



# Business and Children Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	School uniform costs in state schools and support available for families
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## 1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to inform Scrutiny Committee members of recently introduced statutory guidance on the cost of school uniform, the average cost of school uniform in Westminster and the advice the council offers to schools and parents.

## 2. Government guidance on the cost of school uniforms

There continues to be local and national interest in the cost of school uniforms and the impact such costs have on economically disadvantaged families in England. The School Uniform Bill, which makes guidance on school uniforms legally binding for schools' governing bodies, passed on 29th April 2021. The subsequent new guidance on the cost considerations of school uniform was published on 19th November 2021. The guidance requires all schools to review their current uniform policy, and to make any necessary changes by September 2022. This guidance should be read in line with the government's existing non-statutory guidance on school uniform policies, which states that

*“No school uniform should be so expensive as to leave pupils or their families feeling unable to apply to, or attend, a school of their choice, due to the cost of the uniform. School governing bodies should therefore give high priority to cost considerations”*

The new statutory guidance outlines the cost considerations which schools must take into account when developing and implementing their uniform policies and managing their uniform supplier arrangements. It also provides guidance on the provision of second-hand uniform (which under the new guidance must be available), and other support with the cost of uniform for disadvantaged families. Schools are also advised to keep branded uniform items to a minimum and encouraged to allow more high-street options.

### **3. Local Picture**

School uniform policies are developed and updated by their governing bodies.

Where families are experiencing financial challenges in terms of meeting the cost of school uniform, a child will never be turned away from school. All efforts will be made by the school to support the family and to ensure that the child has school uniform, including linking with any other partners, such as John Lyons Charity and the Portal Trust. Most schools have donation schemes and second-hand schemes available, where uniform is provided for free or at a low cost to families in need. Some schools hold funding in reserve to assist families in financial difficulties to purchase uniform. The Pupil Premium can also be considered for use to support with uniform provision. Our Early Help service advises and signposts families on how they can access support with the costs of school uniforms.

In Westminster, the majority of secondary schools are either academies or free schools and often have resources which may be drawn upon in order to support school uniform costs when necessary.

In Ormiston Beachcroft Alternative Provision Academy, all students are issued with appropriate uniform free of charge.

### **4. Council Response**

Upon guidance being issued on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021, the council contacted all schools immediately to ensure awareness of the new guidance and provide a summary of the key points of the guidance. This is in addition to schools receiving notification of the new guidance by the Department for Education.

High-level desk-based research has been undertaken to benchmark the average cost of school uniforms in Westminster in comparison to average costs across the country.

Based on a sample of 8 schools in the borough with published uniform costs, the average cost of a complete set of primary school uniform, including PE kit and summer/ winter variations is between £230 - £290. The cost of a complete set of uniform, including summer and winter variations and PE kit for our secondary schools ranges from around £240 to £380 depending on the school. These costs compare to the national average school uniform of £315 per year for each primary school child and £337 per year for each secondary school child, as established in a survey of 1,000 parents conducted by the Children's Society in March 2020.

Local authorities and academy trusts in England are not required to provide support to parents in meeting the costs of school uniforms as they are in the devolved administrations. They can choose whether to provide school clothing grants or to help with the cost of school clothing in cases of financial hardship. In Westminster, advice and support is provided for vulnerable families by the Early Help team and many schools run their own schemes to provide assistance with the costs of or the provision of school uniform.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the  
Background Papers, please contact Katie Hodges**

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