

## School uniform – good for discipline?

**1** One of the first things many children starting secondary school have to learn is how to tie a tie. Uniforms with blazers, shirts and ties and sensible grey trousers or skirts, are still the norm at most schools in the UK.

**2** But school uniform rules are often controversial. This year, for example, girls at Northgate High School in Ipswich protested because they were told they must wear trousers, not skirts, as so many girls turned up in ultra-short minis and had to be sent home to change. The head teacher said that the ban on skirts would “enable my staff to focus their time giving pupils the best education possible”.

**3** A government survey of more than 9,000 schools showed that 98 per cent of state secondary schools and 79 per cent of state primary schools now have compulsory uniforms. Politicians of all parties have good arguments for uniforms: they say they improve discipline and lead to higher standards at schools.

**4** A Conservative paper, published in 2007, said that the best schools have “strict uniform policies with blazer, shirt and tie, and with a zero-tolerance of incorrect or untidy dress”. The former Labour education minister Charles Clarke said that “uniforms are good for discipline”.

**5** Parents like school uniforms because they say that poorer children can’t be teased or even bullied because they are wearing the “wrong” brands. A uniform is also practical as the child knows exactly what to put on every day. Schools say that wearing a smart uniform gives pupils a sense of belonging and pride in their school.

**6** Uniforms vary a lot. Some schools, especially public schools, are very strict about uniforms and parents can only buy their children’s school clothes from one supplier. Other schools just say which colours children have to wear. Some schools want blazers, shirts and ties, others only a sweatshirt in the school colours.

**7** But however strict a uniform is, pupils usually find a way to bend the rules. Fashion-conscious teenage girls roll up their waistbands to turn knee-length skirts into minis. Boys and girls hate ties, so they knot them so that instead of sitting neatly under their shirt collars, they hang down low.

**8** Apart from these minor problems, there are more serious issues. In 2005, one Muslim girl went to court to fight for the right to wear the jilbab – a full-length gown – at school. And earlier this year, a court decided that a London school’s ban on the cornrows hairstyle indirectly discriminated against an African-Caribbean boy.

**9** While schools make the final decision on the uniform, the government has some guidelines. The uniform should not be too expensive, and not discriminate on the grounds of gender, race or belief. That means that Sikhs, for example, are allowed to wear turbans, and Muslim girls can wear the shalwar kameez (trousers and tunic).

**10** Making sure that pupils are wearing the right clothes to school is a big issue, and a few schools have decided that it's not worth the time and effort. One very successful school in Totnes, Devon decided to abolish uniform a few years ago. The head teacher, Kate Mason, told the Guardian newspaper: "Too many conversations with students were about tucking shirts in." The school wanted to concentrate on teaching and learning not clothes. So at Ms Mason's school the rule is "3Cs – clean, comfortable and covered up".

**11** Anthony Gell School in Wirksworth, Derbyshire has also found that pupils learn and behave well despite not having a uniform. Head teacher David Baker says that clothes are not important for learning. "I believe in treating children as individuals with rights and responsibilities," he told the Guardian.

**12** But at most schools, pupils will have to accept that as far as clothes go, they aren't allowed to be too individual. Brown, dark green and navy blue blazers, and shirts with collars and striped ties are here to stay. But there's one piece of good news for all the kids who are still trying unsuccessfully to make a neat knot in their school ties: lots of schools prefer clip-on ties today!

ReadOn October 2011

**Uniforms: What they cost, what's banned**

- A boy starting at Eton College, one of Britain's most expensive public schools, has to have a long list of items including a tailcoat for £100 and grey trousers for £45.
- Pupils at a typical state school can expect to pay less: about £40 for a blazer and £16 for a sweatshirt. Schools in poorer areas have uniforms that can be bought at shops like Tesco, a supermarket that has a complete uniform for just £4.50.
- Jewellery except watches and small earrings is often banned. So are make-up and extreme hairstyles – that means that no brightly dyed or bleached hair, no shaved heads, no beading. Shoes have to be sensible – no platforms or stilettos.

**Comprehension**

1. Read the text and match the following titles to the different paragraphs.

Title	Number
Arguments against uniforms	
Conclusion	
Controversial uniforms	
Differences in uniforms	
For once politicians agree	
Introduction	
Parents' reasons for approving of uniforms	
Sensible government guidelines	
Uniforms may discriminate	

Uniforms not essential for good behaviour	
Uniforms responsible for good discipline	

There should be one paragraph left. Come up with a title for this one.

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- List the advantages and disadvantages of school uniforms. If possible, give an example from the text or of your own. Can you think of other advantages or disadvantages?

Advantages	Examples

Disadvantages	Examples

- Use your notes from question 2 to write a structured essay on whether school uniforms should be introduced in Luxembourg.

### Vocabulary

- Find words connected with the following lexical fields.

*Rules and Regulations*

*Clothes*

### Glossary

peer pressure	
to feel obligated to do sth	
to struggle	
to fit in	
to bully / bullying	
to tease sb	
to follow / observe a rule	
to break a rule	
to ban sth / a ban on	
controversial	
head teacher / headmaster	