

Talking Heads:

*The views of London's school leaders
on future challenges*

June 2017



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Introduction

Managing school budgets, staff recruitment and teacher workload – these are the top three challenges facing school leaders in London. Historically, teacher workload has topped the list¹; now schools inside and outside London rank managing the school budget as their number one challenge.

Since 2010, the UK government has been proposing changes to the education funding system through a series of public consultations, with the aim of making school funding fairer. At the time of writing, following the General Election, the introduction of the new National Funding Formula (NFF) in its proposed form looks increasingly unlikely and the three main parties all pledged increased funding for education in their manifestos. Nevertheless, the uncertainty surrounding the impact of current budget pressures including the new NFF has put significant strain on schools in the period it was proposed. Under the new rebalanced formula, money would be moving from London and other urban areas to schools that had traditionally received less funding. 70% of London's schools would lose funding as a result of the introduction of the NFF, with at least one school in every local authority area experiencing a reduction. Combined with additional cost pressures such as inflation, the apprenticeship levy, increases to the teachers' pension schemes and national insurance contributions, schools across the country are facing real-term cuts of 8% between 2014-15 and 2019-20², equivalent to £3bn. Were it to be introduced, no school in London would gain enough additional funding from the NFF to compensate for these increased cost pressures.³

¹ For example see [The Key, State of Education Survey Report 2016](#), Accessed 30.03.17

² National Audit Office, [Financial Sustainability of Schools](#), December 2016, Accessed 30.03.17

³ London Councils, [How London will be affected by the National Funding Formula for Schools](#), February 2017, Accessed 30.03.17

Background to the research

London Councils commissioned TES, The Education Company and Shift Learning to research what schools are doing in the face of these funding challenges. Schools have been putting financial efficiencies in place since funding reductions first hit them following advice from the Department of Education – however, what does this really mean for schools, and how are they coping with these important changes? In February 2017, The Education Company and TES broadcast an online survey to schools across the UK. Responses were received from 399 school leaders in London, with all 32 London boroughs being represented. 264 responses were received from the rest of England. In-depth follow-up interviews were then conducted by Shift Learning, speaking with 48 London headteachers from a broad range of London schools. The interviews delved deeper into the survey responses to understand the current and future impact of the cuts, as well as exploring headteachers' views around the role local authorities and other bodies might play in the future around accountability and school performance.

School budget reforms and impact on schools

The majority (70%) of London school leaders have already suffered budget cuts, 10% more than leaders in the rest of England. Almost half (47%) of London schools reported a decrease in budget of over 3% in the past two years. This reflects the real-term cuts these schools are facing from a wide range of cost pressures, such as increases in national insurance and pension contributions. To cope with these budget pressures, schools across the country have been changing the way that they operate: 47% of secondary schools said they have reduced the breadth of their curriculum, saving costs by losing vocational courses, subjects with low pupil numbers at A Level, and technology and equipment-heavy subjects. The creative curriculum is narrowing in primary schools, with hours for subjects requiring specialist teachers (music, drama, dance, languages for example) being cut. 70% of primary schools have already reduced their numbers of Teaching Assistants, impacting especially on children with Special

Educational Needs (SEN) and English as an additional language (EAL), who are losing the extra one-to-one or small group attention they need to progress. Approximately 63% of all schools have cut spending on learning resources, with textbooks not being replaced and IT resources out of date – severely restricting the capacity of schools to respond to the new required emphasis on STEM subjects.

Almost two thirds (64%) of London schools believe they have coped well with these historic budget cuts compared to 55% of schools in the rest of England. Coming through strongly in the interviews was the passion and commitment of headteachers, who were determined to approach the cuts in ways which least impact on the attainment of their pupils. Approaches taken to alleviate financial pressures reveal how every measure put in place is carefully planned and scrutinised against alternatives to ensure the least possible damage to student outcomes – buildings and maintenance are seen as a primary area in which to hold back on spending for example, improvements are postponed and maintenance patched – and headteachers are increasingly entrepreneurial in bringing new revenue streams into their schools, ranging from the secondment of their own senior team to letting out school buildings. However, with schools already stripping back to the bare bones, the question is how much more financially efficient can schools become before standards are impacted? In spite of their best efforts, some headteachers suggested that budgetary pressures are already impacting on results. This is true across the wider pupil population, but also particularly for SEN pupils given the increase in staff to student ratios and support staff losses.

At the time of the interviews many headteachers anticipated these cuts to continue or worsen over the next two years, reflecting the expected impact of the introduction of the NFF and the redistribution of funds away from many schools in London. Only 40% of London schools believe they are prepared for these future cuts, with confidence levels much lower in primary schools compared to secondary. Over half (58%) are expecting their overall budget to decrease by approximately 3% or more in the next two years, which could have a devastating impact on

staffing, pupil outcomes and the school environment. We have already seen schools reducing spend and cutting education support staff such as Teaching Assistants, but in the next two years, two-thirds (65%) of London secondary schools are also planning to cut teacher numbers. Approaches to cutting staff are being planned in the least painful way possible, including non-replacement, merging roles, using experienced support roles in class, and increasing contact time, but more teacher redundancies would appear an inevitable course of action given the current trajectory. A narrowing of the curriculum was also seen as a natural extension of staff cuts. Some schools were considering a decrease in contact time, with a shortened day or even a four day week. It is therefore unsurprising that over 70% of London leaders believe this will result in negative outcomes for pupils.

Teacher recruitment and retention

Staff recruitment was the second biggest challenge facing London schools behind managing budgets and before teacher workload, all of which are interconnected. Last year, school pupil numbers grew faster in London than in other parts of the country (1.8% vs 1.4%), increasing the demand for teachers in the capital. The government has continually missed its target for initial teacher training, especially in hard-to-fill subjects such as maths and physics⁴. Despite London's high concentration of teaching schools and higher education institutions, almost half of London leaders (49%) felt that recruiting newly-qualified teachers [NQTs] had become more difficult in the last five years. A similar proportion (42%), believe that the quality of NQTs entering the system is not improving. Whilst London and other major cities in the UK can typically attract young and ambitious teachers, heavy workloads combined with high expectations and comparatively low salaries are likely to influence a graduate's decision to join the teaching workforce and become an NQT.

⁴ Department for Education, [Initial Teacher Training: trainee number census 2016 to 2017](#) (SFR-57), November 2016, Accessed 30.03.17

In interviews, concerns were expressed around the smaller pool of available NQTs and the cost of recruitment, since agency recruitment costs make the churn in staff particularly expensive. Within London, unaffordable house prices meant that teachers were leaving to move outside of the city. Survey responses indicated that over a third (37%) of teachers who left a London school last year moved to teach outside of London. Cost of living can significantly influence the movement of experienced teachers such as subject leaders, and especially those who wish to buy a home or start a family. 94% of London school leaders agreed that local house prices make it very difficult for teachers to stay put, compared to just 37% of school leaders in the rest of the country. Outer London schools, particularly those close to inner London borders, had the added challenge of teachers being drawn to teach in inner London schools to benefit from the inner London weighting. Over a quarter (27%), of those leaving London schools were reported as leaving teaching altogether.

Accountability and trust

The most popular group that school leaders trusted to hold schools to account were school governors (72%), followed by the local authority (50%).

As the country moves towards an increasingly academised system, headteachers forecast that schools will have greater autonomy and move away from the local authority, with some reporting feeling forced into academisation through the decline of local authority services. Despite this, the local authority remained the most trusted body to turn around failing schools (52%), versus just 10% trusting the Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) that were introduced in 2014.

Unsurprisingly, academy headteachers in Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) thought their trustees in the best position to hold them to account, however 24% of academies within MATs continued to value some sustained, albeit more limited, involvement from their local authority as

an impartial body, beyond the accountability to their trust.

Overall headteachers reported valuing strong collaboration and mutual accountability through school and community roles, including parents, teachers, governors, trustees in academies, and headteachers in other schools, where the emphasis on local knowledge was highly valued. A key theme coming through in the interviews was the increase in networks between all types of schools, with the aim of sharing best practice to support school improvement, providing mutual reviews and advice and saving costs through joint purchasing networks.

Conversely, Ofsted and the Regional School Commissioners were seen as distant to the school and linked with retrospective accountability, in comparison with the on-going support offered by other bodies 'closer' to – and perceived as more knowledgeable about – the school community.

Headteachers suggested that local authorities' unique characteristics as third parties and democratically elected bodies, with unique local contextual knowledge, lends them to having a role in three key areas: as an impartial advisor or observer in all school types; as a third party broker of school networks (both inside and outside the academy model); and as an expert in wider community areas intrinsically involved in the school environment – safeguarding, SEN, and social care for example.

Headteachers were strongly conscious of the need to find new ways of building on and preserving the benefits of local authority services that seem to be disappearing, leveraging community strengths and fostering new types of relationships with local schools networks through collaborative initiatives.

Whilst the future relationship between schools and local authorities is currently unknown, it is evident that school leaders across the country view authorities as trusted bodies that are truly capable of bringing about change in schools.

Methodology and timing

The research supporting this report was carried out during February and March 2017.

Quantitative research – survey

The quantitative data was collected using several online surveys broadcast to school leaders by the Education Company and TES.

399 schools in London and 264 schools in the rest of England responded to the survey. Of the 399 London schools, 162 were based in Inner London and 237 in Outer London. 422 were primary schools and 241 were secondary schools. 88 schools were academies within multi-academy trusts, 101 were standalone academies. 474 were LA-maintained.

Qualitative research – depth interviews

The qualitative data is based on responses from telephone interviews with 48 headteachers in London schools scheduled and conducted by Shift Learning.

Half of these headteachers were recruited after expressing interest in the interviews through the initial survey, and half through direct calling to London schools. An interlocking quota was designed in order to ensure a balanced sample of schools from across London according to phase, funding type and Ofsted grading, and as such the recruitment of the headteachers was subject to their school meeting certain selection criteria.

Of the sample of 48, an even split of 24 headteachers of academies and 24 headteachers of local authority maintained schools participated in the interviews. Primary (or Junior) schools accounted for 22 of the schools, whilst the remaining 26 were Secondary schools. With regards to geographical location, 13 of the schools were classed as serving Inner London, and 35 were situated in Outer London boroughs.

At the time of recruitment, the Ofsted ratings of the participating schools were as follows:

Grade 1: 17 schools

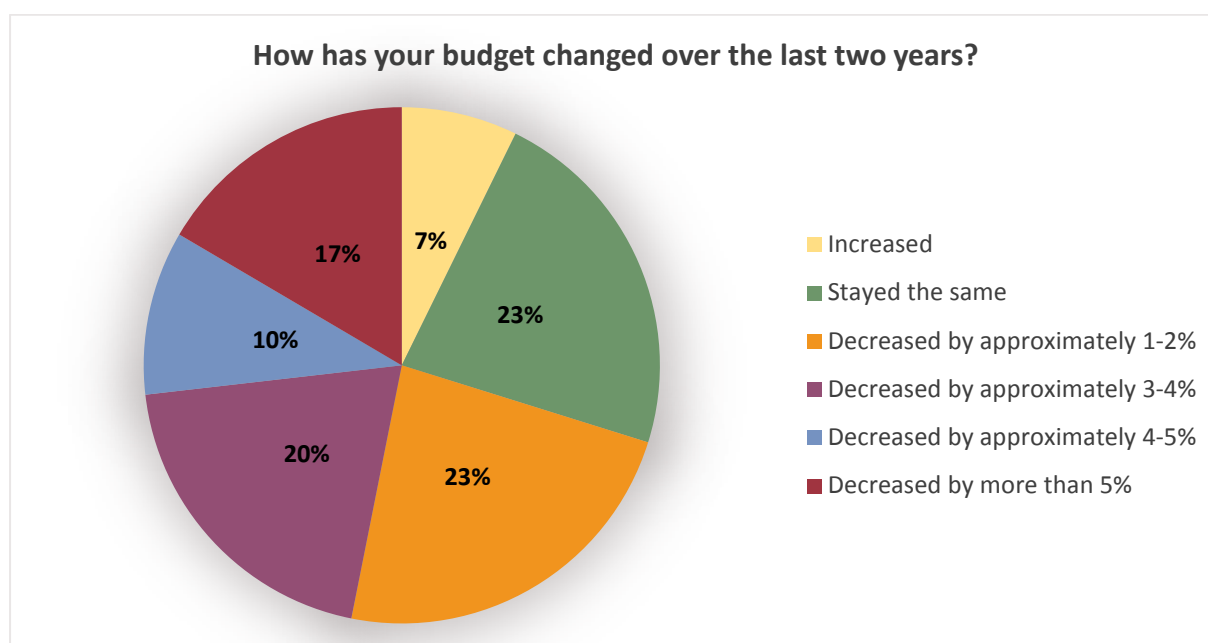
Grade 2: 22 schools

Grade 3: 9 schools

A difficult past and an uncertain future

The survey and the subsequent interviews asked school leaders about their experiences over the last 5 years and their expectations for the future. Half of the schools we surveyed in London are still unsure what their budgets will look like in two years' time. This uncertainty is shared by the rest of England, but perhaps unsurprisingly given the proposed model for the National Funding Formula and its likely impact on London's schools, school leaders in the capital are less certain about the future.

This uncertainty follows several years of real-term budget cuts, largely caused by staff pay rises, and higher employer contributions to national insurance and the teachers' pension scheme. 47% of London schools are reporting a 3% or more decrease in budget over the last two years, as illustrated by the chart below.



Base size: 399, all London senior leader respondents who answered Q2.

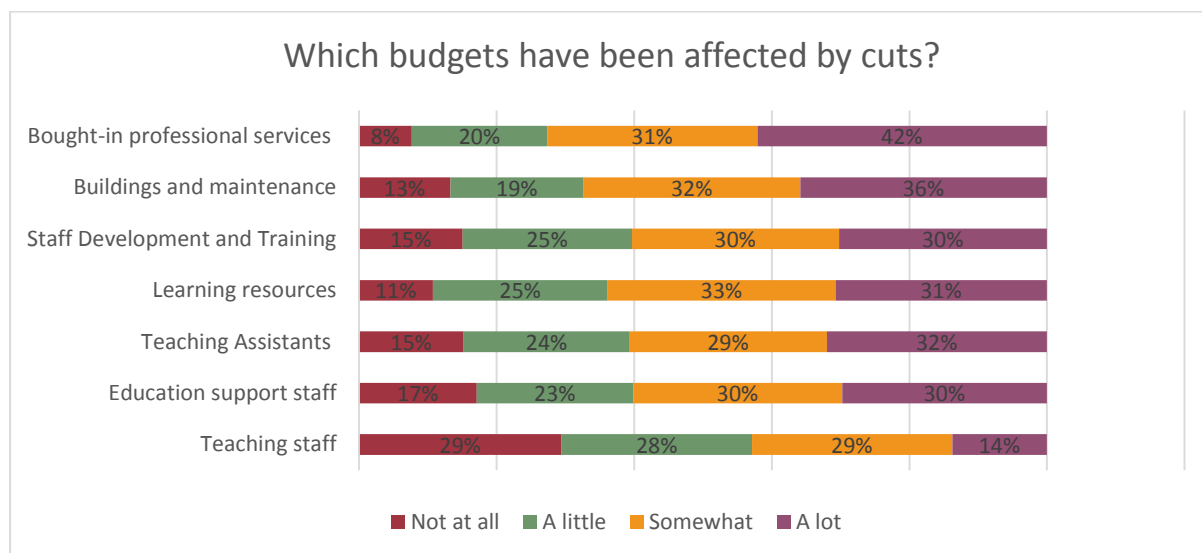
Schools from MATs appear to be somewhat more confident that they understand the budget changes they are facing in the next two years. 51% said they were confident or very confident that they understood how their budget would change, compared with 43% of standalone academies and 37% of LA-maintained schools. However, interviews across academies and LA-maintained schools revealed strong misgivings about the future:

I think it's going to get more and more difficult... This year is the full year of the pay increase for teaching staff, pay increases for support staff, pensions, and pensions contributions, national insurance contributions. We've got the apprenticeship levy coming in, in just over a month's time, so there are considerable pressures on the budget and so it's going to get worse because our costs are going up.

