

MAESTEG SCHOOL

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Headteacher / Pennaeth: H. Jones B.A. (Hons) N.P.Q.H.

Dear Parent/Carer,

You will, by now, be aware of the Governor's decision to introduce a blazer as part of our school uniform for Years 7 and 10 only from September 2023. We are aware of the reaction of this decision from a few parts of our community and believe it is important that we clarify the rationale behind this decision. We appreciate that like all decisions, there will be those which disagree; however, we strongly believe that adopting a blazer is ultimately in the best interest of our pupils and their families, a conviction which underpins everything that we do as a school.

We would be grateful if you take the time to read and fully reflect on the information we wish to share in this letter.

Rationale

- In a statement at the start of May, Jeremy Miles, the education and Welsh language minister, tasked all schools 'to prioritise making school uniforms cheaper for families, who continue to feel the pressure of rising costs.' This was a little over five weeks ago and as a school we were aware that any changes would need to be implemented promptly as parents would soon begin the process of purchasing items for the new school year in September.
- The decision to adopt blazers as part of our new uniform was very much in keeping with Jeremy Miles' statement. The wearing of a uniform should give pupils a sense of pride and belonging and not something which creates an unnecessary burden on a family's finances. With most items of uniform, parents are able to 'shop around' and have the choice of a number of retail outlets for best value items. The consultation therefore included the mid-layer top as parents and pupils have already adopted this item as the uniform preferred by younger year groups; the traditional school jumper and the new option of a black blazer in keeping with the blazers already adopted by the 6th form.

At the time of research, best prices for these items were as follows:

Item	Stockist	Cost
Blazer without Logo	ASDA	£14 - £18
	Marks and Spencer	£23 - £29
Blazer with Logo	Gwyn Richards	£28-£35
	Euro Schools	
	Front Row	

Jumpers without Logo	ASDA	2 pack starting at £11
	Marks and Spencer	2 pack from £11 - £17
	TESCO	2 pack starting from £8
Jumpers with Logo	Gwyn Richards	From £18
	Front Row	
Mid-Layer Top with Logo	Gwyn Richards	Anything up to Youth Large - £25
	Front Row	Youth XL - £30
		Small Adults - £35

Cost of Living

The school has always been sensitive to the associated costs parents face when sending their child to school. As a result, we have worked hard to introduce initiatives that allow all children to engage fully in the life of the school removing additional costs that could pose a barrier. Examples of these initiatives are listed below:

- ➔ Free transport - Free transport every day from the after-school clubs Monday - Thursday
- ➔ School funds all cookery lessons to protect parents from having to supply ingredients for food technology lessons
- ➔ Free Chrome book for every single child from year 7 to year 13
- ➔ Free breakfast for every learner
- ➔ Free swimming lessons for Yr7 learners from an Olympic swimmer
- ➔ Free access to subscriptions for platforms like the Financial Times
- ➔ Private Tutor experience for Yr11 learners in English and Maths
- ➔ Uniform Swap Shop – we hope that this will be further developed with the introduction of blazers so that parents can pick up a blazer in return for donating one
- ➔ Prince's Trust projects and other community projects which support the most vulnerable in our community
- ➔ Prom Dress Swap
- ➔ Fund-raising to provide equipment for every young person participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award

Such initiatives show our commitment to keeping costs to a minimum to support our pupils and our community and we are proud to be developing young people who are determined to find ways to support the community in the current 'cost-of-living' crisis.

Consultation Process

The consultation period opened on 24th April. The purpose of the consultation was to seek the views of our school community rather than to count votes for each item of clothing. On reflection this should have been made clearer at the start of the process. We also apologise that the letter on 26th May which outlined the outcome of the consultation was sent only to parents of those pupils in Year 9; this was an administrative error and has since been rectified.

Final Outcome

	Black Blazer, White Shirt and Tie	Mid-Layer Top, Shirt and Tie	School Jumper, Shirt and Tie
Pupils	43	134	36
Parents	24	168	3

Mid Layer Top

It is worth outlining here, how the mid-layer top has become part of our school uniform. The mid-layer top was originally an optional item of the school's GCSE P.E. kit. However, due to the uniform adjustments schools were required to make during the Covid period, it was allowed as an option to all pupils throughout the pandemic. Given the cost of this single item, parents argued that as they had already purchased this expensive item, it should remain as an option to the school jumpers. The governors agreed to this request.

The consultation has shown that this piece of clothing is regarded as the most popular by both parents and pupils. However, Governors did not feel that they could endorse the mid-layer top as our adopted uniform because it is not widely available in a range of stores and is a relatively expensive item of clothing.

If the mid-layer top had not been included in the consultation (there is a strong argument that it should not have featured as an option at all) it is evident that the next most popular choice was the blazer.

