

Connect's snap survey on school uniform

Full findings report, January 2023

Connect

Mansfield Traquair Centre, 15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BB

0131 474 6199 | info@connect.scot | www.connect.scot | [f @ConnectScot](https://www.facebook.com/ConnectScot) | [t @connect_scot](https://twitter.com/connect_scot)

Connect is a trading name of Scottish Parent Teacher Council, Company No SC151086 and Scottish Charity No SC019168



Our vision

**That high-quality parental
engagement in every
school community
Improves all children's
life chances**

Introduction

- Connect is an independent membership organisation and charity for parents and parent groups in Scotland for 75 years.
- Offers a range of services, including support and advice to parent groups and parents
- Works with school communities and education staff
- Regularly surveys parents/carers on different issues
- Seeks to promote positive relationships and communication between all involved in education and learning
- Connect ran this survey to submit findings and data to the [Scottish Government consultation](#) on establishing some national principles and guidelines for school uniforms and submitted the [Survey data](#) to the Scottish Government consultation in October 2022.

Survey Report Summary

- The survey ran from 8 to 30 September 2022
- **813 responses** from **30 local authority areas**
- A significant majority of respondents were from parents with children in local authority-run schools, with only 4 responses with children in independent schools.
- Respondents were asked to select the age/stage of their children, with the option to select multiple options if they had more than one child:
 - Early years/nursery - **7% (54)**
 - P1 - P3 - **39% (319)**
 - P4 - P7 - **54% (442)**
 - S1 - S3 - **29% (233)**
 - S4 - **6% (49)**
 - S5 - **6% (48)**
 - S6 - **4% (34)**
- This survey report looks in more detail at the survey findings and sets out some clear principles about school uniforms from survey responses.

Survey Report Summary

- Most respondents' children have school- uniforms (**99.5%**)
- **47%** of families spend **over £121** on school uniform and PE kit per year; almost **a third** spend **over £180**
- Most respondents (**over 70%**) strongly agreed or agreed that the school uniform at their school was affordable, comfortable and practical; **15%** disagreed or strongly disagreed that the uniform was affordable, comfortable and practical.
- Parents reported that **almost half** of their schools consult them on school uniforms; they said about **a quarter** consulted children and young people on uniforms (although **a third** and **half** of respondents respectively didn't know)
- **Most respondents (70%)** said their schools are aware of the costs of uniforms and suggest more affordable items; **half** said the approach to uniforms was inclusive and fair (**over a third** didn't know)
- **Over two-thirds** said the uniform policy is 'about right' (in terms of strictness)
- **Nearly half** said their school did not punish pupils for wearing unsuitable uniforms; just over **10%** said they did punish pupils; **45%** didn't know

Survey Report Summary

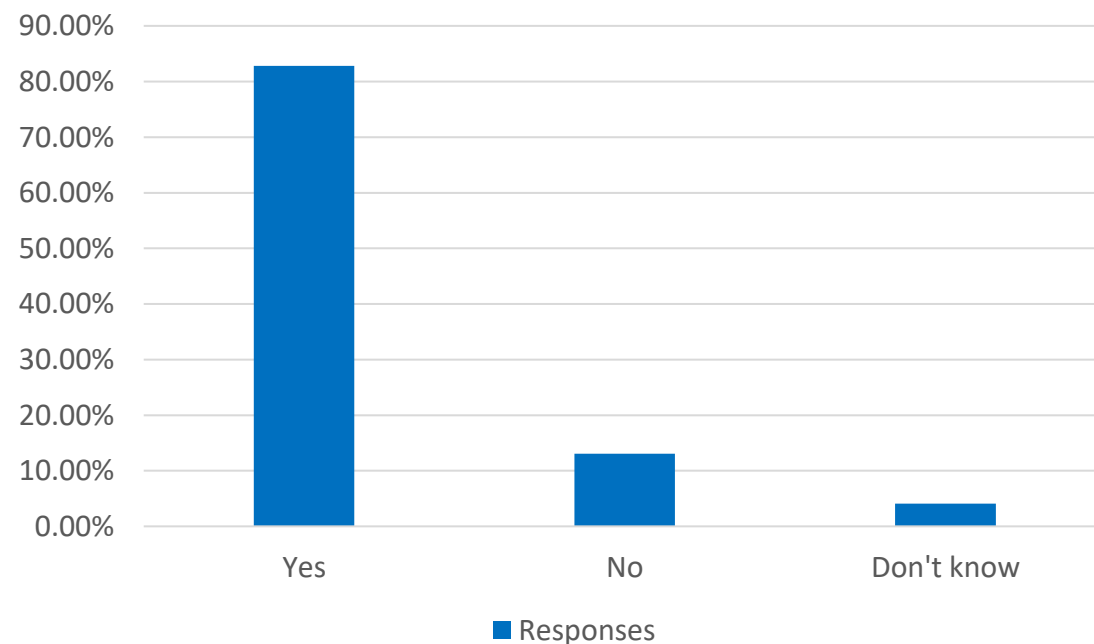
- Most parents (**64%**) didn't know if the school contacts parents about children's uniform if it is unsuitable
- While a majority (**67%**) said their school did not require branded items (logos) as part of the school uniform, **1-in-5** respondents told us their school did require branded items (which can contribute to increased costs).
- Apart from coats (**20%**), most items of school uniform and PE kit are ONLY worn in school, .e., they are not used outside of school.
- The top three priorities for being included in national uniform guidance were affordability (**90%**), practicality (**82%**) and comfort (**78%**)
- **78%** of respondents said pupils should NOT be excluded for failing to wear school uniform
- Nearly half (**49%**) said they thought pupils should not be penalised or punished for not wearing school uniforms; **a third** said it depended on the age of the pupil
- Most respondents (**83%**) believe that uniforms contribute to the ethos and culture of the school.

Connect's Calls for Change from the Survey Findings

- Nine-in-ten respondents said that the Scottish Government must take affordability into account when devising the new guidance.
- The survey findings suggest that parents and carers remain committed to the idea that school uniform has an important role to play in creating a positive ethos and culture within schools.
- However, most respondents to the survey do not want to see children and young people punished (or worse, expelled) if they are not wearing a suitable uniform.
- It is heartening to see that most respondents report that their schools are sensitive to the pressures of family budgets and the potential costs of school uniforms.
- Based on the survey responses, we would urge schools to continue to work towards removing branding and logos from uniforms (which create extra cost or pressure, as branding can become a visible differentiation between families who can and can't afford branded items).
- We would also urge schools – where possible – to make sure that shoes and coats (and perhaps other items) could be worn outside of school i.e., they are not too restrictive in uniform policy.
- It would also be a positive step if all schools consulted parents (beyond but including Parent Councils) and children/young people when reviewing the school uniform policy.

