



National Audit Office

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## **Report**

by the Comptroller  
and Auditor General

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## **Department for Education**

# Retaining and developing the teaching workforce

## Key facts

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**457,300**

teachers in state-funded schools in England in November 2016

**£21bn**

spent annually by state-funded schools on teaching staff

**£35.7m**

our estimate of the Department for Education's spending on programmes to retain and develop the teaching workforce in 2016-17

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**26,000** increase in the number of primary and nursery school teachers between November 2010 and November 2016 (13.2% increase)

**10,800** fall in the number of secondary school teachers between November 2010 and November 2016 (4.9% decrease)

**14,200** number of qualified teachers returning to state-funded schools in 2016 (representing around a third of total qualified entrants)

**34,910** number of qualified teachers leaving for reasons other than retirement in 2016

**85%** of secondary school leaders surveyed considered that they did not receive sufficient support from the Department for Education to retain high-quality teachers

**52%** of secondary school vacancies in 2015/16 were filled by teachers with the experience and expertise required, according to our survey of school leaders

**82%** of secondary school pupils in 2016 were in schools where Ofsted rated the quality of teaching, learning and assessment as outstanding or good

**97%** of school leaders surveyed considered that cost was a barrier to improving the quality of their teaching workforce

Teacher numbers are reported as full-time equivalents.

In this report, dates in the format '20xx-yy' refer to central or local government financial years (1 April to 31 March). Maintained schools report their finances in financial years. Dates in the format '20xx/yy' refer to academic years (1 September to 31 August). Academies report their finances in academic years.

# Summary

**1** At November 2016 some 457,300 teachers worked in the state-funded sector in England, mainly in primary and secondary schools (**Figure 1** overleaf). The teaching workforce had grown slightly since November 2015, with 1,000 more qualified teachers joining than leaving during the year.

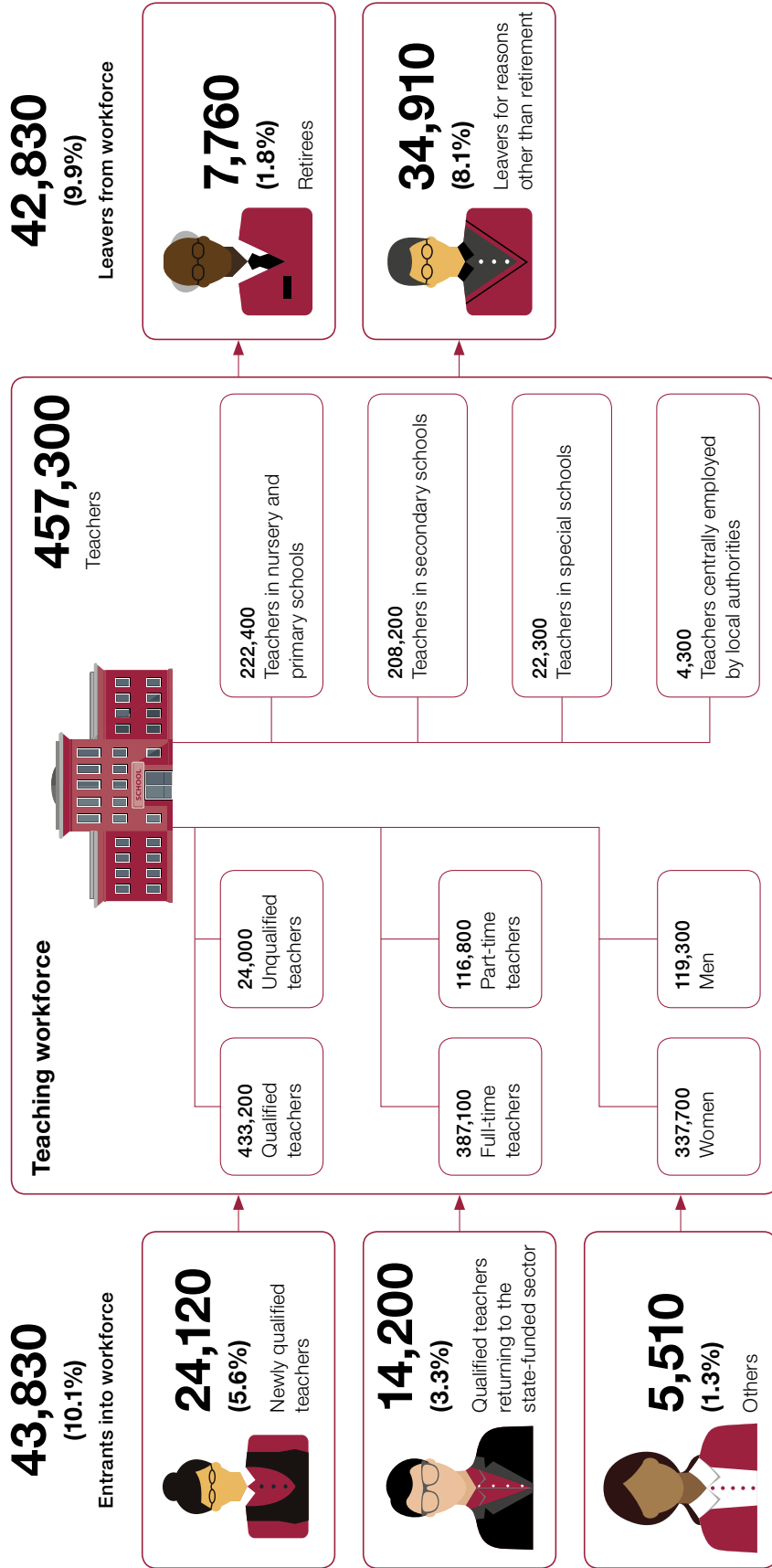
**2** There are approximately 21,900 state-funded schools in England, which educate 8.1 million pupils aged up to 19. The school-age population has been growing, increasing the need for teachers. The number of pupils of primary and nursery age in state-funded schools increased by 598,000 (14.6%) between January 2011 and January 2017. This larger number of pupils is now moving from primary to secondary education. After a reduction between 2011 and 2015, the number of pupils of secondary school age has since begun to increase and is forecast to rise by 540,000 (19.4%) between 2017 and 2025.

