



Rebuilding our School Communities: Teachers' Priorities – March 2021

Job Reference:

496621/CM/COD



Research Objectives and Methodology



To gather data on teachers' priorities for building resilient school communities in the post-pandemic period, including how best to support the work of classroom teachers, student and teacher wellbeing, ICT integration, effective school leadership and the physical environment.



2,527 which represents a response rate of 19.5% - a strong response. (Sample of 12,969 members). The margin of error from this sample size within this population is +/- 2%



A random sample of c13,000 ASTI members – both teachers and principals – for whom ASTI has a valid email address.



March 2021



Online questionnaire, sent by RED C Research to the c13,000 ASTI members on email database





Principal Findings



Principal Findings

- / **Supporting the work of the classroom teacher:** Teachers identified a cluster of related areas for future investment to support the work of the classroom teacher. Smaller class size is identified by the majority of teachers as the priority investment area. This is strongly followed by associated measures of more time for teachers to engage in non-teaching professional work. Students with emotional and behavioural problems is also a priority area for future investment.
- / **Integrating ICT into classroom teaching and learning:** The provision of ICT devices to students is prioritised by teachers for integrating ICT into teaching and learning across education. Training for students on how to use ICT and software is also a priority – as is ongoing CPD for teachers. The provision of laptops to teachers is also a critical area for investment. Broadband availability is also an area for investment – better broadband in school and free broadband for students outside of school.



Principal Findings

- / **Supporting all students to be effective learners and ensuring their wellbeing:** Access for students to dedicated mental health services outside of school is the top priority for investment. This is closely followed by adequate Guidance Counselling services in schools and ongoing teacher CPD on emotional and behavioural disorders. Future investment also needs to provide adequate learning supports for students with special and additional educational needs. Consonant with a focus on students with emotional and behavioural disorders, teachers also emphasised the need for effective student behaviour policies in schools.
- / **Effective school leadership:** Quality consultation and communication are identified by teachers as absolutely central to effective school leadership. This includes consultation with staff and communication to staff – both are interlinked. Middle management is also an important dimension of effective school leadership. Time for post holders to conduct their work was the third highest priority of teachers in terms of future investment. Ongoing CPD for post holders was also identified as important for effective school leadership.



Principal Findings

- / **Improving the physical environment in schools:** Once again, smaller class size is prioritised by teachers as requiring investment. Such a measure would reduce current overcrowding. Dedicated work-space for teachers – outside of staff-room/canteen – is the second priority for teachers. Other key areas for investment have already been highlighted by COVID-19 safety measures including improving ventilation systems; upgrading toilet/sanitary facilities for teachers; adequate canteen facilities for students; and improving heating systems.
- / **Promoting teacher wellbeing:** Consultation and communication with staff again emerged as priorities, in particular, consultation on changes which impact on teachers' workload and time. Reducing teacher workload is critical as is ensuring a whole-school approach to a better work-life balance for teachers. Concomitant with the latter is the need to implement a 'right to disconnect' policy on communications from school at the end of the school day and at weekends.



Principal Findings

- / **Work intensity:** Work intensity is a constant in teachers' working lives. COVID-19 has had an incalculable impact on work intensity: 90% of teachers stated an increase in work intensity, of whom 62% indicated a significant increase.
- / **Teachers' job satisfaction:** 6 in 10 teachers are satisfied with their job.



Profile of Sample

(Base: all respondents – n=2527)

Over 70% of respondents are female, which is broadly reflective of the gender breakdown within the ASTI (69% female; 31% male). The majority of respondents - 74% - have 11 or more years teaching experience.

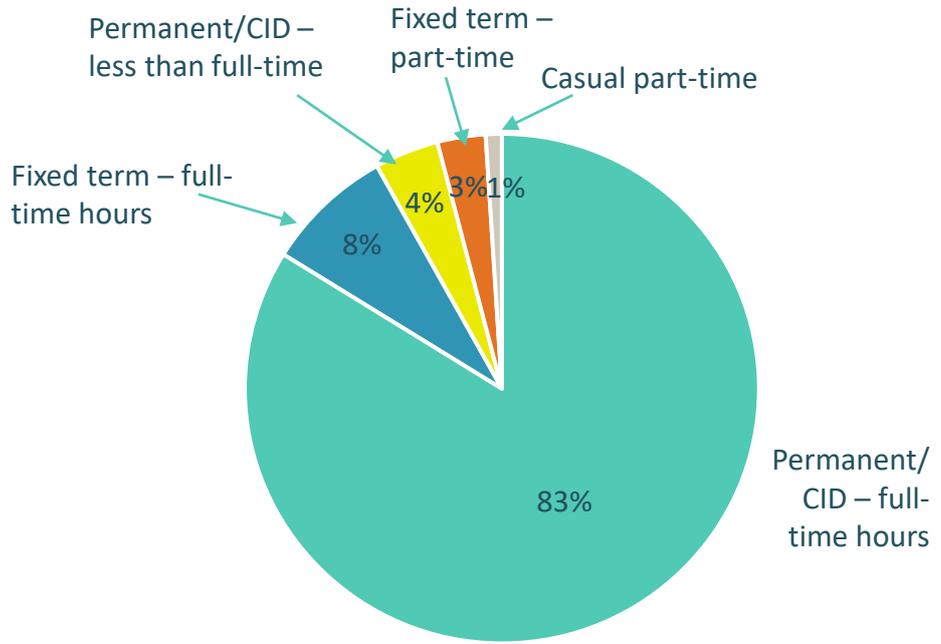


How many years are you teaching?
Please select your gender:

