The priorities and challenges facing our schools

School and trust governance in 2022

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www.nga.org.uk/governance2022

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Foreword

For twelve consecutive years the National Governance Association (NGA) has conducted a survey exploring the challenges governing boards face, the strategies they are applying and their experiences governing. A huge thank you to the more than 4100 respondents from across the country who took the time to contribute.

Every respondent has a unique voice to bring to our findings, and collectively you provide us with a comprehensive and evolving view of the priorities for the sector as a whole. While each school and trust is different, operating from a particular geographical context, findings underline that many of the challenges faced are sector wide. The picture of what it is really like to govern schools and trusts today provides richness of insight and intelligence that NGA uses to inform and influence central policy making.

A governing board volunteers to act as custodian of schools and trusts in the interests of pupils. This report pinpoints the challenges that their schools or trusts, and in some cases their communities face, and how they are shifting over time. It also identifies the most common strategic priorities they adopt as they ensure the best possible education so that our young people are able to flourish and take their place in the world.

This year's results show that it is both local and global factors that pose challenges for schools and trusts to overcome. Schools are increasingly finding themselves needing to mitigate both the events and pressures from the national and worldwide stage, including the rampaging cost of living crisis and the lingering impact of the pandemic, as well as the circumstances faced by their own distinct communities.

This survey was undertaken in May, and even then before costs had risen to the extent they have now, balancing the budget was identified as the top challenge across the country, regardless of school type or structure. But this year's responses carried a heightened level of urgency in comparison to what we have seen in recent years, with the fears being expressed that presaged the cost pressures now being experienced across the sector.

The impact of rising costs on school and trust budgets is a now a national challenge like no other; it is hard to remember a time where the situation has felt quite so volatile. Senior leaders and governing boards throughout the country are reviewing their budgets in the face of these enormous rises, including unfunded national pay awards for their staff. The situation has been compounded by the fact that the funding for schools per-pupil remains below the level it was in 2010. These discussions for some might include potential redundancies, a reduction of the offer to pupils and less expenditure on buildings.

The current economic situation makes even medium-term planning difficult. While at the time of writing schools have been informed of a six-month energy "guarantee" for the public sector, governing boards will be wondering about how long energy costs will continue to rise and making the call on long-term financial sustainability is significantly trickier than previously. Even an experienced and skilled board is not able to fully insulate its school or trust against the combination of current external factors.

And money is not the only thing on governing board agendas; there remains a whole host of other considerations that respondents have told us about. This year we wanted to see how the challenges governing boards face marry up with their strategic priorities. Each year it is fascinating to check whether those challenges and priorities are different in different places, phases or school types. Once again it is the case that the concerns identified are very much the same across the piece. There are some very small differences, but not significant ones, and we will report on the few that are. But the generalisations made in this report are not due to the lack of analysis; they are due to the unanimity within the sector.

A few years ago, the development of a new Ofsted framework instigated a sector wide discussion on curriculum development, and as a result governing boards began taking a more active role in the overview of the curriculum driven by the organisation's overarching values, vision and strategy. This year curriculum was most likely to be reported as a strategic priority, followed by pupil attainment. Boards are clearly prioritising the education offer to pupils and the outcomes of that offer.

Leaders and governing boards together should always be thinking critically about what is important for their pupils to know and be able to do, what to teach and why. It is pleasing to see that despite everything else that requires their attention, boards are showing a commitment to ensuring the curriculum does not stand still.

Over the last few years the governing boards' concerns about inadequate provision for pupils with SEND has grown as the needs have grown but resources diminished. It is of no surprise that support for pupils with SEND is now featuring in both respondents' lists of main challenges for schools and trusts and strategic priorities. Access to the required support has been lacking for many children and young people. While there is still a long way to go before there is change, this year's long awaited government green paper on SEND and alternative provision has much to be positive about. A new vision for reform backed by £70m of funding is a welcome step in the right direction that cannot come soon enough. And it is the funding of SEND support that is repeatedly raised by governors and trustees as inadequate. With more schools having to subsidise the cost of SEND provision out of the core budget, we hope that by this time next year we can start to report on the proposals within the green paper taking firmer shape.

Recovery from COVID-19 features as a specified strategic priority for some, and the attainment of disadvantaged children is the second most frequently identified challenge for schools and trusts. The Education Endowment Foundation recently reported disadvantaged children as being the hardest hit by learning loss following the pandemic. And as well as considering the education provided, almost all schools are providing other services to try and combat the effects of the disadvantage and poverty on families.

Another crucially important duty of governing boards is that of ensuring that their school or trust is a safe environment for pupils is never off the agenda. Safeguarding is sometimes talked about in terms of compliance, but it is much more than that, driven by the organisation's culture and ethos. The pandemic has had an impact on the wellbeing and safety of some pupils, with almost three quarters of governors and trustees this year reporting an increase in safeguarding concerns following the pandemic. This truly significant increase has of course resulted in greater levels of discussion on safeguarding around the board table.

Staff wellbeing and workload has featured as a concern of some governing boards for many years, but in 2022 it become an even more prominent issue, featuring as both a strategic priority and one of the top three challenges facing schools. Another issue that deserves a mention here is the recruitment of teachers, which is being identified by more boards as a challenge than ever before. Interestingly this is something the sector as a whole has been reporting for a number of years, but the views of governing boards up to this point had painted a slightly different picture. But 2022 can leave us in no doubt this is an issue growing in prominence.

This year saw the lowest number of respondents (10%) with a positive view on the government's performance on education over the past year since we first asked the question in 2011. There was a low ebb between 2016 and 2019 of 12-14% which coincided with a previous period of very tight funding. This is a very worrying position to be in when such a significant percentage (70%) of the community of citizens who have responsibility and oversight of such an important public service have lost faith in the government's approach and track record.

We hope the results of this survey will be taken seriously by the powers that be. The governance community always have and continue to provide the schools system with a huge amount of support, accountability and direction. The views and accounts of these knowledgeable volunteers need to be listened to more by our parliamentarians and our policy makers. Here is an enormous group of people – quarter of a million volunteers across England – who understand the strengths and weaknesses of their schools and trusts, and they are not afraid to move into action to address the things that need addressing in order to improve schooling for children and their community. They give so much to the sector and they are owed the respect of being listened to in return.

Emma Knights OBE

Chief Executive
National Governance Association

Introduction

The National Governance Association's (NGA) annual governance survey seeks to understand the challenges faced by schools and trusts across the country, from the view point of governing boards. It also explores the strategic priorities of trustees and governors as they look to fulfil their core functions.

While many of the challenges faced by governing boards are by no means new, the impact of COVID-19 and more recently the cost of living crisis have exacerbated long standing issues such as pupil mental health and wellbeing, finance and funding, and staff wellbeing, recruitment and retention. In this year's survey we look at how governance continues to champion the needs of all pupils within schools and trusts amid these challenges.

This year, the annual governance survey gathered the views of over 4100 governors and trustees. Drawing on longitudinal data that NGA has collected in the previous 11 years of the survey, it joins two other reports presenting findings from the 2022 survey data.

Find the full series of school and trust governance in 2022 reports at:

▶ www.nga.org.uk/governance2022

Methodology

This is the twelfth consecutive year that NGA has conducted this school and trust governance survey. It is the largest of its kind and provides an extensive overview of the governance of state funded schools in England. This longitudinal national data documents the evolution of governance which otherwise may have been overlooked.

The survey was open to everyone governing state funded schools, whether as trustees of academy trusts or governors of single schools between 25 April and 30 May 2022 via the online survey website SmartSurvey.

While not all respondents answered every question, 4,185 respondents in total engaged with the survey. Respondents cover all school phases, types and regions. Although self-selecting, the distribution of respondents and their school setting broadly matches the national picture by phase, type, structure, and region. Respondents governing in nurseries and secondary schools are slightly overrepresented as are those in the South East while those governing in the East of England are slightly underrepresented. Respondents do not need to be members of NGA, but 87% are.

For a full overview of the methodology used:

▶ Visit www.nga.org.uk/governance2022

Terminology

This report refers to:

▶ **MATs** – a multi academy trust which is two or more academies governed by one board of trustees

▶ **SATs** – a single academy trust

▶ **Academy committees** – to describe committees of a trust board for an individual school (also known as local governing bodies)

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Key findings

01 There has been a significant shift in the strategic priorities identified by governing boards since last year, with curriculum and attainment being the issues most frequently included as a school or trust priority in 2022. Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum was identified as a strategic priority by 70% followed by improving attainment (62%).

02 For all regions, school types and phases, school funding is the biggest challenge for schools and trusts. Only 30% of respondents said they are financially sustainable in the medium to long term without drawing on unspent funds or making significant changes.

03 Schools and trusts are increasingly negative about their long term financial position. Only 35% of respondents believe that their organisation is sufficiently funded to deliver its vision and strategy to meet the needs of all pupils, down from 40% in 2021.

04 A combination of different financial pressures are threatening school budgets. The top challenges boards reported facing when setting a balanced budget were staff pay costs (60%), the cost of supporting SEND and high needs pupils (47%) and infrastructure costs (46%) including catering, ICT, estates management, business administration, energy and supplies.

05 Operating costs including energy prices presented a growing financial challenge for governing boards even before prices reached current levels. There was a 21 percentage point increase (25% to 46%) in the number of respondents placing infrastructure in their top three challenges when setting a balanced budget when respondents completed the survey back in May 2022.

06 Governing boards report a large increase in safeguarding concerns following the pandemic. Nearly three quarters of respondents (71%) said they had seen an increase in the number of safeguarding concerns including domestic abuse and neglect in addition to concerns around pupil mental health and wellbeing.

07 Challenges in recruiting teaching staff are at their highest level since 2016. Just over half of those surveyed (53%) said their school or trust had found it difficult to recruit teaching staff – an increase from 29% in 2021.

08 Staff wellbeing and workload has become a more prominent issue, featuring as both a strategic priority and one of the top three challenges facing schools. 57% of respondents said their school or trust is signposting to accessible support services such as counselling.

09 Almost all schools (95%) offer additional services to families. Second hand uniform provision, wrap around before and after school care and providing pupils with breakfast are the top three most frequently offered services provided by schools.

10 Governing boards want more help to support families experiencing poverty. 8 out of 10 respondents said access to additional funding was needed while 69% also stated that more support/collaboration is needed from other statutory and non-statutory services.

11 Overwhelmed external support services are having a detrimental impact on providing support for pupil mental health and wellbeing. 76% of respondents said that improved access to specialist services and 75% said access to additional funding would help their school further support pupil mental health and wellbeing.

12 Support for pupils with special educational needs is a key issue for boards. 47% of boards ranked it as being one of their top five strategic priorities and 25% of respondents consider it to be one of their overall top three challenges as well as one of their top three challenges when setting a balanced budget (47%).

13 This year we saw the lowest number of respondents (10%) with a positive view on the government's performance on education over the past year since we first asked the question in 2011.

Top challenges facing schools and trusts

1. Balancing the budget
2. The attainment of disadvantaged children
3. Staff wellbeing including workload
4. Improving attainment
5. Support for pupils with special educational needs
6. COVID-19 recovery

Top strategic priorities for governing boards

1. Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum
2. Improving attainment
3. Support for pupils with special educational needs
4. Pupil mental health and wellbeing
5. Staff wellbeing including workload
6. Ensuring best use of resources

Findings

Every governing board, no matter the type, educational phase or size of the organisation must ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction of their organisation. Governing boards champion the needs of all pupils within their organisation, working closely with senior leaders to develop a strategy that serves the best interests of all the children and young people within the school or trust. To do that, there needs to be a clear understanding of the context of the school, the challenges it faces, and the strategies required to drive improvement.

This year we asked respondents to tell us specifically about both the challenges they faced and the strategic priorities they were putting in place. Together these provide us with an informed picture of both the context schools and trusts are operating in, and how they intend to implement their strategy to turn their vision to reality.

Challenges

Respondents were asked to tell us the top three challenges facing the school or trust they governed, picking three options from a list of 16. Bar 2021 when we did not specifically ask about challenges, balancing the budget has been the top challenge identified by governing boards since we first asked the question in 2018, and this year was no different across all regions, school phases and board types. Balancing the budget was most likely to be considered the number one challenge of schools and trusts with 25% of respondents giving it the top spot and 44% of respondents including it in their top three challenges. Despite increased investment since 2019, the level of funding schools receive per-pupil remains, in real terms, below what it was in 2010. Rising costs mean that the government is no longer on track to restore real terms per pupil

Challenge	%
Balancing the budget	44%
The attainment of disadvantaged children	31%
Staff wellbeing including workload	27%
Improving attainment	26%
Support for pupils with SEND	25%
COVID-19 recovery	25%
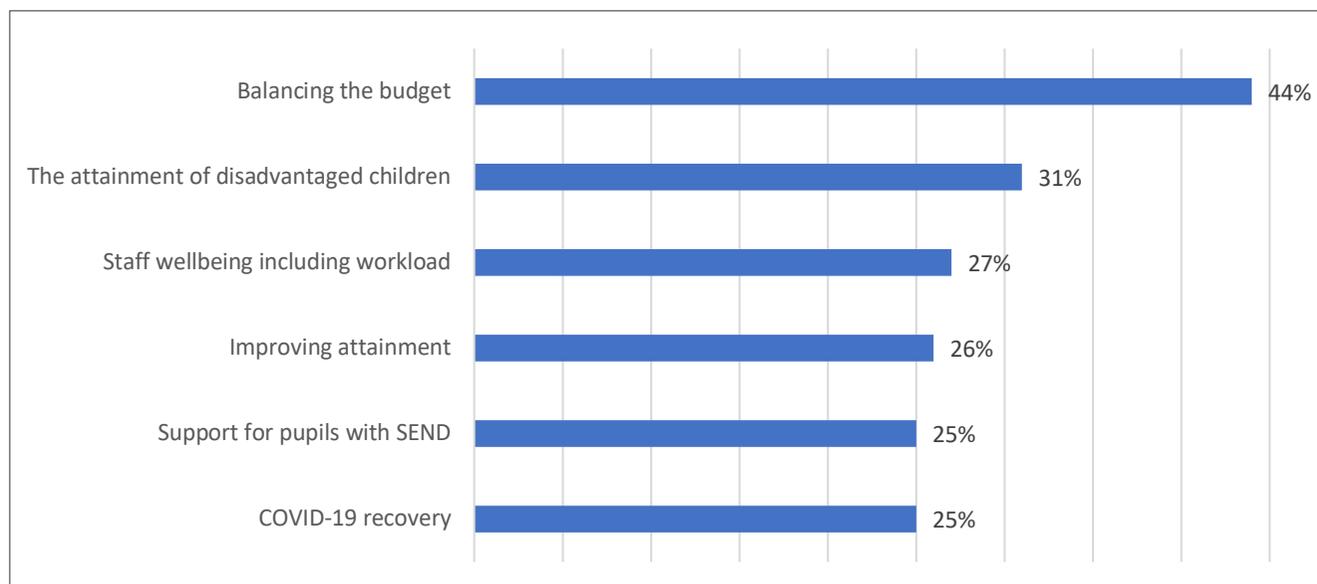
Figure one, percentage of respondents that considered the above to be one of the top three challenges faced by their school or trust.

funding to 2010 levels by 2024-25. The impact of the lack of funding and investment into schools can be seen throughout the survey as respondents repeatedly identify a need for additional funding to address issues such as disadvantage and pupil mental health and wellbeing.

