

Workload reduction in schools in England

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Executive summary

Reducing teacher workload can have a positive impact on improving teacher retention and wellbeing. The Department for Education (DfE) in England, in 2018, developed a policy and toolkit to support schools' workload reduction work. The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented situation for schools in England and globally, with unknown impacts on teacher workload. Education Development Trust was commissioned to support schools with teacher-led research into new approaches that schools could take to streamline processes that arose in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although 80 schools in total were recruited to participate, a large proportion of schools reported that they had already implemented everything they felt possible in workload reduction. 76 of the schools that originally signed up provided qualitative details on the workload reduction efforts their schools had participated in, and their perceived impact. Additional schools were also invited to participate in a survey to provide their perceptions of workload reduction, with a total of 1,002 responses received from school leaders and teachers (including the 76 schools participating in our study). Five schools participated in interviews.

Findings

Overall, school leaders and teachers reported that the number of unnecessary hours worked per week had reduced in the past four years (coinciding with the introduction of the DfE workload reduction policy and toolkit in 2018). School leaders and teachers estimated that, on average, teachers worked 8.75 'unnecessary hours'¹ per week in 2018, compared to an average of 7.07 'unnecessary hours' per week at the time of taking the survey.

The areas where schools mostly reported workload reduction were:

- data management, through

¹ Unnecessary hours were defined as time spent on tasks that respondents did not feel directly benefited learners. This was defined by practitioners, with examples of what they found unnecessary reported in subsequent responses in open text responses.

- reducing reporting cycles
- reducing the amount of data inputting required by teachers
- marking and feedback, through
 - switching to in-class verbal feedback and either reducing or completely eliminating written marking
- curriculum planning, through
 - purchasing plan schemes
 - school leadership taking on the role of planning lessons
- communications, through
 - reducing the number of parents evenings, holding them during school time or moving them online
 - reducing the number of meetings held
 - bringing in policies around communications during the evenings, weekends and school holidays.

Despite these efforts, there were schools that reported persistent problems with workload. This often related to perceptions of what was required for Ofsted inspections, teachers being required to play multiple roles, waiting times for health and social care referrals, challenges with school resourcing, among other areas.

1. Background

1.1 DfE workload reduction toolkit

The DfE [school workload reduction toolkit](#) is a practical resource first published in 2018 to support workload reduction efforts in schools. It was produced by school leaders, teachers and other sector experts in collaboration with the DfE. The resources in the toolkit can be used to:

- i. identify workload issues in schools
- ii. address workload issues in schools, and
- iii. evaluate the impact of workload reduction measures.

The toolkit includes resources that support wellbeing and workload reduction around the areas of data management, feedback and marking, curriculum planning and resources, behaviour management and communications.

1.2 Rationale for this project

COVID-19 significantly changed the way teachers help pupils learn and presented new challenges. As part of the DfE's ongoing work to refresh the toolkit and ensure continued relevance and usefulness, this study was commissioned to identify new approaches schools could take to streamline processes that arose in response to the pandemic that would support their immediate recovery and beyond.

2. Approach

2.1 Recruitment

The project team initially successfully recruited 40 schools to participate in the study. The project team continued to recruit schools throughout the duration of the project, to account for any attrition. 80 schools in total expressed interest in the project.

2.2 Training

Schools were provided with access to online training in small-scale trial methods, with support in designing trials to measure impact on workload, wellbeing, and pupil outcomes. The online training materials were accessed by a total of 76 schools between November 2021 and October 2022.

2.3 Data collection

Only two schools were able to successfully complete small-scale trials. The schools that were unable to run full trials gave the following reasons:

- (i) broad, ongoing challenges with workload, and continued staff and student sickness due to COVID-19
- (ii) schools had already implemented all workload reduction efforts possible, with little perceived benefit of running trials.

Table 1 below outlines the workload reduction efforts in which these schools engaged.

The project team distributed a survey to collect other data from the participating schools on workload reduction efforts. This survey was also opened to other schools not part of the initial project group. A total of 395 school leaders (principals and deputy principals) and 669 teachers (plus seven teaching assistants and 23 people in other roles, such as SENCOs) completed the survey. The survey contained a combination of closed and open-ended questions around workload levels, workload reduction efforts and impact of those efforts. Interviews with five school principals were also conducted to elaborate on survey responses.

2.4 Limitations

Safety precautions around COVID-19 prevented training from being delivered face-to-face, which led to issues around retention of schools in the project. Schools had to access training online rather than face to face. The sample of schools was also self-selected, which in turn will affect the representativeness of the sample.

Because of the small sample sizes and number of trials that were completed, we have not included their results in this report.

Regarding the sample of teachers and school leaders in the large-scale survey, no random selection (to reduce bias as to who was surveyed), or stratification (to ensure the sample was representative of the population), was able to take place. Instead, a volunteer sample was used. This consisted of all participants who came across the survey through contact via Education Development Trust's databases, or on social media, and were willing to complete the questionnaire. Volunteer sampling has the risk that the sample is more likely to consist of likeminded people motivated to complete the survey. Readers should take this into account when interpreting the findings.

3. Findings from programme schools

This section discusses findings from the 76 schools that participated in the project and submitted data through teacher-led research trials, participation in interviews and surveys (with a mixture of quantitative and qualitative responses).

Workload reduction activities employed by programme schools

Table 1 outlines the workload reduction approaches adopted by the schools that engaged in our training, thematically organised by workload reduction area.

Table 1: Workload reduction activities employed by schools participating in the teacher-led research.

