

## SCHOOLWEAR ASSOCIATION BRIEFING

The Schoolwear Association represents retailers, suppliers and manufacturers involved in the supply of school uniform. Our membership includes more than 250 SMEs, which are principally local family businesses, based in high street locations that support their local communities. Together, our members clothe more than three quarters of the country's schoolchildren, providing sustainable, long-lasting and affordable school uniform for families across the UK.

### The benefits of school uniform in Wales

- School uniforms have considerable societal and educational benefits for pupils. Unifying all students regardless of background, school uniforms act as a social leveller in schools and increase pupils' sense of pride and belonging while reducing bullying.
- A survey of around 8,000 head teachers and teachers by the Schoolwear Association, in partnership with Teacher Tapp, in April 2023 found that:
  - 83% believed that school uniform was vital to creating a level playing field
  - 71% thought that were school uniform to be removed, children would worry about what to wear
  - 53% said they believed it reduced the chances of bullying
- Research conducted for the Schoolwear Association in November 2022, specifically looking at Welsh schools showed that:
  - 60% of schools specify logo'd garments and agreed that these garments give children a sense of pride
  - 87% of schools say parents have not raised concerns over the cost of uniform
  - 60% of Welsh schools have already amended their uniform policy or intend to do so in the next 12 months, to take into account the 2019 Statutory Guidance that required schools to ensure their uniform policies were appropriate and affordable

### Value for money

- School uniform is worn by children for **195 days of the year**, so it is important that garments are made of high-quality materials and are durable.
- High quality garments can be donated, sold in second hand sales, or handed down to younger siblings - maximising their affordability and minimising their impact on the planet.
- Our data shows that the combined average basket cost of compulsory secondary school uniform is **£96.68 per pupil** in 2022.

### Problems with the Welsh Government's new guidance on school uniform

- Limiting logos and branded items will undermine the value of uniform and increase social inequality between pupils, who will feel under pressure to abide by the latest fashion trends.
  - Costs are also likely to rise for parents too, who may end up purchasing more expensive and/or less durable items for their children, which don't offer long-term value.
- Minimising supplier contracts will push up prices for families.
  - With appropriate tendering, sole supply allows for more competitive pricing for families and ensures supplier accountability to ensure all children have a uniform, with all sizes stocked all year around.
  - Sole supply arrangements also allow suppliers to support schools on a local basis with, for example, discounted or free uniform for pupils that the schools identify are most in need. This is not possible if there are many uniform suppliers.
- The guidance fails to recognise and respect existing arrangements, whether formal or informal, that are already in place between schools and uniform suppliers.
- The Welsh Government needs to define a timeframe for which schools should avoid significant or frequent changes to uniform specifications.
  - We recommend that this period should be a minimum of 12 months to consider uniform items already purchased by both suppliers and parents.

### Call to action:

1. Write to the Minister or table questions in the Senedd to address issues with the new guidance
2. Meet with the Schoolwear Association and support schoolwear retailers and suppliers in your constituency

# Welsh Government changes to statutory guidance on school uniform and appearance policies

## Consultation Questions

### Question 1

**Do you agree that school governing bodies should prioritise affordability when setting their school uniform and appearance policy?**

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

School uniform policies must be underpinned by an accurate understanding of uniform costs and affordability. As part of this, we would strongly advocate that school governing bodies prioritise value for money when setting their school uniform and appearance policy and consider how the quality of a garment impacts value for parent over its lifetime alongside the upfront cost.

School uniform is worn by children for 195 days of the year, so it is important that these garments are made of high-quality materials and are durable. This will ensure that they last children the duration of the school year and beyond.

The schoolwear industry takes pride in providing high quality uniforms, which mean that parents do not have to buy new garments as often, and they can either donate the uniform to be sold in second hand sales or hand them down to other children. This is only possible when garments are made to a high standard and can retain their smart look, which is not usually possible with clothing sold in supermarkets.

Ultimately there is the risk that parents are forced to spend more money in the long term as cheaper items are not guaranteed to last as long and they're forced to regularly repurchase. Our data shows families only need to buy on average 2.4 £35 blazers to see children through from years 7 to 11 (data covers 68,000 secondary school pupils)

While we agree that affordability is an important consideration, recent research our members carried out with Welsh schools, representing nearly 20,000 pupils across Wales, found that 87% of schools have not received pressure from parents to make uniform more affordable in the last year.

