



## The Teachers of Promise Project

A longitudinal study of the personal and professional factors that keep teachers engaged and interested in their work.

# Teachers of Promise

### Phase one: 2005-2008

In 2005 we began to follow a group of 57 promising primary and secondary teachers from their third year of teaching until the end of 2008, when they were in their sixth year of teaching. They were identified as promising by lecturers in their initial teacher education programme and by school leaders who were keen to see that they stayed in teaching.

By 2008, 52 percent were still teaching in New Zealand, a figure similar to that reported in

There were also some policy issues at play, such as the kinds of on-going learning opportunities available to them.

### Phase two: 2011

In 2011 we tracked down all the teachers from the first study. The most surprising finding was that many more respondents (73 percent) were now teaching in New Zealand (Northland, Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Manawatu-Wanganui, Wellington and Canterbury) than in 2008. The main reason for this was that most teachers who were teaching overseas in 2008 had returned to New Zealand to teach by 2011. Ten percent (all women) were parenting full-time. Five of the seven ex-teachers were working in teaching related fields, such as road safety, sports and numeracy coaching.

In October 2011, 48 people from the original group completed an online survey about their career decisions, roles and responsibilities, working

conditions, opportunities to develop their teaching and leadership skills, and the factors that supported or discouraged their motivation and commitment to teaching. Some respondents were no longer teachers, and some were parents who were teaching part-time or who were considering returning to their careers later. Here we report mainly on responses from the 37 who were currently teaching, although data from leavers and parents is included where relevant.

## What's the project about?

This newsletter provides an update on the Teachers of Promise project. We tracked a group of promising teachers between 2005 and 2008, and in 2011 we went back to them to see how they were getting on. The focus of this research is teachers, since the research tells us teacher quality is the single most important school factor in student success. You can read more about the project at <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/teachers-promise>

international studies. We identified key factors that helped teachers make a good start in teaching, and encouraged them to keep their initial passion and enthusiasm for their work. We found that personal and workplace factors all influenced their commitment to teaching — the kinds of people they are, how well they were prepared for teaching, events in their personal lives and the effectiveness of their induction and mentoring as new teachers.

## Movers

Around 60 percent of teachers surveyed have changed schools since 2008. Primary teachers were more likely to move than their secondary colleagues.

Of those teachers who changed schools (and gave a reason why):

- 43 percent moved for personal reasons (e.g. relocating to a new town)
- A similar percentage moved because of dissatisfaction with their current workplace
- 21 percent were not satisfied with their school leadership and management
- 27 percent of those who have left teaching altogether also gave this reason for leaving
- 23 percent moved because of unsatisfactory working conditions
- 27 percent changed schools because there were greater career opportunities in a new school.

One male primary teacher retrained and is now teaching in early childhood education. He changed sectors because of the workload and anticipated that he would work fewer hours and have more energy for the other interests in his life. He now says:

*"I'm loving the change to early childhood."*

David, 30-39, former primary, now early childhood teacher

### Current roles

Most fulltime teachers (around 70 percent) also contribute to the learning of other teachers.

- Around 60 percent hold a management unit or release time for their leadership roles (eg ICT lead teacher, special needs coordinator, gifted and talented co-ordinator)
- Four teachers are in head of department (HOD) positions
- Two teachers lead the middle school section of their Years 1-13 schools

Almost all teachers had professional support for these roles, mostly in the form of general advice when needed. Primary teachers were more likely to have received significant mentoring.

### Future career intentions

Teachers appeared to have open minds about their plans for the next five years including:

- increasing their leadership responsibilities (30 percent)
- becoming an HOD (25 percent) or an in-school coach or curriculum leader (54 percent)
- government educational work (30 percent)
- private educational work (18 percent)
- leaving teaching for a non-educational career (38 percent).

*"I'm not a person that likes unpredictability but I am a person that enjoys some variety."*

Robyn, 30-39 HOD secondary

*"I'm not interested in leadership... I see people in management roles and I think I'd rather be a teacher that's there every day for the children."*

Rose, 30-39, primary

*"I'd like to start a 0-10 school...to be a founding principal... where there were no established systems and understandings."*

Gary, 30-39, head of middle school

*"I used to have ambitions to eventually seek a senior leadership role, at AP or DP level. However, as my career has progressed, that desire has died in the face of 1) a belief that I'm of greater value to the education system doing what I'm already doing, 2) a crisis of confidence that I could actually ever undertake such roles, and 3) a realisation that it's not what you know, it's who you know if one wishes to 'get on'."* Steven, 30-39, HOD secondary

### Teachers' changing views of their work

Some teachers filled out surveys in 2005, 2008 and 2011, so we were able to compare their responses over time.

- The majority of primary and secondary teachers continue to express high levels of satisfaction with their relationships with students and their colleagues, their principal and parents.
- Teachers are generally somewhat happier with their choice of career than they were when first surveyed, although almost half the primary teachers now think that they are not as happy with teaching as they thought they would be.
- Primary teachers are now much happier with their salaries. 81 percent think their salaries are appropriate for their work, compared with 20 percent in 2005.
- 88 percent of primary and 60 percent of secondary teachers would still be teachers if they had their time over again.