Workload reduction area	Description	Number of schools, n
Data management	Reduced reporting cycles. Reduced marking, leading to fewer data inputting requirements.	20
Feedback and marking	Switching to verbal feedback only during class times and eliminating marking. Self- and peer-marking during lesson times and as homework. Cutting back on written feedback and marking (where not eliminated completely). Introducing whole class feedback. Giving Teaching assistants additional hours to support with feedback and marking.	44
Curriculum planning and resources	Shared/team planning with other teachers. Purchased planning schemes/schemes of work. Eliminating day to day planning.	22
Behaviour management	Counselling services to support learners with behavioural problems. Centralised detentions.	20

Workload reduction area	Description	Number of schools, n
Communications	<p>Shifting parents evening to online and/or moving meetings to during school hours spread over longer time periods.</p> <p>Running teacher professional development and other all staff meetings immediately after school to avoid evening meetings.</p> <p>Email and comms reduction policies to prevent unnecessary communications during evenings and weekends.</p>	9

Other workload reduction efforts cited include holding wellbeing sessions and having a schoolwide focus on teacher wellbeing (n = 5), lowering expectations for classroom displays (n = 2), changing the format of lesson observations for less involvement from SLT (n = 1), hiring a cover teacher to allow teachers to take more PPA (n = 1) and allowing staff to take PPA time off-site (n = 1).

4. Quantitative survey findings

This section discusses findings from the survey distributed to schools in England in the last summer and early autumn term 2022.

4.1 Additional working hours before the introduction of the workload reduction policy compared to the present day

Average weekly hours data was collected from senior leadership team members and teachers (N = 1,013). After removing participants who did not have teaching or leadership roles, we were able to analyse complete data from over 90% of respondents (N = 1,002). Headteacher and deputy headteacher participants were asked to estimate the average number of additional (perceived as ‘unnecessary’) hours of workload that their staff were engaged in before the introduction of workload reduction efforts in schools, and at present (July-September 2022). Teachers were asked to make estimates on an individual level. Both sets of participants were also asked to estimate the number of hours of present-day additional hours of workload that had been the direct consequence of COVID-19. Teachers completing the survey were also asked to estimate their own average additional hours per week in the same way (Tables 2, 3 and 4).

Despite the challenges of COVID-19 and post-COVID recovery, overall schools and teachers reported a significant reduction in reported unnecessary working hours since the introduction of the workload reduction efforts in their school. This was calculated by subtracting the present average reported unnecessary working hours from the average before workload initiatives were introduced in schools. The footnotes show the statistics that would be expected in more formal academic publications².

This perceived reduction equated to approximately one and a half hours per week³. Controlling for estimated additional hours caused by COVID, there was also a significant reduction in additional hours, with this reduction on average amounting to

² When reporting the results from statistical tests that produce a p-value (the probability that a result might have occurred by chance), as well as reporting this value the convention is to also give the ‘test statistic’ from which the p-value has been calculated. These test statistics vary depending on the statistical test that has been used. We used two types of tests depending on the analysis: ANCOVA with pre-test scores as the covariate (for which F is reported); and Mann-Whitney U test (for which Z is reported).

³ Z = 13.58, p < .001

around four hours per week⁴. Similar findings were found for primary schools⁵ and secondary schools⁶; and for estimates by senior leaders and by teachers.

Teachers and leaders report that the number of hours teachers spend each week on unnecessary tasks has reduced.

- School leaders and teachers reported a significant reduction in reported unnecessary working hours since the introduction of the workload reduction efforts.
- This perceived reduction equated to approximately one and a half hours per week.
- Controlling for estimated additional hours caused by COVID, this reduction on average amounted to around four hours per week.

⁴ F = 64.37, p < .001

⁵ Z = 10.28, p < .001; F = 29.28, p < .001

⁶ Z = 4.24, p < .001; F = 11.52, p < .001

Table 2: Estimated unnecessary working hours before the introduction of the School Workload Reduction Toolkit and now (all participants).

	Number of respondents, N	Mean 'unnecessary hours' before	Mean 'unnecessary hours' now	Mean 'unnecessary' COVID-related hours	Mean 'unnecessary hours' present day when removing COVID-related hours
All schools	1,002	8.75	7.07	2.76	4.30
Primary schools	892	8.79	7.18	2.78	4.40
Secondary schools	110	8.40	6.49	2.86	3.55

Table 3: Estimated unnecessary working hours before the introduction of the School Workload reduction Toolkit and now (senior leadership teams).

	Number of respondents, N	Mean 'unnecessary hours' before	Mean 'unnecessary hours' now	Mean 'unnecessary' COVID-related hours	Mean 'unnecessary hours' present day when removing COVID-related hours
Combined data	319	9.01	6.58	2.67	3.89
Primary schools	283	9.13	6.72	2.75	3.96
Secondary schools	35	8.24	5.73	2.07	3.66

Table 4: Estimated unnecessary working hours before the introduction of the School Workload Reduction Toolkit and now (teachers).

	Number of respondents, N	Mean 'unnecessary hours' Before	Mean 'unnecessary hours' now	Mean 'unnecessary' COVID-related hours	Mean 'unnecessary hours' present day when removing COVID-related hours
Combined data	672	8.64	7.29	2.79	4.50
Primary schools	590	8.63	7.40	2.78	4.62
Secondary schools	111	8.74	6.69	2.63	4.07

Separate analysis of the additional hours data for teachers who engaged with the school-level research training and activities (n = 107) showed similar findings in terms of both workload reduction over the period of policy delivery⁷ and when controlling for COVID-related pressures⁸. The effect of COVID-19-related pressures was reported as half the amount in secondary schools (just under two hours per week) than in primary schools (around four hours per week per teacher). Schools reported that COVID-related pressures included: development delays, increased behavioural problems and prolonged waiting lists for health and social care services.

Between teacher variation in additional working hours in secondary schools was also approximately half that in primary schools, suggesting that the experience of teachers involved in the programme was more similar in the secondary schools than in the primary ones.

The schools that participated in our training were also marginally more likely to report having someone at their school formally or informally responsible for workload reduction compared to other schools. This was cited as one of the reasons for not completing trials, as schools' workload reduction leads felt they had already done everything they could.

