



# Affordable school uniforms: a guide

**The  
Children's  
Society**



**THE COST OF  
THE SCHOOL DAY**





Every child should feel like they belong – especially at school. A school's uniform can bring the school community together and create a shared identity. But when school uniforms are too expensive, this doesn't happen.

## **Pricey uniforms put pressure on stretched family budgets. Research from The Children's Society shows how the high price of uniforms can push families into difficulty.**



In 2020, 1 in 8 families were having to cut back on essentials like food to afford uniforms for their children. 1 in 10 families were borrowing from friends or getting into debt to cover the costs. This isn't right.

And for children at school, research from Child Poverty Action Group and Children North East shows the impact can be huge. Without the right uniform, children might not feel that they're part of the school community. They can feel out of place or isolated, worrying about not wearing the right thing. They might be made fun of or even bullied. Those fears can make it difficult for children to focus, and sometimes they might even have to miss lessons because they don't have the right uniform, losing essential learning time. No child should have to face these challenges. That's why the new law on school uniforms that was passed in 2021 is so important.

**Things are changing, and it will make a real difference for children and families across the country.**

The new law means affordability must be the top priority for schools when setting uniform policies. The Department for Education has also released statutory guidance about the issue - meaning all state-run primary and secondary schools must follow it.

To help your school implement the guidance, The Children's Society, Child Poverty Action Group, and Children North East have joined forces to share some ideas and good practice from our research with schools. With some adjustments to policies and practices, schools can relieve the pressure of uniform costs on children and their families. Your school might already have made changes, or you might just be starting out. Whatever stage you're at, our guidance shows how you can help make affordable uniforms a reality. Read on to find out what the new law means for schools, how to involve families and pupils in your uniform policy, and how you can help pupils access pre-loved uniform.





# What the new law means for schools

**This statutory guidance means schools must consider cost and value for money for parents first when setting their uniform policy. Schools should also:**

- Engage with parents, carers, and pupils when developing their uniform policy.
- Keep the number of branded items to a minimum.
- Make sure second-hand uniform is easily available.
- Make the uniform policy clear and easy to access for parents and carers.
- Make sure uniform suppliers are good value for money and avoid relying on single suppliers.

Schools should make as many changes as possible before the end of summer 2022, so that parents are fully informed before buying uniform for September's new school year.

If your school needs to make new arrangements with suppliers, these must be in place by December 2022.

The full guidance can be found on the Government website: [gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms)

# Updating your school's uniform policy

**Before making any changes, consult with the whole of your school community to help make sure your new policy is relevant and will be adhered to.**

If changes are to be made to your school uniform policy, make sure families are given enough notice. Use this guide to make sure families and pupils get the opportunity to feedback on all aspects of your uniform policy, including cost, PE kit, branding, and suppliers.

## 1. Involving children and families

It is important that school stakeholders like children and their families are included in decision-making around the school uniform policy. You could:

- Run groups and individual sessions with young people around different aspects of the uniform policy, such as cost, how branding is used, and PE kit to make sure their views are included.
- Be proactive in seeking the views of pupils in diverse groups.
- Recruit a task group of parents and carers who care about this issue. Make sure that this group is diverse, reflects your school community, and includes parents and carers from low-income families and families whose children receive the pupil premium.
- Advertise opportunities to engage in the consultation through letters, newsletters, email, text, and so on. Give different options for getting involved so that the consultation is accessible for everyone.
- Set a time frame for the consultation and make it clear how the feedback will be used.
- Provide anonymous opportunities for children and families to give feedback, such as online and paper surveys or comment drop-boxes. Talking directly about family finances can be challenging, so this is a good way to make sure people feel able to share their views.
- Consider including future pupils and families in transition year groups in the consultation too. They will be affected by any changes made, so should be given the opportunity to feedback.

*'Uniform is quite expensive for families that don't have that much money.'*



Year 6 pupil

## 2. Support

As well as deciding what uniform is required, think about:

- What support your school will offer if a student does not have the correct uniform.
- How your uniform policy links to other policies, including behaviour, rewards, and sanctions.
- Which members of staff will be a point of contact for students and families who need support with uniform.
- What action your school will take if any student faces bullying or discrimination because of their uniform or clothing.