**3** The Department for Education (the Department) is accountable for securing value for money from spending on education services. It distributes funding to schools using formulae set by local authorities. Schools spend around £21 billion a year on teaching staff, more than half of their total spending. As employers, schools play a crucial role in retaining and developing teachers. Local authorities are responsible for supporting maintained schools, and multi-academy trusts play a similar role in the academies sector.

**4** Schools are managing their teaching workforce within an increasingly challenging context. Although the overall schools budget was protected in real terms following the 2015 Spending Review, average funding per pupil was not due to increase in line with inflation. To deal with this, and meet cost pressures outside their control, the Department expected schools to make significant efficiency savings, including £1.7 billion a year by 2019-20 by using staff more efficiently. In July 2017 the Department announced additional funding of £1.3 billion for the core schools budget over two years, 2018-19 and 2019-20. It has not yet revised its estimates of the savings that schools will need to make.

**5** Successive governments have aimed to improve the quality of education and teaching. The Department set out its ambitions for the teaching workforce in its March 2016 white paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*. It wants to see “great teachers everywhere they are needed”. It has a range of initiatives aimed at improving the quality of teachers, supporting the retention of teachers and ensuring that teachers are deployed where they are needed most. We estimate that the Department spent £35.7 million on these activities in 2016-17.

**Figure 1** Flows into and out of the state-funded teaching workforce in 2016



**Notes**

- 1 Full- and part-time teachers are shown as headcount, with all other figures shown as full-time equivalents.
- 2 Entrants and leavers are qualified teachers only for the year November 2015 to November 2016, also expressed as a percentage of the qualified teaching workforce.
- 3 Teaching workforce figures are as at November 2016.
- 4 Numbers for primary schools include teachers in maintained nursery schools, who totalled 1,200 at November 2016.
- 5 Other entrants include qualified teachers from overseas and trainees who deferred entering the state-funded sector.
- 6 Figures exclude teaching assistants, who are outside the scope of this report.
- 7 The components of the teaching workforce, and the flows into and out of the workforce, may not sum to the total due to rounding or, for example, the exclusion of serving teachers who died during the year.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Department for Education 2016 school workforce census data

## Focus of our report

**6** The Department considers that the quality of teaching is more important to pupil outcomes than anything else a school can control. Having enough high-quality teachers is essential to the effective operation of the school system.

