

Browne Jacobson's School Leaders Survey illustrates concerns over financial resilience ahead of spending review

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Financial prospects are worsening for most schools and show little sign of improvement in the coming years, according to results from a new Browne Jacobson survey revealed on the eve of the Chancellor's spending review.

The UK and Ireland law firm's [School Leaders Survey](#) for summer 2025 found that 85% of leaders feel negative or very negative about their financial situation compared to 12 months ago, with only 4% saying they felt positive. This marks a deterioration of confidence from the Spring 2024 survey, when 73% of respondents felt negative about their financial situation.

Meanwhile, four in 10 (40%) leaders say their current financial situation is poor or very poor, compared to 14% reporting it is good or very good, and 46% saying it is "manageable".

When asked how confident they feel about their organisation's financial security over the next three years, 64% of respondents said "not very confident" or "not confident at all", versus 18% saying "very confident" or "fairly confident".

The School Leaders Survey was completed by nearly 200 trust and multi-academy trust leaders – including CEOs, executive headteachers, trustees and governors – representing more than 1,000 schools and responsible for over half a million pupils in England during May 2025.

The findings are published ahead of Wednesday's spending review, which sets out public spending plans for government departments and, according to reports at the weekend, will include an extra £4.5bn per year for schools.

[Nick MacKenzie](#), Head of Education at Browne Jacobson, said: *"These findings paint a clear picture of the state of school finances, which are under real pressure to fund everything from teacher pay rises and SEND provision to buildings maintenance, and ultimately the condition of organisational resilience in the state-funded schools sector."*

"When details of the review are announced, schools will hope the reported extra £4.5bn is not simply made up of existing commitments on SEND and pay, and includes genuine new financial commitments by the government – resulting in a fresh injection of new cash into the education system."

"The sector will also be looking with real interest for clues on the government's priorities and, in particular, how favourably the settlement for the Department for Education stacks up against other departments."

"To their credit, many schools and trusts are undertaking various proactive measures to improve their financial sustainability. Our survey shows the most popular interventions include reviewing staffing requirements and contracts, strategic financial planning and budgeting, optimising resources, cutting expenditure, and mitigating potential financial risks."

Participants in the survey were asked how satisfied they were with various aspects of government policy, with nine in 10 (89%) saying they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with school and academy funding.

Other areas of dissatisfaction included special educational and disability needs (SEND) funding (90% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied), SEND policy (83%), capital funding and estates (76%), pay and reward (67%), Ofsted and inspections (63%), parental complaints (63%), and academisation (48%).

Attitudes were slightly more positive towards the curriculum (23% satisfied versus 28% dissatisfied) and governance (22% satisfied versus 24% dissatisfied).

Nick added: *“Views on government policy largely mirror the levels of dissatisfaction conveyed before the general election in our spring 2024 survey – other than in academisation, where dissatisfaction has risen by 10%.*

“This reflects a real challenge for the government to move the dial on the perception of its education policy programme.”

The full findings of the School Leaders Survey will be published on the week of 30 June at www.brownejacobson.com/school-leaders-survey.

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