

What would I ask? Teacher Tapp founder Laura reflects

For eight years I've asked teachers three questions every day. Not always mine – many came from teachers and leaders themselves – but I've seen which ones reveal something useful, and which sink without trace.

So, after all this, what would I say to a headteacher who is thinking about asking surveys this year? Simple: timing matters.

Some things shift constantly, like behaviour and morale, while others barely move. If you ask at the wrong time, you'll get a distorted picture and may end up acting on the wrong problem.

Take behaviour. Everyone knows the arc. September: neat shoes, polite chatter. By February: frayed nerves. Around Easter: absolute rock bottom. Then, somehow, things pick up again. Summer can be almost calm—unless it's scorching, in which case pupils settle but staff morale evaporates.

So if I were leading a school, I'd check behaviour and morale twice a year: late September, when the shine has gone but optimism hasn't, and just before Easter, when everyone is stretched to breaking point. That way you capture the highs and lows. Do it in week one and you'll get a rosy picture; do it in late July and exhaustion will drown out everything else.

Workload is trickier. It doesn't just change across the year; it changes across the week. Teachers often say Mondays and Tuesdays feel like an uphill slog, with five days of lessons still ahead. Senior leaders, on the other hand, see their week unravel on Thursdays and Fridays as safeguarding cases, HR crises and parental complaints pile up.

Zoom out to the whole year and you see the real pattern: workload rarely lightens, it just changes flavour. Autumn brings accountability deadlines. Spring: mock exams, parents' evenings, inspection rumours. Summer: reports and transition. Each adds another layer. Which is why I'd suggest workload surveys at least twice a year – more if you can. Not because leaders should swoop in with instant fixes. Teachers know the job is heavy. But the data helps leaders avoid bad decisions, like dropping a new initiative into the middle of February when staff are already drowning.

Beyond behaviour, morale and workload, I'd only add one other focus each year. One is enough. The smart move is to pick it strategically: curriculum, CPD, lunchtimes, communication – any of the areas where small irritations quickly spiral into big frustrations.

Communication is the one that crops up most. Teachers complain they get timetable changes at the last minute. Leaders complain that no one reads the emails. Both sides are right. Both sides are cross. Fixing it isn't a quick win, and running a single survey only makes people more cynical.

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The schools who do it well treat it as a loop. First, they explain why they're asking. Then they push for a near-universal response - sometimes by giving out QR codes in a briefing and insisting everyone completes it there and then. After that, they form a response team: union reps, wellbeing leads, a couple of new teachers. Their job is to draft solutions, which senior leaders then deliberate and adapt. Crucially, the school checks back later in the year and repeats the cycle. Because communication, like behaviour, isn't "fixed." It's maintained.

Whatever you choose - curriculum, CPD, lunchtimes - the same principle holds. Questions must lead to a conversation and some visible change. Otherwise staff assume their views are being collected for a dusty PDF that will never be opened again.

After eight years of living in questions, here's the rhythm I'd recommend to any school leader:

- Behaviour and morale: twice a year.
- Workload: at least twice, maybe more.
- One strategic theme: carried through properly.

Does this mean multiple surveys through the year? It depends. You need to decide on what works for you and your team. You might want to combine these themes into just a handful of surveys per year, or you might pulse more regularly, pursuing different themes separately.

What matters is the discipline to survey intentionally and close the communication loop with regular feedback. Too often I see the opposite: scattergun surveys with low response rates, or no surveys at all because leaders are scared of what the answers might be.

And yes, the answers are often hard. Teaching is exhausting! But they're also useful. They show what's cyclical, what's new, and when things have genuinely gone off-track.

Teachers don't expect miracles. They don't need every gripe solved. What they want is to feel heard - and to see, occasionally, that what they said made a difference. That's the power of a good question, asked at the right time.

Guidance and tools to make your own plan

We've recently published an example of a [school's yearly surveying plan](#), together with [this template](#) that you can download to create your own schedule.

