

Teacher Recruitment and Retention in 2026

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Executive Summary

The Teacher Tapp and SchoolDash annual report on teacher recruitment and retention, funded by Gatsby Foundation, provides insights into the current state of the teaching profession in England. By monitoring job advertisements and conducting surveys with over 10,000 teachers, the report presents key trends and challenges. Here are the key findings.

Key Finding 1: Secondary teacher recruitment activity has fallen to its lowest level in the last decade. Job advertisements for secondary school roles are down 32% compared to last year and 46% lower than in the pre-pandemic 2018/19 academic year. This decline is consistent across all subjects and appears to reflect a combination of factors, including schools' anticipation of falling pupil rolls, reduced teacher turnover linked to a weak wider labour market, and budgetary caution.

Key Finding 2: Fewer vacancies don't seem to translate into better staffing for pupils. Despite low recruitment activity in the primary sector, primary teachers' perceptions of staffing quality have continued to worsen, with 21% now reporting that their school is inadequately staffed with suitably qualified teachers. While we do not have a definitive explanation for this trend, it may reflect the fact that schools are reducing posts overall in response to budgetary pressures, which leaves those who remain feeling that their school is less well resourced, even if there are fewer unfilled vacancies. The decline in job advertisements should not be mistaken for an improvement in staffing. Schools are advertising less, but teachers do not report feeling better staffed.

Key Finding 3: Teachers' long-term commitment to the profession remains well below pre-pandemic levels. Around 61% of teachers now expect to still be teaching in three years' time, compared to approximately 75% before the pandemic. This figure has stabilised since 2022, but the persistent gap reflects ongoing challenges including the burden of managing pupil behaviour and the limited flexibility of teaching relative to other careers.

Key Finding 4: The pipeline of future headteachers continues to narrow. Just 37% of deputy and assistant headteachers say they aspire to headship, down from 55% in 2017. Headteacher turnover in the secondary phase has also fallen to its lowest level outside the pandemic, raising concerns about leadership capacity in the years ahead.

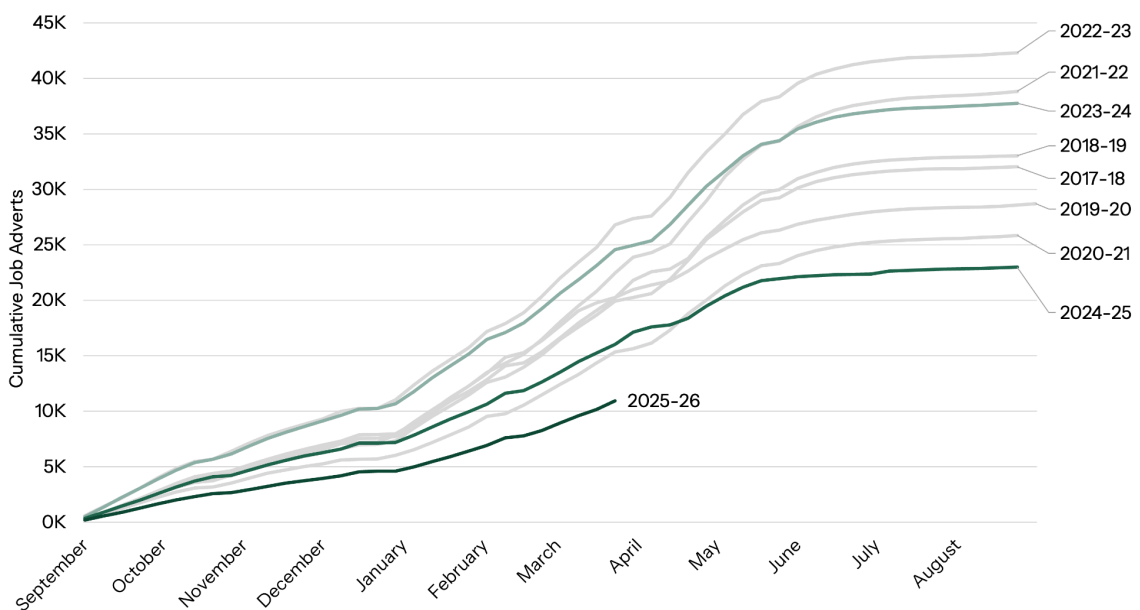
Teacher Recruitment in 2026

Secondary school job advertisements fall to historic lows

This report is being published before the 31st May resignation deadline, by which point teachers wishing to take up a new post in September must have given notice. As a result, much of this year's recruitment activity is not yet reflected in the current data. A follow-up report will be published in early summer to provide a more complete picture of the teacher labour market for the 2025/26 academic year.

