

# COSTS OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS BILL

## Briefing for MPs for second reading of Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Bill - Friday 13 March

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The Costs of School Uniforms Bill is a Private Members' Bill that addresses excessive school uniform costs. Its second reading is scheduled to take place on **Friday 13 March 2020**. This briefing aims to give you more information about the costs of school uniforms, how these costs can impact families in your constituencies, and how you can support the Bill. We are encouraging MPs to attend the second reading of the Bill and show their support for it on social media. If you have any questions, or would like to meet with us to discuss school costs, please contact Kate Anstey, UK Cost of the School Day Lead, on [kanstey@cpag.org.uk](mailto:kanstey@cpag.org.uk).

This briefing covers:

1. The costs of school uniforms and their impact on families
2. Information about the Costs of School Uniforms Bill
3. How you can support the Bill
4. About the Cost of the School Day project
5. About Child Poverty Action Group

### 1. The costs of school uniforms and their impact on families

The high costs of school uniforms are a burden on children and families across England. Through our Cost of the School Day project, we have heard from children, families and school staff about **the pressure that uniform costs and school policies around uniforms place on families**.

*"You see from day one the ones that it will get worse for, you see it as the term goes on – they all start smart and clean but then some families can replace [clothing] and some can't." – Teacher*

*"School uniform can be quite expensive, especially if you want to look smart." – Pupil, age 10*

*"You get detention... if you don't have your tie on." – Pupil, age 11*

A 2018 survey by the Children's Society found that 13% of parents were **getting into debt** to cover school uniform costs, and nearly one in six families said school uniform costs were to blame for them having to **cut back on food and other basic essentials**.<sup>1</sup>

Parents spend an average of **£340 per year** on uniform for each child at secondary school, and **£255 per year** for each child in primary school.<sup>2</sup>

Pupils and families report **stigmatisation and marginalisation** related to the high costs of school uniform, with poorer families less able to replace items that are worn out or no longer fit. Children and young people involved in our Cost of the School Day project report that pupils are aware of differences in the condition of their peers' clothing, and describe instances where people are picked on for their uniform.<sup>3</sup>

*"Kids have told me that, that's one of the things that hurts the most, when they get picked on for having like broken shoes or like a hole in their top or whatever, because kids are just laughing and say 'oh, you've got a hole in your shoes' but they don't realise that it's actually because they don't have a lot of money." – School staff member<sup>4</sup>*

One factor contributing to the high costs of uniforms is the increasing use by schools of **compulsory branded clothes** as part of their uniforms instead of more affordable unbranded items. This often means that families can only buy the uniforms from one supplier. When schools have an **exclusive supplier**, the average cost of a uniform **increases by £71** for secondary schools and **£77** for primary schools.<sup>5</sup>

*“If you send your child to a private school, you might expect to pay those costs. But these are state schools.” – Kirsty Powell, mother of four*

## 2. Information about the Costs of School Uniforms Bill

There is no legislation currently in place relating to school uniform in England. Schools are not required to have a uniform policy, but the Department for Education strongly encourages schools to have a uniform and follow its published guidance.<sup>6</sup> In November 2015, the Government indicated it would make this guidance statutory, and in 2019, schools minister Nick Gibbs stated that the Government “intends to put the school uniform guidance on a statutory footing when a suitable legislative opportunity arises.”

**Mike Amesbury MP’s Private Members’ Bill about school uniform costs** aims to introduce new statutory guidance on school uniforms costs, and specifies that schools must have regard to this guidance when setting their uniform policies. The key points of the Bill:

- The Secretary of State **must issue guidance** to the appropriate authorities of relevant schools in England about the **costs aspects of school uniform policies**.
- The appropriate authority of a relevant school **must have regard** to guidance issued under this section when developing and implementing a school uniform policy for the school.

## 3. How you can support the Bill

CPAG has joined a number of charities and organisations in signing an open letter of support for this Bill, because we believe it could make a positive difference to children and families across England by addressing excessive uniform costs. We encourage you to support the Bill: if you are able to, **please attend the second reading of the Bill on Friday 13 March 2020**. If you are unable to attend, please **show your support for the Bill on social media**.

## 4. About the Cost of the School Day project

The Cost of the School Day project was started by CPAG in Scotland in 2014 with the aim of reducing the financial barriers that prevent pupils from fully participating in the school day. 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. Following the success of this project in Glasgow and Dundee, CPAG recently expanded the project to local authorities in England, Wales and new parts of Scotland.

Since January of this year, we have already worked in six schools and spoken with over 2,000 pupils. We regularly hear from families that school uniforms are too expensive. In addition to addressing uniform costs, we work with schools to address costs associated with other aspects of the school day, including learning resources, eating at school, school trips, and fun events. Beyond school-level interventions, we also work with local authorities to bring about system and policy change. Find out more at: [cpag.org.uk/cosd](http://cpag.org.uk/cosd)

## 5. About Child Poverty Action Group

Child Poverty Action Group works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. It doesn’t have to be like this. Our vision is of a society free of child poverty, where all children can enjoy a childhood free of financial hardship and have a fair chance in life to reach their full potential. 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. We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need.

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<sup>1</sup> [‘The Wrong Blazer 2018’](#), 2018, The Children’s Society

<sup>2</sup> See note 1

<sup>3</sup> [‘Cost of the School Day Glasgow report’](#), 2015, Child Poverty Action Group

<sup>4</sup> [‘Cost of the School Day Dundee report’](#), 2018, Child Poverty Action Group

<sup>5</sup> See note 1

<sup>6</sup> [‘School uniform costs in England’](#), 2019, House of Commons Library