PRIMARY TEACHING
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PRIMARY TEACHING

EDITED BY

CATHERINE CARDEN

LEARNING & TEACHING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS TODAY

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WHAT ARE THE REALITIES OF BEING A TEACHER IN THE UK TODAY?

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**KEY WORDS**

- Academies
- Accountability
- Assessment
- Faith schools
- Local education authorities (LEA)
- National Curriculum
- Ofsted
- Standardised Assessment tests (SATs)
- Teaching unions
- Work-life balance
What are the realities of being a teacher in the UK today?

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will explore the different aspects of being a teacher in the UK today. We begin by looking at different school systems currently prevailing in England and Wales, and move on to looking at the National Curriculum, a teacher’s roles and responsibilities, and how they are assessed. We will also look at other people a teacher has to work with, and briefly, at safeguarding responsibilities. We examine support for teachers, including unions, and how to maintain a good work–life balance. Finally, we compare a selection of countries’ teacher training requirements to see how different they are from England and Wales.

HOW IS EDUCATION ORGANISED IN THE UK?

The education system in England and Wales has undergone several periods of transformational change. The 1944 Education Act introduced the tripartite system of grammar schools, technical colleges and secondary moderns, parts of which system are still in operation in some areas of the UK today. It was based around the 11+ examination, so-called as it was taken at the age of 11 in the final year of primary school, and it determined which secondary school you would go to. Some educationalists want to return to this system.

Grammar school: a state-maintained secondary school providing an education with an academic bias for children who are selected by the 11+ examination, teachers’ reports, or other means.

Technical college: a college to study arts and technical subjects often required for a particular job.

Secondary modern: a secondary school for those who failed the 11+, and where more attention was paid to practical skills.

Comprehensive school: a secondary school for children of all abilities from the same district.

The next big change in the organisation of educational establishments was the introduction of comprehensive schools in 1965. This system was not based on selection, but on geographical area. Often it meant that grammar and secondary moderns were put together. Margaret Thatcher stopped this amalgamation being compulsory in 1970, but most schools had changed by then. This does, however, explain the continued existence of the two conflicting and apparently incompatible systems, side by side, in some areas of the country.
3 What are the realities of being a teacher in the UK today?

CRITICAL QUESTION

What has been the effect of parental choice on primary schools in the UK? Do you agree with it?

In all the cases above, primary schools functioned as what were called ‘feeder schools’. A cluster of primary schools would ‘feed’ the local secondary school. Going to a particular primary school then would mean you knew which secondary school you would go to. Thatcher changed this by allowing ‘parental choice’ in the 1988 Education Act, meaning that parents could now choose a primary school from outside their area. This continues to the present day.

The next big change began in 2000, with the introduction of academies. Up till then, the country had been divided into local education authorities (LEAs) based on local government areas, and the LEAs had been run by local councils. The academy structure took control of these schools away from the LEAs and made them directly responsible to government, from where they received some of their funding.

Academies: state-maintained but independently run schools in England set up with the help of outside sponsors.

Free schools: are part of the academisation process, and can be set up by faith groups, parents and education charities by an application to the Department of Education.

CRITICAL QUESTION

How has the academisation of primary schools affected the education system?

Academies are self-governing and may get extra support from private or corporate sponsors. Some academies are part of academy chains or multi-academy trusts (MATs) where numbers of academies are run by the same trust. At present, the academisation of the education system at both primary and secondary level is continuing, although forced academisation only happens currently if a school is graded 4, or fail.

None of the systems that have been tried, and continue to be tried by central government, are wholly supported across a wide range of thinking, and all have flaws. Different political viewpoints are worth investigating to see the variety of opinions about them.
3 What are the realities of being a teacher in the UK today?

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM?

We are establishing a national curriculum for basic subjects. It is vital that children master essential skills: reading, writing, spelling, grammar, arithmetic; and that they understand basic science and technology. And for good teachers this will provide a foundation on which they can build with their own creative skill and professionalism.

(Margaret Thatcher, 1987)

CRITICAL QUESTION

‘Instead of a national curriculum for education, what is really needed is an individual curriculum for every child.’ Do you agree?

