



September brings a new school year, one of my children is in primary school and the other secondary. Between uniforms, PE kit and knowing they'll need to catch the bus each day the costs are adding up. I'm already pretty stretched, so I'm not sure how to cover these extra outgoings. Is there any help I can get?

A new school year can put pressure on lots of people's budgets, so you're not alone in your worries.

But there is help available. If you are online, a good place to start is the Citizens Advice website at citizensadvice.org.uk/family/education/help-with-school-costs where you'll find lots of information on the support you might be entitled to for school-related costs. The help you can get to cover school lunches will vary depending on how old your children are and if you claim benefits. Children in Reception, Year 1 and 2 automatically get free school meals. You can apply for free school meals for older children if you claim certain types of benefits, including Universal Credit, Child Tax Credit and Income Support.

You mentioned concerns about travel costs. If your child can't walk to school because of special educational needs or disabilities they should get free school transport. You may be able to get help with transport costs from Suffolk County Council if your children can't walk because it's dangerous or too far.

If you're on a low income, Suffolk County Council may also be able to help you with activity and school uniform costs. You're likely to be considered to be on a low income if you get means-tested benefits like Universal Credit or Housing Benefit. In some places there are also local charitable schemes that can help. A good place to find out about these is the school itself or Parent Teacher Association (PTA), as both will usually know if these kinds of schemes exist. A lot of people are feeling the squeeze at the moment, but it's important to remember that help is available with school costs and you're not alone.

If you need more information on getting help with school costs, the advisers at Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk will be happy to help.

Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk can provide advice on issues including debt, finances, employment, benefits, family/relationships and more. You can contact them by phone on 01449 676060, visit in person at Milton House, 5 Milton Road South, Stowmarket IP14 1EZ or use the contact form at midsuffolkcab.org.uk/contact-us. Our opening hours are Monday-Thursday 9.30am – 3.30pm and Friday 9.30am – 12.30pm. For more information go to midsuffolkcab.org.uk.