Inquiry into 'The Loss of the Love of Learning'

Findings from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education's Call for Evidence and Roundtables

Contents

Foreword: Steve Witherden, MP

The Education APPG is a group of MPs and Peers who believe in the power of education to change lives and our country for the better.

I'm delighted to present the findings from the group's inquiry into the loss of the love of learning. Through this inquiry, we have heard from pupils, teachers, schools, parents and range of experts from across the sector. In particular, our conversations with pupils were impressively candid about the life of a pupil today.

The report does not mark the end of the APPG's interest in this area. Through our findings we have found a number of complex societal and structural challenges which all contribute to a decline in pupils love of learning. The work of the APPG over the course of this Parliament will seek to delve further into these challenges to understand how we can reverse the decline and create a system which inspires pupils and excites teachers.

Now more than ever we need to focus on creating an education system which serves all learners in their pursuit of skills and knowledge. For too long, our sector has been forced to pursue a narrow set of goals often at the expense of pupils in some of our most disadvantaged communities.

I am very grateful to the teachers, schools and stakeholders from across the sector who provided invaluable insights to the APPG during the call for evidence and oral evidence sessions. I would also like to extend my thanks to my fellow officers of the APPG in both Houses of Parliament.

Finally, I would like to thank Ranelagh Communications for their support in organising the work of the APPG, the British Educational Suppliers Association in their support drafting the report and conducting supplementary research, and The Education Company for their support in recruiting pupils for our oral evidence sessions.

Module 1:
The Current Landscape of Engagement in Education

There are a variety of metrics which indicate a perceived decline in a love of learning in schools. Through our call for evidence and roundtable discussions we have identified several which will form the basis of our inquiry. However, it is important to acknowledge that some areas which we have chosen to include as part of this inquiry are based on anecdotal observations rather than measurable statistics.

One of the main issues in addressing engagement as an issue within schools is that there is currently no agreed measurable standard of school engagement. Many of the metrics referenced within this inquiry consider various stakeholders but falls short of synthesising this into a single metric.

Educational research organisation, ImpactEd, highlighted the importance of considering multi-stakeholder engagement as part of their extensive piece of research into student engagement. As part of their measurement of engagement they have suggested the TEP theory of engagement (Jerrim, 2025).

This theory defines engagement through three core dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural. Crucially, it applies to all members of the school community, recognising that pupil outcomes are shaped not only by individual effort but by the broader environment (Jerrim, 2025).

In the absence of an agreed measure of engagement we are reducing measurement of school success based upon the narrow measures of academic achievement. If the Department for Education agreed to measure engagement based on a broad array of indicators it would enable a more holistic approach to school improvement, one that extends beyond academic performance to include emotional support, community cohesion, and effective resource allocation.

Absenteeism

A wide range of submissions to the APPG inquiry indicate a worrying decline in students' and teachers' love of learning. One stark indicator is the ongoing attendance crisis in schools which was the most cited indicator as evidence of a decline in engagement in education by contributors to the call for evidence.

Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed) for 'Absence by geographic level' in England between 2006/07 and 2023/25
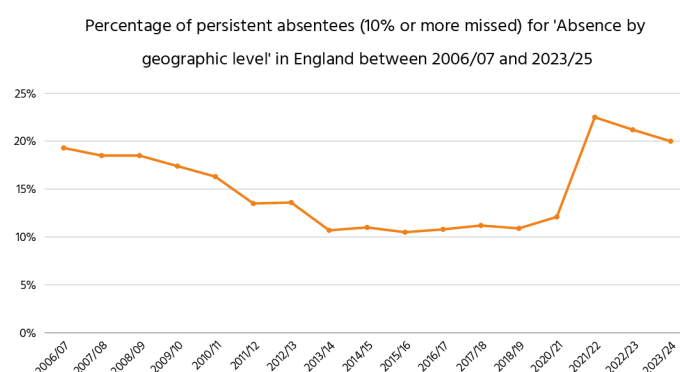
Figure 1: Department for Education

Research from ImpactEd shows that there is a strong link between engagement and attendance for pupils in England's secondary schools. Using their engagement metric, TEP, ImpactEd found that secondary pupils in the top 25% of engagement scores are 10 percentage points less likely to be persistently absent than those in the bottom 25% (Jerrim, 2025).

The same report found that there was a weaker link in primary schools compared to secondary schools, with only a 3-percentage point difference in attendance between the highest and lowest quarter percentile engagement. One explanation for this weaker link is that parents are more likely to assist their child in getting ready and taking them to school during this phase, even if the child themselves is disengaged.

Submissions also point to student self-reports of declining enjoyment. In the Department for Education's National Behaviour Survey 2022/23, only 11% of pupils reported that they had enjoyed coming to school "every day" in the past week, while 17% said that they had "never" enjoyed school.

A key trend observed from the previous years survey was that the percentage of pupils indicating that they enjoyed school every day had declined by 4%, suggesting a declining trend in daily school enjoyment. As one commentator observed, when nearly one in five children routinely dislikes school, "it should give us pause" about whether the system is meeting its fundamental purpose.

Home Education

Relatedly, the number of children being elective home educated (EHE) has increased. There are many reasons which a parent may opt for EHE including:

- Religious or cultural belief
- Special educational needs and disabilities
- Bullying
- Dissatisfaction with school
- Mental health

Education is a key public service and should be inclusive of all children, regardless of the setting in which they learn. While many parents rightly choose to electively home educate their children for a range of valid reasons, school environments can offer distinct opportunities for social development, such as regular peer interaction and participation in group-based activities, that may be less readily accessible in a home setting.

Therefore, it is also important to understand whether some of the factors contributing to a rise in home education are due to conditions created at school, and therefore, whether for some the decision to choose EHE is driven by a loss of a love of learning.

There is limited data available on the perceived rise in EHE. Whilst some Local Authorities do keep registers of the number of children in EHE, not all do. Furthermore, the Department for Education has only started to collect data on EHE from all Local Authorities since Summer 2024.
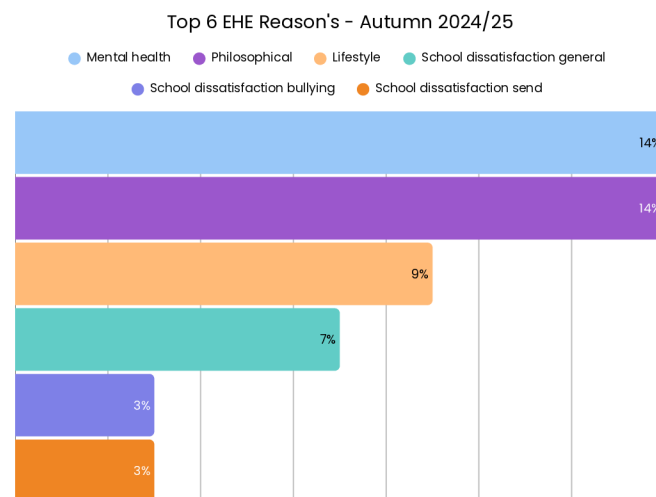
Figure 2: Department for Education

The most recent census records the number of children in EHE at 111,700, this is an increase on the DfE's estimated 92,000 children in EHE the previous year, representing a potential increase of 18%. The most cited reason that children were in EHE was due to mental health reasons (14%) tied with philosophical reasons (14%). (Department for Education, 2024)

Several contributions to the inquiry identified disengagement from mainstream schooling as a factor driving this trend.