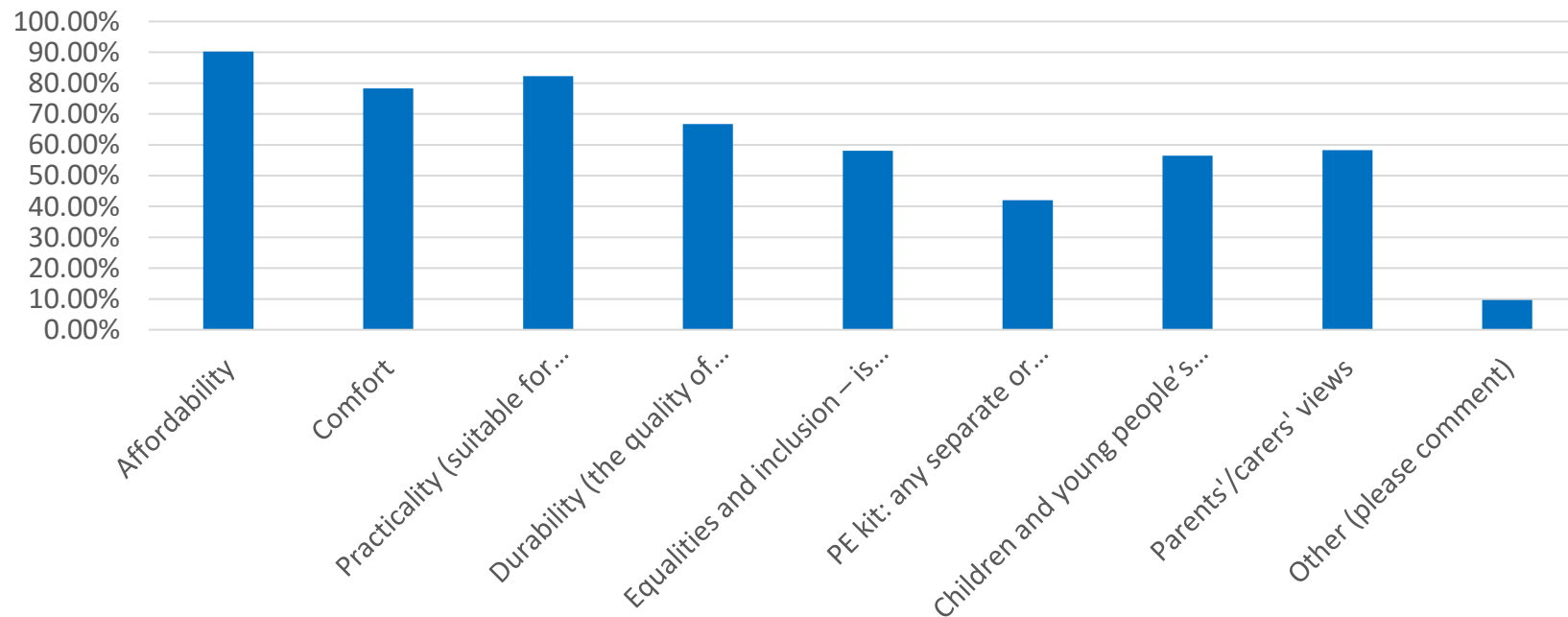
In general, do you think school uniform contributes to the ethos and culture of a school?

- 83% of respondents said yes
- 13% said no
- 4% said they didn't know



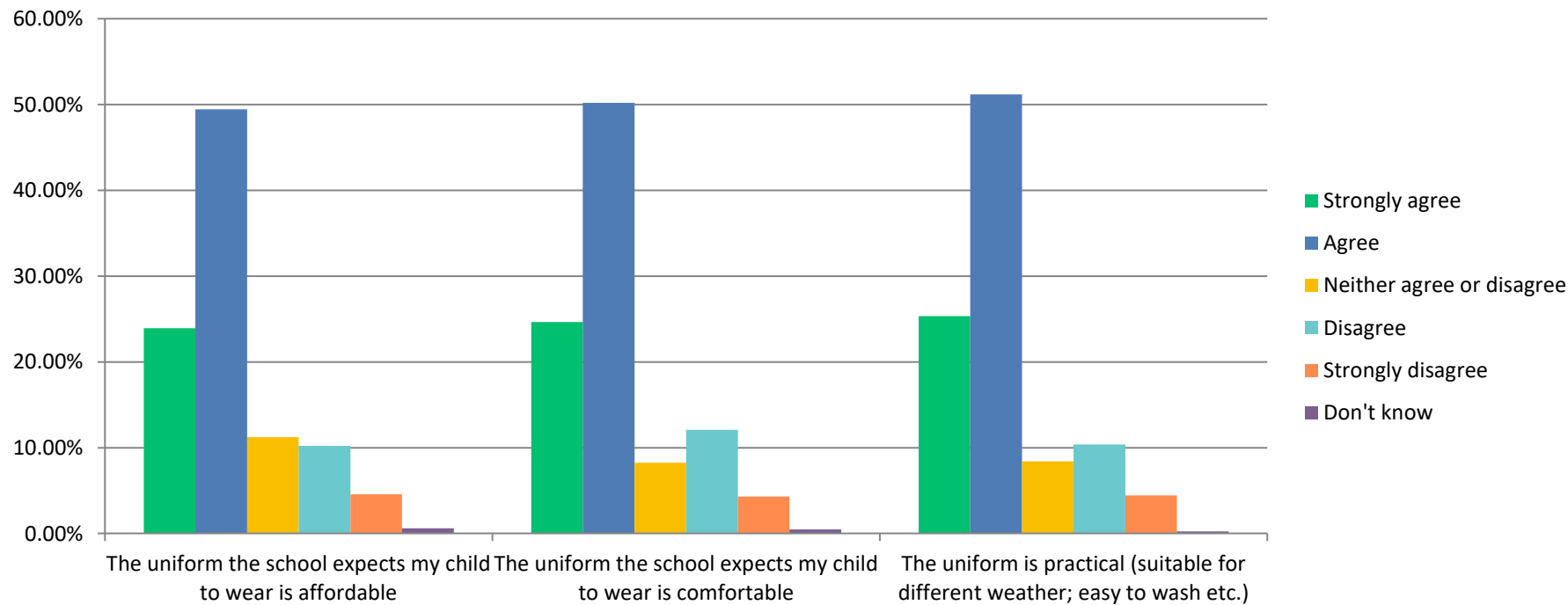
What should be taken into account in the proposed national uniform guidance?

