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Offsite Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA)

Summary for school leaders

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Victoria Cook, Becky Taylor, Lisa-
Maria Müller, Hettie Burn, Jake
Anders and Isabella Rubens.



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Education Endowment Foundation
5th Floor, Millbank Tower
21–24 Millbank
SW1P 4QP



0207 802 1653



info@eefoundation.org.uk



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About the evaluator

This independent evaluation was conducted by a team from UCL Institute of Education and Chartered College of Teaching; Professor Becky Taylor, Dr Lisa-Maria Müller, Dr Victoria Cook, Dr Hettie Burn, Professor Jake Anders and Isabella Rubens.

The lead evaluator was Professor Becky Taylor.

Contact details:

Name Professor Becky Taylor

Address UCL Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London. WC1H 0AL

Tel: +44 (0)20 7679 2000

Email: becky.taylor@ucl.ac.uk

Introduction

This report summarises key findings from the scoping phase of the Schools Choices study Exploring the Impact of Offsite Planning, Preparation, and Assessment (PPA) on Teacher Retention funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). It explores the barriers and enablers to offering offsite PPA in schools, where teachers can take their PPA time away from the school site without specifically requesting flexible working arrangements. The research was mainly conducted with leaders and teachers from primary schools so we cannot assume that these findings are transferable to secondary schools. We therefore distinguish between findings from different phases in the sections that follow. The report is aimed at senior leaders in schools and multi-academy trusts, particularly those with responsibility for timetabling or flexible working policies.

Key takeaways

- Offsite PPA is offered in many primary schools on a discretionary basis. These discretionary policies limit the number of days that can be taken offsite, require individuals to seek line manager approval before going offsite, or require individuals to formally request offsite PPA through the school's flexible working policy.
- Primary school leaders reported that the main barriers to offering offsite PPA were the need for teachers to be in school for activities such as collaboration with colleagues, meetings before or after school, parents' evenings, staff INSET, and difficulties offering offsite PPA to all members of staff. Budget constraints was the most common reason cited by primary school leaders for being unable to overcome barriers to offering offsite PPA.
- Primary schools that have overcome these barriers have done so by adapting their practices, for example by regularly reviewing teacher timetables for PPA and by running hybrid meetings.
- Some primary school leaders, lacking the space onsite for staff to complete their PPA, have chosen to offer offsite PPA as part of a drive to improve staff wellbeing and a desire to demonstrate professional trust in their staff.
- Offsite PPA often enables teachers to work in a quieter and more comfortable environment, which they feel makes a difference to both their productivity and their wellbeing.
- Teachers in schools offering offsite PPA report feeling trusted by their school leaders.
- Having worked in schools that offer offsite PPA, teachers described this as an important factor that they would take into consideration when searching for a new teaching job.
- The main barriers to offering offsite PPA in secondary schools are a desire to spread PPA throughout the week and a preference for minimising split classes, where two teachers share responsibility for a single class. These two issues are perceived as important indicators of quality in secondary school timetables.

Key definitions

PPA	Planning, preparation, and assessment: guaranteed time for teachers in state-maintained schools in England to complete their duties away from the children in their care, amounting to not less than 10% of a teacher's timetabled teaching time.
Offsite PPA	Teachers allowed to take their planning, preparation, and assessment time away from the school site without specifically requesting flexible working arrangements.

Offsite PPA and our research

Teacher retention is a significant challenge for schools in England: only 67% of teachers are still in service five years after qualifying and only 57% after ten years (DfE, 2025). Schools serving disadvantaged communities tend to face greater challenges in retaining teachers, meaning that teacher turnover particularly impacts socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils (Allen et al., 2019; NFER, 2022; Tereshchenko et al., 2020). Workload and work-life balance are reported as key drivers causing teachers to leave the profession (Adams et al., 2023; McLean and Worth, 2025).

Expanding and enabling flexible working is a priority for recruitment and retention (Education Committee, 2025), however, there is limited evidence as to what works in schools (Harland et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2023). The 2024 edition of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) has been amended to include the following:

'Where reasonably appropriate and agreed by both the individual teacher and the headteacher, PPA can be taken in one weekly unit and it can be taken away from the school site' (DfE, 2024, pp. 51–52).

