

# **Why here? Report of qualitative work with teachers working in schools above and below the floor targets**

**Part of the ippr Choice and Equity in Teacher Supply research project**

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## Executive summary

The starting point of the report is that the most important factor in raising levels of attainment in schools facing challenging circumstances is a high quality workforce, backed up by good leaders. Yet it is felt by many that it is precisely these schools that have the most difficulty in attracting and retaining sufficient staff. This view is based on widespread belief, anecdotal evidence, and some research evidence. At the same time, the high level deregulation of the teacher market in England can make changing this situation difficult in policy terms.

ippr wanted to investigate two key policy challenges arising from these factors:

- How can a climate be created to ensure that enough high quality (or potential high quality) teachers want to teach, and stay teaching, in the most challenging schools?
- How can teachers who have made this choice be supported and trained so that they have the resources to do the best possible job, and so that they are motivated to remain in these schools?

Our view is that the vast majority of teachers are able to be ‘high quality teachers’ when they are well supported and valued. The research sought to understand why teachers are attracted to one school over another from the teachers’ perspective.

The report should be read as part of the broader piece of ippr research ‘Choice and Equity in Teacher Supply’. This focuses on supporting and encouraging teachers to work in the most challenging and vulnerable schools and involves a review of existing literature and quantitative survey work<sup>1</sup>. This report provides an account of the key findings of the qualitative element of the research.

ippr conducted qualitative research with teachers working in some of the most challenging and vulnerable schools, as well as teachers working in matched schools in the same geographical areas with higher levels of attainment. A focus group format was adopted as it establishes an informal setting for discussion. Each group was led by a facilitator. Teachers also completed a survey at the end of the groups. This gave us some quantitative data.

Eleven focus groups were conducted. Seven took place in London, two in the Government Office of the North West and two within the Government Office of the South East. A total of 16 schools and 73 teachers participated. In selecting the sample the focus was on areas where there are clusters of both challenging schools and those that they could be matched with. ‘Challenging schools’ were defined in terms of attainment at GCSE level; schools which had 5 A\* to C attainment at around or below the floor target of 25 per cent were included in this category. ‘Matched’ schools were selected in the same travel to work area as the challenging schools, were similar in terms of type and ethos, but they had better records of attainment.

Invitations to attend the group discussions were distributed to a range of schools. A financial incentive was provided to encourage participation and to recognise the time that teachers were giving up. It is important to note that teachers attending the groups were self-selecting and had some interest in the discussion.

The research focused on the following key questions:

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<sup>1</sup> Available at [www.ippr.org/education](http://www.ippr.org/education)

- What motivates teachers to work in particular schools? What keeps them there or makes them want to leave?
- What factors most impact on how happy teachers feel in their jobs, particularly at challenging schools?
- What factors are most likely to encourage teachers to stay working in challenging schools? And what is most likely to persuade teachers to move from less challenging schools?

***Key findings from the focus groups:***

**Why teach?**

Teachers in our study can be grouped into two main categories in their motivations for entering the profession. The decisions they make about what type of school to teach in often flow from these different motivations.

*Teachers by default*

The first category of teachers can broadly be described as those who ‘fall’ into it. This includes, for example, older female teachers who remember being advised at school that teaching was a ‘good job for a woman’ and who opted for teaching over a career in banking or the civil service. This category also includes younger teachers who enter the profession after university and who ‘don’t know what else to do’.

*Teachers by design*

The second category of teachers is those who are explicit in stating that they made a conscious decision to teach. Some teachers still describe the job as a vocation, whilst others suggest it is something that they have always set their mind on. This category can include teachers who have taken the B.Ed route into teaching, making their mind up on their future profession before going to university. It also includes career changers who tend to be more reflective about what teaching offers in terms of tangible rewards and challenges, compared to other jobs that they have undertaken.

These two broad categories crudely divide motivations for becoming a teacher for those participating in the focus groups, but it is important to note that teachers may develop different motivations, once in the job, for staying in the profession.

Regardless of their motivations, the vast majority of teachers involved in the focus groups wanted to stay teaching, at least in the short term. Many teachers said that they enjoyed the job, despite its challenges. However, teaching was described as tiring and demanding. Many younger teachers felt that teaching was not a job that they would still have the energy for when they were older.

**What school to choose?**

Practical motivations underpin any decision about where to teach and can limit the extent to which a teacher is able to actively choose the type of school that they want to teach in. Our research found that key practical considerations include:

- Where there are jobs available
- Where a job is offered
- Location and travel to work distance
- A school that enables you to meet your family responsibilities
- Opportunities for career development and progression – and a better salary

This list of practical considerations to take into account when choosing a school applied to all teachers, although the importance and weight of different factors varied. In addition there are two key variables that influence the choices (assuming a choice is available) teachers make about where to teach.

### *Altruism*

The first of these is the level of altruism underpinning a teacher's motivations for teaching. Those who make a conscious choice to teach, rather than falling into it, appear more likely to articulate a positive account of wanting to make a difference. But 'making a difference' is interpreted differently in practice. For some teachers it means helping young people to learn and develop as individuals, and the profile of the pupil intake is not relevant to them. They feel that they are fulfilling an important social function by working as a teacher within the state system. Other teachers however are clear that making a difference means working with children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and working in schools located in deprived and challenging areas. Their motivation is in helping young people in these areas to get a good start in life, raising their aspirations and helping them to achieve 'despite the odds'.

### *Teaching, managing behaviour or both?*

The second variable that can influence what school a teacher chooses to work in concerns the level of 'challenge' that they are prepared to take on in a school. 'Challenge' in this context is defined primarily in terms of the level of problem behaviour at a school. Challenging schools with low attainment are commonly perceived to face significant behaviour challenges. Teachers differ in the extent to which they are prepared to take on behaviour management as a core component of their job. Those teachers who appear most comfortable working in schools with challenging intakes are clear that managing behaviour is an inevitable part of the job and something that they feel able to develop the necessary skills to deal with.

We found that not all teachers are willing to work in a school where dealing with the challenge of difficult behaviour is likely to take up as much of their time as classroom teaching. Even teachers in schools with relatively low levels of severely challenging behaviour describe the drain of constantly having to tackle low level behavioural problems.

In some cases teachers described personal experience of being the victim of poor pupil behaviour. Even those who are motivated to work in challenging schools where pupils may be more likely to exhibit difficult behaviour will set limits on what they are personally willing and able to tolerate.

### **The status of teaching**

There was a strong perception from the teachers in our focus groups that the status of teaching is lower now than in the past, in comparison to approximately 40 years ago. Some teachers felt that they lacked respect both from pupils and parents. However, in describing their job, the effort they put in and the challenges they faced, it was clear that many teachers were proud of what they did.

The relationship between status and the type of school teachers work in varies according to the individual teacher. Teachers who were explicit in wanting to work in a challenging school because of the difference they could make in such a setting appeared to gain a sense of personal esteem from working in such schools. Some felt that you had to develop additional skills and resilience to work in a challenging school. They enjoyed the variety and challenge of the job.

Those who had ended up in a challenging school through circumstance rather than choice, or who emphasised their subject specialty as their main focus (above pastoral support), were more likely to think that they might gain more status working in a less challenging school where pupils might be able to stretch them more academically and where they would spend less time managing behaviour.

### **What is it like working in a challenging school where attainment is low?**

All teachers working in challenging schools identified their school as more challenging than the average school. More than two thirds of teachers in matched schools also identified their school as more challenging than most. Across the board teachers described their job as demanding, tiring and at times emotionally draining. Despite this and the likelihood of these factors listed below being present in the most challenging schools, many of those working in such schools were keen to emphasise that the challenge was part of the enjoyment for them. Some liked the unpredictability of working in such schools.

Focusing on the experience of teachers working in the most challenging schools where attainment is low, there are a number of factors that they are *more likely* to experience. It is important to note however that these are not exclusive to challenging schools.

#### *Poor behaviour*

The majority of teachers in both challenging and matched schools identified behaviour as an issue that got in the way of teaching but the problem appears more acute in challenging schools (not least because of the paperwork it generates). It was suggested that poor behaviour and poor attainment are directly correlated.

#### *Lack of independent learners*

Teachers in challenging schools frequently noted the level of active, direct teaching required to teach children who lack the skills to learn independently. This type of teaching was described as especially demanding as it requires the bulk of each lesson to be actively 'taught'; a particularly difficult task in mixed ability classes. For some teachers the lack of independent learners was a problem as they felt that opportunities to develop their skills and expertise were dependent on the academic abilities of the pupils they taught.

#### *Additional scrutiny*

A number of the challenging schools included in the research were either currently in Special Measures or had been so in the past. It was recognised that this can put additional pressure on teachers as their work is put in the spotlight and everything is focused on raising attainment. While it was recognised that this can be a positive in creating a sense of common endeavour it was also suggested that it can mean that other priorities (e.g. CPD) are sidelined, particularly if management is weak.

#### *There are positives*

Despite this, many teachers stressed that they enjoyed the challenge of working in such schools. In particular, they liked the unpredictability of the work and the feeling that it stretched their abilities.

### **Push and Pull Factors**

Schools need to be effective at creating an environment and conditions that work for teachers if they are to attract and keep them. The discussions revealed that there are generic factors relevant to both challenging and matched schools that impact on how happy a teacher feels in a school and how likely they are to stay or leave. Given their profiles, it is likely that challenging schools need to be better at making sure that the

majority of these factors are in place in order to maintain a stable workforce and attract good applicants. These factors are listed below; those underlined are the issues arising from the focus groups and surveys as most likely to act as a 'make or break' factor in either retaining a teacher at a particular school or impelling them to leave.

- Good leadership and a strong Senior Management Team (SMT)
- Effective systems for dealing with poor behaviour
- A good atmosphere and supportive colleagues
- A good department and opportunities to develop professionally
- Good pay
- Good working conditions

### **Policy recommendations**

In developing policy ideas to encourage the most suitable teachers to work, and stay working, in the most challenging schools the key need is to attract those who will thrive in a challenging school. This may mean filtering out those who may be motivated by the enhanced conditions (e.g. better pay) but do not have the capacity to develop into effective teachers in these settings.

The research findings indicate that some teachers currently working in matched schools would be attracted to work in a more challenging school for a number of reasons: the opportunity for rapid career progression; the chance to work in a school in the process of 'turning around'; the desire to make more of a tangible difference; the possibility of developing new skills and expertise and so on. But there are also teachers who rule out working in such schools, put off primarily by the perceived level of behaviour challenge or by a desire to work in a school where they think pupils will stretch them more academically.

Listed below are a range of policy ideas that teachers brought up in the focus groups that could be effective levers for attracting the best teachers to work, and stay working, in the most challenging schools. Those underlined are the ones teachers felt should be prioritised, however all were seen as important elements of attracting appropriate teachers to the most challenging schools.

- Good management and support, particularly in relation to behaviour
- A strong sell on values
- Respite linked to continuing professional development
- More non-contact time, more classroom support and smaller class sizes
- Teacher training and continuing professional development
- Improving collaboration and multi-agency working
- Pay and other financial incentives
- Different measures of achievement
- Broader policy changes: inclusive and flexible curriculum that met the needs of their intake and tackling the politics and biases of school intake and local selection processes

## Introduction

As part of a wider project examining choice and equity in teacher supply, ippr set out to establish what factors underpin teacher motivation to work in different schools, with a particular interest in the issues facing challenging schools. 'Challenging circumstances' or 'challenging schools' can have many interpretations and associations around pupil intake, low performance, or negative Ofsted judgements. In this report we use these terms in a broad sense, recognising these connotations but without passing judgement, aware that these crude measures do not encapsulate the complex contexts of these schools.

The starting point of the report is that the most important factor in raising levels of attainment in schools facing challenging circumstances is a high quality, stable workforce, backed up by good leaders. Yet it is felt by many that it is precisely these schools that have the most difficulty in attracting and retaining a sufficient quality of staff. This view is based on widespread belief, anecdotal evidence, and some research evidence<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the high level deregulation of the teacher market in England can make changing this situation difficult in policy terms.

ippr wanted to investigate two key policy challenges arising from these factors:

- How can a climate be created to ensure that enough high quality (or potential high quality) teachers want to teach, and stay teaching, in the most challenging schools?
- How can teachers who have made this choice be supported and trained so that they have the resources to do the best possible job, and so that they are motivated to remain in these schools?

