

Back to School Survey 2022

Summary

Introduction

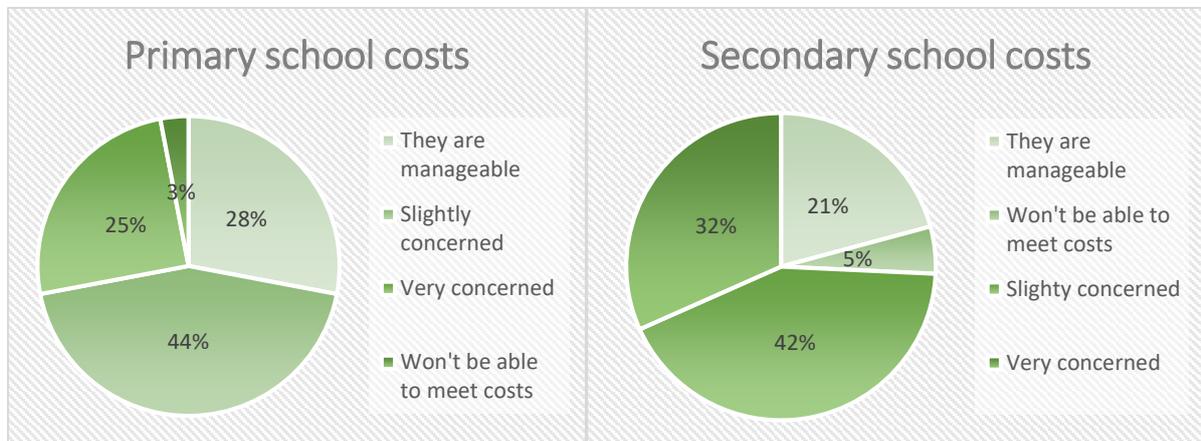
For over a decade, Barnardos has highlighted the costs incurred by parents in preparing their children to return to school each September through an online survey. This year a total of 1,132 responses were received. Responses to the survey came from a cross section of Irish society, with a representative geographic spread and respondents covering all classes and years within the primary and secondary school cycles. Each year, parents describe the substantial costs imposed on them and the impact that this financial burden has on their family and household budget.

“Education should be free as it is in other countries. It should start with free school books and extend to all costs. No child's education should depend on their parents' ability to pay.” (Primary school parent)

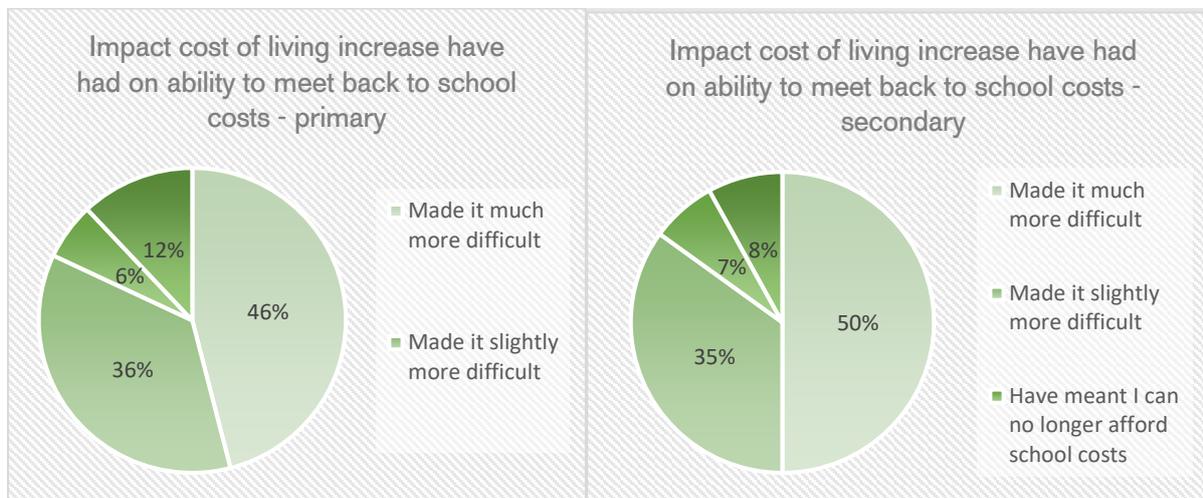
Back to School Costs

It was clear from the survey that parents are concerned about meeting costs this year. Over two thirds of primary (69%) and three-quarters of secondary school parents (74%) are worried about meeting costs this year.

