

Dáil Éireann recognises that

- The costs of returning to school each year, cause enormous financial stress and pressure on parents, a fact likely to be exacerbated by the rising cost of living crisis.
- According to a survey undertaken by the Irish League of Credit Unions in 2021 63% of parents found covering the cost of back to school a significant financial burden, 24% of families get in to debt over back to school costs, and 21% of families having debts of over €500.
- According to the same survey, the average cost of sending a child to primary school is now €1,186, and €1,491 for a secondary school child.
- Barnardos 2021 survey found that 50% of parents said they were concerned about the cost of returning to school, and that 20% of parents take out some form of loan to pay for school costs.

Dáil Éireann notes

- That primary and post primary education in this state is intended to be 'free', under constitution and legislation, but that the reality is profoundly different.
- That the cost of living crisis continues to mount, with almost two thirds of parents saying they and their children had to go without essentials over the past 6 months due to cost of living increases, that 28% have cut back or gone without heat,
- That despite the fact that Back to School costs have continued to increase in recent years, that the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is lower now than it was in 2007
- That Primary and Secondary Schools remain profoundly underfunded, leading schools to request 'voluntary contributions' and to fundraise simply to pay basic and essential bills, and that this situation is likely to be worse this year due to increased energy costs
- That this state is 75 years behind the north in introducing free school books, where it was introduced in 1947
- The complete failure of Ministers Foley and Ministers Madigan to take any concrete action to tackle these costs within their Department

That Dáil Éireann therefore calls on the Government to

- Give Back to School Allowance to middle income families by extending it to 500,000 additional children
- Increase Back to School Allowance by 50pc for those who already Qualify
- Work towards abolishing Voluntary Contributions, by implementing the Education (Voluntary Contribution) Bill 2021 proposed by Sinn Féin and by increasing capitation funding to schools
- Deliver a fully free schoolbook scheme for all children, through increases in funding to rapidly expand the availability of book rental schemes over a number of budgets.
- Enact Sinn Féin's Education (Affordable School Uniforms) Bill without delay, to ensure all schools have a uniform policy that reduces costs for families.
- Eliminate fees on the school transport scheme, beginning with a 20% reduction next year, and provide seats for an additional 10,000 children.