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[Department  
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Guidance

# School uniforms

Updated 2 June 2023

## Applies to England

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform/school-uniforms>

# Introduction

This non-statutory guidance will help support schools in developing and implementing their school uniform policy. It should be read alongside the statutory guidance on the [cost of school uniforms](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms>).

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. We would, however, expect governing boards to consider this guidance, to ensure that they comply with their obligations under the [Human Rights Act 1998](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents>) and the [Equality Act 2010](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>).

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 around 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 upon all governing boards by statute to ensure that school policies promote good behaviour and discipline amongst 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

We have published statutory guidance on the [cost of school uniforms](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms>) which the governing board must have regard to when developing and implementing their uniform policy.

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:

- engage with parents and pupils when designing their uniform policy or when making any significant changes - these views should be considered in determining the final 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
- take a sensible approach to allow for exceptions to be made during extreme weather, for example, allowing pupils to wear shorts in very hot weather or 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 which they could be visible in when it is dark going home
- choose a PE kit which is practical, comfortable, appropriate to the activity involved and affordable
- ensure the final policy is published on the school's website so it is easy for parents (including parents of prospective pupils) to access and understand
- consider carefully the risk of a challenge to the policy and consider the appropriate insurance cover

## Other factors to consider

Outside of their responsibilities to comply with all relevant legislation, governing boards will also want to consider other relevant factors. For instance, manufacturing items of clothing can have a significant impact on the environment.

Schools may want to consider the environmental impact of their uniform and should consider how any branded items if they choose to have them, are sourced.

## Reviewing your policy

We would also recommend that schools review their policy at appropriate intervals to ensure that it is still fit for purpose.

Reviewing a policy does not necessarily have to result in changes being made.

## Cost considerations

Where a school's uniform is too expensive it can place an unreasonable burden on families. 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, due to the cost of the uniform.

Schools should give high priority to cost considerations. We have issued statutory guidance on the [cost of school uniforms](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms>), which relevant schools must have regard to when developing and implementing their uniform policy.

## Human rights, equality and discrimination considerations

When making decisions about their uniform policy, a school must have regard to its obligations under the [Human Rights Act 1998](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents>) and the [Equality Act 2010](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>). A school will need to consider the impact of their policy on pupils who share a protected characteristic.

The relevant protected characteristics 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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools>) for more information. [Technical guidance for schools](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/technical-guidance-schools-england) (<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/technical-guidance-schools-england>) from the Equality and Human Rights Commission is also available.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission, with support from the Race Disparity Unit in the Cabinet Office, have produced guidance on [preventing hair discrimination in schools](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/preventing-hair-discrimination-schools) (<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/preventing-hair-discrimination-schools>). Schools may find it helpful to consider this guidance when developing and reviewing their uniform policies.

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

## Religion or beliefs

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, or covering their head. Pupils have the right to manifest a religion or belief, but not necessarily at all times, 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.

## Discrimination

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

To avoid discriminating against those who share particular protected characteristics, governing boards should aim for their uniform policy to be as inclusive as possible.

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

If a requirement will affect a certain group with protected characteristics more than others, schools should think very carefully about whether this requirement is the best way to achieve their aims and what mitigations could be put in place.

Such a requirement will need to be justified as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim if it is to be lawful, and the policy will need to be flexible enough to allow for necessary exceptions.

Even when a policy has been agreed, schools should be willing to allow for some individual variations to their uniform policy, where necessary to avoid indirect discrimination. For instance, reasonable adjustments must be made, as appropriate, for pupils with a disability.

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

## Complaints and challenges to school uniform policy

Disputes about 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 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.

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 is due to a pupil's protected characteristic, governing boards should carefully consider requests to vary their uniform policy.

## Pupil non-compliance

Teachers can discipline pupils for breaching the school's rules on appearance or uniform. This should be carried out in accordance with the school's published behaviour policy.

We would expect schools to deal with pupil non-compliance in a proportionate and fair way. Guidance on [behaviour and discipline in schools](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-and-discipline-in-schools) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-and-discipline-in-schools>) is available.

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