

Methodology

Performance Tracker 2026: Schools

General

This chapter examines schools in England (education being devolved) serving pupils aged 5–16.* It primarily covers state-funded mainstream schools, including local authority-maintained schools and academies. However, it also touches on special and independent schools.

Analysis is undertaken at a national, regional, upper-tier local authority, trust and school level. The City of London and Isles of Scilly are excluded from all local authority-level analysis as a result of their small population sizes.

Throughout the chapter we refer to both academic school years and financial years. We refer to school years as 20XX–YY, and financial years as 20XX/YY.

Institute for Government interviews

To inform the chapter, we conducted 20 semi-structured interviews between March and August 2026 with policy experts and staff working in government, schools and trusts, representative bodies and the third sector.

Deflating spending data

To estimate the real cost of public spending, we deflate government spending figures using the GDP deflators published by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) in the Economic and Fiscal Outlook from March 2026.¹ To better reflect the underlying inflation conditions present in 2020/21, we estimate our own figures by generating a mid-point that averages across values from 2019/20 and 2021/22. We deflate spending figures in our financial analysis across the entire chapter to 2026/27 prices – unless stated otherwise.

In cases where we calculate real-terms figures that relate to individuals, such as teacher pay, we use the CPI rather than the GDP deflator. The CPI that we use also comes from the OBR's Economic and Fiscal Outlook from March 2026. Because the

* With the exception of some analysis on teacher workforce, which also covers Further Education. The government's headline target on the teacher workforce cannot be broken down by sector or phase.

OBR publishes CPI forecasts on a quarterly rather than monthly basis, we approximate academic-year inflation by averaging CPI from Q3 of one year to Q2 of the next (October to September).

Regressions

Interpreting regression results

Throughout the chapter, we use univariate and multivariate regression analysis to identify relationships between variables. These regressions do not let us say that one variable causes another, but they do let us see if a high level in one variable tends to occur with a high or low level in another.

Regression tables included in this chapter should be interpreted as follows:

- The dependent variable (the factor being measured) is listed along the top of the table. There is always exactly one dependent variable per regression.
- The independent variables (the factor we are testing the effect of on the dependent variable) are listed in the 'Independent variable' column. There may be more than one independent variable per regression.
- At the intersection between an independent and dependent variable is the coefficient on that independent variable. This shows the unit change in the dependent variable associated with a one-unit higher independent variable, holding all other independent variables constant.
- We use asterisks to represent the level of significance of an independent variable, as determined by the p-value from our regressions. Three asterisks signify the highest level of significance and one asterisk the lowest.
 - The thresholds are as follows:
 - * Weakly significant: $0.01 < p < 0.05$
 - ** Moderately significant: $0.001 < p < 0.01$
 - *** Highly significant: $p < 0.001$
 - A dot signifies that a variable has fallen just short of significance ($0.05 < p < 0.1$).
- We also report the R^2 for univariate Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions (those with only one independent variable). This is the proportion of the variation in the dependent variable that can be explained by variation in the independent variable.
 - We classify R^2 s as indicative of:
 - No relationship, when $R^2=0$
 - A weak relationship, when $0 < R^2 < 0.1$
 - A moderate relationship, when $0.1 \leq R^2 < 0.35$
 - A strong relationship, when $R^2 \geq 0.35$

Economy-wide vacancies, and teacher recruitment/retention

We ran three regressions, each with the number of vacancies in the UK between 2010–11 and 2024–25* as the independent variable, and three different dependent variables covering state-funded schools in 2010–11 and 2024–25:

- The number of postgraduate initial teacher trainees recruited into secondary schools in England, as a proportion of the government's target for England
- The number of teachers leaving secondary schools in England (excluding teachers leaving due to retirement or death), as a proportion of qualified secondary teachers in England
- The number of teachers leaving special schools and alternative provision (AP) in England (excluding teachers leaving due to retirement or death), as a proportion of qualified special school and AP teachers in England

We found strong, statistically significant relationships in all three regressions.

Regressions: economy-wide vacancies on teacher recruitment and retention, 2010–11 to 2024–25



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Independent variable	Secondary school initial teacher training performance against targets	Secondary school teacher leaver rate	Special school/AP teacher leaver rate
Economy-wide vacancies	-0.0001*** (0.0000)	0.0000** (0.0000)	0.0000*** (0.0000)
Constant	147.0331*** (5.8254)	5.2984*** (0.7161)	1.7673* (0.6475)
Observations	15	15	15
R ²	0.9065	0.4337	0.8548

Source: Institute for Government analysis of DfE, 'School workforce in England', 2010–11 to 2024–25 and ONS, 'Vacancies and unemployment', September 2010 to August 2026. • Notes: Ordinary least squares regression. The dependent variables are all percentages covering state-funded schools in England. The independent variable is the number of vacancies in the UK. AP stands for alternative provision. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.



Deprivation, and teacher vacancies/temporarily filled teacher posts

We ran two regressions, both with upper-tier local authorities in England as the unit of analysis, with the Isles of Scilly and City of London excluded. Both have the average score from the English indices of deprivation 2025 as the independent variable. The dependent variables are:

- The number of teacher vacancies in state-funded schools as a proportion of teacher posts, in England, 2025–26

* Averaged across the quarters in the academic year.

- The number of temporarily filled teacher posts in state-funded schools as a proportion of teacher posts, in England, 2025–26

We did not find evidence of a relationship, in either regression. We also re-ran the regressions with the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index as the independent variable; with the proportion of children on free school meals as the independent variable; controlling for rurality; and with the rate of vacancies and temporarily filled posts (combined) as the dependent variable. None yielded any notable relationships.

