



SCHOOLWEAR  
ASSOCIATION

# School Uniform: A guide to specifying and sourcing uniform for schools and academies



## At a glance

- ✓ Review your school uniform agreement regularly, ideally every three to five years.
- ✓ Create a shortlist of potential suppliers, and ask for their advice on design, colour and product range. Give your existing supplier(s) reasonable notice as they may have a considerable stockholding of your current school uniform.
- ✓ When reviewing, run a consultation with parents and governors (and consider including students).
- ✓ Discuss feedback with your selected tenderers. Consider the quality, price and availability of products.
- ✓ Decide how many products require branding with the school badge or identity. Consider the cost to parents.
- ✓ Confirm your choice of supplier.
- ✓ Allow plenty of time for the process. Suppliers need to order garments at least 3 to 4 months in advance of delivery, longer for bespoke items. Aim to finalise your decision before Christmas to give the supplier plenty of time to meet your needs. Otherwise, make Easter term the cut-off point.



## Introduction

This guide is for head teachers, governors, teachers, managers, buyers and other school staff who are responsible for, or involved in, specifying and sourcing school uniform. The aim is to help you to manage the process so that every child and every school benefits from the advantages of a high quality, good value uniform in terms of its benefits to learning, behaviour and safety.

You should be aware that at some point during 2017 the Department of Education guidelines on buying school uniform are expected to become statutory and you will need to make sure that you are compliant with policy. It is likely that you will need to put contracts out to tender and consider carefully the benefits of sole supplier agreements versus a shared supply arrangement.

A message from David Burgess, Chair, The Schoolwear Association

**“The evidence of research bears out what teachers and parents instinctively know, that school specific uniform is more than just a practical and cost effective solution for schools and families, it also drives a sense of belonging and pride for students. Like schools, many schoolwear businesses are part of their local community, with high ethical values and standards of service, providing local jobs for local people. We believe they deserve your support but we also recognise that schools must always seek value when specifying uniform, which is why we have produced this guide. We hope you find it useful.”**



## Getting the timing right

Choosing a new uniform or updating an existing one should be an exciting event. Uniform is the most obvious form of branding a school has, and the appearance of students helps to create most people's first impression of a school. It can be a lengthy process, and it is vital to get the timing right to ensure:

- You have sufficient time to research potential suppliers
- Delivery dates can be met
- Minimised waste, as dedicated schoolwear suppliers can keep a lot of uniform in stock
- Samples can be sourced in time to ensure the school gets exactly what it requires
- Parents receive ample notice
- There is an opportunity to consider a phasing in period, typically 12 to 24 months but consider any contracts and notice periods which may already be in place

Suppliers typically make contact with their schools in October to ensure there are no changes planned. Autumn is when their stocks of uniform are at their lowest after the busy back-to-school period. This is the time schools should inform them of any intention to change.

The first thing to consider is choice of supplier(s).

### Supplier types

- Direct to school supplier
- Independent retailer
- Internet supplier
- Supermarket
- A combination of the above

Department of Education guidelines state any of these are acceptable, as long as the school has considered all options and thought about what is best for parents. Choice of suppliers should be based on factors including availability, price, and convenience for parents, ethical sourcing and consistency of the uniform. The most transparent way to do this is with a regular and rigorous tendering process.

When specifying uniform, it is good practice to have a balance of bespoke items specific to your school available from specialists, and generic items available more widely to ensure uniform is unique to the school but not cost prohibitive for parents. The best way to ensure your specification meets your quality requirements and is cost effective is to work closely with an experienced specialist supplier. Remember that all Schoolwear Association members have signed up to a Code of Practice. This ensures that members work in the best interests of parents, teachers, children and the community, and that they source uniform ethically from places where workers are well treated.

