

# Making data work: report of the Teacher Workload Advisory Group

## Introduction and background

**Workload is consistently cited as one of the most important factors for teachers who are leaving the profession. The Workload Challenge (2014) identified unnecessary tasks linked to assessment and data, with 56 per cent of respondents citing tasks around 'recording, inputting, monitoring and analysing data' as burdensome. Time associated with data collection and analysis is also frequently cited as the most wasteful with teachers often unclear as to its purpose. Data is often used too much for monitoring and compliance, rather than to support pupil learning and school improvement.**

This report was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education, following on from a commitment to tackle workload and strip away tasks that do not add value. It makes recommendations for how DfE, Ofsted and other organisations can support schools to adopt proportionate and sustainable approaches in this area. The full report includes a number of case studies providing examples of good practice.

## Key points

### Principles for evaluating data use in schools

- When establishing data systems, schools should adopt the principles which were established in the 2016 report by the Data Management Review Group (see below).
- The purpose and use of data should be clear, relevant to the intended audience and in line with school values and aims.
- The precision and limitations of data, and what can be inferred from it, are well understood. For example, is the cohort size too small for anything to be inferred from the data?
- The amount of data collected and the frequency with which it is collected is *proportionate*, i.e. the time spent must be worth the outcome.
- School and trust leaders should review processes for both collecting and using data. They should decide on whom the burden of collection and analysis should fall and ensure they have the capacity to do so.

### Recommendations

- The DfE should find out how school and trust leaders currently evaluate their use of data. By Spring 2019 the DfE should test with school staff whether there is a need for further support such as a toolkit.
- The DfE, Ofsted, unions and professional bodies should reflect the above principles in their training and guidance for schools.
- The DfE should evaluate the extent to which schools are aligned to the principles by using existing surveys in a representative sample of schools.
- Ofsted should monitor the consistency of inspection practice with regard to the data principles.

### Pastoral data management

- Schools should have simple systems that allow behaviour incidents, detentions and other pastoral information to be

logged during the normal working day, rather than at break and lunchtimes.

- Central collection of this information allows schools to run centralised detentions, which can reduce teacher workload. The right technology can support straightforward data entry using codes, and can automate many of the processes identified in a school behaviour policy, including issuing detentions and reporting behaviour incidents to parents.
- Teachers will find the use of a limited number of codes less burdensome than having to write extensive reports.
- There is a role for school and trust leaders to manage expectations of parents and carers about the detailed reporting of behaviour incidents, to limit the overall burden on staff.

### Recommendations

- The DfE should add a new section on behaviour management to the workload reduction toolkit.
- Ofsted should assure schools that inspectors will not expect to see detailed logging of every single incident and detention.

### High quality pupil attainment information

- Teacher assessment can give a rough indication to parents and school leaders of whether pupils have learned the topics taught. However, it can only be used to decide if a class is on track when there is a robust system of cross school moderation.
- Given the limited circumstances under which teacher judgements of pupil attainment are useful to leaders, the number of pieces of information teachers are expected to compile should be minimised or eliminated.
- Unless school and trust leaders understand the quality and purpose of the assessments being used in their school - including details of their reliability and validity in relation to

