



NEWB

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL WELFARE BOARD
AN BORD NÁISIÚNTA LEASA OIDEACHAIS

MAKING A DIFFERENCE
TARGETING SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM IN BUDGET 2004



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THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL WELFARE BOARD (NEWB) IS THE STATUTORY AGENCY SET UP TO SUPPORT REGULAR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Established under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Board has very specific and onerous legal obligations.

This pre-budget submission is made in accordance with the Board's statutory role to advise the Minister for Education and Science on all aspects of policy pertaining to school attendance and on the resource requirements and costs of providing the educational welfare service.

In making this submission, the NEWB is also informed by the Government commitment to tackling educational disadvantage and early school leaving as set out in the National Development Plan 2000-2006 (1999), Agreed Programme for Government (2002), National Anti Poverty Strategy Review (2002) and Sustaining Progress (2003).

MOST VULNERABLE WILL MISS OUT

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IS AN ISSUE AFFECTING CHILDREN IN EVERY SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY IN THE COUNTRY

Irregular school attendance reduces class contact time which is known to be the key to achievement and underachievement in school. It is also closely linked with early school leaving, which is itself the most salient manifestation of educational disadvantage and poverty (Morgan 1998).

Many of the children requiring the services of the National Educational Welfare Board are the most vulnerable in our society. They may be children with disabilities and special education needs who are unable to gain admission to recognised schools, children whose families have no tradition in education, children who have not transferred from primary to secondary school, children who are excluded from school or children who are homeless, for example.

Failure to meet the needs of the children and the families entitled to the Board's services runs contrary to Government policy and will impact heavily on the State and society in general.

THE BOARD ADVOCATES THAT €25 MILLION IS PRIORITISED IN BUDGET 2004 AS A VITAL INVESTMENT IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

This is the minimum required to cover the costs of developing the service as required by legislation. The current budget of €5.4 million is only sufficient to meet the costs of the inadequate existing staff levels and overheads. A detailed breakdown of the budget required for 2004 – 2006 is attached.

RE-DIRECTING EXISTING FUNDING

The Board believes that its budget requirement can be financed from funds already in existence. In addition, it believes that targeting funding specifically and consistently towards school attendance is the most effective way of eradicating educational disadvantage and poverty. Investment now will save money for the State in the long term.

This approach is supported by both the National Economic & Social Council (NESC) and the Economic Social Research Institute (ESRI). The NESC states that many young people who do not reach a minimum level of education face increasingly bleak prospects in adult life (NESC 2002). The ESRI confirmed that despite recent economic successes, people with no educational qualifications continue to do badly in the job market; unemployment levels for this group continue to be as high as ever (ESRI 2003).

In the United States, it has been shown that every \$1 spent on two years of intensive teaching and parenting help for children at risk of failure saved \$7 later in life in crime, social security, housing and mental health, while greatly improving school success.

THE NEWB PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING:

- The Department of Education and Science and other agencies and state bodies allocate funding to deal with educational disadvantage both directly and indirectly to a wide range of organisations. The NEWB advocates that there should be a full audit and evaluation of this funding and its purposes to eliminate the possibility of waste and duplication. Money saved should be redirected towards improving school attendance.
- In addition, there are many short term and once-off Government funded programmes aimed at disadvantage. The NEWB believes that it would be a more effective use of current resources to retarget this funding towards the specific employment of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO).

PROVIDING AN ADEQUATE SERVICE

In 2003, the National Educational Welfare Board will have a national service for children at risk of non-attendance at school and for following up urgent cases. This service will be limited, however, and it must be expanded if the Board is to fulfil its statutory obligations fully. With €25 million in 2004, the NEWB can proceed to its second phase of development and recruit additional service delivery staff and a small number of head office staff.

RECRUIT 148 SERVICE DELIVERY STAFF TO BRING THE TOTAL SERVICE DELIVERY STAFF STRENGTH TO 221

The new staff will be deployed to:

- intensify the service to families and schools in areas that have a service in 2003;
- extend coverage beyond the 10 - 16 age cohort, to other geographical areas of concentrated disadvantage and to rural areas;
- establish two additional Regional Teams, one each in the Midlands and West;
- operate a register for children educated outside of a recognised school to become fully operational and recruit permanent staff to provide this service;
- Commence roll out of the Education Plans service and the monitoring process for 16-17 year olds who have left school to take up employment.

