squeezable

9 in 10 primary teachers support yearly measurement of fine motor skills

Our October 2026 survey of 6,892 teachers in England.

Technical Report

October 2026

Executive summary

Background

77% of primary teachers have noticed a decline in pupils' fine motor skills since 2020 (Art-k, 2025), yet the only statutory check is a teacher judgement at the end of Reception (DfE, 2026). On 7 October 2026, 6,892 teachers in England were asked through Teacher Tapp whether they would support a yearly check of pupils' fine motor skills in their school.

Key findings

- 88% of primary teachers support yearly measurement of fine motor skills in their school (75% of secondary teachers, 81% of all teachers).
- 87% of SENCOs and 76% of headteachers support it.
- 8% of all teachers oppose it, and 11% are not sure.
- Support holds across every region (80–83%), school size (81–84%) and funding type (78–82%).
- Support falls slightly with teacher age, seniority and experience, but remains high (from an average of 86% to 78%).
- 48% of supporters would measure every pupil each year and 52% only pupils they are already concerned about.
- Teachers of the youngest pupils are the most likely to want every pupil measured: 55% of supporters in EYFS/KS1, 51% in KS2 and 44% in KS3 & 4.

Implications

The findings show clear, nationwide support for yearly measurement of fine motor skills in schools. At 81%, an estimated 378,000 of England's 466,000 teachers would support it. In primary schools, this works out to an estimated 3.8 million pupils being taught by a teacher who supports it (DfE, 2026). Teachers of younger pupils lean towards measuring every pupil, while teachers of older pupils lean towards measuring only pupils of concern. This points towards universal measurement in the first years of school, followed by continued tracking of those who need support as they get older.

Measurement alone will not reverse the decline; its value lies in what the data makes possible. Objective results, compared against age norms, can quantifiably inform occupational therapy referrals, help prioritise oversubscribed waiting lists, and show which areas of hand skill each child needs support with, so that training can be targeted to the individual.

1. Background

Fine motor skills

Fine motor skills are the small, precise movements of the hands and fingers that children use to hold a pencil, use scissors, fasten buttons and manage cutlery. They depend on a combination of physical abilities, such as strength and range of motion, and neural abilities, such as sensorimotor control and motor memory. In school, they underpin handwriting, practical classroom tasks and children's independence in self-care.

Evidence of decline

77% of primary teachers have noticed a decline in pupils' fine motor skills since 2020 (Art-k, 2025). The wider picture of school readiness is similar: 37% of children start school without the basic independence they need to be school ready, up from 33% in 2024. This is based on teachers' judgement of whether children can manage everyday tasks such as holding a pencil comfortably, dressing themselves, and eating and drinking independently. Primary school staff report losing 2.4 hours of teaching time a day helping children catch up with developmental milestones (Kindred Squared, 2026).

Current assessment

In England, the only statutory assessment of fine motor skills is the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile, completed by teachers at the end of Reception. Each child is judged against the Fine Motor Skills early learning goal as either meeting the expected level or 'emerging' (DfE, 2026). The judgement is based on teacher observation, and there is no routine measurement of fine motor skills after Reception.

Aim

This survey asked whether teachers in England would support a structured, yearly measurement of pupils' fine motor skills in their school, and whether they would measure every pupil or only those they are already concerned about.

2. Methods

Survey platform

The question was commissioned by SqueezAble and run through Teacher Tapp, a daily survey app used by teachers in England. Teachers answer a small number of multiple-choice questions each day and can see how teachers nationwide answered the following day.

Question

On 7 October 2026, teachers were asked:

"Your school is considering a yearly check to measure pupils' fine motor skills (e.g. finger strength and coordination) to identify who needs extra help. Would you support this?"

Teachers could answer:

- Yes, for all pupils
- Yes, but only for pupils we're already concerned about
- No
- Not sure
- Not relevant / cannot answer

Sample

6,892 teachers in England answered the question, including 2,618 primary teachers and 4,274 secondary teachers. About 1% (around 76 teachers) answered "Not relevant / cannot answer".

Analysis

Answers of "Not relevant / cannot answer" were excluded, and results were weighted by Teacher Tapp to reflect the national teacher workforce, using school workforce data from the Department for Education. "Support" refers to teachers who answered either "yes" option. Results are reported for all teachers and by phase, key stage, role, region, school size, funding type, age, seniority and years of experience. For teachers who support measurement, the split between measuring every pupil and measuring only pupils of concern is also reported.