Our view is that the vast majority of teachers are able to be 'high quality teachers' when they are well supported and valued. The research sought to understand from the teachers' perspective - why are teachers attracted to school x rather than school y?

This report details the findings from qualitative work ippr undertook with teachers working at a variety of schools. We sought to understand what motivates teachers working in different types of schools, and to develop policy recommendations based upon the findings.

## Methodology

The project involved qualitative research with teachers working in both 'challenging' and matched schools. Qualitative research is useful in allowing in-depth exploration of experience, attitudes and opinion and acts as a useful complement to quantitative analysis. A focus group format was adopted as it establishes an informal setting for discussion. Each group was led by a trained ippr facilitator, working through a standardised discussion guide. There were two slightly different discussion guides, one for challenging schools and one for matched.<sup>3</sup> Teachers individually completed a survey at the end of each group. This was voluntary; all but one teacher completed the survey.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See: Smithers, A. and Robinson, P. (2005) *Teacher Turnover, Wastage and Movements between Schools*, Research Report RR640. London: DfES. This report confirmed their earlier findings that 'challenging' secondary schools were more likely to lose teachers to other schools and experience higher turnover. In addition the authors recommended a focus on the teachers that chose to stay at a school, an aspect this report has sought to include.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendices II and III

<sup>4</sup> See Appendices I and III

Eleven focus groups were conducted. Seven took place in London, two in the Government Office of the North West and two within the Government Office of the South East. We carried out a higher proportion of focus groups in London as there have been particular issues in relation to recruitment and retention in London. The London Challenge team at the Department for Education and Skills were also particularly interested in the findings for London, and they helped by kindly providing some funding for the qualitative strand of the research.

A total of 16 schools and 73 teachers participated in the research (see full details below). In selecting the sample the focus was on areas where there are clusters of both challenging schools and those that they could be matched with.

We selected our population of challenging schools as those schools who were at risk of missing the government's 'floor targets': schools with below 25 per cent of students achieving the benchmark of five GCSEs at grades A\*-C in four out of the last five years, including 2004. This gave us a population of 96 schools outside of London. It would have only given us 11 schools in London and we were interested in the particular issues faced by schools in the capital, so we boosted the London sample to include schools who had not reached 25 per cent of students achieving five GCSEs at grades A\*-C in three out of last five years and this did not necessarily include 2004, giving us 24 London schools in total.

We matched this group with schools similar in terms of type and ethos, factoring out other factors that affect teachers' choice. The matched schools were in the same travel to work area (under a thirty minutes drive between the challenging and matched schools) and had the same features in terms of faith/non-faith, single-sex/mixed, with/without a sixth form. The rationale for this was to eliminate a range of possible reasons why a teacher might prefer working in one school rather than another, and focus on attainment. In every case the matched school had significantly higher attainment, although we also avoided those schools that were extremes in terms of exceptionally high attainment. In London, the challenging and matched schools had more broadly similar profiles and intakes. This was less easy to achieve in some other areas, particularly where there was less choice of secondary schools in a travel to work area.

This population was used for all the research that has formed ippr's 'Choice and Equity in Teacher Supply' project<sup>5</sup>. For the focus groups the sample selected was taken from within these two groups of schools, with focus groups with teachers from one or two of the challenging schools, and other focus groups with teachers from one or two of the matched schools. Not all schools were prepared to take part in the research, therefore they were not all matched pairs, however they were always in the same geographical area.

Invitations to attend the group discussions were distributed to a range of schools. A financial incentive was provided to encourage participation and to recognise the time that teachers were giving up. It is important to note that teachers attending the groups were self-selecting and had some interest in the discussion. Schools have been anonymised in the research report.

This research needs to be seen in the context of the wider ippr project, which includes quantitative data and a literature review. These confirm the qualitative research findings and trends. Nonetheless, due to the relatively small sample size

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<sup>5</sup> Available at [www.ippr.org/education](http://www.ippr.org/education)

and the self selecting nature of the participation, the qualitative research findings need to be treated as only indicative of broader trends. It cannot be assumed that these findings reflect the reality in all schools or for all teachers.

### Summary of schools and participants

Area	School type	No. of teachers	No. of schools represented
London	Challenging	10	2
London	Challenging	4	2
London	Challenging	3	2
London	Matched	6	1
London	Matched	5	1
London	Matched	6	1
London	Matched	5	1
Government Office of the North West (GONW)	Challenging	8	2
Government Office of the North West (GONW)	Matched (two consecutive discussion groups were conducted)	12	2
Government Office of the South East (GOSE)	Challenging	6	1
Government Office of the South East (GOSE)	Matched	8	1
	<b>Total for London</b>	39	10
	<b>Total for outside of London</b>	34	6
	<b>Overall total</b>	73	16

## Profile of schools

The challenging schools were selected on the basis of their attainment over the last five years, all at risk of missing the government's 'floor targets'. The matched schools were in the same travel to work area with higher attainment, although we avoided those schools that were extremes in terms of exceptionally high attainment.

		<b>London challenging schools</b>	<b>London matched schools</b>	<b>Non-London challenging schools</b>	<b>Non- London matched schools</b>
<b>% FSM 2003</b>	Range	27.8 - 52.7	11.3 – 65.2	32.3 - 50.5	5 -16.2
	Average	41	39.2	38.5	11.7
<b>% SEN 2003 (With and without statements)</b>	Range	23.9 - 39.1	4.6 – 45.1	19.9 - 25	4.7 – 14.1
	Average	29.43	26.2	22.3	10.5
<b>Value Added 2003 KS 2-3</b>	Range	96.4 - 109	96.8 - 101	97.8 – 100.5	99 – 100.7
	Average	99.8	98.7	98.7	100
<b>Valued Added 2003 KS 3-4</b>	Range	94.1-104	98.1 – 108.1	93.4 – 96.5	95.8 – 103.5
	Average	98.63	102.7	95	99.5
<b>% Attainment 5A*-C 2004</b>	Range	13 - 27	45 - 75	15 - 24	42 - 86
	Average	21.3	57	20	57.3
<b>Prior Attainment band 2003-3</b>	Range	1- 3	3 – 5	3 - 4	4 - 6
	Average	2.2	4.25	3.33	5.33
<b>Special Measures status 2003</b>	Range	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Average	1	N/A	N/A	N/A

## Profile of Participants

	London Challenging schools	Non London Challenging schools	London Matched schools	Non London Matched schools	Total
<b>No. of participants</b>	17	13	22	20	72*
<b>Men</b>	9	5	8	5	27
<b>Women</b>	8	8	14	15	45
<b>Average no. of years in teaching</b>	6	17	10	5	10
<b>Number who have taught at 3 or more schools</b>	4	6	9	2	21
<b>20-29</b>	9	3	10	15	37
<b>30-39</b>	7	3	5	2	17
<b>40-49</b>	0	1	5	2	8
<b>50-59</b>	1	4	1	1	7
<b>60+</b>	0	2	0	0	2
<b>White</b>	13	13	19	20	65
<b>Asian/Asian British</b>	3	0	0	0	3
<b>Black/Black British</b>	1	0	1	0	2
<b>Mixed race</b>	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Chinese/other ethnicity</b>	0	0	1	0	1
<b>B.Ed</b>	3	5	2	1	11
<b>BA/BSC with QTS</b>	2	1	5	3	11
<b>PGCE</b>	10	4	18	15	47
<b>SCITT</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>GTP</b>	2	3	1	2	8
<b>RTP</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Teach First</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Fast Track</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Other</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Unqualified</b>	2	0	1	0	3
<b>Fixed daily rate</b>	2	0	0	0	2
<b>Main Scale</b>	8	7	14	18	47
<b>Upper scale</b>	2	6	4	2	14
<b>Leadership group</b>	2	0	0	0	2
<b>AST</b>	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Management Points</b>	10	7	11	8	36
<b>SEN allowances</b>	0	0	0	0	0

\*This is less than the total number of participants as one participant did not complete a survey.

Teachers involved in the groups came from a diverse range of subjects including humanities (e.g. history, geography, sociology); art and design; vocational subjects (such as health and social care); core subjects (e.g. English, maths, science); modern languages; physical education and 'newer' subject areas (e.g. citizenship, media and textiles).

## Research findings

### Why teach?

Teachers in our study can be grouped into two main categories in their motivations for entering the profession. The decisions they make about what type of school to teach in will often flow from these different motivations.

#### 1. Teachers by default

The first category of teachers can broadly be described as those who 'fall' into it. This includes, for example, older female teachers who remember being advised at school that teaching was a 'good job for a woman' and who opted for teaching over a career in banking or the civil service. This category also includes younger teachers who enter the profession after university and who 'don't know what else to do'. Some suggest that they entered teaching as a means to buy time and remain a student or because it is a job that they think that they are capable of doing. These teachers, on the whole, are not less committed to teaching (although this is the case in some instances) but some are less likely to articulate a positive account of teaching as a profession of value and which has real impact.

*"My intention was never to be a teacher but I'm in it now"  
challenging school, GOSE*

*"My son was starting school and I wanted to fit my hours around him"  
matched school, London*

*"If I was starting again I wouldn't choose teaching. Every year I ask myself – am I going to stay in teaching? I'm looking for other jobs"  
challenging school, London*

#### 2. Teachers by design

The second category of teachers is those who are explicit in stating that they made a conscious decision to teach. Some teachers still describe the job as a vocation, while others suggest it is something that they have always set their mind on. This category can include teachers who have taken the B.Ed route into teaching, making their mind up on their future profession before going to university. It also includes career changers who tend to be more reflective about what teaching offers in terms of tangible rewards and challenges, compared to other jobs that they have undertaken. Teachers who enter teaching 'by design' are more likely to articulate altruistic motives and a positive account of 'wanting to make a difference'. Career changers were among the most vocal in highlighting the sense of fulfilment they get from teaching.

*"I worked in business for a bit but I had no job satisfaction. I was just making other people rich. There was nothing you could see, feel or touch as evidence of what you'd done. [...] I like that feeling of knowledge transfer, it's such a nice feeling when you can see that they've understood something. You just don't get that in other jobs"  
challenging school, London*

*"I worked in industry, I stopped when I was bored and wanted to do something worthwhile"  
matched school, London*

*"I didn't go straight into it. I worked in marketing first and didn't find it rewarding, it's also in my blood as my dad is a teacher"*  
challenging school, London

*"I always knew I was going to teach, it's just something I really wanted to do"*  
matched school, London

These two broad categories crudely divide motivations for becoming a teacher but it is important to note that teachers may develop different motivations, once in the job, for staying in the profession. Those who 'fall into' teaching may develop a passion for the job and a sense of teaching as a positive career choice where they have an impact. Those who make a conscious choice to teach may have times in their career when other priorities (for example family responsibilities or their own health) take priority over their commitment to making a difference as a teacher. Teachers by 'default' and teachers by 'design' appeared in the focus groups to be evenly spread between challenging and matched schools.

*"I was advised in a career interview at university to teach, so I just fell into it – I love it to pieces but it didn't cross my mind to do it"*  
matched school, GONW

*"I tried to get into journalism but didn't make it. I ended up in office jobs and I was looking for something different. I really enjoy it now"*  
matched school, GONW

Regardless of their motivations, the vast majority of teachers involved in the focus groups wanted to stay teaching, at least in the short term. Those who were planning to leave were largely people nearing retirement; only a small minority stated that they wanted to leave to pursue another career. Many teachers were explicit in stating that they enjoyed the job, despite its challenges. Teaching is seen to provide opportunities for personal development, for example travel; the holidays are a positive incentive and it is a job that can fit well with other parts of people's lives. Teachers particularly welcome the ability to fit family responsibilities around the job, and for many this was an important factor when they made the decision to teach.

*"I'll probably stay teaching; I've done lots of jobs in my time and nothing comes close to this"*  
matched school, GONW

*"I've never been so stressed out but I've also never been so satisfied"*  
matched school, London

*"I get a buzz out of it still"*  
challenging school, GOSE

*"This job lets me leave school at a reasonable time so I can see my kids. I still have to do work, marking etc, but it is more flexible"*  
matched school, GOSE

However, teaching was described as tiring and demanding. Many younger teachers felt that teaching was not a job that they would still have the energy for when they were older. The older teachers tended to agree and many had taken breaks from teaching during their career.

