Class size and the Physical environment in our schools: The Teachers' Perspective March 2020

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Job Reference: 422919/CM/RT

Research Objectives and Methodology

Why? To gather data on class size, on teachers' perceptions of the impact of class size on teaching and learning in the junior cycle, and their perceptions of other aspects of the physical work environment in their schools

How Many? 1,829 which represents a response rate of 16% - a strong response. (Sample of 11,768 members). The margin of error from this sample size within this population is +/- 2.3%

Who? ASTI members who are classroom teachers teaching junior cycle subjects

When? 3rd – 14th February 2020

How? Online questionnaire, sent by RED C Research to ASTI members on email database

Principal Findings

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Principal Findings – Class Size

- Most subjects have class sizes in the range of 21-30. Core subjects such as English and history have larger than average class sizes, followed by geography, business studies and religious education.
- Class size depends on the nature of the subject: subjects which require specialist equipment have smaller classes.
- More than half of all classes in short courses such as CSPE, SPHE and physical education have classes in the range of 26-30.
- Most teachers have 2 or 3 class groups for each year of the junior cycle. Teachers of practical subjects such as home economics, physical education, science and technology subjects have 3 or 4 class groups for each year of the junior cycle.
- Majority of teachers state that large classes have a negative impact on teaching and learning and on the disciplinary climate in the classroom. At least 4 in 5 teachers feel that class size inhibits range of teaching strategies used and opportunities for students to engage in group and other collaborative work.

Principal Findings - Technology in the Classroom

- While 3 in 5 teachers rate the provision of core ICT equipment – digital projector, whiteboard and computer – as adequate, this rating drops significantly in relation computers for students, video cameras and mobile multi-media stations.
- The majority of teachers – 7 in 10 – use ICT in the classroom every day. Those who use it once a week or less cite delays in getting technical assistance and lack of time for planning as the main reasons for low level of usage.
- Key measures to support greater usage of ICT in the classroom include smaller classes, more computers in the classroom and more time for classroom planning.

Principal Findings - Teaching space and physical environment

- Most teachers – 77%- have their own base-classroom or dedicated teaching space. 22% do not have their own base-classroom or dedicated teaching space.
- Overcrowding in the classroom is the biggest concern followed by inadequate storage space and inadequate sound-proofing.
- Less than half of schools – 47% - have dedicated office space for Assistant Principals. Slightly over half have staff-rooms with dedicated work spaces for teachers. Just over one third of schools – 39% - have dedicated rooms for teachers' meeting and planning activities.
- Overall, just over 1 in 3 teachers agree that the quality of the physical environment in their school was good. More than half -52% -stated that their school was overcrowded.
- Adequacy of facilities for students such as canteen/dining spaces, corridor space and toilet/sanitary facilities were also of concern.

Principal Findings – Teacher wellbeing

- The main sources of stress for teachers are workload, expectations of parents and other stakeholders and the quality of management-staff communications in school in that order.
- In addition to the three factors above, class size is the next major source of stress.
- Almost 4 in 5 teachers believe that their workload has increased significantly in the last three years.
- The level of job satisfaction has decreased to 48% - down from 77% in 2009.


Teachers' Profile
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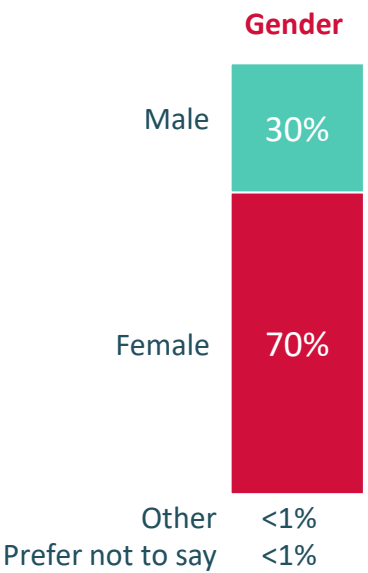
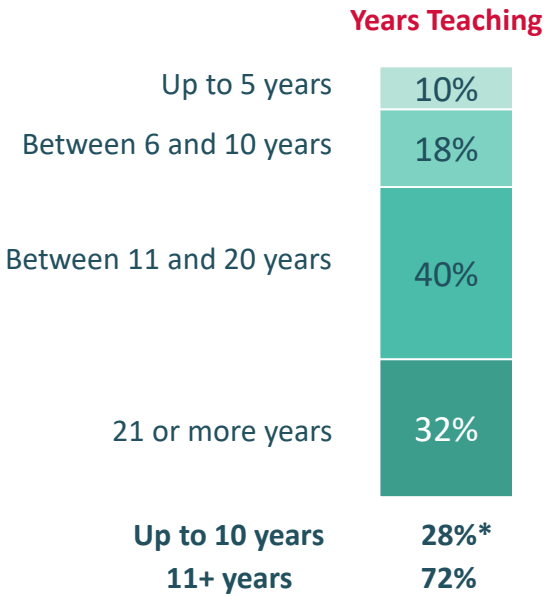
Profile of Sample

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

70% of teachers are female which is broadly reflective of the gender breakdown within the ASTI (69% female; 31% male). The majority -72% - have 11 or more years teaching experience.





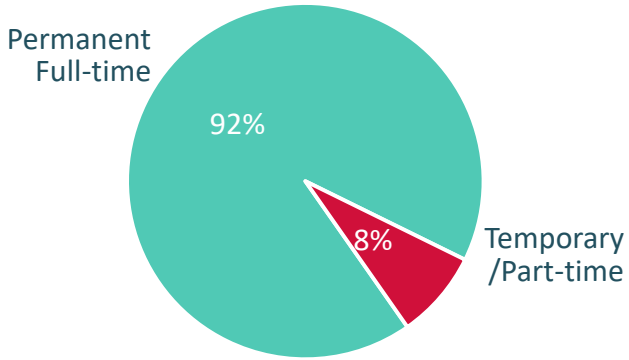
Q1: How many years are you teaching?
Q2: Please select your gender

Employment Status

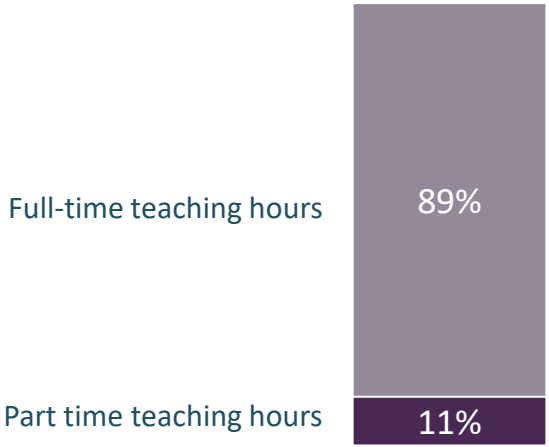
(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

92% of teachers are in permanent positions. The majority of teachers have full-time hours.

Employment status



Hours Timetabled to Teach

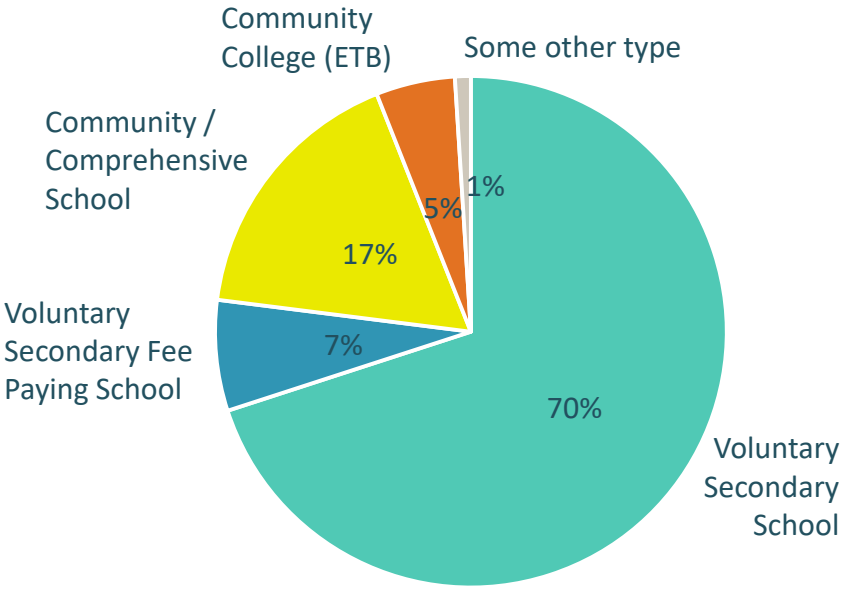


Q3A: What is your employment status?
Q4: How many hours are you timetabled to teach? Please include timetabled hours with class groups, resource teaching hours with small groups/individual students.

Type of School Taught In

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

The majority of teachers - 70% - teach in the voluntary secondary sector which is broadly reflective of the ASTI membership.

