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Circular Letter 0141/2006

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Building Unit

To: The Boards of Management and Principals of National Schools

Grant Scheme for Minor Works to National School Properties

1. REVISED SCHEME

The Minister for Education and Science has reviewed the devolved grant scheme for minor works to national school properties which first came into operation in 1997. Under the revised scheme, funding will be made available to all primary schools with full recognition on the following basis:

- (a) **€5,500 basic grant plus €18.50 per mainstream pupil and €74 per special needs pupil on the rolls on the 30th September of the year prior to the issue of the grant. (The €74 rate applies to a special needs pupil attending a special school or attending a special class attached to a mainstream school);**
- (b) **The grant will be paid on an annual basis thereafter.**

Schools should make every effort to spend this funding during the course of the year. However, where schools have a larger project in mind, which would be covered under this scheme, but would cost in excess of the annual grant-aid, such schools should:

- * Advise the Department's School Building Section of the specific project for which the funding is earmarked;
- * Accumulate the grant-aid for a period of two years or more, providing there are no on-going works required;
- * Not apply for grant-aid to carry out any other works covered under the scheme for the period in question.

Schools should be aware that future grant payments may be withheld from schools where grant aid is accumulating or where expenditure plans are vague or do not comply with the purposes of this scheme. Schools should **not** apply to the Department for grant-aid for works covered by this scheme.

2. WORKS COVERED UNDER THE SCHEME

The funds being transferred to the schools must be spent on the physical infrastructure of the school or on items of furniture and equipment for educational use including IT related equipment. Works covered include:-

- * improvements to school buildings and grounds (*Items such as the replacement of windows, roof repairs, re-surfacing of school yard, re-painting and re-decorating, improving insulation standards and improving access for all qualify under this heading*);
- * improvement or replacement of mechanical and electrical services;
- * the purchase of standard furniture and physical education equipment;
- * the purchase of floor coverings and window blinds;
- * the purchase of IT related equipment (*Items such as computers, printers, overhead projectors and photocopiers qualify under this heading*).

Schools need not apply to the Department for approval to carry out works or to purchase items covered by the scheme.

3. PE EQUIPMENT RENEWAL

This year the minor works grant is being increased on a once-off basis by €2,000 per primary school to provide capital funding to meet PE equipment renewal requirements. Thereafter, any such requirements must be addressed from within the standard annual minor works grant. The first priority for this once-off

additional capital funding is to address any health and safety issues in relation to goalposts in schools. The background is that there have been a number of injuries and fatalities in Ireland and the UK in recent years due to substandard or unsecured goalposts.

To address these issues, an interagency Goalpost Safety Committee was convened by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) to develop a National Standard for goalposts and to initiate a safety awareness programme. The Department is represented on this committee. A Standard (I.S. EN 748: 2004) is already in place for fixed soccer goalposts. In the coming weeks draft Standards pr I.S. 356 pr I.S. 357 will be published on the NSAI website (www.n sai.ie) for portable goalposts and for other sports. It is anticipated that the new Standards will be ratified in the first half of 2007. Copies of these Standards can then be obtained from the NSAI.

The onus will be on school authorities to satisfy themselves, and keep adequate records, that any existing goalposts are safe and comply with these new safety standards. **Appendix A to this circular contains an 11 point goalpost safety plan which should be of assistance to school authorities in assessing any required action, e.g. replacement of goalposts.** School authorities may use any remaining balance of this additional funding to meet their other PE requirements for the replacement or purchase of new equipment. Schools should ensure that the equipment purchased is suitable for their pupils' use and suppliers should certify, where appropriate, that it meets the relevant Irish, European or British standard. Some guidance on primary school PE equipment is available on the Department's website at www.education.ie

4. WORKS NOT COVERED UNDER THE SCHEME

4.1. Additional Classrooms.

All proposals relating to the provision of additional classroom accommodation should continue to be referred to the Department for approval.

4.2. Non capital expenditure

The grant may not be used for items of a non-capital nature. This includes payment of wages or salaries, payment of bills such as ESB and telephone accounts, water rates, purchase of oil etc.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES, RECORDS AND AUDITING

The grant will be paid directly into the school bank. As with all exchequer grant-aid, school authorities must be able to provide detailed records on how funding, provided under this scheme, was spent. In addition, schools must be able to prove that expenditure was on works allowed under the scheme. All expenditure in connection with the scheme must therefore be vouched. Invoices and receipts must be retained in the event of an audit inspection by the Department and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General. It is necessary for schools to keep details of quotations received, invoices, receipts and any other relevant records in respect of all expenditure for a period of five years. Schools should note the dates on which works were carried out and completed. **Appendix B to this Circular contains details of the nature of records to be maintained.**

Schools, on request, must provide the Department with a written statement of the expenditure of the grant and any remaining balances and other relevant information that may be required. If a school closes permanently, any balance held in the account must be surrendered to the Department on the date that the school ceases operation.