RECRUIT 10 ADDITIONAL HEAD OFFICE STAFF TO BRING THE TOTAL TO 21

The additional head office staff are required to:

- manage, develop, support and coordinate the service nationally;
- contribute to policy development; develop the necessary IT systems for pupil tracking, attendance monitoring and reporting;
- develop appropriate guidance and information for schools, parents and others in relation to school attendance;
- develop monitoring arrangements for the development of the service and its effectiveness;
- attend to the accountability requirements of the Board

Pending the successful achievement of phase 2, almost 600,000 children (or 84% of those entitled to a service) will be receiving services from the Board by the end of 2004.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE

The National Educational Welfare Board has a new, unique and distinct role in Irish Education and society. It has very specific legal obligations that cannot be downgraded to discretionary functions. Failure to provide the services outlined for it in the Act leaves the Board, the Minister and his Department open to litigation by parents, families and others who feel that they are not receiving their statutory entitlements. There is already strong evidence emerging that many parents and families are taking this route.

- The NEWB is the only body with a statutory remit for school attendance. The Board has the legal power to compel a parent to send a child to school. Parents and schools must co-operate with the NEWB under law.
- The Board is the only body with a statutory remit to assess the standard of education provided to children being educated outside of a recognised school, for example, in the home.
- NEWB is the only body to maintain a register of young people aged 16 and 17 who leave school to work so that they can be helped with further education and training.
- The NEWB has a statutory obligation to respond to parents and families whose children encounter difficulty at school. This covers a broad area of worries and concerns about school. The Board must also respond to schools seeking help.
- The Board has the sole statutory function to act in place of the parent to appeal decisions by schools where a child has been refused enrolment or has been expelled.
- NEWB has a statutory remit for the whole country and is available all year round.
- The NEWB will co-operate and co-ordinate its work with complementary schemes i.e. the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and the Visiting Teachers Scheme (VTS) which are available in about 10% of schools during school hours.
- Educational Welfare Officers are not staff members of any school and come from a variety of backgrounds. They will take a holistic and a balanced and independent view of family, school and community issues related to non-attendance, particularly issues regarding school exclusion and placement.
- The Board will provide a local service to families, children and schools and will complement the new drive by the Department of Education & Science to provide services locally through its new regional office structure.

THE REAL COST OF POOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Poor school attendance and early school leaving are critical components of educational disadvantage and child poverty. The National Anti Poverty Strategy, the National Economic & Social Forum report on early school leavers and recent NESC reports all identify educational disadvantage as a deep rooted and most serious socio-economic problem.

- Early school leaving is not a single event but rather the culmination of a long process of failure, low self esteem, poor adjustment, low aspirations, low intellectual stimulation and poverty. Poor attendance at school is an early indicator of potential early school leaving.
- Each year 15% of young people leave school without the Leaving Certificate and 3% with no qualification at all – accounting for almost one in five young people.
- Recent pupil retention reports released by the Department of Education & Science suggest that there are major variations between schools in relation to pupil retention. Schools and areas with the highest and lowest retention rates are easily recognisable; however, there is little doubt but that early school leaving and poor school attendance affects every area of the country.
- Up to 1000 pupils do not transfer annually from primary to post-primary education. Being out of school leaves these children open to exploitation and a variety of negative influences that condemns them to living life on the margins of society.
- Travellers are attending school more regularly, but there is still some way to go to catch up with the attendance levels of the rest of the population.
- One in 10 children still leave primary school with significant literacy problems. Increased school attendance is necessary to improve this.
- Participation in education by minority groups present new challenges for Irish society. Some groups do not have a school going tradition and need particular help and support to ensure that their children attend school regularly.
- Three out of four of our prisoners had poor attendance at school and about 40% of them left school at 14 or younger. Many prisoners have a limited range of skills which restricts the life choices and employment opportunities open to them which in turn predisposes them to a lifetime of criminality (Morgan, Kett, 2003).

