



## MP Ellie Reeves

Through my casework I know how difficult the last year has been for so many families in this cost-of-living crisis. Mortgages rising, food prices rising and stubborn inflation - it has been overwhelming. And yet one often overlooked cost that can have a big impact is school uniforms. Their cost is up 25% since 2015. Sadly, many families struggle to afford uniforms placing undue financial and emotional pressure on them.

I was really proud to learn that our community has been taking action on this. Sense Charity Shop in Penge has partnered with parents from the Alexandra Junior School Parent Teacher and Friends Association to set up a fantastic uniform-hub. The hub accepts donations for general school uniforms as well as specifics from Alexandra, St John's, Churchfields, Harris Primary CP and Worsley Bridge with more coming soon. They sell these on at very affordable prices with proceeds going to the Sense charity.

I recently visited the shop and was not only blown away by the quantity of uniform donations but also by the quality of uniforms on sale. It was so heartening to see our community coming together to help address this issue and increase recycling rates. So a big thank you to everyone who has made this happen.

Children deserve to have the best start possible and small actions like this can go a long way. But another area in which young people are impacted is access to creative subjects in our schools. For example, music lessons are increasingly becoming an extracurricular activity open only to those who can afford it.

Government education cuts have left schools with difficult decisions to make. Despite this, again our community has responded. The brilliant Twang Guitars on Penge High Street recently set up the Twang Music Foundation (TMF) which aims to bring music teaching to children who would otherwise not be able to afford it.

I know Twang Guitars well and recently met with them to discuss the TMF. Alexandra Junior School was selected to be the test school for testing the idea and from this month TMF will be running a "rock school" teaching the kids guitar, drums, and demonstrating that learning an instrument isn't just about theory but can be great fun as well.

All of this community work is humbling. But in a country as well off as ours it is wrong that families still struggle with costs and access to creative subjects. A Labour government would change this. We would cut the cost of school uniforms by limiting the number of branded items parents are forced to buy, and we would ensure students can study a creative subject to the age of 16.

Imagine the progress our children can make when they have not only a willing community but also a willing government working for them.

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