



Research and analysis

Summary and recommendations: teacher well-being research report

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This information forms part of our research report into teacher well-being at work in schools and further education providers.

Introduction

According to the UK's Health and Safety Executive, teaching staff and education professionals report the highest rates of work-related stress, depression and anxiety in Britain. It came as no surprise, then, that when Ofsted asked teachers to contribute ideas for our research programme, teachers overwhelmingly wanted us to research teacher stress, workload and well-being.

In view of this request, the attested issues and a significant policy interest in teacher retention, stress and workload, this report is a detailed investigation of well-being in the education profession. We discuss levels of occupational well-being as well as positive and negative factors that influence well-being in the profession. Our aim is to better understand the issues and what causes them so that we can provide evidence-based recommendations for further action.

Context of the results

Well-being at work has been identified by scholars as one of the most important dimensions of an individual's overall well-being, but also as a contributing factor to the economic growth of a country through its workforce.

The International Labour Organization defines workplace well-being broadly as:

“ all the related aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and work organization.”

This is reflected in the What Works Centre for Wellbeing framework, which we used as a guiding framework in this study [see Appendix 1](#).

Its main elements are:

- health (how we feel physically and mentally)
- relationships with others at work
- purpose (including clarity of goals, motivation, workload, ability to influence decisions)
- environment (work culture, facilities and tools)
- security (financial security, safety, bullying/harassment).

So, well-being at work is more than just liking your own job.

Occupational well-being is like an eco-system. It consists of inter-related elements and is shaped by an individual as well as those around her. Levels of low or high well-being are rarely due to just one factor.

Executive summary

Teachers enjoy teaching and are positive about their workplace and colleagues, but they are disappointed by the profession.

Our results show that teachers in both schools and further education and skills (FES) providers love their profession, overwhelmingly enjoy teaching, are generally very positive about their workplace and colleagues, and enjoy building relationships with pupils and seeing them flourish. However, these positive elements of well-being at work are counterbalanced by negative elements that lead to poor occupational well-being for many teachers.

This report shows that teachers are suffering from high workloads, lack of work–life balance, a perceived lack of resources and, in some cases, a perceived lack of support from senior managers, especially in managing pupils' behaviour. They sometimes feel the profession does not receive the respect it deserves. All these

negative feelings in turn may lead to higher levels of sickness absence.

Teachers love being in the classroom and working with pupils. Their love of teaching arises from generally positive relationships with pupils and from teachers' belief that teaching is worthwhile. Relationships with colleagues and work culture are generally positive factors that contribute to teachers' well-being at work.

However, despite the positive feelings towards teaching as a vocation and towards their workplace, many teachers believe that the advantages of their profession do not outweigh the disadvantages and that their profession is undervalued in society. This is exemplified for some by the combination of limited policy influence (they feel 'done to' rather than 'worked with') and insufficient funding to deliver the goals they would like to. This leads to a sense of de-professionalisation.

Levels of satisfaction with life are higher among the general public than staff in schools and FES providers and overall levels of teachers' occupational well-being are low.

Our respondents' and especially teachers' satisfaction with life is lower than that of the general public. This could, at least partially, be due to the impact of occupational well-being on general well-being in life, in view of the excessive amount of time that is spent on work-related tasks particularly by teachers and senior leaders.

The self-reported occupational well-being of most respondents from schools and FES providers is generally low or moderate. We found lower levels of well-being among more experienced teachers and those working in schools or providers graded requires improvement or inadequate. Low levels of occupational well-being are in turn related to (self-reported) health issues. Specific elements of well-being, such as excessive workload and work–life balance, coupled with perceived low pay, were also found to have led some teachers to leave the profession.

Findings

Workload is high, affecting work–life balance

Working hours in schools and FES providers are long. Full-time school teachers reported working 51 hours on average during the given week, while senior leaders worked even longer, 57 hours on average. Our findings show that teachers spend less than a half of their time on teaching, while lesson planning, marking and administrative tasks take up a large part of their non-teaching time. Many respondents in both sectors do not have enough time to do the important aspects of their job. This is why they work in their free time: evenings, weekends or annual

leave.

The main causes of heavy workload are:

- the volume of administrative tasks
- the volume of marking
- staff shortages
- lack of support from external specialist agencies such as for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or behaviour
- challenging behaviour of pupils
- changes to external examinations
- frequently changing government policies and regulations
- in some cases, lack of skills or training

Staff perceive lack of resources as a problem that stops them from doing their job as well as they can

Shortages of human resources negatively impact on occupational well-being for several reasons:

- they are seen to increase the already high workload
- decrease the ability to carry out work effectively
- result in staff taking on extra responsibilities outside of their area of expertise

The lack of physical resources is also perceived to hinder instruction, such as:

- shortage or inadequacy of instructional materials
- computers for instruction
- library materials
- audio-visual resources

There is a sense of disempowerment among respondents. They feel that despite having the skills and knowledge to deliver good quality education, the lack of resources does not allow them to reach their educational goals.

Poor behaviour is a considerable source of low occupational well-being, and teachers do not always feel supported by senior leaders and parents with managing it

Pupils' and students' behaviour, such as low-level disruption in the classroom, absenteeism, intimidation or verbal abuse is often a negative influence on

teachers' well-being at work and will also impact on learning.

