

## Presentation to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education on Tackling School Costs

30<sup>th</sup> August 2018

### Introduction

Barnardos welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and skills. Barnardos works with over 14,000 children and their families each year across our 42 projects which are all based in areas of disadvantage.

Barnardos has been a long time campaigner to ease the burden of school costs on parents because we see daily the huge financial pressure on parents to ensure their children have all they need to participate in school.

Our 2018 School Costs Survey was completed by 2,200 parents across the country spanning both DEIS and non-DEIS schools. This survey is different from others as it only covers the basics required to go back to school. It does not include things such as school lunches, extra-curricular activities or items for practical subjects.

The key findings from this year's survey are:

- The average cost for the basic items were €360 for a senior infant pupil, €380 for 4<sup>th</sup> class pupil and €765 for a 1<sup>st</sup> year pupil.
- More parents are going into debt: 11% of primary school parents and 21% of secondary school parents are forced to borrow money to cover school costs; the majority of the remaining either delay payment of other bills or take money out of savings.
- Uniforms: 75% of parents of primary school pupils and 97% of parents of secondary school pupils have to buy at crested uniform. The average cost ranges from €110-€200.
- Books: Majority of parents reported an increase in the cost of school books. Parents are exacerbated by the lack of consistency in both the expense and number of books required to teach the same curriculum from school to school. School book rental schemes are more popular at primary level than secondary yet what they offer varies considerably which reduces the saving that parents can avail of.
- Voluntary Contributions: 67% of primary school parents are asked for a voluntary contribution (up 11% since 2017) with average cost being €85. 71% of secondary school

parents are asked for voluntary contribution (up 2% since 2017) with the average cost being €225.

The efforts made to date for instance the 2011 Voluntary Code with book publishers or the Minister issuing a circular to schools in April 2017 is not having a real impact on parents. Again the resounding message from parents is being frustrated, overwhelmed and over-burdened at having to continuously prop up Ireland's underfunded education system when it purports to be a 'free education' system. Inevitably it is families with the lowest incomes who are disproportionately affected by school costs. For too long our schools have been operating on a shoestring having to rely on parent's top ups to pay for essentials such as lighting and heating. This is grossly unfair and something as a nation we should be ashamed of especially when we know the effective role education has in eradicating child poverty. It also undermines the Department's own aim which is to make Ireland's education system the best in Europe by 2020.

Barnardos believes that everything a child needs to learn to complete the curriculum should be provided by the State. Ireland is a total outlier in this regard. It undermines the child's right to education as per our Constitution or UNCRC if it is conditional on parent's ability to pay.

We calculate it would cost just an extra €103 million annually to deliver free primary education and an extra €126 million in secondary education. This €103 million or just €185 extra per pupil per year would provide free textbooks and workbooks, remove need for voluntary contributions or classroom resources fees, restore capitation rates back to 2010 levels and provide free school transport for those availing of the School Transport Scheme. To put this into context, the Department of Education's overall budget exceeds €10bn annually.

Being pragmatic this proposal can be phased in over a few budgets beginning with Budget 2019 committing €20m which would provide free schoolbooks and workbooks for all primary school pupils. This investment would finally honour a 1937 Fine Gael General Election promise. Our children have waited too long for Ireland to have a genuinely free education system. It is cheap to do, needs political leadership and a guarantees positive legacy.

Education unlocks children's potential – it is vital all children have the key.

# A VICTORY FOR FINE GAEL WOULD MEAN

## FOR THE FARMER

Re-opening of the World's greatest market for Cattle, Sheep, Pigs, Poultry, etc.  
Agricultural land to be free of rates  
Fixity of tenure with no increase in present annuities.  
Cheap loans at 3% to restock farms.  
Continuance of Guaranteed price for Wheat and Beet.  
Fixed minimum price of 5d. per gallon for milk.

## FOR THE LABOURER

Better wages for Agricultural labourers (The Government Policy has reduced the wages paid to labourers by 3/- per week.)  
No rates on land attached to labourers' cottages.  
More livestock means more tillage, more work and more pay.  
Mixed farming gives more all the year round employment.

## FOR THE TOWN

Planning so that established Industries are not hampered by Government action

Better prospects of continuous employment for workers.

More security for capital invested in Irish Industries.

Better markets for farmers, higher wages for labourers and lower taxation will bring more money into circulation. More money means more purchases and more work in Irish Factories.

Better opportunities of work for the unemployed.

The present Government Party has reduced the price the farmer gets and increased the price the consumer pays.

A change of Government means a reduction in the cost of food and common articles.

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Fine Gael will not reduce unemployment assistance or other benefits.

The poorer you are the harder you are hit by rising taxes.

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## FOR ALL

No Taxes on food. Free imports of necessities not manufactured at home.

Reduction of the enormous burden of taxation which has increased by 1/6 per head, per week on every man, woman and child.

Reduction in prices so that money will buy more than at present.

Free School books.

# VOTE COSGRAVE