Despite the interest in offsite PPA as a promising approach to flexible working in schools, Teacher Tapp (2024) data suggests that the number of teachers allowed to work from home during their PPA hours has remained relatively stable. In their survey of primary (n = 3,219) and secondary (n = 6,395) teachers in September 2024—which was weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics—33% of primary teachers surveyed were allowed to do their PPA from home, a rise of two percentage points from the previous academic year. Only 9% of secondary teachers surveyed were allowed to do this, a rise of one percentage point compared to the previous academic year.

The research

The research forms part of a 'School Choices' project. The aim of School Choices research is to produce causal evidence about the impact of different school-level approaches and policies, with particular attention to the impact on pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. School Choices evaluations are divided into two phases: a scoping phase and an impact evaluation phase.

The scoping phase was completed during 2024/2025 by the Chartered College of Teaching and UCL's Institute of Education. The aim of the scoping phase was to understand what offsite PPA looks like in practice, including the degree of variability in implementing this across primary schools. We were also interested in the factors that drive schools' decisions to offer offsite PPA the barriers that prevent schools from offering this, and the feasibility of designing an evaluation to assess the impact of offsite PPA on teacher retention and wellbeing.

For the purposes of the study, we defined offsite PPA as teachers being allowed to leave school premises during their PPA time. This typically involves the block timetabling of PPA time at the beginning or end of day at least once a week for all teachers. In comparison, 'onsite PPA' is characterised by the requirement that staff (whether explicitly required or tacitly understood) must remain on school premises during their PPA time.

The scoping phase employed a range of methods, including exploratory focus groups with primary teachers (n = 21), interviews with primary leaders (headteachers and MAT CEOs, n = 12), two surveys of primary leaders (n = 314 and n = 27 complete and validated responses)¹ and analysis of Teacher Tapp data. Workshops with individuals responsible for timetabling in secondary schools (n = 12) were also conducted to explore secondary issues relating to offsite PPA.

¹ Complete survey responses were validated using the school's postcode or the postcode of the lead school in the trust.

The research was mainly conducted with leaders and teachers from primary schools. We therefore cannot assume that the findings are transferable to secondary contexts. The research also faced some challenges around recruitment, with the sample for the second leader survey below the target of 150 responses. A diverse and representative sample was also not achieved for the teacher focus groups so these findings cannot, therefore, be considered representative of primary teachers' experiences of offsite PPA more broadly.

Findings

Offsite PPA in primary schools

As part of our research, we spoke to primary leaders about the factors that drive schools' decisions to offer offsite PPA and the perceived impacts of doing so on teaching quality and pupil learning. We also spoke to primary teachers to understand more about their experiences of offsite PPA.

Discretionary offsite PPA is common

Our findings suggest that block timetabling of PPA is common in most primary schools, either as a half-day once a week at the beginning or end of the day or one full day every fortnight. Six of the twelve leaders who were interviewed offered offsite PPA on a discretionary basis. This means that teachers may sometimes be able to take their PPA time offsite under specific circumstances, but not as a general rule. These discretionary policies limit the number of days that can be taken offsite, require individuals to seek line manager approval before going offsite, or require individuals to formally request offsite PPA through the school's flexible working policy. An online survey of headteachers and MAT CEOs conducted at the end of the scoping phase confirmed the prevalence of discretionary offsite PPA: 42 of 57 schools and MAT CEOs who answered this question² cited this as a flexible working arrangement offered in their settings.

Leaders who were interviewed from schools not offering offsite PPA described their main reasons for this as the inability to provide the same offer to all staff, alongside staffing challenges. Our survey findings also suggest that it is difficult for leaders to offer offsite PPA to all staff equitably and that this is most difficult for schools with above average levels of free school meal (FSM) eligibility. Leaders are also often reluctant to offer offsite PPA that does not need to be formally requested through the school's flexible working policy, with the greatest reluctance among headteachers from schools with above average levels of FSM. This finding is supported by our analysis of Teacher Tapp data that suggest schools with low proportions of pupils eligible for FSM are more likely to allow teachers to do PPA at home.

PPA time is not always protected

The STPCD stipulates: 'A teacher must not be required to carry out any other duties during the teacher's PPA time' (DfE, 2024 ,p. 52). Our findings suggest that this is not necessarily the case in all schools, with an expectation among some leaders that PPA time is used for collaboration, mentoring, and emergency cover. This expectation forms a barrier to offering offsite PPA in some schools.

