

A Summary for Schools

The School Teacher & Support Staff Workforce in England 2026



This Research Bite summarises the key trends in teacher and support staff workforces. It explores findings about **staff numbers, recruitment, retention, pay and working conditions**, as identified in NFER's annual reports. It also suggests actions schools could consider and shares the recommendations we have made to policymakers.

Some positive news for teachers

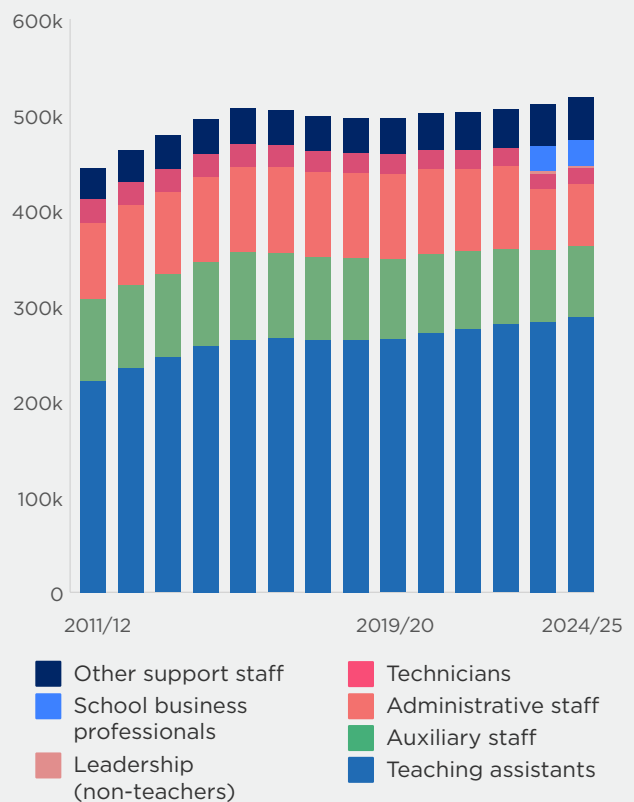
This year's annual report on teachers, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, provides a happier impression than previous years; teacher retention shows significant signs of improvement, teachers' working hours have fallen slightly and teachers are more positive about their workload than four years ago. However, it is worth noting that the progress we show here is only partial and could easily be reversed in the coming years.

Support staff: a growing part of the workforce

Support staff make up more than half of the school workforce in England yet, compared to teachers, relatively little research has been done into the labour force dynamics of this diverse group.

The support staff workforce has been growing in England, driven by an increase in the number of teaching assistants.

Support staff (FTE) in state funded schools in England, by role



Source: SWC (2011/12-2D24/25). Two new categories introduced in 2023/24 means caution should be used when comparing with previous data.

NFER is seeking to address this research gap with a series of annual reports looking at the school support staff workforce.

What were the key findings in the teacher and support staff workforce reports 2026?

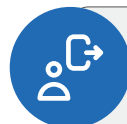


Teachers

The teacher workforce shows some encouraging signs of improvement, although some challenges remain.

- Teacher numbers are increasing in secondary and special schools but are decreasing in primary schools due to falling pupil numbers.
- Recruitment to initial teacher training (ITT) is expected to improve significantly in 2026/27 compared to previous years, despite some cuts to bursaries.

- Teacher retention has improved over the past two years and exit rates for first year early career teachers were the lowest on record.

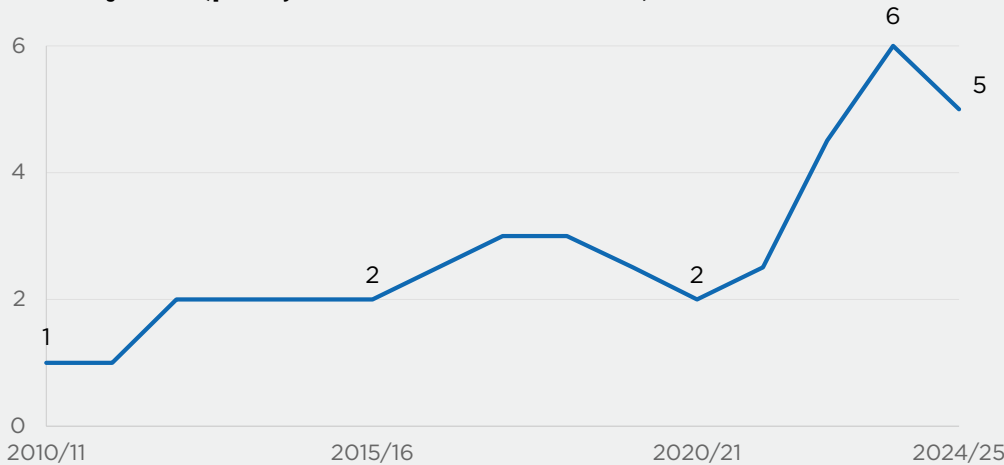


9% of teachers

left the state school system between 23/24 and 24/25 – a slight improvement on 10.6% recorded a decade before.