Improving attainment is also a top challenge for schools/trusts with 26% of respondents considering it to be one of their top three and 31% particularly concerned about the attainment of disadvantaged children. It comes as no surprise that a quarter (25%) of respondents identified COVID-19 recovery as one of their top three challenges.

Strategic priorities

When asked to pick their school or trust's five strategic priorities out of a list of 16, ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum (70%) and improving attainment (62%) topped the list this year. These were followed by support for pupils with SEND (47%). Last year pupil mental health and wellbeing took the top spot as schools dealt with the initial impact of COVID-19 on their pupil's mental health and wellbeing. This year it came in just under SEND with 46% of respondents placing it in their top five.

Staff wellbeing and workload was also a prominent priority issue, with some respondents reporting that decisions taken to make cuts in order to balance the books had added to the burden on staff, for example, staff working longer hours and managing larger class sizes. Many boards have also placed ensuring best use of resources on their list of strategic priorities (41%).

> "Schools and teachers have been amazing during Covid – extending skills to both face to face and remote teaching with little recognition by Government and great recognition by Parents who realise how hard teaching is now! Most schools now need additional funding to survive/keep offering the same levels of education/catch up learning lost during Covid."
>
> Trustee, primary SAT
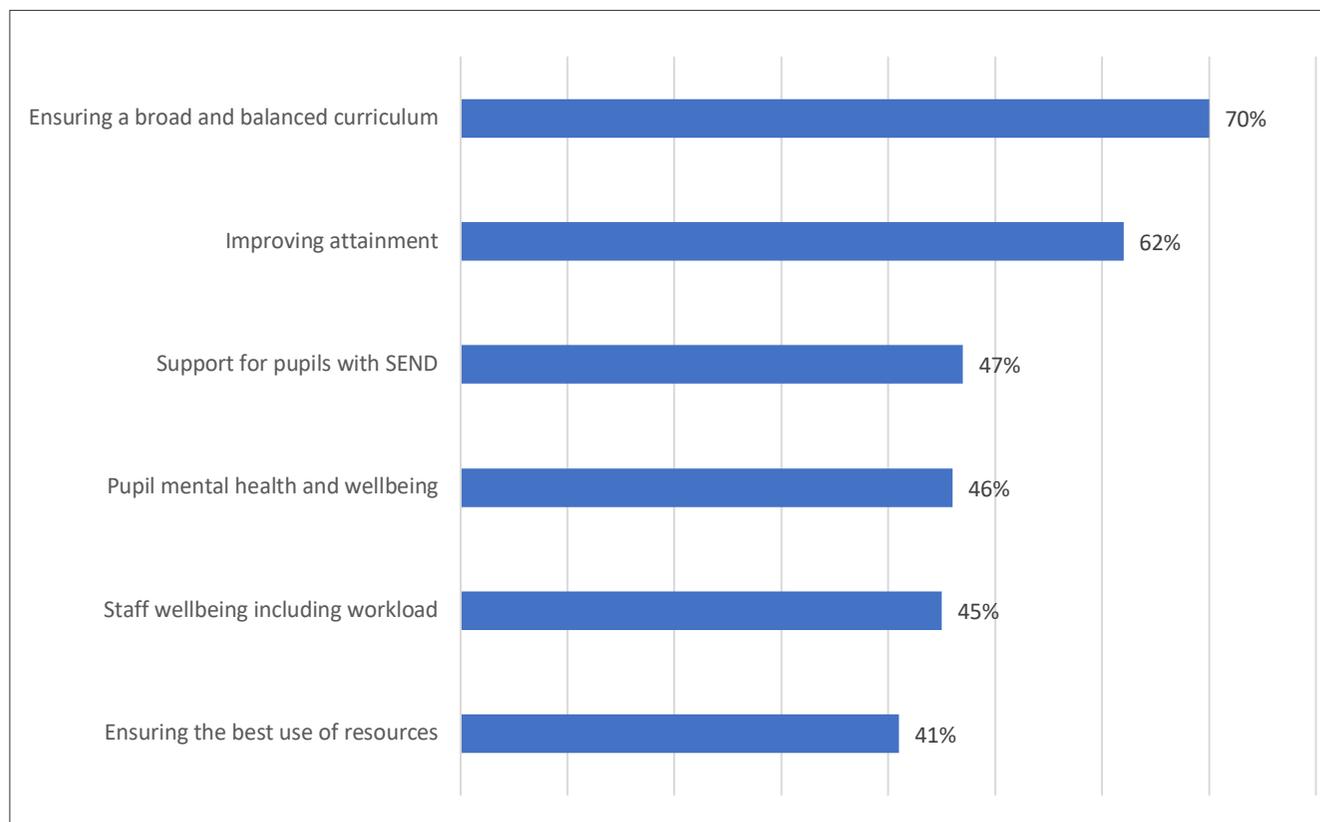
Figure two, percentage of respondents that identified the above as one of their board's strategic priorities in 2022.

> "A lack of funding and staffing for schools is affecting staff wellbeing and workload, therefore impacting on outcomes for children."
>
> Chair, primary MAT

Finance

As one of the core functions of governance, boards hold the responsibility for the financial oversight of their school or trust. Each organisation will have unique needs and priorities for how funding is spent, but a common goal in ensuring pupil needs are met remain at the heart of their spending decisions.

School funding per pupil has fallen in real terms over the last decade and wider cost pressures mean that it will remain below 2010 levels in 2024-25. This is despite £7bn increase in school funding by 2024-25, compared with 2021-22. It is not surprising therefore that balancing the budget was marked the biggest overall challenge facing schools and trusts across all regions and school types even before inflation and energy prices had reached their current (August 2022) levels. A quarter of respondents (25%) placed it as their school's/trusts top challenge and 44% considered it to be one of their top three.

The survey findings showing the financial picture of schools and trusts was provided before the full extent of the cost of living crisis had taken hold. Despite this it already revealed that many organisations were starting to struggle with rising cost pressures.

Just over half of governors and trustees (53%) reported that their school or trust is able to balance income and expenditure, with a further 21% stating they were able to do so while maintaining a healthy surplus, a similar picture to 2021. Respondents governing in alternative provisions (93%), MATs (86%) and in the North East (84%) were most likely to report that they were able to balance income and expenditure, including some retaining a surplus.

Many of those reporting to be able to balance income and expenditure stated that they were doing so at a cost to the organisation as a whole. Respondents spoke of relying on committed staff who are willingly taking on additional duties, limiting their curriculum offer and putting infrastructure improvement plans on hold.
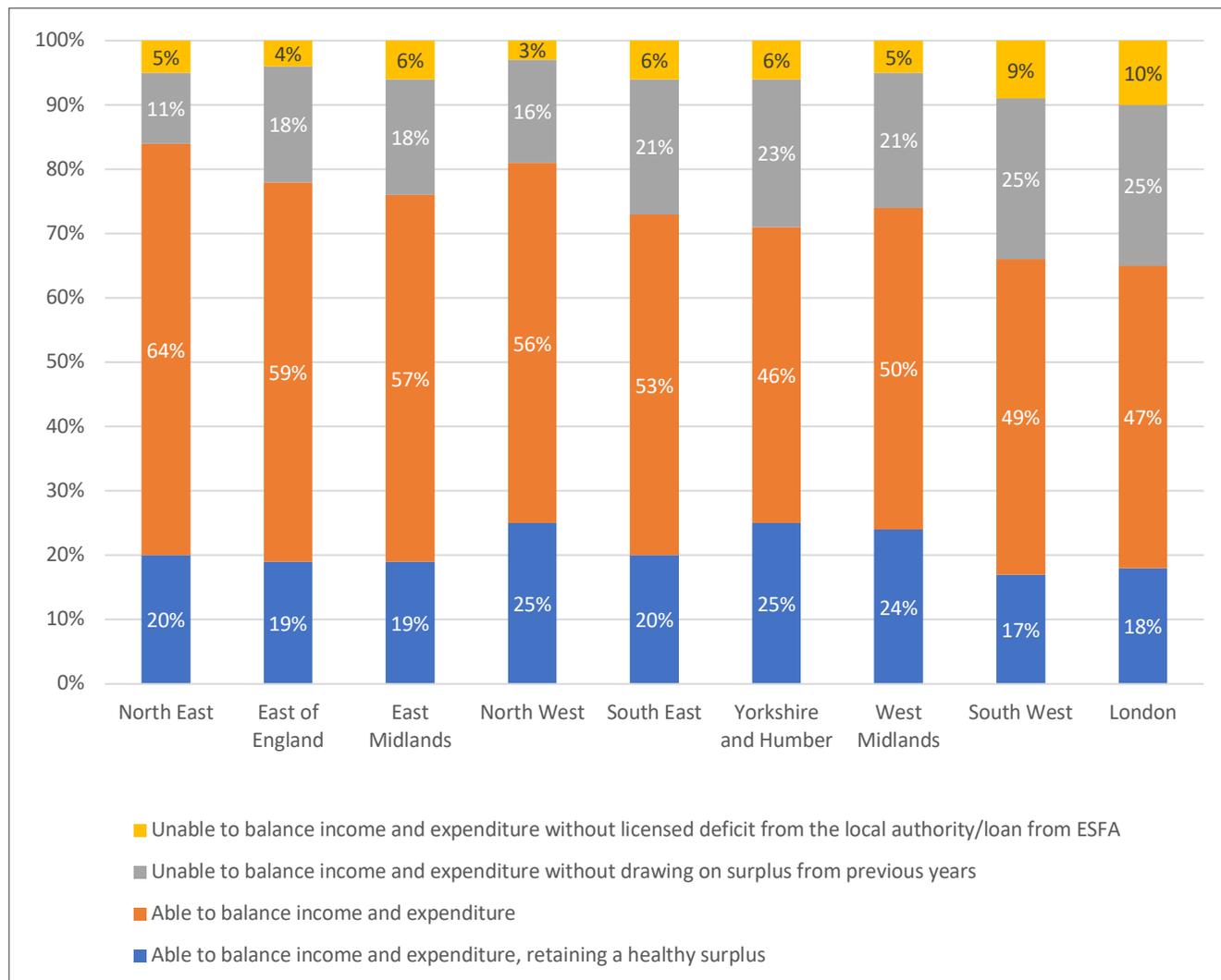
Figure three, financial position of respondent's school or trust by region (excluding those who selected don't know).

Despite the majority of respondents saying that they were able the balance their income and expenditure this year, only 30% felt financially sustainable with current levels of funding and income, down three percentage points compared to 2021. Almost a half of boards (49%) reported that they would not achieve financial sustainability without efficiency savings or drawing on unspent funds, an increase of four percentage points since last year (45%). A further 21% expect that significant change will be needed to sustain the school or trust. This comes as no surprise as we see the inflationary pressures on schools mounting with the increasing cost of energy and food and the well overdue staff pay awards in the pipeline, with no additional funding planned to cover the costs.

Local authority (LA) maintained federation schools had the highest number of respondents reporting that they were financially unsustainable without significant changes (31%). Those governing in a trust reported the most positive future financial position with 40% of MAT respondents and 38% of SAT respondents saying that they will be sustainable with current funding and income levels. However, even trusts are seeing an increase in concerns about sustainability without changes, with 14% MAT trustees now feeling this way compared to 10% last year.

When asked to expand on their concerns about the financial future of their school/trust, the cost of living crisis was raised as a concern for boards and their staff, with the volatility and increasing cost of energy and food prices eating into an already stretched budget. We recognise that the picture is now likely to be more stark than we are able to report on.

Respondents also expressed concern over covering the cost of staff pay increases with no additional funding from the government to account for this. Falling pupil rolls were also among concerns cited by respondents for the future financial position of their school. This was particularly an issue for schools in rural areas and where rapidly increasing house prices and rental costs are forcing families to move.

We asked respondents about the measures their schools and trusts are likely to take in the next 3-5 years to ensure financial sustainability. The top five measures chosen were:

- Reviewing contracts for the supply of goods and services
- Income generation strategy
- Collaborate with other schools
- Staff restructure
- Reduce spending on infrastructure

Funding for vision and strategy

A large number of respondents expressed fears over the current levels of funding to support their vision and strategy. Overall, 65% of respondents said that they did not feel their school or trust is sufficiently funded to deliver its vision and strategy to meet the needs of all pupils, this is a five-percentage point increase since the question was first asked last year (60%). Concerns around falling pupil rolls, unfunded

Your voice

"We are currently in a good financial position but concerned about inflation in both staff pay and service costs if funding does not keep pace."
Chair, secondary SAT

"We have a surplus for this year, but with cost of living crisis, projected staff pay rises and lower birth rates in some year groups we are projected to have a deficit in two year's time."
Vice chair, LA maintained primary school

"Our reserve will dwindle over 3 years unless funding increases in line with staff pay awards and minimum salary expectations aimed at retention of teachers."
Chair, LA maintained primary school

"We've worked really hard to eliminate a significant inherited deficit but as a result we have no reserves to fall back on. Energy costs will be £250k higher, additional funding will be completely swallowed up by this and the likely (but deserved and necessary) staff pay increases so the only benefit of increased funding is standing still for 2022-23. We don't expect an uplift for the following year so this will mean cuts."
CEO, all-through MAT

"We have had surplus for years and have been prudent in making savings during recent significant cuts in funding for schools but Covid has wiped out all our contingency and carry over. Predicted future pay rises and energy costs are going to make us tumble into significant deficit."
Chair, LA maintained primary school

"Impact of rising energy and infrastructure costs eg: replacement boiler. Experienced staff with high salaries – impact of new starting salaries for NQT's. Rural area with falling rolls, unaffordable or no new family accommodation. Rising number of children with SEND and lack of local support."
Chair, primary local academy committee

"We may be financially sustainable, but, given central government policy, this runs against our ability to do our best by the children whom we teach and care for. For example, we have a very committed staff, who have willingly taken on additional roles as IT experts with parents who are not able to navigate on line lessons, and as unpaid informal social workers for families who are not coping either with the pandemic or with the pressures that remain on children and their parents in this period of 'living with covid'. We are fortunate in having an SLT who are committed to actions which can underpin staff well being despite the continuing pressures of a budget which does not cover what we as a governing board would like the school to provide. eg we have had to abandon a successful professional staff development initiative that had been running for several years."
Vice Chair, LA maintained nursery and primary school

staff pay increases and energy costs were echoed by respondents. Regionally, the South West reported struggling with this most (75%) and those in the North East least likely (58%). Those governing in nursery and primary schools were also the school phases most likely to struggle with 67% not feeling sufficiently funded to meet their vision and strategy.

