

# The Cost of Education

2014





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## **BACKGROUND**

Austerity measures have impacted adversely on families' incomes, with households facing the biggest income fall since the 1970s, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), and increasing levels of child poverty, as highlighted by the charities Save the Children, the IFS and the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG).

Family income and child poverty have been impacted on by benefit cuts, public sector pay policies, the loss of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), increases in higher education (HE) tuition fees and the interest charged on student loans, alongside unemployment and the wider effects of recession.

The Education Act 2011 brought in changes that include allowing different types of state-funded schools to have increased 'freedoms', including over curriculum provision, admissions, school finances and changing policies; for example, allowing schools to charge for non-core curriculum subjects.

These increased freedoms have been accompanied by changes to the ways schools can be monitored in the public interest.

In the light of growing concerns expressed to the NASUWT by teachers and parents and the information from the IFS, CPAG and Save the Children, the NASUWT instigated a longitudinal study to ascertain any changes to the costs incurred to families in the context of their children's education.

This Report is the third annual survey of parents, grandparents and carers conducted by the NASUWT on this issue.

## METHODOLOGY

The Survey was undertaken in Autumn 2014 and received over 2,500 responses. It covered the full age range of pupils from 3 to 19 years old.

While the majority of respondents reported that they were parents of pupils in local authority schools, the respondents were a representative sample of parents across the education system.

The age range of the pupil cohort the respondents covered was similarly representative.

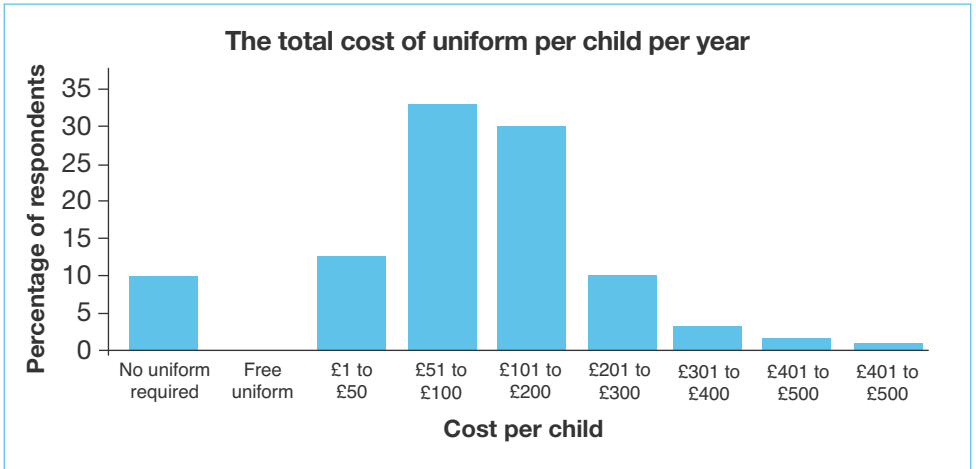
The Survey examined experiences and views of parents, grandparents and carers on a range of key issues, including:

- the cost of uniform and PE equipment;
- whether respondents were required to use a particular supplier for uniform and equipment;
- what educational equipment was required by schools to be purchased and the cost;
- lunchtime arrangements and the cost of food;
- parental financial contributions to schools;
- the cost of travel to and from school;
- the cost of educational visits and activities; and
- the cost of extracurricular activities.

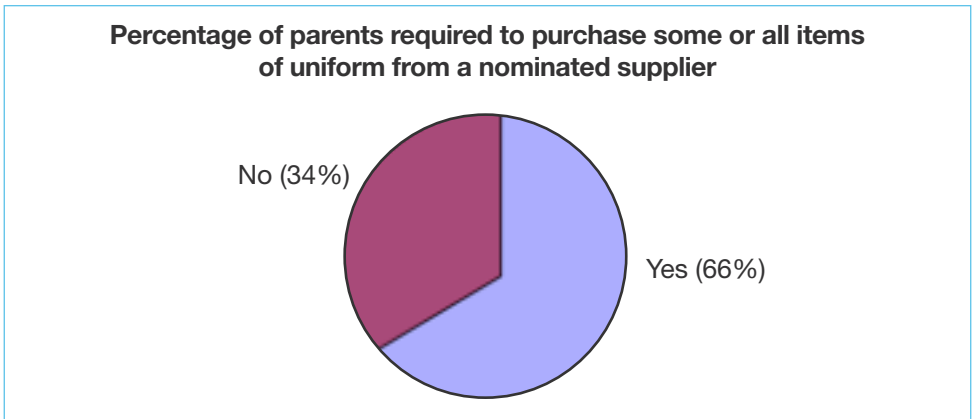
# KEY FINDINGS OF THE NASUWT SURVEY ON THE COST OF EDUCATION 2014

## The cost of uniform and PE equipment

The 2014 statistics on school uniform costs are significant, especially where there have been changes to the uniform.



