



Circular 0023/2008

To: The Management Authorities of Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and The Chief Executive Officers of Vocational Education Committees

School Books Grant Scheme for Needy Pupils – 2008/2009

1. Introduction

- 1.1 I am directed by the Minister for Education and Science to refer to the scheme of grants towards the cost of providing school textbooks for needy pupils in second-level schools and to say that the scheme will operate again in 2008.
- 1.2 The Minister wishes to again acknowledge the sensitive, responsive and resourceful manner in which the management and staff of schools, particularly the Principals, have operated the scheme to date. The Minister looks forward to continued co-operation in serving the interests of the most needy pupils.

2. Eligibility of Pupils

- 2.1 The scheme applies to needy pupils in schools in the free education scheme.
- 2.2 A needy pupil is defined as a pupil from a family where there is genuine hardship. Such families may be grouped into the following three categories:
- Families who are **mainly dependent on social welfare** payments;
 - Families on **low incomes from employment**. (Such families are likely to be in receipt of the Family Income Supplement, which is a weekly cash payment by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to help families at work on low pay, or to be beneficiaries under the Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Scheme);
 - Families who are experiencing **financial hardship because of particular circumstances** in the home. (It is expected that only a small proportion will fall within this category).
- 2.3 Participants in VTOS, Youthreach and PLC programmes, who are supported by other arrangements, are ineligible under this Scheme. Pupils who are in the care of foster families under arrangements made by the relevant Health Board are also ineligible. Support for such pupils is a matter for the Health Board.
- 2.4 A pupil who transfers from one second-level school to another after the commencement of the school year is ineligible in the second school unless the Principal is satisfied that assistance was not already given under this scheme or that any books already supplied in the current school year have been returned.
- 2.5 The amount and form of assistance given to eligible pupils is a matter for individual schools subject to the terms of the scheme.

3. **Medical Card Holders**

3.1 Entitlement to a medical card is not necessarily an indicator of eligibility. In this regard, other factors should be taken into account when assessing pupils' eligibility.

4. **Book Loan/Rental schemes operated by schools**

4.1 The Minister urges management authorities and principals to adopt to the greatest extent possible the suggestions for textbook loan/rental schemes outlined in Circular M54/91 and in the Code of Good Practice outlined in the Cooney/Carey "School Books in Ireland" report which was issued to schools in 1994.

4.2 In the case of schools **designated as disadvantaged** and which are **participating in DEIS**, additional seed capital funding may be available to assist in the establishment of book loan/rental schemes. **This seed capital is only payable in respect of needy pupils.**

5. **Application for allocation under the scheme**

5.1 Applications for grants, for both school textbooks and for seed capital, should be submitted on the attached form. **Faxed or photocopied application forms will not be accepted.** Funding will be allocated on the basis of applications received on or before **2nd April 2008**. Applications received after this date risk being excluded from consideration.

5.2 Applications may be submitted by individual secondary, community and comprehensive schools. In the case of VECs, an overall application form should be submitted in respect of the relevant scheme as a whole, based on information received from their second-level schools. **In addition, VECs should include with their application form details of the breakdown of the numbers of needy pupils for each school under their aegis (copies of application forms completed by individual schools will be accepted in this regard).**

5.3 To enable the issue of grants prior to the start of 2008/09 school year, applications should include the number of eligible pupils assisted in 2007/08 as funding will be calculated on the basis of this information.

6. **General**

6.1 A copy of this circular letter should be provided to the appropriate representatives of parents/teachers for transmission to individual parents and teachers. Schools should also clearly establish and publicise eligibility criteria.

6.2 School authorities should endeavour to establish a written application procedure for those wishing to avail of assistance. As far as is practicable, documented records in connection with the scheme should be maintained.

6.3 Separate accounts should be maintained for the Book Grant and any book loan/rental scheme that is being operated.

6.4 Guidelines as to how the scheme might best operate at school level are included in the [Appendix](#) to this Circular Letter.

