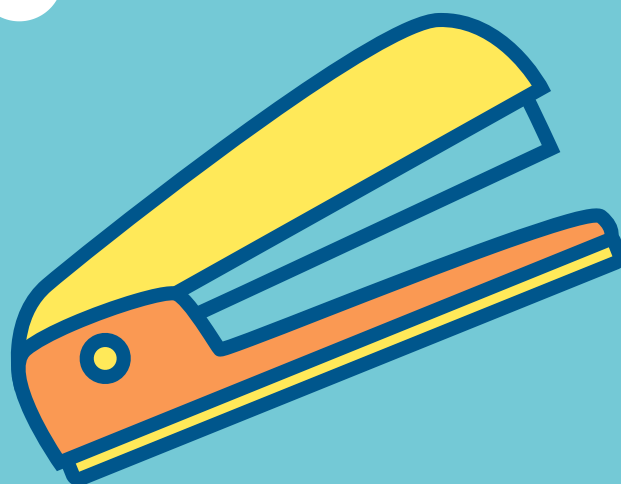
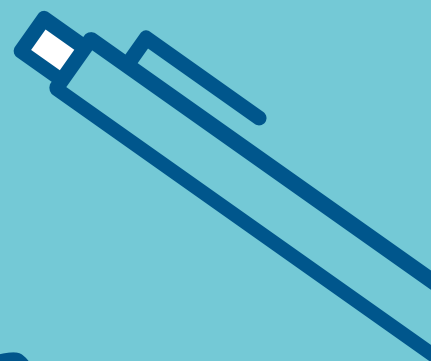
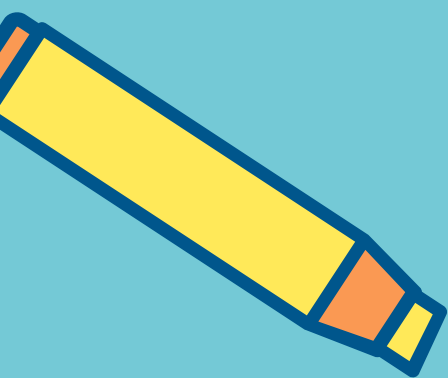


COST OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS IN NORTHERN IRELAND



CONTEXT

"I'm selling things I own and using credit cards I just can't afford it. Trying not to let the kids know whilst I worry so it doesn't make them feel bad. We barely get by as it is and I work full time and it's so embarrassing and I feel shameful to say I just can't do it. Living on a budget means there's usually no room outside basic needs and we have no emergency money saved. So when August comes around even if I have managed to save a little I feel like I'm drowning and failing as a parent." (Survey Respondent)

This report portrays the experiences of 240 parents and guardians involved in providing school uniforms and sportswear for their children in Northern Ireland. This 'rapid response' survey was completed over a two week period in early August (5th - 19th) when parents are traditionally buying these items and are most familiar with the requirements of the schools their children or guardians attend. Responses provided cover primary, secondary, Grammar, integrated, special schools and Irish medium schools.

School uniforms are intended to have an equalising effect on pupils in schools. Despite this, the results of the survey show that arbitrary requirements for high-cost branded sportswear, and the use of exclusive suppliers are putting unnecessary financial pressure on families across Northern Ireland.

