

Pay, holidays and feeling isolated

1. Is everyone on half-term?

[via GIPHY](#)

If you are still in school and it feels like EVERYONE is on half-term, take comfort that you're not alone. Half of all schools in England don't start their half-term until next week.

And if you feel like EVERYONE is talking about two week half-terms right now, remember it is still pretty rare in state schools. Just 7% of state school teachers are having a two-week half-term this October. (Admittedly 57% of private school teachers get one, but many work extra Saturday mornings or teach until at least 4pm each day during term time).

This does mean our questions are a little tricky at this time of year as we can't easily ask about what is going on in classrooms when half of you are in and half of you are out. But don't worry, we still have things to ask! Speaking of which...

2. Sometimes we ask WEIRD questions. Here's why!

Over the past few weeks, teachers have got in touch wondering why we sometimes ask oddly phrased questions. For example, we recently asked a question about whether people had felt "downhearted or depressed" and several users felt the two terms shouldn't be used as equivalents given the seriousness of clinical depression. However, it's sometimes important we ask questions in strange ways. Why? Because these questions are taken from validated surveys - that is, surveys which have been tested over and over again by academics in order to ensure their reliability and validity. Individual questions from the surveys can sometimes seem a bit odd. Taken in combination with other questions, however, they can be very good at pinpointing particular effects or opinions. Given the academics who create these surveys will have tested many variations of wording - and have found the best ones - we often stick to exactly what they suggest.

A second reason to ask weird questions is to see if they can be answered! For example, does an average classroom teacher know how much it costs to hire a supply teacher? It's possible that many of you have no idea - because it's not something you routinely deal with. If we ask a question about the cost range of supply teachers, we may find that around 50% (or more) say they don't know. This is useful! It means that if we are asking about supply teacher purchasing

in the future we know that the majority of teachers aren't going to give accurate information in this area (and it's not a great use of future questions).

In conclusion then: sometimes, what look like weird questions are the very ones which help us learn the most important stuff! Speaking of which...

3. The isolation of the classroom

Becky gave a talk at ResearchEd Surrey at the weekend which included lots of findings from Teacher Tapp. Much of it reflected on the implications of teachers working in relative isolation from each other. Some very basic questions – such as 'do you have sufficient contact with colleagues' – are starting to show us how lonely the profession of teaching can be.

Only 20% of classroom teachers said they had 'sufficient' contact with colleagues in their work. Sufficient! Not 'lots' or 'as much as you need' – merely, 'sufficient'. Senior leaders have much more contact with colleagues in their work, which means that sometimes they forget how isolating it can be to have a 22.5 hours a week teaching load.

One of the consequences of working in isolation is that not many hours each week are spent discussing school policy changes. The US sociologist Seymour B. Sarason says that "existing vehicles for discussion and planning are based on the principle of the avoidance of controversy". Only 1-in-5 teachers saying they are often or always involved in decisions that affect the nature of their job. It's a dilemma though, because most teachers feel staff meetings detract from the important business of doing-their-job. We've all been that teacher in a staff meeting who, on hearing the headteacher say 'any questions?', mutters under their breath 'please don't ask any questions, please don't ask any questions, ...'.

Put together this means that teachers are often exhausted from their classroom interactions, so they stay in their classrooms at lunch, or hide away from colleagues, so that they can decompress and regroup their thoughts. And there's no reason for them to proactively take part in the broader school life if they feel decisions are taken without them anyway. All of which can contribute to an environment in which teachers don't have time to discuss things with their colleagues and miss out on the low-stakes professional development that comes with sharing techniques or advice about pupils. INSET tries to get around this problem but often misses the mark.

How can middle and senior leaders improve this? We are going to keep looking at the data thinking about that one.

4. Pay rises? Not yet!

A teacher asked us to find out what is happening with pay rises in schools. As you can see above, across the country around 30% of teachers say they are not getting a pay rise - with academy convertors the least likely to be saying yes. If you did get a pay rise in September, you are one of the lucky ones (unless you're in a private school, where 63% teachers were paid more from the start of the year).

Such figures should make the education secretary scratch his head as the official line is that teachers should have had a 2.75% pay rise this year and, although schools don't get the cash until later this term, it is backdated to September - meaning rises should technically start at the beginning of the academic year.

Unfortunately, the government is only giving schools enough to pay 0.75% more because it says the 2% increase is already affordable under current budgets. Perhaps this explains the difference?!

5. How we label Pupil Premium children

There has been a stark shift in the policy narrative around the pupil premium over the past six months, with the Education Endowment Foundation [publishing new guidance](#) that encourages schools to focus on the quality of teaching. So, we wanted to see how much teachers were still being asked to individually target pupil premium students. The answer is: A LOT!

The majority of primary teachers are still expected to memorise which pupils in their class receive free meals (and so receive 'the pupil premium'). In secondary schools, most teachers are expected to mark their status clearly on a seating plan. And in 8% of primary schools - teachers are expected to label the exercise books of pupil premium students to indicate their status. Why? So that teachers can ensure these children are getting extra support - but is there a chance this means the children are also subconsciously marked out and treated differently?

You also told us that some of you are expected to mark pupil premium students' book first, to ask these pupils questions first, or to give targeted in-lesson interventions. This is a remarkable amount of effort and it shows how seriously schools take the challenge of reducing the attainment gap. The question is whether it is working? Since the pupil premium was introduced the gap has barely reduced. Could this be the wrong sort of effort? Or is it the case that not enough schools are doing these things?

6. Key stage assessment strategies colliding with Ofsted!

Continuing our theme of the different views of senior leadership and 'normal' classroom teachers, we asked our primary tappers some questions about the impact of Key Stage assessments. Half of all senior leadership claim that the KS1 assessments have no impact on what they do at their school, but fewer classroom teachers agree.

The majority of classroom teachers feel that the KS2 tests lead to an excessive focus on maths and English. It'll be interesting to see how this conflicts with the new Ofsted framework where it is clear that the other foundation subjects are being investigated more closely. (If you want an entertaining outline of how heads will be dealing with this conflict, [watch this with subtitles on!](#))

7. Shhh.... the secret questions ■■■■■■

Last week we asked two questions about inspirational teachers but didn't show the answers. What was going on?! We were secretly working in partnership with The Teaching Awards which will be shown on your televisions next Saturday at 5.25pm. Tune in for a fest of tears, hugs, and awesome teaching brilliance ■■

The team at the Awards wanted to know how many of you were inspired into the profession by former teachers so they could announce it at as a surprise at the Awards and in media this week.

The headlines are in and 49.6% of you said a teacher inspired you into the profession. That means around 250,000 teachers have carried the baton from their own classrooms into today. Who knows how many more teachers you will go on to inspire!

Even more excitingly, we found the subject that inspires the most people to go on to teach is... English! With English teachers of the past obviously inspiring many current English teachers, but also inspiring a substantial number of Primary and other subject teachers too.

8. Finally, finally, we know you love the daily tips so here are last weeks...

- [Sending a postcard to improve pupil attendance](#)
- [What To Do If Your School Has A Batshit Crazy Marking Policy](#)
- [Are children addicted to social media - and does it matter?](#)
- [Doubting yourself](#)
- [Textbooks could help the teacher workload problem](#)
- [A long read on John Dewey](#)