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for Education

Cost of School Uniforms Survey 2023

Research report

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This research report was written before the new UK Government took office on 5 July 2024. As a result, the content may not reflect current Government policy.

Executive summary

Introduction

This report presents findings from the Cost of School Uniform 2023 study. The research was carried out by BMG Research on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) with parents/carers of children in state funded education.

The research was commissioned to assess whether the relative cost of school uniforms has changed since the previous 'Cost of school Uniforms 2015' study¹ and to assess the impacts of the statutory guidance on the Cost of school uniforms, published by the government in November 2021². The 2023 study also provides a new baseline against which to measure the impact of any future policy action.

In line with the 2015 study, findings are presented separately for school uniform and PE kit unless stated otherwise.

Method

The study involved a telephone survey of a representative sample of 1,207 parents/carers of children aged 4 to 16 attending state funded schools in England. Fieldwork was conducted between 24 November 2023 and 8 January 2024.

Subgroup analysis has been undertaken to understand key differences based on school phase, school type, household income, and eligibility for free school meals. When comparing costs with findings from 2015 these have been adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI)³.

Key findings

Uniform, PE kit, and branding requirements

Nearly all parents/carers (over 99%) said their child's school required children to wear school uniform. Several items are required by nearly every child who requires a school uniform, including shirts/blouses (98% for girls and 97% for boys) and shoes (95%), while

¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a809b06ed915d74e622f6b9/RR474_Cost_of_school_uniform.pdf An earlier 'Cost of schooling' was also conducted in 2007

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms>

³ See Appendix 1 for more details.

fewer parents/carers than in 2015 mentioned jumpers/sweatshirts (87% compared with 91%).

There was little change in uniform items required between 2015 and 2023. The proportion of parents/carers who reported that their child's school required them to have blazers changed little between 2015 and 2023 (35% and 37% respectively). Fewer parents/carers mentioned school bags in 2023 compared with 2015 (68% compared with 79%).

Parents/carers whose child was at a secondary school were more likely than those whose child was at a primary school to require a blazer (83% compared with 7%), and this proportion had increased in secondary schools since 2015 (75%). Parents/carers whose child was at a secondary academy school were more likely to require a blazer than those whose child was at a secondary maintained school (87% compared with 78%), with both having increased since 2015 (then 81% in academies compared with 70% in maintained secondaries).

As in 2015, 4% of parents/carers reported that their child had been sent home from school at any time because they did not have the right uniform, although this increased to 8% among parents/carers with a child in secondary school, compared with 2% among those with a child in primary school. The likelihood of a child being sent home from school also increased to 18% among children whose parents/carers reported suffering financial hardship as a result of purchasing uniform.

The majority of parents/carers (91%) said that their child's school required children to have a PE kit. This is a lower proportion than reported in 2015 (94%). Parents/carers of children in primary school were less likely to say their child required a PE kit than those with a child in secondary school (89% compared with 96%).

Items that were required by nearly every child who required a PE kit included all-year-round t-shirts (96%) and plimsolls/trainers (95%).

Parents/carers whose child was at a secondary school were more likely to require items specific to individual sports, such as football, rugby, netball, hockey and so on, than those whose child was in primary school, including: football/rugby boots (33% compared with 8%); socks (66% compared with 34%); a summer t-shirt (28% compared with 18%); a winter t-shirt (29% compared with 12%); a football/rugby shirt (18% compared with 5%); and a skort (girls) (28% compared with 12%).

Most parents/carers (86%) reported that at least one item of uniform required branding, i.e., items were required to have a school logo, or to have characteristics distinctive to the school, such as design, colour and style. The requirement for branded items was significantly more prevalent within secondary schools than in primary schools; 98% of

parents/carers whose child was in secondary school reported the requirement for at least one branded item, compared with 78% of parents/carers of children in primary school.

Seven in ten parents/carers (71%) reported that at least one item of PE kit required branding. Again, this proportion was significantly higher among parents/carers whose child was in secondary school than among those whose child was in primary school (94% compared with 54%).

In 2023, a higher proportion of parents/carers than in 2015⁴ could buy all their child's school uniform and PE kit from any shop (24% compared with 17%), and fewer than in 2015 had to purchase all items from a designated shop or from school (14% compared with 21%). The majority of parents/carers (62%, unchanged from 2015) could buy these items from a combination of designated shops/the school and elsewhere.

Among parents/carers of children in secondary school, 26% reported having to buy all their child's uniform from designated shops or from the school, and 67% reported having to buy some but not all of it from these outlets, which is unchanged since 2015 (26% and 70% respectively).

However, compared with 2015, parents/carers of children in primary school were more likely to be able to buy all their child's uniform from anywhere in 2023 (35% compared with 26%), and less likely to have to buy from designated shops or from the school (6% compared with 10%).

In 2023, parents/carers were significantly more likely than they were in 2015 to report that the school their child attended facilitated purchase of second-hand school uniform items (65% compared with 32%). As in 2015, parents/carers of children in primary schools were more likely than parents/carers of children in secondary schools to report that second-hand uniform items were available through their child's school (75% compared with 51%), but this represented more widespread availability of second-hand items (or more widespread awareness of its availability) in both primary and secondary schools compared with 2015 (38% and 24% respectively in 2015). Parents/carers who reported experiencing financial hardship were also less likely to report that their child's school made second-hand uniform items available to purchase (51% compared with 67%). This may be a true reflection of the availability of second-hand uniform items within their school, which in turn may be contributing to the financial hardship reported, or it may reflect less well-informed parents/carers.

⁴ There was a question wording change between 2015 and 2023 and this has been taken in account in comparisons.

Cost of school uniform

Once the 2015 costs had been adjusted for inflation, the average cost of most items of uniform had decreased since 2015. There was an increase in the cost of a school bag and slight increases in the cost of hats and socks.

Across the board, items were more expensive for parents/carers of children in secondary school than for those with children at primary school. There were few significant differences by type of school; with only boys' shirts and girls' dresses/pinafores more expensive for parents/carers of children in primary academies than for those with children in primary maintained schools. Within secondary schools, the average costs of items in academies were slightly, but not statistically significantly lower than in maintained schools.

The average total expenditure on school uniform, based on the items required in the school year 2023/24 to date, was £249.58 compared with £279.51 for a similar period (and adjusted for inflation) in 2014/2015.

It was less expensive for parents/carers of children in primary schools (£217.65 for boys and £246.80 for girls) than for those with children in secondary schools (£266.14 for boys and £289.04 for girls).

Average expenditure reduced as the range of outlets from which parents/carers were allowed to purchase items increased. The average spent on items was significantly lower where all could be purchased from anywhere (£227.29) than where all had to be purchased from a designated shop or from a school (£283.90). Specifically, for some items, for example, shirts/blouses (girls), jumpers/sweatshirts/cardigans, skirts/kilts and shorts, parents/carers buying from a designated shop or from school had paid around twice that of parents/carers able to buy from anywhere. However, more specialist items such as blazers and hats were found to be similar in price when bought exclusively from specialist shops or the school or from elsewhere.

Cost of PE Kit

The average total expenditure on PE kit to date based on the items required in 2023 was £139.70 compared with £115.11 in 2015 (adjusted for inflation). PE kit was less expensive for those in primary school (£120.10 for boys and £117.09 for girls) than in secondary school (£172.03 for boys and £169.06 for girls). Compared with 2015, and with certain items omitted⁵ to ensure a like-for-like comparison, the revised 2023 average of £135.89 was higher (£115.11 in 2015 - adjusted for inflation),

⁵ In 2023, girls' football/rugby boots and girls' football/rugby shirts were included for the first time so were removed when comparing with 2015.

The increase in average total expenditure on PE kit is contrary to the lower average spend on most items compared with 2015. The overall total expenditure was impacted by the increase in spend on the relatively high value items of plimsolls/trainers since 2015. The amount spent on PE bags had also increased since 2015 but these are lower value items and thus their impact on the overall total expenditure was limited. The increase in spend on plimsolls/trainers is likely to reflect the choice made by parents to buy trainers rather than plimsolls. This is supported by the fact that the average spend on a pair of plimsolls/trainers among parents/carers of primary school age children has increased from £15.52 in 2015 (adjusted) to £22.91 in 2024. The amount spent on trainers (per item) has hardly increased for parents of children in secondary schools (from £42.26 in 2015 to £45.12 in 2024).

As with school uniform, the average total expenditure was lower when items could be purchased from any anywhere (£113.19), being 55% higher, on average, when all items had to be purchased from the designated shop and/or school (£175.66). As the majority of parents/carers reporting no restrictions on where they could purchase PE kit had a child in primary school, and the majority of those who had to go to a designated shop or from the school were parents/carers of secondary school children, the lower average expenditure where items could be purchased from anywhere both reflect and contribute to the lower average expenditure reported by parents/carers of primary school children compared with parents/carers of secondary school children.

As is the case for main uniform items, PE kit items were consistently more expensive for parents/carers of children in secondary school than for those with children at primary school.

Average total expenditure on school uniform and PE Kit

The average total expenditure on school uniform and PE kit combined based on the items required in 2023 was £381.92⁶. There were higher levels of expenditure for children in secondary schools than in primary schools (£442.25 v £343.28), and within both phases, for girls (secondary: £454.31; primary: £357.28) than boys (secondary: £430.40; primary: £330.78).

The 'like-for-like' comparison between 2023 and 2015 (removing costs associated with girls' football/rugby boots and girls' football/rugby shirts which were not included in 2015 from the 2023 calculation) indicates a decrease in average total expenditure in 2023: £373.24, compared with (an inflation adjusted) average total expenditure in 2015 of £387.44.

⁶ To note: This is not calculated by summing the individual average expenditure on school uniforms and PE kit. It is calculated at a respondent case level.

This reduction is largely driven by a decrease in average total expenditure for parents/carers of children in secondary schools (£432.12 in 2023; £460.05 in 2015), as average total expenditure for parents/carers of primary schools has hardly changed (£335.51 in 2023; £334.80 in 2015).

Changes to school uniform

One in six parents/carers (18%) had experienced changes in their child's school uniform in the last 2 years (or during the time they had been there if less than 2 years). This was more likely to be the case where the child attended a secondary school academy than a maintained secondary or a primary school (whether an academy or not) (27% compared with 20% and 15% respectively). Fewer than half the parents/carers reporting changes (43%) said they had been consulted by the school over these changes.

School uniform changes could consist of a combination of revisions to branded items, additional branded items, and fewer branded items - perhaps as a consequence of a major review of the uniform specification by their child's school. Changes to uniform were most commonly around new versions of branded items, which more than half of parents/carers reported (56%), while the addition of branded items (22%) and/or unbranded items changing to branded items (15%) were less common. Fewer parents/carers, reported fewer branded items than additional branded items – 21% reported branded items changing to unbranded items, and 12% reported the removal of branded items. For nearly half of parents/carers who had experienced these changes (49%; equating to 9% of all parents/carers) it was perceived to have resulted in an increase in cost.

Satisfaction with costs

Even though there has been a real terms decrease in average total expenditure on school uniform and PE kit, there has been a significant downward trend in satisfaction with the cost of school uniform and PE kit since 2007. While more than half of parents/carers (56%) were 'very happy' or 'quite happy' with the cost of school uniform and PE kit in 2023, this compares with 69% in 2015 and 75% in 2007. In the last couple of years there has been relatively high price inflation compared with that which people have been used to over the last couple of decades, and this has led to the inevitable resulting cost of living pressures. Furthermore, parents/carers are unlikely to adjust for inflation themselves when considering what they pay now compared with what they have paid in the past. These factors are going to contribute to more negative perceptions of the cost of school uniform and PE kit these days.

Parents/carers of children in primary school were more likely to be happy with the costs than those who have children in secondary school, and there was a greater decline in satisfaction among those with a child in secondary school (from 58% in 2015 to 37% in

2023) than among those with a child in primary school (from 77% in 2015 to 69% in 2015).

Satisfaction with the costs of uniform and PE kits was lower among lower income families and among parents/carers with children eligible for free school meals. However, the most significant factor influencing satisfaction with uniform costs is whether the child attends primary or secondary school, which is likely to reflect the higher costs of uniform and PE kits for parents/carers with a child in secondary school compared with these costs within primary schools.

A minority of parents/carers (8%) reported that the cost of school uniform had, at some point in the past, discouraged them from applying to enter their child into a particular school. This was, however, a higher proportion than in 2015 (3%). This figure increased to 26% among parents/carers who had experienced financial hardship as a result of purchasing school uniform items.

Financial hardship and assistance

A lower proportion of parents/carers than in 2015 reported that they had suffered financial hardship as a result of purchasing their child's school uniform (12% compared with 18%). Parents/carers of children at secondary school were more likely to report financial hardship (16% compared with 9% of those with primary school children). As in 2015, parents/carers were significantly less likely to report that they experienced financial hardship if the school allowed them to purchase all items of uniform from anywhere (6%).

Parents/carers whose households had a lower annual income and/or were eligible for free school meals were more likely to report experiencing financial hardship: 28% of those with an annual household income of below £25,000 or less report this compared with 5% of those with household incomes of at least £25,000; and 23% of those who are eligible for free school meals report this compared with 8% of those who are ineligible.

Seven per cent of parents/carers reported that they had received financial help or assistance when buying school uniform for their child (including Local Authority grants, charity grants, funds from school, or funds from friends/family). This is a higher proportion than previously (3% in 2015 and 4% in 2007).

While 18% of parents/carers who had experienced financial hardship had received some assistance – mainly through a Local Authority grant (6%) - the remainder had not (82%) and two-thirds of parents/carers in these circumstances (67%) reported that they were not aware of any financial assistance that may have been available.

Introduction

This report presents findings from the Cost of School Uniforms 2023 study. The research was carried out by BMG Research, on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE), with parents/carers of children in state-funded education.

Background to the research

DfE published new statutory guidance on the Cost of school uniforms in November 2021. This guidance was intended to ensure that the cost of school uniform is reasonable and secures value for money, and that uniform cost is not a consideration when parents choose a school for their child to attend. The guidance sets out the cost considerations schools should consider when developing their uniform policy and making arrangements with uniform suppliers. Requirements for schools include:

- schools should ensure their uniform is affordable;
- publishing their school uniform policy on their website;
- ensuring that uniform supplier arrangements prioritise cost and value for money, including quality and durability;
- avoiding single supplier contracts unless regular tendering competitions are run at least every 5 years;
- ensuring that second hand uniforms are available for parents to acquire, and that information is available to parents including on the school website; and
- engaging parents and pupils in the development of school uniform policies.

Schools were required to review their current policies to determine if changes were required. Changes to the uniform policy and compliance with the requirements to have a clear policy published on the school website and make second hand uniform available were required by summer 2022. Full compliance with the guidance, including setting up of new contracts, was expected by summer 2023, with an exception where this would mean a breach of contract with an existing supplier.

The main implications of the guidance for parents/carers were as follows:

- parents should not have to think about the cost of a school uniform when choosing which school(s) to apply for;
- schools should be considering the total cost of school uniforms, taking into account all items of uniform or clothing parents will need to provide while their child is at the school when specifying uniform items;
- branded items should be kept to a minimum;

- parents should be able to access information on a school's uniform policy on the school's website, and this information should be easily understood;
- parents should have the option to purchase second-hand uniforms either via the school directly or from an established scheme, and information on second-hand uniforms should be clear for parents of current and prospective pupils and published on the school's website; and
- parents and pupils should have the opportunity to engage with the school when the school uniform policy is being developed.

Aims of the research

The DfE commissioned this research to address the following research questions:

- What proportion of children are required to wear a school uniform?
- What are the proportions of children required to have specified school uniform items such as blazers or tracksuit tops for PE?
- What are the logo/branding requirements for school uniforms?
- Where can school uniform and PE Kit be bought? Is it a single supplier or can other shops such as supermarkets be used?
- What proportion of parents have been given access to second-hand uniform provision through their child's school?
- What are the costs of required items of school uniform and PE Kit and has this changed since 2015 (taking account of RPI)?
- How satisfied are parents/carers with the costs and affordability of school uniform?
- Have school uniform requirements caused financial hardship?
- Are parents aware of any recent changes to school uniform policies? If so, what changes have been made?
- Has cost of uniform influenced choice of school?

Methodology

A key consideration for the approach to this research was that findings should be comparable with those of the 2007 and 2015 survey. For this reason, a similar approach was adopted to that used in the survey of parents/carers in 2023. However, there were some key differences between the 2007 and 2015 survey designs that should be borne in mind when comparing with the earlier 2007 survey. In 2015 the decision was taken to add parents/carers of children in reception classes into the design for the first time, to allow the views and experiences of these parents/carers to be included in the research. The 2015 and 2023 surveys both explore a shorter period of time – the year to date up to

the end of February and early January respectively, compared with a full (previous) school year in 2007. This latter change while affecting the number of items bought would not affect the average cost of each item.

The questionnaire was also kept similar, although some amendments were made to make sure the questions were up-to-date and relevant to current circumstances, to explore the decision-making process parents/carers undertook when purchasing school uniform, and to widen the scope around logo requirements to cover where schools stipulate that parents/carers are required to purchase items of a specific style, colour or brand, as well as where they are required to purchase items with a logo. As the question text in 2023 widened the scope around logo requirements to encompass not just logos but also requirements to purchase items of a specific style, colour or brand, comparisons with 2015 in this respect were not possible.

