



State of Education SURVEY REPORT

INSIDE

- School leaders' views on education policies
- Challenges facing school leaders
- What school leaders think would most improve education



At **The Key**, we never take school leaders for granted. It's vital that their voices are heard



Foreword



The Key's second annual State of Education report with Ipsos MORI gives an unparalleled insight into school leaders' views in another year of frenetic change in education.

We asked 1,180 school leaders across the country about the big issues facing our education system today. The results tell us what they think about government

policies, the education system and the structures they work in, responsibilities for driving change, and the challenges they face in the months ahead. So, what is the state of education today and what more can be done to support schools in delivering better outcomes for children and young people?

Our report shows that school leaders are tired of changes to the rules each year. They think that headteachers and their leadership teams should have most say in what happens in school, and they want less political influence over the curriculum and inspection. And while there is some difference in support between parties, almost six in ten say they're unsure which party is best equipped to improve the education system.

We know schools are facing difficulties, with tightening budgets, a shortage of places and the continued strain on school buildings, to name but a few. These are very real challenges, but it's workload that's most on the mind of school leaders. They're worried about overstretched teachers, their own accountability and work/life balance. Almost two thirds say their role is bad for their mental health, while more than half say they plan to be out of their roles within three years. These are extraordinary figures, and should make us sit up, take notice and think about what should happen next.

For five years, the drive has been towards greater autonomy, increasing the number of academies and free schools, and giving them more freedom over curriculum, pay and performance. School leaders seem unconvinced that these changes can drive improvement. Above all, they want to improve the school system by finding out what works: 99% think education reforms should be evaluated for their effectiveness. They want more collaboration between schools, and better access to research. We know there is an appetite for working together and for learning from research. But, school leaders say, the incentives and infrastructure are not yet there to make this happen.

So, the message from school leaders is loud and clear: cut down on changes, address our workloads, help us collaborate, and make sure we all know what works.

As CEO of The Key, I'm privileged to spend time in schools across the country. Wherever I go, I'm hugely impressed by the talent and passion of the school leaders I meet, and their commitment to helping pupils overcome the challenges they face. I'm committed, in turn, to making sure we help school leaders meet the challenges highlighted in this report.

At The Key, we never take school leaders for granted. It's vital that their voices are heard.

Fergal Roche, CEO

1

SCHOOL LEADERS' VIEWS ON THE CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM

School leaders and governors are tired of political interference in education, but unsure which political party is best placed to make a difference. They are unhappy with the government and with Ofsted, and fear teaching and headship have become less attractive career options. At the same time, they think the quality of education has improved or stayed the same over the past five years, and are positive about the quality of teaching in schools.



I do not think it is appropriate for ministers, who mostly have little or no experience of schools other than attending one themselves, to make decisions that a qualified education professional should be making for the lives of millions of our children.”

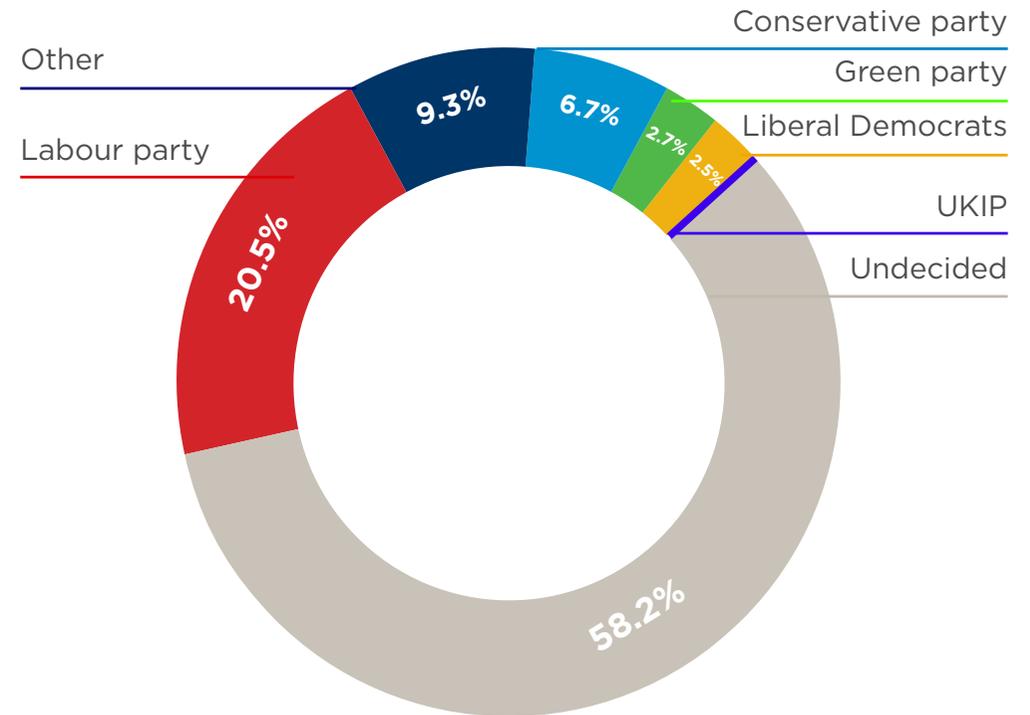
Anne Byrne
Headteacher
Hampton Vale Primary School

Education and politics

The past five years have seen rapid and far-reaching change in the school system. The expanded academies programme, free schools, a new National Curriculum, the pupil premium, changes to assessment, performance-related pay for teachers, and reform of support for children with special educational needs mean that it’s now a very different world for school leaders.

Across the country, irrespective of school type or phase, school leaders are critical of how the Coalition government has been doing on education. More than three quarters (77.2%) say they are dissatisfied with its performance, with almost half (45%) very dissatisfied. This doesn’t mean, though, that they’ve made up their minds on which party is best placed to improve the education system. Labour gets the highest backing (20.5%), with the Conservatives some way back (6.7%), but almost six in ten school leaders (58.2%) are not sure which party is best placed to make a difference. And comments from some school leaders give a clear message that they want less interference from Westminster to allow them to get on with the job of educating children.

Which party is best equipped to improve the education system from 2015?



It’s clear that developments since our 2014 State of Education survey¹ have not made school leaders feel more positive about the politics of education

¹ The Key (2014) https://www.thekeysupport.com/media/cms_page_media/23/Survey_Report_FINAL_WEB.pdf



Overseeing education needs to be handed over to an independent body that's not aligned to any political party."

Dr Ellis Field
Headteacher
St John Fisher Catholic Voluntary Academy

Spotlight on school inspections

When it comes to school inspections, the picture has not greatly changed since 2014² – school leaders are still unhappy about the inspection system. Almost six in ten (59%) think the current system for schools in England is poor, with only 18.2% rating it good. And more than a third (35.7%) think the current Ofsted grade of their school is not an accurate reflection of its quality.

At the same time, school leaders are nervous about the introduction of no-notice inspections in England's schools. More than seven in ten (74.9%) say they will have a negative impact on the quality of education over the next 18 months. Those in maintained schools³ show more concern than academy leaders: 76.3% anticipate a negative impact. With a bad Ofsted grade now enough to turn a maintained school into an academy, the risk of a disappointing inspection outcome may seem particularly real for this group.

NATHAN EASEY, insights manager at The Key, explains:

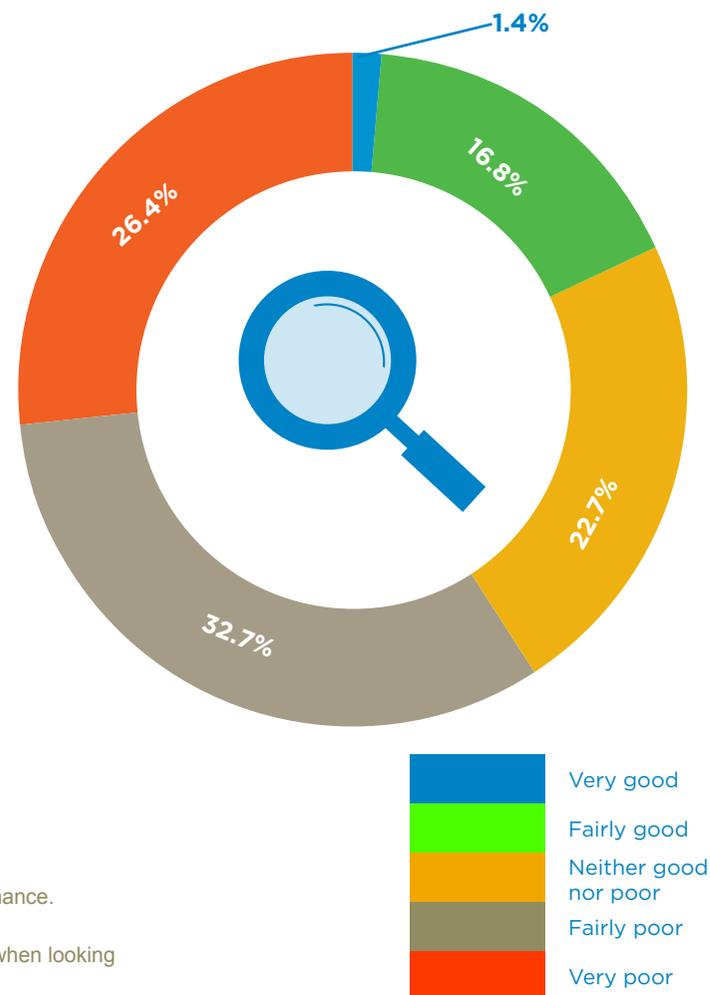


"This concern around Ofsted is reflected in school leaders' appetite for information and guidance about inspection. 'Inspection' has been the third most-popular area of The Key for School Leaders' website so far this academic year (up from 4th in 2013-14), with our pre-inspection checklist article the second most viewed across the entire website."