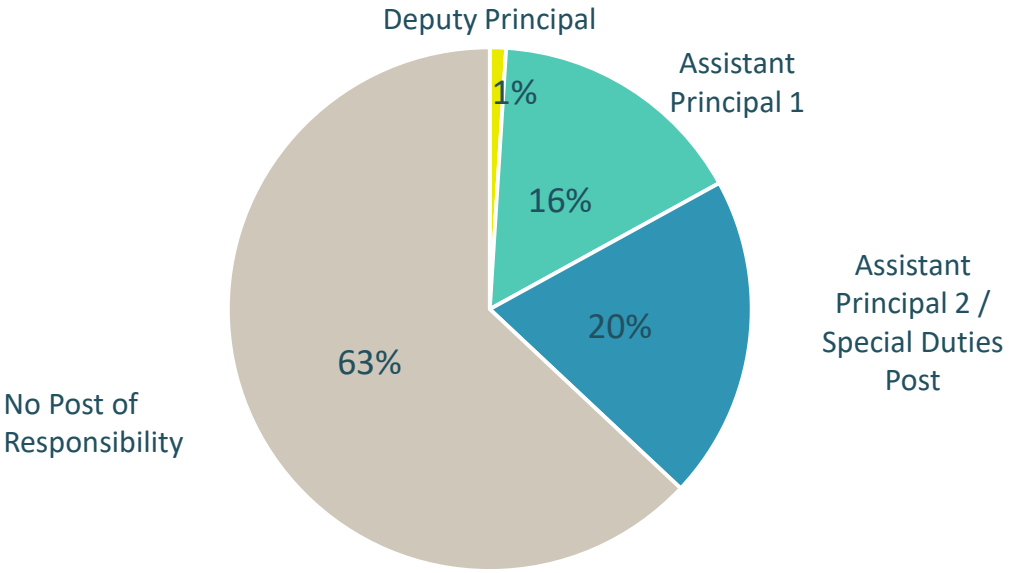


Q3D: What type of school do you teach in?

Posts of Responsibility

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

Just over one-third -36%- have a leadership post in addition to their teaching duties.



Q3B: Do you have a Post of Responsibility as follows:

Subjects Taught & Class Groups

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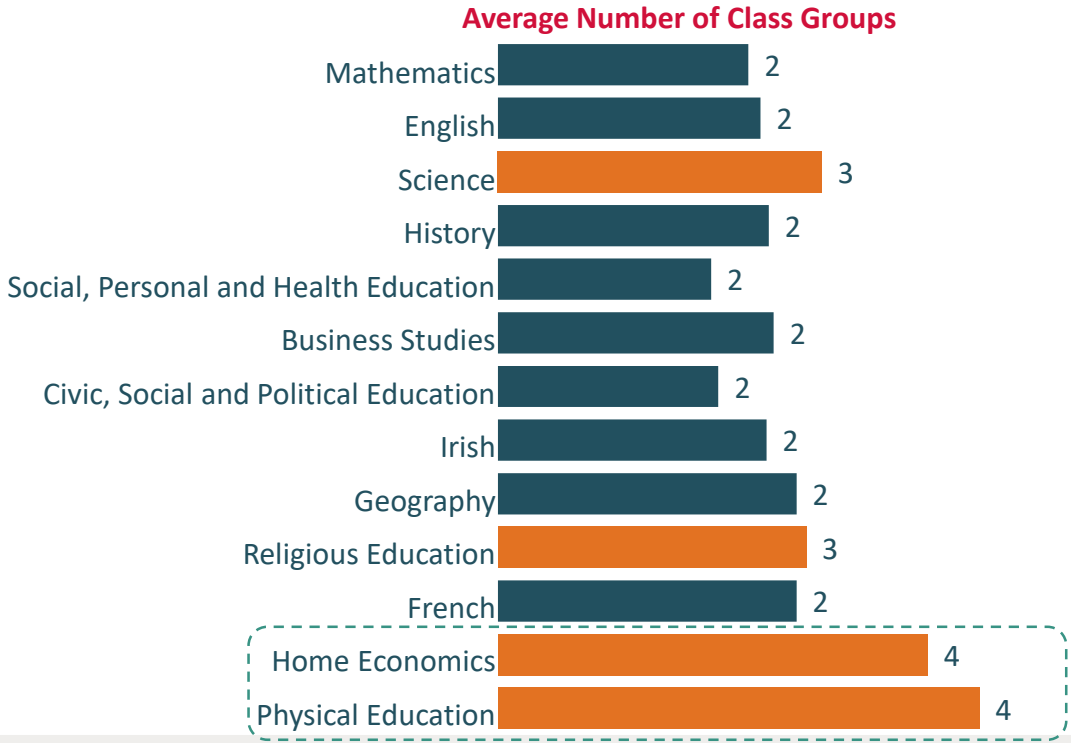
Subjects Taught & Average Class Group - I

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

Higher than average class group across all subjects

On average, teachers teach 2-3 class groups for each year of junior cycle. Home Economics and PE teachers have the highest number of class groups with teachers teaching an average of 4 class groups for each year of the junior cycle .



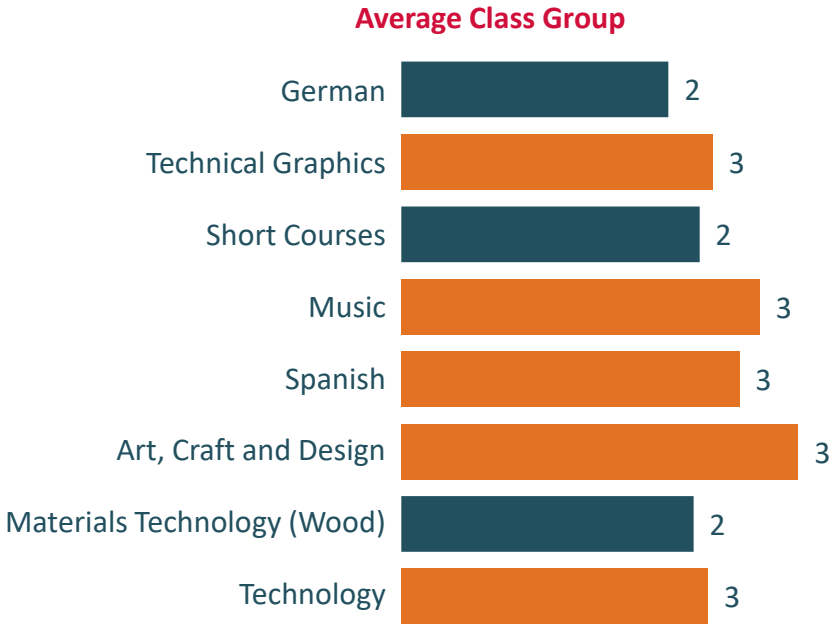
Q7a:How many individual class groups do you teach for each of the below subjects at junior cycle?

Subjects Taught & Average Class Group - II

Higher than average class group across all subjects

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

In general, lesser taught subjects have a higher than average class group.

