



Ms Allyson Rooney  
Senior Staff Officer  
South Dublin County Council  
County Hall, Town Centre  
Tallaght  
Dublin 24

*AR*  
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Dear Ms Rooney

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the BOM, Staff, Parents and Children of Kill National School to Batt O'Keeffe TD, Minister for Education and Science concerning the Budget measures relating to education.

The Minister would like to set out the position in relation to these measures and the wider context for Budget 2009.

The Government has more than trebled expenditure on education since 1997. In 2009, spending on education will increase to €9.6 billion compared to €3.1 billion in 1997. The Government is providing an increase of €302 million or 3.2% more next year when compared to 2008. The Government is committed to continuing to invest in education but has to invest at a level that is consistent with what we can afford and what is sustainable given the economic circumstances.

The Government has sheltered critical services such as education but it is not possible to completely exempt such a significant area of spending given the current economic climate and the need to manage public expenditure.

### **School Staff**

Provision for teacher pay and pensions next year, even with the Budget measures, has to increase by about €300 million to €5.4 billion. The Budget measures mean that there will be 200 less teacher posts in primary schools and 200 less teacher posts in post-primary schools next September. That represents a reduction of less than 1% of the overall teacher workforce. The Government has provided for 15,000 more teachers in our schools since 1997. 7,000 of those going into our schools since 2002. Given the current financial difficulties, it is simply not possible to continue to increase the overall number of teachers in our schools at this time.

In addition to extra teachers, significant additional supports have also been given to schools particularly in the area of special education, with 19,000 adults now working directly with children with special education needs. The Government has also targeted significant resources at our most disadvantaged schools, with a range of additional financial and staffing resources being provided to 673 primary schools and 203 post-primary schools.

In primary schools, from September 2009, teachers will be allocated on the same basis as in the 2006/07 school year. This means teachers will be allocated on the basis of 1 teacher for every 28 pupils instead of the current allocation of 1 teacher for every 27 pupils. At second level the pupil teacher ratio is increasing by one point. In second level fee-paying schools the pupil teacher ratio is increasing by two points.

In relation to the staffing in individual schools from September 2009, schools are currently returning data to the Department in relation to their enrolment as of 30 September last. The allocation process including notification to schools will commence early in the new year. The allocation process includes appellate mechanisms under which schools can appeal against the allocation due to them under the staffing schedules. This is particularly relevant at second level where schools can apply for curricular concessions. The final allocation to a primary school is also a function of the operation of the redeployment panels which provide for the retention of a teacher in an existing school if a new post is not available within the agreed terms of the scheme.

The most disadvantaged primary schools included in the Department's DEIS programme will continue to benefit from more favourable staffing ratios and these are not affected by the general change in the allocation of teachers to schools.

It is important to note also that resource teachers and special needs assistants will continue to be allocated to schools to work with children with special education needs. The Government has allocated an additional €10 million in the education budget next year for children with special educational needs. This will enable the Minister to expand the Department's educational psychological service. This will mean more psychologists working directly with children in our schools. The psychologists will also support school staff in catering for children for special needs in the school setting.

In relation to language support teachers, the budget measures will mean that the level of language support will be reduced from a maximum of six teachers per school to a maximum of two teachers per school, as was the case before 2007. The Minister announced on budget day there will be some alleviation for the position of those schools where there is a significant concentration of newcomer pupils as a proportion of the overall enrolment. This will be done on a case by case basis.

The allocation process for language support teachers is an annual one and existing provision is not rolled over automatically. Schools will be applying afresh in the spring and early summer of 2009 for the 2009/10 school year, based on their assessment of the prospective needs of existing pupils and any new pupils they are enrolling.

It is still envisaged that there will be over 1,400 language support teachers in our schools in September 2009 and up to about 500 other teachers in part-time posts. By any standards this is a very significant resource and the challenge will be to ensure that it is used to maximum effect.



## **Substitution**

In relation to the suspension of substitution cover for uncertified sick leave and official school business, interim arrangements have been put in place for the remainder of the current school year following receipt of proposals from the primary and post-primary management bodies which have identified savings and potential efficiencies in relation to supervision, substitution and related matters.

The Minister is making available €2 million to primary schools to provide substitute cover for teachers on uncertified sick leave other than on the first day. In a school where more than one teacher is absent from teaching duty on the first day of uncertified sick leave, substitute cover will be provided for the second and subsequent teachers that are absent. Substitute cover will also be provided for all absences on uncertified sick leave in schools with 2 teachers or less. The Minister is also making €2.7 million available to provide each post-primary school with a defined number of hours of substitution cover outside of the supervision and substitution scheme.