Regressions: deprivation on teacher vacancy rates and temporarily filled teacher posts		
Independent variable	Teacher vacancy rate, 2025–26	Temporarily filled teacher posts, 2025–26
Deprivation, 2025	-0.0017 (0.0021)	0.0034 (0.0026)
Constant	0.3880*** (0.0512)	0.3282*** (0.0625)
Observations	149	149
R ²	0.0045	0.0115

Source: Institute for Government analysis of DfE, 'School workforce in England', 2025–26 and MHCLG, 'English indices of deprivation', 2025. • Notes: Ordinary least squares regression. Upper-tier local authorities in England, excluding the Isles of Scilly and the City of London, are the unit of analysis. The dependent variables are both percentages covering state-funded schools. The independent variable is the average IMD score. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.



Special educational needs and disabilities projections

We use a constant growth assumption to project both the share of pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and the share of pupils attending special schools between 2027 and 2030. Specifically, we assume that the average annual growth rates observed between 2022 and 2026 continue through to 2030: 11.2% for pupils with an EHCP and 5.3% for the proportion attending special schools.

We do not produce projections beyond 2030 as this is the point at which SEND reforms are expected to be fully implemented, making longer-term trends highly uncertain.

Figure SCH 26: Per-pupil funding, actual and projected, 2010/11–2028/29 (2026/27 prices)

To calculate school funding for 5–16 year-olds for 2010/11–2028/29, we used the DfE's 'School funding statistics'² and spending allocations from the 2025 spending review³. We then updated these using more recent announcements on additional

funding for teacher pay grants,⁴ and the additional £3.5bn of high-needs funding in 2028/29.⁵ We deflated these figures to 2026/27 prices, using our standard approach.

To turn this into per-pupil funding, we started with pupil numbers from the 'School funding statistics' release, which provides data up to 2026/27. To forecast these forward to 2028/29, we used FOI data from DfE, which gave us pupil projections for 5–16 year-olds. Specifically, we applied the projected annual percentage changes in the number of full-time equivalent pupils in state-funded schools to the 2026/27 pupil count from the 'School funding statistics' for each year. We then divided funding figures by these pupil number figures.

To estimate what per-pupil funding is excluding funding for SEND reform, we first estimate the yearly allocations of SEND reform funding for 2026/27 through to 2028/29. For £3.6bn of this funding, yearly allocations are known.⁶ We estimated the yearly allocations for the remaining £0.4bn by assuming the same proportion of that funding is going to be released in each year as we know is true for the rest of SEND reform funding. We deflated these figures to 2026/27 prices, and converted them into per-pupil figures, as above. We then subtracted all of this funding from the per-pupil funding figures we had already calculated.*

Finally, we estimated per-pupil funding levels excluding high-needs funding. We used figures on high-needs funding for 5–16 year olds provided by DfE, which cover 2012/13 to 2025/26. These figures are based on published dedicated schools grant (DSG) high-needs block allocations for all ages – these publications did not separate out high-needs funding prior to 2012/13, so similar data is unavailable prior to that date.

A series of additions and deductions are then made to that data, including removing an estimate of post-16 high-needs funding, and adding non-DSG, pre-16 high-needs funding for non-maintained special schools and special/alternative provision free schools, pay and pension grants for high-needs providers, and the budgeted high-needs safety valve funding.

We projected these figures forward to 2026/27 by assuming that the same proportion of overall high-needs funding (given for 2026/27 in the DfE's 'Dedicated schools grant (DSG): 2026 to 2027' guidance⁷) will go to 5–16 year olds

* This assumption that all £4bn of SEND reform funding is flowing through the core schools settlement is based on a footnote from the OBR's March 2026 Economic and Fiscal Outlook: "There are spending announcements in [the 2026 schools white paper] that relate to the years before 2028-29. The Treasury has stated that the additional new spending commitments in the White Paper in the Spending Review period will come from previously unallocated funding, which was set aside within the 2025 Spending Review core schools settlement for SEND reform and so will not have implications for the existing high needs and mainstream (core schools) blocks".

as did on average between 2023/24 and 2025/26. This is also the approach taken in the earlier figure 'High-needs spending* and funding as a share of schools funding, 2015/16–2026/27'.

We then projected high-needs funding figures forward to 2028/29 using the DfE's central estimate of forecast high-needs revenue costs, as reported by the National Audit Office at the end of 2024.⁸ To estimate costs in 2027/28, we apply the forecast year-on-year growth rate between 2026/27 and 2027/28 to the 2026/27 baseline. For 2028/29, we apply the average of the year-on-year growth rates for 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28.

We then add £3.5bn to the resulting 2028/29 estimate to reflect additional high-needs funding announced in March 2026. This adjustment is based on the expectation that, from 2028/29 onwards, central government will assume responsibility for historic SEND deficits. We therefore treat this additional funding as 'new' as it covers costs that would otherwise fall on local authorities.

We deflated these high-needs funding figures to 2026/27 prices, and converted them into per-pupil figures, as above. We then subtracted all of this funding from the per-pupil funding figures we had already calculated.

The geographic concentration of schools in trusts

In the report, we measure geographic concentration using the mean pairwise distance between schools within a trust. To test whether this was an appropriate measure, we explored several alternatives, including density-based clustering algorithms, to identify whether trusts commonly consisted of multiple distinct geographic clusters of schools.

If such clustering had been common, the mean pairwise distance would have been a less informative measure because it would not have captured important differences in how schools were spatially distributed within trusts. However, we found little evidence that trusts typically contain multiple separate clusters of schools.

References

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