Response from School Council

The school council met on *Wednesday 24th May* prior to the full Governing Body Meetings and was chaired by Mrs Sian Waters. Our School Council consisted of representatives from each year group with the exception of Year 11 and Year 13 who were involved in examinations. At that meeting, pupils were given the results of the consultation as they stood at that time. They had samples of all 3 items of clothing involved in the consultation and examined and tried on the options available for jumpers and blazers. The school council wishes parents to know:

“At the start of the process, the majority of the school council did not think that the blazers were a good idea due to the fact that the survey results came back as blazers being second choice after the quarter zip. In addition, it was stated that they are warm in the summer and lots of students mentioned that they didn't like the look of them.

However, after a meeting with the headteacher, we were introduced to the blazers and tried them on. The school council were surprised how comfy they were, how professional they looked and that the pockets would be really useful. Also, the research showed that a blazer could be purchased anywhere, not just from local suppliers unlike the mid layer. This was important to school council members as price came up as the main concern for lots of people in the survey. After much discussion, the school council agreed that the blazers were in fact the better choice. We understand that people will still have concerns, but we are hopeful that this will change with time. As a school council we believe that after all arguments were considered, blazers were the best option overall.

Please note that the meeting with the Headteacher took place before she presented this to the governing body of the school.” (Maesteg School Council)

Governing Body

The Full Governors’ board met on Wednesday 24th May, a date which is scheduled at the start of the school year. Governors were aware at the time of discussing the introduction of the blazer that the consultation ended on Friday 26th May and any additional information which came into the school would be made available to them. As each returned survey carries a date on which it is completed, only one further response was made following the 24th May, which chose the jumper as the most appropriate choice. Information shared with Governors at the meeting on 24th May included:

- research into the cost of various option choices;
- outcomes of the consultation period;
- rationale and vote from the school council;
- discussion of the financial and durability implications of the blazer and jumpers.

Uniform September 2023

Year	School Uniform	Games Uniform
7	Black trousers or black skirt – knee length Black blazer (with or without logo) White shirt School tie Black shoes or trainer (no logos) (optional – black v-neck jumper)	Black t shirt (logo optional) Black jogger, shorts or leggings Trainers Mid-layer top optional
8	Black trousers or black skirt – knee length Black v-neck jumper <i>OR mid-layer top</i> White shirt School tie Black shoes or trainers (no logos)	Black t shirt (logo optional) Black jogger, shorts or leggings Trainers Mid-layer top optional

9	Black trousers or black skirt – knee length Black v-neck jumper <i>OR mid-layer top</i> White shirt School tie Black shoes or trainers (no logos)	<i>Black t shirt (logo optional)</i> <i>Black jogger, shorts or leggings</i> <i>Trainers</i> <i>Mid-layer top optional</i>
10	Black trousers or black skirt – knee length Black blazer (with or without logo) White shirt School tie Black shoes or trainer (no logos) (optional – black v-neck jumper)	<i>Black t shirt (logo optional)</i> <i>Black jogger, shorts or leggings</i> <i>Trainers</i> <i>Mid-layer top optional</i>
11	Black trousers or black skirt – knee length Black v-neck jumper <i>OR mid-layer top</i> White shirt School tie Black shoes or trainers (no logos)	<i>Black t shirt (logo optional)</i> <i>Black jogger, shorts or leggings</i> <i>Trainers</i> <i>Mid-layer top optional</i>
12 and 13	Black trousers or black skirt Grey sixth form blazer (with or without logo) White shirt or blouse and tie Black shoes	N/A unless a BTEC PE student

Branded Items

Welsh Government have also strongly encouraged schools to minimise costs further by reducing the number of branded school logo items required. Although the school would prefer that the blazer is branded with our Maesteg School logo, we will not insist on this to enable parents to shop in high street stores. We are currently exploring ways to add logos to unbranded blazers (such as iron-on versions/embroidery machine) and will update parents once this is organised.

Summary

In short, the Governors' decision to introduce the blazer as part of school uniform was made after much discussion and careful consideration of all options. Our Governing Body includes parents and representatives from the community who contribute to decisions that are made in the best interests of our pupils, our families and our school. We work hard to raise the aspirations of our school community and have high expectations of the children who attend Maesteg School.

Thankyou

We wish to thank those parents in particular, who have taken the time to contact the school directly to formally engage in discussion with us around this topic and we are grateful for the perspective they have brought to this particular decision. We are aware that at times, decisions may be made that conflict with a parent's personal view which can be frustrating, and reasons for making such decisions are not always clearly or effectively communicated. For this we apologise and will endeavour to improve our communication with parents.

We appreciate the time you have taken to read this letter and hope that it may have gone some way to allay your concerns and fears and answered some questions. However, in order to improve communication between home and school and to allow parents to share their views with the school, there will be a 'Meet the Headteacher' forum which will be held at the school on Thursday 29th June at 3:30 pm. We look forward to meeting you then.

Yours faithfully,

Mrs H. Jones

Motivated to Strive / Ysgogi i Ymdrech