For example, Speech and Language Link, who specialise in supporting speech, language, and communication needs, observed that parents frequently resort to EHE when schools fail to meet crucial requirements, such as ensuring pupil safety, adequately addressing mental health or special educational needs, or providing a sufficiently diverse curriculum. In such cases, EHE does not imply a lack of interest in education; rather, it often represents parents' determination to pursue their child's education beyond traditional barriers. Nevertheless, the rise in home education and absenteeism is widely regarded as symptomatic of systemic challenges in maintaining learner engagement.

Teacher Engagement

Teachers' engagement and morale appear to be under similar strain. The inquiry heard evidence of an ongoing workforce crisis: according to the National Foundation for Educational Research, teacher attrition remains high 9.6% of teachers left state-sector teaching in 2022/23, slightly above pre-pandemic rates. The report also found that over 90% of teachers had considered leaving the sector in the last 12 months. (McClean & Worth, 2025)

These findings aligned with contributions from Education Support (a teachers' wellbeing charity) that "social, structural and financial challenges" are making it hard for staff to feel they are making a difference, even if a significant majority (86%) still had a clear sense of purpose in their role (Education Support, 2024). In other words, many educators still want to inspire a love of learning, but excessive pressures are undermining their capacity to do so.

Indeed, multiple submissions described teachers on the brink of burnout, feeling "overworked and overextended" in an attempt to plug gaps and meet targets. Education Support's Teacher Wellbeing Index found that 70% of teachers experienced an increase in challenging interactions with parents, which negatively impacted their mental health (Education Support, 2024).

Such stressors contribute to teachers losing the "spark" that drew them to the profession. Low retention, in turn, feeds back into the student experience: staff turnover and shortages disrupt the continuity and relationships that help foster love of learning.

Behavioural Challenges

Another issue which may stem from a perceived decline in the loss of the love of learning is the rise in behaviour issues within schools.

Data from the DfE's National Behaviour Survey 2022/23 provides quantitative insight into behaviour on a national level. The survey found that the perceptions of behaviour has declined in both children and teachers.

Less than half of pupils (43%) indicated that behaviour in their school was good or very good, a slight decline on the previous years survey of 47%. The decline in positive perception was also observed among school leaders (from 90% to 82%) and teachers (from 64% to 55%) over the same period. Notably, secondary pupils consistently reported behaviour as substantially worse than their primary school peers. (Department for Education, 2023)

Coupled with a perceived rise in behavioural issues is an increased in disruption to learning. 76% of teachers in reported that misbehaviour stopped or interrupted a lesson in the past week - an increase from 64% in the previous year. The report estimates that an average of 7mins were lost due to misbehaviour for every 30mins of lesson time in May 2023, up from 6.3 minutes in June 2022. . (Department for Education, 2023)

The inquiry received multiple contributions during the call for evidence and roundtable discussions which highlighted the rise in behavioural issues as symptomatic of a lack of engagement in schools.

The Chartered College of Teaching for instance directly attributed, amongst other factors, the rise in behavioural issues as evidence of a decline in the love of learning. Another submission noted that "Teachers themselves link some of this misbehaviour to disengagement; they report that many children become restless or switched off when lessons focus narrowly on test content at the expense of interactive learning"

Behaviour can also be reflective of a pupil's attitude towards their peers and of teachers within the school community. This was highlighted by Rivers Multi-Academy Trust who said that "positive relationships are a key element of them wanting to engage in learning".

Conversely, a lack of consistent, caring relationships, particularly in secondary schools where students have multiple teachers, can lead to disengagement and behavioural problems, this perhaps somewhat reflects the large difference in behavioural issues between the Primary and Secondary sectors reflected the in the DfE's survey on.

Some contributors linked behavioural issues as having greatly increased following the COVID-19 pandemic. This is supported by Ofsted's research series into education recovery following the reopening of schools after the pandemic which found "Across the academic year, leaders said the pandemic had resulted in poorer behaviour among some pupils."

However, whilst many contributors acknowledged that behaviour had become worse since the pandemic, this was not the only reason cited through our roundtable discussions or call for evidence. During the inquiry's roundtable discussions with pupils, it was noted by pupils from both Primary and Secondary phases that the influence of harmful content spread by pupils was having a corrosive effect on cohesion within the school community.

Pupils identified that content shared on apps like and group chats as platforms where they could be "randomly added," spammed and told "to do really bad things," or exposed to "awful things" being discussed by strangers or people talking behind others' backs. The ability for bullies to "carry on bullying into the evening through devices, through mobile phones, through social media platforms" means that the respite from bullying that children might have once found at home is no longer guaranteed.

The National Behaviour Survey indicates that 26% of pupils being a victim of bullying for any reason in the last 12 months - an increase from 22% from the previous year. Among those bullied, the most common reason perceived reasons included their appearance (32% online), disability or special educational needs (14% online), and sexual orientation (14% online).

Parents of secondary-aged pupils (31%) were significantly more likely to report the bullying their child experienced online compared to primary aged pupils. (Department for Education, 2023)

Comparatively, children in England's schools experienced bullying much more frequently than other countries in the OECD. This study also found that children that were more exposed to bullying had lower average mathematics performance than those who reported less instances of bullying (Ingram, Stiff, Cadwallader, Lee, & Kayton, 2023). This indicates that exposure to bullying has a negative effect on a child's academic performance which may suggest reduced engagement in learning as a consequence of bullying.

When bullying occurs, it creates an environment where not all children feel they belong or are comfortable taking risks. It can erode trust and positive interactions among pupils which weaken their sense of inclusion within the school community and belonging. This can lead to increased anxiety and stress and at the worst create discomfort and fear which leads to disengagement from learning and increased absenteeism.

The Impact of Behaviour on Pupil-Teacher Relations

Bullying can have a corrosive effect on trust between teachers and pupils. Schools are responsible for ensuring that pupils learn within a safe environment though when poor behaviour occurs, it can undermine a pupil's belief in fairness and supportiveness of the school environment. This erosion, in turn, can have broader negative consequences for social cohesion and overall wellbeing.