Employment Status

(Base: All respondents - n=2,527)

83% of respondents had permanent contracts, while 16% had non-permanent and/or part-time contracts

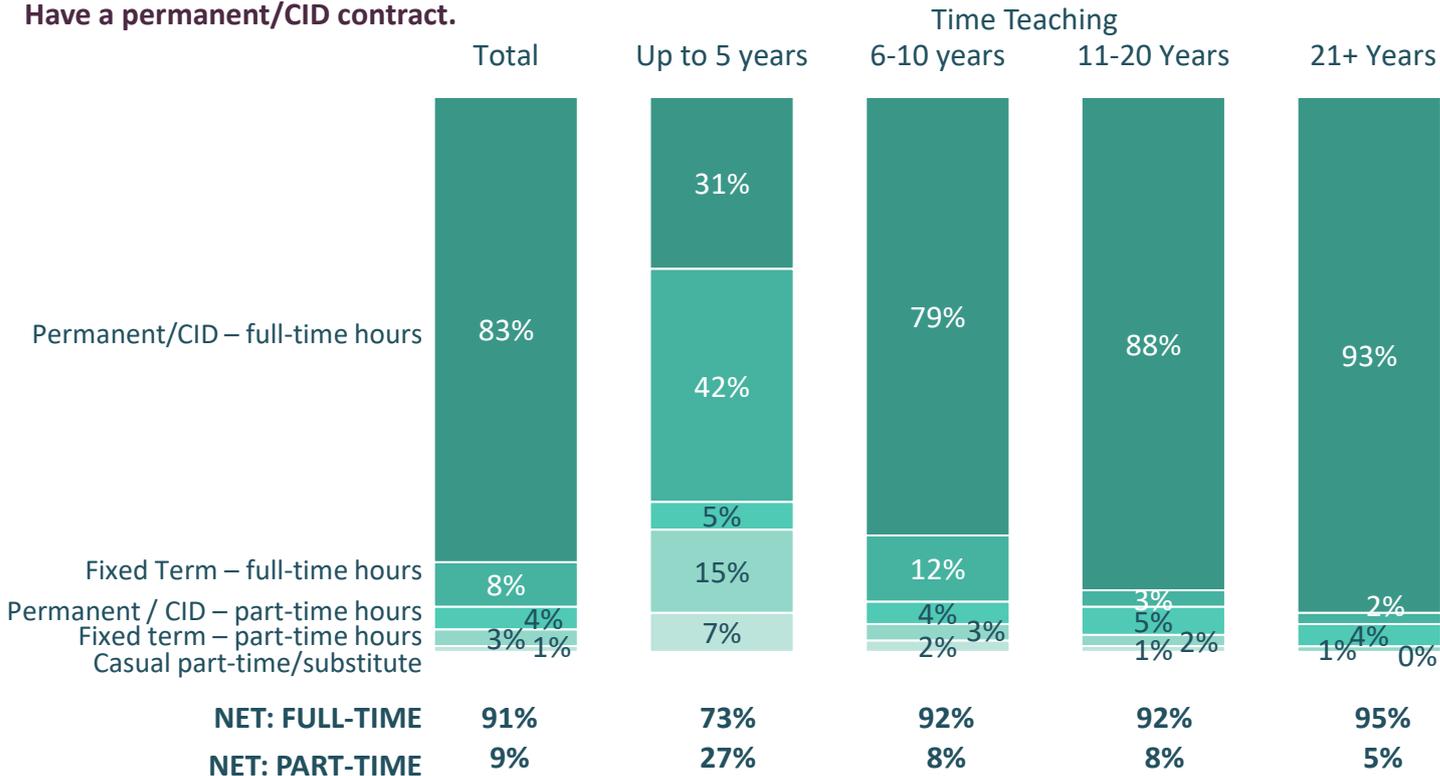


What is your employment status?

Employment Status

(Base: all respondents – n=2527)

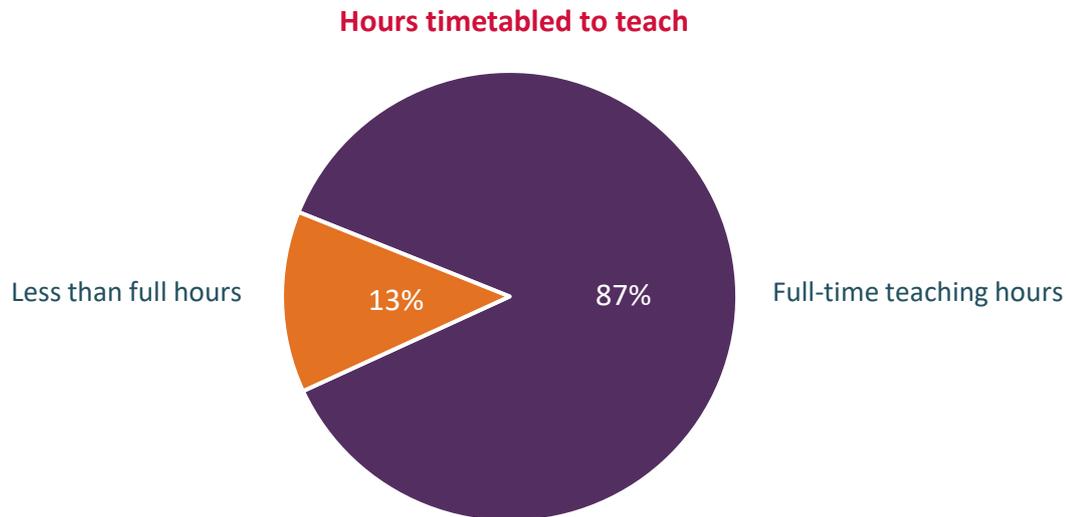
Among those teaching for less than 5 years, over a quarter have only part-time hours, and less than 4 in 10 Have a permanent/CID contract.