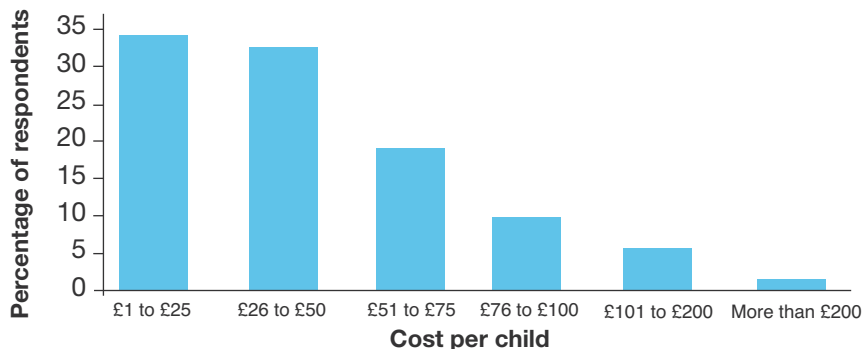
Of parents required to purchase a uniform, half spent over £100 per child and two thirds were required to use a particular supplier, which could be the school.



More than one in six parents were required to provide essential PE equipment.

Four fifths (81%) of respondents were required to buy specific clothing and footwear for PE. For a third of parents the cost of this was in excess of £50 per year per child.

### The approximate cost of providing PE clothing and school footwear per child over the past year



A sample parental comment from the Survey:

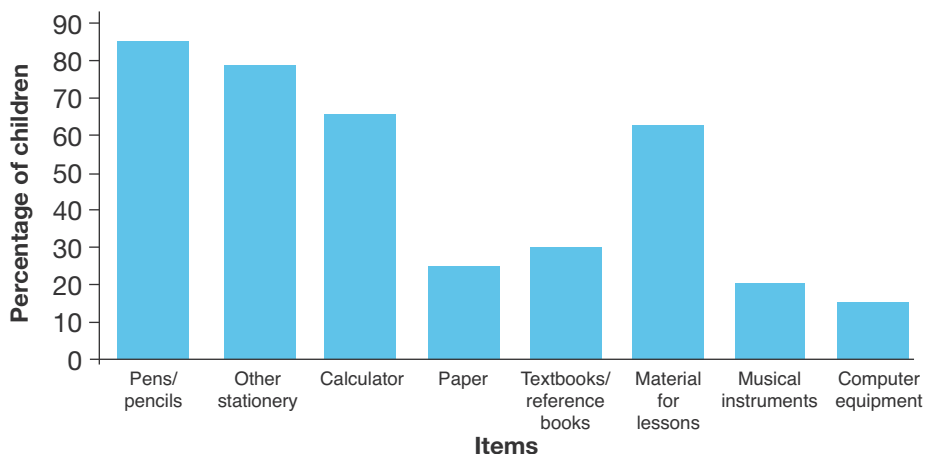
*More and more specifications have been added to the school uniform to include, for instance, trainers solely for school use, and jumpers, tops and hats now having to be purchased from the school. This has resulted in more than doubling my expenditure for this year.*

### The educational equipment required to be purchased and the cost

Of particular interest were the findings related to equipment, materials and resources that are essential to children's basic participation in education.