As in 2007 and 2015 the survey of parents/carers was carried out by telephone. In 2023 the survey used purchased samples of mobile telephone numbers⁷. Interviewers screened households to ensure that the respondent had at least one child aged between 4 to 16 in state-funded education and that the prospective interviewee was the person best able to discuss the costs associated with their child's education. If there was more than one eligible child, a random technique, selection of the child who had the most recent birthday, was used to select one child as the focus of survey questions. Thus, all questions in the survey were asked in relation to this randomly-selected child.

1,207 parents/carers were interviewed in total using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) approach. The questionnaire took an average of 15 minutes to complete. The pilot stage of the survey, to test the questionnaire, took place on the 24th November and 25th November 2023. Main stage fieldwork was carried out between 27th November 2023 and 8th January 2024 inclusive.

Notes on reading the report

Although occasional anomalies appear due to rounding differences, these are never more than +/-1 per cent. These occur where, for example, average scores on rating scales have been added to calculate proportions of respondents who are satisfied at all (i.e., adding together percentages of those who are either very or fairly satisfied).

⁷ The 2015 and 2007 studies used Random Digit Dialling but this approach was felt to be unsuitable in 2023 due to lower proportions of people having landline numbers.

Following comparison of the survey sample profile in respect of a variety of 'structural' characteristics (household size and income, ethnicity, and others) with the same characteristics of the general population of households in England and with the same characteristics of the 2015 Cost of School Uniforms survey, it was determined that weighting of the sample should only be considered based on the relative proportions of responses from parents/carers of children at the primary stage compared with those from parents/carers of children at the secondary stage. The 2023 survey profile was similar to that of the population profile in respect of education Phase. A decision was made, therefore, not to weight the survey data in 2023 (Appendix 2 describes weighting considerations in more detail and a full sample profile is included in Appendix 4).

Sample bases, (the actual numbers of respondents who answered particular questions prior to adjusting the primary/secondary balance of responses) are shown in the report's graphs and tables.

Various cross-tabulations have been included in our analysis for this report. These show whether there are differences in findings between sub-groups of the population which was surveyed. Comparisons are made according to:

- School phase and type
- Child in question's gender

Whether parents can purchase uniform items from anywhere or whether they must purchase from a designated shop/school

- Uniform changes
- Household income
- Financial hardship
- Eligibility for free school meals (excluding parents/carers with both a household income of more than £15,000 and a child below Year 3)
- Ethnicity
- Number of financially dependent children
- Region

Independent t-tests for the significance of differences between sub-groups were conducted at the 95 per cent confidence level. Where specific findings from cross-tabulations are discussed in the report it is because they have been identified as statistically significant unless otherwise stated.

Throughout the report findings are compared, where possible, to findings from the previous 2015 Cost of School Uniforms study. It was felt that 2007 was too long ago to provide a meaningful comparison, so there would be extremely limited comparisons with this earlier study and that there would be no cost comparisons with 2007 at all. When costs are compared between 2015 and 2023, data from 2015 has been adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Appendix 1 gives details of this procedure.

In line with the 2015 study, findings are presented separately for school uniform and PE kit unless otherwise stated. This is because the sample bases differ, as findings are based on where parents/carers are required to provide their children with school uniform and/or PE kit. Not all parents/carers report having to provide one or the other or both.

Survey findings

The following section explores the findings from the survey. Where distinctions are relevant and significant, the section compares subgroups including those based on school phase/type, household income, and eligibility for free school meals. Differences by gender are also included where relevant given some items of uniform could be different for girls and boys, for example skirts/kilts for girls and shorts for boys.

It should be noted that, unless otherwise stated, findings related to school uniform and PE kit are reported separately.

Uniform and branding requirements

All but less than half a percent of parents/carers (100%) said their child's school required children to wear school uniform. This figure is similar to that reported in 2015 (99%) and 2007 (98%). All parents/carers of a child in primary school and 99% of those with a child in secondary school said their child was required to wear a school uniform.

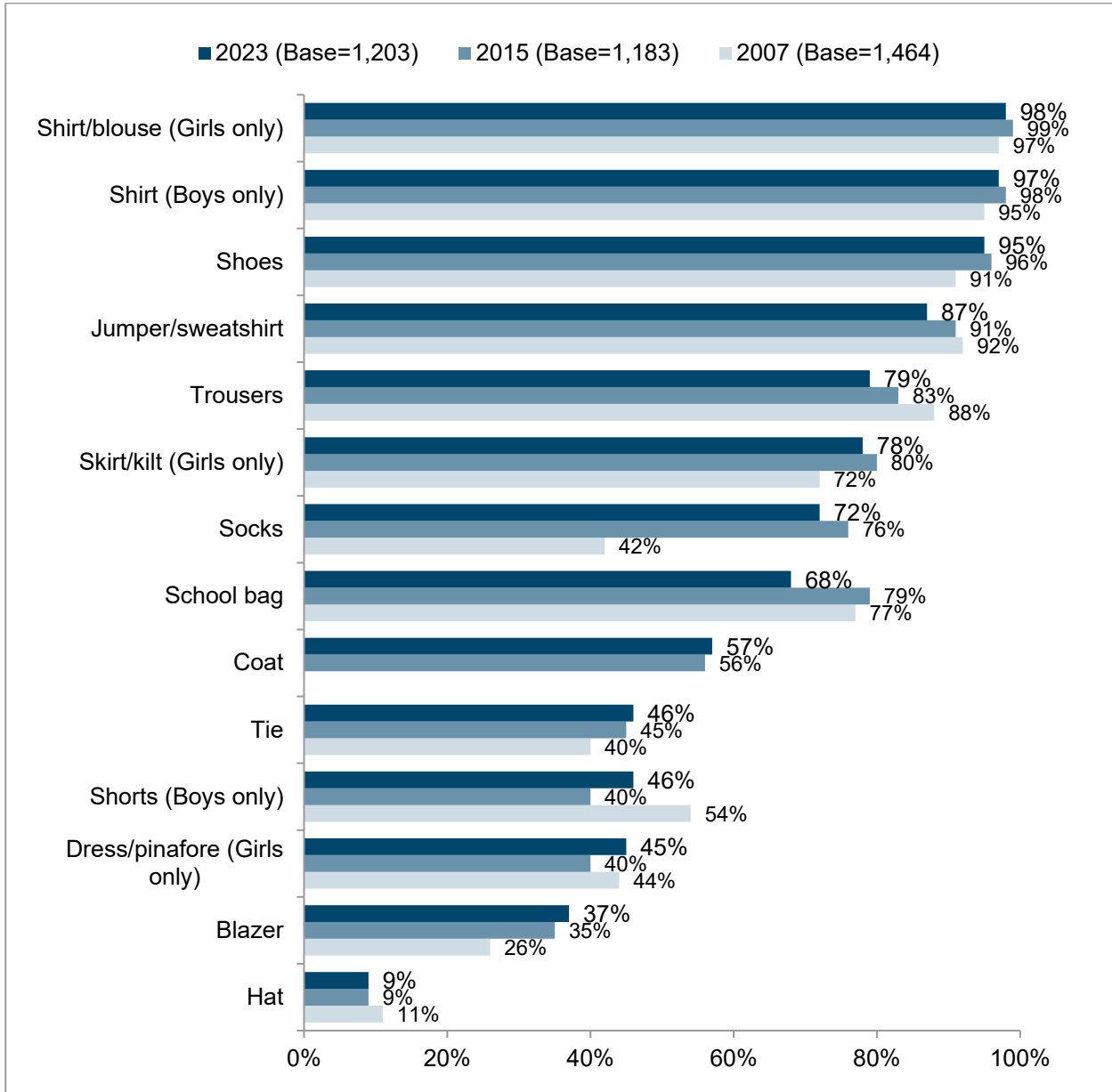
Required items of uniform

Parents/carers were asked which items of clothing the school requires them to buy for their child from a pre-defined list which was read out.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of parents/carers who reported that their child's school required each item of uniform compared with the 2007 and 2015 studies. As in 2007 and 2015, shirts/blouses (98% for girls and 97% for boys) and shoes (95%) were required by nearly every child who requires a school uniform, but fewer than previously mentioned jumpers/sweatshirts (87%).

Fewer parents/carers reported that they are required to buy trousers (79%), skirts/kilts (78%), socks (72%) and school bags (68%) than was the case in 2007 and 2015. Overall, there has been little significant change since 2015.

Figure 1 Items of uniform required in 2007, 2015 and 2023



Base= All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit).

Sample bases in parentheses

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: Coats were included as an item in 2015 but not 2007

There has been an increase in the proportion of parents/carers stating that they are required to buy, specifically, shorts (for boys) (from 40% in 2015 to 46% in 2023) and dresses/pinafores (for girls) (from 40% in 2015 to 45% in 2023), which are predominantly primary school uniform items. Parents/carers whose child was at a primary school were more likely than those whose child (girl) was at a secondary school to require a

dress/pinafore (71% compared with 5%); shorts (boy) (63% compared with 20%) a hat (12% compared with 4%); and a coat (60% compared with 52%).

In contrast, parents/carers whose child was at a secondary school were more likely than those whose child was at a primary school to require a blazer (83% compared with 7%), and a tie (82% compared with 22%).

Compared with 2015, there has been an increase in the proportion of parents/carers whose child is at a primary school who were required to buy shorts (54% to 63%) (boy) and dresses/pinafores (girl) (66% to 71%) for their child, while the requirement for parents/carers to buy shorts for their child (boy) at secondary school has decreased (29% to 20%).

Among parents/carers discussing a child in secondary school, fewer reported having to buy a jumper/sweatshirt/cardigan than in 2015 (70% compared with 80%), while higher proportions reported having to buy a blazer (83% compared with 75%) and tie (82% compared with 77%). Socks were slightly less frequently required than was the case in 2015 in both primary and secondary phases.

Table 1 overleaf summarises items required by phase.

Table 1 Items of uniform required in 2015 and 2023 by school phase

	2015 Primary (n=602)	2023 Primary (n=735)	2015 Secondary (n=581)	2023 Secondary (n=468)
Shirt/blouse (girls only)	98%	98%	99%	98%
Shirt (boys only)	98%	97%	99%	97%
Trousers	83%	80%	83%	78%
Skirt/kilt (girls only)	86%	77%	73%	79%
Shorts (boys only)	54%	63%	29%	20%
Jumper / Sweatshirt / Cardigan	99%	98%	80%	70%
Blazer	6%	7%	75%	83%
Dress/Pinafore (girls only)	66%	71%	7%	5%
Tie	22%	22%	77%	82%
Shoes	95%	95%	96%	94%
School bag	79%	62%	78%	78%
Book bag	-	55%	-	0%
Hat	12%	12%	4%	4%
Socks / Tights	77%	74%	76%	70%
Coat	59%	60%	52%	52%

All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses).

Source: Survey of parents/carers

When type of school is also taken into consideration, there were further variations between phases and types of schools.

- Parents/carers whose child was at a secondary maintained school were more likely to require a jumper/sweatshirt/cardigan than those in a secondary academy (73% compared with 68%), both having decreased since 2015 (84% within secondary maintained compared with 76% within secondary academy)
- Parents/carers whose child was at a secondary academy school were more likely to require a blazer than those who child was at a secondary maintained (87% compared with 78%), with both having increased since 2015 (81% compared with 70%)

- Similarly, parents/carers whose child was at a secondary academy were more likely to require a tie than those whose child was at a secondary maintained (89% compared with 74%), but this has only increased within academies since 2015 (83% compared with 73% of those at secondary maintained in 2015)

There were no significant differences in the types of uniform parents/carers were required to buy between the different types of primary school.

Consequences of not wearing the required uniform

As in 2015, 4% of parents/carers reported that their child had been sent home from school because they did not have the uniform required by the school. This proportion was higher among parents/carers with a child in secondary school than among those with a child in primary school (8% compared with 2%). There was little difference by school type, that is, whether or not the school was an academy. There was also no difference by the gender of the child.

Having a child sent home was however, more likely if the parent/carer reported financial hardship as a result of purchasing uniform items (18% compared with 3% of those who did not), and the proportion was higher than average within lower income households (8% with an income below £25,000 compared with 3% of higher income households) and where the child was eligible for free school meals (7% compared with 4% of those ineligible).

While the findings suggest that being sent home for not having the required uniform is only experienced by a minority of children, those less well-off were more likely to have experienced this, which may have had implications, although probably only minor, for their school attendance.

Branded items and use of school logo on uniforms

The guidance states that *schools should keep branded items to a minimum and limit their use to low cost or long-lasting items.*

In 2023, parents/carers were asked how many of the items of school uniform they were required to buy also were required to be branded or for which this was optional. Branding, parents/carers were informed, covers logos but also other distinctive characteristics, such as design, colour or style, which makes items unique to the school. This mirrors the definition used in the Cost of school uniform guidance. As previous studies used a narrower definition focused solely on whether logos were required, earlier findings are not directly comparable with those of 2023.

In 2023, most parents/carers (86%) reported that at least one item of uniform should be branded. Half of parents/carers stated that at least one branded item was optional (51%).

Table 2 shows the percentages of parents/carers who reported that branded items were required. Nearly all parents/carers of secondary school age children reported the need for branding for at least one uniform item (98%), and this is a significantly higher proportion than reported by parents/carers of primary school age children (78%).

In terms of the number of items that were required to be branded by school phase, 11% of parents/carers with primary school age children and 12% of parents/carers with secondary school age children cited the need for five or more branded items. The mean number of items that were required to be branded was higher in secondary schools than in primary schools (2.91 v 2.35).

Table 2 Number of items for which branding was compulsory by school phase

	Primary (n=735)	Secondary (n=468)
None	22%	2%
One	22%	9%
Two	21%	35%
Three	16%	29%
Four	8%	13%
Five or more	11%	12%
Average number of branded items	2.35	2.91

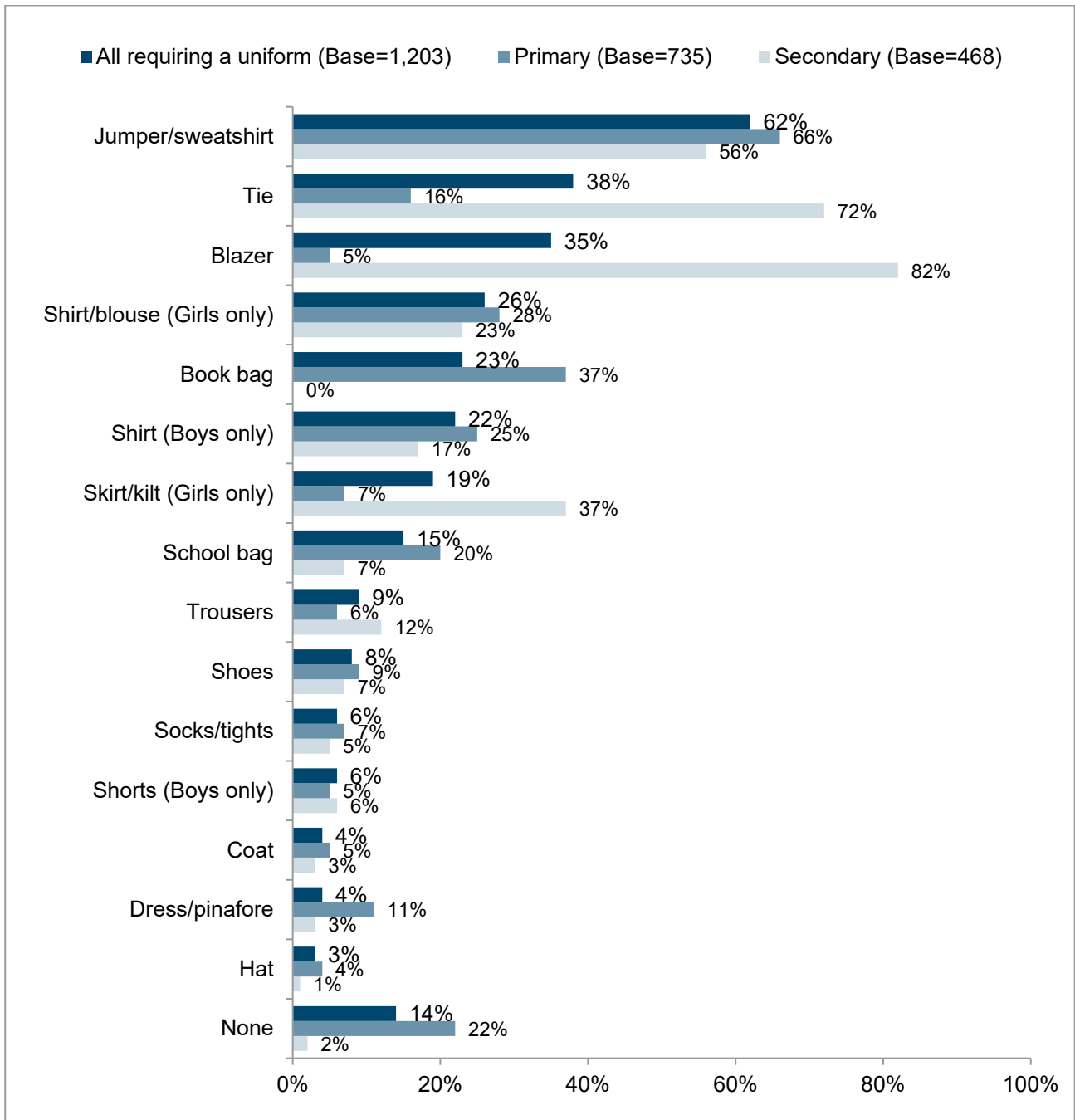
All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Based on all parents/carers, jumpers/sweatshirts/cardigans were the most frequently cited item that were required to be branded (62%), and this proportion was significantly higher in primary schools than in secondary schools (66% compared with 56%). Primary school children were also more likely to have a branded blouse/shirt/t-shirt (26% compared with 20% of secondary school children). Secondary school children were more likely than those in primary schools to need branded skirts/kilts/shorts (22% compared with 6%) and trousers (12% compared with 6%).

