

Recruitment & Retention Report



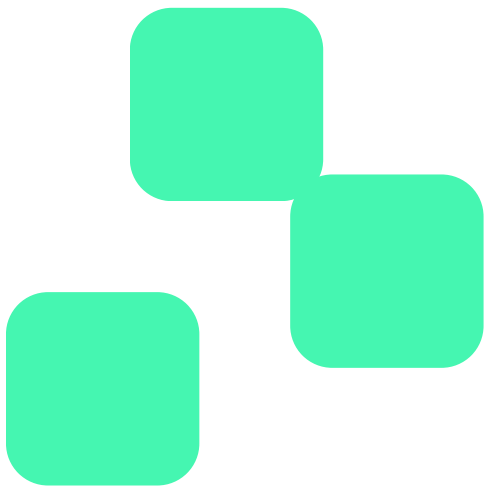
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Table of Content



- 1.** Introduction
- 2.** Key Insights by
Career Stage -
Early Career
Teachers
- 3.** Key Insights by
Career Stage - Mid
Career Teachers
- 4.** Key Insights by
Career Stage -
Long Serving
Career Teachers
- 5.** Recommendations



Introduction

Although government spending promises and recent reports¹ indicate that the recruitment and retention crisis in Britain's schools is easing, industry leaders state that historical issues in this area are leaving problems across the sector. A recent Schools Week² article reporting on the DfE's School Workforce Census reported shrinking teacher numbers (in line with reduced pupil populations), a reduction in the number of teachers leaving the profession and improved retention rates for new teachers. Despite this seemingly positive view, vacancies rates remain higher than in pre-pandemic times. More than six teaching posts in every 1,000 remained vacant, according to the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER),³ which is double pre-pandemic levels. Against this background, Eton's Centre for Innovation and Research in Learning (CIRL) explored the issues surrounding retention with a group of teachers at a state school in the Midlands.

We interviewed a total of 18 teachers, categorised into three career stages. Our first cohort consisted of five early-career teachers who had joined the school within the last couple of years and were generally in their 20s. This distinction, considering both career stage and demographics, offers valuable insights into what different individuals might seek from their careers, informing our potential recommendations. The second group comprised eight mid-career teachers who had been in the profession for two to six years, mostly at the same school. Lastly, our five long-serving teachers had been in the profession for 10 or more years, with some approaching two decades of teaching experience.

While each cohort demonstrated distinct priorities, several cross-cutting themes were relevant for all participants. Across all experience levels, teachers were significantly energised by the school's clear, ambitious vision to become what was then 'Ofsted outstanding', finding deep meaning in this shared goal. Underpinning their work was a shared moral mission, a collective belief in the transformative power of education to change lives irrespective of potential barriers to learning. Staff universally valued the tailored, relevant professional development (CPD), which they appreciated was personalised to their individual roles and aspirations rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Furthermore, a strong sense of inclusion and voice resonated throughout the school, with staff feeling heard and involved in decision-making, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging and professional respect. Ultimately, the senior leadership's commitment to investing in its staff played a crucial role in fostering their desire to remain in both the profession and the school.

1. DfE School workforce in England, June 2025, <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england/2024>

2. Fewer teachers quit and more return: 10 key workforce findings – Schools Week, June 2025, https://schoolsweek.co.uk/fewer-teachers-quit-and-more-return-10-key-workforce-findings/?mc_cid=b58d24b815&mc_eid=529aa378dd

3. Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report 2025, NFER, March 2025, <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2025/>

Key Insights by Career Stage

Early-career teachers

- **Meaningful work and purpose:** Teaching is seen as a way to **contribute to society**. Gen Z teachers especially value a career path that feels impactful. The teachers interviewed started in different careers, such as an environmental consultant in the case of one teacher, but they felt that particular career did not have the impact on society they would have liked to make through their jobs. Being able to see the impact on the students' lives on a day-to-day basis was of importance to all the teachers who recently joined. This aligns with wider research on Gen Z which has found that having a sense of purpose at work is vital for a sense of wellbeing.
- **Inclusive ethos:** Teachers at the school deeply resonate with its **no-barrier, inclusive ethos** and its unwavering commitment to equity. This perspective is often rooted in their own experiences, as many are state school alumni. They particularly appreciate the school's emphasis on providing abundant trips, enrichment, and cultural capital-building opportunities, believing these are crucial for dismantling educational barriers. Their personal journeys through similar systems reinforce their conviction in the importance of nurturing high aspirations in all students.
- **Personalised professional growth:** The school empowers its teachers to develop strong judgment and autonomy early in their careers through **tailored professional development**. A key example is the mandatory action research project, where teachers investigate their own practice with full support from senior management. This reflective process often provides useful insights into classroom dynamics. What's more, the school allocates both the time and funding for teachers to pursue external professional development, further broadening their expertise.
- **Alumni connections:** The school has seen a positive trend of former students returning as teachers, motivated by a desire to contribute to the very institution that once provided them with such a positive and comforting experience. Their personal connection fuels a commitment to **recreate that supportive atmosphere** for current students. These teachers also acknowledge the positive transformations the school has undergone, recognising how these changes have broadly benefited the entire community.