Until the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, teachers in England and Wales had a great deal of autonomy over which subjects they taught, and how they taught them. The National Curriculum changed that. For the first time, teachers in England and Wales had to follow a set of prescribed subjects, detailed down to individual targets and levels. It saw the introduction of core and foundation subjects – core being English, maths and science, and foundation being everything else – history, geography, music, art, design technology, PE and modern foreign languages with Religious Education still an anomaly, as it is not on the National Curriculum but still a legal obligation. All state schools are expected to follow the National Curriculum, although academies, faith schools and free schools are exempt. They are, however, expected to follow a broad and balanced curriculum.
The beginning of the National Curriculum document states:

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Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based, and which promotes
the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and pre-
pares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.
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(DfE, Statutory guidance, 2014)

This is a clear statement of intent for the National Curriculum’s implementation. The breadth of the curriculum is meant to prepare students for their life and work after school, but also to make them into model citizens. Student teachers today are trained to be aware of spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of learning (SMSC), and to make sure that their teaching reflects this.

**KEY READING**


This is the full National Curriculum in detail.

www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum


Now 10 years old, the Rose Report is a good background to all the different aspects of a primary school.


The National Curriculum divides the primary school into 3 stages: Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS), which is nursery and Reception classes, Key Stage 1 (KS1), which is Year 1 and Year 2, and Key Stage 2 (KS2), which is Years 3-6. KS2 is often divided into upper and lower. Originally, at the end of every key stage there were standardised assessment tests, or SATs, that were nationally administered. These aimed to give a national picture of attainment. At the same time, the introduction of a league table of schools, based on their SATs results, allowed for the comparison of schools in the same area, and indeed nationwide. These league tables have now been abolished. Currently, the government, responding to parental pressure, has promised to remove KS1 SATs by 2022, but other SATs remain.

**CRITICAL QUESTION**

Do you agree that English, maths and science are more important than other subjects on the curriculum?
What are the realities of being a teacher in the UK today?

THE BALANCE OF SUBJECTS IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

There is no doubt that the primary school curriculum is usually skewed towards the core subjects, with even science sometimes taking a back seat. As a result, most teacher training will give a good grounding in these subjects. It must be said, though, that the National Curriculum states, as does most research on the subject, that a broad and balanced curriculum is necessary for children to become fully rounded individuals, and that it also is the most effective way to raise standards.

As a result, the foundation subjects play a crucial role in the education of the child. The Chief Inspector of the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted), has recently complained about the constricted curriculum, something that she says schools are offering to children. By this, she means that schools are failing to deliver the foundation subjects in full, and this is being looked at increasingly during an Ofsted inspection.

Two subjects that are not included in the National Curriculum are Religious Education (RE) and Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE). RE is a legal requirement in schools, and the syllabus is worked out locally, so that it can be responsive to the religions represented in an individual area. PSHE is fitted into the curriculum as and when there is time – different schools will prioritise it differently. There are moves to make both part of the National Curriculum, to give them the same status as other subjects, but at present only Relationship and Sex Education (RSE), a part of PSHE, is.

WHAT DOES A TEACHER’S WORK LIFE ACTUALLY INVOLVE?

Almost all primary schools have teaching hours from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., although individual schools vary. This variation is allowable so long as they are open for 190 days over the school year. Academies and free schools can set their own hours. There is, however, an obvious expectation that teachers are in before 9 a.m. and stay after 3 p.m. Student teachers are usually asked to be in school between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Most teachers will divide their work between pupil-facing work and paperwork. The two are obviously linked, the paperwork generally informing the teaching. The National Curriculum documents inform the content of the planning, with each year and subject having its own objective. Usually in a school, planning is done in teams, and broad themes are set for the individual class teacher to follow. If the school has two or more classes in every year (two form entry), the teachers usually work together in planning and other support. This is the first of many sets of relationships for a teacher to negotiate.

THE PEOPLE IN A TEACHER’S DAY

Behind every great teacher is a great teaching assistant.

(Anon.)

It can seem sometimes that a teacher is autonomous, in sole charge of their classroom, but in reality there are many different sets of people involved in their working life. First, with them in the classroom, there are
teaching assistants (TAs) who support the learning in class. Sometimes these are employed to look after particular children with special needs, but often they are general support staff that a teacher must include in any planning. While schools vary in the way in which they use TAs, the class teacher usually determines their daily tasks.

**KEY READING**


Part of the teachers’ toolkit series, the EEF document explains how best to use TAs, though it is a website worth browsing thoroughly.