² In 2014 we found 64% of school leaders did not believe the inspection system accurately measured schools' performance. https://www.thekeysupport.com/media/cms_page_media/23/Survey_Report_FINAL_WEB.pdf

³ Far fewer school leaders from independent and overseas schools completed the survey (22 in total). In light of this, when looking at results by type of school, the report focuses on maintained schools and academies.

The current inspection system for schools



How attractive is becoming a teacher, a head or a governor?

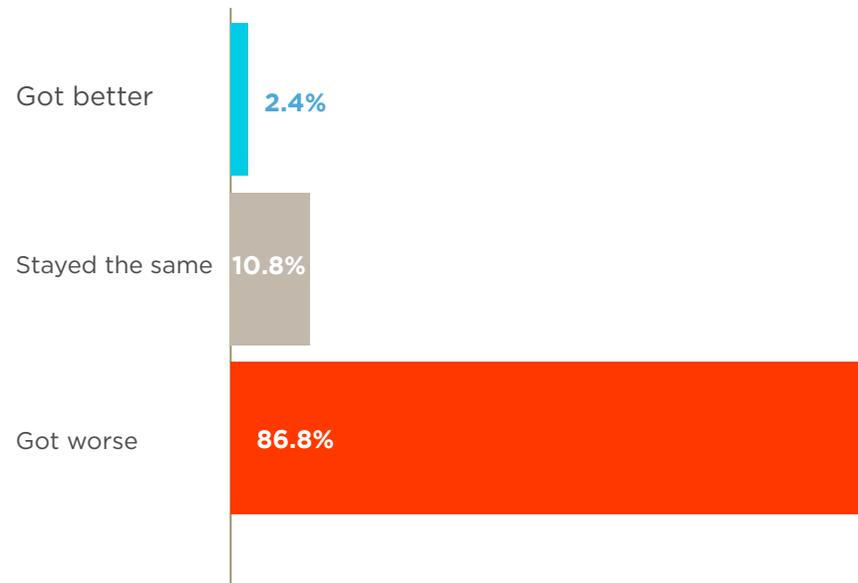
This dissatisfaction with policy and the pressure of Ofsted are important context for our next finding. School leaders say teaching, headship and the role of governor are less attractive to new entrants now than five years ago. Three quarters (75.1%) think teaching is less attractive now, while only 4.7% think it is more attractive now. These figures can't be separated from our findings on morale in the teaching profession: more than eight in ten school leaders (85%) think this is worse now than five years ago.

School leaders also voice concern about how attractive headship is, with over eight in ten (86.8%) saying it is less attractive as a career choice now than it was five years ago. This is a jump up from our 2014 survey, when 74% said headship had become less attractive since 2010. Headship in academies, in particular, has become more complex, but our results show there is relatively equal feeling among school leaders in maintained schools (88.2%) and in academies (87.2%).

While more than half of school leaders (52.6%) say school governance in England's school is of good quality, they're split over whether it has improved in the past five years (44%) or stayed the same (41%). Almost half of school leaders from maintained schools (46%) feel it has improved over this period, while in academies the largest group feel it has stayed the same (43.2%). Governance has been a particular focus for the Coalition government, with calls for governing bodies to improve their skills, slim down, and learn from business and charities. In the light of these changes, and the emergence of more complex roles for governors in multi-academy trusts and elsewhere, it's worth noting that almost three-quarters (73%) of school leaders think the role of governor has become less attractive for new volunteers over the past five years.

“ Three-quarters (75.1%) think teaching is less attractive now, while only 4.7% think it is more attractive now.

Attractiveness of headship over the past five years



Quality of education in England's schools

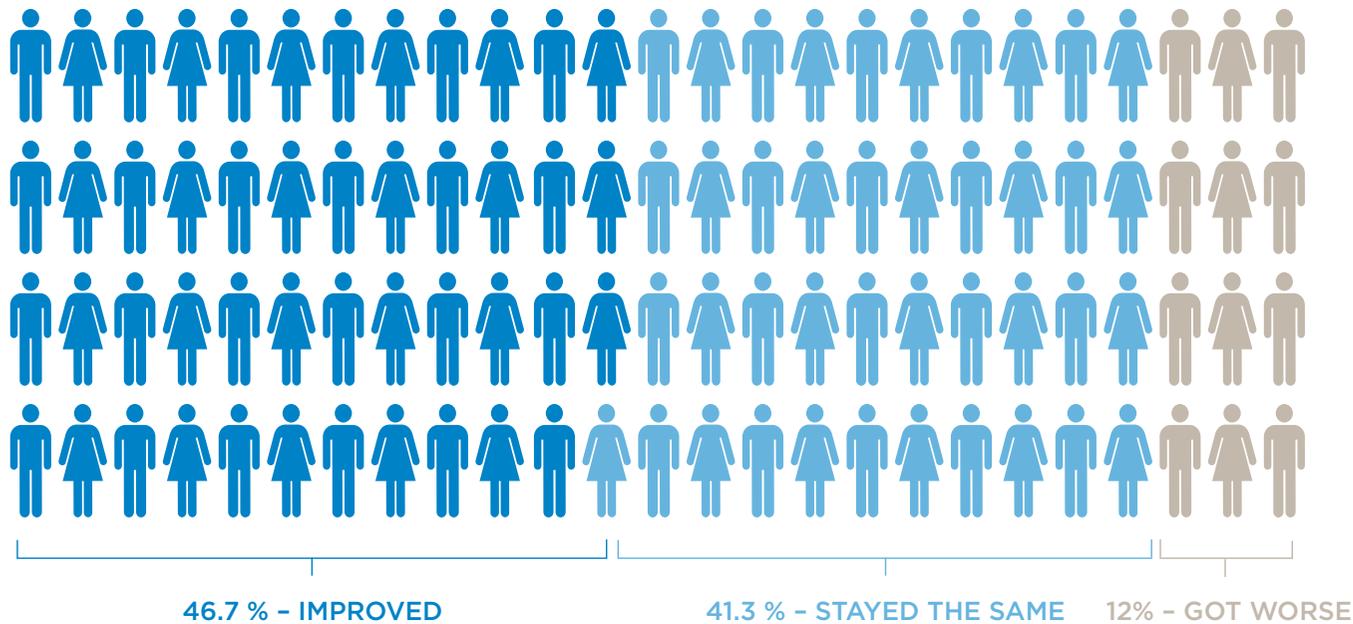
While our results show dissatisfaction with the government, frustration with inspection and concerns about attracting new recruits to key roles, school leaders are just as positive as last year about the quality of education. Almost half (46.7%) say it has got better in the past five years, 41.3% say it has stayed the same and 12% think it has got worse. And despite their concerns about pressure on teachers, more than half of school leaders (55.3%) think the quality of teaching in the profession has improved in the past five years. This is good news for the pupils in our schools.



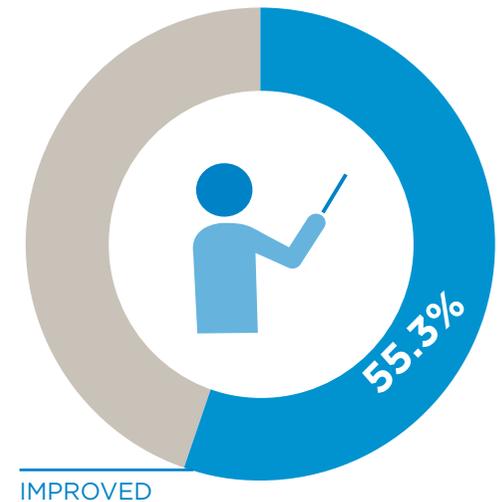
It should not be up to one political party! We are then subject to the whims of individual ministers, rather than implementing policies that are thoroughly thought through and have the wellbeing of all our children at the heart of them.”

Survey respondent

Quality of education in the last 5 years



Quality of teaching in the profession in the past five years



Comments

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The survey has no surprises. How disappointing that no political party offers a vision of education that inspires confidence. School leaders want policies based on the evidence of research on what works best, not political whims. Politicians need to listen. The high stakes culture with a focus on inspection and tests looks set to continue. Testing does not raise attainment, what does is great practitioners supported by leaders with high expectations. Inspection outcomes can be inconsistent and we know judgements can wreck a career. In this climate, it is no wonder that the teaching profession is no longer attractive. Great things are happening in schools despite the pressure of inspections and this a testament to dedicated leaders and brilliant teachers across the country.”

Louise Salewski
Headteacher, Streatham Wells Primary School

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These survey results are fascinating and worrying in equal measure. The profession has had to deal with extraordinary levels of change which inevitably impacts on morale, work-life balance and levels of stress. But what shines through this time is deep scepticism whether the changes imposed are likely to improve quality coupled with a strong desire to ensure that future changes are driven by a better understanding of ‘what works’. So, politicians of all parties have much to do to convince school leaders that they do understand what really drives improvement in schools and they are prepared to take account of research in making decisions. With more than a half of all leaders saying they have plans to leave within three years time is short to win back the doubters.”

