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Statutory guidance

Cost of school uniforms

Updated 23 October 2025

Applies to England

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This updated statutory guidance replaces previous statutory guidance on the cost of school uniforms.

It contains statutory guidance, as well as draft statutory guidance. The draft statutory guidance is presented in highlighted text boxes.

The draft statutory guidance relates to the proposed limit on the number of branded items of school uniform and PE kit that schools can require. The government intends to make this a legal requirement from September 2026 through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

We strongly advise schools to take the draft statutory guidance into account now when planning uniform requirements for September 2026. The draft statutory guidance will be updated on completion of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill's passage through Parliament.

Introduction

Schools and their governing boards must have regard to this statutory guidance. They should read it alongside the [non-statutory guidance on school uniform](#).

The purpose of the statutory guidance is to ensure the cost of school uniforms is reasonable and provides the best value for money.

It outlines the cost considerations for schools when they are:

- developing and implementing their uniform policies
- managing their uniform supply arrangements

It also covers:

- the provision of second-hand uniform
- other support available to help with the cost of school uniform
- the information schools should provide to parents about their uniform requirements
- the limit on the number of compulsory branded items of uniform and PE kit that schools can require

This guidance is issued under the [Education \(Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms\) Act 2021](#). The act requires the appropriate authorities of relevant schools to have regard to the guidance.

Schools and their governing boards will also need to comply with [other relevant legal obligations](#) – in particular, duties under equalities legislation.

Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for:

- academy schools and trusts, including:
 - special academies
 - alternative provision academies
 - nursery classes within an academy school
 - sixth forms within an academy school
- maintained schools, including:
 - maintained special schools
 - nursery classes within a maintained school (but not maintained nursery schools)
 - sixth forms within a maintained school

- non-maintained special schools
- pupil referral units
- local authorities
- governing boards, local governors and governance professionals
- city technology colleges and city colleges for the technology of the arts

It will also be of interest to:

- parents
- school uniform suppliers and retailers

Some schools, or year groups within them, may not have a uniform policy or dress code, so some aspects of this guidance may not be relevant to them. In these cases, the governing board should still consider the cost implications to parents of the decision not to have a uniform.

The term ‘governing board’ in this guidance includes the:

- trust board for an academy trust
- governing body of a maintained school or non-maintained special school
- local authority for a pupil-referral unit

Throughout this guidance, ‘parents’ should be taken to include all those with parental responsibility, including guardians and carers.

Main points

School uniform should help to build a sense of identity and community among pupils and with their school. To do this, it

must be affordable. Affordability should never be a barrier to the schools for which parents apply or the activities in which children can participate.

Schools should engage with parents and pupils when they are developing their uniform policy. They need to think about the total cost of uniforms, taking into account all the items that parents will need to provide while their child is at the school.

All branded items should be kept to a minimum.

From September 2026:

- schools should limit the number of compulsory branded items of uniform and PE kit to 3 or fewer
- secondary and middle schools should limit the number of compulsory branded items of uniform and PE kit to 4 or fewer, if one is a tie

The government is currently pursuing legislation to make this limit mandatory.

Schools do not need to require branded items to control details such as colour, shade, fabric or fit. They can set and enforce rules for generic uniform items.

A school's uniform policy should be:

- published on its website
- available for all parents, including parents of prospective pupils
- easily understood

Schools should ensure that their uniform supply arrangements give the highest priority to cost and value for money, including to an item's:

- quality
- durability
- sustainability

They should avoid [single-supplier contracts](#) except in certain circumstances.

Schools should ensure that opportunities to acquire second-hand uniforms are freely accessible to all parents. Information on second-hand uniforms should be clear and available to parents of both current and prospective pupils, and be published on the school's website.

Actions for schools

Schools should take the following actions before parents seek to purchase or acquire uniform items in summer 2026.

They should:

- review their uniform policy to determine if they should remove any compulsory branded items to adhere to the limit, or if any other changes are required
- confirm as soon as possible which branded uniform items, within the limit, will be compulsory from September 2026 – other optional branded items can be specified, but schools should keep these to a minimum and permit generic alternatives
- look at their existing supply arrangements, seeking legal advice where necessary, and promptly discuss any changes with their supplier(s) to give them appropriate notice and resolve any contractual implications
- be aware that, to ensure the most cost-effective routes, suppliers plan production 9 to 12 months in

advance, with branded uniform stock being ordered by December for the following summer and most sales occurring in the weeks before the start of the autumn term

- publish their revised uniform policy on the school's website and ensure it is easily understood
- inform parents of any requirements for generic alternatives (such as colour, shade, fabric or fit, ensuring sports leggings are opaque, or any requirements for logos), so they can purchase appropriately
- ensure that all parents, especially those of new starters, are made aware of where second-hand uniforms can be purchased, and that they make this facility available to all parents before the start of the new academic year

