



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Announces €18m Funding For Back To School Expenses

Brennan Says Tens Of Thousands Of Students May Be Losing Out Because Parents Not Applying

Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., has approved €18 million, under his Department's Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance scheme, to help parents with the cost of school clothing and footwear for the new school year.

While more than 150,000 students benefited from the targeted support scheme last year, Minister Brennan today said it appeared that tens of thousands of people on social welfare payments who may qualify for the allowance have not been applying and may as a result have lost out on this important support at a time of particular financial strain.

Minister Brennan said: "I fully appreciate the enormous financial pressure many parents are under when it comes to meeting the cost of uniforms and footwear for the new school year. In an effort to help meet some of the financial strain families, particularly those on low incomes, feel at this time of year, I've approved funding of €18 million for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, an increase of €1 million on payments under the scheme last year. While over 150,000 children were helped last year through the scheme, I am very concerned that tens of thousands of families on social welfare payments who may qualify for the scheme appear not to be applying for the financial support for whatever reason despite all the publicity and promotion the scheme is given. I am appealing to people on welfare or low income employment to carefully examine the scheme conditions. This scheme is there to help those who genuinely need support in getting their children outfitted for the new school year."

Minister Brennan said he will also examine specific proposals in this area that he recently received from the Combat Poverty Agency on the benefits of promoting standardised school uniforms from major retail outlets, reforms of the school book scheme to provide an entitlement for low income pupils, and the promotion of book rental schemes.

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is a targeted payment designed to help people depending on certain social welfare and Health Service Executive (HSE) payments with the cost of children's school clothing and footwear. It is also available to people on low incomes who are getting Family Income Supplement.

The payment, which is income related, is funded by the Department of Social and Family Affairs and is administered by the HSE.

Parents will get €80 for each eligible child aged between 2 and 11 years and will receive €150 for each child aged between 12 and 22 years. Parents can apply to their local HSE office for funding under the Scheme, between now and the end of September.

A couple with 1 child whose weekly income is at or below €368.10 may qualify for the Allowance. A couple with two children whose weekly income is at or below €387.40 may qualify. If they have three children, they may have income of €406.70 and qualify. (For families with more children, the income limit is increased by €19.30 for each additional child).

A lone parent with one child could have income of up to €250.90 per week and qualify for a payment. (For lone parent families, with more than one child, the income limit is increased by €21.60 for each additional child.)

Last year, a Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance was paid in respect of 153,409 children at a cost of €17.03 million; 95,761 were aged between 2 and 11 years, 50,568 were aged between 12 and 17 years and 7,080 were aged between 18 and 22 years.

Press Release Ends

Please see attached note for News Editors

Note for News Editors

An applicant may qualify for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance if they:

- (a) are getting a Social Welfare Payment (including Family Income Supplement) or a Health Service Executive payment or taking part in an approved employment scheme or training course and
- (b) are getting a child dependant allowance with their social welfare payment and
- (c) have a total household income below certain limits.

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is payable to parents whose income limits are at or below the following amounts:

Couple with:	Income Limit	Lone Parent with:	Income Limit
1 child	€ 368.10	1 child	€ 250.90
2 children	€ 387.40	2 children	€ 272.50
3 children	€ 406.70	3 children	€ 294.10
4 children	€ 426.00*	4 children	€ 315.70**

*Limit is increased by € 19.30 for each additional child

**Limit is increased by € 21.60 for each additional child

Allowance	Rate Payable
Rate for each child aged 2 – 11:	€ 80.00
Rate for each child aged 12 – 17***	€ 150.00

*** and children aged 18 – 22 if in full time education for whom a child dependant allowance is payable.

Breakdown of children by Health Board and Age Group for whom payments were made in 2004

Health Board Regions	Age Groups				
	2 – 4	5 – 11	12 – 17	18-22	Total
Eastern Regional Health Authority	16,620	21,203	14,696	1,357	53,876
Western Health Board	2,449	6,503	6,074	1,403	16,429
Southern Health Board	3,998	9,353	8,120	1,469	22,940
South Eastern Health Board	2,503	5,671	5,106	644	13,924
North Eastern Health Board	2,603	5,633	4,629	622	13,487
Mid Western Health Board	2,259	5,745	4,651	501	13,156
North Western Health Board	1,914	5,176	4,970	818	12,878
Midland Health Board	1,203	2,928	2,322	266	6,719
Total	33,549	62,212	50,568	7,080	153,409