*“I like to think I would stay in teaching but there is not as much recognition as I would like for the time and effort we put in. I might go and do another job in education”*  
*challenging school, London*

*“I look at people who’ve taught for a long time and there is a sense of burnout and cynicism – I don’t want to be like them, I’d prefer not to teach than to teach like that”*  
*matched school, London*

## What school to choose?

Practical motivations underpin any decision about where to teach and can limit the extent to which a teacher is able to actively choose the type of school that they want to teach in. Key practical considerations include:

**Where there are jobs available.** This is particularly relevant for non-shortage subjects where teachers, particularly outside of London, felt that they had far less scope to be 'picky' about where they taught.

*"It's also about the subject and how much it is in demand when you qualify, some people will be able to be more picky"  
matched school, London*

**Where a job is offered.** For NQTs in particular there was a sense that you were likely to take the first job that you were offered.

*"The right job in the Learning Support Unit came up for me"  
challenging school, GONW*

*"It's the first place that offered me a job"  
challenging school, GOSE*

*"It was the first job I saw in the paper. In History you don't have a lot of options, if you're offered it, you take it"  
matched school, GONW*

**Location and travel to work distance.** The majority of teachers look for a job within a specific area and do not have the flexibility to move anywhere in the country.

*"I just wanted to get a job anywhere vaguely local"  
matched school, London*

*"My partner is from here, and we were moving back – I needed the job"  
matched school, GOSE*

**A school that enables you to meet your family responsibilities.** For example wanting to teach in the same area as your children attend school.

*"I moved back here, and now I've got a family, it's easy for me to combine the two"  
matched school, GOSE*

## Opportunities for career development and progression – and a better salary.

This means different things for different teachers. Some are clear that their motivation for choosing a school is led largely by the desire for promotion, greater responsibility and more money. Others see career development in terms of developing their subject expertise and may, for example, be motivated to move to another school with a stronger department in their subject. A number of teachers also referred to the desire to get a mix of school experience 'under their belt' and talked about developing their career by working in schools with different profiles (e.g. a single sex school or school with a high percentage of pupils from ethnic minorities).

*“I only left my old school – which was very challenging – because there was an opportunity for promotion here”  
matched school, GONW*

*“I wanted to teach in a mixed school in [name of London Borough] - I like the fact that the ethnic mix reflects the wider community”  
matched school, London*

Teachers appear to develop a clearer sense of what they're looking for in a school as their career progresses. Some stated that as they moved to their second or third school they felt better equipped to identify the things to look out for to ensure that the school fitted their personality and motivations.

*“You're not taught what to look for as an NQT, so you just act on gut feelings when you got to an interview. This was my second school and I knew what to look for, I knew I wanted to make a difference”  
matched school, London*

This list of practical considerations to take into account when choosing a school applies to all teachers, although the importance and weight of different factors will vary. In addition there are two key variables that influence the choices (assuming a choice is available) teachers make about where to teach.

### **Altruism**

The first of these is the level of altruism underpinning a teacher's motivations for teaching. Those who make a conscious choice to teach, rather than falling into it, appear more likely to articulate a positive account of wanting to make a difference. But 'making a difference' is interpreted differently in practice. For some teachers it means helping young people to learn and develop as individuals, and the profile of the pupil intake is not relevant to them. They feel that they are fulfilling an important social function by working as a teacher within the state system. Other teachers however are clear that it means working with children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and working in schools located in deprived and challenging areas. Their motivation is in helping young people in these areas to get a good start in life, raising their aspirations and helping them to achieve 'despite the odds'.

Some also emphasise and enjoy the heightened pastoral support role that teachers play in such schools. Some teachers suggest that making progress as a teacher in these schools is more rewarding, particularly when the ethos and vision of the school embodies their own values. One teacher in a challenging school described that a teacher in a school with a more affluent, middle class intake was merely a 'facilitator' as children in such schools were likely to thrive, regardless of your skills or knowledge as a teacher.

*“The advert said something about working with working class students and that appealed to me. I didn't know about the high attainment level when I applied”  
matched school, GONW*

*“I have always chosen to work in challenging schools, you get more interesting social interactions and you do feel like you make a difference”  
challenging school, London*

*“I made a decision that I would prefer to work with students disaffected with school”*

*challenging school, London*

*“I made an active decision about what type of school I wanted to work in – one where the kids were less well-off...I definitely started out with an altruistic interest in working in those schools”*

*challenging school, GONW*

*“It took me this long to work out what my strengths are – I’m very strong on pastoral support and I realise the students at [school name] had been messed about a lot, lots of supply teachers and so on. I knew that if I could stay it would pay off with the good classes and as I stayed I found that the initially more difficult classes came round”*

*challenging school, London (supply teacher who decided to commit to long-term placement at school)*

*“People who choose to teach in a comprehensive in [name of London Borough] have a strong ethos of social responsibility and that makes a real difference to how you deal with your colleagues and the students”*

*matched school, London*

### **Teaching, managing behaviour or both?**

The second variable that can influence what school a teacher chooses to work concerns the level of ‘challenge’ they are prepared to take on in a school. ‘Challenge’ in this context is defined primarily in terms of the level of problem behaviour at a school. Some teachers actively seek to work in schools in deprived communities. Challenging schools with low attainment are commonly perceived to face significant behaviour challenges. Teachers differ in the extent to which they are prepared to take on behaviour management as a core component of their job. Those teachers who appear most comfortable working in schools with challenging intakes are clear that managing behaviour is an inevitable part of the job and something that they feel able to develop the necessary skills to deal with. A number of teachers in the focus groups working in challenging schools had pursued qualifications and training in behaviour management. Some emphasise the need to develop effective and positive relationships with pupils.

*“As a teacher you can develop tricks, strategies etc [to deal with difficult behaviour] but it is also about your ability to build effective relationships with pupils”*

*challenging school, London*

*“It’s challenging, that’s what I like...it’s not threatening”*

*challenging school, GONW*

*“You need a different mindset of teachers to work at [school name], you really have to connect with these students”*

*challenging school, London*

*“Every school I have taught in has got more challenging and I have made a conscious decision about that. I also have an interest in behaviour”*

*challenging school, London*

*“My first post was after my fifth interview and it was a challenging school. I loved the interaction and was totally engaged by it. When I moved to [school name] I knew it was a similar sort of school and I knew I could take the strategies I had learnt with me”*

*challenging school, London*

*"I don't just want to be a 'middling' teacher. I want to work in challenging schools"*

*challenging school, London*

Not all teachers are willing to work in a school where dealing with the challenge of difficult behaviour is likely to take up as much of their time as classroom teaching. Some are more likely to emphasise their role as a subject teacher and it is in this area that they want to be stretched. These teachers tend to imply that responsibility for behaviour management rests higher up in the school hierarchy. This group of teachers includes some younger teachers who have not yet developed effective behaviour management techniques (but may do so with more experience). It also includes more experienced teachers who are reluctant for managing behaviour to be a major part of their job and are not willing to put themselves in 'the firing line'.

*"There's a fine line between behaviour management and ducking chairs...I'd just think 'I can get another job, I don't need to put up with this'"*

*matched school, GONW*

*"I'd go [to a more challenging school] if they make it a school that is teachable. I'll only manage behaviour to a certain extent, by setting an example, but I don't think I should have to do more than that."*

*matched school, GONW*

*"I like teaching, I don't want to stand all day moaning at children to behave...I just want to work at a nice school..."*

*matched school, GONW*

*"At the moment I'm keen to get as much experience of teaching my subject as possible and not be thinking about class control"*

*matched school, London*

*"Managing behaviour comes first, not your subject here. I'm looking to change school"*

*matched school, London*

In challenging schools, teachers described how dealing with constant low level behaviour issues drained their energy and made them less effective teachers. There was particular concern about the effect of this on 'quiet' children, or those of average ability who need more attention than those able to learn more independently. Teachers felt that these groups can get overlooked as a result of the sheer pressure of dealing with the more disruptive pupils.

*"It's the quiet students I worry about, the ones I know would really benefit from just two minutes of my time, but I'm not able to do that when I'm having to control the class. They're the ones that get really overlooked in the inclusivity agenda"*

*matched school, London*

*"The students with middle of the road ability are the ones that really lose out because of poor behaviour"*

*challenging school, GOSE*

In some cases teachers described personal experience of being the victim of poor pupil behaviour in either their current or their previous schools. For some this was the catalyst to leave that particular school. One teacher for example had his wallet stolen and was assaulted by a pupil on three occasions. Another female NQT described being the target of offensive sexual comments from a group of male pupils. In both cases the teacher felt unsupported by senior management and the incident was not resolved effectively. Some suggested that teachers can be vulnerable and can be expected to tolerate levels of abuse and aggression that would not be accepted in other jobs. Even those who are motivated to work in challenging schools where pupils may be more likely to exhibit difficult behaviour will set limits on what they are personally willing and able to tolerate.

*“I’m a professional, if that happened to me in any other industry there would have been uproar. It doesn’t feel like they did anything after the incident”  
matched school, London*

*‘You do sometimes think, I’m not getting paid to have chairs thrown at me’  
challenging school, GOSE*

*“I looked at some schools when I was applying for jobs and they were just too rough. There was barbed wire, police everywhere. I just didn’t want that”  
matched school, GONW*

*That’s the thing that puts people off working in a challenging school...you can’t neglect your safety”  
matched school, GONW*

## Status of teaching

There was a strong perception from the teachers in our focus groups that the status of teaching is lower now than in the past, in comparison to approximately 40 years ago. Some teachers felt that they lacked respect both from pupils and parents. Many teachers felt under scrutiny and described working in an environment where they constantly had to justify their actions – not just in relation to inspections but on a day-to-day basis with pupils, parents and other teachers. This was true for teachers working both in ‘challenging’ and matched schools.

*“We’re now questioned on everything we do – times have moved on and pupils and parents say and do what they like”  
matched school, GONW*

*“I don’t tell loved ones the whole story sometimes in terms of how I’m talked to by pupils and parents”  
matched school, GONW*

*“The national idea is that it’s all the fault of the teachers and schools, you have a lot of responsibility on your shoulders”  
matched school, London*

However, in describing their job, the effort they put in and the challenges they faced, it was clear that many teachers were proud of what they did. Many described friends and family thinking they ‘were mad’ to go into teaching as it was a tough job and they enjoyed the fact that they were capable of working in such an environment. Some also felt that the status of teaching had improved recently, particularly as pay has improved.

*“I feel proud to say I’m a teacher”  
matched school, London*

*“Working with students is the most fulfilling thing you can do”  
matched school, London*

*“I’m happy, I’m loving it, you know the routine, you settle in...it’s only when you’re unhappy that you move on”  
challenging school, GONW*

The relationship between status and the type of school worked in differed according to the individual teacher. Teachers who were explicit in wanting to work in a challenging school because of the difference they could make in such a setting appeared to gain a sense of personal esteem from working in such schools. For some there was a sense that if you can survive in a challenging school, you can survive anywhere. Some felt that you had to develop additional skills and resilience to work in a challenging school. They enjoyed the variety and challenge of the job.

*“There is some status if you go from a challenging school to work in another challenging school....any urban, tough area would come with the same problems, solutions and ideals [...] I moved from another challenging school where I’d seen particular things work well and I wanted to do the same at [school name]”  
challenging school, London*

*‘The school’s reputation does make a difference, at least locally, people think you’re either brave or mad to work in a really difficult school’  
matched school, London*

*“There’s a sense of value in a job like this...you’re making a difference, trying to raise their aspirations...you feel a much greater sense of satisfaction”  
challenging school, GONW*

*“Special Measures can put people off but there’s kudos attached to working at a school that is on the way up”  
challenging school, London*

Some teachers working in challenging schools suggested that the job required you to be a better teacher and to develop additional skills.

*“You have a different role in a challenging school, for example you have to be a bit of a social worker and a carer”  
challenging school, London*

*“If you teach in an inner city school you have to be a much better teacher”  
challenging school, London*

*“I read the Ofsted report of a local school where attainment is higher and it said the teaching was ‘uninspiring’. You couldn’t get away with uninspiring teaching at a school like this”  
challenging school, GONW*

Those who had ended up in a challenging school through circumstance rather than choice, or who emphasised their subject specialty as their main focus (above pastoral support), were more likely to think that they might gain more status working in a less challenging school where pupils might be able to stretch them more academically and where they would spend less time managing behaviour. Some stated that they felt that they were held in lower regard because they worked in a school with low attainment. This was not backed up by comments made by teachers working in matched schools however. They gained satisfaction from good results (particularly in the face of a ‘challenging intake’) but did not think that teachers working in more challenging schools were less respected.

