A Summary for Schools
Teacher Retention

What factors encourage teachers to stay in the profession?

Teacher retention remains an important focus for education policy with ongoing challenges in making sure there are enough teachers, particularly in core subjects in secondary schools.

> Recent NFER research shows that while increasing teacher pay is one way to improve retention, there are lots of ways that school leaders can contribute to improving teachers' working conditions and retention. This could include providing teachers with more opportunities to participate in whole-school decisions, using time-saving tools in planning tasks to relieve workload pressures and making dealing with disruptive pupil behaviour a top school priority. These approaches could be particularly important given the budget pressures facing schools and Government.
>
> **Jack Worth, Education Workforce Lead, NFER**

A key Government objective is to recruit *'an additional 6,500 new expert teachers across secondary and special schools, and in our colleges, over the course of this Parliament'* (UK Parliament 2025).

The proportion of teachers leaving the state-funded sector in England has improved slightly over the last decade, but remains high, having fallen from 10.6% in 2016/17 to 9.0% in 2023/24 (DfE, 2024a). That equates to around 40,000 teachers per year leaving the sector, who need to be replaced by newly qualified and returning teachers to maintain supply.

Our report published in February 2026, which used data from the Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders survey, revealed important insights about some of the key factors linked to teachers' decisions to leave the profession. While correlations have been interpreted with appropriate caution, this research revealed patterns and findings that are backed up by other evidence to offer a useful guide for informing policy development and supporting decision-making in schools. This Research Bite distils the key findings relevant to school and trust leaders, to save you valuable time.

> Even small improvements in retention can have an impact on costs, leaders' time spent on recruitment and disruption for pupils. Improving teacher supply, particularly in secondary schools where recruitment and retention challenges are most prevalent, can ensure pupils receive the high-quality education they deserve.
>
> **Jack Worth, Education Workforce Lead, NFER**

What are the key factors linked to teachers' decisions to leave the profession?

Job satisfaction and wellbeing are closely linked to whether teachers stay in the profession, but they can mask other factors affecting retention rates. The analysis suggests that other factors, explored below, also have an indirect influence on teachers' considerations about leaving.

School Leadership

- Teachers are more likely to stay when they feel valued and supported by school leaders.

- Feeling involved in decision-making and having access to flexible working are linked to better retention.

- A strong sense of involvement, engagement and professional autonomy plays a key role.

- School leaders have a critical role in creating an environment where staff feel supported.

Pupil Behaviour

- Teachers feeling they spend too much time on behaviour and pastoral support are significant factors affecting retention.

- Teachers are more likely to stay in schools where pupil behaviour is well managed.

- Teachers' perceptions of pupil behaviour have worsened since 2021/22.

- More teachers report spending too much time dealing with behaviour incidents.

Improving retention matters both for delivering the Government goal of recruiting an additional 6,500 teachers and for teacher sufficiency because, all else equal, more teachers retained leads to fewer vacancies, an increase in workforce size and lower ITT recruitment targets. Reducing the teacher leaving rate by one percentage point per year would lead to a 26% reduction in the ITT targets.

Teacher Pay

- Higher pay satisfaction is linked to better retention.

- Teacher pay growth has fallen behind pay growth in the wider labour market, particularly for experienced teachers.

- This has reduced the competitiveness of teachers' pay and affected both recruitment and retention.

- NFER regularly gives evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body and Government on the impact teacher pay can have on recruitment and retention.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

- Teachers are more likely to stay when CPD has a clear, positive impact on their practice.

- CPD is likely to be most effective when it aligns with a teacher's own priorities.

- Giving teachers more input into their CPD could improve both its impact and teacher retention.
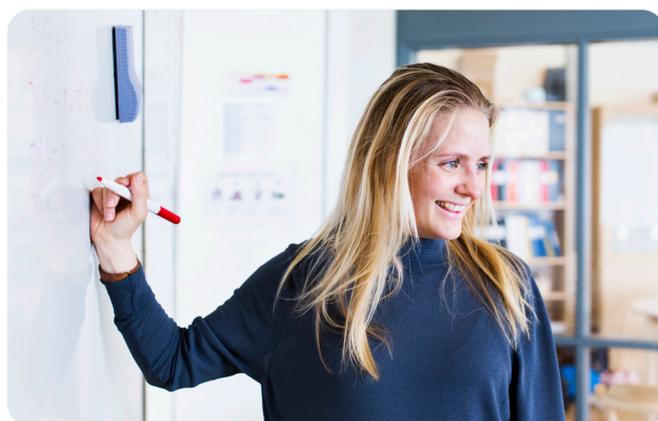
An NFER study found that using ChatGPT helped science teachers save time on lesson planning, with no evidence of negative impacts on the quality of materials or teachers' sense of autonomy or creativity.

Lesson Planning Workload

- Teachers feeling they spend too much time on lesson planning is linked to lower retention.

- Leaders should think carefully about setting proportionate expectations for teachers' planning.

- Shared resources and collaborative planning can help reduce workload.

- Evidence suggests AI tools (such as ChatGPT) can save time on planning without reducing quality, if used carefully.

What actions could be taken to further improve teacher retention?

We have recommended that Government could:

- ensure the National Professional Qualification (NPQ) suite for middle leaders, senior leaders, headteachers and executive leaders adequately covers people management and relational leadership skills.

- further develop its approach for supporting schools to improve pupil behaviour and meet pupils' additional pastoral and learning needs, reinforced by improved external school support services and backed with additional funding.

- aim to sustain levels of pay satisfaction by at least maintaining the competitiveness of teachers' pay each year (i.e. matching the growth in average earnings outside teaching) and funding schools to deliver it.

- produce guidance around the Standards for Teachers' Professional Development to emphasise how teachers can be given greater involvement in setting their CPD goals and activities.

School & trust leaders could:

- explore how teachers can be meaningfully involved and engaged in setting the school's priorities and making important decisions.

- review their school's behaviour policies and consider how best to support teachers with an increase in pupils' behaviour and pastoral care needs.

- include teachers in decisions about their CPD and ongoing career progression.

- consider whether and how generative AI tools such as ChatGPT could help improve their teachers' planning workload, for example using DfE's guidance on generative AI in education or the Teaching with ChatGPT resources.

To see the full set of actions NFER are recommending to policymakers, please see the main report in the publications section of our website.

Teacher retention requires a strategic mix of approaches. Teachers' perceptions of workload, disruptive pupil behaviour, support for children's additional needs, and teachers' sense of influence over their work are strongly associated with leaving the profession. Policymakers and school and trust leaders could support small improvements across these areas to have a positive impact on teacher supply and improve pupil outcomes.

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