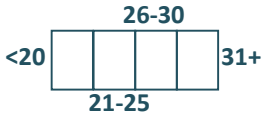


Subjects that are taught by less than 1% of teachers not shown

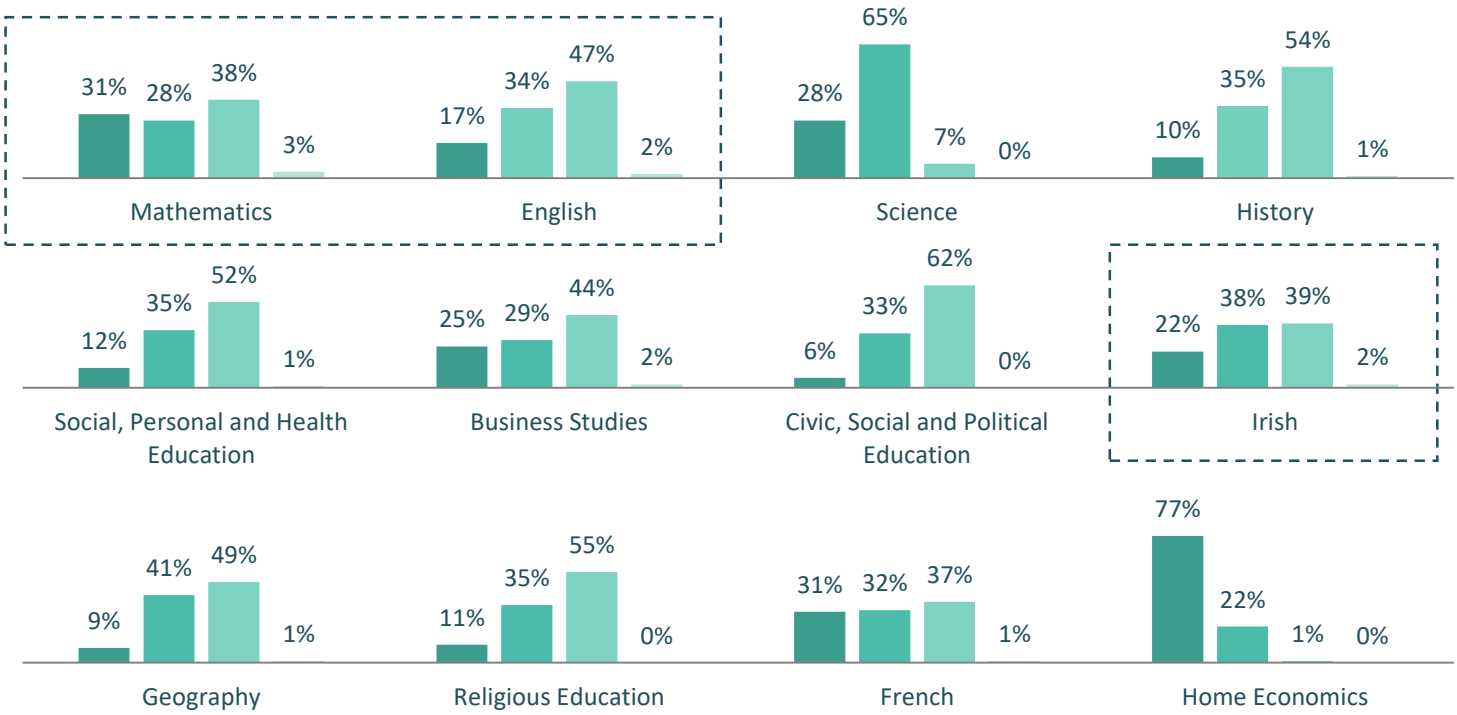
Q7a:How many individual class groups do you teach for each of the below subjects at junior cycle?

Class Size for Subjects Taught

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)



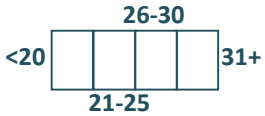
Most subjects have class sizes in the range of 21-30. However, a slightly higher proportion are in the 26-30 range. Core subjects such as English, Irish, Mathematics have higher proportion of classes with an average class size of 25+.



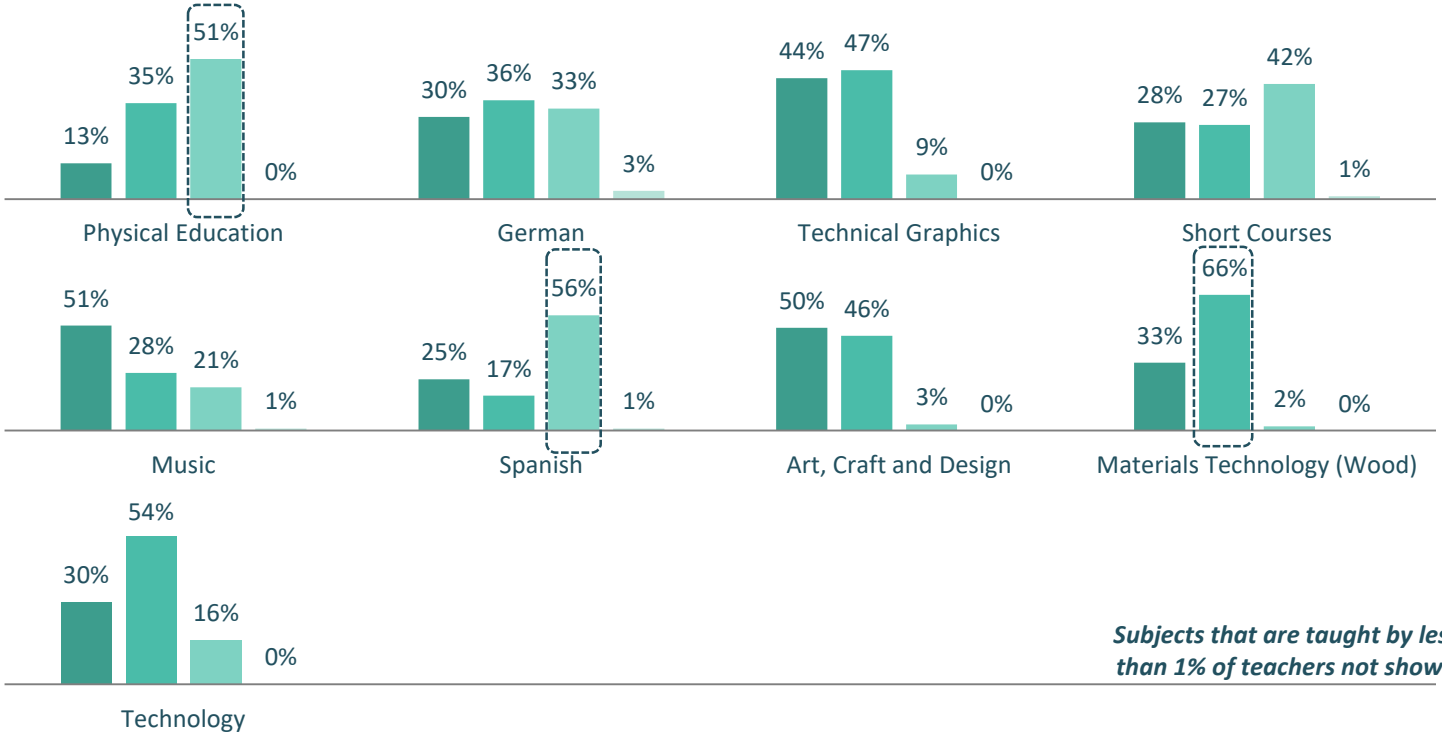
Q8: For each class group that you teach, please select the subject, year and class size using the drop down boxes below.

Class Size for Subjects Taught

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)



While lesser taught subjects are more likely to have a class size of 26-30, these subjects also have a higher Proportion of smaller class sizes than more regularly taught subjects.

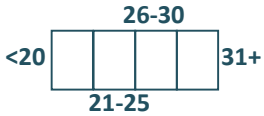


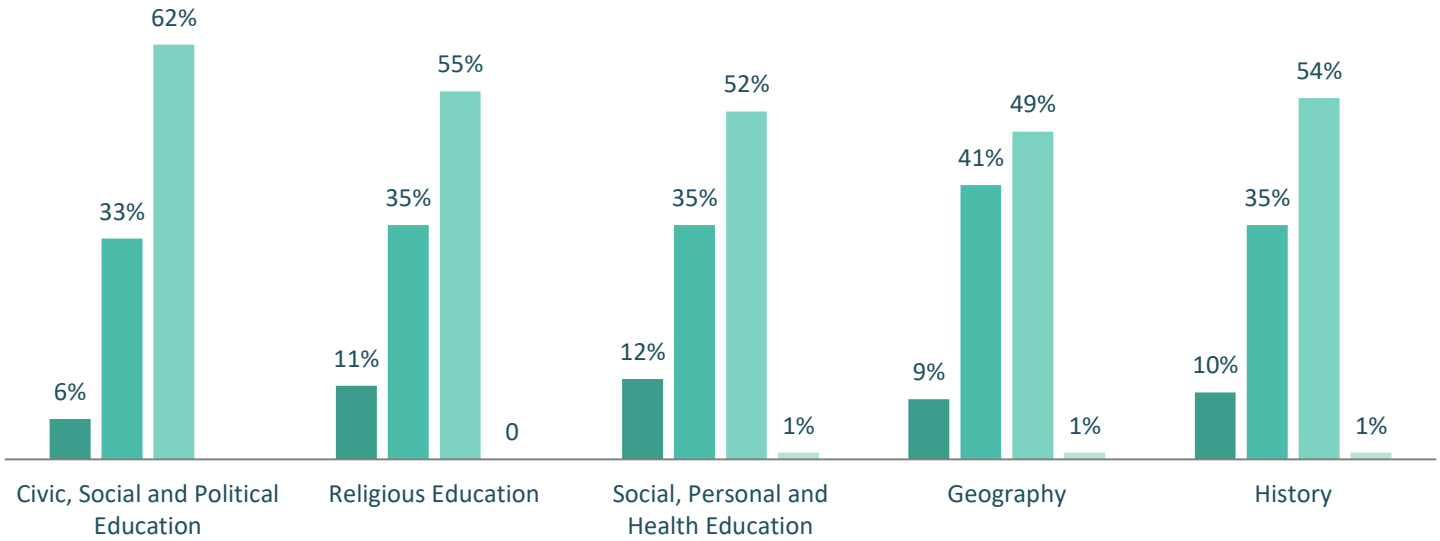
Subjects that are taught by less than 1% of teachers not shown

Q8: For each class group that you teach, please select the subject, year and class size using the drop down boxes below. As a reminder, you said that you teach:

Top 5 Subjects with Largest Class Size

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)



