
13. Teachers' work, morale, and changes they would make

A national spotlight shone on teachers' work in 2019, with unprecedented strikes in support of salary increases as well as teachers wanting high workloads addressed. Our national survey went out several months after negotiations had yielded pay increases and an Accord between the Ministry of Education and teacher unions was registered to make progress on workload, wellbeing, and change management issues.⁴³

As in previous rounds, the national survey contained questions about teachers' experience and roles, their job satisfaction, workload and morale, changes they would like to their work, and plans for the future. Teachers also made general comments about their work.

We had responses from 27% of the teachers ($n = 620$), from 181 of the 350 schools in the national sample. We sent each school in our sample sufficient surveys for a sample of teachers based on student numbers. The margin of error is around 3.9%.⁴⁴ The median response rate in the schools that took part was 50%. Teachers' responses are somewhat under-representative of decile 1–2 schools, full primary schools, and smaller schools. They are somewhat over-representative of decile 7–10 schools.

Eighty-six percent of the teachers responding were women, and 12% men; the remainder did not give their gender. Most teachers identified their ethnicity as NZ European / Pākehā (81%), 10% as Māori, 2% gave a Pacific culture, and 1% an Asian culture; 11% gave other identifications such as their country of origin.

Many teachers are long-serving in the profession, and have roles beyond the classroom

Table 8 shows the range of teachers' length of experience in teaching, and Table 9 shows how long teachers have taught at their current school. Half the teachers who completed the 2019 national survey had been teaching for more than 15 years, but only 12% had stayed in their current school for more than 15 years.

⁴³ <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/News/Bargaining/Accord.pdf>

⁴⁴ This is an approximation since we asked schools to distribute the surveys randomly, with guidance, but cannot guarantee that the distribution was random.

TABLE 8 Teachers' length of experience teaching

Years teaching	2019 (n = 620) %
First year	6
Second year	5
3–5 years	13
6–10 years	12
11–15 years	15
More than 15 years	50

TABLE 9 Teachers' length of experience at current school

Years at their current school	2019 (n = 620) %
First year	16
Second year	15
3–5 years	28
6–10 years	16
11–15 years	13
More than 15 years	12

Eighty-three percent of the teachers were in permanent positions, and 17% were in fixed-term positions. Just over half the teachers in their first year of teaching were in fixed-term positions (59%). Most of the teachers (88%) were in full-time positions.

The majority (86%) were classroom teachers. Two-thirds of the classroom teachers also had roles beyond the classroom. Thirty percent held formal leadership roles (deputy principal, assistant principal, curriculum/syndicate leader for English/Literacy or Maths). Thirty-two percent received a management unit.

Roles that teachers undertook included:

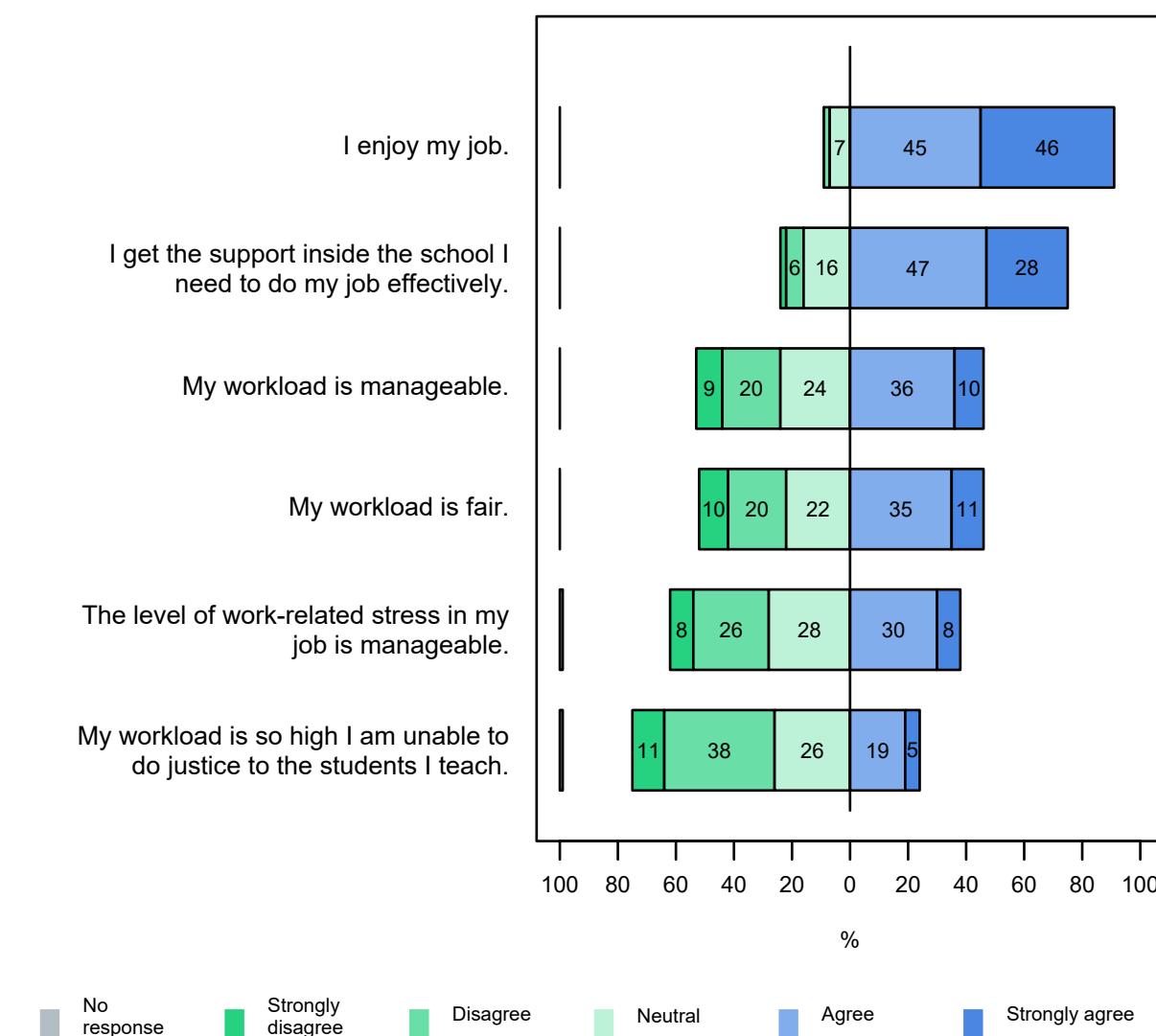
- classroom teacher (86%)
- senior teacher / syndicate leader (19%)
- associate teacher for student teachers on practicum (14%)
- mentor/tutor teacher (12%)
- subject specialist (11%)
- staff rep on the school board (8%)
- curriculum/syndicate leader—English/Literacy (7%)
- curriculum/syndicate leader—Maths (6%)
- Kāhui Ako within-school teacher (6%)
- special education needs co-ordinator (SENCO) (6%)
- assistant principal (5%)
- Kāhui Ako across-schools teacher (2%).

Surveys were completed by somewhat greater proportions of teachers with a home class in the Year 1 to Year 6 range (18% to 25% each) than those with a home class of New Entrants / Year 0 (14%) and Year 7 and 8 students (2% each). A small proportion (8%) of teachers had no home class.

Teachers have high job enjoyment but issues with workload

Job enjoyment continued to be high among primary teachers (see Figure 60). There was less agreement that they get the support inside the school that they need to do their job effectively, and less than half thought their workload was fair or manageable, or that they could manage the level of work-related stress in their job. A quarter thought their workload was so high that they could not do justice to the students they taught. This is a very similar picture to 2016 and 2013.

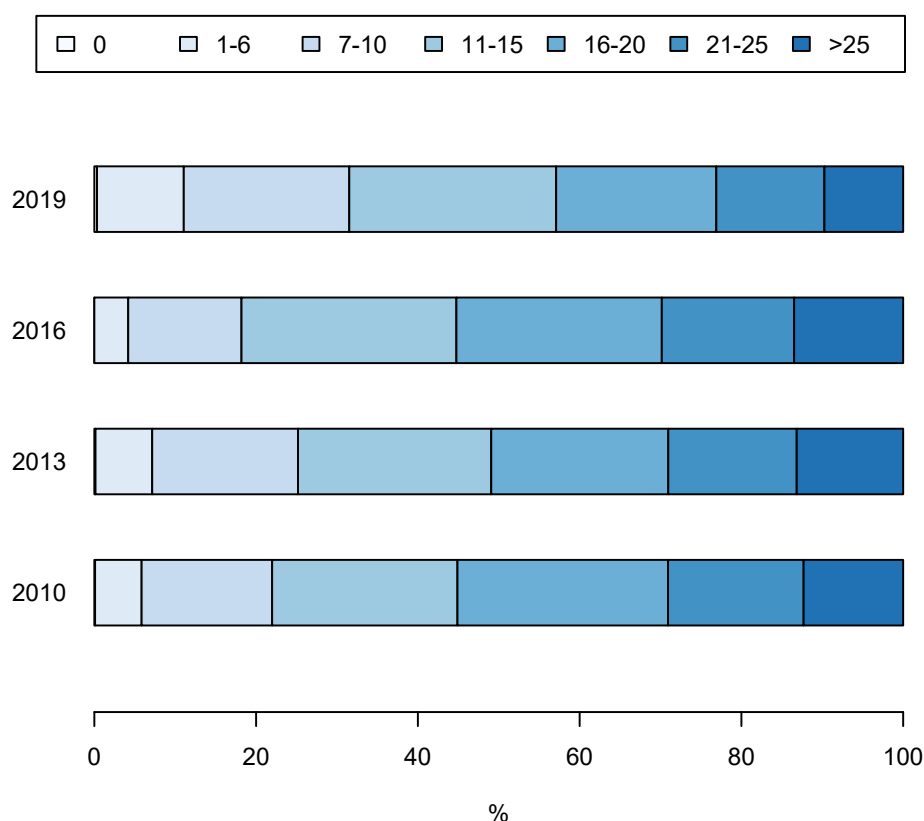
FIGURE 60 Teachers' job satisfaction, workload and in-school support (n = 620)