Lord Bichard
Non-executive Director of The Key

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STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

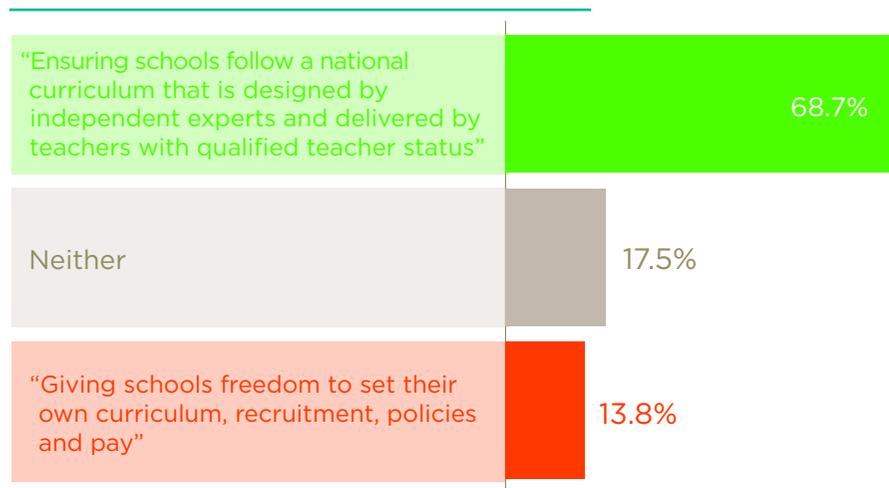
School leaders seem unconvinced about the impact of structural reforms, and are critical, in particular, of the free schools programme and academisation of underperforming schools. They agree that the top three influences on an individual school should be the senior leadership team, the headteacher and the governors. School leaders in different types of school disagree on who should be ultimately responsible if a school fails to deliver good standards with answers ranging from local authorities to the headteacher.

The changes of the past five years have altered the shape and structure of the school system, with greater autonomy for some schools, new types of school introduced and a shrinking role for local authorities.

Are structural changes the answer for school improvement?

School leaders seem unconvinced about the need for greater freedoms. When asked which of the two options we presented would most help raise standards of teaching in schools, almost seven in ten (68.7%) said 'ensuring schools follow a national curriculum that is designed by independent experts and delivered by teachers with qualified teacher status'. Only 13.8% chose the second option ('giving schools freedom to set their own curriculum, recruitment, policies and pay'). Support for the first option is higher among those in the primary sector (71.4%), where more schools have stayed with local authorities, but is also high among those in secondary schools (58.4%).

Which of our two options would most help raise standards of teaching in schools?



School leaders are sceptical about the impact of greater autonomy on school improvement. Over half (55.4%) say that allowing 'good' and 'outstanding' schools to convert to academy status will have neither a positive nor negative impact on the quality of education across the country in the next 18 months. This holds true for school leaders in all types of school, though more of those in academies think it will have a positive impact (29.7% compared with 6.6% in maintained schools).

School leaders are more critical of other reforms and proposals. Strong majorities said that creating free schools (76.8%) and academising underperforming schools (71.1%) would have a negative impact on the quality of education over the next 18 months. A smaller majority (54.4%) said the same about introducing more grammar schools.

School leadership: where should responsibility lie?

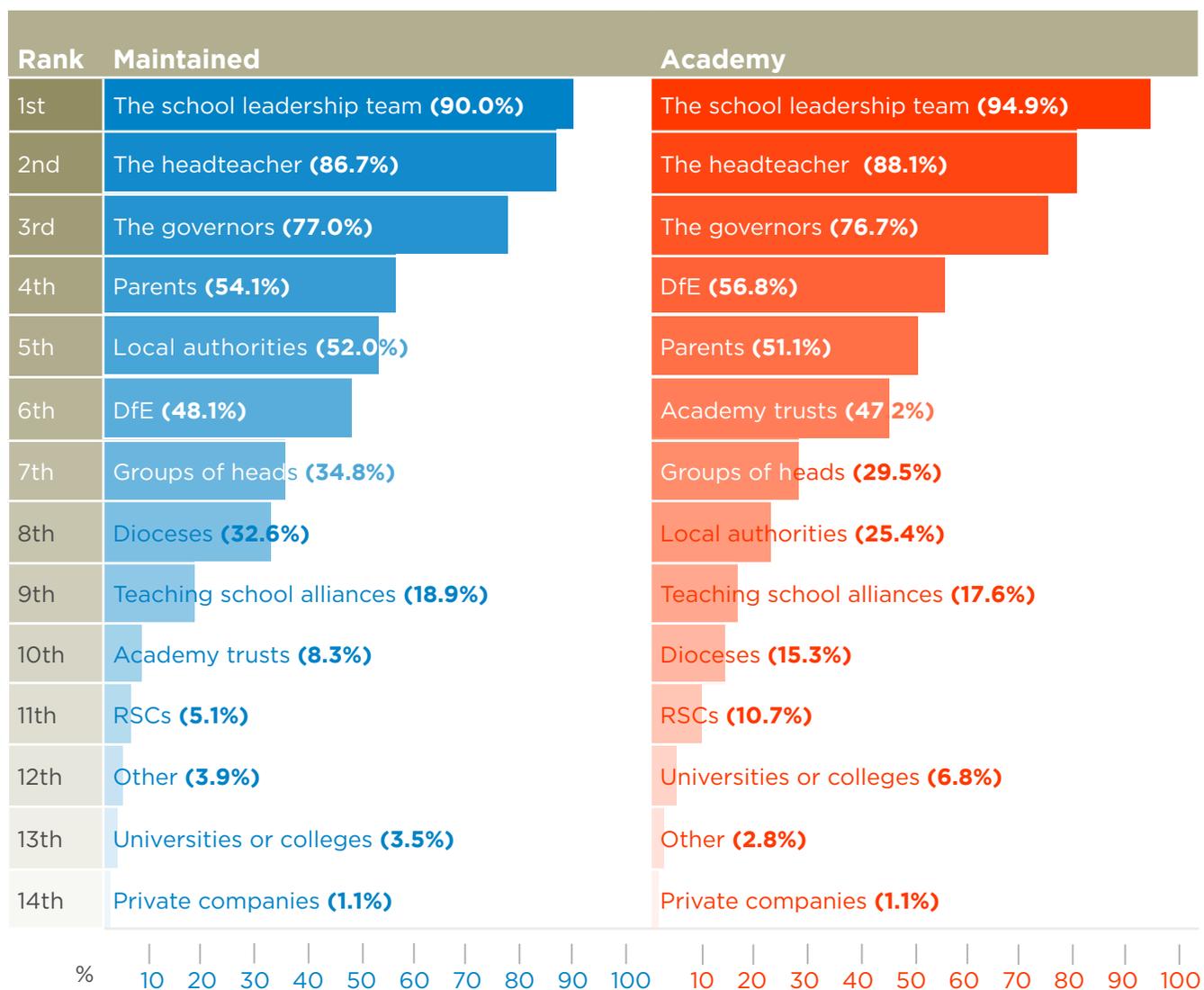
School leaders from all school types send a strong message that they want to be in charge of how their schools are run. Those in maintained schools and academies picked the same top three when asked who should be able to influence policy at an individual school:

- The school leadership team (81%)
- The school's headteacher/principal (77.1%)
- The governors (68.2%)

Lower down the list, we see some differences between school leaders in different types of school.

School leaders from academies put the Department for Education (DfE) fourth on the list, above academy trusts and regional schools commissioners (RSCs). For school leaders at maintained, the Department came sixth on the list, while all groups placed private companies last on the list.

Which of the following groups do you think should be able to influence policy at an individual school? (Results by school type)



Who should ultimately be responsible if a school is not delivering good standards of education?

When asked to pick one option from our list, more school leaders (22.8%) chose the leadership team than any other option, with local authorities second (21.3%) and the headteacher third (18%).

As we might expect, school leaders from maintained schools put local authorities top when asked who should ultimately be responsible (25.6%), while academy leaders put them bottom (6.2%).

The findings on local authorities stand out here. For school leaders, they're low on the list of who should influence policy in a school, but high on the list for who should ultimately be responsible when a school is struggling. In the government's thinking, academy chains have been taking the lead in turning round failing schools, but recent research from the DfE¹ adds to the debate on whether this has been effective. Some academy chains are doing particularly well in driving improvement of schools. Most, though, are seeing their schools improve at about the national average rate and some local authorities are outperforming even the best of the chains.

