The wider schools workforce

Better value for money in schools

March 2011
Introduction

1 Maintained schools in England spent over £35 billion in 2009/10, some £5,000 on average per pupil. They have seen a large increase in available funds, with spending increasing by 28 per cent since 2002/03. Schools spend three quarters of this funding on their workforce. As budgets tighten, school leaders are increasingly focusing on how well that money is spent.

2 Schools make decisions about how they design their provision and how they deploy and manage their workforce. These decisions reflect their individual circumstances and constraints and will depend upon their different priorities. But they all face the challenge of tightening budgets. School leadership teams and governing bodies need to understand the costs and benefits of different staffing models in order to achieve value for money. Councils can help assess the relative positions of local schools and consider where they can offer support.

3 This briefing is one of four published by the Audit Commission in March 2011 which aims to identify where schools can achieve greater efficiency. They examine patterns of spending in maintained schools in England. They build on our national report Valuable Lessons, published in 2009 (Ref.1). We aim to help schools, governing bodies and councils identify where they have scope for efficiencies without compromising the effectiveness of their provision. This briefing examines the wider schools' workforce. The others look at classroom deployment, curriculum breadth and staff absence and cover.

4 The main findings on the wider schools' workforce are as follows.

■ In 2002/03 teachers accounted for 76 per cent of staff costs in schools; by 2009/10 this had fallen to 68 per cent. There is notable variation in workforce profiles and teachers typically make up anything between 27 and 75 per cent of the workforce in individual schools.

■ Expenditure on educational support staff has risen as a result of investment in teaching assistants. But there has also been a growth and diversification of other educational support staff roles. We did not find a strong statistical link between the proportion of pupils with special educational needs in schools and the proportion of educational support staff they employ.

■ Administrative and clerical staff account for 7 per cent of total spending on staff, some £1.7 billion. Variation in numbers of these staff between primary schools suggests that they have kept additional numbers of these staff to a minimum. In secondary schools, variation may reflect different strategies for employing these staff.

■ Expenditure on additional staff expenses accounts for some 6 per cent of schools' costs. Spend on bought-in non-curriculum-related costs has increased from £316 million in 2002/03 to £492 million in 2009/10.
The non-teaching workforce

5 The National Agreement on workload, adopted in 2003 by the government, unions and teacher bodies, identified inappropriate teacher workload as a barrier to school effectiveness. The agreement aimed to support teachers by reforming support staff roles, recruiting business and personnel managers and ensuring teachers, including head teachers, do not routinely undertake administrative tasks.

6 This focus has been backed by a significant investment in the wider schools workforce since 2002/03. Spending on non-teachers was £3.8 billion in 2002/3 and has risen to £8.7 billion in 2009/10. Investment in teachers has continued but has grown at a slower rate. In 2002/03 teachers accounted for 76 per cent of staff costs in schools, by 2009/10 this had fallen to 68 per cent.

7 We have focused on the rising numbers of non-teaching school staff, here defined as educational support staff and administrative and clerical staff. Although teacher numbers rose from 2003, they have reduced as a proportion of the school workforce, falling from 65 per cent of the workforce in 2002/03 to 54 per cent in 2009/10. The clearest driver of this growth has been the increase in educational support staff, whose numbers have risen by 62 per cent to over 273,000. However, administrative and clerical staff numbers also increased by over 40 per cent (Figure 1).

Figure 1: There has been a growth in the non-teaching workforce
Relative change in the proportion of different staff groups in the school workforce

Source: Audit Commission analysis of DfE schools census

i In this briefing changes in expenditure over time are calculated for 2009/10 prices using the Treasury GDP deflator.

ii Here we define the schools workforce as teachers, educational support staff and administrative and clerical staff. Reliable data is not available for numbers of other roles.
Individual schools take different approaches to using support staff, with school leaders recruiting and deploying support staff in line with school priorities. There is notable variation in workforce profiles, and teachers typically make up anything between 27 and 75 per cent of the workforce in individual schools.

Workforce profiles vary according to school type and location:

- in primary schools, teachers are, on average, a higher proportion of the workforce in rural areas and in smaller schools;
- in secondary schools, teachers are, on average, a higher proportion of the workforce in larger schools and in those with sixth forms; and
- special schools in urban areas have, on average, more teachers as a proportion of the workforce than schools in rural areas.

Support roles may have a less visible impact on pupil outcomes than teachers, so schools need to understand how they contribute to the success of a school, and this should be reflected in performance indicators for these roles. It is important for schools to examine any changes in their staff profile against attainment over time to ensure they can justify the contribution all staff make to pupil outcomes. In our survey of school business managers, 56 per cent of respondents reported there is scope to save money by changing the balance of classroom staff and the wider school workforce.