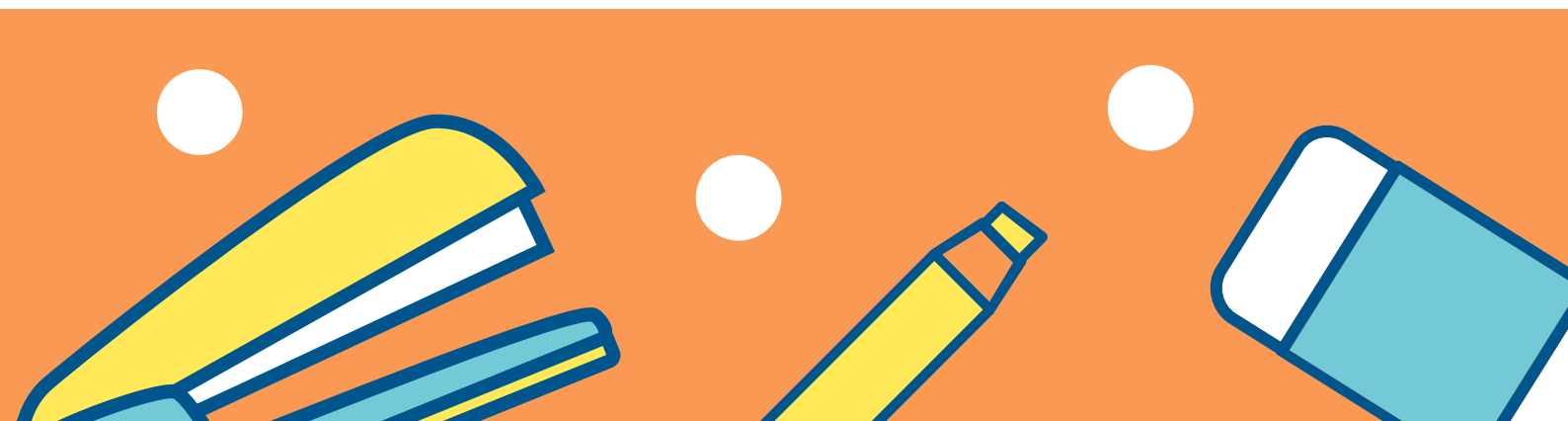
Research indicates families living in poverty will usually plan, budget and implement cautious and careful financial strategies in their efforts to meet uniform requirements. However the extra expenses brought by COVID-19 and lockdowns have made many of these strategies impossible



WHAT SCHOOL DOES YOUR CHILD ATTEND?

The survey received information on the school uniform policies of the following schools

Forge integrated primary school Botanic primary St Joseph's Grammar Donaghmore Coagh Primary School
Grosvenor Newcastle primary school Dominican College Magherafelt Primary
RBAI Our Lady and St Pats, Knock St Teresa PS Derrychrin primary school
Lumen christi college Castlederg High School Gaelscoil Aodha Rua HTC Cookstown
Kircubbin integrated primary The Royal School Armagh St. Conor's College St Ronans College Lurgan
Down High School Fivemiletown College St Marys CBGS Cookstown High School
Lagan College ilkeel primary Islandmagee Primary School Oakwood Integrated Primary School
Hunterhouse College St Anthonys Gaelcholaiste Dhoire St Joesph's Donaghmore
Aquinas Grammar School St. Killians Lurgan Junior High Edendork PS
Lagan College Killkeel High School Tenplecarrraig Drumragh
Lough View IPS Tempo Controlled PS Mossgrove Magherafelt High School
Scoil an droichid & Trinity College City of Armagh high school Carrickfergus Grammar St Joseph's PS Galbally
Ballyclare High School Gaelcholaiste Dhoire Bangor Grammar Kilronan Special School
Oakwood Integrated Primary School Grosvenor Grammar School St. Patrick's College Maghera St. Patricks Mullinohoe
Ballyclare Secondary School Lismore St Patrick's Primary School St Marys Stewartstown
Dominican College Fortwilliam Methodist College St. Joseph's College, Coalisland Sperrin Integrated College
Crumlin integrated college Belfast Royal Academy Ballycarry Integrated College Dungannon
St Joseph's PS Belfast St. Joseph's Donaghmore St. Patricks College, Dungannon Cookstown high school
Grosvenor Grammer School Dominican College St Therese of lisuex Phoenix Integrated Cookstown
St ronan's college Lurgan Bunscoil an Traonaigh Lisnaska St Marys Grammar Magherafelt Holy Family primary school
(Magherafelt)
Lurgan Junior high Knocknagor PS Trillick Co Tyrone Silverstream Primary School St. Pius X College (Magherafelt)
Blackwater integrated college Cranmore IPS St Colmcilles PS Claudy Coagh Primary School
Ashfield Girls Belfast At Ronans college Holy Trinity College Derrychrin primary school
Annsborough Intergrated Primary School St Mary's on the Hill St. Peter's Primary Moortown Holy Trinity Primary Cookstown
St. Test National School Our Lady and St. Patricks Gaelscoil Eoghain St.Colms High School
Good Shepherd Primary School St Marks, Warrenpoint Holy trinity PS Devenish college
Holy Family Good shepherd Primary School Sperrin & at Patrick's Mullinahoe Lissan Primary School
Broughshane primary school Kilbroney Integrated, Rostrevor Cookstown high school Bunscoil Naomh Bríd
Thornhill College Harding Memorial Primary School St. Mary's Grammar school Moy regional
St Mary's CBGS, Glen Road Priory integrated college Cookstown high school Cookstown primary
Primate Dixon St Colman's PS Holy Trinity Coagh primary school
St Colman's, Lambeg Dungannon Academy St.Pius Larne High
St Josephs Slate street Friends High School Sperrinview Special School St Marys Pomeroy
All Saint College Enniskillen Royal Grammar Holy Trinity College, Cookstown Dromore High
Hunterhouse College Magherafelt High School St Peters Moortown Sperrin integrated College
Ulidia Integrated College Nettlefield Primary School St Marys Grammar School, Magherafelt Bush Primary
Mercy primary St Josephs Killough Holy Trinity Primary, Cookstown Saints and scholars primary
Sacred Heart Primary School Nettlefield primary school St Brigids Brocagh Ballytra
At John's college. St. Mary's Downpatrick Phoenix integrated primary Cookstown Cookstown high school
St Oliver Plunkett PS De la Salle Downpatrick Holy Trinity Primary School Sperrinview Special School
Nettlefield primary St Johns Swatragh Cookstown High School Ashfield High School
St Benedicts College randalstown Killowen primary Dungannon Primary School Belfast High
Edenbrooke PS Royal School Dungannon Royal School Dungannon Gilnahirk PS
Belfast Royal Academy The High School Ballynahinch Cookstown Primary School Groggan Primary School
Downshire Primary St Patrick's College, Maghera Clare Primary school Harberton Special School
Girls Model Gaelcholaiste Dhoire Kilrea Primary School Cookstown High School
Wallace High St. Malachys College Cookstown High School Rainey Endowed
Omagh High School St Patrick's Academy Derrychrin primary school. St Louises college
Omagh County Primary School Good Shepherd Primary School St Mary's Primary School Glenveiw Strathearn School
St Marys Grammar, Magherafelt Glenlola Collegiate ICD Dungannon Drumglass
Knockbreda Primary Dominican College St. James Primary Methodist College

