

June 2026

Secondary School Staffing Survey report 2026

This report summarises the 2026 findings of an annual survey on the teacher staffing situation in secondary and composite schools.

“ . . . there is a sense that the staffing challenge has moved from an availability crisis to a suitability crisis.”

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1. Introduction

In Term 1 2026 principals of state secondary schools and state composite schools with secondary rolls were surveyed about their staffing situation. The questions focused on the broader aspects of the teacher supply equation, raising issues of both quantity and quality of supply.

This report is based upon replies received from 155 principals, representing 30% of those who received the survey. The data relates to the survey baseline date of 9 March 2026.

The data has been summarised in this report and individual school responses are not identified.

PPTA Te Wehengarua has been undertaking similar surveys and reports annually for 30 years now, since 1996. Data for 2019 and 2013 have been used throughout the report to compare the supply situation immediately pre-COVID and with a historic reference point. Graphs presenting a fuller time series are also included. It seemed particularly appropriate to incorporate these this year, given that this is a '30th anniversary' edition.

This year's results are also relevant in the context of the biggest changes to curriculum and assessment in 20 years in Aotearoa New Zealand. These changes will have a fundamental impact on the way that schools operate – and therefore how they will need to be staffed.

Acknowledgements

The annual staffing surveys, and the reports from them, are a unique overview of key indicators of the health of teacher supply in New Zealand and are only possible with the participation of principals from across the motu.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Secondary Principals' Council and the many principals who gave their time and information to enable the production of this report.

Finally, I want to acknowledge recently retired PPTA Te Wehengarua advisory officer, Rob Willetts, who pioneered the staffing survey and led the work on the surveys and reports for the previous 29 years. We will strive to continue to meet the high standards he has set for this work!

Chris Abercrombie

PPTA Te Wehengarua President

2. Overview

2.1 Context and commentary

Since the impact of COVID-19 and particularly over 2023-25, New Zealand secondary schools have been suffering an acute staffing crisis. Attrition rates were high while the number of domestic and (initially) international applicants for jobs were at historic lows.

This year marks a notable easing across a broad range of staffing statistics, which is a positive development. These improvements, however, need to be placed in perspective.

Firstly, while definitely better than 2023-25 on most measures, the 2026 results do not represent a return to pre-COVID norms. They would generally be amongst the worst results since records began, if the previous three years (which are even worse) were excluded.

Secondly, there is a sense that the staffing challenge has moved from an *availability* crisis to a *suitability* crisis.

More teachers are applying but the number of suitable applicants has barely increased.

In this regard, the most telling measures may be those found in Figure 4 (page 10) which show the suitability rate of applicants declining even compared to 2025 (although still above 2024).

Much of this reflects a strong upturn in overseas applicants (cf. Figure 2 on page 7), as they tend to be found unsuitable more often.

But there has also been a steep decline in the suitability rate of domestic applicants (Figure 4 again). This may be a one-off occurrence, but it could also be the start of a worrying new trend.

Reliance on holders of a Limited Authority to Teach (LAT) is also higher than at any time during the recent crisis and is at levels not seen since 2003 (Figure 5 on page 11). This is of particular concern given the intense changes to curriculum and assessment that are being implemented. These changes are less likely to be done well by people who do not hold a teaching qualification.

2.2 Key indicators

Key indicators of the health of secondary teacher supply at 9 March 2026 were:

Applications for positions

- The average number of New Zealand trained applicants per classroom position was 2.8.
- Slightly more than half of principals did not have a choice in selecting applicants from New Zealand for classroom jobs because there were either none (28%) or only one (25%).
- Five percent of advertised classroom positions had no applicants at all.

Suitable applicants

- Twenty-three percent of teaching positions had no suitable applicants and 37% had only one.
- Thirty-three percent of teaching positions had no suitable New Zealand trained applicants and 36% had only one.

Filling positions

- Twenty percent of advertised positions could not be filled at all and 8% were filled by people with limited authority to teach (LATs).
- Forty-seven percent of principals employed untrained or unqualified teachers because they could not find trained and qualified staff.

Day relief pool

- The average number of available day-relievers per school was 7.3.
- Sixty-two percent of principals had fewer than six day-relievers available.

Curriculum impacts

- Forty-seven percent of principals have teachers working in non-specialist areas because they could not find a specialist teacher.
- Twenty-four percent of schools have cancelled or transferred courses to distance learning because of a lack of qualified teachers.

Retention

- The top reasons reported by principals for staff leaving the secondary teaching service were for retirement and to go overseas.
- About a quarter of principals are more pessimistic about retention of teachers through this year compared to 2025.

3. Recruitment

3.1 Advertised jobs

Sixty-three percent of the principals had advertised vacant secondary teaching positions between the start of Term 1 2026 and 9 March 2026.

There were 249 actual vacancy positions advertised. Two jobs were not identified by tenure. Of the rest, 65% of positions advertised were permanent vacancies and 35% were fixed term.

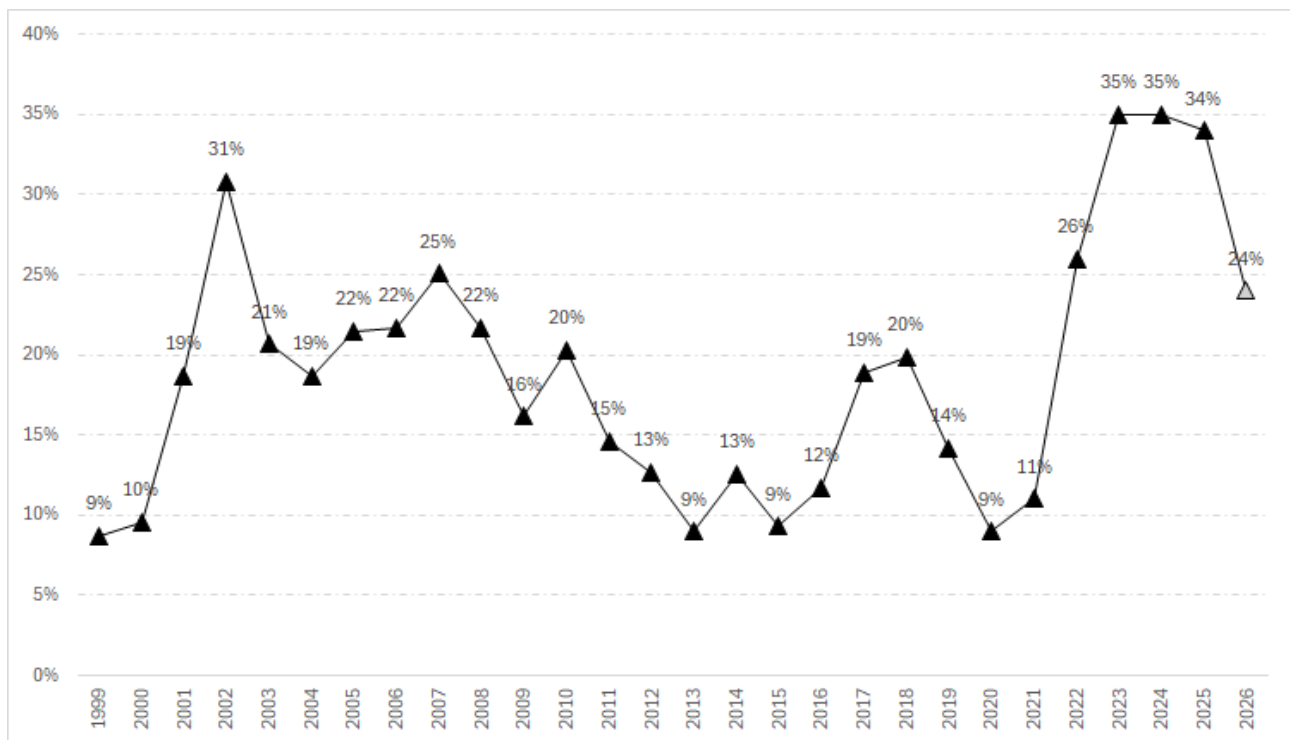
The number of jobs advertised over this shorter period ranged from 1 to 10 per advertising school.

3.2 Unadvertised vacancies

Twenty-four percent of the schools had vacancies that had not yet been advertised on 9 March. This represented 0.41 positions per school. Nationally that would reflect 209 unadvertised positions.

This a reduction from 2025 when the equivalent figures were 34% of schools and 0.69 jobs per school. But it is higher than earlier reference years: the equivalent figure in 2019 was 14% of schools and 0.19 jobs per school, and in 2013 9% of schools and 0.15 jobs per school (see Figure 1 for a full time series).