⁷ Z = 3.89, p = .001

⁸ F = 8.53, p = .004

Table 5: Estimated unnecessary working hours before the introduction of the School Workload Reduction Toolkit and now (Schools participating in the teacher-led research).

	Number of respondents, N	Mean 'unnecessary hours' Before	Mean 'unnecessary hours' now	Mean 'unnecessary' COVID-related hours	Mean 'unnecessary hours' present day when removing COVID-related hours
Combined data	107	8.94	7.61	3.24	4.42
Primary schools	95	8.94	7.68	3.42	4.31
Secondary schools	12	8.65	7.08	1.91	5.18

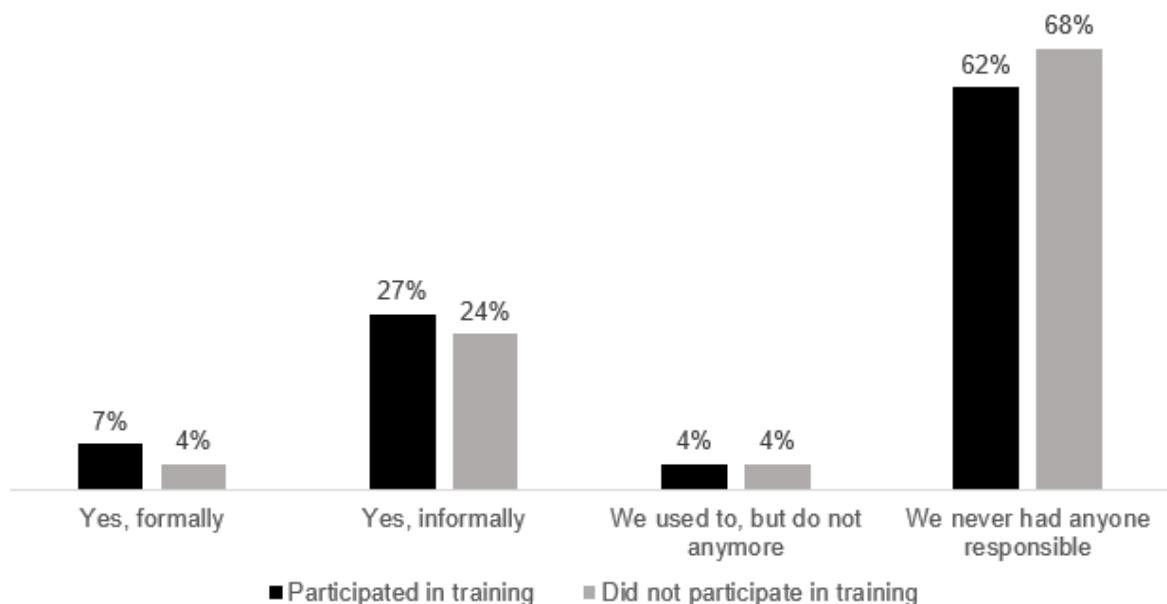


Figure 1: Percentage of leaders and teachers reporting having someone responsible for workload reduction in their school.

4.2 Associations between workload reduction, student attainment and teacher wellbeing

To explore the relationships across a range of areas that might, or might not, have been associated with teacher workload, participants were asked additional questions including the extent to which they had engaged in workload reduction generally and in terms of the areas on which we had previously reported (Churches, 2020). This included assessing whether awareness of the Department for Education’s workload reduction policy and use of the workload reduction toolkit by schools were associated with changes in workload. We also asked about wellbeing and the extent to which someone had been identified as responsible for workload and wellbeing within their school.

Participants were given the opportunity to provide unstructured qualitative reports and information about their activities and ongoing challenges, which are outlined in more detail from section 4.7 below.

4.3 Teacher experience, school size and workload reduction

The longer that teachers had been teaching in their current school, the more likely they were to have engaged in workload reduction generally and to have reduced workload in areas such as data management, feedback and marking and planning.⁹ In addition, these teachers were more likely to be aware of the workload reduction toolkit¹⁰. They were also more likely to be in schools where someone has been allocated a role to lead workload reduction.¹¹ Although a relatively small effect, the larger a school was the less likely it was to have engaged in workload reduction in relation to feedback and marking.¹²

4.4 Engagement in workload reduction, teacher time and student attainment

Engaging in workload reduction generally was associated with reduced additional working hours in absolute terms and when controlling for COVID-related workload inflation¹³. General engagement in workload reduction was also associated with increased student attainment¹⁴, supporting previous research that suggested that at least no harm to student attainment could be expected from implementing workload reduction (Churches, 2020; Churches, Sims and Hall, 2021). This was also the case for all the specific workload reduction areas that participants were asked to report on: data management, marking and feedback, planning, behaviour policy and streamlining communications¹⁵.

General engagement in workload reduction was associated with reduced additional working hours and increased student attainment.

4.5 Awareness of the Department for Education Workload Reduction policy and use of the toolkit

There were significant associations between teachers' awareness of the workload reduction policy, use of the toolkit and several areas, including their engagement in

⁹ $r_s = .220, p < .0001$; $.114, p < .0001$; $.095, p = .003$; $.095, p = .003$

¹⁰ A moderately small effect ($r_s = .205, p < .0001$)

¹¹ A small effect ($r_s = .134, p < .0001$)

¹² A small effect ($r_s = .091, p = .0008$)

¹³ Moderate to moderately small effects ($r_s = -.284, p < .0001$; $-.247, p < .0001$)

¹⁴ A moderately small effect ($r_s = .224, p < .0001$)

¹⁵ Small to moderately small effects ($r_s = .202, p < .0001$; $.251, p < .0001$; $.136, p < .0001$; $.150, p < .0001$)

workload reduction activities, reduced additional working time and estimated effects on student attainment. Awareness and usage were also associated with schools appointing someone to be responsible for workload and wellbeing and for improvements in teacher wellbeing.