**7** We reported in 2016 on whether the Department was achieving value for money through its arrangements to train new teachers.<sup>1</sup> We concluded that the Department had missed its recruitment targets for new trainee teachers for the past four years and that there were signs that teacher shortages were growing.

**8** This report focuses on the Department's arrangements to develop and retain the existing teaching workforce. These arrangements would be working optimally if there were enough teachers of the right quality in the right places, and if this was being achieved in a cost-effective way. For example, it is likely to be more effective and cheaper for the taxpayer to encourage existing teachers to stay in the profession, provided they are performing well, than it would be to train new teachers.

**9** This report examines whether the Department is effectively supporting the schools sector to retain and develop the teaching workforce. We assessed:

- the teaching workforce and the Department's approach (Part One);
- retention, recruitment of former teachers and deployment (Part Two); and
- teacher quality (Part Three).

**10** We set out our audit approach in Appendix One and our evidence base in Appendix Two.

<sup>1</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General, *Training new teachers*, Session 2016-17, HC 798, National Audit Office, February 2016.

## Key findings

The teaching workforce and the Department's approach

**11 The teaching workforce has grown in recent years, but secondary schools face significant challenges to keep pace with rising pupil numbers.** Overall, the number of full-time equivalent teachers in state-funded schools increased by 15,500 (3.5%) between 2010 and 2016. However, this masks a reduction in the number of teachers in secondary schools, which fell by 10,800 (4.9%) between 2010 and 2016. In all regions of England, a larger proportion of secondary than primary schools reported at least one teacher vacancy during the same period. Primary pupil-teacher ratios remained fairly constant at around 20.5:1 between 2011 and 2015 with a slight increase to 20.6:1 in 2016, despite the rise in the number of pupils. Secondary pupil-teacher ratios rose from 14.9:1 in 2011 to 15.6:1 in 2016. The Department's default scenario from the teacher supply model assumes that these ratios will continue to rise. This may mean larger classes or more contact time for teachers in secondary schools (paragraphs 1.2 to 1.4 and 2.24).

**12 The Department has not set out in a coherent way and shared with schools and the teaching profession how they can work together to improve the teaching workforce.** Since its 2016 white paper, the Department has been developing its approach to focus on improving social mobility, helping schools to build capacity and supporting teaching as a profession. It is providing funding of up to £5 million over four years to help establish the Chartered College of Teaching as an independent professional body for teachers. The Department expects schools to take the lead in developing and retaining their teachers. However, it has not brought together and communicated its aims and initiatives in a coherent way that is integrated with its financial health and efficiency programme. To help make the necessary efficiency savings, schools may increase teachers' contact time and require senior staff to do more teaching. These steps risk increasing teachers' workload with implications for recruitment and retention (paragraphs 1.6 to 1.13).

**13 The Department's interventions to support the existing teaching workforce have been relatively small scale.** We estimate that the Department spent a total of £35.7 million in 2016-17 on its various programmes. This included £91,000 on workload and pupil behaviour interventions, aimed at improving teacher retention. The Department also spent an estimated £34.2 million in 2016-17 on programmes aimed at improving teacher quality. It plans to increase spending significantly to around £70 million on average each year between 2017-18 and 2019-20, including on new programmes such as the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund. These amounts are small compared with the £555 million that central government spent on training and supporting new teachers in 2013/14. In our survey, 74% of primary school leaders and 85% of secondary school leaders disagreed that the Department provides schools with sufficient support to retain teachers (paragraphs 1.20, 1.21, 2.12, 2.21 and 3.14).

**14 The Department has limited evidence that its initiatives to retain and develop the teaching workforce are making a difference.** The Department found in 2015 that its longest-established programme – teaching schools, which lead alliances of schools offering training and support to each other – was having positive effects, particularly in improving collaboration between schools. However, its evaluation also found that teaching schools had not had a measurable impact on pupil outcomes. In general, the Department has not set out clearly the improvement in outcomes it expects from its initiatives, which it could use to help evaluate impact. The impact of the Department’s initiatives depends on schools and teachers engaging with them. Our survey of school leaders found that levels of awareness and engagement varied widely across the different programmes (paragraphs 2.13 and 3.15 to 3.18).

