



My oldest child is starting school in September and with uniforms and PE kits, the costs are already mounting. We're already pretty stretched, so I'm not sure how to cover these new costs. Is there any extra help I can get?

The start of a school year can be tough for many people's budgets, so you're not alone in your worries. But there is help available.

On the National Citizens Advice website, we have lots of information on the support you might be entitled to for school-related costs. If you're claiming benefits it's worth checking if you can get extra help for things like school lunches, transport and uniforms. This information can be found at citizensadvice.org.uk/family/education/help-with-school-costs. If you are not online, Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk can advise on the telephone or in person.

Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 automatically get free school meals. For older children, you can apply for free school meals if you claim certain types of benefits. The full list is available on the Citizens Advice website, and includes Universal Credit, Child Tax Credit and Income Support.

Schools can advise on finding cheap or free second hand uniforms. Often the school will have a second hand uniform shop, where the cost is much cheaper. A lot of schools accept cheaper non logo items rather than official logo school uniform, so do check with your school if this is the case.

If your child is disabled or has a health condition, you can also claim Disability Living Allowance (this isn't means-tested).

A lot of peoples' budgets are feeling the squeeze at the moment, but it's important to remember that help is available with starting school costs.

Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk can provide advice on this or any other issue, including debt, finances, employment, benefits and family/relationships. You can contact them 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.