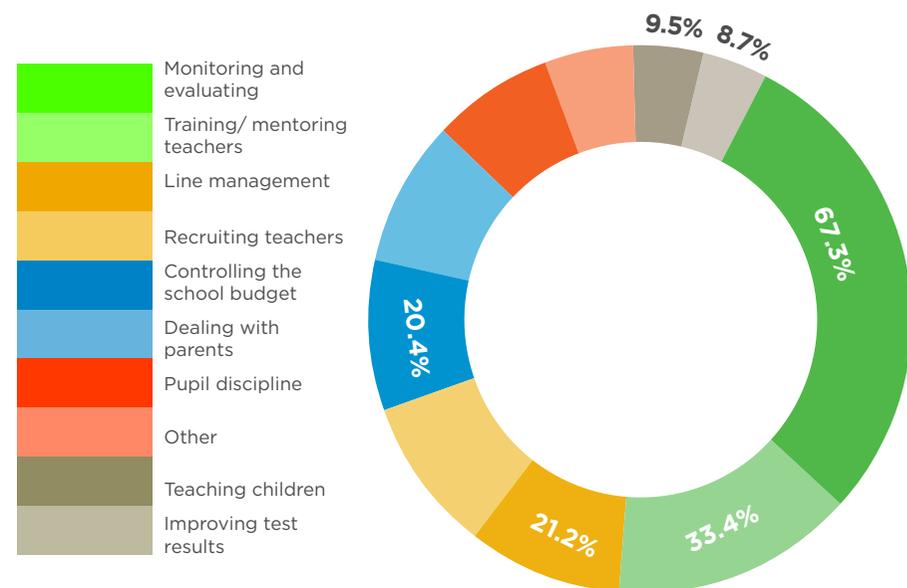
With proposals for a new 'middle tier' bubbling up ahead of the election, it's not quite clear what role local authorities and academy chains will be playing in school improvement under the next government. Watch for developments on this as we move through the year.

Moving away from this focus on structures, our survey finds support for the view that headteachers should be responsible for addressing serious underperformance. Those in academies put the headteacher first and second, respectively, on the list of who should be responsible, as we might expect, given the autonomy headteachers can experience in these schools.

With more responsibility falling to headteachers, it's more important than ever that they're armed with all the evidence needed to show how a school is performing. More than six in ten school leaders (67.3%) say monitoring and evaluating is one of a headteacher's top three roles, with more choosing this option than any of the others on our list.

Far fewer school leaders (only 8.7%) put improving test results in the top three roles for headteachers. Controlling the school budget was

What are the most important roles of a headteacher?



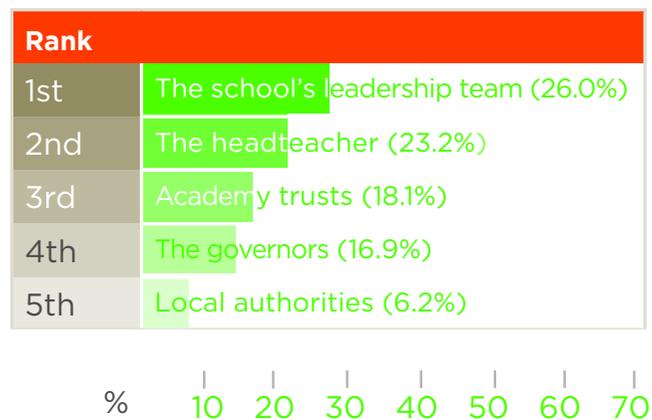
¹ DfE (2015) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-in-academy-chains-and-las-performance-measures>

also fairly low on the list (chosen by 20.4%), although it was higher (33%) for school leaders in secondary, middle and all-through schools than those in primary schools (23.3%). Perhaps budgets loom larger for school leaders in these schools as they have more money to control. At the same time, these are also the schools that are more likely to employ a school business manager.

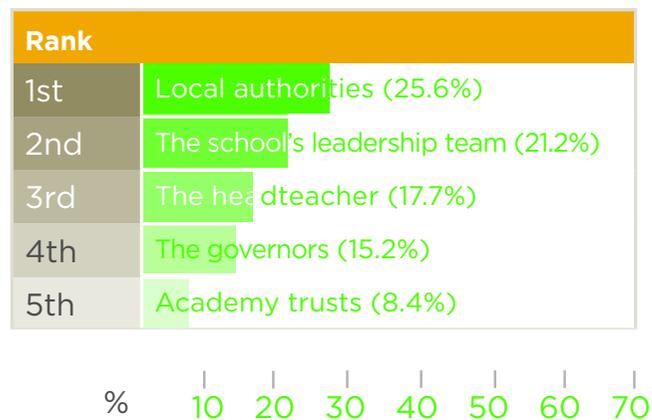
“ As we might expect, school leaders from maintained schools put local authorities top when asked who should ultimately be responsible (25.6%), while academy leaders put them bottom (6.2%).

If a school fails to deliver good standards of education, which one of the following groups do you think should ultimately be responsible for addressing the problem?

Academies



Maintained



Comments

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The survey responses are a powerful reflection of chronic systemic incoherence. School leaders know that responsibility for improvement rightly sits with individual schools, but their responses highlight real and justified concern at the absence of an effective middle tier for when schools fail. This is because successive governments have shied away from their responsibility for end-to-end system design, preferring instead to enshrine in statute piecemeal interventions as each problem (perceived or real) presented itself. A middle tier is urgently needed for failure intervention, indifferent to type and free from management responsibilities. We could call it a local authority.”

Kieran McDermott
Chief Executive, One Education Ltd

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This survey highlights some interesting contradictions within school leadership: school leaders want to take responsibility for their schools, yet also recognise the need for outside intervention where schools fail. There is uncertainty about where that responsibility should lie. Time and again voices across the sector plead for less focus on structural reforms, yet the ongoing lack of clarity about the ‘middle tier’ makes this difficult. Our members talk passionately about lots of excellent focus on teaching and learning in their schools, but this is all too easily overshadowed by these questions about accountability and structural coherence.”

June Stevenson
Chief Operating Officer of The Key

3

SCHOOL LEADERS' VIEWS ON EDUCATION POLICIES

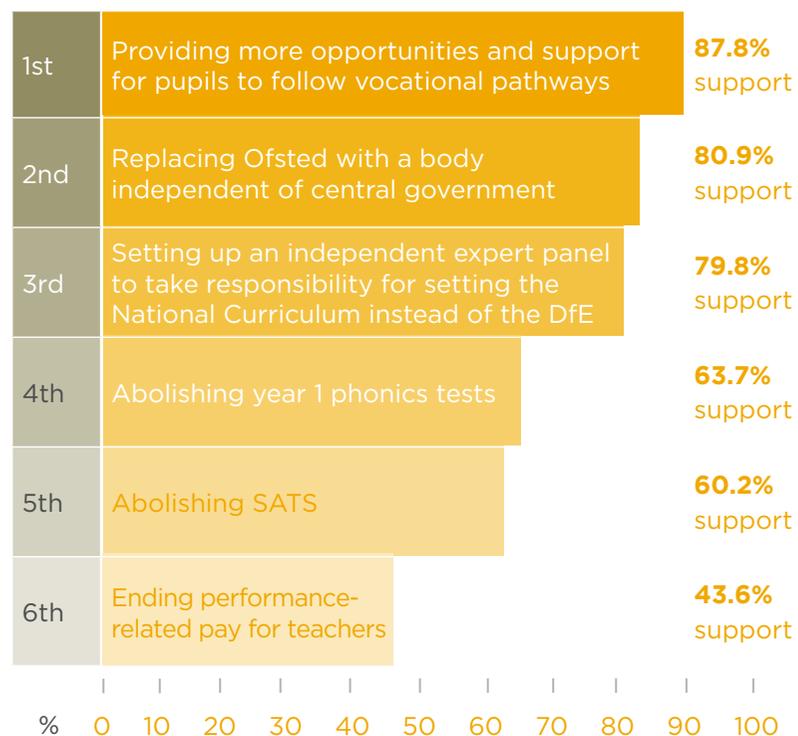
School leaders' preferences for policies do not follow party political lines. They largely support proposals that place responsibility for education with bodies independent of the government.

Support for specific education policies

Given that school leaders are undecided on which party is best equipped to improve education, it's no surprise to learn that they back policies from across the political spectrum.

Most strikingly, they favour less political control. More than eight in ten school leaders (80.9%) support replacing Ofsted with a body independent of central government and almost half (48.6%) strongly

Policies most supported by school leaders

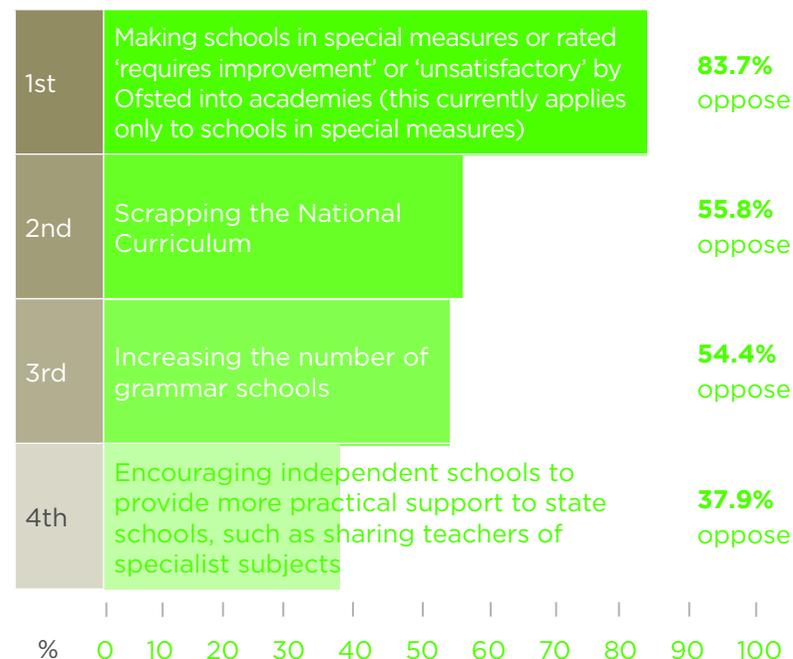


support this. Almost eight in ten (79.8%) also favour an independent expert panel taking over responsibility for setting the National Curriculum from the DfE.

