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More than 15,000 pupils across more than 100 primary schools to benefit from the increased investment

Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh T.D. has today (Thursday 9th January 2020) announced a new €1 million fund which aims to provide free books in primary schools.

The investment is being made on top of the book grant provided to all schools in the country and follows a commitment to in Budget 2020 to introduce an extra support to reduce costs for families and school communities.

Around 15,500 children will benefit from the additional funding.

The new pilot which aims to provide free school books will be available to more than 100 primary schools which are part of the DEIS programme, in both rural and urban areas.

Announcing the investment Minister McHugh said: “I am delighted to be able to announce an additional funding of €1 million for a new pilot programme to provide books in primary school.

“Around 15,500 children, their families and their schools will benefit from the initiative, which is about reducing costs and easing financial burdens as well as helping to improve children’s education and enjoy the beauty of books.”

The pilot programme will see the book grant increase to €85 per pupil in the participating schools, all of which are in the DEIS programme.

Minister McHugh said: “The additional €1 million funding for these schools effectively means we are now investing four times as much money on book grants for next September. The aim is to provide school books for these children and their families and we hope to build on this.

“The cost of school books is recognised as a significant element of back to school costs and in line with the overall aim of DEIS to ensure all learners have equal opportunity to fulfil their potential.

“I have decided to focus this funding on DEIS schools, in both urban and rural areas, which cater for high concentrations of students from disadvantaged areas.”

The Department of Education and Skills already provides a book grant of almost €17 million to all recognised primary and post primary schools within the Free Education Scheme in order to provide assistance for books, including book rental schemes and all schools are encouraged to operate book rental schemes to help alleviate costs to parents.

Minister McHugh said: “The DEIS Plan is the Government’s main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage and this additional investment fits with the overall aim of targeting extra resources as closely as possible at those students with the greatest level of need.”

Ends

Notes for Editors

1. Purpose of the Book Grant.

This Department already provides a book grant to all recognised primary and post primary schools within the Free Education Scheme in order to provide assistance for books including Book Rental Schemes. DEIS schools receive an enhanced rate.

Under this scheme, the Department provides funding of €16.9 million annually to all of these schools. It is a matter for the Board of Management of each individual school to decide on its own policy in relation to the use of this funding in the school but they are expected to adopt a cost-conscious approach to the selection of books for use in their classes.

The current arrangement relies on the local knowledge of the school in order to ensure a fair allocation of funds to those most in need. The arrangements in relation to this scheme are set out in Circular 0046/2013 which is published on the Department's website at http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0046_2013.pdf

2. Schools to be included in the pilot.

The 102 DEIS schools will be notified by email in the coming days informing them of their inclusion in the programme. While the criteria attached will be in line with the terms of the existing Book Grant Scheme further details will issue to these schools in due course.

An additional €64 will be provided per student on top of the existing per capita book grant issued to the schools within the pilot.

3. How were school selected

Schools were selected based on their levels of concentrated disadvantage using the data available and represent both urban and rural schools.

4. Funding level

The additional funding allocation to schools is in line with the costings as set out in the 2019 Barnardos report on the Real Cost of School which states that €85 is the average cost of schools books at primary level and is one of the many measures undertaken by this Department to reduce school costs overall.