The inquiry heard from the mental health charity YoungMinds that there was a strong link between the impact of punitive behavioural issues and teacher-pupil relationships. The charity found that the majority of young people who experienced these sanction said it had an impact on their mental health, with some saying it evoked negative feeling about themselves, and negatively impacted their relationship with their teachers.

Structural or Societal Factors: What is driving the decline?

Contributors identified a complex interplay of structural factors within education and broader societal challenges. On the structural side, many pointed to an overly narrow, high-pressure school environment as a primary culprit.

The Association of Colleges (AoC) emphasised that enjoyable learning is highly contextual, it flourishes when certain conditions are present (meaningful engagement, motivation, supportive relationships, a safe environment, time to explore). When these conditions are lacking, the result is "poor experiences" that erode any love of learning. AoC and others argued that the current system often fails to provide such conditions. Narrow curricula and teaching to the test were frequently mentioned. One former teacher, now education professional, observed that in some classrooms learning has become a "high-pressure sprint through content, rather than a journey of discovery", leaving little time for curiosity or joy.

Teachers are pressured to "cover everything" required by exams or inspections, at the expense of spontaneity, creativity and personal connection. During the inquiries roundtable discussions with representatives from the teaching sector noted that:

> *"A teacher told us that down the English corridor everyone follows the same PowerPoint and senior management go around saying 'are you on slide eight yet' because everyone has to be on the same slide at exactly the same time...children don't really work like that. [It's] very demoralising for the young people and the teachers that work with them" – APPG Teacher's Roundtable*

The excessive demand of tests and exams means that much of students' time is spent on exam content and revision, which can bore or stress them and crowd out enriching activities. The National Education Union (NEU) likewise found that over half of teachers feel the national curriculum is "crowding out" valuable activities, as excessive accountability and content coverage requirements turn lessons into tick-box exercises (Traianou, Stevenson, Pearce, & Brady, 2025).

In addition, accountability pressures and funding-driven constraints within schools were cited as structural factors harming engagement. The Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) highlighted how accountability measures since 2010 (league tables, the EBacc/Progress 8 focus on core academic subjects, Ofsted criteria, etc.) have narrowed the curriculum, squeezing out arts, creativity and "wider enrichment learning" that often ignite students' passions.

With limited space and budget for anything not deemed "core", many schools, especially in disadvantaged areas, have cut back opportunities like music, drama, or field trips. With over half of schools reportedly reducing trips/outings in recent years due to funding and time pressures. (The Sutton Trust, 2025)

The result is a thinner, more utilitarian educational diet that may improve test scores but fails to nourish a love of learning. Notably, the government's focus on Progress 8 subjects has led to a narrowing of disciplines offered, particularly harming creative and applied learning pathways.

Several respondents argued that when students cannot find subjects or activities that speak to their interests and talents, they become disengaged or "see no point" in school. This is especially true for students who are less academically inclined. As one parent put it, the exclusive focus on academic subjects "leaves lots of kids feeling incompetent" if their strengths lie elsewhere.

On the staffing side, excessive workload and "audit culture" in schools is a structural issue sapping teachers' love of their job. Education Support reported that an "audit culture" driven by perceptions of Ofsted creates a lot of "empty work" that is time-consuming, takes teachers away from actual teaching, and contributes to burnout. This was echoed by multiple teacher testimonies and during our teacher roundtables.

Teachers commonly work 50-60 hours per week (government data shows full-time teachers average 51.2 hours, and leaders 57.6 hours), (IFF Research and IOE; UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, 2025) well above the threshold the WHO considers a serious health hazard (World Health Organization, 2021).

Yet much of this effort is spent "feeding the beast" of accountability rather than engaging with students. A former Department for Education advisor, Sir Kevan Collins, cautioned that some teachers have "never been more 'enslaved'" told what to do down to the exact lesson slide resulting in shallow compliance, loss of professional fulfilment, and little room for the "joyful serendipity" that can spark learning when teachers and pupils pursue an unexpected question or interest (Norden, 2024).

Structural features like a high-stakes testing regime, a crowded curriculum, strict accountability metrics, and under-resourcing of enrichment all appear to be undermining the conditions that foster genuine engagement.

Societal Factors

At the same time, societal factors beyond the school gates are exacerbating the decline in the love of learning. A recurring point from the call for evidence is the impact of the mental health crisis among children and youth. Many parents now report that school has become a source of anxiety for their children, rather than enjoyment.

Indeed, anxiety is the most common reason parents cite for withdrawing children from school (see Figure 2).

The Association of Colleges noted that poor mental health (as well as physical ill-health) can severely impede a learner's engagement, a student consumed by anxiety or depression will struggle to find any learning enjoyable.

School-Home Support's research with Public First found a "seismic shift in parental attitudes" since COVID-19, with far fewer parents now believing it is essential for children to attend school every day (Burtonshaw & Dorrell, 2023). This suggests that many families, especially those whose children have anxiety or other vulnerabilities, are no longer confident that conventional schooling is in their child's best interest.

One submission remarked that schools are "hard places to work" right now in part because they are trying to compensate for these external social deficits: many schools find themselves providing mental health support, feeding children, and even buying clothes for students in need. While such whole-child support is laudable, it can stretch staff thin and lies largely outside their core responsibilities.

Through our roundtable sessions with pupils, the inquiry heard first-hand accounts of their experiences with school attendance. During a discussion with primary school pupils, one pupil openly described their experience of anxiety related to attending school.

> *"When I'm leaving my parents, it makes my anxiety go absolutely crazy... I don't want to [go to] school anymore" – Primary Pupil APPG Roundtable*

Economic hardship and poverty also play a major role. AoC underlined that students facing hunger, lack of sleep, or feeling unsafe "are less likely to engage" in learning. Schools in disadvantaged communities often serve children coping with multiple stressors such as poverty, unstable housing, caring responsibilities which can translate into irregular attendance, low concentration, or disruptive behaviour born out of unmet needs.

The "cost of living" crisis was noted as another drag on engagement, both directly (students without equipment, adequate nutrition, or internet access struggle to participate), and indirectly (family stress and financial anxiety spill over into children's wellbeing).

The lack of role models for lifelong learning in some communities was raised by adult education providers: the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) pointed out that persistent educational inequality means some children "may not see [in their family] role models who have positive experiences of learning".

If parents and grandparents had negative or limited schooling, a "culture of learning" may not exist in the home, dampening a child's initial curiosity. Indeed, WEA argued that the absence of a national lifelong learning strategy in England, combined with steep funding cuts to adult and community education, has sent a message that education is something you endure in youth and then abandon.