“I really don't know how we are going to get three children ready for school and it breaks my heart as we are a normal hardworking middle class family but yet we are finding ourselves on the poverty line.” (Primary school parent)



Almost half of parents said the increase in cost of living prices has made it much more difficult to meet costs with a further one third of parents (36%) saying it had made it slightly more difficult.



"I am a single parent with three children. Unfortunately the cost of living has increased so much that I am barely scraping by and I have to sacrifice a lot to ensure we have our basic needs met. It doesn't feel like we are thriving it feels like we are surviving." (Secondary school parent)

Cost	4 th class	1 st year	5 th year
Uniforms	€ 122	€ 199	€ 199
Books	€ 124	€ 237	€ 221
Digital	€ 50	€ 182	€ 104
Classroom resources*	€ 46	€ 75	€ 66
Voluntary contributions*	€ 82	€ 121	€ 132
Total	€ 424	€ 814	€ 722

*Average paid by parents who were asked to pay a voluntary contribution and/or for classroom resources.

Costs for parents	2021	2022
Uniforms		
Primary	€116	€117
Secondary	€184	€194
Voluntary contribution		
Primary	€79	€81
Secondary	€127	€124
Schoolbooks		
Primary	€101	€110
Secondary	€201	€207
Classroom resources		
Primary	€40	€45
Secondary	€61	€64

Paying for Costs

Parents were asked how they planned to meet back to school costs this year. One in five will have to go into their savings (19%); 13% of primary and 19% of secondary parents will either get a professional loan or need to use a credit card; and a further 9% of primary and 18% of secondary parents will have to borrow from friends and family.

How will you pay for back to school costs	Primary school	Secondary school
Out of normal budget	52%	52%
Juggling their budget	44%	46%
Savings	18%	20%
Borrowing from friends and families	9%	18%
Credit cards	6%	10%
Professional loan	7%	9%

"The government need to realise that people need better supports to cover the cost of back to school. I work and I find it degrading that I have to borrow from people to get my child what he needs for school." (Primary school parent)

Barnardos does not believe parents should be placed under additional financial pressures to meet back to school costs. It is unacceptable that parents report they have to go without or cut back on other essentials in order to meet school costs this year.

"Can't afford back to school costs without having to miss meals to cover it. God forbid how we'll heat the house come winter." (Secondary school parent)

Uniforms

On average primary school parents spent €117 on uniforms and secondary school parents €194. Seventy-five percent of primary and 80% of secondary school parents, felt costs had gone up from last year. 74% of primary school and 93% of secondary school parents said their children had to wear crested/branded uniforms. We believe it is important that all schools provide an affordable uniform option.

"It's about time the government made generic, comfortable uniforms mandatory to give parents some breathing room and choice in what their child wears to school."
(Secondary school parent)

Many parents responding to the survey suggested their children's school was out of touch with financial struggles when it came to uniforms.

"My child is one year away from secondary school and their PE uniform is 150. This is just the average community school. This uniform was only brought in in the last few years when the new principal decided she wanted a branded PE uniform. Before that the uniform cost 15 for the T-shirt and any navy tracksuit bottoms."
(Primary school parent)

Twenty-four percent of parents said that they receive the back to school clothing and footwear allowance, with 72% saying it was insufficient to cover costs (72%).¹ A significant amount of parents suggested the need to reduce the threshold for receiving the allowance, stating that they were struggling to meet school costs but entitled to no state support.

"School clothing and footwear allowance doesn't even cover half the costs for me to have everything my two children need to go back to school." (Secondary school parent)

School Books and Digital Tools

The average cost of schoolbooks for primary school children is €110 and for secondary school is €207. Many parents feel the costs of books are high and believe they should be able to get more assistance in paying for them. Sixty-nine percent of parents of primary school pupils and 50% of secondary school students had book rental scheme in their school.

"There should be more costs helped with as books and bags and all other essentials are very expensive and not available to people who don't have spare money on a weekly basis". (Primary school parent)

Overall, primary school parents spent €46 on average on digital costs while secondary school parents spent €121. Twenty-three percent of secondary school parents stated they had to pay over €300 for digital costs for their child. Additionally, 71% of primary and 66% of secondary school parents were asked to contribute towards classroom resources, of those who were the average cost was €45 and €64 respectively.

¹ However, it should be stated that the majority of respondents filled in the survey before the government announced their 100 increase to the BSCFA.