Our analysis suggests some schools could structure their wider school workforce more cost-effectively without compromising school attainment. In particular schools should:

- examine the size and cost of the non-teaching workforce;
- look at reallocating tasks between administration and teaching staff to ensure cost-effective delivery; and
- analyse the potential to share staff in the wider workforce between schools.

Questions for school leaders, governing bodies and councils

- How has the balance between teachers and the wider workforce changed since the introduction of the National Agreement on workload? Does this balance still reflect the current objectives of the school?
- To what extent have you explored the scope for sharing support staff with other schools?
- How do you measure the impact of the deployment and use of support staff on educational outcomes?
Educational support staff

12 Educational support staff support teaching and learning in schools. They play an important role in supporting teachers to deliver classes, support individual pupils and help the smooth running of the school. School leaders decide on the number and cost of educational support staff in line with school priorities.

13 In the past ten years successive educational policies have promoted the role of educational support staff, as part of the workforce ‘remodelling’ envisaged in the National Agreement on workload. For pupils and parents the most visible change has been the increased use of teaching assistants in the classroom to support teachers and pupils. Although we summarise headline data on teaching assistants in this paper, a more detailed discussion of their role is included in our Briefing on Classroom Deployment. Here we focus on other educational support roles such as specialist technicians, library staff and pastoral support.

14 Expenditure on educational support staff has almost doubled since 2002/03. Schools now spend £4.7 billion on educational support staff in primary and secondary schools, some 14 per cent of their staff costs (up from 12 per cent in 2002/03). The use of educational support staff varies depending on school phase. (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Spend on educational support staff has increased
Spend on educational support staff 2002/03 to 2009/10

Source: Audit Commission analysis of DfE Consistent Financial Reporting data
This increase has mainly been the result of investment in teaching assistants, whose numbers have increased by 93 per cent. However, the numbers of other educational support staff have also risen by 25 per cent in primaries, 48 per cent in secondary schools and 49 per cent in special schools. Excluding teaching assistants, there are 136,000 educational support staff employed in maintained schools in England. Figure 3 below shows the breakdown of these staff nationally in 2009/10.

Figure 3: **Schools employ a range of educational support staff**

Numbers of educational support staff in schools 2009/10

![Pie chart showing the breakdown of educational support staff in schools in 2009/10.](chart)

Source: Audit Commission analysis of DfE schools census 2010

Numbers of librarians, childcare staff and minority ethnic support staff in schools have remained consistently low since 2003. The largest growth over time has been in ‘other’ support staff, the numbers of which have increased by 60 per cent since 2003 from 34,000 to 57,000 full-time equivalent staff. This includes welfare assistants in the classroom, learning mentors, study supervisors, cover supervisors and any other education support staff regularly employed by schools. The numbers of technicians have also increased by 34 per cent since 2003. Numbers of special needs support staff have remained largely static and currently number over 45,000 nationally (Figure 4).
Our analysis suggests that educational support roles have diversified, with school leaders recruiting a wider range of specialists in line with school priorities. School leaders report that this is a result of the National Agreement on workload and a stronger emphasis on special educational needs. However, we did not find a strong statistical link between the proportion of pupils with special educational needs in schools and the proportion of educational support staff they employ. School leaders also noted that they are employing increasing numbers of pre-PGCE work experience students to support staff.

Head teachers should evaluate the full cost of employing extra dedicated educational support staff. Schools may be also able to save money by using educational support staff better through negotiating shared timetables between networks of schools.
Questions for school leaders, governing bodies and councils

- Have you evaluated the impact of educational support staff roles to ensure you still require the hours; grade and responsibility level?
- Have you explored the scope for sharing educational support staff with other schools?
- How do you measure how the deployment and use of support staff contributes to educational outcomes?

Administrative and clerical staff

19 In recent years the role of administrative and clerical staff in schools has become more strategic. Policies have stressed the role those outside the classroom can play in the smooth and efficient running of a school and the impact on staff and pupils. The National Agreement on workload, in particular, aimed to free teachers to spend more time with pupils by identifying a set of 24 activities that should be undertaken by administrative and clerical staff.

20 Administrative and clerical staff include school bursars, business managers, secretaries and receptionists. Since 2003 there has been a significant growth in all these groups of staff. In 2010 administrative and clerical staff made up 9 per cent of the total schools workforce – 71,000 full-time-equivalent staff. Secondary schools employ a greater proportion of administration staff (12 per cent) than primary schools (8 per cent) and special schools (7 per cent).