*“You are not academically stretched in a challenging school”  
challenging school, London*

*“You get promotion a lot quicker in a challenging school, but I don’t feel like I get kudos from working here”  
challenging school, London*

*“I don’t like the fact that it is challenging”  
challenging school, London*

*“People think you must be a bad teacher if you teach in a difficult school”  
challenging school, GOSE*

*“In a way you almost get more respect for working in a tough school, people think you’re mad, but they know how hard it is”  
matched school, GOSE*

## What is it like working in a challenging school where attainment is low?

All teachers working in challenging schools identified their school as more challenging than the average school. More than two thirds of teachers in matched schools also identified their school as more challenging than most. Across the board teachers described their job as demanding, tiring and at times emotionally draining. For example, the vast majority of teachers across both challenging and matched schools felt that managing behaviour gets in the way of teaching.

Behaviour problems were seen to be more of a problem in challenging schools. Some teachers working in matched schools were quick to recognise the more acute challenges faced in other schools. Others, particularly younger teachers with less experience of different schools, were less convinced that other schools could be more challenging. They pointed out that high attainment levels can mask a challenging intake.

*“I’ve worked in worse, a lot worse...with only 12 per cent getting 5 A\* to C at GCSE and kids jumping out the windows and setting fire to the classroom...but you deal with it”  
matched school, GONW*

*“It’s challenging compared to other schools I’ve worked in. In my NQT year I worked in one school where they gave me a round of applause at the end of my first lesson! I have worked in schools where students do as they’re told”  
matched school, GONW*

Focusing on the experience of teachers working in the most challenging schools where attainment is low, there are a number of factors that they are *more likely* to experience. It is important to note that these are not exclusive to challenging schools.

**Poor behaviour.** The majority of teachers identified behaviour as an issue that got in the way of teaching but the problem appears more acute in challenging schools (not least because of the paperwork it generates). It was suggested that poor behaviour and poor attainment are directly correlated. Poor and challenging behaviour results in part from the profile of pupils, for example: a high proportion of pupils with SEN or EBD; a highly mobile pupil population; tensions between different groups (e.g. according to ethnicity or area); or a continuous stream of new pupils throughout the year (e.g. asylum seekers and refugees). Some were quick to suggest that a proportion of their pupils should not be in mainstream education (this was particularly the case when school's lacked alternative onsite or offsite provision).

*“We have 25 or 30 students who should not be in mainstream education but they have nowhere else for them to go”  
challenging school, London*

The extent to which behaviour is a problem is also dependent on the effectiveness of behaviour management systems. These were seen to vary between both challenging and matched schools. Some of the teachers in challenging schools explicitly highlighted the need for more effective and consistent behaviour management. Good behaviour management was related in part to a visible management presence.

*“A more consistent approach to dealing with behaviour would make life easier. The kids are too laissez faire – they hang around outside after break is over; they sense they own the place...they call the shots and the power is all wrong”*

*challenging school, London*

**Lack of independent learners.** Teachers in challenging schools frequently noted the level of active, direct teaching required to teach children who lack the skills to learn independently. They found it difficult to set tasks for pupils to pursue independently and some had low expectations of how much work pupils would produce. This type of teaching was described as especially demanding as it requires the bulk of each lesson to be actively ‘taught’; a particularly difficult task in mixed ability classes. Some teachers in challenging schools suggested that evidence of the impact and difference you are making can take time to consolidate and requires you to focus on small changes.

*“One of the key differences working in a challenging school is that you have to work harder – you have to plan to be interactive for a whole lesson, you can’t set them things to get on with. It’s 100% physical”*

*challenging school, GONW*

*“The students are not independent learners and they expect a lot from you”*

*challenging school, London*

*“You don’t have the marking load because the students don’t produce the work”*

*challenging school, London*

*“It takes a lot longer to get to the stage where you’ve made a difference in this sort of school....you’ve got to hang on in there much longer and really try to motivate them and yourself”*

*challenging school, GONW*

For some teachers the lack of independent learners was a problem as they felt that opportunities to develop their skills and expertise were dependent on the academic abilities of the pupils they taught. Some felt frustrated that they were not being stretched by the pupils they taught and wanted to teach pupils of higher ability.

*“For me, I’d leave because I’m not being stretched enough – the top sets might push you but for other lessons I feel like I’m working within myself...at another school, even the lower sets would push you”*

*challenging school, GONW*

**Additional scrutiny.** A number of the challenging schools included in the research were either currently in Special Measures or had been so in the past. It was recognised that this can put additional pressure on teachers as their work is put in the spotlight and everything is focused on raising attainment. While it was recognised that this can be a positive in creating a sense of common endeavour it was also suggested that it can mean that other priorities (e.g. CPD) are sidelined, particularly if management is weak. Some teachers resented the style of Ofsted inspections as a process of critical observation rather than partnership working.

*“The first thing that goes when a school is in Special Measures is professional development – you have to learn everything through experience, there’s no*

*space for reflection. Once the management structure is shot you're fire-fighting"*  
*challenging school, London*

*"I'm fed up with the threat of Ofsted – outside people coming in to 'advise' but actually they just assess, they're just always hanging over you"*  
*challenging school, GONW*

### **There are positives**

Despite the likelihood of these factors being present in the most challenging schools, many of those working in such schools were keen to emphasise that the challenge was part of the enjoyment for them. Some liked the unpredictability of working in such schools. Others felt that they were stretched to the limit of their abilities and relished the challenge and feeling that they make a difference.

*"It's bloody good fun – it's unpredictable and adrenalin fuelled and I find that unpredictability important. There's never a dull moment"*  
*challenging school, London*

*"I could never work in an office!"*  
*challenging school, London*

*"I've got a friend who teaches at a school in leafy Surrey and it just sounds so boring"*  
*challenging school, London*

*"No two days are ever the same"*  
*challenging school, GOSE*

## Push and Pull Factors: What motivates teachers to work in particular schools?

Survey responses (see Appendix 1) indicate that around 4 in 10 teachers planned to leave their current school in the next three years with another 2 in 10 unsure whether they would do so or not. Schools need to be effective at creating an environment and conditions that work for teachers if they are to attract and keep them. The discussions revealed that there are generic factors relevant to both challenging and matched schools that impact on how happy a teacher feels in a school and how likely they are to stay or leave<sup>6</sup>. Given their profiles, it is likely that challenging schools need to be better at making sure that the majority of these factors are in place in order to maintain a stable workforce and attract good applicants. These factors are listed below, those underlined are most likely to act as a 'make or break' factor in either retaining a teacher at a particular school or impelling them to leave.

### **Good leadership and a strong Senior Management Team (SMT)**

The quality of management was frequently mentioned by teachers and plays a major part in how happy they felt at their school. There are a range of qualities that teachers want in the head teacher and SMT: vision; good at communicating with staff and pupils; approachable; committed to the school; effective at acknowledging and praising the contribution that teachers make; supportive of teachers and seen to be on their side, particularly in relation to behaviour; and a head who has a visible presence in the school and is respected by pupils, parents and staff.

In survey responses teachers' views on the extent to which they were supported by senior management varied considerably in both 'challenging' and matched schools. However, poor management can be mitigated by a strong, supportive department and good relationships with colleagues. More than 4 in 5 teachers in the focus groups felt well supported by department colleagues, even if they lacked support from SMT.

What support teachers get in the classroom is also important. Many would welcome more support from teaching assistants, learning mentors and so on and felt that this support was stretched in their school.

As a pull factor:

*'I feel like I could go to the Head directly with a concern if I had to, the support is great'  
matched school, London*

*"If you feel your school is being led well, with strong leadership and with similar values to you own then that's important. We've had a new head at the school who's come in with a very different style, who's got a real vision...the change is really welcome"  
challenging school, GONW*

*"When we had poor management the teams worked well together anyway, but now we've got strong management and it's much better"*

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<sup>6</sup> These factors are broadly in line with existing research by Smithers and Robinson, 2005 (ibid). Their report identifies the seven key factors underpinning teachers' reasons for changing schools as: career development, the characteristics of the new school, dissatisfaction with the present school, location, time, pupil and parents and previous experience of the new school.

*matched school, London*

As a push factor:

*"I don't feel valued; the PE department did really well last year and no-one mentioned it"*

*challenging school, GOSE*

*"There's uncertainty with the new head and the two deputies haven't been around for different reasons. People were definitely happier last year before the changes...you have to prove yourself all over again with the new head even if you've built up a good reputation"*

*matched school, GONW*

*"The head has no vision for the future, and you really need that...or maybe she has a vision but she's just not communicating it. If you want to change something then you have to tell staff, particularly when you want to change things when attainment levels are already high"*

*matched school, GONW*

*"I just don't feel management's presence in the school, only a few of them seem to be visible and respected...and the back-up and support is not there in my department either"*

*challenging school, London*

*"We support each other in the department because we know we can't rely on the boss"*

*matched school, GOSE*

### **Effective systems for dealing with poor behaviour**

The extent to which teachers are prepared to take on the challenge of managing difficult behaviour and how this relates to the schools they choose to work in has already been discussed. However, regardless of the level of challenging behaviour teachers are willing to deal with, teachers emphasise the need for effective behaviour management as a key element they want in a school. This means a system for disciplining pupils that works and is linked strongly by many teachers to good school management, committed to sanctions when necessary and a visible head and SMT.

Teachers want to know that they will be backed up when there is a problem or incident and that sanctions that they impose (but which require others at a more senior level to carry out) are followed through. Some younger teachers in particular were keen to have a clear point of contact at a more senior level to defer problems to and felt vulnerable when they felt that this wasn't in place. Some felt compromised when there was nowhere to send a child who was severely disrupting a lesson (ie. If there was no immediate option for referral). Lack of additional support in the form of teaching assistants or learning mentors was also felt to add to the challenge of managing behaviour. It was clear that in some schools little time was invested in helping teachers develop their own capacity and skills to manage difficult behaviour. Teachers working in challenging schools where staff turnover was high and there was a high proportion of supply and/or foreign teachers felt that this could have a negative impact on a school's ability to manage behaviour effectively.

As a pull factor:

*“In comparison to other schools I’ve worked in, the structure of the school works much better here...in relation to discipline, pastoral support, line management and so on. It’s important that the system works. In my old school students never made it to the top of the system when there were behaviour problems, it just wasn’t dealt with effectively”*  
matched school, GONW

*“There’s a whole school approach to dealing with behaviour, the standards are up on the walls and pupils know what they are...it can become a paper chase though as tracking all the incidents is really difficult”*  
challenging school, GONW

As a push factor:

*“You need to feel safe – if you don’t there’s no point working there. In any other industry if you were assaulted it would be dealt with and sanctioned.”*  
matched school, London

*“The new head has lost the power of sanctions, no-one is permanently excluded, it’s part of an inclusive agenda, and the whole ‘Every Child matters’ thing. Apparently the old head was breaking the rules on exclusions. But the students need the stability of behaviour being dealt with as well”*  
matched school, GONW

*“In terms of behaviour there should be consistency so that students know what they can and can’t do – we don’t have that consistency here”*  
matched school, GOSE

### **A good atmosphere and supportive colleagues**

Many teachers emphasised the need for good staff morale and being able to draw on support and guidance from colleagues. Teachers who were happy at their current school frequently mentioned the fact that they liked their colleagues and enjoyed working as a part of a team. In challenging schools in particular teachers who felt comfortable in the job tended to emphasise the sense of camaraderie and common purpose that they shared with other teachers. In some instances teachers stressed the importance of having ‘someone to sound off to’ when things go wrong and having the time and space to share problems as well as techniques for dealing with them. In the vast majority of schools most teachers did feel supported by department colleagues but there were some cases of teachers who felt isolated and unsupported. This was a particular problem for those just starting out in their teaching career. Some teachers also implied that particular staff were treated as ‘favourites’ and given better development opportunities and support than others, this in turn caused resentment.