There was little difference by school type, although children in an academy were more likely to need a branded tie than those in a maintained school (primary: 19% compared with 14%; secondary: 76% compared with 68%), and children in the secondary phase were more likely to require a branded blazer if they attended an academy than if they attended a maintained school (86% compared with 76%).

Figure 2 Items of uniform required to be branded by school phase



Base= All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses – individual sample bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Based on each of the items that were required, the types of clothes that were most frequently reported to be branded were blazers (95% of those who said they were required) and ties (84%) were the types of clothes that were most frequently reported to require branding followed by jumpers/sweatshirts/cardigans (71%). These findings are summarised in Table 3 overleaf.

Table 3 Of those parents/carers reporting an item was required, what proportion reported that the item had to be branded? - by school phase and type

Items required	% that require branding (n=1,203)	Primary (n=735)	Secondary (n=468)	Primary (inc. reception) – Academy (n=291)	Primary (inc. reception) – Not academy (n=444)	Secondary – Academy (n=270)	Secondary – Not academy (n=198)
Blazer	95%	69%*	98%	75%*	65%*	98%	98%
Tie	84%	73%	88%	79%	68%	86%	92%
Jumper / Sweatshirt / Cardigan	71%	67%	80%	67%	67%	79%	82%
Book bag	68%	68%	-	67%	68%	-	-
Hat	34%	36%	24%*	36%*	35%*	23%	25%
Blouse / Shirt / T-shirt	25%	27%	21%	27%	27%	17%	25%
School bag	22%	32%	9%	33%	31%	10%	7%
Skirt / Kilt / Shorts	20%	9%	44%	5%	11%	43%	45%
Dress / Pinafore	18%	15%	64%*	13%	16%	50%	70%
Trousers	11%	8%	16%	7%	8%	18%	13%
Shoes	9%	10%	8%	9%	10%	10%	5%
Socks / Tights	8%	9%	7%	8%	10%	9%	4%
Coat	7%	8%	6%	9%	8%	5%	7%

All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses – individual sample bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

*caution: low sample base

Optional brands/logos were less commonly reported within secondary schools than within primary schools, with 34% of parents/carers of secondary school children reporting at least one item for which branding was optional, compared with 63% of parents/carers of primary school children. This reflects the fact that compulsory branded items were more frequently required in secondary schools.

Items most frequently reported as being those for which branding was optional included: blouse/shirt/t-shirt (32%; 25% said this item was required to have a logo) and coats (28%, 7%).

Where items can be purchased

Parents/carers were asked where items of school uniform and PE kit could be purchased (including from designated shops, the school itself, or any other outlets such as sole sources or as combinations of sources). Table 4 compares findings from 2007, 2015 and 2023.

Table 4 Buying restrictions in 2023, compared with 2007 and 2015

	2007 (n=1,464)	2015 (n=1,183)	2023 (n=1,206)
All items have to be bought from designated shop(s) or from school	17%	21%	14%
Majority/some items have to be bought from designated shop(s) or from school, but others can be bought anywhere	61%	62%	62%
All items can be bought from anywhere	22%	17%	24%

All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

The question was structured slightly differently in 2023 and those that reported 'some' and the 'majority' must be bought from a designated shop or from the school in 2023 have been aggregated for comparison purposes. In 2023, 19% of parents/carers reported that the majority of items have to be bought from a designated shop or the school and 43% reported that some items had to be purchased from these sources, and some could be purchased from other outlets.

- Parents/carers of children in secondary school were significantly more likely to need to buy their child's uniform from designated shops or from the school than those whose child was in primary school, with 26% having to buy all items from a designated shop or from the school (6% of those with children in primary school) and 33% having to buy the majority of items from these sources (compared with 10%)
- Parents/carers of children in primary school were significantly more likely to be able to buy all their child's uniform from anywhere than those whose child was in secondary school (35% compared with 6%). This has increased since 2015 (26% and 4% respectively)
- Among parents/carers of children in primary school, 49% reported having to buy some items, but not all, and not the majority of items, from a designated shop or from the school, which compares with 34% of parents/carers of children in secondary school.

Although there has been little change since 2015 in the extent to which parents/carers have to purchase some items but not all from a designated shop or from the school, the proportion of parents/carers that were able to buy all items from other outlets has increased, while fewer had to buy all items from a designated shop or from the school. This reverses the trend that was reported between 2007 and 2015.

There were no significant differences in where items could be purchased when comparing types of schools within each phase.

Second-hand items

The guidance states that schools should *make sure that second-hand uniforms are available to acquire (either from the school directly or from an established scheme)*.

Although the majority of parents/carers reported having to purchase at least some items from a designated shop or from the school, many parents/carers reported that the school their child attended makes second-hand school uniforms available for purchase, which helps to mitigate that (65%). This is a significantly higher proportion than reported in 2015 (32%⁸). The option of buying second-hand items from school was much more likely in primary than secondary schools (75% compared with 51%), and in both settings it was more common than in 2015 (38% in primary schools and 24% in secondary schools).

Fewer parents/carers with a child in secondary school reported having this option partly due to a higher proportion of these parents/carers not knowing whether it was available or not (13% compared with 5% of parents/carers with a child in primary school), but nonetheless, they were more likely to say that second-hand items were *not* made available by the school (36% compared with 20%).

⁸ Including second-hand uniform items available for free in 2015

Cost of school uniform

Parents/carers were asked about the number of items they had purchased in the 2023/24 school year and the costs of a randomly-selected four of these items. This data was used to determine the average cost of specific items and the total average cost of school uniform.

As in previous surveys, interviewers were instructed to probe for the price of single items only. For example, if the price of a pack of three shirts was given, the cost recorded was calculated on the price of a single item (i.e., pack price divided by 3).

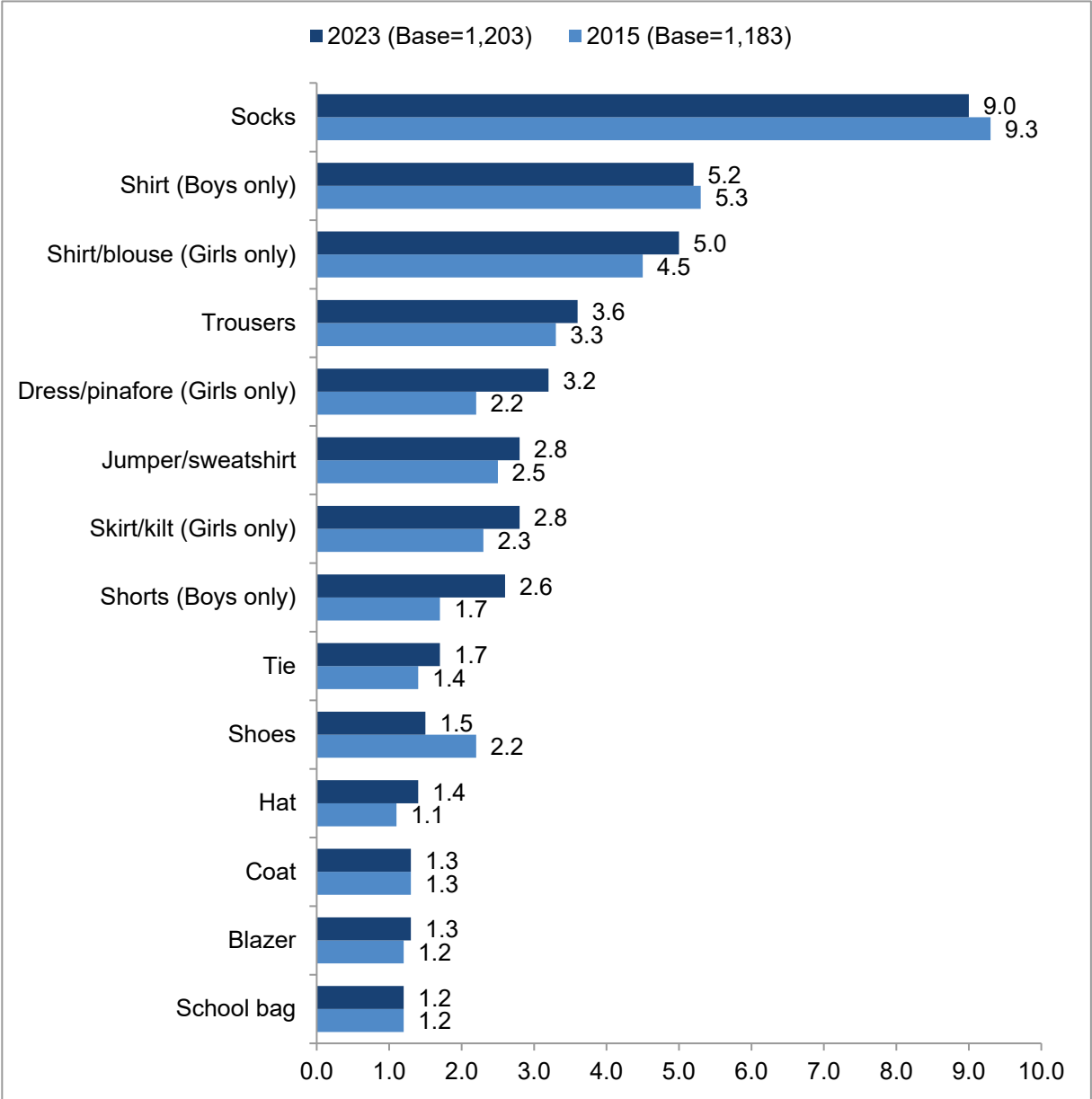
Average number of items bought

Figure 3 shows the average number of each item purchased to date for the 2023/24 school year compared with those bought in 2015⁹.

Compared with 2015, there was an increase in the number of items purchased in 2023 with regard to trousers, dresses/pinafores, skirts, shorts, shirts/blouses for girls, jumpers/sweatshirts, and ties. For the remaining items there was a slight reduction in the number bought, although in most cases there was no significant change. The exception to this is shoes, with parents/carers purchasing an average of 1.5 pairs so far this school year, compared with an average of 2.2 in 2015.

⁹ The time period over which purchases were measured in 2007 was longer and took in the full school year, while 2015 and 2023 studies cover the first term of the respective school years. Comparisons with regard to the number of purchases in 2007 are therefore inadvisable.

Figure 3 Average number of uniform items bought in 2023 compared with 2015



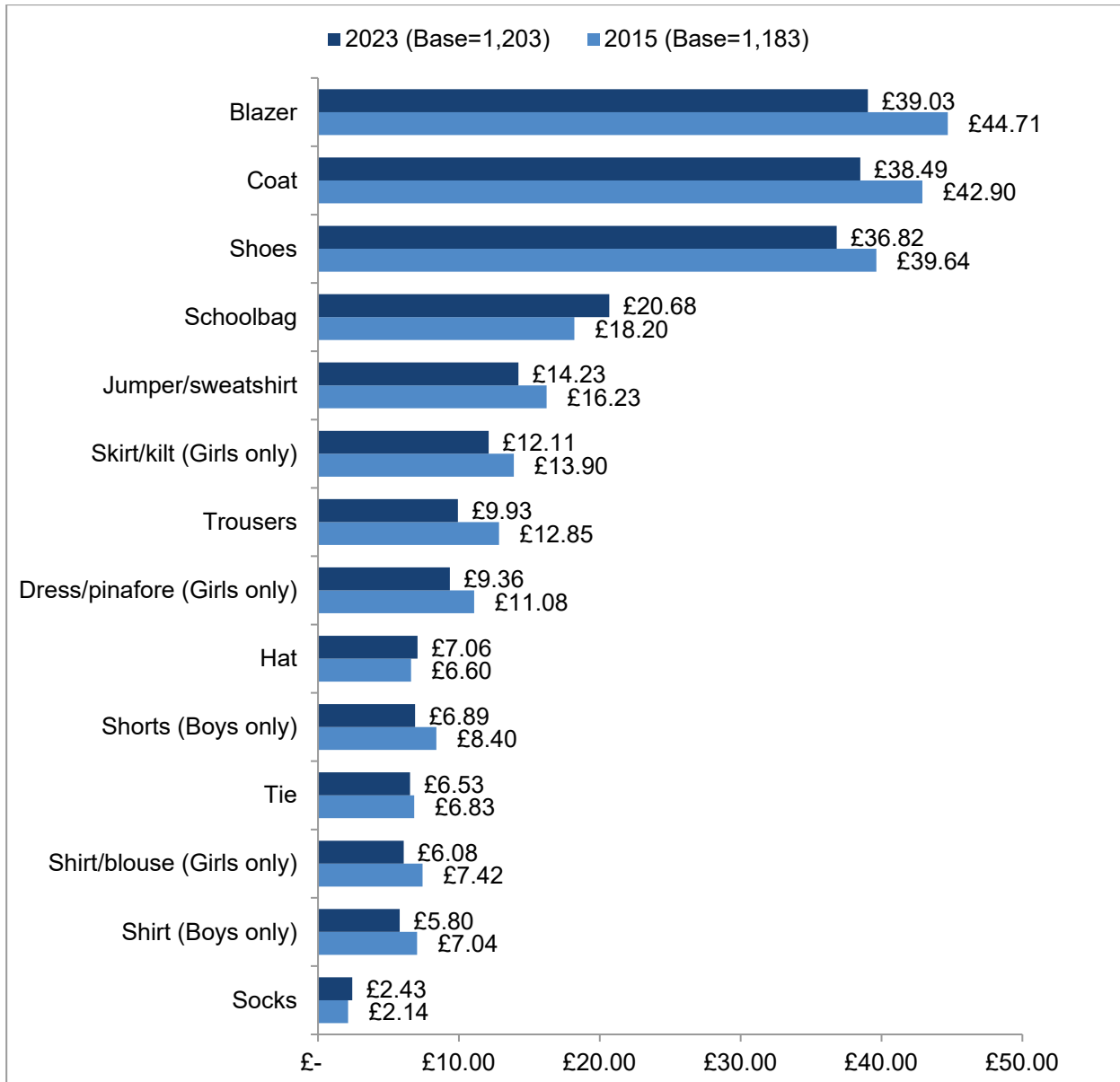
Base= All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses, individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Cost of each item of uniform

Figure 4 shows the average costs for one of each item of uniform for both the 2023 and 2015 studies¹⁰. The 2015 figures have been adjusted for inflation using the general CPI to allow a more direct comparison between the findings (see Appendix 1 for more information).

Figure 4 Average costs of uniform by item in 2023 v 2015 (adjusted for inflation)



Base= All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: CPI 2015 to 2023 31.3% – Inflationary adjustment applied to 2015 figures

¹⁰ 2007 costs have not been included in the comparison.

Once the 2015 costs had been adjusted for inflation, the average costs of most items of uniform were lower in 2023 than they were in 2015. The exception to this was school bags, hats and socks which increased in cost.

By phase, the average cost of school bags has increased for primary school children, but not for those in secondary school, while ties were also slightly more expensive in primary schools

Across the board, items were more expensive for parents/carers of children in secondary school than for those with children at primary school. The largest differences by school phase were with regard to skirt/kilts for girls (three times the cost in secondary schools than in primary schools) and dresses/pinafores (nearly twice the cost¹¹).

¹¹ This is a low sample base though as dresses/pinafores not widely purchased for secondary school children.

