



Department
for Education

DRAFT Cost of School Uniform

**Statutory guidance for academy
schools, maintained schools, non-
maintained special schools, pupil
referral units and local authorities**

[Month] 202X

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Summary

About this guidance

1. This is statutory guidance from the Department for Education. This means that recipients must have regard to it when developing and implementing their school uniform policies. The guidance covers the cost aspects of uniform policy. The Department produces additional non-statutory advisory guidance on school uniform which schools should read in conjunction with this guidance when developing and implementing their uniform policies.
2. The purpose of this guidance is to ensure the cost of school uniform is reasonable and secures best value for money for parents. The guidance outlines the cost considerations schools should take into account when developing uniform policies and managing their uniform supplier arrangements. It also covers the provision of second-hand uniform, other support with the cost of school uniform and the information schools should provide to parents regarding their uniform requirements.

When does this guidance come into effect?

3. *[This guidance will only come into effect if the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Bill receives Royal Assent.*
4. *The exact timings will depend on when the Bill receives Royal Assent, and will take account of appropriate implementation considerations.*
5. *We recognise schools might be tied into existing contracts with uniform suppliers and may therefore not be able to comply with all the changes in this guidance immediately. We would expect them to comply with the guidance when their uniform supply contract is next renewed, and to seek to implement other elements of the guidance sooner where appropriate and feasible (eg providing information to parents).]*

Expiry or review date

6. This guidance will be kept under review and updated versions will be published when necessary.

What legislation does this guidance refer to?

7. This guidance is issued under the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 202X. This Act requires the appropriate authorities of relevant schools to have regard to this guidance when developing and implementing their school's uniform policy.
8. The guidance should be read in conjunction with the Department for Education's non-statutory advisory guidance on school uniform. Schools will also need to have regard to other relevant statutory obligations, in particular duties under equalities legislation.
9. Links to other relevant legislation referred to in this guidance are included at the end of the document.

Who is this guidance for?

10. This guidance is for:
 - a. Academy schools (including special academies and alternative provision academies and including nursery classes and sixth forms within an academy school)
 - b. Maintained schools (including maintained special schools and including nursery classes and sixth forms within a maintained school), excluding maintained nursery schools
 - c. Non-maintained special schools
 - d. Pupil referral units (PRUs)
 - e. Local authorities.
 - f. It will also be of interest to parents and school uniform suppliers and retailers.
11. Some schools, or year groups within schools, may not have a uniform policy or dress code, in which case 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.
12. The term 'governing board' in this guidance includes the board of trustees for an academy trust, the governing body of a maintained school or non-maintained special school and the local authority in respect of a PRU.

Main Points

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

14. In considering cost, schools will need to think about the total cost of school uniform, taking into account all items of uniform or clothing parents will need to provide while the child is at the school.
15. Schools should keep the use of branded items to a minimum.
16. A school's uniform policy should be published on the school's website and available for all parents, including prospective parents, and easy for parents to understand.
17. Schools should ensure that their uniform supplier arrangements give highest priority to cost and value for money (including the quality and durability of the garment) for parents.
18. Schools should tender their uniform contracts at least every 5 years. Exclusive single supplier contracts should be avoided unless regular tendering competitions are run where more than one supplier can compete for the contract and where best value for parents is secured.
19. Schools should ensure that second-hand uniform is available for parents to acquire. Information on second-hand uniform should be clear for parents of current and prospective pupils and published on the school's website.

The importance of the cost of school uniform

20. It is for the governing board of a school to decide whether there should be a school uniform policy and if so, what that should be. The Department strongly encourages 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 camaraderie, and setting an appropriate tone.
21. Through 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. But if 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 that cannot, this can reduce the benefits of a uniform and has the potential to negatively impact attendance, access and participation, and lead to bullying.
22. Parents should not have to think about the cost of a school's uniform when choosing which school to apply for. Therefore, schools need to ensure that their uniforms are affordable. The School Admissions Code 2014, which applies to all mainstream schools, states "Admission authorities must ensure that [...] policies around school uniform or school trips do not discourage parents from applying for a place for their child." 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.
23. This guidance is issued under the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 202X. The following sections outline the areas which governing boards should consider when developing and implementing their school uniform policy to achieve value for money for parents.

Cost considerations when developing or reviewing a school uniform policy

24. Developing a school uniform policy is not simple. As well as thinking about cost for parents, school 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 2010¹, safeguarding and health and safety considerations, and 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 parents has been achieved when developing or making any change to their uniform policy.

25. In doing this, schools will need to think about the total cost of school uniform. It is not enough to give consideration to just everyday classroom wear, schools should take into account all items of uniform or clothing parents will need to provide while the child is at the school. No child should be discouraged from participating in *any* aspect of school life, such as inter-school competitions, because of the cost of additional uniform requirements. This means schools should:

- a. Assess the overall cost implications of their school uniform policy for parents and be aware of how costs could mount up for parents 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.
- b. 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 and the increase in overall costs for parents that this can cause.
- c. Avoid frequent changes to uniform specifications. Schools should show how any change in uniform specifications has secured best value for money for parents or why this was required. Similarly, schools should assess the financial impact of any change and take action to minimise this on parents (such as allowing children to continue to wear the old uniform for a reasonable period). Consider how the cost might affect each group represented at the school – especially children who belong to groups with a particular protected characteristic. The Department produces additional non-statutory guidance to help schools comply with the Equality Act 2010 which can be accessed [here](#).
- d. When schools are developing their uniform policy or making changes, they should consult with parents and pupils on cost issues and consider the views which they may have. Schools should be able to show how these views have been reflected in their policy. We also encourage schools to consult with parents and pupils on other aspects of their uniform when making significant changes to their policy as set out in the non-statutory advisory guidance on school uniform.
- e. 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 having a standard PE kit for PE lessons as set out below.

