



**Isle of Man
Government**

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Department of Education, Sport and Culture School Uniform Policy Guidance

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Glossary

Articles of Government mean the document which details the way in which a school should be run and managed.

Department means the Department of Education, Sport and Culture (DESC) including schools, UCM, Villa Gaiety and MSR.

Summary

About this guidance

This is non-statutory guidance from the Department of Education, Sport and Culture relating to best practice on developing school uniform policy. There is no legislation in place that deals specifically with school uniform or other aspects of appearance, but we do expect schools to take full account of this guidance.

Who is this document for?

This guidance is for school leaders, school staff and the Governing Bodies of all the schools maintained by DESC.

It may also be referenced by parents, pupils and the wider public for information.

Key points

This guidance sets out those aspects that school leaders and Governing Bodies will need to consider when developing, implementing and reviewing their school uniform policy.

- Great emphasis is placed on considering the cost and availability of the uniform when making decisions relating to the school dress code.
- Schools and their governing bodies are expected to demonstrate transparency and best value for money when appointing suppliers.

Effective Date

This document is effective from August 2021. It will be kept under review and updated at least five yearly.

School Uniform Policy

The Departments Policy on School Uniform

Individual schools will have their own uniform policy, which outlines what is acceptable and what sanctions will be imposed if the school policy is not adhered to. These are usually available on the school website or prospectus.

It is the responsibility of a school leadership team and its Governing Body to decide whether there should be a school uniform policy and if so what that should be.

This flows from the duties placed upon all Governing Bodies by section 23 of each schools' Articles of Government¹ to ensure that school policies promote good behaviour and discipline throughout the school. It is also for the school and their Governing Body to decide how the uniform should be sourced.

The Department acknowledges that a school uniform can play a valuable role in contributing to the character and culture of a school.

A uniform can:

- instil pride in the school, encourage pupils to identify with it and to support its ethos
- promote positive behaviour and discipline
- help to protect pupils from peer group pressure to dress in a certain fashion
- help to promote cohesion between groups from different backgrounds

What should a school consider when developing or amending its uniform policy?

We strongly recommend that in setting its uniform/appearance policy the school and their Governing Body:

- consider the timeframe for introducing a new uniform policy or amending an existing one
- take into account the views of parents and pupils on significant changes to school uniform policy

¹ See section 23 of the school's Articles of Government

- consider the cost, the available supply sources and year round availability of the proposed uniform to ensure it is providing best value for money for parents
- ensure that the PE uniform is practical, comfortable and appropriate to the activity involved, and that consideration is given to the cost of compulsory PE clothing
- consider how the introduction of the proposed uniform policy might affect each group represented in the school

Once a policy has been agreed, it is recommended that the school and their Governing Body:

- describe its uniform/appearance policy clearly and ensure that parents are informed
- consider carefully reasonable requests to vary the policy, in particular to meet the needs of any individual pupil to accommodate their religion or belief, ethnicity, disability or other special considerations
- review the policy at appropriate intervals (at least once every five years as a minimum) to ensure it is still fit for purpose.

The importance of cost consideration

No school uniform should be so expensive as to leave pupils or their families feeling unable to attend school due to the cost of the uniform.

Schools and their Governing Bodies should therefore give high priority to cost considerations. It is important that uniform is affordable to all and particular attention should be given to the necessity for 'school branded' items which commonly attract a higher cost than unbranded articles of clothing. This consideration must also be given to PE kit.

When considering how the school uniform should be sourced, the school and their Governing Body should give highest priority to the consideration of cost and value for money for parents.

The school uniform should be easily available for parents to purchase and schools should seek to select items that can be purchased cheaply from good value retailers.

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. In cases where a single supplier

contract exists, Governing Bodies should be able to demonstrate that they have obtained the best value for money from suppliers.

In cases of financial hardship, parents should be directed to the Department's Corporate Services Division who administer several Endowment Funds which may be able to assist with the cost of school clothing. Schools may also wish to consider running their own schemes to provide assistance.

Schools should avoid frequent changes to uniform specifications.

Human Rights, Equality and Discrimination considerations

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 belief², but not necessarily at all times, places or in a particular manner³. 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 (for example, the wearing of items of jewellery associated with religion while undertaking sporting activities) or security considerations, the restriction of an individual's rights to manifest their religion or belief may be justified.

The school must balance the rights of individual pupils against the best interests of the school community as a whole. Nevertheless, it should be possible for most religious requirements to be met within a school uniform policy and a governing body should act reasonably through consultation and dialogue in accommodating these.

In formulating its school uniform policy, a school will need to consider its obligations not to discriminate unlawfully⁴. For example, it is not expected that the cost of girls' uniform is significantly more expensive than boys or vice-versa as this may constitute unlawful sex discrimination.

A school should also bear in mind the concept of "indirect" discrimination. This involves the application of a requirement, which, although applied equally to everyone, puts certain people at a particular disadvantage because of their gender, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief or gender reassignment.

² See Human Rights Act 2001

³ See Equality Act 2017

⁴ See Equality Act 2017

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

Complaints and challenges to school uniform policy

Disputes about school uniforms should be addressed directly with school.

The Department has a complaints procedure in place to deal with issues which arise in schools such as a complaint about school uniform⁵. This can be found on the Gov.im website and paper copies can be obtained from every school or by contacting the Department. Parents should be able to lodge their complaints and/or objections easily. It is expected that the school and the Governing Body will consult and work closely with parents to arrive at a mutually acceptable outcome.

If a school has a contract in place with a specific supplier, they (along with the Governing Body) should ensure that the supplier has an agreed procedure to deal with parental complaints about the supply and quality of uniform.

Schools and their Governing Body should be willing to consider reasonable requests for flexibility in the uniform policy for an individual pupil to accommodate particular social and cultural circumstances.

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.

⁵ <https://www.gov.im/media/192010/complaints-policy-and-procedure-jan-2020-update-160120.pdf>

Associated Resources

1. Individual Schools Behaviour Policy
2. Individual Schools Uniform requirements

This information can be found on the schools' websites.

Individual schools **Articles of Government** can be found on the Isle of Man Government website -

<https://www.gov.im/about-the-government/departments/education-sport-and-culture/>

Version Control

The business area that owns this document is DESC Education Advisory Service.

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V0.2	Rachel Birch	23.06.2021	Amendments following consultation
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Review Date

This document was issued in July 2021 and is due to be reviewed no later than July 2023.