Table 5 Average costs of uniform by item and phase in 2023 v 2015 (adjusted for inflation)

	2015 Primary (n=602)	2023 Primary (n=735)	2015 Secondary (n=581)	2023 Secondary (n=471)
Shirt/blouse (Girls only)	£5.55	£4.74	£9.68	£8.21
Shirt (Boys only)	£6.41	£5.35	£8.15	£6.60
Jumper/sweatshirt/cardigan	£13.54	£12.10	£21.98	£19.34
Shoes	£34.14	£31.48	£47.85	£45.40
Trousers	£9.41	£7.75	£17.67	£13.60
School bag	£11.78	£16.30	£27.52	£25.36
Skirt/kilt (Girls only)	£8.99	£6.69	£22.61	£19.70
Shorts (Boys only)	£7.27	£6.12	£11.33	£10.77
Socks	£2.10	£2.24	£2.19	£2.70
Tie	£5.03	£5.36	£7.50	£7.02
Dress/pinafore	£10.32	£9.14	£25.93	£17.67
Blazer	£39.86	£29.17	£45.06	£40.13
Coat	£35.92	£30.76	£54.13	£51.28

All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (total sample bases in parentheses - individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: Costs for hat and book bag not included due to low subgroup bases and comparison not available for book bag

Note: CPI 2015 to 2023 31.3% – Inflationary adjustment applied to 2015 figures

By type of school attended by children in the different phases, there were few significant differences, and only boys' shirts and girls' dresses/pinafores were more expensive for parents/carers of children in primary academies than for those with children in primary maintained schools. Within secondary schools, the average cost of items in academies were lower than in maintained secondary schools, but these differences were not statistically significant.

In terms of the average cost of items based on where it can be or has to be bought from, as shown in Table 6, there is a clear pattern with the average cost of items significantly lower where they can be bought from somewhere other than a designated shop or from school. In some cases, shirt/blouse (girls), jumper/sweatshirt/cardigan, skirt/kilt and shorts, parents/carers buying from a designated shop or from school have paid around twice that of parents/carers able to buy from anywhere.

The key figures in Table 6 are those based on parents/carers who must buy all items from the school or a designated shop and those who are able to buy everything from anywhere. Where there is a combination of the two, some items will be more likely to fall into the category of having to be bought from a designated shop or from school. This will include more specialised items such as blazers, ties and hats, and the relatively similar costs of these items across the categories that include buying from a designated shop or from school reflect this.

Table 6 Average costs of uniform by item and buying restrictions in 2023

	All items have to be bought from school/ designated shop (n=171)	Majority have to be bought from school/ designated shop (n=227)	Some items have to be bought from designated shop or from school (n=521)	Items can be bought anywhere (n=286)
Shirt/blouse (Girls only) (n=271)	£9.07	£7.59	£5.87	£4.36
Shirt (Boys only) (n=351)	£7.18	£7.05	£5.46	£4.74
Jumper/sweatshirt/cardigan (n=571)	£19.30	£17.85	£14.06	£10.22
Shoes (n=604)	£46.36	£39.49	£33.84	£34.64
Trousers (n=523)	£13.21	£11.64	£9.37	£8.15
Schoolbag (n=399)	£22.69	£23.68	£19.58	£17.85
Skirt/kilt (Girls only) (n=236)	£19.23	£17.19	£9.82	£6.75
Shorts (Boys only) (n=145)	£10.37	£5.98	£6.95	£5.71
Socks (n=412)	£3.30	£2.50	£2.16	£2.38
Tie (n=262)	£7.48	£6.43	£6.32	£5.74
Hat (n=39)	£7.79	£7.01	£7.39	£5.50
Dress/pinafore (n=115)	£11.60	£14.40	£8.96	£7.67
Blazer (n=234)	£38.06	£40.49	£39.83	£33.42
Book bag (n=214)	£10.80	£9.24	£8.79	£8.75

	All items have to be bought from school/ designated shop (n=171)	Majority have to be bought from school/ designated shop (n=227)	Some items have to be bought from designated shop or from school (n=521)	Items can be bought anywhere (n=286)
Coat (n=320)	£52.02	£44.56	£34.29	£34.47

All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses – sample bases for each item in each column vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Average expenditure on each item of uniform

By taking the price for each item of uniform and multiplying by the number of items bought in the previous year for each respondent, the average cost to parents/carers for school uniform items was calculated. As parents/carers were only asked about the cost of up to four randomly-selected items, this was then imputed for those who required this item of school uniform but did not report the cost, and an overall average was calculated. The cost in both 2023 and 2015 therefore applies only to parents/carers who needed each item, and the average cost was calculated for each item based on individual responses to both questions and not simply obtained by multiplying the average cost of each item by the average number bought.

Table 7 shows the average expenditure on each type of item by the parents who purchased that type of item. Average annual expenditure was highest (for parents who made that type of expenditure) on shoes (£53.14); and this was followed by coats (£50.30) and blazers (£48.24), This echoes item expenditure in 2015. However, compared with 2015, jumpers/sweatshirt/cardigans (£36.69) overtook trousers (£32.87) for higher expenditure in 2023.

Compared with 2015, with expenditure adjusted for inflation, parents/carers have spent less on most items, with notable exceptions being for dresses/pinafores and hats, with small increases in expenditure on skirts/kilts and socks. There has been a significant reduction in expenditure on shoes, which parents/carers have bought fewer of this year.

Table 7 Average total expenditure on individual items of uniform 2015 and 2023 (to date at time of interview)

	% needing item (n=1,203)	Average cost per item (£)	Average number of items bought	2023 Average total expenditure (£)	2015 Average total expenditure (£)
Shoes	95%	£36.82	1.51	£53.14	£77.64
Coat	57%	£38.49	1.29	£50.30	£55.21
Blazer	37%	£39.03	1.27	£48.24	£50.98
Jumper/sweatshirt/cardigan	87%	£14.23	2.80	£36.69	£37.63
Trousers	79%	£9.93	3.61	£32.87	£40.24
Dress/pinafore	22%	£9.36	3.23	£29.93	£22.91
Skirt/kilt (Girls only)	78%	£12.11	2.77	£29.29	£27.35
Shirt/blouse (Girls only)	98%	£6.08	4.98	£27.20	£31.07
Shirt (Boys only)	97%	£5.80	5.24	£27.19	£32.33
Schoolbag	68%	£20.68	1.15	£23.74	£24.43
Socks	72%	£2.43	8.98	£19.20	£18.53
Shorts (Boys only)	46%	£6.89	2.56	£16.88	£20.78
Tie	46%	£6.53	1.71	£10.88	£9.37
Hat	9%	£7.06	1.42	£10.01	£6.91
Book bag	33%	£8.97	1.05	£9.37	-

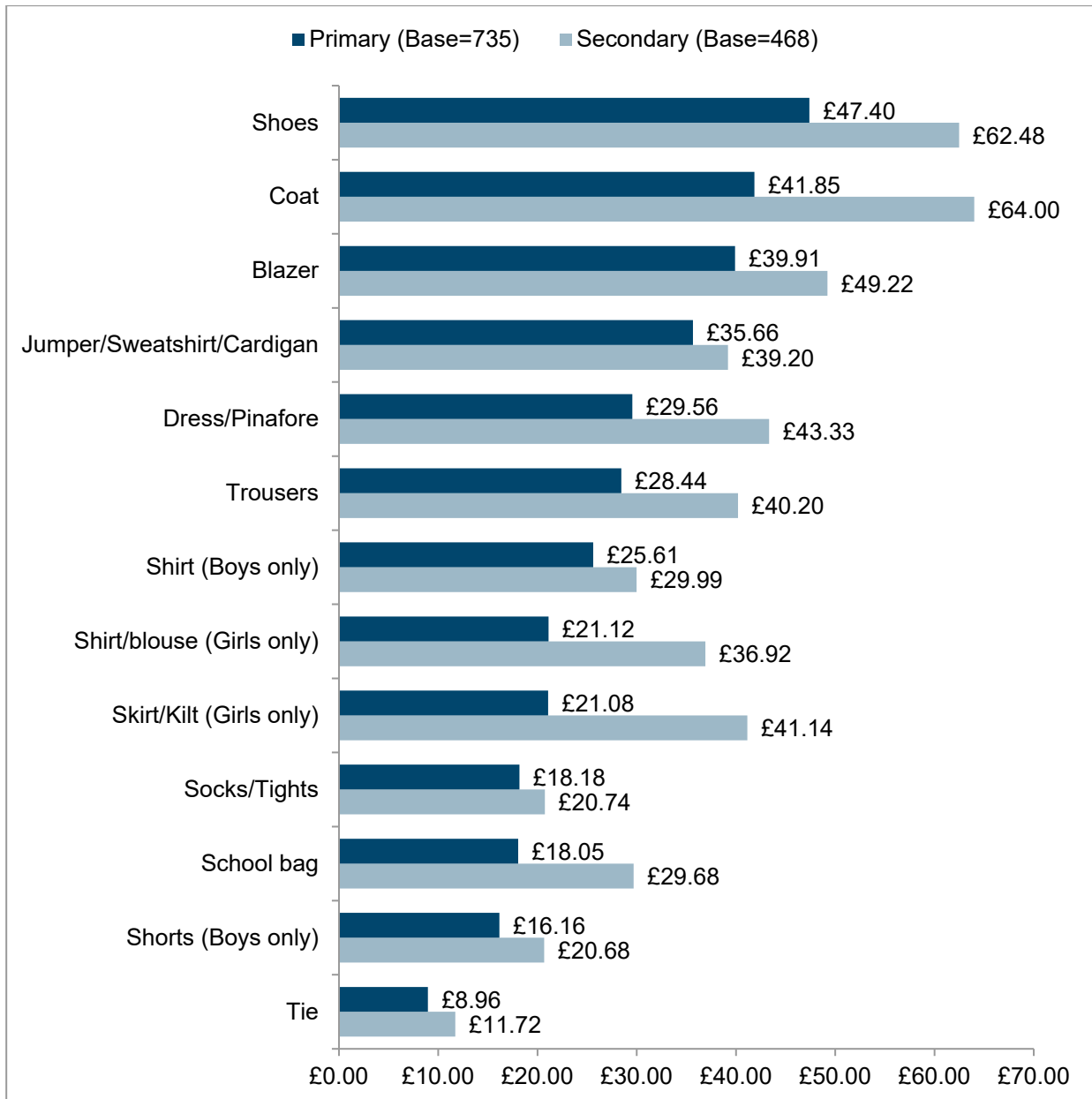
All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses, individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: CPI 2015 to 2023 31.3% – Inflationary adjustment applied to 2015 figures

Average expenditures were higher across all types of items of school uniform for children in secondary school than for children in primary school (see Figure 5). As shown earlier in Tables 5 and 6 these differences reflect a higher cost per item in the secondary phase than in primary.

Figure 5 Average total costs of uniform by item by school phase



Base= All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses - individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Total expenditure on school uniform in 2023 to date

This section examines the total expenditure on school uniform in the current school year (2023/24) up to when parents/carers were interviewed (latest being up to early January 2024).

Table 8 provides a banded breakdown of total school uniform expenditures for both phase of schooling and type of school. As in previous surveys and reflecting findings regarding the cost of individual uniform items, total expenditures were more likely to be higher for parents/carers with children in secondary school compared with parents/carers of primary school children. There was no statistically significant difference in expenditure when comparing types of school within each phase of education. There were no statistically significant differences based on household income or eligibility for free school meals.

Table 8 Total expenditure on all school uniform items in school year 2023/24 (to date)

	Total (n=1,203)	Primary (n=735)	Secondary (n=468)
Less than £100	3%	4%	2%
£100-£149	8%	11%	3%
£150-£199	18%	22%	13%
£200-£249	24%	27%	19%
£250-£299	23%	19%	29%
£300+	24%	17%	34%
Average total expenditure on all school uniform items	£249.58	£231.49	£277.99

All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses - individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Table 9 shows the average total expenditure on school uniform in 2023 to date by phase and gender. The corresponding figures from 2015 for the school year 2014/2015 (to late February 2015) adjusted for inflation are also shown.

The average total expenditure on school uniform, based on the items required in the school year 2023/24 to date was £249.58 compared with £279.51 for a similar period in 2014/2015.

Table 9 Average total expenditure on all school uniform items in 2015 and 2023 by gender, phase, and type (to date at time of interview)

	Total cost 2015 (n=1,183)	Total cost 2023 (n=1,203)
All parents/carers	£279.51	£249.58
Primary – boys	£252.28	£217.65
Secondary – boys	£303.32	£266.14
Primary – girls	£263.97	£246.80
Secondary – girls	£315.03	£289.04

All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (sample bases in parentheses - individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: CPI 2015 to 2023 31.3% – Inflationary adjustment applied to 2015 figures

Moving from primary to secondary school involves purchasing a new set of school uniform and PE items, so it is appropriate to focus on average total expenditure for parents/carers with a child in Year 7, the first year of secondary school. However, average total expenditure for school uniform for children in Year 7 was £277.78, which is similar to the average total expenditure for children in secondary school (£277.99). Rather than highlighting significantly higher expenditure for children in Year 7, it highlights the extent to which expenditure remains at a similar level across secondary school years, with parents/carers purchasing new/replacement items from year to year.

Finally, in Table 10, the average total expenditures on school uniform were compared for parents/carers who had different options as to where items of school uniform could be purchased. This comparison shows that the average expenditure on school uniform was lowest where items can be purchased from anywhere (£227.29) and highest when all items had to be purchased from designated shops and/or the school itself (£283.90). Although the cost differences reflect the fact that nearly all parents/carers who reported being able to buy all uniform items from anywhere were discussing a child in primary school, and for these parents/carers uniform costs were significantly lower than for those whose children were in secondary school, lower costs for those who were able to purchase most items from somewhere other than a designated shop or from the school were evident within each phase.

The anomalies by phase, wherein parents/carers of primary school children who have had to purchase all items from a designated shop or school have spent less when one would expect them to have spent more, and parents/carers of secondary school children who were able to purchase items from anywhere have spent more when one would expect them to have spent less, should be treated with caution as sample bases for these parents/carers are small.

Table 10 Average total expenditure on all school uniform items in school year 2023/24 by where uniform is available (to date at time of interview)

	Total cost	Primary	Secondary
All parents/carers (n=1,203)	£249.58	£231.49	£277.99
All items have to be purchased from designated shop or school (n=169)	£283.90	£244.93*	£298.91
Majority of items have to be purchased from designated shop or school but some can be purchased anywhere (n=227)	£273.86	£266.47	£277.22
Some items have to be purchased from designated shop or school and some can be purchased anywhere (n=521)	£240.07	£230.10	£262.37
All items can be purchased from anywhere (n=285)	£227.29	£221.32	£282.07*

All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform (excluding PE kit) (Total cost sample bases in parentheses) *bases are below 50

Source: Survey of parents/carers

PE kit and branding requirements

The majority of parents/carers (91%) said that their child's school required children to have a PE kit. This is slightly lower than the proportion in 2015 (94%, and similar to that reported in 2007 (90%). Parents/carers of children in primary school were less likely to say their child required a PE kit than those with a child in secondary school (89% compared with 96%), and in primary schools this is a lower proportion than in 2015 (93%), while in secondary schools it is at a similar level (97% in 2015).

Parents/carers of children attending academies, both primary and secondary, were more likely to have to buy a PE kit than those at maintained schools (primary: academy, 90%; maintained, 88%; secondary: academy, 97%; maintained, 93%).

Required items of PE kit

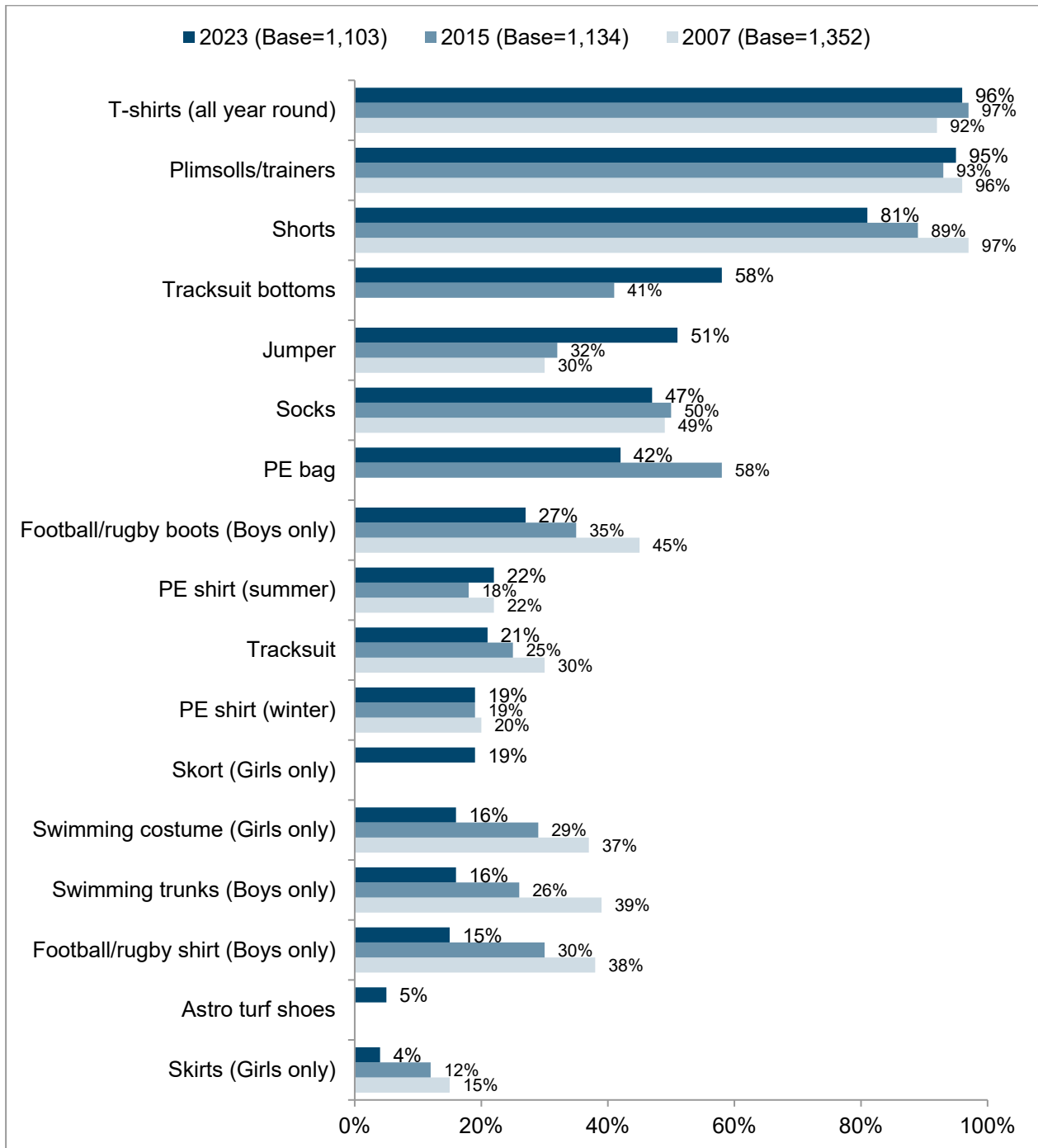
Parents/carers were asked which items of PE kit the school required them to buy for their child from a pre-defined list which was read out.

