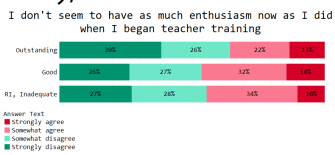
What Teachers Tapped This Week #36 - 4th June 2018

Happy Summer Term! Teacher Tappers, we've nearly done a whole academic year of questions, and you've nearly cooked your pupils to perfection - just a few more weeks in your classroom and they'll be ready to move on into the next realm of their education... In the meantime, here's what we learned this week...

1.Teachers stay more enthusiastic in Outstanding schools

A common belief about teaching is that young graduates rush fresh-faced into the job, but soon become disillusioned and leave. However, numerous research projects also find the opposite occurs. Some teachers come into the job as a stop-gap, believing they'll do something else in future, but get so passionate about the job they stay much longer than planned. Which might explain why so many people disagreed with the question below...

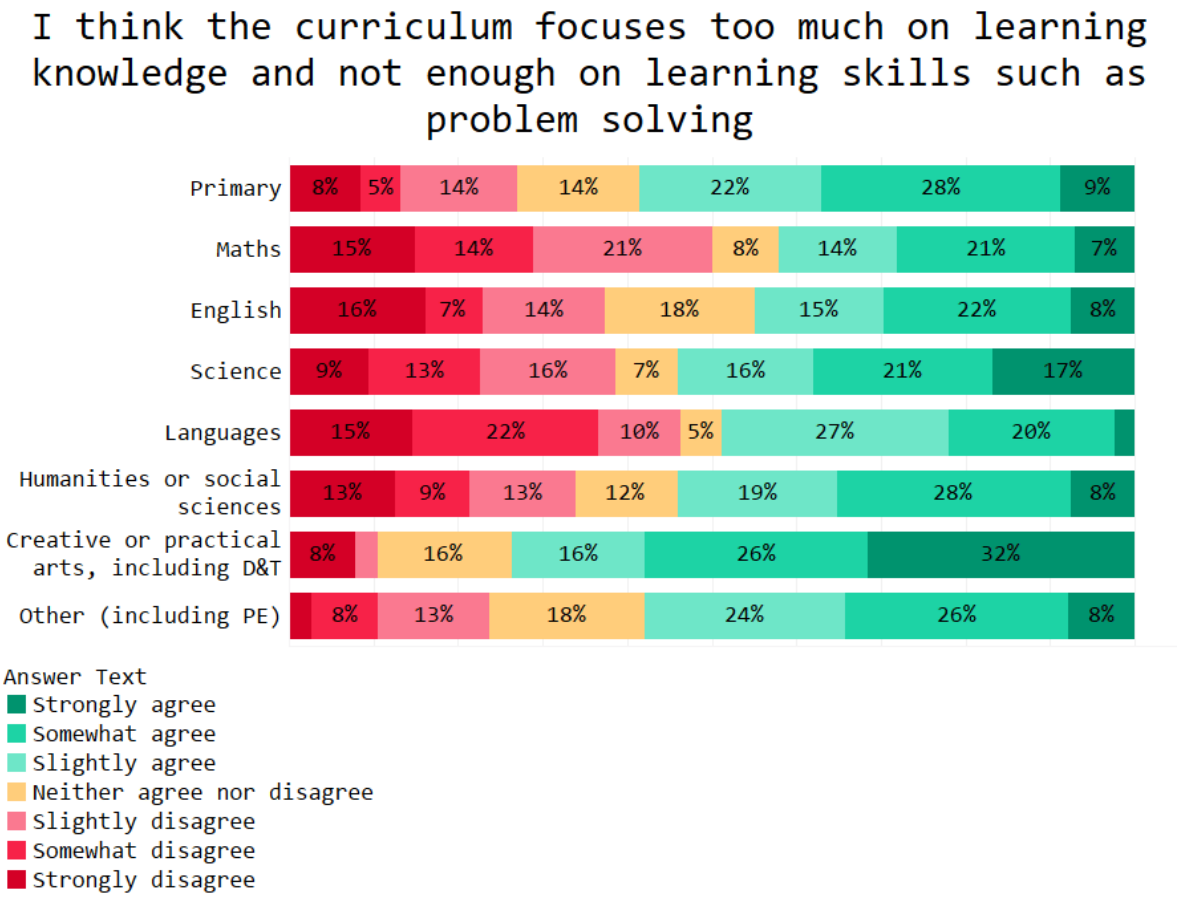
Around half of teachers are more (or equally) enthusiastic as when they started teaching. The other half have waned, but only 15% report a strong difference. Attitudes varied depending on how long people were in the profession. Teachers with fewer than 5 years experience seemed to be about as enthusiastic as when in training, and those with more than 20 years experience were most likely to say they felt less enthusiastic. But the differences across the groups were relatively small. A bigger difference was in the Ofsted grading of a school. Teachers working in outstanding schools were far more likely to disagree (the dark green bar), and so show more enthusiasm, compared to those in good or inadequate schools.



