# Survey reveals severe mental health crisis among school leaders in England



A recent survey conducted by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) has revealed a severe mental health crisis among school leaders in England, with a significant number reporting negative impacts on their well-being over the past year. The findings indicate not only widespread stress and declining mental health among those in leadership roles but also a sharp decrease in aspirations to pursue headship positions in the future.

The poll, which included responses from 1,517 NAHT members conducted between September and October 2024, found that 65 per cent of school leaders said their role had adversely affected their mental health within the past 12 months. More than two in five (45 per cent) reported a need for mental health and wellbeing support during the same period. Furthermore, the survey revealed that 88 per cent experienced disrupted sleep, 77 per cent faced increased worry and stress, 76 per cent felt their family or personal life was negatively impacted, and 59 per cent reported a detrimental effect on their physical health.

In addition to these troubling mental health statistics, the survey highlighted a worrying trend regarding career ambitions in school leadership. Only 20 per cent of senior leaders now aspire to headship or higher roles, marking a record low since the NAHT began polling on wellbeing in 2016.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT, described the situation as "deeply concerning" and called for urgent action. Speaking to The Independent, Whiteman stated, “From crippling workload, fuelled by picking up the slack after years of under-investment in public services, to the pressure of inhumane, unreliable high-stakes inspections, it feels like school leadership increasingly comes with a health warning." He emphasised the need to revitalise school leadership as a career and urged for "real ambition" in improving pay, funding, inspection processes, and reducing workload to reverse the negative trend.

The mental health toll on school leaders was personally illustrated by Hilary Mitchell, a former principal at Caldmore Primary Academy in Walsall, West Midlands. She resigned at Easter, citing overwhelming pressures on her mental well-being. Ms Mitchell described taking on a wide range of responsibilities beyond leadership, including cleaning, administrative tasks, and supervising breaks due to staffing shortages.

“You get phone calls and messages at all hours and it was causing arguments between me and my partner,” she told The Independent. Mitchell recounted nights where she struggled with insomnia, worrying about work until 2am or waking up as early as 4am. She had taken time off work for stress and accessed phone counselling through her trust. Reflecting on her decision to leave, she said, “I was 55 and I thought, life’s too short, even though I live and breathe that school. I feel huge relief, but also massive guilt for my children and staff.”

Mitchell also mentioned her participation in an online head teachers’ group where many express feelings of being overwhelmed and plans to leave the profession, echoing the broader exodus indicated by the poll.

These results come ahead of the NAHT’s annual conference in Harrogate, scheduled for the weekend, where a key motion will be debated on Saturday addressing the immense pressures on school leaders. The motion highlights the crisis point reached by many in these roles and stresses the urgent need for support concerning their mental health and well-being.

The situation depicts a challenging landscape for school leadership in England with implications for the education system, driven by increasing workloads, insufficient investment, and demanding inspection regimes. The NAHT’s findings underscore the critical state of school leaders’ welfare and the declining appeal of headship roles, signalling a need for systemic changes to support these pivotal education professionals.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.naht.org.uk/News/Latest-comments/Press-room/ArtMID/558/ArticleID/2270/Mental-health-toll-on-school-leaders-is-fuelling-recruitment-and-retention-crisis-says-NAHT> - This press release from the NAHT emphasizes that nearly half of school leaders (49%) needed professional help with their mental health or well-being in the last year, contributing to a recruitment and retention crisis in the education sector.
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5. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/ofsted-naht-england-government-reading-b2464492.html> - This article discusses the NAHT survey findings, including that 38% of school leaders accessed professional support for their mental health or well-being in the last year, and 84% reported that their role had impacted the quality of their sleep in the previous 12 months.
6. <https://edexec.co.uk/school-leaders-mental-health-crisis/> - This article discusses the NAHT's annual survey revealing the escalating mental health toll on school leaders, highlighting the impact of workload, inspection, and accountability on their personal well-being.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/school-leaders-headteacher-mental-health-children-b2741619.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data