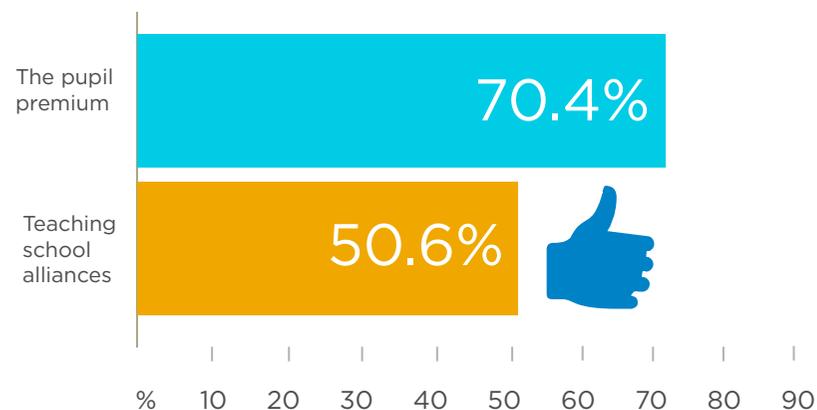
Expected impact of specific education policies

Seven in ten school leaders (70.3%) say the pupil premium will have a positive impact on quality of education in the next 18 months, and just over half (50.6%) say the same about teaching school alliances. For all the rest of the policies on our list, school leaders expect to see a negative impact, or no impact at all.

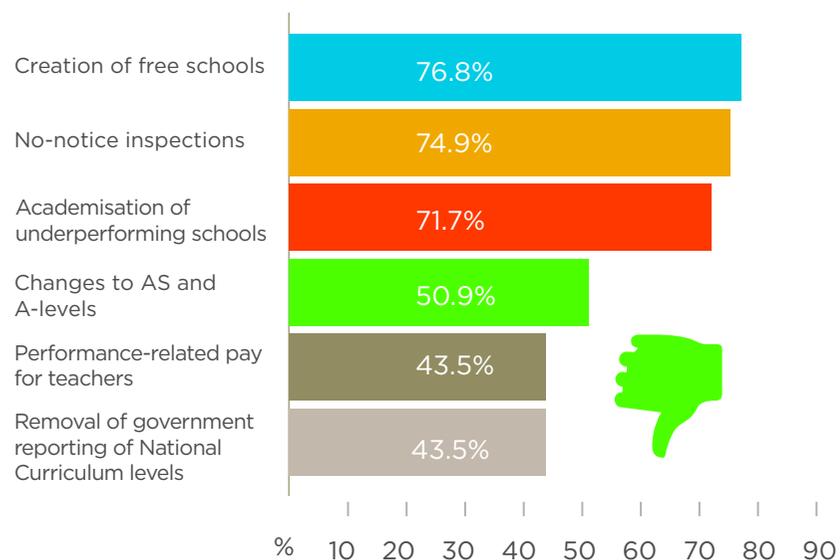
Policies most opposed by school leaders



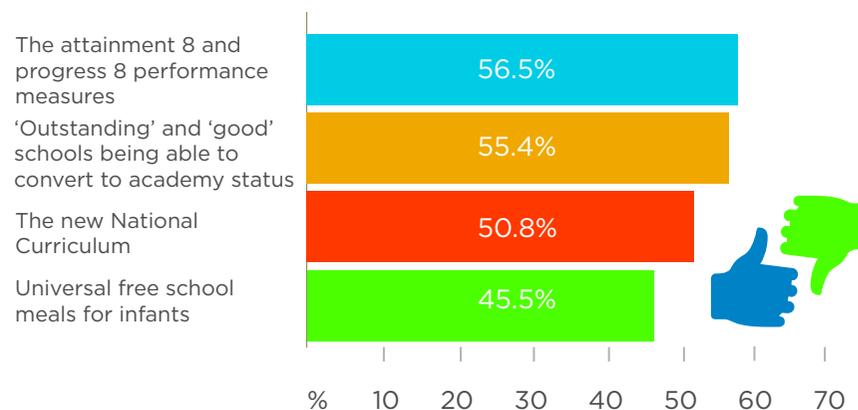
Policies expected to have a positive impact on the quality of education over the next 18 months



Policies expected to have a negative impact on the quality of education over the next 18 months



Policies rated as making neither a positive nor negative impact on the quality of education in England's schools over the next 18 months



Making schools rated 'required improvement' or below into academies

More than eight in ten school leaders (83.7%) say they oppose and six in ten (61.4%) strongly oppose turning schools in special measures or with low Ofsted ratings into academies. A majority of school leaders across phases and type of school oppose this policy, but school leaders in maintained schools and primary schools, who are most likely to be directly affected, are most strongly opposed.

Performance-related pay

Performance-related pay for teachers was introduced for maintained schools for the 2014 pay round, to a largely hostile welcome from unions and the profession. In our 2014 survey, six in ten school leaders (59%) said performance-related pay is not important in attracting and retaining high-quality staff. They were also divided on its likely impact on improving education - only around a third said it would have a positive effect.

With the first round of pay decisions now made, half of school leaders (49.4%) say they have found this policy difficult to implement. Four in ten (43.6%) support ending performance-related pay, and almost the same proportion (43.5%) expect performance-related pay to have a negative impact on quality of education in the next 18 months. The breakdown for this last figure shows higher numbers thinking it will have a negative impact in maintained schools (44.6%) than in academies (38.9%), which have always been free to use performance-related pay. In all types of school, the largest group of school leaders expect a negative impact, with a similar slightly smaller proportion saying it will have neither a positive nor negative impact.

Pupil premium

The pupil premium grant for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils is a popular policy among school leaders, with 70.4% expecting it to have a positive impact on the quality of education over the next 18 months. Similar proportions of school leaders in maintained schools and academies expect a positive impact.

The new National Curriculum

Almost half of school leaders (47.9%) say that the introduction of the new National Curriculum was difficult to implement this year. They are also unconvinced about its impact: more than half (51.7%) do not think it prepares children well for higher education, and half (50.8%) think it will make neither a positive nor negative impact on the quality of education in schools over the next 18 months. The picture is similar for school leaders in maintained schools and academies, despite the different levels of freedom over the curriculum in these types of school.

Vocational pathways

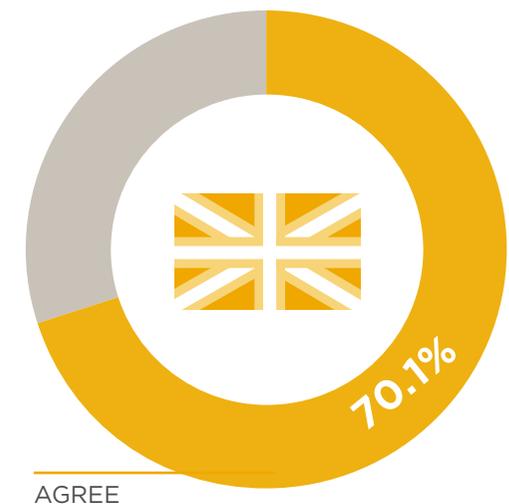
Politicians of all parties have started to talk about the need to improve vocational options for young people, whether through more apprenticeships or a new Technical Baccalaureate. This higher profile for vocational learning is backed by school leaders: 87.8% are in favour of providing more opportunities and support for pupils to follow vocational pathways.

Teaching British values

Schools have been grappling with the idea of British values in the past year amid growing concern about radicalisation of young people, and the fallout from the 'Trojan horse' affair, where suspicions were raised of an organised attempt to take over several Birmingham schools.

Under rules introduced from September 2014, all schools must actively promote fundamental British values, and Ofsted inspectors are now expected to report on this when they inspect schools.

School leaders are largely positive about this new duty. Our results show a high level of confidence in what 'British values' are, despite debate on whether they can be clearly defined: more than eight in ten school leaders (83%) say they understand what is meant by the term.



Across the board, almost nine in ten school leaders (86.8%) are confident that their school is well equipped to promote British values to pupils.

The majority of school leaders (70.1%) agree that promoting British values is an appropriate role for schools, although almost three in ten (29.9%) disagree. Breaking this down by region, we find most support in school leaders from the East Midlands (80.6%) and least support from those in the West Midlands (58.7%) – the area at the centre of the ‘Trojan Horse’ affair. The split was similar on whether promoting British values will help prepare pupils for life in modern Britain, with two thirds of school leaders (66.2%) agreeing and a third (33.8%) disagreeing.