Key Insights by Career Stage

Mid-career teachers

- **Work-life balance for families:** The teachers in this cohort were a slightly older demographic, primarily in their 30s and 40s. A common theme among them was the appeal of school holidays and a flexible work culture, which they found highly conducive to managing family responsibilities. Many had previously pursued different careers but transitioned into teaching after starting families, recognising its greater alignment with their family commitments. This specific school stood out for its family-friendly ethos, consistently accommodating family events and supporting teachers' attendance at their children's school activities. This flexibility was a central factor in their decision to pursue both the teaching profession and employment at this particular school.
- **Clear and consistent behaviour policies:** Poor **student behaviour** is a significant issue in schools and frequently contributes to teachers leaving the profession. However, this school's clear **behaviour policy** and its consistent, appropriate implementation create a general sense of calmness. This reduces daily stress for staff, allowing them to focus effectively on teaching and learning.
- **Supportive leadership:** Teachers reported feeling highly involved in **decision-making** and empowered to lead various aspects of school life. For instance, middle leaders are responsible for elements of the professional development programme. From the outset of joining the school, staff are asked about their aspirations and career progression. The senior leadership team collaborates with teachers to ensure their needs are met and that career progression pathways are clear. Staff expressed feeling supported in their decisions, both within the classroom and regarding their professional development. Many specifically praised the headteacher for their open-door policy, consistent support, and transparency.
- **Professional vision:** A collective commitment to the school's aspiration of achieving 'Ofsted outstanding' status acts as a significant motivator, inspiring staff to dedicate their time and energy. Teachers expressed a clear desire for a defined vision and direction for the school's future. Much like early career teachers, they sought a profound sense of purpose within their profession. For this cohort, this manifested differently; while still emphasising their desire to make a tangible difference in students' lives.

Key Insights by Career Stage

Long-serving teachers

- **Honest leadership in difficult times:** Long-serving staff at the school consistently highlighted the critical role of **transparency from leaders**, especially when facing less favourable Ofsted outcomes. Even during challenging periods, staff were willing to remain at the school. This was largely due to their ability to clearly see the actions the leadership team was taking to implement change. Crucially, they believed that the leadership's efforts were genuinely focused on the **best interests of both students and staff**.
- **Managed workload and flexible working:** Staff greatly appreciated the **streamlined processes** implemented at the school, which successfully kept their **workload lower** compared to similar schools. This included beneficial changes like fewer meetings and simplified parent evenings. The availability of **flexible working arrangements** was also a significant positive, particularly for those with families. The annual review of these arrangements further reassured staff that their working patterns could adapt to their changing life commitments
- **Upskilling and support:** Senior leaders at the school are dedicated to **investing in staff potential**, providing development opportunities that ensure roles remain both **challenging and fulfilling**. Staff expressed contentment that their roles didn't feel stagnant and that they were consistently able to pursue further development. This commitment to growth was particularly welcomed by long-serving teachers, who valued the ability to **progress their careers within the school**, even after years of working at the same school.

Recommendations

For Schools

- **Prioritise Professional Development:** Offer **tailored, relevant, and personalised CPD** that moves beyond generic training. Empower early-career teachers with autonomy through initiatives like action research, and provide dedicated time and funding for external development for all staff.
- **Foster supportive and transparent leadership:** Implement an **open-door policy** and demonstrate clear **investment in staff**. Ensure senior leaders are transparent, especially during challenging times, and actively collaborate with teachers to define clear career progression pathways and support professional development choices.
- **Champion a family-friendly culture and manage workload:** Actively support **work-life balance and flexibility**, accommodating family responsibilities. Whenever possible, streamline processes and reduce non-essential meetings to ensure **managed workload**.
- **Incentivise purpose-driven career paths:** Develop policies that highlight and support the **moral mission and societal impact of teaching**, particularly to attract and retain younger generations who seek meaningful work.

For Policymakers

- **Fund tailored professional growth:** Allocate funding and resources for **personalised professional development** programmes.
- **Support flexible working and workload management:** Introduce policy frameworks that encourage **flexible working arrangements** within schools. Provide guidance and resources to help schools effectively manage and reduce teacher workload.
- **Strengthen behaviour management frameworks:** Develop national policies that support schools in establishing and maintaining **clear, consistent, and effective behaviour management strategies**.



For any questions, feedback, or further inquiries,
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