## Ordering timeline for suppliers

### October

Schools inform suppliers of intention to review arrangements and possibly change suppliers

### November

Schools meet suppliers to discuss requirements and to view suggested outfits

### December

Schools that finalise their uniform before Christmas help their suppliers by giving them the best opportunity to source the garments cost effectively from specialist schoolwear manufacturers and wholesalers

### February

Orders for plain garments begin to arrive in February giving suppliers time to embroider items

### April

Ideally the latest that school uniform should be ordered to be supplied in time for the new September term but check with prospective suppliers

### May/June

Orders placed in November/December for bespoke items arrive so that stock is ready for school open days, sale days and induction evenings

### July

Parents begin to purchase uniform as soon as children finish the school year so a specialist supplier will make sure all uniform is available. Schools can encourage parents to buy early to avoid the end of August rush

## How to produce a good tender document

The tender form should be specific to school uniform and only ask relevant questions to encourage more suppliers to tender and make the process more competitive and open. Give clear details about the items required so that prices can be compared, and give information regarding likely quantities and pupil numbers per school year.

Ask shortlisted suppliers for graphics (visualisations showing how the uniform will look) with prices for all items and any variable options.

Ask which delivery methods suppliers can offer

- Direct to school
- On-line supplier shop
- Postal service
- Retail shop
- Sales at school
- School shop

Schools need to know that their chosen supplier is financially viable, but beware of making overly-complex requests for financial information which are time-consuming to complete.

Request references.

It is always beneficial to have a face to face meeting or at least a telephone call to clarify requirements. The better your supplier understands your needs, the better they will be able to serve you.

**Download further advice on producing a tender document here**

[www.schoolwearassociation.co.uk/schools-info/](http://www.schoolwearassociation.co.uk/schools-info/)



## Single or multiple suppliers?

A sole supplier will have full responsibility to the school for uniform, but there are also advantages of having more than one supplier. If you decide on a sole supplier arrangement (subject to statutory rules), then you need to periodically put contracts out to tender and compare suppliers on quality, service levels, year-round stocking, ethical sourcing and price, but remember price does not always equate to best value.

With a multiple supplier arrangement, ensure all suppliers are provided with, and adhere to, consistent uniform specifications. Where possible, suppliers should source garments from the same or similar manufacturers. Pay attention to colour consistency and placement of logos, otherwise some children may be disadvantaged with uniform that stands apart from others. All suppliers should meet together with the school regularly to make sure all are operating consistently and sharing responsibility.

### Advantages of a single supplier

- A single supplier can predict sales and take full responsibility for the uniform which can help them buy cost effectively on behalf of the parents.
- Garments supplied are more likely to be consistent in terms of appearance and quality.
- Because they are dedicated to the school, sole suppliers may be motivated to provide better service, experience suggests that a sole supplier may be committed to supplying all uniform sizes instead of just the popular ones.

### Advantages of multiple suppliers

- The school is not reliant upon one supplier and its risk is spread.
- Prices may be more competitive and price competition may be stronger.
- Parents have more choice, for example if there are more stores stocking the school's uniform. Please note that with shared supplier arrangements, some of the efficiencies of purchasing may be lost owing to smaller orders, larger carriage costs etc. Inevitably that has to be funded somehow so this needs to be considered.

## Value versus price

For hard-pressed families, price is important, but parents and schools understand the benefits of a proper uniform with a badge. Learning, behaviour and wellbeing should not be compromised by sourcing uniform solely on the basis of price. Children spend on average ten hours a day in uniform so comfort and durability are vital. Responsible specialist suppliers should provide sensible advice and quality products at competitive prices with a mix of school specific uniform items and generic garments to create a smart look at an acceptable price.

## Every child is worth it

Many Schoolwear Association members and other suppliers help schools to help disadvantaged families. For advice on how to ensure all children have access to a good quality uniform, download our advice sheet from the links at the end of this guide.



## What does school uniform really cost?

Cost depends on factors such as the number of garments in the uniform, quality and how many items are badged. Research by Oxford Brookes University in summer 2015 showed a complete secondary school uniform outfit excluding PE kit ranged from £46 to £97\* while for primary school uniform, the range was from £26 to £36.

**“School uniform has a modest cost, especially given the amount of time children spend wearing it, and almost certainly represents better value than non-uniform clothes. Overall, the cost to parents is relatively small when you weigh up the usage it gets and the added benefits it provides, which include pride in appearance and a sense of belonging to a school.”**

Lynn McBain, Consultant Researcher, Oxford Brookes University

\*Primary school basket based on two polo shirts or shirts, one pair of trousers or skirt, one sweatshirt and a pack of five pairs of socks. Secondary school basket based on two shirts, one tie, one pair of trousers or a skirt, one sweatshirt or cardigan, one blazer and a pack of three pairs of socks.

