

New rules to drive down cost of school uniform for families



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Families will save money on school uniforms from next year, following new legally-binding guidance published today (Friday 19th November) requiring schools to make uniform affordable for all.

The Department for Education (DfE) guidance means schools in England must ensure that school uniform costs are reasonable, and parents get the best value for money.

Research from the DfE in 2015 showed that parents can save almost £50 on average if they can buy all school uniform items from any store, compared to uniform which all needs to be bought from a designated shop or school. From next autumn, schools will be required to help keep costs down by taking steps to remove unnecessary branded items and allowing more high-street options, like supermarket own-brand uniform.

To support families, schools will have to make sure second-hand uniforms are available, also helping work towards achieving net zero carbon emissions. In the UK, an estimated 350,000 tonnes of clothes end up in landfill every year and encouraging families to use second-hand uniform can reduce waste and bring down emissions from manufacturing new garments, while making it cost-effective for families.

Secretary of State for Education Nadhim Zahawi said:

School uniform provides a sense of identity and community for children and young people, and should be a real source of pride. But it must never be a burden for parents or a barrier to pupils accessing education.

This new binding guidance will help to make uniforms far more affordable for families by driving costs down as we work hard to level up the country.

Schools should make sure their uniform policy is published on their website and is clear and easy for parents to understand.

The new guidance also requires schools to use competitive and transparent contracts with suppliers. Should schools need to tender to secure a new contract, they have until December 2022.

Ensuring that uniform does not restrict where pupils go to school supports the Government's commitment to levelling up opportunity across the country.

Schools are expected to have taken steps to adhere to the new guidance before parents buy uniform for the academic year beginning in September 2022.

Matt Easter, Co-Chair of the Schoolwear Association, said:

We welcome this guidance as it takes a balanced and proportionate approach towards ensuring parents get good value for money from uniforms, without creating unreasonable burdens on schools or uniform suppliers. Importantly, it reinforces that the majority of schools are already doing the right thing and, in most cases, will already be fully, or almost, compliant.

As the leading schoolwear industry body, we are committed to helping schools understand the implications of the guidance for their uniform policies, and will continue to work with them to ensure the process of choosing a uniform supplier remains as robust, competitive, and easy as possible.

Mark Russell, Chief Executive of The Children's Society, said:

For too many years the cost of school uniform has been a heavy financial burden on many families, causing money worries and even debt, so these new guidelines to make sure school uniforms are affordable are extremely welcome.

Until now, too many parents have had to fork out for expensive branded items rather than cheaper alternatives, while having to cut back on essentials like food or heating. So we hope schools are able to start working with the guidance, which should ultimately make it much easier for families to kit out their children for school without breaking the bank.

Ann Pope, CMA Senior Director of Antitrust, said:

No one should be made to pay over the odds when buying the basics that their children need to attend school. That's why it is important that schools have clearer rules on how to choose uniform suppliers, to ensure people get value for money.

We have been working with the government to develop this guidance, which legally obliges schools to consider the cost of uniforms and to undergo regular tenders if they have a single supplier. This should lead to lower prices for parents by ensuring suppliers compete more strongly to win schools' business.

Parentkind CEO John Jolly said:

Parentkind strongly welcomes the new guidance that reduces costs for parents and promotes schools engaging with their parent community on uniform policy. We were delighted to present parents' views to the Department, and we are pleased that they have been heard.

Our Parent Voice Report 2021 finds that uniforms top parents' concerns on schooling costs. More PTA-run second hand uniform shops, along with the new guidance, should quickly reduce the financial burden on parents.

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