What is your employment status?

Almost 9 in 10 teachers are timetabled to teach full-time hours

(Base: all non-principals, n=2472)

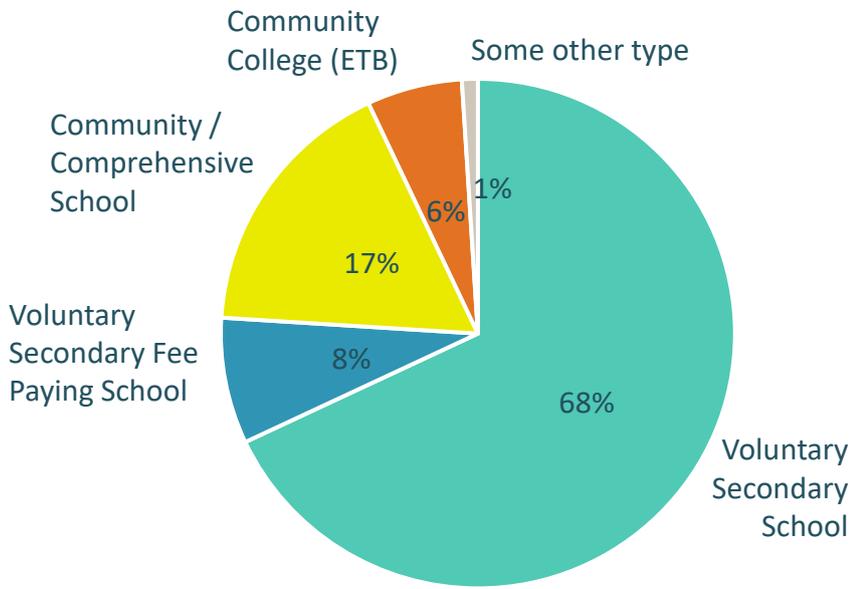


How many hours are you timetabled to teach?

Type of School Taught In

(Base: All respondents - n=2,527)

Three-quarters work in the voluntary secondary sector, which is broadly reflective of the ASTI membership.

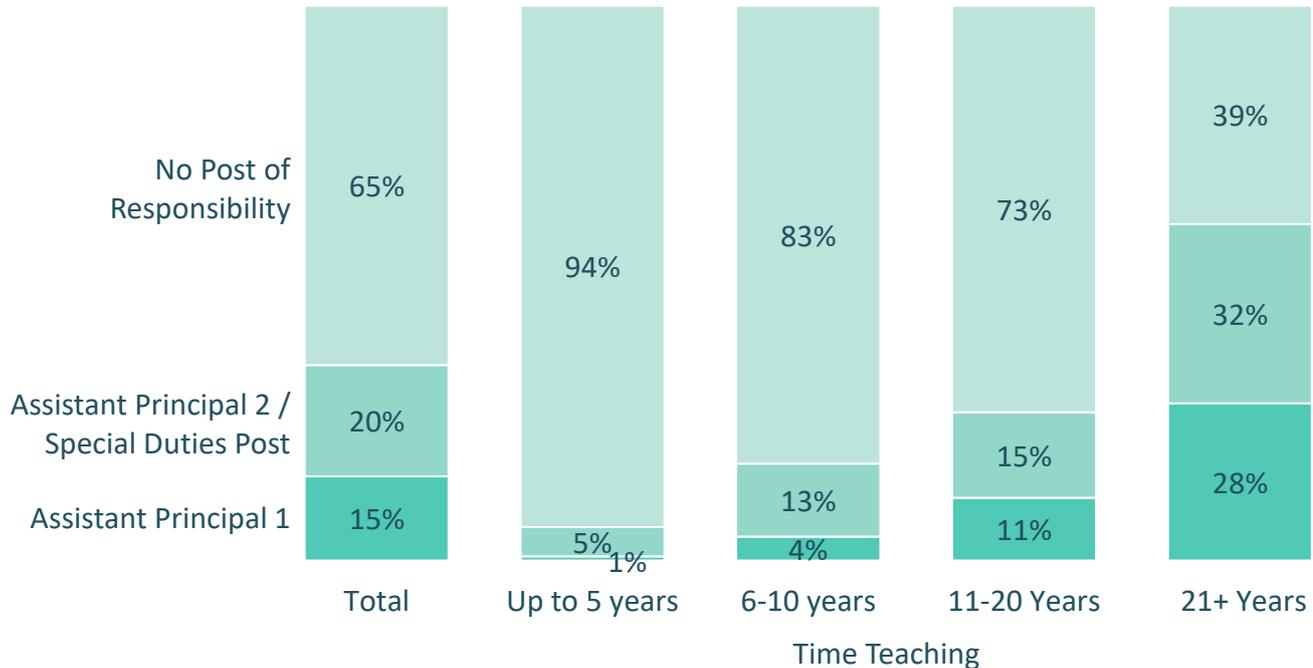


What type of school do you teach in?