This policy gap contributes to a society in which learning is not widely valued or modelled across generations, potentially chilling young people's enthusiasm, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

Finally, several respondents mentioned the lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic itself. Beyond attendance declines, the pandemic disrupted routines and social development, and many students returned with elevated disengagement. This was identified by Ofsted which found that school leaders, in the wake of the reopening of schools, had noticed that a much higher proportion of children were not ready to transition to the next stage of education, had higher levels of mental health issues, and negative behaviour (Ofsted, 2022; Ofsted, 2022)

As School-Home Support observed, the attendance crisis is a "holistic issue" with roots in a myriad of challenges families face, many of which predate COVID, but were exacerbated by it.

Despite broad consensus that there is a serious problem, contributors to the inquiry stressed that not all is lost, the enthusiasm is still there, latent, and could be re-kindled if conditions improve.

Encouragingly, a number of positive initiatives were cited. The Government has begun acknowledging these issues. For example, the Department for Education's recent curriculum review interim report recognizes that "prioritising quality over quantity" in the curriculum could improve both understanding and enjoyment.

Schools themselves are experimenting with ways to boost engagement: some focus on creating a stronger "sense of belonging" for students, while others invest in additional pastoral staff or family support workers to bridge home and school.

Nevertheless, the evidence submitted to this inquiry makes clear that significant, systemic changes will be needed to reverse the current trajectory. The decline in the love of learning is real and multi-faceted, stemming from both within-school practices and wider societal currents. This sets the stage for deeper analysis in subsequent modules on how curriculum design, assessment, and teacher support can be reformed to re-engage students and inspire educators.

Challenges

- With no nationally agreed measure of student engagement, current evaluations of school success rely too heavily on academic outcomes, limiting our understanding of pupils' broader educational experience.

- Persistent absence remains significantly above pre-pandemic levels, with 1 in 5 pupils missing substantial time from school, a trend strongly linked to disengagement.

- Many parents choosing EHE cite mental health, SEND, or dissatisfaction with school, suggesting that for some, home education is a response to a loss of joy and security in traditional settings. More than half of teachers report rising rates of pupil disengagement, with increasing numbers of students appearing switched off from classroom learning.

- When teachers experience burnout and lose professional joy, the ripple effects reduce the consistency and quality of pupil relationships, which are key to fostering engagement.

- Behaviour in schools is worsening, particularly in secondary settings, with misbehaviour disrupting an estimated 7 minutes of every 30-minute lesson.

- Mental health difficulties among children are rising, and anxiety is now one of the most cited reasons for school refusal or withdrawal.

- Some families no longer see formal education as beneficial, especially when schools are perceived as sources of stress rather than support.
- Economic hardship contributes to low engagement through hunger, poor sleep, digital exclusion, and family stress, all of which hinder pupils' ability to participate fully in learning.

- A lack of intergenerational learning culture in some communities may dampen children's enthusiasm for education, particularly when few adult role models exist who value or enjoy learning.

- The pandemic has exacerbated many of these challenges, increasing disengagement, anxiety, and gaps in readiness for the next stages of learning.

Module 2:
Curriculum Design and Engagement

A dominant theme in the evidence is that the design of the curriculum itself has a profound impact on student engagement. Currently, many feel it is for worse. Numerous submissions described England's curriculum as overstuffed with content and overly rigid, leaving insufficient room for the kind of deep, exploratory learning that fosters a love of the subject.

As one curriculum-developer vividly put it, today's curriculum is often "a mile wide and an inch deep." In an effort to raise standards and "cover all bases," successive reforms have continually added content to the national curriculum and exam specifications "but rarely taken anything away." The result is a timetable "crammed with objectives, leaving limited room for digression or depth".

Experienced teachers worry that by trying to teach everything in the syllabus, they end up "inspiring nothing". Several concrete examples illustrate this overload: a secondary science teacher reported having no class time to demonstrate an experiment that might spark students' curiosity, because they must race through required theory; a primary teacher lamented having to rush her class through the Stone Age, Romans and Tudors all in one year, without the luxury to linger on a historical period that particularly captivated her pupils. Such frenetic pacing, driven by expansive curricula and high-stakes tests, can reduce lessons to checklists rather than meaningful explorations.

Indeed, 54% of primary teachers in one survey said that external tests like SATs exert significant influence on what is taught, essentially dictating the sequence and timing of lessons so that everything is covered by test day (Quick, 2024).

The National Literacy Trust has documented a decline not only in children's enjoyment of reading, but in their frequency of reading for pleasure, especially at secondary level (National Literacy Trust, 2024).

One likely reason, a submission argued, is that teenagers today have "every hour of their school day (and much of their homework time) earmarked" for one subject or another, leaving almost no unstructured time to read or pursue personal interests. By Year 11, many pupils come to see education as all pressure, no pleasure.

The issue was similarly echoed by the Field Studies Council who observed that pressure to "get through" an expansive syllabus has squeezed out the time for curiosity. Over the past two decades, the average length of school residential field trips shrank from 4.6 days to 2.9 days, reflecting schools' reluctance to spend time away from the classroom due to content and exam pressures (Field Studies Council, 2025).

Evidence suggests that the issue of "curriculum overload" extends beyond academic debates, directly impacting pupil engagement. Crucially, policymakers are beginning to share this perspective.

Contributors specifically referenced the Department for Education's ongoing Curriculum & Assessment Review, noting that the volume of content across Key Stages is actively under consideration as part of plans to refresh the national curriculum (Department for Education, 2025).

Other countries periodically declutter their curricula; many contributors to the inquiry suspect England will need to do the same in order to alleviate undue pressure on students and teachers. Suggestions were made for selective content reductions.

For example, one area which was raised both during the roundtable discussions and through the call for evidence was the study of grammar at KS2, which contributors said was overly focused on the textual features of reading and writing that it hinders children, especially those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This focus means that children lose their "love of writing stories and exploring their interests because it all boils down to learning formulaic rules and jumping through hoops" where their "imagination is not valued"

The Decline of Creativity

Nearly every stakeholder who commented on curriculum design mentioned the marginalisation of creative and practical subjects as a major concern. Since 2010, accountability measures (EBacc, Progress 8) have effectively prioritised a narrow set of academic subjects, leading many schools to cut back time for arts, music, drama, design & technology, and other creative disciplines.

The Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) documented a "narrowing of England's curriculum" and "diminishing opportunities for cultural and creative learning", which coincides with declines in pupil wellbeing and engagement.

In concrete terms, the CLA's 2025 Report Card shows a growing gap in arts access: in more affluent schools, children still often receive arts enrichment (through trips, orchestras, etc.), while in disadvantaged schools such opportunities have dwindled to a trickle. Submissions argued this is not just an equity issue but directly linked to love of learning.

Creative subjects were repeatedly described as "fostering a love of learning" by giving students avenues for personal expression, agency, and tangible achievement that many do not get elsewhere in the curriculum. The Cultural Learning Alliance explained that the arts provide "multiple pathways to success" and thereby help more children experience competence and pride in learning. They also noted that arts education emphasises process, experimentation, and

reflection over the one-right-answer approach, building resilience and comfort with learning from mistakes. These habits carry over to other subjects.

