

**Dáil Éireann - Volume 571 - 02 October, 2003**  
**Ceisteanna – Questions. - Schools Building Projects.**

**Mr. J. Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will honour the commitment given to Clarecastle national school and immediately approve the building of a new school given that the present school is in a bad state of repair and is not suitable for the numbers attending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21706/03]

**Mr. N. Dempsey:** The large-scale building project for Clarecastle national school is listed in section 7 of the 2003 school building programme which is published on my Department's website at *www.education.ie*. This project is at stage 3 of architectural planning, which means that the outline sketch scheme has been further developed and cost proposals for the project submitted for consideration. It has been assigned a band 2 rating by my Department in accordance with the published criteria for prioritising large-scale projects. This project, with other projects listed in sections 6 and 7, will not be authorised to progress beyond their current stage of architectural planning at this time.

Budgetary provisions in 2004 and subsequent years will determine the rate of progression to tender and construction of these projects in conjunction with the band rating individually assigned. In the meantime, individual schools should, as appropriate, use their devolved grant to deal with urgent health and safety works.

**Mr. J. Breen:** Does the Minister accept his predecessor gave a definite commitment to the board of management of Clarecastle national school that the new building would commence in 2002? Approximately 300 pupils attend the school and it has 16 teachers. Does he agree the toilet facilities installed in that four classroom school are not adequate? There is no access to the school for children with disabilities. The school was given a greenfield site by Clarecastle hurling club and there must be an onus on the Government to honour the commitment that was made. Does the Minister accept his predecessor made such a

commitment? Why is he reneging on it?

**Mr. N. Dempsey:** I do not have information in regard to a definite commitment to commence work in 2002. A number of other schools need to be provided with additional accommodation or new buildings but that can only be done within the available budget and within our priorities. I guarantee the Deputy the school will be dealt with fairly, openly and transparently. When I know how much I have for the 2004 school building programme, the information will be updated on the website and the list will be circulated to Members. I assure the Deputy no school will jump the queue.

**Mr. J. Breen:** Does the Minister agree the provision of a prefabricated classroom at a cost of €83,000 was money unwisely spent given that it could have been put towards the building of the new school? Who is responsible if children get injured or contract a disease because of the poor toilet facilities in the school? There is an onus on the Department to give this case more urgent attention rather than saying it will be examined and considered in 2004. That is not good enough. I ask the Minister to give this urgent case priority. The population of Clarecastle is increasing and a proper building should accommodate at least 100 more pupils, particularly given the difficulty of getting children into schools in Ennis because of overcrowding. The Minister's programme is in a shambles.

**Mr. N. Dempsey:** Similar cases to that raised by the Deputy can be outlined in greater detail by other schools that are having more difficulty. I can only make provision on the basis of my allocation. I stand over my firm undertaking that schools will be dealt with in order of priority.

Health and safety issues are a matter for the board of management of the school in the first instance. If the issues are of such a serious nature that they cannot be addressed using the devolved grant or the capitation grant, the board can make a case to the Department to be dealt with under the emergency provisions that we make.

The issue of prefabricated classrooms comes up constantly. I do not agree with what has been said. I do not think the pupils in the school would choose not to avail of a modern prefabricated structure while they wait for their new school to be finished. If such a structure is necessary, it is necessary. If the Department is not in a position to provide a new school, the provision of temporary accommodation in such a form is far better than leaving pupils to tolerate the difficulties they were experiencing.