



CPSMA Submission on the shortage of qualified substitute teachers and issues related to recruitment and retention of teachers in the State.

Preliminary Observations

1. CPSMA thanks the Committee on Education and Skills for its decision to consider the matter of the shortage of qualified substitute teachers and issues related to the recruitment and retention of teachers in the State.
2. CPSMA received over 9000 queries from principals and chairpersons of Boards of Management of primary schools in the course of the last academic year. Through these contacts, for the most part made by principals and chairpersons in response to live issues in their schools, CPSMA is made acutely aware of issues in the primary school sector as they arise.
3. One common theme of these calls throughout 2017 concerned the difficulties that many schools experienced in securing suitably qualified substitute teachers. This difficulty, historically, typically arose towards the end of the academic year, but over the course of the last few academic years CPSMA noted that the difficulties were being reported from significantly earlier in the school year.
4. In September of 2017, principals began reporting these difficulties from the start of the school year. In order to gain harder data on the issue, and to avoid the anecdotal nature of much of the information used to drive the public and political discussion of education policy, CPSMA conducted a survey of primary school principals. The report is attached to this submission as an Appendix.
5. Alongside difficulties in securing suitably qualified substitute teachers principals reported difficulties in filling permanent and one-year fixed-term positions. While, as Minister Richard Bruton correctly noted, all positions were eventually filled, a not insignificant number of schools had to engage in multiple rounds of advertising in order to secure any applications. Many principals reported concerns as to only receiving only one or two applications for posts.

6. There is little hard data on the above and CPSMA believes, in line with *Recommendation 1* contained in *Striking the Balance – Teacher Supply in Ireland: Technical Working Group Report* (p.31), that the collection of data is critical to understanding and assessing the problem and to identifying solutions. This is now urgent. The Technical Working Group had recommended that a Standing Group to review the future needs of schools be established no later than June 2016, but no action was taken. This delay may well have been caused by the significant and inexplicable delay in publishing the Technical Working Group's Report (completed in December 2015, but only published in June 2017).

Report on CPSMA survey: Substitute teacher availability September - October 2017 - primary level

7. CPSMA conducted a survey on the availability of substitute teachers during September and October, the first two months of the academic year. The survey was conducted from Wednesday 25th October – Friday 3rd November 2017. All primary schools were closed for Hallowe'en midterm from Monday 30th October – Friday 3rd November 2017. 846 primary school principals responded to the survey, of which 844 responded to the questions in full. Schools responded from each of the 26 counties in the Republic. Principals also left comments.
8. The main findings were:
 - 757 schools (89.69%) indicated that they are experiencing difficulty sourcing a substitute teacher.
 - 69 schools (8.18%) indicated that they are not experiencing difficulty sourcing a substitute teacher.
 - 18 schools (2.13%) indicated that they have not needed a substitute teacher this year.

CPSMA recommended alleviation measures

9. CPSMA welcomes the publication of the Teaching Council Technical Working Group report, *Striking the Balance*, and calls for the immediate implementation of the report's recommendations. The planning for and development of an accurate model of teacher supply is an essential element of the report recommendations.

Research

10. An in-depth understanding of the matter of teacher supply and demand is essential, on both a national and regional level (in particular in Dublin and along the Western seaboard).
11. Research and investigation is urgently required to examine the extent of and reasons for: teacher attrition, teacher emigration, teachers returning to the profession.
12. While a lot of focus in recent media commentary has been on incentives such as pay, other factors need to be examined in understanding teachers' motivations to leave the profession and/or the State and also the factors which are acting as a disincentive to their return to the profession or to return to the State from abroad.
13. International research, particularly that from the American context, identifies that while teacher attrition is an issue for teachers at all stages of their career, it presents as an acute issue for newly qualified teachers. Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) identified that one third of newly qualified teachers leave teaching within the first three years of their career and Ingersoll (2003) specifies that up to half of newly qualified teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their career. Research undertaken by Tye and O'Brien (2002) described external factors including stress from prescribed pupil testing and escalating levels of accountability within the education system as a leading factor for teachers leaving the profession.
14. While this research relates to an international context, they indicate a requirement for data and research within the Irish primary system to identify the levels of and reasons for teacher attrition and also methods of encouraging teachers to return to the profession.

Targeted recruitment campaign

15. A targeted, broad based, recruitment campaign is required to encourage qualified registered teachers not currently teaching in the State to advise them of the opportunities to teach in Ireland and the mechanisms by which they may return.