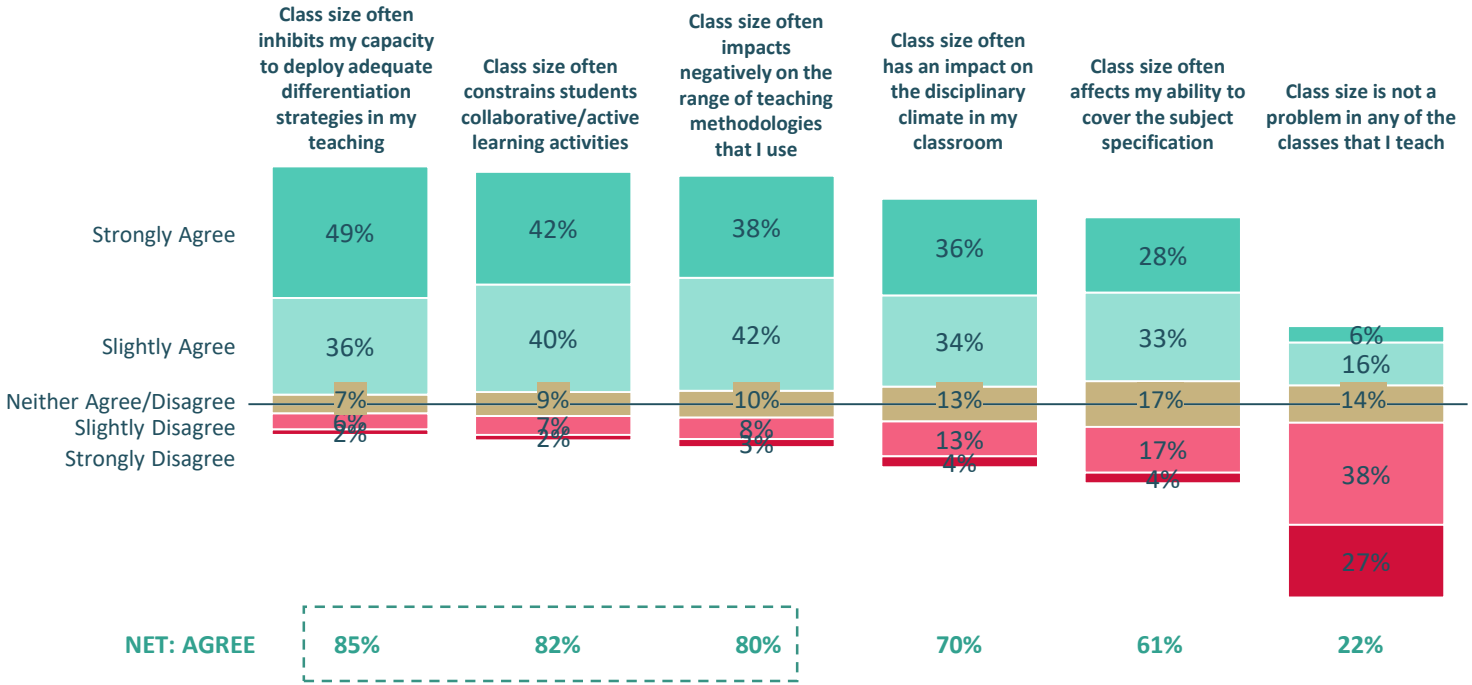


Q8: For each class group that you teach, please select the subject, year and class size using the drop down boxes below. As a reminder, you said that you teach:

Impact of Class Size

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

The majority of teachers state that class size has a negative impact. At least 4 in 5 teachers feel that class size inhibits capacity to deploy adequate differentiation strategies and teaching methodologies and constrains the range of students' learning activities.



Q9a: Please express how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about class size


Technology in School
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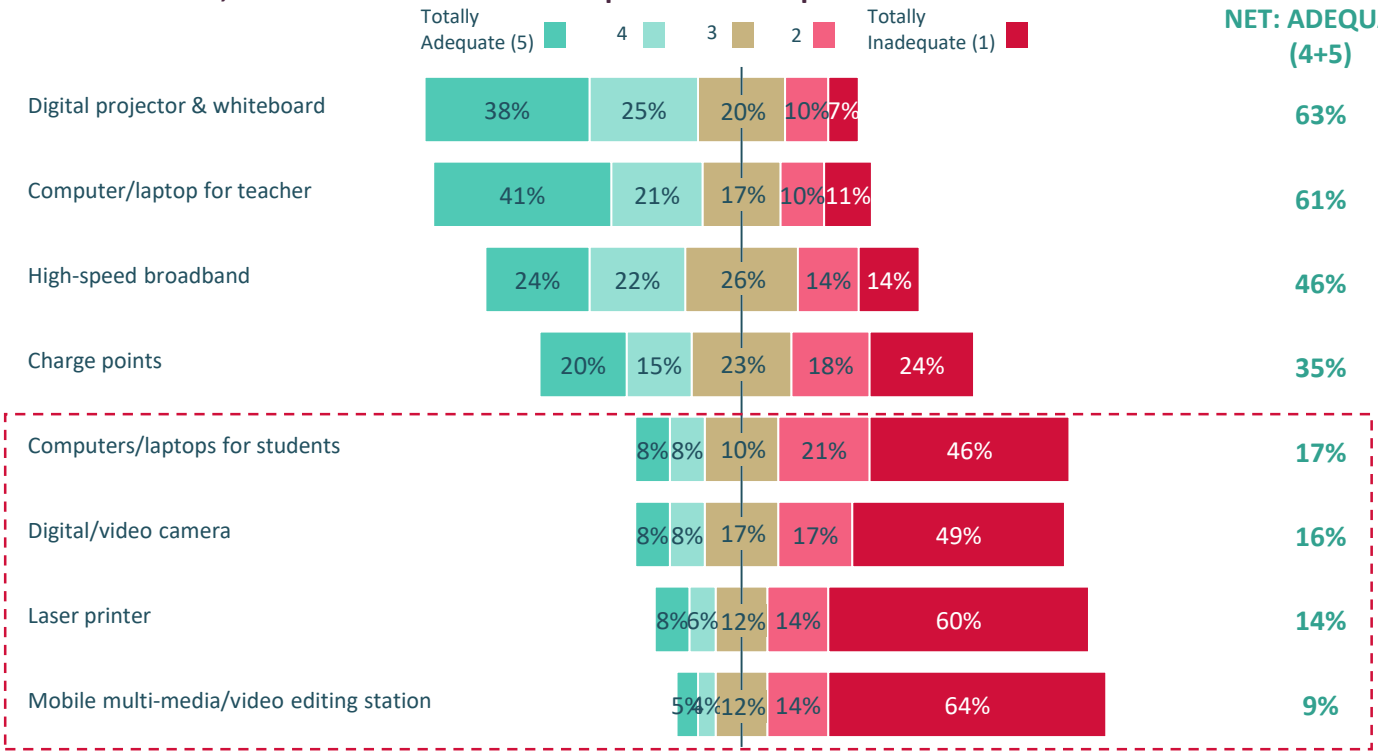
Technology in the Classroom

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

Overall, 3 in 5 teachers rate the provision of core ICT equipment - digital projector, whiteboard and computer – as adequate. This rating drops in relation to computers for students, video cameras, laser printers and mobile/ multi-media stations, which are deemed less adequate in their opinion.



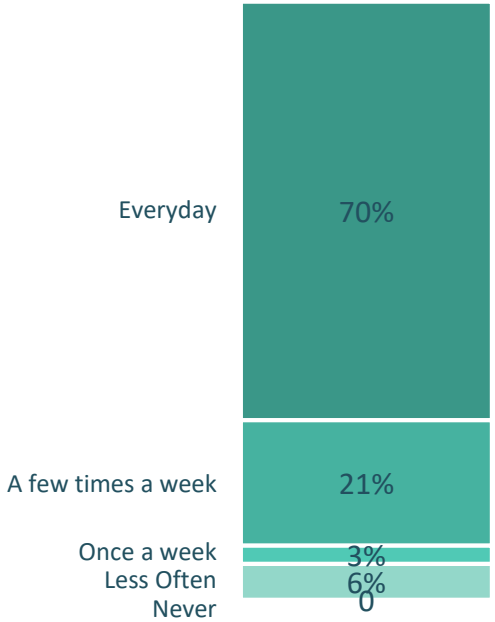
Q11: Please rate the availability of each of the following resources for your classroom/teaching space