Several teachers wrote that when creative activities are cut, some children lose their "hook" that keeps them engaged in school at all. An educator from Manchester observed that her very creative daughter felt devalued in a system that celebrates only academic or athletic achievement; she "wondered if [her daughter] would feel differently if creativity was celebrated and rewarded in school.".

This encapsulates a wider point: a broad curriculum that includes the arts, humanities, and practical learning can re-engage students who might otherwise feel alienated by a purely academic focus. It also enriches the love of learning for all students by showing that learning is not just rote memorisation but also creation, performance, and discovery.

A Curriculum for All Students

Another area pointed out through the inquiry's written and oral evidence was that the content in specific areas of the curriculum was outdated and didn't properly reflect the interests of pupils today. Specifically, as was noted by the Chartered College of Teaching "a lack of diversity in the current curriculum can make it difficult for young people from a diverse range of backgrounds to feel represented and included".

In particular, it was noted by YoungMinds that with 38% of pupils in England now from a minority ethnic background (Department for Education, 2025), the continued dominance of a Eurocentric curriculum "limits students' global understanding and risks disengagement and alienation" among those whose heritage is routinely omitted. Currently, non-European perspectives are often relegated to token mentions (e.g. Black History Month) rather than integrated across subjects. This lack of representation can cause minority students to feel that school "is not about them," diminishing their interest.

To remedy this, YoungMinds have proposed embedding an intersectional framework in curriculum design that recognises that pupils' experiences vary by race, gender, class etc., ensuring that content speaks to that breadth.

An area of the curriculum specifically highlighted by contributors was the English literature GCSE, which was criticised for its heavy emphasis on heritage texts which are neither contemporary nor reflective of diverse backgrounds. During the inquiry's roundtable discussions, one secondary expressed a desire for more modern or relatable texts, such as "The Hunger Games".

The desire for texts that "reflect modern problems" and "connect to their real life" resonates with findings from Pearson that 55% of secondary students feel the curriculum "doesn't help [them] with the issues [they're] facing now or in the future". Many young people want to learn about topics more relevant to them and their lives, with 86% expressing this desire. (Pearson, 2024).

In their submission to the APPG, Pearson, highlighted the work of the Lit Colour Initiative, created by Penguin, to support schools in making the teaching of English Literature more inclusive of authors of colour. Research into the program by academics at the University of Oxford found hat teachers and students reported higher levels of classroom engagement when studying Lit in Colour Pioneer texts (Elliot, Watkins, Hart, & Davison, 2024).

Skills

Another oft-cited gap was practical life skills education. The inquiry heard that young people crave more real-world relevant learning. In surveys, secondary students say they wish school taught them things like how to manage money, basic cooking, understanding taxes, interpersonal skills and mental health management. The current curriculum offers relatively little of this, and as a result many youths do not "see the point" of what they are learning in class when it seems disconnected from life outside school. The Applied Learning Coalition, a group including Young

Enterprise, Skills Builder and others, argued for applied learning approaches to be embedded in the curriculum. Applied learning means giving students the chance to use knowledge in practical, real-world contexts, thereby answering the perennial student question: "Why am I learning this?" Their submission noted that when students understand how their learning connects to future work or life, it can dramatically increase engagement and reduce absenteeism.

For instance, Young Enterprise's programs that have pupils set up and run a small business for a year allow students to apply skills from across subjects in a meaningful project. These experiences have been shown to build confidence and enthusiasm, especially in students who were disengaged by abstract classroom learning. The Coalition cited feedback from young people that enjoyment of a subject is a major factor in their willingness to pursue it. In one survey, 82% of young people said the subjects they enjoyed were an important influence on what they chose to study, second only to the subjects they felt good at. For girls, enjoyment was even more important than for boys. (Youth Employment, 2024)

Students learn better when they actually like the subject matter or see its relevance. Yet the current curriculum in many schools, leaves little space for enjoyment or real-world connections. Pearson found in its schools report that young people feel increasingly distant from what's taught in schools, with 55% of secondary students feeling the curriculum "doesn't help [them] with issues [they're] facing now or in the future" (Pearson, 2024).

Standardisation of Curriculum Content

A related issue that emerged is the tension between standardised curricula/lessons and teacher autonomy to adapt content to engage their particular students. Over the past decade, many schools (especially in large multi-academy trusts) have implemented highly consistent, centrally planned lesson sequences across classrooms.

This was intended to ensure every child gets a high-quality, knowledge-rich curriculum and to support less experienced teachers with ready-made resources.

Indeed, it has become very common: one survey found that standardised curricula (common lesson plans, scripts or slide decks) are now used by 90% of primary teachers and over half of secondary teachers in some form (Traianou, Stevenson, Pearce, & Brady, 2025).

Teachers do appreciate not having to "reinvent the wheel" for every lesson, particularly in core subjects. However, multiple submissions warned of downsides.

The NEU's recent report "Are You on Slide 8 Yet?" documents a creeping "Taylorisation" of teaching – a factory-style model where teachers are reduced to delivering someone else's script.

In practice, many teachers report a reduced sense of professional autonomy under standardised schemes. Over one-third of primary teachers said they have little or no influence over the content of individual lessons in their own classroom. In secondary schools, two-thirds of teachers felt that external exam specifications dictate much of their lesson content. As one teacher quipped, they have become "deliverers of someone else's script," hesitant to deviate from the PowerPoint provided. (Traianou, Stevenson, Pearce, & Brady, 2025)

This lack of flexibility can directly impact student engagement. Teachers attested that they sometimes wanted to slow down or delve deeper into a topic their class found intriguing but felt they "couldn't" because of internal policies requiring all classes to stay in sync or cover the same slides by the same time. Thus, opportunities for responsive, passion-driven teaching are lost. In one anecdote, a teacher had an opportunity to explore a fascinating tangent or do a hands-on activity, but "that's not in the scheme" so it was skipped, a missed chance for igniting students' curiosity.

It's worth noting that standardisation is not all

negative and schemes of work can provide benefits that should be balanced with flexibility. Shared curricula can help guide early career teachers and provide helpful sequenced templates which can inspire teachers when lesson planning. But the evidence suggests a need to rebalance more teacher agency in curriculum design and delivery.

Research by ImpactEd has found a strong association between engaged teachers and engaged pupils. In schools where teachers were more engaged in their work, their pupils were more engaged with their studies, with a correlation coefficient around 0.6. Even after controlling for school characteristics a moderate positive relationship (correlation around 0.4) persists. (Jerrim, 2025)

Academics have also highlighted the impact overprescribed can have on student engagement. Dr Douglas Yacek, cautions that overly homogeneous, scripted lessons can breed tedium among both pupils and teachers (Robson, 2024).

