

School Uniform Review

Millthorpe School



Introduction

Schools in the UK are strongly recommended by the DfE to have a uniform* and the vast majority do, in common with other youth organisations (sports teams, scouts etc.) and employers in a variety of sectors, including healthcare, education, legal, police and armed forces, as well as most other office, construction, retail and hospitality jobs.

Different people have different views about what sort of uniform a school should have.

Some people want relatively relaxed rules about what students can wear. They may believe that too many rules stifle self-expression and individuality, and that uniform items are unnecessarily expensive. They may believe that certain items not allowed by a dress policy would be more comfortable, more practical or better suited to their own child. Students in particular may feel that relaxed rules would mean they could dress more fashionably and more in keeping with their own preferences.

Some people want quite a formal uniform and very precise rules. This may be because it helps make it very clear what is and is not acceptable, and makes young people look smart, purposeful and ready to learn. They may also believe it helps make it less obvious which children come from less affluent households and avoids pressure on parents/carers to obtain clothes from particular brands or follow current trends. They may feel that clothes selected in this way are more likely to be practical than if young people have more freedom to choose. Students may feel they are less likely to be judged or ridiculed by their peers if everyone is dressed similarly.

Some people have very strong views; others are quite happy to accept the rules as long as they are reasonable. Many people consider there is no strong link between uniform and academic performance: this may prompt some to challenge uniform rules or urge school to spend less time enforcing those rules and more time on teaching; others will feel that, as there have to be rules, it is better to accept them and allow teachers to get on with teaching and for parents/carers to focus their effort on holding school to account for the quality of their teaching and student care.

When reviewing our policy, we need to bear all of this in mind, and as such, make sure we listen to a wide range of views, not just the strongest opinions, and accept that neither is there a solution that will satisfy everyone, nor is there a particular policy that is more logical, easier to implement or straightforward than others (There is no 'can't you just...') as no two people will agree exactly on the best solution (one person may feel that insisting on a shirt and tie is OK but trainers should be allowed; another might think the reverse is true). And whatever the rules are, they have to be enforced: having rules that you don't enforce is perverse and unfair to people who abide by them.

*Note that referring to the dress code in schools as school uniform is not particularly accurate: a 'uniform' that allows any degree of flexibility is something of a contradiction in terms. However, the phrase is so widely used that most people understand what is meant by it.

Impact of Government Legislation

The Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 2021 was produced in response to concerns about the affordability of school clothing, although it isn't always very clear about how this is best achieved. It states, for example, that branded items should be kept to a minimum but also emphasises the need to consider quality and durability of uniform items, which is only possible if the items are from a specified supplier. There is a strong focus on reducing the initial outlay for parents but less consideration of the overall costs in the longer term or the environmental and social impact of buying cheap 'disposable' clothes.

As implied above, the problem with simply removing branded items from a uniform is that the alternative for parents is a wide range of generic products that will vary greatly in price, quality, durability, sustainability and appearance. In many cases, the total cost of equipping a child across their school life will be just as high or higher as items may need to be replaced more frequently if the initial price is low. The collective bargaining power that can be leveraged when dealing with a single supplier is lost and it may become easier to identify students from lower income households who are more likely to buy low cost, poor quality items that quickly deteriorate and cannot be adjusted as the child grows. The ethical credentials and sustainability of items will also vary and the ability to recycle used uniform is reduced; parents will be less clear about which items are permissible and may face pressure from students to buy more expensive brands because they are more fashionable. So, whilst it might seem a good idea on the face of it to reduce branded items, the reality is a lot less clearcut.

The approach Millthorpe proposes is to fully embrace the spirit of the legislation by considering how its uniform policy can:

- Provide the best value for money across the duration of a child's time in the school
- Promote sustainability and ethical trading
- Give parents and students clarity about what is expected of them

We aim to do this by:

- Identifying garments that are smart and practical
- Allowing generic products wherever this is good value for parents
- Choosing a supplier carefully, through a competitive tender process, for items that are specified/branded
- Working hard with parents and the supplier to make sure the branded items we do include are selected on the basis of value for money, quality, durability and sustainability.
- Giving all families easy access to a wide range of good quality second hand uniform via our Eco Laundry.
- Publishing clear uniform/dress expectations on our website

Outline Proposal

An outline of our current proposal for uniform is below. We don't believe major changes are necessary - as noted in the government guidance, most schools are already doing the right thing and are already fully or almost compliant. The main emphasis is on securing the best possible arrangements with a new supplier and promoting use of 'pre-loved' uniform from the Eco Laundry. Below we have set out our proposed option for different items and, where appropriate, other options under consideration, with the pros and cons of each.