Senior leaders are not always seen as providing sufficient support for managing pupils' behaviour. According to many respondents, senior leaders do not work with teachers when it is necessary to solve discipline problems jointly and the issues are made worse by an inconsistent approach to managing behaviour. In addition, there is often a lack of parental support on this front.

Relationships with parents can be a negative factor and a source of stress

This can be due to a range of reasons: unrealistic parental expectations for their child/children which could lead to excessive pressure on staff; the frequency of emails from parents and an expectation for an instant response; and parents raising concerns or complaints inappropriately.

Educators told us that they do not have enough influence over policy, which changes too quickly

The impact of that is experienced as negative for two main reasons: frequent changes increase the already high workload; and the perceived lack of say leads to feelings of de-professionalisation.

Educators also feel that Ofsted inspections are a source of stress

This is largely because inspections are reported to increase administrative workload, though part of this appears to be driven by senior leadership or because there is an excessive focus on data and exam results, which narrows educators' focus to test outcomes rather than quality education.

Ofsted has been working on alleviating those negative effects through myth-busting campaigns and by revising the inspection framework.

Findings on overall support from senior leaders are mixed

Senior leaders are seen to positively contribute to well-being by some. When this is the case, senior leaders support a positive work culture, are accessible to staff,

listen to them, value them as professionals, recognise their work and support their autonomy.

In other cases, senior leaders are thought to contribute to low well-being. This is when there is poor communication with staff, an autocratic management style, workload pressure, and insufficient support and collaboration with staff. Addressing the issues would improve the workplace culture.

Staff need more support from their line managers

Line managers in schools and providers positively contribute to occupational well-being when they are supportive, approachable and respectful.

However, our findings show that many do not receive enough line management support in the following areas: help with resolving issues such as heavy workload; recognition of a job well done; provision of useful feedback on work; and encouraging and supporting development.

Recommendations

For leaders

Fully support teachers to implement behaviour policies consistently and ensure that the overall school culture helps to optimise pupils' behaviour. Our findings show that teachers experience a relatively high prevalence of poor behaviour in schools. They do not always feel fully supported by senior leaders (nor parents) in managing pupils' misbehaviour.

To reduce teachers' workload leaders should familiarise themselves with the Department for Education (DfE)'s guidance to reduce workload in the areas of marking, administrative tasks and lesson planning. The DfE policy page on reducing teacher workload and the workload reduction toolkit, which contain practical advice and tools to help school leaders and teachers review and reduce workload, are particularly useful. The 'Making data work' report sets out recommendations and principles to reduce the unnecessary workload associated with data and evidence collection. Local authorities and multi-academy trusts should follow DfE guidance and ensure they do not increase workload through unnecessary data requests.

Senior leaders should ensure that parents are informed about the most appropriate ways of raising concerns and that they have appropriate mechanisms to respond to parents. Open access to email addresses of staff and an instant

response culture often add to the already heavy workload, so senior leaders should consider alternative ways in which parents and staff could communicate, while continuing to ensure that the views of parents are heard.

Develop staff well-being by creating a positive and collegial working environment in which staff feel supported, valued and listened to and have an appropriate level of autonomy.

We found that a positive working environment is a predictor of staff well-being. Creating such an environment is one of the main ways in which we can improve well-being and enhance retention.

Familiarise yourselves and your staff with the new education inspection framework (EIF) to avoid unnecessary workload. Educators told us that they experienced high levels of workload through collecting data for Ofsted, and that our frameworks had led to too much emphasis on attainment. The EIF re-focuses inspection on quality of education with the curriculum at its heart. Unnecessary data should not be collected for inspection.

For the Department of Education

Continue to spread the message that teaching is a highly valued and important occupation and to communicate the many positives of teaching.

Encourage the production and take-up of high-quality curricular materials and textbooks so that teachers can spend less time on lesson planning, which takes up a large part of non-teaching time.

Continue to reduce administration in schools and providers, and disseminate successful strategies.

Ensure consistency between all DfE teams and agencies on eliminating unnecessary data collection, as all data requests typically translate into additional workload for school leaders and teachers.

Encourage effective leadership development for leaders in schools, multi-academy trusts and providers.

Further encourage the take-up of tools for effective scrutiny of resource allocation and management of resources.

Enable schools and providers to focus on what they should be responsible for by making sure that external support services (for example, for SEND and mental health issues) are properly resourced so that they can provide an adequate level of support to schools and providers.

What Ofsted is doing

We added behaviour and attitudes as a separate judgement area in the EIF, to ensure that inspectors take full account of this area on inspection. We will ensure that under this framework behaviour is rigorously monitored.

Staff well-being forms part of the leadership and management judgement in the EIF. We will ensure that inspectors take this into account in coming to their judgements and monitor this through quality assurance and evaluation.

Inspector training under the EIF focuses on quality of education. This will mitigate against the unintended culture of schools and providers producing large amounts of data.

Evaluation of the implementation of the EIF will look at the extent to which the framework is leading to unnecessary workload, so that steps can be taken to alleviate any issues.

We will continue to clarify that we do not expect schools and providers to produce documentation for inspection, to try to reduce administrative workload.

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