Posts of Responsibility - Teachers

(Base: All teachers- n=2,406)

Around 1 in 3 have a leadership post in addition to their teaching duties. Those 21+ years teaching are most likely to have a post.

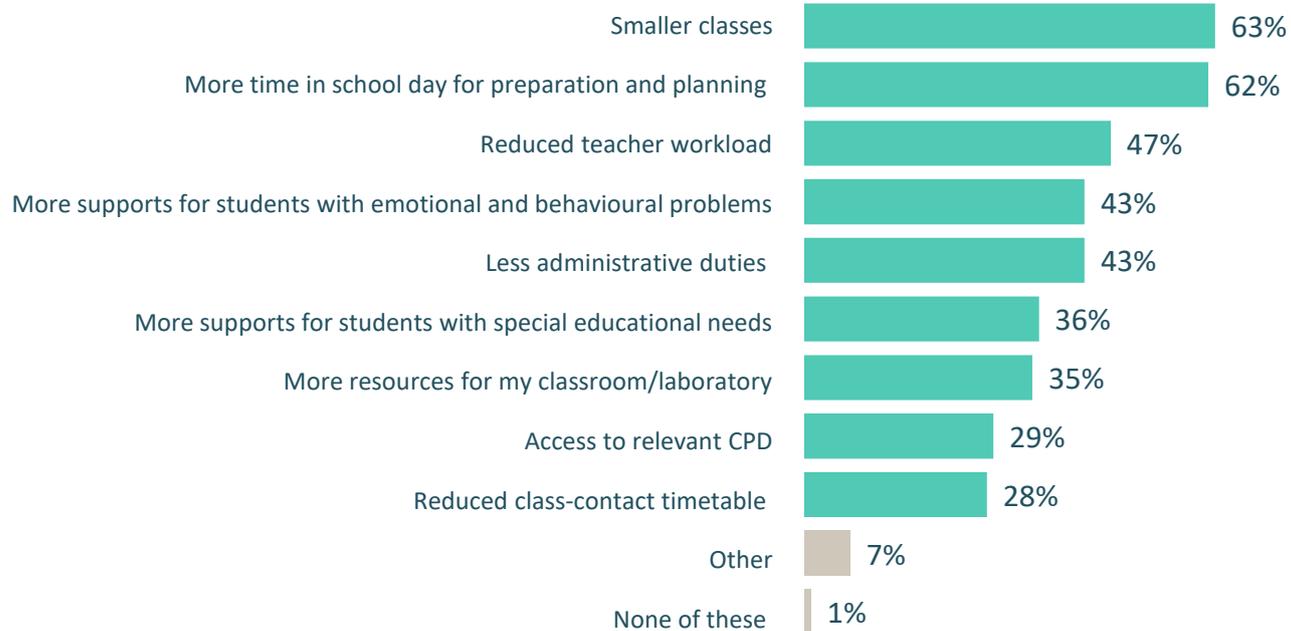


Do you have a Post of Responsibility as follows:

Smaller classes & preparation time are most important ways of supporting work in the classroom

(Base: all non-principals, n=2472)

Most important to support work in the classroom post-pandemic?

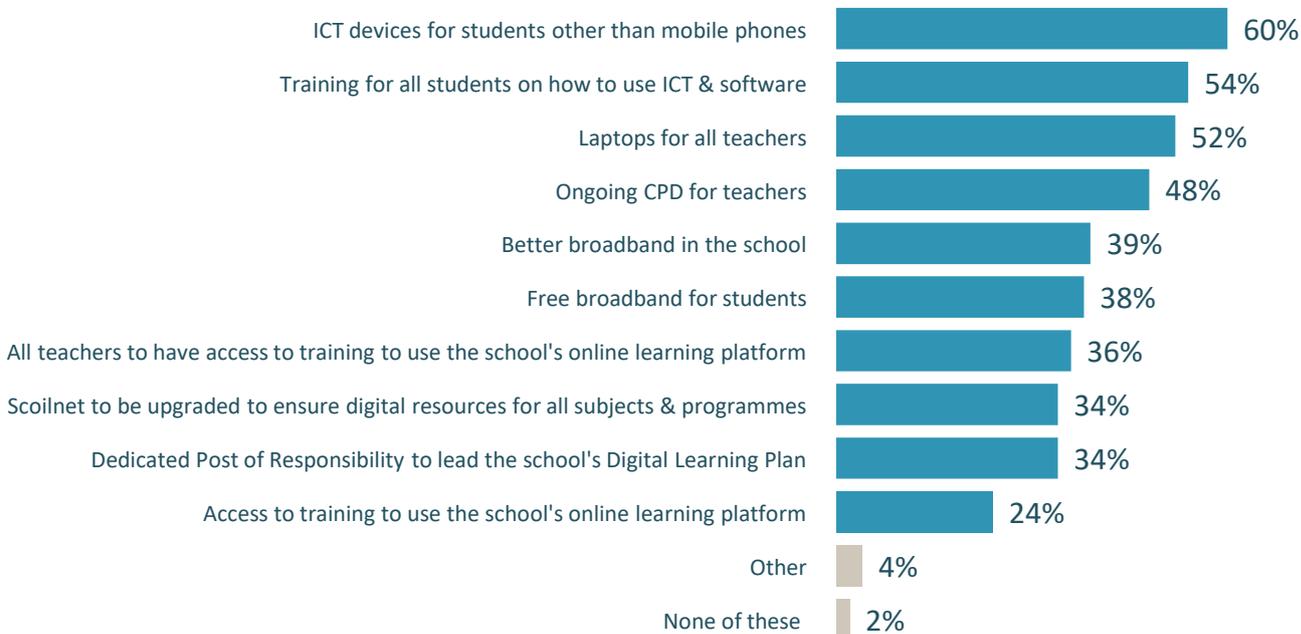


Which of the following are most important for you to support your work in the classroom?

