

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland**

**Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills regarding** ‘**school costs, school facilities and related matters’**

**(August 29th 2018)**

**Introduction**

The TUI would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to make a submission on the topic of ‘school costs, school facilities and related matters’. Ireland has an internationally acknowledged, high-performing education system despite spending relatively little on education. The rapidly improving economic situation means that Government is in a good position to make a meaningful contribution to improving school facilities and reducing school costs incurred by parents.

Ireland has a very young population (Eurostat, 2015). The latest projections by DPER (2018) are that enrolments in post-primary are expected to rise 12.5% between 2018 and 2024. This creates obvious issues regarding the timely provision of school buildings.

**School Costs**

The TUI believes that ‘free education’ should mean genuinely free education. Barnardos (2018) has estimated that genuinely free post-primary education would only cost €127m. A useful first step would be restoration of the full capitation/block grant to schools/ETBs. This would only cost €18.5m. This is a tiny sum in the context of the State funding approximately sixty fee-paying schools to the tune of c.€115m (Irish Examiner, December 9th, 2013).

Funding to achieve genuinely free post-primary education could be sourced, at no net cost to the Exchequer, through a financial transactions tax, the restoration of the 13.5% rate of VAT on the hospitality industry, and/or the abolition of bogus self-employment which is designed solely to rob workers of employment rights and to place some businesses beyond the tax net.

**School Facilities**

As well as catering for the rapid rise in student numbers over the next seven years, it is important that the school buildings programme takes account of:

* The provision of special classes for students with autism;
* Special educational needs generally e.g. availability of resource rooms to provide small group and one-to-one tuition;
* The need for provision of ancilliary staff to maintain buildings and keep them open at night;
* Adequate and sufficient bathroom facilities for staff and students including members of the Transgender community;
* Increases in building costs especially in remote regions;
* Updating of facilities such as science laboratories;
* Temporary buildings not taking over playing facilities;
* Curricular needs, for example some schools do not have access to sufficient (or in some cases any) PE hall, science laboratories, home economics kitchens, woodwork/engineering rooms etc. This will become an even more urgent issue when the revised Junior Cycle is fully rolled out. Its emphasis on experiential learning requires adequate facilities for such learning to take place. Recent, and upcoming, changes in Senior Cycle also create a buildings facilities issue. For example, new exam subjects such as Computer Science and PE have been warmly welcomed by the TUI, but do create clear issues regarding the availability of facilities;
* Provision for specialised provision in the further education sector i.e. it often has very particular needs both due to the Increased specialisation for the programmes provided, the numbers of students present and the older age profile of those students;
* Supporting new schools where they are temporarily being housed in primary schools;
* Meeting local and language needs e.g. Gaelcholáistí.

**Recommendations**

In the interest of students, staff and communities, the TUI recommends the following:

* Genuinely free education should be achieved through the implementation of revised tax measures;
* Significant investment is required for both the building of new schools and the modernisation/expansion of existing schools;
* Curricular needs and changes to curriculum must be taken into account in terms of deciding building projects and the resources attached to same;
* Building cost inflation, and the time required to get approval for buildings, needs to be factored into budgets, as does the additional costs of building in remote areas;
* A small number of schools seem to be reluctant to agree extensions if the extension is recommended for the provision of special classes. Recent legislation prevents ‘soft exclusion’ in admissions criteria but lack of building space doesn’t prevent ‘soft exclusion’. All schools and sectors should be welcoming of students with SEN, and have the necessary buildings and facilities to enable inclusion;
* Ancillary staffing allocations should be increased;
* The unique needs of new schools temporarily being housed in primary schools, must be taken into account.

**Conclusion**

The TUI would like again to thank the Committee for this opportunity to make a submission, and would of course welcome any questions that you may have. The TUI was also delighted to make a more extensive written submission earlier this month which focused particularly on the issue of school buildings, and will shortly publish its pre-Budget 2019 submission which addresses tax measures which would achieve free education at no net cost to the Exchequer. The problem of school costs, school facilities and related matters worries the TUI and its members deeply. The TUI believes that significant changes need to be made and welcomes the interest shown by the Oireachtas Committee in examining this issue. Thank you.

**Ends.**

**Glossary**

DPER Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

PE Physical Education

SEN Special Educational Needs

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

**References**

Barnardos (2018), *School Costs Survey 2018*: Briefing paper, Dublin: Barnardos

DPER (2018), *Spending Review 2018: Pay Expenditure Drivers at Primary and Second Level*, Dublin: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Eurostat (2015), *Being Young in Europe Today*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union