

Dublin Friends of the Earth

Executive Summary: This is a summary of a paper by Dublin Friends of the Earth, an environmental campaign group, to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection, in preparation for an oral hearing on Wednesday 4th June 2014.

- Energy costs in Ireland's 4,000 schools are estimated at up €50-€80 million a year, but there is no reliable data available to confirm this figure.
- Government policy as stated in NEEAP, the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan, is to reduce public sector energy use by 33% by 2020 compared to 2009. As well as substantial emissions cuts, this means estimated total savings of €200m a year, and up to €27m a year in education.
- SEAI, the Sustainable Energy Authority, is responsible for implementation of this policy. For almost two years now, SEAI has promised and failed to publish baseline data on energy use for the year 2011 by the 100 largest public sector bodies. As a result, in mid 2014, almost halfway to 2020, we still have no available data on 2011, nor on 2012 or 2013, and therefore no reliable basis on which to measure progress.
- But even when SEAI publishes that data, school energy costs will not be available as they have not been included. A pilot project in 8-10 schools on monitoring and reporting energy use is now underway in 2014, according to SEAI, and all schools will be obliged to report energy use and actions to reduce it from January 2015, a delay of four years on the reporting date for all other public sector bodies.
- Energy in Education is a programme launched by SEAI and DES in 2012 to provide advice and guidance to schools, but available figures show it has worked with only 6% of schools to date; and DES has not told most schools of its existence.
- Green Schools, a voluntary initiative in which a majority of schools now participate, has shown how individual schools can save thousands of euros through simple actions such as turning off lights, whiteboards and heating after hours. But energy is just one theme in six and there is no guarantee that such efforts continue after the initial two years of effort; and Green Schools does not have the remit or resources to implement a national strategy to ensure achievement of the 33% savings in all schools in Ireland.
- Reducing energy use in schools are cuts that don't hurt – in other words, a potential good news story. But in spite of the financial and climate crises, it is clear to Dublin FOE that millions of euros a year are being wasted by the failure to implement such a strategy.
- We are asking the Committee to pursue our recommendations on this issue:
 1. Every school board required to have an energy management plan with whole-school involvement in carrying it out, and sanctions if necessary for those that don't.
 2. A national strategy and resources for external support and guidance to all schools. The cost of investing in energy reduction has been shown to be repaid very quickly.
 3. A government decision on giving the remit for that strategy to Green Schools, unless it can be shown that another organisation is better able to implement it.