The inquiry heard of examples of schools who were having success in balancing prescribed schemes of work with teachers autonomy. During the inquiry's roundtable discussions, a headteacher from a small primary school in Devon shared their aim to make school "unmissable" with a "very creative curriculum" that "brings learning to life every day". Importantly, this school deliberately offers its teachers "a little bit of wiggle room to take risks, to have fun," allowing them to "go a little bit off piece" and adapt the curriculum to their own teaching style.

The Use of Technology

Another promising avenue discussed is the integration of technology to enrich curriculum delivery. Done thoughtfully, digital tools can increase engagement by personalising learning and fostering creativity. Dr Alison Porter (University of Southampton) and Professor Suzanne Graham (University of Reading) submitted research evidence in the context of foreign language education, demonstrating how technology can be harnessed to sustain the love of learning.

They note that fostering a love of learning hinges on supporting students' intrinsic motivation, which in turn depends on meeting needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In their project, Year 5 pupils in 17 primary schools were given a digital, interactive storytelling experience in French/Spanish. Using tablets, the children engaged with multimodal stories (combining audio, text, and images) slightly above their usual difficulty level, with built-in supports and creative follow-up activities. This approach, dubbed "supported challenge," was enabled by technology (the Nearpod platform).

Crucially, it allowed students some autonomy through activities where they could draw or record their own responses to story scenarios and build a sense of competence by helping them comprehend challenging material via multimedia support. The researchers found that such use of EdTech boosted pupils' enjoyment and engagement in language learning, counteracting the typical decline in enthusiasm observed as students progress through primary school.

More broadly, The Access Group reported that well-designed digital learning platforms can help address curriculum overload by enabling more personalised learning. Their platform (GCSEPod) offers thousands of short video lessons across the curriculum, allowing students to review or get ahead at their own pace. Teachers told the Access Group that having such tools helps relieve the pressure to "get through everything" in class time and frees them to focus on richer interactions e.g. discussions, deeper dives, or providing individual support.

However, it was cautioned that tech is not a panacea; its impact depends on pedagogy. The evidence suggests technology is most engaging when used to empower students with more choice, creative outlets, and immediate feedback, not simply to digitise rote learning.

This was echoed by pupils during our roundtable discussions which stressed that whilst technology when deployed thoughtfully could be a powerful learning aide, it could also be a double-edged sword. One pupil noted that an overuse of devices could make lessons "boring" or "distract from the lesson".

Challenges

- With the national curriculum described as overly dense and rigid, teachers report lacking time for deep, exploratory learning that fosters curiosity and engagement.

- The pressure to meet syllabus demands has led to the shortening of enrichment activities such as field trips, with the average residential visit declining from 4.6 to 2.9 days.

- Opportunities for cultural and creative learning are increasingly concentrated in more affluent schools, widening inequality in access to the arts.

- Pupils and teachers alike report that curriculum content often feels outdated and disconnected from modern life, contributing to disengagement.

- A lack of diversity in the curriculum limits students' sense of belonging, with many minority ethnic pupils feeling unrepresented and disengaged.

- Literature curricula in particular have been criticised for an overemphasis on heritage texts, with students calling for texts that reflect contemporary and relatable experiences.

- Curriculum standardisation across schools has reduced many teachers' ability to adapt content to suit their pupils' interests.

Module 3:
Assessment Practices and Their Impact on Engagement

Evidence to the inquiry powerfully illustrated how assessment practices, particularly the prevalence of high-stakes, summative exams, influence student engagement and attitudes toward learning. The current assessment regime in England (with major standardised exams at ages 11, 16, and 18, and frequent testing in between) was frequently described as a key factor undermining the love of learning. In primary schools, the focus on SATs in Year 6 has had outsized effects on both teaching and pupil wellbeing.

SATs

Multiple submissions highlighted that SATs preparation dominates Year 6, often to the detriment of a broad education. By spring of Year 6, many schools devote extensive hours weekly to drilling English and maths test content.

Notably, this issue is most acute in deprived areas: survey data from early 2024 showed only 13% of schools in the most affluent areas spent over 6 hours a week on SATs prep, but among schools with the most disadvantaged intakes, that figure was 40%; a three-fold increase. In other words, in schools under more pressure to raise results, test prep can eclipse other learning. Teachers in high-poverty schools also reported substantially higher levels of pupil worry, pressure, and disengagement related to SATs, compared to those in more affluent schools. (Quick, 2024)

This indicates that high-stakes testing may be exacerbating educational inequalities: the very students who could benefit most from a rich, engaging curriculum are spending the most time on narrow test practice, often becoming anxious or fed up.

SATs also have a negative effect on pupils mental health, with more than 60% of Year 6 pupils saying that they were worried about taking SATs, and 1 in 10 said they were losing sleep because of them. According to More Than A Score's survey, 60% of Year 6 pupils said they were worried about taking SATs, and 1 in 10 said they were losing sleep because of them.

By April 2024, nearly two-thirds of teachers agreed that their Year 6 pupils were "worried about failing" the tests.

The APPG asked primary school pupils directly about their experience with SATs during the inquiry's roundtable discussions. One pupil shared a friends experience of being "extremely stressed out on her test" and becoming "really emotional" when she was one of the last to finish, with tests happening "one after another".

Secondary

In secondary education, the reforms of the mid-2010s that moved GCSEs and A-Levels to almost entirely terminal exams (with coursework largely removed and a linear two-year course structure) were cited as another flashpoint.

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) shared survey findings showing alarming levels of exam anxiety among GCSE students under the reformed system. Teachers overwhelmingly report that high-stakes GCSEs generate intense stress for pupils. In a survey conducted by the National Education Union, 73% of teachers said that reformed GCSE's had contributed negatively to pupils' mental health (Monbiot, 2022).

Comparatively England has one of the most intense assessment regimes of comparable countries, with pupils expected to sit 31.5hrs of exams at the end of GCSE. This is in addition to the amount of time taken up by mock exams and revision. Which, as the examination body OCR concluded, results in a system which is only focused on one mode of assessment, consequently narrowing learning. (OCR, 2024)

While exam anxiety is widespread, it is especially acute for students with special educational needs, mental health issues, or instability in their lives. These groups may struggle with the format of timed silent exams or lack study support at home, so the all-or-nothing testing regime leaves them at a pronounced disadvantage.

Some students who feel "unable to succeed" in the exam framework simply disengage from learning, seeing little point in trying. This disaffection can contribute to higher risks of exclusion or dropout for lower-achieving and vulnerable teenagers. A 2020 RSA report found that the push for a more "rigorous" exam-heavy curriculum in the 2010s made it difficult for some learners to access the curriculum at all, increasing disengagement (Partridge, Strong, Lobley, & Mason, 2022).

