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Statutory guidance

# Cost of school uniforms

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## Applies to England

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## Summary

This is statutory guidance from the Department for Education. This means that schools and their governing boards must have regard to it when developing and implementing their school and trust uniform policies. It should be read alongside the non-statutory guidance on [school uniforms](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform>).

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

The guidance outlines the cost considerations which schools should consider when:

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

It also covers:

- the provision of second-hand uniform
- other support with the cost of school uniforms
- the information schools should provide to parents regarding their uniform requirements

This guidance is issued under the [Education \(Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms\) Act 2021](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/20/enacted) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/20/enacted>). This Act requires the appropriate authorities of relevant schools to have regard to this guidance when developing and implementing their school's uniform policy.

Schools and governing boards will also need to have regard to 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 (PRUs)
- local authorities
- governing boards, local governors, and governance professionals

It will also be of interest to parents, and school uniform suppliers and retailers.

Some schools, or year groups within them, may not have a uniform policy or dress code, in which case some aspects of this guidance may not be relevant. 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 PRU

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

## **Main points**

Parents should not have to think about the cost of a school uniform when choosing which school(s) to apply for. Therefore, schools need to ensure that their uniform is affordable.

In considering cost, schools will need to think about the total cost of school uniforms, taking into account all items of uniform or clothing parents will need to provide while their child is at the school.

Schools should keep the use of branded items to a minimum.

A school's uniform policy should be published on the school's website, be available for all parents, including parents of prospective pupils, and be easily understood.

Schools should ensure that their uniform supplier arrangements give the highest priority to cost and value for money (including the quality and durability of the garment).

Single supplier contracts should be avoided unless regular tendering competitions are run where more than one supplier can compete for the contract and where the best value for money is secured. This contract should be retendered at least every 5 years.

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

Schools should engage with parents and pupils when they are developing their school uniform policy.

## **Requirements for schools**

Following the publication of this guidance, all schools should review their current uniform policy to determine if any changes are required.

Where changes of either uniform items or uniform suppliers are agreed, schools should work with their suppliers to ensure that there is a sensible transition period in place, taking into account the fact that suppliers plan in advance and that most sales occur in the weeks preceding the autumn term.

Governing boards should be compliant with much of this guidance by September 2022. The exceptions to this would be where:

- this would breach a pre-existing contract or informal agreement with a uniform supplier (particularly when the supplier may already have stock)
- a school will need to run a competitive tender to set up a new contract for their uniform

This means the following actions need to happen before parents seek to purchase or acquire uniform items in summer 2022:

- changes to the uniform policy which do not fit with these exceptions, such as removing an unnecessary branded item
- publishing the uniform policy on the school's website and ensuring it is easily understood
- making sure that second-hand uniforms are available to acquire (either from the school directly or from an established scheme)

Where a school needs to run a competitive process to set up a new contract to secure a supplier for elements of their uniform, they will need to ensure that they have a clear plan to meet this requirement as soon as possible. The size of the contract and the number of changes required will determine how long any changes will take but the contract should be in place no later than December 2022. This will allow time for suppliers to provide the new uniform for the summer of 2023.

As a result, all schools should be fully compliant with the guidance by summer 2023, although we recognise that some schools might be tied into existing contracts with suppliers and may not be able to comply with some elements of the guidance until their contract is due for renewal, which may be later.

## **The importance of the cost of school uniform**

It is for the governing board to decide whether there should be a school uniform policy and if so, what that should be. It is also for the governing board to decide 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 amongst all pupils, regardless of background, a school uniform can act as a social leveller. It can reduce bullying and peer pressure to wear the latest fashions or other expensive clothes. If, however, the uniform is too expensive it can place an unreasonable burden on families. Furthermore, if a distinction can be made between those who can afford it and those who cannot, this can reduce the benefits of a uniform and has the potential to negatively impact attendance, access and participation, and 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 school uniform should be so expensive as to leave pupils or their families feeling unable to apply to, or attend, a school of their choice. Therefore, schools need to ensure that 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, governing boards will be considering:

- how the uniform can create a shared identity and common sense of purpose
- what is required practically for classroom lessons or for sport
- obligations under the [Equality Act 2010 \(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents)
- safeguarding and health and safety considerations
- the wishes of parents and pupils

Nonetheless, school governing boards should give high priority to considerations of cost for parents, and they should be able to demonstrate how best value for money has been achieved when developing or making any change to their uniform policy.

Schools will need to think about the total cost of their school uniform. It is not enough to consider everyday classroom wear.

Schools should also take into account all items of uniform or clothing parents will need to provide while their child is at the school. This includes items in their PE kit.

No pupil should be discouraged from participating in any aspect of school life, such as interschool competitions, because of the cost of additional uniform requirements.

## **Actions schools should take**

Governing boards should ensure that schools consider these factors 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 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).

### **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 particular protected characteristic.

### **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 their policy 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 any 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 additional items to be used for interschool competitions. This does not preclude schools from having a standard PE kit for PE lessons.

