



**CHURCH OF IRELAND  
THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Church of Ireland House, Church Avenue, Rathmines, Dublin 6

**Presentation to Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection**

Introduction:

On behalf of the Church of Ireland Primary Schools may I thank the Committee and the Chairperson, Ms Tuffy, for the opportunity to make this short presentation to you this morning.

My name is Ken Fennelly and I am the Secretary of the General Synod Board of Education of the Church of Ireland which is the body within the Church of Ireland's structures that has responsibility for the Church's education policy. In that capacity the Board represents the interests of the Church of Ireland in education and also provides an advisory service to Boards of Management in Church of Ireland primary schools.

While schools under Presbyterian, Methodist or Society of Friends (Quaker) patronage have their own boards of education, the Board also provides support and advice to these schools.

We also advise and liaise closely with the patrons of Church of Ireland primary schools. There are ten bishops of the Church of Ireland who are patrons of their local Church of Ireland primary schools and the Board also liaises and provides advice to these patrons.

The schools I am representing this morning can be outlined as follows:

A total of 200 Protestant Primary Schools in the State of which:

174 are Church of Ireland

24 are Presbyterian, Methodist (1), Quaker (1)

50 are in Dublin, remainder are dispersed across the country, many in rural locations.

In the next few minutes I will describe what I call "direct" costs to parents and "indirect" costs to parents resulting from the cost of running the school.

**Direct costs**

Direct costs are items such as school books, art and stationary materials, uniforms, costs associated with activities such as swimming, school tours, along with transport costs for those in rural areas.

The committee will be aware of the recent survey by the charity Barnardo's which advised a figure of €355 for starting a child in junior infants rising to €390 per year thereafter.

School books are a significant item of costs to parents. Many schools now operate school book rental schemes where the school buys books and rents them out.

However, a major issue facing parents in schools in rural areas, is the provision and increase in cost of school transport. In 2011 a charge of €50 per child for the provision of school transport was introduced and Budget 2012 raised this charge to €100 per child. This constitutes a significant increase over a short period. In 2011 changes to the eligibility criteria in respect of the retention of a school bus service have resulted in the loss (and projected loss) of a large number of school buses, representing a significant hardship to affected parent. We are advised that the grant provided to parents in lieu of the provision of a school bus, falls far short of the cost to provide a private bus or to cover the cost of getting the child to school by alternative means. In my view, the recent changes to the school transport scheme have caused an inequitable hardship on parents, children and schools in rural areas.

In relation to school uniforms, the practice on this varies widely but I am advised that many of our schools have moved away from the idea of a “special” school uniform but now opt for generic clothing which can be purchased relatively cheaply from large retailers and the school crest simply affixed later. Some schools have moved away from a school uniform entirely as part of a conscious effort on the part of Boards of Management to reduce costs for parents. I am advised that some schools operate a “recycling shelf” for school uniforms which they have found reduce costs considerably.

The supply of stationary, art equipment, bags etc. constitute further direct costs for parents. The current curriculum, introduced in 1999, requires art resources. The State does not provide additional funding for this. In most of our schools the parents association are the major support for financing these items. The Boards of Management also rely on parents associations to support activities such as swimming or school trips. Parents associations are also experiencing the effects of the recession with fundraising becoming more difficult. I am aware of at least one area of the country where school Boards of Management have been assisted by the St Vincent de Paul in relation to funding school related activities. School Principals advise me also that they are conscious of giving plenty of notice to parents if they are planning a school trip.

While a child’s “back to school” needs may be reduced by the measures already set out, it is important to mention that costs occur throughout the year and not as a “once off” in September).

I would like to briefly outline to the committee the indirect costs which also fall to parents arising out of the running of the school.

**Indirect Costs:**

The running of a primary school rests with the Board of Management of the school who receive funding from the Department of Education and Skills in two main ways: through specific grants (for ancillary staff such as the school caretaker and secretary) and capitation funding which is the amount received by the school per child.

In the school year 2012/13 capitation at primary level is €178 per pupil, subject to a minimum grant of €10,680 Budget 2012 signalled that this capitation grant will be reduced incrementally by 7.5% by 2015.

This is a major decrease in the core funding of Irish primary schools.

In addition, the grant for minor works will cease this year. . Schools relied heavily on this grant to fund works during the year

Schools are also facing rising costs as a result of:

- The increase of VAT to 23%
- Administrative fee for substitution will be reduced by 3%.
- Rising fuel and electricity costs
- Refuse/recycling
- Insurance (can be substantial: €4 – 6,000 per annum would not be unusual)
- Increase in water rates (one of our schools was charged €270 for the month of July when closed!);
- Cleaning to the building (ancillary grant from Department is not adequate)
- Security;
- Office costs (ancillary grant does not usually cover cost of a secretary plus caretaker plus cleaner).
- Accountancy and other professional advices (accountancy/architectural/legal, etc)

I am aware that there are many schools around the country with annual deficits of between €10,000 and €20,000 or perhaps more. This deficit can only be defrayed through seeking contributions from parents and fundraising while seeking an emergency loan from the patron or parish until the funds can be raised.

Boards of Management are bracing themselves for further announcements in relation to cuts December, given the overall budgetary target of a reduction of €138 million by 2014.

Schools also advise that in some years grant money does not arrive until the end of the year, putting pressure on the cash flow of the school with electricity, heating and insurance being paid throughout the year!

In summary, while these are not a direct cost on parents, the shortfall in funding from the State to defray these costs results in the schools seeking financial assistance from parents in this regard.

I would suggest that Boards of Management and Parents Associations use their best endeavours to reduce costs and to fundraise to support both activities in school and the running costs of the school. In addition, both school management bodies and the Department of Education and Skills through the procurement service have been endeavouring to encourage schools to use procurement to try and reduce costs to individual schools. However, the shortfall between the support provided by the state and rising costs in expenditure faced by schools contributes significantly to the real costs associated with parents sending to and maintaining their children in schools. The

supports provided by the State are standard and therefore schools in wealthier sections of the community are at an advantage over developing or new schools.

May I thank you Deputy Tuffy and committee for giving me the opportunity to raise these matters with you today.