Figure 6 shows the percentages of parents/carers who reported that their child's school required each item of PE kit and compares these with percentages from the 2007 and 2015 studies. It should be noted that, for the purposes of comparison with these previous studies, the figures for some items are based on parents/carers of female children only (skirts, skorts and swimming costume) and others based on parents/carers of male children only (football/rugby shirts and boots, and swimming trunks).

Figure 6 shows that, as previously, there are a few items that are required by nearly every child who requires a PE kit, including all-year round t-shirts (96%) and plimsolls/trainers (95%).

Other items were more dependent on sports choices (football/rugby boots), the seasonal nature of some sports and facilities available (including swimming costume/trunks and astro turf shoes). Although skorts were not included in 2007 and 2015, the decrease in skirts suggests that they have largely replaced the latter.

Figure 6 Items of PE kit required in 2007, 2015 and 2023



Base= All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (sample bases in parentheses)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: PE bags and tracksuit bottoms were not included in 2007. Skorts and astro turf shoes were new to 2023

As in 2007 and 2015, parents/carers whose child was at a secondary school were more likely to require specialist items than those whose child was in primary school, including: football/rugby boots (boys and girls: 33% compared with 8%); socks (66% compared with 34%); a summer t-shirt (28% compared with 18%); a winter t-shirt (29% compared with 12%); a football/rugby shirt (boys and girls: 18% compared with 5%); and a skort (girls) (28% compared with 12%).

In contrast, parents/carers whose child was at a primary school were more likely to require the items that are more general purpose than those whose child was at secondary school, including: a year-round t-shirt (98% compared with 94%); tracksuit bottoms (63% compared with 51%); and a swimming costume/trunks – where swimming tends to be a more universal activity in the younger year groups (22% compared with 9%); and a PE bag – more likely to be specified in primary than secondary school (45% compared with 38%).

There are no differences in the type of PE kit required when comparing types of school within each phase of education.

Branded PE kit

Parents/carers were asked how many of the items of compulsory PE kit were required to be branded, or for which branding was optional. As was the case for school uniform items, the 2023 survey included other distinctive characteristics, such as design, colour or style, which make items unique to a school, as well as logos, in the definition of branding. This was a wider definition than in previous studies that solely asked about items for which logos were required. Thus, 2023 findings are not directly comparable with those of previous studies.

Seven in ten parents/carers (71%) reported that at least one item of PE kit was required (i.e., it was compulsory) to be branded. Table 11 shows the percentages of parents/carers who reported different numbers of items required to be branded by school phase. The proportion of parents/carers who reported that at least one item of PE kit required branding was significantly higher for those whose child was in secondary school (94% compared with 54% of those in primary school).

**Table 11 Number of PE items for which branding is compulsory by school phase
2023**

	Total (n=1,103)	Primary (n=651)	Secondary (n=452)
None	29%	46%	6%
One	18%	23%	11%
Two	16%	13%	20%
Three	13%	7%	21%
Four	8%	4%	14%
Five or more	15%	6%	29%
Average number of branded items required	2.45	1.73	3.49

All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (Sample bases in parentheses)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Overall, the types of PE kit that were most frequently reported to require branding were all year-round t-shirts (62%), followed by jumpers/hoodies/tracksuit tops (30%) and shorts (27%). However, as a proportion of parents/carers required to buy each PE item, winter PE shirts and football/rugby shirts were most commonly required to be branded (74% and 73% respectively of those required to buy each), followed by all year-round t-shirts and summer PE shirts (64% and 63% respectively where required to buy).

Most parents/carers of children in secondary schools reported that most individual items required branding, particularly all-round t-shirts (91% of those required to buy this item), winter PE shirts (89%), football/rugby shirts (88%) and shorts (88%). The need for each item to be branded was much lower among parents/carers of children in primary school; at most 49% for winter PE shirts (of those required to buy this item). This is summarised in Table 12.

Table 12 Proportion of those stating an item of PE kit was required that reported branding for that item was compulsory by school phase and type

Items required	% that required branding (n=1,103)	Primary (n=651)	Secondary (n=452)
Winter PE shirt	74%	49%	89%
Football/rugby shirt	73%	35%	88%
T-shirt (used all year round)	64%	46%	91%
Summer PE shirt	63%	43%	82%
Jumper/hoodie/tracksuit top	59%	39%	83%
Skort	56%	21%	77%
Skirt	53%	27%	88%
Full tracksuit	43%	26%	72%
Shorts	34%	14%	63%
Socks	31%	7%	49%
Tracksuit bottoms	30%	15%	56%
PE Bag	30%	34%	21%
Swimming costume/Swimming trunks	9%	7%	15%

All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (sample bases in parentheses – individual sample bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

*caution: low sample base

Two in five parents/carers (41%) stated that branding for at least one item was optional. The item most frequently reported as one for which branding was optional was a PE bag (27%, where 30% of those required to buy this item reported that branding was compulsory).

Optional branding was more common in primary schools than secondary schools, based on 48% of parents/carers with primary school children reporting at least one item of PE kit could have optional branding compared with 31% of those whose child was in a secondary school. Similarly to school uniform items, this will reflect the greater extent to which branding is compulsory in secondary schools compared with primary schools.

Table 13 shows the percentages of parents/carers who reported different numbers of items for which branding was optional by school phase. The proportion of parents/carers who reported that there was at least one item of PE kit for which branding was optional was significantly higher for those whose child was in primary school (48% compared with 31% of those in secondary school), reflecting the fact that compulsory branding was more widespread in secondary schools than in primary schools.

Table 13 Number of PE items for which branding is optional by school phase 2023

	Total (n=1,103)	Primary (n=651)	Secondary (n=452)
None	59%	52%	69%
One	19%	21%	17%
Two	9%	12%	6%
Three	5%	5%	5%
Four	4%	5%	2%
Five or more	4%	4%	<1%
Average number of branded items required	1.49	1.64	1.26

All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (Sample bases in parentheses)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Cost of PE kit

Parents/carers were subsequently asked about the number of items they purchased and the costs of up to four of these in order to determine the average cost of specific items, and the total average cost of PE kit.

Interviewers were instructed to probe for the price of a single item only (as in previous studies). For example, if the price of a pack of three T-shirts was given, the cost recorded was calculated on the price of a single item (i.e., divided by 3).

Average number of items bought

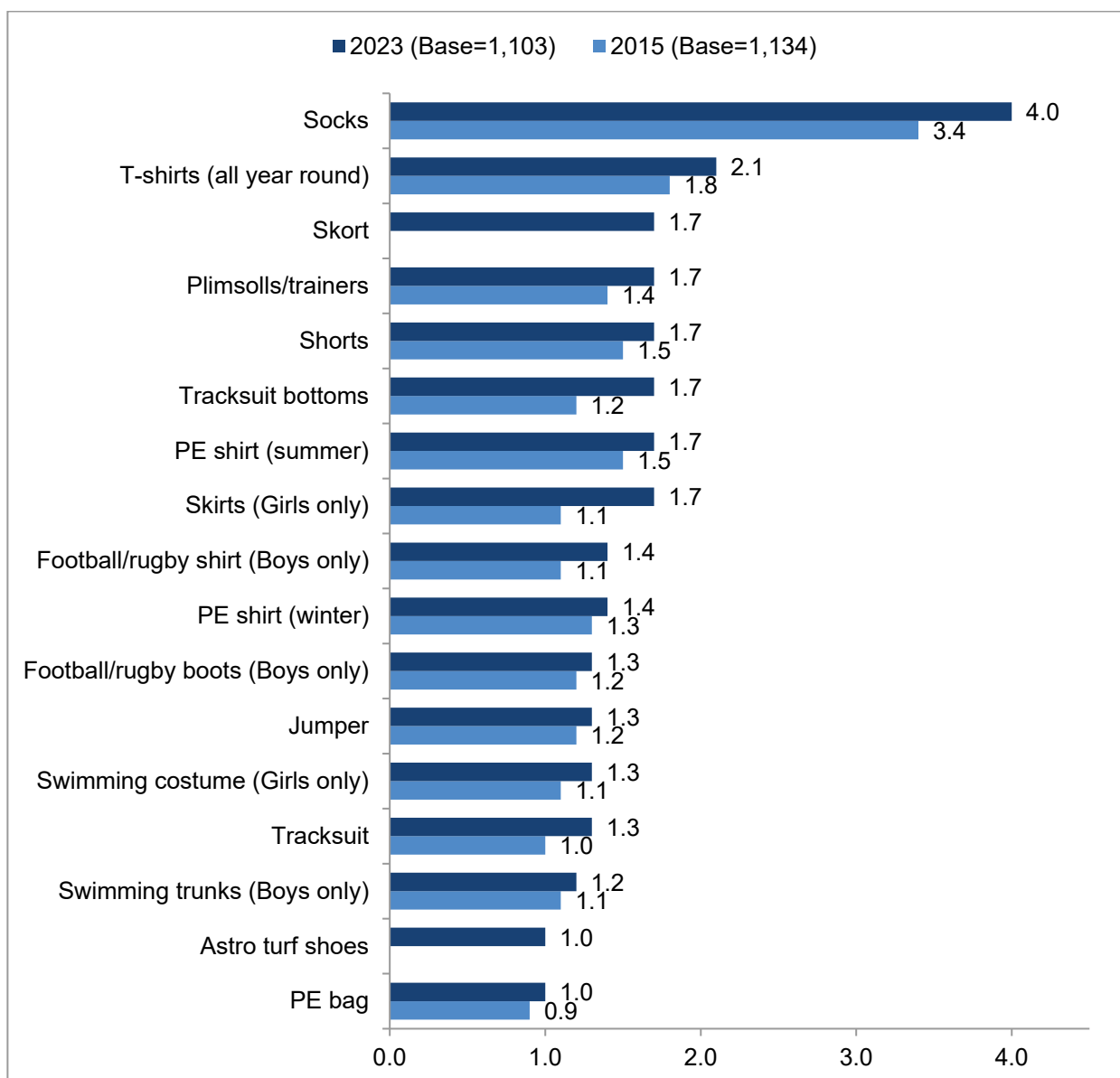
Figure 7 shows the average number of each item purchased for the 2023/24 school year to date, compared with those purchased in the 2014/15 school year over a similar period¹².

As noted regarding school uniform, in many instances parents/carers in this study have purchased slightly more items than those in 2015.

Again, it should be noted that, for the purposes of comparison with these previous studies, the figures for some items are based on parents/carers of female children only (skirts, skorts and swimming costume) and others based on parents/carers of male children only (football/rugby shirts and boots, and swimming trunks).

¹² The 2007 study covered a full school year, a longer period than the 2015 and 2023 studies, and thus, comparisons with this earlier study are inadvisable.

Figure 7 Average number of PE items bought in 2023 compared with 2015



Base= All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (Sample bases in parentheses, individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

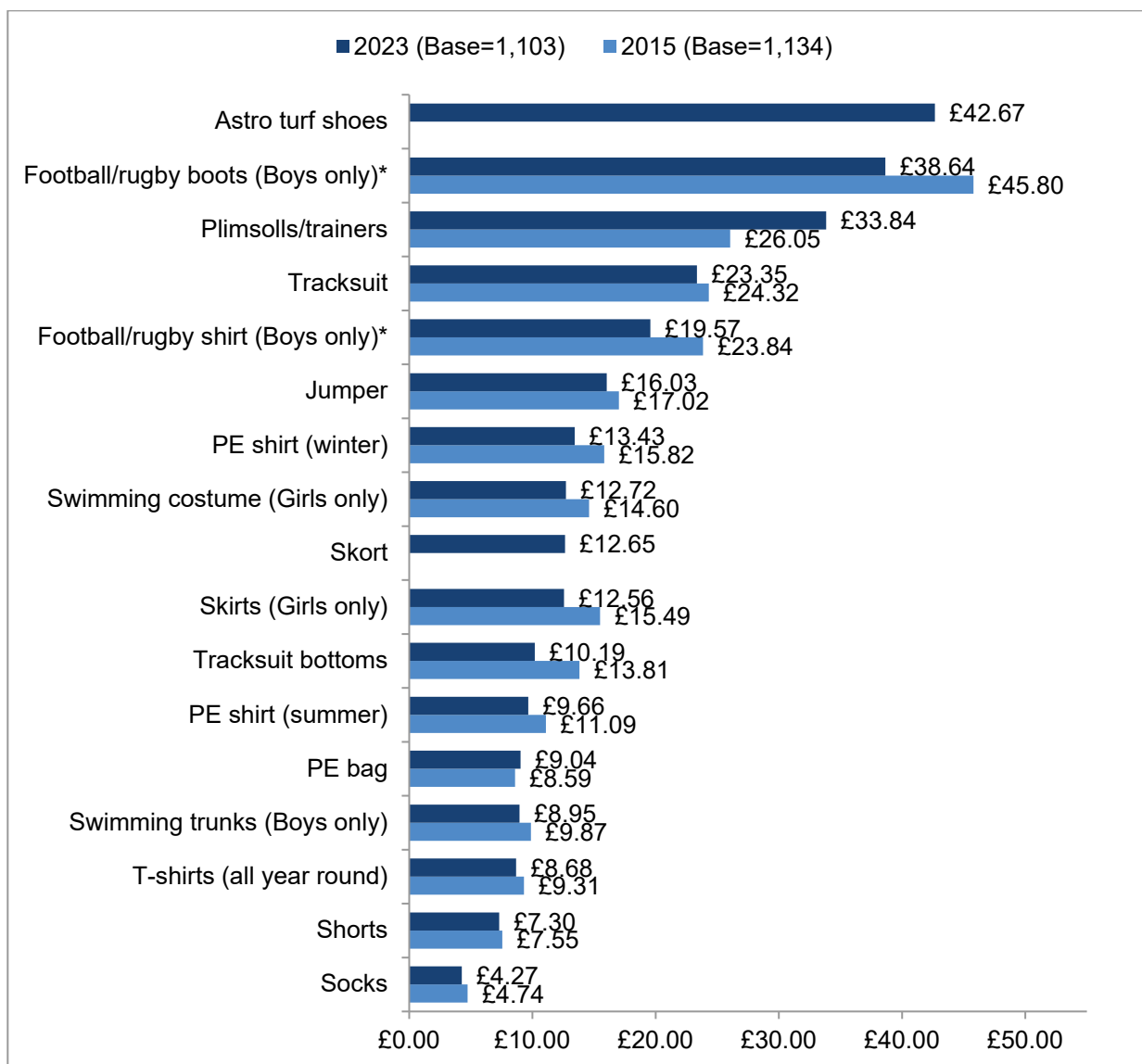
Note: Skorts and astro turf shoes are new to the 2023 survey

Cost of each item of PE kit

Figure 8 shows the average costs for one of each item of PE kit in the 2015 and 2023 studies. The 2015 figures were adjusted for inflation using the general CPI to allow a more direct comparison between the two sets of findings.

Once the 2015 costs had been adjusted for inflation, the average cost of all PE clothing items decreased in 2023 compared with 2015. There has, however, been a substantial increase in the average cost of plimsolls/trainers (but not football/rugby boots which have decreased), and a small increase in the average cost of PE bags.

Figure 8 Average costs of PE kit by item in 2023 compared with 2015 (adjusted for inflation)



Base= All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit, individual item bases vary

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: CPI 2015 to 2023 31.3% – Inflationary adjustment applied to 2015 figures

*Comparisons for football/rugby shirts and boots are based on boys only as 2015 only asked this of parents/carers discussing boys

By school phase, as shown in Table 14, against 2015 (with 2015 figures adjusted for inflation), the largest increase for parents/carers of children in primary schools was for plimsolls/trainers (average cost increased by a third), while parents/carers of children in secondary schools only experienced a small increase in this item. In both primary and secondary schools there were particularly large reductions in the cost of tracksuit bottoms, while among parents/carers of primary school children there had also been a large reduction in the cost of tracksuits. Parents/carers of children in secondary schools reported significant reductions in costs for winter PE shirts and swimming costumes (for girls), while the cost of swimming trunks (for boys) had increased.