Establishment of supply panels of substitute teachers.

16. The development of supply panels will allow stability of employment for substitutes and provide continuity of cover for schools, particularly where substitute cover is a planned requirement such as providing cover for principal release days.

17. The need for established supply panels for substitute teachers is one which was highlighted by the OECD in their 2003 report titled *Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*. This need was further reiterated by the Teaching Council in Recommendation 9 of their report, *Striking the Balance*.

Increasing the number of days for which a teacher on career break may act as a substitute teacher.

18. As an alleviation measure in 2017, the cap on the number of days for which a teacher on career break may work as a substitute teacher was raised from 40 days to 90 days. A further lift on this cap is proposed as a further alleviation measure. It is also proposed that teachers on career break be allowed to cover short-term specified purpose (fixed term) leaves such as parental leave.

Teachers who are job-sharing should be allowed some flexibility with regard to substitute work as a temporary short-term measure.

19. It is proposed that teachers who are working on a job-share basis will be allowed flexibility with regard to substitute work during their “off-days”.

Encourage retired teachers to re-register with the Teaching Council.

20. Incentives for retired teachers to re-register with the Teaching Council would provide a pool of experienced teachers who could be available to act as substitute teachers in local schools when the need arises. Ensuring that these retired teachers are registered with the Teaching Council reduces the administrative burden for principals by ensuring that the relevant documentation is available for the individual to work as a substitute teacher and that their work is acknowledged as that of a qualified teacher, thus foregoing the requirements of the five day rule which apply to unregistered persons.

Non-Statutory Leave Schemes

21. Many schools do not have sufficiently robust policies on the use of non-statutory leave schemes by teachers, and some schools have found themselves in difficulty due to the granting of such leave to a significant proportion of permanent teachers within the school in the same school year as being a contributory factor in this issue.
22. CPSMA acknowledge its own role in addressing this difficulty.

Other Observations

23. Special Education schools are reporting significant difficulty in recruiting or retaining teachers, whether permanent, temporary, or substitute. The extent of this issue and its underlying causes should be investigated. Anecdotally, principals are reporting that many newly qualified teachers are not attracted to teaching in such schools, given the extra workload and stresses that teachers in these schools often experience. Measures may have to be taken to enhance the attractiveness of taking a position in such schools.
24. The cost of living, particularly in relation to housing, in certain areas of the country, particularly Dublin, has been reported by principals as being a strong disincentive to teachers taking up posts in these areas. This may also be relevant in understanding the motives of newly qualified teachers who have emigrated. While this policy area lies beyond the committee's remit, CPSMA believes that its relevance to the issue of teacher shortages cannot be ignored.

REPORT ON CPSMA SURVEY:

Substitute teacher availability

September - October 2017

Primary Level



Number of respondent schools by county:

Carlow	19	Longford	7
Cavan	17	Louth	22
Clare	39	Mayo	30
Cork	75	Meath	34
Donegal	30	Monaghan	14
Dublin	137	Offaly	15
Galway	44	Roscommon	22
Kerry	48	Sligo	18
Kildare	29	Tipperary	46
Kilkenny	19	Waterford	17
Laois	21	Westmeath	21
Leitrim	7	Wexford	44
Limerick	42	Wicklow	29