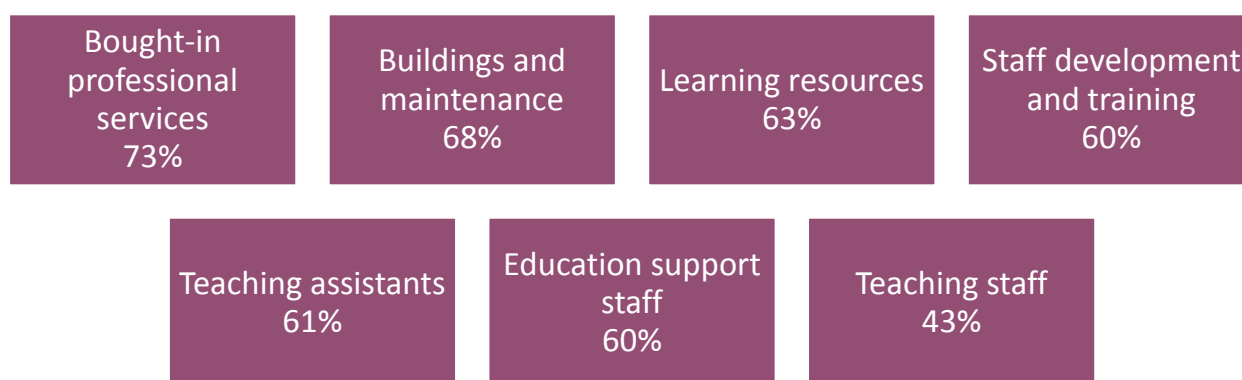
Headteacher, Secondary Academy (Grade 2), Outer London

Schools have coped so far – and here’s how... part one

With 70% of London schools and 60% of the rest of England schools reporting budget cuts over the last two years, it is important to understand how they have coped. Over 50% of the schools in England have dealt with these cuts by directly reducing spend on key provisions, and starting to cut back on support staff and now teaching staff in order to balance their books. The interviews revealed where cuts have been focused in each of these areas, and the impact these decisions are having.



The following chart shows the percentage of all schools reporting 'somewhat' and 'a lot' of impact or the cuts in each area, broken down by budget:



Base size: 625, all England senior leader respondents who answered Q3.

Bought in professional services have been cut 'somewhat' or 'a lot' in 73% of schools nationally

Almost three quarters of school leaders reported cutting the number of bought in professional services 'somewhat' or 'a lot', with a further 20% cutting these 'a little', a statistic backed up by qualitative interviews with London headteachers. These private services, for example mental health counsellors or phonics specialists, were seen as increasingly important to the day-to-day running of all schools. Many local authorities have had to withdraw these services due to funding cuts, leaving schools with the only option of buying into these services.

...We provide what is statutory. Any additional areas such as for counselling, such as the number of interventions that we require we won't be able to buy in.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained (Grade 2), Outer London

Schools are increasingly either on their own or looking towards new ways of working, often through partnerships with other schools, in order to make their budgets go further. The changing role of the local authority and the new ways of working adopted by schools are discussed in the last section of this report.

I think the agenda is not to privatise schools... but to privatise all the services that schools use. So, for example, in this borough people who are doing special needs... they are all being made redundant and then they will all become sole traders and schools will have to buy into that service, but schools have got less money to buy into any service.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy (Grade 3), Outer London

Schools have cut spending on buildings and maintenance, with 68% of schools nationally reporting that this budget has been cut 'somewhat' or 'a lot'

In interviews, school leaders were clear that student outcomes were of ultimate importance to them, with budgets directly related to teaching and learning less likely to be cut first. This prioritisation often appears to be to the detriment of investment in the maintenance of buildings and grounds. Heads expressed a real concern that their schools were becoming increasingly unsuitable places for children.

I've got a fabulous site team and a really, really good facilities manager. And he does a lot of patching. And we've been patching for years... Things like carpets on the floor, they do a lot of remedial work on toilets. The flooring...there's more... tape on the carpet than there is carpet. And it's that kind of patching, a lot of health and safety patching.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

A future of ever tighter budgets suggests that these priorities are unlikely to change; indeed in readiness for proposed funding cuts, a number of schools suggested that the renovation of buildings did not figure in their long term financial strategies.

We've massively cut back on our maintenance budget. So, I worry about the state of the building. We have 16 different buildings. I do worry at some point we'll be hit by some massive maintenance bill, but we're not going to be able to – that will be a real challenge for us. We are making do and mending. I just worry that at some point the IT or physical infrastructure of the place will fall over.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

The improbability of budgets being spent on building work appears likely to impact on schools' capacity to increase their revenue via larger class sizes or extra forms. There is also an effect on existing learners, who will not experience the benefits of modernisation or new facilities in what are, in many cases, increasingly antiquated buildings.

We've got a small building project that we really want to do, that we think will be amazing for the children which normally we would have been saving up over two or three years to put the money aside, because it will be probably about £40,000 which, you know, in the bigger scheme of things isn't huge but I can't afford to do that. So, that is basically on indefinite delay because I cannot see that we will be able to do that...

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

Perhaps of most immediate concern, current low states of repair also led to reports of potential issues around health and safety:

It's creating a massive amount of budgetary pressure – my school is in a state of disrepair... The school is dangerous in some places and difficult to make use of the whole building because there are areas that are not safe.... Yesterday Storm Doris, there was water coming in all over the place in the school. While we have accessed the condition improvement fund, although we haven't heard if we've been successful, the reality is that it's scratching the surface and we are trying very hard to make budgetary provision. I have made budgetary provision of at least £50,000 and possibly up to £75,000 to spend on refurbishing the building, which is a colossal amount of money and a massive amount of impact in the sense that I'm not spending that money on resources and children and staffing. £50-75,000 will barely scratch the surface of repairing the building.

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Where class sizes have been increased to allow for greater per pupil funding, they have not always been suited to the space available in the classrooms, which has impacted on safety in some classrooms and science labs:

And we're now talking about, in fact I'm going to make the decision after this phone call, I have a meeting to increase the number of students in each form, which we can't really do because our rooms don't allow for it. So we're already – 50% of our rooms are at capacity. They aren't big enough. Half of ours are not as big as they should be to house our students and we're talking about increasing it further.

That will rebound on the students a little bit. If you add another desk and table into a science lab, the health and safety is a little bit unhinged because people are moving around and doing experiments.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

Several headteachers expressed frustration that building for free schools was being conducted in their local areas, with extremely high building costs, while relatively low cost and high impact improvements could be made to existing schools. This comparison was particularly stark when comparing the per pupil costs of this type of expenditure.

It's just there are some anomalies... So we're finding it very difficult to get any money to improve the site, yet if they found a site for the free school they could spend up to £25million, I suppose, building a new school. Buying the land in London, building a new school. So, it seems a bit inequitable. I think that's the best way of putting it.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

We have the capacity to improve. Some one-storey buildings could become two or three storeys, and we could on this site go up quite a significant bit... Again and again we're told all the funding for new places is going through the free schools. Well, somebody should stop that. It's fine to have free schools. It's fine to have money for that, but they shouldn't be soaking up all the money, and it's a very expensive use of money because the free schools are open with one year group. It takes five years for them to be full, but all the costs of setting up a school are there at the beginning, whereas to increase our... it would cost somewhere between £7000 and £8000 per place to do the building works here, whereas in a new school it costs £20,000. Those sorts of things the LA needs to articulate to central government and they need to be listened to.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 2, Outer London

Feelings were particularly strong where it was considered that free schools were unnecessary in relation to the local demand for school places:

So, just to give you an example, part of my funding... I've had a school rebuilt within a mile of my school and I've had a new free school open, so I wasn't full last year for the first time because effectively I've got 360 places on my doorstep, and the fact that I wasn't full in Year 7 when we've had a waiting list of 150 up 'til now, that's exacerbated the problem, if you like, of funding.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

We'll lose £28,000 with the new formula. I think the outrage on that is the announcement about the additional £300 million going into free schools. I know having worked in the free school system that there are far too many free schools open that are not good enough and are in places that are not

needed, i.e. there are spaces in other schools. I honestly believe that if schools were funded appropriately then the teaching in those schools would increase and there wouldn't be a need for them. I'm also sure that there are places where free schools are needed, but because it's a government policy on the free schools and has been since go start, they're given the go ahead without enough consideration of local need.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 3, Inner London

Learning resource budgets have been cut across primary and secondary schools, with 63% of schools nationally reporting cuts

Heads were keen to stress the pressures they were under to purchase new textbooks and learning resources in order to support changes to the curriculum – for example new GCSEs and A levels, the former introducing a numbered grading system. Almost two-thirds of survey respondents reported cuts to their learning resources budget in recent years. It is in this climate that staff and schools are looking to simultaneously cut costs and raise student attainment.

On top of that, the other thing that's particularly worrying for schools is all the curriculum reforms that have been brought in, new GCSEs, new A levels, new numbering system for GCSEs, and it's all been done at the same time, and that's putting a lot of pressure on staff and schools, and if you've got new courses then probably it's going to require new textbooks, and schools just haven't got the money to be purchasing textbooks, so it's a vicious circle.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 1, Outer London

Schools of all kinds are reducing capitation to departments; with all but the most essential resources facing an uncertain future, reductions of a third over the past 2 years have not been uncommon. Textbooks were often mentioned as not being replaced as frequently as staff would like. Any additional resources and opportunities schools want to provide for young people are unlikely to be offered, which can have a fundamental impact on the running of the school and the nature of teaching and learning that takes place.

Definitely curriculum spending, just reducing the amount of resources. It could be textbooks; it could be cancelling new projects we were previously committed to, just not doing it. Can't afford it.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

Despite schools' considerable reduction in resource budgets, the resultant savings have not been sufficient to significantly better their financial position – these cuts are simply indicative of the enforced savings being made across all areas of school budgets.

IT equipment is becoming more and more important to staff and students, though schools are finding it difficult to find funding to invest in it

IT infrastructure in schools is becoming increasingly important. Front and back end equipment is required to be up to date and capable of meeting the demands of both the curriculum and office requirements.

Recent curriculum reforms have placed an emphasis on STEM, with higher digital engagement expected of learners of all ages. While some schools have decidedly invested in new resources such as tablets, PCs and robotics equipment, many find the required budget for such investments to be unrealistic in the current climate. This has led to some schools finding it difficult to provide IT education of an adequate standard, and threatens to impact upon Ofsted ratings. Institutions already classed as Requires Improvement may find it more difficult to progress with these barriers in place.

...the curriculum budget has been cut quite a lot, particularly things like computing... We're not able to currently replace things that we need to replace in order to really fulfil the curriculum. And with the changing curriculum in 2014 and having to meet all those new expectations, it's a bit more difficult as well because we haven't got the funding there necessarily to meet that new criteria.

Headteacher, Primary, Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

The nature of IT equipment means that it is likely to require constant renewal and updating; even schools that currently have adequate IT resources may shortly face issues with budgetary implications.

We haven't invested in front end IT for two years. 70% of my IT stock is end of life.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Inner London

Schools are also looking to their own servers and systems to help keep track of their pupils and to maintain efficient administration. A lack of continued investment in these systems leaves them vulnerable to failure, with potentially catastrophic consequences. Severe budget limitations mean that these possibilities leave school leaders with highly difficult decisions to make:

The ICT people are telling me I need a new server, and it will cost £20,000. The risk is that if it goes wrong, all the information on our school management system is gone... The only way to replace it is to lose another member of staff. That is the stark choice I have on that.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 3, Inner London

Training moves towards in-house provision only

Interviews suggest that the purchase of external training is very rare amongst London schools of all kinds, with a clear trend towards in-house provision. This is especially true of MATs, but also evident

in the numerous teaching alliances, groups and partnerships in which schools participate. We have uncovered many examples of schools successfully pooling resources and sharing best practice, usually amongst institutions in close proximity to one another. This is the case for both academies and maintained schools.

Traditionally, much training has been instigated by the local authority. Such training appears to be in decline, though a number of schools still reported receiving briefings on new statutory regulations – for example on target setting, reforms at GCSE and A level, the new measures for Progress 8, and the new 1-9 grading system.

They are huge changes and costly changes. They're costly in terms of staff time for CPD, costly in terms of resource, and... at an ever more important time to share and make sure schools are working together... that's a big challenge for us.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Interviews suggested that these opportunities seem to be in decline, with schools forced to find their own ways of keeping up to date. Of course, this independence takes up time and resources, with further implications for school budgets. If schools have no choice but to send staff away to external statutory training, the associated agency costs for cover can be difficult to manage.

Our biggest cost is agency to cover for CPD. Very... I mean when all the new curriculum came in and all the new SATs, the amount of money we had to spend on sending teachers off to... monitoring courses and god knows what else was phenomenal, and that we felt was very unfair because, you know, if the government introduces something new they should pay for it.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

Certainly, more staff development is taking place within schools than in previous years, with two reasons reported by headteachers: firstly, the associated costs of external training means training is brought in-house, and secondly the increased numbers of teachers new to the profession require a greater level of instruction from existing teachers than experienced staff.

The interviews indicate a direct link between the number of NQTs in schools and cost cutting measures. Interviews suggest that many schools have replaced experienced staff, who would command a higher pay scale, with newcomers to teaching. In some cases older staff are simply not replaced as they retire, although redundancies of more senior staff are not unknown.

Increased levels of internal training have been observed to cause or exacerbate existing issues within schools. Complex timetables and the amount of time needed for planning mean that slots for training sessions cannot always be found. Where time is found, experienced teachers asked to deliver training have their workloads increased still further. This extra stress, combined with increasing contact time and workload for example, is seen to have a knock-on effect on retention. The growing challenges around teacher retention and recruitment are discussed in a later section of this report.

One popular method of CPD is internal mentoring, often with teachers shadowing SLT members. This also has the danger of diluting the quality of leadership, especially at a time when senior members of staff are being asked both to spend more time teaching, and to micromanage the business side of school affairs.

Well, there are certainly areas of the school where the quality of teaching and learning isn't as high as we would want it to be and all of that then puts huge pressure on the people that are here, you know, they get increased workload. It means that we're doing a lot more in-house training of less experienced people than probably we are set up to be able to do. I mean, in English we've got, I think, nine NQTs this year and we don't have enough people to mentor them because we have so many new members of staff. So, it does put increasing strain and pressure on the general system.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

We're using more in school cover, so high level Teaching Assistants instead of qualified teachers, which isn't ideal, but that's how schools work nowadays, and also we have to look at what training we provide, and we're tending to do things more in the locality now rather than people going into London or national courses. We're tending to keep much more local and collective because it's easier to cover for half a day than it is to send someone out for the day on a course.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Staffing costs make up the majority of school budgets and there have already been cuts to Teaching Assistants, educational support staff, and increasingly, classroom teachers

London headteachers described staffing costs as accounting for around 80% of overall school budgets. As such, it is not surprising that schools have had to start to make cuts across their staff in recent years as budget cuts take hold. Ultimately, schools looking to make significant savings have done so by reducing staffing levels. As discussed, staff and Teaching Assistants have borne the brunt of these efficiencies, with many schools starting to report and forecasting redundancies. 60% of surveyed school leaders reported a reduction in Teaching Assistants. This extended to 70% in primary schools. The interviews described the nature of these changes.

