

How to complain on school costs issues and how to challenge your local authority's failure to offer school clothing grants.

Are you a parent/carer with concerns over the cost of schooling? Perhaps you have tried to get a school uniform grant from your local authority and been told they no longer offer them. Or perhaps you've tried contacting your school about the cost of uniform/kit/trips and not felt listened to. The following guidance explains some steps you might like to consider in improving matters for yourself and other parents in the same position.

Secretary of State for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) Ed Balls stated recently that schools should give high priority to costs and that policies should be kept under review. The following questions and answers are based on the guidance provided by the Secretary of State.

I am concerned that my child's school does not give high priority to costs and does not keep costs under review. What should I do?

In the first instance take up the matter with the **school** direct, with the head or member of the school management team. They should be aware of legislation which prevents schools charging for certain activities and be aware of guidance in the School Admissions Code on school uniforms and charging policies. Keep a record of any replies you receive.

I've taken the matter up with the school but I'm still not happy.

The school **governing body** must have a complaints procedure in place to deal with issues such as complaints about uniform policies. The school will be able to put you in touch with the chair of governors.

Is there anyone else or any other organisation or body which will listen to complaints from parents?

Yes! There are a number of possible routes depending on the nature of your complaint. If your school has an exclusive contracts to provide school uniforms then this may be subject to enforcement action by the **Office of Fair Trading**. If you are concerned that certain school policies are affecting your decision to send your child to a particular school then you can object to the **Schools adjudicator**. Parents can object to the adjudicator about admission arrangements which they do not think comply with the law.

My concerns about uniforms are not going to stop me from sending my child to a particular school but I feel the policies are unfair and the school isn't listening. Is there anything else I can do?

Yes ! You can contact the **Admission Forum**. Under the law, all local authorities are required to establish and Admission Forum. Made up of schools, local authority representatives and other interested parties, the forums consider local policies and fair

access. They have the power to look at uniform or charging policies and suggest areas of improvement. Schools “must have regard to any advice” offered by their Admissions Forum. Your local **Citizens Advice Bureaux** may be already involved trying to influence the work of the admissions forum so you could contact them. They would be interested to hear your experiences on school cost issues as part of the Adding Up campaign which aims to influence government policy on this important issue. If you want to find out more about the campaign contact: Adrian.galvin@citizensadvice.org.uk

Can I get help with school costs such as uniforms and other essential clothing?

The law gives local authorities discretion to provide school uniform grants. Check out your local authority website to see what its policy is on school uniform grants.

My local authority says it does not provide school clothing grants. Is there anything I can do?

Yes. Citizens Advice is encouraging parents/carers to challenge local authorities that refuse to consider reasonable requests for school clothing grants. In September 2008 a Rossendale CAB client successfully challenged Lancashire County Council over its refusal to consider her request for a grant. Help is available for clients challenging their local authority. Contact your local CAB to find out if it is already doing campaigning work on education costs. Or contact: adrian.galvin@citizensadvice.org.uk