



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Extension of School Meals Programme to preschool children - Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Ms. Mary Coughlan T.D., today announced an extension of the School Meals Programme to nursery schools that cater for disadvantaged preschool children.

The funding will be made available to community based, not-for-profit, groups that provide preschool education (e.g. Montessori and similar type nursery schools) for disadvantaged children. The scheme does not apply to commercial projects.

The purpose of the funding is to assist disadvantaged children in gaining maximum benefit from preschool educational services.

"The school meals programme makes an important contribution to ensuring that school children receive better nutrition and this consequently contributes to improved school attendance, quality of learning and life chances," Minister Coughlan said.

In 2003, funding of EUR3.29million was given to 278 projects benefiting approximately 28,300 children. This year EUR6.08m has been allocated for school meals funding.

Funding is targeted at children who are at risk of leaving school early, disadvantaged children and children with special needs. Primary and secondary schools throughout the country may now participate in the scheme following the Minister's review and expansion of the scheme.

"I have visited some of these schemes and spoken with teachers who have seen the difference and benefit of a breakfast or lunch for children who might otherwise go to school hungry because of their family circumstances. Extending the school meals programme to qualifying preschool groups will further enhance the scheme and improve educational opportunity for children, said Minister Coughlan."

International experience had shown that a school meals scheme proved a positive force for children at school, and in areas of disadvantage helped children concentrate, consequently limiting disruptive behaviour, and encouraged children to attend school.

There is a direct correlation between development of cognitive abilities and nutrition.

Groups applying for funding will be required to demonstrate that they are providing preschool education.

The normal criteria relating to the School Meals Programme will apply. Funding is for food items only. Food must be of a suitable nutritional quality, prepared and consumed in an appropriate environment, funding will be made available for breakfast, light meal/lunch and dinner.

Enquiries and application forms should be directed to:



Department of Social and Family Affairs

School Meals Section
Department of Social and Family Affairs
Floor 5
Aras Mhic Dhiarmada
Store Street
Dublin 1

Telephone: 7043146/3013/3645

ENDS September 24th 2004