

Addressing Poverty Through School Uniform

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Introduction

Uniform is a tool that can be used to equalise pupils in the school setting. However, if not correctly administered, it can also lead to pupils feeling stigmatised and place a burden on parents. The [Department for Education](#) (2021) has **statutory guidance to ensure “the cost of school uniforms is reasonable.” Despite this, parents can often find uniform costs unmanageable** and leave pupils excluded from activities (The Children’s Society, 2020).

In the Poverty Proofing© the School Day Bradford sample by Children North East, they raised several points that need further work within this area.

In **53%** of schools, there was **no provision for pre-loved uniforms**.

In **45%** of schools, pupils **had to miss PE if they didn't have their PE kit** - *'If you forget your uniform twice, then you miss PE.'* (pupil)

In **30%** of schools, parents were **worried about the cost of uniforms** - *'A lot of places don't stock my size trousers as they are kids' sizes, this makes it really expensive.'* (pupil)




In **15%** of schools, pupils were **given sanctions for incorrect/missing uniforms** - *'We get a detention if we don't wear black socks.'* (pupil)

Use this document to consider your school's uniform offer with an income inequality lens.

For further support around uniforms, look at **“Affordable school uniforms: a guide”** ([The Children's Society 2022](#)). It includes details on how you can update your school's uniform policy (pg. 5) and pre-loved uniformed guide (pg. 10). Also, for ideas around actions your school can take, visit [The Child Poverty Action Group Website](#).



Questions To Ask Your School

	Question	Page
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are uniforms accessible to purchase and available from more than a single supplier? • Are there ways that families with financial difficulties can access affordable uniforms? • Is there an ample supply of good quality spare uniforms (PE/Swimming kit) available for pupils to borrow if needed? • Can pupils discretely access appropriate clothes for the weather in colder months for playtimes? • If any changes in the uniform are made, are families involved in consultation? 	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there opportunities for pupils to access costumes for any plays or performances without expecting families to provide their own? • Are items that are school branded kept to a minimum or able to be sewn on? • Are vouchers available to pupils eligible for FSM and families with financial difficulties to help purchase uniforms? Are the vouchers aligned with pricing? 	6
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it ensured that pupils are not penalised for having the wrong uniform or PE kit? • Is empathy and understanding given when pupils do not come to school in full uniform? • Is a pupil's lack of kit followed up with offers of support or conversations to understand why? • Is there a 'no logo' policy to stop pupils from feeling pressure from their peers to have branded bags, shoes, and coats? 	7



Supply of Uniform and Kit

What Citizens Say



'No, I've never heard of second hand uniform but I don't use the food sale so.' (parent)

'People think you are poor because the (spare) tops don't fit you properly and they really stink.' (pupil)

'If you find something in your size you can take it home, if you don't want it you can just bring it back.' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers

Guidance

Parents are unable to buy the right uniform because **the uniform shop is too far away**, or they don't have any way to get to it.

- Ensure that uniforms are available in the **local area**, for example, at the local supermarket.
- Have it so families can **order, buy, and collect the uniform from the school**.

Parents are not able to afford the total cost of the uniform. Families may need to buy several uniforms over the year or several uniforms for several children.

- **Have swap shops or second-hand uniform stalls at parents' events or a place within the community** where the school can collect a spare uniform for parents to help themselves.

Pupils may **not want to use a spare kit because they are worried about** what other students will think or say or that it will not be available.

- Ensure that there is **sufficient spare PE kit**, that it is the same as the official kit and is well-presented and **available in several different sizes** so that pupils do not feel stigmatised when wearing it.

Pupils are not participating in plays or performances because they are **worried they won't be able to afford the cost of the costumes**.

- **The school provides all costumes for plays and performances.** There is no expectation for families to offer their own.

Pupils are worried about accessing the uniform as they **don't know where it is and don't want others to see them getting it**.

- Ensure all pupils understand where the pre-loved uniform is and **how to access it**.



Barriers

Families may feel uncomfortable sharing their stories with multiple staff members or not know who to go to.

Families may not feel able to talk to somebody in person and feel more comfortable contacting the school in another way.

Guidance

- Make it clear that **everyone's role** is to serve those with fewer resources.
- Ensure that everyone can support pupils with access to uniforms.

- **They could have a card or specific email** so they can be discreet about communicating their needs.

Case Study

Bradford School



School run a uniform swap shop where items can be swapped for correct sizes; this includes PE kit and is an excellent way of reducing the burden on families. *'You can email in and swap items, it's brilliant.'* (parent)

There have been many occasions where staff have provided emergency uniforms from local supermarkets for pupils in desperate need: *'Families arrived in the country, so we just got the uniform for the children.'* (staff)

Children come in wearing PE kits on the appropriate days, and staff mostly **focus on appropriate footwear (for health and safety) rather than tracksuits**. Children who forgot their swimming kit are provided with a school kit; this kit is of good quality and has no stigma attached.