These arrangements are being put in place with effect from 1 January 2009 and will remain in place for the remainder of the 2008/09 school year while a review of the supervision/substitution 37 hour scheme and related matters takes place.

Substitution will continue to be provided for all other categories of absences currently available including maternity leave and certified sick leave. It is important to point out that we have retained the scheme whereby teachers can voluntarily accept an additional payment of €1,789 per annum in return for providing 37 hours supervision and substitution cover during the school year.

## **School Funding**

In relation to day to day funding for schools, the Minister prioritised an increase in funding for primary schools recognising the submissions made by the school management bodies. While the Minister appreciates that the abolition of a range of grants will make it a challenging year ahead, most of the available funding was used to increase the standard rate of capitation grants for both primary and post-primary schools. The primary capitation grant is increasing to €200 per pupil. This equates to an increase of almost 12pc on the existing €178.58 grant rate and represents an increase of 146pc in the standard rate of capitation grant since 2000. At post-primary, the increase of €14 per pupil in the capitation grant is a 4.3pc increase on 2008, bringing the grant to €345 per pupil.

In addition, the increases in the enhanced rates for special needs pupils in special classes and special schools brings the top rate up to almost €1,000 per pupil.

While the Minister clearly will want to improve funding as soon as circumstances permit, he is anxious to make the capitation grant mechanism the single funding channel for schools. This will give schools more flexibility and discretion on how to target funding to the school's own priorities based on its knowledge and understanding of the needs of the students it serves. There is the added advantage that administration and accounting can be reduced for schools and the Department.

In relation to the school books grant, approximately €7 million was made available in 2008 to DEIS schools for the school book grant scheme and this fund of €7 million will be made available for distribution to schools in the DEIS programme in 2009.

### **Traveller children**

Approximately €2.4 million was made available in 2008 in respect of enhanced capitation for traveller pupils. Budget measures relating to enhanced capitation for traveller children amounts to a reduction of about €600,000 at primary level and €600,000 at post-primary level.

This reduction in the enhanced capitation has to be viewed in the overall context of resources for traveller children in our schools. This year about €60m is being spent on additional supports for travellers. Next year there will still be 520 resource teachers for travellers in our primary schools, extra teaching hours equivalent to 136 posts at second level and also a visiting teacher service. These are in addition to the normal classroom teachers and represent a considerable resource and are not affected by the Budget measures.

### **Protestant fee-charging schools**

With regard to the removal of certain support services grants received by Protestant fee-charging schools, the Minister wishes to reemphasise that the Protestant Block grant remains in place. Protestant fee-charging schools receive, and will continue to receive, this grant, which amounts to €6.25 million in the current school year.

This payment covers capitation, tuition and boarding grants. It is distributed by the Secondary Education Committee among needier Protestant children. Applications are made by parents to the Central Protestant Churches Authority, which, on the basis of a means test, distributes the funds to individual schools on the basis of pupil needs.

The retention of this grant demonstrates the importance that the Minister, and this Government, continue to attach to ensuring that students of the Protestant faith can attend schools that reflect their denominational ethos.

The Minister has had to take decisions on a number of grants that have impacted on the funding of schools generally. With the Protestant Block grant protected, he can see no justification for treating the Protestant fee-charging schools in a special way, particularly given that Catholic fee-charging schools have not been in receipt of the grants in question at all.

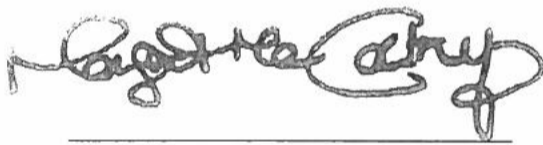
## Budget 2009

As the Minister has said on a number of occasions in recent weeks, difficult decisions had to be taken in order to achieve savings in 2009. As the Taoiseach has pointed out, our day to day spending exceeds our revenue coming in by over €1,000 for every man, woman and child in the state. 10% of the cost of every teacher, doctor and nurse is paid for from borrowing. The Government has raised €2 billion in the Budget through taxation. The Government cannot raise more in 2009 without risking damaging jobs and the economy. Public sector spending has to be managed too.

The Government is dealing with an economic situation of unprecedented difficulty. The Government had a collective duty to respond to that difficulty in the national interest. In doing so, the Government sheltered education as much as possible, but given the scale of expenditure in the sector, it was simply not possible to avoid tough decisions. The Minister fully accepts that these decisions were not, of themselves, desirable and that they can only be justified by the imperative of securing the future economic stability of our nation.

The Minister is calling for cooperation from all the education partners in meeting the challenges facing us.

Yours sincerely



Margaret McCarthy  
Private Secretary