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Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on the new role. We know that despite what people outside the sector might assume, education doesn't stop for the summer, so your to-do list is already long, and plenty of people will be queuing up to tell you what should and shouldn't change.

That's exactly why we wanted to do something different: hand you teachers' own words, unfiltered.

Every day, thousands of teachers tap into Teacher Tapp and tell us, honestly and often bluntly, what's really happening in their schools¹. As soon as your appointment was announced, we asked them what they'd want you to know if you were sat in front of them. Here's what 4,000 of them said:

Responses from leaders in schools

Pay rises should be funded, not absorbed. Leaders are clear that they want staff paid fairly – but not at their school's expense: "A pay deal that isn't fully funded is a budget cut that will squeeze experienced teachers out of the system." And: "Schools do not have 'give' in their budgets. Partially funding pay rises means losing essential services in schools."

Ofsted reform hasn't been well received. "The current crisis is multidimensional and needs attacking from a variety of stances... toxic academy chains, the punitive and destructive nature of OFSTED, the unfairness of the curriculum and the micromanagement of talented staff." Leaders are direct about the cost: "OFSTED are the cause of huge teacher and leadership mental health issues, retention of staff and narrowed curriculum."

SEND needs proper specialist infrastructure, not good intentions.

"Trying to do inclusion on the cheap is disingenuous and short sighted," one leader said. And Alternative Provision deserves recognition, not stigma: "Alternative Provision is often viewed as a 'failure' for many pupils. It's not. It's a great way to safeguard, care for and teach our most vulnerable children in society."

MAT executive pay needs scrutiny. "Sort out MAT CEO pay. It's obscene," was one of the more polite responses. MATs were criticised by Teacher Tappers, but opinions are mixed. **59%**

¹ Teacher Tapp has the largest active sample of practising teachers in England, with over 10,000 responding every day. Our panel is representative rather than random: we apply post-stratification weights to ensure the composition of our respondents matches the Department for Education Workforce Census data.



of leaders who have worked in academies believe they give teachers more, or the same autonomy as Local Authority schools; whereas leaders who have never worked in an academy are much less likely to say the same (18%).

Leaders want stability, not another initiative. "Fund schools and stop this constant churn of change." And specifically: "Stop introducing new initiatives and bringing in additional statutory documents all at the same time – you are overloading school staff, especially leaders."

Responses from primary teachers

Teachers welcome curriculum and assessment reforms. Tappers describe the primary curriculum as "boring, blotted and not fit for purpose." Many teachers wrote in requesting a new curriculum with room for joy and creativity again. And play needs to be taken seriously as pedagogy, not sidelined as a treat: "Play is vital for ALL children. Up to the age of at least 7 it should be compulsory pedagogy. Ideally this should continue all through primary school. This kind of reform to the curriculum would have significant benefits for all children but especially those with SEND."

SEND provision in mainstream classrooms is at breaking point. As one Tapper put it: "Primary schools do not have the budget, adults, space or expertise to properly meet the needs of the HUGE influx of children with complex additional needs – children whose needs would always have been met in a special school setting but who now get put into mainstream with schools expected to cater for them. Everyone's education suffers."

Teaching assistants deserve better. "TAs are the backbone of our education," one teacher told us – and yet they're leaving in droves because the pay doesn't reflect it. "Please give us the funding for more bodies in school. More TAs are so desperately needed and please pay them a proper wage. They are wonderful, wonderful people."

Falling pupil numbers are an opportunity, not a threat. Teachers want smaller classes, not redundancies: "With class sizes dropping and the number of pupils in primary schools falling, use this as an opportunity to decrease class sizes instead of forcing schools into redundancies and trying to work with less."

Responses from secondary teachers

Not every student needs the same pathway. Secondary staff want a curriculum that matches real life after school: "Curriculum change to meet what employers actually want. More practical and technical subjects and opportunities that students would value and use in their adult lives. Put food and nutrition (with practical cookery classes) back on the KS3 curriculum... Functional English for all students so that students can fill in an application form."

Teachers are hopeful about GCSEs reform. The volume of content and exams is, in teachers' words, unrealistic: "Please look at radical reform of the curriculum because the sheer quantity of exam papers sat by students and breadth of content they are expected to remember for GCSEs is an unrealistic expectation." English GCSE comes in for particular criticism: "Please change the English GCSE curriculum. It is too white, too male and too Victorian. Too much focus on learning quotations by heart and reading 19th century texts."