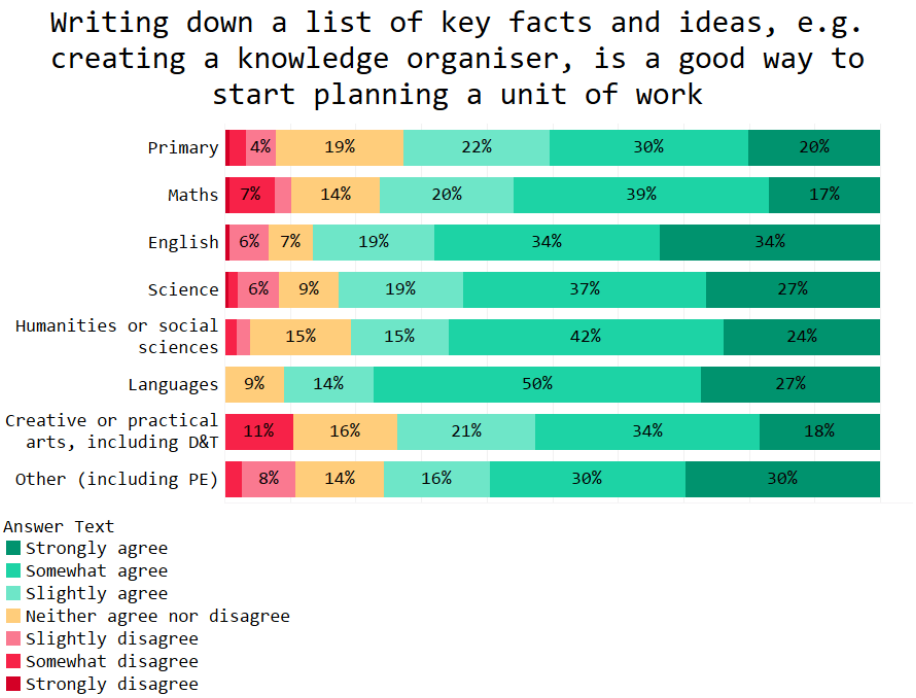
Given retention is an issue for the sector, could it be that a stint in an outstanding school would reinvigorate a teacher whose enthusiasm is waning? It's worth an experiment, surely?

2.Knowledge: who cares?

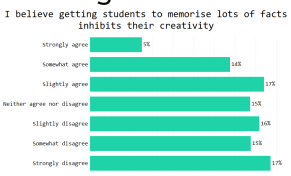
Our continued questioning of teacher beliefs and values is causing a stir. We are asking around 40 questions, related to a host of beliefs that may underlie a teacher's practice. Teacher Tapp users don't always like the questions, especially when the wording seems ambiguous. That's okay! One reason there are seven choices for answers (including slight agreement, and neither agree/disagree) is because we know these questions are nuanced. Individual questions may not seem to tell us much, but slowly we start to see patterns. For example, look at the differences here (dark green is strongly agree, down to dark red which is strongly disagree):



