12th October 2020

Dear Valued Customer,

**A warm thank you**

Now that Back-To-School has finally run its course, we wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for delivering a successful season in the face of such exceptionally challenging conditions.

Please also pass on special thanks to your colleagues on the ‘front line’ of retail, interacting everyday with the general public in the face of great uncertainty, and under so much stress. You are the public face of our trade and your highly professional, can-do attitude is a credit to us all.

**Order Early to assure good service**

It will come as no surprise that we expect 2021 to be a bumpy ride. Global supply chains are still facing significant challenges due to COVID and we therefore encourage you to place your orders for next year as soon as possible. This will help suppliers mitigate some of the risks that we will all face by getting things made and shipped from overseas as soon as possible. In turn, it will help us to deliver a better service to you and your customers, which is a goal that we all share.

We know that forecasting next year’s sales will be very difficult, as we are in that same boat; so the more conversations you can have with your schools on this subject the better.

**Our supply chains**

Our ‘order early’ message isn’t about suppliers trying to put to the onus on retailers to fix problems – we can assure you and your schools that our supply chains are robust, ready and able to deliver. However, as the pandemic continues to evolve, we must think ahead and do all we can to assure robust supply and the simplest way of achieving this is to place our orders early, which we can only do if we have your orders in first.

The impact of the ending of the Brexit transition period and the issue of a trade deal with the EU is still uncertain, and again placing orders order will help to mitigate some of that risk.

**Schoolwear Association**

You will be aware of the key role the Schoolwear Association played in ensuring the DfE’s guidelines about uniform were clear and positive when schools returned in September. Had we not had a trade association it may have been a very different outcome. We would encourage all non-members to get involved, as there are still challenges ahead. The Schoolwear Association has grown in influence but really needs to increase membership so that it can continue to help us all.

The absence of the Schoolwear Show this year is a big loss, but we hope to see you soon.

With a positive outlook, determination and good communication we are confident that the trade will come through the pandemic stronger and more united.

With sincere thanks,

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