

# SUPPORTING YOUR WORKLOAD AS AN EARLY CAREER TEACHER

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I write this article as a proud member of the teaching profession. This is no less true today than it was when I first stepped foot in the classroom as a primary teacher back in 2002. Admittedly, it was a different classroom. The challenges teachers face today are different. Regardless, the opportunity to shape young minds and have an impact on their future is just as exciting today as it ever has been. You are entering a hugely rewarding and satisfying profession. Does it have its challenges? Yes. Are these insurmountable? No.

One challenge that, quite rightly, has received considerable attention across all swathes of the education sector recently concerns workload. Whilst this is relevant to all involved in education, it is of particular relevance to teachers in the early stages of their career; a government study (Higton et al., 2017) revealed that teachers in the first five years of their career work longer hours than their more experienced peers. Of course, it's important to acknowledge here that teachers' experiences of workload are unique, and different issues may arise in specific phases or year groups.

Since December 2017, I've been in the privileged position of being seconded to the Department for Education as an advisor on workload, and have witnessed first-hand the unflinching determination to address this issue. The aspiration of the government is for teachers to be confident to support their learners in the most effective way throughout their careers, whilst ensuring that their workload is manageable and sustainable. Workload isn't just a government or Ofsted issue though; it is the responsibility of all involved in the profession – ITE providers, leaders, governors and teachers themselves – to tackle this issue and challenge practice that causes unnecessary workload burdens.

Whilst there is no silver bullet to solving the complex issue of workload, there are some important strategies in place to support you in the early stages of your career. Tanya Ovenden-Hope and Kate Brimacombe describe how to secure your work-life balance on p.87, and Marie Hamer explains three key steps for managing your time effectively on p.76. It's also important to be aware of the myths that can exacerbate workload and challenge them.

## **Challenging workload myths**

Respondents to the 2014 Workload Challenge said that one of the main drivers of unnecessary workload was accountability and perceived pressures of Ofsted (Gibson et al., 2015). Whilst I am not dismissing that this has been an issue in the recent past, I would contend that this isn't the case now. In her speech to the Association of College Leaders (ASCL), the Chief Inspector of Schools went so far as to say that 'endless data cuts, triple marking, 10 page lesson plans, and, worst of all, mocksteds are a distraction from the core purpose of education' (Spielman, 2018). The idea then that certain activities 'must be carried out because Ofsted asks for them' is simply misguided. If you haven't already done so, I'd suggest reading the guidance by Ofsted on myths associated with inspections. Some takeaway points include:

- Ofsted are not interested in the amount, frequency or form that marking may take. They are only interested in how marking and feedback promote pupil progress.
- Ofsted do not wish to see written evidence of oral feedback being provided to pupils. The impact of this feedback should be evident in the pupils' work itself.
- Ofsted are only interested in the effectiveness of planning – not the format that it is presented in nor the level of detail included. Fautley and Savage would agree with this. They contend that whilst planning is an essential component of any teacher's practice, 'there is a myth among new teachers that the longer spent planning a lesson, the more successful it will be' (Fautley and Savage, 2013). They go on to highlight the ramifications of this: 'teachers who have spent so long planning that when they come to teach they are already exhausted!'

The key message to remember is that Ofsted do not want teachers to undertake any additional work purely if the reason is related to preparing for an inspection.

### **Government commitment to reduce unnecessary workload burdens**

Since the 2014 Workload Challenge, the government set out an extensive programme of action to address the complex issues that have led to unnecessary teacher workload. If you haven't already had a chance to, make sure you review and consider the recommendations outlined in the three independent reports on marking, planning and resourcing, and data management, and look at the pamphlet and poster produced in partnership with the teaching unions and Ofsted. The Department also used the DfE Teaching Blog as a vehicle to share examples of ways in which schools have addressed workload; they are certainly worth reading and can be accessed, along with the reports and posters, via the DfE's reducing teacher workload policy page.

I hope that in reading this article you realise that teaching doesn't have to be a 24/7 profession. There are ways to positively impact on pupil progress AND reduce unnecessary workload. Remember, teaching is an amazing profession and the impact you have will be considerable. I wish you every success in your career.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- **Use the advice in this publication, and from your colleagues, to put strategies in place to ensure that your workload is manageable and sustainable.**
- **Remember that Ofsted do not want teachers to undertake any additional work purely to prepare for an inspection.**
- **The government is committed to reducing unnecessary workload burdens – they update progress on this on their policy webpage.**

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