SchoolDash has been monitoring the volume of job advertisements posted by secondary schools over the past nine years. As shown in the chart below, cumulative job adverts in the current academic year are tracking well below every previous year in the dataset, including the 2020/21 academic year when the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted staff movement. Compared to last year, the number of secondary job adverts is down by 32%, and it is 46% lower than during the 2018/19 pre-pandemic period. The scale of this decline is unprecedented in the period for which we have data.

Secondary school job adverts, cumulative over academic year



The number of secondary job ads has fallen dramatically, and this is consistent across all subjects, which suggests a systemic shift in demand for teachers rather than subject-specific supply issues. In primary schools, falling pupil numbers have clearly been reducing demand for teachers for several years. In secondary, the picture is more complex. Official census data show that total secondary rolls were broadly flat through 2025, but the DfE's national pupil projections indicate that secondary rolls have now plateaued and are projected to begin declining from September. Crucially, at this point in the academic year, schools already know the size of their incoming Year 7 cohort, which is smaller than the Year

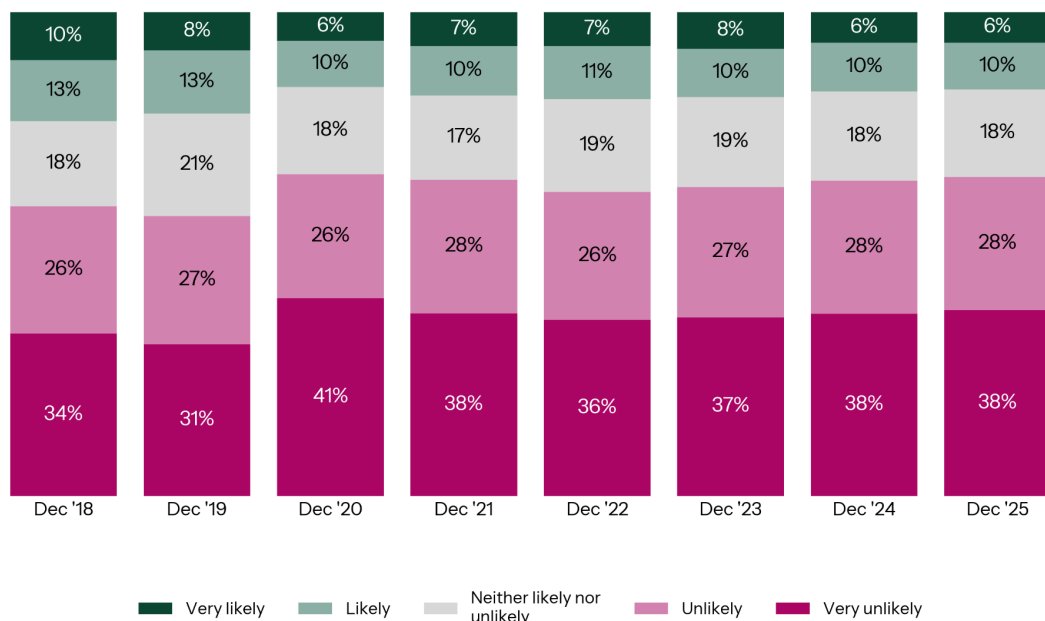
11 cohort about to leave. Schools are therefore hiring for a net smaller pupil body, even before this shows up fully in published census figures.

It is important to note that teacher labour markets are highly sensitive to marginal changes in demand. Even a modest reduction in the average number of posts per school can produce a sharp fall in total advertised vacancies, because most of the "flow" in teacher recruitment comes from the margin, i.e. the posts that tip from being needed to not being needed. At the same time, the wider UK labour market has weakened, with fewer job opportunities available outside teaching. This may be suppressing teacher wastage from the profession, which in turn reduces the number of replacement posts schools need to advertise.

Survey data from the Christmas period supports this interpretation. At that point in the year, teachers have not yet seen most job advertisements for the coming academic year, so their stated intentions reflect underlying inclination rather than responses to specific opportunities. As shown in the chart below, the proportion of teachers reporting that they are likely to leave their school has been largely unchanged since the pandemic, suggesting that demand from teachers to move has held steady even as the number of available positions has fallen sharply.

All these factors likely reinforce one another. Schools anticipating smaller cohorts may be choosing not to replace departing staff, while lower wastage to other professions means fewer departures to replace in the first place.