3. Results

Overall support for yearly measurement of fine motor skills

Overall support by teachers

88%

PRIMARY TEACHERS*

support yearly measurement of fine motor skills in their school.

75%
SECONDARY TEACHERS

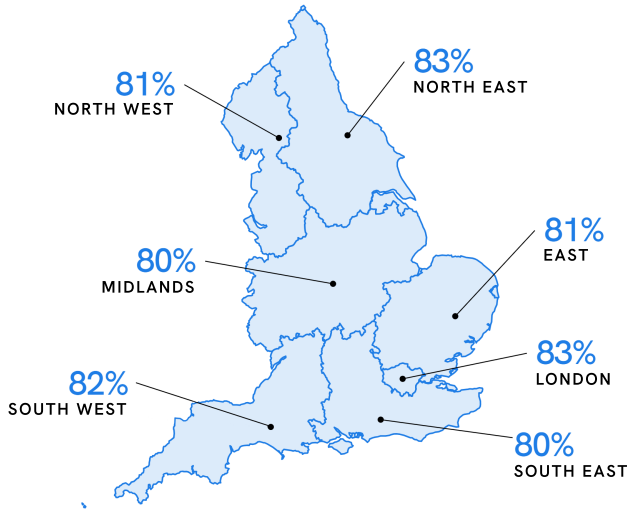
81%
ALL TEACHERS

76%
HEADTEACHERS

87%
SENCOS

Figure 1. Support for yearly measurement of fine motor skills, by phase and role.
*Support was 89% among teachers of EYFS/KS1 (n = 724) and 89% among teachers of KS2 (n = 1,416). The primary figure (n = 2,618) also includes primary teachers who did not record a key stage.

Overall support by region, school size and funding



80–83%
ACROSS REGIONS

81–84%
ACROSS SCHOOL SIZES

78–82%
ACROSS FUNDING TYPES

Figure 2. Support by region, school size and funding type. Boundaries: ONS (Open Government Licence).

