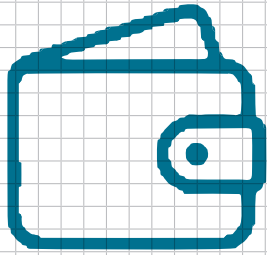


PRIMARY & SECONDARY BACK TO SCHOOL COSTS 2026



59%

say back to school costs
are higher than last year

THE TOP REASONS PARENTS CITE ARE:



School uniforms

56%



Branded or
crested items

38%

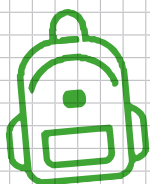


School lunches
/snacks

33%

A fuller picture of school costs

This year's research separates upfront back to school spend from running costs across the year, and captures additional items such as devices, branded sports clothing, tutoring and school lockers.



Primary School

£1,363

£570

upfront total

£793

running cost total



Secondary School

£2,029

£1,106

upfront total

£923

running cost total

BACK to
SCHOOL
Research 2026

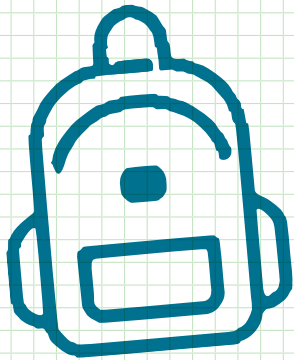
NI



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PRIMARY school costs in 2026

Full school-year cost captured in the ILCU Back to School research



£1,363

AVERAGE SPEND
across the school year

Back to school upfront costs - £570



Stationery

£65



Books

£62



Uniform /
Clothing

£122



Average
voluntary
contribution

£87



Gym gear /
Sports
equipment

£88



Shoes

£78



Other
upfront costs

£68

Running costs across school year - £793



After-school
care

£159



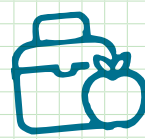
School trips

£126



Extracurricular
activities

£139



School lunches
and snacks

£202



Transport
to school

£81



Other
running costs

£86

For primary school parents, the pressure is not only the first school bill but the running costs that continue throughout the year.

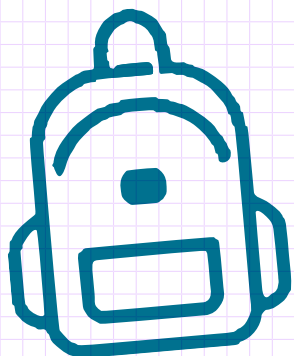
BACK to
SCHOOL
Research 2026



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SECONDARY school costs in 2026

Full school-year cost captured in the ILCU Back to School research



£2,029

AVERAGE SPEND
across the school year

Back to school upfront costs - £1,106



Stationery

£74



Books

£75



Uniform /
Clothing

£187



Average voluntary
contribution

£130



Gym gear /
Sports equipment

£123



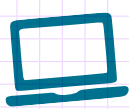
Shoes

£95



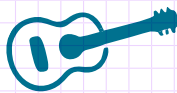
Branded
sports clothing

£107



Devices
for School

£159



Musical
Instruments

£67



Locker rental

£36



Other
upfront costs

£53

Running costs across school year - £923



After-school
care

£66



School trips

£188



Extracurricular
activities

£135



School lunches
and snacks

£249



Transport
to school

£121



Tutoring

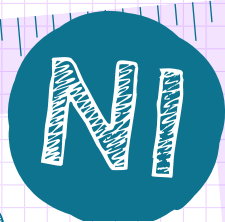
£84



Other
running costs

£80

**BACK to
SCHOOL**
Research 2026



For secondary
school parents,
costs are driven
by both the initial
outlay and ongoing
expenses across
the school year.



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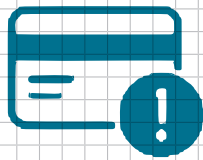
Perceptions on overall school costs across Primary & Secondary

COSTS STILL WEIGHING ON NI FAMILIES



71%

say B2S costs are a financial burden



37%

get into debt to cover B2S costs



£301

average debt among those who borrow



Survey Respondent Comments

THE OVERALL AFFORDABILITY CHALLENGE

"Back-to-school costs are way too high for families to afford."

THE PRESSURE ON SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

"It is too expensive, especially as a single mum with two children."

THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN FREE EDUCATION AND FAMILY COSTS

"There shouldn't be back-to-school costs. It is meant to be free education. I can understand some cost for a uniform, but the additional costs throughout the year and dinner money are just too expensive."

COSTS INCREASING ALONGSIDE THE WIDER COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

"It's getting harder to keep up with the cost of living, especially with rising school costs."

PRESSURE TO PURCHASE BRANDED PRODUCTS

"I think the pressure to buy only branded items should be addressed."

LIMITED CHOICE OF UNIFORM SUPPLIERS

"Uniforms should not be branded and only available from one supplier."

THE PRACTICAL IMPACT OF EXPENSIVE UNIFORM RULES

"All uniform items should be available from supermarkets or generic shops. My daughter's uniform is available from only two shops, and her summer blouses were £20 each."

SECONDARY-SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY ADDING A NEW LAYER OF EXPENSE

"The cost of school can vary greatly depending on what is needed, for example digital devices when starting secondary school."

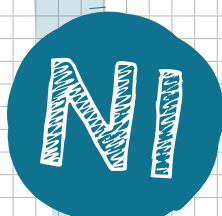
FAMILIES CUTTING BACK ELSEWHERE TO MEET SCHOOL COSTS

"I'm struggling so much that I have had to cut back on my daily routine."

EVIDENCE THAT PRACTICAL SCHOOL POLICIES CAN REDUCE THE BURDEN

"The school provides iPads for all pupils, which are returned at the end of term. I only have to pay for the insurance."

BACK to
SCHOOL
Research 2026



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