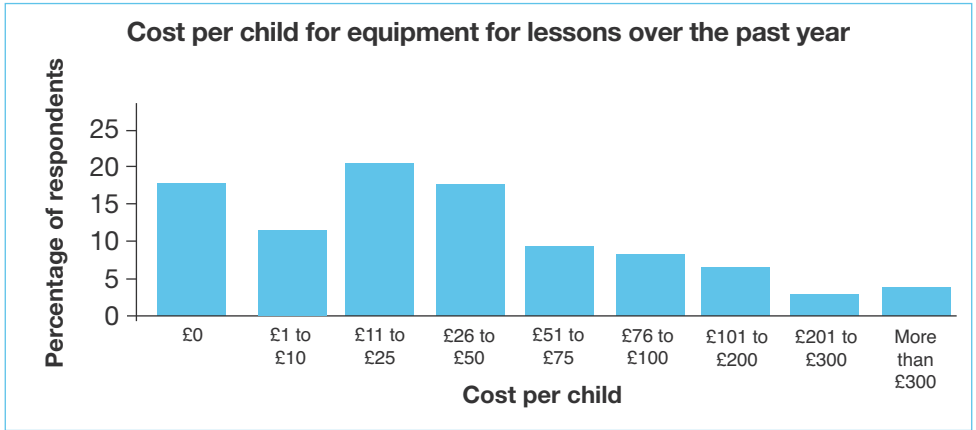
Nearly a third of the respondents were required to purchase textbooks and reference books; more than four out of five parents were required to provide writing instruments; over three quarters had to buy basic stationery.

### Items required by the school to be provided by parents for each child





Half of parents were expected to pay in excess of £25 per year per child and nearly a third of parents in excess of £50.



Fifteen per cent of children were expected to have electronic equipment provided by parents.

A sample of comments from the Survey:

*Education should be free. It isn't. My eldest son's school now expects all students to have iPads in Year 8. I also think that it is wrong that schools have to ask students to buy textbooks, but the schools just can't make ends meet.*

*I have concerns regarding the implicit costs rather than those asked for explicitly, e.g. when homework is set and asked for in a word-processed form or Internet research is set etc., the assumption is all children have printing facilities and access to the Internet.*

*There is an expectation that parents can and will pay for electronic gadgets that are now becoming an expected part of the teaching process.*

*It has cost me £3,000+ (including a laptop each – required to access online learning and intranet operated by the school).*

*I bought a laptop as most homework was given electronically and expected to access Google drive and Internet. Also had to buy wifi.*

## Lunchtime arrangements and the cost of food

Nearly a half of pupils have school meals.

The most common reason given for those that did not pay for school meals was poor value for money. Of those that purchased school meals, a third of respondents (33.5%) said their children do not like the meals provided and a fifth (21%) indicated that the meals were poor quality.

Twelve per cent of respondents pays over £3 per day per child on school lunches (equivalent to over £570 p.a.). A fifth of parents pay the school over £1 a day on snacks, with some reports of paying more than £3 a day.

A sample of comments from the survey:

*I can't afford them! £2.50 per child per day is £25 a week!*

*Cost of lunches is not within my budget.*

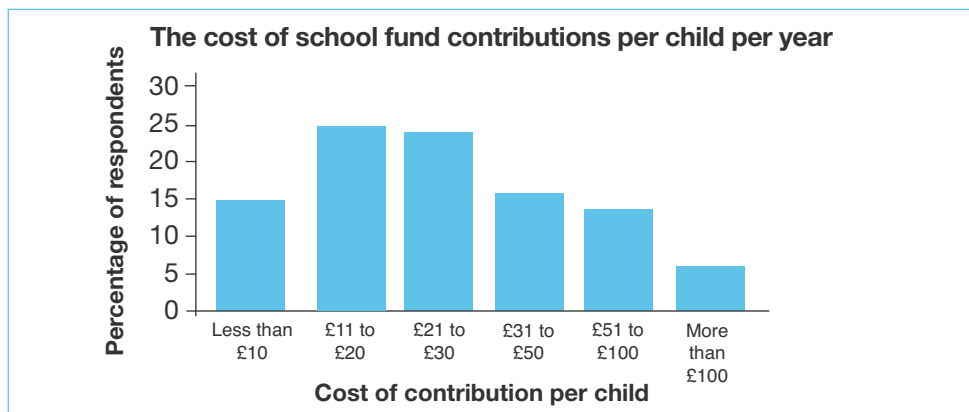
*I can't justify spending in excess of £60 a month per child on school lunches.*

*It is too much money to pay for three school lunches every day.*

## Financial contributions to schools

Over a third of parents make financial contributions to their children's school, with a fifth of parents reporting that they were expected to contribute to a school fund.

A fifth of parents that made financial contributions paid over £51 p.a. which was in addition to other, sometimes frequent, requests for money throughout the year.