Just over two-thirds said their morale as a teacher was 'good' (46%) or 'very good' (22%). Morale was satisfactory for 23%. Nine percent reported 'poor' or 'very poor' morale. This is much the same as in 2016 and 2013.

Almost all teachers work beyond their timetabled hours, with almost half working another 15 hours a week or more. In 2019, more teachers reported that they worked an additional 10 or fewer hours a week than in 2016 (31%, compared with 18% in 2016, and comparable to 27% in 2013). Somewhat fewer reported working more than 20 hours more than their timetabled hours (23%, compared with 30% in 2016, and 29% in 2013)—see Figure 61.

FIGURE 61 Hours per week teachers reported spending on their work, outside timetabled hours; 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019



Most teachers want a better balance in their work and more support

Table 10 shows the desired changes in their work that teachers chose from the items we have included for some time in the national survey, and patterns over time.

In 2019, around two-thirds wanted to reduce administration/paperwork, have more support staff, reduce class size, have more non-contact time, and more time to work with individual students. Interest in having more support staff, more non-contact time, and reducing class size has increased since 2013.

The proportion of teachers who want more support with adapting NZC for students with additional learning needs has increased over time from 12% in 2013, to 19% in 2016, to 35% in 2019. There was also more interest in having better access generally to useful curriculum resources and external curriculum advice, and a slight increase in interest in reducing curriculum coverage or size.

Increasing attention to the value of working with parents and whānau as partners in children’s learning is evident—31% of teachers now identify more time to work with parents and whānau as a desired change in their work, increasing from 16% in 2013.

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Teachers also showed more interest in having more support to learn effective ways of managing behaviour—19% identified this as a change they would like, increasing from 11% in 2016 and 2013.

The 2019 collective contract negotiations and associated industrial action saw increases in teacher pay. Better pay was still identified by 49% in the national survey, which went out after the negotiations had concluded, but this was lower than in 2016.

TABLE 10 What primary and intermediate teachers would change about their work—2013, 2016, and 2019

Change desired	2013 (n = 713) %	2016 (n = 771) %	2019 (n = 620) %
Reduce administration/paperwork	74	71	66
More support staff	50	59	64
Reduce class size	52	59	64
More noncontact time for preparation, etc.	58	62	64
More time to work with individual students	60	56	63
More time to reflect/plan/share ideas	55	54	54
More time to design relevant local learning activities	48	46	50
Better pay	54	59	49
More noncontact time to work with other teachers	44	50	49
Reduce assessment workload	43	46	44
More classroom resources	40	36	43
Reduce the number of initiatives at any one time	46	44	43
More support for me to adapt NZC for students with additional learning needs	12	19	35
More time to work with parents and whānau	16	21	31
Reduce curriculum coverage/size	23	25	30
More sharing of knowledge/ideas with teachers from other schools	39	31	29
Better access to useful curriculum resources	22	19	27
Reduce pace of change	27	23	26
More advice available when assessment results show gaps in student learning	25	20	23
More appreciation of my work by school leaders	23	21	22
More support for me to learn effective ways of managing behaviour	11	11	19
Better access to external curriculum advice	16	11	18

Ten percent of teachers indicated there were other things they would change about their work. Changes they would like include more support generally for students' learning, wellbeing, and behaviour needs.

Interest in reducing their assessment workload was greatest among decile 1–2 school teachers (61%). Wanting more classroom resources was also linked to school decile, increasing from 35% of decile 9–10 school teachers to 54% of decile 1–2 school teachers.

Rewarding but over-demanding: Insight from teachers' comments about their work

Almost a third of the teachers ($n = 172$) gave us comments about their work as a teacher. Enjoyment of teaching and commitment to children's learning was most voiced—alongside an equal number of comments about having too great and broad a workload, the stress of this, and the difficulty of achieving a work–life balance. Quite often these two feelings were voiced together.

