Cultures that care: a retention toolkit for schools

Education Support

Teacher retention is an ongoing challenge across the UK. In England, 1 in 11 qualified teachers left the state school system in 2023—2024.

Why retention matters

High staff turnover impacts:

- Teaching quality
- Social equity and opportunity
- Productivity and school performance
- Value for money, including recruitment and training costs

All of these ultimately affect the outcomes and wellbeing of children and young people.

Our latest **Teacher Wellbeing Index** shows that 1 in 4 teachers and education staff have considered leaving due to pressures on their mental health and wellbeing. Strengthening workplace wellbeing is therefore essential to improving retention.

What schools can do

Alongside urgent action needed from Government to support teacher retention, there are evidence-based actionable steps schools can take to reduce staff attrition.

Research supported by the **Wellbeing Research Centre** at the University of Oxford identifies key drivers of workplace wellbeing and demonstrates that by improving these drivers, we can improve recruitment, retention and performance across schools. These drivers are evolving over time - see the latest version here.

1 in 4

teachers and education staff have actively sought to leave their job due to pressures on their mental health and wellbeing

Recommendations and resources

To explore the evidence and our recommendations, see our paper **Revisiting the teacher retention crisis: recommendations for change**

This free toolkit brings together actionable recommendations and resources aligned to the key drivers of workplace wellbeing. It's designed to help school leaders create positive cultures where staff feel supported, stay longer, and thrive.

Revisiting the teacher retention crisis: recommendations for change

Autumn 2025

Education Support
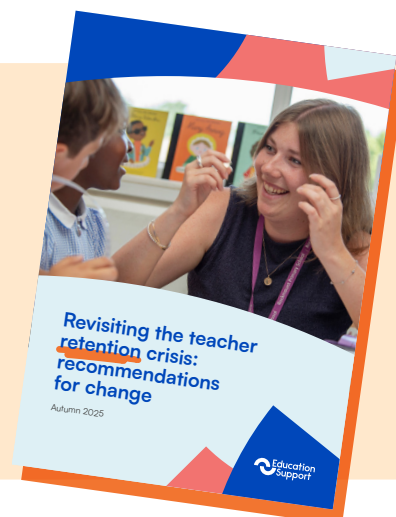
Drivers of workplace wellbeing

Support

Recommendations:

- Promote and facilitate collaborative working practices
- Balance teacher agency and organisational efficiency in planning and/or team-teaching approaches
- Support and enhance professional autonomy
- Provide access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or other emotional support

Resources:

Develop a staff mental health and wellbeing plan: Staff who feel supported are less stressed, more effective and more likely to stay in their roles. Developing a staff mental health and wellbeing plan is a great place to start to show your commitment to prioritising the wellbeing of your staff.

Download helpline poster: You can also share our helpline poster with all staff. Our emotional support helpline is available to all staff, 24/7, 7 days a week.

Learning

Recommendations:

- Encourage and support a culture of continuous professional learning, supporting teachers to improve, not prove, themselves
- Invest in relational skill development
- Support bespoke development strategies for individuals

Resource:

Access our e-learning tool. When leaders and managers have access to learning and reflection opportunities it has wide-ranging benefits, to both them and their teams. Our e-learning tool provides a range of techniques to support personal and peer reflective practice.

Appreciation

Recommendation:

- Engage staff to co-produce whole-school appreciation practices

Resource:

Watch our staff appreciation video: Showing genuine appreciation to staff in your school has a powerful impact on wellbeing at work. Our Director of Programmes and Services, Faye McGuinness, talks about how schools can show they appreciate their staff.

Flexibility

Recommendations:

- Be open to exploring ways of implementing flexible working
- Experiment with and evaluate flexible working options
- Ensure transition between full and part-time contracts is straightforward

Resource:

Download our guide on flexible working for information on how schools can implement flexible working and real-life case study examples.

Inclusion & belonging

Recommendations:

- Be explicit about inclusion in the school culture
- Ensure staff and student voice is regularly heard
- Promote respect, civility, openness and collegiality practices

Resource:

Do a 5-minute Psychological Safety Audit as a team. The desire to feel a sense of belonging is a fundamental human experience. A great first step toward fostering a more inclusive and supportive team environment is by doing our 5-minute Psychological Safety Audit as a team.

Management

Recommendations:

- Review workload practices at least annually
- Enquire and understand what matters for staff retention locally
- Ensure that the journey to management and leadership responsibilities is well-paced with proper support and training
- Line management training (including relational skills) for middle leaders to enable more engaged relationships

Resource:

Share our resource on wellbeing conversations with your teams. Do your line managers have the skills they need to support colleagues and themselves? Line management is an important skill that needs to be invested in and supported. Share our resource on how they can bring wellbeing into the everyday to support your team.

Stress

Recommendations:

- Ensure PPA time is respected and not routinely compromised
- Promote reflective practice for leaders
- Implement consistent, positive school discipline practices

Resources:

Take a look at our guide on how to develop a Stress Risk Assessment to reduce the risk of stres to yourself and your colleagues and create a healthy school environment.

Sign up to access fully funded professional supervision for school and college leaders in England.

Trust

Recommendations:

- Increase staff involvement in decision-making
- Regular, transparent internal communications
- Adopt high challenge/low stakes internal performance improvement approaches

Resource:

Read this article about vulnerability and how it is one of the most crucial attributes for good leadership and how it can help you to build trust and inspire your teams.

Purpose

Recommendations:

- Intentionally curate opportunities for staff to reconnect with their sense of purpose
- Clearly articulate how school aims align with local community context

Resource:

Try this reflective exercise to reconnect with your 'why' in education. Taking time to reflect on your day, practice and reactions can help you reclaim the joy in teaching.

Energy

Recommendations:

- Directly challenge presenteeism
- Role model, encourage and support healthy work-life balance
- Continue to prioritise and deprioritise work to minimise overwork

Resource:

Take a look at our tips on setting boundaries for better work-life balance. The more energised you are, the more engaged, effective and happy you feel at work. All education staff should be supported to protect their energy and take meaningful breaks.

Achievement

Recommendations:

- Celebrate good news, regularly
- Involve and engage staff in setting school development goals

Resource:

Try our reflective exercise at the end of each term to help remind you of the difference you make. Feeling a sense of achievement helps to keep people connected to their sense of purpose and motivation. When was the last time you reflected on your achievements, skill and dedication?

Sources:

- Cunningham, S., Fleming, W., Regier, C., Kaats, M., and De Neve, J. (2024). "Work Wellbeing Playbook: A Systematic Review of Evidence-Based Interventions to Improve Employee Wellbeing". Work Wellbeing Movement.
- School workforce in England data: explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england/2024

Professional supervision

Culture and retention work is demanding. To lead well, you need to stay well. Sign up for our fully funded professional supervision to create space for your own wellbeing.

Download our helpline poster to share with staff.

Our emotional support helpline is available to all education staff, 24/7. **08000 562 561**

Need to talk? You're not alone.

Call us. We'll listen.
08000 562 561
educationsupport.org.uk/helpline

Education Support

educationsupport.org.uk