

Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Youth

Recruitment and Retention of Teachers to Alleviate Shortages in Supply

Opening Statement by ASTI General Secretary Kieran Christie

For the meeting of 10th December 2025

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Crisis in Ireland

Ireland is experiencing a deep teacher recruitment and retention crisis across second-level schools, with severe implications for the quality and sustainability of the education system. ASTI believes that the situation has become chronic, with vacancies going unfilled, subject provision shrinking, and schools resorting to emergency measures to maintain timetables. While government responses have acknowledged the issue, we would argue that actions to date have been insufficient, piecemeal, and lacking in strategic vision.

Scale and Nature of the Crisis

The crisis has been developing for over a decade but has now reached a point where it is affecting every part of the school system. ASTI surveys repeatedly indicate widespread difficulty in hiring and keeping teachers. In recent data from 2024–2025:

- Around two-thirds of school leaders report unfilled vacancies, even after multiple rounds of advertising.
- Approximately 75% of schools say they have advertised posts for which no applicant applied.
- Hundreds of posts nationwide remained vacant last August as schools prepared to reopen for the current school year.
- Many schools rely on non-qualified, out-of-field, or casual teachers, and a significant proportion have had to drop certain subjects entirely.

Shortages are most acute in Mathematics, Irish, French, Construction Studies/Woodwork, Engineering/Metalwork, English, Biology, Home Economics, Chemistry, and Art. In urban areas in particular, affordability pressures make recruitment even harder.

School-Level Impacts

Schools are using a range of stopgap strategies that are increasingly unsustainable. Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers are frequently reassigned to mainstream classes, reducing supports for vulnerable students. Subject options are being cut, and in some schools, students are taught by a succession of different teachers over the course of a term. Parents in some communities have organised public meetings to demand action, reflecting the growing concern that students are losing valuable learning time and subject continuity. Teachers report that students commonly have multiple “free classes” due to staffing shortages — a sign of the immediate impact on educational quality.

Underlying Causes Identified by the ASTI

The crisis is structural, long-predicted, and driven by several interlocking factors:

1. Pay and Conditions

Teacher pay has been eroded in real terms. OECD data shows that Irish teachers’ salaries fell by 6% in real terms between 2015 and 2023, even as pay in other OECD countries rose by 4%. Pay inequality for new entrants — introduced in 2011 and later reversed — damaged morale and the attractiveness of the profession. Allowances for teaching through Irish, SEN roles, and island schools were abolished for new beneficiaries in 2012 and have not been restored.

Contract insecurity is a major deterrent. A substantial majority of new teachers start on part-time or low-hours contracts: only 26% receive full hours on entry, and just 11–13% are granted permanent contracts. Many must wait years before receiving a Contract of Indefinite Duration (CID), delaying their ability to access housing or plan long-term careers. The initiative taken by Minister McEntee last Easter to address this matter, while welcome, may be too little and too late.

Teachers returning from outside the EU face further barriers, as their experience is often not recognised for incremental credit, effectively placing them back at the start of the pay scale.

2. Cost of Living and Housing

High accommodation costs, particularly in urban areas, have made teaching financially unviable for many. The oversubscription for discounted key-worker

apartments in Dublin (such as the Bolands Mills development some time ago) highlights the severity of housing pressures. The unions argue that the cost of living now deters new entrants and pushes existing teachers to leave the profession or relocate abroad.

3. Workload and Bureaucracy

Teachers cite intense and escalating workloads that go beyond classroom teaching. Initiative overload, administrative paperwork, assessment demands, and a complex inspection regime contribute to burnout. Many teachers report that the job has become unsustainable and that they feel less valued than peers in comparable professions.

4. Training Route Barriers

The extension of the Professional Master of Education (PME) from one to two years has been a significant barrier. The average cost of the PME is around €14,700 in fees, on top of the cost of six years of education. Students often need family support or face taking on large debt, only to enter a profession where initial employment is typically fragmented and insecure.

Consequences for Students and the Education System

The most significant impact is on students. With reduced staffing, fewer subject options are available, and specialist subjects are increasingly vulnerable. Students may be taught by non-specialists or by several different teachers within the same school year, undermining learning continuity. SEN supports are reduced as teachers are reassigned to cover mainstream shortages.

Schools face greater operational pressure, with principals struggling to fill timetables and maintain subject breadth. The loss of promotional posts — cut during the recession and never fully restored — has intensified management workload and removed career progression opportunities, making retention harder.

Evaluation of Government Responses

ASTI considers that government actions to date have been reactive and inadequate. Measures such as modest changes to substitution rules, increasing PME places, or adjusting student-teacher placement structures are seen as cosmetic and not addressing core issues. While the recent move to allow

permanency after one year represents progress, we would argue it is only a first step.

ASTI believes the Department of Education and Youth is attempting to time out the crisis in anticipation of demographic declines in student numbers, rather than tackling its root causes. However, this approach risks long-term damage: today's students only go through the system once, and lost subject choice cannot be recovered later.

Solutions Proposed by ASTI

ASTI has offered a consistent set of recommendations:

1. Provide full-time, permanent employment from the start (post-probation), including for teachers returning from abroad.
2. Reduce the PME from two years back to one year to reduce financial and time barriers.
3. Restore and expand Posts of Responsibility to rebuild career structures.
4. Conduct a pay review, including shortening pay scales and restoring key allowances.
5. Increase teaching allocations so schools can offer full-hours contracts at entry.
6. Recognise relevant overseas experience for incremental credit.
7. Introduce targeted housing supports, including ring-fenced affordable accommodation.
8. Reduce bureaucratic workload and streamline administrative demands.

Conclusion

Ireland's teacher recruitment and retention crisis is not a temporary fluctuation but a systemic challenge that threatens the quality and equity of education. Without significant structural reform in pay, training, workload, housing, and career progression, the crisis is expected to deepen. ASTI argues that swift, bold action is required to restore teaching as an attractive and sustainable profession and to safeguard the educational experience of current and future students.