

Our State Primary is Overrun with Pupils from Private Schools, Charlotte Cripps, *The Independent*, February 16th, 2025

Labour's decision to impose VAT on private school fees is leading to an exodus of pupils into the state system – and believe me, I'm seeing the fallout.

My children's state primary in Kensington is filling up rapidly with pupils from the private sector since many parents have been faced with a 20 per cent increase in fees at the start of this year.

Some of the parents (coincidentally with double-barrelled names) rang me up in tears – asking me all about our lovely little Church of England school. They all nabbed places before the onslaught began. I wish I'd put the phone down.

New data this week reveals state schools across England are oversubscribed across at least 27 local authorities, spanning from Bristol to Hull – with years 7 and 8 being the most jam-packed. It's sparking fears they may struggle to squeeze in the influx of an estimated 35,000 pupils from private schools.

Labour originally said that the increase in fees wouldn't have any impact on the number of pupils attending private schools – we were led to believe an enormous fuss was being made on behalf of fewer than seven per cent of our school children. However, the reality is very different.

I'm now worrying about getting my daughters, Lola, 8, and Liberty, 6, into my preferred state secondary schools – and the playdates are hell. I'm having a girl over for a sleepover next week – but the last time she came over, she asked me why my hallway was falling apart. Another child asked me, "Why don't we have a private coach to take us swimming? Why do we use public buses?" My daughters looked at me in utter bewilderment.

Another mum I chatted to at the school gates was ecstatic not to be paying the nearly £10,000-a-term fees, as it meant she could still dart off on family holidays to the Maldives and go skiing – exactly where they're heading off to this half-term, while the rest of us can't afford the hike in airfares over the school holidays.

These children ask for organic options for tea – or sushi on Deliveroo. They moan about the lack of sports and big class sizes. They get picked up by a nanny (always Filipino). When my children get invited over to playdates, they get lost in their massive houses. Their open-plan kitchens are the size of my entire flat.

The other day, Liberty nearly got strangled in a boy's five-storey house by a long piece of string that they use to dangle down the staircase with a felt basket to bring up pencils and notes. The parents, of course, were devastated when I sent them photos on WhatsApp of her lacerated neck – and they promptly sent their nanny off to buy me organic healing cream from a King's Road pharmacy.

Another mum does the majority of the school run in an Uber – which she admits "saves on the parking tickets". I didn't dream of telling her I could hardly afford my heating bill. These parents are happy-clappy with the huge savings on fees – especially if they have more than one child. Two children at nearby Notting Hill Prep costs £8,783 per term.

I'm not saying it's easy to downsize to a state school where the lunches are inedible. And for many middle-class families, they sacrificed everything to privately educate their children, only to be penalised by Labour's clampdown. I'm not against independent education, either; I went to a private school. But one of the bonuses of sending my kids into the state system is that I didn't have to keep up with the Joneses.

That's all changed. Of course, there are many other parents like me in the same boat and admittedly, we live in one of London's most expensive boroughs. But as I feel the pinch, the last thing I need is a child throwing their Chloé Kids patchwork faux shearling coat at me – and asking for a salmon maki.