Challenges to a balanced budget

Staff pay costs were reported as the biggest concern for boards when setting a balanced budget, with 60% of respondents identifying it as being one of their top three main challenges, this was an increase of eight percentage points since last year. The cost of supporting SEND and high needs pupils was also in the top three and remained the same as last year at 47%. 46% of boards included infrastructure costs as one of their top three challenges, jumping up by 21 percentage points since 2021. Infrastructure costs include things like catering, ICT, estates management, business administration, energy and supplies – so it is unsurprising to see this drastic increase in its challenge to schools budgets amid the cost of living crisis.

Your voice

"Being a rural school being funded per pupil does not cover the costs of providing a decent education and maintaining an out-dated building. Furthermore, there a huge problems with the funding system of students with SEND."
Vice chair, primary MAT

"Local support for SEND and mental health is so stretched that it is close to breaking point."
Governor, primary LA maintained school

Financially unsustainable without significant changes
Financially sustainable with efficiency savings and drawing on unspent funds
Financially sustainable with current levels of funding and income

Figure four, medium to long-term financial position of schools and trusts by board type.
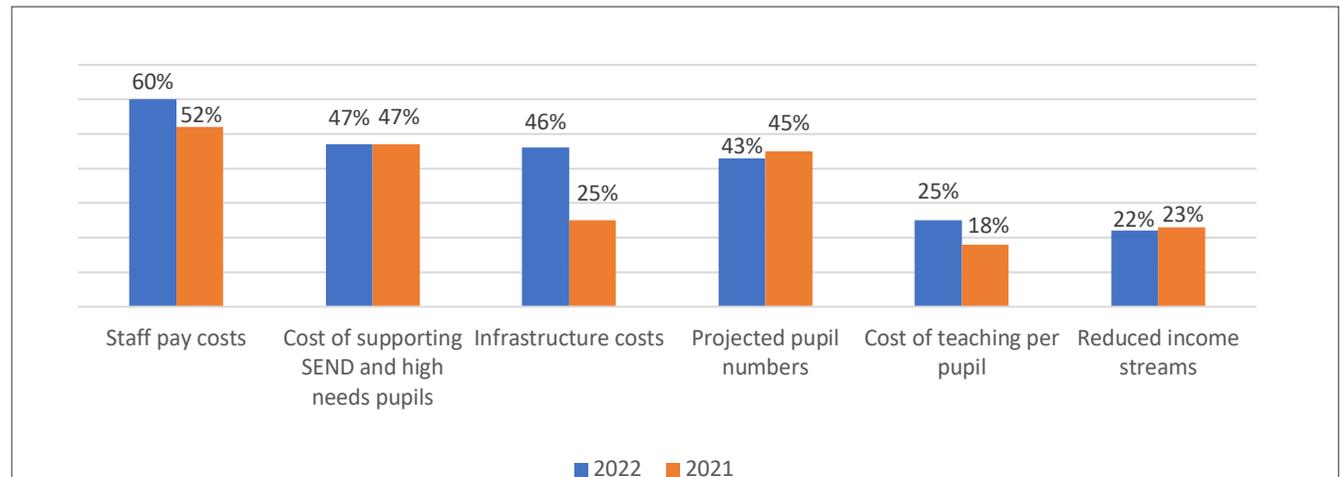
Figure five, top challenges to setting a balanced budget.

Staffing

Wellbeing, workload and work life balance

During the last year there has been numerous reports of a recruitment and retention crisis of teachers and leaders, including research carried out by Teacher Tapp which highlights unsustainable workloads and rates of pay well below inflation for teachers.[1] A large number of respondents expressed concern for their headteacher's/CEO's wellbeing through the free text boxes and said they were taking steps to ensure that their workload is balanced and manageable.

However, some respondents are finding that the external demands on their school leaders present challenges beyond their control. This year's data indicates that there has been an increase in respondents monitoring the workload, wellbeing and work life balance of headteachers/CEOs with 79% of respondents now monitoring this compared to 73% in 2021. Nurseries (86%) and LA maintained federations (86%) were most likely to do this.

The most common methods governing boards choose to monitor and address issues relating to the workload, wellbeing and work life balance of all staff are through regular staff surveys (61%) and ensuring it forms part of the headteachers' appraisals (61%). The least common methods boards engage in are through flexible working arrangements (30%) and signing up to the Department for Education (DfE) education staff wellbeing charter (13%).

Where developing and retaining staff was a top strategic priority for their board, regular staff surveys were the most common used method to address workload, wellbeing and work life balance within their school or trust. Findings also show that where retention and development of staff was a strategic priority, governing boards were more likely to engage in an array of methods to address issues relating to workload, wellbeing and work life balance.

[1] 2022-06 Teacher Tapp / SchoolDash – Teacher Recruitment (gatsby.org.uk)

Recruitment

Schools and trusts across the country are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit good candidates. Most notably, the percentage of governing boards reporting that their school/ trust had found it difficult to recruit staff to teaching and support positions saw the highest increase, with a 31 percentage point increase for support staff since last year (22% to 53%) and a 24 percentage point increase for teaching staff (29% to 53%).

Those governing in all-through (81%), alternative provision (73%) and special schools (70%) were the most likely to struggle with teacher recruitment. In addition, 57% of those governing in trust settings struggle to recruit teachers versus 46% of LA maintained schools. Regionally, those in London (61%) and the South West (57%) also find it most difficult.

Your voice

"The demands made by government etc and the short turn around times means it is difficult for them to adhere to a work/life balance."
Chair, primary SAT

"We use the performance management process as a means for regularly checking on this. We are very conscious that the demands of the pandemic together with ongoing staffing sickness levels has placed an intolerable burden on Heads and has required a level of resilience that cannot be maintained indefinitely. Headteacher burnout is a real concern for governors."
Vice chair, primary LA maintained school

"Under extremely difficult circumstances, with low staffing levels this rural school has meet lots of obstacles. The school has gone above and beyond expectations to assist staff and pupils in this difficult period."
Committee chair, secondary SAT

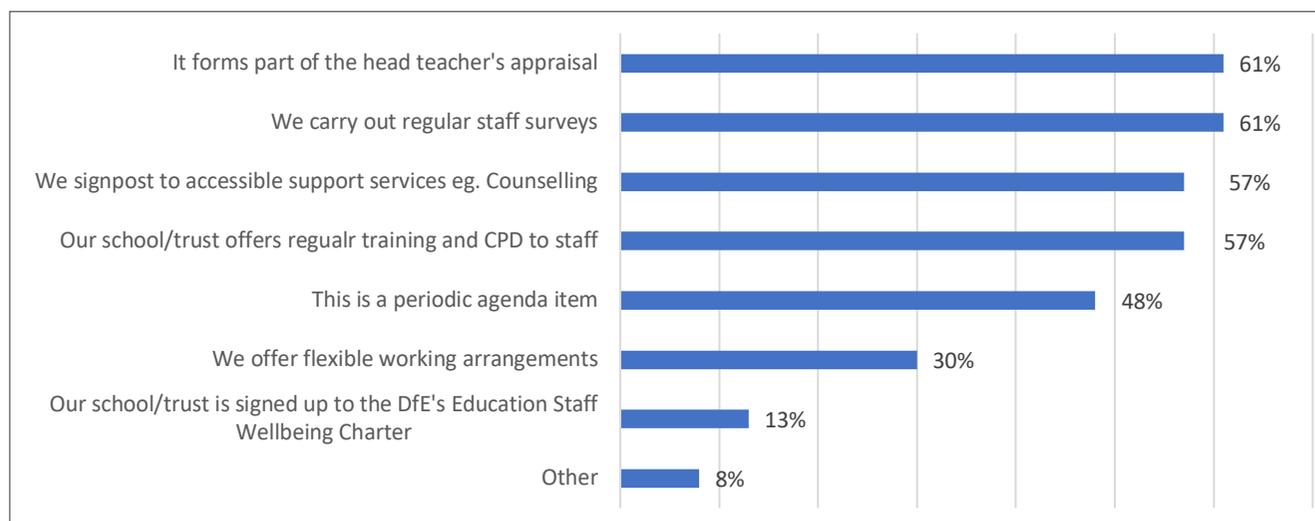| Method	Percentage
It forms part of the head teacher's appraisal	61%
We carry out regular staff surveys	61%
We signpost to accessible support services eg. Counselling	57%
Our school/trust offers regualr training and CPD to staff	57%
This is a periodic agenda item	48%
We offer flexible working arrangements	30%
Our school/trust is signed up to the DfE's Education Staff Wellbeing Charter	13%
Other	8%

Figure six, percentage of boards who use listed methods to monitor and address issues relating to staff workload, wellbeing and work life balance.

When asked to share why there was a difficulty in recruitment the dominant themes emerging were lack of applicants, lack of experienced/qualified candidates and the pay offered. There is particular concern around a shortage of support staff with respondents highlighting that prospective candidates and current support staff can find higher paid jobs with more flexibility in roles requiring less skill and expertise. They also voiced concerns over the shortage of well trained, quality teaching staff with the relevant experience, attributing this in part to insufficient training during the pandemic. A lack of applicants specialising in social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) and SEND were flagged as presenting a particular recruitment challenge as well as those specialising in specific subjects such as modern foreign languages (MFL) and STEM subjects.

Location was another commonly raised concern in the free text responses, with those governing in schools located in deprived areas struggling to attract quality applicants. The affordability of living in some areas when compared to current salary scales was also flagged as a deterrent to prospective applicants, most commonly by those governing in London, the South East and the South West.

Continuing the trend from 2021, workplace culture (57%), the reputation of the school (51%) and managing workload and wellbeing (45%), were most likely to be considered by boards as the top factors when recruiting quality staff.
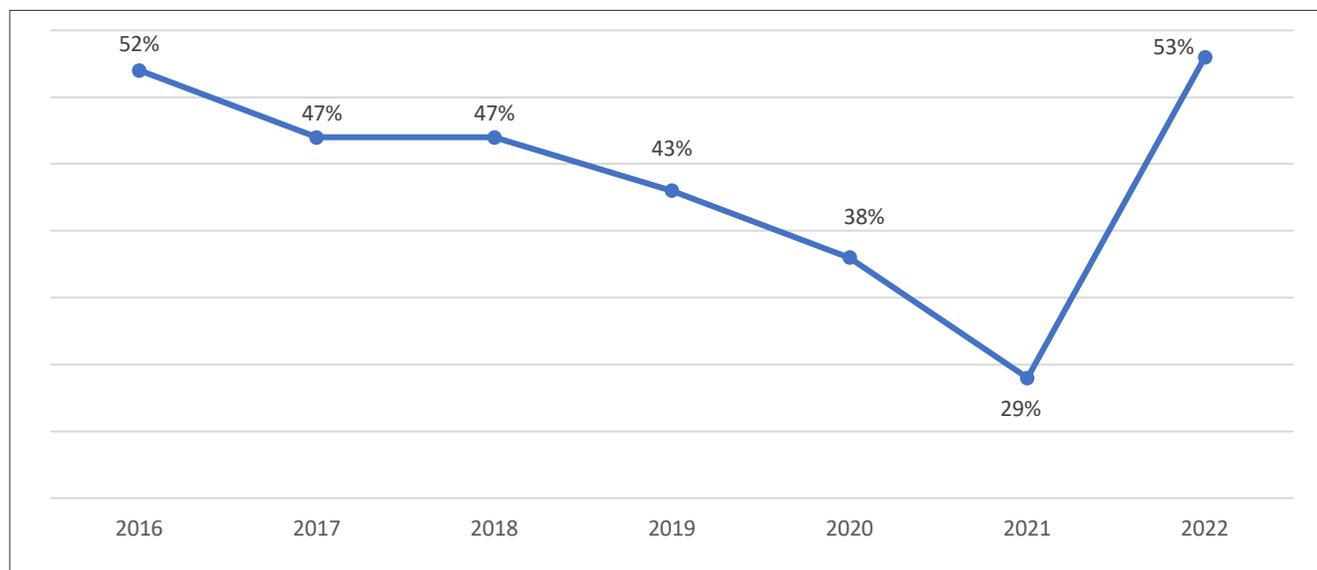
Figure seven, showing the percentage of respondents since 2016 that agree recruiting to teaching posts has been difficult.
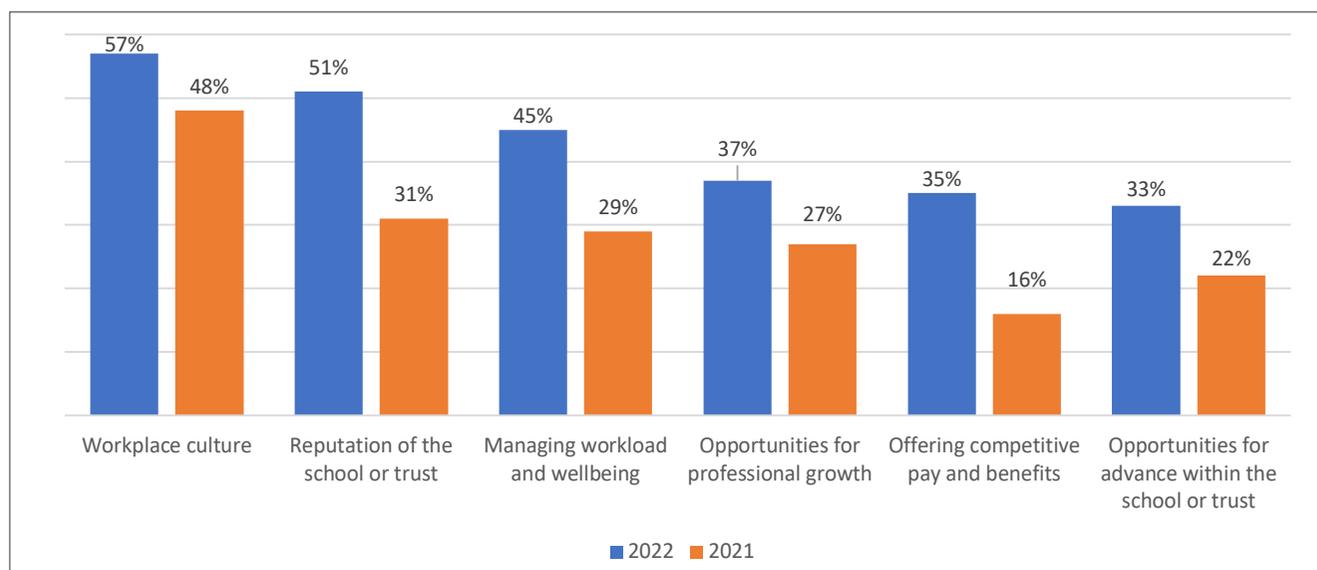
Figure eight, top factors when recruiting and retaining quality staff 2022 and 2021.

