



SVP Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills.

30th August 2018

The Society of St. Vincent De Paul welcomes the opportunity to make a presentation to this committee. SVP see access to education as a critical enabler out of social exclusion and poverty.

In August 2017 SVP received 5,000 calls from parents for back to school help. This figure is expected to be exceeded this year as the latest available data show a 20% increase compared to the same period last year.

Behind these figures SVP members see the anxiety and stress of parents trying to juggle their low incomes to meet school costs. Curricular based sport and music costs, exam fees, trips, fund raising ventures are additional expenses on top of the substantial amounts incurred at the start of each school year for school books, uniforms and footwear, digital devices, school transport and 'voluntary' contributions. SVP members state Transition Year is a major source of financial stress for families. Completing transition year can cost on average between €300 and €900 per pupil.¹

These case studies highlight the impact school costs have on families and children.

- A Parent was extremely upset to receive reminder text messages concerning a 'voluntary' contribution. She described how this was so traumatic for her as she regularly receives phone calls from her bank as she is in mortgage arrears.
- One Parent Family, four children. Child starting 1st year. I-pad €700 and registration fee €250. 'Voluntary' fees for two other children at €180.00 each.
- Low income families are going to moneylenders to fund school trips rather than tell their child they can't afford to pay. (SVP Member)

¹ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Transition-Year-Exploring-the-Student-Experience.pdf>

While many SVP Conferences do not give financial assistance towards 'voluntary' contributions, they would instead give food vouchers which allows parents use that money which was for the weekly food bill. In other instances, Conference members work with the school on behalf of families to negotiate fee waivers. We fully acknowledge that the cuts to the capitation rates have meant that schools have very little option but to fundraise or seek contributions.

Ultimately, schools should not have to ask families to subsidise running costs and parents should not have to choose between food or paying a contribution towards their child's education. Access to a free primary education is enshrined in the Irish Constitution (Article 42). SVP therefore want to see an end to the practice of 'voluntary' contributions.

- In Budget 2019 we are asking that the commitment in the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 to restore capitation rates to 2010 levels be honoured.
- Over the medium term we are requesting that the Department carry out an independent assessment of the adequacy of the capitation rates and incrementally increase funding to schools so that all children have access to quality, free primary and secondary education.

SVP recommends that funding for the School Book Rental Scheme be increased by €20 million in Budget 2019 which would allow more schools avail of the scheme and reduce costs to parents. In the longer term we want to see the delivery of an entirely free school book scheme.

Concluding Remarks

It is parents on low incomes who are affected the most from school costs. School costs also prohibit the full participation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in education. Under-achievement in school can have profound consequences for children. SVP contends that non-fee paying primary and secondary schools need to be adequately resourced which would ensure schools can carry out the role they are meant too- educate our future generation in an equal and inclusive manner.

Annex

Delivering Free, Inclusive, Primary & Secondary Education: [Recommendations](#)

<p>End the 'voluntary' contribution system in non-fee paying primary and secondary schools.</p> <p>Commission an independent assessment on the adequacy of the capitation rates and incrementally increase funding so that all schools have sufficient funds to cover running costs.</p> <p>Begin by delivering on the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 commitment of restoring capitation rates to 2010 levels. Estimated cost of restoring capitation rates: €35 million.</p> <p>Allocate an additional €20 million for classroom resources.</p>
<p>Increase funding for the School Book Rental Scheme by €20 million and implement the recommendation from the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection (2013) to introduce a five-year template for the delivery of an entirely free school book scheme. Estimated Cost: €40 million.</p>
<p>Restore the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance to the 2011 level of €305 for children over 12 years, and to €200 for children under 12 years. Equalise income thresholds for one and two-parent families. Introduce tapering to the BSCFA payment. Estimated cost to restore BSCFA: €18 million.</p>
<p>Make child benefit payable to families with children over the age of 18 who are enrolled in secondary school, reflecting the higher educational costs for families with adolescents.</p> <p>Estimated cost: €62 million</p>
<p>All children who hold a medical card should be eligible for the scheme and not have to pay €100 contribution irrespective of their distance from school. Estimated cost: €2 million</p>
<p>Conduct an assessment on the cost of Transition Year. Develop new guidelines which include a commitment to making participation in the year available to all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background or other potential barriers. Provide additional funding to promote the participation of students from disadvantaged and low- income families.</p>
<p>The Department of Education and Skills to address the anomaly whereby digital school books are liable to 23% VAT and School Books have a VAT exemption.</p>
<p>Place all funding for food in schools under the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, to address the fragmentation regarding the issue at national level.</p>
<p>A strategy of phased universalism, starting with hot meals in schools and breakfast clubs for all children in DEIS schools, all children in schools in areas of high poverty and over time all schools.</p>
<p>Ring fence funding for school kitchen infrastructure across all schools nationally in the new allocation of €4.8 billion for school building in the National 2040 Plan.</p>

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul

The Society of St Vincent de Paul exists to fight poverty in its various forms. We work for social justice and the creation of a more just, caring nation. Through our wide range of services, from household visitation to premises-based local services, we provide practical support to people in need. Established in 1844 we are the largest, voluntary, charitable organisation in Ireland with 11,000 members, 4,500 volunteers and 750 staff. SVP is a volunteer-based, volunteer-led organisation.

130,000 calls for assistance		
SVP's Response		
 €12.5m on food	 €5.1m on direct financial support to households	 €4.3m on fuel & electricity
 €3.7m on education	 €1m on clothing & furniture	 €0.6m on holidays & outings

Special works:

- Shops: 199, 4,500 volunteers, sales of €28 million for 2016
- Emergency accommodation: 10 units, 300 beds, 147 staff. Located in Longford, Carlow, Limerick, Wexford, Waterford, Ennis, Cork, Letterkenny
- Social housing: 1,000 units, 740 volunteers, 14 staff
- Resource centres: 7. Dublin, Ballina, Castleisland, Cavan, Carrigtowhill, Tuam, Galway
- Prison visitor centres: 3
- Children's/Young Adult Services: 6 youth clubs in Dublin, residential breaks in Sunshine House and Knockadoon, Early Childhood services in Dublin, Waterford, Lurgan, Belfast, Carrigtowhill, Castleisland.
- Day centres for older people, various meals on wheels services, Seafarer's Club in Dublin