Teachers' inclination to move at Christmas has stabilised since the pandemic

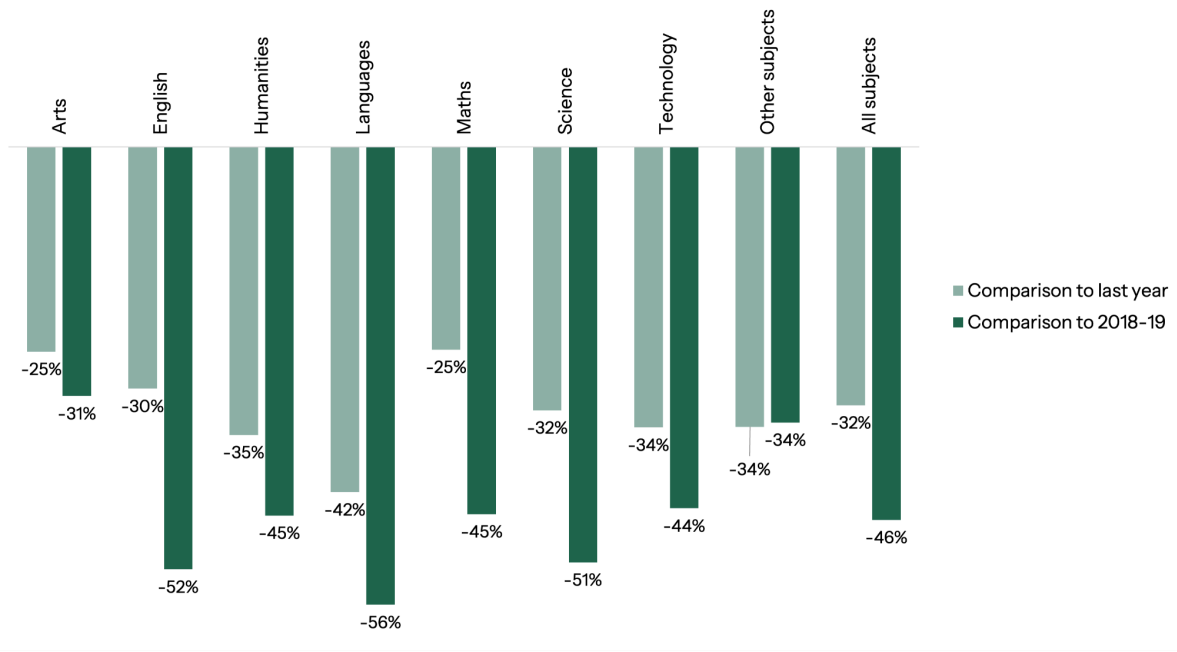


Question asked: "How likely is it that you will leave your school at the end of this academic year?"

SchoolDash data also allows for analysis at the secondary phase subject level. As shown in the chart below, the decline in job advertisements is broadly consistent across all subjects,

both compared to last year and to the 2018/19 pre-pandemic baseline. Even in traditionally hard-to-recruit subjects such as maths and science, adverts are down by around 25% and 32% respectively compared to last year, and by 45% and 51% compared to 2018/19. Languages has seen the largest fall relative to pre-pandemic levels, at 56%. The breadth of the decline reinforces the view that this reflects a systemic contraction in the secondary teacher labour market (whether through fewer posts, lower turnover, or both) rather than changes in teacher supply in particular subject areas.