6.5 Educationally, it is recognized that textbooks have to be changed periodically to ensure that content and methodology are kept up to date. However, mindful of the need to minimise the cost burden for parents in respect of the purchase of textbooks, the Department wishes to advise school authorities that books should be changed only to the extent that it is absolutely necessary.

6.6 If you have any queries in relation to the contents of this circular, you may contact either Mr. Brian Masterson at (01) 889 2046 or Mr. Michael Power at (01) 889 2049 in the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit.

6.7 This circular is also available on the Department's website at www.education.ie

Margaret Kelly
Principal Officer
Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit
February 2008

School Books Grant Scheme for Needy Pupils Application by School/VEC for Grant for 2008/09

Name of applicant school/VEC: _____

School Roll number: _____ Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

PART A: Number of eligible pupils assisted in 2007/08

NEEDY PUPILS ASSISTED UNDER THE SCHEME IN 2007/08 (Paragraph 5.3 OF CL refers)	NUMBER OF NEEDY 2 ND LEVEL PUPILS ^(a)
1. From families mainly dependant on social welfare	
2. From families on low income	
3. From families experiencing particular hardship because of particular circumstances ^(b)	
TOTAL NEEDY PUPILS (1+2+3) ^(c)	

Note (a): PLC students who will have access to student support grants are not eligible.

Note (b): Only a small proportion is expected to fall within category 3.

Note (c): If there is a significant variation from the previous year's return please provide a brief explanatory note.

PART B: To be completed in respect of schools which are designated as disadvantaged and participate in DEIS

(a) Do you currently operate a Book Loan/Rental Scheme for needy pupils? YES /NO

(b) If not, would you be interested in operating one? YES /NO

(If YES, please submit details of your school's proposal)

PART C: Certification

I confirm that the 2007 allocation under the scheme has been expended in full for the purpose it was intended. (If the full allocation was not expended, please provide an explanation and outline the balance on hands in the box provided below.)

Balance, if any, in Book Grant Account at 31/12/2007

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Signature of Principal/CEO: _____

Date: _____

Completed Forms must be returned to Department of Education and Science, Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit, Block 2, (Ground Floor), Marlborough Street, Dublin 1, as soon as possible but no later than 2nd April 2008.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY			
Checked By		Date	



SCHOOL BOOKS GRANT SCHEME FOR NEEDY PUPILS - APPENDIX

GUIDELINES ON THE OPERATION OF THE SCHEME AT SCHOOL LEVEL

The amount of assistance to individual pupils may be fixed at the discretion of the Principal having regard to the total and relative levels of need, and available resources.

The following guidelines should apply to the operation of this scheme at school level.

- Schools/VECs should each year submit an application for a grant allocation to the Department indicating the number of eligible pupils assisted in the previous school year
- the basis for the application for an allocation should be available for examination
- Boards should not be involved in the consideration of individual cases, but they should devise general criteria for assisting eligible pupils and should oversee the operation of the scheme by the Principal
- there should be an application procedure for pupils which should be agreed by the Board and publicised within the school
- assistance would normally be granted on the basis of a written application
- a summary list of the eligible pupils assisted, together with the amount of assistance granted in each case, and their category of need under the scheme (Families mainly dependent on social welfare; Families on low income; and Families experiencing particular financial hardship) should be kept for each school year. Receipts signed and dated by parents/guardians (this could be part of the application form) or other equivalent documentation should be retained as evidence of disbursements
- the Department's grant allocation should be lodged in schools'/VECs' bank accounts in accordance with the financial management guidelines pertaining to the relevant post-primary sector
- the operation of the Scheme must be subject to normal internal controls and record-keeping applicable to receipts and payments
- funds allocated by the Department for the purpose of this scheme may only be used for that purpose
- as allocations to schools/VECs are based on the reported number of eligible pupils in each school, it is expected that the full grant allocation would be utilised by the school each year
- in the event that there is an unexpended balance, that fact should be advised to the Department prior to the commencement of the next school year. Account will be taken of this balance in the following year's allocation.
- book grant disbursements and receipts should be shown as separate entries in accounts. A reconciliation of each school year's allocation showing receipts and disbursements supported by appropriate documentation should be performed. This reconciliation should be available to the Department upon request.