- the curriculum - it is impossible for them to ensure that reasonable inferences are being made from the test data.
- Assessments provided as part of curriculum materials, or in-school tests written by teachers can be useful in providing a relative indication of students' performance and identifying individual difficulties, but they cannot be used to determine the quality of teaching or to predict future school results. Documenting whether a student has or has not made 'expected progress' is not necessary or meaningful, since there is huge variation in rates of learning between students with the same baseline attainment.
- Where schools have the infrastructure (such as the right hardware and broadband), online testing can have a positive impact for workload, by reducing the burden of planning, marking, and data input/analysis.
- Teachers collect student attainment information every day in their classroom. It is rarely desirable to standardise this process across a school because the approaches vary considerably depending on subject, age of children, frequency of teacher contact and teaching styles. School leaders should therefore consider whether it is optimal, given the likely data quality, to require all staff to submit data on the same timetable and with the same frequency.
- There are many examples of schools where the actions arising after a half-termly deposit of attainment data do not justify the time investment required by teachers. There are, on the other hand, large schools which successfully manage the process of pupil support and school improvement with one single centralised attainment data collection point in the year. The group therefore feels that schools should not have more than two or three attainment data collection points a year, which should be used to inform clear actions. Evidence suggests that increasing assessment frequency is not inherently likely to improve outcomes for schools.
- There is currently no evidence that setting students challenging attainment targets is motivational for them. Targets can be limiting as much as they can be motivating.
- Although predicted grades are necessary for exam boards, students do not need to be told that they 'should' or 'are likely to' achieve a predicted grade at the end of a key stage. Similarly, 'flight paths' for pupils with similar starting points are not valid, because they underestimate the variation in student trajectories of development.
- Conducting analysis on pupil premium students or by gender might be straightforward, but is not an educationally meaningful way to determine interventions and actions because students within these groups do not always share similar needs. School and trust leaders should consider the most efficient way to collect information needed to decide on a plan of action for groups of pupils.
- Although supporting disadvantaged pupils should be a focus, the current DfE requirements to report on the effectiveness of pupil premium spend to Ofsted at the point of inspection, and via reports on the school website, can create unnecessary burdens for teachers, school and trust leaders and governors. There is insufficient evidence to show that the current approach to reporting has a positive impact that justifies the burden.
- The smaller the groups being compared, the more likely that any differences observed are simply statistical noise. For example, in a one form entry primary school with 30 per cent pupil premium pupils, you would need a 40 percentage point difference in pass rates between groups to report statistically meaningful attainment gaps.

## Recommendations

- The DfE should work with sector bodies to promote the development of teachers' understanding of assessment as

a key feature of teacher expertise.

- Ofsted inspectors should ask questions about, and report on whether schools' attainment data collections are proportionate, represent an efficient use of school resources, and are sustainable for staff.
- Neither the DfE, local authorities or multi-academy trusts should request data on pupil targets or predictions to hold schools to account. Where such data is required to provide support, it should be in the school's existing format.
- The DfE should commission research into target-setting practices and into the effect of such practices on pupils' mental health.
- The DfE should speak to schools to better understand the impact and burden of reporting requirements for pupil premium and primary PE sport premium spend.

## Teacher performance management

- Teachers should have goals that are within their control, that are closely tied to genuinely actionable behaviours, and that are aspirational yet achievable.
- The performance of a single exam class should not be used as a principal measure of teaching quality in a performance management system, not least because it can distort the focus of teachers away from other classes. The exam performance of a class depends on many factors, most of which are outside the control of the person who happens to have them in their final year.
- If teachers are held to account for things that are largely outside their own control, it is not only unfair, but induces high levels of stress.

## Recommendations

- DfE guidance should clarify that performance management discussions should not be based on teacher-generated predictions or on the assessment data for a single group of pupils. Ofsted should ensure that inspectors do not ask to see performance management targets based on assessment data.

## Communicating with governing boards, parents and carers

- Governors should normally be prepared to receive information in whatever form it is currently being used in the school. They should agree with school and trust leaders about what high-quality data they need. They should avoid making unreasonable, ad hoc data requests during the course of the school year. They should not routinely see data on individual pupils, 'flight paths' or other teacher judgement tracking data.
- School and trust leaders should review their approach to producing the annual written report, to inform parents and carers of their child's performance and behaviour at school in a way that is manageable for teachers.

## Recommendations

- The DfE should revise the governance handbook, competency framework and other guidance to reflect the principles of this report. It should also incorporate myth busting for governors into the teacher workload toolkit.
- The DfE should commission research which examines the impact of low-time investment models of teacher engagement. It should also review its guidance on reporting to parents and carers so that the latter have clear and realistic expectations.

**The full document can be downloaded from:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teacher-workload-advisory-group-report-and-government-response>