Figure 1. Proportion of schools with unadvertised vacancies, 1999-2026



3.3 Subjects/positions advertised

Subject	Assistant	Classroom	Leadership
Mathematics	1	30	1
Numeracy		1	
Literacy and Numeracy		4	
English		22	7
ESOL		2	
Science		20	5
Biology		2	
Physics		5	
Agriculture/Horticulture		2	
PE & Health	1	18	10
Outdoor Education		1	
Hard Materials Technology		2	1
Food and Hospitality		6	
Technology		4	1
Digital Technology/DVC		6	
Materials Technology		2	
Music		4	
Art		2	
Drama and Dance		3	3
Social Science		14	2
Humanities		2	
Geography		3	1
History		3	
Media Studies			1
Psychology		1	
Religious Education		3	4
Tourism		1	
Learning support/student support		10	
Special Education		2	
Alternative Education		1	
Languages			4
Te Reo Māori		9	2
Gagana Sāmoa		1	
Commerce/Economics		5	
Guidance Counsellor		3	
Careers/vocational pathways		1	
International Students			2
Specialist Classroom teacher		2	
General/cross curricular		12	2
'Reliever'		3	
Support staff	2		
Bilingual - Te Reo Maori			1
Bilingual - Pangarau		1	
Assistant/Deputy Principal/Principal			10

3.4 Hard to staff subjects

In their comments principals referred to the following as hard to staff:

- Commerce
- Food Technology
- Hard Materials
- Mathematics
- Outdoor Education
- Pāngarau
- Pātaiao
- Physical Education
- Religious Education
- Samoan
- Te Reo Māori

Indications of hard to staff subjects can also be found in 3.8 and 6.2 below, i.e. positions which could not be filled and classes/courses that have had to be cancelled or transferred.

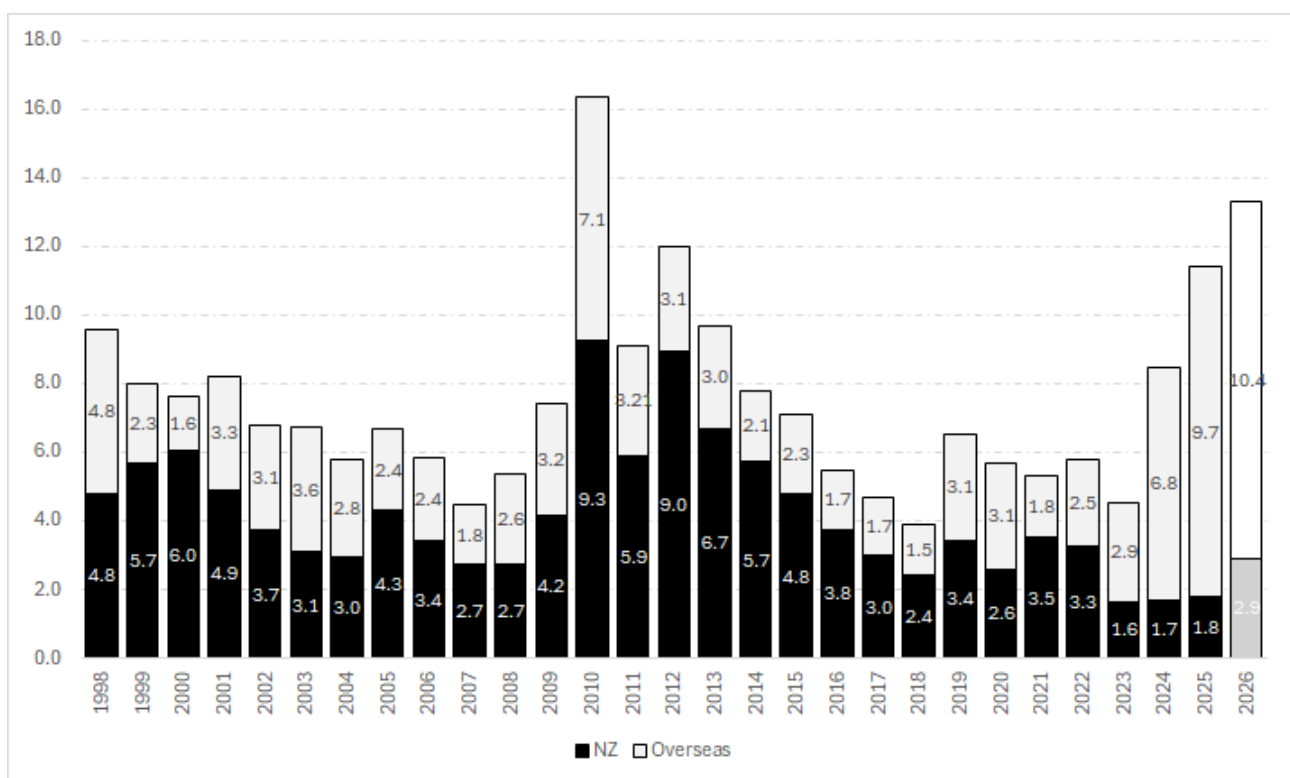
3.5 Applications for positions

Relative to 2013, 2019 and 2024 there has been increased interest from overseas applicants.

The average number of applicants across all positions was 13.3 (10.4 overseas applicants and 2.9 New Zealand applicants), compared with 11.4 in 2025.

The interest from overseas applicants is at its highest level on record, but, while New Zealand applications are higher than the previous three years, they are lower than most other years (see Figure 2 for a full timeseries).

Figure 2. Number of New Zealand and overseas applicants per vacancy (all positions), 1998-2026



Focussing in on classroom teachers (as opposed to leadership positions), the number of New Zealand trained applicants for classroom teaching positions improved to 2.8 from 1.6 in 2025 and 2024's record low of 1.4. The average number of overseas trained applicants per classroom position was 11.7, similar to last year's figure (11.4).

The average numbers of applicants per advertised actual vacancy which had closed by 9 March are shown below.

Nature of role	Positions	Average number of applicants per job	
		New Zealand	Overseas
Classroom	185	2.8	11.7
Middle leadership	42	2.1	6.4
Senior leadership	7	9.7	1.9

As a pre-Covid comparison the average number of applicants for classroom positions in 2019 were 3.4 New Zealand applicants per job and 3.6 overseas applicants per job. For further comparison, the average number of applicants in 2013 were 9.9 and 6.8 respectively.

3.6 Distribution of applications for positions

The table below shows the proportion of jobs with the indicated number of applicants, firstly only New Zealand applicants, then overseas applicants and lastly all applicants. In this case middle and senior leadership data is combined.

Applicants per job	Distribution of applicants per job (% jobs) ¹					
	New Zealand		Overseas		All applicants	
	Teacher	Leadership	Teacher	Leadership	Teacher	Leadership
0	28	22	18	29	5	4
1	25	22	4	14	5	4
2	17	22	5	8	4	12
3	8	12	4	10	3	6
4	6	4	6	6	6	14
5-9	8	10	21	14	22	27
10+	8	6	42	18	55	33

The normal experience of principals was not having a choice in selecting applicants from New Zealand because there were either none (28% for classroom jobs) or only one (25% for classroom jobs).

Five percent of advertised classroom positions and four percent of leadership positions had no applicants at all, an improvement on previous years driven primarily by the number of overseas trained applicants.

For 10% of classroom jobs and 8% of leadership jobs there was no choice of applicants of any origin because there were no applicants or only one.

¹ Percentages in this and the following tables may not add to 100% because of rounding.

3.7 Applicant suitability

The following are the measures of 'suitability' used in the survey, as suggested by principals when the survey started.

Base scale and unit holder positions

- Evidence of teaching competence
- Recognised secondary teacher training
- Relevant tertiary subject qualification(s)
- Appropriate communication skills
- Appropriate interpersonal skills
- Any 'special character' considerations

For unit holder positions – the above plus appropriate experience relevant to position.

