School uniform costs and school-branded items briefing | September 2025

The Children's Society's June 2025 survey of parents of school-age children asked about the affordability of school uniform, and experiences and views of school-branded uniform. This survey found a substantial proportion of families were continuing to struggle with the cost of school uniforms.

Consequently, this briefing highlights the benefits of limiting the number of school-branded items of uniform that schools can require their pupils to wear, the support for this change amongst parents, and the importance of the Government promptly implementing the measures it has brought forward to put this limit in place.

Key Findings

- Parents overwhelmingly supported the introduction of a statutory limit on school-branded uniform, with 78% agreeing such a limit should be put in place.
- When asked about the specific items schools should be allowed to require to be school-branded, the median number of items parents chose was three, in line with the measure in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.
- Moreover, over half of parents on the lowest incomes selected zero to two items to be school-branded, with just one-in-five of those parents choosing five or more.

Introduction

For over a decade, The Children's Society has been investigating the costs of school uniforms for families and campaigning to make uniform affordable for everyone. Our first report on this issue, *At What Cost: Exposing the impact of poverty on school life*,[1] was published in 2014. It found that the cost of school uniforms was putting families under unnecessary strain. In 2015 and 2018, we surveyed parents to explore issues around uniform costs in more detail, and in 2020, we published our *The Wrong Blazer* report.

Since then, The Children's Society has surveyed parents in 2023 and 2024, as well as again in June 2025. Our 2025 survey was of a representative sample of 3,000 parents of school-age children attending state-funded schools from across the UK. It asked parents about the cost and affordability of their child's school uniform, and their views and experiences of school-branded uniform items.[a] We worked with Dr

[a] School-branded items of uniform are defined as items that have a design or pattern that is specific to the school, or can only be purchased from a specific shop or seller. This can include branding with the school name or logo.

Matt Barnes, from City St George's, University of London, and Dr Rachel Shanks, from the University of Aberdeen, to develop this survey and analyse the results.

The focus on school-branded uniform items in the 2025 survey was particularly important in relation to the Government's Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. This Bill aims to bring down school uniform costs for families by placing a statutory limit on the number of school-branded items of uniform state-funded schools in England can require their pupils to wear. It proposes a limit of three school-branded items for primary schools. For secondary and middle schools, the proposed limit is also three items, but with a fourth permitted if one is a tie.

The current landscape

In 2021, a private members' bill was passed into law as the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 2021. This requires the Government to publish statutory guidance on the costs of school uniforms. Schools and their leaders are obliged 'to have regard to this guidance' in developing and implementing their school's uniform policy. Since the publication of this guidance, the Department for Education (DfE) published research in 2024 on the cost of school uniform. This found, when adjusting for inflation, there had been a small reduction in the cost of school uniform in 2023 compared to 2015, the year research was last carried out. This was driven mostly by a small fall in the cost of uniform and PE kit for parents of secondary school children, with the costs for parents of primary school children remaining almost the same. The latest research sees the average cost of a primary school uniform and PE kit standing at £343.28, and £442.25 for secondary school.[2]

Despite the progress made with the introduction of this guidance, we know many families still face considerable pressures on their household budgets. For the year to March 2024, 31% of children lived in households in 'relative low income' after housing costs, meaning the household median weekly income was of about £337 or less.[3] These pressures were also seen in our survey, with 38% of parents of school-age children agreeing they were struggling to pay for the uniform their child needs for school. **For those families in our survey with the lowest incomes,[b] 54% reported struggling to pay for uniform**, compared to 21% of those with the highest incomes.[c] Moreover, 42% of parents in our survey said they found school uniform this year was less affordable than in the previous year, highlighting that for some, the 2021 guidance was not having as great an effect as was hoped.

Survey findings

[b] Household income was calculated based on self-reported income from all sources, after tax, but before housing costs. This was then equivalised based on self-reported household size. When referring to households with the lowest income, we are referring to the lowest equivalised income quintile (20%) of survey respondents.

