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[Department
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Guidance

Developing school uniform policy

Updated 7 November 2025

Applies to England

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Introduction

This non-statutory guidance is intended to support schools in developing and implementing their school uniform policy. It should be read alongside the statutory guidance on the [cost of school uniforms](#).

We would expect all governing boards to consider this guidance to help ensure that they comply with their obligations under the [Human Rights Act 1998](#) and the [Equality Act 2010](#), even where the school (or year groups within the school) does not have a uniform policy or dress code. The Equality Act 2010 places duties on ‘responsible bodies’. For the purposes of school uniform, this will be the governing board.

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

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

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

Our policy on school uniform

It is for the governing board of a school to decide:

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

These duties are placed on all governing boards by statute to ensure that school policies promote good behaviour and discipline among the pupil body.

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

Requirements for governing boards

In addition to this guidance, schools should also be aware of the statutory guidance on the [cost of school uniforms](#), which was updated in October 2025, to which the governing board must have regard when developing and implementing a uniform policy.

Legislation which would limit the number of branded items of uniform and PE kit which schools can require is currently being considered by parliament. Schools should be aware that the government intends to introduce the limit from September 2026. The cost of school uniforms guidance has more information on the limit.

Governing boards will also need to ensure that, in developing and implementing their uniform policy, they comply with the Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010 and take into account key considerations such as safeguarding requirements and the health and safety of their pupils.

Actions to help develop your school uniform policy

To help governing boards meet these requirements, we strongly recommend that they:

- actively engage with parents and pupils when designing their uniform policy or making any significant changes and take these views into account when determining the final policy – the statutory [cost of school uniforms](#) guidance states that schools should engage with parents and pupils on cost issues when developing or making changes to a uniform policy
- consider how the introduction of the proposed uniform policy might affect groups represented in the school, especially those who share protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010
- consider how comfortable the proposed uniform will be for pupils – some schools, for example, have adopted active uniforms which allow pupils to move freely and promote physical activity throughout the day
- take a sensible approach to allow for exceptions or adaptations to be made during extreme or adverse weather (particularly where the UK Health Security Agency has issued weather-health alerts) – for instance by allowing pupils to wear shorts or PE kit or relaxing rules on blazers in very hot weather, or by allowing trousers to be worn instead of skirts in very cold weather
- ensure that their uniform is suitable and safe for pupils who walk or cycle to school – for instance, by allowing pupils to wear a coat in which they could be visible when it is dark going home
- ensure the final policy is published on the school's website and clearly signposted so it is easy for parents (including parents of prospective pupils) to access and understand

- review the uniform policy at appropriate intervals to ensure that it is still fit for purpose
- consider how they will support pupils who do not have the correct uniform, including which members of staff will be a point of contact for families and pupils who need support with uniform and what action they will take if any pupil faces bullying or discrimination because of their uniform or clothing
- consider carefully the risk of a legal challenge to the policy and consider the appropriate insurance cover

Other factors to consider

Governing boards will also want to consider other relevant factors. For instance, the manufacturing of items of clothing can have a significant impact on the environment. Schools may therefore want to consider the environmental impact and sustainability of their uniform and should consider how any branded items, if they choose to have them, are sourced.

Schools should consider whether to make their position on political impartiality clear in their uniform policy. This includes any rules around badges or other items supporting causes or organisations being fixed to uniform items.

The policy should be clear and applied consistently.

When setting this policy, schools will need to consider:

- how it aligns with human rights and equalities legislation
- safeguarding and other statutory duties
- pupil wellbeing

PE kit

When designing a PE kit, schools should make sure it is:

- practical
- comfortable
- suitable for the activity
- affordable

Schools should also consider how the kit supports inclusion and participation and engagement for all pupils, for example by:

- offering pupils a choice of items so they feel comfortable, such as offering girls a choice of shorts, skorts, tracksuit bottoms or leggings
- promoting the importance of girls wearing sports bras when taking part in PE and sport

We advise schools to consider setting requirements that reduce peer pressure to wear designer sportswear and avoid extra cost for parents – for example, by stating in their policy that items should not have visible logos or branding.

Statutory guidance on the [cost of school uniforms](#) has more information about branded and generic uniform items.

Uniform and attendance

When deciding how to implement their uniform policy, schools should consider the link between uniform and attendance.

All schools have a continuing responsibility to proactively manage and improve attendance across their school community. Schools have flexibility over their uniform policy and can offer short-term changes if this would support pupil attendance.

Schools should be aware that pupils may miss school because they do not have:

- the correct uniform or PE kit
- access to clean uniform or PE kit

Not having clean uniform or PE kit can result in bullying, which can also lead to poor attendance. Schools should consider what action they can take to support attendance in such cases.

Non-uniform days

Schools can choose to hold non-uniform days. This is a decision for individual schools, and school leaders are best placed to understand what is appropriate for their community.

When planning non-uniform days, schools should consider:

- any impact it may have on attendance
- setting clear expectations on appropriate clothing in advance, including any rules on logos, slogans or political messaging (some schools include these in their uniform policy)
- how it relates to the behaviour policy
- the ability of pupils from low-income families to fully take part, especially where costumes or dressing up are required

Participation should not be dependent on parents or pupils making a financial contribution.

