



**NATIONAL PARENTS COUNCIL
Post Primary**

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OPENING SPEECH FOR JOINT COMMITTEE OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS ON THE TOPIC OF SCHOOL COSTS, 12TH SEPTEMBER 2019

Post Primary education in Ireland is supposed to be free - since Donagh O'Malley's courageous and insightful decision in the late 1960's.

Unfortunately, the funding required for schools to properly meet this commitment has failed to keep up with the demands in the changing education system and gradually but increasingly parents are required to subsidize government responsibilities in education.

This situation is at the very least disappointing but in reality is negligent of the governmental responsibilities undertaken and promised by Donagh O'Malley to ensure all children have access to the solid foundation that stems from a full and balanced secondary education.

Parental support to ensure the availability of basic requirements in school through 'so called' voluntary contributions (which are no longer voluntary in most cases and therefore amount to school fees) is completely unacceptable and must be addressed as a priority.

Our nations children must have access, at no cost, to secondary education as committed to by the state.

Currently NPCPP receives many complaints from angry parents whose children have been denied school lockers, school diaries, access to daily activities and other basic educational requirements because a parent has been unable to pay a 'voluntary' contribution.

Children are isolated and highlighted amongst their peers because of their parents financial circumstances.

Such practice is a disgrace, totally unacceptable and must cease immediately.

Back to school and college time at the end of August has become one of the most stressful times for parents with so many costs and charges landing at the same time.

Provision to spread any such costs through the year must be made. Many parents now borrow to meet such requirements. Others are not in a position to avail of or even approach a reputable lender such as the Credit Union.

NPCPP respectfully suggest that there must be some process designed whereby government supported or underwritten facilities should be available to enable families to spread Education costs (including campus accommodation at third level) across the year.

The mental stress on parents and students brought about by costs of education landing in only a two month period must be acknowledged and must be addressed.

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The relationship between a school or college and their students and parents must be focussed on education and not finance.

National investment in education has long been confirmed and demonstrated to be the most worthy spend of a nation's government.

The returns to the state, our economy and our society are not in doubt - having been the cornerstone and key factor driving the development of the Irish economy over the recent decades.

NPCPP advocates a state aspiration to return to free secondary education for all of our children and for a system of financial support to be put in place for parents and families to alleviate the current back to school financial stress while the state addresses and delivers actual free education committed to in 1967 but yet to be realized.