ICT devices and training for students are most important for integration of ICT

(Base: All respondents – n=2,527)

Most important for integrating ICT into classroom teaching and learning post-pandemic?

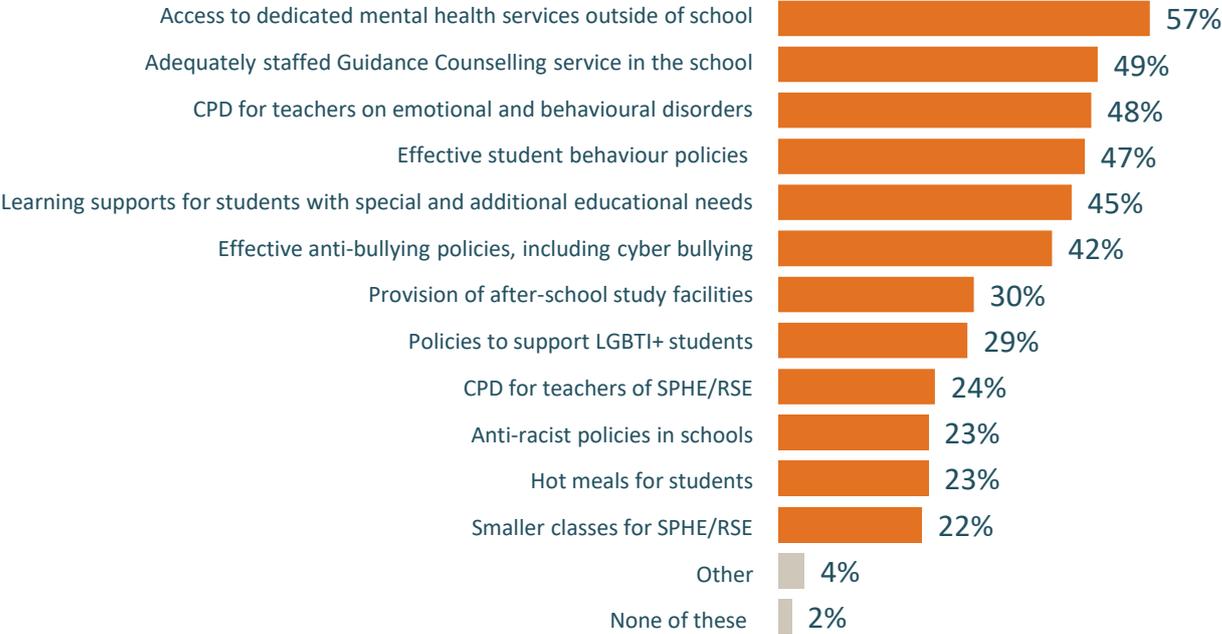


Which of the following are most important for you in terms of integrating ICT into classroom teaching and learning?

Mental health & guidance counselling services important in supporting students

(Base: All respondents – n=2,527)

Most important in supporting all students to be effective learners and ensuring their wellbeing post-pandemic

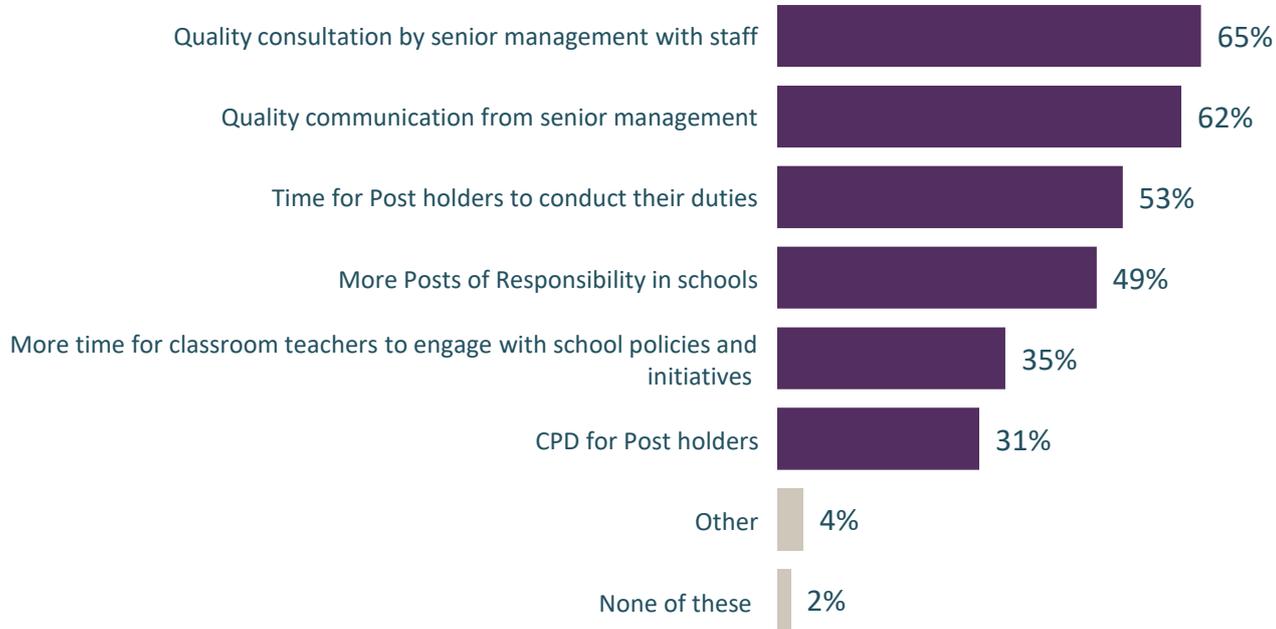


Which of the following are most important for you in terms of supporting all students to be effective learners and ensuring their wellbeing?