## Good quality school uniform benefits children’s learning and behaviour

Behaviour is a significant issue in schools, and research shows a proper uniform is part of the solution with 83 per cent of teachers preferring their class to wear it. A uniform that is specific to a school creates a sense of belonging. Good quality uniform looks smart and putting it on makes the child feel ready to work.

**“Wearing a badged uniform gives a child a sense of pride and community, and helps promote positive well-being,” she says. “It avoids bullying issues associated with having to keep up with the latest fashions, and instead gives children a feeling of unity and belonging to an identifiable group. In contrast, a badly fitting or tatty uniform means children stand out from their peer group, and can make them feel embarrassed or uncomfortable, and a likelier target for teasing and bullying. So it’s important to choose uniform that fits your child well, is comfortable to wear and good quality, and to keep it in good order.”**

Jo Hemmings, Behavioural Psychologist

School uniform has been shown to increase concentration in the classroom, leading to higher achievement. Positive perceptions encourage teachers to respond well to students, which enhances students’ good behaviour. More than 90 per cent of parents say school uniform is good for maintaining discipline, and 78 per cent say it encourages better behaviour. School specific uniform significantly reduces concerns about absenteeism, vandalism, bullying and other behavioural problems in and out of school.

## Useful resources

### How to protect your school's identity

Download our fact sheet on how you can trademark your school logo/badge here

<http://www.schoolwearassociation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/SA-Factsheet.pdf>

### Support for local, independent businesses

Find out how school uniform can help to support smaller local businesses and retailers and why this is important here

<http://schoolwearassociation.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/testing-testing.html>

### Ethical considerations 'Every child is worth it'

When ordering or purchasing school uniform, it is not just the children who will be wearing the garments we need to think about. Depending on where and how garments are sourced by suppliers and retailers, there is a risk that child labour may have been employed in making them. Find out more here

<http://schoolwearassociation.blogspot.co.uk/2016/03/every-child-is-worth-it.html>

### Helping disadvantaged families

We know the cost of uniform can be a significant concern for parents. There are a number of strategies schools can employ to help disadvantaged families. Find out about these here

<http://schoolwearassociation.blogspot.co.uk/2016/04/ethical-considerations-should-always-be.html>

### Campaigning / lobbying

The Schoolwear Association works with a wide range of organisations including the Department for Education, the Office of Fair Trading, the National Governors Association, various teacher and parent organisations and many more. Find out more about our previous campaigns here

<http://schoolwearassociation.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/myfamilyclubcoulk-in-support-of-our.html>

## Information for parents

These factsheets are available to download and distribute to parents

How to get the best value out of your child's school uniform

<http://schoolwearassociation.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/how-to-get-best-value-from-your-childs.html>

How to keep your child's school uniform looking and feeling great

<http://www.schoolwearassociation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/A5-Garment-Care-Leaflet.pdf>

Why school uniform is important for your child

<http://schoolwearassociation.blogspot.co.uk/2015/12/seven-reasons-why-school-specific.html>



The information contained in this document is intended to provide general guidance only and should neither be regarded as comprehensive nor sufficient for making decisions on individual transactions, nor should it be used in place of professional advice. The Schoolwear Association accepts no responsibility for any loss arising from any action taken or not taken by anyone using this material.

# About the Schoolwear Association

The Schoolwear Association represents all those involved in the supply of school specific uniform - including retailers, direct to school suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, suppliers, decorators, agents and schools. Together, our members help to clothe three quarters of Britain's school children.

The Schoolwear Association was formed in 2006 to promote the benefits of school specific uniform and to establish strong standards in the supply chain of garments to parents and schools.

The Association is proud to have in excess of 200 supplier and retail members who pay a subscription to support the work of the Association. The industry has adopted a code of practice and works with schools to further the provision of good school uniform and all the benefits that confers on both the school, and the students.

## Code of Practice

View the Schoolwear Association's Code of Practice on the website  
[www.schoolwearassociation.co.uk](http://www.schoolwearassociation.co.uk)

Or download the link

<http://www.schoolwearassociation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/codeofpractice1.pdf>

For more information, visit the schools section at

[www.schoolwearassociation.co.uk](http://www.schoolwearassociation.co.uk)