21 Administrative and clerical staff account for 7 per cent of total spending on staff, some £1.7 billion. The spending per pupil on administrative and clerical staff has increased significantly since 2002/03 (Figure 5).

22 There has been an 80 per cent increase in bursars and business manager numbers since 2003. There are now 9,000 full-time-equivalents, of whom 5,250 work in primary schools and 3,250 in secondary schools. Given the higher number of primary schools, this means that bursars and business managers are much more prevalent in secondary schools. Previous governments worked with the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services to increase the skills and numbers of business managers.
Business managers are now involved in a range of school management activities including human resource management and income generation alongside their core financial management and administration role. Bursars and business managers can identify savings (particularly in procurement), generate income and release head teacher time previously used for financial management and administration. Between 2008 and 2010 secondary school head teachers reported a fall of 77 per cent in the time they spend on administration (Refs. 2, 3). However, in primary schools head teachers saw a 21 per cent increase in the same period. This may reflect the greater number of business managers in secondary schools. Where schools can not afford their own business manager they should consider collaborating on a business manager resource.

Figure 5: Schools now spend more on administrative and clerical staff
Spend on administrative staff per pupil 2002/03 to 2009/10

Source: Audit Commission analysis of DfE Consistent Financial Reporting data

The use of administrative and clerical staff varies between schools. In primary schools, some of this variation can be explained by school size. This suggests there is a minimum requirement for administrative or clerical support – all but the very smallest primary schools still require a school secretary or receptionist. Larger primaries have kept additional numbers of these staff to a minimum. In secondary and special schools there is no relationship between school size and the proportion of administrative staff. This suggests that school leaders in these schools are making different strategic decisions about the level of administrative and clerical support they need and the role these staff can play in delivering school outcomes. There is sizeable variation in spending on administrative and clerical staff between otherwise similar schools in all school types (Figures 6, 7).
There are local reasons why some schools might have higher spend on administrative and clerical staff. Some run their own payroll, as opposed to this being provided through the council. Others have appointed non-teaching pastoral leads as heads of year and non-teaching timetablers. In other schools teachers may undertake these tasks and receive learning responsibility increments as well as their basic salary.
26 Schools should consider if they can make savings by sharing administrative and clerical staff between local schools. We recognise there is greater potential to make these savings in urban areas where journeys between schools are generally shorter. It may also be possible for schools to generate income by selling school business managers’ time to schools that do not have their own bursar or business management support.

Questions for school leaders, governing bodies and councils

- What is the current profile of administrative and clerical staff in the school? How do current roles link to educational outcomes?
- How can you be sure that school business managers and other finance managers provide value for money? What role do these staff play in senior leadership decisions?
- What is the balance of spend between administrative and clerical staff and additional spending on teachers’ teaching and learning responsibility points?

Other staff groups

27 Expenditure on additional staff expenses accounts for some 6 per cent of schools’ costs. This includes the costs of some further staff groups, indirect employee costs such as pension and redundancy payments, and staff development, training and insurance. Here we set out the patterns of expenditure for three staff groups: premises and catering staff; staff delivering community focussed extended schools services; and bought-in professional services.

28 There has been growth in spending on catering and premises staff since 2002/03; from £93 to £128 per pupil (Figure 8). However, schools have different approaches to managing these services, including contracting with a third-party provider, which makes it difficult to compare spend across schools. We also recognise that private-finance-initiative (PFI) schools may have fixed payments for facilities and premises and have less flexibility to save money. Schools that buy premises and catering services outside the school should revisit the procurement savings guidance in the 2009 Audit Commission report Valuable Lessons.
Spending on community focused extended services staff started to be recorded in 2006/07, so there is less data available than for other staff groups. Spending on these extended services staff has increased from £38 million in 2006/07 to £134 million in 2009/10 in primary, secondary and special schools. Schools receive specific income for extended services and deliver these services in various ways, including using teachers’ time on a voluntary basis.

In 2002/03 primary, secondary and special schools spent £316 million on bought-in non-curriculum-related costs, by 2009/10 this had increased to £492 million. The increase in specialist secondary schools will account for some of this increase. School leaders said that this spending was primarily on consultants supporting national strategies or supporting a school moving to specialist status.
Questions for school leaders, governing bodies and councils

- How well has your school examined the potential for savings from sharing premises staff across local schools?
- When did the school last review its options for providing catering? How can you achieve the best balance between the quality and cost of catering?
- How does the provision of community-focused extended school services change staff costs? Has the school calculated whether funding for and income from these services covers staff costs?
- What are the costs and benefits of using bought-in professional services? How well does funding for this support cover costs?

Contact Details

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References


