

Measuring Teacher Effectiveness in England: Why It's Tough and How We're Tackling It

Great teachers are the key to student success. Research shows that effective teachers can significantly boost student achievement, with long-lasting effects. Retaining these teachers is equally important – high turnover disrupts continuity, lowering student outcomes.

However, great teaching takes time to develop. Studies show that teachers improve most in their first few years and the right working conditions, like supportive leadership and a collaborative culture, play a vital role in helping this process.

Research has told us so much about what makes a great teacher, but almost all of this research comes from the US. But what about teachers in England? We actually know very little about them because the data linking teachers to their students' achievement is much harder to come by – until now.

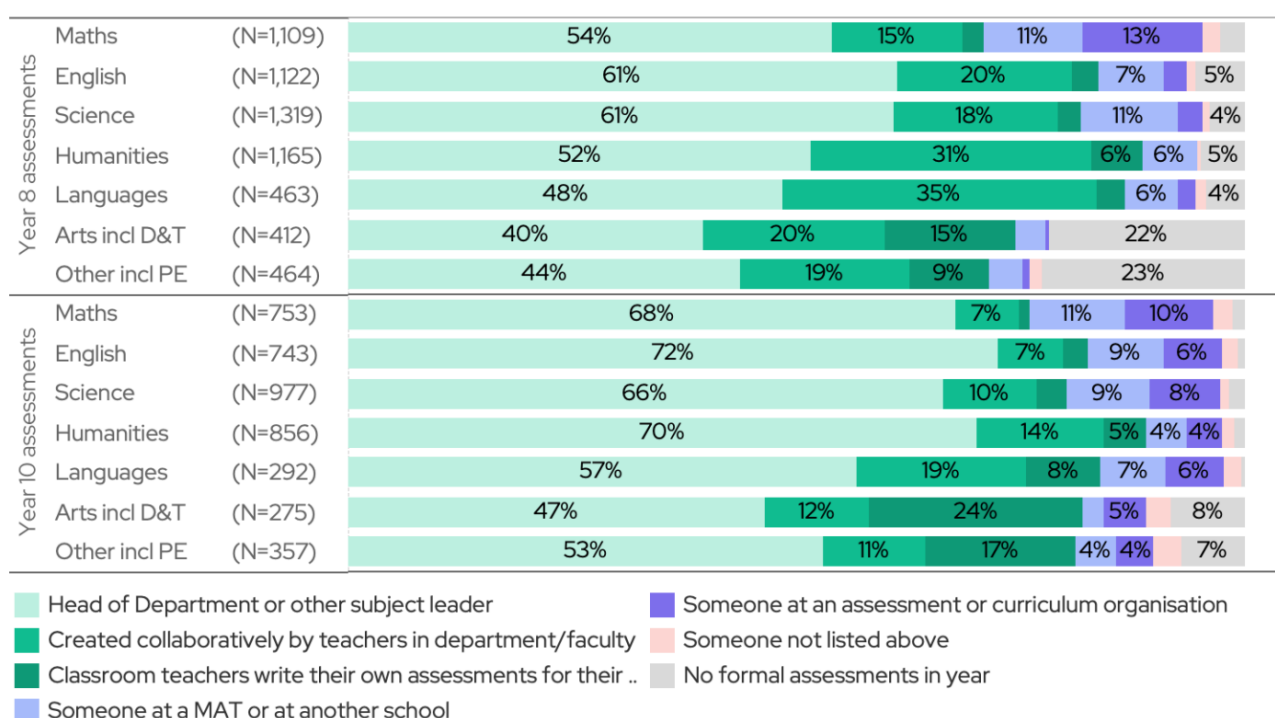
Why We Need to Understand Teachers in England

Understanding teacher effectiveness in England is crucial because our education system is fundamentally different from the U.S. in several key areas, including national exams, inspections, teacher training, and school structures. We organise our curriculum, classrooms, and teachers' daily lives quite differently. While U.S.-based research has shaped global education policies, England needs its own data and research to ensure that reforms are tailored to our specific needs. By studying how teachers in England contribute to student learning, we can create training programs and school environments that truly support teachers here, helping them improve and thrive in their teaching career.

