



One Parent Families Scotland



Findings from 2017 School Clothing Grants Survey

Issued: November 2017

This briefing note highlights key findings of a survey of parents across Scotland on their views on school clothing grants carried out by CPAG (Scotland), One Parent Families Scotland and the Poverty Truth Commission. It makes key recommendations for the Scottish Government and local authorities.

“I did without for months in order to afford school uniform”

Introduction

Under the [1980 Education Act](#) local authorities must make provision for the clothing of pupils who would otherwise be unable to afford school wear. At present all local authorities in Scotland provide a school clothing grant, each authority deciding the eligibility criteria, the grant amount and the application process. Across Scotland, the school clothing grant varies by local authority (from £40 to £110) and in many areas, amounts set are not enough to adequately clothe children for school (see Appendix 1 for a breakdown of school clothing grant by local authority area).

Despite the Scottish Government securing the power under the Education (Scotland) Act 2016¹ to introduce a minimum school clothing grant, there has been no agreement yet reached between COSLA and the Scottish Government.

"Crucially, the policy will provide consistency of approach throughout Scotland. Although local authorities currently have a general duty to make provision, it is clear from our discussions with a number of organisations that there is inconsistency throughout Scotland and it is unacceptable that any child should lose out.

Amendment 169 gives ministers the power through regulations to place local authorities under a duty to pay a grant of a specified amount for the provision of clothing for certain pupils under certain conditions. We need to support the children and young people who need help the most and it is both sensible and timely to put those powers in place now.

The description of these pupils is still to be agreed and I look forward to continuing those discussions with COSLA. I fully intend to work in partnership with COSLA to agree a minimum level of grant provision throughout Scotland. Provided that agreement can be reached to ensure implementation, there will be no need to call on the enabling powers"

Angela Constance MSP in her capacity as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning bringing forward the school clothing grant amendment during the Education (Scotland) Bill (December 2015).

¹ <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10258&mode=pdf>



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Of those parents responding to the survey, only 6% reported being able to purchase a full school uniform within the most common grant range (£50-£69) offered by local authorities.

Parents also provided anecdotal evidence in their own words of the challenges they face in meeting the costs of school uniform and these are set out within the report.

Recommendation

Unless agreement between COSLA and the Scottish Government can be reached in this school year, regulations should be introduced to ensure education authorities provide school clothing grant that meets or exceeds an agreed minimum level.

The minimum level of grant should be set based on discussion with key stakeholders including parents struggling on low incomes. It should be regularly reviewed to make progress towards a more realistic contribution towards the cost of school clothing across the whole of Scotland.



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Survey Background:

In 2017, **CPAG Scotland**, **One Parent Families Scotland** and **The Poverty Truth Commission** undertook a survey of parents on the school clothing grant.

The survey was online and advertised via the organisations' websites, electronic mailing lists and social media. 343 respondents took part in the survey with participants answering from nearly every local authority across Scotland (29 of 32)

Although self-selecting, the survey provides a useful snapshot of the challenges faced by many parents across Scotland as they struggle to meet the costs associated with school clothing requirements, with over half of respondents reporting that they have had to borrow money (from friends and family or a bank or other financial lender) in order to buy uniforms.

School Clothing Grants in Scotland

In 2016, the Scottish Government gained the power to introduce a minimum school clothing grant through an amendment to the Education (Scotland) Act 2016.

On 25th July, 2016, in answer to a Parliamentary Question, Education Secretary John Swinney MSP stated that: *"Scottish Ministers continue to discuss the provision of school clothing grants and appropriate timescales for implementation with COSLA. We intend to achieve this in partnership with COSLA rather than by imposing regulations, in the same way that we have successfully implemented universal free school meals for Primary 1 to 3. However, the regulation - making power provides an alternative route should this not prove possible."*

On 10th August 2017, COSLA stated *"Scotland's Councils are committed to doing the very best for the communities they are elected to represent – especially those people in the most need. However, years of UK Government austerity and a lack of investment in public services takes its toll. This coupled with year on year cuts to council budgets from the Scottish Government has meant that councils have had to make extremely difficult decisions across all areas of their expenditure."*

"The simple truth is that demand for our services will always outstrip our ability to pay for all that we would like to do. That is why in the forthcoming spending review COSLA will be pushing for the funding local government needs to deliver the essential services for our communities."

