

Fewer Teachers in Wigan as National Shortages Deepen

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The number of full-time teachers in Wigan has dropped compared to the previous year, reflecting a broader trend of teacher shortages across England. New data reveals not only a local staffing dip but also a nationwide challenge in recruiting and retaining qualified educators. This trend raises concerns for the future of British education.

According to the Department for Education (DfE), Wigan's state-funded schools employed 2,600 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers as of November 2024. This marked a decline from 2,636 the year prior, despite the borough hosting 127 schools. Nationally, the number of

full-time teachers stood at 468,300, down by 400 from the previous year. While this figure remains higher than 2010 levels, when the national school workforce census first began, the pace of growth appears to be stalling.

Pepe Di'lasio, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), criticised recent recruitment pledges, noting that promises to hire 6,500 new teachers are “frustratingly vague”. He emphasised that these commitments lack clarity, particularly regarding their implementation and sufficiency in addressing systemic shortages.

“Postgraduate recruitment targets are frequently missed by very wide margins, and we lose a lot of teachers early in their careers,” Di'lasio said. He urged the Government to adopt a long-term, strategic approach to teacher recruitment and retention, spanning at least five to ten years.

Locally, Wigan reported 14 teacher vacancies in November, translating to 0.5 vacancies per 100 teachers, a slight increase from the previous year and comparable to the national vacancy rate. These shortfalls place additional strain on schools, leading to increased use of non-specialist staff or temporary cover.

Paul Whiteman, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), linked the drop in teacher numbers to a decline in new entrants and high early-career attrition rates. He warned that shortages directly affect pupil outcomes. “Vacancies directly impact children’s education, making it challenging for schools to deliver the full curriculum,” Whiteman said. He also called for stronger efforts to restore teaching as “an attractive and sustainable professional graduate career,” including improved pay, workload reduction, and more flexible working arrangements.

The Government has stated that addressing recruitment and retention is a top priority. Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson cited recent efforts to “reset the relationship with the teaching profession”, highlighting pay awards totalling nearly 10% over two years. She also pointed to an increase in teacher training applicants this year, particularly in secondary and special education. “We are delivering on our pledge to recruit an additional 6,500 expert teachers,” Phillipson said, framing the move as central to improving life chances for children.

Yet many within the education sector remain cautious. While salary increases and training incentives are welcome, leaders argue that without addressing deeper structural issues, such as workloads and career sustainability, the profession will continue to face retention

difficulties. As vacancies rise and qualified educators leave the profession, the urgency for a robust, long-term plan grows ever more pressing.