



Cullen – €28 million School Meals Scheme will benefit over 160,000 children in 2007

Minister for Social and Family Affairs, **Martin Cullen TD** has said (Thursday 13 September 2007) that the **School Meals Scheme**, funded through his Department, will assist schools and local organisations provide meals to over **160,000 school children** by the end of 2007. The Scheme targets disadvantaged schools, as well as children with special needs, and aims to provide regular nutritious meals so children can take full advantage of the education provided for them. Commenting on the figure, Minister Cullen said that as we look now to the next school year and in to 2008 he “expects even greater demand for the Scheme”.

Minister Cullen said: “Expenditure on the Scheme has risen very dramatically and come December, the Government will have spent some **€28 million** on the Scheme this year. In 2006 we spent €13.6 million. In 2004 the figure was €4.6 million; in 2005 it was €8.2 million. Demand is there in terms of the number of children being provided with meals and also numbers of meals - with many schools/organisations who might have started off with breakfast, now offering pupils their lunch or dinner too.”

Two different types of programmes are offered under the School Meal Scheme - the **Urban School Meals Scheme** and **Local Projects Scheme**. Depending on which programme a school/organisation is operating under, small snacks, to breakfast, lunch and dinner can be made available to children. Meals are of good quality in line with Departmental guidelines and provided free or at a nominal charge to children.

The number of meals provided to children under the **Local Projects Scheme** doubled from nearly 90,000 during the 2005/06 school year to nearly 180,000 in



Department of Social and Family Affairs

the 2006/07 school year. One thousand and eight schools, preschools/ local organisations received funding under the Local Projects Scheme to provide these meals in 2006.

Minister Cullen said: "It is expected that again under this particular Local Projects Scheme, 1,500 schools/preschools and 120,000 pupils will benefit in the school year 2007/08".

In 2006, some 386 national schools (with approximately 55,000 pupils) benefited under the **Urban School Meals Scheme**.

The Minister said: "The benefits of providing quality, nutritious food to children are well-documented in Ireland and other countries. International research has shown that nutritional intake and cognitive ability are linked. Inadequate nutrition impacts negatively on a child's ability to learn and proper food encourages better school attendance, makes children more settled in themselves and improves educational achievement."

Schools that come under the Department of Education and Science's initiative for disadvantaged schools, 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS) have been particularly targeted for inclusion in the Scheme. Currently approximately 650 of the total 875 DEIS schools participate in the School Meals Scheme.

Minister Cullen concluded: "Having recently launched Combat Poverty's 2006 Annual Report, which stated that almost 290,000 people (including 10% of all children) are on low incomes and deprived of one or more basic necessities such as adequate food, clothes or heating, the School Meals Scheme is therefore an important and necessary part of Government policy to support children, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds".



Editor's note:

As stated above, there are two programmes under the School Meals Scheme. The **Urban School Meals Scheme** is operated by Local Authorities in urban areas and part-financed by the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

The School Meals **Local Projects Scheme** is fully funded by the Department and provides funding directly to national schools, secondary schools, community-based not-for-profit preschools and voluntary organisations which operate their own school meals projects.

Responsibility for the operation of the School Meals Scheme lies with each school/project. It is the decision of each school or project as to the exact items of food to be provided. Funding is for healthy, nutritious food items only. Funding is not made available for sugary drinks, fried foods and confectionary. The food provided must be of good quality and prepared and consumed in appropriate facilities. Funding can be refused or withheld if schools/projects do not adhere to these guidelines. Typical food items served include yoghurt, fruit juice, baked potatoes, sandwiches/wraps, egg/beans on toast, pasta.

Other schools and projects targeting disadvantaged children who are interested in the Scheme are welcome to contact the Department's School Meals Section:

Address: School Meals Section, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Social Welfare Services Office, College Road, Sligo

Tel: 071 916813 or 071 9138612

Issued by:

Michelle Hctor, 087 8563070

Niamh Fitzgerald, 087 2547232

Oonagh Duffy, 087 254 9683

Press Release

13/091/07



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Press Release Ends