

School uniform



Very low or no impact for very low cost, based on very limited evidence.

School uniform is the clothing pupils are required to wear at school. Uniforms vary from the very formal (requiring blazers) to more informal (involving just a school sweatshirt). Schools vary as to how strictly a uniform policy is enforced.

How effective is it?

There is a general belief in many countries that school uniform supports the development of a whole school ethos and therefore supports discipline and motivation. However, there is no robust evidence that introducing a school uniform will, by itself, improve academic performance, behaviour, or attendance. There are studies that show changes in these outcomes after the introduction of a school uniform policy. However, in these cases uniform was usually one factor amongst several improvement measures, such as changes in **behaviour policy** or other aspects teaching and learning. Therefore it is not possible to claim that changes in outcomes were caused by the introduction of a uniform.

There are cultural issues about how a school uniform is perceived which play an important role in determining its acceptability and pupils' compliance. There is some evidence that free school uniforms improve attendance in areas of very high poverty, however this does not appear to be true in all cases. In some cultures, school uniforms are associated with regulation and the loss of individuality, so care must be taken when generalising from studies in different contexts.

How secure is the evidence?

There are no systematic reviews or meta-analyses of well-controlled studies of school uniform policy. The evidence rests mainly on correlational studies that have compared the performance of schools with uniforms to those without, or that have examined a school's trajectory of improvement after the introduction of school uniform. One of the problems in interpreting this evidence is that schools in challenging circumstances often choose a school uniform policy as part of a broader range of improvement measures. The most rigorous reviews and analyses have so far been unable to establish a causal link, but speculate that adoption of a uniform policy may provide a symbolic and public commitment to school improvement.

What are the costs?

The costs for schools associated with introducing a school uniform are very low. Normally the costs are borne by parents who must buy the required clothes.

What should I consider?

Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:

1. Wearing a uniform is not, on its own, likely to improve learning, but can be successfully incorporated into a broader school improvement process which includes the development of a school ethos and the improvement of behaviour and discipline. If you are planning to implement a uniform policy, have you considered how you will embed it in a wider school policy which will improve learning?
2. There is a general belief that school uniform leads to improvements in pupils' behavior. It is important to remember that improved behaviour, on its own, does not necessarily lead to better learning, though it may be an important precondition (see **Behaviour interventions**).
3. Staff commitment to upholding and enforcing a uniform policy is crucial to successful implementation.

Technical Appendix

Definition

School uniform is the clothing pupils are required to wear at school. Uniforms vary from the very formal (requiring blazers) to more informal (involving just a school sweatshirt). Schools have uniforms in different styles and colours to identify pupils as attending a particular institution. Uniforms are required in most schools in the UK.

Search Terms: school uniform

Evidence Rating

There are no systematic reviews or meta-analyses of well-controlled interventions of a school uniform policy. The evidence rests mainly on correlational studies that have compared the performance of schools with uniforms to those without, or that have examined a school's trajectory of improvement after the introduction of school uniform. The most rigorous reviews and analyses have so far been unable to establish a causal link, but speculate that adoption of a uniform policy may provide a symbolic and public commitment to school improvement. Overall, the evidence is rated as very limited.

Additional Cost Information

The costs associated with introducing a school uniform are very low and mainly depend on parents buying the uniform instead of other clothing the child would wear.

References

- 1 Brunsma, D.L. & Rockquemore, K.
Examining the effects of student uniforms on attendance, substance abuse, disciplinary behavior problems, academic achievement [↗](#)
Journal of Educational Research 92 pp 53-62
(1998)
- 2 Brunsma, D.L. & Rockquemore, K.
Statistics, sound bites and school uniforms: a reply to Bodine [↗](#)
Journal of Educational Research 97.2 pp 72-77
(2003)
- 3 Reynolds, B.A.
An analysis of the evidence produced by quantitative research on the effects of school uniforms on student discipline and academic achievement [↗](#)
PhD thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University, Salt Lake City, Utah
(2004)
- 4 Samuels, K.S.
The relationship of school uniforms to students' achievement, attendance, discipline referrals and perceptions: an analysis of one school district [↗](#)
PhD dissertation University of Alabama at Birmingham
(2003)
- 5 Sowell, R. E.
The relationship of school uniforms to student attendance, achievement, and discipline [↗](#)
Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University
(2012)
- 6 Yeung, R.
Are school uniforms a good fit? Results from the ECLS-K and the NELS [↗](#)
Educational Policy, 23(6), 847-874
(2009)

Summary of effects

Meta-analyses	Effect size	FSM effect size	
Single Studies			
Samuels, K.S. (2003)	0.03	-	Language arts
	-0.06	-	Mathematics
Sowell, R. E. (2012)	0.02	-	Reading
Yeung, R. (2009)	0.00	-	Reading (2nd grade)
Median effect size	0.01		

The right hand column provides detail on the specific outcome measures or, if in brackets, details of the intervention or control group.