

**Rannán na Scoileanna – Airgeadas  
An Roinn Oideachais agus  
Scileanna  
Cor na Madadh  
Baile Átha Luain  
Co. na hIarmhí**



**Schools Division - Financial  
Department of Education and  
Skills  
Cornamaddy  
Athlone  
Co. Westmeath**

**Circular 0065/2010**

**To Chairpersons of Boards of Management and Principals  
of Post-Primary schools**

**Free Education Scheme**

**Requirement that fees are not charged for continued eligibility for certain grants and  
staffing allocations**

**Revision of ceiling applying to boarding fees**

Recognised schools in the Free Education Scheme have teaching resources and other funding allocated to them on a different basis from those schools that charge fees.

Continued eligibility for such funding arrangements are contingent on a school not requiring mandatory fees or payments from existing pupils or from those seeking admission to the school. The Minister may withdraw all such funding where a school is found, in respect of one or more existing or prospective pupils, to be in breach of the requirements in relation to the non-charging of fees.

The primary purpose of this circular is to clarify certain charges that may be legitimately requested from pupils such as:

- Payment for school books or photocopied material provided by the school where the charge is reasonable and simply reflects the true costs concerned;
- Charges for meals and refreshments provided pupils are not forced to purchase same and can bring their own refreshments to school (e.g. lunchbox); or
- Services and activities provided by the school in excess of that included in the general school programme, provided the pupil can elect to avail of such services (e.g. supervised after-school study, school tours, or visits to theatres or sporting events).

While the above is not exhaustive, the key requirement is that a school does not operate a charge, in whatever form, that is in effect a mandatory fee and contrary to the principle of not charging fees that distinguishes recognised schools in the Free Education Scheme from those recognised schools that have elected to charge fees. Voluntary contributions may be sought from parents, provided it is made clear to parents that there is no compulsion to pay and that a

child's place in the school or continued enrolment is not dependant on a willingness to make a contribution.

## **Boarding Fees**

Charging fees to recover the true economic cost of a residential boarding facility provided by a recognised school does not ipso facto constitute a breach of the requirements in relation to the non-charging of fees as a condition of funding under the Free Education Scheme. In this context, the Department historically has imposed a ceiling on the amount that may be charged for residential boarding as a means of ensuring that recognised schools in the Free Education Scheme are not applying hidden fees over and above the true economic costs of providing the boarding facilities.

The ceiling is being revised to €6,000 per annum in respect of the 2010/11 school year where the charge is in respect of a student who boards for five days and to €7,800 for students who board for six or seven days.

Where a school in the Free Education Scheme proposes to charge in excess of the limit for boarding fees, the school must first demonstrate through audited accounts, or other evidence that the Department may request, that the fee proposed relates exclusively to the service provided to residential boarders over and above those provided to day pupils and does not contain any element of a tuition fee. In effect, this means that the fee charged to those pupils who elect to board must not contain any element of a charge in respect of the school's daily activities that the pupil could participate in without charge if attending as a day pupil.

If a school cannot demonstrate that the boarding fee is exclusively related to the economic cost of the boarding service provided, the school must either comply with the limit or be re-categorised for funding purposes as a fee-charging school, resulting in the loss of all grants and teaching resources that are unavailable to fee paying schools.

Matthew Ryan  
Principal Officer  
Schools Division – Financial  
November 2010