The more aware teachers were of the DfE Workload Reduction policy the more likely they were to have engaged in workload reduction generally and workload reduction¹⁶ in the areas of data management, feedback and marking, planning, behaviour and streamlined communication¹⁷. Similar significant associations were found regarding use of the workload reduction toolkit, workload generally¹⁸ and the same areas above.¹⁹

Importantly, the more aware teachers were of workload reduction policy and the toolkit, the greater the reduction in additional teacher working time, both in absolute terms²⁰ and controlling for COVID-related pressures.²¹

The more aware teachers were of workload reduction policy and the toolkit, the greater the reduction in additional teacher working time.

4.6 Teacher wellbeing, additional hours, attainment and workload reduction

Increased levels of additional hours perceived as ‘unnecessary’ were associated with lower levels of wellbeing, supporting the importance of workload reduction and its potential impact on areas such as retention, as has been noted in a number of earlier publications (DfE, 2018; Foster, 2019)²².

Increased workload reduction activity was associated with improved teacher wellbeing both generally and in terms of specific tasks such as data management, feedback and marking, planning, behaviour management and communications. Similar but smaller associations were found for the use of the toolkit, both generally and related to the same areas above. Furthermore, as teacher wellbeing improved,

¹⁶ A large effect ($r_s = .511$, $p < .0001$)

¹⁷ Large to moderate effects ($r_s = .471$, $p < .0001$; $.419$, $p < .0001$; $.379$, $p < .0001$; $.360$, $p < .0001$)

¹⁸ A small to moderately small effect ($r_s = .156$, $p < .0001$)

¹⁹ Small to moderately small effects ($r_s = .155$, $p < .0001$; $.127$, $p < .0001$; $.160$, $p < .0001$; $.176$, $p < .0001$; $.162$; $p < .0001$)

²⁰ $r_s = -.106$, $p = .0001$

²¹ $r_s = -.095$, $p = .0003$

²² $r_s = -.085$, $p = .007$; $-.222$, $p < .0001$; $-.110$, $p = .0001$; $-.142$, $p < .0001$

so did student attainment. Interviews and open-ended responses indicated that overall, learning outcomes had not been negatively impacted by workload reduction.

Increased workload reduction activity was associated with improved teacher wellbeing.

Furthermore, as teacher wellbeing improved, so did student attainment.

4.7 Effects associated with having someone formally identified as responsible for improving teacher workload and wellbeing in the school

As noted above, awareness of workload policy and use of the toolkit was associated with the extent to which someone in the school was responsible for managing teacher workload and wellbeing.

In addition, teachers in schools where someone was responsible for implementing policy in this area were more likely to be engaged in workload reduction generally²³, as well as being more likely to take part in all the main workload reduction approaches that are promoted by the toolkit²⁴. The data also suggested that the greater the level of responsibility that was given to a named person the more likely it was that the number of additional working hours had fallen during the policy implementation period (both in real terms and controlling for COVID-related increases)²⁵. Having someone responsible for implementing workload reduction was also associated with improved wellbeing²⁶ and increased pupil attainment.

²³ A moderately large effect ($R_s = .408, p < .0001$)

²⁴ Moderate effects for data management, feedback and marking, planning and streamlined communications ($R_s = .343, p < .0001; .305, p < .0001; .295, p < .0001; .282, p < .0001$)

²⁵ $r_s = -.126, p < .0001; -.130, p < .0001$

²⁶ $r_s = .172, p < .0001; .173, p < .0001$

Teachers in schools where someone was responsible for implementing policy in this area were more likely to be engaged in workload reduction.

The greater the level of responsibility that was given to a named person, the more likely it was that the number of additional working hours had fallen during the policy implementation period.

Having someone responsible for implementing workload reduction was also associated with improved wellbeing and increased pupil attainment.

4.8 Use of the workload reduction toolkit predicted workload reduction

Finally, and for completeness, we assessed the extent to which the combined effects of workload policy awareness, use of the workload reduction toolkit and having a formally appointed person to lead on workload and wellbeing policy in the school predicted²⁷ workload reduction, controlling for COVID-related effects. The combination of the three areas related to workload policy implementation predicted workload reduction controlling for COVID-related effects²⁸ although the strongest single predictor was the use of the workload reduction toolkit²⁹.

4.9 Workload reduction strategies adopted by schools

The below section outlines the approaches all schools responding to our survey have taken to reducing teacher workload in each of the five core areas in the toolkit.

²⁷ Multiple linear regression and simple linear regression was used with awareness, use of the toolkit and having a leadership role as the independent variables.

²⁸ $R = .131$, $p = .001$, $R^2 = .17$

²⁹ $R = .125$, $p = .001$, $R^2 = .15$

Data Management

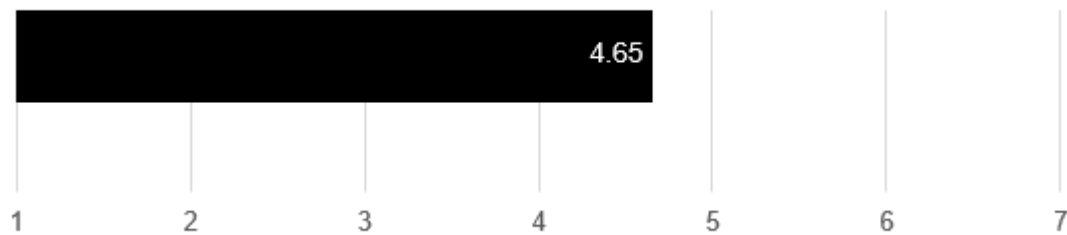


Figure 2: To what extent has your school reduced workload in relation to data management?

On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 being not at all, and 7 the greatest extent possible), schools responding to our survey scored their workload reduction activities against data management at 4.65. This was the highest average amongst all thematic areas, suggesting data management has been the area of greatest focus.