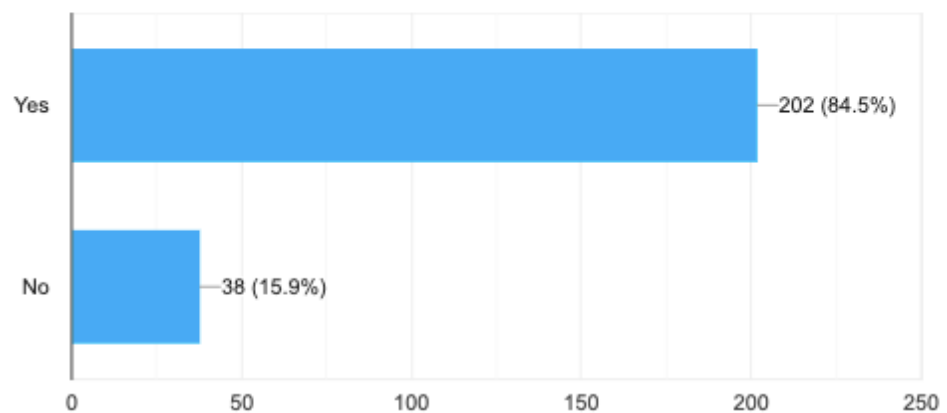


DOES YOUR SCHOOL REQUIRE BRANDED SPORTSWEAR AS PART OF IT'S PE KIT OR USE A PARTICULAR SUPPLIER FOR IT'S UNIFORM?

YES – 84.5%
NO – 15.9%

Does your school require branded sportswear as part of its PE kit or use a particular supplier for it's uniform?

239 responses



WHAT IS REQUIRED AND AT WHAT COST?

GRAMMAR SCHOOLS

T shirt with school logo. It's not that expensive - they are between £5-10 and you just need to buy one that is then left in school all term. **(Forge Integrated PS)**

Tshirt, half zip and leggings. Approx £80 for the 3 items **(Lumens Christie)**

Full PE kit required including hoody and tracksuit bottoms that she has yet to wear in the 5 years she has been there. Initial cost for starting Y8 was nearly £200, have spent about £100 since that replacing outgrown items **(Lagan College)**

Ballyclare High school - Canterbury.
Ballyclare Secondary School - Kukri. Approx £200 per each full, compulsory, kit. Tracksuit bottoms, rugby shorts, games shorts, hoodie, rugby top, games top, socks. **(Ballyclare High School)** Tracksuit bottoms, shorts, skort, PE top, hoodie, socks. **(Ballyclare Secondary School)**

£92 for branded sweatshirt, PE top and skhort in addition to plain white trainers which can cost around £50 **(Dominican College, Fortwilliam)**

WHAT IS REQUIRED AND AT WHAT COST?