- **90%** of respondents said affordability
- **82%** said practicality
- **78%** said comfort
- **67%** said durability
- **58%** said equalities and inclusion (suitable for everyone)
- **58%** said parents' and carers' views
- **57%** said children and young people's views
- **42%** said PE kit
- **10%** stated other factors – comment themes included branded items, colours, equalities, environmentally friendly, and footwear



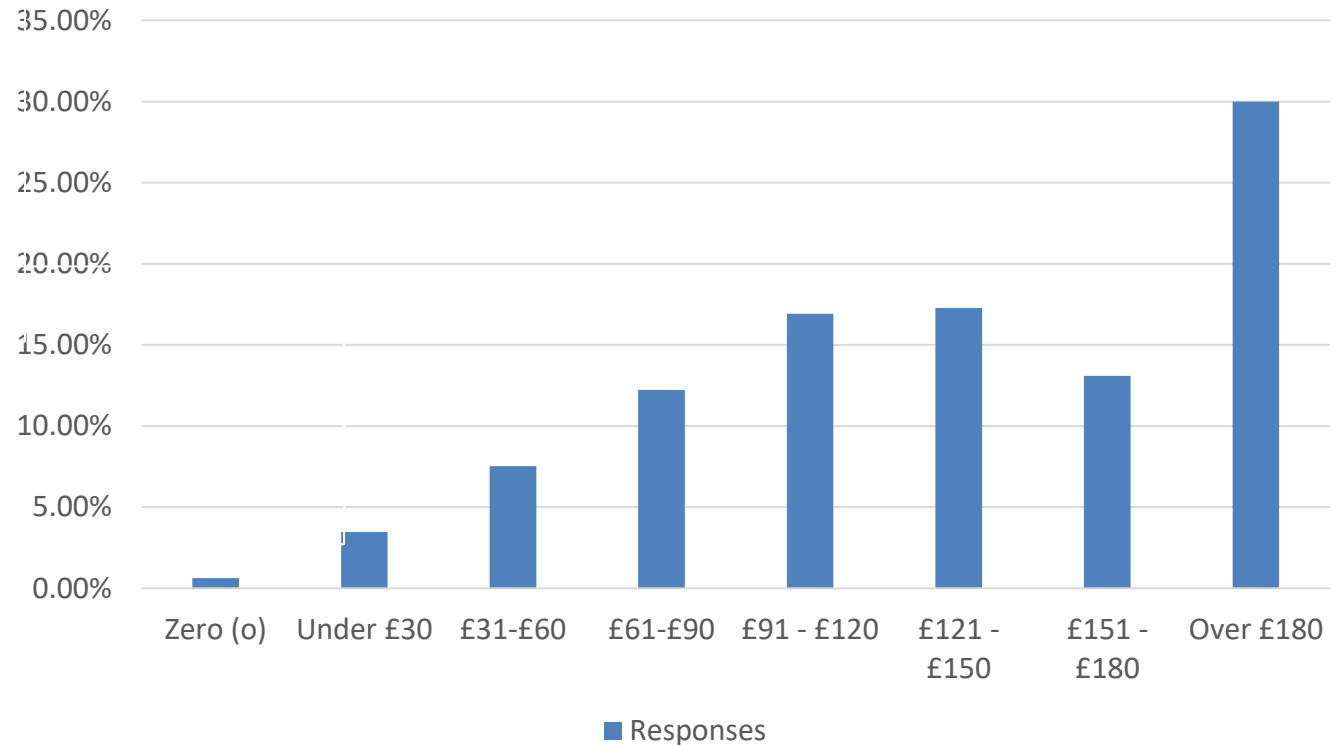
Tells us if you agree or disagree with the following statements

- The uniform the school expects my child to wear is **affordable**: **73.3%** strongly agreed or agreed.
- The uniform the school expects my child to wear is **comfortable**: **75%** strongly agreed or agreed.
- The uniform is **practical**: **77%** strongly agreed or agreed.



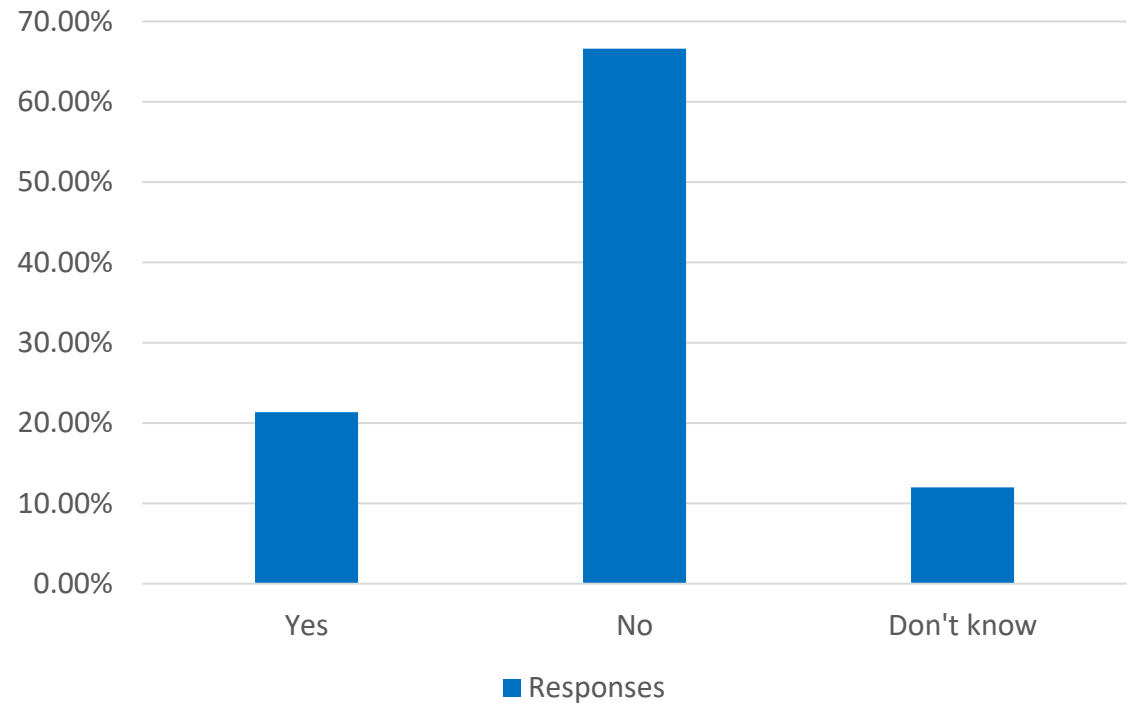
As a family, approximately how much did you spend in total this year on school uniforms, including PE kit?

