

The Email Equation: Calculating the Workload of Teachers' Inboxes

It's that autumn time of year: dark mornings are back, classroom radiators are clanking, and who has started wearing their winter coat?

Meanwhile, here at TT towers, we've spent our frosty mornings digging into the topic of EMAILS.

When we started in 2017 the watchword of the time was workload. A later edu-sec, Damian Hinds was very concerned that emails were a source of extra work for teachers. Was he right? And have things got any better?

The Digital Workload of Emails

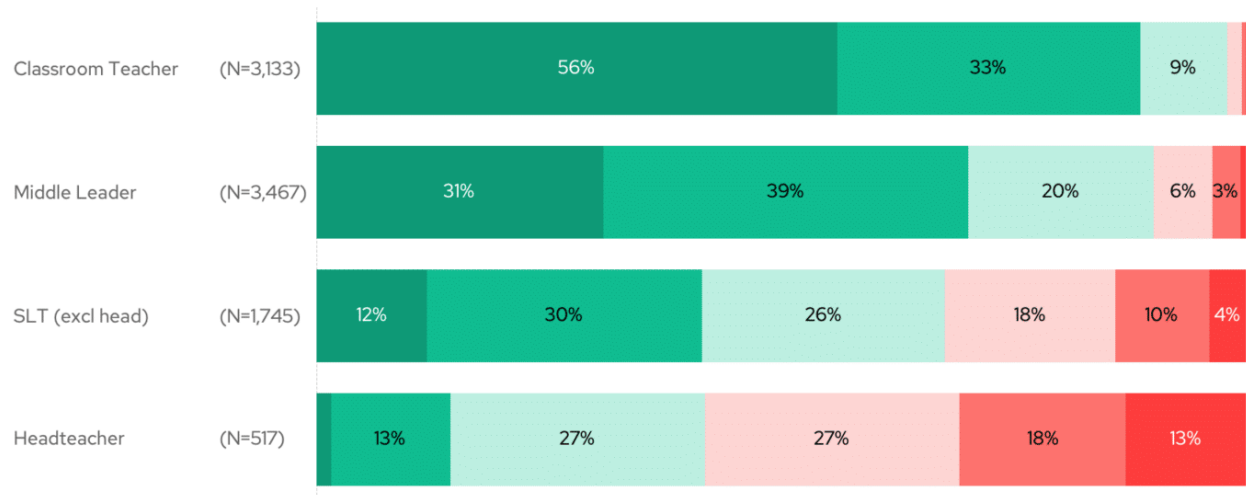
When teachers say emails are causing them workload - do they mean reading or writing the emails? And exactly how much time are we talking about?

When it comes to writing, most teachers send fewer than 5 emails a day. BUT, this varies by job role.

While a whopping 9 in 10 classroom teachers send less than 10 emails (and most send less than 5). 1 in 10 headteachers said they send more than fifty emails in the average day.

Middle leaders, who still have substantial teaching loads, were also creeping up the scale - with 30% saying they sent more than 10 emails.

How many emails do you think you *send* on an average day at school?



Question answered by 8,862 teachers on 09/10/2023 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

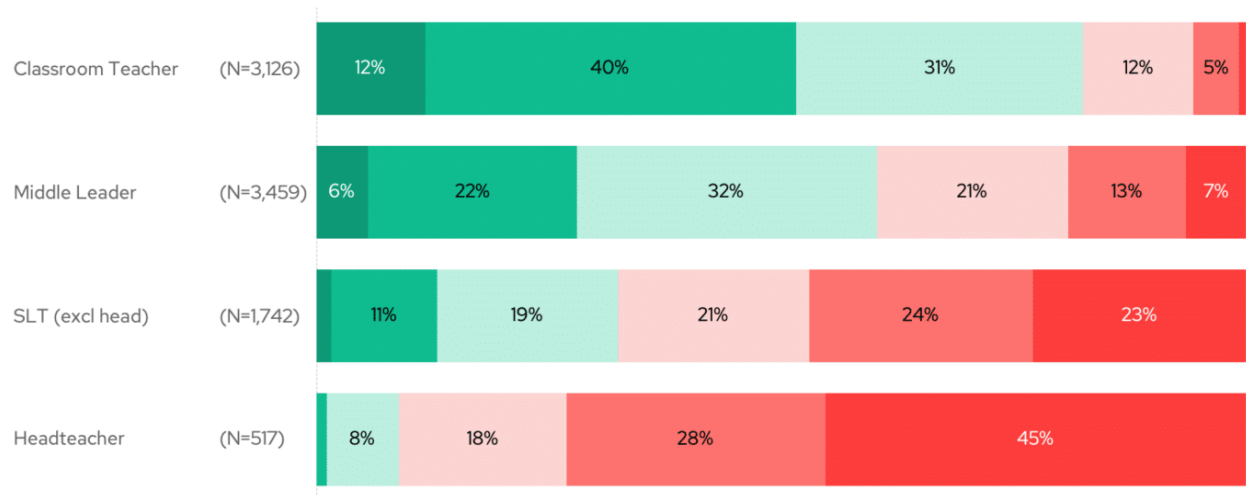
- Fewer than 5
- Between 5 and 10
- Between 11 and 20
- Between 21 and 30
- Between 31 and 50
- Over 50

