



Going Back to School Breaks the Bank for Some Families, Warns Charity Family Action

- **Some Families Could Pay Nearly 40% of Monthly Income on Back to School Costs;**
- **Charity Warns That Increase in Academies Could Put Further Pressure on Family Finances as Uniform Costs Grow**

Charity Family Action is today warning that back to school costs are causing real hardship for low income and vulnerable families. Research by the charity, which provides emotional, practical and financial support to disadvantaged families, shows that for some families basic back to school costs can account for up to 40% of their monthly income. The charity is warning that a rise in Academies and Free Schools and cuts to local authority assistance could mean that going back to school breaks the bank for many families.

Research conducted by Family Action using a sample of Hackney schools and a selection of branded and non branded uniform and back to school items shows that uniform costs can account for up to two fifths of a family's income in August. Even when families spread back to school costs over two months they face having to spend up to a fifth of their disposable income on preparing their child for the start of term in September. Family Action's Grants Department still receives requests for financial assistance towards the cost of school uniforms from the poorest families as they struggle to equip their children with the basics for school.

Evidence is emerging that school uniform costs are increasing with more Academies than ever before and the possibility that new Free Schools will adopt expensive new uniform policies which will price out lower income parents. More than a fifth of all secondary schools are now Academies. Last summer the LGA warned that academies should not adopt expensive uniforms which would stretch the finances of families with children going back to school.

Family Action is calling on Local Authorities to ensure that there are more LEA grants schemes for families on low incomes to mitigate the pressure on family finances on back to school costs. Devolved budgets for schools should include a ring-fenced amount for school uniform grant scheme for poorest pupils so that children are not disadvantaged at school and family finances aren't further squeezed.

Family Action is also calling on the Government and Academy and Free School Governors to adopt fair uniform policies which keep branded items to a minimum, keep the number of compulsory items required to a minimum, make school uniform lists available to parents as early as possible, so they can begin planning, saving and purchasing the required items earlier, offer items of the uniform at cost price from the school shop rather than seeking to make a profit and set up a school uniform and equipment bank so that poor pupils can purchase items at reduced rate or be given them for free.

Family Action Chief Executive Helen Dent said: "It can't be right that going back to school breaks the bank for some families. Children and families should approach the new school year eagerly but we know from our work that too many families struggle to make ends meet over the expensive summer months in preparation for September. We have some good examples of local councils supporting vulnerable families with back to school costs in Hackney and Islington but for many families there is no such help and going back to school is squeezing family finances. With an increase in the number of Academies and Free Schools in the offing we want to see firmer guidance from Government and more support from Local Authorities and School Governors so that children don't miss out and parents don't dread their children going back to school."

Ends

Notes to Editors

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Family Action and Save the Children conducted polling in August 2009 which showed that over half of UK parents surveyed (51%) with an income below £30,000 couldn't afford everything their children needed for the start of the new school year. For parents on incomes below £12,000 a year that figure increased to 59%.

Case Study: Lone Parent living on the poverty line

In 2008/09, there were 3.9 million children (31 per cent) living in low income households ("being in poverty"): a household income less than 60 per cent of median household income. For 2008/09, the low-income threshold for a single parent with 2 children was worth £202 per week. This figure represents the individual's disposable income where tax and housing costs have been deducted.

Consider a lone parent with a disposable income of £202 a week (on the poverty line) with one primary school aged child and one secondary school child (total costs is £305.40). In the month of August when 'back-to-school' purchases are likely to take place, the estimated proportion of he/she's monthly income (£808) spent on 'back-to-school' is 37.8 per cent. This is 2.9 per cent of annual income (£11,128). Similarly over a 2-month period, the costs account for 18.9 per cent of each month's income.

Source: www.poverty.org.uk

Academy and Free School Number

One fifth of secondary school are now academies – 801. 1353 schools have applied to be an academy since June 2010.

323 schools have applied to be Free Schools.