Cost considerations

If a school's uniform is too expensive, it can place an unreasonable burden on families. No school uniform should be so expensive that it prevents pupils or their families from:

- applying to a school

- attending school
- participating in school activities of their choice

Schools should therefore give high priority to cost and value for money (including the quality, durability and sustainability of the garment).

We have updated the statutory guidance on the [cost of school uniforms](#) to which relevant schools must have regard when developing and implementing their uniform policy. This update includes draft statutory guidance on the proposed limit on branded uniform, which is currently being considered by parliament.

Human rights, equality and discrimination considerations

When making decisions about their uniform policy, a school must comply with its obligations under the [Human Rights Act 1998](#) and the [Equality Act 2010](#), in particular its duty not to unlawfully discriminate.

The relevant protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, which schools should consider when developing and implementing their uniform policy, are:

- sex
- religion or belief
- race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin)
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy

See the guidance for schools on [how to comply with the Equality](#)

[Act 2010](#) for more information. [Technical guidance for schools](#) from the Equality and Human Rights Commission is also available.

Schools should also be aware that protections under the Human Rights Act 1998 are broader and include individuals of 'other status'. This has been recognised by the courts as including special educational needs, medical conditions and gender identity.

In developing and implementing its school uniform policy, a school will need to consider its obligations not to discriminate unlawfully.

Governing boards should aim for their uniform policy to be as inclusive as possible and should be considerate in the implementation of their uniform policy so that all pupils are able to wear the uniform.

Schools should engage with parents and pupils when developing their uniform policy to ensure that it is suitable for their school community, recognising that the school community may change over time.

If a requirement will affect a group with certain characteristics more than others, schools should:

- carefully consider whether the requirement is the best way to achieve their aims
- think about what mitigations could be put in place.

Such a requirement must be justified as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim to be lawful, and the policy should be flexible enough to allow for necessary exceptions.

Even when a policy has been agreed, schools must consider individual variations, where necessary, to avoid discrimination. For example, they must make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils as appropriate.

If the school does not allow for these adjustments where they are necessary, this may constitute discrimination.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission, with support from the Race Equality Unit in the Cabinet Office, has published guidance on [preventing hair discrimination in schools](#). Schools should consider this guidance when developing and reviewing their uniform policies.

Some religions and beliefs require their adherents to conform to a particular dress code or to otherwise outwardly manifest their belief. This could include:

- wearing or carrying specific religious artefacts
- not cutting their hair
- dressing modestly
- covering their head

Pupils have the right to manifest a religion or belief, but not necessarily at all times or places, or in a particular manner.

Where a school has good reason for restricting an individual's freedoms – for example, the promotion of cohesion and good order in the school, or genuine health and safety or security considerations – the restriction of an individual's rights to manifest their religion or belief may be justified.

Schools should be sensitive to the needs of different cultures, races and religions and act reasonably in accommodating these needs, without compromising important school policies, such as school safety or discipline. It should be possible for most religious requirements to be met within a school uniform policy, and a governing board should act reasonably through consultation and dialogue in accommodating these.

Schools are permitted to have different uniform and hairstyle requirements for girls and boys and to specify that certain options are just for girls or boys, so long as those requirements do not unlawfully discriminate. For example, while schools can

designate different uniform requirements for boys and girls, girls' uniforms should not be significantly more expensive than boys' or vice versa, as this may constitute unlawful sex discrimination.

Some schools provide a choice of uniform that can be worn by both sexes and offers flexibility. This approach aligns with advice in the Cass Review to maintain flexibility and avoid rigid rules based on gender stereotypes.

When determining a uniform policy, governing boards should be aware of the needs of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities and consider whether certain items of clothing could create challenges for these pupils. Schools should consider:

- what flexibilities, adaptations, adjustments or alternatives might mitigate any negative impact on these pupils
- adopting a more comfortable or less restrictive uniform
- determining a more flexible policy that allows pupils to choose from a range of items so they feel more comfortable

Pupil non-compliance

It is for a head teacher to decide how to deal with pupils who do not follow the school's policy on uniform and appearance, in accordance with the school's published behaviour policy.

We expect schools to deal with pupil misbehaviour such as uniform breaches in a proportionate and fair way. The guidance on [behaviour in schools](#) has more information.

Before taking disciplinary action, schools should consider any reasons for non-compliance with the uniform policy that may be outside the pupil's control.

The statutory guidance on the [cost of school uniforms](#) also

states schools should take considerate approach to resolve a situation where it is suspected that financial hardship may be the reason a pupil has not complied with the uniform policy.

If a school issues a sanction such as suspension in relation to uniform non-compliance, it must follow the formal suspension process as set out in the statutory [suspension and permanent exclusion](#) guidance.

Complaints and challenges to school uniform policy

Disputes about school uniforms should be resolved locally and pursued in accordance with the school's complaints policy. In law, governing boards must have a complaints procedure in place to deal with issues such as a complaint about school uniform.

Parents should be able to lodge their complaints and objections easily. We expect schools to consult and work closely with parents to arrive at a mutually acceptable outcome.

A school uniform should be inclusive, and we expect schools to be considerate when implementing their policy so that their uniform is able to be worn by all pupils. Where the subject of a complaint relates to a pupil's protected characteristic, governing boards should carefully consider requests to vary their uniform policy.

If a school has a contract in place 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.

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