A slight problem of so many emails being sent is that they also have to be read – and this is where the timings really start to ramp up.

Half of classroom teachers said they read more than 10 emails per day – with 1 in 20 saying they read over 30.

Meanwhile, heads are drowning in emails – almost half (45%) say they read over 50 per day.

How many emails do you think you receive *and read* on an average day at school?



Question answered by 8,844 teachers on 09/10/2023 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

- Fewer than 5
- Between 5 and 10
- Between 11 and 20
- Between 21 and 30
- Between 31 and 50
- Over 50

Quantifying the amount of time it takes to write and read emails is difficult. Some are as simple as a notification that a student has completed their homework on a digital platform - others are in-depth curriculum matters with multiple actions.

Estimates vary from 20 seconds per email to around 3 minutes (if they're actually reading and not just glancing). If we go for 20 seconds to read and 10 seconds to switch between them, it's not so bad. For classroom teachers it's between 5 and 15 minutes to get through everything. For heads, it's closer to half an hour.

The problem is that this doesn't give any time for responses or actions - and those are even harder to quantify.

At a complete stab in the dark: let's imagine a third of emails require an action that takes on average 4 minutes (given some are just a simple 'yes pls' response and others involve going across school to see someone). If true, classroom teachers must add between 15 and 45 minutes to their email response times. If you're teaching a full timetable that's a lot of extra work!

One thing of note, though: it doesn't seem to be getting worse. The amount of emails teachers have reported since 2021 has been flat.

In Defence of Emails

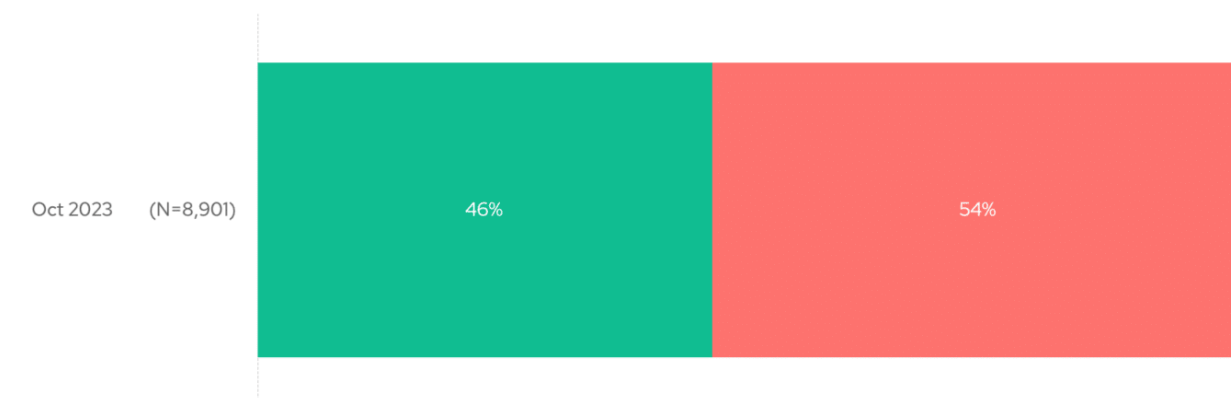
While 45 minutes of additional work per day may seem a lot, compared to sitting in a meeting for sixty minutes, it may be more efficient!

When we asked, over 46% of you said you attended a meeting last week that could have been an email! Even if we give the email the full 5 and a half minutes of reading, processing and action time - that's still likely to be shorter than the time in a meeting!

NB; this was especially true of middle leaders. 49% said they'd been in this sort of meeting. Heads were less convinced: just 22% felt their meetings could have been an email. But given how many more meetings they attend there's still a chance for some time-saving!