Headteacher/CEO

Nearly one quarter of respondents (23%) reported that their headteacher/CEO had resigned in the last two years. Those governing in multi academy trusts (26%) and special schools (29%) saw the highest resignation rates.

Reasons given for resignations are mostly in line with 2021 with the top reasons including retirement (44%), up from 40% last year, and leaving for another headship/promotion within the trust (19%).

Resignation levels and reasons recorded this year could indicate a that some headteachers/CEOs delayed retirement plans in their commitment to supporting their school/trust through the pandemic.

Curriculum and attainment

Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum was the top strategic priority for boards this year with 70% of respondents ranking it in their top five, followed by the closely linked improving attainment (62%).

When considering steps they have taken to ensure a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum offer, boards were most likely to say they agreed or strongly agreed that curriculum planning ensures pupils experiencing poverty are not financially excluded from participating in subjects with a potential cost (93%), with only 1% of respondents disagreeing. Boards were least likely to agree that their curriculum offer represents those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (70%).

Our voice

While school leaders and teachers are responsible for planning and teaching the curriculum, governing boards have a significant role in ensuring that every pupil experiences a curriculum that is broad and balanced, and which equips them with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life. Providing a curriculum that is not only broad and balanced but also inclusive and accessible, is crucial if all pupils are to be given the opportunity to reach their full potential in education and holistic wellbeing.
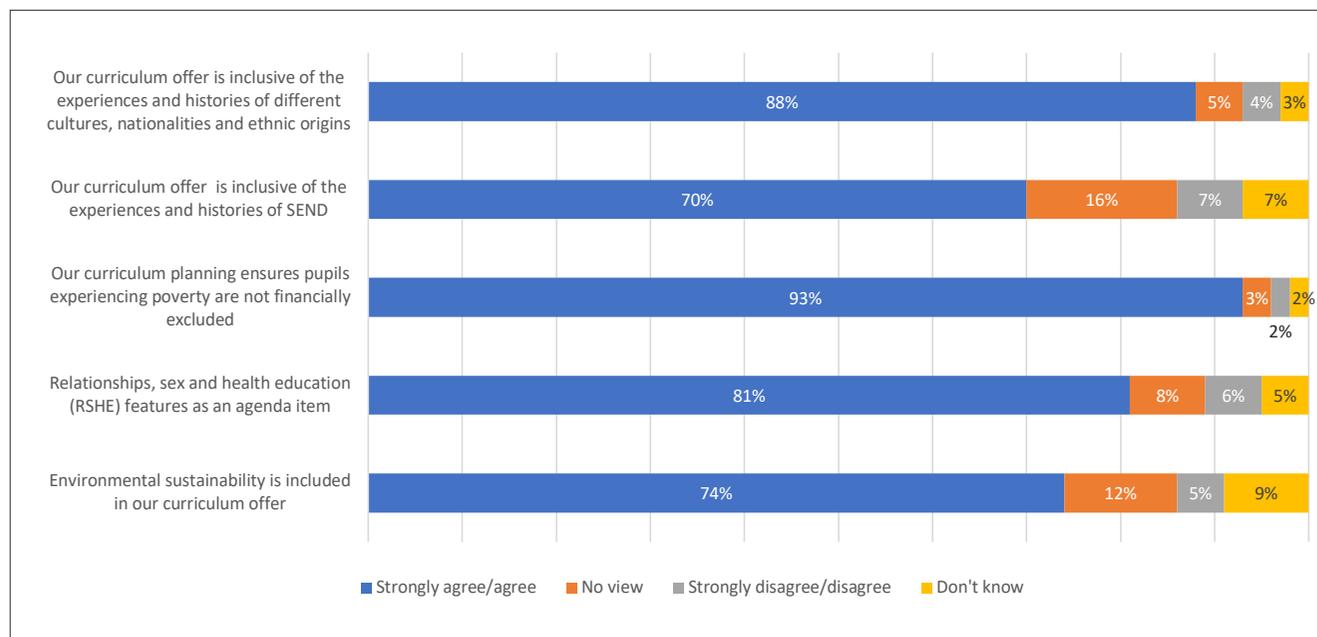
Figure nine, extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with statements on their school's/trust's curriculum offer.

Despite governing boards now having a responsibility for ensuring relationships and sex education (RSE) is being delivered in line with recently published statutory guidance, only 81% of respondents said that the subject had featured as a specific agenda item in the last academic year, with 6% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 88% of respondents stated that their school/ trust's curriculum offer was inclusive of the experiences and histories of those from different culture, nationalities and ethnic origins.

Greener Governance

It has been two years since we last asked about what schools and trusts are doing on environmental sustainability, and in that time, we have seen world leaders come together at COP 26 in Glasgow and the DfE have published a sustainability and climate change strategy for education and NGA has led a Greener Governance campaign to raise the profile of the issue with boards and their leaders.

Overall, a similar percentage (41%) of schools and trusts are taking some action on environmental sustainability in comparison to 2020 (44%). However we think that this year's results are due at last in part to a more informed judgement as to what action looks like given NGA's improved guidance on the topic and that we were more comprehensive with our survey questions this year. Another factor may be around the increasing costs schools and trusts are facing and toll this is taking on school finances which is reflected in the number of respondents expressing the need for more funding in order to take further action on environmental sustainability.

93 respondents have taken NGA's Greener Governance pledge, and just over one in five respondents (21%) has identified environmental sustainability as a strategic priority. LA maintained schools are leading the way with these accounting for 46% of those who do.
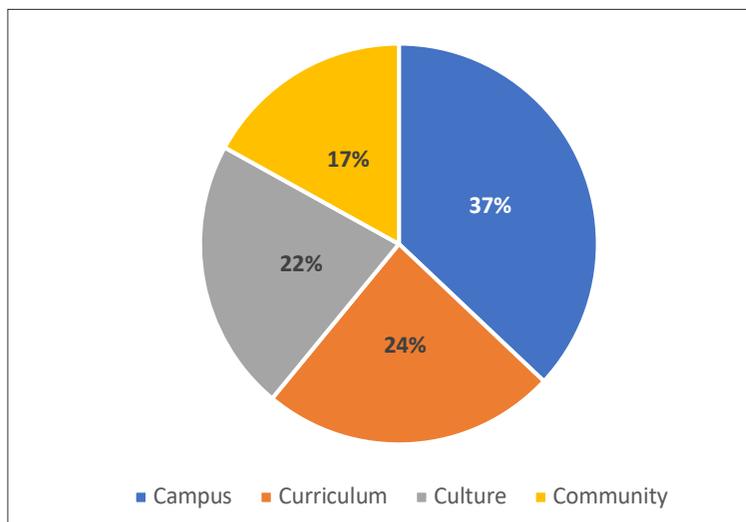
Figure ten, percentage of action taken in schools and trusts in relation to the four Cs of environmental sustainability.

Greener Governance
in schools and trusts

NGA developed the Greener Governance pledge which asks schools and trusts to:
- reduce their carbon emissions
- put environmental sustainability on the agenda
- ensure a climate action plan is developed.
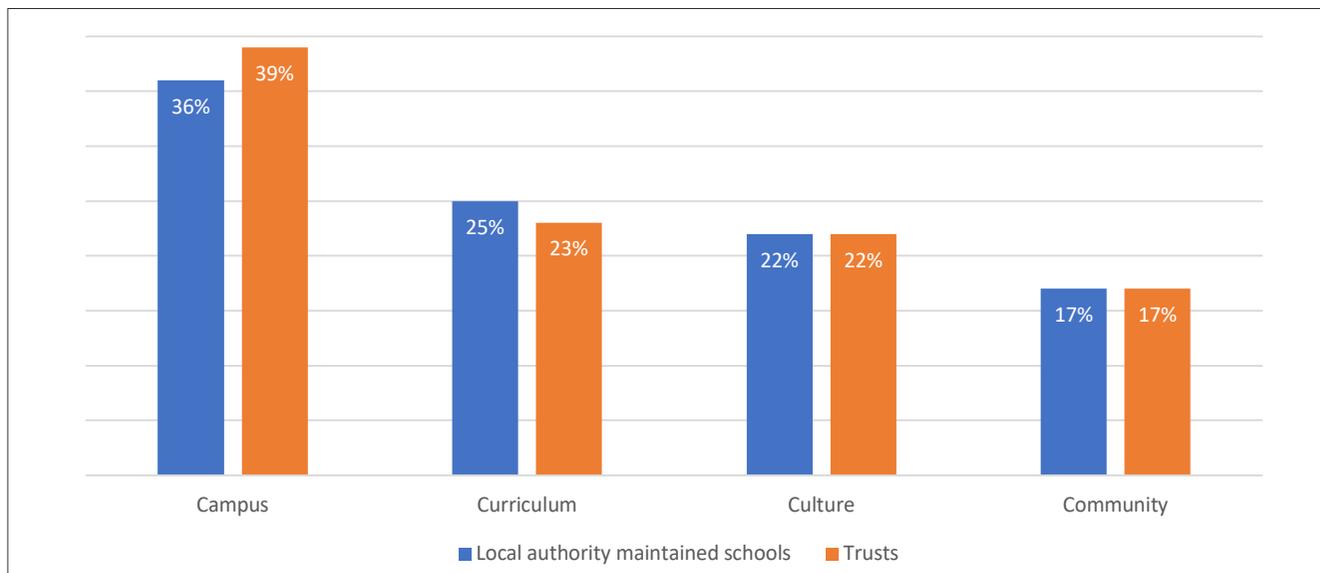
Figure 11, percentage of respondents that have taken action schools and trusts in relation to the four Cs of environmental sustainability by school structure.

During our Greener Governance campaign we have broken down the areas of action according the NAEE's four Cs of sustainability (campus, curriculum, culture and community). Over a third of all action taken by respondents has related to campus (37%) in addition nearly a quarter have also taken action with the curriculum (24%) and their culture (22%). The least action taken involved the community (17%). The top actions taken overall included providing opportunities for outdoor learning, teaching what is required by the national curriculum and reducing waste. Least taken action included revising the school food strategy, appointing a member of staff with responsibility for sustainability and working towards an eco-schools award.

Overall, activity taken is very similar between trusts and LA maintained schools. However, trusts have a taken more action with their campus (39%) compared to 36% of LA maintained schools and maintained schools have done more relating to curriculum (25% versus 23%).

Across all board types, staff time and capacity are what was deemed to be most needed in supporting environmental sustainability in schools (72%) closely followed by dedicated funding (69%). A quarter of respondents (26%) would support a criterion within the Ofsted inspection framework to encourage action.
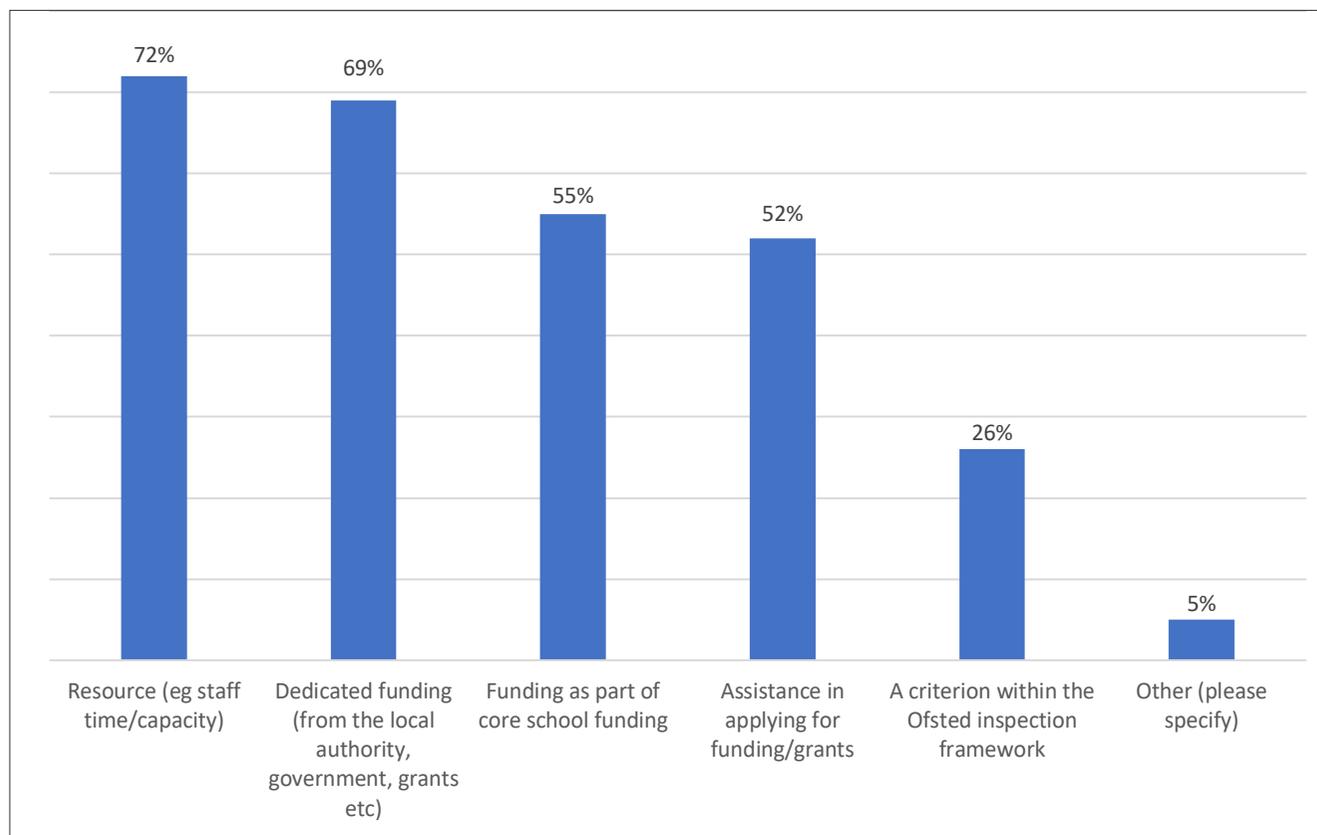
Figure 12, support needed for schools and trusts to take further action on environmental sustainability.

