

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

1st Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 9
December 2022

PE1914: Ban school uniforms in secondary
schools

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner Matthew Lewis Simpson

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to
remove the requirement for school uniforms in secondary schools.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1914>

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 30 November 2021.
2. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 17 signatures have been received.
4. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe B** of this paper.
5. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe C**.

Scottish Government submission

6. The Scottish Government's submission makes it clear that there is no legislative requirement in place in Scotland which legally requires the wearing of school uniforms. Instead, school uniform policy is a matter for local authorities and individual schools. The Scottish Government states that it would not support a proposal to ban school uniforms at any school in Scotland.
7. The submission sets out a number of perceived advantages to wearing school uniform, which include:
 - Reducing competition between pupils in respect of expensive clothing brands;
 - Reducing bullying;
 - Creating a positive image of a school in a local community; and
 - Improving school security (allowing staff to identify anyone who does not belong to the school).
8. The Scottish Government acknowledges the petitioner's concerns about buying school uniforms, recognising that 'this can be one of the most significant costs for families' and that 'this can be a source of anxiety for low income families'.
9. It goes on to state this is why the Scottish Government recently increased the amounts paid for school clothing grants.
10. The Scottish Government has 'committed to introducing statutory guidance on uniforms for schools and local authorities during the lifetime of this parliamentary session' which it states will cover:
 - The affordability of school uniforms;
 - The consideration of equalities issues when deciding school uniform policies; and
 - Considerations for physical education classes
11. The Scottish Government concludes by highlighting a public consultation on proposed school uniform guidance which is due to be launched in the New Year.

SPICe briefing

12. The SPICe briefing accompanying this petition points to research carried out at the University of Aberdeen which found that almost every secondary school in Scotland has a compulsory uniform (96%), with almost 20% of Scottish secondary schools specifying an exclusive supplier for that uniform.

13. Further research by the Children’s Society in 2020 found that UK families spent, on average, £337 per year per child attending secondary school.
14. The Scottish Government’s national minimum school clothing grant increased from £100 per eligible secondary school pupil to £150 in 2021.
15. The briefing also highlights the Cost of the School day project, carried out in Glasgow, which looked at barriers for low-income families to fully participating in schools. It states that there was wide support for school uniform from teachers and pupils who recognised ‘the value in everyone wearing the same clothes and minimising visible income difference.’
16. However, the same project also found that ‘uniform was still a key income indicator and potential trigger for exclusion and stigma’, with some schools having strict policies prohibiting branded clothing to try and minimise differences.
17. Whilst uniform was seen as the cheapest option, it was recognised that this still represented a significant cost for families, with strict dress code enforcement by schools being found to embarrass young people ‘who will likely have little control over the replacement of uniform’.
18. The briefing also highlights several recent PQs and motions relevant to this petition.

Action

The Committee is invited to decide what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

PE1914: Ban school uniforms in secondary schools

Petitioner

Matthew Lewis Simpson

Date Lodged:

30/11/21

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to remove the requirement for school uniforms in secondary schools

Previous action

I have contacted Minister for Children and Young People, and they had given me no response

Background information

School uniforms prevent students from expressing their personality and culture.

They're a source of anxiety for low income families; uniforms are expensive and are an unnecessary cost. Students want to be able to dress comfortably, in their choice of style. Uniforms don't consider weather, and they're not suitable for all year round.

They are uncomfortable. Concentration is increased when students feel like they're in a safe environment, and wearing their own clothes is much more pleasant than stiff blazers and itchy skirts.

Uniforms don't stop judgement from others. Wearing uniforms immediately makes you a representative of the school you're from. Others can judge you by your school before they've even met you. Students shouldn't just be

SPICe

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1914](#): Ban school uniforms in secondary schools, lodged by Matthew Lewis Simpson

Calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to remove the requirement for school uniforms in secondary schools. The petitioner states that school uniforms:

- Prevent students from expressing their personality and culture;
- Are a source of anxiety for low income families;
- Are uncomfortable for students;
- Do not prevent judgement from others;
- Are unnecessary.

Introduction

Pupils are not legally obliged to wear school uniform in Scotland. School uniform policy is determined by schools and the Local Authority Education Departments. However, headteachers may insist upon an “acceptable dress standard” from pupils. Schools must also consider the health and safety of pupils and may insist on certain dress (including how hair is worn) for certain activities (e.g. PE, Science etc.)

Recent research by [Dr Rachel Shanks](#) at the University of Aberdeen found that almost every secondary school in Scotland has a compulsory uniform (over 96%). And almost 20% of Scottish secondary schools specify an exclusive supplier for school uniform. Research carried out by [The Children’s Society](#) in 2020 found that in the UK families spent, on average, £337 per year per child attending secondary school. In 2018 the Scottish Government introduced a national minimum school clothing

grant of £100. Following an agreement between the Scottish Government and local authorities, the minimum grant was increased to £150 per eligible secondary school pupil in 2021.

Attitudes Towards School Uniforms

Supporters of school uniform identify a number of benefits from schools having a uniform. The [Schoolwear Association](#) states “School uniform creates a sense of community and equality in a school environment, placing children on a level playing field and developing a sense of pride.”

In 2011, the [Scottish Youth Parliament](#) responded to a petition ([PE1411](#)) calling for ‘reforming uniform policy in all Scottish local authority schools by producing mandatory guidelines’. They conducted an online survey receiving a total of 151 responses from Members aged between 14 and 25. Most of the respondents were still at school at the time.

Of those whose schools had a uniform policy, 71.7% said that it was ‘strictly enforced’, with 28.3% feeling that it was ‘not very strictly enforced.’