Thought for the week: Are there any meetings you could change to an email? What would be the plusses or minuses?

Did you attend a meeting this week that could have been an email?



Teacher responses vary from 8,901, depending on date asked (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

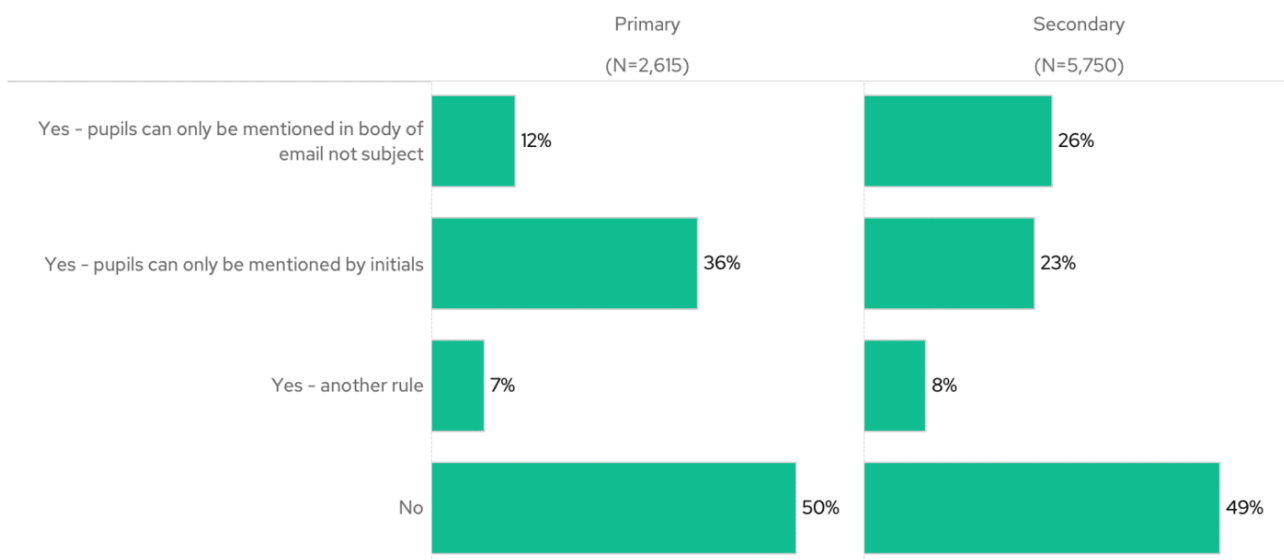
Yes
No

What is IN teacher emails?

Schools are increasingly concerned about data privacy in emails – and anyone who has accidentally revealed their emails on a classroom whiteboard in front of pupils will understand why. (Who us? Never... 🤐)

Which is why half of schools now have rules about how pupils should be named in emails. 1 in 5 schools only allows pupils to be mentioned in the email body, not the subject, and 3 in 10 only allow pupils to be mentioned by initials – though with the initials AB particularly popular in England, good luck knowing which Ava, Alfie or Amelia is being discussed.

Does your school have rules about how pupils should be named in emails?



Question answered by 8,365 teachers on 05/09/2023 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

Another popular email past-time in schools is sending all-staff emails about niggling things; "PLEASE HELP - LOST AUTHENTICATOR KEY" or "PURPLE CAR MV65 BLOCKING GATE", which are often redundant by the time the person opens them. Or, worse, it has descended into people responding about their own authenticator keys or who recently bought a purple car.

To limit such things, 18% of schools limit who can send an all-staff email. Apparently 1% also ban them, but that figure is within the margin of people whose fingers slipped. So maybe they do, or maybe it's just clumsiness...

In any case, we know that secondary schools are more likely to limit all-staff emails. 1 in 3 only let senior leaders or heads send them. Whereas 95% of primary schools are up for anyone sending. Given they typically have fewer staff, the potential for a thread to get out of hand is lower!

Thought for the week: Would it be better if you couldn't send all-staff emails?

1 in 3 secondary schools limits all-staff emails



So what about workload?

One of the mooted solutions to email workload is reducing the amount of hours in which emails can be sent.