Management consultation and communication important for school leadership

(Base: All respondents – n=2,527)

Most important in terms of effective school leadership post-pandemic

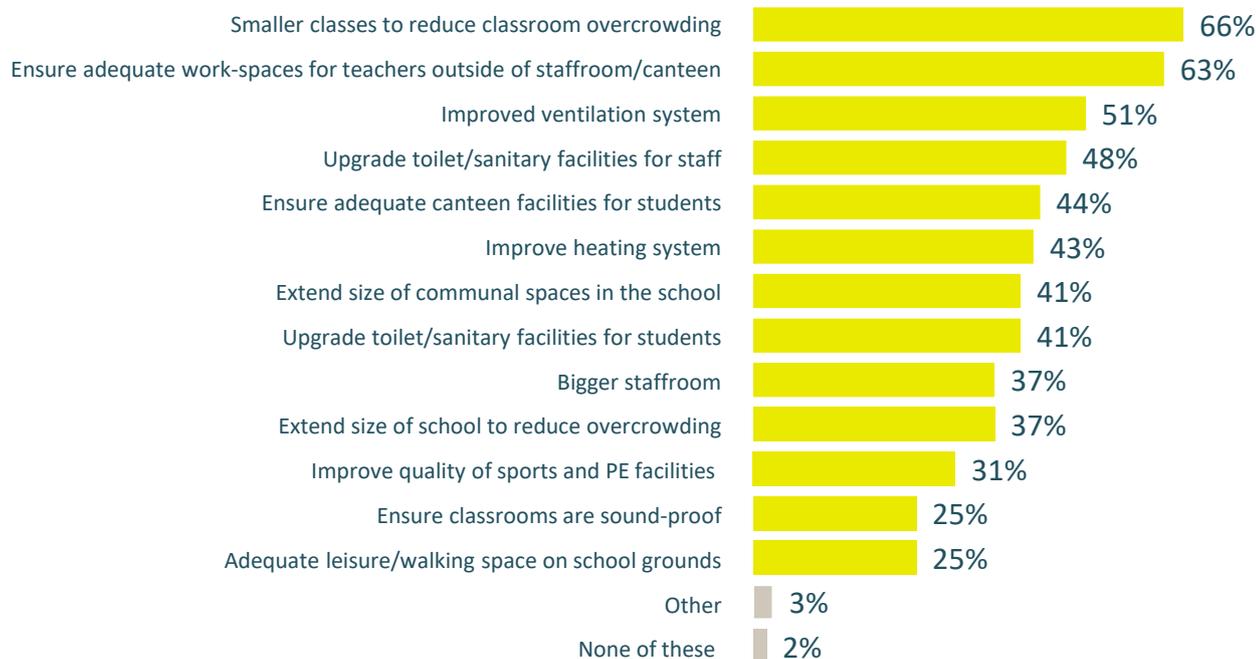


Which of the following are most important for you in terms of effective school leadership?

Work-spaces & smaller classes are important for improving school environment

(Base: All respondents - n=2,527)

Most important for improving the physical environment in school post-pandemic



Which of the following are most important for you in terms of improving the physical environment in your school?

Staff consultation & reducing workload most important for teacher wellbeing

(Base: All respondents- n=2,527)

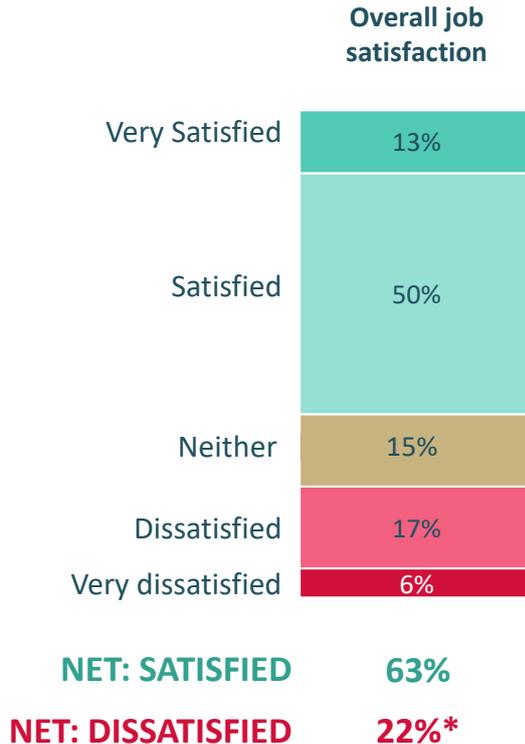
Most important for promoting teacher wellbeing post-pandemic



Which of the following are most important for you in terms of promoting teacher wellbeing?