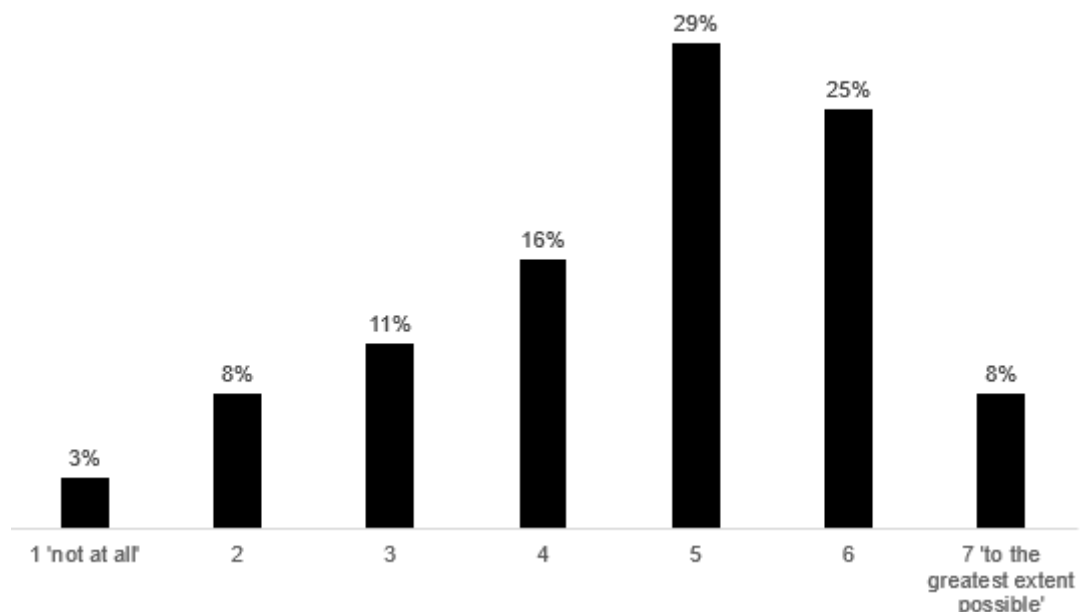


Figure 3: School leaders and teachers reporting their school engaging in workload reduction in relation to data management.

Schools that reported engaging in workload reduction around data management typically also reported engaging in workload reduction in marking and feedback. The activities schools engaged in to reduce data management workload included:

- Reduced data collection (i.e., often coupled with reduced marking)
- Reduced reporting cycles/data drops (usually cited alongside a change in approach to assessment)
- Giving teachers time in directed hours in the school day to do data drops
- Removed written end of term reports or reduced the amount of detail required in reports
- Taking away responsibility of data inputting from teachers and delegating to administrative teams
- Directed time allocated to analysing data to improve learning outcomes
- Stopped taking photographs of activities etc. to stick into books as evidence
- Electronic assessment recording systems that automatically generate reports which were previously done manually

Schools did not report any negative impact on learners or performance in Ofsted through making reductions in data drops or lowering the frequency or volume of written reports. Two schools commented that reducing the amount of data collected and the frequency better prepared them for Ofsted as they spent more time focusing on learning and less time on preparing evidence of learning. Other schools that reduced the number of data drops and streamlined reporting processes reported substantial reductions in teachers overall working hours, with one school suggesting teachers work on average 10 hours less per week due to reduced administrative work. “Fewer data drops” was also associated with improved wellbeing of students, as it removed the need for frequent assessments.

Schools that use technology to automate reporting (e.g., for student end of term reports) noted a substantial reduction in teacher workload, through eliminating the need for teachers to manually write up reports for each student.

Schools did not report any negative impact on learners or performance in Ofsted through making reductions in data drops or lowering the frequency or volume of written reports.

“Fewer data drops” was also associated with improved wellbeing of students.

Schools that use technology to automate reporting noted a substantial reduction in teacher workload.

Marking and feedback



Figure 4: To what extent has your school reduced workload in relation to marking and feedback?

On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 being not at all, and 7 the greatest extent possible), schools responding to our survey scored their workload reduction activities against marking and feedback at 3.97.

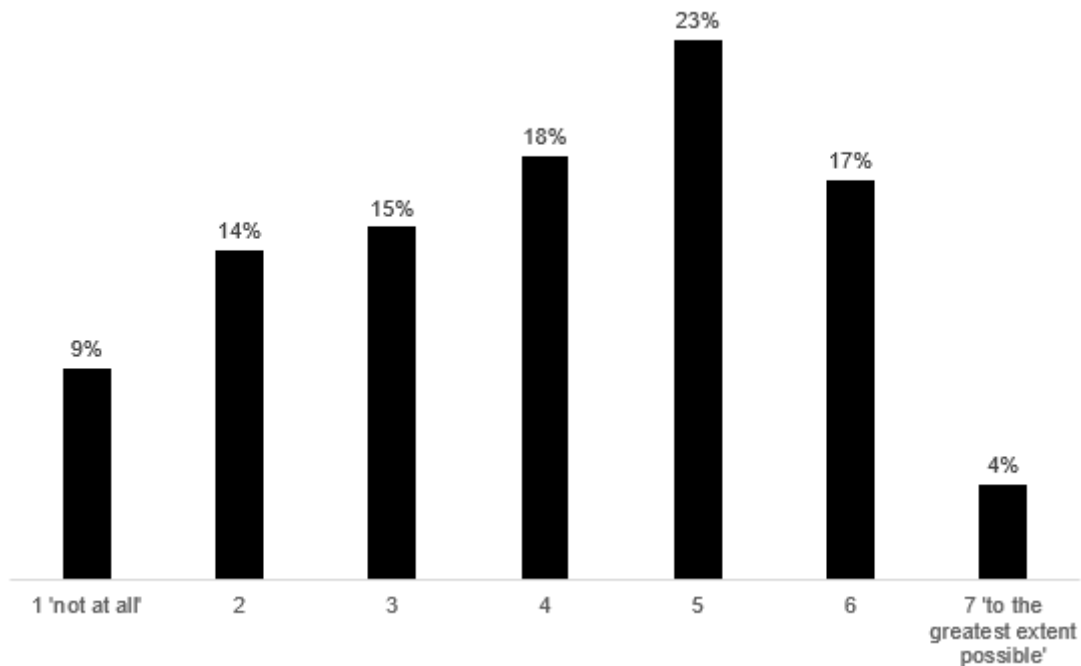


Figure 5: School leaders and teachers reporting their school engaging in workload reduction in relation to marking and feedback.