As a pull factor:

*“It is the staff that keeps me at [school name]”*  
challenging school, London

*“You have to find a release mechanism, somewhere to sound off. It’s really important to find an outlet for some of the things you’re dealing with”*  
challenging school, London

*“Part of what’s keeping me there is a real sense of camaraderie and a sense of professional trust and respect – there’s a belief in each other and a desire*

*to get the school out of Special Measures. Also, the students are fantastic who've ended up in a difficult situation and there's an element there of wanting to protect them"*  
*challenging school, London*

*"People are really happy here, there is a positive vibe...People aren't precious about their status"*  
*matched school, London*

*"Informal conversations about the children mean that we all know what's going on, the school is deliberately set up so that we can get to know each other. Being a small school really helps"*  
*matched school, London*

As a push factor:

*"I've had very poor back up in my department, on behaviour and other things – I feel like I've just been let loose and abandoned. If I have a problem I don't feel I can go to someone"*  
*challenging school, London (NQT year)*

*"There's only two of us in the department in total and I get very little support from my line manager, I'm going to leave in July, I just want to work in a better environment"*  
*matched school, GONW*

### **A good department and opportunities to develop professionally**

Working in a school where you feel valued and where there is clear investment in your professional development is a strong incentive for most teachers. Some teachers talked positively about the opportunities available to them to pursue training and the extent to which they were supported and enabled to develop new skills by their department colleagues. There are clear differences however between schools (and sometimes within schools) in the extent to which such opportunities are available. In this research, all teachers working in challenging schools outside of London agreed that their training and development needs were met and that there were opportunities for career progression at their school. In London challenging schools around 6 in 10 teachers thought there were opportunities for career progression but only 3 in 10 felt that their training and development needs were met. When opportunities to develop or gain promotion are limited or when they are seen to be unfairly distributed, teachers are likely to feel less loyal and committed to staying at the school.

Challenging schools in some cases appear to offer greater opportunities for career progression but the intensity of the job and high workload was felt by some to act as a barrier to pursuing professional development opportunities. For example, one teacher at a challenging school in London had failed to complete a Masters course as he felt he wasn't able to complete the work involved satisfactorily as well as put the effort required into teaching.

As a pull factor:

*"There are lots of opportunities for CPD and it's up to the individual to pursue them; there's money there to support you...it's very rare that staff are turned down if they come forward with a course of training that they want to go for"*  
*challenging school, GONW*

*“You have to organise it yourself but they do pay for things if you ask”  
matched school, London*

As a push factor:

*“You hit a ceiling and you just can’t get any higher. There are favourites who seem to get ahead; people get ahead because of that rather than on the basis of whether they’re good or not...it’s not based on ability”  
matched school, GONW*

*“Some staff soak training opportunities up like a sponge and some get nothing”  
matched school, GONW*

*“They’ve put a ban on NQTs doing training during the school week, they say it’s better for us to get training in the school but it just seems unfair. I’ve had to go on courses at the weekend”  
matched school, GONW*

*“There are courses available. It’s harder to progress up the scale though because the senior management team is pretty static, they’re at the top of the pay scale and some of them just don’t want to move”  
challenging school, London*

*“At my school there is a line of senior management who don’t support career development”  
challenging school, London*

*“I can’t progress now within my department, if I wanted career progression I would have to move schools”  
matched school, GOSE*

### **Good pay**

In survey responses teachers were divided in their view of whether or not pay was good at their school. Teachers at challenging schools in London were least likely to think that pay was good. Those teaching outside of London tended to view their pay more positively. Our study found that while money is certainly one factor in recruiting and retaining staff to particular positions, it is not necessarily the most important one.

Teachers talked positively about the use of recruitment and retention points and honoraria (where a teacher was given an extra £1,000 per year for taking on an additional responsibility). The extent to which there are opportunities to increase pay in the future is also clearly a factor in retaining teachers. For some this was based on opportunities to gain additional responsibilities and move to a more senior position with better pay. Some teachers in challenging schools felt that they had greater opportunities for career and salary progression as a result of their school profile.

Pay can also work as a push factor however if teachers feel that there are inconsistencies or anomalies in terms of how salary points are accrued or if they feel there are few opportunities for them to move up the pay scale. Some teachers felt frustrated that their pay didn’t truly reflect the hours and effort they put into the job, particularly in terms of extra-curricula activities. Increases in pay that were felt to be mis-matched with the amount of extra work or responsibility required were also viewed negatively. There was a sense of frustration amongst some teachers that a

move into management is generally needed to move up the pay scales – as one teacher said ‘*you feel like you’re being pushed out of the classroom, experience of classroom teaching isn’t recognised*’.

As a pull factor:

*“I was attracted by the R&R points”  
matched school, GONW*

*“I get paid overtime for weekend work...it’s unusual but a good idea – you get paid for what you do”  
challenging school, London*

*“I chose [school name] because I knew I would get more money for working there...although it’s a hard job”  
challenging school, London*

As a push factor:

*“It used to be a very bad school and you had to protect the students. It was a dangerous place and we got extra incentives in terms of pay to work there. But they removed the incentive points 3 or 4 years ago and it’s caused a lot of unhappiness. I feel very let down by the governors”  
matched school, London*

*“Now it’s not worth going for promotion. You get more work with not much more pay”  
challenging school, GOSE*

*“You do an incredible amount of overtime that you don’t get paid for”  
challenging school, London*

*“It’s really hard in London because everything’s so expensive. Starting salaries are good now, but you don’t earn much more as you progress unless you go into management – and I really like being a classroom teacher”  
matched school, London*

### **Good working conditions**

Working in a school that provides a good physical working environment and is well resourced was a positive incentive for teachers. Teachers in schools that had received significant investment in both the physical building and resources noted the knock-on effect that this could have on staff morale. Teachers working in specialist schools related to their own subject were particularly positive about the good resources at their school. In one focus group teachers working in a challenging school that was in the process of turning into an Academy suggested that this was a factor that both drew them to the school and was likely to keep them there (despite the fact that their jobs were not guaranteed). Academy status was linked to a sense that the school was ‘turning around’ and the likely investment in improving working conditions was attractive to teachers.

Working conditions were also discussed in relation to the extent to which teachers felt that they had additional classroom support in the form of teaching assistants, learning mentors and so on. There were significant differences both between and within schools. Teachers in non-compulsory subjects often felt unsupported and most teachers felt that there were not enough classroom support staff. Teachers also

emphasised the need to have good quality teaching assistants rather than simply 'minders'. In one challenging school in London for example, teachers felt that the school had difficulty attracting good quality teaching assistants and that they were poorly trained once they arrived at the school. Being able to draw on support from external professionals and outside agencies was also identified as important by some. The range of educational, behavioural and emotional needs of their pupils and the diversity of their backgrounds meant that some teachers were keen to engage with agencies like Social Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and so on.

Comments were also made in relation to class size with teachers welcoming opportunities to teach smaller classes. In one challenging school in GONW class sizes were very small in some subjects, particularly in the lowest sets, due to a combination of a low school roll, lack of interest in particular subjects and non-attendance. The teacher recognised that this was not an ideal situation but felt that the small class size did make the job easier. In one of the matched London schools teachers reported that the school had a policy of ensuring that no year 9, 10 or 11 classes were large than 25 pupils. This guarantee of a limit on class size was viewed very positively. Many more teachers reported managing much larger classes and felt that smaller classes would make their job a lot easier, particularly when pupils have high levels of special educational needs or emotional or behavioural problems.

Good working conditions relates to more than the physical state of the school and the resources (both in terms of staff and equipment) available. Also important is the extent to which teachers have the time to plan and prepare for lessons or have a school timetable which is balanced and fits with their own needs. For example, teachers working in schools where an effective cover supervisor system was in place valued the fact that their non-contact time was protected.

As a pull factor:

*"There are superb premises and the school is kept really well"  
matched school, London*

*"Reduce class sizes as well, that would be the thing that would definitely  
make my life better"  
Matched school, GOSE*

*"I wasn't happy at the other school I was at. I wanted a similar school in terms  
of intake and I was also attracted by the free laptop and the fact that it was a  
technology school – my old school had really poor technology"  
matched school, GONW*

*"The cover system is very good, you only have to do half covers so you're  
never too burdened  
matched school, London*

As a push factor:

*"The school environment itself is disgusting...the toilets are horrible and  
there's lots of graffiti"  
challenging school, GOSE*

*"The music department lacks resources and as a music teacher that  
demotivates me...you just have to try your best"*

*challenging school, London*

*“We get very little from the LEA for redecorating internally, it just seems unfair in a school like ours. It’s not a good environment to work in and the stuff they do refurbish is often a ‘patch up’ job...it makes it hard to think that things are moving forward”*

*challenging school, London*

*“Smaller class sizes would make a big difference, particularly when you’ve got a class where half the pupils are SEN. Currently my classes are around 30 pupils, ideally I’d like half that size”*

*challenging school, GONW*

*“If I was looking for a new job, I’d definitely check the children’s toilets, that tells you a lot about a school”*

*matched school, London*

## **School examples**

The push and pull factors listed do not work in isolation but combine to either strengthen or undermine a teacher’s sense of confidence and ease at a school. The examples below illustrate this point, demonstrating that when the factors above work together they act as a powerful incentive for a teacher to stay at a school (and conversely to leave when they fall apart).

**School A** is a matched school in London where attainment has improved significantly in recent years. This is despite a challenging intake with, for example, high levels of special educational needs among pupils, low literacy skills and divisions between pupils from different areas and ethnicities. Five teachers from the school were involved in the focus group and all but one had been in teaching for 15 years or more. Teachers from the school talked enthusiastically about their experiences and emphasised that *“the crucial element is the strong management”*. One teacher suggested that the management has succeeded in making achievement matter for pupils and there was strong vision and commitment among staff to raise pupil aspiration. Morale among staff was felt to be very good with a sense that they worked as a team to achieve results, backed up by a management keen to take an inclusive approach – *“the team work we do is valued”*. The school ethos was seen to be supportive and encouraging rather than dogmatic – *“No-one’s worried about admitting failure, you’re not judged. I don’t think you get that everywhere”*. Teachers also felt management backed them up on behaviour issues without undermining an individual teacher’s authority. The school has benefited from investment in the premises, which has also added to a more positive experience. All teachers in the focus group from this school felt that teachers were happy at their school, well supported by senior management and by department colleagues. The one NQT in the group was really positive about her experiences at the school and planned to stay. Behaviour management was still an issue and there were some grumbles about pay but only one planned to leave the school in the next 3 years.

**School B** is a challenging school in the Government Office of the North West. The school’s intake includes a high proportion of children from deprived backgrounds, a range of emotional, behaviour, literacy and numeracy problems and a high percentage of pupils with physical disabilities. Six teachers from the school were

interviewed, most with many years teaching experience. They felt challenged but were quick to impress that they enjoyed working at the school because they had a clear sense of the management's vision for the future and were committed to the values of the school – *“this is attractive for me, it's a very inclusive school and it provides a very supportive environment; staff pull together as one big team”*. Teachers valued the style and approach of the fairly recently appointed head teacher, describing him as *“innovative, an educationalist, he's very caring, creative, flexible, open to new ideas...previously everything was cast in stone and nothing changed”*. There was a clear sense that the fortunes of the school were changing and teachers were keen to be part of that. Importantly teachers felt that their efforts were recognised and appreciated – *“He [the head teacher] appreciates what you do...and he tells you and that raises your morale”*. None of the teachers at School B planned to leave in the next three years and the majority felt supported both by management and department colleagues. Most also felt that pay was good.

**School C** is a matched school in the Government Office of the North West with a mixed intake and a poor reputation, despite reasonable levels of attainment. Teachers interviewed included three NQTs and two older teachers with over twenty years experience. Morale was low, particularly among the NQTs who felt unsupported and out of their depth in relation to dealing with behaviour. The head teacher was held in low regard and described as a 'business woman': good at networking, attracting money and involved in national initiatives but poor at managing people and with low visibility in the school among staff and pupils. One teacher stated *“She's not a 'teaching' head; she does one lesson a week but that's usually covered”*. The lack of a visible head at the school was felt to be resented by pupils who then played up as they knew that they were unlikely to be sanctioned. This has a knock-on effect on teacher confidence – *“I feel personally undermined when a disruptive pupil in my class receives no sanction....the other pupils can see he's got away with it too”*. The head was also seen to put pressure on teachers to raise attainment without appearing to get involved herself or to recognise the effort that teachers themselves put in. The school had specialist status which some of the teachers were attracted to but the head played down this fact in recruitment as she felt it 'attracted the wrong type of teacher'; again undermining the confidence of existing staff. Three out of the five teachers from this school planned to leave in the next three years; none felt supported by senior management and all strongly believed that managing behaviour got in the way of teaching.