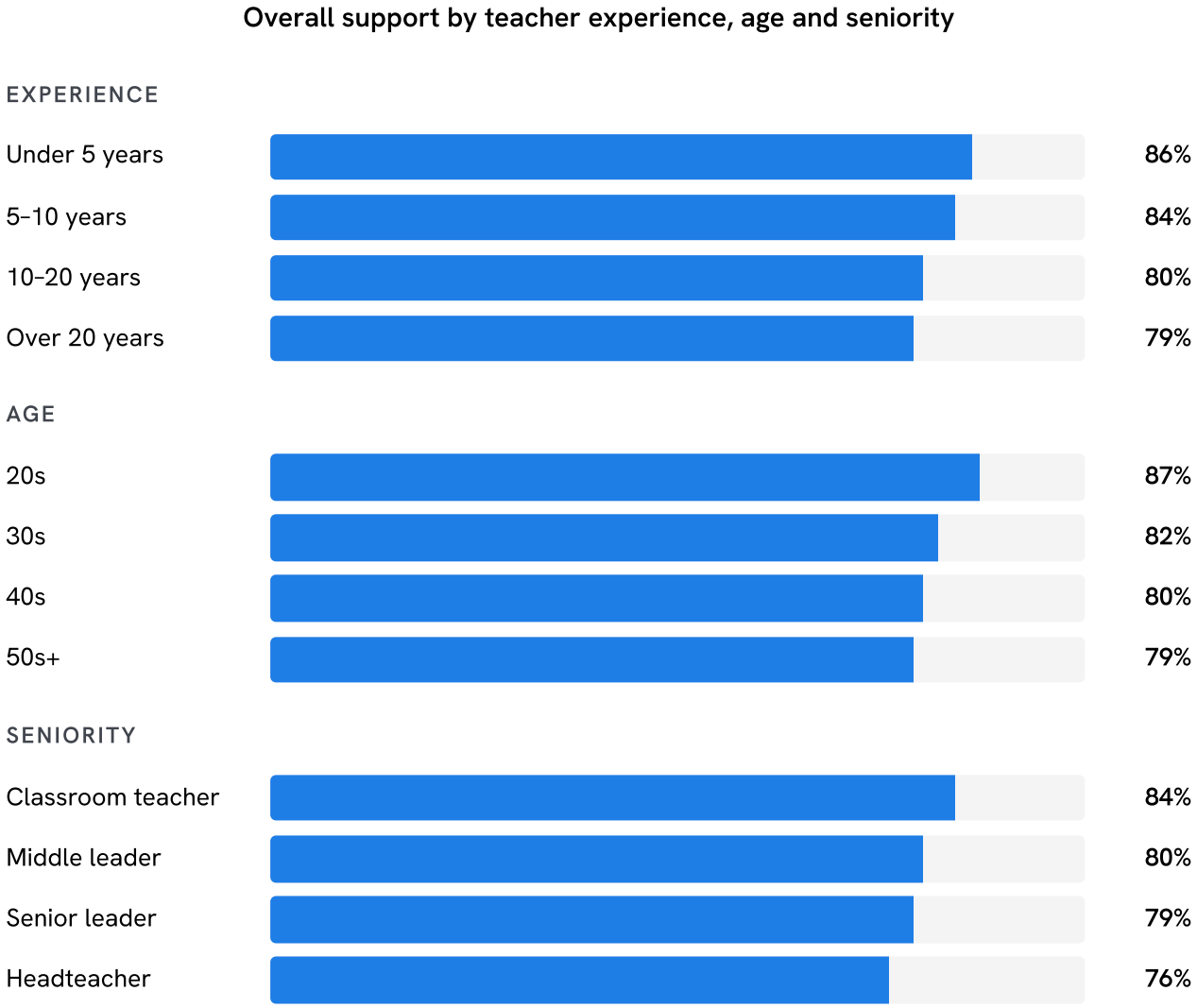


Figure 3. Support for yearly measurement of fine motor skills by years of teaching experience, teacher age and seniority. Senior leader excludes headteachers.

Summary of overall support

- Support is high among all teachers, and higher among primary than secondary teachers.
- Few teachers oppose it (8%), and more are not sure (11%).
- Among roles, support is highest among those closest to the issue (classroom teachers and SENCOs).
- Support is high among leaders and headteachers.
- Support is consistently high across regions, school sizes and funding types.
- Support falls slightly with teacher experience, age and seniority.

Teacher preference for measuring the fine motor skills of every pupil or only pupils of concern each year

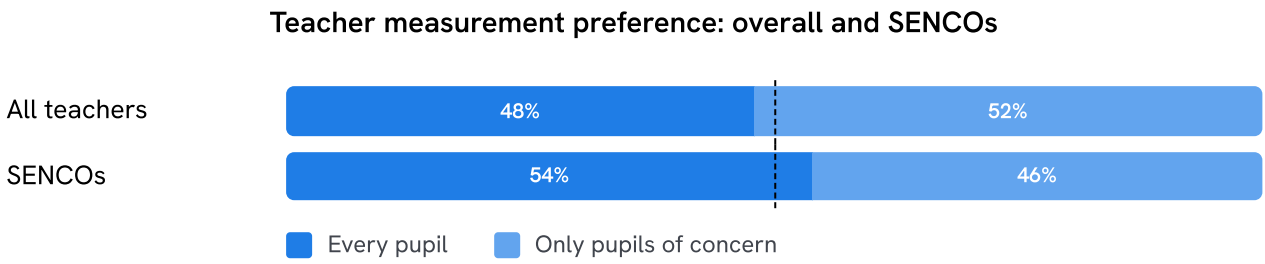


Figure 4. Among teachers who support yearly measurement, the share who would measure every pupil and the share who would measure only pupils they are already concerned about: all teachers and SENCOs.

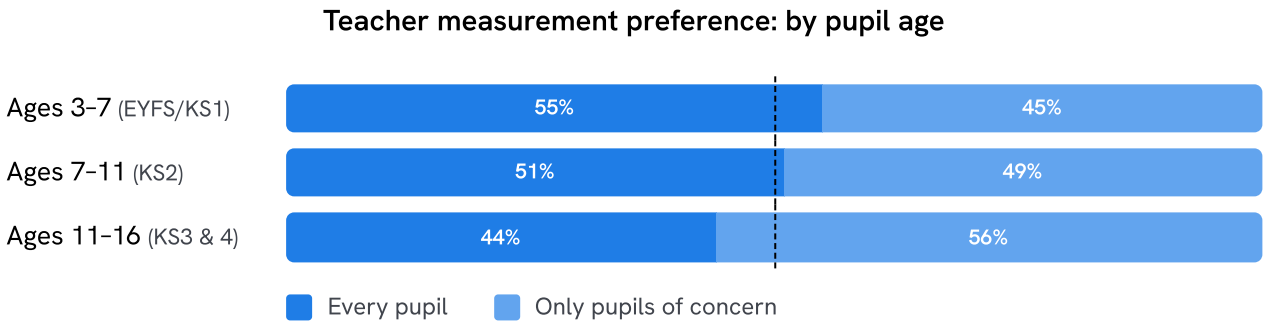


Figure 5. Among supporters, the split by the age of pupils taught. KS3 & 4 shows all secondary teachers.

