



## **Church school uniform project sees 137 children kitted out**

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By Tola Mbakwe

As children in the UK head back to school, a church in Stoke-on-Trent has helped parents who find buying school uniform can put quite a dent in their wallets.

St Michaels Chell partnered with Tesco to collect well looked after school uniforms over the summer holidays.

Thanks to the scheme, 137 children have been kitted out.

Rev Chris Coupe from the church told Premier that the families were referred from schools and social services.

"Many of these families have two or three children they're trying to kit out and that's expensive," he said.

"It's expensive when money is tight, when they're already trying to stretch what budget they've got during the summer period.

"We very much perceive this is as a way of reaching out to the community that we're a part of. We see very much as an outworking of James 2... faith in action; putting legs on our faith."

Rev Coupe said families have expressed a lot of gratitude.

He added: "They're absolutely overwhelmed.

"Folk have come from the other side of the city. We never realised the enormity of the need.

"People in the parish and the community have stepped up with good quality, pre-loved school uniforms, also new items. People have giving us money to buy whatever was needed."

Rev Coupe said generous donations also enabled the church to distribute school bags, shoes and PE kits. He said the goal was for pupils to be able to start school with their head held high.

"No one wants to be the odd one out in a class because their uniform's not right.

"It's important for children to feel part and parcel of their peer group, it could be as simple as having the right clothes on their back."

Rev Coupe told Premier he can relate to the children helped through the scheme.

"From the age 13 I was in a one parent family, so I grew up knowing what it's like when there isn't enough money, and there isn't enough to have school uniforms and sometimes school uniforms that fit."

Rev Coupe said he hopes the school uniform project can be bigger next year with various local churches partnering to expand the effort throughout the whole city.

"It would be fantastic if it could grow to that extent," he said.