

LETTER FROM SVP NATIONAL PRESIDENT TO THE TEACHERS' UNIONS

"I am writing to highlight the deep and growing concern of the Society of St Vincent de Paul with the practice in many schools of prescribing revised editions of textbooks at the start of each school year and the use of workbooks which make it impossible for families to purchase second hand books or to hand books down to younger children.

"The production and use of revised editions of textbooks is in our view unnecessary and extremely costly and is already causing distress for parents who have been issued with lengthy book lists containing books which they must buy brand new. This is particularly frustrating for families where an older child may have used an earlier version of the textbook but where the teacher insists that the revised version must now be used (which in many cases does not differ substantially from earlier versions).

"The decision to remove the school book grant scheme from non-DEIS schools will compound the strain felt by parents at this expensive time of year. Over 120,000 students from low income families attending non-DEIS primary and secondary schools received this grant in the 2008/9 school year, and as you are aware these students will be without the support of the grant in the coming year.

"Our members are already receiving requests for assistance with the cost of books from both parents and schools, as well as with the other costs associated with the return to school. The continual use of new editions of textbooks and the use of workbooks only adds to these costs and should certainly be avoidable.

"The cost of school books must be kept as low as possible for families, and teachers have a role to play in this. By allowing the use of older versions of textbooks, and by using alternatives to workbooks parents will at least be able to purchase second hand books or hand books down to younger children in order to reduce the financial outlay at the start of the year.

"We are requesting that the teachers' unions highlight our concerns and recommendations to your members and we would be happy to meet with you to discuss this issue further."

Mairead Bushnell,
National President,
SVP.