- **30%** spent over £180
- **13%** spent between £151 - £180
- **17%** spent between £121 - £150
- **17%** spent between £91 - £120
- **12%** spent between £61 - £90
- **8%** spent between £31 - £60
- **3%** spent between under £30
- **0.6%** spent nothing at all



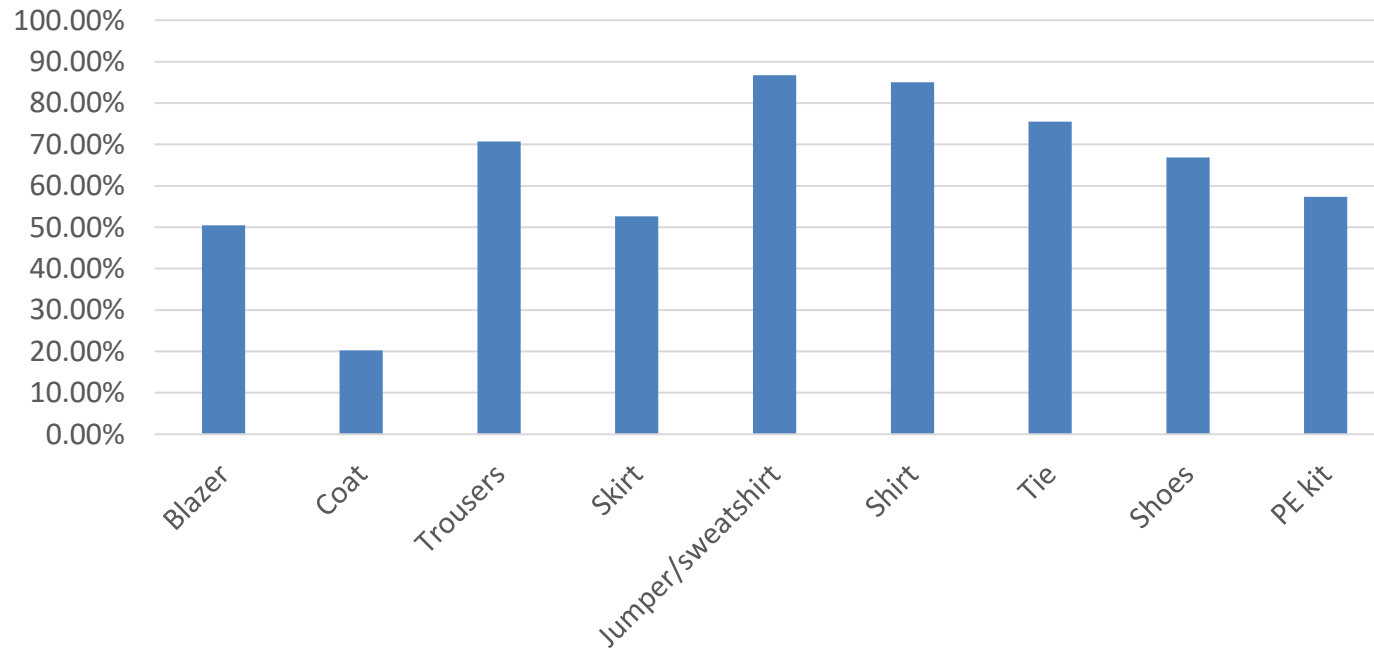
Does your school require school logos/badges on any items, i.e. there is no unbranded alternative?

- **21%** said yes
- **67%** said no
- **12%** said they didn't know



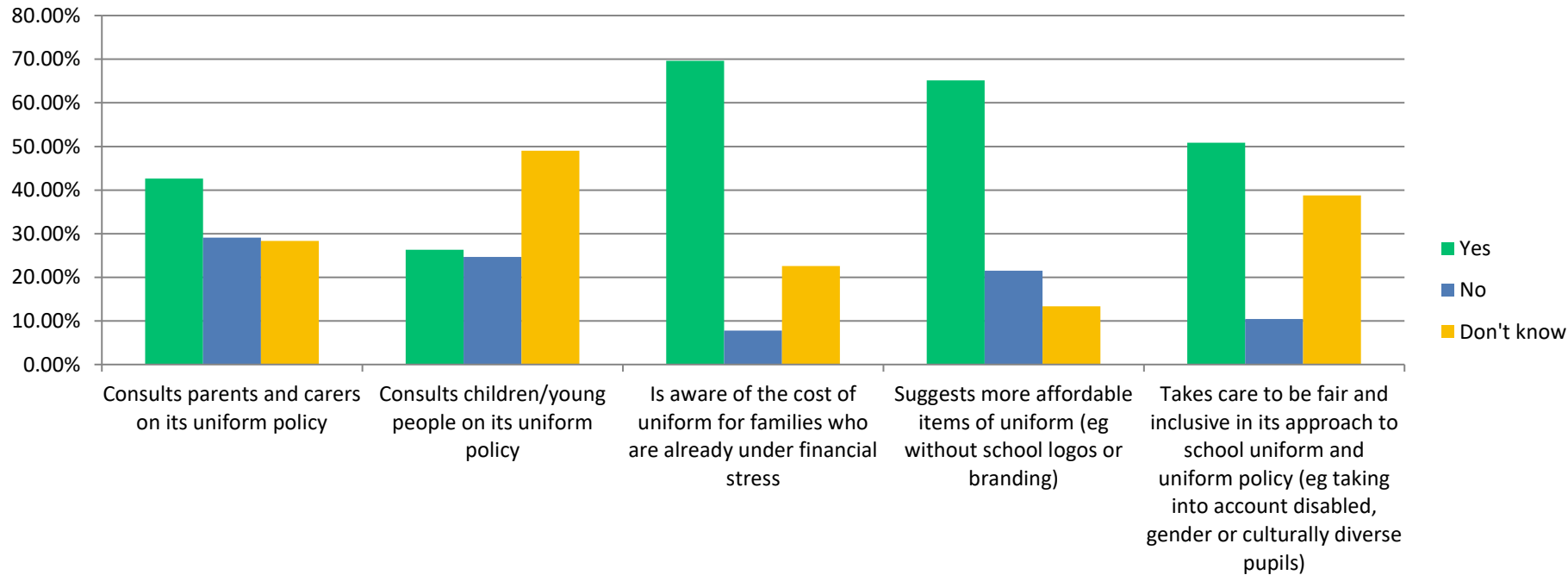
Thinking about your child(ren), which of the following items of uniform are **ONLY** worn in school (i.e., they are not used at weekends or on holidays)?