As reported for uniform items. PE kit items were consistently more expensive for parents/carers of children in secondary school than for those with children at primary school.

Table 14 Average costs of PE kit by item and phase in 2023 v 2015 (adjusted for inflation)

	2015 Primary (n=568)	2023 Primary (n=651)	2015 Secondary (n=569)	2023 Secondary (n=452)
T-shirts (all year round)	£6.04	£5.83	£14.96	£13.43
PE shirt (summer)	£6.14	£5.86	£14.36	£13.17
PE shirt (winter)	£8.57	£7.42	£21.32	£16.65
Plimsolls/trainers	£15.52	£22.91	£42.24	£45.12
Shorts	£5.59	£4.90	£11.36	£11.34
PE bag	£7.44	£7.48	£12.33	£11.60
Socks	£2.39	£2.06	£6.03	£5.81
Tracksuit bottoms	£9.01	£7.44	£19.50	£15.60
Jumper	£11.59	£11.60	£22.27	£21.36
Tracksuit	£19.73	£16.35	£36.88	£37.48
Swimming costume	£11.21	£11.50	£19.35	£15.94
Swimming trunks	£9.16	£8.48	£9.19	£11.00

All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (sample bases in parentheses - individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: CPI 2015 to 2023 31.3% – Inflationary adjustment applied to 2015 figures

Costs for some items not included due to low subgroup bases

In 2023, parents/carers who were discussing their daughters, were asked whether they had been required to purchase a football/rugby shirt and football/rugby boots. These items were not included in the lists for girls in 2015. For that reason, the figures presented so far in this report for these items have been based on boys only. These items for girls are included in the overall expenditure figures for PE kit, but not in the figures when comparing with those from 2015. Among parents/carers discussing their daughters, 6% reported that they had been required to purchase football/rugby shirts for their daughters, increasing to 11% of those whose child was attending secondary school, compared with 3% of those whose child was attending primary school. In respect of football/rugby boots, 15% of parents/carers discussing their daughters reported that they

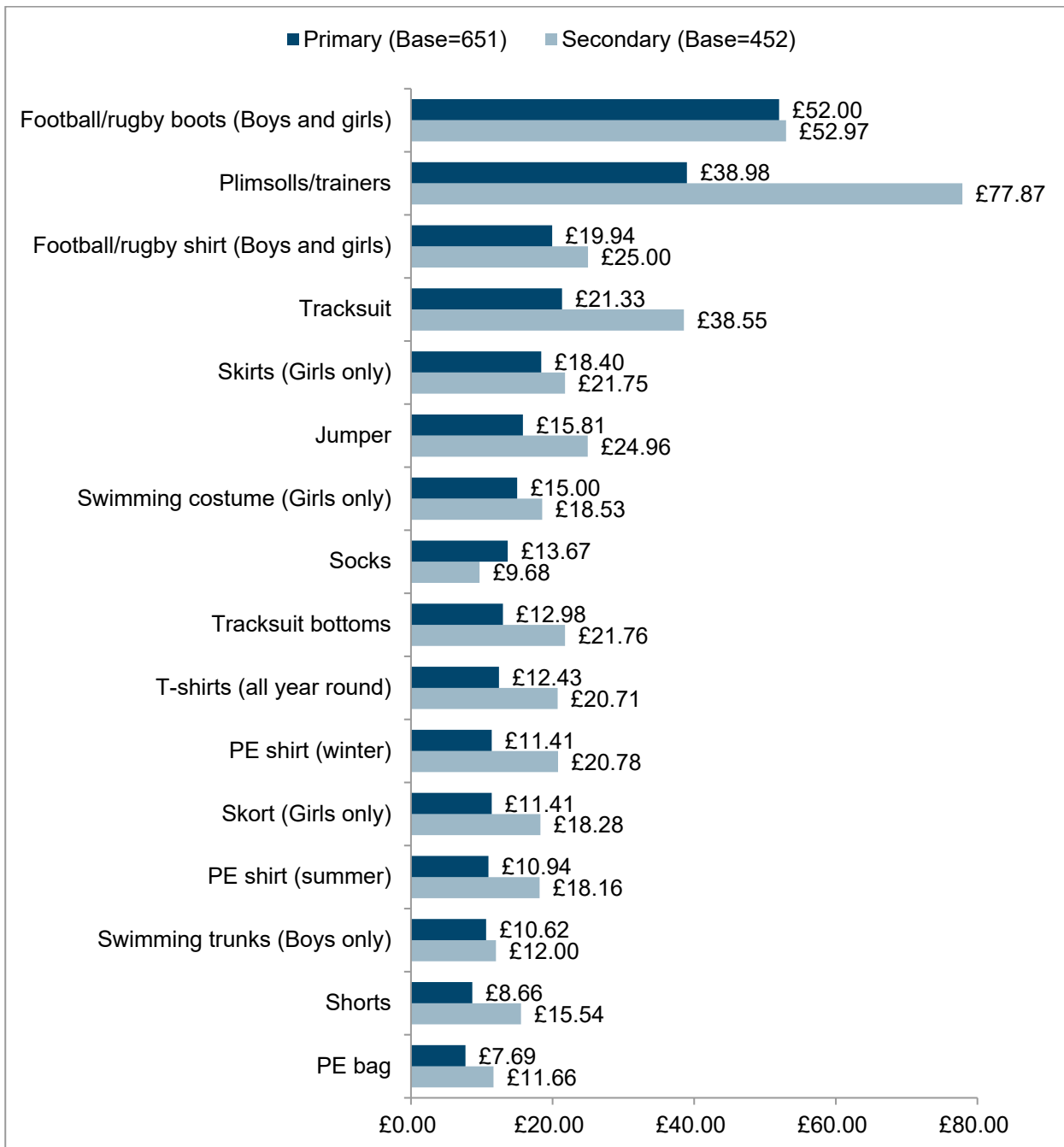
had been required to buy these, increasing to 24% in secondary schools, a much higher proportion than in primary schools (4%). Overall, parents/carers spent an average of £1.70 less on a single football/rugby shirt for girls than boys (£18.35 compared with £20.03, per item) and significantly less was spent on football/rugby boots for girls than boys (£34.80 compared with £41.04, per item).

Average expenditure on each type of item of PE kit

The average expenditure on PE kit items by parents/carers was calculated by taking the price for each item of PE kit and multiplying by the number of items bought. To reduce the burden on respondents during the interview, this information was obtained for up to four items only, but based on these responses, an overall average was calculated by imputing a value for those who required this item of PE kit but did not report the cost. Therefore, the average cost was calculated for each item based on individual responses to both questions and not simply obtained by multiplying the average cost of each item by the average number bought. The cost applies only to parents/carers who needed each item.

Average expenditure was again higher for all items of school PE kit for children in secondary school than for children in primary school for all but football/rugby boots, where it was at similar levels, and socks, where it was higher for children in primary school. Parents/carers of children in secondary schools on average spent twice as much on plimsolls/trainers than parents/carers of children in primary schools. This reflects the lower cost of plimsolls, which tend to only be required in primary schools, and more expensive trainers, bought by nearly all parents/carers of children in secondary schools. Overall, higher average expenditure for children in secondary schools compared with those in primary schools reflects higher costs per item reported for the secondary phase compared with the primary phase. This is summarised in Figure 9.

Figure 9 Average total expenditure on individual items of PE kit in 2023 by school phase



Base= All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (sample bases in parentheses - individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: Astroturf shoes not shown due to low sample base

Table 15 shows the average expenditure on each type of item by the parents who purchased that type of item. Average annual expenditure was highest (for parents who made that type of expenditure) for plimsolls/trainers (£58.00), which represented a significant increase on 2015 (£37.13 when adjusted for inflation), suggesting that trainers make up a greater proportion of that category than cheaper plimsolls compared with previously. Football/rugby boots were the second highest expenditure (£52.79) but did not increase significantly based on the inflation-adjusted value in 2015 (£51.85 in 2015). For the remaining items there was little change – generally +/-£1 at most. The exception to this is swimming trunks (boys) for which expenditure decreased by 24%.

Table 15 Average total expenditure on individual items of PE kit in 2023 compared with 2015 (adjusted for inflation)

	% needing item (n=1,103)	Average cost per item	Average number of items bought	2023 Average total expenditure	2015 Average total expenditure
T-shirts (all year round) Primary	98%	£5.83	2.34	£12.43	£12.42
T-shirts (all year round) Secondary	94%	£13.43	1.60	£20.70	£20.21
Plimsolls/trainers Primary	98%	£22.91	1.71	£38.98	£27.42
Plimsolls/trainers Secondary	92%	£45.12	1.62	£77.87	£46.35
Shorts Primary	83%	£4.90	1.80	£8.66	£9.55
Shorts Secondary	79%	£11.34	1.43	£15.54	£14.38
PE bag Primary	45%	£7.48	1.01	£7.69	£7.79
PE bag Secondary	38%	£11.60	1.03	£11.66	£10.19
Socks Primary	34%	£2.06	6.41	£13.67	£11.28
Socks Secondary	66%	£5.81	2.23	£9.68	£10.82
Tracksuit bottoms Primary	63%	£7.44	1.78	£12.98	£13.69
Tracksuit bottoms Secondary	51%	£15.60	1.44	£21.76	£19.75
Football/rugby boots (Boys only) Primary	12%	£47.00*	1.40	£52.00	£47.83
Football/rugby boots (Boys only) Secondary	43%	£39.47	1.35	£52.97	£52.68
Jumper Primary	47%	£11.60	1.41	£15.81	£17.48
Jumper Secondary	55%	£21.36	1.19	£24.96	£22.28

	% needing item (n=1,103)	Average cost per item	Average number of items bought	2023 Average total expenditure	2015 Average total expenditure
Football/rugby shirt (Boys only) Primary	7%	£14.46*	1.54	£21.46	£27.42
Football/rugby shirt (Boys only) Secondary	26%	£22.30	1.21	£26.75	£23.07
Swimming costume (Girls only) Primary	21%	£11.50	1.33	£15.00	£13.55
Swimming costume (Girls only) Secondary	9%	£15.94	1.15	£18.53	£18.30
Swimming trunks (Boys only) Primary	22%	£8.48	1.13	£10.62	£12.83
Swimming trunks (Boys only) Secondary	8%	£11.00	1.33	£12.00	£17.34
Tracksuit Primary	22%	£16.35	1.35	£21.33	£22.66
Tracksuit Secondary	20%	£37.48	1.14	£38.55	£29.04
PE shirt (winter) Primary	12%	£7.42*	1,60	£11.41*	£14.81
PE shirt (winter) Secondary	29%	£16.65	1.26	£20.78	£20.00
PE shirt (summer) Primary	18%	£5.86	1.93	310.94	£13.00
PE shirt (summer) Secondary	28%	£13.17	1.52	£18.16	£16.89
PE shirt (summer)Primary	12%	£7.15*	1.71	£11.41*	-
PE shirt (summer)Secondary	14%	£15.10	1.17	£18.28	-

	% needing item (n=1,103)	Average cost per item	Average number of items bought	2023 Average total expenditure	2015 Average total expenditure
Skirts (Girls only) Primary	4%	£10.00*	1.80	£18.40*	£16.04
Skirts (Girls only) Secondary	2%	£15.75	1.50	£21.75	£20.14

All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (sample bases in parentheses - individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: CPI 2015 to 2023 31.3% – Inflationary adjustment applied to 2015 figures

Total expenditure on PE kit to date in 2023

This section examines total expenditure on PE kit so far in 2023. As with school uniform expenditure, whilst broad comparisons are made in this section of the total expenditure on PE kit in 2023 and 2015, some caution is necessary as there are additional items included in 2023, namely skorts and astro turf shoes (the latter required by very few parents/carers however).

Table 16 provides a banded breakdown of total expenditure on PE kit by school phase. As in 2015, total expenditures were more likely to be higher for parents/carers with children in secondary school than for parents/carers of primary school children. There were no statistically significant differences in these bandings based on household income or eligibility for free school meals.

Table 16 Average total expenditure on all PE kit items in 2023

	Total (n=1,103)	Primary (n=651)	Secondary (n=452)
Less than £100	30%	42%	14%
£100-£149	34%	37%	30%
£150-£199	20%	13%	30%
£200-£249	9%	4%	17%
£250-£299	4%	2%	5%
£300+	2%	1%	4%
Mean expenditure	£139.70	£118.67	£169.98

All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (sample bases in parentheses - individual item bases vary)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: CPI 2015 to 2023 31.3% – Inflationary adjustment applied to 2015 figures

Table 17 shows the average total expenditure on school PE kit in 2023 to date. The corresponding figures from 2015 adjusted for inflation are also shown.

The average total expenditure on PE kit to date based on the items required in 2023 was compared with 2015, but the figure for 2023 was recalculated to account for the omission of football/rugby boots and football/rugby shirts for girls in 2015 (these were included for girls for the first time in 2023). Based on this like-for-like comparison, average total expenditure on PE kit has increased among parents/carers of primary school boys and girls, and among parents/carers of girls in secondary school, but there is no change for parents/carers of boys in secondary school.

Table 17 Average total expenditure on all PE kit items in 2023 v 2015 (adjusted for inflation) by gender and phase

	Total cost 2015	Total cost 2023
All parents/carers (n=1,103)	£115.11	£135.89*
Primary – boys (n=341)	£86.96	£120.10
Secondary – boys (n=223)	£171.37	£172.03
Primary – girls (n=310)	£82.19	£114.51
Secondary – girls (n=225)	£136.07	£153.93

All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (sample bases for 2023 in parentheses)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Note: CPI 2015 to 2023 31.3% – Inflationary adjustment applied to 2015 figures *2023 total figure adjusted to exclude girls' football/rugby boots and shirts not included in 2015

The overall increase in average total expenditure on PE kit in 2023 compared with 2015 is almost counter-intuitive, as it appears to contradict findings at a single item level. However, it is a consequence of parents/carers purchasing a higher number of some items than in 2015, and also reflects the impact of increases in total expenditure on some particularly high value items, most notably plimsolls/trainers and, among secondary school pupils, tracksuits.

By school type, whether the school was an academy or another state-funded school, there is little difference in total PE expenditure at primary-level (£120.00 in primary academies and £117.78 in primary maintained schools), while at secondary-level, total expenditure on PE kit is higher in maintained schools than academies (£184.08 in secondary maintained schools and £160.12 in secondary academies).

Focusing on expenditure of parents/carers of children in Year 7, when the move from primary to secondary school involves purchasing a new set of school uniform and PE items, there is no evidence that average total expenditure for PE kit for these children is higher than the average total expenditure for children in secondary school. On average,

these parents/carers reported spending £167.37 on PE kit to date in the school year 2023/24, compared with an average of £169.98 across the secondary school phase. This is a similar finding to that reported for school uniform and highlights the ongoing nature of expenditure on school uniform and PE kit.

Finally, average total expenditure on PE kit was analysed according to where parents/carers could buy it. Table 18 shows that average expenditure on PE kit was lowest where items can be purchased from anywhere (£113.19) and highest where all items had to be purchased from the designated shop and/or school (£175.66).

This trend is similar across both primary and secondary phases, although the average expenditure at either end of the scale regarding all items having to be purchased at a designated shop or from the school and all items being able to be sourced from anywhere, is dominated by phase. The majority of those reporting having to purchase all PE kit from a designated shop or from the school were parents/carers of secondary school children, while the majority of those reporting being able to purchase PE kit from anywhere were parents/carers of primary school children. Thus, the relative expenditure based on where items could be purchased both reflects and contributes to the differences in average cost of PE kit for parents/carers of children in primary school and secondary school.

Table 18 Average total expenditure on all school PE kit items in 2023 by where PE kit is available

	Total cost	Primary	Secondary
All parents/carers	£139.70 (n=1,103)	£118.67 (n=651)	£169.98 (n=452)
All items have to be purchased from designated shop or school	£175.66 (n=161)	£140.75 (n=38)	£186.44 (n=123)
Majority of items have to be purchased from designated shop or school and some can be purchased from elsewhere	£163.14 (n=219)	£135.52 (n=64)	£174.54 (n=155)
Some items have to be purchased from designated shop or school and some have to be purchased from elsewhere	£130.14 (n=479)	£119.60 (n=328)	£153.02 (n=151)
All items can be purchased from anywhere	£113.19 (n=243)	£108.61 (n=221)	£159.21 (n=22)

All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (sample bases in parentheses)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Overall average total expenditure on school uniform and PE kit in 2023

The average total expenditure on school uniform and PE kit combined based on the items required in 2023 was £381.92¹³. The differences by school phase and child gender are summarised in Table 19. It highlights higher levels of expenditure for children in secondary schools than in primary schools, and within both phases, higher levels of expenditure for girls than boys.