AMY COOK, senior researcher at The Key, explains:

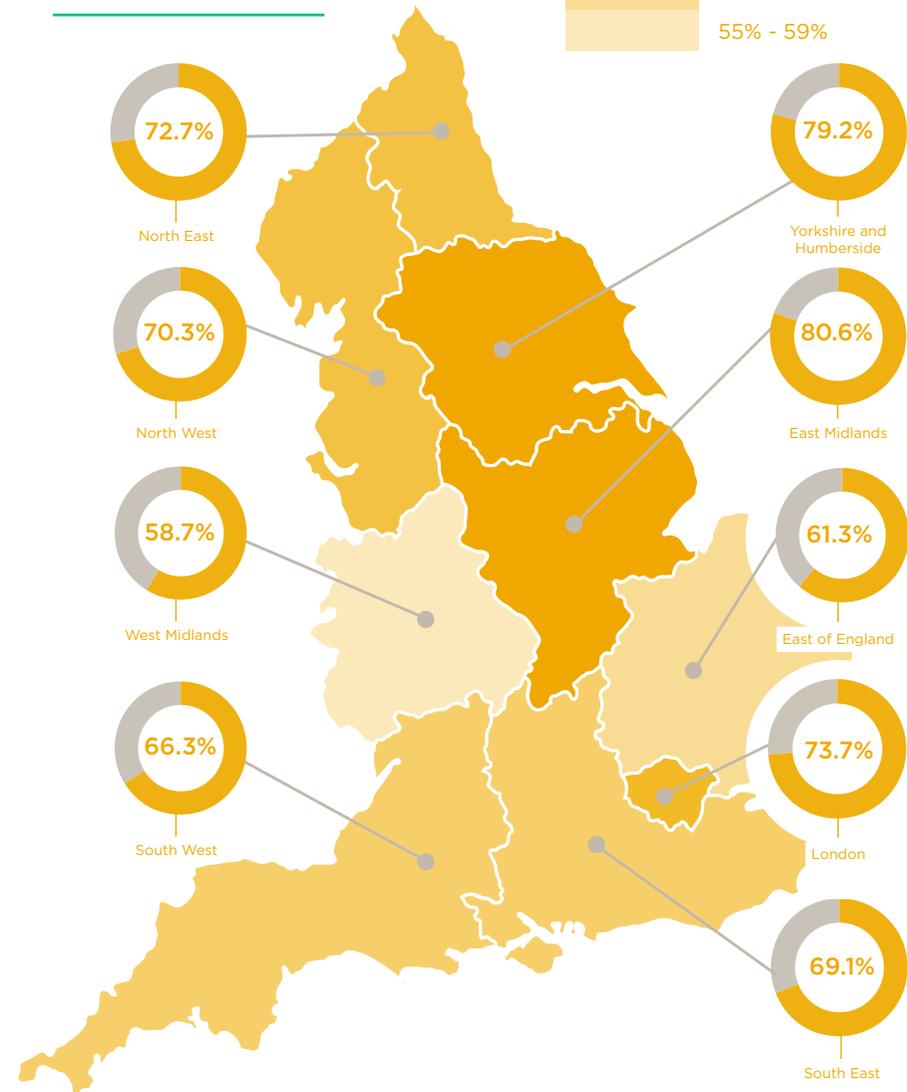
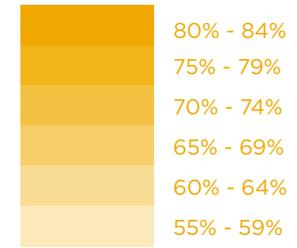


“British values are a real talking point for school leaders at the moment. Since September 2014, our articles on British values and protecting young people from radicalisation or extremism have been viewed more than 8,000 times. We haven’t seen any real resistance to this duty. Instead, school leaders have sought guidance on making it work. They’ve been reading up on how they can weave British values into the curriculum, for instance, and for pointers on inviting religious speakers into school, so it makes sense to me that the majority of school leaders agree that promoting these values is a job for schools.

It’s good to read that more than 80% of school leaders understand what British values mean – despite the debates in the media; perhaps this shows that, for most schools, this duty just reflects what was already happening on the ground.”

It is appropriate for schools to take on the role of actively promoting British values to pupils.

Percentage in regions that AGREE with this statement:



Comments

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As the person initially entrusted to work with the profession to roll out the concept of teaching school alliances, I am delighted to see that the potential benefits of this collaborative approach to schools leading the self-improving system have been well received.

On the other hand, it is disappointing to see a measure such as progress 8 being seen as neither positive nor negative, given it is such an improvement on current arrangements. I suspect this reflects the fact that the sheer volume and timing of the changes that school leaders are currently facing make even the good ideas seem less attractive.”

Andy Buck
Managing Director, Leadership Matters
Dean of the Leadership Faculty, Teaching Leaders

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These statistics show the cost of five years of frenetic reform: massive scepticism among school leaders about the role of central government in education. Ofsted is singled out for criticism. A regulator shouldn't be popular but Ofsted has lost the confidence of many; change cannot be far off. The unpalatable tactics deployed in the process of forced academisation have angered a surprisingly large number of leaders, many of whom are untouched by the initiative themselves and supportive of school autonomy; an own goal there.

But the real news is the priority given to vocational education. Are the stars aligning for this perennial poor cousin?”

Russell Hobby
General Secretary, NAHT

4

CHALLENGES FACING SCHOOL LEADERS

Teacher workload has been a challenge for most school leaders in the past year. They have also struggled with policy changes, including the removal of National Curriculum levels. School leaders have real concerns about morale in the teaching profession and their own work/life balance.

“The pace of change over the past year has been challenging for school leaders, as they’ve struggled to implement new policy, while wrestling with the usual complications of running a school.

We listed some changes and challenges, and asked school leaders which they had found easy and which difficult to implement or to manage over the past 12 months.

From our list, there were only two things that more school leaders found easy than found difficult: pupil recruitment (unsurprising with the shortage of school places) and universal free school meals for infants. The latter is particularly interesting given the concerns in summer 2014 that schools were unprepared for this change.

The table on the next page shows the rest of the results.

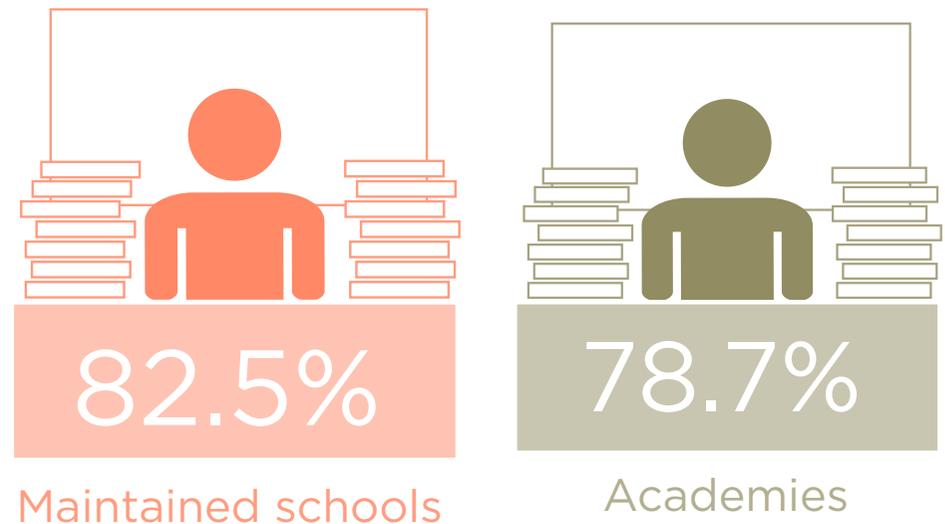
Teacher workload

More school leaders found managing teacher workload difficult than any other challenge. Breaking this down by type of school, we see that a higher percentage of school leaders in maintained schools (82.5%) than in academies (78.7%) said it was difficult.

This concern about workload echoes other recent findings. The government’s Workload Challenge consultation found that some

teachers cannot complete the tasks piled on them even when working extra hours¹, while 82% of teachers in a survey for the Guardian said their workload was unmanageable², and an investigation by the BBC found high levels of stress among teachers³. The Workload Challenge report highlights, in particular, the perceived pressure of Ofsted and policy change at a national level⁴.

The difficulty of managing teacher workload in the past 12 months



¹ DfE (2015) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/401406/RR445_-_Workload_Challenge_-_Analysis_of_teacher_consultation_responses_FINAL.pdf

² The Guardian (2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2015/mar/12/teachers-overworked-undervalued-education-survey>