26. Generic items which are widely available (including from low cost outlets) give parents choice and allows them to control the cost of school uniform. 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 appropriate to require a certain colour for socks, requiring them to have the school logo would be unnecessary.
27. 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 makes it unique to the school or academy trust. As a rule of thumb, if an item cannot be purchased at a range of retailers, including low cost outlets, it is likely to be a branded item. Such items are often designed specifically for the school and 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 or design 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 which can be bought from a variety of retailers would not be considered branded.
28. Where it is deemed that a branded item is required, schools should consider how they can maintain the benefits of a branded item whilst keeping costs low. This may involve using sew/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 branded school shirts. Schools should also consider whether changes to the specification of a branded item might reduce costs for parents.
29. To ensure that school uniform acts as a social leveller, optional branded items should also be kept to a minimum.
30. 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.
31. When designing their school's PE kit, schools should apply the same consideration to cost as they would for the everyday items in their uniform. Schools will want to 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 branded shorts for football

and hockey would be unnecessary. No child should feel unable to participate fully in PE or represent their class or school because the PE kit is too expensive.

Arrangements for the supply of uniform

32. Cost and value for money for parents should be the most important consideration for governing boards when considering how school uniform 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.
33. 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 wherever possible. Schools should not enter into cash back arrangements.
34. Schools should ensure that suppliers continue to provide good value for money for parents throughout the duration of the contract.
35. Schools should tender their school uniform contracts at least every 5 years. Retendering a uniform contract should not, by itself, result in significant changes to a school's uniform policy. The Department for Education produces guidance on procurement for schools in particular, [guidance on buying for schools](#) and [guidance on buying procedures and procurement law for schools](#). When doing so it is important to consider:
 - a. 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/July in time for the back-to-school period.
 - b. Competition – the value of the contract will determine the type of procurement procedure a school needs to undertake, and within that a requirement for competition in tendering exercises. The higher the value of the contract the more rigorous the tender process will need to be. For example, this might range from seeking three quotes for low value contracts to a full tendering exercise for much larger ones.
 - c. 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 method(s) their parents would prefer.
 - d. Uniform specification – schools should request visualisations showing what the uniform will look like as well as fabric samples, to support their decision making when awarding contracts. The uniform should be machine-washable.

- e. The views of parents and pupils – schools should ensure the views which have been expressed when consulting with parents and pupils about cost issues have been taken into consideration.
36. Exclusive single supplier contracts should be avoided unless regular tendering competitions are run where more than one supplier can compete for the contract and where best value for parents is secured. Where a school chooses to enter into a single supplier arrangement for branded items, they should make clear which items this arrangement is for, allowing parents to purchase other items of uniform from a retailer of their choice.

Provision of second-hand uniform

37. The availability of second-hand uniform can benefit all parents, particularly those on low incomes. In addition, by extending the life of garments, it can improve sustainability.
38. Every school should ensure that arrangements are in place so that second-hand school uniform is available for parents to acquire (for example through periodic second-hand uniform sales or swap shops). It is for the governing board to decide how this will be best achieved. A school may wish to organise the provision or sale of second-hand uniform 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 supply second-hand uniform, all schools should ensure that information on second-hand uniform is clear for parents of current and prospective pupils and published on the school's website. This should clearly state where second-hand uniform is available to be purchased.

Other support with the cost of school uniform

39. Local authorities and academy schools might choose to provide school clothing grants to help with the cost of school clothing in cases of financial hardship.² In some cases, individual schools may run their own schemes to provide assistance, particularly for supporting new intakes of children entering the school or in the event of substantial changes to existing uniform.

Providing information to parents about uniform requirements

40. A school's uniform policy should be published on the school's website, be available for all parents, including prospective parents and be easy for parents to understand.

41. 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 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.
42. Sufficient information should be provided so that a parent is clear whether an item can only be purchased from a specific retailer or can be purchased more widely, including from second hand retailers.

Complaints

43. 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 uniform. Parents should be able to lodge their complaints and/or objections easily. We do 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 parental complaints about the supply and quality of uniform.

Pupil non-compliance

44. Information on managing cases of pupil non-compliance is set out in the Department's non-statutory school uniform guidance. In cases where it is suspected that financial hardship has resulted in a child not complying with a school's published uniform policy, we would expect schools to take a mindful and considerate approach to resolving the situation.

Further information

Relevant legislation

- Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 202X [link]
- School Information (England) Regulations 2008
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2008/3093/made>
- School Admissions Code <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2>
- Equality Act 2010 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
- Education Act 1996 (Sections 449-462 set out the law on charging for school activities) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>

Other relevant departmental advice and statutory guidance

- School Uniform guidance (non-statutory)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform>
- Equality Act 2010: Advice for schools
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools>

Other departmental resources

- Guidance on buying for schools <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-for-schools>
- Guidance on buying procedures and procurement law for schools
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-procedures-and-procurement-law-for-schools>
- Charging for school activities: advice
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charging-for-school-activities>

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