Headteachers were unanimous in their support for Teaching Assistants, and described their centrality to improving student outcomes. However, their lack of statutory requirement in the classroom leaves them in a vulnerable position. The past two years have seen positions left by TAs tendering resignations or receiving promotions remain unfilled. Subsequent restructuring has seen TAs shared over classes and year groups.

Other schools have had to take more drastic action – TA redundancies were evident across all school types.

We did radically change the way we did support in the school. So, we've made every TA redundant and teachers pick that up with additional teaching time on their timetable.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Reductions have been most significant at primary level, with 85% of primary schools surveyed reporting a decrease in TA numbers.

Educational Support staff have also seen reductions in number over recent years, with 83% of school leaders also reporting a decline here. Many schools are relying on SLT members to provide cover, or for teachers to spend their free periods assisting in other classes. It appears common for contracts to be renegotiated with staff members.

Where not an absolute necessity, support staff numbers have diminished, at both primary and secondary level. The likelihood of future increases in class sizes, and the related increase in SEN needs amongst these pupils, suggests that teaching staff may become even more stretched, to the subsequent detriment of student outcomes.

When support staff have left, we've replaced them with a smaller number of hours. So full timers have been replaced with part timers and people have taken on additional jobs within their roles. So we've got a very small – for a school of 760, and our senior team only have four people. We have a very small number of support staff. We're right down to the bone. If anybody is off sick. Like at the moment, we've got someone on a... residential trip with students and immediately we can barely cover reception with everything else. We're to the wire on people that we need. There's been a lot of all of that going on and not spending money on anything other than the absolute essentials.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

As a final resort, teachers have been lost; 42% of survey respondents reported this had been the case in their school. At this stage it occurs largely through non-replacement on teachers' retirement or leaving the school, though heads appear to be considering redundancies as they make drastic cuts to their budgets.

We've not replaced teachers by increasing class sizes, so we haven't had to make any redundancies because we've been trying to do it by natural wastage, so when teachers have left we've increased class sizes and not replaced teachers, so we've lost one fulltime history teacher, we've lost a part-time English teacher, we've lost in science, so all the time we're cutting the staffing to the bone, and on the other hand we're also having to look at support staff and we've made cuts to support staff as well.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 1, Outer London

Other schools described losing specialist staff from non-core subjects, as well as part time, after school and other non-statutory team members.

Schools have enacted large scale restructures of staff, covering teaching and support staff, administration and senior team members. While a handful of heads noted that they had inherited a school with a degree of wastage in staff costs, many felt that they had been running a tight and

efficient budget for some time in order to mitigate against the background of existing cuts and difficulties.

[The restructuring] involved reduction of salaries around admin staff and changes to contracts. It involved redundancies both at senior leadership level and at teaching staff level, and at inclusion staff level, and it meant redefining people's job descriptions and roles so they had a broader brief, so those are quite painful processes to go through as a school but they were necessary in terms of staying out of deficit.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Schools have coped so far – and here's how... part two

Direct cuts to specific budgets have not been enough to balance the books for many schools, and additional measures have already been put in place to make savings, including cuts to the curriculum, increasing class sizes and reducing senior teams.

London schools have implemented the following additional cost saving methods:

47% of secondary schools have implemented larger class sizes

47% of secondary schools and 18% of primary schools have reduced the breadth of the curriculum

40% of schools have reduced the size of their SLT

Base size: 135 secondary schools, 235 primary school senior leader respondents in London who answered Q4

Class sizes have grown significantly, especially amongst academy schools

Increasing class sizes appears to be more popular outside of London, with over 70% of secondary schools in the rest of England reporting that they have implemented this strategy, compared with 60% of secondary schools in London.

Similarly, across primary and secondary phases, 44% of schools outside of London had increased class sizes compared with 28% in London.

Interviews with London headteachers suggested that this may be because London's local authority schools operate from older buildings in built up areas, which would require greater investment in order to expand and house larger class sizes.

But the biggest problem we have is because of our building we can't ... even if I wanted to I couldn't expand to full one form entry. We have expanded significantly since I've been the head. In the last year and a half we've expanded by ten percent, but we are pretty much at the limit of how many children we can take. We reckon we might be able to take up to ten more, so that would still leave us about 185 and one form entry is 210.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Inner London

Nationally, local authority maintained secondary schools are less likely to have increased class sizes: only 52% of them have done this in comparison with 75% of academies. This is reflected in the London sample: fewer local authority maintained schools had increased class sizes; 46% LA-maintained schools compared with 72% of standalone academies reported increased class sizes (70% of academies in MATs). This reflects press reports around schools being forced to increase class sizes because of oversubscription and the less stringent regulations under academy funding requirements for limiting class numbers.⁵

Indeed, some local authority school headteachers reported a decrease in class sizes because they were losing pupils to local academies and free schools which were reported as being set up in undersubscribed areas. The seemingly 'random' opening of new schools, combined with increased gentrification and the cost of housing forcing less affluent families out of the area, was seen to be causing an imbalance in provision of places.

There are about 1,200 vacant school places because of this issue, because of this gentrification of [the borough], and the lack of affordable housing is having a huge impact and the random opening up of Free Schools without any, you know, need for them basically...

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

Nonetheless, a small number of headteachers of local authority schools in London described how they were indeed beginning to increase class sizes, and the negative effect this would have on staff morale and teacher workload, with additional implications for student attainment.

I do think in the future if we increase class sizes, if we're asking teachers to do more, then there's going to be a burnout and outcomes will be affected.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 1, Outer London

London academy heads were all too familiar with the problems caused by increased staff to student ratios. Crucially, class expansions had made the GCSE experience, and resulting outcomes, more challenging.

Our own five A to C results have dropped since 2014, each year they have gone down. I think we went 77% to 70% to something like 67% to 65%, to 64%. So, I mean, in those terms certainly our outcomes have dropped. I mean, it's always a complicated business why that might be, but certainly our results have dropped year-on-year since the funding became more tricky. Our class sizes are a lot bigger, that's another big impact. We put our PAN up from 316 to 336 a year. So, our class sizes are much, much*

⁵ For example see: Local Schools Network, [Will we see class sizes of 30+ in academies and free schools in the future?](#), January 2012, Accessed 30.03.17
The Guardian, [More than 500,000 primary school pupils taught in 'super-size' classes](#), January 2016, Accessed 30.03.17

bigger than they used to be, you know, so there's obviously more teacher workload and children don't get quite the attention to detail that they used to get.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

In spite of the problems associated with increased class sizes, increasing pupil numbers has marked one of the most effective ways for schools to increase their income and mitigate against increasing costs and cuts to their funding.

I mean all this nonsense about, you know, letting a building out more or saving a bit on electricity is rubbish that will just save you a few thousand quid. The real thing is, if you're going to get more income you have to take in more students, and that's the only thing we've got in our hands to do.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Secondary schools in particular are reducing the breadth of the curriculum on offer to students

Increases in student numbers and the non-replacement of staff often go hand in hand with a reduction in the number of subjects these students are able to study. Secondary schools in particular are saving money by rationalising a greater number of students into a smaller number of classes, in order to reduce the amount of fulltime staff, thus cutting salary costs.

While good for budgets, these arrangements reduce options for pupils. This encompasses both vocational subjects, and those academic subjects which generally attract a smaller cohort of students such as Modern Foreign Languages, Music, Drama, and Art. Particularly at risk are those subjects not often required as A levels for undergraduate study, for example Politics or Philosophy. In some schools, more traditionally core subjects have already been cut:

We've halved PE and art. We've reduced design technology by almost a half. We have taken out some of our vocational courses, so we've taken out music technology, we've taken out some business studies, so the vocational have been hit. I've merged departments. I'm merging art and design technology because I can't afford to pay for two middle leaders to run them.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Inner London

While the primary curriculum does not seem to have been affected as of yet, there is some evidence to suggest that schools may see a reduction in the breadth of the curriculum on offer to primary school pupils in the future.

Well, [cuts] will have an impact because we actually believe that it will certainly impact on the curriculum that we are able... the broad and balanced curriculum that we should be offering will not be able to be offered to the children. We will not be able to offer that kind of level of enrichment, which we

believe supports achievement in the core subjects of English and maths, and we believe that, you know, having good foundation subjects enriches the achievement in all areas of the curriculum.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Outer London

In a small number of cases the school day is being shortened and individual contact time reduced, thereby effectively cutting opportunities in some areas of the curriculum. 15% of secondary schools say they have reduced staff contact time, and this looks to be a measure increasingly considered as an option to save costs.⁶

Senior leadership team sizes have shrunk in an effort to make savings

As described, staffing forms the bulk of school costs, and so all institutions wishing to make savings are likely to look into making reductions in this area. The higher salaries of SLT members mean that many schools have, through redundancy and natural wastage, shrunk the size of their leadership team.

We've made savings by... we had a deputy head who was promoted to a headship and we haven't replaced her. Every time a post becomes vacant, we actively think: can we do without this person?

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

The negative effects of this have been felt most keenly by secondary schools, which subsequently lack sufficient strategic capability to steer the school through difficult financial and educational times.

The SLT, Senior Leadership Team. So, we went from 14 to seven, so that's just, you know, it's a hugely pressured environment for the SLT that remain because we're basically doing twice as much as we did do before... it's much more difficult to be strategic because there are less people to pick up any day-to-day issues and there are more day-to-day issues... We're not able to drive forward huge change in the way we would have been a few years ago.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Deputy heads in particular have been reduced in numbers, putting space between teachers and the SLT, and further reducing the flexibility and strategic management of schools, especially at subject level. This lack of grounding and direction in core subjects may become increasingly problematic as staff attempt to steer larger class sizes, with a significant SEN quotient, through new curriculum reforms.

⁶ See [Contact time is increased – schools are increasingly looking at shortening the school day](#) on p.30 for more on this area

We have also cut leadership posts and we have gone for a while without posts. In maths we've suffered a bit but the head of maths didn't have any leadership support within the department but we've now put them in. We went three or four years without an assistant head of maths, which is a big department and a critical department.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 2, Outer London

Consequences

The survey asked respondents to consider a longer time frame, i.e. the last 5 years, and indicate whether budget cuts had resulted in negative outcomes for their school and students. Many schools have worked hard to put themselves in a position of relative strength, even during a period of general financial hardship. A number of heads felt that, while times had been tough, they had worked hard to make financial ends meet and this had paid off, in the form of additional funds put aside for the future, a leaner, more efficient business plan and improved outcomes.

Over 60% of schools believe they have coped well with historical budgets cuts, with London more positive on this point than the rest of England (64% vs. 55%). Only a small number of schools, 5.5%, strongly disagreed with the statement that they had coped well.

Notably 68% of London schools in the survey reported implementing more robust procurement methods compared with 62% of schools in the rest of England, indicating that this leaner approach to management was particularly being implemented in London schools. Indeed, the interviews indicated that many had built up contingency funds for use in times ahead.

However, this period seems to be at a close. Headteachers mentioned a range of significant cost pressures which have arrived in recent months, including:

National Insurance employer contribution increases

Pension rate increases

Teacher salary increases

The apprenticeship levy

Increased local authority service costs

Removal of the Education Services Grant

IDACI Deprivation Funding banding changes

Rising rates and energy prices

Inflation

These costs combine with a significant real terms cut over successive years:

So my budget was fine until about two or three years ago. Two or three years ago we were fine, we were in the black, no problems. And two or three years ago is when it started, when all the cuts started effectively, and the increases in pensions and all those things. So the cost pressures started then and we are now dealing with the result of that. And so with that in mind, we've had to re-jig the timetable a little bit, and we've had to extra load the staff. So it's not changed the nature of my staff. We've managed to do it with in good spirits, and the teachers are understanding that we're in a very difficult position. So there's no kind of internal blame here going on. But it does mean that teachers are teaching more, and then teaching bigger classes.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Well if you take next year, next year will be the fifth year in a row that we've had a 1.5% budget decrease of pupil funding. So already what we've had is a 6% decrease in funding, but on top of that we've got added contributions to pensions and to National Insurance. We've got the apprenticeship levy coming in this year at 0.5%. And so there's been a gradual rippling away of any sort of extraneous budget. We've done things that we need to do to maintain that. Although we have as a school, sought to grow wherever possible... we've increased our pupil admission numbers by 30 for this current year seven. So that brings in extra funding for us. And we've increased the size of our sixth form, we've increased lettings. And also we have other revenue streams coming in because we're a teaching school, so we've brought revenue to that. We bid for funding that's available, that tallies with work that we wish to do. So yeah, for us I would say, we're not typical of most schools at the minute, that we're only just getting to the stage where we're considering staffing reductions or increased class sizes, whereas most schools are already there, or very urgently needing to do it. We have striven instead to grow capacity wherever possible.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

It should be noted that headteachers are intensely proud of their schools, and understandably protective of their reputation. A great deal of work has gone into balancing the books while maintaining standards over recent years. Nonetheless, a small number of school leaders felt that they were being slowly edged out of existence, or forced into academisation. What is clear is that the cumulative effect of rising budgetary pressures is beginning to bite, even in institutions with robust financial strategies and multiple revenue streams.

Indeed, there have already been consequences for both students and the school itself:

46% of London schools indicated that outcomes for students had already been directly affected by budget cuts

64% of London schools have said that SEN pupils have been directly affected by budget cuts

67% of London schools have said that the quality of the school environment has been directly affected by budget cuts

Base size: 341 London senior leader respondents who answered Q8

Headteachers felt that student outcomes were already beginning to be affected by funding pressures, with SEN and disadvantaged children the first to feel the impact

Interviews found many schools reporting excellent pupil progress and attainment, with improvements year on year. However, the possibility of maintaining these results in the face of the changing school funding environment appears now to be at risk.

Existing financial pressures have already begun to impact upon pupils' school lives, with children requiring more specialised and individual care, such as EAL and SEN learners, in a particularly vulnerable position.

I think the SEN curriculum leader and the head of learning support would both say the pupils with SEN have lost out. One of the posts we cut was a counsellor. We found different ways of providing that need, but those social, emotional and mental health needs are growing in number. I think it's an area we are compensating really well through the leadership of that area, but certainly the person in charge would say we have really lost out there in terms of being able to provide as fully as we wanted to.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 2, Outer London

As adult to child ratios decrease, the level of small group or one to one support offered to children has reduced. Whereas Teaching Assistants or other support staff would once be able to provide multi-tiered and personalised assistance to pupils with varying levels of ability, it is now not uncommon for one class teacher to take responsibility for all students.

We've had to reduce our inclusion team and that's had impact in terms of both support for vulnerable young people in classes and those with special needs but also support for teachers in terms of having an expert in there in differentiation.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

This has an effect on all children. SEN learners are disadvantaged, with reduced one to one time, lessening the chances that staff can recognise signs and symptoms which may trigger an intervention or other external help. Indeed, in cases where SEN needs are paramount, staff time becomes stretched – to the detriment of other children.

I think the real impact is for those children coming in with more specific needs, is moving adults to work with them, which means the rest of the children are suffering, in all honesty...