Approaches to reducing workload in feedback and marking reported by schools in open ended comments and during interviews included:

- Switching to verbal feedback during class times and eliminating marking
- Self- and peer-marking during lesson times and as homework
- Cutting back on written feedback and marking (where not eliminated completely)
- Introduced whole class feedback
- Changing marking feedback to codes rather than written
- Use of technology for automated feedback and marking through education apps

Of all the schools that reported switching to verbal feedback only, or dramatically reducing approaches to marking, only one school reported a negative impact on student learning. All other schools reported improvements in learning, particularly when switching to in-class verbal feedback. Teachers adopting verbal feedback reported having a better understanding of their students, being able to correct students quickly before they go on to make further mistakes, and building better

direct relationships with their students in lesson due to increased 1:1 engagement. Teachers overall reported that verbal feedback enabled them to identify student needs quickly and adapt lessons accordingly or provide more appropriate individualised support to learners. A further benefit to teachers in switching to verbal feedback was reportedly less stringent checks from the senior leadership team of student exercise books, which alleviated pressure on teachers. Interestingly, a small number of schools that switched to verbal feedback reported improvements in student behaviour. Self-marking and peer-marking were also reportedly associated with improved student outcomes.

Curriculum planning and resources

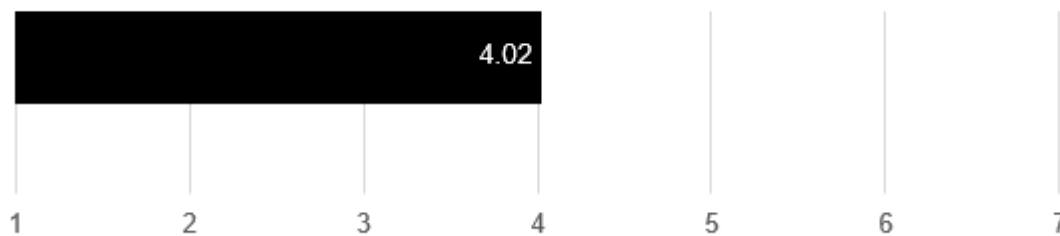


Figure 6: To what extent has your school reduced workload in relation to curriculum planning and resources?

On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 being not at all, and 7 the greatest extent possible), schools responding to our survey scored their workload reduction activities against curriculum planning and resources at 4.02.

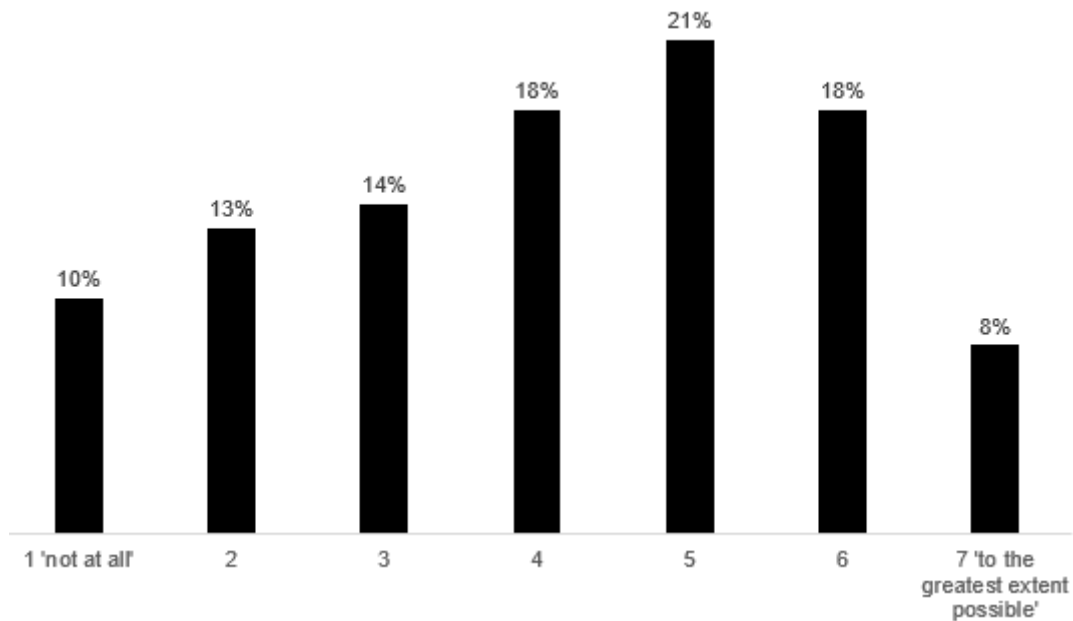


Figure 7: School leaders and teachers reporting their school engaging in workload reduction in relation to curriculum planning and resources.

Approaches to reducing workload in curriculum planning and resources reported by schools in open ended comments and during interviews included:

- Shared planning with other teachers
- Purchased planning schemes/schemes of work
- Elimination of day-to-day planning
- Specialist teachers (primary level) teach PE, Music and Modern Foreign Languages, giving additional PPA time to teachers
- Making previous plans available to all teachers for adaptation
- SLT taking on the responsibility of planning and identifying lesson resources, allowing teachers to adapt the resources to suit their pupils
- Removing planning templates to allow teachers the freedom to plan in whatever way they find useful
- Streamlining of the curriculum to “teach less better”
- Planning reduced to PowerPoint slides to be used in class to guide lessons

Shared planning reportedly improved the quality of lessons and enhanced learning. Purchasing lesson schemes was considered to be a positive approach that saved time, though some teachers reported that due to the high level of individual need in

their classes, adapting plans to be appropriate to learner need was still time consuming. The schools that moved away from standard lesson plan templates or specific expectations overall reported improved wellbeing and reduced workload amongst teachers.

