

Whitepaper - Why do Teachers leave schools?

Kent-Teach

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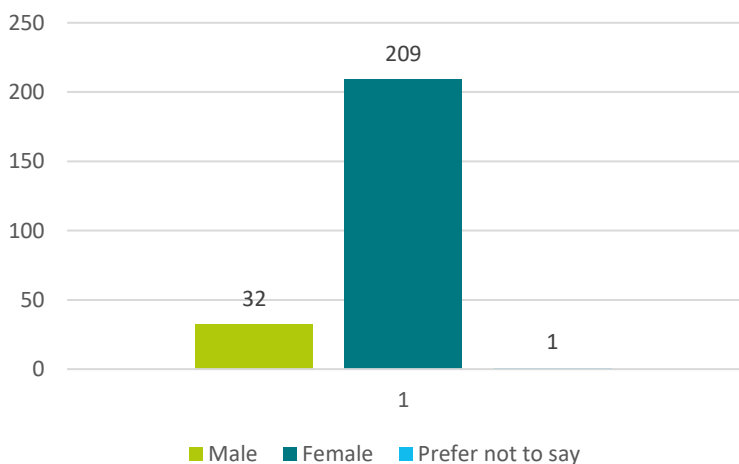
Introduction

From October to December in 2020, Kent-Teach conducted an anonymous survey to understand the reasons for teachers leaving the profession or school. The Survey was completed by 245 teachers and below we have analysed key themes, facts and potential solutions.

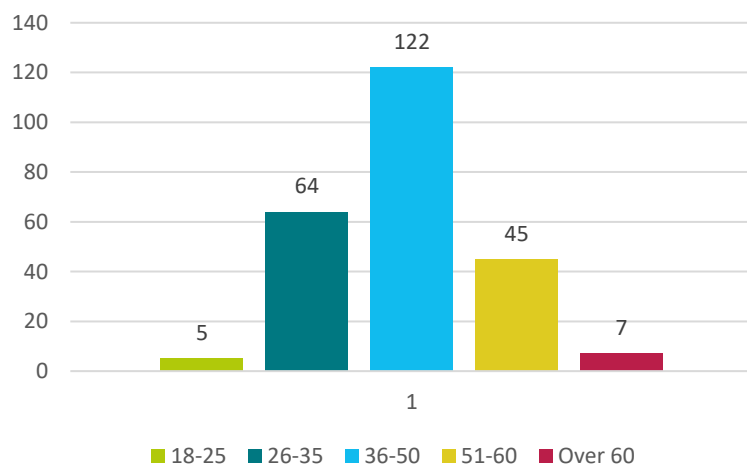
Survey Respondents?

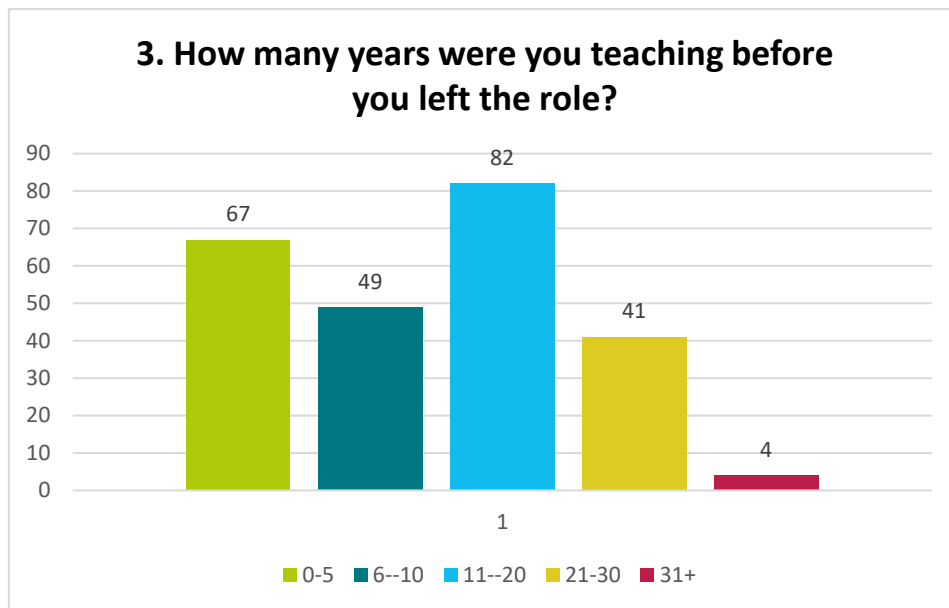
The age bracket of who completed the survey the most was 36–50-year-olds (122), far beyond the second highest of 25–35-year-olds (67). We found the majority had been teaching 11-20 years (82). The survey reached a wide range of teaching experience, resulting in a number of different perceptions from veteran teachers to newly qualified teachers. We found the majority of the respondents were female and this is something we discuss in greater depth later.