### **Engage with uniform suppliers**

We would also expect schools to engage with their existing or prospective uniform supplier 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.

### **Branded items**

Generic items which are widely available (including from low-cost outlets) give parents choice and allows them to control the cost of school uniforms. As such, schools should keep branded items to a minimum and limit their use to low cost or long-lasting items. Schools should carefully consider whether requiring a branded item is the most cost-effective way of achieving the desired result for their uniform. For instance, whilst it may be appropriate to require a certain colour for socks, requiring them to have the school logo would be unnecessary.

The term 'branded item' is not just an item with a logo. It is used to describe an item of clothing with distinctive characteristics which make it unique to the school or trust. As a general rule, if an item cannot be purchased at a range of retailers it is likely to be a branded item. Such items are often designed specifically for the school and are unique in colour, design, or fabric. For instance, a blazer with a school logo embroidered onto it, a sew on logo, a sweatshirt with a specific coloured trim, or trousers with a unique style which are therefore only available from a specific supplier, would all be classed as branded items. In comparison, a navy skirt or a grey cardigan that can be bought from a variety of retailers would not be considered a branded item.

Where a school decides that a branded item is required, they should consider how they can maintain the benefits of a branded item whilst keeping costs low. This may involve using sew or iron on labels or limiting the branded items to longer-lasting items such as ties rather than items that the parent may need to purchase more frequently or in larger quantities such as shirts. Schools should also consider whether changes to the specification of a branded item might reduce costs for parents.

To ensure that school uniform acts as a social leveller, optional branded items should also be kept to a minimum.

To avoid parents having to purchase multiple expensive items such as coats, bags, and trainers, which 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 instance, it may be appropriate to require a coat to be simple, sensible and without any branding but requiring a coat to have the school logo or

certain school colours would be unnecessary. Similarly, schools should be mindful of the cost implication for parents when they make requirements on what is deemed appropriate footwear, including footwear required for sport.

## **PE kit**

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

Schools should avoid being overly specific in their kit requirements for different sports and keep the number of items, particularly the number of branded items, to a minimum. For instance, it may be appropriate to have both shorts and tracksuit bottoms but specifying different shorts for football and hockey would be unnecessary.

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

## **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.

## **Arrangements for the supply of uniforms**

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.

Where a school's uniform policy includes a branded item, the governing board should ensure a written contract is in place with their supplier 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.

Single supplier contracts should be avoided unless regular tendering competitions are run where more than one supplier can compete for the contract and where the best value is secured. This contract should be retendered 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 [buying for schools \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-for-schools\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-for-schools) and [buying procedures and procurement law for schools \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-procedures-and-procurement-law-for-schools\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/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 these factors.

## **Views of parents and pupils**

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

## **Timing**

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

## **Uniform specification**

Schools should request visualisations showing what the uniforms will look like as well as fabric samples, to support their decision making when awarding contracts. The uniforms 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 issues you might consider**

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 which are important to the school community, such as sustainability and ethical supply chains.

## **Provision of second-hand uniforms**

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

Schools should ensure that arrangements are in place so that second-hand school uniforms are available for parents to acquire (for example through periodic second-hand uniform sales or swap shops). It is for the school to decide how this will be best achieved. A school may wish to organise the provision or sale of second-hand uniforms themselves or via their Parent Teacher Association (PTA), or to participate in other appropriate established local schemes (for instance a local authority uniform exchange scheme).

While schools can decide the particular method they are going to use to make the provision of second-hand uniforms available to parents, all schools should ensure that information on second-hand uniforms is clear for parents of current and prospective pupils and published on the school's website. This should clearly state where second-hand uniforms are available to be purchased.

## **Other support with the cost of school uniforms**

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

In some cases, individual schools may run their own schemes to provide assistance, particularly for supporting new intakes of pupils entering the school 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 instance, smart black shoes, then 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, then 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.

## Complaints

Disputes about the cost of school uniforms should be resolved locally and should be 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 uniforms.

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

If a school has in place 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 [school uniforms](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform>).

In cases where it is suspected that financial hardship has resulted in a pupil not complying with a school's published uniform policy, we would expect schools to take a mindful and considerate approach to resolve the situation.

## Further information

Relevant legislation includes:

- [Education \(Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms\) Act 2021](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/20/enacted) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/20/enacted>)
- [School Information \(England\) Regulations 2008](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2008/3093/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2008/3093/made>)
- [Equality Act 2010](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>)

- [Education Act 1996 \(sections 449 to 462 set out the law on charging for school activities\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents)  
(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>)

More information is available on:

- [school uniforms](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform>)
- the [Equality Act 2010 - advice for schools](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools>)
- [buying for schools](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-for-schools) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-for-schools>)
- [buying procedures and procurement law for schools](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-procedures-and-procurement-law-for-schools) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-procedures-and-procurement-law-for-schools>)
- [charging for school activities](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charging-for-school-activities) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charging-for-school-activities>)
- the [School Admissions Code](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2>)

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