Your uniform should support inclusion in all aspects of school life. Missing uniform should not lead to missing learning.

## 3. Cost

Making sure uniforms are affordable for families is now mandatory when designing your uniform policy. There are different ways to reduce the cost of school uniform, including:

- Keeping branded items to a minimum so that families can buy the majority of the uniform from low-cost suppliers.
- Encouraging families to purchase sew- or iron-on badges which can be added to unbranded items, if branded items are required. Making clear to families which uniform items are compulsory and which are optional.
- Identifying how uniform costs vary across the school – are there price differences for pupils of different genders or ages?
- Reviewing your suppliers regularly to make sure they are offering the best value for money.
- Reviewing the uniform policy regularly, in consultation with children, parents, and carers, to make sure it is affordable and is not putting extra pressure on families.

*'My secondary uniform will cost around £350 for the PE kit and uniform all together.'*

Year 6 pupil



A young girl with dark hair, wearing a school uniform consisting of a white collared shirt, a green sweater, and a dark jacket, is smiling and looking slightly to the right. The background is a blurred indoor setting, possibly a school hallway or gym.

*'Strict shoe rules mean  
I'll probably have to buy  
new shoes and trainers.'*

Year 6 pupil

#### **4. PE Kit**

You should include your PE kit as part of your uniform policy review.

Think about how to:

- Keep the number of branded items to a minimum so that your PE kit is affordable for families.
- Make sure that students without PE kit do not miss out on PE lessons.
- Consider introducing a year-round PE kit suitable for all weathers and sports activities rather than asking families to purchase summer and winter clothing.

#### **5. Choosing a uniform supplier**

As well as the cost and quality of uniform, you should also think about whether your uniform supplier is accessible for families.

- If there is a physical uniform shop, how far is it from your school, how convenient are the opening hours for families, and how easy is it for parents and carers to travel there?
- What delivery options are there for families? Do they face additional charges for paying online?
- What payment options are offered? Do they run any savings schemes?
- How easy is the ordering process for families to navigate? Are there any offline options for families without internet access or digital skills?



## 6. Further considerations

You might also want to:

- Encourage families to write names inside labels rather than using embroidered personalisation so that it is easier for pre-loved uniform to be passed on.
- Avoid uniform changes between different year groups so families are not required to buy new uniforms.
- Publicise any local grants or pre-loved uniform provision using a range of different communication methods.

*'There's a shop you can go to. It's a bit far away. Kind of difficult, sometimes we'll take a taxi or a bus.'*

Year 5 pupil





# Three things to remember...

A well thought-out school uniform policy helps all families, especially those on low incomes. Think about...

**Affordable suppliers vs. expensive branding**

**Support vs. sanctions**

**Essentials only vs. extensive uniform list**

**'I think having school uniform is a good thing and makes things a bit more equal.'**

Parent

Consulting with the whole school community on the most important aspects of your school uniform policy can help you make sure your uniform works for children and their parents and carers.



# Pre-loved uniformed guide



**Setting up a pre-loved uniform provision is a great way to make uniforms more affordable. By doing this, you can:**

- Help families access compulsory school uniform at reduced or no cost.
- Extend the life of items children quickly grow out of.
- Promote a positive eco-friendly culture of contributing and reusing.
- Raise funds for the school if families choose to make a donation.

Your school's ability to help families access pre-loved uniforms will depend on the space and resources you have available. What each school can offer will vary, and it's important to think about what will work best for you, your pupils, and their families. The ideas in this guide are designed to inspire you and spark your thinking about what might be possible in your school.

## Running your pre-loved uniform provision

Commitment and planning are essential. Various groups can get involved to help with the organisation, including students, parents and carers, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members, and school staff.

Volunteers can become Pre-loved Uniform Coordinators, which is a great role for someone looking to work with families and support your school community.

Students can take on the role of Pre-loved Uniform Champions to promote the provision and help develop the whole school ethos of re-using.

*'It's saving money, it's fine, it's not an issue. Not everyone has lots of money. As long as they are wearing a jumper.'*

Year 6 pupil



# Setting up a pre-loved school uniform shop



## 1. Designing your shop

Sometimes, parents and carers might feel that there is a stigma around accessing pre-loved uniform. You can help reduce that worry by:

- Making the experience easier and quicker by organising clothes into categories and sizes.
- Displaying clothes neatly on rails and hangers if you can.
- Having a discreet pot for donations so that families can decide if and how much they wish to contribute.
- Creating a shopping experience by providing recycled paper bags for items to be taken.