1. What gender are you?



2. What age are you?

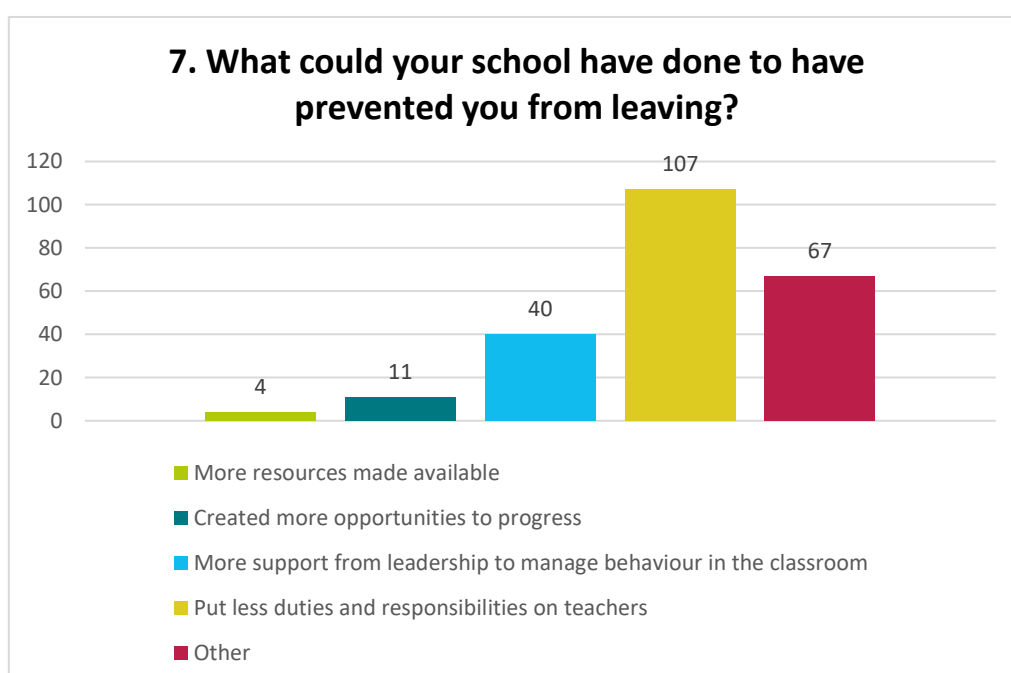


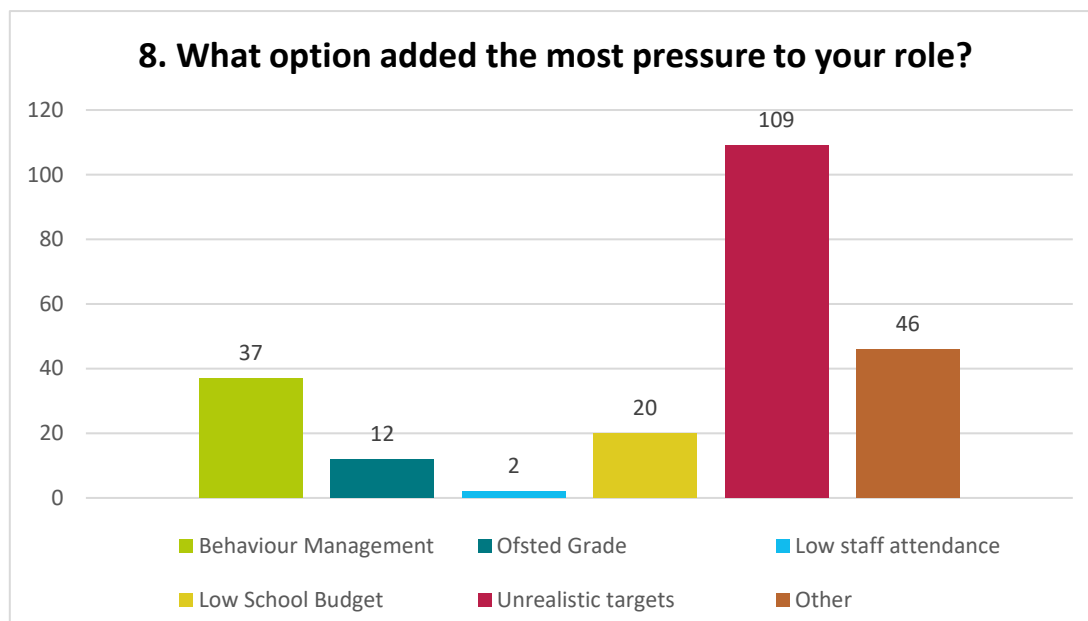


The Repeated Theme of Lack of Support

A theme that is clearly portrayed through multiple questions is that the teachers felt they lacked support and had too much pressure on themselves as individuals. Many teachers in the survey felt their targets were unrealistic, that they did not have enough support in behaviour management, and that they had too many responsibilities.

Question 7 exemplifies this as the top 2 answers for **what their school could have done to have prevented them from leaving** was placing less responsibilities on them and more support from leadership, adding up to 76% of the responses. Question 8 reiterates the need to put less responsibilities on teachers as unrealistic targets was by far the highest tallied answer for **things that added the most pressure to teachers' roles** (109, with the next highest answer being 37).





Again question 5 ties in well with the overall theme and responses on other questions. Workload was undoubtedly the number one answer **for the reason that most influenced teachers' decisions to leave their teaching role** (110), the next highest answered option for question 5 was health with 24.

Even when it came to the time of leaving the teachers in this sample were still not supported. 79% of teachers in question 4 said **they did not have support from their SLT when leaving**. Only 50 out of the 243 who answered did have support. This brings us full circle in this particular theme, as 76% of teachers felt their school could have given them more support from leadership and less responsibilities, pushing them to leaving their role and when that time came, according to question 4 they still felt they did not receive enough support from their leadership.