Key Issues from the 2017 Survey

The school clothing grant is a lifeline for many low income parents in Scotland. While parents on the lowest income can receive some help by way of a school clothing grant from



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their local authority, in many areas the grant available is nowhere near enough to cover even the most basic items.

Previous research from The Poverty Truth Commission, OPFS and CPAG in Scotland estimates that the total cost of buying base components of a school uniform (using lower-end retail costs) amounts to £129.50 per child. This figure includes: one winter coat, a blazer, two pairs of trousers, a tie, two shirts, a jumper, one pair of school shoes, a PE Kit, one pair of trainers, two polo shirts and a school bag (see Appendix 3 for more detail). In this context it is useful to note that:

- 16 out of 32 local authorities offer a school clothing grant of £50-£69, while 6 local authorities offer a grant of less than £50. Only 8 out of 32 local authorities offer a higher grant for secondary school pupils. 5 local authorities offer a grant of £90 or more.
- Over a third of single parent families who responded, reported finding it difficult to afford uniform most years.
- A quarter of respondents who answered the question, were not aware of their eligibility or choose not to apply for a school clothing grant.
- Over four fifths of parents who answered the question reported finding it difficult on at least one occasion to meet all the uniform requirements for their child at school.
- One fifth of respondents who answered the question reported being late paying rent or being late in making another essential payment to pay for uniform.
- Over three quarters of respondents who answered questions on secondary school clothing reported spending more on meeting these costs and said that there should a higher clothing grant available for secondary school pupils.



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Parents Views

On managing uniform costs:

“I took hand-me downs, bought cheap equivalents and could not badge most of my kids' uniform. I also raided the lost property cupboard just before it went to charity (with permission of course). I also try to survive with the minimum number of uniform items as possible and quite often their shoes are wrecked and I have to wait until money comes in before I can buy new ones. I can't always buy good quality shoes so their feet get wet and their shoes are ill-fitting.”

“I had to save up and not have family days out during holidays so there was enough money for uniform - No summer holiday due to high uniform costs.”

On the level of school clothing grant:

“This is not even enough to pay for a decent pair of shoes in this day and age. Kids are cruel and comment on poorer looking children. Buying for three teenagers who wear adult sizes leaves me struggling every year. Cheapest trousers from Asda are £16 a pair for boys. That's all my money away at summer holidays buying items each pay and leaves nothing to spare and often debt.”

“I have absolutely no idea how people are expected to buy adequate uniform with just £50. I'm careful with money, I purchase coats in the sales, I make use of second hand clothing passed from friends, I buy very few items with logos etc, and yet I spend between three and four times the amount available as a grant. I make a point of donating to help others where I can and feel very strongly that the grant should be increased as a matter of urgency.”

“I am lucky enough to be able to afford uniform, and our school's requirements are not onerous/difficult to buy, so I don't need the grant. However, I see that my LA awards £55 - this is nowhere near enough for full uniform including shoes and a decent coat (not even counting the cost of a blazer).

On higher clothing grants for secondary pupils:

“Kids are often in adult sized clothes by this time. One shirt and one pair of trousers is not enough for five days and a change of clothes is needed if you don' have a tumble dryer. Blazer with logo and gym shirts are expensive, kids can't wear cheap shoes or they get picked on by better off pupils.”

“[As they get older,] larger sizes cost more, stigma around inadequate uniform increases.”

“Both my children need adult sizes now which is more expensive. Also, because my eldest is 16 she is no longer eligible for clothing grant but has to apply for an EMA, which there is no guarantee she will get each week if she is ill for example.”



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Recommendations:

Although the responsibility for setting eligibility for school clothing grants lies with local authorities, the Scottish Government has a golden opportunity to set a minimum rate for the whole of Scotland, helping to ensure every child can return to school feeling comfortable, confident and ready to learn.

