

JMB Financial Support Services Unit

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Financial Support Service for Voluntary Secondary Schools

Return of School Accounts (2003/2004) to the JMB Financial Support Services Unit

Dear Principal, Chairperson / Manager,

As you are aware, the new Financial Support Services Unit for the Voluntary Secondary sector has been up and running since the beginning of September in the JMB Secretariat. Over the past few weeks, I have spent my time getting to grips with the current situation in schools with regard to school accounts, budgeting and general school financial management.

Meetings with Trustees

I have met a number of Trustee representatives especially those involved in setting up the new Trust Bodies such as ERST, CEIST, Loreto and Le Chéile as well as other Trustee representatives outside these groups.

In general, I have encountered very committed people who are pursuing the same objectives and goals in terms of financial management and guidelines for schools as envisaged for this Unit and we have very much agreed to work together and in cooperation to put in place a uniform system of financial control for all schools in the voluntary secondary sector. Further meetings and contacts are being arranged with these and other interested parties.

Immediate Objectives of the Financial Support Services Unit

Over the coming months and years detailed guidelines on various aspects of financial management in our schools will be prepared and communicated to you. I want to assure you that it is not the intention of this Unit to overburden school Principals and management with further time-consuming paperwork and bureaucracy but rather to provide support in the area of financial management to ensure good practice and for the protection of everyone involved in accounting for public monies.

It is our intention to develop an agreed system of budgeting and annual accounts and to provide guidelines on good financial management and best practice in cooperation with the school Trustees. I welcome any opportunity to meet and speak with Principals, Chairpersons of Boards, Trustee representatives and anyone else involved in the financial aspects of Voluntary Secondary schools.

Return of School Accounts to the Financial Support Services Unit

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those schools who have sent copies of school accounts to the JMB Secretariat over the past number of years. Now that the Financial Support Services Unit has been set up, it is important to state that **all voluntary secondary schools in receipt of public funds are required to send a copy of school accounts to the JMB** beginning with those for the school year 2003/2004. All accounts received from now on will be formally acknowledged and, of course, confidentiality regarding the detail of school accounts is guaranteed. Those schools who have not yet submitted accounts for 2002/2003 and for 2001/2002 school years are requested to do so as soon as possible.

It has always been a requirement on schools to send a copy of the annual accounts to the JMB Secretariat. However, in recent years there was no follow-up on this requirement and as a result many schools did not do so. The Financial Support Services Unit is now undertaking this work and all schools are requested to send in a copy of the annual accounts as soon as they become available but no later than December 31st after the end of the previous school year. In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that confidentiality with regard to details of school accounts will be fully respected by this office and no school will be identified by name without the prior approval of the Principal or Board of Management.

Questionnaire

I enclose a short questionnaire with this letter which I earnestly request you to complete and return as soon as possible. In particular, we are anxious to find out how many schools are using computerised accounts packages and how many would be interested in purchasing one. Over the coming months, new personnel will be employed in the Financial Support Services Unit to provide a comprehensive support and advice service for schools in all aspects of financial management.

Financial Support and School Building Support

In the meantime, I would like you to know that I am available to all schools who have any queries or requests on all aspects of financial management in school whether by telephone, email or school visit if required. I will also be acting as JMB liaison person with the DES Planning and Building Unit in Tullamore should Principals or Boards of Management require any help or support in this area.

Over the coming months, I hope to meet as many groups of Principals, Board of Management representatives and Trustee representatives as possible to explain the role of this Unit and to coordinate the whole area of school financial management and reporting across the Voluntary sector.

Finally, may I remind you once again to return the enclosed questionnaire as soon as possible and to send on a copy of school accounts for the last school year whenever they become available.

Yours sincerely,

Fergus Dunne (Director, JMB Financial Support Services Unit).