- Blazer **51%**
- Coat **20%**
- Trousers **71%**
- Skirt **53%**
- Jumper **87%**
- Shirt **85%**
- Tie **76%**
- Shoes **67%**
- PE Kit **57%**



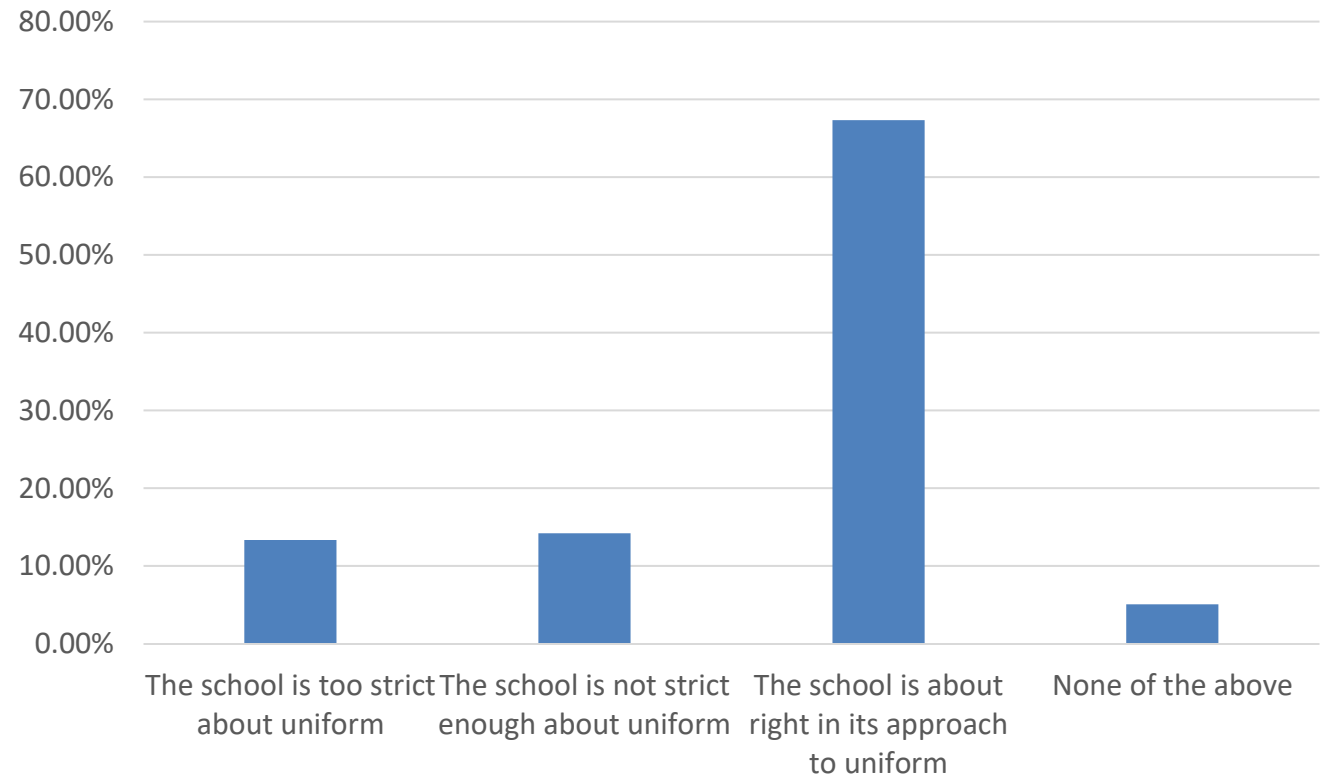
My child's school...

- ...consults parents and carers on its uniform policy: **43%** said yes, **29%** said no
 - ...consults children/young people on its uniform policy: **26%** said yes, **25%** said no
 - ...is aware of the cost of uniforms for families who are already under financial stress: **70%** said yes, **8%** said no
 - ...suggests more affordable items of uniform: **65%** said yes, **22%** said no
 - ...takes care to be fair and inclusive in its approach to school uniform and uniform policy: **51%** said yes, **10%** said no
- no