- **Introduce a minimum level of school clothing grant across the country.** Local authorities should also give consideration to the additional costs of secondary school children and factor this in to awards.
 - Regulations should be introduced to ensure every local authority sets school clothing grants at, or above, an agreed minimum level.
 - This amount should be set at an adequate level, based on engagement with stakeholders including parents with experience of raising children on a low income. The minimum level should be regularly reviewed to make progress towards a more realistic contribution towards the cost of school clothing across the whole of Scotland.
- **Local authorities should consider automatic awarding of school clothing grants.** Many families are not aware of their eligibility and automatic award of entitlements can help increase uptake. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act requires the Scottish Government to set out in nation delivery plans measure they are taking to support local authorities to ‘consider the automatic payment of benefits’.
- **Schools should be supported to poverty proof their school day, including reviewing school uniform policies and allowing parents to buy generic items instead of branded school items. Branded uniform requirements put additional pressure on already hard pressed family budgets.** Strict policies can also impact on children’s experience of school, for example, telling children not wearing the correct uniform to go home and change can be a barrier to their education. Having clear anti-bullying policies and practices which are alert to income based bullying and stigma which pupils on low incomes may face can also be helpful.

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Appendix 1. School Clothing Grants by Local Authority Area 2017-2018.

(Figures collated by the Poverty Truth Commission from local authority websites and direct calls)

2017 – 2018 amount of School Clothing Grant per eligible pupil.		
Local Authority	PRIMARY	SECONDARY
Aberdeen City	£55	£60
Aberdeenshire	£50	£50
Angus	£50	£50 up from £20 in 2016
Argyll & Bute	£50	£50
Clackmannanshire	£55	£55
Dumfries and Galloway	£80	£80
Dundee	£81	£81
East Ayrshire	£100	£100 up from £75 in 2016
East Dunbartonshire	£50	£50
East Lothian	£60	£65 *
East Renfrewshire	£75	£75 up from £50 in 2016
Edinburgh	£43	£50 (vouchers)
Eilean Siar / Western Isles Council	Age 5-8 £50, Age 9-12 £55	Age 13 – 14 £60, Age 15 - 18 £65
Falkirk	£50	£50
Fife	£55	£55
Glasgow City	£52	£52* up from £47 in 2016
Highland	£90	£90 up from £81 in 2016
Inverclyde	£90	£90
Midlothian	£60	£65
Moray	£45	£45*
North Ayrshire	£40	£40
North Lanarkshire	£70	£70
Orkney Islands	£56	£56 up from £55 in 2016
Perth & Kinross	£45	£50
Renfrewshire	£55	£55
Scottish Borders	£45	£45
Shetland Islands	£45 (Nursery £40)	£50
South Ayrshire	£50	£50
South Lanarkshire	£50	£50
Stirling (see below)	£50	£50
West Dunbartonshire	£100	£100
West Lothian	£94	£110

*These local authorities do not award pupils on EMA with clothing grant.

Stirling is undergoing a trial of a further £30 payment to be made in January to assist with school expenses.

Appendix 2.

Key statistics from survey findings - (Online survey of 343 parents).

83% (of 290 respondents) have found it difficult to afford all the uniform requirements at least once.

37% of single parent families find it difficult to afford uniform most years, and 20% of two parent families face the same challenge. (290 respondents).

58% (of 228 respondents) had to borrow money to buy school uniforms.

26% (of 228 respondents) were unable to buy full uniform.

21% (of 228 respondents) reported being late paying rent or other making another essential payment to pay for uniform.

25% (of 254 respondents) don't apply or do not know if they are eligible for school clothing grant.

77% (of 257 respondents) reported spending more on meeting secondary school costs.

78% (of 343 respondents) have experienced pressure from additional costs.

84% (of 265 respondents) don't think that the school clothing grant for their local area is sufficient.

89% (of 257 respondents) believe that a higher clothing grant should be given to secondary school pupils.

Appendix 3.

School Uniform Costs (Costs of a child's school uniform - based on lower-end retail costs).

THE COST OF SCHOOL UNIFORM

The Cost of the School Day project explored how costs relating to education impacted on children and young people from low-income households.

School uniform is one of the biggest costs and children spoke about the challenges they face relating to buying and maintaining a decent and sufficient uniform.

WHAT DOES IT ACTUALLY COST?

We added up the total cost of buying base components of school uniform for a child using lower-end retail costs.



EXTRA COSTS CAN INCLUDE...



SCHOOL UNIFORM POLICY CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE FOR FAMILIES ON A LOW INCOME.



FIND OUT MORE: www.cpag.org.uk/scotland