Each school will also have staff responsible for different areas of the curriculum – subject leads and special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs). These staff members are responsible for the work in their specialist areas and will inform the class teacher of school policy, new developments and sometimes of new ways of working. Some schools have leads for different areas – creative curriculum leads, for example, who inform the class teacher among other things, of different school-wide events. Some schools still have home–school liaison teachers, part of whose job is to involve parents in the school life of their children.

At the top of the school hierarchy is the head teacher and, depending on the size of the school, deputy heads too. These form the senior management team (SMT), and determine the ethos and policies of the school, alongside the governing body. In a normal day, an ordinary class teacher will not be involved with the governors, but the head teacher is usually in school every day. Academies’ and free schools’ daily management will be broadly similar but will also have the involvement of sponsors, faith groups or special interest groups depending on the make-up of the academy.

Alongside these school-based staff, the individual class teacher has a role with the parents of the children in their class. It is a cliché to say that parents are the child’s first teacher, but it is also very true, and research shows that involving parents in school work of all different kinds, not just in the home, improves learning outcomes. Meeting and greeting, sending regular communications home and building relationships is, therefore, a crucial part of a teacher’s role. Parents can also play an important role within the class, listening to children read or helping on school trips, for example. It is worthwhile mentioning too that this liaison also may include any foster parents, social workers working with families and other support workers.

**SAFEGUARDING**

This brings the discussion on to safeguarding. A crucial part of a teacher’s role is safeguarding the children in their care. This is discussed more fully in the following chapters, but it is a vitally important part of the teacher’s core tasks. Usually, the teacher will refer any children seemingly at risk to the safeguarding lead in school – the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) – so the initial job a teacher has to do is to make sure they know who that is, and also what the safeguarding policy in the school is.
3 What are the realities of being a teacher in the UK today?

**BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT**

**INTRINSIC VS. EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION**

Primary schools are very good at extrinsic motivation – external rewards such as points or stars that add up to bigger rewards and attempt to modify behaviour. Intrinsic motivation, which is, for example, one of the teaching standards – 4b. a love of learning – is more difficult, but research shows, longer lasting.

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**CRITICAL QUESTION**

Do you think intrinsic or extrinsic motivation is best for behaviour management?

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Aside from any teaching and planning, one of the aspects of teaching that often causes concern, particularly for the new teacher, is behaviour management. This can be part of the pressure that builds on teachers on top of paperwork and teaching. Class sizes are usually no more than 30 pupils, although budgetary constraints mean that this can be increased. A total of 30:1 seems like a daunting ratio for the new teacher and something like a con trick that the children will rumble. There has been a lot of research into behaviour management, and several reports, particularly in recent years the Bennett Report (2017), explaining how best to achieve it. It may be some comfort to know that every teacher has gone through this, and most manage. All teacher training will include behaviour management and there are many sources of advice – see the end of the chapter for some pointers.

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**KEY READING**

*Creating a Culture: How school leaders can optimise behaviour* - Tom Bennett, DfE, 2017.

This is the most up-to-date report on behaviour in British schools. It also offers a lot of advice.


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Above all, the teams that you work in will be more than willing to offer advice. Children are not, however much they may seem to be, all-knowing monsters, and always respond to humour and clear boundaries. Individual schools usually have policies to follow on praise and rewards, which also help, and will also have policies for punishment too. All these will help with your behaviour management. The main thing to remember is to ask for help and guidance. Never allow it to become a huge problem before you approach others.
3 What are the realities of being a teacher in the UK today?

HOW ARE TEACHERS ASSESSED?

Student teachers are assessed by both their training institution and the school they train in, and are assessed against the Teachers’ Standards, which are in two parts, the first about teaching in the classroom, the second about personal and professional conduct. There are eight standards in Part One, all subdivided into micro standards, and they address every aspect of life inside the classroom. You can see the full set of standards in the Appendices at the end of this book. Remember that these are what you will be able to do when you are trained – they can look daunting, but the purpose of your training is to get you to this standard.

Part Two of the standards make interesting reading. It is the part of a teacher’s job that all teachers understand is necessary, but one that those outside the teaching profession rarely acknowledge, unless the standards are broken for any reason. A recent introduction is the standard on British values, a present government initiative. British values consist of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. These need to be implicitly and explicitly taught in lessons and will form a part of your planning.