GRAMMAR SCHOOLS

"A branded PE top, white shorts & socks AND a branded games top, blue short & branded socks. Total cost around £160" **(Grosvenor Grammar School)**

"Only 2 suppliers of uniform in the town and all pe kit has to be bought online from the manufacturer." **(Thornhill College)**

PE Shirt £27. PE Skin £38.69. PE Hoodie £40. Tracksuit Bottoms £33. PE Leggings £29. Sports socks £8. PE Skort £24
(Hunterhouse College)

"It's ordered from a specialist company with both schools and u need shorts joggers T-shirt rugby too long sleeve zip up socks etc that's just one child it's so expensive it's ridiculous." **(Carrick Grammar, Larne High)**

"compulsory:

- pe top £20-£27
- skort/shorts £26
- optional:
- hoodie/zip top/windbreaker £35-£48
- leggings/tracksuit bottoms £30
- rugby top- £40-£58"

(Belfast Royal Academy)



WHAT IS REQUIRED AND AT WHAT COST? GRAMMAR SCHOOLS

"It's very expensive as everything is branded and you can only buy it in their school shop! I've found out that there is a price difference of almost £30 a blazer compared to a school wear shop!! There are 2 different types of sports kits alone. Then it's all change for the sixth form with different blazers and now half honours ties. If you are awarded a sixth form blazer for upper sixth it's hundreds of pounds to change the entire uniform!" **(Royal School Armagh)**

"Shorts, tracksuit bottoms, sweatshirt, socks, t shirt, kit bag all approx £180"
(Dungannon Academy)

"Required Blazer is £80, the sports rugby kit has to be their required and costs £140 for 2 t-shirts, 2 shorts and 2 socks."
(Royal School Dungannon)

"Only a few shops sell the uniform itself, blazer has to be woollen. Has to have a PE kit and a rugby kit for Games. All of these including socks have to be bought from specific supplier. All in all came to well over £200 for last year when he was a year 8. He has grown (because teenagers do) massively this year and I have to buy all of this again." **(Methodist College)**

Sports hoodie £45, sports bottoms £45, skirt and t shirt together £55, socks. All Kukri brand. Similar for both schools.
(Bangor Grammar/Glenlola Collegiate)

WHAT IS REQUIRED AND AT WHAT COST?

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

"O'Neills with School and child's initials on the back. branding cost is approx £40-44 per kit" **(St. Brigids, Brocagh)**

"For secondary. Just a top which is essential so around £20" **(St. Marys Downpatrick)**

"PE kit can only be bought from Rhoda Stewart's, it cost £107 for tshirt, track suit bottoms, socks and hoodie. Girls shirts which can't be sourced any where else cost £35 for 2. Boys shirts are plain white and can be bought anywhere." **(The High School Ballynahinch)**

"Half zip, jersey, shorts. Skinny bottoms trainers football boots £150" **(Gaelcholaiste Dhoire)**

"School logo required for both PE kits costing £30 each or more, school logo jumper, school blouse which is £20 for 2, a school skirt which is £27 for secondary , a blazer £80, plus hockey socks shin pads and for secondary they are only allowed a particular pair of shoes which can cost up to £40, secondary school is only allowed school logo hoodie and school scarf which is another £50" **(Omagh High School)**



WHAT IS REQUIRED AND AT WHAT COST?

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

1 set of school uniform, blazer, jumpers shirt, trousers shirt & tie cost £155 the pe gear on top of that is sold by oneills and that will be a further £70 - **(Holy Trinity College)**

"Shorts . Jogging bottoms . T shirt top. Pull over top . Socks £169" **(Crumlin Integrated College)**

"They use o'neills sports gear. Track bottoms, t-shirt, and half zip jumper and for the full P.E uniform it's costing £85.00 which I cannot afford. All I get for secondary school child is £73.00 and that's meant to get a full uniform including blazer (which is £45.00 on its own) plus the P.E uniform what we get is nowhere near enough." **(Mercy College)**

"Shorts t-shirt socks which comes to nearly 75 quid" **(Cookstown High School)**

"School uniform £150, PE KIT £90" **(Castleberg High School)**

"PE skirt/polo shirt/ hoodie @ £100 roughly" **(Ashfield Girls Belfast)**

O'Neills GAA brand for schools, both for jersey, shorts, socks and PE kit bag approx. £70 for each child, and this is just for one pe kit **(St. Joseph's College, Coalisland)**

WHAT IS REQUIRED AND AT WHAT COST?