[c] When referring to households with the highest income, we are referring to those whose equivalised income places them in the highest quintile of income of survey respondents.

Introducing a limit on school-branded items of uniform

To further help families with the cost of school uniforms, the number of school-branded items of uniform that schools require its pupils to wear should be addressed. Research from the DfE found that **the average expenditure of parents and carers on school uniform and PE kit reduced as the range of outlets from which items could be purchased increased**.[4] Where generic items can be purchased from a range of suppliers, it can increase competition and likely contribute to lower prices. However, school-branded items can often only be purchased from a specific outlet or seller, limiting competition. As such, looking at school-branded items presents an opportunity to further address challenges around school uniform costs.

Consequently, The Children's Society welcomes the proposals the Government has set out in its Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, to introduce a statutory limit on the number of school-branded uniform items schools can require. In our recent survey, this proposal was supported by an overwhelming majority of parents, with **78% agreeing that such a limit should be introduced**, and a further 2% saying schools should not be allowed to require school-branded uniform items.

Further analysis of survey responses revealed **parents who said they struggled with the affordability of school uniform[d] were more strongly in favour of a limit on school-branded items**. For those struggling with affordability, 59% strongly agreed there should be a statutory limit on school-branded items, compared to 40% of those who said they found uniform was affordable.[e]

The number of school-branded items

When parents were asked about the items of uniform that they thought schools should be allowed to require to be school-branded, the median number of items they selected was three, in line with the Government's plans. The most common response was for parents to select one to two items (37%).

When looking at the number of items parents thought should be allowed to be school-branded based on income, half of parents with the lowest household incomes (51%), chose between zero and two branded items, and just one-in-five (20%) favoured five or more items. In addition, over half of parents in the next two lowest income quintiles also chose zero to two items. This compares to 24% of

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[d] The group who said they struggled with the affordability of school uniform consists of those parents who disagreed or strongly disagreed that 'the school uniform, including PE kit, that my child needs is affordable', and agreed or strongly agreed that they 'struggle to pay for the school uniform, including both day-to-day items and PE/sports items, that my child needs', and disagreed or strongly disagreed that 'the uniform I have purchased for the current academic year (2024-25) was more affordable that the uniform I purchased in the previous academic year (2023-24)'.

[e] The group who said they found uniform affordable consists of those who gave the opposite responses to the same three statements listed above, for those who struggled with the affordability of school uniform.

parents with the highest household incomes who selected zero to two items, and half (51%) who chose five or more items.

Parents who said they struggled with the affordability of uniforms were also more likely to select a lower number of items that schools should be allowed to require be school-branded. For this group, 67% chose zero to two items, compared to 26% of parents who felt uniform was affordable. Together this suggests **the introduction of a statutory limit not only has widespread support amongst parents, but, at the currently proposed level of three items, would also be particularly welcomed by parents with low incomes** and those already struggling with the affordability of school uniforms.

Uniform items that could be school-branded

In terms of which particular uniform items parents said should be school-branded, looking at responses by income, parents with the lowest household incomes are less likely to support branding across all items. This compares to parents with the highest household incomes, who are more open to items being school branded.

Overall, the individual items parents most commonly said schools should be allowed to require be school-branded (excluding ties) were blazers (54%), jumpers/cardigans (50%), and PE/sports tops (31%).

There were differences in the responses between parents of primary school and secondary school children. For parents of primary school-age children, the top three items they said schools should be allowed to require be school-branded were a jumper/cardigan (56%), blazer (47%), and a shirt/blouse/polo shirt (32%). For parents of secondary school-age children, the top three items selected were a blazer (64%), jumper/cardigan (43%), and a PE/sports top (34%).