Contentious in some communities, Ofsted incorporates an analysis of how the children are being taught the values in their inspection.

CRITICAL QUESTION

What do you see as British values? Are they the same as Ofsted’s list? Can you see any issues with the term?

Once employed in a school, the Teachers’ Standards are still used as a benchmark to assess teachers. Most teachers will be observed regularly by the SMT in their school, though the frequency of these observations are usually dictated by school policy often negotiated with the various teaching unions. Many of these observations are not necessarily someone sitting in your classroom and watching you teach, as many schools now use different methods to reach conclusions about a teacher’s performance. Some schools look at or video pupils in your lesson to see how your teaching is having effect; some schools favour book scrutiny where children’s workbooks are examined to see if policies are being followed and if the children are making enough progression; still others favour learning walks where, usually, a predetermined set of questions are evidenced. Sometimes the focus is a particular teaching strategy; sometimes the focus is staff development.

SATs results, and the SATs subjects, are often crucial to the assessment of teachers’ performance. Many in the teaching profession find these to be an unfair marker, as results can be dependent on the cohort, not the teaching, and one set of students in one year may perform much better than another simply due to their backgrounds.
What are the realities of being a teacher in the UK today?

Done in a supportive manner, these observations and assessments can help teachers reflect on their performance and improve, which is clearly the intention. There is no doubt that at first they can be very stressful, but once they can be seen simply as a means to get even better, and sometimes to show how well different aspects of your class are working, they become part of the teacher’s daily life. The teaching unions have policies on observation that it is always good to have read.

THE OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION, CHILDREN’S SERVICES AND SKILLS (OFSTED)

An Ofsted inspection is usually by a team of inspectors. They look primarily at a selection of teaching, at data around learning, and at the management of the school. The schools are graded in different areas, and overall, after what is usually a three-day inspection. They are graded on a 4-point scale: 1 (Outstanding), 2 (Good), 3 (Requires improvement, or RI) and 4 (Inadequate). You will have seen the Ofsted banners outside schools, displaying their judgements – if they are good.

The inspection reports are published on Ofsted’s and the school’s website so that interested parties can read them in detail. Any school judged inadequate will be put into ‘special measures’ and until recently was forced into academisation. Now, they are given special support and more frequent inspections.

Ofsted has recently moved to reduce the fear and burden of inspections on schools. Their recent workload document makes it clear that schools should not make special efforts in advance of an inspection, something that made many teachers laugh hollowly. Until the consequences of a bad inspection are reduced, it is unlikely that many schools will obey Ofsted’s suggestions.

HOW DO TEACHERS ACHIEVE A GOOD WORK–LIFE BALANCE? IS IT EVEN POSSIBLE?

Work life balance is about adjusting working patterns and policies so that everyone – regardless of age, race or gender, can find a rhythm that enables them more easily to combine work with their other responsibilities or aspirations. (Work-life balance toolkit for education professionals, ATL, 2017)

So, how do teachers manage their workload? You will have heard of many teachers leaving the profession and of the stress that those who remain are under. At the time of writing, the government has been putting extra money into schools for schemes to protect children’s mental health – but what about teachers?

A good analogy to make clear the importance of looking after your mental health is being on an aeroplane listening to the safety talk. They always tell you to put an oxygen mask on yourself before any children in your care, because the children will need you to be strong and able to look after them. The same applies in a classroom. It is pointless wearing yourself out looking after children if you then have to give up.
The teaching unions are aware of the pressures and the new National Education Union is at the time of writing running a workload campaign, with the hashtag #make1change. There is a workload tracker, to manage a work–life balance, and advice on how to deal with this within an increasingly stretched and burdened system. It has seen workplace meetings set up well-being committees, and marking policies changed to lighten the load, among many different ideas.

#make1change is a good place to look for tips to manage your workload. Some people have a never work past 8 p.m. rule, others never work on a Friday, others that at least one day of the weekend is free from work. Some use the famous 5-minute lesson plan from @teachertoolkit. Another increasingly popular idea is to learn mindfulness or meditation.

### KEY READING


Work–life balance toolkit for education professionals (ATL).

Above are four different documents regarding workload: three from the government and the last from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers Union (ATL). All are interesting background reading, with the ATL document being practical advice.