Integration of ICT

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

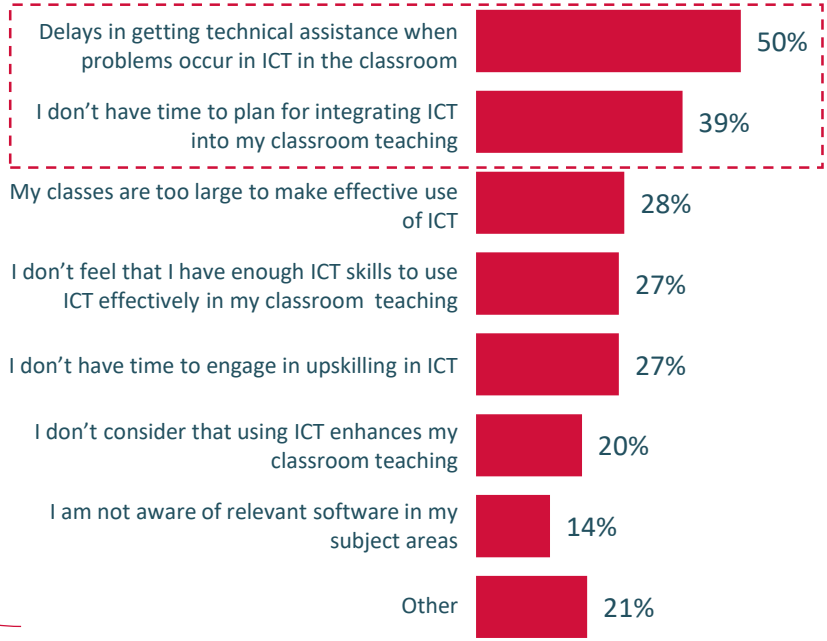
70% of teachers use ICT in the classroom every day. Teachers who use ICT once a week or less cite delays in getting technical assistance and not having time to plan for as the main reasons for low level of usage.

Frequency of using ICT



Reasons for not using ICT

(Base: All those using ICT less than a few times a week, n=177)



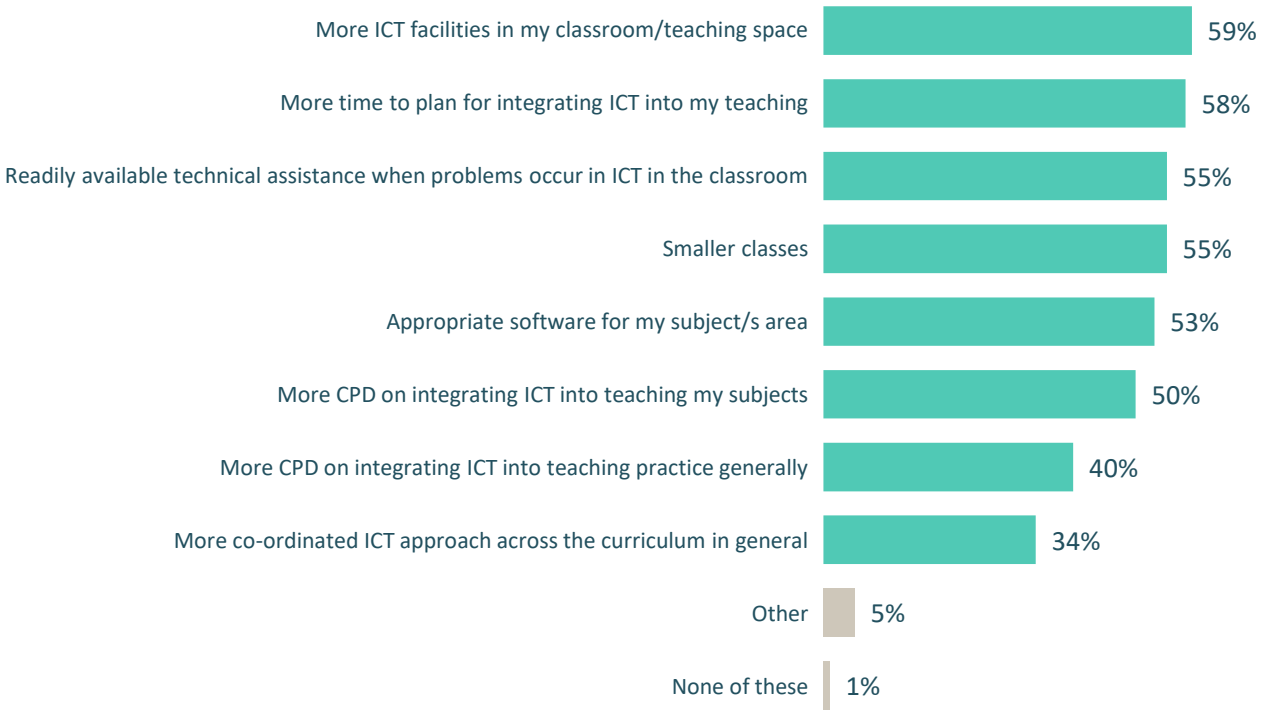
Q12: Looking at your average teaching week, how often would you use ICT in your classroom/teaching space?
Q13: You said you never use ICT in your classroom. Which of the following reflects your situation?

REDC

Measures to Support Use of ICT

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

More ICT facilities in classrooms/teaching space, more time to plan for integration, technical assistance and smaller classes are key measures to support greater use of ICT in classrooms.



Q14: Broadly speaking, which of the following measures would support more use of ICT in your classroom/teaching space?

REDC

Teaching Space & Physical Environment in Schools

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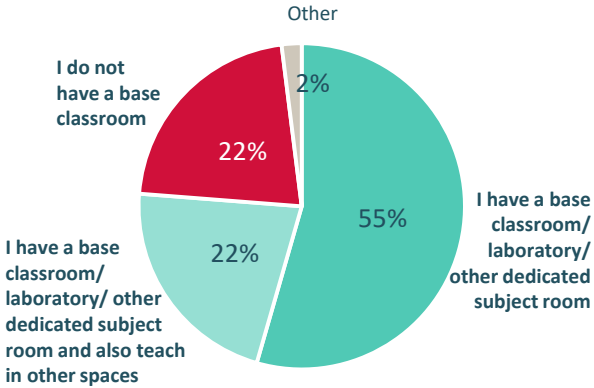
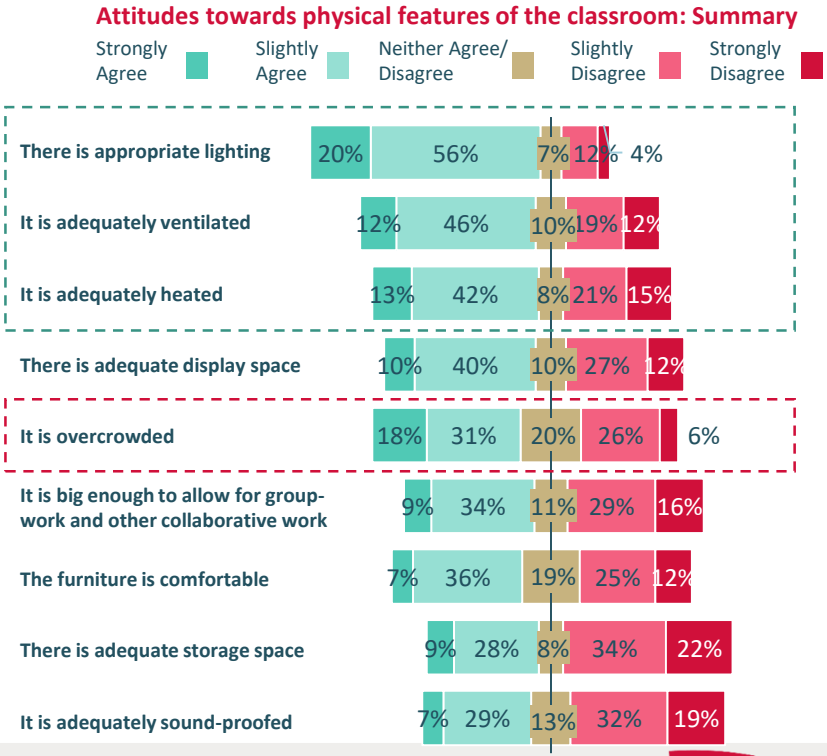
Current Teaching Space

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

Three quarters of teachers have their own base classroom/teaching space. Overcrowding is the biggest concern with just under half -49%- stating that their classrooms/teaching space are overcrowded. 45% stated that rooms were big enough to allow for student group-work.