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

Interviews also suggested that in some areas, large numbers of SEN students are funnelled into local authority schools after being turned away from academies who do not want to take them. While heads acknowledged the fact that they received extra funding for these students, the

situation is clearly creating an extra squeeze on school resources and management. Interview responses showed an increase in SEN pupil provision in LA-maintained schools particularly:

Yes. We've got provision for 40 and we've got 16 have started with us from September, and the way [the local authority] have reorganised their primary SEN services, we are the provision for moderate learning difficulties, so we would expect that provision to get towards forty over the next two to three years... It's a strategic decision by the council to look for a good mainstream school.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

We've also got the additional challenge of academies either side of my school... they don't have special needs and they're directed straight to my school. They just tell the parents they don't have a provision for them... The parents come and tell us they've been directed by the two academies. I've got one either side of the school... if you look at their intake and you look at my intake you would probably think that they're completely different areas but we're literally six metres apart if that.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Disadvantaged children suffer most from a reduction in the number of enrichment opportunities

Many schools described reductions in the number of enrichment opportunities they presented to learners. School trips, after-school lessons, visits from external speakers and organisations and sporting opportunities had all seen cuts, across both primary and secondary schools.

We used to fund free music lessons for children with disadvantaged backgrounds, which we're not able to do anymore.

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Other schools had not cut these activities, but had turned to parents to front all costs.

We used to match-fund or part-fund some of the residential opportunities that children had here, but that's gone now. So, if you can't afford it as a parent you don't go.

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

Clearly, this puts all but statutory activities outside the grasp of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, many of whom are unlikely to travel outside the local area or take part in extra educational, artistic or sporting endeavours unless facilitated by their school. Those whose schools still fund this kind of activity noted that subsidising disadvantaged children consumed a large amount of their budget, which they are increasingly required to spend in other areas.

Schools are becoming increasingly entrepreneurial

In order to mitigate against cuts, increased costs and other budgetary pressures, schools are looking at ways to increase their revenue. While the most common method of raising additional income was by admitting more students, or increasing class sizes or the number of forms, headteachers also described a number of creative methods they employed to bring cash into their school.

Requesting voluntary contributions from parents to budgets appeared commonplace in schools from more affluent areas. The nature of these contributions varied, with some schools linking them directly to specific budgets, for example building maintenance, after school music lessons, or to support A Levels with particularly small class sizes. These were in the order of £25-£50 per month. However, a smaller number of schools are beginning to ask for more general contributions to the budget, either outright or in addition to requesting specific funding.

What we do is ask parents... we've always done this but we've had to be quite energetic in our campaign this year. We ask parents to make a donation to something called The Standards Fund and then we use the... in the past we've used it to build new buildings or contribute to buying textbooks for a department, the extras, but this time we're using that money to offset the budget deficit so we've had to do that.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 1, Outer London

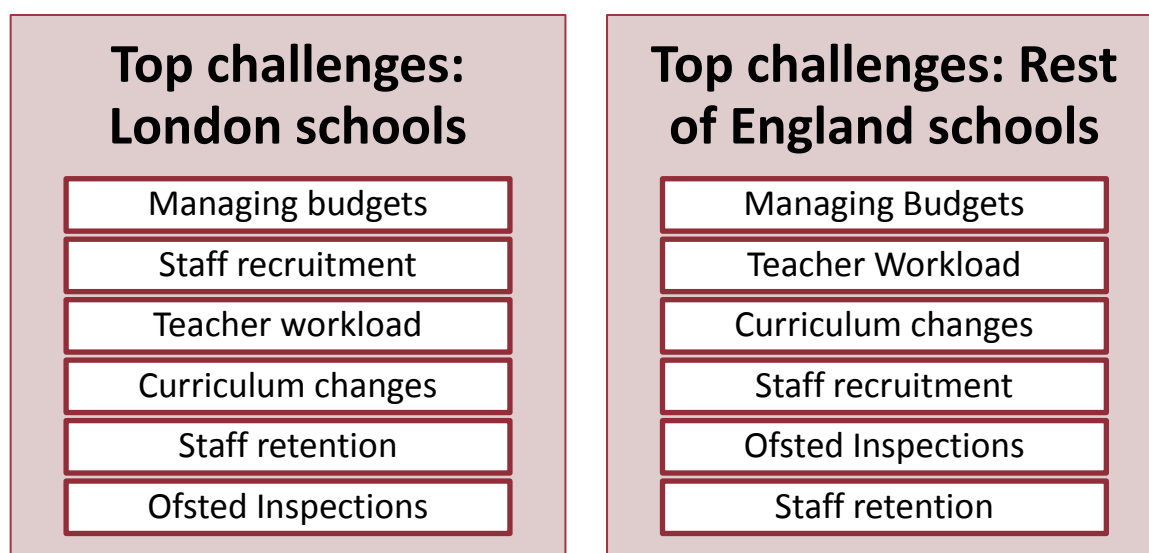
Rental income provides another source of revenue. Schools are often looking to charge for access to their buildings and grounds, especially during evenings and weekends. Indeed, a handful of schools let buildings out on a full time basis, for example letting space to private nursery companies, or even offering standalone buildings as residential premises. Whilst financially worthwhile, managing these business interests has proven stressful for SLT members, and could be cause for distraction from their teaching priorities.

In summary, the majority of schools inside and outside of London have experienced budget cuts over the last few years. They appear to have coped reasonably well with these cuts, but it is very clear that both students and the school environment are starting to be affected.

The National Funding Formula and beyond

Historically teacher workload has topped the headlines, particularly following the 2016 teacher workload survey by the Department for Education.⁷ However, senior leaders in London and the rest of England have comprehensively marked managing budgets as their number one challenge now and in the foreseeable future, with many saying they are not prepared for the level of future cuts. This section looks at school leaders' expectations for their schools' budgets over the next 3-5 years, the ways they anticipate reacting to these changes and the impact they anticipate these measures having on pupil outcomes.

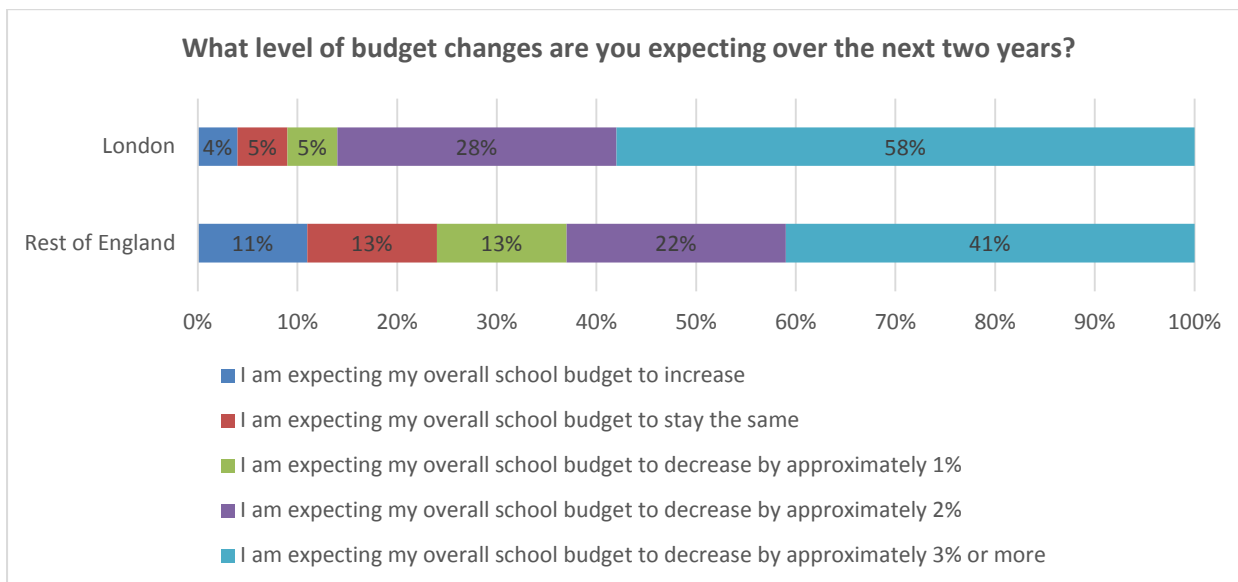
While managing budgets was listed as the number 1 challenge, for London schools, recruitment and retention are also major issues. With recruitment costs reported as higher than 5 years ago, this will continue to add further strain on already stretched budgets.



Base size: 322 London senior leaders and 221 rest of England senior leader respondents who answered Q15

Now that the Department for Education has announced indicative allocations for schools, most schools should be able to establish what their funding model will look like after the implementation of the NFF. London schools are expecting their budgets to be impacted more negatively than schools outside of London under current proposals.

⁷ The Department for Education, [Teacher Workload Survey 2016](#), February 2016, Accessed 30.03.17

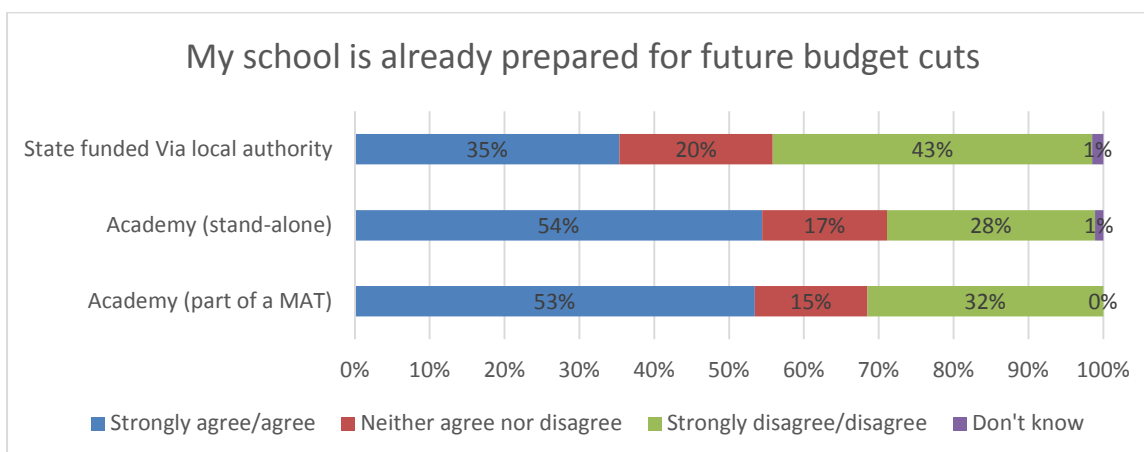


Base size: 368 London senior leaders and 246 rest of England senior leader respondents who answered Q5

38% of schools overall reported that they are not prepared for future budget cuts

This was somewhat more strongly felt by London schools who were more likely to disagree that they were prepared for cuts (40% of London schools vs 37% in the rest of England).

Responses in the survey also illustrated how this sentiment was held more strongly by maintained schools (43%) than academies that are part of multi-academy trusts (32%) or stand-alone academies (28%).



However, interviews revealed deep concerns across the range of schools in the research, at primary and secondary levels, in LA-maintained, academies and academy trusts, and including special, comprehensive and selective schools, that they would struggle to cope under further cuts. Even where headteachers were confident that they understood the level of the cuts they may face, many reported that budgets are already cut down to essentials, and some were worried about their ability to further cut costs to the extent that they were considering school closure.

We don't feel prepared at all because it's all come so suddenly. National insurance, pensions, that was only mentioned last April. That put a huge amount of pressure on schools, and now we've got the national funding formula, so I think the government has brought in too much too quickly, and schools are really suffering

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 1, Outer London

And of course the national funding formula is going to be the real biggie. That is going to ... without being too dramatic, it could well lead to the closure of the school if things aren't done.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Inner London

We are stripped back to the core and we've worked really hard to make sure incoming and outgoing are equal, which we've managed incredibly in the last few years. We won't be able to do that moving forward.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy (Selective), Grade 1, Outer London

I cannot actually see a way, as a creative problem-solver as I am, I cannot see a way to kind of make this work long-term. I'm getting to that desperation stage of thinking, 'I don't understand how this is possible. Something must give.'

Headteacher, Secondary Academy (MAT) (Grade 2), Inner London

There's not enough money coming into schools is the issue. The national funding formula doesn't in any way solve that. It doesn't come close. It's fairly insulting really in so far as it doesn't address any small part of the issues that schools are facing. There needs to be significant increase in funding coming into schools, not just the realignment of the pot.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

Plans for dealing with future cuts

Plans for dealing with future cuts are broadly in line with historical behaviour, i.e. schools are reporting that they will continue to decrease the number of Teaching Assistants and reduce spend on learning resources and education support staff.

As we have seen, reducing teaching staff has been seen as a last resort but at this stage seems to be the only option left open to many.

In the survey, 70% of London secondary school leaders said they were planning to reduce the number of teachers in their schools.

...we've done all the sort of the easier cuts that doesn't affect staff. But now we've got to the point when we have to look at the cost of our staffing, because that's the main part of our budget.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Inner London

I think in a school when 85% of your budget is teaching and staffing costs there is no other way to look at where you can prune your staff...

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 1, Outer London

But that includes cutting deputy heads from my staff, so cutting two members of my leadership team over the next three years and making another four staff redundant in two years' time. So in total from now moving forwards, it would be nine staff that would be lost plus two members of the leadership team, plus two support staff, plus two SEN staff. So that's a significant head count decrease that I would have to do to balance over the next four years.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Inner London

In the interviews headteachers reported planning the following approaches to reducing teacher numbers, with these measures already in process in some schools:

Staff who leave will not be replaced, with redundancies starting to become more common

Roles are merged and unqualified teachers increasingly used to cover classes

Contact time is increased – schools are increasingly looking at shortening the school day

The curriculum is narrowed further still

Staff who leave are not replaced, with redundancies starting to become more common

As discussed, this is already being implemented through the non-replacement of teachers who leave, by way of avoiding redundancies where possible. With further cuts however, heads see redundancies as the inevitable next step.

There's been some natural resignations that we have then not filled that vacancy and restructured. But this year there are, without doubt, going to be the need for redundancies.

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

Roles are merged and unqualified teachers increasingly used to cover classes

Fewer staff will result in, for example, the merging of departments under a single head of department, the covering of classes by experienced but unqualified Teaching Assistants, and increased class sizes.

I already know that there are two members of staff leaving at Easter, teachers. One I'm not replacing. She is a head of department, but I'm not replacing her, I'm putting her department alongside another department because my TAs etc., also provide cover...

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Inner London

Hopefully by not replacing some members of support staff over the next couple of years, that will be able to create the money to be able to do that. But there is nothing left to cut out the budget. We've cut everything that can be cut. And there isn't anything else. We are genuinely at a position where if there was a significant cut to our budget, it would be a case of looking at losing members of staff, but I honestly don't know if we could afford that because there's no money for redundancy. It's creating a massive amount of budgetary pressure.