Job advertisements down across all secondary subjects

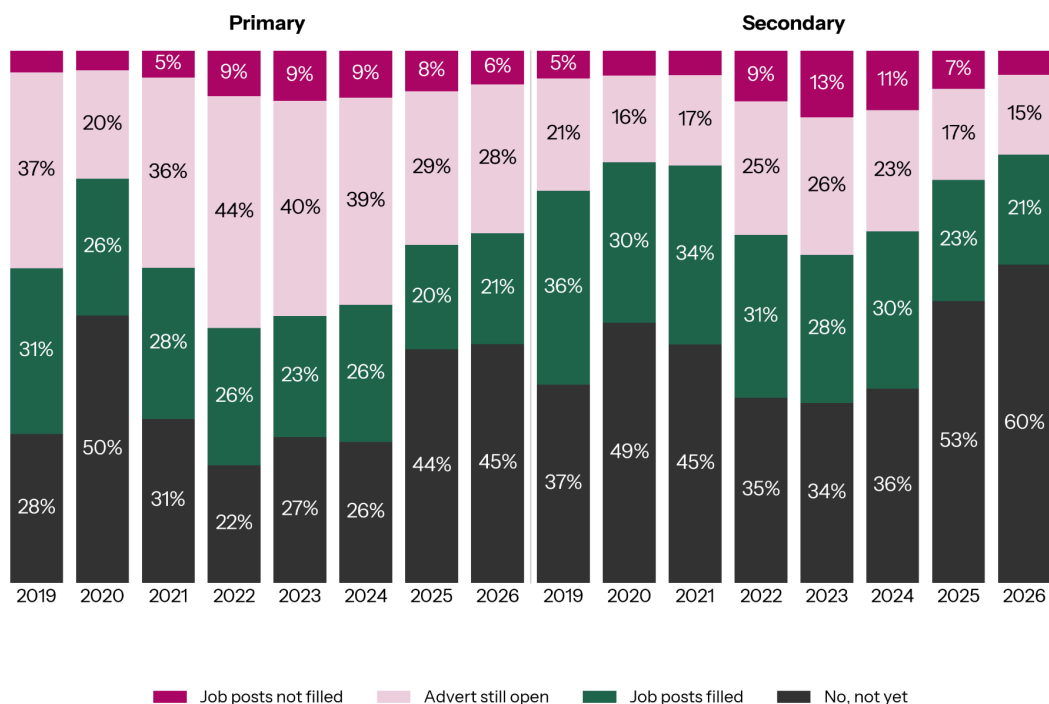


Primary recruitment stabilises at low levels

In the primary phase, falling pupil numbers have been reducing demand for teachers for several years. The survey data below suggest that the worst of this contraction may now have largely worked through into the recruitment market: the proportion of primary teachers reporting that their school has not yet advertised any jobs this season is broadly unchanged from last year, at 45% compared to 44%. Similarly, the share reporting that posts have been advertised and filled is stable at around 21%.

In the secondary phase, where the demographic decline is arriving later, the picture continues to suggest a deterioration in job availability. The proportion of secondary teachers reporting that no jobs have been advertised in their department has risen from 53% last year to 60%, consistent with the sharp falls in job advertisements recorded by SchoolDash. This suggests that the contraction in the secondary labour market may have further to run as the anticipated decline in pupil rolls begins to take effect across more schools.

Primary recruitment activity holds steady while secondary continues to slow



Question asked: "Has your school (primary) or department (secondary) already advertised for any jobs this season?"

Over the past five years, unfilled teaching positions have been a persistent challenge for both primary and secondary schools, with direct consequences for the quality of education that schools are able to provide. There are now signs that this is beginning to improve. In both the primary and secondary phases, just 6% of teachers report that advertised posts in their school or department remain unfilled at this point in the year. These are close to the lowest figures reported since we began tracking this measure.

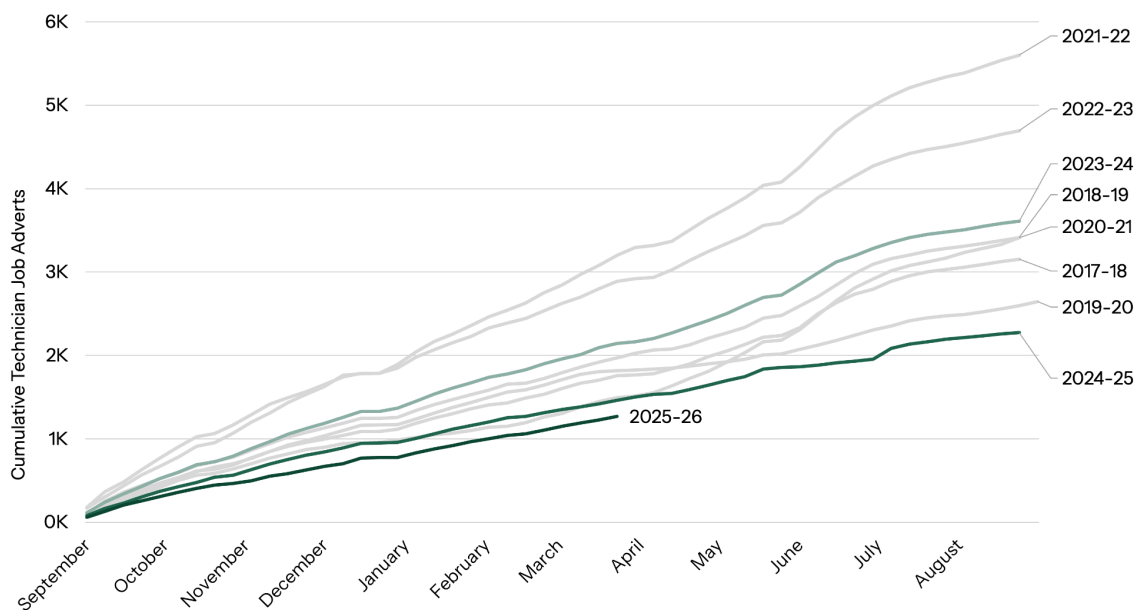
Technician recruitment mirrors the decline in teacher vacancies

