

Briefing for the Petitions Committee

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 21 Mai 2019

Petitions Committee | 21 May 2019

Research Briefing: Children's used uniform scheme

Petition number: [P-05-877](#)

Petition title: **Children's used uniform scheme**

Text of petition:

We the children of Monnow Primary School in Newport would like to see a used school uniform scheme up and running in every city in Wales. The scheme should provide uniforms, shoes and trainers for all ages. This would make sure that all children have access to affordable uniforms. Families that receive free school meals should take priority.

1. Legal and policy position

The Minister for Education's letter highlights that there is currently no legislation in Wales regarding the wearing of school uniform. This comes under the 'conduct of a maintained school', which is the **responsibility of the school's governing body**. The governing body is required to conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement, which the Minister says may include having a school uniform policy.

The Minister says that the Welsh Government 'strongly encourages schools to have a school uniform policy in place as it has many benefits'. She also says that the Welsh Government expects governing bodies to consider the wide availability of uniform clothing and cost implications for families.

The Welsh Government issues **non-statutory guidance** to schools and governing bodies on school uniform and appearance policies. The existing version was published in 2011, although the Welsh Government has recently consulted on new guidance to take effect from September 2019. Unlike the current guidance this will be statutory.

2. Welsh Government action

When launching a [consultation on new draft statutory guidance](#) in November 2018, the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams, said she wanted to establish a more consistent approach to the

affordability. This was one of the reasons the new guidance will be statutory unlike the current version. The [Minister said](#):

The consultation focuses on affordability, and also addresses a number of issues that should be considered when developing school uniform and appearance policies, such as gender-neutral uniform items and flexibility during extreme weather conditions.

As the Minister's letter outlines, the new draft guidance includes the following **examples of good practice**:

- Promote and encourage good quality **second-hand school uniform stalls** at parents' evenings or other events.
- **Loan second-hand uniform** items to pupils and setting up a resource room where pupils can access these discretely to avoid stigmatisation

The Welsh Government has also established a new scheme of financial support, '**PDG Access**'¹, which will help eligible households with various school costs, including school uniform. PDG Access was established after the Welsh Government ended the previous School Uniform Grant in the 2018-19 budget setting round (see section 4, 'Assembly action').

The previous School Uniform Grant had an annual budget of £700,000 and provided £105 to each household of a pupil eligible for free school meals (eFSM) on their transition to secondary school (Year 7), to help meet school uniform costs. The Welsh Government [decided in its 2018-19 budget](#) to end this grant and make the money available for the reprioritisation of various local government grants for general funding for local authorities to support school budgets.

The Minister for Education subsequently [announced in June 2018](#) that there would be a **new broader PDG Access fund** which would **replace the School Uniform Grant** and provide more flexibility in what households could use the money for. Introduced in September 2018 at a cost of £1.7 million, it is worth more for each household (£125 as opposed to £105) and supports a greater number of pupils. The Welsh Government has focused the grant on the entry point to primary education (Reception) as well as the transition point to secondary school (Year 7).

The [Welsh Government has recently announced](#) the further extension of PDG Access to include pupils starting Years 3 and 10 (the other two key stage transition points) and Looked After Children in all year groups. To finance this, the Welsh Government has allocated £3.4 million on top of the current £1.7 million to bring the **cost of PDG Access to over £5 million**.

The level of support is again increasing, to **£200 per eligible child**, and the eligible uses of the money are being extended further to not only uniform and other school-based costs but non-classroom settings such as youth clubs. Local authorities will administer the scheme.

¹ The scheme is called PDG Access as it is targeted at the same group of pupils – eFSM pupils – as the Pupil Development Grant (PDG), which since 2012 has provided additional money to schools to support the education of eFSM pupils, Looked After Children and adopted children.

The Minister's letter to this Committee, responding to the petition, also gives details of this announcement, as did [her statement in Plenary on 30 April 2019](#).

3. Assembly action

As referred to above, the Welsh Government's action regarding PDG Access followed criticism it received from stakeholders and the Children, Young People and Education Committee of its decision in the 2018–19 budget to **end the School Uniform Grant**.

In April 2018, the [CYPE Committee wrote](#) to the Minister for Education, expressing concern that this could 'lead to a loss of important financial support to families on low incomes in purchasing school uniforms' and asking several questions about the process that the Welsh Government had followed when deciding to end the former School Uniform Grant.

The [Minister's response \(May 2018\)](#) set out her intention to introduce an improved scheme to replace the former School Uniform Grant. Kirsty Williams' statement of 7 June 2018 and subsequent announcements (discussed in section 2 above) followed thereafter.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.