This finding was supported by the teacher focus groups, where teachers discussed a lack of regard for PPA as protected time in school as the reason why they choose to work offsite. Even where a dedicated PPA space is available to work, teachers still described being frequently interrupted.

Reasons for offering offsite PPA

The main reasons why leaders chose to offer offsite PPA in their settings were a lack of dedicated space onsite for staff to complete their PPA, a drive to improve staff wellbeing, and a desire to demonstrate professional trust

² This includes respondents who did not complete the entire survey.

in their staff. Most leaders do not have any expectations about how teachers spend their PPA time provided that the work is completed.

Perceived impact on teaching quality and pupil learning

Leaders were asked about the perceived impacts of offsite PPA policies on teaching quality and pupil learning: none expressed the view that offsite PPA would improve teaching quality, however, as one MAT CEO reflected, 'PPA is a drop in the ocean: if you want really high-quality lessons that are really thoughtful, you need more than two hours to do that.' Three leaders spoke about a reduction in collaboration between staff during PPA time, which may in turn impact the consistency of lesson content, the evaluation of lesson delivery, and the implementation of a school's marking strategy. Early Career Teachers and individuals with performance management concerns were identified as two groups that may require more time onsite to help with lesson planning. Leaders did not perceive any impact, positive or negative, of offsite PPA on pupil learning.

Teachers' experiences of offsite PPA

The working environment is the main influence on teachers' experiences of offsite PPA. Offsite PPA enables teachers to work in a quieter and more comfortable environment, which is perceived to impact both productivity and wellbeing. Teachers' uptake of offsite PPA is also influenced by a desire to have greater control over their workload, which in turn is perceived to positively impact wellbeing. Teachers reported that having a choice over the timing and place of their work improves their work-life balance and makes them feel trusted as professionals by their school leaders. Those who had previously worked in schools offering offsite PPA described this as an important factor that they would take into consideration when searching for a new teaching job.

Perceived barriers to offsite PPA in primary schools

The online survey of leaders conducted at the end of the scoping phase confirmed that the most common barriers to offering offsite PPA were the need for teachers to be in school for activities such as collaboration with colleagues, meetings before or after school, parents' evenings, staff INSET, and to ensure a consistent offer for all staff. However, the low response rate means that these findings should be interpreted with caution.

Budget constraints—and financial pressures more generally—was the most common reason cited for being unable to overcome the barriers to offering offsite PPA. Falling budgets have had an impact on staffing numbers and cover arrangements in some schools, meaning that staff are required onsite to help with emergency cover and to ensure that the requirement to have a minimum number of adults on the school site at any time is met. This suggests that offsite PPA is not necessarily a viable option for flexible working in all primary schools.

Overcoming barriers—taking a flexible approach

In primary schools that have overcome these barriers, a flexible approach to offsite PPA has been adopted.

- Timetables are regularly reviewed to ensure that the allocation of PPA is fair and that all teachers are aware of this. For example, a school may swap morning and afternoon PPA slots every half term to ensure that teachers receive an equitable amount of release time.
- Where possible, schools try not to plan meetings on the same day as PPA. Others do not schedule PPA on a Monday or a Friday so that it is unaffected by bank holidays and INSET days.
- If a teacher's PPA falls on the same day as an in-person event before or after school (such as a staff meeting, parents' evening, or INSET) it may be possible to swap their PPA to a different day. It may also be possible to run hybrid meetings to enable teachers who are offsite to join.
- In exceptional circumstances where an individual is required to be onsite, for example, because it is not possible to join a meeting remotely or rearrange PPA, the process of regularly reviewing the timetable ensures that the same member of staff is not affected by this in consecutive terms or years.

- In schools offering offsite PPA, teachers choose when and how they wish to collaborate. Colleagues who wish to collaborate in their PPA time and work offsite have found new ways to do this, for example, by meeting remotely or communicating via telephone or email. Others choose to meet outside of PPA time.
- To protect the integrity of PPA time, leaders draw clear distinctions between PPA time and time spent on other activities, such as ECT time or coaching supervision.