Perception of Government Policies

We asked the respondents **if there were any government policies they felt affected their decision to leave the profession or role**. Out of the 139 responses for this question 54 said no government policies influenced their decision in leaving, meaning 85 felt government policies directly influenced them to leave. This clearly illustrates that the majority of teachers in this sample felt government policies influenced teaching negatively.

We categorised the answers to this question into four categories: changing curriculum/exams, Ofsted/feeling untrusted and monitored, lack of funding, heavy workload, and COVID-19. We have not explored the COVID-19 policies deeply as this only represents a defined period of time and was only a factor for 5 respondents.

Out of the 85 who answered yes, the top 2 categories were changing curriculum/ exams (23) and Ofsted/feeling untrusted and monitored (30). These 2 categories totalling at 53, is a large percentage in the context of those who answered yes, making up 62.6% and 38.1% out of the whole question. A running theme between Ofsted and change of curriculum is that its clear

teachers in this sample do not like constant change of policies, which was also outlined in other answers directly. Responders outlined many times how they felt they were not trusted and constantly felt monitored either by Ofsted or through general government policies.

Heavy workload constituted 7 responses and lack of funding constituted 10 responses. You could argue that the top 4 categories are all linked as a lack of funding will contribute to the high workload and the constant changing of policies through Ofsted and curriculum means they cannot properly stay on top of their workload as it is always changing.