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF RESOURCES REQUIRED TO DELIVER SERVICES

In 2002, the NEWB engaged an independent consultant to advise on resources and the management structures required to deliver the range of services provided for in the Education (Welfare) Act. Following a detailed examination of similar services here and abroad, the consultant estimated that a total of 363 staff were required.

The Board accepted the consultant's recommendations and decided that the new service would be phased-in in three phases and that it would be structured on a regional basis.

BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR 2003

The Board sought a total of €13m for Phase I, to take place during 2003. It was planned that 111 service delivery and 10 management staff would be in place by the end of the year.

However, a budget of only €5.4m was allocated in 2003 and sanction to recruit 36 service delivery staff was received in May 2003. A management team of 11 persons was also sanctioned.

NATIONAL SERVICE - URGENT CASES

In order to make the most use of the budget allocated for 2003, the Board decided that it was most effective to provide a two tiered service, one aimed at the most disadvantaged areas (e.g. areas designated by Government under the RAPID initiative, areas designated by the Department of Education & Science) and the most at risk groups and secondly, provide a response to urgent cases (e.g. children who are out of school permanently).

In addition in 2003, the Board is:

- Establishing a register for children educated in settings outside of recognised schools;
- Taking steps to develop a service for 16-17 year olds who leave school to enter employment;
- Developing guidelines for schools on a range of issues in relation to school attendance;
- Reviewing procedures at school level for recording, monitoring and reporting on school attendance;
- Developing a Strategic Plan in consultation with education partners;
- Planning a public information programme on the legislation.
- Developing a code of good practice for EWOs and protocols for interacting with schools.

MORE STAFF NEEDED

With the budget allocation for 2003 the NEWB will have 73 staff (including the 37 posts transferred from the local authorities) delivering educational welfare services throughout the country.

However, there are an estimated 700,000 children in over 4,000 schools entitled to receive a service from the Board.

With 73 staff, it is simply not possible to provide services to the numbers of children and schools involved. The Board is only able to provide a service to an estimated 180,000 children and their families or just 26% of those entitled to a service. This runs contrary to the import of the Education (Welfare) Act which outlines that each school in the country will have an EWO assigned to them.

BUDGET FOR 2004 CRITICAL

The Board is committed to building a national service to meet its obligations under the Act. The school attendance service provided by the Gardaí is no longer available.

The Board is also conscious that it is the most vulnerable children that will lose out in the absence of a comprehensive national service.

The Board is aware of the difficult financial position facing the Government. However, it is precisely in this situation that protection should be afforded to those who are most vulnerable. The total cost of implementing Phases 1 and 2 of building a national service is 25 million in 2004.

The National Educational Welfare Board is hopeful that resources will be forthcoming to make this very important investment in the lives of our children and young people. A 'save now pay later' policy will not work.

THE EDUCATION (WELFARE) ACT 2000 PROVIDES FOR THE:

- Entitlement of every child to receive a certain minimum education
- Repeal of the School Attendance Acts 1926 to 1967
- Compulsory attendance at school by children aged between 6 and 16
- Monitoring of education provided outside of recognised schools
- Compulsory registration of young people who leave school early to enter employment
- Establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board to administer and enforce the Act.

On 5 July 2002 when the new Act commenced, the traditional function of the Gardaí in the enforcement of school attendance was terminated. The 37 former school attendance officers became staff of the Board on the same date.

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL WELFARE BOARD
BUDGET REQUIREMENTS 2004 - 2006 (PHASES 1 & 2)

	2004 €	2005 €
Pay	16.44	25.52
Training and Development	0.82	1.28
Travel and Subsistence	1.33	2.00
Legal and professional costs	0.90	0.99
Accommodation	3.00	3.00
Research	0.50	0.55
Communications	0.50	0.55
IT	1.00	0.50
Management and Consulting Costs	0.25	0.28
Insurance	0.50	0.55
Total	25.24	35.21



Premier Business Centre
11-15 Tara Street
Dublin 2

Tel 01 2409 408
Fax 01 2409 467
Email info@newb.ie