

April 2024 Policy Briefing

School clothing grant and school uniform policies in Aberdeen

Dr Rachel Shanks and Nneoma Dike

About the Research

School handbooks and websites have been analysed to find out about school uniform, dress code and appearance policies in publicly funded schools in Scotland. In 2023 school uniform banks completed an online survey. Freedom of Information requests have gathered information from all 32 local authorities on school clothing grants.

About this briefing

In this short report we provide results from Aberdeen City schools and the local authority, covering the level of school clothing grant, eligibility criteria, automatic payment, rollover, application process, information provided to families about school clothing grant and more.

Key Findings from Aberdeen City

- The amount of the school clothing grant is not provided on the relevant [Aberdeen City Council webpage](#)
- Less children are receiving clothing grant in Aberdeen than the Scottish Government predicts are eligible, with a difference of 21.7% in 2022/23 and 28.9% in 2021/22.
- The Council could increase applications for school clothing grant by ensuring that all school websites and handbooks include up-to-date information on clothing grant, in particular the amount, eligibility criteria and a link to the Council's application webpage.
- Aberdeen City Council has always set its school clothing grant at the national minimum, however, in 2023/24 an extra £20 was paid to every family receiving the grant.
- While at least 8 local authorities exclude Education Maintenance Allowance recipients from receiving school clothing grant Aberdeen City Council does not.
- The Council could make automatic payments of school clothing grant to certain eligible families as 12 local authorities already do this.ⁱ
- There is no roll over of school clothing grant from one school year to the next and so families must make a new application every year.
- Information is not collected about applicants in relation to the Scottish Government's 6 priority family groupingsⁱⁱ (lone parent, minority ethnic, disabled adult or child, younger mother (under 25), child under one, and larger families (three or more children)).

School Clothing Grant

School clothing grant was paid for 4722 children in Aberdeen in 2022/23. This was a 14.6% increase from 2021/22.ⁱⁱⁱ However, Scottish Government forecast that 6031 children were eligible in 2022-23 and 5882 in 2021/22.^{iv} This is a difference of 1309 in 2022/23 (21.7%) and 1760 in 2021/22 (28.9%).

Automatic Payment of Clothing Grant

In 2023-24 Aberdeen City Council was due to introduce the automatic payment of school clothing grant, e.g. when a family receives housing benefit, instead from April 2024 families who receive these benefits will be contacted and asked to apply for the clothing grant. Twelve local authorities currently make automatic payments.

Level of Clothing Grant

Aberdeen school clothing grant has always been set at the national minimum rate. It is one of 18 local authorities to set the grant at the minimum amount. However, in 2022/23 an extra £20 was paid by ACC to every family in receipt of the grant.

Rollover of payment to next year

Aberdeen City Council does not rollover payment from one school year to the next, instead families must apply for the grant every year in April. In Scotland 7 local authorities automatically roll over school clothing grant.

Eligibility Criteria

These are the same as for Free School Meals. Some Councils have more generous criteria for clothing grant, e.g., allowing families to have a slightly higher income.

Six priority family groups

The 6 priority family groups may be under-represented in applications, but this information is not collected, thus hindering the Child Poverty Action Plan process.

School Handbooks Information

3 (out of 11) secondary school handbooks have clothing grant information and 1 provides a weblink to apply. 29 (out of 40) primary school handbooks have this information and 17 have a link. 8 primaries have no handbook on their website.

Council Website Information

The Aberdeen City Council webpage for free school meals and school clothing grant does not state how much the school clothing grant is set at.

Young People's Opinions

In 2022, the Scottish Government held a consultation on school uniform and received 2751 responses. As part of the consultation, children consulted by the Children's Parliament stated they wanted their school clothing to be cheap and comfortable.^v

School Clothing and Uniform and School Handbooks

- A national minimum school clothing grant was introduced in 2018 and set at £100 for all pupils. The grant is now set at different amounts for primary (£120) and secondary (£150) pupils.^{vi} This is due to be increased in line with inflation in 2024.^{vii}
- National non-statutory guidance is due to be issued for the first time in Scotland in 2024. This will provide guidelines for schools in relation to the affordability, equality, diversity and inclusion and sustainability of school uniform.
- The Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 make it clear that School Handbooks should be available on a website which the local authority uses to provide information to the public. This can be the school's own website.

To reference this briefing: Shanks, R. and Dike, N. (2024) *School clothing grant and school uniform policies in Aberdeen*. Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen.

For more information, please contact Dr Rachel Shanks at r.k.shanks@abdn.ac.uk

ⁱ 10 local authorities use Housing Benefit and/or Council tax reduction and 2 use Free School Meals data.

ⁱⁱ Scottish Government (2023) *Tackling child poverty priority families overview* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/tackling-child-poverty-priority-families-overview/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Information from Freedom of Information requests to Aberdeen City Council.

^{iv} See <https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-government-allocation-statistics-green-book-archive/> and *Scottish Local Government Finance 'Green Book' 2022-23 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)*

^v <https://www.gov.scot/publications/analysis-report-responses-consultation-school-uniform-scotland/documents/>

^{vi} <https://www.mygov.scot/clothing-grants>

^{vii} <https://www.gov.scot/publications/programme-government-2023-24/documents/>