#### Retention, recruitment of returning teachers and deployment

**15 Teachers are increasingly leaving state-funded schools before they reach retirement.** The number of qualified teachers leaving state-funded schools increased by 0.6 percentage points from 9.3% of the qualified workforce in 2011 (39,370 full-time equivalent teachers) to 9.9% of the qualified workforce in 2016 (42,830). This was lower than the Department’s forecast of 47,360 leavers in 2015/16. The number of qualified teachers retiring fell by 1.5 percentage points between 2011 and 2016, but the number leaving for other reasons increased by 2.1 percentage points over the same period. This meant that 34,910 full-time equivalent teachers left before retirement in 2016. The National Foundation for Educational Research reported in November 2015 that just over half of teachers who leave remain within the schools sector. The Department has undertaken a survey to collect information on why teachers have left and expects the results to be available in autumn 2017 (paragraphs 2.3 to 2.7).

**16 Workload is a significant barrier to teacher retention.** Our survey of school leaders found that workload is the most important factor in retaining teachers: 67% of respondents reported that workload is a barrier to retention. To help tackle teachers’ workload, in March 2016 the Department published reports from three independent groups on marking practices, lesson planning and use of resources, and data management. Our survey found that 81% of school leaders are aware of this guidance but only 44% are engaged with it. The Department has also committed to carry out a survey every two years to track teachers’ workload. The baseline survey, published in February 2017, found that classroom teachers and middle leaders worked 54.4 hours on average, during the reference week in March 2016, including the weekend. The Department published an action plan in light of the survey, including offering grants to groups of schools to conduct workload reviews, but has not set out how it expects teacher workload to change (paragraphs 2.8 and 2.13).

**17 Schools are finding it increasingly difficult to fill posts with the quality of teachers they need, which may have implications for the quality of education.**

Overall, the number of reported teacher vacancies has increased but remains low as a proportion of the total workforce. In 2016 schools reported that they had 4,200 vacancies and posts filled temporarily (1.2%), compared with 2,170 (0.6%) in 2010. The proportion of secondary schools reporting at least one teacher vacancy rose from 15.9% in 2010 to 23.0% in 2015; for primary schools, the proportion rose from 4.2% to 6.9% over the same period. Our survey found that schools filled only around half of their vacant posts during 2015/16 with qualified teachers with the experience and expertise required. Schools generally filled the remainder with less experienced teachers, or with teachers with different subject specialisms. However, in around one-tenth of cases, schools did not fill the vacancy at all (paragraphs 2.23 and 2.24).

**18 A greater number of qualified teachers are returning to state-funded schools, and the Department and schools have scope to attract back even more teachers who have left and benefit from the investment made in their training.**

In 2016, 14,200 full-time equivalent teachers returned to work in state-funded schools, an increase of 1,110 on 2011. There is a large pool of trained teachers who are not currently working in state-funded schools. The Department's most recent data show that 243,900 qualified former teachers aged under 60 were not in teaching at the end of 2015, 63% of whom had worked in the previous 10 years. Our survey found, however, that nearly 90% of school leaders had not employed anyone returning to teaching in 2015/16. Schools may prefer to take on newly qualified teachers, for example because they are cheaper or have up-to-date curriculum knowledge. Schools may also not offer the flexible working conditions that some returning teachers seek. The Department's first return-to-work pilot project recruited 428 returning teachers, just over half of the target of 810 (paragraphs 2.17 to 2.21).

**19 There are local variations in teacher supply, and the Department and schools do not have mechanisms to make sure that teachers are available where they are most needed.** In 2015, the North East had the lowest proportion of schools reporting at least one vacancy (16.4% of secondary schools). The highest proportions of secondary schools reporting at least one vacancy were in outer London (30.4%), the South East (26.4%) and the East of England (25.3%). The Department cancelled its main programme to improve deployment, the National Teaching Service, in December 2016 following a pilot project in the North West. The pilot placed only 24 teachers in schools against a target of 100. The Department concluded that it is challenging to encourage teachers to relocate, although it also recognised that it had not planned the pilot well. It also continues to have limited information on local teacher supply and the factors that affect it. The Department is developing ways to improve its knowledge of the local demand for, and supply of, teachers, but this work is at an early stage (paragraphs 2.26 to 2.33).