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

"Gaelscoil Eoghain takes their own uniform orders but allows for unbranded tshirts. They also do a uniform swap. The cost of their uniform is about £25 for a jumper and polo. Sports clothes were to be bought from O'Neills but they have found a new supplier this year, the cost of the sports uniform is £75. **(Gaelscoil Eoghain)**

PE kit is optional but approximately £45 for hoodie and joggers if bought together. Only one official uniform supplier. Polo shirt £14.99, sweatshirt £19.99 **(Islandmagee Primary School)**

They have introduced a new branded "optional" PE uniform for this year at a cost of between £25-50 per child depending on what you purchase. **(St Colmcille's PS, Claudy)**

Only one supplier for uniform. School jumper and school polo shirts both require school logo on them. **(Groggan Primary School)**

"Changed to Canterbury PE. Prices ridiculous £35 for the shirt alone." **(Phoenix/Sperrin Integrated Schools)**

"PE kit @ £25 Jumpers £16.50 tie £3.99" **(St. Joseph's PS Belfast)**

Kukari PE Kit from podium. Tracksuit bottoms are about £30, shorts £20, t-shirt £15 and jacket £30. This is on top of embroidered jumpers and t-shirts from signature works. **(Strandtown Primary)**

School crest is on t shirt, track bottoms and zipper top. You can buy bottoms and zipper top without school crest if needs be. **(St Oliver Plunkett PS)**

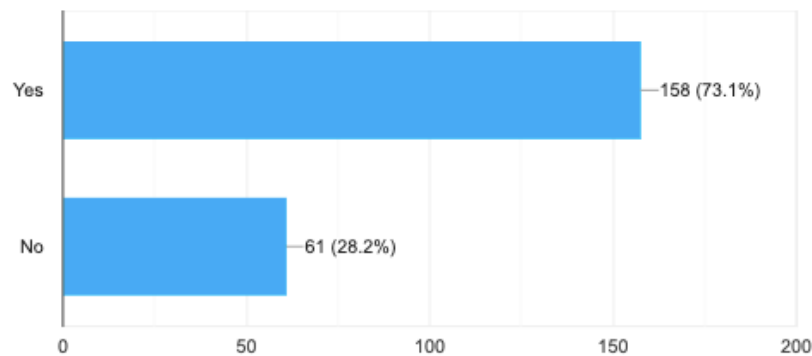


DO SCHOOL UNIFORM COSTS CAUSE YOUR FAMILY FINANCIAL HARDSHIP?

YES – 73.1%
NO – 28.2%

Do school uniform costs cause your family financial hardship?

216 responses



ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO TELL US ABOUT SCHOOL UNIFORMS?

"I don't have children but I grew up in a poor household and back to school hands down was the worse because we couldn't afford ANYTHING. Honestly I can't really describe the feeling when I saw my mom crying that she couldn't afford anything. What makes it worse is that it doesn't have to be this way. Children are the ones that always suffer the consequences of adults. People in positions of power do not care because they have never suffered. "

"Cost of uniforms should be affordable and what is affordable should be decided following consultation with parents and the community sector."

"Forge are exceptionally relaxed about uniform and i think more primary schools should take their approach. Especially since the school closures with covid - when the kids came back they let them wear pretty much anything they wanted, not just for PE but in all classes. They are very understanding of what parents might not be able to afford. I think this attitude comes from the fact they value individuality, creativity and the character of the kids rather than conformity or outward appearance." **(Forge Primary School)**

"Tracksuit bottoms never worn, personalised hoodie never worn, mouth guard and shin pads never used, hockey stick only used a few times. All compulsory items for starting the school (items all checked by PE staff)"

"I lost my partner last year and have 3 more children, I will receive a uniform grant for all children but the price of the PE. Kit on top of the school uniform is wild."