The importance of the cost of school uniform

It is for the governing board to decide:

- whether there should be a school uniform and, if so, what that should be
- how the uniform should be sourced

We strongly encourage schools to have a uniform, as it can play a key role in:

- promoting the ethos of a school
- providing a sense of belonging and identity
- setting an appropriate tone for education

By creating a common identity among all pupils, regardless of background, a uniform can:

- act as a social leveller
- reduce bullying and peer pressure to wear the latest fashions or other expensive clothes

However, if the uniform is too expensive, it can place an unreasonable burden on families. If a distinction can be made between those who can afford it and those who cannot, this can reduce its benefits. This has the potential to:

- negatively impact:
 - attendance
 - access
 - participation
- lead to bullying

Parents should not have to think about the cost of a school uniform when choosing which school(s) to apply for. No uniform should be so expensive as to leave pupils or their families feeling unable to apply to, or attend, a school of their choice. Nor should the cost of uniform be a barrier to pupils participating in sport and other school activities. Therefore, schools need to ensure their uniforms are affordable.

Cost considerations

Developing a school uniform policy will require governing boards to consider a range of factors. As well as thinking about the cost for parents, they will be considering:

- how it can create a shared identity and common sense of purpose

- what is required practically, either for classroom lessons or for sport
- obligations under the [Equality Act 2010](#)
- safeguarding, and health and safety considerations
- the wishes of parents and pupils

Nonetheless, they should give high priority to considerations of cost for parents and be able to demonstrate how best value for money has been achieved when developing or revising their policy.

Schools will need to think about the total cost of their uniform. It is not enough to consider only everyday classroom wear. They should also take into account PE kit, as well as clothing needed for extra-curricular activities and when travelling to and from school. No pupil should be discouraged from participating in any aspect of school life such as PE lessons, extra-curricular activities or interschool competitions because of the cost of additional uniform requirements.

Governing boards should do the following when developing or reviewing their school uniform policy.

Assess the overall cost implications

Schools should assess the overall cost implications of their school uniform policy for parents and be aware of how costs could mount up where multiple items of the same garment may be needed: for instance, when a child may grow out of an item quickly or where spare items are likely to be needed.

Assess the impact that variations in their uniform can have

Schools should assess the impact which variations in their uniform (such as house colours or specific items of clothing for different year groups) can have on total costs and the ability of parents to pass items down between siblings.

Avoid frequent changes

Schools should avoid frequent changes to uniform specifications. They should show how any change in uniform specifications secures the best value for money or why the change is required.

Schools should take action to minimise any financial impact of any change on parents (such as allowing pupils to continue to wear the old uniform for a reasonable period or – apart from where changes are necessary to comply with this guidance – only introducing new uniforms at entry or transition points in the school).

Consider how costs affect different groups of pupils

Schools should consider how the cost of their uniform might affect each group represented at the school, especially children who belong to groups with a relevant protected characteristic and families on very low incomes.

Engage with parents and pupils

Schools should engage with parents and pupils on cost issues when they are developing their uniform policy. They should be able to show how these views have been considered in their policy.

We also encourage schools to engage with parents and pupils on other aspects of their uniform policy when making significant changes to it, as set out in the [non-statutory guidance on school uniforms](#).

Avoid needing additional uniform for extra-curricular activities

Schools should avoid requiring parents to purchase additional uniform for the purpose of extra-curricular activity. This may involve, but is not limited to, extra-curricular activities such as sport, music or drama.

Similarly, schools should avoid requiring parents to purchase additional items to be used for interschool competitions. This should not preclude schools from having a standard PE kit for PE lessons or from loaning items.

Engage with uniform suppliers

We would also expect schools to engage with their existing or prospective uniform supplier(s) on how to ensure that they get the best value for money on their proposed uniform. For instance, a supplier may be able to provide standard-style items cheaper than more intricate and unique designs.

Ensure non-uniform days are accessible to all pupils

When making decisions on non-uniform days, schools should consider the impact on families on low incomes and their ability to fully take part (especially on days which require costumes or dressing-up). This can affect attendance. In addition, participation should not be dependent on parents or pupils making a financial contribution.

Consider pupils attending more than one school

Where a pupil is attending 2 settings as part of a regular educational programme, the school to which the pupil is registered should consider how it can support them with uniform for the other setting.

Branded items

A branded item of uniform is one with distinctive characteristics, such as a name or logo, that make it unique to a school or academy trust. Branded items also include any item that, due to its colour, design, fabric or other distinctive characteristic, is only available from the school's or trust's appointed uniform supplier(s) – for example, a blazer with a logo embroidered or sewn onto it, a sweatshirt with a specific-coloured trim, or trousers with a unique style that are only available from a specific supplier. In comparison, a navy skirt or a grey cardigan that can be bought from a range of retailers would not be considered a branded item. If the specified item cannot be purchased at a range of retailers, it is likely to be a branded item. Allowing generic items that are widely available gives parents choice and control over uniform costs.