Pupil wellbeing

In 2021 pupil mental health and wellbeing took the top spot in terms of strategic priorities for boards, but this year, while no longer the top priority, it remains a strategic priority for almost half of boards (46%). According to a survey by NHS Digital one in six children aged five to 16 were identified as having a probable mental health problem in July 2021[2], an increase from one in nine in 2017. This upwards trend has continued since with the latest NHS data reporting the number of children and young people accessing mental health services rising from 572,912 in March 2021 to 691,935 in June 2022[3]. However, the number of children facing challenges with their mental health and wellbeing is likely to be higher than the available data suggests due to the extensive waiting times for those waiting to access specialist services.

With evidence suggesting that children who struggle with their mental health are significantly more likely to be excluded from school than their peers, it come as no surprise that alternative provision schools were more likely to consider it to be one of their top strategic priorities than other school types with 44% of respondents governing in alternative provision schools considering it to be their number one priority.

Despite the increased profile of pupil mental health and wellbeing across the sector since the start of the pandemic, only 48% of boards receive whole school data on the issue. This is a decrease of six percentage points since we first asked the question in 2021.

[2] NHS Digital (2021):'Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021'.

[3] NHS Digital Mental Health Monthly statistics dashboard.

Supporting pupil mental health and wellbeing

Respondents shared of a range of methods that their school/trust uses to support pupil mental health and wellbeing with the most popular strategies being:

1. in-school early intervention support
2. whole school staff training on mental health
3. access to external/community mental health services and organisations

Despite the fact that the number of pupils with SEMH needs continues to rise nationally, only 45% of respondents said that the school or trust itself collects data on pupil mental health and wellbeing.
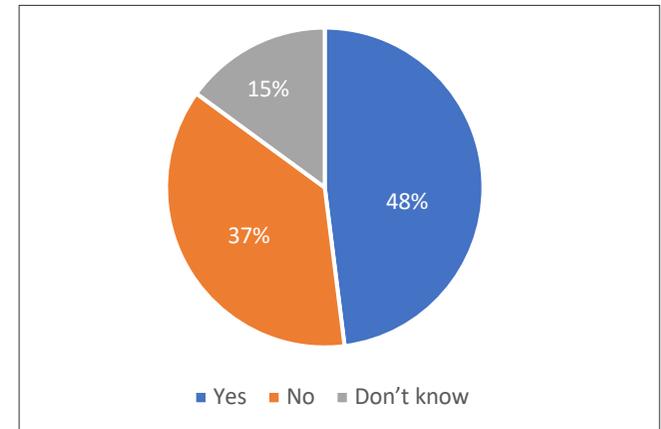
Figure 13, percentage of respondents that receive whole school data on pupil mental health and wellbeing.

Our voice

Mental and emotional health and wellbeing influences the physical and social health, attainment, and success of children and young people. Schools have an important role in supporting their pupils to be mentally healthy, resilient and to prevent mental health issues. As children spend the majority of their waking hours at school, education staff are often spearheading a lot of the first response interventions as well as shouldering the implications of stretched external specialist support services.

Boards can provide strategic leadership to champion a whole school/trust approach to wellbeing, including setting an ethos and culture that is inclusive, promotes resilience, and provides space for pupils to feel supported and listened to. Boards also need to ensure policies, procedures and decisions are taken in the interest of pupil wellbeing and monitor the impact of interventions put in place.

Your voice

"Access to therapies as part of curricular and pastoral delivery (speech and language therapy, drama therapy, canine assisted learning)."
Chair, special alternative provision school, local academy committee

"We are employing a Health Professional as we can't get NHS to fully meet our needs."
Chair, special MAT

"We buy in support from two local organisations for mental health and wellbeing and have a contract for psychological services as the waiting list is so long for LA support. We have extensive pastoral support and a family support worker."
Chair, secondary LA maintained school

"We have support from our church with 12 adults meeting once per week with children 1-2-1. We have a registered charity which supports those in need. The Trust has funded mental health classes and some individual students."
Chair, primary LA maintained school

In free text responses, a number of respondents reported that long waiting lists for external services has meant they have had to employ inhouse professionals such as psychotherapists, family liaison/support workers and health professionals and buy in bespoke services. Several respondents also said that their school has invested in Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) for staff. Access to therapeutic interventions as part of the curriculum and pastoral care offer were also used to support pupils as well as volunteers from the local churches such as 'school pastors'.

Further support

When asked what support boards and their school/trust require to further support the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils, the top three methods identified were:

1. improved access to specialist services such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

2. access to additional funding

3. high quality staff training and professional development

When respondents expanded on the support schools and trusts needed, an overwhelming narrative around extensive waiting times for the essential intervention of external services emerged.

Some respondents expressed frustration around schools picking up responsibilities that they have neither the time, capacity or resource for, highlighting further the impact of underfunded and stretched external services. Other respondents suggested better networking and sharing best practice with other schools. While some governors and trustees reported having robust and effective systems in place, including wellbeing link governors and governors/trustees themselves accessing training and development in this area, others expressed that they didn't know where to start and would benefit from some form of training and development in the areas of mental health and wellbeing.
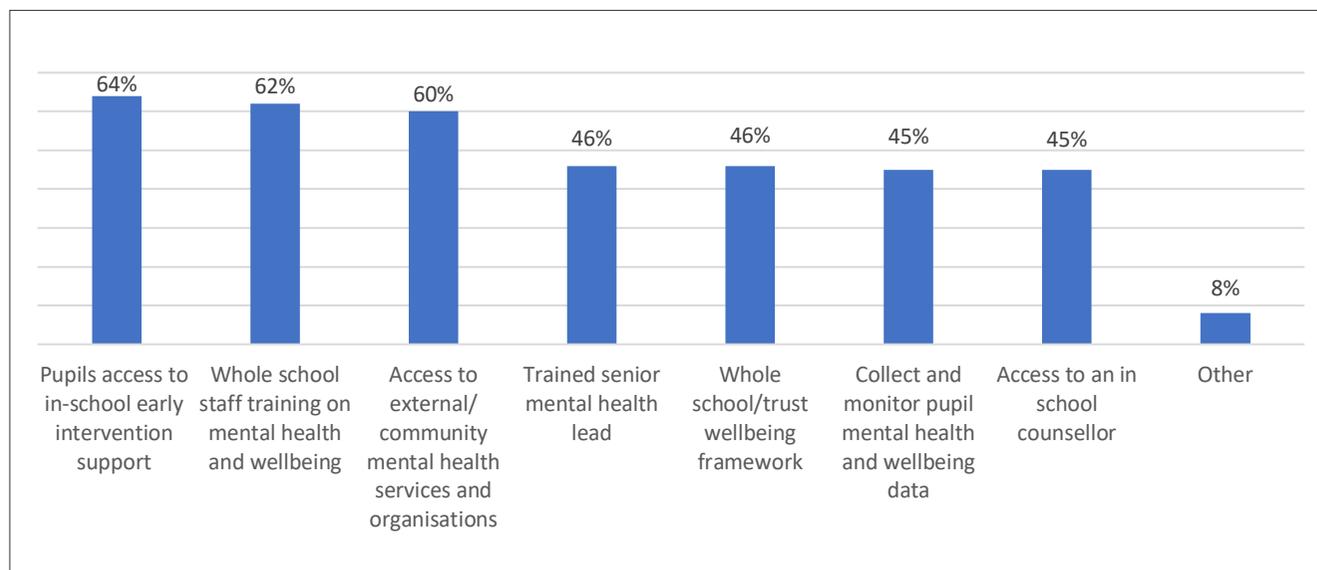
Figure 14, methods that schools/trusts use to support pupil mental health and wellbeing.
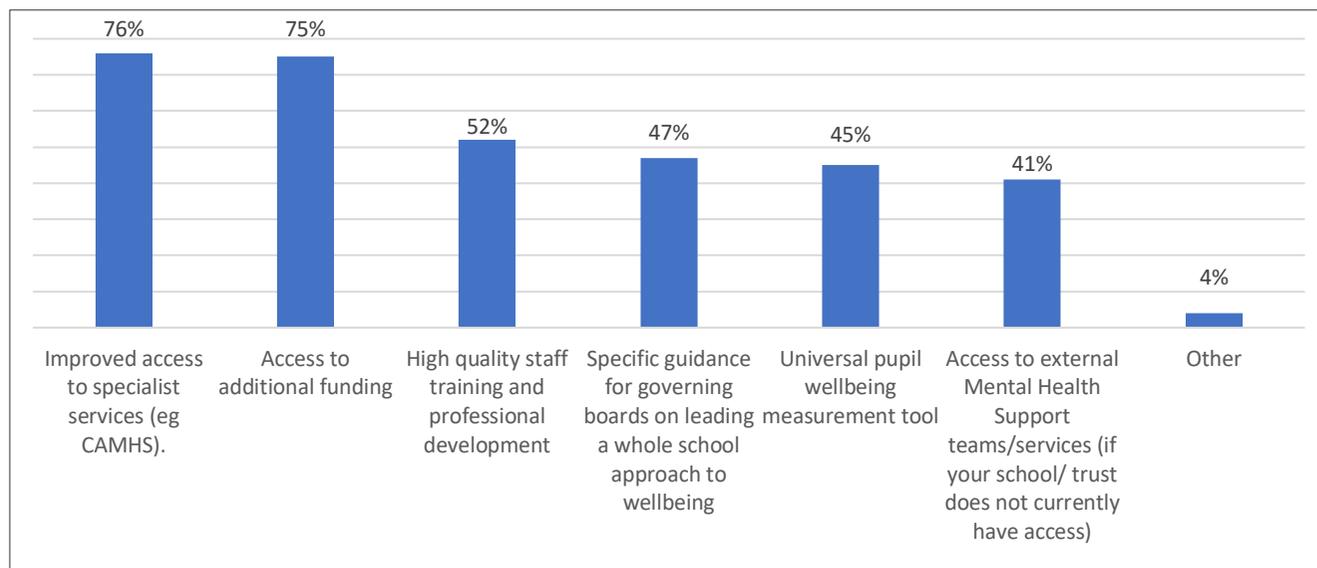
Figure 15, approaches that would help schools/trusts to further support pupils' mental health and wellbeing.

Safeguarding

71% of boards have reported an increase in safeguarding concerns following the pandemic, among wider possible factors, this reflects the impact of the partial school closures on pupils' safety and wellbeing across the country. This has been widely reported within and beyond the sector.

Safeguarding referrals made by schools during the partial school closures fell by almost a third according to data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS), reflecting the reduced face to face contact that school staff had with their pupils. However, according to The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) the number of children that were exposed to or were victims of abuse increased during the same period[4].

This is despite many schools working tirelessly during this time, not only to educate their pupils but also to check on their safety and wellbeing, often acting as a frontline key source of continuity and support for families and children experiencing safeguarding issues. However, since they re-opened to all pupils in 2020, schools have seen a surge in safeguarding issues.

Domestic abuse was a recurring theme when respondents were asked to expand on the most common safeguarding concerns within their school. Respondents also highlighted the impact of poverty on the wellbeing of their pupils with some of their basic needs not being met.

While the data presents as concerning across all school types, those who govern in a special school (67%) were the least likely to report a significant increase in safeguarding, closely followed by nursery (73%) and primary schools (75%). This may be linked to government guidance advising schools remain open for vulnerable children including SEND pupils.

[4] Statistics on the impact of COVID on children | NSPCC Learning
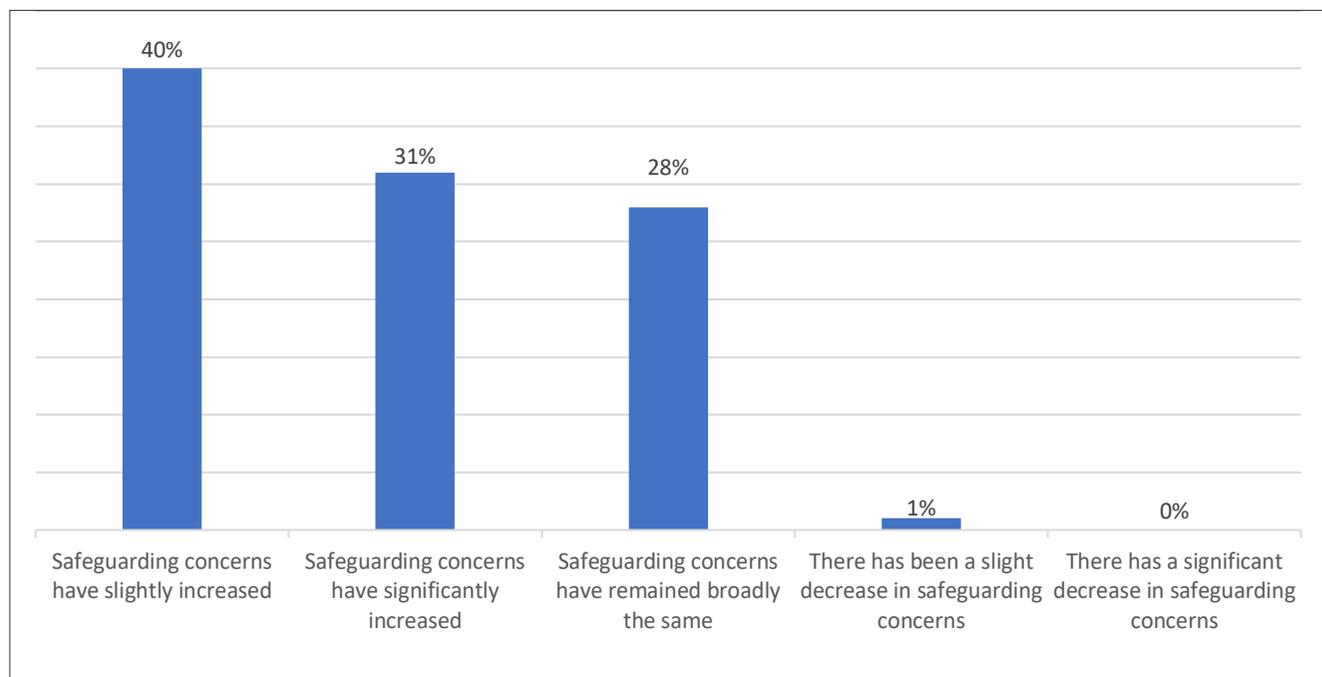
Figure 16, extent to which respondents have seen a change in the number of safeguarding concerns following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Your voice

"The categorisation we use has 'safeguarding' as the top ranked concern, followed by SLT phone calls regarding pupils behaviour. Worryingly, we have an increase in the number involving domestic violence."
Chair, nursery and primary LA maintained school

"Poor families are increasingly finding it difficult to make ends meet. Increase in children going hungry, poor clothing, etc. Friction at home – unemployment, domestic violence, parental irresponsibility, or absence. Neglect generally."
Vice chair, Primary MAT

"Pupils, families and teachers are all experiencing the ongoing and long term impact of covid. This includes mental health issues, challenges to wellbeing, and the impact of trauma and loss. It can be more difficult to monitor and engage with children and families when they are experiencing difficulties. Support services and wrap around care are all much more limited and waitlists have increased."
Committee chair, nursery and primary LA maintained school

It could also reflect the communication barrier that age can present in younger children and those with SEND when disclosing abuse or other safeguarding issues, as they can be less likely to have the language skills or awareness to do so. Those governing in secondary (84%) and all-through (92%) schools were most likely to report an increase in safeguarding concerns since the pandemic.