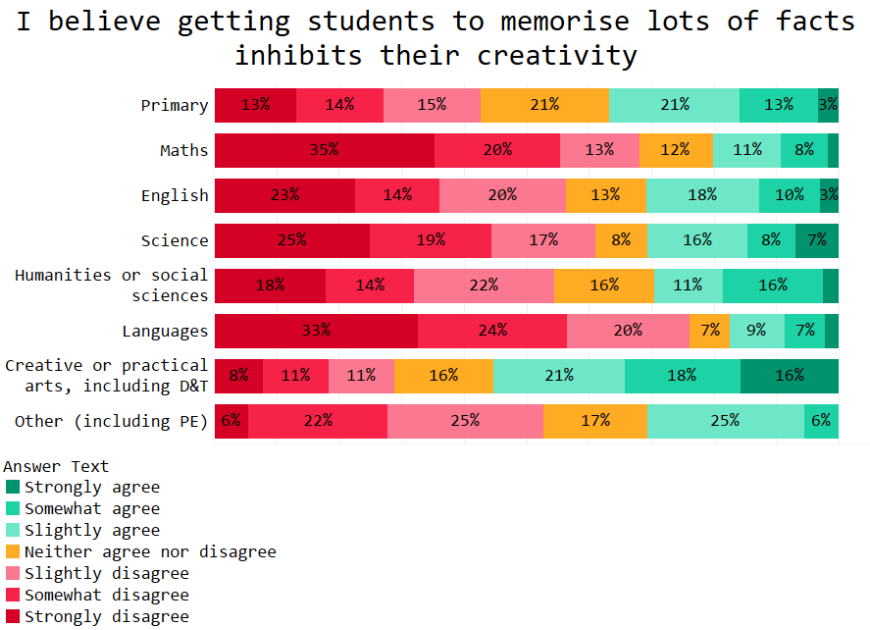
The majority of teachers agree, to some degree, that the curriculum focuses on knowledge over skills. But there are big differences between subjects. Maths and languages teachers are most likely to feel there is just the right amount of knowledge, or they would like more. This may also explain why language teachers really like 'knowledge organisers', which list key facts, as a form of lesson planning.



But, ironically, maths teachers don't show quite the same pattern. Around 23% of maths teachers are ambivalent towards knowledge organisers, second only to primary and creative arts teachers. Maths teachers therefore seem to want more freedom to focus on problem-solving yet also believe the curriculum has the right blend of knowledge versus skills. Why? Well, we've more questions to dig into and a range of factors to take into account. This is why it's important we ask lots of different questions. It may even be that we find, in the end, there isn't a great deal of consistency in people's answers - which would show that most teachers don't have strongly held beliefs about teaching practice. Either way, it will be interesting and useful to find out. Here's another example of the way a simple question becomes more complex when you break it down by subject. When we asked whether memorising facts inhibited creativity, we found that more teachers disagreed than agreed.



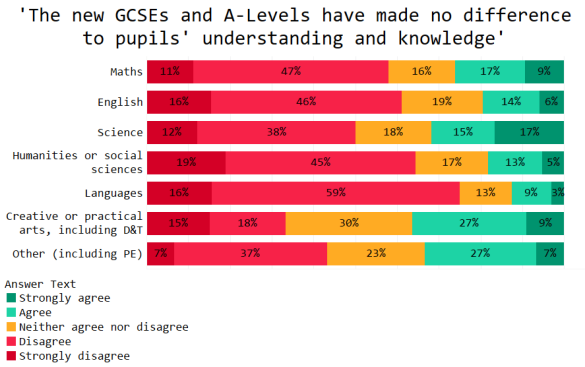
But patterns vary! Primary teachers were almost evenly divided between agree and disagree on memory inhibiting creativity, and one in 4 opted for 'neither'. Language teachers were much less divided. 77% disagreed that memorising facts inhibits creativity, and just 7% felt ambiguously about it. (To be fair, have you ever tried to creatively communicate in a language you haven't learned?!)