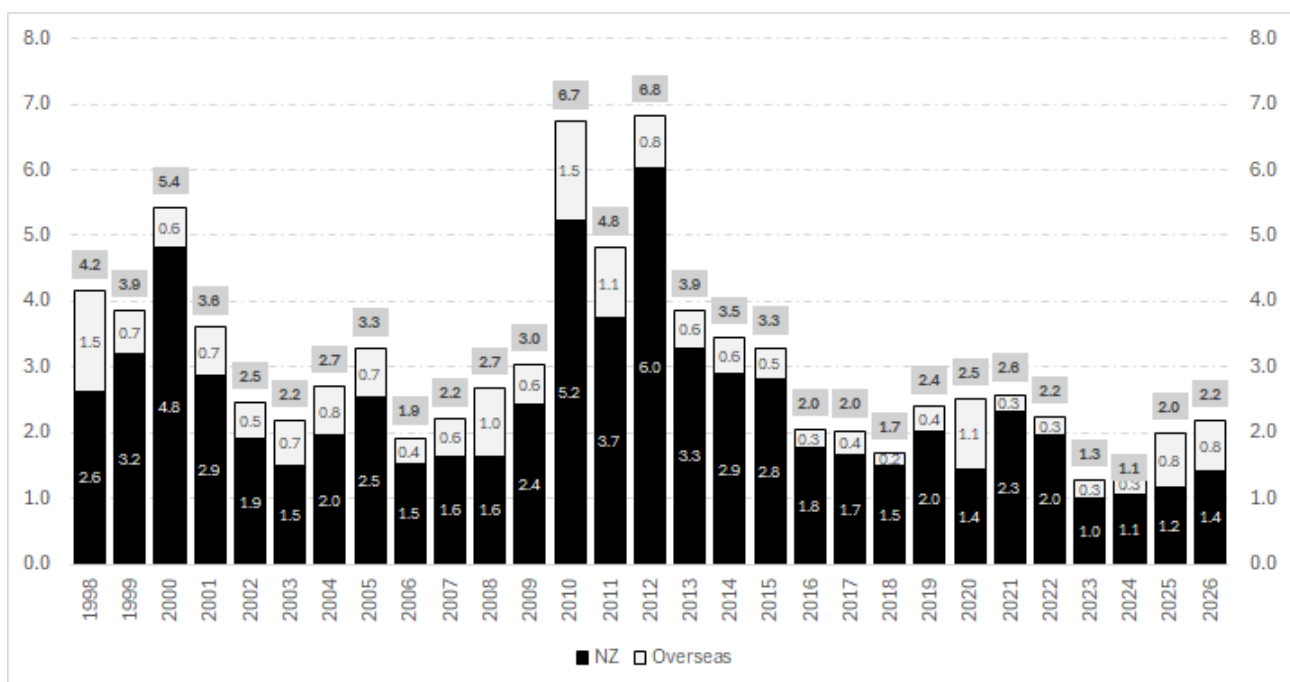
On these measures principals assessed the average number of suitable candidates per position this year as follows:

Nature of role	Positions	Suitable applicants per job	
		NZ	Overseas
Classroom	185	1.3	0.9
Middle leadership	42	1.1	0.4
Senior leadership	7	7.3	0.3

In 2019 there were 2.0 suitable New Zealand applicants per advertised classroom job and 0.3 suitable overseas applicants for these positions. In 2013 the equivalent figures were respectively 3.3 and 0.6 suitable applicants per job.

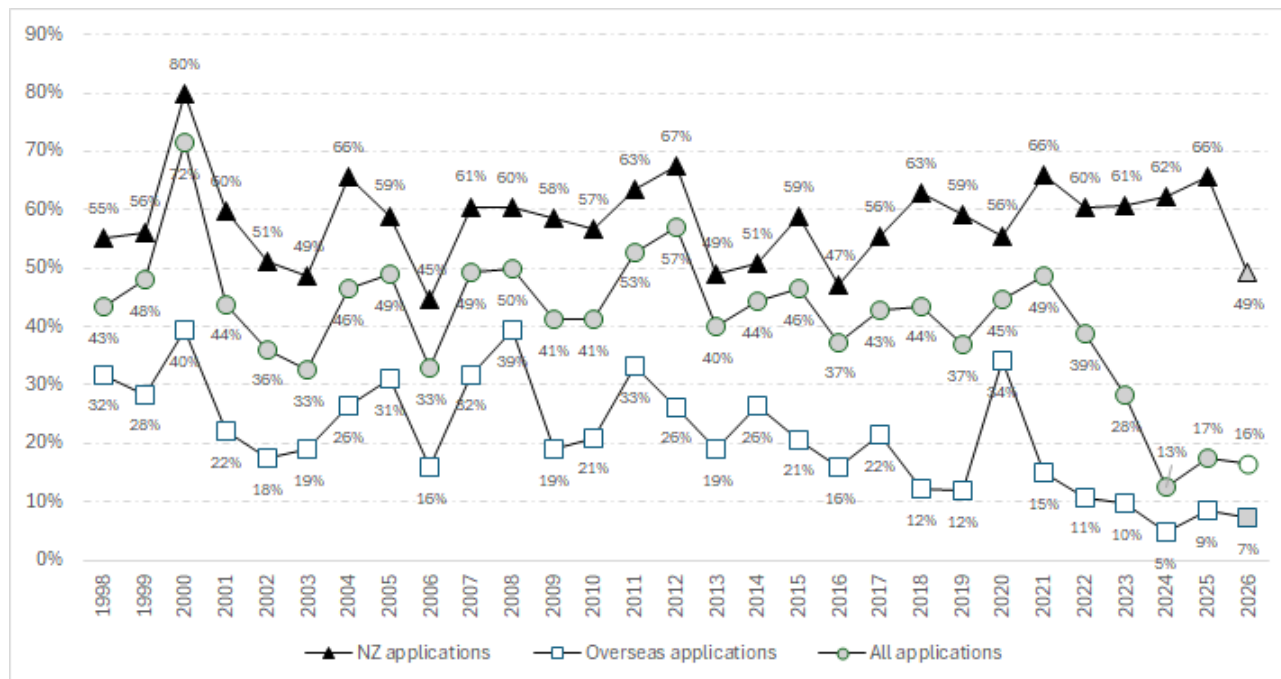
Across all positions, the average number of suitable applicants has risen for the second year, following the low points of 2023 and 2024, but these are still historically low figures for New Zealand applicants (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Number of suitable New Zealand and overseas applicants per vacancy (all positions), 1998-2026



However the increases in suitable applicants have not kept pace with the overall growth in the number of applicants. Consequently, as shown in Figure 4, the proportion of applicants who are considered suitable has declined, particularly for New Zealand applications. This could be a one-year, as was the case in 2006, or it could be a worrying new trend. The fall in the suitability rates for overseas applicants and overall is more modest, but in both cases it takes the figure to the second-lowest level since records began.

Figure 4. Proportion of domestic, international and all applicants considered suitable, 1998-2026



The table below shows the proportion of jobs with the indicated number of applicants who were considered potentially suitable for the advertised position, again, firstly New Zealand applicants, then overseas applicants and lastly all applicants. Middle and senior leadership data is combined.

Suitable applicant distribution (% of jobs)						
Suitable applicants for job (n)	New Zealand		Overseas		All applicants	
	Teacher	Leadership	Teacher	Leadership	Teacher	Leadership
0	33	36	78	83	23	32
1	36	26	10	9	37	28
2	16	15	3	6	18	9
3	7	9	2	0	8	9
4	3	9	1	0	4	15
5-9	4	2	3	2	5	4
10+	1	4	3	0	5	4

The normal experience of principals was not having a choice in selecting a suitable applicant from New Zealand because there were either none (33% for classroom jobs) or only one (36%).

In one in three jobs (31%) the principal had a potential choice between suitable New Zealand applicants for classroom positions and a slightly higher proportion (38%) for leadership.

For 60% of both classroom jobs and leadership jobs there was no potential choice of suitable applicants of any origin because there were either no suitable applicants or only one.

3.8 Appointments

One hundred and one positions (87 permanent and 14 fixed term) had sufficient information to identify how they had been filled. Twenty percent of those advertised jobs could not be filled and a further 8% were filled by holders of a Limited Authority to Teach (LAT).

Note that the proportion of responses that provided information about the outcome of the appointment process declined significantly in 2026. This information was not provided for 43% of advertised positions reported in the 2026 survey compared with 11% of the advertised positions reported in the 2026 survey. A further 16% of the advertised positions had not yet closed in 2026, compared with 13% in 2025.

Comparatively, in 2019 19% of positions could not be filled and 2% were filled by LATs. In 2013 those figures were respectively 8% and 2%.