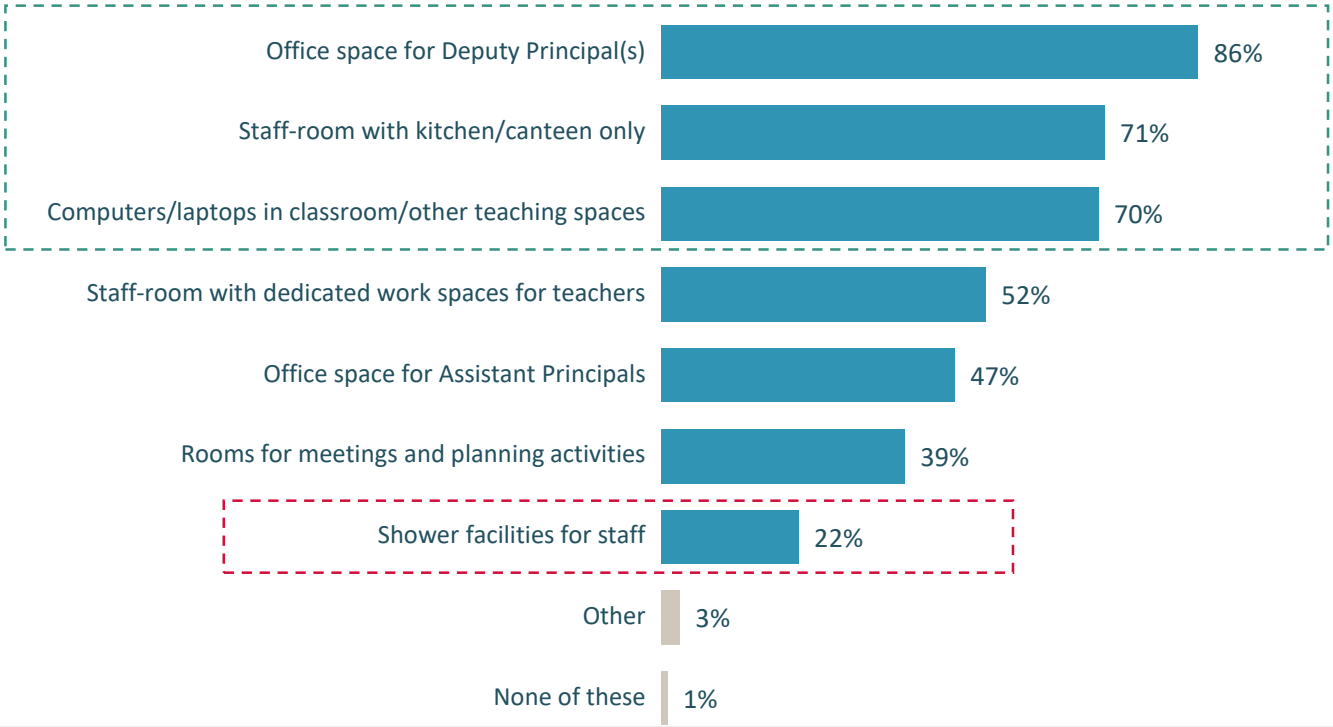


Q9b: Which of the following best describes your teaching space in the current school year?

Facilities in schools

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

Just under half of schools – 47% - have dedicated space for Assistant Principals while only 39% have rooms for meeting and planning activities.

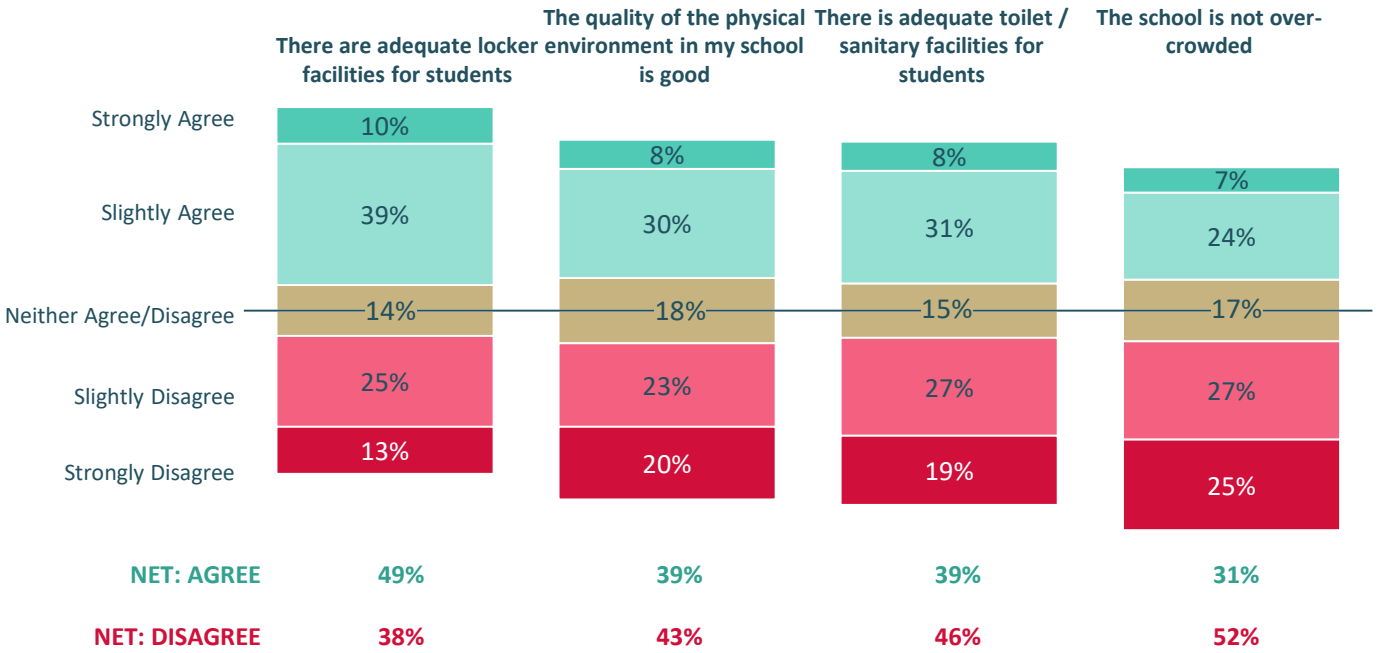


Q15: We want to identify the range of facilities provided for teachers in your school. Which of the following are available in your school?

Quality of Physical Environment in School - I

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

Just over a third of teachers – 39% - agreed that the quality of the physical environment in their school was good; 49% agreed that there was adequate locker facilities for students. 39% of teachers also stated that there was adequate toilet / sanitary facilities for students.

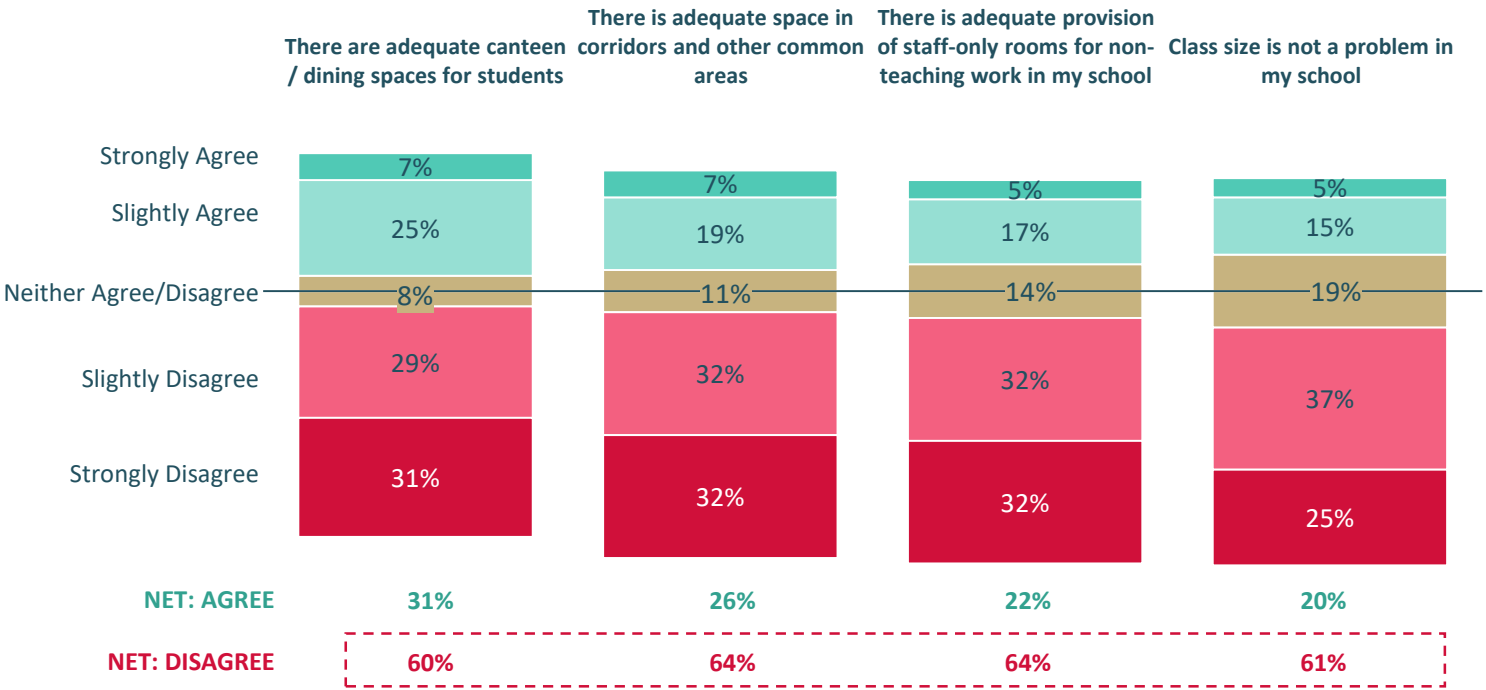


Q16: How would you describe the quality of the physical environment in your school?