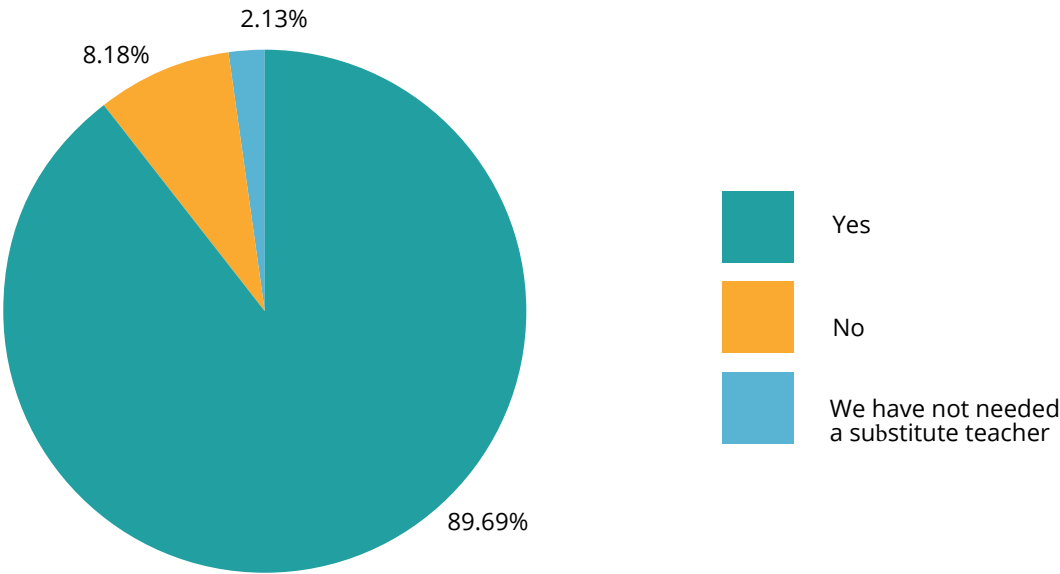


- **CPSMA** conducted a survey on the availability of substitute teachers during the first two months of the academic year.
- Survey ran from **Wednesday 25th October until Friday 3rd November 2017.**
- All primary schools were closed for Hallowe'en midterm from Monday 30th October – Friday 3rd November 2017.
- **846** primary school principals responded to the survey.
- Schools responded from each of the **26 counties** in the Republic.



Number of respondents who are experiencing difficulty sourcing a substitute teacher:

Q3 Are you experiencing difficulty sourcing a substitute teacher?

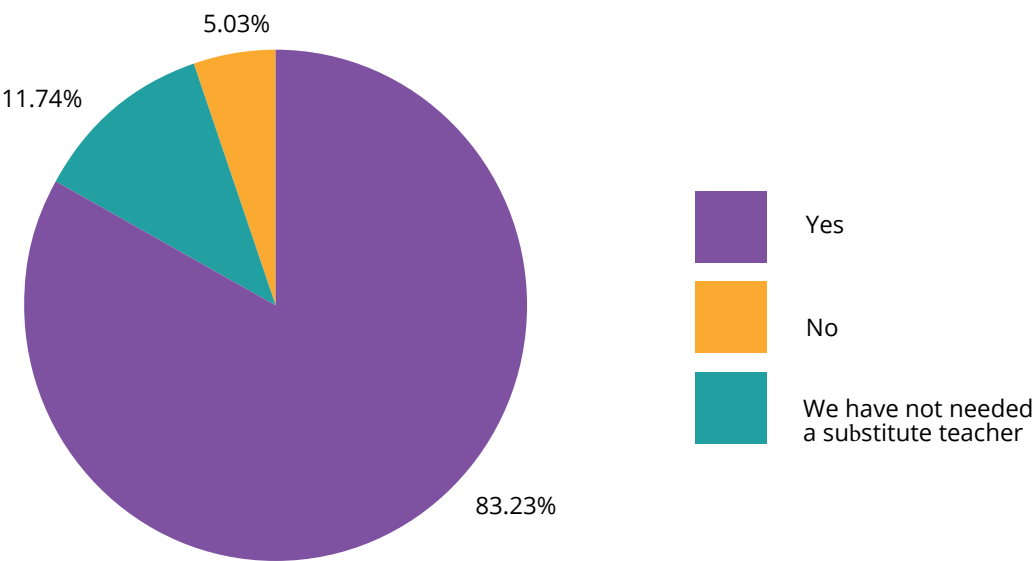


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	89.69%	757
No	8.18%	69
We have not needed a substitute teacher this year	2.13%	18
TOTAL		644

- 844 answered the question.
- 2 did not answer the question.
- 757 schools (89.69%) indicated that they are experiencing difficulty sourcing a substitute teacher.
- 69 schools (8.18%) indicated that they are not experiencing difficulty sourcing a substitute teacher.
- 18 schools (2.13%) indicated that they have not needed a substitute teacher this year.

Respondents were asked if it is more difficult to recruit a substitute teacher this year, as compared to their experiences of previous academic years.

O4 Based on your experience of previous academic years has the recruiting of substitute teachers this year been more difficult?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	83.23%	695
No	5.03%	42
We have not needed a substitute teacher this year	11.74%	98
TOTAL		835

- 835 answered the question.
- 11 did not answer the question.
- 695 schools (82.23%) indicated that it is more difficult to recruit a sub this academic year, as compared to their experience of previous academic years.
- 42 schools (5.03%) indicated that it is not more difficult to recruit a sub this academic year, as compared to their experience of previous academic years.
- 98 schools (11.74%) indicated that they are experiencing similar levels of difficulty recruiting substitute teachers.