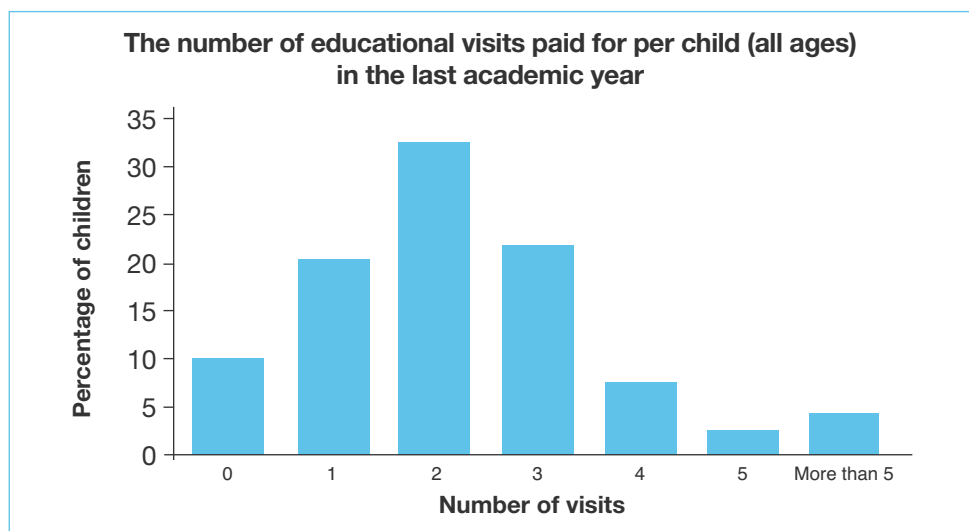


A sample of comments from the Survey:

*The headteacher informed us that the £600 p.a. contribution is to top up the cuts they have had in funding.*

*My son's school has non-uniform days every third Friday. This has a specified theme so new clothes are to be purchased. There is then the added cost of £1 to wear your own clothes! Between June and July the total requested from school came to £62. My son is only five.*

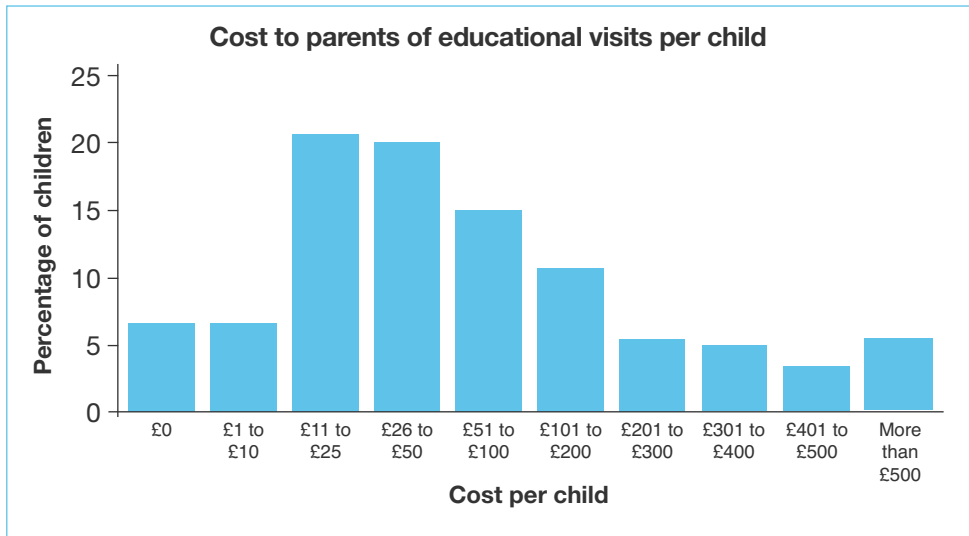
### The cost of educational trips and activities



Over a third of respondents that are parents of pupils over 11 years old reported that they were required to pay for field trips that are compulsory elements of examination courses, such as A-level geography and biology.

The vast majority (91%) of all respondents reported that they were required to pay for other educational visits such as trips to museums, theatres or nature reserves.

Almost half of parents paid more than £50 per child over the last year to enable participation in educational visits.



Nearly a quarter of children over 11 years old were unable to participate in educational trips and activities due to the cost.