Quality of Physical Environment in School - II

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

31% of teachers agreed that there is adequate canteen/dining spaces for students. However, only 1 in 5 teachers agree that class size is not a problem in their school.

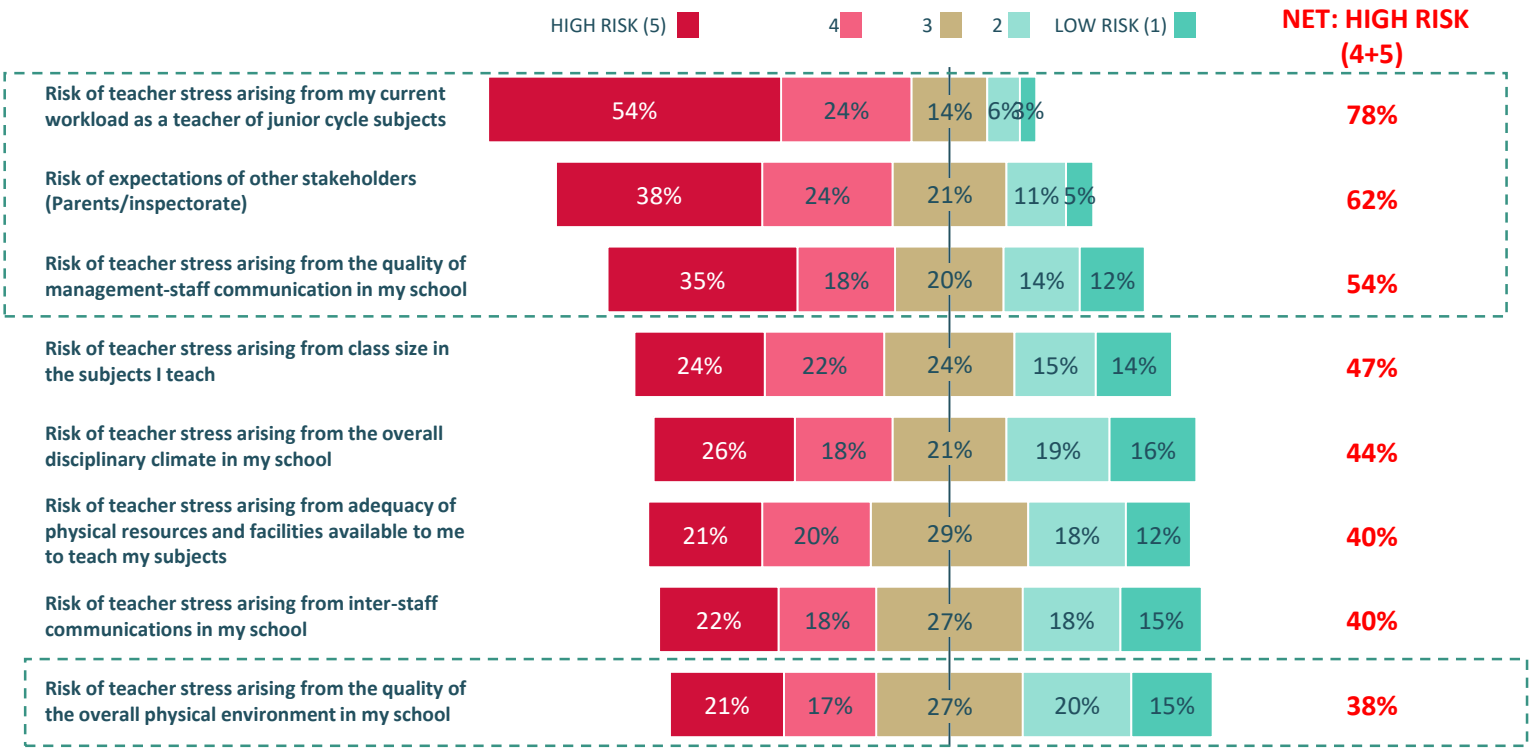


Q16: How would you describe the quality of the physical environment in your school?

Teacher Stress Risks In Your Workplace

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

The top 3 stress risks arising for teachers are workload, expectations of stakeholders and quality of management communication. For 2 in 5 the quality of overall physical environment also poses a high risk.



Q17: How would you rate the level of risk arising from each of the following?

Reflecting on Job Satisfaction & Work Intensity

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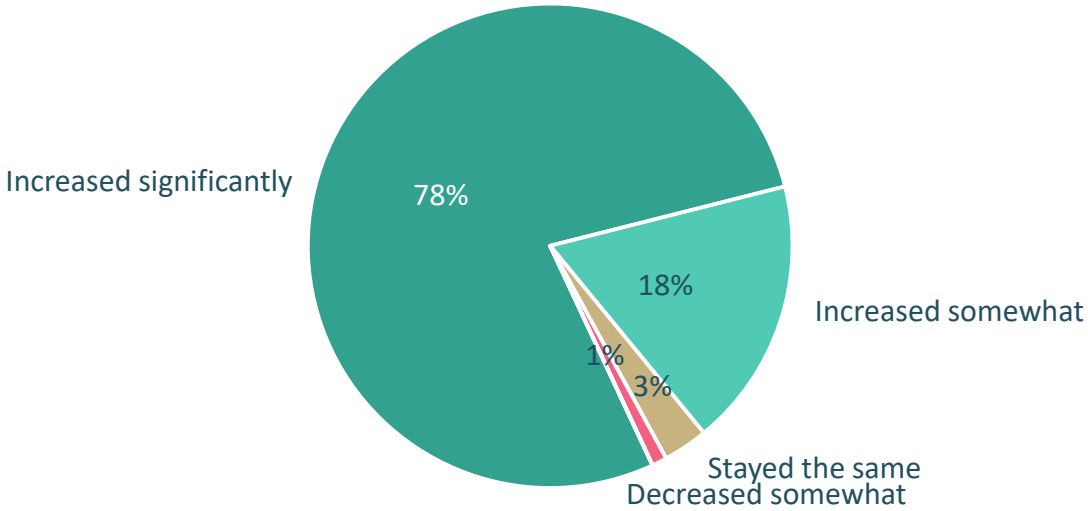
Intensity of Teachers' Work

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

Almost 4 in 5 teachers believe their workload has increased significantly over the last 3 years.



Increased (Significantly / Somewhat) 96%*

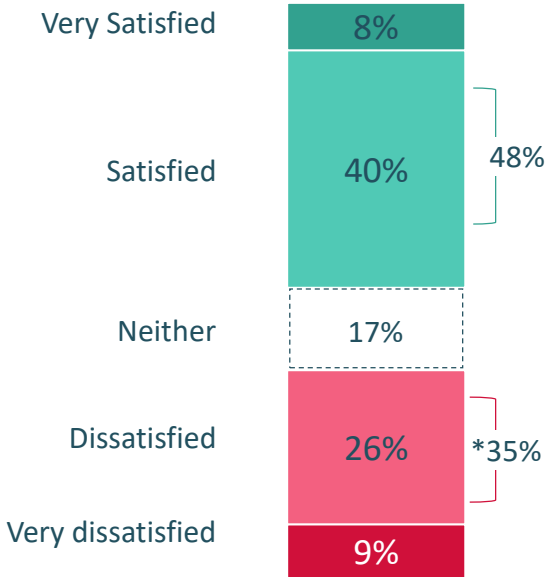
***= Figures have been rounded to the nearest %**

Q19: Thinking back to your work as a teacher over the last 3 years, would you say that the intensity of your working week has increased, decreased or stayed the same?

Overall Job Satisfaction

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

Just under half of the teachers are satisfied with their job.