The detrimental impact of overwhelmed and underfunded external support services for children and young people is evident. Respondents reporting a need for more support for pupils from other statutory and non-statutory services were more likely to report an increase in safeguarding concerns.

- 76% of respondents identifying a need for improved access to specialist services such as CAMHS, said that safeguarding concerns had increased since the pandemic.
- 75% of those who said they required more external support for families experiencing poverty were also said that safeguarding concerns had increased since the pandemic.

	Nursery	Primary (including infant and junior)	Secondary (inc sixth form)	All-through	Special	Alternative provisions or pupil referral unit
Safeguarding concerns have significantly increased	29%	26%	45%	45%	23%	40%
Safeguarding concerns have slightly increased	44%	40%	39%	47%	44%	40%
Safeguarding concerns have remained broadly the same	27%	33%	15%	5%	31%	17%
There has been a slight decrease in safeguarding concerns	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%	3%
There has been a significant decrease in the number of safeguarding concerns	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%

Figure 17, extent at which respondents have seen a change in the number of safeguarding concerns following the COVID-19 pandemic by phase.

Your voice

"Prompt access to psychiatry, educational psych assessments, speech and language, physio, occupational therapy. Many things escalate wildly in prolonged waiting leading to distressed pupils parents and staff and much increased costs!"
Committee Chair, MAT

"Sharing best practice/resources with other schools to pick up on local issues. Happens informally but could be better organised."
Chair, primary LA maintained school

"Additional funding to community services so school is not the only source of support. Community has to share responsibility."
Chair, secondary SAT

"Honestly, we haven't had full staff or pupil attendance for a year. Our staff are struggling to get full PPA time as no supply staff available. They don't have the time or mental capacity to take on new policies and responsibilities as they are stretched to capacity."
Chair, primary LA maintained school

Disadvantage

Supporting pupils living in poverty

While addressing poverty is a broad issue that governing boards alone cannot tackle, there is much that schools can do, and are doing, to remove some of these barriers to learning due to poverty.

Governing boards are engaging in a variety of strategies to support pupils in poverty, most commonly regularly monitoring pupil premium spending and impact (87%) and ensuring disadvantage and pupil premium features as a regular agenda item for their governing board meetings (74%).
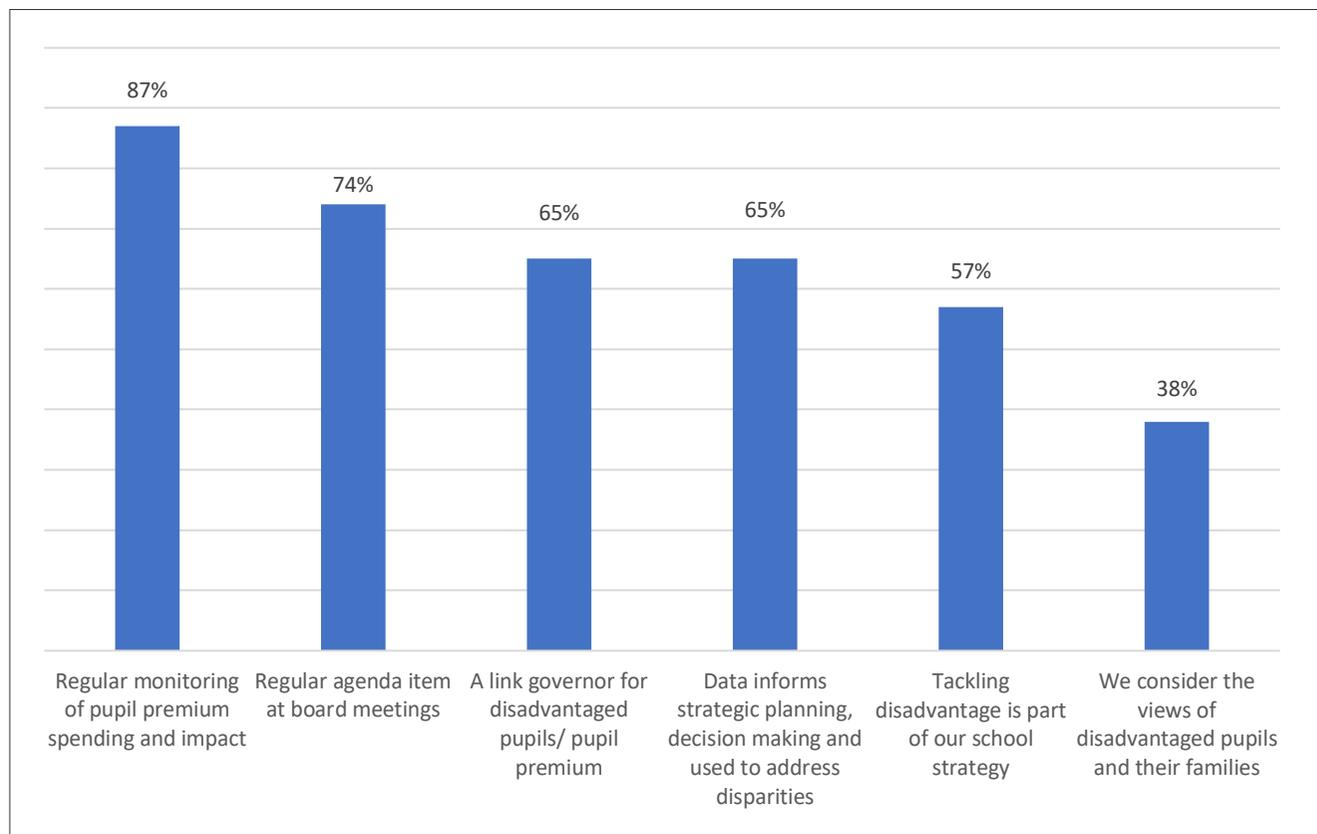
Figure 18, percentage of respondents used the listed methods to support pupils living in poverty.

[5] For the purpose of this survey vulnerable refers to pupils who have a child in need, child protection or early help plan, looked after children and have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable education providers or local authorities (eg receiving regular pastoral support/wellbeing interventions, on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services)

[6] Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic Year 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

[7] 800,000 children in poverty not getting free school meals | CPAG

When asked to share other strategies being adopted to support pupils living in poverty, respondents expressed a driving ambition to support their school community and build an inclusive vision. While there was some frustration shared over schools shouldering the consequences of funding cuts of some other key services, it is clear that schools and trusts are not short of passionate governors and trustees who are willing to step up and lead in supporting those most in need.

Services for families

As they have done for many years, schools are continuing to provide a variety of additional services to families and pupils in need. The extent of the services provided are a clear indication of the distinct and growing role that schools play as pillars of society. Almost all respondents (95%) said that their school/trust offers additional services to families over and above education. This year we added three new options to the list of services which are also the top three most frequently offered services provided by schools: second hand uniform provision (66%), wrap around before and after school care (54%) and providing pupils with breakfast (47%).

Reflective of the pupil age group, those governing in nurseries (71%) and primary schools (67%) were more likely to say they offer wrap around care as an additional service.

The percentage of respondents whose schools provide food banks (21%) is increasing, up from 18% in 2021 and has increased by almost 13 percentage points since before the pandemic (8.2% in 2019). There has also been a significant jump in the percentage of schools providing meals outside of term time when compared to pre-pandemic levels (37% in 2022 compared to 4.2% in 2019).

When we asked respondents to comment on other services they offer pupils and their families, it was clear that many schools are often going above any beyond to support families who are facing hardship.

Services schools provide for families

66% Second hand uniform provision	**54%** Wrap around before and after school care	**47%** Providing pupils with breakfast	**37%** Meals outside of term time	**36%** Financial support with purchasing school uniforms
21% Family learning	**21%** Food banks	**15%** Advice about income and benefits	**6%** Washing of school uniforms	**2%** Emergency loans

When asking respondents about the further support that would help boards to support families experiencing poverty, 8 out of 10 (82%) said that access to additional funding would equip schools and trusts to go further. This was the most common response across all regions and school phases. Respondents also commonly reported that more support and collaboration from other statutory and non-statutory services would be beneficial.

Expanding further on their views, an overwhelming number of respondents again expressed their frustration with the lack of wider government funding of external agencies leading to schools picking up responsibilities that would be better performed by other agencies. Other responses included making it easier for families to sign up for free school meals, improved early years offer and funding and the need for greater autonomy on how funding is spent to support the demographics of their school.
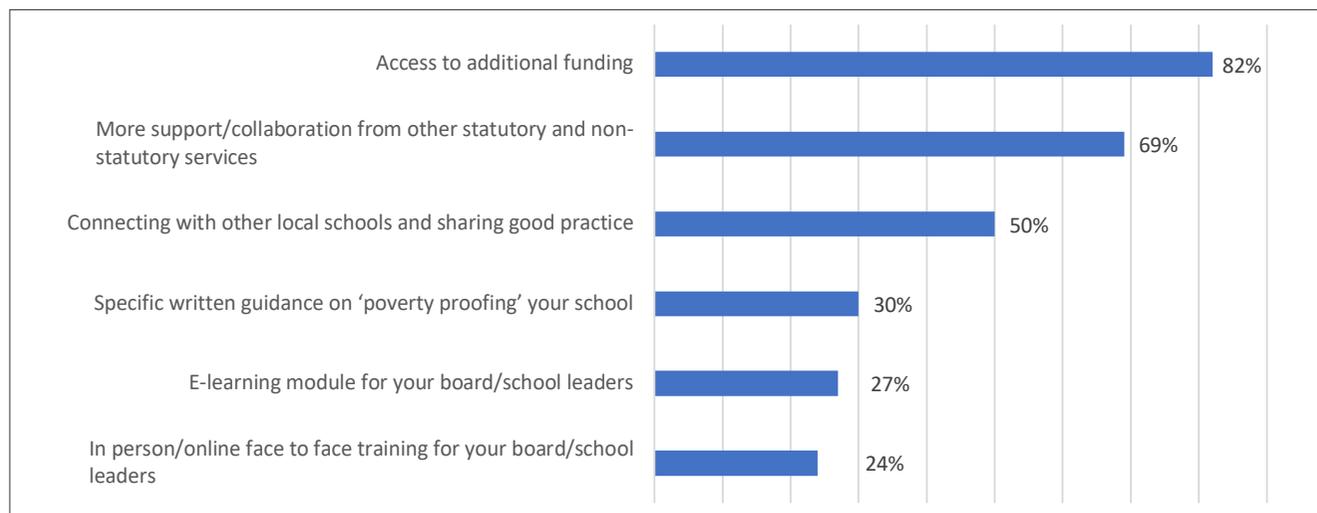
Figure 19, support respondents selected as needed for schools/trust to further support pupils from families experiencing poverty.

Wider drivers of disadvantage

Respondents were asked about the data they received for pupil groups who are statistically at a higher risk of being at a disadvantage in their education. Overall, boards are most likely to receive a breakdown of data for those pupils who are in receipt of pupil premium and SEND pupils. Boards are least likely to receive a breakdown of data by ethnicity.

This year we reformulated the question to include attendance. The disruption to the education system caused by COVID-19 has brought pupil attendance into sharp focus this year highlighting concerns that, while exacerbated by partial school closures, pre-date the pandemic. In their research and analysis report published earlier this year, Ofsted point out the importance of governors and trustees drilling down beyond the surface level attendance data[8].

Overall, boards are most likely to receive a breakdown of data for those pupils who are in receipt of pupil premium and SEND pupils. Boards are least likely to receive a breakdown of data by ethnicity.