SchoolDash has also tracked job advertisement levels for secondary school technicians over the same period. As shown in the chart below, the pattern closely mirrors the decline observed in teacher job adverts: cumulative technician adverts in the current academic year are tracking below every previous year in the dataset. Compared to the 2024/25 academic year, advertisement levels are down by 13%.

It is important to note that these figures alone do not indicate whether the decline is primarily due to reduced staff turnover within the technician workforce, or whether schools are actively reducing the number of technician posts in response to budgetary pressures. We

do not currently collect survey data from technicians, so we are unable to distinguish between these explanations. It is worth noting that the School Workforce Census shows overall support staff numbers in secondary schools have continued to rise in recent years, suggesting that the fall in technician adverts is more likely to reflect lower turnover than a systematic reduction in posts, though we cannot confirm this without technician-specific workforce data.

Technician job adverts, cumulative over academic year



Fewer vacancies, but schools are not better staffed

The sharp fall in job advertisements might suggest that teacher supply pressures are easing. In fact, the opposite appears to be true. What has changed is the nature of the problem: schools are no longer struggling to fill advertised posts, but are instead absorbing staffing shortfalls internally: by relying on non-specialist teachers, splitting classes between staff, and using non-teaching staff to cover PPA time. The recruitment challenge has become less visible, but the underlying workforce capacity problem has, if anything, worsened.

We continue to monitor **three key indicators of primary teacher shortages**, and all three have worsened a little compared to last year. Despite relatively low levels of recruitment activity, the proportion of primary teachers reporting that their school is inadequately staffed has risen to 21%, up from 16% in both 2024 and 2025. At the same time, reliance on non-teaching staff to cover PPA time and on temporary or unqualified teachers to lead classes continues to grow. This pattern suggests that schools are responding to financial pressures by not replacing departing staff, rather than finding it easier to fill the posts they do advertise.

The most recent survey data for primary schools show:

1. Percentage of teachers reporting that their school is inadequately staffed with suitably qualified teachers: 21% (compared to 16% in 2025 and 16% in 2024)
2. Percentage of teachers reporting that non-teachers cover their PPA time: 57% (compared to 54% in 2025 and 51% in 2024)
3. Percentage of teachers reporting that a class is led by a short-term temporary, agency, or unqualified teacher: 54% (compared to 53% in 2025 and 51% in 2024)

Taken together, these figures suggest that schools are responding to financial and demographic pressures not by advertising posts they cannot fill, but by coping with fewer qualified staff than they feel they need. The result is a deterioration in the quality of provision that does not show up in headline vacancy figures.

We also track **three indicators of secondary teacher shortages**, focusing specifically on teachers' experiences within their own subject departments or faculties. These data suggest a similar level in staffing pressures compared to last year:

1. Percentage of teachers reporting that their department lacks an adequate number of suitably qualified teachers: 24% (compared to 21% in 2025 and 23% in 2024)
2. Percentage of teachers expressing dissatisfaction with classes being split between two teachers: 33% (compared to 33% in 2025 and 36% in 2024)
3. Percentage of teachers expressing unhappiness with mid-year changes to their timetable: 20% (compared to 20% in 2025 and 25% in 2024)

These pressures are particularly acute in shortage subjects such as physics, where securing enough specialist teachers has long been a challenge. A fall in advertised vacancies for these subjects does not mean the underlying shortage has been resolved; it may simply mean that schools have stopped trying to recruit specialists they know they cannot attract.

