



## Cost of school uniforms: guidance for governing boards

**Created in collaboration with our governance expert, Denise Maloney.**

Denise has gained more than 25 years of governance experience, working in roles including chair and clerk, and currently, vice chair on a board of MAT trustees. Denise also writes and runs bespoke training for governors, schools and LAs, sharing her expertise to help mentor and upskill individuals and ensure schools can run successfully.

In this article, our governance expert, Denise Maloney, goes through what governing boards should consider following the release of the DfE's new '[Cost of school uniforms](#)' statutory guidance. Read on for more detail!

### What's inside?

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### Next steps

## The benefits of school uniform

School uniform can be a great benefit for pupils. It can help give them a sense of purpose and make them feel part of a common identity with their peers, irrespective of their background.

By providing all pupils with the same clothing, uniform also functions as a great leveller between pupils – for example, by removing the need to remain on trend with fashion or compete with their peers.

Implementing a smart uniform allows schools to achieve a formal, corporate look across their staff and pupils, which can help to facilitate an atmosphere conducive to learning.

## Complying with statutory guidance



Schools must be compliant with all of the 'Cost of school uniforms' statutory guidance by September 2023.

The 'Cost of school uniforms' statutory guidance applies from September 2022, but schools will need to have compliant procedures in place in enough time for suppliers to get any branded uniform in stock, and to allow parents to make financially informed decisions. Governing boards, therefore, should discuss any necessary changes to their school's current uniform policy as soon as possible.

Schools must be compliant with the majority of the guidance by September 2022, and all of the guidance by September 2023 at the latest. The DfE recognises, however, that pre-existing contracts may tie some schools to certain suppliers, preventing compliance with some elements of the guidance until the contracts are due for renewal, which may be later than September 2023.

## Choosing uniform suppliers

When choosing school uniforms, governing boards should consider using suppliers who cater for the masses, rather than suppliers bespoke to their school.

Choosing mass uniform suppliers will be a more cost-effective way forward. Governing boards will need to do their research and check that prices remain as agreed with the uniform supplier.

Governing boards could find out if their uniform suppliers are providing other schools with the same choices of uniform items, and negotiate with the other schools and the supplier to help drive down prices for these items.

Personalisation is one area that governing boards should examine to help reduce costs. The sections below detail some specific elements of personalisation to think about.

### Including the school logo

Governing boards should consider whether the school uniform needs to include the school logo, or whether this could be left out. Not using the school logo would allow parents to purchase uniform from mass suppliers, such as supermarkets, rather than uniform suppliers catering for specific schools.

One way to include the school logo while still allowing parents to buy from mass suppliers is to sell sew-on or iron-on logo patches that can be affixed to the relevant piece of school uniform. This would maintain the element of personalisation without forcing parents to buy from specific suppliers.

If the school logo is included on items of school uniform, consider whether the number of items including the logo should be reduced; for example, only including the logo on the school blazer, and leaving jumpers, shirts, PE tops and other items plain.

### Using school brand colours

Governing boards should also examine the use of more specific colours and items. Common examples of items that may be less easily available in mass suppliers include:

- Blazers of a less common colour (e.g. burgundy or navy as opposed to black)
- Blazers with a coloured trim
- Ties of a specific pattern or less common colour
- Skirts of a specific pattern or shape (e.g. a specific tartan as opposed to black)
- Polo shirts of a less common colour or with specific embroidery

Whilst including the school colours in uniform can help establish a recognisable look for school pupils, especially if the school's uniform does not include the school logo, it can make it more difficult for parents to access uniform items from mass suppliers, so governing boards should consider how these colours are utilised.



#### A few good practice tips:

- **Allow parents to buy uniform from mass suppliers, e.g. supermarkets.**
- **Make school logo patches available to iron or sew onto plain items.**
- **Reduce the amount of personalised uniform items.**

**Good practice**

## Changing the school uniform

The new guidance reiterates that schools need to ensure their uniform is affordable, and states specifically that parents should not have to think about the cost of the school uniform when choosing school places for their children.

If choosing to change the school uniform in line with the new statutory guidance, governing boards should consider any costs incurred by the changes, including costs for suppliers, parents and other stakeholders, and the school itself.

This is particularly important during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, when many families have faced additional financial strain. Changing the uniform substantially could place a great additional financial burden on parents, particularly disadvantaged families or parents with multiple children. This applies even if the new uniform is cheaper – if a parent has already purchased the previous uniform, having to buy new items of uniform would be an additional expense.

To ensure parents and pupils are not placed under additional financial burden by changes to school uniform, schools will need to build in a degree of time flexibility to the introduction of the new uniform.

Flexible measures could include only introducing the uniform for new pupils or pupils buying new uniform, e.g. if they grow out of their current uniform. Schools could also allow all pupils who have the previous uniform to continue attending school in that uniform. Governing boards could also consider extending this flexibility to younger siblings, who may wear the second-hand uniform of their older siblings when they outgrow it.

Alongside the additional considerations created by the new guidance on costs, governing boards must continue to consider their other obligations in relation to uniform, such as:

- Abiding by the Equality Act 2010 – for example, by catering to religious, cultural or other requirements related to uniform appropriately.
- Ensuring uniform does not pose any risks to health and safety – for example, by making sure shoe specifications are weather- and activity-appropriate.
- Demonstrating how the board has achieved best value for money.

## **Consulting parents**

All potential changes to school uniform should go through parental consultation. This can be a great opportunity to increase parental engagement with the school and governors. Adding uniform-related questions to an annual parental survey is one way to check continually whether parents are satisfied with the school uniform.

Outcomes from any consultation should be minuted in full governing board meetings. Governing boards should take note of any common thread issues that arise from parental consultation, and be ready to justify any changes imposed in the future.

Governing boards should consider whether any changes in school uniform might cause ill feeling amongst stakeholders. Boards should also ensure their school's complaints policy has procedures in place to manage parental complaints related to the school uniform.

## Reviewing the uniform policy

After making all of the above considerations, governing boards should form or update their school's uniform policy and keep it under regular review.

### Next steps

- Find out the main points from the new guidance: [Up-to-speed on: Statutory 'Cost of school uniforms' Guidance](#)
- Learn more about the guidance: [Cost of School Uniform – 3 Minute Read](#)
- Use our policy: [School Uniform Policy](#)
- Read our article on school uniform: [Setting or Changing Your School Uniform: Everything You Need to Know](#)