Figure 5. Proportion of positions not filled by a registered teacher, 2003-2026

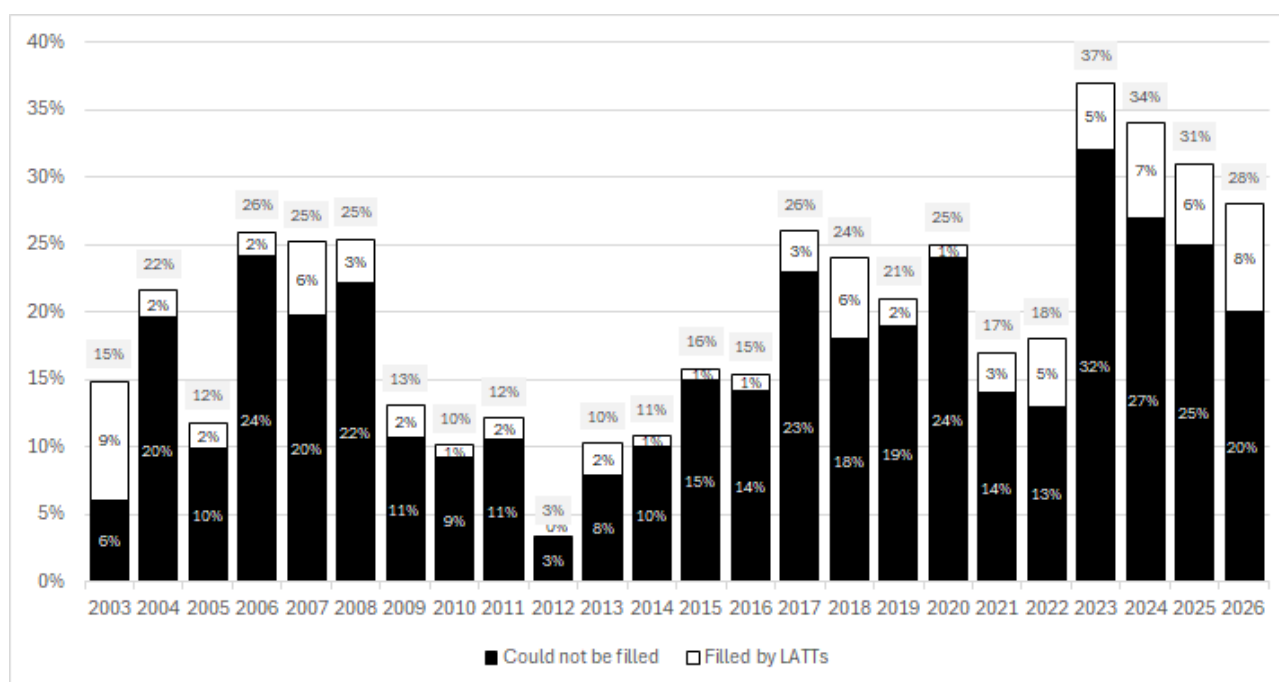


Figure 5 has the full time series, which shows (with appropriate caveats around the 2026 response rate) that the proportion of positions filled by a LAT holder is the highest recorded apart from 2003. This means that while unfilled positions are down, the proportion of positions not filled by a registered teacher is still the highest of any period apart from 2023-25.

Appointments – by tenure

Position type	Appointment type (% job type)			
	External	Internal	LAT	Could not fill
Permanent	64	8	8	20
Fixed term	57	14	7	21

The types of classroom and leadership positions which could not be filled were:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| English | Learning support/student support | Religious Education |
| Gagana Sāmoa | Mathematics | Social Science |
| General/cross curricular | PE & Health | Te Reo Māori |
| Hard Materials Technology | Psychology | |

The types of positions that had to be filled by LATs were:

Materials Technology
Mathematics

Music
Science

Social Science
Te Reo Māori

3.9 Appointment of untrained/unqualified teachers

Forty-seven percent of principals had to employ untrained or unqualified teachers because they could not find trained and qualified teachers for the first term of the year.

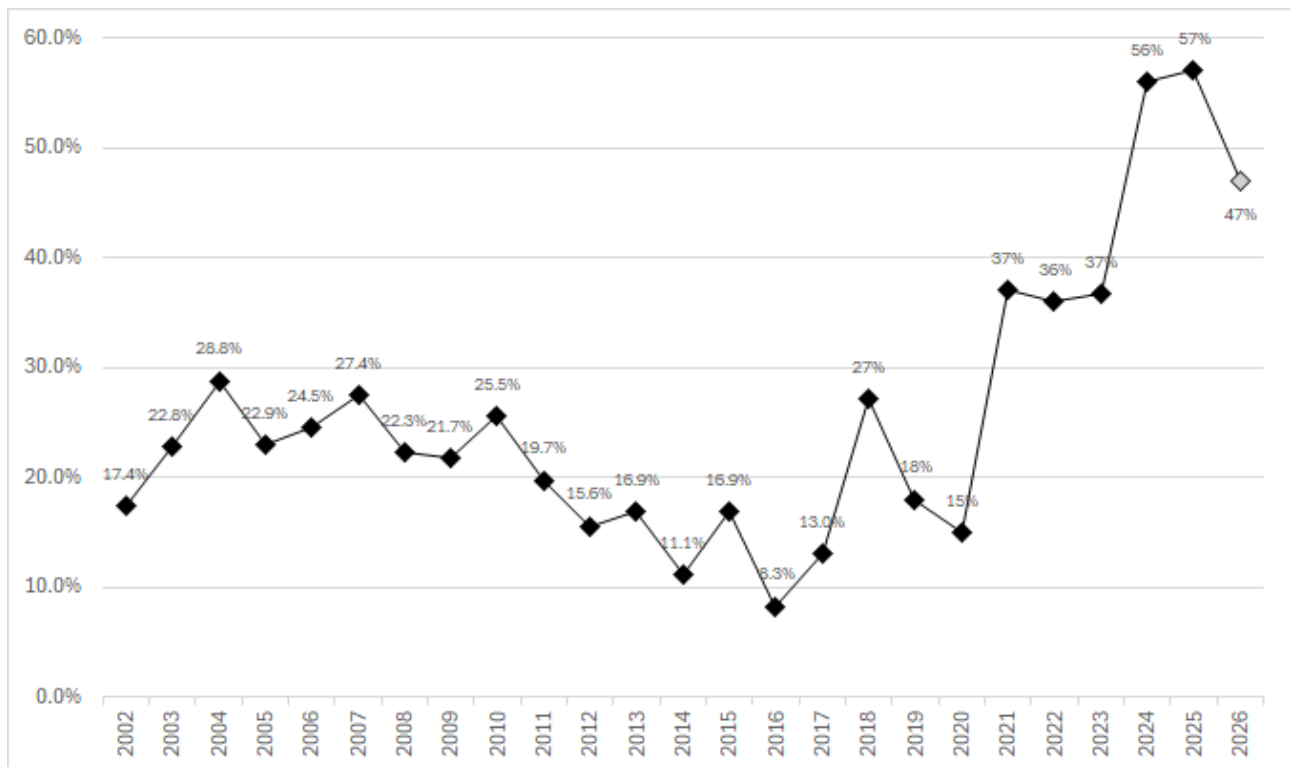
An average of 1.02 untrained/unqualified teachers were employed per school. The employing schools had appointed 2.15 such teachers each on average.

Thirty-two percent of schools had employed untrained/unqualified teachers to fixed term positions (0.37 per school) and 21% had employed them to permanent positions (0.65 per school).

Comparative figures are 18% of schools and an average of 0.25 appointments per school in 2019 and 17% of schools and 0.25 appointments in 2013.

As can be seen from the full time series in Figure 6, while the proportion of schools employing untrained/unqualified teachers has fallen from 2024 and 2025 levels, it is still far higher than any previous year.

Figure 6. Proportion of schools appointing untrained or unqualified people to permanent or fixed-term teaching roles, 2002-2026



3.10 Principals' comments on the jobs advertised

- I haven't advertised for any staff as it is too hard to go through all the advertising and we have to interview and we don't get the staff we want.
- None so far this year. We will be advertising soon to cover people going on leave mid year.
- [For three of the jobs advertised] teachers withdrew before interviews
- We ended up waiting nearly 8 months for the physics/maths teacher to arrive, and Religious Studies teacher over 4 months.