Uniform Costs

What Citizens Say



'It's not just the uniform, but the P.E. kit, the shoes...it's never ending.' (parent)
'It soon adds up, I'm not always comfortable asking for help.' (parent)

'A child came in, in a strappy top and shorts and had no suitable clothing for school-so we went out and bought her a uniform.' (staff)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers

Parents who are not on Free School Meals may be unaware of the support they can receive or how to ask for it.

Vouchers given to support with uniforms do not always **cover buying a complete set of uniforms.**

Specific school uniforms with a badge on can cost families more.

Parents are unable to afford **specific shoes or equipment for PE**, such as pumps.

Guidance

- Pupils on Free Schools Meals receive a **voucher to support the cost of uniforms.**
- Also provide these to families that may not be eligible but are experiencing financial difficulties and may not be eligible for Free School Meals.

- Make it possible for plain uniforms to be worn with the option of **iron-on badges.**

- **Revisit the uniform rules** with children and consider the price of the uniform.
- Can the logo be optional? Can only some items need a logo?

- Pumps are an additional expense for families; **consider the uniform policy** to see if regular shoes or trainers could be worn instead.

Case Study

Bradford Schools



Some students were aware of support available for families struggling to buy uniform and a few mentioned receiving gift vouchers for uniform, **'yes, there is support given to students who struggle,' "school offers blazers temporarily.'** (staff)



Expectations in Relation to Uniform

What Citizens Say



'Loads of people wear Nike trainers'. (pupil)

'people look at you and say "where's that from?" in a mean way'. (pupil)

'You don't get shouted at or anything, they're just pleased to see you.' "They talk to you one-on-one and say: 'Try to remember to wear the right things tomorrow and then say: Do you need any help, have you got the right things at home?' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers

Guidance

Parents may be unsure if messaging is unclear about sanctions for incorrect uniforms. They may be **worried about their child getting told off**.

- If pupils do not attend school in the correct uniform, **there are no sanctions**.
- Instead, **staff will have a conversation** with them as there could be difficulties at home and an opportunity to offer support.

Parents may feel like they stand out if they send their child to school not in uniform.

- Give pupils who **turn up without uniform a school fleece/blazer/jumper to wear** so that they don't stand out to other pupils.

Parents may send their children in branded clothing or be **worried if they are not wearing well-known brands**.

- **No logo policies reduce** opportunities in which pupils can compare and identify those who cannot afford 'logo-ed' items.

Parents may not have **the right equipment for PE, so do** not send them to school on that day.

- Pupils could **come in wearing PE kits** on the appropriate days.
- Mostly **focus on appropriate footwear** (for health and safety) rather than what they're wearing.
- **Ensure that pupils don't miss out on PE** despite not having the correct equipment.

Pupils may feel **under pressure on non-uniform days**, worrying that other pupils will judge them based on their clothes and trainers.

- **Consider alternative fundraising to non-uniform day**, including bag packs, a stall selling items within the community, and writing letters to local businesses.



Case Study

Bradford School



There is no markup on uniform with the school logo – parents are encouraged to buy supermarket uniform and add logos which can be bought from the school, or just wear without the logos. Footwear is flexible and this relaxed approach is welcomed by parents. *'It's easy to get uniform, it doesn't cost a lot.'* (parent)

'It's good that you can wear whatever shoes or trainers, shoes can be pricey.' (parent)



Appendix

Links Referenced

Department for Education Cost of School Uniform Guidance	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms
Affordable School Uniforms: A Guide	https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-campaigns/cut-the-cost-school-uniforms
The Child Poverty Action Group Website	https://cpag.org.uk/what-we-do/project-work/cost-school-day/resources/ideas-bank/uniform

References

Department for Education (2021). Cost of school uniforms. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms>.

The Children's Society (2020). The Wrong Blazer 2020: Time for action on school uniform costs The Wrong Blazer 2020: Time for action on school uniform costs. [online] Available at: <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/the-wrong-blazer-report-2020.pdf>.

The Children's Society (2022). Affordable School Uniforms: A guide. [online] Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/what-we-do/project-work/cost-school-day/resources/all-resources>

Child Poverty Action Group. School uniform. <https://cpag.org.uk/what-we-do/project-work/cost-school-day/resources/ideas-bank/uniform>



If you have any feedback on this document or good practice that your school is doing, **we would love to hear from you.**

Please email schools@mylivingwell.co.uk.