The move away from coursework and modular assessment has also removed some safety valves that previously helped a wider range of students demonstrate achievement. Without those, students who don't test well in formal conditions are left with no alternative means to show their knowledge. As one analysis put it, the shift to end-of-course exams makes sitting GCSEs "more difficult for young people who struggle to concentrate in silence and for those with literacy difficulties", and for those pupils, the risk of disengaging (or being pushed out) rises.

Even for academically able students, the all-or-nothing nature of GCSEs and A-levels can distort the learning mindset. Rather than encouraging intellectual curiosity, the system sends a message that only the final grade matters. Young people in the inquiry described the stigma attached to not achieving a "good pass.". Under a system where a third of pupils do fail to achieve the pass rate, this can mean that pupils get trapped in a cycle of failure where resits offer little relief other than condemning many to "re-experience their past failure".

As one submission observed, a system that communicates student "deficit" rather than progress ends up "demotivat[ing] learners and narrows their sense of possibility." In other words, when learning is treated purely as a means to achieve exam results, its intrinsic joy and value are lost. Stakeholders argue that students effectively learn that learning itself "has no joy unless it's validated by a mark scheme." This erosion of intrinsic motivation is at the heart of concerns that the love of learning is being lost in our exam-heavy secondary system.

The Impact of Accountability Measures

The introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and Progress 8 accountability measures has significantly influenced curriculum design and student engagement within secondary schools, notably having a profound effect on the range of choice in subjects available to pupils at secondary school.

Data from Summer 2020 to Summer 2024 shows that while Ebacc entries increased, non-Ebacc entries declined over the same period.

Music for instance, has declined significantly at GCSE and A level as it is not an Ebacc subject and only an open group option in Progress 8 in which all arts subjects must compete with each other for uptake (Independent Society of Musicians, 2022).

Since the renewal of the EBacc in 2015, the FFT Education Datalab has observed an increase in the percentage of school where no pupils did music or the performing arts. For music, this increased from 7% in 2015 to 14% in 2023, and for the performing arts, from 4% to 9%. (Beynon & Thomson, 2024)

Concerningly, the omission of creative subjects from schools was significantly more acute in disadvantaged areas, where 25% of schools with the most disadvantaged populations had no music entries. For the performing arts the equivalent figure was 11% (Beynon & Thomson, 2024). This creates enormous inequalities as the arts subjects rapidly decline in the state sector while thriving in the private sector. (Ashton & Ashton, 2022)

It was noted by contributors that accountability has benefits "no one is suggesting we abandon accountability, far from it". In fact, rigorous assessment and high expectations are vital for ensuring every child masters the basics. However, the consensus was that the current system has overshot, defining success too narrowly. As one commentary put it, "we should ask: Are we measuring what truly matters?".

Challenges

- With SATs preparation dominating Year 6, particularly in disadvantaged schools, pupils are missing out on a broader curriculum that supports deeper and more engaging learning.

- The pressure of SATs is negatively affecting pupil wellbeing, with a majority of Year 6 pupils reporting worry and a notable proportion experiencing sleep loss and emotional distress.

- With GCSEs and A-levels now assessed almost entirely through end-of-course exams, students face heightened pressure with little opportunity to demonstrate learning through alternative methods.

- Comparatively long exam durations in England, combined with revision and mock exam pressures, leave little space for varied learning experiences or holistic development.

- Pupils with SEND, mental health needs, or unstable home environments are disproportionately disadvantaged by the current model of high-stakes terminal assessment.

- Some students disengage entirely from learning due to the belief that they cannot succeed within the exam framework, increasing the risk of exclusion or dropout.

- Even high-achieving pupils are impacted, with the system promoting a narrow focus on final grades rather than a love of learning or intellectual curiosity.

- The emphasis on ranking and pass thresholds leads some students to internalise failure, reinforcing low self-worth and undermining motivation.

- As the EBacc and Progress 8 shape school accountability, schools are incentivised to reduce subject choice, particularly in creative disciplines.

- Without reform, the accountability system may continue to discourage schools from offering diverse subject options, limiting pupil choice and engagement.

Module 4:
Supporting Teachers in the Love of Learning

The final module of the inquiry focuses on teachers themselves. Submissions painted a sobering picture of a profession under strain, which is leading many teachers to lose their love of teaching and, in alarming numbers, leave the classroom.

As noted earlier, teacher retention rates are troubling: roughly 1 in 10 teachers leaves the state sector each year, and surveys suggest a vast majority have at least considered quitting (Education Support, 2024). Attrition amongst early career teachers is particularly high, with 1 in 3 leaving within the first 5 years in the profession (Department for Edcuation, 2025).

The underlying reasons, however, came through loud and clear. Chief among them is workload and work conditions. Multiple submissions starkly highlighted that teaching in 2025 has become a job characterised by long hours, high intensity, and low professional agency, all of which erode wellbeing.

Full-time teachers regularly work around 52 hours per week (IFF Research and IOE; UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, 2025), near or above the 55-hour threshold identified by the WHO as a serious health risk (World Health Organization, 2021).

But it's not just the quantity of hours, it's the nature of the work during those hours. Teachers report a relentless pace and ever-mounting expectations. Professor Francis Green's research found that teachers' work intensity, essentially the mental labour required per hour, has increased significantly over time, while their autonomy has declined compared to other professions. (Green, 2021)

A frequent complaint is the burden of bureaucracy and accountability-driven tasks that divert teachers from the core of teaching. As discussed in Module 1 and 3, a pervasive "audit culture" means teachers spend inordinate time to satisfying or evidencing accountability metrics, often with dubious value for actual learning.

One teacher described this as "empty work" that is exhausting teachers while yielding little benefit to students. The pressure of Ofsted inspections was repeatedly mentioned: schools feel they must achieve or maintain a certain Ofsted rating, which cascades stress throughout the staff. An Education Support position paper on the inspection system (referenced in their evidence) argues that fear of Ofsted drives many unproductive practices and anxiety.

Teachers echoed that sentiment; as noted earlier, they "feel compelled to produce data and evidence for inspectors, sometimes to the detriment of spontaneity in the classroom". High-stakes accountability can also create a blame culture. All of this contributes to a climate where teachers struggle to sustain their love for the profession.

Several submissions, including from teacher associations, pointed out that when teachers spend their evenings and weekends doing paperwork or marking for tests, and when they have little autonomy to bring their own creative flair to teaching, their job satisfaction plummets.

A NASUWT study found that teachers today report markedly lower levels of autonomy in their teaching than in the past, which many participants linked to an "out-of-date curriculum with irrelevant content and limiting delivery methods" being imposed on them.

Teaching Assistants

One area which contributors noted was too infrequently considered was the pressure an ever decreasing supply of teaching assistants (TA) has on the sector. Teaching Assistants have a significant role to play in supporting a positive dynamic in the classroom, particularly when that class has children with SEND.