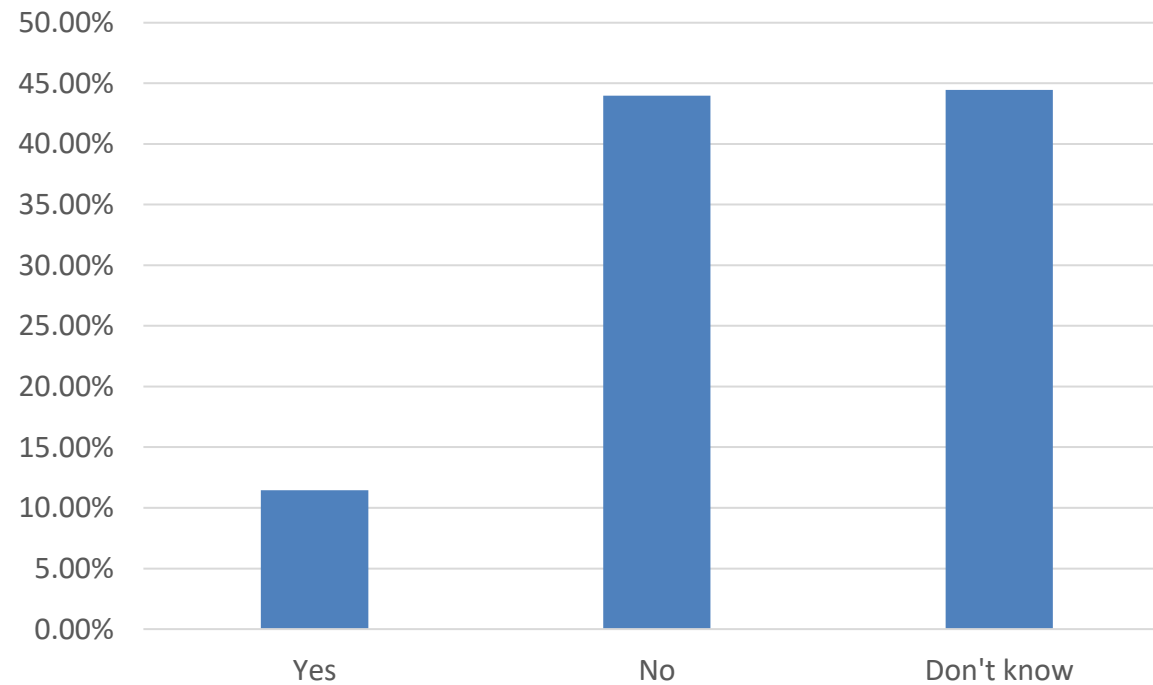
Which of the following statements reflects your view of the approach to uniforms at your child's school?

- 13% said it's **too strict**
- 14% said it's **not strict enough**
- 67% said it's **about right** in its approach
- 5% of respondents said none of the above



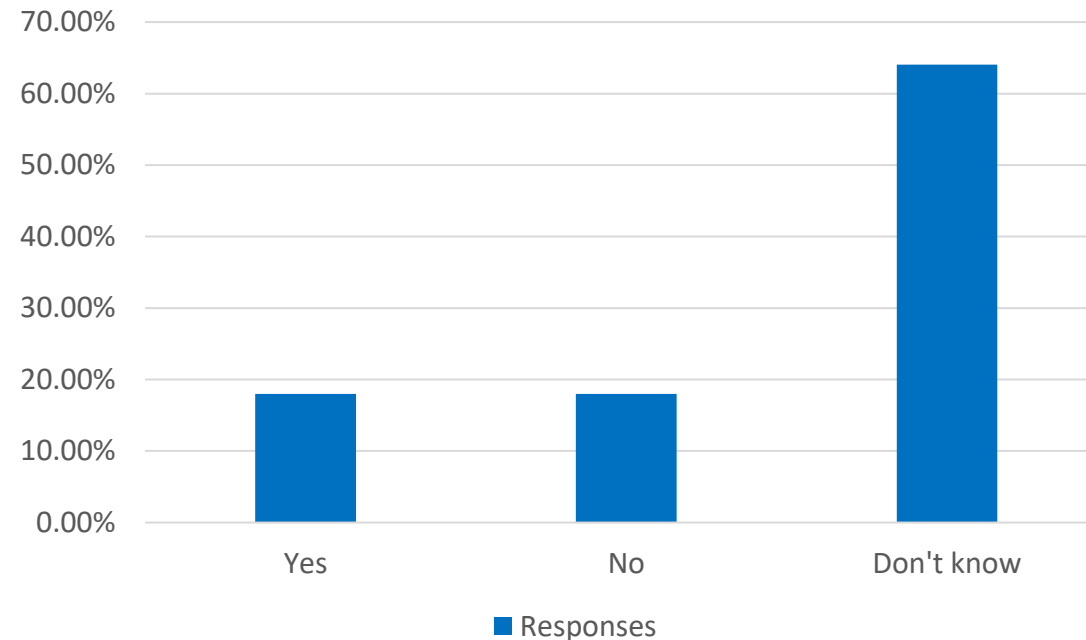
Does your school punish pupils for not wearing suitable school uniforms?

- **12%** said yes
- **44%** said no
- **45%** said they didn't know



Does your school contact parents/carers if they are dissatisfied with a child's uniform?

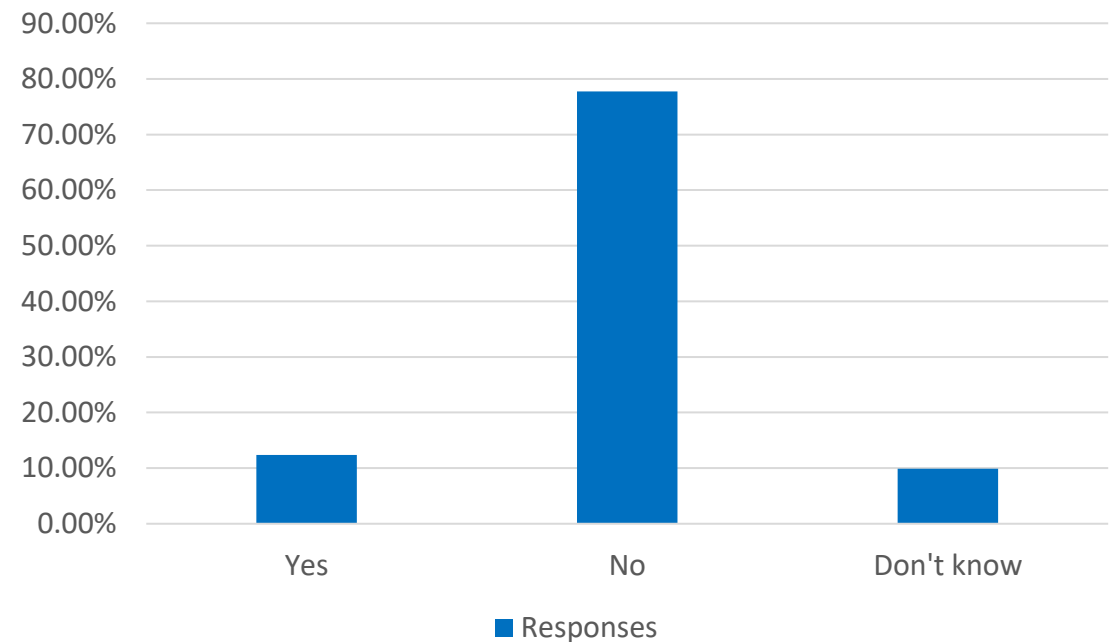
- 18% of respondents said yes
- 18% said no
- 64% didn't know



One issue being explored in the Scottish Government consultation is whether failure to wear a uniform should or should not result in schools excluding pupils.