Behaviour management



Figure 8: To what extent has your school reduced workload in relation to behaviour management?

On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 being not at all, and 7 the greatest extent possible), schools responding to our survey scored their workload reduction activities against behaviour management at 3.89.

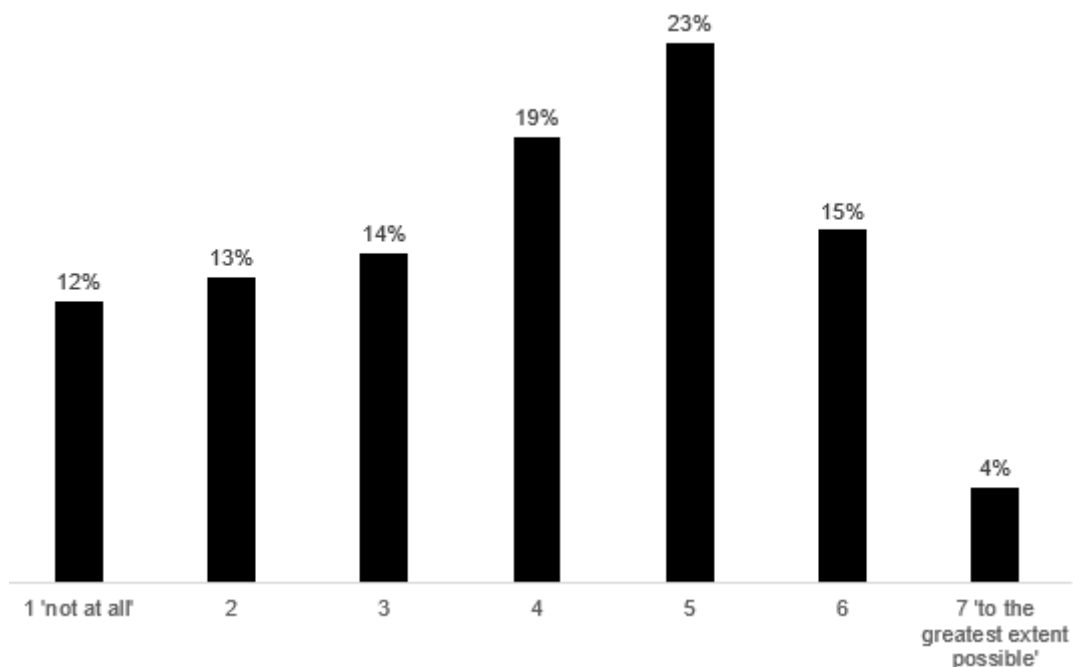


Figure 9: School leaders and teachers reporting their school engaging in workload reduction in relation behaviour management.

Approaches to reducing workload in behaviour management reported by schools in open ended comments and during interviews included:

- Changing how detentions are operated (e.g., group detentions/centralised organized detentions)
- Counselling and similar services leading to reduction in behavioural problems, leading to fewer detentions and freeing up staff time

Behaviour management approaches, such as centralised detentions, reportedly led to reduced teacher workload overall. Other interventions, that sought to address the root cause of behavioural problems (i.e., counselling), were considered to initially increase workload, with workload eventually reducing once behavioural problems were addressed.

Communications (i.e., communicating with parents)



Figure 10: To what extent has your school reduced workload in relation to communications, i.e. communicating with parents.

On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 being not at all, and 7 the greatest extent possible), schools responding to our survey scored their workload reduction activities against behaviour management at 2.99. Of the five areas of workload reduction, “communications” was the area of least attention amongst schools responding to our survey.

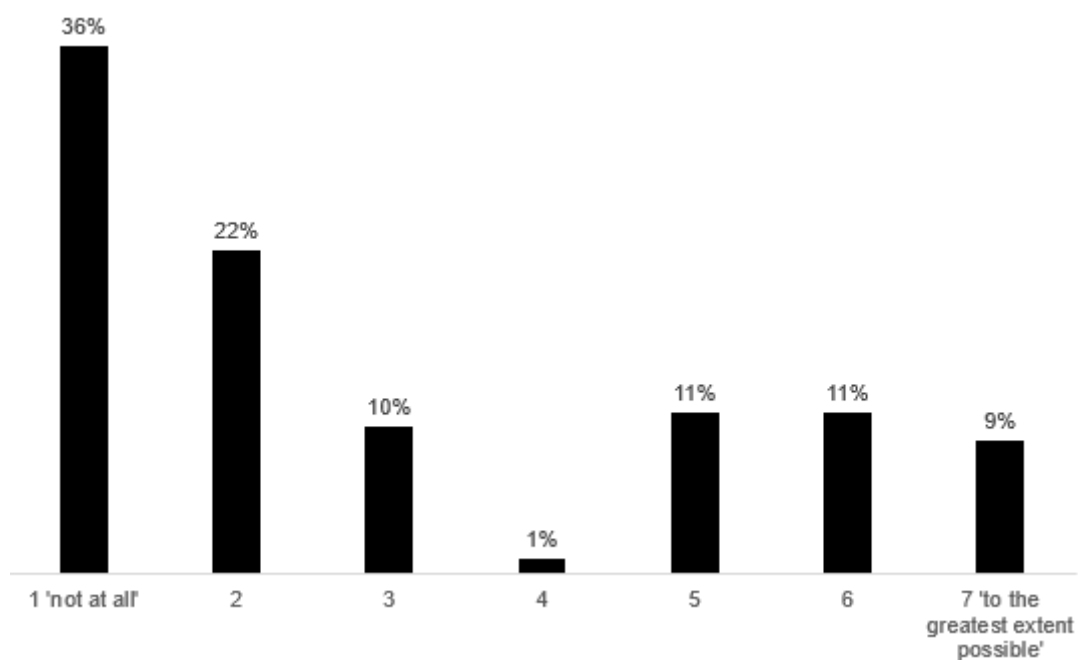


Figure 11: School leaders and teachers reporting their school engaging in workload reduction in relation to communications.