In light of these subject differences, the primary teachers' ambivalence makes more sense. Primary teachers cover the whole subject range: art, languages, maths, science, and so on. Hence, it may be more difficult for them to pick one of the answers. Also, simply because teachers think differently to one another doesn't show that any one of them is right. What the data is useful for, however, is that when people make broad sweeping statements about teachers' views on knowledge and skills, or memorisation and creativity, they are covering a whole range of subjects and ages, and those views may be very different depending on the facts/skills/creativity inherent in what any teacher is trying to get pupils to learn.

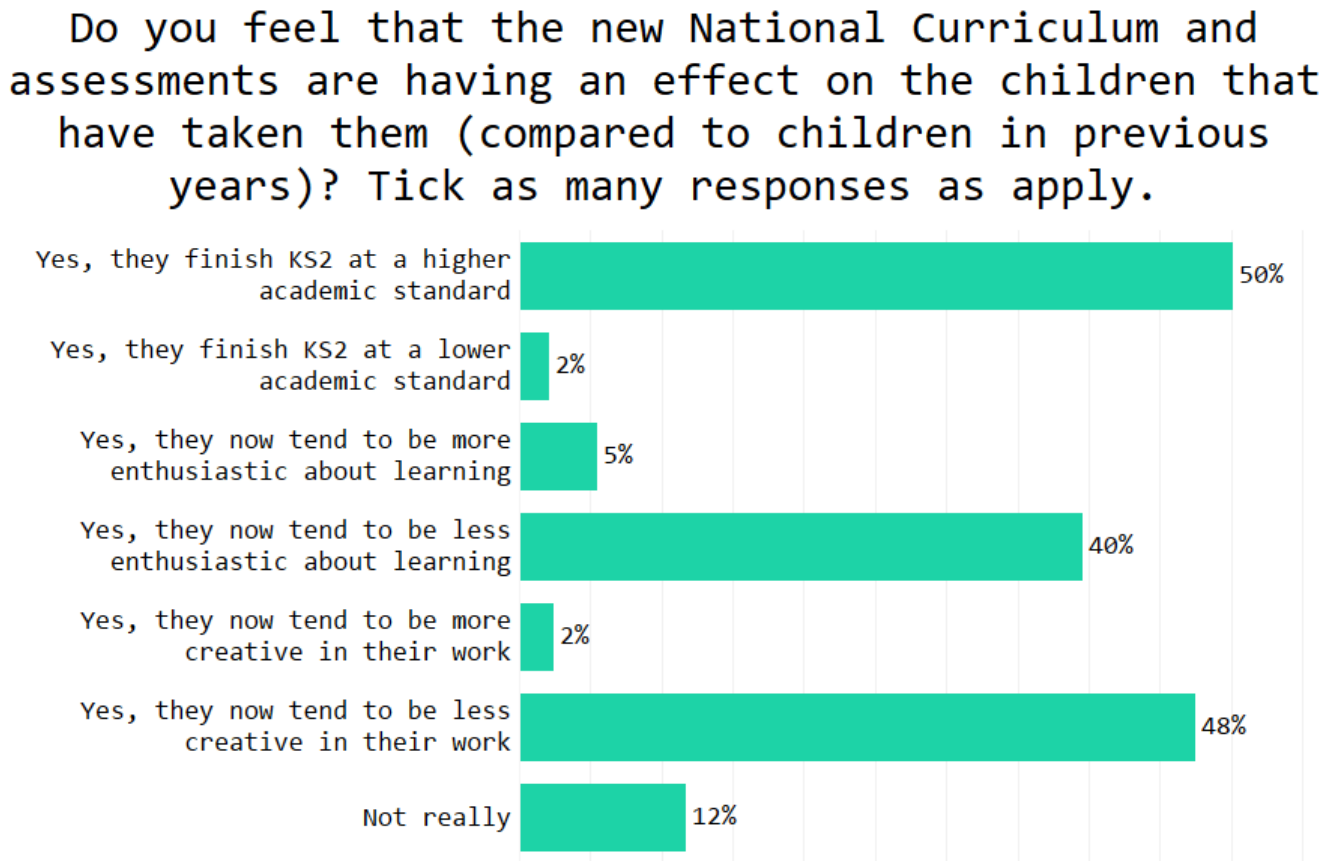
3. Do teachers think the new GCSEs have made no difference?