³ BBC (2015) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b055g8zh>

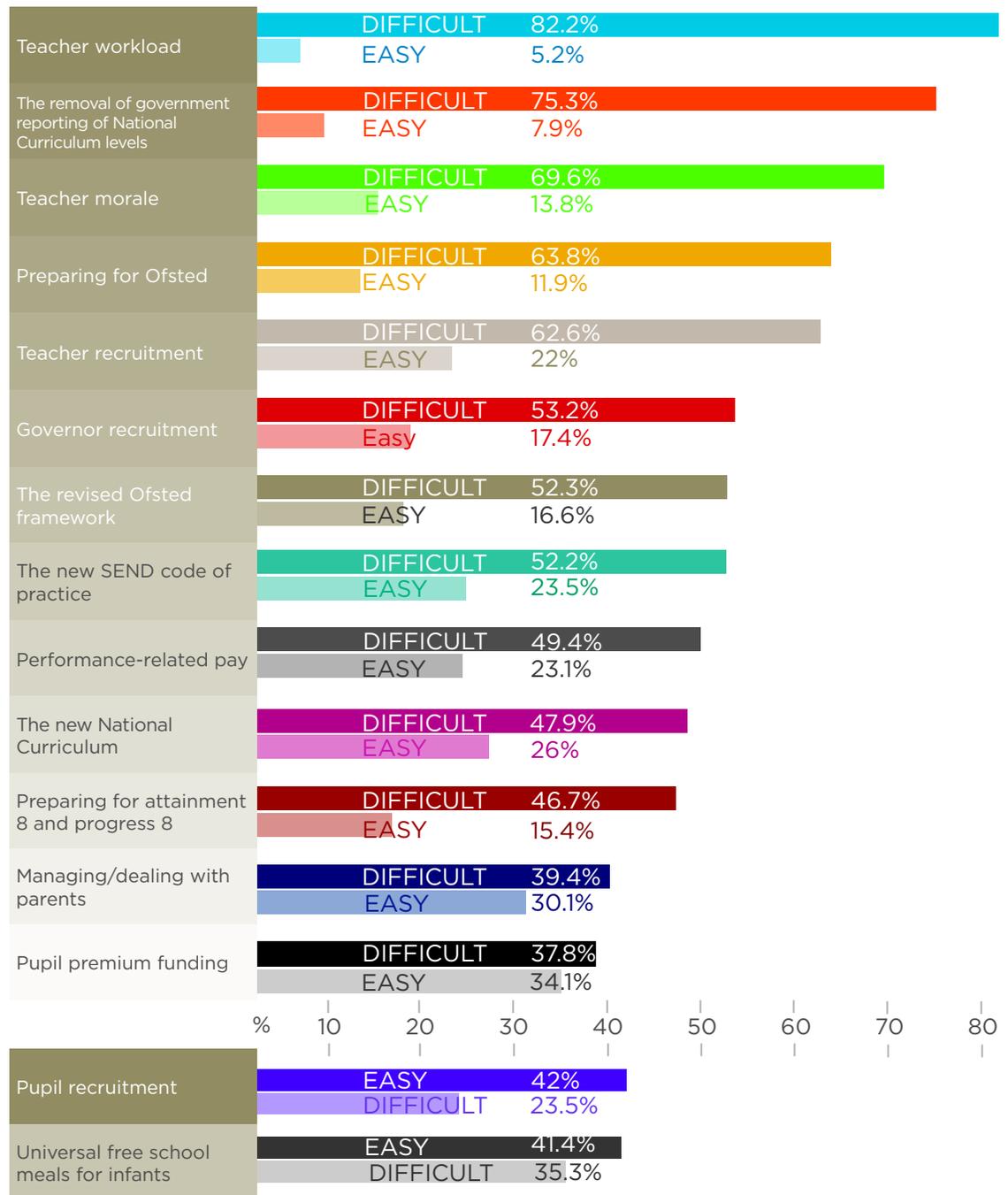
⁴ DfE (2015) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/401406/RR445_-_Workload_Challenge_-_Analysis_of_teacher_consultation_responses_FINAL.pdf

In the past 12 months, how easy or difficult have you found implementing and/or managing each of the following in your school?

“ The government’s Workload Challenge consultation found that some teachers cannot complete the tasks piled on them even when working extra hours, while 82% of teachers in a survey for the Guardian said their workload was unmanageable...

MOST DIFFICULT to manage/implement...

EASIEST to manage/implement...



Changes to assessment

Another area of concern is the introduction of new arrangements for assessment. More than seven in ten school leaders (71.4%) still do not think their school is comfortable with the new arrangements. What's more, half (50.9%) think the changes to AS- and A-levels will have a negative impact on the quality of education in England's schools over the next 18 months.

The end of National Curriculum levels has also caused difficulties. More than three quarters (75.3%) of school leaders say this change has been difficult to implement over the past 12 months, and more than eight in ten (82.6%) do not think that the removal of levels has had a positive impact on their school. School leaders in both maintained schools and academies say it's been difficult: 77.3% in maintained schools say so, while 68.5% in academies agree (despite the greater freedoms related to assessment these schools already had).

School leaders are unhappy, too, with the way school performance is reported nationally. More than eight in ten (83%) say that national performance tables should be scrapped, with more primary school leaders (85.7%) than secondary school leaders (69.1%) saying they're in favour of ending them.

School collaboration

Despite fears that the schools sector is fragmenting, and that recent changes have encouraged greater competition, our results suggest that school leaders still think collaboration between schools is productive. For example, more than half (53.8%) think continuous professional development is most effective with other schools, and about half (50.6%) think teaching school alliances will have a positive impact on the quality of education in England.

At the same time, the majority (63.7%) think that the right infrastructure is not in place to support collaboration, with the figure for secondary schools (71%) even higher. The majority (54.7%) of school leaders also say they do not think schools have enough incentive to collaborate.

Morale within the profession

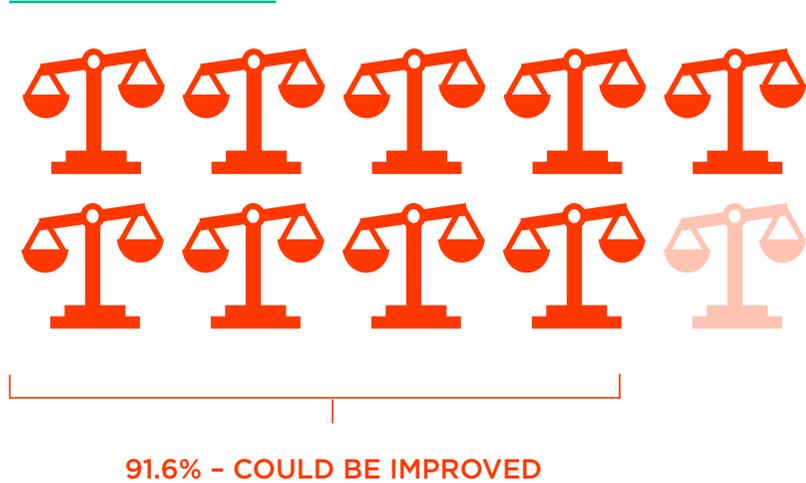
Given these findings on the challenges schools are facing, it's no great surprise that school leaders are worried about teachers' morale. More than eight in ten (85%) think morale in the teaching profession has got worse in the past five years, and only 2.3% think it has got better.

School leaders are also feeling the strain themselves. More than nine in ten (91.6%) say their work/life balance could be improved, more than three-quarters (77.6%) say their family life has been negatively affected by their role, and more than three in five (64.2%) say the same about their mental health.

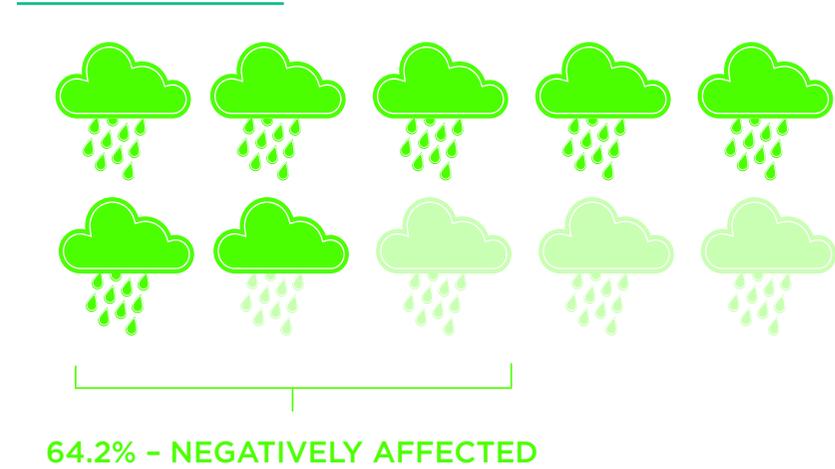
At the same time, almost two-thirds (65.6%) say they're satisfied with their current role, and more than half (53.9%) are satisfied with their level of pay. More of those in academies (58%) than in maintained schools (52.5%) say they're satisfied with their pay.

So, are a satisfying role and satisfactory pay enough to keep school leaders in their jobs? Our final finding on this is a cause for concern. More than half (53.8%) of school leaders say they plan to leave their role within the next three years.

Work/life balance



Mental health



Family life



“ More than eight in ten (83%) say that national performance tables should be scrapped, with more primary school leaders (85.7%) than secondary school leaders (69.1%) saying they’re in favour of ending them.

“

The challenge for schools leaders is to manage the workload and pressure on their staff. The best headteachers focus on what is important for their teachers to achieve, i.e. high-quality teaching and the progress of their students, and do not distract them with less important activities. This is easier to achieve when school leaders have a clear vision and philosophy of education and are not constantly refocusing to meet the latest government initiative. This also has a positive impact on teacher morale.”

Sue Williamson
Chief Executive, SSAT

“

ASCL welcomes The Key's State of Education report. It is not surprising that workload features highly. None of us want a life that is totally dominated by work. But nor do we want to position teaching in an out-dated industrial era. Teaching is first and foremost a profession. As such, it ignites our passion and our moral purpose. However, there is a problem that we need to solve - too many teachers say that their professional lives contain unnecessary tasks so that they cannot integrate their life and work. ASCL has published a ten-point plan which mobilises the whole system to respond to this issue.”

Leora Cruddas
Director of Policy, The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)

5

WHAT DO SCHOOL LEADERS THINK WOULD MOST IMPROVE EDUCATION?

When asked to choose what would improve the quality of education in England, school leaders selected fewer in-year statutory changes, reduced teacher workload and increased funding as their top three. Greater freedoms and being set challenging targets were bottom of the list.

We asked school leaders to pick the three changes from our list that would do most to improve the quality of education in England. Results are shown below.

Fewer in-year statutory changes

Top of the list was fewer in-year statutory changes. We know from the questions we answer for school leaders that they can feel like they are chasing their tails when too much change comes from the top. This sentiment was echoed by Peter Kent, president of the ASCL, at the union's annual conference. He said government should "take a step back" and trust the judgement and professional knowledge of teachers to drive the necessary changes in schools.

