



Dear Parent/Carer,

The issue of footwear as a part of the school uniform appears to have caused some confusion at the start of the new school year. I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to outline the situation which we currently face and to explain the thinking behind Dyffryn Taf's approach to school uniform.

A school uniform has many purposes:-

- It promotes a sense of identity and belonging;
- It removes the need for decision making on what to wear;
- Importantly, a lack of branding other than that of the school itself helps to ensure that pupils from families where money is tight are not unduly disadvantaged.

Having decided that they want to have a uniform, schools then have to decide how they want that uniform to look. Dyffryn Taf has always opted for a smart, formal type of uniform – e.g. shirt and tie, school jumper etc. We believe that a smart, formal look conveys the values we wish to promote as a school; high standards, a firm approach to discipline and an acknowledgement of the excellent traditions of the school. I can assure you that those values remain at our core and will not be changing.

However, it has become clear since I have taken up my position that a grey area has emerged in recent years regarding footwear. I would like to explain that situation, but also to stress that in doing so, I am not being critical of anything which has gone before. As we all know, sometimes things evolve as a result of competing factors, not all of which are within our control.

In recent years, there has been a deliberate trend by some footwear manufacturers to produce designs so that, effectively, many trainers resemble school shoes. Also, many of the more traditional shoe makers have launched hybrid designs that look more like trainers than shoes, for both the child and adult markets. These decisions are obviously outside the school's control.

Within the school, there are some areas of information which have been open to interpretation. For example, the most recent prospectus specifically states that 'Vans' and 'Converse' leather trainers are not allowed. Earlier prospectuses and certain messages on the website only make reference to black leather shoes. It also seems to be the case that, on occasions, certain styles of leather 'Vans' have been approved in discussions with staff as fitting the bill of leather shoes. Again, that is not offered as a criticism, but as an example of difficult and sometimes subjective decisions that staff have been forced to make, often on the basis of relatively minor differences in design.

We are, therefore, now at a point where a considerable minority of pupils are wearing leather trainers, many of which are difficult to distinguish from the more casual shoes referred to above. I will be frank; I have no doubt that amongst that group of pupils are some who choose that footwear knowing that it was not allowed at the school. However, I am also of the view that some will have bought these in good faith on the basis of previous interaction with staff.

I would also like to explicitly thank those parents who have supported the school's uniform policy, and possibly fought a summer long battle with their children by insisting upon formal school shoes. As a parent of one teenager and one near teenager, I know myself how draining that can sometimes be!

In summary, we have a situation in which we need to balance the principle of full adherence to school expectations with the practical reality of a situation where money has been spent, where footwear (unlike say jewellery) cannot be confiscated and where shoes are becoming a distraction from our core purpose – i.e. the promotion of high quality teaching and learning.

I have, therefore, reached the following decision. **For the remainder of this academic year only, all black leather shoes will be allowed.** However, the principle of not wanting branding in sight remains important. If your son or daughter wishes to wear Vans or similar, he or she will have to ensure that they are completely black and unbranded.

Additionally, this situation has led me and the Senior Management Team to consider a uniform review, in order to establish and communicate very clear parameters. Further information on that will be forthcoming across the year and I would urge you to engage with surveys and discussions etc, as your time allows. In the meantime, if you would like to meet with me to discuss these issues in person, or wish to offer any views in writing, please do not hesitate to contact me at the school.

I hope this offers a practical solution to a problem which is not of any one person's making. May I again thank you for supporting the school in our commitment to maintaining high standards.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J Kennedy". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name below it.

Mr J G Kennedy
Headteacher