

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND YOUTH TO DISCUSS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS TO ALLEVIATE SHORTAGES IN SUPPLY

Opening Statement on behalf of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation

10 December 2025

Vere Foster House
35 Parnell Square
Dublin 1
D01 ET35

Tel: 01 804 7700
Email: info@into.ie
Web: www.into.ie
General Secretary: John Boyle



Áras Vere Foster
35 Cearnóg Parnell
Baile Átha Cliath 1
D01 ET35

Guthán: 01 804 7700
Ríomhphost: info@into.ie
Greasán: www.into.ie
Árd Rúnaí: Sean O Baoill

We would like to thank the Committee for affording us this opportunity to address you on the matter of recruitment and retention of teachers to alleviate shortages in supply. The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) is the oldest and largest teacher union on the island, with 54,000 members. We believe that for children to achieve the best possible outcomes, they need to be taught by a qualified teacher every day, including when their assigned teacher is on leave. In order to achieve this, the recruitment and retention of teachers is of paramount importance.

We should not underestimate the scale of the challenge. The [Global Report on Teachers](#), a collaboration between UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 reveals an urgent need for 44 million primary and secondary teachers worldwide by 2030. Ireland is in a global market for teachers who are well educated, flexible and mobile. To compete in this market, Ireland needs to ensure that the teaching profession in Ireland is well paid, properly resourced and that teacher supply is planned to meet demand. UNESCO is also currently compiling a major report on the main factors affecting teacher supply in Ireland which will be published in 2026.

Unlike in many countries, attracting people, particularly school leavers, into initial primary teacher education is not an issue. The demand for primary teaching undergraduate courses remains stable. Typically, about 3.5 per cent of all CAO applicants for Level 8 courses at higher education indicate a preference for an undergraduate primary education teaching course. The successful applicants generally have over 450 CAO points, indicating a high demand from students with very good Leaving Certificate results. There are now 58,266 registered primary teachers on the Teaching Council register.

However, repeated surveys and data from the Department of Education and Youth (DEY) show that there are many vacant posts across the primary and special education sectors, and unqualified personnel acting in the place of teachers. A [Department of Education and Youth \(DEY\)](#) review of teacher payroll in March of this year found there were 1,847 vacant posts across schools. Most unfilled teacher positions were at primary level (1,228 posts) compared to second level (619). Particular geographical locations (Dublin, Wicklow, Kildare) continue to experience acute shortage, due to the impact of the housing crisis. Teachers and other public servants cannot afford to live in the communities they serve, leading to long commute times and stress. This in turn makes working in tax free areas such as the Middle East an attractive option for teachers looking to build up a deposit and get a mortgage. In 2019, an estimated 6,000 Irish teachers were employed in schools across the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Oman.

Teacher working conditions are key to recruiting and retaining teachers. Irish primary teachers teach in the largest class sizes in Europe. The system of supporting children with special educational needs through psychological and other therapeutic supports is not fit for purpose and children's unmet need can be expressed in the form of challenging behaviour which causes stress and physical injury to their teachers.

A series of surveys by the INTO in conjunction with the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) and Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) in 2023, 2024 and 2025 (see briefing document) have shown settings where recruitment and retention of teachers is particularly challenging. Special schools show higher rates of vacant posts than mainstream schools. Schools who operate through the medium of Irish and schools in disadvantaged areas also have high rates of vacant posts and unqualified personnel.

The matter of the unavailability of substitute teachers is of grave concern. In our survey in 2025, 60% (336) of the responding schools reported that they had been unable to source a substitute for an absence. 56 schools reported that they had 10 or more days where they could not get a substitute in September. A freedom of information request by RTÉ/TG4 in 2025 revealed that 8,883 individuals were paid at the unqualified rate in 3,029 primary schools in the 2023/24 school year.

The INTO believes that substitute supply panels at primary level are key to ensuring that qualified substitutes are available for all short-term absences. Currently 587 posts are allocated to 168 supply panels serving 2,900 schools, which allow principals to access qualified short-term substitutes and offer security of employment to teachers carrying out substitute work. The DEY needs to continue to take account of the need for these panels and carry out regular reviews to ensure that they are adequately staffed.

The INTO has made repeated calls on the DEY to take action to address teacher supply issues. The first requirement is to establish reliable statistics to reflect the demand, and particularly to predict demand in the future. The DEY needs to take an approach that relies not only on demographics but also takes account of policy. For example, government decisions to extend leave for parents, which we welcome, require planning to ensure qualified replacement teachers are available. *The Programme for Government* commits to reducing class size to 19:1 and introduce targeted measures in schools with very large classes. Since 2023 one mainstream class teacher has been provided for every 23 pupils. The DEY estimates that reducing class size by one pupil would require 400 posts.

The DEY must include the projected increases in special classes, EAL teaching hours, and projections for increased statutory leave, increases to other leave including bereavement leave, career breaks, job-sharing in its planning for teacher supply. Currently approximately 3% of primary pupils are in special education settings. The DEY estimates that by 2030 that figure will rise to 5%, which means that the demand for teachers in special schools and classes will rise. In most models shown by the DEY the projected increased demand for special education places is not factored into the projections for demand for teachers.

In summary, in order to address the recruitment and retention challenges, the DEY needs to develop improved models of projected demand, improve teachers' terms and conditions and ensure that substitute supply panels of qualified teachers are available to cover for all teacher absences. The INTO is proactively engaged with the DEY on the issue of teacher supply and a summary of our work in this area is included in the briefing paper which we have forwarded to the Committee.

Thank you for your attention.