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

The high salary costs of experienced staff meant that headteachers were looking at replacing more experienced teachers with less experienced, at a lower cost:

...you can change your paper supplier and you can order less paper clips but the only thing that's going to make any difference really are the staffing levels. So, if you've got an experienced staff profile or a staff with a lot of responsibility points... or a leadership team where you've got people that have been long-serving and good, then you've got a situation where the staffing has to change and you've almost got to replace experienced people with inexperienced people just to make the budget balance... I think you will end up with replacing, you know, Second in Departments and Key Stage Coordinators and specific posts and responsibility holders, Numeracy Coordinators and the like, and they will just be replaced by main scale teachers. So, potentially, you are going to be getting an inexperienced cohort in and the potential knock-on on standards... It's going to have a real knock-on effect, but yes I genuinely know that's what's going to have to happen here.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy (MAT), Grade 2, Inner London

Contact time is increased – schools are increasingly looking at shortening the school day

Headteachers are looking to increase teacher contact time, and reduce their planning time, which is already severely limited, in order to make up for non-replacement of teachers:

Another thing is to reduce teachers' planning time and increasing their contact time, so if we increased teachers... Currently our teachers teach 42 periods out of a 50 period fortnight so if we looked to increase that to 43 periods over 50 periods we'd probably save on about three teachers, and the average cost of a teacher is about £52,000.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Another solution is to cut class time, thereby reducing the teaching load, though the impact on pupil outcomes in this case is a real concern:

Yes, classroom teachers. So, by making those changes... so, if you like, just to give you an example I've got 53 classes in Year 12 next year. If I take an hour a fortnight off, that's 53 hours of teaching. A main scale teacher teaches 42 a week, so it's like one and a bit teachers. If I do the same in Year 13, I've got two and a half teachers. If I take out two complete classes in Year 7 I get two and a bit teachers. The difficulty is, you end up having conversations around what's going to have the least impact on the children. I could have made the teachers teach more, however, their job is tough enough and my worry is if I make them teach more they're going to leave in their droves and it's actually going to become a false economy, or they're going to get ill and then my cover budget goes up. So, I don't really think that that's a runner at the moment.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

One headteacher had already cut the length of the school day on one day a week as a way of saving the equivalent of two members of staff. Another spoke of looking at this as a way of reducing costs in the future:

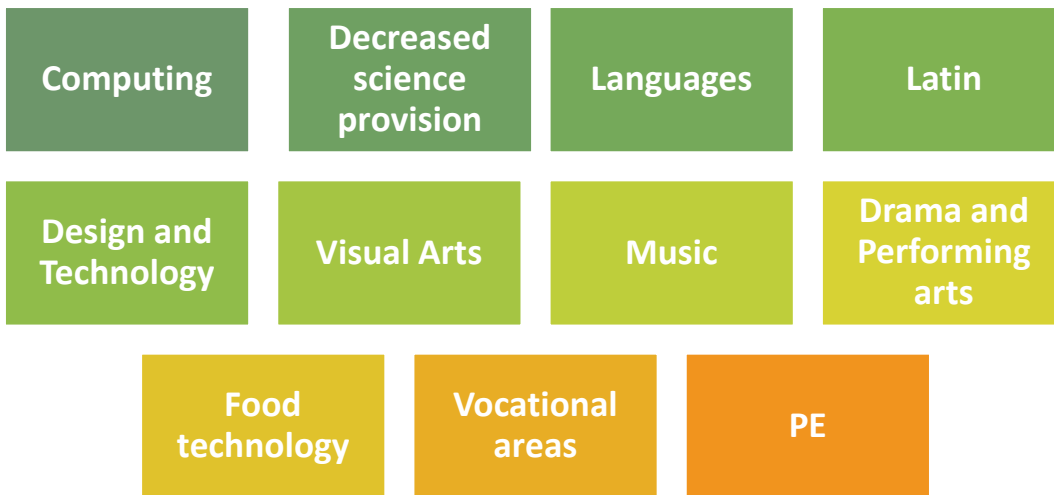
The other thing that's been talked about is possibly going to... we're going to have to shorten our school day. I know some authorities have talked about going to a four day week to make further cuts. That's quite drastic to do that but we've all got to keep looking at what we're doing.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 1, Outer London

The curriculum is narrowed further still

As discussed, schools are already starting to narrow curriculums. The interviews showed that this was likely to intensify in the face of future cuts.

At A Level, subjects with fewer students at sixth form would likely be the first to be dropped. If a subject is removed from the sixth form offering, it then becomes harder to recruit teachers to teach that subject in the main school. Classes that were smaller and more expensive to run and require specialist equipment, for example in the case of Design and Technology, also appeared to be at increased risk. In primary schools, provision of PE, music and other arts subjects look set to be cut further in the future, increasing existing pressure on the creative curriculum. The following subjects were all mentioned as being under threat:



I think things like dance, drama, PE, where you have specialist teachers, are the areas that are likely to suffer most.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

We have a challenge with the languages. It's any subject that gets single figures at the start of sixth form, it can't run on the same basis as it has before.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

There are cuts that could still be made to staffing by getting rid of, you know, the classes that need smaller classes and are more practical and are more expensive to run. [It] could be the end of... subjects like DT where you only have 18 in a room and the equipment is expensive because why would you do that when you could put 30 in a room and have very cheap equipment like exercise books? So, there are some very difficult decisions that are going to affect, I think, the future generation and the workforce coming...

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

We're going to lose four subjects in September from the sixth form curriculum, so we're going to lose Latin, and we're one of the few state schools that still does Latin. We're going to lose PE, technology, and sociology. Because they've had small numbers, we can no longer sustain them in the curriculum.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 1, Outer London

I think it's a finance informed curriculum now. I wouldn't say it's a finance-led one because we're dealing with young people and young people's lives, but it's certainly finance informed...

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

There's very little else to cut without cutting part of the curriculum and to actually lose a drama teacher or lose a technology teacher and actually reduce the curriculum offer, which I'm reluctant to do because we've got a broad and balanced curriculum and it really suits our students, but that is the natural next stage with further cuts coming... It doesn't fit with the vision of what we want to do. We believe that students learn best through making things and creating things, and doing things, and the thought of taking that away to focus on the academic subjects we have to cover and not having that balance affects young people's development and their creativity

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Bought-in professional services, including mental health counsellors and speech and language therapists are already being cut and may have to be ruled out in the future

Heads spoke of further restricting access to counsellors, mentors and speech and language therapists, with hours cut and services likely to disappear in coming years. This will have a strong impact on deprived pupil groups and areas with high level of EAL families:

Well, I've had to cut back on professional services. So, I've had to cut back on, you know, children come in to my nursery, for example, about 85% of them are below age-related expectations. So, they come in really, really low and one of their lowest areas is speech and language. They have very, very poor speech and language... So, I had, used to have up until just last week, a speech therapist that I employed through the school for two days a week. So, I've cut that back to one day a week and that will have a big impact on that. I've also had to cut back, I've got a school counsellor, so I have a lot of mental health problems amongst children and parents, there's quite a high rate of it. So, I had a school counsellor for two days a week and, again, from just this past term... I've cut that back to one day a week, which is going to have a big impact on the mental health and wellbeing...

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

You know, a lot of the children are new to English, new to the country, have come from war torn zones so it's not just like getting a new pupil it's a whole nurturing package, so you have to put... you know, mental health is at its worst.

I employ a company called A Place to Be, now they cost me £25,000 for two days, I need five days a week. I don't know if I can afford the two days next year to be honest. What happens to those children? Who's going to mentor those children? So, the counsellor's going to go.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Purchase of new books and resources will stop and access to technology will be reduced

Additional future measures headteachers were planning, and which came out strongly in interviews, included declining (or ceasing) purchases of resources and IT updates. Headteachers stressed that provision of books and other resources would be impacted further still, both in school and in material previously provided to support home learning, with ageing computer hardware impacting on teachers' ability to teach with 21st century methods.

Because the children come from very deprived backgrounds, we want to give them a very high quality learning experience, and so we have always been a resource rich school, and I think that actually that will start to decrease, so in terms of investment in books and other resources, that will... We won't be able to invest in as much of those. And obviously things like up to date ICT and computing equipment which the children need for living in a 21st century society also cost a lot of money. We are a very innovative trust and we'll look for ways to maintain excellence as much as possible, even with the budget cuts, but I think things will definitely change...

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

Well, in particular I used to provide... home learning packs for parents and study books for parents, and maps... all that sort of thing to support parents because they can't really afford to buy them. So, I'm going to have to cut all of that. So, it's mostly parent support but also IT equipment, as in, I won't be buying any IT equipment next year.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

Another thing I think that we'll be doing is not being very innovative with IT. So, I can see us not investing in things like Chromebooks for the children and tablets and so on. I think that's feeling a bit pie in the sky at the moment with the current issues. So, the teaching and learning will be less dynamic and less, kind of, modern and they won't be as well-prepared for the real world outside because we'll be laying down a curriculum that's probably a bit more old-fashioned.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Strained budgets mean few opportunities for enrichment, hitting disadvantaged children hardest

As discussed, schools are increasingly asking parents to contribute to schools budgets, either through regular voluntary contributions or through increased fundraising activities, though schools in more deprived areas are reluctant to put parents in the position of feeling that they need to find this money:

We also have parental donations, and we're having to go to quite draconian lengths to say we need you to contribute whatever you can. They pay for all of that stuff. There's massive of things that go on here.

The pupil premium kids, we have funds for them and they're fine, paid for, but everyone else is expected to contribute to things. We've set up the general contributions, lots of parents contribute and we'll have to write and say it's extras or to do a building project. Moving forwards it's core money to survive.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy (Selective), Grade 1, Outer London

I know I've heard some schools are now... asking parents to make... voluntary contributions of £1,000 a year or whatever to support school funds and there's no way that our parents would be able to do anything like that, and I would be very hesitant to ask them because I'd be taking food off the table.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Trips and after school clubs which have been free or subsidised in the past are now charged or will be in the future. Due to the difficulty of asking all parents to supplement such activities, these types of enrichment opportunities are being offered less often or involve cheaper options, restricting these experiences across the board. In deprived areas, where often children's only cultural or educational trips come through school, this is a major hit. One teacher is applying outside the education system to a charity with the aim of securing funding to provide trips for their deprived students or to provide children with a play scheme during the holidays.

Because the children come from very deprived backgrounds... We do a residential to France each year and all the children go, no matter whether they can pay or not, because we pay for that, and the children really benefit from that. But it will be that sort of thing that will have to stop because we just won't be able to subsidise it from the school budget... which is absolutely devastating for our community because our community don't leave [the borough]. They really, really don't. When we say they've never been on a tube or a bus, they haven't. Their excitement really is walking to Iceland on a Saturday. So it absolutely, if we don't provide the opportunities for them to go to museums and galleries and have their aspirations raised, they won't do it without us. Because... loads of factors mean that they don't. So I think that will be devastating.

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

Headteachers are finding more creative ways to introduce new revenue streams

In addition to requesting parent contributions, we have seen how schools are becoming increasingly entrepreneurial, for example, letting out school buildings to increase revenue. While these measures go some way to lessening the impact of cuts, the senior teams' time is taken up by business growing ventures or contracting out their expertise which takes their attention away from their school. Other ventures included charging other schools for services, for example assessment services, which involved the secondment of senior team members to other schools one day a week, or setting up before and after school childcare businesses as an additional revenue stream.

The only other thing I can say that I think I will do... is try and outsource our experience, you know, and share that with other schools. So, I've got an exceptional assessment system within my school and I

want to share that with another school I might charge them for it, but that's such a shame because actually we shouldn't be charging each other. We should be sharing that information for free. So, you know, I am very, very concerned.

Headteacher, Primary Voluntary Aided Faith School, Grade 2, Outer London

Nursery provision appears to be at risk of delayed improvements and cuts to much needed places, impacting on progress through school and on attainment by Year 6⁸

Although not highlighted in the survey questions, several LA-maintained primary headteachers talked of severe threats to the nursery provision in their schools, both in terms of curbs on urgently needed improvements and cutting places. With nursery funding reducing, schools are being forced to cut places and they fear that this will severely impact on pupil outcomes in later years.

We're going to have to look very carefully at how early years looks as well, and we're going to have to limit the quality of the physical provision in early years. It's going to be compromised... It's expensive and it will feel the impact most... the plans to develop the learning provision just can't happen, and that was something we identified as a priority...

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 3, Inner London

The impact of cuts on future outcomes

The outlook for schools in London post-NFF is indeed challenging. The following are some of the key expectations stated by the survey respondents.

72% of schools in London are expecting budgetary cuts to result in negative outcomes for pupils

74% of schools in London are expecting budgetary cuts to result in negative outcomes for SEN pupils

56% of schools in London are expecting budgetary cuts to result in a poorer quality of teaching

82% of schools in London are expecting budgetary cuts to negatively affect the school environment

Base size: 337 London senior leader respondents who answered 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to Q9 I am expecting [area] to be negatively affected by changes to my budget.

⁸ An additional case study describing the experience of one school reducing its nursery provision in the face of cuts is provided in the appendix: [Nursery cuts impacting on children's Year 6 attainment and wider social needs in a deprived inner London area](#)

Through the interviews headteachers were passionate about the focus they place on their pupils' progress and attainment. Responses reveal how every measure put in place to balance the books is scrutinised against alternatives to ensure that the damage to student outcomes is as minimal as possible. However, headteachers reluctantly noted that outcomes would likely be affected in future as a result of the measures already put in place and all the more in the face of forthcoming pressures.

In the survey, 72% of headteachers in London said that they were expecting budgetary cuts to result in negative outcomes for pupils.

Fewer experienced staff, a cut in specialist teachers and the decrease in TAs and other support staff all point to this inevitable impact on outcomes. Headteachers reported how these staff manage behavioural issues which allows the class teacher to teach, they also have a strong impact on the progress and attainment of lower ability and EAL students and on students with special needs that need additional support:

Rather than the teacher sorting out the behaviour, the youth worker or the support worker will actually sort of [sic] that out, and then basically what we find is that you lose less time of learning time, the lesson time if you've actually got that. So, it does have that impact on learning because, again, a lot of people don't, I think appreciate what all our, what we call 'associate staff' do to actually help the learning in the school.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Student outcomes I think will reduce because we will have less support staff. We'll have enough to put, you know, a member of staff in front of a class of children but particularly with our very high percentage of EAL pupils, our needy children, it will be very difficult to keep the level of staffing that we've currently got so that they acquire English and achieve more in that timescale. It's going to affect standards.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

The cuts seem likely to impact most heavily on less able pupils as well as on those who may need stretching, as larger classes will make differentiation and intervention a challenge. Heads thought that, in spite of all best efforts, in the face of the cuts results would likely be affected in the future:

We're already on a shoestring as it is. Any more cuts, it's going to be staffing, and that's going to have an impact, and it's going to be a negative impact. Our results may well dip as a result of it.

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

We're outstanding. Our results are good, we're in a good local authority. We have good relationships with the community... But we're really, really going to be hit by the funding cuts. And the education that I can offer to the students, the really good education that my students get is going to start to be hit by these cuts... the results of our young people are going to be affected by these cuts.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Inner London

Headteachers forecasted that SEN pupils in particular are likely to be affected by cuts in the future, largely as a result of reduced support for class teachers through support staff cuts.

74% of schools in London are expecting budgetary cuts to result in negative outcomes for SEN pupils.⁹

It means that the children that will suffer the most will be those children with special needs, because you're going to have larger classes, you're going to have fewer specialists, you're going to have, you know, teachers with the funding crisis it's going to be more difficult to recruit and retain. You know, it's good teaching and children with special needs need good, qualified teaching staff.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Outer London

Well funding is in a crisis for us. We have 40 percent special needs, some of which have EHCPs, some don't. So, enlisting services like Ed Psychs, Speech and Language, the pot's dry, so it's very hard for us to maintain a consistent provision really. Due to the cuts, I'm concerned about staffing, I don't know if I'll be able to maintain what I have, we've come from a failing school to good with a couple of outstanding areas.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

The head of an outstanding secondary special school spoke of having to increase class sizes for the school's high needs children, with potentially serious implications on safety and children's mental health:

I think it could have serious mental health effects on the young people. If I have to reduce my staffing, then the students won't get the 1:1 support that they get currently. So it means they may deteriorate in a classroom setting because they haven't got the 1:1 at the moment. My maximum class size is about 8. So, I might have to put 10 students in a class and that means that people – you might not notice a child

⁹ An additional case study describing the complex funding process for SEN and its impact on accessing funding is provided in the appendix here: [Schools cannot access funds allocated to children with special education needs because of a paradox in the funding process](#)

who's suddenly starting to see things or hear voices. At the moment, these things we can go quietly to the child and say, are you okay?