A sample of comments from the Survey:

*My children have only been able to go on visits and residentials because my in-laws have paid for them.*

*A-level business studies trips to Russia: £900... Ridiculous. Not accessible for the majority of parents!!!*

*Ski trip...child wanted to go, cost £700. I couldn't find that kind of money.*

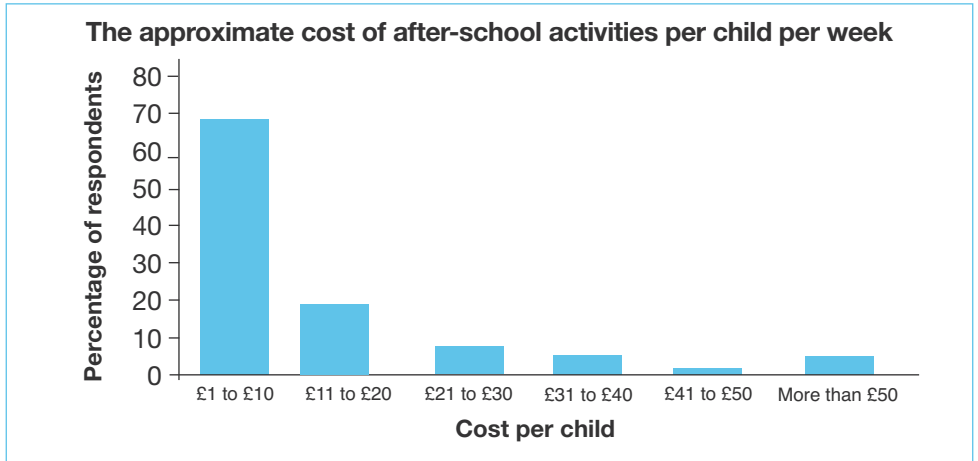
*'Activities Week' – c.£70+ for anything good, or free frisbee on the school field for three days.*

*The school seems to give little regard to whether trips are affordable. For example, year 12 AS geography field trip, which is a mandatory part of the course, was in Arran, a long trip from the south-east, and costing nearly as much as a budget holiday for a family. Another local school meets the needs of a field trip by local day excursions.*

## Extracurricular costs

The parents of 40% of children had to pay to access after-school activities, such as after-school club.

Nearly a third of these parents paid over £10 per week per child, with some paying in excess of £50 per week per child.



In addition to the cost of extracurricular activities, parents commented on their concerns about the additional costs of private music and sport tuition and equipment.

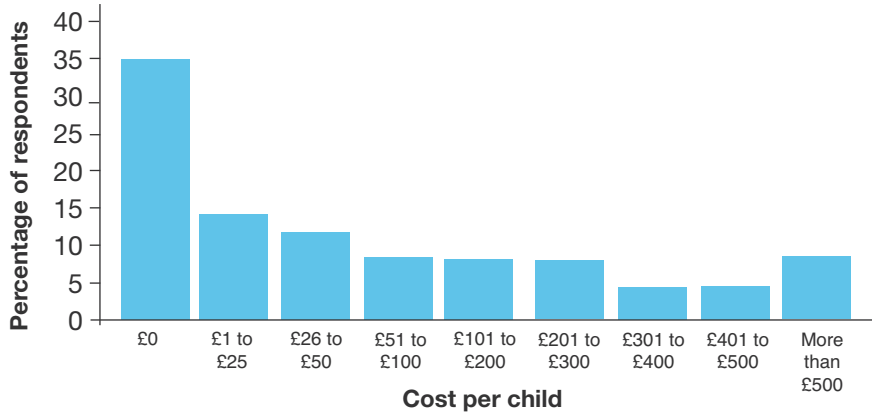
A sample comment from the Survey:

*School-based activities such as cooking, music, some sports, drama are now voluntary depending on whether you want to pay. Some of these activities take place in school time if you pay.*

## The cost of voluntary trips or excursions

Nearly two thirds of children had the opportunity to participate in voluntary trips or excursions. Nearly a half (48%) of those parents that paid for the trips reported paying in excess of £100 p.a. per child.

## The cost to parents of voluntary trips or excursions during the past year



Over a third of pupils over 11 years old were unable to participate due to the cost of the trips.

