

Introduction

This report sets out the decision regarding school uniform which was made by the governing body at its meeting on 3 June 2015. It also summarises the results of the consultation with parents/carers, staff and children, and sets out some of the common points raised, as well as some of the very particular points which we felt needed to be considered.

The consultation ran from 27 February – 27 March. Consultation documents and feedback forms were sent out to 659 parents/carers, and 78 members of staff. Each named parent/carer was given a feedback form, regardless of number of children at the school, and all staff (teaching and non-teaching) were included. Forms were numbered to ensure that they couldn't be copied. Three open meetings were held during the consultation period, on different days and at different times. Children were given time in class to discuss the issue, and class reps brought comments to a special meeting of the School Council.

There has been a very large response to the consultation from all parts of the Chestnuts community. We received 309 feedback forms from parents/carers, and 47 from staff. About 15 parents came to one or other of the open meetings, and the governors have received emailed comments as well.

Although we asked people to select their preferred option from a list, we did not consider this to be a vote. Rather, we have aimed to listen to as many people as possible, and to consider how best to proceed taking into account the rationale put forward by the school, the 'sense of the community' as a whole, and the particular points raised during the consultation.

Hundreds of individual points were raised during the consultation, and each one has been included in our decision-making. It would be impossible to set them all out here, so we have tried to summarise the common themes, and hope that everyone will find their own opinions reflected somewhere in this document.

The decision

Given that a very clear majority of parents and staff who responded to the consultation said that they would like to see compulsory school uniform introduced, the governing body has decided that **from September 2015 all pupils will be required to wear school uniform.**

Having considered the many issues that were raised during the consultation, both by those for and against compulsory uniform, we have decided that **the uniform will consist of:**

- Plain yellow or gold polo shirt with collar (with or without Chestnuts logo).
- Plain yellow or brown jumper, sweatshirt or cardigan (with or without Chestnuts logo).
- Plain black, brown or grey trousers, skirts, shorts, leggings, tights or tunics, or combinations (e.g., leggings under a skirt).
- Yellow check dresses.
- Comfortable shoes with a low heel, which are fitted to the child's foot.

Uniform items can be brought from anywhere, and do not need to include the school logo. However, it will be possible to order uniform with the school logo through the school website and via the School Office.

Consultation results: preferred options

Five options were given on the feedback form for parents/carers and members of staff. The table below sets out the responses received.

Option	Parents/carers	Staff
A (keep policy the same)	60 (19%)	1 (2%)
B (compulsory polo shirt)	4 (1%)	0 (0%)
C (compulsory polo + jumper)	31 (10%)	3 (6%)
D (compulsory polo + jumper + trousers/skirt/shorts)	85 (28%)	16 (34%)
E (compulsory polo + jumper + trousers/skirt/shorts + shoes)	122 (39%)	26 (55%)
Other (unclear, more than one option ticked, etc.)	7 (2%)	1 (2%)
Total	309 (100%)	47 (100%)

It is clear from the responses that a large majority (78%) of parents/carers, and an even larger majority (95%) of staff, wish to see a compulsory school uniform at Chestnuts. A sizeable majority of parents/carers (67%), and a large majority of staff (89%), wish this compulsory uniform to include clothing worn on the bottom half (trousers, skirts, shorts). However, a majority of respondents (58%) do not wish the uniform to include shoes.

Children’s feedback from School Council was more balanced, with many arguments on both sides (children were not invited to select a preferred option.)

General comments in favour of compulsory school uniform

Of the many hundreds of comments received, these are some of the main points raised.

Ease for parents in the morning. Having a compulsory uniform would make the mornings easier, as it would mean there were no arguments with their children about what to wear.

Safety on school trips. Agreeing with the school that having all children looking the same would make management of school trips easier and safer.

Financial reasons. Uniform will cost less money, so it will be easier for families to clothe their children.

Looking smart. The school will look a lot smarter if all children were wearing the same, and it will give a smarter feel to the place.

Unity and community. Uniform will help promote a sense of belonging and togetherness, and bring the whole school together as a community.

Less bullying, more inclusive. If everyone was wearing the same, there would be less bullying around clothing.

Less peer pressure. Uniform would remove peer pressure to dress in a certain way.

Supporting the SLT. The governors and parents should support the school, who know the children best.

Preparation for secondary school. Uniform now gets children in the mind for uniform at secondary school.