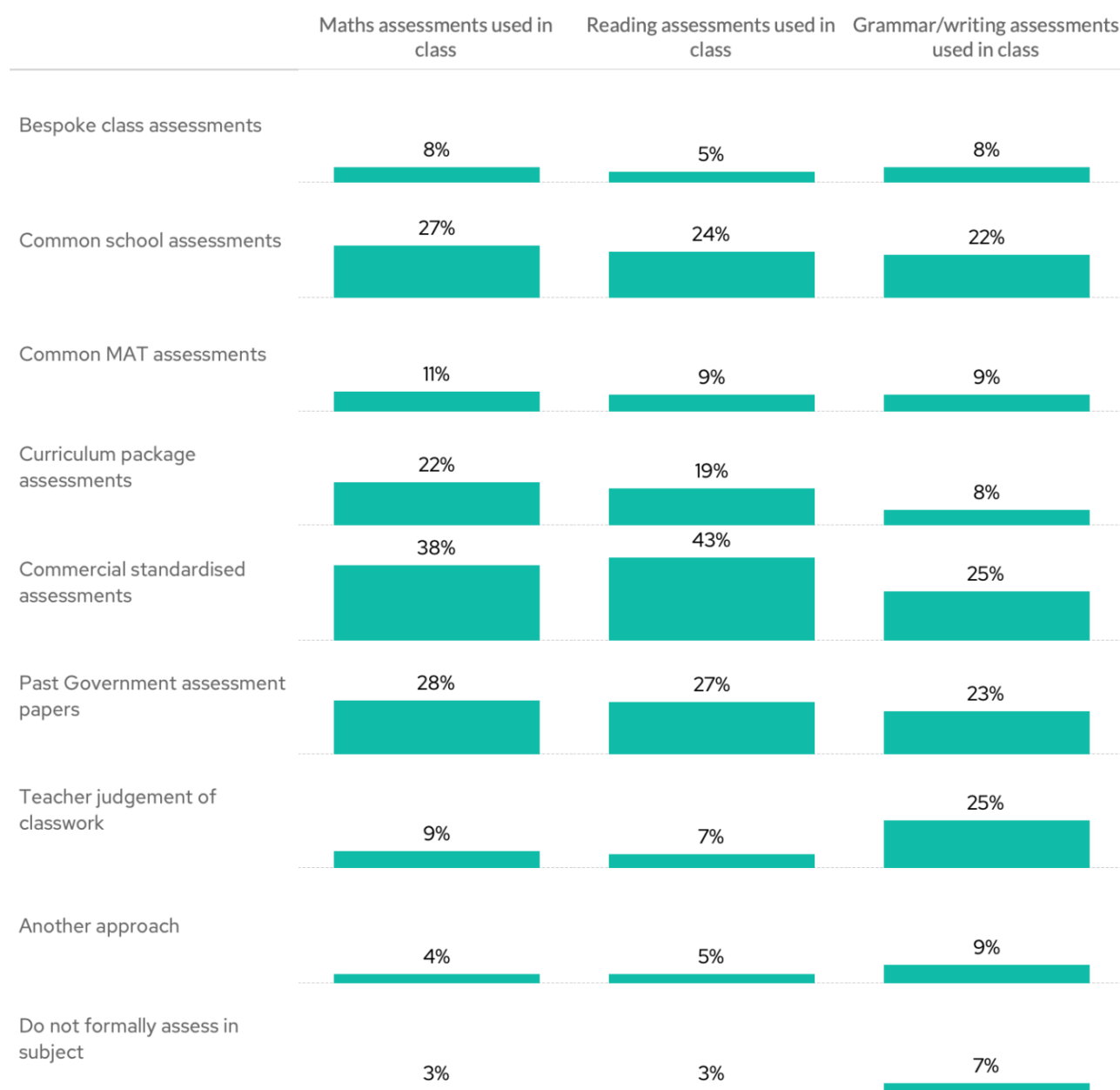
What makes it so difficult to estimate the contribution of a teacher to student learning growth in England?

Measuring teacher contributions to student learning growth in England is challenging due to the lack of a unified, standardised assessment system. Usually, research can only compare student learning growth across schools where schools share a common annual assessments. In secondary schools, whilst formal end of year assessments are the norm, less than 1-in-5 are using an assessment that is common to more than one school (shown in lilac or purple below).

In the main subject you teach, who writes the formal assessments that are used in Years 8 and 10?



These shared assessments are now far more common in primary schools, albeit only in the core subjects of English and maths, because so many teachers use either commercial standardised assessment or assessments included in their curriculum packages. (You can read more about current assessment practice [here](#).)



The lack of common assessments is not the only challenge for researchers in England. In secondary schools, it can be particularly difficult to attribute an individual student's learning gains to a particular teacher due to the way that assignment to classes takes place. The process of assigning students to classes, particularly where attainment grouping is taking place, is complex, making it hard to be sure whether a class that achieves strong learning growth does so due to their teacher's skill or some other factor associated with the grouping process. For example, if a student with relatively low prior attainment is placed in a high-attaining class because teachers believe they can keep up, their subsequent strong progress may reflect their underlying potential, rather than the teacher's effectiveness.