Similarly, the Children's Society recently [reported](#) that most parents across the UK are not struggling to afford school uniform this year. This suggests that while uniform should be made financially accessible to everyone, the majority of parents are not worried about the costs of uniform in Wales.

### Consulting families and suppliers to get the best outcome

Affordability may also mean different things to different regions. It is therefore essential that there is not a one size fits all approach and that schools consider the needs of their families on a case-by-case

basis. The senior leadership team within schools are often embedded within their communities and will know what affordability will look like for the families they serve.

The school uniform industry always seeks to work with schools to support the design of school uniform policies, acting as advisers to ensure that a school's uniform is as appropriate, affordable, and accessible to families as possible.

The uniform provider will then be able to advise the best routes to help achieve the look (or as close to the look as possible) in the most cost-effective way.

Through our Code of Practice, Schoolwear Association members work with schools to provide affordability measures to support those families who need it. This includes facilitating second hand uniform sales and swap shops and enables parents to pay for uniform in manageable instalments, usually at no additional cost.

### **The benefits of school uniform**

School uniforms also have considerable societal and educational benefits for pupils, which should also be considered alongside costs and affordability.

They unify all students regardless of background, and act as a leveller in schools by driving equality. Uniform has also been found to increase pupils' sense of pride and belonging, promote productivity and concentration leading to higher levels of educational attainment, and improve welfare by creating a more cohesive environment, counteracting bullying.

The Schoolwear Association recently conducted research with Welsh schools, representing nearly 20,000 pupils. When school leaders were asked why they specify logoed garments as part of their uniform policy, over half of schools said it was to remove the desire to buy more expensive brands and act as a social leveller, and another 42% said it was to reduce bullying.

A 2017 report into attitudes around school uniforms, conducted by Schoolwear Association member Trutex in association with The Diana Award, found:

- 95% of teachers said uniforms help students 'fit-in', while 89% believe they play an active role in reducing bullying.
- 66% of parents thought wearing a uniform puts students on a level playing field, making their lives easier.
- 61% of parents agreed uniform counteracts bullying and 68% believe it reduces the pressure on students to wear the latest fashion trends.

An Oxford Brookes study with psychologist Dr Barbie Clark also found uniform removes points of difference between students, unifying the student body and providing greater focus on academic work.

In light of this research, it is clear that one of the primary reasons for including a school specific uniform, is to remove the risk of bullying based on appearances. Ultimately by removing this social leveller there is the real risk of unintentionally exposing children to discrimination and prejudice.

As such, we strongly recommend that the guidance not only considers affordability alongside long-term value for money, but also the government's implementation of any uniform changes don't unintentionally lead to schools implementing a 'non-uniform policy' which would negatively impact the welfare of students.

### *Question 2*

**Do you agree that school governing bodies should ensure easy access and availability of uniform items when setting their school uniform and appearance policy?**

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

It is absolutely essential that uniform is available for parents to purchase in a large range of sizes and all year round so that no pupil is ever left without uniform that fits them.

The best way to ensure easy access and availability of uniforms is through a sole supplier contract, which provides accountability and certainty to schools. As part of these contracts, school uniform providers are required to stock garments in every size all year round, meaning that parents will always have access to the uniform they need as and when it suits them.

By contrast, supermarkets are not required to stock every size of garment, and indeed only usually sell uniform items for a limited period of time in the run up to the back-to-school period.

Where schools do undertake sole supply arrangements, we believe it is critical that any updated statutory guidance mandates there is a robust and competitive procurement process in place at the point of selecting a provider to ensure provision is fit for purpose and provides the best quality and value for money for parents.

### *Question 3*

**Do you agree that logos should not be required on school uniforms?**

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

While logos have many benefits, it is not that alone which creates the uniform look, nor do they determine the cost. Key to creating a uniform look is the fact that some of the key garments (typically upper body, outer items) are uniform in nature, i.e. identical styling, materials and colouring. Without this structure, the whole premise of uniform breaks down as it is open to interpretation and difference, eliminating the universally accepted benefits of levelling and equality.