The Department reserves the right to withhold future payments to schools for non-compliance with any of the terms of this Circular.

6. LOCAL CONTRIBUTION

Schools are not required to make a local contribution towards the cost of works covered by the scheme but may supplement the grant through local fundraising to complete a particular project. **The devolved grant scheme cannot be used to pay local contributions in respect of other capital projects undertaken by the school.**

7. VESTED AREA

The funds should only be used for work to facilities within the vested area of the school.

8. AUTHORITY/RESPONSIBILITY

This Grant Scheme devolves authority to Boards of Management for the execution of minor works. Responsibility for the proper execution of works will also rest with the Boards of Management.

9. EXECUTION OF WORKS

Schools must organise the execution of the works covered under the scheme in accordance with public procurement procedures, and pay the bills themselves. Schools already hold a copy of the Department's maintenance manual, "*Maintenance Matters*" which was compiled to assist schools in relation to the procedures for the execution of works (Manual also available on Department's website). School authorities should refer to the procedures contained in this manual before authorising any expenditure under the scheme. Chapter 9 provides information on statutory approvals, tenders, contracts and tax clearance. School authorities should also be aware that building contractors must be members of the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) Pension/Sick Pay Scheme or equivalent. **Appendix B to this Circular summarises the details of tender procedures that should be followed.**

The Local Government (Planning & Development) Act 1999 deals with the protection of architectural heritage. It came into operation on 1st January 2000 and applies to structures and lands listed as, or under consideration to be listed as, protected structures within the meaning of the Act. Boards of Management should check with their local planning office or seek expert professional advice if they intend to carry out works to school buildings and grounds, which come under the terms of the Act.

10. TREATMENT OF ASBESTOS

Renovation and improvement work of any kind at the school **must** be undertaken in accordance with all relevant Health, Welfare and Safety at Work Regulations. Contractors appointed to carry out work in the school must be made aware of and requested to review the school's safety file to establish the position relating to any health and safety issues, such as the presence of asbestos. Asbestos may be present in the boiler house insulation, ceiling tiles or other areas and may only be removed by competent persons in accordance with current health and safety legislation. If the school has been tested for the presence of asbestos, the results of this test will be recorded in the safety file. Any special instructions relating to the material contained in this file must be adhered to.

If the school has not already been tested for the presence of asbestos or if you are unsure whether or not it has been tested, you should contact the **Health and Safety Unit, Office of Public Works, 51 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2** - Tel.: 01 6476000. In this context, please refer also to circular letter 37/99 issued in December 1999. Asbestos is potentially harmful if disturbed and breathed in. Under no circumstances should school authorities

engage non-specialist contractors to remove asbestos or undertake work in an area of the school suspected of containing asbestos without consulting with the Health and Safety Unit of the Office of Public Works.

11. SCHOOLS HOUSED IN RENTED ACCOMMODATION

Where works are required to schools housed in rented accommodation, Boards of Management should ensure that they do not contravene the terms of the lease.

12. STATUS OF CIRCULAR 4/00

(The previous circular on the Minor Works Grant Scheme that issued in 2000)

This Circular supersedes Circular 4/00 which is hereby withdrawn.

Hubert Loftus
Principal Officer
School Building Unit
Tullamore
Co Offaly

November 2006

Enquiries about this Circular should be referred to:

**School Building Unit
Department of Education and Science
Portlaoise Road
Tullamore
Co Offaly**

Telephone: 057-9324300

Fax: 057-9351119

Web: www.education.ie

APPENDIX A

Goalpost Safety Plan

Guidance for the general procurement, installation, maintenance, storage and other related matters.