Table 19 Average total expenditure on all school uniform and PE kit items in 2023 by gender and phase

	Total cost 2023
All parents/carers (n=1,206)	£376.73
Primary – all (n=735)	£336.60
Secondary – all (n=471)	£439.34
Primary – boys (n=387)	£323.48
Secondary – boys (n=235)	£427.11
Primary – girls (n=347)	£351.61
Secondary – girls (n=232)	£451.75

All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (sample bases in parentheses)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

In comparing with 2015, we need to recalculate the figure for 2023 to adjust for the omission of football/rugby boots and football/rugby shirts for girls in 2015, which were included for girls for the first time in 2023. Based on this recalculation, the average total expenditure on all school uniform and PE kit items was £373.24, which compares with a higher 2015 inflation adjusted figure of £387.44, indicating a reduction in the cost of school uniform and PE kit since 2015.

This reduction is largely driven by a decrease in average total expenditure for parents/carers of children in secondary schools (£432.12 in 2023; £460.05 in 2015), as average total expenditure for parents/carers of primary schools has hardly changed (£335.51 in 2023; £334.80 in 2015).

¹³ To note: This is not calculated by summing the individual average expenditure on school uniforms and PE kit. It is calculated at a respondent case level.

Overall branding requirements for school uniform and PE kit in 2023

Table 20 combines the data for uniform and PE kit and shows the proportion of parents/carers who reported each number of branded items that were required. Nearly all parents/carers of secondary school age children reported the need for branding for at least one item (99%), and this is a significantly higher proportion than reported by parents/carers of primary school age children (81%).

In terms of the number of items that were required to be branded by school phase, 24% of parents/carers with primary school age children and 71% of parents/carers with secondary school age children cited the need for five or more branded items. The mean number of items that were required to be branded was higher in secondary schools than in primary schools (6.1 vs 3.4).

Table 20 The number of branded items (uniform and PE kit combined) by phase

Number of branded Items required	Total (n=1206)	Primary inc. reception (n=735)	Secondary (n=471)
None	12%	19%	1%
One	11%	16%	3%
Two	11%	15%	5%
Three	12%	14%	8%
Four	11%	11%	11%
Five	10%	7%	16%
Six	8%	4%	14%
Seven	7%	3%	13%
Eight	5%	3%	10%
Nine	4%	2%	7%
Ten of more	8%	6%	12%
Mean average	4.5	3.4	6.1

All parents/carers (sample bases in parentheses) Source: Survey of parents/carers

Financial assistance with uniform and PE kit

Financial hardship

One in eight parents/carers (12%) reported that they had suffered financial hardship as a result of purchasing their child's school uniform. This is a lower proportion than in 2015 (18%).

Parents/carers of children at secondary school were significantly more likely than those with a child at primary school to report experiencing financial hardship as a result of purchasing their child's school uniform (16% compared with 9%). The proportion was higher still (significantly) among parents/carers with a child in a secondary academy school (18% compared with 15% in maintained schools).

As in 2015, parents/carers were significantly less likely to report that they experienced financial hardship if the school allowed them to purchase all items of uniform from anywhere at 6%, compared with 16% of those who had to purchase all items from a designated shop or from school and 20% of those who had to purchase the majority of items from a designated shop or from school. The average total expenditure on uniform was 25% higher and the cost of PE kit was 55% higher for those who had to buy it all from a designated shop or from the school compared with those who were able to buy it from anywhere. Those who reported having experienced financial hardship paid on average 24% more than those who did not for their child's uniform and 29% more for their child's PE kit (£301.48 for uniform and £173.30 for PE kit for those who had experienced this, compared with £242.82 for uniform and £134.76 for PE kit for those who had not).

These findings bring together the impact of higher levels of expenditure required for uniform and PE kit for secondary school education compared with that required during the primary phase, and the impact of having to purchase items from a designated shop or from the school and not being able to look for cheaper alternatives. These factors are closely linked, with secondary schools more likely than primary schools to specify single sources of uniform and PE items. The result is that there is a higher likelihood of parents/carers finding it difficult to afford their child's school uniform during the secondary school years.

Parents/carers whose households had a lower annual income were more likely to report experiencing financial hardship (28% of those with an annual household income of less than £25,000 report this compared with 5% of those with household incomes of £25,000 or more). As one would expect, parents/carers whose child was eligible for free school meals were more likely than average to report having experienced financial hardship (23% of those eligible at Year 3 and above, or up to Year 2 and on a low income, compared with 8% of ineligible parents/carers).

As observed in 2015, essentially, financial hardship appears to be a combined function of low income and high uniform costs, the latter influenced by school policies that dictate that all or most uniform items have to be bought from a designated shop or from a school and/or whether a child is in primary or secondary school and the types of items that parents/carers have to buy.

Types of assistance accessed

The guidance states that *local authorities and trusts might choose to provide school clothing grants to help with the cost of school clothing in cases of financial hardship.*

In some cases, individual schools may run their own schemes to provide assistance, particularly for supporting new intakes of pupils entering the school or in the event of substantial changes to the existing uniform.

When asked if they had received any financial help or assistance when buying school uniform for their child (including Local Authority grants, charity grants, funds from school, or funds from friends/family) 7% of parents/carers reported that they had received help, compared with 3% in 2015 and 4% in 2007. The proportion that did not receive financial assistance because there was none available was lower than in 2015 (37%, compared with 58%). However, only 21% of parents/carers responding with this option (8% of all) had reported experiencing financial hardship because of purchasing uniform items, suggesting that, for most, the fact that there was no assistance available was not an issue.

While 18% of parents/carers who had experienced financial hardship had received some assistance – mainly through a Local Authority grant (6%) - the remainder had not (82%) and two-thirds of parents/carers in these circumstances (67%) reported that no financial assistance had been made available.

Parents/carers eligible for free school meals or at the lower end of the household income scale were more likely to have received financial assistance, but also more likely to report that no financial assistance was available, perhaps due to a lack of awareness of what there was available. Those at the higher end of the household income scale were more likely to report no financial assistance because they did not need it and it is probable that, owing to a lack of need for it, that they were not able to comment on whether it was available or not.

Among lower income households, the majority (88%) reported receiving no financial help or assistance when buying school uniform for their child, and where assistance was provided it was just as likely to have come from school funds as it was from a Local Authority grant (see Table 21).

Table 21 Financial help or assistance with buying school uniform received, by household income and whether eligible for free school meals (FSM)

	Total (n=1,206)	<25k income (n=323)	£25k+ income (n=815)	FSM Y3 or Recep/Y1/Y2 and low come (n=452)	Not FSM eligible (n=741)
No financial assistance – I don't need any	56%	28%	68%	33%	65%
No financial assistance – none available	37%	59%	28%	51%	32%
Local Authority Grant	1%	3%	0%	3%	<0.5%
Charity grant	1%	2%	0%	2%	<0.5%
Friends/family	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Funds from school	2%	4%	1%	6%	<0.5%
Other	1%	2%	1%	3%	1%
None received	93%	88%	96%	84%	97%

All parents/carers where child's school requires PE kit (sample bases in parentheses)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Three-quarters of those who had received financial help in the form of grants from an organisation were eligible for free school meals (76%), while the proportion was even higher for those who received funds from the school (83%). Those who were not eligible for free school meals were more likely to have received support from friends/family (58% of all those who received financial help).

There were no differences in likelihood of receiving financial support according to phase or type of school attended by the child, nor were there any differences based on whether parents/carers had to purchase items from a designated shop or from school or whether they could purchase from anywhere.

While overall two-thirds of parents/carers (65%) reported that their child's school had put arrangements in place for parents to purchase second-hand uniform, these opportunities were less likely to be available to parents/carers who reported experiencing financial hardship than those who did not (51% compared with 67%). There is no reason why schools attended by children of less well-off families should be less likely to offer

opportunities to buy second-hand uniform. The fact that these parents/carers were more likely to report that this option was not available may suggest that they were less likely to be aware of the provision. It is possible that parents/carers in less well-off families are harder to reach than those in more affluent households.

The guidance states that *'no pupil should be discouraged from participating in any aspect of school life, such as interschool competitions, because of the cost of additional uniform requirements.'* The 2023 survey determined that 8% of parents/carers reported having been discouraged from applying to a particular school due to the cost of the school uniform, which, even at this low level, is deemed unacceptable by the guidance and is an increase from 3% in 2015. Furthermore, the proportion of parents/carers reporting that they have been discouraged from applying to a particular school due to school uniform costs was higher among those reporting financial hardship as a result of purchasing uniform items (26%) as well as amongst parents/carers with an annual household income of below £25,000 (15%). It was also significantly higher than average amongst parents/carers eligible for free school meals (13%).

Changes to school uniform and PE kit

The guidance states that *schools should engage with parents and pupils when they are developing their school uniform policy.*

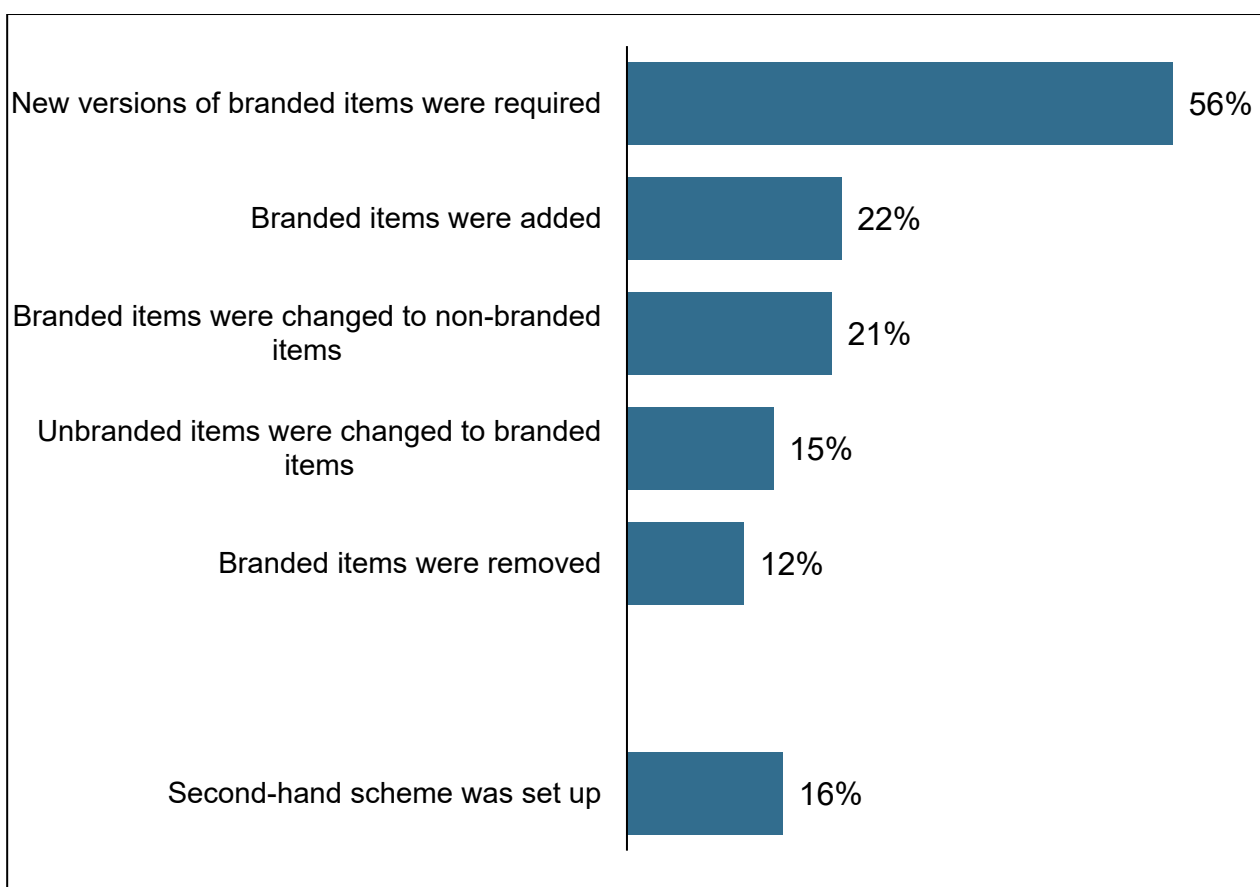
Parents were asked if there had been any changes to their child's uniform or PE kit in the last 2 years (or less if the child had not been in the school that long).

One in six parents/carers (18%) reported their child's school making changes to its school uniform during this period. This was more likely to be the case where the child attended a secondary school academy than a maintained secondary or a primary school (whether an academy or not) (27% compared with 20% and 15% respectively). In fewer than half the cases where a school had made changes to the school uniform, parents/carers reported being consulted (43%), and this varied little by phase or type of school.

In terms of uniform changes made, parents/carers may have experienced more than one of the following: additional branded items; fewer branded items; revisions to existing branded items. The 18% of parents who reported uniform changes were more likely to report additional, rather than fewer, branded items; 22% reported branded items being added and 15% reported unbranded items changed to branded items, which compared with 21% who reported branded items had been changed to unbranded items and 12% who reported that branded items had been removed. More than half of parents/carers reported that new versions of branded items had been required (56% of those reporting uniform changes).

These changes varied little by school phase and type, although a higher proportion of parents/carers whose child attended a secondary academy than those whose child attended a secondary maintained school mentioned new versions of branded items required (66% compared with 54%). This proportion was also higher in primary academies than in primary maintained schools (55% compared with 47%). These differences within school phase were not statistically significant, although the figure re: secondary academies was significantly higher than the sample average overall. Speculatively, schools becoming academies may have driven the requirement for new versions of branded items.

Figure 10 Changes made to uniforms within schools



Base= Where changes have been made (sample base = 222) – multiple responses allowed

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Changes made to uniforms were more likely than not to have increased the cost of the uniform overall: 49% of parents/carers who had experienced changes in uniform within their children’s schools reported an increase in cost, compared with 17% that reported a cost reduction. This was based on the impact on the cost overall rather than the amount they had spent on the uniform. A third of parents/carers who had experienced changes (33%) reported little or no difference in the cost of the uniform overall.

While the only significant difference by school phase and type was that more parents/carers of children in primary schools where changes had been made reported a reduction in cost compared with those with children in secondary schools (22% compared with 12%), parents/carers of children in secondary academies were slightly more likely to report an increase in the cost of the uniform overall than those in maintained schools (56% compared with 46%).

Parents/carers who had experienced financial hardship and who had also experienced changes to the uniform were significantly more likely to report an increase in the cost of the uniform as a result of changes made than those not experiencing it (68% compared with 45%), which suggests that it may be somewhat about the perception of the impact, but also that it might have exacerbated difficulties these parent/carers have had in affording the uniform and even pushed some into financial hardship in this respect.

Happiness with costs of uniform

Although more than half of parents/carers (56%) were 'very happy' or 'quite happy' with the cost of school uniform and PE kit in 2023, this represents a significant decrease since 2015 (69%) and continues a longer-term downward trend (75% in 2007). Focusing on those who were 'very happy' with the costs of uniform and PE kit, this has declined from 21% in 2007 to 16% in 2015 to 12% in 2023. A further 44% were quite happy with the costs, but this too is significantly lower than in 2015 (53%) and 2007 (59%).