Our voice

Boards will routinely receive a variety of school data, whether that be attendance, safeguarding, attainment etc. While it is useful to get an overall snapshot of how your school compares to regional and national averages, further analysis can highlight patterns of concern associated with particular pupil groups. The local context and demographics of your school should inform the data you are particularly interested in exploring further in order for school leaders to effectively address disparities among different pupil groups.
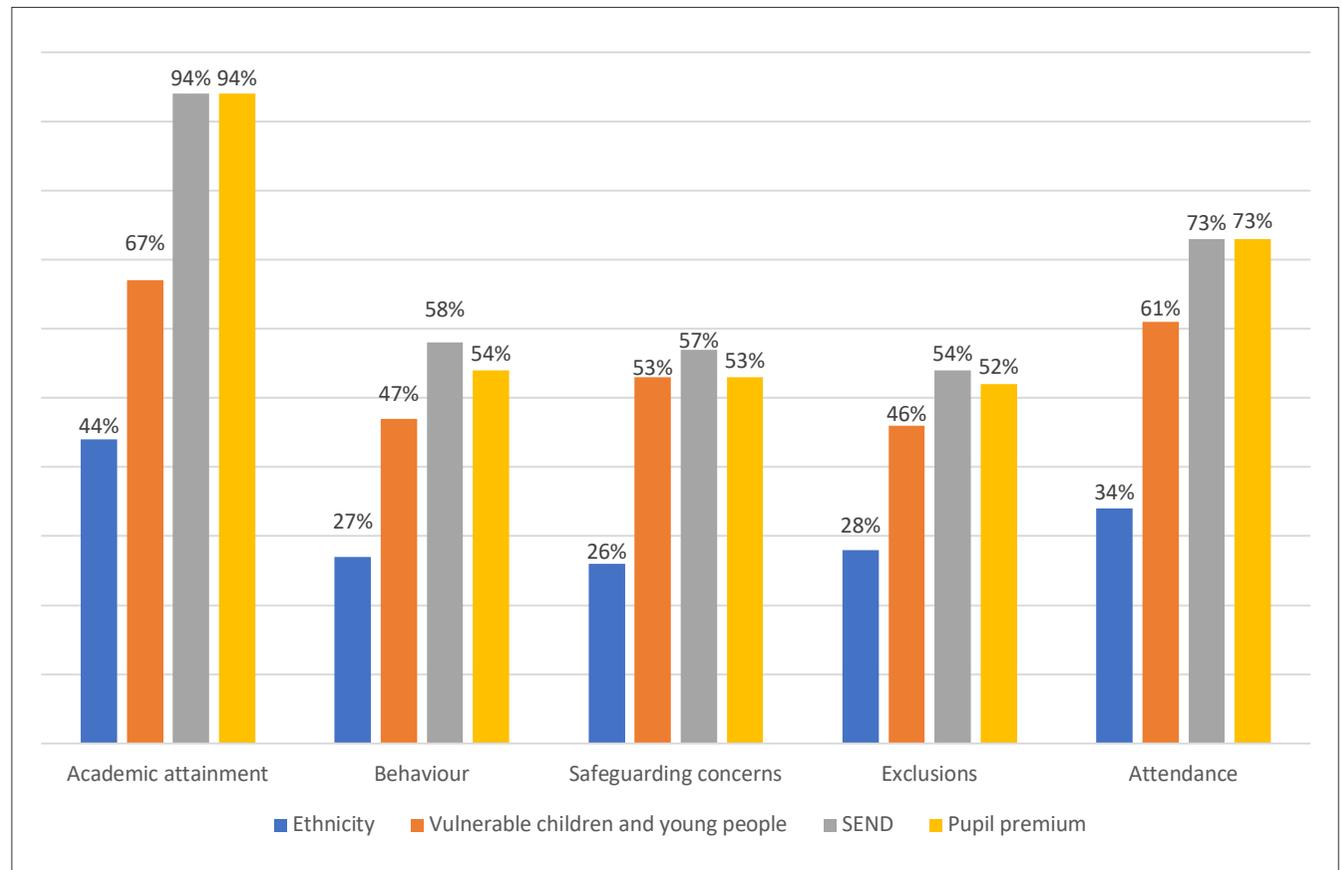

Figure 20, the percentage of boards receiving a breakdown of data for pupil groups at risk of disadvantage.

8 Securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

SEND

The recent green paper published earlier this year has highlighted several concerns around SEND education provision. In addition, limited funding and resource and a lack of training and support for mainstream school staff in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND has created the perfect storm.

Many respondents have voiced their concern over these issues in this year's survey, with funding repeatedly raised as a concern and many schools/trusts having to subsidise much of the cost of SEND provision out of the core budget. 47% of respondents ranked support for pupils with special educational needs as being one of their top five strategic priorities and 25% of respondents considered it to be one of their overall top three challenges, as well as one of their top three challenges when setting a balanced budget (46%). Regionally, those in the North East (14%), West Midlands (13%) and South East (10%) are more likely to have supporting pupils with SEND as one of their top five strategic priorities than other regions.

Respondents were asked the ways in which their governing board monitors the effectiveness of SEND provision. The most popular strategy (89%) is having a SEND governor/trustee that liaises regularly with the school's SENCO (eg termly meetings with the SENCO and keeps the board informed). While this number is high, we question why this is not closer to 100% given that appointing a SEND governor or trustee is a requirement of the code of practice, so is the norm in mainstream practice.

The methods used by boards to monitor the effectiveness of the school's SEND provision:

- SEND governor/trustee liaises regularly with the school's SENCO (89%)
- It is part of their development plan and regularly monitored (72%)
- Monitor the funding the school receives for SEND (69%)
- SEND is considered when approving and reviewing policies and procedures (67%)
- The SENCO regularly contributes to board meetings (49%)
- Monitor how pupils, parents and carers are actively involved in the decision making process. (38%)

Respondents shared other methods that they use which included examples such as SEND questionnaires for families as a way of monitoring the quality of provision using stakeholder voice and regular learning walks.

Despite this, only 38% of respondents' boards are ensuring that pupils, parents and carers are actively involved in the assessment and decision-making process for pupils with SEND, down from 53% in 2021. This shows that there is more room for boards to incorporate SEND within their stakeholder engagement activity going forward so that they are proactively thinking about pupils in relation to every decision.

The recently published SEND green paper highlights that the current system of support does not consistently enable pupils to fulfil their potential. When asked how data on SEND pupils collected by the board is broken down, academic attainment was the area most commonly monitored by boards.

Your voice

"There is significant overlap with SEND, EAL and PPG at our school. Our notional SEND budget is currently inadequate (having taken into account the number of EHCPs we have in our school) and increasing this would really help to support PPG pupils who face multiple barriers to learning, but do not have EHCPs in place."
Chair, primary LA maintained school

"SEND needs are going up, but funding reducing, energy bills are going up, staff pay & pensions are going up. But funding isn't."
Vice chair, primary SAT

"The school went into significant financial deficit due to having to pay extra full time staff out of its base budget to support several high need SEND pupils whilst the LA took three years to agree sufficient funding by granting EHCPs."
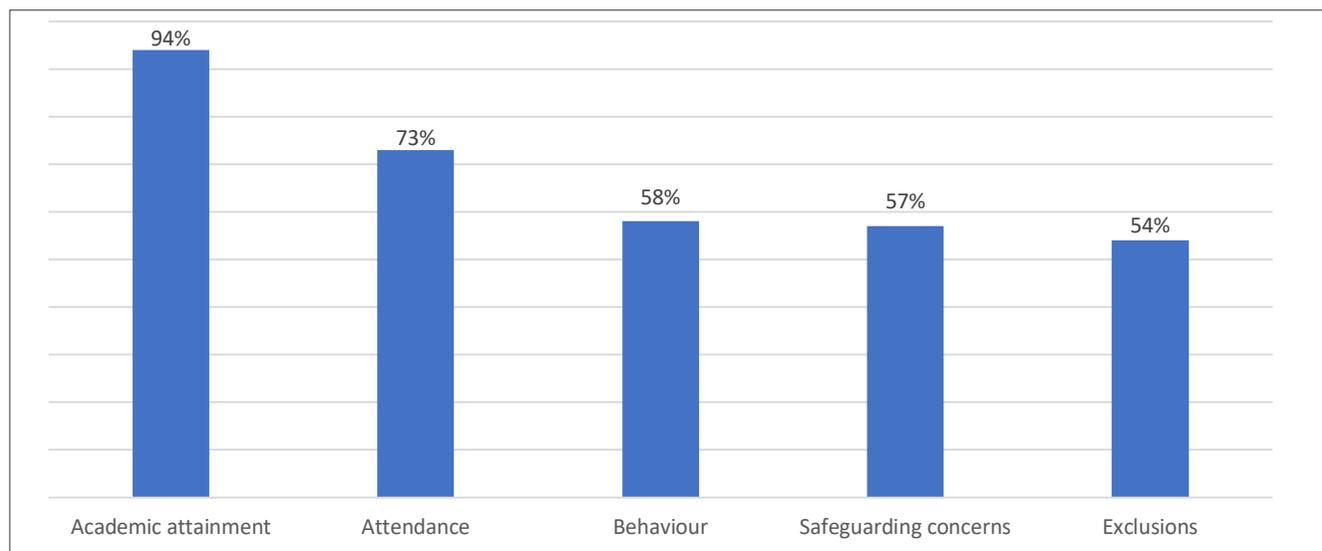**Chair, primary LA maintained school**

Figure 21, support respondents selected as needed for schools/trust to further support pupils from families experiencing poverty.

Behaviour and exclusions

Monitoring behaviour management

We asked governors and trustees about steps taken to monitor behaviour management. DfE guidance outlines the board's statutory responsibility in providing clear guidance to the headteacher on which they can base the school/ trust's behaviour policy. 81% of respondents said that they regularly review their school/ trust's behaviour policy. The step that respondents were least likely to take was to have a link governor/ committee for the purpose of monitoring behaviour management (31%).

Of those that considered behaviour to be one of their top three challenges, regular reports that include behaviour statistics was the method most used for monitoring behaviour. Respondents that reported behaviour as one of their top five strategic priorities most commonly received reports of behaviour statistics and reviewed their behaviour policy.

Our voice

Poor behaviour is a complex issue. The Timpson review highlights that children with poor mental health are more likely to be excluded from school than their peers, the same can be said for children identified as having additional needs, those living in poverty and children who have children's services involvement[9]. Taking this into account, it is important that governing boards have a clear understanding of the needs of their school community that underpins their school's behaviour strategy.

[9] Timpson Review of School Exclusion (publishing.service.gov.uk)
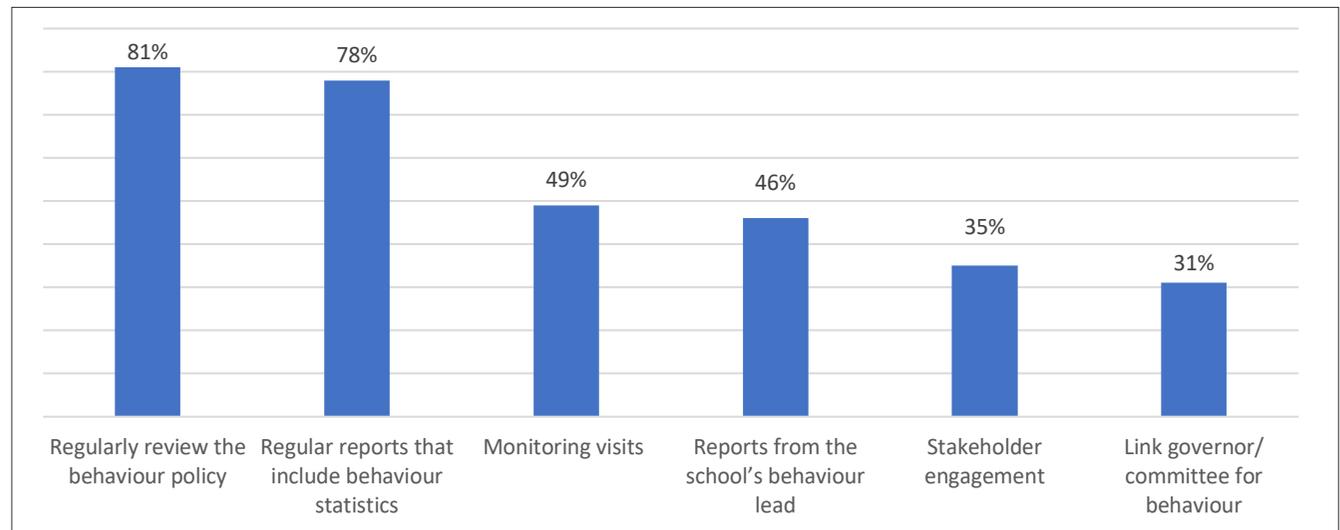

Figure 22, percentage of boards who use the listed steps to monitor behaviour management.
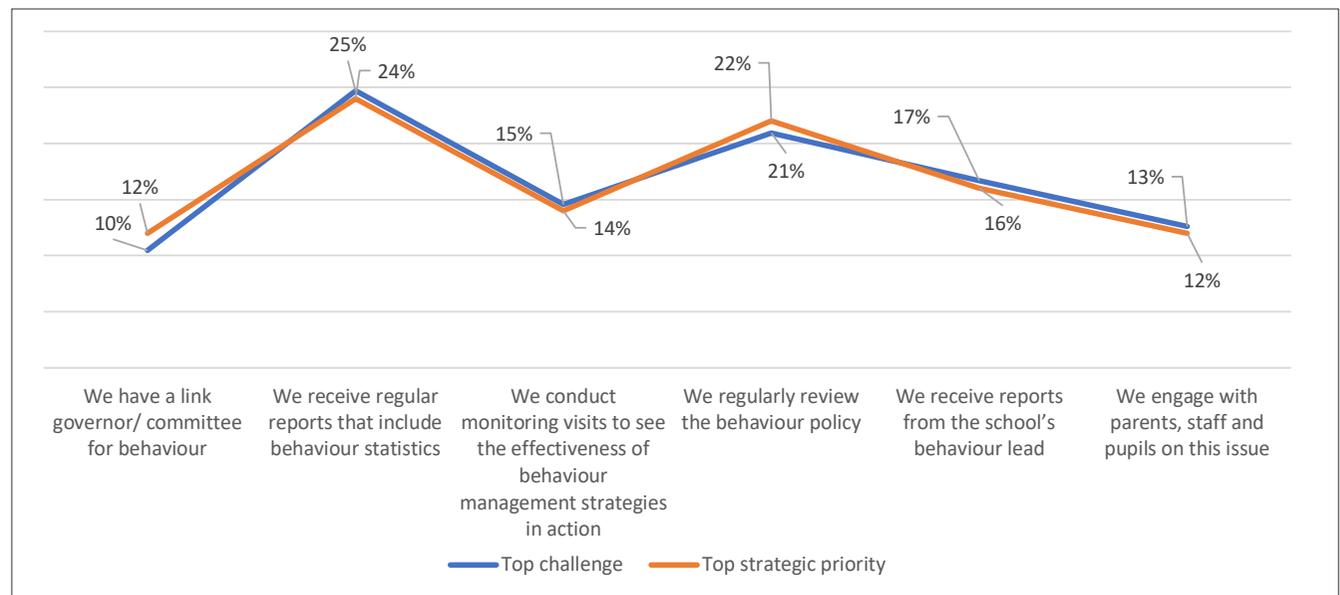

Figure 23, percentage of all action taken to monitor and address behaviour by those who selected behaviour as a top challenge or strategic priority.

Exclusion panels

All governing boards have a role in the oversight of suspension and exclusions, and using data and evidence to review suspensions and exclusion decisions made by the headteacher. In some situations this includes considering and directing the reinstatement of pupils. Of the 39% of respondents said that they had been a member of an exclusions panel 25% said that they had reinstated a pupil.

As a member of an exclusions panel, did you receive training and if so was it useful?	
Yes, and it was useful	71%
Yes, and it was not useful	5%
No, but I would've liked this	14%
No	10%

Figure 24, percentage of exclusion panel members that received training.

Governors and trustees of alternative provision (35%), secondary (30%) and all-through (30%) schools were most likely to say that they had reinstated a pupil following a panel hearing, with those governing at special schools (21%) least likely. By board type, those governing in a MAT (34%) were most likely to say they had reinstated a pupil, with those governing at LA maintained schools (20%) least likely.