Reduced teacher workload

We saw earlier in this report that teacher workload has been a real worry for school leaders over the past year; this may well contribute to their view that teaching has become less attractive for new entrants over the past five years.

Increased funding

At a time of austerity, funding will always be on school leaders' minds. Though school budgets have been relatively protected over the past five years, there's more uncertainty in store for schools as the election plays out, and despite some changes, a national funding formula to make allocation of funds to schools more transparent, still seems some way off. If we see tighter budgets after the election will funding jump up this list?

Differences by school type

The top five results were the same for all types of schools, but there were some differences in the order:

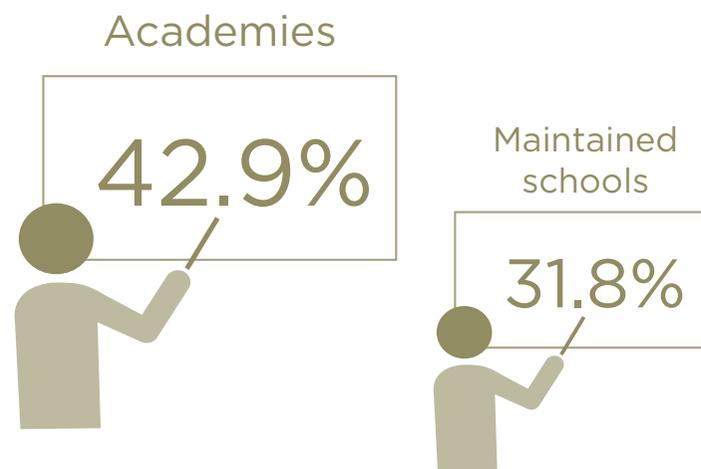
- For school leaders in maintained schools, reducing teacher workload was second (51.4%) and for those in academies it was fourth (42.6%).

- A greater proportion of school leaders from academies (42.9%) than from maintained schools (31.8%) put better quality teaching in their top three.
- Better quality staff development and training was chosen by more school leaders from maintained schools (31.8%) than from academies (23.7%).
- A higher percentage of school leaders in academies (13.6%) than in maintained schools (9.8%) put better quality buildings in their top three for improving the quality of education.

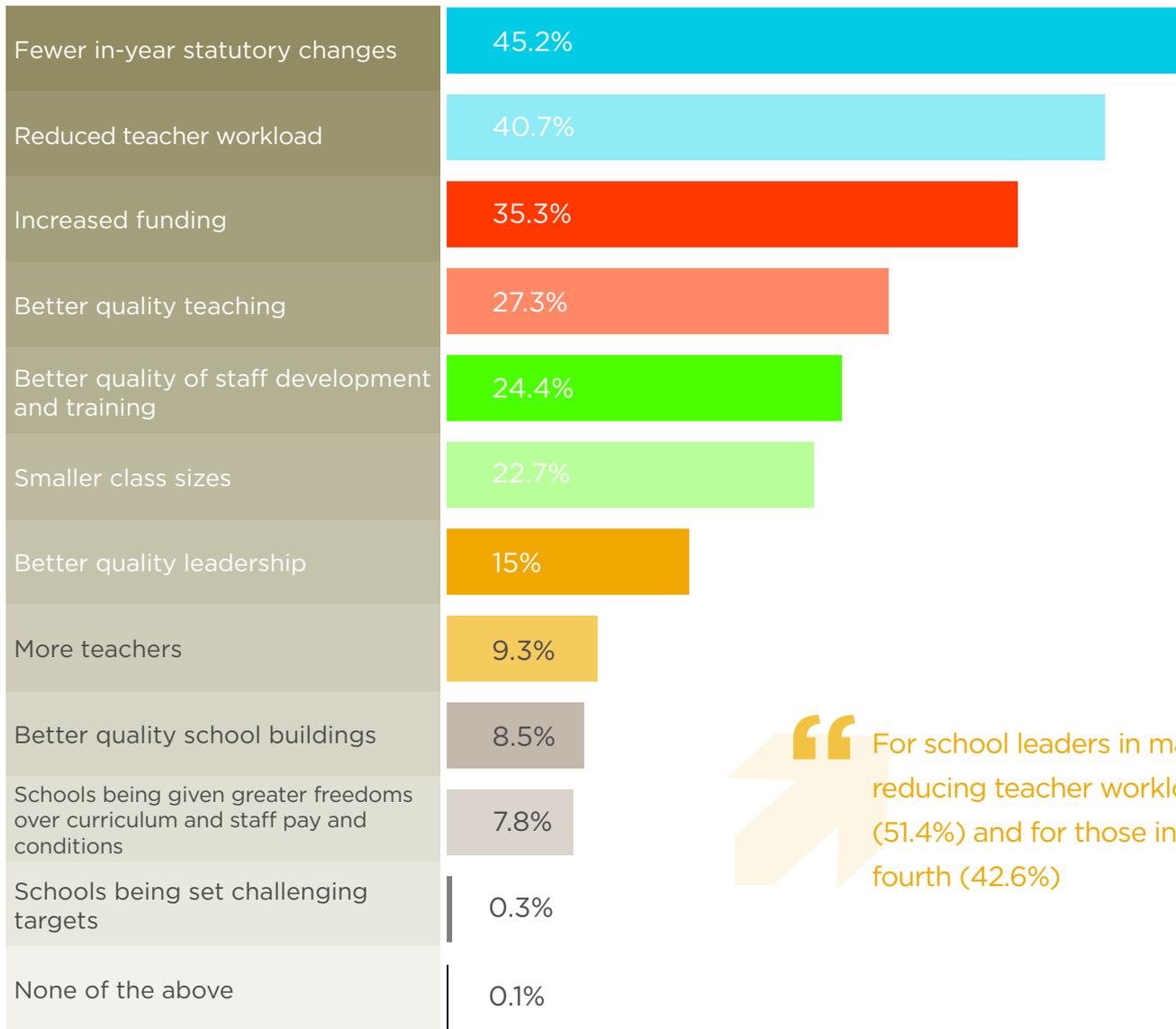
Least popular choices

At the other end of the table, only 7.8% of school leaders put greater freedoms over curriculum and staff pay and conditions in their top three. Even fewer (0.3%) chose schools being set challenging targets.

Proportion of school leaders who put better quality teaching in their top three to improve education



Which of the following would do most to improve the quality of education in England?



“ For school leaders in maintained schools, reducing teacher workload was second (51.4%) and for those in academies it was fourth (42.6%)

Comments

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It's noticeable the answers reflect those found in the government's Workload Challenge, and could be construed as 'what would help teachers' rather than 'what would help education'. That said, effective teachers should make for better education. The DfE have issued guidelines saying they will not change policies mid-year where possible. On workload, it's a shame there isn't more detail on what, precisely, would reduce it. As for funding, it does make a difference to additional services and that sometimes takes a while to show through in results, but they're right - education will suffer, slowly but surely, if cutbacks occur.”

Laura McInerney
Editor, Schools Week

“

It is clear from the responses that school leaders find government interference a huge distraction. The fact that the quality of teaching was rated only fourth most important when it comes to improving education is probably the most striking - and the most disturbing - aspect of the data. The quality of teaching has to be the single most important factor when it comes to improving education. If we are funded well enough to run our schools so that we can recruit and retain the best teachers in world, then we we will have the best education system in the world. It is that simple.”

John Tomsett
Headteacher, Huntington School
Co-founder of the Headteachers' Roundtable

About the survey

A sample of 14,507 school leaders and 8,173 governors was selected from The Key's membership database to complete an online survey in February 2015. The questionnaire for this study was designed by The Key with guidance from Ipsos MORI and conducted online using Survey Monkey; 1,180 school leaders and 1,320 governors completed the full survey. Both school leader and governor sets of data have been weighted to match the population profile of schools in The Key's database in terms of region, school phase and school type. The data described in this summary can therefore be taken to represent the views of teachers and governors on The Key's database, which in turn provides an indication of the opinions of leaders and governors in mainstream schools across England.

Please note: This report is predominantly based on data from school leaders. A report on the governor findings will be released later in the year.

About The Key

The Key provides impartial, trusted leadership and management support to more than 40% of the schools in England and Wales. Our high-quality information, guidance and events help busy school leaders and governors work with increased confidence, knowledge and capacity. At the heart of everything we do is a passionate commitment to supporting schools in delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

We run two national information services, The Key for School Leaders and The Key for School Governors. They offer instant answers to questions on all aspects of school management. No question is too big or too small and we cover topics such as raising attainment, financial management, special educational needs, compliance, setting a strategic vision for the school ... and everything in between.

We have built a rich network of contacts and an extensive knowledge base: every day we answer new questions from school leaders and governors; every week we visit schools and meet with those at the forefront of education; every year there are more than a million clicks on articles on our websites. These deep connections give us unparalleled insights into the concerns, trends and good practice within the sector.

We also run practical events on topical issues, which bring together leading voices in education including expert practitioners, thought leaders, policy makers and school inspectors. These events, which are open to all, offer practical workshops, 1-to-1 sessions and networking opportunities.

About Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute works closely with national government, local public services and the not-for-profit sector. Its 200 research staff focus on public service and policy issues, including a team focusing on education issues. Each of our researchers has expertise in a particular part of the public sector, ensuring we have a detailed understanding of specific sectors and policy challenges. This, combined with our methodological and communications expertise, ensures that our research makes a difference for decision makers and communities.

Find further comment at insights.keysupport.com