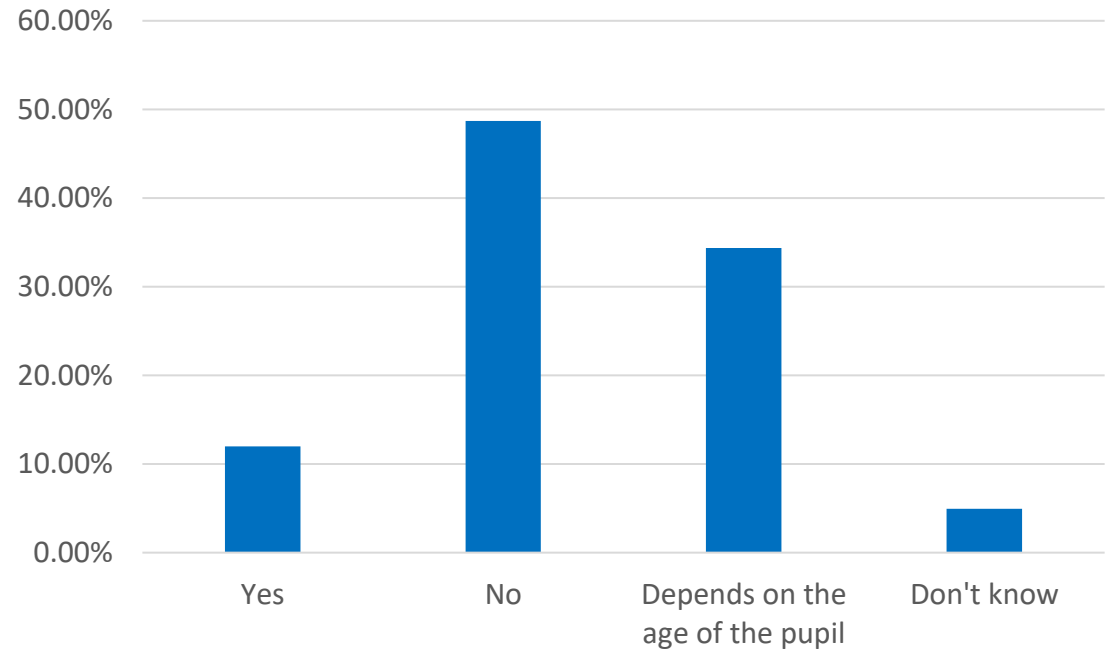
Do you think pupils should be excluded from school for not wearing the school uniform?

- **78%** said no
- **12%** of respondents said yes
- **10%** said they didn't know



In general, do you think pupils should be penalised or punished in other ways for not wearing a uniform, e.g., with detentions or other penalties?

- 12% of respondents said yes
- 49% said no
- 34% said it depends on the age of the pupil
- 5% said they didn't know



Parents' Comments: Views on School Uniforms

'Having a uniform means my children can wear the same hard-wearing handful of items every week. There is no pressure to have something new or fashionable. School uniforms are more cost-effective than wearing own clothes.'

'I think that uniforms are practical and easy to organise. If my kids didn't wear uniforms, I would spend more money on clothing and would have to deal with clothing choices on a daily basis, branding snobbery, bullying etc, basically a whole pile of issues I don't have because uniforms are prescriptive.'

'There is definitely something nice about identifying as part of a community by wearing the same colour, and I understand that it makes life easier for teaching staff.'

'I think the uniform is important, but it needs to move with the times, be comfortable and practical and be mindful of the cost of living crisis.'

Parents' Comments: Views on School Uniforms

'My issue with school uniform is that it is too formal. I think, with the focus on a more active day with outdoor learning, that children should be warm, dry and comfortable as a priority. Leggings/joggers, a jumper, and comfortable, waterproof shoes should be adequate. Currently, particularly girls school wear, is too formal/impractical, especially footwear.'

'Uniform is probably cheaper than buying non uniform clothes to wear so I support uniforms in general - although the ability for children to express themselves through tweaking the uniform should be encouraged (in-line with UNCRC)'

'I grew up outside the UK where no school uniform was required. Casual and comfortable clothing wasn't detrimental to my education or well-being but made me more aware of who I wanted to become as an individual, and it also taught me to be resilient, tolerant and to work hard to get to where I wanted to be. I recognise that wearing a uniform in the UK is deeply cultural and gives some a sense of community.'

Parents' Comments: on support to Families

'School has a uniform clothing bank available to everyone.'

'Our parent community have a pre-loved uniform page where uniform items (only in good condition) can be advertised for free for anyone who needs or wants. No stigma and endorsed by the school. Helps with both cost of living crisis and climate change.'

'The school is working with Parent Council to offer a Uniform bank and swap shop to help more vulnerable children as well as to lower the environmental impact by recycling clothing.'

'School uniform is affordable for all with supermarkets doing budget versions and lower paid families receiving grants from the local authority and many other avenues of support.'

'The school runs a uniform swap a couple of times a year, a good chance to share round second-hand pieces. The logo was updated, but no pressure to buy new logo items. I think our school has a good approach.'

Parents' Comments: on uniform strictness

'Uniform policy is far too strict. Everything must conform to the school policy. Everything must be branded with the school logo. If kids have the wrong item, they are sent to the school office and kept there until a parent brings the right item. That's an unacceptable punishment which both stigmatises the child and creates a massive inconvenience for families with working parents. The overall sense is that the kids are at a military academy! Anyone can make a mistake, but the social and economic cost of fixing a mistake with a uniform is way out of touch with reality. And on top of all that, it is far too expensive and must be logoed, so no chance to get less expensive unbranded items.'

'The school have unrealistic expectations but don't consult on it or follow up on not wearing uniform with parents. They have said they will not allow pupils NOT wearing it to go on trips/ represent the school. This is inequitable and archaic in my opinion. They also require seniors to sign a contract to wear it although many seniors are not statutory school leavers and are required to be educated regardless of what they are wearing.'

Parents' Comments: on uniform strictness

'My children have been 'given into trouble' for wearing joggers on a PE day with red stripes down them rather than unbranded. I was FURIOUS. Children generally wear what is left out for them- surely the priority is that they are attending school and participating comfortably in physical exercise. The issue should have been raised with me- shaming children is NOT reflective of any of the Wellbeing indicators, neither is it GIRFEC.'