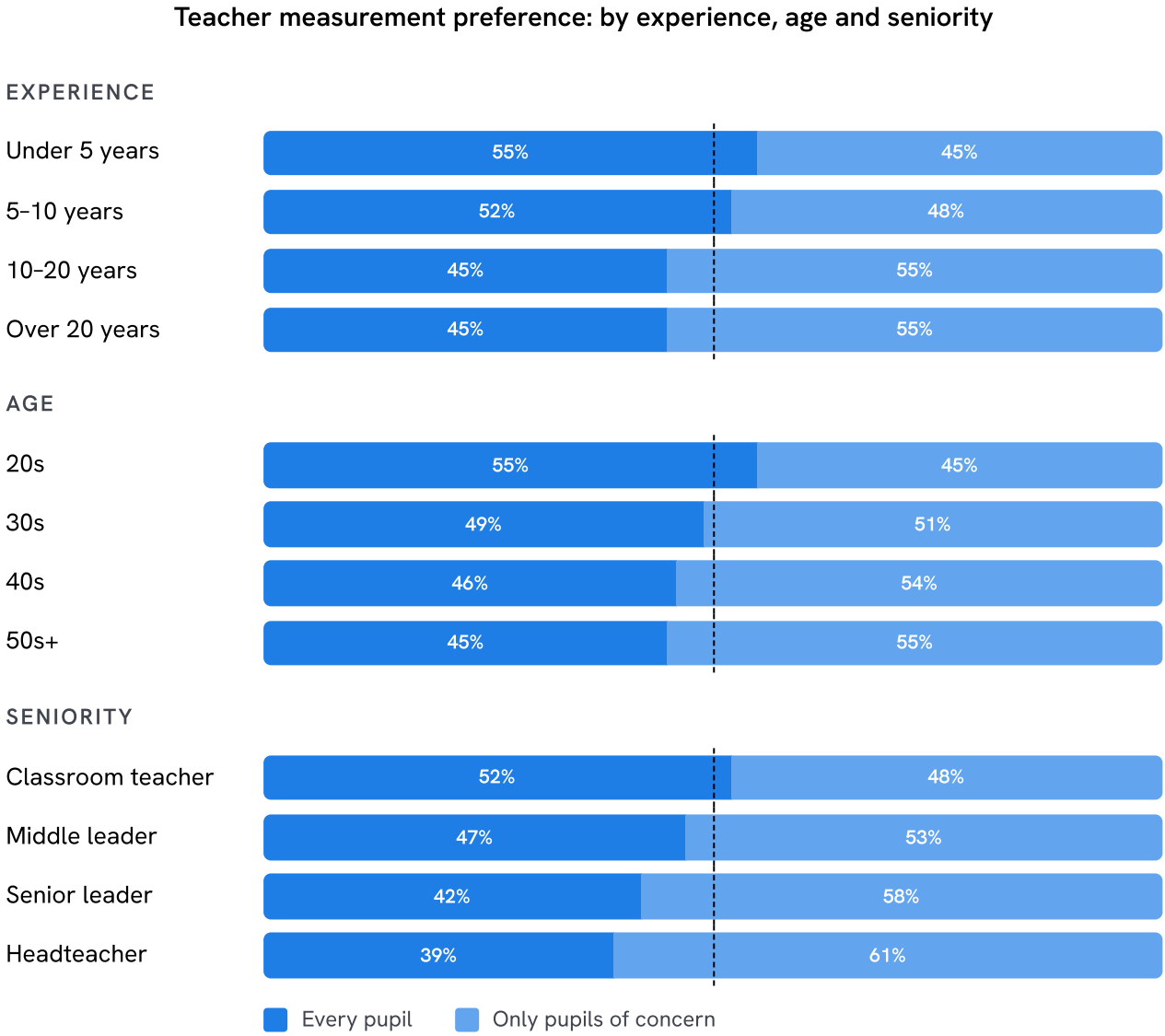


Figure 6. Among supporters, the split by years of teaching experience, teacher age and seniority. Senior leader excludes headteachers.