"Generally, the school are excellent about uniform. They were particularly flexible following periods of lockdown." **(Oakwood Integrated)**

"I don't understand why a polo shirt needs the school logo when the jumper shows the logo. Why a grey school skirt has to be from a certain supplier. Socks with school colours meaning more expense. I do understand school blazer with badge in high school and jumper with school logo for primary school but grey trousers and skirts should be from any shop that sells them."

"A sweatshirt is not compulsory but a school branded sports sweatshirt is only permitted when it comes to the colder months and the children need them- plain, non branded are not acceptable. The children can also purchase school branded black leggings in school but again they would not be permitted to wear plain black leggings." **(Dominican College, Fortwilliam)**

"I am happy with costs but know my son's grammar school uniform costs significantly less than a lot of others. Also, the pe uniform is the minimum, most probably driven by the socially deprived area where it is located "**(St. Marys CGBS)**

Prices should be limited and uniform should be easily available in supermarkets. Sew-on or stick-on school logos/shields could be used to identify schools. Uniform should be affordable.

I am a single parent and only work part time, I really feel stressed at this time of year.

There should be an emblem on blazer or jumper but nothing else it's not fair the price of uniforms.

I have 5 children, currently at 3 different schools. I pass down what I can, including shoes and try to make blazers last 2 years but I can't control or predict my children's rate of growth. I buy secondhand, if I can find them, but am afraid I will know the family and my children will be embarrassed by anyone knowing their clothes were secondhand.

I try not to buy uniforms every year. I can sometimes get second hand unbranded while t shirts and I also buy clothing that is slightly too big so that it will do my child longer. I look out for shoes second hand and sometimes my siblings have hand me downs that I can make use of. As a family we earn too much to benefit from the school uniform grant but we still find ourselves struggle when large expenditures come around.

The new regulations in England have helped so many avoid uniform poverty, it should absolutely be adopted in NI too

I spoke to the principal and he has said that the school governors are pushing the new compulsory uniform items. I would usually buy multi packs and get all of the cardigans I need for the same price as just one of the school ones. As a working class single parent I can't afford this and worry more items will be made compulsory in the future

It is ridiculous that a complete school uniform costs more than the weekly wages of anyone on minimum wage. Schools should not be able to state a brand or a supplier they should just specify colour etc if they want uniformity

I teach in a secondary school and I know that the uniform costs a lot of money. The PE kit is Kukri brand and expensive. Parents have complained...understandably.

I don't see why a black pair of shorts and t-shirt can't do the same job

It's either buy uniform or have a summer holiday/ day trips, unfortunately I can't afford both so it's uniforms that are priority

It's hard to buy the PE kit, we cannot return it they also charge £7 for delivery so if it doesn't fit we are left with it.

Food shopping and essentials have to be cut for a couple of weeks to be able to afford uniform.

I feel like although it may not cause us hardship it's a lot of money to be paying for one child's uniform before shoes, stationery and school bags are even purchased! for a primary school aged child to kit them out for school is between £150-£200

I think there should be a cap on uniforms especially secondary school ones

We have one supplier who can charge what she wants for the uniform. Need a different tender or something so they can stop massively profiting from the uniforms

Things have to change now!!!!

OF COURSE, IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY...

There are examples across the UK of how school uniforms policies can be improved.

In 2019, the Welsh Government became the first in the UK to introduce statutory guidance on the cost of school uniforms, requiring governing bodies to give high priority to cost and affordability, and to consider avoiding high cost items like blazers, and the necessity of logos, particularly across multiple items of clothing. Where single supplier arrangements are in place for uniform items, governing bodies should review these arrangements regularly and be able to demonstrate that they have obtained the best value for money. Parents should be consulted on the formation of the policy. The Welsh Government provides up to £125 as a school uniform grant, with some year seven students entitled to apply for a grant of up to £200 to help with the cost of starting secondary school. England have just introduced similar statutory guidance..

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education provide non statutory guidance for schools on developing a school uniform (2018.) The guidance encourages schools to consider the costs of uniforms carefully including:

- The use of branded items,
- The cost of uniform upkeep (e.g. Dry Cleaning); and
- The ability to purchase 'off the peg' items from a number of suppliers.

The guidance also encourages schools to consult widely with students, parents and communities when developing the policy. School uniform grants are also available however, as uniforms are not a legislative requirement, but are a matter for individual schools to determine whether they are needed, the scheme is not intended to cover the full cost of a uniform.