When asked about the degree to which the uniform could be personalised, such as being allowed to choose between a shirt and a polo shirt, or whether or not to wear a tie, the majority of respondents (59.4%) said that they could personalise ‘some elements’ of their uniform; 40.6% said that there was ‘one specific uniform, personalisation is not allowed’.

Of the 151 respondents, 49% did not find their school uniform uncomfortable. And 24.8% of respondents felt that their school uniform restricted their movement and was not very practical. When asked if school uniform ‘avoids a “fashion show” where pupils feel under pressure to wear expensive designer gear’, 65.6% of respondents agreed with this statement. Finally, the respondents were asked whether all schools in Scotland should have a uniform; 55% agreed, 30.2% disagreed and 14.8% were unsure.

In 2014-15, the [Cost of the School Day](#) action research project, involving 229 pupils and 111 staff across eight schools in Glasgow City, identified barriers that prevented children and young people from low-income households fully participating in schools. The project found wide support from school uniform from teachers and pupils with children and young

people recognising the value in everyone wearing the same clothes and minimising visible income differences.

With that being said, the project found that uniform was still a key income indicator and potential trigger for exclusion and stigma. Some schools included in the study applied a strict policy which prohibited branded clothing in an effort to minimise differences. In some cases, this had unintended consequences by placing pressure on families unable to afford school uniforms. Pupils attending school without the correct uniform were sanctioned by staff, leading to embarrassment.

The Cost of the School Day project is ongoing and provides [information](#) relating to uniform policy in schools across Scotland. It finds that uniform is the cheapest option but still represents a significant cost for families. It also finds that strict dress code enforcement embarrasses young people who likely have little control over the replacement of uniform. Although school uniforms minimise visible differences, it is still the main indicator of income at school. Non-uniform days were found, in some instances, to affect attendance. Children and young people said that they feel pressure to buy new clothes for non-uniform days. Some schools have stopped non-uniform days as a result.

The Education Endowment Foundation provides summaries of research of a wide range of interventions and the evidence of the impact of those interventions. It reports that the “evidence base on school uniform and academic outcomes is extremely weak”. The EEF notes that often school uniform policies are introduced at the same time as other measures which clouds any effect of the school uniform policy. The EEF also noted that “there is a general belief in the UK that school uniform leads to improvements in pupils’ behaviour.”

Scottish Parliament Action

On 18 May 2021, Jeremy Balfour, Lothian, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party asked the Scottish Government whether, similar to Wales and Northern Ireland, it will produce guidance on school uniform supplies, regarding (a) reducing costs, (b) preventing exclusive suppliers and (c) making uniforms affordable for all, and if so, when the guidance will be delivered ([ref. S6W-00094](#)).

On 24 May 2021, Shirley-Anne Sommerville answered:

The Scottish Government recognises the cost of buying a school uniform can be considerable for many families. In 2018, in partnership with local authorities, we introduced the national minimum school clothing grant of £100 for all eligible children and young people.

We are committed to developing guidance to ensure consistency on school uniform policies across all of Scotland, ending expensive insistence on exclusive suppliers and to support the automation of school clothing grants in every local authority area in order to remove barriers to application and to boost uptake. We will work with our partners in local government on the development of guidance and on measures to support the automation of school clothing grants during 2021-22.

On 7 September 2021, a motion was lodged by Fulton MacGregor, Coatbridge and Chryston, Scottish National Party: Alleviating Poverty Associated with the Purchase of School Uniforms in Scotland ([ref. S6M-01065](#)).

Scottish Government Action

In July 2021, the Scottish Government and local authorities reached an agreement to increase the school clothing grant to a minimum of £150 per eligible secondary school pupil.

Amanda Gavin and Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
02/12/2021

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Scottish Government submission dated 18 November 2021

PE1914/A: Ban school uniforms in secondary schools

I am responding to the Committee on behalf of the Scottish Government in relation to Petition PE1914, raised by Matthew Lewis Simpson, which calls for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to remove the requirement for school uniforms in secondary schools.

The petition seeks that the Scottish Government removes the requirement to wear school uniforms in secondary schools. I should be clear at the outset that there is no legislative requirement in place in Scotland which legally requires the wearing of school uniform. School uniform policy is a matter for local authorities and individual schools to decide upon at the local level, the Scottish Government would not support a proposal to ban school uniforms at any school within Scotland.

There are also other advantages to wearing school uniforms - these include reducing competition between pupils in respect of expensive clothing brands, which in turn reduces one of the causes of bullying; they help to create a positive image of the school within its local community; and they are also good from a school's security perspective since they allow school staff to easily identify anyone who does not belong to the school.

However, I do fully sympathise with Matthew's concerns that buying school uniforms can be one of the most significant school costs for families and this can be a source of anxiety for low income families. That is the main reason why the Scottish Government increased the amounts paid for school clothing grants earlier this year.

I also recognise that not all families will be eligible to receive the school clothing grant, and that some of those families will only be marginally above the qualifying threshold. That is why we have committed to introducing statutory guidance on uniforms for schools and local authorities during the lifetime of this parliamentary session.

Our school uniform guidance will consider a range of issues which we feel will be important to both the children and young people attending school, and their families. The issues covered will of course include affordability of school uniforms, as well as the consideration of equalities when deciding upon uniform policies and considerations for physical education classes. Also, at times of extreme weather, schools already have the flexibility to temporarily adjust their uniform policies to take account of exceptional weather conditions if they feel it would be beneficial to do so.

My officials will be launching a public consultation on our proposed school uniform guidance on the Scottish Government's consultation hub in the new year and Matthew will be welcome to contribute his views to this consultation if he wishes to do so.

I hope that this information is helpful to the Committee in it's consideration of the petition.