Unexpected Insights

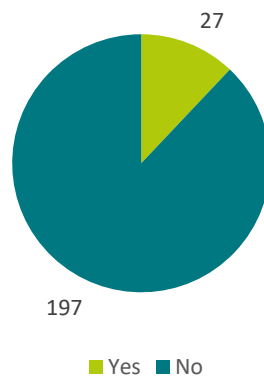
A very interesting response that came up frequently in the **Other** section for question 5 for **(the reason that most influenced teachers' decisions to leave their teaching role)** was related to bullying. Your initial thought may be to think yes, the management of student bullying is very challenging, however, most of the answers related to bullying was teacher bullying, or leadership bullying. In total the answers related to do with bullying or mistreatment of either students or teachers was 23 which is the third highest answer. This is also a point to note as it came in the **Other** section where respondents had the opportunity for free text, showing they felt it was of more importance than the 7 options, provided to them. Teacher and leadership bullying again came up a few times in the **Other** section for question 8 **(things that added the most pressure to teachers' roles)**. This could of course be the same responders to question 5, however it is worth noting even if it is, it amplifies how strongly the respondents in this survey felt about the issue or that many teachers in the sample felt this way.

Another interesting statistic to note is the number of respondents to the survey who were female. 86% (209) of the responders were female. This of course could be explained due to the higher population of females in teaching compared to men. According to Government [statistics](#) in 2018, around three-quarters of schoolteachers were women.

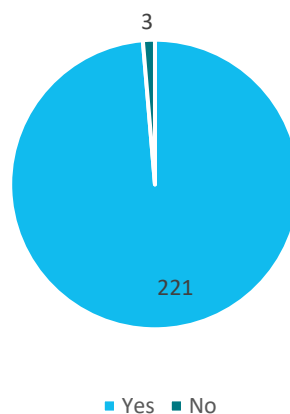
Regrets and Recommendations

Question 9 and 10 are the standout answers for the survey as it shows how many respondents have almost identical feelings for the profession in our sample. 99% of the teachers who responded to the question **felt they made the right choice in leaving the profession or their role**. Only 3 teachers said no, in comparison with 221 who said yes, that is an incredible ratio and very telling alongside question 9. 88% of the responders for question 9 **said they would not recommend the profession to friends and family**. 197 to 27, again a large ratio for a profession that is so important for our society. For the 221 teachers who did not regret leaving, this is very unfortunate as the survey portrays that almost all the reasons teachers left was external to their thoughts about teaching itself.

9. Would you recommend the teaching profession to friends and family?



10. Do you feel you made the right choice in leaving?



Why Does High Staff Turnover Matter?

You might be wondering, why does high staff turnover matter, most people leave their job after a while and are replaced without too much trouble. The reason it differs in importance in teaching rather than in most jobs you are not expected to stay their long-term, it's a steppingstone but in teaching it's generally a vocational career for life and something you had to go through a lot to get there, and to just leave after all that work seems an incredible waste. The changing of staff members at most companies does not affect the customer but in this case the student it does.

For question 3, 67 teachers answered they had left the profession after 0-5 years of teaching, the second highest answer **for how many years they had been teaching before leaving**. If this continued trend of teachers leaving within such a short timeframe, it could result in schools starting to lack experienced teachers who know the school well and the type of students they get. Newly qualified teachers need experienced teachers who understand the needs of the school and the students, without this guidance from the experienced teachers

the standard of education could become lower for students in the future. Having a relationship with a teacher may mean students are more comfortable going to speak to them about an issue they are having, if they like them, they are more likely to do better work for them. If students are surrounded by unfamiliar faces, they are more likely to misbehave and not get past that stage where they are testing the boundaries.

As important as the potential influence on the students is, there is also a case for the effect on future teachers. If the issue of high staff turnover is not fixed the continued correlation of teachers leaving could be very impactful on people who want to become teachers or are trainee teachers. It could be an extremely daunting thought planning or thinking about going into a career knowing many teachers often leave or move around schools. This could lead to the eventual struggle of schools receiving large numbers of applications due to aspiring teachers being put off and the lack of teachers recommending the profession, depicted by question 9 in the image above. Of course, we cannot say for certain how many teachers join the profession via recommendations, however, we are sure the absence of recommendations does more harm than good.