Future career intentions

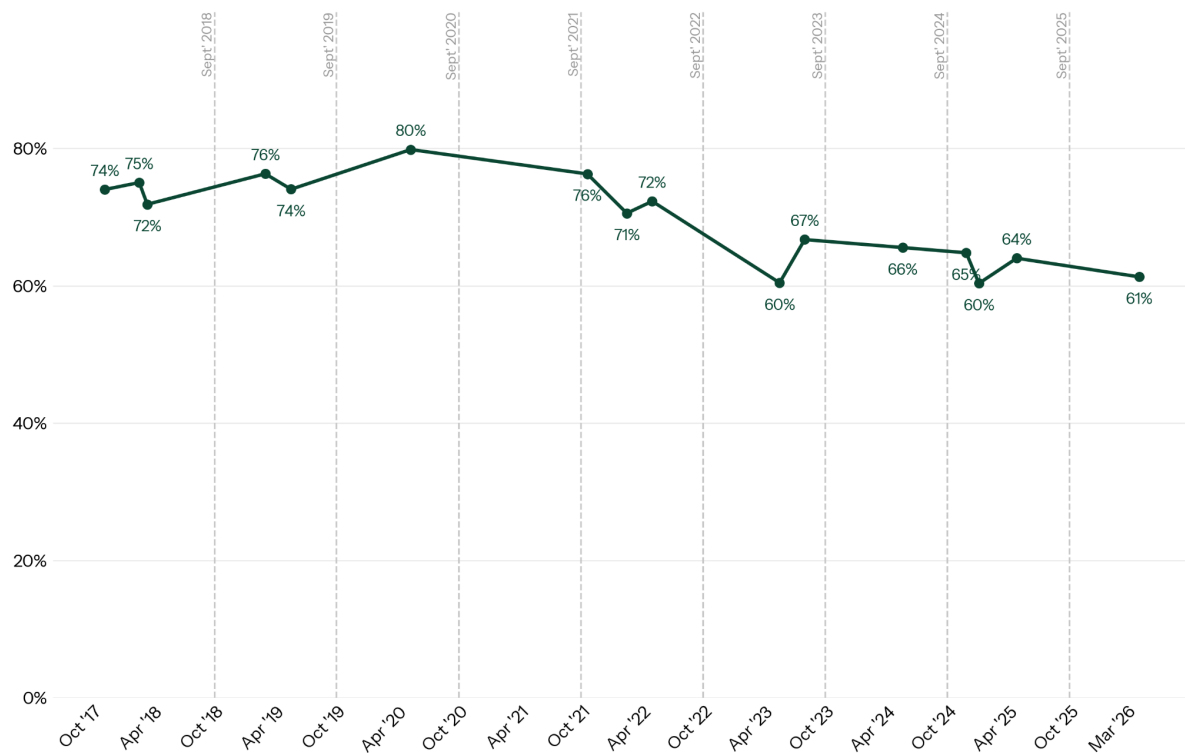
Since 2017, Teacher Tapp has regularly asked teachers whether they expect to remain in the profession over the next three years. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this figure was relatively stable at around 75%. Since 2022, it has settled at a markedly lower level, fluctuating between 60% and 65%. The most recent data, from March 2026, show 61% of teachers saying they expect to still be teaching in three years' time.

While this stabilisation is preferable to further decline, the gap between current and pre-pandemic levels reflects a lasting shift in how teachers view their long-term careers. On the push side, many teachers report that the challenges of managing pupil behaviour and the growing weight of pastoral responsibilities have intensified since the pandemic, making the day-to-day experience of teaching harder. On the pull side, the expansion of remote and flexible working in other sectors has made alternative careers more attractive, particularly for those who find the rigid structure of the school day difficult to reconcile with their personal circumstances (we know that 4-in-10 teachers find work-from-home contracts in other

professions very attractive). Together, these factors appear to have permanently lowered the baseline level of commitment to the profession, even as the immediate post-pandemic turbulence has subsided.

This creates a latent risk for the profession. Currently, a weak wider labour market appears to be suppressing teacher turnover, but if and when economic conditions improve and opportunities outside teaching increase, the combination of low commitment and pent-up desire to leave could trigger a sharp rise in departures, precisely when schools may also be adjusting to new demographic realities.