Summary of measurement preference

- Teachers who support measurement are split almost evenly between measuring every pupil and measuring only pupils of concern.
- SENCOs lean slightly towards measuring every pupil.
- Teachers of younger pupils lean towards measuring every pupil, while teachers of older pupils lean towards measuring only pupils of concern.
- Preference for measuring every pupil falls with teacher experience, age and seniority.

4. Discussion

What this means

The findings show clear, nationwide support for yearly measurement of fine motor skills in schools. At 81%, an estimated 378,000 of England's 466,000 teachers (DfE, 2026) would support it. This includes an estimated 187,000 primary teachers (88% of 212,800) and 164,000 secondary teachers (75% of 218,500). In primary schools, this works out to an estimated 3.8 million pupils (88% of 4.3 million; DfE, 2026) being taught by a teacher who supports it. Support at this level suggests that teachers see this as a serious problem that requires assessing.

While support is high across all groups, it falls slightly with teacher age, seniority and experience. This may reflect the practical considerations leaders weigh, such as measurement time and cost, and greater confidence among experienced teachers in spotting fine motor difficulties by eye.

Support is split almost evenly between measuring every pupil and measuring only pupils teachers are already concerned about. Teachers of younger pupils lean towards measuring every pupil, while teachers of older pupils lean towards measuring only pupils of concern. Both approaches reflect a real need.

In primary school, hand skills are still developing and difficulties are less likely to have been spotted, so measuring every child is the surest way to find those who need help. By secondary school, teachers are more likely to know which pupils are struggling. This points towards universal measurement in the first years of school, followed by continued tracking of those who need support as they get older.

Why it matters

The effects of declining hand skills are already visible in classrooms. 37% of children start school without the basic independence they need to be school ready, up from 33% in 2024. This is based on teachers' judgement of whether children can manage everyday tasks such as holding a pencil comfortably, dressing themselves, and eating and drinking independently. As a result, primary school staff report losing 2.4 hours of teaching time a day helping children catch up with developmental milestones (Kindred Squared, 2026).

The decline is also likely to affect future attainment, if it is not already. Research consistently shows that early hand skills are a strong predictor of academic achievement, most strongly in maths (read here). Weaker hand skills, combined with lost teaching time, put pupils' progress at risk.

Measurement alone will not reverse the decline - its value lies in what the data makes possible. Objective results, compared against age norms, can inform occupational therapy referrals in place of judgements that vary from teacher to teacher. They can also help occupational therapists prioritise oversubscribed waiting lists, where 87% say delays are holding back children's development of skills such as handwriting and self-care (RCOT, 2026). Furthermore, they can show which areas of hand skill each child needs support with, so that training can be targeted to the individual. There is evidence that training hand skills can improve academic outcomes (read here).

What next

In practice, measuring fine motor skills in education settings presents a challenge, because they depend upon a complex interplay between physical (e.g. strength, range of motion) and neural (e.g. sensorimotor control, motor memory) abilities. A measurement system could draw on sensor-based tools, hand-tracking technologies or a combination of approaches. It would need to be simple to use, engaging, and consistent regardless of who runs it. It would also need to be cost-efficient, saving education settings time and resources in the long term.