Headteacher, Secondary Special School, Grade 1, Outer London

Headteachers spoke of an accumulation of cause and effect which, in spite of dedicated and strongly loyal teachers, they feared would inevitably lead to a deterioration in the quality of teaching that they could offer across the school.

Survey responses showed that 56% of schools in London are expecting budgetary cuts to result in poorer quality of teaching.

Larger class sizes and increased contact time meant less attention would be spent on children in class time but also in marking and feedback. Workload pressure, already a recognised factor in the profession, would increase, adding to stress and lowering morale. Retaining high quality teachers would in turn become even more of a challenge. Stressed teachers and the need to recruit less experienced teachers, perhaps even non-qualified but experienced TAs as class teachers, at a lower cost to cut salary spend would also inevitably lead to a decrease in the quality of teaching. Elsewhere, respondents spoke of a lack of resources impacting on teachers' capacity to develop innovative and creative lessons.

I cannot see any way other than that teaching and learning is going to suffer and we'll have to just absolutely slash the number of adults in class or shut the school.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Inner London

...increasing class sizes at KS4 will inevitably have quite a knock on effect on staff workload and on their morale. We've got very high morale here, but if staff feel that level of pressure they're much more likely to leave the profession... I think there's a real danger that more and more staff will leave schools like ours and it will be increasingly difficult to recruit, so the standards of teaching and learning will be affected.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Yes. It's impacting on the staff now, because we are trying to do everything we can to protect the children from it. But that's not sustainable. You can have these increased workloads for a short term, a year or two perhaps, and just the staff's own energies and enthusiasm would carry them through. But there's burnout that comes afterwards. And because the staff are very loyal to their school, they will do the work. But I worry about the burnout on them, and me.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

82% of London school leaders in the survey were expecting budgetary cuts to negatively affect the school environment.

As discussed, headteachers spoke about how buildings and maintenance were seen as the first areas to cut on the basis that environment, rather than staffing, impacted least on pupil progress and outcomes. Savings were being made wherever possible by looking at renegotiating existing contracts with suppliers or looking for new suppliers to reduce running costs. However, with buildings and maintenance the first things to be left aside in the face of historical real term cuts, headteachers reported that the legacy of leaving repairs was starting to impact seriously on the school environment.

What it means is certain things we would have liked to have done won't be happening, so we're cutting back on IT expenditure. There's many changes we were going to make to the playground, to the fabric of the building, and they just won't be on the agenda.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 2, Outer London

I don't think you can say that the work environment doesn't have an impact. If you're in a classroom which hasn't been decorated for a number of years and has undergone wear and tear then that doesn't make it a good environment for everybody... we've worked quite hard with our buildings over the past few years but there's still lots to do. If there's a block of toilets which need refurbishment because they're 40 years' old, and we're talking about basic hygiene, and it's not nice to say to children that's the only toilet you can use.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Inner London

We need a new boiler. If we miss a capital grant on that in late March then we will have to spend all our reserves on a new boiler. So, at that point there won't be any cushioning for us at all. So, we're, kind of, trying to weigh it up.

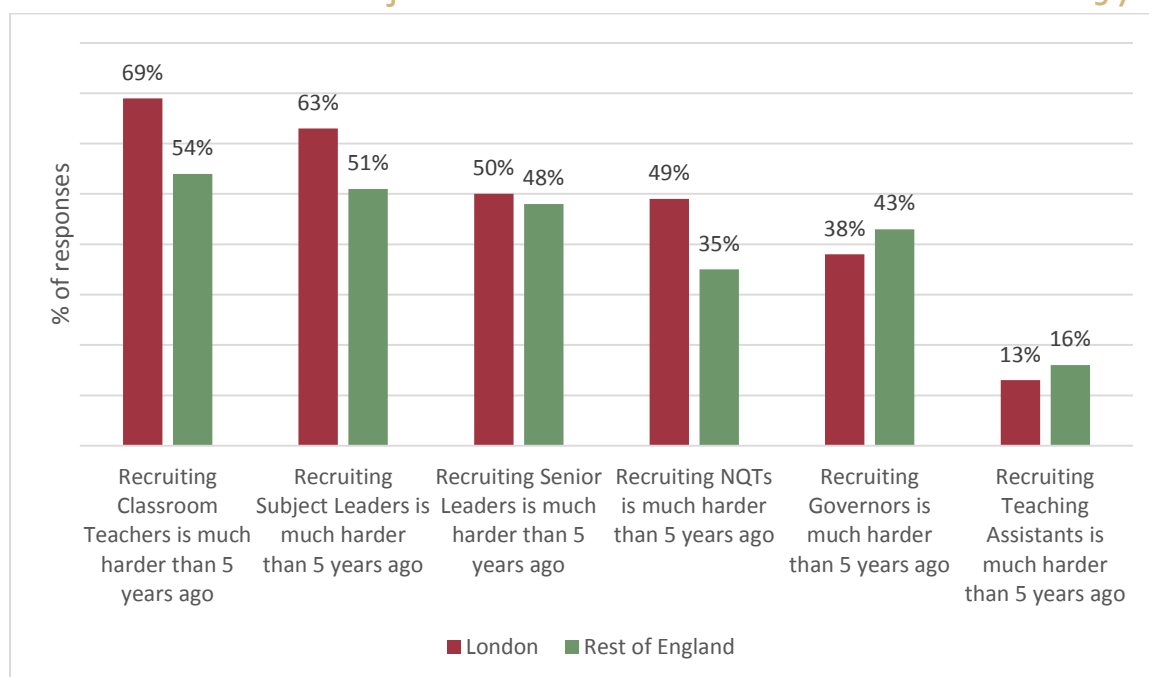
Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Inner London

Teacher recruitment and retention

Recruitment is getting harder

The interviews revealed how challenges around teacher recruitment and retention were inextricably linked with outcomes. The survey asked school leaders about their experiences recruiting staff, asking them to consider a 5-year time frame and review whether the recruitment of specific roles had become harder or easier.

In London particularly, survey responses showed how the recruitment of NQTs, classroom teachers and subject leaders has become more difficult over the last 5 years.



Base size: 337 London senior leaders and 232 rest of England senior leader respondents answered Q10

These figures were slightly higher within individual school phases in London:

71% of London Primary school respondents told us that recruiting classroom teachers is much harder compared to 52% outside of London.

64% of London Secondary school responders told us that recruiting subject leaders is much harder, compared to 58% outside of London.

Very few schools are finding the recruitment of Teaching Assistants more difficult, but the general view is that recruitment is more difficult than it was 5 years ago, particularly in London.

We also analysed these responses by Ofsted Grade; the numbers varied very little which suggests that the pattern of recruitment becoming harder is not influenced by the performance of the school.

School leaders confirmed in interviews that recruitment across most roles had become much more difficult over the last 5 years, with a noticeable decrease in the number of applications, coupled with a perceived fall in the quality of applicants.

Yes, I mean there's a teacher here who's in her fourth year of teaching. When we employed her, we had 35 applicants for that job. The last three years I've had to get people from agencies, partly because people don't apply direct, partly because the ones that do weren't good enough.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

...whenever anybody resigns it's almost like a doom moment because whenever we advertise jobs at the moment the quality and quantity of people we have applying is getting less and less every year, especially in key subjects like science, maths, and geography.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

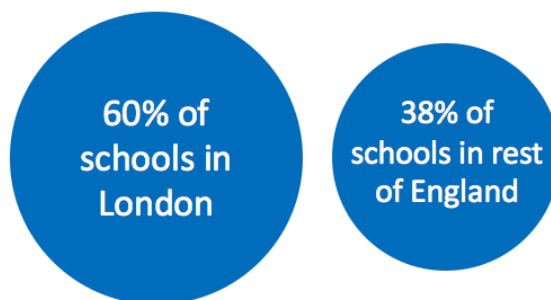
Respondents often noted that the lack of NQTs applying for positions was a particular concern. Schools were attempting to make savings by replacing more experienced staff with NQTs, however the reduction in the pool of available NQTs of a high standard was making this strategy difficult to implement:

I typically, because of the finances, I nearly always recruit NQTs. I lose an experienced member of staff and I save some money by recruiting down at the bottom, and that's a deliberate strategy. I can do that because we've got quite a strong senior leadership that can induct NQTs in the right way, but I've certainly noticed the last two years a real drop in the number and quality of NQTs. It's been much, much harder. I interview on behalf of the borough. I've done it for six or seven years, and there's just far fewer applicants. People aren't wanting to go into it.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Inner London

The rising cost of recruitment

60% of schools in London state that recruitment costs have increased significantly. The sentiment outside of London is less severe, in line with the less intense retention challenges



Recruitment costs have increased a lot

Base size: 329 London senior leaders and 231 rest of England senior leader respondents who answered Q14.

During interviews, London school leaders confirmed that the cost of recruitment had risen significantly over the last 5 years, predominantly due to the high expense of using recruitment agencies. As pressure has grown on teacher headcount, finding staff for some roles has become harder for certain key combinations of subjects and geographies - such as maths teachers in London. As a result, for these roles schools are in having to look outside their traditional methods and to agencies instead, which introduces significant cost inefficiencies and avoidable expense. The high costs of this approach were considered to impact on spending in other much needed areas such as learning resources:

We can either take them on, on a day-by-day basis, which doesn't give them much certainty. Equally, if they decide just to stop coming in one day that's not good for our children. Typical sign on fee is about 25-30% of the salary, so if we appoint someone that's starting on £25,000 it costs us another £4000 to £5000 to buy them out of their agency.

What implications do you think that has for your school?

It means we can't spend money elsewhere. If I'm paying £6000 to buy a teacher from an agency then that means I don't have £6000 to put into curriculum resources or events for the school

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

A secondary issue reported by London school leaders was that agencies were also blocking routes to direct recruitment that had previously been used through their presence in universities and teacher training institutes:

The really huge concern that many secondary heads have is that the agencies are going into colleges of higher education and teacher training institutions signing people up and saying 'have a laptop and we'll get you a job, so of course they send their CVs to us and we'll say 'By the way, we want a higher starting salary and we charge 20% to place that person with you.' So it's having a massive increase on recruitment and staffing budgets.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Retention is also getting harder

In the survey we asked school leaders to tell us about their experiences of retaining staff, asking them to consider a 5-year time frame and review whether the retention of specific roles had become harder or easier.

Staff retention is a particular issue in London, with house prices leading experienced teachers to move out of London to buy a home or start a family.

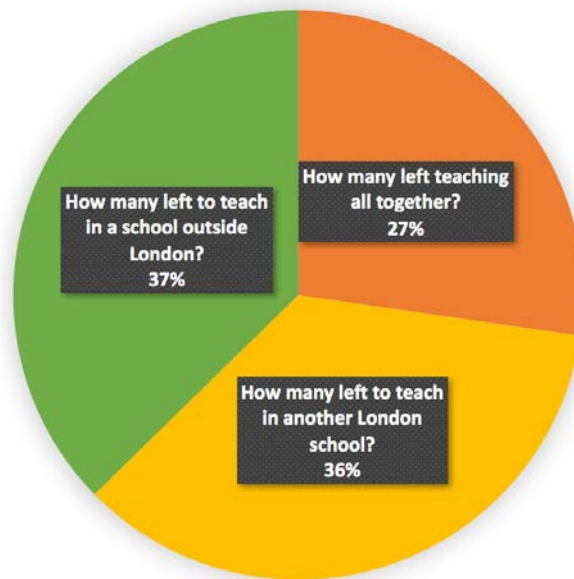
In line with recruitment challenges, **secondary schools** are reporting that the retention of **subject leaders** is harder now than 5 years ago. Over 50% of the secondary schools surveyed report that it has become harder to retain subject leaders, with only slight variations between London and the rest of England.

Primary school leaders told us that retaining **classroom teachers** has become harder over the last 5 years, and this problem is more acute in London than the rest of England. 65% of leaders in London said this had become harder, compared with 47% outside London.

94% of London school leaders agree that **local house prices** make it very difficult for teachers to continue teaching in London. Only 37% of school leaders outside of London agreed with a similar statement for their area.

Retaining NQTs was seen to be harder and this is particularly true in London. 53% of school leaders in London said that this had become more difficult, compared with 36% outside London.

We asked London school leaders to tell us where their leavers are going. The chart shows the destination of teachers that have left London schools in the last 12 months:



Base size: 311 London senior leader respondents answered Q13.

Academies appear to have more leavers than LA-maintained schools. This is likely a consequence of the changes that occur during restructuring following academisation, with on-going movement then following a similar model to maintained schools.

37% of school leaders report that staff who had left their schools were moving outside of London.

School leaders noted a significant difficulty in the retention of classroom teachers as a result of the rising property prices in London over the last 5 years. Often, teachers who had several years' experience at a school would be most likely to look outside of London to more affordable neighbourhoods in order to enter the housing market. Although it was acknowledged that organisations such as Teach First provide some relief to the difficulties in recruiting NQTs (as shown in the quantitative survey responses), the issues in retaining these experienced teachers resulted in a vacuum of mid to higher-level staff at many schools, worsened by the challenge of recruiting into classroom teacher and subject leader roles:

The cost of living in London is prohibitive and even though we are fairly well supplied by Teach First and younger members of the profession, they will often leave when they get to their late twenties and early thirties because they want to start a family or they want to own a house, and that's just not possible within central London at the moment with the salaries that we offer, which are reasonable salaries.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Getting good, experienced teachers that want to work in London. It's really hard. Housing is expensive, and rightly so because there is a shortage of good teachers, they are wanting premium money. We're not able to do that so we end up in a salary war with other schools.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

27% of teachers leaving London schools are leaving teaching altogether.

In addition to staff members across all roles, in particular those with several years' experience, moving outside of London to avoid high property prices and cost of living, headteachers confirmed survey findings that a considerable number of teachers were leaving the profession altogether:

I know the statistics, and I haven't seen it personally but the number of teachers dropping out of the profession is incredibly high. I think in the first five years of teaching we lose somewhere in the region... I think it's 40 to 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession. So we know that is creating real pressures. Because essentially, I think the profession is becoming less and less attractive financially. There's been a pay freeze for several years now at one percent and the pace of salaries just hasn't kept pace with other jobs for new graduates. It's just a fact of life. So it's a less attractive career, and the pressures are ever mounting. It's a very different profession to the one I came into. Pressure on class teachers is immense.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Outer London

It was also acknowledged that persistent assessment changes to the curriculum were a factor, in addition to financial concerns, in the retention of London teachers:

I think more transparency needs to come through from the government about where this has come about, bearing in mind it is three years after a new curriculum has been brought in, one year after new tests have been brought in. There's so many changes going on for people to get to grips with... And I just don't know how many more changes they can cope with when they are... when it means that they are losing staff. There's a massive drop out of staff now for teaching.

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

36% were leaving to teach in another London school

Interviews indicated that outer London schools faced specific difficulties in the recruiting of teachers across all roles due to the disparity in wages between inner and outer London. This issue was particularly prominent in schools located very near, but not inside, the inner London boundary:

...we are an outer London borough and we are less than 0.5 miles away from the border with [an inner London borough] where you can earn quite an additional amount of money because there's London weighting. There are schools less than a mile from here that might earn £6-7,000 more than what they will earn in my school. Although as an academy we could change our salary brackets and bandings, the reality is that we don't have the money and budget to do that because we're funded as an outer London school, not an inner London school.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Conversely, school leaders at inner London schools suggested that the increased wages due to the inner London weighting, coupled with rises in the pension contribution and other external factors such as the apprenticeship levy, added an additional strain in managing school budgets:

....What I don't think's been factored in is the fact that we have to pay London weighting. So, we actually pay more for, you know, an NQT than somebody who is somewhere else. Our staff pay more for housing and I don't think that's been taken into account at all. It costs me more to run my school than it does a school elsewhere in the country...