## 2. Opening times

Ideally, try to choose a mixture of days and times that coincide with both busier and quieter periods in school. We know that resource is really under pressure for most schools and the following suggestions might not always be possible. Support from members of your school community who are eager to help can make it easier for you to offer pre-loved uniform provision at different times of the day or school year. You could open:

- At school events like parents' evenings, summer fayres, or school performances.
- At the end of the spring, summer, and autumn terms.
- Once a month or once every half-term.

You could also set up a dedicated email address so families can place orders and organise access outside the usual opening times.

## 3. Donations

Make sure that parents and carers know that only good quality, clean uniform items are being collected.

You could also:

- Set up collection points at certain times and days around the school e.g. have labelled boxes in the reception, playground, classroom etc.
- Ask Pre-loved Uniform Coordinators to be responsible for sifting and sorting donations.
- Decide how and where donations will be stored.





# Promoting your pre-loved uniform provision

## You can promote your pre-loved uniform provision through:

- Newsletters.
- Parent noticeboards.
- Half-termly text or email reminders.
- Leaflets and posters created by students to get them all involved.
- School website – front page and uniform section.
- Social media – school and PTA Twitter and Facebook accounts.
- Assemblies prior to opening.
- Transition and new starter information.
- Creative ideas from Pre-loved Uniform Champions.



‘The school does its utmost to support families who struggle to buy uniform. Used uniform is always donated to the school. The uniform is cleaned, ironed, and available for families who require support. There isn’t any pressure to pay for the uniform.’

Member of staff





## Five things to consider

**There can be a stigma attached to accessing pre-loved clothing. Parents and carers might worry that it will be obvious they have not bought brand-new clothing, or think that others will judge them for choosing this option. You can help alleviate those fears by thinking about:**

- Language: pre-loved vs. second-hand.
- Promotion: eco-friendly vs. financial status.
- Access: universal vs. free school meals or pupil premium eligibility.
- Environment: shop vs. spare uniform box.
- Feeling: whole school ethos vs. necessity.

**This resource is published with thanks to pupils and families who took part in the Cost of the School Day and Poverty Proofing projects for their participation and quotes.**

Much of the content of this guide has previously been published in separate guides, over 2021/22. An updated edition of this combined resource, with additional best practice case studies, will be available to download Autumn 2022.

### **About The Children's Society and the campaign for affordable uniforms**

The Children's Society fights for the hope and happiness of young people when it's threatened by abuse, exploitation and neglect. We use our research, policy and campaigns to fight for change and create a society which works for all children.

Our campaign for affordable school uniforms started in 2014, when young people on our Children's Commission on Poverty found that expensive uniforms were causing problems for children and their families. Over the next seven years, we researched, campaigned, and worked closely with the Department for Education, Schools Minister Nick Gibb and Mike Amesbury MP, until a law to make uniforms affordable passed in 2021.

[childrenssociety.org.uk/how-you-can-help/campaign](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/how-you-can-help/campaign)

### **About Child Poverty Action Group and UK Cost of the School Day**

Child Poverty Action Group works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. We use our understanding of what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives to campaign for policies that will prevent and solve poverty – for good.

The Cost of the School Day approach involves working with whole-school communities to identify and reduce cost barriers faced by pupils from low-income backgrounds.

[cpag.org.uk/CoSD](https://cpag.org.uk/CoSD)

### **About Children North East and Poverty Proofing® the School Day**

Children North East exists because growing up can be hard. We create life-changing differences for babies, children and young people in their families, schools and communities.

Poverty Proofing® the School Day is a project developed by Children North East. The project provides a toolkit to poverty proof the school day, to reduce stigma and remove barriers to learning. Poverty Proofing® the School Day consists of an audit for each individual school and the result is a tailored action plan.

[children-ne.org.uk](https://children-ne.org.uk)

[povertyproofing.co.uk](https://povertyproofing.co.uk)

*Photo credit Serena Brown*