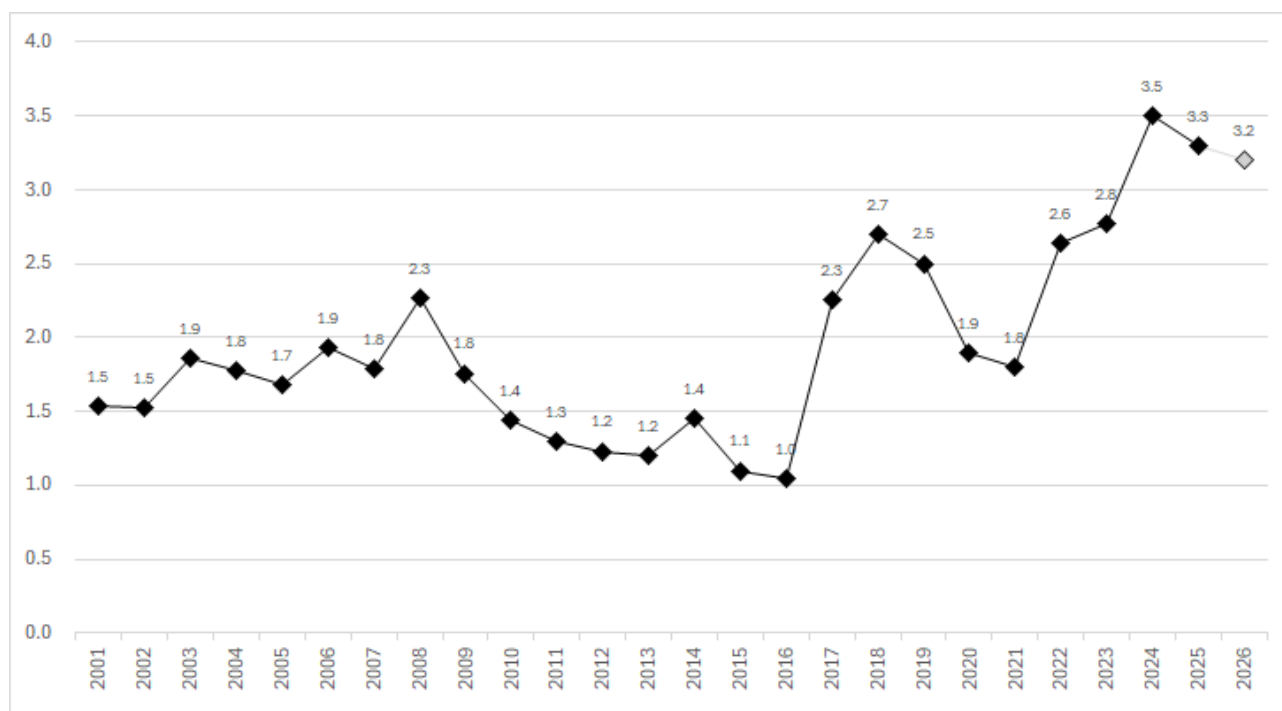
4. Attrition

The attrition data below refers to teachers who resigned to leave the secondary state teaching service in New Zealand other than for temporary reasons, such as maternity leave, and those moving around amongst state and state integrated secondary and area schools.

4.1 Resignations

One hundred and thirty schools gave details of their leavers. Ninety-four percent reported that they had teachers who had left the secondary teaching workforce between the start of Term 4 2024 and 9 March 2026. They collectively reported 392 teachers over that time who left the secondary teaching profession, an average of 3.2 teachers per school. This compares with 3.3 in 2025, 2.5 in 2019 and 1.2 in 2013 (see Figure 7 for the full time series).

Figure 7. Teacher losses from workforce per school (November - March), 2001-2026



4.2 Resignations by reason

Retirement remains the most common single reason given by principals for teachers leaving teaching. Figures for 2024 and comparative 2013 and 2019 figures are given below.

Reasons for resignation (%)

Survey year	Reason for resignation (%)						
	Retirement	Non-teaching job	Overseas	Primary teaching	Private schools	Tertiary teaching	Other
2026	32	15	21	3	4	2	23
2025	27	16	19	6	6	1	25
2019	40	17	15	3	7	1	17
2013	*	16	23	5	3	3	*50

*Until 2016 retirements were included with 'Other'. From 2016-2022 'Other' has averaged 19% of reasons for leaving secondary teaching in New Zealand and 'Retirement' has averaged 38% of reasons.

5. Day-relief pool

One hundred and fifty principals supplied data on their relief pools. They show a modest improvement on last year, which was the lowest figures in our records.

The principals had an average of 7.3 day-relievers available to them, including 7.1 trained and qualified teachers. However, 62% of principals reported fewer than 6 day-relievers available. Almost half of the principals could access only five or fewer.

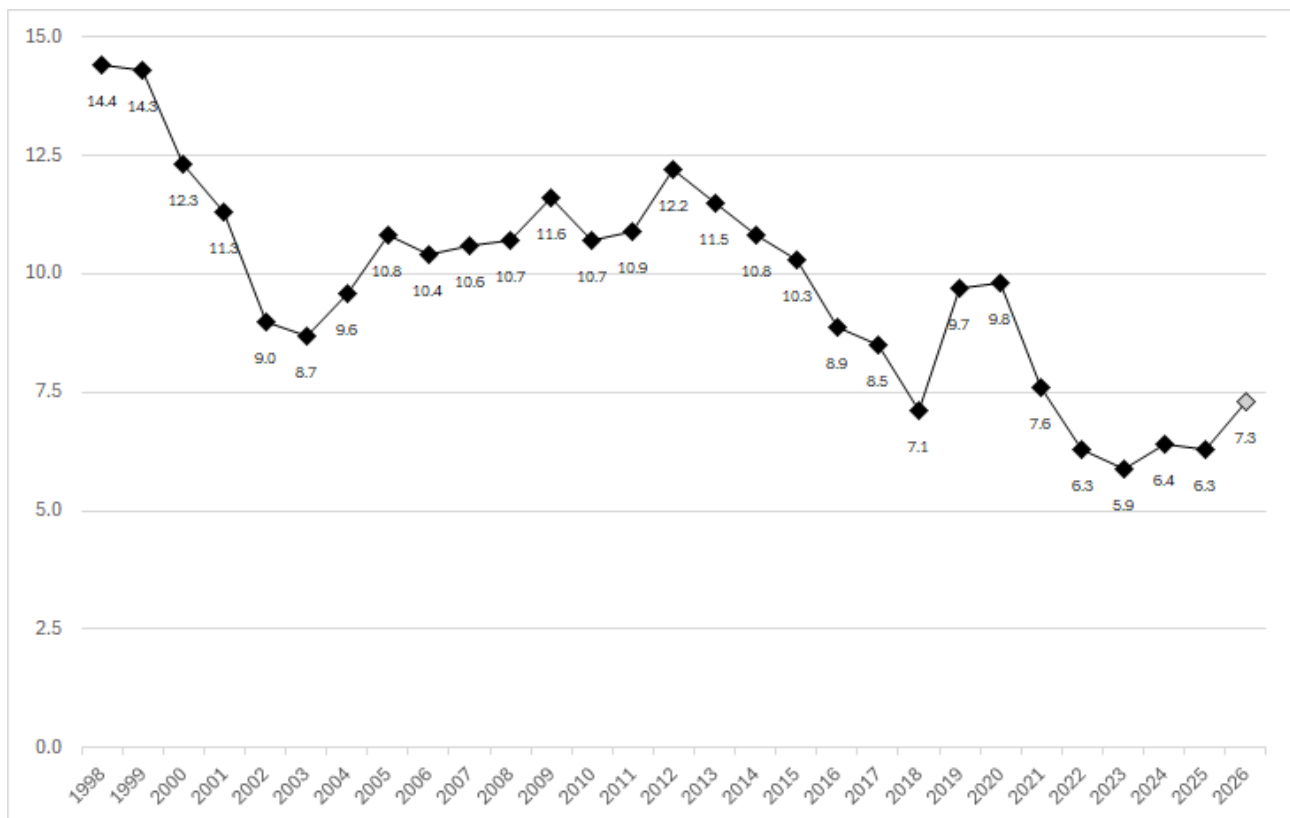
The distribution of day-relievers this year is shown below:

	Number of day-relievers										
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
% schools 2026	6	4	5	14	11	12	9	4	7	1	25
% schools 2025	8	2	10	15	13	13	5	3	7	3	19
% schools 2024	4	8	10	16	9	9	9	0	9	3	22

About one in ten schools currently have access to either one or no relievers.

In 2019 there were an average of 9.7 relievers per school and 39% reporting fewer than six day-relievers available, while in 2013 there were 11.5 relievers per school and 33% of schools reporting fewer than six day-relievers available. (See Figure 8 for the full timeseries.)

