



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Schools Urged To Take Up Subsidised Dairy Products Scheme - Mary Coughlan Minister For Social And Family Affairs

Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs today joined with the National Dairy Council in urging schools to promote milk rather than high sugar content fizzy drinks for children.

"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 school meals programme has proven benefits in helping children concentrate and achieve better results and has also helped counter truancy.

"Today, I'd remind schools that funding is available to put in place a school milk programme and a school meals programme. Last year I extended the meals programme so that second level schools and those outside Dublin could benefit from the scheme - and doubled the funding available to E4 million, " said Minister Coughlan.

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.

Last 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.

"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
January 20th 2004