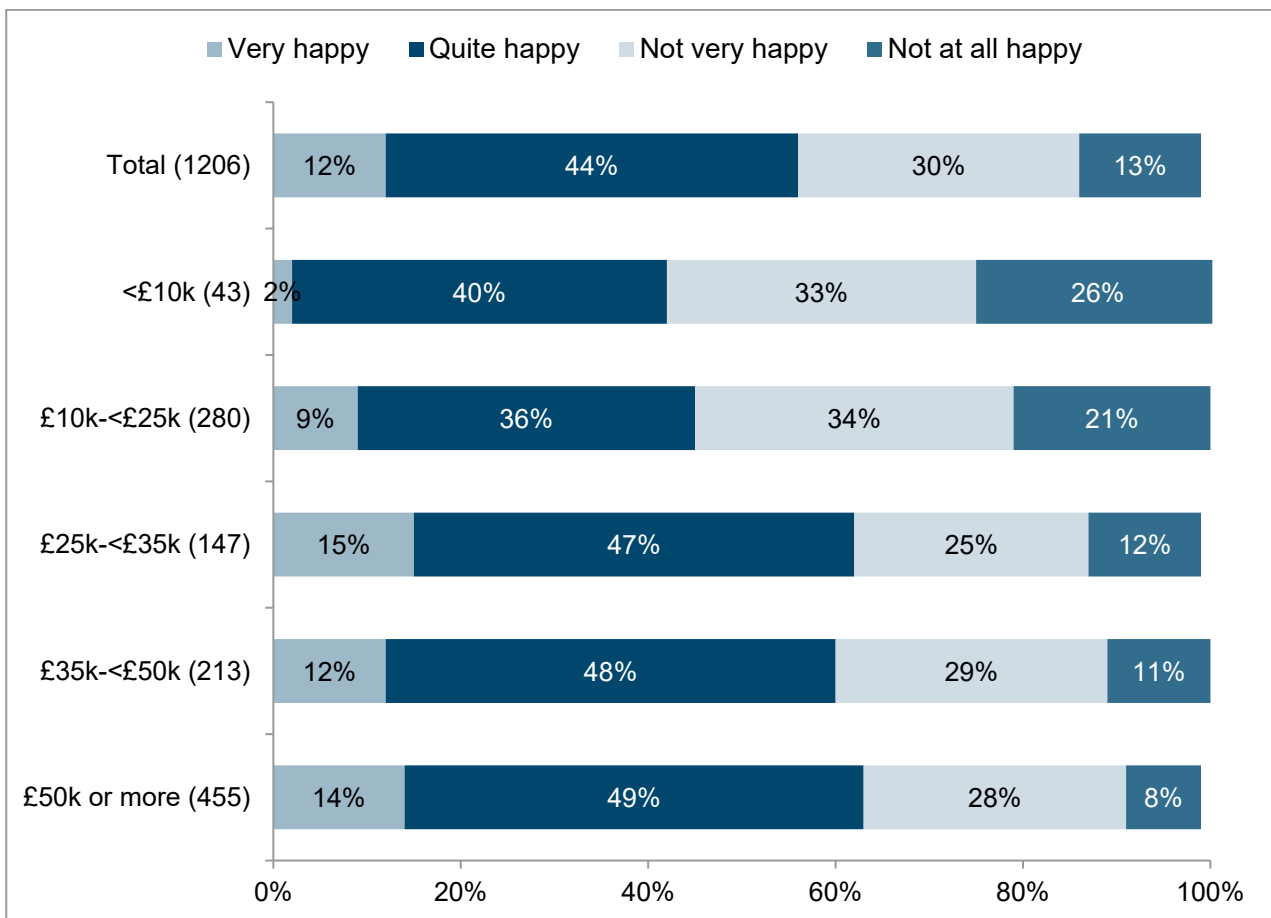
Lower levels of satisfaction do not reflect the fact that most items of uniform and PE kit are cheaper relative to (inflation-adjusted) prices in 2015. Uniform costs are undoubtedly assessed in the context of other costs that are incurred by families and what is happening regarding these. Cost of living increases in the last two years particularly will have squeezed family budgets and even without price increases on uniform items, the cost of uniform and PE kit will be seen as less affordable by some. Furthermore, although average costs for school uniforms have decreased against 2015, this is against costs in 2015 that have been adjusted for inflation. Parents/carers will not be adjusting for inflation when they look back at what they were paying for items two or three or more years ago.

In 2023, 30% of parents/carers were 'not very happy' with the costs of uniform and PE kit, which compares with 22% in 2015, while one in eight (13%) were 'not at all happy', also a higher proportion than in 2015 (8%).

Parents/carers of children in primary school were more likely to be happy with the costs than those who have children in secondary school (69% compared with 37%). There has been a larger decrease among parents of children in secondary school than among those in primary school compared with 2015 (58% and 77% respectively in 2015).

As one would expect, happiness with costs varied by household income, with wealthier families being more likely to be happy with the costs. Figure 11 shows happiness with the costs of uniform and PE kit for all parents/carers and for different household income groups. Lower income families (those with household incomes of less than £25,000) were particularly likely to be *unhappy* with the costs of uniform and PE kit compared with those with higher household incomes (56% per cent of the former were unhappy compared with 37% of the latter).

Figure 11 Happiness with costs of school uniform and PE kit by household income



Base= All parents/carers where child's school requires uniform or PE kit (sample bases in parentheses)

Source: Survey of parents/carers

Parents/carers who were less well-off, as indicated by eligibility for free school meals and reports of financial hardship because of purchasing school uniform items, were less likely to be happy with the cost of school uniform and PE kit. Of those eligible for free school meals, 47% were happy with the cost, compared with 57% of those who were ineligible for free school meals, while 13% of parents/carers who had reported experiencing financial hardship as a result of purchasing uniform items were happy with uniform costs, compared with 52% of parents/carers who had not experienced financial hardship

because of this. That they experienced these financial difficulties would undoubtedly be a contributory factor to why they would be unhappy with the cost of school uniform and PE kit.

These patterns are evident among the separate primary and secondary school groups of parents/carers to a consistent degree, but these patterns notwithstanding, the most significant factor influencing satisfaction with uniform and PE kit costs is whether the child attends primary or secondary school. This is likely to reflect the fact that, on average, uniform and PE kit costs for parents/carers with a child in secondary school are, on average, 50% more than for those with a child in primary school.

Conclusions

Nearly all children in schools, from reception to Year 11, are required to wear school uniform, while the vast majority are required to have a PE kit to a certain specification. The statutory guidance on the Cost of school uniforms (published in November 2021) was intended to ensure that these requirements are not onerous for parents/carers, and that the cost of school uniforms and PE kit is reasonable, secures value for money, and is not an obstacle to children attending the school of their choice. The 2023 survey findings suggest that good progress is being made in respect of the aims of the guidance.

Compared with 2015 expenditure (when adjusted for inflation over the last eight years) the cost of most items and overall average expenditure on school uniforms has decreased. However, average expenditure on PE kit has increased. This is due, for the most part, to more expensive trainers chosen over cheaper plimsolls in primary schools, and some parents/carers purchasing trainers at the higher end of the potential cost range over cheaper alternatives within both primary and secondary schools.

Compared with 2015, parents/carers were more likely to report that they were able to purchase school uniform and PE kit from somewhere other than from designated shops and/or from the school, and this has helped to bring expenditure down, as average expenditure was lower among parents/carers who reported that they were not tied to single sources. However, it is noted that the changes schools are making to uniform policies are not necessarily leading to a reduction in the overall number of branded items required.

The 2023 survey findings report a significant increase since 2015 in parents/carers reporting that their child's school makes second-hand school uniforms available for purchase. This represents an improvement, but there is some way to go in terms of reflecting the guidance which states that all schools should provide this facility - particularly within secondary schools. There may be a lack of awareness of this option among parents/carers rather than a failure of some schools to provide it, but nevertheless it suggests that schools should be doing more to make second-hand school uniforms available or promoting the fact that they provide this facility.

Whilst there is clear evidence that the financial demands on parents/carers with respect to school uniform requirements are lessening, and that other indicators which are the focus of the statutory guidance are moving in the right direction, the 2023 survey also shows that parents (unsurprisingly given the currently economic climate), remain concerned about the cost of school uniform. The findings suggest that achieving significant change within schools in this area remains a work in progress.

Appendix 1: Cost calculations

Cost calculations were applied using the same approach as that undertaken in the Cost of School 2007 and the Cost of School Uniform 2015 studies in order to ensure comparability of findings.

As in the previous studies, parents/carers were asked in a telephone interview whether a particular item of uniform or PE kit had been required. Then, for a maximum of four items (i.e., four items for school uniform and four for PE kit) they were asked what the cost per item was and how many they had bought so far in 2023/24. The overall expenditure on each item was then calculated by multiplying the number bought by the price for each case, and an average price calculated for each item.

As noted in previous studies, there are some limitations with this approach as it relies on respondent recall of purchases. Time constraints on the project in both studies dictated a telephone approach which, despite the reliance on the ability of parents/carers to recall, is an efficient and effective way of collecting the data. It should be noted that, due to the timing of the 2015 and 2023 surveys, there was less elapsed time between parents'/carers' purchases at the start of the current school year and the survey, than in the previous 2007 survey, which asked parents/carers to think back over a full school year. In the 2015 and 2023 surveys parents/carers only reported current school year purchases to date and did not consider any items that may be purchased during the remainder of the school year. However, comparisons with the 2007 survey show that when the average number of items purchased is compared, these are similar for each item. It may be concluded that parents/carers buy most items at the start of the school year and, therefore, reasonable comparisons of the total costs of school uniform and PE kit can be made between the three studies, albeit with this caveat regarding survey timings.

The fact that each respondent was only asked for four randomly chosen items (to reduce the time burden on respondents) meant it was not possible to compile a complete picture of the expenditure of each parent/carer. Therefore, when total expenditure on uniform or PE kit was calculated, in cases where an item of uniform or PE kit was purchased but no cost was given (each respondent being asked the cost of a maximum of four items only) then an imputed cost was used – the mean cost for that item (based on all those who did answer the question). Whilst this approach is not exact, it allows the most accurate cost estimates within the interview length and other methodological constraints of the survey.

Throughout the report costs and expenditures are compared with those reported by the previous 2015 study only. It was felt that 2007 was too long ago to provide a meaningful comparison. To enable valid comparisons, figures from the 2015 study have been adjusted to account for inflation. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) has been used to make the adjustment. Using the Bank of England's inflation calculator (<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>) the general CPI rate between September 2015 and September 2023 (selected to be in-line with the beginning of the school year) was 31.3%. This percentage was applied to 2015 financial figures to adjust for inflation and provide a like-for-like comparison.

The combined uniform and PE kit average expenditure is not calculated by summing the individual average expenditure on school uniforms and PE kit. It is calculated at a respondent case level in order to take into account the different sample bases for each, as not all parents/carers are required to provide either school uniform or PE kit or both.

Appendix 2: Weighting considerations and profile data

Weighting considerations

We need the sample of parents/carers reached to be representative of the population as a whole so that the findings can be relied upon to reflect experiences of all parents/carers of children aged between 4 and 16. Is there a level of non-response in certain groups that suggest the need for weighting the data? We do not have an exact population profile of parents/carers with children aged between 4 and 16 available so must therefore look to other variables to determine how representative the sample is and whether we need to adjust the data through the weighting process.

In 2015, the data was weighted by phase i.e. the number of pupils within primary and secondary schools. The data from the survey sample data was compared to the known proportions of children in primary and secondary schools and it was determined that there was sufficient divergence between sample and population to justify weighting on this characteristic (Primary – 51%; Secondary – 49% versus Primary – 58%; Secondary – 42%). Thus, the following design weights were applied to ensure that the sample proportions of parents/carers of children in primary and secondary schools reflected actual population proportions: Primary – 1.1354; Secondary – 0.8586.

In 2023, there is less divergence between sample and population with regard to this variable. The sample achieved is Primary – 61%; Secondary – 39%, compared with the 2022/23 population Primary – 59%; Secondary – 41%. The weighting factors that would be applied on this basis would be: Primary – 0.9672; Secondary - 1.05128. Although the adjustment would be slight, it may be advisable to apply these weighting factors in order to be consistent with the 2015 approach.

Examining other variables, data from the national Population Census, the Labour Force Survey, and the previous studies in 2007 and 2015 are potential sources of data to determine whether any other weights should be applied to adjust for potential non-response.

The variables that might relevant include:

- Number of financially dependent children in household
- Ethnicity
- Working status
- Region
- Eligibility for free school meals

In 2023 the profile of respondents and respondent households achieved within the survey sample was very close to national population and workforce profiles on these dimensions. Non-response weighting was therefore not necessary on the grounds of significant sample/population divergences in these respects.

To allow meaningful comparisons with the 2007 and 2015 studies it is also important that the 2023 sample profile should not differ to any substantial degree from these previous samples. Should this be the case, it would be inadvisable to pursue a weighting strategy that involving adjusting any variables other than phase.

Sample profile

The following table shows the unweighted profile of respondents to the 2023 parents/carers survey compared with the relevant figures from the 2007 and 2015 surveys. It highlights a higher proportion of single child (at least children who are financially dependent) households in 2023, and a higher representation of ethnic minority groups, particularly those from Asian backgrounds, in the 2023 sample. The working status profile (based on broad categories working/not working) in 2023 is closer to 2007 than 2015, although the decision was taken in 2015 not to weight by this variable, suggesting that it should not be used to weight the data in 2023 as this would constitute an inconsistent approach. While no data is available for a regional breakdown of the parents/carers sample in 2007, 2023 data matches that of 2015 very closely. This is because region was a quota variable applied during fieldwork.

Compared with 2007 and 2015, household income levels were higher in 2023. The comparisons are made on the basis of where parents/carers gave a response (don't know/refused removed from the calculations). While CPI (the chosen measure of inflation) between 2015 and 2023 was 31.3%, the increase in mean income has not matched this, and ONS statistics¹⁴ suggest that between 2015 and 2023, mean income in the UK has increased by 3.2%. The survey sample, however, suggests a greater increase in household income than this. However, it is important to note that the survey data is household income and not individual income (which the ONS measures). The 2023 survey sample also indicates a higher proportion of parents/carers who were working than in 2015, and a higher proportion that were working full time hours. Thus, household incomes may have increased as a result of more parents/carers working and also working more hours, perhaps to manage the higher cost of living reflected in the CPI.

¹⁴

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/householddisposableincomeandinequality/financialyearending2022#average-household-income-data>

Table 22 Comparisons of sample profiles between 2007, 2015 and 2023 - Income

Household income	% in 2007 study	% in 2015 study	% in 2023 study
-	-	-	Bandings have changed
Less than £3,000	2%	2%	-
£3,000 - £5,999	4%	4%	-
£6,000 - £9,999	7%	10%	4%*
£10,000 - £14,999	11%	15%	7%
£15,000 - £24,999	18%	37%	17%
£25,000 - £34,999	18%	33%	13%
£35,000 - £49,999	21%	14%	20%
£50,000 or more	19%	14%	40%
Don't know/Refused			

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents

*The figure for 2023 is a combined figure for all values under £10,000

Table 23 Comparisons of sample profiles between 2007, 2015 and 2023 – Financial dependents

Number of financially dependent children (under 18) in household	% in 2007 study	% in 2015 study	% in 2023 study
1	29%	30%	31%
2	49%	44%	47%
3	17%	18%	16%
4	4%	6%	4%
5	1%	2%	<0.5%
6+	0.3%	1%	<0.5%

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents

Table 24 Comparisons of sample profiles between 2007, 2015 and 2023 – Ethnicity

Ethnic origin of respondent	% in 2007 study	% in 2015 study	% in 2023 study
White	89%	84%	74%
Black or Black British	3%	4%	5%
Asian or Asian British	4%	8%	14%
Mixed	1%	2%	5%
Any other ethnic group	2%	1%	2%

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents

Table 25 Comparisons of sample profiles between 2007, 2015 and 2023 – Working status

Working status of respondent	% in 2007 study	% in 2015 study	% in 2023 study
Working	79%	68%	78%
Retired	1%	1%	<0.5%
Other	21%	31%	20%

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents

Table 26 Comparisons of sample profiles between 2007, 2015 and 2023 – Working hours

Working hours of respondent	% in 2007 study	% in 2015 study	% in 2023 study
Thirty or more (full time) per week	-	32%	51%
Less than thirty hours per week	-	35%	27%

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents

Table 27 Comparisons of sample profiles between 2007, 2015 and 2023 – Region

Region	% in 2007 study	% in 2015 study	% in 2023 study
East Midlands	-	9%	8%
East of England	-	10%	11%
London	-	16%	16%
North East	-	5%	5%
North West	-	12%	13%
South East	-	15%	17%
South West	-	11%	9%
West Midlands	-	11%	11%
Yorkshire and Humber	-	11%	10%

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents

Table 28 Comparisons of sample profiles by phase between 2015 and 2023 – Household income

Household income	% Primary 2015	% Secondary 2015	% Primary 2023	% Secondary 2023
Less than £3,000	2%	2%	-	-
£3,000 - £5,999	5%	2%	-	-
£6,000 - £9,999	10%	8%	3%*	5%*
£10,000 - £14,999	18%	11%	8%	7%
£15,000 - £24,999	22%	23%	16%	18%
£25,000 - £34,999	16%	22%	13%	13%
£35,000 - £49,999	14%	14%	18%	20%
£50,000 or more	14%	14%	41%	37%

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents

*The figure for 2023 is a combined figure for all values under £10,000

**Table 29 Comparisons of sample profiles by phase between 2015 and 2023 –
Financial dependency**

Number of financially dependent children (under 18) in household	% Primary 2015	% Secondary 2015	% Primary 2023	% Secondary 2023
1	17%	43%	28%	37%
2	46%	40%	50%	43%
3	24%	11%	18%	14%
4	8%	3%	4%	5%
5	2%	2%	<0.5%	<0.5%
6+	1%	1%	<0.5%	<0.5%

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents

**Table 30 Comparisons of sample profiles by phase between 2015 and 2023 –
Ethnicity**

Ethnic origin of respondent	% Primary 2015	% Secondary 2015	% Primary 2023	% Secondary 2023
White	81%	86%	73%	77%
Black or Black British	4%	4%	4%	5%
Asian or Asian British	11%	5%	15%	13%
Mixed	2%	1%	6%	3%
Any other ethnic group	2%	1%	2%	1%

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents

**Table 31 Comparisons of sample profiles by phase between 2015 and 2023 –
Working status**

Working status of respondent	% Primary 2015	% Secondary 2015	% Primary 2023	% Secondary 2023
Working	63%	73%	79%	78%
Retired	*%	2%	<0.5%	1%
Other	36%	25%	20%	21%

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents

**Table 32 Comparisons of sample profiles by phase between 2015 and 2023 –
Working hours**

Working hours of respondent	% Primary 2015	% Secondary 2015	% Primary 2023	% Secondary 2023
Thirty or more (full time) per week	29%	37%	50%	54%
Less than thirty hours per week	34%	36%	29%	24%

Base: All respondents (2023 = 1,210; 2015 = 1,200), Source: Survey of parents



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