## Teacher quality

**20 A greater number of pupils are in schools where Ofsted has rated the quality of teaching, learning and assessment as good or outstanding, but there is considerable regional variation.** Measuring teacher quality is not straightforward and it is particularly difficult to assess quality in terms of educational outcomes. The Department uses proxy indicators to measure quality, including Ofsted ratings. In 2016, 90% of primary pupils and 82% of secondary pupils were in schools where Ofsted rated the quality of teaching, learning and assessment as outstanding or good. This compared with 68% and 67% respectively in 2010. However, in 2016 the proportion of pupils in secondary schools where Ofsted rated the teaching, learning and assessment as requires improvement or inadequate varied from 9% in London to 26% in Yorkshire and the Humber. The proportion of pupils in secondary schools rated as inadequate increased with deprivation (paragraphs 3.3 to 3.8).

**21 The available data suggest that teachers are undertaking relatively low levels of training and development, with schools reporting that time and cost are barriers to improving teacher quality.** Unlike many other professions, teaching does not set and regulate continuing professional development requirements. The Department has published guidance but schools do not have to follow it and there are no minimum expectations for teachers' continuing professional development. The Education Policy Institute reported that, on average, teachers in England spent four days a year on continuing professional development in 2013, compared with an average of 10.5 days across the 36 countries covered by its analysis. In our survey, at least 94% of school leaders said that time and cost are barriers to improving the quality of their teaching workforce. The need for schools to make significant workforce efficiency savings is likely to make it more difficult for them to support teachers' development. Schools also struggle with finding training of the right quality, with no regulation of the wide range of external providers (paragraphs 3.9 to 3.13).

## Conclusion on value for money

**22** Having enough high-quality teachers in the right places is crucial to the success of the school system and to securing value for money for the £21 billion that schools spend on their teaching workforce. Performance against national indicators suggests progress: the overall teaching workforce has been growing and more children are in schools where Ofsted has rated teaching, learning and assessment as good or outstanding. These indicators, however, mask significant variation between schools and concerning trends, especially in secondary schools. Schools are facing real challenges in retaining and developing their teachers, particularly when they are also expected to make significant savings by using staff more efficiently. Without a clear and practical integrated workforce and financial approach, supported by good evidence and school engagement, there is a risk that the pressure on teachers will grow, with implications for the sustainability of the workforce.

**23** Developments, such as the Chartered College of Teaching, are promising but are at an early stage. The college will need ongoing support from the Department and the schools sector if it is to help address the issues we have identified. The Department still lacks data on local patterns of demand and supply and cannot demonstrate that its interventions are having a positive impact on teacher retention, deployment and quality. Overall, the Department cannot be assured that schools and the teaching profession are implementing its policy intent and we cannot conclude that it is achieving value for money.

## **Recommendations**

- a The Department should set out, and communicate to schools and other bodies in the sector, its approach to improving teacher retention, deployment and quality.** This should include: details of its various programmes and the funding available; what outcomes it is aiming to achieve and by when, and how progress will be measured; and its assessment of how schools can retain and develop their teachers at the same time as making significant workforce efficiency savings.
- b The Department should set out clear measures of success and plans for evaluating its various programmes,** including impact and outcome indicators.
- c The Department should use the information it is developing on local teacher demand and supply to determine how best to support schools or to intervene in the market.**
- d The Department should work with the schools sector to understand better why more teachers are leaving before retirement and how to attract more former teachers back to the profession.** It should, for example, work with the sector on how to implement flexible working or provide refresher training to former teachers looking to return.
- e The Department should work with, and support, the Chartered College of Teaching, teaching schools and others in the schools sector to develop clearer expectations for teachers' continuing professional development.** This should form part of its work with the college and others to support teaching as a profession.
- f The Department should, as a matter of routine, explicitly assess the workforce implications for schools of all key policy changes and guidance, in particular the impact on teachers' workload.** It should also consider the cumulative impact on schools and teachers of changes initiated by central government.
- g The Department should undertake the work we and the Committee of Public Accounts recommended in 2016 to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of its spending on supporting the serving workforce,** set against its investment in training new teachers.