

Performance pay, policy and job satisfaction: school leaders speak out

Emma Drury

Heads, deputies and department heads share their views in our GTN leaders' survey



School leaders say they are struggling to keep up with the rapid changes in education policy.
Photograph: Alamy

Last month the Guardian Teacher Network asked school leaders to take part in survey to try and get a sense of how leaders are feeling about the changes facing education in the UK.

Heads, assistant heads and department heads all wanted to share their views on how they feel about the rapid changes to policy, funding issues plus the prospect of performance-related pay.

The most striking statistic to come out of the survey was that 88% of leaders feel that the government does not have a coherent set of policies to see schools through this period of change. Just 3.2% thought the government did.

More than half of the respondents said they felt the biggest challenge facing schools was the rapid change in education policy which had no evidence base. Here's what one leader said: "It is almost impossible to undertake any long term planning currently, with the number of announcements made by the education secretary that appear to be based on very little consultation of what currently goes on in schools. For the first time in my career I am regularly engaged in conversations with parents and my own peers who appear to think that GCSEs are easy and anyone can get an A* and that if this grade is not achieved, as it is so easy, there is clearly something wrong with the teaching."

Another leader added this comment: "Change does not have to be a bad thing. However, changing things just because others introduced them does not mean they were not good. Change without evidence backed research will lead to aimless reform that falls short for many."

Some 37% of leaders do not support the government's plans for exam reform while 44% felt that school leaders needed to flex their muscles more to influence government policy on schools while 78% said the onus should be on the government to consult more widely with schools on new policies. One leader said there are "too many changes brought in by government committees without the necessary knowledge or research to inform changes."

The intense focus on exam results and tests are seen by 48% as being a major issue for leaders and leading to an acceleration in the competition felt between schools. Nearly half of the respondents (46%) felt that schools really need to work more collegiately. But, as this

leader points out: "I know now how GP fund holders felt. We used to have such a strong culture of collaboration but we now find ourselves in competition in a number of ways - no way to run a public service. Oops forgot it barely is public anymore."

And they weren't the only ones to draw a comparison with the NHS in the survey. "I do still love my job - it is still very rewarding. With teachers fearful of expressing their concerns in case they 'rock the boat' I think the kind of traumas that have been seen in the National Health Service, and with other powerful people, when whistleblowers are bullied into silence are possible."

One major issue that concerned many respondents when dealing with their staff was that of performance-related pay. Only 7% support the performance-related pay model for teachers and only 6% strongly agreed that their school was prepared for the model to be introduced in their school. Many of the respondents had something to say on the issue: "Performance-related pay has encouraged further discrimination and bullying to the system. Some heads of departments could give themselves 'easy' groups that are expected to over perform and give difficult under performing students to teachers that they dislike. Schools with financial woes will also reluctantly operate this policy with integrity. Teachers not moving up the pay scale will effectively take pay cuts. The teaching profession must be the only profession where PRP is not entirely linked with their performance but the performance of others (students)."

Another leader added: "It is a nonsense to link pay to results. This never works. Many people in a school work together as a team to produce an individual child's results."

Most of the respondents seem settled in their positions with only 6% strongly fearing redundancy and 38% saying they had no plans to leave education in the pursuit of another career. It is clear, that despite the constant turning tide of change, funding and resource pressures leaders still love their jobs. In fact 41% strongly agreed with the statement that said: "I enjoy my job." As this leader said: "I love teaching. It still, after 20 years, inspires and challenges me. I can't imagine doing any other job, they all seem boring by comparison. I like the children in my school, I love what I teach, I like the parents with all the challenges they bring, I love the extra curricular things I do. I have only had one moment in the past 10 years that I have not enjoyed on some level."

Fonte: The Guardian , Inglaterra, 18 Abr. 2013, Internacional.