Figure 8. Average number of day-relievers available per school, 1998-2026



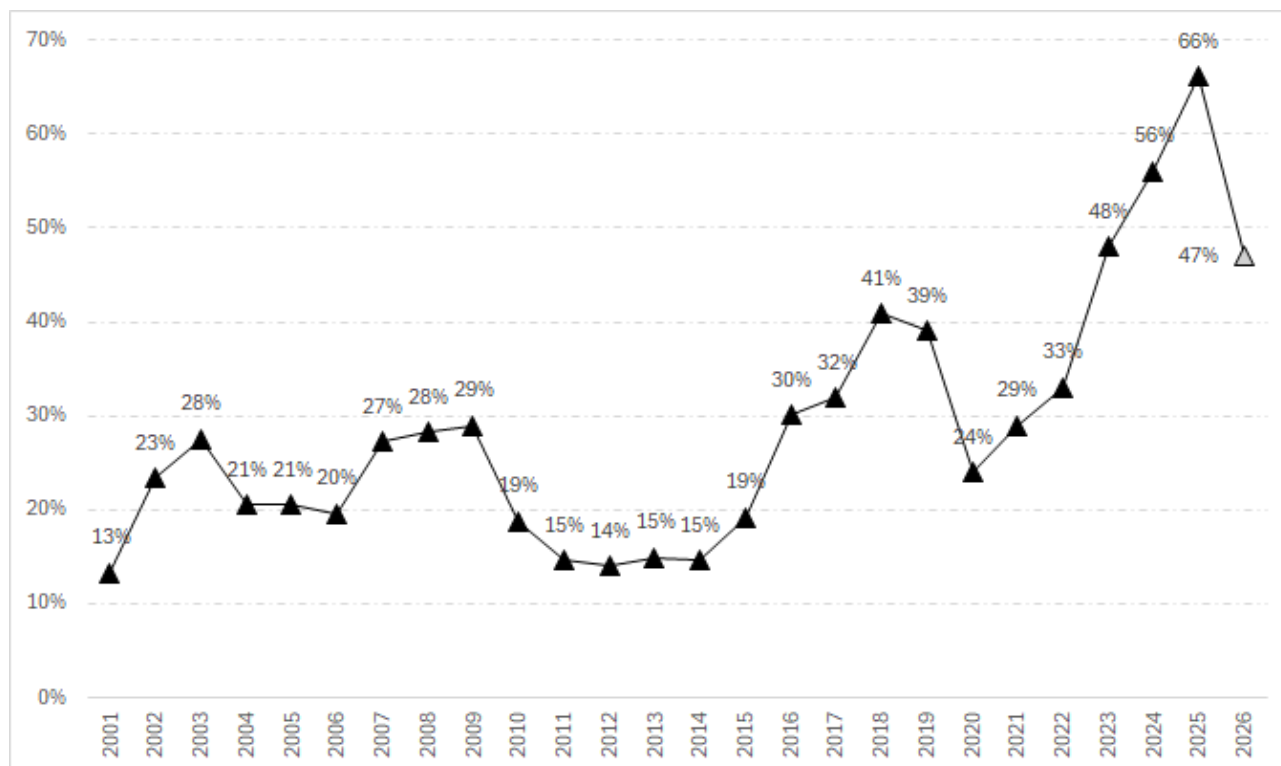
Note - in areas where several schools are close together they may share a number of day-relievers.

6. Curriculum delivery issues

6.1 Use of non-specialists

Forty-seven percent of principals had teachers working in non-specialist areas because they could not find a specialist teacher. This is lower than in 2025. By comparison, in 2019 the proportion was 39% and in 2013 it was 15% of schools (see Figure 9 for the full timeseries).

Figure 9. Schools forced to use teachers outside specialist fields



6.2 Classes cancelled or transferred

An average of 0.52 classes per school were cancelled or transferred to Te Kura (Correspondence School), polytechnics or electronic delivery because schools have been unable to find subject specialists this year.

Twenty-four percent of the principals had had to cancel or transfer classes because specialists could not be found. This is a lower proportion than 2024 (29%). In 2019 the comparative figure was 18% of schools and in 2013 it was 15% (see Figure 10 overleaf for a full time series).

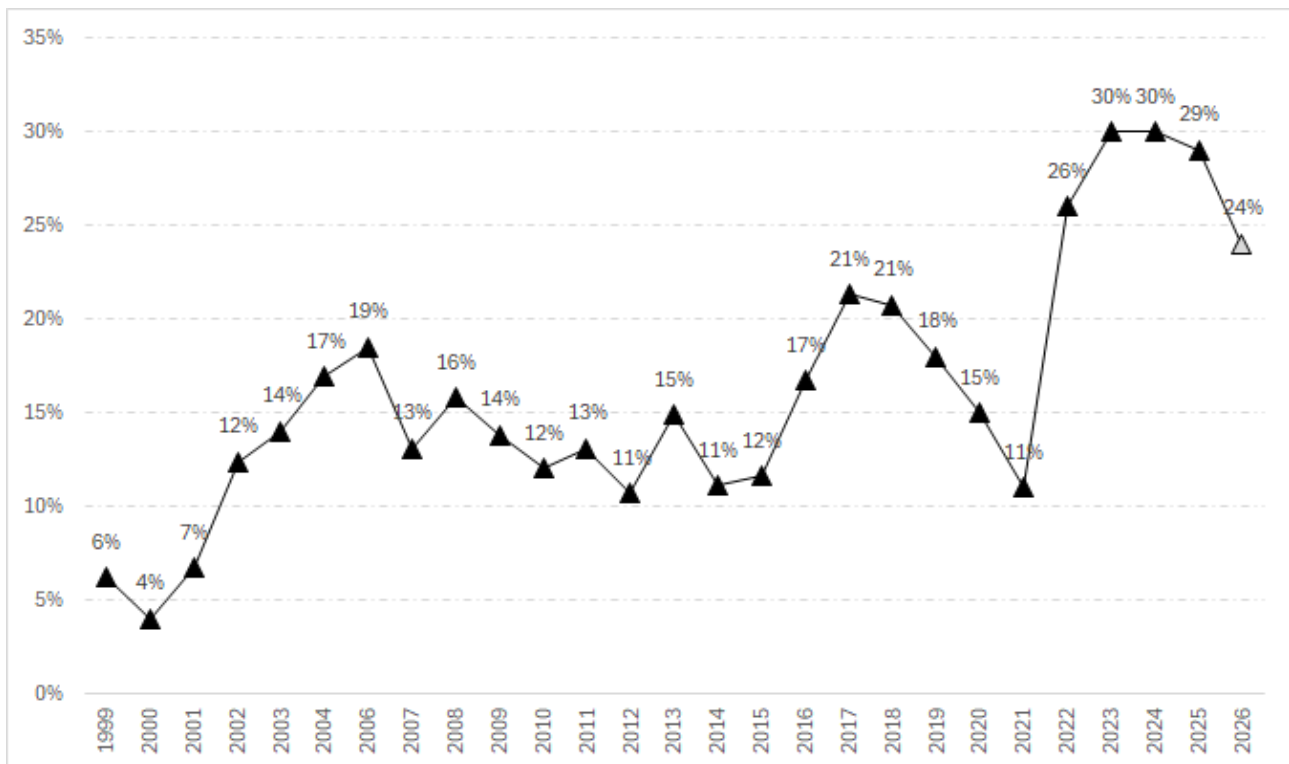
On average one in seven schools cancelled classes and slightly more than one in six schools had to transfer courses/classes.

Courses/classes affected this year were in:

- Accounting
- Art
- Biology
- Building and Construction
- Business Studies
- Chemistry
- Classics
- Commerce
- Design and Visual Communication
- Digital Technology
- Economics
- Engineering
- Geography
- German
- History
- Hospitality

- Languages
- Maths
- Mechanical Engineering
- Media Studies
- Science
- Photography
- Physical Education
- Physics
- Product Design
- Psychology
- Samoan language
- Te Ao Haka
- Te Reo Maori
- Technology
- Textiles
- Tongan
- Visual Art
- Wood Technology

Figure 10. Proportion of schools with classes cancelled or transferred because specialists were not available, 1999-2026



Principal's comments on cancellation/transfer

- Hospitality [cancelled]- students now entered into Food Technology
- No cancelled classes - but we use NetNZ to facilitate teaching that we cannot undertake ourselves due to staffing ratios.
- None but particular strain felt in Technology / Science.

7. Staffing expectations

7.1 Expectations of recruitment and retention

Principals indicated their recruitment and retention experience and expectations for this year relative to the previous year. The table below indicates their expectations (excluding those who said they did not know).