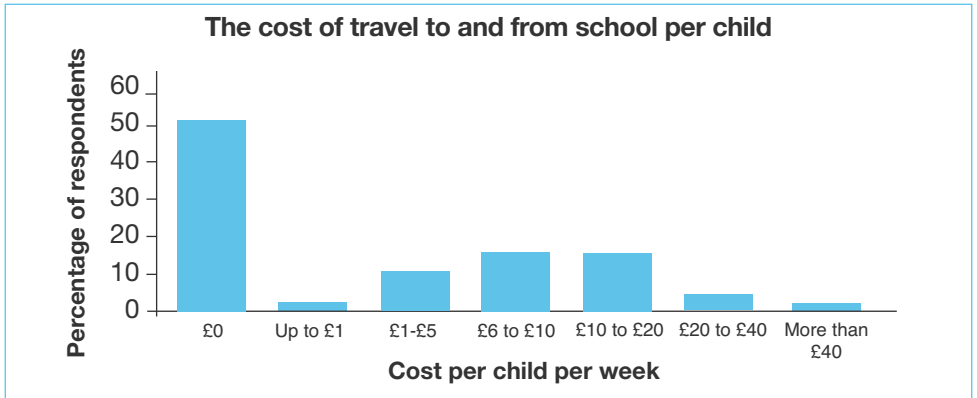
A sample of comments from the Survey:

*My children's school doesn't do activities week but the school I used to work at does and every child had to pay to do an activity (some were hundreds of pounds). The children have to come in as it is a school week but it is very divisive as the poor kids are left doing nothing all week but get in trouble if they stay at home. It is ridiculous.*

*My son's school visits were billed as 'voluntary contributions' but they could only be booked onto the trip through 'wisePAY' and no other method. There was no option to pay or not – if you did not pay, they did not go.*

## The cost of travel to and from school

Almost a half of respondents (47%) reported an increase in the cost of travel to and from school in the past year.



A third of children over 11 years old have travel costs over £10 per week, with some paying over £40 a week, equivalent to at least £1,520 p.a. per child.

A sample of comments from the Survey:

*I do not yet know how I can afford the bus fares next year. I will probably have to take out a loan.*

*The cost of a bus pass is ridiculous: £650 for the year for a trip to school and back.*

*Subsidised transport arrangements have been altered by the local council, increasing the cost to us by a very substantial amount.*

*Transport costs have also increased significantly as services are no longer free.*

*Northumberland LA is introducing transport charges for post-16 students. In a largely rural area this is discriminatory on the grounds of location, particularly as some people in rural locations are low paid. This makes post-16 education an economic decision as some families will have to find around £20 per day for bus fares.*

**Repeated concerns raised by respondents in the comments section included:**

**Cost of living**

*“School costs coupled with living costs are spiralling out of control. As parents we regularly miss out on things needed so our children do not miss out on educational opportunities; however, it is becoming increasingly difficult to meet the costs of what the children should be entitled to have.”*

*“I have a job and work. I am lucky. I would feel marginalised if I could not afford*

*even the most basic trips and uniform items. I do not agree with the academies stipulating that uniform items MUST be bought from their designated supplier. This is an excessive cost. Soon to be x2 children."*

*"The cost is steadily increasing. Living in an affluent area gives schools an inaccurate assumption that all parents can pay."*

### **Pressure from schools**

*"If we choose not to participate due to cost, we are made to feel we are damaging the child's education."*

*"There is a high level of pressure/expectation applied to parents to provide these funds by schools and peer pressure."*

*"Often, we have to give up other things for paying for school items but feel we have to, because schools pressure you into paying for things and nobody wants their kid to be the one who misses out, or the parent who gets fined."*

*"There was extreme pressure on parents; proms need banning."*

### **Higher education**

*"The exorbitant cost of university education in my opinion is going to be the real financial time-bomb for families and young people. It would seem that most people are not aware of the implications of taking on a £50,000 debt to pay for this. I have huge concerns for my two children."*

### **SEN**

*"Communication support costs for my two deaf children to access after-school clubs and activities."*

*"School will not have my son in if he has a migraine, as they have nowhere quiet for him to work. He has attended 25% this year and the same the year before."*

**A representative sample of other comments can be found in Annex 1.**



## **TRENDS COMPARED TO THE 2012 AND 2013 COST OF EDUCATION SURVEYS**

The findings of the 2012 and 2013 surveys confirmed the profound concerns that the NASUWT holds about the increasing cost of education for families and the consequential increase in disparity of opportunity.

The 2014 survey reveals that the concerns not only remain, but in many cases the situation has deteriorated even further.

For many children, access to many critical educational opportunities and key entitlements are based on the parents' ability to pay. There is an increasing disparity between schools, not only of what provision is offered but also how much it costs to access it, and this is increasing inequality.

The imbalance of provision in schools is reinforced by the increasing expectation that children will have access to IT equipment other than that which the school provides.

