolls are likely to reduce the number of classes and their workforce if they can, but this will often be challenging for schools. Furthermore, these trends will affect individual schools differently, which is why NFER is calling on the DfE to provide its predictions at a local level in future.
3. London has experienced large falls, which has had a disproportionate impact on the percentage fall in primary pupil numbers. Indeed, primary school pupil numbers have fallen by about 50,000 in London alone, compared to 70,000 nationally.
4. In the data on class sizes, national state primary pupil numbers have fallen by 3.7 per cent between 2017/18 and 2023/24. Over the same period, the number of classes have fallen by 2 per cent. As a result, the average class size has fallen from 27.1 pupils per class to 26.6 (1.5 per cent).

## Recommendations

1. There is significant uncertainty regarding pupil numbers which means that clear communication and insights from DfE will be particularly important. To support this, DfE should publish different scenarios when they release pupil projections.
2. Where practical, schools with falling rolls can reduce their costs by sharing staff and office functions.
3. School leaders could set up an informal partnership with neighbouring schools and the local authorities (LAs) to cap new admissions in certain year groups.
4. Government should change admission arrangements to help ensure a level playing field for schools.
5. Government can increase per-pupil funding faster than inflation, which would reduce the financial blow of falling numbers.

# National Tutoring Programme Year 3: Impact Evaluation

***Published September 2024***

The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) was introduced in the 2020-21 academic year and aimed to support socio-economically disadvantaged pupils to recover lost learning and help close the attainment gap for these pupils. With the immediate aftermath of the pandemic over, the focus of the NTP later shifted towards tackling the persistent socio-economic attainment gap.

This report summarises the findings from research undertaken for the Department for Education (DfE) to evaluate the impact of the third year of the NTP on English and maths outcomes for pupils in Key Stages 2 and 4.

## Key Findings

### *For Key Stage 2*

1. Participation in the NTP was associated with small improvements in English and maths outcomes.
2. Improvements in maths were larger and more consistent than in English.
3. Maths improvements related to school-led tutoring in maths were still detectable one year later.
4. All these improvements equated to one months' additional progress or less.

### *For Key Stage 4*

5. There was more limited evidence that the NTP may be associated with very small improvements in English and maths outcomes.
6. These improvements equated to less than one month's additional progress.
7. There was no evidence of sustained improvements in either maths or English.
8. Due to limitations with the analysis, the true impact of the NTP is likely to be greater than these results suggest.

## Recommendations

1. Senior leaders should consider which pupils are likely to benefit from regular tutoring and concentrate the tutoring hours they are able to offer on a smaller number of pupils. An optimum number of hours for greatest impact within a limited budget is likely to lie above 20 hours per pupil.
2. DfE should seek to further build the evidence base around how to optimise the delivery of tutoring to maximise impact. This includes understanding the optimum tutoring dosage, session duration, frequency, mode of delivery (online versus in person), how best to align sessions with the school curriculum and time of delivery (during the school day or outside of normal teaching hours).
3. If there is going to be continued funding for tutoring, consideration should be given to focussing it on maths and English in primary school. Evidence for the impact of primary maths tuition was strong in this evaluation (including a sustained impact), while previous evidence suggests strong benefits of English tuition in this age group.

**Funded by**



**Department  
for Education**



# Factors influencing primary and secondary pupils' educational outcomes

***Published September 2024***

These reports present the findings of rapid literature reviews that aimed to support the Department for Education (DfE) Education and Outcomes Panel Studies (EOPS) by identifying the range of factors known to affect the attainment outcomes of primary and secondary pupils.

The reviews were led by NFER in partnership with NatCen Social Research and the National Children's Bureau.

In partnership with



## Primary School Key Findings

1. There is a positive association between attainment and children's cognitive capabilities (such as reasoning, problem-solving, attention, memory and language skills).
2. There is a negative association between attainment outcomes and children's mental health problems (including depression).
3. Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have lower average scores in educational attainment compared to their peers and are more likely to be excluded from school.
4. Those who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) were generally more likely to have received support for SEND and have poorer educational attainment at both key stage 1 and 2 compared to their peers.
5. Children living in a family with a low income, low parental education, parental worklessness and poor housing are at risk of lower attainment.

## Secondary School Key Findings

1. There is a positive association between attainment and pupils' non-cognitive capabilities, especially conscientiousness, motivation, self-perception of abilities and social-emotional skills.
2. There is a negative association between pupils' attainment and presence of mental health problems (such as depression and hyperactivity disorder).
3. Pupils with SEND are much less likely to achieve the same grades as their peers or to register for advance qualifications.
4. Young people living in a family with a low income, low parental education and those living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are more likely to be at risk of lower attainment.
5. Parenting styles characterised as positive, involved and harmonious were shown to improve academic attainment.

# Building a stronger FE college workforce: How improving pay and working conditions can help support FE college teacher supply

***Published September 2024***

Further education (FE) is key to delivering technical and academic qualifications to post-16 students and adult learners in England but has recently been facing significant challenges, including critical staff shortages in some subject areas.

This mixed-method research investigated some of the key barriers FE colleges face in recruiting and retaining staff in three subject areas: Construction, Engineering and Digital.

**Commissioned by**



## Key Findings

1. The combination of skills shortages within Construction, Engineering and Digital and the pay differential with both industry and other education roles places FE at a disadvantage for both recruitment and retention.
2. The financial responsibilities of younger workers mean they are generally less able to take the pay cut to move from industry into FE, driving an ageing workforce.
3. FE salary bands are narrow, limiting opportunities for pay progression – particularly where unqualified teachers are recruited straight from industry at the top of the band to reduce the pay gap.
4. Offering higher pay to support recruitment feeds poor retention by creating pay inequalities that lower staff morale.
5. FE teachers consider their workload to be excessive and inappropriately centred on unfulfilling administrative work.

## Recommendations

1. Government should continue to increase funding to the FE sector to help colleges, at a minimum, match FE teacher pay with that of school teachers.
2. Colleges should consider how they can help recruit and retain more teaching staff from industry, by improving onboarding procedures for new staff and by better promoting the positive lifestyle benefits of the role to potential recruits.
3. Government should devise a long-term evidence-based strategy and concrete resources to help reduce FE teacher workload, similar to what exists for schools. This strategy should be informed by further research on how improving working conditions can help support FE teacher supply, including by collecting qualitative and quantitative data on teacher workload.
4. Government should continue to support improvements to future waves of data relating to post-16 providers.



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