5. Conclusion

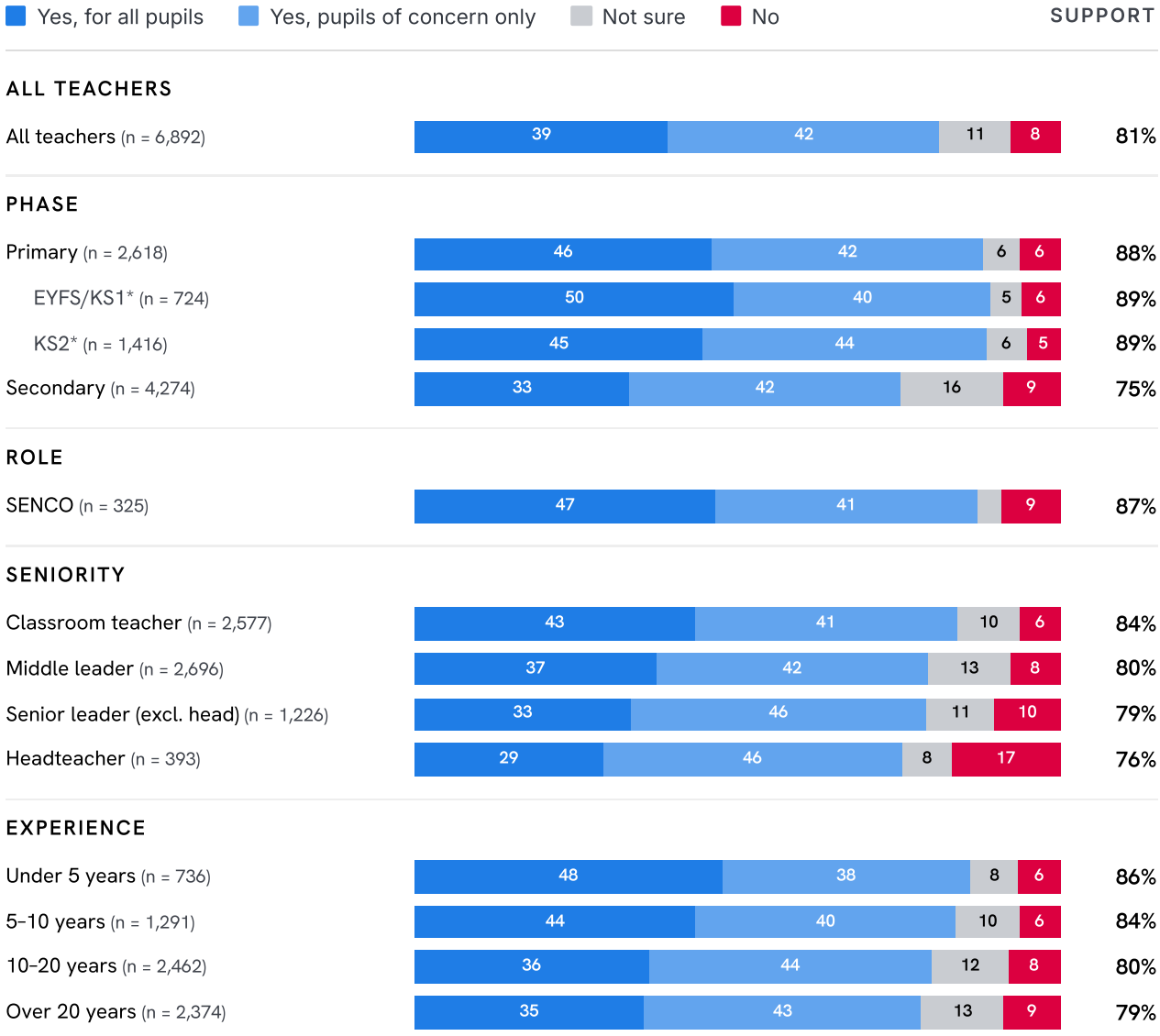
There is evidence that pupils' fine motor skills are declining, and the effects are already being felt in schools: more children are starting school without the basic independence they need, and staff are losing teaching time helping them catch up. In addition, early hand skills are linked to later academic achievement, and this raises real concern for the future attainment of today's pupils.