To achieve the benefits associated with uniforms, policies need to consider the clothing beyond the logo. If the policy was that pupils should wear navy blue jumpers, there is the risk that each pupil ends up with different type of blue jumper – and there is no longer uniform.

When determining a uniform policy, the suppliers work with schools to decide the design, acting as advisers to ensure that a school's policy is as appropriate, affordable, and as accessible to families as possible. Within this process, we recommend that the guidance allows the school's senior leadership team the authority to determine whether their uniform should have a logo and if that is suitable for their situation.

#### *Question 4*

**Do you agree that logos should be limited to one outer garment, for example a jumper, cardigan or blazer?**

Agree

**Disagree**

Neither agree nor disagree

In this instance it is important to consider that different regions and communities may have different requirements, and there is the risk that being too prescriptive could have adverse effects. While logos are broadly limited to one outer garment, this might not be right for every school policy. There have been many instances where some elements of a uniform policy have been made compulsory to deal with certain local issues.

For example, in North London there is a school where senior leadership team require pupils to wear a school specific badged trouser. This was to address gang culture where children were being singled out for not wearing a particular brand of trouser and was resulting in harm and safety concerns. This created a social leveller and ensured that no child was singled out for the way they dressed.

As such, it is important to give the leadership team the power to make decisions based on the different needs of their schools and pupils.

It is also important to note that, in our experience, the majority of schools that we work with in Wales have limited their uniform to 1.5 badged garments already.

#### *Question 5*

**Do you agree that iron-on or sew-on logo badges should be provided for learners, free of charge?**

Agree

**Disagree**

Neither agree nor disagree

The logo is not the individual element that gives a uniform its cohesive look, indeed it merely acts as an identifier. By simply providing sew-on or iron logos there is the implication that pupils can wear any type of clothing if the logo is visible. This could result in several challenges for parents, particularly around cost and will likely break down the premise of uniform and negate the benefits associated with it.

To ensure these principles of uniform are realised, we need to ensure that garments are differentiated between clothing that can be bought from a wide range of stores and garments that are bespoke to a school. For example, 'a blue jumper' and a 'specific blue jumper from a nominated uniform supplier, with or without a school logo'. In the case of the former, whilst it gives parents the option to buy from anywhere, it does not result in uniform and therefore eliminates all the well understood benefits of uniform in school.

Significantly, we are concerned that without a prescribed uniform there is a risk that parents will be under pressure to buy a designer or expensive 'blue jumpers' as opposed to the standard school one. This would have the adverse effect of driving up costs for parents, whose children face peer pressure to fit in.

In contrast, specifying a 'specific blue jumper from a nominated uniform supplier, with or without a school logo' ensures the principles and benefits of uniform are upheld. This will also create accountability on the part of the uniform provider to ensure all children have access to uniform garments in all sizes all year round.

### *Question 6*

**Do you agree that logos should not be required on school sportswear and other school equipment?**

Agree

**Disagree**

Neither agree nor disagree

As with Question 5, the logo is not what achieves a uniform and there is the likelihood that you lose the benefits associated with uniforms if garments are not supplied by specialist retailers.

Parents may find it difficult to find what they need on the high street. The garments may not be available, in the right sizes, at the right time and at the right price. Often it is very difficult to find unbranded sportswear that is suitable for purpose and doesn't cost more than a uniform from a school specific supplier.

Furthermore, without prescribed school sportswear, parents will be under considerable pressure to buy designer sportswear for their children, which is usually much more expensive than the sportswear required by schools as part of a uniform.

Interestingly, we know that two thirds of schools in Wales feel that having a modern sports kit helps to ensure that pupils feel comfortable to participate in sport. As such, there is a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of pupils.

### *Question 7*

**Many schools enter into single supplier arrangements with a school uniform supplier. This means that there is no choice about where branded uniform items are bought. Do you agree that schools should avoid single-supplier agreements with suppliers of branded school uniforms?**

Agree

**Disagree**

Neither agree nor disagree

In our experience, the vast majority of schools in Wales do not have sole supplier arrangements, and there are usually two or three retailers who stock the same uniforms.