Behaviour needs attention "Behaviour in schools is worsening. There needs to be a recognition that this is linked to poor parenting and schools are not to blame." And on what teachers are being asked to be: "We are educators, not social workers, child services, surrogate parents, mental health specialists or daycare providers so stop expecting us to be experts in all of these things."

Retention, not recruitment, is the real crisis. "Recruitment isn't your problem – retention is," one teacher told us plainly. And the fix, they say, starts with time: "Teachers don't teach to the best of their ability when they are overworked – enforce a mandatory PPA increase immediately."

The arts need investment, not an afterthought. "Invest in the arts!! This will help improve student mental health and wellbeing as there is so much emphasis on 'academia' and limited (depends on schools) investment in creativity. Children are losing the art of using their imagination."

What's working (please don't undo this!)

It wasn't all asks and frustrations, though. Plenty of Tappers used the survey to tell us what's gone right over the last decade too – and to plead with you not to throw it out.

The knowledge-rich curriculum is working. "The knowledge rich curriculum works. It is helping young people. We have had a successful decade," one respondent told us. Another put it more urgently: "Do not undo all the good work done with curriculum in the last ten years! Build on it, do not undo! Knowledge rich NEEDS to stay."

Maths Hubs get a special mention. One teacher called them "fabulous ways of keeping experienced teachers feeling developed and stretched in the classroom" – and wondered why every subject doesn't get the same treatment.

Flexible working is a genuine win. "Keep the momentum on flexible working!" something we have seen in our data too with more than half of teachers telling us they think more flexible working would help with the retention of female teachers.

Keep the letters coming. Communication from the top got a rare compliment too, with one Tapper telling us: "Continue in Bridget's shoes, keep writing your termly letters – we have been well informed by Bridget this way."

In closing

None of this is coming from a vocal minority – it's the same themes, surfacing again and again, from teachers and leaders across the country, in primary, secondary and everywhere in between. We'd be glad to share the full data behind any of this, and we know Tappers would welcome the chance to see their words land somewhere that can actually act on them.

With thanks on behalf of the profession,

The Teacher Tapp Team

TeacherTapp

Five graphs we think you should see

If you were the education secretary, what would be your top priority this year? (You can only pick one)



Question answered by 9,157 teachers on 21st July 2026 (results weighted to reflect teacher and school demographics)

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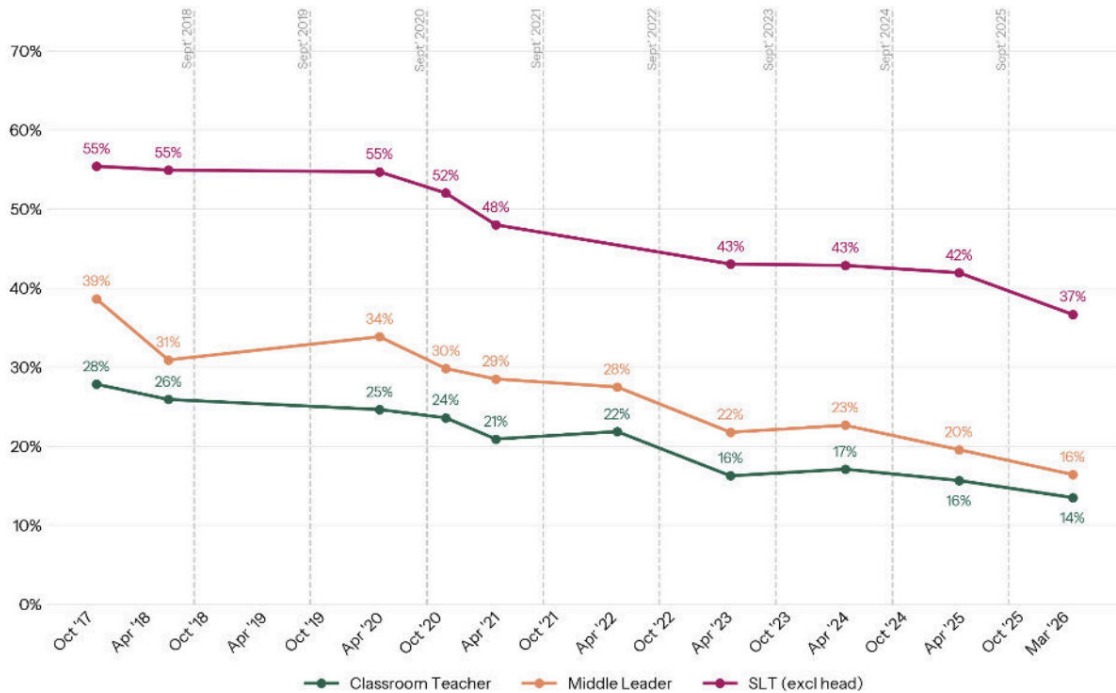
Teachers reactions to the 2026 pay award offer compared to 2022