Since the removal of the advice to schools prohibiting forcing parents to purchase school uniforms from a limited number of stockists, there has been a further increase in 2014 in the practice. The Office of Fair Trading has previously been forced to issue a warning to all schools on this but there is no evidence in this survey that it has had any impact on school behaviour.

Families are having to make sacrifices in order to meet the financial expectations of schools and are increasingly expected to make up the shortfall in school budgets to meet even basic requirements.

The additional costs of education have been exacerbated by the loss of the EMA which is impacting on young people and their families and has created a high level of anxiety about the cost of education to families and the ongoing costs to young people, especially those who go on to university and start their adult life with the increased long-term debt burden from student loans.

## KEY CHANGES IN THE COST OF EDUCATION

The 2014 survey reveals that the concerns about the cost of education to families remain and the situation for many families has worsened.

Below we have listed the areas of the greatest increase in costs.

### School uniform and equipment

Cost of the school uniform has increased from 2013. Fewer parents paid under £51, a reduction from 31% to 24.5%, whereas there has been an increase in the number of parents that paid over £201 from 10% to 14%.

#### Proportion of parents paying over £201 per year per child for school uniform



The NASUWT survey has shown a continued increase in the requirement for uniforms, PE kit and equipment to be purchased from the school directly or from a particular supplier, up to 66% in 2014 from 57% in 2013 for uniforms, and up to 48% from 44% for PE kit and equipment.

#### Proportion of pupils required to purchase uniforms from schools directly or from a nominated supplier



There has been an increase in the cost of providing PE kit. Fewer parents paid under £51 in 2014, a reduction from 71% to 66% in 2013, whereas there has been an increase in the number of parents that paid over £101 from 4.7% to 6% across the same period.

There has been a steady increase in the costs of providing equipment for lessons. The number of pupils that did not need to pay for school equipment has decreased from 25% in 2012 and 19% in 2013 to 17% in 2014. The number of children whose equipment costs parents under £50 has reduced from 84% in 2012 to 69% in 2014, whereas the number of children whose equipment costs parents in excess of £76 has risen from 6% in 2012 and 21% in 2013, to 23% in 2014.

### School meals

The average cost to families of school meals has increased. In 2014, 51% paid

between £2 and £4 whereas, in 2013, 44% paid between £2 and £4 with the average cost being between £1 and £3 (71%).

### Proportion of parents paying between £2 and £4 per child per day for school meals



There has also been an increase in the cost of snacks. In 2014, 20% paid over £1 per day unlike in 2013 when 6% paid over £1 per day. There has been a marked increase of over 5% in the proportion of children paying £1-£2 per day for snacks.

### Financial donations

There has been an increase in the amount of money families have donated to schools.

In 2014, 62% of parents that made financial donations to their child's school paid over £21 p.a.; this is up 10% from 2013 and a 6% increase in the number donating in excess of £51.

### Electronic Payment Systems (EPS)

The majority of schools now use EPS, up from 47% to 51% between 2013 and 2014.

The vast majority do not give parents a choice to not use the EPS. In 2013, 35% were voluntary systems; in 2014, only 29% are voluntary.

### Proportion of Electronic Payment Systems in schools reported to be voluntary for parents to use



### Other extracurricular activities

Among key extracurricular activities, prom tickets have increased in price: in 2013, 33% of tickets were under £10; in 2014, this was reduced to 30% and the average cost of a ticket was £21-£30, with reports of some costing over £100.

### Educational visits and trips

The additional costs associated with out-of-school activities have also increased, averaging an extra £100-£300 for 39% of pupils in 2014, an increase of 5% from the comparable figure in 2013.

## **Voluntary trips or excursions**

There has been an increase over the past year in the number of children given the opportunity for an end-of-term/year excursion, up from 60% to 63%, but nearly a quarter of children (24%) were unable to participate due to the cost, an increase from last year.

The cost of these trips has also increased with 28% of children costing their family over £200 p.a.; this was 21% of children last year.

There has been a further increase in the percentage of children unable to participate in these activities due to cost.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of the survey confirm the concerns raised by teachers and parents about the extent to which the financial circumstances of families could impact upon the access children have to the educational opportunities and resources they need in order to learn, and the extent to which the costs associated with attendance at some schools will act as an indirect form of socio-economic selection, in part by the impact financial limitations will have on reducing parental choice when selecting a school.

The survey results also highlight potential use, by some schools, of financial contributions as a condition of admission, despite this breaking the terms of the legal admissions code, alongside the downscaling of arrangements to monitor adherence by school admissions authorities to the admissions code. In the current competitive context, these aspects inevitably put pressure on schools that will lead to an increasing number of schools that will feel the need to charge in order to keep pace with other schools.