Other themes in the comments included: challenges around meeting all students' needs; feeling that teaching was not valued as a profession; and insufficient input into, and support for, curriculum and policy changes.

The focus of the comments was similar to 2016.

Some illustrations:

I really do enjoy teaching. I love the magic of the children. BUT the paperwork and crammed curriculum have taken away the opportunities to explore and experiment. School trips are very few because of the paperwork and restrictions.

It's a fun job but it doesn't have the respect in the community that it once did. So many social issues impact our tamariki and a teacher needs general life skills to be a social worker, counsellor, dietician, health worker, first aider. It's rewarding and draining every day.

I love my job but work 4 days a week so that I have 1 day at home for all the admin and planning. It doesn't seem too fair to only get paid for 4 days but work 5. I do it for my own mental well-being

I love being in the classroom teaching my students, but the downsides of too much paperwork/assessment and dealing with parents who think I have only 1 child in my class of 29 gets overwhelming.

I love working with children but I don't enjoy the expectations and workload. Too much is put on teachers to be everything for students. I have a young family and I feel stressed and grumpy when I get home. This is not fair to my family!

Teaching, learning and working with children is fun yet challenging. The biggest issue at present is the level of anxiety many kids face at school. We need to address learning expectations so that the children are challenged but not overwhelmed.

I wish I had the time/resources/support to help the children who really need it

It is undervalued by society and the government. It's poorly resourced, especially for children with high learning needs, special or behavioural needs. I feel that I regularly fail children not because of my teaching ability but because I have too many children with too many complex needs in my class and no people to help. Children are missing out year after year.

I would like to see a huge increase in support for students with needs. Real in-class support, not more advisory roles. Waiting lists for health diagnosis reduced (currently we are waiting 18 months for a diagnosis). Ways to identify and support needs for students coming from pre-school to school. Most of my workload is adapting programs for kids with needs and then trying to cater for several high needs students at the same time as teaching the rest of the class.

I am a passionate progressive teacher who works collaboratively with colleagues to ensure our tamariki get the best education possible. The learning difficulties/behavioral difficulties that are becoming more and more common today, require us to adjust, reflect and dig deeper for strategies that are relevant, sustaining and appropriate for this century.

The culture of each school can be so different from each other and a teacher has no way of knowing until they are part of the staff, what it will be like for them as a teacher there. Not all things can be addressed, so it's vital that the school you are in fits with your philosophy of teaching.

Teachers' career plans remain stable, with more teachers seeing they can progress their career within their school

Teachers were asked to indicate their career plans for the next 5 years (see Table 11). Overall, the picture is much the same as in 2016, with some reduction in the proportion intending to take on a leadership role with management units, or apply for a study award, sabbatical, or fellowship. Forty percent of teachers planned to continue as they were in 2019.

TABLE 11 Teachers' career plans for the next 5 years—2013, 2016, and 2019⁴⁵

What teachers plan to do	2013 (n = 713) %	2016 (n = 771) %	2019 (n = 620)
Continue as I am now	35	38	40
Build my leadership skills	*	*	23
Change schools	19	15	17
Take on a leadership role with management units	28	24	16
Increase level of responsibility within teaching (e.g., Kāhui Ako role, curriculum leader role)*	*	*	14
Begin or complete a postgrad qualification	17	14	12
Apply for a study award/sabbatical/fellowship	18	17	12
Take on a middle management role ⁺	*	*	12
Change careers within education	11	10	11
Retire	10	9	11
Take on a senior management role ⁺	*	*	10
Retrain/change to a career outside education	8	9	10
Leave teaching for personal reasons (e.g., travel, family)	9	10	9
Not sure	6	7	9
Get a permanent position	8	10	9
Other	3	4	9
Get a part-time position	5	6	6
Get a full-time position	3	4	3

* Not asked.

+ In 2016, 24% of teachers indicated they planned to 'increase their level of responsibility'. In 2019, this was split into three separate items to give more specific information about what teachers intended to do.

45 Teachers could give multiple responses here.

In another question, 58% of the teachers thought that they could progress their career within their current school, an increase from the 43% who thought this in 2016. We asked this year about career progression beyond the school, and 66% thought that was available.

Eleven percent of teachers responding expressed interest in becoming a principal in the future, with a further 19% unsure about this. Sixty-eight percent had no interest in becoming a principal. This was much the same as in 2016.

Summary

Comparison of 2019 teacher responses with those from 2013 and 2016 show that workload issues for teachers are far from new. Enjoyment of the work remains high, but it is undercut by increasing expectations that are often not matched by resourcing, support, or time.

A real test of the changes arising from Ministry–union Accord and the Government's work programme following the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce recommendations that addressed key aspects of teacher support and how schools work will be whether we see changes in this national survey picture of teachers' experiences.