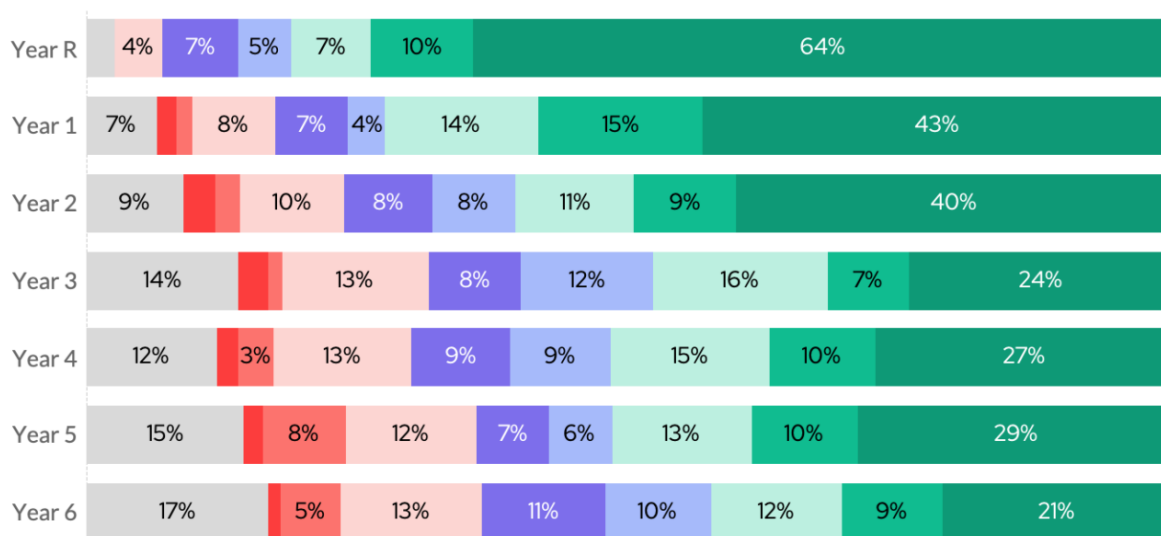
In the main subject you teach, which of the following year groups are students grouped into classes by general ability, subject ability, or prior attainment?

		Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11	All mixed attainment
Maths	(N=848)	66%	74%	83%	86%	87%	9%
English	(N=872)	37%	43%	49%	62%	63%	29%
Science	(N=982)	31%	41%	57%	71%	73%	23%
History	(N=379)	20%	22%	23%	13%	13%	70%
Geography	(N=272)	28%	29%	31%	16%	15%	65%
Religious Studies	(N=194)	25%	28%	30%	28%	25%	60%
Foreign Languages	(N=291)	28%	37%	41%	28%	26%	47%
ICT or Computing	(N=124)	23%	26%	26%	15%	15%	66%
Design and Technology	(N=85)	18%	18%	19%	10%	10%	78%
Music	(N=126)	24%	25%	24%	11%	11%	71%
Art	(N=60)	19%	18%	17%	22%	24%	74%
Business	(N=70)	10%	10%	13%	22%	25%	76%
Physical Education	(N=113)	43%	52%	53%	34%	26%	43%
Another subject	(N=14)	10%	10%	10%	22%	22%	78%

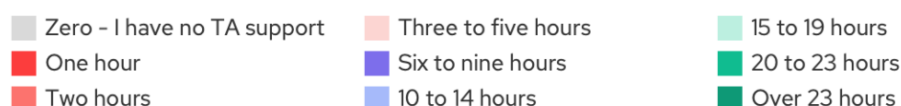
Furthermore, split classes where two teachers share one class are common, students often move classes during the school year, and teacher timetables often need to be adjusted mid-year if a teacher goes on leave. (You can read more about the organisation of secondary school classes [here](#).)

In primary school, it is clearly more straightforward to observe which teacher teaches which students, but we should recognise that the class teacher alone is not always responsible for the class learning. All teachers are entitled to time out of the classroom, which is covered by an assistant or another teacher. Many classes are now taught within a job share. And most classes have a teaching assistant for part of the week, which may affect the quality of the learning experience in the classroom. (Read more about diversity in organisation of primary classes [here](#).)

How many hours a week do you have a teaching assistant in the classroom with you?



Sample restricted to primary teachers with full-time class responsibilities



How is the NIOT project trying to overcome this

The "Teaching Improvement through Data and Evaluation" (TIDE) project is an exciting opportunity to transform how we understand and support teachers in England. It is collecting attainment data from shared assessments across large Multi-Academy Trusts, with the aim of identifying the teaching environments and practices that truly help teachers grow and thrive. Instead of relying on evidence developed in the U.S., this research will offer evidence on what really works for teachers here—helping to create more effective support, training, and classroom structures that align with the unique challenges teachers in England face in their daily work.

You can read more about the project [here](https://teachertapp.com/uk/articles/measuring-teacher-effectiveness-in-england-why-its-tough-and-how-were-tackling-it/).