
THE COST OF SCHOOLING

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Introduction

This research brief summarises the key findings from the Costs of Schooling survey, carried out by BMRB International on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills.

The project involved three components: a telephone survey of parents/carers; a postal/web based self-completion survey of state schools; and a face-to-face survey of school pupils themselves (using BMRB's Access to Youth omnibus survey).

Methodology

Interviews were carried out with 1,496 parents/carers between February and April 2004. Over the same period, 280 schools took part in the postal/internet survey. A total of 1,066 face-to-face interviews with schoolchildren were conducted between April and June 2004.

Both the survey of parents/carers and the schools survey involved establishing what extra costs were asked of parents by schools and what the actual value of these additional costs amounted to. The extra costs examined included school uniform, sports kit, class materials, contributions to school fund, charity events, school trips, school photos, school meals and transport. Attitudes towards being asked to pay for these items were also examined in the parents/carers survey. The survey of schoolchildren examined the role children play in "gate-keeping" requests for contributions for school trips, charity events, etc.

Key Findings

- According to data from the parents/carers survey, based on the costs paid by ALL parents in 2003, the total annual average amount spent on costs associated with sending children to state schools was £736.22 per child.
- The total annual average costs varied in terms of the type of school attended. For primary pupils the average annual total was £563.15 per child, compared to £948.11 for secondary pupils.
- The largest individual area of cost was meals during school time. On average parents/carers spent £1.66 per day on meals for children - including school meals, packed lunches and meals at home (during school day). The combined annual average total spent on school meals was £316.20..
- According to the survey of parents, the average amount spent on school uniform in 2003 was £157.50. This figure is based on all parents/carers whose child required school uniform. The amount spent on uniform varied according to gender and type of school. For male primary school pupils the average spent was £132.02 compared to £138.28 for female pupils. For male secondary school pupils the average spent was £191.32 compared to £175.33 for female pupils.

- According to the survey of parents/carers, the average amount spent on PE kit in 2003 was £78.47. This figure is based on all parents/carers whose child needed a PE kit. The amount spent on PE kit varied according to gender and type of school. For male primary school pupils the average spent was £52.53 compared to £44.78 for female pupils. For male secondary school pupils the average spent was £127.12 compared to £92.39 for female pupils.
- Looking at the cost of school clothing (uniform and PE kit) as a whole, the average cost to parents/carers (based on those whose child needed school uniform or PE kit) was £224.69 per child¹. Again the total costs varied according to gender and type of school. For male primary school pupils the average spent was £171.48 compared to £172.19 for female pupils. For male secondary school pupils the average spent was £312.85 compared to £261.08 for female pupils.
- The costs to parents of a school trip in 2003 varied in terms of type of trip (whether residential or day) and in terms of the type of school. For parents of primary schoolchildren, the average cost of a day trip was £8.32 and for a residential trip £119.60. For parents of secondary schoolchildren, the average cost of a day trip was £19.38 and a residential trip was £186.72.
- Parents/carers were asked whether they had to contribute to class materials for their child for six different lessons (music, cookery, IT, art, design and technology and sewing). Overall three in five parents/carers (61 per cent) were asked to contribute to class materials on behalf of their child. There was clear difference between primary and secondary schools with this. Less than half (47 per cent) of parents/carers of primary schoolchildren had to contribute to class materials compared to 79 per cent of parents/carers of secondary school pupils (section 5.1.1). The costs of the contribution towards class materials were then asked for the six subject areas. Music lessons had the highest associated average costs (£70.49). Cookery materials (£39.34) and IT materials (£20.25) were next followed by materials for Art (£14.32), Design and Technology (£13.19) and Sewing (£12.54).
- Over a third (34 per cent) of parents were asked to contribute to the school fund. The average amount contributed over the year was £25.32. In contrast 38 per cent of the schools surveyed said they asked parents for a contribution to the school fund. The average amount asked from parents by schools was higher at £37.02 (however there was a low number of schools answering this question).
- The average cost paid for school photographs by parents in 2003 was £15.71. The average cost paid by parents for a typical charity event was £3.22 (the median was lower at £1). The average annual parental contribution was £11.81 for activities such as school raffles, parties, jumble sales etc. (the median amount was lower at £6).
- Over one in five parents/carers (21 per cent) said their child used public transport or taxis to and from school. Of these parents/carers, 64 per cent said they paid the costs themselves. The average cost of travel to school paid by parents whose children used public transport or taxis was £7.29 a week.
- In terms of comparison between the schools and parents/carers survey, the costs associated with items of uniform, PE kit and class materials drawn from the survey of schools were consistently lower than those given by parents/carers. However the relatively low number of schools who responded to the survey should be borne in mind.