- Unfilled vacancies and recruitment difficulties remain high but have eased slightly since 2023, as shown here:

Vacancy rate (per 1,000 teachers in service)



Source: School Workforce in England.

- Recent teacher pay increases have slightly reduced the gap with average earnings in the wider job market, but teacher pay is still less competitive than in 2010/11.



In 2025/26

experienced teachers' pay remains around 8.5% lower than in 2010/11 in real terms, while starting salaries have caught back up.

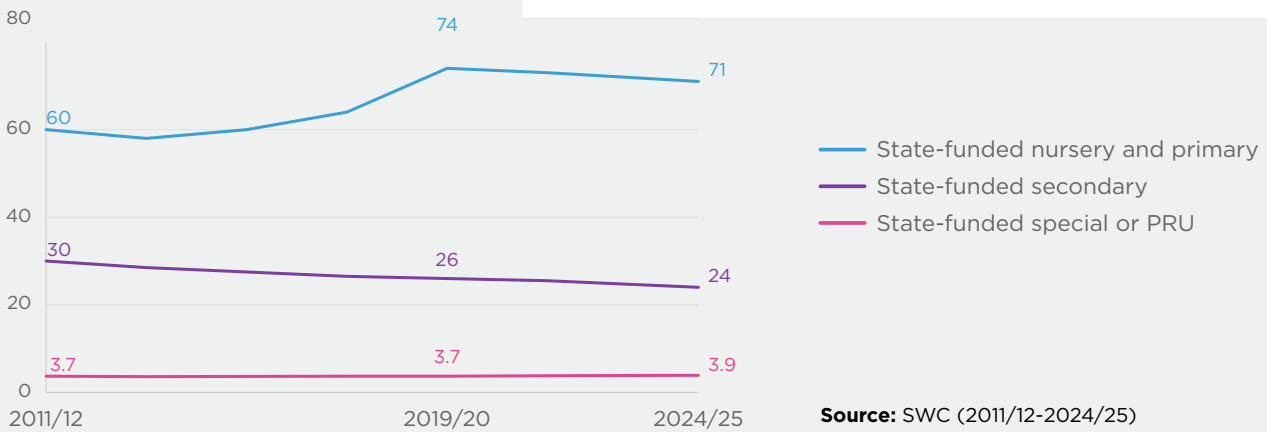
- The Government's proposed 6.5% pay increase over the next three years is unlikely to keep up with pay increases in other jobs.
- Teachers' working hours and workload perceptions have improved modestly in recent years but remain less positive than for graduates with similar characteristics in other jobs.

Support staff

Support staff make up a significant and growing part of the school workforce, especially TAs (teaching assistants), and have their own distinct recruitment and retention challenges.

- Despite some improvement since 2023, three in four school leaders said they found it difficult to recruit TAs in 2025. Leaders were more likely to report difficulties recruiting TAs than teachers.

The ratio of pupils to teaching assistants in state funded schools in England, by school type



- Support staff are less likely than similar workers to agree that their employer offers good opportunities for career progression.
- Support staff tend to work fewer hours per week than similar workers in England.
- Almost all school support staff cannot work from home, but around 30% of similar workers can.



Support staff exit rates

have now reached the highest level since data was first collected in 2011/12. Among support staff who are considering leaving their jobs, the most common reason is that they do not feel valued.

- This chart shows that there are now fewer pupils for each TA than in recent years. Although primary pupil numbers are falling and data suggests support staff exit rates are increasing, new TAs joining the workforce also has an impact on the overall numbers.



The weekly pay of support staff is **around 30 to 35% less** than workers with similar characteristics, such as qualifications.



Some reasons support staff are leaving their jobs: feeling undervalued, low staff morale, insufficient staffing, and financial pressures.



Using the findings

The aim of NFER's annual series of reports on the education workforce is to monitor progress towards meeting workforce supply needs, considering the latest research, key trends, and challenges.



Based on the findings, here are some actions schools could consider:

- Prioritise retention by understanding and addressing why staff leave.
- Reduce workload demands where possible.
- Include teachers and support staff in conversations about their own CPD, identifying and supporting career progression opportunities.
- Explore flexible working options for teachers and support staff, for example taking PPA at home or part-time hours.
- Review recruitment approaches if experiencing difficulty filling roles, especially for support staff.
- Invest in staff wellbeing and positive school culture, where teachers and support staff feel valued.

We have made the following recommendations for policymakers:

- Keep teacher pay competitive with the wider labour market and fund schools to deliver it.
- Improve national teacher workforce planning for special schools and alternative provision.
- Increase financial incentives for training in subjects that are below recruitment targets.
- Strengthen recruitment support for schools.
- Strengthen SEND training opportunities for TAs.
- Review pay and career progression for support staff.
- Improve data on support staff vacancies and workforce gaps.



For full details of the recommendations we have made to policymakers, please read the full reports by going to the [Publications & Research](#) page of our website. This Research Bite is a summary of the [School Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report 2026](#) and the [School Support Staff Workforce in England Annual Report 2026](#), written by Jack Worth and Michael Scott, funded by the Nuffield Foundation.



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