Solutions and Conclusion

From our analysis we have identified that there are clear overlapping answers and themes. Teachers in this sample feel they are underappreciated, under supported and over worked, all the while feeling mistreated and monitored. This is of importance as they are not a small minority they account for a large proportion of this sample.

As outlined above, some of the most staggering statistics for example the quantity of teachers who do not regret leaving (221:3) and would not recommend the profession (27:197), clearly presents a picture to schools that things do need to change in order to counter the high staff turnover and the general negative feeling of the profession portrayed by the teachers in this sample.

So, what could schools do to prevent this? Some very simple changes could be made such as meetings where teachers can freely discuss school policies like targets, workload and support from leadership. Once more open dialogue starts and schools want honest feedback, that could lead to teachers feeling more comfortable to putting their thoughts forward individually or as a group and progress can begin to be made.

If schools and teachers would prefer to keep their thoughts more anonymous a suggestion box could be used and if schools see clear patterns and themes repeating, they can discuss solutions to those issues.

As outlined in question 5, certain teachers felt they were mistreated, so having a structure in place to monitor staff's mental health through having a Wellbeing Policy and Wellbeing Action Plan could encourage good working practices to measure and improve staff wellbeing.

In addition to this, offering staff a confidential route to discuss their concerns should also be a top priority for schools. This could include offering access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which provides staff access to counselling and support services. The

introduction of trained Mental Health First Aiders in schools would also be beneficial to ensure staff have someone to turn to when they are struggling. By normalising conversations and opening dialogue, a lot of staff concerns could be identified early and hopefully resolved. In instances of bullying, however it is important that the school has a strict policy on Anti Bullying, that sets expectations on acceptable behaviour. The school could also offer Mediation to the parties involved to try and find a resolution.

Constant change of curriculum and the curriculum itself is clearly shown to be disliked by teachers in this sample, however this is out of the schools' hands, so what could be done? It may be very unlikely this would be set into motion, but since teachers have to teach the curriculum set, they should have a say in it. If there was a process that could be designed where the national curriculum had to be approved by teachers before it is officially set this would be positive for many of the survey respondents.

A possible solution that is much more achievable than getting more influence in government curriculum policies is an increased presence of teaching unions. How many teachers know who their rep is? Or how to get in touch? A potential idea is for teaching unions to send representatives into schools frequently to be able to gauge the general feeling of teachers on the ground. This more personal relationship could magnify teachers voices massively and get much higher up the chain of command from a more powerful voice.

As much as this survey shines a light on many of the issues teachers face and how many are in agreement with specific problems, it is up to schools, unions, education-based organisations and teachers to implement change. Even as teachers you may feel certain policies like curriculum and Ofsted are out of your hands, there are things you can do just by speaking to teachers in your school about possible solutions or just individually communicating certain information to SLT. It seems a shame for so many teachers who dedicated years of studying to becoming a qualified teacher and actually enjoying the role itself to leave based on external factors. We hope this whitepaper will shine a light and draw attention and motivate individuals to implement solutions and make other teachers see the situation isn't hopeless and influence them into similar activities.

Of course, we do need to put this into context that only 245 teachers responded which is a small number compared to the full potential of responders. We also have to take into account the survey does not analyse any personal circumstances in relation to the respondents, if their reasons are fully justified for leaving or not, we have drawn conclusions solely from the data provided. Nevertheless, this should not diminish the number of teachers who are well aligned on many of the topics. We would like to thank all the teachers who responded to our survey and hope this whitepaper has been insightful.

Appendix – Survey Questions

Q1 - What gender are you?

Q2 - What age are you?

Q3 - How many years were you teaching before you left the role?

Q4 - Did you have support from your SLT team at the time of leaving?

Q5 - Which of these options most influenced your decision to leave your teaching role?

Q6 - Have the Government implemented any policies or practices which affected your decision to leave the profession? Please state below

Q7 - What could your school have done to have prevented you from leaving?

Q8 - What option added the most pressure to your role?

Q9 - Would you recommend the teaching profession to friends and family?

Q10 - Do you feel you made the right choice in leaving?