

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-877
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/05862/19

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Dear Janet

Thank you for your letter of 8 April asking for my view in relation to a petition the Petitions Committee has received from Rachael Mackay of Monnow Primary School in Newport that would like to see a used school uniform scheme up and running in every city in Wales.

There is no education legislation in Wales specifically covering the wearing of school uniform. Section 21 of the Education Act 2002 places the conduct of a maintained school under the direction 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 and this may include having a school uniform policy in place which can promote school discipline and ensure that pupils are dressed appropriately for learning activity.

The Welsh Government strongly encourages schools to have a school uniform policy in place as it has many benefits. When introducing a new uniform policy or considering changes in school uniform requirements, the Welsh Government expects governing bodies to consider equality issues, the wide availability of uniform garments and cost implications to families and to consult widely with parents, pupils and other groups on a new or revised school uniform policy.

The Welsh Government currently provides non-statutory guidance to schools and governing bodies on school uniform and appearance policies. In November 2018 I published a consultation seeking views from stakeholders on Welsh Government's draft statutory guidance for governing bodies on school uniform and appearance policies.

In addition to updating the guidance I decided to make it statutory to better support governing bodies in making their decisions on school uniform policies in respect of access, affordability and flexibility.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The examples of good practice in relation to financial assistance with school uniforms given in the draft guidance include,

- 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.
- Bulk purchase of items to sell to parents at a discounted price, possibly coupled with an easy payment scheme.
- Denbighshire County Council and Citizens Advice Denbighshire run a school uniform recycle scheme that allows parents to access affordable, high-quality uniforms in their community. Donated uniforms are collected from schools before the end of the summer term so that they can be recycled and made available to other families for free or for a donation at a recycle shop (donations help cover the cost of washing the uniforms).

The consultation received over 900 responses, these are now being carefully considered by Welsh Government officials to finalise the guidance accordingly. It will replace the current non-statutory guidance and will come into effect from September 2019.

I'm fully aware the cost of the school day is a really important issue for many families in Wales, my officials continue to investigate the matter to see if more can be done to help keep costs down. It is essential all our learners are able to access the same opportunities. It is unacceptable some of our young people miss out on opportunities because of their personal circumstances and background. I want young people to show up at school ready to learn and reach their best outcomes. I also want to explore all avenues to help ensure that happens – whether that's thinking about how their well-being can be prioritised or by helping remove worries associated with some of the costs of the school day.

Late last year, I asked Children in Wales to produce a suite of guides for schools covering key aspects in addressing the cost of the school day, including understanding the causes and impact of living in poverty, food and hunger, and school uniforms. Children in Wales will work in partnership to develop the guides, including with the End Child Poverty Network Cymru. The guides will focus on opportunities to change culture in schools around poverty and disadvantage and provide strategies for addressing particular challenges and barriers around the cost of the school day.

Alongside this work we have already announced the significant increase in funding through our Pupil Development Grant – Access. Funding exceeds £5m for next financial year. Not only are we looking for opportunities to change cultures and practices in schools, but we are also providing direct funding to families. This funding is not limited to supporting the cost of school uniform; it will support greater aspiration, cultural enrichment, well-being and resilience. Whether it is help buying school uniform or getting the right clothing or equipment for young people to take part in their favourite sport or activity inside or outside of school, then PDG – Access will support those opportunities. We are also supporting more learners.

The additional investment means that eligible families of Year 7 pupils will receive £200, instead of the current £125; relieving some of the increased costs associated with starting secondary school. The funding will also allow the inclusion of eligible learners in Year 3 and Year 10, and provide funding for looked after children (LAC) in every compulsory school year. This means the funding will extend to a much wider cohort of learners, ensuring more parents are able to access the support they need when they need it.

I have also asked local authorities to administer a fund to develop more sustainable long term options. We are extending this beyond the classroom to include groups such as youth clubs, to bid for kit stores.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kirsty Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

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