**School D** is a challenging school in London where teachers feel that behaviour is one of their biggest obstacles. Eight teachers from the school were involved in the focus group, most had less than 8 years of teaching experience although there were also two older, more experienced and senior members of staff. They thought staff worked well together as a team but senior management is viewed negatively and seen to be detached from the everyday challenges faced by teachers – *“I find middle management know the students whereas senior management are more removed”*. Some teachers felt that senior management was the main barrier to the school's progress and consequently teachers felt frustrated and constrained in the impact that they were able to have – *“everyone underneath the line of senior management would like to take the school forward but can't [...] A change of head with a clearer understanding of what was going on around the school, that's what would help out teachers”*. A number of teachers also felt limited in their capacity to pursue professional development opportunities, not least because of time constraints – *“fire fighting doesn't leave much room for professional development”*. None felt that their training and development needs were met at the school. Similarly none felt that pay was good. The majority planned to leave the school within three years.

## Policy recommendations

The focus groups highlighted factors which act as a strong incentive for teachers to go to and stay at a school. In developing policy ideas to encourage the best teachers to work, and stay working, in the most challenging schools the key is to attract those who will thrive in a challenging school. This may mean filtering out those who may be motivated by the enhanced conditions (e.g. better pay) but do not have the capacity to develop into effective teachers in these settings.

The research findings indicate that some teachers currently working in matched schools would be attracted to work in a more challenging school for a number of reasons: the opportunity for rapid career progression; the chance to work in a school in the process of 'turning around'; the desire to make more of a tangible difference; the possibility of developing new skills and expertise and so on. But there are also teachers who rule out working in such schools, put off primarily by the perceived level of behaviour challenge or by a desire to work in a school where they think pupils will stretch them more academically.

When asked what might encourage them to work in a challenging school with low attainment, those working in matched schools tended to want the things that they lacked at their current school. If they felt that their current management was weak they may be motivated to move to a challenging school if they were impressed by the leadership team and had clear sense of where the school was heading, for example.

Listed below are a range of policy ideas that teachers brought up in the focus groups that could be effective levers for attracting the best teachers to work, and stay working, in the most challenging schools. Those underlined are the ones teachers felt should be prioritised, however all were seen as important elements of attracting appropriate teachers to the most challenging schools.

### **Good management and support, particularly in relation to behaviour**

The importance of good management and support was repeatedly highlighted in the focus groups with teachers. This in part depends on in-school factors such as the personality and expertise of the head. There is a need to invest in good management training for line managers and those in senior positions, and to develop the leadership skills of the workforce as a whole. Good management was also linked to workforce remodelling that would free up time to enable people to manage.

*“Day-to-day I’d like more effective and quality management time. The managers are good but over-burdened because they have a heavy teaching load. They just need to be freed up to be able to manage”  
challenging school, London*

*“Getting management right in a difficult school is a real challenge – because everything becomes so task orientated with little chance for overall reflection or vision”  
challenging school, London*

*“If I got the support I wouldn’t mind working in a challenging school, you can make a real difference”  
matched school, London*

However, informal support networks are also important in shaping a teacher’s experience at a school, and developing policy to aid and strengthen such networks

would be of benefit. Teachers described feeling isolated from their support networks for much of the day, with little time at break and lunch to properly catch up with colleagues and discuss issues or challenges that they were facing. In turn there was concern that moving to a challenging school could be tough and might require a steep learning curve and a period of quickly having to acquire new skills. In order to ease the transition a number of suggestions to strengthen the capacity of informal support networks were made. The first was to protect non-contact time and to schedule the school timetable in such a way to allow groups of teachers to have common periods of non-contact time where they can come together. Another suggestion some teachers came up with was to introduce new teachers to challenging schools as part of a group, perhaps with time spent in advance preparing them for the likely challenges they might face. This was felt to offer new teachers to a challenging school a ready made support network.

*“It would be better if we could spend more time together as staff, with less contact time. Then we’d have to time to talk and share experiences”  
challenging school, London*

*“Even in the most challenging school the staff can be supportive and that support and back up is crucial”  
matched school, GONW*

*“This is what we need, we need to sit around a table and be listened to.  
Teaching is a very isolating profession”  
matched school, London*

One area where teachers were explicit in wanting effective support was in relation to behaviour. There is potential for greater focus on the development of behaviour management skills and effective training in this area, not just for new teachers but existing teachers. It was clear that many younger teachers felt ill-equipped to deal with some of the most problematic behaviour. An individual teacher’s ability to deal with behaviour is also clearly dependent on the extent to which the school as a whole has an effective system of sanctions in place. A number of teachers stressed the need to feel ‘backed up’ by management on behaviour issues.

*“if I was to work in a challenging school I’d need to know that there was a strong support network in place. You need to know that the back up is going to be there if there’s an incident”  
matched school, GONW*

*“The school would need to have very clear boundaries on behaviour – there needs to be common standards and consistency”  
matched school, GONW*

### **A strong sell on values**

The accounts given by some teachers of their motivations for teaching and desire to have an impact indicate the need to emphasise the extent to which teachers working in challenging schools can make a real difference, rather than just ‘doing a job’. Recent recruitment drives to attract teachers to the profession which have focused on emphasising teaching as an inspiring and rewarding job could be replicated to focus specifically on attracting good teachers to the most challenging schools. In the process it would be possible to emphasise opportunities for professional development, creativity and autonomy that can be heightened when working in the most challenging schools. Some teachers were looking explicitly for a school with expertise and a track record in particular areas, for example special educational

needs, pastoral support or raising achievement of particular ethnic minority groups. By emphasising points such as these in recruitment advertisements, schools could specifically aim to attract individuals with these interests and skills.

*“You need to pitch the school at people who’d be successful in it – highlight the positives: you are never bored; it’s interesting and challenging; it’s good for team players and you have an opportunity to create your own agenda”  
challenging school, GOSE*

*“I’d go somewhere where I knew I could have an impact”  
matched school, GONW*

*“The school would need to show it understands the needs of black boys and ethnic minorities”  
matched school, London*

*I’d definitely consider it, I really enjoy adding something, and I think it would be very satisfying  
matched school, London*

*“You could really concentrate on a kid’s performance, it would be very rewarding”  
matched school, London*

In one of the challenging schools in Government Office of the North West a number of teachers referred to the initial letter that they had received when they applied for a job at the school. The positive tone of the letter and the sense of vision and challenge that the head teacher had set out was appealing. This is linked to the appeal of working at a school that is seen to be ‘going places’ even if it faces significant challenge in the process.

*“When I read the tone of the letter I was really impressed, there was a real sense of where he wanted the school to go but also honesty about the challenges it faced and emphasising the fact that not everyone would be up to the job”  
challenging school, GONW*

*“It would have to have a vision of where it was going – where it wanted to be. You don’t want to go to a challenging school where you have no sense of its ambition to move forward”  
matched school, GONW*

The strong sell on values can be linked to the need for a ‘pat on the back’ once in the job. Feeling valued is crucial to a teacher’s experience at a school, particularly at the most challenging schools where teachers can feel as if they are battling against the odds. Pay is clearly one way of rewarding and recognising teachers but is not enough in itself; teachers, like anyone else, look for and welcome other forms of praise for the time and effort they put in. Some linked this to their perception that the status of teaching was in decline and suggested that this recognition was needed not just at school level but at national level too.

*“Getting credit, being recognised for what you do is really important...recognition can be more important than the financial reward”  
matched school, GONW*

*“Teachers need a pat on the back for managing other people’s children...and not to be blamed for things that are a parent’s responsibility”  
matched school, GONW*

### **Respite linked to continuing professional development**

A strong theme that emerged in the discussions was the high levels of energy required to teach, particularly in the most challenging schools. A range of ideas were suggested to enable teachers to get some form of respite and gain experience and skills in another setting. It was felt that these opportunities should be linked to CPD and to enable teachers to develop and refresh their skills and experience.

Respite might come in the form of a sabbatical or career breaks. Teachers would be given time off to pursue other interests such as travel, further training or to gain experience in another industry.

*“A sabbatical year would be great, they have them in Australia and it would help re-charge your batteries”  
challenging school, London*

*“I was lucky, I had a secondment to GONW University for a year, but even a term secondment would be good for a lot of teachers”  
challenging school, GONW*

Job swaps were also suggested as a form of respite. These could work in two ways: to give teachers working in challenging schools a rest and experience of working in a different setting and to give teachers who might be effective in challenging schools a ‘taster’ of what it would be like working in such schools.

*“Some schools are much more chaotic and sometimes it would do teachers good to go on a 6 week placement or swap to get different experience”  
matched school, GONW*

*‘I’d love to go to another school and then be able to come back, you’d learn loads’  
matched school, London*

### **More non-contact time, more classroom support and smaller class sizes**

Linked to the need for respite was the desire for more time within the school day away from classroom teaching. This was partly based on the need for a ‘breather’ and would also mean more time to plan and prepare for lessons within the school day. This tended to be something that all teachers wanted and could be an effective incentive for attracting teachers to the most challenging schools and making life easier for them once they are there.

*“The job has got to be deliverable, you need to cut down on the workload and recognise that hours are longer at challenging schools”  
challenging school, GOSE*

*“Less contact time and more time to prepare lessons would be great...it can feel like a production line at times and I don’t have a non-contact hour until Thursday each week”  
challenging school, GONW*

A number of teachers reported good use of cover supervisors in their school and a system that worked to protect their non-contact time hours. But this was not the case in all schools. Other workforce remodelling options were also discussed (e.g. the appointment of non-teaching heads of year, attendance monitors) and were felt to be largely positive, although untested in practice. A number of teachers noted the campaign by the teaching unions to remove 24 tasks from a teacher's job description. Again, they tended to be positive about such plans but were not always convinced how realistic it was to achieve in practice. Many teachers also called for smaller class sizes (around 15 pupils ideally) and some favoured school day changes. A number of teachers stated that they would prefer a continental school day which would finish early and allow teachers time in the afternoon to spend preparing and marking.

*"The cover supervisors have worked really well. At my last school I counted 42 covers that I'd taken in one year. Here I've only done two this year because of the cover supervisors"*  
*matched school, GONW*

*"Not having to do covers would make my life a lot easier. As an NQT I'm meant to have a 90% protected timetable but it just constantly gets eaten into"*  
*challenging school, London*

*"The appointment of learning mentors for each year has been really good – it has freed up teacher time to do other things"*  
*challenging school, GONW*

There were also calls for more in-class support in the form of teaching assistants, learning mentors and other specialist support staff. Some suggested that simply having another adult in the classroom was useful in being able to deal with poor behaviour and keep pupils focused. Teachers were quick to stress however the need for good quality support able to engage pupils effectively in a lesson. Teachers in one challenging school in London felt that their school had difficulty attracting such high calibre support staff. Some suggested that 'team teaching' could be a valuable means of supporting the 'middle' pupils and helping newer teachers to develop their classroom skills.

*"The lack of classroom support is a problem, I have no learning mentors in my class...it's because I teach languages and it's a non-compulsory subject"*  
*challenging school, London*

*"we have a really limited number of teaching assistants – it's very patchy and they focus on the core subjects"*  
*challenging school, London*

*"TAs seem in short supply...you particularly need them in practical situations like in science, food technology. Quality teaching assistants are really important"*  
*challenging school, GONW*

Focus group participants suggested a radical change to free up teacher time, by introducing a four day week for teachers working in the most challenging schools. This would rely on a timetable that effectively 'rotated' teachers to enable each to have one day off a week at the same time as maintaining a full school week.

### **Teacher training and continuing professional development**

Very few teachers working in challenging schools felt that their teacher training had prepared them well for the job. In part this was taken as inevitable and it was suggested that ultimately it is 'on the job' training that matters most. The six teachers in the focus groups who had undertaken the GTP training, five of whom were based in challenging schools, were largely positive about how well this had prepared them to work in their current school. This suggests that the GTP route may be a good option for attracting teachers to work in challenging schools.

