



Baroness Berridge of the Vale of Catmose

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System
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Lord Watson of Invergowrie
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27 April 2021

Dear Mike,

Thank you for your contributions to the Committee Stage debate on the Education (Guidance about the Costs of School Uniforms) Bill on 16 April 2021. I am writing to you to follow up on the issue of school uniform grants.

As I outlined during the debate, the Department believes that rather than subsidising expensive school uniforms by providing uniform grants, we should focus on making school uniform affordable for all families by issuing statutory guidance.

The draft statutory guidance asks schools to think about their uniform holistically to keep the cost down. As branded items are often more expensive than their generic counterparts, schools should keep these items to a minimum and limit their use to low cost or long-lasting items. Schools should also ensure that their supply arrangements are transparent and competitive. This will ensure that parents get the best value for money in their supply arrangements. To ensure that parents can benefit from these changes and make the best decisions schools should ensure that their uniform policy should be clear and easy for parents to understand.

Nevertheless, we do recognise that some families may continue to struggle with the cost of school uniform. Therefore, we have also placed a strong emphasis on second-hand uniform, advocating the benefits of this and requiring all schools to make this available to parents in some way. For example, they could either provide this service themselves or participate in other appropriate established local schemes.

I also want to make clear that the Government would not want to prevent local authorities from continuing to offer clothing grants or help with the cost of school clothing in cases of financial hardship, or prevent schools from offering support where they choose to do so. Therefore, as in the existing non-

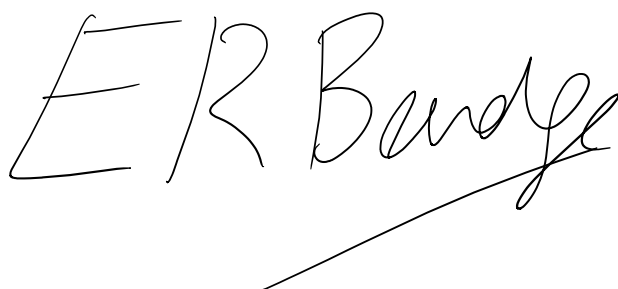
statutory guidance on school uniform, we have also included information on school clothing grants in the draft statutory guidance.

School autonomy is a key principle in our school system, and we have been careful not to undermine this in the guidance. We want to allow schools to take sensible decisions based on their own individual circumstances. Trusts can sometimes negotiate support for struggling families as part of their contract with uniform providers.

As I mentioned during the debate, this Government is delivering the biggest funding boost for schools in a decade which will give every school more money for every child. We are increasing school funding by more than £14bn over three years, compared with 2019-20. We trust schools and head teachers to spend their budgets in a way that achieves the best outcomes.

I hope this response is helpful and I am grateful for your support on this important issue. I will place a copy of this letter in the House library.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "ER Berridge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

BARONESS BERRIDGE OF THE VALE OF CATMOSE

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY