

JMB Financial Support Services Unit

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Schools Buying Together

Since the setting up of the JMB Financial Support Services Unit last September we have been asked by a number of people to investigate the possibility of schools grouping together to make bulk purchases at lower cost. It is obvious that there are major potential benefits to be gained if a mechanism could be found to facilitate bulk buying for up to 400 schools.

In the few cases which we investigated, we discovered that the process is quite time consuming and difficult. However, it has come to our attention that there is a commercial, internet based company offering this very service to schools and I have had preliminary discussions with them. The firm in question is called ScoilBuy.ie and although based in Dublin it is only accessible on the internet at www.scoilbuy.ie

ScoilBuy.ie is a specific purchasing scheme for schools and claims to offer high quality service for a significant range of goods and services required by schools at discounts ranging from 30% to 80% on normal market prices. The categories of goods and services on offer include audio-visual equipment, heating and fuel oil, photocopiers, all forms of office stationery and equipment, sports goods, catering and cleaning materials and computer consumables.

Having spoken to the people behind the project, I am happy enough to state that the goods and services on offer are genuine and represent significant savings for most schools. Schools can check the website for themselves as mentioned above and if they wish they register online using the school roll number and a password. Once registered, there is no obligation whatsoever to purchase.

ScoilBuy.ie employs professional purchasing managers who make binding three year contracts with firms nationwide to supply specific goods to schools at a discount greater than any individual school could negotiate. For example, a contract has been signed with an oil firm which has agreed to supply registered schools with heating oil at a significant discount. Schools are free to compare the price with local suppliers and may or may not take up the offer. ScoilBuy.ie is in the process of negotiating a discount on electricity costs for registered schools.

Registered schools receive all invoices from ScoilBuy.ie and not from individual suppliers and payments are made directly to ScoilBuy.ie. All orders are placed over the internet so that schools do not have to negotiate with the individual suppliers.

It is not the function of the JMB to promote any commercial firm. However, given the nature of ScoilBuy.ie and its emphasis on value for money for schools, we feel it is worth drawing it to your attention.