The potential to identify trainee teachers at PGCE stage to work in challenging schools was discussed in some of the focus groups. One specific target group may be career changers (who from the focus groups seemed also more likely to opt for the GTP route) This could have benefits in putting extra focus on skills that teachers in such schools may be likely to draw on (e.g. behaviour management) and in creating a pool of teachers ready to be deployed to the most challenging schools. But drawbacks were also identified. A trainee teacher may be put off working in a challenging school if they are thrown 'in at the deep end' before they have a chance to develop their skills and authority. Without effective in-school support a trainee who opts for a challenging school is likely to feel unable to cope.

There is also scope to invest in training teachers to cope effectively in the most challenging schools. Aside from focusing on specific areas of expertise, such as behaviour management, special educational needs or pastoral support, there is also potential to focus on 'coping' skills such as stress and time management. These would clearly benefit all teachers but may be of most value in challenging schools.

*"I would need to develop different skills to go to a really challenging school though"  
matched school, London*

*"Teachers need to be taught in a very practical way how to manage stress"  
matched school, London*

Some teachers working in challenging schools also called for greater investment and focus on their individual professional development, something that can easily fall off the radar when a school with poor attainment moves into fire-fighting mode. The Fast Track teaching programme was noted by some to be tailored to individual development but it was argued that such support and guidance should be available to all teachers and not just those selected through this scheme. It was suggested that schools could be grouped together in a region with a nominated personnel and professional development adviser available for teachers to make use of. Such a system might also make the process of teachers moving between schools in a particular area easier and more open and could potentially facilitate job swaps and exchanges between teachers. One teacher suggested 'managed staff moves' in the same way that there are managed moves for pupils. It was implied that schools can be isolated from each other and poor at working together.

*"Overall the management of teachers' professional development is very poor, at national level and not just school level. After four years teaching you're entitled to £500 to spend on training but nobody told me about it. I found out the day before the deadline for applications and they couldn't send the forms to me in the post in time [...] Why can't all teachers get something similar to the support that Fast Track teachers get? Schools could be grouped in a consortium with a designated person or team to act as an external adviser or*

*personnel manager...many schools at the moment don't have anyone with personnel or HR skills"  
challenging school, London*

### **Improving collaboration and multi-agency working**

There was a mixed picture in the extent to which teachers felt that their school was effective at working with other agencies and professionals. Some schools were clearly more proactive in working with others such as Social Services, the Police, Educational Psychologists, youth workers, organisations providing an alternative curriculum and so on. A number of teachers commented that while their school clearly worked with other agencies, the knowledge and expertise of other professionals about particular students often did not filter down to classroom teachers. Some teachers suggested that they did not always feel well-informed or well-equipped to respond to the needs of particular pupils who displayed a range of emotional, behavioural and learning needs. They didn't have the capacity to visit pupils in their own home and couldn't always guarantee access to parents to discuss a child's background. Information provided by, for example, a social worker in contact with the family, could prove invaluable. The problem appeared to be one of poor communication between 'frontline teachers' and other agencies and also lack of resource and capacity for external agencies to work effectively in schools. There is potential to identify best practice in this area and strengthen the channels of communication between key agencies like Social Services and the Police and schools.

*"Lots of pupils you're not sure 100% what their background is, you're not sure if there's even an adult supporting them at home. You need to understand their context and you can't force parents to come in...  
challenging school, London*

*"It would be good to have help from outside agencies more often – and for them actually to come into the school and see the child"  
challenging school, London*

While most teachers working in challenging schools recognised the need for multi-agency working it was also noted that it can present challenges and needs to be well-managed. One teacher from a challenging school in London described how his school had been very proactive in working with other agencies and bringing a range of new expertise and non-statutory agencies into the school. While the move was broadly positive he noted that there were some clashes in terms of cultures and direction. Some teachers felt that their professional status and expertise was being challenged by, for example, the more informal and relationship based approach of youth workers. Even differences in dress code (teachers were expected to wear suits whilst youth workers wore casual clothing) were felt to send mixed messages to pupils. A similar situation was described in a challenging school in Government Office of the South East where the use of other agencies and professionals was felt to sometimes undermine teaching when pupils are taken out of classroom teaching.

*"There is lots of counselling and social support services available in the school...it can be a problem because the students are not always there in the lessons"  
challenging school, GOSE*

*"At [school name] we've had multi-agency working with lots of other agencies coming into the school but it wasn't managed well. We've taken time out but will go back to it and the new head has taken control of it – there's a danger*

*otherwise of people acting at cross-purposes. Multi-agency working needs to enhance a school rather than challenge or undermine existing practice”  
challenging school, London*

In a challenging school in Government Office of the North West a different type of multi-agency working was in place. A ‘task force’ had been established, made up of various local stakeholders to help steer the direction of the school and develop recommendations on key issues. Again, whilst seen as a positive initiative, in practice it needed to be well-managed and staffed by effective ‘consultants’.

*“At [school name] they’re setting up a ‘Task Group’ made up of LEA representatives, head teachers from ‘successful’ schools in the area and two independent consultants. It’s a good idea to focus attention but it depends on the people who get involved – it can be patchy”  
challenging school, GONW*

### **Different measures of achievement**

Part of the frustration felt by teachers working in challenging schools was in the fact that the impact of their work was not always reflected in GCSE attainment levels. In some cases the ‘value added’ scores were viewed positively by some although it was felt that they were little understood outside of teaching. One teacher for example pointed out that his school had performed in the top five of schools nationally in value-added scores and clearly drew some status from this fact. There was consensus that there needs to be effective measures in place to measure impact in challenging schools that don’t allow teachers to be under-ambitious on behalf of their pupils but do allow them to prove and demonstrate progress in different ways.

*“I’ve just moved from a really challenging school, it was in special measures, and I loved it and would go back. But it’s so different, you need to have realistic targets and expectations”  
matched school, London*

*“There need to be lower expectations [of teachers] about what can be achieved; we can’t be brilliant all the time”  
challenging school, GOSE*

Teachers working in matched schools tended to suggest that they needed criteria such as the valued added scores if they moved to a challenging school. At one particular matched school in Government Office of the North West for example teachers described the pressure of attainment targets being set per child in each subject. This had clearly helped achieve good results (5 A\* to C attainment was above 70 per cent) but these teachers would not want the same pressure in a more challenging school and resented targets being set that they felt were unrealistic.

*“I’d not want the same pressure in relation to attainment if I went to a challenging school, you’d want recognition that achievement can be measured in different ways, as well as recognition of all the non-academic stuff that you do.”  
matched school, GONW*

The challenge is not to remove target setting or pressure to increase attainment altogether but to create a system in challenging schools that enables teachers to have a realistic yet optimistic account of where and how each pupil can progress.

### **Pay and other financial incentives**

Pay was commonly mentioned as one of the most obvious incentives to work in a challenging school. Whilst most teachers in challenging schools outside of London felt that pay was good, only 1 in 4 teachers at challenging schools in London agreed. A number of options were suggested linked to pay:

*Establishing a set number of additional salary points or specific recruitment and retention points for working in a challenging school.*

Some teachers in matched schools felt that awarding extra pay points suggested that teachers in challenging schools worked harder, but most agreed that it was necessary incentive to attract teachers to challenging schools. They compared the idea to the use of 'golden hellos' to attract teachers in shortage subjects. Some schools already had extra points in place to encourage teachers but this practice can also cause resentment if these points are later removed. Teachers at one matched school in London related how they initially received extra salary points for working in a challenging school but these were later removed as the school's fortunes turned. This might make economic sense if the school is no longer struggling to attract high calibre teachers but also has a negative effect on staff morale.

*"Pay is more important than other incentives, it's a much harder job"  
matched school, London*

*"I previously worked at an Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties centre and its knackered, you'd need a good financial incentive to do that longer term"  
matched school, GONW*

*"They'd have to pay me significantly more to work in a challenging school, around £30k, because I know that I'd be challenged and there's also an element of danger"  
matched school, GONW*

*"Pay is part of it – you should earn a bit more, maybe with bonuses for good results"  
challenging school, GOSE*

*Free laptop/ other equipment*

In one matched school every teacher was provided with their own laptop. Equipment incentives are also attached to schemes like the Fast Track teaching programme. A number of teachers talked positively about such incentives as an added bonus that might sway their decision about which school to teach in.

*Housing support*

This was more likely to be mentioned by teachers working in London, some of whom raised concerns about affordability. A small number of London teachers had accessed support from the key worker housing programme and talked positively about it.

*Honoraria*

In one matched school honoraria of an extra £1,000 per year were awarded to teachers for taking on an additional responsibility (e.g. organising learning mentors or managing assessment processes). Some teachers suggested that the system was not always well managed as processes were not in place to check whether teachers were genuinely fulfilling their additional responsibilities. However, the fact that the scheme existed and provided opportunities to increase salary was welcomed.

## **Broader policy changes**

Some teachers noted that there were limits to the impact of initiatives and incentives provided at school level to encourage good teachers to work in the most challenging schools. Broader factors impact on how able and effective teachers are likely to feel working in such schools. The first key factor noted by a number of teachers was the need for challenging schools to be able to provide an **inclusive and flexible curriculum that met the needs of their intake**. Teachers emphasised the need for schools to be able to offer a broad range of courses, including vocational subjects, in order to engage the full spectrum of needs, interests and skills of the pupils they taught.

*“My biggest challenge, more than dealing with behaviour and ‘attitude’ is dealing with low ability and trying to find a way to make the course fit their ability and needs...”*

*challenging school, GONW*

*“What would really help would be broadening the curriculum and making it relevant to our intake”*

*challenging school, London*

*“The most important thing is increasing flexibility in the curriculum offer – part-time release, vocational courses and so on. It’s key in a challenging school to be able to manage multi-agency provision effectively”*

*challenging school, London*

*“The students ask ‘why do I need to learn this sir?’ and I’m thinking, ‘It will be absolutely no use to you, but you do have to learn it’”*

*matched school, London*

A second key priority for teachers working in the most challenging schools was **tackling the politics and biases of school intake and local selection processes**. A number of teachers noted the impact that the dynamics of local school selection procedures can have on the profile of pupils at a school. Challenging schools can suffer when neighbouring schools are able to find ways to select particular pupils and when low school rolls require them to take any pupil offered throughout the year.

*“One thing that keeps our school dysfunctional is intake politics. We’re in a neighbourhood with lots of church schools and our intake becomes very skewed as a result. Also if you’re undersubscribed you have to take any pupil you’re offered throughout the year [...] It would be very useful to have a fair and reliable system of managed moves for pupils but schools in our area don’t do very well at talking to each other....partly because they don’t want to take our pupils!”*

*challenging school, London*

*“We have no selection criteria – we are basically [area name’s] dumping ground.”*

*challenging school, London*

## Appendix I

### Summary of responses on key survey questions:

NB Responses are represented as percentages for ease of comparison but it is important to note the small sample base. These are not statistically significant findings but are useful in providing an indication of the differences in experience between teachers at different types of schools.

	London 'challenging'	Non London 'challenging'	London 'matched'	Non London 'matched'	Total 'challenging'	Total 'matched'
Base (no. of teachers)	17	13	22	20	30	42
Planning to leave in next 3 years	10 (59%)	2 (15%)	7 (32%)	8 (40%)	12 (40%)	15 (36%)
Not planning to leave in the next 3 years	1 (6%)	9 (69%)	11 (50%)	3 (15%)	10 (33%)	14 (33%)
Not sure whether or not will leave in the next 3 years	6 (35%)	2 (15%)	4 (18%)	9 (45%)	8 (27%)	13 (31%)
Agree that most teachers are happy at the school	7 (41%)	10 (77%)	16 (73%)	9 (45%)	17 (57%)	20 (48%)
Agree that teachers feel supported by SMT	3 (18%)	12 (92%)	15 (68%)	5 (25%)	15 (50%)	16 (38%)
Agree 'I am well supported by colleagues in my dept'	15 (88%)	13 (100%)	19 (86%)	17 (85%)	28 (93%)	25 (60%)
Agree managing behaviour gets in the way of teaching	15 (88%)	12 (92%)	14 (64%)	14 (70%)	27 (90%)	17 (40%)
Agree that pay is good	4 (24%)	8 (62%)	11 (50%)	7 (35%)	12 (40%)	16 (38%)
Agree that training and development needs are met	5 (29%)	13 (100%)	15 (68%)	8 (40%)	18 (60%)	18 (43%)
Agree that there are opportunities for career progression	10 (59%)	13 (100%)	17 (77%)	12 (60%)	23 (77%)	19 (45%)
Agree overall quality of teaching is good	13 (76%)	9 (69%)	20 (91%)	13 (65%)	22 (73%)	25 (60%)
Agree school is more challenging than the average school	17 (100%)	13 (100%)	11 (50%)	15 (75%)	30 (100%)	19 (45%)

## **Appendix II Focus group discussion guide – teachers in challenging schools**

### **Welcome (5 Minutes) 4.30pm**

- Facilitator to introduce themselves
- Explain background to the project  
We are keen to hear directly from teachers to find out what motivates them to work in particular schools and what factors might encourage them to teach or stay teaching in the most challenging schools.
- Explain about the format of the discussion
- Get permission to tape the discussion and to take notes – explain about confidentiality.