¹ This cost is based on parents/carers whose child required any form of school clothing - either uniform or PE kit or both. The overall average amount spent on school clothing is not simply calculated by adding together the average cost of school uniform and PE kit as some parents/carers may need to buy items of uniform but no PE kit or vice versa.

- Twenty-nine per cent of parents/carers said they were very happy with the costs of schooling. 61 per cent described themselves as quite happy. Nine per cent of parents/carers were not happy (including one per cent who said they were not at all happy). Happiness with the costs of schooling was clearly related to the ability to pay. Those in the higher household income brackets were more likely to be quite or very happy with the costs compared to those with a lower annual household income.
- Overall 18 per cent of respondents said they found it very easy to meet the costs associated with sending their child to state school. Over half (53 per cent) said they found it quite easy. In contrast 22 per cent said they found it quite difficult and five per cent said they found it very difficult to meet the costs expected of them. There were clear differences between household income brackets. Respondents with a higher annual household income were more likely to say they found it easy to meet the costs. In contrast those on lower household incomes were more likely to say meeting the costs was difficult. Looking at the bottom two income brackets combined, over half (55 per cent) of those with a household income of under £15,000 felt it was quite difficult or very difficult to meet the costs discussed. Of the lowest household income bracket (less than £10,000pa), the proportion who found meeting the costs difficult was 62 per cent, including 14 per cent who said they found it very difficult.
- Statistical analysis was used to establish the most important factors influencing overall happiness with the costs of schooling. The most influential factor was how easy parents/carers found it to meet the costs. Happiness with the costs of school trips was the second most influential factor, followed by happiness with the costs of school uniform.
- Nearly two thirds (64 per cent) of the young people interviewed said they *always* passed on letters from their school requesting financial contributions and a

further 26 per cent said they did so *most of the time*. However eight per cent said they passed on letters such as these *not very often* or *never*. In terms of the reasons why letters are not always passed on, simply forgetting was by far the most common reason (68 per cent), followed by the respondent not wanting to take part in the activity or go on the trip in question (29 per cent). However four per cent of children said that one of the reasons for them not always passing requests on was thinking that their parents/carers could not afford to pay. This was clearly influenced by household income - eight per cent of children from families with an income less than £15,000 per year said that thinking their parents/carers could not afford to pay was a reason they did not always pass requests for parental contributions on, compared to only one per cent of children from families with an income of over £15,000.

The costs involved with schooling vary considerably between primary and secondary schools and (to some extent) between boys and girls.

The costs associated with items of uniform, PE kit and class materials drawn from the survey of schools were generally lower than those given by parents/carers in their survey. It is to be expected that costs given by parents/carers would be more accurate than those given by schools but the consistent difference is an interesting finding perhaps worthy of further investigation.

The survey of parents/carers has shown that ability to meet these costs and happiness with the different areas of expense vary with socio-economic factors such as household income and social grade, as well as other factors such as eligibility for free school meals.

The survey of children revealed that a small minority (particularly from low income families) did not pass on all requests for financial contributions from the school to their parents because of a fear their parents cannot afford it.

Additional Information

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