Schools manage workload best when they work together as a whole. John Tomsett (2015) says:

> Ultimately, the DfE can do very little to reduce workload – it is up to school leaders to set a culture where staff are cared for, well-trained and valued and policies are based on common sense and the principle that we shouldn't be doing things unless they clearly help improve student outcomes.

The best head teachers will do this. Perhaps one of the best ways to ensure your work–life balance is to choose your first school carefully. Ask questions, talk to teachers who work there. Find out if this is a stressed or a supportive school.

The fact remains that teacher workload is an issue that has been at the forefront of professional dissatisfaction for a long time. Many teachers are leaving the profession because of it, and others are sure that it is impossible to achieve. The recent publications by the DfE show that they have begun to take this seriously, and the campaigns by teachers’ unions are adding to the pressure. It is difficult to fight a system as an individual teacher, but the profession now has a real chance to make a real difference to a teacher’s working life if they work together.
What are the realities of being a teacher in the UK today?

TEACHING AROUND THE WORLD

While the situation varies greatly from country to country, around the world teaching is seen as a degree-based profession. There has to be a recognition of different circumstances – in rural India, for example, many teachers are not qualified; in Nigeria, there is a three-year A-level route into teaching, but these are the exceptions. Finland is rare in that it only allows Master's-level teachers, as does France, but the most common route is at least a three-year bachelor's degree. In India, where there are many rural schools with teachers who have no qualifications, the government have introduced a minimum requirement of a B.Ed to be a teacher and allowed unqualified teachers a five-year period to gain the degree or lose their jobs.

CRITICAL QUESTION

Is it right that in many countries, teaching early years requires lower qualifications?

In the USA, the situation is complicated by a number of factors, such as state mandates, years of experience, the age of students, and school subject. Most states require a bachelor's degree, and often part of the degree is a teacher training programme, with an internship of 8–12 weeks following in a local school. Each teacher then needs a licence and state certification, unless they work in a private school where this is not required.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- There are different types of school in the UK, including state schools and academies. All provide different experiences for the teacher.
- A teacher has many different roles to negotiate during their work day – planning the delivery of the appropriate level of the National Curriculum, differentiated where necessary, managing the behaviour of their students, and ensuring that safeguarding procedures are known and used.
- A teacher also has to liaise with many different groups of people over a working day: TAs, parents, other members of staff, the SMT, and many others.
- Teachers are assessed against the Teachers' Standards.
- Ofsted is the inspecting body for UK educational institutions and can grade a school between 1 and 4, 1 being excellent, 4 being a fail.
- Balancing this and a life outside work is a challenge. This is now being addressed by the profession, as the number of teachers leaving due to unrealistic expectations is at critical levels.

ASSIGNMENTS

If you are writing an assignment on the realities of being a teacher today, you may want to:

- consider what makes children learn - what motivates them?
3 What are the realities of being a teacher in the UK today?

- consider the different approaches to inclusion in a classroom.

What steps would you take to manage your workload?

How do you look after children's mental health while also looking after yourself?

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USEFUL WEBSITES

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www.teachtortoolkit.co.uk/ (accessed 18/2/18).


TIMELINE OF
CHILDHOOD
LINKED TO THEORY

DURING THE MIDDLE AGES
Aries (1962) claims during this period of history childhood was not an important life stage and society did not have images clearly depicting children. However, much of the art work depicts children as versions of small adults in society at a slightly older age rather than babies or toddlers. Children were portrayed with others, not alone and perhaps because of their very low life expectancy not something to get attached to. Cunningham (1995) suggests that during this period mothers not only recognised the first seven years of life but were encouraged to bring up their children with kindness and they mourned their loss.

DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
Rousseau cited in Hendrick (1997) argued that childhood was a valued stage of life and emphasised the natural goodness and virtuousness of children. This ideology was lost during the industrial revolution but then revived by social reformers who debated that children should be protected from adult realities of the world.

DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Mass education influenced society’s perception as it was used to shape and mould pupils’ behaviour whose attendance was compulsory (Hendrick, 1997).

DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Successive governments regarded children as society’s most valuable assets, placed them top of their agenda and passed laws to secure their proper development by the provision and monitoring of services. Children still viewed as dependent on adults and the state (Hendrick, 1997).

PREVIOUS GENERATIONS HAD THEIR CONCEPT OF BEING ‘A CHILD’ WHICH DIFFERS FROM THAT WHICH WE HOLD TODAY (ARCHARD, 1993)