### **Introduction (5 Minutes) 4.35pm**

- Each participant to introduce themselves with;  
Name; subject; how long they have been teaching for; any extra responsibilities; how long in this particular school.

### **Warm-Up Discussion (10 Minutes) 4.40pm**

- Why did you decide to become a teacher? How long do you think you will stay in teaching?
- How would you describe your school? How does your school compare to others in the area?
- What do you think of the status of teaching? Does working at your current school carry status? Why/why not?

### **Deciding where to teach (10 minutes) 4.50pm**

- How did you end up teaching at your current school?
- Did you apply to others?
- What factors influence your decision about where to teach?

### **What helps/hinders teachers at school (10 mins) 5.00pm**

- Are teachers generally happy at the school?
- Do you think you and your colleagues are able to do the best job?
- What do you think are the main challenge facing teachers in your school?
- What factors keep teachers working at your school? And what factors make some teachers leave?
- What things would most improve life for teachers at your school?

*I'd like to pick up on a couple of areas in particular:*

### **Support (5 minutes) 5.10pm**

- What kind of support do you think teachers should get? To what extent do you get this support?
- Do you have classroom assistants? How important are they?
- Do you feel supported to deliver good quality teaching?
- Probe leadership and management and how far colleagues support one another. Probe the culture at the school and how far teachers feel valued
- Do you feel pay is good at your school?
- What about conditions? Probe on workload if not mentioned spontaneously

**Behaviour (5 minutes) 5.15pm**

- How would you describe the intake at your school?
- How much of an issue is managing behaviour?
- How effective is your school at managing behaviour?
- Probe whether they feel supported in managing pupil behaviour – both in terms of training and leadership/management.
- Probe parental engagement and ask how far it is a help or a hindrance.

**Professional Development (5 minutes) 5.20pm**

- Do you think your school is somewhere you can develop your career?
- Probe the reasons why, is CPD seen as a priority at the schools, is there someone who is responsible for CPD?
- Are training/opportunities for development targeted at your individual needs?
- Do you think that ITT prepared you for teaching at this school?
- Probe what, if any, additional training they may have wanted.
- To work in your particular school what qualities do you think you need?
- Probe whether they think they are able/supported to develop these qualities.

**Collaboration (5 minutes) 5.25pm**

- Is your school good at working with other schools in the area?
- Do you think it is useful to work with other schools on particular initiatives?
- Are there barriers to working together effectively? Can these be overcome?
- How good is your school at working with local agencies like social services or the police? Do you find this beneficial? How could working with other agencies be improved?
- Parental/ community support? What are the relationships like?

**Looking Ahead... (20 minutes) 5.30pm**

- We are interested in the motivation of teachers working in schools like yours, with a deprived intake and achievement around the floor target. We are interested in finding out how teachers can be supported and encouraged to stay working in these schools.
- What do you think can attract good teachers to a school like yours?
- What do you think helps to retain good teachers at a school like yours?
- What would you like to see happening in order to keep good teachers working in schools like yours?

(note to facilitator - in this section we would like spontaneous responses. If the following areas are not covered, ask about their importance)

- Better pay and conditions
- More support – what type of support?
- More effective behaviour management
- More networking/collaboration
- More investment in training and professional development
- A different approach to ITT for teachers who want to work in schools in very challenging circumstances

- Class sizes
- Teaching Assistants
- More time devoted to CPD
- More non contact time – may link to broader discussion about workforce remodelling
- Would you work in a very challenging school if the pay was significantly higher?
- Other incentives like housing?

Teachers to prioritise the most important factors.

**Voluntary survey (5 minutes) 5.50pm**

**Thanks and close 6pm**

## **Appendix III Discussion guide for focus groups – teachers in matched schools**

### **Welcome (5 Minutes) 4.30pm**

- Facilitator to introduce themselves
- Explain background to the project  
We are keen to hear directly from teachers to find out what motivates them to work in particular schools and what factors might encourage them to teach or stay teaching in the most challenging schools.
- Explain about the format of the discussion
- Get permission to tape the discussion and to take notes – explain about confidentiality.

### **Introduction (5 Minutes) 4.35pm**

- Each participant to introduce themselves with;  
Name; subject; how long they have been teaching for; any extra responsibilities; how long in this particular school.

### **Warm-Up Discussion (10 Minutes) 4.40pm**

- Why did you decide to become a teacher? How long do you think you will stay in teaching?
- How would you describe your school? How does your school compare to others in the area? (Probe: do they recognise more challenging schools in the area?)
- What do you think of the status of teaching? Does working at your current school carry status? Why/why not?

### **Deciding where to teach (10 minutes) 4.50pm**

- How did you end up teaching at your current school?
- Did you apply to others? (probe – did they apply to other more challenging schools?)
- What factors influence your decision about where to teach?

### **What helps/hinders teachers at school (10 mins) 5.00pm**

- Are teachers generally happy at your school?
- Do you think you and your colleagues are able to do the best job?
- What do you think are the main challenges facing teachers in your school?
- What factors keep teachers working at your school? And what factors make some teachers leave?
- What things would most improve life for teachers at your school?

*I'd like to pick up on a couple of areas in particular that relate to how happy teachers are in the job:*

### **Support (5 minutes) 5.10pm**

- What kind of support do you think teachers should get? To what extent do you get this support?
- Do you have classroom assistants? How important are they?
- Do you feel supported to deliver good quality teaching?

- Probe leadership and management and how far colleagues support one another. Probe the culture at the school and how far teachers feel valued
- Do you feel pay is good at your school?
- What about conditions? Probe on workload if not mentioned spontaneously
- Do you feel the support and conditions at your school are better than at other schools in your area? (Probe on schools that fit the low achievement criteria)

***Behaviour (5 minutes) 5.15pm***

- How would you describe the intake at your school?
- How much of an issue is managing behaviour?
- How effective is your school at managing behaviour?
- Probe whether they feel supported in managing pupil behaviour – both in terms of training and leadership/management.
- Probe parental engagement and ask how far it is a help or a hindrance.
- Probe to what extent good behaviour/behaviour management is part of the reason they like teaching at their school and whether other schools in the area have a poorer record on behaviour

***Professional Development (5 minutes) 5.20pm***

- Do you think your school is somewhere you can develop your career?
- Probe the reasons why, is CPD seen as a priority at the schools, is there someone who is responsible for CPD?
- Are training/opportunities for development targeted at your individual needs?
- Do you think that ITT prepared you for teaching at this school?
- Probe what, if any, additional training they may have wanted.
- Thinking about other schools in your area, particularly those that are performing less well, are there particular qualities that you think you need to develop to work in those schools? Are they places where you can/would want to develop a career?

***Collaboration (5 minutes) 5.25pm***

- Is your school good at working with other schools in the area?
- Do you think it is useful to work with other schools on particular initiatives?
- How good is your school at working with local agencies like social services or the police? Do you find this beneficial? How could working with other agencies be improved?
- Parental/ community support? What are the relationships like?
- Probe whether effective collaboration is a factor in their motivation for working at the school

***Looking Ahead... (20 minutes) 5.30pm***

We would like to find out from you whether you have ideas about what would help to encourage teachers to work in the most challenging schools where achievement levels are around or below the floor target.

Thinking about other schools in your area, perhaps those with a more deprived intake or lower achievement level – (below the floor target)

- What is your impression of how comfortable/happy teachers feel at those schools?

- What sort of teachers choose to work at those schools?
- Is it something that you would consider? Why/why not?
- What factors might make you more likely to teach at those schools?
- What do you think can attract good teachers to work in the most challenging schools?
- What do you think helps to retain good teachers in the most challenging schools?

(note to facilitator - in this section we would like spontaneous responses. If the following areas are not covered, ask about their importance)

- Better pay and conditions
- More support – what type of support?
- More effective behaviour management
- More networking/collaboration
- More investment in training and professional development
- A different approach to ITT for teachers who want to work in schools in very challenging circumstances
- Class sizes
- Teaching Assistants
- More time devoted to CPD
- More non contact time – may link to broader discussion about workforce remodelling
- Would you work in a very challenging school if the pay was significantly higher?
- Other incentives like housing?

Get teachers to prioritise the most important factors.

**Voluntary survey (5 minutes) 5.50pm**

**Thanks and Close 6.00pm**

**Appendix III – Teacher survey**

*Please note: all information will be kept confidential*

**Your experience:**

**How long have you been teaching for?**

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**How long have you been working at your current school?**

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**How many different schools have you worked in during your career?**

1	
2	
3-4	
More than 4	

**What do you teach?**

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**What other, if any, responsibilities do you have at your school (e.g. form tutor, Head of Year, Head of Subject etc)?**

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**Future Plans:**

6. Are you planning to leave your current school within the next 3 years?

Yes	
No	
Not sure	

7. If you are planning to leave your current school in less than 3 years, can you indicate the reason why?

I'm retiring	
I want to teach at another school	
I want to leave teaching and pursue another career	
Other reason (please give details):	

7b If you want to teach at another school, what are the THREE main reasons behind your decision?

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8. If you are planning to stay at your current school for the next 3 years or longer, what are the THREE main reasons that make you want to stay at the school?

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9. To what extent do you personally agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ no opinion
<i>Most of the teachers at my school are happy in their job</i>					
<i>Most of the teachers at my school feel well supported by senior management</i>					
<i>I am well supported by colleagues in my department</i>					
<i>Managing behaviour gets in the way of teaching at my school</i>					
<i>Pay for teachers at my school is good</i>					
<i>My training and development needs are met at my school</i>					
<i>There are opportunities for career progression at my school</i>					
<i>The overall quality of teaching at my school is good</i>					
<i>My school is more challenging to work at than the average school</i>					

## About you:

### Your gender:

<input type="checkbox"/>	male
<input type="checkbox"/>	female

### Your ethnicity:

White

<input type="checkbox"/>	White British
<input type="checkbox"/>	White Irish
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other White background

Asian/Asian British

<input type="checkbox"/>	Indian
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pakistani
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangladeshi
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Asian background

Chinese/Other ethnic group

<input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other ethnic group (please specify)

### Your age:

<input type="checkbox"/>	20-29
<input type="checkbox"/>	30-39
<input type="checkbox"/>	40-49
<input type="checkbox"/>	50-59
<input type="checkbox"/>	60 and over

Mixed

<input type="checkbox"/>	White and Black Caribbean
<input type="checkbox"/>	White and Black African
<input type="checkbox"/>	White and Asian
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other mixed background

Black/Black British

<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Caribbean
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black African
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other black background

### What route did you take to get in to teaching?

<input type="checkbox"/>	B.Ed
<input type="checkbox"/>	BA or BSc with QTS
<input type="checkbox"/>	PGCE
<input type="checkbox"/>	School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Graduate Training Programme (GTP)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Registered Training Programme (RTP)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teach First
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fast Track
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please state)

### Please state where you studied for your Initial Teacher Training:

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### Please give details about your first degree:

Subject	
Degree class (i.e. First, 2:1, 2:2 etc)	

### Please give details of any other postgraduate study you have undertaken:

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**Please indicate what scale you are paid on:**

Unqualified	
Fixed daily rate through agency	
Main scale	
Upper scale	
Leadership group	
Advanced skills teacher	

**Please tick if you receive these allowances:**

Management points	
SEN allowances	