To avoid parents having to purchase multiple expensive items such as coats, bags and trainers that they may already have purchased for use on non-school days, schools should avoid being overly specific about such items in their uniform policy. For example, it may be appropriate to require a coat to be simple and sensible in style, in a plain and easily available colour, and without any branding, but requiring a coat to have the school logo or certain school colours would be unnecessary.

Schools should carefully consider whether a branded item is the most cost-effective way of achieving the desired result for their uniform. They should keep all such items to a minimum and limit them to those that are low cost or long-lasting.

Compulsory branded items

From September 2026, the government is seeking to make it a legal requirement that [schools should limit the number of compulsory branded items](#) they require pupils to have.

A branded item is compulsory if a pupil is required to have or wear the item:

- for general use at the school
- to travel to or from the school
- to take part in any lesson, club or activity facilitated by the school

This also applies to any after-school activities.

The limit on branded items includes any branded bags, such as book bags or rucksacks, and any items required only at particular times of year, such as summer dresses. For example, a secondary-school pupil could not be required to have a branded skirt for the winter months and a branded dress for the summer months if they are also required to have a branded blazer, tie and PE top,

because the total number of branded items required for the school year would be 5.

If a school allows pupils to choose between different branded items, such as being able to choose between wearing a branded skirt or branded trousers, this would only count as one item, as the pupil is only required to have one of those items to be compliant with the school's uniform policy.

The limit does not prevent a school from adopting different branded uniform requirements for different key stages, but it should consider the cost implications for parents in doing so.

If a school decides that a branded item is required, it should consider how it can maintain the benefits of a branded item while also keeping costs low. This may involve using sew-on or iron-on labels or limiting the branded items to longer-lasting items such as ties, rather than items that parents may need to purchase more frequently or in larger quantities, such as shirts. Schools should be aware that if they ask parents to sew badges onto generic items, those items will be considered to be branded items and will be captured within the limit. Schools should also consider whether changes to the specification of a branded item might reduce costs for parents.

Optional, loaned and gifted branded items

All loaned or gifted branded items will be captured within the limit if they are required to be worn. However, schools can continue to lend, give out or make available for sale additional branded items, as long as wearing those items is optional.

If a school offers optional branded uniform items, it should also ensure that wearing an equivalent unbranded version of that item is also permitted. For example, if it permits an optional branded woollen hat in winter, it should ensure it sets out any requirements for unbranded woollen hats that would also be acceptable, such as that they should be plain and black.

Schools can require that generic items meet standards of modesty and are fit for purpose. Any such requirements should form part of the published uniform policy.

Schools can also still lend or give out for free additional branded uniform items such as a netball or rugby kit for activities, such as sports competitions. However, schools should not require pupils to wear branded items to take part in an activity unless these items count towards the limit on such items. If a pupil does not want or is unable to wear a loaned branded item – for example, for a medical or health reason – schools should allow them to wear a suitable alternative, such as a plain sports shirt in a similar colour or a different branded item that is already part of their usual PE kit or school uniform.

The uniform items for Scouts or Cadet Forces are not captured by the limit.

PE kit

When developing their school's PE kit, governing boards should apply the same consideration to cost as they would for everyday uniform items.

Schools should avoid being overly specific in their kit requirements for different sports and keep the number of items to a minimum. For example, it may be appropriate to have both

shorts and tracksuit bottoms, but specifying different shorts for football and hockey would be unnecessary. Similarly, schools should be mindful of the cost implication for parents when they make multiple requirements for the footwear required for different sports.

No pupil should feel unable to participate fully in PE or to represent their class or school because the required PE kit is too expensive.

Uniform supply arrangements

Cost and value for money for parents should be the most important consideration for governing boards when considering how school uniforms should be sourced. Parents should be able to purchase generic items of uniform from a range of retailers, giving them choice and value for money.

If a school's uniform policy includes a branded item, the governing board should ensure a written contract is in place with their supplier(s) for these items.

Governing boards should be able to demonstrate that they have obtained the best value for money from suppliers. Any savings negotiated with suppliers should be passed on to parents. Governing boards should not enter into cashback arrangements.

Governing boards should ensure that suppliers continue to provide good value for money throughout the duration of the contract.

They should avoid single-supplier contracts unless regular tendering competitions are run where more than one supplier can compete for the contract and the best value for money is secured. The contract should be re-tendered at least every 5 years. Reviewing a policy does not necessarily have to result in changes being made.

