

THE WORKERS' PARTY

socialist, secular, democratic

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Educating all, equally

The Workers' Party believes in a Secular, Equal and Democratic system of education. This means that schools should be:

- **Secular** - all children educated together regardless of religious beliefs or none
- **Totally free** - it should not be the role of parents to fund the school system
- **An integral part of the community**

Guided by the principles of
Equality - between all children
Solidarity - with all children
Respect - for all children

Primary Education — as it is today

The average cost of preparing a 4th class child for school in September is €395, and when all costs are totted up it will cost parents just under €1,000 to send each child to primary school in 2016. 1 in 4 households will struggle to pay bills on time this September. 60% of Parents' Associations have to fundraise to cover basic running costs of schools, and 65% of primary schools levy a 'Voluntary contribution', and 40% find it difficult or impossible to pay these 'voluntary contributions'.

Primary Education - as it should be

The Workers' Party believes that a system which expects parents to fundraise for basic running costs contributes to creating a huge inequality in the system. There is a massive discrepancy in the amounts that different communities have at their disposal, and this impacts on the resources and supports different schools can put in place.

Books, materials, classroom resources, uniforms, transport, school meals, curricular (eg swimming, tin whistle) and extracurricular activities should be free for all primary school children.

According to the children's charity Barnardos, it would only take an extra €103 million per year to provide free primary education. This would amount to less than €200 per child.

Voluntary Contributions must Stop

One of the most controversial issues relating to both primary and secondary school costs is the so called Voluntary Contribution. Not only do parents feel under enormous pressure to pay but Voluntary contributions hugely discriminate between schools. The wealthier the parent body the higher is the amount of money raised both through contributions and tax rebates.

The Workers' Party supports the National Parents' Council in its call for 'voluntary contributions' to stop immediately.



Secondary education — as it is today

No family should have to go into debt in order to send their children to school. But the average cost of preparing a 1st year student for secondary school in September is €775, and when all costs are totted up it will cost parents €1,474 on average to send each child to secondary-school in 2016. Transport costs alone average €650 per family at second level, and nearly 80 per cent of secondary school parents are asked for 'voluntary contributions'. The use of expensive digital technology is further increasing costs for parents.

Cuts hitting children

Cuts to social welfare and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance have made it extremely difficult for less well-off parents to pay the high costs of sending their children to school. Cuts to education have meant that parents have to pay more to fund the basic running costs of schools. Since 2010 the capitation grants have been cut by approximately 15%. Cuts to education services, including teachers, have had a particularly negative impact on the education of students from less well-off backgrounds, traveller students, migrant students and students with special education needs.

Secondary Education - as it should be

Books, classroom resources, digital technology, uniforms, transport, school meals and extracurricular activities should be free for all second level students. According to Barnardos, just an extra €126.9m annually would provide free school books, free transport, free classroom resources, remove 'voluntary contributions' and restore capitation grant at secondary school level within 3 years. This is not much more than the subsidy that the state paid to private fee paying schools in 2012.

Grinding inequality

Our highly competitive points-driven exam system is underpinned by private grinds for those who can afford them. Grinds, if required, should be available to all students and should not just be the preserve of those who can afford them.

A New Vision

Ireland's system of multiple patrons, parental contributions to public schools and publicly subsidised private schools is unique and uniquely damaging to our children and to society. The Workers' Party aims for a system that is

Secular and An integral part of the community

All children and young people should have the opportunity to automatically enrol in their local school. All schools should be state schools managed through regional authorities and local boards in which religion does not determine entry, curriculum or employment practices. Where parents/ children seek religious formation this should take place outside of the school day.

Equality, Solidarity and Respect means

- Schools should educate all children to reach their full potential regardless of physical or intellectual ability or of social or economic background
- Children should be encouraged to demonstrate solidarity within and outside the school
- All children should be treated with dignity and respect and afforded equal opportunity to fulfil their potential regardless of cultural background

Diesel can fuel Free Education

Free education can be achieved through a single state system of education in which all schools are funded through general taxation on a basis which meets the needs of all its students. €628m, almost three times the present shortfall of €230m, could be available annually (according to Social Justice Ireland) merely by introducing tax rebates for agricultural and industrial diesel in order to prevent the losses to Revenue due to fuel smuggling and laundering.

Sources: Barnardos, Irish League of Credit Unions, National Parents' Council, DES.