Of those respondents that said they had sat on an exclusions panel, 71% said that they had received training for this particular role and had found it useful. 24% said they had not received training.

Accountability and Exams

Ofsted

Following two years of disruption to Ofsted inspections, routine school inspections returned in September 2021. Views were mixed on how routine inspection contributes to the system and whether it strengthens it or not. Just under a half of respondents (48%) felt that routine Ofsted inspections are a valued measure of school performance and school improvement.

To ensure that schools were continuing to provide a high quality education to their pupils during the pandemic, Ofsted conducted ungraded school visits using the Education inspection framework (EIF) to assess a schools quality of education alongside the other judgement areas that inspectors consider under the EIF. Unlike routine graded inspections, there was more of a consensus that these ungraded inspections were valued. Seven in 10 respondents (70%) who did have a view said that the non graded interim visits were a preferred way to inspect schools compared to 30% feeling they were not.

The EIF places a prominent focus on the school's curriculum and the quality that it is delivered at to ensure that pupils are able to perform to the best of their ability. Of the respondents that had a view, 85% reported that their most recent inspection was a fair and accurate picture of their school. Meanwhile, 15% felt that it was not.

One aim of the EIF was to reduce the level of stress and workload that school leaders and staff were facing as a consequence of inspection. When asking whether this has actually happened, only 18% felt that it had in comparison to 52% reporting that this was not the case.

The introduction of a new framework also sought to improve and simplify the information available to parents and other relevant stakeholders to provide a clear picture of what it is like to be a pupil at the school. Under a fifth (19%) of respondents felt that this had been achieved meanwhile, 31% of respondents felt that this was not the case (51% of respondents had no view on this).

Exams

2022 saw the return of 'normal' exams with pupils sitting their GCSE or A Levels in person for the first time since 2019. But with exams and assessments adapted during the pandemic, questions were raised by many on whether the current examination system is fit for purpose. Exploring the views of governors and trustees on this issue, our findings show a range of opinions with no one set view of what the future of exams should look like emerging.

Over a third (37%) of respondents felt that teacher assessed grades should be a permanent factor that contributes to the awarding of grades for GCSE, AS and A Level subjects. Meanwhile, 30% felt that the awarding of grades should return to usual exams and assessments set by exam boards but with other adaptations. Over a fifth (22%) of respondents shared that the awarding of grades should remain as the usual exams and assessments set by exam boards that schools returned to in 2022.

Figure 25 demonstrates the shift in views over the course of 12 months as the state of the pandemic changed, showing the percentage of respondents sharing the view that teacher assessed grades should contribute to the awarding of grades has increased by 10 percentage points.
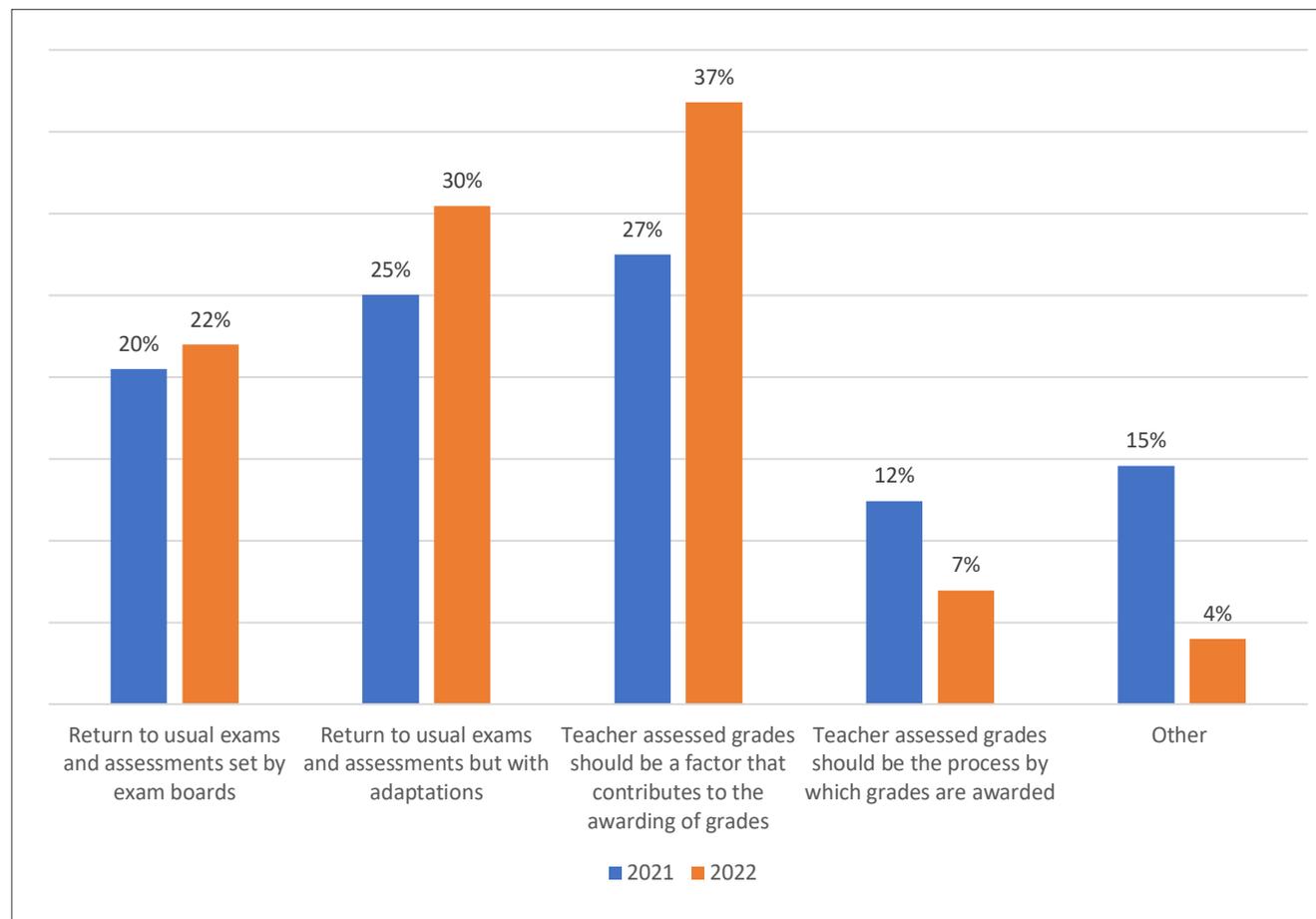
Figure 25, respondent views on the future of exams and assessments.

Our voice

Accountability extends beyond Ofsted and exam results. It is important for governing boards to consider methods of accountability that sit closer to the school or trust. Ensuring the voices of stakeholders are heard is the fourth core function of governance and is another way in which boards themselves are held accountable.

The pandemic has impacted the communication and relationships that governing boards have with various stakeholder groups. NGA's second 2022 annual survey report 'Governance volunteers and practice' explores the methods that boards are using to gather the views of stakeholders.

The government's performance in education

Each year we ask respondents to give their verdict on how the government has performed in education for that particular academic year. This year we saw the lowest number of respondents (10%) with a very positive or slightly positive view (figure 26) on the governments performance since we first asked the question in 2011 (other than 2017 when we did not ask the question due to the timing of the survey with an election taking place). 70% of respondents expressed a very negative or slightly negative view and 20% expressed a neutral view of the government's performance.

Your voice

"The government has not increased the funding which the school needs. I appreciate that covid has played its part but the lack of an increase of funding in real terms is extremely worrying and is going to cause real problems for the school in the next 2 years."
Governor, primary LA maintained school

"Funding for Covid was inadequate; the arrangements over exams were again poorly handled; schools are always having additional tasks placed on them (and we want the best outcomes for our pupils), but there is rarely sufficient funding to support that. It is rare for government to acknowledge the challenged and effort put in by school staff."
Committee chair, secondary SAT

"The white and green papers have good aims but do not say where the resources, training and funding is coming from. The confusion on exams during covid has caused teachers and students a great deal of stress."
Chair, secondary SAT

"Continued financial pressure on schools, no work life balance for staff, not enough support for parents and pupils to address the emotional fall out from Covid."
Trustee, primary MAT

When asked to expand on the reasons for their verdict on the government's performance in education, funding was raised as a common concern. Respondents also shared frustration over the government's handling and lack of support for schools around all aspects of COVID-19 recovery.
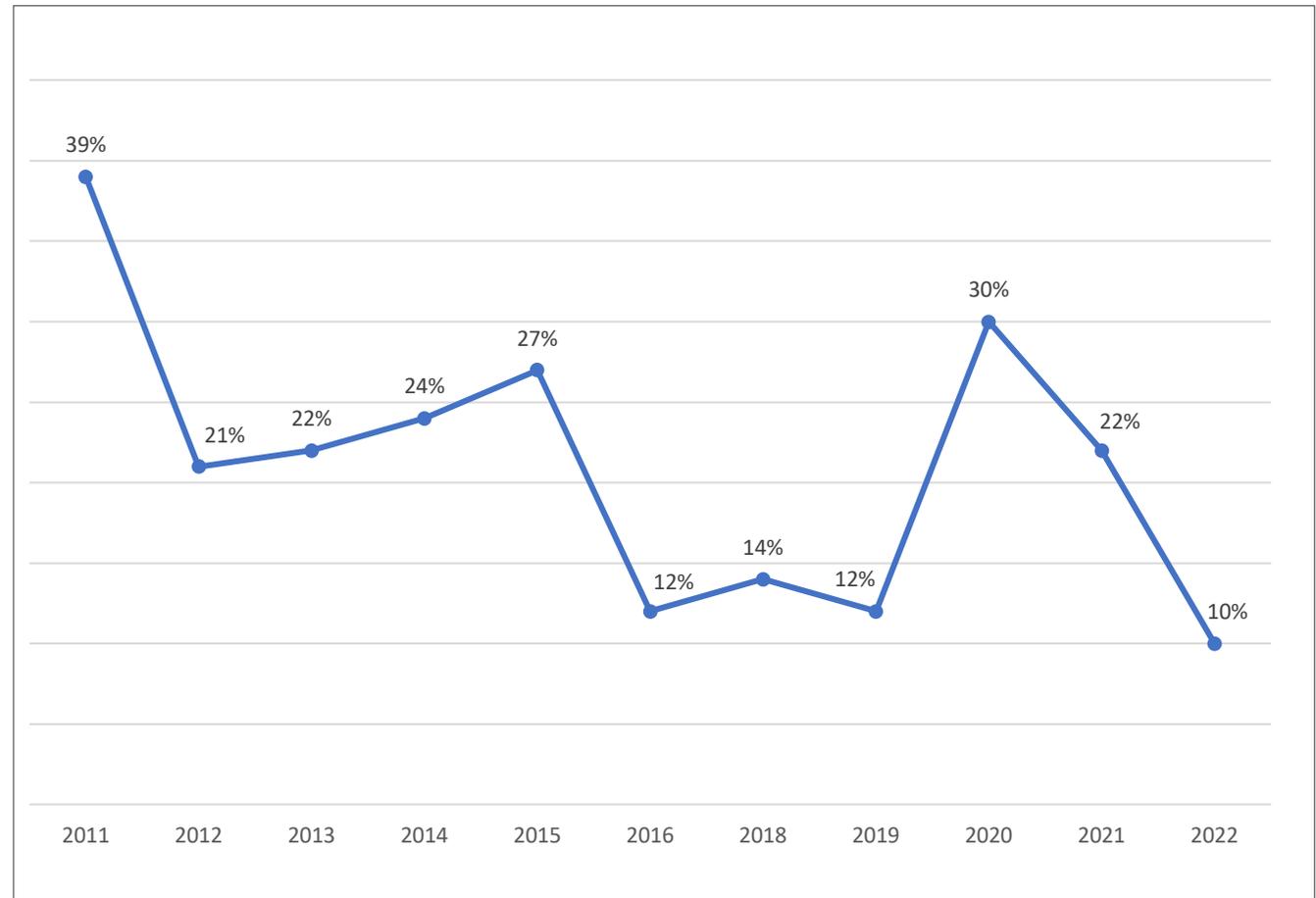

Figure 26, the percentage of respondents that were slightly positive or very positive in their views on the government's performance in education.

Further Reading

Knowledge Centre resources

- **Being strategic** – This guide produced with the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) offers leaders and governing boards a robust annual cycle for creating, monitoring and reviewing strategy.

- **Finance resources** – NGA's Knowledge Centre features a range of resources to help governing boards with their financial oversight, including procurement, budget setting and monitoring, integrated curriculum and financial planning (ICFP) and reviewing staffing costs.

- **Curriculum: the governing boards role** – This guide sets out the legal responsibilities of governing boards and a practical approach to collaborating with school leaders when reviewing curriculum aims and areas for development.

- **Subject specific curriculum guides** – NGA's Knoweldge Centre also has a range of subject specific guides to support governing boards including PSHE, relationships education and RSE, and cultural education.

- **Environmental sustainability: a whole school approach** – This guide, produced in collaboration with the National Association for Environmental Education (NAEE) encourages governing boards to adopt environmental sustainability as a strategic priority for their school or trust.

- **Managing teacher workload and wellbeing** – This guide supports governing boards to implement strategies that create a healthy working environment for all staff.

- **Promoting school leaders' wellbeing: an evaluation tool** – Produced with the Schools Advisory Service (SAS), this tool provides advice on setting an effective wellbeing culture and strategy and allows governing boards to audit their current practice.

- **Executive leader recruitment** – NGA's Knowledge Centre features guidance and a toolkit for recruiting heads of schools, executive headteachers and chief executive officers.

- **Pupil mental wellbeing** – This information sheet is designed to help governing boards understand their role in promoting mental wellbeing, review the current situation in their school or trust, and identify areas for improvement.

- **Safeguarding: a guide for governing boards** – This guide sets out the governing boards safeguarding responsibilities, how to lead a safeguarding culture and provide strategic oversight and monitoring of safeguarding.

- **Pupil premium: a guide for governing boards** – This guide supports governing boards and school leaders to determine effective ways to use pupil premium, monitor spending and impact and demonstrate accountability though reporting.

- **SEND and the governing board** – This guide helps governors and trustees build an understanding of their responsibilities relating to special educational needs and disability (SEND) and inclusion.

- **Effective behaviour management** – This guide explains how governing boards meet their responsibility to promote effective behaviour management in their school or trust.

- **Procedural exclusions guidance** – This procedural guide describes the stages of the exclusion/suspension process and explains the governing board's role at each stage.

- **Ofsted inspection** – This guide helps governing boards know what to expect from an Ofsted inspection and take steps following inspection to support school improvement.

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