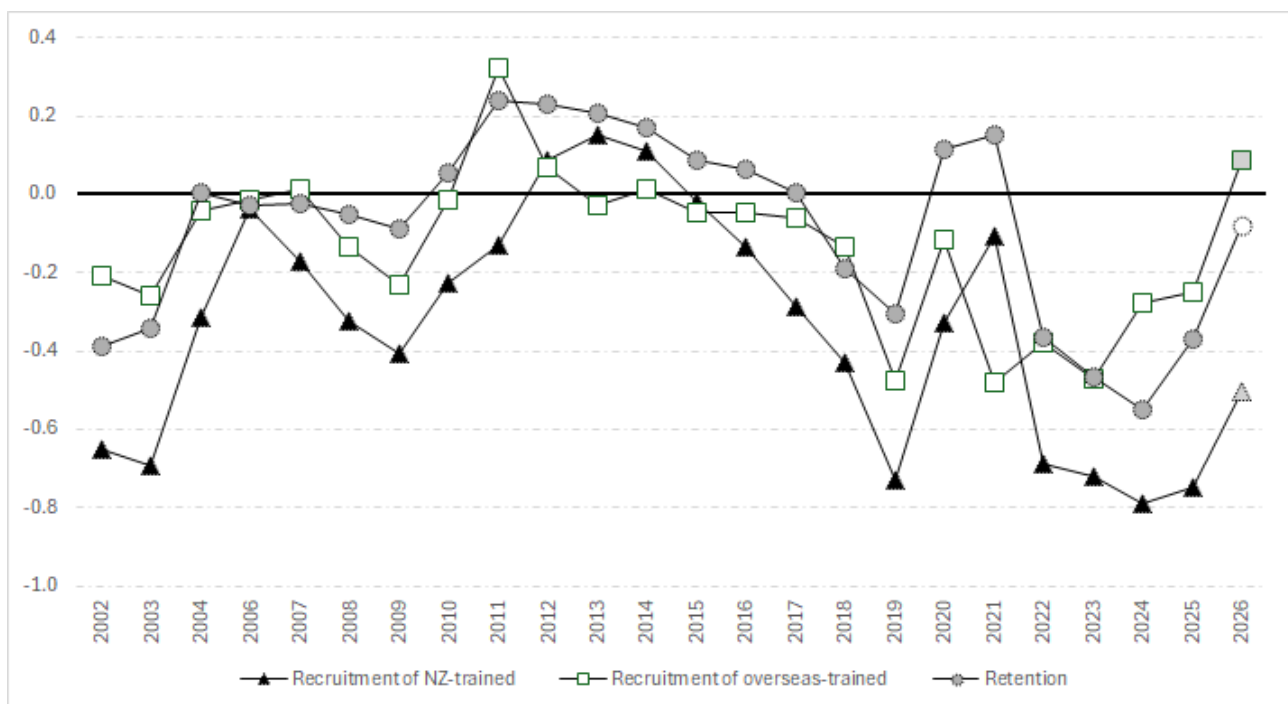
Expectation 2025	Response (%)		
	Easier / much easier	No different	Harder / much harder
Recruitment - NZ	9	32	59
Recruitment - overseas	19	72	10
Retention	18	56	26

Three in every five principals with an opinion anticipate it will be harder or much harder to recruit from within New Zealand for the rest of this year. Only one in ten expected more difficulty this year in recruiting from overseas.

Principals are less pessimistic than in 2025 about retaining staff this year, but still about a quarter expect it to be harder or much harder.

As Figure 11 illustrates, expectations about overseas recruitment are now strong by historical comparison. However, while domestic recruitment and retention expectations are the most positive they have been in five years, they are still weak compared to the period prior to 2018.

Figure 11. Index of expectations regarding domestic recruitment, overseas recruitment and retention, 2002-2026



Note – indices for 2002 to 2022 based on a mix of actual experience and expectations for the rest of the year; indices for 2023 to 2026 based on 'general perception' of the year.

8. Principals' comments on teacher supply

General experience

We have not had any difficulty recruiting and retaining NZ teachers.
The teaching shortage is dire ... it places so much pressure on staff and SLT. I have been a Tumuaki for 23 years and the last few years have been the worst! So much so that I dread term 4 and the staffing implications.
We are a low equity index Auckland school with an excellent reputation and struggle to get staff. I would hate to be principal of some other schools that are isolated or with high equity indexes.
There is a chronic shortage of quality secondary teachers. While the number of applicants can look healthy, many many applicants are unsuitable. We need it to be recognised that the recruitment challenges in secondary are different to primary. The subject specialist degrees required by secondary teachers give graduates multiple positive options other than teaching. This is at the heart of the secondary teachers supply problem.
We increasingly see unsolicited CV's being sent in where there is either no advertised vacancy or where the sender does not hold either the right to teach or a suitable tertiary qualification.
We are fortunate at the moment in being fully staffed. We are also hyper aware of the fact that the job is not that attractive at the moment due to everything that we are being expected to do.
For the first time in my leadership career (more than a decade), I have started the school year with the same staff as the previous year. Great continuity for the school.
We are blessed with stable staffing and suitable applicants when we do need to advertise.
There is not the depth of ability or skill in teachers out there, it is more difficult to recruit in regions and more isolated areas.
This is the worst that trying to staff this school has ever been.

Overseas Teacher Recruitment and Integration

School is fully staffed. Overseas trained teachers these days fill the majority of our vacancies. They have settled well in our ILE teaching environment enabling them to share with and learn from colleagues. They seem well attuned to the needs of kiwi kids because of this.
Have just advertised for a Maths position, and among the many overseas applicants are two from the USA - the start of a new wave?
I'm far more likely to start looking at overseas teachers now than ever before. In some cases, I only give a cursory look to the local market (e.g. maths, physics) before turning my full attention to overseas teachers.
Generally we are swamped with unsuitable overseas applicants. The few NZ applicants we do receive generally are well qualified and suitable. The general numbers are dwindling.
We are getting a number of overseas applicants, but often none from within New Zealand or with any experience of New Zealand students/curriculum.
Quality New Zealand-trained teachers who understand our local educational context are increasingly difficult to recruit in the secondary sector. As a result, our strategy has been to invest in developing our current teaching staff so they can adapt and teach in subject areas where there are shortages. At the same time, the immigration pathway for overseas teachers has become increasingly complex and costly. The visa approval process is uncertain, application costs are extremely high for candidates, and the average processing time is currently around 3-4 months. In our experience, applicants from Fiji appear to face some of the greatest challenges in progressing through the system, which further limits our ability to recruit from a region that has traditionally supported New Zealand schools.
We advertised for one primary position. I had 48 overseas applicants, and one NZ. Fortunately the NZ teacher is very competent. 40% of my staff at an isolated high EQI Area School are overseas trained, and if we were not a "Gateway School" for immigrants we would be in deep trouble over staffing!
When we advertise for teaching positions; the majority of applicants are from overseas. We do get some NZ teachers applying but most of the time they come with red flags to be fair.
At the end of 2025 I decided to become a fully registered accredited employer. As a result of this I employed two staff members from the USA. They filled the last two available positions within the school.

It is challenging to find teachers that fit the context of the school and the students. It is not just as simple as hiring an overseas teacher - more often it causes issues as they just don't understand the NZ context in particular [high] equity index - these students require a special type of person.
I feel very lucky that for the first year in many we did not have to recruit from overseas.
We have not had any NZ-trained teachers apply for any of the 4 Secondary positions we have advertised in the last 3 years. I anticipate that any upcoming Secondary positions would also be filled by OST teachers.

Relief Teacher availability

We are really pushed to find suitable relievers. This means our current staff are owed time as they use their release time to fill in for classes where a teacher/colleague is missing.
While we have 4 qualified relievers for casual day relief this year, we have sought LATs for two senior teacher aides to be able to relieve in secondary classes.
There was a shortage of relief teachers in the first half of 2025, but not the same difficult in 2026, so will not need to extend some LATs.
Relief is also a complex thing because so many relievers have caveats around their work availability which means a school might have 10 relievers on the books but the reality being only 4 or 5 might be used. Also the relievers who want work but who have less than average classroom management....

Specialist subject teacher recruitment

It took nearly 2 years to recruit a replacement for a retired woodwork/hard materials teacher - this teacher gave another year's work to assist in 2025. It was difficult to locate NZ registered, qualified Mathematics teachers that met tagged criteria in 2025 for 2026 start.
This year I did have a couple of NZ trained teachers applying for positions, which was great, especially as both are Science positions. However did have to advertise the positions twice. We were unable to gain a NZ trained teacher for both Food Technology and Te Reo Māori. This meant that both positions were filled with LAT's. The Te Reo Māori position was advertised three times.
Our recruitment has generally been good, but there are particular subjects that are very hard to staff. Religious Education is especially difficult and important as a Catholic Integrated school. Te Reo Māori, and Mathematics have been very challenging in recent years.
I have had trouble in two areas at the school: Te Reo Māori and Commerce. These prove to be very difficult positions to fill.
Lack of availability of specialist subjects for Wharekura (Pāngarau, Pātaiao)
Although we are currently in a good space my worry is not being able to find a suitable Samoan language teacher. Last year when we advertised we had so many overseas applicants. However, we were lucky to have found domestic teachers to employ. We have advertised for a English/drama position that starts in week 6 of term 2 and am hopeful to find a domestic NZ trained teacher.
Physical Education staffing has been difficult over the past few years for our school. The other areas are pretty good.
Our main source of difficulty has been finding Outdoor Education teachers.
In specialist areas where a LAT may be the only option in the short term, the low pay rate for LAT is a huge barrier.