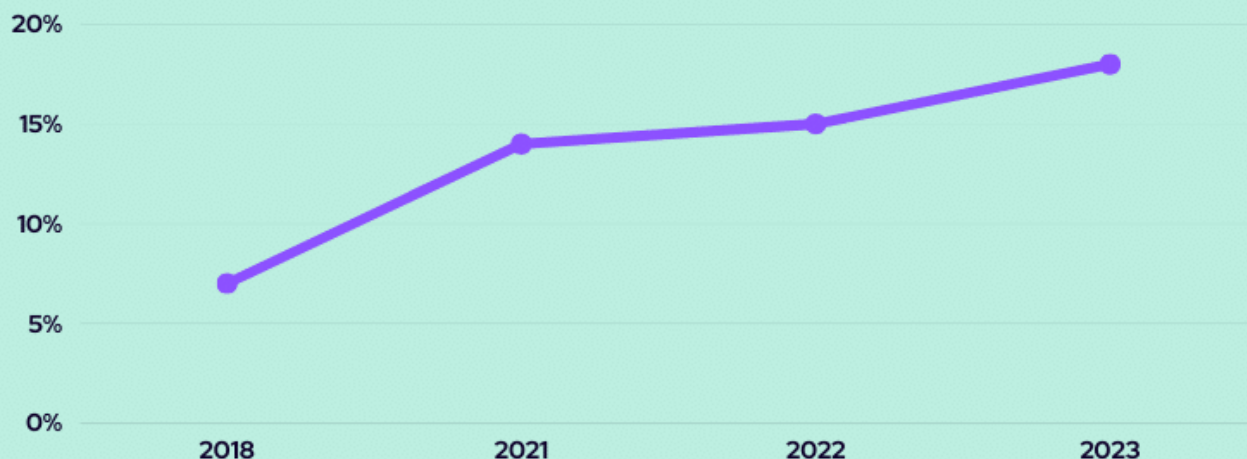
For people who struggle with anxiety around receiving emails, and feel compelled to respond when they arrive, it can be helpful to know they aren't going to get disturbed later in the day.

However, for others, it's crucial for their wellbeing they can work more flexibly – for example, catching up with emails after putting children to bed. Given they may also do school drop-off they'd prefer to avoid arriving to a flood of emails at 7.45am, which they could have handled at 11pm.

Pleasing both groups is difficult to do. So which way are schools jumping?

Back in 2018, when we first asked, very few schools limited out-of-hours emails. While still a minority position, the policy has grown in popularity – with 18% of schools not allowing emails to be sent on evenings, weekends or both. It is slightly more common in secondary (21%) than primary (16%).

18% of schools don't allow 'out of hours' emails



Teachertapp

One of the suggested benefits is that it changes the culture around emails, meaning they are relied on less often and so there's less emailing especially frenetic out of hours things. But is there any evidence this is true?

1. Does it change the amount of emails overall? Not really. Schools with an out of hours policy had slightly fewer read and received emails, but the difference was marginal – not big enough for us to say decisively it was down to the email policy.
2. Does it change how likely you are to engage in holidays? < Also apparently not. In both types of schools people were just as likely to choose to ignore or read emails, set out of office replies.
3. Does it make you less likely to receive stressful communications in holidays? < Again, not so much. In the last holiday, 20% of teachers received an email that made them stressed or unhappy. The most likely person to do this was the head (57% had stressful holiday emails), least likely was classroom teachers (14%). But whether your school had an out of hours policy

or not made little difference.

Obviously this isn't the last word on the policy. We haven't asked people about receiving stressful emails out of hours – only in holidays – nor have we asked how people feel about these policies. But it does suggest it may not have much difference either way. So if people like having an out of hours policy, great. And if it doesn't work, it may not make much difference either way.

Ups and Downs

On the rise

Speed of parental contact: 10% more of you must respond to parents within 48 hours than when we first asked in 2018. At least half of schools now have a policy dictating response times.

Internet homework: More of you are setting homework using the internet this year – 53% up from 46% last October.

Independent work: Schools are more often requiring teachers to have pupils do independent work in each lesson – 20% of secondary teachers said this is now a mandated element of lessons, compared to just 14% last year.

Tough Problems: Teachers are more positive that they can raise tough issues with management in their school this year – up from 17% last October to 21%. Primary particularly improved – from 19% to 25%.

Heading down

Free food: Fewer of you are receiving free meals when staying late for parents' and open evenings – it's down to 46%, previously 53%.

And finally...

The most read tip of the last week has been: [Icebergs, antibodies and silos](#)

And here are the rest for your reference:

- [Homework, evidence, strategy development and practices](#)
- [Working memory – is it poor resolution?](#)
- [What Wordle can tell us about teaching](#)
- [Consistency and autonomy](#)
- [Assessment reliability](#)