Six in ten teachers and principals are satisfied in their job

(Base: All respondents – n=2,527)



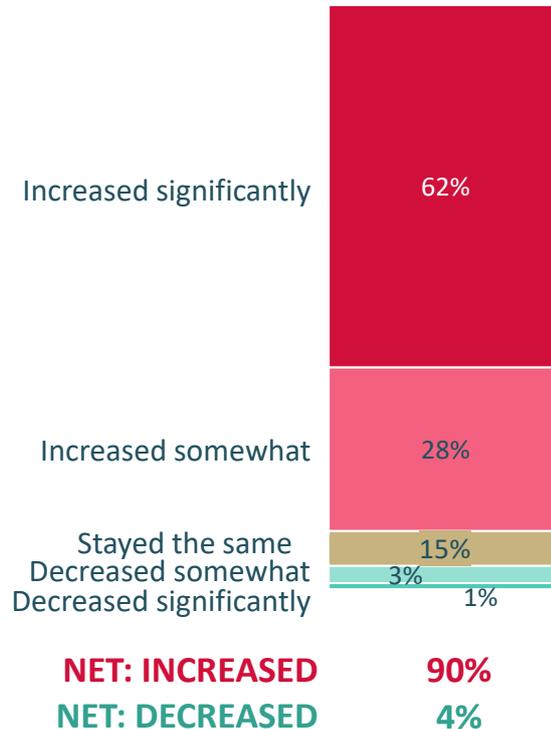
**= Figures have been rounded to the nearest %*

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

Change in Intensity of the Working Week

(Base: All respondents- n=2,527)

However, the overwhelming majority believe the intensity of their working week has increased, with six in ten saying that it has increased significantly



Thinking back on your work over the last year, since COVID-19 would you say that the intensity of your working week has increased, decreased or stayed the same?

What Teachers Are Saying...

A happy workforce leads to a more resilient school - equal pay for equal work should be prioritised.

A nationwide infrastructure programme is needed. My school building needs to be improved. All schools should have PE halls especially those over 300 students. A national plan to improve school infrastructure should be created and put into action asap. There has been chronic under investment over the last number of years. A shortage of PE halls, an abundance of prefabs illustrates this.

A pastoral care structure in the schools that meets the needs of students or staff that are struggling for whatever reasons. Smaller class sizes so student don't get 'lost' so to speak in a class of 30 students. Better recreational areas in schools for students. Give post holders time to do their jobs.

A reduced timetable and smaller class sizes are paramount for effective teaching and learning to occur. Better equipment and facilities for sports and recreation. A dedicated work space and computers provided in all classrooms for teachers to use.

A supportive management, timely communication, collaborative working environment. Recognition by management of the stress involved in teaching and the need for CPDs to upskill teachers.

Again, 20 years waiting for a building, working out of 24+ prefab is demoralising for staff.

Adequate buildings and facilities for students and staff. There's a huge issue with overcrowding in schools, particularly in urban areas.

Adding teachers to list of frontline workers as a priority for vaccines now and in the future.

As a guidance counsellor I see the level of anxiety increasing in students at an alarming rate. There should be a dedicated resilience programme for all schools.

I work in a school where staff are valued by management, there is a very good caring atmosphere so the issues we face are down to the physical environment of the school. It is old, too small and many areas are not really fit for purpose. It is cold, poorly ventilated and overcrowded.

Improvements to school buildings and grounds, less overcrowding, more green space, better ventilation.

What Teachers Are Saying...

Emphasis on safety, health and welfare at work should be prioritised in particular an effort to reduce teachers' stress in the workplace.

Competency and feeling safe in using digital technologies are of paramount importance. CPD required for students and teachers. School timetable should allow for upskilling. In our school all teachers upskilled in their own time attending evening classes.

In a nutshell, smaller classes are the answer to most problems. So many educational, behavioural and workload problems would be solved at the one time.

ICT in all rooms to accommodate the constant moving around (this happened for a large number of teachers in my school before COVID) So much lesson time is wasted as a result of the lack of ICT and rooms in my school. I have a wonderful principal and I teach wonderful students and the environment and resources we have is below sub-standard.

Greater recognition of the professional role of the teacher and increased consultation with regard to decisions around policy, practice and procedures.

More time for communication. Very few staff meetings happen. Management very busy with admin and other matters not easy to get time with them.

Our school is over-crowded by approximately 400 students. It puts huge pressure on the school community - toilets, eating facilities, crowded corridors, noise pollution, etc. Resilient school communities are developed by a caring, active staff that respect their colleagues and students, and love the subjects they are teaching. A pro-active and positive management team is also key.

Pay equality to reduce the divisiveness in staff rooms of a two-tier pay scale.

Much smaller class sizes would solve a lot of problems: from reducing teachers' workload to a more personalised, individualised care for students which would help both their learning and their wellbeing. Class sizes max. 20 (at the moment I teach classes of 32 pupils at Junior level, 30 at senior level).



Summary



$$\frac{3 \cdot \sqrt{2}}{5 \cdot \sqrt{2} \cdot \sqrt{2}} = \frac{3\sqrt{2}}{5 \cdot 2} = \frac{3\sqrt{2}}{10} \approx \frac{3}{10}$$
$$= \frac{2\sqrt{3}}{3}$$



Thematic Summary

ASTI View

Explanatory note: Out of 2,527 respondents, 1,116 submitted comments in the open question at the end. The latter invited teachers to reflect on their answers to the questionnaire and submit their concerns on current education issues.