The influence of a school's character and location

We make a concerted effort to train our own teachers. They usually start as a teacher aide and we scaffold them into completing a teaching qualification. Having fluent speakers of Te Reo Māori has always been a challenge but due to this strategy we are finally having less challenges filling positions. Ngā Kura ā Iwi provides NCEA subjects to enable Kura ā Iwi schools to access to a variety of subjects. This learning option is facilitated in Te Reo Māori and by experienced, engaging kaiako.
As a Special Character school we are required to maintain a certain number of 'tagged' positions - when we advertise, despite making this very clear and providing the information as part of the advertising of the position, many applicants apply who do not meet the criteria.

We had 4 teachers who stated that they were leaving to live in small towns because Auckland is too expensive on a teacher income buying a house and raising a family. Its really nice that small towns are getting their service but the reason is concerning.
One of our teachers left to move to a teaching job elsewhere in order to access affordable housing because we are in the Wellington Region. Another left to a teaching job elsewhere for lifestyle reasons.
We have a consistent problem of people applying for a job in our school to get a foothold in NZ then leaving after only a few months or a year rather than staying as our town is so small and life is not what they expect. It is almost impossible to get NZ trained teachers to apply for our positions and anything fixed term we are lucky if we get even one suitable applicant.
As a small school, the answers to these questions can vary widely from day to day.
[Our school] works really hard to retain staff through many incentives and additional release time. It's hard! We have staff travelling from [nearby regions]. We support with transport costs too which all adds up! Again, it's really hard to attract staff to [our school]. The incentive payment (\$2500 for HP) for teachers has stayed the same for years - this needs to be increased along with another payment to make coming to an isolated, hard to staff area more attractive.
This is a complex issue with many factors contributing to creating pictures that are often unique to particular geographical areas.
We are a small school, our staff have stabilised and remain stable from 2025 to 2026. We are fortunate.
I know that we are in a fortunate position. That is we have mostly trained teachers who are subject specialists in their area. The advantage we have is that we are in a place people do not move to unless it is for the lifestyle. This makes it less likely that staff will leave regularly. Transience is low.
I am lucky we have a settled staff and have been lucky with finding replacements due to local knowledge and living in [a particular provincial area] also helps along with our school houses providing cheap rent. However the numbers applying are pitiful if you want a NZ trained teacher especially in English or Maths.

Staff turnover

I have had 6 teachers leave since the start of Term 4 2025, with most going on to other jobs in secondary schools (one to a new charter school). Over the year, the actual movement of teachers has been less than previously with all but one going on to teach in other schools. One was heading overseas for further study in Europe.
We were lucky this year - we had more quality applicants than in the past couple of years so have some great teachers appointed. These people will be huge losses for those schools they left though, so it's robbing Peter to pay Paul.
It's really hard as a provincial school to attract good quality teachers. It is extremely disappointing when you do attract a first year teacher and contract them to your school to then have them poached by another school offering more than we are able to. There is a lack of professionalism and ruthlessness being shown that wasn't there in the past.

Ageing workforce

We are hanging on because of the older staff who have not yet retired. The wave will arrive in the next few years.
It is harder to retain quality teaching staff with an aging workforce. I am seeing a clear trend of more staff requiring significant extended leave for major surgery from age related things. This is ok if the quality of replacements are there with long term relievers, but that is not currently the case.
I continue to be concerned about the aging workforce and what this means for the future of teaching.
We have not had any significant turnover of secondary staff in this time but are aware that we have an aging staff, many of whom will not be with us in 3-4 years' time. This we be a time of great significance for us as we need to replace experienced staff (with special character).
We had very little staff turnover last year, however, there will be a significant number of retirements this year. Seeking replacement staff is an anxious time as there is no depth. We have been lucky so far that there has been 1 maybe 2 suitable candidates. Rather than selecting between a number of suitable candidates for the best fit for the school, it is hoping that we will get anyone suitable.

Teaching outside of specialty

We have trained teachers in all areas. What doesn't show is the number who teach across areas that are not their specialist area, due to being great practitioners and I want to keep them at our school. I would have five staff who have been doing this for sometime now and we actually forget this is how they came into the position. The subject areas I am talking about are Science and Mathematics - I have three teachers in each of these areas who we have supported to change (mostly from PE) to teach in these areas. We have had senior teachers in these areas working closely with them to enable this to work successfully for them, the students and us as a school. Without this we would not be fully staffed with teachers who are competent and can do the job, there were no suitably qualified and/or competent teachers applying for these positions.

Teacher quality and Initial Teacher Education

We have recruited early, using the pool of Auckland trained university graduates and had great success. We have found recruitment for school teachers relatively straight-forward.

We have been proactive in terms of using teacher training programmes where we know we might have people finishing. We advertised as early as we could for things like refreshment leave, vacancies and so on. We were lucky to get experienced people, particularly in Maths and English.

Some subjects are harder to staff than others, although the traditionally hard-to-staff subjects are now being joined by others; for instance, we found it far more challenging finding a suitable applicant for an English role, whereas it wasn't that long ago there would be a good number of applicants from which to choose.

It has also been noticeable that the number of high-quality academic staff, those who can teach to scholarship level, is becoming fewer. It is a concern that those people are not coming into the profession. The standard of student teachers has been disappointing for the last two-three years, which does not fill one with confidence for the future as the average age of teachers in NZ continues to rise, certainly at our school.

The lack of quality teachers around generally is a concern.

There is push back from the community for schools with too many overseas trained teachers. Often they have the subject knowledge but not the classroom presence/pedagogy so we become a teacher training facility.

35 applicants for the English position. Interviewed 1 of the 3 that are in NZ. Trained here. Curriculum knowledge patchy. Knowledge of NZ language and literature very thin. Knew one book in whole resource room. Might be suited to ESOL teaching at a stretch. A nightmare when you get a resignation during the year! Hard enough when you begin in August trying to fill positions for next year. Very stressful and time consuming. College of Education training unsuitable people- issues with literacy and language.

Education system context

I am concerned about the churn and lack of clarity of curriculum and assessment change on teacher retention

I am hardening my view that the key to recruiting and retaining quality teaching staff lies in enabling them to focus their time and energy on where they can have the greatest direct impact: the delivery of instruction and support for student learning in the classroom.

While tasks such as sending STAR letters and entering data are necessary, they draw teachers away from their most important responsibilities. This pulls them away from the work they find most meaningful and impactful.

The constant flux in curriculum requirements, combined with the ongoing criticism directed at schools and teachers, further compounds the challenges associated with recruiting and retaining quality staff. Teachers need stability and clarity to do their jobs effectively.

The Ministry of Education's lack of strategic vision and leadership is increasingly evident in its disjointed responses, whether in the ongoing struggle for adequate funding or in what often appears to be a disconnect from the real issues facing schools and students. This creates an environment that can be demoralising for teachers.

I believe the Ministry of Education needs to provide stronger leadership and a coherent, well-resourced

strategy that enables teachers to focus on teaching and learning. Doing so will help attract and retain staff, as teachers will feel supported to concentrate on the work that matters most for students.

My concern is the level of stress-related sickness in the Primary part of the school, e.g., one member of staff being signed off for a term by their doctor. The narrative is the pace of the government, and the amount of new learning is creating very stressful situations for the staff involved.

Broader contextual factors

We had a tiny number of staff leave last year and only 6 new staff in 2026. I know, from discussions, that we have more thinking about leaving at the end of this year to travel, but geo political events might change that.

One resignation was owing to transport issues - this will become more difficult if petrol prices continue to rise.

My 2IC and DP left the education sector, took a pay cut and moved into Deloitte. As a staff of mostly women, there are more of my colleagues seeking flexible working arrangements, so part time work which makes filling the full role difficult and at a greater cost eg form time and extra curricular support to assist engagement.

There are very real gender differences that are not being acknowledged. I have overspent by relief budget the last 3 years with caregiving falling on women and caring for aged parents as our work force is aging.