1. Before use, ensure that the goalpost is secured at all times by means of the appropriate supplied anchoring system. This applies to all posts whether they are fixed, portable or free-standing. All goalposts should be either anchored, weighted, pinned, chained, pegged or otherwise made secure so as to prevent overturning.
2. Before assembly of equipment check that is not damaged and that it is fit for use. Check for damages to nets, joints and that locking devices are in good working condition.
3. Check that the equipment for securing the product is intact and in good working order.
4. When goalposts that are tall or heavy are being erected/assembled, it is recommended that heavy lifting equipment is used and that correct tools for the job are used at all times. Assembly and erection of goals should be carried out by sufficient number of persons.
5. Consideration should be given to the proximity of overhead electrical cables during the erection and transportation of goalposts.
6. When dismantling goalposts follow the assembly instructions and recommendations. Ensure all ground sockets have been suitably blanked off when goalposts have been taken out to eliminate trip hazards.
7. Portable goalposts should be dismantled or removed to a secure area when not in use following the recommended storage instructions by the manufacturer/owner.
8. Moving: If a piece of equipment must be moved, and no transportation wheels are provided, the equipment should be lifted by a sufficient number of competent persons to prevent injury and to prevent damage to the product.
9. Procurement: All new goalposts should be purchased from manufactures/suppliers that comply with the following standards I.S.EN 748, I.S.EN 749, I.S.EN 750 and BS 8462. All products should carry a manufactures label and safety warning label. The manufacturers label should include instructions for installation, storage, dismantling, inspection and maintenance.
10. Maintenance: Regular maintenance of goalposts is essential to ensure that it is fit for use. In the absence of a standard, it is recommended that the user follow the guidelines set out by the manufacturer.
11. Alterations or additions/appendages (such as target sets) to parts of a goalpost that could affect the essential safety of the equipment should not be carried out.

Please note that the goalpost safety plan as outlined in this appendix is based on a document that originated from Elizabeth O Ferrall, Technical Secretariat, Goalpost Safety Committee, NSAI, Glasnevin, Dublin 9 on 13 July 2006 and is solely for guidance only. The Goalpost Safety Committee is not responsible for any omissions that may have occurred during its generation. Users are responsible for all aspects of goal safety from procurement to installation to storage. Please follow the manufactures instruction at all times. All users should generate their own safety plan in relation to these matters. Queries should not be sent to the NSAI Goalpost Safety Committee.

APPENDIX B

Tender Procedures and Record Maintenance

The Board of Management must establish a set of procedures governing purchasing and should set out the arrangements for tendering and buying of goods, payment of invoices and maintenance of accounting records.

Purchasing

- A purchasing policy needs to strike a balance between quality and cost, as the cheapest is not always the best. However, tender documents should clearly specify criteria for awarding contract and these may not be deviated from during award process.
- Boards of Management must take reasonable steps to satisfy themselves that suppliers and contractors engaged are reputable and competent.
- In all cases, where a contract (verbal or written agreement) is to be awarded for the supply of goods or services and payments under the contract are likely to exceed €6,500 (inclusive of VAT) in any twelve-month period, the contractor is required to produce either a valid tax clearance or C2 certificate. Further details on appointing contractors can be found in Chapter 9 of “Maintenance Matters”.
- All purchases under the scheme should be made with the consent of the Board of Management.
- A file containing evidence of the tendering and quotation procedures actually followed must be retained for inspection if required.

Tendering Procedures

- At least three tenders must be obtained.
- The invitation to tender must be issued directly to firms that would be capable of carrying out the contract or supplying the goods and are of reputable standing.
- A date for receipt of tenders must be specified.
- All tenders should be opened at the same time by two people nominated by the Board of Management.
- A report of each tendering procedure and reasons for selection should be retained by the Board.

Payment of Invoices and Accounts

- A suitable system of receiving and checking goods and services should be maintained.
- The Board should establish procedures for payment of bills.
- Invoices should be clearly stamped as “PAID” only when paid. Schools are advised that self-inking/pre-inked/rubber stamps with ink pads are suitable for this purpose.

- Bills should be paid immediately upon receipt.
- Payments should only be made on receipt of original invoices – not on receipt of statements or photocopied invoices.

Records to be maintained for inspection

- Tender documents (successful and unsuccessful).
- Documentation of quotations (whether received in writing or over the phone).
- Evidence of the evaluation/approval/acceptance of tenders.
- Evidence of compliance by contractors/companies with Tax Clearance Procedures (where relevant).
- Evidence of compliance by building contractors with the requirements of the Construction Industry Sick Pay Scheme (where relevant).
- Evidence that any goalposts are safe and comply with the new safety standards.
- Order forms (if appropriate).
- Delivery dockets.
- Invoices.
- Cheque book stubs.
- Bank Statements.
- In addition to the above items, the Board should ensure that there is some form of accounts, whether on computer or in manual format with expenditure of the grant being balanced on a regular basis to take account of the grant received, cheques cashed and outstanding cheques.