Item	Proposal/Options	Considerations
Blazer	Proposal: keep as current - purchase from uniform supplier	<p>Smart, practical, durable and adjustable.</p> <p>Relatively high initial outlay but reasonable value across school stay.</p> <p>Can be swapped for free at the Eco Laundry when a child outgrows their blazer (subject to availability).</p> <p>Aim to secure best value possible through re-tender of supplier.</p>
	Alternative option: allow generic alternative with badge sewn on	<p>Small savings may be possible.</p> <p>May lead to variations in quality/appearance.</p> <p>May be best suited to students struggling to find good fit.</p>
Jumper (already an optional uniform item)	Proposal: keep as current - purchase from uniform supplier	<p>Smart, practical and durable.</p> <p>Moderate initial cost but reasonable value across school stay.</p> <p>Can be swapped for free at the Eco Laundry when a child outgrows their blazer (subject to availability).</p> <p>Aim to secure best value possible through re-tender of supplier.</p>

	<p>Alternative option: allow a plain navy blue, v-neck jumper as an alternative. No badges, names or branding e.g. cannot be a designer brand such as the Lacoste crocodile or Ralph Lauren polo player.</p>	<p>Financial savings possible. May lead to variations in quality/appearance.</p> <p>May be better to look into savings of a non-embroidered but standard school jumper.</p>
Shirt	<p>Proposal: keep as current (purchase from anywhere)</p>	<p>Wide range of suitable white shirts available from retailers.</p> <p>Can purchase from uniform supplier if preferred.</p>
Tie	<p>Proposal: keep as current - purchase from uniform supplier</p>	<p>Low cost and long-lasting. Same tie can now be worn for duration of stay in school.</p> <p>Needs to be consistent to work as identifier of school/year group.</p> <p>Spares available from the Eco Laundry in most circumstances.</p>
Trousers/skirts	<p>Proposal: keep as current - purchase from uniform supplier</p>	<p>Smart, practical, durable and adjustable.</p> <p>Generally represents good value across school stay. Complete clarity for parents and students about what is acceptable.</p> <p>Provides high level of consistency. Quality and ethical status verifiable by school.</p> <p>Through tender process and negotiation with supplier, aim to achieve most competitive price possible.</p> <p>Aim to secure best value possible through re-tender of supplier.</p> <p>Also, consider school</p>

		covering the cost of branding to make it clear that the intention is to give parents a clear, good value option, not to create a highly branded uniform.
	Alternative option: allow generic alternative with or without badge sewn on, with various requirements as to what constitutes a 'suitable' skirt or pair of trousers.	<p>Challenges around quality, durability and adjustability of some alternatives.</p> <p>Less consistency.</p> <p>Good quality alternatives not significantly cheaper.</p> <p>Lower priced items of poor quality so may need to be replaced more frequently.</p> <p>Experience suggests it is hard/impossible to provide clarity on precisely what is acceptable, which is likely to lead to difficulties for parents/carers when choosing items and pressure from students to buy something that is closer to what they consider fashionable.</p> <p>Likelihood of this leading to more interactions (discussions and debates) between staff and students and staff and parents/carers about items being acceptable or not. This is time consuming and distracting for all parties but is inevitable if it isn't possible to have complete clarity.</p>
Footwear	Proposal: Keep as current (purchase from anywhere)	There is a wide range of suitable school shoes in black or brown leather/leather look material available from retailers.
PE kit - reversible top	Proposal: promote use of standard item from uniform supplier but allow parents to	Aim to offer a good quality, good value option from uniform supplier as this is

	purchase a suitable garment from any outlet	likely to be the simplest choice for most families but if better value can be obtained elsewhere, this shouldn't be a problem as there is relatively little variation in this type of item.
PE kit - all other items	Proposal: keep as current (purchase from anywhere, with clear details of what is required, e.g. colour, no branding)	<p>A wide range of good value/quality unbranded sportswear is available from retailers.</p> <p>It may be beneficial in the near future to review the type of garment specified for PE to make sure it is as appropriate, modern and fit for purpose as possible for a wide range of students. The aim would be to do this with no cost impact on parents/carers.</p>

Other expectations around appearance

We do not propose to make any changes to other expectations around appearance, for example, make-up, piercings, jewellery and hair dyeing. If you have any comments about these policies, you can submit these through the usual channels at any time.

The Eco Laundry

Our Eco Laundry has already successfully recycled hundreds of uniform garments and other items, saving families over £17,000 since it launched. To build on this success, we aim to:

- Make the items available to purchase easier to view and browse by finding a new location for the 'shop' part of the laundry and looking in to an online presence
- Encourage use by all families, regardless of income, on the basis of sustainability as well as great value
- Make it easier for parents/carers to trade in good quality items for larger sizes
- Continue to encourage donations of any unwanted items, particularly in larger sizes

Consultation

We want to hear from as many parents/carers as possible and gather a wide range of views. Please share your views using the form below. Responses should be submitted by midnight on **Sunday 30 October**.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd5e0n1ZuaBvEKAHWmFpZrijaKzxp_TcR0xO8kGaD2rru9WnQ/viewform?usp=sf_link