Offsite PPA in secondary schools

Our findings from the workshops with individuals responsible for timetabling in secondary schools suggest that the block timetabling of PPA is not currently feasible in most secondary schools. The main barriers to offsite PPA appear to be a desire to spread PPA throughout the week and a drive to minimise split classes where two teachers share responsibility for a single class. Spreading PPA throughout the week and minimising split classes are perceived as two important indicators of quality in secondary school timetables. Another key barrier is the difficulty of providing the same offer to all staff.

In the majority of secondary schools that we spoke to, PPA is timetabled last. For offsite PPA to be feasible in secondary schools, school leaders would need to make timetabling PPA the priority, which would likely require significant additional resourcing.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that offsite PPA is valued by teachers and can be a strong indicator of leaders' professional trust in their staff. However, equity is an important issue in relation to offsite PPA. In some schools, offsite PPA is discretionary and is therefore not freely available to all teachers. In other schools, the inability to provide the same offer to all staff may prevent them from offering it entirely. Our findings also highlight the challenges around protecting PPA time in schools, with leaders directing specific activities, including collaboration, during PPA time to varying extents. In primary schools offering offsite PPA, a transparent approach that recognises the need for flexibility from both leaders and teachers has enabled the common barriers to offsite PPA to be overcome. In secondary schools, for offsite PPA to be feasible it is likely that this may require additional resourcing.

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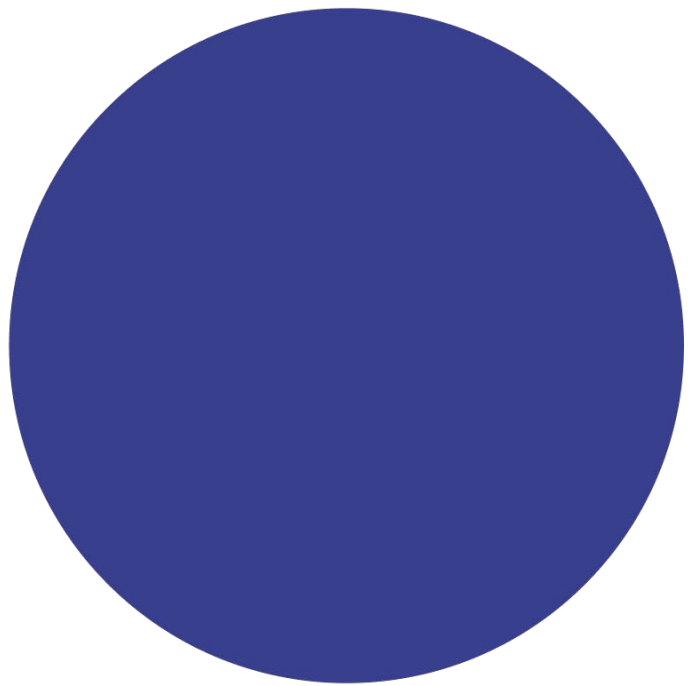
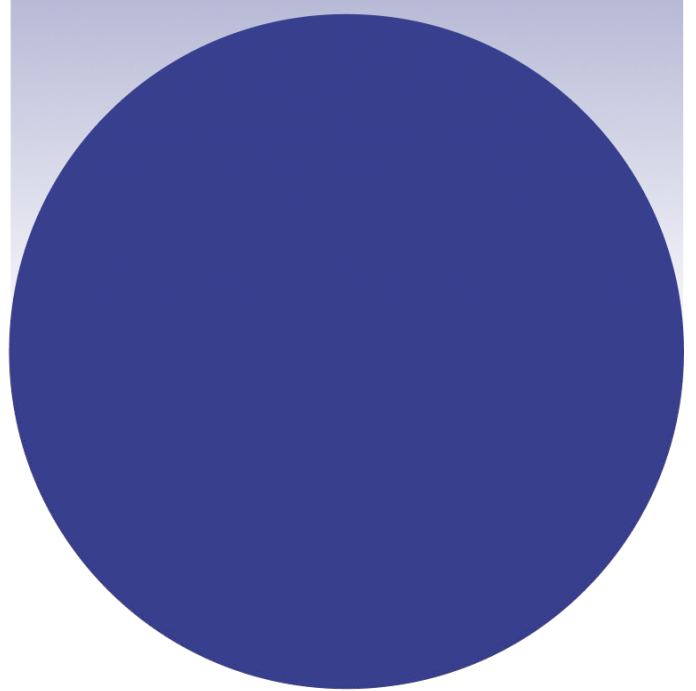
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