'About the strictness - I've no issue with black shoe stipulation, but it goes too far when you can't have any white- e.g. logo/soles. Completely black trainers are difficult to find.'

Parents' Comments: on the cost of uniforms

'Some items can only be bought from a single retailer, who are understaffed at key times, with very limited opening hours. Parents have to use annual leave to visit and queueing time is often around 30 minutes!'

'High School uniform, incredibly difficult to order. Has been out of stock since the summer holiday and only managed to order last week, despite checking everyday and requesting stock email. Also now on a 3 week despatch.'

'School uniforms are very expensive. It's adding too much pressure in a financial crisis; if you have a child with additional support needs, you need more uniform items than normal, and it piles up too much. It's not only uniforms but bags, lunch bags, PE kits, water bottles and much more. Most of the time, his pants are torn on the knees due to playing and falling, so he needs extra pants. Extra leggings. Extra cardigans and jumpers as they get dirty with colour and other stuff. Some stains and damage are permanent. Having logos in those changing uniforms is very expensive, hectic and hard.'

Parents' Comments: on the cost of uniforms

'Uniforms are ridiculous cost - and grants only given to those on benefits. What about the people who work all the hours under the sun for pittance and still have to fork out fortunes for uniform as well as pay bills and mortgage - we don't get housing benefits or any benefits.'

'Schools should be encouraged not to have badges as the shirts and jumpers, then we can just use the supermarket which is so much cheaper 1 jumper with a badge is £15 I could get at least 3 from Asda for that!'

'I think the uniform is very important; however, affordability needs to be considered. I am aware that school clothing grants are offered to low-income families, but many other families are also struggling at the moment due to the cost of living and do not meet the criteria. It would be useful for all families to be given an allowance towards uniform costs at the end of each school year.'

Parents' Comments: on uniform equality

'My main comments are around skirts and shirts. Our local authority's uniform policy still requires "modest" skirts, which is archaic language. I'd prefer to see no skirts worn by primary-age children in any case, as it makes it more difficult for girls to participate in physical play (which shouldn't just be limited to PE). Shirts are so old-fashioned! The children of today will likely never have to wear a shirt and tie to school - my six-year-old daughter certainly won't!'

'Schools need to be more aware that some young people have sensory issues and cannot always tolerate the preferred clothing.'

'My children have no ASN but do have sensory preferences. The school uniform does not account for this and they just about tolerate it. I really feel this uniform is not inclusive for those with medical or ASN needs. Working in a nursery where we nurture these needs, this gets forgotten about the further up the system a child travels. Adults no longer need to wear such items to work on a day to day basis so why are we forcing our children to be uncomfortable. Children will learn better when feeling safe and comfortable in their surroundings. None of the items we buy for the school year are suitable to wear outside of school.'

Parents' Comments: on uniform practicalities

'Kids clothes sizing makes it difficult to buy. My sons are both very tall for their age and finding adult size alternatives to school uniform is tricky and very expensive.'

'At the moment we are allowed to wear any shoes to school. But there was chat about bringing in shoes/trainer policy which I feel is wrong for primary. The colour of the shoes/trainers make no difference to their learning and should not be an issue. My child cycles to school so shoes are not practical. Trainers work best for him for comfort and lasting.'

'Blazer looks smart but is totally impractical for walking to school- heavy wool with no hood= stays wet and smells all day when arriving in rain and hair wet (nowhere to store an umbrella at school). Blazer is too hot for summer, too cold for winter. Needs modernising to a weatherproof jacket style.'

Parents' Comments: on uniform practicalities

'Part of my kids school uniform is a white polo shirt. My child regularly gets whiteboard pen all over his white polo shirt. White board pen marks do not come off the white polo shirts even with stain remover. Polo shirts & sweatshirts for primary school children should be in dark colours. Wash able pens should be used in schools too.'

'Insisting on the wearing of blazers and dress shoes in all weather is a ridiculous policy. School uniform requirements should be reflective of what pupils will experience in the working world i.e. that they should be dressed appropriately for the time of year. Teachers aren't expected to wear a suit jacket only within the school, pupils shouldn't be either.'

Parents' Comments: on refusal and enforcement

'Do not exclude or punish children for a uniform breach: often many factors at play when this happens and a blanket approach will adversely affect children and produce a blame/shame culture. Please leave punishments for real breaches or safety concerns.'

'I would withdraw my child from any school that hands out punishment for 'uniform ' infringements, it is often subjective and frequently sexist. I would also point out that the children do NOT buy the uniforms and as such are not responsible for having a uniform that isn't up to the schools standard. I also think that no school should be able to enforce a 'skirt only' rule for girls.'

'Schools need flexibility to address the varied reasons for pupils not wearing uniform ranging from "I don't want to" (which needs consequences) to pupils who need support to access uniform for genuine reasons (sensory issues, money issues and more).'

Parents' Comments: on refusal and enforcement

'Uniforms should be enforced within reason. Common sense should be applied in relation to suitable & appropriate clothing where possible.'

'Children should be aware of the uniform policy of the school so they understand why they wear it. Older children should be accountable for wearing of it as it sets them up for expectations of high school and the working world beyond.'

'I don't think pupils should be punished, it's the parents who are deciding what to put on younger children especially. Encouragement/reward/positive reinforcement would be better than punishment.'

Parents' Comments: other suggestions

'I don't mind the school enforcing a uniform policy however I think they should relook at their uniform colours as some of it is more expensive to buy than alternative colours, the colour can prove difficult to find in supermarkets you cannot purchase affordable sensory adapted uniform in our colours.'

'If there must always be a school badge/logo on show, the cheapest & easiest way is for this to be on the school tie. That way the shirts & jumpers can be plain, generic items which are easily & cheaply available in supermarkets.'

'A more informal approach to uniform would be more comfortable and practical for modern day - ie joggers and a polo shirt, sweatshirt and therefore suitable for most leaning environments including PE and would also be gender neutral. It would also be more comfortable and less stressful!'

'White polo shirts are terrible as they don't keep their colour, should be darker colours. Navy blue would be better.'

'Unbranded alternatives would make uniform cheaper to purchase ie from supermarkets.'

Connect is grateful to all the parents and carers who participated in this survey.

For more information, please contact us at
info@connect.scot.

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Mansfield Traquair Centre, 15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BB

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