- / **Smaller classes for more effective teaching and learning:** Teachers are going through a period of profound reflection arising from the shift to remote teaching. Not only do they have to rapidly learn new digital skills, they have also had to engage with their students on an individual basis for a long period of time. This experience has resulted in a deeper understanding of their students' learning needs and the importance of pedagogy in meeting those needs. In this context, it is not surprising that reducing class size is prioritised as the key area for future investment. ASTI commissioned research in 2020 confirmed that class size in the Junior Cycle is higher than the OECD average of 23 and the EU average of 21.
- / In their comments, teachers repeatedly stressed the need for smaller classes in order to differentiate their teaching to meet the needs of each student. The latter are diverse, dynamic and in many instances, complex. The phrase 'personalised instruction' was frequently used by teachers and the need for teachers to create the conditions in the classroom for learner autonomy wherein students understand how they learn best and manage their learning accordingly was repeatedly emphasised. This insight into learner autonomy is consonant with other research conducted by academics since the shift to remote teaching.



Thematic Summary

ASTI View

- / **Supporting student wellbeing:** Student wellbeing is a constant concern for teachers. The shift to remote teaching and the more individualised nature of online teaching has been profoundly revealing for teachers. Many reported how they came to understand their students better as they became aware of their home circumstances, limited access to digital technology, their changing patterns of learner motivation and resilience. Teachers stated that they had come to understand their students in a more holistic way and that their classroom teaching would reflect this. There was a universal concern for student wellbeing in the context of school closure, physical restrictions on social engagement and being removed from peer groups.
- / Going forward teachers widely agree that more investment is needed in the Guidance Counselling service in schools and in supports for students with additional and special educational needs. However, the most prominent concern of teachers is the inadequacy of external adolescent mental health services. Teachers repeatedly cited their frustration that students with significant emotional or behavioural problems could not get timely support from the public health services. Of interest, given the focus of the survey on future investment priorities, was the large number of teachers who stated that schools needed more social spaces for students to relax in. Improved canteen facilities and the provision of hot food were key in this regard.



Thematic Summary

ASTI View

- / **Workload and professional time** : Workload and the lack of time during the school day to discharge professional duties were dominant themes in teachers' commentary. Workload assumed a particular significance in the context of remote teaching. As in previous ASTI research, teachers stated that no matter what mix of synchronous and asynchronous teaching they provided, student feedback was invariably individualised. This has resulted not just in more work but also an elongated working day as students submitted assignments at different times, frequently late into the night.
- / The right to disconnect was a major concern of teachers who underlined that communications from school management outside of the working day and over the weekend was frequently a source of extra work. Looking to the future, teachers underlined that the issue of professional time for classroom planning, for subject planning with colleagues, and for wider school activities, is critical. Society needs to understand the work of teachers as comprising more than classroom teaching and future investment should enable teachers to have reduced timetables so that they can attend to their other professional duties.



Thematic Summary

ASTI View

- / **New entrants to the profession:** The survey confirms that new entrants to the profession, those with up to 5 years teaching experience, continue to experience inferior working conditions. Over a quarter have only part-time hours, and less than 4 in 10 – 36% – have a permanent/CID contract. This is in marked contrast to teachers with 6 to 10 years' experience, 83% of whom have a permanent/CID contract. Pay inequality remains a priority for the profession: irrespective of age/length of service, teachers repeatedly underlined its demoralising – indeed corrosive – impact on morale and commitment to remaining in the profession. Both must be of major concern in the context of ongoing teacher shortages and an 8% decline in applications to under-graduate B.Ed. programmes in 2021 as reported by the CAO.
- / **School leadership and collegial cultures:** School leadership comprises many dimensions and is invariably complex and dynamic. In the collegial professional culture of the school, quality communication and consultation are of paramount importance. Profound dissatisfaction was expressed by teachers concerning the lack of time allocated to Assistant Principals in voluntary secondary schools to discharge their duties. (These post holders have up to 4 hours non-classroom time in ETBI and community and comprehensive schools.) Moreover, there are not enough middle management posts in schools to meet the complex and constantly extending national policy initiatives and to support student wellbeing. Many teachers underlined the need for schools to have a dedicated Assistant Principal post for greater digital integration. Teachers also emphasised the need for schools to have dedicated office space for all levels of school management. This issue also strongly featured in research commissioned by the ASTI in 2020 on quality of physical infrastructure in schools.



Thematic Summary

ASTI View

- / **Teacher wellbeing and valuing the work of teachers:** The shift to remote teaching has dramatically highlighted the central role of school in young people's lives. It has also deepened society's understanding of the complex nature of teachers' work, the depth of knowledge and skills which underpins that work and how that work collectively contributes to the welfare of individuals and communities. Teachers have demonstrated extraordinary levels of innovation and resilience in the overnight shift to remote teaching. Earlier ASTI research on this shift underlined the strong sense of agency and responsibility which teachers collectively demonstrated in response to this unprecedented societal crisis.
- / At the same time, in their commentary, teachers also reported feeling demoralised by some media narratives which they felt played down their contribution and efforts. This impact of negative media commentary is a recurring theme in the ASTI research with members. It is experienced as being demoralising and unfair. On the wider theme of teacher wellbeing, teachers do not consider that it is a policy priority for either their employer or the Department of Education and Skills. Teachers identified key ingredients of wellbeing as reduced workload, time for non-classroom duties, the right to disconnect, improved communication and consultation from school management, and respect for the work of the teaching profession.



**THANK
YOU**

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