



Funding Available For School Meals –Mary Coughlan

Minister For Social And Family Affairs

Funding to provide nutritious meals for children in schools is available under the expanded school meals programme, Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs said today.

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

"Discussions between my officials and the Department of Education and Science regarding post primary schools with pupils most at risk of early school leaving and their feeder primary schools are ongoing to encourage a take up of the expanded scheme".

"This scheme has huge potential, and having worked with the Department of Education in prioritising schools with disadvantage I expect that with the additional funding I have now made available, that the number of children benefiting will be substantially increased in the forthcoming school year," said Minister Coughlan.

In 2003 funding of €3.29million was given to 278 projects benefiting approximately 28,300 children. This year €6.08m 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."

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.

Schools currently provide a variety of services for children, either a hot meal cooked on the premises, a light snack or a breakfast. The programmes are organised by the school.

"I have an open mind on how the funds in this scheme are spent - whether on hot meals cooked on the premises in kitchen facilities, airline type food trays that need only be microwaved in the school, or nutritious cold meals such as fruit, milk and sandwiches. Each school has its own requirements and facilities and the scheme is flexible enough to respond to each school's individual needs," added Minister Coughlan.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

The Minister urged school managers who want to put a school meals programme in place to contact her Department. A number of schools will receive funding for the first time this year, and others will expand their programme.

ENDS
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