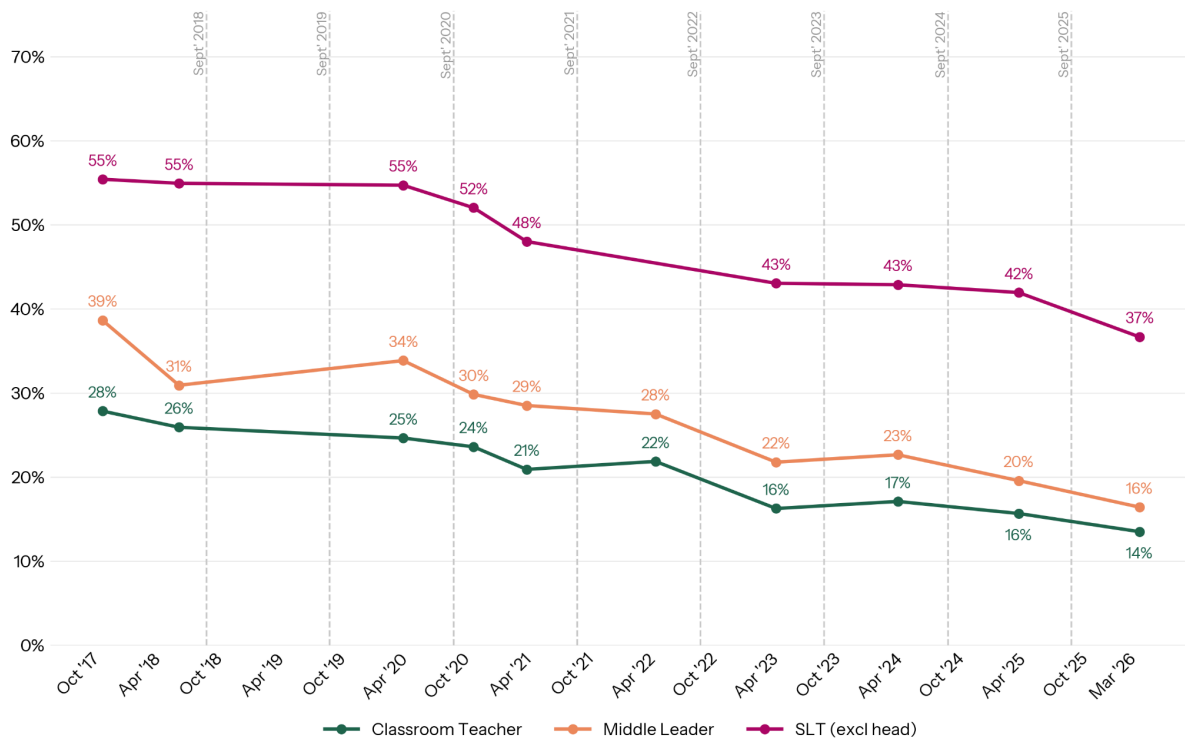
Long-term commitment to teaching remains below pre-pandemic levels



Question asked: "Do you expect to be a teacher in three years' time?" (Those who responded, "Yes, most likely")

A related concern is the declining appetite among teachers at all levels for taking on headship. As shown in the chart below, the proportion of teachers who say they would like to become a headteacher one day has fallen steadily across all seniority groups since we began tracking this question in 2017. The most significant trend is among deputy and assistant headteachers, i.e. the group from whom the next generation of headteachers will be drawn. Just 37% of these senior leaders now express an aspiration to headship, down from 55% in 2017. If this trend continues, schools will face growing difficulty in filling headteacher posts in the years ahead, with potential consequences for school leadership capacity across the system.

