

33. Book Grant Scheme for “Needy Pupils”

1. Each school year, an allocation is provided to applicant schools by the Department of Education and Science under its scheme of assistance for the purchase of school books for/by needy students.
2. The grant allocation for a school year is based on information about the number of needy students assisted in the previous year as submitted by the school. The term “needy” is clearly defined in the scheme. The grant is relatively higher to schools which operate a Book Loan or Rental Scheme.
3. Principals have discretion, subject to the terms of the scheme, in the manner and amount of assistance given to individual “needy” students. The manner of assistance may be in the form of:
 - Direct provision of textbooks on a return or non-return basis
 - Through a school Book Rental or Loan Scheme
 - Cheque payment to the family of a needy student (least desirable option)
 - Book Vouchers
4. The amount of assistance to individual students may be fixed at the discretion of the Principal having regard to the total and relative levels of need and available resources.
5. The scheme only applies to “needy pupils” in schools in the free education scheme.
6. A needy student is defined as a student from a family where there is:
 - Genuine hardship because of unemployment or short time working
 - Prolonged illness of a parent
 - Large family size with inadequate means
 - Single parenthood
 - Other family circumstances (e.g. alcoholism) indicating a similar degree of financial hardship
7. The Department of Education and Science guidelines recommend dividing such families into the following three categories:
 - Families which are dependent mainly on **social welfare payments**
 - Families on **low incomes from employment** (Such families should be in receipt of the Family Income Supplement (FIS) or beneficiaries under the Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear scheme)
 - Families which are experiencing **financial hardship** because of particular circumstances in the home

N.B. Entitlement to a medical card is not necessarily an indication of eligibility.

8. The following guidelines are recommended to operate the scheme at school level:

- Each year the school submits an application for a grant allocation to the DES on the official application form indicating the number of eligible students in the previous school year
- Based on this application form a grant is devolved to the school which must be expended for this purpose
- The Board of Management does not get involved in the consideration of individual cases but should devise general criteria for assisting eligible students and oversee the operation of the scheme by the Principal and other staff members involved
- The Board should agree an application procedure which will be publicised within the school and which gives consideration to the sensitivities of students and their parents
- Depending on the manner of assistance given, receipts should be signed and dated by parents / guardians
- The receipt and disbursement of the Book Grant should be clearly recorded in the official school accounts
- The operation of the scheme is subject to normal internal controls and record keeping

9. Book Rental Schemes

A consultancy report (School Books in Ireland: Cost to Parents by Cooney / Carey 1994) commissioned by the DES came to the conclusion that book rental schemes offer the most practical method of curtailing the cost of school books to parents.

Where such schemes are established they operate on a self-financing basis with costs met by rental income. In the case of needy students, the amount of the appropriate rent may be paid in full or in part on their behalf into the book rental scheme from the school's allocation under the book grant scheme.

The operation of a book rental scheme may be more equitable and cost effective for students and their parents but it does impose a significant administrative burden on the school especially for the first year or two.

(See Appendix 4)