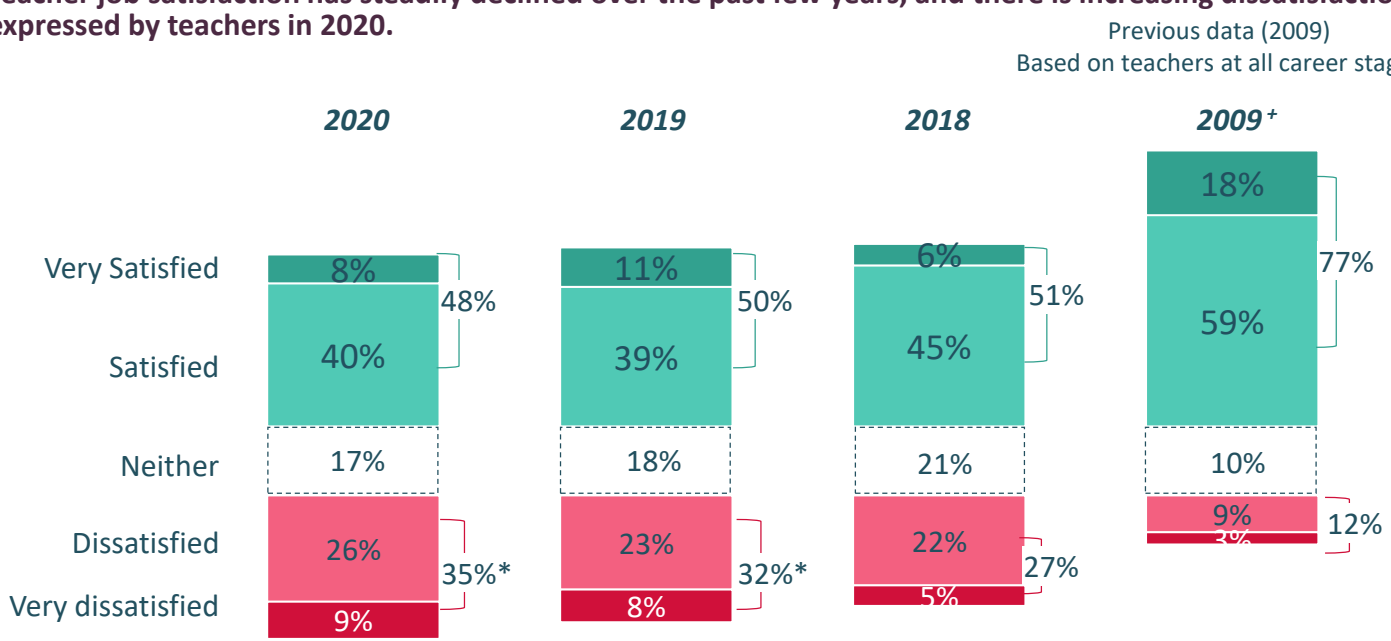
***= Figures have been rounded to the nearest %**

Q18: Taking into account your current work duties and work environment, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your job?

Overall Job Satisfaction

(Base: All Junior Cycle Teachers - n=1,829)

Teacher job satisfaction has steadily declined over the past few years, and there is increasing dissatisfaction being expressed by teachers in 2020.



(+Source: Millward Brown/ASTI 2009)

= Figures have been rounded to the nearest %

Q18: Taking into account your current work duties and work environment, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your job?

Reflecting on Physical Environment

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What Teachers Are Saying…

Class size is a huge issue. Not enough space in my school.

Teaching overall is a lovely job but it has become so much more difficult because of the introduction of the JC Framework without adequate planning or resources.

Lack of digital devices for students can be difficult when there are so many research-based Learning Outcomes in the new junior cycle.

Lack of ICT facilities for teachers and students is one of the biggest causes of stress in my school.

We work in an area with a booming population but there is no sign of the extension promised 15 years ago. School is overcrowded.

Current class sizes are not conducive to varied seating arrangements and the Assessment for Learning approach in the junior cycle. One tries but it is often a limited version of what is ideal.

PE hall and sports facilities inadequate…classes sometimes doubled or trebled because of the weather.

While change will always be difficult, the rate of this (JC curriculum) change has caused huge stress among teachers and students alike. In order to fully engage with the vision for junior cycle, it is essential that class sizes are reduced.

What Teachers Are Saying…

The school I work in is ageing poorly and there are many issues with the physical environment.

I haven't applied for any posts of responsibility in my school as my teaching job has become so much busier. More and more teachers in my school have gone job-sharing because of the workload.

My Home Economics kitchen will be forty years old this year! It is in dire need of upgrading. I've worked here for a decade and begged for an upgrade.

I have always felt teaching was a vocation. However, due to pay and overall conditions, impossibly high expectations, initiative overload, deteriorating discipline, fear of litigation, etc., I am considering my position.

We have one photocopier and printer for use by all the staff.

Burnt-out teachers won't encourage the next generation to take up teaching.

30 students in my class is far too many…it leads to stress, heavy workload, lack of diversity in teaching strategies and discipline issues.

Too much change and too little support.

Summary

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Thematic Summary

Class size and the quality of education – I

Class size is an important dimension of quality education. The 2018 OECD TALIS survey shows that teachers tend to spend less classroom time on actual teaching and learning when teaching larger classes[1]. Smaller class sizes are generally perceived as allowing teachers to spend more time with each student and less time on classroom management, thereby providing better instruction tailored to the students' individual needs. Differentiated teaching is central to the subject specifications in the Framework for Junior Cycle and is also fundamental to inclusive teaching and learning for students with special and additional educational needs.

The average OECD class size in lower secondary education is 23: in the EU it is 21. Class size in the Irish junior cycle is higher than both these global averages. Only in subjects requiring specialist equipment are Irish class sizes in line with international norms. The negative impact of large classes is strongly articulated by teachers. 85% agreed that it often inhibits their capacity to deploy adequate differentiation strategies followed by 80% agreeing that it often impacts negatively on the range of teaching methodologies they use. 82% of teachers further stated that class size often constrains students' collaborative and active learning activities. The latter are central to the new subject specifications in the Framework which in addition to knowledge, focuses on skills and learning outcomes. The first Classroom-Based Assessment at the end of second year encourages students to engage in group work.

[1] *OECD 2018 TALIS Results (Volume 2) Teachers and school leaders as valued professionals*

Thematic Summary

Class size and the quality of education - II

Teachers workload is directly determined by class size. The 2018 ASTI-commissioned RED C Research on teacher workload provides strong evidence in this regard. In addition to 21hours-pluse class-contact teaching time, on a weekly basis teachers work an additional 20 hours. The vast majority of the latter includes lesson planning and preparation, marking homework, preparing classrooms/learning spaces. The larger the class, the more out-of-class work for individual teachers. It is no surprise that the vast majority of comments provided in the open question at the end of the survey highlighted workload as a source of stress, low morale and questioning about continuing to work as a teacher.

Thematic Summary

Technology in the classroom

In line with ESRI research, teachers report a high level of usage of ICT in the classroom[2]. 70% of teachers use ICT on a daily basis followed by 21% who use it a few times a week. The reasons for lower usage of ICT also mirror the findings of the ESRI which stated that ICT infrastructure and resources for maintaining ICT devices were the major factors impacting on ICT use in schools. While teachers are broadly satisfied with the adequacy of provision of core ICT infrastructure – digital projector, whiteboard, teacher computer/laptop – other areas are considered highly inadequate. Only 17% of teachers rated as adequate the availability of computers for students. The provision of ICT equipment such as digital cameras, laser printers and mobile multi-media/video editing stations is also inadequate. This situation is highly frustrating for teachers as the Classroom-Based Assessments in the new subject specifications require the usage of such equipment to record, store and award descriptors to students' work. Workload also has an impact on teachers' usage of ICT in the classroom: over a quarter stated they didn't have time to engage in upskilling in this area while a similar number stated that their classes are too large to make effective use of ICT.

[2] *ESRI 2016 Teaching and learning in second-level schools at the advent of high-speed broadband*

Thematic Summary

Teaching space and physical environment

The physical environment in schools is critical for both teachers and learners. Just over a third of teachers agreed that the quality of the overall physical environment in their school was good. Similarly low levels of agreement were stated for indicators such as the adequacy of toilet/sanitary facilities, space in corridors and other communal areas and canteen/dining spaces for students. While most teachers have a base classroom/dedicated learning space, a significant minority – 22% - do not. As noted in the comments to the open question, this situation is highly stressful for teachers as they have to spend precious classroom time on setting up materials and making sure the ICT is working. Spaces for other professional activities are also limited: not all schools had office space for Deputy Principals while less than half had office space for Assistant Principals and just over a third had dedicated rooms for meetings and planning activities. The latter is a particular source of frustration for teaches as junior cycle teachers have at least four Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings per year.

Thematic Summary

Teacher wellbeing

Teacher wellbeing is central to the quality of the teaching profession. Teachers' wellbeing is primarily determined by their working conditions and the quality of relationships in their professional work. As evidenced in the 2018 OECD TALIS survey, the working conditions of teachers play a crucial role in shaping the prestige of the profession. Unmanageable job demands and stressful working conditions can lead to low job satisfaction and wellbeing, low levels of commitment and reduced retention in the profession. The main sources of stress for teachers are workload, expectations of parents and other stakeholders and the quality of management-staff communications in school in that order. Class size is the next major source of stress and is inextricably linked to workload. Almost 4 in 5 teachers believe that their workload has increased significantly in the last three years. The survey demonstrates a continued decrease in levels of job satisfaction among teachers: down to 48% from 77% in 2009. Multiple comments in the open question confirmed the TALIS findings about burnout, low morale and a desire to leave teaching.

THANK YOU

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