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

Accountability and Trust

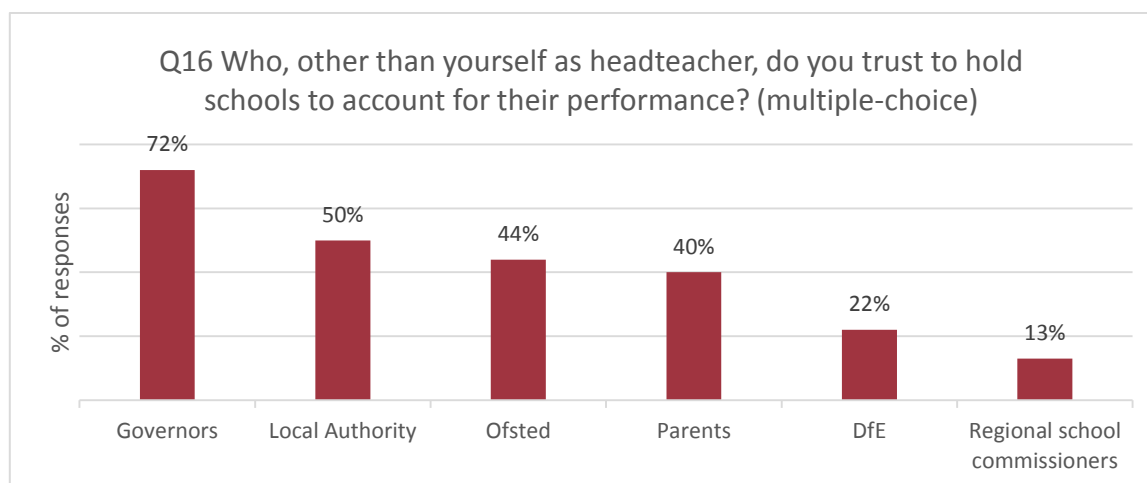
Final questions in the survey and in interviews asked school leaders who, other than themselves as headteacher, they trust to hold their schools to account and to turn around failing schools. Interviews also prompted headteachers around the relationships they had now and expected to have in the future, based on different parties' understanding of their local and wider reaching challenges and their views and ideas on the future strategic role of local authorities.

In the area of accountability and trust, responses clearly varied widely depending on the funding and accountability models of the different school types. However, the research found that levels of academisation, and the role of the relevant local authority in individual boroughs, also had a strong impact.

70% of schools across England said they trust their governing bodies and 50% of schools trust local authorities to hold them to account.

Schools in inner London were more likely to trust their local authority (61%, compared with 47% in outer London and 46% in the rest of England). Although obvious that LA-maintained schools are more likely to trust their local authority in this role, the survey data showed that 24% of MAT academies also said they trusted LAs. This is compared with 6% of standalone academies and 67% of LA-maintained schools, indicating that MATs still see a role for the LA relating to accountability for their schools.

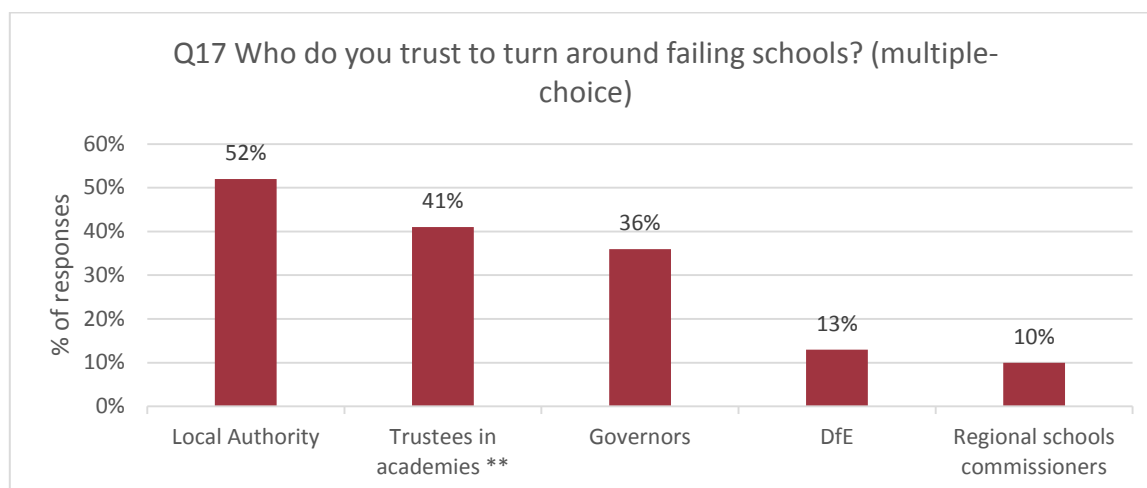
In addition, LA-maintained and standalone academies were more likely to trust their governors to hold them to account (75% and 72% respectively), compared with 59% in MATs (where trustees likely hold a larger proportion of influence).



Base size: 314 London & 215 rest of England senior leader respondents answered Q16

We asked our respondents who they trust to turn around failing schools.

52% of schools stated that they trusted their local authority to perform this role, which is the most popular group.



** This response is filtered only to respondents from academies

Base size: 311 London & 214 rest of England senior leader respondents answered Q17.

Both academies and LA-maintained schools trust their governing body to hold them to account

Interview responses reflected these findings. LA-maintained schools and academy heads held differing views on trust and accountability, likely due to their different funding and accountability structures. However, trust in and respect for their **governing body** was felt by both groups, particularly in LA-maintained schools. Governors were seen as holding schools to account in terms of finance and monitoring academic results and progress and then addressing related concerns. They were believed to have a strong understanding of the local context the schools were working in.

The current governing body is very aware of its role to scrutinise and hold to account, and we've very actively recruited a governing body with that full skill set to do so, so that's been a lot of work. That's mutual trust.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 3, Inner London (P8, NR)

I do trust the governors to hold this school to account and to hold me to account. I think they're ethical and brave. I think they take hard decisions when they need to. They dealt with the leadership issues and the legacy issues, and appointed me to come in and sort out the teaching and learning, and behaviour. I think they took decisive action when the local authority failed to act.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

However, it was acknowledged that the governing body needed strong background support from the LA or MAT, particularly as their voluntary status meant they could be inconsistent or change suddenly, leaving schools rather less accountable than they might have been to a school improvement partner from their local authority:

But all governors are volunteers... And of course, you can have some very strong governors that then leave, and all of a sudden you have a very weak governing body. There's not so much consistency as there would have been say with the local authority... in one sense governors are typically, in my experience, less demanding in terms of their questioning than say a School Improvement Partner would ever be. It's a much tougher day when the School Improvement Partner used to come in and would ask some very pertinent, difficult questions, or challenging questions, and that's right, that's what they should be doing.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Inner London

Academy heads in MATs trusted their MAT trustees and continued to have some sustained, though limited, involvement from the LA

The majority of academy heads who were part of MATs felt well supported and thought that the **MAT trustees** or board of directors (to whom they were directly accountable in their role as headteacher) was the obvious body to hold them to account for their performance and to turn around failing schools. MAT headteachers also spoke of being instrumental in selecting trustees which gave them more ownership and trust in this relationship.

Yes, [I trust my trustees most to hold the school to account] because I've been involved in their recruitment. I chose people who would be particularly challenging and want the best for the community.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Inner London

As reflected in the survey findings, academy headteachers spoke supportively of a continuing **LA presence sitting behind their MAT or trustees** and holding them to account, though the level of support available from the local authority was dwindling. Stand-alone academies or those in trusts of only two or three schools reported feeling somewhat adrift and isolated, with LA support declining and inconsistent, and no alternative overarching body in their place as they are for MATs.

When you take the local authority out... the vast majority of multi academy trusts are 1, 2, and 3 schools. The school to school improvement and the accountability isn't necessarily going to come from them. It's not going to be there within those small MATs. You might get it if you're in one of these larger multi academy trusts, but for the likes of us as a single academy trust you really do feel very much you're on your own, which is why leaders don't want to become heads.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Inner London

Academy heads spoke resignedly of the role of the LA in school improvement as a disappearing service:

[LA support] has significantly reduced because it's had to. Their services have been particularly hard hit so it has reduced, but where they can they still work very positively... They've been hit so hard that it's going to be very difficult to return back from that point.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

LA-maintained schools were supportive about their local authority but were impacted by the decline in their capacity to offer the same level of support as in the past

As may be expected, headteachers from LA-maintained schools reported that they trusted their **local authority** to hold schools to account for their performance. Experiences varied by borough, often depending on the extent of academisation or the historical structure of education departments in the individual authorities. Many were supportive and still experienced strong school improvement support from their LA.

Local authority, without a doubt. I've worked for [borough]. They're excellent in terms of their level of rigour, attention to detail, and a selfless approach to ensuring every child's outcome is the best it can be.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

Yes. She comes in once or twice a term, looks at what we've got, and she asks questions. She suggests ways we could tweak things. Sometimes they're presentational things, sometimes they're systems in place, so it's a good two-way process and it is beneficial to the school.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

For others though, particularly in boroughs where most schools were academies, the strong support offered in the past was seen to be dwindling. Many respondents were resigned to the prospect that these services would all but disappear in the future in the face of cuts to the Education Support Grant and in changes in government policy and the LA role. Good or outstanding LA-maintained schools recognised that resources from the LA had to be focused on poorer performing schools that needed extra support:

Even when I started here there was a school improvement partner from [the LA] that came and spoke to me about results, and in my last job it was the same, but now with people disappearing in the local authority there's very little. I'd say there's very little accountability and there's very little support because there's nobody there to do it, so then schools are being asked to do more school to school support and schools are already stretched financially so it's like it doesn't make sense.

Headteacher, Secondary Voluntary Aided School, Grade 1, Outer London

Ofsted and the Regional School Commissioners (RSCs) were seen as distant and linked with retrospective accountability, rather than on-going support offered by other bodies 'closer' to the school community

The interview responses did not rate Ofsted highly as an accountability body, largely because of characteristics of distance and unpredictability. Although the accountability was acknowledged, because of the clear impact of the judgements on schools' development and futures, it was discussed as a remote, official body and the judgements were seen as somewhat arbitrary.

I think Ofsted is just a complete, kind of, lottery really, what happens on that day, who turns up. I don't think it's fool-proof as a system at all.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

Headteachers had had contact with RSCs but discussed how they are so thinly spread that they couldn't work with many schools in their area. Some were unsure of their role, others had found it hard to contact them, with repeated phone messages left unanswered. LA-maintained school heads had a perception that the RSC had a 'strong academy agenda' and was pushing this line in the contact that they had with them. As with Ofsted, the RSC was seen as having very limited knowledge of the context in which individual schools were working. They were seen as stepping in only at the last minute or perhaps when schools failed to balance their budgets.

I think it's sad if we are removing that sense of whether it's a local authority or another local knowledge of the school because the RSC can't hold the knowledge we would expect for such a wide geographic region. If underneath the RSC there were a range of officers who can get to know the different authorities then that's great, but it feels that they're... for the geographical region they're covering, their resources will potentially be stretched as well.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Inner London

Strong collaboration and mutual accountability existed in school and community roles

Some heads felt strongly that the closest **in-school and community roles and bodies** were best placed to hold each other to account – parents, teachers, senior team members and governors, spreading outwards to the LA/MAT with Ofsted, the RSC and the DfE very much on the margins.

Local bodies were felt to have the best interests of the school at heart. Parents were held as central with parent forums held every half term, for example.

Across both funding types, **headteachers within MAT groups and in partnerships between schools more widely** appeared to be greatly trusted as collaborative, supportive networks within which to share best practice and aid school improvement. This theme of school-to-school collaboration was strong throughout the interviews and looks to be a key route towards approaching school improvement and accountability in the future.

The strategic role of the local authority

In the interviews we asked headteachers to consider the strategic role they thought local authorities could play in the future schools landscape.

Although many functions previously provided by local authorities were valued, headteachers reported a recent decline in these services due to central funding cuts and some lack of coherence within new academised structures

Headteachers highlighted the following areas of LA activity that they had experienced and valued now and/or in the past.

- As a **school improvement partner** with varying levels of involvement depending on funding type and borough
- Support and **advice around behavioural issues**
- As a **facilitator in academisation and brokering trusts**, supporting headteachers looking to join a MAT and enabling non-academy school partnerships
- **Advising schools around latest changes in funding and policy** and how they impact individual schools
- Support and advice around **finance and negotiating Service Level Agreements**
- As an **impartial observer/adviser/facilitator**, for example, chairing headteacher groups and forums, sitting in on headteacher appraisals
- As a strong **back-up support to diocese for faith schools** – there was recognition that where the diocese has been supported by the LA this may change in the future and that in this case, the diocese may struggle to step up and take the role historically taken by the LA
- **Strong community knowledge** and experience including school-related, wider council areas of **safeguarding, social care, child support team, Prevent team and early support service**, all offered to school free through the LA. This gave LAs a unique view of the local context in which schools were working combined with holistic understanding of wider authority-led issues

While these activities were widely supported, the declining capacity of local authorities in the face of funding changes and academisation led headteachers to be pessimistic about the role the LA could play in the future. This was largely based around their own experiences of declining levels of service and, specifically, the inconsistency of support roles and the loss of specialist roles entirely, for example, specialist subject directors. It was felt that many of the most high quality staff had left

the local authorities, with many setting up private consultancy partnerships and selling their services independently to schools.

Now with people disappearing in the local authority there's very little. I'd say there's very little accountability and there's very little support because there's nobody there to do it, so then schools are being asked to do more school to school support.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Outer London

They're over-stretched. It's like a revolving door. One consultant in, the next one's out. They stay 6 months, do a job, disappear. Just when you think you're getting somewhere with a person, they're gone.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Outer London

Well, I do have a lot of interaction because, as I say, this is a very good local authority and a very senior person from there is the Deputy Chair of Governors in my school. They have been stripped of so much funding I don't think they can do any more but I've found them extremely supportive in as much as they can do, but they are literally divesting themselves of staff at a rate of knots. It's very, very sad. They've argued, you know, they have militated against this for some time but at the end of the day when the money is simply not being made forthcoming, then they have to lose staff.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

Where LA school improvement partners still worked with academies one head felt that, despite a positive personal relationship, the role perhaps lacked coherence in an academy context.

There is a link inspector role. That's been retained. I've got a good relationship with our link inspector, but there's no sense of that... that's almost it's a personal relationship that doesn't appear to be as part of a well-designed strategy. It is simply that she comes in and has a chat... I can't remember the last time anybody from the local authority, apart from the link inspector, ever came into my school.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Inner London

As discussed in this report, there was a concern that decline in capacity of LAs left both LA-maintained schools and standalone academies outside MATs vulnerable. In addition, schools inside MATS were felt to be at risk of becoming insular and perhaps unaccountable beyond the auspices of their own trust.

I think there needs to be a little more openness and transparency. I think the danger with MATs is that it's almost a little like empire building, and as soon as the empire is built it's quite intrinsic. People are

quite inward looking rather than looking out and continuing to look out, and continuing to work across phase and across other schools.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

The future role of the local authority

Headteachers suggested the following local authority activities as elements which could go some way to defining their role in the future.



