

The real cost kitting out your kid

By [Lauren Cohen](#)

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As any parent with school-going children knows, the cost of uniforms, books and what-have-you is substantial. Well, it may actually be more than you think – and it seems the private schools are quite brand specific.

Retailers say there is a surge in spending by parents as schools re-open around the country. Government schools in Gauteng, Free State, Mpumalanga, North West and Limpopo have started their school year already and those in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape and Western Cape will open next Wednesday, on January 16.

Parents are having to dig deeper into their pockets to pay for school shoes, uniforms and stationery as well as face rising prices for fuel, food and possibly interest rates.

PEP's merchandise director, Sean Cardinaal, said that in the next two weeks they expect major back-to-school buying at their stores around the country.

“Our big sellers include clothing and footwear as well as stationery items, water bottles, lunch boxes and suitcases,” he said. Cardinaal predicted that back-to-school buying would continue into next month.

“Sixty-five percent of our January sales come from back-to-school purchases,” he said.

Research by the Retail Liaison Committee shows that PEP sells more than half of the country's school wear.

Though retailers said serious back-to-school buying would only start in mid-January, some mothers said they had started shopping last year.

Costs of stationery also mount

“I did all the uniform shopping after Christmas, now I'm buying her stationery,” said Linda Solwandle of her daughter Sisipho, who is in grade six at St Raphael's Primary School in Athlone, Cape Town.

Brian Weyers, marketing director of the Shoprite group, said the bottom end of the market bought certain items as Christmas presents for their children, such as school shoes, a backpack or colouring-in materials. Weyers added that the back-to-school period just after Christmas was their second-biggest trading period after Christmas itself.

Shoprite's biggest volume lies in stationery, which Weyers said makes up 80% of the group's back-to-school turnover.

Big sellers at Pick n Pay include exercise books, files and dictionaries. Less than 10% of the chain's December turnover involved back-to-school items, said group finance director Dennis Cope.

CNA divisional buying manager Debi Weber said stationery costs were grade and school specific.

Weber said, "It seems the private schools are quite brand specific and tend to give parents lists of top-end items to buy, while the government schools just list the item.

"I'd say books and stationery costs are in the region of R750 per child."

Weber said CNA's biggest sellers were Pritt glue sticks, exercise books, plastic wrap and HB pencils.

"The rush starts about two days before the schools go back, so earlier in Gauteng than the coastal areas."

Easy and stress-free – if you're organised

Nicola Sinclair, a mother, said the experience of getting her son Matthew prepared for grade one at Grey Junior School in Port Elizabeth was easy and stress-free.

"The school gave us a list of the clothes and stationery to buy, and most of it can be bought from the school shop.

"The list totalled R2350 and that included the full uniform as well as extra pants, shirts, sports shoes and a school bag.

"Most of his books and stationery are supplied by the school and included in school fees, I just have to cover and label them," she said.

To afford the cost of sending her son to a "big school", Sinclair said she cut back on Christmas presents.

"It is a big cost that you don't normally have and it comes at an expensive time of the year when you need money for holidays," she said.

What you'll pay for education

At Shoprite, shoes range between R29.99 and R49.99. Shirts cost between R33.99 and R39.99 for larger sizes.

At Pick n Pay Hypermarkets, a grade one shirt costs R25.90 and a long- sleeve shirt R32.90. Black school shoes start at R69.90.

To kit out a girl at Jet, you will pay R44.95 for a blue long-sleeved shirt, R59.95 for a grey skirt, R22.95 for white ankle socks and R155.95 for school shoes.

You will pay R29.95 for a boy's white short-sleeved shirt, R49.95 for grey shorts, R99.95 for long grey pants, R24.95 for grey knee-length socks and R145.95 for shoes.

When you have finished adding up the bill to clothe and equip your child for school, there are still tuition costs to consider.

Parents can expect to pay anything from R100 a year for a government school in the Eastern Cape to more than R129000 for a private boarding school in KwaZulu-Natal.

According to the Private Schools South Africa database, there are about 2000 registered pre-primary, primary and secondary private schools in South Africa.

Most of these schools cost less than R8000 a year, but private boarding schools, such as Hilton College in KwaZulu-Natal and Kingswood College in the Eastern Cape, cost more than R100000 for a year's tuition and boarding.

Fees at a Port Elizabeth township school, Walmer High School, have been R100 for the past six or seven years. —
Additional reporting by Lihle Z Mtshali.

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