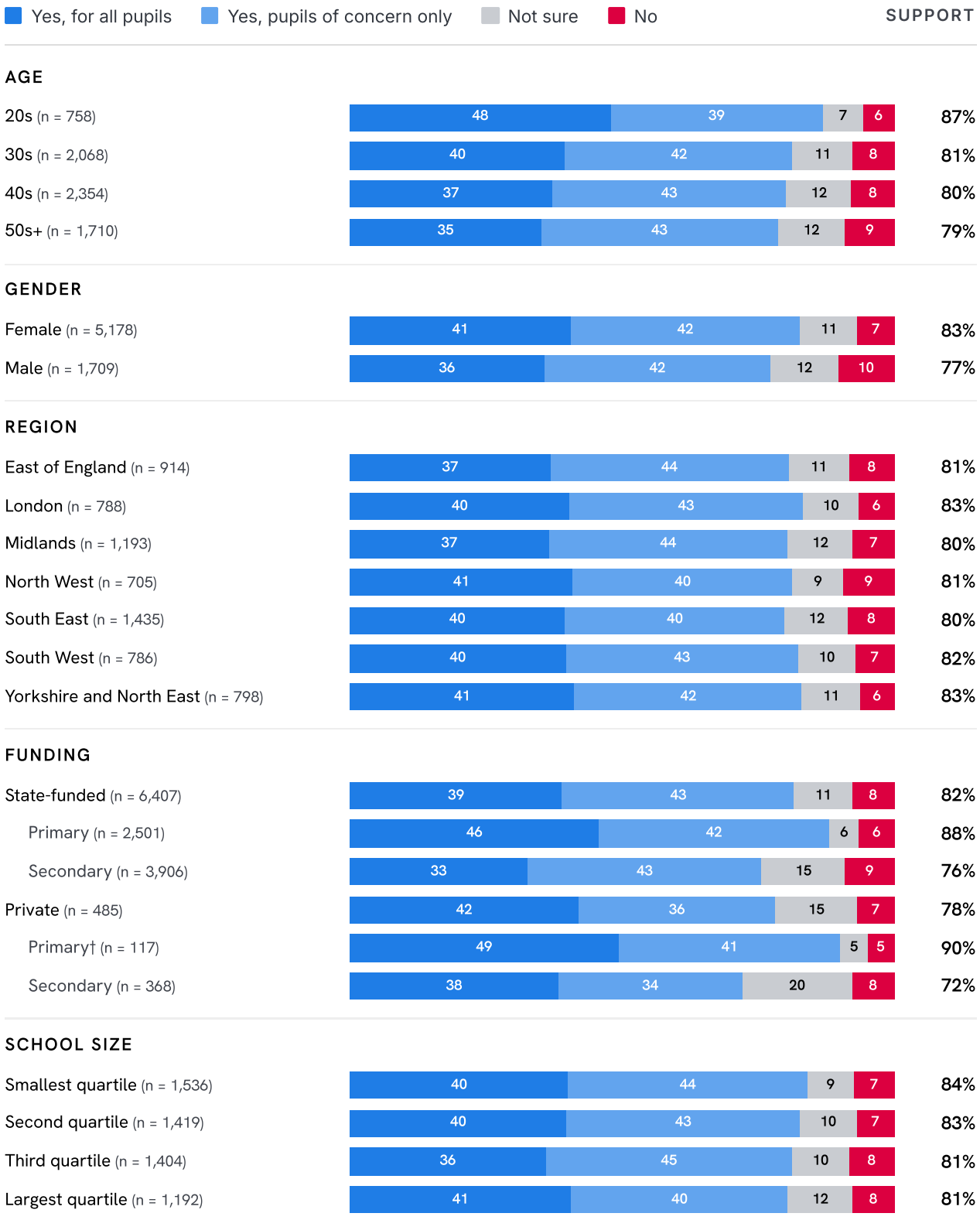
Support at the level found in this survey suggests that teachers see this as a serious problem that requires assessing. At present, the only statutory assessment of fine motor skills is a teacher judgement at the end of Reception. A formal, objective measure could inform occupational therapy referrals, help prioritise oversubscribed waiting lists, and show which areas of hand skill each child needs support with, so that training can be personalised to the individual. There is also evidence that training hand skills can improve academic outcomes.