Based on the DfE's 2023 research, the average costs of one of each these items of uniform was £14.23 for a jumper/sweatshirt, £39.03 for a blazer, £5.80 for a boy's shirt, £6.08 for a girl's shirt/blouse, £13.43 for a winter PE shirt, and £9.66 for a summer PE shirt.[5] These averages will be based on a mix of school-branded and generic items, depending on what surveyed parents were required to purchase for their child.

The costs of individual items can be higher when it is required for them to be school-branded or purchased from a specific supplier, rather than being something generic that can be bought from any retailer. Moreover, it is likely that parents will have to purchase more than one of a range of uniform items for their child. For instance, the DfE found parents bought an average of about five shirts or blouses, and more than two jumpers/sweatshirts.

The Government's proposed limit on the number of school-branded items allows middle and secondary schools an additional fourth item, if one is a tie. As such, we chose to ask parents specifically about school ties. This saw parents being in favour

of ties, with 78% supporting them being part of uniforms. Moreover, 46% of parents said ties should be school-branded or otherwise specific to the school.

For parents who struggle with the affordability of uniform, we found they are more likely to oppose ties being part of school uniforms, with 42% disagreeing ties should be included in uniforms. In addition, parents in this group are far less likely to support school-branded ties, with only 32% in favour of them. Support for school specific ties was greatest amongst parents from the highest income households, with 60% supporting them. This group was also the least likely to oppose ties being part of school uniforms, with only 12% against ties.

Conclusion

Since The Children's Society's first report on school uniforms over 10 years ago, much progress has been made to reduce the cost of uniform for families. We have seen the success of the Cost of school uniforms statutory guidance brought in by the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 2021, with the overall cost of uniform declining between 2015 and 2023. In addition, there is good practice from schools across the country as many have updated uniform policies and provided support, such as improved access to second hand uniforms to help families with the cost of uniform.[f]

While there has been significant progress in bringing down the costs of school uniforms, our latest survey, carried out in June 2025, shows **there is still more to be done, especially for the families on the lowest incomes and those struggling with the affordability of school uniforms**. Families have been facing heightened cost-of-living pressures now for a number of years, and this means that many are still struggling to afford school uniform for their children. With research from the DfE showing that uniform costs are lower for families able to buy uniform from a wider range of suppliers, addressing the challenges of often expensive school-branded uniform items is a key next step in reducing the burdens on families' finances.

The measures that the Government has put forward in its Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill aim to do just that; limiting school-branded items will help to increase choice for parents when shopping for uniform, giving them more flexibility and help with the costs. Therefore, **The Children's Society welcomes and supports this aspect of the Bill, and we are calling for the prompt implementation of this provision, once the Bill becomes law**. Once the limit comes into effect, it is essential the implementation of this change is carefully monitored, to ensure it brings about the meaningful, real-life change many families still need.

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[f] In May 2023, The Children's Society surveyed 2,000 parents across the UK about the costs of school uniforms. This survey was carried out by Censuswide from a nationally representative sample of UK adults. This found that over a quarter of parents (26%) said their child's school was signposting to uniform banks or pre-loved items, and three-in-10 (30%) said there was an up-to-date uniform policy available on their schools' website.

[1] The Children's Society. At What Cost: Exposing the impact of poverty on school life. London: The Children's Society; 2014.
[2] Department for Education. Cost of School Uniforms Survey 2023 [Internet]. Department for Education: London; 2024 [accessed 26 August 2025]. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms-survey-2023
[3] Department for Work and Pensions. Households Below Average Income: an analysis of the UK income distribution: FYE 1995 to FYE 2024 [Internet]. Department for Work and Pensions: London; 2025 [accessed 2 September 2025]. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2024
[4] Department for Education. Cost of School Uniforms Survey 2023 [Internet]. Department for Education: London; 2024 [accessed 26 August 2025]. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms-survey-2023
[5] Department for Education. Cost of School Uniforms Survey 2023 [Internet]. Department for Education: London; 2024 [accessed 26 August 2025]. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms-survey-2023