

One in five teaching assistant posts unfilled



Schools face a staggering staff crisis

One in five teaching assistant (TA) posts are unfilled, shortages, new figures show.

A massive 18 per cent of TA posts in local authority maintained schools are unfilled, according to those councils that tracked vacancies.

GMB, a union representing more than 145,000 school support staff, obtained the records through Freedom of Information requests to all local authorities with responsibility for education in England.



The East Riding of Yorkshire reported a vacancy rate of 19 per cent and Luton reported a vacancy rate of 22 per cent.

Derbyshire reported the highest vacancy rate with 27 per cent of posts unfilled. However, the council said that this figure may be artificially high as schools were not obliged to remove vacancies from its system.

The average vacancy rate was 18 per cent across the local authorities that provided information. Stockport council also said that schools experienced a 19 per cent turnover rate for teaching assistants in 2022/23.

The vast majority of local authorities said that did not monitor teaching assistant vacancy rates. The Department for Education requires schools to report teacher vacancy rates each year, but this requirement does not apply to support staff roles. [2]

Recruitment challenges in schools have reached a critical point due to low pay, GMB warned. In September, the Low Pay Commission reclassified teaching assistants and other support staff roles as ‘low-paying occupations’ for the first time. Teaching assistants were paid £15,476 on average last year, according to the ONS.

NFER warned in September that ‘the overwhelming majority of schools’ are ‘struggling to recruit TAs and other support staff. Large numbers of TA and other support staff vacancies remained vacant for more than two months, especially among special schools.’ [4]

Following Freedom of Information requests to all 153 local authorities with responsibility for education in England, the following authorities were able to provide data:

LA	Date	Vacancies (hc)	Vacancies (FTE)	Vacancy rate (%)	
Gateshead	30-Jan-24	21	18.4	2.36	
Hackney	29-Jan-24	199		16.55	



Newcastle	26-Jan-24	34		4.56	
Rotherham	Sep-23		7.42	2.87	
East Riding of Yorkshire	12-Jan-24	330		19	
Stockport	01-Sep-23				1
Luton	11-Jan-24	372	332.45	21.85	
Redcar and Cleveland	Jan-24	0	0	0	



Derbyshire	31-Dec-23	1,037	1036.09	27	
Wirral	07-Jan-24	38		4.65	
City of London	01-Jan-24	0	0	0	



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Stacey Booth, GMB National Officer, said:

“Pupils are denied an inclusive education while Ministers bury their heads in the sand.

“The Department for Education is ignoring the problem. Workforce planning should be driven by pupils’ needs, but these shocking figures show that the low-paid women who make up the majority of the workforce are being overlooked.

“Teacher shortages might get the headlines but schools face serious recruitment challenges across the board.

“We are calling on Gillian Keegan to meet with GMB, reinstate the School Support Staff Negotiating Body, and fund the decent pay rates that our members deserve.”

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Member requiring help?

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