Voluntary Contributions

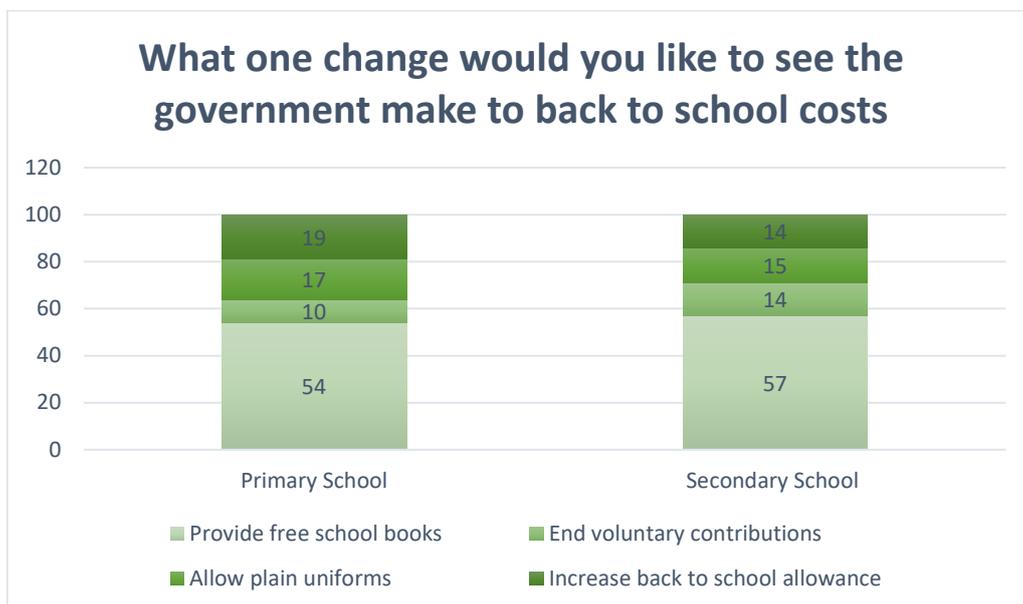
Sixty-five percent of primary and 73% of secondary school parents said that their schools requested a voluntary contribution. The average amount asked for of parents by schools was €81 for primary school parents and €124 for secondary school parents. Seventy percent of parents said that it did not feel voluntary and three quarters (74%) said that parents should not have to pay it.

*“We should not be relying on money from parents for the school to be able to merely function. The government should provide enough for schools to run.”
(Secondary school parent)*

Barnardos does not believe parents should be required to fund the daily costs of running a school. The Department of Education should appropriately fund schools, so that they do not require additional income from parents.

Addressing Costs

We gave parents an opportunity to suggest changes they would want the government to prioritise in order to make costs more affordable for them. The majority stated it should be the introduction of free schoolbooks (55%). An additional 16% said the focus should be on allowing children to wear non branded/crested uniforms and 12% ending the practice of voluntary contributions.



Children's Development

Seventy-six percent of primary and 75% of secondary school parents agreed that their children were ready to move into the next year. Nine percent of all parents disagreed. Only 55% of primary and 44% of secondary school parents said that their children had caught up educationally from before the pandemic, 26% and 38% disagreeing. Fifty-five percent of primary and 52% of secondary school parents believe that their children have caught up socially and emotionally, 28% and 31% disagree

“My child is behind on her reading due to missing school as a result of covid. The support teacher that was allocated pre covid is no longer available so all responsibility is on me as the parent to teach her and help her to reach the national reading average for her age.” (Primary school parent)

The majority of both primary, 55%, and secondary school, 65%, parents disagreed that the government had provided sufficient additional support to help children catch up.

“I do not feel enough support was given to schools in returning to education after the pandemic. As a result our school took a punitive approach to adjustment” (Secondary school parent)

Recommendations

Barnardos believes that no parent should face financial pressure and struggles in trying to meet what are essential costs for their children's education. No child should feel any anxiety about their parents' ability to meet school costs. For many families, struggling to meet recent cost of living increases has meant their ability to be able to afford back to school costs is particularly precarious this year. The government should set out plans to provide genuinely free education for all children.

- 1. Free school books**
- 2. Affordable uniforms**
- 3. Maintain back to school allowance increase**
- 4. End voluntary contributions**

Barnardos Back to School 2022 Survey Full Report

Barnardos Back to School 2022 Survey Infographic