



**AIB invests EUR 1.27 million annually, for three years, in Irish children's education
8th January 2002**

More than 3000 Irish children most at risk of missing school will benefit from an annual investment of 1.27 million euro for three years in Schoolmate, the flagship initiative of AIB's new Better Ireland Programme.

Schoolmate was developed with the help of charities Barnados, ISPCC and FOCUS Ireland as a specific ring-fenced project that would help break the cycle that leads to the social exclusion of vulnerable children affected by poverty, drug and alcohol abuse and homelessness. At the launch, AIB Group Chief Executive, Michael Buckley said, "The aim of our Schoolmate project is to create the conditions necessary to release the social and intellectual potential of these children through education and learning."

This will be achieved by providing funding to the three charities to enable them to extend and enlarge services such as after school clubs, breakfast clubs, parenting programmes, anti-drugs campaigns and self-esteem programmes at 23 centres around the country.

Speaking at the reception, Barnardos Chief Executive Officer, Owen Keenan said, "I believe that this is, and will be, a groundbreaking initiative in terms of corporate sponsorship for charitable causes in Ireland. AIB has, of course, a positive track record over many years through its Better Ireland Awards. This new initiative represents the very best features of corporate citizenship and it is one with which Barnardos is delighted to be associated."

Paul Gilligan, Chief Executive Officer ISPCC said, "A truly child centred society can only be achieved through the efforts of all sectors within society. Through this initiative AIB are leading the corporate sector by example and are demonstrating not just the company's but also AIB staff commitment to children in Ireland."

Acting Chief Executive Officer, Focus Ireland Orla Barry said, "The new Better Ireland Programme will tackle social exclusion at an early stage and focus resources on key concerns affecting children in Ireland."