However, the best way to ensure there is easy accessibility and uniform is kept in stock is through sole supplier contracts. This keeps the supplier accountable for the provision of uniform, rather than allowing them to rely on others. If they do not honour the contract, then they risk losing it and it passing to another supplier.

We would strongly encourage that there is a robust and competitive tender to select a uniform provider, but this should be at the point of selection not distribution.

### *Question 8*

**Do you agree that schools should be transparent in demonstrating that any benefit of a financial agreement they have with a school uniform supplier is being passed on to the customer?**

**Agree**

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

It is important that schools are transparent about all of the contracts that they enter into, to ensure accountability about the financial decisions that they make.

### *Question 9*

**Do you agree that if schools enter into an agreement with a school uniform supplier, they should ensure that the costs of using this supplier are similar to the costs of school uniforms available from high street retailers or supermarkets?**

Agree

**Disagree**

Neither agree nor disagree

When considering the cost of school uniform, it is important to understand the differences between the types of providers such as supermarkets and a specialised uniform supplier or retailer.

Supermarkets are not required to hold uniform stock in a vast range of sizes all year round. They may also not have access to the same type of uniform year on year. Instead, supermarkets will purchase uniform in seasonal cycles, offering the average size ranges, and on occasion have to change the

uniform range depending on the cost. Unfortunately, this means that children with more extreme sizing requirements are not catered for, and often parents will find it difficult to replace or buy uniform after the back-to-school period.

Alternatively, specialised uniform suppliers are contractually obliged to ensure that every child, whatever their size is catered for all year round.

The long-term value of garments should also be considered alongside the cost. While supermarket prices may be lower priced in the first instance, the often-cheaper materials are not durable and need to be replaced on a more regular basis. In the longer term, families can end up spending more money as they're forced to replace items more often.

Our data shows that the combined average basket cost of compulsory secondary school uniform in England is £96.68 per pupil in 2022. While school uniform is worn by children for 195 days of the year, **less than half** of these items need to be replaced each year if the uniform is from a specialised supplier. As such the average annual spend per pupil on compulsory items at secondary school is **£33.21 a year**, or 17 pence a day.

By comparison, we know that Wales typically has only 1.5 specified garments, which is less than the UK average. Therefore, we expect the costs would be lower for Wales.

### *Question 10*

**Do you agree that schools should operate a uniform exchange and/or recycling scheme available to families?**

**Agree**

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Schoolwear Association members, by signing our Code of Practice, are committed to ensuring that second hand uniform is available for sale in schools.

More generally, the schoolwear industry takes pride in providing high quality uniforms, which mean that parents do not have to buy new garments as often, and they can either donate the uniform to be sold in second hand sales or hand them down to their younger children. This is only possible when garments are made to a high standard and can retain their smart look, which is not usually possible with clothing sold in supermarkets.

We recently spoke to Paul Kent, the Founder of Community Inspires, a not-for-profit organisation that sells second-hand school uniform. He explained that around 60% of uniforms that are donated are difficult to be re-used because they are low quality. Paul added that “the garments provided by independent retailers are generally able to withstand the rigours of school life and once they're no longer needed, are still suitable for re-use and drive the availability of second-hand uniform”.



Overall, any rise in families resorting to cheaper garments would result in a lack of items available for re-use at uniform banks. This would also have an adverse effect on the environment. Clothing sold by supermarkets, are generally considered 'fast fashion' and the lower quality garments that parents are forced to replace more regularly will end up in a landfill. This creates more clothing waste than is necessary. WRAP research shows that extending a garment's life by just nine months can reduce its carbon footprint by 8% and its water footprint by 10% by displacing the need for virgin resources to create new products.

Ultimately, uniform exchange/recycling schemes are only possible when the items of clothing are in a state that they can be re-worn.

### *Question 11*

**We would like to know your views on the effects that guidance on school uniform and appearance policies would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?**

We do not have any specific comments to make on this question, however we do note that many school logos in Wales are already written in the Welsh language.

### *Question 12*

**Please also explain how you believe the guidance on school uniform and appearance policies could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.**

We do not have any specific comments to make on this question, however we do note that many school logos in Wales are already written in the Welsh language.