It should be borne in mind that where schools ask for voluntary contributions, parents' and carers' perception of these contributions may well be that they are expected to pay and this puts them under pressure, believing the expectation that they will pay implies that they are not voluntary in practice.

The results of the survey also raise important questions about what the level of entitlement should be for children in the school curriculum and in the wider aspects of educational enrichment experiences and how schools and colleges should be funded.

The survey results demonstrate the extent to which current policies and the resultant trends reported in this survey will exacerbate rather than alleviate socio-economic segregation in future. This information must also be considered in the context of the Conservative party's stated intention that, in future, schools will be allowed to make a profit.

The information gathered by the survey should be a key concern for all those who believe in public services that should be free at the point of use, in order for all children and young people to be able to access their educational entitlements.

Public education should close the gap in educational achievement for disadvantaged children and young people. Access to education should not be based on parents' ability to pay.

*“Education seems to be less and less a free service and more and more a costly experience.”*

*“It’s a nightmare.”*

*“Having four children all different ages is very difficult to manage financially, even with both myself and my husband working full time.”*

*“I had not realised the associated costs of education until I took the survey; it was very enlightening.”*

*“My daughter had to take part in a ‘Vikings Day’ at her junior school (not a trip out) and had to pay £5 for the privilege, as well as purchase a Vikings costume at £20.”*

*“It is incredibly difficult to establish priorities and there are things that it is impossible NOT to pay for, even though they are expensive, because of your child losing face/missing out. We have done without a family holiday this year because there was so much we had to pay for via school.”*

*“I think the reality is that, rather than the children not participating due to cost, for many families we do not want our child to be the only one that can’t go, so the rest of the family makes disproportionate sacrifices.”*

*“We struggle because we don’t want our children to stand out. We do without.”*

*“When I compared the yearly outlay with friends whose children were at state schools, they actually paid more for uniform, equipment, lunches, etc.”*

*“Costs are rising in the post-16 arena exponentially and bursaries don’t help as they are aimed at the very lowest paid – we in the middle are struggling too, with mortgages, rates etc. that aren’t paid for by benefits or tax credits. No-one seems to care that our children are also likely to experience lack of participation due to costs.”*

### **Electronic Payment Systems**

*“I refused to allow my eldest daughter to be fingerprinted, so she is excluded from the system. If she wants to buy lunch, she uses another student’s card. The school seems happy with this arrangement.”*

*“I have not been very happy with the cashless system which has led to abuse and bullying in the school, where some children have been forced to buy food for other children. I requested that a daily cap amount be put into my children’s accounts as it was running into large sums which I couldn’t control. The feedback and help from school on this issue was negative and hard to procure. I was told that it is a completely failsafe system which could not possibly be open to abuse from children in school. As a teacher in two neighbouring schools, I know that this simply isn’t true!”*

*"I only have experience of the AllPay cashless system at the school where I work. Honestly, it's been a bit of a nightmare, with money 'going missing' due to a fault in the system. The problems were rectified eventually, but only after considerable input on my part, and the company was not very gracious, to say the least. It has put me off registering for my son's school meals."*

*"I have not signed up to ParentPay as the privacy and security conditions are not satisfactory. This makes paying for lunches and trips etc. very difficult as the school no longer accepts cash and is reticent to accept cheques. There was no option but to sign up for the system – and my son had to provide a fingerprint scan. I have no option but to trust that this data is stored securely and that it will be removed now that he has finished Y11 and left."*

*"It is a source of irritation to me that every transaction is charged approximately £1.50 per transaction. Obviously, school passes this cost on to parents. If we want to pay electronically, this is the only method they accept, so we can't use a free system such as PayPal."*

*"Many Y11 pupils leaving the school will have balances that they don't claim. Seems a nice little earner for schools."*

*"I am worried about the direction that the current government is taking the education system in. If any of my children want to focus on arts-based subjects then they are not able to."*

*"The Government needs to plough more money into education if we are to achieve the same standards of performance as other major European countries. The skills gap is becoming wider and wider. If money is not ploughed into the right areas of education, we risk having an education system of an underdeveloped country!"*

*"Academy status has resulted in increased use of unqualified staff and the appointment of the cheapest rather than the best teachers. This is the real price my children are paying."*

# **NASUWT**

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