As a general rule, the value of the contract will determine the type of procurement procedure a school needs to undertake. The higher the value of the contract, the more rigorous the tender process will need to be. For example, this might range from seeking 3 quotes for low-value contracts to a full tendering exercise for high-value ones.

More information is available in the guidance on:

- [procuring school uniform supplies](#)
- [buying for schools](#)
- [buying procedures and procurement law for schools](#)

Other considerations when tendering for a uniform contract

When tendering for a uniform contract, it is important to consider the following factors.

Views of parents and pupils

Schools should engage with parents and pupils on cost issues and ensure their opinions have been taken into consideration.

Timing

Schools should be mindful of suppliers' ordering timelines. To ensure best value for parents, suppliers tend to order branded uniform stock by December to ensure it is delivered by June or July, in time for the back-to-school period.

Uniform specification

To support their decision-making when awarding contracts, schools should request visualisations showing what the uniform will look like, as well as fabric samples. Garments should be machine washable.

Delivery

Different suppliers will be able to offer different delivery methods. Some of the most common include direct to school, online and retail shops. Schools should consider which methods their parents would prefer.

Other considerations

Although cost and value for money for parents should be the most important consideration for governing boards, that does not prevent them from considering other issues that are important to the school community, such as sustainability and ethical supply chains.

Making second-hand uniform accessible

Second-hand uniforms can benefit all parents, particularly those on low incomes, and extending the life of garments is more sustainable.

Schools should ensure that arrangements are in place so that second-hand uniforms are available for current and prospective parents to acquire in a timely manner – for example, through periodic second-hand uniform sales or swap shops. Parents of pupils joining the school will need sufficient notice of where they can buy second-hand uniform so they can acquire it in advance of the new school year.

It is for the school to decide how this will be best achieved. It may wish to organise the provision or sale of second-hand uniforms itself or ask its parent-teacher association to do so, or it may wish to participate in other appropriate established schemes, such as its local authority's.

While it is up to schools to decide how they are going to make second-hand uniforms accessible to parents, they should ensure that the information about this is clear for parents of both

current and prospective pupils, and is published on the school's website. This information should clearly state where second-hand uniforms are freely available to purchase. It would not be acceptable, for example, for parents to have to access second-hand uniform via paid for events, such as school fairs. Schools will also want to ensure that parents are able to secure second-hand items discreetly, where needed.

Other support with school uniform costs

Local authorities and trusts may choose to provide school clothing grants to help with the cost of uniform, in cases of financial hardship.

Individual schools may run their own schemes to provide assistance, particularly to support new intakes of pupils or in the event of substantial changes to the existing uniform.

Providing information to parents

A school's uniform policy should be:

- published on the school's website
- available for all parents, including parents of prospective pupils
- easily understood

If an item needs to meet specific requirements – for example, smart black shoes – this should be clearly stated.

The published uniform policy should clearly state whether each item is optional or required. If the item is only used in certain circumstances or at particular times of the year, this should be made clear.

The policy should also make clear whether a generic item will be accepted or if a branded item is required.

Schools should include sufficient information so that a parent is clear whether an item can only be purchased from a specific retailer or if it can be purchased more widely, including from second-hand retailers.

Uniform policies that include the rationale for any requirements will help parents understand the decisions the school has made and will better support schools and parents if there are complaints.

Complaints and pupil non-compliance

Complaints

Disputes about the cost of uniform should be resolved locally, in line with the school's complaints policy. In law, governing boards must have a complaints procedure in place to deal with such issues.

Parents should be able to make a complaint or objection easily. We expect the governing board to consult and work closely with parents to arrive at a mutually acceptable outcome.

If a complainant has fully exhausted or been prevented from following the school's full complaints process or is of the opinion

that the school is not adhering to statutory guidance or education law, they may contact the Department for Education through the [customer help portal](#).

If a school has a contract with a specific supplier, the governing board should ensure that the supplier has an agreed procedure to deal with complaints about the supply and quality of uniforms.

Pupil non-compliance

Information on managing cases of pupil non-compliance is set out in the guidance on [developing school uniform policy](#).

In cases where it is suspected that financial hardship has resulted in a pupil not complying with the published uniform policy, schools should take a considerate approach to resolve the situation.

While it is for a headteacher to decide how to handle pupils breaching the policy on uniform and appearance, in line with the school's published behaviour policy, we would not expect pupils who are unable to comply with the uniform policy for financial reasons to miss out on classroom teaching as a result.

Other relevant legislation and sources of information

- [School Information \(England\) Regulations 2008](#)
- [Education Act 1996](#)
- [School uniforms: guidance for schools](#)
- [Equality Act 2010: advice for schools](#)
- [Charging for school activities](#)

- [School admissions code](#)

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