Impartial advisor/observer

Some still felt that local authorities had an essential role to play in an 'advisory role' to schools and as an impartial body standing outside the MAT. For example, although MAT groups of schools were seen as a useful local network for school improvement, headteachers stressed that they could become insular. Looking more widely at national approaches and standards beyond the MAT group was also deemed to be essential and the local authority, as an impartial body working across all school types, had a potential role to play here. As such, there was support for the LA having a role in chairing headteacher forums and sitting in on appraisals, again as an impartial figure, although it was also stated that these groups could be organised independently by headteacher-organised groups, as indeed they were being in many cases.

As a broker of networks

Many headteachers stressed that local authorities were strongly effective facilitators for brokering networks between MATs and facilitating teaching improvement and review mechanisms between networks of standalone academies and/or LA-maintained schools. Partnerships and the sharing of best practice emerged as key themes from the interviews, and there was an acknowledgement that this looked to be a valuable role which LAs were already filling because of their ability to hold a broad overview of the context in which local schools were working:

I do trust the local authority. I think they know their schools exceptionally well, they are able to facilitate that school-to-school support, they are able to create networks.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Outer London

It's become very complicated. I think the key has to be headteachers that are willing to talk to each other. So whether you are in a MAT, whether you are in a local authority school or a single academy you need to build a network of headteachers and deputies, and whoever it might be, and use that network to work positively in your local area. That's very difficult because you're always in competition... It is useful for the LA to act as a conduit for [engaging with other schools].

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

Our local authority is very good in that it doesn't discriminate between academies and non-academies. If you're a school in their area everything's open for you. And that's just because of the good relationship that key heads and key members of the local authority have, and wanting to keep everyone together.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Inner London

As a provider of expert support, advice and guidance beyond the school performance remit

The LA role in overseeing admissions was seen to be key, but also a role which was increasingly difficult because of the competition set up between different school types within a borough. With schools clearly aiming to maximise their funding through per-pupil funding, schools were competing for places. It was thought that competition for enrolment between academies, LA-maintained and free schools made it problematic to provide an overview and to plan for the right number of school places. That the LA continued to provide this now and in the future was strongly valued by headteachers, who called for more LA power over the direction of new school building for example.

On the basis that the LA role in school improvement was declining, headteachers emphasised the most appropriate role in the future would necessarily be confined to areas outside school improvement – admissions, safeguarding, SEN provision, wider social care – areas for which the LA was ideally placed, partly because of its statutory duty in these areas.

The LA's unique understanding of the local community and the wider social areas in their remit put them in a strong position to continue in this role, in addition to the acknowledgement that they were a democratically elected body with a public mandate for accountability:

The guidance and leadership they provide on things like radicalisation, working with MOPAC on the gang strategies, and Prevent and so on, I think that's really good because it's absolutely... schools aren't just about maths and English, and communities aren't just about children come to school and they go home. We're community leaders and it's really important that we work together to protect children from all the things which living in a big global city bring about.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 2, Outer London

You cannot work as an island... because, obviously, if Social Services aren't doing their work effectively that's going to impact on us big time and then also if health aren't doing their work properly, that's going to impact on us big time as well.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Certainly we had an experience when one of our students a couple of years ago travelled to Syria and joined ISIS. And the support that we got from the local authority and the local police through the local authority were second to none. It was excellent. And so I think the local authority do offer support there within the community in terms of safeguarding issues, child sexual exploitation, gangs and other bits and pieces that we come across in London schools.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Inner London

If that joint networking isn't there and that joint community work that's led by the local authority, I think some schools could become very vulnerable, very quickly, and it'd be too late to be able to seek that support.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Outer London

They are local and they are voted in, so in a sense, you know, you are taking away a local knowledge, a local say. You know, it may not be always what we want but they do have benefits.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

I am in favour of local authorities because... they are democratically accountable to the local community and I am in favour of them, and they have an understanding about their school

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

New ways of working – collaborative networks

As discussed, a key theme coming through the interviews was the increase in networks between all types of schools with the aim of:

Sharing best practice to support school improvement

Providing mutual reviews and advice

Saving costs through joint purchasing networks

School improvement support was increasingly coming about through formal or informal groups of heads coming together, either as part of their MAT, facilitated by the local authority or self-organised by heads in LA-maintained schools.

Well, it is what you've just said. It's a consortium of heads that meet together to ensure standards are right across the trust and it's a very equitable arrangement. So, we each hold our own funding and, you know, it's about sharing good practice.

Headteacher, Primary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

We're a Network Learning Community. So, that has been put together by the local authority and, you know, we work with a further group of schools and we do work well together but we are of differing types and as the four multi-academy trust places come through that network will break because we have faith schools within the group.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Outer London

Yes. There's a... network of schools where we meet... We also have, sort of, little clusters. So, the other local primary schools and... the high school, the secondary school and, you know, things like doing joint moderation together. We've actually organised a joint inset for October for all of the schools in the cluster... So, you know, there are these little groups going on.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

... we go and see each other's schools and carry out reviews, but we also share expertise across teaching and learning, subject knowledge, leadership, behaviour and so on. I meet very regularly with the headteachers of local schools.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Local Authorities were reported as advising schools to set up networks or consortia with a view to cost sharing, as a way of overcoming the inevitable loss of some areas of service through LAs:

...so just recently they've encouraged the schools to set up little...either join MATs or consider local consortia basically saying, 'Get yourselves sorted out because I don't think the authority's going to be here to support you much longer.' They've just this year, you know, created an education services company. So, again, most of the local authority personnel have joined an offshoot company.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 1, Outer London

Indeed some networks had been set up with the aim of sharing costs independent of the LA:

We are part of an alliance and that has helped, especially when you're thinking about financial constraints and restraints, so being able to go to some big secondary schools and getting CPD or support from them has been really helpful. Recruitment as well, working together to recruit together as a group. That kind of very gentle alliance has to date proved effective.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 3, Inner London

So we are trying to... We're just beginning to explore how we can share admin functions with other local schools with finance and possibly even premises, things like that. But we're very lean.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Inner London

Furthermore, some local authorities were moving towards a 'school-led partnership' arrangement where schools and the LA grouped together to safeguard LA-provided services which would otherwise be lost for lack of uptake and funding:

I think there are moves at the moment, and I think it is a positive move, although it remains to be seen, is that the local authority in our example are moving towards what's called a school led partnership now. So there is, to try and maintain some of the services that would be potentially under threat in the next year or so with the local authorities, schools are looking at the potential of forming, as it's been happening in a few authorities over the last few years, they're looking at forming a partnership where schools are the majority shareholders so we maintain things like the improvement service and some Service Level Agreements. Because otherwise, potentially that would just disappear within the next 12 to 18 months and schools then would have to look to external providers in other authorities... So I think that is going to be the key in the way ahead, is to reform some kind of partnership and that's well underway within our authority, and I think it's a really positive thing. Because having had positive experiences with the local authority I wouldn't want to lose some of the advice and services that they offer.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Outer London

One head spoke of a new partnership between a group of schools and the LA as a means of sharing resources and purchasing and capitalising on the holistic role LAs could play in school improvement, including health and social care as well as education, again highlighting the unique role the LA can play in joining other services in its remit with education.

Well, it's part of the white paper with the School Improvement function being taken away. What we're doing is, is we want to set up a company that's owned by the schools and the local authority so we're actually working together on it, and I think, I mean, for me personally to bring about school improvement it's not just looking at education. You've got to look at healthcare, you've got to look at

Social Services, everything has actually got to be looked at together, holistically, to actually ensure that you can actually I think really address the issues of disadvantaged.

Headteacher, Secondary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Outer London

Above all headteachers were strongly conscious of finding new and independent ways of preserving the benefits of LA services that looked to be disappearing as well as fostering new types of relationships to share best practice. In addition, they were keen to create a type of mutual accountability structure with those community bodies closest to and most knowledgeable about their own school, and to some extent independent of more distant government accountability bodies. Collaboration was key:

I think it's by collaboration and through tailoring external support in the way that best fits the school, for example, headteachers supporting each other with school to school reviews, governors working across schools in the phase or borough so that there's representation on primary and secondary phases, leaders working together and not against each other to support better understanding and to support a change, and better capacity to approach changes in one another's experiences.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

Conclusions

Responses showed how London school leaders are passionate about working to improve progress and attainment for the children in their schools, and how their focus rests on minimising the impact of recent budgetary pressures on pupil outcomes. Nevertheless they also revealed a system under strain, and facing increased fixed costs, even prior to the introduction of the NFF. Media reports released as this research was being conducted, prior to the General Election, closely mirror the findings in the interviews; they describe drastic cuts to Teaching Assistants and support staff¹⁰, growing class sizes¹¹, a narrowing of the curriculum¹² and a thinning of enrichment activities¹³, with increasing reports of teacher cuts and redundancies¹⁴ which in the past were seen as a last resort. Responses also reveal how these cuts disproportionately affect deprived and SEN groups, and are now increasingly impacting on pupils' progress and attainment more widely. While teachers are proud of their schools and reluctant to surrender to the pressures they are facing, many admitted that they saw no alternative to a deterioration in the level of progress and attainment that has been so applauded in London schools in the recent past.

While London schools would be facing proportionately bigger budget cuts than schools nationally under the NFF in its proposed form, the extent to which they can cope with current pressures is exacerbated further by London-specific challenges, including the demand for school places and lower teacher retention due to high London property prices for example. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a national sample in our survey showed how the pressures on schools are being experienced nationwide. While there is acceptance across the board that a redistribution must and should occur, headteachers' responses from London and the rest of England support the demand for schools funding to be levelled up across all regions, as well as for the distribution of the available budget under the NFF to be revised, if schools are to retain their current levels of attainment.

When asked about school accountability and improvement, headteachers were putting their trust particularly in locally based bodies. They strongly valued the support they received from their governing bodies, and have developed highly effective ways of sharing best practice and gaining mutual peer support, both within MATs and in LA-maintained schools, through the development of local headteacher networks. Beyond this there was a sense that the input of local authorities was strongly valued, clearly more so in LA-maintained schools, but also by headteachers within MATs and in standalone academies. Headteachers spoke of MATs becoming insular, and standalone academies could seem isolated. While local authority services in strongly academised boroughs

¹⁰ For example see: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/apr/11/schools-special-needs-teaching-assistants-lose-jobs-pupils-budget-cuts> Accessed 15.05.17

¹¹ For example see: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/uk-school-increase-class-sizes-due-to-underfunding-a7658941.html> Accessed 15.05.17

¹² For example see: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-39527183> Accessed 15.05.17

¹³ For example see: <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2016/mar/31/funding-cuts-london-schools-social-mobility> and <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/education-schools-struggling-financially-axing-gcse-a-level-courses-cutting-class-trips-headteachers-a7620931.html> Accessed 15.05.17

¹⁴ For example see: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/mar/07/headteachers-write-to-parents-over-school-funding-and-job-cuts> and <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jan/17/cuts-headteachers-schools-funding-crisis> Accessed 15.05.17

were seen to have diminished, and headteachers were often resigned to the fact that these services could not be resurrected, the services they had offered in the past were missed, particularly in school improvement. Beyond this, and into the future, the local authority was appreciated for playing a pivotal role in brokering networks both within and across the different school funding types. It was thought to provide an impartial voice across a diverse school landscape, as well as offering advice and support couched in the unique and broad-based local community knowledge that is not achievable through centralised bodies.

Case studies

The following case studies illustrate in a little more detail the specific circumstances described by headteachers in relation to the impact of current and future cuts to nursery provision and issues around funding sources for SEN pupils. Footnotes in the body of the report indicate where these areas are covered in the reporting.

Nursery cuts impacting on children's Year 6 attainment and wider social needs in a deprived inner London area

One inner London LA-maintained school (Grade 2) was experiencing strong pressure on their nursery provision with severe implications for children in their deprived catchment area.

The school has been subsidising full-time nursery places based on the borough paying 80% towards the cost with the school paying the remainder from their school budget, in order that all children could have a full-time nursery place. School meals for nursery children were also paid for but this has already been cut due to overall budgetary pressures.

Children in this area entering the nursery are generally 80-85% below the national average for their development. However, the school has seen dramatic success in children's progress by the time they reach Year 6 with these children reaching well above the national average levels for reading, writing and maths. The nursery provision is seen as a key starting point for this success, laying the foundations for learning when they start reception year.

However with cuts in the subsidy from 80% to 60% in September 2017, decreasing again to 40% the following year, this is unsustainable. Options include opening part-time places only and restricting them to working parents of 3 and 4-year old children, but the social injustice of this is emphasised, with those working, and most able to pay parents, receiving places, while children from perhaps more deprived families go without the advantage of a nursery place and the future attainment for which this provision lays the foundations. Only a very low percentage of families have both parents working and the headteacher recognised the vital importance the nursery provision has to non-working families who would lose out.

So, you can see if you track back to the beginning of nursery to the end of Year 6, but I think if we're not able to offer these children full-time places in nursery it's going to make a huge difference because we won't have those foundation years to be able to help them. So, we'd just be doing catch-up the whole time because it's not only, you know, the subjects, the core subjects, it's the whole personal and social and everything that we do an awful lot for when they get into nursery.

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 2, Inner London

Schools cannot access funds allocated to children with special education needs because of a paradox in the funding process

The headteacher of a secondary academy (Grade 3) in outer London had recently made a proportion of their SEN staff redundant. Beyond the main SENCO, a statutory provision, this headteacher reported a team of a further eight learning support staff - three of these will also soon be made redundant.

The headteacher described the complex process in place for allocation of SEN funding and how the application process hinders access to additional funds for eligible children. Schools are allocated £6,000 in their budget to pay for support for each child with a special needs statement in their school. Where this does not provide enough provision for an individual child the school can apply for additional funding for that child, with the resulting Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) allocating a set number of hours of additional Learning Support Assistant (LSA) support.

This school, along with others in this research, described how the individual child-allocated initial £6,000 is used in a variety of ways to ensure its effectiveness is as wide-spread as it can be, for example allowing a smaller class size, or providing the Accelerated Reader reading programme, benefitting a whole cohort as well as the individual SEN children in the group. In schools like this one, where the proportion of need is high, these whole school strategies benefit all.

However, this approach conflicts with the rules in place for the allocation of additional funding. In order to be eligible for the additional LSA funding schools must give evidence that learning support provided for a particular child within the initial £6,000 funding, has not been effective - this support was often already not available for this child because of the school's chosen strategy of using the funding more effectively across a whole class. Consequently this funding would not be granted.

If you only have LSAs equivalent to the amount of money you have got coming into the school, which we have got to the stage of, for children who have already got EHCPs, you can't be providing them with any LSA support and therefore you can't get any EHCPs because you can't be shown to have done that.

Headteacher, Secondary Academy, Grade 3, Outer London

This has a strong impact on the amount of small group and one-to-one attention the school can give to children with special needs. This is only more exacerbated by the likely future reduction of number of Higher Level Teaching Assistants in the school, who currently also provide additional one-to-one and small group support to supplement the special needs provision.

These concerns were also echoed by a primary headteacher in an LA-maintained school, who reported the imminent cutting of one-to-one support for children with special needs.

What currently some of our pupils have who are SEN is, they receive more support than what is allocated via EHC plans, because they need greater support because it's quite difficult to have to go through the criteria. So, we actually do provide more because that's what the children need but, unfortunately, that is something that's going to have to be withdrawn as the funding's withdrawn

Headteacher, Primary LA-maintained, Grade 1, Outer London

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