

Joint Press Release on Teacher Shortages (Nov 2023)

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), in conjunction with the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA) today published the results of an extensive survey highlighting an unprecedented level of vacant teaching posts in primary and special schools.

The survey found that, in total, there is a current shortfall of 809 permanent, fixed-term and long-term substitute teachers in the schools who responded to the survey. To make matters even worse, these schools have also indicated that they anticipate having an additional 1,202 long-term vacancies within the next three months.

This survey also identifies the disproportionate adverse impact on certain schools. 28% of all schools in the survey reported long term vacancies, but that percentage rose to 50% in DEIS Band One schools and Gaelscoileanna, and 43% in special schools.

The survey showed a particular geographical impact on Dublin and other urban areas. Dublin was the county with the most vacant posts – 513 out of 809 (63%) of all vacant posts were in the greater Dublin area (109 permanent, 213 fixed-term and 191 long-term substitute). Within Dublin, the areas worst affected are Dublin 24 (58 vacancies, including 21 permanent), Dublin 15 (35, including 9 permanent) and Dublin 12 (33 including 10 permanent). There were 70 vacancies in Kildare, 63 in Meath, 30 in Louth and 32 in Wicklow.

Two thirds of primary schools responded that they had used a Special Education Teacher (SET) to cover for an absence and 61 schools responded that they had used a SET for more than 20 days by the end of the first month of the school year. This indicates the impact that the teacher shortage is having on special education provision.

The survey of all primary and special schools was conducted in the first week of October with a total of 1,094 schools responding (a 35% response rate). The demographics of the schools that responded were broadly reflective of the primary education sector.

The findings prove beyond any doubt that planning for teacher supply in the primary and special education sectors is failing and it is pupils with the greatest needs who are most adversely impacted.

Last Christmas, the Department of Education stated that, in the primary sector, 99.5% of contracts extending to a year or more had been filled, but they admitted that an average of 1,200 short-term daily substitute vacancies existed during the first academic term. School principals have indicated clearly that the lack of short-term substitutes is already much more severe this year and that they have never before witnessed such massive numbers of longer-term vacancies.

Key findings of the survey include:

In relation to long term vacancies:

- Only 72% of the schools who responded had been able to fill all their vacancies, with 306 schools still having vacant posts.
- 89 schools had vacant permanent posts, with 1 school having 8 vacancies and 1 school having 9.
- 149 schools had unfilled long-term fixed-term posts with 13 schools having 4 such posts unfilled, and 6 schools having 5.

- 212 schools had long-term substitute vacancies with 10 schools having 4 vacant substitute posts and 18 having 3.
- 34% of the special schools in the survey had vacant permanent posts.
- Of the 109 DEIS band 1 schools that responded, there were 45 vacant permanent posts, 81 fixed-term posts and 55 unfilled substitute posts.
- In the 53 Gaelscoileanna that responded, there were 18 permanent and 18 fixed-term posts vacant as well as 34 vacant long-term substitute posts.

Expected vacancies:

- 12% of schools in the survey expected to have permanent vacancies in the next three months, a total of 157 posts.
- 57% of schools expected to have long-term substitute posts available – a total of 1,045 posts. This is in addition to the required cover for short-term absences.

Impact on SEN provision:

- 721 schools (66%) responded that they had used a SET to cover for an absence. For most of these schools, (442) SETs were used for between 1 and 5 days, but 61 schools responded that they had used a SET to cover classes for more than 20 days.
- 8 schools indicated that they had used a SET as cover for more than 50 days, indicating that SET were being used as a long-term solution to fill vacancies.
- Using the median figures from the survey, it can be estimated that 5,214 days substitution have been provided by SETs already this year.

Launching the report, IPPN CEO Pairic Clerkin said:

“As the professional body for primary school leaders, IPPN is acutely aware of and concerned about the challenges schools are facing with regard to unfilled teaching posts. The shortfall in the number of teachers is compromising the ability of schools to meet the needs of all pupils, as our members are forced to ensure that they have teachers for all mainstream classes, meaning they have a reduced cohort of Special Education Teachers to work with children with additional needs.

Over the last number of years, IPPN has consistently highlighted the issues school leaders face in securing substitute cover for teacher absence. This will prove even more difficult this year, which will add to the challenge of ensuring continuity of provision to children. If schools are finding it difficult to fill permanent and fixed-term teaching positions, what chance have they of finding teachers to fill part-time or substitute positions?”

INTO Deputy General Secretary Deirdre O'Connor said:

“This survey indicates that in the schools who responded, there is a current shortfall of 809 teaching posts in the schools surveyed, with another 1,202 expected vacancies in the next 3 months. In the midst of a staffing crisis in our schools, particularly in our urban areas, all options must actively be explored to ensure that no child is left without a qualified teacher. We are acutely aware of the profound impact that the housing crisis and escalating living costs are having on the recruitment and retention of teachers in Ireland, particularly within areas experiencing rent pressures.

Prior to the austerity cuts to salaries, allowances and posts of responsibility there was no teacher retention crisis in Ireland. The downgrading of the profession between 2009 and 2013 when allowances for teachers were withdrawn and the heart was stripped from the promotional system has left a damning legacy. Other countries are incentivising Ireland's primary teachers to work overseas, and the Department of Education is failing to convince them that they are valued here. As a result, our most vulnerable pupils are losing out. For the sake of these pupils concrete measures to tackle the teacher retention crisis must emerge from the next public service agreement. It is long past time for the government to get serious about making teaching in Ireland's primary and special schools as attractive as it once was."

CPSMA Secretary General Seamus Mulconry said:

"CPSMA would like to acknowledge the sustained engagement of Minister Foley and her Department on this issue, which is without doubt the single greatest challenge facing primary education. The mitigation measures introduced by the Department have had a positive impact, but the scale of the challenge is now so great, and the crisis so grave that a "whole of government" approach is warranted, and measures which are beyond the gift of the Department of Education are needed if we are to meet this challenge.

There is no problem attracting young people to a career in teaching, the challenge is to ensure that when they graduate they can afford to live and work on the east coast. Government must act now to ensure that teaching in Dublin is a better option than teaching in Dubai.

The staffing crisis has put primary education under immense pressure. It is only the commitment, dedication and hard work of school leaders and teachers that has prevented widespread disruption to the system. We all owe school leaders and their staff a great debt of gratitude and, more importantly, action so young teachers can choose Dublin over Dubai."