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2012/2013 Financial Guideline 02

Funding in Voluntary Secondary Schools, October Returns

1. Grants to Voluntary Secondary Schools

The Department of Education and Skills is currently processing the first tranche of grants to voluntary secondary schools for the school year 2012/2013. The JMB has been informed that the first part of the standard capitation grant will be paid out by Friday next, August 31st and should be available in school bank accounts early next week.

The School Support Services Grant and other grants due will be processed shortly after that. The Supervision and Substitution grant due to schools for 2011/2012 has been delayed and will be paid in September when all other grants due have been processed. Schools are reminded that the S & S grant for 2011/2012 should be incorporated into school accounts for 2011/2012 irrespective of when it is received.

2. School Charges and Voluntary Contributions

At this time of year, public and media attention is focussed on the charges imposed by schools and in particular on voluntary contributions. In this regard, all non-fee charging schools must be in full compliance with Department of Education and Skills Circular 0065/2010. In order to be eligible for grants and staffing allocations, schools in the "free education scheme" cannot impose **compulsory fees or charges** on students or their parents.

Continued eligibility for DES funding is contingent on the school not requiring mandatory fees or payments from existing or prospective students. The charging of "Registration Fees" or other forms of non-refundable payments to secure admission or re-admission by students is not permitted. In schools where this has been reported, capitation and other grants have been withdrawn and significant repayments for breaches of the regulations have been sought by the DES.

Schools in the free education scheme may request certain charges from students or their parents/guardians provided it is clearly stated that they are not compulsory. Examples of legitimate charges include:

- Payment for school books or photocopied material provided by the school where the charge is reasonable and reflects the true costs involved
- Charges for meals and refreshments which are not compulsory and students are permitted to bring their own lunchboxes and refreshments to school
- Charges for services and activities which students may avail of and which are not mandatory e.g. supervised after-school study, school tours and trips of an educational nature, visits to theatres or sporting events.

In the annual October Returns, the Principal of each school in the Free Education Scheme is required to certify that **no charge is made on these pupils, their parents or guardians** in respect of

- Instruction in any part of the Department's programme for secondary schools;
- Recreational or study facilities where all the pupils are expected to avail themselves of them as part of the school programme;
- Any other school activity in which all pupils are required to take part.

Voluntary contributions may be requested from parents provided it is clearly stated that there is no compulsion to pay. **"The key requirement is that the school does not impose any charge, in whatever form, that is in effect a mandatory fee and contrary to the principle of not charging fees which distinguishes schools in the Free Education Scheme from those that have elected to charge fees."** (Cir. 0065/2010)

Payments or charges of any sort cannot be required by a school to guarantee a prospective place or to ensure continued enrolment.

3. Accuracy of October Returns

Each year, schools are required to submit the "October Returns" which includes the total number of students enrolled in the school on September 30th. It is extremely important that this enrolment return is accurate since it is used to calculate staffing and grant allocations to the school and for State examination entries.

Capitation and most other State grants paid to voluntary secondary schools are calculated on a per capita basis. Similarly, the allocation of teaching resources is based on the number of recognised students enrolled.

A recognised student is defined as one following an approved course for Junior or Senior Cycle and who is not less than 12 years of age on January 1st of the relevant school year. Details in relation to recognised students, students on short term placements and approved courses are laid down by the Department of Education and Skills in Circulars 57/2011 and M47/93. Detailed guidelines on the completion of October Returns for 2012/2013 are available on <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Returns/October-Returns>

It is clearly stated in [Circular 0057/2011](#) that any deliberate overstatement of student numbers in a school's October Returns for the purpose of claiming additional resources may be referred by the Department to An Garda Síochána.

**Fergus Dunne, Director,
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