

Press Release

29th March 2011

JMB/AMCSS President Welcomes the Government's Commitment to Education in the Programme for National Recovery.

The President of JMB/AMCSS, Noel Merrick, at the 24th Annual Conference of the organisation in Killarney, welcomed the Government's commitment to education in the *Programme for National Recovery*.

Mr Merrick, in a far-reaching address, stated that “ while the pressure on the State's finances is undeniably real, we must remember that investment in education pays off in multiples in the short, medium and long terms.”

“ The reality is that education in Ireland has remained under resourced even in good times. Ireland is ranked in 30th place out of 33 OECD countries in terms of expenditure on education” said Noel Merrick

Mr Merrick stated that “ schools are also feeling the strain of the cut-backs due to reductions in staffing and the 5% decrease in all grants as outlined in Budget 2011. The loss of the allocation for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, support for the pupils from a traveller community background and English as an Additional Language is making the task of providing an appropriate curriculum for the most vulnerable pupils in the schools very difficult. The cut-backs affect the pupils who are at greatest risk of leaving school early which seems a strange way to treat these young people.”

“ The reductions in staffing allocations on top of the increase in the pupil teacher ratio in 2009 and the loss of disadvantaged status for many voluntary secondary schools over the past three years has created severe pressure on some schools leading to serious question marks about their survival,” claimed Noel Merrick.

Mr Merrick gave the example of one stand-alone co-educational school with a little over two hundred pupils which has lost almost three teachers due to the cut-backs.

“ This is an example of a school that has reached a curricular and financial tipping point,” suggested Mr Merrick.

“ For school principals all of these issues have created a serious strain and a major distraction from their primary task of leading learning in their schools. The loss of many middle management posts due to the moratorium has created an extraordinary burden on schools principals,” according to Mr Merrick.

“For some the only answer to the stress and pressure caused by the increasing workload is to give in and get out. The stress of coping with the issues outlined

earlier on top of a myriad of administrative and managerial tasks is just too much for some principals and they are left with no option but to retire,” said Mr Merrick.

Noel Merrick called on the Minister to “ address the issue of the workload of the principals as a matter of urgency. An initiative which would have a transforming effect on the day to day management of our schools is the appointment of a second Deputy Principal to large schools with a pro-rata allocation to smaller schools”.

Mr Merrick reminded the Conference participants that “ that voluntary secondary schools have always embraced challenges and our schools are now ready to work with the State to continue to provide an inclusive education where each young person is valued and encouraged to reach her/his potential.”

In conclusion he emphasised that “ those who lead our schools are deeply dedicated, committed and skilled. Our schools are renewing themselves constantly and due to a superb cohort of young people and teachers, they are centres of positive energy, of Christian hope and of excellence. It’s in this spirit of service to the common good that our voluntary secondary schools wish to part of the fabric of Irish life.”

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