Response	Jul 2022 n=7,489	Jul 2026 n=8,948	Change
Strongly agree with the offer	6%	2%	↓ 4pp
Disappointed, but necessary in the circumstances	35%	25%	↓ 10pp
Disagree with the offer	28%	37%	↑ 9pp
Angry about the offer	19%	27%	↑ 8pp
I'm not sure	12%	9%	↓ 3pp

Low High

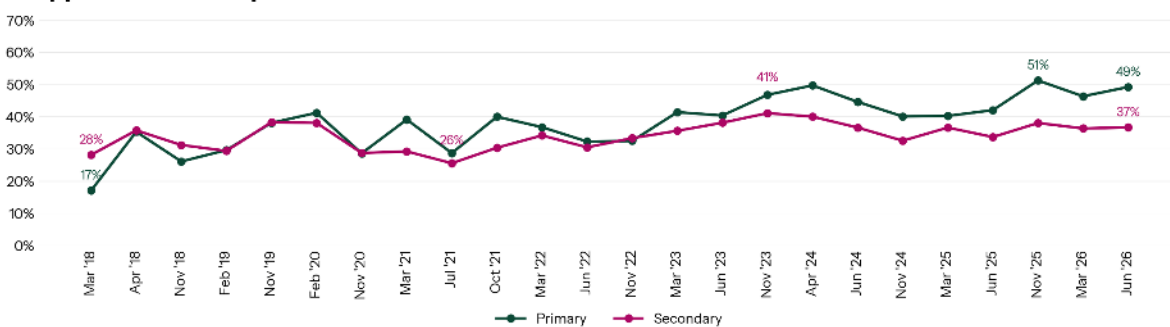
2022 question answered by 7,489 teachers on 26th July 2022. 2026 question answered by 8,948 teachers on 8th July 2026. Both results weighted to reflect teacher and school demographics.

Fewer than four in ten senior leaders aspire to headship



Question asked: "Would you like to be a headteacher yourself one day?" (Those who responded, "Yes, definitely" or "Yes, perhaps")

In the last lesson you taught, was there any time when you felt teaching and learning largely stopped because of poor behaviour?



Question answered by between 134 and 5,356 teachers, depending on date asked (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

TeacherTapp

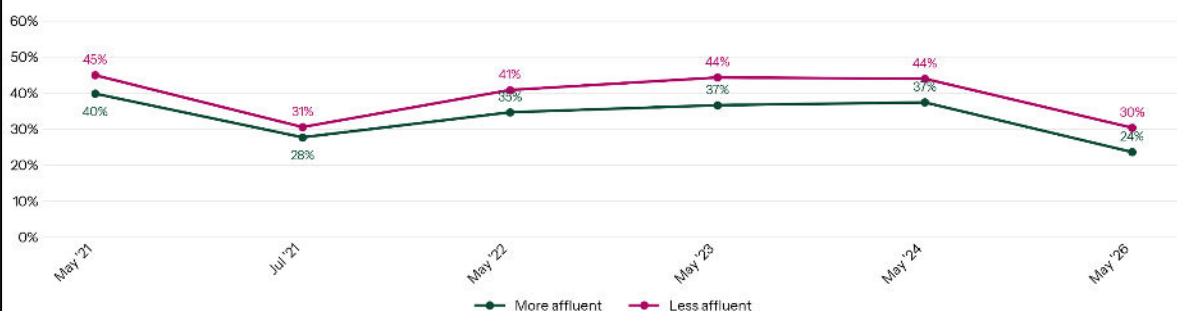
Which of these has been the MOST important at times when you've considered leaving in the past year?



Question answered by 9,956 teachers on 28th November 2025 (results weighted to reflect teacher and school demographics)

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Did a student take out a mobile phone in one of your lessons today without permission?



Question answered by between 939 and 2,440 secondary teachers, depending on date asked (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

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