



## Evidence-based approaches to addressing issues of teacher recruitment and retention

### Executive summary

The teacher supply “crisis” has plagued our education system for many decades. Successive governments have invested a substantial amount in solving the problem. The problem persists. One of the reasons for this is that current policies are not addressing the right issue.

The issue is not a shortage of people interested in teaching. There are more applicants to initial teacher training than there are places available. **In the 2023/24 cycle, only 50% of applicants were offered a place.** Although the number of applicants had increased, the number accepted had not. Attracting more people into teaching is only one part of the solution.

### The challenges of teacher retention:

Accountability pressures and the lack of support and resources in schools are among the few things that make retention challenging. International data indicates that countries with chronic shortages of teachers often struggle with issues such as teacher abuse, relative low pay compared to other fields, extensive level of lesson preparation requirements, lack of resources and workplace stress. Recruiting more teachers can relieve pressure on schools, reduce workload and so aid retention.

### Addressing the ethnic under-representation of ethnic minority teachers:

In England there is a growing mismatch between the proportion of teachers and pupils of each ethnic minority group. This matters because exposure of students to a more diverse teacher workforce benefits all students (including White students), providing them with an ethnically and linguistically rich

experience, promoting social cohesion, racial understanding and tolerance.

Ethnic minority applicants are less likely to be accepted into teacher training than White applicants. They are also less likely to gain qualified teacher status and a teaching post in state-funded schools than White trainees.

### Policy recommendations

#### Money from the tax on private schools should be used to improve teachers' working conditions:

1. **Increase teaching and classroom resources.** Provide free access to online teaching resources to support teachers in delivering high quality lessons and reduce preparation time.
2. **Support for disadvantaged schools.** Offer smaller class sizes or a lower pupil to teacher ratio in schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils.
3. **Reform pay structure of teachers.** Revise the pay structure for teachers to make the profession financially more attractive and competitive
4. **Funding for flexibility of working hours.** Allocate funds to allow schools more flexibility in teaching hours. Although the Department for Education (DfE) has encouraged flexible working, practical implementation remains challenging due to insufficient funding.
5. **Offer sabbaticals.** Provide funding for schools to enable them to offer sabbaticals for long-serving teachers,

ensuring there are resources available to find replacements during this period.

### **Address the accountability pressures from Ofsted inspections.**

**While Ofsted aims to improve the quality of teaching and the professional status of teaching, the current approach can be counterproductive.**

1. **Supportive rather than judgemental inspections.** The role of Ofsted should be supportive, offering formative feedback rather than merely summative judgements. This approach would involve not just identifying shortcomings but also providing practical suggestions for improvement.
2. **Consider school and pupil characteristics.** Factors like school and pupil demographics can significantly impact performance. Schools in disadvantaged areas often face more significant challenges, which should be considered in evaluations. Our research has shown that it is possible to predict Ofsted grades for over 71% of schools based on the percentage of students with special educational needs (SEN), those eligible for free school meals (FSM), and the average Index of Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) rank of the schools.

### **Children's Wellbeing Bill**

**Prioritise teacher wellbeing and mental health:** Wellbeing of teachers play an important role children's mental health. Happy, cared-for teachers are better positioned to look after the wellbeing of their pupils. Teacher wellbeing also has a downstream effect on pupil wellbeing [PISA survey](#) highlights a strong link between teacher wellbeing and student wellbeing. [Evidence shows](#) students whose teachers are happy also feel happier.

**Tackle implicit bias and potential racism in teacher recruitment and retention:** Increase awareness of unconscious bias through training in screening potential teachers and in hiring practices. Ofsted inspections need to look more closely at differential acceptance rates into initial teacher training.

### **About the research**

The above recommendations are based on three inter-related projects on teacher recruitment and retention.

[Comparative analysis of teacher policies across international education systems.](#)

[Investigating the recruitment and retention of ethnic minority teachers.](#)

[Understanding the complex determinants of teacher supply.](#)

### **Contact**

[Beng Huat See](#), Professor of Education Research, University of Birmingham

Email: [b.h.see.1@bham.ac.uk](mailto:b.h.see.1@bham.ac.uk)

[ORCID](#)

We advance  
**We activate**  

---

birmingham.ac.uk