Fewer than four in ten senior leaders aspire to headship

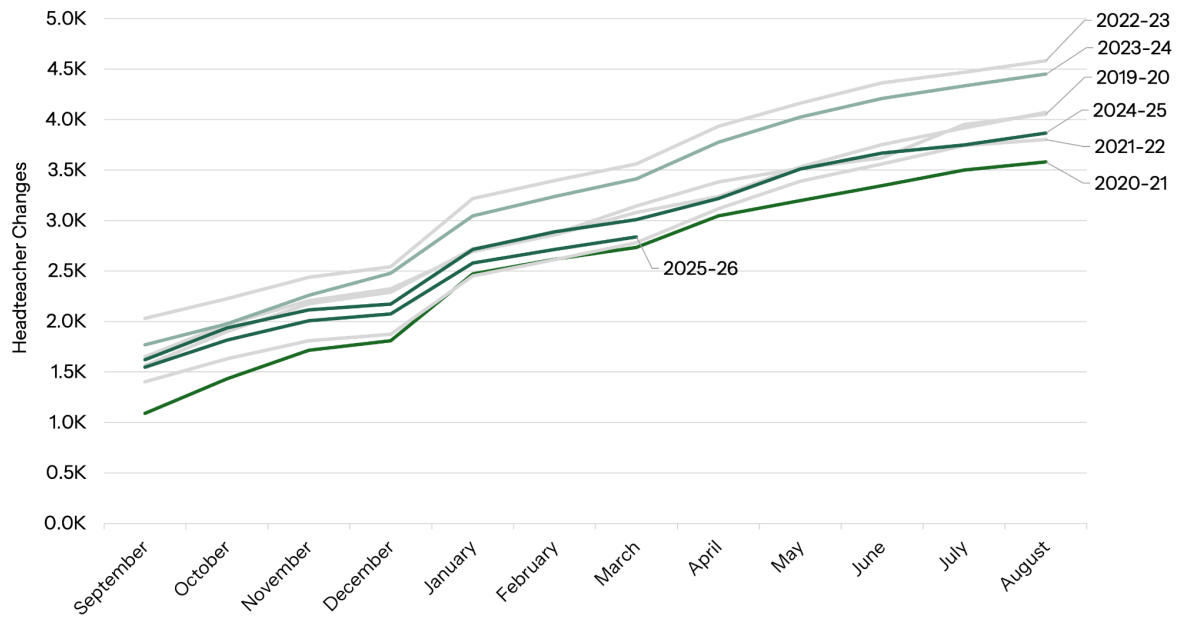


Question asked: "Would you like to be a headteacher yourself one day?" (Those who responded, "Yes, definitely" or "Yes, perhaps")

We draw on Department for Education records to track changes in headteacher appointments across the academic year. SchoolDash monitors whether the named headteacher at each school has changed, providing a direct measure of headteacher turnover that complements the survey and job advertisement data presented elsewhere in this report.

As shown in the chart below, the cumulative number of headteacher changes in 2025/26 is tracking below every recent year except 2020/21, when the pandemic suppressed almost all staff movement. While we do not show the phase-level breakdown here, the decline appears to be driven primarily by the secondary sector, where headteacher changes are particularly low. In the primary phase, turnover looks more typical. This pattern is consistent with the broader trends identified in this report: the secondary phase is experiencing the most pronounced contraction in its labour market movements.

Headteacher changes in 2025/26 are tracking below recent years



Notes on data and methodology

The SchoolDash job advertisements

The websites of all secondary schools, sixth-form colleges and further-education colleges in England were indexed each weekday night and compared to the previous day in order to detect new advertised teaching positions, excluding trainee and apprenticeship positions. This process does not capture all relevant vacancies because: (a) not all positions are advertised on school or college websites, (b) even when they are, they are not necessarily presented in a way that can be automatically indexed, and (c) websites are sometimes unresponsive or otherwise unavailable. For this reason, the data presented should be thought of as being based not on a comprehensive list of all vacancies but on a subset. However, positions were detected for well over 90% of schools and colleges, and these are broadly representative of the overall population of schools.

The Teacher Tapp panel

The Teacher Tapp survey panel comprises teachers across the state and private sectors in England who download a mobile app, provide valid teacher credentials and allow it to notify them of new questions at 3:30pm. Teachers are recruited to the panel via social and traditional media, promotion at CPD events, and via word of mouth in schools.

Calculation of Teacher Tapp panel weights

We apply post-stratification weights to the Teacher Tapp panel responses to ensure they reflect the demographic characteristics of teachers in England, using the following procedure:

1. We drop the results of all users who've declared they're not a teacher and results for teachers who have not provided us with valid information for: teaching phase; school funding; seniority/job post; gender; age; and school type (requiring users to answer questions on at least 7 days). These are the characteristics that allow us to match the users against the population in the School Workforce Census and Independent Schools Census.
2. We calculate population shares in census data for 24 groupings of teachers who are allocated according to their phase, funding, gender, age and job post.
3. We calculate sample shares in the Teacher Tapp valid responses for each question, which yields sample weights as the ratio of population to sample share.

Survey questions asked

Teacher Tapp main teacher job market activity questions

Question Text	Target (if any)	Date	Number of responses
Are there any classes in your school that are currently being regularly taught by agency/supply teachers, TAs or HLTAs, or teachers on very short-term contracts?	Primary	22/03/2026	3,693
Inability to recruit suitably qualified staff affects the quality of education we can provide at our school		22/03/2026	9,673
Which of the following have you *disliked* about your timetable this year?	Secondary	28/03/2026	5,839
Who takes over your class during your PPA time?	Primary	28/03/2026	3,626
My department or faculty is currently well staffed with suitably qualified teachers	Secondary	28/03/2026	5,867
My school is currently well staffed with suitably qualified teachers	Primary	28/03/2026	3,633
Do you expect to be a teacher in three years' time?		28/03/2026	9,512
Would you like to be a headteacher yourself one day?		21/03/2026	8,888
Has your department already advertised for any jobs this season?	Secondary	03/04/2026	5,869
Has your school already advertised for any jobs this season?	Primary	03/04/2026	3,682
Has anyone in your department/faculty given notice that they intend to leave this summer?	Secondary	03/04/2026	5,881
Has anyone in your school given notice that they intend to leave this summer?	Primary	03/04/2026	3,686
How likely is it that you will leave your school at the end of this academic year?		26/12/2025	10,160



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