Approaches to reducing workload in communications reported by schools in open ended comments and during interviews included:

- Shifting parents evening to online and/or moving meetings to during school hours spread over longer time periods
- Running teacher professional development and other all staff meetings immediately after school to avoid evening meetings, or during school hours where possible
- Email and comms reduction policies to prevent unnecessary communications during evenings and weekends
- Staff meeting time allocated to completing tasks and supporting one another
- Leadership and administrative team taking on all parental communications
- Not making teacher email addresses available to parents
- New tech systems that streamline communications with parents

Reducing meetings with parents and internally amongst school staff was overall associated with reported improvements in staff wellbeing.

Other areas of reported workload reduction

Schools also reported other areas of workload reduction that did not neatly fit into the above categories. These typically related to teacher wellbeing which were perceived to directly impact how teachers perceive their workload. Areas reported included:

- Collaboration with other schools locally and distribution of tasks and responsibilities with those schools.
- Allowing teachers to have paid time to see their own children in events (e.g., own children sports days or plays)
- Medical appointments and family commitments supported within work hours
- Dedicated time for subject leadership

Reported issues with workload

Of the 1,002 individuals who responded to the survey, 403 (40.3%) provided additional comments on areas where they have continued to experience challenges with workload reduction. There were 50 thematic areas coded from open-ended responses. Table 6 highlights the thematic areas raised by at least ten school leaders or teachers, with a brief description of the points raised where there was consistency. The most common response related to perceived accountability pressures continuing to drive reportedly high levels of unnecessary workload in both primary and secondary schools.

Table 6: Areas of continued high workload in primary and secondary schools in England, 2022.

Area	Summary	n	%
Perceptions of Ofsted expectations	Anxiety over forthcoming Ofsted inspections, in some cases leading to school leaders implementing policies that can result in excessive workload. Short notice of inspection has not always led to a reduction in pre-inspection anxiety; and where this leads to increased workload may have had a negative effect.	83	9

Area	Summary	n	%
Resourcing and resource allocation	<p>Reduced number of Teaching Assistants leading to additional workload.</p> <p>Challenges related to the resourcing of and support for pupils with SEND.</p> <p>Concern over energy bills and inflation affecting resourcing and therefore workload.</p>	77	8%
Directed time not reflective of hours worked	<p>In some schools the way in which directed time is defined and expected is insufficient for teachers to carry out basic tasks. This may lead to an issue with morale and perception of pay versus hours worked.</p>	68	7%
SEND	<p>Waiting time for health and social care referrals when made by the school.</p> <p>More children in classes with differential needs adds to planning time.</p> <p>In some parts of the country there are limited places in special schools and pupil referral units.</p>	47	5%
Meetings and admin	<p>Teachers report too many unnecessary meetings and administrative tasks that do not benefit learners.</p>	39	4%
Staff with multiple roles	<p>School leaders, (particularly reported in smaller schools, though mentioned by larger schools, too), report taking on additional administrative tasks due to tight budgets and not being able to afford administrators.</p> <p>Teachers taking on additional roles (with subject leadership frequently mentioned) without additional PPA time to cover additional responsibilities.</p>	30	3%

Area	Summary	n	%
COVID recovery	<p>Children substantially behind which is adding pressure to cover more curriculum content in tighter time periods.</p> <p>Early Years children showing delayed development socially, emotionally and academically.</p> <p>Continued COVID infection-related staff absences.</p>	23	2%
Social expectations	<p>Teachers under pressure to take on health and social care related functions.</p> <p>Increased parental expectations of teachers.</p>	13	1%
Responsibility shifts around the school	<p>Some teachers and school leaders reported that when workload reduction efforts are put in place, the responsibility shifts elsewhere rather than workload being removed (i.e., teachers taking on more workload from leaders, or leaders taking on more to reduce teacher workload).</p>	12	1%

5. Conclusions

Overall, the schools that participated have reported great gains in the extent to which they have reduced teacher workload. This has been achieved without negative consequences for learners, with all but one school that engaged in workload reduction activities reporting a positive impact on learner attainment and teacher wellbeing and retention. Workload reduction activities included:

- Data management: reduced reporting cycles, limiting data inputting required from teachers
- Marking and feedback: reducing or eliminating written feedback and switching to verbal feedback and/or self- and peer-marking
- Curriculum planning and resources: purchasing lesson plans and schemes
- Behaviour management: mentoring and counselling to reduce behavioural issues, streamlining detention systems
- Communications: reducing parents' evenings, switching parents evening to online and/or during the school day, reducing the number of meetings, stricter policies around evening and weekend communications

Increased workload reduction activity was associated with improved teacher wellbeing. Furthermore, as teacher wellbeing improved, so did student attainment.

Teachers in schools where someone was responsible for implementing policy in this area were more likely to be engaged in workload reduction. The greater the level of responsibility that was given to a named person, the more likely it was that the number of additional working hours had fallen during the policy implementation period.

Having someone responsible for implementing workload reduction was also associated with improved wellbeing and increased pupil attainment.

Problems that persist around workload included perceptions of workload due to Ofsted inspections, resource constraints, long waiting lists for social and health care referrals, teachers and leaders playing multiple roles and social expectations. No negative impacts on Ofsted performance were reported as a result of workload reduction activity.

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