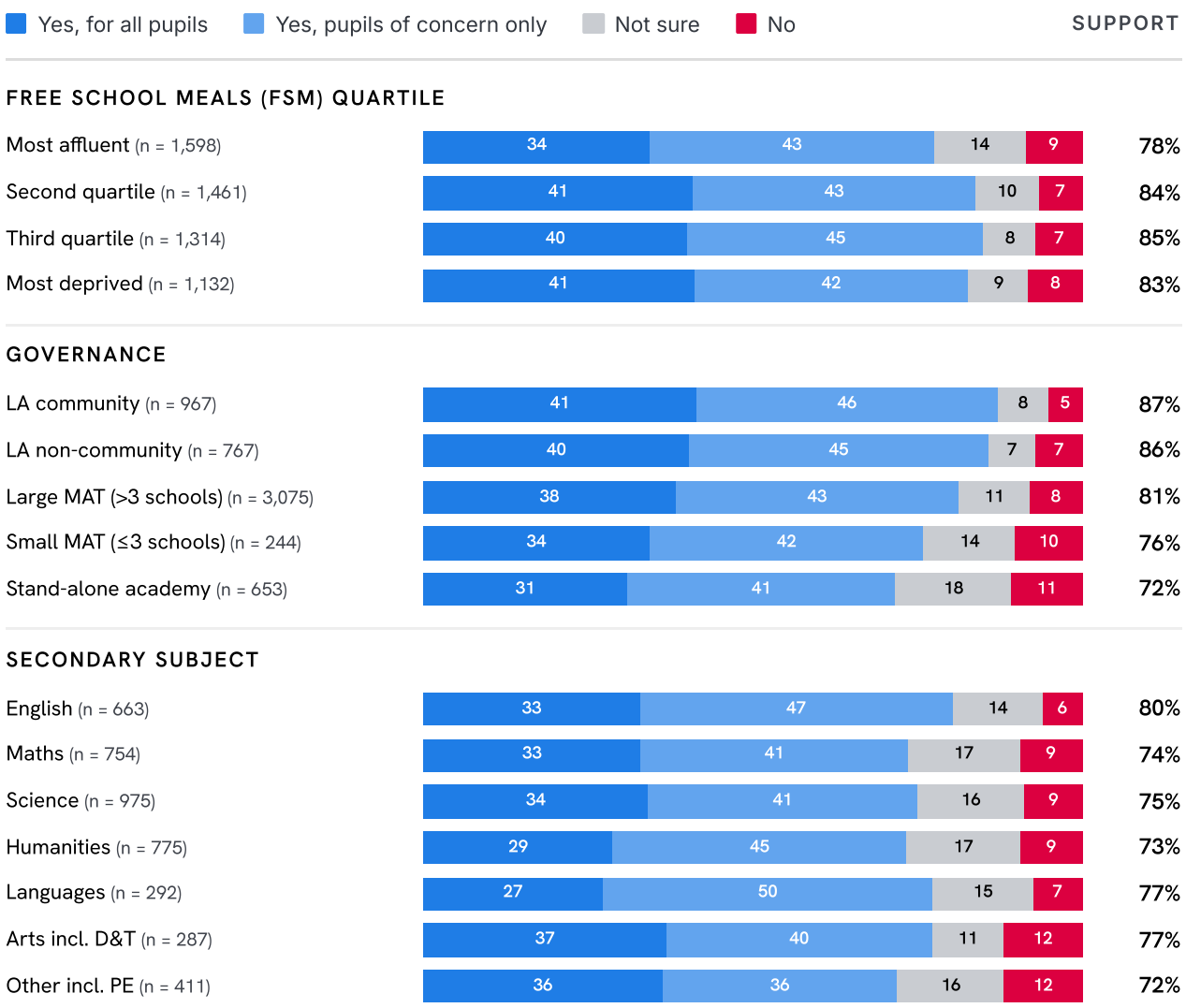
Increasing access to occupational therapists for routine measurement is unlikely to be affordable at scale. Practical solutions are more likely to come from tools that education settings can use themselves, such as sensor-based or hand-tracking technologies, provided they are simple to use, engaging, consistent and cost-efficient.

6. Appendix: full data breakdown

"Your school is considering a yearly check to measure pupils' fine motor skills (e.g. finger strength and coordination) to identify who needs extra help. Would you support this?"




Yes, for all pupils
Yes, pupils of concern only
Not sure
No
SUPPORT
AGE
20s (n = 758) 48 39 7 6 87%
30s (n = 2,068) 40 42 11 8 81%
40s (n = 2,354) 37 43 12 8 80%
50s+ (n = 1,710) 35 43 12 9 79%
GENDER
Female (n = 5,178) 41 42 11 7 83%
Male (n = 1,709) 36 42 12 10 77%
REGION
East of England (n = 914) 37 44 11 8 81%
London (n = 788) 40 43 10 6 83%
Midlands (n = 1,193) 37 44 12 7 80%
North West (n = 705) 41 40 9 9 81%
South East (n = 1,435) 40 40 12 8 80%
South West (n = 786) 40 43 10 7 82%
Yorkshire and North East (n = 798) 41 42 11 6 83%
FUNDING
State-funded (n = 6,407) 39 43 11 8 82%
Primary (n = 2,501) 46 42 6 6 88%
Secondary (n = 3,906) 33 43 15 9 76%
Private (n = 485) 42 36 15 7 78%
Primary† (n = 117) 49 41 5 5 90%
Secondary (n = 368) 38 34 20 8 72%
SCHOOL SIZE
Smallest quartile (n = 1,536) 40 44 9 7 84%
Second quartile (n = 1,419) 40 43 10 7 83%
Third quartile (n = 1,404) 36 45 10 8 81%
Largest quartile (n = 1,192) 41 40 12 8 81%



Source: Teacher Tapp, 7 October 2026. 6,892 teachers in England, weighted to the national workforce. Support is "Yes, for all pupils" plus "Yes, pupils of concern only". *EYFS/KS1 and KS2 only include primary teachers who gave a year group, so they do not add up to the primary total. FSM = free school meals quartile. †Private primary: 117 responses, margin of error ±9 points.