

SCHOOLSHOP



2020 so far has been a most unusual and challenging period and will no doubt continue to be so for some time. As we enter the last 1/3 of the academic year and schools start to work towards welcoming the new starters in readiness for September, I wanted to update you on our position as your uniform provider and look for ways that will help us to support one another, to provide parents with as many opportunities as possible to get what they need and get the correct sizes for their child/children.

Stock

During the lockdown we have continued to remain operational with all the appropriate safety measures in place to protect staff and the public. Our forward orders were placed several months ago and are well advanced, we are in regular contact with our suppliers and in some cases we have taken delivery of plain stock to decorate in-house because dates had slipped and we wanted to avoid the possibility of goods arriving late.

Our embroidery section is running 5 days per week and the rails in the warehouse are filling up nicely. For some of our smaller schools we took delivery of plain stock in February and this stock has already been decorated and committed to the warehouse. If any school wishes to speak with me about their stock position, I am available Monday to Friday 7am to 5pm on 07981 453392.

Shop service

Our shop like many small retail outlets has been closed since the lockdown was introduced, but once restrictions are relaxed we will re-open. We will continue to observe all the required safety procedures which the government recommend and that may change the way we operate in our shop this summer.

If social distancing needs to be observed we will look to introduce an appointment system for those people who wish to come to our store, so their children can try on uniform. If this happens, we will extend our opening hours and introduce Sunday opening to create as many opportunities as possible for parents to get what they need.

Online sales

Our new website is in the final stages of testing and we have set a launch date during w/c 4th May. This is a completely new platform supported by a local operator just outside York. There will be a host of new back office features which will afford us better control and allow us to automatically keep customers informed of the progress of their order via e-mail updates.

This will help to reduce the anxiety of parents during the Back to School period and we should in turn see a decrease in the number of calls/e-mails for updates, which means we can concentrate on the business of getting orders completed as quickly as possible.

If sizings cannot take place in our Secondary Schools for Yr 6 pupils, it is possible that online orders may be placed with multiple product lines across several sizes. We would prefer to discourage this practice and will require your help to communicate with parents about the best options open to them.

If sizings don't go ahead we will most likely pull our cut off date back to late July to ensure we have the best possible chance of getting orders completed and delivered as quickly as possible. If goods then need to be returned for exchange we can then get these requests processed and the replacement goods out to parents in time for the start of school.

It may be that we have to restrict the number of products we can send to customers, to ensure there is sufficient stock for everyone. We don't know yet whether we would have to invoke such sanctions, but we cannot control who orders what and when and we want to do our very best to help everyone, but we also have to be realistic about what stock we can make available so that we ourselves are not over-stocked at the end of Back to School as this could be a huge financial burden and could jeopardise to future viability of Schoolshop.

Sizings

It is our hope that Yr 6 sizing events do go ahead in June/July. The expectation at present is that secondary schools may not fully re-open until September and this then may mean that there is an opportunity to conduct Full Day Sizing events in school on the agreed dates.

I have secured the support of the majority of my sizing team, although very sadly we have lost one of our sizing team and a very close personal friend to Covid-19 and as a former Headteacher and Educational Advisor, Project Manager of a Foodbank and a Chair of Governors at a PRS, he will be a huge loss not just to us but to many, many people.

If sizings can go ahead with the support of our schools, and my sizing team and social distancing needs to continue to be strictly observed, then we can offer full day sizing events which will help considerably to restrict the flow of families through the day by means of an appointment system. I have explored the possibility of installing an appointment calendar on our new website and have found several suitable plugins which would work well.

Sizings are a vital resource for parents to help them get the correct sized uniform for their child/children and enable them to make better informed choices about what items to purchase. We hope the sizings can take place and we are keen to work very closely with our primary & secondary schools to support these events taking place.

In most schools, parents are able to place orders before leaving the sizing event, it is uncertain whether due to staff numbers, etc we will be able to offer a till service, but if we can do so, we will and if we need to obtain new equipment to help keep parents and staff safe then we will do so.

Returns

It is very likely that restrictions on travel and social distancing may mean parents have to rely heavily on online ordering. This may result in a large volume of returns and this will impact massively on our operation, not just in extra workload but financially. Currently to undertake an exchange for a customer the cost is in the region of £8-£10 per customer.

This comprises of 4 elements as follows:

- A fixed return cost of £2.51
- A fixed postage cost of £3.26 for the replacement goods to be returned, even if this were just 1 item
- A staff cost of between £2 & £4, depending upon the time take to process the return
- Packing costs of £0.15 per parcel

To ensure we can operate an efficient and cost effective service we have regrettably had to withdraw our free returns facility and parents will be required to pay for goods to be returned at an average cost of £2.85 for a small 2nd class parcel, which is the service we provided as part of our free returns offering.

This was a difficult decision to make, but necessary in the event that the restrictions we are facing mean everything has to be done differently this summer.

We are here to help

We want to do everything we can to ensure this Back to School runs as smoothly as possible and the best way to achieve this is to work together. We will need your help to communicate our messages to parents, but also want to know how we can support you, so please engage with us and tell us what we can do to help.

I am under no illusions that this will be a difficult Back to School, parents can play their part by ordering as early as possible (some have already done so) and being patient with us as we will need time to get everything organised for them. The key message as with every Back to School is “DON’T LEAVE IT TOO LATE”, let’s get this done together.

Take care & stay safe

Peter

Peter Dalton