## Workload

- Since 2005, primary teachers have reduced their student-related work such as coaching, clubs, and music outside of class time. The majority (59 percent) report that they do not undertake extracurricular work, compared with ten percent of secondary teachers.
- Planning and assessment responsibilities are less onerous for primary teachers than in 2005, when over half the primary teachers worked over ten additional hours a week – the figure is 14 percent in 2011. Forty-four percent of primary teachers work an extra 4-10 hours a week.
- Workload has not reduced for secondary teachers. Although 40 percent work an additional 4-10 hours a week, 40 percent work more than 10 extra hours. This may reflect the greater assessment responsibilities at the secondary level.
- 70 percent of primary teachers and 60 percent of secondary teachers think that their workload is acceptable, although both sectors (especially secondary) find work-related stress to be a challenge.
- More primary teachers say they feel able to maintain a balance between their personal and professional lives, compared to secondary.

## Working conditions

- The percentage of primary school teachers who think that teaching resources are sufficient has increased (47 percent in 2005, 67 percent in 2008 and 81 percent in 2011). Secondary teachers' views of adequacy of teaching resources between 2005 and 2011 stayed constant with around 70 percent agreeing that resources are adequate.
- However 40 percent of all teachers considered that they needed to supplement teaching resources with their own funds.
- More primary than secondary teachers agreed that school leaders ensured disruptions to their teaching were kept to a minimum. More primary teachers agreed that their principal was interested in, and led, professional learning.
- Primary teachers are much more likely than secondary teachers to agree that student learning is the primary concern in their school.
- Increasingly, teachers disagree that they are involved in school decisions that affect them. In 2011 40 percent of primary teachers and almost all secondary teachers disagreed.

- About two thirds of primary teachers have consistently agreed that feedback from performance management helps motivate them to improve their teaching. In 2011 only one secondary teacher agreed.
- Scheduled time for teachers to work together on curriculum planning and assessment has increased somewhat since 2005.

## Single biggest frustration

Teachers report the same frustrations as in previous surveys, namely:

*“Administration, i.e. the keeping up to date with the useless paperwork that is ‘vital’, but never gets read or used for anything meaningful by the senior managers who demand it.”*

Steven 30-39, HOD secondary school

*“Dealing with the pressures of time when delivering teaching programmes, not feeling like I am doing the best for the kids I teach.”*

Gary, 30-39, head of middle school

*“Expectations of management which detract from the time and energy spent engaging with students.”* Jessica, 30-39, primary school

*“Expectations which are inconsistent with resourcing, and available time. Also lack of thanks for taking on extra-curricular music e.g. production, performance evenings.”*

Ksenya, 50-59, secondary school

- Around three quarters of all teachers agree that they are encouraged to be innovative; work in a collegial atmosphere; and feel part of an effective team.
- “I believe I am extremely fortunate to be in this school. There is excellent leadership from the principal and a very talented and enthusiastic staff.”*
- Robert, early 30s, assistant principal middle school
- Over 80 percent of all teachers have consistently agreed that they are proud to work in their school.

### Opportunities for on-going professional learning

- Teachers said that subject-focussed professional development was the external learning that had the strongest impacts on classroom practice. Most teachers would have liked more external curriculum courses.
- School-based learning activities such as teacher networks focussed on student data and teaching implications, discussions of professional reading and observations of teaching, were all judged to have moderate to high impact.

### What keeps teachers in the job?

The stimulation of continually learning new things

*“Opportunities to learn more about my subject area, about teaching well, about relating well with students (growth).”*

Mac, 40-49, secondary school

Supporting the professional growth of other teachers

*“Being able to work alongside teachers and mentor them. Also the role I have as liaison with the university for our trainee teachers is rewarding.”*

Robert, 30-39, assistant principal, middle school

Enjoyment of teaching subject

*“I love my subjects and I feel I have a sense of duty to teach such knowledge to young people, like my favourite teachers did when I was in school.”* Steven, 30-39, HOD, secondary school

The stimulus of belonging to a workplace that is committed to improving teaching and learning, and that trusts and believes in teachers

*“Working at my current school is fantastic. I am supported at all levels and encouraged to lead others with their learning. We have a VERY collegial working environment and everyone supports each other which is fantastic - AN AWESOME PLACE TO WORK :)”*

Tan, 30-39, primary school

#### PROJECT WEBSITE:

<http://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/teachers-promise>

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*“I absolutely love working in a New Zealand school again after having taught in London. I feel supported just the right amount, and left alone just the right amount too, to get on and do a good job. There is a good work/life balance encouraged and modelled at the school; teachers are respected and treated as professionals.”* Jane, 30-39, primary school

Knowing that their work has purpose and meaning

*“Knowing that I am part of the awesome process of facilitating young children's learning which will be foundational for the rest of their life.”* David, 30-39, ECE teacher

*“The children and my enjoyment of actually teaching and making a difference.”*

Danielle, 30-39, primary school

Practical reasons

*“Currently it really suits my needs in terms of money, hours of work and family. It is somewhat varied which keeps it more interesting.”* Lani, 30-39, primary school

*“The job has its financial benefits after this long, so money keeps me in the job.”*

Kimberly, 40-49, primary school

## Implications

- Teachers retain their enthusiasm and passion for teaching when they belong to a lively workplace that trusts and supports them to continue to learn, and that acknowledges their contributions.
- When workplaces fail to provide experiences that create spaces for them to learn and grow, some look for other schools, or leave teaching altogether. Neglecting adult learning also leads some teachers to “switch off”, become cynical, or to coast.
- The changes required for the intentions of the New Zealand Curriculum to be realised, require schools to be places for teachers to be thoughtful, responsive, and open to rethinking some current school practices. Excluding teachers from school decision-making is not conducive to teacher engagement and commitment.
- While most teachers appreciate their school principals as people, the study reinforces the need for all school leaders to develop their leadership knowledge and practices, and support the teacher talent that is in their workplace.