Questions asked in the Survey

How many substitutable teacher absences have there been in your school between 1st September 2017 and 27th October 2017?

Schools indicated that have had approximately 15552 days of substitutable absences between these dates.

How many of these days were covered by a registered teacher?

Schools indicated that approximately 10328 of these days were covered by a registered teacher.

How many of these days were covered by unregistered person under the five day rule?

Schools indicated that approximately 1136 of these days were covered by an unregistered person under the five day rule.

For how many days was the school unable to employ a substitute teacher?

Schools indicated that they were unable to employ a substitute teacher for approximately 3659 days.

Why does this matter?

1. 89.6 % of schools surveyed indicated that they are having trouble sourcing a substitute teacher. This result is representative of all counties in the Republic of Ireland. This means that there are times when principals and schools must prioritise sourcing short-term staff over other activities:

A principal stated that: It can take hours on the phone and attempting to make contact with subs to get a sub, if indeed you can get one!

2. There were a significant number of days when children in our schools were not taught by a qualified teacher.
3. Children with special educational needs did not receive specialised teaching time as their Special Education Teachers had to supervise pupils instead of teaching them.

A principal said: "School are been forced to use SET teachers to cover absences in classes to ensure children are properly looked after and supervised"





Why does it matter continued

4. Teaching Principals are unable to take their principal release days which are vital to undertake essential school management, administration and leadership tasks. As such, principals are forced to firefight school management issues while juggling their full-time teaching responsibilities.

A teaching principal expressed her frustrations with the crisis and workload impact: *"I am sitting in school at 6pm for the third day in a row this week. Last night I was here until 8pm. I have been unable to find a sub to cover admin days. I have SO MUCH to do in the office and SO MUCH planning to do for my FOUR classes, and I cant do it unless its after school hours! If there was a teacher appointed who would cover admin days for the cluster of schools in my area, it would solve a LOT of our problems. We would have continuity, in that the same teacher could work with students and there wouldn't be a panic looking for subs. I also had a surgery recently, and couldn't take the following week off (even though I was granted a sick cert) as I couldn't find a sub to cover for the week!!"*

A teaching principal stated: *"I have not been in the position to take my principal re-lease days in a small rural school as I at the moment I cannot get any sub to cover my classes."*

Principal in Sligo: *I have been unable to take my admin. days, which are vital for me to be able to carry out my role as school leader of Teaching and Learning, due to this shortage.*

5. It is increasingly difficulty to find appropriately qualified teachers for schools with specialised settings such as special schools, Gaelscoileanna or Scoileanna Lán-Ghaelach.

A school reports difficult sourcing a teacher with fluent Irish for the area:

"We are a gaeltacht school and it is impossible to get someone with Gaeilge líofa. We end up with teachers who have little or no Irish. This situation is not good enough."

A principal stated that due to the impact of substitute shortage, their *"special school [is experiencing a] severe lack of experienced subs".*

A principal of a DEIS school:

"Impossible to find qualified substitutes for DEIS schools. Really worrying with three maternity leaves coming next term. Immediate action is necessary by DES."



Why does it matter continued

6. The shortage is impacting on the delivery of in-service training programmes which are prioritised by the Department of Education and Skills.

An example of this is the current resilience building programmes for DEIS schools. On 9th October, 2017, the Minister of Education issued a press release titled *Resilience and Wellbeing Teacher Training Programmes being rolled out to all DEIS schools*. The press release described his Department's roll out of two research based programmes, Friends for Life and Incredible Years, which would be of benefit to pupils in schools. The delivery of the training relied heavily on substitute cover, which was made available for schools. However, they have been impacted by availability of substitute teachers.

A principal stated:

"As a DEIS school, we could not accept the full number of Incredible Years/FRIENDS CPD days offered (with substitute cover) as the required number of substitute teachers were not available."

7. It is proving difficult to recruit substitute teachers for long-term positions such as to cover a maternity leave.

A principal stated: *I advertised a substitute maternity job in my school twice as on the first occasion everyone on the panel following the interview had already been employed. The second time it was advertised I received one application. So I think that fairly I well indicates that there is a shortage of subs.*

8. Due to the shortage of teachers, it may be more difficult for Boards of Managements to grant leave in respect of career break or job-sharing initiatives. Many teachers heretofore have availed of these opportunities to travel or explore other career opportunities. The current situation could directly lead to lack of morale in schools or disaffection among the staff of a school.