A recent ASCL and TES poll found that half of school leaders felt the new GCSEs and A-levels had made 'no difference' to pupils' understanding and knowledge. We wanted to dig into this with our teachers (who are mostly not leaders) a little more as we suspected it may differ by subject. Not only did most people disagree with this statement (meaning they felt the exam made some difference, either positive or negative), BUT: Teachers of creative and practical arts were least affected, with just 33% saying the changes had made no difference (i.e. they disagreed with the statement). But more than half of maths, English, humanities, and languages teachers said they had seen a difference.



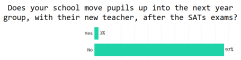
It's tempting to assume this means the change was positive, but we don't know that... yet. Keep eyes peeled! 4.[The High Cost of Smarter Primary Kids]() On the same day as secondary teachers were asked about GCSEs (see above) we asked primary teachers about the new SATs and its effects on pupils. Three effects were reported by around half of teachers:

- Pupils finish primary school with higher academic standards
- Pupils are now less creative
- Pupils are less enthusiastic about learning



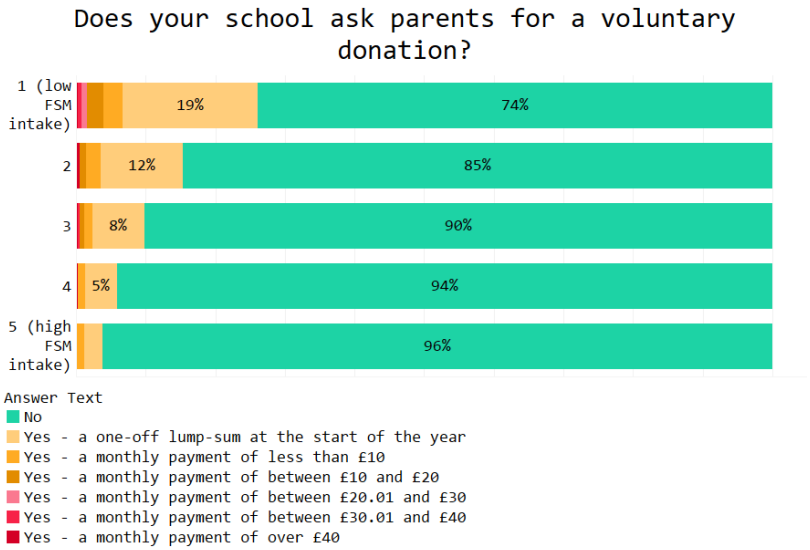
First, it's worth noting these are perceptions. If children are doing less creative work because they are busy preparing for SATs exams, then it may be that teachers see that children are now less creative in their work but, secretly, up in their bedrooms, they are crafting away at endeavours more creative than anything seen previously among 11 -year-olds. Second, it's also worth noting a shift like this wouldn't actually be surprising given other data. Over the past 15 years, as children have increasingly become fixated and anxious about exams, the country has seen a drop in teen pregnancy, underage drug & alcohol use, and juvenile theft & vandalism. Academic success appears to come at the cost of rebellion. In countries around the world with high academic scores, politicians have long been concerned their children are

not creative enough. Around 2010, while English politicians were sending delegations to find out about maths mastery, those countries were sending ones back to look at skills and citizenship education here! The theory of the current curriculum reforms are that, in time, the higher academic skills of primary pupils will translate into greater creativity once they become more expert and specialised later on in their education. The price to pay for that, right now, may be their current enthusiasm and creativity. Is the theory correct? We shall have to wait and see. On a separate SATs note, former teacher Debra Kidd raised the issue of her daughter's Year 6 teacher moving down to teach Year 5 immediately after exams, much to the dismay of the children. We asked to see how common this is - and around 3% of primary teachers said their school employs a similar system. Sign of a trend to come?



