

School funding and Pupil Premium

Introduction and background

The annual Sutton Trust poll looks at school funding, budget pressures, use of research evidence in schools and the impact and use of the Pupil Premium. The Pupil Premium is additional funding for schools designed to help disadvantaged pupils. Funding is set at £1,320 per pupil in primary school and £935 for pupils in secondary school.

A total of 1,678 teachers and school leaders from 1,439 schools in state-funded schools in England were surveyed through the Teacher Voice Omnibus, conducted by the National Foundation for Educational research (NFER). The sample encompassed the full range of roles from newly qualified teachers to headteachers. Fifty-one per cent of respondents worked in primary schools and 49 per cent worked in secondary schools. The sample of schools was representative across a range of factors including region, school type, performance and local authority type.

Key points

Budgets and funding

- Sixty-nine per cent of secondary senior leaders have reported having to make cuts to teaching staff for financial reasons along with 70 per cent for teaching assistants and 72 per cent for support staff. At primary level, 32 per cent of senior leaders reported cutting back on teaching staff, 72 per cent on teaching assistants and 43 per cent on support staff.
- Increasing numbers of secondary leaders report cutting IT equipment (61%), school outings (41%) and sport (28%). At primary level the picture is similar; 49 per cent of senior leaders report cutting IT equipment, 41 per cent report cutting back on trips and outings and 25 per cent report cutting back on sports and other extra-curricular activities.
- At secondary level, 47 per cent of secondary leaders report cutting subject choices at GCSE and 40 per cent report cutting choices at A level.

Pupil premium funding

- Respondents were asked about their main priority when it came to spending Pupil Premium funding. At both primary and secondary level, and across school roles, the top priority for spending was early intervention schemes; 28 per cent of all primary respondents and 22 per cent of all secondary respondents chose this option. Additional teaching assistants were high on the list in primary schools (20% of all staff), but much less so in secondary schools (5%). More one-to-one tuition was selected by 9 per cent of all staff in primary school and by 10 per cent of all staff in secondary schools.
- Twenty-seven per cent of secondary school leaders and 22 per cent of primary school leaders report that their Pupil Premium is being used to plug gaps elsewhere in their budget. However, considerably fewer classroom teachers feel that this is the case (10% of teachers in primary and 9% in secondary).

- Fifty-five per cent of school leaders feel that their pupil premium funding is helping to close attainment gaps in their school. Primary leaders (57%) are more likely to feel this is the case than secondary leaders (50%) and classroom teachers at both primary and secondary level were less likely than leaders to feel that this was the case.
- Of those who disagree that the Pupil Premium is having an impact, there were a number of reasons given. Many felt that the funding is not enough to make an impact, or that it is being spent on other things. Teachers also pointed out the difficulty in closing gaps given the number of factors outside the school gates. Headteachers who reported having to plug budget gaps with their Pupil premium funding were less likely to say that attainment gaps were closing (62% vs 40%).
- Respondents were asked about the extent to which the Pupil Premium allows their school to target resources to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. Responses to this question were fairly similar across primary and secondary phases. Thirty-two per cent of primary senior leaders and 25 per cent of secondary school leaders responded 'to a great extent' whereas 56 per cent of both primary and secondary leaders responded 'to some extent'. Classroom teachers in both phases were less positive; 18 per cent of primary classroom teachers and 16 per cent of secondary classroom teachers responded 'to a great extent'.
- A large number of senior leaders and classroom teachers at both primary and secondary level felt that the Pupil Premium enabled the continuation of activities which would otherwise cease. Across all phases and school roles, 13 per cent of respondents felt that this was the case 'to a great extent' and 33 per cent responded 'to some extent'.

Choosing approaches and using research

- Respondents were asked how their schools decided which approaches to adopt to improve pupil learning. The most commonly cited approach overall was using past experience of what works (62%). However, at secondary level top priority was given to research evidence (cited by 76% of secondary senior leaders and 51% of secondary classroom teachers. Evaluation of programmes and approaches before use was widely practised (cited by 42% overall) as was learning from what works in other schools (cited by 58% overall).
- Use of research evidence is up again this year and is now at its highest levels since the Sutton Trust began reporting on this issue in 2012. Seventy-four per cent of all senior leaders (up from 68%) and 47 per cent of teachers (up from 45%) reported that they used research evidence in decision-making. Secondary teachers who reported using research evidence were more likely to report that their pupil premium money was proving effective (46% vs 32%).
- Use of the Sutton Trust/EEF toolkit is also increasing. Seventy per cent of secondary school senior leaders report reading it (a rise of 7% since last year). The figure for primary senior leaders is 60 per cent. Although the toolkit is less commonly read by classroom teachers (20% primary and 25% secondary), here too the numbers are rising.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/TeacherPollingTables2019.pdf>