However, schools are finding retaining and recruiting teaching assistants particularly challenging. Research from the British Educational Suppliers Association has shown that 43% of school are having serious issues recruiting non-teaching staff, and 29% are having issues retaining non-teaching staff.

In their submission to the inquiry, Rivers Mutli-Academy Trust highlighted that whilst TA's support is "massive inside the classroom" and can help teachers deliver better lessons, the lack of sufficient numbers means teachers are left to deal with "disruption and discipline" themselves, adding to their workload.

These concerns were echoed in the OECD's PISA study which found hat the "lack of assisting staff" hinders instruction "to some extent" or "a lot" for 54% of pupils. (Ingram, Stiff, Cadwallader, Lee, & Kayton, 2023)

Frontline Support

Furthermore, teachers are being increasingly stretched beyond their core responsibilities to fill in gaps left by front line services. The Child Poverty Action Group has found that 79% of school staff have found that they and their colleagues have less time and capacity for other parts of their role because of the effects of child poverty (Child Poverty Action Group, 2023).

A critical driving factor for this issue is the absence of adequate support from external agencies which would otherwise provide these services. In particular, excessive waiting times for child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was noted by multiple contributors for having inadequately long waiting times, with some young people waiting 3-4 years to access services.

Teachers can only deal with so much, and therefore it is to be expected that ultimately some children, despite schools best efforts, will ultimately through the cracks. However, the implications of this are still felt in the classroom, whether that be through be through those children exhibiting more challenging behaviour, or through deteriorating mental health conditions.

In this sense, the overreliance on teachers to provide support, which is beyond their expertise, not only stretches them now, it fuels a cycle which makes problems worse and takes teachers away from their role of facilitating brilliant, engaging lessons.

Some schools have already begun to bring more services, traditionally fulfilled by external agencies, in-house. For instance, we heard from a secondary school during our roundtable discussions who have been providing more in-house support for speech and language therapy provision due to the high-levels of children entering their secondary school with high needs. However, concerningly, this school questioned how long they would be able to keep up this level support, as budget pressures have meant they may need to cut back on services which fall outside of the schools core responsibilities.

Ultimately, schools will always need to provide some level of basic support to children for things such as mental health issues. Mainstream schools are complex ecosystems, and it is understandable that schools may be the first port of call for a child when they a dealing with a crisis. However, the absence of external support means that schools are no longer just the first port of call, they are the main vehicle of delivery despite not being given the financial or technical resources to be able to adequately deal with them.

The Government must urgently look at how the system as a whole can better deliver those services, such as CAMHS or Speech and Language therapy, so that they can get the support they need in a timely manner. This would alleviate pressures on teachers who are neither well-resourced nor qualified to effectively deal with them.

Contributors welcomed the Government's commitment for all schools to have access to mental health professionals. However, the consensus was that this commitment must go further. Schools need integrated, localised access to a wider range of external services if they are to meet pupils' diverse and complex needs effectively.

Why Teacher Engagement Matters

Teacher's matter for student engagement because, as numerous respondents emphasised, learner engagement depends heavily on teacher engagement and confidence. One can't separate the two: a teacher who is passionate, energised, and supported is far more likely to inspire a love of learning in students. Conversely, a demoralised or burnt-out teacher can hardly be expected to spark joy in the classroom.

Many school leaders now cite teacher wellbeing as one of their major concerns, recognising that high staff turnover and low morale create a poor learning environment for pupils. Research from the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA), highlights that teacher retention and recruitment remain a key concern for school leaders, with 27% of schools having 'serious' Issues with teacher retention - and further 42% expressing having at least 'some Issues' (British Educational Suppliers Association, 2025).

Indeed, poor teacher retention often means a rotating cast of less experienced or temporary teachers, disrupting relationship-building with students. It also means remaining teachers are frequently covering classes or teaching outside their specialty, further lowering quality and enthusiasm.

In a vicious cycle, as teaching becomes less enjoyable, teachers leave, which increases workload on those who stay, making the job even less attractive. Several submissions termed it a "workforce crisis" that urgently needs addressing to restore stability and positivity in schools. As research form LearnED highlighted supporting teachers is not a separate agenda from student engagement; rather, it is a prerequisite for re-injecting a love of learning into classrooms (Jerrim, 2025).

An underlying message in the evidence is that any measures to support teachers must involve listening to teachers themselves. As one submission put it, there is a "strong appetite" among educators to be part of the solution, teachers have insights into what causes burnout and what would help, so their opinions should be central.

Whether it's designing new training or changing assessment, consulting teachers and even letting them lead reforms can ensure the changes truly address the problems. Several union submissions (NEU, NASUWT via the Applied Coalition) emphasised that recent top-down initiatives sometimes backfire because they ignore teacher workload realities or professional judgment. In contrast, when teachers feel ownership of initiatives (say, developing a new enrichment week or contributing to curriculum redesign), their enthusiasm and commitment rise.

The evidence for Module 4 converges on a simple truth: "happy teachers teach better." When teachers are supported, through manageable workloads, professional autonomy, development opportunities, and a culture of trust, they are more likely to stay in the profession and to bring energy and creativity to their classrooms. This directly benefits students, who feed off teachers' enthusiasm.

Conversely, the current strains on teachers are a major factor in the decline of the love of learning. Tackling those strains requires systemic changes: rethinking accountability demands, investing in teacher wellbeing and training, and rebuilding respect for the teaching profession.

If teachers can rediscover their love of teaching, they will be the spark that reignites students' love of learning. As the Association of Colleges succinctly advised, "we need to ensure teacher accountability is driven by the quality of learning rather than purely external metrics" a shift that would allow teachers to focus on what really matters: inspiring and supporting their students.

By relieving pressures and trusting educators as professionals, we create the conditions for both teachers and students to thrive in a virtuous cycle of mutual engagement. The inquiry's evidence leaves little doubt that supporting teachers is not only an end in itself, but a critical strategy in recovering the joy and love of learning in our education system

Challenges

- With approximately one in ten teachers leaving the state sector annually and one in three early career teachers exiting within five years, the high level of teacher attrition must be addressed.

- Teachers increasingly report a loss of professional autonomy, limiting their ability to adapt lessons and apply their judgement in the classroom.

- A significant portion of teachers' time is now spent on administrative and accountability-driven tasks, often at the expense of activities with direct educational value.

- The reduction in available teaching assistants means that teachers are managing complex needs and behavioural challenges alone, which is affecting both classroom dynamics and their wellbeing.

- Delays in accessing external services—such as CAMHS and speech and language therapy—are leaving many pupils without the support they need, with consequences felt in classroom behaviour and learning.

- Teachers' limited involvement in the design and implementation of education policy is contributing to a sense of disempowerment and reducing the effectiveness of reform initiatives.

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