5. The Middle Class School Subsidy

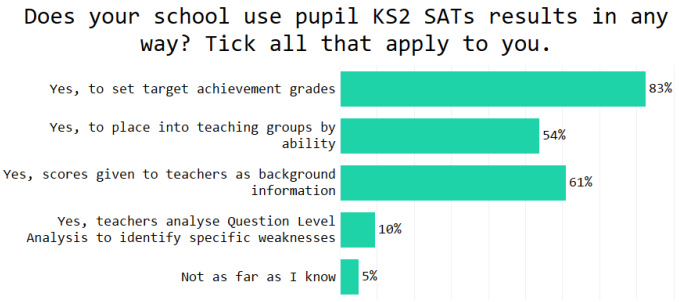
A local councillor got in touch over a concern that schools in her local area were increasingly asking parents for voluntary donations. (*Requiring* payment is illegal). She was told it was a common issue. But, is it? As the bright green bars below show - most schools do not ask parents for a voluntary donation. Among those who do, the most common request is a one-off payment at the start of the year.



HOWEVER, we found a small percentage of schools asking for monthly payments and, in a few instances, these were monthly payments of over £40. Donation requests were most popular in schools with the most privileged intakes. One way to look at this is that schools with wealthier parents are able to get more cash than those serving poorer communities. BUT, it is worth remembering that pupils who are on free meals come with a substantial premium for the school. Given budget cuts, one might view the graph above as evidence that parents in wealthier areas who can afford to do so are being asked to contribute more, while children who are in the least wealthy areas are getting more cash from the taxpayer. In this sense, the donations are actually acting as a form of progressive (if voluntary) 'taxation'. What we certainly cannot say, however, is that donation requests are common. They appear to be quite the opposite.

6. How Do Secondary Schools Use SATs?

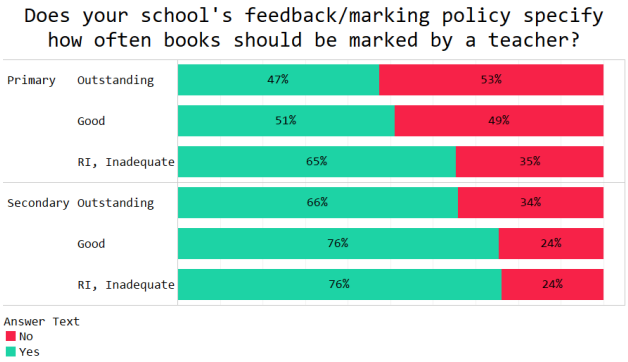
Secondary school teachers tend not to trust SATs results, and yet the scores are used by secondary schools for many things. |Such as:



Primary colleagues may wonder why 83% of secondary schools set targets based on SATs when they say they don't trust them. The answer is easy: it is what the Progress 8 accountability measures use.

7. Marking Policies: The Ususal Drill

Finally, a little confirmatory finding this week. We've long found that Outstanding schools have the least prescriptive policies, and schools with lower graded Ofsteds have the most prescriptive. Marking policies appear to follow the usual drill, though note how much more prescriptive secondary schools are than primary!



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8. Finally, finally as ever, we learned that you really love our daily tips, so here are the links for last week:

Leading INSETs on wellbeing The Fallacy of Robot Teachers What if we cannot measure pupil progress? How to attract Generation Y to teaching Teacher portfolios instead of PRP *

Right folks - over and out for another week...

In the meantime, keep sharing what we are doing. Here's a powerpoint slide (with script), a PDF, and a black-and-white one-pager to help. Remember, we need more of you before we can do the really exciting and detailed analysis! Enjoyed this post and want to join our Teacher Tapp panel? Sign up via the iPhone App Store or the Android App Store. You can also check out more at www.teachertapp.com