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## **Schools urged to take up subsidised dairy products scheme by Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs**

Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, is to launch a campaign to bring subsidised milk, cheese and yoghurt into classrooms.

“I would like to see this valuable scheme dovetailing with the revised and expanded school meals programme. Milk has proven benefits for young children in particular, and I’d like to encourage more children to drink it,” said Minister Mary Coughlan.

The Minister is to ask her officials to contact disadvantaged schools already targeted in the new school meals programme in a bid to get them to take up the milk scheme and complement the school meals programme which has had funding doubled this year to €4million.

Under the school milk programme the Department of Agriculture has operational responsibility for the scheme and approves applications to operate the scheme from milk suppliers and schools.



The provision of subsidised milk, cheese and yoghurt under the EU backed scheme could reduce the costs for schools participating in the school meals programme. The use of subsidised dairy products would effectively free up funds provided by Minister Coughlan to either enhance individual schemes or make more funding available for more schools to join the school meals programme.

Approximately 90,000 children all over the country in over 2,500 schools currently benefit from the dairy scheme – while over 15,700 children benefit currently from the meals programme.

Earlier this year, after consultations with the Department of Education, post primary schools with pupils most at risk of early school leaving and their feeder primary schools were targeted to encourage a take up of the expanded school meals scheme. Now Minister Coughlan is to alert those schools to the school milk scheme.

“I am conscious that many schools are not aware of the scheme. Now that we have identified schools where there is a need we are taking a proactive approach in encouraging those schools to join



the school meals scheme. I would hope that the subsidised milk scheme could complement the school meals scheme, and where schools cannot for whatever reason organise a school meals programme, they may perhaps be able to take up the option of providing subsidised dairy products under the programme at least,” said Minister Coughlan.

**ENDS** September 18<sup>th</sup> 2003