General comments in favour of keeping the policy as it is

Ease for parents in the morning. Parents and children need to be able to negotiate issues such as dressing, and this is much more of an issue in the early years (R, Yr1). Unfair to impose a uniform on all just because some would find it easier. Others would find it harder to force their children into uniform.

Safety on school trips. Children wear coats on trips, so the uniform would be hidden in any case. Hi-viz jackets would be an easy/cheap alternative.

Financial reasons. Buying a whole new set of clothes just for school hours is an additional expense. Much cheaper if you can source your children's clothes from anywhere.

Unity and community. Chestnuts has a great sense of community already – this is one of the standout features of the school. No evidence that uniform increases a sense of community.

Bullying. If there is an issue of bullying, why isn't it being addressed in any case? Bullying is about deeper issues than clothing, and these root causes need to be tackled.

Lost clothing. If parents are upset at losing expensive branded items, they should learn the lesson from this. Not a reason to impose uniform.

Sense of individual identity. Children's choice of clothes is an important form of self-expression and creativity, and at primary school age it would be a real shame to squash this.

Not secondary school. Given that uniform is compulsory at most secondary schools, children should be given their primary school years without it.

Particular issues raised during the consultation process

From the feedback received from parents and staff, it is clear that a large majority support the school's proposal to introduce compulsory school uniform (feedback from the children was more balanced, with many in favour and many against). It was therefore clear that governors needed to agree to a change in school uniform policy, as requested by the school.

However, a number of important points – detailed below – were raised by parents who either wanted to keep uniform optional, or who supported compulsory uniform but nevertheless raised particular concerns. The governors felt that it was important to consider the features of the new policy carefully, in order to meet as many of these concerns as possible whilst supporting the rationale provided by the school.

Minimising cost. Although financial arguments were made for and against uniform, there was feedback which suggested real concern on behalf of some parents about how they would be able to afford the expenditure on additional clothing. Several respondents were very worried that further clothing costs would have a direct impact on the amount of money available for food.

In addition, for many of those who selected Option D but not Option E (i.e., selected to exclude shoes), cost was an important factor. Many mentioned how expensive shoes are, and how quickly children's feet grow.

Physical difficulties in wearing uniforms. A number of parents were worried that their children would have physical difficulties in wearing an official uniform, and that any 'special allowance' in their cases might serve to single them out.

Trousers, shorts and skirts. There were many points raised – especially amongst those in favour of uniform – about needing to ensure that the uniform allowed for summer months, and that there was a choice of clothing for the bottom half to allow for individual needs and varying weather.

Diversity. Although the weight of opinion amongst the community clearly values uniformity over diversity, some important and powerful points were raised about the value of diversity in clothing reflecting the diversity of the children. The beauty of self-expression through clothing (whether that is a batman outfit or princess dress, or simply some nail varnish or hair gel) was expressed by many parents.

Many of these opinions connected with concerns over the gendering of clothing, and pressures of conformity in questions of emerging sexuality. Given that the school highly values diversity, self-expression and individuality, the governors thought it important to think about ways in which a uniform policy reflected these priorities.

Allergic reactions and environmental concerns. Several parents stated that their children were allergic to nylon / Teflon, and would not be able to wear the uniform currently provided by the school. Others queried the environmental impact of such materials, and the ethics of supermarket purchasing.

Pupil premium. Several responses queried whether the use of Pupil Premium to improve the look of the school is an appropriate use of this money.

Enforcement. Some parents were concerned about the enforcement of the policy, given a concern that they would not be able to wash the uniforms in time, or might get their children into trouble. Others were concerned that a compulsory uniform would lead to significant teacher time being taken up with enforcement, and might alter the relationship between teachers and parents in a negative way.

How these points fed into our decision

Governors were clear that most parents/carers and most staff were in favour of compulsory school uniform, and that we therefore needed to agree to this change. However, we also felt that introducing flexibility within the policy would support families with different budgets, allergies, disabilities, and environmental/ethical concerns, and also allow for some degree of self-expression and diversity.

We decided that this flexibility should be about having clear colour guidelines whilst allowing families to choose suppliers, materials and styles. We also decided to exclude shoes from the policy (other than continuing to say that they need to be comfortable, low heeled and close fitting). Such flexibility would also mean that the school did not need to offer financial support as a matter of course, given that parents could source clothing from any supplier at low cost. There will be financial support available to those who need, on request to the school.

We also asked the school to clarify that uniform is not a behaviour issue, and any enforcement issues will be taken up gently with parents/carers, and not with the children. The school has reassured us that it will continue to be the same friendly and supportive place as always!